



# Amit Shah to review J&K security at high-level meet in Delhi today

First security review meet on J&K in 2026

LG Sinha, Chief Secretary, DGP Prabhat, others to attend

Meeting to focus on making completely eliminate terrorism from J&K

Steps taken to ensure zero infiltration along LoC, IB to be discussed

Ahmad Taimur

Srinagar, Jan 07: Union Home Minister Amit Shah will chair a high-level meeting to review the security scenario of Jammu and Kashmir among other thing in New Delhi tomorrow, officials said here on Wednesday. This will be the first high-level security review meeting on Jammu and Kashmir in 2026.

An official told news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) that the meeting will be attended by Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha besides senior officers of J&K Police, civil administration, intelligence agencies and top officials of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

He said that the meeting will discuss various aspects of the security situation in Jammu and Kashmir, including steps being taken to ensure zero infiltration along the Line of Control (LoC)



and the International Border (IB) during the winter months.

He said that meeting will also review steps to intensify counter-terror operations to eliminate the remaining terrorists, especially foreign terrorists, and to crush the local support system, including the Over Ground Workers (OGW) network in Jammu and Kashmir.

"The meeting will also

discuss the current momentum and coordination among various security agencies, and ground-level operations with special focus on making 2026 a decisive year in the complete elimination of terrorism from Jammu and Kashmir," he said.

Besides LG Manoj Sinha, top police and civil officers, including Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo, Home

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## Ensure benefits of growth reach every household: Omar

- Reviews dev scenario in Samba
- Stresses time-bound completion of projects

KT News Desk

Samba, Jan 07: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Wednesday held a comprehensive district review meeting at the conference hall Samba to take a first-hand appraisal of the overall development scenario in Samba district.

The meeting was attended by Deputy Chief Minister Surinder Kumar

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## India's Reform Express continues to gain momentum: PM Modi on GDP numbers

PTI

New Delhi, Jan 07: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said India's "Reform Express" is gaining momentum, powered by the NDA government's investment policies as the economy is projected to grow at 7.4 per cent in the fiscal year 2026.

"India's Reform Express continues to gain momentum. This is powered by the NDA Government's comprehensive investment push and demand-led policies," Modi said in a post on X.



The First Advance Estimates released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation on Wednesday put the GDP growth rate in 2025-26 (April 2025 to March 2026) at better than the

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## True progress means creating opportunities for others to move forward: LG to youth

Flags off 53-member J&K contingent to participate in 29th National Youth Festival-Viksit Bharat Young Leaders' Dialogue-2026

KNO Desk

Jammu, Jan 07: Asserting that true progress is about creating opportunities for others to move forward, Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Wednesday reminded youth that they are accountable to society and nation.

According to the details available with the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), LG Sinha today virtually, flagged off a 53-member youth contingent from UT of Jammu Kashmir for New Delhi to participate in the 29th National Youth Festival-Viksit Bharat Young Leaders' Dialogue-2026.

While addressing the youth,



LG Sinha said, "Your greatest responsibility is towards society and the nation. True progress is about creating opportunities for others to move forward."

The contingent selected for the Viksit Bharat Challenge Track and Cultural/Innovation Track will represent J&K at the

prestigious national event at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, from 10th to 12th January 2026.

The Lieutenant Governor congratulated the participants for emerging from local competitions to reach the national stage, noting that their journey reflects the immense

potential inherent in the youth of Jammu and Kashmir.

"Youth is not a matter about age. It is the mindset. It is about courage, curiosity, and the power to bring about change. I have complete faith in our Youth's potential and their resolve to shape a developed India," the Lieutenant Governor said.

Invoking Swami Vivekananda's iconic clarion call, "Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached," the Lieutenant Governor urged the youth to make their dreams the sole purpose of their lives and to consider every challenge on the way as a lesson in discipline and patience.

He emphasized that true leadership is

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## NMC decision harms local medical aspirants: CM Omar

» Says 50 seats could have grown to 400 soon

» Orders relocation of affected students to nearest colleges

Sajid Raina

Samba, Jan 07: Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Wednesday expressed serious concern over the cancellation of recognition of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Institute of Medical Excellence by the National Medical Commission, saying the decision has adversely affected the future of students



from the Union Territory. Speaking to reporters in Samba, Omar, as per the

news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), said the college's closure has disrupted admissions for hundreds of students.

"They have played with the future of the students of J&K. This time, 40 out of 50 seats were allocated to Kashmiri students. Within a year or two, the seats would have increased to around 400, with possibly

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## LoP Sharma hails NMC's 'historic' decision

'Move upholds faith, transparency, protects students' future'

Rehan Qayoom Mir

Srinagar, Jan 07: Leader of Opposition in Jammu and Kashmir Assembly, and senior BJP leader Sunil Sharma, on Wednesday welcomed the decision of the National



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### BUDGET SESSION

## J&K Law Dept directs submission of legislative proposals well in advance

- Proposals requiring LG's concurrence to be submitted to Lok Bhavan
- Rules/notifications to be laid in House
- Administrative secretaries, HODs must remain present

KNO Special Correspondent

Srinagar, Jan 07: In a significant move, the Department of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs has directed all departments to submit draft bills and

other legislative proposals, intended to be introduced in the Assembly during the session and requiring legal vetting, well before the commencement of the session.

In a circular, a copy of which is in possession of the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), the Department of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs has instructed departments to submit legislative proposals well before the beginning of the session, | More on P6

## Cold wave to intensify in J&K as Chillai-Kalan enters peak phase

Sajid Raina

Srinagar, Jan 07: Cold wave conditions are set to intensify across Jammu and Kashmir from Wednesday as the 40-day harsh winter period of Chillai-Kalan enters its peak phase, the independent weather forecaster said on Wednesday.

Minimum temperatures dipped further across the Kashmir Valley, with Sonamarg recording the lowest at minus 10.1 degrees Celsius, followed by Gulmarg at minus 7.6 degrees and Pahalgam at minus 7.2 degrees Celsius. Srinagar recorded a

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## Intensify water quality testing under Jal Jeevan Mission: CM Omar

- Chairs District Review meeting of Kathua
- Calls for timely completion of SASCI projects
- Inaugurates, lays foundation of projects worth 11.58 cr

KT News Desk

Kathua, Jan 07: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Wednesday dedicated development works worth 11.58 crore in Kathua district, including inaugurations and foundation stones, aimed at strengthening infrastructure, boosting local entrepreneurship



and enhancing livelihood opportunities.

He also directed intensification of water quality testing under the Jal Jeevan Mission, timely completion of SASCI projects and examination of reforms under the Industrial Policy to

enhance local employment opportunities.

Chairing a District Review Meeting at the Deputy Commissioner's Office Complex here, the Chief Minister inaugurated key projects spanning rural

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## WINTER SEASON FIRE SAFETY ADVISORY

To ensure safety during winter, follow these simple precautions:

### Safety Tips:



**Unplug heaters, stoves & turn off LPG after use.**



**Store dry grass/wood away from homes.**



**Use only good-quality electrical appliances.**



**Stay in the kitchen while cooking — never leave the stove unattended.**



**Ensure proper ventilation when using LPG heaters.**



**Keep exits & water points clear.**



**Avoid throwing burning cigarette butts.**



**Use Kangris with utmost care, keep them at safe places and avoid their toppling**



**Avoid using substandard-high wattage electrical appliances and defective electric blankets**

Call Fire & Emergency Services – 101

Control Room Srinagar: 0194-2452155, 2452222

Courtesy- Office of District Magistrate, Srinagar

DIPK-9749/25 | Dated: 07/01/2026



# Rana reviews functioning of Territorial Forest Department in Kashmir Division

**Directs officers to expedite all ongoing works, adhere strictly to timelines**

KT NEWS DESK

SRINAGAR, JANUARY 07: Minister for Forest, Environment and Ecology Javed Ahmed Rana Wednesday chaired a review meeting of senior officers to assess the overall functioning and performance of the Territorial Forest Department in the Kashmir Division.

The meeting was attended by Irfan Rasool Wani, Chief Conservator of Forests, Kashmir; Irfan Shah, Conservator of Forests, North Circle; Dr. Nadeem, Conservator of Forests, South Circle along with other senior officers of the department.

The Minister, as per an official statement, had a comprehensive review of key operational, developmental and service delivery aspects of the department.

Detailed discussions were held on the availability and distribution of firewood, progress of afforestation and plantation activities, timber supply under the Kashmir



Notice Timber framework, implementation of Special Area Sector Capital Investment (SASCI) projects, development of Eco Parks and Forest Huts, timber marking besides achievement of prescribed physical and financial targets.

The officers informed the Minister that the department has achieved approximately 53

percent physical progress under the SASCI projects. It was further stated that the remaining works under these projects, as well as other ongoing developmental initiatives, are on track and targeted for completion by March this year.

Regarding essential public services, the Minister was apprised that against the approved target of 80,000

quintal of firewood, nearly 60,000 quintal have already been provisioned across the division. The remaining quantity is expected to be supplied by March, ensuring adequate availability during the winter season.

The meeting was also informed that under the Kashmir Notice Timber mechanism, around 2 lakh cubic feet (CFT)

of timber has been supplied to 2,274 beneficiaries. Additionally, both the North and South Forest Circles have successfully completed timber marking of 5 lakh CFT each, which will be extracted by the Jammu and Kashmir Forest Development Corporation.

While expressing satisfaction over the progress achieved so far, Rana issued clear directions to the officers to expedite all ongoing works and adhere strictly to the set timelines. He stressed the need for ensuring firewood availability on a demand-driven basis while maintaining smooth, transparent and efficient functioning of the Forest Department.

Emphasizing timely achievement of targets and improved service delivery, the Minister urged the officers to remain responsive to public needs. He asked them to ensure that essential forest-related services are delivered effectively, particularly during the harsh winter months.

## Div Com Kashmir inaugurates parking facility at old secretariat



KT NEWS DESK

SRINAGAR, JANUARY 07: Divisional Commissioner Kashmir, Anshul Garg, Wednesday inaugurated a dedicated parking facility at the Old Secretariat, Srinagar, for the staff of various offices housed at the Amar Niwas Complex.

Deputy Commissioner Srinagar, Akshay Labroo and other officers including Assistant Commissioner Central, Additional Deputy Commissioner Srinagar, Chief Planning Officer Srinagar, Deputy Director Planning, and other senior officers were present on the occasion.

The parking space for around 50 vehicles has been earmarked to facilitate

employees of various offices including the Financial Commissioner's Office, Divisional Commissioner's Office, and Deputy Commissioner's Office.

The newly inaugurated parking facility is expected to provide significant relief to employees who were earlier unable to park their vehicles conveniently due to space constraints.

On the occasion, the Divisional Commissioner, as per an official statement directed police officials to assist in the efficient utilization of the parking facility. He also instructed officials of the Kashmir Power Distribution Corporation Limited (KPDCL) to relocate electric poles from the parking area to

## Deputations call on Javed Rana

KT NEWS DESK

SRINAGAR, JANUARY 07: Minister for Jal Shakti, Forest, Ecology & Environment and Tribal Affairs, Javed Ahmed Rana, Wednesday held a series of meetings with various public deputations and individuals at Srinagar, during which they apprised him of issues and grievances.

A deputation of the Jal Shakti Contractors Welfare Association, Kashmir submitted a detailed memorandum highlighting the acute financial distress being faced by contractors owing to the non-release of work-done liabilities under the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM).

The Association, as per an official statement, informed



the Minister that contractors have executed works strictly in accordance with approved estimates and technical specifications, but payments have remained pending for a prolonged period, adversely impacting their financial stability and ability to continue ongoing projects. A delegation

of Range Officers Grade-II also called on the Minister and presented a comprehensive representation seeking early redressal of issues related to their promotions.

The delegation urged the Government to expedite the promotion process, citing long-standing stagnation that

has affected morale, career progression, and overall efficiency within the department.

Another deputation, comprising employees working in water testing laboratories, apprised the Minister of challenges related to low remuneration and inadequate financial support for water quality monitoring activities.

They emphasized that strengthening laboratory infrastructure, providing adequate resources, and ensuring fair compensation are essential for maintaining prescribed drinking water quality standards under various water supply schemes.

Additionally, a delegation sought their re-engagement in the Sindh Forest Division,

highlighting their past contributions and experience.

Besides these, several other deputations and individuals raised issues of public importance concerning development works and civic amenities in their respective areas, seeking the Minister's intervention for timely resolution.

The Minister gave a patient hearing to all the delegations and assured them that their genuine concerns would be examined sympathetically in consultation with the concerned departments.

He reiterated the Government's commitment to addressing public grievances and assured that appropriate steps would be taken for their redressal at the earliest.

