

DIPK-11014/25
Dated: 16-02-2026Nasha Mukht
Jammu Kashmir

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LG Sinha reopens 11 tourist spots in Kashmir, 3 in Jammu

Tourism stakeholders welcome timely decision; traders, hoteliers, tour operators express 'special gratitude', say it will boost industry

Rehan Qayoom Mir

Srinagar, Feb 16: Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Monday ordered reopening of 14 more tourist spots across Jammu and Kashmir Divisions.

As per the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) the Lieutenant Governor's office this morning announced that eleven tourist spots in the Kashmir and three in Jammu have been reopened with immediate effect, while a few snow-bound destinations will be thrown open after clearance.

Pertinently, the government had closed down 50 tourist destinations temporarily across J&K following the April 22, 2025 Pahalgam terror attack that left 26 civilians, mostly tourists dead, as a precautionary measure.

"After a thorough security review and discussion, I've ordered reopening of more tourist spots in Kashmir and Jammu Divisions, which were temporarily closed as precautionary measures," a tweet from the LG's office said.



In the Kashmir Division, the reopened destinations include Yusmarg, Doodhpathri, Dandipora Park in Kokernag, Peer Ki Gali, Dubjan and Padawan in Shopian, Astanpora, Tulip Garden in Srinagar, Thajwas Glacier, Hung Park in Ganderbal and Wullar/Watlab in Baramulla.

In the Jammu Division, Devi Pindi in Reasi, Mahu Mangat in Ramban and Mughal Maidan in Kishtwar have also been reopened.

The LG office stated that three sites in the Kashmir Division—Gurez, Athwatoo and Bangus—and one site in the Jammu Division—Ramkund in

Ramban—will be reopened once snow is cleared.

Since then, the reopening has taken place in phases. Around two months after the attack, in June 2025, the first set of tourist spots was reopened following security assessments. "Another group of destinations resumed operations around September 2025 after further review. With today's decision, nearly ten months after the attack, 14 additional destinations stand reopened."

Tourism stakeholders welcomed LG Sinha's decision to reopen the tourist spots and termed the latest move a major boost for the sector and a strong confidence-building measure ahead of the upcoming tourist season.

Tourism players said the decision has come at a crucial time as Kashmir prepares for the spring season, when tourist arrivals typically start picking up. "We are thankful to LG Sinha for giving a boost to tourism sector at an appropriate time," they said.

"This decision has come at the right time. | More on P6

J&K moving towards lasting peace, will be violence-free by 2029: Amit Shah

Security situation in UT has improved after Art 370 abrogation | Terror-related violence has declined | '2014-2026 golden era for internal security'

Sajid Raina

New Delhi, Feb 16: Asserting that Jammu and Kashmir would be violence free by 2029, Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday said that the Union Territory is moving towards lasting peace.

While addressing an event marking the 79th foundation day of Delhi Police in the National Capital, Shah, according to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) said, "Nearly 80 percent of internal security challenges faced by the country prior to 2014, particularly in Jammu & Kashmir, the North-East, and Maoist-affected regions, have now been brought under control."

"In Jammu & Kashmir the security situation is gradually improving following the abrogation of the region's special status under Article 370. I can assure the countrymen that J&K and North-East would be free of violence by 2029," Shah added.

He stated that terror-related violence, including gun violence and killings of civilians and security forces personnel, has declined sharply since the Centre revoked Article 370 and 35A from the erstwhile state.



In the North-East, he noted that nearly 20 peace agreements have been signed with insurgent groups, and over 10,000 youths have surrendered their arms and joined mainstream society.

He also said the period from 2014 to 2026 will be recorded as a golden era for India's internal security, citing significant progress in Jammu & Kashmir, the North-East, and Maoist-affected regions.

Shah noted that prior to 2014, India faced major internal security challenges in these three regions, which had persisted for three to four decades. Since then, he said, measures undertaken by the government have substantially

reduced violence.

"I am pleased to state that after the abrogation of Article 370, incidents of violence have declined by up to 80 per cent in Jammu & Kashmir, the North-East, and Maoist-affected areas. The day is not far when these regions will be free from violence," Shah said.

He highlighted developments in the North-East, where over 10,000 youths have surrendered their arms and returned to mainstream society.

Shah said the government has signed more than 20 peace accords with insurgent groups, significantly contributing to regional stability.

Referring to the government's | More on P6

34% power shortage likely in J&K, Ladakh during Ramadan

Riyaz Bhat

Srinagar, Feb 16: Ahead of holy month Ramadhan, Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh is likely to witness power deficiency of 34 percent during the peak demand in the month of February and March respectively.

The official figures revealed by Northern Region Power Committee (NRPC) have projected power deficiency of 34 percent during the peak time in these months for both the Union Territories against the total projected power availability.

According to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), the officials have projected that in the month of February, J&K and Ladakh will likely have a 33 percent power deficit against the availability of 2450 Megawatts (MWs) during

the peak demand. It also said that the regions may face a power shortage of 1206 MWs during the peak hours.

The official figures further anticipated that in the month of March, Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh may face a power shortage of 35.6 percent against the total projected availability of 2520 MWs.

The figures also reveal that in the month of March, both the Union Territories may face a power shortage of 1393 MWs during the peak demand.

As already reported by KNO that in Jammu and Kashmir, hydel power generation in the winters has reduced by nearly 70 percent from the local generation plants.

An official had informed that the power | More on P6

Nearly 10,000 cancer patients registered at GMC Sgr since 2017

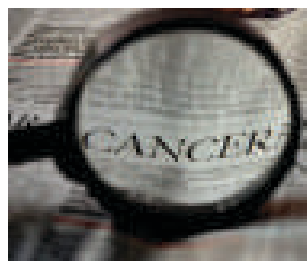
PET Scan facility expected this year, doctors call for therapies like proton beam treatment

Jahangeer Ganaie

Srinagar, Feb 16: The rising burden of cancer in Jammu and Kashmir has emerged as a major public health concern, with nearly 10,000 patients registered at the Department of Radiation Oncology at Government Medical College (GMC) Srinagar since 2017.

According to figures accessed by the news agency—Kashmir News Observer, as many as 1558 cases were registered at the hospital last year, indicating that the trend continues to rise.

Official data reveals a consistent jump in patient



numbers over the past nine years as in 2017: 491 cases were registered followed by 2018: 1,032 cases, 2019: 801 cases, 2020: 650 cases (dip during COVID-19 period), 2021: 1,010 cases, 2022: 1,169 cases, 2023: 1,640 cases, 2024: 1,659 cases and in 2025 1,558

cases were registered. Officials said that on average, four to five new cancer patients are being registered every day at the hospital, highlighting the growing pressure on oncology services.

An oncologist at the Radiation Oncology Department of SMHS Hospital, Srinagar, described the situation as deeply concerning.

He said there is a sharp rise in new cancer cases across Jammu and Kashmir. The most common tumour in males is lung cancer, while in females it is breast cancer.

The doctor warned that the high incidence | More on P6

J&K to witness dry weather, hr reaches may see light snowfall next week: MeT

Sajid Raina

Srinagar, Feb 16: The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Monday predicted mainly dry weather across Jammu and Kashmir over the next week, with only isolated light snow expected in higher reaches of the region.

According to the IMD's forecast, accessed by the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), light snow may occur at isolated higher reaches on February 17, while February 18-21 and February 22-24 are likely to remain generally dry.

The weather, it said, is expected to turn partly cloudy to generally cloudy on February 25-26, with light snow possible

in isolated higher reaches towards the evening and night of February 28.

Early March (1-2) may witness generally cloudy conditions with isolated light snowfall in higher areas.

The IMD advised farmers to continue with farm operations as there is no major disruption expected. "A gradual rise in both minimum and maximum temperatures is likely at most places during the next seven days. Visitors and the public are cautioned against venturing into snow-bound higher reaches prone to avalanches or slippery slopes," it added.

Temperature readings across the region showed a mix of near-normal | More on P6

Pulwama gets respite, NH-444 link road thrown open

Locals hail long-awaited connectivity, say it'll ease traffic congestion, boost economic activity in south Kmr

Jahangeer Ganaie

Pulwama, Feb 16: In a major infrastructural milestone for south Kashmir, the long-pending NH-444 link road connecting Bonura to Gudoora in Pulwama district was opened for traffic on Monday.

As per the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), the opening of the highway will bring much-needed relief to thousands of daily commuters and would significantly reduce congestion in | More on P6

Three inmates escape from juvenile observation home in Jammu

Raids underway at several locations; SIT constituted: Police

KNO Correspondent

Jammu, Feb 16: Two Pakistani nationals were among three inmates who escaped from a Juvenile Observation Home in RS Pura sector of Jammu after allegedly assaulting police personnel on guard duty on Monday evening.

Officials told news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), that at around 5:05

pm, information was received that three inmates fled from custody after attacking and injuring two police personnel deployed at the facility.

The escaped inmates have been identified as Ahsan Anwar, son of Mohammad Anwar, a resident of Nankana Sahib, Punjab, Pakistan; Mohammad Sanaulah, son of Mohammad Zaffer, a resident of Basti Jawewala, Tehsil Dinpur, District Muzaffarabad, Punjab, Pakistan; and Karanjit Singh alias Gugga, son of Arjun Singh, a | More on P6

PM Modi inaugurates India AI Impact Expo with 600+ startups, 13 country pavilions

'Together, we will shape solutions for world'

PTI

New Delhi, Feb 16: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday inaugurated the India AI Impact Expo here featuring over 600 high-potential startups and 13 country pavilions showcasing international collaboration in the AI ecosystem.

He also interacted with startups participating in the expo. The prime minister visited various stalls and spoke with the companies participating in



the expo. He was seen asking questions from company representatives to better understand

what they are showcasing. The prime minister spent several minutes at various

stalls while interacting with the representatives.

Modi said in a post on X, "Inaugurated the India AI Impact Expo 2026 at Bharat Mandapam. Being here among innovators, researchers and tech enthusiasts gives a glimpse of the extraordinary potential of AI, Indian talent and innovation. Together, we will shape solutions not just for India but for the world!"

The Expo brings together global technology firms, startups, academia and research institutions, central and state governments and international partners.

Spread across | More on P6

CS calls for time-bound disaster relief, clearance of pending claims

Chairs 4th SEC meeting of DMRR&R

KT NEWS DESK

JAMMU, FEBRUARY 16: Chief Secretary, Atal Dulloo Monday underscored the need for timely and effective relief to disaster-affected families while chairing the 4th meeting of the State Executive Committee (SEC) of the Department of Disaster Management, Relief, Rehabilitation & Reconstruction (DMRR&R).

Emphasizing the vulnerability of disaster-hit communities in Jammu & Kashmir, the Chief Secretary, as per an official statement, observed that families impacted by natural calamities often have no recourse except the support extended by the government. He stressed that relief assistance must reach the affected households without any delay and directed officers to always ensure prompt disbursement of assistance to the affected populations.

The meeting was attended by Principal Secretary, Home; Special Director General, Coordination; Special Secretary, Finance; senior representatives from concerned departments; and officers of DMRR&R.

Taking serious note of pending relief claims, the Chief Secretary unequivocally directed the immediate clearance of outstanding amounts in favour of Deputy Commissioners of districts affected by last year's flash floods. He sought a detailed compliance report to ensure that funds had been released strictly as per the assessed requirements of each district.

Highlighting the unpredictable nature of disasters, the Chief Secretary called for establishing a robust and clearly defined mechanism to respond to such emergencies. He directed the departments to strengthen preparedness measures, undertake mitigation efforts in advance, and institutionalize



a standardized framework delineating roles and responsibilities of officers to ensure swift, coordinated, and effective action on the ground.

Earlier, Principal Secretary, Home, Chandraker Bharti, briefed the Committee on the Action Taken Reports (ATRs) following previous SEC meetings. He informed that the process for constituting Urban Disaster Management Authorities for both Jammu and Srinagar is currently underway. He further disclosed that engagement of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as a technical partner for Disaster Risk Management in J&K is in progress to facilitate formulation of a comprehensive and forward-looking disaster mitigation plan for the Union Territory.

The Principal Secretary also provided details regarding the release of approximately 96 crore to districts under the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) in the wake of recent disasters. He highlighted various capacity-building initiatives undertaken by the department to enhance preparedness and response capabilities across districts.

He further apprised the Committee about the Post Disaster Needs Assessments (PDNA) carried out in

the Union Territory with the support of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), in accordance with guidelines of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). The assessments aim to comprehensively evaluate losses and damages and formulate a structured reconstruction and recovery strategy.

To strengthen disaster response at the divisional and district levels and operationalize the Incident Response System (IRS) at the grassroots, the Committee approved a standardized IRS notification for both divisions and districts. This step is expected to ensure a coordinated, coherent, and prompt response during emergencies.

The meeting also deliberated on further strengthening the District Disaster Management Authorities (DDMAs). It was informed that the Finance Department will provide necessary funds for hiring consultants to enhance the technical and institutional capacity of DDMAs across the Union Territory.

Reiterating the government's commitment to safeguarding lives and livelihoods, the Chief Secretary directed the departments to work for building a resilient and responsive disaster management framework for Jammu & Kashmir for the times to come.

DC Baramulla inaugurates drug de-addiction centre in Sopore

KT NEWS DESK

BARAMULLA, FEBRUARY 16: In a significant step towards strengthening healthcare infrastructure and addressing the growing challenge of substance abuse, Deputy Commissioner Baramulla, Minga Sherpa, Monday inaugurated the newly constructed Drug De-Addiction Centre at Sopore.

