



21 killed, 51 injured as bus falls into gorge in Udhampur

Prez, PM, HM, LG, CM, others express grief; ex-gratia relief announced for victims

Umair Gull Ganie/ Yogesh

Udhampur, Apr 20: At least 21 persons were killed and 51 others injured when a passenger bus rolled down a hill at Kagort village in the Ramnagar area of Udhampur district on Monday, officials said.

Officials told the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) that a bus (No. JK14D-2121) was on its way to Udhampur from a remote village when it met with an accident while negotiating a blind curve near Kagort village.

Soon after the accident, locals, Army personnel, police, and other emergency responders rushed to the spot and launched a rescue operation, officials said.

They said that 21 people died, while 51 injured persons were evacuated to hospitals.

A case has been registered under the relevant sections of law and further investigation is underway, the official added.

Shiv Kumar Sharma, Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of the Udhampur-Reasi Range, said the driver of the ill-fated bus lost control on a sharp curve, rolled down nearly 60-70 feet, and also hit an auto-rickshaw on the road below, injuring its



occupants.

"It appears the driver lost control at a sharp turn near Kagort village. The bus was travelling from Ramnagar to Udhampur," he said.

PREZ MURMU, PM MODI, HM SHAH, LG SINHA, CM OMAR, JITENDRA SINGH, OTHERS EXPRESS GRIEF

President Droupadi Murmu in a post on X wrote: "I am deeply saddened to learn about

the deaths of several people in the bus accident that occurred in Udhampur district of Jammu and Kashmir. I express my condolences to the families of those who lost their lives in this tragedy. I pray for the swift recovery of the injured."

Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed grief over the loss of lives and announced an ex-gratia of 2 lakh from the Prime Minister's National Relief

Fund to the next of kin of each deceased, and 50,000 for the injured.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday also expressed condolences. In a message posted on X, Shah said the road accident in Udhampur is extremely tragic. "I express my deepest condolences to the families of those who lost their lives in this accident. The local administration is | More on P6

CM Omar questions Centre's intent over statehood restoration

Asks what 'right time' means; demands roadmap

Sajid Raina

Rajouri, Apr 20: Asserting that despite repeated assurances there is no clarity on restoring J&K's statehood, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Monday criticised the Centre over the delay and questioned its intent.

Addressing a public rally in Rajouri district, CM Omar, according to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) said, "Commitments made by the BJP-led government at multiple forums, including Parliament and before the Supreme Court of India, have not translated into action."

He questioned the Centre's use of the phrase "at the right time", asking what it meant in practical terms for the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

The Chief Minister said a promise made to the people, particularly one linked to democratic rights and constitutional status, could not be deferred indefinitely.

He urged the Centre to spell out a clear roadmap for restoring statehood and specify if any conditions were attached to it.

"People deserve to know what benchmarks, if any, they are expected to meet. Without that, uncertainty and mistrust will continue," CM Omar said.

Referring to the Centre's earlier position, the Chief Minister,



as per KNO, said the sequence outlined by the Bharatiya Janata Party included delimitation, followed by elections and then restoration of statehood. He noted that delimitation had been completed and elections, including both Parliamentary and Assembly polls, had been held in 2024.

"Despite this, there has been no progress on the final step," he said, adding that more than a year had passed since an elected government assumed office in the Union Territory.

CM Omar described the 2019

reorganisation of Jammu and Kashmir into a Union Territory as a move that many people perceived as punitive. He said participation in subsequent elections was driven in part by assurances that statehood would be restored.

The Chief Minister also raised concerns over the delimitation exercise, alleging that it had been used for political advantage. He claimed that a majority of newly created constituencies had benefited the BJP, though he added that electoral outcomes did not | More on P6

Nearly 30% Kashmiris affected by PCOS

Overall prevalence in India below 20 per cent

Experts say sedentary lifestyles, poor diet, chronic stress reasons

Jahangeer Ganaie

Srinagar, Apr 20: The prevalence of Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) in Kashmir is significantly higher than the national average. While the national prevalence of PCOS is below 20 per cent, Kashmir faces a far greater challenge, with nearly 30 per cent of the population affected.

According to a study conducted under the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) Task Force, represented by Prof M. Ashraf Ganie, Director of SKIMS, and published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), the prevalence of PCOS in India is 19.3 per cent.

Speaking at the 6th Annual

International Conference of the M.P-PCOS Society at SKIMS, Dr Yoginder Gupta, as reported by the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), said that Kashmir faces a disproportionately high regional burden, with nearly 30 per cent of the population affected by PCOS. Dr Gupta emphasised that such alarming figures call for collective, multi-sectoral action, stating that PCOS can no longer be addressed in isolation.

"The extensive data generated at SKIMS has been instrumental in shaping national and global understanding of the disorder, including its medical and social implications," he said. "The research has enabled the ICMR to undertake multifactorial studies, addressing not only clinical aspects but also the stigma and broader societal consequences associated with PCOS."

