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Preserve Jammu's heritage, uphold legacy of values: LG Sinha

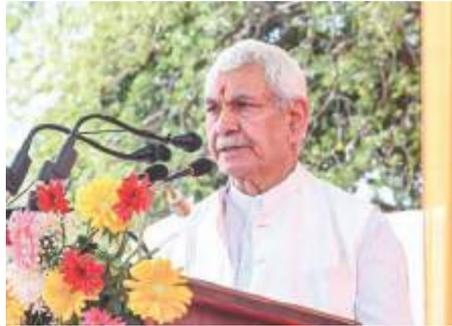
'Traditions have taught us to rise above divisions of caste, creed, artificial boundaries'

KNO Desk

Jammu, Mar 13: Calling upon practitioners of literature and arts to preserve Jammu's rich heritage, Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Friday asked the youth to uphold the living legacy of values passed down through generations.

Speaking at the inaugural ceremony of two-day literary-cultural conclave "Sahitya Sanskriti Samagam", organised by University of Jammu here, LG Sinha, according to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) said, "Jammu's traditions in literature, culture, and spirituality have taught us to rise above divisions of caste, creed, and artificial boundaries. The values embedded in our culture embody an ideology that places humanity above all."

He commended the University of Jammu for its steadfast commitment to preserving and promoting the region's cultural ethos and making its mark among the country's top universities.



The Lieutenant Governor said the society shaped by our abundant literary and cultural wealth will determine who we are and what we can become.

He urged everyone to reflect in this festival of literature and culture on the true identity that binds us and instills a profound sense of belonging.

"True confluence of culture and literature means engaging with the soil through diverse art forms, infusing new resonance into society's soul," he said.

Paying homage to great

luminaries and illustrious literary personalities, the Lieutenant Governor emphasised that a region's identity is not defined merely by economic achievements; it shines through its stories, songs, and the vibrant hues of its artisans. He said that the society's enlightened minds must recognize folk arts and folk literature as Jammu's living vitality.

"Our folk traditions do not dwell in libraries; they thrive in writers' quills, singers' songs, folk dance footprints, and | More on P6

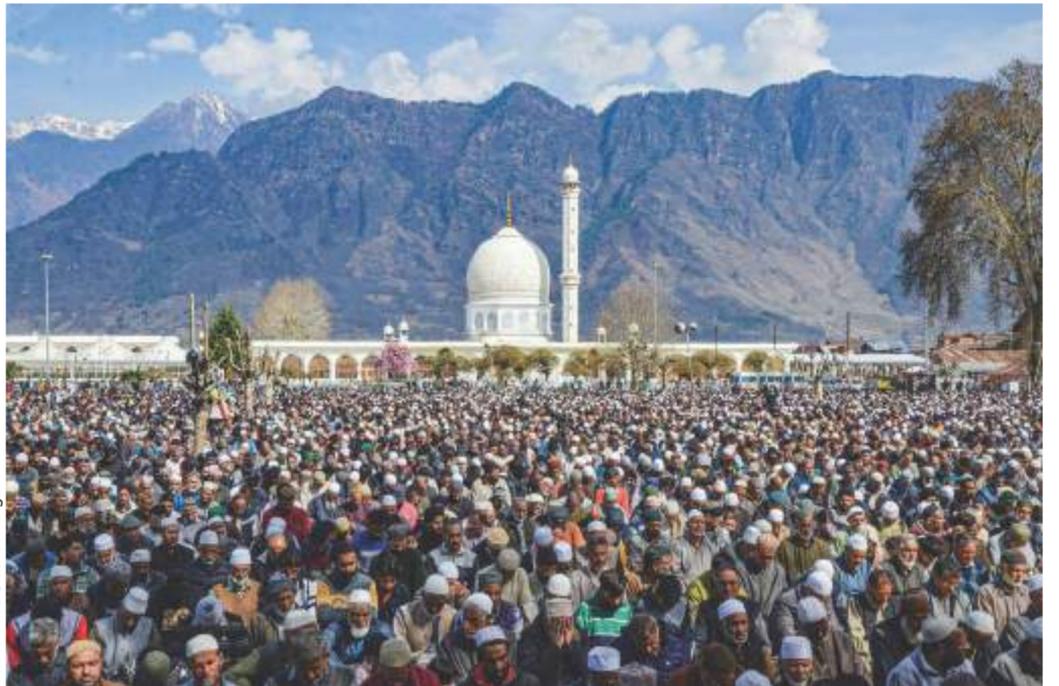


Photo: KNO Shah Jehangir

Jumat-ul-Vida observed with religious fervour

- Over 1.5 lakh devotees gather at Hazratbal Shrine
- Massive congregations across Valley
- Authorities arrange special buses
- Dr Farooq joins prayers

Rehan Qayoom Mir

Srinagar, Mar 13: Walking with the support of a wooden stick and moving slowly through the sea of people, 80-year-old Ghulam Nabi finally found a place in the front rows of devotees gathered at the revered Hazratbal Shrine on Friday.

Each step was slow but determined. For Nabi, age was no barrier as devotion pulled him towards the

shrine on the last Friday of Ramadan—Jumat-ul-Vida.

"I have been coming here for decades for Jumat-ul-Vida prayers. Even if my legs grow weak, my faith brings me here," he said moments before joining thousands of worshippers in prayer while speaking with the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO).

Nabi was among an ocean of devotees who thronged Hazratbal to offer congregational

prayers on Jumat-ul-Vida, one of the most spiritually significant days for Muslims.

From the early hours of the morning, streams of devotees from different districts of Kashmir could be seen heading towards the shrine.

Many walked long distances while others arrived in buses and private vehicles, filling the roads leading to Hazratbal with people eager to offer prayers and supplications. | More on P6

Unspent CDF balances must be spent first: J&K Govt

- ◆ Circular cites non-lapsable nature of CDF
- ◆ DCs told to furnish yearly balance details

KNO Special Correspondent

Jammu, Mar 13: The Jammu & Kashmir Government on Friday directed officers that the unspent Constituency Development Fund (CDF) balance from a preceding financial year shall be prioritised for utilization under the scheme in the next fiscal.

As per the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), citing CDF scheme guidelines, which state that funds under the scheme are non-lapsable, the government instructed officers that "any unspent funds under each activity, if available as on 31st March of every year with the District Development Commissioner or executing agencies, shall | More on P6

HM Shah-led panel clears additional disaster relief aid of Rs 330.34 cr for J&K

Sajid Raina

Srinagar, Mar 13: The Centre has approved 330.34 crore as additional financial assistance to Jammu and Kashmir from the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) to support relief measures for natural disasters during 2025, the Union Home Ministry said on Friday.

The assistance, as per the agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), was cleared by a high-level committee chaired by Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

According to an official statement, the funds have been sanctioned for areas affected by floods, flash floods, cloudbursts, landslides and cyclonic storm 'Montha' during 2025.

The committee approved a total of Rs 1,912.99 crore as additional central assistance for six states and Union territories. Of this, Rs 330.34 crore has been allocated to Jammu and Kashmir.



Other states receiving assistance include Andhra Pradesh (Rs 341.48 crore), Chhattisgarh (Rs 15.70 crore), Gujarat (Rs 778.67 crore), Himachal Pradesh (Rs 288.39 crore) and Nagaland (Rs 158.41 crore).

The assistance will be provided from the National Disaster Response Fund and will be subject to adjustment of 50 per cent of the opening balance available in the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) for the year, the ministry said. The Union government said

the additional assistance is over and above the funds already released to states under the SDRF.

The ministry said that during the financial year 2025-26, the Centre has released Rs 20,735.20 crore to 28 states under the SDRF and Rs 3,628.18 crore to 21 states from the NDRF.

It added that Rs 5,373.20 crore has also been released to 23 states from the State Disaster Mitigation Fund and Rs 1,189.56 crore | More on P6

Cabinet approves 18% passenger fare hike

- ◆ Gives go-ahead to enhancing allowances of ministers, MLAs
- ◆ 136 GMC faculty posts to be created

KNO Special Correspondent

Jammu, Mar 13: The Cabinet on Friday approved an 18 percent hike in fares for all passenger vehicles, sources disclosed.

Sources told news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) that Chief Minister Omar Abdullah chaired a Cabinet meeting here this morning in

which several important decisions were taken. The proposals cleared by the Cabinet will go to the Lieutenant Governor for approval.

According to sources, the Cabinet greenlighted the proposal of an 18 percent hike in fares for all passenger vehicles and fixed e-rickshaw fare at Rs 15 per kilometre, e-auto at Rs 25 for the first kilometre and Rs 20 thereafter.

Sources said the Cabinet also gave its approval to the enhancement of allowances for Ministers, Members of the Legislative Assembly, the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, and | More on P6

Cabinet condemns attack on Farooq Abdullah

KNO Special Correspondent

The Jammu & Kashmir Cabinet on Friday unanimously condemned the attack on National Conference president Dr. Farooq Abdullah, sources disclosed. Sources told news agency—Kashmir News Observer | More on P6

J&K Govt to overhaul rules for class IV jobs

High-level panel to revisit qualifications, recruitment process; 12351 MTS vacancies in depts

KNO Special Correspondent

Jammu, Mar 13: In a significant move, the Jammu and Kashmir Government has decided to review the rules governing the appointment of Class IV employees, commonly referred to as multi-tasking staff.

To initiate the process, as per the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), the government has constituted a high-level committee under the chairmanship of the Administrative Secretary, Finance Department. The committee also includes the Administrative Secretary, General Administration Department; Administrative Secretary, Skill Development Department; and Administrative | More on P6

Anantnag's Nagam village bakes its way to US, Saudi Arabia, Russia

15 bakery shops, 200 workers; traditional taste, quality ingredients drive demand abroad

Umair Gull Ganie

Kokernag (Nagam), Mar 13: Nagam village in the Kokernag area of south Kashmir's Anantnag district is gaining recognition for its traditional bakery products, which have found their way to the United States and several other foreign countries due to their distinctive taste.

Local bakers told the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) that the village has a long-standing tradition of preparing Kashmiri bakery items, which are now reaching overseas markets informally through relatives and traders living abroad. They said the unique flavour, traditional preparation methods



and use of quality ingredients have made these products popular among Kashmiris living overseas.

Residents said visitors to the area often carry these bakery items to countries such as the United States | More on P6

India to host first-ever national conference on cold water fisheries in Sgr

Press Information Bureau

New Delhi, Mar 13: In a landmark initiative, the Department of Fisheries, Government of India, is set to organize the first-ever National Conference on Cold Water Fisheries in Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir, on March 14, 2026. The event will be held at the Sher-e-Kashmir International Conference Centre (SKICC) and aims to chart a strategic course for the sustainable growth of India's cold water fisheries sector.

The conference is being held under the guidance of Union Minister Rajiv Ranjan Singh, Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry & Dairying (MoFAHD), and Panchayati Raj. The event will witness the presence of distinguished dignitaries including Manoj

Sinha, Lieutenant Governor of Jammu & Kashmir; Omar Abdullah, Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir; Prof. S.P. Singh Baghel, MoS, MoFAHD; George Kurian, MoS, MoFAHD; and Javid Ahmad Dar, Minister of Agriculture Production, Jammu & Kashmir.

This pioneering national dialogue aims to explore opportunities for harnessing the vast potential of India's cold water fisheries, which are primarily located in high-altitude regions of the Himalayas, Northeast, and select peninsular zones. Covering over 5.33 lakh square kilometers of mountainous terrain, these ecosystems are home to more than 278 identified cold water fish species, offering immense prospects for livelihood generation, biodiversity conservation, | More on P6

Northern Army Commander chairs security meet with DGP, paramilitary chiefs in Jammu

Real-time intelligence sharing, counter-terror coordination top agenda



Yogesh

Jammu, Mar 13: The General Officer Commanding-in-Chief (GOC-in-C) of the Army's Northern Command, Lieutenant General Pratik Sharma, chaired a weekly coordination meeting of key security stakeholders at Police headquarters here.

According to the details available with the news

agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), Director General of Police Nalin Prabhat and other senior officers from various paramilitary forces and security agencies attended the meeting.

It reviewed the prevailing security situation and deliberated upon the steps taken to strengthen counter-terror coordination across Jammu and Kashmir. | More on P6

Passport Office Srinagar to hold special passport service drive today

Passport applications to be processed at POPSK Anantnag, Baramulla



KT NEWS DESK

Srinagar 13 March: The Passport Seva Project (PSP) under the Ministry External Affairs, Government of India will conduct a special passport service drive on March 14, 2026 (Saturday) in view of the high demand for passport services within its jurisdiction.

As part of the initiative, the Passport Office Srinagar, as per PIB statement, will facilitate passport application processing at the Post Office Passport Seva Kendra Anantnag and Post Office Passport Seva Kendra Baramulla, which will remain functional on the said date.

B. S. Rawat, Regional Passport Officer, Srinagar, said that the special drive has been organised to

facilitate applicants facing delays due to high demand and to provide faster access to passport services within the region.

