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Turn varsities into powerhouses of ideas, talent: LG Manoj Sinha

Chairs 89th meeting of JU's University Council

Says institutions must set benchmarks for innovation, research

Calls for incorporating AI, cutting-edge IT technologies

KNO Desk

Jammu, Jan 16: Asserting that universities should become powerhouses of ideas, talent and ready to solve real-world problems, Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Friday called upon the varsity administrations to look beyond degrees and transform the campuses into epicentres of creative solutions.

Chairing the 89th meeting of the University Council of the University of Jammu at Lok Bhawan here, LG Sinha, according to the news agency—Kashmir



News Observer (KNO), said, "Universities must set benchmarks for innovation and research and make regular revision of courses to incorporate Artificial Intelligence (AI) and cutting-edge IT technologies."

The Lieutenant Governor said that it's time for universities to step-up and lead innovation, building Skills and solving society's toughest challenges.

He directed the University of Jammu for collaboration with financial | More on P6

Artists, GenZ entrepreneurs will forge India's future together: LG Sinha

KT News Desk
and developed society, Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha said on Friday. He was speaking at the valedictory session of International Painting Workshop, organised by Anandam: The Centre of Happiness and the Art Club at IIM Jammu. In his | More on P6

Jammu, Jan 16: "Artists and GenZ Entrepreneurs will forge India's future together. Art and business alliance is a unique power and Imagination and Investment will be able to build a vibrant

LG, CM greet people on Shab-e-Meraj

KT News Desk

Jammu, Jan 16: Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha and Chief Minister Omar Abdullah extended their greetings to the people on the auspicious occasion of Shab-e-Meraj.

In a message, the Lieutenant Governor has said: "On the auspicious occasion of Shab-e-Meraj, I convey my greetings and best wishes to all. May this pious occasion guide us on the path of harmony and kindness. I pray for good health, happiness and prosperity for all."

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah conveyed his warm greetings to the people of Jammu and Kashmir on the auspicious occasion of Shab-e-Meraj-un-Nabi (PBUH), which commemorates the miraculous night journey and ascension of | More on P6

Our goal is to lead world in startup trends, tech in coming years: PM Modi



The PM said he has full faith in confidence, courage and innovation of startups and entrepreneurs in India, and noted that the nation's future is taking shape.

He said the time has come for startups to also focus on

manufacturing and research. Today's research becomes tomorrow's intellectual property, the PM said.

On the India startup success story, Modi said several schemes have been rolled out to provide | More on P6

CM Omar for stronger partnership with travel fraternity to promote J&K tourism



KT News Desk

Mumbai, Jan 16: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Friday addressed leading stakeholders from the travel and trade sector in Mumbai, calling upon them to partner with the government in promoting Jammu & Kashmir as a safe, vibrant and all-season tourism destination.

Addressing travel agents, tour operators and representatives of travel associations from Maharashtra and Gujarat, the Chief Minister underlined that the

KT News Desk
CM explores collaboration opportunities during Mumbai visit

outreach was not about selling the destination, but about strengthening trust and partnership.

"Today I have not come to promote Jammu and Kashmir tourism. I have not come to sell J&K as a tourist destination amongst you. Today I have not come to talk about the beauty of J&K. As much as I know about the beauty of Kashmir, you also know it."

the Chief Minister said, while stressing the long-standing bond between Jammu & Kashmir and the travel fraternity of | More on P6

Mumbai, Jan 16: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah visited the Indian Institute of Creative Technologies (IITC) campus at the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC), Mumbai, on January 15, to explore avenues | More on P6

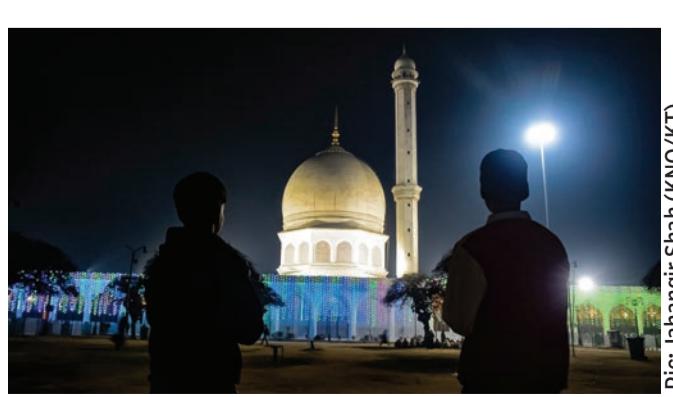
Shab-e-Meraj observed with fervour 'Moi-e-Muqqadas' to be displayed after five prayers today at Dargah Hazratbal

Rehan Qayoom Mir

Srinagar, Jan 16: Kashmir Valley glowed last night with the warmth of faith and devotion.

From the shores of Hazratbal to the narrow lanes of old city Srinagar, thousands of homes are lit with hope and reverence as the Valley observes Shab-e-Meraj - the blessed night that marks Prophet Muhammad's (Peace Be Upon Him) Divine journey from Makkah to the heavens.

It is a night when believers bow with humility, their hearts filled with gratitude for the



Pic: Jahangir Shah (KNO/KT)

divine gift of five daily prayers bestowed upon humanity on this sacred occasion.

At the centre of this devotion in Kashmir lies the beautiful Dargah Hazratbal, | More on P6

Centre- Ladakh talks to resume on Feb 4 in New Delhi

MoS Home Nityanand Rai to chair -powered committee meeting

KNO Special Correspondent

Srinagar, Jan 16: The high-powered committee (HPC) constituted by the Union Home Ministry to deliberate on the issues of the Ladakh Union Territory is set to meet in the first week of February in New Delhi under the chairmanship of Minister of State for Home, Nityanand Rai.

The Union Home Ministry has convened the HPC meeting on February 4 at 4:00 PM in New Delhi, according to the meeting notice issued

by Ruchika Katyal, Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs and Member Secretary of the HPC, a copy of which is in possession of news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO).

The meeting assumes significance as it is the first HPC session after the Leh Apex Body (LAB) and the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) submitted a 29-page draft proposal to the Ministry of Home Affairs, seeking statehood, Sixth Schedule status for Ladakh, and amnesty for people arrested after the September 24, 2025 protests.

On September 24, 2025, Leh erupted in protests over demands for statehood and constitutional safeguards on the 15th day of a | More on P6

'Threat' from New Zealand imports J&K Govt conveys apple growers' concerns to Centre

KNO Special Correspondent

Srinagar, Jan 16: In a significant move, the Jammu & Kashmir Government has conveyed the concerns and apprehensions of fruit growers in Kashmir over the free trade agreement signed between India and New Zealand to the Union Government.

Talking to news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), Minister for Rural Development and Horticulture, Javid Ahmad Dar, currently in New Delhi, said that he has personally raised the growers' apprehensions with Union Agriculture

Minister Shivraj Chouhan.

"The Union Minister assured me that farmers' interests will be protected and remain their top priority," Dar told KNO.

Dar added that the Omar Abdullah-led government is committed to safeguarding the interests of fruit growers and farmers of J&K.

The Government of India's decision to lower import tariffs on apples from New Zealand has caused concern among apple growers in Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, who fear that cheaper imports could destabilize | More on P6

Chief Secretary reviews 2026 sports, youth engagement calendar for J&K

Mega sports calendar to engage over 40 lakh youth across J&K

KT NEWS DESK

JAMMU, JANUARY 16: The Department of Youth Services & Sports (DYSS) Friday presented a comprehensive and ambitious roadmap for youth engagement before Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo, outlining a year-long calendar of sports, fitness, cultural and youth-centric activities aimed at fostering holistic development, social participation and sporting excellence across the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir.

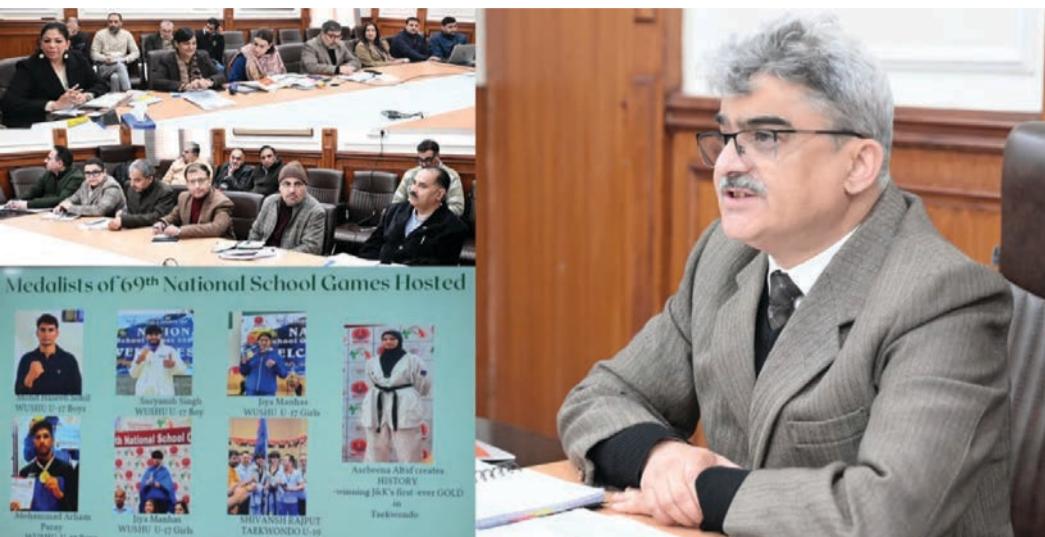
The high-level meeting, as per an official statement, was attended by Principal Secretary, Culture, Brij Mohan Sharma; Commissioner Secretary, Youth Services & Sports, YashaMudgal; Director General, YSS&S; Secretary, J&K Sports Council; representatives of the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, Government of India; School Education and Higher Education Departments, besides other concerned officers.

Emphasizing effective execution, the Chief Secretary directed the Department to ensure time-bound and outcome-oriented implementation of the activity calendars framed by the Directorate of Youth Services & Sports and the J&K Sports Council.

Principal Secretary, Culture, Brij Mohan Sharma informed the meeting that the Department is developing an inclusive and impact-driven roadmap in line with the Chief Secretary's vision, ensuring outreach across the length and breadth of the Union Territory.

Commissioner Secretary, Youth Services & Sports, YashaMudgal apprised the meeting of reinvigorated sports and activity-based calendars prepared by the Directorate of Sports and the J&K Sports Council, aimed at large-scale youth engagement across schools and panchayats. She highlighted the Department's proactive engagement with national and international sports bodies to host major events in J&K, supported by ongoing and proposed infrastructure upgrades. She also emphasized the need for additional trainers, coaches and allied human resources to strengthen service delivery across districts.

Director General, Youth Services & Sports, Anuradha Gupta detailed the Directorate's institutionalized five-tier tournament framework, beginning with intramural school-level competitions and culminating in national and international representation. This pyramid structure ensures mass participation, systematic talent identification and progression. Annually, over 15.39 lakh students participate at the intramural level, followed by 4.40 lakh at inter-school zonal level, 0.93 lakh at inter-zone district level, 0.18 lakh at provincial/UT championships and around 2,500 athletes representing J&K at the National School Games.



calendar of high-impact UT-level events, complemented by regular district and school-level programmes, to provide platforms for youth to showcase talent in performing and creative arts. He further advised hosting national-level competitions across art forms to recognize and nurture creative excellence.

Emphasizing effective execution, the Chief Secretary directed the Department to ensure time-bound and outcome-oriented implementation of the activity calendars framed by the Directorate of Youth Services & Sports and the J&K Sports Council. He underscored the need to focus on measurable physical and sporting achievements and called for hosting national and international sporting events across disciplines to create visibility, enthusiasm and momentum among the youth. He also stressed robust information and awareness campaigns before and during events to maximize outreach and participation.

The Chief Secretary further advised the Department to optimally leverage funds available under SASCI, Ministry of Sports schemes and Capex allocations to upgrade sports infrastructure to modern standards. He emphasized that both infrastructure and events must meet high-quality benchmarks to nurture elite sportspersons. He also directed that sporting and recreational activities be evenly distributed across all districts to ensure equal opportunities for aspiring youth.

Highlighting digital empowerment, the Chief Secretary underscored the need for an online benchmarking and athlete-tracking platform. He directed the Department to scale registrations on the My BHARAT portal from the current 5.5 lakh to at least 20 lakh, while ensuring continuous creation of events on both the My BHARAT and Fit India portals. He emphasized automated alerts to registered youth for wider participation.

The Chief Secretary also stressed integrating cultural activities as a core societal component alongside sports. He called upon the Culture Department to frame a year-round

calendar of high-impact UT-level events, complemented by regular district and school-level programmes, to provide platforms for youth to showcase talent in performing and creative arts. He further advised hosting national-level competitions across art forms to recognize and nurture creative excellence.

