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Victim was a burden, terrorist a beneficiary: LG Sinha

Terms past neglect as 'civilisational failure' | Vows to dismantle 'troubling system' | Asks elders of society to introspect | Says era of conflict entrepreneurs is over

Yogesh

Jammu, Mar 23: Urging society's elders to engage in honest introspection, Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Monday said a troubling system had taken roots in Jammu and Kashmir, where terror victims were treated as burdens while those linked to terror were made beneficiaries.

While addressing a function in Jammu organized to handover appointment letters to families of terror victims and other beneficiaries, LG Sinha, according to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) said, "The elders of the society must ask themselves some tough questions—what kind of society we had become a few decades ago? How did Jammu Kashmir evolve into a system where the victim became a burden that time and those linked to terror were turned



into beneficiaries?"

"I am confident that these questions will shake our conscience, because such practices hollowed out every value that makes a society just. Such darkness had extinguished the very spirit of law, trust, and coexistence," he said.

LG Sinha handed over appointment letters to 37 Next

of Kins (NoKs) of victims of terrorism. The job letters were also handed over to 29 NoKs of government employees who lost their lives in service, and beneficiaries in age relaxation cases, under Jammu & Kashmir Rehabilitation Assistance Scheme-2022 and SRO 43.

The Lieutenant Governor said, "Those who were part of

the terror ecosystem and managed to infiltrate government machinery in the past will face the law and they will be systematically removed from government jobs and punished as per the law."

He said, "Those directly linked to terrorism are being dismissed from service, while decades-long | [More on P6](#)

438 appointment letters given to NOKs of terror victims: LG Sinha

Says compassionate appointment policy relaxed, will cover families of govt employees who died due to natural causes

Yogesh

Jammu, Mar 23: Asserting that family members of 438 terror victims have been given job letters since 2025, Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Monday said that J&K's compassionate appointment policy has been relaxed to also cover families of government employees who died due to natural causes.

Talking to the reporters after handing over the appointment letters to Next of Kins (NOKs) of terror victims and other beneficiaries here, LG Sinha, according to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) said, "As many as 438 appointment letters have already been issued to NoKs of terror victims under the government's support measures." "I am aware of the pain of terror victims and the administration is making efforts to reach out to NOKs of such



families," he added. LG Sinha said Deputy Commissioners and Senior Superintendents of Police have been directed to expedite pending cases by forwarding them to the General Administration Department (GAD) at the earliest, while ensuring that each case undergoes proper verification. "Every application is processed only after thorough verification and approval. We have to | [More on P6](#)

LG's Healing Touch After decades of loss, jobs provide solace to terror victims' kin

Yogesh

Jammu, Mar 23: In stories marked by grief, resilience and a long wait for justice, families of terror victims in Jammu and Kashmir found a measure of solace as appointment letters were distributed to Next of Kin (NoK) under a special initiative led by Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha.

According to the details available with the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) among the beneficiaries was Masood Ahmed from Ramban, who was a child when tragedy struck his family over two decades ago. On July 15, 2001, terrorists took his father to a hilltop and killed him, leaving behind a shattered household and years of hardship. For 24 years, the family carried the burden of loss, struggling to rebuild their lives amid memories of that fateful day.

On Monday, Masood Ahmed finally received a government job appointment letter—an outcome he and his family had waited for | [More on P6](#)

72 private member bills to be listed, but passage unlikely in J&K Assembly

All eyes on Tanvir Sadiq's Land Grants Bill

KNO Special Correspondent

Srinagar, Mar 23: As many as 72 private member bills are scheduled to be listed for introduction in the second leg of the budget session starting on March 27. However, the chances of these bills being passed remain bleak, given that such legislations have rarely been approved in J&K's legislative history.

As per the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), despite politicking over these bills, records show that they have failed to move beyond the stage of introduction, leaving most proposals without

legislative success. Since 1980, only three private member bills have been cleared by the legislature of the erstwhile state.

Two of those were The Jammu and Kashmir Grant of Permit for Resettlement in (or Permanent Return to) the State Act, 1982 and The Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 2007, both moved by Abdul Rahim Rather, Speaker of the J&K Assembly. The third was the Jammu and Kashmir State Legislature Members Pension (Amendment) Act, 2014, jointly moved by NC and PDP MLAs

India will overcome West Asia crisis like Covid: PM Modi

Calls for dialogue, diplomacy to end conflict

PTI

New Delhi, Mar 23: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday said the difficult global conditions caused by the West Asia conflict are likely to persist for a long time and called upon the nation to remain prepared and united, just as it had stood together during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a statement in the Lok Sabha, PM Modi addressed concerns related to the impact on fuel, fertilisers, national security and other areas in India as well as on its nationals residing in the West Asia region, detailing steps taken by the government to ensure that "ordinary families face as little trouble as possible", and said



a unanimous voice should go out to the world from India's Parliament on this crisis.

Reaffirming India's unwavering commitment to humanity and peace, the prime minister said the dialogue and diplomacy remain the only path to resolution and every

Indian effort is directed at de-escalation and the cessation of hostilities.

Informing the House that he has engaged with all relevant West Asian leaders and urged them to reduce tensions and end the conflict, Modi emphasised that attacks on commercial ships and obstruction of international waterways like the Strait of Hormuz, through which 20 per cent of the world's energy is transported, are "wholly unacceptable".

He said endangering any life in this war runs counter to the interests of humanity and "India's effort is to encourage all parties to arrive at a peaceful resolution as soon as possible".

On India's diplomatic response to | [More on P6](#)

'Tulip Garden attracts over 57,000 visitors in first week'

- ◆ Despite rain disruptions, authorities expect surge
- ◆ Foreign tourists begin to trickle in
- ◆ Figure based on offline ticket sales



Rehan Qayoom Mir

Srinagar, Mar 23: The Tulip Garden in Srinagar, Asia's largest, recorded a footfall of around 57,000 visitors in its first week of opening, officials said on Monday.

Assistant Floriculture Officer In-charge Tulip Garden Srinagar, Imran Ahmad, informed the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) that the figure pertains to

offline ticket sales recorded during the initial week.

"The footfall in the first week is around 57,000, and this is based on offline ticketing," he said, adding that the online ticketing data is currently not accessible.

The officer said the online figures will be compiled and made available after the garden closes for the season. "The online ticketing data can be accessed | [More on P6](#)

J&K to get its first automatic weather station in 2026 under Mission Mausam

Raja Syed Rather

Srinagar, Mar 23: The Union government on Monday said that one Automatic Weather Station (AWS) will be installed in Jammu and Kashmir in 2026 under Mission Mausam Phase-II to strengthen weather monitoring and agro-advisory services.

Replying to a question in Lok Sabha, the Ministry of Earth Sciences said that around 200 Agro-AWS will be deployed across the country during 2026, aimed at improving agro-meteorological observations and providing better weather-based advisories to the agriculture sector.

According to official data accessed by the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO),



Jammu and Kashmir has been allocated one such station under the proposed expansion plan.

The Ministry further said

that the India Meteorological Department (IMD) currently operates 1,008 Automatic Weather Stations across the country, including

Centre focuses on developing J&K as mountain tourism hub

Raja Syed Rather

Srinagar, Mar 23: The Centre on Monday said that Jammu and Kashmir is receiving focused attention under various central tourism schemes aimed at developing world-class infrastructure and promoting mountain tourism in the region.

Replying to a question in Lok Sabha, the Ministry of Tourism said that while development of tourism remains primarily the responsibility of States and Union Territories, the Centre is supplementing efforts through flagship schemes like Swadesh Darshan 2.0, PRASHAD and other initiatives.

The government said that Jammu and Kashmir has been included in the Himalayan

tourism circuit under the Swadesh Darshan scheme, with multiple projects sanctioned to boost tourism infrastructure across key destinations, including Jammu, Srinagar, Pahalgam, Gulmarg, Baramulla and Kupwara.

According to official details accessed by the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), several projects worth crores have been sanctioned in J&K under the Himalayan Circuit, focusing on the development of tourist facilities, connectivity, and infrastructure in both the Kashmir and Jammu regions. These include projects for areas such as Anantnag, Pulwama, Kishtwar, Daksum and Ranjith Sagar Dam, among others.

The Ministry further said that the | [More on P6](#)

Cybercrime cases in J&K rise steadily, 185 reported in 2023: GoI

Raja Syed Rather

Srinagar, Mar 23: The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has revealed that cybercrime cases in Jammu & Kashmir have witnessed a steady increase over the past three years, with 185 cases reported in 2023.

According to official data presented in the Lok Sabha, J&K recorded 154 cybercrime cases in 2021, which rose to 173 in 2022 and further to 185 in 2023, indicating a gradual upward trend in such offences.

The data, compiled by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) and accessed by the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), highlights the

growing challenge of cyber-related crimes across the Union Territory, amid increasing digital penetration and online activity.

The Ministry further informed that multiple forensic mechanisms have been strengthened at the national level to tackle cybercrimes. At present, seven Central Forensic Science Laboratories and 27 State Forensic Science Laboratories are operational across the country to assist in investigations.

Additionally, under centrally sponsored schemes, financial assistance has been extended to several states and Union Territories for | [More on P6](#)

Full Court Reference held to bid farewell to Justice Javed Iqbal Wani



KT NEWS DESK

SRINAGAR, MARCH 23: A Full Court Reference was held in the Court Room of the Chief Justice at the Srinagar Wing of High Court of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh to bid farewell to Justice Javed Iqbal Wani, Judge of the High Court of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh, on demitting office upon attaining the age of superannuation.

The Full Court Reference, as per an official statement, was convened in accordance with the long-standing conventions and institutional traditions of the High Court.

The Reference was attended by Chief Justice Arun Palli and Justice Sanjeev Kumar, Justice Sindhu Sharma, Justice Rajesh Oswal, Justice Sanjay Dhar, Justice Rahul Bharti, Justice Moksha

Khajuria Kazmi, Justice Wasim Sadiq Nargal, Justice Rajesh Sekhri, Justice Mohd. Yousuf Wani, Justice Sanjay Parihar, and Justice Shahzad Azeem along with the spouses of the Judges of the High Court.

The proceedings were also attended by former Chief Justices and former Judges of the High Court of J&K and Ladakh; senior officers of the civil administration and police, including the Secretary Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs; Senior Additional Advocate General; Deputy Solicitors General of India at Jammu and Srinagar; the President, Kashmir Advocates Association, Srinagar; Senior Advocates; Principal District and Sessions Judge, Srinagar; Judicial Officers; officers of the Registry; and family members of Justice Javed Iqbal Wani. Besides,

officers and officials and Advocates of the High Court from Jammu Wing joined the proceedings through virtual mode.

The farewell address was delivered by Mohsin Qadri, Senior Additional Advocate General, who lauded the dedication, judicial acumen and steadfast commitment of Justice Wani to uphold the rule of law. He observed that the tenure of Justice Wani as a Judge of the High Court of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh was marked by judicial prudence, fairness and a deep sense of justice, with particular emphasis on ensuring access to justice for the poor and the marginalized. She described Justice Wani as a gentleman par excellence and highlighted his positive approach, institutional contributions and respectful conduct towards members of

the Bar.

President, Kashmir Advocates Association, Srinagar, Advocate Waseem Gull in his farewell address, commended the distinguished judicial service rendered by Justice Javed Iqbal Wani and highlighted his unwavering commitment to fairness, justice and constitutional values.

The Chief Justice, in his address, highlighted Justice Wani's academic excellence, professional integrity and balanced judicial temperament, noting his dedication both at the Bar and on the Bench. His tenure was marked by discipline and clarity of thought earning him respect across the legal fraternity. The Court also acknowledged the invaluable support of his family throughout his judicial journey and

extended its heartfelt appreciation and best wishes for his health, happiness and fulfillment in the years ahead.

Justice Javed Iqbal Wani, in his response, expressed profound gratitude to the Chief Justice, brother and sister Judges, members of the Bar, Judicial Officers, officers of the Registry and Court staff for their cooperation and support throughout his tenure. He emphasized that effective dispensation of justice is possible only through harmonious cooperation between the Bench and the Bar. He also appreciated the legal acumen, professional competence and commitment of the advocates of the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh and placed on record his appreciation for the dedication and assistance of his personal staff.

The proceedings of the Full Court Reference were conducted by M. K. Sharma, Registrar General, High Court of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh.

Upon conclusion of the proceedings, Justice Javed Iqbal Wani was accorded a Guard of Honor by the security personnel as a mark of respect and recognition of his distinguished and meritorious judicial service.

DC Srinagar presides over Mega Job Fair at Kashmir Haat



KT NEWS DESK

SRINAGAR, MARCH 23: Deputy Commissioner (DC) Srinagar, Akshay Labroo on Monday presided over a one day Mega Job Fair at Kashmir Haat (Numaish Gah) Exhibition Ground, aimed at promoting employment opportunities, entrepreneurship and enhancing self-employment opportunities among the youth of the district.

