



Women Farmers Conference

Women empowerment across all sectors Modi govt's top priority: LG Sinha

Proud of J&K's self-help groups, women-led FPOs, skill programs

When women control production resources, they ensure food security

Rehan Qayoom Mir

Srinagar, Apr 16: Asserting that Jammu and Kashmir has set a national example in every sector since 2020, Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Thursday said that women empowerment across all sectors is the top priority of Prime Minister Narendra Modi led regime.

Speaking at the Women Farmers Conference, organised by Indian Farmers Fertilizer Cooperative Limited (IFFCO) here, LG Sinha, according to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), highlighted the contributions of women farmers in agriculture and allied sectors, the efforts of women agri-entrepreneurs, and emphasized developing agriculture sector under their leadership. "Without women farmers, every plate would be empty, leaving humanity starved. They sustain the world, work harder than their male counterparts and their strength anchors food security, planting seeds of prosperity for families and society in every field," LG Sinha said.



The Lieutenant Governor said that the global food system rests on women's labor, yet it excludes them from prosperity. He urged every cooperative, government stakeholder to ask, what challenge or barrier in women farmers' lives can be eliminated immediately? By removing them one by one, we can honor their leadership and enrich society and the nation

through direct market access, he said.

The Lieutenant Governor said that the UN General Assembly has fittingly declared 2026 the International Year of Women Farmers, which was a long-awaited dream.

"I view International Women Farmers Year 2026 as a historic opportunity, proclaiming women as creators, not

mere laborers, in agriculture's growth. Prioritize women farmers in every scheme. I trust 2026 will sincerely recognize women's roles in agriculture and allied sectors, fulfilling their aspirations," he said.

The Lieutenant Governor called upon technology innovators to prioritize technical tools for women farmers.

He stressed that the

agriculture, horticulture, fisheries, and dairy departments must allocate resources to women farmers, while financial institutions design loan products enabling landless women farmers to access credit in their names.

"We must reinvigorate society with the resolve for women-led development in Jammu Kashmir, enabling women's power to transform it. Significant strides in women empowerment since 2020 has set a national example and our women farmers empowerment project exemplifies the success," the Lieutenant Governor said.

LG Sinha exhorted the stakeholders to grant women farmers and entrepreneurs recognition, resources, and agency to work on their terms.

"Empowered women farmers are bearers of climate resilience, building robust agri-ecosystems with quality seeds, digital tools, and market linkages from cooperatives," he said.

The Lieutenant Governor observed that through Holistic Agriculture Development Program (HADP), Jammu Kashmir advances | More on P6

India, Austria condemn Pahalgam attack

Call for global anti-terror push, joint counter-terror mechanism



Sajid Raina

New Delhi, Apr 16: India and Austria on Thursday strongly condemned the Pahalgam terror attack that killed 26 tourists last year in Kashmir and called for coordinated global efforts to counter terrorism, including cross-border networks and radicalisation.

According to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) the issue figured prominently during talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Austrian Chancellor Christian Stocker, marking the first visit by an Austrian leader to India in nearly four decades.

Briefing reporters, MEA Secretary (West) Sibi George said both sides "categorically and unequivocally" denounced

terrorism in all its forms and stressed the need for sustained international cooperation to tackle the threat.

The two countries also referred to the Pahalgam attack and a terror incident near Delhi's Red Fort, condemning them in strong terms and calling for a comprehensive response to such acts.

According to officials, India and Austria agreed to enhance co-operation on counter-terrorism, including efforts to curb terror financing, prevent misuse of emerging technologies, and check recruitment by extremist groups.

A Letter of Intent was signed to establish a joint working group on counter-terrorism, aimed at facilitating information sharing, capacity building and coordination in multilateral forums, particularly | More on P6

J&K drops CUET for UG admissions in 2026-27

Riyaz Bhat

Srinagar, Apr 16: Higher Education Department Thursday decided to discontinue Common University Entrance Test (CUET) based admission for Undergraduate (UG) admissions for the academic session 2026-27 in all Government Degree Colleges (GDCs) of J&K.

The department further decided to revert to a merit-based system on Class 12 scores.

In the previous academic session, the department had exempted 64 Government Degree Colleges from making admissions through CUET score for academic session 2024-25 in wake of low CUET based admissions in many degree colleges of Jammu and Kashmir.

According to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), Higher Education Department in a fresh notice said, "All undergraduate admissions for the session 2026-27 across all GDCs in J&K shall be granted on Non-CUET basis as per 10+2 scores and merit."

It also said that all students shall be required to register and apply through a centralised

admission portal. "The allotment of colleges shall be made on the basis of 10+2 merit and the preferences submitted by the candidates."

The department further said that the information is being issued in advance to enable students and parents to prepare for the upcoming admission cycle. "Students are advised to note the following important changes and updates for the session 2026-27."

As already reported by KNO, that there are 'no takers' of the government colleges of J&K that are facing dismal student enrolment.

Till the March-2026, the government had informed that GDC Baghi Dilawar Khan and GDC Chattisinghpura have no active student enrolment, as the previous enrolment levels were not adequate to sustain a viable academic environment and the institutions have not attracted sufficient student admissions," the government said.

It also said "GDC Chattisinghpura and GDC Baghi Dilawar Khan are presently placed under the charge of Government | More on P6

'Doctors Terror Module' case

KNO Desk

Srinagar, Apr 16: The State Investigation Agency (SIA), Kashmir, on Thursday filed a chargesheet against ten accused in a major terror conspiracy case involving a covert network dubbed as "Doctors Terror Module."

In a statement issued to a news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), a SIA spokesman said, "The chargesheet was submitted in connection with an FIR registered at Police Station Nowgam, Srinagar, following an incident on October 19, 2025, when threatening posters surfaced in the area in the name of the banned outfit Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM). The posters were intended to spread fear, disrupt public order, and challenge the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country."

"Investigations revealed that the poster campaign was part of a larger, well-planned conspiracy aimed at

SIA files chargesheet against 10 accused



reviving the proscribed terror outfit Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind (AGuH). The accused had formed a highly clandestine module engaged in radicalisation, recruitment, and preparations for carrying out terror attacks," the statement added.

It said, "The group deliberately used the name of JeM to create psychological impact while covertly working to rebuild AGuH, in an apparent attempt to mislead security agencies and conceal their real objectives. The probe further uncovered that the module

included highly educated individuals, including doctors, who allegedly misused their professional access and institutional spaces for unlawful activities linked to Al-Falah Medical College/University. They were also involved in spreading extremist propaganda through digital platforms and procuring materials for fabricating explosives."

"Investigators found that the group had identified Triacetone Triperoxide (TATP), a highly volatile explosive used in several global terror | More on P6

MeT forecasts two-day wet spell across J&K

Gusty winds damage rooftops, electricity poles, other infra

Sajid Raina

Srinagar, Apr 16: The Meteorological Centre Srinagar on Thursday forecast generally cloudy conditions with intermittent spells of light rain and thundershowers across Jammu and Kashmir till April 19, with a possibility of gusty winds and hailstorms at isolated places.

An official of the MeT department told the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) that from April 17 to 19, the weather is likely to remain generally cloudy, with intermittent spells of light rain and thundershowers at many places, particularly during morning and late evening hours.

He also warned of gusty winds with speeds reaching 40-50 kmph and the possibility of hailstorms at a few locations during this period.

The weather is expected to improve from April 20 to 24, with generally dry conditions likely to prevail across the Union Territory.

Similar conditions are forecast for April 25 and 26, although brief spells of light rain or thundershower with gusty winds may occur at isolated places towards the afternoon.

Meanwhile, gusty winds reported in several parts of Kashmir on Thursday evening caused damage to rooftops, electricity poles and other infrastructure, officials said.

There were also reports of minor disruptions to power supply in some areas following the strong winds.

The MeT department has issued an advisory asking farmers to suspend farm operations from April 17 to 19 in view of the expected weather activity, including rain, gusty winds and possible hailstorms.

Officials said the advisory has been issued as a precautionary measure to minimise potential damage to crops and ensure safety during adverse weather conditions.

The department has urged people to | More on P6

Nasha-Mukt J&K Abhiyan

13 drug peddlers arrested across Kashmir, contraband seized

Sajid Raina

Srinagar, Apr 16: Police on Thursday arrested 13 alleged drug peddlers and seized contraband substances in multiple operations across Kashmir as part of the ongoing "Nasha-Mukt Jammu and Kashmir Abhiyan."

According to the details available with the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), in Anantnag district, police carried out a series of operations leading to several arrests and recoveries.

Acting on specific information, a police team from Srignufwara raided a house in Dachigam and recovered around 2 kg of charas-like substance.

In separate naka checking operations at Shakras and Pethnoo



Crossing, two persons were apprehended with around 2 kg of charas-like substance each.

In another operation, police intercepted a passenger auto at Iqbal Market near Mill Mod and arrested two persons, recovering about 12 grams of heroin from them.

Separately, one person was apprehended at K.V Pora

Marhama, and around 7.854 kg of charas-like substance was recovered from his possession, they said.

In Awantipora, police arrested two persons travelling on a motorcycle at Toll Plaza and recovered 1.258 kg of charas-like substance. The motorcycle was also seized.

In another | More on P6

Rapid conversion of paddy fields raises food security concerns in Kashmir

'Valley may become 100% dependent on outside states for staple rice if trend continues'

Jahangeer Ganaie

Srinagar, Apr 16: The rapid conversion of agricultural land into horticulture across Kashmir is emerging as a serious concern, with experts warning that the trend could leave the Valley heavily, if not entirely, dependent on other states for its staple food, particularly rice.

A directorate-level retired officer of the Agriculture Department, speaking with the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), said that Kashmir is already facing a food deficit of nearly 40-50 per cent. He said the steady shift from paddy cultivation to high-density apple orchards over the past five to six years has only deepened this dependence.

"Thousands of hectares of fertile paddy land have been



converted into orchards, primarily for apple cultivation. While this transition has improved the income of some farmers, it has significantly reduced local rice production," the officer said.

He cautioned that the Valley, once known for its self-sufficiency in rice, is now at a critical juncture. "If this trend continues unchecked, Kashmir could become 100 per cent reliant on other states for rice in

the coming years," he warned. The shift toward horticulture, especially high-density apple farming, has been largely driven by better financial returns compared to traditional paddy cultivation. Farmers are increasingly opting for orchards as they promise higher profits and relatively stable market demand.

However, experts believe this economic gain comes at a long-term cost.

"Horticulture undoubtedly boosts farmers' incomes, but it also exposes the region to external risks. Any disruption in supply chains—whether due to natural disasters, transport issues, or political instability—can trigger food shortages," said an official of the Agriculture department, wishing anonymity. Historically, | More on P6

Shri Amarnathji Yatra-2026 57-Day Yatra to be held from July 3 to August 28, 2026

CS reviews preparations, directs BRO to ensure timely snow clearance on all Yatra tracks, DMRR&R tasked with identifying, demarcating flood- and disaster-prone areas to prevent installation of facilities

KT NEWS DESK

JAMMU, APRIL 16: Chief Secretary, Atal Dulloo Thursday chaired a high-level meeting of the Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board (SASB), attended by senior officers from the Civil Administration and Police department to review the comprehensive arrangements being made for the smooth, safe, and successful conduct of the Shri Amarnathji Yatra (SANJY)-2026, scheduled to commence on July 3, 2026.

During the meeting, the Chief Secretary, as per an official statement, undertook a detailed review of the preparedness across all sectors, with a particular focus on ensuring the safe and seamless movement of pilgrims along the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway, as well as the two primary routes to the holy cave via Baltal and Chandanwari. Emphasizing the anticipated increase in pilgrim footfall this year, he directed all concerned departments to augment infrastructure and services accordingly.

Dr. Mandeep K. Bhandari, Principal Secretary to the Lieutenant Governor and Chief Executive Officer, SASB, delivered a comprehensive presentation outlining key aspects of SANJY-2026. These included registration processes, service provider arrangements, establishment of Yatra camps, langar services, and provisioning of essential facilities.

It was informed that registration for the Yatra commenced on April 15, 2026, through both offline (bank branches) and online modes, with 19,402 pilgrims registering on the very first day. The Pratham Puja is scheduled to take place on June 29, 2026.

The Chief Secretary directed the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) to ensure timely snow clearance on all Yatra tracks by May 15, 2026. He also emphasized the need for proper road maintenance, installation of signages and crash barriers, slope stabilization, bridge maintenance,



and restoration of shelter sheds along the Yatra routes. The Public Works Department (PWD) was instructed to complete macadamization of roads around base camps and undertake necessary repairs of helipads at Neelgrath, Baltal, and Pahalgam.

The Department of Disaster Management, Relief, Rehabilitation & Reconstruction (DMRR&R) was tasked with identifying and demarcating flood- and disaster-prone areas to prevent the installation of facilities in vulnerable zones. Additionally, it was directed to ensure early debris clearance of nallahs near the holy cave and operationalize the Integrated Command and Control Centre (ICCC) in Srinagar by June 10, 2026.

The Department of Rural Sanitation was asked to ensure high standards of sanitation before, during, and after the Yatra, particularly along both routes during the 57-day pilgrimage period. Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and Development Authorities at Pahalgam and Sonamarg were directed to implement scientific waste disposal systems.

