



LG calls for dismantling entire ecosystem of drug smuggling, narco-terrorism in J&K

» Says deliberate, sinister efforts being made to push youth into abyss of addiction » Proposes roping in pol, religious leaders, social organisations in fight against menace

Yogesh

Jammu, Mar 28: Directing law enforcing agencies to dismantle the entire ecosystem of drug smuggling and narco-terrorism, Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Saturday said that deliberate and sinister efforts are being made to push the youth of Jammu Kashmir into the abyss of drug addiction.

While reviewing the progress of Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyaan in the UT of Jammu Kashmir, at a high-level meeting at Lok Bhavan here, LG Sinha, according to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) directed for a massive crackdown on smuggling networks that target the youth of Jammu & Kashmir.

"Deliberate and sinister efforts are being made to push the J&K youth into the abyss of drug addiction. A comprehensive,



whole-of-government approach, combining stringent enforcement, robust preventive measures, and a carefully calibrated multi-pronged action plan, is urgently required to dismantle the entire ecosystem of drug smuggling and narco-terrorism," the Lieutenant Governor said.

He called for Jan Bhagidari and a coordinated response

against drug abuse for achieving the goal of Nasha Mukta Jammu Kashmir.

The meeting discussed five key focused areas—Enforcement, IEC, Counselling, Treatment, and Rehabilitation, while integrating a rigorous social media monitoring system to counter false narratives.

The Lieutenant Governor directed the officials for

implementation of deterrents, especially within educational institutions, in mission mode. He further directed for identifying and strictly punishing any remnants of narco-terror networks within the system.

The Lieutenant Governor emphasised that the citizens must be encouraged to report the drug addiction and drug smuggling related matters to the

police and the administration.

The Lieutenant Governor also reviewed the preparations of all the line departments for the upcoming intensive drug awareness campaign across the UT of J&K.

"Religious leaders, social organisations, ex-servicemen, NCC, NSS, Scouts and Guides and political leaders must be taken on-board in the fight against drug addiction," he said.

The Lieutenant Governor directed for assessment of activities conducted under the Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyaan over the past one year.

The meeting also discussed the onboarding of all the districts on Nasha Mukta J&K Portal, engagement of nodal officers, ongoing community outreach programmes, training and capacity building, strengthening and expansion of de-addiction infrastructure | [More on P6](#)

Bill on drug de-addiction finalised: H&ME Minister

KNO Special Correspondent

Jammu, Mar 28: The Jammu & Kashmir Government on Saturday informed the Legislative Assembly that a bill on drug de-addiction has been finalised and will be introduced during the ongoing budget session.

Responding to supplementary questions from MLAs during Question Hour, Minister for Health & Medical Education Sakina Masood Itoo said they would make efforts to introduce the bill in the current session. "I assure you that the bill is ready. We will try to introduce it during the ongoing session," the minister said, according to news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO).

The Minister emphasised that the responsibility of curbing the flow of drugs in Jammu



& Kashmir lies with the police, while the Health Department's role is confined to creating awareness and rehabilitating patients affected by substance abuse.

"The role of the Health & Medical Education Department is not to punish drug peddlers, but to treat, counsel, and rehabilitate patients," she said.

She requested the Home Department to | [More on P6](#)

CM says proposal under examination to notify new tourism areas in J&K

KT News Desk

Jammu, Mar 28: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Saturday said the government is examining a proposal for the notification of new tourism-worthy areas in Jammu & Kashmir, including several locations in District Doda.

Replying to a question raised by MLA Doda West, Shakti Raj Parihar, during the Question Hour of the ongoing Budget Session of the Legislative Assembly, the Chief Minister said the identified locations in Doda district include Udhraha (Bhaderwah), Sarna (Bhaderwah), Nalthi, Chinta, Guldanda, Padri, Khaleni Top, Lal Draman, Doda (Municipal Limits) and Shibnote (Premnagar).

The Chief Minister, who is also the Minister in-charge Tourism, informed the House



that the Tourism Department is committed to strengthening infrastructure and improving visitor facilities at major tourist destinations across Jammu and Kashmir. He said that prominent destinations

in Doda district—such as Lal Draman, Dedni, Dal Draman, Ramrachna, Galadhar and Dossa—are being actively developed and promoted.

He further stated that District Doda is already recognised as an important tourist destination, and the Department is undertaking sustained efforts to boost tourism in the region.

"As part of the promotional strategy for the financial years 2024-25 and 2025-26, several events have been organized and publicized, including the Lavender Festival, Winter Festival, Mega Wrestling Competition, promotion of Maa Chandni Yatra, One-Day Mela at Bhal Padri (Bhalesa) and the Lal Draman Snow Festival, among others, to enhance tourism awareness and attract visitors," the | [More on P6](#)

Eliminate redundant NoCs for businesses: CS

KT News Desk

Jammu, Mar 28: Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo on Saturday chaired a meeting of the concerned Administrative Secretaries to review the progress achieved in the implementation of identified deregulation measures under the next phase of the Ease of Doing Business (EoDB) programme in Jammu and Kashmir.

During the meeting, the Chief Secretary underscored the urgent need to eliminate unnecessary regulatory bottlenecks, particularly the requirement of multiple No Objection Certificates (NoCs) for establishing businesses.

He observed that such procedures are often redundant and create avoidable hurdles for entrepreneurs. Emphasizing the importance of timely reforms,



he remarked that rationalizing these requirements within a defined timeframe would significantly benefit the people of the Union Territory.

Citing practical examples, the Chief Secretary pointed out that individuals seeking to establish small enterprises such as schools, nursing homes, or health clinics are often required to obtain numerous clearances from different departments, making the process

cumbersome and discouraging for potential investors.

He stressed the need to streamline such procedures and explore the feasibility of issuing lifetime licenses in suitable sectors, particularly in health and education, where periodic renewals may not serve any meaningful purpose.

To address these concerns, the Chief Secretary directed the Labour and Employment Department to | [More on P6](#)

MLAs unite to condemn attack on Dr Farooq

Seek thorough probe

Waris Fayaz

Jammu, Mar 28: In a rare show of unity in the Jammu & Kashmir Assembly, MLAs cutting across party lines on Saturday condemned the attack on former Chief Minister Dr Farooq Abdullah and demanded a thorough probe into the incident.

The issue was discussed in the House at length after MLAs from the National Conference submitted an adjournment motion.

Opening the debate, as per news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), NC's Salman Sagar termed the attack "highly condemnable" and called

for a time-bound investigation report. "If a leader of such stature is not safe, it raises serious concerns about the security of others," he said.

His party colleague, MLA Trehgam Mir Saifullah, questioned the silence of authorities over the attack on the NC president. "Why has no official statement been issued? Why was adequate security not in place?" he asked, alleging a possible conspiracy behind the incident.

Senior BJP leader and MLA Sham Lal Sharma described Dr Abdullah as a "tall leader who needs no certification." He said the incident pointed to possible security lapses that must be investigated.

Bandipora | [More on P6](#)

Big Impact Awards J&K 2026

J&K entrepreneurs exemplify innovation amid adversity: LG Sinha

Highlights post-NEP, COVID transformations



KT News Desk

Jammu, Mar 28: Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Saturday called upon the entrepreneurs and distinguished personalities from diverse fields to channel their resolve to elevate diverse sectors in Jammu & Kashmir, rendering them more robust and humane. "In realising the Make in India vision, our entrepreneurs are carving distinct identities through originality. Despite raw material hurdles, they have expanded production capacities and diversified markets," the Lieutenant Governor said while speaking at the 'Big Impact Awards 2026' for J&K, organised by 92.7 Big FM.

He felicitated the distinguished awardees and urged them to lead with a purpose as they contribute to forging a stronger, more prosperous

India.

"Through sweeping reforms, Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has fostered an ecosystem where India evolves from consumer to creator. India stands as an innovation superpower, ranking among the world's most dynamic forces in moulding tomorrow's global economy," he said.

The LG said that revolutionary change in industrial and business ecosystem is not a coincidence, but it is the tangible outcome of bold reforms and the relentless dedication of entrepreneurs. "True entrepreneurship lies in converting crises into opportunities, and I take pride in how Jammu & Kashmir's entrepreneurs and innovators have exemplified this in action," he said. "Innovation is not a fleeting event. Genuine innovation and success stem | [More on P6](#)

J&K Assembly passes three Bills through voice vote



KT News Desk

Jammu, Mar 28: The Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly on Saturday passed three important Bills through voice vote, marking a significant step towards governance reforms, social equity and strengthening of

the judicial framework in Jammu and Kashmir.

The Bills were moved by Chief Minister Omar Abdullah and were subsequently put to vote by Speaker Abdul Rahim Rather, who presented bills before the House for passage.

The House | [More on P6](#)

CM tables Finance & Audit reports

KT News Desk

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Saturday laid on the Table of the House copies of key financial and audit documents pertaining to Jammu and Kashmir's finances. The documents placed before the House include Finance Accounts (Volume I) for the year 2023-24; Finance Accounts (Volume II) for the year 2023-24; Appropriation Accounts for the year 2023-24; and Report of the | [More on P6](#)

GHOSTS OF EDUCATION

Riyaz Bhat

Srinagar, Mar 28: Over the past four years, nearly 3200 schools in Jammu and Kashmir were either functioning with less than ten or zero student enrolment—leaving over 2500 teachers deployed in empty schools.

The latest figures revealed in the Legislative Assembly reveal that 3192 schools in Jammu and Kashmir reported less than ten or zero enrolment since 2022 including 1494 schools in Jammu and 1698 in Kashmir region

'In J&K, 3,192 schools operate with ten or zero students since 2022'



respectively. According to the news agency—the house was also informed that 2518 teachers

were posted in these schools including 1934 teachers in 1494 schools of Jammu division and 584 teachers in 1698

institutions of Kashmir region.

In 2024 news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) reported that nearly 4400 government run schools were closed in Jammu and Kashmir owing to 'zero or extremely low' enrolment of students.

In the year there were a total of 23,117 government run schools in Jammu and Kashmir out of which 4394 were deleted from the UDISE data.

An official said that the count of overall public schools in Jammu and Kashmir reduced because "There were some | [More on P6](#)

Gondola model not viable beyond Gulmarg: CM

Waris Fayaz

Jammu, Mar 28: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Saturday told the Assembly that a cable car project is unlikely to boost tourism in Karnah, citing limited success of similar projects outside Gulmarg.

Responding to a query by MLA Javid Ahmad Mirchal, the Chief Minister, as per the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) said there is no proposal under consideration to construct a cable car from TD Dryangari to Zarla via Sadhna Pass in Karnah constituency.

He said the success of the gondola in Gulmarg cannot be replicated elsewhere. He pointed to projects in Jammu and Srinagar where similar attempts failed to draw comparable tourist footfall. He also referred to the gondola at Patnitop, which has not seen traffic on the scale of Gulmarg.

The Chief Minister said the government will instead focus on targeted interventions to promote tourism in Karnah. These include infrastructure upgrades and promotion of homestays at the grassroots level to ensure direct | [More on P6](#)

Reservation policy report under consideration: Govt

Naveed UI Haq Ganaiee

Srinagar, Mar 28: The Jammu and Kashmir Government on Saturday said that the Cabinet Sub-Committee constituted to examine the reservation policy has submitted its report, which is currently under consideration before the competent authority.

Replying to a question in the Legislative Assembly tabled by MLA Budgam Aga Syed Muntazir Mehdi, the government, according to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) said, "The Cabinet Sub-Committee constituted for examining various aspects of reservation policy and rationalization of reservation in J&K has | [More on P6](#)

Budget Session 2026

Speaker calls for fair probe, strict punishment for culprit in Dr Farooq Abdullah assassination attempt

KT NEWS DESK

JAMMU, MARCH 28: J&K Assembly Speaker Abdul Rahim Rather, following a discussion on the assassination attempt on former Chief Minister Dr Farooq Abdullah, described him as an internationally respected figure who dedicated his work to J&K's welfare, development and communal harmony.

He remembered that Dr Abdullah took the reins of J&K in very difficult times and worked tirelessly to navigate the then State from hardships. He also mentioned that Home Minister Amit Shah and Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha called Dr Abdullah to know his well being and assured for in depth investigation into the incident. The Speaker, as per an official



statement, expressed belief that fair probe will be conducted and the culprit be given strict punishment so that no one dares to repeat

such cowardly act in future.

The members, who earlier participated in the discussion and condemned the assassination attempt on former Chief Minister Dr. Farooq Abdullah, included Ministers Sakeena Itoo and Satish Sharma, Salman Sagar, Mir Saifulah, Sham Lal Sharma, Waheed ur Rehman Para, Nizam-ud-din Bhat, Arjun Singh Raju, Rajeev Jasrotia, Choudhary Mohammad Akram, Sajad Shaheen, Tanveer Sadiq, Javid Riyaz Bedar, Pawan Kumar Gupta, Mohammad Yousuf Tarigami, Dr Shafi Ahmad Wani, Surjeet Singh Slathia, Altaf Ahmad Wani (Kaloo), Showkat Hussain Ganie, Sajad Gani Lone, Rafiq Ahmad Naik, Dr. Bashir Ahmad Shah Veeri, Ajaz Ahmad Jan, Nazir Ahmad Khan (Gurezi), Dr. Rameshwar Singh and Mubarak Gul.

