





Pulse Polio Campaign

"Do **Blood** Zindagi Ki"

Don't forget this Date.

Healthy children lead the way, let polio fade away



Polio Day

21 December 2025

Sunday

In all districts

Ensure every child under 5 years of age gets polio drops everytime



Department of Information & Public Relations, J&K

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Dated: 18-12-2025
DIPK-9117/25

LG Sinha calls for decisive action against terrorists, supporters



■ Chairs maiden UT-level security conference in Jammu

■ Says conference to develop whole of govt approach to counter terrorism

■ Directs forces to preserve gains made since 2019, target terrorists

■ Hails leadership of PM Modi, HM Shah

Sajid Raina

Jammu, Dec 18: Stressing on the need for coordinated and decisive action against terrorists, their enablers and ideologues, Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha, on Thursday directed the security top brass to completely dismantle the terror ecosystem and eliminate safe havens.

Chairing UT level security conference here on the theme "Viksit Bharat: Security Dimensions", LG Sinha, according to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), said that under the guidance of PM

Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah the UT level security conference will serve as the hub for deliberation and collaboration to develop a whole of government approach to counter terrorism in all its form.

He also observed that during DGPs/IGPs conference in Raipur this year, threadbare discussions were held on the theme 'Viksit Bharat: Security Dimensions', which reflects GoI's commitment to transform our policing institutions to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world.

Addressing senior officers of the civil administration, J&K Police, Army, Central

Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) and intelligence agencies, the Lieutenant Governor said, "The real security gains achieved since 2019 must be defended at all costs. Every single terrorist and their supporter operating in the Valley, forests, hills or villages must be neutralised."

He reiterated that there would be zero tolerance for terrorism and its support structures. "Over the past six years, the Union Territory has witnessed a significant strengthening of the security grid, resulting in a marked decline in terrorist violence, the number of active terrorists and | [More on P6](#)

PM Modi conferred with the Order of Oman

PTI

Muscat, Dec 18: Prime Minister Narendra Modi was on Thursday conferred with the Order of Oman, the Sultanate's uniquely distinct civilian honour, by Sultan Haitham bin Tariq for his "exceptional contribution" to India-Oman ties and his "visionary leadership".

Modi received the award during his ongoing two-day visit to Oman, the final leg of his three-nation tour that included Jordan and Ethiopia.

"Honoured to receive the Order of Oman (First Class). My gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, the Government and people of Oman for this honour. This is a symbol of affection and trust between the people of India



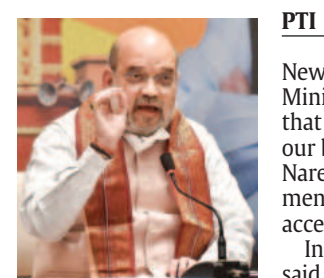
and Oman," Modi said.

This is the latest addition to PM Modi's distinguished list of over 28 highest civilian awards from foreign nations, including recent honours such as

Ethiopia's Great Honour Nishan of Ethiopia and Kuwait's Order of Mubarak Al-Kabeer.

"For centuries, our ancestors have been connected with each other, engaged | [More on P6](#)

Grand endorsement of PM's statesmanship: Shah



PTI

New Delhi, Dec 18: Union Home Minister Amit Shah said Thursday that Oman's highest civilian honour bestowed upon Prime Minister Narendra Modi is a "grand endorsement of his statesmanship and his acceptance as a global leader".

In a message posted on 'X', Shah said, "The back-to-back honours to

our Prime Minister Modi ji attest to the power of 140 crore Indians and the emergence of India as a transformed nation under his leadership."

"Oman's highest civilian honour, 'The First Class of the Order of Oman', being conferred on PM Shri @narendramodi ji is a grand endorsement of his statesmanship and his | [More on P6](#)

Chillai Kalan nears, temps fall across valley, snowfall expected

Sajid Raina

SRINAGAR, Dec 18: Minimum temperatures across Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh fell further on Thursday, as the region approaches the 40-day-long harshest cold period, Chillai Kalan, beginning December 21, coinciding with forecasts of snowfall over Kashmir.

According to the data obtained by the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), several parts of the Kashmir Valley recorded sub-zero temperatures, with Zojila Pass at -17.0°C, Awantipora at -3.8°C, Pulwama at -3.2°C, and Pampore at -1.8°C. Srinagar registered a minimum of 0.2°C, while Qazigund recorded 0.8°C. In contrast, Gulmarg and Kulgam were

relatively warmer at 1.6°C and 2.0°C, respectively.

In Jammu division, Katra was the coldest at 12.1°C, followed by Jammu Airport at 11.5°C and Jammu city at 11.0°C. Banihal and Bhaderwah recorded 5.7°C and 5.0°C, respectively, while Rajouri dipped to 3.0°C.

Ladakh also experienced near-freezing conditions, with Leh recording a temperature of minus 3.4°C.

A comparison with Tuesday's data indicates a further fall in night temperatures across most areas.

Srinagar fell from minus 1.6°C to 0.2°C, Qazigund rose slightly from minus 3.0°C to 0.8°C, while Pulwama recorded a rise from minus 4.4°C to minus 3.2°C.

Pampore's | [More on P6](#)

Draw lessons from 'Op Sindoor,' be prepared for future challenges: Rajnath to IAF commanders

Sajid Raina

New Delhi, Dec 18: Asking Air Force commanders to draw lessons from 'Operation Sindoor' and remain prepared for future challenges, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday said that action against the terrorist camps in Pakistan and PoK demonstrated India's high-impact, short-duration operational capability.

Addressing the Indian Air Force Commanders' Conclave here, Singh, according to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), said the Indian Air Force plays a key role in safeguarding national interests amid a changing global security environment.

He said the operation reflected the ability of the armed forces to act with speed and



coordination.

The Defence Minister while referring to the strikes on terror camps during 'Operation Sindoor' and the subsequent response to actions by Pakistan said, "Public confidence in the armed forces, particularly in air defence preparedness, was evident as people remained calm during attempts to target Indian installations."

Singh underlined the need for a clear assessment of an adversary's offensive and defensive capabilities to maintain an operational edge.

He said commanders must stay vigilant and ready to deal with emerging threats.

Referring to recent conflicts including the Russia-Ukraine war, the Israel-Hamas conflict, the Balakot | [More on P6](#)

Three J&K districts record 20 pc rainfall deficit

Raja Syed Rather

Srinagar, Dec 17: Three districts of Jammu and Kashmir recorded deficient rainfall during the 2025 southwest monsoon season, official data tabled in the Lok Sabha revealed.

The Ministry of Earth Sciences, while responding to a question raised by Lok Sabha member Shri Anil Yeshwant Desai as said to news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), informed that Kishtwar, Kupwara and Shopian districts witnessed rainfall short-fall of more than 20 per cent compared to the Long Period Average (LPA). | [More on P6](#)

J&K to crack down on bird hazards near airports

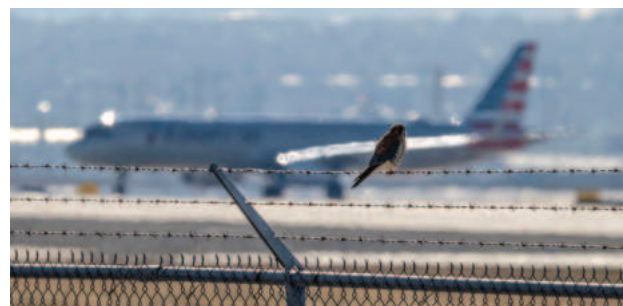
Two committees formed to curb bird-attracting activities near aerodromes

KNO Special Correspondent

Srinagar, Dec 18: In a move to safeguard air travel, the Jammu & Kashmir government has constituted two committees to monitor and regulate activities prohibited under Rule 91 of the Indian Aircraft Rules, 1937.

The government has constituted two committees, one each for Kashmir and Jammu, for strict implementation of the Rule 91, which prohibits activities near airports which attract birds, as these can cause dangerous bird strikes to aircraft.

According to an order issued



by General Administration Department, a copy of which is in possession of news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), the committee for Jammu is headed by the Divisional Commissioner,

Jammu, and comprises Administrative Secretary, Civil Aviation Department; Deputy Commissioner, Jammu; Commissioner, Jammu Municipal Corporation; Senior Superintendent | [More on P6](#)

Centre approves 44 flood management projects for J&K

Releases ₹805.27 crore

Raja Syed Rather

Srinagar, Dec 18: The Centre has approved 44 flood management projects for Jammu and Kashmir since the Eleventh Plan, through an estimated cost of ₹ 2,594.12 crore; of this, ₹805.27 crore has been released as central assistance till March 2025.

The Ministry of Jal Shakti informed the Lok Sabha, as said to a news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), that Jammu and Kashmir has

received funds for 43 flood management projects under the Flood Management Programme (FMP) during Eleventh and Twelfth Plans, while one more project was approved for the 2017-26 period.

Additionally centre has released ₹25.91 crore to J&K against an approved allocation of ₹9.98 crore under the River Management Activities and Works related to Border Areas (RMBA) component.

The Ministry clarified that flood management projects are implemented by State and UT governments, as the Centre provides | [More on P6](#)

Fog blankets Kashmir, travel disrupted

Sajid Raina

Srinagar, Dec 18: Dense fog blanketed Kashmir on Thursday, snarling traffic and disrupting travel during morning and evening rush hours.

Witnesses told the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), that several roads across the Valley, including Srinagar-Jammu highway, Baramulla-Handwara, and Pulwama-Kulgam routes and other Srinagar city roads saw a low visibility due to thick fog.

Officials warned drivers to exercise caution and follow traffic advisories to | [More on P6](#)



KNO Desk

New Delhi, Dec 18: The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has arrested another key accused in case linked to the Delhi blast that killed 11 persons and injured several others near the historic Red Fort area last month, taking the accused person arrested in the case to nine.

According to details available with news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), the accused has been identified as Yasir Ahmad Dar of Shopian. "He was arrested from New Delhi under relevant provisions of the UA(P) Act 1967 and BNS 2023 in the case RC-21/2025/NIA/DLI," the anti-terror agency

said.

It said that investigations have revealed Yasir's active role in the conspiracy behind the blast that rocked the national capital on November 10. "An active participant in the conspiracy, he had sworn allegiance and taken an oath | [More on P6](#)

Centre steps up tourism promotion in J&K: Union Minister

KT NEWS DESK

New Delhi, December, 18: The Government of India is promoting tourism in Jammu & Kashmir through a range of ongoing schemes and initiatives aimed at holistic destination development and improved tourism infrastructure. This was stated by Union Minister of Tourism, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat Rajya Sabha in response to a parliamentary question raised in the Rajya Sabha on Thursday.

The Union Minister, as per PIB statement, informed that the Ministry of Tourism promotes destinations and tourism experiences across the country, including Jammu & Kashmir, under its existing Domestic Promotion & Publicity including Hospitality (DPPH) and Overseas Promotion & Publicity (OPP) schemes. These initiatives target both domestic and international markets to enhance visibility and tourist footfall.

He further stated that the Ministry supports tourism infrastructure development in Jammu & Kashmir through its central sector schemes such as Swadesh Darshan, Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Heritage Augmentation Drive (PRASHAD), and Assistance to Central Agencies for Tourism Infrastructure



Development (ACATID). Under these schemes, financial assistance is extended to States and Union Territories to complement their efforts in strengthening tourism infrastructure.

Under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme, several projects were sanctioned in Jammu & Kashmir during 2016-17 under the Himalayan Circuit. These include the development of the Jammu-Srinagar-Pahalgam-Bhagwati Nagar-Anantnag-Salamabad Uri-Kargil-Leh circuit at a sanctioned cost of Rs.77.33 crore, of which Rs.67.37 crore has been released;

development of tourist facilities at Jammu-Rajouri-Shopian-Pulwama at a cost of Rs.81.60 crore with Rs. 67.35 crore released; construction of tourism assets destroyed in the 2014 floods under the Prime Minister's Development Package at a sanctioned cost of Rs.90.43 crore with Rs.74.70 crore released; development of tourist facilities at Mantalai and Sudhmahadev with a sanctioned cost of Rs.91.99 crore and Rs.91.93 crore released; development of tourist facilities at Anantnag-Pulwama-Kishtwar-Pahalgam-Zanskar-Padum-Daksum-Ranjit Sagar Dam at a cost of Rs.86.39 crore with Rs.69.95 crore released; and development of tourist facilities at Gulmarg-Baramulla-Kupwara-Kargil-Leh at a sanctioned cost of Rs.91.84 crore, with Rs.85.80 crore released.

Under the PRASHAD Scheme, the Ministry sanctioned Rs.40.46 crore for development works at the Hazratbal Shrine in Srinagar, against which Rs.34.30 crore has been released. In addition, under the Assistance to Central Agencies for Tourism Infrastructure Development Scheme, a Sound and Light Show at Nigeen Lake was sanctioned at a cost of 5.00 crore, with Rs.3.08 crore released.

Republic Day-2026: DC Baramulla reviews preparations

KT NEWS DESK

BARAMULLA, DECEMBER 18: Deputy Commissioner, Baramulla, Minga Sherpa, Thursday chaired a meeting at the Main Meeting Hall of DC Office to review the preparation for the upcoming Republic Day-2026 celebration across Baramulla.

The DC, as per an official statement, directed all concerned departments to work in close coordination to ensure seamless arrangements for the national event.

The DC issued strict instructions for setting up awareness stalls highlighting various Government-sponsored schemes, while the DYSSO were tasked with organizing a cricket match as part of the celebrations.