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a strong upward trajectory in youth participation, with over 36.45 lakh participants engaged during 2025-26 (till December 2025) across sports and non-sports activities. Between April and December 2025, major sports events across disciplines engaged 20.55 lakh youth, while non-sports and social initiatives such as plantation drives, Nasha Mukt Bharat, International Yoga Day and National Unity Day engaged 15.89 lakh participants.

DYSS informed that J&K athletes have achieved notable success nationally and internationally. At the 69th National School Games, J&K emerged as Overall National Champions in Taekwondo with 11 Gold, 9 Silver and 18 Bronze medals, besides a Bronze in Football. Internationally, Nasir Ejaz Sufi of Baramulla contributed to India's Bronze medal win at the ISF World School Games in China. Achievements of Aarbeena Altaf, J&K's first-ever Taekwondo Gold medalist, and Sheetal Devi of Kishtwar, the youngest Indian Paralympian medalist at Paris 2024, were highlighted as inspirational milestones.

Beyond competitive sports, DYSS showcased initiatives promoting creativity, innovation and civic engagement. Open Mic programmes across districts culminated in the mega cultural event "Dastaan-e-Mic", while digital outreach was strengthened through the inspirational podcast "Khel Khel Mein". Volunteering has been reinforced through the My BHARAT portal and J&K Bharat Scouts & Guides, with over 5.5 lakh registered volunteers and 15,189 Scouts & Guides actively engaged in sports, youth festivals and social campaigns.

A key pillar of the roadmap is the creation of a comprehensive digital athlete ecosystem, targeting over 20 lakh player registrations. The proposed system will feature unique Sports IDs, performance dashboards, DigiLocker-linked certificates, Aadhaar-based authentication and real-time tracking of athlete progression from grassroots to

elite levels. Strategic collaborations with institutions such as Dani Foundation and CSC-SPV were highlighted, alongside emphasis on coach education, sports science and capacity building under the Human Resource Development in Sports Scheme. DYSS also proposed establishing a world-class Sports Science and Injury Centre in J&K with support from the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports.

Secretary, J&K Sports Council, Nuzhat Gul presented a result-oriented roadmap, revealing that against a target of 37.50 lakh youth engagement for 2025-26, the Sports Council has already engaged 29.75 lakh youth till December 2025. With an additional 8 lakh youth expected between January and March 2026, total engagement is projected at 37.75 lakh, surpassing the annual target.

She detailed a series of flagship leagues and events scheduled for January-March 2026, including Jammu Cyclotron, Football and Cricket Premier Cups, South Kashmir Volleyball League, Snow Festivals at major winter destinations and the 6th Edition of Khelo India Winter Games 2026 at Gulmarg and Srinagar in February, featuring participation from 31 States and UTs.

During the January-March 2026 quarter, the Sports Council will conduct 364 activities, including one national event, 20 UT-level championships, five major leagues and 338 community-based programmes, engaging around 8 lakh youth across 50 disciplines.

The Chief Secretary appreciated the comprehensive, data-driven and inclusive approach adopted by the Department and reiterated the need for sustained engagement, transparency and outcome-based implementation. The presentation reaffirmed the Government's commitment to nurturing talent, promoting fitness, strengthening social cohesion and empowering youth as key stakeholders in the Union Territory's development journey.

CBI arrests Patwari, Chowkidar while accepting bribe in Anantnag

KT NEWS DESK

Srinagar, JANUARY 16: The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has arrested two public servants—one Patwari, Revenue Department, Halqa Soaf Shali, Kokernag, Anantnag and one Chowkidar, Halqa Soaf Shali, Kokernag while accepting a bribe of Rs.15,000/- from the complainant.

The CBI, as per PIB statement issued on Friday, registered the instant case on 15.01.2026 against the accused Patwari. It was alleged that the accused public servant demanded bribe of Rs. 30,000 for demarcation of land of the complainant.

The CBI laid trap on 15.01.2026 and caught the accused Patwari along with the middleman Chowkidar, another public servant, red-handed while accepting the bribe amount of Rs.15,000 from the complainant. The aforesaid accused persons have been arrested.

DC Srinagar felicitates J&K Deaf Cricket Team for National title win

KT NEWS DESK

Srinagar, JANUARY 16: Deputy Commissioner (DC) Srinagar, Akshay Labroo Friday felicitated the J&K Deaf Cricket Team, for winning the Indian Deaf Cricket Association (IDCA) 4th Test National Cricket Championship for Deaf here in his Office Chamber.

The Deputy Commissioner, as per an official statement, congratulated the team members for winning IDCA 4th Test National Cricket Championship . He

commended the players for their dedication, teamwork and exceptional performance throughout the tournament and highlighted the growing prominence and achievements of sportspersons with special abilities in the sporting arena.

The Jammu & Kashmir Deaf Cricket Team emerged as winners of the championship, which was held from 3rd to 9th November 2025. The national-level tournament featured four teams from across the country and the remarkable

performance of the J&K team earned them the top position, bringing honour to Jammu and Kashmir.

The players who met the Deputy Commissioner on the occasion included Riyaz Ahmad Tramboo, Muzaffar Ahmad, Mohammad Shafi Kasha, and Munakib Majeed Bakshi.

The DC wished the team continued success in their future endeavours and assured them of all possible support for the promotion of sports among specially abled sportspersons.

DC Baramulla reviews anti-drug measures at NCORD Meeting

KT NEWS DESK

BARAMULLA, JANUARY 16: District Magistrate Baramulla, Minga Sherpa, Friday chaired the 24th meeting of the Narco Coordination Centre (NCORD) at the Meeting Hall, Baramulla, to review the implementation of measures aimed at curbing drug abuse and illicit trafficking in the district.

During the meeting, the DC, as per an official statement, underscored the importance of collective, coordinated, and sustained efforts by all stakeholders to effectively eliminate the drug menace from society. He directed the concerned departments to expedite

preventive and enforcement measures at identified drug-prone locations.

The District Magistrate further directed that all pending works related to the Drug De-addiction Centre at Sopore be completed by January 31. He also set January 20 as the deadline for completing surveillance-related measures at identified hotspots to strengthen monitoring and enforcement.

Emphasizing prevention as a key pillar in the fight against drug abuse, the DC called for intensified awareness campaigns in schools, colleges, and public spaces to sensitize the youth about the harmful consequences of substance abuse.

Deputy CM Surinder Choudhary extends Shab-e-Meraj (SAW) greetings

KT NEWS DESK

JAMMU, JANUARY 16: The Deputy Chief Minister, Surinder Choudhary, Friday extended his warm greetings to the people, especially the Muslim community, on the auspicious occasion of Shab-e-Meraj.

The Deputy Chief Minister, as per an official statement, said that Shab-e-Meraj holds profound religious and spiritual significance, marking the sacred night of divine blessings.

He noted that the occasion inspires faith and humility with the Almighty and uphold the values of compassion, patience and service to humanity.

He expressed hope that this sacred occasion brings peace, prosperity, inner strength and harmony, and further strengthens the spirit of unity and mutual respect to every household Jammu and Kashmir. Highlighting



the rich tradition of communal harmony in Jammu and Kashmir, the Deputy Chief Minister said that the people of J&K have always stood united, celebrating festivals and auspicious occasions across religious and community lines.

He emphasized that this shared culture of brotherhood and coexistence is the true strength of Jammu and Kashmir.

GOVERNMENT OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, MECHANICAL IRRIGATION DIVISION SRINAGAR, NEAR J&K BANK(ZALDAGAR)

Telefax No. 0194-2952696 e-mail id: to-exenmidsrinagar@jk.gov.in

Sub: - Extension in bidding time for e-NIT No. 34 OF 2025-26, Dated: 22-12-2025 for below mentioned work: Revamping / Modernization of Marval Lift Irrigation Scheme, Pulwama.

Ref: - JK Government official e-Procurement portal Tender ID No.: - 2025_IFC_298835_1

EXTENSION NOTICE 2

Due to No response the tender deadline is hereby extended by 10 days. The critical dates are extended as under:

Bid submission/ Document download / sale end Date	27/01/2026 at 1400 hrs
Date and time of Bid opening	28/01/2026 at 1200 hrs

Rest of the terms and conditions shall remain un-altered as laid down in the original

e-NIT.

Sd/-

Executive Engineer,
Mechanical Irrigation Division
Srinagar

No. MIDS/Ts/4943-4965
Dated: -16-01-2025 DIPK-10124/25
DATED: 16-01-2026

GOVERNMENT OF JAMMU & KASHMIR (U T) OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER MACHINERY DIVISION KASHMIR, MECHANICAL & HOSPITAL ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT, KASHMIR.

Corrigendum 01 for Date extension

Name of work: - Re-development of Bore well 113 (Checki Chadoora) in district Budgam under National Saffron Mission

Reference: - This office e-NIT No.: - MDSK/TS /2025-26/84 Date:06-01-2026

(Tender ID: 2025_PWDJK_299965_1)

Due to no response, the critical dates of the above referred e-NIT is extended as under:

S.No.	Description	Previous Dates	New Dates.
01.	Last date of download/ submission of bids	15-01-2026 upto 06:55PM	29-01-2026 upto 06:55PM
02.	Date of opening of bids online	16-01-2026 at 02:00 PM	30-01-2026 at 02:00 PM

All other terms, conditions and specifications as stipulated in the e-NIT shall remain unchanged.

Sd/-
Executive Engineer
Machinery Division, Kashmir.

No: MDSK/TS/5472-75 Date: 16-01-2026. DIPK-10118/25
DATED: 16-01-2026

Government of Jammu & Kashmir (U T) OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER MACHINERY DIVISION KASHMIR, MECHANICAL & HOSPITAL ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT, KASHMIR.

CORRIGENDUM 07 FOR DATE EXTENSION

Name of work: - Restoring functionality through repairs / maintenance of 8 No. Bore Wells (17,19,54,58,60,61,91 and 96 (under priority-1) Culuster-2) of department of Agriculture in District Pulwama under implementation of National Mission of Saffron

Reference: - This office e-NIT No.: - MDSK/TS /2025-26/54 Date:29-10-2025

(Tender ID: 2025_PWDJK_293574_1)

Due to no response, the critical dates of the above referred e-NIT is extended as under:

S.No.	Description	Previous Dates	New Dates.
01.	Last date		

Wular Lake welcomes first-ever rare feathered visitors

SAJID RAINA

Srinagar, Jan 16: For the first time, a Tundra Bean Goose has been seen at Wular Lake, marking the species' first documented presence in Kashmir's largest freshwater wetland.

Wildlife officials said that the sighting assumes significance as Wular Lake continues to host the highest number of migratory birds in the Valley due to its vast area and favourable ecological conditions. "Lakhs of migratory birds have already arrived at the wetland this season, with numbers expected to increase further in the coming weeks," they added.

An official associated with bird monitoring



at Wular said the Wildlife Department, Forest Protection Force, Wular Management Authority and Jammu and Kashmir Police, have put in place coordinated arrangements to ensure protection of migratory birds and their habitat.

"Wular Lake remains the most important wetland in Kashmir for migratory birds. Protection measures and favourable conditions have helped attract a large number of species every year," the official added.

"Besides the Tundra Bean Goose, several rare bird species have been recorded at Wular in recent years. These include the Smew, Long-tailed Duck, Falcated Duck,

Common Goldeneye, Western Reef Heron, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Short-eared Owl and Chinese Pond Heron," he said.

Another official said that one or two rare species are usually seen at the wetland every year, underlining its importance as a critical wintering ground along the Central Asian Flyway.

"If the present conditions continue, we expect migratory birds to keep returning to Wular Lake in large numbers in the coming years as well," the official added.

Wular Lake, a designated Ramsar site, is considered one of the most significant wetlands in the region for biodiversity conservation and bird migration—(KNO)

Haj 2026 booking deadline extended to Jan 25



REHAN QAYOOM MIR

Srinagar, Jan 16: The Union Ministry of Minority Affairs has extended the deadline for completing Haj 2026 booking formalities through Haj group organisers and private tour operators till January 25, 2026, offering relief to thousands of pilgrims who were struggling to meet the earlier cut-off.

According to an official circular issued by the Haj Division of the Ministry, the extension has been granted in view of multiple representations received from pilgrims and other stakeholders seeking additional time to complete mandatory procedures.

The ministry clarified that the extension is final and has been provided in the larger public interest to avoid inconvenience to pilgrims.

During the extended period, provisionally selected

pilgrims are required to complete all remaining formalities, including finalising the booking process, submitting valid passports to the Haj Committee of India or concerned HGOs and ensuring successful onboarding on the Nasuk Portal within the stipulated timeline.

