



## Evening Aarti discipline of soul, expression of gratefulness: LG Sinha Urges people to organise it daily or weekly along riverbanks

KNO Desk

Jammu, Mar 18: Lieutenant Governor, Manoj Sinha today called upon the people to organise daily or weekly evening aartis in the towns and villages nestled along the riverbanks of Jammu Division in collaboration with the local communities.

The Lieutenant Governor, according to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) said, "I urge people to organise daily or weekly evening Aartis in towns and villages settled along the riverbanks in Jammu Division. Light kindled by Aarti's lamps will awaken the society towards our profound rich culture and connect the young generation with timeless verses of our holy scriptures."

The Lieutenant Governor



attended Shri Raghunath Ji's Jammu Aarti organized by 'Shri Raghunath Ji Ki Jammu Aarti Sanstha'. He expressed his gratitude to the organisers and observed that this unique Jammu Aarti performed by devoted men and women today, embodies India's timeless reverence for Nari Shakti and Ardhanarishvar, while invoking divine blessings upon every living soul.

"I strongly believe the evening Aarti is the discipline of the soul. It is a conscious and awakened effort to inspire the society to look at the source of our existence and be grateful," the Lieutenant Governor said.

The Lieutenant Governor also stated that every flame that rises in the aarti is an offering of absolute devotion, every prayer is a dialogue with the | More on P6

## J&K Police's proactive, innovative strategy paying dividends

» Terror-related incidents on decline in Jammu upper reaches

» Elite units of J&K Police Snow Leopards, Markhor on job

KNO Special Correspondent

Srinagar, Mar 18: The proactive and innovative strategy devised by J&K Police to counter terror in mountains and forests has led to significant decline in terror-related incidents in the upper reaches of Jammu region.

Sources told the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) that in 2023-24, the twin border districts of Poonch and Rajouri and upper reaches of Udhampur as well as an area of Kathua witnessed terror attacks, raising serious security concerns.

"It was during this challenging period that Nalin Prabhat assumed charge as the DGP of Jammu and Kashmir and began restructuring counter-terror operations with a focused approach on difficult terrains," the



sources said.

DGP Prabhat soon after assuming charge recognized the unique geographical challenges of the region—dense forests, rugged mountains, and

high-altitude areas. "The DGP introduced a specialized operational framework within the Special Operation Group (SOG). Under this strategy, two elite groups were formed

within SOG: Snow Leopards and Markhor," sources informed. "The Snow Leopards unit is centrally located and primarily tasked with operations in snow bound and higher mountain tops and ridges.

The Markhor units spread across the UT are specially trained and deployed to dominate forest belts and mountainous terrain, the areas that had long been exploited by terrorist groups for infiltration and hideouts."

"To enhance the operational efficiency, selected personnel for these units were sent to Greyhounds, Andhra Pradesh and trained with elite army units for advanced training in jungle warfare, endurance and specialized combat techniques.

This | More on P6

## PM Modi hails cabinet's decisions 'Will accelerate industrial growth, attract investments'

PTI

New Delhi, Mar 18: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday hailed the Union Cabinet's approval of the Bharat Audyogik Vikas Yojana (BHAVYA) and the Small Hydro Power Development Scheme, among other decisions, and said these will attract investments and create employment in rural and remote regions.

Modi also said the NDA government is leaving no stone unturned to make the lives of farmers as easy as possible and in this direction, MSP funding for the 2023-24 cotton season was approved on Wednesday.

"A landmark step towards accelerating India's industrial growth! The Union Cabinet has approved Bharat Audyogik Vikas Yojna (BHAVYA). This



will enable the development of 100 plug-and-play industrial parks, boosting manufacturing, investment and jobs across the nation," he said in a post on X.

The prime minister said the scheme will significantly enhance ease of doing business through streamlined approvals and single-window systems

and boost the logistics and services sectors too.

He said the Union Cabinet has approved the Small Hydro Power Development Scheme, which will boost clean energy, attract investments and create employment across rural and remote regions.

"The Northeast | More on P6

## LG, CM extend Navratri, Navreh greetings

KT News Desk

Jammu, Mar 18: Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha and Chief Minister Omar Abdullah have conveyed greetings to the people on the eve of Navreh, Chaitra Sukladi, Ugadi, Gudi Padava and Cheti Chand.

In a message, the Lieutenant Governor said, "On the auspicious occasion of Navreh, Chaitra Sukladi, Ugadi, Gudi Padava and Cheti Chand, I extend my greetings and good wishes to all. These festivals, observed throughout the nation, herald the dawn of the New Year and embody the profound renewal of faith and hope. May these festivals bring prosperity, peace and happiness in everyone's life and also promote the spirit of | More on P6

## Foreign tourist spike shows confidence in J&K as tourist destination, says Parl Panel

Committee calls for eco-tourism push, better facilities at emerging destinations

KNO Special Correspondent

Srinagar, Mar 18: A parliamentary panel has observed that the increase in foreign tourist arrivals in Jammu & Kashmir reflects growing international confidence in it as a tourist destination.

In its report, the Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Home Affairs expressed satisfaction over tourist arrivals in Jammu & Kashmir. "The Committee notes with satisfaction the significant growth in tourist arrivals from 2022 to 2024, with total footfall increasing from 1.88 crore to 2.36 crore. The sharp increase in foreign tourist arrivals from about 20,000 in 2022 to over

65,000 in 2024 is particularly noteworthy and reflects growing international confidence in the Union Territory as a tourist destination," reads the report, a copy of which is in possession of news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO).

The report was tabled in Parliament on Monday (March 17, 2026).

The Committee further observed that although there was a decline in tourist arrivals in 2025



Amidst rain, Srinagar's market pulses with festive energy ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr. Pic | Jahangir Shah (KNO/KT)

## Day 4: Snow, rain bring chill back

- Weather to remain inclement till Mar 20
- Farmers advised to suspend operations

Sajid Raina

Srinagar, Mar 18: Intermittent rain in the plains and fresh snowfall in upper reaches for the fourth running day on Wednesday brought chill back in Kashmir, while the MeT predicted that weather may remain inclement till March 20, coinciding with the expected day of Eid-ul-Fitr.

An official of the MeT Department told the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) that fresh Western Disturbance is active over the region, resulting in widespread cloud cover and precipitation across the Valley. As per the details upper reaches, including Gulmarg



and Sonamarg, received fresh snowfall, while plains such as Srinagar witnessed intermittent drizzle during the day. "Generally cloudy weather with intermittent light to moderate rain or snow at many places is likely till March 20. A few higher reaches of Chenab valley and South Kashmir may receive moderate to heavy snowfall," he

said. Eid-ul-Fitr, which marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan, is likely to be observed on March 20 or 21, subject to the sighting of the moon. Officials said the prevailing weather conditions may impact travel plans, particularly for those heading to their native places or visiting | More on P6

## Peak power demand in J&K likely to surge by 6%

Riyaz Bhat

Srinagar, Mar 18: Jammu and Kashmir is likely to face a four percent Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) increase in electricity requirement and six percent increase in peak electricity demand for the period of 2025-26 to 2035-36.

The official documents available with the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) reveal that it has considered electrical energy requirement projections as per J&K State Load Despatch Center (SLDC).

The documents reveal that the SLDC has projected that the annual electrical energy



requirement of the UT is likely to grow at a CAGR of 4 percent while the peak electricity demand for the utility is likely to grow at a CAGR of 6 percent for the period of 2025-26 to

2035-36.

About the day-wise surplus coal capacity, the documents said that the surplus capacity is available with the Union Territory due to RE availability, demand variation etcetera..

"The UT has likely surplus capacity of around 700-900 MW during May to June months and 500 MW from July to September in 2028-29 which can be shared with other states and Discoms," it reads.

It also said that this capacity can be shared with other states and Discoms and reduce the fixed cost burden on the utility resulting in reduction in the cost to consumer. | More on P6

## 20% of adults in Jammu, 12% in Kashmir affected by diabetes Doctors say what you eat can change everything

Jahangeer Ganaie

Srinagar, Mar 18: With diabetes cases witnessing a speedy rise across Jammu and Kashmir, health experts are raising concerns over what they describe as a "silent epidemic" in the region.

As per the data available with the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), nearly 20 per cent of adults in Jammu and around 10-12 per cent in Kashmir are living with Diabetes Mellitus.

Doctors say that while medication plays an important role, diet and lifestyle remain the cornerstone of effective diabetes management.



As per the 2023 guidelines issued by the Indian Council of Medical Research, over 10.1 crore people in India are currently affected by diabetes, making it one of the

fastest-growing health challenges in the country.

"Diabetes is a long-term condition where blood sugar levels remain elevated either due to insufficient insulin production

or the body's inability to use it effectively," said Dr Murtaza, a senior physician. "If not managed properly, it can lead to serious complications including nerve damage, kidney disease, and cardiovascular problems."

He said a well-planned diet can significantly help in stabilising blood sugar levels, maintaining a healthy weight, and preventing complications. "Incorporating foods with a low glycemic index, rich in fibre and nutrients, is crucial for better glucose control," he said

Experts recommend a diet built around complex carbohydrates - whole grains, legumes and vegetables - to avoid sudden sugar | More on P6

## Govt resolute to deliver equitable, affordable healthcare: Sakeena Itoo

Inaugurates 50 bedded Integrated AYUSH Hospital at Kulgam



KT NEWS DESK

KULGAM, MARCH 18: Minister for Health and Medical Education, Social Welfare and Education, Sakeena Itoo Wednesday inaugurated 50 bedded Integrated AYUSH Hospital at Chawalgam here.

The Hospital, constructed at an estimated cost of around Rs. 7.40 crores, marks a significant milestone in the Government's sustained efforts to promote traditional systems of medicine alongside modern healthcare services.

MLA Kulgam, Mohammad Yousuf Tarigami; Deputy Commissioner Kulgam, Shahzad Alam; Director Ayush, ADC Kulgam, CMO Kulgam, Nodal Officer Ayush, CEO Kulgam, senior officers of district administration and large number of locals were also present on the occasion.

In her address after the inauguration ceremony, Minister Sakeena, as per an official statement, underscored the Omar Abdullah led Government's commitment to

role in lifestyle management, chronic disease care and immunity enhancement. She added that this hospital will also serve as a centre for health awareness, community outreach programmes, and capacity-building initiatives.

"This 50-bedded hospital is equipped with well-furnished inpatient wards, specialized outpatient departments, Panchakarma therapy units, diagnostic facilities, Yoga and wellness centres and dedicated consultation chambers to ensure high standards of treatment and patient care", she stated.

The Minister reiterated that strengthening healthcare infrastructure in underserved and rural areas remains a top priority of the Government. She assured the public that necessary resources and manpower would be provided to ensure the smooth and efficient functioning of the hospital.

She also said that the macadamization of approach road to the hospital as well as other works related to landscaping of exteriors of hospital will be taken in due course of time.

The Minister underlined that the Government led by Omar Abdullah in last 18 months has given max priority to Health sector.

MLA Kulgam, Mohammad Yousuf Tarigami in his address lauded the healthcare professionals for their remarkable contribution to Health sector.

Deputy Commissioner Kulgam, Shahzad Alam, while speaking on the occasion, outlined the development of healthcare network in Kulgam district, adding that a robust healthcare infrastructure has been established in the district for the people.

expanding quality healthcare services to the grassroots level. She emphasized that the integration of AYUSH systems with conventional medicine will not only broaden treatment options but also revive and institutionalize time-tested indigenous healing practices.

"The Government is resolute in its mission to deliver equitable, inclusive, and affordable healthcare to every citizen. The inauguration of this Integrated AYUSH Hospital at Kulgam reflects our vision of a robust and diversified healthcare system that respects tradition while embracing innovation", the Minister stated.

She highlighted that the newly established facility will provide comprehensive and integrated treatment modalities under Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, and Homeopathy (AYUSH), ensuring accessible and affordable healthcare to the people of Kulgam and adjoining areas.

Highlighting the importance of preventive healthcare, Minister Sakeena remarked that AYUSH plays a crucial

## Complete digitisation of land records in time bound, transparent manner: DC Srinagar

KT NEWS DESK

SRINAGAR MARCH 18: Deputy Commissioner (DC) Srinagar, Akshay Labroo, Wednesday chaired a meeting of senior Revenue Officers at the Conference Hall of the DC Office Complex to review tehsil-wise progress on key revenue matters and to further strengthen service delivery systems across the district, with a special focus on the digitization of revenue records.

The meeting, as per an official statement, was attended by Additional Deputy Commissioner Srinagar, Mir Imtiyaz Ul Aziz, SDM West, Irfan Bahadur, SDM East, Zubair Ahmad, Assistant Commissioner Revenue, Umar Gulzar and all Tehsildars.

At the outset, the Deputy Commissioner conducted a detailed review of tehsil-wise progress in the digitization of revenue records, updation and attestation of mutations, disposal of public grievances, and delivery of other time-bound services by the Revenue Department.

