



Build strong, lasting connection with timeless traditions: LG Sinha to youth

Says next generation will reshape India's legacy, propel it towards developed, sustainable tomorrow

KNO Desk

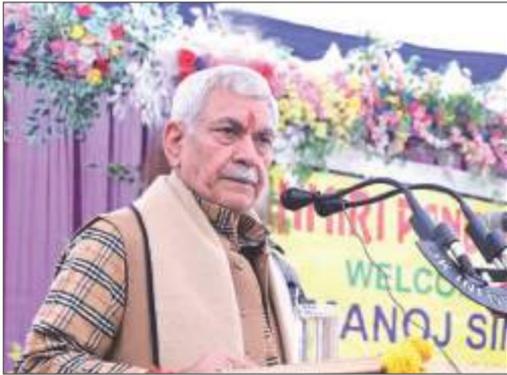
Jammu, Mar 19: Urging youth to build a strong and lasting connection with the timeless traditions, Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Thursday said that rich spiritual heritage and wisdom would always remain our greatest treasures.

Speaking at the Navreh celebrations, organised by Kashmiri Pandit Sabha, here, LG Sinha, according to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) said, "Youth will not merely inherit India's legacy but reshape it and propel it toward a developed, sustainable tomorrow."

He said that Jammu Kashmir holds the potential for a dynamic and flourishing future, growing into a vibrant center of culture and advancing into a prosperous Union Territory through steady progress. "Achieving this vision ultimately depends on the younger generation. I sincerely hope that our youth will draw strength from the wisdom passed down by our ancestors and work with determination to elevate Jammu Kashmir to a place among the country's developed regions," he said.

The Lieutenant Governor invoked the blessings of Maa Sharika for the health, prosperity, and well-being of all.

Interacting with the devotees, the Lieutenant Governor wished that the New Year usher in a radiant dawn for everyone,



illuminating paths to renewed hope and a thriving future. "Worship of Maa Durga and Maa Sharika is a profound bow to the primal source of power from which universe spring. As Rigveda says, the mother's strength is infinite. The true seeker who worships her with sincerity attains the essence of reality, from which all life's insights flow effortlessly," he added.

"I personally hold that Navreh and Navratri mark an inner journey. Over nine days of fasting, prayer, and discipline, Navratri transforms the devotee from within," the Lieutenant Governor said.

LG Sinha highlighted that our traditions outline four stages of devotion— attentively hearing

the prayer, deeply contemplating it, internalizing it fully, and reaching samadhi, where the knower and the known merge as one. "I pray that all devotees experience these stages in life," he said.

On the occasion, the Lieutenant Governor also felicitated Padma Shri Brij Lal Bhat. K.K Khosa, President, Kashmiri Pandit Sabha, Jammu; Deepak Dhar, senior Vice President and other office-bearers of Kashmiri Pandit Sabha and people from different walks of life joined the Navreh celebrations.

Padma Shri Dr SP Varma; Dr Ashok Bhan, Member, Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board; Brij Mohan Sharma, Principal Secretary Culture; Ashok Koul, BJP General | [More on P6](#)

Navratri: LG joins devotees, pays obeisance at Vaishno Devi shrine



Yogesh

Jammu, Mar 19: Braving the rain and bitter chill with fervent chants of "Jai Mata Di", thousands of devotees trekked along the serpentine path to the cave shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi atop the Trikuta hills on the first day of Navratri, to pay obeisance to the deity.

According to the details available with the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) Reasi district witnessed a huge rush of pilgrims, with around 15,000 devotees seeking the blessings of Mata Vaishno Devi on the first day of Chaitra Navratri.

Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha also paid obeisance at the revered Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine, joining thousands of devotees who thronged the cave shrine. He offered prayers for peace, prosperity and well-being as the 9-day festival commenced with intense spiritual fervour across the region. "Paid obeisance at revered Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine on the auspicious occasion of Chaitra Navratri. Prayed for peace, prosperity, happiness and well-being of one and all", the LG said in a post on his X handle.

An official said, "The yatra progressed | [More on P6](#)

Snowfall disrupts road connectivity across J&K, key highways closed

Sgr-Kargil, SSG, Mughal, Sinthan roads, Razdan Pass shut

Traffic moving slowly on Jammu-Srinagar highway



Sajid Raina

Srinagar, Mar 19: Fresh snowfall across several high-altitude areas of Jammu and Kashmir disrupted road connectivity on Thursday, forcing authorities to close key roads, including the Srinagar-Kargil highway and other strategic routes, officials said.

An official told the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) that traffic on the Srinagar-Kargil highway was suspended after continuous snowfall along the Zojila axis, including Minimarg, Drass and Gumri, rendered the road unsafe for vehicular movement.

"The heavy accumulation and reduced visibility led to the precautionary closure of the highway. The road has become slippery and hazardous

due to continuous snowfall," the official said.

He said that snowfall is ongoing across the Zojila corridor, significantly affecting visibility and increasing the risk of avalanches in vulnerable stretches.

The closure has snapped surface connectivity between Kashmir and the Kargil region. Road clearance agencies, including the Border Roads Organisation, are monitoring the situation and will begin snow removal operations once weather conditions improve.

Meanwhile, the Bandipora-Gurez road via Razdan Pass has also been closed following fresh snowfall. Traffic on the nearly 85-kilometre stretch has been suspended till further orders.

Sub-Divisional Magistrate Gurez said the decision was taken in view | [More on P6](#)

Crescent not sighted, Eid on Saturday: Grand Mufti

Rehan Qayoom Mir

Srinagar, Mar 19: Grand Mufti Nasir-ul-Islam has announced that the crescent was not sighted anywhere in Jammu and Kashmir on Thursday and Eid-ul-Fitr will be observed on Saturday.

The announcement ended suspense across the Valley following Maghrib prayers.

Speaking to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), he said no credible reports of moon sighting were received by the official moon-sighting committee. "With the crescent not sighted this evening, Edi-ul-Fitr will be celebrated on Saturday," the Grand Mufti said.

The committee, which includes Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, confirmed the decision after reviewing inputs from various districts. Muslims across J&K will celebrate Eid on Saturday. (KNO)

J&K Bank logs Rs 8,300 cr Eid transactions across UT

UPI leads with over 4 crore transactions | Nearly 6 crore deals recorded in 4 days

Rehan Qayoom Mir

Srinagar, Mar 19: Banking activity across Jammu and Kashmir witnessed a sharp spike during the Eid-ul-Fitr shopping period, with digital platforms leading the surge as thousands of people turned to cashless modes for festive purchases.

Notably, trends from the Eid-ul-Fitr rush indicate a decisive shift towards digital payments across the region.

As per official data of J&K Bank, available with the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), non-branch banking transactions between March 16 and 19 touched Rs 8,393.88 crore, spread across 5,94,00,887 transactions, reflecting robust economic activity ahead of Eid.

Going forward, such spikes are expected to increase further tomorrow, being the



last day of the holy month of Ramadan, with growing digital penetration and consumer preference for faster payment modes.

As per the data, UPI remained the dominant transaction channel, recording 4,00,48,711 transactions worth Rs 3,125.00 crore during the four-day period.

It further said that mobile-based mPay services also witnessed significant activity, logging 1,70,58,715 transactions amounting to Rs 2,991.70 crore. The volume is expected to rise further with the culmination of Ramadan and peak festive shopping.

The data further revealed that despite the digital surge,

ATM withdrawals continued alongside, with 15,50,168 transactions worth Rs 658.57 crore, indicating that cash still plays a parallel role during high-spending periods.

"High-value transactions through e-banking channels remained significant, with Rs 1,466.00 crore worth of transactions recorded, although the number of such transactions stood at 83,641," the data said.

It added that kiosk banking also maintained its presence in underserved areas, facilitating 65,952 transactions worth Rs 152.61 crore during the period.

It is important to mention that Jammu and Kashmir has witnessed a steady rise in digital banking adoption over the past few years. While multiple banks operate in the region, J&K Bank remains the largest and most widely used financial institution, with a dominant presence in | [More on P6](#)

Kashmir bakers' association distributes over 560 Eid kits among underprivileged

KNO Desk

Srinagar, Mar 19: In a humanitarian initiative ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr, the Kashmir Bakers Confectioners Association (KBCA) on Thursday said they have distributed more than 560 bakery kits among underprivileged families across the Valley during Ramadan, aiming to ensure that the spirit of the festival reaches every household.

In a statement issued to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), a spokesperson said the distribution drive, carried out in three phases, reflects the Association's continued commitment to social welfare. By reaching hundreds of families, KBCA has reinforced its role as a socially responsible organization dedicated to community support, especially during significant religious occasions.

Speaking to the media, KBCA President Shahid Hussain Mir, as per the statement said by other office bearers, stated



that the Association has always played an active role in social service.

"He highlighted that the organization's constitution encourages and permits members to extend support to the needy during challenging times, natural disasters, or major occasions like Eid."

Providing details, Mir said that this year's initiative saw an approximate 15 percent increase in distribution compared to last year. "A total of 560-plus bakery kits have been

distributed in three phases, including 255 kits in the first phase, 155 in the second and 150 in the third phase," he said.

He further noted that while the Association generally avoids publicizing such charitable activities, the decision to highlight this initiative was taken to inspire other sectors of society to come forward and contribute towards helping the underprivileged.

"Kashmiris have always been at the forefront of charitable and welfare activities—be it in

healthcare, education, or during times of crisis," Mir said, urging people to actively participate in such initiatives to help build a stronger and more compassionate society.

"On the occasion, he also advised bakery owners to maintain good behavior with customers, ensure the supply of quality products and strictly adhere to the guidelines set by authorities. He appealed to consumers to report any grievances against Association members through the contact numbers provided below the official rate lists."

"Among others present at the event were senior advisors Umar Mukhtar and Atta Mohammad, General Secretary Bilal Ahmad Khan, Senior Vice President Javid Ahmad Khan, Vice President Humayun Yousuf Jan, Additional General Secretary Ashiq Hussain Bhat, Treasurer Syed Ayoub Sofi and Organizer Ejaz Ahmad Sofi etc. The Association reaffirmed its commitment to | [More on P6](#)

India condemns attacks on energy infrastructure in West Asia PM Modi calls for early restoration of peace

PTI

New Delhi, Mar 19: As fresh attacks on West Asian gas hubs triggered global concerns, India on Thursday said the strikes are "unacceptable and need to cease" even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi reached out to top leaders of Oman, Jordan, France and Malaysia, emphasizing the urgency to restore peace in the volatile region.

Following his phone conversation with Jordan's King Abdullah II, Modi said the attacks on energy infrastructure in West Asia are "condemnable and can lead to avoidable escalation".

New Delhi described the attacks on the gas infrastructure as "deeply disturbing" and that assaults will only serve to further destabilise an already uncertain energy market globally.

An Israeli attack on Iran's strategic gas fields of South Pars on Wednesday resulted in an intense Iranian retaliation on key



energy infrastructure in a number of Gulf nations including Qatar's LNG (liquefied natural gas) hub of Ras Laffan. Qatar accounts for nearly 40 per cent of India's LNG requirement.

India's reaction to the attacks on the energy infrastructure appeared to mark a nuanced shift in its position as it did not distinguish between Israeli strike on the Iranian gas hub and Iran's counter attack.

New Delhi had earlier only

condemned Iran's attacks on civilian infrastructure in several Gulf nations, including Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, but stopped short of denouncing attacks on Iranian facilities.

"India had previously called for the avoidance of targeting civilian infrastructure, including energy infrastructure, across the region," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said at his weekly media briefing.

"The recent attacks against energy installations in different locations across this region are therefore deeply disturbing and only serve to further destabilise an already uncertain energy scenario for the whole world," he said.

"Such attacks are unacceptable and need to cease," Jaiswal said without naming any country.