## Commissioner SMC conducts field inspection of Municipal Assets

KT NEWS DESK

SRINAGAR, JANUARY 7: In a concerted push to reinforce financial sustainability and enhance the delivery of civic services, the Commissioner, Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC), Faz Lul Haseeb, on Wednesday undertook an extensive field inspection of key municipal assets, underscoring the pivotal role of revenue generation in effective urban governance.

The Commissioner, as per an official statement, inspected municipal properties at Bagh Nand Singh and Pindchi Mandi (Tattoo Ground), accompanied by the Joint Commissioner, Chief Revenue Officer, and other senior officers of the Corporation.

During the visit, the Commissioner reviewed the physical condition, operational status, and current utilisation of the assets under the ongoing asset mapping and monetisation programme. He assessed their scope for optimal, lawful,

and transparent utilisation through policy-driven monetisation mechanisms aimed at strengthening the Corporation's revenue base.

Highlighting the direct correlation between strong municipal finances and improved civic amenities, the Commissioner stated that sustainable revenue streams are fundamental to ensuring efficient sanitation services, upgraded urban infrastructure, and the timely delivery of essential civic facilities. He directed the concerned officers to prepare a comprehensive and updated inventory of all municipal assets, identify underutilised properties, and initiate time-bound measures for their effective monetisation strictly in accordance with existing rules and government policies.

The Commissioner further emphasised the importance of regular monitoring, planned maintenance, prevention of encroachments, and plugging revenue leakages as integral components of sound asset management.

## DDC Baramulla reviews works under District Capex Budget 2025-26

KT NEWS DESK

BARAMULLA, JANUARY 07: District Development Commissioner (DDC) Baramulla, Minga Sherpa, Wednesday chaired a review meeting at the DC Office meeting hall to assess the progress of works being executed under various components of the District Capex Budget 2025-26.

During the meeting, the DDC, as per an official statement, conducted a detailed, sector-wise assessment of the progress on deliverables outlined in the 2025-26 district CAPEX budget, covering all concerned departments such as R&B, Animal Husbandry, Revenue, Education, and others.

The DDC was apprised by the department heads of the sector-wise status of allotted and tendered works, including their progress and completion across various departments.

After conducting a department-wise

review of work progress, Minga Sherpa impressed upon the concerned heads to adopt all necessary measures to accelerate the pace of execution.

Meanwhile, The DDC called upon the department heads to strengthen inter-departmental coordination to promptly address bottlenecks and issues that could hinder the smooth implementation of developmental initiatives.

The DDC further emphasized strict adherence to timelines for achieving the developmental goals of 2025-26 and stressed the need for judicious and timely utilization of funds within the current quarter.

The meeting was attended by the Chief Planning Officer, Assistant Commissioner Revenue, Assistant Commissioner Development, Superintending Engineer R&B, Chief Education Officer, besides all officers of concerned departments.

## DC Srinagar reviews saturation of Govt flagship welfare schemes

KT NEWS DESK

SRINAGAR JANUARY 07: In order to assess the progress on the saturation of various Government flagship schemes in the Rural Blocks of the district, a meeting of concerned Officers was held on Wednesday, under the Chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner (DC) Srinagar, Akshay Labroo here at Meeting Hall of the DC Office.

The meeting, as per an official statement, was convened in the backdrop of month long saturation campaign launched across all rural blocks of the district to cover every eligible beneficiary under different beneficiary oriented schemes and key citizen centric programmes related to social welfare, livelihood, agriculture & farmer welfare housing, employment generation and other public welfare schemes.

During the meeting, the Deputy Commissioner was apprised of the block-wise achievements made under the saturation campaign in various Rural Development Blocks of Srinagar District, including Harwan, Khonmoh, Srinagar and Qamarwari. Detailed presentations highlighted efforts undertaken to ensure maximum outreach and enrolment of eligible beneficiaries under different government-sponsored schemes. While reviewing the progress, the DC emphasized the need for intensified outreach at the grassroots level and stressed upon conducting door-to-door surveys



and proactive service delivery to bridge existing gaps. He directed all Block Development Officers to work with missionary zeal and ensure that every eligible household and individual is covered under the respective welfare schemes, leaving no beneficiary behind.

The DC also underscored the importance of strengthened coordination among line departments and block-level officers. He instructed all concerned officers to work with renewed focus, dedication, and accountability to achieve the saturation targets within the stipulated timeframe. The DC

further highlighted the commitment of the district administration towards ensuring last-mile delivery of Government initiatives so that the benefits of welfare schemes reach the intended beneficiaries in an efficient and time bound manner. The meeting was attended by Chief Planning Officer, Fayaz Ahmad Dar; PO ICDS, Bureeda Majeed; Assistant Commissioner Development, Tariq Ahmad Reshi; District Social Welfare Officer, Dr Mukhtar Ahmad, all Block Development Officers, all District/ Sectoral Officers, LDM(- Banks), other Officers and Engineers.

## RPO Srinagar to deploy Mobile Passport Van in Kupwara for two days



KT NEWS DESK

Srinagar, January 7: In a citizen centric initiative aimed at improving accessibility to passport services, the Regional Passport Office Srinagar, under the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, will deploy a Mobile Passport Van in Kupwara from Thursday, 08th January 2026 to Friday 09th January 2026.

The initiative, as per an official PIB release, is part of the Passport Seva Project (PSP), aimed at delivering efficient, transparent, and citizen friendly passport services across the country. The Mobile Passport Van will provide doorstep passport facilities, especially in remote and far flung regions under the jurisdiction of the Srinagar office.

B.S. Rawat, Regional Passport Officer, Srinagar, said that the introduction of the Mobile Passport Van service in Kupwara is a proactive step towards extending passport services to underserved regions. This initiative reflects the Ministry's continued efforts to ensure that citizens, irrespective of their location, are provided timely and

hassle free access to essential documentation.

The Mobile Passport Van will be stationed at the Deputy Commissioner, Office Park, Kupwara, during the specified dates.

Applicants from Kupwara and nearby areas who wish to avail the services must book an appointment through the official Passport Seva website [www.passportindia.gov.in](http://www.passportindia.gov.in). While booking, applicants should select "Passport Van" as the service option and choose a suitable date and time slot between 08th to 09th January 2026. On the day of their appointment, applicants are advised to visit the designated location at the scheduled time. They may contact the Mobile Passport Van team, bearing Registration Number PB65BF1377, for any on site assistance or procedural support.

This initiative marks a significant step in decentralising passport services and making them more accessible to citizens residing in remote regions. It reflects the Ministry's broader vision of delivering timely, transparent, and efficient services to all sections of the population.

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# Drass reels under -22°C

## ■ Army's 'Jashn-E-Fateh' keeps sports spirit alive

RAJA SYED RATHER

Drass (Ladakh), Jan 07: As intense cold tightened its grip over Ladakh, Drass—the world's second coldest inhabited place—recorded a biting minimum temperature of minus 22 degrees Celsius, freezing water bodies and streams and marking the peak of the winter season in the Valley.

Despite the harsh conditions, local residents, particularly the youth, are actively participating in winter sports carnival "Jashn-E-Fateh", organized by



the Indian Army.

The region has witnessed spells of snowfall in recent days, raising hopes for the upcoming Winter Games, including ice hockey and other snow-based events. However, residents noted that snowfall this season has been comparatively less and expressed hope for more snow to ensure smooth conduct of winter sports.

"Even in such extreme cold, these sports activities keep us motivated and engaged. We are thankful to the Army for giving youth a positive platform during the long winter," a

local youth told KNO.

An Army official said the initiative is part of sustained efforts to strengthen bonds with the local population. "Through Jashn-E-Fateh, we aim to encourage sportsmanship, resilience and civil-military harmony in this challenging terrain," the official said.

The winter carnival is expected to further strengthen civil-military ties while showcasing the grit and enthusiasm of the people of Drass amid extreme climatic conditions—(KNO)

## Minister Rana sets March deadline for Kashmir forest projects

REHAN QAYOOM MIR

Srinagar, Jan 07: Minister for Forest, Environment and Ecology Javed Ahmed Rana on Wednesday called for completing all ongoing works of the Territorial Forest Department in Kashmir Division, as the department has achieved 53 per cent progress under the Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment (SASCI) projects. With 60,000 quintals of firewood supplied and 2 lakh CFT of timber delivered, Rana directed the timely completion of key initiatives.

The minister further directed that all pending projects, including afforestation drives, eco-parks and forest huts, must be completed by March 2026.

Rana chaired a review meeting of senior officers, focusing on key operational, developmental and service delivery aspects such as firewood distribution, afforestation and plantation activities, timber supply under the Kashmir Notice Timber framework, SASCI project implementation, eco-park and forest hut development, timber marking and achievement of physical and financial targets.



Officials informed Rana that the department has achieved 53 per cent physical progress under the SASCI projects. The remaining works, along with other ongoing initiatives, are on track for completion by March 2026, they said.

Regarding essential public services, the minister was informed that against the 80,000 quintal firewood target, nearly 60,000

quintals have already been provisioned across the division, with the remaining supply expected by March to ensure adequate winter availability.

Officials added that under the Kashmir Notice Timber mechanism, 2 lakh CFT timber has been supplied to 2,274 beneficiaries, while both the North and South Forest Circles have completed timber marking of 5 lakh CFT

each, totalling 10 lakh CFT to be extracted by the Jammu and Kashmir Forest Development Corporation (JKFDC).

Rana expressed satisfaction over the progress achieved so far but issued clear directions to expedite all works, strictly adhere to timelines and maintain transparent, smooth and efficient functioning of the department, an official said. The minister stressed that firewood supply should be demand-driven and urged officers to remain responsive to public needs, ensuring the timely delivery of essential forest-related services during the harsh winter months, he added.

The minister further reviewed progress on afforestation and plantation drives, eco-park development and forest hut construction, highlighting the integration of these initiatives with livelihood generation and eco-tourism promotion.

The meeting was attended by Irfan Rasool Wani, Chief Conservator of Forests, Kashmir; Irfan Shah, Conservator of Forests (North Circle); Dr Nadeem, Conservator of Forests (South Circle); and other senior department officials—(KNO)

## 'Sector-by-Sector' plan to ease Srinagar traffic congestion

REHAN QAYOOM MIR

Srinagar, Jan 07: Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Traffic City Srinagar, Ajaz Ahmad Bhat, on Wednesday said the department is working with a planned strategy to streamline vehicular movement and address key bottlenecks in the city.

He said the drives are aimed at easing congestion and ensuring smooth traffic flow, with officials continuously monitoring peak-hour movement and public adherence to road rules.

The SSP said the department has adopted a comprehensive plan to tackle persistent issues ranging from illegal parking and street vending to violations of road discipline, but stressed that public cooperation remains essential for a lasting solution.

"We have come here during evening peak time to gauge how much improvement has taken place and how many people are following traffic rules. We feel people have become more observant and there is visible improvement—but it will take continued effort," Bhat said.

The officer said the department's enforcement teams



are focusing on clearing road obstructions and maintaining pedestrian pathways. "You saw yesterday, we also went to Batamalo and Babadamb. Even today, we removed some vendors who had set up again. This action will continue wherever footpaths are occupied, or shopkeepers park their vehicles and block the normal flow of traffic," he said.

SSP Bhat said the challenges built up over the years cannot be resolved overnight. "The damage that has occurred in traffic management will not be fixed in a day or two; it will take time. Our staff is ensuring that movement improves sector by sector," he added. Bhat

said his team assessed an experimental opening of one intersection to test traffic response. "We tried to open this intersection but found that congestion increased. So, we closed it again. Sometimes people feel a certain intervention will improve the situation, but when we see the ground impact, it doesn't always work that way," he explained.

Appealing to the public for cooperation, the SSP said that citizens, especially youth, have been coming forward with feedback. "The public here is sensitive and cooperative.

*Continued on  
www.kashmirthunder.in*

## Mehbooba criticizes Omar's 'silence' on key issues

JAHANGEER GANAIE

Bijbehara, Jan 07: Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) president Mehbooba Mufti on Wednesday launched a sharp attack on Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, accusing him of remaining silent on issues that directly affect common people, particularly land acquisition and the concerns of orchardists.

Speaking on the death anniversary of her father and former Chief Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed in Bijbehara, Mehbooba said that instead of solving public issues, Omar Abdullah is busy speaking only against the PDP.

"He has an absolute majority, and his party has members in both the Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha, yet he chooses silence on issues that hurt the poor," she said.

Mufti further claimed that CM Abdullah does not understand the emotional and economic value of orchards and land that belong to ordinary



Kashmiris. "He doesn't know what an orchard or a piece of land means to a poor family. That is why he is mute on these issues and refuses to speak for the people whose livelihoods are at stake," she said.

The former Chief Minister added, "The unemployment rate and alienation among the people of J&K have reached a level that a doctor from Pulwama killed himself and some innocents in Delhi." Yet, the

Omar Abdullah-led government is silent on burning issues in J&K, she said.

