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DIPK-10589/25
Dated: 03-02-2026

Teachers must think beyond curriculum's rigid map: LG Sinha

Says teaching not about rote delivery but nurturing creativity Calls for cultivating culture of collaboration in classroom

KT News Desk

Jammu, Feb 03: Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Tuesday emphasised the need for forward-thinking teachers who can equip students for tomorrow's uncertainties, like Artificial Intelligence (AI) disruptions, climate shifts, inspire to pioneer breakthroughs and fuel a dynamic and innovation-driven economy.

The Lieutenant Governor was speaking at the "Inspirational Teachers Award" ceremony organized by Amar Ujala Group at Padma Shri Padma Sachdev Government College for Women, Gandhi Nagar, Jammu. At the ceremony, a total of 101 best inspirational teachers from various schools across Jammu were honoured with the prestigious Award.

In his address, the Lieutenant Governor lauded the valuable



contribution of teaching community in shaping the character and cultivating the talents that boldly reshape the future at full throttle, equipping young students with skills and courage to brave an unpredictable world.

"I believe teachers and their craft form the backbone of a society and the soul of the nation,"

he said.

The Lieutenant Governor observed that like a master artisan at the forge, teacher knows learning ignites from sheer curiosity.

"Inspirational teachers avoid rote learning and they weave science into captivating tales that electrify the classroom and for them history transcends mere

dates and timelines, blooming into vivid sagas of human triumphs and tumbles," he said.

The Lieutenant Governor highlighted that we need more inspirational teachers who can transform students from passive listeners into intrepid explorers. "Teachers are bedrock of tomorrow. | More on P6

Victimisation of Kashmiris to come up in ongoing Assembly session: CM

- Says US tariff rollback relief for Indian exporters
- Announces railway projects in south Kmr put on hold
- Bats for inclusive pilgrimages, stronger RTC

Sajid Raina

Jammu, Feb 03: Stating that the issue of alleged victimisation and harassment of Kashmiris will be taken up for discussion in the ongoing Assembly session, Chief



Minister Omar Abdullah on Tuesday said that he would respond to queries related to the budget only on the floor of the House.

Talking to reporters outside the Assembly, Omar, according

to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) said that a discussion on concerns related to Kashmiris had been scheduled in the legislature.

"We are going to have a discussion on the issue of victimising and harassing Kashmiris," he said.

Asked about his views on the budget presentation, the Chief Minister declined to comment outside the House, saying he would address the matter during the Assembly proceedings. "I will say everything in the House regarding the budget," he said.

Responding to questions about remarks allegedly made by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in Parliament, Omar said it was the Speaker's privilege to decide | More on P6

CM tables J&K Jan Vishwas Ordinance, 2025

KT News Desk

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Tuesday tabled The Jammu

and Kashmir Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Ordinance, 2025 (Ordinance No. 01 of 2025) in the Jammu and Kashmir | More on P6

LG, CM greet people on Shab-e-Baraat

KT News Desk

Jammu, Feb 03 Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha and Chief Minister Omar Abdullah have extended greetings to the people on the auspicious occasion of Shab-e-Baraat.

In his message, the Lieutenant Governor said, "On the holy occasion of Shab-e-Baraat, I convey my greetings and best wishes to all. This sacred night offers devotees a precious opportunity to seek divine pardon, blessings, and wisdom. It invites seekers to ponder their inner journey and forge a profound bond with the almighty. Above all, Shab-e-Baraat reminds us to embrace a life grounded in truth, humility, and kindness. May this holy night shower peace, prosperity, and joy upon everyone."

CM Omar Abdullah, in his message, underscored the deep spiritual significance of Shab-e-Baraat, describing it as a night of self-reflection and devotion when believers seek forgiveness and | More on P6

Drug seizures in J&K declines sharply since 2021: MHA tells Parl

Lowest narcotics seized in 2025

Opium drug seizures down 90% since 2021

Cannabis seizures stable

Border checks, drones, intel reduce drug trafficking

Sajid Raina

New Delhi, Feb 03 : Ministry of Home Affairs on Tuesday informed the Parliament that seizure of narcotic substances in Jammu and Kashmir has declined sharply over the past five years, particularly in opium-based drugs.

Data tabled in the Lok Sabha by the MHA, according to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), substantiated its claims,

The data, compiled by the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) from reports submitted by various Drug Law Enforcement Agencies, covers the period from 2020 to 2025, with figures for 2025 available up to November.

In 2021, Jammu and Kashmir recorded the highest seizure of opium-based drugs during the period at 19,405 kg. Cannabis-based drugs seized during the year stood at 1,617 kg, while no cocaine or synthetic drugs were reported.

In 2023, seizures of opium-based drugs in the Union Territory fell to 8,927 kg, while cannabis-based drugs seized were 1,379 kg. During the year, 1 kg of cocaine and 0.16 kg of synthetic drugs were also seized.

The downward trend continued in 2024, with seizures of opium-based drugs declining further to 3,676 kg and cannabis-based drugs to 1,540 kg. | More on P6

After objections from farmers, MLAs, Centre halts 3 railway projects in Kashmir

Jahangeer Ganaie

Srinagar, Feb 03: The Centre on Tuesday said that three proposed railway projects in Kashmir have been put on hold following objections from locals and elected representatives.

According to news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), Union Railway Minister Ashwani Kumar said, "There is already a railway line from Srinagar to Baramulla, and there was a demand to set up three more railway lines."

He said, "Later, the Jammu and Kashmir government and Members of Parliament raised concerns that these lines must not be set up as these would have impacted apple orchards significantly. Now, the government has decided to put these proposed projects on hold," he said.

Kumar said that survey for railway projects from Baramulla to Uri and Jammu to



Rajouri is at the last stage.

The Minister further added that when almost all roads connections Kashmir were hit, railway emerged as hope for the people of J&K through which apple reached different parts of country and now items are being brought from Jammu to Kashmir.

The decision of halting three railway projects comes amid protests by apple growers and residents in Pulwama, Shopian

and Anantnag districts, voicing concern that these projects would affect the agricultural and horticultural land, damage orchards, and lead to displacement of families.

Several demonstrations were held over the past months, with locals demanding rerouting of the projects, fair compensation, and consultation before any land acquisition.

"The decision to put the Pahalgam | More on P6

Fresh snowfall in J&K higher reaches, rain lashes plains Night temps improved

Sajid Raina

Srinagar, Feb 03: Fresh snowfall was reported in the higher reaches of the Kashmir Valley on Tuesday, while several areas in the plains received rainfall, even as temperatures showed a marginal improvement across Jammu and Kashmir, officials said.

As per details obtained by the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), light snowfall occurred in the middle and upper reaches, including Gulmarg, Sonamarg, Doodhpathri, Tangmarg, Pahalgam, Gurez, Sadhna Pass, Dubjan-Herpura, Peer Ki Gali and the Daksam-Sinthan top areas. Meanwhile, parts of the Kashmir plains witnessed rainfall during the afternoon.

According to the Meteorological Department, a weak western disturbance is currently affecting the region, leading to generally cloudy conditions with intermittent rain and snow at | More on P6

Two bills to be introduced in Assembly today

KNO Special Correspondent

Jammu, Feb 03: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah will introduce two bills—one for decriminalising certain offences to further enhance trust-based governance for ease of living and doing business, and another for eliminating discrimination against leprosy-affected patients on Wednesday in the Legislative Assembly.

As per the list of business circulated by the Legislative Assembly this evening, a copy of which is in possession of news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), CM Omar Abdullah will introduce a bill

to amend certain enactments of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir for decriminalising and rationalising offences to further strengthen trust-based governance and promote ease of living and doing business.

The CM will also move another bill to amend certain enactments of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir to eliminate any discrimination or denial of equal treatment for persons affected by leprosy. The bill seeks to address practices that negatively impact such persons, promote segregation and discrimination, and enable the Union Territory to discharge | More on P6

NC MLAs stage protest over statehood, harassment issues

KNO Special Correspondent

Jammu, Feb 03: Legislators of the ruling National Conference on Tuesday staged a protest outside the Legislative Assembly complex here, demanding the restoration of statehood and calling for an end to the harassment of Kashmiris in several states.

Before the start of proceedings, NC lawmakers, as per news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), converged outside the Assembly complex and staged a demonstration seeking the restoration of statehood.

Carrying placards that read



"Restore constitutional guarantees," "Restore statehood," and "Stop demonising Kashmiris," the NC legislators protested for nearly ten | More on P6

CM Omar flags off J&K RTC buses to major religious destinations across country

KT News Desk

Jammu, Feb 03: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Tuesday flagged off J&K Road Transport Corporation (RTC) buses to major religious destinations of different faiths across the country from MA Stadium, Jammu.

Minister for Transport Satish Sharma and Advisor to the Chief Minister Nasir Aslam, Managing Director J&K RTC Abdul Rashid War and other concerned were also present on the occasion.

The special bus services will operate to prominent religious sites including Shahdra Sharief, Jawalaji, Namgyal Monastery (McLeod Ganj), Shri Anandpur



Sahib, Ajmer Sharief and Our Lady of Graces, Sardhana, enabling devotees from Jammu

and Kashmir to undertake pilgrimages with greater ease and affordability. | More on P6

Rs 289.39 Cr SDRF, Rs 100 Cr UT capex released for flood restoration in J&K: Deputy CM

KT NEWS DESK

JAMMU, FEBRUARY 3: Deputy Chief Minister Surinder Choudhary Tuesday said that Rs 289.39 crores were released during the current financial year, 2025-26, under the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF), besides an amount of Rs. 100.00 crores (Rs 5.00 crore for each district) has been released under the UT Capex Budget (2025-26) of DMRRR under the activity "Flood Relief Measures" to undertake urgent flood restoration works across Jammu and Kashmir.

The Deputy Chief Minister, as per an official statement, said this while replying to a question, on behalf of Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, raised by Legislator Rajiv Jasrotia in the House.

He informed the Assembly that no funds till date have been released by the Government of India for flood restoration works during the



current financial year 2025-26.

The Deputy CM also said that based on the report of Inter-Ministerial Central Team (IMCT), the GoI under SASCI (Scheme for Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment) has allocated Rs. 1431.00 Cr. for J&K for flood restoration works.

He added that, Jal Shakti Department has received funds for ongoing flood

management projects under Flood Management & Border Area Programme (FMBAP) during the current financial year. He said that the released funds are mainly for Flood Management Works JK-21, JK-22, JK-23 amounting to Rs. 164.35 lacs and for Comprehensive Flood Management of River Jhelum, Phase-II (Part-A) amounting to Rs. 6041.25 lacs.

G&B hostels in Kupwara, Handwara ready for admissions from next session: Javed Rana

KT NEWS DESK

JAMMU, FEBRUARY 3: Government Tuesday informed the Legislative Assembly that Gujjar & Bakerwal Girls Hostel Zangli, Kupwara and Gujjar Bakerwal Boys Hostel, Handwara are completed and are ready to commence admission process from next academic session.

Replying to a question raised by Choudhary Mohammad Akram in the House, Minister for Tribal Affairs, Javed Ahmed Rana, as per an official statement stated that twin hostels are complete and are ready for admission of the students.

He said that the budgetary Provision for dietary items, bedding and other miscellaneous expenses to run the hostels have been projected in revised estimates 2025-2026 and budget estimates for the year 2026-2027.

Regarding the construction of Gujjar & Bakerwal Girls Hostel Budgam and Gujjar & Bakerwal Girls Hostel Baramulla, Minister informed that the Hostels are at finishing level and will be completed soon. However, some works related to electricity, power, water connection are pending



and the matter has been taken up with concerned executive agency, so that the admission process can be initiated from the next academic session.

The Minister also said that land has been transferred in favour of Tribal Affairs department for the construction of ST/G&B Girls Hostel at Srinagar.

Deputy Chief Minister extends greetings on Shab-i-Barat

KT NEWS DESK

JAMMU, FEBRUARY 03: Deputy Chief Minister, Surinder Choudhary, Tuesday extended his warm greetings to the people on the auspicious occasion of Shab-i-Barat.

He said that Shab-i-Barat holds great religious and spiritual significance for Muslims and is a night of prayers, forgiveness, and reflection. On this sacred occasion, he urged people to pray for peace, prosperity and overall welfare of all.

The Deputy Chief Minister also observed that Jammu and Kashmir stands as a shining example of mutual understanding, harmony and spirit of celebrating festivals together. He said that the people of the region have always upheld the values of unity and coexistence.

He also prayed for the well-being of all and urged people to strengthen communal harmony and brotherhood in Jammu and Kashmir.

E- Bus service operates within SMR limits: Satish Sharma



KT NEWS DESK

JAMMU, FEBRUARY 3: Minister for Transport, Satish Sharma said that as per the operational guidelines of Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs (MoHUA), e-bus service is being

operated within the Srinagar Metropolitan Region (SMR) limits.

The Minister, as per an official statement, said this while replying to a question raised by Rafiq Ahmad Naik.

He informed the house that the Tral constituency falls out of SMR limits.

While replying to a supplementary, the Minister said that consideration would be given to include Tral in the network, once new fleet of buses is received by the department.