The Labour Department and Animal and Sheep Husbandry Department, in coordination with the concerned district administrations were instructed to ensure registration of all service

providers and ponies in collaboration with district administrations of Anantnag and Ganderbal. Deputy Commissioners were directed to implement a digital prepaid system and notify standardized service rates for the convenience of pilgrims and service providers.

The Jal Shakti Department and Power Development Department were tasked with ensuring adequate water supply and uninterrupted power through necessary pipeline and cable networks, along with installation of RO filters and backup generators and illumination of tracks and base camps too.

The Health Department was directed to operationalize 100-bedded hospitals at Chandanwari and Baltal by June 20, 2026, and ensure deployment of sufficient medical and paramedical staff, along with critical care ambulances at all base camps and along both routes.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) will provide Doppler-based weather forecasting services and install LED display screens at base camps for real-time updates. Telecom service providers have been directed to ensure robust mobile and internet connectivity along the Yatra routes by May 15, 2026.

The Food & Civil Supplies Department will enhance the quota of essential

commodities such as ration, LPG, and kerosene and ensure their uninterrupted availability throughout the Yatra.

The Chief Secretary also directed the Information Department to install an adequate number of public address systems, hoardings, and banners at Yatra camps, lodgement centres, and key locations along the route to facilitate dissemination of information to pilgrims.

The Fire & Emergency Services Department was instructed to deploy sufficient firefighting equipment at all camps, lodgement centres, langar sites, tents, and commercial establishments, and to conduct fire safety audits well in advance. Training and capacity building of service providers and langar operators were also emphasized to enable them to act as first responders during emergencies.

The Chief Secretary reiterated the importance of coordinated efforts among all departments and directed officials to ensure that all arrangements are in place well ahead of time. He stressed that the overarching objective is to provide pilgrims with a safe, comfortable, and spiritually fulfilling journey, ensuring the successful and smooth conduct of SANJY-2026.

Javid Dar reviews functioning of education department in Baramulla



KT NEWS DESK

BARAMULLA, APRIL 16: Minister for Agriculture Production, Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Cooperative and Election Department, Javid Ahmad Dar, Thursday chaired a comprehensive review meeting to assess the functioning and key challenges facing the Education Department in district Baramulla and Rafiabab.

The meeting, as per an official statement, was attended by the Director School Education Kashmir, Chief Education Officer (CEO) Baramulla, District Education Planning Officer (DEPO) Baramulla and Zonal Education Officers (ZEOs). They presented a detailed overview of the current status of educational institutions, infrastructure, staffing and ongoing developmental initiatives in the district.

During the meeting, the Minister emphasized the need for strengthening the education system through effective planning, better coordination among the stakeholder departments and timely resolution of issues. He

directed the concerned officers to ensure quality education, optimal utilization of resources and enhanced monitoring mechanisms to achieve the desired outcomes.

Javid Dar stressed the importance of providing a conducive learning environment in schools, addressing infrastructure gaps, ensuring availability of teaching staff and promoting student enrolment and retention, particularly in rural and far-flung areas. He also called for adopting innovative teaching methods and leveraging technology to improve the learning outcomes. He asked the officers to work with dedication and accountability to ensure that the government schools deliver quality education comparable to the best standards.

The officers apprised the Minister of various challenges facing the sector and sought necessary support for their resolution.

The Minister assured that all their genuine issues will be addressed on priority to further strengthen the education system in the district.

House Committee begins ground inspection of JJM works in Rajouri-Poonch

KT NEWS DESK

RAJOURI, APRIL 16: The thirteen member House Committee, constituted for Jal Jeevan Mission in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, Thursday commenced on-ground inspections of various JJM schemes in Rajouri district.

The Committee, as per an official statement, is being headed by legislator and former High Court judge Hasnain Masoodi with M. Y. Tarigami, Ali Mohammad Dar, Altaf Ahmad Wani, Ajaz Ahmad Jan, Rajiv Jasrotia, Ranbir Singh Pathania, Tanvir Sadiq, Javid Riyaz Bedar, Muzaffar Iqbal Khan, Rafiq Ahmad Naik, Arjun Singh Raju and Iftikar Ahmed as its members.

JKSSB Junior Assistant Examination arrangements finalised in Budgam

KT NEWS DESK

BUDGAM, APRIL 16: District Administration Budgam on Thursday convened a meeting at the Conference Hall Budgam to finalise arrangements for the OMR-based written examination for the post of Junior Assistant, scheduled to be conducted on 19th of April by the Jammu and Kashmir Services Selection Board (JKSSB).

The meeting, as per an official statement, was chaired by Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) Budgam, Mehraj-uddin Shah, and attended by the Additional Secretary JKSSB along with senior officers and officials from various departments. Among those present were District Transport Officer Budgam, District Informatics Officer Budgam, ARTO Budgam, representatives from Police, Education Department, Traffic Police, besides Centre Superintendents, Deputy Superintendents, Magistrates/Observers, and Heads of Institutions of the designated examination centres.

During the meeting, the ADC reviewed in detail the arrangements being put in place for the smooth conduct of the examination. He stressed the importance of effective coordination among all departments to ensure that the examination is conducted in a fair, transparent, and orderly manner.

discussions were held on crucial aspects including deployment of magistrates and observers, security arrangements, transportation facilities, confidentiality and safe handling of examination material, availability of basic amenities at examination centres, and strict adherence to Standard Operating Procedures prescribed for the examination.

The Additional Secretary JKSSB briefed the participants about examination guidelines, protocols to be followed at centres, and the responsibilities assigned to supervisory staff. He emphasized strict compliance with the Board's instructions to uphold transparency and integrity throughout the examination process.

ADC Budgam directed all concerned officers to ensure advance arrangements related to security deployment, traffic regulation, and logistical support. He instructed Centre Superintendents and supervisory staff to remain vigilant and facilitate a hassle-free examination experience for candidates.

All departments were asked to maintain close coordination and ensure timely deployment of manpower and resources for the successful conduct of the JKSSB Junior Assistant examination across all designated centres in the district.

Sakeena Itoo expresses grief over death of college student in tragic Udhampur road accident

KT NEWS DESK

SRINAGAR, APRIL 16: Minister for Education, Social Welfare, Health and Medical Education, Sakeena Itoo Thursday expressed profound grief and sorrow over the tragic demise of Anjali Choudhary, a 4th semester student of Government College for Women, Gandhi Nagar Jammu, who lost her life in a road accident near Udhampur this morning. The unfortunate incident occurred when the student was travelling along with fellow students on a picnic to Patnitop. Expressing her heartfelt condolences, the Minister said she was deeply saddened by the untimely loss of the young student, describing the incident as heart-break-



ing and tragic. "I am deeply saddened to learn about the tragic demise of Anjali Choudhary, a bright young student of Government College for Women, Gandhi Nagar Jammu, who lost her life in an unfortunate road accident near Udhampur while travelling with fellow students to Patnitop," the Minister as per an official statement said. Sakeena Itoo conveyed her sympathies to the bereaved family, friends and the entire college fraternity during this difficult time.

ZONAL HEADQUARTERS POLICE TELECOMMUNICATION KASHMIR

Email: telmrzone@jkpolice.gov.in Phone no: office 0194-2452698 fax 0194-2506526

PUBLIC NOTICE

Mushtaq Ahmad Wani S/O Ab.Gani Wani R/O pulwama working as HC/R in AK Police Telecommunication under Regimental No. 355/PW, Tel-952694 has represented for correction in his name and parentage recorded as Mushtaq Ahmed Wani S/O AID. Gani in the service records of the official. As such, objections if any, in this regard are invited from general public which should reach to this office within the period of (7) Seven day from the date of this publication of this notice.

Sr. Superintendent of Police
Telecommunication Kashmir

No: ESTT/PF-355/KZ-2026/6649
DATED: 13/04/2026

DIPK-466/26 Dated: 16.04.2026

GOVERNMENT OF THE UNION TERRITORY OF JAMMU & KASHMIR OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, MECHANICAL IRRIGATION DIVISION, KHOJA BAGH, BARAMULLA.

Email ID: amitabhman.721013@jk.gov.in

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Fresh e-NIT No. MIDB/04 OF 2026-27 Dated: 16-04-2026

For and on behalf of Lieutenant Governor of J&K UT, Executive Engineer, Mechanical Irrigation Division, Baramulla, invites tenders on item rate basis by e-tendering mode for the following items of work from the reputed Original Equipment Manufacturers or their Authorized contractors/fabricators/firms/Joint Ventures having relevant experience. The bidding process shall be completed online in two covers viz Cover '1st' -Tender fee and Earnest Money details. Deposit, fulfillment of prequalification criteria, technical specifications and acceptance to terms and conditions of the tender & Cover '2nd' - Financial Bid in the prescribed BOQ.

S. No.	Particulars of the work	Name of Division	Advertised Cost (In Rs. Lacs)	Cost of document/ tender fee (In Rs.)	Earnest money (In Rs.)	Validity of Rates
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.	Construction of Lift Irrigation Scheme Reban Rafiabab.	MID Baramulla	Rs. 50.47	Rs. 1,000/-	1,00,000/-	90 Days

Position of funds: Awaited

Head of Account: CDF of Hon'ble MLA Rafiabab (Jenab Javid Ahmad Dar).

AAA: Order No: 388/DDC of 2026 Dated:02-01-2026

TS: Accorded vide no:07 TS of 2025-26 Dated:31-01-2026

Key/critical Dates:

01	Date of issue of Tender Notice	16/04/2026
02	Date of downloading of bidding documents	16/04/2026 from 04.00 PM
03	Date, Time & Venue of Pre-bid meeting	25/04/2026 at 11.00 AM in the office of Executive Engineer, MID Baramulla.
04	Bid submission start date	16/04/2026 from 04.00 PM
05	Bid Submission end date	07/05/2026 up to 04.00 PM
06	Date & time of opening Technical Bids (online)	08/05/2026 at 01.00 PM in the office of Executive Engineer, MID Baramulla.
07	Date & time of opening Financial Bids (online)	To be notified after technical bid evaluation

1. Bid documents can be assessed at and downloaded from the websites www.ifckashmir.com / <http://jktenders.gov.in>

2. The Bids shall be deposited on the website <http://jktenders.gov.in>

3. The complete bidding process will be online <http://jktenders.gov.in>.

4. The bids received shall be opened in the office of the Executive Engineer, Mechanical Irrigation Division, Baramulla on the date given above; the bids shall be evaluated online/offline thereafter.

5. Bids must be accompanied by bid security and cost of Tender Document as specified in column 5 & 6 of the table above payable at Baramulla.

a. Bid Security to be pledged in favour of Executive Engineer, Mechanical Irrigation Division, Baramulla Bid Security will have to be in form of CDR/ FDR/IBG of any scheduled Bank and shall have to be valid for one year or more after last date of receipt of Bid.

b. The cost of downloaded tender documents should be in form of DD/Treasury challan //GR MH 0702 in favor of Executive Engineer MID Baramulla payable at Baramulla.

6. The hard copies of cost of tender document in shape of DD, Earnest money in shape of CDR / FDR must be delivered to the office of the Executive Engineer, Mechanical Irrigation Division, Baramulla as and when demanded.

7. Only the OEM/ Bidder authorized by OEM of Pumps having sound experience can quote for the tender in similar type of job can participate in the tendering process. The bidder could be an individual, Limited Company/corporation, Proprietary firm, Partnership firm, Consortium or Joint Venture Companies. Bids from joint ventures are allowed with maximum two partners.

8. The bid for the work shall remain open for acceptance for a period of 90 days from the date of opening of bids. If any bidder/tenderer withdraws his bid/ tender before the said period or makes any modifications in the terms and conditions of the bid, the said earnest money shall stand forfeited.

9. Other details can be seen in the bidding documents from the website <http://jktenders.gov.in>.

10. Queries by email if any should be made at amitabhman.721013@jk.gov.in

No: MIDB/ 245-51

Date: 16/04/2026

DIPK-453/26 Dated: 16.04.2026

Sd/-
Executive Engineer
Mech. Irri. Division Baramulla

Gandbal: Bridge stands, hearts broken

REHAN QAYOUM MIR

Srinagar, Apr 16: Two years ago, on April 16, 2024, Kashmir woke to an ordinary morning. By noon, it was mourning.

The Gandbal-Batwara boat tragedy lasted only minutes in the waters of the Jhelum, but its impact stretched across months and years. What happened that day became more than a disaster; it became a symbol of delay, loss, waiting and grief.

Residents of Gandbal, Batwara and nearby areas had for years relied on small boats to cross the Jhelum. The two banks were close, but the nearest bridge was far, forcing people to choose between a long route or a risky shortcut. Locals had repeatedly said that an under-construction footbridge has remained delayed for years.

Children used the crossing to reach schools, workers used it for jobs, while women used it for daily errands. Over time, risk had become routine.

April 16, 2024 — morning turns into horror. On the morning of April 16, a routine ferry boat carrying locals and schoolchildren entered the Jhelum near Gandbal-Batwara.

After making a few regular trips, the boat reportedly struck a pillar of the under-construction bridge and overturned. The boat, carrying men, women and children, lost balance in the current and capsized within moments.

School bags, books, slippers and shawls were later seen floating in the river. Chaos on both banks



Locals immediately rushed into the water. Some swam toward children, some used ropes, while others shouted names into the river.

Rescue teams from SDRF, NDRF, police and MARCOS were mobilised. Parents who had sent their children to school arrived at the riverbank to scenes no family could imagine. Same day evening — Kashmir counts the dead. As rescue operations continued, reports

of deaths and missing persons started emerging.