During the meeting, the Deputy Commissioner undertook a comprehensive review of progress across all



tehsils, particularly focusing on digitization of revenue records, updation and attestation of mutations, disposal of public grievances and delivery of other time-bound services by the Revenue Department. The progress of verification of cases under PMAY 2.0 was also assessed.

The DC also evaluated the performance of online service delivery platforms highlighting its importance in ensuring transparency and efficiency.

Acknowledging the efforts

of the Revenue Officers and field functionaries, the Deputy Commissioner asked them to consistently continue their proactive approach in expediting the freezing of Jamabandies and grievance registers across all Tehsils.

Stressing the need for sustained efficiency, the DC called for the adoption of robust and result-oriented mechanisms to enhance overall departmental performance. He directed Officers to ensure prompt and high-quality service delivery to the public, with strict adherence to PSGA timelines, particularly through platforms such as Jansugam and Revenue Plus. He further instructed officials to accelerate the disposal of backlog mutation cases to ensure timely relief to the public.

While reviewing the progress of PMAY 2.0 cases, the Deputy Commissioner emphasized the need for early completion of the verification process.

On the issue of court case compliance, the DC directed Tehsildars to ensure submission of clear, accurate, and timely replies for quality and swift disposal of the court cases including cases and grievances registered under Migrant Act.

## Deputy CM visits DH Pora Kulgam

KT NEWS DESK

KULGAM, MARCH 18: Deputy Chief Minister, Surinder Choudhary Wednesday visited DH Pora Kulgam to pay rich tributes to former Speaker of Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly and former Minister, Shaheed Wali Mohammad Itoo on his 32nd death anniversary.

Addressing the gathering, the Deputy Chief Minister, as per an official statement, described Shaheed Wali Mohammad Itoo as a visionary statesman and a grassroots leader who devoted his life to the welfare and upliftment of the people, particularly those belonging to marginalized and rural communities. He said that the late leader's commitment to inclusive development, communal harmony and democratic values continues to serve as a guiding force for present and future generations.

The Deputy Chief Minister highlighted that Shaheed Wali Mohammad Itoo played a pivotal role in strengthening democratic institutions and maintaining close engagement with the public



to address their grievances effectively. He added that the Government remains committed to carrying forward the legacy of people-centric governance and equitable development envisioned by the late leader.

Speaking on the occasion,

Minister for Health and Medical Education, Social Welfare and Education, Sakeena Itoo paid glowing tributes to the late leader and remembered his invaluable contribution towards the socio-economic development of the region.

### GOVERNMENT OF INDIA UNION TERRITORY OF JAMMU & KASHMIR OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER IRRIGATION AND FLOOD CONTROL JAL SHAKTI DIVISION GANDERBAL

NEAR GIRAJ ---- PIN: 191201, PHONE: 0194-2416246, FAX-0194-2416246, EMAIL- exen-ifcdgbl@jk.gov.in

SHORT TERM NOTICE INVITING TENDER  
e-NIT No: 46 of 2025-26 (e-Tendering)

For and on behalf of the Lt. Governor of Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir e-tenders (in Single Cover) on item rate basis are invited for below mentioned job/ work from registered Contractors/ owners of commercial Vehicles (with Union Territory of J&K Govt.) Drivers cum Vehicle Owners/ Tour and Travel agencies for the complete Financial year of 2026-27 (w.e.f. 01.04.2026 to 31.03.2027)

S. No	Particulars / Name of work	Qty	Unit	Amount of CDR (in Rs)	Tender fee	Major Head of Account
01	"Engagement / Hiring of Commercial vehicle Innova/ Mahindra Scorpio/ Mahindra Bolero of 2014 or above make/model with J&K Registration only on monthly basis for Office Use along with the driver (must available for 24x7) for the year 2026-27 (excluding fuel but including the day-to-day maintenance charges of the vehicle)	1.00	Month	1000.00	Rs. 100/=	MH 2701 M&R, MH 2702 M&R, MH 2711 M&R and all other contingency Heads of this Division

The Bidding document consisting of qualifying information, eligibility criteria, specifications, set of terms and conditions and other details can be seen/downloaded on e-procurement Portal [www.jktenders.gov.in](http://www.jktenders.gov.in) as per schedule of dates given below:

S. No	Publishing Date	16-03-2026	04:00 P.M
01	Publishing Date	16-03-2026	04:00 P.M
02	Download Date Start	16-03-2026	04:00 P.M
03	Bid submission Date Start	16-03-2026	04:00 P.M
04	Bid submission Date End	23-03-2026	04:00 P.M
05	Bid opening Date	24-03-2026	11:00 A.M

- The bids shall be deposited in electronic format on the departmental website [www.jktenders.gov.in](http://www.jktenders.gov.in)
- The bids uploaded on the Web site up to due date and time will be opened on 24-03-2026 at (11:00 A.M) in the Office of the Executive Engineer Irrigation and Flood Control Division Ganderbal in presence of the bidders who wish to attend. In case of Holidays or office happening to be closed on the date of opening of the bids, the same will be opened on the next working day at the same time and venue. The complete bidding process will be online.
- Bids must be accompanied with cost of tender document (Non- Refundable/ Non- transferrable) to be deposited under MH: 0702-Rev. Misc. in shape of Treasury Challan / receipt or e-Challan (mentioning therein e-NIT No and Serial No of Work) to be pledged in favour of the Executive Engineer Irrigation and Flood Control Division Ganderbal, besides the dates on the instruments must not be prior to date of issuance of this Notice. The bids for the work shall remain valid for a period of 90 days from the date of opening of Price bids.

1. The e-NIT must be accompanied/ uploaded with:

01	Earnest Money in shape of CDR / FDR for an amount of Rs.1000/- pledged in favour of the Executive Engineer Irrigation and Flood control Division Ganderbal.	Scanned Copy
02	Treasury Receipt (T.R) deposited to MH: 0702 as cost of tender document for an amount of Rs.100/- pledged in favour of the Executive Engineer Irrigation and Flood control Division Ganderbal	Scanned Copy
03	GST with latest clearance upto to 12/2025 /Pan card with ITR for the FY 2024-25 along with Self Attested WhatsApp Number and email ID of the agency/driver	Scanned Copy
04	HMV License only of the driver	Scanned Copy
05	Registration Certificate / Ownership, Pollution Certificate, Insurance's certificate of Commercial Vehicle, Route Permit for all J&K Routes.	Scanned Copy
05	The driver proposed for the vehicle must have experience of similar nature of work for not less than 03 complete years with any Govt Deptt of J&K during the last 05 Years. The Experience Certificate of the driver must be issued by a Govt Deptt of J&K, duly bearing the proper seal and signature of the competent issuing authority. Only such certificates shall be accepted and the same must be uploaded along with the bid documents at the time of submission of the tender. Certificates issued by private individuals, firms, agencies, or organizations shall not be considered.	Scanned copy

GENERAL TERMS AND CONDITIONS:

- The 1st Lowest bidder has to produce CDR / FDR for an amount of Rs.1000/- (Earnest Money), Treasury Challan of Rs. 100/- (Tender Fee) in original within one day after the generation of comparative chart and the same shall be released after successful completion of job.
  - Bidders must ensure to upload their e-bids in single cover.
  - Rates are to be quoted on monthly basis for the categories of vehicle (excluded fuel).
  - Deduction on account of taxes/levies, etc shall be made from the bills of the agency/driver on gross amount of the bill as per the rates prevailing at that time.
  - The bidder must upload scanned copy of Registration /permit/ LMV/HMV License/Ownership/ Pan Card/ Similar nature of work not less than past 03 years.
  - The bidder must submit consumption certificate from the competent authority for such type of vehicle.
  - The bidder shall be given hire charges rates as per the rate quoted but not more than the rates approved by the Government.
  - The Bidder shall ensure that the vehicle/driver should not be changed frequently. Any such change(s) should be informed to the authority well in advance.
  - In case of any breakdown/ emergency, the bidder/ driver shall arrange the alternate vehicle/ driver so that the departmental work doesn't suffer.
  - The successful bidder shall submit invoice in triplicate in the office of undersigned duly accompanied by log-book verified by the concerned officer/official.
  - The e-NIT shall be uploaded in electronic format on the departmental website [www.jktenders.gov.in](http://www.jktenders.gov.in)
  - The Earnest Money Deposit shall be forfeited if:-  
a. Any Tenderer withdraws his e-NIT/tender during the period of e-NIT validity or makes any modification in terms and conditions of the e-NIT.  
b. The tenderer shall have to execute the agreement within 07-days after fixation of the contract.
  - The vehicle must be in a fit & fine condition and having valid manufacturing/Registration No. not before the year 2014. The vehicle having manufacturing date before the said year shall not be accepted in any case.
  - The successful bidder should provide dedicated Vehicle and driver and any change in vehicle and /or driver should be made only in very exceptional circumstances. The contractor has to submit all the necessary documents of the vehicle such as Registration certificate, pollution certificate, Insurance's certificate or any other document as required by the motor vehicle Department/concerned authorities. The driver should be having transport license, for driving commercial/passenger vehicle with minimum past 03 years minimum experience.
  - The successful bidder has to park the vehicle in the campus of Direction office at Srinagar as and when directed or otherwise has to park the vehicle at Divisional Stores Gulab Bagh Srinagar.
  - The successful bidder has to make necessary arrangements to reach the parking lot at specific time at his own for which no additional payment shall be made.
- Instructions to Tenderer(s) regarding e-Tendering process:-  
1. Tenderers are advised to download Tender submission manual from the "downloads" option as well as from Tenderers manual Kit" on website [www.jktenders.gov.in](http://www.jktenders.gov.in) in acquait e-NIT submission process.  
2. To participate in tendering process tenderers have to get digital signature certificate (DSC) as per information technology act. 2000 Tenderers can get digital certificate from approved vendor.  
3. The Tenderer has to upload his e-NIT online in electronic format with digital signature. No financial Tender will be accepted in physical form.  
4. Tenderers must ensure to upload scanned copy of all necessary documents like, similar experience certificate (mentioned above), CDR, Treasury challan/receipt, PAN Card, GST Clearance, etc. in respect of the work as mentioned in the Terms & Conditions.  
5. The department will not be responsible for delay in online submission due to any reason.  
6. The date of start of the work shall be reckoned within one day from the date of issuance of L.O.I./Contract allotment as the case may be.  
7. Time extension: -Suitable time extension shall be granted in case of increase in scope of Work and in the event of delay beyond control of agency/driver to be determined by the department.  
8. Advance Payments: - No mobilization advance/equipment advance shall be paid.  
9. The tender receiving authority reserves the right to accept or reject the bids of the e-NIT without assigning any reason thereof.  
10. The tender/bid is liable to rejection if it does not fulfill the requirements as laid down in e-NIT.  
All other terms and conditions as laid down in the PWD Form 25 Double shall also remain in force.

NO: IFCD/GBL/10991-11040  
Dated : 16.03.2026

DIPK-11986/25  
Dated: 18-03-2026

(Er. Iftikhar Nadeem Mattoo)  
Executive Engineer  
Irrigation and Flood Control  
Division Ganderbal

## Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER Public Works(R&B) DIVISION AWANTIPORA

Email: [rb-awantipora@jk.gov.in](mailto:rb-awantipora@jk.gov.in)  
NO: T-1/EEA/11671-75 Dated: 16/03/2026

### EXTENSION NOTICE

Subject: -

- Construction of Elementary Girls Toilet at MS Overgrund.....(under S.No. 1028).
- Old National Highway at Drangbal.
- Construction of RAMP at Boys Primary School Wuyan Balla .....(S.No. 1381).

Reference: -

- This office e-NIT No. 168/EEA/R&B of 2025-26/9817-27 Dated 10-02-2026.
- This office e-NIT No. 197/EEA/R&B of 2025-26/10929-39 Dated: 05-03-2026.
- This office e-NIT No. 201/EEA/R&B of 2025-26/11074-84 Dated: 09-03-2026

The critical dates for the above noted Work is hereby extended as under:

1	Bid Submission End Date	25 -03-2026 up to 4. 00 P.M
2	Date & time of opening of Technical Bids (Online)	26 -03-2026 up to 12.00 P.M

All other terms & Conditions shall remain same as per above mentioned NIT.

Sd/-  
Technical officer

DIPK-11983/25  
Dated: 18-03-2026

Sd/-  
Executive Engineer  
R&B Division Awantipora

## Kashmir Admin reviews arrangements for forthcoming festivals

KT NEWS DESK

Srinagar, Mar 18: To ensure smooth and peaceful celebrations of the forthcoming religious festivals of Eid-ul-Fitr, Navroz and Navratra, the Divisional Commissioner Kashmir, Anshul Garg, Wednesday chaired a meeting of officers to review the preparedness and arrangements being put in place across the Kashmir Division.

