



Govt committed to addressing unemployment, infrastructure gaps, social welfare: LG Sinha

Transition to popular governance strengthened public faith in democratic institutions

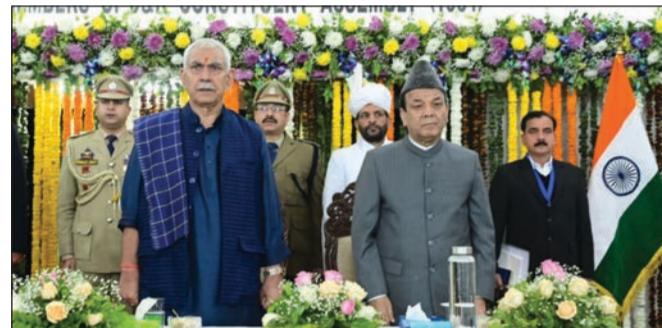
Good governance cornerstone of development strategy

KNO Desk

Jammu, Feb 02: Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Monday said his government remains committed to addressing the challenges of unemployment, infrastructure gaps, and social welfare in Jammu & Kashmir.

In his address to Members of the Legislative Assembly in the central hall of Assembly complex here, the LG, as per news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), said that the Government during its first year in office has sought to combine development with dignity, growth with social justice, and progress with peace.

The Government during its first year in office has sought



to combine development with dignity, growth with social justice, and progress with peace. Guided by the vision of inclusive governance, it remains committed to addressing the challenges of unemployment, infrastructure gaps, and social welfare with renewed energy

and determination," he said. In his third address to the House since the formation of the elected government in Jammu & Kashmir in 2024, the LG today said the Government has adopted a humane and compassionate approach in dealing with issues affecting

common citizens. "Emphasis has been placed on fair treatment, dignity, and sensitivity in administration. Decisions affecting employees, daily wagers, contractual workers, and marginalized groups have been examined with empathy, and corrective steps initiated wherever required," the LG said.

He said the development trajectory of Jammu and Kashmir continues to be guided by the foundational principles of Economy, Ecology, and Equity.

"These principles are not merely aspirational but serve as the guiding framework for policy formulation and implementation. While notable progress has been achieved across sectors, the Government remains conscious | More on P6

LG's address reflected NC Govt's disappointing policies: LoP Sharma

- Says no vision for unemployed in J&K budget document
- Questions CM's promises on electricity, jobs, LPG cylinders

Rehan Qayoom Mir

Srinagar, Feb 02: Leader of Opposition Sunil Sharma on Monday termed the Lieutenant Governor's address, which he said reflected the ruling NC government's policies and vision, as "disappointing."

Sharma, according to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer

(KNO) while talking to the reporters said, "The document prepared by the NC government and read by the Lieutenant Governor lacked vision, roadmap and commitment towards key issues, particularly unemployment in Jammu and Kashmir."

He said the LG's address and the documents he read reflected the ruling government's policies and vision but offers "nothing substantial" for the common people.

"The budget for J&K is disappointing for every section of society, especially the unemployed youth," he said.

LoP Sharma alleged that the "document lacks a roadmap to tackle the growing unemployment crisis | More on P6

NC-Cong meeting, meant to counter opposition, exposes rift between allies

5 Congress MLAs stay away; Nizamuddin attends, questions coalition dharma, Centre-related strategy; ruling party hits back

Umer Maqbool

Srinagar, Feb 02: The differences between ruling alliance partners, the National Conference (NC) and the Congress, came out in the open during a joint meeting of the alliance to chalk out a strategy during the budget session, which began on Monday.

The meeting, called at Chief Minister Omar Abdullah's Jammu residence, turned literally into a verbal duel between the alliance partners.

In a move aimed at sending out a message to its alliance partner that all is not well, the

Congress decided to send only its chief whip Nizamuddin Bhat. Another five of its MLAs, including PCC president Tariq Hamid Karra and senior leader Ghulam Ahmad Mir, chose not to participate in the meeting.

Sources disclosed to news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) that Bhat told NC leaders during the meeting—attended by Dr. Farooq Abdullah, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, all NC MLAs, and their non-Congress allies—that the party is not comfortable with the post-poll working arrangement.

He reportedly told NC leaders that they were not serious about the statehood demand. Bhat also pointed out that there was no coordination between the allies in the Rajya Sabha polls as well as over Centre-related strategy of the government.

Bhat's remarks angered NC leaders, who told him that they have to maintain better Centre-State relations to run the State.

"Politics and government are two different: We have to ensure that Centre-State relations are better for running the State (UT)," Bhat was reportedly told by the Chief Minister.

Omar told Bhat out that NC had conceded | More on P6

Sajad Lone proposes amendments on Kashmiris' safety, job age limit

KNO Special Correspondent

Srinagar, Feb 02: Peoples Conference president Sajad Gani Lone has submitted crucial amendments to the Lieutenant Governor's address concerning the safety of Kashmiris, the regularisation of daily wagers, and the enhancement of the age limit for open merit candidates appearing in the Jammu and Kashmir Administrative Service (JKAS) examination.

According to the business circulated by the Assembly Secretariat as per news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), Lone has proposed an amendment regretting the omission of condemnation



regarding attacks on Kashmiri students, traders, and hawkers in different States and Union Territories.

Lone, who is the only opposition MLA from Kashmir to move amendments to the LG's

address, has also proposed an amendment seeking to enhance the age limit for open merit candidates appearing in the J&K Administrative Services examination from 32 to 37 years. (KNO)

Night temps record marginal increase in Kashmir

MeT forecasts cloudy weather from Feb 4 to 6; light rain, snow on Feb 7

Sajid Raina

Srinagar, Feb 02: Night temperatures across Kashmir recorded a marginal rise, with Srinagar recording a minimum of 2.6 degrees Celsius, about three degrees above the seasonal average.

An official from the Meteorological Department told the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) that the minimum temperature in the city has seen gradual increase over the past few days, though cold conditions continue to persist across large parts of Jammu and Kashmir.

Gulmarg, the ski resort in north Kashmir's | More on P6



Photo: KNO | Shah Jehangir

Special-needs students of Abhinandan Home deliver 100% result, 14 secure distinction

"We don't want sympathy; we want equal opportunity"

Jahangeer Ganaie

Srinagar, Feb 02: Students of Abhinandan Home, Solina Srinagar, run under the Department of Social Welfare, Kashmir, have delivered an encouraging performance in the Class 11 Annual Examination 2025, proving once again that physical or intellectual challenges are no barrier to academic excellence when given the right support.

agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), all appearing students, classified as CWNS (Children With Special Needs), passed the examination, with a large number securing distinctions and first divisions, reflecting the sustained efforts of both students and teachers at the institution.

Principal Mudasir Ahmad attributed the success to collective dedication and perseverance. "These results are a reflection of the tireless hard work put in by our students and teachers. Despite challenges, our children showed determination, discipline and confidence. We are proud of each one of them," he said.

He said 17 students appeared



in the examination, and among them, 14 secured distinction.

The result, the Principal said, was 100 per cent.

Those who secured distinction include Muntaha Munee - 449, Sahil Mehraj - 435, Sadiya Parvez - 430, Subee Ashraf - 416, Nayilah Jaan - 415, Mehak Jaan - 410, Sheikh Adnan Mehraj 409, Mohammad Sameer - 394, Abdul Wajid Sheikh - 391, Salim Khan - 386, Ahsanullah- 384, Suhail Amin - 380, Simran Shafii (375), Ateeb Bashir - 374, Usman Bashir - 366, Ulfat Jaan - 351 and Mehwish Khazir - 338.

While celebrating their success, students raised a collective demand for better educational infrastructure for the specially-abled persons.

Muntaha Munee, the topper, said the journey was not easy. "We study with focus and hope,

but travelling long distances after school becomes difficult for students like us. If schools are available at the tehsil level and colleges at the district level, many more specially-abled students will continue their education," she said.

Echoing similar concerns, Sahil Mehraj said accessibility remains a major challenge. "Our teachers motivate us every day, but higher education facilities are limited. Many students drop out because colleges are far and transport is not friendly for persons with disabilities," he said.

Another student, who also secured a distinction, stressed the need for inclusive planning. "We don't want sympathy, we want

equal opportunities. Separate and well-equipped institutions at local levels will help us become independent and confident citizens," he said.

Students urged the government to establish special schools for CWNS at the tehsil level and dedicated colleges at the district level, saying such steps would significantly reduce hardship and dropout rates among specially-abled students.

Parents and staff members also appreciated the role of the Department of Social Welfare for supporting the institution, while urging authorities to strengthen infrastructure, ensure trained staff, and build more such schools. (KNO)

Div Com Kashmir reviews IWAI's river Jhelum water transport project



KT NEWS DESK

SRINAGAR, FEBRUARY 02: Divisional Commissioner Kashmir, Anshul Garg, along with Secretary Transport, Avny Lavasa Monday chaired a meeting to review the removal of bottlenecks for water transport of the inland waterways Authority of India's (IWAI) envisaged project of River Jhelum.

The meeting, as per an official statement was participated in by Deputy Commissioners of Srinagar,

Budgam, Baramulla and Ganderbal; RTO Kashmir; Chief Engineers KPDCL & PWD; engineer from I&FC and PWD departments; and the IWAI Coordinator.

At the outset, the IWAI Coordinator gave a detailed presentation on the bottlenecks of the project and highlighted the required interventions.

Addressing the meeting, the Divisional Commissioner directed IWAI to take possession of land at two identified locations and to conduct a joint inspection to identify

land for the third location. It was informed that out of eight proposed locations, four have already been taken over by IWAI.

Regarding issues related to HT and LT power lines, the Divisional Commissioner instructed IWAI to share a detailed list of site-specific issues with the Chief Engineer, KPDCL, for preparation of removal estimates.

Similarly, the PWD was directed to assess removal of cofferdams under bridges and to facilitate necessary clearances.

Div Com, Dir Sericulture unveil 'Silk Kash' quarterly journal

KT NEWS DESK

SRINAGAR, FEBRUARY 02: Divisional Commissioner Kashmir, Anshul Garg along with Director Sericulture J&K, Ajaz Ahmad Bhat Monday unveiled the Quarterly Journal 2026 of the Sericulture Development Department, J&K in the presence of senior officers & officials.

Speaking on the occasion, the Div Com, as per an official statement highlighted that the Sericulture sector being a viable component of the region's economy, provides livelihood to a sizable population across the Union Territory of J&K.

He lauded the department's efforts in adopting a multipronged approach to disseminate awareness about various schemes, facilities, and activities aimed at harnessing the full potential of the sector.

The Div Com further commended the initiative of publishing the quarterly journal for the first time. He emphasized that silkworm rearing is a cost-effective activity with high returns and stressed the need for an aggressive publicity campaign to educate people about its benefits by utilizing every available medium.

He congratulated the Director Sericulture J&K for the successful publication of the journal and expressed hope that this initiative will significantly contribute to improving the economic conditions of people in the region.

Addressing the gathering, the Director stated that the quarterly journal, being launched for the first time will henceforth be a regular feature.

Conceived as a dedicated platform, the publication aims to highlight best practices, share success stories of progressive silkworm rearers and create awareness about Centrally Sponsored Schemes and initiatives such as Silk Samagra-2 and the Holistic Agriculture Development Programme (HADP) which are being proactively implemented by the Department for the benefit of stakeholders at the grassroots level.