As bodies were retrieved throughout the day, the scale of the tragedy became clearer. Children were among those killed, and the incident sent shockwaves across Kashmir, triggering mourning and anger.

Questions begin. Soon after the tragedy, questions began to arise. Why were people still crossing like this in

2024? Why had the bridge remained incomplete? Why does action come only after loss? Locals openly linked the tragedy to years of delay in infrastructure.

Search operations continued in the Jhelum in the following days. Several bodies were recovered, but Showkat Ahmad Sheikh, a 40-year-old mason from Gandbal, remained missing.

For most families, burial marked the beginning of grief. For his family, grief could not begin properly.

"We had been demanding the bridge for years. It came only after lives were lost," Zubair Ahmad, a local resident, told the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO).

Mid to late 2024 — a family still waiting. As public attention faded, one family remained trapped in the events of April 16.

No body meant no burial. No grave meant no place to sit and pray. His ailing mother kept asking for updates and waiting for news from the river.

Following public uproar, the under-construction footbridge near the accident site was completed in the following months.

For many locals, the completion brought mixed emotions, as what could have prevented deaths came only after the tragedy.

April 16, 2025 — one year later. When the first anniversary arrived, most families marked the day with prayers at the graves.

But Showkat Ahmad's family still had no grave to visit. His mother's health had weakened, while uncertainty continued inside the

home. Though one year had passed, for the family, April 16 had never ended.

Year later, January 11–19, 2026 — grim discovery

During sand extraction in the river stretch, partial human remains were found, including a foot later identified by the family through footwear

This led authorities to intensify searches. MARCOS and SDRF resumed underwater scanning and dredging operations in the river.

January 19, 2026 — the last victim returns. On January 19, 2026, the mortal remains of Showkat Ahmad Sheikh were recovered from the Jhelum. With this, the longest unfinished chapter of the tragedy came to an end.

His remains were later buried, and final rites were performed. For the family, the waiting ended that day.

Mother performs Umrah. Family sources told KNO that the ailing mother later travelled for Umrah after the son's burial.

Those close to the family said she carried prayers for her son and for all those who lost their lives in the tragedy.

Today marks exactly two years since the Gandbal tragedy, not three. The bridge now stands. The missing man was found. The final burial was completed. Yet for the affected families, mornings remain divided into two parts—before the boat and after the boat.

"The bridge stands now, but those who died will not return," said Tawkeer Ahmad, a neighbor—(KNO)

Tawi Baisakhi Mela to be Jammu's major festival: Dy CM

KT NEWS DESK

Jammu, Apr 16: Deputy Chief Minister, Surinder Choudhary on Thursday said that the Baisakhi Mela on the banks of River Tawi will be promoted into one of the biggest festivals of Jammu and Kashmir, aimed at attracting the tourists from across the country and beyond.

Addressing a large gathering during the concluding day of Tawi Mohatsav celebrations, the Deputy Chief Minister said that the vibrant mela has fulfilled a long-cherished dream of the people of Jammu to celebrate such a grand cultural festival along the banks of River Tawi, also revered as Maa Surya Putri.

He said that the government is working earnestly towards promoting Jammu as a key cultural and religious destination, adding that sustained efforts will be made to further enhance the scale and outreach of the Baisakhi Mela in the coming years.

He also appreciated the Lieutenant Governor, Manoj Sinha and the Chief Minister, Omar Abdullah, for their continued support and encouragement in organizing such a grand event. He also lauded the efforts of the Jammu Municipal Corporation, Smart City officials, Tourism Department and other concerned agencies for their coordinated work in making the festival a grand success. Highlighting the



collective efforts behind the event, the Deputy Chief Minister said that while planning plays a crucial role, it is the dedication and hard work of officers and officials on the ground that ensure successful execution of such mega events. He further said that all efforts shall be taken to elevate the Baisakhi Mela into one of the biggest festivals of Jammu and Kashmir, drawing participation from artists, tourists and cultural enthusiasts from across the globe.

The Deputy Chief Minister also called for incorporating public feedback and suggestions to further improve the event in the coming years, ensuring that the festival continues to

grow in scale, quality and appeal.

The three-day event witnessed a series of cultural programmes, musical performances, traditional activities and large public participation, reflecting the rich cultural heritage and festive spirit of Jammu region.

On the occasion, the Deputy Chief Minister also witnessed Dangal, cultural events and participated in Arti puja held on the banks of river Tawi. He also felicitated various participants of dangal, cultural events and others for their role in making the festival a big success.

Commissioner JMC, Dr. Devansh Yadav, Joint Commissioner and other senior officers were also present on the occasion.

Guide youth energy to sports, tourism: Raja Waseem

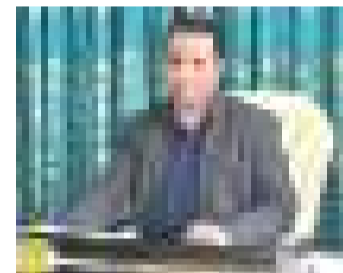
REHAN QAYOUM MIR

Srinagar, Apr 16: Joint Director Tourism Kashmir, Raja Waseem on Thursday said the administration wants youth to stay away from drugs and channel their energies towards sports, tourism and recreational activities.

Speaking during the Shikara rally organised on Dal Lake by the Tourism Department in collaboration with District Administration Srinagar to promote the campaign for a drug-free Jammu and Kashmir, Waseem said the youth of Jammu and Kashmir have great potential, and their energy should be guided in a positive direction.

He urged youngsters to participate more in sports activities and recreational programmes. "There are different modes of awareness. Campaigns are being conducted in schools, colleges and other institutions, while departments are also carrying out programmes at their own level," he said.

The Joint Director said the Shikara rally was a special initiative by the Tourism Department. "However, every department, including the Information Department and



District Administration, is playing a positive role in the anti-drug campaign. We all have one common goal. Activities may be different, but the objective is to keep our youth away from drugs," he said.

Highlighting positive alternatives for youth, Waseem said young people should take part in tourism and adventure-related activities such as rafting, paragliding, trekking and camping, which can help build confidence and promote a healthy lifestyle.

He urged the media to play an active role in spreading awareness and carrying forward the message of a drug-free society.

The rally witnessed decorated shikaras moving across Dal Lake carrying anti-drug messages and promoting youth engagement in constructive activities—(KNO)

DIPR, Tourism Dept collaborate for Nasha Mukta J&K campaign

KT NEWS DESK

Srinagar, Apr 16: In a unique initiative, the Department of Information and Public Relations (DIPR), in collaboration with the Tourism Department, organized a mega anti-drug Shikara rally on the iconic Dal Lake under the ongoing Nasha Mukta Jammu and Kashmir Abhiyan.

The initiative was a part of the ongoing 100-Day 'Nasha Mukta Jammu and Kashmir' campaign launched by the Lieutenant Governor J&K, and in line with the calendar of activities of District Administration Srinagar.

The rally aimed to spread awareness about the ill effects of drug abuse among a wide spectrum of stakeholders, including tourists, shikara owners, and communities residing in and around water bodies. The initiative sought to ensure that the message of a drug-free society reaches even the most remote and water-bound habitations.

Dozens of vibrantly decorated shikaras glided across the waters of Dal Lake, carrying banners, placards, and messages advocating a drug-free lifestyle. On the occasion, Joint Director Information Kashmir, Syed Shah Nawaz Bukhari, and Joint Director Tourism Kashmir, Waseem Raja, actively participated in the rally along with students, shikara owners, and officials from both departments.

Continued on www.kashmirthunder.in

Season ends for Tulip Garden with 3.9 lakh visitors

REHAN QAYOUM MIR

Srinagar, Apr 16: Asia's largest Tulip Garden in Srinagar closed for the season on Wednesday, capping a successful run with total footfall nearing 3.9 lakh and revenue surpassing Rs 3.66 crore, officials said.

Assistant Floriculture Officer In-charge Tulip Garden Srinagar, Imran Ahmad said that the garden recorded 3,82,297 visitors till the last day, with the final figure expected to reach around 3.89 lakh after inclusion of pending online ticketing data.

"Footfall will be around 3.89 lakh as at least 7,000 more visitors will be added once the final online figures are received," Ahmad said.

He said the garden witnessed a steady stream of visitors throughout the season, with a notable surge on the closing day despite the bloom declining significantly. "Even in the last phase, the response remained strong. The closing day saw a heavy rush of visitors," he added. In revenue terms, the garden



generated Rs 3,66,43,504 from ticket sales, reflecting one of the strongest seasons in recent years. Of this, Rs 7,64,104 has been earned through online ticketing, while the final e-ticketing figures are awaited from J&K Bank.

He said offline ticketing continued to dominate, though digital bookings are gradually gaining traction.

The visitor profile this season reflected a strong turnout across categories. Around 2,24,233 tourists from outside Jammu

and Kashmir visited the garden, while 1,56,842 were local visitors. Additionally, 1,222 foreign tourists also explored the garden, underscoring its growing global appeal.

Notably, the garden, which opened 10–12 days earlier than usual, maintained an average daily footfall of nearly 10,000 visitors. Peak days witnessed even higher numbers, with domestic tourist arrivals alone touching between 9,000 and 11,000 daily with significantly higher than previous years.

Visitors expressed delight over the experience, calling it a highlight of their Kashmir trip. "The Tulip Garden is absolutely breathtaking. Even though we came towards the end of the season, the beauty and scale are unmatched. It's a must-visit," said a tourist from Delhi.

Another visitor from Maharashtra said the garden exceeded expectations. "We had seen pictures online, but witnessing it in person is something else. The arrangements and the view with the mountains in the backdrop make it unforgettable," he said.

Officials said the Tulip Garden once again lived up to its reputation as the curtain-raiser for Kashmir's tourism season, drawing large crowds and setting a positive tone for the months ahead.

It is pertinent to mention that earlier, officials had announced that the garden would close on April 16 as the bloom had declined to around 20 per cent and was expected to fall further below the operational threshold—(KNO)

WARIS FAYAZ

Baramulla, Apr 16: Former Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti on Thursday said her biggest political achievement was compelling top leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party to reach the residence of late separatist leader Syed Ali Shah Geelani for dialogue on Kashmir.

Speaking at the PDP's 'Kath Baath' interactive session in Baramulla, Mufti said no other leader had managed such an engagement during their tenures.

Mehbooba said that she had also written to the central leadership seeking dialogue on the "Kashmir issue," which she said, "Is not being entertained at present."

The PDP Chief said that during her tenure in a coalition with the BJP, her government facilitated the withdrawal of cases against around 12,000 youth. She asserted that issues in Jammu and Kashmir cannot be resolved through force and stressed that dialogue remains



the only viable path. Referring to cross-LoC trade, she said the Muzaffarabad road was opened to promote business. "If the Government of India considers Jammu and Kashmir its integral part, it should address public concerns by reopening routes and restoring control over local resources, including power projects," she said. Hitting out at present government led by

National Conference, Mehbooba alleged that even basic public issues were not being discussed.

Her remarks came a day after Chief Minister's Advisor Nasir Aslam Wani accused the PDP of contributing to the current situation in the Valley. Wani had said that in 2016, Dr Farooq Abdullah and Omar Abdullah had advised Mufti against forming an alliance with the BJP, but she chose to proceed.

Meanwhile, Mufti expressed optimism about the role of youth, stating that Generation Z is well exposed and can play a transformative role in Jammu and Kashmir if provided a platform without fear. She said young people have the ability to take the region's voice to larger forums and contribute meaningfully to its future.

She described the 'Kath Baath' programme as a platform for public participation and free expression, and thanked the people of Baramulla for attending the event despite short notice—(KNO)

EDITORIAL

Friday Special: Fight Against Drug Addiction Is Islamic Obligation

In an era where drug addiction has ravaged families, destroyed futures, and fueled crime across societies, the Islamic position on intoxicants stands as a timeless and unambiguous safeguard. The Quran and Hadith do not merely discourage drug abuse; they declare it a grave sin, a satanic abomination, and a path to individual and collective destruction. For the Muslim believer, this prohibition is not a matter of opinion but a divine command demanding absolute obedience. The Quran delivers its

most decisive verdict on intoxicants in Surah Al-Ma'idah: "O you who have believed, indeed, intoxicants, gambling, idols, and divining arrows are but defilement from the work of Satan, so avoid them that you may be successful" (5:90). The language is striking. Intoxicants are termed rijs—defilement, filth, an abomination. The command is not to moderate or limit but to avoid completely. The purpose is success, both in this world and the Hereafter. No ambiguity remains. The Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon

Him) reinforced this absolute prohibition with the clearest of warnings. He declared: "Every intoxicant is forbidden. Whatever intoxicates in large quantities, a small quantity of it is also forbidden" (Sunan Abi Dawud). This principle eliminates any attempt to rationalise moderate use. Whether it is alcohol, heroin, cocaine, prescription opioids, or synthetic drugs—if it alters the mind and impairs judgment, it is categorically haram. The wisdom behind this prohibition is profound. Intoxicants attack the very faculty

that distinguishes humans from animals: the intellect. A person under the influence loses control, says what they would not say, does what they would not do, and harms whom they would not harm. The Prophet (PBUH) warned that "intoxicants are the mother of all evils" (Sunan an-Nasa'i), linking them to obscenity, violence, broken families, and societal decay. Islam also protects the honour and safety of others. The one who sells drugs, facilitates their use, or profits from this trade shares in the sin. The

line between the substance and the soul is clear: drugs have no place in a Muslim's life. The fight against drug addiction is not only a government campaign; it is an Islamic obligation. Every parent who warns their child, every imam who speaks from the pulpit, every government that enforces laws against trafficking—all are fulfilling a divine mandate. To protect the mind is to protect faith. To save a generation from addiction is to answer the call of the Quran. The poison is forbidden. The duty to resist is sacred.