Applicants can avail passport services by booking an appointment through the official Passport Seva portal and selecting their preferred location, POPSK Anantnag or POPSK Baramulla, along with the available time slot for the specified date.

Applicants are required to visit the designated centre at the scheduled time with the appointment confirmation and carry all requisite documents in original.

For further information, applicants may visit the official Passport Seva website or contact the Regional Passport Office Srinagar.

DDC Anantnag reviews progress of RDD Sector

KT NEWS DESK

ANANTNAG, MARCH 13: To assess the physical and financial progress of Capex and Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) implemented by RDD in the district, District Development Commissioner (DDC) Anantnag, Dr. Bilal Mohiud Din Bhat on Thursday chaired a review meeting at Dak Bungalow, Khanabal.

During the meeting, the DDC, as per an official statement, conducted a comprehensive review of key rural development programmes, including MGNREGA Scheme, PMAY(G), RGSA, Panchayat Ghars, Common Service Centres (CSCs) and other works being executed under District Capex, UT Capex and MPLADS.

Reviewing implementation of MGNREGA, the DDC assessed both physical and financial progress, including workforce participation and key performance indicators under the scheme.

It was informed that out of 9412 works taken up during 2025-26, 7686 have been completed and 31.44 lakh PDs were generated.

The DDC laid emphasis on maintaining transparency in execution of works besides timely completion of approved projects. On



PMAY-G, the meeting was informed that 324 landless beneficiaries in the district were identified under the AWAASPlus PWL Survey; land was allotted for 31 of those by revenue authorities and houses have been sanctioned in their favor.

Further, 276 cases were rejected after verification, and 17 cases are presently under consideration.

The DDC directed concerned officers to expedite the resolution of pending cases and ensure that eligible beneficiaries receive housing assistance without delay.

In connection with RGSA, the meeting discussed initiatives

aimed at strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions through capacity building, improved governance practices and institutional strengthening at the grassroots level. The DDC stressed the effective utilization of RGSA funds for enhancing the functional capacity of Panchayats.

The progress of Panchayat Ghars and Common Service Centres (CSCs) for the financial year 2025-26 was also reviewed. Officials briefed the chair that against a target of 58 Panchayat Ghar Works, 54 have been allotted, 47 taken up and 30 stand completed/handed over indicating

a progress of 64 against taken up works. Similarly, 30 CSCs have been completed/handed over out of total 48 taken up against a target of 59 CSCs.

On Initiative of Panchayat Learning Centres (PLCs), one is partly operational and 4 more have been nominated in FY 2025-26. Advances made on Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI), which aimed at evaluating governance performance of Panchayats across various development indicators, were also discussed.

Taking stock of works under District Capex, UT Capex and MPLADS, the DDC stressed strict adherence to timelines, quality standards and effective monitoring of projects. He directed officers to remove bottlenecks and ensure developmental benefits reach rural communities in effective manner.

Reiterating the administration's commitment to inclusive and sustainable rural development, Dr. Bilal issued instructions to identify and prioritize works for developing playfields in Panchayats without these amenities. He also called for enhancing rural sanitation and cleanliness through effective implementation of SBM(G) and other initiatives.

No back-log of contract payments at treasuries: DGAT

KT NEWS DESK

JAMMU, MARCH 13: Directorate of Accounts and Treasuries (DGAT) has completely negated the recent media reports regarding delay in contract payments, terming them false and inaccurate.

In a statement issued here, the DGAT puts on record that all liability on account of contract payment has been cleared and there is no back-log so far as contract payment at treasuries is concerned. "The fact is that the Department has released full funds under Capex", the statement reads.

The DGAT, as per an official statement, has further requested the media organisations that in the interest of balanced and professional reporting, Finance department's version regarding these matters may also be included.

Jal Mahotsav Pakhwada District Admin Bandipora celebrates Jal Arpan Diwas

KT NEWS DESK

BANDIPORA, MARCH 13: As part of the ongoing Jal Mahotsav Pakhwada, the District Administration Bandipora celebrated Jal Arpan Diwas at two Water Supply Schemes (WSS) in the district Friday.

The programmes, as per an official statement, were organised at WSS Konan Babagund in Block Arin and WSS Pehlipora Chandergeer, where the completed water supply schemes were formally handed over to the local communities for operation and maintenance.

Officials from the Jal Shakti Department, (Hydraulic) Division Bandipora, along with representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions and local residents, participated in the events.

Mission YUVA

Potential entrepreneurship mela organised in Pahalgam

KT NEWS DESK

ANANTNAG, MARCH 13: Department of Employment, Anantnag in collaboration with Sub-Divisional Administration Pahalgam, Friday organised a Potential Entrepreneurship Mela under Mission YUVA at Town Hall Pahalgam.

The event, as per an official statement, was attended by SDM Pahalgam, Qaiser Mehmood as Chief Guest and was also attended by District Employment Officer (DEO), officers from various line departments, representatives from banks, members of Team

Mission YUVA and aspiring entrepreneurs.

Addressing the gathering, the DEO briefed about the objectives and opportunities being provided under Mission YUVA, emphasizing the importance of youth entrepreneurship and self-employment initiatives launched by the Government.

During the programme, representatives from various banks assured youth of timely processing and disbursement of financial assistance under Mission YUVA.

The highlight of the program was the successful

entrepreneurs sharing their inspiring stories and motivating youth to take up entrepreneurship as career option.

Speaking on the occasion, SDM Pahalgam urged the youth to actively avail the benefits of Mission YUVA and encouraged them to explore self-employment opportunities under different government schemes. He asked the bank representatives to ensure disbursement in respect of all pending eligible cases so that the youth are provided meaningful employment in a time bound manner.

He further advised the

successful entrepreneurs to serve as ambassadors for motivating others and become catalysts for effective implementation of the flagship initiative.

Earlier, the SDM inspected the stalls installed by the concerned departments and financial institutions associated with implementation of Mission YUVA and other self-employment schemes.

The event served as an important platform to connect youth with financial institutions and concerned government agencies.

Jal Mahotsav Pakhwada

District Admin Bandipora celebrates Jal Arpan Diwas

KT NEWS DESK

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Officials from the Jal Shakti Department, (Hydraulic) Division Bandipora, along with representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions and local residents, participated in the events.

During the programmes, speakers highlighted the objectives of the Jal Jeevan Mission

and emphasised the importance of community participation in the operation and maintenance of water supply schemes to ensure sustainable and reliable drinking water services under the Har Ghar Jal initiative.

Awareness sessions and



demonstrations on water quality testing were also conducted to sensitise the public about the importance of safe drinking water and regular monitoring of water quality.

SKUAST-K joins ICAR-NCVTC Network as Mycoplasma Repository

KT NEWS DESK

SRINAGAR, MARCH 13: In a move that cements Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technologies of Kashmir's status as a premier research institution, variety's Faculty of Veterinary Sciences & Animal Husbandry Shuhama has been formally inducted into the Indian Council of Agricultural Research's National Centre for Veterinary Type Culture (ICAR-NCVTC) network.

The prestigious national recognition designates the Veterinary Faculty Shuhama as a specialized repository unit for Mycoplasma cultures, positioning SKUAST-K at the forefront of national efforts to combat economically important livestock diseases.

The inclusion was formalised during the XIVth Annual Review Meeting of the ICAR-NCVTC Network Project held at the NASC Complex, New Delhi.

The meeting, as per an official statement, was chaired by Dr Raghavendra Bhatta, Deputy Director General, Animal Science, ICAR, and attended by Dr Divakar Hemadri, ADG, Animal Health; Dr TK Bhattacharya, Director, ICAR-NRCE, and Dr RK Vaid, Head of Division, NCVTC.

As a designated repository unit, the Mycoplasma Laboratory at Shuhama will play a vital role in the collection, identification and preservation of veterinary pathogens. The collaboration is set to significantly enhance the university's research capacity and its contribution to national biosecurity.

Agriculture Dept Kashmir organises valley-wide training program on Scientific Beekeeping



KT NEWS DESK

SRINAGAR, MARCH 13: In a significant initiative to promote beekeeping as a viable livelihood option and equip beekeepers with the latest scientific practices, the Directorate of Agriculture Kashmir Friday launched a comprehensive seven-day training program on Scientific Beekeeping across the Kashmir Valley.

The program, as per an official statement, was inaugurated by Director Agriculture Kashmir, Sartaj Ahmad Shah, at Directorate hall Lalmandi Srinagar. The training at Lalmandi serves the central districts, while parallel sessions are being conducted for North Kashmir at the Faculty of Agriculture, Wadura, and for South Kashmir at the DAK Bungalow, Anantnag.

The training aims to acquaint

existing and aspiring beekeepers with modern, scientific methods of apiculture, including colony management, disease prevention, honey extraction techniques, value addition of hive products, and strategies to enhance pollination services for better crop yields, particularly in oilseed and horticultural crops.

Sartaj Ahmad Shah, while inaugurating the program at Lalmandi, emphasized the importance of scientific beekeeping in boosting rural economies, generating employment opportunities, and supporting sustainable agriculture in the region. He highlighted that beekeeping not only provides additional income to farmers but also plays a crucial role in enhancing biodiversity and agricultural productivity through improved pollination.

Awareness Programme on Intergenerational Bonding held at CCI Palaash Reban

KT NEWS DESK

BARAMULLA, MARCH 13: A one-day Mega Awareness Programme on Intergenerational Bonding was successfully organized by the Department of Social Welfare Baramulla at CCI Palaash, Reban Rafiabab on March 12, 2026.

The programme, as per an official statement, witnessed enthusiastic participation from a large number of senior citizens and members of the local community. Various activities were organized during the event to encourage interaction, understanding, and bonding between different generations.

As part of the programme, a plantation drive was conducted within the premises to promote environmental awareness and responsibility among participants. Several indoor recreational games including chess, carrom, and table tennis were also organized, which provided an opportunity for friendly interaction and engagement among participants of different age groups. Officers from various government departments also participated in the programme, reflecting strong interdepartmental coordination and support for social welfare initiatives.

The Superintendent of CCI Palaash, Bharat Bushan Koul, appreciated the active participation of senior citizens, officers from various departments, and local residents, which contributed to the successful conduct of the programme.

From Office of the Advocate Meer Yousha & Associates Lic. No. 335/20

Phone No: 700609320

In the case of

Arshed Hussain Wani

S/o Gulam Ahmed Wani

R/o Soitang Lasjan, Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir-191101

(Caveator)

Vs

PUBLIC AT LARGE

(Caveat being under Section 148-A of C.P.C.)

(Non-Caveators)

The caveator has reason to believe/apprehension that a suit or any other type of proceeding before the Hon'ble Court may be filed on some relief/order misrepresent and cooked story and on the basis of distorted facts/misrepresent and lost and story and it may succeed before that caveator is given opportunity of being heard by the Hon'ble Court before passing any order

Jumat-ul-Vida: Buses roll as Hazratbal calls



Pic: Jahangir Shah (KNO/KT)

REHAN QAYOUM MIR

Srinagar, Mar 13: Thousands of devotees thronged the revered Hazratbal Shrine on Friday for Jumat-ul-Vida prayers, prompting authorities to press special buses into service to facilitate their movement, even as the massive rush led to heavy traffic congestion on several routes across the city.

Officials said that around 22 buses of the Jammu and Kashmir State Road Transport Corporation (JKSRTC) and 25 buses operated by Srinagar Smart City Limited (SSCL) were deployed to ferry devotees from different parts of Srinagar to Hazratbal and back.

Despite the transport arrangements and traffic diversions put in

place by authorities, several roads leading to Hazratbal and adjoining areas witnessed heavy congestion as thousands of people converged on the shrine.

Devotees said the roads remained choked for long periods due to the overwhelming rush of vehicles and pedestrians.

"We remained stuck in traffic for quite some time before and after the prayers and eventually had to walk as the roads were completely packed," said Nazir Ahmad, a devotee who had come to offer prayers at Hazratbal.

Several others also reported similar experiences, saying that movement of vehicles became extremely slow due to the large number of devotees returning from the shrine at the same time.

"There was a huge rush of people and vehicles on the roads. While the buses helped many reach the shrine, the traffic situation became difficult to manage once the prayers concluded," another devotee said.

Notably, traffic personnel were deployed at various junctions to regulate the movement of vehicles, while authorities maintained that special arrangements, including additional buses and diversions, were made to ensure devotees could attend the prayers without major inconvenience.

However, the large gathering led to traffic bottlenecks at several points around the shrine and adjoining localities, locals and eyewitnesses said—(KNO)

Bhaderwah road accident kills 2 of family

KT NEWS DESK

Doda, Mar 13: A husband and wife died and their two children were injured after the car they were travelling in met with a road accident near Basti Pul Nalthi on the Bhaderwah-Bani road on Friday morning.