The spokesperson said LNG supply could be impacted due to the latest attacks and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz. But he also said | [More on P6](#)

Satish Sharma leads market checking drive across Jammu

Issues warning against black marketing, hoarding, overcharging

KT NEWS DESK

JAMMU, MARCH 19: In a decisive move to safeguard consumer interests and ensure uninterrupted supply of essential commodities, Minister for Food, Civil Supplies & Consumer Affairs (FCS&CA), IT, Transport, Youth Services & Sports, Satish Sharma Thursday led an extensive and high-intensity market checking drive across multiple locations from Katra to Jammu, focusing particularly on the distribution and availability of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG).

Demonstrating proactive governance and on-ground monitoring, the Minister, as per an official statement, conducted surprise inspections at several LPG godowns, distribution outlets, and retail points. He thoroughly reviewed stock positions, distribution records, booking and delivery systems, and compliance with prescribed norms. He also interacted with consumers, delivery personnel, and distributors to get first-hand feedback regarding availability, pricing, and service delivery. During the inspections, Satish Sharma issued a stern warning against black marketing, hoarding, overcharging, and



any attempts to create artificial scarcity of LPG. He made it unequivocally clear that the government will adopt a zero-tolerance policy towards such malpractices.

"There will be no atonement for those found indulging in black marketing or exploiting

consumers. Anyone violating the law, be it an LPG distributor, delivery agent or any intermediary, will face strict legal action without exception," the Minister asserted.

Reiterating the government's commitment to transparency, accountability, and consumer

protection, the Minister emphasized that ensuring the availability of LPG at regulated prices remains a top priority. He assured the public that there is adequate stock of LPG and that the government is closely monitoring the supply chain to prevent any disruption.

Satish Sharma further directed the concerned officers of the FCS&CA department to intensify market checking drives across all districts, maintain strict vigilance, and take immediate punitive action against violators. He stressed the need for a robust monitoring mechanism, including regular inspections and real-time reporting, to curb any malpractice effectively. He instructed them to ensure continuous enforcement of regulations and strengthen coordination with law enforcement agencies to maintain discipline in the markets. The Minister also called upon the general public to remain vigilant and report any instances of overcharging, hoarding, or denial of service. He assured that prompt action will be taken on all genuine complaints and strict penalties will be imposed on offenders.

Senior officers of the FCS&CA department and district administration accompanied the Minister during the drive.

NIELIT organises Mega Job Fair in Jammu

KT NEWS DESK

JAMMU, MARCH 19: The National Institute of Electronics & Information Technology (NIELIT) Jammu organised a Mega Job Fair at Convention Centre, Canal Road here under the Digital J&K Project sponsored by Union Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeITy).

During the fair, as per an official statement, more than 500 vacancies across technical and marketing roles were offered for youth through the participation of over 20 reputed companies from IT services, electronics manufacturing, and allied industries.

Speaking on the occasion, Joint Director & Officer Incharge, NIELIT Jammu, Rajneesh Raina highlighted the importance of the fair in bridging the gap between industry requirements and skilled youth, while expressing gratitude to his dedicated team, trainers, and the hospitality and protocols department for their ground and background support in making the event a success.

Joint Director and Event Coordinator, Sarita Kaur in her address underlined the



trust and enthusiasm shown by companies and candidates in the fair.

Placement Officer, Kanchan Koul noted that the initiative ensured transparent and merit-based recruitment, while as CGC Coordinator, Gopal Sharan observed that the Career Guidance & Counselling tie-up with NIELIT will strengthen industry-academia collaboration,

ensuring structured guidance and placement support for students.

The event drew a large turnout of graduates, diploma holders, and skilled youth from across the Union Territory, reinforcing NIELIT Jammu's role in strengthening the skill ecosystem and aligning with the Government of India's vision of digital empowerment and inclusive growth.

DC Bandipora reviews Semi Ring Road works at Sumbal

Assesses subsidence in Hajin & Chandergir areas

KT NEWS DESK

BANDIPORA, MARCH 19: Deputy Commissioner Bandipora, Indu Kanwal Chib, Thursday conducted an extensive field visit to Wangipora Sumbal to inspect NHAI works, Naninara Bridge, Hajin and Chandergir areas to review ongoing works, assess ground conditions, and examine issues related to infrastructure and land subsidence.

During the visit to Wangipora Sumbal, the DC, as per an official statement, inspected the progress of works under the Semi Ring Road Phase II project being executed by NHAI. She took stock of on-site developments and reviewed bottlenecks affecting execution. It was informed that a major issue concerning a graveyard along the alignment has restricted the road width to two lanes at a particular stretch. The DC directed the concerned agencies to resolve the issue in coordination with stakeholders while ensuring minimal disruption to the project timeline. She also stressed the need for accelerating work by deploying adequate manpower and machinery and maintaining close coordination among departments.

At Naninara Bridge, the Deputy Commissioner reviewed the ongoing works and assessed the structural condition. Taking note of the prevailing weather conditions and the sensitive nature of the works, she said that the alternate route will remain closed for all types of vehicular movement, including two-wheelers, for another one week. She appreciated the efforts of the R&B



Sub-Division Sumbal for their work, along with the support of SDM Sumbal and the District Administration.

On the occasion, the DC acknowledged the inconvenience faced by the public and appealed for patience and cooperation, emphasizing that the quality and safety of the structure remain the top priority.

The DC also visited Hajin and Chandergir, where she inspected areas affected by land subsidence. She directed the concerned departments to carry out detailed assessments and ensure coordinated, time-bound measures to mitigate risks and safeguard affected areas. She reiterated the

need for a long-term and sustainable solution to address the issue.

During her visit, the Deputy Commissioner interacted with local residents, listened to their concerns, and assured them of all possible support from the administration. She emphasized that public cooperation is essential for timely completion of works and effective resolution of ongoing issues.

The Deputy Commissioner was accompanied by Additional Deputy Commissioner Bandipora, Zaffar Hussain Shawl; Sub-Divisional Magistrate Sumbal, Executive Engineers, Tehsil Sumbal and other concerned officers.

Mission YUVA: Bandipora Admin organises Potential Entrepreneurship Mela

KT NEWS DESK

BANDIPORA, MARCH 19: District Administration Bandipora organized a one-day Potential Entrepreneurship Mela under Mission YUVA at GDC Sumbal.

During the mela, as per an official statement, various departments including Handicrafts and Handloom, Agriculture, Animal and Sheep Husbandry, NRLM, DE&CC, J&K Bank and RSETI set up stalls to showcase schemes and provide on-the-spot guidance to aspiring entrepreneurs. Help desks and advisory counters were established to facilitate interactions regarding credit facilities, training programmes, and institutional support.

Sanction letters were also distributed among applicants whose cases had been approved by the bank, marking a significant step towards facilitating entrepreneurship on the ground.

Successful entrepreneurs and members of Self Help Groups (SHGs) also participated in the event and shared their experiences, motivating aspiring youth to explore entrepreneurship as a viable career option.

The programme witnessed active participation from local youth, women entrepreneurs, officials, and other stakeholders.

GMC Srinagar secures NABL Accreditation for Biochemistry Lab



KT NEWS DESK

SRINAGAR, MARCH 19: In a major development, the Biochemistry Diagnostic Laboratory, Government Medical College (GMC) Srinagar & Associated SMHS Hospital has secured accreditation from the National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories (NABL) in accordance with the international standard ISO 15189:2022.

NABL, a constituent board of the Quality Council of India, certifies laboratories for quality and technical competence, ensuring accurate and reliable diagnostic services.

The accreditation, as per an official statement, granted for a period of four years till 2030 covers an extensive scope of routine and advanced biochemical and immunological investigations, including blood glucose, electrolytes, renal function tests, Liver Function Tests (LFT), Kidney Function Tests (KFT), glycated hemoglobin (HbA1c), lipid profile, thyroid function tests, enzyme assays, advanced hormone assays, tumor (cancer) markers, and other specialized parameters, all validated as per international standards.

Prof. Iffat Hassan, Principal/Dean, Govt Medical College Srinagar appreciated the efforts of the faculty and laboratory staff of the department of Biochemistry and emphasized continued commitment to high-quality diagnostic services.

Head, Department of Biochemistry, Prof. Sabyia Majid stated that this is the first large Government sector laboratory in the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir to achieve NABL accreditation of this scale and it reflects the dedicated teamwork of faculty and technical staff, making the laboratory a path-breaker in delivering quality diagnostic services in the region.

The Biochemistry Lab is a state-of-the-art fully automated facility equipped with advanced machinery, testing equipment, and robotic intervention, enabling it to conduct approximately 30 lakh tests annually with accuracy and efficiency. The lab's quality management system and technical competence were key factors in securing the accreditation.

GMC Srinagar reaffirms its commitment to maintaining and expanding its NABL-accredited scope in line with global best practices.

Training on Housing Census conducted in Reasi

KT NEWS DESK

REASI, MARCH 19: A training programme for Phase-1 of the House-listing and Housing Census was organized in Reasi by Census officials. The session aimed to thoroughly train Charge Officers, Sub-Divisional Magistrates (SDMs) and their Census Clerks on all aspects of the upcoming first phase of Census operations.

The training, as per an official statement, covered critical components of the House-listing and Housing Census, including preparation of the House-list, collection of data on housing conditions, household amenities, assets and infrastructure facilities. Participants were given hands-on guidance on the use of digital tools, mobile applications and the self-enumeration portal to ensure accurate, efficient and transparent data collection during the field operations.

The programme was graced by the presence of district officers, Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC), Assistant Commissioner Revenue (ACR), Chief Planning Officer (CPO), District Statistics & Evaluation Officer (DSEO) and Accounts Officer to the Deputy Commissioner (AO to DC).

Census officials conducted detailed interactive sessions, practical demonstrations and addressed queries related to roles, responsibilities, timelines and quality control measures for Phase-1 operations. Emphasis was laid on achieving complete coverage, maintaining data integrity and adhering strictly to the prescribed schedules and guidelines.

Market checking drives conducted in Ramban

KT NEWS DESK

RAMBAN, MARCH 19: In line with the directives of Deputy Commissioner Ramban Mohammad Alyas Khan, market checking drives were conducted by joint teams of various enforcement departments across the district to ensure adherence to quality standards and fair trade practices.

In view of the festivals, the drive is continuing across Ramban, a team led under the guidance of Tehsil Ramban, Deep Kumar carried out intensive inspections of markets with special focus on edible and perishable items. The checking primarily covered fresh consumables including mutton, chicken, cheese and other essential food items. During the inspection, the team verified the quality, hygiene, pricing and proper display of rate lists. Shopkeepers were directed to maintain cleanliness, ensure the sale of quality products and strictly adhere to the prescribed norms.

JMC launches citywide awareness drive

Residents urged to clear water dues before March 31 deadline

KT NEWS DESK

JAMMU, MARCH 19: With the deadline for payment of water bills approaching on March 31, the Commissioner, Jammu Municipal Corporation Dr. Devansh Yadav issued comprehensive directives to ensure maximum public participation in clearing pending dues and to streamline the collection process across the city.

In line with these directions, the Jal Shakti Department, as per an official statement, particularly Divisions 1 and 2 functioning within the jurisdiction of JMC launched a widespread awareness and

facilitation campaign. As part of this initiative, 12 dedicated camps have been established at various locations across Jammu to educate residents about the importance of timely payment of water charges and to provide convenient on-the-spot payment facilities.

Under Division 1, camps have been set up at Roopnagar, Dhonthli, Resham Ghar, Janipur and Hazuri Bagh. Similarly, under Division 2, camps are operational at Kunjwani, Trikuta Nagar, Sainik Colony, Digiana Ashram, Channi Himmat, Channi Rama and Greater Kailash. These camps witnessed active participation

from residents, with officials providing guidance, addressing queries and facilitating immediate bill payments.