The Time Is Now: Why Women's Reservation Will Transform Indian Democracy

This is a moment that belongs to all of us, not to any one party, but to Parliament as an institution. I appeal to all as a woman who has served this nation at every level of government, and I believe we all share the same desire to see India's democracy stronger and more complete.

Shobha Karandlaje

While taking my first oath as a Minister of State, I looked around the packed room and made a count. The number of women present in that space could be counted on a single hand. This visual left a mark, not as a personal achievement, but as a clear indication of the long distance that women are yet to traverse in the public sphere.

I belong to a small village near Puttur in coastal Karnataka, a traditionally rich region, where women have always shown their resilience and strength. I know what it meant to channel that strength into public life, to walk a path that few had walked before and how not every woman gets the same chance with that same fire.

The Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam has already been passed. The Parliament spoke in September 2023; the Constitution was amended but now comes the difficult part: keeping that word.

Democracy That Represents Its People

India is home to 670 million women but for many long years, our lawmakers have represented merely 15% of that population. A democracy which continuously excludes half of its citizens from the process of decision-making cannot be considered as true democracy; it remains a work in progress. The Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam is an important step towards completing this endeavour, but a law on paper holds little value unless it is effectively executed. The census needs to be conducted.



Following that, delimitation must occur, and one third of the seats in both Parliament and every state assembly should be occupied by women in due course.

When women are included at the table where laws are made, the focal point of legislation changes. Panchayati Raj institutions where 33% reservation for women was implemented decades ago show a measurable shift in priorities. More

budgets were allocated to water, health, education and child nutrition. There was less tolerance for corruption and more accountability to communities. It is not mere a coincidence. It is representation in action.

Breaking the Cycle

I have heard the argument that women should rise "on their own merit." I respect the sentiment, but I reject the premise. Merit does not exist in a vacuum. It flourishes where

opportunity exists.

For generations, structural barriers—social, economic and cultural—have kept brilliant women out of politics. The selection process for candidates has always favoured those who have well established networks and contacts, inherited political capital and freedom from domestic responsibilities. Women, on the other hand, have had none of these advantages in their favour.

Reservation does not lower the bar. It removes the wall.

Women were initially dismissed when they entered Panchayats in large numbers. Eventually, in study after study, they were rated as more effective, more accessible, and more honest than their male counterparts by their own communities. When given a fair chance, women do not just participate. They lead.

What This Means for Policy

My extensive experience in the government has taught me that who is in the room determines what is discussed. Women legislators push for maternal health funding when it would otherwise be cut. They flag the gendered impact of policies that might fall hardest on women in practice. They bring constituency concerns that male colleagues, through no fault of their own, simply do not encounter.

33% reservation in Parliament and state assemblies means that for the first time, these voices will not be exceptional. They will be structural. Permanent. Impossible to ignore.

Nari Shakti: From Vision to Law

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has long held that India cannot realise its full potential without the full and equal participation of its women. This is not rhetoric, but a conviction that has driven policy after policy, from Beti Bachao Beti Padhao to the record inclusion of women in Jan Dhan, Ujjwala and PM Awas Yojana. He has consistently spoken about Nari Shakti not as a slogan but as the foundation of a Viksit Bharat. The Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam is the fullest expression of that vision,

bringing women's empowerment from welfare into the very structure of governance.

To My Colleagues Across Party Lines

This is a moment that belongs to all of us, not to any one party, but to Parliament as an institution. I appeal to all as a woman who has served this nation at every level of government, and I believe we all share the same desire to see India's democracy stronger and more complete. What we owe to the women of India now is urgency, in conducting the census, completing delimitation, and ensuring not a single day is lost needlessly.

I understand the concerns around implementation, rotation of reserved seats, proxy candidates, sunset clauses. These are legitimate debates but we need to ensure that this gets immediate attention. The principle is sound. The need is urgent. Let us not allow the perfect to be the enemy of the transformative.

A Nation That Chooses to Be Just

History was made in September 2023. But history is only as meaningful as what follows it. A country that chooses to be just does its silent, lasting work of living by the laws it passes. For every young girl in any community who aspires to serve her country, for the leader who has never had a platform, and for the voice that has never been given a microphone, now is the time to act.

Implement this law. Make the room bigger. India is watching.

The author is the Union Minister of State for MSME and Labour & Employment

Who controls your EGO?

Majd Arbil

There is a disease of the heart between faith and faithlessness, which shows itself when people get involved in trying to alter the precepts of the religion. The cause of this illness is total dependence on limited human logic and intelligence; total faith in one's own opinions; obedience to the desires of one's flesh and the ambitions of one's ego. The worst of these is slavery to the ego.

Guidance from Allah

Do not be misled by your egos, or you will be led away from the truth and into lies. (hadith qudsi) He also says that your egos will lead you away from your Lord. And He promises:

For such as had entertained the fear of standing before their Lord's judgment and had restrained the ego from its desires, the abode will be Paradise. (79:40-41)

Have not you known the ones who take their whims and desires as their god? (45:23 and 25:43)

Who is more led astray than the ones who follow the fancies of their ego? (28:50)

Nay, the wrongdoers merely follow their own lusts, being devoid of knowledge. But who will guide those whom God leaves astray? For them, there will be no helpers. (30:29)

Guidance from Prophet Muhammad (SAW)

Anas ibn Malik reported that the Messenger of Allah (SAW) said: "What destroys the human being is arrogance, following lusts and the desires of the ego, and miserliness." (Bazzaz)

The blessed 'Ali ibn Abi Talib reported that



the Prophet (SAW) said: "What I fear for you most are two habits: to go along with the dictates of your egos and to be ambitious for this world. (Ibn Abi Dunya)"

Shaddad ibn 'Aws related that the Messenger of Allah (SAW) said: "The sign of a person who is aware and intelligent is that he has his ego under control and devotes his life to the preparation for the Hereafter. The sign of the weak person is that he continues being a slave to his ego and hopes for his Lord's forgiveness." (Tirmidhi)

Guidance from the Companions and the Wise

The blessed 'Ali ibn Abi Talib advised, "Give comfort and rest to your heart. For if you

oppress your heart with heavy tasks, it will tire of them, and leave them and everything else."

Abu Darda' said, "At times I give rest and comfort to my ego. When I do this, it helps me on the path to truth."

Imam Ghazali advised, "When your wish and desire for prayer and worship diminishes if you feel that some rest, sleep, amusement, or recreation would restore it, do it without delay. This rest is better than making one's prayers unwillingly."

To seek rest, comfort, and recreation, not for their own sake, but to give one strength and motivation to live a righteous life, is to abide by the rules of religion.

The Destructive EGO

Our egos and the appetites of our physical being contain a tendency toward wrongdoing. They have the strength to impose their wishes in our lives—but to obey all their desires is surely the way to our downfall. Almost always they lead to forbidden things, harmful even to our material being and life in this world, in addition to being disastrous for the Hereafter. They push us to revolt against Allah's prescriptions and the path of salvation, leading us to regions of pain, confusion, disaster, and sin by pretending that these are desirable conditions and good for us. And those of us who remain slaves to our egos become lowly, immoral, tyrannical, selfish, stingy, hypocritical, lying, cursed beings, enemies of the public and of themselves.

Reduce the Demands of the EGO

It is necessary to fight an endless battle in this life in order to protect ourselves against this greatest of evil enemies. A continuous effort must be made to repel it, or at least to reduce our acquiescence to its demands.

Perhaps the first attempt should be to change our habits, which usually already represent the established rule of our egos. That struggle is the true sign of the righteous. It is the only way to take hold of the force that leads us astray. We must fight to bring our egos under control, in order to save our souls and afford them their rightful ruling place in our lives.

Help from Allah

O seeker of truth, if you wish your Lord to lead you on the straight path to truth, first you must eliminate the hindrance of your ego on that path. Then Allah will certainly act upon

what He promises:

And those who strive in Our cause, We will certainly guide them in Our path, for verily Allah is with those who do right. (29:69)

Be Compassionate Towards your EGO

In the struggle with the ego, we should be careful not to tyrannize ourselves. Among the desires of our flesh, there are things permissible, even necessary. One should be able to gauge the strength and insistence of these desires: it is excess that makes them blameworthy. Indeed, it is not possible for human nature totally to deny what the flesh and the ego desire. The exaggeration of asceticism is forbidden in Islam. Even in our worship, moderation is advised.

The blessed 'A'ishah, may Allah be pleased with her, reported that the Messenger of Allah (SAW) said:

"O people, only do things that you are able to continue doing, for otherwise you will soon be discouraged and stop. The actions that Allah considers to be the best are the constant and continuous ones, even if they are small. (Bukhari)

Adapted from "The Path of Muhammad" by Imam Birgivi

Imam Birgivi was a scholar and moralist who lived during the height of the Ottoman Empire, in the 16th century CE. His influence on Islamic morals and ethics continues to this day. This book is still being used as a text in the most important faculties of theology and in the universities of many Muslim countries.

Source: IslamiCity

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

CS Atal Dulloo assesses impact, implementation of PMIS in J&K

KT News Desk

JAMMU, APRIL 16: Chief Secretary, Atal Dulloo Thursday convened a meeting to assess the implementation status of the Prime Minister's Internship Scheme (PMIS) in Jammu and Kashmir and outlined a comprehensive strategy to enhance its outreach and impact across the Union Territory.

Those who attended this meeting, as per an official statement, includes Commissioner Secretary, School Education Department; Secretary, Employment and Skill Development Departments; MD, Skill Development Mission along with other concerned officers.

Director, PMIS in Ministry of Corporate Affairs, GoI attended the meeting through video link.

The Chief Secretary underscored the importance of the scheme in improving youth employability by providing structured internship opportunities in reputed companies. He noted that PMIS, launched under the Union Budget 2024-25, offers internships of 6 to 9 months with a monthly stipend of 9,000 and an additional one-time grant of 6,000, thereby enabling young individuals to gain valuable industry exposure.

Reviewing the progress, it was informed that Jammu and Kashmir has witnessed encouraging response in terms of



registrations, with over 4,400 youth registered on the portal and more than 2,800 profiles completed so far. However, only 68 internship opportunities are currently available in the UT, despite J&K ranking among the top states in registrations.

The Chief Secretary took this occasion to impress upon the concerned to bridge the gap between registrations and available opportunities, he also emphasized the need for aggressive industry engagement with the active role of the Ministry in doing the same for J&K. He observed that increasing participation of companies is crucial to ensuring that the registered youth are meaningfully absorbed under the scheme.

The Chief Secretary directed the department to significantly scale up registration efforts and set an ambitious target of achieving at least 2 lakh registrations from across the districts of Jammu and Kashmir. He emphasized that this can be achieved through a mission-mode

approach involving educational institutions, employment centres, and grassroots-level outreach mechanisms.

Highlighting the constraints posed by the limited presence of large corporate houses in the UT, he stressed the need to scale up internship opportunities multifold for the youth across the States/UTs of the country. He called for proactive engagement with the Ministry of Corporate Affairs to enhance the number of internship opportunities to at least 1,000 in the coming days, so as to bridge the existing gap between demand and availability.

The Chief Secretary directed that PMIS registration be integrated with institutional mechanisms, including ITIs, polytechnics, and colleges, to ensure maximum coverage of eligible youth. He also called for active involvement of District Employment & Counselling Centres, Common Service Centres, and placement cells in facilitating registrations.

The Secretary, SDD, Kumar

Rajeev Ranjan apprised the meeting of a 100-day roadmap aimed at significantly scaling up registrations and improving outcomes. The plan targets 20,000 registrations in the initial phase, with a structured approach involving campus drives, establishment of help desks, mass awareness campaigns, and deployment of mobile registration units in remote areas.

A key focus of the strategy, he revealed, pivots on the convergence with Mission YUVA to leverage its extensive youth database and grassroots network. He further divulged that over 4.73 lakh "willing to work" youth have already been identified under Mission YUVA, and around 2,000 YUVA Doots will be mobilized to carry out door-to-door awareness and registration drives across all districts.

Stressing the need for effective monitoring, he instructed departments to conduct regular reviews and ensure real-time tracking of progress through digital platforms. He further directed that bottlenecks, if any, be promptly escalated for timely resolution.

Highlighting the transformative potential of the scheme, the Chief Secretary said that PMIS can play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between education and employment and in preparing the youth of Jammu and Kashmir for the demands of the modern job market.

DC Bandipora reviews progress of Panchayat Electoral Roll Revision, stresses transparency, saturation

KT News Desk

BANDIPORA, APRIL 16: Deputy Commissioner Bandipora, Indu Kanwal Chib, on Thursday chaired a meeting at Mini Secretariat Bandipora to review the progress of the Summary Revision of Panchayat Electoral Rolls 2026.

During the meeting, as per an official statement, it was informed that the revision process is being carried out across 1133 polling stations in the district. The DC took a detailed review of the progress achieved so far and emphasized the need for ensuring transparency and saturation in the electoral roll updation process.