Mehbooba said a man from Qazigum set himself on fire after his close relatives were arrested, but no one from the government spoke on the issue.

"I approached the court to facilitate the release of Kashmiris languishing in jails outside the region, but I was told, 'Who are you?' When the government refuses to address this issue, then who will? The people in jail are our own, and we have every right to speak about them," she said.

The PDP chief urged the government to prioritise employment for local youth before acquiring land for railway and other major infrastructure projects in Kashmir, saying development cannot come at the cost of people's livelihoods and dignity.

*Continued on  
www.kashmirthunder.in*

## Authorities reclaim illegally occupied slaughterhouse

KNO

Handwara, Jan 07: Authorities have reclaimed a long-forgotten, unlawfully occupied slaughterhouse in Handwara, following mounting public pressure for a functional facility in the township. Officials informed that the Municipal Committee, upon verification, discovered that the slaughterhouse already existed but had been unlawfully taken over and locked by unidentified individuals. The issue came to light after repeated public demands for a proper slaughterhouse in Handwara. The Municipal Committee's Executive Officer Shahid Yousuf said the encroached government property has now been retrieved, and strict action will be taken against those involved in the illegal occupation. "We will be taking strict action against anyone who had illegally occupied and locked the government property. The infrastructure will be assessed, and we will coordinate with the R&B department for necessary renovations," he said.

The officer assured residents that the facility will soon be restored to serve its intended purpose, addressing a long-standing civic demand in the town—(KNO)

## Aspiring nurses demand filling of hospital vacancies

JAHANGEER GANAIE

Srinagar, Jan 07: Nursing aspirants from across Jammu and Kashmir have put forward their demand for the immediate advertisement and filling of long-pending nursing vacancies in government hospitals.

Aspirants said, "The delay has severely impacted both the healthcare system and the future of thousands of qualified nurses."

The aspirants said that they have submitted a detailed representation to Health and Medical Education Minister Sakina Ito, seeking her urgent intervention to address "unjustified and prolonged silence" over nursing recruitment in the Union Territory. The representation reads: "No major recruitment drive for nursing posts has been conducted since 2021, despite the existence of thousands of vacancies in district hospitals, Primary Health Centres (PHCs), Community Health Centres (CHCs), and newly established medical colleges."

"It is with deep pain and disappointment that we bring to your notice the prolonged delay in nursing recruitment. Since 2021, no substantial steps have been taken to fill vacant posts, while hospitals continue to function with acute staff shortages," it states. "The shortage of nursing staff has put immense pressure on the existing

workforce, adversely affecting patient care and overburdening the limited staff currently in service. The healthcare system in Jammu and Kashmir is already under severe strain. Hospitals are forced to operate with inadequate manpower, compromising the quality of care provided to patients, especially in rural and far-flung areas," the representation added.

The aspirants pointed out that while the government has invested heavily in infrastructure by establishing new medical colleges and upgrading health facilities, the lack of nursing staff has undermined the purpose of these initiatives. "What is the use of new hospitals and medical colleges if there are no nurses to run wards, emergency units, ICUs and operation theatres efficiently?" aspirants asked.

Highlighting their personal hardships, the aspirants said that thousands of qualified and registered nurses remain unemployed, despite completing rigorous training and meeting all professional requirements. "We are educated, trained, and registered, yet we are sitting idle for years. This uncertainty has pushed many of us into mental distress, financial hardship and hopelessness," they said.

*Continued on  
www.kashmirthunder.in*

## CIK raids 22 locations in 3 Kashmir districts, 22 detained

KNO

Srinagar, Jan 07: In a decisive blow to organised cybercrime and its sinister linkage with terror financing, Counter Intelligence Kashmir (CIK) has intensified its crackdown on an extensive criminal network operating mule bank accounts to launder proceeds of cyber frauds, illegal online gaming, betting rackets and other unlawful activities.

According to a statement, acting on credible and specific intelligence inputs, FIR No. 06/2025 under Sections 66 (C) and 66 (D) of the Information Technology Act, 2000; Sections 303, 308, 314, 316 (2), 318 (4), 336 (3), 340 (2) and 61 (2) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, and Section 13 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 has been registered at Police Station Counter Intelligence Kashmir, unveiling a sophisticated and well-entrenched financial crime syndicate that posed a serious threat to national economic security and digital safety.

A Hidden Financial Machinery Behind



Cyber Crime

Investigations so far have exposed a carefully orchestrated conspiracy in which accused

persons, in active connivance with local and outside operatives, exploited bank accounts of innocent, vulnerable and economically

weak individuals, converting them into "mule accounts".

These accounts, the CIK said, were used as temporary conduits to route massive volumes of illicit money generated from: Cyber frauds and online scams, banned online gaming and betting platforms, Fake investment and trading applications "Alarmingly, the illegally generated funds are suspected to have been channelled further into terror financing and other activities prejudicial to the sovereignty and integrity of the nation," it said.

The syndicate functioned through gross violations of banking norms, abuse of KYC procedures, registration of non-existing business establishments on UDHAYAM portal subsequently used for opening of accounts, allotment of Virtual Account Numbers, identity theft, impersonation, and complex money-laundering techniques, deliberately designed to mask the origin and destination of criminal proceeds.

What is a Mule Account and Why It Is Dangerous

A mule account is a bank or digital payment account used by criminals to receive, transfer, and camouflage illegally obtained money. The account holder—known as a money mule—may be: Complicit, Wilfully ignorant, or completely unaware that their account is being misused.

Mule accounts are a critical component of cyber-enabled crimes, facilitating the layering stage of money laundering by distancing the actual criminals from the victim and law-enforcement agencies. Such accounts are widely used in: Phishing and impersonation scams, online trading and investment frauds, Fake loan apps, Illegal payment gateways or Online gaming and betting frauds.

How Cyber Frauds Trap Victims

The CIK said criminals typically initiate frauds through: Phone calls, SMS, WhatsApp or Telegram messages or Social media and search-engine advertisements.

*Continued on  
www.kashmirthunder.in*



## EDITORIAL

# Course Correction Needed For Our Children's Health

The revelation that over 50% of children aged 5-9 in Jammu & Kashmir have high triglyceride levels is a startling public health alarm that transcends individual concern. This is a prognosis for a future epidemic of heart disease, diabetes, and stroke, indicating a profound failure in our collective approach to child nutrition and physical well-being. When a majority of our young children show early signs of metabolic dysfunction, it is a clear signal that their environment—their diet and daily habits—is making them sick. Doctors rightly attribute this crisis to a toxic synergy of

increased consumption of sugary, deep-fried, and processed foods, coupled with plummeting physical activity and soaring screen time. This shift from traditional, active lifestyles to sedentary, convenience-driven diets is programming a generation for chronic illness. Addressing this requires an urgent, two-pronged strategy involving both the government and the public. For the government, policy must create a healthier ecosystem. This includes mandatory, regular school health screenings to identify at-risk children early, with referrals for dietary counselling; strict nutritional guidelines for school

meals and canteens, banning junk food and promoting locally sourced, whole foods; revitalising physical education in schools, ensuring daily, structured activity is non-negotiable and public awareness campaigns that empower parents with clear information on healthy alternatives to packaged snacks and sugary drinks. For families and the public, the solution lies in conscious daily choices. Parents and guardians must lead by example: replacing processed snacks with fruits and nuts, cooking meals at home, setting firm limits on screen time, and making outdoor play a daily family ritual.

Communities can organise local sports events and create safe spaces for children to play. The window for intervention is narrow but crucial. Childhood plasticity means this damage is still reversible. We must act now to protect these children from a lifetime of health complications. This is about securing the vitality and productivity of Jammu & Kashmir's future. The health of our children is the ultimate measure of our society's well-being, and on this metric, we are currently failing. We must correct course, decisively and collectively, starting today.

# Synthetic Wisdom

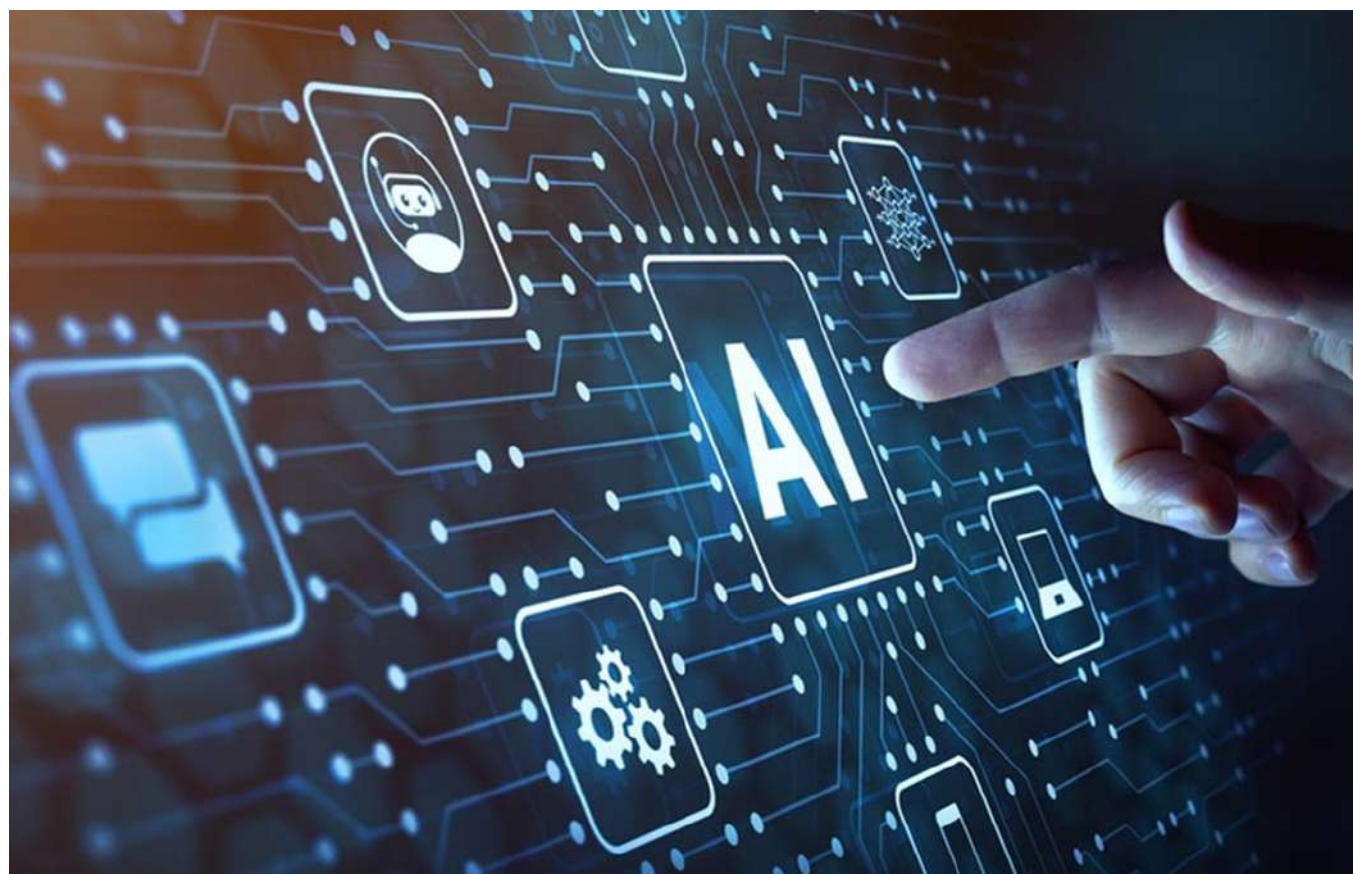
Artificial Intelligence is yet to reach that level where it can awaken critical consciousness to bring change to society. For this reason, AI would not be able to replace a social science teacher.

Nirupam Hazra

In the last 10 years, the world has experienced many unprecedented breakthroughs. One of them, on the technological front, is the advent of large language model-based Artificial Intelligence.

Every invention and technological advancement comes with its own boon and bane. AI is not going to be an exception. What is distinctive about AI is its ability to mimic certain human qualities with far more efficiency. Actions that required human intervention can now be delegated to AI. On the occasion of Teachers' Day, when my students were busy conveying their respect and gratitude, I was occupied with the thought whether teachers, too, would be replaced by AI.

The use of technology in teaching is not new. Technology has made teaching accessible, overcoming various barriers. When the internet opened the floodgates of information, search engines like Google earned the sobriquet of the modern 'guru' or teacher. The wealth of information on the internet, however, did not make teachers dispensable — because teaching is not only about imparting information and learning is not limited to information-gathering. Having a meaningful dialogue is an important part of the teaching-learning process. Dialogue serves both as a means and as an end in teaching. In his book, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, the famous Brazilian educationist, Paulo Freire, had strongly criticised the practice of teaching where learners' role is confined to being a silent recipient of knowledge. AI, thus, will do a better job than a teacher in a classroom with little or no space for students to engage in a dialogue. AI not just caters to information;



it collates and coheres information from various sources and conveys the same in a conversational manner. For a student, the attraction of AI is that it gives the learner an opportunity to engage with the technology, to prod it further without the fear of being silenced.