The initiative aims not only to improve revenue realization but also to promote a sense of civic responsibility among citizens regarding the maintenance and sustainability of essential water supply services. Officials highlighted that water dues amounting to nearly 30 crore are still pending across Jammu city, which significantly impacts the department's ability to maintain and upgrade infrastructure.

Appealing to the public, the department urged all consumers

to take advantage of these camps and clear their outstanding dues well before the deadline to avoid last-minute inconvenience. The camps have been strategically located to ensure easy accessibility for residents from all parts of the city.

Providing further details, Executive Engineer, Jal Shakti Department (Division 1) Tajinder Pal Singh said that strict action may be initiated against defaulters after the due date. He cautioned that non-payment of water charges could lead to disconnection of water supply connections and urged residents to act promptly.



Eid rush in Kashmir markets defies rain

REHAN QAYOOM MIR

Srinagar, Mar 19: A visible excitement and last-minute rush gripped markets across Kashmir on Thursday as shoppers thronged bazaars for last-minute Eid purchases.

From early morning, markets in Srinagar and other districts witnessed heavy footfall, with people, young and old, making a final dash to buy clothes, bakery items, footwear and essentials ahead of Eid.

Despite intermittent rain and a dip in temperatures, the enthusiasm remained

undeterred.

Vendors said the last days before Eid are always crucial, with this year too, the turnout is good as families came out together, many after days of waiting for the right time to shop.

"There is always a different feeling in the air before Eid. People want everything perfect, new clothes for children, and special food for guests. It is not just shopping, it is part of the celebration," a local shopkeeper in Srinagar said.

Notably, parents were seen

accompanying children, while youth crowded garment and footwear stores, adding to the festive buzz.

The spirit of Eid was visible in every corner of the markets, with bakeries witnessing queues and roadside vendors doing good business.

While the prevailing weather conditions caused brief disruptions, shoppers made the most of dry intervals, underscoring their determination to complete preparations in time—(KNO)

SKIMS to fill 1,100 vacancies via JKSSB, JKPSC



JAHANGEER GANIE

Srinagar, Mar 19: To cut down on patient load and delays in specialised care, Sher-i-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences (SKIMS), Soura, has initiated the process to fill around 1,100 vacant posts through the Jammu and Kashmir Services Selection Board (JKSSB) and Jammu and Kashmir Public Service Commission (JKPSC).

Director SKIMS Soura, Dr Ashraf Ganie, speaking to the media on the sidelines of the commissioning of high-end medical equipment and advanced

diagnostic facilities at the institute on Wednesday, said the recruitment drive is crucial to addressing persistent manpower shortages that have impacted waiting time for consultations and surgeries, particularly in super-specialty departments.

"We have taken up around 1,100 posts for referral to recruiting agencies. Once these positions are filled, the institute will be in a much better position to handle patient flow," the Director said.

Dr Ganie, however, said that waiting periods at SKIMS were still comparatively lower than

those at leading institutions outside J&K. "In many premier hospitals, waiting time can stretch to months. At SKIMS, it is generally within six to twelve weeks in super-specialties," he said.

To bring down delays, the institute is planning operational changes alongside recruitment. "Once adequate manpower is in place, we intend to start double shifts in outpatient departments and operation theatres. This will significantly reduce waiting time," he added.

Officials said general medicine and general surgery departments continue to cater to patients on a daily basis, but super-specialty services remain under strain due to heavy demand.

Alongside staffing measures, SKIMS has undertaken a major overhaul of its medical infrastructure over the past two years. Dr Ganie said outdated and defunct equipment has been replaced, and gaps in critical care facilities have largely been addressed.

"We found that many essential machines had not been procured for years. Over the last two years, we have utilised the full budget and supplemented it with support from central agencies to upgrade facilities," he said.

Among the key additions is a high-end linear accelerator for cancer treatment, procured at a cost of around Rs 39 crore, expected to be installed within the next few months—(KNO)

Dr Farooq extends Navreh, Navratri greetings



KT NEWS DESK

Srinagar, 19 Mar: The Jammu and Kashmir National Conference President Dr. Farooq Abdullah Thursday extended warm greetings to the people on the auspicious occasion of Navratri and Navreh.

In his message, Dr Farooq described the festival as a reflection of Jammu and Kashmir's rich cultural heritage and composite traditions. He said that Navreh symbolizes renewal, hope, and the enduring spirit of harmony that has long defined the cultural ethos of Kashmir.

He expressed hope that the festival would be celebrated in the true spirit of brotherhood, unity, and gaiety, and would further strengthen communal harmony among the people. He added that such occasions

serve as a reminder of the region's pluralistic identity and its tradition of peaceful coexistence.

He also prayed for lasting peace, progress, and prosperity in Jammu and Kashmir and the country as a whole.

Meanwhile, several senior party leaders including Ali Muhammad Sagar, Shammi Oberoi, Nasir Aslam Wani, Tanvir Sadiq, Choudhary Muhammad Ramzan, Mian Altaf Ahmad, Sakina Itoo, Shameema Firdous, Sajjad Kichloo, Imran Nabi Dar, Showkat Mir, Rattan Lal Gupta also extended their greetings to the people on the festive occasion.

They expressed hope that the celebrations would usher in an era of peace, prosperity, and well-being for the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

Parents urge Govt action on students stranded at Iran borders

JAHANGEER GANAIE

Srinagar, Mar 19: Amid ongoing evacuation efforts from Iran and neighbouring regions, anxious parents in Jammu and Kashmir have reiterated their demand for immediate intervention by authorities to facilitate the safe return of hundreds of stranded students, many of whom are facing severe financial and health challenges.

As per the details, more than 200 Indian students, primarily from Jammu and Kashmir and enrolled in universities in Isfahan and Golestan Province, have successfully crossed the Iran-Armenia border in what is being seen as a significant step forward in the evacuation process.

Students who were earlier relocated from Tehran to Qom have now been moved towards the border points in Armenia and Azerbaijan. However, despite reaching these transit locations, many continue to face uncertainty due to a lack of financial resources.

Parents allege that the students have been left to arrange their travel independently, placing a heavy financial burden on already distressed families.

"We have been bearing all the expenses ourselves. The government must at



least facilitate their return at this crucial time," said one of the parents, expressing frustration over what they described as inadequate logistical support.

Several batches of students are expected to return to India between March 20 and March 25, including those from Shiraz University.

Indian engineering students from Kerman have also reached the Iran-Armenia border and are currently awaiting visa clearances.

However, the situation remains grim at the Azerbaijan border, where over 100 Indian students are reportedly stranded due

to procedural delays. Only around 6 to 10 students are being issued exit codes each day, which has significantly slowed down the evacuation process, the parents said.

Many students have been stuck at the border since March 12, missing scheduled flights and incurring heavy financial losses.

Parents claimed that around 250 Kashmiri students remain stuck at the Azerbaijan border, with several suffering from chest infections and influenza-like symptoms, while access to proper medical care remains limited.

151 Indian students

managed to cross the Iran-Azerbaijan border in the last 24 hours. Some students with tickets for March 14, 18, 19, and 20 were allowed to cross, but those with bookings for March 15, 16, and 17 are still stranded.

Despite some progress, the overall situation remains critical. Hundreds of students are still stranded at various border points, grappling with financial hardships, health risks, and uncertainty, as families continue to appeal for swift and comprehensive government intervention to ensure their safe return home—(KNO)

CIK busts international cyber fraud racket in Sgr

KNO

Srinagar, Mar 19: Counter Intelligence Kashmir (CIK) on Thursday said that it has received various technical and credible inputs regarding the functioning of covert call centres engaged in fraudulent online activities targeting foreign/local nationals.

In a statement, a CIK spokesperson said, "After receiving the inputs CIK promptly constituted specialised teams comprising technical experts and field operatives and carried out systematic surveillance, digital intelligence gathering and verification across multiple locations, ultimately identifying a key operational hub at the Industrial Area, Rangreth, Srinagar."

He said in furtherance to this, a CIK team conducted swift and well-coordinated raids at different parts across Srinagar city.

"During the raid, seven suspects were apprehended on the spot and digital and communication equipment, including 13 mobile

phones, 09 laptops, VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) systems, SIM cards and networking devices, digital storage media etc, were seized from them," the spokesperson added.

He said the seized material contained substantial incriminating evidence, clearly indicating a highly organized and technologically advanced criminal setup.

"Preliminary investigation has revealed that the accused were part of a larger, well-coordinated cybercrime syndicate with linkages extending beyond Jammu & Kashmir. Part of the network was specifically designed to target victims in countries such as USA, UK and Canada, operate through international communication masking technologies, use psychological manipulation and impersonation tactics and launder money through modern digital and cryptocurrency channels," said the spokesperson.

Continued on www.kashmirthunder.in

Pulwama nursing students demand exam centre shift

JAHANGEER GANAIE

Srinagar, Mar 19: Students of B.Sc Nursing 7th Semester (Batch 2022) from various institutions in south Kashmir have voiced serious concern over the allotment of their examination centre by the University of Kashmir, citing logistical challenges and lack of adequate transport facilities.

The affected students belong to Ramzaan College of Nursing, Pulwama, Dolphin Institute of Medical Sciences & Technology, Pulwama, and Government Nursing College, Pulwama.

According to them, the recently issued centre notice—Notification No: F. Centre-Notice B.Sc. Nursing 7th Sem DU/KU/26 dated March 16, 2026—has scheduled their examination at 2:00 PM at the South Campus of the university in

Anantnag. Students said that a majority of candidates are residents of Pulwama, Srinagar, and adjoining areas, making the allocated centre at South Campus, Anantnag, inconvenient and difficult to access. They said the campus is located at a considerable distance from the main town of Anantnag, further compounding travel-related issues.

Highlighting the lack of reliable public transport between Pulwama and Anantnag, the students said that reaching the examination centre on time would be a significant challenge, particularly given the afternoon timing of the exam. They also raised concerns about safety and the availability of transport while returning home after the examination.

Continued on www.kashmirthunder.in

Traffic advisory issued for Sopore ahead of Eid

KNO

Sopore, Mar 19: Authorities on Thursday issued a traffic advisory for Sopore town ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr prayers, citing continuous rainfall and forecast of further inclement weather.

As per the advisory, Eid congregational prayers will not be held at Eidgah Noorghah this year. The decision follows announcements by Auqaf committees managing Jamia Masjid Sopore and Khanqah-e-Moula Sopore, where major gatherings are expected instead.

Officials said both locations lie in the congested core of Sopore town and have limited parking space. Traffic restrictions and diversions have been put in place to prevent congestion and ensure smooth movement.

According to the plan, traffic from Chinkipora, Arampora and Shalpora will not be allowed beyond Shalpora Chowk towards



the main town centre. Commuters from Iqbal Market side will be stopped at the

Clock Tower, while vehicles from Degree College crossing will not be permitted towards

the main chowk via Shah Dargah.

Traffic from Tarzoo and Nigli will be diverted through Sofi Akbar Road. Movement towards Hathishah Bridge has been restricted, with the route reserved for emergency vehicles. Similarly, no general traffic will be allowed from Chankhan Bridge towards Khanqah-e-Moula and Hathishah, with the stretch declared a no-parking zone.

Authorities have advised all heavy and light motor vehicles to use the bypass road for travel towards Srinagar, Kupwara and Bandipora. Designated parking areas have been identified at Bus Stand Sopore, Shah Dargah and other roadside locations.