The Chief Medical Officer was instructed to organize a medical camp during the event. Directions were also issued to concerned departments to ensure proper sanitation, uninterrupted essential services, adequate fire and emergency preparedness, and robust security arrangements.

SMC organises Health & Wellness camp for employees

KT NEWS DESK

SRINAGAR, DECEMBER 18: Reaffirming its commitment to employee welfare and preventive healthcare, the Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC) organised a comprehensive Health and Wellness Camp at its Head Office in Karan Nagar, in collaboration with Noora Hospital, Srinagar.

The camp, as per an official statement, was inaugurated by the Commissioner, SMC, Faz Lul Haseeb, and was attended by Nuzhat Qureshi, Joint Commissioner SMC (Administration); Suhail ul Islam, Joint Commissioner, along with other senior officers of the Corporation.

The camp witnessed enthusiastic participation from officers and staff across various wings of SMC, underscoring the Corporation's strong institutional focus on employee well-being.

Javid Ahmad Dar calls for awareness drive on agriculture, allied schemes



KT NEWS DESK

JAMMU, DECEMBER 18: Minister for Agriculture Production, Rural Development, Panchayati Raj, Cooperative and Election Department, Javid Ahmad Dar, Thursday addressed the Multi-Stakeholder Platform Meet-2 under the Jammu & Kashmir Comprehensive Agricultural Development Programme (JKCIP/HADP) at Kisan Kendra, Talab Tillo, Jammu.

The Minister, as per an official statement, highlighted the importance of such platforms in bringing together the farmers, FPOs, government departments, agri-entrepreneurs, financial institutions, researchers and civil society to collectively work for growth of agriculture and allied sectors. He reiterated that agriculture remains the backbone of Jammu & Kashmir's economy and stressed the need to empower the farmers for sustainable regional development.

He emphasized the launching of a vigorous awareness campaign on agriculture and allied sector schemes to ensure maximum outreach and benefits to the farming

community. He underlined the need to promote market-driven production, strengthen market linkages, reduce dependency on middlemen, encourage public-private partnerships and foster inclusive decision-making involving small and marginal farmers, women and youth.

The Minister also called for replication of successful innovations and technologies in agriculture and horticulture, stating that the goal is to transform the traditional farming into a modern, income-oriented and market-driven system.

Later, the Minister visited the Rural Development Department Jammu, interacted with the officials and reviewed the progress of ongoing developmental works in Jammu division.

The event was attended by the Mission Director JKCI/HADP, Directors of Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Husbandry, MD JK AGRO, experts from SKUAST-J and Universities, representatives of financial institutions including J&K Bank and PNB, members of the Kissan Advisory Board, farmers, FPOs and budding entrepreneurs.

DC Budgam reviews stamp rate revision process for 2026

KT NEWS DESK

BUDGAM , DECEMBER 18: A review meeting regarding the revision of stamp rates for the year 2026 was chaired by the Deputy Commissioner (DC) Budgam, Dr. Bilal Mohi-ud-Din Bhat, at the District Headquarters.

The meeting, as per an official statement, was attended by the ADC Budgam Mehraj-ud-din Shah, General Manager, District Industries Centre Budgam Zahid Ahmad; Assistant Commissioner Revenue, Budgam; Assistant Commissioner Panchayat, Budgam; Divisional Forest Officer, PP Forest Division Budgam; Sub Registrar, Budgam; Town Planner, Housing and Urban Development Department, Budgam; Sub-Divisional Magistrate Beerwah/Chadoora/Khansahib; and Executive Officers of Municipal Councils/Committees of Budgam, Beerwah, Chadoora, Charar-i-Sharief, Khansahib and Magam. During the meeting, a detailed review



of the existing stamp rates was undertaken in light of the proposed revisions for 2026. The DC emphasized that the revision process must be carried out in a scientific, data-driven and objective manner, taking into account prevailing market trends, recent developmental activities, and variations in land use patterns across urban, semi-urban and rural areas of the district.

He directed that a comparative analysis of current stamp rates and proposed revised rates be conducted with due

consideration to infrastructure growth, commercial viability, residential expansion and overall economic activity in different localities. The DC highlighted about importance of ensuring uniformity, transparency and rationality in the revised rates so as to prevent both undervaluation and undue financial burden on the public. The DC further stressed the need for close inter-departmental coordination, directing all concerned departments to furnish relevant inputs and factual data within the prescribed timeframe.

He underlined that the revised stamp duties must be well-documented, properly justified and aligned with existing legal provisions and government policies.

The DC also emphasised timely finalization of the exercise so that the revised stamp duties are notified and implemented uniformly with effect from 1st January, 2026, ensuring smooth administration and enhanced revenue realization for the district.

GOVERNMENT OF JAMMU & KASHMIR

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER/ DISTRICT MAGISTRATE DISTRICT DEV. COMMISSONER KUPWARA

Website: Kupwara.nic.in Email: dcup-jk@nic.in Ph.No: 01955-253335

Subject: Inclement Weather Forecast — Advisory thereof.

In view of the inclement weather forecast due to intensity of western disturbance and subsequent prediction of snowfall on higher reaches from 20th to 22nd Dec. 2025, the District Administration advises the general public and directs all line departments to remain alert and take following precautionary measures:

Advisory for General Public

- Avoid unnecessary travel, particularly towards hilly, avalanche-prone, landslide-prone areas.
 - Do not venture close to rivers, streams, nallahs, irrigation canals, or other water bodies, as water levels may rise abruptly.
 - Fishermen, sand excavators, and construction workers near water bodies are strictly prohibited from venturing out until the weather improves.
 - People living in low-lying and vulnerable areas are advised to remain vigilant against possible waterlogging, flash floods, and mudslides.
 - Farmers are advised to take precautionary measures for protection of crops, livestock, and stored produce.
 - Drivers and commuters must exercise utmost caution while driving on slippery roads; avoid over-speeding and ensure proper functioning of vehicle headlights and brakes.
 - Parents are advised to ensure that children do not play near swollen water bodies or Streams.
- In case of landslides, house collapses, flash floods, or other emergencies, the public should immediately inform the nearest Police Station, Tehsil Office, or Disaster Management Control Room.
- Directions to Line Departments**
- PWD / R&B Department/PMGSY/BRO/Mechanical and Hospital Div. Kupwara/MC Kupwara/ Handwara/ Langate: Keep men and machinery on standby for snow clearance of roads and blockages and also ensure, Control Rooms are functional.
 - I&FC Department: Closely monitor water levels in Pohru, tributaries, and nallahs; ensure embankments and flood channels are inspected and strengthened where necessary.
 - PHE Department: Ensure uninterrupted water supply and maintain readiness for quick restoration in case of damage.
 - KPDC (Electricity): Maintain vigil on power supply lines; deploy rapid response teams to restore supply in case of breakdowns.
 - Health Department: Keep emergency medical teams, ambulances, and first aid facilities in readiness at district and block levels.
 - Police & SDRF: Remain alert for evacuation, rescue, and crowd management if required.
 - Fire & Emergency Services: Keep units/ dewatering pumps on standby for immediate response.
 - Rural Development & Municipal Committees: Ensure proper drainage of rainwater in vulnerable habitations and clear debris to prevent waterlogging. Food, Civil Supplies & Consumer Affairs (FCS&CA): Ensure adequate stock of ration and essentials at distribution centers, especially in remote areas.
 - All Tehsildars BDOS: Remain in close contact with local PRIS and keep field functionaries alert for immediate reporting of any incident.

Emergency Contact Information

District Emergency Operation Centre (DEOC)	Police Control Room, Kupwara/ Handwara	Fire and Emergency Service	Ambulance and Medical Helpline No.	ERSS
01955-253522/ 9419268121	01955-252451 01955-262295	01955-252222	108	112

District Administration, in coordination with Police, SDRF, and all line departments, has kept adequate men and machinery ready to deal with any eventuality. Public cooperation is solicited to ensure community safety during this period of inclement weather. Issued in Public Interest.

(Shrikant Balasaheb Suse (IAS)
Deputy Commissioner,
Kupwara

No: DCK/PS/2025

DIPK-9095/25
DATED: 18-12-2025

GOVERNMENT OF JAMMU & KASHMIR

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER MECHANICAL& HOSPITAL DIVISION SRINAGAR (Erstwhile Mechanical Hospital & Central Heating Division Srinagar)

Contact No: 0194-2496089, Email Id: exen-mechospmgr@jk.gov.in

GIST of e-tender

e-NIT No: M&HDS/TS /2025-26/119/e-tendering,

Dated: 17-12-2025

(SHORT TERM)

For and on behalf of the Lt. Governor, J&K UT e-tenders are invited in two cover system on percentage basis from registered/reputed/experienced firms with J&K State Govt., CPWD, Railways and other State/Central Governments for the below mentioned work: --

Name of Work	Est. Cost (In rupees)	Cost of T/Doc. (In rupees)	Time of completion	AA Accorded Vide No:	TS No	Earnest Money	Position of Funds
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Comprehensive Maintenance Contract for OTIS make lift installed at oncology SMHS Hospital Srinagar	1,45,000/-	200	365 days	04 MCS of 2025, Dated:- 08-05-2025	M&HDS/ TS/87, Dated:- 12/2025	2% of the estimated cost	Available with intending Department

The bidding document consisting of qualifying information, eligibility criteria, specifications, Bill of quantities (B.O.Q), Set of terms and conditions of contract and other details can be seen/downloaded from the Govt. website www.jktenders.gov.in as per schedule given below:-

1	Publish date	17-12-2025 (17:00 hrs)
2	Period of downloading of bidding document	17-12-2025 (17:00 hrs)
3	Bid submission start date	17-12-2025 (18:00 hrs)
4	Bid submission end date	24-12-2025 (13:00 hrs)
5	Date and time of opening of bids	24-12-2025 (15:00 hrs)

No: M&HDS/TS/ 7070-75

DIPK-9108/25
DATED: 18-12-2025

Dated:17.12.2025

Sd/-
Executive Engineer,
M&HD, Srinagar

PUBLIC NOTICE

Subject: - Grant of Registration of Paying Guest House/ Home stay under the name and style "Corte de Paradise" Situated at Highland Enclave, Gogo, Humhama, Budgam

Where, I Mr/Ms: Irfa Khan S/O D/o W/o: Anwar Sadath Shawl R/o: Highland Enclave, Gogo, Humhama, Budgam, Kashmir, intends to apply in the office of Prescribed Authority of Directorate of Tourism Kashmir for registration of my proposed Paying Guest House /Home Stay under the name and style " " Situated at Kashmir under the Tourist Trade Act 1978/82/2011.

Whereas, I will submit Landownership Certificate from Concerned Tehsildar with attested photographs of the unit through Dy. Commissioner concerned, Rent/Lease Deed/Partnership Deed/issued by concerned Sub-Registrar, Judicial Magistrate (if applicable) NOC from the owner to the effect that the property can be used as Home stay), Character Certificate of the applicant from the concerned Police Station, undertaking from the owner as self-declaration, Public Notice inviting objections, if any in print media, list of family members Name, Age, and Photograph self-attested by owner, Photographs of the unit as mentioned in the application (each of exterior and individual bed rooms and bathrooms), Inspection report by the Committee The recommendation of the inspection Committee shall decide whether to issue a registration to the unit or not keeping in view, the type of accommodation and amenity, adhar card.

Now before my case is processed for registration by the Prescribed Authority. The matter is hereby notified for information of general Public/ organizations for objections if any and the same should reach to the office of Prescribed Authority within a period of 7 days from the publication of this notice in leading local newspaper of the Valley. Objections received beyond the period of 7 days from the date of publication shall not be entertained and the case shall be processed under rules as per merit.

From The Parliament

‘Railway network in J&K expands by 34,428 km’

RAJA SYED RATHER

Srinagar, Dec 17: The delays in several railway infrastructure projects in Jammu and Kashmir are linked to different challenges like land acquisition, forest clearances, difficult terrain and other statutory issues, the Union Ministry said on Thursday. However, the Centre has asserted that it is making sustained efforts to expedite the execution of these projects.

The details were shared by Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw in a written reply to a question raised by Lok Sabha members Mala Roy and Dr. Raj Kumar Chabbewal.

Highlighting projects related to Jammu and Kashmir, the Ministry said, “capacity augmentation works on the Jalandhar–Pathankot–Jammu Tawi section, a critical rail corridor serving as the main rail link to the Union Territory. The project aims to improve connectivity, operational efficiency and passenger movement to and from J&K.”

In recent years, the construction of railways has gained momentum. Between 2014 and 2025, 34,428 km of new tracks were commissioned, which shows a huge acceleration in the project



execution when compared to 7,599 km added during 2009–14.

The Ministry attributed the completion of timelines of projects connected with J&K to factors like land acquisition by state governments, forest and wildlife clearances, shifting of utilities, geological challenges, law and order issues and limited working months in hilly areas.

The Minister clarified that the government is trying to overcome the challenges by taking measures like enhanced budgetary support, delegation of powers at the field level, close monitoring of projects and regular coordination with concerned authorities to fast-track

clearances.

He reiterated that railway projects, particularly those linked to Jammu and Kashmir, are approved while keeping in view aspects like strategic importance, connectivity to remote and border areas, socio-economic benefits and overall availability of funds.

The Minister also informed the parliament that as on April 1, 2025, Indian Railways has sanctioned 431 infrastructure projects across the country, including new lines, gauge conversion and doubling works, covering 35,966 km at an estimated cost of about Rs.6.75 lakh crore—(KNO)

Over 45,000 PMAY-U homes sanctioned for J&K: GoI

RAJA SYED RATHER

Srinagar, Dec 18: More than 45,000 houses have been sanctioned under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana–Urban (PMAY-U) and PMAY-U 2.0 in Jammu and Kashmir, the government of India informed the Lok Sabha on Thursday. It added that Ladakh has received approval for more than 1,400 houses under the scheme.