The meeting was attended by all Deputy Commissioners, Commissioner SMC, SSP Srinagar, Chief Engineer PWD, ARTO Kashmir, Director Sheep Husbandry Kashmir, SSP Traffic Rural Kashmir, Joint Director Information Kashmir, Joint Director FCS&CA and other senior officers of concerned departments.

At the outset, the Deputy Commissioners briefed the Divisional Commissioner about the arrangements being put in place in their respective districts for the smooth celebration of Eid-ul-Fitr, Navroz and Navratra. They also apprised him regarding the availability and stock position of essential commodities, including LPG, petrol and diesel.

While addressing the meeting, the Divisional Commissioner directed all Deputy Commissioners to ensure meticulous arrangements with regard to the availability of basic facilities, deployment of Magistrates, and effective security and traffic management, particularly at major congregational places where Eid prayers are scheduled to be held.

He directed KPDCL to ensure uninterrupted electricity supply across the Kashmir Division on the eve of Eid-ul-Fitr, especially



at Aasar-i-Sharief Hazratbal and other prominent religious places.

The Jal Shakti Department was instructed to ensure adequate and uninterrupted supply of safe drinking water during the festive days.

With regard to essential commodities, the Divisional Commissioner emphasized maintaining adequate stocks and ensuring the availability of all essential items, including LPG, petrol and diesel, across the division so that the public does not face any inconvenience during the celebrations.

The FCS&CA Department was directed to ensure sufficient domestic LPG stock in

all districts and to prevent any shortages. He further instructed concerned authorities to conduct comprehensive market inspections to curb hoarding, overpricing and the sale of sub-standard goods. Stressing close coordination among enforcement agencies, he directed that fair pricing and adequate availability of essential commodities, particularly mutton and poultry, be ensured on the eve of Eid-ul-Fitr.

Reviewing traffic management measures, the Divisional Commissioner directed traffic authorities to regulate vehicular movement near major mosques and marketplaces. He also emphasized the arrangement

of adequate public transport facilities on key routes leading to Hazratbal to facilitate smooth movement of devotees, especially for Eid prayers.

To ensure safety at congregation venues, he directed the deployment of fire tenders and adequate security personnel to ensure the smooth and peaceful celebration of all the festivals across the Kashmir Division.

The Divisional Commissioner reiterated the need for seamless coordination among all departments to ensure that the upcoming religious festivals are celebrated in a peaceful and orderly manner.

## GOC Sharawat reviews troops preparedness in Kathua

YOGESH

Jammu, Mar 18: General Officer Commanding (GOC) of the Rising Star Corps, Lieutenant General Rajan Sharawat today reviewed the operational preparedness of troops deployed in the Bani-Machhedi sector of Kathua district.

An official said that the review came amid heightened security focus in the mountainous belt of Bani-Machhedi. "The area has witnessed multiple terrorist related incidents, including attacks and encounters over the past two years," he said, adding, "The area is considered a sensitive infiltration route from the International Border, with connectivity towards the districts of Doda, Kishtwar and Udhampur."

During the visit, the Corps Commander assessed the readiness levels, deployment patterns and operational capabilities of the troops stationed in the high-altitude terrain, the official said, adding, the commander expressed satisfaction



over their state of preparedness and commended personnel for maintaining high morale and professionalism under challenging conditions.

"The Army has significantly strengthened its presence in the Bani-Machhedi sector over the past year, with additional troop deployments aimed at countering infiltration attempts and ensuring area domination. The increased

focus on surveillance and operational readiness is part of broader efforts to secure vulnerable routes and maintain stability in the region," the official said, adding that such reviews are conducted periodically to ensure that forces remain prepared to effectively respond to evolving security challenges along the International Border and adjoining hinterland areas—(KNO)

## Northern Army Commander visits Jhangar Lauds troops for foiling infiltration bid

YOGESH

Jammu, Mar 18: Northern Command Army Commander Lieutenant General Pratik Sharma visited the Jhangar Battalion in Poonch and reviewed the security situation and operational preparedness in the sector following the successful conduct of Operation Balliyan.

Army's Jammu based spokesperson, while sharing the details wrote on X: "The Army Commander's visit came in the wake of a successful anti-infiltration operation in which alert troops foiled an infiltration attempt."

"Lt Gen Pratik Sharma, Army Cdr NC, visited Jhangar Battalion on successful conduct of OPBALLIYAN wherein the alert troops successfully eliminated the infiltration attempt," the Corps said.

"During the visit, the Army Commander interacted with troops on the ground and assessed the prevailing security situation and readiness levels in the area," he wrote, adding, "While reviewing the



security situation, operational preparedness and interaction with all ranks, the Army Commander commended them for professionalism and resolute commitment towards ensuring peace and stability in the region," he added—(KNO)

## Rajpora bakers pin hopes on Eid Sheermal rush



JAHANGEER GANAIE

Pulwama, Mar 18: Despite a noticeable slowdown in sales this year so far, traditional bakers in Rajpora area of south Kashmir's Pulwama district continue to remain optimistic that business will pick up as Eid approaches.

The region, located a few kilometres from Pulwama town, is widely known for its iconic delicacy—Sheermal—which continues to hold a special place in Kashmir's festive culture.

Sheermal, a round, slightly thick flatbread with a distinct textured surface, is typically garnished with sesame seeds, giving it a unique flavour and appearance. It is commonly relished with traditional beverages like Sheer Chai (salt tea) and Kehwa, making it an indispensable part of celebrations and social gatherings across the Valley.

In Rajpora, the age-old tradition of baking Sheermal is very much alive. Local bakeries, popularly known as Kander Wan, have been working tirelessly to prepare for the festive rush. Around 30-40 bakers in the area are engaged in producing this brownish, sesame-coated bread, continuing a legacy that has been passed down through generations.

Javid Ahmad Sofi, a veteran baker, said that although the

market response has been relatively dull this year so far, they are hopeful that demand will increase in the final days leading up to Eid. "Every year, we witness a surge in sales just before Eid. While things are slow at the moment, we are expecting a good turnout in the coming days," Sofi said.

He added that Sheermal was once considered a luxury item, consumed only by affluent families. However, over time, it has become a common feature at almost every household's festive spread, reflecting changing socio-economic conditions in the region.

Another baker, Mohamad Shaban, said that Rajpora's Sheermal enjoys a reputation that extends far beyond Kashmir. "People living outside the Valley, and even abroad, place advance orders. Many visitors take it along as gifts for their friends and relatives," he said, attributing this popularity to the consistent quality maintained by local bakers.

Sameer Ahmad, a baker who mostly deals with online delivery of this delicious Sheermal, said he is receiving a good number of orders online, which he sends outside the valley and even abroad. He, however, said that the sales on the ground haven't been as they used to be on festive occasions.

The bakers expressed hope

that the pace will pick up on Eid.

Many other traders admit that overall sales have been lower this season compared to previous years—possibly due to economic challenges and reduced spending—they believe Eid will revive the market. Traditionally, hundreds of customers from different districts visit Rajpora during the festive period, and each baker sells large quantities of Sheermal, making it a key source of livelihood.

Customers, too, remain loyal to the Rajpora speciality.

Muzamil Ahmad, a resident of Anantnag, said his family has followed a long-standing tradition of purchasing Sheermal from Rajpora. "The taste here is unmatched. We always buy in bulk and distribute it among relatives during Eid," he said. Apart from Eid, Sheermal holds cultural importance in various ceremonies such as weddings, engagements, and other religious events. It is prepared in two main varieties—sweet and salty—each paired with different traditional drinks, adding to its versatility and appeal.

For the people of Kashmir, Sheermal is not merely a food item but a symbol of heritage, celebration, and togetherness. Even in the face of slow business, the unwavering hope of Rajpora's bakers reflects the enduring spirit of this cherished tradition—(KNO)

## Evacuation efforts continue as several students return from Iran

JAHANGEER GANAIE

Srinagar, Mar 18: The evacuation of Indian medical students from war-hit Iran has entered a critical phase, with several students returning safely while hundreds remain stranded at border points, particularly along the Azerbaijan-Iran corridor.

Growing uncertainty and logistical hurdles have triggered panic among students and their families, prompting urgent appeals for intervention by higher authorities.

According to details, a batch of 20 Indian students evacuated via Armenia landed safely in India at 9:55 AM on Tuesday.

Moreover, four students who had earlier crossed into Azerbaijan arrived in India from Baku at 3:40 AM. While these evacuations have offered some relief, a much larger group continues to face distressing conditions.

The situation is especially alarming at the Azerbaijan-Iran border, where an estimated 200-250 Indian students are reportedly stuck. Authorities in Azerbaijan have made it mandatory for students to possess specific "travel codes" to cross the border and proceed to Baku airport. In the absence of these codes, many students have been denied passage, leaving them stranded in uncertain and tense circumstances. Dr Mohammad



Momin Khan, Vice President of the All India Medical Students' Association (AIMSA), said that several students are unable to move forward despite having valid travel documents. "Many students have suffered financial losses as their non-refundable flight tickets from Baku have gone unused due to the delays," he said.

Parents of stranded students have expressed deep concern over the safety and well-being of their children. In a formal communication addressed to authorities, including External Affairs Minister

S Jaishankar, they stated that their wards had booked flights from Baku to Mumbai on March 19, 20, and 23. However, due to the non-issuance of required travel codes by Azerbaijani authorities, students are unable to reach the airport.

"With great concern, we wish to bring to your notice that our children are stranded at the Astra border crossing between Iran and Azerbaijan. Despite having confirmed tickets, they are being denied movement due to a lack of travel codes. The students are frightened and

vulnerable. We request immediate intervention to ensure their safe evacuation," the parents said in their letter.

Meanwhile, some progress has been made in relocating students from other regions. Around 86 students from Shiraz have successfully crossed into Armenia and are expected to return to India on March 20. Similarly, students from Golestan University have also reached Armenia safely.

Continued on  
www.kashmirthunder.in

## Wali Muhammad Itoo remembered on 32nd death anniversary

JAHANGEER GANAIE

Kulgam, Mar 18: Late National Conference (NC) leader Wali Muhammad Itoo was fondly remembered on his 32nd death anniversary on Wednesday, with tributes pouring in from political leaders, workers, and locals across south Kashmir.

Speaking to reporters at DH Pora in Kulgam, his daughter and Minister for Health and Medical Education Department, Sakeena Itoo, said her father continues to live in the hearts of the people due to his unwavering commitment to public welfare.

"He dedicated his life to serving the people. Even today, the love and

respect people have for him show that his legacy remains alive," she said.

Recalling his contributions, Itoo said that although her father had a relatively short tenure as a minister, his work left a lasting impact on the region. "He did remarkable work in a limited time. Several important roads constructed during his tenure continue to benefit the public to this day," she added.

Wali Mohammad Itoo, also a former Speaker of the J&K Legislative Assembly, was assassinated on March 18, 1994.

Continued on  
www.kashmirthunder.in



## EDITORIAL

### Alarming Surge In Pet Cat Bites A Wake-Up Call

The revelation that over 15,983 pet cat bite cases were reported at SMHS Hospital in just one year, from March 2025 to March 2026, is a public health emergency unfolding silently across the Kashmir Valley. With an average of 44 cases daily, this surge represents thousands of individuals, many of them children, exposed to the risk of rabies, a disease that is virtually 100% fatal once symptoms appear, yet entirely preventable through timely intervention. The fact that these are pet cat bites, not stray animal incidents, shifts the

paradigm entirely. This is not a failure of municipal animal control but a crisis of awareness, responsibility, and preventive healthcare among pet-owning households. The post-pandemic rise in pet ownership, particularly cats, appears to have outpaced public education about the responsibilities that accompany domesticating animals. Medical experts rightly emphasise that even minor scratches or bites from vaccinated pets require proper medical attention. Yet the sheer volume of cases suggests that either pets are

not being vaccinated, or owners are not taking basic precautions, or both. Rabies remains one of the most terrifying diseases known to medicine – a slow, inexorable assault on the nervous system that ends in certain death. That 15,983 individuals had to confront this risk in a single year reflects a systemic failure at multiple levels. The solution demands urgent, coordinated action. First, mandatory pet vaccination must become a non-negotiable requirement. Subsidised, accessible vaccination camps across urban and rural areas can

dramatically reduce the rabies reservoir in domesticated animals. Second, a massive public awareness campaign is essential. Pet owners must understand that "cute" scratches carry real danger, that vaccination is not optional, and that children must be supervised around animals. Third, healthcare facilities must maintain adequate vaccine stocks. With 44 daily patients, any supply disruption would have catastrophic consequences. Fourth, veterinarians and animal welfare organisations must partner with health departments

to create a comprehensive pet management framework. The Anti-Rabies Clinic at SMHS deserves appreciation for managing this overwhelming caseload. But treatment is not prevention. Until we address the root causes – unvaccinated pets, unaware owners, and inadequate public education – the queue outside the clinic will only grow longer. Every day of delay is a day when another family learns the hard way that a beloved pet's playful scratch can carry the deadliest of consequences.