DC Srinagar chairs DRSC, DLMC meeting to strengthen road safety framework

KT NEWS DESK

SRINAGAR FEBRUARY 03: In order to prevent road accidents and take corrective measures, the Deputy Commissioner (DC) Srinagar, Akshay Labroo who is also Chairman of District Road Safety Committee and District Level Monitoring Committee (DRSC/ DLMC) Tuesday chaired a

meeting here at the Meeting Hall of the DC office Complex.

SSP Traffic Police, Aijaz Ahmad; RTO Kashmir, Qazi Irfan; Additional Deputy Commissioner, Mir Imtiyaz Ul Aziz; Superintendent of Police, Umar Shah; Superintending Engineer R&B (North), Shabir Ahmad; Superintending Engineer of R&B (South), Tatheer Manzoor; SDM West, Irfan Bahadur; SDM

East, Zubair Ahmad, other senior Officers of School Education, Colleges, R&B and other concerned Departments attended the meeting.

At the outset, the meeting discussed in detail remedial measures to prevent road accidents and 'Hit and Run' cases in the district emphasizing implementation of road safety measures recommended

by the Supreme Court.

On the occasion, the Deputy Commissioner, as per an official statement, emphasized the line departments to submit detailed GIS coordinates of accident-prone areas (black spots) along with transport data to identify vulnerable road stretches as per the Integrated Road Accident Database (IRAD) framework. The

DC asked the R&B department to formulate a robust plan in accordance with the Supreme Court's directions for the identification and management of black spots. He stressed that focused technological and enforcement interventions should be undertaken to significantly reduce road accidents particularly along highways.

PIB press delegation from Srinagar visits Rubber Research, Training Institutes in Kerala

KT NEWS DESK

Kottayam (Kerala), February 3: On the second day of the ongoing press tour organised by the Press Information Bureau (PIB), Srinagar, the press delegation from Srinagar, J&K, visited the National Institute for Rubber Training (NIRT) and the Rubber Research Institute of India (RRII) at Kottayam, Kerala. Both institutions function under the aegis of the Rubber Board, a statutory body constituted under the Rubber Act, 1947, for the overall development of the rubber industry in India and functioning under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India.

The delegation, as per the PIB statement, held an interactive session at NIRT with M. Vasanthagesan, IRS, Executive Director, Rubber Board, and Priya Varma, Director (Training), NIRT. The interaction provided an in-depth understanding of policy initiatives and developmental interventions undertaken by the Rubber Board to strengthen India's rubber sector.

Addressing the media delegation, M.



Vasanthagesan, IRS, outlined the mandate and functioning of the Rubber Board, stating that the Board is implementing key policy interventions of the Government of India aimed at tapping the potential of the predominantly small and marginal rubber-growing sector. He said that sustained efforts are being made to achieve self-sufficiency in natural rubber production while ensuring long-term sustainability.

The Government of India is focusing on sustainable natural rubber production through scientific interventions, policy support and traceability mechanisms. The Bharath Sustainable Natural Rubber (BSNR) platform has been launched to ensure legality

and traceability across the rubber value chain, Vasanthagesan said.

He explained the processes of latex extraction and elaborated on various forms of rubber, including latex-based products and dry rubber-based goods, noting that a major share of domestic rubber production is consumed by the tyre industry. He also informed that the Rubber Board is exploring diversification through alternate varieties and has recently signed an MoU with the Himalayan Forest Research Institute to initiate experimental trials at feasible locations across different agro-climatic zones.

The press tour to Kerala led by Majid Pandit, Media & Communication Officer, PIB Srinagar is

part of media outreach programme, aimed at providing journalists from Srinagar firsthand exposure to key Central Government institutions, research ecosystems and national development initiatives.

Subsequently, the press delegation visited the Rubber Research Institute of India (RRII). The delegation interacted with senior scientists including Dr. C. Narayanan, Senior Scientist and Officer-in-Charge, Germplasm Division; Dr. Kala, Officer-in-Charge, Biotechnology Division; Dr. Bindu Roy, Senior Scientist, Pathology Division; and Madhusoodhanan, Officer-in-Charge, Rubber Technology Division.

The scientists briefed the delegation on RRII's role in enhancing productivity and quality through scientific breeding programmes, biotechnology interventions and disease management strategies. The delegation was given a practical demonstration of rubber tapping techniques.

The team also visited the International Hevea Clone Museum at RRII, which serves as a repository of advanced genetic resources.

World Wetlands Day: EIACP hosts Mansar Lake awareness tour for GCW students

KT NEWS DESK

JAMMU, FEBRUARY 03: To mark World Wetlands Day 2026, Department of Ecology, Environment & Remote Sensing (EIACP) J&K Hub on Tuesday organized an awareness and outreach programme in alignment with the global theme of "Wetlands and traditional knowledge: Celebrating cultural heritage" and the Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) initiative.

The event, as per an official statement, aimed to sensitize students and the local community to the ecological, cultural and environmental significance of wetlands.

Students from the Department of Environmental Sciences (EVS), Government College for Women (GCW), Parade, along with Dr. Harmanmeet

Kour, HOD & Dr. Neha were taken on an educational field visit to Mansar Lake, a renowned wetland and a Ramsar site of Jammu region. During the visit, an awareness rally was organized around the periphery of the lake, where students actively spread messages discouraging the use of plastic and highlighting its harmful effects on wetlands and biodiversity.

A cleanliness drive was also conducted along the lake area, in which students participated enthusiastically. The drive resulted in the collection of approximately 70 kilograms of plastic waste (handed over to Wildlife department for disposal under rule), reinforcing the core principles of Mission LiFE through collective action and responsible behavior.

The participants were briefed about the ecological importance of Mansar

Lake by Yashbeer Singh, Block Development Officer (BDO), who highlighted its biodiversity, conservation challenges and sustainable management practices.

The Programme Officer- EIACP J&K Hub, Dr. Kirti Bhatt elaborated on the cultural significance of wetlands, Ramsar sites and their role in maintaining ecological balance, emphasizing the need for community participation in wetland conservation.

The programme was attended by Range Officer, Anil Sharma, Nitin Sharma, Chetan Gupta along with the staff of the NMSHE Project. The event witnessed the active participation of nearly 60 students and stakeholders, making it a meaningful and impactful observance of World Wetlands Day 2026. The programme was organized under the supervision of Dr. Rajan Singh, Coordinator, EIACP J&K hub.

GOVERNMENT OF (U.T) JAMMU & KASHMIR

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE

ENGINEER JAL SHAKTI (PHE) DEPTT.

GROUND WATER DIVISION SRINAGAR

BAGHI-ALI-MARDAN, NOWSHARA SRINAGAR.

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SHORT TERM

NOTICE INVITING E-TENDERS

GIST of Detailed e- NIT No:- 79/JS-PHE/GWDS/Mech. of 2025-26.

For and on behalf of Government of UT - J&K, e-tenders from reputed and resourceful Firms/Companies/drilling agencies/Joint Ventures etc for "registered experienced Contractors of Machine Drilled Hand pump wells" as per details given below The bidding process shall be completed online on www.jktenders.gov.in in two covers viz. Cover 1st consisting of Pre Qualification Criteria, General Terms and Conditions and Technical Specifications and Cover 2nd shall consist of Financial Bid in the prescribed BOQ. Table-I

S. No	S. No of AA	Name of work	Est. Cost Rs. in Lacs	Earnest money (EMD)	Cost of Tender Document	Time of completion	Tender Call
1		Construction of Bore Well with allied works at Lane 04 Friends Colony Humhama District Budgam.	Rs. 3.67 Lacs	Rs.11,100/-	Rs.300/-	10 Days (after identification of site)	1 st

The Bidding Documents and other details can be downloaded from the website:
https://www.jktenders.gov.in
From 03.02.2026 (04:00 PM) to 09.02.2026 (03:00 PM)
The Bidding documents consisting of qualifying information, eligibility criteria, specifications, Drawings (if any), Bill of quantities (B.O.Q), Set of terms, conditions of contract and other details can be seen / downloaded from the website:
https://www.jktenders.gov.in
As per Critical Dates/Information scheduled given below Table-II

1.	Publishing Date	03-02-2026 (04:00 P.M)
2.	Period of Downloading of Bids	03-02-2026 (04:00 P.M) upto 09-02-2026 (03:00 P.M).
3.	Period of Submission of bids	03-02-2026 (04:00 P.M) upto 09-02-2026 (03:00 P.M).
4.	Date of opening of Tender.	10-02-2026 (01:00 P.M)
5.	Tender Receiving Authority: Executive Engineer , Jal Shakti (PHE) Ground Water Srinagar Kashmir-190011 Cost of Tender Document : Non-Refundable should be in form of DD /TR/e-challan/ via online deposited to Account Head 0215 or in the below mentioned account Number in favour of Executive Engineer (Jal Shakti) PHE Ground Water Division Srinagar(at Saddar Treasury Srinagar) (The firm shall specify the name of work for which apply)	
6.	Name of Bank	Jammu & Kashmir Bank
	Name of Branch	Residency Road, Lal Chowk-190001
	Name of Account	Executive Engineer PHE Ground Water Division Srinagar.
	Account Type	Current Accounts Government.
	Account Number	0005 0405 0004 7709
	IFSC Code	JAKA0CHINAR
	MICR Code	190051056
7.	NOTE: In case the firm/agency/contractor submits/uploaded scanned copy of tender document fee in the shape of DD /TR/ e-challan/ via online, the hard copies shall have to be submitted in the divisional office before opening of cover 2 nd (Financial Cover) of e-NIT Bid Validity Period: 180 Days	
8.	The bids can be downloaded or uploaded on www. Jktenders.gov.in	

Bids must be accompanied by bid security viz: Earnest Money in shape of CDR/FDR and (The date of CDR/FDR etc must not be prior to 03 months from the date of issuance of this e-Nit and Treasury Receipt (mentioning therein the NIT No., S.No. of work and Advertised Cost as per the NIT) as cost of Tender Document under Account Head 0215 to be pledged in favour of the Executive Engineer Ground Water Division Srinagar (as specified in the table (I) (Page 1st). Bid security will have to be in any one of the forms as specified in the bidding documents and shall be valid for 180 Days after opening of bid. Bids will be opened in the Office of the Executive Engineer Jal Shakti (PHE) Ground Water Division Srinagar (H.Q. Baghi-Ali-Mardan, Nowshara Srinagar) on 09-02-2026 (01:00 PM) If the officer happens to be closed on the date of opening of the bids as specified, the bids will be opened on the next working day at the same time and venue.

No:- JS-PHE/GWDS/25-26/Camp/18406-16
Dated:- 03-02-2026

DIPK-10571/25

Dated: 03-02-2026

Sd/-

Executive Engineer

Jal Shakti (PHE) Deptt.

Ground Water Division, Srinagar.

Discussion on Motion of Thanks on LG’s address begins in JKLA

KT NEWS DESK

Jammu, Feb 03: The discussion on Motion of Thanks on Lieutenant Governor’s Address commenced in Legislative Assembly today.

The motion was moved by MLA Showkat Hussain Ganie and seconded by MLA Dr. Rameshwar Singh.

Initiating the debate, Showkat Hussain Ganie stated that more than 7000 people have been employed since Omar Abdullah assumed office, while around more than 23000 more are currently in the process of recruitment. He acknowledged that the tourism sector had suffered initially, but noted that over two crore tourists have since visited the region, reflecting sustained efforts by the government to revive the sector.

Highlighting infrastructure development, he referred to construction of major roads and tunnels, including Sonamarg Tunnel, Shopian–Surankote National Highway and several flyover projects, aimed at improving connectivity and boosting economic activity.

He further mentioned key welfare measures, including the free ration schemes and the enhancement of old-age pension, asserting that these initiatives were in line with the commitments made in the election manifesto.

Rameshwar Singh who seconded the motion, reflected the achievements in terms of education, health, rural infrastructure said that the present government has accepted the challenges and the work it has done is praise worthy.

He also expressed serious concern over the growing menace of substance abuse and drug addiction in the Union Territory, describing the figures as alarming.



Singh further emphasized that collective efforts are essential to ensure unity and sustained progress in Jammu and Kashmir.

Mohammad Yousuf Rather (Targami) highlighted that the Budget should have a provision for separate climate fund for Jammu and Kashmir, on the lines of provisions made in other States and Union Territories, to effectively address climate-related challenges.

Sham Lal Sharma said that people need respite from unscheduled power cuts and more efforts need to be taken in this direction as there has been significant increase in revenue realization in the power sector. He also said that JJM schemes need to be completed so that people will have regular water supply. He further said that more avenues need to be created

for generating employment for the youth of Jammu and Kashmir.

Ghulam Ahmad Mir, while participating in the debate, asserted for more efforts from the government for restoration of statehood. He added that business rules shall also be finalized as soon as possible for smooth functioning of the Government.

Ajaz Ahmad Jan while speaking on the motion, said that pre-budget meetings were held by Chief Minister with all stakeholders so that the upcoming budget reflects aspirations of the people.

Arjun Singh Raju said that the government has made significant strides in development across various sectors, including power infrastructure, reduction of transmission and distribution losses, roads, education, health, and other

key areas, particularly in Ramban district.