Speaker chairs HLAC meet, reviews implementation of NeVA project in J&K Assembly

KT NEWS DESK

JAMMU, MARCH 28: Speaker, J&K Legislative Assembly, Abdul Rahim Rather Saturday chaired the High Level Apex Committee (HLAC) meeting at Assembly Complex here to review and accelerate the implementation of the National e-Vidhan Application (NeVA) project in J&K Legislative Assembly.

The meeting, as per an official statement, was attended by MLAs Justice (Retd.) Hasnain Masoodi, Nizamuddin Bhat, Tanvir Sadiq, Arjun Singh Raju, Dr Sunil Bhardwaj, Waheed ur Rehman Para and Dr Bharat Bhushan; Secretary J&K Legislative Assembly, Manoj Kumar Pandita besides other senior officers from IT, NIC and NICS.

During the meeting, the Speaker emphasised on the importance of timely completion and integration of NeVA project to modernize the legislative processes and ensure a paperless functioning of J&K Assembly.

He directed the concerned officers to expedite the remaining tasks like procurement of hardware and other necessary network equipment for both Assembly Complexes at Srinagar and Jammu.

Continued on
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Govt endeavours to strengthen irrigation network in Khansahib: Javed Rana

KT NEWS DESK

The government Saturday reiterated that the irrigation network in Khansahib Constituency remains robust and fully functional, with extensive works being carried out over the past three years to strengthen canals, khuls and irrigation infrastructure.

The Government stated that all the major irrigation canals in the constituency remained operational during the last irrigation season, ensuring smooth water supply to the farmers.

Minister for Jal Shakti, Forest Ecology, Environment and Tribal Affairs, Javed Ahmed Rana said that a comprehensive set of works has been executed under various schemes between 2023-24 and 2025-26.

Javed Rana was replying to a question raised by MLA Khansahib, Saif-ud-din Bhat regarding the irrigation facilities.

The Minister informed that during 2023-24, works worth 62.68 lakh were taken up, of which, 50.59 lakh have been utilized, achieving full physical completion in all the fields



cases. Similarly, in 2024-25, works amounting 31.28 lakh were undertaken with 22.83 lakh expended and all projects reported as fully completed.

For the ongoing 2025-26 financial year, works worth 54.62 lakh have been initiated, with 46.74 lakh already utilized.

It was informed that majority of these projects have been completed while the remaining are at various stages of progress.

Continued on
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NGT Guidelines

Enforcement intensified to protect ecologically sensitive areas in Baderwah sub-division

KT NEWS DESK

BHADERWAH, MARCH 28: In a significant move to safeguard environmentally sensitive areas, the Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) Sunil Kumar Bhaty has intensified the enforcement of National Green Tribunal (NGT) guidelines across Baderwah sub-division.

At a high-level review meeting held on Saturday, the ADC emphasized strict implementation of environmental norms to ensure sustainable waste management and ecological protection. Key

directions issued included daily monitoring of waste collection systems and the mandatory sharing of geo-tagged photographs on a daily basis to ensure transparency and accountability.

The ADC, as per an official statement, further directed the concerned departments to achieve 100% door-to-door waste collection in rural areas. Special focus was laid on improving sanitation in marketplaces, with instructions to deploy separate vehicles for the collection of waste from fruit and vegetable markets as well as chicken shops.

Additionally, chain-link fencing was proposed in vulnerable areas to prevent garbage dumping to protect the environment.

Officials from the Municipality Committee, Baderwah Development Authority (BDA), Public Works Department (R&B), Irrigation & Flood Control (I&FC), Jal Shakti Department, Health Department, Jammu and Kashmir Pollution Control Committee (JKPCC) Doda, Mechanical Department, Assistant Commissioner Panchayat (ACP) Doda along with representatives of various departments were present in the meeting.

Green Commitment in Action Earth Hour pledge echoes across district Kishtwar

KT NEWS DESK

KISHTWAR, MARCH 28: The Youth Services & Sports Department Kishtwar on Saturday organized a district-wide Earth Hour Pledge event, witnessing enthusiastic participation from students, staff and local communities across various zones of the district.

The programme, as per an official statement, was conducted under the directions of Director General Youth Services & Sports J&K, Anuradha Gupta and under the guidance of District Youth Services & Sports Officer Jaffer Haider Sheikh with overall supervision of all Zonal Physical Education Officers (ZPEOs).

The event aimed to spread awareness about environmental conservation, energy saving and the importance of collective action in combating climate change.

Students and participants took a solemn pledge to switch off non-essential lights and electrical appliances during Earth Hour, symbolizing their commitment towards a sustainable and eco-friendly future.

Workshop on NTCP held in Kathua

KT NEWS DESK

KATHUA, MARCH 28: One-day Training-cum-Workshop on the National Tobacco Control Programme (NTCP) was held on Saturday at the Conference Hall of DC Office Kathua.

At the outset, the Chief Medical Officer Dr Vijay Raina highlighted the objectives of the workshop, emphasizing the importance of inter-departmental coordination for effective implementation of the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA), 2003.

During the technical session, Divisional Coordinator NTCP Shveta Raina delivered a detailed presentation covering key components of the programme, including enforcement of COTPA provisions, role and responsibilities of stakeholders, awareness generation strategies, tobacco cessation services and monitoring mechanisms, thereby enhancing the capacity of participants on tobacco control measures.

Deputy Commissioner Rajesh Sharma, in his

address, stressed strict enforcement of tobacco control laws and called for robust coordination among departments. He emphasized regular inspections, intensified awareness campaigns



and active community participation to curb tobacco use, besides directing officers to ensure tobacco-free public places and institutions.

To promote tobacco-free environments at the grassroots level, Tobacco-Free Village signboards were handed over by DC to the Block Development Officer (HQ) for installation in identified villages.

JAMMU AND KASHMIR PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

RESHAM GHAR COLONY, BAKSHI NAGAR, JAMMU - 180016

Website: <http://jkpsc.nic.in>

Subject: Filling up of the posts of Medical Officer (Allopathic) in the Health & Medical Education Department, 2025 - Result of Written Test reg;

Notification No. PSC/Exam/S/2026/30

Dated: 27.03.2026

In pursuance of J&K Health & Medical Education (Gazetted) Service Rules issued vide SRO 325 dated 12.07.2013 read with amendments notified vide SRO 388 dated 10.09.2018 and Jammu and Kashmir Public Service Commission (Conduct of Examinations) Rules, 2022 read with J&K Public Service Commission (Business & Procedure) Rules, 2021 as amended up to date and on the basis of the performance of the candidates in the written test held on 14.03.2026, the result of the candidates who appeared in the said written test is annexed as Annexure-A to this notification.

Consequent upon the above-

a) The list of candidates called for verification of original certificates/documents in support of their claim pertaining to age, educational qualifications, internship, registration by MCI/State Medical Council, domicile, category and disability, if any, etc. in terms of Rules 27 & 28 of the J&K Public Service Commission (Business & Procedure) Rules, 2021, is annexed as Annexure-B against notification No. 20-PSC (DR-P) of 2025 dated 31.12.2025 to this notification. The inclusion of the candidates in Annexure-B is provisional and solely for the purpose of verification of documents and does not confer any preferential right or claim upon these candidates for selection/recommendation/appointment, which shall be made in terms of the rules and shall further be subject to the outcome of writ petition(s), if any, pending disposal before Court(s) of Law.

b) The schedule for verification of documents shall be notified separately.

DIPK-12211/25

DATED: 28-03-2026

No. PSC/EX-Secy/2026/18

Sachin Jamwal JKAS

Controller of Examination

J&K Public Service Commission

Dated: 27.03.2026

UNION TERRITORY OF JAMMU & KASHMIR JAL SHAKTI DEPARTMENT OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER FBI DIVISION TANGMARG

Corrigendum 2nd to This Office E-NIT No.28 of 2025-26

Ref.:- This office Corrigendum No.:- FBID/8308-20, Dated:-27-03-2026

As requested by various transport associations, please read model of vehicle from 2024 instead of 2025.

All other terms and conditions shall remain same as laid the said e-NIT.

Sd/-

Executive Engineer,
F.B.I. Jal Shakti Division,
Tangmarg

No.:- FBID/8342-57
Dated:-28-03-2026.

DIPK-12202/25
DATED: 28-03-2026

UNION TERRITORY OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER PUBLIC WORKS (R&B) DIVISION AWANTIPORA

Email: rb-awantipora@jk.gov.in

NO: T-1/EEA/11962-66

Dated: 28/03/2026

Cancellation of NIT

Subject: 1. Restoration of Dysfunctional Toilet at Girls Primary School Lethpore (S.No. 1382).

Reference: 1. This office e-NIT No.205/EEA/RNB of 2025-26/11450-60 Dated 16-03-2026.

Due to Technical reasons the work advertised at S.No.3 of this office e-NIT No. under reference, is hereby cancelled and shall be invited a fresh.

Sd/-

Technical officer

Sd/-

Executive Engineer
R&B Division Awantipora

DIPK-12223/25
DATED: 28-03-2026

CS pushes for fast track transformation of Higher Education



KT NEWS DESK

Jammu, Mar 28: Chief Secretary, Atal Dulloo on Saturday chaired a comprehensive review meeting of the Higher Education Department (HED) to strategise a forward-looking roadmap for advancing higher education and steering Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) in Jammu and Kashmir towards excellence.

The meeting was attended by the Vice-Chancellors of various Universities; Commissioner Secretary, HED; Registrars of the Universities; Director Colleges; and other senior officers of the department.

Emphasising the need for institutional accountability and time-bound reforms, the Chief Secretary directed all HEIs to formulate their own actionable plans for implementation of reform measures recommended

during the 5th Chief Secretaries' Conference chaired by the Prime Minister himself. He stressed strict adherence to timelines and called for a results-oriented approach without any laxity.

He observed that these reform measures are closely aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and form a strong foundation for achieving the objectives envisioned for higher education institutions in the Union Territory.

Taking a detailed review of faculty positions and student enrollment across universities and colleges, the Chief Secretary directed that faculty vacancies be filled up to at least 90 percent by August this year, underscoring that quality education hinges on adequate and competent teaching staff.

The Chief Secretary also emphasised regular updation of curricula to reflect latest

developments and research in respective fields. He instructed institutions to integrate skill-based courses with conventional academic programmes to enhance employability and industry readiness of graduates.

Focusing on professional education, he directed the Vice-Chancellors of IUST and SMVDU to undertake a detailed study of engineering colleges and schools of architecture in the UT and recommend measures to improve enrolment. He noted that these institutions possess robust infrastructure and faculty, which must be optimally utilised.

Similarly, the Vice-Chancellors of the University of Kashmir and University of Jammu were asked to assess enrolment trends in their affiliated colleges and suggest corrective measures, particularly in institutions witnessing low student intake. The Chief

Secretary also reviewed the status of infrastructure development in newly established colleges and stressed expeditious completion of ongoing construction works.

During the meeting, the Vice-Chancellors presented updates on implementation of the 21 reform points identified in the Chief Secretaries' Conference. They also outlined their respective roadmaps and assured timely and effective execution of these reforms.

Regarding staffing, it was informed that out of 3,635 sanctioned teaching and 2,955 non-teaching posts, 3,425 teaching and 2,413 non-teaching positions are filled, with efforts underway to fill the remaining vacancies.

The meeting also held an in-depth university-wise review of key reform initiatives, including the launch of a Global Talent Return Scheme, engagement of Professors of Practice, mission mode faculty recruitment in institutions with over 30 percent vacancies, development of delivery partnership agreements, curriculum reforms integrating emerging areas, adoption of unified digital platforms, apprenticeship-embedded degree programmes and cross-disciplinary frameworks.

The Chief Secretary reiterated the commitment of transforming the higher education ecosystem into a dynamic, inclusive and globally competitive sector, capable of producing skilled, innovative and employable youth by the institutions established across the districts of J&K.

MLAs' questions must not exceed 150 words: Speaker



KT NEWS DESK

Jammu, Mar 28: MLA Balwant Singh Mankotia raised a Point of Order regarding the length of questions raised during the Question Hour.

In response, Speaker Legislative Assembly Abdul Rahim Rather emphasised the need for concise questions, stating that the length should not exceed 150 words to save the House's precious time.

Rather, while citing Rule 38 Condition 7, stressed that MLAs' questions should be

brief and within the 150-word limit.

The Speaker observed that most questions were lengthy and violated the rules, but had been allowed using his special powers to admit most questions.

He sought cooperation from members to avoid lengthy questions, warning that such questions would be rejected in future to save time.

He suggested a workshop or seminar by the experts on rules to make MLAs more aware of the prescribed guidelines.

Zoji La Pass accident death toll mounts to 7

LG Sinha announces Rs 4 lakh ex-gratia relief for kin of deceased

RAJA SYED RATHER

Zojila Mar 28: The death toll in the tragic accident at Zoji La Pass mounted to seven on Saturday after rescuers recovered another body this morning, while one of the injured persons succumbed to his injuries, officials said.

Multiple vehicles were buried under a snow avalanche on Friday leading to the death of five commuters on the spot and injuries to eight others. The injured were rushed to a hospital.

The operation, which entered its second day, has now been called off after all missing persons were accounted for.

Pertinently, soon after the accident, SSP Ganderbal Khalil Ahmed Poswal

along with his team and Kargil Police, launched a rescue operation. SDPO Kangan Rajeev Raina and SHO Sonamarg, besides teams from State Disaster Response Force and the Indian Army, actively participated in the rescue efforts.