The inauguration, as per an official statement, ceremony was attended by Senior Superintendent of Police Sopore, Iftkhar Talib; Additional Deputy Commissioner Sopore; Assistant Commissioner Development Baramulla; Chief Planning Officer Baramulla; Chief Medical Officer Baramulla; Sub Divisional Police Officer Sopore; Block Development Officer Sopore; Block Medical Officer Sopore, among other officers. While inaugurating the facility constructed at the cost

of Rs 44 Lakh, the DC appreciated the efforts of the Rural Development Department (RDD) and RDD Block Sopore for completing the project in a record time.

The DC further added that establishing such a centre was a long-pending demand of the people of Sub Division Sopore, which has now been fulfilled by RDD Block Sopore.

Speaking on the occasion, the DC stated that the Drug De-Addiction Centre at Sopore is the first of its kind in Sub Division Sopore which will provide a comprehensive range of community-based services including identification, motivation, counselling, de-addiction treatment, aftercare, and rehabilitation. The DC further said that the facility will be expanded in a phased manner to cater to the increasing needs of the district informing that proposal for additional staff has already been submitted to ensure smooth and effective functioning of the centre.

DC Bandipora reviews environment plan 220 rainwater harvesting sites proposed

KT NEWS DESK

BANDIPORA, FEBRUARY 16: Deputy Commissioner Bandipora, Indu Kanwal Chib, Monday chaired a meeting to review and deliberate upon the Environment Management Plan (EMP) of KGHEP and to discuss related measures, DPRs, and inter-departmental coordination mechanisms.

During the meeting, detailed deliberations were held on the Site Sustainability Analysis of Rainwater Harvesting (RWH) structures in District Bandipora under the 'Catch the Rain' programme, which forms a crucial component of environmental management and water resource conservation.

The Deputy Commissioner, as per an official statement emphasized the importance of rainwater harvesting in addressing water scarcity affecting people, livestock, and the agriculture sector. She stressed the need for optimal utilization of available funds and directed concerned departments to ensure timely execution of works so that identified projects are completed well before the onset of the monsoon season.

The meeting reviewed the inventory of existing rainwater harvesting structures, including farm ponds, field bunds, and other water conservation assets across the district.

Threadbare discussions were also held on land use and land cover classification of the district, covering agricultural cropland, plantation areas, built-up areas, fallow land, forests, grasslands, scrubland, snow-covered areas, wastelands, and waterbodies.

It was informed that a total of 220 sites have been proposed for the creation of new water harvesting structures in accordance with IMSD guidelines.

The Deputy Commissioner directed that proper ground-truthing of all proposed sites be undertaken to ensure technical feasibility, suitability, and long-term sustainability. She further instructed the Department of Ecology, Environment and Remote Sensing (DEERS) to submit relevant data from the NRSC Bhuvan portal for comprehensive analysis and monitoring. Extensive discussions were held on the types of structures to be constructed, site selection criteria, estimated costs, community participation, implementation methodology, timelines, and the role of the Groundwater Board.

The Soil and Water Conservation Department, in coordination with DEERS, SKUAST-Kashmir, and the Forest Department, was tasked with providing technical inputs and ensuring effective inter-departmental convergence.

NSD TIE Centre stages children's plays at Bharat Rang Mahotsav in Srinagar



KT NEWS DESK

Srinagar, FEBRUARY 16: As part of the 25th edition of Bharat Rang Mahotsav (BRM) 2026, the world's largest international theatre festival, the National School of Drama (NSD) TIE Centre, Srinagar, presented two Children's Theatre Workshop productions titled "Qissa Kala Pahad Ka" and "Waai Woff".

The performances, as per PIB statement were staged by two different age groups (8-12 years and 12-16 years) at the NSD TIE Theatre Studio, Cultural Academy Campus, Lal Mandi, Srinagar.

The programme commenced with the playing of the Bharat Rang Mahotsav anthem during the inaugural session, in the presence of distinguished guests and theatre enthusiasts.

In his welcome address, Gulzar Ganaie, Coordinator, NSD TIE Centre, Srinagar, stated that this is the third time the Centre is organising Bharat

Rang Mahotsav in Srinagar. He highlighted that the 25th edition marks a significant milestone in the journey of the festival and underscored the importance of theatre as a powerful medium for education, social change, and community engagement.

Lal Chand (JKAS), Additional Secretary, J&K Academy of Art, Culture & Languages, attended the function as the Chief Guest, while Satish Vimal was the Guest of Honour. Both dignitaries were felicitated with bouquets and shawls. The event was also attended by prominent theatre personalities of the Valley, including Mushtaque Ali Ahmad Khan and Shakeel-Ur-Rehman, among others.

The programme concluded with a vote of thanks proposed by Shri Sandeep Chaudhary, who expressed gratitude to the guests, parents of the participants, and all attendees for their support and encouragement.

GOVERNMENT OF JAMMU & KASHMIR (UT)

OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT SOCIAL WELFARE OFFICER

Administrative Complex Mini Secretariat Ganderbal

Email ID: dswomsgbl@gmail.com

Sub: Publication of Cumulative marks sheet/ merit list of candidates for the posts of Case Worker, MTS/Cook and Security Guard/ Night Guard at One Stop Centre Ganderbal-invitation of objection thereof.

NOTICE

Whereas, the District Social Welfare Officer Ganderbal (Nodal Officer OSC) had advertised one (01) post of Case Worker, (02) posts of MTS/Cook, (03) posts of Security Guards for engagement on temporary/Contractual basis for OSC, Ganderbal vide Notification No: - DSWO/Gbl/Estt/OSC/2025/528-31, dated: - 15-10-2025; and

Whereas, District Development Commissioner Ganderbal vide Order 128 DDCG of 2025 dated 12-11-2025, dated: - 16-10-2025 constituted a screening committee to scrutinize/ evaluate the applications so received and submit the short list to the Interview Committee framed vide same order, and

Whereas, Committee met on 22-11-2025 in the Office chamber of District Programme Officer (POSHAN) Ganderbal. During the meeting the District Social Welfare Officer Ganderbal conveyed that, in response to the aforementioned notification, as many as 101 (41 for Case Worker, 38 for Cook/MTS and 22 for Security Guard) Applications have been received in offline mode from 16-10-2025 to 25-10-2025, and

Whereas, the committee, after examining all the 101 Applications along with supporting documents received by the District Social Welfare Office Ganderbal, as well as the eligible criteria fixed for such engagement, made the observations in each case, which are recorded against each in the, and

Whereas, in order to ensure transparency in the whole process, the committee decided to publish the details of the Applicants along-with the observations recorded against each Candidate in the leading daily newspapers as well as on the official pages of the District Administration Ganderbal, to invite objections, if any, within the period of (10) days form the date of publication. The list was published on 30/11/2025 in Daily Maqсад & Kashmir Images.

Whereas, Committee after disposing of the objections received submitted short list of candidates in the ratio of 1:5 (except Security Guard/Night Guard where only 10 candidates were eligible) to the Interview Committee headed by Additional District Development Commissioner for conducting interview of shortlisted candidates. The short list was published in Daily Kashmir Images on 30' of January, 2026 and was also uploaded on the official website of District Administration. The interviews were conducted on 4th and 5 of February, 2026 in the office chambers of Additional District Development Commissioner (Chairman) Ganderbal.

Whereas, as per the said down criteria of weightage on pro-rata basis to the academic qualification (Graduation for Case Worker and Matriculation for MTS/ Cook and Security Guard/ Night Guard) and marks obtained in interview/ viva-voce, the merit list /cumulative marks sheet of candidates for the posts of the Case Worker, MTS/Cook and Security Guard/Night Guard is published/ notified as Annexure A, B and C respectively for information to general public/ applicants for invitation of objections (if any).

The objection (if any) may be submitted to the office of District Social Welfare Officer, Mini Secretariat, Ganderbal within a period of six (06) days from the date of publication of this notice, after that no objection shall be entertained.

District Social Welfare Officer, Ganderbal.

No; - DSWO/Gbl/Estt/2025-26/1063-71

Dated: - 16/07/2026

(One Stop Centre) Ganderbal Cumulative Marks Sheet of Candidates for the post of Case Worker						
S.NO.	Name of the Candidate	D/O, S/O, W/O	Address	Academic qualification Points/ Marks out of 80 on Pro-rata Basis	Average interview marks (out of 20)	Total marks 100 (Qualification +Interview (5+6)
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Sumaira Bashir	Bashir Ahmad Tabardar	Shallabugh Ganderbal	67.04	13.8	80.84
2	Rabiya Akhter	Abdul Rashid Chasti	Gasba Lar	66.08	15.4	81.48
3	Ishrat Yousuf	Mohammad Yousuf Shah	Chinner Kangan	54.89	11.2	66.09
4	Tahira Jan	Yasir Ahmad Sofi	Hanpora Kangan	52.09	10.2	62.29
5	Neelofar Nazir	Nazir Ahmad Rather	Manigam. Lar Ganderbal	48.98	12.4	61.38

Cumulative Marks Sheet of Candidates for the post of Multi Task Staff (MTS) Cook (One Stop Centre) Ganderbal						
S.NO.	Name of the Candidate	D/O, S/O, W/O	Address	Academic qualification Points/ Marks out of 80 on Pro-rata Basis	Average interview marks (out of 20)	Total marks 100 (Qualification +Interview (5+6)
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Muzamil Majeed	Abdul Majeed Wani	Tullamulla Ganderbal	69.6	10.2	79.8
2	Syed Sehrish	Syed Mudabir	Takibal Watalbagh Ganderbal	56.8	10	66.8
3	Bisma Akhter	Ghulam Qadir Sheikh	Nagbal Ganderbal	46.4	15.6	62
4	Mohd Saleem Lone	Ghulam Hassan Lone	Duderhama Ganderbal	44.32	12.2	56.52
5	Nahida Farooq	Farooq Ahmad Dar	Urpash Ganderbal	36.48	12.8	49.28
6	Foziya gul	Ghulam Mohammad Hajam	Arampora Ganderbal	36.32	13	49.32
7	Azra	Mehraj ud din Hajam	Uppash Ganderbal	42.72	16.2	58.92
8	Sajad Ahmad Khan	Ghulam Nabi Khan	Arhama Kangan	36	11.8	47.8
9	Saima Bashir	Bashir Ahmad Bhat	Nunner Ganderbal	34.88	Absent	Absent
10	Jameela Rashid	Mohammad Altaf Wagay	Safapora Ganderbal	32.16	12.4	44.56

Cumulative Marks Sheet of Candidates for the post of Security Guard / Night Guard (One Stop Centre) Ganderbal						
S.NO.	Name of the Candidate	D/O, S/O, W/O	Address	Academic qualification Points/ Marks out of 80 on Pro-rata Basis	Average interview marks (out of 20)	Total marks 100 (Qualification +Interview (5+6)
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Manzoor Ahmad Dar	Mohammad Sultan Dar	Gratabal Safapora	47.68	10.2	57.88
2	Bilal Ahmad Sheikh	Sonaulah Sheikh	Wahidpora Ganderbal	43.2	16.2	59.4
3	Asif Manzoor Hajam	Manzoor Ahmad Hajam	Safapora Lar Ganderbal	41.44	11.4	52.84
4	Rakib Rafeeq Qureshi	Rafeeq Ahmad Qureshi	Chanthan Gulabpora Lar	37.6	15	52.6
5	Safi Saquib Maqbool	Sofi Mohammad Maqbool	Khranihama Ganderbal	35.84	10.2	46.04
6	Peer Junaid Irshad Farooqi	Peer Irshad Ahmad Farooqi	Barsoo Ganderbal	34.4	12.6	47
7	Lone Aadil Manzoor	Manzoor Ahmad Manzoor	Bamloora Ganderbal	32.16	Absent	Absent
8	Mehraj Ud Din Hajam	Ghulam Mohammad Hajam	Urpash Ganderbal	31.2	13.8	45
9	Faroze Ahmad Mir	Ghulam Ahmad Mir	Larsun 8ardullah Ganderbal	29.44	14.2	43.64
10	Naseer Ahmad Waza	Ghulam Hassan Waza	Chapperbund Ganderbal	28.16	14	42.16

Assistant Director Employment Ganderbal Member

Addl. Superintendent of Police Ganderbal Member

Chief Planning Officer Ganderbal Member

DIPK-10990/25
DATED: 16-02-2026

District Programmer Officer ICDS Poshan Ganderbal Member

Addl. District Development Commissioner Ganderbal Chairman

'Tulip garden likely to open by March 15'

REHAN QAYOOM MIR

Srinagar, Feb 16: The Indira Gandhi Memorial Tulip Garden, located in the foothills of Zabarwan, is likely to be opened around March 15, subject to favourable weather conditions, officials said.

The officials at Asia's largest tulip garden said the preparations are in the final phase, adding that the wait is only for the weather.

Imran Ahmad, Assistant Floriculture Officer said that the department has shifted into "wait and watch mode" as climatic conditions will determine the exact opening date.

"Everything now depends on the weather. If the weather remains favourable, there is a



possibility that the Tulip Garden will open around March 15," Ahmad said.

He said that apart from bulb plantation, finishing works are currently underway in the garden located on the foothills of the Zabarwan range overlooking Dal Lake.

"Works like tightening and repairing railings, fixing and reshaping flower beds, repairing pathways, painting and upgrading washrooms and others are going on in full swing," he said.

