



J&K's health sector shows progress in 2025 but mounting challenges continue to strain system

Jahangeer Ganaie

Srinagar, Dec 23: Despite witnessing notable reforms, policy initiatives and infrastructure expansion during 2025, Jammu and Kashmir's health sector continues to grapple with deep-rooted challenges that threaten to offset the gains made so far.

According to the news agency – Kashmir News Observer (KNO), while the government has invested significantly in upgrading healthcare facilities, the rising burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), severe manpower shortages, inadequate advanced diagnostic infrastructure, and delayed flagship projects like AIIMS Kashmir remain areas of serious concern.



Infrastructure push: Crores allocated, expectations high

In a major attempt to strengthen healthcare infrastructure across the Union Territory, the government announced an allocation of Rs 124.83 crore for upgrading

critical medical facilities. According to the Kashmir News Observer (KNO), the funds were earmarked for installing advanced diagnostic and treatment equipment across multiple Government Medical Colleges (GMCs).

Out of the total allocation,

Rs 124.83 crore was specifically

Main concerns:

- Rising non-communicable diseases
- Acute staff shortages
- Lack of advanced diagnostics in new medical colleges
- Delayed AIIMS Kashmir project

cally sanctioned for installing CT scan facilities at GMC Jammu, MRI machines at GMC Baramulla, GMC Kathua and GMC Rajouri, a Cath Lab at GMC Doda, a PET scan facility at GMC Srinagar, and strengthening telemedicine services with the establishment of 80 telemedicine units across J&K.

At present, Kashmir has only one functional PET scan facility at SKIMS Soura, which caters to thousands of cancer patients from across the Valley. The proposed installation of a second PET scan machine at GMC Srinagar has therefore been widely welcomed by patients and healthcare professionals alike. Meanwhile, a PET scan facility at GMC Jammu was made operational only this year, providing some relief to cancer patients in the Jammu division.

Long-awaited relief: Bone & Joint Hospital Barzulla expansion

One of the most visible successes this year has been the operationalisation of a new block at the | [More on P6](#)

Rajnath unveils BRO manual to enhance strategic road projects in border regions

'New guide to improve planning, quality of infrastructure in J&K, Ladakh'



Sajid Raina

New Delhi, Dec 23: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday released a Border Roads Organisation (BRO) manual aimed at streamlining the preparation of Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) for road infrastructure projects, a move expected to significantly benefit strategic road construction in Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh and other states.

The guide, titled "Guide on Preparation of Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) for Road Infrastructure Projects", was released at South Block here.

Officials told the news agency – Kashmir News Observer (KNO) that the manual would help improve planning, quality and timely execution of roads and bridges in difficult border terrains, including those in J&K and Ladakh.

The BRO is responsible for building and maintaining highways and strategic roads in some of the country's most remote regions, many of them located along the Line of Control and the Line of Actual Control in the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.

According to the Ministry of Defence, the guide provides a uniform and comprehensive reference for engineers, covering specifications, standards, procedures and best practices for DPR preparation.

It is designed to support

projects involving new road construction as well as the upgradation of existing infrastructure. "The guide aims to address issues of time and cost overruns caused by inadequately prepared DPRs. It is expected to enhance the quality and consistency of reports, ensuring timely execution of projects and improving strategic connectivity in border areas," the ministry said.

Officials said better DPRs would translate into faster completion of roads and bridges, improved logistics movement for the armed forces and enhanced socio-economic development in border regions such as Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh.

Chief of Army Staff General Upendra Dwivedi, Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh, Road Transport and Highways Secretary V Umashankar, Director General Border Roads Lt Gen Raghu Srinivasan and other senior officials were present at the event.

Earlier this month, Singh had dedicated 125 BRO infrastructure projects to the nation, many of them located in Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. These projects included roads and bridges critical for all-weather connectivity to forward areas.

The 125 projects, completed at a cost of around Rs 5,000 crore, were spread across Ladakh, Jammu | [More on P6](#)

NIA court orders attachment of US-based Kashmiri ISI agent's property in Budgam

KNO Correspondent

Budgam, Dec 23: A special NIA court on Tuesday ordered immediate attachment of land belonging to Ghulam Nabi Fai, a US-based Kashmiri lobbyist and convicted agent of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

According to the details available with the news agency – Kashmir News Observer (KNO) the attachment of immovable property was ordered under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

National Investigation Agency (NIA) Special Judge Yahaya Firdous of Budgam district authorised the seizure of over 1.5 kanals of land across two villages – Wadwan and Chattabugh.

The NIA Court directed the District Collector Budgam to take immediate possession of



the Fai's land and asked the Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Budgam to provide necessary assistance to ensure the execution of the order.

The attachment was ordered in FIR No. 46/2020 registered at Police Station Budgam under Sections 10, 13 and 39 of the UAPA. The order was passed after the accused failed to appear before the investigating agency despite the issuance of a proclamation notice. | [More on P6](#)

Rs 27.59 cr spent on unapproved works under SAUBHAGYA scheme in J&K: CAG

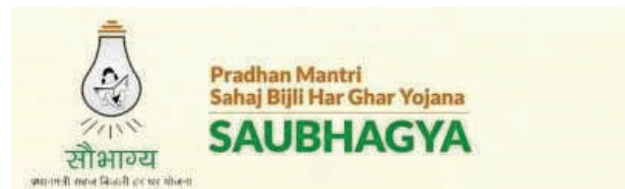
■ Union Power Ministry denies irregularity

■ Auditor says documentary support provided for only Rs 0.09 cr of works

KNO Special Correspondent

Srinagar, Dec 23: The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India has revealed that Rs 27.59 crore were spent in Jammu & Kashmir, including Ladakh, on unapproved works under an ambitious scheme of the Union Power Ministry.

The audit report, tabled in Parliament on December 18, 2025, states that an



expenditure of Rs 27.59 crore across seven projects was booked for works that were not approved in the Detailed Project Reports (DPRs), resulting in the execution of ineligible works under the scheme, the report notes, as accessed by news agency – Kashmir News Observer (KNO).

According to the report, the Union Power Ministry, in its response to audit observations, claimed that there was no irregular expenditure. "MoP stated (June 2022) that in respect of KPDC, no irregular expenditure or ineligible works were included in the closure of schemes, as closure was | [More on P6](#)

Kashmir booked an expenditure of Rs 27.59 crore in seven projects on account of execution of works which were not approved in the DPRs, resulting in ineligible works under the scheme," the report notes, as accessed by news agency – Kashmir News Observer (KNO).

ensuring maximum public participation in the celebrations at all levels and to organise befitting functions across the length and breadth of J&K, reflecting the spirit of unity and national pride.

The Chief Secretary directed the concerned authorities to make special efforts to ensure cleanliness and sanitation in and around all venues as part of the celebrations. He stressed the need for uninterrupted power

IGP Kashmir chairs crime review meeting in Baramulla

KNO

Srinagar, Dec 23: Inspector General of Police (IGP) Kashmir, V.K. Birdi (IPS) on Tuesday reviewed the prevailing crime scenario and assessed crime control measures being undertaken by district police in the year 2025.

According to a statement issued to the news agency – Kashmir News Observer (KNO), the meeting was attended by DIG NKR, SSP Baramulla, SSP Sopore, SSP Handwara, Addl. SP Baramulla, SP Ops Baramulla, ASP HQ Baramulla, CPO DPHQ and all SDPOs, SHO's and IC PP's of district Baramulla.

Police Stations presented figures of crime trends, detection



rates, preventive policing initiatives, and measures taken to strengthen investigation and prosecution.

Reviewing the crime scenario, the IGP Kashmir emphasized

intelligence-led and proactive policing for effective crime control. He directed officers to maintain close supervision over crime-prone areas, habitual offenders, and | [More on P6](#)

77th Republic Day: CS calls for flawless arrangements

KT News Desk

Jammu, Dec 23: Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo on Tuesday called upon the civil administration and police to ensure comprehensive and flawless arrangements for the celebration of the 77th Republic Day, to be observed with national fervour on January 26, 2026. He made these remarks while chairing a high-level meeting to review the preparedness and arrangements being put in place across the UT.

Emphasising the significance of the occasion, the Chief Secretary impressed upon the Divisional and District Administrations to illuminate all government offices and prominent buildings with decorative lighting on the eve of Republic Day. He enjoined upon them to



ensure maximum public participation in the celebrations at all levels and to organise befitting functions across the length and breadth of J&K, reflecting the spirit of unity and national pride.

The Chief Secretary directed the concerned authorities to make special efforts to ensure cleanliness and sanitation in and around all venues as part of the celebrations. He stressed the need for uninterrupted power

and water supply, particularly at the main venues in Srinagar and Jammu. Highlighting the role of educational institutions, he instructed that every school in the UT should organise its own Republic Day event. He further directed all Heads of Departments and District Officers to hold commemorative functions within their respective offices.

Dulloo also reviewed the arrangements being made for

cultural programmes, including performances by school children and band displays by various forces. He sought details regarding transport arrangements and traffic management plans, especially in the major cities, to ensure smooth conduct of the celebrations without inconvenience to the public.

Encouraging departments to creatively showcase their achievements, the Chief Secretary asked them to prepare thematic tableaux ('Jankies') for display during the main Republic Day functions at Jammu and Srinagar. He advised that the tableaux should prominently reflect national and UT-specific themes such as Viksit Bharat, Nasha Mukta Bharat, Swachh Bharat, digital transformation, women empowerment, and other areas | [More on P6](#)

Northern Railway's Jammu Division introduces scratch rakes to beat fog delays

Officials say step taken to ensure punctual operations

Sajid Raina

Jammu, Dec 23: In a bid to minimise delays caused by dense fog during the winter season and to enhance passenger convenience, Northern Railway's Jammu Division has introduced the provision of "scratch rakes" or additional rakes for select trains.

An official while talking to the news agency – Kashmir

News Observer (KNO) said, "The initiative aims to ensure timely departure and arrival of trains that are often affected by severe fog conditions during winter, particularly in North India."

"Under this arrangement, an additional fully prepared rake is kept on standby and pressed into service when the original train rake is delayed significantly due to fog or other operational constraints," the officials added.

According to railway officials, the facility has been implemented for Train No. 12414



Jammu Tawi-Ajmer Express and Train Nos. 22478/22477

Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra-New Delhi-Katra Express.

The scratch rake will be utilised when the original rake of these trains is delayed by seven hours or more, or when the delay is indefinite, enabling the scheduled train service to operate on time, the officials added.

The decision has been taken under the directions of Divisional Railway Manager Vivek Kumar, with coordinated efforts by the Senior Divisional Commercial Manager and Senior Divisional Operations Manager of Jammu Division.

Officials said the move reflects a proactive operational

strategy to tackle recurring winter challenges and reduce inconvenience to passengers.

Senior Divisional Commercial Manager Uchit Singhal said the introduction of scratch rakes was a significant step towards improving reliability during foggy conditions. "Trains frequently face delays in winter due to dense fog, which disrupts schedules and causes hardship to passengers. The operation of scratch rakes or additional rakes will help ensure timely running of trains and reduce long waiting hours at stations," he said.

Singhal added that the initiative would not only improve punctuality but also contribute to better crowd management and passenger satisfaction. "The primary objective is to ensure comfortable and timely travel for passengers during the winter season. These additional arrangements will also help the railways meet increasing passenger demand in the future," he said.

Railway officials noted that the measure is part of a broader set of initiatives undertaken by the Jammu Division to improve passenger | [More on P6](#)

Div Com Kashmir reviews wooden pedestrian bridge work at Amira Kadal

KT NEWS DESK

SRINAGAR, DECEMBER 23: Divisional Commissioner, Kashmir, Anshul Garg, on Tuesday conducted a comprehensive on-site review of the under-construction wooden pedestrian bridge at Amira Kadal.

He was accompanied by the Deputy Commissioner, Srinagar, Akshay Labroo, and the Chief Executive Officer, Srinagar Smart City Limited (SSCL), Faz Lul Haseeb.

During the inspection, the Div Com, as per an official statement, assessed the pace, quality, and technical aspects of the work being executed on the existing piers of the old bridge.