He further emphasized that through this publication, the Department seeks to ensure that silkworm rearers, farmers, silk reeling and weaving unit holders, educated youth, women and tribal communities are well informed about schemes, subsidies, training programmes, facilities, and technical support, thereby enabling them to fully leverage the opportunities available. On the occasion, the Director Sericulture also apprised the Divisional Commissioner Kashmir about various initiatives and programmes of the Department. He informed that special emphasis is being laid on strengthening capacity building of stakeholders through skill upgradation programmes for departmental field functionaries, exposure tours for silkworm rearers and farmers and awareness camps for educated youth, women, and tribal communities.

DC Anantnag directs for time-bound, quality-checked redressal of public grievances



KT NEWS DESK

ANANTNAG, FEBRUARY 02: Deputy Commissioner (DC) Anantnag, SF Hamid, Monday directed all concerned officers to ensure time-bound and quality-checked redressal of public grievances received through the JK Samadhan and CGPRAMS portals, emphasizing that responses must be substantive, fact-based, and outcome-oriented.

He underscored that prompt and quality grievance disposal by line departments is critical to improving public service delivery and maintaining public trust.

The DC, as per an official statement, also stressed the need for expeditious disposal of offline grievances, particularly those pertaining to the Revenue, Public Health Engineering (PHE), Rural Development Department (RDD), Power Development Department (PDD), and other departments, with a clear focus on clearing pendency in the district.

These directions were issued while chairing a comprehensive review meeting of all departments at Dak Bungalow, Khanabal.

Khanabal.

Taking note of the limited time remaining in the current financial year, the DC directed all departments to expedite ongoing works and expenditure under all Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSSs) and other development programmes. He emphasized timely completion of physical works, including SASCI and other priority government initiatives, to ensure effective and optimal utilization of approved funds within the current financial year.

The meeting was attended by the Principal, Government Medical College Anantnag; Additional District Development Commissioner; Additional Deputy Commissioner; Superintending Engineers of PWD, Jal Shakti/PHE and KPDCL; General Manager, DIC; Chief Planning Officer; Sub-Divisional Magistrates; Executive Engineers of R&B, Jal Shakti/PHE, PDD and I&FC; Assistant Commissioner Development, all district and sectoral officers, and District Coordinators and Programme Managers of various Central and UT-sponsored schemes and projects.

Budget Session-2026

Ensuring productive Budget session is collective responsibility: Speaker Abdul Rahim Rather

KT NEWS DESK

JAMMU, FEBRUARY 02: Speaker Legislative Assembly, Abdul Rahim Rather Monday remarked that it is collective responsibility of the House to ensure productive outcomes during the session.

The Speaker said that people expect solutions to their problems and reminded members that significant public resources are invested in conducting legislative sessions, and it is the collective responsibility of the House to ensure productive outcomes.

Earlier, welcoming the members of the House, Speaker, as per an official statement, said that this institution represents the hopes, expectations and aspirations of the people who have elected us. "Serving the people is both privilege and profound responsibility upon all the members of the House," he said.

The Speaker highlighted that time utilised in the House is precious, adding that every minute spent here belongs to the people. He urged upon the members that the judicious use of time is essential to live up to the expectations of the people.

The Speaker observed that democracy allows space for disagreements, but it must be expressed in a dignified manner, with mutual respect for one another. He cautioned that the proceedings of the House are closely watched by the public and even



a single mistake does not go unnoticed. He assured members that during the Budget Session, ample opportunities would be provided to accommodate all voices.

The Speaker also said that Business Advisory Committee of House has decided that two sittings will be held during current session so that every member can raise issues related to their constituency, ensure accountability of the government, and effectively represent public concerns.

He called upon members to set an example through their conduct and expressed hope that the House would fulfil the purpose for which people have elected their representatives.

Earlier, the Speaker tabled the Lieutenant Governor's address before the house.

Speaker announces panel of chairmen for Budget session

KT NEWS DESK

JAMMU, FEBRUARY 02: Speaker, Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly, Abdul Rahim Rather, Monday named three legislators as Panel of Chairmen for the Budget Session of Legislative Assembly commenced Monday.

He nominated MLA Eidgah Mubarak Gul, MLA Samba Surjeet Singh Slatia and MLA Bandipora Nizamuddin Bhat.

The Panel of Chairmen will preside over the House proceedings in absence of the Speaker.

District Anantnag Association of Deaf Registered Under the Societies Registration Act

Regd No. 7944/2024
Ref No: DAAD
Dated: 29/01/2026

President General Secretary
Aquib Gull Anam ulla Rather

NOTICE OF EMERGENCY MEETING OF THE GENERAL BODY

It is hereby informed to the members of the District Anantnag of the Deaf that an emergency meeting of the General Body was held at Anantnag Stadium on 19/01/2026 for taking an oath and approving the changes in the General Body under the union members, as detailed below:

Mr. Aquib Gull — President
Mr. Anam ulla Rather — General Secretary
Mrs. Bisma Jan — Treasurer

District Anantnag Association of the Deaf

Government of Jammu and Kashmir OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER REW DIVISION PULWAMA

NOTICE INVITING TENDERS

e- NIT No. 177/2025-26 Dated 31-01-2026

For and on behalf of the Lt. Governor, Of Union Territory of JandK, e-tenders (In Single cover system) are invited on Percentage basis from approved and eligible Contractors registered with UT of JandK Govt., CPWD, Railways and other State/Central Governments for the following works:-
Call 1st (Except Indicated)

S. No.	Name of the Work	Block	Estimated /Adv. Cost (In lacs)	Cost of tender documents (In Rupees)	EMD (in %)	Class of Contractor	Time of completion	Major head
1.	CONSTRUCTION OF DANDI NEAR LAND OF ABDUL MAJEED MAGRAY AND OTHERS AT SHIT PARRAYPORA	Litter	1.953	200/=	2%	DEE	30 Days	CDF
2.	CONSTRUCTION OF LANE FROM HOUSE OF ABDULHA-MID BHAT TO HOUSE OF MOHAMMAD MAQBOOL BHAT AT SHIT PARRAYPORA	Litter	2.471	200/=	2%	DEE	30 Days	CDF
3.	CONSTRUCTION OF CULVERT WITH IRRIGATION CHANNEL NEAR HOUSE OF YOUSUF MIR AT NILOORA	Litter	1.575	200/=	2%	DEE	30 Days	CDF
4.	CONSTRUCTION OF LANE FROM MAIN ROAD TO HOUSE OF MOHAMMAD AMIN WANI AT ALAMDAR COLONY LITTER	Litter	2.926	200/=	2%	DEE	30 Days	CDF
5.	C/O CSC NEAR MASJID SHAREEF CHINAR MOHALLA, DRABGAM, BLOCK SHADIMARG	Shadi-marg	2.935	200/=	2%	DEE	30 Days	SBM II 2 nd call
6.	C/O CSC NEAR MASJID BABA NASEEM UD DIN GHAZI, TUMLAHAL, BLOCK LITTER	Litter	2.990	200/=	2%	DEE	30 Days	SBM II 2 nd call
7.	C/o Ghat Steps at Khanday Mohalla Larmooh Near the House of Nazir Ahmad Khanday, Farooq Ah Dar and Others at Larmuh	Dadsara	0.495	200/=	2%	DEE	30 Days	CDF 11 th call

Position of A/A: - Accrued

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

1. Date of Issue of Tender Notice	31-01-2026
2. Online Bid submission Start Date	31-01-2026 from 06:55 PM
3. Online Bid Submission End Date	12-02-2026 up to 06:55 PM
4. Date and time of opening of Online Bids	13-02-2026 at 10:00 AM or any convenient day In the office of the Executive Engineer REW Pulwama
5. Note: - Fee Receipt and EMD shall be deposited after the financial bids opened. Incase The original Tender Document Fee Receipt and EMD is not Deposited within 5 days after the Financial Bids Opened for all responsive bidders Who have participated online, the Department shall take action as per Rules.	

Xen/REW/Pul/12270-76
Dated: - 31/01/2026

DIPK-10532/25
DATED: 02-02-2026

Sd= Executive Engineer
REW Division Pulwama

High-value Kashmir nut crops get Budget push

JAHANGIR GANAIE

Srinagar, Feb 02: The Union Budget announcement by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to extend support for high-value nut crops, including walnuts, has sparked fresh optimism in Jammu and Kashmir's walnut sector, which sustains the livelihoods of nearly seven lakh people across the region.

Mushtaq Ahmad Ganie, a known walnut trader, said that the traditional cultivation methods had reached a dead end. "In Kashmir walnut trees are huge and difficult to manage. Harvesting them is risky, and every year farmers suffer injuries while climbing," he said.

"On top of that, the traditional varieties have very hard shells. During cracking, the kernel often gets damaged, which lowers the market value," he added.

Local growers said, "This has allowed soft-shelled walnuts from countries like California and Chile to dominate Indian markets, pushing Kashmiri produce to the margins despite its superior taste."

"The imported walnuts look uniform, crack easily and are better packaged. Buyers prefer them," said Zahid Sabir a grower from Budgam. "We were losing



our space even in our own country," he added.

The Finance Minister's emphasis on high-density plantations is being viewed as a potential turning point. Unlike traditional trees, high-density walnut plants are shorter, safer to harvest and offer higher, more uniform yields—qualities essential for competing globally.

"This is a very positive step," he said. "High-density cultivation will modernise our orchards and help us match international standards. It can revive the entire walnut economy of

Kashmir." The decline of the sector has also been linked to poor infrastructure and outdated processing facilities. Several walnut processing units have shut down in recent years due to lack of modern machinery and proper packaging, plunging thousands of farming families into economic distress.

"Many of us survived only because walnut prices improved slightly this year," said Waqar Ahmad, a trader from Shopian. "For the first time in years, we feel the hard shell around our problems may finally be cracking."—(KNO)

Export figures show that over 2,134 metric tonnes of walnuts, valued at approximately 7.8 million dollars, were shipped from India to countries including the UAE, Turkey, Iraq, Singapore, Algeria, Qatar, Bhutan, Kuwait, Seychelles and Nigeria.

For growers who say they have been "fighting for survival" for years, the budget announcement has rekindled confidence.

"If the policy is implemented honestly, our future will be secure," said a grower from south Kashmir.

"For the first time in years, we feel the hard shell around our problems may finally be cracking."—(KNO)

Dy CM urges centre for statehood, 'special package'

REHAN QAYOOM MIR

Srinagar, Feb 02: Urging the Centre to announce a "special, State-like package" for the Union Territory, Deputy Chief Minister Surinder Choudhary on Monday said Jammu & Kashmir's developmental requirements are urgent.

He added that these needs are "as large as those of any full-fledged state".

Speaking to reporters on the opening day of the Budget session, the Dy CM said J&K faces unique challenges, including rising unemployment, repeated flood losses and tourism setbacks, which demand targeted fiscal support beyond the standard UT framework.

"Even as a Union Territory, our needs are equal to a state. The Union Budget must recognise our special circumstances and provide a matching package," Choudhary said.

He said unemployment has sharply risen over the last decade, while natural disasters and other disturbances have repeatedly hit tourism and livelihoods," he said. "A robust financial intervention is essential for recovery and growth."

Choudhary also called for the demand for restoration of statehood, reminding the BJP of its 2024 election pledge.

"The BJP had promised that statehood would be restored after elections. Their MLAs must now explain what happened to that commitment," he said, adding that "people of J&K expect clarity once the Budget is presented."

Responding to a question about the Chief Minister's recent meeting with Union Home Minister, Amit Shah, he



declined to comment, citing confidentiality. "Discussions held during such meetings remain confidential," he said.