Deputy Director Employment, Srinagar, Shubi Tabasum, District Employment Officer, Career Counselling Officer (CCO), other senior Officers from the Employment Department and other concerned also attended the event.

The job fair, as per an official statement, witnessed an overwhelming response from the youth who registered online for participation in the event.

Around 22 companies with adequate vacancies in diverse sectors including Tourism, Agriculture, Horticulture, Insurance, Banking, Automobile and Hospitality were part of this event offering a wide range of

employment opportunities.

During the programme, the Deputy Commissioner inspected several stalls set up by government departments showcasing various self-employment schemes. These stalls provided detailed information on scheme benefits, financial assistance, and application procedures aimed at facilitating and encouraging aspiring entrepreneurs.

Addressing on the occasion, the Deputy Commissioner underscored the importance of such job fairs in creating a direct interface between job providers and job seekers, thereby enabling placements, selections, and formal registration of unemployed youth with the Employment Department.

He further urged youth to avail hassle-free credit facilities offered under key government initiatives such as Mission YUVA, HADP, and JKPCIP.

He reiterated that the District Administration is committed to extending all necessary support through the Employment Department to foster entrepreneurship across Srinagar

DC Kulgam reviews power sector functioning

KT NEWS DESK

KULGAM, MARCH 23: Deputy Commissioner (DC) Kulgam, Shahzad Alam Monday chaired a meeting to review the functioning of the power sector in the district and assess the progress of works being carried out under the Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS).

During the meeting, the DC, as per an official statement, took a detailed review of the status of ongoing projects, infrastructure upgrades, and other initiatives aimed at strengthening the power distribution network in the district. He was apprised by the concerned officials about the progress achieved under the scheme, including installation of smart meters, augmentation of distribution infrastructure, and measures being taken to reduce power losses.

The DC emphasized the need for effective implementation of the scheme to ensure reliable and quality power supply to consumers. He directed the concerned departments to expedite the ongoing works under RDSS and ensure that all targets are achieved within the stipulated timelines.

He also stressed the importance of close coordination among departments and called for prompt redressal of public grievances related to electricity supply.

He instructed officials to regularly monitor field-level progress and ensure that the benefits of the scheme reach the people in a timely manner.

Div Com Kashmir inaugurates Gyan Bharatam Workshop, National Survey of Manuscripts



KT NEWS DESK

SRINAGAR, MARCH 23: Divisional Commissioner Kashmir, Anshul Garg Monday inaugurated a three-day Gyan Bharatam Workshop & National Survey of Manuscripts at Indian IIM, Sanat Nagar, Srinagar.

The workshop is being organized by the Department of Archives, Archaeology & Museums, J&K to promote identification, preservation, conservation,

and digitization of centuries-old manuscripts across Jammu & Kashmir.

Addressing the participants, the Divisional Commissioner, as per an official statement, underscored the importance of public participation in safeguarding manuscript heritage. He emphasized that the mission adopts a "Har Ghar Dastak" approach to reach custodians and ensure documentation of valuable manuscripts.

Highlighting the significance of the

initiative, he said the Gyan Bharatam Mission aligns with the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to preserve and document India's rich intellectual and cultural legacy.

The Director, Kuldeep Krishan Sidha stated that the workshop aims to sensitize and train District Level Committees in manuscript identification and provide practical training on the use of the Gyan Bharatam Mission mobile application for field surveys.

The programme also focuses on creating awareness about the importance of manuscript preservation and digitization as part of the broader knowledge ecosystem. The Gyan Bharatam App, launched by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, is being used to monitor progress, with regular review at the PMO level.

Sidha informed that manuscripts will remain with their custodians, while experts will assist in assessing their nature, category, and physical condition. "The department will undertake digitization free of cost", he said and appealed private collectors to actively participate in the mission.

Dr. Jahangir Iqbal, HoD and Cluster Centre Head, Gyan Bharatam Mission, Department of Persian, Kashmir University, is the nodal officer for Kashmir.

The workshop is being attended by experts from Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, District Level Committee officers, private manuscript collectors, and officials of the department.

Mega Aadhaar MBU drive 2.0 launched across J&K

KT NEWS DESK

JAMMU, MARCH 23: The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), in association with the Information Technology Department, J&K and Project Samagra Shiksha, School Education Department, J&K has launched Mega Aadhaar Mandatory Biometric Update (MBU) drive 2.0 across the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir.

The drive has commenced from March 23, 2026 in winter zone schools while for schools in summer zones, it will begin from April 1, 2026 onwards. This large-scale initiative aims to cover 2,382 identified schools and provide Aadhaar biometric update services to over 2 lakh students of Jammu & Kashmir within school premises.

This initiative, as per an official statement, builds upon the success of the earlier MBU drive

conducted from September to 31st December 2025, during which approximately 1.5 lakh students successfully updated their biometrics. Despite this progress, around 3.5 lakh children still require mandatory biometric updates, necessitating the continuation of the mission mode approach.

Earlier, UIDAI had rolled out the mission mode MBU drive for school children in September 2025 following a successful technological integration with the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) application of the Union Department of School Education and Literacy. This integration enabled real-time visibility of the biometric update status of students at the school level, facilitating identification of children due for updates and enabling targeted camps within school premises.

150 Years of Vande Mataram

District Admin Baramulla launches week-long campaign

KT NEWS DESK

BARAMULLA, MARCH 23: District Administration Baramulla Monday launched a special week-long campaign to commemorate 150 years of Vande Mataram at Sherwani Hall, Baramulla.

The programme was inaugurated by Deputy Commissioner Baramulla, Syeed Fakhruddin Hamid.

On the occasion, a short documentary, as per an official statement, on the historical background and significance of Vande Mataram was screened for the participants.

Speaking during the event, the Deputy Commissioner highlighted the historical importance of Vande



Mataram in our Nation's freedom movement and its continuing relevance in promoting awareness of the country's historical and cultural heritage among the younger

generation. He noted that the composition by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay occupies an important place in the history of the national movement

and has remained associated with the spirit of public awakening during and patriotism.

An exhibition was also organised at the venue featuring photographs, biographical sketches, and brief accounts from the lives of prominent freedom fighters.

The Deputy Commissioner and other participants also paid tributes to Shaheed Mohammad Maqbool Sherwani, recalling his contribution and sacrifice.

The week-long campaign will include a series of activities across educational institutions and public spaces, aimed at enhancing public awareness about the historical and cultural significance of Vande Mataram.

DC Budgam reviews arrangements

KT NEWS DESK

BUDGAM, MARCH 23: In connection with the Commemoration of 150 years of the National Song Vande Mataram (Special Phase) and the observance of Shaheed Diwas, District Administration Budgam Monday held a meeting under the chairmanship of the Deputy Commissioner Budgam, Athar Aamir Khan.

At the outset, it was informed that a series of activities will be held across the district from 23rd to 30th March 2026 as part of the Special Phase celebrations, aimed at commemorating the historic legacy of Vande Mataram and paying rich tributes to the martyrs of the nation on Shaheed Diwas. During the meeting, as per an official statement, threadbare deliberations were held on ensuring the smooth and successful conduct of all scheduled programmes.

The DC highlighted the historic significance of the 150-year commemoration of Vande Mataram, describing it as a powerful symbol of India's freedom movement and national identity. Stressing the

importance of effective implementation, the DC directed all departments to ensure seamless coordination, proactive planning, and enthusiastic participation at all levels. He instructed officers to organize a wide range of activities including cultural programmes, patriotic events, awareness drives, student engagement initiatives, and community outreach programmes in all blocks and panchayats. The DC further underscored the need to actively involve youth, educational institutions and civil society, so that the spirit of patriotism and national pride is carried to the grassroots. He reiterated that the celebrations should be inclusive, vibrant, and reflective of the collective aspirations of the people.

Reviewing the logistical arrangements, the DC directed the concerned departments to ensure adequate infrastructure, proper publicity, and smooth execution of all events. He also stressed maintaining discipline and coordination to ensure that all programmes are conducted in a befitting manner.

SKUAST-K mulls online, hybrid classes amid LPG crisis

RIYAZ BHAT

Srinagar, Mar 23: Facing a growing Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) crisis, the Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology of Kashmir (SKUAST-K) is devising a mechanism to shift the regular classes to online and hybrid mode.

Top officials of SKUAST-K informed that main and satellite campuses have started facing LPG crisis. "Keeping in view the issue, we have directed the deans of the university to gear for online classes or hybrid mode of education."

He said, "The instruction for online and hybrid modes of education is a precautionary measure, if the situation deteriorates and demands shift to online education, we must be ready for that to avoid the academic losses."

"We are preparing a Learning Management



System (LMS) for the online and hybrid mode of education because more than 65-70 percent of the students in different campuses of SKUAST-K are either residing in university hostels or in Paying Guests (PGs)," the official said.

Furthermore, the official added that for the first time, the university has introduced online registration for the spring semester session. "Earlier, the students were supposed to apply for the semester registration in the offline mode, however due to the LPG crisis we have started online registration so that the students who are currently not in the campuses can apply for the registration online."

"If situation demands online education, it requires an online portal, we will be working on it," the official added.

About the commencement of regular classes for the spring semester session the

official said that the classes should normally start by next week. "Let's see what the situation demands. As of now the LPG crisis are growing."

He added, "At SKUAST-K, we have over 6,000 student enrolment and in different campuses of the university in Kashmir, at least 25 percent students are from outside Kashmir region and more than 1000 students are outside J&K."

"We have a total of 30 hostels in different campuses of Kashmir region and on an average at least one hundred students are residing in each hostel. Moreover many students are residing in PGs," the official said.

Meanwhile, the officials at University of Kashmir and Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST) Awantipora said that they have not taken any call regarding the preparations or conducting the online classes—(KNO)

'Bloodlines Pahalgam' book presented to LG Sinha



KT NEWS DESK

Jammu, Mar 23: Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha was on Monday presented with a book authored by Brig. Dr Vijay Sagar Dheman (Retd.).

The title of the book is "Bloodlines Pahalgam: A Democracy Confronts Terrorism". The Lieutenant Governor congratulated the

author on the publication of his book.

On the occasion, the Lieutenant Governor was also presented with the publication titled "Valley of Shadows: The Untold Story of Terror in Kashmir (1947-2007)".

Maj Gen Govardhan Singh Jamwal (Retd.) and members of International Institute of J&K Studies and Analyses (IISJA) Jammu were also present.

General Zorawar Singh Trust delegation calls on LG



Jammu, Mar 23: A delegation of Pithoo and Pony Labour Union Mata Vaishno Devi, Katra, led by its President Bhupinder Singh, called on Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Monday. Devinder Singh Kaluria, Diksha Kaluria and Riya Kaluria, Chairman and Trustees of General Zorawar Singh Memorial Education and Charitable Trust also called on Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha.

Concerns mount over 'slow evacuation' of 120 Indian students in Astara

JAHANGEER GANAIE

Srinagar, Mar 23: The slow evacuation of Indian students stranded in Iran continues as nearly 120 students remain stuck in Astara awaiting exit clearance, with uncertainties looming over their timely return.

According to details available, around 100 out of the 120 students currently in Astara may receive the required exit codes by March 31 due to the slow process. This has raised apprehensions among students and their families, as it may not be feasible for all of them to secure clearance within the given timeframe.

The evacuation process via land routes has been progressing at a sluggish pace, with only about 8 to 20 students crossing the Azerbaijan border each day. Authorities had earlier arranged evacuation corridors through

Armenia and Azerbaijan as part of a coordinated effort to facilitate the safe return of Indian nationals stranded in Iran. However, the limited daily movement has slowed down the overall process.

Several students have already been routed to Mumbai through alternative arrangements, with the majority of those evacuated so far belonging to Jammu & Kashmir.

Around 200 Indian medical students are still stranded in different parts of Iran, waiting for evacuation or relocation options.

Dr Mohammad Momin Khan, Vice President of the All India Medical Students Association, acknowledged the challenges but expressed gratitude to the authorities involved in the operation. He said that despite major holidays such as Nowruz and Eid, officials and support

teams have remained actively engaged on the ground to assist students.

"If the current pace of evacuation continues, we are hopeful that most of the stranded students will be able to leave Iran by March 31," Dr Khan said, adding that the process is still underway and requires sustained coordination.

The evacuation efforts are being carried out through close coordination between student bodies and government agencies, aimed at ensuring the safe and orderly return of Indian nationals.