Speaking during the debate on Motion of Thanks, Baldev Raj Sharma spoke about various constituency specific issues.

Rafiq Ahmad Naik, in his address said that the Pre-Budget consultations of Chief Minister with Legislators is an encouraging step for charting the developmental road-map of Jammu and Kashmir. He also raised various constituency specific issues during the debate.

Saiman Ali Sagar, while speaking in favour of the motion, said that Omar Abdullah led Government has laid great focus on socio-economic upliftment of people across all sections of society and has been working tirelessly for the holistic development of Jammu and Kashmir. While participating in the

debate, Shakti Raj Parihar said that the Government should give focus on the development of Chenab Valley, including Doda district.

Speaking in support of Motion, Pirzada Farooq Ahmad Shah said that due to strenuous efforts of Government, particularly Chief minister Omar Abdullah, tourism sector has revived across J&K. He added that Chief Minister participating in numerous conferences outside J&K like Mumbai, West Bengal, Gujrat, New Delhi and others, which in turn have translated into revival of tourism sector here.

Nizam-ud-din Bhat, in his address spoke about the basic privileges for the Legislators and also raised various issues of his constituency.

Participating in the debate, Payare Lal Sharma appreciated the government’s development-oriented vision for Jammu and Kashmir. He thanked Chief Minister for sanctioning Rs. 80 crore for electricity infrastructure in his constituency, improving power supply in the area. He also appreciated the government’s efforts in strengthening the Education and Health sectors by providing basic facilities to the people.

Hasnain Masoodi, while participating in the debate, appreciated the efforts of the government for sustainable development in J&K. He said that the government has developed a robust people centric mechanism and public grievances redressal system bringing transparency and good governance.

Devinder Kumal Manyal, during the debate spoke on various constituency specific issues. He sought upgradation of facilities in tourist and religious places like Utter Vani–Purmadal and Baba Chambyal.

PMGSY-I connects 2,132 J&K habitations: Centre

RAJA SYED RATHER

Srinagar, Feb 03: The Government of India on Tuesday informed Parliament that Jammu and Kashmir has made significant progress in achieving universal all-weather rural road connectivity under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY).

In a written reply to the Lok Sabha, the Union Ministry of Rural Development said, “Under PMGSY-I, as many as 2,132 eligible habitations in Jammu and Kashmir have already been connected with all-weather roads.

At the national level, the scheme has achieved near-universal coverage, with only a small number of habitations remaining unconnected across the country.”

The Ministry stated that under the recently launched PMGSY-IV, a fresh survey has been conducted to identify newly eligible habitations based on population growth as per Census 2011.

“In Jammu and Kashmir, 2,278 habitations were surveyed, out of which 2,276 habitations have been approved by the National Rural Infrastructure Development Agency (NRIDA) for consideration under the scheme. PMGSY-IV aims to provide all-weather connectivity to such habitations, with the timeline for completion set as March 2029,” it added.

Highlighting quality assurance measures, the Government said that a three-tier quality management system has been put in place for PMGSY roads in Jammu and Kashmir. “This includes in-house quality checks by Project Implementation Units, independent inspections by State Quality Monitors, and random inspections by National Quality Monitors deployed by NRIDA. The monitoring process is supported by an online management and monitoring system to ensure transparency and real-time tracking of project quality,” it added.

The Centre also said that hilly, remote, border and tribal areas of Jammu and Kashmir are being treated as a priority area, under PMGSY, with relaxed population norms to ensure inclusivity.

The roads constructed under the scheme cater to the access needs of the entire rural population and are not community- or individual-specific.

The Government reiterated that PMGSY continues to play a crucial role in improving rural connectivity in Jammu and Kashmir, strengthening access to markets, schools, healthcare facilities and other essential services, while contributing to overall development and integration of far-flung areas of the Union Territory—(KNO)

LA Question Hour

J&K mulls online single-window system for tourism licenses

REHAN QAYOUM MIR

Srinagar, Feb 03: The Jammu and Kashmir government on Tuesday said it is considering introducing a single-window, online system for registration and renewal of tourism-related establishments and for obtaining mandatory No Objec-

tion Certificates (NOCs) from multiple departments.

In a written reply to a question by MLA Sheikh Ahsan Ahmed Pardesi, the Tourism Department said that stakeholders in the tourism sector including hoteliers, houseboat owners, shikarawallas, travel operators and allied service

providers are required to obtain registration or renewal of licences under the J&K Registration of Tourist Trade Act.

It said that NOCs from departments such as the Pollution Control Board, Fire and Emergency Services and Building Permission Issuing Authority are mandatory

for hotels, guest houses and houseboats. “Registration and renewal are presently being done online through the Tourism Department portal (<http://www.tourismjk.in>). Integration of the said portal with the Government’s Single Window System, including linkage with line departments

for issuance of NOCs in a time-bound manner, is under consideration of the Administrative Department,” the reply states. However, the department clarified that no assessment has been made regarding financial losses suffered by tourism stakeholders during the year 2025—(KNO)

Govt disburses Rs 164 Cr to 31,500 under marriage assistance scheme this FY

WARIS FAYAZ

Srinagar, Feb 03: The government on Tuesday acknowledged that payments under the Marriage Assistance Scheme are pending for thousands of approved beneficiaries, even as it denied any inordinate delay in disbursement. In a written reply to a question tabled by legislator Javid Hassan Baig, the Social Welfare Department said that during the current financial year, an amount of Rs 163.93 crore has been disbursed to 31,524 beneficiary girls under the scheme.

The department further disclosed that sanction has already been accorded for around 12,777 additional beneficiaries. However, bills amounting to Rs 70.08 crore are still pending in the treasury for payment since October 2025. The government response stated that these cases have been sanctioned and are under process, with payments awaiting treasury clearance. However, it maintained that there is no undue delay on its part, attributing the pending payments to procedural processing of bills. On another query over financial support to specially-abled individuals, the government said that financial support is already being provided to specially-abled individuals, including children, through existing social security schemes. “Eligible beneficiaries are receiving monthly financial assistance under the Integrated Social Security Scheme and the National Social Assistance Programme”, the minister incharge Social Welfare Department said—(KNO)

‘Nearly 10,000 posts vacant in Health Dept’

JAHANGIR GANAIE

Srinagar, Feb 03: Jammu and Kashmir’s public healthcare system is facing a severe staffing crisis, with nearly 10,000 positions lying vacant across its medical colleges and health institutions, the government informed the Legislative Assembly on Tuesday.

In a written reply to the question raised by MLA Budgam Aga Muntazir Mehdi, Health and Medical Education Minister Sakeena Itoo said thousands of posts are lying vacant in the department, and the government is working to fill all vacancies.

According to the reply, Government Medical College (GMC) Baramulla has 431 vacant posts out of a sanctioned strength



of 1,304, with only 873 positions currently filled. Similarly, GMC Anantnag is functioning with 424 vacancies out of 1,098 sanctioned posts, while GMC Rajouri is facing a shortage of 125 faculty members.

The situation is particularly grim at GMC Udhampur, where 668 posts are vacant out of a total sanctioned strength of 799, indicating that the institution is operating with a skeletal workforce. At GMC Handwara, the government acknowledged 37 vacant gazetted posts, in addition to hundreds

of non-gazetted posts remaining unfilled.

In the Family Welfare Department, the minister said that out of 2,276 sanctioned posts, only 1,703 are in position, leaving 573 posts vacant. The reply further revealed large-scale vacancies in the Directorate of Health Services, Kashmir (DHSK), where 388 gazetted posts and 2,797 non-gazetted posts are lying vacant, severely impacting primary and secondary healthcare services across the Valley.

Major tertiary care institutions are also affected. At

GMC Jammu, the government reported 538 vacant gazetted posts and 904 non-gazetted posts, while GMC Srinagar is short of 434 gazetted and 174 non-gazetted staff.

At GMC Kathua, 288 posts remain vacant, including 84 gazetted and 204 non-gazetted positions. Dental education is not immune either, with 57 posts vacant at Government Dental College, Jammu and 48 vacancies at Government Dental College, Srinagar.

In the Directorate of Health Services, Jammu (DHSJ), the government disclosed 1,489 vacancies, in addition to 116 other posts lying unfilled. Meanwhile, GMC Doda is facing shortages across multiple categories, with vacancies reported as 336 posts under different heads—(KNO)

J&K tourism losses in 2025 unassessed: Govt

KNO

Jammu, Feb 03: The Jammu & Kashmir Government on Tuesday said that no assessment has been carried out to evaluate the losses suffered by tourism stakeholders in 2025.

In a written reply to a question from MLA Lal Chowk, Ahsan Pardesi, the minister in charge of

Tourism, who also happens to be Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, stated that the department has not conducted any assessment regarding the financial losses suffered by tourism stakeholders in 2025.

Kashmir’s tourism industry incurred heavy losses after a deadly attack in the meadow of Baisaran near Pahalgam on April 22, 2025, in which 26 people—mostly tourists—were killed—(KNO)

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This is to inform the general public that I am applying for fresh electricity connection. If anybody has any objection he/she may contact PDD subdivision Hawal within seven days from the date of publication of this notice. Nothing shall be entertained thereafter.

Khalid Bin Hassan Beig
Son of Ghulam Hassan Beig
R/o Green Avenue Shah Faisal colony 90
feet Sura, Srinagar

EDITORIAL

Duty Cut On Cancer Drugs A Major Relief

The Union Budget's decision to remove import duty on 17 key cancer drugs is a deeply humane and welcome step that goes beyond just economics. For thousands of patients and their families fighting this terrible disease, this move is a real lifeline. It directly tackles one of the biggest problems in cancer care: the sky-high cost of imported medicines. This will make treatment more affordable

and save families from financial disaster. In places like Jammu & Kashmir, where cancer treatment can cost lakhs of rupees, this relief is especially important. Patients and their loved ones often face impossible choices between continuing life-saving treatment and facing complete financial ruin. Stories of people selling their land, using up all their savings, or having to stop their medicine halfway are sadly very

common. This duty cut will ease that heavy burden, letting patients focus on getting better instead of worrying about money. While this is an excellent and compassionate decision, it also reminds us of the need for a complete national plan to fight cancer. Making treatment accessible is about more than just drug prices. We need better cancer hospitals in smaller cities, wider coverage under health insurance

schemes like Ayushman Bharat, making sure these medicines are actually available in pharmacies, and better systems for early detection and supportive care. A full plan must look at the entire journey of a patient, from preventing and finding cancer early, to treating it, and supporting survivors afterwards. This government decision shows policy-making that listens and cares. It understands that

public health is a matter of basic fairness and that helping patients in distress is a key job of the state. This initiative deserves our full support and should be the starting point for creating a fairer, more patient-focused cancer care system in India. Let this relief be the first of many steps to ensure that no Indian family is ever forced to choose between health and financial survival.

Our Collective Failure In Protecting Children

While we discuss protection in seminars, children cry in our neighbourhoods. Child protection is not just a social duty but a divine accountability. The communities and relatives must revive their role as the first line of defence.

Yamin Yasin

Khudi Mein Doob Ja Ghaafil! Yeh Sirr-E-Zindagi Hai
Nikal Kar Halqa-E-Shaam O Seher Se Jaavedaan Ho Ja

In the moral landscape of our society, where values and virtues often fade under the shadow of modern challenges, the protection of children remains one of the most sacred and yet most neglected responsibilities. Every day, countless children face violence, exploitation, and emotional neglect not because protection mechanisms are absent, but because we as communities, relatives, and responsible citizens often fail to act when we should. The words of Allama Iqbal remind us of the essence of khudi self-realisation, moral awakening, and accountability.

When a society becomes numb to the suffering of its weakest members, especially its children, it slowly loses its moral direction. Protecting a child is not only a social or legal duty, but it is also an act of faith and humanity. It is said that on the Day of Judgement, every responsible person will be held accountable for the people and community entrusted to their care. Parents will be asked about their children, teachers about their students, leaders about their followers, and the wealthy about the poor who looked up to them for help. This divine accountability reminds us that our silence or inaction in the face of a child's suffering is not just a social failure; it is a moral and spiritual one.

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) emphasised the responsibility of every individual in a community: "Each of you is a shepherd, and each of you is responsible for his flock." Children, being the most vulnerable among us, form the very heart of that flock. Yet, in our daily routines, we overlook their silent cries: the child who is bullied but no one intervenes, the child who drops out of school but no one asks why, the orphan who goes hungry while we waste food at our tables. On the Day of Judgement, as we stand before the Almighty, all these neglected responsibilities will not remain silent. Every child we ignored, every opportunity we failed to provide, and every injustice we tolerated will stand as testimony to our indifference.

Child protection is not merely the duty of the government or NGO's; it begins at the community level in our neighbourhoods, schools, mosques, and markets. Communities are the first line of defence for children. They are where warning signs are first visible, whether it's a child facing domestic violence, being forced into labour, or dropping out of school due to poverty. When communities are active, aware, and compassionate, children thrive. A single vigilant neighbour can save a child from abuse. A caring teacher can stop a student from leaving education. A responsible elder can counsel a struggling family before the situation worsens.