Pakistan's boycott and sports politics

Reacting to Pakistan's announcement to boycott its ICC T20 World Cup match against India, the Deputy CM said the move "makes no difference" to India.

"If Pakistan doesn't play, it is their choice. India is a big country and their decisions do not affect us," he said, stressing that politics should never intrude into sports.

He added that mixing politics with sports "has historically harmed the spirit of the game" and advised all nations to keep the two spheres separate.

Barbar Move, NLU row and government focus

The Deputy CM accused the BJP and the Leader of Opposition (Lo) Sunil Sharma of creating uproar over the demand for a National Law University (NLU) instead of focusing on broader governance issues.

Continued on www.kashmirthunder.in

Prioritize tourism in Budget to fight unemployment: MLA Gulmarg

REHAN QAYOOM MIR

Srinagar, Feb 02: Calling tourism the "life-line" of Jammu and Kashmir's economy, Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) Gulmarg Farooq Ahmad Shah on Monday urged the Centre to give the sector a 'central place' in the upcoming Budget 2026-27.

He said a genuine revival of tourism and horticulture can tackle unemployment and create sustainable livelihoods for thousands across the Union Territory.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the Budget Session in Jammu, Shah said the region has unmatched potential but continues to face chronic underfunding. "Tourism is our economic key," he said, urging the government to treat the sector as a national priority to address unemployment.



Shah said tourism, if given serious policy attention, can power jobs, self-employment and infrastructure growth across the region.

The MLA said there has been a decade-long delay in the release of funds under the Prime Minister's Development Package (PMDP). "In 2014, the Prime Minister announced Rs 2,000 crore for the tourism sector. Sadly, only Rs 400 crore has been released so far, while Rs 1,600 crore remains pending. That delay has held back vital projects in Gulmarg, Pahalgam, Sonamarg and other destinations that could have transformed our tourism economy," he said.

Highlighting the link between tourism and youth employment, Farooq Shah said that Kashmir's hospitality industry, adventure tourism and handicrafts could absorb thousands of unemployed youth if given financial and institutional support. "We

have the human resource, we have natural beauty and what we need is vision-backed funding," he said.

He also drew attention to the horticulture

sector, calling it "the other half" of Kashmir's economic base. "Our agro-based products face post-harvest issues every year. Under the Holistic Agriculture Development Programme (HADP), we must focus on cold storage, processing units and marketing channels. The government should also consider KCC loan waivers for small orchardists," he added. The MLA Gulmarg further said that despite multiple challenges, the people of Jammu and Kashmir continue to show resilience. "Our youth want opportunities, not handouts. Tourism and horticulture can provide those opportunities if the right budgetary decisions are taken this time," he said.

Shah also raised concerns about the rising unemployment and unfilled vacancies in government departments. "Thousands of posts remain vacant. Daily wagers and SPOs

are worried about their future. The upcoming Budget should send a message of hope, not hesitation," he said.

Calling the present administration "promising and responsive," the MLA added that the leadership must now translate intent into action. "Our Chief Minister has a vision and a mission to address the people's hardships. The team must work in unison to fulfil public expectations. This government is of the people, by the people, and for the people," Shah said.

He further said that Kashmir's true prosperity lies not just in infrastructure or statistics but in empowering its people through sustainable sectors. "Tourism is not merely a pleasure, but it is a livelihood. If we treat it that way, this Budget could mark a new beginning for Jammu and Kashmir's economy," the MLA said—(KNO)

83% qualify 11th class exams

KNO

Srinagar, Feb 02: The Jammu and Kashmir Board of School Education (JKBOSE) Monday announced annual regular results of 11th standard with at least 83 percent qualifying the exams.

JKBOSE officials informed that 83 percent students qualify the exams.

The board official also said that the pass percentage of girls is 86 percent and 81 percent among the male students.

JKBOSE said that a total of 81,573 candidates were enrolled for the exams out of which 67,932 successfully qualified it.

In the exams, a total of 37,997 students have registered distinctions, 25,694 secured first

divisions, 4216 bagged second division and 25 candidates registered third division.

BOSE further said that in the examination, 608 students couldn't qualify the exams while 13,032 have been asked to reappear in the exams.

Pertinently, BOSE had announced syllabus relaxation of 15 percent for 10th, 11th and 12th standard examination.

Director Academics of BOSE in a notification said that the decision was taken upon the recommendations received from the DSEK and DSEJ and pleas received from other stakeholders regarding reduction in syllabus due to delayed commencement of academic session this year coupled with disruptions in academic calendar due

to heat wave, torrential rains, cloudbursts and floods.

"As approved by the competent authority, it is notified that the prospective eligible students appearing in class 10th, 11th and 12th in the ensuing annual regular, 2025 examination in Kashmir Division and winter zone areas of Jammu Division including UT of Ladakh, shall attempt 85 percent marks which will correspond to 100 percent marks, availing thus 15 percent relaxation in syllabus," reads the notification.

Pertinently, on January 14, JKBOSE declared results of both 10th and 12th standard on the same day with at least 84 percent qualifying the exam of 12th standard and 85 percent in 10th standard respectively—(KNO)

GHSS Zadibal logs 94% results

Srinagar, Feb 02: In a resounding affirmation of academic rigor and institutional excellence, the Government Girls Higher Secondary School Zadibal has recorded a commendable 94 percent pass percentage in the Class 11th board examinations.

This achievement of GHSS Zadibal reflects the profound commitment of students, faculty and the broader school community to fostering holistic educational outcomes.

A total of 396 students appeared for the examination across the Humanities, Science and Commerce streams, with 373 students successfully qualifying the exams.

This robust performance underscores the efficacy of the school's comprehensive preparation strategies, including targeted remedial classes, peer mentoring and technology-integrated learning modules tailored to diverse learner needs.

In the Commerce stream, Saboor Shabir emerged as the topper with an outstanding score of 495 marks. Rutba Rashid secured the second position with 492 marks, followed by Madiha

Nazir, who stood third with 491 marks. The Science stream witnessed an exceptional performance, with five students jointly securing the top position. Noorain Fatima, Mahroush, Saheen Fatima, Sameena Inayat, and Urzeeba each scored 493 marks, reflecting the high academic standards maintained in the stream.

In the Humanities stream, Muskan Omer secured the top position by scoring 493 marks. She was closely followed by Mubeena Ibrahim, who stood second with 492 marks, while Suzain Ayoub clinched the third position with 491 marks.

These meritorious students exemplify the transformative potential of disciplined effort within a supportive educational ecosystem.

Principal GHSS Zadibal, Mr. Mohammad Shafi Lone, articulated the significance of this milestone and said: "This 94% pass rate is more than a statistic. It is a testament to the resilience of our students and the visionary guidance of our educators."

Continued on www.kashmirthunder.in

J&K 'Crown of India', needs financial support to shine: Minister Sharma

REHAN QAYOOM MIR

Srinagar, Feb 02: Describing Jammu and Kashmir as the "crown of India," Cabinet minister Satish Sharma on Monday called for financial support to help the region flourish.

He said the region has faced extreme challenges in recent months, including unprecedented rainfall, war and the Pahalgam terror attack.

Speaking to reporters after the Assembly session in Jammu, Minister Sharma said J&K has witnessed the heaviest rainfall of this century, endured a war in the past seven months and also suffered the Pahalgam incident.

"If you say that J&K is the crown of India, then to make this crown shine, we need some financial support," he said.

The minister also further said drug addiction remains one of the biggest challenges in the Union Territory and

called for a collective effort to combat the menace.

"We need to fight this epidemic, this disease of drugs, whether it involves political figures, some police officials, or others. Many people are involved these days. When they are caught, they must face the law, with support from the community, religion and society," he said.

Sharma highlighted other pressing issues, including unemployment and limited development resources, drawing

a comparison with past parliamentary leadership. "During Sardar Manmohan Singh's time, MPs used to bring significant funds for development. Today, resources are limited, but I hope Delhi will support J&K in the same way," he said.

Hailing India's diversity, unity and achievements, the minister said J&K's youth and teams have the potential to excel in sports and other fields with proper leadership and support.

"Every community, every religion, every region contributes to India's beauty. With the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, we will make great progress in sports and aim to be among the top in the country," he said.

The minister also underscored the importance of collective action, law enforcement and national support to address social and developmental challenges in Jammu and Kashmir—(KNO)

Speaker JKLA releases 'Kuliyat Janbaaz Kishtwari'

KT NEWS DESK

Jammu, Feb 02: Speaker, Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly, Abdul Rahim Rathore on Monday released the book "Kuliyat Janbaaz Kishtwari", a comprehensive collection of works by renowned Kashmiri poet Janbaaz Kishtwari at a literary function at KL Sahgal Hall, Jammu.

The function was organized by the Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages (JKAACL), in collaboration with Chalant Cultural Forum, Kishtwar.

The Speaker lauded the contribution of Janbaaz Kishtwari to Kashmiri literature and emphasized the role of such literary initiatives in



J&K Known for his contribution to Kashmiri culture, literature and distinct singing style. "Janbaaz Kishtwari is recognized as a cultural icon who brought the soul of the Chenab Valley to his art," he added.

Principal Secretary, Culture Department, BM Sharma, Secretary, JKACL, Harvinder Kour, Zubair Ahmad Janbaaz (son of Janbaaz Kishtwari), along with a galaxy of eminent writers, poets, scholars and literary enthusiasts were present on the occasion.

In his address, Brij Mohan highlighted the significance of compiling the complete works of Janbaaz Kishtwari, stating that the publication would serve as an important reference for researchers, students

and lovers of Kashmiri literature, while also ensuring that the poet's legacy is preserved for future generations.

The book release session was presided over by Professor Shad Ramzan, who in his presidential remarks, termed Janbaaz Kishtwari as a towering figure of Kashmiri poetry whose creative expression reflected social realities, human emotions, and cultural consciousness.

A detailed paper on the book was presented by Mansoor Banjali, who critically analyzed the poetic themes, linguistic richness and stylistic nuances of Janbaaz Kishtwari's work.

Continued on www.kashmirthunder.in

EDITORIAL

A Budget Of Confidence And Strategic Continuity

The Union Budget 2026-27, with its ambitious outlay of 53.47 lakh crore, is a powerful articulation of economic confidence and strategic foresight. It masterfully navigates the dual imperatives of sustaining high growth momentum and ensuring macroeconomic stability, thereby reinforcing the foundations for a *Viksit Bharat*. This is a carefully calibrated blueprint for the next phase of India's transformative journey. The government deserves acclaim for

maintaining a steadfast commitment to fiscal consolidation—pegging the deficit at a prudent 4.3% of GDP while simultaneously increasing total expenditure by 7.7%. This delicate balance, achieving a declining debt-to-GDP trajectory while funding priority sectors, reflects disciplined economic management. It signals to global markets that India's growth is sustainable and credible, a fact underscored by the projected 10% rise in nominal GDP to 393 lakh crore. The budget's core

strength lies in its continuity of a growth-positive strategy. By maintaining focus on capital expenditure, it ensures that the multiplier effect of infrastructure investment continues to crowd in private investment and create jobs. The specific emphasis on MSMEs, manufacturing in seven strategic sectors, and the India Semiconductor Mission 2.0 showcases a clear vision to deepen India's integration into global value chains and build self-reliance in critical technologies. For

Jammu & Kashmir, the enhanced allocation of over 43,290 crore, a nearly 5% increase, is a significant endorsement of its developmental trajectory. The special focus on ecologically sustainable mountain trails is a visionary step that can unlock unique tourism and livelihood potential, aligning economic growth with environmental preservation. As the Prime Minister and the Lieutenant Governor highlighted, this budget is a "highway of opportunities". It empowers

the key pillars of New India—youth, women, farmers, and entrepreneurs—while investing in the digital and physical infrastructure of the future. By prioritising inflation containment, fiscal discipline, and inclusive growth, it lays a robust pathway towards the \$5 trillion economy milestone. This budget reaffirms that India's reform journey is on an accelerated, irreversible path, building a future of prosperity that leaves no citizen behind.