But teaching is not restricted to accessing content. Context is far more important than content. Context gives meaning to content. AI may present the content in a comprehensive manner — this, too, may suffer from the biases it is fed — but it falters in contextualisation. The reason is that context is a

contested terrain, with multiple claimants. It does not end with the churning out of information and thus eludes a straightforward answer.

Contextualisation also involves interpretation and critical cognition; it demands looking at things from multiple

perspectives. It is one thing to learn about Michel Foucault's 'regime of truth' and quite another to understand how it works and affects us in a post-truth world. Similarly, to read and understand Marxism in the age of thriving capitalism and widening inequality is not simply about having access to the content on Karl Marx and his ideas.

AI is helping students compose critical essays for their examinations and assignments; students are eagerly making use of it. But the moot question is whether AI can make students ask the right questions. Can it train young minds to debate and challenge the

status-quo? Social science education is supposed to make one critically aware of social realities. Freire termed it as "conscientization": a critical consciousness that eventually leads to the dismantling of oppressive structures. Social scientists play the role of interpreters of social maladies and in doing so they often face the wrath of power. AI is yet to reach that level where it can awaken critical consciousness to bring change to society. For this reason, AI would not be able to replace a social science teacher as long as social science as a discipline is allowed to do what it is meant to.

My claim is not a reflection of self-assuring hubris to establish my indispensability as a teacher. When I asked AI the same question it also agreed, saying that it can make teaching-learning more transformative but it lacks a human's interpretive faculties. There is intelligence in AI, but we must not forget that it is artificial.

Nirupam Hazra is Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, Bankura University, West Bengal

Source: The Telegraph India

# Before Goals, Pause And Honour Your Journey

Asha Iyer Kumar

It's that time of the season when life slowly comes to a pause and people return to themselves, leaving their external businesses outside the door. Resolutions, reflections, goal-setting and a smattering of philosophy take centre stage, and a fresh blueprint for life ahead is chalked out. The first week of the New Year is filled with renewed optimism about the times that would ensue and the leaps we would make in the next twelve months.

As the year was drawing to a close, an acquaintance on LinkedIn posed a question — 'What goals and lessons are you planning to bring into 2026? Let's inspire each other with our answers.' I sat with the question for a bit, and confessed that I was not setting any concrete goals as of now. I was merely going to take stock — of how far I have come from what I was, and what corners I have turned to get to this point of success. I was going to defy the phrase 'no looking back' and seriously look at my past to acknowledge the distance I have stridden, the milestones I have reached, and the footprints I have left on those whose lives I have touched.

Self-acknowledgement: is that something we have forgotten to put on our to-do list in our hurry to be proactive and future-ready? If yes, it is the first thing



we must do - not just on the occasion of a new Gregorian year, but periodically. Every once in a while, we must ask ourselves: Where am I today? How did I get this far? — and then turn that thought over in the mind. Count every small win and compliment ourselves for the effort we took to make that victory possible. No

accomplishment, big or small, could have arrived

without putting ourselves out there; without exposing ourselves to risks; without taking chances; without being resilient; without self-belief; without falling and faltering; without learning.

It is only when we allow ourselves this

quiet contemplation about our own past that we realise we are more worthy than we give ourselves credit for. That's when gratitude and fulfilment gush into our life, shifting our understanding of what success truly means. Currently, we define ourselves more by how we are perceived by the world than by self-estimation — a

huge disservice to our talent, perseverance, endeavours, and triumphs.

Of course, planning and setting goals give us direction, but the courage to expand our horizons comes from recognising how steadfast we have been. We may not have come as far as we aspired, but staying stuck in cynicism and self-doubt can only hold us back. What propels us forward is self-recognition — not grandstanding — but an intimate acceptance of who and what we are today, by dint of hard slog.

We have all been through the harsh winters and sultry summers of life. We have hung in there. We have driven on the roughest roads, and we have arrived here — and for this, we all deserve congratulations.

Internally, many of us still critique ourselves for not having done better or reached that elusive point of success. This habit of focusing on what was not attained keeps us in despair. We may have miles to go before we sleep, but while we are awake, let us pat ourselves on the back for making a difference — to our lives and to others — with our resolve and resilience. We are our own heroes with inspiring backstories — and nothing should take away from that truth.

The writer is a Dubai-based author, columnist, independent journalist and children's writing coach; views are personal  
Source: The Pioneer

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



# Pragati Portal: A Game Changer In Accelerating India’s Dedicated Freight Corridor Project

By ensuring faster decision-making, reducing inter-departmental friction, and enforcing accountability at every level, Pragati has played a decisive role in steering the DFC Project towards successful and timely completion, while setting a benchmark for future infrastructure programmes in India

RK Jain

Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC) Project is one of the most ambitious rail infrastructure initiatives undertaken since Independence. Designed to provide a high-capacity, technology-enabled rail corridor for freight transportation, the DFC aims to help Indian Railways regain its freight market share by offering faster, safer, more reliable and cost-effective logistics solutions. The project is also expected to catalyse the development of multimodal logistics parks, thereby reducing logistics costs and improving efficiency across the supply chain.

With an estimated cost of over 1.2 lakh crore and a total length of 2843 km, the DFC has two major arms:

**Eastern Dedicated Freight Corridor (EDFC):**

1337 km Stretching from Sahnewal (Ludhiana) in Punjab to Sonnagar in Bihar, the corridor passes through Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar

**Western Dedicated Freight Corridor (WDFC):**

1506 km Stretching from Dadri in Uttar Pradesh to Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT) near Mumbai, it traverses Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh.

Together, the DFC alignment passes through 7 states and 56 districts, cutting across forest areas, wildlife sanctuaries, mangrove stretches and creek zones — making project execution inherently complex.

**Challenges That Threatened Timely Completion**

Although the project was initiated in 2008, progress was hampered for several years due to multiple bottlenecks:

- Acquisition of about 11,000 hectares of land, including removal of structures and encroachments.
- Obtaining statutory clearances for forest



land, wildlife sanctuaries, mangroves, tree cutting, creek crossings, etc.

- Elimination of over 900 level crossings through construction of Road Over Bridges (ROBs) and Road Under Bridges (RUBs), each requiring joint GAD approvals and land acquisition for approaches.
- Shifting of high-tension electric lines, gas and oil pipelines.

- Approvals from Defence authorities, NHAI, state highways, irrigation departments for canal crossings, and permissions

for earth borrowing.

- Post-COVID financial stress on contractors, leading to poor cash flows.

The absence of encumbrance-free land severely impacted construction schedules and exposed the project to potential claims.

**Pragati Portal – The Turning Point**

The launch of the Pragati Portal by the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) proved to be a watershed moment for the DFC Project.

Through the portal, unresolved issues were uploaded with detailed documentation

by DFC officials. What made Pragati truly powerful was the visibility and accountability it created: concerned ministries, state governments and authorities knew that progress was being monitored at the highest level, including by the Hon’ble Prime Minister himself.

Issues that had remained pending for years despite relentless follow-ups were resolved within weeks — sometimes even days. In cases where immediate compliance was not feasible, authorities committed to

firm target dates, which were then rigorously adhered to.

**A New Culture of Governance and Accountability**

The Pragati Portal emerged as a highly effective platform for:

- Real-time project monitoring
- Escalation of issues across multiple tiers simultaneously
- Inter-ministerial and inter-state coordination through a single window

Within DFC, a similar internal monitoring framework was institutionalised. Weekly reviews of major contracts, intensive site visits and continuous tracking of committed milestones became the norm. Since all timelines placed on the portal were on record, it also instilled a sense of responsibility within the project team to honour its commitments.

**Tangible Impact on Project Execution**

The faster resolution of complex issues significantly boosted construction progress and safeguarded the organisation from potential claims arising out of delays in providing encumbrance-free land. More importantly, Pragati transformed the overall governance culture by embedding transparency, responsiveness and accountability into day-to-day project management.

**Conclusion**

The Pragati Portal stands today as a live example of effective digital governance in action. For a mega project like the Dedicated Freight Corridor — cutting across multiple states, departments and regulatory jurisdictions — Pragati proved to be not just a monitoring tool, but a catalyst for change.

By ensuring faster decision-making, reducing inter-departmental friction, and enforcing accountability at every level, Pragati has played a decisive role in steering the DFC Project towards successful and timely completion, while setting a benchmark for future infrastructure programmes in India.

*The author is former MD, DFCCIL*

## If ‘Trump’s Court’ Summons You

It would serve you well to pause over the new US national security strategy and the updated Monroe Doctrine

Ghassan Charbel

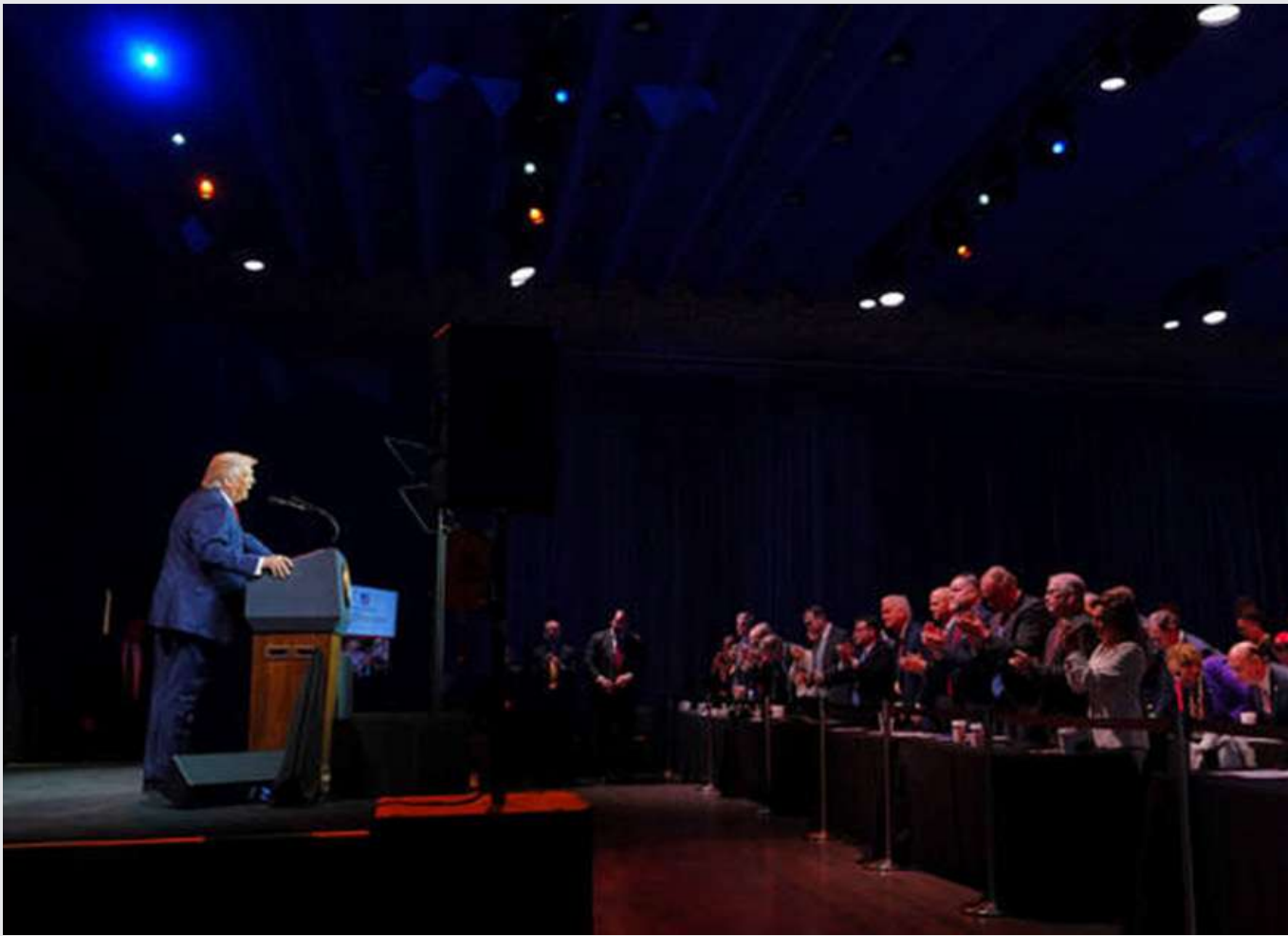
If “Trump’s court” summons you, then treat the issue with the seriousness it deserves. This applies whether you are a president accused of sponsoring terrorism or of running a drug empire. It also applies if you are the leader of a faction assigned to harass the “Great Satan,” its embassies and its interests.