In a written reply to the Lok Sabha, the Ministry of State for Housing and

Urban Affairs, Tokhan Sahu said that out of 45, 112 sanctioned houses, 34, 453 houses have been completed and occupied. While in Ladakh, 1,434 houses have been approved, and 934 houses stand completed and occupied.

Housing and urban development are State and UT subjects, and the implementation of schemes such as PMAY-U, AMRUT, Swachh Bharat Mission–Urban and PM e-Bus Sewa is carried out by the respective UT administrations with

financial and technical support from the Centre, said the Ministry.

It was informed that PMAY-U scheme, which was launched in 2015 to provide all-weather pucca houses with basic civic amenities to eligible urban beneficiaries and the deadline for completion has been extended till December 31, 2025.

Based on the experience gained from PMAY-U, the Centre launched PMAY-U 2.0 in September 2024 to extend housing support

to an additional one crore beneficiaries across the country over the next five years. This scheme also includes slum dwellers and adds a dedicated Affordable Rental Housing component.

The Ministry further said that the progress of PMAY-U and PMAY-U 2.0 in Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh is being monitored at the city, UT and central levels through regular reviews to ensure timely completion and occupancy of houses—(KNO)

Ladakh's 3 EMRS Await opening: Centre

RAJA SYED RATHER

Srinagar, Dec 18: The three Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) sanctioned for the Union Territory of Ladakh are yet to become operational, the Government of India informed Parliament on Thursday.

The information was shared by the Minister of State for Tribal Affairs, Shri Durgadas Uikey, in a written reply to a question raised by Ladakh MP Mohmad Haneefa in the Lok Sabha.

The Minister said that the delay in making the EMRS functional is mainly due to the non-identification of suitable land by the UT administration and issues related to

the high cost involved.

Stating further, he said that the National Education Society for Tribal Students (NESTS) has advised the concerned State and UT governments to ensure that the approved EMRS are made functional. This will help in providing quality residential facilities to tribal students in remote areas.

While responding to the demand for more Eklavya Model Residential Schools in Ladakh, the Government said that the need for new EMRS across the country, including tribal-dominated areas such as Ladakh, is reviewed periodically, but no specific timeline or fresh sanction details were shared—(KNO)

J&K has LPG bottling capacity of 185 TMTPA: Govt

RAJA SYED RATHER

Srinagar, Dec 18: The Government of India informed the Lok Sabha on Thursday that Jammu and Kashmir has an LPG bottling capacity of 185 Thousand Metric Tonnes Per Annum (TMTPA).

In a written reply to a question in Lok

Sabha, the Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas, Hardeep Singh Puri has said that the LPG bottling capacity in Jammu and Kashmir includes 65 TMTPA of Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL) and 120 TMTPA of Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPL). It also added that the Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited

(BPCL) has no bottling plant capacity in the Union Territory.

The Minister said that there is adequate LPG bottling capacity available across the country and that most bottling plants of Public Sector Oil Marketing Companies operate in single or double shifts, with scope for further enhancement by

increasing shifts as per requirement. To strengthen supply infrastructure, Public Sector Oil Marketing Companies have commissioned several new LPG bottling plants nationwide in the last decade. Besides that government is reviewing to augment more LPG storage and distribution capacity to ensure an uninterrupted supply.

The Centre maintained that assessment of additional infrastructure and expansion of LPG facilities, including storage and bottling capacity, is a continuous process and is undertaken based on technical and commercial feasibility to meet consumer demand, including in Jammu and Kashmir—(KNO)

RTOs, ARTOs designated as executive magistrates in J&K

REHAN QAYOOM MIR

Srinagar, Dec 18: The Jammu and Kashmir Government has empowered all Regional Transport Officers (RTOs) and Assistant Regional Transport Officers (ARTOs) to act as Executive Magistrates within their respective jurisdictions.

As per a government notification issued by the Department of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, the decision has been taken under sub-section (1) of Section 14 of the

Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS).

The order further authorizes these officers to exercise the powers of Executive Magistrates “as prescribed under the provisions of BNSS, until further orders.”

The order says, the move aims to strengthen enforcement of transport and road safety laws across Jammu and Kashmir by enabling RTOs and ARTOs to take magisterial action on violations within their jurisdictions—(KNO)

Augib Nabi thanks Delhi Capitals, supporters for trust



WARIS FAYAZ

Srinagar, Dec 18: Jammu and Kashmir's pace sensation Augib Nabi Dar has expressed joy and thrill over being acquired by Delhi Capitals for the IPL 2026 season, following a record-breaking auction bid.

In a video message shared by Delhi Capitals, Jammu & Kashmir pacer Augib Nabi Dar said, “I am thrilled to be part of the Delhi Capitals squad.”

Augib thanked his fans back home and the Delhi Capitals management for reposing trust in him. “I can't wait

to play alongside stars like KL Y and Mitchell Starc”, he said. Pertinently, the J&K cricketer entered the IPL 2026 mini-auction in Abu Dhabi with a base price of Rs 30 lakh but sparked a fierce bidding war among Delhi Capitals, Rajasthan Royals, Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Sunrisers Hyderabad, ultimately fetching Rs 8.40 crore—28 times his base price and the highest for any J&K player in the IPL history.

The landmark deal marks a historic moment for J&K cricket, with the 28-year-old emerging as one of the top uncapped buys—(KNO)

Recruitment Scam: Aspirants praise LG Sinha for transparent inquiry

REHAN QAYOOM MIR

Srinagar, Dec 18: Aspirants affected by the 2020 Fire and Emergency Services recruitment scam on Thursday thanked Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha and BJP leader Ravindra Raina for what they called “a transparent and fair handling of the inquiry” that led to the termination of 103 firemen earlier this week.

The aspirants gathered at the Press Enclave in Srinagar and expressed gratitude to the LG administration for acting on the findings of the probe into the 2020 recruitment irregularities.

“The inquiry was fair and transparent. For the first time, we feel our voices have been heard,” said one of the aspirants, adding that the decision has restored faith in merit-based recruitment.

Another aspirant remarked, “This is just a trailer; the



movie is yet to come. We thank LG Manoj Sinha and Ravindra Raina for taking action and ensuring that honesty and merit are respected.”

The participants said the move has “sent a strong message” against corruption in recruitment. “Those who manipulated the process have been exposed, and the deserving youth have regained hope,” another aspirant told KNO. “This is a turning point in the fight for transparent recruitment in Jammu and Kashmir. We hope this accountability continues in every department.”

Recently, the Lieutenant

Governor-led administration, following an inquiry committee's report and an Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) investigation, ordered the termination of 103 firemen appointed through the 2020 recruitment process.

The probe had confirmed tampering of OMR sheets, manipulation of merit lists, fabrication of records and inflated marks. Of the 106 candidates found to have benefited from the irregularities, three had already been removed earlier for failing mandatory formalities, leaving 103 affected by the latest order—(KNO)

Nasir Aijaz wins Bronze at World Volleyball Championship in China

WARIS FAYAZ

Srinagar, Dec 18: Seventeen-year-old Nasir Aijaz Sufi from Sempora area of Sopore has brought laurels to Jammu and Kashmir by clinching a bronze medal at the ISF World School Volleyball Championship held recently in Shangluo, China.

Nasir, the only participant from J&K to represent India in the global event, was part of the team competing under the banner of the School Games Federation of India (SGFI). The championship was held from December 4 to 13, featuring teams from 20 countries.

An opposite hitter by position, Nasir developed a love for volleyball at a young age, inspired by his elder brother, who also played the game. “It was bronze today, but it will be gold for Jammu and Kashmir next time,” he told said, expressing his determination to strive for greater success in future

tournaments.

Having risen through the ranks from zonal to district, state, national and now international level, Nasir credits his accomplishment to his family, teachers and coaches. “It was not an easy task, being the only player selected from the valley,” he added.

His family expressed overwhelming pride at his achievement, saying they always supported and encouraged him.

Similarly, villagers also hailed Nasir as a source of inspiration for the youth of the valley.

Altaf Hussain Mir, chairman of Nasir's school, praised his dedication, saying, “He was a talented boy, and we always saw a spark in him.”

The feat marks a historic moment in J&K's sports history, placing Indian school volleyball on the global map through the team's maiden appearance at the prestigious championship—(KNO)

LoP Sharma meets Nitin Nabin

Congratulates him on new BJP role



KNO

New Delhi, Dec 18: Leader of Opposition (LoP) and BJP Senior Leader, Sunil Sharma on Thursday met with Nitin Nabin, extending heartfelt congratulations on his appointment as the youngest National Working President of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

The meeting, marked by warmth and mutual respect, was held at the BJP headquarters, New Delhi, where both leaders reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening the party's organizational goals and democratic values.

During the cordial interaction, Sunil Sharma lauded Nitin Nabin's remarkable journey and leadership qualities and congratulated him on this monumental achievement.

“Becoming the youngest National Working President of the BJP is not only a personal milestone but also a testament to his dedication, strategic vision, and ability to inspire people across generations,”

He said that Nabin's exemplary work in fostering youth participation in politics has set a benchmark for future leaders. Sharma emphasized that Nitin Nabin's appointment reflects the party's commitment to promoting young talent and empowering progressive leadership at the national level.

“In a rapidly evolving political landscape, youth

leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping India's future. Nitin Nabin embodies the dynamism, energy, and innovation needed to take our party forward,” Sharma said.

Nitin Nabin expressed his gratitude for the warm wishes and support extended by Sunil Sharma. He acknowledged the role of senior leaders and party workers in his political journey and pledged to uphold the values and vision of the BJP.

“It is an honour to serve as the National Working President. I am deeply humbled by the trust placed in me by our party leadership and our supporters nationwide,” Nabin said. Both leaders discussed key strategies for grassroots engagement and strengthening the party's presence across regions, especially focusing on youth and grassroots empowerment initiatives.

Nitin Nabin reiterated his belief that inclusive politics and active youth participation are essential for the nation's progress. “Our focus will be to amplify the voices of young Indians and ensure they are actively involved in decision-making processes that shape the future of our country,” he added.

The meeting concluded with mutual commitments to uphold democratic ideals and work collaboratively to achieve the party's goals as India strides toward socio-economic development and political inclusivity—(KNO)

EDITORIAL

Friday Brief: Caring For The Poor And Destitute

In the moral and social framework of Islam, the care for the poor, the needy, and the destitute is not a matter of optional charity but a fundamental pillar of faith and a compulsory act of justice. The Quran and Hadith establish this duty with unambiguous clarity, weaving compassion into the very fabric of a believer's life and the structure of a righteous society. The Quran repeatedly links true piety with tangible support for the vulnerable. It sternly questions those who neglect this duty: "Have

you seen the one who denies the Recompense? For that is the one who drives away the orphan and does not encourage the feeding of the poor" (107:1-3). Similarly, the righteous are those "who give food—despite their love for it—to the poor, the orphan, and the captive" (76:8), solely for the pleasure of God. This transforms welfare from mere pity into a spiritual exercise and a recognition of divine bounty. Wealth is portrayed not as absolute ownership, but as a trust from God, in which the poor have a

divinely ordained right. "And in their wealth there was a rightful share for the beggar and the deprived" (51:19). This establishes Zakat not as a voluntary donation, but as a purified debt owed by the wealthy to the community, a systematic mechanism for redistribution and social solidarity. The Hadith of Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) powerfully reinforces this. He stated, "He is not a believer whose stomach is full while his neighbour goes hungry" (Al-Adab Al-Mufrad). This profound

saying makes care for the destitute a condition of genuine faith itself. The Prophet's own life was a model of empathy. He urged feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, and supporting the broken-hearted, framing these acts as pathways to Paradise. He warned that on the Day of Judgment, God will directly question those whom He had blessed with wealth about where and how they discharged their duty towards His less fortunate creation. Thus, Islamic teachings present a holistic vision. It combines compulsory

alms (Zakat) with voluntary charity (Sadaqah), institutional obligation with personal empathy. This system aims not merely to alleviate temporary hunger but to eradicate destitution, uphold human dignity, and foster a society where no one is left behind. To ignore the cry of the poor is, in this light, not just a social failing, but a spiritual bankruptcy. It is a rejection of a core covenant with the Creator, who tests the grateful by their generosity to His most vulnerable servants.

Viksit Bharat- G RAM G Bill 2025: ‘Reforming MGNREGA For Viksit Bharat’

Press Information Bureau

Rural employment has been a cornerstone of India's social protection framework for nearly two decades. Since its enactment in 2005, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) played a key role in providing wage employment, stabilising rural incomes and creating basic infrastructure. Over time, however, the structure and objectives of rural India have evolved significantly. Rising incomes, expanded connectivity, widespread digital penetration and diversified livelihoods have altered the nature of rural employment needs.

Against this backdrop, the Government has proposed the Viksit Bharat- Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Bill, 2025, also referred to as Viksit Bharat- G RAM G Bill, 2025. The Bill represents a comprehensive statutory overhaul of MGNREGA, aligning rural employment with the long-term vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, while strengthening accountability, infrastructure outcomes and income security.