The review covered retrofitting and strengthening of the piers, construction of the wooden superstructure, and other allied components of the project, which is being developed at an estimated cost of 7.17 crore.

The bridge, once completed, is expected to substantially improve pedestrian connectivity across the Jhelum River and will also help preserve the traditional and heritage look of the Amira Kadal area. It will provide safe and convenient pedestrian access to the Jhelum Riverfront and ensure seamless linkage to prominent heritage and commercial hubs, including Goni Khan, Maharaja Bazar, and Hari Singh High Street. Emphasising the



importance of quality and safety, the Div Com directed the executing agencies to adhere strictly to prescribed standards and timelines. He also underscored the need for incorporating heritage-sensitive design elements that harmonise with the historical and cultural significance of the area.

Officials informed that the project will not only serve as an important pedestrian link but will also promote

walkability, support local business activity, and enhance the overall city experience for residents, traders, and tourists. Expressing satisfaction over the progress achieved so far, the Div Com urged the concerned agencies to maintain momentum and ensure timely completion of the project, delivering a durable, safe, and aesthetically appealing public asset for the city of Srinagar.

KT NEWS DESK

SRINAGAR DECEMBER 23: Deputy Commissioner(DC) Srinagar, Akshay Labroo, Tuesday chaired a comprehensive review meeting at the Meeting Hall of the DC Office Complex to assess the progress of key health initiatives being implemented in the district.

During the meeting, the Deputy Commissioner, as per an official statement, reviewed Medical Zone-wise progress of the enrolment of Ayushman Bharat Health Account (ABHA) IDs, the status of enrolment of eligible beneficiaries under the Ayushman Vay Vandhana Card, an expansion of the Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) and the implementation of Tuberculosis (TB) control measures.

At the outset, the DC emphasized the importance of achieving universal coverage under the ABHA ID initiative to ensure seamless access to digital health services. He directed the Officers to intensify



awareness campaigns and expedite the registration process across all Medical Zones/Blocks in the district so that citizens are benefited from the Government initiatives.

While reviewing the enrolment status of senior citizens under the Vay Vandhana Card scheme, the DC instructed the concerned health functionaries to ensure saturation of eligible beneficiaries, enabling them to avail cashless healthcare services at empanelled public and private hospitals under the AB-PMJAY

framework.

On the occasion, the DC emphasized the importance of digital health records, and directed the concerned officers to ensure maximum coverage through intensified awareness drives, field-level mobilisation and coordinated efforts among health functionaries.

The DC directed the Health Functionaries to ensure considerable progress in ABHA ID generation and Vay Vandhana enrolment in the coming days across all medical zones and blocks to ensure that citizens benefit

from digital health services

The DC called for improved inter-departmental coordination and real-time monitoring to address implementation gaps and ensure that the benefits of these flagship health schemes reach every eligible citizen.

Reviewing the status of Tuberculosis control measures, the DC assessed screening, detection, treatment and follow-up mechanisms being undertaken under the National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP).

He stressed the need to further enhance presumptive TB screening, early diagnosis, and regular monitoring to further reduce TB incidence and achieve the goal of a TB-free district.

Among others, the meeting was attended by Chief Planning Officer Fayaz Ahmad Dar; Chief Medical Officer, Dr Tahir Sajad; Medical Superintendents of SKIMS, JLNH Hospital, SMHS Hospital and CD Hospital, District Tuberculosis Officer and all Zonal Medical Officers of Srinagar district.

Prashasan Gaon Ki Ore District administration Kulgam intensifies public outreach

KT NEWS DESK

KULGAM, DECEMBER 23: Continuing its citizen-centric governance initiative under the ongoing "Prashasan Gaon Ki Ore" campaign, the district administration Kulgam organised public outreach and grievance redressal programmes at multiple locations across the district.


A large number of residents actively participated and projected their grievances and demands. Officers from the concerned departments patiently listened to the issues raised by the public and assured time-bound and effective redressal.

Special emphasis was laid on awareness generation regarding various welfare and beneficiary-oriented schemes and on-the-spot service delivery.

The outreach camps provided an effective platform for resolving long-pending issues while further strengthening trust and coordination between citizens and the administration.

Meanwhile, training sessions were also organised for farmers, and awareness programmes were conducted wherein resource persons briefed participants about departmental schemes and initiatives.

اجتماعی فاتحہ خوانی



وادی کے مشہور و معروف قلمکار، دانشور، ادیب و شاعر عبدالاحد فرہادی اجتماعی فاتحہ خوانی جمعرات، 25 دسمبر، صبح 10 بجکر 30 منٹ پر ان کے آبائی مقبرہ صوہ، نزدیک ملک صاحب زیارت میں انجام دی جائے گی۔

بعد ازاں ان کی آبائی رہائش گاہ واقع عمرہیم، نزدیک مسجد عثمان غنی میں تعزیتی مجلس منعقد ہوگی۔

منجانب: ڈاکٹر سائمنہ فرہاد (دختر) سمرینہ (دختر) ڈاکٹر محمد ابراہیم وانی (فرزند سستی) محمد فیصل (فرزند سستی)

KASHMIR THUNDER

IS AVAILABLE AT ALL LEADING STALLS



GOVERNMENT OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER REW DIVISION PULWAMA

NOTICE INVITING TENDERS

e- NIT No. 156/2025-26 Dated 20-12-2025

For and on behalf of the Lt. Governor, Of Union Territory of JandK, e-tenders (In Single cover system) are invited on Percentage basis from approved and eligible Contractors registered with UT of JandK Govt., CPWD, Railways and other State/ Central Governments for the following works: -

S. No.	Name of the Work	Block	Estim ated /Adv. Cost (In lacs)	Cost of tender docum ents (In Rupees)	EMD (in %)	Class of Contracto r	Time of completi on	Major head
1.	CO DRAIN ASLONGSIDE OF LINK ROAD FROM MAIN ROAD TO TANCHEMADAAN RAKH CHILDREN PULWAMA	Litter	1.48	200/=	2%	DEE	30 days	CD&PYT

Position of A/A: - Accorded Position of T/S: - Accorded
The Bidding documents consisting of qualifying information, eligibility criteria, specifications, Drawings, bill of quantities (B.O.Q), Set of terms and conditions of contract and other details can be seen/downloaded from the departmental website www.jktenders.gov.in as per schedule of dates.

1.	Date of Issue of Tender Notice	20-12-2025
2.	Online Bid submission Start Date	20-12-2025 from 06:55 PM
3.	Online Bid Submission End Date	30-12-2025 up to 06:55 PM
4.	Date and time of opening of Online Bids	31-12-2025 at 10:00 AM or any convenient day In the office of the Executive Engineer REW Pulwama
5.	Note: - Fee Receipt and EMD shall be deposited after the financial bids opened. Incase The original Tender Document Fee Receipt and EMD is not Deposited within 5 days after the Financial Bids Opened for all responsive bidders Who have participated online, the Department shall take action as per Rules.	

Special Condition 01:

Only the eligible contractors of respective Panchayat Halqa shall take part in the tendering process for works under District Capex with Advertised Cost 3.0 Lacs or below for District Capex works only. Bidders must upload any document viz residential certificate/ Adhar Card/ Ration Card/ Electricity Bill showing panchayat name, as residence proof that he/she is residing the respective Panchayat Halqa (Applicable for DEE Class contractors in call Ist only).

SC02: - Contractors Strictly not eligible

The Bidders who had participated in 2023-24/2024-25 and has not completed the works within stipulated time frame/who had left the work midway/ who had not started/taken up the works are strictly not eligible. Any such participation may lead to cancellation of their bid and No claim shall be entertained in this regard.

Conditions for Bidders:

Every Participating supplier/ contractor to mandatorily disclose the Bank Account No. which is linked with their GSTIN at the time of bid submission. No Payment shall be released by Govt. Deptt./Agency to any other Bank Account except the one linked with GST Registered number of the Successful bidder. As per Circular No. 01 (Adm) FD of 2025 Dated 08/07/2025 issued by Govt. of JandK Finance Department Civil Secretariat Jammu/Srinagar.

- As per Government Order No. 238-F of 2021 Dated 07-09-2021, in case of inadequate response to a tender, participation from adjoining Panchayats will be permitted (i.e in 2nd call of tendering preceding condition will be applied).
- Contractors who failed to execute the allotted work/works during the previous financial year (2024-25) are not eligible for-tendering for the current financial year (2025-26).
- Any Bidder who will go down more than 10% of Advertised Cost shall upload the Additional Security online in shape of CDR/FDR during tendering process as per Unbalance Bid Table mentioned in NIT at S. No 09 (Non uploading of Additional Security will let to the rejection of the tender).
- The bids of Responsive bidders shall be opened online on same Web Site in the Office of Executive Engineer REW Division Pulwama (Tender receiving authority).
- In Addition to Earnest Money Deposit (Bid Security), the 1st lowest Bidder has to produce an amount equal to 5% of allotted cost as Performance Security in the shape of CDR/FDR within 05 days before fixation of contract. The EMD (Bid Security/Earnest money) of 2% of advertised cost of successful bidder shall be released after receipt of 5% Performance Security, which will be released after successful completion of the DLP/ Maintenance Period.
- The 1st lowest responsive (Successful) shall submit all the hard copies of uploaded documents within 05 Days before fixation of Contract. Failure to produce the documents shall render the L1 as non-responsive and he shall be debarred to participate in any tendering process up to 12 months after forfeiting the CDR and case for debarring of the Contractor is forwarded to Higher Authorities for a period of 01 Year.
- The Earnest Money Deposit (EMD@2% of Advertised Cost) in the shape of CDR/FDR of the unsuccessful Bidder shall be released after opening the Tender on production of Treasury Challan.
- The Tender Opening Authority reserves the right to accept or reject any or all tenders or any part of any tender without assigning reason thereof.
- The bids for the work shall remain valid for a period of 120 days from the date of opening of technical bids
- Unbalanced Bid: The bidders have to produce additional security in shape of CDR/FDR of recognize scheduled/ commercial Bank, pledged to Executive Engineer REW Division Pulwama. The CDR/FDR shall be valid for maximum six months or more after the last date of receipt to bids along with the bid document as per following break up:
Additional Security online in shape of CDR/FDR
(As Finance Department Circular No. FD-Code/ 441/ 2024-02-158 Dated 08-08-2025)

S.NO.	Percentage of Unbalanced Bid viz; Advertised cost on account flow rates	Additional Security Advertised value of work as percentage of Advertised cost
1	Up to and including 10% below	Nil
2	Greater than 10% up to 20% below	1%
3	Greater than 20% up to 30% below	3%
4	Greater than 30% up to 40% below	5%
5	Greater than 40% up to 50% below	7%

Instruction to bidders regarding e-tendering process.

Bidders are advised to download bid submission manual from the "Downloads" option as well as from " Bidders Manual Kit" on website www.jktenders.gov.in to acquaint bid submission process.

Xen/REW/Pul/10600-06
Dated:- 20/12/2025

DIPK-9274/25
DATED: 23-12-2025

Sd/= Executive Engineer
REW Division Pulwama

GOVERNMENT OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR TRANSPORT DEPARTMENT, CIVIL SECRETARIAT, J&K

Subject: Appointment under SRO 43 of 1994 for the post of Multitasking Staff (MTS) in the State Motor Garages Department.