Take it seriously. The era of balance is over. The Soviet Union lies in its grave. Safe havens have evaporated. The hunted no longer enjoy such immunity. Space itself is an American playground. An American aircraft knows whether you shaved your beard today or not. An American drone can pay you a visit wherever you are hiding — be it a hotel, a cave or an anonymous room in a crowded city. The owner of the court does not need to dispatch Delta Force to finish you off or drag you away in handcuffs. He can shackle your country with sanctions and drive your national currency into the ground and irrelevance.

I assume you are wise enough not to bet on international law, the sanctity of national sovereignty and the UN secretary-general and his tears. You should also understand that the current owner of the court is unlike his predecessors. He is not Bill Clinton. He is not Barack Obama, who drew a red line for Bashar Assad and then avoided imposing decisive punishment. And he is certainly not Joe Biden, whose body has no room left for arrows in his back.

It would serve you well to pause over the new US national security strategy and the updated Monroe Doctrine. Gone are the days when Fidel Castro was allowed to live for decades as a thorn in America’s side. Gone are the days when Iran was permitted to assign “Abu Zaynab” to ram a truck bomb into the US Marines’ headquarters in Beirut. Gone are the days when the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine could assassinate a US ambassador in Beirut or when another faction could kill the American ambassador in Khartoum. The world has changed and America has changed with it.

It never required artificial intelligence to know that exporting drugs from Venezuela to the US means importing trouble and retaliation. Nor do you have



the right, when gazing at your country’s map, to invite China into America’s “backyard,” along with Russia, Iranian drones and North Korean missiles. You should have factored in the catastrophic collapse of the national currency and the flight of millions from your rule, even though your country sits atop the largest oil reserves in the world.

You should have learned the lesson. The US military command in Iraq knew that Gen. Qassem Soleimani was planning bombings and attacks against its forces. They knew he regularly traveled to Baghdad. Yet Washington long believed that deciding to

kill Soleimani was riskier than deciding to kill Osama bin Laden. No American president dared order the killing of the No. 2 man in the Iranian system despite knowing he had mined entire maps with tunnels and missiles.

On Jan. 3, 2020, the Middle East shook. The man in the White House ordered Soleimani killed near Baghdad airport. Donald Trump does not recognize the red lines drawn by his enemies, nor those vaguely suggested by his advisers. It is Iran’s misfortune that he returned to the White House to strike its nuclear facilities. And it is Nicolas Maduro’s misfortune that Trump returned to order

his arrest and compel him to stand before an American court.

By dragging Maduro before a US court, Trump sent a message more brutal than the massive bombs his aircraft dropped on Iran’s nuclear facilities. How devastating it must have been for Iran’s supreme leader to hear of Maduro’s abduction at the hands of American forces.

True, the distance between Caracas and Tehran is vast, as is the difference between the nature of the two regimes. But it is also true that Iran’s currency has buckled under the weight of sanctions; that the voices of protesters resonate across

the country; that Trump has threatened intervention if peaceful demonstrators are killed; and that Benjamin Netanyahu dreams of Trump’s support in destroying the Revolutionary Guards’ missile arsenal. Added to this is the fact that Venezuelan oil falling into the custody of the “big brother” strips Tehran of its card of intimidating the West by threatening to close the Strait of Hormuz.

In his American prison, Maduro will fall prey to memories. He was once nothing more than a bus driver when revolutionary fervor swept him up — the Latin American legacy of hatred for US interventions, the clenched fists of the descendants of Simon Bolivar, Castro’s olive-green fatigues, his fiery and endless speeches, and the iron resolve of his patron Hugo Chavez, who found no better heir when cancer consumed his body.

America may appear fearful but it becomes terrifying when the master of the Oval Office unleashes “the strongest army in history.” Vladimir Putin most likely received the news with deep resentment. His army has been fighting Volodymyr Zelensky for four years without killing or capturing him.

I was also reminded of what I heard from Muammar Qaddafi’s companions about the fear that seized him when American warplanes once struck his bedroom and how he instinctively touched his neck when he saw the noose tightening around that of Saddam Hussein. The image of the rope also haunted the late Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh.

This is the world. What is permitted to the strong is denied to others. International law restrains only the weak. Arresting Maduro is more dangerous than abducting Manuel Noriega. The world is a jungle. Does it ever occur to Putin to kidnap Zelensky and bring him before a Russian court on charges of corruption and the spilling of soldiers’ blood — soldiers who came to “reshape” the map of his country? And why did the master of the Kremlin not think of granting Maduro “humanitarian asylum” and an apartment in Moscow, as he did for Bashar Assad?

*Ghassan Charbel is editor-in-chief of Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper. This article first appeared in Asharq Al-Awsat.*



## Encounter breaks out in Kathua

Yogesh

Jammu, Jan 07: An encounter broke out between security forces and terrorists in a remote forest area of Jammu's Kathua district on Wednesday evening.

An official told the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) that on a tip-off, security forces cordoned off the Kamadh Nullah forest near Kahog village in the Billawar tehsil. "As the searches progressed terrorists present in the area opened fire which was retaliated to, triggering an encounter, which was continuing when reports last came in," the official said, adding, "Two to three terrorists are believed to be trapped in the area."

Inspector General of Police (IGP) Jammu Zone, Bhim Sen Tuti, confirmed the development in a post on X, stating: "SOG Kathua has engaged terrorists in the forest of Kamadh Nullah, Kathua."

As per sources locals sighted a suspected terrorist around 4 pm in the Kamad Nallah area. "This individual is believed to be the same one spotted earlier in the morning at Dhannu Parole, prompting heightened alerts in the area," they added.

Reinforcements, including teams from the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), have joined the Special Operations Group (SOG) of Jammu and Kashmir Police in the joint operation. The operation is being closely monitored by senior officers, including SSP Kathua. The area has been fully cordoned off and escape routes have been plugged. (KNO)

## US seizes 2 sanctioned oil tankers linked to Venezuela in North Atlantic, Caribbean

AP

Washington, Jan 07: The United States has seized two sanctioned oil tankers linked to Venezuela in back-to-back actions in the North Atlantic and the Caribbean, officials said Wednesday.

US European Command announced the seizure of the merchant vessel Bella 1 for "violations of US sanctions" in a social media post. The US had been pursuing the tanker since last month after it tried to evade a US blockade on sanctioned oil vessels around Venezuela.

Then, Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem revealed that US forces also took control of the tanker Sophia in the Caribbean. Noem said in a social media post both ships were "either last docked in Venezuela or en route to it."

Noem said that both ships are part of a large "ghost fleet" of sanctioned vessels that carry oil from Russia, Iran and Venezuela in defiance of Western sanctions, mostly to

customers in Asia.

The Trump administration is "selectively" removing sanctions to enable the shipping and sale of Venezuelan oil to markets worldwide, according to an outline of the policies published Wednesday by the Energy Department.

The oil sales are slated to begin immediately with the sale of 30 million to 50 million barrels from the South American country. The US government said the sales "will continue indefinitely" with the proceeds settling in US-controlled accounts at "globally recognized banks." The money would then be disbursed to the US and Venezuelan populations at the "discretion" of Trump's government.

The two ship seizures come just days after US military forces conducted a surprise nighttime raid on Venezuela's capital of Caracas and captured then-President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, whom President Donald Trump's administration has accused of partnering with drug traffickers. Since that raid,

officials in Trump's Republican administration have said that they intend to continue to seize sanctioned vessels connected to the country.

"We are enforcing American laws with regards to oil sanctions," Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on NBC on Sunday. "We go to court. We get a warrant. We seize those boats with oil. And that will continue."

The US military seized the Bella 1 and subsequently handed over control of it to law enforcement officials, said a US official, who spoke to The Associated Press on Wednesday on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive military operations.

The ship was sanctioned by the US in 2024 for allegedly smuggling cargo for a company linked to Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, which is backed by Iran.

It was cruising across the Atlantic nearing the Caribbean on December 15 when it abruptly turned and changed its heading north, toward Europe. The change in direction

came days after the first US tanker seizure of a ship called the Skipper, on December 10, after it had left Venezuela carrying a cargo of oil.

The US Coast Guard attempted to board it in the Caribbean in December as it headed for Venezuela. The ship refused boarding and headed across the Atlantic. US European Command confirmed that the US Coast Guard cutter Munro tracked the ship ahead of its seizure "pursuant to a warrant issued by a US federal court" in a social media post.

During this time, the Bella 1 was renamed Marinera and flagged to Russia, shipping databases show. The US official also confirmed that the ship's crew had painted a Russian flag on the side of the hull.

Earlier Wednesday, open-source maritime tracking sites showed its position as between Scotland and Iceland, travelling north. The US official also confirmed the ship was in the North Atlantic. Flight tracking websites showed several U-28A US special operations aircraft landing at Wick

John O'Groats airport on the northern tip of Scotland, before flying further north toward Iceland on Wednesday. P8 Poseidon submarine-hunting aircraft and KC-135 refuelling planes were also seen on tracking websites, heading to the area near the tanker.

Russia's Foreign Ministry said before the seizure that it was "following with concern the anomalous situation that has developed around the Russian oil tanker Marinera."

Immediately following news of the seizure, Russia's Ministry of Transport confirmed the boarding in a statement and noted that "no state has the right to use force against vessels duly registered in the jurisdictions of other states," citing the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Maduro appeared in court this week in New York, where he protested his capture and pleaded not guilty to the federal drug trafficking charges the Trump administration used to justify removing him from power in Venezuela.

## CONTD. FROM FRONT PAGE

### Amit Shah to

Secretary Chandraker Bharti, Director General of Police (DGP), J&K Nalin Prabhat, Union Home Secretary Govind Mohan and heads of all CAPFs and Intelligence agencies will attend the review meeting.

The meeting comes a couple weeks ahead of the 76th Republic Day celebrations across the country, including Jammu and Kashmir. The meeting also comes at a time when security forces have launched aggressive counter-terror operations in mountains and remote areas of the Jammu region to hunt down terrorists.

The official further said that seniors officers are expected to apprise the chair about the co-ordinated strategy to eliminate terrorists hiding in difficult, inaccessible areas of J&K while ensuring zero infiltration on the LoC and the IB.

During the past few months, security forces have engaged terrorists in several encounters in the upper reaches of Kishtwar, Doda, Udhampur and other districts of the region as the infiltration attempts by the terrorists have been foiled on the LoC and the IB during this period.

On Wednesday itself, an encounter took place between security forces and terrorists in the forest area of Kamadh Nallah in the Kathua district, with officials saying that despite darkness, thick vegetation and treacherous terrain, the Special Operations Group (SOG) of J&K Police along with teams of CRPF relentless engaged the terrorists. (KNO)

### True progress means

defined not by personal achievements, but by the ability to create opportunities for others.

Develop future capabilities, focus on character building and embrace lifelong learning. Be bold, be fearless, think beyond boundaries. Your courage, discipline, clarity, and determination, combined with the experience will be your guide in this journey toward Viksit Bharat," the Lieutenant Governor told the youth.

Pertinently, the National Youth Festival (NYF), dedicated to youth empowerment and national unity, is organised every year to commemorate the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda on January 12. In 2025, the National Youth Festival was restructured and renamed as the Viksit Bharat Young Leaders' Dialogue, in order to align it with the national vision of Viksit Bharat @2047, with a sharper focus on nurturing leadership, innovation and active participation of youth in nation-building.

Yasha Mudgal, Commissioner/Secretary to Government, Youth Services and Sports; Anuradha Gupta, Director General Youth Services and Sports; senior officials, participating youth and officials accompanying the Contingent were present on the occasion. (KNO)

### LoP Sharma

Medical Commission (NMC) to withdraw the Letter of Permission (LoP) granted to the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Medical College of Excellence.

He said the action was taken after the NMC found "serious irregularities" during inspection, calling it a step that safeguards both students' futures and public faith associated with the shrine.

The LoP Sharma, according to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), said the move not only addressed long-standing irregularities but also safeguarded the academic interests of MBBS students, who have now been accommodated in other medical colleges.

"I welcome the historic decision of the National Medical Commission to withdraw the Letter of Permission granted to the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Medical College of Excellence after serious irregularities were found during inspection."

"Ensuring that affected MBBS students are accommodated in other colleges reflects a responsible and student-centric approach," LoP Sharma said.

He expressed "sincere gratitude" to Union Health Minister J P Nadda, Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha and the National Medical Commission for upholding public faith and respecting the deep religious sentiments associated with the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine.

"This decision reaffirms the importance of preserving faith, transparency and accountability while safeguarding the future of students," he added.

CITES FINDINGS OF NMC ASSESSMENT

Referring to the NMC's recent inspection through its National Assessment and Rating Board, he said the review uncovered "many irregularities," prompting the Commission to act decisively.