The two-day international conference, hosted at the SKIMS Auditorium, brought together leading national and international experts to | More on P6

Pahalgam terror attack anniversary

Security beefed up across J&K

Grid strengthened, tourist hubs secured, ops intensified, border areas vigilant

Sajid Raina/Jahangeer Ganaie

Jammu, Apr 20: Ahead of the first anniversary of the April 22, 2025 terror attack in Pahalgam that left 26 people, mostly tourists dead, authorities have beefed security across Jammu and Kashmir.

According to the details available with the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) senior officers are holding preparatory meetings to finalise a comprehensive security plan, with a focus on religious shrines, tourist hubs and vital installations across the Union Territory.

The attack, which took place at Baisaran meadow in Pahalgam, had left 25 tourists and a local pony handler dead, triggering a sharp decline in tourist arrivals.

Authorities had subsequently shut nearly 50 tourist destinations as a precautionary



measure, reopening several of them in phases following security audits.

Officials said a QR code-based identification system has now been introduced for tourism service providers in Pahalgam to enhance visitor safety and ensure better monitoring.

Security agencies have been placed on high alert following inputs about suspected

terrorist movement in districts along the International Border, including Kathua and Samba. Vigil has also been stepped up at major religious sites, including the Vaishno Devi shrine in the Trikuta hills.

Senior Superintendent of Police, Samba, Anuj Kumar, reviewed security arrangements in border areas during a visit to the Ramgarh sector. He inspected | More on P6

Weather to remain dry till April 23: MeT

Temps rise across J&K

Sajid Raina

Srinagar, Apr 20: Day temperatures recorded an increase across Jammu and Kashmir on Monday, with the Meteorological Department predicting largely dry weather conditions till April 23, followed by intermittent rain spells later in the week.

According to the MeT department's evening data accessed by the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) most places in the Valley and Jammu division recorded temperatures above normal. Srinagar registered a maximum temperature of 23.5 degrees Celsius, nearly 2.7 degrees above normal, while the minimum settled at 9.4 degrees Celsius.

Qazigund recorded a high of 24 degrees Celsius, 3.8 degrees above normal, and Pahalgam reported 20.4 degrees Celsius.

Kupwara and Kokernag also saw above-normal day temperatures at 21.6 degrees Celsius and 22.8 degrees Celsius, respectively.

Gulmarg, a popular tourist destination, recorded a maximum temperature of 13.2 degrees Celsius, which was around 2.6 degrees above the seasonal average.

In the Jammu division, Jammu city recorded a maximum temperature of 34.7 degrees Celsius, 1.6 degrees above normal, while Katra registered 33 degrees Celsius, nearly 4.8 degrees above the average. Batote and Baderwah also recorded temperatures above normal.

The MeT department said there was no significant rainfall recorded across most stations during the day, although some places received light precipitation over the past 24 hours. Pahalgam recorded the highest rainfall of 9.2 mm during this period. An official said the weather is | More on P6

Nasha Mukht Jammu & Kashmir Abhiyan

11 drug peddlers arrested; contraband, vehicles seized

KT News Desk

Srinagar, Apr 20: Continuing its sustained crackdown on drug trafficking under the ongoing 100-day Nasha Mukht Jammu & Kashmir Abhiyan, J&K Police intensify enforcement drive, arresting 11 drug peddlers and seizing substantial contraband and cash in separate operations across the valley.

According to a statement issued here, J&K Police in Anantnag arrested three drug peddlers in two separate operations. In the first operation, a police team from Police Station Bijbehara, during routine naka checking at Tulkhan Bridge, intercepted and apprehended one individual identified as Arif Ahmad Dar S/o Mohd Shaban Dar R/o Tulkhan Bijbehara. Upon search, 1.269 kilograms of charas powder was recovered from his possession. In another operation, a police party from PP Kahnabal at a checkpoint established at Batengoo-Uranhall crossing, intercepted a vehicle bearing registration number JK03D-5313 with two persons



on board identified as Aaqib Fayaz S/o Fayaz Ahmad Dar R/o Uranhall and Mudasar Ahmad S/o Ab Rehman R/o Uranhall. Upon search, 37 grams of charas powder was recovered from the co-driver Mudasar Ahmad, while 41 grams of the same contraband was seized from the boot space of the vehicle driven by Aaqib Fayaz.

In Pulwama, J&K Police arrested four drug peddlers in two separate operations. In the first operation, a police party from PP Nawa at a naka established at Singu Narbal intercepted a motorcycle (Registration No. JK22D-1015) ridden | More on P6

Fatty liver affects 23-30% of Kashmir's population: Dr Wahid Akbar

'Metabolic syndrome, poor dietary habits primary drivers; can be reversed in early stages; FibroScan, ultrasound, CT scan, MRI, liver biopsy tests for diagnosis'

Jahangeer Ganaie

Srinagar, Apr 20: As liver diseases continue to rise globally and across the Kashmir valley, health experts are calling for regular health check-ups and a shift toward healthier lifestyles to combat what they describe as a silent epidemic.