India-EU FTA Is More Than A Deal, It's A Roadmap To Our Future

It's a clear demonstration of how strong leadership and strategic clarity can unlock new opportunities which can propel the nation on the path of prosperity

Piyush Goyal

The India-EU Free Trade Agreement is a historic milestone in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's economic diplomacy. It will generate millions of jobs, create vast opportunities for India's youth and farmers, and create wealth for nearly 2 billion people who together account for a quarter of the global economy.

The agreement between the world's second- and fourth-largest economies is among the biggest trade deals ever signed. In fact, it is far more than a trade deal. It represents a comprehensive partnership that fosters cooperation in critical sectors such as artificial intelligence, defence, and semiconductors. The FTA will benefit every region and citizen of India, particularly the poorer sections.

The FTA ensures rules-based trade and stability in economic policies, making India even more attractive for domestic and foreign investment. This will create numerous opportunities for small businesses, startups, and workers.

The world has applauded PM Modi's announcement, calling it the "mother of all deals". It reinforces stability at a time of global uncertainty. The agreement positions India and the European Union as trusted partners committed to open markets, predictability, and inclusive growth.

India has secured unprecedented market access for more than 99 per cent of its exports to the EU by trade value, strongly bolstering the Make in India initiative. The FTA gives a decisive boost to labour-intensive sectors such as textiles, apparel, leather, footwear, marine products, gems and jewellery, handicrafts, engineering goods, and automobiles.

It will eliminate tariffs of up to 10 per cent on nearly \$33 billion worth of Indian exports. The agreement also empowers workers, artisans, women, youth, and MSMEs, while integrating Indian businesses more deeply into global value chains and reinforcing India's role as a key supplier in global



trade.

The deal also eases mobility for businesspersons and professionals and opens new opportunities in services such as education, information technology, financial services, and computers. These commitments unlock high-value employment opportunities and further strengthen India's position as a global hub for talent, innovation, and sustainable economic growth.

Trade agreements are part of the Modi government's broader strategy to improve the lives of the poor – first by strengthening the economy through path-breaking reforms and prudent fiscal management, and then by negotiating with developed and complementary economies with the

objective of a win-win deal. This approach enables India to leverage its comparative advantages access markets which are key for growing its labour-intensive sectors while safeguarding sensitive sectors such as agriculture and dairy.

Trade agreements with developed countries expose Indian industry to healthy competition and provide consumers with world-class products. Unlike the UPA, which recklessly opened India's markets, the Modi government has negotiated agreements in which tariff reductions are gradual, giving industry adequate time to improve competitiveness and quality with appropriate policy support.

The supply of high-quality products at

competitive prices is central to the PM's *Viksit Bharat* 2047 vision. Reiterating this commitment last week, the Prime Minister said: "Come, let us prioritise quality with all our might this year. Let our only mantra be quality, quality, and only quality. Better quality today than yesterday. Let us resolve to improve the quality of whatever we manufacture."

The India-EU FTA is fully aligned with PM Modi's vision of making India a developed country. It positions India as a dynamic, trusted, and forward-looking partner on the global stage, laying the foundation for inclusive, resilient, and future-ready growth for both regions. The Modi government has concluded trade agreements only with

developed countries, which do not compete with India's major job-creating sectors such as textiles, footwear, gems and jewellery, and handicrafts. This stands in sharp contrast to the UPA regime, which rushed into agreements with competing economies and often conceded far more than India gained.

Moreover, there is no evidence that the UPA government conducted meaningful consultations with stakeholders before signing trade agreements. In contrast, the Modi government has signed FTAs only after rigorous consultations with economists, industry bodies, experts, and multiple government departments and ministries. As a result, every FTA signed by the Modi government has received widespread appreciation from industry. Every FTA concluded by the Modi government has created new opportunities for both sides and expanded global opportunities for India's labour-intensive sectors. These agreements have accelerated India's journey towards becoming a developed country by 2047.

During the UPA's tenure, developed countries, including the European Union, had lost interest in India as economic growth slowed, inflation remained high, and business sentiment was pessimistic. India lost valuable opportunities to conclude win-win trade deals that could have accelerated growth and generated employment.

The India-EU FTA, along with other trade agreements concluded by the Modi government, underlines the difference between drift and decisive leadership. While earlier regimes hesitated and compromised, the Modi government has delivered a transformative agreement that expands markets, creates jobs, and protects India's core interests. It is a clear demonstration of how strong leadership and strategic clarity can unlock new opportunities which can propel the nation on the path of prosperity.

The author is Union Minister for Commerce and Industry

PRAGATI@50: Why Delivery, Not Intent, Defines Governance

PRAGATI is both a record of leadership-driven delivery and a blueprint for governing complexity. The Global attention and applause that it is receiving are proof of this.

T.K. Ramachandran

Two path-breaking interventions by the Government have had a great impact on planning, execution and monitoring of large projects - PM Gati Shakti and PRAGATI. We look at the latter in this piece.

The 50th high-level review under the PRAGATI (Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation) framework marks a fundamental shift in how the Indian State approaches governance, moving from intent to delivery, procedural compliance to outcomes, and fragmented authority to coordinated, timely execution. PRAGATI is thus not merely an administrative innovation; it represents a deliberate re-engineering of governance architecture. How did this model of governance deliver results when others have failed?

The Need For PRAGATI

Delays in public projects have become almost axiomatic. Yet they rarely stem from a lack of policy clarity or financial sanction. They arise because governance systems are fragmented. Ministries function vertically; States and the Centre act sequentially; and disputes circulate without a forum empowered to impose resolution. Accountability diffuses even as activity multiplies. The core problem is weak coordination and silo-based review mechanisms.

As a result, the broader objective of project

delivery is often lost. Many projects remained stalled for years due to land issues, environmental or forest clearances, regulatory approvals, contractual disputes, or inter-State coordination challenges. In a multi-ministry and multi-State political economy where each entity lords over the domain it controls, it is difficult for anyone to convince the other.

When several States and Ministries have to contribute to project completion the old approach of having meetings, discussions, field visits, constituting committees, and endless correspondence is ineffective. This was an approach in which discussion was mistaken for decision, activity for work, movement to progress and mere intent for achievement.

Enter PRAGATI

PRAGATI addresses these persistent structural failures by redesigning how decisions are taken, synchronised, and enforced. Functioning as a system integrator, it brings decision-makers across Ministries, States, and districts onto a single institutional and digital platform. It collapses delays caused by file movement, jurisdictional ambiguity, and inter-departmental correspondence. Most importantly, it restores a bird's-eye view of execution, allowing leadership to identify where the system is constrained rather than where a file is pending.

The Hon'ble Prime Minister's role in chairing

PRAGATI reviews is central to its effectiveness. His direct engagement sends an unambiguous signal that delivery is a national priority and that execution failures will receive attention at the highest level. It facilitates decisive action and transforms review into a binding framework for results. Decisions taken during these reviews are final, time-bound, and digitally recorded, ensuring accountability is clear and enforceable.

Technology acts as a critical enabler. Real-time data, geo-spatial visualisation, and live interaction with field authorities eliminate information asymmetry between stakeholders and ensure that decision-making is grounded in evidence. Importantly, technology strengthens administrative judgment rather than replacing it, reinforcing leadership responsibility within the system.

What distinguishes PRAGATI from earlier review mechanisms is its insistence on closure. Issues remain live until resolved and are continuously tracked by the Cabinet Secretariat and the Prime Minister's Office. Explanations no longer substitute outcomes. Over time, this discipline has reshaped administrative behaviour, encouraging Ministries and States to anticipate and resolve problems before escalation becomes necessary.

The Results

The outcomes are clearly visible and measurable. Projects worth over 85 lakh crore

have seen accelerated progress. In recent years, ten projects of the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW) were reviewed under PRAGATI, enabling early resolution of bottlenecks and faster execution. I will use two projects as examples.

The National Maritime Heritage Complex at Lothal is a massive project involving many Ministries at the Centre like Culture, Defence, External Affairs, Railways and Highways as well as the Government of Gujarat. Also, since several coastal State pavilions are to be set up, the concerned States are also part of the project.

Bringing the NMHC project onto the PRAGATI agenda last year immediately spurred action at multiple levels. Usually, the agenda is notified a few months before it is taken up for review by the Hon'ble Prime Minister, providing an opportunity for different stakeholders to address issues with a sense of urgency. The result is that most issues that can be sorted at an official/ministerial level are already sorted out and only intractable residual items requiring guidance or direction are taken up during the actual review.

Similarly, the Jal Marg Vikas project, which is being implemented on NW-1 that passes through Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, and West Bengal was reviewed under PRAGATI twice. This project is now at completion stage with most pending issues resolved.

PRAGATI underscores a critical truth: public value is created not merely by announcing schemes, but by ensuring that sanctioned investments translate into outcomes. Stalled projects have progressed not because policies were rewritten, but because execution pathways were simplified and accountability enforced. Equally significant is PRAGATI's contribution to cooperative federalism. By placing Chief Secretaries and Union Secretaries on a single real-time platform, it replaces fragmented responsibility with shared ownership of results.

PRAGATI@50 stands as evidence that governance outcomes are a function of institutional design. Dismantling silos, restoring a bird's-eye view of execution, and prioritising closure, PRAGATI demonstrates that effective governance is not just about doing more, but also about doing what is already sanctioned, faster, better, and together. Timely execution accelerates access to services, boosts the economy, reduces regional disparities, and strengthens public confidence in the State's capacity to govern.

PRAGATI is both a record of leadership-driven delivery and a blueprint for governing complexity. The Global attention and applause that it is receiving are proof of this.

The author is Ex Secretary, Ministry of Ports Shipping and Waterways

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

Rana reviews UT CAPEX works of Jal Shakti department

Stresses timely, transparent completion of WSS and I&FC works

KT News Desk

JAMMU, FEBRUARY 2: Minister for Jal Shakti, Forest, Ecology & Environment and Tribal Affairs, Javed Ahmed Rana, Monday reviewed progress on UT CAPEX works of the Jal Shakti Department, with special focus on execution status of Water Supply Schemes (WSS) and Irrigation & Flood Control (I&FC) works targeted for 2025-26.

The Minister, as per an official statement, undertook a comprehensive review of projects being executed in Jammu division, analysing the physical and financial progress, bottlenecks and timelines. He issued clear instructions for expediting execution and ensuring timely completion of all targeted works, emphasizing transparency, quality and adherence to set deadlines.

The Minister stressed that timely and transparent



completion of WSS and I&FC works is crucial for improving service delivery, strengthening irrigation infrastructure and ensuring drinking water security across sub-regions.

The meeting was attended by Additional Chief Secretary,

DLTFC approves 30 JKREGP projects in Rajouri

KT News Desk

RAJOURI, FEBRUARY 02: The District Level Task Force Committee meeting under Jammu Kashmir Rural Employment Generation Programme (JKREGP), was Monday convened by the J&K Khadi & Village Industries Board Rajouri at its office for selection of the candidates who have applied for financial assistance to establish different types of Micro Industrial units under Manufacturing, Service & trading sector.