Four members of the same family were travelling in the vehicle at the time of the mishap. The deceased have been identified as Zulfiqar Ali (47) son of Abdul Latief, resident of Lawang Bani and his wife Rehana Begum (42). Their two sons, Kamran and Arish sustained injuries in the accident. The injured were immediately shifted to Sub-District Hospital Bhaderwah for treatment and were later shifted to government medical college Hospital Doda. As per doctors, the victims sustained multiple injuries but are stable and are presently under observation.

District Administration Doda promptly ensured that the injured persons received immediate medical attention and all required treatment.

Meanwhile, Union Minister Dr. Jitendra Singh telephonically spoke with Deputy Commissioner Krishan Lal and directed the district administration to ensure proper care of the injured and extend all possible assistance.

Meanwhile, the Deputy Commissioner visited the Government Medical College here to enquire about the condition of the injured.

The hospital authorities briefed the Deputy Commissioner about the condition of the injured and the treatment being provided to them at the hospital. He directed the Chief Medical Officer and attending doctors to ensure the best possible medical treatment and proper care for the injured.

Continued on www.kashmirthunder.in

New Delhi-Katra special train run extended

KNO

Jammu, Mar 13: Taking into account the surge in passenger traffic and the convenience of devotees, the Jammu Division of Northern Railway has decided to extend the operational period of the special reserved train No. 04081/04082 (New Delhi-Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra).

According to a statement, the decision has been taken in view of the large number of pilgrims expected to visit the shrine for Darshan of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi during the auspicious occasion of Chaitra Navratri.

The extension of the special train service is expected to ensure a smoother and more comfortable travel experience for devotees travelling to Katra during the festive period.

The details of the extended train services are as follows: Train No. 04081 running from New Delhi to Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra, which was earlier scheduled to operate from February 21 to

March 8, 2026, will now run for an extended period from March 17 to March 30, 2026, with a total of 14 trips.

Similarly, Train No. 04082 operating from Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra to New Delhi, previously scheduled from February 22 to March 9, 2026, has also been extended and will run from March 18 to March 31, 2026, completing 14 trips during the extended period.

Speaking on the extension of the service, Senior Divisional Commercial Manager, Jammu Division, Uchit Singhal said the Railways remains committed to meeting the growing travel needs of passengers.

He stated that the decision to extend the operation of the New Delhi-Katra Special train was taken in view of its immense popularity among passengers and the 100 per cent occupancy recorded during earlier trips.

Continued on www.kashmirthunder.in

Erratic weather in J&K till Mar-20: MeT



SAJID RAINA

Srinagar, Mar 13: Erratic weather conditions are likely to continue across Jammu and Kashmir till March 20, with spells of rain and snowfall expected at several places, the Meteorological Department said on Friday.

According to the Meteorological Centre Srinagar, the Union Territory is expected to witness generally dry weather on March 13 and 14.

From the night of March 15 to the morning of March 16, the weather is likely to remain generally cloudy with spells of light to moderate rain in the plains and snowfall in higher reaches at many places. The MeT department said that between the night of March 17 and the morning of March 18, brief spells of light rain or snowfall over higher reaches are expected at isolated to scattered places.

Another spell of generally cloudy weather with the possibility of light to moderate rain and snowfall in higher areas is likely at many places between the night of March 19 and the morning of March 20.

The department said weather conditions are expected to remain generally dry between March 21 and 23. However, from March 24 to 25, skies may remain generally cloudy with the possibility of light rain or snowfall over higher reaches at isolated places.

The MeT also issued an advisory warning of the possibility of thunderstorms accompanied by gusty winds at a few places on the evening of March 15.

Farmers have been advised to resume farm operations during the relatively stable weather window between March 13 and 14.

Meanwhile, the weather during the past 24 hours till 8:30 am Thursday saw temperatures remain above normal in many parts of the Kashmir division and several areas of the Jammu division.

Precipitation was reported at several stations across the region, with moderate rainfall recorded in some areas, the department said—(KNO)

Vinai Kumar Saxena sworn in as Ladakh LG

SAJID RAINA

Leh, Mar 13: Vinai Kumar Saxena on Friday took oath as the fourth Lieutenant Governor of Ladakh at a ceremony held in Leh.

According to the details available, the oath of office and secrecy was administered by Arun Palli at the Arya Nagarjuna Auditorium of the Central Institute of Buddhist Studies in Choglamsar.

Earlier, Chief Secretary Ashish Kundra read out the warrant of appointment issued by the President of India, following which Saxena signed the charge certificate.

Saxena succeeds Kavinder Gupta as the Lieutenant Governor of the Union Territory.

After the swearing-in ceremony, he was accorded a ceremonial guard of honour by the Ladakh Police. Speaking



to reporters, Saxena thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah for entrusting him with the responsibility of serving the people of Ladakh.

He said he would visit villages and remote areas to understand issues faced by residents and work on solutions. Saxena said Ladakh has

tourism potential and added that efforts would be made to further develop the sector.

He also spoke about the need for development that takes into account the region's environmental conditions and said focus would be placed on plantation drives, afforestation and development of water bodies. Saxena said

steps would also be taken to improve urban infrastructure, including cleanliness and expansion of sewage treatment facilities.

He said the administration would work in coordination with people from different sections of society.

Among those present at the ceremony were Member of Parliament from Ladakh Mohamad Haneeza Jan, Chief Executive Councillor of LAH-DC Kargil Dr Mohammad Jaffer Akhoun, senior officials of the administration, representatives of civil society organisations and officers from the Army, ITBP and Ladakh Police.

Saxena previously served as the Lieutenant Governor of Delhi. During his tenure, he oversaw initiatives related to urban governance, environmental conservation and public infrastructure—(KNO)

First batch of Kashmiri students evacuated from Iran to Armenia



JAHANGEER GANAIE

Srinagar, Mar 13: The first batch of Kashmiri medical students stranded in Iran has crossed into Armenia and is heading to temporary accommodation, with around 150 students from Kashmir expected to land in Delhi and Mumbai on March 15 as the repatriation process gathers pace.

Students from Urmia University have already crossed the Armenian border and are safe and in stable condition. Those with confirmed flight tickets for March 14 are expected to proceed to the airport shortly for their onward journey to India.

A second group that departed from Qom has reached the border and is awaiting immigration clearance

before crossing into Armenia. Students from Shiraz Medical University have safely reached Qom after being relocated from their campuses and are expected to move towards Azerbaijan or Armenia once their visas are processed.

Around 27 students from Arak Medical University, along with several other Indian students, have also reached the border safely and are staying at a hotel near the crossing while awaiting further travel arrangements. Their flights to India are scheduled for March 20.

Despite the progress, concerns persist. The All India Medical Students Association (AIMSA) said it received distress calls from several Arak University students on the evening of March 12 after a building adjacent to

their dormitory was attacked, triggering panic among those still in the area.

Students from Isfahan University have also requested immediate relocation, citing growing security concerns in the region.

Dr Mohammad Momin Khan of AIMSA, who has been coordinating closely with students and authorities throughout the evacuation, urged the Indian Embassy in Iran to expedite relocation for all remaining students. "AIMSA has been in constant contact with Indian students across different universities in Iran to ensure their safety and smooth evacuation," he said, appealing to the Embassy to immediately shift all Indian citizens to safer locations given the evolving security situation.

Among the returning students, around 150 belong to different districts of Kashmir. Parents in the Valley expressed relief as the evacuation moved forward, but urged the government to continue facilitating the safe return of all students still in Iran.

Students are expected to land at airports in Delhi and Mumbai before proceeding to their respective home states—(KNO)

Israel-Iran conflict hits J&K basmati exports

JAHANGEER GANAIE

Srinagar, Mar 13: The ongoing conflict between Iran and Israel has begun to cast a shadow on India's agricultural export sector, with traders and millers in Jammu and Kashmir's renowned rice belt of R.S. Pura reporting significant disruptions in the export of premium basmati rice.

R.S. Pura basmati, which enjoys a prestigious Geographical Indication (GI) tag, is internationally recognised for its distinct aroma, long grain and superior cooking quality.

The rice is exported in large quantities every year to markets across the Gulf region, Europe, and several other countries. However, exporters say that escalating hostilities in the Middle East have severely disrupted shipping routes, leaving several consignments stranded and creating uncertainty in the export chain.

Traders in the region told the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) that consignments of basmati rice are currently stuck either in transit or at ports due to disruptions in shipping routes to Iran and other Gulf destinations. The Middle East is among the largest consumers of basmati rice, which is widely used in traditional dishes such as biryani.

Sandeep Singh, an owner of one such mill, said the ongoing crisis has brought exports almost to a halt. "Our mill alone exports nearly 20,000 quintals of basmati rice annually to Gulf and European markets. Because of the war, shipments have come to a standstill. Several consignments are stuck, and payments are pending in Delhi," he said.

Singh added that the disruption has created serious financial strain for millers and farmers alike. "Farmers are waiting for their payments, but since exporters are not receiving funds from buyers, we are unable to clear their dues on time. This has created a chain reaction affecting the entire industry,"

he said.

With the situation worsening, traders and mill owners have appealed to the government for immediate intervention. They have requested External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and J&K's Food & Supplies minister Satish Sharma for relief measures for the affected sector.

The exporters have requested the government to explore diplomatic solutions to ease trade disruptions and provide financial support to millers and exporters facing losses.

Among their key demands is a waiver or reduction of loan interest rates to help businesses survive the crisis.

The disruption in exports has also triggered a sharp decline in basmati rice prices in the domestic market. Traders say the price of R.S. Pura basmati has fallen by nearly 600-800 per quintal, dealing a severe blow to farmers who had hoped for better returns after last year's harvest.

"The rice crop was harvested in November, and February-March is normally the peak export season when international demand is highest," Singh said. "Due to the ongoing conflict, the entire export chain has been disrupted, and the industry is facing heavy financial losses."

Farmers in the R.S. Pura belt—one of the most prominent basmati-growing regions in Jammu and Kashmir—fear that if the conflict continues and export routes remain affected, the losses could deepen in the coming months.

Basmati exports are a crucial source of income for thousands of farmers, millers and traders in the region. Any prolonged disruption in international trade could significantly impact the rural economy that depends heavily on this premium crop.

Stakeholders are hoping for a swift resolution to the geopolitical tensions so that normal trade routes can resume and the export cycle for the prized R.S. Pura basmati can be restored—(KNO)

EDITORIAL

India's Long-Term Vision For Energy Security

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's quick and firm response to the LPG supply concerns caused by the West Asia crisis shows leadership that puts the nation's strength ahead of political gains. By directly warning those who are trying to spread unnecessary panic, he has drawn a clear line between genuine public worry and the kind of alarmism that only harms the country. The situation is indeed serious. India depends on imports for 62 per cent of its LPG needs, and with the Strait of Hormuz—a key

shipping route—disrupted, there is a real risk of supply problems. But instead of hiding from the problem or delaying action, the government has responded with openness, coordination, and proactive steps. The Centre's immediate orders to states to keep a close watch on black marketers and hoarders show a clear understanding of how crises work. When genuine supply issues arise, unscrupulous people will always try to profit from the situation. By instructing chief secretaries and police chiefs to stay vigilant, the

government has made it clear that profiteering will not be tolerated. The decision to impose a 25-day gap between LPG refills is a practical step to prevent hoarding while making sure supplies are distributed fairly. The Prime Minister's appeal to citizens to share only verified information acknowledges how powerful rumours can be in making a crisis worse. The assurance that household LPG supplies remain secure addresses the main worry of millions of families across the country. At the same time, the government's

active diplomatic efforts and efforts to find new energy sources reflect a long-term plan for energy security. The push for ethanol and biofuels represents a structural shift toward self-reliance that will reduce India's vulnerability to global shocks. For Jammu and Kashmir, where the hotel and restaurant sector employs around 3.5 lakh people, the government's promise to maintain buffer stocks and crack down on hoarding offers some relief. Exploring alternatives such as induction cooking may also provide temporary

relief for businesses facing supply pressures. In times of global crisis, the real test of any government is not whether challenges arise, but how well it responds to them. By taking firm action against panic-mongering, closely monitoring supply chains, communicating transparently with citizens, and diversifying energy sources, the government is steering the country through these troubled waters with steady hands. The message is clear: India will overcome, just as it always has.

Ramadan: Nurturing The Spirit Of Giving

The psychological impact and spiritual satisfaction felt by the giver are far more enduring than those experienced by the receiver

Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak

There is an anonymous quote that says, "Give and you'll be given more; love and you'll be loved more." The act of giving depicts offering a helping hand to alleviate someone's suffering. In contrast to the materialist and individualist philosophy of life, most religions have made it a core part of their teachings to show kindness, sympathy, empathy, and compassion towards those who are less fortunate.

Giving is not limited to monetary help alone; it may also take the form of offering one's time, a piece of advice, food, clothing, shelter, scholarships, and other essential items needed by those in desperate situations. With this understanding, even those who are not affluent can still help others.