Background of Rural Employment and Development Policy in India

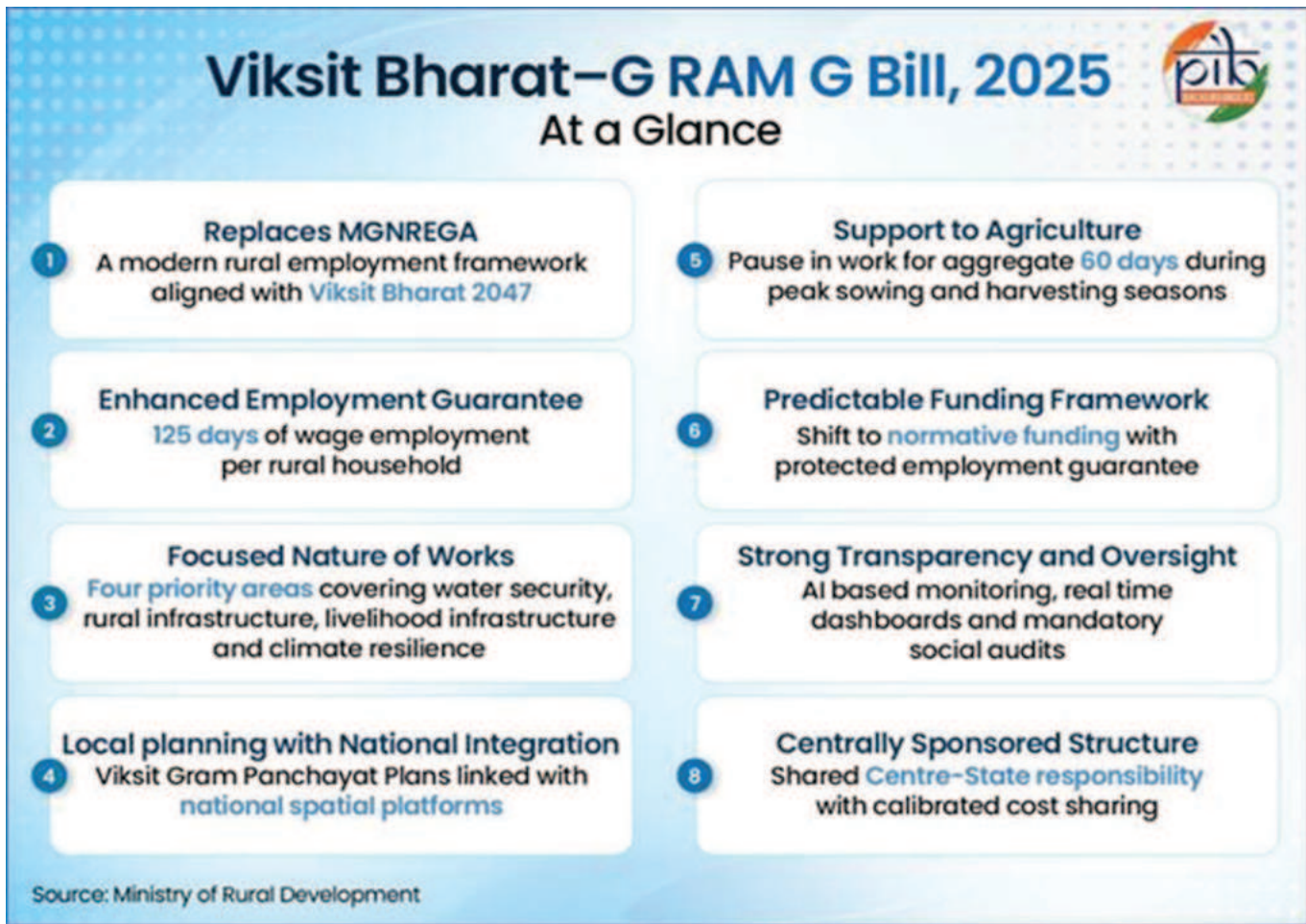
Since Independence, rural development policies in India have focused on reducing poverty, improving agricultural productivity, and creating employment for surplus and underemployed rural labour. Wage employment programmes have gradually evolved as key instruments for supporting rural livelihoods while also strengthening basic infrastructure, with approaches adapting to changing socio-economic conditions over time.

India's wage employment initiatives progressed through multiple phases, beginning with early programmes such as the Rural Manpower Programme (1960s) and the Crash Scheme for Rural Employment (1971). These were followed by more structured efforts in the 1980s and 1990s, including the National Rural Employment Programme, Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme, later merged into Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (1993), which consolidated into Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana in 1999, aimed at improving coverage and co-ordination. Complementary schemes such as the Employment Assurance Scheme and the Food for Work Programme addressed seasonal unemployment and food security. A major shift came with the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Act of 1977, which introduced the concept of a statutory right to work. These experiences culminated in the enactment of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in 2005, providing a nationwide legal framework for rural employment generation.

MGNREGA Evolution and the Limits of Incremental Reform

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was a flagship programme aimed at enhancing livelihood security by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment each year to rural households willing to undertake unskilled manual work. Over the years, a range of administrative and technological reforms strengthened its implementation, leading to notable improvements in participation, transparency, and digital governance. Women's participation rose steadily from 48 per cent to 58.15 per cent between FY 2013-14 and FY 2025-26, Aadhaar seeding expanded sharply, the Aadhaar-Based Payment System was widely adopted, and electronic wage payments became nearly universal. Monitoring of works also improved, with a large expansion in geo-tagged assets and a growing share of individual assets created at the household level.

The experience under MGNREGA also highlighted the critical role played by field-level staff, who ensured continuity and scale of implementation despite working with limited administrative resources and staffing. However, alongside these gains, deeper structural issues persisted. Monitoring across several states revealed gaps such as work not found on the ground, expenditure not matching physical progress, use of machines in labour-intensive works, and



frequent bypassing of digital attendance systems. Over time, misappropriation accumulated, and only a small proportion of households were able to complete the full one hundred days of employment in the post pandemic period. These trends indicated that while delivery systems improved, the overall architecture of MGNREGA had reached its limits.

The Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission Gramin Bill responds to this experience through a comprehensive legislative reset. It strengthens the implementation framework by increasing the administrative expenditure ceiling from 6 per cent to 9 per cent, providing greater support for staffing, remuneration, training, and technical capacity. This shift reflects a practical and people-centred approach to programme management, moving towards a more professional and adequately supported system. Stronger administrative capacity is expected to improve planning and execution, enhance service delivery, and reinforce accountability, ensuring that the objectives of the new framework are achieved consistently at the village level.

Rationale for a New Statutory Framework
The need for reform is also rooted in broader socio-economic changes. MGNREGA was built in 2005, but rural India has transformed. Poverty levels declined from 27.1 per cent in 2011-12 to 5.3 per cent in 2022-23, supported by rising consumption, improved financial access, and expanded welfare coverage. With rural livelihoods becoming more diversified and digitally integrated, the open-ended and demand-driven design of MGNREGA no longer aligns fully with contemporary rural realities.

The Viksit Bharat- G RAM G Bill, 2025 responds to this context by modernising rural employment guarantees, strengthening accountability, and aligning employment creation with long term infrastructure and climate resilience goals.

Key Features of the Viksit Bharat- G RAM G Bill, 2025

The Bill guarantees 125 days of wage employment per rural household in each financial year to such rural households whose adult members volunteer to undertake unskilled manual work, contributing to income security beyond the earlier 100-day entitlement, with an aggregated 60-day no-work period to ensure the availability of agricultural labour during peak sowing and harvesting season. Workers continue to receive 125 guaranteed days of employment within the remaining 305 days, ensuring that both farmers and labourers benefit. The

disbursement of daily wages shall be made on a weekly basis or, in any case, not later than a fortnight after the date on which such work was done. Employment creation is integrated with infrastructure development through four priority verticals:

Water security through water-related works

Core-rural infrastructure
Livelihood- related infrastructure
Special works to mitigate extreme weather events

All assets created are aggregated into the Viksit Bharat National Rural Infrastructure Stack, ensuring a unified, coordinated national development strategy. Planning is decentralised through Viksit Gram Panchayat Plans, which are prepared locally and spatially integrated with national systems such as PM Gati Shakti.

MGNREGA vs VIKSIT BHARAT- G RAM G Bill, 2025

The new Bill represents a major upgrade over MGNREGA, fixing structural weaknesses while enhancing employment, transparency, planning, and accountability.

The Financial Architecture

The shift from a central sector scheme to a centrally sponsored framework reflects the inherently local nature of rural employment and asset creation. Under the new architecture, states share both cost and responsibility through a normative allocation framework, creating stronger incentives for effective implementation and preventing misuse. Planning is grounded in regional realities through Gram Panchayat Plans. At the same time, the Centre continues to set standards, while states execute with accountability, resulting in a cooperative partnership that improves efficiency and strengthens outcomes.

Why shift from Demand-Based to Normative Funding?

"Normative allocation" means the allocation of the fund made by the Central Government to the State. A demand-based model leads to unpredictable allocations and mismatched budgeting. Normative funding aligns the scheme with the budgeting model used for most Government of India schemes, without reducing the employment guarantee, through the use of objective parameters, ensuring predictable and rational planning while preserving the legal entitlement to employment or unemployment allowance.

The total estimated annual requirement of funds on wage, material, and administrative components is Rs.1,51,282 crore, including the State share. Of this, the estimated Central share is Rs.95,692.31 crore. This

transition does not impose an undue financial burden on states. The funding structure is calibrated to state capacity, with a standard cost-sharing ratio of 60:40 between the Centre and states, enhanced support of 90:10 for North Eastern and Himalayan states, and 100 per cent central funding for Union Territories without legislatures. States were already bearing a share of material and administrative costs under the earlier framework, and the move to predictable normative allocations further supports sound budgeting. Provisions for additional assistance to states during disasters and stronger oversight mechanisms also help reduce long term losses arising from misappropriation, reinforcing fiscal sustainability alongside accountability.

Benefits of the Viksit Bharat- G RAM G Bill

The Bill strengthens the rural economy by linking employment generation with productive asset creation, leading to higher household incomes and improved resilience. Priority is given to water-related works, supporting agriculture and groundwater recharge. Investment in core rural infrastructure, such as roads and connectivity, improves market access, while livelihood infrastructure, including storage, markets, and production assets, enables income diversification. Climate resilience is strengthened through works focused on water harvesting, flood drainage, and soil conservation. The guarantee of 125 days of employment raises household earnings, stimulates village-level consumption, and helps reduce distress-driven migration, supported by digital attendance, wage payments, and data-driven planning.

Farmers benefit from assured labour availability through state-notified pauses in public works during peak sowing and harvesting seasons, prevention of wage inflation, and improved irrigation, storage, and connectivity. Labourers gain from higher potential earnings, predictable work through Viksit Gram Panchayat Plans, secure digital wage payments, direct benefits from the assets they help create, and a mandatory unemployment allowance. Where work is not provided, a daily unemployment allowance becomes payable after 15 days, with liability resting on the States. The rates and conditions are to be prescribed through rules, ensuring flexibility while safeguarding workers' rights and promoting the timely provision of employment.

Implementing and Monitoring Authorities

The Bill establishes a clear institutional framework to ensure coordinated, accountable, and transparent implementation of the

Key Takeaways

- The Viksit Bharat- G RAM G Bill, 2025 replaces MGNREGA with a new statutory framework aligned with Viksit Bharat 2047.
- The employment guarantee is enhanced to 125 days per rural household, strengthening income security
- Links wage employment with durable rural infrastructure across 4 priority areas.
- Strengthens decentralised planning through Viksit Gram Panchayat Plans and nationally integrated through the Viksit Bharat National Rural Infrastructure Stack.
- The shift to normative funding and a centrally sponsored structure improves predictability, accountability and Centre-State partnership.

Mission across national, State, district, block, and village levels.

Central and State Gramin Rozgar Guarantee Councils provide policy guidance, review implementation, and strengthen accountability.

National and State Steering Committees drive strategic direction, convergence, and performance review.

Panchayati Raj Institutions lead planning and execution, with Gram Panchayats implementing at least half of the works in terms of cost.

District Programme Coordinators and Programme Officers manage planning, compliance, payments, and social audits.

Gram Sabhas play a strengthened role in conducting social audits and ensuring transparency through access to all records.

Transparency, Accountability, and Social Protection

The Bill equips the Central Government with clear enforcement powers to ensure compliance and protect public funds. It authorises the Centre to investigate complaints relating to implementation, suspend fund releases where serious irregularities are detected, and direct corrective or remedial measures to address deficiencies. These provisions strengthen accountability across the system, maintain financial discipline, and enable timely intervention to prevent misuse.

The Bill also establishes a comprehensive transparency framework covering every stage of implementation. It enables the use of artificial intelligence and biometric authentication to identify irregularities early, supported by Central and State Steering Committees that provide continuous guidance and coordination. A focused approach through four clearly defined rural development verticals allows closer tracking of outcomes. Panchayats are assigned an enhanced role in supervision, complemented by GPS and mobile-based monitoring of works in real time. Real-time MIS dashboards and weekly public disclosures ensure public visibility, while social audits mandated at least once every six months reinforce community participation and trust.

Conclusion

The Viksit Bharat- Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Bill, 2025, represents a decisive shift in India's rural employment policy. While MGNREGA achieved significant gains in participation, digitisation, and transparency over time, persistent structural weaknesses limited its effectiveness. The new Bill builds on past improvements while addressing their shortcomings through a modern, accountable, and infrastructure-focused framework.

By expanding guaranteed employment, aligning work with national development priorities, and embedding strong digital governance, the Bill repositions rural employment as a strategic instrument for sustainable growth and resilient livelihoods, fully aligned with the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

The views expressed by contributors on this page are their own and do not necessarily reflect the policies or positions of the newspaper

Satish Sharma reviews functioning of key departments in Kupwara

KT NEWS DESK

KUPWARA, DECEMBER 18: In continuation with the government's public outreach programme, Minister for FCS&CA, Transport, Youth Services and Sports, IT, Science and Technology, Satish Sharma, along with Advisor to the Chief Minister, Nasir Aslam Wani Thursday reviewed the progress and performance of several departments during a meeting held at Kupwara.