## Infrastructure Financing In India: Trends, Institutions, And Innovations

Press Information Bureau

Infrastructure is the backbone of India's economic growth and social development, shaping opportunities for industry, employment, and improved quality of life. Infrastructure financing is vital because it ensures a steady flow of funds for large projects, reducing dependence on government budgets alone. It helps attract private investment, spread risks, and accelerate project delivery, while aligning infrastructure growth with long-term national goals of sustainability, competitiveness, and inclusive development. Over the past decade, India has consistently prioritized large-scale investment in infrastructure as a driver of inclusive progress and competitiveness, with the World Bank ranking it among the top five countries worldwide for job creation in infrastructure among low and middle-income economies.

The Union Budget 2026-27 continues this momentum, announcing new measures to strengthen financing instruments, expand public capital expenditure, and support risk mitigation and asset monetisation. These initiatives reflect the vision of Viksit Bharat, where modern infrastructure serves as its foundation.

**Rising Public Capex, Stronger Infrastructure Push**

Public Capital expenditure refers to government spending on the creation of assets such as roads, buildings, machinery, and equipment, with a high multiplier effect on economic growth.

Over the past decade, public capital expenditure has been the driving force of India's infrastructure push. The Government has steadily raised allocations, using higher spending as a tool to attract private investment, generate employment, and boost the economy.

**Rising Capex Levels:** Public investment has seen a sharp rise, growing from 2 lakh crore in FY2014-15 to a Budget Estimate of 12.2 lakh crore in 2026-27, continuing its upward trajectory and underscoring the Government's commitment to infrastructure-led growth.

**Why Higher Capex Matters**

**Crowding in private investment:** Large-scale government spending builds investor confidence and encourages private participation in infrastructure projects.

**Job creation:** Construction of roads, railways, housing, and energy projects generates employment across multiple sectors.

**Boosting demand:** Higher capex stimulates demand for steel, cement, machinery, and services, strengthening industrial output and overall economic activity.

**Focus on Tier II and Tier III Cities:** The Union Budget 2026-27 places emphasis on developing cities with populations above 5 lakh, positioning them as new growth centres. Investments in housing, transport, and urban infrastructure aim to spread growth beyond metropolitan areas, ensuring balanced regional development.

Further to amplify the potential of urban centres, the Union Budget 2026-27 introduces the concept of City Economic Regions (CERs), mapped according to their specific growth drivers. An allocation of 5,000 crore per CER over five years has been proposed, to be implemented through a challenge mode with a reform-and-results-based financing mechanism.

**Debt Market Reforms Driving Long-Term Financing**

The debt market plays a crucial role in infrastructure financing by enabling governments, companies, and institutions to raise long-term funds through bonds and similar instruments. Investors buy these bonds, providing capital for projects and earning fixed interest in return. Unlike other financing channels that mobilize equity, blended finance, or institutional capital, debt market financing is purely borrowing-based and relies on repayment obligations. The Government has been working to make India's debt markets stronger and more effective for long-term infrastructure financing through the following measures:

**Inclusive Access:** Incentives in public debt issues for women, senior citizens, armed forces personnel, and retail investors.

**Simplified Compliance:** Easier rules



for issuers, including rationalised norms for large listed entities and digital annual reports.

**Transparency & Efficiency:** Refinement of the Electronic Book Provider (EBP) framework for better private placements. An Electronic Book Provider (EBP) is a platform mandated by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) for the issuance of debt securities through private placement.

**ESG Financing:** Frameworks for Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) debt securities such as green, social, sustainability, and sustainability-linked bonds.

**Asset Monetisation:** Streamlined norms to strengthen Infrastructure Investment Trusts (InvITs) for recycling capital and financing new projects.

India's Infrastructure Financing Ecosystem India's infrastructure financing has undergone a major transformation over the past decade, shifting from reliance on budgetary support to a blended model of public and private capital. According to the World Bank, India has emerged as the largest recipient of Private Participation in Infrastructure (PPI) investment in South Asia, accounting for over 90% of the region's total. Institutions like the National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) and the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID) have emerged as pivotal anchors, mobilising global and domestic capital and providing long-term development finance to strengthen India's infrastructure ecosystem. Alongside these institutions, instruments such as Infrastructure Investment Trusts (InvITs) and Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs) have enabled monetisation of completed assets and recycling of funds into new projects.

**Institutional Anchors of India's Infrastructure Financing:** India's infrastructure financing landscape is supported by specialized funds and institutions that channel capital, strengthen project pipelines, and enable sustainable growth across key sectors.

**National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF):** The National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF), founded in 2015 and anchored by the Government of India, raises capital from global and domestic institutional investors. It focuses on building a diversified portfolio with risk-adjusted returns by investing in operational assets and projects under construction. NIIF creates scalable platforms in transportation, energy, and digital infrastructure, either through its own management teams or by partnering with experienced operators. Its strong governance and market expertise make it a trusted partner for institutional investors in India's infrastructure sector. Today, it manages USD 4.9 billion in Assets Under Management (AUM) across its funds.

**Partnerships and Fund Structure:** Over

the years, the National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) has evolved into a sovereign-linked asset manager, building strong partnerships with leading global investors. These include sovereign wealth funds such as Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA) and Temasek; pension funds like Australian Super, Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan, and Canada Pension Plan Investment Board (CPPIB); multi-lateral development banks such as Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), Asian Development Bank (ADB), and New Development Bank (NDB); along with strategic government counterparts like the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC).

**Active Funds under NIIF**

**Master Fund – Focused on infrastructure investments.**

**Private Markets Fund – A fund of funds supporting private equity managers.**

**India-Japan Fund – Dedicated to climate, sustainability, and bilateral corridor projects.**

**Strategic Opportunities Fund – Concentrated on growth equity investments.**

Both the Master Fund and Private Markets Fund are fully committed, with Master Fund investments contributing to greenfield assets in ports, logistics, airports, and data centres.

**National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID):** The National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID), established in 2021, is a specialized Development Finance Institution dedicated to strengthening India's infrastructure sector. It addresses gaps in long-term non-recourse finance, supports bond and derivatives market development, and fosters sustainable economic growth. NaBFID acts as a provider, enabler, and catalyst by offering lending, investment, equity opportunities, and ESG-focused financing across the life cycle of infrastructure projects.

**Sanctions & Disbursements:** As of December 2025, it has approved ~ 3.03 lakh crore and disbursed ~ 1.09 lakh crore across core infrastructure and social/commercial sectors.

**Investor Base Expansion:** Introduced the Partial Credit Enhancement (PCE) product to attract wider participation in infrastructure, including insurance funds and pension funds. PCE is a support provided by financial institutions to improve the credit rating of the bonds issued by corporates, including their SPVs, NBFCs, and HFCS. It helps these entities get better terms when raising money through bonds. The Institution sanctioned its first PCE facility in February 2026.

**Transaction Advisory:** The Institution provides transaction advisory services to build a pipeline of investment-ready Public-Private Partnership (PPP) projects. These include engagements with the Government of J&K

(tourism projects for sustainable development of Dal Lake and surrounding areas in Srinagar) and Andhra Pradesh (Development of port and airport projects). The Institution is under active discussions with multiple state Government bodies, including Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Assam, Maharashtra, Telangana, and Gujarat.

**Global Capital Mobilisation:** In order to facilitate foreign investment in India's infrastructure, the Institution is in the process of setting up investment arms at GIFT City through a Finance Company, Fund Management Entity and Alternative Investment Fund. The Institution aims to attract private capital into infrastructure financing through equity investments, thus sharing investment risks and aligning interests with private investors.

**Urban Infrastructure Financing:** Expanded support, including 520 crore investment in municipal bonds.

**Partnerships & State Engagement:** Strengthened Multilateral Development Banks (MDB) collaborations and worked with State Governments on asset monetisation, acting as anchor investor in proposed InvITs.

**Signed MoU with International Finance Corporation (IFC)** in June 2023 to jointly offer Transaction Advisory Services focused on Public Private Partnership (PPP) projects.

**Signed Letter of Intent (LoI)** with Asian Development Bank (ADB) in December 2024, to promote climate resilience and sustainable urban & rural infrastructure in India.

**Signed LoI with Foreign Commonwealth & Development Office** in February 2025 to explore opportunities for financing of climate positive infrastructure projects, development of financial instruments and capacity building.

**Signed MoU with New Development Bank (NDB)** in April 2025 to help bridge the infrastructure financing gap in the country and explore long-term collaboration opportunities, including the exchange of technical expertise, joint participation in infrastructure investments through credit lines, guarantees, co-financing and technical cooperation schemes.

**Signed LoI with Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)** in June 2025 to foster joint efforts to develop sustainable infrastructure in India, with a strong emphasis on climate adaptation and mitigation.

**Signed LoI with Climate Bonds Initiative** in June 2025 to provide technical advisory for green financing.

**Signed LoI with KfW IPEX Bank** in December 2025 for establishing a framework for collaboration in assessing, structuring, and co-financing infrastructure projects across India.

**Strengthening Rail Infrastructure through IRFC**

Railways form the backbone of India's infrastructure, driving connectivity, trade, and economic growth. To support this vast network, the Indian Railway Finance Corporation (IRFC) serves as the dedicated financing arm, mobilising resources and strengthening the financial foundation of Indian Railways.

Established in 1986 as the exclusive financing arm of Indian Railways.

Raises funds from domestic and international markets to meet Extra Budgetary Resource needs.

Operates on a leasing model, financing assets that are leased back to Indian Railways.

Has financed 13,764 locomotives, 76,735 passenger coaches, and 2,65,815 wagons, covering nearly 75% of the rolling stock fleet.

**InvITs & REITs:** India's financial ecosystem has introduced innovative market structures that pool investor resources, broaden access to large-scale projects, and create diversified avenues for long-term growth in infrastructure and real estate.

**Infrastructure Investment Trusts (InvITs):** Introduced by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) in 2014, InvITs are special funds that let investors invest in big infrastructure projects. Earlier, only large institutions could access such opportunities, but InvITs open them up to ordinary investors as well. By pooling money, they create a diversified portfolio of projects that can generate steady income and long-term growth. At the same time, they allow infrastructure

developers to tap into household savings, helping finance essential projects.

The first Public InvIT is planned for launch in 2026, following cumulative monetisation of 1.52 lakh crore through Toll-Operate-Transfer (ToT) and private InvITs.

**Financing in Road Infrastructure:** These specialised trusts are enabling large-scale monetisation and reliable financing in India's highways sector.

The National Highways Infra Trust (NHIT), set up by the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) in 2020, concluded its fourth fundraising round at an enterprise value of 18,380 crore – the largest monetisation transaction in India's road sector. Across four rounds, NHIT has realised over 46,000 crore.

In January 2026, NHAI-sponsored Raajmarg Infra Investment Trust (RIIT) received a AAA (Stable) rating from CARE Ratings Limited, highlighting the safety and reliability of its debt instruments.

In September 2020, the Government approved monetisation of POWERGRID's assets through the InvIT model, the first such initiative in the power sector with proceeds channelled into new and under-construction projects.

InvITs have thus emerged as a trusted instrument for utilising long-term capital, attracting global investors, and strengthening India's infrastructure financing ecosystem.

**2. Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs):** Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs), regulated by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), allow investors to participate in income-generating real estate through small investments. Their units are listed on stock exchanges, offering transparency, liquidity, and diversification. Further, the Union Budget 2026-27 has announced the creation of dedicated REITs for Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) to accelerate monetisation of government-owned real estate assets.

**Structure:** Tripartite model with a sponsor, management company, and trust that owns properties on behalf of investors.

**Income Sources:** Rental income from real estate assets and capital gains from property sales.

**Low Entry Cost:** Enables investment with small ticket sizes compared to physical real estate.

**Liquidity & Divisibility:** Units can be traded on stock exchanges, allowing partial exits unlike whole property sales.

**Diversification:** Provides exposure to multiple properties across locations, reducing concentration risk.

**Transparency:** Regular disclosure of Net Asset Value (NAV) ensures clarity on investments.

**Infrastructure Risk Guarantee Fund – Securing Finance, Delivering Projects**

Infrastructure projects often face challenges such as early-stage project construction & development risks, delays, and uncertainty in execution. To address these issues, the Government introduced the Infrastructure Risk Guarantee Fund in the Union Budget 2026-27 to strengthen investor confidence and ensure the timely delivery of projects. This fund will provide wide of partial guarantees to lenders, reducing default risks for private developers and making financing more secure.

**Crowd-in private capital:** This mechanism will enable the crowding in of private capital and enable higher private sector participation in large-scale infrastructure projects.

**Ensuring Timely Completion:** By covering financing gaps, the fund will help prevent delays and ensure projects are completed on schedule.

**Building Confidence:** This measure reassures both domestic and global investors, aligning with the broader objectives of the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP) and the vision of Viksit Bharat.