Officials urged people to avoid unnecessary vehicular movement towards prayer venues and prefer walking to ease congestion. They also appealed to the public to cooperate with police and volunteers to ensure the smooth conduct of Eid prayers—(KNO)

EDITORIAL

Friday Brief: Ramadan Departs But Its Impact Must Remain

Ramadan ends. The month of mercy, forgiveness, and emancipation from hellfire has completed its annual visit, leaving behind a soul either elevated by its blessings or diminished by its neglect. This moment of farewell is itself a spiritual station that the Quran and Hadith illuminate with profound wisdom. The Quran establishes the purpose of this sacred month with crystal-line clarity: "So that you may complete the

prescribed period and glorify Allah for having guided you, and perhaps you will be grateful" (2:185). Completion of the fast is not an end but a culmination – a transition from the intensity of Ramadan to the gratitude of Eid, from disciplined worship to sustained consciousness. The Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) understood the bittersweet nature of this departure. Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) reported that during

the last ten days, he would "tighten his waist belt, stay awake at night, and wake his family" (Sahih al-Bukhari). This urgency was born of certainty that this guest would not stay forever. Yet he also taught that the true measure of Ramadan is not how intensely we fasted but how enduringly we transform: "Whoever fasts Ramadan out of faith and seeking reward, his past sins will be forgiven" (Sahih al-Bukhari). The completion of Ramadan is

therefore a test. Will the heightened consciousness, the Qur'anic connection, the charitable spirit, and the disciplined prayer survive the return to ordinary time? Or will Ramadan become an isolated island of piety in a sea of heedlessness? As the month departs, the believer's heart should hold both sorrow at losing this beloved guest and hope that its lessons will endure. The Qur'an recited should continue to be recited. The prayers offered

should continue to be offered. The charity given should continue to be given. Ramadan was not meant to be an exception but a training ground for a lifetime of devotion. May Allah accept our fasts, our prayers, and our supplications. May He make us among those who emerge from Ramadan forgiven, purified, and transformed. Ramadan has departed, but its impact must remain – etched not in calendars but in character.

7 Things To Do Before Ramadan Ends

The most important moment of Ramadan is not the beginning - but how we choose to finish it

As the blessed month of Ramadan reaches its final days, many hearts feel something difficult to describe.

There is gratitude for the chance to experience this sacred time. There is hope that our fasting, prayers, and charity were accepted. And for many people, there is also a quiet reflection - wondering whether we truly made the most of it.

At the beginning of Ramadan, everything feels fresh and full of energy. The first fast. The first night prayers. The excitement of reconnecting with faith.

But toward the end of the month, a different feeling begins to settle in. Ramadan is leaving.

For many believers, these last nights are the most emotional. Some spent them searching for the blessings of Laylat al-Qadr, the night described as better than a thousand months. Others may feel they could have done more.

Yet one of the most beautiful lessons of Ramadan is this: as long as the month has not ended, the opportunity for mercy is still open.

The final days are not meant to be a time of regret - they are meant to be a time of sincerity, reflection, and finishing strong.

Here are seven meaningful things you can do before Ramadan ends.

1. Make One Dua That Truly Matters
In these final nights, many people make long lists of requests in their prayers. While there is nothing wrong with that, sometimes

the most powerful supplication is the simplest one.

Choose one dua that truly matters to you. Ask yourself a question: if only one prayer were answered tonight, what would you ask for?

It might be guidance in your life, healing for your heart, forgiveness for past mistakes, or peace within your family. When a prayer comes from a place of deep sincerity, it carries a special weight.

Ramadan reminds us that sometimes one sincere prayer can transform an entire life.

2. Seek Forgiveness with an Open Heart
At its core, Ramadan is a month of forgiveness.

These final days are an opportunity to ask Allah for a fresh beginning. Many believers repeat a famous supplication taught for the nights connected to Laylat al-Qadr:

"O Allah, You are Most Forgiving, and You love to forgive, so forgive me."

The beauty of this prayer lies in its meaning. It reminds us that forgiveness is not something we must struggle to earn alone - it is something that Allah loves to give.

Take time in these final nights to reflect honestly on your past and ask forgiveness sincerely. Seek forgiveness not only for the mistakes you remember, but also for the ones you may have forgotten.

Forgiveness is not only about erasing the past. It is about freeing the future.

3. Give Charity - Even If It Is Small
Acts of generosity hold a special place

during Ramadan.

Charity does not need to be large or public to be meaningful. In fact, some of the most beautiful acts of charity are the quiet ones - the ones done with no expectation of recognition.

Perhaps it is donating to someone in need, helping a neighbor, or supporting a cause that benefits others.

The value of charity is not measured by the amount given, but by the sincerity behind it.

A small act of kindness performed during Ramadan may carry rewards far beyond what we can imagine.

4. Forgive Someone
Forgiveness is often one of the hardest spiritual acts, yet it can also be one of the most liberating.

Many people carry old grievances in their hearts - arguments, misunderstandings, or painful memories that linger long after the moment has passed.

Ramadan invites us to ask a difficult question: is holding onto that anger helping us, or is it only weighing us down?

Forgiving someone does not mean forgetting what happened or pretending that pain did not exist. It simply means choosing not to carry the burden any longer.

Sometimes the act of forgiving someone else becomes a way of healing ourselves.

5. Reflect on What Ramadan Taught You
Before the month ends, take a moment to reflect on your personal Ramadan journey.

Ask yourself:

What changed in me during this month?

Did I become more patient or more mindful?

Did my relationship with prayer or reflection grow stronger?

Ramadan is not only about fasting during the day and praying at night. It is about transformation.

Even if your Ramadan was not perfect - and for most people it never is - there are still lessons hidden within it.

Recognizing those lessons helps carry the spirit of Ramadan beyond the month itself.

6. Choose One Habit to Continue
A common experience after Ramadan is that the spiritual habits we built slowly fade away.

The prayers become rushed again. The extra acts of worship disappear. Life returns to its usual pace.

Instead of trying to maintain everything you did during Ramadan, focus on keeping just one habit.

It could be reading a few verses of the Qur'an each day, setting aside time for quiet reflection, or maintaining regular remembrance.

Small actions performed consistently often have the greatest impact over time.

Ramadan is not only a time of worship - it is also a time of training the heart to continue that worship throughout the year.

7. Say Goodbye to Ramadan with Gratitude
For many believers, the final nights of Ramadan carry a sense of sadness.

There is a feeling that something special is coming to an end - a time when hearts soften, communities gather, and spiritual focus becomes stronger.

Early Muslims often worried not about whether they performed enough acts of worship, but whether their efforts were accepted.

Before Ramadan leaves, take a moment to make a simple prayer.

Ask that your fasting, prayers, and charity be accepted. Ask for forgiveness for the moments when you fell short. And ask to be granted the opportunity to experience another Ramadan in the future.

Because the truth is that none of us knows if we will meet it again.

A Final Reflection
Ramadan may be coming to an end, but the spiritual connection it nurtures does not have to disappear.

The patience learned through fasting, the peace found in prayer, and the compassion shown through charity can continue long after the month has passed.

In many ways, the true success of Ramadan is not measured by what we did during the month itself.

It is measured by how its lessons shape the rest of our lives.

And sometimes, the most important moment of Ramadan is not the beginning - but how we choose to finish it.

Source: IslamiCity

Are You Easily Offended?

When you get offended easily, you may have a reaction similar to an allergy

Anna Braverman

Being prone to taking offense is a lot like having allergies. You may be chuckling, but keep reading—the analogy actually works pretty well. The reason you want to know about this is that, as a graduate student, you really can't afford to take offense too easily, and people who do often end up hurting their careers.

1. Allergies
Allergies are a byproduct of an active immune system. We need our immune system to be strong and active and to fight off real threats, like bacteria, but we suffer when that same immune system becomes over-protective and makes us sneeze and cough from exposure to harmless stimuli.

Getting offended too easily
Taking offense is an extension of a healthy sense of self-worth, fairness, and justice. We need to have a healthy ability to become angry when we are treated poorly, but we suffer if we become oversensitized to perceived slights and start reacting with intense negative emotions to inconsequential or ambiguous behaviors.

2. Allergies
When people have severe allergies, they become more likely to miss an actual illness because they are so used to coughing and sneezing all the time.

Getting offended too easily
People who become offended easily can sometimes lose the ability to tell the difference between an actual problematic behavior and a minor annoyance because they are constantly in a state of arousal and suspicion.

3. Allergies
People who suffer from allergies find themselves having to take extraordinary precautions (carrying EpiPens, triple-checking ingredients at restaurants) before doing



ordinary things.

Getting offended too easily
People who get offended easily often find themselves spending extraordinary effort to navigate ordinary situations.

Crucial difference: Allergies can be managed but are not currently treatable; with work, dedication, and sometimes therapy, people can actually alter their reaction to perceived slights and decrease their tendency to get offended.

Why should you care? Here are some

scenarios for you to consider:

1. Your advisor dismissed a comment you made during a lab meeting. Did he do this on purpose? Did he mean to publicly humiliate you? Should you get offended, or should you consider this to be a mere annoyance?

2. Two fellow students whispered to each other all through your presentation. Should you take this to mean that they don't respect your work, or should you chalk it up to poor habits?

3. You submitted a paper to your advisor

and received harshly worded feedback. Should you assume that your advisor has a personal problem with you?

Often, whether or not someone takes offense in an ambiguous situation is based on the following factors:

Underlying beliefs about people in general. People who have underlying positive beliefs (they believe that people are good) are more likely to assume that a particular instance of bad behavior was accidental.

The extent to which behavior is believed to be influenced by the environment. Those who tend to attribute people's behaviors to internal processes ("he wanted to ignore me") are more likely to take offense than those who tend to weigh external circumstances more heavily ("the room was noisy, and he probably didn't hear me").

Confidence and self-efficacy. People who feel confident that they would be able to stand up for themselves if someone really were trying to hurt them are more likely to let go of small, untoward interactions.

Beliefs about the importance of "honor" versus the importance of practical outcomes. People who focus more on honor are more likely to take offense than people who are more focused on practical outcomes ("as long as the paper gets published, it doesn't really matter what harsh comment my advisor made during the writing process").

It is important to stand up for yourself when another person truly and credibly means you harm. Getting mad when a behavior is hurtful, intentional, repeated, and disrespectful is actually a very healthy response, just like mounting a robust immune response to an actual infection is indispensable.

The problem is that when you mount an "immune response" to behaviors that are not worth the trouble, you run the risk of

creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. If you start avoiding someone who made a questionable comment, before you know it, you may stop collaborating with them, and when they don't include you in a project, it won't be because of what they thought about you when they made that comment, but because of the coldness they feel from you now. If your advisor dispenses insensitive feedback to everyone but you are the one who takes it personally, your relationship with your advisor may suffer. If a rude recruiter offends you and you pull out of the race, the person who lets things slide may get the internship.

For all these reasons, next time you are about to get offended, ask yourself:

Is this situation clear-cut, or are there multiple ways to understand it? What is the actual likelihood that the offending behavior was either accidental or driven by an external process not related to you?

How much harm was caused? If the harm was severe, then maybe it doesn't matter whether the behavior was accidental, but if the harm was minor and isolated, then maybe it is wiser to give the offending person the benefit of the doubt.

Did the offending event trigger any particular vulnerability in you? Sometimes we get offended at others, not for what they said or did, but because of how their behavior interacted with something that is happening inside of us. For example, someone's awkward or foolish joke about food may really offend someone who is already deeply self-critical about their diet, but someone who does not have that particular vulnerability may simply identify the joke as tasteless and quickly forget it.

Anna Braverman, Psy.D., is a clinical psychologist based in Princeton, NJ.

Source: Psychology Today

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22nd Instalment Of PM-KISAN: Direct Benefit Transfer Of Over ₹18,640 Crore To 9.32 Crore Farmers

Press Information Bureau

The 22nd instalment of the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) was disbursed on 13 March 2026 at Guwahati, Assam. Under this instalment, nearly 9.32 crore eligible farmers, including more than 2.15 crore women beneficiaries, have received around ₹18,640 crore in direct financial assistance through the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) system, ensuring transparency and eliminating intermediaries. The scheme is widely regarded as a significant initiative towards ensuring 'Annadata Samman'. Reflecting the government's continued commitment to strengthening farmers' income security, the Union Budget 2026-27 has allocated ₹60,000 crore for the PM-KISAN scheme.