Unfortunately, today's society often chooses silence over responsibility. We see but do

not speak. We know but do not act. We discuss child protection in seminars and social media posts, yet when it comes to real-life action, most people look the other way. This silence creates space for abuse, exploitation, and neglect to grow. A strong community does not wait for government intervention; it acts. It forms Child Protection Groups (CPGs), strengthens parent-teacher associations, and ensures that every child is known, cared for, and supported.

When a community collectively safeguards its children, no harm can easily reach them. Relatives are often the immediate safety net for children when parents are absent, ill, or deceased. In many societies, especially in rural and traditional settings, extended families play a central role in a child's upbringing. Grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins contribute emotionally, financially, and socially to a child's well-being. However, in recent times, this strong bond of kinship has weakened under the pressures of modern life. Individualism has replaced collectivism. Many families no longer feel responsible for the children of their relatives. When a father dies, relatives offer condolences, but few remain to provide long-term support for the education and health of the orphaned child. This moral weakening must be addressed. Relatives should remember that their responsibility does not end with words of sympathy; it begins with sustained care, involvement, and emotional support. A small contribution,

a monthly visit, or consistent mentoring can bring immense change to a child's life. When a child loses one or both parents, it is not only the duty of institutions to step in, but it is the moral duty of relatives and neighbours to ensure that the child continues to live with dignity, safety, and access to opportunities.

Every religion emphasises care for the vulnerable, and in Islam, protecting an orphan or a child in distress is one of the most rewarded deeds. The Holy Qur'an repeatedly commands believers to safeguard orphans, not to exploit them, and to treat them with kindness and fairness.

Yet, we must ask ourselves: Are we fulfilling that command?

Each passing day, we witness children begging on the streets, working in shops, or suffering silently in homes filled with conflict. We offer charity to distant causes but ignore the children crying in our own neighbourhoods. Faith without responsibility becomes hollow. True belief manifests in action in standing for justice, in lending a helping hand, and in becoming the voice for the voiceless. Communities and relatives, when guided by faith and compassion, can become the strongest shield for every child's rights.

The world today is advancing in technology but declining in empathy. We are busy building careers, buying homes, and chasing dreams, yet we often forget the children who need our attention the most. Day by day, we do many things, but as you rightly

said, we continuously ignore the child and their protection measures. Child protection is not an occasional responsibility; it is an everyday commitment. It requires awareness, empathy, and action. It means teaching our children to speak up, guiding them through moral education, and creating safe spaces for their growth. It also means standing up against abuse, exploitation, and neglect whenever and wherever they occur.

We must return to our moral roots, where the suffering of one child was the concern of the entire community. Relatives must revive their sense of familial duty, and community elders must restore collective guardianship over children's safety and well-being. Child protection should not be the job of social workers alone; it should be a shared mission of every heart that beats with humanity.

When communities unite, when relatives support, and when conscience awakens, no child will ever feel abandoned or unsafe. And as we live our days on this earth, let us not forget the eternal truth that a day will come when every responsible person will be questioned about their role. On that Day of Judgment, our deeds will speak louder than our words. Let us hope that among our deeds stands the protection of children, the most innocent trust ever placed in our hands.

The writer is the District Coordinator, Shopian, Human Welfare Voluntary Organisation. He can be reached at yamin@hwwvo.org

India's Rare Earth Strategy: Manufacturing, Corridors, And Global Integration

Press Information Bureau

India is taking decisive steps toward self-reliance in critical materials by establishing a domestic ecosystem for Rare Earth Permanent Magnets (REPMs) - high-performance magnets essential for electric vehicles, wind turbines, electronics, aerospace, and defence. To support this goal, the government approved a 7,280 crore scheme to develop 6,000 MTPA of integrated REPM manufacturing capacity in November 2025, covering the full value chain from rare-earth oxides to finished magnets.

Complementing this, the Union Budget 2026-27 has announced the creation of Dedicated Rare Earth Corridors in Odisha, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu to promote mining, processing, research, and manufacturing. These initiatives align with the national priorities of Atmanirbhar Bharat, Net Zero 2070, and Viksit Bharat @2047, while positioning India as a key player in global advanced-materials value chains.

Strategic Importance and Resource Potential of Rare Earth Permanent Magnets in India

Rare Earth Permanent Magnets (REPMs) are among the strongest types of permanent magnets, known for their high magnetic strength and stability. Their compact size and powerful performance make them indispensable for advanced engineering applications such as electric vehicle motors, wind turbine generators, consumer and industrial electronics, aerospace systems, defence equipment, and precision sensors.

As India expands its manufacturing footprint in clean energy, advanced mobility, and strategic sectors, a reliable domestic supply of REPMs is critical. It not only reduces import dependence but also strengthens India's competitiveness in global value chains for advanced materials.

India's Resource Base

India possesses a substantial reserve of rare-earth minerals, providing a strong foundation for downstream industries like REPM manufacturing.

Monazite Deposits: India holds 13.15 million tonnes of monazite, containing an estimated 7.23 million tonnes of rare-earth oxides (REO).

Geographic Spread: These deposits occur across Odisha, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Jharkhand, primarily in coastal beach sands, teri/red sands, and inland alluvium.

Additional Resources: In Gujarat and Rajasthan, 1.29 million tonnes of in-situ REO resources have been identified in hard-rock areas.

Exploration Efforts: The Geological Survey of India (GSI) has further augmented reserves, identifying 482.6 million tonnes of rare-earth ore resources in 34 exploration projects.

Together, these reserves demonstrate India's strong raw material base to support the establishment of an integrated REPM manufacturing ecosystem.

Need to Explore and Invest in the Sector - Although India has a strong rare-earth resource base, domestic production of permanent magnets is still at a developing stage, with imports mainly from China, meeting most of the demand (nearly 60-80% by value and 85-90% by quantity between 2022-25). With the consumption of Rare Earth Permanent Magnets expected to double by 2030 due to rapid growth in electric mobility, renewable energy, electronics, and defence applications, it is essential for India to expand domestic capability and invest in this sector to reduce import dependence and ensure long-term self-reliance.

Budget Push for Rare Earth Manufacturing and Corridors

The Union Budget 2026-27 has placed strong emphasis on building India's self-reliance in critical materials by complementing the recently approved Rare Earth Permanent Magnet (REPM) Manufacturing Scheme with new corridor-based initiatives. Together, these measures create a comprehensive framework for strengthening domestic capacity, reducing import dependence, and positioning India as a global leader in advanced materials.

REPM Manufacturing Scheme

To strengthen India's self-reliance in critical materials, the government on 26TH November, 2025, approved a major scheme for Rare Earth Permanent Magnets (REPMs). This initiative provides financial support and incentives to build a fully integrated

domestic manufacturing ecosystem.

Financial Outlay: 7,280 crore

Capacity Creation: 6,000 MTPA integrated manufacturing capacity of sintered REPMs, distributed among up to five beneficiaries through global competitive bidding

Incentives: 6,450 crore in sales-linked incentives over five years

Capital Subsidy: 750 crore to support advanced facilities

Timeline: Two-year gestation for setup, followed by five years of incentive disbursement linked to production

Objective: Establish an end-to-end ecosystem from rare-earth oxides to finished magnets, ensuring supply for sectors like electric mobility, renewable energy, electronics, aerospace, and defence.

Union Budget 2026-27: Rare Earth Corridors

To complement the REPM scheme, the Union Budget 2026-27 announced Dedicated Rare Earth Corridors in Odisha, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu. These corridors will focus on mining, processing, research, and manufacturing, leveraging the mineral-rich base of these states. The initiative is expected to generate stronger local economies, enhance R&D capacity, and integrate India more deeply into global advanced-materials value chains.

These corridors directly complement the existing presence of IREL (India) Limited in Odisha and Kerala.

IREL (India) Limited, formerly Indian Rare Earths Limited, has been operating under the Department of Atomic Energy since 1963. With a processing capacity of 10 lakh tonnes per annum, it produces strategic minerals such as ilmenite, rutile, zircon, sillimanite, and garnet. Importantly, IREL runs a Rare Earth Extraction Plant in Odisha and a Rare Earth Refining Unit at Aluva in Kerala, both of which align with the corridor initiative. By integrating IREL's established facilities with the new corridors, the government aims to expand domestic rare earth capacity, foster advanced manufacturing, and accelerate India's transition toward self-reliance and clean energy.

Rare Earth Development Aligned with National Goals

India's recent policy measures reflect how

rare earth development is being aligned with broader national priorities. The focus is not only on industrial growth but also on clean energy, defence, and strategic resource security.

Self-Reliance (Atmanirbhar Bharat): By reducing dependence on imports, where 60-80% of the value and 85-90% of quantity of permanent magnets were sourced from China between 2022-25, India aims to strengthen its domestic capability and secure critical supply chains.

Clean Energy Transition: Rare earth magnets are essential for electric vehicle motors and wind turbine generators, both central to India's renewable energy expansion and its Net Zero 2070 vision. The corridors announced in the Union Budget will ensure that mineral-rich states directly contribute to this transition.

National Security and Defence: Rare earth magnets are vital for aerospace systems, defence equipment, and precision sensors. Domestic corridors and manufacturing capacity ensure secure access for strategic applications, reducing vulnerability to global supply chain disruptions.

Policy and Institutional Reforms: These initiatives complement reforms under the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act (MMDR Act, amended in 2023), which introduced a dedicated list of critical minerals and opened exploration and mining to private participation. They also align with the National Critical Minerals Mission (NCMM, approved in January 2025), which aims to secure sustainable supply chains for rare earths and other strategic minerals.

Strengthening Global Mineral Partnerships India's rare earth and critical minerals strategy is not limited to domestic reforms; it is closely tied to international cooperation to build resilient supply chains.

Bilateral Agreements

The Ministry of Mines has entered into agreements with mineral-rich countries such as Australia, Argentina, Zambia, Mozambique, Peru, Zimbabwe, Malawi, and Côte d'Ivoire.

These partnerships aim to secure long-term access to rare earths and other critical minerals essential for clean energy, advanced

mobility, and defence applications.

Multilateral Platforms

India participates in the Minerals Security Partnership (MSP), a grouping of major economies focused on diversifying and securing global supply chains for critical minerals.

India is also part of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), which includes cooperation on clean energy and critical mineral supply chains.

These platforms provide India with opportunities to collaborate on technology, investment, and sustainable mining practices, reducing the risks of supply disruptions.

Role of Khanij Bidesh India Limited (KABIL)

KABIL is a joint venture of National Aluminium Company Ltd. (NALCO), Hindustan Copper Ltd. (HCL), and Mineral Exploration & Consultancy Ltd. (MECL) under the Ministry of Mines.

Its mandate is to acquire and develop overseas mineral assets to strengthen India's domestic value chains.

KABIL signed an agreement with CAMYEN in Argentina for the exploration and mining of five lithium brine blocks, marking a significant step in securing overseas critical mineral assets.

Conclusion:

India's rare earth strategy is moving decisively toward self-reliance by combining strong domestic resource potential with targeted policy and financial support. The 7,280 crore REPM Manufacturing Scheme and the Union Budget 2026-27 announcement of Dedicated Rare Earth Corridors together create an integrated framework for mining, processing, research, and manufacturing. These measures reduce import dependence, strengthen clean energy and defence supply chains, and align with national priorities of Atmanirbhar Bharat, Net Zero 2070, and Viksit Bharat @2047. Complementary international partnerships and institutional reforms further ensure resilient access to critical minerals. With co-ordinated domestic and global initiatives, India is positioning itself as a reliable and competitive player in advanced materials value chains.

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

Minimum wages revised across J&K in 2022, further hike linked to National Floor Wage: Deputy CM

KT News Desk

JAMMU, FEBRUARY 3: Deputy Chief Minister Surinder Kumar Choudhary Tuesday said that the Jammu and Kashmir has revised the minimum wages in respect of the scheduled employments in October 2002 and any further revision will be done as and when the GoI notifies and implements the National Floor Wages under Code on Wages 2019, which shall be applicable to Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

The Deputy Chief Minister, said this while replying to a question on enhancement of minimum wages, raised by Legislator Ali Mohammad Dar in the Legislative Assembly.

He said that the Government of India, through the Ministry of Labour and Employment and the office of the Chief Labour Commissioner (Central), has issued notifications revising the minimum wage structure applicable under the Minimum Wages Act, 1948.

He, as per an official statement added that these revisions are based on adjustments to the Variable Dearness Allowance (VDA), which is linked to the Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers (CPI-IW), and aim to address inflationary pressures and



cost-of-living across skill for workers increases categories. The Deputy Chief Minister said that under the latest available central notifications (effective October 1, 2024 and subsequently updated), the minimum wage rates for workers employed in the unorganized sector and scheduled employments have been revised upwards for all skill categories including unskilled, semi-skilled, and skilled workers along with higher rates for highly skilled workers.

He added that these revised wages take into account both basic wage and VDA components, as notified by the Government of India.

The Deputy CM also said that, under the Code on Wages, 2019 (now in force w.e.f 21st of November 2025 in pan India also in J&K as part

of the consolidated labour codes), the Government of India has established provisions for national floor minimum wage and strengthened mechanisms for periodic revision of minimum wages based on socio-economic criteria. He added that Minimum wages Act, 1948 has been subsumed under code of wages, 2019 and now wages will be governed under this code.