NOTICE

Pursuant to the approval of Competent Authority (Hon'ble Minister Incharge Transport Department) for appointment of Miss Serat Hamid D/o Late Ab. Hamid Bhat (Ex-Chauffeur of State Motor Garages Department) R/o Tankipora, Srinagar at present Usmania Colony, Bemina, Srinagar, as Multitasking Staff (MTS) in the State Motor Garages Department under SRO-43 of 1994, Miss Serat Hamid is hereby directed to submit her particulars as per the below prescribed format in the Directorate of State Motor Garages Department in person or on Email id dirmsmg@gmail.com within a period of Ten days positively for uploading the same on the Employee Verification System (EVS) portal, failing which it shall be presumed that the applicant is not willing to take up the appointment as Multitasking Staff (MTS) in the State Motor Garages Department, and shall forfeit the right of appointment without any further notice:-

S. No	B.D. No	Candidate Name	Parentage	Selection Category	Address	Contact Number	Email id	Signature

Nighat Parveen
Under Secretary to Government
Transport Department

No.TRPT-SMG0SRO/1/2021-02(17407)
Dated: 19.12.2025

DIPK-9262/25
DATED: 23-12-2025

Snowfall sparks booking surge

REHAN QAYOOM MIR

Srinagar, Dec 23: The first snowfall spell of the season has breathed new life into Kashmir's winter tourism sector, with travel operators reporting a noticeable spike in tourist queries and bookings. The fresh snow spell has transformed popular destinations like Gulmarg, Pahalgam and Sonamarg into a winter paradise, drawing excitement from visitors and local businesses alike. Rouf Trambo, president of the Travel Agents Association of Kashmir (TAAK) said the snowfall has boosted confidence among tourism stakeholders. "This first spell of snow has awakened



hopes for tour operators. Calls and queries from tourists have picked up sharply since yesterday," he said. Trambo said that additional snowfall spells in the coming weeks could further increase interest. "If we get one or two more snow spells, we expect an even bigger surge in inquiries, bookings and tourist movement," he added. Other operators said they are receiving online queries for hotel bookings, ski rentals, gondola rides and guided tours. Tawqeer, a travel operator based in Srinagar and owner of Connect Kashmir Mobile, said, "Tourists are eager to experience snow, and the response has

been good. Our counters have again started seeing queues, and many are finalising packages on the spot." Hotels, adventure activity operators and restaurants across tourist hubs also reported an increase in footfall, while visitors themselves expressed excitement over the fresh snowfall. Ananya Verma, a tourist from Delhi, said: "The snow is perfect and everyone is excited. We couldn't wait to book our rides and enjoy the slopes." With queries picking up and bookings rising, stakeholders in Kashmir's tourism sector are hopeful that this first spell of snow will set the tone for a thriving winter season—(KNO)

Heightened vigil in Srinagar for Christmas, New Year

REHAN QAYOOM MIR

Srinagar, Dec 23: With Christmas and New Year celebrations approaching, Srinagar city has been placed under a heightened security blanket. Jammu & Kashmir Police, along with the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), have intensified checking drives, surveillance and patrols across vital installations and public spaces.

The stepped-up security measures aim to ensure public safety during the festive season, with authorities closely monitoring movement and maintaining a visible presence in crowded areas.

From the bustling corridors of Lal Chowk to the beautiful stretches around Dal Lake, Nehru Park and the other side of the city's Tengpora Bypass, security personnel have been deployed in greater numbers, setting up surprise checkpoints and conducting random frisking of vehicles and pedestrians.

Officials said that the step comes as part of preventive security measures to ensure peace and public safety during the festive period.

They said, joint teams of Police and CRPF have been conducting area domination exercises and surprise checks to maintain high alertness across the city. "Vehicles, identity documents and passenger



belongings are being thoroughly inspected to rule out any security threats."

The intensified operations covered several sensitive pockets, including Maharaj Bazar, Hari Singh High Street, Magarmal Bagh, Jehangir Chowk, Tankipora, Lal Chowk, Nehru Park, Dalgate interiors, etc., where business establishments and high-footfall zones remained under watch throughout the day. In a parallel exercise, Srinagar Police conducted an Area Security Trial (AST), in collaboration with CRPF, along the Tengpora stretch of the National Highway. The mock drill simulated coordinated responses to potential emergencies and tested ground readiness. During the exercise, shops, commercial premises and moving vehicles were inspected as part of a

comprehensive grid review. Commuters too reported increased presence of uniformed personnel across market routes, with security vehicles stationed at intersections and strategic corners. Security officials said the city will remain under tight vigil in the coming days, with more surprise checks expected in view of the twin celebrations. "Visibility of forces and public confidence are both crucial at this stage."

A police spokesperson said that Srinagar Police, in close coordination with the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), conducted Area Security/Anti-Sabotage (AST) operations around major vital installations and sensitive locations in the North Zone of Srinagar, to strengthen preventive security measures and counter any potential threats. The

purpose of the joint security exercise is to reinforce the overall security grid, enhance operational preparedness, and ensure the safety and security of critical infrastructure as well as the general public, the spokesperson said in a statement, adding, "During the operation, thorough checking and sanitisation of the identified areas were carried out, along with a comprehensive review of existing security arrangements. Such joint security exercises will continue to be conducted periodically as part of proactive measures to deter potential threats and reinforce public confidence."

Srinagar Police remains committed to maintaining peace and ensuring a secure environment across the city, the spokesperson said—(KNO)

Aru Valley dazzles under snowfall, tourists thrilled



JAHANGEER GANAIE

Pahalgam, Dec 23: A first spell of snowfall, though limited to just a few inches, transformed the picturesque Aru Valley in Pahalgam into a breathtaking winter wonderland, drawing smiles, excitement and renewed enthusiasm among tourists visiting the famed destination, nestled in Himalayas, in South Kashmir.

As gentle snowflakes blanketed meadows, rooftops and pine-covered slopes, the entire valley took on a pristine white look, offering visitors a postcard-perfect setting. The snowfall, the first one of the season in the area, was enough to change the landscape dramatically without causing disruption to road connectivity or daily activities, making it ideal for tourists.

Visitors, including

families and adventure enthusiasts, were seen clicking photographs, throwing snowballs and simply soaking in the serene beauty of the valley. Many said that even a light snowfall had fulfilled their long-cherished dream of witnessing Kashmir's winter charm.

"This is our first visit to Kashmir, and seeing Aru Valley covered in snow feels magical," said Rakesh Kumar, a tourist from Delhi. "Even though the snowfall is just a few inches, it has completely changed the atmosphere. It feels like we are walking inside a movie scene."

Another tourist, Neha Sharma from Mumbai, shared similar views. "We were not expecting snowfall during our stay, so this came as a pleasant surprise.

Continued on
www.kashmirthunder.in

Chief Engineer MED reports ready for snow

RAJA SYED RATHER

Srinagar, Dec 23: The Chief Engineer Mechanical Engineering Department on Tuesday said that government has set up dedicated snow control rooms across Kashmir to ensure public safety, smooth coordination of snow clearance operations and uninterrupted essential services during the winter season.

Speaking with reporters, Chief Engineer Er. Bodh Raj said that the department, which is responsible for clearing the majority of roads in the Valley, has completed all necessary preparations. He said the department has divided the entire road network into four operational zones to ensure timely snow clearance.

He said the first zone covers Srinagar and Budgam districts, while the second zone covers four districts of south Kashmir, the third zone covers Baramulla district, and the fourth zone covers Kupwara, Bandipora and Ganderbal districts.

"The department has set a target of clearing over 10,015 km of roads this winter season. For this purpose, the department has deployed 301 snow clearance machines and a workforce of 305 staff members, including additional manpower hired to strengthen operations," he said.

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Assembly environment committee reviews SIDCO Ghatti industrial impact



KT NEWS DESK

Kathua, Dec 23: The Committee on Environment of the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly, headed by its Chairman Mohammad Yousuf Tarigami, MLA on Tuesday visited the SIDCO Industrial Estate, Ghatti Complex, Kathua to interact with the stakeholders and take stock of environmental concerns related to industrial activities in the area.

The Committee has been mandated to assess the impact of industrial waste on human health, flora, fauna and agricultural land besides reviewing the status of measures taken for maintaining ecological balance and environmental protection.

During the visit, MLA Chanapora, Mustaq Guroo, MLA Kokernag, Zafar Ali Khatana, MLA Gulabgarh,

Khurshied Ahmad, MLA Jasrota Rajiv Jasrotia and MLA Basohli Darshan Kumar, who are members of the Committee, were present.

Secretary, Industries and Commerce Department, Vikramjeet Singh, Chairman Pollution Control Committee, Vasu Yadav, Director Industries and Commerce Jammu, Arun Kumar Manhas, Deputy Commissioner Kathua Rajesh Sharma, President Industrial Association Kathua and deputations from different areas also attended the interaction.

The Committee took first-hand appraisal of the issues and concerns raised by various deputations. It held detailed discussions on the prevailing ground situation, environmental implications and apprehensions of the local population.

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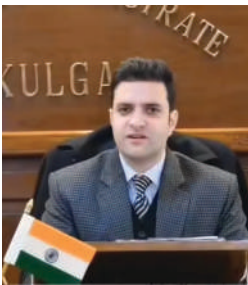
DC Kulgam chairs DLRC, DCC meet

KT NEWS DESK

Kulgam, Dec 23: A meeting of the District Level Review Committee/ District Consultative Committee (DLRC/DCC) for Q2 FY 2025-26 was held on Tuesday under the chairmanship of the Deputy Commissioner Kulgam, Athar Aamir Khan here at Mini Secretariat Kulgam to review the performance of banks and sponsoring departments under various Government initiatives and flagship schemes for the financial year 2025-26.

The meeting was attended by Additional District Development Commissioner Kulgam, Altaf Ahmad Khan; DLO RBI, Anoop Sharma; General Manager DIC, Dr. Bashir Ahmad; CEO Kulgam, Shabir Ahmad; Lead District Manager (Banks) Iftikhar Ahmad Padder; Director RSETI, Mohd Ayoub, Other District Officers and representatives of banks and financial institutions operating in Kulgam.

At the outset, the Deputy Commissioner, who is also Chairman of the



DLRC/DCC, conducted a detailed sector-wise review of banks' performance in implementing various Government schemes.

He also assessed achievements under Priority and Non-Priority Sector lending in line with the Annual Credit Plan.

Addressing on the occasion, the DC urged banks and sponsoring agencies to focus on achieving Priority Sector Lending targets and emphasized improving ease of access to banking facilities for consumers.

The DC stressed effective implementation of self-employment schemes including Mission YUVA, Holistic Agriculture Development Programme (HADP), PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana, and other livelihood-oriented

initiatives.

He also emphasized strengthening financial inclusion through proper handholding of beneficiaries to enhance credit outreach.

He further directed banks to sensitize their staff to deal with customers compassionately and ensure timely redressal of public grievances.

The DC emphasized close coordination between banks and sponsoring agencies for seamless implementation of self-employment schemes, enabling beneficiaries to establish income-generating units effectively.

During the meeting, it was informed that YOY Deposits of the District have increased from Rs 2541.67 Cr to Rs 2747.05 Cr witnessing 8.08% increase. Advances have grown from Rs 2324.98 Cr to Rs 2560.94 Cr witnessing 10.15% growth.

Further, it was informed that the achievement as on 30.09.2025, under District Credit Plan is Rs 1070.68 Cr which is 55% of the fixed target of Rs 1938 Cr for FY 2025-26.

Boniya receives temporary fire tender

KNO

Uri, Dec 23: Amid public concern over the absence of a local fire station and recent blaze incidents in the area, the Directorate of Fire and Emergency Services, Jammu and Kashmir, has ordered the temporary deployment of a fire tender at Boniyar in North Kashmir's Baramulla district.

As per an order states that the tender bearing chassis and registration No. 3078/CH, presently attached with the Fire and Emergency Services Headquarters Srinagar, will be stationed at Boniyar for three months

with immediate effect to ensure uninterrupted fire and emergency response in the vulnerable belt.

The order further details that eight officials from various fire stations, including Chadoora, Dangiawacha, Kreeri, Baramulla, Kunzar, Gulmarg and Sopore, have been attached with the tender for effective manning and operational support, while another official has been re-deployed to assist drivers at Command Budgam during the period, with the arrangement to remain in force till completion of the deployment or further directions—(KNO)

Police attach property of peddler

KNO

Srinagar, Dec 23: Jammu and Kashmir Police on Tuesday attached property worth 1 crore of a notorious drug peddler here, alleging it was acquired through the proceeds of illicit drug trafficking, officials said.

The attached property attached under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act comprises a double-storey residential house built on 12 marlas of land, situated at Sultan Mohalla, Saidakadal, belonging to the accused Nisar Ahmad Bota, they said.

The accused is involved in a case registered at Rainawari police station, the official said. During the

course of the investigation, it was established that the said property had been acquired through illicit proceeds generated from drug trafficking activities. Consequently, the property was attached under Section 68-F of the NDPS Act, a police spokesman said.