Parents have proposed destinations such as Bangladesh, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Germany, stressing that prolonged uncertainty and disruptions could severely impact the academic future of their children—(KNO)

3-month ration likely in J&K from April

FCS&CA awaits final nod

REHAN QAYOOM MIR

Srinagar, Mar 23: The Jammu & Kashmir is likely to roll out a three-month ration supply scheme from the month of April, with the Department of Food, Civil Supplies & Consumer Affairs (FCS&CA) working on modalities following directions from the Government of India, officials said here on Monday.

A CAPD official said that the department has received instructions to ensure availability of ration for three months, but the proposal is still under process.

"We have received directions from the Government of India (GoI) to provide three months' ration. The department is working on it, but things have not been finalised yet," the official said, adding that the directions have been issued to all States and Union Territories and not only to Jammu and Kashmir.

He said the scheme is anticipated to be launched at the earliest from April. "It is expected that from next month the ration scheme can start, but final-stage

meetings are yet to take place and modalities are still being worked out," he said.

The official said the move is aimed at ensuring smoother and more efficient distribution of foodgrains to beneficiaries across the Union Territory.

Regarding the quantity, he said the monthly ration entitlement will be multiplied by three and provided at once.

Meanwhile, the development comes as the Centre recently reviewed key aspects of foodgrain procurement, storage and Public Distribution System (PDS) reforms with States and Union Territories.

As per details of the meeting available with KNO, chaired by the Secretary, Department of Food & Public Distribution (DFPD) in New Delhi, the wheat procurement target for the upcoming Rabi Marketing Season (RMS) 2026-27 has been fixed at 303 lakh metric tonnes (LMT), while paddy procurement for Kharif Marketing Season (KMS) 2025-26 (Rabi crop) has been estimated at 76 LMT (in terms of rice).

The Centre also projected

procurement of around 7.79 LMT of coarse grains, including millets (Shri Anna) and ensured availability of packaging material with allocation of 7.83 lakh jute bales and 9.22 lakh HDPE bags.

Key PDS reforms discussed in the meeting included pilot distribution of improved rice with up to 10 percent broken grains, QR code tagging of foodgrain bags and expansion of digital tools like "Anna Chakra" for supply chain optimisation along with Vehicle Location Tracking System (VLTS).

Other initiatives such as Subsidy Claim Application for NFSA (SCAN), Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC), Smart PDS, Sarthak PDS and AI-led system "ASHA" were also reviewed.

Officials said these reforms are aimed at improving transparency, efficiency and last-mile delivery of foodgrains under the PDS.

It is important to mention, further clarity on the three-month ration scheme in J&K is expected once CAPD finalises the modalities in the coming days—(KNO)

Northern Army commander lauds Kishtwar troops

YOGESH

Jammu, Mar 23: Army's Northern Commander Lieutenant General Pratik Sharma on Monday appreciated the sustained efforts of troops in maintaining peace in Jammu and Kashmir.

According to the details, Lieutenant General Sharma on Monday visited Kishtwar district and lauded the troops for their professionalism. He asked them to maintain sustained momentum to ensure lasting peace and stability in the region.

In a post on X, the Northern Command said the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Lt Gen Sharma, visited Kishtwar sector to review operational preparedness and security grid. He had detailed deliberations with commanders in chains and interaction with troops.

"He appreciated their sustained efforts, professionalism and resolute conduct of operations in challenging terrain and inclement weather conditions exhorting them to maintain the momentum and seamless coordination with sister security agencies to ensure continued peace and stability in the region," the post said.

It may be recalled that Pakistan-based terror outfit Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) suffered a major blow in Kishtwar district as the Army eliminated seven of its highly trained terrorists in a year-long operation in challenging high-altitude areas, with the last three, including most-wanted commander Saifullah, killed on February 22—(KNO)

Blast outside former sarpanch's home in Samba

NIA, NSG teams visit site

YOGESH

Jammu, Mar 23: A mysterious blast outside the house of a former sarpanch in Samba district early Monday shook the neighbourhood, officials said.

An official said that the blast, whose origins were not yet known, occurred outside the residence of Jai Ram Sharma in Gawala Talab, about 10 km from the International Border in the Ghagwal sector.

"The blast damaged the house gate, a portion of the boundary wall and shattered window panes of several adjoining houses. No casualties were reported. A team of forensic experts collected samples from the scene to ascertain the cause of the explosion," the official added.

"Teams of the National Investigation Agency and the National Security Guard, accompanied by sniffer dogs, also visited the blast site," he said.

"The incident occurred around 1.07 am. When the residents heard the explosion they came out and found that the gate had been damaged," Samba Senior Superintendent of Police Virinder Singh Manhas told reporters at the spot.

"We have never heard such a loud explosion before. It shook the entire village and shattered the window panes of our house and nearby homes," Sharma said, requesting a thorough probe to identify those responsible for the act.

He said the police collected shrapnel and other pieces, possibly from a bomb or some explosive.

"The area is also close to the border, so people are scared," the former sarpanch, whose son is serving in the Army, said. An FIR was filed in connection with the incident—(KNO)

No fuel shortage in Kashmir: Div Com Says stocks up to 15 days available

KNO

Srinagar, Mar 23: Divisional Commissioner Kashmir Anshul Garg on Monday said there is no shortage of fuel or LPG in the Valley, asserting that adequate stocks are available and the situation is under close monitoring at multiple levels.

Speaking to reporters in Srinagar, the Divisional Commissioner said the domestic LPG supply across Kashmir is running smoothly, with an available stock position of around 10 to 15 days. "The stock position is dynamic, but at present we have sufficient availability. Continuous monitoring is being carried out at both divisional and district levels to ensure there is no disruption," he said.

He added that supplies of petrol and diesel are also stable, with oil marketing companies being closely monitored by district-level committees to prevent any irregularities such as hoarding, black marketing or overpricing.

"Control rooms at district and divisional levels are actively following up on supply and distribution. The Food and Civil Supplies Department is generating daily reports in a centralised format, which are being reviewed regularly to ensure the public does not face inconvenience," Garg said.

Addressing complaints regarding delays in LPG deliveries, he said such issues are being handled on a case-to-case basis by Deputy Commissioners and concerned departments. "Teams on the ground are actively resolving these complaints to ensure timely delivery," he said.

The Divisional Commissioner urged people to rely only on official communication and avoid panic. "There is no need to believe in rumours or unverified information. The government is committed to keeping the public informed and ensuring uninterrupted supply," he added.

On the issue of students from Jammu and Kashmir stranded in Iran, he said both the Government of India and the Union Territory



administration are making sustained efforts to ensure their safe return.

He said dedicated helplines have been set up and continuous communication is being maintained with parents through control rooms. "We are sharing every update received from the Government of India with the families. The Chief Minister has also assured all possible support," he said.

The Divisional Commissioner added that coordination between authorities and families has improved, with parents cooperating with the administration. "Our effort is that all students return safely and at the earliest. We are hopeful that the situation will be resolved soon," he said.

Reiterating the administration's commitment, he said the situation is being closely monitored and necessary steps are being taken on priority—(KNO)

EDITORIAL

Govt's Proactive Stance Amid Geopolitical Crises

As the West Asia conflict disrupts global energy supply chains, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's high-level review of the energy situation demonstrates the government's unwavering commitment to protecting Indian consumers and industry. With 20% of the world's energy passing through the Strait of Hormuz, now largely blocked, the stakes could not be higher. Yet the message emerging from this meeting is one of preparedness, coordination, and resolve. The breadth of the meeting reflects the interconnected nature of this crisis. Defence, Home, External Affairs, Finance,

Petroleum, Power, and Commerce—all were at the table. This whole-of-government approach ensures that no sector operates in isolation. The presence of National Security Advisor Ajit Doval further underscores the strategic dimension of energy security, linking diplomatic engagement to supply chain resilience. Since the conflict erupted on February 28, the government has moved swiftly on multiple fronts. Diplomatic channels have been activated, with the Prime Minister engaging leaders across the Gulf, the region, and beyond. On the domestic front, the Petroleum and Explosives Safety

Organisation has been directed to fast-track City Gas Distribution applications within 10 days, accelerating the rollout of piped natural gas to reduce dependence on imported LPG. The calibrated restoration of commercial LPG supply—progressively increased from an initial cap to 50%—reflects a careful balancing act. Priority has been rightly given to essential institutions: hospitals, educational establishments, and community kitchens. The additional allocations for restaurants, hotels, food processing units, and migrant workers acknowledge that economic activity cannot be paralysed even as

conservation is practised. Domestic LPG supply remains stable, with no dry-outs reported and normal delivery patterns maintained. The shift toward PNG in urban areas represents a structural solution, reducing vulnerability to imported LPG shocks. The government's push to transition commercial consumers to PNG will build long-term resilience even as temporary measures address immediate shortages. India's response to this energy crisis mirrors its handling of the pandemic—calm, coordinated, and citizen-centric. The message to the public has been consistent: there is no need for panic;

the government is on top of the situation. This reassurance, backed by concrete action, has prevented the kind of hoarding and black-marketing that often accompanies such crises. Amid global uncertainties, the government's proactive stance offers a model for navigating geopolitical shocks. By combining diplomatic outreach, domestic supply management, structural reforms, and transparent communication, India is ensuring that its citizens do not bear the brunt of conflicts they did not create. This is governance that protects, and it deserves full recognition.

India's Pharmaceuticals In Global Healthcare: From Domestic Production To International Markets

India's pharmaceutical ecosystem has evolved into a globally integrated and policy-supported system that combines scale, affordability, and regulatory credibility

Press Information Bureau

Introduction - Linking Public Health with Economic Progress

Health functions both as a driver and an outcome of economic development, and the pharmaceutical industry occupies a unique position at this intersection. By ensuring the availability of essential medicines and vaccines, the industry plays a critical role in advancing public health outcomes and societal welfare, while concurrently generating employment, reinforcing supply-chain resilience, and contributing to broader socio-economic development. Over time, the Indian pharmaceutical industry has emerged as one of the world's most distinctive and socially significant sectors, positioning India among the largest and most technologically advanced pharmaceutical producers globally.

India in the Global Pharmaceuticals Market
India's standing as the Pharmacy of the World is rooted in the unique combination of affordable pricing and assured quality, which has made Indian medicines widely preferred across global markets. Cost-efficient manufacturing, supported by a strong scientific workforce and scale, has enabled the consistent supply of essential drugs without compromising standards.

The Indian pharmaceutical industry ranks 3rd globally by volume and 11th by value, with more than 3,000 companies and 10,500 manufacturing units. The domestic pharmaceutical market, valued at USD 60 billion, is projected to reach USD 130 billion by 2030. As per Economic Survey 2025-26, in FY25, the sector's annual turnover reached Rs. 4.72 lakh crore, with exports growing at a CAGR of 7 per cent over the last decade (FY15 to FY25). India is the largest global supplier of generic medicines, accounting for around 20 per cent of global supply, manufacturing about 60,000 generic brands across 60 therapeutic categories. By expanding access to affordable HIV treatment and emerging as a leading global supplier of cost-effective vaccines, the pharmaceutical industry continues to advance public health outcomes domestically and internationally while generating economic opportunities.

India hosts the highest number of manufacturing plants approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) outside the United States of America, reinforcing international confidence in the safety and quality of Indian pharmaceuticals. There are about 500 active pharmaceutical ingredient (API) manufacturers, accounting for nearly 8 per cent of the global API industry.

Pharmaceutical Exports - Global Reach and Investment Growth

India is the global leader in the supply of Diphtheria, Tetanus, and Pertussis (DPT), Bacillus Calmette-Guerin (BCG), and measles vaccines. Indian manufacturers provide about 60 per cent of vaccine supplies to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), meet 40-70 per cent of global demand for DPT and BCG vaccines, and account for 90 per cent of the World Health Organization's (WHO) measles vaccine demand. This highlights the robustness of Indian pharmaceutical exports and their substantial integration within global healthcare supply networks.

Export Performance

As per the Economic Survey 2025-26, India currently ranks 11th globally in pharmaceutical exports by value, with exports to 191 countries in 2024-25, of which 50 per cent are directed to highly regulated markets such as the United States and Europe, reflecting wide international acceptance of Indian medicines. In 2024-25, pharmaceutical exports stood at USD 30.5 billion, a nearly 16-fold increase from USD 1.9 billion in 2000-01. Export momentum has also remained strong every month, with Drugs and Pharmaceuticals exports rising by approximately 2.70 per cent from USD 2.59 billion in January 2025 to USD 2.66 billion in January 2026. Further, medical device exports have grown significantly from USD 2.5 billion in 2020-21 to USD 4.1 billion in 2024-25, with exports to 187 countries in FY25.

India's pharmaceutical sector has expanded its global presence through rising exports and

steady foreign investment, signalling strong international confidence in its manufacturing and regulatory standards. Collectively, these strengths position India as a dependable supplier of quality, affordable medicines and underpin its continued export-driven growth.