As per official records from Sub-District Hospital Drass, the deceased had been identified as Mohammad Baaqir Balti (63) of Nilgarh Sonamarg, Asadullah (12 months) of Yuljuk, Mohammad Ali (72) of Sankoo Kargil, Toiba Banoo (36) of Sangra Kargil, Shahar Banoo (32) of Yuljuk Kargil, Mohammad Yousof (38) of Tangole Panikhar, and Ali Akbar (44) of Pashkum Kargil.

Continued on www.kashmirthunder.in

I was denied security to attend my father's funeral: Lone

KNO

Jammu, Mar 28: Peoples Conference president Sajad Gani Lone on Saturday claimed that the National Conference-led government denied him security to attend the funeral of his father, Abdul Gani Lone, who was killed by militants in 2002.

Speaking on the floor of the Legislative Assembly, Lone said that despite his plea for security cover to attend his father's last rites, the government refused to provide it.

"I remember the moments when my father was killed. The next day we had to bury him at the very place where he was attacked - Mubarak Gul Sahab's constituency, just 100 feet from where he was shot. I swear by God, I am not trying to score a point, but that government did not give me security to go there," he said.

Lone further recalled that the then Divisional Commissioner of Kashmir had warned him that he could be killed if he went to Eidgah for the funeral. He said Parvez Dewan, the Divisional Commissioner at the time, advised him not to attend, cautioning that he might be targeted.



According to Lone, he asked for a few policemen for protection, but the government refused, saying that they would be at risk and might also be killed.

Lone described his words as a son's plea, adding that there must be thousands of sons across Kashmir who have faced similar anguish.

He said that ideological differences cannot be the basis for denial of security to an individual. "When my father was martyred, it was Farooq Abdullah Sahab in place of the LG. I swear, he (my father) was helpless. My father was not contesting elections; he was a separatist. The biggest question is: if we have ideological differences, should we allow a person to be killed by denying him security? That is the question we must ask."

Continued on www.kashmirthunder.in

From Legislative Assembly

With 4,479 lecturer posts unfilled, SED turns to CRC as interim fix



RIYAZ BHAT

Srinagar, Mar 28: In Jammu and Kashmir at least 4479 lecturer posts are lying vacant—forcing the School Education Department (SED) to hire Clusters Resources Coordinators (CRCs) to support teaching in Higher Secondary Schools

facing staff shortages.

The official figures reveal that at least 4479 lecturer posts are lying in the School Education Department of Jammu and Kashmir. In Kashmir division 2038 lecturer posts are lying vacant followed by 2441 vacancies in Jammu region. The government in the Legislative

Assembly said that with regard to the vacancies of teachers, all the existing and anticipated vacancies of Teachers are being utilized for the transition of REIs into Teacher Grade-II and Grade-III, who were engaged under SSA.

Continued on www.kashmirthunder.in

No 50% concession for smart bus services: Govt

RAJA SYED RATHER

Srinagar, Mar 28: The Jammu and Kashmir government on Saturday ruled out any proposal under consideration to grant a 50 percent fare concession specifically in Smart Bus services, saying the existing concessions for students are already in place under notified rules.

Replying to an unstarred question (A.Q. No. 1523) tabled by MLA Sheikh Ahsan Ahmad, the Transport Department said that as per Government Notification S.O.P-MVD of 2017 dated June 22, 2017, all school and college students in Jammu and Kashmir are entitled to 50 percent concession in bus fare while travelling in buses operated by JKRTC, subject to valid student identification.

The government further said that no proposal is currently under consideration to provide a dedicated Smart Bus service from Lal

Chowk to University of Kashmir exclusively for female students.

It, however, informed that Srinagar Smart City Limited is operating a limited fleet of Smart Buses, with six buses currently plying on the Jehangir Chowk-Hazratbal route via Khanyar, and two buses operating between Tourist Reception Centre (TRC) and Women's College, Batapora via Dargah Hazratbal, catering to the commuting needs of female students.

The government further said that one JKRTC e-bus is operating on the Lal Chowk-Gulab Bagh route via Dargah Hazratbal, which also serves students of the University of Kashmir.

The Transport Department said that JKRTC is not in a position to operate a dedicated bus service exclusively for female students on the said route due to limited fleet strength—(KNO)

Govt rules out regularising Gram Rozgar Sahayaks

RAJA SYED RATHER

Srinagar, Mar 28: The Jammu and Kashmir government on Saturday said there is no proposal under consideration to regularise or absorb Gram Rozgar Sahayaks (GRSs) engaged under MGNREGA on a permanent basis.

Replying to an unstarred question (A.Q. No. 1524) tabled by MLA Javid Hassan Baig, the Department of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj said that all supporting staff engaged under the centrally sponsored MGNREGA scheme are purely on a temporary and contractual basis.

"Their engagement is co-terminus with the project or scheme and is not against any clear vacancy," the government said, adding that as of now, no proposal exists for the regularisation of such staff.

On whether any committee was constituted in 2009 to address the issue of GRS regularisation, it replied in the negative.

Regarding honorarium, the government said that it has been periodically enhanced for MGNREGA supporting staff, including GRS. It said that the latest revision was carried out under Government Order No. 49-RD & PR of



2024 dated January 30, 2024.

As per the revised structure, the honorarium of GRS has been increased from Rs 6,806 to Rs 10,209. Similarly, Technical Assistants' honorarium has been raised from Rs 11,000 to Rs 16,500, MISOs from Rs 11,000 to Rs 13,200, and Administrative/Accounts Assistants from Rs 6,806 to Rs 10,209.

The government further said that any future enhancement in honorarium will be considered when the State Employment Guarantee Council (SEGC) meets.

On job security or interim relief for long-serving GRS staff, the government reiterated that the position remains the same as stated above—(KNO)

'Over Rs 1.25 Cr allocated for school repairs'

RAJA SYED RATHER

Srinagar, Mar 28: The government on Saturday informed the Legislative Assembly that significant funds have been sanctioned and utilised for major repair works in schools across Jammu & Kashmir under the Samagra Shiksha Scheme over the past two years, with further allocations made for the financial year.

Replying to an unstarred question by MLA Peerzada Feroze Ahmad, the Minister in-charge School Education Department, as reported by the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), said that a total of 372 major repair works were taken up during 2023-24 and 2024-25, for which Rs 1,258 lakh were approved. Out of this, Rs 857 lakh were released, and Rs 532 lakh have been expended so far.

Providing year-wise details, the minister said

that during 2023-24, as many as 263 works were executed with Rs 922 lakh approved, Rs 672 lakh released and Rs 496.27 lakh spent. In 2024-25, 109 works were taken up with Rs 336 lakh approved, Rs 185 lakh released, and Rs 35.73 lakh expended.

For the current financial year 2025-26, the government said that Rs 1,340 lakh have been approved for carrying out major repairs in 322 schools, out of which Rs 533 lakh have been released so far, while expenditure is yet to be reported.

The approved works, the minister said, include whitewashing and painting, repair of cracks, damaged tile work, installation of grills, repair of window panes and doors, and repair of trusses and roofs, among other necessary interventions aimed at improving school

infrastructure. Replying to another part of the question regarding basic infrastructure, the government said that under the Samagra Shiksha Scheme, the School Education Department has been strengthening facilities in schools across the Union Territory.

These include provision of Additional Classrooms (ACRs), boundary walls, separate toilets for boys and girls, headmaster rooms, drinking water facilities, and major repairs, besides support for building-less schools.

"Facilities such as computer rooms, art and craft rooms, science laboratories (including Physics, Chemistry and Biology labs), and library rooms are also being provided based on enrolment and infrastructure gaps, as per UDISE data," the government said—(KNO)

India's Agricultural Transformation: Record Output, Rising Exports, And Global Leadership

Press Information Bureau

India's agricultural sector continues to play a pivotal role in sustaining rural livelihoods, ensuring economic resilience, and safeguarding national food security. Agriculture and allied activities account for nearly one-fifth of the country's gross value added at current prices, employ approximately 46.1 percent of the workforce, and support close to 55 percent of the population, underscoring their substantial socio-economic significance. Over the past five years, the sector has achieved an average annual growth rate of around 4.4 percent at constant prices, reflecting enhanced expansion supported by improved farm practices, technological integration, and more resilient production systems.

India's Agricultural Production Performance
In the agricultural year 2024-25, India recorded an unprecedented foodgrain output of 357.73 million metric tonnes (MMT), marking an increase of 25.43 million metric tonnes (MMT) over the preceding year, reflecting sustained gains in productivity, improved input management, and strengthened institutional support to farmers. The increase was primarily driven by higher production of rice, wheat, maize, and coarse cereals (including millets, designated as Shree Anna).

Horticulture has simultaneously emerged as a major driver of agricultural transformation and value addition. Total horticulture production reached 362.08 million tonnes (MT) in 2024-25, indicating a structural shift towards high-value crops. According to the second advance estimates, production increased from 280.70 million tonnes in 2013-14 to 367.72 million tonnes in 2024-25. This output comprises approximately 114.51 million tonnes of fruits, 219.67 million tonnes of vegetables, and 33.54 million tonnes from other horticultural crops. The gradual scaling of both foodgrain and horticultural production underscores India's strengthening domestic agricultural base and its growing prominence in global agri-food systems.

India in Global Agricultural Markets
India's agricultural exports have grown steadily in recent years. Agricultural export earnings increased from USD 34.5 billion in FY20 to USD 51.1 billion in FY25, reflecting a CAGR of 8.2 percent. In FY25, agri-food exports, including processed food products, amounted to USD 49.43 billion, accounting for about 11.2 percent of total exports. Notably, the share of processed food exports has also risen consistently, from 14.9 percent in FY18 to 20.4 percent in FY25, indicating a progressive shift toward higher value-added within the agricultural export basket.

These trends underline the expanding role of processed and diversified agricultural products in strengthening export competitiveness while creating new opportunities across production, processing, and global market integration.

India holds a strong position in global agriculture, supported by diversified production systems and region-specific strengths across cereals, pulses, horticulture, and plantation crops. With the world's second-largest agricultural land area, India is a global leader in farm output, ranking among the world's top producers across several commodities, reflecting both the scale and sustainability of its agricultural production.

India's Dominance in Cereals, Pulses, and Millets

Rice and Wheat: India ranks as the world's second-largest producer of both rice and wheat, with output reaching 150.18 million tonnes of rice and 117.94 million tonnes of wheat during the agricultural year 2024-25. Rice production is primarily concentrated in states such as Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, and West Bengal. At the same time, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Punjab constitute the leading wheat-producing regions, reflecting the geographic concentration of cereal production within the country.

Pulses and Millets: India also leads globally in pulse production, recording an output of 25.68 million tonnes (2024-25), with Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan serving as the principal producing states. The country also ranks first worldwide in millet production, achieving approximately 18.59 million tonnes (2024-25), largely driven by Rajasthan, Maharashtra, and Karnataka.

In terms of trade performance, Rice exports reached USD 12.95 billion in 2024-2025, while exports of pulses and millets amounted to USD 855 million and USD 59.20 million, respectively. These figures underscore the growing international demand for diversified, climate-resilient cereal crops, reinforcing India's strategic role in global food and nutrition security.

India's Global Position in Horticulture
Fruits and Vegetables: India is the world's second-largest producer of fruits and vegetables, with output reaching 114.51 million tonnes of fruits and 219.67 million tonnes of vegetables in 2024-25. Fruit production is primarily concentrated in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu, while Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, and Gujarat lead vegetable output. Exports of fruits and vegetables amounted to USD 1,818.56 million in 2024-25, reflecting the increasing contribution of high-value horticulture crops to India's agricultural trade and in global market integration.

Dry Onion: India also ranks first globally in dry onion production, contributing nearly 25 percent of total world output, largely from Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat.

India's Leadership in High-Value Cash Crops

Sugarcane: In high-value cash crops, India is the second-largest producer of sugarcane, with output of 454.61 million tonnes (2024-25), mainly from Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra.

Cotton: India ranks as the world's second largest producer of cotton, with output estimated at approximately 5.05 million tonnes (converted from bales) in 2024-25. Production is concentrated mainly in Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Gujarat, which constitute the principal cotton-growing states. On the trade front, despite global tariff-related challenges, India's cotton exports to the USA during January-October 2025 amounted to USD 31.31 billion, indicating relative stability in export performance amid evolving international market conditions.

Tea: India ranks second globally in tea production, with output reaching 1.203 million tonnes during April-December 2024-25. Production is concentrated in Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka. Tea exports during the period from April to October 2025-26 amounted to USD 605.90 million, up 15.16 percent from the corresponding period of the previous year.

Spices: India continues to lead the world as the leading producer, with total production reaching 12 million metric tonnes in 2023-24. Major producing states include Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, and Andhra Pradesh. Spices exports reached USD 4.52 billion in FY25, underscoring India's strong global market presence in this segment.

Coconut: India ranks first globally in coconut production, with an annual output of approximately 21.3 billion nuts. Coconut exports were valued at USD 513 million in 2024-25, reflecting steady international demand.

Coffee: India produces around 0.36 million tonnes of coffee annually, with nearly 70 percent exported to 128 countries. Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu are the principal producing states. During April-October FY 2025-26, coffee exports amounted to USD 1,176.31 million, representing an increase of approximately 12 percent over the corresponding period of the previous year.