The EROs/AEROs informed that the draft electoral rolls had already been published at Panchayats on 27-03-2026 for inspection by the general public and for inviting claims and objections. The Deputy Commissioner directed the Assistant Commissioner Panchayat (ACP) to share a detailed calendar regarding public announcement vehicles with the BDOs to strengthen awareness and outreach at the grassroots level. She also directed the ACP to chair meetings focusing on



door-to-door data capturing to improve coverage.

Expressing concern over poor penetration in certain areas, the DC stressed the need for intensified field-level engagement. She directed Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) to ensure proper identification and inclusion of vulnerable sections, particularly persons with disabilities and voters aged 85 years and above.

The DC further called for organizing dedicated meetings with Booth Level Officers (BLOs) to streamline the process and enhance efficiency.

She emphasized the importance of proactive public interaction, urging officers to listen to people's concerns and address grievances effectively to ensure maximum participation and accuracy in the electoral rolls.

The meeting was attended by Assistant Commissioner Revenue, Assistant Commissioner Panchayat, Deputy District Election Officer, Sub-Divisional Magistrate Sumbal, District Sheep Husbandry Officer, BDOs, District Informatics Officer, and other concerned officers.

DIPR cultural unit organises anti-drug awareness programme at GSS Balhama



KT News Desk

SRINAGAR, APRIL 16: As part of the ongoing 100-Day 'Nasha Mukht Jammu and Kashmir' campaign launched by the Hon'ble Lieutenant Governor J&K, and in line with the calendar of activities of District Administration Srinagar, the Cultural Unit Kashmir of the Department of Information and Public Relations (DIPR) Thursday organized an awareness programme titled "Say No to Drugs and Yes to Life" under the ongoing Nasha Mukht J&K Abhiyan at Girls Secondary School (GSS), Balhama.

The programme, as per an official statement, witnessed active participation of students and staff, aiming to sensitize young minds about the harmful effects of drug abuse and the importance of leading a healthy and responsible life.

Assistant Commissioner Development (ACD) Srinagar, Tariq Reshi; BDO Khonmoh, Muqsit Wani; and AECO Cultural Unit, Syed Shakeel Shan, addressed the gathering.

The speakers highlighted the serious physical, psychological, and social consequences of drug addiction and emphasized the need for collective efforts to eradicate this menace from society. They urged students to stay away from drugs and become ambassadors of a drug-free society.

As part of the awareness initiative, the Cultural Unit presented a thematic folk song and a short play carrying strong anti-drug messages.

The Principal and staff of the school appreciated the initiative taken by DIPR, acknowledging its role in creating awareness and guiding youth towards a positive and healthy future.

DC Shopian reviews progress under PM Surya Ghar, RDSS

Stresses accelerated implementation and enhanced outreach

KT News Desk

SHOPIAN, APRIL 16: Deputy Commissioner Shopian, Shishir Gupta Thursday chaired a comprehensive review meeting at the Mini Secretariat to assess the progress of key power sector initiatives, including PM Surya Ghar (Rooftop Solar Scheme) and the Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS) in the district.

During the meeting, the DC conducted a detailed review of ongoing works and sought inputs from officers of KPDC, executing agencies, and other stakeholders.

Emphasis was laid on achieving set targets within stipulated timelines and addressing gaps requiring immediate intervention.

Highlighting the importance of mass participation, the DC directed all concerned officers, particularly Assistant Engineers (AEs) and Junior Engineers (JEs) from various blocks, to significantly increase registrations on the PM Surya Ghar portal.

They were instructed to ensure submission of daily progress figures and work towards covering the entire eligible population of the district.

The DC, as per an official statement, stressed the need



to accelerate rooftop solar installations and called for intensified field level efforts to enhance adoption.

He further directed that all inspections related to solar installations be completed within one week to avoid delays in execution.

While reviewing RDSS components, the DC underscored the importance of strengthening power distribution infrastructure for improved service delivery.

Issues related to smart metering were discussed in detail, and concerned were directed to resolve technical and operational bottlenecks promptly, ensuring smooth installation and functionality of smart meters.

The DC also emphasized addressing consumer-related concerns, including billing issues and service grievances, in a time bound manner.

Grievances raised by

vendors and executing agencies were also discussed. The DC assured necessary support and directed departments to facilitate smooth coordination and remove procedural hurdles impacting progress.

To enhance awareness and public participation, the DC called for intensified publicity campaigns highlighting the benefits of PM Surya Ghar and RDSS.

He stressed the need to document and promote success stories to encourage wider adoption across the district and further instructed that periodic progress reports be submitted for continuous monitoring and review.

The meeting was attended by Sub Divisional Magistrate Zainapora, Bilal Ahamd, Executive Engineers of KPDC, R&B, LDM Shopian, senior officers, AEs, JEs, representatives of executing agencies, vendors etc.

DC Budgam reviews progress of 100-Day Nasha Mukht Abhiyan

Calls for intensified IEC activities, greater public participation to eliminate Drug Menace



KT News Desk

BUDGAM, APRIL 16: Deputy Commissioner Budgam, Athar Aamir Khan Thursday chaired a comprehensive review meeting to assess the progress of the ongoing 100-day intensive Nasha Mukht Abhiyan in the district.

During the meeting, the DC, as per an official statement, took a detailed review of activities being carried out by various departments under the Nasha Mukht Abhiyan, emphasizing the need for sustained and coordinated efforts to eliminate drug abuse from society. He stressed that all stakeholders must work in close synergy to ensure the success of the initiative.

Threadbare discussions were held on awareness campaigns, community outreach programmes, and the role of educational institutions in sensitizing youth against the menace of drug abuse. The DC underscored the importance of involving local communities,

youth groups, and institutions in spreading awareness and promoting a drug-free environment.

He directed all officers to intensify IEC activities, ensure wider public participation, and regularly monitor progress at the grassroots level. Departments were also instructed to share daily updates of their activities to maintain momentum and visibility of the campaign.

The DC called for a collective and proactive approach to make Budgam a drug-free district.

The meeting was attended by the Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) Budgam, Joint Director Planning, all Sub-Divisional Magistrates (SDMs), Assistant Commissioner Police (ACP), Chief Medical Officer (CMO), Principals of all Degree Colleges, District Information Officer (DIO), District Social Welfare Officer (DSWO), Executive Officers (EOs) of all Municipal Committees and representatives from the School Education Department.

DLSA Budgam conducts awareness programme on rights of prisoners

KT News Desk

BUDGAM, APRIL 16: As part of its calendar of activities, the District Legal Services Authority, Budgam (DLSA Budgam), under the aegis of the J&K Legal Services Authority and under the chairmanship of O. P. Bhagat, Chairman DLSA (Principal District & Sessions Judge), Budgam, successfully conducted an awareness programme at Central Jail Srinagar on Rights of Prisoners and Legal Aid to Prisoners.

The programme, as per an official statement, was organized with the objective of sensitizing inmates about their legal rights and the availability of free legal aid services, ensuring that they are aware of their entitlements under law and are able to access justice effectively.

During the programme, resource person, Lateef Ahmad Khan, Chief LADC spoke on the importance of legal aid to prisoners. He explained the



procedures for availing free legal services and highlighted the role of Legal Services Authorities in ensuring that no individual is denied justice due to lack of financial resources. He encouraged the inmates to approach legal aid counsel for assistance in their cases and assured them of timely and effective legal support.

Nazeer Ahmad Wagay, Deputy LADC, elaborated on key rights such as the right to life and dignity, right to free legal aid, right to fair and speedy trial, and right to humane treatment while in custody. He also underscored the importance of access to

medical care, communication with family members and legal counsel, and protection against any form of torture or inhuman treatment.

The programme witnessed active participation from the inmates, who raised queries regarding their cases and legal remedies. These queries were addressed comprehensively by the panel of legal experts.

The initiative reflects the continued commitment of DLSA Budgam towards promoting legal awareness and ensuring access to justice for all, particularly the marginalized and underprivileged sections of society, including prisoners.

Nasha Mukht Abhiyaan DC Shopian chairs meeting with traders, vendors

KT News Desk

SHOPIAN, APRIL 16: Deputy Commissioner Shopian, Shishir Gupta, Thursday chaired a meeting with representatives of traders and vendors associations of the district to seek their active cooperation in making the ongoing Nasha Mukht Abhiyaan more impactful in its results.

During the meeting, The DC, as per an official statement, emphasized the crucial role of the business community in curbing the menace of drug abuse and appealed to all stakeholders to extend their full support in this collective effort.

Traders and vendors were urged to remain vigilant and assist authorities in identifying and reporting any suspicious activities related to drug peddling.

Senior Superintendent of Police Shopian, Mushtaq Ahmad Choudhary, also participated in the meeting and requested traders and vendors

to cooperate with the police in efforts to eradicate the drug menace from the district.

He highlighted the importance of timely information from the public in identifying and acting against drug peddlers.

Traders and vendors were further encouraged to spread awareness and carry forward the message of a drug free society across all sections of the community.

During the interaction, representatives of traders associations and vendors assured the administration that they would extend full cooperation and help in every possible way to curb the drug menace from the district. They expressed their commitment to actively participate in awareness and prevention efforts. The meeting was also attended by the Additional Deputy Commissioner Shopian, Dr. Zakir Hussain Faaz, Chief Executive Officer, Municipal Council Shopian, and other officials.

Nasha Mukht Abhiyaan District Admin Bandipora conducts IEC awareness programmes

KT News Desk

BANDIPORA, APRIL 16: Continuing its sustained outreach under the Nasha Mukht Jammu & Kashmir Abhiyan, the District Administration Bandipora on Thursday organised a series of IEC (Information, Education and Communication) awareness programmes across multiple Panchayat Halqas, Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and educational institutions in the district.

The IEC activities were conducted across ULB areas including Sumbal (Bon Mohalla), Bandipora (Ward No. 12 Kaloosa) and Hajin (Bhangar Mohalla), as well as several educational institutions including HSS Quilmuqam, HS Malangam, GHSS Dawer, HS

Kanzalwan, HSS Gadakhud, HSS Chuntimulla, HSS Shahgund and HS Odina.

A multi-departmental team comprising officials and resource persons from Health, Police, Education, Social Welfare, Excise & Taxation, Youth Services & Sports and JKNRLM participated in the programmes, ensuring a coordinated and impactful awareness campaign at the grassroots level.

During the sessions, resource persons, as per an official statement, sensitised participants about the harmful effects of drug abuse and emphasised the importance of preventive measures, healthy lifestyle choices and collective societal responsibility in eradicating substance abuse.

DPS delegation calls on LG Sinha

KT News Desk

Jammu, Apr 16: A 15-member delegation, led by Dr. Ritu Singh, Founder and Pro Vice Chairperson of Delhi Public School (DPS) Jammu, Nagbani, and Katra, called on Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Thursday.

The delegation apprised the Lieutenant Governor of the extensive activities of the DPS school community in support of "Nasha Mukta Jammu Kashmir Abhiyaan." The Lieutenant Governor appreciated the commendable efforts of the DPS fraternity and lauded the students for their awareness, confidence, and commitment, encouraging them to continue serving as agents of positive change. The delegation



included the eight student Brand Ambassadors, namely Mahira Tandon, Dhriti Langeh, Abhilasha Gupta, Myra Gupta, Jenna Nuryan, Nadia, Sparsh Bakshi and Kashvi Arora, who actively led awareness efforts and encouraged peer participation in building a drug-free society.

It was informed that the DPS Jammu, DPS Nagbani, and DPS Katra organised a comprehensive Nasha Mukta J&K Pledge Campaign, engaging around 12,000 students, their parents, and members of the teaching and administrative staff across all three schools, along with impactful activities sensitising

the citizens. Ruchi Chhabra, Principal, DPS Jammu; Rajkumar Verma, Principal, DPS Nagbani; Simmi Sharma, School Incharge, DPS Katra; Meenu Gupta, Vice Principal, DPS Jammu; Ravi Kotroo, Headmaster and Umesh Sharma, Deputy Headmaster, were also present during the interaction.

Chief Secy reviews dev of key circuits to boost tourism in Jammu



KT News Desk

Jammu, Apr 16: Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo on Thursday chaired a high-level meeting to review the progress of works and strategic initiatives undertaken by the Tourism Department for the promotion and holistic development of tourism across the Jammu region. The meeting focused on assessing the implementation of various tourism development strategies aimed at strengthening diverse tourism circuits across districts and positioning Jammu as a vibrant, all-season tourism destination.

The meeting was attended by Additional Chief Secretaries of Finance, Tourism, and Public Works Department (PWD), Divisional Commissioner Jammu, Managing Director JKTC, Director Tourism Jammu, and other senior officers.

Emphasising the immense untapped tourism potential of the region, the Chief Secretary directed the department to identify and prioritise high-impact works under the Capex budget. He specifically called for immediate interventions at key religious and heritage destinations such as Shivkhori, Katra, Uttarbehni, and Purmandal. He observed that even diverting a small percentage of pilgrims visiting Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine to these circuits could significantly boost tourist footfall and transform them into major attractions.

Highlighting the importance of border tourism, the Chief Secretary stressed large-scale development at Suchetgarh, noting its growing popularity among visitors in recent years. He also underscored the need to explore and expand adventure tourism avenues at locations such as Aithem and the iconic Chenab Rail Bridge, suggesting that many such projects could be developed through

Public-Private Partnership (PPP) models.