Indian pharmaceutical exporters have strategically diversified their export portfolio by expanding shipments to emerging and non-traditional destinations, including Nigeria, Mexico, the United Republic of Tanzania, the Netherlands, France, Brazil, Sri Lanka, Saudi Arabia, and Spain, across bulk drugs, surgical products, and formulations. This targeted market diversification has enhanced export resilience by mitigating exposure to tariff-related risks concentrated in individual markets.

Foreign Direct Investment

The Indian pharmaceutical sector has emerged as a priority destination for foreign investors and is among the top 10 industries attracting foreign investment in India. Foreign investment flows in Drugs and Pharmaceuticals reached 13,193 Crore for the current financial year 2025-26 (up to September). This outlines strengthening investor confidence, supported by expanding production capacity, regulatory stability, and India's positioning as a global manufacturing hub.

Strengthening India's Pharmaceutical and Medical Device Exports through Trade Agreements

India's growing network of trade agreements is expanding global market access for its pharmaceuticals and medical devices sectors. These partnerships are strengthening India's position as a reliable supplier of affordable medicines and medical technologies worldwide. Recent agreements with Europe and New Zealand are expected to further boost exports, investment, and integration into global healthcare value chains.

India-EU FTA

India and the European Union have concluded negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement that significantly expands opportunities for the Indian pharmaceuticals and medical devices sectors. The agreement provides enhanced market access to the EU, valued at approximately USD 572.3 billion, encompassing pharmaceutical products and medical technologies. Tariff liberalisation is expected to improve the global competitiveness of Indian medical devices, while established manufacturing hubs in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Telangana, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh are likely to experience export expansion. The agreement is further anticipated to stimulate skilled employment, strengthen Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise (MSME) participation, and deepen India's integration into global healthcare value chains.

India-UK CETA

The India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), signed in July 2025, creates new opportunities for India's pharmaceutical and medical devices sectors. Under the agreement, 56 pharmaceutical tariff lines will receive zero-duty market access, making Indian generic medicines more competitive in the UK, which remains India's largest pharmaceutical export market in Europe. The agreement also provides duty-free access for several medical devices, including surgical instruments, diagnostic equipment, ECG machines, and X-ray systems. This is expected to reduce costs for Indian manufacturers and strengthen their competitiveness in the UK market.

India-NZ FTA

The India-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement, concluded in December 2025, expands opportunities for Indian pharmaceutical exports by providing zero-duty access to pharmaceutical products across around 90 tariff lines, where earlier duties ranged up to 5%.

These agreements are therefore expected to deepen healthcare trade and support the growth of India's pharmaceutical manufacturing ecosystem.

Government-led Intervention Supporting the Pharmaceuticals Sector

At the forefront of the Government's strategy are the Production Linked Incentive schemes, aimed at strengthening domestic manufacturing, reducing import dependence, and boosting

exports across pharmaceuticals, bulk drugs, and medical devices. Complemented by bulk drug and medical device parks, industry support initiatives, and research promotion measures, these schemes are expanding manufacturing capacity, enhancing infrastructure, and reinforcing India's position as a globally competitive pharmaceutical hub.

Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Schemes

The Production Linked Incentive schemes implemented by the Department of Pharmaceuticals form the cornerstone of efforts to strengthen domestic manufacturing and reduce import dependence across the pharmaceutical sector. These schemes have already resulted in the avoidance of imports worth Rs. 3,591 crore of active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs), key starting materials (KSMs), and drug intermediates (DIs) under PLI schemes for pharmaceuticals and bulk drugs, thereby contributing to a measurable reduction in import dependency and strengthening India's manufacturing resilience.

Active Pharmaceutical Ingredient (API)

A substance used in the manufacture of a medicinal product that becomes the active ingredient of the final drug. It provides the pharmacological effect or direct therapeutic action in the diagnosis, treatment or prevention of disease.

Drug Intermediate (DI)

A material formed during the intermediate stages of synthesis that undergoes further processing before it becomes an active pharmaceutical ingredient.

Key Starting Material (KSM)

A raw material, intermediate or API used in the production of an API that forms a significant structural part of it. It has defined chemical properties and may be commercially sourced or produced in-house.

PLI Scheme for Pharmaceuticals

The scheme supports domestic manufacturing of high-value biopharmaceutical products, complex generics, and autoimmune drugs, contributing to significant sales, exports, and employment generation. The investment under the scheme stands at Rs. 40,890 crore against a target of Rs. 17,274.96 crore as of September 2025.

Since its inception in 2021:

Total sales have reached Rs. 3,16,797 crore up to September 2025.

Exports account for Rs. 2,03,730 crore within these total sales.

Approximately 97,000 persons, including contractual and apprentice workers, have been employed under the scheme as of September 2025.

PLI Scheme for Bulk Drugs (APIs/KSMs/DIs)

The scheme aims to ensure a steady supply of critical inputs and reduce reliance on a single source.

As of September 2025:

Total manufacturing capacity of 55,100 metric tonnes per year has been established for 26 critical APIs/KSMs

Cumulative sales since inception (2022) have reached Rs. 2,313.16 crore, including exports of Rs. 508.12 crore.

Investments mobilised under the scheme stand at Rs. 4,763.34 crore against a target of Rs. 4,329.95 crore.

Employment for 4,929 persons has been generated under the scheme.

PLI Scheme for Promoting Domestic Manufacturing of Medical Devices

This scheme intends to boost domestic manufacturing and attract large investments in the medical devices sector.

As of September 2025:

The cumulative sales under the scheme stand at Rs. 12,344.37 crore, including exports worth Rs. 5,869.36 crore.

The scheme has attracted actual investment of Rs. 1,093.69 crore.

Schemes for Infrastructure Development for Bulk Drug and Medical Devices

Scheme for Promotion of Bulk Drug Parks

The Scheme for Promotion of Bulk Drug Parks supports the development of a common infrastructure for bulk drug manufacturing. Under the scheme, three bulk drug parks have been approved and are at various stages of development in the States of Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, and Himachal Pradesh, through their respective

State implementing agencies. As of February 2026, the total project cost of these parks is over Rs.6,306.68 crore, with Central assistance to the tune of Rs.1,000 crore each for creation of common infrastructure facilities (budgetary outlay of Rs.3,000 crore).

Scheme for Promotion of Medical Devices Parks

The scheme aims to provide common testing and laboratory facilities/centres at one place, significantly reducing manufacturing costs and helping create a robust ecosystem for medical device manufacturing in the country. Under this scheme, three parks are being set up and are at an advanced stage of development in Uttar Pradesh (Greater Noida), Madhya Pradesh (Ujjain), and Tamil Nadu (Kanchipuram). The total project cost of these Parks is Rs. 871.11 crore, with a Central grant-in-aid of Rs. 100 crore each for the creation of common infrastructure facilities. As of December 2025, 199 medical device manufacturers have been allotted land across the three parks, total 306.64 acres, and 34 units have commenced construction of their plants.

Other initiatives for Innovation and Improved Access

Research and Innovation

The Scheme for Promotion of Research and Innovation in Pharma MedTech (PRIP) seeks to strengthen India's pharmaceutical and medical technology ecosystem by moving beyond generic manufacturing towards innovation-driven growth. It supports research, product development, and closer collaboration between industry and academia through two structured components.

Under Component A, 7 Centres of Excellence have been established, one at each National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education and Research, with an overall outlay of Rs. 700 crore. As of November 2025, 111 research projects have been approved, 46 research papers have been published, and 6 patents have been filed under the Centres of Excellence.

Under Component B, financial assistance is provided to industries, MSMEs, and start-ups for research in identified priority areas in the Pharma MedTech sector.

Access to Affordable Medicines

The Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP) aims to improve access to affordable, quality generic medicines across the country. Through a wide network of dedicated outlets, the scheme seeks to reduce out-of-pocket expenditure on medicines and ensure that essential drugs and medical devices are available at reasonable prices.

Under the scheme, as of March 2026, over 18,646 Jan Aushadhi Kendras (JAKs) as of 28.02.2026 are operational.

The product basket comprises 2,110 medicines, 315 medical devices, and consumables covering 29 therapeutic groups.

Jan Aushadhi Suvidha Sanitary Napkins are available at Rs. 1 per pad, with over 100 crore pads sold till 31.01.2026. Out of this, over 22.50 crore Jan Aushadhi Suvidha Sanitary Pads have been sold in the FY 2025-26 till 31.01.2026.

In 2024-25, sales of Rs. 2,022.47 crore resulted in estimated savings of about Rs. 8,000 crore for citizens.

In 2025-26, up to 30 November 2025, sales of Rs. 1,409.32 crore have led to savings of approximately Rs. 5,637 crore for citizens.

Together, these initiatives demonstrate a coordinated policy approach to strengthening domestic manufacturing, promoting innovation, improving affordability, and enhancing global competitiveness across the pharmaceutical and MedTech sectors.

Biopharma SHAKTI - Strengthening India's Biopharmaceutical Ecosystem

In the Union Budget 2026-27, the government has proposed the Biopharma SHAKTI (Strategy for Healthcare Advancement through Knowledge, Technology and Innovation) initiative to position India as a global biopharmaceutical manufacturing hub. The initiative will be launched with a total outlay of Rs. 10,000 crore over the next five years and aims to build a strong ecosystem for the domestic production of biologics and biosimilars.

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Empowering Women Farmers In Agriculture: Policies, Innovations, And Institutional Support

Enhancing women's skills, visibility, and leadership in agriculture, in alignment with the vision of the International Year of the Woman Farmer (IYWF 2026), will strengthen rural livelihoods and resilience while making a substantial contribution to national food and nutrition security.

Press Information Bureau

Agriculture has long been the backbone of India's economy, supporting food security, livelihoods, and rural development. For women in rural areas, agriculture and allied sectors are the primary source of livelihood, with 80% of rural women being engaged in these sectors. Of these, 33% are agricultural labourers and 48% are self-employed farmers.

The United Nations has designated 2026 as the International Year of the Woman Farmer (IYWF 2026), in recognition of the vital and indispensable role of women in global agriculture. Women farmers constitute a critical component of the agricultural sector, which is increasingly characterised by substantial female participation.

Their involvement extends across the entire agricultural value chain, encompassing crop production, livestock management, agroforestry, fishing, horticulture, pre-harvest operations, post-harvest processing, packaging, and marketing. Consequently, women's engagement is central to driving agricultural growth, enhancing food security, and strengthening rural livelihoods.

IYWF 2026 seeks to highlight women's contributions to agriculture while promoting equitable access to land, resources, technology, finance, and markets. The Year aims to mobilise governments, development partners, civil society, and the private sector to promote inclusive policies and targeted actions that enhance the visibility, recognition, and economic empowerment of women farmers worldwide.

Promoting Gender-Inclusive Growth in Agri-Food Systems: GCWAS-2026

The UN's declaration of 2026 as the International Year of Women Farmers presents a significant opportunity to advance policy reforms, enhance awareness, strengthen global cooperation, and mobilise resources to support women in agriculture.

The Global Conference on Women in Agri-Food Systems (GCWAS-2026), centred on "Driving Progress, Attaining New Heights," underscores India's commitment to integrating women more effectively into agricultural development. A three-day GCWAS-2026 was held in New Delhi from 12-14 March 2026 at the ICAR Convention Centre. The conference brought together over 700 participants from India and abroad, including scientists, policymakers, industry leaders, entrepreneurs, women farmers, start-ups, and students.

The conference focused on strengthening gender-responsive policies, promoting women's leadership and economic inclusion, and advancing technology-driven, climate-smart, and women-friendly agricultural innovations. It also featured a Women Farmers' Forum, a Youth Forum, and an exhibition showcasing women-oriented technologies and start-up innovations. Overall, the conference aimed to generate actionable recommendations, global best practices, and a future roadmap for building more inclusive, sustainable, and equitable agri-food systems.

Targeted Schemes Ensuring Agricultural Development and Women Farmer Empowerment

Women farmers are playing an increasingly significant role in driving India's agricultural progress. Their growing participation in farming and allied activities is being strengthened through various government initiatives that enhance their access to resources, technologies, and markets.

Schemes such as the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF), Integrated Scheme for Agricultural Marketing (ISAM)/Agricultural Marketing Infrastructure (AMI), Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH), Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN), and the Modified Interest Subvention Scheme (MISS) provide financial support and credit access to women farmers through subsidies, interest subvention, and direct income transfers.

Additionally, initiatives such as the Namu Drone Didi Programme, National Beekeeping and Honey Mission (NBHM), and the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) strengthen women's participation by promoting technology adoption, skill development, and livelihood diversification. Together, these initiatives strengthen women's participation in the agricultural value chain by improving infrastructure, enhancing market linkages, and supporting efficient post-harvest management.

Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF)
The scheme was launched to strengthen agricultural infrastructure across India. It provides a medium to long-term debt financing facility through interest subvention and credit guarantee support for loans used to develop viable post-harvest management facilities and productive farm assets. Its primary focus is on creating storage and logistics infrastructure at the farm gate, enabling farmers to store their produce properly and secure better prices by reducing post-harvest losses and limiting reliance on intermediaries.



As of 28 February 2025, a total of 8,190 projects amounting to 2,377 crore have been sanctioned to women farmers under the scheme.

Integrated Scheme for Agriculture Marketing (ISAM)

The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, under the Integrated Scheme for Agriculture Marketing (ISAM), implements the Agricultural Marketing Infrastructure (AMI) scheme. Its objective is to strengthen agricultural marketing systems across rural India by offering financial assistance for the building and upgrading of godowns and warehouses. Women farmers, SC/ST promoters, Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), and beneficiaries in the North-Eastern and hilly regions are eligible for a 33.33% subsidy, while farmers in plain areas are eligible for a 25% subsidy.

Progress of Women Beneficiaries Assisted under AMI (as on 31 January 2026):

As of January 31, 2026, under the Agricultural Marketing Infrastructure (AMI) scheme, a total of 10,631 women beneficiaries have been assisted for storage infrastructure projects, creating a capacity of 3,59,53,967.8 metric tonnes, with a subsidy release of 17,39,71.41 lakh. Additionally, for other than storage infrastructure projects, 1,095 women beneficiaries have been assisted, with a subsidy release of 11,767.67 lakh.

A total of 10,631 storage infrastructure projects have been sanctioned, with a combined storage capacity of 395.53 lakh MT. A subsidy of 1,73,971.41 lakh has been released, alongside 1,095 non-storage infrastructure projects with a subsidy of 11,767.67 lakh to women beneficiaries across the country, reflecting the scheme's commitment to enhancing women's participation in agricultural marketing.

Namu Drone Didi
The Namu Drone Didi Scheme is a Central Sector initiative to provide 15,000 drones to Women Self-Help Groups (SHGs) from 2023-24 to 2025-26, with an outlay of 1,261 crore. It promotes modern agricultural technology, enhances efficiency, and strengthens women's livelihoods by enabling SHGs to offer drone-based services.

Selected SHGs receive 80% Central Financial Assistance (up to 8 lakh) for a drone package, along with 15 days of training for a drone pilot and 5 days for a drone assistant. In 2023-24, 1,094 drones were distributed across 22 states through Lead Fertilizer Companies (LFCs), with 500 provided under the scheme.

In addition, the Sub-Mission on Agricultural Mechanization (SMAM) supports entrepreneurship by helping farmers, including women, set up Custom Hiring Centres (CHCs) and provides 50% assistance (up to 5 lakh) for drone purchases by small, marginal, SC/ST, North-Eastern, and women farmers.

National Beekeeping and Honey Mission (NBHM)

NBHM is a Central Sector Scheme launched by the Government to promote scientific beekeeping and increase the production of quality honey and other beehive products. The scheme aims to foster the holistic growth of the beekeeping sector, enhancing income generation, employment opportunities, and livelihood support for both farm and non-farm households, including women farmers. NBHM places strong emphasis on awareness creation, capacity building, and skill development, with a dedicated focus on empowering

women through training and support in beekeeping activities.

Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihood Mission (DAY-NRLM)

This flagship poverty-alleviation programme is implemented entirely through women, aiming to empower them in agriculture and allied sectors. It reduces rural poverty by helping poor households, especially women, access self-employment and skilled wage opportunities, thereby creating sustainable, diversified livelihoods. A major milestone under DAY-NRLM is the disbursement of over 11 lakh crore in credit to women Self-Help Groups (SHGs) through formal financial institutions.

Between FY 2022-23 and 2024-25:

- 2.58 crore women farmers received training in agro-ecology and livestock management
- 2.50 lakh community resource persons (such as Pashu Sakhis) were trained
- 503 Krishi Sakhis were trained as Drone Sakhis
- 70,021 SHG women were trained in natural farming
- 800 women-led producer companies were promoted under the FPO scheme

Modified Interest Subvention Scheme (MISS)

The Modified Interest Subvention Scheme (MISS) is a central sector scheme that ensures the availability of short-term credit to farmers at affordable rates through the Kisan Credit Card (KCC). Under the scheme, farmers can avail loans of up to 3 lakh at a 7% interest rate, with a 1.5% interest subvention to lending institutions. To enhance access for women farmers, awareness is being promoted through Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) campaigns by banks, state and central governments, the RBI, NABARD, and digital platforms such as the Kisan Rin Portal. Additionally, the collateral-free credit limit has been increased from 1.6 lakh to 2 lakh, effective from 1 January 2025.

Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH)

MIDH, a Centrally Sponsored Scheme implemented since 2014-15, supports the comprehensive growth of India's horticulture sector, including fruits, vegetables, spices, flowers, and plantation crops. The scheme follows a 60:40 Centre-State funding pattern (90:10 for North-Eastern and Himalayan states). MIDH assists farmers, including women farmers, in developing Post-Harvest Management (PHM) infrastructure for perishable horticulture produce.

Mission for Aatmanirbharta in Pulses (Dalhan Aatmanirbharta Mission)

The Mission for Aatmanirbharta in Pulses, with a total outlay of 11,440 crore over six years (2025-26 to 2030-31), aims to enhance pulses production, with a special focus on Tur, Urad, and Masoor. The Mission promotes climate-resilient seeds, expansion of cultivation area, and post-harvest storage technologies. It also provides support for assured procurement through NAFED and NCCF under PM-AASHA. As per operational guidelines, implementing states ensure that at least 20% of funds are allocated to women farmers.

Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN)

Launched on 24 February 2019, PM-KISAN provides eligible farmers with 6,000 annually, disbursed in three equal instalments of

2,000 each. Farmers self-register through the PM-Kisan portal, mobile app, or CSC, with land records digitally verified. Financial assistance is transferred to Aadhaar-seeded bank accounts through the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) system.

Women Beneficiaries under PM-KISAN (22nd Instalment, as on 17 March 2026):

Number of Women Beneficiaries (2,15,47,095)
Amount Transferred (Rs 4,309.46 Crores)

Since the scheme's inception, over 1.01 lakh crore has been disbursed to women beneficiaries.

Women-Led Collectivisation and Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)
A Farmer Producer Organization (FPO) is a collective of farmers who come together to jointly produce, process, and market their agricultural products. FPOs aim to enhance farmers' income, improve market access, and uplift members, especially women, through collective decision-making and cooperative management.

To promote farmer collectivisation, the Government launched the Central Sector Scheme for the Formation and Promotion of 10,000 Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) on 29 February 2020, with a total outlay of 6,865 crore up to 2027-28. Since the launch, 481.38 crore has been released as equity grants to 7,041 FPOs, while credit guarantee cover worth 712.16 crore has been provided to 2,761 FPOs.

As of 28 February 2026:

- Each FPO has at least one woman member on its Board of Directors
- 1,175 FPOs have 100% women shareholders
- 1,084 FPOs have 50% to 99% women members

Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar, Maharashtra, and Telangana are among the leading states in terms of all-women FPOs.

Institutional Support to Enhance Women's Participation in Agriculture

Strengthening women's participation in agriculture requires a robust network of institutions providing training, research support, policy guidance, and field-level capacity building.

A. National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE), Hyderabad

The Centre for Gender in Agriculture at MANAGE conducts structured training programmes on gender mainstreaming, gender-responsive extension advisory services, women's entrepreneurship, leadership skills, and digital technologies. Since 2020, 61,496 women participants have benefited from these programmes.

B. National Gender Resource Centre in Agriculture (NGRCA)

NGRCA serves as the national coordinating body for gender-focused initiatives, integrating gender considerations across agricultural policies, schemes, and programmes.

C. ICAR-Central Institute for Women in Agriculture (CIWA), Bhubaneswar

CIWA undertakes research on Women in Agriculture, identifying gender issues and promoting women-friendly technologies, drudgery-reducing tools, and gender-responsive farming practices. It has developed modules on climate-smart nutri-sensitive agricultural practices, natural farming, homestead farming systems, mushroom cultivation, scientific dairy management, backyard poultry, and value addition.

Women-Friendly Tools Field-Tested and Introduced:

- Pedal-operated coconut dehusker
- Power-operated groundnut decorticator-cum-stripper
- Maize dehusker-cum-sheller
- Rotary goat feeding system
- Revolving milking stool
- Easy harvest bag
- Improved manual disc ridgers
- Opium stripper
- Device to manage head load
- Apron-type collection bag
- Fertiliser trolley
- Seed drill
- Vegetable plucker

Gender-Responsive Extension Models Developed:

- Gender Responsive Integrated Homestead Aqua-horticulture Model (GRIHA)
- Sustainable She-preneurship in Mushroom Cultivation Model (2S2M)
- JANANI Nutri-Garden Model
- Gender Sensitive Agri-Nutri Farming System Model (GSAN)
- Gender-Sensitive Community-based Agripreneurship Model (GCAM)
- Gender-Sensitive Model for Doubling Farmers' Income
- Multi Agency Participatory Extension Model for Sustainable Backyard Poultry (MAPEM)
- Gender Responsive Climate Smart Agriculture Framework

Transformational Journey of Kamini Nathsharma: From Subsistence to Sustainability

Smt. Kamini Nathsharma, a farm woman from Dularpur village in Cuttack, Odisha, lived with her family of five on only 0.33 acres of cultivated land. With income largely dependent on seasonal rice farming, she and her husband struggled to improve their livelihood.

Under a participatory research project of ICAR-CIWA, Kamini received training, exposure visits, vegetable seeds, and fruit saplings. She also received support to start duck farming in their unused pond and poultry rearing in a small shed. With two cows already in the household, Hybrid Napier grass was introduced to enhance fodder supply.

The results soon became evident. The family began earning from eggs, milk, and surplus vegetables. Milk production increased, improving household nutrition. For every 1 invested, they earned 1.75, raising their annual income to 96,000 through ICAR-CIWA's intervention. Kamini emerged as a role model, demonstrating how training and innovation can strengthen rural livelihoods.

D. Farm Machinery Training and Testing Institutes (FMTTIs)

The four FMTTIs located at Budni (Madhya Pradesh), Hisar (Haryana), Anantapur (Andhra Pradesh), and Biswanath Chariali (Assam) provide skill development training to farmers, particularly women, technicians, and entrepreneurs. By training beneficiaries to operate machinery used in Custom Hiring Centres (CHCs), the institutes promote wider access to mechanisation and reduce the gender gap.

NURTURING GROWTH: COMMUNITY-BASED EXTENSION AND TRAINING INITIATIVES

Krishi Sakhis

Krishi Sakhis are practicing women farmers trained as para-extension professionals to support sustainable agriculture at the grassroots level. They act as "farmers' friends," providing doorstep guidance in Natural Farming and Soil Health Management. The Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, along with the Ministry of Rural Development, has jointly undertaken the training of 70,000 Krishi Sakhis in a phased manner.

In the post-training phase, Krishi Sakhis conduct awareness programmes across SHGs, schools, Anganwadis, Gram Panchayats, and Village Organisations. Their role is to encourage the widespread adoption of environmentally friendly, economically viable agricultural practices.

Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP)

MKSP offers skill development and capacity-building support for rural women under the DAY-NRLM framework. It empowers women farmers by strengthening community institutions and promoting sustainable agriculture, improved livestock management, and scientific Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) cultivation and collection.

By June 2025, the mission had supported 4.62 crore Mahila Kisans in adopting agro-ecological practices, including 2.09 crore trained in livestock management. A network of over 3.50 lakh Community Resource Persons—Krishi Sakhis (agriculture), Pashu Sakhis (livestock), Van Sakhis (NTFP), and Matsya Sakhis (fisheries)—provides field-level guidance.

Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA)

ATMA enhances agricultural extension at the district and block levels through training, capacity building, and demonstrations. It promotes women's participation by supporting Farm Women's Food Security Groups (FSGs), which serve as "Model Food Security Hubs" through kitchen gardening, backyard poultry, goat rearing, mushroom cultivation, and dairying. Each FSG receives 25,000 for training and inputs, with at least two groups formed per block annually. Women beneficiaries under ATMA increased from 9.93 lakh in 2024-25 to 11.61 lakh in 2025-26 (up to 28 February 2026).

Skill Training of Rural Youth (STRY)

STRY offers short-term vocational training to rural youth and farmers in agriculture and allied sectors, including horticulture, dairy, and fisheries. The programme enhances skills and promotes both self-employment and wage employment, with a focus on women and young entrepreneurs. Training beneficiaries: 10,546 in 2021-22, 11,634 in 2022-23, and 20,940 in 2023-24. By December 2024, over 51,000 rural beneficiaries, including women farmers, had been trained since 2021.