Ahmad further informed that this year, the department has increased the density of flower beds to enhance the visual impact of the garden.

"Earlier, 30 to 35 beds would fit in a particular patch. This year, we have

increased it to more than 42 beds in the same space to make the display denser, more vibrant and more attractive for visitors," he added.

Notably, the garden is expected to showcase nearly 1.8 million tulips of 70-75 varieties this season, promising a beautiful floral display.

Meanwhile, the Tulip Garden set a new record last season by witnessing an unprecedented footfall of 8,55,125 visitors during its 30-day opening period from March 26 to April 24, 2025. The record-breaking number included locals, domestic tourists and international visitors who thronged the garden to witness over 1.7 million blooming tulips—(KNO)

CS assesses Culture, Education Departments' plans

Mega youth drive to engage over 80,000 students

KT NEWS DESK

Jammu, Feb 16: In a significant move to institutionalize structured youth engagement and promote holistic development among students, Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo on Monday chaired a high-level meeting of key stakeholders, during which the School Education Department and the Department of Culture unveiled a comprehensive and integrated Youth Engagement Drive across the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir.

The ambitious initiatives lay out a structured roadmap to engage more than 80,000 students and youth annually through school-based platforms, grassroots cultural institutions and national-level exchange programmes, thereby strengthening experiential learning, cultural preservation and talent development across J&K.

The meeting was attended by Principal Secretary, Culture; Commissioner Secretary, Youth Services & Sports; Commissioner Secretary, School Education; Secretary, Culture; Managing Director, Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan; Secretary, Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages; and other senior officers.

Addressing the gathering, the Chief Secretary emphasized that co-curricular and cultural initiatives are as vital as academic curricula in shaping well-rounded individuals. He underscored the need for inter-departmental convergence, structured implementation and continuous monitoring at every level to ensure effective stakeholder engagement and measurable



outcomes. Detailing the Department of Culture's roadmap, Principal Secretary, Culture, Brij Mohan Sharma informed the meeting that a comprehensive Youth Engagement and Empowerment Plan has been formulated to extend structured cultural activities to schools while revitalizing grassroots cultural ecosystems.

As part of this plan, School Cultural Clubs will be established in 2,530 Government High and Higher Secondary Schools, engaging over 63,000 students annually. Each club, comprising 25 students, will function under the mentorship of the Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages and serve as a platform for skill development, cultural training and nurturing of young cultural ambassadors.

To ensure deeper outreach at district and tehsil levels, District Cultural Committees will be constituted under the chairmanship of respective Additional District Development Commissioners, while Tehsil Cultural Clubs will be set up across 207

tehsils, engaging more than 10,000 youth annually. These bodies will curate structured cultural calendars and organize workshops, exhibitions and heritage exposure visits to foster sustained participation and community involvement.

A major highlight of the initiative is the "One District - One Traditional Art Form" programme, under which 27 district-specific traditional art forms have been identified for revival through a structured Guru-Shishya model. Master trainers will mentor selected youth trainees for a period of one year, ensuring preservation of endangered traditions while creating professional pathways for emerging artists.

Further strengthening social outreach, the Department will organize 200 Nukkad Natak (street play) programmes annually—100 each in Jammu and Srinagar—addressing critical social issues such as drug abuse prevention, mental health awareness, gender sensitivity and civic responsibility. Nearly 4,000 youth artists are expected to participate in these grassroots awareness campaigns across

schools, colleges and community spaces.

Additionally, two seven-day Youth Cultural Summits will be organized annually in Jammu and Srinagar under the banner of Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat, providing a national platform for cultural exchange and creative collaboration among young artists. In a landmark academic intervention, a two-year Diploma Course in Calligraphy has been formalized in collaboration with the University of Kashmir, offering structured training in multiple classical scripts along with stipendiary support to enrolled students.

Complementing these efforts, the School Education Department, through the Jammu and Kashmir State Council of Educational Research and Training, will launch a flagship programme titled "Display Your Talent - Excellence in Culture, Sports, Education & Learning," aligned with the vision of the National Education Policy 2020.

The initiative as elaborated by the Commissioner Secretary, School Education, Ram Niwas Sharma envisions holistic

student development by integrating academics with arts, sports, skills and cultural learning. Covering more than 24,000 schools across 20 districts and 188 educational zones, the programme follows a five-tier progression model—from school level to a grand UT-level finale—ensuring systematic talent identification and advancement.

The engagement framework, he added, has been carefully structured according to age groups. At the foundational stage, activities will focus on storytelling, rhymes and fun-based sports. Preparatory classes will participate in spell bee competitions, junior logic exercises, folk dance and mini-games. Middle-stage students will engage in science exhibitions, STEM challenges, kabaddi and classical or folk music competitions.

It was revealed that at the secondary level, students will participate in policy parliament simulations, coding competitions, pro-league sports and theatre activities, fostering leadership, innovation and civic awareness. To ensure inclusivity, a dedicated 'Samarth' Inclusive Framework has been incorporated to facilitate meaningful participation of Children With Special Needs through Braille support, sign language interpretation, inclusive sports and tactile arts.

The integrated framework marks a transformative step towards positioning Jammu & Kashmir as a vibrant hub of educational excellence and cultural renaissance, while ensuring that the youth of the Union Territory are equipped with creativity, confidence and character to shape a progressive future.

Kashmir colleges reopen after 52-day winter break

RIYAZ BHAT

Srinagar, Feb 16: Colleges in Kashmir valley on Monday resumed activities following a 52 days of winter vacations.

The Jammu and Kashmir Higher Education Department on December-23-2025 had announced 52-days winter vacation for degree colleges falling in the winter zones of Kashmir division.

The government had said that the degree colleges in the Kashmir Division and those in the winter zone of Jammu Division shall observe winter vacations from December-24-2025 to February-14-2026.

Pertinently, the schools in Kashmir division and winter zones of Jammu division are all set to resume regular class work from February-23.

On November-25, School Education Department (SED) had

announced winter break in a phased manner for Kashmir division and winter zones of Jammu division.

SED in an order had said that the vacations for Pre-primary (Balvatika) classes shall commence from November-26 to February-28-2026.

In case of middle classes upto 8th standard, the department had said that the vacations shall be observed from December-01 to February-28.

It also said that the winter break for 9th to 12th standard shall commence from December-11 to February-22.

SED had ordered the teaching faculty to remain available for any academic activity during the vacation period.

The Teaching staff was ordered to report back to their respective schools on February-20-2026 for making arrangements regarding opening of schools—(KNO)

Dy CM meets delegations, assures people centric governance



KT NEWS DESK

Jammu, Feb 16: Deputy Chief Minister, Surinder Choudhary on Monday reiterated government's determination towards ensuring people-centric governance in Jammu and Kashmir.

The Deputy Chief Minister was interacting with various public and individual delegations at the Civil Secretariat, Jammu.

During the interaction, the Deputy Chief Minister said that all efforts are being made to ensure timely completion of developmental projects and prompt service delivery across all government offices.

The delegations who called on the Deputy Chief Minister hailed from Kishtwar, Rajouri, Jammu,

Kathua, Baramulla, Srinagar, Ganderbal and other districts of Jammu and Kashmir. They raised issues pertaining to construction of roads, bridges and culverts, mining-related matters, concerns of the labour class, employee-related issues and other public demands.

The Deputy Chief Minister assured the delegations that all their genuine issues would be taken up with the concerned departments for prompt redressal.

"Our agenda is to ensure time-bound grievance redressal and seamless relief to the people," he said. He added that the officers have been directed to give a compassionate hearing to public issues and adopt a positive approach for their timely resolution.

Sopore gets drug de-addiction centre

KNO

Sopore, Feb 16: Sopore in north Kashmir gets its own drug de-addiction centre, with officials saying the facility will strengthen the subdivision's response to substance abuse and expand access to treatment facilities.

The facility was inaugurated by Deputy Commissioner (DC) Minga Sherpa, who said the centre was sanctioned earlier and completed in record time by the Rural Development Department.

He said the district already has a treatment facility at Government Medical College (GMC)

Baramulla and a facility run by the police. However, Sopore lacked such infrastructure, forcing patients to travel outside the subdivision for medical care. "With this centre, people from Sopore and nearby areas will have access to screening and basic treatment locally," Sherpa said.

The DC said the Government of India (GoI) had proposed setting up the facility in Sopore. The administration, he said, will now equip the centre in phases and post additional staff to make it fully operational.

Continued on
www.kashmirthunder.in

Doctor among 9 arrested in Rs 209 Cr online scam

RAJA SYED RATHER

Ganderbal, Feb 16: In a major breakthrough, the Jammu and Kashmir Police have unearthed a transnational multi-crore fake online investment scam and arrested nine accused, including an MBBS doctor from Hissar, Haryana.

The case was registered at Police Station Ganderbal following a complaint from a resident regarding identity theft and online cheating.

Acting on the complaint, SSP Khalil Ahmad Poswal constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the matter.

During the investigation, police found that fake trading and phishing websites were used to lure victims with promises of high returns through coin trading. The fraudulently collected money was routed through local bank accounts across Budgam, Srinagar and Baramulla, and later transferred outside Jammu and Kashmir and even outside the country.

Police identified the main handler as Ekant Yogdutt, also known as Dr. Morphine, who allegedly learned cyber fraud techniques

while pursuing MBBS studies in the Philippines and maintained links with nationals from China. He was arrested at Delhi airport while returning from abroad.

The investigation also revealed involvement of local operatives, including Mohammad Ibrahim Shah, Nasir Ahmad Ganie, Maqsood Ahmad, Tanveer Ahmad, Tawseef Ahmad Mir, Khurshid Ahmad, and Ishfaq Ahmad. These accused allegedly convinced Below Poverty Line (BPL) account holders to provide bank accounts and ATM cards in exchange for 8,000-10,000 per month.

Police have so far identified 835 suspicious bank accounts and verified transactions in 290 accounts, revealing fraud worth 209 crore from investors across India. Officials believe the amount may exceed 400 crore after full verification.

Police have urged the public not to fall prey to fake investment websites promising high returns and warned people against renting out bank accounts for monetary benefits. Victims can lodge complaints at cybercrime.gov.in or contact the cyber helpline 1930—(KNO)

Top Army Commanders review counter terrorism grid in Kishtwar

YOGESH

Jammu, Feb 16: Top Army commanders on Monday visited the general area of Kishtwar to review the Counter Terrorism Grid and assess operational preparedness of troops deployed in the region.

According to the details, General Officer Commanding (GOC) of White Knight Corps (16 Corps), Lieutenant General P K Mishra, accompanied by the General Officer Commanding of Counter-Insurgency Force (Delta), during their visit assessed operational preparedness of troops deployed in the region.

"The senior commanders received updates on the prevailing security scenario, operational challenges and ongoing measures to strengthen the security framework and inter-agency coordination among the Army, police and Central Reserve Police Force in the hilly districts," said



an official. "The focus of deliberations was on enhancing vigilance, accelerating intelligence-driven operations and sustaining a robust security posture in the Chenab Valley and adjoining areas," he added.

Pertinently the visit came against the backdrop of intensified counter-terror efforts in both Kishtwar and neighbouring Udhampur districts.

In recent weeks, joint operations by the Army, J&K Police, CRPF and other forces have led to significant engagements with

terrorists linked to banned terrorist outfits, resulting in neutralisation of suspected operatives in both regions.

These actions form part of a coordinated campaign to dismantle terror networks and disrupt their movement through dense forests and mountainous terrain.

Security forces have continued search and cordon operations amid challenging weather and landscape, emphasising enhanced surveillance, aviation support and reinforcement of forward positions to maintain area dominance—(KNO)

EDITORIAL

India Leading The Global AI Revolution

The India AI Impact Summit 2026, inaugurated at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, is a resounding declaration of India's emergence as a global leader in shaping the future of artificial intelligence. With over 2.5 lakh registrations from across the world, the sheer scale of participation is itself a testament to the nation's energy, ambition, and readiness to lead in the most consequential technological transition of our time. This landmark event, under the visionary leadership of Prime

Minister Narendra Modi, firmly establishes India not merely as an AI consumer but as a trusted AI creator and service provider for the entire world. The Summit's strategic high-level dialogue on "Shaping Resilient Futures in the Age of AI" brings together global policymakers and experts to address the critical "Triple Transition", aligning advancements in AI, low-carbon energy systems, and modernised security frameworks. This reflects India's holistic understanding that true national resilience

requires technology to serve societal equity and sustainable development. The focus on India Stack as a global model for digital public infrastructure demonstrates how the nation is exporting technology as well as a human-centric philosophy of innovation. The government's proactive, agile policy approach deserves immense credit. From the Atal Innovation Mission nurturing startups to the Ministry of Electronics and IT's inclusive, large-scale facilitation, the Summit exemplifies the

Centre's commitment to making India the AI talent and skill capital of the world. The collaboration with international partners, including 13 country pavilions, underscores India's role as a bridge between advanced innovation and population-scale deployment, serving the Global South and beyond. The parallel pre-summit focus on scalable AI for climate-resilient agriculture highlights the government's dedication to ensuring that technology reaches the grassroots - the farmer, the small

entrepreneur, the marginalised. This is innovation with purpose, inclusion, and impact. India is not just participating in the global AI conversation; it is convening it, shaping it, and leading it towards responsible, inclusive outcomes. Under PM Modi's guidance, the nation is building an innovation-led economy where technology strengthens economic resilience, accelerates energy transition, and enhances national security. This summit is a proud milestone in that historic journey.