**Conclusion** India's infrastructure financing journey reflects a decisive shift towards scale, innovation, and resilience. By blending public investment with institutional strength and modern instruments, the country is building a robust foundation for inclusive growth. The strategy not only secures capital flows but also ensures sustainability, competitiveness, and confidence in India's long-term development trajectory.

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

## Govt committed to public welfare, service delivery, inclusive growth: Satish Sharma

### Extends Navratra greetings, calls for peace, unity, prosperity

KT News Desk

SRINAGAR, MARCH 18: Minister for Food, Civil Supplies & Consumer Affairs, Information Technology, Transport, Youth Services & Sports, and Science & Technology, Satish Sharma Wednesday extended warm and heartfelt greetings to the people of Jammu and Kashmir on the auspicious occasion of Navratra.

In his message, the Minister, as per an official statement, underscored the spiritual and cultural significance of the nine-day festival, which is dedicated to the worship of Goddess Durga and symbolizes the victory of good over evil, light over darkness, and truth over falsehood. He said that Navratra is not merely a religious observance but a celebration of faith, devotion, inner strength, and the enduring values that bind



society together.

Satish Sharma noted that the festival serves as a reminder for all to reaffirm their commitment to righteousness, compassion, and self-discipline. He emphasized that such sacred occasions provide an opportunity to strengthen the bonds of communal harmony, brotherhood, and mutual respect

among people of all communities across Jammu and Kashmir. Highlighting the rich cultural diversity of Jammu and Kashmir, the Minister said that festivals like Navratra showcase the region's composite heritage and reinforce the spirit of unity in diversity. He urged people to celebrate the festival with devotion, enthusiasm, and a sense of

responsibility, while also ensuring care for the underprivileged and those in need.

The Minister further expressed hope that the auspicious occasion would usher in an era of peace, progress, and prosperity in Jammu and Kashmir. He reiterated the Government's commitment towards ensuring the welfare of the people, strengthening public service delivery, and promoting inclusive growth across all sectors.

Satish Sharma also prayed for the well-being, happiness, and good health of all citizens, and for continued peace and development in the region.

"May the divine blessings of Goddess Durga inspire us with courage, wisdom, and strength to overcome challenges and work collectively towards building a harmonious, progressive, and prosperous Jammu and Kashmir," he added.

## DC Bandipora chairs Road Safety Meeting

KT News Desk

BANDIPORA, MARCH 18: Deputy Commissioner Bandipora, Indu Kanwal Chib, Wednesday chaired a comprehensive road safety meeting to review the existing road safety scenario and discuss department-wise measures to minimise accidents across the district at the Mini Secretariat Bandipora.

During the meeting, as per an official statement, detailed deliberations were held on the roles and responsibilities of various departments in ensuring safer roads.

The Deputy Commissioner stressed the need for a coordinated and proactive approach, with special focus on awareness generation, infrastructure improvement, and identification of accident-prone areas.

The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) informed the meeting that several black spots have been identified across the district. The Deputy Commissioner directed the installation of signboards, road markings, and billboards at

vulnerable locations, especially at sharp turns and abrupt road endings.

The Superintending Engineer was directed to formally communicate with all concerned departments regarding necessary interventions.

On the occasion, the Deputy Commissioner directed the Traffic Police Department to submit division-wise data on road accidents, with particular emphasis on infrastructure-related causes. The DC highlighted the importance of data-driven planning to effectively address accident-prone zones.

ARTO, R&B, PMGSY, and Traffic Police departments were directed to submit detailed suggestions for improving road safety, particularly at key junctions such as Nussoo Stand Junction, Nowpora Chowk, and Kangri Chowk. Specific areas including SK Bala, Ajas, and Wullar Vantage Park were identified as highly vulnerable, where installation of crash barriers was strongly recommended.

The Deputy Commissioner further directed that all signboards across the district must

be highly reflective and clearly visible to ensure better guidance for commuters, especially during night hours. She also emphasised the role of public participation, urging citizens to inform the administration about locations requiring infrastructure interventions to enhance road safety.

During the meeting, the DC directed Municipal Committees to conduct field inspections of all urban areas and submit detailed reports on required interventions. The issue of encroachments affecting road safety was also discussed, with directions issued for identification and necessary action.

The meeting was attended by Additional Deputy Commissioner Bandipora, Zaffar Hussain Shawl; Superintending Engineer, R&B Circle Bandipora; Chief Planning Officer Bandipora; Chief Medical Officer; Executive Engineers of R&B and PMGSY; Deputy Superintendent of Traffic Police; Assistant Regional Transport Officer; representatives of BRO and NHAI, and other concerned officers.

## Mission YUVA: 393 cases approved by DLIC Anantnag

KT News Desk

ANANTNAG, MARCH 18: In a significant step to boost self-employment in the district, Mission YUVA District Level Implementation Committee (DLIC), Anantnag Wednesday approved 393 cases during its 27th meeting held at the DC office.

The meeting, as per an official statement, was chaired by District Development Commissioner (DDC), Chairman DLIC, Dr. Bilal Mohiud Din Bhat and was attended by ADDC (DNO, Mission YUVA), GM DIC, AD Employment, DSWO, District LDM, DNO JKEDI, DDM NABARD, Employment Officer and other concerned officials from Banks and other institutions.

Sector-wise, the approved cases included 185 in Retail, 59 in Transport, 54 in the Service sector and 28 in agricultural and allied sector besides other small business ventures associated with meaningful employment. With these 393 fresh cases, the district's tally of approved cases has reached 5904, out of which 2270 have received bank loans so far.

Notably, 27.5 percent of the applications were submitted by women aspirants, indicating their increasing interest in entrepreneurial initiatives in the



district.

Addressing the meeting, the DDC directed the concerned departments and banking institutions to ensure expeditious processing of loan cases and provide necessary facilitation to the applicants so the benefits of Mission YUVA are accrued by them.

The DDC emphasized the need for close coordination between banks and line departments for smooth implementation of the scheme.

At the conclusion, the DLIC reaffirmed the commitment to strengthening entrepreneurship avenues, promoting self-reliance and providing sustainable employment opportunities to the youth through Mission YUVA in the district.

## GYAN BHARATAM MISSION

### 3-day awareness cum training workshop concludes in Jammu

KT News Desk

JAMMU, MARCH 18: The three day Awareness Cum Training program on GYAN BHARATAM MISSION concluded Wednesday at Kala Kendra here.

The workshop, as per an official statement, focused on manuscript preservation, conservation and digitization, and aimed to Search and Scan manuscripts, share knowledge through the Gyan Bharatam Mission App, and create a universal Indian Knowledge System portal.

An Expert Team from IGNC, New Delhi comprising Senior Conservators, Dr Satyendra Kumar and Dr Nitin Kumar gave hand holding practice and knowledge to the participants and briefed them about techniques for conservation of manuscripts besides, digitization, documentation and conservations of Manuscripts during the process of survey in Urban and Rural areas in J&K.

Speaking on the occasion, Director, Archives, Archaeology and Museums, K K Sidha said that the 3 Day Gyan Bharatam Mission workshop focused on manuscript preservation, conservation and digitization with experts from IGNC New Delhi and



both Cluster Centre of J&K chapter. He added that the objectives of GYAN BHARATAM MISSION is Search, scan, share manuscripts and how to use Gyan Bharatam Mission App for survey and data collection for line departments to conduct district and sub-division level training workshops.

The Director also highlighted the objectives of GYAN BHARATAM MISSION and its goal to digitize and share India's ancient knowledge and briefed them about techniques for conservation of manuscripts to cover Ayurveda, Agriculture Science, Vedas, and everyday life topics etc.

The Director said that post training program, the line department officer teams will search manuscripts door-to-door, like "Har Ghar Dastak" & Digitize with the custodians' to create a universal Indian Knowledge System portal and make it accessible to scholars, universities and the public nationwide.

During the programme, Senior district officers from Jammu Division received hands-on training from IGNC experts.

Regional Director, Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts (IGNCA), Shruti Awasthi; HOD and Cluster Head Gyan Bharatam Mission, Department of Persian, Kashmir University Dr Jahangir Iqbal; Coordinator, Regional Cluster Centre, Gyan Bharatam Shashvat Art Gallery, Museum and Manuscript Library, Upper Bazar Jammu, Dr Suresh Kumar Abrol; Deputy Director, AA&M JK, Dr Sangeeta Sharma; Secretary Kala Kendra, Dr. Javed Rahi, besides, other concerned senior officers and stakeholders including ADDCs, BDOs, Technical Officers and Private collectors, official from Spiritual Growth Centre Shree Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board, Ranbir Sanskrit library, Dharmarth Trust Jammu, Education Department, Library department also participated in the workshop.

## DC Kulgam reviews functioning of Solid Waste Management Site at Liroo

KT News Desk

KULGAM, MARCH 18: Deputy Commissioner (DC) Kulgam, Shahzad Alam, Wednesday visited the Solid Waste Management (SWM) site at Liroo and reviewed its functioning.

During the visit, the DC, as per an official statement, inspected key components of the facility, including compost pits and the Material Recovery Facility (MRF), and took stock of the overall operations.

He directed the concerned officials to ensure that the facility is made fully operational at the earliest.

Emphasizing the importance of efficient waste management, the DC stressed the need for proper segregation of waste at source, timely processing, and expedited clearance of legacy waste.



He instructed for strict adherence to Solid Waste Management rules and called for maintaining proper hygiene and cleanliness at the site.

The DC further instructed the officials to adopt a proactive approach to streamline operations and ensure sustainable waste management practices across the district.

## DDC Bandipora reviews District CAPEX Budget 2025-26



KT News Desk

BANDIPORA, MARCH 18: District Development Commissioner (DDC) Bandipora, Indu Kanwal Chib, Wednesday chaired a comprehensive review meeting to assess the progress under the District CAPEX Budget 2025-26 at the Mini Secretariat Bandipora.

During the meeting, the DC, as per an official statement, conducted a detailed review of both financial and physical progress achieved under the CAPEX Budget. It was informed that the district has achieved 70.79% cumulative financial progress, while physical progress stood at 88%, with 2009 works completed so far.

A thorough department-wise review was carried out, covering parameters including outlay, funds released, expenditure incurred, allotted cost of new works, percentage expenditure against releases, and number of bills pending at the treasury for payment.

The DDC reviewed progress across key sectors and departments, including R&B Bandipora, Sumbal and Gurez; I&FC Sumbal; PHE Bandipora and Sopore; PHE Hydraulics Bandipora, and Minor Irrigation Division Shadipora. Sectoral performance of Elementary and Secondary Education (CEO Bandipora), Health (CMO

Bandipora), Youth Services & Sports, and Urban Local Bodies including Municipal Committees Bandipora, Sumbal, and Hajin was also assessed.

The DC also took stock of works executed under various funding components including Un-tied Grants, DDC Grants, BDC Grants, PRI Grants, Aspirational Block Development Scheme (ABDS). Departments such as RDD Bandipora, ACP Bandipora, Education Bandipora, Health Bandipora, JAKEDA, Ground Water Srinagar, PDD Bandipora and Sumbal, MID Shadipora, Floriculture, Handicrafts, Sheep Husbandry, Agriculture, and others were reviewed for their performance under these schemes.

Further, the progress under Samridh Seema Yojana was also evaluated, with works executed by PDD Bandipora, Forest Department, and R&B Gurez.

While reviewing the performance, the DDC stressed the need for timely execution of works, optimal utilization of funds, and adherence to quality standards. She emphasized that all departments must ensure that allocated funds are translated into tangible and visible outcomes on the ground.

The DDC expressed concern over delays in some sectors and directed the concerned officers to expedite the pace of work and clear pending liabilities, including bills at the treasury level.

## Commissioner JMC conducts inspection of Wards 26, 39 & 66

### Assures time-bound redressal of civic issues

KT News Desk

JAMMU, MARCH 18: Commissioner, Jammu Municipal Corporation (JMC) Dr. Devansh Yadav Wednesday undertook an extensive inspection tour of Wards 26, 39 and 66, covering the areas of Top Sherkhania, Subash Nagar, Suryavanshi Nagar, Lower Roopnagar and Muthi, to take firsthand stock of the civic issues and challenges being faced by the residents.

During the visit, Dr Yadav, as per an official statement, interacted with locals, who apprised him of a range of pressing concerns affecting their day-to-day lives. Prominent among these were demand for a comprehensive improvement in the drinking water supply system, immediate repair and maintenance of drainage networks to prevent waterlogging and black-topping of dilapidated roads. Residents also emphasized the need for tiling work in inner lanes to enhance accessibility and cleanliness.

In addition, the locals raised serious concerns regarding sanitation conditions in various pockets of the locality and highlighted the issue of non-functional streetlights, which pose safety risks, especially during night hours.



of these issues, Dr. Yadav issued on-the-spot directions to the concerned officials to ensure swift and effective action. Health Officer, Dr. Vinod Sharma was directed to intensify sanitation measures in the area and to carry out regular inspections, including daily monitoring of the attendance and performance of sanitary workers to ensure accountability and efficiency.