Strengthening Farm Confidence through PM-KISAN Support

Bhamini, a farmer from Edakkara, Kerala, is among the women beneficiaries of the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN). After receiving the 21st instalment, she observed that timely financial assistance encourages her to strengthen farming practices and work towards improving productivity. The seamless transfer of benefits through the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) system ensures that support reaches farmers without delay, enabling them to continue their agricultural activities with greater confidence.

Direct Income Support to Small and Marginal Farmers PM-KISAN

The Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) is a centrally sponsored scheme launched on 24 February 2019 to provide assured income support to landholding farmer families with cultivable land nationwide. Under the scheme, each eligible farmer family receives annual financial assistance of ₹6,000, disbursed in three equal instalments of ₹2,000 through the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) mechanism into Aadhaar-seeded bank accounts.

So far, more than ₹4.27 lakh crores have been disbursed to eligible farmer families in the country through 21 instalments. The benefits of the scheme are provided to farmers upon seeding of land records in the PM-KISAN portal, linking bank accounts with Aadhaar, and completing e-KYC verification.

The scheme seeks to increase the income of small and marginal farmers by providing financial support for agricultural inputs, thereby improving crop health and productivity. Providing direct financial assistance also helps reduce farmers' reliance on informal credit sources and supports the continuity of agricultural activities. PM-KISAN stands out as one of the largest Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) initiatives globally, underscoring its significant institutional mechanism for delivering financial support directly to farmers, with more than 25 percent of beneficiaries being women, highlighting its inclusive outreach.

Voices from the Field: Strengthening Farm Productivity

Across diverse regions of the country, the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) has helped farmers invest in their fields and strengthen agricultural productivity.

For Anil Halder, a farmer from Durgapur in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the annual assistance of ₹6,000 has been timely support for agricultural activities. After receiving an instalment in August 2025, he initiated watermelon cultivation, using the funds to purchase essential inputs. The financial assistance enabled him to diversify his crop and expand his farming operations.

Similarly, Deepak Singh Negi, a farmer from Kupwara in Jammu and Kashmir, uses the scheme's assistance to procure key agricultural inputs such as seeds, fertilisers, and pesticides. These investments have improved both the quality and yield of his crops, illustrating how direct income support can help farmers strengthen productivity and sustain their livelihoods.

Amitabh Mandal from Vivekanandapur in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands has utilised the assistance received under PM-KISAN to purchase organic fertilisers for his farm. According to him, the financial support has enabled him to enhance productivity while lowering input costs, thereby improving farm profitability and facilitating the adoption of more sustainable agricultural practices.

Institutional Framework and Digital Governance of PM-KISAN

The PM-KISAN scheme is implemented through a coordinated institutional framework involving the Central Government, State Governments, and a technology-enabled digital infrastructure. The system integrates verified beneficiary databases, Aadhaar-based authentication, and multiple digital platforms to facilitate efficient transfer of benefits while enabling robust monitoring and transparency in programme implementation.

Targeting, Beneficiary Identification, and Database Management

Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN)

Key Features:

- Financial Support:** ₹6000 Per Year
- Funding:** 100% funded by the Government of India
- Payment:** Direct transfer to bank accounts of farmers

So far, more than ₹4.27 lakh crores have been disbursed to eligible farmer families in the country through 21 instalments.

Source: Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare

State Governments play a central role in implementing the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi by identifying eligible farmer households and developing a comprehensive beneficiary database. This database includes key details such as name, age, category, Aadhaar number, bank account information, and mobile number. States are responsible for ensuring the accuracy of these records, preventing duplicate payments, and promptly addressing bank account issues. Beneficiary identification is primarily based on land ownership records maintained by States and Union Territories. These records must be regularly updated, digitised, and linked to Aadhaar and bank account information to enable seamless Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) of benefits.

Under the PM-KISAN, the lists of eligible beneficiaries are publicly displayed at the village level to promote transparency and enable farmers who may have been inadvertently excluded to seek inclusion through the appropriate grievance redressal mechanisms. Additionally, States and Union Territories are required to initiate recovery proceedings in cases where benefits have been disbursed to ineligible individuals, including income tax payers, government employees, public sector undertaking (PSU) personnel, and holders of constitutional posts. As of 2 December 2025, a total amount of ₹416.75 crore has been recovered from ineligible beneficiaries nationwide.

Technology-Enabled Service Delivery System

PM-KISAN is supported by a farmer-centric digital infrastructure that streamlines access and enhances transparency in benefit delivery. Aadhaar-based authentication forms a key pillar of the system, facilitating secure

beneficiary identification and payment verification through the e-KYC mechanism. Farmers can complete e-KYC using:

- OTP-based authentication
- Biometric authentication
- Face authentication

The Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) web portal serves as the central digital platform for beneficiary registration, verification, and data management. It maintains a unified national database of farmers, facilitates fund transfers through integration with the Public Financial Management System (PFMS), and enables real-time monitoring of financial transactions nationwide. The portal also provides location-wise lists of beneficiary farmers, thereby enhancing transparency in programme implementation.

Complementing the portal, the PM-KISAN mobile application, launched in 2020, extends these services to mobile users. The application enables farmers to undertake self-registration, track the status of benefit transfers, and complete e-KYC verification. In 2023, the application was upgraded with a Face Authentication feature, allowing farmers to complete e-KYC by scanning their face, thereby eliminating the need for OTP or fingerprint-based verification and improving accessibility.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Support System: Kisan-eMitra

In September 2023, the Government introduced Kisan-eMitra, an AI-enabled chatbot integrated with the PM-KISAN digital ecosystem. Developed with technical support from the EKStep Foundation and BHASHINI, the chatbot provides farmers with real-time information on payments, registrations, and eligibility

under the scheme in multiple Indian languages.

The platform offers 24/7 assistance in 11 major languages: Hindi, English, Tamil, Bengali, Odia, Malayalam, Gujarati, Punjabi, Telugu, Marathi, and Kannada, thereby improving accessibility for a diverse user base. Through voice- and text-based queries, farmers can check the status of their applications, track payment updates, and obtain scheme-related information, enhancing transparency and ease of access to services.

Multi-Tier Monitoring and Grievance Redressal Framework

Monitoring of the PM-KISAN is undertaken through a multi-tiered institutional framework operating at the national, state, and district levels. At the national level, the review mechanism is chaired by the Cabinet Secretary, while State and District Monitoring Committees supervise implementation within their respective jurisdictions. Farmers can register grievances through the PM-KISAN portal and the Centralized Public Grievance Redressal and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS), facilitating timely resolution and transparent grievance management. During FY 2024-25, a total of 24,605 grievances were recorded on the PM-KISAN portal.

Institutional Convergence for Farmer-Centric Services

The Government has integrated Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) with PM-KISAN and several other central schemes through a standardised Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) platform. This integration connects PACS with programmes such as Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samridhi Kendras (PMKSK),

Key Takeaways

- The Prime Minister released over ₹18,640 crore as the 22nd instalment of the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) scheme from Guwahati, Assam, on March 13, 2026.
- Over 9.32 crore farmers have received financial assistance under this instalment. 2.15 crore of these are women farmers
- More than ₹4.27 lakh crore has been disbursed since its launch, making PM-KISAN one of the world's largest DBT initiatives.
- The scheme is implemented through Aadhaar-based authentication and digitised land records, ensuring transparent and efficient direct benefit transfer to verified beneficiaries.
- Impact evaluations by IFPRI and NITI Aayog show farmers reporting increased agricultural income and reduced reliance on informal credit.

Common Service Centres, Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Kendras (PMBJP), LPG distributorships, fuel retail outlets, rural water supply systems, and Farmer-Producer Organizations (FPOs). The integration aims to broaden PACS's functional scope, promote service convergence at the grassroots level, and enhance its long-term financial viability.

Evidence from Impact Evaluations of PM-KISAN

Several impact evaluations of the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) provide evidence of its contribution to strengthening farmers' incomes and supporting the rural economy. These studies collectively indicate that the scheme's direct income transfers have helped ease liquidity constraints faced by small and marginal farmers while encouraging productive agricultural investments.

An independent assessment conducted by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in 2019 examined the utilisation of cash transfers under the scheme. The study found that the financial support provided through PM-KISAN has helped alleviate short-term credit constraints in rural areas, thereby enabling farmers to increase investment in agricultural inputs. The findings also suggest that assured income support enhances farmers' capacity to undertake productive, yet relatively riskier, agricultural investments, thereby contributing to broader rural economic activity. Complementing these findings, the Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare has instituted a structured beneficiary feedback mechanism through Kisan Call Centres. Surveys conducted through this mechanism indicate a high level of beneficiary satisfaction, with more than 92 percent of respondents expressing satisfaction with the scheme and over 93 percent reporting that the financial assistance is primarily utilised for agricultural activities.

Further empirical evidence emerges from an impact evaluation undertaken by the Development Monitoring and Evaluation Office of NITI Aayog. The study reports that more than 92 percent of beneficiary farmers used the financial assistance to purchase essential agricultural inputs, such as seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides, inputs that have become increasingly critical amid rising input costs and climate-related uncertainties. In addition, nearly 85 percent of beneficiaries reported improvements in agricultural income and a reduced reliance on informal credit sources during periods of crop loss or household emergencies. These findings highlight the scheme's broader contribution to advancing national commitments related to poverty reduction, food security, gender inclusion, and institutional transparency under the Sustainable Development Goals.

Conclusion

The Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) extends beyond a conventional income-support programme and reflects a broader policy orientation towards farmer-centric and inclusive agricultural development. By enabling a shift from entitlement-based assistance to empowerment-oriented support, the scheme contributes to redefining the relationship between public institutions and the farming community. Impact assessment studies conducted by institutions such as the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and NITI Aayog indicate that a significant number of beneficiaries utilise the financial assistance to purchase agricultural inputs. These studies also report improvements in agricultural income and a decline in farmers' dependence on informal credit sources.

In the context of India's aspiration to become a \$5 trillion economy, initiatives such as PM-KISAN provide an important foundation for inclusive, broad-based economic progress. With the continued integration of advanced technologies and the increasing policy emphasis on climate resilience, sustainability, and precision agriculture, the scheme is expected to play a significant role in strengthening farmers' livelihoods and supporting the long-term development of the agricultural economy.

Farmer-Centric Digital Infrastructure for PM-KISAN

- Aadhaar-Based Authentication
- PM-KISAN Web Portal
- PM-KISAN Mobile Application
- Kisan e-Mitra

Source: Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare

Only Donald can achieve peace across the world: Japanese PM

PTI

Washington, Mar 19: Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi on Thursday told Donald Trump that the situation in West Asia was extremely grave and she believed that only the US President can bring peace and prosperity to the world.

Meeting Trump at the White House, Takaichi said Iran's nuclear weapons development must never be tolerated and that Japan had consistently called for a response.

"The global security environment, including the current Middle East situation, is extremely grave, and the world economy is also under significant strain," the Japanese prime minister said.

"However, I firmly believe that it is only you, Donald, who can achieve peace and prosperity across the world. I am ready to reach out to many of the partners in the international community to achieve our objective together. Today, I have come to convey that message," she said.

Takaichi said Japan has also condemned attacks on neighbouring countries and the de facto blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, and Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi has requested Iran's foreign minister to halt such actions.

"Today, I hope to discuss how Japan and the US can become stronger and more prosperous together. I have also brought proposals to stabilise the global energy market. We aim to discuss economic security, cooperation on critical minerals and energy, and growth strategies to build resilient economies," she said.

Takaichi said the security environment in the Indo-Pacific, as well as the Middle East, is extremely grave.

"I am grateful that President Trump has shown deep trust in Japan and remains committed to an unshakable alliance," the Japanese Prime Minister said.

Brent crude briefly tops USD 119 per barrel before pulling back, stocks sink worldwide

AP

New York, Mar 19: Oil prices shot up again on Thursday because of the war with Iran, tightening their grip on the global economy and sending stock markets worldwide sharply lower.