He said the attachment proceedings were conducted strictly in accordance with the prescribed legal procedure and in the presence of two independent witnesses.

As per the attachment order, the owner has been restrained from selling, leasing, transferring, altering, or creating any third-party interest in the said property until further orders, the police said—(KNO)

EDITORIAL

Freight Train Network Result Of Visionary National Policy

The arrival of the first-ever Food Corporation of India freight train at the Anantnag Goods Terminal is a transformative milestone for Jammu & Kashmir’s economy and food security. This historic movement of over 1,380 tonnes of foodgrains directly into south Kashmir via rail marks the true operational integration of the Valley with the national freight network, realising a long-held aspiration. This achievement

heralds a new era of reliability, efficiency, and resilience. By providing an all-weather, cost-effective alternative to road transport on the often-vulnerable National Highway-44, the rail link ensures an uninterrupted supply chain for essential commodities. It guarantees that buffer stocks reach remote areas consistently, directly strengthening the region’s food security architecture. The significant reduction in transportation costs will benefit

the public exchequer and, ultimately, the consumer, while also easing congestion and wear on road infrastructure. Economically, the implications are profound. The Anantnag terminal now becomes a vital node, poised to boost local markets, support agricultural trade, and spark growth in logistics and warehousing sectors. It promises faster, cheaper movement of goods for enterprises and infrastructure projects, catalysing broader

economic development. This is infrastructure that works silently but powerfully for inclusive growth. This milestone is the result of visionary national policy and dedicated execution. The strategic focus on extending the railways’ reach into the Valley has culminated in a tangible asset that serves the people. It is a testament to the commitment to weave Jammu & Kashmir firmly into the national economic fabric through sustainable

and modern connectivity. The freight carries with it the promise of stability, prosperity, and progress. This is a foundational step, and its true success will be measured by the consistent operation and expansion of freight services, touching more sectors and regions. For today, however, it deserves recognition as a decisive leap forward, one that connects the Valley not just by tracks, but by trust in a more secure and prosperous future.

Viksit Bharat – G RAM G Act 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 President of India has given assent to the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Bill, 2025 marking a significant milestone in the transformation of rural employment policy. The Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Act, 2025 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

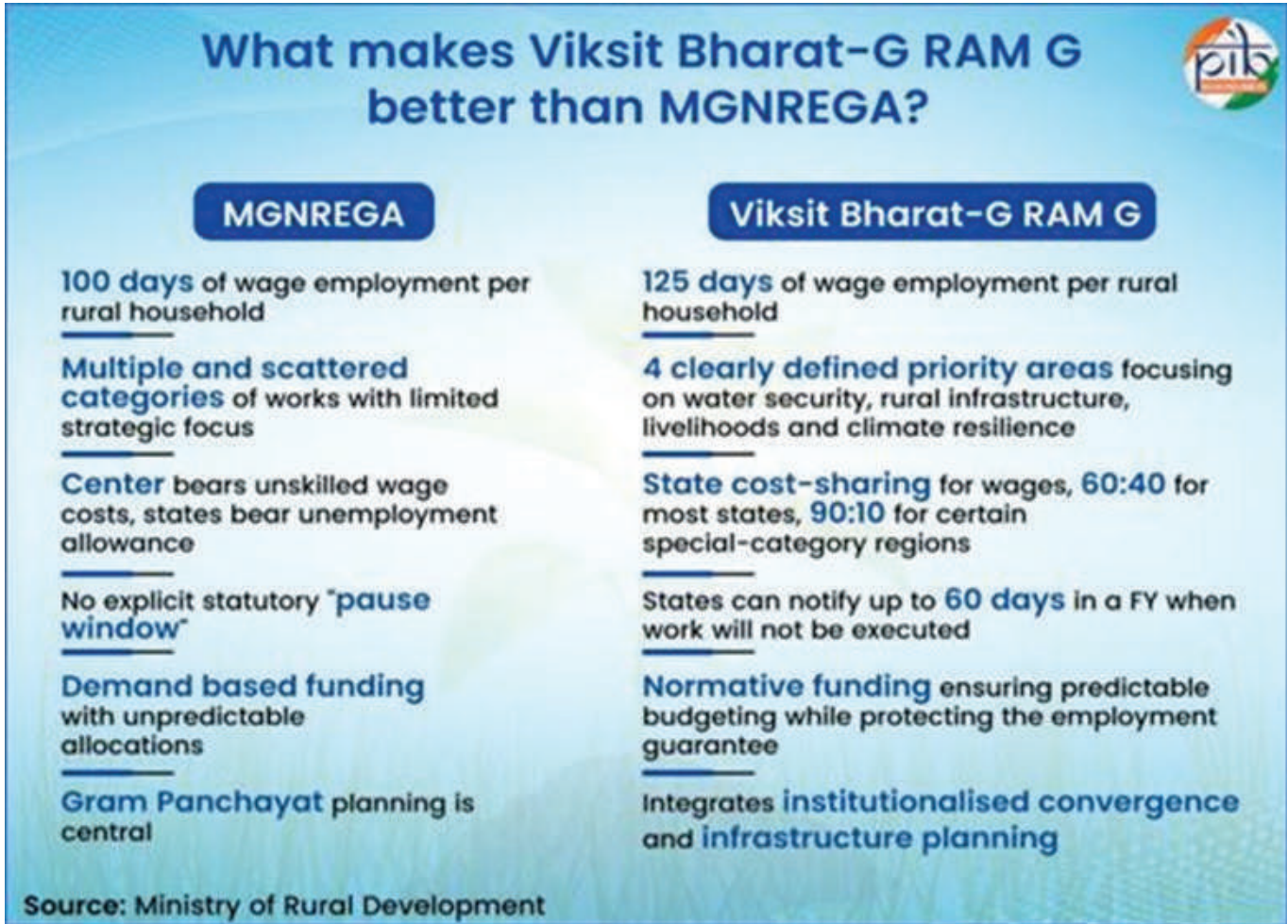
Since Independence, rural development policies in India have focused on reducing poverty, improving agricultural productivity, and creating employment for surplus and underemployed rural labour. Wage employment programmes have gradually evolved as key instruments for supporting rural livelihoods while 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 geotagged 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 Aajeevika Mission Gramin Act 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 Act, 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 Act, 2025

The Act 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 Act, 2025

The new Act 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 Act

The Act 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 Act establishes a clear institutional framework to ensure coordinated, accountable, and transparent implementation of the 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 Act 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 Act 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 Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act, 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 Act 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 Act 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

Rana chairs review meeting to address drinking water issues in Jammu city

KT News Desk

JAMMU, DECEMBER 23: Minister for Jal Shakti, Javed Ahmed Rana, Tuesday chaired a review meeting at the Civil Secretariat here to assess and address the pressing drinking water related issues in various localities of Jammu city.

The Minister, as per an official statement, impressed upon the concerned officers to formulate both short-term and long-term strategies to ensure that the existing as well as future drinking water requirements of the city are met in a sustainable manner. He underscored the importance of ensuring a regular, adequate and reliable water supply for the public. He directed the officials to respond promptly and effectively to public grievances.

During the deliberations, the Minister reviewed the proposal for permanent restoration of the Sitlee Water Treatment Plant. He instructed the concerned authorities to prepare a Detailed Project Report (DPR) at the earliest to facilitate timely execution of the project.



To further augment the drinking water supply in Chaman Vihar and adjoining areas, the Minister directed to make the pumping water station fully operational within a week. He noted that once functional, the project would substantially alleviate water scarcity issues faced by the residents in the area.

Emphasising efficient utilisation of available resources, the Minister stressed that all development initiatives must

translate into tangible benefits for the people on the ground. He also highlighted the need for expeditious completion of procedural and administrative formalities to ensure early implementation of approved projects.

Reviewing another significant intervention, the Minister discussed the construction of a sump tank at Kamdhenu. He said that the facility would address the drinking water concerns not only in Kamdhenu

but also in surrounding areas once it gets completed.

The Minister also took note of the issues raised by MLA Jammu West, Arvind Gupta. He assured him that all genuine concerns pertaining to drinking water supply would be examined and addressed on priority.

The meeting was attended by the Chief Engineer, PHE, Superintending Engineers and other senior officers of the department.

National Farmers Day

Javid Ahmed Dar inaugurates Farmers' Mela in Samba

KT News Desk

SAMBA, DECEMBER 23: Minister for Agriculture Production Department, Rural Development Department and Panchayati Raj, Cooperative and Election Department, Javid Ahmed Dar, Tuesday inaugurated a Farmers' Mela at Samba.

The event, as per an official statement has been organised with a special focus on innovation, secondary agriculture and awareness about government schemes on the occasion of National Farmers Day (Kisan Diwas). It is being celebrated annually on December 23 to mark the birth anniversary of 5th Prime Minister of India, Choudhary Charan Singh.

Speaking on the occasion, the Minister said that the main objective of the mela was to bridge the gap between the scientists, innovators and farmers by promoting scientific temper and encouraging adoption of modern farming techniques. He emphasised that such initiatives play a crucial role in empowering the farmers with knowledge about the latest developments in agriculture.

The Minister further highlighted that the Mela provided farmers with exposure to the latest farm machinery and technologies, improved seed



varieties, field demonstrations and best agricultural practices. He said the event also served as an important platform for agro-industrial exhibitions and direct interaction with the scientists and subject-matter experts from various departments.

Among those present on the occasion were MLA Samba Surjit Singh Slathia, MLA Vijaypur Chander Prakash Ganga, MLA Ramgarh Dr Devinder Kumar Manyal, DDC Chairman Keshav Dutt Sharma, Deputy Commissioner Samba Ayushi Sudan, DDC Vice Chairman along with senior officers from the Agriculture and allied sectors.

During the Mela, Javid Ahmad Dar inspected various stalls set up by different departments, Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) and volunteers. He interacted with the participants and appreciated their efforts in spreading awareness about the

innovative agricultural practices and government schemes aimed at farmers' welfare.

MLAs from Samba, Vijaypur and Ramgarh also addressed the gathering and underlined the vast potential of the agriculture sector in generating employment and strengthening the rural economy. They emphasized that diversification, adoption of modern technology and promotion of allied sectors such as horticulture, dairy and agri-based industries can open new avenues of livelihood for the youth and farmers. The legislators stressed the need to encourage innovation, skill development and value addition to make agriculture a sustainable and profitable sector, while assuring continued support for initiatives aimed at farmers' welfare and rural development.

The Mela witnessed enthusiastic participation from the farmers from across the district.

District-level Good Governance workshop organised in Anantnag



KT News Desk

ANANTNAG, DECEMBER 23: As part of the ongoing Good Governance Week (Sushasan Saptah-2025) being organised under the flagship campaign 'Prashasan Gaon Ki Ore' and to strengthen efficient and citizen-centric governance, a one day district-level workshop was held Tuesday at Town Hall Anantnag.

The event, as per an official statement, was presided over by the Additional District Development Commissioner (ADDC), Sandeep Singh Bali and attended by ACD, CAO, DSEO, ARTO, Tehsildar Anantnag, DAO, officers and officials of line departments, civil society members and the general public.

The ADC in his address impressed upon the officers to ensure saturation of centrally sponsored and other government schemes, expedite grievance redressal and enhance the quality of public service delivery across the district.

During the workshop, resource persons from Transport, AYUSH, Agriculture and other departments imparted awareness to the general public about key government services, schemes and initiatives.

On the occasion, beneficiaries from multiple departments including Agriculture, Horticulture, Fisheries, RDD, Social Welfare, ICDS, Health, Animal Husbandry, Sheep Husbandry and Industries were provided sanction letters.

Additionally, documentaries highlighting achievements and good governance practices of the district were screened and beneficiaries of Agriculture (HADP), Animal Husbandry and Industries Departments shared testimonials about the success of their self-employment units established under various government schemes.

The workshop reaffirmed the district administration's commitment to participatory governance and improved service delivery at the grassroots level.