Further, he instructed the department to identify suitable land parcels around Patnitop for development under the "One State: One Global Destination" programme. The Chief Secretary also reviewed ongoing promotional strategies and stressed the importance of timely completion of all infrastructure projects. He called for a comprehensive approach to convert the large influx of pilgrims into multi-day tourists by encouraging them to explore leisure, heritage, adventure, and spiritual tourism offerings beyond traditional routes.

Detailed reviews were conducted for major pilgrimage circuits, including Katra-Shivkhori and Uttarbehni-Purmandal, as well as adventure circuits covering Aithem, Chenab Rail Bridge, Baradari (Reasi), and Ranjit Sagar Lake (Kathua). Progress on leisure tourism circuits such as Patnitop-Sanasar, Surinsar-Mansar, and Rajouri-Poonch was also assessed.

Additional Chief Secretary Finance, Shailendra Kumar, suggested measures to improve accessibility to tourist destinations, including upgradation of road infrastructure, development of essential amenities such as eateries and refreshment points, and strengthening public transport connectivity. He also proposed the development of entertainment and amusement facilities within Jammu city to encourage longer tourist stays.

Additional Chief Secretary Tourism, Ashish Chandra Verma, presented a comprehensive overview of departmental initiatives, outlining a multi-pronged strategy focused on thematic tourism circuits, heritage experiences, adventure tourism, infrastructure augmentation, and promotion

of offbeat destinations. These initiatives aim to enhance tourist footfall while encouraging extended stays through diversified and customised experiences.

Director Tourism Jammu, Dr. Vikas Gupta, provided detailed insights into the works executed and promotional efforts across various circuits. He highlighted the integration of major religious and heritage sites within the Katra-Shivkhori circuit, including Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine, Shivkhori, Krimchi Temples, Raghunath Temple, and Ranbireswar Temple. He also briefed the meeting on ongoing projects and long-term development proposals for each destination.

The meeting was further apprised of key initiatives such as the development of an Adventure Hub and Food Village at Aithem, establishment of a rafting centre at Baradari, and proposed adventure activities including bungee jumping, ziplining, and paragliding at the Chenab Rail Bridge with support from professional agencies. Plans for water sports at Ranjit Sagar Lake and promotion of border tourism at Suchetgarh and Gharana were also discussed.

The Tourism Department highlighted its extensive promotional efforts over the past year, including Familiarisation (FAM) tours, enhanced digital and social media outreach, and the successful organisation of thematic events such as the Jammu Marathon, Winter Carnivals at Patnitop, Baderwah, and Sarthal, National Rafting Championship at Shibnotte (Doda), and Lohri Festival at Mubarak Mandi, among others.

The meeting also took appraisal of wide-ranging publicity campaigns conducted in major cities across the country to promote Jammu as a premier tourism destination.

Iran criticises US economic threats

AP

Tehran, Apr 16: Iran's foreign ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei criticised economic threats by US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, saying they harm "innocent people" and reflect an "inhumane mindset".

"These are nothing short of economic terrorism and state-sponsored extortion," he wrote on X, referring to Bessent's Wednesday remarks about potentially carrying out the "financial equivalent" of a bombing campaign. China's UN envoy calls US blockade of Hormuz 'dangerous', 'irresponsible'

Ambassador Fu Cong said the Strait of Hormuz "should be safeguarded" for international navigation and called on Iran to take proactive measures to open the waterway, used to ship about 20% of the world's oil.

"The issue of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz is a spillover effect of the conflict in Iran," he said. "Only a complete ceasefire can fundamentally create conditions for easing the situation."

Fu told the UN General Assembly on Thursday that Beijing is engaged "in intensive mediation with all parties to actively promote talks for peace" and an end to the war in Iran. The 193-member world body was meeting to hear China and Russia explain why they vetoed a Security Council resolution backed by the US and Gulf nations aimed at opening the Strait of Hormuz.

Fu claimed the resolution would have given "a carte blanche for the continuation of aggressive actions and further escalation" rather than de-escalate the conflict and promote negotiations.

Cuba's president says island does not wish for US aggression but ready to fight if needed

AP

Havana, Apr 16: Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel said Thursday that while Cuba does not want military aggression from the United States, his country is prepared to fight should it happen. Diaz-Canel spoke during a rally that drew hundreds of people to commemorate the 65th anniversary of the declaration of the Cuban Revolution's socialist essence.

"The moment is extremely challenging and calls upon us once again, as on April 16, 1961, to be ready to confront serious threats, including military aggression. We do not want it, but it is our duty to prepare to avoid it and, if it becomes inevitable, to defeat it," Diaz-Canel said.

He spoke as tensions remain high between the two countries, with Cuba's crises deepening as a result of a US energy blockade.

Earlier this week, Trump said his administration could focus on Cuba after the war in Iran ends.

"We may stop by Cuba after we finish with this," he said. He described it as a "failing nation" and asserted that it's "been a terribly run country for a long time".

Trump previously has threatened to intervene in Cuba, like he did in early January when the US military attacked Venezuela and halted key oil shipments from the South American country.

Weeks later, Trump threatened tariffs on any country that sells or provides oil to Cuba.

Both Trump and US Secretary of State Marco Rubio — whose parents emigrated from Cuba in the 1950s before the revolution — described the island's government as ineffective and abusive.

Diaz-Canel accused them of trying to construct a "narrative" that has no justification.

"Cuba is not a failed state. Cuba is a besieged state. Cuba is a state facing multidimensional aggression: economic warfare, an intensified blockade and an energy blockade," said Diaz-Canel, the main speaker at Thursday's rally.

"Cuba is a threatened state that does not surrender. And despite everything. And thanks to socialism. Cuba is a state that resists, creates, and make no mistake, a state that will prevail," Diaz-Canel added.

Both Cuba and the US have acknowledged talks to resolve the tension, but no details

have been disclosed.

The Cuban president recalled the achievements made possible by the revolution and its social welfare system, which allows for free education that has trained thousands of professionals, many of whom have now been forced to emigrate due to the crisis.

The oil embargo imposed by Trump worsened the already harsh conditions brought on by an economic crisis that has lasted for five years and was triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic and a tightening of US sanctions aimed at pressuring for a change in the island's political model.

Experts have warned of a humanitarian crisis.

Measures to prevent the island from acquiring oil from its Venezuelan, Mexican and Russian suppliers are exacerbating the already poor living conditions of the population, including prolonged blackouts and fuel shortages.

The rally commemorated the 65th anniversary of a historic speech by the late leader, Fidel Castro, during a crisis with the United States. That moment marked the ideological course the Caribbean nation would take and its opposition to Washington's continental hegemony.

CONTD. FROM FRONT PAGE

Women empowerment

holistic, tech-driven, farmer-centric transformation for higher production, incomes, and sustainable agriculture. It has registered 14,782 women farmers.

He said that PM Modi launched JKICP on June 20, 2024, targeting climate-smart, market-oriented production; agri-economy ecosystems; sectoral development; and aid for vulnerable groups, women, and youth—registering 5,248 women farmers. PM Kisan Samman Nidhi has over 90,000 women beneficiaries. Over 8,000 women farmers are registered in natural farming and central schemes; 4,472 in horticulture; 128 in sericulture; over 144,000 in SKUAST schemes; 27,500 in dairy; and more than 16,000 in sheep farming and fisheries. Across agriculture and allied sectors, nearly 3,11,000 women are registered, he further said.

"I recognize millions more unregistered women farmers; I urge them to join central schemes. I take pride in Jammu Kashmir's self-help groups, women-led FPOs, and skill programs in mushrooms, horticulture, beekeeping, food processing, and dairy, empowering rural women as farmers, agri-entrepreneurs, and decision-makers. When women control production resources, inputs, and services in agriculture and allied sectors, they ensure food security," the Lieutenant Governor said.

The Lieutenant Governor urged the IFFCO to establish farmers' training centre, multi-facility farmers service centre, sheep production unit in J&K and provision of mobile soil testing machine to support local farmers.

MASS MOVEMENT FOR 'DRUG FREE JAMMU KASHMIR' FOR KASHMIR DIVISION TO BE LAUNCHED FROM SRINAGAR ON MAY 3

The Lieutenant Governor also announced that the Mass Movement for 'Drug Free Jammu Kashmir' for the Kashmir Division will be launched from Srinagar on May 3, 2026. He called upon the women, youth and all sections of society to actively participate in this movement to eradicate the drug menace from the Union Territory.

On the occasion, the Lieutenant Governor felicitated the women agri-entrepreneurs. He also visited the stalls put up by IFFCO and various agri-entrepreneurs.

Javid Ahmad Dar, Minister for Agriculture

Production, Rural Development & Panchayati Raj and Cooperative; Dileep Singhani, Chairman IFFCO; K.J. Patel, Managing Director IFFCO; Yogendra Kumar, Marketing Director IFFCO, Sartaj Ahmad Shah, Director Agriculture, Kashmir; women farmers & Agri-entrepreneurs, members of women self-help groups and women delegates participated in the conference.

Balwant Singh Mankotia, Member of Legislative Assembly from Chenani; Akshay Labroo, Deputy Commissioner Srinagar; Dr GV Sundeep Chakravarthy, SSP Srinagar; senior officials and Agriculture experts were also present. (KNO)

India, Austria condemn

in the context of India's engagement with the European Union.

Both sides reiterated their commitment to disrupting financial channels linked to terrorism and strengthening mechanisms under global frameworks such as the United Nations and the Financial Action Task Force.

The visit also saw the conclusion of 15 agreements and outcomes across sectors including defence, trade, innovation and skills development.

Among the key initiatives, the two countries agreed to set up a fast-track mechanism to address concerns of businesses and boost investment flows. An agreement on audiovisual co-production was also signed to promote collaboration between the film industries of India and Austria.

Officials said the discussions also touched upon broader economic cooperation, with both sides noting the potential of the India-European Union free trade agreement to expand trade and investment opportunities.

The engagements, they added, are expected to strengthen bilateral ties and deepen cooperation across strategic and economic sectors. (KNO)

J&K drops CUET

Degree College, Anantnag and S.P College, Srinagar, respectively, for administrative oversight."

The Higher Education Department had also informed the house that less than 30 students were enrolled in each of the 13 colleges of

Jammu and Kashmir.

The government figures also said that at least five colleges of Jammu and Kashmir were functioning with an enrolment of less than twenty students in 2025 and eight colleges were functioning with less than 30 students respectively.

The figures further reveal that in 14 colleges in Jammu and Kashmir, fewer than 50 students were enrolled in each college.

Furthermore, 24 government colleges were having less than 100 students enrolled in each college.

The government figures also reveal that in 13 colleges of Jammu and Kashmir, only 100-300 students were enrolled in each college.

Pertinently, in April-2025, KNO reported that in wake of low CUET based admissions in many degree colleges of Jammu and Kashmir, Higher Education Department had exempted 64 Government Degree Colleges from making admissions through CUET score for academic session 2024-25.

The department had further said that many other students did not prefer to seek admission through the Common University Entrance Test (CUET) mode keeping in view their geographical locations, topography and availability of the infrastructure.

The government in the respective commune had said that among the colleges that have been exempted from making admissions through CUET score for academic session 2024-25 includes 35 government colleges of Jammu division and 29 of Kashmir region respectively.

"In view of very low CUET based admissions in some government degree colleges during last year admissions, the situation was revisited this year after discussions with all the stakeholders and it was decided to identify the colleges where the students did not prefer to seek admission through the CUET mode keeping in view their geographical locations, topography, availability of the infrastructure etcetera and where the CUET based admissions were very low during last year," it reads. (KNO)

SIA files

attacks, as a preferred material due to the ease of sourcing its components. The scale of accumulation of explosive materials and precursors indicated a high level of preparedness and potentially grave consequences," the

statement said.

The SIA stated that it has dismantled the entire network and gathered substantial evidence, including recoveries, digital forensics, scientific analysis, and witness accounts, establishing the roles and involvement of each accused.

Among those chargesheeted are Arif Nisar Dar alias Sahil, Yasir Ul Ashraf Bhat, Maqsood Ahmad Dar alias Shahid, Irfan Ahmad Wagay alias Owais, Zameer Ahmad Ahanger alias Mutlashi, Dr. Muzamil Shakeel Ganaie alias MUSAIB, Dr. Adeel Ahmad Rather alias Javaid, Dr. Shaheen Saeed, Tufail Ahmad Bhat, and Dr. Umar Un Nabi, who was killed in a Red Fort suicide attack.

The chargesheet has been filed before a competent court, and further investigation in the case is ongoing.

The SIA reiterated its commitment to dismantling terror networks and safeguarding national security, noting that the case highlights the evolving and sophisticated nature of such conspiracies, including the misuse of professional institutions and digital platforms. (KNO)

MeT forecasts

remain cautious, especially during periods of strong winds and thunderstorms, and to follow official advisories. (KNO)

13 drug peddlers

naka checking at Nambal Crossing along the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway, two more persons were held with around 12 grams of heroin-like substance, officials said.

In Pulwama, one person was arrested at Zadoora with 520 grams of poppy straw and 30 grams of charas powder-like substance. In a separate operation at Tujan Telsar crossing, another individual was apprehended with around 3 grams of heroin-like substance.