Islam, as a religion that preaches universal brotherhood and shared values, has made charity one of its five central pillars. With its comprehensive understanding of what charity truly entails, Islam calls upon Muslims to share their God-given blessings with their families, friends, neighbours, countrymen, and humanity at large.

The Arabic terms Zakat, Sadaqah, Infaq, and the like are all intended to encourage helping the Muslim community as well as humanity at large.

Philosophically speaking, Islam teaches that within a rich person's wealth lies a right for the poor. No well-to-do individual can be considered a complete Muslim if they are unwilling to share a portion of their income or resources with the poor and needy.

The emphasis on sharing one's wealth is well-justified in the following Qur'anic verse: "You will never achieve righteousness until you donate some of what you cherish. And whatever you give is certainly well known to Allah. (Ali' Imaran: 92)

Contrary to the materialistic belief that giving charity decreases the wealth of an

individual, the Qur'an affirms that charity given to help others in no way decreases, but increases manifold:

"The likeness of those who spend their wealth in the Way of Allah, is as the likeness of a grain (of corn); it grows seven ears, and each ear has a hundred grains. Allah gives manifold increase to whom He pleases. And Allah is All-Sufficient for His creatures' needs, All-Knower." (Surah Al-Baqarah 2:261)

"Who is it that will give Allah a good loan so that He may multiply it for him many times over?" (Surah Al-Baqarah 2:245)

The Benefits of Giving Charity
In many ways, the giving of charity purifies the soul of the giver. Giving, as an act of Ibadah, elevates the status of a believer in the sight of Allah and strengthens the bond between the giver and the recipient of the charity.

Socially, it narrows the disparity between the haves and the have-nots in society. On several occasions, the Prophet of Islam (SAW) mentioned that charity has the capacity to prolong life, avert misfortune, ensure that the giver does not become poor, wash away sins, and bring many other blessings to the giver. The following are some A hadith related to charity:

"Charity increases lifespan."
"Give charity without delay, for it stands in the way of calamity."
"Charity extinguishes sins just as water extinguishes fire."

"Charity does not decrease wealth, and no one forgives except that Allah increases him in honour."

The psychological impact and spiritual satisfaction felt by the giver are far more enduring than those experienced by the receiver. In general, when giving, the giver hopes and prays that his humble contribution is accepted and rewarded in the sight of Allah.

As people commonly say nowadays, "what goes around, comes around." Similarly, in one of the Hadith, Prophet Muhammad



(SAW) said that the kindness we show to others will be reciprocated by Allah Himself: "Those who show mercy will be shown mercy by the Most Merciful." (Reported in Sunan al-Tirmidhi)

Eight Categories of Recipients
In Surah At-Tawbah, Allah has outlined the eight categories of people who are eligible to receive Zakat (obligatory charity):

"Alms are for the poor and the needy, and those employed to administer the (funds); for those whose hearts have been (recently)

reconciled (to Truth); for those in bondage and in debt; in the cause of Allah; and for the wayfarer: (thus is it) ordained by Allah, and Allah is full of knowledge and wisdom." (Al-Taubah: 60)

Charity During Ramadhan
In contrast to the other months of the Islamic calendar, during Ramadhan, Muslims around the world, whether individually or collectively, become more charitable. Zakat al-Fitr, which is a special form of charity given exclusively during the fasting month, becomes

highly prioritized, as one's fasting is not considered complete without fulfilling this obligation. It is the responsibility of the father, as the head of the household, to give Zakat al-Fitr on behalf of each member of the family.

Apart from Zakat al-Fitr, it is a common practice among Muslim communities worldwide to contribute food, drinks, and delicacies for Iftar at mosques, orphanages, and other designated places for breaking the fast.

In addition to these Iftar contributions, individuals and Muslim charitable organizations also provide meals during Suhur.

Like daily prayers and Tilawah, charity done during the month of Ramadhan also carries a greater reward.

To further enhance their acts of charity, some Muslims go beyond food provision by offering the poor, needy, and destitute cash, clothing, and other essential items to help them celebrate Eid at the end of Ramadhan.

In recognizing the spiritual, psychological, and social benefits of charity, we should seize every opportunity to be generous. Furthermore, for the Muslim Ummah to be dynamic and self-sufficient, those who aspire to follow in the footsteps of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) should be inspired to contribute in every possible way, be it money, food, clothing, ideas, knowledge, or skills.

The challenges faced by poor Muslim communities and nations should not be left solely to developed countries to address. Oil-rich Muslim nations, in particular, have a responsibility to support those countries grappling with crises of all kinds. Finally, as we conclude this blessed month of Ramadhan, let us strive to carry the spirit of charity throughout the year.

The views expressed are those of Dr. Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak from the Department of Fundamental and Interdisciplinary Studies, AHAS KIRKHS, IUM

Source: IslamiCity

Yoga Leading The Way In Preventive Healthcare

WHO collaboration and mobile innovation helping scale India's yoga outreach globally

Prataprao Jadhav

Over the past decade, Yoga has evolved from being widely appreciated as a traditional wellness practice to being increasingly recognized as an evidence-based approach to health and well-being. Scientific research, digital innovation, and global collaboration are now helping us understand Yoga not only as India's cultural heritage but also as a powerful public health intervention.

The Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga (MDNIY) has been designated as a WHO Collaborating Centre for Traditional Medicine (Yoga) and re-designated for the period 2025-2029, further reinforcing India's leadership in Yoga research. This recognition reflects the Institute's growing role in promoting evidence-based Yoga interventions for Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs). Key partners in this endeavour include the Ministry of Ayush, AIIMS Delhi, Lady Hardinge Medical College, Central Council for Research in Unani Medicine, and Institute of Nuclear Medicine & Allied Sciences, Delhi.

Through these collaborations, the Centre is developing technical guidelines and advancing research on Yoga-based interventions for non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, obesity, and stress-related disorders. International organisations are also partnering in these efforts, further strengthening the scientific foundations of Yoga and demonstrating its potential as a scalable, cost-effective, and evidence-backed tool for preventive healthcare.

At the institutional level, MDNIY continues to strengthen the scientific foundations of Yoga. Through research laboratories in physiology, biochemistry, biomechanics, and psychology, the Institute examines the psycho-physiological and biochemical effects of Yoga, its role in ageing, and its impact on lifestyle-related disorders. This work reflects India's commitment to integrating traditional knowledge with modern scientific validation.

Digital platforms have further expanded Yoga's reach, bringing evidence-based practices directly into people's daily lives. Initiatives such as the m-Yoga mobile application and the Y-Break

protocol demonstrate how Yoga can be delivered at scale while maintaining its authenticity and therapeutic value. The m-Yoga platform, developed in collaboration with the World Health Organization, has recorded over 1.1 lakh downloads, reflecting a growing interest in accessible digital wellness tools while the Workplace Yoga program Y-Break—a simple 5-10 minute Yoga Break during work hours—has already benefited over 33 lakh government officials.

Research findings and engagement analytics from these initiatives are highly encouraging. Regular Y Break practices have been shown to reduce perceived stress by up to 40 percent within a few weeks. Studies also indicate improvements in mental alertness, emotional resilience, and decision-making, along with positive changes in physiological indicators such as cortisol levels.

Physical benefits include reduced neck, shoulder, and lower back discomfort, improved respiratory efficiency through breathing practices, and enhanced overall vitality—outcomes that are especially relevant in today's sedentary, screen-driven workplaces. Y-Break

have also contributed to lower absenteeism, improved employee morale, and healthier work-life balance, underlining Yoga's potential to strengthen both individual and organisational well-being.

The importance of scientific validation was also emphasized during the National Conference on Naturopathy-2026, jointly organized by MDNIY and the Central Council for Research in Yoga & Naturopathy. Experts highlighted that rigorous research, interdisciplinary collaboration, and robust digital engagement are essential to integrating Yoga into modern healthcare systems and ensuring measurable health outcomes.

These developments reflect a significant shift in the global perception of Yoga. It is no longer viewed merely as a personal wellness practice but increasingly as a pathway for public health, skill development, and wellness-based employment opportunities. By combining tradition with science and technology, Yoga is emerging as a driving force behind the Global Yoga Kranti and strengthening India's leadership in the

international wellness sector.

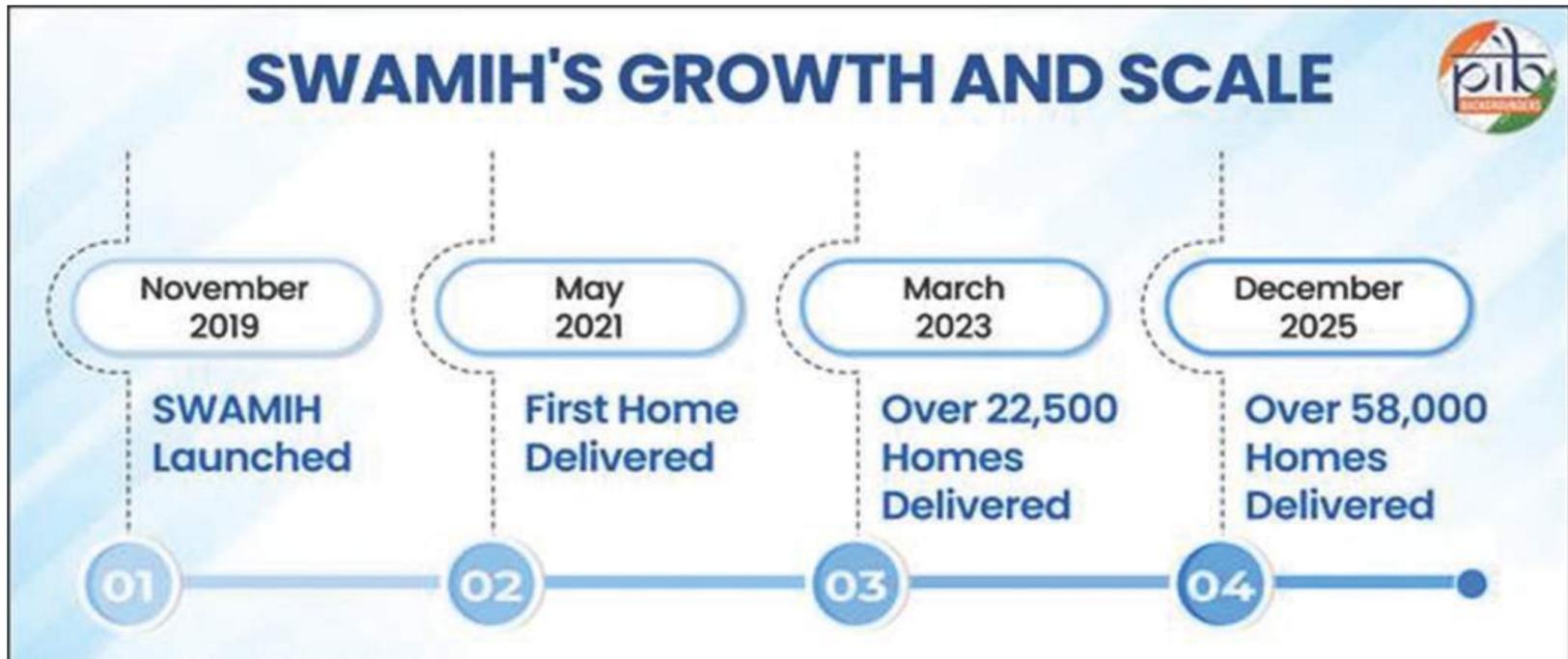
As we approach 13 March, which marks the 100-day countdown to the upcoming International Day of Yoga on 21 June, it provides an opportunity to reflect on how Yoga continues to evolve—from an ancient practice to a globally recognized, evidence-based pathway to health and well-being. Let these hundred days serve as a gentle reminder to begin or renew daily Yoga practice and inspire our families, friends, and communities to embrace Yoga as a way of life.

By integrating Yoga into daily living, we not only strengthen individual health but also foster collective well-being, organisational efficiency, and societal harmony. Today, through research, technology, and international collaboration, India is taking the next decisive step—transforming the timeless wisdom of Yoga into a scientifically validated and universally accessible pathway for global health, balance, and well-being.

The author is Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Ayush and Union Minister of State for Health & Family Welfare

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

SWAMIH: A Policy Lifeline For India's Housing Sector



Housing at the Centre of India's Transformation

For millions of Indian families, owning a home represents stability, security, and a lifetime investment. As India's cities grow and urban aspirations expand, housing has become central to social wellbeing and economic progress, supporting employment and activity across construction, infrastructure, and allied sectors.

Home ownership is seen both as a personal milestone and a foundation for inclusive infrastructure development. Over the years, steady policy attention has strengthened housing supply in the affordable and mid-income segments, with a large number of projects coming up in towns and cities across the country. Many of these projects get stalled due to financial and other constraints.

An Expert Committee on the Rehabilitation of Legacy Stalled Real Estate Projects (MoHUA, 2023) observed that stress in real estate projects largely stems from gaps in financial viability, often resulting in cost overruns and delays. The Committee emphasised the importance of priority financing and recommended a proactive role for the SWAMIH Fund in enabling project completion. The underlying premise was clear: unless stalled developments are carried through to completion, the intended expansion in housing supply cannot be fully realised.