The advisory also reiterated that pilgrims must verify their registration status, quota allocation and approval of the concerned operators before making any booking, and stressed that bookings should be made only through authorised organisers.

"In view of the requests received and in the larger interest of pilgrims, a final extension has been granted till January 25, 2026. No further extension shall be allowed beyond this date under any circumstances," a senior official at Haj House Srinagar told KNO—(KNO)

3 terrorist hideouts busted in Kathua

YOGESH

Jammu, Jan 16: In a significant anti-terror breakthrough, joint teams of security forces have dismantled three terrorist hideouts in the forest areas of Billawar in Kathua district, officials said on Friday.

The operation began on January 7, 2026, following credible intelligence inputs about the movement of anti-national elements in the forested regions of Kamaad Nallah, Kalaban, and Dhanu Parole," an official said, adding, "Security personnel launched a large-scale search to neutralize the suspected

terrorists. During the initial phase, terrorists opened indiscriminate fire on the forces, triggering nighttime exchanges of fire. Two separate encounters occurred, but the terrorists managed to slip away under the cover of darkness and the challenging terrain."

"On Wednesday, forces discovered the first hideout and recovered several items, including two empty M4 cartridges, a plastic box with desi ghee, a packet of almonds, hand gloves, a cap, a blanket, a tarpaulin sheet, a small pouch, and a polythene bag," he added.

Continued on
www.kashmirthunder.in

JKMC registers 2,381 doctors in 2025

JAHANGEER GANAIE

Srinagar, Jan 16: The Jammu and Kashmir Medical Council (JKMC) has recorded a historic milestone in 2025 by processing a record 2,381 permanent medical registrations, the highest ever in a single year, reflecting a significant expansion of the healthcare workforce and improved regulatory efficiency in the Union Territory.

The number of permanent registrations have witnessed a steady upward trend over the past five years. While 459 registrations were processed in 2021, the figure rose to 931 in 2022, 987 in 2023, and 1,324 in 2024, before registering a massive jump in 2025.

Officials said the 2,381 registrations in 2025 represent an increase of nearly 80 per cent compared to 2024, underlining JKMC's strengthened institutional capacity and its focused efforts to streamline medical registration and professional services.

Breaking down the 2025 figures, JKMC issued 939 Foreign Medical Graduate (FMG) permanent registrations, more than double the 584 registrations recorded in 2024. Additionally, 1,252 permanent registrations were granted to graduates from medical colleges within Jammu and Kashmir.

The Council also processed 190 permanent reciprocal registrations. These include doctors from outside Jammu and Kashmir who visit the UT for professional

services and are mandatorily required to register with JKMC, as well as doctors from across the country selected for PG NEET and DNB courses in medical colleges and institutions of J&K.

Apart from permanent registrations, the Council recorded a sharp rise in allied regulatory services. During 2025, JKMC issued 1,045 additional registrations, reflecting increased professional mobility and demand for credential verification. It also granted 783 No Objection Certificates (NOCs), 231 Good Standing Certificates, and facilitated 125 Continuing Medical Education (CME) credits, aimed at strengthening professional competence and ethical medical practice.

From 2021 to 2025, JKMC handled a total of 6,082 permanent registrations, with 2025 alone contributing nearly 40 per cent of the cumulative five-year figure.

Officials attributed this surge to improved coordination between

the Council's Jammu and Srinagar offices, digitisation of processes, and increased intake of medical professionals in the region.

An official from the Council said the record performance reflects JKMC's resolve to support healthcare delivery by ensuring timely registration and strict adherence to regulatory norms. "Our focus remains on facilitating doctors while ensuring that the highest professional, ethical and regulatory standards are upheld," the official said.

The JKMC reaffirmed its commitment to strengthen medical governance in Jammu and Kashmir and ensuring transparent, efficient and ethical practice. With the growing number of doctors entering the system, the Council said it will continue to enhance its services to meet future healthcare needs of the Union Territory—(KNO)

Sajad Lone's 'divorce' remarks, childish: Dy CM

REHAN QAYOOM MIR

Srinagar, Jan 16: Deputy Chief Minister, Surinder Kumar Choudhary on Friday dismissed People's Conference chairman Sajad Lone's remarks suggesting a "divorce" between Jammu and Kashmir, terming these as "childish talk."

Speaking to reporters in Jammu, the Deputy CM said, "There is no question of separating Jammu and Kashmir. The region is an inseparable entity shaped by generations of leaders and sacrifices."

"I don't understand why there is talk of divorce. This Jammu and Kashmir was created by our elders—whether they were ours or theirs. This is the Jammu and Kashmir of Maharaja Gulab Singh, Maharaja Hari Singh and Sher-e-Kashmir Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah," he said.

The Deputy CM said Jammu and Kashmir has emerged stronger after facing difficult times,

including the 1947 war and external aggression. "By making such childish statements, Jammu and Kashmir will not benefit," he added.

Reacting to demands for a separate Jammu state, he said Jammu has historically raised such issues, but experience shows that division does not work. Referring to the 2019 reorganisation and Ladakh's conversion into a Union Territory, he said people there are protesting even today. "Look at what is happening in Ladakh and Kargil. The experience in front of us shows that this model cannot work," he said.

The Deputy CM said Jammu and Kashmir has emerged stronger after facing difficult times, questioning the economic viability of a separate Jammu state, the Deputy CM asked how its expenses would be met and what revenue would be generated. "Even electricity bills become an issue here. If Jammu is separated, how will expenses be managed and from where will revenue come?" he said.

Sharma said demands for separate institutions should be addressed through dialogue rather than division, citing the bifurcation of Sher-e-Kashmir Agricultural University in 1995–96. "If we want institutions, we can talk about that.

But separating Jammu and Kashmir will finish our civilisation and culture," he said.

Highlighting economic interdependence, the Deputy CM said even a temporary closure of movement had severely impacted Jammu's economy. He said after the reopening of routes following a decision by the Omar Abdullah-led government, economic activity has revived across Jammu. "Businesses, rentals, transport, petrol pumps, dairy and sweet shops all stand benefited. This shows how interconnected our economy is," he said.

The Deputy CM said the real issues facing Jammu and Kashmir relate to development, employment and the aspirations of the youth. "We must ask what the youth and future generations of Jammu and Kashmir want. A few people giving statements for their day-to-day politics will not work," he added—(KNO)

J&K medical students to return from Iran

REHAN QAYOOM MIR

Srinagar, Jan 16: Amid escalating tensions in Iran, around 100 medical students from Jammu and Kashmir are set to return home through commercial flights.

Most students are currently at Shiraz Airport and are travelling to India via Air Arabia flight G9-214 from Shiraz to Sharjah, followed by a connecting Air Arabia flight G9-463 to Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGI), New Delhi. The flight is scheduled to land in Delhi at 2:40 AM.

Another batch of students is departing from Tehran International Airport aboard Mahan Air flight W5-071, which is expected to arrive at IGI Airport at 12:10 AM, sources said.

They said that all students and a significant number of pilgrims are also travelling on the two flights. "The students are expected to arrive in Delhi late tonight and will proceed to Srinagar in morning flights," sources added.

Meanwhile, the Ministry

of External Affairs (MEA) has issued an advisory urging Indian nationals to avoid all travel to Iran and advising those already present there to leave by available means, including commercial flights.

MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal, during the weekly media briefing, said that the situation in Iran is being closely monitored and that the government will take all necessary steps to ensure the welfare of Indian citizens.

Commenting on the developments, Dr Mohammad Momin Khan, Vice President of the Jammu and Kashmir All India Medical Students Association, told KNO that around 100 students from J&K are returning amid growing concerns over safety.

Separately, Nasir Khuehami, President of the Jammu and Kashmir Students Association, said that they are in touch with the officials and the students. "We will personally inform them through official channels if evacuation becomes necessary," he said—(KNO)

Verifying Imams, Mosques shields religious properties: Waqf chairperson

REHAN QAYOOM MIR

Srinagar, Jan 16: Stating that the verification of Imams, Khateeb and mosques is purely administrative to safeguard Waqf assets and dismiss any political motives, the

Jammu & Kashmir Waqf Board Chairperson, Dr Darakhshan Andrabi on Friday dismissed any political motives in the verification of Imams, Khateeb and mosques, terming it a "purely administrative" process to ensure long-term protection of religious properties across the Union Territory.

She appealed to the clerics and mosque committees to cooperate with the administration.

"The verification process is being unnecessarily politicised by certain vested interests. There is absolutely no need for fear or confusion. This exercise is meant to secure our religious and community assets, not to target anyone," Dr Andrabi said, as per the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO).

She said Jammu and Kashmir has emerged among the top UTs in registering Waqf properties under the UMEED Portal launched by the Ministry of Minority Affairs. "We worked tirelessly to ensure transparency. If mosques are part of Waqf assets, they are already registered on the portal," she said.

Dr Darakhshan stressed that documentation and verification are essential to avoid future disputes. "Just as land ownership needs records, religious places too require authentication for their protection," she said, urging Imams, Molvis and mosque management not to panic.

Terminating the spread of fear "unfortunate", she said political elements are attempting to mislead people for their own gains. "This initiative is for the larger good of Jammu and Kashmir and should not be misrepresented or politicised," the Waqf Board chairperson added—(KNO)



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NOTICE

In my Adhar card bearing Adhar no 203134468303, my name has been enrolled as Zamruuda instead of Zamrooda Now I want to apply for it's Correction in this Connection if anybody is having any objection he may file same to the Concerned Department within a period of Seven days after seven days no objection will be entertained.

Zamrooda
W/O Ali Mohammad Joo
R/O Nabdi Pora Hawal

ED attaches Rs 49 Lakh in woman's account under PMLA

KNO

Srinagar, Jan 16: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has attached nearly Rs 49 lakhs under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) lying in a bank account of a woman.

An official said that the ED Srinagar Zonal Office has provisionally attached proceeds of crime amounting to Rs 48.99 lakh under the PMLA 2002, lying in a bank account of Syed Sadaf

Andrabi, wife of accused Abdul Momin Peer, in a case related to narcotics smuggling and terror funding in Jammu and Kashmir.

"The ED initiated its investigation on the basis of an FIR and charge sheet filed by the National Investigation Agency (NIA), Jammu. The case pertains to the arrest of Abdul Momin Peer by J&K Police in 2020 at a checkpoint in Handwara, during which 6 kg of heroin and ₹20 lakh in cash were recovered from his possession.

Subsequently, the NIA also seized 1.15 crore in cash and 15 kg of heroin from his relatives and associates," the official said.

"Investigations revealed that Abdul Momin Peer, in collusion with his relatives Islam-Ul-Haq Peer, Syed Iftikhar Andrabi, Syed Saleem Andrabi, and other associates, was engaged in the illegal drug trade for a prolonged period. The proceeds from the narcotics trade were allegedly used

for the nourishment and propagation of terror activities in the Union Territory. Peer had earlier been arrested twice by the J&K Police in separate drug trafficking cases," he said.

"The ED identified a residential house in Bemina, Srinagar, as proceeds of crime generated from the illicit drug trade. The property was purchased in the name of Syed Sadaf Andrabi using illegal funds. The house has already been attached, and a prosecution complaint was

filed in the matter in November 2025. During further investigation, the ED identified a savings bank account in the name of Syed Sadaf Andrabi containing Rs 48.99 lakh as proceeds of crime. The amount was allegedly deposited by Abdul Momin Peer and other accused persons from the illegal drug trade. The account has now been provisionally attached under PMLA.

Further investigation in the case is underway," he added—(KNO)

EDITORIAL

Cyber Vigilance Is Our Shared Duty

The staggering figure of nearly 185 crore lost to cyber fraud in Jammu & Kashmir last year is a stark indicator of a new, pervasive form of crime that preys on trust, opportunity, and fear in our increasingly digital lives. While the recovery of over 32 crore through swift police action is commendable, it represents a fraction of the total loss and underscores a critical truth: in cyberspace, prevention and immediate response are infinitely more effective than cure. The

evolving tactics of fraudsters, from sophisticated "digital arrest" scams to fake investment schemes, exploit fundamental human emotions: greed for quick returns and fear of legal trouble. A hacker doesn't hack your phone; they hack your mind. This psychological warfare makes every digital citizen a potential frontline soldier in this battle. The police can act as a rapid reaction force, but the first line of defence must be an informed and vigilant public. Therefore, building a resilient digital

society requires a two-fold strategy. First, public awareness must become a continuous mission. Citizens must internalise basic digital hygiene: never sharing OTPs or personal details, verifying contacts independently, distrusting unsolicited lucrative offers, and understanding that no legitimate authority conducts "digital arrests". Educational campaigns must penetrate homes, colleges, and community centres, making scepticism a default setting. Second, the infrastructure of response must

be common knowledge. The national helpline 1930 and the Cyber Crime portal are powerful tools, but only if used within the "golden hour". This immediate reporting is the most potent weapon to freeze and recover funds. Citizens must treat these resources like emergency services, memorising and using them without hesitation or shame. The government and institutions must also intensify efforts to secure digital ecosystems, regulate deceptive online advertisements, and expedite the

tracking of cross-border fraud networks. Ultimately, cybersecurity is not just a police responsibility; it is a civic responsibility. Each of us must cultivate a habit of verification over trust, caution over curiosity. In the digital age, protecting our assets and personal safety begins with a simple, disciplined click. The fight against cyber fraud will be won not in server rooms alone, but in the conscious minds of every user navigating the online world.