Conclusion

Empowering women in agriculture is crucial for enhancing productivity, bolstering rural livelihoods, and promoting inclusive economic growth. Targeted interventions—such as gender-responsive schemes, skill development programmes, women-friendly technologies, and institutional support—play a crucial role in reducing drudgery, enhancing incomes, and enabling women to become leaders across value chains.

Initiatives like AIF, PM-KISAN, ATMA, DAY-NRLM, Namu Drone Didi, and the Krishi Sakhi programme are expanding women's access to resources, training, and modern farming practices. The growth of women-led FPOs and capacity-building efforts through KVKs and ICAR-CIWA are further enabling women to boost productivity, diversify livelihoods, and engage more actively in decision-making.

Enhancing women's skills, visibility, and leadership in agriculture, in alignment with the vision of the International Year of the Woman Farmer (IYWF 2026), will strengthen rural livelihoods and resilience while making a substantial contribution to national food and nutrition security.

Govt plans 2 bills to ensure women's quota law implemented before delimitation exercise

PTI

New Delhi, Mar 23: The government is "willing" to bring two bills in the ongoing Budget session of Parliament to ensure that the women's reservation law is implemented before the completion of the delimitation exercise for Lok Sabha and assembly constituencies, sources said on Monday.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah held separate meetings with NDA and non-Congress opposition parties' floor leaders to arrive at a consensus.

If the consensus is reached, the two bills could be brought as early as this week, the sources said.

P V Midhun Reddy (YSRCP), Dimple Yadav (SP), Supriya Sule (NCP-SP), Manoj Jha (BJD) and Asaduddin Owaisi (AIMIM) were among the opposition leaders who attended the meet.

Shah is likely to hold consultations with the Congress too in the coming days.

The provision to provide 33 per cent reservation to women in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies was brought by amending the Constitution, but it will come into effect after the completion of the delimitation exercise.

According to the broad contours available, the number of Lok Sabha seats would be increased from the present 543 to 816, with 273 seats reserved for women. The reservation will also be done in a "vertical basis" with



seats allocated for SCs and STs.

A similar exercise will be carried out for state assemblies where seats will be reserved on a pro-rata basis.

While a Constitution amendment bill will tweak the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, commonly known as women's reservation law, another ordinary bill will amend the Delimitation Act.

Once approved by Parliament, the proposed laws will come into force on March 31, 2029 and will help reserve seats in the next Lok Sabha elections and assembly elections in Odisha, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Andhra Pradesh.

The sources also underlined that a delimitation or boundary commission is a "neutral" body mandated to redraw Lok Sabha and assembly constituencies, and its decisions cannot be challenged even in the Supreme Court.

They said a neutral body will instil faith in the delimitation

exercise. The Election Commission is another independent institution, but it cannot be mandated to carry out a pan-India delimitation exercise.

"At best, it can carry out delimitation of one or a few states, as it carried out delimitation in Assam recently," a government functionary pointed out.

Besides the delimitation exercise, which can decide the constituencies that can be reserved for women, as it does for the Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes (by way of population in their cases), another way to decide on constituencies can be by rotation.

In September 2023, President Droupadi Murmu gave her assent to the Nari Shakti Vandan Bill.

The law is officially known as the Constitution (106th Amendment) Act.

The sources said the Act,

though not yet in force, can still be amended by Parliament through another Constitution amendment bill, if the government wishes so and it gets the required support in the two Houses.

According to its provision, it shall come into force on such date as the Central government may, by notification in the official gazette, appoint.

The Constitution (106th Amendment) Bill was passed by the Lok Sabha with near unanimity and the Rajya Sabha with unanimity.

When the Bill was passed, the government noted that the next census and the subsequent delimitation exercise would ascertain the particular seats being earmarked for women.

The budget allocation under the scheme for 2025-26 was Rs

West Asia crisis: Govt restores full RoDTEP benefits to exporters till Mar 31

PTI

New Delhi, Mar 23: The government on Monday restored full benefits under the RoDTEP scheme to exporters till March 31 amidst the ongoing West Asia crisis disrupting global trade.

Last month, the government halved the rate of duty benefits under the Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP) Scheme. The exporting community expressed disappointment and had sought reconsideration of the decision.

"The RoDTEP rates and value caps as specified...as applicable on February 22, 2026, are hereby restored with effect from February 23, 2026, to March 31, 2026, for all eligible export products," the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) said in a notification.

The Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP) Scheme, launched in 2021, provides for a refund of taxes, duties and levies that are incurred by exporters in the process of manufacturing and distribution of goods, and not being reimbursed under any other mechanism at the Centre, state or local level.

Refunds under the scheme range from 0.3 per cent to 3.9 per cent. The scheme is valid till March this year.

The budget allocation under the scheme for 2025-26 was Rs

18,232 crore. It was proposed to increase to Rs 21,709 crore in 2026-27. But the budget allocated was Rs 10,000 crore.

The exporting community was earlier grappling with the high US tariffs and is now facing challenges from the West Asia crisis triggered by the joint attack of the US and Israel on Iran last month.

The conflict has pushed up sea and air freight rates, while insurance premiums are also rising.

The country's merchandise exports dropped marginally by 0.81 per cent year-on-year to USD 36.61 billion in February, while the trade deficit narrowed to USD 27.1 billion from the previous month.

The impact of the West Asia crisis will be reflected in the data for March, as the war began on February 28. The data will be released by a mid-May.

Recent developments in West Asia have posed challenges for maritime logistics, including shifts in routing and transit patterns. These have affected logistics costs and shipping schedules for export consignments moving to or through the region.

In view of the evolving geopolitical situation and its implications for maritime trade, the government has decided to restore the rates and value caps under the scheme.

This step is intended to provide timely support to Indian

exporters facing elevated freight costs and war-related trade risks arising from disruptions in the Gulf and the wider West Asia maritime corridor, the commerce ministry said.

The government last week launched a Rs 487 crore RELIEF (Resilience & Logistics Intervention for Export Facilitation) scheme to provide relief to exporters.

Federation of Indian Export Organisations President S C Ralhan said this is a welcome decision at a time when exporters are navigating heightened global uncertainties, rising logistics costs, and demand-side caution, this move will go a long way in reinforcing positive sentiment across the exporting community.

"By ensuring full remission of embedded taxes and duties, it directly enhances the cost competitiveness of Indian products in global markets, while also providing much-needed predictability to exporters," he said.

Think tank GTRI said the restoration decision is valid for exports made up only on March 31, i.e., one week from now.

"No one knows what rates apply after March 31. This creates huge uncertainty for the exporters in such uncertain times. No export contracts can factor RoDTEP benefits in such cases," GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said.

CONTD. FROM FRONT PAGE

Victim was a burden

neglected terror-victim families are being given government jobs to secure their economic and social dignity. I see this not merely as a policy correction, but as a new moral declaration for a new Jammu Kashmir."

The Lieutenant Governor reiterated that it is his commitment to ensure that every terror victim's family receive the justice, jobs, recognition and support they deserve after years of suffering.

"Terror victim families remained erased from society's memory for decades. Among all these stories, the most painful and bitter truth is that these families were let down by the very system whose duty and primary obligation was to protect them," he said, adding, "I do not see this merely as an administrative lapse but it was a civilisational failure of that time."

The Lieutenant Governor said that the terror victim families were harassed by elements of terror ecosystem and the situation was not simply unjust but it was the complete collapse of social morality.

The Lieutenant Governor vowed strongest action against terror ecosystem and terrorist supporters.

"I pledge to the families of terror victims that we will work with full commitment to secure their dignified and honourable lives. We will discharge every duty towards them with utmost seriousness, and we will not rest until justice reaches every family," he said.

The Lieutenant Governor observed that justice to terror victim families is not limited to only punishments but also healing the wounds and restoring dignity.

"Justice also lies in which stories society chooses to remember. Justice also means wiping the tears of grieving families, acknowledging their pain, and healing the wounds inflicted on their souls. Justice also means that the stories of terror-victim families, once forgotten, are now being rewritten with renewed memory and honour," he said.

"We stand at a decisive turning point in J&K today. The youth of the Union Territory and terror victim families aspire to a bright future and wish to live a better life. It is our shared responsibility to make that future a reality and create the opportunities they deserve," the Lieutenant Governor said.

"This is a clear message that a new order has arrived, one that will punish mercilessly those tied to terrorism and will firmly fulfil its duties to restore the dignity of victims. This moral declaration is the announcement of a system that defines justice not only in words, but in deeds," the Lieutenant Governor said.

The Lieutenant Governor issued a stern warning to the remaining elements of the terror ecosystem and conflict entrepreneurs, stating that their era of terror is over.

"The people of Jammu Kashmir know fully well who shielded such terror elements, but that shield is now crumbling. I warn them that there is no longer any safe haven in Jammu Kashmir for terrorists or the networks that support them," he said.

The Lieutenant Governor reiterated that it is his commitment to ensure that every terror victim's family receive the justice, jobs, recognition and support they deserve after years of suffering.

Principal Secretary to Lieutenant Governor, Dr Mandeep K. Bhandari; Commissioner Secretary, General Administration Department, Shri M Raju; Divisional Commissioner Jammu, Shri Ramesh Kumar; Deputy Commissioner

Jammu, Dr. Rakesh Minhas; senior officials, members of various social organisations and family members of victims of terrorism were present. (KNO)

438 appointment

ensure that no ineligible person benefits from the scheme," he said.

Highlighting the key policy shift, he said that families of government employees who died natural deaths, earlier not covered under the norms, are now being included under the compassionate appointment framework after relaxation in rules.

He described the initiative as an effort to provide relief to grieving families and "heal their wounds." (KNO)

After decades of

through years of uncertainty. The moment marked not just employment, but recognition of their suffering and a step towards restoring dignity.

In a similar case, an appointment letter was handed over to Mohammad Rafiq of Sumbal Jawari in Ramban, whose mother was gunned down by terrorists on September 24, 2006. Recalling years of neglect, Rafiq said the family had repeatedly sought compensation but found little support in the past.

"It is only now that the administration has come forward to help us," he indicated, reflecting a mix of relief and lingering pain after nearly two decades of struggle.

Officials said several hundred appointment letters were distributed to families of terror victims across the Jammu region since 2025. "The step is being seen as a significant outreach effort by the administration. The initiative aims to provide long-awaited relief and rehabilitation to those who have borne the brunt of terrorism," they added.

For many recipients, the gesture goes beyond employment—it represents closure to years of silent suffering, recognition of their loss, and a renewed hope for a more secure future. (KNO)

'Tulip Garden

later and will be available once the garden is closed," he added.

Ahmad said the visitors include a mix of locals, domestic tourists and foreigners. "There has been a good mix of locals and tourists. Around 200 to 300 foreign tourists have also visited the garden in the first week," he said.

He, however, noted that intermittent rainfall during the opening week slightly impacted visitor turnout. Despite this, officials are hopeful of an increase in footfall in the coming days. "We are expecting more visitors in the coming days," he said.

Spread over the foothills of the Zabarwan range overlooking Dal Lake, the garden this year showcases around 70-75 varieties of tulips, along with other ornamental flowers. Opened annually during the spring season, it remains a key highlight of Jammu and Kashmir's tourism calendar and attracts thousands of visitors from across India and abroad. (KNO)

India will overcome

the West Asia conflict, the Prime Minister said India's stand has been clear from the very beginning, when the US and Israel attacked Iran and the latter retaliated by targeting its Gulf neighbours and Israel, "one of expressing deep concern, advocating de-escalation, and opposing attacks on civilians and on energy and transport infrastructure".

"India, through diplomacy, is making continuous efforts for the safe passage of Indian ships

even amidst the war environment. Due to such efforts, several of our ships that were stuck in the Strait of Hormuz have also arrived in India in recent days," he said.

The prime minister also drew the attention of the House to the internal security dimension of the crisis, warning that certain elements attempt to exploit such situations.

He said all security agencies have been placed on alert and that security across all domains, coastal, border, cyber, and strategic installations, is being further strengthened.

"Whether it is coastal security, border security, cyber security, or strategic installations, the security of all is being reinforced," he said.

Urging patience, restraint, and vigilance, and cautioning against those who may seek to exploit the situation by spreading falsehoods, engaging in black-marketing, or hoarding, Modi appealed to all state governments to ensure strict monitoring and swift action against such elements.

Expressing his abiding faith in the collective resolve of the nation, the Prime Minister said that when every government and every citizen of this country walk together, "we can challenge every challenge, this is our identity, and this is our strength".

The prime minister remarked that the difficult global conditions caused by this war are likely to persist for a long time and called upon the nation to remain prepared and united, just as it had stood together during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The prime minister said the crisis has been going on now for more than three weeks and it is having a very adverse impact on the global economy and on people's lives. The entire world is urging all parties for the earliest resolution of this crisis, he said.