A targeted intervention in the form of SWAMIH was introduced by the Government of India. Launched in 2019, the Special Window for Affordable and Mid-Income Housing Investment Fund provides last-mile financing to housing projects affected by financial constraints. By focusing on completion rather than initiation, SWAMIH seeks to translate partially built structures into delivered homes, safeguard the interests of existing homebuyers, and reinforce confidence in the housing sector. The initiative reflects a broader shift towards outcome-based infrastructure support, where success is measured not only by investment deployed, but by timely delivery and tangible impact on people's lives.

SWAMIH's portfolio spans over 146 residential projects across 20 cities and 12 States, positioning SWAMIH as the largest residential-focused stress resolution platform in the country. Through these interventions, the Fund is expected to facilitate the delivery of more than 1 lakh homes, providing relief to over 2.38 lakh people. Building on the success of the original SWAMIH Fund, the government announced in Budget 2025-26 that SWAMIH Fund-2 will be established to further accelerate the completion of stalled housing projects across the country.

India's Housing Policy Ecosystem

India's housing strategy has evolved as a cohesive policy ecosystem, addressing housing needs across income segments, geographies, and stages of development. The approach combines housing creation, affordability support, rental solutions, and project completion mechanisms. Together, these policies reinforce stability, confidence, and continuity in the housing sector.

Housing Creation and Access: Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana – Urban (PMAY-U)

PMAY-U was launched in 2015 to enable access to pucca housing for eligible households, particularly within Economically Weaker Sections (EWS), Low Income Groups (LIG), and Middle Income Groups (MIG).

Expanding Coverage and Inclusivity: PMAY-U 2.0

PMAY-U 2.0 builds upon earlier learnings to extend housing support to an additional one crore families over the next phase. The scheme involves an investment of 10 lakh crore and will be implemented over a five-year period starting from 1 September 2024. The scheme expands eligibility and incorporates a wider set of beneficiary categories, including vulnerable and special groups.

Rental Housing as a Complement: Affordable Rental Housing Complexes (ARHCs)

Recognising the need for flexible housing options, ARHCs were introduced to provide dignified rental accommodation for migrants and urban workers. The initiative leverages both existing government housing stock and new developments through partnerships.

Completing What Is Already Built: The Role of SWAMIH

While flagship missions focus on creation and access, SWAMIH plays a distinct role by addressing the final stage of the housing lifecycle – ensuring that homes under development are completed and handed over to home buyers. Backed by an aggregate corpus of 15,531 crore from the Government of India, Public Sector Undertaking banks, and LIC, the fund provides financing to facilitate completion of stalled and stressed residential developments nationwide.

From Stalled Projects to Delivered Homes: The Need for SWAMIH

Before the launch of SWAMIH, nearly 90% of stalled housing projects – around 1,509 projects involving approximately 4.58 lakh housing units were concentrated in the affordable and mid-income segments, requiring ~ 55,000 crore of funding to complete them according to a study commissioned by SBI Ventures. Recognising the scale of this challenge, the SWAMIH Investment Fund was established to unlock liquidity in stressed housing projects and reduce financial pressure. The initiative supports the residential real estate ecosystem and its allied sectors such as construction, building materials, and financial services.

The effectiveness of this approach became visible in 2021, when possession was handed over to homebuyers at Rivali Park, in suburban Mumbai. Rivali Park became the first housing project in the country to be completed with SWAMIH funding. This marked a turning point, demonstrating how SWAMIH's support could convert unfinished sites into livable homes. By March 2023, SWAMIH had delivered over 22,500 homes, marking an early milestone in the Fund's implementation. This progress continued to scale, with over 58,000 homes delivered by December 2025, underscoring the growing scale of the Fund's on-ground impact.

Understanding the Structure of SWAMIH

SWAMIH operates as a government-backed investment fund created specifically to support stalled housing projects. It pools capital from multiple investors and deploys it as priority debt to projects that are viable but delayed due to lack of funds. The Government of India acts as the Sponsor of the Fund with the Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, responsible for oversight and strategic direction. Professional fund management is handled by SBICAP Ventures Ltd., a wholly-owned subsidiary of the State Bank of India, ensuring institutional rigor and financial discipline in the deployment and monitoring of

funds.

SWAMIH is a Category-II Alternate Investment Fund. An Alternative Investment Fund (AIF) refers to any fund established or incorporated in India that functions as a privately pooled investment vehicle. It raises capital from sophisticated investors, whether domestic or overseas, and invests these funds in line with a clearly defined investment policy, with the objective of generating returns for its investors. Category II AIFs include real estate funds, private equity funds, funds for distressed assets, etc. Created under Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) regulations with the explicit purpose of facilitating priority debt financing for the completion of stalled residential housing projects, it is a first-of-its-kind social impact investment vehicle in India.

Eligibility: What Qualifies for SWAMIH Funding

Projects considered for funding under SWAMIH must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- 1. Stalled Due to Lack of Adequate Funds**
Only those projects that have been stalled or delayed mainly because of insufficient funding are eligible for SWAMIH support.
- 2. Real Estate Regulatory Authority (RERA)-Registered Projects**
All projects seeking SWAMIH funding must be registered under the Real Estate Regulatory Authority.
- 3. Affordable and Middle-Income Housing Category**
Eligible projects must fall under the affordable housing or middle-income housing segments, which are defined as any housing units that do not exceed 200 sqm RERA carpet area and are priced as follows (as applicable):
Less than INR 2 crore in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region.
Less than INR 1.5 crore in the National Capital Region, Chennai, Kolkata, Pune, Hyderabad, Bangalore, and Ahmedabad.
Less than INR 1 crore in the rest of India.
- 4. Net Worth Positive Projects**
Projects must be net worth positive, meaning those projects where the value of receivables plus the value of unsold inventory is greater than the completion cost and outstanding liabilities at the project-level.
- 5. Priority to Projects Nearing Completion**
Priority is accorded to projects that are in advanced stages of construction and are close to completion.

To widen the scope of investments, projects classified as Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) as well as those under proceedings before the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) are also eligible for consideration. All funding applications are examined by the Fund's Investment Committee after detailed due diligence and consultations with existing lenders and legal advisors. Projects undergoing the corporate insolvency resolution process before the NCLT are eligible for funding until the resolution plan is approved or rejected by the Committee of Creditors.

Milestones and Implementation: What SWAMIH Has Achieved

Over the years, the Fund has demonstrated steady progress in reviving pending housing projects while maintaining a strong balance between social outcomes and financial discipline. Through robust governance, active asset management, and close oversight, it has delivered large-scale impact across housing, employment, and economic activity nationwide.

As on 15 December 2025, over 58,000 homes have been completed across 146 projects. This includes more than 7,000 units

under the rehabilitation and Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) category.

Strong governance and proactive asset management have enabled SWAMIH to recover its investments resulting in 55 full exits and 44 partial exits, reflecting effective project resolution.

The Fund has unlocked over 49,500 crore of capital across 146 projects nationwide, covering more than 90 million square feet of development area, with 44% dedicated to Low-Income Group and Middle-Income Group housing.

These interventions have generated employment for over 30,000 skilled and unskilled workers.

The Fund's activities have contributed an estimated 6,900 crore+ in revenues to the Centre and State through GST, government dues, and stamp duty collections.

Revival of stalled projects has driven significant demand for construction materials, including over 20 lakh tonnes of cement and 5.5 lakh metric tonnes of steel.

Sustainability efforts have resulted in the addition of more than 1.06 lakh trees, enhancing green cover across project sites.

Nearly 50% of the drawn capital has already been returned to investors, highlighting the Fund's ability to maintain social impact alongside financial prudence.

Of the approximately 7,000 crore invested by the Government of India in SWAMIH projects so far, about 3,500 crore has already been recovered and returned to the government demonstrating the fund's financial sustainability.

SWAMIH in Action: Delivering Homes, Restoring Confidence

SWAMIH's impact is most clearly demonstrated through projects that transitioned from prolonged delays to timely completion, delivering homes to thousands of families while ensuring financial discipline and market confidence. Some of these success stories are outlined below.

SS Leaf, Gurgaon

SS Leaf is a residential development in Gurgaon, comprising 670 units. Launched in 2012, the project was delayed by nearly five years due to cash-flow mismatches and the Non-Banking Financial Company (NBFC) crisis.

SWAMIH invested in September 2020 to enable rapid completion. The project received full Occupancy Certificate by June 2022.

Impact and Outcomes

Project completed within ~2 years of investment
62 new units sold; ~ 164 crore collected
Vendor dues cleared and workforce payments stabilised
670 homebuyers received possession of their homes

Mantri Serenity, Bengaluru

Mantri Serenity is a large mid-income residential development located in Bengaluru, comprising approximately 1,800 housing units. Launched in 2011, the project faced delays of nearly three to four years due to funding constraints, slower sales, and weakened cash flows.

SWAMIH invested in the project in September 2020 to support completion. Despite pandemic-related disruptions, the project progressed steadily under close monitoring.

Impact and Outcomes

Key Takeaways

- Launched in 2019, SWAMIH provides last-mile financing to stalled affordable and mid-income housing projects.
- Over 58,596 homes completed so far under SWAMIH, with more than 1 lakh homes expected, benefiting over 2.38 lakh people.
- Revival of projects has generated 30,000+ jobs and significant demand for construction materials.
- SWAMIH Fund-2 announced with a ₹15,000 crore corpus to complete an additional 1 lakh stalled housing units.

Project completed within ~4 years of investment

~350 new units sold, generating collections of ~ 450 crore

Contractor and vendor dues cleared; employee salaries regularised

Legal and regulatory challenges resolved during asset management

Full repayment of 230 crore achieved by April 2024

1,800 homebuyers enabled to receive their homes

Elite Acres, Chennai

Elite Acres is a residential project located in Chennai, with 249 units. Launched in 2017, the project faced delays exceeding two years due to approval delays, the NBFC crisis, and its loan turning NPA.

SWAMIH invested in July 2020 to support completion and stabilise the project.

Impact and Outcomes

Project completed within ~2 years of investment

Entire SWAMIH investment repaid

193 new units sold; ~ 59 crore collected

Contractor and vendor dues cleared

Project completion certificate obtained

Over 250 homes delivered to awaiting buyers

The Next Chapter: SWAMIH Fund 2

With thousands of homes delivered and construction activity revived across multiple cities, the demand for timely housing delivery continues. SWAMIH Fund-2, announced in Budget 2025-26, represents the next phase of intervention, focused on accelerating project completion across the country. The new fund will operate as a blended finance facility with contributions from the Government, banks, and private investors. With a proposed corpus of 15,000 crore, SWAMIH Fund-2 is aimed at the expeditious completion of an additional 1 lakh units, reinforcing the commitment to homebuyers, housing sector revival, and inclusive urban development.

Conclusion: SWAMIH's Role in India's Housing Future

More than just a financing vehicle, SWAMIH represents a targeted policy instrument that bridges financial markets, regulatory frameworks, and social needs. Through structured debt financing, strict eligibility measures, and professional fund management, the initiative has delivered tangible results: completed homes, resumed construction activity, and restored faith among homebuyers. As SWAMIH Fund 2 is rolled out, the Government of India continues to strengthen its commitment to Affordable and Mid-Income Housing, using sophisticated policy tools to address structural challenges in one of the country's most essential sectors.

Iraq caught in crossfire of Iran war, with attacks by both sides on its soil

AP

Irbil (Iraq), Mar 13: Iraq is getting caught in the crossfire of the Iran war as the only country facing strikes from both sides, and that threatens to drag the nation that has so far avoided two years of regional turmoil into a full-blown crisis.

As the war nears two full weeks, Iraq's situation is growing more desperate.

Disruptions to Gulf shipping and strikes on oil fields and infrastructure have all but halted exports, jeopardising a state that relies on such trade for the bulk of its revenue.

If the shutdown continues, Baghdad could be unable to meet its oversized public-sector payroll as soon as next month, risking widespread unrest, two Iraqi Kurdish officials said.

The federal government has appealed to northern Kurdish leaders to resume exports via a pipeline to Turkey, but talks remain deadlocked over long-standing domestic issues.

The officials spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive political matters.

In the meantime, a parallel conflict to the wider war has escalated between Iran-backed Iraqi militia groups and the US.

Near-daily drone strikes have targeted American interests across the country, while the US

has struck back against militia bases to defend its troops.

Since the war began February 28 following a major US and Israeli strike in Iran, drone and missile attacks have targeted American interests in Iraq, including military bases in the Baghdad and Irbil airports, and US diplomatic facilities. Iran and its allied Iraqi militias also have struck oil fields and energy infrastructure to escalate the economic toll.

Unlike other Middle Eastern states touched by the war, Iraq hosts both entrenched Iran-aligned forces and significant US interests.