A Decade Of Startup India Scaling Innovation, Shaping India's Growth Story

Press Information Bureau

Startups: Pivotal Role in Economic Transformation

National Startup Day on 16 January 2026 marks a landmark decade of the Startup India Initiative. What began in 2016 as a policy push to energise entrepreneurship has evolved into one of the world's largest and most diverse startup ecosystems. Anchored by "Startup India" this movement has had a transformative impact on India's entrepreneurial and innovation ecosystem. It is firmly aligned with India's march toward achievement of *Viksit Bharat 2047*, combining economic modernization with inclusive regional uplift, reflecting its.

Startups have emerged as a vital pillar of India's economic transformation, driving innovation, job creation, and inclusive development. Over the past decade, India has rapidly evolved into one of the world's largest startup ecosystems, with more than 2 lakh startups as of December 2025. Major hubs like Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Mumbai, and Delhi-NCR have been at the forefront of this transformation. At the same time, smaller cities are also steadily contributing to the momentum with around 50% of the startups emerging from Tier II/ III cities, reflecting the democratisation of entrepreneurship.

Startups: An Inspiration for Economic Growth

Drive technological innovation and productivity
Create large-scale employment opportunities
Enhance financial inclusion and digital access
Promote regional and grassroots entrepreneurship

Startups are increasingly bridging India's rural-urban divide by deploying solutions across agri-tech, telemedicine, microfinance, tourism, and ed-tech, directly addressing developmental gaps and supporting rural livelihoods. Within this landscape, women-led startups are emerging as key drivers of inclusive and regionally balanced growth, with more than 45% of recognised startups having at least one-woman Director/Partner as of December 2025. This reflects the emergence of innovation not only as an economic engine but also as a driver of social equity and balanced regional development.

Startup India Initiative: A Decade of Building India's Innovation Backbone

The Startup India Initiative, led by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, has emerged as the cornerstone of India's innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystem. Over the past decade, the initiative has evolved from a policy-focused framework into a comprehensive, multi-dimensional platform supporting startups at every stage from ideation to scaling operations. This progress is reflected in India's high-value startup ecosystem, which has expanded from just four privately held companies valued above \$1 billion in 2014 to over 120 such firms today, with a combined valuation exceeding \$350 billion underscoring both the scale and growing global relevance of India's startup landscape.

Startups are leveraging India's young demographic dividend, generating employment across technology, services, and manufacturing sectors, while also creating indirect job opportunities through gig work and supply chains. Beyond employment, startups are increasingly collaborating with large corporates and multinational companies, facilitating technology transfer, scalability, and global market integration.

In traditional sectors, innovation is driving economy-wide impact: agri-tech platforms like Hesa are improving farmers' market access by bridging the rural-urban divide, while clean mobility startups such as Zypa are delivering scalable EV-based last-mile solutions. These innovations are producing multiplier effects across finance, supply chains, sustainability, and digital infrastructure, underscoring the broader ecosystem benefits of a thriving startup sector.

To accelerate innovation-led entrepreneurship, DPIIT, through the Startup India initiative, has rolled out the following flagship schemes and digital platforms to support funding, mentorship, and the scaling of startups nationwide.

Fund of Funds for Startups (FFS)

The Fund of Funds for Startups (FFS) is a flagship initiative of the DPIIT under the Startup India Action Plan and is managed by the

Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI). With a corpus of 10,000 crore, the scheme supports SEBI-registered Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs), which in turn invest in startups, with the objective of expanding access to domestic risk capital and strengthening the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

The corpus of Rs. 10,000 crore has been committed to over 140 AIFs, which have collectively invested 25,500+ crore in 1,370+ startups.

Credit Guarantee Scheme for Startups

The Credit Guarantee Scheme for Startups is implemented for enabling collateral-free loans to startups through eligible financial institutions. CGSS is operationalized by the National Credit

Guarantee Trustee Company (NCGTC) Limited. Under CGSS, 330+ loans worth over 800 crore have been guaranteed for startup borrowers.

Startup India Seed Fund Scheme (SISFS)

With a corpus of 945 crore, the Startup India Seed Fund Scheme (SISFS) provides financial assistance to startups for activities such as proof of concept, prototyping, product trials, market entry, and commercialisation. The scheme is overseen by an Expert Advisory Committee (EAC), which is responsible for its implementation, execution, and monitoring.

The corpus of 945 crore have been approved to 215+ incubators to support early-stage startups under the scheme.

Startup India Hub

The Startup India Online Hub is a one-of-a-kind digital platform for all stakeholders of the entrepreneurial ecosystem in India to discover, connect and engage with each other. The Startup Hub operationalizes this by connecting investors, mentors, and incubators with India's aspiring entrepreneur. It brings together funds, academic institutions, corporates, and government bodies.

States' Startup Ranking Framework (SRF)

The States' Startup Ranking Framework (SRF) assesses states and Union Territories based on their startup-friendly policies and implementation, fostering competitive federalism to strengthen India's entrepreneurial ecosystem. Under the framework, states and UTs are classified into categories such as Best Performers, Top Performers, Leaders, Aspiring Leaders, and Emerging Startup Ecosystems, encouraging healthy competition and continuous improvement in startup governance.

National Mentorship Portal (MAARG)

The Mentorship, Advisory, Assistance, Resilience, and Growth (MAARG) program has been developed to provide startups across the country with easy access to mentorship.

By connecting entrepreneurs with experienced mentors, the portal aims to support startup growth, offer strategic guidance, and strengthen the overall entrepreneurial ecosystem nationwide.

Startup India Investor Connect Portal

Developed in collaboration with SIDBI, the Startup India Investor Connect Portal is a digital platform that connects startups with venture capital funds and investors, with a particular focus on early-stage ventures. The platform enables entrepreneurs to reach multiple investors through a single application and pitch their ideas efficiently.

Schemes Strengthening India's Startup Ecosystem

In addition to Startup India, a range of sector-specific and ministry-led initiatives have reinforced India's startup ecosystem by addressing technology development, rural entrepreneurship, academic innovation, and regional inclusion. These schemes ensure that startup support is broad-based, decentralised, and aligned with national development priorities.

Atal Innovation Mission (AIM)

Launched in 2016 by NITI Aayog, the Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) is the Government's flagship initiative that aims to foster a nationwide culture of innovation and entrepreneurship across schools, universities, research institutions, startups, and industry. With an outlay of 2,750 crore up to March 2028, AIM provides an integrated framework to design innovation programmes, enable partnerships, and strengthen India's startup ecosystem.

AIM 1.0: Flagship Programs

While closely working with various central and state ministries, incubators, and global partners, the flagship programmes under AIM promote the Indian startup ecosystem.

Atal Tinkering Labs (ATLs)

The Atal Tinkering Lab (ATL) programme is focussed to reshape India's education landscape by moving students away from rote

learning towards creativity, problem-solving, and innovation.

With more than 10,000 ATLs spread across 733 districts, AIM is enabling millions of students to explore 21st-century skills such as AI, robotics, IoT, 3D printing, and beyond. While engaging over 1.1 crore students, it has enabled 16 lakh+ innovation projects.

Community Innovator Fellowship (CIF)

Implemented in partnership with UNDP India, the programme equips aspiring community innovators with the knowledge, mentorship, and infrastructure support needed to drive grassroots entrepreneurship and social impact.

In one-year intensive fellowship, each fellow is placed at an Atal Community Innovation Centre, where they gain SDG awareness, entrepreneurial and life skills, and hands-on experience in developing and refining their own innovation ideas.

Youth Co:Lab program

Youth Co:Lab aims at empowering and investing in young people across Asia-Pacific to drive the SDGs through leadership, social innovation, and entrepreneurship.

The programme highlighted theme-based national dialogues, through panels, workshops, and webinars, while also supporting youth-led ventures via long-term incubation and representation at regional summits.

The Youth Co:Lab National Innovation Challenge 2024-25, in partnership with AssisTech Foundation, focused on enabling young entrepreneurs, including innovators with disabilities, to develop solutions that enhanced access and well-being for Persons with Disabilities across assistive technology, inclusive ed-tech and skilling, and care service models.

While AIM 1.0 focused on establishing innovation infrastructure and nurturing India's emerging ecosystem, AIM 2.0 (2024) is centred on piloting new initiatives that address ecosystem gaps and scaling proven models in collaboration with Governments, industry, academia, and communities. It is also strengthening the early-stage innovation pipeline by scaling the Atal Tinkering Labs (ATLs) ecosystem, which nurtures problem-solving and entrepreneurial mindsets among school students.

Programs under AIM 2.0

The Language Inclusive Program of Innovation (LIP) focuses on reducing barriers for innovators, entrepreneurs, and investors who do not speak English through India's 22 scheduled languages by establishing 30 Vernacular Innovation Centres

The Frontier Program seeks to design tailored innovation and entrepreneurship models for Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, the North Eastern states, and Aspirational Districts and Blocks through Atal Tinkering Labs.

The Human Capital Development Program aims to build a pipeline of professionals, managers, teachers, and trainers, equipped to develop, operate and maintain India's innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem.

The DeepTech Reactor serves as a research sandbox to explore effective pathways for commercializing deep tech innovations, particularly those requiring long gestation periods and significant investment.

The International Innovation Collaborations program takes India's innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem international.

Other programs that target at improving the quality of output (jobs, products, and services) include the Industrial Accelerator program to increase industry involvement in scaling-up advanced startups and; The Atal Sectoral Innovation Launchpads (ASIL) program to build iDEX-like platforms in central ministries for integrating and procuring from startups in key industry sectors.

NIDHI-Accelerator (Startup Acceleration Programme)

The NIDHI-Accelerator (Startup Acceleration Programme), Fast tracking a start-up through focused intervention.

NIDHI-SSS (Seed Support System), Provide early-stage investment through a maximum financial support of 1000 lakh (made available to an incubator) and 100 lakh per start-up as Seed Support

NIDHI-COE(Centres of Excellence), provide globally competitive facilities to help startups go global.

Startup Village Entrepreneurship Program (SVEP)

Implemented in May 2015 as a sub-scheme under the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihood Mission (DAY-NRLM), the SVEP aims to promote rural entrepreneurship by enabling households to set up and scale local enterprises.

It aims to reduce poverty through self-employment and skilled wage employment resulting in sustainable and diversified livelihood options for the poor.

SVEP bridges gaps in capital access and technical support for rural enterprises.

Through these targeted interventions, the programme has supported 3.74 lakh enterprises as of 30 June 2025, strengthening local economies and enhancing income-generating opportunities at the grassroots level.

MeitY Startup Hub (MSH)

Established in 2016, the MeitY Startup Hub

(MSH) under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) promotes technology-led innovation and strengthens India's startup ecosystem. The Hub drives technology-led economic growth and innovation and acts as a central platform connecting incubation centres, Centres of Excellence on Emerging Technologies, and other platforms supported by the MeitY.

As of December 2025, the MeitY Startup Hub (MSH) supports a thriving ecosystem comprising of over 6,148+ startups, more than 517 incubators and over 329 labs across the country.

Technology Incubation and Development of Entrepreneurs (TIDE) 2.0 Scheme

Anchored within the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), the TIDE 2.0 Scheme was introduced in 2019 to catalyse technology-driven entrepreneurship by strengthening incubators that support Information and Communication Technology (ICT) startups using emerging technologies such as IoT, AI, blockchain and robotics.

The supported thematic include Healthcare, Education, Agriculture, Financial Inclusion (including digital payments), Infrastructure and Transportation and Environment and Clean Tech.

It further seeks to offer holistic support across seven thematic areas aligned with national priorities. Support is channelled through 51 incubators situated in top academic institutions and national research organisations across the country.

NIDHI (National Initiative for Developing and Harnessing Innovations)

The National Initiative for Developing and Harnessing Innovations (NIDHI), launched in 2016 by the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Ministry of Science and Technology, acts as an umbrella programme for nurturing ideas and innovations (knowledge-based and technology-driven) into successful startups. The programme focuses on building an innovation-driven entrepreneurial ecosystem with the objective of socio-economic development through wealth and job creation.