This region is important to India for yet another reason, as nearly one crore Indians live and work in the Gulf countries and among the commercial ships that sail in these seas, the number of Indian crew members is also very high, he said.

"India's concerns are naturally greater, and therefore it is essential that a united and unanimous voice goes out to the world from India's Parliament on this crisis," he said.

Modi underscored how the energy diversification strategy pursued over the past decade has proven its worth in the current crisis.

He informed the House that India has expanded its energy import sources from 27 countries to 41 countries over the past 11 years, thereby reducing dependence on any single region.

Emphasising the foresight of this approach, Modi said in today's circumstances, the steps taken over the past decade regarding energy security have become even more relevant.

Modi said India has more than 5.3 million metric tonnes of strategic petroleum reserves, and the country is also working on arrangements for more than 6.5 million metric tonnes of storage.

Apart from this, he said, there are reserves held by the domestic oil companies.

"In the last 11 years, our refining capacity has increased significantly, and the government is in constant touch with suppliers from different countries. The effort is to ensure that oil and gas supplies continue from wherever possible," he said.

Highlighting the scale of the evacuation effort, the Prime Minister said more than 3,75,000 Indians have safely returned to India since the war began, including approximately 1,000 Indians from Iran alone, of whom over

700 are young medical students.

Addressing the broader economic ramifications, Modi acknowledged that energy is the backbone of the modern economy and that West Asia is a major source for global energy needs, making the current crisis a challenge for economies worldwide.

He said the government is working with a comprehensive short-term, medium-term, and long-term strategy, supported by strong economic fundamentals, sector-specific stakeholder consultations, and a dedicated Inter-Ministerial Group that meets daily to assess and resolve every difficulty in India's import-export chain.

"I am fully confident that through the joint efforts of the government and industry, we will be able to face these circumstances effectively," he said.

The prime minister said, unfortunately, several lives were lost and some people were injured during the conflict and their families are being given the necessary help, and treatment of the injured is being ensured.

He said another question is the impact of the war on agriculture, but the good part is that the country's farmers have filled the food grain reserves, so India is well prepared in terms of food security.

"We are also making efforts to ensure that the Kharif sowing takes place properly. For this, the government has made adequate arrangements for fertilisers to deal with any emergency. In the past as well, our government did not let any global crisis impact our farmers," he said.

Modi said that as the summer season has begun in India, electricity demand has increased, but all power plants in the country have adequate coal stock available.

"India has created a record by producing more than 1 billion tonnes of coal for the second consecutive year. In the last decade, the country has also taken major steps towards renewable energy," he said.

72 private member

to enhance the pension of former legislators.

Among the 72 private member bills to be listed in this session, the spotlight is on NC MLA Tanvir Sadiq's proposal to amend the Land Grants Act, a bill addressing the issue of expired leases. Sources have not ruled out the possibility of MLAs from the ruling party and its allies supporting the bill in the House. The proposal has already evoked responses from smaller opposition parties such as the PDP and the PC.

However, it is not certain that the bill will come up for introduction—the stage where the government decides whether to allow bill for consideration before it proceeds to other stages. This uncertainty arises because the bill is likely to be listed at serial number 27. Normally, 10 to 12 bills are taken up each day when private member bills are scheduled.

Other significant private member bills include four separate proposals on liquor ban, submitted by Ali Muhammad Sagar, Mir Muhammad Fayaz, Sheikh Khurshid, and Ahsan Pardesi. Besides, three bills seeking regularisation of daily wagers have been submitted by M.Y. Tarigami (CP(M)), Waheed-ur-Rehman Para (PDP), and Devinder Manyal (BJP).

NC MLA Bashir Ahmad Veeeri's bill for amendment to the Jammu & Kashmir Reservation Act could be taken up for introduction in the House, given that it is likely to be listed at serial number 16.

A bill submitted by BJP MLA Balwant Singh Mankotia seeking ownership rights for

occupants of Evacuee property could also come up for introduction in the House.

NC MLA from Pahalgam, Altaf Ahmad Wani, has submitted a bill for the protection of land and employment rights of the domiciles of the Union Territory. Its chances of coming up for introduction in the House during this session is bleak.

PDP MLA Waheed-ur-Rehman Para has submitted a bill for the creation of separate divisions for Chenab and Pir Panchal Valley and the creation of new districts. The bill is unlikely to come up for introduction in the House before 2028, given that it is likely to be listed at the tail end of the business.

Similarly, the National Law University Bill submitted by RS Pathania is also likely to be listed at the tail end of the business.

Private member bills are listed in business of the House according to the date their notices are received. Since 46 such bills of 2025 are pending for introduction, they will be given priority in the day's business as per the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the J&K Legislative Assembly. (KNO)

J&K to get its first

17 in Jammu and Kashmir.

The government added that these stations play a key role in strengthening weather forecasting systems and supporting sectors like agriculture, disaster management and aviation.

It also clarified that there is no proposal at present to install new AWS alongside existing departmental observatories, and locations are selected based on technical feasibility, coverage gaps and observational requirements.

The Centre said the initiative is part of broader efforts to enhance India's meteorological infrastructure and ensure better climate resilience, including in regions like Jammu and Kashmir. (KNO)

Centre focuses

government is also investing in restoration and development works, including infrastructure created in lieu of assets damaged during the 2014 floods in the region.

Under the PRASHAD scheme, the government has also sanctioned development works at Hazratbal Shrine in Srinagar to enhance pilgrimage tourism and improve facilities for visitors.

Highlighting future plans, the government said that in the Union Budget 2026-27, special emphasis has been laid on developing world-class trekking and hiking trails in Jammu and Kashmir, recognising its vast potential in mountain tourism.

The Centre added that under various national schemes, financial assistance is being provided to improve tourism experiences, infrastructure and sustainability across the region, aiming to position Jammu and Kashmir as a global tourism destination.

The government reiterated that these initiatives are part of a broader strategy to promote sustainable tourism, generate employment and boost the local economy in Jammu and Kashmir. (KNO)

Cybercrime cases

enhancing cyber forensic capabilities, including setting up cyber forensic-cum-training laboratories.

Officials said the government continues to focus on capacity building, modernisation of forensic infrastructure, and early-stage cyber investigation support to curb the rising trend of cybercrimes. (KNO)

President urges stakeholders to work together to end tuberculosis for all

PTI

New Delhi, Mar 23: President Droupadi Murmu on Monday asked all stakeholders to work together with collective resolve to end tuberculosis once and for all.

In a message, she said tuberculosis (TB) continues to pose a significant public health challenge, affecting millions of lives across the world.

However, TB Mukht Bharat Abhiyan has made remarkable progress in expanding early diagnosis, ensuring free treatment, strengthening nutritional support

and improving patient care, Murmu said on the eve of World Tuberculosis Day.

This progress underscores our shared determination and the strength of the national TB elimination programme, she said.

"I urge all stakeholders to work together with collective resolve to end tuberculosis once and for all," the President said.

Murmu said she is happy to know that World Tuberculosis Day is being celebrated on March 24, to raise awareness about the global challenge posed by TB.



However, TB Mukht Bharat Abhiyan has made remarkable progress in expanding early diagnosis, ensuring free treatment, strengthening nutritional support and improving patient care, Murmu said on the eve of World Tuberculosis Day.

Taking appropriate measures to address West Asia implications on flight ops: Govt

PTI

New Delhi, Mar 23: The financial implications of the West Asia conflict on the flight operations are evolving and appropriate measures are being taken in consultation with airlines and other stakeholders, the civil aviation ministry said on Monday.

The escalating conflict involving the US, Israel, and Iran that started on February 28 has significantly hit operations of airlines in and through the West Asia region.

Minister of State for Civil Aviation Murlidhar Mohol told the Rajya Sabha that the situation arising from the closure of the West Asian air corridor and its impact on flight operations was being closely monitored by the ministry. "The associated financial implications are evolving and appropriate measures are being taken as required by the ministry in consultation with airlines and other stakeholders," he said in a written reply.

According to him, the ministry is in constant coordination with



airlines and closely monitoring airfares to ensure that ticket prices remain reasonable and that there is no undue surge in airfare during this period. Aviation regulator DGCA

has established a robust mechanism for monitoring high-risk airspace, including issuance of regular advisories, NOTAMS (Notices to Airmen), and real-time risk assessments in

coordination with relevant international agencies to ensure safety of operations, he noted.

"As on 17.03.2026, 721 scheduled flights were operated by Indian operators, carrying 1,19,458 passengers. Mumbai and Ahmedabad were among the landing points for these flights," Mohol said.

The minister also said the Indian Mission in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in coordination with the Missions in Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the UAE, has enabled transit of over 3,500 people through Saudi Arabia with the support of Saudi authorities as of March 17.

"The Mission in Doha (Qatar), assistance has been extended through passenger registration, coordination for limited flights and support for accommodation and emergency cases. The Mission in Abu Dhabi, in coordination with local authorities, has assisted affected nationals by securing exemptions from visa overstay fines," he said.

Seat-sharing agreement done deal in NDA

AIADMK allots 56 seats to BJP, PMK, AMMK



PTI

Chennai, Mar 23: The AIADMK-led NDA in Tamil Nadu on Monday finalised seat sharing arrangement for key constituents of the alliance for the April 23 Assembly polls, with the Dravidian party allotting 27 seats for BJP, 18 for PMK and 11 for AMMK.

AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami, addressing a crowded press conference at party headquarters Puratchi Thalaivar MGR Maaligai, here, said talks continued with other allies as well and it will be concluded by tonight.

The names of constituencies to be contested by alliance parties will be identified soon, he said, adding the seat sharing talks were cordial.

Elections to 234 Assembly seats in Tamil Nadu will be held on April 23. NDA's other constituents include former union minister GK Vasan-led Tamil Maanila Congress (Moopanar) and IJK.

Asked about the number of seats to be contested by AIADMK, Palaniswami said talks continued with some parties and following its conclusion the information would be shared.

In the presence of leaders of alliance parties including senior BJP leader Piyush Goyal, PMK top leader Anbumani Ramadoss and AMMK chief TTV Dhinakaran, Palaniswami described the alliance it leads as one marked by "bonding," and called it a "victorious" combine. He expressed confidence that the alliance would go on to win at least 210 Assembly constituencies out of the total 234.

"The alliance will win and AIADMK will form the government," he

asserted. Ridiculing "protracted, delayed" seat-sharing exercise involving "war of words" between the DMK and Congress, he alleged the CPI(M), which got six seats in 2021 was now struggling to get five Assembly seats.

"Piyush Goyal, Nainar Nagenthran L Murugan, Anbumani Ramadoss TTV Dhinakaran came in the morning, it (seat-sharing) was decided in the afternoon and the decision is being announced in the evening; see how quickly it has happened. The AIADMK's goal is to dislodge the DMK from the seat of power. The media did not criticise the deadlock in seat-sharing talks in the DMK front," he said.

Hitting back at DMK's criticism aimed at him for his Delhi visit to meet Union Home Minister Amit Shah in connection with seat sharing, he wondered why DMK MP Kanimozhi met Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in the national capital recently. It has become a wont for Chief Minister M K Stalin to spread defamatory content targeting the NDA leaders if they visited Delhi, he alleged. "Delhi visit is for sharing our opinions, to discuss Assembly polls related matters, CM fears whenever we go to Delhi."

Targeting the DMK for blaming the AIADMK over alliance-related matters, he fired salvos at the ruling party for aligning with the Congress party which imposed the infamous Emergency (1975-77) and also invoked the MISA against detainees during that period.

PMK leader Anbumani said he went to Delhi days ago to visit Rajya Sabha for signing purposes and that he did not meet Amit Shah.

Sensex plunges 1,836 pts; Nifty down to 22,512 as war, crude oil prices continue to hit sentiments



PTI

Mumbai, Mar 23: Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty plummeted on Monday, in tandem with an extremely weak trend in global markets as the war in the Middle East showed no signs of a slowdown.

Rising crude oil prices due to the war, which has entered its fourth week, relentless foreign fund outflows and weakness in the rupee have also made investors risk-averse.

The 30-share BSE Sensex dived 1,836.57 points, or 2.46 per cent, to settle at 72,696.39. During the day, it plunged 1,974.52 points, or 2.64 per cent, to 72,558.44.

The 50-share NSE Nifty tanked 601.85 points, or 2.60 per cent, to end at 22,512.65.

From the 30-Sensex firms, Titan tumbled the most by 6.24 per cent. Trent, UltraTech Cement, Bharat Electronics, InterGlobe Aviation, Tata Steel, and HDFC Bank were also among the major

laggards.

HCL Tech, Power Grid, Infosys, and Tech Mahindra were the winners.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, jumped 0.97 per cent to USD 113.3 per barrel.