Brent crude, the international standard, briefly rose above USD 119 per barrel in the morning before pulling back to USD 112.70, which is still a 5 per cent rise from the prior day.

A barrel of benchmark US crude added 1.4 per cent to USD 96.78 after Iran intensified its attacks on oil and gas facilities around the Persian Gulf in response to an Israeli attack on an important Iranian natural gas field.

The attacks added to fears that fighting may knock out production of oil and gas in the Gulf for a long time, which would mean high prices could last a while and cause inflation to rip higher around the world.

Stock indexes dropped 3.4 per cent in Japan, 2.7 per cent in South Korea, 2.6 per cent in Germany and 2.6 per cent in the United Kingdom. On Wall Street, where trading began after Brent crude's price pared some of its big gain and where companies are less reliant on oil from the Gulf,



the losses were a bit more modest.

The S and P 500 fell 0.9 per cent to deepen its drop for the week so far, which is on track to be its fourth straight losing week. The Dow Jones Industrial Average was down 331 points, or 0.7 per cent, as of 9:35 a.m. Eastern time, and the Nasdaq composite was 1.3 per cent lower.

President Donald Trump and countries around the world have made moves to stem the spike in oil prices, but they're mostly short-term fixes when markets want to see less risk for Gulf oil fields and a clearance of the Strait of Hormuz off Iran's coast, where a fifth of the world's oil typically sails.

Worries are so high about oil prices that traders are now even betting on a slim chance that the Federal Reserve may have to hike interest rates this year. It's a dramatic turnaround from just a month ago, when traders were betting heavily that the Fed would cut rates multiple times this year.

Cuts to rates would give the economy and prices for investments a boost, and they're something Trump has angrily been calling for, but they would risk worsening inflation. The Fed on Wednesday decided to hold off on cutting interest rates at its latest meeting, and traders found comments from Chair Jerome Powell discouraging about the possibility for cuts in 2026.

Now, traders are betting on a 10 per cent chance the Fed could hike its main interest rate by the end of the year and

a nearly 84 per cent chance that it will at least hold steady, according to data from CME Group. Just a month ago, those same traders were betting on a 74 per cent probability of two or more cuts.

That drove Treasury yields higher, and the two-year Treasury yield touched its highest level since the summer. It rose to 3.85 per cent from 3.76 per cent late Wednesday.

The more widely followed 10-year Treasury yield rose to 4.28 per cent from 4.26 per cent late Wednesday and just 3.97 per cent before the war with Iran started.

Earlier in the day, the Bank of Japan, the European Central Bank and the Bank of England held their own interest rates steady.

Besides the threat of higher inflation, a couple solid reports on the US economy also helped to lift yields. One said fewer US workers applied for unemployment benefits last week, when economists were expecting a slight rise. Another said growth for manufacturing in the mid-Atlantic area unexpectedly accelerated.

Besides sending rates for mortgages and other kinds of loans upward, higher Treasury yields also grind down on prices for all kinds of investments, from stocks to crypto to gold.

DGCA asks airlines to avoid 9 airspaces, ensure robust contingency plans

PTI

New Delhi, Mar 19: Amid escalating conflict in West Asia, aviation watchdog DGCA on Thursday asked airlines to avoid nine airspaces in the region and ensure robust contingency plans as part of safety risk assessments.

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has asked airlines to avoid the airspaces of Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Qatar and United Arab Emirates (UAE), according to an advisory.

Indian airlines can operate flights over Oman and Saudi Arabia airspaces subject to certain conditions, the regulator said. It told the airlines not to operate below FL 320 or 32,000 feet within the airspace of Saudi Arabia and Oman located south of the segments defined by following compulsory reporting points.

About the nine airspaces, the DGCA asked airlines to "refrain from operating within the affected airspace...at all flight levels and altitudes".

Any continued operations would be at the discretion of the operator based on their safety risk assessment, it added.

"Operations to airports in the affected region, where other international carriers are currently operating, must involve robust contingency planning to cover all eventualities, as part of the safety risk assessments by the operators," the DGCA said.

The advisory, the regulator said, was effective immediately and would remain valid until March 28, unless reviewed or superseded by further developments.

"Operators are advised to provide their flight crew with information regarding latest NOTAMS, airspace restrictions affecting flight that are already airborne," it said.

NOTAM refers to Notice to Airmen that provides real time updates about airspace and airports to pilots and crew.

"Recent military strikes conducted by the United States and Israel against targets within Iranian territory have led to a high-risk environment for civil aviation. In response to these strikes, Iran has announced retaliatory measures," DGCA said and added that the current situation presents critical hazards to civil flight operations.



Iran intensifies attacks on Gulf energy sites after Israel struck its key gas field

PTI

Dubai, Mar 19: Iran intensified its attacks on oil and natural gas facilities around the Gulf on Thursday, raising the stakes in a war that is sending shock waves through the global economy.

The strikes, in retaliation for an Israeli attack on a key Iranian gas field, sent fuel prices soaring and risked drawing Iran's Arab neighbours directly into the conflict. Tehran's targeting of energy production further stressed global supplies already under pressure because of Iran's stranglehold on the Strait of Hormuz, a strategic waterway through which a fifth of the world's oil is transported.

Underscoring the danger to ships in the region, a vessel was set ablaze off the coast of the United Arab Emirates and another damaged off Qatar. But efforts to bypass the strait were also under pressure: An Iranian drone hit a Saudi refinery on the Red Sea, which the country had been hoping to use as an

alternative exit route.

Brent crude oil, the international standard, spiked to as high as USD 118 a barrel, up more than 60 per cent since Israel and the United States started the war Feb 28 with strikes on Iran. The European benchmark for natural gas prices rose 17 per cent on Thursday and has doubled in the past month.

Ahead of a European Union summit overshadowed by the conflict's impact on energy prices, French President Emmanuel Macron condemned what he called a "reckless" escalation and urged a truce and negotiations as the Islamic holy month of Ramadan comes to an end.

Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE denounced the Iranian attacks. Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit called them a "dangerous escalation."

But Iran showed no signs of backing down. Saudi Arabia said its SAMREF refinery in the Red Sea port city of Yanbu was hit, and that it intercepted six drones in Riyadh and its Eastern province.

Saudi Arabia had begun pumping large volumes of oil west toward the Red Sea to avoid the Strait of Hormuz. The Saudi Defense Ministry and Shell said a damage assessment was underway at the facility.

Qatar, a key source of natural gas for world markets, said firefighters put out a blaze at the Ras Laffan LNG facility after it was hit by Iranian missiles. Production had already been halted there after earlier attacks. The state-owned QatarEnergy said the fire had caused "extensive" damage.

Ras Laffan is the largest liquefied natural gas export facility in the world, according to QatarEnergy. Damage to the facility could delay Qatar's ability to get supplies to the market even after the war ends.

A drone attack on Kuwait's Mina Al-Ahmadi refinery sparked a fire but caused no injuries, the state-run KUNA news agency reported. The refinery is one of the biggest in the Middle East. Shortly after, a drone attack

set ablaze the nearby Mina Abdullah refinery, officials said.

Authorities in Abu Dhabi said they were forced to shut down operations at its Habshan gas facility and Bab field, calling Iranian overnight attacks on the sites a "dangerous escalation."

In Israel, more than a half-dozen waves of Iranian attacks targeting large parts of the country sent millions of people to shelters. The strikes caused damage to buildings but no significant casualties were reported.

In Washington, Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth told reporters that the US military "controls the fate" of Iran.

"Iran has the ability to make the right choices," he said, adding that Tehran "should not, going forward, target Arab allies, Arab countries, trying to create pain, the pain that they created themselves."

Since the war on Feb 28, the Trump administration has cited various objectives, including degrading Iran's missile capabilities

and its nuclear program. Killing senior leaders has also been a priority for the US and Israel.

Hegseth on Thursday implied Thursday that more leaders could be targeted, referring specifically to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and Basij force, a powerful internal security unit whose leader was killed by Israel earlier this week.

"The last job anyone in the world wants right now, senior leader for the IRGC or Basij, temp jobs, all of them," Hegseth said.

Among the Iranian energy facilities hit in recent days was the Bushehr nuclear power plant complex. There were no injuries and the plant suffered no damage, the International Atomic Energy Agency said. US forces struck more than 90 targets on Kharg Island, which is vital to Iran's oil network, Gen Dan Caine, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said Thursday.

The Pentagon is seeking USD 200 billion in additional funds for the Iran war, a senior administration official says. The

department sent the request to the White House, according to the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the private information.

Iran stepped up its attacks on Gulf energy facilities after Israel hit South Pars, the Iranian part of the world's largest gas field, which is located offshore in the Persian Gulf and owned jointly with Qatar.

With some 80 per cent of all power generated in Iran coming from natural gas, according to the International Energy Agency, the attack directly threatens the country's electricity supplies. Natural gas is also used to supply household heating and cooking across the Islamic Republic.

Hitting the gas field is a "clear expansion of the conflict," the New York-based Soufan Center said in a research note.

Iran condemned the strike on South Pars, with President Masoud Pezeshkian warning of "unacceptable consequences" that "could engulf the entire world."

In Washington, President

Donald Trump said that Israel would not attack South Pars again, but warned on social media that if Iran continued striking Qatar's energy infrastructure, the U.S. would retaliate and "massively blow up the entirety" of the field.

"I do not want to authorize this level of violence and destruction because of the long term implications that it will have on the future of Iran," Trump said on social media.

More than 1,300 people in Iran have been killed during the war. Israeli strikes against the Iranian-backed Hezbollah militant group in Lebanon have displaced more than 1 million people — roughly 20 per cent of the population — according to the Lebanese government, which says more than 900 people have been killed.

In Israel, 15 people have been killed by Iranian missile fire. Four people were also killed in the occupied West Bank overnight by an Iranian missile strike, according to officials.

CONTD. FROM FRONT PAGE

Build strong, lasting

Secretary (Organisation), J&K and Ladakh; senior officials and prominent citizens were also present. (KNO)

Navratri: LG joins

smoothly under elaborate arrangements made by the administration and the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board. Multi-layered security deployment involving the police, paramilitary forces and the Army has been put in place, supported by round-the-clock surveillance through CCTV and integrated monitoring systems.

Authorities have also strengthened crowd management measures, including RFID tracking and regulated movement along the track from Katra to the Bhawan, to ensure the safety and convenience of pilgrims. Registration facilities have been expanded, while essential services such as sanitation, water supply, food distribution and medical aid have been enhanced to cater to the surge in footfall, the official said, adding, the shrine and its surroundings have been decorated with vibrant lights and floral arrangements. Devotional music and continuous chants create a spiritually charged environment as pilgrims steadily moved towards the sanctum for darshan.

Officials expect a sustained influx of 20,000 to 30,000 pilgrims daily during the festival period, underscoring the shrine's significance as one of the country's main spiritual destinations.

Meanwhile, similar scenes of devotion were witnessed at other temples across the region, including the Bahu Fort, where long queues of devotees were seen at the Bawe Wali Mata temple since early morning. (KNO)

Snowfall disrupts

of slippery conditions at Razdan Top and to ensure commuter safety.

In a separate advisory, the traffic police said the Srinagar-Sonamarg-Gumri road (SSG

Road) has been temporarily closed due to snow accumulation along the Zojila axis. The historic Mughal Road has also been shut due to snowfall at Peer Ki Gali.

Additionally, the Kishtwar-Sinthan-Anantnag road remains temporarily closed for vehicular movement following orders from the district administration.

On the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway (NH-44), traffic movement remained slow due to single-lane stretches between Marog and Kishtwari Pathar and breakdown of heavy motor vehicles. Authorities advised commuters to prefer daytime travel and follow lane discipline.