Dr G N Itoo chairs workshop on Good Governance practices in Baramulla

KT News Desk

BARAMULLA, DECEMBER 23: As part of the nationwide observance of Good Governance Week, Dr. G. N. Itoo, Director, Centre for Good Governance and Policy Analysis, Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST) chaired a workshop on Good Governance Practices at the Main Meeting Hall of the DC Office, Baramulla.

The workshop, as per an official statement, was organised under the banner of "Prashasan Gaon Ki Ore", a week-long outreach programme being observed from 19th to 25th December across all Panchayat Halqas of the district, with the objective of strengthening citizen-centric governance and effective service delivery.

In his welcome address, Assistant Commissioner Development (ACD) Baramulla, Chaudhary Mudasir Hussain, highlighted the various outreach activities being undertaken across all the 402 Halqa Panchayats during Good Governance Week in the district.

Speaking during the workshop, Dr. G. N. Itoo appreciated the district administration for its proactive initiatives and committed efforts in



promoting transparent and responsive governance.

Meanwhile, Dr. Itoo stated that the broader goal of Good Governance Week aligns with the national vision of Viksit Bharat, which requires the adoption and consistent implementation of best governance practices.

Furthermore, Dr. Itoo underscored that transparency is a cornerstone of good governance and emphasised that government officers must remain easily accessible to the public, enabling citizens to voice their grievances and participate meaningfully in the governance process.

The workshop witnessed interactive deliberations, during which officers from various departments shared valuable

insights and perspectives on strengthening governance mechanisms at the district level.

During the workshop, DIO Baramulla, Iftakhar Ahmad, presented an overview of the newly conceptualized podcast series "Jhelum Se Chinab Tak", highlighting its role as a technology-driven good governance initiative that facilitates direct outreach by Heads of Departments to improve public awareness, transparency and citizen participation.

The workshop concluded with a renewed commitment by all stakeholders to uphold the principles of transparency, accountability and citizen-centric administration in pursuit of effective and inclusive governance.

District-level Good Governance workshop held in Shopian

KT News Desk

SHOPIAN, DECEMBER, 23: District Level Workshop on Good Governance practices and initiatives was Tuesday held under the guidance of Deputy Commissioner (DC) Shopian, Shishir Gupta here at Mini Secretariat, Shopian, as part of the ongoing "Prashasan Gaon Ki Ore" campaign aimed at strengthening public grievance redressal and service delivery.

Workshop, as per an official statement, commenced with a welcome address by ADC Shopian, Dr. Zakir Hussain Faaz, who elaborated the significance of organising the district workshop.

The session was followed by an inaugural address by the Chief Guest Showkat Aijaz Bhat, former Deputy Commissioner, Shopian who highlighted the importance of innovation, accountability and people-centric governance in strengthening public service delivery. He stressed that good governance must translate into timely, transparent and citizen-friendly service delivery at the grassroots level.

Chief Horticulture Officer Shopian presented specific points of District

@100, outlining the horticulture sector developmental vision and scheme achievements.

Short films showcasing district-level initiatives was also presented on the occasion detailing the achievements of different government schemes and district initiatives for accelerating the developmental and welfare parameters of the district.

The workshop featured presentations on good governance practices implemented in the district, covering key areas such as public service delivery, horticulture, animal husbandry, health, education, social welfare, grievance redressal and public works.

ADDC Shopian, Dr. Nasir Ahmad Lone in his address, appreciated the efforts of departments for their contribution in the ongoing campaign.

District, Sectoral officers besides officials of all line departments participated in the workshop along with public.

Meanwhile, grievance redressal cum services delivery and awareness camps were held by Rural Development Department in association with tehsil administrations and line departments in scheduled Panchayats of the district.

Agriculture department Kashmir observes Kisan Diwas

KT News Desk

SRINAGAR, DECEMBER 23: Directorate of Agriculture Kashmir organised Kisan Diwas (National Farmer's Day) 2015 to acknowledge and encourage the relentless efforts of farmers, who form the backbone of the agricultural economy. The programme, as per an official statement, highlighted the need to support farmers through sustained policy measures, innovation, and extension services.

On the occasion, Director Agriculture Kashmir, Sartaj Ahmad Shah, delivered a detailed address on the importance of Kisan Diwas and underscored the vital role played by farmers in ensuring food security and rural development. He also outlined the future work strategies of the department, focusing on strengthening farmer-centric initiatives, improving productivity, and promoting sustainable agricultural practices.

The Joint Director Agriculture (Extension) Kashmir also spoke on the significance of the day, emphasizing the role of extension services in transferring modern technologies and best practices to farmers at the grassroots level. Senior officers of the Agriculture Department were present during the event, reaffirming the department's commitment to farmer welfare and agricultural development in the region.

Good Governance Week Kupwara admin organises Mega Workshop

KT News Desk

KUPWARA, DECEMBER 23: In continuation of the ongoing Good Governance Week "Sushasan Saptah - Prashasan Gaon Ki Ore" campaign, the District Administration Kupwara Tuesday organized a Mega Workshop aimed at strengthening governance delivery at the grassroots level here at Town Hall Kupwara.

The workshop, as per an official statement, was chaired by the Additional District Development Commissioner (ADDC) Kupwara, Mufti Fareed-ud-Din. Officers from various line departments, along with a large number of officials and field functionaries, participated in the programme.

The workshop focused on sensitizing officers and field staff about the objectives of Good Governance Week, emphasizing transparency, accountability, responsiveness, and effective implementation of government schemes at the grassroots. Discussions were held on improving service delivery mechanisms, addressing public



grievances promptly, and enhancing coordination among departments.

Speaking on the occasion, the ADCDC highlighted the importance of taking administration closer to the people and ensuring that the benefits of government initiatives reach the intended beneficiaries in a timely and efficient manner. He urged all departments to work with dedication and synergy to realize the spirit of "Prashasan Gaon Ki Ore".

Information & PR Kupwara presented a film on the district level initiatives taken under the Good Governance Week.

The programme witnessed active participation from attendees, who shared insights and field-level experiences, making the workshop interactive and outcome-oriented.

DLSA Budgam Holds Awareness Program on LSMS

KT News Desk

BUDGAM, DECEMBER 23: District Legal Services Authority, Budgam (DLSA Budgam), under the aegis of the J&K Legal Services Authority and under the chairmanship of O. P. Bhagat, Chairman, DLSA (Principal District & Sessions Judge) Budgam successfully conducted a Training-cum-Awareness Programme on the Legal Services Management System (LSMS) along with a review of Regulation 11 of the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA).

The programme, as per an official statement, was organised with the objective of reviewing the progress of legal aid cases, monitoring the performance of panel lawyers, and sensitizing all stakeholders on the effective use of the Legal Services Management System (LSMS) to strengthen case management and enhance the delivery of legal aid services.

The programme witnessed

active participation from legal professionals, officials and staff of DLSA, panel lawyers and Junior Assistants of TLSCs, who attended the programme virtually.

The technical and theoretical sessions focused on imparting practical training and awareness on LSMS, reviewing existing case management processes, sharing best practices, identifying challenges, and ensuring timely and effective legal assistance to beneficiaries, particularly those belonging to marginalized sections of society.

In her address, the Secretary, DLSA Budgam highlighted the critical need for regular and timely updating of case details on LSMS to enhance transparency, efficiency, and effective oversight. She exhorted panel lawyers to maintain regular communication with their clients, uphold the highest standards of professionalism, integrity, and confidentiality, and adopt a client-centric approach while representing vulnerable groups

such as women, children, senior citizens, and persons with disabilities.

Practical training on the use of LSMS was imparted by the official of DLSA Budgam, who elaborated on the practical aspects of the system. The session was specifically tailored for legal professionals and staff members of DLSA and TLSCs.

The programme also provided an interactive platform for panel lawyers to exchange experiences, discuss challenges faced in the delivery of legal aid, and explore practical solutions for improving outcomes.

The active participation of all stakeholders reflected a strong collective commitment to strengthening the legal aid framework and advancing access to justice in District Budgam.

The programme concluded with a renewed resolve to ensure high-quality, accessible, efficient, and responsive legal aid services through the effective utilization of the Legal Services Management System.

President confers Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar on 24 scientists

PTI

New Delhi, Dec 23: President Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday conferred the Vijyan Ratna Puraskar posthumously on renowned astrophysicist Jayant Naralikar for his contribution to cosmology and popularisation of science.

The award was received by R Srianand, the Director of the Pune-based Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics, which was founded by Naralikar.

Murmu also gave away the Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar at a function held at the Ganatantra Mandap at Rashtrapati Bhawan.

In the second edition of the Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar, 24 awards were presented to distinguished scientists in four categories – Vigyan Ratna, Vigyan Shri, Vigyan Yuva, and Vigyan Team.

The objective of the Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar is to recognise the notable and inspiring contributions made by the scientists, technologists and innovators individually or in teams in various fields of science, technology and technology-led innovation," an official statement said.

Noted agriculture scientist Gyanendra Pratap Singh, popularly known as the wheat breeder, was conferred the Vigyan Shri award for his contribution to the field of Agricultural Science.

Yusuf Mohammad Seikh, Director of the physics group of the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, was given the Vigyan Shri for his contribution to the field of Atomic Energy.

K Thangaraj of the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology has won the award in the field of Biological Sciences, and Pradeep Thalappil of IIT-Madras bagged the Vigyan Shri in the field of Chemistry.

Vice Chancellor of the Institute of Chemical Technology, Aniruddha Bhalchandra Pandit, was awarded the Vigyan Shri in the field of Engineering Sciences, and S Venkata Mohan, Director of National Environmental Engineering Research Institute, received the award in the field of Environmental Science.

Mahan Maharaj, a monk of the Ramakrishna Order and Professor of Mathematics at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, received the Vigyan Shri in the field of Mathematics and Computer Science.

Jayan N of the Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre received the Vigyan Shri award for his contribution to Space Science and Technology.

According to the state, Jagdis Gupta Kapuganti (Agricultural Science), Satendra Kumar Mangrauthia (Agricultural Science), Debarka Sengupta (Biological Sciences), Deepa Agashe (Biological Sciences), Dibyendu Das (Chemistry), Waliur Rahaman (Earth Science), and Arkaprava Basu (Engineering Sciences) received the Vigyan Yuva award.

Sabyasachi Mukherjee (Mathematics and Computer Science), Shweta Prem Agrawal (Mathematics and Computer Science), Suresh Kumar (Medicine), Amit Kumar Agarwal (Physics), Surhud Shrikant More (Physics), Ankur Garg (Space Science and Technology), and Mohanasankar Sivaprakasam (Technology and Innovation) were also among those who received the Vigyan Yuva award.

The Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR) Aroma Mission Team, which heralded the 'Lavender Mission' in Jammu and Kashmir, won the Vigyan Team award.

CJI urges young lawyers to be nation builders

PTI

Patiala (Pb), Dec 23: Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant told young lawyers on Tuesday to see themselves not merely as "case builders" but as "nation builders" and ask themselves a larger, more enduring question -- what is the role of a lawyer in a country like India.

Addressing the seventh convocation ceremony of the Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law (RGNUL) here, the CJI said every generation inherits the country in an unfinished form and bears the responsibility of shaping its future.

He drew a distinction between "case builders" and "nation builders".

"Watching all of you take your place in the world, I am reminded of a simple truth -- every generation receives the republic unfinished. Our Constitution is not a monument cast in stone, it is an ingenious blueprint. The courts give it interpretation, the institutions give it structure, but you, my dear young ones, must give it life. You must decide what India becomes next," he told the graduating students.

The CJI said whenever he has the privilege of addressing such a young and dynamic audience, "I must confess that I assume most of you will join the bar."

"This is more of an earnest hope. And this also brings me to the central theme I want to share with you all today -- that even as advocates, you are not merely case builders. You are, in fact, nation builders," he said.

Justice Kant told the gathering that when many of the students chose to study law, they might have imagined themselves arguing landmark cases, drafting intricate contracts or perhaps, addressing constitutional benches one day, which he said are worthy ambitions and there is nothing wrong with those.

"But I would urge you to



pause and ask a larger, more enduring question -- what is the role of a lawyer in a nation like India at this moment in its history? I insist upon this, being well aware that too often, we reduce the legal profession to a narrow exercise -- winning cases, billing hours, mastering procedure," he said, adding that while this certainly produces competent practitioners, it does not necessarily create nation builders.