He further said that the Government of Jammu & Kashmir revised the minimum wages in respect of scheduled employments vide S. O. 513 dated 12.10.2022. He informed that in terms of Section 3(1) (b) of the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, appropriate Government is empowered to issue notifications for revision of the rates of minimum wages in accordance with the provisions of Section 5 of the Act, and the said revision shall remain operative till October, 2027. He further informed that as and when the Government of India notifies and implements the National Floor Wages under Code on Wages 2019 and same shall be applicable to the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir.

On the subject, legislators Mohammad Yousef Tarigami and Hasnain Masoodi raised supplementary questions.

128 of 199 brick kilns deposit royalty in Budgam: Deputy CM



KT News Desk

JAMMU, FEBRUARY 3: Deputy Chief Minister Surinder Choudhary Tuesday informed the House that there are 199 Brick Kilns in the district Budgam out of which 128 Brick Kilns have deposited the royalty in District Mineral officer Budgam on account of Consumption of Brick earth during the current financial year.

The Deputy Chief Minister, as per an official statement, said this while replying to a question regarding Brick Kilns, raised by Legislator Dr. Shafi Ahmad Wani in the Legislative Assembly.

He informed the house that the Geology and Mining Department is

entrusted to monitor the raw material procured by the unit holders for processing and its transportation comes from legitimate sources only.

The Deputy CM added that as per records provided by DMO, Budgam, 107 Crusher unit holders and 44 Hot wet mix plants are registered on the departmental web portal, geologyminingjk.gov.in with upgradation of legal quantity and its sale/transportation through proper e-challans/ e-permits only.

Replying to supplementary question, raised by Legislator Ali Mohammad Dar, the Deputy Chief Minister said that the Government will examine the recent demolition of brick kilns in Budgam district.

Div Com Kashmir reviews traffic streamlining measures in Srinagar



KT News Desk

SRINAGAR, FEBRUARY 3: As part of continued efforts to streamline traffic movement in Srinagar city, Divisional Commissioner Kashmir, Anshul Garg, on Tuesday chaired a meeting of the Multi-Disciplinary Committee on Traffic Management System for Srinagar City.

The meeting, as per an official statement, was attended by the Deputy Commissioner Srinagar, Vice Chairpersons of LCMA and SDA, Regional Transport Officer Kashmir, SSP Traffic, Joint Commissioner SMC, and senior officers from R&B and SSCL.

During the meeting, the Divisional Commissioner directed the SSCL to prepare DPR for the development of a rotary at Exchange Junction. SSCL was also directed to start traffic on the trail basis over realigned take off corridor towards airport flyover.

He also reviewed the induction and management of one-way traffic on various routes and stressed effective implementation for smoother traffic flow.

Regarding development of parking at several locations, he instructed Deputy Commissioner Srinagar to develop surface parking facilities at the Children's Hospital and JVC, while the Vice Chairperson

LCMA was directed to develop parking facilities at Chattabal.

To augment parking space at Jahangir Chowk, he directed Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC) to relocate the kiosks.

The Divisional Commissioner also directed that work on e-bus charging stations at Batamalo be commenced from February 15. It was informed that Zoonimar charging station shall be functional by February 15.

Regarding the Intelligent Traffic Management System (ITMS), the meeting was informed that all 800 traffic cameras are functioning smoothly. In view of the proposed installation of traffic lights at Bemina and Nowgam Flyovers, concerned agency was instructed to take up the work on priority. However, the meeting decided to explore the feasibility of constructing a rotary at Sanatnagar Flyover to streamline the Traffic System.

The Divisional Commissioner further directed SMC to install 'No Honking Zone' signage at identified locations across the city. He also instructed the concerned authorities to close vulnerable median crossings along the road stretch from Pantha Chowk to Shalteng to enhance road safety.

Also, the Div Com directed the SSP Traffic to intensify action against illegal parking and ensure generation of challans using SSCL traffic cameras.

District task force conducts drive against child labour in Bandipora



KT News Desk

BANDIPORA, FEBRUARY 03: Under the Pan-India Rescue and Rehabilitation Campaign for the eradication of child and adolescent labour, the District Task Force under the Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1996, conducted a comprehensive awareness and inspection drive in the main town of Bandipora and its adjoining areas.

During the campaign, multiple establishments including hotels, shops, and units in both organized and unorganized sectors were inspected to identify instances of child and adolescent labour. The drive aimed to enforce legal provisions and ensure the protection and

rehabilitation of vulnerable children.

As part of the initiative, business owners and general public, as per an official statement were sensitized about the legal implications of employing children and the harmful impact of child labour on their health, education, and future. Authorities also emphasized the crucial role of community participation in reporting child labour cases to concerned departments for timely intervention.

The campaign witnessed active participation from officials of Mission Vatsalya, Labour Department, and District Legal Services Authority Bandipora, who collectively reinforced awareness about Child Rights, legal safeguards, and rehabilitation support for rescued children.

State Taxes Dept felicitates teams for Republic Day 2026 participation

KT News Desk

JAMMU, FEBRUARY 3: State Taxes Department (STD), Jammu and Kashmir, Tuesday organized a felicitation programme to honour departmental teams that participated in the Republic Day-2026 celebrations held at MA Stadium here.

The felicitation ceremony was led by Commissioner, State Taxes, PK Bhat.

The teams, as per an official statement, were recognised for their contribution to the Tableau on GST Reforms and participating in the March Past contingent during the Republic Day parade.

The Tableau effectively showcased key objectives and achievements of GST reforms, highlighting department's focus on transparency, ease of compliance and taxpayer-centric governance.

Additional Commissioner (Enforcement and Administration), Jammu, Namrita Dogra; Additional Commissioner (Tax Planning, Policy & Advance Ruling), Kishori Lal Sharma; Principal Excise and Taxation Training Institute, Nagrota, Renu Bala; Deputy Commissioner (Headquarters) Ashima



Sher; Deputy Commissioner Enforcement (Central) Sonu Pargal; DC Appeal-I Pardeep Singh Chib; DC Appeal-II Kulraj Singh; Assistant Commissioner (Enforcement) Samia Shareef Khan and other senior officers were also present on the occasion.

Addressing the gathering, Commissioner, State Taxes, PK Bhat said that the participation of our teams in the Republic Day celebrations reflects collective commitment and professionalism of the department. He added that the GST Tableau was an important medium to communicate reforms and their

benefits to the public.

Appreciating the efforts of the officials and staff involved in the preparations, he said, "The successful presentation at MA Stadium was the result of sustained coordination, discipline and hard work of our teams. Such initiatives strengthen public awareness and reinforce the reform-driven image of the department."

On the occasion, Mementos and Certificates of appreciation were awarded to the officials and staff who contributed to the planning, design, coordination and execution of the Tableau and March Past.

DC Baramulla inaugurates Vaccination Programme for Haj Pilgrims-2026



KT News Desk

BARAMULLA, FEBRUARY 03: Deputy Commissioner Baramulla, Minga Sherpa Tuesday inaugurated the vaccination programme for Haj Pilgrims 2026, conducted at the Associated Hospital, Government Medical College (GMC), Baramulla.

On the occasion, the Deputy Commissioner, as per an official statement reviewed the arrangements at the vaccination

centre to ensure smooth and timely vaccination of pilgrims.

Principal, GMC Baramulla; Chief Medical Officer, Baramulla; District Immunization Officer; Medical Superintendent; and other concerned officials were present during the event.

The initiative aims to ensure timely vaccination and comprehensive health preparedness of Haj pilgrims in accordance with prescribed health protocols, facilitating a safe pilgrimage.

DC Kathua reviews implementation of ICDS, Social Welfare schemes

KT News Desk

KATHUA, FEBRUARY 03: Deputy Commissioner Kathua, Rajesh Sharma Tuesday reviewed the functioning and implementation of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and Social Welfare Department schemes at a meeting held in the Conference Hall of the DC Office Complex.

The meeting, as per an official statement, was attended by ADDC Surinder Mohan Sharma; Programme Officer ICDS, Mohammed Syed; CPO Ranjeet Thakur; District Social Welfare Officer, Varun Chaudhary; Child Development Project Officers (CDPOs), Tehsil Welfare Officers (TWSOs) and other concerned officials. Threadbare discussions were held on expanding coverage and strengthening the delivery mechanism of the welfare schemes being implemented by the ICDS and Social Welfare Departments



in the district. At the outset, the Programme Officer ICDS presented a detailed status report on Central and UT-sponsored schemes. He informed that 1641 Anganwadi Centres are presently functional in the district, while 3915 beneficiaries have been registered under the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY).

The meeting was also briefed about activities being carried out under schemes such as Supplementary Nutrition Programme, Health Check-ups, Poshan Abhiyan, Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG), Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) and Ladli Beti.

Reviewing the progress, the Deputy Commissioner directed the field functionaries to ensure saturation of all ICDS schemes in their respective areas. He emphasized the importance of effective inter-departmental coordination among Health, Education and ICDS departments to achieve 100 percent coverage of all eligible beneficiaries.

The Deputy Commissioner also conducted a comprehensive review of Social Welfare Department schemes, including National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP), Integrated Social Security Scheme (ISSS), State Marriage Assistance Scheme

(SMAS), Pradhan Mantri Adarsh Gram Yojana (PMAGY), Assistance to Disabled Persons (ADIP), Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) and Special Central Assistance to Scheduled Castes Programme (SCA to SCP), among others.

The District Social Welfare Officer informed the meeting that Mission Shakti camps are being organized across different parts of the district, during which departmental teams reach out to women beneficiaries to create awareness about women-centric welfare schemes and the support mechanisms available for their empowerment.

The Deputy Commissioner stressed the need for proactive outreach, transparency and timely delivery of benefits. He directed the department to ensure that all eligible beneficiaries are covered so that the intended objectives of the welfare schemes are achieved effectively at the grassroots level.

Director Agriculture reviews progress of key departmental schemes

KT News Desk

JAMMU, FEBRUARY 03: Director Agriculture Jammu, Anil Gupta Tuesday convened a review meeting in the Conference Hall, Krishi Bhawan to assess the physical and financial progress of key agricultural initiatives across Jammu Division.

The meeting, as per an official statement, focused on the implementation status of the Holistic Agriculture Development Programme (HADP), Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS), Capital Expenditure (CAPEX) works, NABARD-funded projects and the uploading of information on various portals.

The meeting was attended by SMS-RL, Krishan Kant; Deputy Director Agriculture (Planning), Mohammad Yaqoob Zargar; Accounts Officer, Vriti Uppal, along with officers from the CSS



and Planning Sections of the Directorate. The Chief Agriculture Officers (CAOs) of Jammu Division and Farm Managers, Chakroli and Chinore, participated in the meeting through Video Conferencing (VC).

During the meeting, comprehensive presentations were delivered, outlining scheme-wise and component-wise physical and financial achievements, besides performance against approved targets under HADP, CSS, CAPEX and NABARD schemes.

The Director called for swift and prudent utilization of allocated resources to maximize

benefits for the farming community, while ensuring transparency, accountability and strict compliance with prescribed guidelines.

Laying special emphasis on the RKVY and Farm Mechanization components, Anil Gupta directed officers to accord priority to these sectors to enhance irrigation, agricultural productivity and mechanization. The Chief Agriculture Officers were asked to closely monitor the progress of HADP projects and ensure that expenditure under all components is completed up to 100 percent within the prescribed timelines.

NABARD estimates priority sector credit potential of ₹49,795.58 cr for J&K

Chief Secretary releases focus paper

KT NEWS DESK

Jammu, Feb 03: The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) has estimated a credit potential of 49,795.58 crore under Priority Sector for the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir for 2026-27. Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo on Tuesday released the focus paper during the Credit Seminar organised by NABARD.

The seminar provided a forum for the policymakers, bankers and other key stakeholders to deliberate on strategies aimed at promoting sustainable and inclusive development in the region.

Addressing the gathering, the Chief Secretary expressed satisfaction over the launch of the focus paper by NABARD. He underscored the theme "Last Mile Credit Inclusion: Reaching the Unreached", describing the Potential Linked Plan (PLP) as a crucial planning instrument that guides credit flow and development priorities. He said that NABARD's projections are realistic and achievable, emphasizing the need for universal coverage of Kisan Credit Cards with timely and adequate credit. He appreciated the role of RIDF in strengthening infrastructure.

Stressing a shift from subsistence to commercially viable agriculture, the Chief Secretary called for greater focus on



infrastructure, processing, value addition, term lending, niche crops and suitable tweaks in KCC, highlighting medicinal and aromatic plants as income-enhancing opportunities.

The Chief Secretary advocated an integrated approach involving universities, banks and line departments. He urged attention to sectors like wool processing and fisheries and emphasized supporting SHGs and "Lakhpatis Didis" as emerging entrepreneurs through credit. He also highlighted the success of Mission YUVA, the need for skill-based lending over collateral, promotion of homestays to decentralize tourism, technology upgradation and traceability in handicrafts and described UJI as a potential game changer requiring focused roll-out in J&K. He also distributed micro ATMs among the Banking Correspondents (BCs) affiliated with J&K Grameen Bank.