The Union Budget 2026-27 has emphasised on the promotion of high value crops, by announcing targeted support for coconut, sandalwood, cocoa and cashew in coastal regions, agar trees in the North Eastern states, and high value nuts such as almonds, walnuts and pine nuts in hilly areas. This region-specific approach reflects a policy intent to harness local agro-climatic strengths, and encourage diversification towards crops that offer higher economic returns.

Therefore, India's diversified commodity base and geographically balanced production systems strengthen its role in stabilising global food supply chains. The integration of improved production practices with expanding export markets reflects a transition towards resilient agriculture that boosts economic growth while promoting long-term environmental balance.

Public Policy Interventions Supporting Resilient Production Systems

India's agricultural policy framework combines financial support, productivity enhancement, and risk management measures to strengthen farmer welfare and sectoral resilience.

Budget Allocation
The Government has significantly enhanced budgetary allocations to the agriculture sector, underscoring a long-term policy commitment to strengthening farmers' welfare and rural livelihoods, and over the years, reflecting a consistent commitment to farmers' welfare.

Budget allocation for the Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare increased from Rs. 21,933.50 crore (approximately USD 2.64 billion) in 2013-2014 to Rs. 1,27,290.16 crore (approximately USD 15.34 billion) in 2025-26, representing a substantial enhancement in public investment over the period. Building on this trajectory, the budget allocated (2026-27) of Rs. 1,30,561.38 crore (approximately USD 15.73 billion) to the Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare reaffirms the continued prioritization of agricultural development.

From Input Support to Resilient Growth: India's Productivity-Led Agricultural Strategy

India's agricultural development strategy has progressively shifted toward enhancing productivity through improved input-use efficiency, technological adoption, and the promotion of sustainable agronomic practices. Mission-oriented interventions, including the National Food Security and Nutrition Mission, the Mission for Aatmanirbharta in Pulses, and the National Mission on Edible Oils-Oilseeds and Oil Palm, along with targeted extension and institutional credit support, are driving this structural transformation toward higher productivity, reduced import dependence, and enhanced resilience within the agricultural sector.

The National Food Security and Nutrition Mission (NFSNM), formerly the National Food Security Mission (NFSM), is a centrally sponsored scheme to increase the production of rice, wheat, pulses, and nutri-cereals/coarse cereals in the country.

The Mission for Aatmanirbharta in Pulses (2025-31) aims to achieve self-sufficiency in pulses by significantly enhancing domestic production reduce import dependence, and pave the way for an "Aatmanirbhar Bharat" in pulses.

The National Mission on Edible Oils (NMEO), including the Oil Palm (NMEO-OP) and Oilseeds (NMEO-Oilseeds) initiatives, aims to achieve self-reliance in edible oil production by 2030-31. It focuses on expanding cultivation areas, enhancing production and productivity through quality seeds, enhancing technology, and increasing farm income to reduce import dependency.

Quality Seeds and Soil Health:
Under the Sub-Mission on Seeds and Planting Materials (SMSP) initiative (a centrally sponsored scheme under the umbrella scheme of "Green Revolution- Krishonnati Yojana"), approximately 6.85 lakh Seed Villages have been established, resulting in the production of 1,649.26 lakh quintals of quality seeds.

As of mid-November 2025, approximately 25.55 crore Soil Health Card scheme cards have been issued to promote balanced and site-specific nutrient management.

The share of gross irrigated area has increased to 55.8 percent under Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY), reflecting progress in expanding irrigation coverage and improving water-use efficiency.

Sub-Mission on Seeds and Planting Material initiative (SMSP) seeks to expand the supply of certified and quality seeds while improving the seed replacement rate and the standard of farm saved seeds. It also works to modernise seed production, processing, testing and storage infrastructure, and encourages the adoption of advanced techniques across the seed value chain.

A Soil Health Card is issued to farmers for each landholding, detailing soil status based on 12 parameters including Nitrogen, Phosphorus, Potassium, Sulphur, Zinc, Iron, Copper, Manganese, Boron, pH, Electrical Conductivity, and Organic Carbon. Issued every two years, it guides farmers on suitable fertilisers and soil treatments to maintain long term soil health.

Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY) aims to improve on farm water efficiency by promoting drip and sprinkler irrigation systems. It also supports small scale water storage and conservation measures to strengthen water availability for micro irrigation.

Credit, Mechanisation and Technology:
Ground-level agricultural credit disbursement reached Rs.28.67 lakh crore in FY 2024-25, reflecting the structural expansion of institutional finance to the farm sector.

As of 31 March 2025, 7.72 crore operative Kisan Credit Card (KCC) accounts were in operation, strengthening farmers' access to timely and affordable credit.

Between 2014-15 and 2025-26, 27,554 Custom Hiring Centres (CHCs) were established to enhance smallholder access to farm mechanisation services. A Custom Hiring Centre (CHC) is a unit comprising a set of farm machinery, implements, and equipment meant for hiring by farmers.

Livestock sector productivity has been supported through large-scale technology and health interventions, including approximately 125 crore vaccinations against Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) since 2020 and 88.32 million artificial inseminations conducted during 2024-25.

Kisan Credit Card (KCC) scheme meets the financial requirements of farmers at various stages of farming. The scheme aims at providing adequate and timely credit support from the banking system under a single window with flexible and simplified procedure to the farmers for their cultivation and other needs like short term credit requirements for cultivation of crops, post-harvest expenses, investment credit requirement for agriculture and allied activities, produce marketing loan, consumption requirements of farmer household, working capital for maintenance of farm assets and activities allied to agriculture.

Sustainable Agriculture, Extension, and Mission Mode Initiatives:

Natural farming expanded to 17,632 clusters covering 6.39 lakh hectares, with 15.79 lakh farmers enrolled

Kisan Call Centres handled 30.65 lakh farmer queries in 2024-25

Oilseed mission recorded over 18 percent increase in oilseed area, nearly 55 percent in production, and about 31 percent in productivity between 2014-15 and 2024-25

Domestic edible oil availability reached 121.75 lakh tonnes in 2023-24
Ethanol blending saved over Rs.1.44 lakh crore in foreign exchange as of August 2025

These interventions reflect a shift towards technology-driven, resource-efficient, and improved production systems that strengthen farm productivity and resilience.

Integrated Support for Farmers' Welfare, Risk Management, and Collective Action

Securing stable farm incomes, institutionalising risk mitigation mechanisms, and strengthening cooperative networks are integral to enhancing farmer resilience and sustaining agricultural growth amid increasing climatic and market variability.

Price and Income Support:
The Minimum Support Price (MSP) has been announced for 22 mandated crops and fixed at least 1.5 times the cost of production, with upward revisions for the Kharif Marketing Season (KMS) 2025-26 and Rabi Marketing Season (RMS) 2026-27

Under Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN), over Rs.4.27 lakh crore has been disbursed in 22 instalments (as on 17th March 2026), providing direct income support to farmers.

The Pradhan Mantri Kisan Maandhan Yojana (PMKMY) has enrolled 24.95 lakh farmers as of 2nd Feb 2026, extending social security coverage to small and marginal cultivators.

Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN), is a Central Sector Scheme offering annual financial assistance of Rs. 6,000/- to each eligible farmer family, delivered in three equal instalments of Rs. 2,000/-, into their Aadhaar seeded bank accounts of farmers through DBT mode.

Pradhan Mantri Kisan Maandhan Yojana (PMKMY) scheme aims to provide social security net for the Small and Marginal Farmers (SMF) by way of pension, as they have minimal or no savings to sustain their livelihood during their old age and to support them in the event of consequent loss of livelihood. Under this scheme, a minimum fixed pension of Rs.3,000/-per month will be provided to the eligible small and marginal farmers, subject to certain exclusion clauses, on attaining the age of 60 years. The scheme is a voluntary and contributory pension scheme, with entry age of 18 to 40 years.

Crop Insurance Protection:
The Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) insured 4.19 crore farmers during 2024-25, covering 6.2 crore hectares.

Since 2016-17, over 86 crore applications have been processed, with claims exceeding Rs.1.90 lakh crore disbursed.

Coverage expanded by 32 percent compared to 2022-23, strengthening protection against climate and market-related risks.

Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) is a crop insurance scheme aiming to provide financial protection to farmers against crop loss due to natural disasters (hail, drought, famine), pests, and diseases. PMFBY provides crop insurance at a cost-effective premium to all Indian farmers through a network of insurance companies and banks.

Strengthening Cooperatives and Collective Systems:

Of 67,930 Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) under computerisation, 54,150 have been onboarded onto Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) platforms, with 43,678 operational.

A total of 18,183 new multipurpose cooperative societies were registered by March 2025.

A decentralised grain storage programme is operational in 11 PACS, with 500 new godowns announced in 2024 to enhance local storage capacity.

Institutional reforms through the National Cooperation Policy and Tribhuvan Sahkari University aim to strengthen governance and capacity-building within the cooperative sector.

Collectively, these interventions consolidate income stability, institutional risk protection, and expand collective market access, thereby reinforcing the resilience and long-term sustainability of India's agricultural economy.

Market Reforms, Value-Chain Modernisation, and Public Food Distribution

The strengthening of food management systems, market infrastructure, and value addition mechanisms has emerged as a central pillar of India's farm-to-market strategy. Strategic investment in storage capacity, processing facilities, digital market platforms, and public distribution reforms is enhancing supply chain efficiency, stabilising prices, and improving farm-level remuneration. Collectively, these interventions are fostering a more resilient, transparent, and integrated food ecosystem that balances producer incentives with consumer welfare.

Market Linkages and Infrastructure:

Significant investments in market linkages and post-harvest infrastructure have strengthened agricultural value chains and improved producers' integration with formal markets. As of 28 February 2026, 49,796 storage projects had received financial assistance amounting to Rs.4,832.70 crore, while 25,009 marketing infrastructure projects had received subsidies totaling Rs.2,193.17 crore. The e-National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) platform expanded its outreach to 1.8 crore farmers, 2.72 lakh traders, and 4,724 Farmer-Producer Organisations (FPOs) across 1,656 mandis in 23 States and 4 Union Territories, enhancing digital price discovery and inter-market trade.

The e-National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) is a pan-India electronic trading portal designed to integrate existing APMC (Agricultural Produce Market Committee) mandis across the country into a unified online platform, enabling "One Nation One Market" for agricultural commodities. The platform streamlines agricultural marketing by offering single-window services such as commodity arrivals, AI-based quality assaying, e-bidding, and direct e-payment to farmers. It aims to enhance transparency, efficiency, and competitiveness in agricultural trade while expanding market access for farmers and reducing information asymmetry.

Under the Formation and Promotion of 10,000 FPOs scheme launched in 2020, 10,000 FPOs had been registered by 28 February 2026. In the fisheries sector, collectivisation has been reinforced through the formation of 2,195 Farmers' Fisheries Producer Organisations (FFPOs), alongside the extension of Kisan Credit Card benefits to 4.39 lakh fishers, thereby broadening institutional credit access and enhancing sectoral resilience.

Food Processing and Value Addition:

The food processing sector plays a significant role in India's industrial landscape, accounting for 12.91 percent of organised manufacturing employment. Under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana (PMKSY), 1,185 projects had been completed as of 30 November 2025, strengthening modern processing and cold-chain infrastructure. The Production Linked Incentive Scheme for the Food Processing Industry (PLISFI) approved 169 applications, mobilising investments of Rs.9,207 crore, with incentives amounting to Rs.2,162.55 crore disbursed by 31 December 2025.

Additionally, the Pradhan Mantri Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises Scheme (PMFME) supported 4,04,062 applications,

facilitating 1,72,707 loans with term lending of Rs.14.19 thousand crore and extending seed capital assistance of Rs.1,277.45 crore to women Self-Help Groups as of 31 December 2025, thereby promoting decentralised value addition and inclusive enterprise development.

Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana (PMKSY) constitutes a comprehensive initiative aimed at developing modern infrastructure for the food processing sector. It seeks to establish an integrated and efficient supply chain spanning from the farm gate to retail markets. The scheme enhances farmers' price realisation, minimises post-harvest losses, promotes value addition, and supports income enhancement. Additionally, it generates rural employment, increases processing capacity, and strengthens the export competitiveness of processed food products.

The Production Linked Incentive Scheme for the Food Processing Industry (PLISFI) proposes financial incentive to modernize and enhance competitiveness of the food processing industry by manufacturing specific categories of food products having high potential for growth in output and value addition.

Pradhan Mantri Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises Scheme (PMFME) is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme by the Ministry of Food Processing Industries, designed to address the challenges faced by the micro-enterprises and to tap the potential of groups and cooperatives in supporting the upgradation and formalization of these enterprises.

Procurement and Food Security:

The Central Government procures foodgrain to ensure food security, while providing price support to farmers through Minimum Support Prices announced by the Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare and Co-operation. The details of the procurement of food grains are as follows:

RMS 2025-26 (Wheat): 300.35 LMT procured; 25.13 Lakh farmers benefited.

KMS 2024-25 (Paddy): 832.17 LMT procured; 118.59 Lakh farmers benefited.

KMS 2025-26 (Paddy) (as on 17.11.2025): 243.48 LMT procured; 21.22 Lakh farmers benefited.

Coarse Grains/Millets 2024-25: 11.72 LMT procured.

KMS 2025-26 (Coarse Grains/Millets) (as on 16.11.2025): 64.365MT procured (ongoing).

Therefore, the government maintains adequate food stocks to meet buffer norms for food security, ensure regular supply through the Public Distribution System, and enable market intervention to stabilise open market prices.