Further, officials from the Electrical Division were instructed to conduct a comprehensive survey of streetlights in the area and ensure immediate repair or replacement of all non-functional units.

Directions were also issued to the engineering wings to assess the requirements for drainage repairs, road black-topping and lane tiling work and initiate necessary action at the earliest. Reaffirming the commitment

of the Jammu Municipal Corporation towards improving civic amenities, Dr. Yadav assured the residents that all genuine demands would be addressed on priority and within a stipulated time frame. He emphasized that coordinated efforts among various departments of JMC would be ensured to deliver tangible results on the ground.

Dr. Yadav further stated that such field visits are part of the Corporation's ongoing efforts to directly engage with citizens, understand their concerns and implement need-based solutions in a transparent and efficient manner.

The visit underscores the proactive and responsive approach of the Jammu Municipal Corporation in strengthening urban infrastructure and enhancing the quality of life for the citizens of Jammu.

## Census 2027

### Training programme for charge officers continues in Baramulla



KT News Desk

BARAMULLA, MARCH 18: The three-day capacity-building programme for Charge and additional charge officers being conducted in connection with the forthcoming Census of India 2027, Wednesday entered its 2nd day at the Meeting Hall of the DC Office Baramulla.

The training sessions were conducted by Master Trainers and District Coordinators from the Directorate of Census Operations, Jammu and Kashmir.

The programme, as per an official statement, was attended by the senior district officers, tehsildars from across all 18 tehsils, and other officials associated with census operations.

Day-2 of the programme focused on strengthening the operational readiness of the

Charge Officers for Phase-I of the Census, i.e., the House Listing and Housing Census (HLO), which lays the groundwork for the entire enumeration exercise.

Expert trainers and National Level Master Trainers conducted in-depth sessions on field-level implementation strategies, effective supervision techniques, and the use of digital tools for real-time data collection.

Emphasis was laid on ensuring accuracy, consistency, and timely reporting of data through robust monitoring mechanisms.

Participants were also engaged in practical demonstrations and interactive discussions aimed at addressing field challenges and enhancing their understanding of prescribed schedules, formats, and guidelines.

## Par panel commends role of Army, IAF during Operation Sindoor

PTI

New Delhi, Mar 18: A parliamentary panel on defence has lauded the IAF for its "commendable role" during Operation Sindoor, and said by executing precision strikes with advanced aerial platforms and integrating indigenous technologies, the air force demonstrated "exceptional professionalism and operational readiness".

In its report, presented in Parliament on Wednesday, the committee also commended the Indian Army's "decisive role" in safeguarding national security during the decisive operation, and said it expected that "our expenditure should be in proportion to the increase in defence spending of our neighbours".

Therefore, the panel feels that the capital budget of the Army should be sufficient to have a "deterrent capacity to ward off adversaries in case of any hostility," the report said.

The committee further said post Operation Sindoor, emergency procurement provisions were accorded in 2025 for capital and revenue procurement to further enhance capability to development.

"The Committee are also happy to know that emergency procurements are being utilised for acquiring drones, counter-drones, weapon systems, precision ammunition, electronic warfare and surveillance systems," it says.

The report is titled -- Demands for Grants of the Ministry of Defence for the year

2026-27 on Army, Air Force, Navy, Joint Staff, Ex-Servicemen Contributory Health Scheme and Director General of Armed Forces Medical Services.

The panel praised the Indian Army's "decisive role" in safeguarding national security during Operation Sindoor last year, and emphasised the need for sustained investment in defence preparedness.

It urged that future budgets should "prioritise induction of state-of-the-art weapon systems and the development of requisite infrastructure", so that the Army's hallmark swift and coordinated response to diverse security scenarios can be maintained and further strengthened.

The panel also praised the Indian Air Force for its "commendable role during Operation Sindoor. By executing precision strikes with advanced aerial platforms and integrating indigenous technologies, the Air Force demonstrated exceptional professionalism and operational readiness".

Its swift deployment, accurate targeting, and seamless coordination with ground forces ensured the success of the mission, "significantly degrading hostile infrastructure," it added.

The Committee emphasised upon the defence ministry that such capabilities underscore the importance of continued investment in modern air power to maintain India's strategic edge and safeguard national security.

It urges upon the ministry to make all necessary efforts for

providing adequate financial support for acquiring latest advanced aircraft, weapons and equipments required to meet the challenges of present geopolitical scenario so that preparedness and combat capability of the air force are "enhanced to a significant level".

In the report, the panel also noted that with a view to fast track the process of theaterisation, a dedicated team of officers from all three Services has been formed under the Chief of Integrated Staff to Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee (CISC).

The Committee also note that three Joint Staff Officers undertake study of global military organisations as well as organise discussions among the three Services to streamline the process of reorganisation.

The Joint Staff has been able to take forward the process of theaterisation to an "advanced stage," it said.

The Committee said it is happy to note that all the three Services are working towards one common goal and enhancing their integration through pursuits in common operational planning process, technology development, harmonising intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance resources, aggregating remotely piloted assets, joint standard operating procedures and formulation of joint military civil fusion doctrine.

In a separate report, 'Review of Sainik Schools, Rashtriya Indian Military College (RIMC) and Rashtriya Military Schools',

also presented in Parliament on Wednesday, the panel flagged that the average dropout rate during the last five years in the Sainik Schools, Rashtriya Military School and Rashtriya Indian Military College is 6.93 per cent, 6.96 per cent and 7.1 per cent, respectively.

The Committee said it feels that the seats which fall vacant after the cadets leave these institutions midway remain vacant until the next entrance examination is held.

"This has a rippling effect as on one side the precious resources of the Government go waste due to idling of seats, on the other side it curtails the opportunities of candidates who intend to join the NDA course. The Committee, therefore, urges upon the Ministry to address this dropout issue on priority basis," it said.

The Committee also urge the ministry to reinforce its commitment and take all necessary steps in a time bound manner for providing requisite infrastructure including administrative infrastructure, dormitories and related facilities for girls cadets in RIMC, which would eventually result in enhancement of their physical and mental faculties for preparation and induction into the armed forces of the nation.

It also recommend that the ministry should review or revise its existing policy, particularly relating to land criteria required for establishment of new Sainik Schools, first of which came up in 1961, and currently number 33 across the country.

## India's sustained efforts driving sharp decline in child mortality: UN Report

PTI

New Delhi, Mar 18: India has emerged as a key contributor to global progress in reducing child mortality, according to the latest United Nations report.

The UN Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (UNIGME) Report 2025 highlighted India's sustained and large-scale efforts in improving child survival outcomes, particularly across neonatal and under-five mortality indicators.

Highlighting the report in an X post, Union Health Minister J P Nadda attributed the progress to India's focused, comprehensive approach to neonatal care.

Over the last two decades, India has played a pivotal role in reducing child mortality in the South Asia region, which witnessed a 76 per cent decline in under-five deaths since 1990 and a 68 per cent drop since 2000.

The under-five mortality rate in the region fell significantly from 92 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2000 to nearly 32 in 2024, reflecting sustained progress in child health outcomes.

This sharp reduction is largely driven by countries like India through targeted public health interventions, improved institutional delivery systems, and expanded immunisation coverage.

"India is among the countries demonstrating steady progress in reducing child mortality through sustained public health efforts. This reflects the strength of a coordinated, standards-driven approach led by the Government of India in collaboration with states, with



a clear focus on translating national priorities into improved outcomes for children," UNICEF India said in a press statement.

Highlighting India's statistics in the report, Health Minister Nadda said on X, "As per the UNIGME 2025 report, Neonatal Mortality Rate (NMR) has declined by nearly 70% -- from 57 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 17 in 2024 -- reflecting sustained improvements in maternal and newborn healthcare services. Similarly, the Under-5 Mortality Rate (U5MR) has registered an even steeper reduction of 79%, declining from 127 in 1990 to 27 in 2024."

Pointing to the key initiatives that led to this reduction, he said, "Key initiatives -- Special Newborn Care Units (SNCUs), Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY), Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram (JSSK), and expanded immunisation combined with robust health systems have been driving this transformation."

"India's focused comprehensive approach on neonatal care has paved the way for eliminating preventable child deaths and securing a healthy future for our children," he added.

The UNIGME report underscored that a majority of child deaths are preventable or treatable, and India's scaling up of interventions such as the Universal Immunisation Programme, facility-based newborn care, and Integrated Management of Neonatal and Childhood Illnesses has significantly improved survival rates.

India's improvements in neonatal care systems have been particularly impactful. Across South Asia, neonatal deaths declined by nearly 60 per cent since 2000 and mortality in children aged 1 to 59 months declined by over 75 per cent.

While South Asia still accounts for nearly 25 per cent of global under-five deaths, the region has made one of the fastest reductions globally, positioning India as a leader among high-burden countries.

India's success demonstrates that targeted, large-scale, and equity-driven interventions can deliver rapid results, even in populous and diverse settings, health ministry sources said.

India is among the first few countries to set targets and release operational guidelines on Stillbirth Surveillance and response, the report said. This surveillance will strengthen systematic reporting to enable corrective actions in the public health system.

"India's experience shows that sustained leadership, strategic investments and strong collaboration with committed stakeholders have enabled a robust, scalable and effective implementation framework targeted towards the achievement of the SDGs," the report said.

## US eases Venezuela oil sanctions as Trump seeks to boost world oil supply

AP

Washington, Mar 18: US companies will be allowed to do business with Venezuela's state-owned oil and gas company after the Treasury Department eased sanctions, with some limitations, on Wednesday as the Trump administration looks for ways to boost world oil supplies during the Iran war.

The Treasury issued a broad authorisation allowing Petróleos de Venezuela SA, or PDVSA, to directly sell Venezuelan oil to US companies and on global markets, a massive shift after Washington for years had largely blocked dealings with Venezuela's

government and its oil sector. Separately, the White House said Trump would waive, for 60 days, Jones Act requirements for goods shipped between US ports to be moved on US-flagged vessels. The 1920s law, designed to protect the American shipbuilding sector, is often blamed for making gas more expensive.

The moves highlight the increased pressure that the Republican administration is under to ease soaring oil prices as the United States, along with Israel, wages a war with Iran without a foreseeable end date. Global oil prices have since spiked as Iran halted traffic through the narrow Strait of Hormuz, where



one-fifth of the world's oil typically passes through from the Persian Gulf to customers worldwide.

Drivers in the United States are paying the highest pump prices in about 2 1/2 years. The national average for a gallon of

regular gasoline topped USD 3.84 on Wednesday according to AAA, compared with USD 2.98 before the US and Israel launched strikes against Iran on Feb 28.

Even before that, voters were worried about higher living costs, and fuel prices are now adding to concerns for Republicans heading into the election season with their control of Congress at stake in November.

"Gas prices are up and we know they're up. And we know that people are hurting because of it. And we're doing everything that we can to ensure that they stay lower," Vice President JD Vance said at an event in Auburn Hills,

Michigan. "This is a temporary blip."

The Treasury's license is designed to incentivise new investment in Venezuela's energy sector and is intended to benefit both the US and Venezuela, while increasing the global oil supply, a Treasury official told The Associated Press. The official was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke one condition of anonymity.

Since the ouster and arrest of Nicolás Maduro as Venezuela's president during a US military operation in January, President Donald Trump has said the US would effectively "run" Venezuela and sell its oil.

The US license provides

targeted relief from sanctions, but does not lift the penalties altogether. The license allows companies that existed before Jan 29, 2025, to buy Venezuelan oil and engage in transactions that would normally be banned under American sanctions, reopening trade for a major oil producer to global markets.

There is not likely to be much impact on US gas prices in the short term, said Geoff Ramsey, an expert on Latin America at the Atlantic Council think tank.

"We're talking about 12 to 18 months before we see dramatic changes in Venezuelan output," Ramsey said in an interview.

## CONTD. FROM FRONT PAGE

### Evening Aarti

infinite and every moment spent is a step towards inner journey

"In this rapidly changing world, amid the relentless pace of life, we need a meditative moment to remind ourselves about the greatest treasure that exists within us. I believe that Jammu Aarti provides an opportunity to every section of society to rediscover this priceless inner wealth," the Lieutenant Governor said.

The Lieutenant Governor observed that efforts are being made to present the beautiful city of Jammu also famously known as city of temples, as a global center of spirituality and a prominent destination on the map of spiritual tourism.

"Through the Jammu Aarti in the sacred precincts of the Raghunath Temple, devotees of Mata Vaishno Devi and Baba Amarnath arriving from across the country and abroad will get the opportunity to truly experience the spiritual radiance of this holy land and the local economy too shall find renewed momentum," the Lieutenant Governor said.

He also observed that such rites and gatherings are perhaps the only means through which true self-realization becomes possible and younger generation gets an opportunity to understand and imbibe the values of spiritual legacy.

"Youth must realize that they have inherited a precious legacy. It is not an inheritance of wealth or position, but of an inner treasure," the Lieutenant Governor said.