The meeting, as per an official statement, was attended by MLA Kupwara Mir Mohammad Fayaz, MLA Karnah Javid Ahmad Mirchal, MLA Langate Khurshid Ahmad Sheikh, Deputy Commissioner Kupwara Shrikant Suse, ADC Handwara, RTO Kashmir, Joint Director FCS&CA and Joint Director Youth Services & Sports, Chief Planning Officer and other concerned district officers.

While reviewing the Food, Civil Supplies & Consumer Affairs Department, the Minister was informed that a total of 6,67,755 beneficiaries have been registered under NFSA and non-NFSA categories in the district. It was further informed that 267.81 metric tonnes of rice have currently been stocked at the main FCS&CA depot at



Bumhama. Adequate stock of rice, atta and sugar have already been pre-positioned in border and snow-bound areas, including Karnah, Machil, Keran, Budnamal, Jungund and Kumkadi, which are being serviced through 170 centres.

The Minister emphasised the need to ensure an uninterrupted supply of essential commodities, particularly in snow-bound and hard-to-reach areas, so that the residents do not face any inconvenience during harsh weather conditions.

Reviewing the Transport Department, the ARTO Kupwara apprised the Minister of the number of passenger buses, trucks and cabs operating in the district. It was informed that 15.91 crore have been

realized during the ongoing financial year 2025-26 through fees, taxes, fitness and passenger tax. Additionally, 5 lakh have been disbursed under the Road Accident Victim Fund during the current year.

Responding to demand of public representatives, the Minister announced the issuance of government buses to all Assembly Constituencies of the district to facilitate daily commuting for the public.

Regarding solarization of government buildings, it was informed that 398 buildings have been solarized so far, and smart meters have been installed in 17 buildings. Additionally, 2,798 solar street lights have been installed during the financial year 2024-25 while 344 more have

been proposed for installation in the current financial year. It was also informed that 13 solar agriculture pumps have been allotted in the district, of which, 10 have already been installed. He also directed the concerned officers to ensure installation of solar lights in all shrines and stadiums of the district. Meanwhile, various solar lights were issued on the spot to all 6 constituencies of the district.

Regarding Hydro Power Plants, the Minister stressed upon the concerned agencies to speed up the execution of work on these projects, which shall augment the power scenario in the district.

Regarding formulation of plans, the Minister enjoined upon all the officers to ensure

utmost coordination with the concerned MLAs while making plans for different works.

The Minister also reviewed the activities of the Youth Services & Sports Department in the district.

The Advisor to Chief Minister, while speaking on the occasion, asked the officers to work in close synergy with the elected representatives while formulating and executing the government schemes and initiatives.

Earlier, the Chief Planning Officer Kupwara presented a detailed district profile of Kupwara.

Afterwards, the Minister, along with the Advisor to Chief, distributed solar lights among all the constituencies of the district.

Later, the Minister, along with Advisor to Chief Minister, had a field visit during which he inspected Playground of HSS Kupwara and Sports Stadium Galizoo.

MLA Kupwara was also present on the occasion.

The Minister directed the officers to prepare a comprehensive DPR for construction of State of Art Sports facilities at these two grounds.

The Minister met several deputations and directed the officers to ensure time-bound redressal of all their genuine grievances at the earliest.

DIC Kulgam conducts PM Vishwakarma awareness, entrepreneurship programme



KT News Desk

KULGAM, DECEMBER 18: District Industries Centre (DIC) Kulgam in collaboration with Ministry of MSME, Srinagar Thursday conducted an awareness cum orientation programme on Marketing and Entrepreneurship under PM Vishwakarma.

Additional District Development Commissioner Kulgam, Mohd Altaf Khan presided as chief guest of programme.

General Manager, District Industries Centre, Kulgam, Dr Bashir Ahmad Lone, Assistant Director MSME, Saheel Alaqband, Principal Polytechnic, Principal ITI, Faculty Members of IUST, District CSC Head, Representatives from MSME Srinagar, Industrial Promotion Officer and other officials of DIC Kulgam were present in the programme.

General Manager, District

Industries Centre, Kulgam gave awareness on the PM Vishwakarma scheme disseminating information among traditional artisans and craftsmen about the various benefits available under the scheme and encouraged them to avail the benefits.

Assistant Director, MSME, in his inaugural address, sensitized participants about importance of marketing and branding of the products made by the traditional skilled artisans cum craftsmen.

The technical session, led by the faculty of IUST, emphasized on Strategies for Effective Product Promotion, Branding, Packaging, Showcasing, Social Media Marketing and Community Based Events and Effective Costing, Budgeting and Inventory Management for Small Businesses to upgrade the skills of PM Vishwakarma.

The PM Vishwakarma artisans were also felicitated at the end of the programme.

District Panel approves 4 CLU cases in Doda



KT News Desk

DODA, DECEMBER 18: Deputy Commissioner Doda, Harvinder Singh Thursday chaired a meeting of the District Level Committee on Change of Land Use (CLU) to review and decide upon the applications received from different parts of the district.

During the meeting, five CLU cases were taken up for discussion of which four were approved after detailed scrutiny. Each case was examined thoroughly to verify compliance with the provisions applicable under rules and regulations.

The Deputy Commissioner emphasized that all CLU applications must be processed in a transparent, objective and time-bound manner to

promote planned development and curb unauthorized land conversion.

The Deputy Commissioner also directed the concerned departments to expedite verification processes, maintain accurate and complete documentation, and strengthen inter-departmental coordination to ensure prompt and error-free disposal of cases.

He further stressed the need to strike a balance between developmental requirements, environmental sustainability and the protection of agricultural land.

The meeting was attended by the ADC, DFO, CEO Bhaderwah Development Authority, CPO, concerned Tehsildars, Executive Engineers (XENS) and other revenue and departmental officials.

JKEDI trains 258 entrepreneurs under RAMP Scheme in 13 districts

KT News Desk

JAMMU/SRINAGAR, DECEMBER 18: The Jammu and Kashmir Entrepreneurship Development Institute (JKEDI) on Thursday successfully concluded the fourth batch of Management Development Programmes (MDPs) across 13 districts of the Union Territory under the Raising and Accelerating MSME Performance (RAMP) scheme. The scheme is funded by the Ministry of MSME, Government of India, and implemented by the Industries and Commerce Department, Government of Jammu and Kashmir.

The six-day intensive MDPs, as per an official statement, conducted from December 12, 2025, were held simultaneously in Anantnag, Bandipora, Baramulla, Budgam, Ganderbal, Kulgam, Pulwama, Shopian, Srinagar, Jammu, Kathua, Reasi and Udhampur. A total of 258 aspiring and existing entrepreneurs successfully completed the 30-hour structured training programme, which comprised expert interactions and field exposure visits. Notably, 243 women entrepreneurs participated in the batch, marking a significant stride towards gender inclusivity in the region's entrepreneurial ecosystem. The programmes were conducted by the respective District Centres of JKEDI under the overall supervision of the



Director, JKEDI.

The MDPs were designed to enhance managerial, financial and strategic competencies of participants, enabling them to scale up their enterprises, improve competitiveness and develop sustainable business models. The initiative aligns with the broader objectives of the RAMP programme, which seeks to strengthen and modernise the MSME ecosystem across the country.

The carefully curated curriculum, developed by subject matter experts, covered key areas including business planning, marketing strategies, use of digital tools, financial literacy, statutory compliance, innovation and leadership development. The training also featured mentorship sessions, case studies, interactive discussions and hands-on workshops to provide participants with practical, real-world business

insights.

Sector-specific sessions formed an important component of the MDPs, with experts from the District Industries Centres (DICs) and the Labour and Employment Department interacting with participants to share domain-specific guidance. In addition, field visits to successful enterprises were organised to provide firsthand exposure to operational best practices.

The programmes were regularly monitored by designated Range and Reviewing Officers, who interacted with participants to assess training quality and gather feedback, ensuring effective implementation and impact. The successful conclusion of the MDPs in 13 districts reflects JKEDI's continued commitment to fostering entrepreneurship and building local capacity to drive economic growth in Jammu and Kashmir.

Handicrafts Department to celebrate Jashn-e-Chillai Kalan at Kashmir Haat

KT News Desk

SRINAGAR, DECEMBER 18: As the Valley prepares to embrace 'Chilla-i- Kalan, the 40-day period of intense winter beginning December 21, the Department of Handicrafts and Handloom, Kashmir, shall host 'Jashn-e-Chilla-i- Kalan, a vibrant celebration of Kashmiri heritage, coinciding with Pheran Day on December 21.

Shahribeg details, a spokesman of the department stated that the two-day event, scheduled for December 20-21, at Kashmir Haat (Numaish Gah), here, will feature the dedicated stalls showcasing exquisite Kashmiri handicrafts, with a special focus on traditional Zari embroidery (tilla work) and Aari (hook) embroidery, timeless staples of Kashmiri craftsmanship often adorning the iconic Pheran. "Noted craftsmen from across the Valley have been invited to participate, offering LIVE demonstrations,

display of hand-embroidered Pherans, Pashmina hawls, and other winter garments, offering opportunities for visitors to engage directly with these master artisans," he added.

The spokesmen further said the event aims to highlight the resilience of Kashmiri traditions during the harshest winter phase while promoting the warmth and elegance of the Pheran, Kashmir's signature loose-fitting attire that provides comfort against the biting cold.

"The event will celebrate the cultural significance of Chilla-i- Kalan and Pheran Day, bringing together locals, tourists, and craft enthusiasts to experience the rich artistry that defines Kashmir. "Visitors can expect a festive atmosphere with stalls brimming with intricate zari and aari works, embodying the Valley's enduring legacy of handloom and embroidery," he said, while urging the general public to attend and support local artisans.

DC Samba reviews preparations for Ratkhada Mela at Ghagwal Temple

KT News Desk

SAMBA, DECEMBER 18: Deputy Commissioner Samba, Ayushi Sudan Thursday convened a comprehensive review meeting at the DC Office to evaluate and finalize preparations for the forthcoming Ratkhada Mela, scheduled to commence from December 27 at the revered Shree Narsingh Dev Ji Temple, Ghagwal.

Recognizing the cultural and devotional importance of the Ratkhada Mela, the Deputy Commissioner, as per an official statement, issued detailed directives to all concerned departments, emphasizing the critical need for meticulous planning, robust inter-departmental coordination and timely execution of arrangements to facilitate the seamless conduct of this major religious event.

During the extensive deliberations, the DC conducted a thorough assessment of multifaceted preparatory measures spanning security protocols, sanitation infrastructure, traffic management systems and the provision of essential public amenities.

Special emphasis was placed on maintaining stringent law and order, ensuring exemplary cleanliness standards and orchestrating a safe, orderly and memorable Ratkhada Mela that honors the religious sentiments of devotees while upholding the highest standards of administrative excellence.

The meeting was attended by ADC Samba, Jagdish Singh, ACR Samba, Ajay Bharti, SDM Ghagwal, K.J.S. Bali, Executive Engineers from various departments and heads of Health, Fire & Emergency Services, Public Health Engineering, Food Safety and Tourism departments and members of the Shree Narsingh Dev Ji Temple Committee, Ghagwal.



drinking water supply, adequate deployment of mobile toilet facilities, comprehensive medical and emergency response systems, fire safety mechanisms and other critical services essential for public welfare.

Strategic directions were issued to designate appropriate spaces for amusement rides and temporary markets while ensuring these do not impede vehicular flow or compromise public convenience, reflecting a balanced approach between tradition and public safety.

The Deputy Commissioner unequivocally stressed that seamless inter-departmental synergy remains paramount to orchestrating a safe, orderly and memorable Ratkhada Mela that honors the religious sentiments of devotees while upholding the highest standards of administrative excellence.

DC Doda reviews implementation of power sector schemes

KT News Desk

DODA, DECEMBER 18: Deputy Commissioner Doda, Harvinder Singh Thursday chaired a meeting to assess the progress of the Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS) and other power sector initiatives being implemented in the district.

During the meeting, the Deputy Commissioner, as per an official statement, undertook a comprehensive appraisal of both the physical and financial progress of RDSS works. The review covered key components including feeder bifurcation, loss-reduction measures, strengthening of distribution infrastructure and installation of smart meters.

Emphasis was laid on maintaining quality standards and adhering strictly to prescribed timelines to achieve the scheme's objective of improving the efficiency and reliability of power supply.

A power point presentation was delivered highlighting the major works executed under RDSS so far. The presentation



included updates on the replacement of wooden poles, feeder-wise completion status, current power supply status, DTR augmentation and replacement and the status of execution of MCM (Million Circuit Meter) quantities across the district.

The review also covered the status of STD station reviews, tower installation works and progress on other critical power infrastructure projects.

The Deputy Commissioner directed the concerned agencies to accord top priority to completion of solarization projects on priority. He further stressed that cabling works and installation of smart meters should be implemented simultaneously to avoid duplication

of efforts and ensure efficient execution.

Directing the executing agencies to expedite ongoing works, particularly in remote and winter-prone areas, the Deputy Commissioner emphasized the need for timely resolution of bottlenecks through effective inter-departmental coordination.

Officers were instructed to carry out regular monitoring, ensure proper field-level supervision and submit periodic progress reports to avoid delays.

The meeting was attended by the CPO, SE PDD, GM DIC, Executive Engineers (XENS) PDD, SDM Thatthri and SDM Gandoh, AEEs, AEs, JEs of PDD and other concerned officers and officials.