It has contributed to the economy by generating 1,30,000+ jobs, supported 12,000+ startups, backed 175+ Technology Business Incubator (TBI) and generated 1100+ IP (Intellectual Property).

Components

NIDHI-PRAYAS (Promotion and Acceleration of Young and Aspiring technology entrepreneurs), Supports from Idea to Prototype by providing a maximum funding support to an innovator/ Startup of 10 lakhs.

NIDHI-EIR (Entrepreneur in Residence), Support system to reduce risk for budding entrepreneurs, and encourage graduate students and provides financial support of up to 30,000/- monthly.

NIDHI-TBI (Technology Business Incubator), To tap innovations and technologies for venture creation by utilising expertise and infrastructure available with the host institution.

NIDHI-ITBI (Inclusive- Technology Business Incubator), A new variant of the NIDHI-TBI where it focuses on promoting entrepreneurship and supporting i-TBIs largely in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities, with a focus on inclusiveness in terms of geographies, gender, persons with special abilities, etc.

NIDHI-Accelerator (Startup Acceleration Programme), Fast tracking a start-up through focused intervention.

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Key Takeaways

- With over 2 lakh DPIIT-recognised startups as of December 2025, India stands firmly as one of the world's largest startup ecosystems.
- A decade of Startup India has built a full-lifecycle support system spanning ideation, funding, mentorship, and scale-up.
- Around 50% of DPIIT-recognised startups originate from Tier-II and Tier-III cities, signalling the democratisation of entrepreneurship.
- AIM 2.0 centred on piloting new initiatives to address ecosystem gaps and scaling proven models in collaboration with Governments, industry, academia, and communities
- Rural and grassroots programmes such as SVEP, ASPIRE, and PMEGP are enabling micro-enterprises, women-led ventures, and local jobs.

ASPIRE (A Scheme for Promotion of Innovation, Rural Industries and Entrepreneurship)

Launched by the Ministry of MSME in 2015, the scheme aims to promote innovation and entrepreneurship in rural and underserved areas. It focuses on setting up Livelihood Business Incubators (LBIs) for micro-enterprise creation, skilling and re-skilling opportunities, and workforce supply to industrial clusters.

Financial Incentives

For procurement of plant and machinery: A maximum of 1 crore to Government agencies

Speaker reviews security, logistics for J&K Assembly Budget session

KT News Desk

JAMMU, JANUARY 16: Speaker Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly, Advocate Abdul Rahim Rather, Friday stressed on ensuring fool-proof security arrangements and other logistical preparedness for smooth and seamless conduct of upcoming Budget Session of Assembly scheduled to commence from 2nd February, 2025.

The Speaker issued these directions while chairing a high level meeting at Legislative Assembly Secretariat, as per an official statement, held here to review the arrangements for upcoming Budget Session of Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly.

During the meeting, the Speaker held comprehensive review of the arrangements being put in place for the forthcoming Budget Session. He laid emphasis on robust security measures and efficient logistical preparedness, highlighting that seamless coordination among all stakeholders is must for smooth session. "All departments have vital role in successful conduct of the Assembly Session and departments need to maintain due coordination and synergy with Assembly Secretariat", the Speaker said.

While reviewing the security related arrangements, the Speaker directed the IGP Security to maintain fool-proof security arrangements within and around the Assembly Secretariat to ensure safety of



members, staff, media personnel and other employees. He directed the security officers to maintain close coordination among the security agencies, strengthen access control mechanisms and remain vigilant throughout the session.

Advocate Rather directed the IGP for complete sanitization of the Assembly Secretariat before the start of session. He also asked for establishing a common control room for better monitoring and surveillance.

While reviewing the other key arrangements like sanitation, power supply, drinking water, fire safety, medical facilities and traffic management, the Speaker directed the concerned officers to maintain uninterrupted essential supplies like drinking water, power supply and other basic facilities during the entire session. He directed the officers of health

department to ensure sufficient number of Ambulances, doctors, medical supplies and other facilities available during the Session.

Advocate Rather further asked the Director Estates to complete all works related to renovation and repairing before one week of the start of session.

He also asked him for timely rectification of sound system in the House and addressing all logistical aspects well in advance so that the proceedings of the House are conducted without any inconvenience.

The Speaker also directed the officers of Fire and Emergency Services to strengthen the fire control measures in and around the Assembly Secretariat.

The Speaker also asked the Commissioner Secretary GAD to appoint Nodal Officers in all the departments for timely submission of replies to

questions being submitted by the MLAs. He also asked the Commissioner Secretary to restrict passes for officers of Civil Secretariat and issue passes to officers who are required to be present during the session.

While reviewing coverage and media related aspects, the Speaker underlined that the Information department has major role during the entire session which act as a bridge between the government and the public. He asked the Director Information to maintain close coordination with Assembly Secretariat for timely finalisation of media persons to be called for coverage of session.

Advocate Rather also asked the Director to ensure timely issuance of passes and other arrangements for the media persons in synergy with Secretary Legislative Assembly. He also

asked him to ensure timely establishment of Public Address System in the House.

Emphasising the importance of discipline and decorum during the Budget Session, the Speaker called upon all the departments to discharge their responsibilities with utmost professionalism and accountability. He underlined that the Budget Session is one of the most important sessions of the House and must reflect the highest standards of legislative functioning.

The Speaker also directed all the officers to ensure that contingency plans are also kept in place to handle any kind of eventualities or unforeseen situations.

Commissioner Secretary GAD, M Raju; Divisional Commissioner Jammu, Ramesh Kumar; Secretary Law, Achal Sethi; IGP Security, Sujit Kumar; Commissioner JMC, Devansh Yadav; Deputy Commissioner Jammu, Rakesh Minhas; Director Information, Nitish Rajora; DIG Jammu-Kathua-Samba Range, Shiv Kumar Sharma; SSP Civil Secretariat, Sajjad Khalil Bhat; SSP Security Jammu, SSP Traffic Jammu City, Director Hospitality and Protocol, Director Estates, Director Ayush, General Manager Government Press Jammu, senior officers of Health, Jal Shakti, PDD, Fire and Emergency Services, besides Secretary Legislative Assembly, Manoj Kumar Pandit and other senior officers of Assembly Secretariat attended the meeting.

DC Kupwara reviews tele-consultation services, pushes digital healthcare outreach

KT News Desk

KUPWARA, JANUARY 16: Deputy Commissioner (DC), Kupwara, Shrikant Suse, chaired a meeting at the DC Office Complex Friday to evaluate status of the Tele-Consultation (e-Sanjeevani) implementation in the district.

The DC assessed the advancement of telemedicine services across the district, designed to enhance specialist healthcare accessibility, particularly in remote and border regions.

Dr. Zaffar Akbar, Chief Medical Officer, Kupwara, presented a comprehensive overview block-wise progress under E-Sanjeevani OPD and E-Sanjeevani AB-HWC. It was noted that the E-Sanjeevani is being operated through 11 functional hubs, 5 functional hubs cum spokes and 130 functional spokes, enabling doctor-to-patient and doctor-to-doctor consultations to reinforce healthcare delivery.

It was informed that the district has recorded an overall 71 percent performance under the AAM-SC framework from April to December 2025.

The Deputy Commissioner instructed underperforming medical blocks to improve performance, service efficiency and wider outreach. He further directed all Block Medical Officers to submit fortnightly progress reports on achievements against the targets.

The Deputy Commissioner

also examined progress on ABHA ID generation under the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission. He emphasized achieving 100 percent saturation in registrations and instructed BMOs to collaborate with CSCs. Additionally, he directed the CSC Manager to deploy operators to GMC Handwara and other health institutions, mandating ABHA registration for all visitors.

It was informed that patients can book OPD slots from home by scanning a QR code via the ABHA app or abdmjik.in, generating tokens in advance to minimize hospital queues.

The Deputy Commissioner also conducted a detailed analysis of the district's performance under the MR elimination initiative. Issuing clear directives to all Block Medical Officers (BMOs), the Deputy Commissioner instructed them to significantly scale up vaccination activities. He stressed the importance of intensifying outreach sessions, ensuring adequate vaccine supply, mobilizing field staff, and enhancing community awareness to bridge any remaining immunization gaps.

The meeting was attended by Chief Planning Officer, Parvaiz Ahmad Lone; CMO Kupwara, MS SDH Kupwara, District Immunisation Officer and other concerned officers. MS, GMC Handwara, and all Block Medical Officers participated virtually.

Javed Rana holds public outreach programme in Mendhar

KT News Desk

MENDHAR, (POONCH) JANUARY 16: Minister for Jal Shakti, Forest, Environment, Ecology and Tribal Affairs, Javed Ahmed Rana, Friday conducted a public outreach programme at Mendhar, assessing the ground-level challenges confronting the people.

During the interaction, the Minister patiently listened to a wide range of grievances and demands raised by the public. Key issues highlighted included drinking water supply schemes, road connectivity, health services and the delivery of other essential public utilities.

The residents urged the government to ensure timely execution of developmental works and improvement in the quality of basic amenities.

Responding to the concerns, the Minister assured the people that all the genuine issues and demands of Mendhar would be addressed on priority.

Taking serious note of the issues raised, the Minister issued clear directions to the officers of the concerned departments to expedite ongoing and approved developmental works. He asked them to strictly adhere to the stipulated timelines and ensure tangible results while maintaining transparency and accountability.

The Minister underscored that public-centric governance, accountability and



responsiveness remains the core philosophy of Omar Abdullah led government. He directed the officers to ensure that the benefits of development percolate to the grassroots in a time-bound manner and that public grievances are addressed promptly and effectively.

During the outreach event, a delegation of the All J&K Non-Gazetted Forest Officers Association submitted a memorandum seeking revision of the pay level of Forest Guards from Pay Level-2 to Pay Level-4, at par with Patwaris, Junior Assistants and Village Level Workers (VLWs), and corresponding upgradation of Foresters to Pay Level-6.

The delegation also demanded grant of 2½ days' additional salary and a risk allowance, citing the round-the-clock nature of duties, night work and life risks involved in forest protection. Additionally, they sought recognition of forest frontline staff under the technical category, given the specialized and technical nature of their responsibilities.

Another delegation from Poonch apprised the Minister of key developmental

concerns of the district, including upgradation of health infrastructure, road connectivity and power supply.

Similarly, a delegation highlighted the vast untapped tourism potential of their areas. They urged the government to promote sustainable tourism through eco-friendly infrastructure, community participation and preservation of local ecology and culture.

The public interaction was attended by Chief Engineer Jal Shakti Jammu, Hanif Choudhary; SDM Mendhar, Imran Kataria; Superintendent Hydraulic Poonch, Vipan Kumar; Executive Engineers of PWD, PHE and PMGSY; Block Medical Officer Mendhar and other sub-divisional officers from Revenue, RD & PR, Education and allied departments. They briefed the Minister on the status of works under their respective jurisdictions.

The Minister also directed the officers to maintain close inter-departmental coordination and submit regular progress reports on the issues raised during the interaction to ensure effective follow-up and timely resolution.

Satish Sharma lays foundation stone for Rs 98.60 lakh beautification project



KT News Desk

JAMMU, JANUARY 16: Minister for Food, Civil Supplies & Consumer Affairs, Information Technology, Youth Services & Sports, and Transport, Satish Sharma, Friday laid foundation stone for the Beautification and Infrastructure Development Project at Border Area Samwan, Thangar-Kachriali panchayat in Chamb Constituency.

The project, being implemented by the Tourism Department, at an estimated cost of 98.60 lakh, aims to transform the border area into a well-developed public and recreational space while improving the civic amenities for local residents and visitors.

Speaking on the occasion, the Minister, as per an official statement, stated that the initiative reflects the government's firm commitment towards inclusive and balanced development, with special focus on border and rural areas. He emphasized that development of such areas is not merely about physical infrastructure but also about restoring confidence, dignity and opportunities for local communities.

Satish Sharma highlighted that the beautification project has been carefully designed to ensure safety, accessibility and aesthetic enhancement of the area.

The scope of work includes chain-link fencing to ensure safety and proper demarcation, construction of a six-foot-wide pedestrian footpath using paver blocks and development of

resting and recreational zones equipped with five gazebos and high-quality steel benches for public use. The project also envisages extensive land development works, including earth filling, removal of wild growth, and proper terrain dressing to create a clean and welcoming environment. In addition, a toilet complex will be constructed to provide basic sanitation facilities and two main entrance gates will be installed to regulate access and improve the overall layout of the site.

The Minister said that such infrastructure will not only enhance the visual appeal of the border belt but will also promote local tourism, encourage community interaction and provide a dignified public space for residents, especially youth and families. He added that the Tourism Department is increasingly focusing on identifying and developing new destinations across Jammu & Kashmir to diversify tourism and spread economic benefits to grassroots levels.