PM Modi's Blueprint For Viksit Bharat

Interview of Prime Minister Narendra Modi with PTI | Q&A

On the trade deal

QUESTION: In the last month or so, India's global interaction has seen a sharp uptick in trade deals. The centrepieces are the trade deals with the EU and the tariff breakthrough with the US. How will these change the trajectory of India's growth and economy?

ANSWER: India's global interaction and integration have seen a sharp uptick over the last few years. These trade agreements may have happened recently, but they are the outcome of a more competitive domestic industry, a confident approach and an open outlook. These are rare qualities in today's world.

Before we speak of India's successful trade agreements in recent years, it is important to recall where we stood just over a decade ago. During the years of the UPA government, they tried to secure some trade deals. Yet the journey was marked by uncertainty and inconsistency. Largely because their economic mismanagement left India unable to negotiate from a position of confidence, they did not lay the environment to bring negotiations to a conclusion. Talks would begin and then break down. In the end, despite prolonged negotiations, very little of real substance was achieved.

But once we came in, we led an economic resurgence through our policy-driven governance, strengthened our economic fundamentals and created a rules-based system. When we ensured political stability, policy predictability and a reform-oriented approach, the world wanted to invest in India.

Our reforms helped both our manufacturing and service sectors and encouraged productivity and competitiveness among our MSMEs. As a confident, competitive and fast-growing economy, many nations saw the benefits of pursuing trade agreements with us.

To understand the difference between the earlier approach and ours, consider the EU trade agreement. It was discussed and negotiated even under the previous government. But it was our government which eventually sealed a win-win deal for our economies.

Over the last few years, we have built a strategic and purposeful network of Free Trade Agreements. We now have FTAs with 38 partner nations, an unprecedented milestone in India's trade history. A remarkable feature of these trade agreements is that they span continents and include countries of varying economic strength. This gives our manufacturers and producers enough diversity and depth to sell our products across many markets.

These FTAs have opened up the markets of major economies to India's manufactured products. For instance, the India-UK FTA and the India-E.U. FTA will eliminate tariffs on 99% of our exports to these countries. Merchandise trade with both Australia and the UAE has doubled since the signing of FTAs with these countries.

Our service sector and its professionals are well known worldwide. They have already made India a hub of Global Capability Centres in different domains. These trade agreements have further boosted their opportunities with greater regulatory certainty, mutually beneficial frameworks and greater mobility across our partner nations.

Our manufacturing sector has been taking giant strides in over the past few years and these trade agreements will help integrate India and Indian products more deeply into global supply chains. They will give better returns to Indian producers and manufacturers and also contribute to increasing prosperity for our people.

The trade agreements of the past few years have come at a historic and opportune time for both our manufacturing and service sectors. They are creating a huge number of opportunities for our youth. I am confident that they will make an impact on the world with the quality and competitiveness of our goods and services. Once our youth make an impact on the minds of the common people of our partner nations, there will be no looking back.

These trade agreements are significant not merely because of tariff reductions but because of supply-chain integration and market access in advanced economies. They gradually liberalise manufacturing tariffs, deepen services integration and create new avenues for labour-intensive exports such as textiles, footwear, electronics and engineering goods. In that sense, they support structural transformation rather than simply boosting headline trade numbers.

These FTAs also anchor domestic reform to external commitments. They widen export opportunities, reduce tariff disadvantages relative to competitors, and integrate Indian firms more deeply into global value chains. They reinforce India's transition toward becoming



a more open, confident and globally engaged economy, aligned with the long-term vision of Viksit Bharat by 2047.

Q: In recent trade agreements, MSMEs have featured prominently, something we did not see earlier. Is this growing focus a reflection of stronger export competitiveness among Indian MSMEs, or does it signal a more deliberate policy shift to integrate smaller firms into global value chains?

A: We are entering into these historic trade deals from a position of strength. The vision of Made in India has filled our MSMEs with new confidence and vigour. As a country that is part of various trade agreements, making Indian products and services globally competitive is crucial. Our stance on 'Zero Defect, Zero Effect' has resonated deeply with the youth, start-ups and small and medium businesses.

Trade competitiveness is not only about tariffs. It is about liquidity, certification, technology adoption and compliance with global standards. Our FTAs are designed to reduce non-tariff barriers and expand market access for MSMEs in sectors such as textiles, leather, processed food, engineering goods, chemicals, handicrafts and gems and jewellery.

The objective is clear: MSMEs must move beyond being peripheral suppliers. They must become technologically upgraded, globally integrated and export-oriented enterprises that form the backbone of India's participation in global value chains.

Many global brands, across fields as diverse as smartphones and aviation, have integrated Indian MSMEs into their value chains. The growing prominence of MSMEs in India's recent trade agreements reflects both the improved competitiveness of Indian small businesses and a clear policy shift to integrate them into global value chains.

Through the deals we signed with Australia, New Zealand, the UK, the EU, and the U.S., we have opened access for our MSMEs, particularly in labour-intensive sectors, to export to these countries with near-zero tariffs or tariffs much lower than those of other exporting countries. This will benefit our MSMEs in textiles, leather, footwear, engineering goods, processed food, chemicals, handicrafts, gems and jewellery.

These agreements are designed not just to increase trade volumes but to embed Indian MSMEs into global markets. Additionally, our FTAs help unlock funds for R&D, testing and certification for MSMEs, and support their environmental sustainability.

These measures establish India as a reliable partner and Indian MSMEs as reliable suppliers. So, the answer is both: Indian MSMEs are more export-ready than before, and India's trade policy now deliberately places MSMEs at the centre of global integration. These FTAs are tools to ensure that our youth are not just suppliers to the domestic market, but active participants in global trade and growth. At the macro level, these are conscious policy choices in our rapid march towards Viksit Bharat 2047.

At the same time, we are making sustained efforts to make MSMEs stronger domestically. The Economic Survey highlights the strong upward trend in bank credit to Micro and Small Enterprises and the sustained improvement in asset quality across the financial system. In this year's Budget, we have addressed one of the most persistent constraints faced by MSMEs: access to affordable working capital. Key measures include expanding credit guarantee coverage, strengthening receivables financing through TReDS platforms, rationalising GST processes to reduce working-capital blockages,

and continuing the prioritisation of MSME lending within the banking system. Public sector banks have also introduced improved credit assessment frameworks to ease the flow of finance to smaller firms.

Q: The government recently presented the Union Budget for 2026-27 in the parliament. The government's strong push for capital expenditure has continued this year also. What are a few strategic choices your government has made in this year's budget?

A: For a long time, high-quality infrastructure had been neglected, posing a challenge for the people and Indian businesses. Broken and outdated infrastructure has no place in a nation that aspires to create a Viksit Bharat.

Therefore, we revolutionised the sector with our speed, scale and focus on creating next-gen infrastructure, while upgrading the existing infrastructure. In the last decade or so, India has seen perhaps the most expansive infrastructure-building effort in our history, an unprecedented emphasis on quality! The most important aspect of this has been the way we have created infrastructure with the future in mind.

At a time when India is placing orders for thousands of aircraft, the number of airports has doubled.

At a time when India is urbanising rapidly, the number of cities with metro services has more than quadrupled.

At a time when rural aspirations are growing, rural roads and internet connectivity are expanding rapidly.

At a time when path-breaking trade agreements with around 38 countries have been concluded and trade volumes are set to grow massively, we have invested in a transformational expansion of our freight corridors, ports, and coastal connectivity.

The Economic Survey has underscored that capital accumulation, labour formalisation, and digital public infrastructure together have elevated India's potential growth rate to 7%.

The recent Budget is a good reflection of our governance style and priorities.

Productive spending has been a hallmark of our government. The high Capital Expenditure reflects our focus on infrastructure and capital investment, which are strong engines for long-term growth. For the next financial year (2026-27), our overall capital expenditure stands at about Rs. 12.2 lakh crore. To put this in perspective, this represents a 5-times increase compared to 2013. This reflects a conscious strategic choice to invest in assets that create productivity, jobs, and future economic capacity rather than short-term populism. This shows that our focus is on improving the quality of life for the people, creating jobs for our youth and advancing the nation's progress towards Viksit Bharat.

We have recorded a capital outlay of almost Rs. 3 lakh crore for Indian Railways, with a priority on high-speed connectivity, freight capacity, and passenger safety. Seven new high-speed rail corridors are proposed to be developed to connect major Indian cities, including the South High-Speed Diamond corridor, which will significantly benefit Karnataka, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Puducherry.

At the same time, the Dedicated Freight Corridors are being expanded to decongest passenger routes and reduce logistics costs for industry.

On the roads front, allocations for national highways have increased nearly 500% compared to a decade ago.

At the same time, we are investing in sunrise sectors, including the Biopharma SHAKTI mission, the India Semiconductor Mission, the Electronics Component Manufacturing Scheme, rare-earth corridors, and chemical parks. This will provide a new impetus to jobs and investment while strengthening India's future.

An important feature of this budget has been our continued stress on trust-based governance. Across sectors, ministries, and processes, we are massively reducing paperwork, decriminalising offences, and reducing compliance requirements. This is because we envisage the state as an enabler, and we trust the citizens. This will have a far deeper impact on people's lives than the numbers in typical budgets.

Q: This year's Budget was not the run-of-the-mill "bahi khata" document. It reads like a vision statement for India's future, focused on strengthening our economy. Why, particularly now? Have you determined that India is now ready to launch into the next phase of development toward a moonshot for Viksit Bharat by 2047? Was it a now-or-never situation?

A: First of all, I would respectfully say that none of our budgets has been made with an attitude of creating a run-of-the-mill 'bahi khata' (बही खता) documents. Because that is not our approach.

It is a privilege of mine that the people's blessings have been with me for a long time, and I have served for 25 years as the head of government, first at the state level and now at the national level. If one takes a closer look at my approach in the last 25 years, it becomes clear that our work doesn't happen in bits and pieces. There is a broader strategy, a plan of action and an effective implementation that reflects the 'whole of the nation' thinking, continuity of purpose and a long-term vision, progressively unfolding step by step, year after year.

Since 2014, the nation has come to view the Budget as far more than a ledger of numbers, facts, or ad hoc announcements. Each budget has contained intent, a clear-cut roadmap, and a sequence of actions, each with stated timelines for achieving them. Then we focus on implementation, and in the next Budget, it is taken to the next logical step.

In these years, we have addressed the structural gaps left behind by earlier administrations, undertaken bold structural reforms, expanded opportunities for the poor, empowered our youth, strengthened the role of women and ensured dignity and security for our farmers.

Along with this, we deployed an inclusive, tech-driven yet human-centric welfare architecture that reaches the last mile and leaves no one behind.

At every stage, the guiding focus has been nation-building, strengthening the economy and laying the foundations of Viksit Bharat.

This Budget represents the next level in this journey, imparting momentum to our 'Reform Express.' It is designed to accelerate momentum and prepare our youth for the opportunities of a rapidly changing world.

A few years ago, I had said from the ramparts of the Red Fort, "Yahi Samay Hai, Sahi Samay Hai" (यही समय है, सही समय है). The 'now is the time' sense of purpose that you are alluding to has always been there within us. But today, that sense of urgency has become a national conviction, a whole-of-society resolve.

There is a new confidence in our nation. Our national character has revealed itself even in times of different kinds of challenges and we are a bright spot of growth even in difficult global circumstances.

We are living in a post-pandemic world order that is opening new doors for India; countries eager to partner with us in trade and innovation, we have a young and increasingly skilled population; and we are focusing on strong growth accompanied by low inflation and macroeconomic stability. Our youth are creating waves in fields as diverse as space, sports and startups. We have ensured political stability and a reform-oriented policy environment. And because of these developments, people are seeing this as a historic opportunity for India.

Even as these developments were gaining momentum, the nation also witnessed the historic Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, which infused the people with a sense of mission.

Further, see the behavioural transformations that have taken root over the last few years. Whether it is cleanliness or any other issue, people know that building a developed nation is not just about infrastructure or economy, but also about social habits.

So, this is not a 'now or never' moment born out of compulsion. It is a 'we are ready' moment born out of preparation and inspiration.

This Budget reflects this yearning to become a developed nation.

Therefore, this budget should not be seen just as Budget 2026. This is the first budget in the second quarter of the 21st century. This budget consolidates the gains made since 2014 and builds upon them to impart momentum for the next quarter-century. Just as the decisions and initiatives taken in the 1920s laid the foundation for independence in 1947, the decisions we are taking now are laying the foundation for Viksit Bharat by 2047.

Q: From the budget announcements, it seems that India has doubled down on the manufacturing sector, like electronics, semiconductors, defence, containers, bio-pharma and textiles. What results have been yielded by previous efforts? Why do you think manufacturing specifically has the potential to provide employment and economic growth?

A: It is well known that with industrialisation and urbanisation, large numbers of youth from rural and semi-rural areas find it aspirational to move to cities and work in globally connected industries. Only a manufacturing and services revolution could fulfil their aspirations. These should have been addressed long before our government came in, but unfortunately, not much happened in this direction under earlier governments. But we have changed the approach.

Manufacturing has always been central to our vision of Viksit Bharat. Any country that wants to grow at scale and grow quickly cannot do so by remaining only a consumer. It must become a producer of high-quality, globally competitive goods.

This conviction led to the launch of 'Make in India' and, over time, to targeted interventions such as the Production Linked Incentive schemes. These initiatives are instruments that are rebuilding India's industrial base, integrating us into global value chains, and creating large-scale employment. We have also been working to support our youth in developing the skills necessary to be part of global value chains.