In Ganderbal district, police recovered about 580 grams of charas-like powder from a cowshed during a search operation conducted in the presence of an executive magistrate and local representatives, and arrested one person. Cases under relevant provisions of law have been registered in all instances and investigations are underway, police said.

Police reiterated their commitment to curbing drug trafficking and urged the public to

share information about such activities, warning of strict action against those involved. (KNO)

Rapid conversion

districts like Kulgam and Pulwama have been regarded as the rice bowls of Kashmir. But over the past two decades, these areas have witnessed a sharp decline in paddy cultivation.

"In Kulgam alone, more than 50 per cent of paddy fields have been lost to horticulture and urban expansion," the official said.

Pulwama presents an even starker picture. "There were areas where orchards were almost non-existent a few years ago. Today, after the introduction of high-density apple varieties, nearly 70 per cent of paddy land has been converted. If this demand continues, we may not see any paddy fields left in certain belts," he added.

Official figures underline the alarming trend. The area under paddy cultivation in Jammu and Kashmir has declined from 1,62,309 hectares in 2012-13 to 1,34,067 hectares in 2021-22—a drop of around 17 per cent.

Experts believe that the current decline could be even steeper, given the pace of land conversion in recent years.

Over the past decade alone, nearly 35,000 hectares of paddy land have reportedly been converted to non-agricultural uses, including horticulture and construction.

At present, nearly 60-70 per cent of the rice consumed in Kashmir is sourced from outside, mainly from Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh. Supplies are routed through the Food Corporation of India (FCI) as well as private traders.

Officials warned that such heavy reliance on external sources makes the region vulnerable. "In case of any disruption, the Valley could face serious food security challenges," they said.

Despite the alarming trend, officials pointed out that there is currently no strict legal framework to prevent the conversion of paddy land into other uses. "There is an urgent need for policy intervention. If corrective measures are not taken now, the situation may soon reach a point of no return," they cautioned.

Experts have called for a balanced approach that safeguards food security while also supporting farmers' incomes. (KNO)

No state will be discriminated against in delimitation exercise: PM Modi in LS

PTI

New Delhi, Apr 16: No state -- big or small, north or south, east or west -- will be discriminated against in the delimitation of constituencies linked with the implementation of women quota law, Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserted on Thursday while strongly backing implementation of the reservation in 2029 and warned that those who oppose this initiative will not be forgiven by the women of the country.

Intervening in the debate in Lok Sabha on the three bills introduced for amendment of the women's quota law and to set up a delimitation commission, Modi also said if any political party opposes the women quota law, it is quite natural that he (Modi) would be politically benefited.

"Here, some people think that there is political self-interest of Modi in this move. If you oppose it, it's natural I will gain political benefit, but if you walk along, no one will gain any political advantage. We don't want credit," he said.

Allaying fears of some states over the delimitation exercise, particularly those from the southern and eastern regions, the prime minister said no state will be discriminated against under the move.

"I want to say from this House today with a great sense of responsibility that whether it is the south, the north, the east, the west, small states or big states, this decision making process will not discriminate against any state or do injustice to anyone," he said.

Modi also made it clear that the proportion of Lok Sabha seats in any state will not come down as a result of the delimitation exercise.

"There will be no change in that proportion (of Lok Sabha seats) either, and the increase will also be in the same proportion," he said.

The prime minister said no one should remain under the illusion that they are giving something to the women of this country as reservation in legislatures is their right.

As the mother of democracy, he said it is India's cultural commitment that women are



given their due right. "It is because of this commitment that we are moving forward. Let us not remain in the illusion that we are giving something to the country's women, no way. It is their right," he said.

Modi also said the ruling dispensation does not want credit for implementation of the women reservation law in 2029 and offered to give credit to the opposition.

"We don't want credit. I give you a blank cheque for claiming credit on passage of women quota bill. If you want me to use the word 'guarantee', I use the word 'guarantee'. If you want me to make a promise, I use the word 'promise'. Because if the intention is clear, there is no need to play games with words," he said.

He said those who had opposed in giving this right to women in the past have not been forgiven by the women of this country, they have faced the consequences.

"Today, I have come to appeal to you that do not weigh this on political scales. This is a decision in the national interest. The women across the country and the world are watching us, will see our decisions. But more than the decision itself, they will judge our intent. If there is any flaw in our intent, the women of this country will never forgive," he said.

Modi said when Parliament was discussing the women reservation legislation in 2023, people were saying, "hurry up".

"But it couldn't happen in 2024, because it can't be done in such a short time. Now in 2029, we have time. If we

don't do it even in 2029, we can imagine what the situation will be like. The demand of the time is that we should not delay any further now," he said.

He said in 2023, the Parliament unanimously passed the 'Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam', the official name of the women reservation act.

"A joyful atmosphere prevailed across the country, and no political colour was attached to it. So it did not become a political issue. Now the question is, how much longer do we have to stall it," he asked.

The prime minister said in India's development journey, MPs have got an opportunity to make women part of decision making.

"A developed India does not mean only good infrastructure but participation of women in policy making," he said.

When an opposition member tried to raise a point about welfare of the backward communities, Modi shot back and said: I come from most backward community but it is my responsibility to take everyone along."

He said 25-30 years ago, those who opposed women's reservation did not let their opposition go below the political surface. "So, don't make the mistake of thinking that today," he said.

Pointing out the historical hypocrisy where politicians feigned support while systematically sabotaging the bill with technical caveats, Modi observed that the era of openly opposing the reservation is long gone.

LS seats in southern states to increase from 129 to 195; up by 50%: Amit Shah



PTI

New Delhi, Apr 16: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday asserted that the Lok Sabha seats in five southern states will go up to 195 from the present 129, an increase of 50 per cent, when the total seats in the Lower House will be enhanced to 816, saying a false narrative is being spread to float misleading information. Intervening in the debate in Lok Sabha on the three bills introduced for amendment of the women's quota law and to set up a delimitation commission, Shah also said the proposed women's reservation will be implemented only in 2029 and till then all polls will be conducted under the present system.

He said the number of Lok Sabha seats in the five southern states will go up from the present 129 to 195 seats while the percentage of power will increase from 23.76 per cent to 23.87 or almost 24 per cent.

"Lok Sabha seats in Karnataka will increase to 42 from the present 28; in Andhra Pradesh, the number of Lok Sabha seats will increase to 38 from 25; in Telangana, it will be 26 from present 17; in Tamil Nadu, the number of Lok Sabha seats will go up to 59 from the present 39; and in Kerala, it will be 30 seats from the present 20," he said.

According to the bill, the Lok Sabha seats will go up to a maximum of 850 but Shah explained that it was a round figure and the seats will remain at 816.

Explaining how the total

number of seats in the new Lok Sabha is fixed at 816, the home minister said it is exactly 50 per cent more than the existing number of seats.

Shah strongly rejected the opposition's suggestion that the government will indulge in some kind of "mischief" during the delimitation exercise, saying the NDA government has not made any changes in the existing law.

"The delimitation bill is exactly like the previous law brought by your government. There is no change, not even a comma or a full stop," he said.

The home minister made it clear that all elections till 2029 parliamentary polls, including 2027 assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, will be conducted under the present system as the women's reservation will be applicable only in 2029.

"Akhilesh ji, (SP chief Akhilesh Yadav) you don't need to worry even though you are not going to win the elections in Uttar Pradesh," he said. He also rejected the suggestion that the women's reservation bill has been brought up eyeing the next week's West Bengal elections.

The home minister also said the Samajwadi Party members were saying that they would place the demand for a caste census but he would like to inform them that the government had already taken a decision to carry out the caste census and it would be carried out along with the population enumeration.

'Air pollution could be linked with increased migraine activity'



PTI

New Delhi, Apr 16: Exposure to air pollution could be associated with an increased migraine activity, according to a study. Both a short-term and cumulative exposure to air pollution were tied to increased migraine activity, as were climate factors such as heat and humidity, findings published in the journal Neurology suggest.

"These results help us to better understand how and when migraine attacks occur," author Ido Peles, of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Be'er Sheva, Israel, said. "They suggest that for people who have a susceptibility to migraine to begin with, environmental factors may play two roles: intermediate-term factors such as heat and humidity may modify the risk for attacks, while short-term factors such as spikes in pollution levels may trigger attacks," Peles said.

Over 7,000 people with a migraine problem who lived in Be'er Sheva in the Negev desert were followed for an average of 10 years.

Researchers looked at the participants' daily exposure to air pollution from traffic, industry and dust storms, and weather conditions.

How often and when people visited the hospital or a primary care office with an acute migraine were analysed and compared to the pollution and weather conditions on that day and up to seven days earlier -- pollution effects may take a few days to affect the body, the team said.

The day with the highest number of hospital or clinic visits was noted to have elevated levels of air pollution, compared to the average over the study period -- PM10, including dust particles, was 119.9 microns per cubic metre, compared to an average of 57.9

microns per cubic metre during the study.

PM2.5 levels were 27.3 microns per cubic metre, compared to an average of 22.3 microns per cubic metre during the study. Participants having a cumulative exposure to high levels of PM2.5 were nine per cent more likely to have high use of migraine drugs, the researchers found.

Level of nitrogen dioxide (NO2), a gas released mostly from traffic emissions, was 11.2 parts per billion, compared to an average of 8.7 parts per billion. People with a cumulative exposure to high levels of NO2 were found to be 10 per cent more likely to have high use of migraine drugs, compared to those without.

The day with the fewest visits to the hospital or clinic also had lower than average pollution levels, the researchers said.

Further, climate conditions were found to amplify the effects of pollutants.

High temperatures and low humidity were found to amplify the effects of NO2, while cold and humid conditions intensified the effects of PM2.5.

"These findings highlight opportunities for anticipating what care will be needed," Peles said.

"As climate change intensifies the frequency of heat waves, dust storms and pollution episodes, we will need to integrate these environmental risk factors into our guidance for people with migraine," the author said.

"When high-risk exposure periods are in the forecast, doctors can advise people to limit their outdoor activity and use air filters, take short-term preventative medications and start using their migraine drugs at the first sign of a problem to ward off attacks," Peles said.

RBI to conduct Rs 2 lakh crore VRRR auction on April 17 to manage surplus liquidity

FIANS

Mumbai, April 16: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Thursday announced it will conduct a Rs 2 lakh crore seven-day variable rate reverse repo (VRRR) auction on April 17 to manage surplus liquidity in the banking system.

In a notification, the central bank said the decision comes in view of the prevailing transient surplus liquidity conditions.

The auction will be held between 9:30 am and 10:00 am on Friday, with funds scheduled to be reversed on April 24.

The move is aimed at absorbing excess liquidity from the system, especially ahead of the usual outflows around the 20th of every month due to GST payments.

These outflows typically exert pressure on systemic liquidity and short-term money market rates.

By timing the reversal of funds after such outflows, the RBI seeks to ensure stability in overnight rates and maintain balanced liquidity conditions. As of April 15, liquidity in the banking system is estimated to be in surplus of around Rs 5.22 lakh crore -- indicating ample cash availability with banks. The central bank had earlier conducted a similar seven-day VRRR auction on April 10, absorbing over Rs 2 lakh crore from the system.

Those funds are set to mature on April 17, coinciding with the fresh liquidity management operation.

RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra had recently emphasised the central bank's proactive approach



towards liquidity management.

Speaking after the April monetary policy, he said the RBI will remain pre-emptive in ensuring adequate liquidity to support the productive requirements of the economy while maintaining stability in financial markets.

Meanwhile, last month, the central bank extended the enhanced export credit period of up to 450 days till June 30, 2026, to support exporters facing disruptions due to the ongoing West Asia crisis.

"Due to ongoing geopolitical uncertainties and logistical disruptions, Reserve Bank of India has been receiving representations from various stakeholders regarding challenges in adhering to the timelines for realisation of export proceeds," the central bank said.

Railway Board urges humanitarian approach in treating newborns without medical ID cards

PTI

New Delhi, Apr 16: The Railway Board has urged the Principal Chief Medical Directors of all railway zones to adopt a humanitarian approach in providing emergency treatment to newborns of medical beneficiaries if the infants don't have a Unique Medical Identity Card.

UMID is a smart medical card issued to all railway employees and pensioners to access medical facilities for themselves and their dependents in railway hospitals.

The board's letter, addressed to all concerned officials, has stated that in a recent interaction between employees and administration, the staff raised the problems of getting medical facilities for their infants in the absence of a Unique Medical Identity Card (UMID).

"To avoid difficulties faced by Railway medical beneficiaries in getting medical treatment for their newborn babies in the absence of UMID cards, it is informed that a facility for instant generation of UMID cards for newborn babies of Railway beneficiaries is available in HMIS (Health Management Information System)," the board's letter said.

"However, in this regard, all concerned may be directed to adopt a humanitarian approach in providing essential medical facilities to newborns of Railway Medical Beneficiaries in case of emergency so that there is no delay due to lack of UMID card," the letter advised the Principal Chief Medical Directors of railway zones.

EC steps up reviewing Bengal poll preparedness as seizures reach Rs 416 crore

PTI

Kolkata, Apr 16: The Election Commission has stepped up its review of poll preparedness in West Bengal, with senior officials travelling to districts across the state to hold meetings with top officebearers.

Enforcement agencies reported seizures worth more than Rs 416 crore in cash and other prohibited items since the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) came into effect on March 15, an official said on Thursday.

During the past three days, senior election officials have been visiting the districts to assess security arrangements, readiness of polling stations, movement of polling personnel and voter awareness measures as part of efforts to ensure smooth conduct of the multi-phase elections, he said.