The Focus Paper outlines sector-wise credit projections with a strong thrust on agriculture and allied sectors, MSMEs, farm

and non-farm activities besides rural infrastructure. Emphasis has been laid on enhancing the agriculture credit flow, strengthening Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) and Rural Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, improving productivity and area expansion in horticulture crops such as apple and saffron and promoting handloom and handicrafts through value addition, structured marketing support and Geographic Indication (GI) registration.

Earlier, Vikas Mittal, General Manager and Officer-in-Charge (GM/OIC), NABARD, highlighted NABARD's continued commitment towards strengthening rural credit flow, agriculture, allied activities, MSMEs and rural infrastructure in Jammu and Kashmir.

In his address, he emphasized NABARD's role in collaborative planning, close coordination with stakeholders and targeted development interventions to unlock the vast economic potential of the region.

Pertinently, NABARD is

driving inclusive development in Jammu & Kashmir through credit planning, agricultural modernisation, digital traceability projects and value chain support for FPOs. It has strengthened rural infrastructure via major RIDF investments, launched a Rural Business Incubation Centre at SKUAST K, supported GI tagging of local products, deepened MSME lending, expanded financial inclusion through CFLs, RSETIs, micro ATMs and literacy camps and fully digitised PACS to enhance last mile credit delivery.

Meanwhile, exhibition stalls highlighting NABARD's initiatives in line with the seminar theme, 'Reaching the Unreached', were arranged as part of the programme.

Manohar Lal, General Manager, NABARD in his vote of thanks reaffirmed NABARD's commitment towards working closely with all partners to translate the projected credit potential into tangible outcomes and sustainable development across Jammu and Kashmir.

Students from Doda's far-flung areas call on Speaker JKLA

KT News Desk

Jammu, Feb 03: Students representing schools of far flung and remote areas of Doda district on Tuesday called on Speaker JKLA Abdul Rahim Rather in Assembly Secretariat here.

While interacting with the Speaker JKLA, the students said that as the residents of far flung and remote areas of the district, their schools don't have the facilities like, smart classes, modern science laboratories, computer system, desks, proper maintenance and infrastructure.

The students also urged for better facilities in schools of



far-flung areas so that they can also get equal opportunities in order to compete with other students. The Speaker assured them that all their concerns shall be raised with the concerned Minister for

their early redressal.

The students expressed their gratitude to the speaker for giving them an opportunity to witness the proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, it's working and conduct.

KCCI welcomes Indo-US trade deal

KNO

Srinagar, Feb 03: The Kashmir Chamber of Commerce & Industry (KCCI) has welcomed the India-US Trade Deal, describing it as a landmark step that will enhance the global competitiveness of Indian products and create fresh opportunities for export-led growth, particularly for Jammu and Kashmir.

In a statement issued to the news agency-Kashmir News Observer (KNO), President, KCCI Javid Tenga expressed profound gratitude to the Government of India for its sustained and effective diplomacy under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He said that the agreement is expected to pave the way for further easing of trade barriers in the future and termed it a major boost for entire handicraft industry of Kashmir.

KCCI noted that the United

States has immediately reduced reciprocal tariffs on Indian goods from 25 per cent to 18 per cent, while waiving additional tariffs imposed earlier. The Chamber said this move strengthens the strategic economic partnership between India and the United States and reflects a shared commitment to deepening trade, technology, and investment ties in an increasingly competitive global landscape.

According to the Chamber, India-US trade deal will help catalyse manufacturing growth, enhance employment generation, and support the development of resilient and diversified supply chains. Reduced tariff duties are expected to lower input costs, strengthen supply chains, and improve price competitiveness of Indian exports in the US market.

KCCI emphasised that for Kashmir, the agreement holds particular significance as it

can revive demand for handicrafts, handmade carpets, and other labour-intensive products, thereby directly benefiting artisans, weavers, and small exporters. The Chamber also observed that export-oriented sectors such as textiles and apparel, which are among the largest employment generators, stand to gain significantly from improved trade terms, helping secure existing jobs and create new employment opportunities, especially for women and skilled workers.

The Kashmir Chamber of Commerce & Industry expressed hope that the momentum generated by the India-US Trade Deal will be translated into tangible outcomes for businesses on the ground, and that regional export centres like Kashmir will receive focused policy and institutional support to fully harness the benefits of expanding India-US economic cooperation.

CONTD. FROM FRONT PAGE

Teachers must

A classroom is not just four walls and a blackboard. A classroom is the glowing forge of a blacksmith, where raw futures are hammered and shaped anew.

I envision classrooms where teachers don't merely dispense bookish answers but ignite inquiry with probing questions. To forge a knowledge economy and vibrant society, transform learners from passive consumers of information into sharp analysts who dissect it," the Lieutenant Governor said.

The Lieutenant Governor exhorted upon the teachers to cultivate a culture of collaboration in their classrooms.

"The truth is, tomorrow's world belongs to those who work as a team. So, we need to turn classrooms into collaboration hubs, where research, writing, and innovation unfold as collective quests," he said.

The Lieutenant Governor further advised the teaching community to think beyond the curriculum's rigid map. He stated that curriculum offers mere direction, but creativity and curiosity propel students toward life's true readiness.

The Lieutenant Governor said that a teacher must tie learning to life itself, so every day sparks fresh discoveries and generates further curiosity.

"In this AI era, teaching isn't about rote delivery but nurturing creativity. I believe humanity's greatest asset in future will be innovative and creative thinking. I want our teachers to break down preconceived boundaries and offer every student not just knowledge but unlimited possibilities," he said.

Prof Umesh Rai, Vice Chancellor, University of Jammu; Prof. K.S. Chandrasekar, Vice Chancellor, Cluster University of Jammu; Ram Niwas Sharma, Commissioner Secretary, School Education Department; Ramesh Kumar, Divisional Commissioner Jammu; Dr Rakesh Minhas, Deputy Commissioner Jammu; Mahendra Tiwari, Editor, Amar Ujala, Naresh Sharma Unit Head and other senior office bearers of Amar Ujala Group; heads of educational institutions, teachers, families of awarded teachers and students attended the award ceremony.

Victimisation of Kashmiris

on such matters and stressed that legislative decorum must be maintained.

"It is the privilege of the Speaker to decide. In the same way, in our Assembly, it is not appropriate to discuss our Assembly in Parliament," he said, adding that he was unaware of what transpired there.

On the Congress's demand for the formation of a coordination committee, Omar said the matter should be taken up with the party leadership. "Talk to the president of the National Conference," he said.

Clarifying his role, Omar said he serves as the Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir and Dr Farooq Abdullah remains the president of the National Conference.

"Meet the president of the National Conference, Farooq Abdullah. Ask him," he added.

He also linked the removal of US tariffs on India to New Delhi's reported decision to stop importing oil from Russia, saying the move would benefit Indian exporters but could have implications for fuel prices.

Abdullah said the tariffs had caused significant hardship for exporters and suggested they were imposed because the US administration was unhappy with India purchasing oil from Russia.

He noted that while the Indian government has not issued an official statement, the US President has announced that India has stopped buying Russian oil, following which the tariffs would no longer apply.

"If we have indeed stopped buying oil from Russia, it remains to be seen where we source our oil from and whether that will lead to an increase in petrol and diesel prices," Abdullah said, adding that the impact would become clear over time.

The Chief Minister said the reduction in tariffs would bring relief to exporters who were struggling due to higher costs and uncertain markets. He said many exporters had feared shutting down operations, but the rollback could help revive their businesses.

Separately, Abdullah criticised the mixing of sports and politics, particularly in the context of India-Pakistan cricket matches.

He said such matches are often projected as confrontations rather than sporting events, unlike games played against other countries. "When sports and politics are combined, this is the result," Abdullah said, questioning the media's portrayal of India-Pakistan matches as a "war."

BATS FOR INCLUSIVE PILGRIMAGES, STRONGER RTC

Asserting that the government is working to strengthen the Jammu and Kashmir Road Transport Corporation (RTC) to make it financially sustainable, CM Omar said there is a public demand to make pilgrimage tourism in the Union Territory inclusive of all religions. "At present only one major pilgrimage destination, Shahdra Sharif in Rajouri, lies within Jammu and Kashmir, while most other religious sites associated with different faiths are located outside the UT.

"There are Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs and Christians, and there is a demand that every religion should be brought into this sphere," he said.

On public transport, the Chief Minister said efforts were underway to improve RTC services by inducting new vehicles, including e-buses and long-distance buses, to enhance revenue generation.

"As new vehicles come in, we are trying our best to strengthen the RTC. If the corporation earns well and uses that revenue properly, it will be able to finance new vehicles on its own," he said.

CM Omar said improving RTC finances would also help ensure better salaries for employees and improve overall service delivery.

On railway expansion in south Kashmir, the chief minister said two proposed rail projects passing through areas such as Pahalgam, Kakapora and Shopian have been put on hold

following objections from local residents and elected representatives.

He said people had raised concerns that the proposed railway alignments would pass through productive orchards and major tourist areas, while roads and highways in the region were already in good condition.

"There was no public demand for these railway lines. The people conveyed that they would not benefit from them," Abdullah said.

He said he had conveyed these concerns to Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on multiple occasions. Abdullah said alternative alignments, including routes towards Ladakh or Rajouri-Poonch, could be explored, but there was no justification for rail lines passing only through Pahalgam and Shopian.

"These projects would consume precious land without offering real benefits," he said, adding that the concerns raised by locals were accepted and the projects were subsequently put on hold.

CM Omar also welcomed the popularity of the Vande Bharat train service in Jammu and Kashmir, particularly during the winter season, saying it has attracted a large number of tourists.

However, he said ticket availability remains a challenge for local residents. "Now tickets have to be booked three to four months in advance. It is difficult for locals to plan travel like that, especially when road conditions are uncertain," he said.

Abdullah urged the Railways to increase the frequency of Vande Bharat services and extend the length of the trains to accommodate more passengers.

"Tourists should be able to travel, but local people should also get seats," he said, congratulating the Railways on the success of the service while flagging the need for expansion. (KNO)

CM tables J&K Jan Vishwas

Legislative Assembly.

The Ordinance proposes amendments to certain laws. It seeks to decriminalise a range of minor offences and rationalisation across several sectors.

Fresh snowfall in

many places.

Srinagar recorded a minimum temperature of 2.8 degrees Celsius, while the ski resort of Gulmarg registered minus 5.3 degrees Celsius. Pahalgam recorded a low of minus 0.4 degrees Celsius.

In the Jammu region, Jammu city recorded a minimum temperature of 9 degrees Celsius, Katra 8.1 degrees, Batote 4.1 degrees, Banihal 1.5 degrees and Bhaderwah 0.8 degrees Celsius.

The MeT department said partly cloudy weather is expected to prevail till the evening of February 6. Light snowfall may occur at isolated higher reaches on February 7, while generally dry weather is forecast for February 8. Light rain or snow at a few places is likely on February 9 and 10.

Advising caution, officials asked travellers and transporters to check road and highway conditions before undertaking journeys. People

living in snow-bound higher reaches were also cautioned against venturing into avalanche-prone areas. (KNO)

After objections from

and Shopian railway lines on hold brings much needed relief to Kashmir's agrarian economy. These projects threatened to destroy scarce fertile land and push over a million rural families into uncertainty. Development that uproots farmers is not progress. Any future plan must be reviewed transparently, with farmers and local communities taken on board, to protect Kashmir's economy and social fabric." Said former CM Mehbooba Mufti in a post on 'X'.

Meanwhile farmers across South Kashmir have heaved a sigh of relief after hearing this news and demanded a permanent cancellation.

Zahoor Ahmad Dar a farmer from Shopian said that he is the father of five daughters and orchards are his only source of income and the proposed railway project was coming through his orchards.

He said that this decision came as a sigh of relief but still fear continues till projects will be abandoned.

Abbas Ahmad a resident of Jaibal area of Anantnag said that he spent all his earnings to construct a house in the last 10 years and as per the proposed railway line he had to dismantle his house due to which their whole family was in depression.

He said there are hundreds of families in Pulwama, Shopian and Anantnag who were getting hit due to the proposed railway lines and now this decision has come as a temporary relief and we are hopeful that the government will take a decision in favour of people and permanently cancel these projects. (KNO)

Drug seizures in J&K

The seizure of synthetic drugs during the year stood at 3 kg, while no cocaine was reported.

In 2025, up to November, seizures dropped to 2,062 kg of opium-based drugs and 1,957 kg of cannabis-based drugs. No cocaine or synthetic drugs were seized in Jammu and Kashmir during the period, the data showed.

The government informed Parliament that while the NCB regularly conducts joint operations with Central and State agencies, no separate consolidated data is maintained on drug trafficking networks or modules busted through joint operations on a year-wise or State-wise basis.

On funding, the government said Jammu and Kashmir did not receive any financial assistance under the centrally sponsored scheme 'Assistance to States/UTs for Narcotic Control' during the period from 2021-22 to 2025-26.

The government said it has taken multiple steps to curb narcotics trafficking, especially across international borders, including empowering the Border Security Force and other border guarding forces under the NDPS Act to carry out search, seizure and arrest.