Reiterating the government's development agenda, Satish Sharma assured that all projects will be executed with strict adherence to quality standards and timelines. He called upon the executing agencies to ensure transparency, accountability, and community participation during implementation.

Senior officers of the Tourism Department, PW(R&B), district administration, elected representatives and local residents were present on the occasion.

DC Kishtwar reviews progress of UT capex plan works



KT News Desk

KISHTWAR, JANUARY 16: Deputy Commissioner Kishtwar, Pankaj Kumar Sharma, Friday chaired a meeting to assess the progress of the development works being executed under the UT Capex Plan 2025-26.

The meeting primarily focused on key infrastructure projects aimed at strengthening public service delivery and the administrative set up in the district.

These projects included the construction of Tehsil Office Mughal Maidan, Tehsil Office Drabshalla and Naibat Office

Palmar along with several other important developmental initiatives.

The Deputy Commissioner inquired about the status of each project. He asked executing agencies to immediately commence work on pending projects, emphasizing that all works have already been allotted.

He stressed the need for timely execution, adherence to quality standards and optimal utilization of allocated funds.

The meeting was attended by Executive Engineer PWD, Ravinder Verma; Executive Engineer Chatroo along with other officers.

DC Kathua reviews implementation of Food Safety Act

KT News Desk

KATHUA, JANUARY 16: Deputy Commissioner Kathua, Rajesh Sharma, Friday chaired a meeting of the District Level Advisory Committee on Safe Food and Healthy Diets to review the implementation of the Food Safety and Standards Act- 2006 along with directions issued by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI).

The meeting discussed issues related to strengthening enforcement and ensuring strict adherence to the provisions of the Act across the district.

At the outset, Deputy Commissioner Food Safety Jammu Division, Madan Lal Magotra, who is also the Designated Officer, Food Safety District Kathua briefed the meeting about the overall performance of the district unit. He apprised the committee on inspections carried out, lifting of sample, prosecution, penalties imposed, registration and licensing of food business operators, besides analysis of samples through Mobile Food Testing Vans (MFTVs).

It was informed that penalties amounting to Rs 14.04 Lakh have been imposed on Traders for violation under



different provisions of the Act. During the period under review, 917 inspections were conducted, 476 food samples were lifted and prosecution was launched against 62 defaulters.

The meeting specifically

discussed the ongoing training and registration of food handlers of the hotel and hospitality industry under FSSAI guidelines. The Committee decided to intensify and expand the training programme to cover ICDS Anganwadi Workers, staff engaged in Mid-Day Meal schemes in schools, Fair Price Shop dealers and their staff, so as to ensure safe handling, preparation and distribution of food at all levels.

The Deputy Commissioner called for joint inspections and random sampling of eatables to send a strong message to violators. He stressed the need for generating maximum awareness among the general public about food safety, hygiene and adulteration through sustained outreach

activities across the district.

The DC underscored the need to involve Agriculture and allied departments in disseminating information on food safety and promotion of healthy diets. He further instructed the stakeholder departments to impart training to their employees through the Food Safety Department and ensure strict implementation of all advisories and directions issued in the interest of public health.

Additional Deputy Commissioner, Vishavjeet Singh, members of different departments and other staff attended the meeting.

LG Sinha flags off first group of Mera Yuva Bharat's Kashmiri Youth Exchange Program



KT News Desk

Jammu, Jan 16: Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Friday flagged off the first Group of 120 youth from Kashmir Division under Kashmiri Youth Exchange Program "Watan Ko Jaano".

The flagship initiative, sponsored by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India

and executed by Mera Yuva Bharat -MY Bharat Jammu Kashmir under the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, aims to foster national integration and empower the youth of the Kashmir Valley.

The Lieutenant Governor interacted with the participating youth and extended his best wishes for their journey. The 6th edition of the program

will see a total 2,000 participants under different groups, including group leaders from across the Kashmir Valley, visiting 15 major cities across India.

The primary objective is to sensitize youth from Kashmir to act as ambassadors of peace and harmony by providing them with firsthand exposure to nation's diverse cultural, industrial, and historical landscape.

IGP Jammu chairs valedictory briefing of Refresher Training Module

KT News Desk

Jammu, Jan 16: A one-week refresher training module was successfully conducted by Zonal Police Headquarters (ZPHQ) Jammu for police personnel transferred/adjusted from various wings to Jammu Zone.

The programme was organised at the Conference Hall, ZPHQ Jammu, with the objective of equipping the personnel with essential operational, legal, procedural and technological knowledge required for effective policing in the Zone.

The refresher course was specifically designed to familiarise the participants with current policing practices, operational protocols and updated legal frameworks, enabling their smooth integration into both field and office assignments. The training focused on enhancing professional competence, ensuring uniformity in procedures and strengthening preparedness to meet contemporary policing challenges.

A total of 71 police personnel, ranging in rank from Inspector to Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI), participated in the programme. The training module covered a wide spectrum of subjects, including new criminal laws,



special acts, police station functioning, CCTNS operations, forensic procedures, cybercrime, digital policing and counter-terrorism training.

The sessions comprised interactive lectures, practical demonstrations and question-answer discussions, ensuring active participation and hands-on understanding of systems and procedures. Senior officers and subject-matter experts delivered lectures to impart practical insights drawn from field

experience and best practices.

On the conclusion of the refresher training programme, the participating personnel were briefed by Bhim Sen Tuti, Inspector General of Police, Jammu Zone and Shamsher Hussain, Staff Officer to IGP Jammu Zone who emphasised the importance of professionalism, discipline and strict adherence to established procedures while discharging duties. The officers were encouraged to effectively apply the knowledge and

skills acquired during the course in their day-to-day functioning.

The refresher training programme was conducted under the supervision and coordination of a committee of Officers of ZPHQ Jammu comprising Hemanshu Mahajan, Sr. PO; Inspector Mohd Sadeeq; Inspector Arun Kaul (Course Coordinator); Inspector Sunny Sharma; Inspector Ashish Chowdhary; PSI Ahsan Ahmed; PSI Anil Sharma and PSI Rakshit Sharma.

CONTD. FROM FRONT PAGE

Turn varsities into

institutions to boost student employability and to conduct a rigorous impact assessment of existing skill development courses.

He asked the Jammu University to take dedicated measures for promotion of studies in local cultural heritage, languages and arts and the revival of the Guru Nanak Dev Chair of Sufi Studies.

The Lieutenant Governor said that the Universities must develop advanced early warning systems for natural disasters and provide solutions to local challenges. He stressed that academic institutions cannot operate in isolation and must align and coordinate their research capabilities to address societal needs. He also directed for the establishment of Animal welfare clubs in all the Universities.

The Council reviewed the progress of the Gandhi Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies and the expansion of IT-enabled services. To ensure administrative efficiency, the Lieutenant Governor directed the streamlining of the e-office system, implementation of IT Enabled services and the timely completion of all ongoing infrastructure projects.

He also called for increased participation of youth in Yuva Connect programme and their active engagement in the Nasha Mukt Bharat campaign and other national awareness initiatives.

University Council accords approval to various proposals

The University Council under the chairmanship of the Lieutenant Governor accorded in-principle approval to various agenda items and proposals including inclusion of several provisions in align with National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and UGC guidelines. These included adoption of Strategic Action Plan (2025-2030); introduction of Five Year Integrated UG-PG Programme in Mathematical Sciences; guidelines of the grant of Duty leaves to the Teachers; Constitution of Jammu University Animal Welfare Club; establishment of a Centre for Regional Studies, Culture, Dialectics and Emotional Intelligence (CRCD&EI); change of nomenclature of B.Tech. (Information Technology) to B.Tech. (Information Technology and Mathematical Innovation) in the Four Year Under Graduate Programme.

Discussions were also held on streamlining the process of direct recruitments for various posts, effective implementation of a robust and comprehensive Sports Policy of the University, and enhancing the overall quality of teaching, learning, and research at the University.

Prof Umesh Rai, Vice Chancellor, University of Jammu presented the progress report of the University highlighting the various achievements. The Registrar of the University presented the various agenda items before the Council for report, consideration and ratification.

It was informed that the University of Jammu has been recognized as one of the SPOKE institutions with IIT Delhi as the Hub Institution under Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF)-Partnerships for Accelerated Innovation and Research (PAIR).

The chair was also briefed on the action taken on the directions passed during the previous meeting of the Council.

The meeting was attended by Sakeena Masood Itoo, Minister for Health & Medical Education, School Education, Higher Education and Social Welfare Departments; Prof. Umesh Rai, Vice Chancellor, University of Jammu; Prof. Nilofer Khan, Vice-Chancellor, University of Kashmir; Prof. K.S Chandrasekhar, Vice Chancellor, Cluster University Jammu; Prof. Mohd Mobin, Vice Chancellor Cluster University Srinagar; Santosh D. Vaidya, Principal Secretary, Finance; Dr Mandeep K. Bhandari, Principal Secretary to Lt Governor; Sh. Ram Niwas Sharma, Commissioner Secretary, Higher Education Department;

Prof. Alok Kumar Rai, Director IIM Calcutta; Prof. AK Kaul, former Professor, Department of Sociology, BHU Varanasi; Dr. Neeraj Sharma, Registrar, Jammu University and other members of the Council. (KNO)

Artists, GenZ entrepreneurs

address, the Lieutenant Governor extended his felicitations to the renowned artists and students for building a stronger tomorrow through creativity. "Artists are the architects of national pride and they are shaping identity, unity, progress and forging a united future. The combined energy of creative minds and the future CEOs can become the new engine of national progress.

On one hand we have dreamers as artists and on the other Doers as next gen leaders and their united effort will redefine the pace of progress," the Lieutenant Governor said.

The Lieutenant Governor emphasised that in today's era of artificial intelligence and machine learning, creative thinking is most needed to discover new opportunities. He said the Business Management professionals must be prepared to learn from experiences and adopt new approaches.

"Art is a vital pillar of interdisciplinary education. Art enriches institutions, transforms personalities, and fosters a sense of belonging, thereby strengthening responsibility towards society and the nation. I see art as the heartbeat of society and the conscience of the nation, shaping our values, preserving our identity, encouraging dialogue, and inspiring a collective purpose," the Lieutenant Governor further said.

On the occasion, the Lieutenant Governor felicitated the eminent and emerging painters. He also commended the IIM Jammu for the unique academic-cultural initiative.

Prof. B.S. Sahay, Director, IIM Jammu; Dr Shakti Gupta, former Executive Director AIIMS Jammu, Prof. Shyam Narayan Lal Chairperson Anandam: The Centre for Happiness; KK Gandhi and other eminent painters, senior officials, heads of educational institutions, faculty members and youth in large number were present.

Higher reaches

recorded 0.2 degrees, compared to minus 1.1 degrees on Thursday.

In north and central Kashmir, Baramulla rose to 0.4 degrees from minus 2.2 degrees, Bandipora to minus 0.7 degrees from minus 2.7 degrees, and Ganderbal to 0.1 degrees from minus 2.6 degrees. Srinagar airport recorded a minimum of minus 2.8 degrees, compared to minus 5.0 degrees a day earlier.

Gulmarg recorded minus 2.3 degrees, up from minus 3.2 degrees.

In Jammu region, Jammu city recorded 4.7 degrees on Friday, marginally higher than Thursday's 4.4 degrees. Banjhal recorded 2.9 degrees against 1.9 degrees, while Batote rose to 7.7 degrees from 4.9 degrees.

Katra recorded 8.8 degrees, compared to 6.8 degrees the previous day. Baderwah and Udhampur recorded 2.0 degrees and 3.0 degrees, respectively, up from sub-zero readings on Thursday.

Ladakh remained colder, with Leh recording minus 8.8 degrees, Hanle minus 11.2 degrees, Kargil minus 8.3 degrees and Nubra Valley minus 7.1 degrees.

According to the weatherman, no major weather activity is expected till January 21, with light snowfall likely at scattered places on January 19 and 20.

From January 22 to 24, there is a possibility of light to moderate rain or snow at most places, while some districts of the Chenab Valley, Pir Panjal range and south Kashmir may receive heavier precipitation.

An advisory has been issued warning of the possibility of heavy rain or snow in parts of the Chenab Valley, Pir Panjal range and south

Kashmir, along with the risk of landslides at vulnerable locations.

Farmers have been advised to suspend farm operations during this period, it added. (KNO)

Our goal is to lead

seed fund to startups, while outdated rules have been done away with.

"We have removed outdated rules and trusted innovators," he said.

Startup India was launched on January 16, 2016, as a transformative national programme to nurture innovation, promote entrepreneurship and enable investment-driven growth, with the objective of making India a nation of job creators rather than job seekers.

On Friday, at the programme marking a decade of the Startup India initiative, PM also interacted with founders of India's vibrant startup ecosystem.

CM Omar for

Maharashtra and Gujarat.