Its economy depends overwhelmingly on oil, so disruptions to production or exports through the Strait of Hormuz could sharply cut government revenue just as a fraught political transition grips Baghdad.

The longer the conflict lasts, the greater the risk that economic shocks, political paralysis and friction with Iran-backed militias will combine to unravel Iraq's hard-won relative stability.

Proxy battles Leaders in Baghdad and Irbil continue to urge caution and insist the war must not be fought on their soil, but the conflict's trajectory is increasingly slipping beyond their control.

The US has communicated assurances to Iraqi leaders that



the country won't be dragged into the regional war, according to the two Kurdish officials who spoke to AP.

In the war's opening days, drone and rocket strikes by Iran and allied groups began targeting US bases, diplomatic missions and oil facilities.

In Irbil, the capital of Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region, near-daily drone attacks have targeted not only US military and allied interests but also commercial sites and even hotels.

Iran-backed groups have also struck Kurdish groups based in northern Iraq after reports that Washington planned to arm some of them to press against Tehran.

Some Iranian Kurdish leaders have signalled their willingness to mount cross-border operations into Iran if supported by the US.

Iraq is operating under a caretaker government after the US opposed the nomination of former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. Caretaker premier Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, with even more limited powers, lacks the influence to rein in powerful militia groups.

The US has struck back, striking militia sites across the country, including in Jurf al-Sakhr, south of Baghdad, northern Iraq and in al-Qaim, along the Iraq-Syria border.

As in past upheavals, Iraqis have learned to adapt to daily violence that intrudes on everyday life.

At an Irbil cafe, patrons heard the whine of incoming drones, then a muffled explosion, before a plume of smoke rose on the horizon where it was shot down. A waiter urged calm, saying the strikes were aimed at the US

Consulate or airport and posed no direct threat to customers.

Major fiscal shocks The gravest threat to Iraq's stability is disrupted oil production, which could cripple government revenues. The Kurdish officials said Baghdad warned them that public-sector payrolls could be disrupted as soon as next month.

To alleviate the pressure, Baghdad has asked for exports of at least 250,000 barrels per day of crude from fields in Kirkuk via the pipeline to Ceyhan in Turkey that runs across Kurdish territory.

Talks have stalled, however, after Kurdish negotiators conditioned the move on lifting an existing US dollar embargo and restoring economic benefits tied to trade.

Iraq's government ordered production curtailed from oil fields in southern Iraq, where the majority of its 4.8 million barrels per day is produced, after the war all but stopped traffic through the Strait of Hormuz and militias attacked facilities.

Sales from oil account for over 90 per cent of state revenues.

Iraq has one of the world's largest public-sector workforces and pensioner rolls, and past payment delays have sparked mass protests.

Production has been halted at oil fields hit by strikes. In the Kurdistan region, Canada's ShaMaran Petroleum and US private firm HKN have suspended

output at the Sarsang and Atrush blocks.

"If oil exports are disrupted, the immediate impact would likely be a decline in the value of the Iraqi dinar. This would quickly trigger inflation, and within a short time the prices of basic goods could rise sharply," said Farhad Soleimanpour, an Iraqi Kurdish political analyst.

"For the Kurdistan region, the situation could be even more difficult because it does not have its own central bank or significant financial reserves. Iraq may be able to withstand the shock for several months, but the Kurdistan Region would likely face immediate financial pressure," he added.

The war has also battered power supplies.

The Khor Mor gas field in the autonomous Kurdistan region is offline, cutting electricity generation by nearly two-thirds. Where the region once provided 24-hour power, households now receive just four to six hours a day, said Omed Ahmad, spokesperson for the Kurdistan Region's Ministry of Electricity.

Political weaknesses Since the November 2025 election, Iraq has been without a government after the US opposed the return of al-Maliki, the former prime minister.

The war complicates the fraught transition, forcing a caretaker administration with

severely limited powers to manage the fallout.

But that caretaker status also lets Iraqi leaders deflect responsibility by claiming they lack the authority to act, said Iraq analyst Tamer Badawi. "No one wants to take this big responsibility at the moment," he said.

That would mean taking charge and reining in multiple armed groups, from Iran-backed militias targeting US interests to Kurdish-Iranian opposition factions, whose actions deepen fault lines that could spark civil unrest.

Even if some oil is exported via the pipeline, there is no way to assure the infrastructure will not come under attack by militia groups, officials have warned.

Iraq has defied the odds so far, largely avoiding the regional upheaval from the war in Gaza that began in 2023. Political and religious leaders have remained committed to keeping the country out of wider conflict and preserving its stability.

"Iraq faces pressure to maintain neutrality while different political groups inside the country have opposing positions regarding the conflict," Soleimanpour said. "Some factions support closer relations with Iran, while others prefer stronger cooperation with the United States and Western countries. This internal division increases political tension."

CONTD. FROM FRONT PAGE

Preserve Jammu's

artists' brushes and pigments.

With deep responsibility, I call upon everyone, especially youth to serve literature and culture. It upholds the living legacy of values passed down through generations, entrusting you not just with an inheritance but with the duty of its cultural-literary bequest. This tradition teaches us the virtue of inclusion," the Lieutenant Governor said.

He observed that safeguarding our language preserves our memories; nurturing regional art forms builds self-assurance.

"Let us focus on local tales, dialects, and artistic traditions, for every individual's identity draws nourishment from these roots. When generations gather to exchange experiences, cultural and literary heritage transcends the past—it becomes a living dialogue," he said.

The two-day literary-cultural conclave features cultural processions, stalls showcasing indigenous attire, handicrafts, traditional cuisines, books and arts, panel discussions, and series of activities highlighting region's unique identity, honouring languages, folklore, customs, creativity and literary heritage.

On the occasion, the first edition of Jammu University's multilingual magazine 'The Litzine' was also released.

Prof. Umesh Rai, Vice Chancellor, University of Jammu; Prof. Pragati Kumar, Vice-Chancellor, Shri Mata Vaishno Devi University; Prof. K.S. Chandrasekar, Vice Chancellor, Cluster University of Jammu; eminent journalists Rajkishor, Consulting Editor, Amar Ujala and Jai Prakash Pandey, Editor, Sahitya Tak India Today Group; Prof. Neelu Rohmetra, Dean Research Studies; Dr Neeraj Sharma, Registrar; Prof. Sadaf Shah, Coordinator, Sahitya Sanskriti Samagam; Heads of Departments, faculty members of Jammu University, senior officials, prominent citizens and students in large number attended the inaugural ceremony. (KNO)

Jumat-ul-Vida observed

The lawns, courtyards and adjoining roads around the shrine turned into a vast congregation as worshippers raised their hands in prayer seeking peace, prosperity and wellbeing for the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

Officials said that to facilitate the massive gathering, authorities had put in place elaborate arrangements across Srinagar.

They said special bus services from Jammu and Kashmir State Road Transport Corporation (JKSRTC) and Srinagar Smart City Limited (SSCL) with a fleet of modern air-conditioned Tata Ultra EV electric buses were arranged from several parts of the city to ferry devotees to Hazratbal and back, while the traffic department implemented diversions and parking plans to manage the large influx of vehicles.

Officials from the shrine management told KNO that over 1.5 lakh devotees gathered at Hazratbal, situated along the beautiful banks of Dal Lake.

Several devotees complained of heavy traffic congestion on roads leading to the shrine due to the massive rush of people. Some said vehicles remained stuck for long periods, forcing many to walk to their destinations.

One of the devotee Nazir Ahmad told KNO, he had to walk towards Lal Bazar as the roads remained packed with vehicles after the prayers. Others also flagged similar concerns, stating that despite traffic diversions and special arrangements, managing the large influx of devotees proved challenging at several points around the shrine.

Security was also significantly enhanced across Srinagar and other parts of the Valley for

the peaceful observance of Jumat-ul-Vida.

Personnel from the Jammu and Kashmir Police and other security agencies were deployed in large numbers around Hazratbal and other major religious places to ensure smooth conduct of prayers and maintain law and order.

Among the worshippers at Hazratbal was veteran political leader Dr Farooq Abdullah, president of the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference.

After offering prayers, Abdullah said he prayed for lasting peace and stability in Jammu and Kashmir and hoped that conflicts across the world would soon come to an end.

While Hazratbal witnessed massive participation, congregational prayers were not allowed at the historic Jama Masjid Srinagar in the old city.

According to the managing body, Anjuman Auqaf Jama Masjid, a statement issued to KNO said authorities locked the mosque gates from all sides and placed Kashmir's chief cleric Mirwaiz Umar Farooq under house arrest, preventing him from delivering the Friday sermon and leading the prayers.

The Auqaf said that for the seventh consecutive year, devotees were not allowed to offer Jumat-ul-Vida prayers at the Valley's central congregational mosque.

VALLEY-WIDE PRAYERS

Meanwhile, mosques and shrines across the Kashmir Valley witnessed huge congregations as thousands of devotees offered Jumat-ul-Vida prayers.

From North Kashmir districts of Baramulla and Kupwara to South Kashmir's Anantnag, Pulwama and Shopian, people gathered in mosques and prayer grounds to seek divine mercy and pray for peace, harmony and prosperity.

For many like Ghulam Nabi at Hazratbal, the day was about faith that transcends age and hardship.

"Ramadan teaches patience and compassion," he said after the prayers. "Today we prayed for peace for our homes, for Kashmir and for the whole world."

It is important to mention that Jumat-ul-Vida, observed on the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadan, holds special spiritual significance for Muslims across the world. On this day, large congregational prayers are offered in mosques and shrines as believers seek forgiveness, mercy and blessings before the conclusion of Ramzan. (KNO)

J&K Govt to

Secretary, Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Department.

The committee has been mandated to review the statutory order issued by the General Administration Department on January 29, 2022, which re-designated all "Class IV" jobs in Jammu and Kashmir as "Multitasking Staff (MTS)," except sanitation workers and posts requiring technical qualifications.

It has also been tasked with reviewing relevant statutes to suggest appropriate measures regarding the recruitment of Multitasking Staff by recruiting agencies.

The committee will examine the minimum and maximum qualification criteria and recommend the provision of specific qualifications or skill tests to ensure the recruitment of manpower suited to departmental needs.

As per existing rules, the minimum qualification for Class IV jobs is matriculation (10th pass), while the maximum qualification is 12th pass (10+2). Candidates with higher qualifications are not eligible for these posts.

The move comes at a time when 12351 posts of multi-tasking staff are vacant in government departments. Apart from these posts, 3808

gazetted posts and 24507 non-gazetted posts are also lying vacant in J&K. (KNO)

Cabinet approves

the Leader of Opposition.

The Cabinet approved the proposal to amend rules to enhance their allowances for travel, medical care and housing and car loan facilities.

The Cabinet is understood to have also given its go-ahead to the creation of 136 faculty posts (27 Professors, 109 Associate Professors) in Government Medical College Jammu and Government Medical College Srinagar.

Sources said the Cabinet has also given its consent for Ladakh to use the Jammu & Kashmir Real Estate Appellate Tribunal as a joint Real Estate Appellate Tribunal. (KNO)

Cabinet condemns

(KNO) that the cabinet meeting, chaired by Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, condemned the assassination attempt on Dr. Farooq Abdullah and demanded a deeper investigation into the incident.

Dr. Farooq Abdullah had a narrow escape on Wednesday evening when a person, identified as Kamal Singh Jamwal, a resident of Purani Mandi, Jammu, approached him from behind with a pistol and opened fire.

The accused was quickly overpowered by two officers of the Jammu and Kashmir Police's security wing, and the shot fired by him missed the target. (KNO)

HM Shah-led panel

to 21 states from the National Disaster Mitigation Fund.

The government said it continues to support states and Union territories affected by natural disasters and provide necessary assistance for relief and rehabilitation measures.

Notably, J&K witnessed a series of severe weather-related disasters in 2025, resulting in significant loss of life and widespread damage across several districts.

According to official data shared with the Ministry of Home Affairs, about 199 people were killed during the year due to incidents such as flash floods, cloudbursts, landslides and heavy rainfall triggered by intense monsoon activity.

The disasters also led to the death of nearly 11,700 livestock, while more than 8,400 houses were damaged across the Union Territory. Agricultural losses were also substantial, with around 77,915 hectares of crop land affected.

The Jammu division recorded the worst damage, particularly during August when multiple extreme weather events struck the region.

On August 14, a cloudburst in Chashoti area of Kishtwar district triggered flash floods and landslides that killed at least 68 people, including pilgrims travelling along the Machail Mata Yatra route. Several others were injured and some were reported missing following the incident.

Later in the month, on August 26, heavy rainfall triggered landslides along the route to the Vaishno Devi shrine, leaving at least 34 people dead.

The same spell of rainfall also caused flooding in parts of Jammu city, where rising water levels in the Tawi river inundated several residential areas and damaged public infrastructure.

Rescue and relief operations were carried out by local authorities with the assistance of the Indian Army and teams from the National Disaster Response Force.