A case builder focuses on the dispute of the day, a nation builder concerns himself with the consequences of today's dispute on tomorrow's society, the CJI said.

The distinction is fundamental -- the former is transactional -- the latter transformational, he added.

Underscoring a young lawyer's role in a broader context, Justice Kant told the students that as they stand "at the beginning of your own apprenticeship, you are entering a world unlike that faced by any generation before you".

"India is modernising faster than its institutions can comfortably adapt. Our disputes no longer fit neatly into familiar categories. Contracts now involve algorithms, property includes digital assets, families stretch across jurisdictions,

environmental cases are battles against time itself.

"And at the centre of this growing complexity stands the Indian lawyer -- expected not merely to argue, but to interpret, to advise, to innovate and, above all, to humanise," he said.

The CJI underlined that judicial reforms and modernisation efforts would achieve a real meaning only when young lawyers translate ideas into action at the grassroots level.

Addressing the young lawyers, he said when he speaks about mediation, advocates for a unified national judicial policy, emphasises the need to modernise the country's courts, he is not shouting into a void.

"I am speaking directly to you -- our youth, our future and indeed, the very best of our human resources. And I am hoping that some among you will carry these ideas forward, refine them, challenge them and ultimately, make them work on the ground. Because it is an incontrovertible fact that words spoken from the bench acquire a meaning only when young minds convert them into action," he said.

"I stress upon the discrepancy between a case builder and a nation builder. A case builder asks, 'How do I win?' A nation builder asks, 'What kind of a system am I strengthening by the way I win?' A case builder is satisfied with technical compliance, a nation builder is concerned with justice, fairness and legitimacy," the CJI said.

He identified three essential pillars for a meaningful and enduring legal career -- integrity, compassion and curiosity -- and described integrity as the institutional backbone of the justice system.

Justice Kant told the graduates that these three pillars will guide them "when the law is unclear, when precedent is divided and when public opinion

is loud but conscience is quiet".

Describing integrity as institutional strength, the CJI said a society may tolerate many inefficiencies, but it cannot survive a justice system that is not trusted.

"And trust, once lost, is extraordinarily difficult to rebuild," he said.

Touching upon the second pillar -- compassion -- the CJI noted that without it, justice risks becoming mechanical -- correct in form, but hollow in effect.

"Both at the bar and on the bench, I have seen how much depends on a lawyer's or a judge's willingness to look beyond the file. I have settled matters where a rigid insistence on procedure would only have prolonged suffering.

"I have permitted last-moment mentions for listing cases when liberty was at stake, knowing fully well that justice delayed in such moments would be justice denied. And I have also known when the law required not urgency, but restraint: when tempering the harshness of an order could preserve dignity without compromising principle," he said.

The third and final pillar is the engine that keeps the law responsive to a changing world -- curiosity -- the CJI said.

He urged the young lawyers to engage thoughtfully with technology.

"Learn to use it, master it, harness it, but never surrender judgment to it. Technology must remain a servant of justice, not its substitute," he said.

On the occasion, the university conferred the Doctor of Laws (Honoris Causa) degree on Supreme Court judges Pankaj Mishra and Rajesh Bindal.

Chief Justice of the Punjab and Haryana High Court Sheel Nagu was also present.

Vice Chancellor of the university Jai Shankar Singh welcomed the guests.

CONTD. FROM FRONT PAGE

J&K's health sector

Bone and Joint Hospital, Barzulla, after years of delays. The additional space has significantly eased congestion, improving working conditions for doctors and nurses while offering better comfort and dignity to patients and their attendants.

Delayed promises: Anantnag maternity hospital still a dream

However, not all announcements have translated into action. Chief Minister Omar Abdullah had announced a 250-bedded maternity and child care hospital in Anantnag, raising hopes among residents of south Kashmir. More than a year later, construction has yet to begin, forcing the hospital to continue functioning from an old, dilapidated and unsafe building, raising serious concerns about maternal and neonatal safety.

Decentralising care: Dialysis, geriatric and chemotherapy services

On a positive note, the establishment of dialysis centres at district and sub-district hospitals has emerged as a game-changer, reducing the need for patients to travel long distances to tertiary hospitals. The introduction of dedicated geriatric wards has also helped improve elderly care.

Similarly, chemotherapy units have been established in all district hospitals, benefiting hundreds of cancer patients who earlier had no option but to seek treatment in Srinagar or Jammu. The introduction of digital payment systems and the "scan and share" facility across hospitals has further streamlined patient services and improved efficiency.

The government has also proposed setting up a medical university at SKIMS, under which all medical colleges in J&K would function--an initiative being described as a potential milestone for academic and clinical coordination in the health sector.

Golden Card scheme: A lifeline for poor The Ayushman Bharat--PMJAY SEHAT Scheme, popularly known as the Golden Card, has emerged as one of the most impactful health interventions in Jammu and Kashmir. The scheme provides Rs 5 lakh health insurance cover per family per year, enabling cashless treatment at empanelled hospitals.

The coverage includes diagnostics, medicines, surgeries and hospitalisation expenses, offering immense relief to economically weaker families who earlier could not afford treatment at private or tertiary-care institutions.

To ensure universal access, the government introduced an online registration system, allowing residents to download their Golden Cards from home via setu.pmjay.gov.in using ration and Aadhaar card details. The aim is to achieve 100% saturation, ensuring no resident

is left out.

The scheme has facilitated thousands of free treatments, making quality healthcare accessible to the poorest sections of society. However, residents continue to demand the inclusion of caesarean deliveries under the scheme, citing high out-of-pocket expenses.

Mounting health challenges: A dual disease burden

Despite infrastructure upgrades, Jammu and Kashmir faces a dual burden of communicable and non-communicable diseases.

Communicable Diseases
Emerging infections such as dengue, swine flu, bird flu, Zika virus, and even global threats like Ebola pose constant risks. Dengue has become particularly problematic, with thousands of cases reported annually, especially in Jammu.

Non-communicable diseases on rise
Lifestyle-related diseases—including diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, strokes, kidney failure, obesity, cancer and mental health disorders—are increasing at an alarming pace.

Health experts estimate that around 10% of the population in J&K and Ladakh suffers from diabetes, while over 20% are prediabetic, largely due to sedentary lifestyles, dietary changes and increased consumption of junk food.

Doctors warn that hypertension remains a silent killer, with nearly every third or fourth adult affected, yet almost half remain unaware of their condition.

"Hypertension often shows no symptoms. Many patients only discover it after suffering a heart attack or stroke," doctors said.

Fertility decline, anaemia and COPD worsen public health picture

According to NFHS-5 (2019–21), J&K now has the lowest fertility rate in India, with a decline of 0.6% since NFHS-4 (2015–16). Experts attribute infertility to late marriages, obesity, lifestyle changes and poor dietary habits.

The prevalence of COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) is also increasing, with doctors stressing smoking cessation as the most effective preventive measure.

J&K ranks as the 6th highest State/UT in tobacco use, with 20.8% of adults smoking, according to GATS-2 data. While smokeless tobacco use remains low, smoking-related illnesses continue to rise.

Anaemia remains a critical concern, especially among women. Data from MoSPI's Women and Men in India 2022 report shows that 66% of women in J&K are anaemic, a sharp rise from NFHS-4.

Drug abuse and mental health: A silent emergency

Drug abuse continues to plague the region. A parliamentary report estimates 13.5 lakh drug users in J&K, including over 5 lakh opioid addicts. Intravenous drug use has increased significantly, raising the risk of HIV, hepatitis and other infections.

Mental health issues are also escalating, with thousands of distress calls received by helplines over the past two years. Doctors have

also flagged "virtual autism" among children due to excessive screen exposure.

Acute staff shortage: Nearly 16,000 vacancies One of the most crippling challenges is the acute shortage of healthcare workers, with nearly 16,000 posts lying vacant across GMCs, the Directorate of Health Services Jammu and Kashmir, AYUSH and NHM.

More than 8,000 vacancies exist in GMCs alone, severely affecting service delivery—especially in rural areas where referrals have increased due to a lack of specialists.

Health Minister Sakina Itoo has acknowledged the gaps, stating that urgent recruitment and infrastructure upgrades are essential to reduce the burden on tertiary hospitals.

Rising cancer burden, delayed AIIMS Kashmir Cancer incidence continues to rise sharply, with an average of 38 new cases detected daily. J&K recorded 14,112 cancer cases in 2024, taking the five-year total to 67,037 cases.

Meanwhile, AIIMS Awantipora remains incomplete, with only 70% physical progress achieved so far, according to the Union Health Ministry, further delaying much-needed tertiary care services.

Animal bite cases surge
Adding to public health concerns, over 12,000 animal bite cases have been reported at ARC SMHS Srinagar this year, including around 5,300 dog bites and over 6,500 cat bite cases, highlighting the need for stronger rabies control and public awareness.

While 2025 has seen meaningful reforms and investments in Jammu and Kashmir's health sector, persistent challenges—ranging from disease burden and staff shortages to delayed mega projects—continue to test the system.

Experts stress that without urgent action on manpower recruitment, preventive healthcare and timely completion of infrastructure projects, the gains made may fall short of addressing the region's growing healthcare needs. (KNO)

Rajnath unveils BRO

and Kashmir and several other border states. They included 28 roads, 93 bridges and four other infrastructure works.

The Defence Minister said that robust border infrastructure is essential not only for national security but also for economic growth, tourism, disaster management and strengthening public confidence in governance, particularly in remote regions like J&K and Ladakh. (KNO)

Rs 27.59 cr spent

approved by REC after scrutiny as per the guidelines and approval of the Monitoring Committee. Regarding JPDCL, the closure for the scheme has been submitted and only those works which were complete in all respects had been loaded on the scheme fund," the report adds.

However, the audit pointed out that the Ministry provided a closure report for only one division, showing spending of just Rs 0.09

crore, but didn't provide supporting documents for the remaining amount.

"In response to the Audit Rebuttal, MoP provided the closure report covering only one division portion that incurred expenditure of Rs 0.09 crore. In respect of the balance portion, no document in support of the reply was provided to Audit," the report states.

The SAUBHAGYA scheme was launched by the Union Government in October 2017 to provide last-mile connectivity and electricity connections to all un-electrified households across the country. (KNO)

NIA court orders

The court noted that Fai was declared a proclaimed absconder on April 26, 2025, for deliberately evading the legal process and avoiding arrest.

The prosecution, through the investigating officer, had moved an application seeking attachment of the accused's property under Section 83 of the Criminal Procedure Code, now Section 85 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, citing the accused had concealed himself.

"This court is satisfied from the record that the accused... has deliberately and intentionally concealed himself," the judge said in the seven-page order.

The prosecution argued that the attachment was urgent as Fai's relatives currently in possession of the land were likely to sell it, which would defeat the legal process.

"... this court directs collector Budgam to attach the immovable property of land measuring one kanal and two marlas under Khewat No 60, survey No 466 in village Wadwan and land measuring 11 marlas under Khewat No 136, Survey No 343 situated at village Chattabugh (belonging to Fai) and take possession forthwith," the court said.

Background
The case against Fai, originally a resident of Budgam, was registered in 2020 under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

Fai, a known supporter of banned Jamaat-e-Islami and alleged to be a close associate of designated terrorist and chief of Hizbul Mujahideen Syed Salahuddin, has been booked for giving support to a terrorist organisation in the country.

Fai, 76, has a long history of legal trouble in both India and the United States. He rose to prominence as the director of the Washington-based Kashmiri American Council (KAC), which he claimed was an independent grassroots organisation of Kashmiri people.

He was arrested by the FBI in 2011 after an investigation showed that the KAC was a "front" for the Pakistani intelligence agency ISI. The US authorities proved that for over 20 years, Fai funnelled at least USD 3.5 million from the ISI into the US to influence American policy on Kashmir.

In 2012, Fai was sentenced to two years in prison by a Virginia federal court for conspiracy and tax violations. At the time, US Attorney

Neil MacBride noted that Fai had "lied to the Justice Department, the IRS, and many political leaders" while pushing ISI propaganda. After his release, he was kept under supervision for three years.