Addressing travel agents, tour operators and representatives of travel associations from Maharashtra and Gujarat, the Chief Minister emphasized the vital role played by Maharashtra in supporting and strengthening J&K's tourism sector over the years. He particularly acknowledged the solidarity and continued support extended by Maharashtra-based travel agencies in the aftermath of the Pahalgam attack last year, noting that their confidence helped restore tourist inflow and trust in the destination.

Maharashtra has always been one of the strongest source markets for Jammu & Kashmir tourism. The support shown by the travel fraternity, especially during challenging times, reflects a deep and enduring partnership," the Chief Minister said.

The event, organised as part of the Maharashtra and Gujarat Travel Fraternity Outreach in Mumbai, also witnessed the felicitation of prominent travel agents and associations for their contribution towards promoting Jammu & Kashmir tourism. The Chief Minister highlighted the diverse tourism offerings of the region, including leisure, adventure, pilgrimage and wellness tourism, and reiterated the government's commitment to ensuring safety, infrastructure development and a tourist-friendly environment.

The outreach programme was attended by Advisor to the Chief Minister, Nasir Aslam Wani; Member of Parliament Gurinder Singh Shammie; MLA Gulmarg Peerzada Farooq Ahmed Shah; Director Tourism Jammu Vikas Gupta; and heads and representatives of major travel bodies from Maharashtra and Gujarat.

The interaction provided a platform for dialogue, collaboration and renewed commitment to position Jammu & Kashmir as a preferred destination for domestic and international tourists alike.

CM explores

for institutional collaboration and student exchange between IITC and the Government of Jammu & Kashmir. The visit, held at the IITC-NFDC Campus, was hosted by Dr. Vishwas Deoskar, Chief Executive Officer, IITC, along with Munjal Shroff, Governing Council Member, IITC.

During the visit, the Chief Minister was taken on a structured walkthrough of the IITC main campus, providing an overview of the institute's academic ecosystem and advanced technology infrastructure. As part of the programme, he attended a curated audiovisual presentation at the Rangayan Preview Theatre, which showcased IITC's vision, academic framework, and capabilities in creative and immersive technologies.

This was followed by a live demonstration at the Anubhuti Drishya Immersive Studio Lab, where applications of augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and mixed reality (MR)

were showcased through hands-on experiential interactions.

Farmers have been advised to suspend farm operations during this period, it added. (KNO)

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Farmers have been advised to suspend farm operations during this period, it added. (KNO)

India driving South Asia as world's brightest growth spot: WEF survey

PTI

New Delhi, Jan 16: Despite a modest improvement in recent months, a majority of chief economists expect global economic conditions to weaken this year but see India anchoring South Asia as the brightest growth spot despite mounting trade headwinds, a new survey showed on Friday.

In its latest Chief Economists Outlook report, released ahead of the Davos annual meeting next week, the World Economic Forum said the global economic outlook has improved modestly but remains uncertain, with asset valuations, mounting debt, geo-economic realignment, and rapid deployment of artificial intelligence creating both opportunities and risks.

Nearly 53 per cent of chief economists surveyed expect global economic conditions to weaken in the year ahead, down from 72 per cent in September 2025, it said.

The report, drawing from consultations and surveys with chief economists from the public and private sectors worldwide, said South Asia has returned to the top of the regional growth outlook.

Two-thirds of the chief economists surveyed expect strong (60 per cent) or very strong (6 per cent) growth, a substantial improvement



compared to 31 per cent in the September edition of the report.

"South Asia remains the brightest growth spot among emerging regions, with India anchoring the outlook despite mounting trade headwinds," it said.

Despite US tariffs on Indian exports, the Reserve Bank of India's recent assessment of a 'goldilocks' economy reflected a surge of 8.2 per cent year-on-year real GDP growth in the September quarter alongside near-zero inflation.

The WEF said India is continuing on its reform pathway by reducing employment restrictions, and

AI adoption is surging alongside investments from US technology firms. "Over one-third of respondents (36 per cent) anticipate a significant positive impact of AI investments on growth over the next two years, it added.

The WEF noted that inflation expectations in South Asia have fallen, while over two-thirds of respondents expect monetary policy to remain unchanged, and 85 per cent do not anticipate major changes to fiscal policy in the year ahead.

Globally, the survey showed three defining trends for 2026:

Surging AI investment and its implications for the global economy; debt approaching critical thresholds with unprecedented shifts in fiscal and monetary policies; and trade realignments, WEF Managing Director Saadia Zahidi said.

"Governments and companies will have to navigate an uncertain near-term environment with agility while continuing to build resilience and invest in the long-term fundamentals of growth," she added.

The survey also forecast bleaker prospects for cryptocurrencies, with 62 per cent anticipating further declines following market turbulence.

Nearly 54 per cent of chief economists believed gold had peaked after recent rallies.

When it comes to the potential expected returns from AI, there was wide variation across regions and sectors.

Roughly four in five chief economists expected productivity gains within two years in the US and China.

Chief economists expected the information technology sector to adopt AI fastest, with nearly three-quarters anticipating imminent productivity gains.

Financial services, supply chain, healthcare, engineering and retail will follow as 'fast-movers', the

survey showed. The employment picture regarding AI was seen in the survey as evolving over time: two-thirds expected modest job losses over the next two years, but views diverged sharply over the longer term.

Nearly 57 per cent anticipated net losses over 10 years, while 32 per cent foresaw gains as new occupations emerge.

On growth expectation among the chief economists surveyed, South Asia led with 66 per cent anticipating strong or very strong performance, driven by robust growth in India.

Some 45 per cent expected strong growth and 55 per cent moderate growth in East Asia and the Pacific, while 36 per cent expected strong growth and 64 per cent moderate growth in the MENA region. The US outlook improved notably, with 69 per cent expecting moderate growth, up from 49 per cent in September 2025, but only 11 per cent expecting strong growth.

China faces mixed prospects, with 47 per cent expecting moderate growth, 24 per cent strong growth and 29 per cent expecting weak growth.

Europe confronts the weakest outlook, with 53 per cent expecting weak growth, 44 per cent moderate growth, and only 3 per cent anticipating strong growth.

Delhi records highest road accident deaths in seven years

Over 1,600 killed in 2025



involving simple injuries also dipped marginally by 0.5 per cent, from 4,069 cases to 4,050 cases.

A longer-term analysis of road safety trends shows that 2025 emerged as the deadliest year on Delhi's roads since 2019. After peaking at 1,433 fatal accidents and 1,463 deaths in 2019, the figures fell dramatically in 2020 due to COVID-19 lockdowns, with Delhi recording 1,163 fatal accidents and 1,196 deaths – the lowest in nearly two decades.

Since then, fatalities have steadily climbed with fatal accidents rising from 1,206 in 2021 to 1,428 in 2022 and 1,432 in 2023, before rising further to 1,504 in 2024 and peaking at 1,578 in 2025.

Similarly, the number of deaths increased from 1,239 in 2021 to 1,461 in 2022, 1,457 in 2023, 1,551 in 2024 and finally 1,617 in 2025.

A senior police officer said the rising death toll reflects increased traffic density, higher average vehicle speeds and persistent violations such as drunk driving, overspeeding, red-light jumping and failure to wear helmets and seat belts.

Despite regular enforcement drives and awareness campaigns, behavioural change among commuters remains a major challenge, they said.

Right to constitutional remedies under Article 32 being misused, says SC



even on adjournments in high courts.

"Article 32 is being misused. The number of cases filed under Article 32 are exponentially being increased. For everything, one adjournment, file Article 32 here. Especially those surrounding Delhi are filing Article 32 petitions. What is this? It is a misuse," the bench said.

The top court said the petition filed under Article 32 is a gross misuse of the process of the court and of law, and dismissed it.

Prosecute those lodging false FIRs: Allahabad HC to UP Police

PTI

Prayagraj, Jan 16: Taking

serious note of false FIRs being lodged by some people, the Allahabad High Court has asked the police in Uttar Pradesh to mandatorily initiate prosecution against those who lodge such false or malicious reports.

The court also warned that failure to do so would render the police officers

**Cash discovery allegations
SC rejects Justice Varma's plea challenging impeachment proceedings**



IANS

New Delhi, Jan 16: The Supreme Court on Friday rejected a plea filed by Allahabad High Court Justice Yashwant Varma – who faces impeachment proceedings following the cash-discovery row – challenging the decision of the Lok Sabha Speaker to constitute a three-member inquiry committee against him under the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968.

Pronouncing the operative part of the verdict, a Bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and Justice Satish Chandra Sharma said, "We hold that the petitioner is not entitled to any relief in the present case."

Last week, the Justice Datta-led Bench had reserved its verdict on Justice Varma's writ petition after hearing extensive arguments from all sides.

In his plea, Justice Varma has challenged the Lok Sabha Speaker's decision primarily on procedural grounds. The plea argued that although impeachment notices were moved in both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha on the same day, Speaker Om Birla constituted the inquiry committee unilaterally, without awaiting the Rajya Sabha Chairman's decision or holding the mandatory joint consultation.

It was contended that the proviso to Section 3(2) of the Judges (Inquiry) Act requires that when notices are given on the same day in both Houses, no committee can be constituted unless the motion is admitted in both Houses, and that too by joint action of the Speaker and the Chairman.

However, the Lok Sabha Secretariat opposed the plea, arguing that the Rajya Sabha did not admit the impeachment motion. It was highlighted that the motion was rejected by the Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman on August 11, 2025, after the then Chairman and Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar resigned in July.

India home to world's second largest diabetes population in 2024

PTI

New Delhi, Jan 16: At 90 million, India ranked second in the number of adults living with diabetes in 2024. China was first at 148 million and the US ranked third at 39 million, according to a study published in The Lancet Diabetes and Endocrinology journal.

Researchers, including those from the International Diabetes Federation in Belgium and the India Diabetes Research Foundation and Dr A Ramachandran's Diabetes Hospital in Chennai, said countries with large populations, such as China, India, the US, and Pakistan, contribute a very large share of the number of people with diabetes worldwide.

They projected that Pakistan could surpass the US by 2050.

The eleventh edition of the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) Diabetes Atlas provides national, regional and global diabetes prevalence estimates for 2024, with projections to 2050.

Estimates were provided for 215 countries and territories after analysing 246 studies conducted between 2005 and 2024.

Over 11 per cent of the world's adult population, or 589 million adults aged 20-79, were affected by the metabolic disorder in 2024 and nearly 13 per cent (853 million adults) are projected to be affected by 2050, the study said.

"In 2024, one in nine adults worldwide was living with diabetes. The number of adults with diabetes in



2024 exceeded 500 million and is projected to rise to close to 900 million by 2050," the authors wrote.

"In 2024, the largest number of adults with diabetes aged 20-79 years was in China (148 million), followed by India (90 million), and the US (39 million)," they said.

Over four-fifths of the world's diabetes population, or 80.64 per cent, were estimated to be living in low and middle-income countries in 2024. The countries could also be expected to see more than 95 per cent of the global increase in cases by 2050.

The increase reflects population growth, population ageing, and ongoing urbanisation, all of which contribute to the rising number of cases of the chronic condition, the researchers said.

Monitoring diabetes burden around the world requires support for data

collection in resource-poor settings, which are expected to experience substantial increases in diabetes prevalence, they said.

Prevalence was found to peak at nearly 25 per cent among the world's adults aged 75-79. Diabetes prevalence was also higher among men than women, and in urban than rural areas, the study found.

Middle-income countries had the highest prevalence (11.46 per cent of adults aged 20-79), followed by high-income (10.21 per cent) and low-income countries (7.47 per cent).

The team added that the diabetes epidemic has continued unchecked since the turn of the millennium, and stronger efforts are needed to slow its progression, with strategies tailored appropriately across countries and population groups.

Muthoot Microfin recognized as Financial Inclusion Institution of the Year

PTI

New Delhi, Jan 16: Senior leadership of Muthoot Microfin Limited receiving the 'Financial Inclusion Institution of the Year' award at the Inclusive Finance India Awards Secures second honor for Responsible Finance at the Global Inclusion Finance Summit

Mumbai, January 15, 2026: Muthoot Microfin Limited (NSE: MUTHOOTMF, BSE: 544055), among India's leading Non-Banking Financial Company-Micro Finance Institution (NBFC-MFI), has secured two prestigious national awards at the Inclusive Finance India Awards 2025, presented at the Global Inclusion Finance Summit

Notices of impeachment, backed by 145 Lok Sabha members and 63 Rajya Sabha members, were moved in both Houses of Parliament in July 2025. Subsequently, the Lok Sabha Speaker announced the constitution of a three-member inquiry committee, a decision that is now under challenge before the Supreme Court.