Under the National Food Security Act, subsidised foodgrains have been provided to 81.35 crore beneficiaries, covering up to 75 percent of the rural population and 50 percent of the urban population.

Storage and Public Distribution System:

The implementation of the One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) has achieved 99.8 percent Aadhaar seeding of ration cards. It has been operationalised across all 36 States and Union Territories, enhancing beneficiary portability and inclusion. Over 99 percent of the 5.43 lakh Fair Price Shops are equipped with electronic point-of-sale (ePos) devices, facilitating the digitisation of more than 98 percent of transactions and strengthening transparency in distribution. In FY24, Rs.267.6 crore was transferred through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) to over 10 lakh beneficiaries, improving targeting efficiency and accountability. Collectively, these reforms reinforce market integration, reduce distribution inefficiencies, and strengthen food security within an increasingly digitised farm-to-distribution ecosystem.

Sustainable Development Goals Linkages

India's agricultural initiatives are closely aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), integrating national development priorities with global sustainability commitments. Productivity enhancement, public procurement and food security measures directly contribute to SDG 2 (Zero Hunger). Initiatives promoting sustainable agriculture, including soil health management, natural farming and resource-efficient practices support SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and SDG 13 (Climate Action). Strategic investments in post-harvest infrastructure, value addition, storage, and digital agricultural markets reinforce SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure). Together, these interventions reinforce a resilient and resilient agricultural ecosystem aligned with global development priorities.

Conclusion

India's agricultural transformation reflects a balanced approach that combines strong production growth, expanding global market presence, and targeted policy interventions across the farm-to-market value chain. Record foodgrain and horticulture output, growing exports, and diversified commodity leadership demonstrate the sector's sustainability and adaptability to changing economic and climatic conditions. Mission-driven support through inputs, income protection, market infrastructure, and digital food systems has strengthened productivity, improved farmer welfare, and enhanced food security outcomes. As resilient production systems continue to evolve, the expanding role of agriculture provides a strong foundation for deeper integration with allied activities, further supporting rural livelihoods, value addition, and long-term economic stability.

Full article on <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressNoteDetails.aspx?Noteld=157935&ModuleId=3®=3&lang=1>

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BUDGET SESSION 2026

Rs. 27.245 lakh disbursed among fire victims in Eidgah constituency: Deputy CM

KT News Desk

JAMMU, MARCH 28: Deputy Chief Minister, Surinder Choudhary, Saturday said that about Rs. 27.245 lakh have been disbursed among the fire affected families in Eidgah constituency during 2024-25 and 2025-26 financial years.

While replying to the calling attention moved by Legislator Mubarak Gul in the Legislative Assembly, the Deputy Chief Minister, as per an official statement, said that a total 14 Fire incidents have been reported in Eidgah constituency in last two years.

He said that responding promptly, immediate relief and rescue measures were initiated by the District Administration preventing any further loss.

The Deputy Chief Minister said that the relief assistance, admissible under SDRF norms, has been provided to the fire victims from time to time out of the funds available under SDRF.



He added that during 2024-25 and 2025-26, in fire incidents in Eidgah Constituency, relief assistance was provided to 20 fully damaged houses (1.30 lakh each), 15 partially damaged houses (6,500 each), 3 fully damaged huts (8,000

each) and 1 damaged cowshed (3,000).

"The recent Fire incident cases of the year 2026 are under active consideration and eligible persons shall be provided relief assistance on priority as per SDRF norms," he added.

Dachigam Control Room functioning round the clock: Javed Rana

Says wildlife deptt taking measures to tackle human-wild boar conflict

KT News Desk

JAMMU, MARCH 28: Minister for Forest, Ecology and Environment, Javed Ahmad Rana, Saturday informed that the Department of Wildlife Protection has taken several measures to effectively and promptly mitigate human-wild boar conflict in and around Dachigam National Park, including New Theed village.

The Minister, as per an official statement, was replying to a Calling Attention Motion moved by Salman Ali Sagar on behalf of Ali Mohammad Sagar in the Legislative Assembly.

The Minister stated that, as part of mitigation efforts, a cement concrete toe wall has been constructed along the existing chain-link fencing over an approximate length of 3 kilometre to prevent wild boars from burrowing beneath the fence. He added that regular anti-plastic and sanitation drives are being conducted within and around Dachigam



National Park to remove waste that may attract wild boars.

He further informed that the Dachigam Control Room is functioning round the clock to respond to incidents of wild boar sightings outside the park.

The Minister said that due to effective management of the human-wild boar conflict,

no human injuries have been reported so far in and around Dachigam National Park, including New Theed village.

He added that regular advisories and awareness programmes are being conducted in fringe villages, particularly for the farming communities. In addition, regular patrolling is being carried out and

equipment such as noise guns and firecrackers are used, whenever required, to deter wild boars from entering affected villages.

The reply further stated that the wild boar (*Sus scrofa*) is an alien invasive species in the Kashmir habitat in general and Dachigam National Park in particular and was introduced during the reign of Maharaja Gulab Singh (1846-1857) for hunting purposes.

It was also informed that Hangul population estimation is carried out by the Department every two years. As per the data, the estimated Hangul population has shown a steady increase over the past decade—from 183 in 2015 to 214 in 2017, 237 in 2019, 261 in 2021, 289 in 2023 and 323 in 2025.

The data indicates a consistent rise in the Hangul population, suggesting that the increase in wild boar population has not adversely affected the growth of Hangul in Dachigam National Park.

GMC Udhampur delivering efficient services: Health Minister

KT News Desk

JAMMU, MARCH 28: Minister for Health and Medical Education Sakeena Itoo Saturday informed the House that the government Medical College (GMC) and Associated Hospital Udhampur is functioning in conformity with the prescribed norms and standards and continues to provide efficient healthcare services to the public.

The Minister, as per an official statement, said this in reply to the Calling Attention motion moved by Pawan Kumar Gupta in the Legislative Assembly Saturday.

He added that all essential departments, including Out-Patient Department (OPD), In-Patient Department (IPD), Emergency Services, and diagnostic facilities, are fully

functional and adequately catering to the healthcare requirements of the region.

Regarding the incident reported on the night of 23rd January, 2026 in the Casualty/Emergency Section of Associated Hospital, Udhampur, the Minister said that an Internal Inquiry Committee was constituted forthwith to ascertain the factual position and the circumstances surrounding the occurrence of this unfortunate incident. She added that the Committee has observed that the patient had either expired prior to arrival or succumbed immediately upon being brought to the hospital and the formal declaration of death was made subsequently in view of the presence of attendants/relatives.

The Minister also said that

the findings of the Inquiry Committee established that the doctors and medical staff on duty responded promptly and discharged their professional responsibilities in accordance with the established medical protocols under the circumstances.

She further said that in view of the incident and the circulation of related videos on social media platforms, the government appointed Professor Ashutosh Gupta, Principal, Government Medical College, Jammu, as the Inquiry Officer to conduct a comprehensive probe into the sequence of events, including administrative, security and institutional aspects.

The Minister reiterated the commitment of government to ensure efficient and

accountable functioning of Government Medical Colleges and Associated Hospitals across the Union Territory, while upholding the highest standards of patient care, institutional discipline and professional conduct. She added that necessary directions have been issued to the concerned authorities to ensure orderly functioning of emergency services and effective coordination in handling such situations.

The Minister also acknowledged the important role of public representatives in raising the matters of public concern. She expressed optimism that all the stakeholders will act in a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect to ensure the smooth functioning of healthcare institutions in the larger public interest.

WSS Magam Town Project to strengthen water supply: Govt

KT News Desk

JAMMU, MARCH 28: Minister for Jal Shakti, Forest, Ecology, Environment and Tribal Affairs, Javed Ahmad Rana, Saturday informed the Legislative Assembly that the government has undertaken WSS Magam Town project under AMRUT 2.0 to augment portable water in Magam and other adjoining areas.

The Minister, as per an official statement, was replying to a Calling Attention Motion moved by legislator Dr Shafi Ahmad Wani.

In his reply, the Minister said that the project has been taken up for extension and strengthening of the existing intake headworks at an approved cost of Rs 4.66 crore.

He informed that Rs 2.17 crore have been released so far, of which, an expenditure of Rs 0.77 crore has been incurred. The project is presently under execution and is expected to ensure sustainable discharge during low-flow periods.

The Minister further stated that an extension of the off-take point by 1.40 km in the nallah was initially proposed. However, in view of concerns raised by the residents of the Tangmarg area, the matter was referred to the Divisional Commissioner, Kashmir, for resolution.

He added that it was unambiguously decided to allow an extension of 500 metres to safeguard the interests of both the regions. This decision has

significantly improved the discharge availability for the water supply scheme.

The Minister further informed that a portion of Kanihama village is being covered under the Mazhama Water Supply Scheme under Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM), which envisages provision of water from an alternate source, Sukhnag Nallah.

He said that upon completion and commissioning of the scheme, the additional supply from this alternate source will reduce dependence on the existing Ferozpora Nallah, thereby improving overall service levels in Magam, Kanihama and adjoining habitations. It was informed that the scheme has been physically completed and is awaiting commissioning.

Vande Mataram @ 150

Rally organised to pay tribute to Martyrs in Kishtwar

KT News Desk

KISHTWAR, MARCH 28: In a stirring display of patriotism and collective remembrance, the Police Department, in collaboration with the District Administration Kishtwar, on Saturday organized a mega rally under the special "Vande Mataram" campaign to commemorate Shaheed Divas and mark the 150th anniversary of India's iconic national song.

The rally, as per an official statement, was led by Additional Deputy Commissioner Pawan Kotwal and DySP Headquarters, Dr. Ishan Gupta. The event formed part of a week-long celebrations being held from March



23 to March 30, 2026, across the country to honour the indomitable spirit of patriotism and remembering the brave hearts who laid down their lives for the nation.

The rally, which commenced from District Police Lines culminated at Dak Bungalow, witnessed enthusiastic

participation from students, officers and officials from civil and police administration, reflecting a strong sense of unity and national pride.

The campaign continues to inspire citizens, especially the youth, to uphold the values of sacrifice, integrity and devotion to the nation.

Shri Amarnathji Yatra 2026

Div Com Jammu reviews action plan for smooth conduct of annual pilgrimage

KT News Desk

JAMMU, MARCH 28: Divisional Commissioner Jammu Ramesh Kumar Saturday chaired a meeting to review the District wise Action Plan for the execution of development works in Jammu Division for the smooth conduct of Shri Amarnathji yatra 2026.

The meeting, as per an official statement, was attended by MD JPDCL, Deputy Commissioners of Jammu, Kathua, Samba, Udhampur and Ramban, Commissioner JMC, Director ULB, Director RDD, Director Health Services and senior officers and HODs from PWD, PHE and other stakeholder departments.

The Divisional Commissioner



sought the district-wise and department-wise details of works kept in the action plan for meeting the needs of logistics and civic amenities for the pilgrims

and security personnel. The action plan includes civil works for the augmentation of lodging, boarding facilities at the lodgement centres in Kathua, Samba,

Jammu, Udhampur and Ramban. Reviewing the Work plan of each District, the Divisional Commissioner directed the Deputy Commissioners and HoDs to expedite the tendering process to complete the works before the commencement of the annual Yatra.

The Divisional Commissioner further directed the DCs to start the repair, renovation and face-lifting works at all lodgement centres in their respective districts.

Similar directions were issued to Tourism, JPDCL, RDD and other stakeholder departments for ensuring timely commencement and completion of the new and renovation works.

Downstream processing of medicinal, aromatic plants concludes at CSIR-IIIM Srinagar

KT News Desk

Srinagar, March 28 The CSIR-Indian Institute of Integrative Medicine (CSIR-IIIM), Srinagar Branch, concluded a three-day hands-on training programme on Downstream Processing of Medicinal & Aromatic Plants (MAPs), with intensive modules on extraction technologies, Gas Chromatography (GC) and High-Performance Liquid Chromatography (HPLC). The programme was conducted under the CSIR-Integrated Skill Initiatives and brought together 20 participants from across India, reflecting the growing national demand for practical, industry-oriented training in natural product processing and quality analytics.

Presiding over the valedictory function as Chief Guest, Dr. Zabeer Ahmed, Director, CSIR-IIIM, as per PIB statement,

distributed certificates to the participants and underscored the strategic importance of downstream processing in converting biodiversity into validated, market-ready products. In his presidential address, Dr. Ahmed highlighted that extraction science and chromatographic analytics form the backbone of quality assurance, safety, and efficacy for herbal and aroma-based value chains. He emphasized that India's leadership in the Medicinal & Aromatic Plants sector must be strengthened through standardization, traceability, and robust analytical characterization, enabling products that can meet both domestic and global regulatory expectations.

Dr. Ahmed further stated that such hands-on programmes are critical to building a skilled workforce that can translate scientific knowledge into scalable



solutions for farmers, entrepreneurs and industry. Linking the programme to the national vision of "Viksit Bharat", he noted that science-enabled value addition in MAPs can accelerate rural livelihoods, strengthen agri-based enterprises and support innovation-driven growth. He also emphasized that AYUSH systems can be synergized with

modern allopathy through rigorous evidence generation, process optimization and advanced analytical platforms—thereby improving confidence, safety and acceptance of plant-based interventions across healthcare ecosystems.