The meeting, as per an official statement, was chaired by Additional District Development Commissioner Malikzada Shaerazul Haq and attended by District Officer KVIB Sameer Ahmed, Lead District Manager J&K Bank, Cluster Head JKB, Director JKB RSETI, representatives from DIC and Area Manager JKGB.

The Additional District Development Commissioner emphasized adherence to the parameters and laid down norms of the Scheme while screening the applicants. "Only projects having good potentiality and viability with area specific approach shall be considered under the schemes," he stressed.

The District officer KVIB placed a list of 64 candidates before the Committee. Each candidate was interviewed by the committee to assess the experience, technical know-how and viability of the projects.

The Committee after considering all related aspects of the scheme, selected 30 proposals, involving project cost of Rs.235.00 Lakh with the margin money component of Rs.82.25 Lakh. The proposed projects are expected to generate employment opportunities for about 180 persons.

Director Agriculture dedicates Mobile AC van to boost farmers' market access in Kashmir

KT News Desk

SRINAGAR, FEBRUARY 02: In a significant step towards strengthening post-harvest infrastructure and supporting farmers in the Kashmir Valley, Director Agriculture Kashmir, Sartaj Ahmad Shah, on Monday dedicated a fully equipped Mobile Air-Conditioned Van to the farming community.

The van is specifically designed for the safe and efficient transportation of perishable agricultural produce within the valley and to markets outside the region.

The vehicle, as per an official statement, procured under the Holistic Agriculture Development Programme (HADP), a flagship initiative of the Agriculture Production Department, Government of Jammu & Kashmir addresses key challenges faced by farmers, including spoilage during transit, limited access to refrigerated transport, and fluctuating market prices due to quality degradation.

Speaking on the occasion, the Director emphasized the government's commitment to farmer welfare and modernization of agriculture in Kashmir. "This mobile air-conditioned van is a practical intervention under HADP to reduce post-harvest losses, preserve the freshness and quality of our farmers' produce such as fruits,



vegetables, and other perishables and enable better market access", he added.

"It will empower growers to transport their harvest reliably to distant markets, fetch remunerative prices, and contribute to the overall growth of the agricultural economy in the region," he said.

The van features advanced air-conditioning and cooling systems to maintain optimal temperature and humidity levels during transportation, ensuring minimal damage to delicate crops. It is expected to benefit small and marginal farmers, cooperatives, and producer groups by providing an affordable, on-demand

transport solution.

This initiative aligns with the broader objectives of HADP, which focuses on holistic development through infrastructure enhancement, value addition, market linkages, and sustainability in agriculture and allied sectors across Jammu & Kashmir.

The Directorate of Agriculture Kashmir remains dedicated to implementing innovative schemes that directly uplift farmers and promote resilient, profitable farming practices.

On the occasion Chief Agriculture Officer Srinagar, Ajaz Hussain Dar and other senior officers of the department were also present.

JKERA CEO reviews progress of Lal Ded hospital expansion project

KT News Desk

SRINAGAR, FEBRUARY 02: Chief Executive Officer, J&K Economic Reconstruction Agency (ERA) /JTFRP, Shreya Singhal, Monday inspected the progress of work on the construction of the state-of-the-art 108-bed additional block for specialised Infertility and Gynae Oncology at Lal Ded Hospital, Srinagar.

The project, as per an official statement is being executed under the World Bank funded Jhelum Tawi Flood Recovery Project (JTFRP) implemented by PWD (R&B), which is being constructed at an estimated cost of Rs 118 crore involving seismic-resistant base isolation technology.

During the inspection, the concerned officers briefed the Chief Executive Officer about the salient features of the project, highlighting that the building is being constructed as per modern hospital architectural standards being adopted nationally



and internationally. The G+5 structure with attic and stilt parking will house specialised zones including modular operation theatres, ICUs, High Dependency Units (HDUs), LDR suites, pre- and post-natal care wards, recovery wards and dedicated patient waiting lounges, with a total built-up area of 11,640 square metres.

The CEO was informed that foundation works of the building have been completed and that the project is entering a crucial phase, with planning and design nearing completion and prefabricated structural components being manufactured off-site and expected to reach the project location shortly.

Emphasising the importance of timely completion of this critical healthcare infrastructure, the CEO directed that the project be expedited and completed well before 31st August, with multiple activities taken up in parallel to avoid any time overruns.

She instructed the Project Implementation Unit (R&B) and Project Management Support (PMS) teams to

conduct weekly site visits to closely monitor progress and ensure adherence to timelines.

The CEO further stressed the need for streamlined coordination with key stakeholder departments, particularly the Health Department, to ensure seamless execution of works and timely integration of services.

Additionally, the CEO instructed the PIU to expedite procurement of medical, electrical and mechanical equipment, so that installation can proceed in sync with civil works as part of the integrated health sector project.

Senior officers including the Chief Engineer, PWD (R&B) (Central) Superintending Engineer, PWD (R&B) Central, Project Manager J&KERA Kashmir, Executive Engineer PWD (R&B) Central, Deputy Project Manager J&KERA Kashmir and other officials from PWD (R&B) and J&KERA accompanied the CEO during the site inspection.

DC Budgam Reviews RGSA, SBM-G progress, stresses timely completion

KT NEWS DESK

BUDGAM, FEBRUARY 02: A meeting on the implementation of Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA) and Swachh Bharat Mission Gramin (SBM-G) was held Monday under the chairmanship of District Development Commissioner Budgam, Dr. Bilal Mohi-ud-Din Bhat.

The meeting, as per an official statement, was convened by the Assistant Commissioner Panchayat Budgam, who briefed the meeting about the agenda and overall status of implementation.

The meeting was held to review physical and financial progress, assess infrastructure development, sanitation coverage, solid and liquid waste management components, and to identify constraints affecting the implementation of the Annual Implementation Plan (AIP) 2025-26.

Under RGSA, a detailed review was conducted on the progress of Panchayat Ghars for the financial years 2023-24 and 2024-25. The status of construction, completion, and operationalisation of Panchayat Ghars was assessed.

On the occasion, the DC emphasised that timely completion of Panchayat Ghars is essential for strengthening the institutional infrastructure of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and for improving grassroots governance.

The DC reviewed the status of Co-location of Common Service Centres (CSCs) in Panchayat Ghar's. He highlighted the importance of ensuring functional CSCs at Panchayat level for delivery of citizen-centric digital services and directions were issued to strengthen coordination for effective co-location.

The DC stressed the need for timely resolution of bottlenecks to ensure smooth execution of approved works.

Under SBM-G, comprehensive review was undertaken of all sanitation and waste management components.

The status of Individual Household Latrines (IHLs) was reviewed, with emphasis on coverage, functionality, and sustainability to ensure continued usage and universal sanitation. The progress of Community Sanitary Complexes was also reviewed.

The DC directed to

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BUDGAM



ensure their timely completion and proper maintenance for public convenience.

While reviewing the status of Segregation Sheds, the DC underscored importance of segregation at source and establishment of proper segregation infrastructure.

The progress of Community Compost Pits was reviewed to strengthen biodegradable waste management at village level. The status of Community Soak Pits

was reviewed, with emphasis on improving liquid waste and grey water management.

The progress of Decentralized Wastewater Treatment Systems (DEWATS) was reviewed in detail. The DC emphasised the establishment of DEWATS as an important component for decentralized treatment of wastewater and for improving overall village sanitation and environmental sustainability.

The status of Plastic Waste Management Units (PWMUs) was reviewed. The establishment and operationalisation of PWMUs was emphasized as a key requirement for scientific handling and processing of plastic waste in the district.

The status of Faecal Sludge Treatment Plants (FSTPs) was also reviewed in detail. The importance of FSTPs for safe treatment and disposal of faecal sludge was highlighted by DC as a critical sanitation



infrastructure component.

The meeting discussed in detail the constraints affecting implementation of the Annual Implementation Plan (AIP) 2025-26. The DC emphasized that all concerned departments and field functionaries must adopt a proactive, coordinated, and result-oriented approach to resolve land-related and legal issues at the earliest so that implementation of RGSA and SBM-G is not adversely impacted.

He stressed that focused efforts must be made to accelerate execution of approved works, ensure adherence to timelines, and maintain quality standards. The need for regular monitoring, timely reporting, and close supervision at field level was reiterated.

The DC further emphasized strengthening sanitation infrastructure, solid and liquid waste management systems, and institutional capacity of Panchayati Raj Institutions across the district. It was stressed that transparency, accountability, and effective implementation must be ensured to achieve the intended objectives of the flagship schemes.

The DC issued directions to all concerned officers to take immediate follow-up action on the identified constraints and to ensure that targets under Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan and Swachh Bharat Mission-Gramin are achieved in a timely, effective, and sustainable manner.

Besides, GM DIC budgam, CPO budgam, SDM Beerwah, ACP budgam, Exen REW, all BDOs, all Tehsildar's and other concerned officers were present in the meeting.

PIB Srinagar media tour to Kerala begins with visit to Kochi Water Metro

Sustainable, climate-resilient urban mobility showcased to J&K media delegation



PIB

Srinagar, Feb 02: The media tour organised by Press Information Bureau (PIB), Srinagar to Kerala commenced on Monday with a visit to Kochi Metro Rail Limited (KMRL), where the press delegation was briefed on the Kochi Water Metro Project, a pioneer in urban mobility initiative.

On the first day of the tour, the PIB Srinagar press delegation visited the office of Kochi Metro Rail Limited, Kochi, to gain first-hand insights into the planning, implementation and operational framework of the Kochi Water Metro. The delegation interacted with senior officials of KMRL and Kochi Water Metro Project.

The media delegation met Loknath Behera, Managing Director, KMRL, Dr. M.P. Ram Navas, Director (Projects), KMRL;

Shaji Janardanan, Chief General Manager, KMRL; Sajan John, Chief Operating Officer, Kochi Water Metro and K.K. Jayakumar, Head (PR & Social Media), KMRL.

Behera described the Water Metro as a time-saving and integrated mobility concept, enabling seamless cross-platform ticketing between water and rail metro services. He emphasised that human interface, attention to detail, cleanliness, efficient ticketing systems and creation of a viable ecosystem are key to the success of any public transport system.

Sajan John, COO, Kochi Water Metro, briefed the delegation on the objectives and vision of the Kochi Water Metro, highlighting its role as a climate-resilient, sustainable and inclusive transport system. He informed that the project provides a seamless transport option with universal and equitable access, improved

safety standards and a shift towards green, low-polluting mobility solutions. He informed that the Water Metro is presently operating with 20 battery-operated boats and 12 terminals, providing connectivity and transport services to thousands of commuters from around 10 surrounding islands.

Operational aspects of the project were explained by Shaji Janardanan, CGM, KMRL, who elaborated on terminal accessibility, safety measures including deployment of rescue boats, and the use of battery-operated vessels with dedicated charging docks, resulting in minimal carbon footprint.

The Kochi Water Metro was inaugurated by Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi on April 25, 2023. Officials informed that feasibility studies for similar water metro systems have been

conducted in 15 cities across the country, including Srinagar, with Mumbai identified as the next potential location. The project, a Government of India initiative jointly implemented by the Government of Kerala and Kochi Metro, has received several national and international recognitions.

Shamila K Y Media & Communication Officer, PIB Kochi also accompanied the delegation during the visit. At the outset of the meeting, Majid Pandit, Media & Communication Officer, PIB Srinagar and Conducting Officer of the tour, introduced the media delegation.