The outcomes of these efforts are now clearly visible. India's goods exports have repeatedly broken earlier records in recent years. A country that imported almost all its mobile phones a decade ago is today the world's second-largest mobile phone manufacturer, with exports forming a significant share of production. In fact, globally celebrated phone brands are being produced in India.

Defence manufacturing is rising, India is a trusted global supplier of pharmaceuticals, and our electronics manufacturing has expanded as well. Similar progress can be seen in textiles, engineering goods and chemicals as well.

The transformation is evident even in sectors that were once taken too lightly, such as toys. India was a net importer of toys not long ago. Today, toy exports have grown by leaps and bounds over the last decade.

It is well known that India has seen a startup revolution, thanks to our young innovators. We went from just a few hundred startups to over 2 lakh in just a decade. Often, we think of these as just tech startups. But among these, there are a number of manufacturing-related startups, creating attractive employment opportunities for our youth.

As a result of this growth in manufacturing, large number of jobs have been created for our youth. Manufacturing is especially important for job creation because it creates jobs across the skill spectrum. Each manufacturing unit also generates a wider ecosystem of ancillary industries, logistics and services.

This manufacturing resurgence has also been reinforced by a cultural shift. There is growing pride among citizens in buying Made in India products. Therefore, over the last 10-11 years, our policy, production, and public sentiment have come together to do wonders for manufacturing. Support for legacy industrial clusters will help sectors such as textiles, apparel, leather and footwear, engineering goods, chemicals and traditional handicrafts.

The pharma sector has been a strong contributor to our growth. The Biopharma SHAKTI initiative will further boost it.

We have also consciously worked to expand India's manufacturing portfolio beyond traditional strengths. We are moving into strategic and sunrise sectors. It is important that India does not remain dependent on imports in areas that will define the future economy. Budget 2026 takes this manufacturing strategy further. It addresses strategically important sectors such as rare earths, semiconductors and container manufacturing.

Read full interview on www.kashmirthunder.in

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Ensure every facility to incoming tourists, Yatris: Dir Tourism Kashmir

Visits TRC Nowgam to oversee it's operation

KT News Desk

SRINAGAR, FEBRUARY 16: Director Tourism Kashmir, Syed Qamar Sajjad Monday conducted a surprise visit to the Tourist Reception Centre, Nowgam Srinagar to oversee facilities for the general tourists including Yartis of upcoming Shri Amaranth ji Yatra 2026.

Joint Director Tourism Kashmir, Waseem Raja and AD Tourism, Nisar Ahmed accompanied the Director during the on spot appraisal visit.

The Director, as per an official statement, took a detailed tour of the Tourism estate cum Facilitation Centre and reviewed the various facilities available for tourists and Yartis arriving in Srinagar via trains.

He issued on spot instructions to concerned officers to ensure every facility and convenience to the incoming tourists and Yatris at Nowgam. Special directions were given on account of immediate establishment of



Information cum Facilitation Counter at the entrance of the TRC Nowgam for tourists and pilgrims of Shri Amarnath Ji Yatra so that they receive proper information and guidance about various tourism related facilities and services available across the valley.

The Director enjoined upon the recreation wing of the Directorate to ensure proper upkeep of the Climbing Wall at the TRC and organise tournaments for the youth in the coming days and make it a regular feature henceforth.

114 Govt schools in Srinagar equipped with computers under District Capex

Initiative aimed to equip students with technological competencies: DC Srinagar

KT News Desk

SRINAGAR FEBRUARY 16: With an aim to enhance digital learning facilities, improve classroom environments and provide better resources to students and teachers, the District Administration Srinagar on Monday distributed computer systems along with necessary furniture to 114 Government Schools of District under the District Capex Budget to strengthen educational infrastructure and enhance access to information technology across the district.

In this connection, Deputy Commissioner(DC) Srinagar, Akshay Labroo, as per an official statement, presided over a programme, organized by the Chief Education Officer Srinagar at Government Higher Secondary School, Kothibagh.

Chief Planning Officer, Fayaz Ahmad Dar; District Statistics & Evaluation Officer, Shah Ismail Bangroo; Chief Education Officer, Ghulam Mohi-U-Din; Deputy CEO, Anjum Raja; Principal GGHSS, Kothibagh, Dr Sameena Wani, Heads of Institutions of various Schools, Staff members were also the part of the program.

Speaking on the occasion, the Deputy Commissioner said that



the initiative is aimed at equipping students with technological competencies and create technology-enabled learning environment in Government Schools across the district. He added that the intervention will promote digital learning and ensure a more conducive, technology-driven atmosphere

and proper maintenance of the provided equipment. He directed school authorities to ensure that students are trained in basic computer skills and that the facilities are effectively used for digital classrooms, e-learning modules and project-based learning.

On the occasion, the DC assured all possible support from the District Administration for further strengthening infrastructure, improving quality of education and ensuring modern technological learning facilities for students across the district.

During the programme, the DC congratulated the Chief Education Officer, his team and the Heads of Schools who received the computers and allied infrastructure. He also lauded the efforts of the Chief Planning Officer, Srinagar, District Statistics & Evaluation Officer and their respective teams for their dedicated efforts in successfully implementing the initiative.

Later, the DC handed over appreciation letters to the concerned Officers and Officials for their contribution towards successful execution of various government schemes and educational programmes in the district.

District Admin Baramulla signs MoU with NHPC to upgrade Sports Infrastructure



KT News Desk

BARAMULLA, FEBRUARY 16: In a step towards improving sports infrastructure in Baramulla, the District Administration Baramulla Monday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC) at the office chamber of Deputy Commissioner Baramulla.

The MoU signing ceremony, as per an official statement, was held in the presence of Deputy Commissioner Baramulla, Minga Sherpa, SDM Uri, Prince Kumar; Chief Planning Officer, Nisar Ahmad, and Officers from NHPC including GGM (Hop) and GGM (CSR) Uri Power Station, and Head of CSR & Sustainable Development Department, Uri Power Station

This collaboration, under NHPC's Corporate Social

Responsibility (CSR) initiative, aims to enhance sports infrastructure facilities in the district.

As part of this agreement, NHPC has committed to upgradation of Mini Stadium at Uri and installation of High Mast Lights at General Bipin Rawat Stadium, Baramulla.

The projects are being funded by NHPC under its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative, with a total financial outlay of 1 crore. An amount of 65 lakh has been allocated for the financial year 2025-26.

Speaking on the occasion, the DC expressed his appreciation for NHPC's proactive role in enhancing the district's sports infrastructure and highlighted the importance of such collaborative efforts in addressing challenges in shared commitment to improving sports facilities in Baramulla.

District Admin Bandipora conducts IEC Awareness programmes

Experts highlighted physical, psychological ill-effects of substance abuse

KT News Desk

BANDIPORA, FEBRUARY 16: Continuing its sustained efforts under the Nasha Mukht Bharat Abhiyan (NMBA), the District Administration Bandipora Monday organized a series of IEC (Information, Education and Communication) awareness programmes across various Panchayats of the district.

The programmes were conducted in Panchayat Halqas including Ganastan-B (Block 23), Badbhothu (Block 22), Ayathmulla (Block 21), Balhama Arin (Block 20), Aloosa Ghat (Block 19), Kawapora (Block 27), Nowgam-A (Block 26), Gundjehangir-B (Block 25), and Ajas-C (Block 24) on Monday.

The IEC activities, as per an official statement, were co-ordinated by the respective Panchayat Secretaries and designated nodal officers at each location. A multi-departmental team comprising officials from Health, Police, Education, Social Welfare (DDAC/Palaash/CHL), Youth Services & Sports,

JKNRLM, and Excise & Taxation departments participated in the programmes to ensure effective outreach at the grass-roots level.

During the awareness sessions, doctors and medical officers highlighted the physical and psychological ill-effects of substance abuse, while police officials sensitized participants about legal consequences and preventive measures.

Representatives from Education and Social Welfare departments emphasized early intervention, counselling support, and the importance of community vigilance. Youth Services & Sports and JKNRLM functionaries encouraged youth engagement in constructive activities and self-reliance initiatives as preventive strategies against drug abuse.

The programmes witnessed active participation from local residents, youth, and community members, who engaged in interactive discussions and pledged to contribute towards building a drug-free society.

Advanced laparoscopic machine installed at Ghagwal hospital

KT News Desk

SAMBA, FEBRUARY 16: In a moment that eloquently captures the promise of purposeful public-private partnership, Deputy Commissioner Samba, Ayushi Sudan, Monday inaugurated a state-of-the-art laparoscopic machine at Government Hospital, Ghagwal - a transformative addition to the district's public healthcare infrastructure that brings the precision and safety of minimally invasive surgical technology within reach of citizens availing government facilities for their medical needs. The equipment, as per an official statement, generously contributed by Sun Pharma under its Corporate Social Responsibility initiative and implemented by ELFA International, stands as an inspiring testament to what governance, corporate conscience and community commitment can achieve in concert.

The introduction of laparoscopic technology at Government Hospital Ghagwal marks a significant qualitative leap in the standard of surgical care available to the people of the region. Laparoscopic procedures, known for their minimally invasive nature, offer patients substantially reduced surgical risk, shorter recovery periods, lesser post-operative pain and lower chances of complications compared to conventional open surgeries. By making this advanced technology accessible at a government facility, the initiative ensures that the benefits of



modern medical science are no longer the exclusive privilege of those who can afford private healthcare – a defining principle of equitable and inclusive governance.

Deputy Commissioner Ayushi Sudan, in her address, underscored that the mere availability of infrastructure is insufficient unless it is matched by the competence and preparedness of those who operate it. She called upon the medical and technical staff of the hospital to pursue rigorous skill upgradation and more intensive, focused training, so that the facility's enhanced capabilities are translated into the best possible outcomes for every patient who walks through its doors. Her emphasis on maximising the utility of existing resources through human capital development reflects a vision of governance that is as attentive to institutional capacity as it is to physical infrastructure.

In a demonstration of her administration's deeply participatory and people-first approach to governance, Deputy Commissioner Sudan engaged

in a wide-ranging and candid interaction with doctors, medical staff, ASHA workers and Primary Health Centre personnel – patiently listening to their on-ground challenges, requirements and experiences. Special focus was accorded to the critical issue of tuberculosis treatment, with the Deputy Commissioner taking stock of progress and gaps in TB care delivery across the district. This direct and empathetic engagement with frontline healthcare workers exemplifies an administrative ethos that values the voices of those at the grassroots as indispensable to effective policymaking and service delivery.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by SDM Ghagwal, Mr. KJS Bali, Chief Medical Officer Samba, Dr. Vidhi Bhatial, Mr. Nawab Mehran Malik representing ELFA International and representatives of Sun Pharma Ms. Priyanka Talwar and Mr. Ajay Kaul – a gathering that embodied the collaborative spirit of administration, healthcare and corporate citizenship working in unison toward a shared goal.

Director Health Services Jammu conducts visit to CHC Thathri

KT News Desk

DODA, FEBRUARY 16: Director, Health Services Jammu (DHSJ), Dr. Abdul Hamid Zargar conducted a comprehensive visit to Community Health Centre (CHC) Thathri in District Doda to review healthcare delivery and assess infrastructure facilities.

During the visit, DHSJ, as per an official statement, inspected various sections of the hospital including OPD, IPD wards, Labour Room, Newborn Care Corner, Emergency Unit, Operation Theatre, Laboratory, Pharmacy and registration counters. He reviewed patient attendance registers, drug availability records, duty rosters and biomedical waste management practices.

DHSJ interacted with patients and attendants to obtain first-hand feedback regarding quality of services, behavior of staff, waiting time and availability of

medicines. He stressed maintaining punctuality, discipline and patient-friendly services within the institution.

The Director also reviewed the status of manpower and directed the concerned authorities to address gaps wherever required. He instructed the Medical Officer Incharge to conduct regular internal reviews and ensure accountability at all levels. The hospital administration briefed the Director about ongoing health initiatives, challenges faced due to geographical constraints and steps taken to improve service delivery in the region.

The Director appreciated the dedication of doctors, paramedics and support staff working in difficult terrain conditions and reiterated the commitment of the Directorate of Health Services Jammu to strengthen healthcare infrastructure in remote and underserved areas.

Awareness camp on welfare schemes for ex-servicemen held in Kupwara

KT News Desk

KUPWARA, FEBRUARY 16: On the directions of Deputy Commissioner Kupwara, Srikanth Suse, the Zila Sainik Welfare Office (ZSWO) Kupwara, in collaboration with the District Administration, Monday organized a Mega Awareness Camp for Ex-Servicemen (ESMs), Veer Naris and their dependents at Town Hall Kupwara. The camp aimed to sensitize the participants about various welfare and self-employment schemes being implemented in the district for their socio-economic upliftment.

During the session, as per an official statement, detailed awareness was provided regarding flagship schemes including MSME initiatives, PMEGP, HADP, KVIB schemes, Mission YUVA, Skill Development programmes and



the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana. Officers elaborated on eligibility criteria, financial assistance, subsidy components and the procedure for availing benefits under these schemes.

Nearly 150 Ex-Servicemen and their dependents participated enthusiastically in the camp. The interactive session enabled participants to raise queries and seek clarifications regarding employment generation, entrepreneurship opportunities and renewable energy benefits.

The initiative reflects the district administration's commitment towards empowering

training module. He informed that the programme focuses on hands-on exposure to in vitro biological assays, including cell viability assays, enzyme-based screening, and mechanism-driven bioassays relevant to drug discovery.