Officials have linked the frequency and intensity of such events to erratic weather patterns in the Himalayan region, raising concerns about disaster preparedness and early warning systems in vulnerable mountain areas. (KNO)

Unspent CDF

be deposited in the government treasury."

The District Development Commissioners (DDCs) have also been directed to furnish details of such unspent balances to the Finance Department at the end of each financial year.

The Finance Department's circular, further invoking CDF guidelines, states that unspent balances are to be deposited in the treasury for utilization in the next financial year.

"In this context, it is impressed upon all the concerned officers/DDOs that these balances under the deposit head MH:8229 shall be prioritized as first charge for their utilization under the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) Scheme in the subsequent financial year to avoid parking of these funds in Receipt Head:8229, leading to delays in the execution and completion of developmental works," the circular reads. (KNO)

Anantnag's Nagam

and parts of Europe, where the demand for traditional Kashmiri bakery products continues to grow.

Ghulam Mohammad Malik, an elderly resident, said the bakery profession in the village began nearly four decades ago. He said Nagam Bakery has earned a strong reputation because of the quality ingredients used in its preparation.

"High-quality ingredients are used in the traditional bakery here. Bakers from this village have reached every corner of India due to the unique taste of their products," he said.

He added that the bakery items are now reaching countries like the United States and Saudi Arabia, as people travelling abroad often carry them along. "Even Hajj pilgrims take these bakery items to Saudi Arabia and preserve them for months," he said.

Malik said the business has been expanding steadily, with many young people in the village now earning a livelihood through bakery units.

"Around 15 bakery shops are operating in this single village, and the younger generation is also actively joining the trade," he said.

He added that with limited employment opportunities in the Valley, small business ventures like a bakery provide a reliable source of income.

Locals said many people from neighbouring villages are also finding employment in Nagam's bakery shops, with each unit employing around six to ten workers.

Mohammad Iqbal Shah, whose father introduced the bakery business in the village, said their products are well known across the Valley and are now reaching foreign countries as well.

"Our bakery products are known for their taste, and customers are attracted to the village for this reason. We receive orders throughout the year, especially during weddings and other functions. Around 200 people in the village are associated with this business," he said.

Another baker, Bashir Ahmed, said the use of high-quality ingredients like pure ghee has contributed to the popularity of the bakery products.

He said the items are now reaching countries such as the United States, Saudi Arabia and Russia, while the business itself has been firmly established in the village for nearly two decades.

He said that many young people are now turning to the bakery as a source of livelihood. "There are very limited employment opportunities in Kashmir, so starting small businesses like bakery units is a better option for many youth," he said. (KNO)

India to host

scientific aquaculture, and nutritional security.

India's cold water fisheries sector has gained significant momentum under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY), with a dedicated investment of 2,299.56 crore. This funding aims to modernize infrastructure, expand hatcheries, improve seed and feed systems, develop raceway facilities, and strengthen cold chain logistics—laying the foundation for a modern, technology-driven aquaculture ecosystem in these regions.

During the conference, Union Minister Rajiv Ranjan Singh will unveil the "Model Guidelines for the Development of Cold Water Fisheries," distribute scheme benefits to traditional and progressive fishers, cooperatives, and Kisan Credit Card beneficiaries under PMMSY, and present awards to the best Fishery Farmer Producer Organizations (FFPOs) and innovative fisheries start-ups from Jammu & Kashmir.

A series of technical sessions will focus on research, innovation, technology adoption, infrastructure expansion, institutional convergence, and entrepreneurship development—aimed at fostering collaborative growth across states like Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Kerala.

India's premium cold water species such as Rainbow Trout, Brown Trout, and Mahseer have demonstrated high growth potential, with trout production increasing nearly 1.8 times over the past decade. However, the country still relies on imports for Salmon and other high-value species, highlighting the need to boost domestic capacity. The government's National Vision for Cold Water Fisheries 2030 aspires to double the production of trout and Mahseer, creating new livelihoods and strengthening the sector's contribution to the economy.

This conference marks a significant step toward unlocking the full potential of India's cold water fisheries, fostering sustainable development, and ensuring nutritional security for remote and mountainous communities through strategic partnerships, innovative research, and policy reforms.

Northern Army

said a source.

"The discussions focused on strengthening real-time intelligence sharing and ensuring seamless operational integration among different agencies to enable swift responses to emerging security challenges," it said, adding, "The meeting also reviewed the ongoing counter-terror strategy in the Union Territory, with participating agencies reiterating their commitment to maintaining a strong operational posture and adopting a coordinated approach against terrorism."

"Emphasis was laid on maintaining a mission-ready framework and further enhancing synergy among the security forces operating in the region," the source added.

Earlier, the Northern Army Commander visited Basantgarh in Udhampur district to assess the ground security situation and review ongoing counter-terror operations in the area.

During the visit, he was briefed on the existing intelligence grid and the measures being undertaken to strengthen the security architecture in coordination with other stakeholders. "Discussions during the field review focused on reinforcing security mechanisms and ensuring effective coordination between the Army, police and other agencies to counter potential threats," an official said, adding, "The Army Commander also interacted with troops deployed in the area and appreciated their professionalism, commitment and operational readiness in maintaining security and stability in Jammu and Kashmir." (KNO)

PM slams Congress for 'endangering' national security

Launches projects worth Rs 24,250 cr from Assam

PTI

Guwahati, Mar 13: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday attacked the Congress, accusing it of endangering national security by handing over indigenous people's land to infiltrators, while launching projects worth over Rs 24,250 crore on the first leg of his two-day tour to Assam ahead of the assembly polls.

Modi said the state was writing a new chapter of peace and development under the "double-engine" government and that the BJP-led administration was bringing to an end a "historic injustice" towards the tea garden community by granting them land rights for their homes.

Recalling the days of his profession as a tea seller, Modi charged the Congress with neglecting tea garden workers by denying them land rights for decades.

The Prime Minister unveiled projects valued at over Rs 4,570 crore in Kokrajhar and later launched development initiatives worth Rs 19,680 crore in Guwahati.

In the first programme of the day, Modi addressed a public meeting in Kokrajhar district virtually from Guwahati after rain disrupted his travel schedule. He said the sounds of



bombs and gunfire because of insurgency are a thing of the past, and asserted that the BJP ensured long-lasting peace in the region, while the Congress, during its tenure, signed various accords for "selfish political interests."

"The Congress has endangered national security by handing over the land of indigenous people to infiltrators," the PM said, alleging that the grand old party was always in league with the infiltrators and never legally granted land rights to the state's indigenous population.

The Congress handed over Adivasi land to the infiltrators, and in districts like Dhubri and Goalpara, the situation was grim, affecting Kokrajhar's demography, he claimed.

"I am happy Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma is leading

a major drive to clear land from encroachment, and the BJP government has handed rights to the indigenous people," the PM said. Modi alleged that Kokrajhar has witnessed the betrayal of the Congress for decades, as the opposition party had made false promises. "The Congress signed peace accords just for show and for selfish interests, but the BJP worked for permanent peace, and ensured the development of Bodoland," Modi said.

He said that hills of Bodoland echoed for decades with sounds of guns and bomb blasts, but "now those days are over, and it is moving ahead in the path of peace and development."

In an apparent reference to Rahul Gandhi's 'Mohabbat ki Dukaan' (shop of love) slogan, the Prime Minister claimed: "The Congress is a 'jhute vaido ke dukaan' (a shop of false

promises), and with one lie it gives four more 'super lies' as a gift, as they do not intend to fulfill any promise."

In contrast, the model of the 'double engine' government is before the people, and an honest effort is being made to fulfill all the promises made, he said.

"Punish the Congress in the upcoming elections and send a clear message that there is no place for infiltrators in this country," he asked the people.

"In today's programme itself, projects worth more than Rs 4,570 crore have been launched with over Rs 1100 crore to be spent on the development of road infrastructure in Bodoland, which will further strengthen road connectivity in the state," he said. Three new trains — the Kamakhya-Charlapalli Amrit Bharat Express, the Guwahati-New Jalpaiguri Express, and the Narangi-Agartala Express — were flagged off by the PM.

These trains will not only be convenient for the people but also promote trade and tourism, Modi said, adding that a railway workshop will be set up here to help the region become a major logistics hub. In his second programme of the day in Guwahati, the PM dedicated to the nation and laid the foundation for projects worth around Rs 19,680 crore, focusing on infrastructure and energy sectors.

World shares decline, while oil pops above \$100 a barrel over Iran war worries

AP

Hong Kong, Mar 13: World shares retreated on Friday while oil prices again popped above \$100 per barrel as anxiety remained over the Iran war and its impact on supplies of crude oil and gas.

U.S. futures slipped, with the futures for the S&P 500 and Dow Jones Industrial Average down 0.3%.

In early European trading, Britain's FTSE 100 fell 0.7% to 10,235.29. Germany's DAX lost 1% to 23,345.90, while France's CAC 40 dropped 1.2% to 7,887.18.

In Asian trading, Tokyo's Nikkei 225 index slipped 1.2% to 53,819.61. Technology-related stocks saw some of the bigger losses, with SoftBank Group falling 4.5%.

South Korea's Kospi fell 1.7% to 5,487.24.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng lost 1% to 25,465.60, while the Shanghai Composite index was down 0.8% at 4,095.45.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 edged 0.1% lower to 8,617.10.

Taiwan's Taiex was trading 0.5% lower, and India's Sensex dropped 1.8%. Oil prices held steady as Brent crude, the international standard, traded at \$101 per barrel. Benchmark US crude was up 0.5% at \$96.23 per barrel.

On Thursday, Iran's new Supreme Leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, in his first public statements, vowed Iran would keep fighting and continue to use the Strait of Hormuz — a crucial waterway for oil and gas transport which has been effectively closed with significant marine traffic



disruptions — as leverage against the US and Israel.

Roughly 20% of the world's oil is estimated to flow through the strait, and attacks on ships in or around the strait have already heightened concerns "over the scale of supply disruption and persistent shipping bottlenecks," wrote analysts at Mizuho Bank in a commentary.

The remarks from Iran's new leader came after U.S. President Donald Trump said the war was "very complete," which has raised worries over how much longer the tensions could last. Intense strikes hit Iran's capital Tehran Friday morning.

Oil prices have been volatile since the Iran war began. While the International Energy Agency said Wednesday its members would make a record 400 million barrels of oil available from their emergency reserves, some economists believe that would do little to reassure markets. Global

inflation will likely worsen as oil prices jump, and rising fuel costs are already starting to hurt consumers globally. Rising energy prices could also, for example, push up AI and chip development and production costs, some analysts say.

Wall Street recorded losses Thursday following volatile swings this month. The S&P 500 dropped 1.5% and the Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 1.6%. The Nasdaq composite shed 1.8%.

Shares of some of the companies heavily reliant on fuel costs saw bigger drops. Cruise-ship operator Carnival fell 7.9%, and United Airlines sank 4.6%.

In other dealings early Friday, gold and silver prices fell. The price of gold fell 0.8% to \$5,082.70 an ounce, and the price of silver dropped 3.2% to \$82.38 per ounce.

The U.S. dollar rose to 159.43 Japanese yen from 159.34 yen. The euro was trading at \$1.1449, down from \$1.1512.

Rajnath, Yogi inaugurate Green Corridor project in Lucknow



PTI

Lucknow, Mar 13: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Friday inaugurated and laid the foundation stone of multiple phases of the Green Corridor project in Lucknow, aimed at easing traffic congestion and significantly reducing travel time across the city.

At a function held in the state capital, the leaders inaugurated the second phase of the Green Corridor, from Daliganj to Samatmulak Chauraha, and laid the foundation stone for the third and fourth phases of the project. Officials noted

that the Green Corridor is being developed as a major urban mobility project to streamline traffic movement in Lucknow. Once completed, the 28-km-long corridor will connect IIM Road to Kisan Path through multiple phases and is expected to reduce travel time on the stretch from about 30 minutes to nearly 10 minutes.

The first phase of the project, from IIM Road to Pakka Pul, spans 6.8 km and was built at a cost of about Rs 100 crore. The second phase from Daliganj to Samatmulak Chauraha covers about 7 km with an estimated cost of Rs 299 crore. Under

the third phase, a 7.7-km stretch from Samatmulak Chauraha to Shaheed Path will be constructed at a cost of Rs 893.67 crore, while the fourth phase from Shaheed Path to Kisan Path will cover 6.5 km at a cost of Rs 326.05 crore.

The total cost of the four phases of the project is estimated at about Rs 1,618 crore. Officials said a fifth phase covering around 10 km is proposed for the next financial year at an estimated cost of Rs 600 crore.

The government is also planning to monetise certain land parcels linked to the project to generate revenue. Around 40 acres of land at Malesemau in Gomti Nagar Extension Sector-7 has been proposed for monetisation with an estimated value of Rs 930 crore, while an 11-acre plot at Gau Ghat is expected to fetch about Rs 70 crore.

The project is expected to play a key role in improving urban connectivity and facilitating smoother traffic movement in the state capital, officials said.