As part of the programme, the media delegation was provided a hands-on experience of the project through a ferry ride on the Kochi Water Metro, offering practical exposure to its operations and passenger facilities.

Secy RDD inaugurates regional workshop on Quality GPDP formulation at IMPARD

Planning at grassroots defines development outcomes: Aijaz Asad

KT News Desk

Jammu, Feb 02: Secretary, Rural Development Department and Panchayati Raj, Mohammad Ajaz Asad, on Monday said that democracy finds its most authentic expression at the level of the Gram Panchayat, emphasizing that meaningful and inclusive development is possible only through sound, participatory, and evidence-based planning at the grassroots.

He was speaking at the inauguration of a three-day Regional Workshop on Capacity Building and Handholding Support for the Formulation of Quality Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs) at IMPARD, J&K, being organized in collaboration with the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad.

The event was attended by Director General, IMPARD, Rehana Batul; Director, Panchayati Raj, J&K, Sham Lal; Project Head, NIRDPR, Dr. A. K. Banja; experts from NIRDPR; Master Trainers; and senior officers of the department. Panchayat Secretaries, Account Assistants, and other field functionaries are participating in the workshop.

The Secretary said the initiative aims to facilitate the formulation of quality GPDPs in 285 Gram Panchayats—one from each Block of the Union Territory which will serve as model plans for replication



across other Panchayats. He described the partnership with NIRDPR as a significant milestone and expressed confidence that it would usher in a new era of participatory, data-driven, and outcome-oriented planning in line with the vision of the Ministry of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad.

similar capacity-building programmes be organized across districts to bring tangible improvements in GPDP formulation and implementation.

Director General, IMPARD, Rehana Batul, highlighted the role of GPDPs in holistic rural development and emphasized the need for structured capacity-building initiatives to strengthen planning and execution at the Panchayat level.

Director Panchayati Raj, Sham Lal, said that innovative initiatives and large-scale capacity-building programmes are transforming rural governance in Jammu & Kashmir. He stated that the project would result in 285 Model GPDPs, supported through mentoring and handholding, and serve as valuable templates for the entire UT. Emphasizing the role of Master Trainers, he said empowered Panchayats lead to empowered people and a more self-reliant rural Jammu & Kashmir.

CONTD. FROM FRONT PAGE

Govt committed

of the need for sustained and focused efforts to ensure balanced, inclusive, and environmentally sustainable development," he said.

The LG said good governance continues to be the cornerstone of the Government's development strategy in Jammu and Kashmir.

"Sustained transparency, reforms, accountability in digital governance, and citizen-centric service delivery have significantly strengthened public trust and institutional efficiency," he said.

The LG said the past year marks a significant milestone in the democratic journey of Jammu and Kashmir with the formation of an elected Government after a gap of several years.

"This transition to popular governance has strengthened public faith in democratic institutions. My Government has focused on restoring participatory governance, rebuilding public confidence, and ensuring that the voice of every region and community finds expression in policymaking," he said.

He said his Government remains firmly committed to further strengthening democratic institutions.

"Timely conduct of elections to local bodies, continued enhancement of grievance redressal mechanisms, and deeper integration of digital governance will reinforce transparency, accountability, and governance," he said.

The LG said the Government has ensured livelihoods for families impacted by tragedy and violence.

"During the year, 910 compassionate appointments were made, including 464 appointments to the Next of Kin of terror-affected families, thereby ensuring dignified livelihoods for families impacted by tragedy and violence," he said.

Talking about the economic growth of the Union Territory, the LG said, "Jammu & Kashmir is one of the fastest-growing States/UTs in the country. GST revenue collection has shown steady growth from Rs 8064 crore in 2023-24 to Rs 8586 crore in 2024-25. The tariff from electric power has witnessed a substantial increase of 16 per cent in 2024-25."

He said the economy of Jammu and Kashmir has demonstrated encouraging momentum in recent years.

"The Union Territory is presently recording an annual nominal growth rate of around 11 per cent (2024-25), reflecting the positive outcomes of sustained policy reforms, enhanced infrastructure development, and proactive investment facilitation. The Government remains committed to consolidating this growth trajectory through strengthened fiscal discipline and by creating diversified and sustainable employment opportunities, with particular emphasis on youth and women," he said.

He said the Special Assistance to States for Capital Infusion (SASI) for interest-free loans for capital investments has been extended to J&K from the current financial year.

"Under SASI, Rs 1431 crore has been sanctioned for 222 projects and Rs 210 crore as matching share for 12 centrally sponsored schemes. The first instalment of Rs 1083 crore

(66% of the sanctioned amount) has been received," he said.

The LG also spoke in detail about infrastructure development in the UT, saying it remains a critical driver of economic transformation.

"The road sector in the Union Territory has witnessed unprecedented investment amounting to Rs 61528 crore, encompassing expressways, National Highways, ring roads, and tunnels, significantly enhancing regional and inter-regional connectivity. Three major tunnels, including the Sonamarg Tunnel, have been completed, while eight others, including the strategic Zojila Tunnel, are at advanced stages of completion. The Narbal-Shopian-Surankote road has been declared a National Highway, further strengthening all-weather connectivity across the Pir Panjal region," he said.

He said 19 new National Highway projects with an estimated cost of Rs 10637 crore have been sanctioned for 2025-26, which include key infrastructure works such as the Pir Ki Gali Tunnel and the Sadhna Tunnel.

"My Government places on record its deep appreciation to the Government of India for the launch of PMGSY-IV, which will ensure road connectivity to 2400 unconnected habitations. Under Phase-I of this programme, 316 projects involving an investment of Rs 4224 crore have already been sanctioned, covering a total road length of 1,781 kilometres," he said.

He said the Kashmir Valley has been connected with the rest of the country through the railway network, opening new avenues for trade, tourism, and economic progress.

"A full-fledged Railway Division has also been sanctioned for Jammu & Kashmir, and expansion and modernization of Jammu Tawi Railway Station is under progress," he said.

He said the power sector has been one of the priority sectors of his Government, which is witnessing structural transformation.

"Major Hydropower Projects-Pakal Dul, Kuru, Kwar, and Ratle-with a combined capacity of 3014 MW are under active execution. Over the past five years, a record 5,708 MVA has been added to the distribution sector and 4239 MVA to the transmission sector. Installation of smart prepaid meters is underway in mission mode, with 10.44 lakh smart meters already installed, and 100% coverage targeted by 2026-27. As a result, losses have been reduced by 9%, while revenue realization has increased by 16%," he said.

He said the Government of India has accorded approval to a project for providing 200 free units of electricity to 2.23 lakh AAY families of Jammu and Kashmir under the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojna—Utility Led Aggregation (ULA) model.

He added that implementation of the project is going to start soon.

The LG said tourism continues to be a vital pillar of the economy of Jammu and Kashmir.

"Despite challenges arising from security-related incidents and natural calamities, the Union Territory recorded 1.78 crore tourist visits in 2025," he said.

The LG said tourism has been accorded industry status to attract investment and

generate employment.

"Recognizing tourism as a lifeline of Jammu and Kashmir's economy, the Government undertook confidence-building measures, facilitation, and improved coordination with stakeholders. Special efforts were made to revive pilgrim tourism in Jammu, adventure tourism in Kashmir, and eco-tourism in tribal and border areas, ensuring equitable regional growth," he said. (KNO)

LG Sinha to NCC

and building a developed society and the nation.

He stated that the NCC has inspired generations of youth with the understanding that national interest stands above personal gain, and that working together for society's welfare represents the true leadership.

"Since 1948, the NCC has provided the country's youth with a platform where young people from diverse backgrounds unite with a shared purpose. Through camps, training, cultural programs, and social campaigns, the NCC has brought values like discipline, leadership, teamwork, and service into the lives of millions of young people. The NCC has inspired generations of youth with the understanding that national interest stands above personal gain, and that working together for society's welfare represents true leadership," the Lieutenant Governor said.

The Lieutenant Governor emphasized that only when young people choose duty over convenience and prioritize society's welfare over their own interests can a developed society and nation truly take shape.

"When honesty, hard work, and the spirit of service become integral to young people's lives in society, development ceases to remain confined to statistics- it becomes connected to life values," he said.

The Lieutenant Governor asked the NCC cadets to focus on self-development. "Your self-development connects directly to the country's progress. When NCC cadets and young people in society advance toward excellence in any field with newfound confidence, they not only secure their own future but also contribute to the nation's progress," the Lieutenant Governor said.

The Lieutenant Governor highlighted that the NCC cadets in Jammu Kashmir bear the significant responsibility of strengthening brotherhood.

"I want cadets of the Jammu Kashmir Ladakh NCC Directorate to eliminate walls of region, language, caste, and religion through their collective work.

The development is not limited to "I" but is truly connected to "we." In giving concrete form to this collective spirit, no other organization in India has contributed more than the NCC.

I want you to create feelings of respect and trust in every district's social fabric through national and international exposure, shared experiences, and common goals. Always remember that mutual brotherhood develops through cooperation, sensitivity, and collective responsibility. All NCC cadets must together

create an atmosphere where unity is practiced daily and diversity is transformed into society's strength," the Lieutenant Governor said.

The Lieutenant Governor observed that, for contributing to different sectors of developed India, we need leadership founded on ethics and social responsibility. He said, whether in IT, industry, education, armed forces, or culture, work must be done with accountability in all fields.

The Lieutenant Governor commended the Jammu Kashmir Ladakh NCC Directorate for incorporating the drone technology into training, in line with today's global changes. "I am fully confident that such initiatives will become not merely the nation's future but its present strength," he further said.

The Lieutenant Governor also felicitated the Cadets with the Certificates of Excellence for their significant contributions to the success of the contingent. He complimented the Cadets and NCC officers for their excellent performance on Kartavya Path and at various other competitions. The Cadets also shared their experience at the Republic Day camp.

A total of 128 cadets of Jammu Kashmir and Ladakh NCC Directorate had participated in this year's Republic Day celebration.

SUO Arpundee Kour of 3 J&K Battalion NCC, Baramulla, was conferred with the prestigious Raksha Mantri Padak for her outstanding leadership and service during OP SINDOOR, while Lieutenant Ruksana Kousar was honoured with the Chief of Army Staff Commendation for her dedication and devotion to duty.

In addition, the Directorate secured an impressive 11 DG NCC Medallions and Commendation Cards, reflecting excellence across multiple disciplines. Cadet Tawheed Altaf of 7 J&K Battalion NCC, Baramulla, was appointed Parade Commander of the All India NCC Boys Contingent at Kartavya Path. Adding further distinction, Cadet Samriti Kalhuria of 8 J&K Bn NCC had the rare honour of serving as pilot to the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India during the PM Rally, underscoring the trust and confidence placed in NCC cadets of the Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh.

The recognition of its consistent performance, rapid transformation and outstanding achievements, NCC Directorate Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh was awarded the Director General's Most Improved Directorate Award and secured an impressive position at the All-India level during Republic Day 2026.

Maj Gen A. Bevli, VSM, Additional Director General of the J&K and Ladakh Directorate, senior Officers and Instructors of J&K and Ladakh NCC Directorate, officials of Lok Bhawan were also present on the occasion.

Speaker, House pay

towards the upliftment of general public.

The Speaker and house members also observed a two-minute silence in memory of the former lawmakers, acknowledging their service and commitment to public welfare.

NC-Cong meeting,

the lone Rajya Sabha seat to Congress in 2015.

Baramulla district, was the coldest recorded place in the Union Territory, registering a minimum temperature of minus 8 degrees Celsius. Pahalgam, a tourist resort in south Kashmir, recorded a low of minus 5.5 degrees Celsius.