"Keeping these irregularities in mind, the letter of permission was withdrawn yesterday and all the students who were studying MBBS were admitted to different colleges," Sharma said. "The Health Ministry, NMC and the Lieutenant Governor deserve full credit for ensuring both fairness and respect for people's emotions."

#### FAITH AND PUBLIC SENTIMENT

LoP Sharma said the decision has restored the faith of millions of devotees across the country who hold deep reverence for the Vaishno Devi Shrine.

"When more than one community was admitted, the hearts of Sanatanis and Hindus across the country were touched. All the worship and offerings there are meant for the propagation of religion," he said, adding that the Shrine Board's involvement in running a medical college had "hurt religious sentiments."

He said the NMC and the Health Ministry had increased the honour of faith and devotion through their action.

#### CRITICISES CM OMAR ABDULLAH

The LoP also accused former Chief Minister Omar Abdullah of "trying to give the issue a communal colour."

"The way Omar Abdullah Sahib tried to divert the issue and turn it into a Hindu-Muslim debate, he has been given a strong answer," Sharma said. "Students' careers have been safeguarded and people's faith has been respected."

He added that while the BJP had no issue with any individual or student, its concern was over preserving the sanctity of the shrine and ensuring offerings made for 'Vedic and religious purposes' were not diverted.

"We had demanded that a Gurukul and a Veda Research Centre be opened there. There are many colleges in the country to make doctors—but this shrine should remain a place of devotion and spiritual pursuit," he said.

#### DECISION REFLECTS BJP'S COMMITMENT TO FAITH

"This decision once again proves that the faith and devotion connected to Mata Vaishno Devi will remain intact," Sharma said, stressing that the BJP gives "special importance" to the sentiments of devotees.

"The emotions of the people of Jammu and Kashmir have been honoured. I once again thank Health Minister J.P. Nadda and the National Medical Commission for this decision," he said. (KNO)

### NMC decision harms

200–250 students from Jammu," he said.

Now, the CM said, these students will not get admission in this college because the entire institution has been shut down in the name of religion.

Abdullah added that he has directed the Health Minister to intervene immediately and ensure that affected students are relocated to medical colleges nearest to their homes.

"Those children who will not get a medical college seat in the future, because this college has been closed, should be accommodated in government medical colleges so they can continue their studies and serve the people here," he said.

He criticised the decision, saying it undermines opportunities for students in J&K at a time when elsewhere in the country, families are fighting to secure medical college seats.

"If you are happy destroying the future of the children, then burst the firecrackers. People struggle for medical education. In Jammu and Kashmir, the fight has been to close a college," Abdullah said.

On other issues, the Chief Minister highlighted ongoing development and governance initiatives in the Samba district. He said progress in certain sectors needs to be accelerated and expressed hope that by the end of the current financial year, Samba's performance will compare favourably with other districts.

Abdullah also lauded the achievements of young sports teams in the UT, including under-16 cricket players who recently won a trophy.

"I do not consider the religion of players. I just want the performance of teams in Jammu and Kashmir to improve. I will meet these young players personally and congratulate

them," he said. (KNO)

### India's Reform Express

7.3 per cent forecast of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the government's initial projection of 6.3 to 6.8 per cent.

"Be it infrastructure, manufacturing incentives, digital public goods or 'Ease of Doing Business', we are working to realise our dream of a prosperous India," the prime minister said.

### Ensure benefits of

Choudhary; Ministers Sakeena Itoo, Javid Ahmad Dar and Satish Sharma; and Advisor to the Chief Minister Nasir Aslam Wani. Also present were Chairperson, District Development Council (DDC) Samba; Members of Legislative Assembly S.S. Slathia (Samba), Chander Prakash Ganga (Vijaypur) and Devinder Kumar Manyal (Ramgarh).

Additional Chief Secretary to the Chief Minister Dheeraj Gupta, Heads of Departments and other senior officers also participated in the review meeting.

Addressing district-specific concerns, the Chief Minister urged the administration to expedite the pace of developmental activities and ensure that benefits of growth reach every household. "Officers must ensure time-bound completion of all projects, remove bottlenecks, improve public service delivery and maintain high standards of quality in execution," the Chief Minister asserted.

Taking note of key issues raised during the meeting, the Chief Minister directed immediate redressal and resolution of matters flagged by the MLAs. He further instructed that all concerns raised be verified on priority and necessary corrective measures taken without delay.

Emphasising a focused approach towards employment generation, the Chief Minister underscored the importance of promoting entrepreneurship, particularly under Mission YUVA, and strengthening Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to make women more economically independent. "Empowering youth and women is central to sustainable and inclusive development," he said.

With regard to projects under SASCI, the Chief Minister directed the Deputy Commissioner to fast-track their execution and ensure periodic reviews to monitor progress and address impediments in a timely manner.

The Chief Minister also stressed the importance of effectively resolving public grievances raised by DDC member and MLAs, directing the administration to maintain close coordination with public representatives to ensure responsive governance.

During the meeting, several other issues were highlighted, including drinking water supply, sanitation, regularisation of daily wagers, upgradation of schools, establishment of colleges in remote areas, implementation of industrial policy, and shortage of staff in hospitals and educational institutions. The Chief Minister assured that all genuine concerns would be examined and addressed in a timely and systematic manner.

Earlier, Deputy Commissioner Samba, Ayushi Sudan, presented a detailed district profile, outlining sector-wise targets and achievements across departments such as Jal Shakti (PHE), Public Works (R&B), Power Development, Education, Health, Agriculture and Social Welfare.

On the occasion, the Chief Minister also e-inaugurated developmental projects worth 533 lakh, including: Improvement and upgradation of link road from Panchayat Ghar Chak Slarian to Ramloo at Tara Resort (length 5.85 km) under NABARD at a cost of 311.66 lakh; and Construction of link road at Village Chak Nazir (length 2.50 km) under NABARD at a cost of 221.54 lakh.

Moreover, the Chief Minister laid the e-foundation stone for the construction of a 100-metre span footbridge over River Basanter at Banab, to be executed under NABARD at an estimated cost of 198.38 lakh.

The Chief Minister complimented the district administration for its proactive role during last year's crisis situation and said that the district has shown considerable progress in respect of several developmental parameters.

### J&K Law Dept

stating that reasonable time is required for their proper examination.

In the circular, the Department has cited

Part C of the Transaction of Business of the Government of Jammu and Kashmir Rules, 2019, which deals with the procedure for initiating legislation and consultation with the Department.

The Department has also asked that rules and notifications, which are to be laid before the Legislative Assembly, shall be placed before the House during the ensuing Assembly session to fulfill legal requirements.

The Department has further directed that legislative proposals requiring the recommendation of the Lieutenant Governor-as per Section 36 of the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019-be submitted well in advance to the LG's Secretariat.

In the circular, the Department has asked all Financial Commissioners (Additional Chief Secretaries), Principal Secretaries, and Commissioners/Secretaries to ensure that the prescribed procedure for dealing with questions and other legislative business is strictly observed.

The Department has also directed administrative Secretaries and heads of departments to remain present in the House whenever issues pertaining to their departments come up for discussion. (KNO)

### Cold wave to

minimum of minus 1.6 degrees, while the airport registered minus 2.2 degrees Celsius, it said.

Other places in the Valley also witnessed sub-zero temperatures, including Kupwara at minus 3.6 degrees, Baramulla at minus 3.0 degrees, Pulwama at minus 5.1 degrees, Shopian at minus 4.3 degrees and Budgam at minus 2.4 degrees Celsius. Qazigund recorded a minimum of 0.1 degrees, while Kokernag settled at minus 2.3 degrees Celsius.

According to details obtained by the news agency - Kashmir News Observer (KNO), in the Jammu region, night temperatures remained relatively higher, with Jammu city recording a minimum of 8.7 degrees Celsius and the airport at 9.3 degrees. Bhaderwah, however, recorded a low of minus 2.6 degrees, while Banihal recorded 2.3 degrees and Batote 3.1 degrees Celsius. Katra registered 6.4 degrees, Rajouri 1.0 degree and Kishtwar 0.1 degrees, it added.

In Ladakh, Leh recorded a minimum temperature of minus 13.4 degrees Celsius, while Drass, known as the second coldest inhabited place in the world, plunged to minus 22.8 degrees. Nyoma recorded minus 20.2 degrees, Padum minus 16.8 degrees and Kargil minus 11.6 degrees Celsius.

Meteorological officials said cold wave conditions are likely to intensify over the next four days, with minimum temperatures in the Kashmir plains expected to range between minus 4 and minus 9 degrees Celsius.

Higher reaches may see night temperatures between minus 6 and minus 13 degrees, while the Jammu plains are likely to record minimum temperatures between 0 and 6 degrees Celsius.

The weather is expected to remain largely dry over the next 10 days, barring weak western disturbances. Isolated light rain or snowfall over higher elevations cannot be ruled out around January 12 and 13, officials said.

With the prolonged dry spell continuing, water levels in rivers and streams across the region are expected to keep falling, raising concerns over water availability in the coming weeks.

Chillai-Kalan, the harshest phase of winter, is known for severe cold, freezing of water bodies and frequent sub-zero temperatures across the region.

Meanwhile, the Meteorological Centre Srinagar said Jammu and Kashmir is likely to witness generally cold and dry weather till January 22, with intermittent cloudy conditions expected between January 16 and 20.

"Minimum temperatures are expected to fall till January 10 and thereafter rise by 1–2 degrees Celsius. Dense fog is likely to persist at a few places in the Jammu division over the next five days," it added. (KNO)

### Intensify water

enterprise, agriculture and allied sectors, which are expected to generate employment and add value to local resources.

Among the major inaugurations were the Bamboo Crafts Common Facility Centre at Sallan ( 2.87 crore), Kathua Kriti Showroom ( 41.51 lakh) for marketing local products,

and the Agarbatti Common Facility Centre at Billawar ( 3.39 crore) to support micro-entrepreneurs and self-help groups.

Further strengthening the agriculture sector, the Chief Minister inaugurated the upgradation of Poultry and Hatchery Unit, Kathua, under the Holistic Agriculture Development Programme (HADP), with an outlay of 3.88 crore, aimed at improving productivity and farmers' income.

In the education sector, the Chief Minister laid the foundation stone for eight additional classrooms at Government Higher Secondary School, Kathera, at an estimated cost of 1.768 crore, to ease congestion and improve learning facilities.

The meeting was attended by Deputy Chief Minister Surinder Kumar Choudhary, Ministers Sakina Itoo, Javid Ahmed Dar and Satish Sharma, Advisor to the CM Nasir Aslam Wani, DDC Chairman Mahan Singh, MLAs Dr Bharat Bhushan (Kathua), Satish Sharma (Billawar), Dr Rameshwar Singh (Bani), Darshan Kumar (Basohli) and Vijay Kumar (Hiranagar).

Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo, Additional Chief Secretary to CM Dheeraj Gupta, Deputy Commissioner Kathua Rajesh Sharma, senior officers and heads of departments were also present.

Deputy Commissioner Kathua presented a brief district profile and progress under various schemes, following which the Chief Minister reviewed sector-wise physical and financial performance and directed departments to ensure time-bound execution with emphasis on quality and visible outcomes on the ground.

Reviewing PMGSY and NABARD-funded roads, the Chief Minister called for identification of bottlenecks and stressed proper drainage, slope protection and safeguards to make roads durable and all-weather. The Deputy Chief Minister informed that the Juthana Bridge is nearing completion and will be opened to the public shortly.

While reviewing agriculture and allied sectors, the Chief Minister directed that the pesticide testing laboratory be made operational within the stipulated timeline and that the DPR of the Regional Cultural Centre of JKAACI be fully equipped, assuring early release of funds after submission of the required proposal.

On the occasion, the Ministers made interventions relating to their respective departments and issued appropriate directions.

On labour welfare, the Deputy Chief Minister emphasised wider outreach under e-Shram, particularly in remote areas, while the Chief Minister directed maximum coverage of eligible beneficiaries and stressed focused water conservation efforts. Issues relating to food grain distribution were also reviewed, with directions for strict quality checks and random inspections.

Emphasising employment generation, the Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister directed that job fairs be outcome-oriented and that Mission YUVA be implemented with active involvement of elected representatives to maximise outreach among youth.

Reviewing education and health sectors, Minister Sakina Itoo stressed rationalisation of teaching staff, filling of vacant gynaecologist posts and ordered that certain transfer orders issued earlier be kept in abeyance pending enquiry. Elected representatives raised issues relating to staff shortages in health and education, completion of major infrastructure projects, drinking water supply, electrification of uncovered villages, road connectivity, sports infrastructure, monkey menace, flood protection measures, land-related issues of educational and horticulture projects and absorption of local youth in industrial units. They also sought upgradation and renovation of health facilities and administrative infrastructure in different constituencies.

The MLAs also thanked CM Omar Abdullah and Health Minister Sakina Itoo for sanctioning MRI machine at Associated Hospital, GMC Kathua which will benefit people of the region.