It said upgraded surveillance grids equipped with AI-based features, radars, electro-optic devices, night vision devices and motion detectors have been installed along border areas, with

integration into command and control centres.

The government further said drone-based capabilities have been institutionalised for aerial surveillance and reconnaissance, while intelligence sharing and controlled delivery operations are being carried out with foreign countries.

India has signed bilateral agreements with 27 countries and memorandums of understanding with 19 countries to combat illicit trafficking of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and chemical precursors, the government added. (KNO)

LG, CM greet people

divine guidance.

The Chief Minister called upon people to imbibe the true spirit of the occasion and offer prayers for peace, harmony, and the welfare of all humanity. He also prayed for peace, prosperity and overall progress for the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

Two bills to be

positive obligations through affirmative action. (KNO)

NC MLAs stage

minutes before the House assembled.

The lawmakers vociferously raised slogans such as "Return statehood" and "Stop harassing Kashmiris."

Talking to reporters, NC MLA and party spokesman Tanvir Sadiq said the time had come to return statehood and constitutional guarantees to Kashmiris.

"We are protesting against the injustice meted out to Kashmiris, whether it concerns constitutional guarantees or statehood. It is the appropriate time to restore the special status that was taken from us," he said.

Tanvir urged the Government of India to intervene and direct states to stop such incidents.

"Our Prime Minister and Home Minister should issue an advisory to all states to prevent the recurrence of these incidents," he said, alleging that the BJP was trying to create a divide between Kashmir and Jammu. (KNO)

CM Omar flags off

Speaking during the ceremony, the Chief Minister said that Jammu and Kashmir has a rich legacy of pluralism and coexistence, and these services reflect the government's commitment to strengthening bonds of mutual respect and understanding among different communities. He emphasized that facilitating access to places of worship of all faiths reinforces the spirit of unity and shared cultural heritage of the region.

The Chief Minister also appreciated the efforts of the Transport Department and J&K RTC for initiating people-friendly services, stating that such initiatives not only promote spiritual well-being but also encourage inter-state connectivity and tourism.

Minister for Transport Satish Sharma said that J&K RTC remains committed to providing safe, reliable and affordable transport facilities, and assured that the department will continue to expand services based on public demand.

NDA should not be complacent with wins in various elections: PM Modi

PTI

New Delhi, Feb 03: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday told NDA leaders that the coalition has been winning various elections due to its people-friendly policies and hard work.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju told reporters after the NDA Parliamentary Party meeting that Prime Minister Modi also told NDA MPs that they should not be complacent with their win in various polls, including local bodies, but continue with the good work.

At the meeting, Modi was felicitated by the NDA leaders for successfully concluding trade deals with 39 countries.

Referring to the US and India agreeing on a trade deal under which Washington will bring down reciprocal tariff on Indian goods to 18 per cent from current 25 per cent, the minister said there is an excitement about it in the entire country.

"There is excitement among the MPs that these trade deals have been concluded under the leadership of PM. The trade deals have been signed with a



total of 39 countries. This is historic. All these 39 countries are developed countries...This is historic. There has been a very good atmosphere in the country," he said.

Shiv Sena MP Milind Deora said, "PM Modi explained to all the MPs that the government works in favour of India, be it a trade deal or budget".

"The credit for the trade deal between India and America and India and India-Europe goes to PM Modi. This has happened because of his determination. The trade deal will

give benefits to small-scale businessmen," he asserted.

Rijiju said the prime minister gave broad guidelines for the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha MPs to carry forward their parliamentary and welfare works.

"The prime minister said the NDA is winning one after another elections due to its good work. He said election can't be won without being on the ground. We have to be on the ground and do good work for the welfare of the people," Rijiju said. Newly elected BJP president Nitin Nabin was

also formally welcomed at the meeting.

MPs belonging to the BJP, TDP, JD(U), IJP (R), Shiv Sena, JD(S) and other constituents of the NDA attended the meeting.

Those who attended the meeting include Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Home Minister Amit Shah, Health Minister J P Nadda, Apna Dal leader and union minister Anupriya Patel, NCP leader Praful Patel, Shiv Sena leader Shrikant Shinde, Rashtriya Lok Morcha leader Upendra Kushwaha among other.

India-US trade deal to boost FDI, FII, strengthen rupee: EAC-PM chairman

PTI

New Delhi, Feb 03: The Indo-US trade deal will boost FDI as well as portfolio investments in the country, having a positive impact on the value of rupee, Chairman of Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) S Mahendra Dev said on Tuesday.

India and the US agreed on a trade deal under which Washington will bring down the reciprocal tariff on Indian goods to 18 per cent, lower than that for countries like China, Bangladesh and Vietnam.

US President Donald Trump made an announcement regarding the trade deal on Monday after a phone conversation with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Dev, in an interview to PTI Video, said the trade deal announcement is a "huge one" for India in several ways as some of the labour-intensive manufacturing sectors, like textiles and gems and jewellery, will benefit.

The Trump administration had imposed 50 per cent tariff, including 25 per cent penalty for purchasing Russian oil, impacting India's exports to America.

Dev said the 18 per cent tariff is lower than that on many countries, including Bangladesh, Vietnam, China and Brazil.

"Now with 18 per cent, we'll have the advantage. And I hope that India's exports will increase to the US and of course, we have FTAs with other countries -- the EU and



the UK and many other countries. So our exports will increase further. And that will also have impact on growth. Our economic growth will be much higher than earlier," he said. Observing that the net FDI and FII inflows were impacted because of uncertainties and repatriation, Dev said with the India-US trade deal, the situation will hopefully reverse, providing support to the domestic currency.

"So now with this announcement, I think the FDI as well as FII flows to the stock market, affected because of uncertainty regarding this deal, will hopefully increase. I think the impact on the rupee will also be positive," Dev said.

The India-US trade announcement comes within a week of New Delhi finalising a free trade agreement with the European Union. Following the trade agreement

announcement by US President Donald Trump, Prime Minister Modi said he was delighted that "Made in India products will now have a reduced tariff of 18 per cent". "Wonderful to speak with my dear friend President Trump today. Delighted that Made in India products will now have a reduced tariff of 18 per cent. Big thanks to President Trump on behalf of the 1.4 billion people of India for this wonderful announcement," Modi said.

He said when two large economies and the world's largest democracies work together, it benefits the people and "unlocks immense opportunities for mutually beneficial cooperation".

"President Trump's leadership is vital for global peace, stability, and prosperity. India fully supports his efforts for peace," Modi said on 'X'.

SC gives protection of arrest for two weeks to shaadi.com founder in fraud case

PTI

New Delhi, Feb 03: The Supreme Court on Tuesday granted shaadi.com founder Anupam Mittal and two others protection from arrest for two weeks in a case related to alleged fraud by a user of the matrimonial platform.

A bench of Justices Prashant Kumar Mishra and N V Anjaria set aside a Telangana High Court order refusing to quash the proceedings against Mittal and sent the matter back to the high court for fresh consideration. The apex court also asked Mittal to approach the high court for interim bail.

The case stems from a Hyderabad woman's allegation that she was defrauded of Rs 11 lakh by a man who used a fake profile on shaadi.com and that the platform failed to properly verify user details.

"Since the quashing petition has not been decided on merits, we set aside the impugned order and remit the matter to the high court to consideration on merits.

Accordingly the criminal cases are restored to their original file. The same shall be dealt with by the high court on its merits. This court has not expressed any opinion on merits," the Supreme Court said.

"In the meanwhile, petitioner shall make a prayer for interim relief before the high court. For a period of eight weeks from today, no coercive steps to be taken against the petitioner," it added.

Senior advocate Atmaram Nadkarni, appearing for Mittal, submitted that he was running a matrimonial site, which is basically just a matchmaker.

"I am just facilitating matching. We are cooperating with the investigation. But why am I an accused?" Nadkarni asked.

On June 26, the top court had issued notice to the Telangana government and stayed all proceedings.

The Telangana High Court last year declined to quash the FIR registered against Mittal and two others, Vignesh and Satish, named as accused in the case.

India has established itself as global healthcare hub: Nadda

PTI

Lucknow, Feb 03: Union Health and Family Welfare Minister Jagat Prakash Nadda on Tuesday said India has established itself as a global healthcare hub, supplying nearly 30 per cent of the world's generic medicines and around 60 per cent of global vaccine demand.

Addressing the Uttar Pradesh Pharma Conclave-1 online, in the presence of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak and several investors, Nadda said Indian pharmaceutical products are exported to more than 200 countries.

"India has established itself as a global healthcare hub, and it is supplying 30 per cent of the world's generic medicines and 60 per cent of global vaccine demand.

"Indian pharma products are exported to more than 200 countries across the world. This event is being held at a time when India is standing at a crucial and decisive phase of its development journey," the minister said.

He said that over the past decade, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has moved beyond a consumption-based economy towards a production- and innovation-driven economy. Nadda said that due



to a strong digital infrastructure and wide-ranging governance reforms, India has emerged as a reliable and responsible global partner. Initiatives such as Make in India, Aatmanirbhar Bharat, Digital India and Viksit Bharat have given a new direction to manufacturing, innovation and human development, he added.

Referring to India's G20 presidency and vaccine diplomacy, the minister said these have clearly demonstrated the country's global responsibility and capabilities, with the most visible impact seen in the healthcare and pharmaceutical sectors.

Nadda said India's healthcare system has witnessed unprecedented expansion in recent years.

Under the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana, over 62 crore beneficiaries are now covered under health protection.

He said more than 10 crore treatments have been carried out under the scheme so far, with the government bearing health expenditure of over Rs 1.30 lakh crore, thereby protecting vulnerable sections from catastrophic financial burden.

Highlighting further achievements, Nadda said over 1.80 lakh Arogya Mandirs have been established across the country, expanding healthcare services beyond treatment to include primary care, prevention, control of non-communicable diseases and

elderly care.

Under the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission, around 84.7 crore ABHA ID cards have been created so far, resulting in large-scale digitisation of health records and greater transparency in healthcare delivery, he said.

Pointing to past gaps, the Union minister said there were 387 medical colleges in the country in 2014, a number that has now crossed 800, along with a significant increase in MBBS seats.

Nadda also said that in the Union Budget 2026-27, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a major initiative named 'Bio-Pharma Shakti', with an allocation of Rs 10,000 crore for five years, aimed at establishing India as a global bio-pharmaceutical manufacturing hub.

He said the national strategy would strengthen drug manufacturing, research, testing and regulation in the country.

The minister said that in the journey towards Viksit Bharat 2047, the pharma and healthcare sectors would remain key pillars of economic growth, employment generation and global leadership.

Expressing confidence, Nadda said the conclave would promote new investments and foster fresh partnerships in the sector.

India emerging force in space programmes, drawing global attention: Shubhanshu Shukla



PTI

Raipur, Feb 03: Astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla on Tuesday said India has emerged as a rising force in space programmes with its proven ability to accomplish complex missions and ambitious policies, drawing close international attention and high expectations.

He also said that the two per cent hike in the allocation for the Department of Space in the recently tabled Union Budget signalled strong leadership support for India's space ambitions.

Speaking to reporters at Swami Vivekananda Airport in Raipur, Shukla also stressed the need to inform children about India's rapid progress in space science and the career opportunities emerging in the sector, saying lack of information often limits young minds while choosing their future paths.

It is essential for children to understand where the country is headed and what it is doing in space exploration, including missions such as Gaganyaan and future lunar programmes, he said.

Indian Air Force Group Captain Shukla, the first Indian to visit the International Space Station (ISS), had undertaken an 18-day mission to the orbital laboratory in June-July last year.

He was in the Chhattisgarh capital on Tuesday to inaugurate a 'Space Lab with Simulator' for students at a government school at Rakhi village in Nava Raipur's Atal Nagar.

Asked about India's image worldwide in space science, Shukla said India is viewed with respect on the global stage.

"The world has expectations from India. Our missions are closely watched because we have successfully accomplished complex tasks. Our capabilities and ambitious policies have positioned India as an emerging force in space programmes," he said.

To a query on the over two per cent increase in allocation for the Department of Space in the Union Budget, Shukla said it reflected strong support from the leadership for India's space ambitions.

Study links intelligence to overall brain activity rather than specific region

PTI

New Delhi, Feb 03: Researchers have found evidence for a theory that views intelligence as a property of how the brain functions as a whole, rather than relating it to a specific cognitive function or brain network.

According to the Network Neuroscience Theory, intelligence is said to reflect how brain networks are coordinated and adapted to solve the diverse problems one encounters in life.

The researchers at the US' University of Notre Dame analysed brain imaging and cognitive data of 831 adults participating in the Human Connectome Project, an initiative focused on mapping the human brain and connecting its structure to function and behaviour.

An independent group of 145 adults were also analysed. "We found evidence for system-wide coordination in the brain that is both robust and adaptable. This coordination does not carry out cognition itself, but determines the range of cognitive operations the system can support," said Ramsey Wilcox, a graduate student at the University of Notre Dame and lead author of the study published in the journal Nature



Communications.