Among other places, Qazigund recorded a minimum temperature of 0.7 degrees Celsius, Kokernag settled at minus 0.6 degrees, while Kupwara in north Kashmir registered a low of minus 1.3 degrees Celsius, officials said.

The Meteorological Department has forecast light rain and snowfall at many places. Weather is expected to remain partly cloudy from February 4 to February 6.

On February 7, light rain or snowfall is likely at a few places, while conditions are expected to remain partly cloudy again from February 8 to February 10.

Travellers and transporters have been advised to check road and highway conditions before undertaking journeys, particularly in snow-bound areas.

People living in higher reaches have also been cautioned against venturing into avalanche-prone areas, officials added.

An avalanche with a low danger level is likely to occur at elevations above 2,400 metres in Bandipora district over the next 24 hours, the Jammu and Kashmir Union Territory Disaster Management Authority (JKUTDMA) said.

Authorities have advised people to avoid avalanche-prone areas and strictly follow official advisories. In case of any emergency, residents have been asked to dial 112. (KNO)

NDA Parliamentary Party meet today to discuss Union Budget

IANS

New Delhi, Feb 02: The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) will hold a Parliamentary Party meeting on Tuesday morning to discuss the Union Budget 2026 and the vision of a Viksit Bharat 2047.

The meeting will be held at 9.30 a.m. in New Delhi and will be attended by top NDA leaders.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, BJP National President Nitin Nohin, and all other NDA ministers and MPs will be present at the meeting.

PM Modi will also address the NDA parliamentary party meeting.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will present the budget's features and forward-looking vision through a presentation, highlighting how it is a major step towards creating a Viksit Bharat by 2047. During the meeting, guidelines will be



provided on how to communicate the budget's features and benefits to the public, and a roadmap for this will be presented.

Sitharaman presented the Union Budget 2026 in the Lok Sabha on Sunday. This was her ninth budget and was motivated by three 'kartavyas' or duties aimed at boosting and maintaining economic growth

by improving competitiveness, meeting aspirations, and ensuring that every family, community, and region has access to resources and opportunities for engagement.

The Prime Minister on Sunday hailed the budget, calling it a "highway of immense opportunities" and said that the "Reform Express" on which India is

riding, "will gain new energy and momentum through this budget". He said that the budget is a "highway of immense opportunities", which will "turn the dreams of the present into reality" and lay a "strong foundation for India's bright future" and for the nation's "high flight" towards the resolution of a Viksit Bharat by 2047.

As the Finance Minister mentioned in Parliament, PM Modi said, "This is a Youth Power Budget. It reflects the thinking, dreams, determination, and energy of young India. The provisions in the budget will prepare leaders, innovators, and creators across sectors."

"From building medical hubs and developing allied health professionals, promoting the orange economy and AVGC sectors, boosting tourism, to opening new opportunities through the Khelo India mission, the budget unlocks pathways for youth to excel and lead," he added.

Goyal meets National Stock Exchange's CEO

PTI

New Delhi, Feb 02: Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Monday held a meeting with National Stock Exchange (NSE) MD and CEO Ashish Kumar Chauhan in Mumbai on the holistic benefits of the Budget 2026-27.

Investors and captains from the mutual funds and asset management industry were also present at the meeting.

"Had an excellent and engaging breakfast meeting on the holistic benefits of the #ViksitBharatBudget2026 at the NSE, with their MD & CEO @AshishChauhan ji, along with investors and captains from the mutual funds and asset management industry. Delighted by their optimism following the budget, their excitement for the growth opportunities that it supports, as well as the new ideas and suggestions that they shared," Goyal said in a social media post.

The meeting comes on the heels of the FY27 Budget proposal to increase the securities transaction tax (STT) on futures contracts to 0.05 per cent from 0.02 per cent. STT on options premium and exercise of options are proposed to be raised to 0.15 per cent from the present rate of 0.1 per cent and 0.125 per cent, respectively.

Jaishankar embarks on 3-day visit to US

PTI

New Delhi, Feb 02: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Monday embarked on a three-day visit to the US to attend a Washington-led ministerial meeting on critical minerals supply chain.

Jaishankar's visit assumes significance as it is being seen as an opportunity to address the sharp downturn in the relations between the two strategic partners. It is expected that the minister will hold bilateral talks with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and other senior officials of the Trump administration. "External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will visit the United States from February 2 to 5 to participate in the Critical Minerals Ministerial convened by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio," the external

affairs ministry said in a statement. It said the ministerial will focus on supply chain resilience, clean energy transition, and strategic cooperation in critical minerals.

"During the visit, the external affairs minister will also hold meetings with senior members of the US administration," it said.

India-US ties have been reeling under severe stress after Trump doubled tariffs on Indian goods to a whopping 50 per cent, including a 25 per cent additional duties, for India's purchase of Russian crude oil.

Apart from the tariff issue, the relations witnessed a downturn on a number of other issues that included Trump's claim of ending the India-Pakistan conflict in May last year and Washington's new immigration policy.



Budget 2026 aims to build job-ready, formal talent base, say experts

PTI

Mumbai, Feb 02: The Union Budget 2026-27 has placed skilling at the centre of workforce development, with a sharper focus on MSMEs, capex, and future-facing industries, aimed at building a more formal, job-ready, and geographically distributed talent ecosystem, experts said.

"Union Budget 2026 represents a fundamental shift in how India approaches workforce development. By prioritising capex, MSMEs, skills and future-facing industries, the government has laid the foundation for a more formal, skilled and geographically distributed talent ecosystem," said CIEL HR MD and CEO Aditya Narayan Mishra.

He said, from an HR perspective, this is exactly what the market needs, a move away from reactive hiring to proactive workforce capacity building.

Sachin Alug, CEO, NLB Services said the Union Budget 2026-27 sends a clear signal that India's next phase of growth will be powered by AI-led digital capabilities, large-scale skill transformation, and globally competitive technology services.

The proposed Education to Employment and Enterprise framework is a timely intervention to bridge the curriculum-industry gap, particularly in emerging areas such as AI, data engineering, and digital platforms, where demand is outpacing talent readiness, he said.

Kartik Narayan, CEO - Jobs Marketplace, Apna.co, stated that the government's textile roadmap, from Mega Parks in challenge mode to the Mahatma Gandhi Gram Samaj initiative, is a well-thought-through intervention in India's labour economy. "It recognises



that scale, clustering and skills must move together if manufacturing is to deliver jobs with dignity and income growth. By linking this push with the Samarth 2.0 skilling framework, the focus shifts from headline job creation to building a workforce that can compete in global supply chains," he said.

Randstad India MD and CEO Viswanath PS opined that the Union Budget marks a decisive shift from intent to impact, setting the stage for sustained job creation through an execution-driven agenda.

"We welcome the targeted investments in high-value sectors like biopharma, manufacturing, and semiconductors, which, alongside the new Rs 10,000 crore SME Growth Fund, will accelerate demand for specialized talent and formal hiring models across the country," he said.

Dr Nipun Sharma, CEO, TeamLease Degree Apprenticeship said, with a 58 per cent increase in women apprentices already recorded from 2021 to 2024, the new Rs 10,000

crore District Hostel scheme is the physical infrastructure our Degree Apprenticeship business needs to reach the 'unreachable'.

"By solving the housing crisis for women learners, we can now mobilize the 42 per cent of undergraduate women who currently drop out of the workforce pipeline," she added.

Roy Aniruddha, Co-Founder and Chairman TechnoStruct Academy, said, "The government's announcement of five university townships near industrial and logistics corridors is a significant step towards strengthening industry-academia collaboration and creating a skilled workforce aligned with real infrastructure demands."

Pawan Gupta, CTO at Skills-Capital said that the push to accelerate growth beyond metropolitan regions, including targeted development across Tier-2, Tier-3 cities and temple towns, is a significant step toward building a more balanced, inclusive and nationally distributed economic ecosystem.

Also, establishing a national framework to continuously align education, enterprise and emerging technology trends is a decisive step toward building future-ready talent at scale. Initiatives like this strengthen India's foundation to become one of the world's most trusted sources of skilled, digitally ready and globally deployable workforce, Gupta said.

Pan IIT Alumni India Chairman Prabhat Kumar said the Union Budget sends a clear signal that India's next phase of growth will be knowledge-led, technology-driven and deeply inclusive.

"For the IIT ecosystem, this is both an opportunity and a responsibility. Our faculty and alumni must step forward as the nation's brain trust,

shaping the AI discourse with evidence-based research that balances productivity with employment. The emphasis on clinical trial networks, sector-specific platforms and deep-tech funding underscores the need to move from academic outputs to translational, problem-centric research deployed at scale," he said.

Equally important is the role of IITians in mentoring the next tier of institutions and startups, ensuring that expertise is shared, not siloed and the focus on women in STEM and grassroots capacity-building calls for IITs to lead by example, he added.

Gig platform TimBuckDo co-founder Mythri Kumar said, the Union Budget 2026-27 takes a decisive step towards building Viksit Bharat jobs by formally recognising the gig economy as a critical pillar of India's workforce.

"Measures such as social security coverage, digital ID cards and access to government services for gig workers bring long-awaited dignity, stability and inclusion to millions of independent professionals. The National Digital Knowledge Grid and education-to-employment focus will unlock new-age opportunities for creators, researchers, local experts, startups and MSMEs," he added.

Adecco India Director and Business Head - General Staffing, Deepesh Gupta said, the Union Budget sets a clear direction for employment-led industrial growth, but the real opportunity lies in how manufacturing expansion and MSME support translate into formal workforce absorption.

"If implemented effectively, these measures can significantly expand regular wage employment and deepen workforce formalisation across regions," he added.

Row in Lok Sabha as Rahul seeks to quote from 'memoir' of Gen Naravane



PTI

New Delhi, Feb 02: A row erupted in the Lok Sabha on Monday after the Leader of the Opposition, Rahul Gandhi, sought to quote from what he said was the memoir of former Army chief M M Naravane, with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Home Minister Amit Shah objecting on the grounds that the book has not yet been published.

As Gandhi rose to speak on the Motion of Thanks to the president's address

and began quoting from the book, Singh asked him to clarify whether the book had been published or not.

The Congress leader insisted that the document was authenticated and he could quote from it. He said he never wanted to speak on the particular issue, but decided to do so after BJP's Tejasvi Surya questioned the patriotism of the Congress party.

Singh, however, maintained that the book had not been published.

Speaker Om Birla cited rules, saying no book or

newspaper clipping can be quoted on a matter not related to the proceedings of the House.

Initiating the debate from the opposition's side on the Motion of Thanks, Gandhi then said he was quoting from a magazine article to put forth his views.

The defence minister accused Gandhi of "misleading the House".

Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav supported Gandhi and urged the Speaker to allow the Congress leader to speak.

Rahul defied speaker's ruling, wasted House's time: Rijiju

PTI

New Delhi, Feb 02: Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju on Monday accused Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi of defying the speaker's ruling and wasting the time of the Lok Sabha by seeking to quote from an unpublished memoir of a former Army chief.

Talking to reporters here, Rijiju said

Speaker Om Birla had ruled in the House that only authenticated documents can be quoted.

Citing House rules, Rijiju also said that books, periodicals and news clippings cannot be quoted during debates if they have no relevance to the proceedings.

Gandhi "repeated the same mistake" by defying the speaker's ruling and "wasted" the time of the House, the minister alleged.