District AYUSH Ramban conducts training programme for MPWs



KT News Desk

RAMBAN, DECEMBER 18: A one-day training programme for Multipurpose Workers (MPWs) was organized Thursday by the District AYUSH Ramban, with the objective of strengthening grassroots-level delivery of its services and promoting preventive healthcare practices.

The training, as per an official statement, was conducted by senior Medical Officer AYUSH and District Yoga Coordinator Dr. Masood Iqbal, who delivered detailed and interactive sessions focusing on effective field-level implementation of AYUSH interventions.

The sessions covered key aspects including proper AYUSH

service delivery at the community level, accurate maintenance of OPD records and registers at Ayush Health and Wellness Centres (AHWCs) and strategies for enhancing community health awareness.

Emphasis was laid on the role of AYUSH in preventive and promotional healthcare, highlighting its significance in addressing lifestyle related ailments and improving overall well-being.

Dr. Iqbal also conducted practical demonstrations of various Yoga sanas such as Tadasana, Vrikshasana, Bhujangasana, Vajrasana and Shashankasana, enabling participants to gain hands-on understanding for effective dissemination in their respective field areas.

J&K charts major expansion plan of health services with NITI Aayog

Aayog assures full support for time-bound implementation

KT News Desk

Jammu, Dec 18: In a major push towards strengthening and expanding healthcare delivery across Jammu and Kashmir, a comprehensive roadmap for health sector reforms was on Thursday discussed by the Health & Medical Education Department with Dr. V.K. Paul, Member, NITI Aayog, in the presence of Chief Secretary, Atal Dulloo.

The high-level interaction focused on strategic interventions, technological integration, academic collaboration, and capacity augmentation aimed at ensuring equitable, accessible, and quality healthcare services across all districts of the UT.

The meeting was attended by the Secretary, Health & Medical Education Department; Managing Director, National Health Mission; Director, SKIMS; Principals of Government Medical Colleges; Executive Director, SMVDIME; Director Health Services, Jammu/Kashmir; CEO, State Health Agency, besides other senior officers.

Addressing the meeting, Dr. V.K. Paul assured the UT of NITI Aayog's full support in strengthening institutional capacities and developing human resources. He advised the Department to implement the healthcare expansion plan through a clearly defined hub-and-spoke model, with institutions frozen for specific roles and responsibilities. Emphasizing structured execution, he called for clearly



detailing institutional activities to ensure time-bound progress toward predefined goals.

Dr. Paul also stressed the need for a flexible and collaborative framework, enabling institutions to seek support from one another and adopt best practices nationally. He urged the Department to go beyond the Terms of Reference of the high-level committee constituted by the UT and explore the establishment of advanced facilities such as Eye Banks, strengthening Forensic Medicine, and upgrading Emergency and Trauma Care services across healthcare institutions.

Calling for a pragmatic yet ambitious approach, Dr. Paul assured that NITI Aayog would facilitate linkages with premier national institutions and provide expert guidance to help J&K achieve its healthcare objectives.

On the occasion, Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo sought NITI Aayog's guidance on strategies to retain senior faculty in medical colleges, attract talent from outside the UT, and extend specialized healthcare services to far-flung, mountainous, and border areas.

He also acknowledged NITI Aayog's crucial role in guiding the UT's health sector reforms, particularly over the past few months, which resulted in the addition of dozens of post-graduate seats and hundreds of MBBS seats across medical colleges in J&K.

The Secretary, Health & Medical Education Department, Dr Syed Abid Rashid Shah presented a comprehensive overview of the initiatives undertaken following sustained consultations with Dr. Paul over the past several months.

He outlined progress in expanding tertiary healthcare services to district hospitals, augmentation of UG, PG, and DNB seats, and development of a robust governance framework. He also detailed the proposed roles, responsibilities, accountability mechanisms, monitoring and evaluation systems, and implementation timelines.

The Executive Director, SMVDIME, Dr.Yashpal Sharma, made a detailed presentation on the proposed healthcare interventions envisaged with active support from NITI Aayog. Key interventions deliberated

during the meeting included the strengthening of critical care services through Tele-ICU rollout in government hospitals under a hub-and-spoke model. It was revealed during this meeting that the Tele-ICU tender, vetted by Team NITI Aayog, has already been floated. To address diagnostic gaps, particularly in peripheral and under-served areas, the UT also plans to implement Tele-Radiology services, for which the tender is in the final stages.

The Health Department is also exploring the establishment of a Dentistry Department, while the creation of Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery and Pedodontics departments in newly established GMCs is under active consideration, the meeting was informed.

Dr. Paul was further apprised about the constitution of a high-level committee tasked with devising collaborative models among AIIMS Jammu, SKIMS Soura, GMC Jammu, GMC Srinagar, and the newly established GMCs. The committee was tasked to focus on cardiology, cancer care, mental health, telemedicine, tele-radiology, and academic integration,

including enhancement of UG, PG, and DNB training capacities.

The Department also sought NITI Aayog's assistance in taking up the matter with the National Medical Commission (NMC) for designating District Hospitals as Associated Hospitals of Government Medical Colleges, a move aimed at improving clinical exposure and decentralizing healthcare delivery.

Detailed deliberations were also held on strengthening Drug De-addiction, Mental Health, and Social Health priorities, with a draft action plan titled "Circle of Care", prepared by Dr. Arshad Hussain, Professor of Psychiatry, GMC Srinagar, submitted to NITI Aayog for its consideration.

In another major development, facilitated by NITI Aayog, it was learnt that the Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences (ILBS) has agreed to provide training to transplant teams along with continued technical support and mentoring. In this regard, a formal request has been submitted by the Health & Medical Education Department seeking support for establishing Liver Transplant facilities in the UT.

The meeting concluded with a reaffirmation of NITI Aayog's continued guidance and support in transforming Jammu & Kashmir's healthcare landscape through technology-driven solutions, academic collaboration, and systemic capacity building, ensuring accessible, affordable, and quality healthcare for its citizens across the length and breadth of the UT.

CIK hosts 4-day orientation, capacity building prog on cyber security, new criminal laws

KNO

Srinagar, Dec 18: The 4-day orientation cum capacity building programme on cybersecurity and new criminal laws commenced at CIK Training Hall, Humhama on Thursday.

In a statement issued to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), a police spokesman said that the Counter Intelligence Kashmir (CIK), a wing of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) has organized the programme with an aim to enhance the professional competence, investigative skills, and legal preparedness of police officers and officials to effectively deal with the rapidly evolving landscape of cyber-enabled crimes and terror-related offences.

He said the programme will run from December 18 to December 22, 2025. "The programme aims to ensure seamless implementation of the newly enacted criminal laws. Officers from various districts and specialised units of CIK are participating in the programme," he added.

"The orientation course focuses on contemporary challenges posed by cybercrime, including cyberterrorism, online radicalisation, misuse of social media platforms, encrypted communications, digital financing of terror networks, and cross-border cyber threats," the spokesman said, adding, "Special emphasis is being laid on strengthening investigative capabilities in terror-related cases in consonance with the new criminal justice framework comprising the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha

Sanhita (BNSS), and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA)."

He said, "Key components of the training include advanced cybercrime investigation techniques, digital forensics, handling and admissibility of electronic evidence, cyber threat assessment, cyber hygiene, and practical application of the new criminal laws in investigation, prosecution, and trial of offences, including those linked to terrorism and organised crime."

"The sessions are being conducted by experienced prosecuting officers & police officers through a mix of interactive lectures, case studies, and hands-on practical demonstrations," the spokesman added.

"The programme underscores CIK's continued commitment towards capacity building, professionalism, and institutional preparedness, particularly in the context of emerging cyber threats and the new dimensions introduced by recent legal reforms. The initiative is expected to significantly strengthen investigative efficiency, ensure legally robust investigations, and enhance the police response to cyber and terror-related offences across the Union Territory," he said.

"By equipping officers with updated technological skills and a clear understanding of the new criminal laws, the programme aims to contribute towards a technology-driven, efficient, and time-bound criminal justice system, thereby reinforcing public confidence in law enforcement and the rule of law," the spokesman said. (KNO)

CONTD. FROM FRONT PAGE

LG Sinha calls

local recruitment. The collaborative efforts of the J&K Police, Army, intelligence agencies and CAPFs have yielded tangible results on the ground," he added.

The Lieutenant Governor stressed that armed terrorists, their supporters, over-ground workers (OGWs) and elements intimidating common citizens must be treated equally. "Those indulging in or facilitating terror activities must be made to pay a very heavy price for their actions," he said.

Highlighting the evolving nature of security challenges, the Lieutenant Governor observed that the landscape of threats has undergone a profound change in recent years.

He called for a shift from reactive to proactive security strategies, with greater emphasis on intelligence-led operations and the use of advanced technologies, including Artificial Intelligence, to counter terrorism, terror financing, radicalisation and narco-terrorism.

The conference reviewed the overall security scenario, assessed emerging threats and discussed measures to further strengthen inter-agency coordination, border management and public safety.

The Lieutenant Governor said that ensuring peace and security is a prerequisite for development and reaffirmed the administration's commitment to safeguarding the lives, livelihoods and aspirations of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. (KNO)

PM Modi conferred

in maritime trade with one another. The Arabian Sea has become a strong bridge between our nations. I dedicate this honour to the people of India. I also dedicate this honour to our ancestors who laid the foundations of this relationship by travelling from Mandvi to Muscat," Modi said.

He also dedicated the award to the seafarers who have, through centuries of exchange, contributed to the progress of both nations.

Instituted in 1970 by Sultan Qaboos bin Said, the Order of Oman (First Class) has been bestowed upon select global leaders in recognition of their contribution to public life and bilateral relations.

Modi's visit to Muscat marks the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations between India and Oman, with both sides focusing on deepening strategic partnership in trade, investment, energy, defence and culture.

Modi arrived here on Wednesday on a two-day visit and was accorded a warm welcome, including a guard of honour.

Grand endorsement

acceptance as a global leader," he said.

Prime Minister Modi received the award during his ongoing two-day visit to Oman, the final leg of his three-nation tour that included Jordan and Ethiopia.

This is the latest addition to PM Modi's distinguished list of more than 28 highest civilian awards from foreign nations, including recent honours such as Ethiopia's Great Honour Nishan of Ethiopia and Kuwait's Order of Mubarak Al-Kabeer.

His visit to Muscat marks the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations between India and Oman, with both sides focusing on deepening strategic partnership in trade, investment, energy, defence and culture.

9th accused arrested

for carrying out self-sacrificial operations," it said.

It added that the probe has further shown that Yasir was in close contact with the other accused persons in the case, including Mufti Irfan and Dr Umar Un Nabi - the suicide who triggered the blast near the Red Fort area.

"Working closely with various central and state agencies, NIA continues to move with alacrity to unravel the complete conspiracy behind the terror attack," it said.

Earlier this month, the NIA had conducted extensive searches at the premises of several accused and suspects in J&K and Uttar Pradesh and seized various digital devices and other incriminating materials.

"These were preceded by similar searches at the premises of the prime accused, Dr Muzammil Shakeel Ganie and Dr Shaheen Saeed, in the Al Falah University complex and other places in Faridabad (Haryana)," it said.

Earlier, the Anti-Terror Agency had arrested eight accused individuals in the case, including several doctors. On November 10, a high-intensity explosion ripped through a car in one of the busiest areas of the national capital, killing 11 people and injuring several others. The blast was triggered by Dr Umar who was driving the car. Following the blast, the investigation of the case was handed over to the NIA by ministry of Home Affairs.

It was only after the arrest of Dr Adeel and Dr Muzammil - co-conspirators in the case - that Jammu and Kashmir police busted the white-collar terror module and recovered over 2,900 kg of explosives from Haryana's Faridabad.

According to the NIA, it is tracing every angle, link, and associates connected to the terror attack to expose the full extent of the plot. (KNO)

Draw lessons from

air strikes and Operation Sindoor, Singh said air power has emerged as a key element in modern warfare. "The air power functions not only as a tactical resource but also as a strategic instrument, enabling leadership to convey intent through speed, reach and precision," he added.

The Defence Minister said warfare in the 21st century is shaped by technology and adaptability.

He pointed to the growing role of cyber operations, artificial intelligence, unmanned systems, satellite-based surveillance and space-related capabilities.

He said precision weapons, real-time intelligence and data-driven decision-making have become integral to military planning.

Singh reiterated the government's commitment to strengthening India's security apparatus. He said the proposed Sudarshan Chakra air defence initiative, announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi earlier this

year, would contribute to the protection of national assets.

He said the development of indigenous jet engines has been taken up as a national mission.

The Defence Minister said the government is working with private industry, start-ups and MSMEs to support modernisation of the Armed Forces through initiatives such as iDEX and ADITI.

He said that as of November 2025, 672 winners had emerged from 565 challenges under iDEX, including 96 winners linked to Indian Air Force requirements.

Describing Operation Sindoor as an example of coordination among the three Services, Singh stressed the importance of jointness to improve operational effectiveness.

He also referred to the Indian Air Force's role in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief missions in India and abroad.

The conclave was attended by Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan and senior Indian Air Force commanders. Air Chief Marshal A P Singh briefed the defence minister on operational readiness. (KNO)

Chillai Kalan nears

minimum climbed from minus 4.0°C to minus 1.8°C, whereas Avantipora slightly warmed from minus 3.2°C to minus 3.8°C.

Jammu region also showed variations, with Jammu city rising from 9.0°C to 11.0°C, Katra from 11.1°C to 12.1°C, and Baderwah from 3.4°C to 5.0°C. Leh in Ladakh warmed from minus 6.3°C to minus 3.4°C.