Officials said restoration of traffic on closed routes will depend on improvement in weather conditions and clearance of snow. Travellers have been advised to check the latest status before undertaking journeys. (KNO)

J&K Bank logs

both urban and rural areas. (KNO)

Weather to improve

Gulmarg recorded around 23 cm of fresh snowfall, while Pahalgam received over 20 mm of precipitation. Fresh snowfall of around 5 to 6 inches was also reported in Gulmarg since Tuesday.

The Meteorological Department said: "Generally cloudy skies with intermittent light to moderate rain or snow are expected at most places on March 20. Higher reaches of the Chenab Valley and South Kashmir may receive moderate to heavy snowfall.

He said the main activity of the system has already brought widespread precipitation across Jammu and Kashmir.

The MeT office also warned of thunderstorms and gusty winds with speeds of 40 to 50 kmph at isolated places, along with the possibility of hailstorms, particularly in parts of the Jammu region.

An advisory has been issued for travellers

and transporters to plan their movement carefully, especially across higher reaches and key mountain passes.

The department said weather conditions are expected to improve from March 21, with generally dry weather likely to prevail till March 25, except for a brief spell of rain or snow at isolated places around March 23.

Farmers have been advised to resume agricultural operations from March 21 onwards, subject to local conditions.

Another spell of rain and snowfall is likely towards the end of the month, between March 29 and 31, officials said. (KNO)

India condemns

India is in talks with several countries and stakeholders to see how best it can secure the country's energy needs.

The fresh attacks resulted in a further spike in global energy prices, with crude oil prices hitting USD 115 a barrel.

As concerns mounted over the escalating situation in West Asia, PM Modi spoke to Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Jordan King, French President Emmanuel Macron and Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim.

In his conversation with the Omani Sultan, Modi also spoke about the need for free passage through the Strait of Hormuz, a strategically key shipping lane.

"We agreed on the need to prioritize dialogue and diplomacy for de-escalation and subsequent restoration of peace and stability," the prime minister said on social media.

Modi said he also reiterated India's condemnation of the violation of Oman's sovereignty and territorial integrity and appreciated the Gulf nation's efforts to facilitate the safe return of thousands of people, including Indian nationals.

"India and Oman stand for safe and free navigation through the Strait of Hormuz," Modi said.

Oman is among the Gulf nations bearing the

brunt of Iranian retaliation following strikes by Israel and the US on Iranian targets.

Following his phone conversation with Macron on the situation in West Asia, Modi said there is an "urgent need for de-escalation, as well as a return to dialogue and diplomacy."

"We look forward to continuing our close coordination to advance peace and stability in the region and beyond," he said.

Macron said India and France are "working closely together to reduce tensions in the region and to keep diplomacy at the heart of our efforts for peace".

After speaking to Ibrahim, Modi said: "We also discussed the deeply concerning situation in West Asia and reaffirmed our shared commitment to de-escalation and the early restoration of peace and stability through dialogue and diplomacy."

On his talks with Jordan's King, Modi said India and Jordan stand in support of "unhindered transit of goods and energy".

"We expressed concern at the evolving situation in West Asia and highlighted the need for dialogue and diplomacy for the early restoration of peace, security and stability in the region," Modi said.

"Attacks on energy infrastructure in West Asia are condemnable and can lead to avoidable escalation," he said.

"Deeply appreciated Jordan's efforts in facilitating the safe return of Indians stranded in the region," he added.

In a related move, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar spoke to his Israeli counterpart Gideon Sa'ar.

"Exchanged views on the ongoing West Asia conflict and its many repercussions," the external affairs minister said on social media.

Jaishankar also held a meeting with United Arab Emirates' Minister of State for International Cooperation Reem Al Hashimy.

"Thanked the UAE Government for taking care of the Indian community. Discussed the latest developments pertaining to the conflict in West

Asia," the external affairs minister said on X.

At the media briefing, Jaiswal also spoke about the Indian seafarers stranded onboard various merchant vessels due to restrictions on passage through the Strait of Hormuz.

"We have a large community of seafarers, possibly the largest in the world. Ninety per cent of our seafaring community serve global commercial shipping. We have 22 ships," he said.

According to estimates, around 610 seafarers are stuck onboard over 20 ships.

"We have seafarers across the region. We are in touch with their companies. Several seafarers have also come back. For example, 15 seafarers who were injured have come back to India or will be arriving in India shortly," he said.

As the overall situation deteriorated further in West Asia, several global leaders called for de-escalation of the situation.

"It is time to open a path towards de-escalation in order to restore stability in the Middle East," French President Macron said.

"France calls for the immediate implementation of a moratorium on strikes targeting civilian infrastructure, whether related to water or to energy. Freedom and security of navigation must be restored," he said.

Macron said tempers must cool and hostilities must cease, in order to give a real chance to the prospect of a negotiated solution to the crisis.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz indicated that US President Donald Trump is willing to halt the military action.

After Iran attacked Qatar's Ras Laffan LNG facility, Trump threatened to blow up Iran's largest gas field if Tehran keeps up its attacks on Qatar.

Kashmir bakers'

continuing such welfare initiatives in the future to extend maximum possible support to the needy sections of society," said the spokesperson further. (KNO)

India denounces strikes on West Asian gas hubs as 'unacceptable'

■ PM Modi speaks to leaders of France, Oman, Malaysia

PTI

New Delhi, Mar 19: As fresh attacks on West Asian gas hubs triggered global concerns, India on Thursday said the strikes are "unacceptable and need to cease" even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi reached out to top leaders of Oman, France and Malaysia, emphasising the urgency to restore peace in the volatile region.

New Delhi described the attacks on the gas infrastructure as "deeply disturbing" and that assaults will only serve to further destabilise an already uncertain energy market globally.

An Israeli attack on Iran's strategic gas fields of South Pars resulted in an intense Iranian retaliation on key energy infrastructure in several Gulf nations including Qatar's LNG (liquefied natural gas) hub of Ras Laffan.

Qatar accounts for nearly 40 per cent of India's LNG requirement.

"India had previously called for the avoidance of targeting civilian infrastructure, including energy



infrastructure, across the region," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said at his weekly media briefing.

"The recent attacks against energy installations in different locations across this region are therefore deeply disturbing and only serve to further destabilise an already uncertain energy scenario for the whole world," he said.

"Such attacks are

unacceptable and need to cease," Jaiswal said without naming any country.

The fresh attacks resulted in a further spike in global energy prices, with crude oil prices hitting USD 115 a barrel. As concerns mounted over the escalating situation in West Asia, PM Modi spoke to Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, French President Emmanuel Macron and Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim.

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the Omani Sultan, Modi also spoke about the need for free passage through the Strait of Hormuz, a strategically key shipping lane.

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integrity and appreciated the Gulf nation's efforts to facilitate the safe return of thousands of people, including Indian nationals.

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After speaking to Ibrahim, Modi said: "We also discussed the deeply concerning situation in West Asia and reaffirmed our shared commitment to de-escalation and the early restoration of peace and stability through dialogue and diplomacy."

Time of renewed hope: PM greets people on Gudi Padwa

PTI

New Delhi, Mar 19: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday greeted the people of Maharashtra and Goa on the occasion of Gudi Padwa and said it symbolises the triumph of righteousness over adversity.

In identical letters to the people of the two western states, Modi said that as India continues its journey towards progress and self-reliance, the essence of Gudi Padwa becomes even more relevant.

"On the auspicious occasion of Gudi Padwa, I extend my heartfelt greetings to you and your family. This sacred festival, marking the beginning of the New Year, is a time of renewed hope and the promise of new beginnings," he said.

The prime minister said the 'gudi' (a symbolic flag hoisted at the entrance of households) stands as a symbol of victory,



prosperity and optimism. Gudi Padwa holds deep cultural and historical significance, he said.

"It symbolises the triumph of righteousness over adversity. It is also associated with the onset of spring, the season of rejuvenation," he added.

"Today, as India continues its journey towards progress and self-reliance, the essence of Gudi Padwa becomes even more relevant," Modi said. The values

Gudi Padwa embodies are the very values that guide everyone.

"In a rapidly changing world, these traditions anchor us, reminding us of our roots and what we stand for.

"Let us carry forward the spirit of Gudi Padwa throughout the year with renewed determination and a sense of purpose. May this New Year bring happiness, good health and prosperity to all," the PM said.

Assam polls: BJP releases first list of 88 candidates

CM Sarma to contest from Jalukbari

PTI

New Delhi, Mar 19: The BJP on Thursday released its first list of 88 candidates for the Assam assembly polls, including Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma from Jalukbari seat. The party named former Congress leader Pradyut Bordoloi as its candidate from Dispur assembly seat. Bordoloi joined the BJP in the presence of Sarma and other party leaders here on Wednesday.

According to the list, Bhupen Kumar Borah, who also joined the BJP recently after leaving the Congress, will contest from Bihpara seat.

Madhavi Das will enter the fray from Birsing-Jarua, Jyotsana Kalita from Chamaria and Nilima Devi from Mangaldai. The first list of candidates was finalised by the BJP's Central Election Committee at its meeting presided over by party president Nitin Nabin here on Wednesday evening.

The meeting was attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and other members of the BJP poll body. BJP Assam unit chief Dilip Saikia was also present at the meeting.

CBI questions Anil Ambani in connection with Reliance Communications case

PTI

New Delhi, Mar 19: The CBI on Thursday questioned industrialist Anil Ambani for nearly eight hours in connection with a Rs 2,929-crore cheating case, registered against Reliance Communications Ltd and him on a complaint by the State Bank of India, officials said.

The industrialist, who is facing several investigations in CBI cases, has been called again on Friday for questioning, they said.

Ambani arrived at the agency headquarters at around 10.15 and was taken to the investigation team after the completion of formalities. He left the agency



headquarters at around 6.15 in the evening.

"In connection with the case registered by CBI on August 21, 2025 against Reliance Communications Limited in Rs. 2929.05 crore Bank Fraud case in which

Reliance Communications Limited, Anil D Ambani and others unknown including unknown public servants, are accused, the CBI summoned Anil D Ambani for interrogation today at CBI Head Office at Delhi," a CBI spokesperson said in a statement.

President Murmu visits Ram temple in Ayodhya

PTI

Ayodhya (UP), Mar 19: President Droupadi Murmu visited the Ram temple in Ayodhya on Thursday and is scheduled to install a 150-kg gold-plated Shri Ram Yantra as part of special religious ceremonies.

According to an official post by the president's office on X, Murmu was received in Ayodhya by Governor Anandiben Patel, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, and Deputy Chief Ministers Keshav Prasad Maurya and Brajesh Pathak.

Temple trust member Anil Mishra said the yantra, based on Vedic mathematics, is designed to generate positive spiritual energy and symbolises the divine presence of Lord Ram. The 150-kg gold-plated square metal plate features engraved Vedic and 'beej' mantras.

The yantra has been modelled on the Shri Ram Yantra of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham and was crafted under the guidance of Swami Vijayendra



Saraswati, Mishra said.

He added that the yantra was brought to Ayodhya in a ceremonial procession from Tirupati Devasthanam about two years ago and has since been worshipped daily. It will be installed on the second floor of the temple during the auspicious 'abhijit muhurat', as part of rituals linked to Chaitra Navratri and the Hindu New Year.

Meanwhile, security has been tightened across Ayodhya for the president's visit. Senior Superintendent of Police Gaurav Grover stated that over 7,000 personnel have been deployed at the temple complex and across the city, with additional forces stationed at sensitive locations.

Commercial LPG crunch

Mounting losses for Delhi eateries amid reduced working hours, curtailed menu

PTI

New Delhi, Mar 19: More than a week after commercial LPG supply crunch hit the capital, restaurants and street food vendors are still struggling to resume full operations, with many operating for reduced working hours and serving a curtailed menu, while also reporting sharp losses.

Operators said while there has been some improvement, access to commercial LPG cylinders remains inconsistent, forcing eateries to cut

down menus, reduce working hours and limit cooking to bulk preparation.