Dr. Ritu Singh, Chairperson of Shri Raghunath Ji ki Jammu Aarti Sanstha, other office bearers, prominent citizens and devotees were present on the occasion. (KNO)

### J&K Police's proactive

capacity-building initiative significantly strengthened the force's ability to operate in hostile and challenging environments of higher reaches."

The results of this strategic overhaul have been clearly visible.

"By 2025, the number of terror incidents in the region saw a marked reduction, reflecting improved intelligence coordination, better

area domination, and swift neutralization of threats," they said.

"This strategy not only disrupted terror networks but also restored a sense of security among the local population in the far flung areas of different districts."

Pertinently, DGP Prabbhat while addressing a Passing Out Parade at the STC Talwara recently stated that J&K Police have changed tactics to counter terror. "Over the past two years the J&K Police altered its operational strategy and intensified action in remote forests and mountains where terrorists have attempted to regroup. The battle has shifted to jungles and upper reaches. We are moving upwards into these areas to get them (terrorists) and destroy their hideouts."

He also said that Police were now actively engaging terrorists in forests. "Our operations are aimed at countering terrorists who are sent by our nefarious neighbour. We are not allowing them to succeed in their evil plans," he said.

While recalling last year's "Operation Mahadev," the DGP said security forces eliminated three Pakistani terrorists during the operation. "The terrorists were responsible for the killing of 26 civilians in the Baisaran (Pahalgam) area. Police had pursued them deep inside the forest before neutralising them." (KNO)

### LG, CM extend

oneness and harmony."

CM Omar Abdullah, in his message, said that Navratri marks the beginning of the New Year and symbolises the triumph of truth, righteousness and virtue over evil. "On this auspicious occasion, I extend my warm wishes to everyone for their success, happiness and well-being," he said.

### PM Modi hails

The Chief Minister also extended his felicitations to the Kashmiri Pandit community on the occasion of Navreh. "May these festivals strengthen the bonds of brotherhood and inspire us to dedicate ourselves to the service of humanity," he added.

### PM Modi hails

in particular will gain significantly from the scheme," he said.

The prime minister said his government is

leaving no stone unturned to make the lives of farmers as easy as possible.

In this direction, he said MSP (minimum support price for crops) funding for the 2023-24 cotton season was approved on Wednesday.

"This step of ours will ensure protection of the interests of cotton farmers across the country," Modi said in a post in Hindi on X.

He said the rapid expansion of connectivity across the country is among the Centre's top priorities.

"In line with this, the four-laning of the Barabanki-Bahraich section of the national highway was approved today. This will not only reduce travel time but will also boost the economic development of the region," he said.

### Day 4: Snow,

relatives for the festival. The MeT department has issued an advisory asking travellers and transporters to plan their movement carefully, especially over higher reaches and key mountain passes, where snowfall and slippery road conditions could lead to disruptions.

"There is a possibility of thunder and gusty winds with speeds of 40-50 kmph at isolated places, along with chances of hailstorm," the official said.

Day temperatures across the Valley remained below normal due to the wet spell, leading to a noticeable drop in the mercury and a return of chill, especially during mornings and evenings. The MeT department has forecast generally dry weather from March 21 to 25, with a brief spell of light rain or snow at isolated places on March 23. Another spell of cloudy weather with light precipitation at scattered to many places is expected between March 26 and 28.

Farmers have been advised to suspend farm operations till March 20 in view of the ongoing wet spell and possible adverse conditions. (KNO)

### Peak power

Earlier in previous week KNO reported that Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh are likely to depend on nearly 30 percent of coal based energy by the year 2030.

The official documents available in this

regard reveal that the likely total projected contracted capacity for the year 2035-36 is around 11,001 Megawatts (MW).

"The projected contracted capacity consists of 3239 MW from coal, 129 MW from gas, 68 MW from nuclear, 3666 MW from hydro, 2040 MW from solar, 598 MW from Distributed Renewable Energy (DRE) and 1261 MW from MTOA or STOA," it reads.

The documents further reveal that the capacity shall be able to meet the projected demand with prescribed reliability criteria.

It also said that any deviations in the commissioning schedule of the planned capacity could result in a situation where the UT is unable to meet the projected peak demand and energy requirements identified with the available resources. (KNO)

### 20% of adults in

spikes. Fibre-rich foods slow glucose absorption and improve digestion, while proteins such as fish, poultry, tofu, eggs and pulses help maintain muscle health and satiety. Healthy fats from nuts, seeds and olive oil should be used in moderation. Eating smaller, balanced meals at consistent times helps regulate calorie intake and stabilise blood sugar levels.

For a practical daily plan, doctors suggest fresh fruits such as guava or papaya in the morning; moong dal or grilled chicken with a mixed vegetable curry, cucumber salad for lunch; and grilled or steamed fish with leafy greens such as methi or spinach, a small portion of red rice or one phulka, and warm low-fat milk with turmeric for dinner. Roasted chickpeas or boiled egg whites with unsweetened herbal tea make for a healthy snack.

Doctors advise choosing whole grains over refined carbohydrates, limiting high glycaemic foods such as white rice and potatoes, avoiding deep-fried and sugar-laden foods and staying hydrated with water, buttermilk or herbal teas.

"The key lies in balanced meals, mindful portions and smart food choices," said Dr Muzaffar Ahmad. "Healthy eating does not mean compromising on taste; it means making better choices."

With cases rising steadily across J&K, health professionals are urging people to adopt preventive measures early, stressing that lifestyle

changes today can prevent serious complications tomorrow. (KNO)

### Foreign tourist

compared to 2024, largely attributable to the Pahalgam incident, the sector demonstrated resilience, with recovery visible from June 2025 onwards.

"The cumulative footfall of approximately 1.78 crore by December 2025 indicates restoration of confidence and sustained interest among visitors," the report states.

In its report, the Committee said that tourism continues to be one of the key drivers of economic activity and employment generation in the Union Territory.

"The upward trend in tourist arrivals in recent years has contributed significantly to livelihoods in hospitality, transport, handicrafts, and allied sectors," reads the report.

The Committee recommended that the development of emerging destinations must be accompanied by adequate infrastructure, waste management systems, carrying capacity assessment, connectivity improvement, and local community participation.

"A long-term sustainable tourism strategy should be prepared, integrating environmental safeguards and tourist carrying capacity norms. Infrastructure development initiatives at emerging destinations may be expedited in a time-bound manner with clear outcome indicators," the report states.

The Committee further recommended that greater emphasis be placed on high-value tourism segments such as eco-tourism, adventure tourism, and winter tourism.

"Skill development and entrepreneurship support should also be provided to local youth to maximize livelihood benefits. Measures for periodic monitoring of tourist satisfaction, safety perception, and infrastructure adequacy could be initiated," reads the report.

The panel reiterated that tourism has emerged as a vital sector for the economic revitalization of Jammu & Kashmir, and sustained focus on diversification, infrastructure strengthening, and confidence-building measures will be essential to maintain the growth momentum. (KNO)

## 'In politics, there's no full stop': PM bids farewell to 59 RS members

Hails Deve Gowda, Mallikarjun Kharge, Sharad Pawar



**PTI**  
New Delhi, Mar 18: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday paid tributes to 59 members retiring from the Rajya Sabha between April and July, calling Parliament "an open university" and urging outgoing legislators to continue contributing to national life.

Addressing the Upper House on the occasion of the biennial farewell, Modi said such moments naturally dissolve partisan divides. "A shared sentiment emerges within us all the realisation that our colleagues are now moving forward to undertake other endeavours," he said. To members who do not plan to return, the Prime Minister offered reassurance: "In politics, there is no such thing as a full stop. The future awaits you as well, and your experience will forever remain an enduring part of our national life."

Modi reserved special praise for three senior leaders former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda, Leader of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge, and NCP chief Sharad Pawar calling them stalwarts who have spent more than half their lives in parliamentary proceedings. "The manner in which they continue to attend the House with such dedication is truly exemplary -- a spirit from which all new parliamentarians ought to learn," he said. The Prime Minister also paid tribute to outgoing Deputy Chairman Harivansh, describing him as "gentle and soft-spoken" yet a "man of rigorous action". He noted that Harivansh had continued to travel across the country during recess periods, engaging with the youth on issues of national importance. In a lighter vein, Modi singled out Union Minister Ramdas Athawale. "Our Athawale-ji is truly evergreen," he said, drawing laughter in the House. "He is departing, yet I am confident no one will feel a void he will continue to serve tirelessly." Reflecting on the bicameral structure of Parliament, the Prime Minister likened the passage of legislation between the two Houses to seeking a "second opinion" -- a practice, he said, that strengthens democratic decision-making. "A decision taken in one House goes to the other for a second opinion. This gives new direction to the entire debate and the decision-making process," he said. Modi also noted that some outgoing members had the rare distinction of having served in both old and new Parliament buildings. He described a six-year Rajya Sabha term as "an invaluable opportunity to shape one's life", offering legislators deep insight into the nuances of national affairs.

## 2.6 lakh passengers returned to India from West Asia since Feb 28: MEA

**PTI**

New Delhi, Mar 18: Amid the escalating West Asia conflict, the government on Wednesday said around 2.6 lakh people have returned from the region to India since February 28. At an inter-ministerial briefing here on the West Asia situation, Additional Secretary (Gulf), Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Aseem R Mahajan, said that on Wednesday, around 70 flights were expected to operate from various airports in the UAE to different destinations in India. The flight situation is "reassuring," he said. MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal spoke about a telephonic conversation between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan on Tuesday. "The two leaders discussed the current situation in West Asia. The prime minister reiterated India's strong condemnation of all attacks on the UAE that have resulted in loss of innocent lives and damage to civilian infrastructure," he said. The two leaders agreed on the importance of "ensuring safe and free navigation through the Strait of Hormuz," Jaiswal said. "Both leaders will continue to work together for the early restoration of peace, security and stability in the region," the



MEA spokesperson said. This was for the second time Modi spoke to the UAE President since the US-Israeli combine launched an attack on Iran on February 28. Tehran has retaliated by attacking several Gulf countries hosting US military bases. The Indian Embassy in Tehran is aiding Indian nationals, especially students, Jaiswal said. Many more Indians have expressed the wish to cross the Iranian border to go to Armenia and Azerbaijan borders, he said. "Our embassy has issued an advisory and we appeal to all to follow them to ensure safe transit across Iran-Armenia and Iran-Azerbaijan borders," he added. On a query on the supply of fuel to some of the neighbouring countries of India, the MEA spokesperson said, "This particular question I have already addressed before. I would like to reiterate

that we have received these requests, and we are examining those requests, keeping in mind our own requirements and availability." Mahajan said the MEA "continues to monitor developments" in the Gulf and the West Asia region "very closely". "We continue to assist seafarers, stranded Indian nationals and short-time visitors for visas, consular services, and logistical support wherever required... We have made special efforts to help Indian students in the Gulf region," he said. Since February 28, around 2.6 lakh passengers have returned from the region to India, Mahajan told reporters. He said that the missions in the regions have reached out to schools, including those affiliated with the CBSE. The class 10 exam on Sunday was cancelled, as was the class 12 exam, he said. The ICSE and

Kerala board exams have also been cancelled, he said. "The respective boards will announce the formulation and determination of marks in these cases in due course," the additional secretary (Gulf) in the MEA said. He added that in Tehran, the Indian Embassy has facilitated the relocation of several Indian students. On the flight situation, Mahajan said, while there have been operational closures in some countries, "overall the flight situation continues to improve" with additional flights operating. On March 17, around 70 flights operated from airports in the UAE to India. Today, around 70 flights are expected to operate from various airports in the UAE to different destinations in India, he said. The Qatar airspace remains partially open. Qatar Airways operated five flights to India yesterday. Qatar Airways also announced flights to nine destinations today, the MEA official said. In Kuwait, airspace has been closed since February 28, he said. Special non-scheduled commercial flights by Jazeera Airways of Kuwait are expected to operate in the coming days to India, from the Al Qaisumah international airport in Saudi Arabia, the MEA official said.

## Two new uranium mining projects at clearance stage: Jitendra Singh



**PTI**  
New Delhi, Mar 18: Uranium Corporation of India Ltd (UCIL) is set to establish a uranium mining and processing plant with a capacity of 2,500 tonnes per day (TPD) at Rohil in Rajasthan's Sikar district and Ja-jwal, Chhattisgarh, said Union Minister Jitendra Singh on Wednesday. In a written reply to the Lok Sabha, the minister said the mining projects were under various stages of obtaining statutory clearances. "UCIL, a public sector undertaking (PSU) under the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE), mandated to mine and process uranium ore in the country, has undertaken initiatives to enhance the indigenous capability of Uranium mining. UCIL has planned to take up new uranium mining projects in line with the vision of Viksit Bharat @2047," said Singh. The minister said that the Nuclear

Fuel Complex (NFC), a constituent unit under the DAE, undertakes fabrication of fuel assemblies indigenously for Nuclear Power Corporation India Limited (NPCIL), which operates pressurised heavy water reactors (PHWRs) and boiling water reactors (BWRs) with uranium as raw material sourced from UCIL and imports. Singh stated that the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) and the Nuclear Recycle Board (NRB) are constructing large-capacity integrated nuclear recycle facilities at the Integrated Nuclear Recycle Plant (INRP) in Tarapur and the Fast Reactor Fuel Cycle Facility (FRFCF) in Kalpakkam. These facilities will be used for recycling and management of spent fuel from domestic sources and the fabrication of fuel. "The facilities are expected to enhance the indigenous capacity for fuel fabrication and waste management in the country," Singh said.