"Markets witnessed a sharp sell-off on Monday, continuing the prevailing downtrend amid weak global cues and escalating geopolitical tensions. Investor sentiment remained extremely fragile amid escalating geopolitical tensions in West Asia, which have once again pushed crude oil prices sharply higher," Ajit Mishra, SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

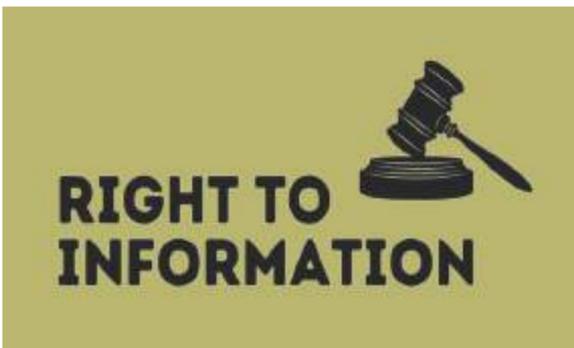
The spike in oil prices, along with continued foreign institutional investor outflows and weakness in the rupee, significantly dented risk appetite, Mishra said.

In Asian markets, South Korea's benchmark Kospi, Japan's Nikkei 225 index, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index ended sharply lower. The Kospi dived the most by 6.49 per cent.

Markets in Europe were trading with deep cuts. The US market ended significantly lower on Friday.

"Domestic markets witnessed a sharp decline, mirroring weakness across Asian markets amid escalating tensions in the Middle East and concerns over potential disruptions to global energy supplies. Investor sentiment turned cautious following Trump's 48-hour ultimatum to Iran on the Strait of Hormuz," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Ltd, said.

Rejection rate of RTI applications came down to 3.26% in 2024-25: Centre in RS



PTI

New Delhi, Mar 23: The rejection rate of Right to Information (RTI) applications has come down to 3.26 per cent in 2024-25 from 7.21 per cent in 2013-14, the Centre has said.

The data on RTI applications received, replied and rejected along with the reasons of rejection, in respect of public authorities in the central government, is available in the annual report of the Central Information Commission (CIC), for the respective years, Union Minister of State for Personnel Jitendra Singh said in a written reply to the Rajya Sabha.

It can be accessed at <https://cic.gov.in/circular-reports-conventions>, he said.

"The rejection rate of RTI applications, in percentage, has come down to 3.26 per cent in the year 2024-25 from 7.21 per cent in the year 2013-14," he said.

Assessment and review to evaluate the effectiveness of the RTI Act

framework is an ongoing process, Singh said.

Guidelines have been issued by the government on conducting third-party transparency audit of proactive/suo-moto disclosures undertaken by the concerned public authorities, he said.

The CIC monitors the progress of the transparency audit and pursues with all public authorities to undertake the audit, the minister said.

If an applicant does not receive the reply in response to an RTI application within the prescribed time or is aggrieved by a decision of the public information officer (PIO), the applicant may prefer an appeal before the first appellate authority and a second appeal lies before the CIC, he said.

Further, an applicant who believes that incomplete, misleading or false information has been furnished by the PIO can raise a complaint directly with the CIC/ State Information Commission (SIC), as the case may be, Singh added.

TN people will reject DMK-Cong, NDA will sweep TN, P'cherry: Goyal

PTI

Chennai, Mar 23: The people of Tamil Nadu will reject the DMK-Congress combine in the ensuing Assembly election just like the people of Maharashtra, Haryana, Bihar and Delhi did for the INDIA combine, BJP Tamil Nadu in-charge and Union Minister Piyush Goyal said on Monday. Goyal, who arrived here to finalise the seat-sharing among the NDA allies, said the AIADMK-led opposition bloc will make a clean sweep in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry and establish NDA government.

"We will launch the fight against the evil force DMK and its partners who have taken Tamil Nadu to extreme difficult times due to their incompetent management of economy and due to actions which hurt Tamil culture. People are fed up with the DMK and Congress," he said. "Just like the Congress and its partners faced defeat continuously in the elections held in Maharashtra, Haryana, Bihar and Delhi, the people of Tamil Nadu will reject the DMK-Congress combine in the state."

"It is because people want good governance, development politics, a better future and opportunities for youth, and women to prosper. Tamil Nadu is ready for a government under the strong National Democratic Alliance under the guidance of visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi," Goyal told reporters.

Trump talks about 'total resolution of hostilities' with Iran

Puts off threat to bomb Iran power stations

REUTERS

Tel Aviv/Jerusalem/Washington, Mar 23: US President Donald Trump said on Monday he had given instructions to postpone any military strikes against Iranian power plants for five days, just hours ahead of a deadline that threatened further escalation in the conflict now in its fourth week.

Trump said in a post on Truth Social that the US and Iran have had "VERY GOOD AND PRODUCTIVE" conversations with Iran over the past two days about a "COMPLETE AND TOTAL RESOLUTION OF HOSTILITIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST."

In his message, written entirely in capital letters, he said he had instructed the defense department to postpone the strikes pending the outcome of current talks.

The price of the Brent crude oil benchmark was down around 7 per cent near \$104 at 1127 GMT.

On Saturday, Trump had warned that Iranian power plants would be destroyed if Tehran failed to "fully open" the Strait of Hormuz to all shipping within 48 hours. Trump



set a deadline of around 7:44 p.m. EDT (2344 GMT) on Monday.

His comments sparked threats of retaliation from Iran's Revolutionary Guards, which said in a statement on Monday they would attack Israel's power plants and those supplying US bases across the Gulf region if Trump followed through with his threat to "obliterate" Iran's power network. More than 2,000

people have been killed in the war the US and Israel launched on February 28, which has upended markets, driven up fuel costs, fueled global inflation fears and convulsed the postwar Western alliance. The threat of strikes on Gulf electricity grids raised fears of mass disruption to desalination for drinking water, and further rattled oil markets.

Markets shoot higher, oil futures sink

AP

Tokyo, Mar 23: Wall Street shot higher and global oil futures tumbled Monday after President Donald Trump extended his deadline for Iran to reopen the crucial Strait of Hormuz.

Trump had said the US would hold off on strikes against Iranian power plants and other energy infrastructure for five days.

Trump's post on social media about the strikes came as the war with Iran enters its fourth week. Futures for the S&P 500 and Dow Jones Industrial Average soared 2.6 per cent before the opening bell.

Oil prices also immediately reversed course, sinking as much as 10 per cent. Benchmark US crude slid USD 8.23 to USD 90 a barrel. Brent crude, the international standard, tumbled USD 9.02 to USD 103.17 a barrel.



Strait of Hormuz open to friendly nations: Iran's envoy to Sri Lanka



PTI

Colombo, Mar 23: The Strait of Hormuz remains open to friendly countries, the Iranian envoy to Sri Lanka said on Monday, stressing that Tehran is ready to supply oil or other essential goods to the island nation if the need arises.

The conflict in West Asia, involving the US, Israel, and Iran, has led to the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, a key shipping route through which 20 per cent of the world's energy is transported.

Iran, which controls the Strait of Hormuz, has allowed very few ships to cross it since the conflict started on February 28.

Addressing a press conference here, Iran's Ambassador to Sri Lanka

Alireza Delkhosh said that the key strait remains open to friendly country vessels to pass.

"Sri Lanka is our friendly country and as I told you, Hormuz is not closed to our friends like Sri Lanka," he said.

"If Sri Lanka demands oil or any other necessary goods, Iran will supply," he added.

The conflict, which has roiled global oil markets, entered its fourth week, coinciding with which, the Sri Lankan government hiked fuel prices by 25 per cent on Sunday.

It was the third fuel price hike by the government since March 1.

Speaking about an Iranian vessel which was torpedoed and sunk in international waters off Sri Lanka's coast by a US submarine earlier this month, the envoy said it was "not here

for war".

"Dena was not ready for war. It was not here for conflict. It was participating in a peaceful exercise in India," he said, calling the targeting a violation of humanitarian law.

The Iranian warship IRIS Dena was returning after participating in the Milan naval exercise, a multilateral wargame hosted by India, when it was struck. At least 87 Iranian sailors were killed in the attack.

Delkhosh said that the Sri Lankan government had invited the three Iranian vessels involved in the Milan exercise to visit the island nation.

"This vessel, with two other vessels, was invited by the Sri Lankan side to come here. And they came here upon their invitation," he said.

Delkhosh expressed gratitude to Sri Lanka for accommodating over 200 sailors from another vessel, IRIS Bushehr, whom the ambassador said were mainly cadets.

It was allowed to dock by Sri Lanka at its eastern port of Trincomalee, after seeking permission to enter Sri Lankan waters, citing an engine failure.

The attack on the Iranian warship marked a major escalation of the conflict between the US and Iran outside of the Persian Gulf and raised questions relating to maritime security in the Indian Ocean.

UK sees no evidence of Iran targeting Britain, says Starmer

REUTERS

London, Mar 23: British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said on Monday there had been no assessment that mainland Britain was being targeted by Iran.

"We carry out assessments all the time in order to keep us safe, and there's no assessment that we're being targeted in that way," Starmer told reporters.

He was asked if Britain could be targeted by Iran after reports at the weekend that Iran had fired two ballistic missiles at the US-UK military base Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean.

Starmer also said that any attempt to reopen the Strait of Hormuz needed careful consideration and a viable plan, and that his number one priority was to protect British interests and de-escalate.

New Hong Kong rules force people to give up passwords in security cases

AFP

Hong Kong, Mar 23: People in Hong Kong will now face a year in jail if they refuse to give police their phone or computer passwords in investigations involving the city's strict national security law, the government said on Monday.

The new rules apply to the implementation of Hong Kong's national security law, which was imposed by Beijing in 2020 after huge and sometimes violent pro-democracy protests in the financial hub.

One of the amendments that came into effect on Monday requires people to provide "any password or other decryption method" necessary to allow police to access electronic equipment that is believed to hold evidence.

Anyone who fails to comply faces a year in prison and a fine of HK\$100,000 (\$12,780).

Previously, refusal to give police a password to unlock a phone or other electronic device did not constitute



obstruction.

The new rule applies to people under investigation for endangering national security and people who own or possess the equipment involved, as well as those authorized to access the equipment and anyone who knows the password or decryption method.

They were drawn up by Chief Executive John Lee in conjunction with the National Security Commission.

I don't like it: Axar Patel on Impact Player rule in IPL

PTI

New Delhi, Mar 23: An all-rounder himself, Axar Patel on Monday became the latest Indian cricketer to criticise the Impact Player rule in the IPL with a blunt "I don't like it" response before insisting that it hurts the growth of his tribe.

Rohit Sharma and Hardik Pandya have spoken against the Impact Player rule, which allows teams to substitute anyone in the playing XI with one of the five listed substitutes at any point of the match. It was introduced in 2023 and will stay until at least 2027.

In 2024, Rohit had said that he was not a fan of the strategic rule saying it hampered the development of all-rounders in Indian cricket while the following season, Hardik said it had become difficult to pick an all-rounder in the side unless he was equally good with both bat and ball.

Responding to a PTI query seeking his views on the rule, the Indian T20 vice-captain too weighed in on the subject ahead of his second season as Delhi Capitals captain.

"I don't like this rule as I am all-rounder myself (laughs). Earlier we used to pick all-rounder for this role (batting and bowling). Now team management goes with a particular batter or bowler, they say why do we need an all-rounder?"

"Being an all-rounder myself I don't like it but at



the same time rules are rules. We have to follow them. But personally I don't like it," said Axar. Axar bowled only 204 balls in the last IPL season compared to 264 balls a season earlier. He said it was not because of the Impact Player rule, but a finger injury that had bothered him leading up to the IPL. "I did not bowl a lot. It wasn't because of Impact Player. After the Champions Trophy, my spinning finger got cut. After that it got worse because of the seam of the ball. Later, it developed into a deep cut, I was not able to apply pressure and rotation on the ball.

"That is why I was bowling only when required and nursing my finger. After seven games, it became better and I bowled frequently," said Axar who has been tasked to take Delhi Capitals to their maiden IPL title. Don't believe in 'greatest Indian team' tag. In a matter of 18 months,

Axar has become a two-time world champion in the shortest format.

An unprecedented title defence earlier this month has fuelled comparisons with the invincible Australian team of 2000s though its roaring success came in the ODI format. Some have dubbed the current Indian side as the greatest T20 unit ever.

However, Axar said he doesn't believe in comparing teams from different eras.

"It all started post 2022, we started playing this brand of cricket and took some tough calls. If this Indian team wants to dominate, we have to continue playing a fearless brand of cricket, change as per the requirement of the game at that time.

"I don't believe in the tag of the greatest T20 team ever. It is all about time and era. If a team's combination is set, they can do wonders," he added.

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