The three-day programme was designed to provide an end-to-end understanding of

downstream processing workflows, from raw material overview to extraction, separation and analytical profiling. On Day 1, the programme commenced with an overview of the scope and significance of MAPs by Dr. Phalsteen Sultan, followed by a technical session on the role of chromatography in phytochemical separation, identification

and quality control by Dr. Syed Khalid. The afternoon session included hands-on training on oil extraction techniques conducted by Dr. Qazi Parvaiz, focusing on practical aspects of process parameters and best practices.

On Day 2, the Participants received hands-on demonstrations on different chromatographic techniques, with emphasis on method principles, sample preparation, and interpretation of chromatograms for ensuring product consistency and quality. On day 3, Dr. Younis Rather, Scientist, GMC Srinagar, conducted an intensive hands-on module on HPLC techniques, covering analytical workflows relevant to natural products and herbal matrices. Participants also visited the Gene Bank facility at CSIR-IIIM Srinagar, gaining exposure to institutional resources supporting

conservation, characterization, and research on valuable biological germplasm.

Earlier, Dr. Nasir Ul Rasheed, Nodal Skill Development, briefed the participants on the CSIR-Integrated Skill Initiatives and its role in systematic capacity building through hands-on, application-driven training. He also informed that CSIR-IIIM has recently launched job-oriented and job-role skill development programmes approved by NCVET and LSSDC, aligned with NEP 2020 guidelines, aimed at enhancing employability and workforce readiness.

At the valedictory session, Dr. Qazi Parvaiz delivered the welcome address, while Dr. Phalsteen Sultan presented an overview of the programme outcomes and learning highlights. The proceedings were conducted by Dr. Khalid Yousaf, and Dr. Fayaz Malik proposed the vote of thanks.

DC Srinagar reviews functioning of Aadhaar Centres

KT News Desk

Srinagar, Mar 28: Deputy Commissioner (DC) Srinagar, Akshay Labroo on Saturday reviewed the progress of Mandatory Biometric updates for Aadhaar in a meeting held here at Meeting Hall of the DC Office Complex. He also reviewed the functioning of Aadhaar Centres and the status of establishment of a Centre of Excellence under Common Services Centres (CSC) in the district.

The meeting was attended by Additional Deputy Commissioner, Mir Imtiaz Ul Aziz, SP headquarters, Umar Shah, Chief Planning Officer, Fayaz Ahmad Dar, SDM East, Zubair Ahmad, Assistant Commissioner Revenue, Umar Gulzar, District Social Welfare Officer, Dr Mukhtar Ahmad, District Statistics & Evaluation Officer, Shah Ismail Bangroo, Chief Education Officer, District Informatics Officer, Medical Superintendents of various City Hospitals, all Tehsildars, Project Manager, UIDAI, District Coordinator CSC E-Governance and other concerned.

At the outset, the Deputy Commissioner was given a detailed overview of the progress on Mandatory Biometric Updates for Aadhaar, achievements under the Civil Registration System (CRS) with a focus on the Birth Registration-Based Aadhaar Enrolment (BRBAE).

On the occasion, the DC stressed the need to ensure timely completion of Aadhaar based Mandatory Biometric Updates (MBU) and emphasized expeditious disposal of pending Aadhaar cases, particularly those involving applicants above 100 years of age. He also underscored the importance of data analysis to achieve time-bound Aadhaar saturation in the district.

The DC further directed that all Aadhaar Centres be made fully functional to ensure greater convenience for the public.

While reviewing the status of infrastructure and preparedness for the establishment of the Centre of Excellence-CSC, the DC instructed the concerned Officers to complete all requisite arrangements and ensure that the Centre is made operational at the earliest to benefit the people.

The DC also stressed the importance of effective coordination among line departments and the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) to ensure seamless functioning of Aadhaar Centres and timely achievement of targets in the district.

Iran-backed Houthis enter month-old war, could further threaten shipping

AP

Dubai, Mar 28: Iranian-backed Houthi rebels entered the month-old war in the Middle East on Saturday by claiming a missile launch that Israel said it intercepted. Pakistan said regional powers plan to meet Sunday on how to end the war, while Iran expressed skepticism about the diplomatic efforts.

The war has threatened global supplies of oil, natural gas and fertilizer and disrupted air travel. Iran's grip on the strategic Strait of Hormuz has shaken markets and prices. The United States and Israel continue to strike Iran, whose retaliatory attacks have targeted Israel and neighboring Gulf Arab states.

The Houthis' entry could further hurt global shipping if they again target vessels in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait off the Red Sea.

There could be limited relief in sight after Iran on Friday agreed to allow humanitarian aid and agricultural shipments through the Strait of Hormuz following a request from the United Nations.

Israeli airstrikes continued Saturday. Associated Press footage showed smoke rising from north-eastern Tehran. Iran fired missiles toward Israel, and Israeli rescue service Magen David Adom said 11 people were lightly wounded in a town near Jerusalem.

Houthi involvement could further complicate war.

Houthi Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree said on the rebels' Al-Masirah satellite television station that they launched a barrage of ballistic missiles toward what he described as "sensitive Israeli military sites" in southern Israel.

Sirens went off around Beer Sheba and near Israel's main nuclear research center as Iran. The Lebanon-based Hezbollah militants also fired on Israel overnight.

If the Houthis increase attacks on commercial shipping, as they have in the past, it would further push up oil prices and destabilize "all of maritime security," said Ahmed Nagi, a senior Yemen analyst at the International Crisis Group. "The impact would not be limited to the energy market."

Countries have scrambled for alternative routes to the Strait of Hormuz. Bab el-Mandeb, at the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, is crucial for vessels heading to the Suez Canal through the Red Sea and Saudi Arabia has been sending millions of barrels of crude oil a day through it because the Strait of Hormuz is effectively closed.

About 12% of the world's trade



typically passes through Bab el-Mandeb and about 10% of global maritime trade — including 40% of container ship traffic — passes through the Suez Canal each year.

Houthi rebels attacked over 100 merchant vessels with missiles and drones, sinking two vessels, between November 2023 and January 2025, saying it was attacking in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza during the war there between Israel and Hamas.

The Houthis' involvement also would complicate the deployment of the USS Gerald R. Ford, the aircraft carrier that arrived in Croatia on Saturday for repairs. Sending the carrier to the Red Sea could draw attacks similar to those experienced by the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower in 2024 and the USS Harry S. Truman in 2025.

The Houthis have held Yemen's capital, Sanaa, since 2014. Saudi Arabia launched a war against the Houthis on behalf of Yemen's exiled government in 2015, and the rebels had stayed out of the current conflict due to their uneasy ceasefire with Saudi Arabia.

Attempts at diplomacy as US sends more troops to region

US President Donald Trump has given Iran until April 6 to reopen the Strait of Hormuz. Iran says it has not engaged in any negotiations.

Pakistan said Saturday that Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Egypt will send top diplomats to Islamabad for talks aimed at ending the war, arriving

Sunday for a two-day visit for "in-depth discussions on a range of issues, including efforts to de-escalate tensions in the region."

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said he and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian held "extensive discussions" on regional hostilities and efforts to end the war.

But the Iranian foreign minister, Abbas Araghchi, told his Turkish counterpart by phone that Tehran was skeptical about recent diplomatic efforts. Iranian state-run media said Araghchi accused the United States of making "unreasonable demands" and exhibiting "contradictory actions."

Trump envoy Steve Witkoff has said Washington delivered a 15-point "action list" to Iran for a possible ceasefire, with a proposal to restrict Iran's nuclear program — the issue at the heart of tensions with the US and Israel — and reopen the strait. Tehran rejected the proposal and presented a five-point proposal that included reparations and recognition of its sovereignty over the waterway.

Meanwhile, US ships with some 2,500 Marines have arrived in the region, and at least 1,000 paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne, trained to land in hostile territory to secure key positions and airfields, have been ordered to the Middle East.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the US "can achieve all of our objectives without ground troops." US troops suffer casualties at Saudi

base, AP sources say

More than two dozen US troops have been wounded in Iranian attacks on Saudi Arabia's Prince Sultan Air Base in the past week, according to two people who have been briefed on the matter and spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to comment publicly.

Iran fired six ballistic missiles and 29 drones at the base Friday, injuring at least 15 troops, including five seriously, they said.

The base, about 96 kilometers (60 miles) from the Saudi capital of Riyadh, came under attack twice earlier in the week, including a strike that wounded 14 US troops, according to the people briefed on the matter. The base is run by the Royal Saudi Air Force but is also used by US troops.

Death toll climbs

Iranian authorities say more than 1,900 people have been killed in the Islamic Republic, while 19 have been reported dead in Israel.

In Lebanon, where Israel has started an invasion in the south, officials said more than 1,100 people have been killed since the start of the war.

At least 13 US troops have been reported killed. In Iraq, where Iranian-supported militia groups have entered the conflict, 80 members of the security forces have died.

In Gulf states, 20 people have been killed and four others in the occupied West Bank.

India opposes China-led investment pact in WTO

PTI

New Delhi, Mar 28: India on Saturday said it has strongly opposed the contentious China-led Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD) Agreement for its incorporation into the WTO framework.

Incorporation of the IFD agreement risks eroding the functional limits of the WTO and undermining its foundational principles, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said in a social media post.

This was stated by India in the ongoing 14th ministerial conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Yaounde, Cameroon.

"At #WTOMC14, drawing inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi ji's philosophy of Truth prevailing over conformity, India showed the courage to stand alone on the contentious issue of the IFD Agreement and did not agree to its incorporation into the WTO framework as an Annex 4 Agreement," he said.

Annex 4 of the WTO Agreement contains Plurilateral Trade Agreements that are binding only on the WTO members that have accepted them, unlike the mandatory multilateral agreements.

As part of WTO reform discussions, members are discussing guardrails and legal safeguards for plurilaterals before the integration of any specific plurilateral outcome, Goyal said.

"In view of the systemic issue at hand, India showed openness to have good faith, comprehensive discussions and constructive engagement under the WTO Reform Agenda," he added.

At the MC13 in Abu Dhabi also, India had strongly opposed the pact.

A China-led group is pushing for the Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD) proposal. The proposal will be binding for only the signatory members.

The IFD was first mooted in 2017 by China and other countries that depend heavily on Chinese investments, and countries with sovereign wealth funds are party to that pact.

CONTD. FROM FRONT PAGE

LG calls for dismantling

and human resource, operationalisation of Addiction Treatment Facilities, Drug De-addiction registry portal, implementation of SoPs and activities undertaken by the line departments.

On the sidelines of the meeting, the Lieutenant Governor directed the senior officials to prioritize vibrant villages programme, with a dedicated focus on inclusive development of border villages.

The meeting was attended by Atal Dulloo, Chief Secretary; Nalin Prabhat, DGP; Shaileendra Kumar, Additional Chief Secretary, Finance Department; Chandraker Bharti, Principal Secretary Home; Dr Mandeep K. Bhandari, Principal Secretary to Lieutenant Governor; M Raju, Commissioner Secretary to Government, Health & Medical Education Department; Administrative Secretaries; Ramesh Kumar, Divisional Commissioner Jammu; Bhim Sen Tuti, IGP Jammu; Sujit Kumar, IGP Security J&K and other senior officials. (KNO)

J&K entrepreneurs

from persistent effort, a commitment to pressing forward through adversity."

The Lieutenant Governor congratulated those entrepreneurs who didn't just conduct business but set a societal example of creation amid hardship. He stated that in the education sector, we have succeeded in shaping the trajectory of human potential.

"Post-National Education Policy and COVID-19, transformations mark a new revolution. COVID obliterated physical classes overnight, yet stakeholders united to build education platforms from scratch, train teachers, and extend virtual tools even to villages unfamiliar with them," he said.

The LG highlighted that the technology integration, NEP-driven innovation, and research focus have birthed a new order, aiming to position India as a knowledge economy.

"We inhabit an era where change is a constant state. Technology, once a mere support system, now tests us fiercely. Amid this turbulence, we must contribute to nation-building with zeal and determination," he said.

The Lieutenant Governor suggested the inclusion of Farming Community in the next edition of the Big Impact Awards to honour their vital role in J&K's economy. He called upon the radio network to spearhead awareness campaigns and activities aligned with the Nasha

Mukt Bharat Abhiyaan.

Vikrant Sharma, Cluster Head 92.7 Big FM; Gaurav Mahajan, National Marketing Head 92.7 Big FM; RJ Juhie, team members of 92.7 Big FM, senior officials and prominent citizens from different walks of life attended the award ceremony.

CM says proposal

Chief Minister said. The CM added that the department has participated in 11 tourism marts during the financial year 2025-26 to promote key destinations of the Jammu Division, including Doda. "Similar promotional activities are planned in the coming months to further place Doda on the national tourism map," he said.

Highlighting infrastructure initiatives, Omar said that key projects have been undertaken in the district, including the construction of a double-storey guest house at Lal Draman at a sanctioned cost of 75.63 lakh. He added that beautification works, viewpoints, public conveniences and allied facilities have also been completed in the area at a cost of 80 lakh under the CAPEX Budget, aimed at improving tourist amenities and generating employment opportunities.

In a separate reply to another legislator regarding outsourcing of the Yoga and Spiritual Centre at Mantalal, the Chief Minister said that the Government is actively pursuing the matter, and efforts are underway to outsource the facility at the earliest.

Bill on drug

take stronger action so that Jammu & Kashmir can be saved from the epidemic of drugs.