The Meteorological Department has issued an advisory warning of possible moderate to heavy snowfall in the higher reaches of Kupwara, Bandipora, and Ganderbal, particularly on December 21.

Travellers and transporters have been advised to plan their journeys accordingly and follow all traffic and administrative guidelines.

The weather update for Jammu and Kashmir indicates light to moderate snow over higher areas of the Kashmir division and light to moderate rain in many plains on the night of December 20, extending to the evening of December 21.

Scattered light rain or snow is expected on December 22, after which no significant precipitation is forecast until December 31.

Two back-to-back Western Disturbances are likely to affect J&K between Saturday and Tuesday, bringing snowfall to higher reaches and light rainfall in plains, according to independent forecaster Faizan Arif.

Dry and cloudy weather is expected across the Union Territory on Thursday and Friday, while mostly dry conditions will prevail on Saturday (Dec 20). However, a few higher-altitude areas, particularly along the Sonamarg-Drass axis and in Kupwara and Bandipora, may record light snowfall, he said.

The first Western Disturbance is expected to impact the region from Saturday night, with precipitation starting over the higher reaches. The second system is likely to join on Monday (Dec 22) and persist until Tuesday afternoon (Dec 23), prolonging

snowfall in north Kashmir, especially in the Kupwara higher reaches. Snowfall in Bandipora, Ganderbal, and Baramulla in the higher elevations is also expected.

Snow accumulation is likely to be light to heavy over elevated areas, while plains may receive light rainfall, with moderate showers in some locations.

"Tourist spots, including Gulmarg and Sonamarg, are expected to witness light to moderate snowfall. Dry snow is possible over Kupwara and nearby areas between Monday night and Tuesday morning due to relatively lower temperatures," he added.

In Jammu division, plains are likely to see mostly cloudy weather with light rain, the middle reaches may receive light to moderate rainfall, and the higher reaches could record light to moderate snowfall.

Faizan Arif noted that overall precipitation is not expected to be high, but cold temperatures could lead to notable snow accumulation above 3,200 metres.

"Flight operations are expected to remain unaffected, air pollution levels are likely to drop, and the risk of forest fires may reduce," he added. (KNO)

Fog blankets

avoid accidents.

"Fog has reduced visibility to less than 50 metres in many parts of the Valley, affecting both local and inter-district travel," said a Traffic Police officer. "We have deployed additional personnel to guide traffic and ensure smooth movement on key routes."

"Transporters have been advised to take precautionary measures and avoid unnecessary travel during peak fog hours," the official added.

Passengers travelling on highways reported delays as vehicles moved at slow speeds. "We had to drive the car at a very low speed in the morning due to the dense fog. It took us over an hour to cover just a few kilometres," said Mohammad Irfan, a daily commuter from Baramulla to Srinagar.

Meteorological officials said that the fog is likely to persist for the next few days, particularly during early mornings and late evenings, due to dropping night temperatures.

Residents are urged to take precautions, especially those travelling in fog-prone hilly areas. "Motorists should use fog lights, maintain safe distances, and follow all traffic rules," said another official.

Meanwhile, the administration has also advised tourists to check road conditions before travelling and to avoid unnecessary night journeys, particularly in higher reaches where fog tends to be denser. (KNO)

Centre approves

technical support and financial assistance for flood control works in critical areas. (KNO)

J&K to crack down

of Police, Jammu ;Director, Urban Local Bodies, Jammu (Member); Member Secretary, J&K Pollution Control Board (Member); and Director, Airport Jammu

The committee for Kashmir is headed

India, Oman ink free trade agreement as PM Modi holds talks with Sultan Haitham

PTI

Muscat, Dec 18: India and Oman on Thursday inked a free trade agreement, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi held talks with Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and explored ways to further add greater depth to the bilateral Strategic Partnership.

Modi, who arrived in Oman on Wednesday on the last leg of his three-nation tour, was welcomed by Sultan Haitham at Al Baraka Palace in Muscat before the bilateral meeting.

During the meeting, both leaders explored ways to further add greater depth to the India-Oman Strategic Partnership, Ministry of External Affairs Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said.

"Both leaders exchanged views on a broad range of topics, including defence, security, trade & investment, energy, agriculture, technology, new and emerging areas, culture and people-to-people ties among others. They also discussed issues of regional and global interest," Jaiswal said.

They noted that the complexion of 70 years of diplomatic relations between India and Oman



is a landmark in the bilateral partnership.

The two leaders welcomed the signing of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) as a milestone in bilateral ties, affirming that it would significantly strengthen the India-Oman strategic partnership.

The CEPA - signed by Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal and Oman's Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion Qais bin Mohammed Al Yousef - is expected to enhance market

access, promote investments, and strengthen cooperation across key sectors.

It will support trade diversification and supply chain resilience at a time of global economic realignment.

This is Oman's second FTA with an individual country and the first FTA they have done in about 20 years.

Earlier, PM Modi said the CEPA between India and Oman will give new confidence and energy to the bilateral relations. Jaiswal said

the signing of the FTA was a "new chapter" in India-Oman strategic partnership, marking a significant milestone in their bilateral economic relations.

He said the agreement will increase the trade between India and Oman, boost investment, catalyse economic diversification, unlock opportunities in all major sectors of the economy, enhance economic growth and generate employment.

"For people, CEPA means more jobs, better market access for businesses, stronger supply chains and greater economic opportunities on both sides," he added.

In the last few years, India has signed many free trade agreements (FTAs), which are reaping rewards for farmers, traders and exporters. Some of them include the UK (2025), EFTA (2024), Australia (2022), the UAE (2022) and Mauritius (2021).

This expanding network of agreements highlights India's foresighted trade strategy focused on diversification, resilience, and mutually beneficial growth, sources said. Modi is visiting Oman at the invitation of Sultan Haitham. This is his second visit to the Gulf

nation. His visit is of special significance as it marks the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

The Prime Minister arrived here on the last leg of his three-nation tour. He earlier visited Ethiopia and Jordan.

Oman is the third-largest export destination for India among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. India already has a similar agreement with another GCC member, the UAE, which came into effect in May 2022.

India-Oman bilateral trade was about USD 10.5 billion (exports USD 4 billion and imports USD 6.54 billion) in 2024-25. India's key imports are petroleum products and urea. These account for over 70 per cent of imports. Other key products are propylene and ethylene polymers, pet coke, gypsum, chemicals, iron and steel, and unwrought aluminium.

The main items of India's exports to Oman include mineral fuels, chemicals, precious metals, iron and steel, cereals, ships, boats and floating structures, electrical machinery, boilers, tea, coffee, spices, apparel, and food items.

‘Luxury litigation’: SC junks PIL on packaged drinking water standards

PTI

New Delhi, Dec 18: The Supreme Court on Thursday refused to entertain a PIL seeking enforcement of international standards for packaged drinking water, saying this is a case of "luxury litigation" in a country where a large population still lacks access to basic drinking water. "Where is the drinking water in this country, Madam? People do not have drinking water; the quality of bottled water will come later on," Chief Justice Surya Kant, who was sitting with Justice Joymalya Bagchi, said, adding that these are "luxury litigations".

The PIL, filed by one Sarang Vaman Yadwadkar, sought directions to improve and align Indian standards for packaged drinking water with global benchmarks, including those prescribed by the World Health Organization.

At the outset, the CJ questioned the very premise of the petition, observing that the court could not lose sight of the broader realities

faced by the country.

Senior advocate Anita Shenoy, appearing for the petitioner, said the issue directly concerned public health and consumer safety.

She submitted that citizens were entitled to clean and safe packaged drinking water and relied on Section 18 of the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, which mandates adherence to prescribed safety norms.

She contended that statutory obligations could not be diluted merely because access to drinking water remained uneven across the country. The bench remained unconvinced and described the plea as reflective of an "urban-centric approach". "This is an urban-centric approach; the people in rural areas drink groundwater, and nothing happens to them," the CJ said.

"Do you think we will be able to introduce the USA, Japan, EU guidelines? Let us face the ground realities of the country. Nobody takes up the cause of the poor; all this is rich and urbanised phobia," the CJ said.

Nadda meets Afghan health min, reaffirms strong medical, humanitarian support

PTI

New Delhi, Dec 18: India has reaffirmed its continued commitment to supporting Afghanistan's health sector and humanitarian needs during a meeting between Union Health Minister J P Nadda and Afghanistan's Minister of Public Health, Mawlawi Noor Jalal Jalali.

During the meeting held on Wednesday, both sides reviewed the ongoing health cooperation and discussed avenues to further strengthen collaboration in healthcare infrastructure, medical supplies and capacity building, the Indian health ministry said.

Nadda underlined that guided by India's long-standing people-centric approach, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has always emphasised that India's engagement with Afghanistan should remain focused on welfare, capacity building and access to critical healthcare services.

He added that India's assistance to Afghanistan remains guided by humanitarian considerations and the long-standing bonds between the people of the two countries.

India has approved and implemented several key healthcare infrastructure projects in Afghanistan. These include the construction of five maternity and health clinics in the provinces of Paktia, Khost and Paktika, a 30-bed hospital in Kabul, and the construction or upgradation of major facilities such as an oncology centre, trauma centre, diagnostic centre and thalassemia centre in Kabul.

Additional proposals for health sector support are currently under active consideration, the health ministry said.

Noting that India has supplied 327 tonnes of medicines and vaccines to Afghanistan over the past four years, Nadda said cancer medicines and one CT scan machine, as requested by the Afghan



public health ministry, are ready for dispatch and will be delivered by the end of this month, the statement said.

Proposals from the Afghan side for a radiotherapy machine and additional medical supplies are also being processed, it said. The meeting also discussed capacity-building initiatives. India is working on modalities to send a team of senior doctors to Afghanistan to organise a medical camp and provide training to Afghan doctors, the ministry stated.

The success of the Jaipur Foot Camp organised in Kabul in June, where 75 prosthetic limbs were fitted, was highlighted, with plans to organise more such camps in the coming year. India reiterated its commitment to providing free treatment in India to Afghan patients suffering from emergency

and serious ailments, and to facilitating medical visas, the statement said.

Since the launch of the new Afghan visa module in April 2025, more than 500 visas, including over 200 medical visas, have been issued in the last four months.

Nadda also recalled India's broader humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan, including the supply of food grains, medicines, vaccines and emergency relief material, as well as support for rehabilitation programmes in partnership with international organisations.

The meeting concluded with both sides expressing satisfaction over the ongoing cooperation and reaffirming their shared commitment to strengthening healthcare support for the Afghan people, the statement said.

‘India tech startups raise USD 10.5 bn in 2025; funding 17 pc lower vs 2024’



PTI

New Delhi, Dec 18: India's tech startups raised USD 10.5 billion in 2025, 17 per cent lower than last year, but stood resolute on the third spot in the global pecking order, ahead of China and Germany, and trailing only the US and the UK, according to year-snapshot by market intelligence platform Tracxn.

Bengaluru and Mumbai emerged as the top-funded cities.

As per the report, India's tech startups raised USD 10.5 billion in 2025, the funding levels 17 per cent lower than USD 12.7 billion in 2024 and a 4 per cent drop compared to USD 11 billion in 2023.

The "slowdown" notwithstanding, India continued to rank as the third-highest funded tech ecosystem globally, behind only

the United States and the United Kingdom, and ahead of China and Germany, it said.

Funding trends petered out differently across stages.

Seed-stage witnessed a total funding of USD 1.1 billion in 2025, marking a 30 per cent drop from 2024 levels and a 25 per cent decline from 2023.

Early-stage funding, however, showed resilience, surging to USD 3.9 billion in 2025, a 7 per cent increase from USD 3.7 billion in 2024 and an 11 per cent rise over USD 3.5 billion raised in 2023, indicating sustained investor confidence in scalable, growth-ready startups.

Late-stage startups raised funding of USD 5.5 billion, a 26 per cent decline from USD 7.5 billion in 2024 and an eight per cent drop compared to USD 6 billion in 2023.

Stock markets trade lower in early deals

PTI

Mumbai: Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty edged lower in early trade on Thursday tracking a weak trend in global markets.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined 214.87 points to 84,344.78 in early trade. The 50-share NSE Nifty dipped 56.1 points to 25,762.45.

From the Sensex firms, Sun Pharma, Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles, Mahindra & Mahindra, NTPC, Bharat Electronics and Maruti were among the biggest laggards. However, HCL Tech, Tata Consultancy Services, Tech Mahindra and ITC were among the gainers.

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi, Japan's Nikkei 225 index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index quoted lower, while Shanghai's SSE Composite index traded in positive territory.

International Solar Alliance, Govt of India hold strategic meeting on global artificial intelligence mission for energy

"Global markets enter today's session on a cautious footing following a sharp overnight sell-off in the US. The S&P 500, Nasdaq, and Dow extended their losing streak as investors booked profits in high-valuation technology and AI stocks.

"Investor sentiment also remains cautious ahead of the release of US consumer price inflation data, with divided views in the market over the future trajectory of monetary policy, prompting participants to stay defensive and avoid aggressive positioning," Ponmudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

Men record higher lung deposition of air pollutants in Delhi: Study

PTI

New Delhi, Dec 18: Sitting in vehicles stuck in traffic or walking along crowded footpaths as they make their way back home from work, men in Delhi are absorbing more of the city's polluted air into their lungs than women, according to a study conducted over five years.

Titled 'Respiratory deposition of particulate matter in Delhi: A five-year assessment of exposure patterns and health risks', the study was conducted by researchers from the Netaji Subhas University of Technology, Delhi, along with researchers from a Noida-based environmental consultancy.

The team analysed data from 39 air quality monitoring stations across Delhi between 2019 and 2023.