Third edition of tri-services future warfare course in Delhi till Feb 25



PTI

New Delhi, Feb 02: The third edition of the tri-services future warfare course featuring an enhanced curriculum which covers specialised subjects and domain-specific warfare developments in military operations will be held here from February 2-25, officials said on Monday.

Additionally, this course features experts on subjects like critical and rare earth elements, supply chain vulnerabilities and regional and global geopolitics impinging on operations in the future, expanding the number of subjects that will need to be studied and analysed by the defence forces in order to plan and conduct operations in the future, they said.

The course is being hosted under the aegis of Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff (HQ IDS) in partnership with the Centre for Joint Warfare Studies (CENJOWS).

Building on the success of the inaugural course held in September 2024, this expanded three-week programme aims to realise the vision of Chief of the Defence Staff Gen Anil Chauhan to prepare officers for the complex challenges of modern warfare, they said.

The course, to be held at the Manekshaw Centre at Delhi Cantt, focuses on developing an erudite understanding on how war fighting is being impacted by technology, necessitating a relook at our thinking, concepts, doctrines, strategies and techniques, and Tactics, Techniques and Procedures (TTPs), the defence ministry said.

"It also caters for deeper exploration of critical topics, practical demonstrations of emerging technologies and visits to institutions of critical importance to the capabilities of the defence forces," the ministry said in a statement.

It said this edition features an enhanced curriculum covering specialised subjects and domain-specific warfare developments in military operations.

The course comprises participants from the three services, as well as representatives from the defence industry including startups, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs) and the private industry.

Among the services' participants, senior officers with ranks varying from majors to major generals (and their equivalents) will be part of it, with the junior officers bringing their technical flair and expertise and the senior officers their operational experience and strategic knowledge, it said.

The future warfare course will align operational priorities of the armed forces with the capabilities of the indigenous defence industry and enable a free-flowing discussion on the various facets of modern and futuristic war-fighting, the ministry said. A diverse range of experts including veterans, serving officers, former ambassadors, industry experts and academic professionals will ensure that a holistic analysis of India's security challenges is debated in a threadbare and professional manner, officials said.

India's wealthy embrace a new luxury symbol: water

REUTERS

New Delhi, Feb 02: At an Indian gourmet food store, Avanti Mehta is organizing a blind tasting of drinks sourced from France, Italy and India. No, this isn't wine, it's water. Participants use tiny shot glasses to check the mineralogy, carbonation and salinity in samples of Evian from the French Alps, Perrier from southern France, San Pellegrino from Italy and India's Aava from the foothills of the Aravalli mountains.

"They will all taste different ... you should be choosing a water that can give you some sort of nutritional value," said Mehta, who is 32 and calls herself India's youngest water sommelier, a term usually associated with premium wine. Her family owns the Aava mineral water brand. Premium water is a \$400 million business in the world's most populous nation and is growing bigger as its wealthy see it as a new status symbol that fits in with a spreading wellness craze.

Premium Indian mineral water costs around \$1 for a one-liter bottle, while imported brands are upwards of \$3, or 15 times the price of the country's lowest-priced basic bottled water.

Clean water is a privilege in the country of 1.4 billion people where researchers say 70 percent of the groundwater is contaminated. Tap water remains unfit to drink, and 16 people died in Indore city after consuming contaminated tap water in December.

Many in India see bottled water as a necessity and standard 20 US-cent bottles are available widely at convenience stores, restaurants and hotels. The market is worth nearly \$5 billion annually and is set to grow 24 percent a year — among the fastest in the world. Bottled water



Avanti Mehta, 32, India's youngest water sommelier, talks about different brands of packaged water at "Sip and Sense", a water tasting event in Hyderabad, India, January 9, 2026.

REUTERS/Rishika Sadam

demand in United States or China is driven by convenience, making it a \$30 billion-plus market in each country which will grow just 4-5 percent each year, Euromonitor says.

In India, the premium water segment is leading the surge in demand, accounting for 8 percent of the bottled water market last year compared to just 1 percent in

2021, Euromonitor said. "Distrust of municipal water in some areas has escalated the demand for bottled water. Now, people understand how mineral water has more health benefits. It's expensive, but the category will boom," said Amulya Pandit, a senior consultant at Euromonitor specializing in the drinks market. Among its consumers are

New Delhi-based real estate developer B.S. Batra, who says his family uses only premium water at home to get more minerals and safeguard health.

"You feel different, more energetic during the day," said Batra, 49, an avid badminton player.

"I consume mineral water even with whisky at home, and kids use it for their smoothies."

Water lures Bollywood star, wealthy

The popular 20-cent plastic bottled water is mainly made by Pepsi, Coca-Cola and Indian market leader Bisleri. In addition, Indians who can afford it, install purifiers in their homes which clean the water but also remove most minerals.

Imported and local premium waters are luring wealthy consumers and businesses alike.

Bollywood star Bhumi Pednekar and her sister have launched Backbay — selling 750 ml cartons of mineral water for \$2.2; Indian conglomerate Tata is expanding its premium water portfolio, and retailers and businesses are reporting higher sales.

Tata Consumer Products, also Starbucks' partner in India, sells 20-cent bottled water, but premium water is its priority as it sees affluent, health-focused consumers willing to spend on the drink without worrying about the price, CEO Sunil D'Souza said in an interview.

"I don't have to push water uphill...I see a long, long, long runway for the business," he said.

Tata's premium "Himalayan" mineral water factory — which a Reuters photographer visited — is located in the foothills of the Himalayan range in Himachal Pradesh state.

Workers there largely keep a hands-free watch on machines filling plastic and glass bottles with water sourced from a natural

underground aquifer.

Looking for springs

Most Indians prefer still water, and the sparkling variant remains niche. Tata said it plans to launch a sparkling Himalayan water, and is also scouting for natural springs for expanding its other offerings. At three Foodstories Indian gourmet stores, sales of premium waters tripled in 2025. Customer demand prompted the chain to import "light and creamy" Saratoga Spring Water from New York, which costs 799 rupees (\$9) for a 355-milliliter (12-fluid-ounce) bottle, and stocks sold out within days, said co-founder Avni Biyani.

Indian mineral water brand Aava's sales touched a record 805 million rupees (\$9 million) last year, growing 40 percent a year since 2021. Tata said its basic and premium water portfolio will grow 30 percent a year, after growing tenfold to \$65 million in six years. Imported waters, which attract an over 30 percent tax, are pricier than Indian brands. Nestle's Perrier and San Pellegrino, and Danone's Evian retail for over 300 rupees, or \$3.20, for a 750 ml bottle.

Nestle declined to comment, while Danone said the Indian bottled water market was growing at a "robust" pace but imported waters "tend to be niche and boutique."

"When you open your tap, you're not getting an Aava, Evian ... And that is what you're essentially paying for," said water sommelier Mehta.

At the water tasting session, some participants said they enjoyed the experience but many found the price hard to swallow.

"To be honest, it is kind of expensive," said executive Hoshini Vallabhanevi, one of 14 people at the event. "For everyday use — it will burn a hole in the pocket."

ICC right to pull up Pakistan for boycotting Indo-Pak fixture: Shukla

PTI

New Delhi, Feb 02: BCCI vice-president Rajeev Shukla on Monday said the International Cricket Council (ICC) was right in warning Pakistan of severe repercussions for its selective pullout from the high-profile T20 World Cup contest against India in Colombo on February 15.

Pakistan's decision, conveyed through an official government statement, is being seen as political protest linked to Bangladesh's removal from the tournament after the world body declined its request to shift matches from India to Sri Lanka on security grounds.

The ICC has already warned Pakistan Cricket Board that a boycott of the marquee fixture could lead to punitive sanctions and said



that the decision is not in the interest of the game in general.

"The ICC has issued a big statement on this subject. It has highlighted element of sportsmanship. We completely agree with the ICC. BCCI will not make any comment until we speak to the ICC," Shukla told reporters

here.

The raging controversy was sparked by Bangladesh pacer's Mustafizur Rahman's ouster from the IPL on instructions of the BCCI for unspecified reasons. Bangladesh refused to travel to India after that citing security concerns.

ICC should take action: Gavaskar, Harbhajan

PTI

New Delhi, Feb 02: Former India captain Sunil Gavaskar foresees Pakistan making a "U-turn" but regardless of that, he called on the ICC to take legal action against the country for boycotting its T20 World Cup match against India on February 15.

Pakistan's government decided against granting permission to its cricket team to play the high-profile game in Colombo and though no official reason has been given, it is being widely construed as a gesture of solidarity with Bangladesh.

Bangladesh were ousted from the World Cup after refusing to play their matches in India, citing security concerns.

Former Bangladesh PM Hasina, relatives sentenced to prison terms after trial in absentia

PTI

Dhaka, Feb 02: A Bangladesh court on Monday sentenced deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to 10 years in jail in two separate corruption cases related to alleged irregularities in allocations of land in a government housing project.

Dhaka's Special Judge's Court handed 79-year-old Hasina 10 years of rigorous imprisonment for using her official influence in allocating residential plots to others, including her niece, UK Labour MP and former British minister Tulip Siddiq, under the Rajuk New Town Project in Purbachol on the outskirts of the capital.

Judge Robiul Alam simultaneously handed down Hasina's two nieces and a nephew, to different prison terms.

Siddiq's younger sister, Azaman Siddiq and brother Radwan Mujib Siddiq Bobby were sentenced to seven years rigorous



imprisonment, while the deposed premier and her relatives were handed down the prison terms after trial in absentia.

Only one of the 16 accused, a senior official of Rajuk, which allocates the plots, Khurshid Alam, was tried in person and was present at the court as the verdict was delivered.

The other accused in the case were sentenced to five years' imprisonment, including a former junior minister for housing, a former secretary of the ministry, a former Rajuk chairman and officials of the state-run entity.

UK ex-ambassador quits Labour over new reports of Epstein links



AFP

London, Feb 02: Former British ambassador to Washington Peter Mandelson quit the Labour Party Sunday, seeking to avoid causing it "further embarrassment" after newly released US documents revived scrutiny of his connection to late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

Mandelson, 72, who was sacked as Britain's ambassador to the United States last year over his ties to Epstein, allegedly received several payments from Epstein in the early 2000s, according to documents released on Friday by the US Justice Department. The payments released on Friday by the US Department of Justice and reported in British media

accounts linked to Mandelson between 2003 and 2004.

Speaking earlier Sunday on the BBC, Mandelson said he had no memory of the transfers and did not know whether the documents were authentic.

Mandelson also appears in newly released, undated photographs, wearing a T-shirt and underwear beside a woman whose face has been redacted by US authorities.

He told the BBC he "cannot place the location or the woman and I cannot think what the circumstances were."

Other documents suggest Epstein sent 10,000 pounds in 2009 to Reinaldo Avila da Silva, Mandelson's partner, at a time when Mandelson was serving as a government minister.

The former ambassador was removed from his post in September after being appointed by Prime Minister Keir Starmer in late 2024. Mandelson apologized in January for maintaining his friendship with Epstein, having initially refused to do so on the grounds that he was not complicit.

Former prince Andrew, stripped of his royal titles last year over his ties to Epstein, was also named in the files released on Friday.

A second woman alleged Sunday that Epstein sent her to Britain in 2010 for a sexual encounter with Andrew, her lawyer told the BBC.

INOX SRINAGAR

Movies Watchlist

Tuesday, 3rd February

DHURANDHAR

HINDI - 12:45 PM

MARDAANI 3

HINDI - 01:15 AM, 05:00 PM

BORDER 2

HINDI - 11:45 AM, 02:00 PM, 03:45 PM, 06:00 PM

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