Addressing the participants, Dr Muzamil Ahmad, Principal Scientist, CSIR-IIIM, highlighted the institute's mandate and contributions in the field of integrative medicine and drug discovery. He elaborated on CSIR-IIIM's role in advancing natural product research, pre-clinical validation, and development of drug candidates for various therapeutic indications.

The CSIR Integrated Skill Initiatives are being conducted under the patronage of Er. Abdul Rahim, Head, IIIM Srinagar Branch and Head, RMBD & IST Division, and are coordinated by Dr. Nasir ul Rasheed, Principal Scientist and Nodal Officer (Skill Development).

Scientists, technical staff, administrative officers, and research scholars were present during the inauguration. Around 20 participants from different parts of the country are taking part in the training programme.

Bangladesh's Yunus announces resignation, end of interim govt

AFP

Dhaka, Feb 16: Bangladesh's interim leader Muhammad Yunus stepped down on Monday in a farewell broadcast to the nation before handing over to an elected government.

"Today, the interim government is stepping down," the 85-year-old Nobel Peace Prize winner said.

"But let the practice of democracy, freedom of speech, and fundamental rights that has begun not be halted."

Yunus returned from self-imposed exile in August 2024, days after the iron-fisted government of Sheikh Hasina was overthrown by a student-led uprising and she fled by helicopter to India.

"That was the day of great liberation," he said. "What a day of joy it was! Bangladeshis across the world shed tears of happiness. The youth of our country freed it from the grip of a demon."

He has led Bangladesh as its "chief adviser" since, and now hands over power after congratulating the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and its leader Tarique Rahman on a "landslide victory" in elections last week.



"The people, voters, political parties, and stakeholder institutions linked to the election have set a commendable example," Yunus said.

"This election has set a benchmark for future elections."

Rahman, 60, chief of the BNP and scion of one of the country's most powerful political dynasties, will lead the South Asian nation of 170 million.

'Rebuilt institutions'
Bangladeshi voters endorsed sweeping democratic reforms in a national referendum, a key pillar

of Yunus's post-uprising transition agenda, on the same day as the elections.

The lengthy document, known as the "July Charter" after the month when the uprising that toppled Hasina began, proposes term limits for prime ministers, the creation of an upper house of parliament, stronger presidential powers and greater judicial independence.

"We did not start from zero — we started from a deficit," he said.

"Sweeping away the ruins, we

rebuilt institutions and set the course for reforms."

The referendum noted that approval would make the charter "binding on the parties that win" the election, obliging them to endorse it.

However, several parties raised questions before the vote, and the reforms will still require ratification by the new parliament.

The BNP alliance won 212 seats, compared with 77 for the Jamaat-e-Islami-led alliance, according to the Election Commission.

Jamaat chief Shafiqur Rahman conceded on Saturday, saying his party would "serve as a vigilant, principled, and peaceful opposition."

Newly elected lawmakers are expected to be sworn in on Tuesday, after which Tarique Rahman is set to become Bangladesh's next prime minister.

Police records show that political clashes during the campaign period killed five people and injured more than 600.

However, despite weeks of turbulence ahead of the polls, voting day passed without major unrest and the country has responded to the results with relative calm.



KT News Desk

Jammu, Feb 16: Daleep Singh Parihar, Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) from Bhaderwah called on Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on

Monday.

Adv Abhinav Sharma, former President J&K High Court Bar Association, Jammu and senior BJP Leader also called on the Lieutenant Governor.

Robert Duvall, Oscar-winning actor and 'Godfather' mainstay, dead at 95

AP

Los Angeles, Feb 16: Robert Duvall, the Oscar-winning actor of matchless versatility and dedication whose classic roles included the intrepid consigliere of the first two "Godfather" movies and the over-the-hill country music singer in "Tender Mercies," has died at age 95.

Duvall died "peacefully" at his home Sunday in Middleburg, Virginia, according to an announcement from his publicist and from a statement posted on his Facebook page by his wife, Luciana Duvall.

"To the world, he was an Academy Award-winning actor, a director, a storyteller. To

me, he was simply everything," Luciana Duvall wrote. "His passion for his craft was matched only by his deep love for characters, a great meal, and holding court. For each of his many roles, Bob gave everything to his characters and to the truth of the human spirit they represented."

The bald, wiry Duvall didn't have leading man looks, but few "character actors" enjoyed such a long, rewarding and unpredictable career, in leading and supporting roles, from an itinerant preacher to Josef Stalin.

Beginning with his 1962 film debut as Boo Radley, the reclusive neighbor in "To Kill a Mockingbird," Duvall created a gallery of unforgettable



portrayals.

They earned him seven Academy Award nominations

and the best actor prize for "Tender Mercies," which came out in 1983. He also won four

Golden Globes, including one for playing the philosophical cattle-drive boss in the 1989 miniseries "Lonesome Dove," a role he often cited as his favorite.

In 2005, Duvall was awarded a National Medal of Arts.

He had been acting for some 20 years when "The Godfather," released in 1972, established him as one of the most in-demand performers of Hollywood. He had made a previous film, "The Rain People," with Francis Coppola, and the director chose him to play Tom Hagen in the mafia epic that featured Al Pacino and Marlon Brando among others.

Duvall was a master of subtlety as an Irishman among Italians,

rarely at the centre of a scene, but often listening and advising in the background, an irreplaceable thread through the saga of the Corleone crime family.

"Stars and Italians alike depend on his efficiency, his tidying up around their grand gestures, his being the perfect shortstop on a team of personality sluggers," wrote the critic David Thomson. "Was there ever a role better designed for its actor than that of Tom Hagen in both parts of The Godfather?"

In another Coppola film, "Apocalypse Now," Duvall was wildly out front, the embodiment of deranged masculinity as Lieutenant Colonel Bill Kilgore, who with equal vigour enjoyed

surfing and bombing raids on the Viet Cong. Duvall required few takes for one of the most famous passages in movie history, barked out on the battlefield by a bare-chested, cavalry-hatted Kilgore: "I love the smell of napalm in the morning. You know, one time we had a hill bombed, for 12 hours. When it was all over, I walked up. We didn't find one of em, not one stinkin' dink body."

"The smell, you know that gasoline smell, the whole hill. Smelled like — victory."

Coppola once commented about Duvall: "Actors click into character at different times — the first week, third week. Bobby's hot after one or two takes."

CONTD. FROM FRONT PAGE

LG Sinha reopens

From March onwards, we see a steady rise in tourist arrivals. The reopening of key destinations will help us restore advance bookings and reassure travel agents across the country," said Tawkeer, a tour operator in Srinagar.

Similarly, those associated with the tourism trade in Doodhpathri and other areas expressed special gratitude to LG Manoj Sinha for reopening 11 more tourist destinations in Kashmir, particularly Doodhpathri and Yusmarg.

"We are sincerely thankful to the LG administration for reopening Doodhpathri. Hundreds of families here depend directly on tourism, from pony owners and food stall operators to guides and transporters. This decision has restored hope among us," said a local resident from Doodhpathri.

Another resident from Dubjan in Shopian told KNO the temporary closure had badly affected livelihoods. "Most families here are directly or indirectly dependent on tourism. From tea stall vendors to taxi drivers and guides, everyone suffered losses. This decision has brought much-needed relief and renewed optimism among the people," said Abdul Rashid, a resident.

Hoteliers in Yusmarg described the move as timely and reassuring, saying bookings had slowed after the precautionary closure but are expected to improve now.

Tour operators in Srinagar said reopening major destinations across Budgam, Shopian, Ganderbal and Baramulla would send a positive message nationwide about stability and improved security conditions.

Hoteliers from Pahalgam and Gulmarg also hailed the move, stating that the overall perception of safety and normalcy across Kashmir benefits the entire tourism ecosystem.

Meanwhile, the Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCC&I) welcomed the decision, terming it a major relief for the tourism and trade sectors that had suffered losses since the April 2025 terror attack.

President of KCC&I, Javid Tenga, said the Chamber had consistently urged the administration to reopen the closed tourist spots and thanked the LG for the decision. The Chamber stated that reviving tourism is critical for employment generation, revenue creation and sustaining local businesses.

Stakeholders expressed confidence that the upcoming tourist season could mark a strong rebound for Jammu and Kashmir's tourism industry. (KNO)

J&K moving towards

progress in Maoist-affected areas, Shah said the administration is close to ending Maoist violence entirely by the March 2026 deadline.

ANNOUNCES 10 NEW INITIATIVES UNDER

"SAFE CITY" PROJECT

Shah announced ten new initiatives under the "Safe City" project for the national capital. The Delhi Police Special Cell's integrated headquarters will play a key role in counter-terror operations. About 2,100 AI-enabled cameras will soon be operational, forming part of a larger network of 10,000 cameras under the project. These will complement the 15,000 cameras already installed across Delhi.

He also highlighted steps to modernise the criminal justice system, including the introduction of three new laws aimed at increasing conviction rates to 75 to 80 percent. States such as Assam, Haryana, and Gujarat have already recorded conviction rate increases of more than 20 percent, he said.

Shah said the government's priorities include building a "drug-free India," countering cyber terrorism, and dismantling organised crime networks.

In 2025, nine gangsters were killed in encounters, while 32 gangsters who fled abroad are being monitored by Delhi Police Special Cell with support from central agencies.

The Home Minister also acknowledged the role of Delhi Police in handling previous security incidents, including the Parliament attack and the bomb blast near the Red Fort.

Acknowledging that challenges remain, the Home Minister said the Ministry of Home Affairs is focused on establishing a new security framework across the country. This includes creating a nationwide network of CCTV cameras and control rooms to combat narcotics, with appropriate legal backing, and modernising border security to prevent infiltration.

Shah also underlined the government's plans to implement three new criminal law codes to strengthen the justice system and improve enforcement across states.

Expressing confidence in the ongoing efforts, he said the government aims to address remaining security challenges in all three regions before 2029. (KNO)

J&K to witness

and below-normal values. In Kashmir Division, Srinagar recorded a maximum of 10.4°C against a normal of 18.0°C, and a minimum of 1.3°C, below the normal 0.1°C.

Pahalgam saw sub-zero temperatures with a minimum of -3.8°C, while Gulmarg recorded a minimum of -1.6°C. Kupwara and Qazigund registered daytime highs of 9.5°C each, with minimum temperatures of -1.4°C and 0.2°C, respectively.

In Jammu Division, Mirpur recorded a high of 28.0°C, while Kathua and Katra saw maximum temperatures of 24.8°C and 24.1°C, respectively. Night temperatures remained low with Jammu at 11.5°C and Banihal at 10.6°C.

Other stations, including Bhadarwah, Batote, and Katra, also reported below-normal night temperatures.

The IMD's 7-day forecast indicates mainly dry conditions across both divisions, with only isolated precipitation on February 17.

Spatial distribution shows isolated precipitation at 1-25% of stations, scattered activity at 26-50%, and fairly widespread to widespread precipitation at higher thresholds. (KNO)

Nearly 10,000 cancer

of lung cancer is directly linked to tobacco consumption.

"This scenario is particularly grim because lung cancer has a strong association with smoking and other tobacco products. It reflects how widespread tobacco use is in our society and how urgently we need mass awareness about its dangers," he added.

On breast cancer, the oncologist pointed to lifestyle-related factors.

"Lack of physical activity and rising obesity levels are among the major contributors. The good news is that both these common cancers are largely preventable if people adopt healthier lifestyles," he said.

Doctors stressed the importance of educating the public about early warning signs and preventive care. "People must be aware of cancer symptoms, undergo timely medical evaluations, and make lifestyle changes. Early detection significantly improves survival and treatment outcomes," he said.

Despite the rising caseload, the department currently offers a wide range of modern radiation therapies, including: Intensity-Modulated Radiation Therapy (IMRT), Image-Guided Radiation Therapy (IGRT), Stereotactic Body Radiation Therapy (SBRT), Volumetric Modulated Arc Therapy (VMAT), Brachytherapy and CT simulation services. The hospital also has dedicated inpatient wards, day-care chemotherapy facilities, blood transfusion units, and specialised care for terminally ill patients.

"All types of tumours in adults and children are being treated here efficiently," the oncologist said.

In a major boost to diagnostic services, officials said that the process to install a PET Scan machine is currently underway.

"We are hopeful that the PET Scan facility will become operational this year, which will greatly enhance cancer detection, staging, and treatment planning," the doctor said.

Doctors also highlighted the need for introducing Proton Beam Therapy, one of the most advanced forms of radiotherapy that minimises damage to surrounding healthy tissues and offers better outcomes, especially in complex cancers.

"Currently, this technology is available at only a few centres in India. Given the rising cancer burden in Jammu and Kashmir, such advanced treatment options should be considered here at the earliest," the oncologist said. (KNO)

34% power shortage

generation from all the power plants owned by Jammu and Kashmir has decreased by nearly 800-900 Megawatts (MWs).

The official had also said, "The power generation from across local power plants is currently ranging from 330 MWs to 400 MWs."

It also said, "From one of the plants from Baglihar, the power generation is ranging from 250-380 MWs and in case of another power plant of Baglihar, Kishenpur and New Wanpoh, we are generating a maximum of one MW."

The official further informed that the department is able to generate only 71 MWs from Kashmir based power plants.

Previously, KNO reported that Jammu and Kashmir valley is reeling under 'severe low voltage issues', officials said.

The NRPC in a document had said that the heating load was picking up during early morning and night hours. "The demand may further increase in the coming days."