West Asia conflict: BJD not to organise Iftar, Eid Milan this year

PTI

Bhubaneswar, Mar 13: The BJD on Friday decided not to organise the annual Iftar party and Eid Milan because of the West Asia conflict. Noting that thousands of innocent people have lost their lives and many more have been injured or displaced, the party said the decision was taken in solidarity with those affected by the conflict.

"In such a situation, and in the hope for an end to the war and the establishment of peace, the BJD has decided not to celebrate Iftar and Eid Milan this year," the party said in a statement.

Addressing a press conference here, BJD vice-president and former minister Pratap Jena said the party organises a grand Iftar and Eid Milan every year in the presence of its president Naveen Patnaik, with members of the Muslim community.

Jena said many people from Odisha who are working in West Asia are currently in distress due to the conflict.

"The war has directly affected more than 10 countries and has had an impact on the entire world. Considering these circumstances, the BJD has decided to suspend this year's Iftar and Eid Milan celebrations," he said. Patnaik has also appealed to the public to refrain from any form of celebrations during this tragic time, the statement added.

IndiGo to levy fuel charge for domestic, int'l flights from Mar 14



PTI

New Delhi, Mar 13: IndiGo will start levying fuel charges ranging from Rs 425 to Rs 2,300 on domestic and international flight tickets from March 14 amid the steep surge in jet fuel prices due to the West Asia crisis.

The fuel charge will be Rs 1,800 for South East Asia, China, and Africa flights, and Rs 2,300 for Europe flights.

Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) accounts for nearly 40 per cent of an airline's operational costs.

For each domestic flight, the fuel surcharge announced by IndiGo is higher compared to the Rs 399 being levied by Air India and Air India Express. Akasa Air and Spicejet have not announced the levying of fuel charges so far. While announcing the introduction of the fuel charge, the airline said the measure has been taken due to the significant surge in fuel prices, following the ongoing geopolitical issues in the Middle East.

West Asia crisis Jaishankar holds 4th phone call with Iranian counterpart in 2 weeks

PTI

New Delhi, Mar 13: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar spoke to his Iranian counterpart Seyed Abbas Araghchi — their fourth such conversation since the West Asia crisis erupted — as New Delhi intensifies efforts to secure safe passage for over two dozen Indian-flagged merchant vessels currently stationed on either side of the Strait of Hormuz.

The two foreign ministers held the phone conversation on Thursday night.

Jaishankar and Araghchi spoke on February 28, soon after the US and Israel launched the attack on Iran that killed Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. They also spoke on March 5 and March 10.

"Had another conversation with Iranian FM @araghchi yesterday night. Discussed bilateral matters as also BRICS related issues," the



external affairs minister said on social media. The latest phone conversation came as India ramped up efforts to secure safe passage to the Indian-flagged merchant vessels through the strategic shipping route of Strait of Hormuz that has been partially blocked by Tehran following an escalation in its conflict with the US and Israel.

Global oil and gas prices have

surged after Iran virtually blocked the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow shipping lane between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman that handles roughly 20 per cent of global oil and LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas).

An Iranian readout said Araghchi briefed his Indian counterpart on the latest situation "resulting from the aggressions and crimes" committed by the US and Israel against Iran and

its consequences on the stability and security of the region and the world.

It said the Iranian foreign minister emphasised to Jaishankar Tehran's firm will to exercise the "legitimate right to self-defence".

"Araghchi emphasised the need for international and regional forums and organisations to condemn military aggression against Iran," the readout said.

"Referring to the importance of the role and position of BRICS as a forum for developing multilateral cooperation, he considered it essential for this institution to play a constructive role at the current juncture to support stability and security in the region and the world," it added.

It said Araghchi emphasised the importance of finding a way to strengthen stability and a sustainable security environment in the region and called it a "collective need".

INOX CINEMA
SHIVPORA SRINAGAR

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Trump revels in killing Iran's leaders as war approaches second week

REUTERS

Dubai/Beirut, Mar 13: US President Donald Trump derided Iran's leaders as "deranged scumbags" and said it was his great honor to kill them as the war in the Middle East approached the two-week mark on Friday with heavy exchanges of drone and missile strikes across the region.

The conflict, which began with joint Israeli-US strikes on Iran at the end of February, has killed more than 2,000 people, disrupted the lives of millions of others and shaken energy and financial markets across the globe.

In a post on social media late on Friday, Trump said the US was "totally destroying the terrorist regime of Iran."

"We have unparalleled firepower, unlimited ammunition, and plenty of time — Watch what happens between these deranged scumbags today," Trump said.

"They've been killing innocent people all over the world for 47 years, and now I, as the 47th President of the United States of America, am killing them. What a great honor it is to do so!"

New Iranian Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei, in his first comments on Thursday, vowed to keep the key energy chokepoint of the Strait of Hormuz shut and called on neighboring countries to close US bases on their territory or risk Iran targeting them.

"I assure everyone that we will



not neglect avenging the blood of your martyrs," said the hardline cleric, who replaced his father after he was killed in Israel's initial strikes. His comments were read out by a television presenter and it was not clear why he did not appear in person. Iranian officials have said he had been lightly wounded and Trump has said he thinks he is alive but "damaged."

Israel says it struck 200 targets in Iran in past day

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also held his first news conference since the US and Israeli airstrikes on Iran started on February 28, issuing a veiled threat to kill new Khamenei and defending the military assault.

"I will not detail the actions we are taking. We are creating the

optimal conditions for toppling the regime but I won't deny that I can't tell you with all certainty that the people of Iran will topple the regime — a regime is toppled from the inside," Netanyahu said on Thursday.

"But we can definitely help and we are helping."

The Israel Defense Forces said on Friday its air force struck more than 200 targets in western and central Iran over the past day, including ballistic missile launchers, air defense systems and weapons production sites, as part of its operation dubbed Operation Roar of the Lion. Iran launched its own barrage of missiles and drones overnight, undermining earlier US and Israeli claims to have

knocked out much of Iran's stock of long-range weapons.

An Iranian missile struck a Bedouin Arab town in northern Israel near Nazareth, according to the military, heavily damaging several homes. Israel's ambulance service said 58 people were injured, including one person in moderate condition with shrapnel wounds. The rest sustained minor injuries.

In Iraq, US Central Command said it was carrying out rescue efforts after one of its refueling aircraft went down in an incident that involved another aircraft but was not the result of hostile or friendly fire. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq, an umbrella group of Iran-backed armed factions, claimed responsibility for downing the aircraft.

France's President Emmanuel Macron said one soldier had died and several were wounded during an attack in northern Iraq, hours after an Italian base was also targeted in the area.

In central Dubai, debris from a successful interception also caused minor damage to the facade of a building, the emirate's media office said early on Friday, adding that no injuries were reported. The office did not specify the exact location of the incident. A witness said the damage occurred at a building close to the Dubai International Financial Center (DIFC).

Earlier this week, banks including Citigroup and Standard Chartered told staff to work from

home and began evacuating some Dubai offices, including in the DIFC, after Iran threatened Gulf banking interests linked to the United States and Israel, according to sources and a memo seen by Reuters.

Oil prices up

Two tankers were set ablaze in the Iraqi port of Basra earlier this week after being hit by suspected Iranian explosive-laden boats and other ships have been struck in the Gulf near the Strait of Hormuz. Drones and missiles have also regularly struck buildings and other infrastructure in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Oman.

In an effort to stabilize global energy markets, the US on Thursday issued a 30-day license for countries to buy Russian oil and petroleum products currently stranded at sea.

"The temporary increase in oil prices is a short-term and temporary disruption that will result in a massive benefit to our nation and economy in the long-term," Bessent said in the statement, echoing earlier comments from Trump.

US political fallout

Trump, who has already declared that the US and Israel won the war, said the United States stood to make significant money from oil prices driven higher because of supply issues tied to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of global oil normally passes.

China to provide USD 200,000 for victims of bomb attack on Iranian school

PTI

Beijing, Mar 13: China on Friday said it will provide USD 200,000 in emergency humanitarian assistance to the students killed in an airstrike on an elementary school in Iran in the ongoing joint US-Israeli attacks on the country.

China expresses deep condolences regarding the deaths of students in the recent attack on an Iranian elementary school and extends sincere sympathies to their families, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said at a media briefing here.

Red Cross Society of China has decided to provide the Iranian Red Crescent Society with USD 200,000 in emergency humanitarian assistance, he said.

Guo said China condemns all indiscriminate attacks against civilians and non-military targets. Targeting schools and harming children constitute a severe violation of international

humanitarian law and cross the bottom line of human morality and conscience, he added.

"China is willing to continue to offer necessary support to Iran in the spirit of humanitarianism to help the Iranian people overcome the difficulties," he said. According to a statement by the United Nations on March



1, missiles reportedly destroyed a girl's primary school in Minab, southern Iran, killing around 150 and wounding almost 100. Many students are believed to be among the dead. Iran has blamed the US and Israel for the attack on the school.

The US military's Central Command (Centcom) said it was looking into reports of the incident, while Israel's military said it was "not aware" of any IDF operations in the area, the BBC reported.

Iran soccer team pushes back on Trump comments, says 'no one can exclude' it from World Cup



AP

Geneva, Mar 13: Pushing back on U.S. President Donald Trump's comments, Iran's national soccer team says "no one can exclude" it from playing in the men's World Cup in the United States.

Instead, a post on the team's official Instagram account Thursday suggested maybe the U.S. team should be excluded after Trump indicated that the host country couldn't guarantee the safety of the Iranian players.

Trump wrote in a social media post Thursday that the Iranian team was welcome at the World Cup despite the ongoing war with Iran but that "I really don't believe it is appropriate that they be there, for their own life and safety."

Iran is set to play all three of its World Cup group games in the U.S., which is co-hosting the tournament with Mexico and Canada.

The regional war has put doubt on Iran's ability to fulfil its World Cup entry, and sports minister Ahmad Donyamali told state TV this week the current circumstances meant it was not possible to play.

But the Iran team's riposte on Instagram confirmed it still wants to participate, and pointed out that the tournament is run by FIFA — not Trump or the U.S.

"The World Cup is a historic and

international event and its governing body is FIFA — not any individual, country," the post said. "Certainly, no one can exclude Iran's national team from the World Cup; the only country that could be excluded is one that merely carries the title of host yet lacks the ability to provide security for the teams participating in this global event."

Iran is scheduled to play in Inglewood, California, against New Zealand on June 15 and Belgium on June 21, before finishing group play in Seattle against Egypt on June 26.

Mixed messages Trump's mixed messages on the subject include saying last week "I really don't care" if Iran plays, then assuring FIFA President Gianni Infantino at the White House on Tuesday that Iran's team was welcome.

Iran is a power in Asian soccer, ranked No. 20 in the world by FIFA and has qualified for its fourth straight World Cup edition.

Iran's soccer federation has planned to use a tournament base camp in Arizona, at the Kino Sports Complex in Tucson.

Before the World Cup, Iranian soccer officials are due to attend FIFA's annual congress on April 30 in Vancouver. The Iranian federation was unable to attend meetings in Atlanta last week to help teams prepare for the 48-nation tournament.

5 Indian youth boxers assured of medals at World Boxing Futures Cup

PTI

Bangkok, Mar 13: Five Indian boxers assured themselves of podium finishes at the World Boxing Futures Cup after a series of impressive quarterfinals wins here on Friday.

India's medal hopes were strengthened with victories from Gunjan (48kg), Joyshree Devi (54kg), Ambekar Meetei (50kg), Chandrika Pujari (51kg) and Radhamani Longjam (57kg), all of whom advanced to the semifinals, thereby assuring the country five medals at the tournament.

In the morning session, Gunjan secured a convincing 5-0 unanimous decision victory over Azerbaijan's Gular Huseynova,

while Joyshree Devi produced a dominant display to defeat Japan's Yura Kanemaru by Referee Stopped Contest (RSC) in the first round.

Ambekar Meetei also progressed with a 4-1 victory over Japan's Akira Ukubo in the men's 50kg category.

The evening session saw two more Indian boxers advance, with Chandrika Pujari (51kg) defeating Spain's Andrea Buelga Garcia by RSC in the second round, while Radhamani Longjam (57kg) registered a 4-1 win over England's Siobhan Haley.

Meanwhile, Sahil Duhan (60kg) went down 1-4 to France's David Harutyunyan in his last eight bout.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

رمضان المبارك

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DUA FOR SEHRI
وَيَصُومُ عَد تَّوَيْتَ مِنْ شَهْرِ رَمَضَانَ
I intend to keep the fast for tomorrow in the month of Ramadan

DUA FOR IFTAR
اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي لَكَ صُمْتُ وَبِكَ آمَنْتُ [وَعَلَيْكَ تَوَكَّلْتُ] وَعَلَى رِزْقِكَ أَفْطَرْتُ
O Allah! I fasted for You and I believe in You and I put my trust in You and I break my fast with Your sustenance

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