The findings point to a clear difference between men and women in terms of lung deposition of air pollutants. While sitting, men recorded

about 1.4 times higher PM2.5 lung deposition and about 1.34 times higher PM10 lung deposition than women.

While walking, men inhale more pollution, with lung deposition about 1.2 times higher than women for both PM2.5 and PM10, according to the study. Researchers said this difference is linked to higher breathing volume and airflow in men, which leads to more polluted air entering the lungs.

Using an internationally accepted scientific model, the researchers calculated how much particulate matter actually enters and settles in different parts of the lungs, rather than only measuring the pollution present in the air.

The study said this dose-based approach highlights the urgent need for immediate policy changes to reduce everyday exposure, especially for commuters and outdoor workers.

After comparing men and women, the researchers assessed how Delhi residents fare against the



safety limits. The study found that lung deposition of fine particulate matter among Delhi residents was about 10 times higher than what would be expected under India's air quality standards, and nearly 40 times higher than the levels estimated under the World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines. The National Ambient Air Quality

Standards prescribe a daily PM2.5 limit of 60 micrograms per cubic metre and a PM10 limit of 100 micrograms per cubic metre.

The WHO's daily guidelines are stricter, at 15 micrograms per cubic metre for PM2.5 and 45 micrograms per cubic metre for PM10.

The study said lung exposure in Delhi far exceeds doses

corresponding to both benchmarks.

The study compared activity levels and found that walking resulted in two to three times higher particulate matter deposition in the lungs than sitting, across both men and women.

Among all the groups analysed, men while walking recorded the highest lung deposition, followed by women walking, men sitting, and women sitting. Based on this, the researchers said pedestrians and street-level workers face the greatest risk, as they combine physical activity with prolonged outdoor exposure.

Fine particles such as PM2.5, which are small enough to penetrate deep into the lungs, were identified as the most harmful.

Exposure was found to rise further during the evening commute. The study showed that lung deposition during evening travel hours was 39 per cent higher for PM2.5 and 23 per cent higher for PM10 as compared to the morning. This was

attributed to higher traffic emissions and weather conditions that trap pollution close to the ground in the evening.

Short-term pollution spikes were also observed during Diwali and other festivals. On Diwali nights, particulate matter deposition in the lungs was found to nearly double compared to pre-festival days, with elevated exposure continuing for several days after the festival.

Area-wise analysis showed that industrial areas recorded the highest lung deposition, followed by commercial zones.

Central Delhi areas with higher green cover recorded comparatively lower exposure, the study found.

During the Covid-19 lockdown in 2020, lung deposition of particulate matter fell sharply by around 60 to 70 per cent across several areas. This showed that large-scale reductions in traffic and industrial activity can quickly reduce health risks, the researchers said.

Trump vows economic boom, blames Biden in address to nation

US President didn't mention Ukraine or Venezuela, but did boast about Gaza ceasefire, US attacks on Iran's nuclear program & 'war on drug traffickers'

AFP

Washington, Dec 18: President Donald Trump promised Americans an economic boom in an address to the nation on Wednesday, while blaming Democratic predecessor Joe Biden for high prices that have hit the Republican's popularity.

"Good evening America. Eleven months ago I inherited a mess, and I'm fixing it," the 79-year-old said in his live speech from the White House at the end of his first year back in power. Trump faces growing voter anger over the issue of affordability despite his efforts to dismiss it as a "hoax" by Democrats, sparking Republican fears they could be punished in the 2026 midterm elections.

The billionaire president insisted that prices of gas and groceries that have worried Americans were "falling rapidly, and it's not done yet. But boy, are we making progress."

In a surprise announcement, Trump said that 1.45 million United States military service members would each receive "warrior dividend" bonus checks for \$1,776 before Christmas, paid for with revenues raised from tariffs.

He added that specific amount was in honor of the year of the founding of the United States, the 250th anniversary of which the country



will celebrate next year.

Trump then promised that "we are poised for an economic boom the likes of which the world has never seen" in 2026, when the United States will co-host the FIFA World Cup, with Canada and Mexico.

But while the White House had billed the speech as a chance for Trump to set out his economic agenda for the rest of his second term, much of it consisted on attacks on familiar targets. He repeatedly raged against Biden, the Democrats, and migrants whom he said "stole American jobs."

Trump's speech comes at the end of a whirlwind year in which he has launched an unprecedented display of presidential power, including a crackdown on migration and the targeting of political

opponents.

- Poll worries for Trump - But polls show what Americans are most concerned about is high prices, which experts say are partly fueled by the tariffs he has slapped on trading partners around the world. The inflation problem also dogged Biden as he tried to heal the US economy after the Covid pandemic, and the Democrat unsuccessfully tried similar arguments with voters about economic good times to come. Trump got his worst approval ratings ever for his handling of the economy in a PBS News/NPR/Marist poll published Wednesday, with 57 percent of Americans disapproving and expressing concerns about the cost of living. A YouGov poll published Tuesday showed that 52 percent of Americans thought the economy was

getting worse under Trump.

He has also faced criticism from his Make America Great Again (MAGA) movement for focusing on peace deals in Ukraine and Gaza and on tensions with Venezuela, instead of domestic issues.

Trump did not mention Ukraine or Venezuela, but did boast about the Gaza ceasefire, the US attacks on Iran's nuclear program, and what he calls a war on drug traffickers.

There are signs Trump's team has had a wake-up call on the economy in recent weeks, with next year's midterm elections for the control of Congress already looming.

Republicans lost heavily in elections in November for the mayor of New York and governorships in Virginia and New Jersey, while Democrats ran them close in a previously safe area in Tennessee.

The president is now ramping up his domestic travel to push his economic message.

Last week in Pennsylvania he promised to "make America affordable again," and on Friday he is due to give another campaign-style rally in North Carolina. Vice President JD Vance - who is rapidly becoming Trump's messenger on the issue as he eyes his own presidential run in 2028 - also urged voters to show patience during a speech on Tuesday.

Russia preparing for contacts with US on Ukraine: Kremlin

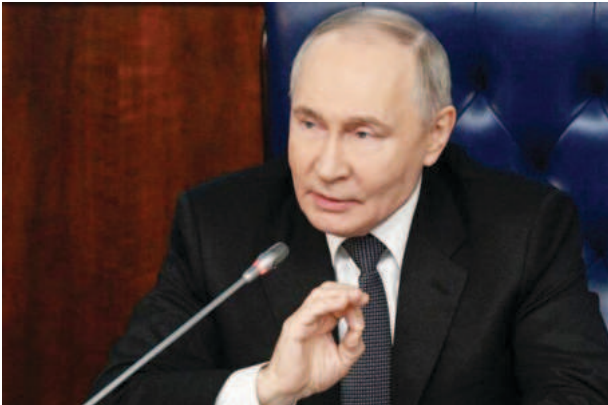
REUTERS

Moscow, Dec 18: The Kremlin said on Thursday that Russia was preparing for contacts with the United States to get details about US talks with European powers and Ukraine on a possible peace settlement to end the Ukraine conflict.

Politico reported that US and Russian officials are expected to meet in Miami at the weekend, and that the Russian delegation would include Russian President Vladimir Putin's investment envoy Kirill Dmitriev.

When asked about media reports about a meeting in Miami, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that contacts were planned with the United States.

"We are indeed preparing



certain contacts with our American counterparts in order to receive information about the results of the work that the Americans have done with the Europeans and with Ukraine," Peskov said.

The United States has held talks with Russia, and separately with Kyiv and European

leaders, on proposals for ending the war in Ukraine but no deal has been reached.

Putin said on Wednesday that Russia would take more land in Ukraine by force if Kyiv and European politicians whom he cast as "young pigs" did not engage over US proposals for a peace settlement.

China voices support to Venezuela amid US blockade, but makes no aid pledges

REUTERS

Beijing, Dec 18: China opposed what it said was "unilateral bullying" after Washington ordered a blockade of tankers entering and leaving oil-rich Venezuela, but did not say exactly how it would come to the South American country's aid or offer any refuge for its embattled leader.

Earlier this week, US President Donald Trump ordered a complete blockade of all sanctioned oil tankers attempting to leave Venezuelan waters, and those arriving, as

Washington massed troops and warships in the region.

China is the biggest buyer of Venezuelan crude, which accounts for roughly 4 percent of its imports, with shipments in December on track to average more than 600,000 barrels per day, analysts have said.

Beijing opposes all forms of "unilateral bullying" and supports countries in safeguarding their sovereignty and national dignity, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told his Venezuelan counterpart Yvan Gil on a phone call on Wednesday.

Most women's national team players earn less than \$20,000, FIFPRO study shows



REUTERS

Manchester, Dec 18: Two-thirds of women's national team players earn less than \$20,000 annually, according to a new FIFPRO survey that highlights persistent financial insecurity and structural gaps in the women's game.

The global players union and affiliated national players unions surveyed 407 footballers from 41 nations who participated in the UEFA Women's Euros, Copa America Femenina, the Women's Africa Cup of Nations and the OFC Women's Nations Cup.

Around 66 per cent of players earn below

\$20,000 annually from football, and nearly one-third of respondents reported earning between \$0 and \$4,999 from football. Only a small minority reached higher income brackets.

Professional clubs remain the main source of income, followed by national team payments, yet one in four players still relies on jobs outside football to make ends meet.

"Financial stability is a cornerstone of any career," said FIFPRO's director of women's football, Alex Culvin. "The data is very clear: most players are earning insufficient income to ensure secure careers within the game."

"It is a risk to the sustainability of the sport because players will be inclined to leave football early to make ends meet."

The survey, conducted between August and October, also revealed that short-term contracts remain common: 33 per cent of players were signed for one year or less, and 22 per cent had no contract at all.

International competition schedules continue to strain players, with 58 per cent saying pre-match rest was inadequate and 57 per cent reporting insufficient recovery after games.

AFP

Mount Maunganui, Dec 18: Devon Conway and Tom Latham plundered a poor West Indies attack Thursday for a mammoth opening partnership on day one of the third Test in Mount Maunganui as New Zealand piled up 334-1.

Conway ended the day 178 not out and captain Latham was out just before the close for 137.

The pair put together 323, the second-highest opening partnership for New Zealand, only bettered by Glenn Turner and Terry Jarvis's 387 stand against the West Indies in Georgetown in 1972.



It was also only the eighth time New Zealand had registered a stand in excess of 300 in Tests.

Conway batted all day facing 279 balls for his second century of the

calendar year, but his first at home since January 2022 against Bangladesh in Christchurch. He scored 153 against Zimbabwe in August. Nightwatchman Jacob Duffy was

on nine at the close of play.

The 34-year-old Conway brought up his sixth Test century from 147 balls, and stroked 25 fours during his 279-ball stay.

Latham's 15th Test century contained 15 fours and a six as he faced 264 balls.

Conway and captain Latham had a near chanceless partnership. For the first two sessions the West Indies toiled without so much as a single lbw shout.

Early in the third session they finally created a chance, but Latham was dropped by wicketkeeper Tevin Imlach off the bowling of Anderson Phillip when on 104 and New Zealand on 253.

Copa del Rey: Mbappe nears Ronaldo record



Talavera De La Reina, (Spain), Dec 18: Kylian Mbappe moved tantalisingly close to Cristiano Ronaldo's calendar-year scoring record for Real Madrid with a brace as it earned a 3-2 victory at third-tier Talavera de la Reina on Wednesday to reach the Copa del Rey's last 16 after a pulsating encounter.

The French striker's two goals, combined with an own-goal by defender Manuel Farranto, proved enough despite strikes from Nahuel Arroyo and Gonzalo Di Renzo that threatened to spoil Real's evening in front of a raucous crowd.

Mbappe, who came into the game with 56 goals scored in all competitions in 2025, is now one goal shy of the 59-goal calendar-year record set by Ronaldo in 2013. With one match

still to play this year - on Saturday against struggling Sevilla in LaLiga at Santiago Bernabeu - the French forward could surpass the Portuguese great.

In front of 4,000 passionate supporters in Castilla-La Mancha, Real Madrid dominated the early stages, with young talents Endrick, Arda Guler and Gonzalo Garcia combining well alongside Mbappe.

However, they were repeatedly thwarted by Talavera's inspired goalkeeper Jaime Gonzalez.

With coach Xabi Alonso resting first-choice stars, including Vinicius Jr, Jude Bellingham and Thibaut Courtois, Madrid looked to Mbappe for inspiration.

Fran Garcia's header was denied by a brilliant goal-line clearance from Alvaro Lopez in the 39th

minute, but controversy followed seconds later.

Referee Guillermo Cuadra penalised the hosts' Marcos Moreno for handball after what appeared to be contact created by Madrid's Alvaro Carreras during a tussle in the box.

With no VAR until the Copa del Rey's last 16, the decision stood, and Mbappe converted the penalty in the 41st minute to move closer to Ronaldo's tally.

Before halftime, Mbappe helped Real find the net again - this time with a slice of fortune. His effort from close range deflected off defender Farrando and into Talavera's goal, handing the visitors a 2-0 advantage at the break.

Madrid squandered several opportunities to extend its lead in the second half, with Mbappe missing a clear one-on-one chance in the 52nd minute before Gonzalez stopped a fierce long-range drive.

Talavera punished Madrid for its profligacy in the 80th minute when Farrando engineered a quick counter-attack, delivering a perfect low cross to Arroyo, who rifled a powerful strike past Andriy Lunin to make it 2-1. The host sensed an upset, but it was undone by a goalkeeping error late on. Mbappe's tame shot from outside the box in the 83rd minute was fumbled by Gonzalez, with the ball bobbling into the net to restore Madrid's two-goal cushion.

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