The awards acknowledge the company's impact in serving women borrowers across rural India through its Joint Liability Group (JLG) model. By focusing exclusively on women from low-income households, Muthoot Microfin

empowering underserved communities and small entrepreneurs, with a Gross Loan Portfolio of 12,558.8 crore as of September 30, 2025. The Responsible Finance for Sustainability award validates Muthoot Microfin's concrete sustainability initiatives in FY25 including operating 50+ solar powered branches, disbursing 306.5 crore in sanitation loans and

29.2 crore in solar product loans, and supporting clients through more than 90,000 natural catastrophe insurance claims. The company is steadily embedding the SDGs into its core operations and service, currently impacting 14 UN SDGs.

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has enabled micro-enterprises, from vegetable vending and tailoring units to dairy farming and agriculture-linked activities, to grow with dignity and financial independence.

Commenting on the achievement, Mr. Sadaf Sayeed, CEO, Muthoot Microfin Limited, said "We are honored to receive these recognitions at a time when microfinance plays a vital role in advancing India's financial inclusion agenda. The 'Financial Inclusion Institution of the Year' recognition is an acknowledgement of how deeply financial inclusion is embedded in the way Muthoot Microfin operates.

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New Delhi, Jan 16: The Supreme Court on

Friday slammed a petitioner for filing a plea under Article 32, which gives citizens the right to seek constitutional remedies from the top court over violation of fundamental rights, despite a petition pending before the Bombay High Court.

A bench of Justices B V Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan said Article 32 is being misused by filing petitions

Prosecute those lodging false FIRs: Allahabad HC to UP Police

PTI

Prayagraj, Jan 16: Taking

serious note of false FIRs being lodged by some people, the Allahabad High Court has asked the police in Uttar Pradesh to mandatorily initiate prosecution against those who lodge such false or malicious reports.

The court also warned that failure to do so would render the police officers

liable for prosecution and departmental action.

"If the observation made by this Court is not followed in letter and spirit, it would amount to contempt of court and the aggrieved person may approach this court for appropriate action against such contemptuous conduct of the police authorities as well as the judicial officers", Justice Praveen Kumar Giri said in an order on Wednesday.

Venezuela's acting president calls for oil industry reforms to attract more foreign investment

AP

Caracas (Venezuela): Venezuela's acting President Delcy Rodríguez used her first state of the union address on Thursday to promote oil industry reforms that would attract foreign investment, an objective aggressively pushed by the Trump administration since it toppled the country's longtime leader less than two weeks ago.

Rodríguez, who has been under pressure from the US to fall in line with its vision for the oil-rich nation, said sales of Venezuelan oil would go to bolster crisis-stricken health services, economic development and other infrastructure projects.

While she sharply criticized the Trump administration and said there was a "stain on our relations," the former vice president also outlined a distinct vision for the future between the two historic adversaries, straying from her predecessors, who have long rallied against American intervention in Venezuela.

"Let us not be afraid of diplomacy" with the US,



said Rodríguez, who must now navigate competing pressures from the Trump administration and a government loyal to former President Nicolás Maduro.

The speech, which was broadcast on a delay in Venezuela, came one day after Rodríguez said her government would continue releasing prisoners detained under Maduro in what she described as "a new political moment" since his ouster.

Trump on Thursday met at the White House with Venezuelan opposition leader María Corina Machado, whose political party is widely considered to have won 2024 elections rejected by Maduro. But in endorsing Rodríguez, who served as Maduro's vice president since 2018, Trump has sidelined Machado.

In her speech, Rodríguez said money earned from foreign oil sales would go into two funds: one dedicated to social services for workers and the public health care system, and another to economic development and infrastructure projects. Hospitals and

other health care facilities across the country have long suffered. Patients are asked to provide practically all supplies needed for their care, from syringes to surgical screws. Economic turmoil, among other factors, has pushed millions of Venezuelans to migrate from the South American nation in recent years.

In moving forward, the acting president must walk a tightrope, balancing pressures from both Washington and top Venezuelan officials who hold sway over Venezuela's security forces and strongly oppose the US. Her recent public speeches reflect those tensions — vacillating from conciliatory calls for cooperation with the US, to defiant rants echoing the anti-imperialist rhetoric of her toppled predecessor. American authorities have long railed against a government they describe as a "dictatorship," while Venezuela's government has built a powerful populist ethos sharply opposed to US meddling in its affairs.

For the foreseeable future, Rodríguez's government has been effectively relieved of having to hold elections. That's because when Venezuela's high court granted Rodríguez presidential powers on an acting basis, it cited a provision of the constitution that allows the vice president to take over for a renewable period of 90 days.

Trump enlisted Rodríguez to help secure US control over Venezuela's oil sales despite sanctioning her for human rights violations during his first term. To ensure she does his bidding, Trump threatened Rodríguez earlier this month with a "situation probably worse than Maduro."

Maduro, who is being held in a Brooklyn jail, has pleaded not guilty to drug-trafficking charges.

Before Rodríguez's speech on Thursday, a group of government supporters was allowed into the presidential palace, where they chanted for Maduro, who the government insists remains the country's president. "Maduro, resist, the people are rising," they shouted.

'Electric air taxis to take off in Dubai by end of 2026'

REUTERS

Dubai, Jan 16: Electric air taxis developed by Joby Aviation are set to begin commercial operations in Dubai by the end of this year. Dubai's Roads and Transport Authority Chairman Mattar Al Tayer said on Friday.

Joby Aviation conducted the first test flight of its fully electric air taxi in the emirate in June 2025, a major milestone in Dubai's efforts to introduce them into its existing transport networks.

The Joby Aerial Taxi, the flagship electric vertical take-off and landing aircraft developed by the California-based company, can fly distances of up to 160 kilometers (100 miles) at speeds reaching 320km/hr (200mph). With zero operating emissions, Joby's air taxi is designed to be both eco-friendly and quiet enough for commercial use in dense urban areas.

In early 2024, Joby signed a contract with Dubai's Roads and Transport Authority that awarded the company exclusive rights to operate aerial taxis in the city for the next six years.

Never experienced this before: Bangladesh players' body head says getting death threats

PTI

Dhaka, Jan 16: Bangladesh's Cricketers' Welfare Association (CWAB) President Mohammad Mithun has said that he has received death threats for taking a stand for the players after they were targeted with derogatory comments by a top Board official.

In an interview to 'Cricbuzz', Mithun reiterated that he wants the national team to play next month's T20 World Cup but not with any security worries. Bangladesh is demanding that its four preliminary World Cup games be moved from India to Sri Lanka on account of security issues.

The players in the country boycotted the sport

remember ever being involved in controversial talk. It's going over my head - when have I ever spoken against the country?" Mithun said.

"I don't know how to take this or describe it as it happens with me for the first time. I haven't used any word that goes against the country; I only spoke for the interest of cricket and the players. "There

is no personal issue here. Since I'm the president of an organization, if I don't talk about players' rights, what's the point of me being in this position? No one is above the country," he added.

Mithun said he hasn't yet formally informed the BCB about the threats but has come to know that even some players have received similar messages.

"I haven't informed the board. To be honest, I am not picking up calls from unknown numbers on my mobile. But I can't stop messages or voice notes on WhatsApp. I was asked about this there. It's not just me; my number is available to people because it goes to the press on behalf of CWAB.

RCB proposes installation of AI-enabled cameras at Chinnaswamy for crowd management

PTI

Bengaluru, Jan 16: Desperate to ensure that IPL matches are not taken away from the M Chinnaswamy Stadium here, the Royal Challengers Bengaluru franchise has proposed the installation of 300-350 AI-enabled cameras at the venue and offered to bear the estimated cost of Rs 4.50 crore for this crowd management initiative.

RCB has made the proposal in an official communication to the Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA).

"RCB has proposed the installation of 300 to 350 AI-enabled cameras at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium. RCB has further committed to bearing the entire one-time cost of this initiative, estimated at approximately Rs 4.5 crore," the franchise said in a release.

"The advanced surveillance technology will empower the KSCA and law enforcement agencies to efficiently manage crowd movement, ensure disciplined queuing, monitor unauthorised access through real-time tracking of entries and exits, and significantly enhance overall fan safety," the franchise added.

All cricket was halted at the Chinnaswamy after 11 fans were killed in a stampede outside the venue during RCB's IPL trophy celebrations last year.

A state government-constituted task force is scheduled to submit its report on Saturday.



after monitoring the safety enhancement work currently in progress at the stadium premises. The investigation had blamed the lack of crowd management measures for the deadly stampede on June 4 when lakhs thronged the venue to take part in RCB's celebrations.

It had held RCB responsible for the chaos, saying the franchise encouraged fans to come out in numbers despite not having necessary clearances from civic and law enforcement agencies. In the aftermath of the tragedy, RCB announced compensation for the families of the victims and set up a foundation to connect with the fans.

For its latest proposal, the franchise said it has partnered with Stagu, a company, which it said has a proven track record in enhancing public safety through automation and data-driven intelligence. Stagu has listed Bihar Police and the Election Commission of India as its clients on its official website.

The success stories that the

Movies Schedule

Saturday, 17th January



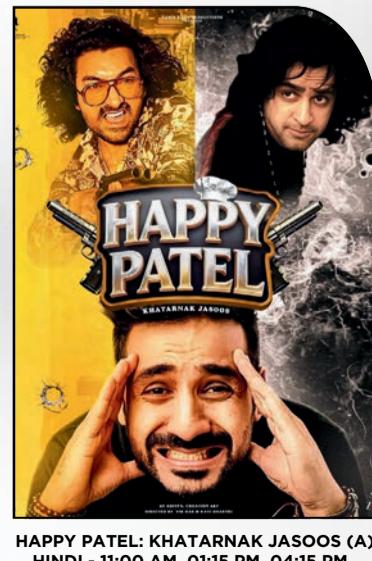
DHURANDHAR (A)

HINDI - 11:15 AM, 06:00 PM



RAHU KETU (U/A 16+)

HINDI - 10:30 AM, 01:30 PM, 03:15 PM, 06:45 PM



HAPPY PATEL: KHATARNAK JASOOS (A)

HINDI - 11:00 AM, 01:15 PM, 04:15 PM, 07:35 PM



AVATAR : FIRE AND ASH (UA 16+)

3D HINDI - 03:45 PM

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Canada's Carney hails 'strategic partnership' in talks with Xi

AFP

Beijing, Jan 16: Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney and Chinese President Xi Jinping began talks in Beijing on Friday, marking the first meeting between the countries' leaders in China's capital in eight years. Carney lauded a "new strategic partnership" between the two countries after he arrived for the talks at the Great Hall of the People.

Trump enlisted Rodríguez to help secure US control over Venezuela's oil sales despite sanctioning her for human rights violations during his first term. To ensure she does his bidding, Trump threatened Rodríguez earlier this month with a "situation probably worse than Maduro."

Maduro, who is being held in a Brooklyn jail, has pleaded not guilty to drug-trafficking charges.

Before Rodríguez's speech on Thursday, a group of government supporters was allowed into the presidential palace, where they chanted for Maduro, who the government insists remains the country's president. "Maduro, resist, the people are rising," they shouted.

China-Canada relations serve the common interests of our two countries," he added.

Xi welcomed Carney and his delegation, saying that China-Canada relations were at a turning point after their last meeting at an APAC summit in October.

"It can be said that our meeting last year opened a new chapter in turning China-Canada relations toward improvement," Xi told Carney.

"The healthy and stable development of



AFP

Tokyo, Jan 16: Tokyo and Washington agreed Friday to boost joint production of defense equipment including missiles, and expand their military presence in waters southwest of mainland Japan, as China ramps up pressure on its Asian neighbor.

The agreement came after Japanese defense minister Shinjiro Koizumi met Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth in Washington, where they also pledged to further cooperation on supply chains including critical minerals.

Japan is embroiled in a heated diplomatic spat with China, triggered by Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's suggestion in November that Japan could intervene militarily if China attacks Taiwan.

China, which regards Taiwan as its own territory, reacted angrily, blocking exports to Japan of "dual-use" items with potential military applications, fueling worries in Tokyo that Beijing could choke supplies of much-needed rare earths.

As the "security environment is rapidly growing severe" in Asia, "the two ministers confirmed the Japan-US alliance remains absolutely unwavering," the statement released by Tokyo's

defense ministry said.

They agreed to further advance joint production of air-to-air missiles and surface-to-air interceptors.

The allies also agreed to work on the expansion of "more sophisticated and practical joint drills in various locations including the Southwest region," the statement said.

Beefing up defense around the so-called "Southwest" region, which includes areas such as the subtropical island of Okinawa, is one of Japan's top priorities.

Okinawa, home to the vast majority of American military bases in Japan, serves as a key US outpost to monitor China, the Taiwan Strait and the Korean peninsula, with both Tokyo and Washington stressing its strategic importance.