It also said that the severe voltage in Jammu and Kashmir is in violation of N-1. (KNO)

PM Modi inaugurates

10 arenas covering more than 70,000 square metres, the Expo brings together global technology firms, startups, academia and research institutions, Union ministries, state governments and international partners.

The Expo also features 13 country pavilions, showcasing international collaboration in the Artificial Intelligence (AI) ecosystem. These include pavilions from Australia, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Serbia, Estonia, Tajikistan and Africa.

The Expo will host over 300 curated exhibition pavilions and live demonstrations, structured across three thematic chakras -- people, planet and progress.

In addition, the Expo will feature over 600 high-potential startups, many of them building globally relevant and population-scale solutions. These startups will demonstrate working solutions that are already deployed in real-world settings.

Three inmates

resident of Dablehar in R.S. Pura.

During the incident, SPO Vinay Kumar and Head Constable Parveen Kumar sustained injuries and were provided medical attention.

Police have launched a massive search operation in the area to trace and apprehend the escaped inmates.

In a statement, police said, "Cognisance has been taken and an investigation has been initiated. Special teams have been constituted and are conducting raids at various locations to apprehend them." (KNO)

Pulwama gets

Pulwama town.

The newly operational stretch connects several key routes, including Rajpora Road, Shopian Road, Pakherpora Road and Rohmoo Road, effectively creating an alternative corridor for vehicles that earlier had no option but to pass through Pulwama's overcrowded town centre. With this connectivity now in place, traffic is being smoothly diverted, easing pressure on internal roads that routinely witnessed long jams, particularly during peak hours.

Residents from Pulwama town and surrounding villages described the development as a "game changer" for daily life.

"For years we have suffered massive traffic congestion, especially in the mornings and evenings," said Mohammad Yousuf, a shopkeeper at Bonura crossing. "With this NH-444 link finally open, vehicles are flowing smoothly from the very first day. It is a huge relief for traders, commuters and pedestrians alike."

Another resident, Mudasi Ahmad from Newa, highlighted the impact on emergency services and overall mobility.

"Earlier ambulances would often get stuck in town traffic, sometimes for several minutes. Now movement is much faster and safer. This road has truly improved accessibility," he said.

Women commuters and office-goers also welcomed the shorter travel time.

Rehana Jan, a school teacher who travels daily toward Pulwama town, said the new route has cut her commute considerably.

"It saves nearly 15 minutes each way. For people who travel daily, this is a big improvement. It also feels safer as traffic is more organized now," she added.

Locals noted that the road will benefit not only Pulwama but also residents traveling toward Shopian and To Srinagar, allowing them to bypass congested areas and reach their destinations without unnecessary delays.

Beyond easing congestion, traders believe the improved connectivity will give a boost to local commerce and transportation of goods.

"With direct access to the highway, movement of fruits, vegetables and other supplies will become faster and cheaper. This will help both farmers and shopkeepers," said a local trader.

People also appreciated the efforts of the district administration and the executing agencies for completing the long-awaited project, urging authorities to ensure regular maintenance, proper signage and safety measures, especially during the winter season.

The opening of the NH-444 Bonura-Gudoor stretch has been widely welcomed as a timely and people-friendly initiative, expected to transform traffic management in Pulwama town while improving connectivity and economic prospects across the district. (KNO)

Markets open lower, turn volatile amid IT sell-off; Sensex falls 350 points



PTI

Mumbai, Feb 16: Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty began the trade on a weak note on Monday, tracking a mixed trend in global markets, but later turned volatile as investors engaged in selective buying after early losses.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined 349.81 points, or 0.42 per cent, to 82,276.95 in early trade. The broader NSE Nifty dropped 98.4 points to 25,372.70.

Later, both the benchmark indices turned volatile, swinging between gains and losses. The Sensex quoted 136.04 points higher at 82,762.80, while the 50-share NSE Nifty rose 51.15 points to 25,522.25 after initial decline.

Among the Sensex constituents, PowerGrid, HDFC Bank, NTPC, Bajaj Finserv, Sun Pharmaceuticals, Eternal, HCL Technologies, ITC, Trent, Asian Paints, and Tata Steel were the gainers.

On the other hand, Infosys, Adani Ports, State Bank of India, Hindustan Unilever, Tech Mahindra, Reliance Industries, Titan, UltraTech Cement, ICICI Bank, and Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) were among the major laggards.

SC issues notice to Centre on plea challenging 2023 data protection law

PTI

New Delhi, Feb 16: In a significant development, the Supreme Court on Monday agreed to examine a batch of pleas challenging the constitutional validity of several provisions of the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023.

The top court, however, refused to grant an interim stay on the impugned provisions, saying "by an interim order, it will not thwart a regime introduced by Parliament unless we hear the case."

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi issued a notice to the Centre on the pleas challenging certain provisions of the DPDP Act and the Digital Personal Data Protection Rules 2025 over their amendment of the provisions of the Right to Information Act.

The bench also referred three petitions, filed by Venkatesh Nayak on behalf of digital news platform 'The Reporters Collective', journalist Nitin Sethi and National Campaign for People's Right to Information (NCPRI), to a larger bench.

The pleas raised concerns over the "fiduciary" clauses, which



allow the central government to requisition data from any data fiduciary at its discretion.

The bench said the matter pertained to "complex and sensitive issues," and it involved balancing two competing sets of fundamental rights, the Right to Information and the Right to Privacy.

"This is about balancing competing interests. We have to iron out the creases and lay down what constitutes personal information," the CJ said.

Advocate Prashant Bhusan, also appearing for one of the petitioners, pointed to

the landmark Subhash Agarwal judgment, asserting that the apex court had already established a framework for balancing RTI and privacy.

However, the bench noted that the new legislative framework required a fresh, deeper examination.

Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, also appearing for one of the petitioners, sought to make additional submissions, but the court proceeded to issue notice to ensure a comprehensive response from the Centre.

The Court has scheduled the matter for a hearing in March.

World's largest AI summit opens to packed halls

PTI

New Delhi, Feb 16: The world's largest artificial intelligence summit opened to packed halls and long queues on Monday, as tech moguls, industry leaders, policymakers, founders, and technologists thronged the venue for the conference, where India is set to push for widening access to AI and seek international agreement on global AI commons.

With huge billboards around the city welcoming delegates, speakers and guests at the AI Impact Summit, Bharat Mandapam saw long queues much before the conference opened at 09.30 hours, signalling the interest in the subject and the conference.

The enthusiasm was high despite the fact that the high profile speakers - from Sundar Pichai of Alphabet to Sam Altman of OpenAI and Dario Amodei of Anthropic - haven't even arrived in the country. Their sessions start not before Wednesday.

Final two days of the Summit - February 19 and 20 - will see more than 20 heads of state and government, including France's Emmanuel Macron and Brazil's Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, along with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, talking about the future of AI alongside business leaders and investors.

A team of PTI reporters on the ground saw long queues outside the halls that are hosting different sessions. There were some logistics issues, but the conference was orderly and well organised. Multiple parallel sessions are happening at the same time and all of them are packed to capacity.

From February 16 to 20, the summit will feature over 3,250 speakers and more than 500 sessions.

"Sessions are packed. There are long queues, and once the halls fill up, doors are closed, which creates some hassle for those still waiting outside," an enthusiastic participant said. "You have to be there for a session well in advance. One cannot float around from session to



session like in other conferences."

Another person said an interesting line up of speakers is drawing huge crowds. "There is a lot of buzz around AI."

Organisers said registrations exceeded expectations, reflecting accelerating interest in AI infrastructure, enterprise adoption and sovereign compute capabilities.

Panel discussions on the future of employability in the age of AI, skilling, safe and trusted AI at scale, AI governance and infrastructure, generative AI deployment, and public sector use cases drew standing-room-only audiences, with participants crowding corridors between sessions to network and exchange ideas.

An expo where the who's who of the tech industry - from Google to Nvidia, Amazon, Meta, OpenAI and Microsoft besides homegrown giants - put on display innovations on AI is held alongside. Focused on AI's transformative impact, it includes 300+ exhibitions, 13 country pavilions, and addresses themes of People, Planet, and Progress.

The summit offers India not just a chance to showcase its vast tech-savvy population and engineering talent but also to push for democratizing AI access to the global south. Besides wider access to AI, New Delhi may also seek

international agreement on 'global AI commons' or a repository of use cases for AI in key sectors that can be shared.

The UK hosted the first AI Summit in 2023 that focused on AI safety and extreme risks. The next edition in France in 2025 saw trumpeting big investments in the tech sector.

For Prime Minister Modi, it offers an opportunity to showcase the impressive digital infrastructure and tech prowess that has attracted the likes of OpenAI and Anthropic to set up operations in the country, as well as an array of data centres commitments by giants such as Amazon, Google and Microsoft.

Ahead of the Summit, Modi, in an interview to PTI, pitched India as a global hub for digital infrastructure and artificial intelligence, saying the country is ready to host the world's data and lead the next wave of the technology revolution.

The summit is expected to focus on expanding access to AI technologies, strengthening digital public infrastructure and building consensus around shared global frameworks for responsible AI development. India is positioning itself at the centre of discussions on democratising AI and shaping international cooperation on emerging technologies.

BJP attacks Rahul Gandhi, calls him 'failed dynast'



PTI

New Delhi, Feb 16: The BJP on Monday attacked Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, alleging that he is a "failed dynast" as neither his own party leaders nor allies have any confidence in him.

This came after Bhupen Borah, former president of the Assam Congress, sent his resignation letter to party president Mallikarjun Kharge, claiming he was being "ignored" by the party leadership and not being accorded his due in the state unit.

Reacting to the development, BJP national spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla wrote on X, "No Confidence in Rahul Gandhi."

"TMC says Rahul 'hatao', Mamata 'lao', INDI alliance 'bachao'. Former Congress leader and chief of Assam Bhupen Bora quits. Mani (Shankar) Aiyar says Congress will lose Kerala and Vijayan will win," he said, asking if there was more proof needed to understand that neither the Gandhi's own party leaders nor his allies take him seriously.

"Rahul neither has 'janmat' nor he has 'sangat'... Rahul is a failed entitled dynast," Poonawalla added.

On Sunday, Congress leader Mani Shankar Aiyar had said he was confident that Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan would continue in office.

Aiyar's remark drew sharp reactions, with the Congress distancing itself from his comments, saying the veteran leader has had no connection whatsoever with the party for the last few years, and that he speaks and writes purely in his personal capacity.

Aiyar on Monday claimed that his remark was "blown out of proportion" by the media. On some Congress leaders claiming that he was not connected with the party anymore, the former MP said that only AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge could oust him from the organisation. Latching on to the row, BJP national spokesperson Pradeep Bhandari wrote on X, "Complete rejection of Rahul Gandhi by Congress leaders! Rahul Gandhi is openly rejected by Mani Shankar Iyer who is a staunch Congress loyalist."

IN THE COURT OF EXECUTIVE MAGISTRATE 1ST CLASS SOPORE

In the case of: Mohd Ashraf War S/o: Gh Nabi War R/o: Harel Kupwara Versus C.E.O Municipal Council Sopore/BDO Sangrama/BDO Sopore (Registrar of Birth and Death) ...Non Applicant

Notice To Public At Large

Whereas, the above titled case is under process in this court, seeking direction therein to the non-applicant u/s 13(3) of the Registration of Births & Deaths Act, 1969 for registration of Birth event of the applicant's Son namely Usman Ashraf S/o: Mohd Ashraf war as 01-01-2023 at M.C.H Sopore

Whereas through the medium of this proclamation the public at large is informed that in case any one has any objection for issuance of direction with respect to the registration of aforementioned Birth event he /she shall file the same before this court in person or through counsel within 7 days from the date of the publication of this proclamation.If the date fixed is declared holi-day,the matter will be taken on the next working day.

Executive Magistrate 1st Class, Sopore

IN THE COURT OF EXECUTIVE MAGISTRATE 1ST CLASS SOPORE

In the case of: Anayatulla Mir S/o: Gh Rasool Mir R/o: Sher Chagal Handwara Versus C.E.O Municipal Council Sopore/BDO Sangrama/BDO Sopore (Registrar of Birth and Death) ...Non Applicant

Notice To Public At Large

Whereas, the above titled case is under process in this court, seeking direction therein to the non-applicant u/s 13(3) of the Registration of Births & Deaths Act, 1969 for registration of Birth event of the applicant's Son namely Anzem Ahmad Mir S/o: Anayatulla Mir as 24-04-2020 at M.C.H Sopore

Whereas through the medium of this proclamation the public at large is informed that in case any one has any objection for issuance of direction with respect to the registration of aforementioned Birth event he /she shall file the same before this court in person or through counsel within 7 days from the date of the publication of this proclamation.If the date fixed is declared holi-day,the matter will be taken on the next working day.

Executive Magistrate 1st Class, Sopore

IN THE COURT OF EXECUTIVE MAGISTRATE 1ST CLASS SOPORE

In the case of: Bilal Ahmad Ganie S/o: Mohd Akbar Ganie R/o: PEHRA PETH LANGATE Versus C.E.O Municipal Council Sopore/BDO Sangrama/BDO Sopore (Registrar of Birth and Death) ...Non Applicant

Notice To Public At Large

Whereas, the above titled case is under process in this court, seeking direction therein to the non-applicant u/s 13(3) of the Registration of Births & Deaths Act, 1969 for registration of Birth event of the applicant's Son namely Usman Bilal S/o: Bilal Ahmad Ganie as 19-02-2023 at M.C.H Sopore

Whereas through the medium of this proclamation the public at large is informed that in case any one has any objection for issuance of direction with respect to the registration of aforementioned Birth event he /she shall file the same before this court in person or through counsel within 7 days from the date of the publication of this proclamation.If the date fixed is declared holi-day,the matter will be taken on the next working day.