Responding to the concerns, the Chief Minister assured that all genuine demands would be examined and addressed in a phased and time-bound manner.

Reviewing District Capex performance, the Chief Minister appreciated the district administration for its sustained efforts, including during the recent floods, and directed departments to push men and machinery to achieve full expenditure with quality asset creation.



# India's GDP seen growing 7.4 pc in FY26, fastest in the world

PTI

New Delhi, Jan 07: The Indian economy is expected to grow by 7.4 per cent in the current fiscal, maintaining its status as the world's fastest-growing major economy despite punitive US tariffs and geopolitical tensions.

The First Advance Estimates released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) on Wednesday put GDP growth in 2025-26 (April 2025 to March 2026 fiscal year) at better than 7.3 per cent forecast by the RBI and the government's initial projection of 6.3-6.8 per cent.

The economy had grown at 6.5 per cent in the previous fiscal.

The better-than-expected showing comes on the back of resilience shown by the economy despite the United States imposing punitive tariffs of 50 per cent on Indian goods, escalating trade tensions and threatening to disrupt key export sectors.

The Modi government has responded by overhauling GST, which lowered taxes on hundreds of items, and implementing long-delayed labour reforms. These, together with the lower income tax burden, cut in interest rates, low inflation and strong rural demand, have kept the momentum in the economy.

Last month, the International Monetary Fund projected India's real GDP growth at 6.6 per cent in fiscal 2026, easing to 6.2 per cent in fiscal 2027, based on the assumption of a prolonged delay in a US-India trade agreement.

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) had expanded by 9.2 per cent during 2023-24. The First Advance Estimates



of national income, released by the government on Wednesday, also showed that Gross Value Added (GVA) is estimated to grow at 7.3 per cent during the current financial year as against 6.4 per cent in the year-ago period.

The manufacturing sector is expected to post a 7 per cent growth (GVA) in the current fiscal, up from 4.5 per cent in 2024-25.

The growth in the services sector has been estimated at 9.1 per cent versus 7.2 per cent in 2024-25, according to data released by the National Statistics Office (NSO), Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation (MoSPI).

Growth in the agriculture and allied sector moderated to 3.1 per cent in the current fiscal from 4.6 per cent in 2024-25.

"Real GDP or GDP at constant prices is estimated to attain a level of Rs 201.90 lakh crore in FY 2025-26, against the provisional estimates (PE) of GDP for FY 2024-25 of Rs 187.97 lakh crore, registering a growth rate of 7.4 per cent," NSO

said. The nominal GDP, which factors in inflation, is estimated to attain a level of Rs 357.14 lakh crore in 2025-26 against Rs 330.68 lakh crore in 2024-25, showing a growth rate of 8 per cent. The government had estimated the nominal GDP expansion at 10.1 per cent in the Union Budget presented in February last year.

The First Advance Estimates are used in preparation of the Union Budget, likely to be presented on February 1.

In US dollar terms, the GDP is likely to be USD 3.97 trillion (1 USD = Rs 90). According to the World Bank's China economic update issued in December, the country is estimated to grow at 4.9 per cent in 2025 and 4.4 per cent in 2026.

The NSO's GDP estimate for the current fiscal is marginally higher than the Reserve Bank's projection of 7.3 per cent.

The real private final consumption expenditure (PFCE) has been estimated to attain a growth rate of 7 per cent during 2025-26.

Gross fixed capital formation

(GFCF) has been estimated to have a 7.8 per cent growth rate at constant prices during 2025-26, compared to 7.1 per cent in the previous financial year.

Despite global headwinds, the Indian economy has been on a steady trajectory, and the government has come out with various reform measures this fiscal, including income tax relief and a reduction in GST rates.

Commenting on the data, Rahul Agrawal, senior economist, ICRA, said the rating agency does not expect fiscal slippage over the targeted 4.4 per cent of GDP, as higher-than-budgeted non-tax revenues and likely expenditure savings would provide a buffer against the expected miss on taxes.

Dharmakirti Joshi, Chief Economist, Crisil, said the growth in real GDP this fiscal will be 7.4 per cent, nearly 100 basis points higher than anticipated at the start of the fiscal year.

"India's growth momentum has sustained despite elevated global uncertainty due to tariff tensions, riding on accommodative monetary and fiscal policies, robust corporate balance sheets, and favourable developments such as above-normal monsoons and low crude oil prices," he said.

Jahnavi Prabhakar, Economist, Bank of Baroda, said the Indian economy remains resilient on the back of festive demand and steady improvement in economic activity.

Strong festive sales, along with GST rationalisation 2.0 and income tax cuts, are expected to boost the consumption sector. Even the post-festive demand has been holding up, Prabhakar said.

## Challenge to arbitral awards before courts would frustrate very purpose of Act: SC

PTI

New Delhi, Jan 07: The Supreme Court on Wednesday said if courts are allowed to step in at every stage and arbitral awards are subjected to a challenge before them, it would frustrate and defeat the very purpose of the law on arbitration.

A bench of Justices P S Narasimha and Pankaj Mithal said the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996, is a special enactment aimed at resolving contractual or commercial disputes through arbitration, with the minimum intervention of the court.

The top court's observations came while setting aside a March 2021 judgment of a division bench of the Madras High Court, which had directed for the deletion of a claim awarded by an arbitral tribunal to a firm. "Before parting, we consider it proper to note that the Act is a special enactment, which aims to resolve contractual or commercial disputes through arbitration, with the minimum intervention of the court, if not without the intervention of the court," the bench observed.

It said if courts are allowed to step in at every stage and the arbitral awards are subjected to a challenge before them in hierarchy "and finally, by means of SLP/ civil appeal before the Supreme Court, it would obviate/frustrate and defeat the very purpose of the Act".

The apex court delivered its verdict on an appeal filed by a firm, which has expertise in executing complex dredging operations, challenging the high court order.

The top court said it is necessary to accept an arbitral award if it is not patently illegal or does not fall within the scope of intervention under section 34 of the Act, which deals with an application for setting aside arbitral awards.

It said the appeal has a much narrower



scope of intervention, particularly when the arbitral award has been upheld under section 34 of the Act.

"The appellate jurisdiction acquires little significance only when the arbitral award has been erroneously upheld or set aside by the court in exercise of its power under section 34 of the Act as discussed earlier, but has no authority of law to consider the matter which was before the arbitral tribunal on merits," it said.

The bench said the primary objective of the Act was to provide a speedy and inexpensive mode of resolution of disputes through the process of arbitration, with the minimum intervention of courts.

It said the Act provides for a challenge of an arbitral award before a court on limited grounds, as contemplated by section 34.

"In other words, the scope of interference of the court with the arbitral matters is virtually prohibited, if not absolutely barred," the bench said.

It noted that disputes arose between the parties relating to alleged non-payment and under-payment of dues, as raised under the final bill for a dredging project.

Initially, the dispute was referred in September 2012 to an arbitral tribunal, which awarded an amount of Rs 14.66 crore to the firm in respect of its claim regarding idling charges of Backhoe Dredger.

## Modi's 3-day Gujarat visit from Jan 10 includes Somnath darshan, hosting German Chancellor

PTI

Ahmedabad, Jan 07: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will embark on a three-day visit to Gujarat beginning January 10, during which he will offer prayers at the historic Somnath temple and hold discussions with German Chancellor Friedrich Merz on bilateral cooperation in Gandhinagar, officials said.

One of the highlights of the visit will be Modi leading the 'Shaurya Yatra', a one-kilometre-long roadshow featuring 108 horses, as part of the 'Somnath Swabhiman Parv'.

Modi is also scheduled to inaugurate the Vibrant Gujarat Regional Conference in Rajkot.

"Modi will reach the Somnath temple near Veraval on the evening of January 10 as part of the 'Somnath Swabhiman Parv'," state minister and government spokesperson Jitu Vaghani said on Wednesday.

The Swabhiman Parv is being celebrated to mark the resilience of Indian civilisation, symbolised by the rebuilding of the Somnath temple, which was repeatedly ravaged by foreign invaders beginning with Mahmud of Ghazni's attack nearly 1,000 years ago. Year-long celebrations are being organised at the Lord Shiva temple located on the Arabian Sea coast in Gujarat's Saurashtra region. "After his arrival in Somnath, the prime minister will attend a drone



show at the temple premises and chair a meeting of the Shree Somnath Trust in his capacity as its chairman," Vaghani told reporters.

On January 11, Modi will offer prayers at the temple, garland the statue of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel near the shrine, and lead the grand 'Shaurya Yatra' featuring 108 horses to the venue of his public address in the afternoon.

Following the event, he will travel to Rajkot to inaugurate the Vibrant Gujarat Regional Conference (VGRC) for the Kutch and Saurashtra regions,

an official said.

This two-day conference focusing on the Kutch and Saurashtra region will be held between January 11 and 12 on the campus of Marwadi University to highlight the emerging economic, industrial and cultural opportunities in the two regions.

Later on January 11, Modi will visit the Sabarmati Ashram, which is currently undergoing major renovation and expansion.

On the morning of January 12, Modi will receive German Chancellor Friedrich Merz in Ahmedabad. The two leaders will jointly visit the Sabarmati Ashram, where Mahatma Gandhi lived during the freedom struggle, and participate in the International Kite Festival at the Sabarmati Riverfront.

The prime minister will then travel by metro from the Old High Court station in Ahmedabad to Mahatma Mandir in Gandhinagar to mark the inauguration of a newly built metro stretch from Sachivalaya to Mahatma Mandir, said the official.

In the evening, Modi and Merz will hold delegation-level talks at Mahatma Mandir, followed by a joint press statement.

The MEA had said PM Modi and Chancellor Merz will also engage with business and industry leaders and exchange views on issues of regional and global importance on January 12.

## Amit Shah to inaugurate national IED data platform this week

PTI

New Delhi, Jan 07: Union Home Minister Amit Shah is expected to launch an NSG-made national IED data management platform this week, officials said.

The portal has been developed by the National Security Guard, a federal counter-terrorist commando force.

The ambitious project had been in the works for some time now and would be a part of the forces' National Bomb Data Centre (NBDC) that analyses all types of bombings that take place in the country, and some of the major ones abroad.

The national IED data management system (NIDMS) will be a digital platform developed by the NBDC for systematic collection, collation, and dissemination of IED-related data, supporting post-blast investigations and a common understanding among state police forces, central paramilitary forces and federal probe and intelligence agencies.

Shah is expected to launch the platform on January 9, officials said.

Raised in 1984, the NSG's 'black cat' commandos are tasked to undertake specific counter-terrorist and counter-hijack operations besides protecting select high-risk VIPs.



## Silver jumps Rs 5,000 to hit fresh peak of Rs 2.56 lakh per kg in Delhi markets



**The white metal closed at Rs 2,51,000 per kilogram on Tuesday. Traders said that escalating tensions between the US and Venezuela have boosted safe-haven appeal, while supply-side constraints and strong industrial usage further amplified the silver prices.**

PTI

New Delhi, Jan 07: Silver prices surged by Rs 5,000 to hit a new record of Rs 2,56,000 per kilogram in the national capital on Wednesday, amid strong safe-haven demand and robust industrial buying, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The white metal closed at Rs 2,51,000 per kilogram on Tuesday. Traders said that escalating tensions between the US and Venezuela have boosted safe-haven appeal, while supply-side constraints and strong industrial usage further amplified the silver prices.

"Silver prices were also driven by sustained buying by the investors and China's export curbs on silver that came into effect from January 1," an expert said.

Meanwhile, the price of gold of 99.9 per cent purity slipped marginally by Rs 100 to Rs 1,41,400 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes), compared to the previous close of Rs 1,41,500 per 10 grams.

"Gold prices experienced a slight decline on

Wednesday as investors took profits following a recent rally," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

He added that a recovery in the US dollar also weighed on gold prices, though persistent geopolitical risks continue to support safe-haven demand for precious metals, which is limiting sharp downside.

In the international market, spot gold fell by USD 45.22, or 1.01 per cent, to USD 4,449.87 per ounce.

Spot silver was trading lower by USD 2.55, or 3.15 per cent, to USD 78.69 per ounce. During the session, the white metal climbed by USD 1.45, or 1.8 per cent, to hit an intraday high of USD 82.75 per ounce in the overseas trade.

Renisha Chainani, Head - Research at Augmont, said, "We could see some profit booking from here, but when it breaks the previous top again, the next level to watch for is USD 84 (Rs 2,66,000 per kg) and USD 88.5 (Rs 2,80,000 per kg)."

# Researchers develop AI model that predicts disease risk from sleep data

PTI

New Delhi, Jan 07: Researchers have developed an artificial intelligence model that can predict one's risk of developing over a hundred different health conditions using sleep data.