The Minister further said that the government has taken action whenever complaints were received against drug de-addiction centers run by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

"We have taken action whenever we received complaints. They have to abide by rules," she added. (KNO)

J&K Assembly

passed L.A. Bill No. 01 of 2026, which seeks to amend certain enactments to decriminalise and rationalise minor offences, thereby promoting trust-based governance and improving ease of living and doing business in Jammu and Kashmir.

The Assembly also approved L.A. Bill No. 02 of 2026, aimed at eliminating discrimination

against persons affected by leprosy. The legislation ensures equal treatment, removes stigmatizing provisions and enables the government to fulfill its obligations through affirmative action.

Further, the House passed L.A. Bill No. 03 of 2026, which proposes amendments to the Jammu and Kashmir Civil Courts Act, 1977 (Svt), with the objective of improving the efficiency and functioning of the judicial system.

All three Bills were passed by voice vote after being taken up for consideration.

Earlier, the amendments proposed with respect to these bills by Legislators Saifullah Mir, Nizamuddin Bhat, and Balwant Singh Mankotia were withdrawn following assurances from the Chief Minister.

CM tables Finance

Comptroller and Auditor General of India on

Unit Territory Finances for the year 2022-23.

Eliminate redundant

work in close coordination with the Department of Law to examine the existing regulatory framework and propose comprehensive solutions.

He further called for a detailed review of the proposed Right to Business Act, with a view to incorporating provisions that facilitate smoother and more efficient processes for establishing and operating businesses in the UT.

Highlighting the broader significance of these reforms, the Chief Secretary noted that their effective implementation is critical for fostering a business-friendly regulatory environment and enhancing investor confidence in Jammu and Kashmir.

Earlier, Commissioner Secretary, Industries and Commerce, Vikramjit Singh, provided an overview of the ongoing initiatives under the second phase of compliance reduction and deregulation, commonly referred to as Deregulation 2.0 or Phase-II of EoDB.

He informed that this phase is aligned with the national framework and envisages the rollout of 30 new priority reform areas across seven key sectors in 2026. He added that the implementation process has already commenced, with substantial progress achieved in several priority areas.

He further elaborated that while the first phase of EoDB primarily focused on digitization of services, Phase-II aims at deeper structural reforms, particularly targeting reduction

of compliance burden on MSMEs and startups. The overarching objective is to simplify regulatory frameworks, eliminate procedural redundancies, and promote sustainable economic growth.

Providing details on the current status of implementation, Director, Industries and Commerce, Jammu, Arun Manhas, informed that the initiative covers seven major focus sectors encompassing 30 priority reform areas, including several domains that were not extensively addressed in earlier phases.

He noted that the reforms include five priority areas each in the Education sector and Utilities/Permissions, three categories of land-related compliances, and two focus areas each in Environment, Health, and Building and Construction sectors. Additionally, high-impact reforms have been identified in Labour, Fire Services, and Tourism sectors to ensure these areas receive a substantial boost through reduced regulatory burden and streamlined compliance mechanisms.

MLAs unite to

MLA Nizam-ud-Din Bhat described Dr Abdullah as a "national asset" and stressed that his safety was the responsibility of the state.

Minister for Health & Medical Education Sakina Itoo said it was encouraging to see unity across party lines but termed the silence of the Home Department "unfortunate."

She demanded that the investigation report be placed before the House and questioned whether any officials had been held accountable.

MLA Ramban, Arjun Singh Raju linked the attack to rising communal tensions and called for a united political stand against divisive forces.

BJP MLA Rajiv Jasrotia termed the incident an attempt to disturb communal harmony and urged that findings

His party colleague Pawan Kumar Gupta said the attack could have turned tragic if not for the timely action of security personnel, suggesting they be rewarded.

CP(M) leader M. Y. Tarigami termed the incident an "assault on society" and called for strict action against those responsible.

Condemning the attack, Peoples Conference MLA Sajad Gani Lone recalled past killings of legislators, saying such incidents reopen old wounds. He urged the House to ensure that security is not compromised under any circumstances.

PDP's Waheed-Ur-Rehman Parra also condemned the attack, calling it shameful. (KNO)

Reservation policy

submitted its report, which is under consideration before the competent authority."

On the status of implementation, the government without specifying any timeline, said that the report has not yet been approved and its implementation will follow only after clearance from the competent authority.

The government further said that at present, the existing reservation policy and relevant statutory provisions continue to remain in force.

On interim measures to address concerns of stakeholders, the government said that no changes have been made so far and the current policy framework continues to be applicable. (KNO)

Gondola model

benefits to local communities.

He assured the House that a comprehensive plan will be prepared to strengthen tourism in the region, stressing that sustainable and locally aligned initiatives would yield better results than large standalone projects like a gondola. (KNO)

'In J&K, 3,192

government schools that were having zero or extremely low students enrolment. Those schools were merged with the nearby public schools."

The official figures reveal that the primary schools category of government schools was hit badly wherein the count of overall public schools in Jammu and Kashmir reduced by nearly 30 percent.

In 2024, the official figures had revealed that a total of 12,977 government primary schools were functioning in Jammu and Kashmir. However, after the merger, only 8966 primary schools were functional.

Similarly, 392 government middle schools, three high schools and one higher secondary were deleted from the UDISE+ list.

Stating the statistics of private and other schools, the official figures had also revealed that there were a total of 5688 such educational institutes out of which only 5555 schools were functional till July-2024.

Overall, Jammu and Kashmir used to have over 28,800 government and private schools. However, as per the official figures, the count has reduced to nearly 24,00 schools. (KNO)

India dismisses report of Musk joining Modi-Trump call

Says it was between two leaders only

PTI

New Delhi, Mar 28: India on Saturday rejected a media report that said billionaire Elon Musk joined a phone conversation between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump earlier this week.

External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said Tuesday's conversation was between the two leaders only.

The New York Times, quoting unnamed US officials, reported that Musk participated in the call between Trump and Modi, adding it was an "unusual appearance" by a private citizen on a call between two heads of state.

"We have seen the story. The telephone conversation on March 24 was between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Donald Trump only," Jaiswal said. "As has been stated



earlier, it provided the opportunity for exchange of views on the situation in West Asia," he said.

In its report, the New York Times said it is "unclear" why Musk was on the call

or whether he spoke.

Our prime minister only spoke to Trump and there was no one else who spoke to the PM, people familiar with the matter said. They suggested that it

is for Washington to clarify if somebody else was in the room or listening to the conversation.

The New York Times said Musk's participation in the phone call signalled a reconciliation between the billionaire and Trump.

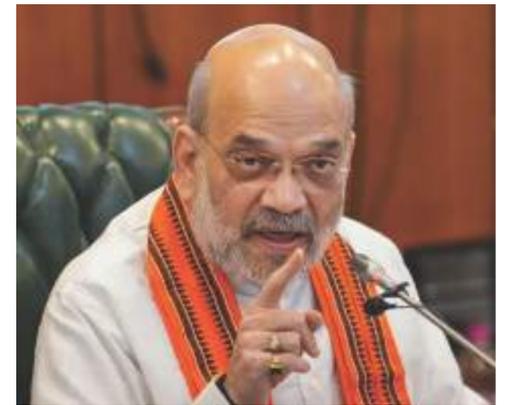
The two had fallen out last year following Musk's exit from a government task force charged with slashing the federal workforce.

The US president had initiated the phone call with Modi to discuss the West Asia crisis.

It was the first conversation between the two leaders since the West Asia conflict began on February 28.

In the conversation, Modi underlined the importance of ensuring that the Strait of Hormuz remains open, secure and accessible, noting that it is vital for global peace, stability and economic well-being.

NDA will return to power in Assam by winning over 90 seats: Amit Shah



PTI

Guwahati, Mar 28: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday asserted that the BJP-led NDA will return to power in Assam for the third consecutive term by winning more than 90 seats in the 126-member assembly.

Shah made the statement as he kick-started his two-day visit to the poll-bound state with a roadshow in Guwahati.

"The people of Assam are excited to form the BJP and NDA government in the state. We will form the government again with more than 90 seats," he said.

Shah said that under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, world-class infrastructure has been built in the state.

"In Assam, extremism, bomb blasts, and firing have stopped. Health infrastructure is being developed here. The state has become the hub of health and education in the entire Northeast," he said.

Shah said huge employment opportunities have been created, and modern industries like semiconductor manufacturing units are being set up.

The former BJP president held the roadshow in

support of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, who is fighting the polls from the Jalukbari seat, Guwahati Central candidate Vijay Kumar Gupta, New Guwahati's Dipu Ranjan Sarma, Dispur's Pradyut Bordoloi, and AGP's Dimoria nominee Tapan Das.

Except for Sarma, all candidates accompanied Shah during the roadshow, which was also attended by state BJP president Dilip Saikia.

The roadshow began from the Arya Vidyapeeth College playground and concluded at the Nepali Mandir, covering around 2 km along the AK Azad Road.

Shah, who stood in an open-decked SUV, was accorded a rousing reception by an enthusiastic crowd and party supporters along the route.

The Union home minister arrived in the city in the evening. During his two-day trip, he is scheduled to address a series of election rallies, besides holding meetings with top BJP functionaries.

Polling is scheduled to be held on April 9, while the votes would be counted on May 4.

Modi speaks to Saudi Crown Prince; discusses West Asia situation

PTI

New Delhi, Mar 28: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday spoke to Crown Prince and PM of Saudi Arabia, Prince Mohammed bin Salman, discussed with him the ongoing conflict in West Asia and agreed on the need to ensure freedom of navigation.

In his telephonic conversation with the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, the prime minister also reiterated India's condemnation of attacks on regional energy infrastructure.

"Spoke with Crown Prince and PM of Saudi Arabia, HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman and discussed the ongoing conflict in West Asia," he said in a post on X.

Modi said both leaders agreed on the need to ensure freedom of navigation and keep shipping lines open and secure.

"Thanked him for his continued support for the welfare of the Indian

community in Saudi Arabia," he said.

This was the second telephonic conversation between the prime minister and the crown prince of Saudi Arabia since the West Asia conflict started on February 28.

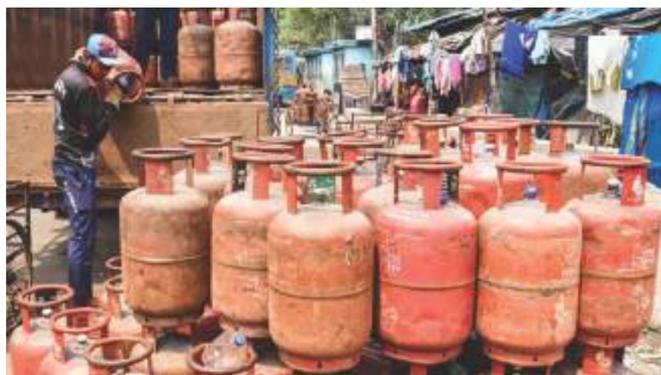
While the US and Israel attacked Iran, the Persian nation targeted its neighbours and Israel.

Iran controls the Strait of Hormuz, a key shipping route through which the world's 20 per cent of energy is transported. Since the conflict, very few ships are allowed by Iran to cross it.

Modi has also spoken to several world leaders since the conflict started and they include those from the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan, Iran, France, Israel and Malaysia.

US President Donald Trump has also spoken to Modi following which the prime minister said he "had a useful exchange of views on the situation in West Asia".

Centre pushes for rapid expansion of PNG networks in urban areas amid LPG 'crunch'



PTI

New Delhi, Mar 28: The Centre on Saturday pushed for rapid expansion of PNG networks across urban areas in the country amid LPG supply concerns arising out of the West Asia conflict. Union Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Manohar Lal Khattar outlined key priorities, including a single-window clearance system, integration of gas pipelines into urban planning, and improved last-mile connectivity.

An ambitious target of providing 50 lakh new piped natural gas (PNG) connections was also highlighted during a roundtable attended by Khattar, Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri, Consumer Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi, state representatives and industry stakeholders.

According to a statement issued by the housing and urban affairs ministry, officials highlighted the key bottlenecks slowing PNG expansion in the country, including delays in municipal permissions, right of way (RoW) approvals, and high restoration charges.

States flagged the need for rationalising or waiving such charges and adopting time-bound clearance systems.

There was a broad consensus on a phased transition from liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) to PNG in the urban areas with the existing infrastructure, backed by consumer awareness measures to avoid service

disruptions.

Khattar called for a mission-mode approach to expand the PNG coverage, stressing the role of cities as economic growth engines.

Hardeep Puri highlighted the evolving global energy landscape and stressed the importance of strengthening the PNG infrastructure to ensure energy security and resilience. The petroleum minister encouraged the states and the urban local bodies (ULBs) to actively promote PNG adoption, particularly in areas where infrastructure is already available.

On the concerns arising from LPG disruptions, Consumer Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi emphasised maintaining an uninterrupted supply of essential fuels, curbing misinformation and preventing black marketing.

In the statement, the housing and urban affairs ministry said that the states and ULBs have agreed to streamline approvals, designate nodal officers and enhance coordination among departments.

A post-meeting breakout session between city gas distribution entities and municipal commissioners identified city-specific hurdles and pending approvals.

The stakeholders agreed on a structured action plan with defined timelines, local task teams and regular monitoring to ensure faster rollout of PNG networks across urban centres.

Nominations open for Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar 2026

PTI

New Delhi, Mar 28: The Centre has invited nominations for the Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar (RVP) 2026, a national initiative to recognise outstanding contributions in the fields of science, technology, and innovation.