## Want to bring all 'good' leaders of Congress in Assam into BJP: Sarma

**PTI**

New Delhi, Mar 18: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday took a swipe at the Congress, saying no person with self-respect will stay in the opposition party and he wants to bring all its "good" leaders in Assam into the BJP for a brighter future of the state. Himanta's remarks came after Congress Lok Sabha MP Pradyut Bordoloi joined the

BJP here. Asked about the Congress alleging that the BJP is inducting its leader because it doesn't have good leaders in the party, the Assam chief minister told reporters, "Let the Congress say what it wants. But, it is our goal to bring all good leaders of Congress into the BJP fold." "We have to brighten the future of the BJP and Assam both. That's why I want to

gradually bring into the BJP fold all those Congress leaders who are assets, not a liability," Sarma said, adding, "We started it (the move) in 2016 and we have achieved 99 per cent success in it." He claimed that no "self-respecting individual" can remain with the Congress, particularly in Assam, given the condition of the party and the kind of ideology that it has been following today.



## Cabinet approves Rs 2,585 cr scheme for small hydro projects

To offer up to Rs 3.6 cr/MW aid

**PTI**  
New Delhi, Mar 18: The Centre on Wednesday decided to provide up to 30 per cent of the project cost, or up to Rs 3.6 crore per MW, in aid for small hydro projects under a new Rs 2,585 crore scheme for the development of about 1,500 MW clean energy capacity. The Union Cabinet, in its meeting on Wednesday, cleared the Small Hydro Power Development Scheme with an outlay of Rs 2,585 crore for five years from 2026-27 to 2030-31, an official statement said. The scheme is expected to attract about Rs 15,000 crore in investment in small hydro projects of up to 25 MW capacity. The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has approved the 'Small Hydro Power (SHP)

Development Scheme for period FY 2026-27 to FY 2030-31' with an outlay of Rs 2584.60 crore for installation of SHP projects of an approximate capacity of 1500 MW, the statement said. The scheme will support small hydro projects (between 1-25 MW capacity) to come up in different states and will especially benefit hilly and North Eastern states with high potential for such projects. In North Eastern States and in districts with international border, central financial assistance to the tune of Rs 3.6 crore per MW or 30 per cent of the project cost, whichever is lower, with an upper limit of Rs 30 crore per project will be available, it stated. In other states, Rs 2.4 crore per MW or 20 per cent of project cost, whichever is lower, with a cap of Rs 20 crore per project, would be available.

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## Iran strikes Tel Aviv with cluster warheads after Israel kills Larijani, son, deputy



REUTERS

Dubai, Mar 18: Iran targeted Tel Aviv with missiles carrying cluster warheads in what it said was retaliation for Israel's assassination of Iran's security chief Ali Larijani, Iranian state television reported on Wednesday. Iran's Supreme National Security Council, which Larijani led as secretary, said Larijani's son and his deputy, Alireza Bayat, were also killed in an Israeli attack on Monday night. The targeted killings took place as the US-Israeli war on Iran shows no signs of de-escalation. Israel has said that Iran has repeatedly used cluster warheads, which disperse into multiple smaller explosives mid-air and spread over a wide area, making them difficult to intercept. The attack on densely populated Tel Aviv overnight on Tuesday killed two people, bringing the death toll in Israel from the war to at least 14. In

Iran, a projectile hit an area near the Bushehr nuclear power plant on Tuesday evening, however it caused no damage or injuries, Iran told the International Atomic Energy Agency. IAEA chief Rafael Grossi reiterated his call for maximum restraint during the conflict to avoid the risk of a nuclear accident. Israel and the US have said preventing Iran from developing a nuclear weapons programme was one of the goals of the attacks they launched more than two weeks ago, which killed the country's supreme leader and many other top officials. Iran's new supreme leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, has rejected proposals conveyed to Iran's foreign ministry for "reducing tensions or ceasefire with the United States," according to a senior Iranian official who asked not to be identified. Khamenei, attending his first foreign-policy meeting since his appointment, said it was not "the right time for peace until the United States

and Israel are brought to their knees, accept defeat, and pay compensation," according to the official. The official did not clarify whether the younger Khamenei, who has not yet appeared in photos or on TV since being named last week to replace his slain father, had attended the meeting in person or remotely. Trump says don't need help US-based Iran human rights group HRANA said on Monday that an estimated 3,000-plus people have been killed in Iran since the US-Israeli attacks began at the end of February. Iranian attacks have killed people in Iraq and across the Gulf states, as well as Israel. More than 900 people have died since Israel began attacks on Lebanon on March 2, the Lebanese Health Ministry said on Tuesday. The Strait of Hormuz, a transit point for a fifth of the global oil trade, remains largely closed as Iran threatens to attack tankers linked to the US and Israel. Oil prices have soared. US President Donald Trump has repeatedly castigated allied countries in recent days for their cool response to his requests for military help to restore the passage of oil tankers through the strait. Most US allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization have told Trump they don't want to get involved in the conflict, he said on Tuesday, describing Nato's position as "a very foolish mistake." "Because of the fact that we have had such Military Success, we no longer 'need,' or desire, the NATO Countries' assistance - WE NEVER DID!" Trump wrote on social media, also singling out Japan, Australia and South Korea.

## Israel says military killed Iranian Intelligence Minister Esmail Khatib

AP

Dubai, Mar 18: Israel's defence minister said Wednesday that the military killed Iranian Intelligence Minister Esmail Khatib. Khatib's killing follows Israel killing top Iranian security official Ali Larijani and the head of the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard's all-volunteer Basij force. Also on Wednesday, Iran launched strikes toward Israel and neighbouring Gulf countries, with explosions heard in the United Arab Emirates and Qatar and interceptions reported in Saudi Arabia. The attacks came hours after Iranian state media confirmed Israel's military killed top Iranian security official Ali Larijani in an overnight strike, as well as General Gholam Reza Soleimani, the head of the Revolutionary Guard's Basij force, known for its role in suppressing protests.

An Israeli airstrike struck an apartment building in Bachoura, central Beirut, completely flattening it as day broke. Two earlier strikes on residential apartments in other central Beirut neighbourhoods early Wednesday killed at least six people and wounded 24 others, according to the Lebanese Health Ministry. Israeli strikes targeting central Beirut have become increasingly frequent in recent days, with or without prior warning. The attacks have hit far from the city's southern suburbs, for which the army issued evacuation notices early in the war with Hezbollah. The US-Israeli war with Iran has killed at least 1,300 people in Iran, more than 900 in Lebanon and 14 in Israel, according to officials in those countries. The US military says 13 US service members have been killed and about 200 wounded.

## Trump says NATO's refusal to help on Iran is "very foolish mistake"



REUTERS

Washington, Mar 18: President Donald Trump on Tuesday said the United States had been informed by most of its NATO allies that they did not want to get involved with the country's military operation in Iran, a move he described as a "very foolish mistake." But Trump gave no indication that he plans to punish NATO allies for their stances, as he took questions from reporters in the Oval Office during the St. Patrick's Day visit of Irish Prime Minister Micheal Martin. Trump said NATO countries were supportive of the joint U.S.-Israeli war, which has now entered its third week, even as they did not want to get involved. "I think NATO is making a very foolish mistake," Trump said. "Everyone agrees with us, but they don't want to help. And we, you know, we as the United States have to remember that because we think it's pretty shocking," he added. As for whether he would retaliate against NATO allies for holding back, Trump said he had "nothing currently in mind." The president in the past has threatened to withdraw the United States from NATO but did not bring that up on Tuesday. Trump called on nations to help police the Strait of Hormuz, through which 20 percent of the world's oil is transported, after Iran responded to U.S.-Israeli attacks by using drones, missiles and mines to effectively close the channel for tankers.

## Pope Leo calls universal health care 'moral imperative'



REUTERS

Vatican City, Mar 18: Pope Leo made a plea on Wednesday for countries to offer their citizens universal health care, calling it a "moral imperative" that people have access to the health services they need. Previous popes have called for countries to offer universal health care, but calling an

issue a "moral imperative" is an unusually strong term for a pope to use, indicating that something is required by Catholic teaching. "Universal health coverage is ... a moral imperative for societies that wish to call themselves just," the pope said in a meeting with participants in a health care conference organized by the World Health Organization

and European bishops. "Healthcare must be accessible to the most vulnerable ... not only because their dignity requires it but also to prevent injustice from becoming a cause of conflict," he said. "Health cannot be a luxury for the few." Leo's predecessor, Pope Francis, called in 2021 for health care systems to be "accessible to all," citing Italy's tax-funded health service as an example. Leo is the first pope from the United States, which does not have universal health coverage. At Wednesday's meeting, he urged bishops in Europe to address inequalities in health care. "Only together can we build communities of solidarity capable of caring for everyone," said the pope. "Caring for the humanity of others helps us to live our own lives to the full."

## Can't play all your life so education is important: Sindhu

PTI

Gurugram, Mar 18: Two-time Olympic medal-winning Indian badminton ace P V Sindhu on Wednesday stressed on the need for aspiring athletes to have good education, warning that it is too "risky" to ignore academics and focus solely on a sporting career that can end with a single injury. The former world champion made these remarks in a fireside conversation at DPS International, while speaking to educationist Devyani Jaipuria. The Hyderabad touched upon several aspects of her own journey to drive home the point, including the self-doubt that she battled before the 2016 Olympics after being laid low by a stress fracture of the left foot. "I have been playing for so many years. At some point of time you have to retire, right? And that's the truth. You can't be playing sport when you're 45 or 50 or 60 at the highest level. "And you have to accept that fact, whereas education will always be lifelong with you, and that will always stay with you," she said, echoing a sentiment expressed by national coach Pullela Gopichand, who has urged parents of aspiring athletes to prioritise education. "Nobody is born with a golden spoon and you have to work hard, whether it is in studies or sports...Studies and sports are equally



important. I have done my MBA. So, I know, like, it's not easy...you go to training in the morning, come back, study, and then you go for evening sessions. "Because at the end of the day, that is the truth, where sports is a very small thing, right? Life-long, you know, you will always have an education by your side. Sport is also important, but not that, you know, completely stop your studies," she asserted. The 30-year-old is on a break after being stranded in Dubai due to closure of air space for some days in the middle of the American and Israeli bombing of Iran. She said sporting injuries can be hard to comeback from and that's why she would urge budding athletes to always have academic backup.

# رمضان المبارك

1447 H / 2026 CE

وقت افطار	اعتقاصمحرى	رمضان المبارك	تاريخ	وقت افطار	اعتقاصمحرى	رمضان المبارك	تاريخ
06:34 PM	05:31 AM	16	06	06:21 PM	05:49 AM	1	19
06:34 PM	05:30 AM	17	07	06:22 PM	05:48 AM	2	20
06:35 PM	05:28 AM	18	08	06:23 PM	05:47 AM	3	21
06:36 PM	05:27 AM	19	09	06:24 PM	05:46 AM	4	22
06:37 PM	05:26 AM	20	10	06:24 PM	05:45 AM	5	23
06:38 PM	05:25 AM	21	11	06:25 PM	05:44 AM	6	24
06:38 PM	05:24 AM	22	12	06:26 PM	05:42 AM	7	25
06:39 PM	05:23 AM	23	13	06:27 PM	05:41 AM	8	26
06:40 PM	05:20 AM	24	14	06:28 PM	05:40 AM	9	27
06:41 PM	05:19 AM	25	15	06:29 PM	05:39 AM	10	28
06:42 PM	05:18 AM	26	16	06:30 PM	05:38 AM	11	01 MAR
06:42 PM	05:16 AM	27	17	06:31 PM	05:37 AM	12	02
06:43 PM	05:15 AM	28	18	06:32 PM	05:36 AM	13	03
06:44 PM	05:14 AM	29	19	06:33 PM	05:34 AM	14	04
06:45 PM	05:12 AM	30	20	06:33 PM	05:33 AM	15	05

**DUA FOR SEHRI**

وَبِصَوْمٍ غَدٍ نُوَيْتُ مِنْ شَهْرِ رَمَضَانَ  
I intend to keep the fast for tomorrow in the month of Ramadan

**DUA FOR IFTAAR**

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي لَكَ صُمْتُ وَبِكَ امْتَنْتُ [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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