During his US trial, federal prosecutors said that Fai had lied about holding a doctorate degree, a title he used for decades to bolster his credibility in political circles.

"Fai has no doctorate degree," US Attorney MacBride informed the court in 2011, noting that his false representation unfairly diluted the respect earned by actual scholars. (KNO)

77th Republic Day

where Jammu and Kashmir has made notable progress.

During the meeting, the Chief Secretary took a comprehensive appraisal of the overall readiness of all concerned departments for organising the national event with enthusiasm and dignity. He underscored the importance of advance planning and seamless coordination among departments for the successful conduct of the celebrations.

Dulloo also reviewed the preparedness of the Information Department regarding the issuance of passes to journalists and installation of public address systems. He assessed arrangements by the Transport Department for providing buses to school children, distribution of invitation cards by the concerned Divisional Administrations, and availability of essential services including power, water supply, fire tenders, and other utilities by the respective departments.

The Chief Secretary urged all stakeholders to work with dedication and coordination to ensure the successful and memorable celebration of this year's Republic Day in Jammu and Kashmir, and extended his best wishes for the smooth culmination of the national event.

IGP Kashmir

ensure timely registration and professional investigation of cases.

The IGP Kashmir also laid special emphasis on curbing the drug menace, reiterating a zero-tolerance policy against drug trafficking, and directed officers to intensify enforcement as well as preventive and awareness measures.

The visit reaffirmed the commitment of Jammu & Kashmir Police towards strengthening crime control mechanisms and ensuring safety and confidence among the public. (KNO)

Northern Railway's Jmu

amenities and operational efficiency. The successful implementation of scratch rakes, they said, demonstrates the railways' preparedness and commitment to addressing seasonal operational challenges while prioritising passenger needs.

Notably, the winter fog often leads to cascading delays across the rail network in North India, and officials believe that such contingency measures will play a key role in maintaining service reliability during the season. (KNO)

Rahul rattled as family members, Congress leaders showing no confidence in him: BJP

PTI

New Delhi, Dec 23: The BJP slammed Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday over his remarks in Berlin, alleging that the Congress leader speaks against India and defames the country on foreign soil because he is "rattled" by the fact that his party colleagues and even family members are showing "no confidence" in him.

Gandhi has lost people's confidence and it is apparent with the Congress losing 95 elections under his leadership, BJP national spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla told a press conference at the party headquarters here.

The BJP came down heavily on Gandhi after the leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha alleged that the ruling party is proposing the "elimination of the Constitution" that grants equal rights to every citizen and vowed to create a system of opposition resistance that will succeed in removing it from power.

Speaking at the Hertie School in Berlin last week, Gandhi accused the Bharatiya Janata



Party (BJP) of launching a full-scale assault on the country's institutional framework and capturing it in order to use it as a tool for building its political power, while asserting that this is what the opposition is fighting against. In an hour-long video released by the Congress on Monday, Gandhi said India's largest and complex democracy is a global asset, and the "assault" on the Indian democratic system is also an attack on the global democratic system.

Hitting back at him, Poonawalla said, "Rahul Gandhi is facing no confidence from people. His

partners in the INDIA bloc, his own party leaders and even his family members are also passing a no-confidence motion against him one after another."

"Hence, he embarked on a foreign trip once again, while remaining committed to (American investor) George Soros, to vent his ire against the BJP and India. Rahul Gandhi, once again in opposition to Modi and the people's mandate, started opposing India in Berlin," he alleged.

Poonawalla claimed that Gandhi is rattled because his party colleagues themselves are

"rejecting what he says", with the latest example being Shashi Tharoor, who "completely diffused" his "vote-chori (vote-theft) narrative" by appreciating the work done by the NDA in Bihar over the last 20 years.

"Congress MP Imran Masood has clearly said that he does not have faith in Rahul Gandhi anymore and sought to bring Priyanka Gandhi Vadra in his place. Then an endorsement to this came from Robert Vadra, who said, 'Yes, it is correct,'" the BJP spokesperson said.

"(CPI-M MP) John Brittas has said Rahul Gandhi should not have gone abroad, leaving a Parliament session. He has also made a big disclosure that not only the Left but the DMK was also against the 'Bharat badnami yatra' of Rahul Gandhi. They said Rahul Gandhi does not take his work seriously," Poonawalla said.

He alleged that the Congress under Gandhi's leadership has become a "Bharat badnami brigade" and is engaged in running "baseless and misleading" propaganda against the country, its constitutional institutions and other bodies.

Delhi Police tightens security in city, near borders ahead of year-end festivities

PTI

New Delhi, Dec 23: Nearly 20,000 police and paramilitary personnel have been deployed to maintain law and order as part of Delhi Police's robust security arrangements for Christmas and New Year's Eve celebrations, an official said on Tuesday.

Police deployment has also been increased in the border areas of the national capital, as it shares borders with Haryana and Uttar Pradesh and is close to Rajasthan. A large crowd is expected to arrive in the city for New Year's celebrations from these states.

The official said nearly 20,000 police personnel, including traffic and paramilitary personnel, will be on the ground to check hooliganism and traffic violations.

Additional pickets, barricades and paramilitary deployment will be made at the borders to tackle nuisance by people from the adjoining states, the official added.

He said that police personnel have already been deployed



in more than 10 locations for Christmas, and security checks will be intensified. Police will also be deployed in 15 more locations from where vehicles will enter Delhi.

"The traffic police have already chalked out a plan to combat motorcycle stunts and drunk driving. Additional forces from different police stations will be deployed to help the traffic police," a senior police officer said. The official

informed that police personnel will be deployed according to shift duties. Station house officers (SHOs) have been ordered to be on the road with their teams to maintain law and order on Christmas and New Year's Eve.

Teams will impound two or four-wheeler vehicles immediately if anyone is found indulging in stunt-like activities. Strict action will be ensured, the officer said.

13 get life term for lynching of father-son in Murshidabad during protests over WAA



PTI

Kolkata, Dec 23: A court in West Bengal's Murshidabad district on Tuesday sentenced 13 people to life imprisonment for the lynching of a man and his son during the protests over the Waqf (Amendment) Act.

Special public prosecutor Bivas Chatterjee said this is the country's second conviction in a mob lynching case and first in West Bengal.

The fast-track court in Jangipur directed the state to give Rs 15 lakh compensation to the family of the victims.

Haragobinda Das (72) and his son Chandan Das (42) were killed by a mob at their house in Jafrabad in the Samserganj police station area on April 12.

Chatterjee said the

prosecution had prayed for capital punishment for the convicts, maintaining that the crime falls in the rarest of rare category.

He said the state government will decide whether it will appeal against the judgment before the Calcutta High Court.

The court had convicted these 13 accused on Monday.

Each of the 13 convicts was also sentenced to 10 years in prison for dacoity, 10 years of imprisonment for house trespass and a five-year term for rioting.

All the sentences will run concurrently, the court said. Violent protests rocked Murshidabad district from April 8 to 12, after the Waqf (Amendment) Act was passed in Parliament. Central forces had to be deployed to control the situation.

Delhiites wake up to hazardous air, AQI crosses 400 at 27 stations

Several others slip to 'severe plus' range



PTI

New Delhi, Dec 23: Delhi woke up to choking air on Tuesday morning as thick fog and haze engulfed the city, with AQI levels crossing 400 (severe category) at 27 monitoring stations and several others slipping into the 'severe plus' range, exposing residents to extremely hazardous pollution.

At 9 a.m. on Tuesday, the city recorded an AQI of 415, slipping from the 'very poor' category a day earlier, as pollution levels continued their upward climb, according to data from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). Out of 40 monitoring stations, 27 recorded severe air quality with AQI readings above

400, a level known to have serious health impacts.

Five stations were in the 'severe plus' category with AQI readings above 450, with Anand Vihar recording an AQI of 470, Nehru Nagar (463), Okhla (459), Mundka (459) and Sirifort (450), as per data from the CPCB's SAMEER app.

According to the CPCB standards, an AQI from 0-50 is considered 'good', 51-100 'satisfactory', 101-200 'moderate', 201-300 'poor', 301-400 'very poor', and 401-500 'severe'.

On the weather front, dense fog led to a sharp drop in visibility, with Palam recording 50 metres visibility under dense fog conditions with west-southwesterly winds

at 5 kmph at 8 a.m., while Safdarjung reported 100 metres visibility with calm winds at the same time.

Visibility improved slightly by 8.30 a.m., with Palam recording 100 metres visibility under dense fog with west-southwesterly winds at 5 kmph and Safdarjung reporting 150 metres visibility with calm winds.

Delhi's minimum temperature dropped to 8.8 degrees Celsius, which is 1.3 degrees above normal, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

The maximum temperature is expected to hover around 23 degrees Celsius, with the forecast indicating dense fog conditions during the day.

Delhi HC protects Gavaskar's personality rights

Orders takedown of objectionable content

PTI

New Delhi, Dec 23: The Delhi High Court on Tuesday protected the personality rights of former cricketer and commentator Sunil Gavaskar by restraining several websites and on-line platforms from illegally using his name or images for commercial gain without his consent.

Justice Manmeet Pritam Singh Aroha also restrained several defendants from using Gavaskar's personality traits through artificial intelligence and deepfake technology, and ordered the takedown of certain obscene content uploaded on the Internet.

The high court said the URLs of the offensive material should be taken down by the websites within 72 hours and in case of failure, the social media intermediaries concerned should remove the content.

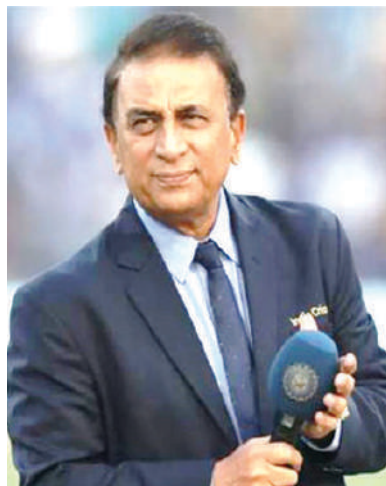
The court listed the matter for further hearing on May 22.

On December 12, the high court had directed social media intermediaries to act within seven days on Gavaskar's plea seeking protection of his personality rights.

It had asked Gavaskar's counsel to first approach the social media intermediaries with his grievances. The high court directed the social media intermediaries to treat Gavaskar's suit as a complaint under the Information and Technology (Intermediaries Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 and take the necessary steps within seven days.

On Tuesday, the court was informed that while some of the content had been removed, others were still there on the Internet.

Gavaskar approached the high court, seeking to prevent the unauthorised use of his name, images, persona and



likeness by social media platforms and e-commerce websites, and to protect his personality rights.

The right to publicity, popularly known as personality rights, is the right to protect, control and profit from one's image, name or likeness.

Recently, Bollywood actors Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, her husband Abhishek Bachchan and her mother-in-law Jaya Bachchan, Hrithik Roshan, Ajay Devgn and R Madhavan, filmmaker Karan Johar, singer Kumar Sanu, Telugu actor Akkineni Nagarjuna, 'Art of Living' founder Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, journalist Sudhir Chaudhary and podcaster Raj Shamani also approached the high court seeking protection of their personality and publicity rights. The court granted them interim relief.

Bollywood actor Salman Khan, Telugu actor NTR Rao Junior and Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan have also approached the Delhi High Court seeking protection of their personality rights.

'Species being discovered at rate quicker than ever before'



PTI

New Delhi, Dec 23: A new study has found that species are being discovered at a faster rate than ever before, with scientists identifying more than 16,000 new species each year.

Researchers led by those at the University of Arizona looked at the classification histories of

roughly 2 million species, spanning all groups of living organisms.

Findings published in the journal Science Advances show that between 2015 and 2020 -- the most recent period with comprehensive data -- an average of more than 16,000 new species each year were documented, including more than 10,000 animals, 2,500 plants and

2,000 fungi.

Discovering new species is important because species cannot be protected until scientifically described, senior author John Wiens, a professor in the University of Arizona's department of ecology and evolutionary biology, said.

"Documentation is the first step in conservation -- we can't safeguard a species from extinction if we don't know it exists," Wiens said.