The AI system, described in a paper in the journal Nature Medicine, was initially tested on standard tasks involving sleep analysis, such as tracking different stages of sleep or diagnosing severity of sleep apnoea.

The model was then used to predict the future onset of disease by analysing sleep data, with health record data sourced from a sleep clinic.

More than 1,000 disease categories in the health records were looked at and 130 could be predicted with reasonable accuracy using a patient's sleep data, the researchers said. "We record an



amazing number of signals when we study sleep. It's a kind of general physiology that we study for eight hours in a subject who's completely captive. It's very data rich" senior author Emmanuel Mignot, professor in sleep medicine at Stanford University's department of psychiatry and behavioural sciences, said.

Polysomnography — considered the gold standard in sleep

studies — is a common means of collecting sleep data that uses sensors to record brain activity, heart function, respiratory signals and eye movements, among other aspects.

The AI model was able to incorporate multiple streams of data — such as electroencephalography (electrical activity of brain), electrocardiography, electro-

myography (electrical activity of muscles), pulse reading and breathing airflow — and glean how they relate to each other, the researchers said.

The team developed a new technique for training the AI, called 'leave-one-out' contrastive learning. This essentially hides one modality or stream of data and challenges the model to reconstruct the missing piece based on the other signals.

The AI system's predictions were found to be particularly strong for cancer, pregnancy complications, circulatory conditions and mental disorders, achieving a 'C-index' score higher than 0.8.

C-index, or concordance index, is a common measure of an AI's predictive performance — specifically, its ability to predict which of any two individuals in a group will experience an event first, the

researchers said.

"From one night of sleep, SleepFM accurately predicts 130 conditions with a C-index of at least 0.75, including all-cause mortality (C-index, 0.84), dementia (0.85), myocardial infarction (0.81), heart failure (0.80), chronic kidney disease (0.79), stroke (0.78) and atrial fibrillation (0.78)," the authors wrote.

"Although performance varies across categories, SleepFM demonstrates strong results in several areas, including neoplasms (tumours), pregnancy complications, circulatory conditions and mental disorders," they said.

Strong performance of the AI model was also seen in predicting risk of Parkinson's disease — in which sleep conditions are considered among the early indicators — and developmental delays and disorders.



## Iran army chief threatens preemptive attack over 'rhetoric' targeting country after Trump's comments

AP

Dubai, Jan 07: Iran's army chief threatened preemptive military action Wednesday over the "rhetoric" targeting the Islamic Republic, likely referring to US President Donald Trump's warning that if Tehran "violently kills peaceful protesters," America "will come to their rescue".

The comments by Maj Gen Amir Hatami come as Iran tries to respond to what it sees as a dual threat posed by Israel and the United States, as well as the protests sparked by its economic woes that have grown into a direct challenge to its theocracy.

Seeking to halt the anger, Iran's government began Wednesday paying the equivalent of \$7 a month to subsidize rising costs for dinner-table essentials like rice, meat and pastas.

Shopkeepers warn prices for items as basic as cooking oil likely will triple under pressure from the collapse of Iran's rial currency and the end of a preferential subsidised dollar-rial exchange rate for importers and manufacturers, likely fuelling further popular anger.

"More than a week of protests in Iran reflects not only worsening economic conditions, but longstanding anger at government repression and regime policies that have led to Iran's global isolation," the New York-based Soufan Center think tank



said. Hatami spoke to military academy students. He took over as commander-in-chief of the Iran's army, known by the Farsi word "Artesh", after Israel killed a slew of the country's top military commanders in June's 12-day war.

He is the first regular military officer in decades to hold a position long controlled by Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard.

"The Islamic Republic considers the intensification of such rhetoric against the Iranian nation as a threat and will not leave its continuation without a response," Hatami said, according to the state-run IRNA news agency.

He added, "I can say with confidence that today the readiness of Iran's armed forces is far greater than before the war. If the enemy commits an error, it will face a more decisive response, and

we will cut off the hand of any aggressor."

Iranian officials including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei have been responding to Trump's comments, which took on more significance after the US military raid that seized Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, a longtime ally of Tehran, over the weekend.

But there's been no immediate public sign of Iran preparing for an attack in the region.

Iranian state television reported on the start of a new subsidy of the equivalent of \$7, put into the bank accounts of heads of households across the country. More than 71 million people will receive the benefit, which is 10 million Iranian rials, it reported. The rial now trades at over 1.4 million to \$1 and continues to depreciate.

The subsidy is more than

double than the 4.5 million rial people previously received. But already, Iranian media report sharp rises in the cost of basic goods, including cooking oil, poultry and cheese, placing additional strain on households already burdened by international sanctions targeting the country and inflation.

Iran's vice president in charge of executive affairs, Mohammad Jafar Ghaempanah, told reporters Wednesday that the country was in a "full-fledged economic war".

He called for "economic surgery" to eliminate rentier policies and corruption within the country.

Iran has faced rounds of nationwide protests in recent years. As sanctions tightened and Iran struggled after the June war with Israel, its rial currency sharply fell in December.

Protests began soon after on Dec 28. They reached their 11th day on Wednesday and did not appear to be stopping.

The US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency offered the latest death toll of 36 for the demonstrations. It said 30 protesters, four children and two members of Iran's security forces have been killed. Demonstrations have reached over 280 locations in 27 of Iran's 31 provinces.

The group, which relies on an activist network inside of Iran for its reporting, has been accurate in past unrest.

## PM Modi speaks to Israel's Netanyahu

Both resolve to fight terror with greater determination

PTI

New Delhi, Jan 07: Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday discussed ways to further strengthen their strategic partnership.

In a post on X, Modi said they also reaffirmed their shared resolve to fight terrorism with greater determination.

"Glad to speak with my friend, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and convey New Year greetings to him and the people of Israel," Modi said.

"We discussed ways to further strengthen the India-Israel Strategic Partnership in the year ahead," he said.

Modi said they also exchanged views on the regional situation.



## Denmark, Greenland seek talks with Rubio after White House says again it wants island



AP

Copenhagen, Jan 07: Denmark and Greenland are seeking a meeting with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio after the Trump administration doubled down on its intention to take over the strategic Arctic island, a Danish territory.

Tensions escalated after the White House said Tuesday that the "US military is always an option", even as a series of European leaders rejected President Donald Trump's renewed calls for the US to take over Greenland, citing strategic reasons.

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen warned earlier this week that a US takeover would amount to the end of the NATO military alliance.

"The Nordics do not lightly make statements like this," Maria Martisiute, a defence analyst at the European Policy Centre think tank, told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

"But it is Trump, whose very bombastic language bordering on direct threats and intimidation, is threatening the fact to another ally by saying 'I will control or annex the territory'."

The leaders of France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain and the UK joined Frederiksen in a statement Tuesday reaffirming that the mineral-rich

island "belongs to its people".

Their statement defended the sovereignty of Greenland, which is a self-governing territory of Denmark and thus part of NATO.

Trump has floated since his first term the idea of acquiring Greenland, arguing that the US needs to control the world's largest island to ensure its own security in the face of rising threats from China and Russia in the Arctic.

This weekend's US military action in Venezuela has heightened fears across Europe, and Trump and his advisers in recent days have reiterated the US leader's desire to take over the island, which guards the Arctic and North Atlantic approaches to North America.

"It's so strategic right now," Trump told reporters Sunday.

Danish Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen and his Greenlandic counterpart, Vivian Motzfeldt, have requested the meeting with Rubio in the near future, according to a statement posted Tuesday to Greenland's government website. Previous requests for a sit-down were not successful, the statement said.

While most US Republicans have supported Trump's statement, Senators Jeanne Shaheen and Thom Tillis, the Democratic and Republican co-chairs of the bipartisan Senate NATO Observer Group, blasted Trump's rhetoric in a statement Tuesday.

"When Denmark and Greenland make it clear that Greenland is not for sale, the United States must honour its treaty obligations and respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Kingdom of Denmark," the statement said.

"Any suggestion that our nation would subject a fellow NATO ally to coercion or external pressure undermines the very principles of self-determination that our Alliance exists to defend."

French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot said he spoke by phone Tuesday with Rubio, who dismissed the idea of a Venezuela-style operation in Greenland.

### China announces another new trade measure against Japan as tensions rise



AP

Beijing, Jan 07: China escalated its trade tensions with Japan on Wednesday by launching an investigation into imported dichlorosilane, a chemical gas used in making semiconductors, a day after it imposed curbs on the export of so-called dual-use goods that could be used by Japan's military.

The Chinese Commerce Ministry said in a statement that it had launched the investigation following an application from the domestic industry showing the price of dichlorosilane imported from Japan had decreased 31% between 2022 and 2024."The dumping of imported products from Japan has damaged the production and operation of our domestic industry," the ministry said.The measure comes a day after Beijing banned exports to Japan of dual-use goods that can have military applications.

Beijing has been showing mounting displeasure with Tokyo after new Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi suggested late last year that her nation's military could intervene if China were to take action against Taiwan — an island democracy that Beijing considers its own territory.

Tensions were stoked again on Tuesday when Japanese lawmaker Hei Seki, who last year was sanctioned by China for "spreading fallacies" about Taiwan and other disputed territories, visited Taiwan and called it an independent country.

Also known as Yo Kitano, he has been banned from entering China. He told reporters that his arrival in Taiwan demonstrated the two are "different countries".

"I came to Taiwan... to prove this point, and to tell the world that Taiwan is an independent country," Hei Seki said, according to Taiwan's Central News Agency. "The nasty words of a petty villain like him are not worth commenting on," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning retorted when asked about his comment.

Masaaki Kanai, head of Asia Oceanian Affairs at Japan's Foreign Ministry, urged China to scrap the trade curbs, saying a measure exclusively targeting Japan that deviates from international practice is unacceptable. Japan, however, has yet to announce any retaliatory measures.

## ICC willing to work with us to address security concerns on playing in India: BCB

PTI

Dhaka, Jan 07: The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) on Wednesday said the ICC is "willing to work closely" with it to address "security concerns" around the team's participation in the T20 World Cup in India even though its demand for a change of venue has not yet been accepted.

The T20 World Cup starts on February 7 and Bangladesh are due to play their four games in Kolkata and Mumbai.

"In its communication, the ICC has reiterated its commitment to ensuring the full and uninterrupted participation of the Bangladesh team in the tournament," the BCB said in a statement. "The ICC has conveyed its willingness to work closely with the



BCB to address the concerns raised and has assured that the Board's inputs will be welcomed and duly considered as part of the detailed security planning for the event," it added. BCB president Aminul Islam and government Asif Nazrul addressed a press conference after the board issued the statement on the sensitive subject.

Both reiterated their

stance on why they are not comfortable with the team's travel to India. Azrul was more vocal than BCB president Aminul.

"So far, we have very clearly taken this decision that we will make the ICC understand that we do not have an environment suitable for playing in India. This will be conveyed tonight or by tomorrow morning.

## Sindhu, Satwik-Chirag make winning start at Malaysia Open



PTI

Kuala Lumpur, Jan 07: Returning from a prolonged injury lay-off, PV Sindhu began the new season on a winning note along with the formidable men's doubles pair of Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy as they entered the second round of the Malaysia Open Super 1000 badminton tournament here on Wednesday.

The 30-year-old former world champion, who had opted to withdraw from all BWF World Tour events in October last year to recover from a foot injury, defeated Chinese Taipei's Sung Shuo Yun 21-14, 22-20 in a 51-minutes showdown of the women's singles opening round.

The 18th-ranked Sindhu showed no signs of discomfort as she overcame the lower-ranked Sung for

the second time to take her head-to-head to 2-0 and set up a round-of-16 clash with world No.9 Tomoka Miyazaki of Japan.

Miyazaki, a 2022 world junior champion, advanced after her 10th-ranked opponent, Sim Yu Jin of South Korea, retired hurt when the Japanese was leading 21-19, 1-2.

Sindhu has a 1-1 record against Miyazaki, whom she beat in the 2025 China Masters during their last meeting. Later, Satwik and Chirag, the former World No.1 pair, saw off Chinese Taipei's Yang Po-Hsuan and Lee Jhe-Hue 21-13 21-15 in 35 minutes to also enter the pre-quarterfinals.

The Asian Games champions, who had reached the semifinals of the season-ending BWF World Tour Finals in December, will face Malaysia's Junaidi Arif and Roy King Yap.

### Movies Schedule

Thursday, 8<sup>th</sup> January

**DHURANDHAR (A)**  
HINDI - 02:15 PM, 04:50 PM, 06:15 PM  
HINDI ATMOS - 11:45 AM

**IKKIS (U/A 13+)**  
HINDI - 11:20 AM, 01:50 PM

**TU MERI MAIN TERA MAIN TERA TU MERI**  
(U/A 16+) HINDI - 11:00 AM

**AVATAR: FIRE AND ASH (UA 16+)**  
3D HINDI - 04:00 PM

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