A team led by Senior Deputy Election Commissioner Gyanesh Bharti reviewed preparations in Purba Bardhaman, Bankura and Hooghly with district election officers, superintendents of police and observers.

Another delegation headed by Senior Deputy Election Commissioner Pawan Kumar Sharma held similar meetings with officials in Nadia and Murshidabad, the official said.

"Separate review meetings were also held in Alipurduar, Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri to take stock of voter awareness campaigns and media monitoring, while the final round of discussions in Kolkata focused on arrangements in North 24 Parganas, South 24 Parganas and the city," he said.

The poll panel had asked district administrations to maintain strict neutrality and ensure that all logistical issues were addressed well before



polling day, he said.

"The effort is to ensure that every voter can cast a ballot in a secure and fear-free atmosphere and that the entire process remains transparent," a senior election official said.

Meanwhile, enforcement agencies have seized cash, liquor, narcotics, precious metals and other inducements worth Rs 416.93 crore across West Bengal since February 26, according to the state CEO's office.

The seizures include cash worth Rs 19.73 crore, liquor valued at Rs 78.40 crore, narcotics worth Rs 95.75 crore, precious metals worth Rs 52.16 crore and freebies worth more than Rs 170 crore, he said. Several large recoveries were made at airports, railway stations

and interstate border checkpoints by agencies such as the CISF, BSF, state police and other central agencies, the official pointed out.

As part of preventive measures, police have seized 327 illegal arms, 539 cartridges and more than 1,100 crude bombs, while over 41,500 licensed firearms have been deposited with the authorities, he said.

More than 17.71 lakh instances of political defacement from public and private properties had also been removed across districts as part of the enforcement of the MCC, he said.

The elections to the 294-member West Bengal assembly will be held in two phases, on April 23 and 29. Counting is scheduled on May 4.

Hopes for Middle East peace grow amid talk of further diplomatic meetings on Iran

REUTERS

Washington/Jerusalem, Apr 16: Optimism grew on Thursday that the war in the Middle East may be near an end, with a key Pakistani mediator in Tehran and the administration of President Donald Trump talking up hopes for a deal that would open the crucial Strait of Hormuz.

US and Iranian officials were weighing a return to Pakistan for further talks as early as the coming weekend, after negotiations ended on Sunday without a breakthrough. Pakistan's army chief and key figure in the mediation, Field Marshal Asim Munir, arrived in Tehran on Wednesday to try to prevent a renewal of the conflict.

"We feel good about the prospects of a deal," White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said at a news conference on Wednesday, calling conversations mediated by Pakistan "productive and ongoing." She denied reports that the US had formally requested an extension of a two-week ceasefire agreed by the two sides on April 8.

More in-person talks had not yet been confirmed but would likely take place in Pakistan again, Leavitt said.

Pakistan's military confirmed Munir had arrived in Tehran. A senior Iranian source told Reuters that Munir, who had mediated the last round of talks, would seek "to narrow gaps" between the two sides.

Pakistan's army chief was set to meet with Iranian officials in Tehran on Thursday in a bid to ease tensions in the Middle East and arrange a second round of negotiations between the United States and Iran after almost seven weeks of war.

A statement from the Pakistan Foreign Ministry on Thursday said both the US and Iran were willing to hold talks, adding that the process was continuing.

But the ministry said there was no information on a date, time or location for talks to take place.

While few details have been released, the statement said the nuclear issue was among others being discussed.

And a senior Iranian official told



Reuters on Thursday that "fundamental disagreements remain over nuclear issues."

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi posted on X welcoming Munir and said Tehran was committed to "promoting peace and stability in the region."

Meanwhile, Pakistan's prime minister, the key mediator in the ceasefire between the United States and Iran, arrived in Qatar on Thursday as part of efforts to revive peace talks.

The office of Shehbaz Sharif said in statements that his delegation had arrived in Doha after a trip to Saudi Arabia and he was expected to meet with Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani. The Pakistani premier is due later in Türkiye.

The talks last weekend broke down without an agreement to end the war, which Trump began alongside Israel on Feb. 28, triggering Iranian attacks on Iran's Gulf neighbors as well as reigniting the Israel-Hezbollah conflict.

Thousands of people have been killed, mostly in Iran and Lebanon, while soaring energy costs have rattled investors and policymakers around the world.

Stock markets have rallied strongly in recent days on expectations of a swift resolution to the fighting, with indexes on Wall Street hitting record highs on Wednesday as crude oil prices steadied.

"While there are hopes for

de-escalation, many investors remain skeptical, given that US-Iran talks have repeatedly broken down even after appearing to make progress," said Toshitaka Tazawa, an analyst at Fujitomi Securities.

ECONOMIC PRESSURE ON IRAN
Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent predicted that China's purchase of Iranian oil would "pause" given a US blockade on vessels calling at Iranian ports. He said the US could impose secondary sanctions on countries that purchase Iranian crude.

The US Treasury had warned two Chinese banks not to process Iranian money or face sanctions, he said, without naming the banks. China previously bought more than 80 percent of Iran's shipped oil.

Trump said on Wednesday he had told Chinese President Xi Jinping not to give Iran weapons, which Xi had said he wasn't. Trump also said that China was very happy he was "permanently opening" the Strait of Hormuz.

"I am doing it for them, also — And the World," he wrote on social media, adding: "President Xi will give me a big, fat, hug when I get there in a few weeks."

The war has led Iran to effectively shut the Strait — a vital artery for global crude and gas shipments — to ships other than its own, sharply reducing exports from the Gulf and leaving energy importers scrambling for alternative

supplies.

TANKERS INTERCEPTED
During the first 48 hours of the US blockade on ships entering and exiting Iranian ports, no vessels have made it past US forces, the US military said. Additionally, nine vessels complied with direction from US forces to turn around and return toward an Iranian port or coastal area.

However, Iran's Fars News agency said an Iranian supertanker subject to US sanctions crossed the strait toward Iran's Imam Khomeini port despite the blockade. Fars did not identify the tanker or give further details of its voyage.

Iran's joint military command warned it would halt trade flows in the Gulf, the Sea of Oman and the Red Sea — which connects to the Suez Canal — if the US blockade continued.

Iran could consider allowing ships to sail freely through the Omani side of the strait without risk of attack as part of proposals it has offered in negotiations with the US, providing a deal is clinched to prevent renewed conflict, a source briefed by Tehran said.

Trump has also threatened to escalate if the war resumes.

"We could take out every one of their bridges in one hour. We could take out every one of their power plants, electric power plants, in one hour. We don't want to do that...so we'll see what happens," he told Fox Business Network.

TALKS COMPLICATED BY NUCLEAR ISSUE

Iran's nuclear ambitions were a key sticking point at last weekend's talks. The US proposed a 20-year suspension of all nuclear activity by Iran — an apparent concession from longstanding demands for a permanent ban — while Tehran suggested a halt of three to five years, according to people familiar with the proposals.

Washington has also pressed for any enriched nuclear material to be removed from Iran, while Tehran has demanded that international sanctions against it be lifted.

One source involved in the talks said back-channel discussions had made progress in narrowing gaps, bringing the two sides closer to a deal that could be presented at a new round of talks.

Lula says Trump has 'no right' to threaten countries

AFP

Madrid, Apr 16: Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva criticized US President Donald Trump, saying the US leader has "no right" to threaten other nations, in an interview published in Spain on Thursday.

Lula's comments come after Trump this month warned that a "whole civilization will die" in Iran if the country did not open up the Strait of Hormuz.

"Trump has no right to wake up in the morning and threaten a country," Lula told the Spanish daily El Pais, recalling that the US Constitution divides authority over war and foreign policy between Congress and the president.

"It is essential that powerful leaders take greater responsibility in maintaining peace," the 80-year-old leftist president added.

Lula and Trump, 79, stand on opposite sides on issues including multilateralism, international trade and the fight against climate change.

Brasília-Washington relations remain strained, despite a meeting between the leaders last year that helped ease tensions and led to a reduction in trade tariffs. Lula



renewed calls for reform of the UN Security Council, including the removal of the veto held by five permanent members and the inclusion of more countries from Africa and Latin America.

"It is time to redefine the United Nations to give it credibility, otherwise Trump is right," he said, referring to the US president's criticism that the post-World War II international system is no longer effective.

Lula spoke to the newspaper ahead of a visit to Spain, where he is to meet Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez and attend a forum of progressive leaders.

Other attendees at the gathering in Barcelona on Saturday include Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum and South African President Cyril Ramaphosa.

China tells travelers to use caution after 'malicious' US border checks



AFP

Beijing, Apr 16: China advised its citizens on Thursday to use caution when traveling to the United States and avoid entry at Seattle's main airport following "malicious" border checks.

Around 20 Chinese scholars planning to attend academic conferences were "recently" denied entry by US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, despite holding valid visas, according to a foreign ministry statement. CBP did not respond immediately to AFP's request, sent outside US business hours, for more

information about the alleged entry denials.

The Chinese foreign ministry said that, "in light of recurring instances of malicious interrogation and harassment targeting Chinese scholars" at the Seattle airport, authorities "advise individuals planning to travel to the United States in the near future to heighten their safety awareness."

Chinese travelers should "avoid entry through this airport," it said.

The statement advised travelers to respond in a "calm and rational manner" if they were questioned by US border authorities.

Captain Bernardo Silva confirms Manchester City exit at end of season

IANIS

Manchester, April 16: Captain Bernardo Silva confirmed on Thursday that he will leave Manchester City at the end of the ongoing season, bringing an end to a remarkable nine-year association with the Premier League side.

The 31-year-old playmaker, who joined City in 2017, has made 451 appearances for the club and played a pivotal role in what is widely regarded as the most successful period in the club's history. During his tenure, Silva has lifted 19 major trophies, including six Premier League titles, one UEFA Champions League.

Mumbai Cricket Association announces player contract system ahead of 2026-2027 season

PTI

Mumbai, Apr 16: In a bid to professionalise and streamline its structure ahead of the 2026-2027 season, Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) on Thursday announced a player contract system, becoming the first state cricket body to introduce such an arrangement.

The players in Grade A are set to be paid Rs 12 lakhs to Rs 20 lakhs per annum, whereas the Grade B players will be paid Rs 8 lakhs to Rs 12 lakhs.



The players to be placed in Grade C will be paid Rs 8 lakhs per annum. "This initiative ushers in a new era by providing financial security, professional structure, and long-term

development pathways for emerging cricketers," the MCA said in a statement.

"Mumbai becomes one of the first state associations in India to formalise such a system, reinforcing its commitment to nurturing talent and maintaining its legacy of excellence," it added.

The contracts will be given to eligible players based on their performances, fitness benchmarks and on the recommendations of the selection committee.

French Open prize money up 10% to \$72 million overall

AP

Paris, Apr 16: French Open prize money has increased by about 10% for an overall pot of 61.7 million euros (\$72.1 million).

The total amount is up 5.3 million euros from last year. Play begins on Sunday, May 24 at Roland Garros in western Paris.

Men's and women's singles champions each receive 2.8 million euros and the runners-up 1.4 million euros. Semifinalists earn 750,000 euros and first round losers get 87,000 euros.

Men's and women's doubles winners pocket 600,000 euros and the mixed doubles champions get 122,000 euros.

Last year, Carlos Alcaraz staged an epic comeback to beat Jannik Sinner in a five-set final and Coco Gauff defeated Aryna Sabalenka for the women's title.

There will be an opening ceremony before the men's and women's finals, lasting about six minutes, with French choreographer Benjamin Millepied in charge of the program.

Also for the first time, players can wear data-collecting portable devices on court in order to gain information on their physical performances, tournament director Amélie Mauresmo said at a news conference on Thursday.

Privacy for players Mauresmo repeated the importance of privacy for players — an issue raised by Iga Swiatek and Gauff at this year's Australian Open.

Gauff's racket-smashing away



from the court went viral. Swiatek said the seemingly limitless access-all-areas cameras that track players made them feel they were being watched like "animals in the zoo."

Without mentioning the Australian Open itself, Mauresmo said tennis should "maintain respect for privacy" and have a secluded space.

"Players need a private area, something which will not change," she said. "No cam access (there)."

Upholding traditions This year, a local amateur beat Sinner and went on to become a millionaire in Australian dollars after winning the newly invented 1 Point Slam at the Australian Open.

Don't expect it at the French Open.

"Our ambition is not to repeat everything that's done elsewhere," Mauresmo said. "This is

not something that corresponds to us, to the image of Roland Garros."

The French Open is also unflinching on the electronic line-calling adopted by Wimbledon and most big tennis tournaments; instead remaining committed to human line judges.

"They are not 100% reliable," Mauresmo said, "but our decision was to stick to our way."

However, Mauresmo was open to women playing five-set matches like their male counterparts.

"You can't change a format overnight to go from best of three to best of five. But if we think about it, would it be only the semifinal, the final, or for all matches?" the former Wimbledon champion asked. "This could be a win-win situation but we have to talk about this with the women players."

Show Timings

Friday, 17th April



LEE CRONINS THE MUMMY (A)
ENGLISH WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES
07:20 PM



BHOOTH BANGLA (U/A16+)
HINDI ATMOS - 05:15 PM, 06:30 PM



DHURANDHAR THE REVENGE (A)
HINDI ATMOS - 02:55 PM, 05:00 PM

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