Executive Magistrate 1st Class, Sopore

IN THE COURT OF EXECUTIVE MAGISTRATE 1ST CLASS SOPORE

In the case of: Rukhsana Begum W/o: Sajad Ahmad Dar R/o: Sher Colony Sopore Versus C.E.O Municipal Council Sopore/BDO Sangrama/BDO Sopore (Registrar of Birth and Death) ...Non Applicant

Notice To Public At Large

Whereas, the above titled case is under process in this court, seeking direction therein to the non-applicant u/s 13(3) of the Registration of Births & Deaths Act, 1969 for registration of Birth event of the applicant's Son namely Mohammad Shajan Dar S/o: Sajad Ahmad Dar as 28-02-2024 at M.C.H Sopore

Whereas through the medium of this proclamation the public at large is informed that in case any one has any objection for issuance of direction with respect to the registration of aforementioned Birth event he /she shall file the same before this court in person or through counsel within 7 days from the date of the publication of this proclamation.If the date fixed is declared holi-day,the matter will be taken on the next working day.

Executive Magistrate 1st Class, Sopore

IN THE COURT OF EXECUTIVE MAGISTRATE 1ST CLASS SOPORE

In the case of: Rukhsana Begum W/o: Sajad Ahmad Dar R/o: Sher Colony Sopore Versus C.E.O Municipal Council Sopore/BDO Sangrama/BDO Sopore (Registrar of Birth and Death) ...Non Applicant

Notice To Public At Large

Whereas, the above titled case is under process in this court, seeking direction therein to the non-applicant u/s 13(3) of the Registration of Births & Deaths Act, 1969 for registration of Birth event of the applicant's Daughter namely Arooba Sajad S/o: Sajad Ahmad Dar as 05-08-2021 at M.C.H Sopore

Whereas through the medium of this proclamation the public at large is informed that in case any one has any objection for issuance of direction with respect to the registration of aforementioned Birth event he /she shall file the same before this court in person or through counsel within 7 days from the date of the publication of this proclamation.If the date fixed is declared holi-day,the matter will be taken on the next working day.

Executive Magistrate 1st Class, Sopore

International Childhood Cancer Day

Timely diagnosis key to saving children, say doctors

PTI

Jaipur, Feb 15: On International Childhood Cancer Day, a group of doctors here on Sunday emphasised that timely diagnosis and proper treatment can save over 80 per cent of children affected by cancer. Paediatric oncologist Dr Shivani Mathur of Bhagwan Mahaveer Cancer Hospital said that cases of childhood cancer differ from those of adult cancer and often progress rapidly, requiring specialised treatment. However, recovery

rates among children are higher. The most common types of cancer in children include blood cancer, brain tumours, kidney cancer and bone cancer, she said.

Haemato-oncologist at Bhagwan Mahaveer Cancer Hospital, Dr Upendra Sharma, said that according to the National Cancer Registry Programme, about 4 per cent of total cancer cases in India occur in children aged 0-14 years, with nearly 50,000 new cases reported

annually. Blood cancer accounts for 25-30 per cent of these cases.

He noted that early detection significantly improves survival chances.

According to doctors, common warning signs include persistent fever, unusual weight loss, prolonged fatigue, bone or joint pain, frequent infections and abnormal swelling. They advised parents not to ignore prolonged symptoms and to seek medical consultation promptly.



Iran meets UN nuclear watchdog in Geneva ahead of second round of US talks

AP

Geneva, Feb 16: Iran's top diplomat met with the head of the U.N. nuclear watchdog agency on Monday, ahead of a second round of negotiations with the United States over Tehran's nuclear program.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi met with Rafael Grossi, director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, and said he would also meet with Foreign Minister Badr al-Busaidi of Oman, which is hosting the US-Iran talks in Geneva on Tuesday.

"I am in Geneva with real ideas to achieve a fair and equitable deal," Araghchi wrote on X. "What is not on the table: submission before threats."

Iran open to compromise in exchange for sanctions relief

On Sunday, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Majid Takht-Ravanchi signaled that Tehran could be open to compromise on the nuclear issue, but is looking for an easing of international sanctions led by the United States.

"The ball is in America's court. They have to prove they want to have a deal with us," Takht-Ravanchi told the BBC. "If we see a sincerity on their part, I am sure that we will be on a road to have an agreement."

"We are ready to discuss this



and other issues related to our program provided that they are also ready to talk about the sanctions," he added.

Oman hosted a first round of indirect talks between the US and Iran on Feb. 6.

The US is also hosting talks between envoys from Russia and Ukraine in Geneva on Tuesday and Wednesday, days ahead of the fourth anniversary of the all-out Russian invasion of its neighbor.

Similar talks last year between the US and Iran about Iran's nuclear program broke down after Israel launched what became a 12-day war on Iran, that included the US bombing Iranian nuclear sites.

US keeps military pressure high

US President Donald Trump initially threatened to take military

action over Iran's bloody crack-down on nationwide protests last month, but then shifted to a pressure campaign in recent weeks to try to get Tehran to make a deal over its nuclear program.

Trump said Friday the USS Gerald R. Ford, the world's largest aircraft carrier, was being sent from the Caribbean to the Mid-east to join other military assets the US has built up in the region. He also said a change in power in Iran "would be the best thing that could happen."

Iran has said if the US attacks, it will respond with an attack of its own.

The Trump administration has maintained that Iran can have no uranium enrichment under any deal. Tehran says it won't agree to that.

Iran has insisted its nuclear program is for peaceful

purposes. However, its officials increasingly threaten to pursue a nuclear weapon. Before the June war, Iran had been enriching uranium up to 60% purity, a short, technical step away from weapons-grade levels.

The direct meeting with Grossi is a significant step after Iran suspended all cooperation with the IAEA following the June war with Israel. The two also met briefly on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in September. The IAEA said it has been unable to verify the status of Iran's near weapons-grade uranium stockpile since the war. Iran has allowed IAEA some access to sites that were not damaged, but has not allowed inspectors to visit other sites.

Iran's stockpile of uranium enriched to 60% could allow Iran to build as many as 10 nuclear bombs, should it decide to weaponize its program, Grossi previously told The Associated Press. He added that it doesn't mean that Iran has such a weapon.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rushed to Washington last week to urge Trump to ensure that any deal to include steps to neutralize Iran's ballistic missile program and end its funding for proxy groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah.

Fearless Kishan took game away from us: Pak coach Hesson



PTI

Colombo, Feb 16: Pakistan head coach Mike Hesson said "fearless" Ishan Kishan's marauding fifty was the difference between his side and India, and urged his players to rally after the heavy defeat in the marquee clash of the T20 World Cup here.

Led by Kishan's aggressive 77 off 40 balls, India trumped Pakistan by 61 runs in a Group A match here Sunday night to seal a Super Eight berth.

"I think he's fearless. He's able to score on both sides of the ground. So, he's not just committed to the leg side. We know he's incredibly strong there, but he can reverse. So, if you've got spin, especially in the power play, it can be a challenge," Hesson said in the post-match press conference.

True to Hesson's words, Kishan scored 66 runs off 37 balls against Pakistan slow bowlers, spoiling their

spin-heavy strategy on a slow Premadasa pitch.

Hesson admitted that Kishan's approach unsettled his spinners.

"I think the fact that he's in a rare vein of form, applied a lot of pressure to our spinners and probably took them away from the basics, which the pitch was actually doing a lot when we bowled nice and slow and into it, but outside of that, no one really scored better than a run a ball.

"Other than him, Dubey was slightly better, but it was tough. And that (Kishan's innings) certainly was a standout amongst the whole match, really. The way Kishan played took the game away from us," he added.

The New Zealand-born coach conceded that the massive defeat has left the team disappointed, and the challenge is to come back and play to their potential in the ICC showpiece.

Pakistan failed to put up even a token fight in

the chase of 176, getting trounced for 114.

The result has pushed Pakistan (4 points) to the third spot in Group A, behind leaders India and the USA, who also have four points, but enjoy a better net run rate of 0.788 as compared to -4.03 of Pakistan.

Now, Pakistan need to beat Namibia in their last league match to enter the Super Eights.

"We know that it's a huge event — Pakistan against India. We've won five (T20I) games on the bounce, we're confident, but today we got outplayed. There's a pretty disappointed dressing room in there at the moment, because they know how much it means to Pakistan," Hesson said.

"We didn't play as well as we could have, but we know in tournaments like this it's not always going to go your way. So, our job is to pick ourselves up and make sure that we're very good in two or three days," he added.

N Korea opens new housing district for families of Ukraine war dead

AP

Seoul, Feb 16: North Korea said Monday it completed a new housing district in Pyongyang for families of North Korean soldiers killed while fighting alongside Russian forces in Ukraine, the latest effort by leader Kim Jong Un to honor the war dead. State media photos showed Kim Jong Un walking through the new street — called Saeppyol Street — and visiting the homes of some of the families with his increasingly prominent daughter, believed to be named Kim Ju Ae, as he pledged to repay the "young martyrs" who "sacrificed all to their motherland."

In recent months, North Korea has intensified propaganda glorifying troops deployed to fight in Russia's war against Ukraine, such as establishing a memorial wall and building a museum. Analysts see it as an effort to bolster internal unity and curb potential public discontent. Kim in recent months has sent thousands of troops and large quantities of military equipment, including artillery and missiles, to fuel Russian President Vladimir Putin's war on Ukraine, as the leaders align in the face of their separate confrontations with Washington.

Navalny's mother calls for 'justice'

AFP

Moscow, Feb 16: The mother of deceased Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny said Monday she felt vindicated by a European assessment that her son died of poisoning and called for those responsible to be held accountable.

"This confirms what we knew from the very beginning. We knew that our son did not simply die in prison, he was murdered," she told reporters including AFP from near his grave in Moscow on the second anniversary of his death. "I think it will take some time, but we will find out who did it. Of course, we want this to happen in our country, and we want justice to prevail."



Late Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny's mother Lyudmila Navalnaya touches his portrait at his grave, two years after his death, at the Borisovskoye Cemetery in Moscow, Russia. (AP)

There is little more pressure than a normal match: Axar on Ind vs Pak games



PTI

Colombo, Feb 16: All-rounder Axar Patel conceded that there is an extra layer of pressure around a cricket match between India and arch-foes Pakistan, but said the players try to remain steady-minded by staying away from outside talks about the intensity of the age-old rivalry.

In the latest episode of the showdown between the two teams, India trounced Pakistan by 61 runs at the Premadasa Stadium here Sunday night to advance to the Super Eight stage of the

ICC T20 World Cup.

"Yes, there is pressure. People around you or your family or friends talk to you about it. So, yes, there is a little more pressure than a normal match," Axar said in the post-match press conference. "As professional cricketers, we just focus on controlling our emotions. We don't think too much about the rivalry or put extra pressure on ourselves because of it," he added.

"We are seeing them as a team. So, we are not thinking about these rivalries etc. We are just focusing on cricket. So, whenever I

am playing, I treat it as one match against an opponent."

Ishan Kishan played a sensational 40-ball 77 to lift India a competitive 175 for seven, and Axar lauded the opener for playing a game-changing innings.

"Yeah, obviously the way he batted, I think one of the great knocks, because it was not so easy, the ball was spinning, some were going straight under light, so it was not easy. It's just that the form he has had in domestic cricket — he has carried it forward to the New Zealand series and then in the last match also he scored 50.

China grants UK, Canada visa-free entry, raising total to 79 countries

PTI

Beijing, Feb 16: British and Canadian citizens can enter China without a visa starting Tuesday, bringing to 79 the number of countries granted visa-free access in a bid to boost tourism and business.

China has expanded eligibility for the programme significantly in the last two years. Visitors can stay for up to 30 days for business, tourism, exchange

programmes and to visit family and friends.

Most Europeans qualify for visa-free entry, along with some from select countries in other regions including Latin America, Southeast Asia and the Middle East.

Citizens of a few other countries, including the United States and Indonesia, can enter for 10 days if they are in transit — meaning they have a ticket departing for a different country

than they arrived from.

Business executives and tourists have welcomed the change, as the China visa application process can be a relatively cumbersome one.

The UK and Canada are being added following visits to China last month by their prime ministers, Keir Starmer and Mark Carney. Both are relatively new leaders who are trying to revamp ties with Beijing after a downturn in recent years.

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Watch List

Tuesday, 17th Feb

O' Romeo

SAJID NADIADWALA PRESENTS

VISHAL BHARDWAJ FILM

O'ROMEO (A)

HINDI WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES - 01:45 PM

HINDI ATMOS - 11:30 AM, 03:15 PM, 06:45 PM

CRIME 101

CRIME 101 (A)

ENGLISH WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES

11:00 AM

TU YAA MAIN

ANAND L. RAO PRESENTS

KOLUR PATEL AND SHANISHAH STUDIO PRODUCTION

UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF

TU YAA MAIN (U/A 16+)

HINDI - 02:45 PM, 06:15 PM

Wuthering Heights

WUTHERING HEIGHTS (A)

ENGLISH WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES

11:55 AM

BORDER 2

BORDER 2 (U/A 13+)

HINDI - 05:30 PM