"Over the past 10 days, business has taken a severe hit. Earlier, our average daily billing across branches was around Rs 3 lakh, but it has now dropped drastically to just about Rs 25,000 to Rs 30,000," a representative of the Tadka Rani restaurant chain said.

He added that they are currently serving barely 20 per cent of their menu, with portions standardised and only bulk preparations being made,

while working hours have also been impacted due to operational constraints.

"Managing operations has become extremely difficult, especially with electrical equipment heating up quickly and limited availability of resources. We are trying to gradually resume some items depending on how the situation improves," the representative said.

He said initially, the outlets had to be shut down completely, and even now, operations remain highly restricted, with losses mounting every day.

Sensex plunges 2,496 points to settle at 74,207; Nifty tanks 775 points to 23,002

PTI

Mumbai, Mar 19: Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty plummeted by over 3 per cent on Thursday as a sharp jump in crude oil prices and weak global trends, amid escalating strikes on energy infrastructure in West Asia, unnerved investors.

The 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 2,496.89 points or 3.26 per cent - its biggest single-day plunge since June 2024 - to settle at 74,207.24. During the day, it dived 2,753.18 points or 3.58 per cent to 73,950.95.

The 50-share NSE Nifty tumbled 775.65 points or 3.26 per cent to end at 23,002.15.

From the 30-Sensex firms, Eternal, Bajaj Finance, Mahindra & Mahindra, HDFC Bank, Larsen & Toubro and Bajaj Finserv were among the major laggards.

HDFC Bank dropped 5.13 per cent after its chairman, Atanu Chakraborty, resigned, citing ethical concerns. Brent



crude, the global oil benchmark, soared 6.75 per cent to USD 114.8 per barrel after Iran attacked a key natural gas facility in Qatar as well as two oil refineries in Kuwait.

Iran intensified its attacks on its Gulf Arab neighbours' energy sites on Thursday, hitting a Saudi refinery on the Red Sea and setting Qatari LNG facilities and two Kuwaiti oil refineries ablaze as it struck back following an Israeli attack on its main natural gas field.

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World Happiness Report highlights social media's negative impact

Ranks Finland as happiest country

AP

Helsinki, Mar 10: Heavy social media use contributes to a stark decline in well-being among young people, with the effects particularly worrying in teenage girls in English-speaking countries and Western Europe, according to the World Happiness Report 2026 published Thursday.

The annual report, published by the Wellbeing Research Center at the University of Oxford, also found that Finland is the happiest land in the world for the ninth year in a row, with other Nordic countries such as Iceland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway ranking among the top 10 countries.

But it highlighted how life evaluations among under 25-year-olds in the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand have dropped significantly over the past decade, and suggested that long hours spent scrolling through social media is a key factor in that trend.

Costa Rica jumps to 4th place; Nordic countries stay on top

A new entry to the top five on the list is Costa Rica, which climbed to fourth place this year after rising through the ranks from 23rd place in 2023.

The report attributes that to well-being boosts from family bonds and other social connections.

"We think it's because of the quality of their social lives and the stability that they currently enjoy," said Jan-Emmanuel De



Neve, an Oxford economics professor who directs the Wellbeing Research Center and co-edits the World Happiness Report.

"Latin America more generally has strong family ties, strong social ties, a great level of social capital, as a sociologist would call it, more so than in other places," he added.

The report said Finland and the other Northern European countries' steady ranking on top is related to a combination of wealth, its equal distribution, having a welfare state that protects people from the risks of recessions, and a healthy life expectancy.

As in previous years, nations in or near zones of major conflict remain at the foot of the rankings. Afghanistan is ranked as the unhappiest country again, followed by Sierra Leone and Malawi in Africa.

Country rankings were based on answers given by around

100,000 people in 140 countries and territories who were asked to rate their own lives. The study was done in partnership with the analytics firm Gallup and the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

In most countries, approximately 1,000 people are contacted by telephone or face-to-face each year.

Teenage girls especially vulnerable

Respondents were asked to evaluate their lives on a scale from 0 to 10. Among under-25s in English-speaking and Western European countries, that score dropped by almost one point over the past decade.

The report said the negative correlation between well-being and extensive social media use is particularly concerning among teenage girls. For example, it said that 15-year-old girls who use social media for five hours or more reported a drop in life

satisfaction, compared to others who use it less.

Young people who use social media for less than one hour per day report the highest levels of well-being, researchers said, higher than those who do not use social media at all. But adolescents are spending an estimated average of 2.5 hours a day on social media.

"It is clear that we should look as much as possible to put the 'social' back into social media," De Neve said.

Algorithmic feeds and influencers seen as culprits

Researchers noted that in some parts of the world, such as the Middle East and South America, the links between social media use and well-being are more positive — and youth well-being has not fallen despite heavy social media use.

The report said this is due to many factors that differ between continents, but concluded that heavy social media use in some countries is an important contributing factor to the decline in youth well-being.

It said the most problematic platforms are those with algorithmic feeds, feature influencers and where the main material is visual, because they encourage social comparisons. Those who use platforms that mainly facilitate communication do better.

The 2026 rankings mark the second year in a row that none of the English-speaking countries appear in the top 10. The United States is at 23rd place, Canada is at 25th and Britain at 29th.

Iranian Americans mark Persian New Year with a mix of sadness, joy



AP

Los Angeles, Mar 19: After thousands of Iranian demonstrators were killed in a January crackdown, Shima Razavi Gacek wanted to keep alive her family's favorite springtime holiday traditions but didn't feel like throwing her annual house party with a roaring bonfire ahead of Nowruz — the Persian New Year.

Instead, the 46-year-old Los Angeles resident organized a vigil Tuesday night at a local park, where the photos of slain protesters were displayed and dozens of Iranian Americans lit candles and took turns hopping over tea lights in a version of a fire-jumping tradition known as Chaharshanbe Suri.

"It is such a beautiful and joyous time of year," said Razavi Gacek, who has lived in the United States since she was 5. "This year, it's not, but we need our community more than ever."

Iranian Americans are

marking Nowruz this year with a mix of somber celebrations and the traditional flowers, music and dancing. Many communities canceled festivities following the crackdown on protesters in January, while others have organized smaller, quieter versions of the usually joyous celebration.

The holiday comes less than a month after US and Israeli forces attacked Iran, killing the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Since then, conflict has spread throughout the region.

Nowruz means "new day" in Farsi, the language typically spoken in Iran. The holiday that coincides with the spring equinox is rooted in Zoroastrian tradition dating back millennia and is celebrated from Afghanistan to Türkiye. Iranians of diverse religious faiths mark Nowruz even though the hard-line Iranian regime has at times discouraged festivities.

It is also celebrated in the

United States, including in Los Angeles, which is home to nearly a third of the country's 750,000 Iranian Americans, and in Nashville, Tennessee, with the largest Kurdish community in the nation.

Celebrations canceled

Many communities have canceled planned Nowruz parties and events since Iran's deadly crackdown on demonstrations.

In New York, a group of elderly Iranian American women called off their celebration, which they host at a suburban shopping mall 25 miles (40 kilometers) outside Manhattan.

"People are not in the mood to celebrate the New Year," said Marjan Khalili, president of the Long Island Ladies Association. "That's what Nowruz is — we welcome the New Year, and now we really don't have much to welcome, you know?"

Shani Moslehi, chief executive of the Orange County Iranian American Chamber of Commerce in Southern California, said her group scratched plans for an annual party and is teaming up with a mental health clinic to provide support to community members dealing with the stress of the war and inability to communicate with family in Iran.

"Everyone I hear from is not doing well," Moslehi said. "The dancing and singing lasted a day, and people realized just killing that one guy is not going to solve the problem."

Some community organizations felt compelled to carry on with Nowruz traditions but have tempered them to meet the moment.

Abhishek must find balance between flair & responsibility like Sehwag, says Kumble



PTI

New Delhi, Mar 19: Former India captain and coach Anil Kumble believes flamboyant opener Abhishek Sharma needs to strike the right balance between aggression and longevity at the crease, much like the explosive Virender Sehwag did during his career.

The 25-year-old Abhishek has been one of the most explosive batters at the top of the order in recent times, often giving his teams flying starts with his high-risk, high-reward approach.

However, his inability to convert brisk starts into substantial scores more often than not has come to the fore.

"I would relate him to someone like Virender Sehwag, because he would look to smash every ball. When he moved from Test cricket to one-day cricket and then to T20 cricket, he realised that he

had to pace his innings slightly differently.

"But Sehwag would still go at a 140-150 strike-rate. So, that's something Abhishek Sharma needs to start thinking about, saying, 'I've been scoring at 200 strike-rate, expectations are on me, should I now go at a strike rate of 300?' No, you just have to be normal. You have to play a number of balls," Kumble said on JioStar.

"If Abhishek Sharma bats 20 balls in an innings, we know he will be close to that 50 mark. We saw that with Sanju Samson, not getting out in the 40s or 50s, but making it count by going deeper, getting to that 85-90 mark.

"That's what you need in the T20 format. Maybe that's the kind of maturity you will see in Abhishek this season, which SRH will be hoping for," he added.

Abhishek, who endured a rather underwhelming T20

World Cup campaign, will turn up for Sunrisers Hyderabad in the IPL, starting March 28.

Former South Africa skipper AB de Villiers also stressed the need for greater consistency from the left hander, who now has to also deal with the burden of expectations.

"He's 25, not 20 anymore. So, this is definitely the phase where he has to start taking more responsibility. There will be media pressure and people asking him to become more consistent.

"We know he was a little inconsistent during the T20 World Cup, which was disappointing. He had a good finish in the final, but otherwise, it was a quiet tournament for him. He was erratic at times. He had an unbelievable IPL 2025, scoring close to a 200 strike-rate and averaging in the 30s, which is good for an opening batter scoring over 400 runs in the tournament, but it could have been better.

"Once again, that word consistency comes to mind. It's a personal challenge he will have to overcome mentally."

"Being the number one international T20I batter in the world comes with expectation, and that is the most dangerous word in cricket, when you feel like the whole world is closing in on you, and it's up to him to fight those mental battles throughout this coming season."

India to host 2028 World Indoor Athletics Championships in Bhubaneswar



PTI

New Delhi, Mar 19: India will host the World Indoor Athletics Championships for the first time in 2028 in Bhubaneswar as the international body on Thursday awarded the hosting rights of the prestigious event to the country at its council meeting in Torun, Poland.

The decision was taken at the World Athletics Council meeting a day before the start of World Indoor Athletics Championships (March 20-22) in the Polish city.

"India has been awarded the World Indoor Athletics Championships for the year 2028,"

World Athletics vice president Adile Sumariwalla told PTI from Poland.

AFI had revealed its bid for the 2028 World Indoor Championships earlier this year.

A two-member team from World Athletics had visited the state-of-the-art indoor facility at the Kalinga Stadium Complex in Bhubaneswar in January.

Along with Sumariwalla, also a World Athletics Council member and a former Athletics Federation of India (AFI) president, officials of the Odisha government had travelled to the Polish city.

AFI president Bahadur Singh Sagoo said the development was an indication of the growing stature of Indian athletics in the international stage.

"The World Athletics 2028 Indoor Athletics Championships allotted to India mark the growing stature of Indian athletics. Indian track and field has been in sharp focus since ace javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra won back-to-back Olympic and World medals," he said.

رمضان المبارك

1447 H / 2026 CE

وقت افطار	انقمام سحری	رمضان المبارک	تاریخ	وقت افطار	انقمام سحری	رمضان المبارک	تاریخ
06:34 PM	05:31 AM	16	06	06:21 PM	05:49 AM	1	19
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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
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06:45 PM	05:12 AM	30	20	06:33 PM	05:33 AM	15	05

DUA FOR SEHRI

وَبِصَوْمٍ غَدٍ نَّوَيْتُ 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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www.kashmirnewsobserver.com

Phone: +91-9906797575, +91-9419006285
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