The author said that scientists have suggested that the pace at which new species are being documented has slowed down, indicating that "we are running out of new species to discover, but our results show the opposite".

"In fact, we're finding new species at a faster rate than ever before," Wiens said.

Under 5 pc of disease-focussed genomic studies conducted in low, middle-income countries: WHO

PTI

New Delhi, Dec 23: More than 80 per cent of genomic studies across the world looking into diseases are concentrated in high-income countries, and under five per cent in low and middle-income countries, according to a new global analysis by the World Health Organization (WHO).

More than 6,500 genomic clinical studies were registered globally between 1990 and 2024 via the WHO's International Clinical Trials Registry Platform, with a steep rise after 2010 driven by advances in sequencing technologies, lower costs and wider applications, it said. China led the list of top ten countries ranked



by total number of genomic clinical studies registered over the past three decades, followed by the United States and Italy. India featured among the top 20 countries.

"Fewer than five per cent of all studies were conducted in lower middle-income and low-income countries

combined, while high-income countries accounted for over 80 per cent of all genomic studies," authors of the 'Human genomics technologies in clinical studies-the research landscape' report said.

Low and middle-income countries (LMICs) were included as study sites

within multicountry studies, but rarely as the leading partner -- India figured in 235 studies, Egypt in 38, South Africa in 17 and Nigeria in 14, the report said.

Cancer, rare diseases and metabolic disorders account for over 75 per cent of genomic studies around the world -- the fields of research were among the first to show a clear use of genomics, the authors said.

However, the trend reveals a missed opportunity to apply insights into human genomics to infectious diseases, which are a global health priority, the team said.

The authors wrote, "Communicable diseases accounted for just three per cent of all genomic studies, despite their ongoing

contribution to the global disease burden."

"Conditions such as tuberculosis, HIV and malaria continue to be major public health priorities in many low-resource settings, yet genomic studies investigating human susceptibility, treatment response or host-pathogen interactions are scanty," they said. The WHO analysis also uncovered gaps in the demographic included in the genomic studies, with more than 75 per cent involving adults aged 18-64 -- only 4.6 per cent focussed specifically on children and 3.3 per cent on older adults.

More inclusive, geographically diverse and context-responsive genomic research are required, the report said.

Search engines will soon start filtering adult content under new eSafety rules

PTI/THE CONVERSATION

Melbourne Dec 23: Search engines in Australia will soon have to blur pornographic and violent images in some cases to limit the chances children accidentally encounter this content. This is one of several rules outlined in a new online safety code covering internet search engines that comes into force on December 27.

Here's what you need to know. Why are these rules being introduced?

In 2022, Australia's online safety body, eSafety, surveyed more than 1,000 Australians aged 16 to 18 years.

The research found that one in three were under age 13 when they were first exposed to pornography. This exposure was "frequent, accidental, unavoidable and unwelcome," with content described by young people as "disturbing" and "in your face".

The eSafety Commissioner, Julie Inman Grant, has said "a high proportion" of accidental exposure is through search engines, which are "the primary gateway to harmful content".

The new code was co-developed by the Digital Industry Group Inc - an industry association representing tech companies including Google, Meta and Microsoft - and the Communications Alliance - the peak body of the Australian telecommunications industry.

The code was announced in July 2025, but has been in development since July 2024.

A single breach could result in fines of up to \$549.5 million.

How will account holders' age



be assured?

The code requires providers of internet search engine services, such as Google and Microsoft (which owns Bing), to "implement appropriate age assurance measures for account holders" in Australia by 27 June 2026.

Age checks will identify whether search engine account holders are over or under 18.

Currently, children as young as 13 can create and hold a Google account, the search engine used by more than 90% of Australians.

The industry code of practice outlines several examples of appropriate age assurance strategies companies can choose, such as:

- photo identification, including digital ID systems
- facial age estimation
- credit card checks
- authentication by a parent of a child account holder's ageuse of artificial intelligence (AI) to estimate age from user data

Some of these approaches (such as digital ID and credit card checks) can verify a person is over 18. However, age estimation, whether based on an AI assessment of user behaviour or facial scanning, and parental attestation may be inaccurate.

The implementation of social

media restrictions earlier this month has already highlighted the limitations of age assurance technologies.

Children may also use VPNs to get around the restrictions, or they may use adults' accounts on their devices, if these are not logged out.

How will this change how Australians use search engines?

Under the code, companies need to filter content for all account holders under age 18 to reduce the risk of Australian children accessing or being exposed to online pornography or harmful material in search engine results.

This means a child who uses search terms such as "porn sites" will not have adult material provided to them.

The new code also changes search results retrieved when people are not logged in.

In addition to blurring thumbnail images of pornographic and violent material, providers must "prevent autocomplete predictions that are sexually explicit or violent".

However, while retrieved images of pornographic and violent content will be blurred for searchers who are not logged in, people of all ages will still be able

to click through and access that content.

When people search for information on suicide and self-harm, results that promote this content will need to be downranked in the results. And companies will also need to prominently display crisis-prevention information, such as helplines, in the results for queries about topics such as self-harm, suicide and eating disorders.

The code will apply to results generated by AI. For example, results generated by Google's Gemini AI service fall under the code, alongside traditional search results.

A significant challenge in implementing these changes will be in defining and identifying what content to filter.

While companies may easily exclude some content (such as well-known pornography websites), content creators can use various strategies to bypass these filters. TikTok creators, for example, have been known to use the term "unalive" to bypass filters that exclude content on "death" or "suicide".

Similarly, some exclusions can be too broad and mistakenly filter out relevant, helpful content.

Bangladeshi journalists say right to life at stake as mobs target media



PTI

Dhaka, Dec 23: Bangladesh's media is facing a difficult time and the freedom of expression has been overtaken by concerns over journalists' "right to stay alive", editors of several leading Bangladesh newspapers have said.

The remarks came on Monday in the wake of mobs vandalising and setting ablaze the offices of Prothom Alo and The Daily Star newspapers in Dhaka on Thursday night, trapping several journalists and staff inside for hours as police and fire services were initially prevented from reaching the spot.

"Freedom of expression is no longer the main issue. Now it is about the right to stay alive," Daily Star editor and publisher Mahfuz Anam said at a press conference attended by senior politicians, business leaders and media owners.

The media in Bangladesh is facing a fight for survival, he said. Anam said the attacks were aimed at killing journalists and staff rather than being acts of protest against specific newspapers. Otherwise, the

mob would have told journalists to leave before setting the buildings on fire, he said. Instead, 26-27 media workers were trapped on the rooftop of The Daily Star building while the fire brigade was not allowed to reach them, Anam said. He also cited social media messages allegedly calling for journalists of the two dailies to be hunted down and killed at their homes.

Meanwhile, the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) defended its delayed intervention, saying immediate action could have worsened the situation. "The reason we could not go into action there was to ensure that no human life was lost," DMP Additional Commissioner Nazrul Islam told reporters.

The interim government led by Muhammad Yunus has said nine people have been arrested so far in connection with the attacks on the offices of the two newspapers and cultural organisations Chhayanaut and Udichi Shilpi Goshthi, following the death of radical right-wing youth leader Sharif Osman Hadi.

US strikes another alleged drug-smuggling boat in eastern Pacific

PTI

Washington, Dec 23: The US military said that it had conducted another strike against a boat it said was smuggling drugs in the eastern Pacific Ocean, killing one person.

In a social media post, US Southern Command said, "Intelligence confirmed the low-profile vessel was transiting along known narco-trafficking routes in the Eastern Pacific and was engaged in narco-trafficking operations." Southern Command provided no evidence that



the vessel was engaged in drug smuggling.

A video posted by US Southern Command shows splashes of water near one side of the boat. After a second salvo, the rear of the boat catches fire. More splashes engulf the craft and the fire grows. In the final second of the

video, the vessel can be seen adrift with a large patch of fire alongside it.

Earlier videos of US boat strikes showed vessels suddenly exploding, suggesting missile strikes. Some strike videos even had visible rocket-like projectiles coming down on the boats.

The Trump administration has said the strikes were meant to stop the flow of drugs into the US and increase pressure on Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

At least 105 people have been killed in 29 known strikes since early September. The strikes have faced scrutiny from US lawmakers and human rights activists, who say the administration has offered scant evidence that its targets are indeed drug smugglers and say the fatal strikes amount to extrajudicial killings.

PM meets Neeraj Chopra, says had great discussion on sports

PTI

New Delhi, Dec 23: Prime Minister Narendra Modi met two-time Olympic medal-winning javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra and his wife Himani Mor. Chopra, who married former tennis player Mor in an intimate ceremony earlier this year, is currently on a break from competition.

"Met Neeraj Chopra and his wife, Himani Mor at 7, Lok Kalyan Marg



earlier today. We had a great interaction on various issues including

sports of course!" Modi posted on 'X'.

The 27-year-old Chopra endured a mixed year in which he breached the 90m mark

at the Doha Diamond League but, hampered by fitness issues, could not defend his World Championship crown in September, ending up eighth overall.

He also hosted and won a javelin throw event instituted in his name in Bengaluru.

At the start of the season, the superstar roped in a new coach in Czech legend Jan Zelezny, the owner of three Olympic gold medals and the javelin throw world record of 98.48m throw.

It's not really up to me, is it?: McCullum on continuing as England coach

PTI

Melbourne, Dec 23: England head coach Brendon McCullum has stressed his desire to continue in the role but conceded that his future is no longer in his control following the team's dismal Ashes campaign.

McCullum has come under intense scrutiny after England surrendered the Ashes 3-0 inside the first three Tests.

The former New Zealand captain is contracted with the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) until the conclusion of the 2027 ODI World Cup, a tenure that also includes the next home Ashes series in the same year.

"I don't know. It's not really up to me, is it? I will just keep trying to do the job, try to learn the lessons that I haven't quite got right here and make adjustments. Those questions are for someone else, not for me," McCullum told reporters when asked if he believes he will be in charge for the home summer next year.

Calling the role a "pretty good gig", McCullum said he remains motivated



despite the heavy criticism. "It's a pretty good gig. It's good fun. You travel the world with the lads and try to play some exciting cricket and try to achieve some things. For me, it's a matter of trying to just get the very best out of the people and try to achieve what you can with them.

"Those other decisions are up to other people. I think we've made some progress from when I took over to where we are," he was quoted as saying by the English media.

McCullum was initially appointed as England's Test coach before taking charge of the white-ball teams earlier this year.

The defeat in Adelaide

extended England's winless run in Tests in Australia to 18 matches, with their last series victory Down Under coming in 2010-11.

Key to probe "excessive drinking" claims

England managing director Rob Key has vowed to investigate reports alleging that players indulged in "excessive drinking" during their mid-Ashes break, describing such behaviour as "completely unacceptable".

With England trailing 0-2 in the series, the squad travelled to Noosa, a resort town in Queensland, for a four-night break following their eight-wicket defeat in the second Test at the

Gabba.

"If there's things where people are saying that our players went out and drank excessively then of course we'll be looking into that," Key was quoted as saying by ESPNcricinfo.

"Drinking excessive amounts of alcohol for an international cricket team is not something that I'd expect to see at any stage, and it would be a fault not to look into what happened there. But from everything that I've heard so far, they were very well behaved."

While Key, who did not travel with the team, maintained that players conducted themselves appropriately, several reports described the trip as a "glorified stag do".

According to the BBC, some players allegedly spent six days drinking -- two in Brisbane followed by four in Noosa.

"I've read what's been written in the last day or so, and if it goes into where they're drinking lots and it's a stag do, all that type of stuff, that's completely unacceptable. I'm not a drinker. I think a drinking culture doesn't help anyone in any stretch whatsoever," Key said.

Movies

SCHEDULE

WEDNESDAY, 24 DECEMBER

DHURANDHAR
(A)
HINDI - 11:40 AM, 02:05 PM, 03:40 PM, 06:10 PM

TERE ISHK MEIN
(U/A 16+)
HINDI - 10:45 AM

AVATAR: FIRE AND ASH
(UA 16+)
3D ENGLISH ATMOS WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES
02:45 PM - 3D HINDI - 11:00 AM, 06:30 PM

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