According to the framework, the brain modelled as a network constrained by global properties such as efficiency, flexibility and integration -- the properties are not tied to individual tasks or brain networks, but are characteristics of the system as a whole, Wilcox said. "Once the question shifts from where intelligence is to how the system is organised, the empirical targets change," the lead author said.

The researchers found evidence to support predictions of the Network Neuroscience Theory. For example, the brain requires integration and

effective long-range communications to manage the distributed way of processing information across multiple networks, according to the theory. Author Aron Barbey, professor of psychology at the University of Notre Dame's department of psychology, said there is "a large and complex system of connections that serve as 'shortcuts' linking distant brain regions and integrating information across the networks."

Barbey added that general intelligence depends on the brain's ability to balance a local specialisation with global integration -- the brain functions best when tightly connected local clusters communicate well, but are still able to link to distant regions of the brain across short communication paths.

The result makes the most effective problem-solving possible, the researchers said. Across both data sets analysed, individual differences in general intelligence were consistently associated with system-level properties -- no single region or basic "intelligence network" accounted for the effect, they said.

"General intelligence becomes visible when cognition is coordinated, when many processes must work together under system-level constraints," Barbey said.

India-US trade deal drives rally in stock markets

Sensex, Nifty quote nearly 3 pc higher

PTI

Mumbai, Feb 03: Stock market benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty were trading nearly 3 per cent higher during afternoon session on Tuesday after India and the US agreed to a trade deal under which Washington will bring down the reciprocal tariff on Indian goods to 18 per cent.

After starting the trade on a buoyant note, the 30-share BSE Sensex later jumped 4,205.27 points or 5.14 per cent to hit the day's high of 85,871.73. The 50-share NSE Nifty surged 1,252.8 points or 4.99 per cent to 26,341.20.

During the afternoon trade, the BSE benchmark traded 2,411.07 points or 2.95 per cent higher at 84,065.30. The Nifty quoted 742.30 points or 2.96 per cent up at 25,828.35.

India and the US have agreed to a trade deal under which Washington will bring down the reciprocal tariff on Indian goods to 18 per cent from current 25 per cent, US President Donald Trump said on Monday after a phone conversation with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

All the 30-Sensex firms were trading higher. Adani Ports, Bajaj

Finance, Power Grid, Bajaj Finserv, Eternal and InterGlobe Aviation were trading sharply higher in the range of 8-4 per cent.

The dramatic announcement of the long-awaited US-India trade deal and the US decision to cut tariffs on India to 18 per cent is a game changer for the Indian economy and stock markets, VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

"The combination of the US-India trade deal, the EU-India trade deal and the growth-oriented Budget will boost the market sentiments and the animal spirits in the economy. The stock market, anticipating and discounting these developments will boom," he added.

The development also propelled a sharp rally in textile, leather, gems and jewellery, seafood exports and specialty chemicals stocks.

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi rebounded and jumped over 6 per cent. Japan's Nikkei 225 index, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index were also trading higher.

US markets ended higher on Monday.

Iran's president seeks 'fair, equitable negotiations' with United States

AP

Dubai, Feb 03: Iran's president said Tuesday he instructed the country's foreign minister to "pursue fair and equitable negotiations" with the United States, the first clear sign from Tehran it wants to try to negotiate as tensions remain high with Washington after the Mid-east country's bloody crack-down on nationwide protests last month.

The announcement marked a major turn for reformist President Masoud Pezeshkian, who broadly had warned Iranians for weeks that the turmoil in his country had gone beyond his control. It also signals that the president received support from Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei for talks that the 86-year-old cleric previously had dismissed.

Turkey had been working behind the scenes to make the talks happen there later this week as U.S. Mideast envoy Steve Witkoff is traveling in the region.

But whether Iran and the U.S. can reach an agreement remains to be seen, particularly as President Donald Trump now has included Iran's nuclear program in a list of demands from Tehran in any talks. Trump ordered the bombing of three Iranian nuclear sites during the 12-day war Israel launched



against Iran in June.

Iran's president signals talks are possible

Writing on X, Pezeshkian said in English and Farsi that the decision came after "requests from friendly governments in the region to respond to the proposal by the President of the United States for negotiations."

"I have instructed my Minister of Foreign Affairs, provided that a suitable environment exists — one free from threats and unreasonable expectations — to pursue fair and equitable negotiations, guided by the principles of dignity, prudence, and expediency," he said.

The U.S. has yet to acknowledge the talks will take place. A semiofficial news agency in Iran on Monday reported — then later deleted without explanation — that Pezeshkian had issued such an order

to Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who held multiple rounds of talks with Witkoff before the 12-day war.

Khamenei adviser speaks on the nuclear issue

Late Monday, the pan-Arab satellite channel Al Mayadeen, which is politically allied with the Iranian-backed Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, aired an interview with Ali Shamkhani, a top Khamenei adviser on security.

Shamkhani, who now sits on the country's Supreme National Security Council and who in the 1980s led Iran's navy, wore a naval uniform as he spoke.

He suggested if the talks happened, they would be indirect at the beginning, then moving to direct talks if a deal appeared to be attainable. Direct talks with the U.S. long have been a highly charged political issue

within Iran's theocracy, with reformists like Pezeshkian pushing for them and hard-liners dismissing them.

The talks would solely focus on nuclear issues, he added. Asked about whether Russia could take Iran's enriched uranium like it did in Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, Shamkhani dismissed the idea, saying there was "no reason" to do so. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov on Monday said Russia had "long offered these services as a possible option that would alleviate certain irritants for a number of countries."

"Iran does not seek nuclear weapons, will not seek a nuclear weapon and will never stockpile nuclear weapons, but the other side must pay a price in return for this," he said.

Iran had been enriching uranium up to 60% purity, a short, technical step away from weapons-grade levels. The International Atomic Energy Agency had said Iran was the only country in the world to enrich to that level that wasn't armed with the bomb.

Iran has been refusing requests by the IAEA to inspect the sites bombed in the June war.

"The quantity of enriched uranium remains unknown, because part of the stockpile is under rubble, and there is no initiative yet to extract it,

as it is extremely dangerous," Shamkhani said.

Witkoff traveling to Israel Witkoff is expected to meet Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other Israeli security officials on Tuesday, according to a White House official who was not authorized to comment publicly about the talks and spoke on condition of anonymity.

While in Israel, Witkoff will meet with the head of the Mossad intelligence service and the Israeli military's chief of staff, according to another official who was not authorized to speak to the media and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Israel is expected to ask that any agreement with Iran include removing enriched uranium from the country, stopping the enrichment of uranium, limiting the creation of ballistic missiles and ending support for Tehran's proxies.

However, Shakhani in his interview rejected giving up uranium enrichment — a major obstacle in earlier talks with the U.S. In November, Araghchi said Iran was doing no enrichment in the country because of the U.S. bombing of the nuclear sites.

Witkoff later will travel to Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, later in the week for Russia-Ukraine talks, the official said.

China's Xi calls for 'equal, multipolar world'



REUTERS

BEIJING: China and Uruguay should work together to advance an "equal and orderly multipolar world," President Xi Jinping told his counterpart Yamandu Orsi on Tuesday, according to a media pool report.

Orsi's visit is the first by a South American leader to the Chinese capital since the United States invaded Venezuela in January and captured then President Nicolas Maduro in a raid.

China and Uruguay should "work together to advance an equal and orderly multipolar world and an inclusive, universally beneficial economic globalization," Xi said in his remarks, aiming to build a community with a shared future for mankind.

The meeting comes in the wake of a flurry of visits to China by Western leaders this year, from Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer to Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney and Finland's Prime Minister Petteri Orpo.

Orsi said his visit aimed to "empower Uruguay in the world and generate opportunities, investment and development" in a Facebook comment on Sunday, following his arrival in Beijing.

He is leading a delegation of 150, including business leaders, on a visit that runs until February 7, which will also take in the commercial capital of Shanghai. The timing is symbolically important for China, said Francisco Urdinez, a professor at the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile.

"For Beijing, hosting Orsi ... signals that South American countries remain eager to engage, despite the increasingly polarized geopolitical environment."

China was the top destination for Uruguayan exports in 2025, taking agricultural products from wood pulp to soybeans and beef. Uruguay ran a trade surplus of \$187.1 million with China in the first half of 2025.

The South American nation imports machinery, electronics and chemicals from China.

AGREEMENTS SIGNED, DEEPER COOPERATION PLEDGED

China and Uruguay signed a joint declaration to deepen a strategic partnership on Tuesday as well as 12 cooperation documents covering science, technology, environmental cooperation, exports and imports of meat and intellectual property.

Third stage of T20 World Cup ticket sales begins



PTI

New Delhi, Feb 03: The BCCI announced the commencement of the third stage of ticket sales for the upcoming T20 World Cup following the two successful ticketing windows, with Phase 1 launched on December 11, 2025, and Phase 2 on January 14, 2026.

This latest phase provides fans with a further opportunity to secure seats for matches across the tournament, which will bring together the world's leading teams, the BCCI said in a release.

The T20 World Cup, starting on Saturday, will be staged at

some of India's most recognised cricketing venues, creating an environment where fans can witness elite international players and the intensity that defines the T20 format throughout the competition.

As preparations across host cities move into final stages, the BCCI, in close coordination with the stakeholders, continues to focus on venue readiness, operational planning, and match-day experience. The aim is to ensure that every fixture offers spectators a setting that matches the quality of cricket on display.

The BCCI also looks forward to the presence of fans from

across the country throughout the tournament, including on days when India is not in action.

BCCI President Mithun Manhas said, "The ICC Men's T20 World Cup is an event of global significance, and the BCCI is committed to working in close partnership with the ICC to ensure that it is delivered to the highest standards."

"As the third phase of ticket sales opens, we look forward to welcoming fans to our stadiums for matches that reflect the depth and competitiveness of international cricket across all participating teams."

BCCI Secretary Devajit Saikia added: "The response to the first two phases of ticketing has been encouraging, and it underlines the anticipation surrounding this World Cup."

"With preparations now in their final phase, our focus remains on creating an environment where players can perform at their best and spectators can enjoy the full experience of top-level T20 cricket, across the tournament and across our high-class and historic venues."

T20WC Boycott: Broadcasters may move court against PCB

PTI

Karachi/New Delhi, Feb 03: The ICC has warned the Pakistan Cricket Board that it faces the prospect of legal action from T20 World Cup's official broadcasters JioStar for boycotting its February 15 game against India, a PCB source said on Tuesday.

Pakistan decided to boycott the match in Colombo on February 15 on instructions of their government but haven't yet officially specified the reasons to ICC.

As reported by PTI, there is a possibility that the ICC will withhold the entire annual revenue share of Pakistan, which is around USD 35 million and pay the broadcasters from that purse.

A PCB source informed that although chairman Mohsin Naqvi had taken advice from the board's legal experts before briefing PM Shehbaz Sharif on the issue last week, the board is bracing for some serious consequences.

"If Pakistan doesn't relent and play against India, not only will they face financial penalties, perhaps a lawsuit from broadcasters but also any efforts to go to the ICC Dispute Resolution Committee (DRC) are likely to fail," a PCB source told PTI.

ICC's DRC is an internal committee which doesn't hear appeals against the decisions made by its own board. "The PCB might face



problems regardless of their government directive to not play India as they are playing all their matches at a neutral venue (Sri Lanka) as per their wishes and not in India," another PCB source said.

"Secondly, while the Indian government has not given permission to its team to play in Pakistan, it has not stopped them from playing against Pakistan at neutral venues in Asia Cup or ICC events even after the May conflict," the board source, who tracks Naqvi closely, added.

The PCB is yet to communicate in writing to the ICC but it the boycott decision is being seen as an act of solidarity with Bangladesh after their ouster.

"When the ICC signed its four year deal with the broadcaster for all ICC events, the contract included Pakistan and India matches based on which the broadcaster made the payments to the ICC," the source explained.

Paris prosecutors raid X offices as part of probe into child abuse images, deepfakes

AP

Paris, Feb 03: French prosecutors searched the offices of Elon Musk's social media platform X on Tuesday as part of a preliminary investigation into a range of alleged offences, including spreading child sexual abuse images and deepfakes.

The investigation was opened in January last year by the prosecutors' cybercrime unit, the Paris prosecutors' office said in a statement. It is looking into alleged "complicity" in possession and spreading of pornographic images of minors, sexually explicit deepfakes, denial of crimes against humanity and manipulation of an automated data processing system as part of an organized group, among other charges.

In addition, prosecutors filed a request for



"voluntary interviews" of Elon Musk and Linda Yaccarino, CEO of X from 2023 to 2025, scheduled for April 20.

Employees of the platform X have also been summoned that same week in April to

be heard as witnesses, the statement said.

A spokesperson for X did not respond immediately to a request for comment.

In a message posted on X, the Paris prosecutors' office announced the ongoing searches and said it was leaving the platform while calling on followers to join on other social media.

"At this stage, the conduct of the investigation is based on a constructive approach, with the aim of ultimately ensuring that the X platform complies with French law, as it operates on the national territory," the prosecutors' statement said.

European Union police agency Europol "is supporting the French authorities in this", Europol spokesperson Jan Op Gen Oorth told The Associated Press, without elaborating.

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DHURANDHAR (A)
HINDI - 12:45 PM