The awards are administered by the RVP Secretariat, Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), the Ministry of Science and Technology, under the chairmanship of the principal scientific advisor to the government.

"The Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar reflects the government's unwavering commitment to fostering excellence in science, technology, and innovation. These awards celebrate the spirit of inquiry and dedication of our scientists and innovators who are driving India's transformation into a global knowledge leader," Union Minister Jitendra Singh said in a statement on Saturday.

Nominations, including self-nominations, are open across a wide range of domains, including agricultural science, atomic energy, biological sciences, chemistry, defence technology, Earth science, engineering sciences, environmental science, medicine, physics, space science and technology, and others.

The awards will be presented in four distinct categories: Vigyan Ratna to recognise lifetime achievements in science and technology; Vigyan Shri to acknowledge distinguished contributions to the field; Vigyan Yuva-Shanti Swarnam Bhatnagar to encourage young scientists (up to 45 years of age); and Vigyan Team (VT) for teams of three or more researchers for collaborative excellence.

Nominations, including self-nominations, are open online via the Ministry of Home Affairs awards portal from 28 March 2026 to 11 May 2026.

Adani Defence delivers first batch of 2,000 'Prahar' light machine guns to Indian Army

PTI

Gwalior, Mar 28: In a boost to the Army's firepower, a defence major on Saturday delivered the first batch of 2,000 'Prahar' light machine guns (LMGs) manufactured under the 'Make in India' initiative.

The 7.62 mm-calibre weapon has been manufactured by Adani Defence and Aerospace at its Small Arms Complex located on the outskirts of Gwalior.

With India seeking to maintain robust defence deployment along its borders, particularly the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and the Line of Control (LoC), the new weaponry will further enhance the Army's firepower and its overall operational capability.

'Prahar' has a barrel length of 508 mm (20 inches), while the light machine gun weighs 8 kg and is 1,100 mm long. It has an effective range of 1,000 m, according to data shared by a spokesperson of the private firm.

A ceremony was held on the premises of the Gwalior facility on Saturday to hand over the LMGs to the Army, which was attended by A Anbarasu, DG Acquisition, Ministry of Defence, Ashish Rajwanshi,



CEO of Adani Defence and Aerospace, and other senior officials of the company.

Anbarasu and others later flagged off a series of trucks carrying the first batch of the LMGs.

Interacting with reporters after the flag-off, Rajwanshi said, "The journey that has begun today took us six years, starting from bid submission, and we have delivered the first batch, 11 months ahead of schedule."

"The original timeline (for complete delivery), which was given

to us by the customer, was over seven years, but I can assure you that in the next three years, the full order will be delivered," he added.

The company spokesperson said the total order for the LMGs stands at around 40,000.

Anbarasu, in his address at the event, praised the firm for saving several months by delivering ahead of schedule, and said it shows there is the ability to "race and fire" against time in turning contracts into deliveries.

Delhi HC protects Gautam Gambhir's personality rights

PTI

New Delhi, Mar 28: The Delhi High Court has protected the personality rights of Indian men's cricket team head coach Gautam Gambhir by restraining several social media users from publishing any unauthorised AI-generated content using his name, image, voice or any other attributes of his persona. Justice Jyoti Singh, in an interim order on a lawsuit by Gambhir, said that as one of the "most decorated cricketers of this country", he has the right to "protect his name, likeness and all other attributes of his personality and no third party has a right to use these attributes without his consent/authorisation".

Gambhir, who played 58 Tests, 147 ODIs and 37 T20 internationals for India between 2004 and 2016, sought protection of his personality and publicity rights from a coordinated campaign of digital impersonation, AI-generated deepfakes, and unauthorised commercial exploitation, available across social media platforms.

The plea said that several social media accounts used artificial intelligence (AI), face-swapping, and voice-cloning technologies to create realistic videos falsely depicting Gambhir.

Additionally, merchandise bearing his image was also being sold online, it said. "Till the next date of hearing, defendants No. 1 to 10 (including unknown entities) are restrained from using and/or in any manner, directly or indirectly, exploiting or misappropriating plaintiff's: (i) names Gautam Gambhir, Gauri and GG; (ii) image; (iii) voice; and (iv) likeness and/or any other attribute of his persona, without his authorisation or consent, for any commercial and/or personal gain, through the use of technology, including but not limited to artificial intelligence, generative artificial intelligence, machine learning, deepfakes, AI chatbots, face morphing and/or any other mediums and formats, amounting to violation of plaintiff's personality/publicity rights," the court said in the order passed on March 25.

Pope Leo slams widening 'chasms between poor and rich'

AFP

Monaco, Mar 28: Pope Leo XIV on Saturday denounced the widening gap between the haves and have-nots as he visited Monaco, a millionaires' playground that is the surprise pick for the first western European trip of his papacy.

Arriving by helicopter from Rome, the pope was greeted by Monaco's ruler Prince Albert II and his wife Princess Charlene at Monte Carlo's heliport under radiant sunshine.

Just after his arrival at the tiny principality on the French Riviera, Leo condemned what he termed the widening "chasms between the poor and the rich."

In an address in French from the balcony of the Prince's Palace, the American pope denounced "unjust configurations of power, structures of sin that dig chasms between poor and rich, between the privileged and the rejected, between friends and enemy."

He added wealth should serve "law and justice, especially at a historical moment when displays of force and the logic of omnipotence wound the world and jeopardize peace," in a clear reference to the growing number of conflicts across the globe.

Bells peal across the principality to mark Leo's arrival in the mini state nestled on the Mediterranean between France and Italy.

Locals gathered outside the palace, many brandishing flags in the red and white of the principality and the yellow and white



of the Vatican.

Along the route of the Popemobile on Rue Grimaldi, a major thoroughfare, shopkeepers had decked out their windows in the colors of both statelets to mark the occasion.

From the palace, the pope was to head to the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception to meet the Catholic community, then to the square in front of the Church of Saint Devota, dedicated to the patron saint of Monaco.

In the tiny city state's streets billboards showing the pontiff in his church regalia

offered a stark contrast to gleaming sports cars and jostling crowds of tourists.

The highlight will be an open-air mass at the Louis II Stadium, expected to be attended by 15,000 people.

Pope Leo was slated to make speeches addressing environmental protection — which is a cause close to Prince Albert's heart — Monaco's role in Europe and "the protection of life in all its forms," according to the Vatican's press office director, Matteo Bruni.

That phrase encompasses opposition to abortion, banned in the principality, and

euthanasia, but also serves as condemnation of all conflict, at a time of war in the Middle East which is destabilizing the global economy. Monaco is one of the few places in Europe where Catholicism remains the state religion, and it has long-standing diplomatic ties with the Holy See.

Though only around eight percent of citizens identify as practicing Catholics, church pews are one of the few places where billionaires, cleaning ladies and construction workers mingle.

'Powerful sign' "This visit is a powerful sign testifying to the Principality's importance within the Catholic Christian world," Prince Albert said in an interview with local daily Nice-Matin.

The prince added he shared with the Vatican common causes including international solidarity and "the promotion of peace through sport."

Though some locals professed indifference to the papal visit, Isabel Fissore, the 62-year-old owner of a small jewelry shop, had managed to secure invitations to attend meetings with the pontiff.

"It's historic: the two smallest states in the world coming together to spread a message of peace, light and love throughout the world. We may be a small nation, yet our hearts are big," Fissore said.

Monaco Archbishop, Monsignor Dominique-Marie David, said the pope is reaching out to "other cultures, other countries, other backgrounds and other languages" in the principality, home to some 140 nationalities.

US vice president says he's obsessed with UFOs



AFP

Washington, Mar 28: US Vice President JD Vance vowed Friday to plumb US government information about unidentified flying objects, adding that in his view, aliens are in fact demons. "I have not been able to spend enough time on this to really understand it, but I am going to, trust me, I'm obsessed with this," a laughing Vance told the conservative podcaster Benny Johnson.

"I've still got three more years as vice president. I will get to the bottom of the UFO files," he added.

Johnson had asked about President Donald Trump's order to federal agencies in February to begin "identifying and releasing" government files related to UFOs and aliens.

Trump said he was taking the step "based on the

tremendous interest shown," the same month that former president Barack Obama said publicly that aliens were "real," though he had not seen them.

Regarding those statements, Trump told reporters that Obama "gave classified information, he is not supposed to be doing that."

Vance for his part told Johnson on Friday, "I don't think they're aliens. I think they're demons," describing this as a Christian understanding of "celestial beings who fly around who do weird things to people."

No evidence has been produced of intelligent life beyond Earth. Interest in UFOs and related phenomena has been renewed in recent years as the US government investigated numerous reports of seemingly supernatural aircraft, amid worries that adversaries could be testing highly advanced technologies.

In March 2024, the Pentagon released a report saying it had no proof that unidentified aerial phenomena were alien technology, with many suspicious sightings turning out to be merely weather balloons, spy planes, satellites and other normal activity.

FIFA World Cup 2026 warm-ups

Lamine Yamal, Oyarzabal shine as Spain thrashes Serbia

REUTERS

Villarreal, Mar 28: Striker Mikel Oyarzabal got two superb first-half goals and substitute Victor Munoz scored on his senior international debut as Spain cruised to a 3-0 win over Serbia in a pre-World Cup friendly on Friday. With Serbia stepping into the breach after Spain's original plan to play Argentina in Qatar was derailed by the ongoing conflict in the Gulf, the Spaniards took the opportunity to hone their attacking play with some breathtaking movement and incisive passing that allowed them to create plenty of chances. Spain took the lead in the 16th minute with a brilliantly constructed goal that saw Lamine Yamal feed midfielder Fermin, who worked the ball on quickly for Oyarzabal to blast into the net with a fierce left-foot shot.

As Spain attacked relentlessly, Yamal received the ball on the edge of the box from Alex Baena three minutes later, but his low spinning drive struck the foot of the post and bounced away to safety.

Indonesia starts implementing social media restrictions for children under 16

AP

Jakarta, Mar 28: Indonesia on Saturday began implementing a new government regulation approved earlier this month that bans children younger than 16 from access to digital platforms that could expose them to pornography, cyberbullying, online scams and addiction.

With the move, Indonesia became the first country in Southeast Asia to ban children from having accounts on YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, Threads, X, Bigo Live and Roblox. It follows measures that Australia took last year in a world-first



social media ban for children as part of a push for families to take back power from tech giants and protect their teens.

Indonesia has said that

the implementation of the restrictions would be carried out gradually, until all platforms comply with the measure.

In announcing the new

regulation earlier in March, Indonesia's Communication and Digital Affairs Minister Meutya Hafid said it would apply to around 70 million children in Indonesia — a country with a population of about 280 million.

Not an easy task Hafid said high-risk digital platforms are identified by factors such as how easy it is for children to become exposed to strangers, potential predators and harmful content in general, as well as the levels of risk of exploitation and data security scams.

But she acknowledged that implementing the new regulation — even gradually as planned — will be difficult.

Dhoni set to miss first two weeks of IPL due to calf strain



PTI

New Delhi, Mar 28: Chennai Super Kings icon MS Dhoni is set to miss the first two weeks of the IPL due to a calf injury, the franchise said on Saturday.

"MS Dhoni is currently undergoing rehabilitation for a calf strain. As a result, he

is likely to miss the first two weeks of TATA IPL 2026," said CSK in a statement.

Dhoni has continued playing the IPL ever since retiring from international cricket in 2020.

The 44-year-old's future in the IPL becomes a topic of intense discussion following CSK's campaign every season. Considering Dhoni only plays the IPL, it becomes tougher to maintain match fitness.

Though Rituraj Gaikwad is the captain of the side, Dhoni is the de facto leader of the franchise having stayed with them since 2008 barring the time they were suspended from the competition.

TBMS Society hosts Annual Cross Country Run 2026



Around 1400 students from classes 5 to 12 participated in the run, representing Tyndale Biscoe and The Kashmir Valley School. The run began at 6:30 a.m. from Sheikh Bagh Campus and was flagged off by Director Education Kashmir, Mr. Nasser Ahmad Wani (JKAS), in the presence of school heads and officials.

KT NEWS DESK

Srinagar, Mar 28: The Tyndale Biscoe and Mallinson Society organized its Annual Cross Country Run (C.C. Run) 2026 for boys on Saturday, marking a vibrant start to the new academic session.

Around 1400 students from classes 5 to 12 participated in the run, representing Tyndale Biscoe and The Kashmir Valley School. The run began at 6:30 a.m. from Sheikh Bagh Campus and was flagged off by Director Education Kashmir, Mr. Nasser Ahmad Wani (JKAS), in the presence of

school heads and officials.

Students displayed commendable endurance and team spirit as they competed in different categories. Proper arrangements for safety, hydration, and medical support ensured the smooth conduct of the event. The run concluded with refreshments for participants at the campus.

The school management thanked the District Administration, Traffic Police, concerned police stations, Security department and Health departments for their support and cooperation in making the event a success.

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Movies Schedule

Sunday, 29 March

PROJECT HAIL MARY (U/A)
ENGLISH WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES
09:40 AM, 08:00 PM

DHURANDHAR THE REVENGE (A)
HINDI - 11:00 AM, 12:45 PM, 03:30 PM, 05:15 PM
HINDI ATMOS - 10:00 AM, 02:30 PM, 07:00 PM

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