In an exclusive interview with the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) Correspondent, Jahangeer Ganaie, Dr Wahid Akbar, a Consultant Gastroenterologist at Amandeep and Ujala Hospital in Srinagar, spoke about the growing burden of liver diseases in the region, the alarming prevalence of fatty liver, and the urgent need for awareness and early intervention.

Here are the edited excerpts from the interview:

KNO: How many people are affected by liver diseases worldwide?



Dr Wahid Akbar: Liver diseases are a significant global health concern, causing millions of deaths each year. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), they are among the leading causes of mortality, with conditions like cirrhosis, liver cancer, and hepatitis contributing to a large number of cases. Fatty liver disease is a silent epidemic

affecting children and adults, often as high as 30 per cent of the population.

KNO: What is the liver disease burden in Kashmir Valley?

Dr Wahid Akbar: Liver disease in the Kashmir valley is a major public health concern, characterised by an exceptionally high prevalence of fatty liver disease, affecting roughly

23 to 30 per cent of the population. A rising incidence of Hepatitis C and Alveolar Echinococcosis is also noted here. Metabolic syndrome and poor dietary habits are primary drivers, with fatty liver often leading to cirrhosis. A study conducted in South Kashmir revealed that out of more than 5,000 subjects screened for Hepatitis B, 2.4 per cent tested positive, highlighting the urgency of addressing this issue. With other variants such as A, C, and E, the combined prevalence of Hepatitis could be much higher. Liver disease due to alcohol contributes to 14 to 15 per cent of cases.

KNO: Can fatty liver be reversed?

Dr Wahid Akbar: Fatty liver disease can often be reversed, especially in its early stages. Making lifestyle changes such as eating a balanced diet, exercising regularly, maintaining a healthy weight, and avoiding

alcohol can help reduce fat buildup in the liver. If left unmanaged, fatty liver can progress to more severe conditions like MASH, fibrosis, cirrhosis, or liver failure.

KNO: How often should I get my liver checked?

Dr Wahid Akbar: The frequency of liver health check-ups depends on factors such as lifestyle, medical history, and risk factors. People with obesity, diabetes, high alcohol intake, or a family history of liver disease should undergo regular screenings. For those at low risk, an annual liver function test is usually sufficient. Those with existing liver conditions may require more frequent monitoring based on their doctor's advice.

KNO: What are the symptoms of an unhealthy liver?

Dr Wahid Akbar: Liver disease often develops silently, but as it progresses, symptoms may include | More on P6

Fast-track, streamline FRA compliance in J&K: Javed Rana



KT NEWS DESK

JAMMU, APRIL 20: Minister for Jal Shakti, Forest, Ecology & Environment and Tribal Affairs, Javed Ahmed Rana, on Monday directed the officials to expedite and streamline the compliance mechanism under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 across the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

The directions were issued during a high-level review meeting held at the Civil Secretariat in Jammu to assess the progress on Act's implementation in the Union Territory. The meeting, as per an official statement, was attended by senior officials, including Commissioner Secretary Forests, Ecology & Environment, Sheetal Nanda; Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Sarvesh Rai; Secretary Tribal Affairs Department, Prasanna Ramaswamy G; Director Tribal Affairs J&K, Mohd. Mumtaz Ali; Director Finance, Tribal Affairs Department, Iftikhar Chouhan and Nodal Officer, Tribal Research Institute, Dr. Abdul Khabir, among others. Emphasising the need for

a more efficient and transparent framework, the Minister instructed the officials to accelerate the recognition of forest rights and ensure prompt operationalisation of Forest Rights Act (FRA) cells at the district level. He noted that these cells play a pivotal role in facilitating claim documentation, ensuring inter-departmental coordination and enabling timely uploading of records. "The formation of FRA cells must be fast-tracked. The entire process should be time-bound, coordinated and people-centric, with clearly defined accountability at every stage to safeguard the interests of tribal communities," Rana said. Highlighting the importance of inter-departmental synergy, the Minister called for seamless convergence between the revenue, forest and tribal affairs departments to eliminate procedural delays and administrative bottlenecks that hinder effective implementation.

It is pertinent to mention that Jammu and Kashmir Government has designated the Tribal Affairs Department as the nodal agency for implementing the Act, replacing the Forest Department

in this role. The legislation aims to address the long standing concerns of the forest-dwelling communities by recognising both individual and community rights over forest land and resources for Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers.

Seeking greater transparency and accountability, Rana directed the officials to compile comprehensive data on rejected claims, along with detailed reasons for such rejections. This, he said, would help ensure that the genuine beneficiaries are not excluded and enable corrective measures wherever necessary.

The Minister further underscored the critical role of Gram Sabhas in the process, stressing the need for adequate and meaningful representation of tribal communities in these grassroots institutions, which are responsible for verifying and recommending the claims under the Act.

Calling for intensified outreach, Rana instructed the officials to strengthen awareness campaigns so that eligible beneficiaries are fully informed about their rights and the procedures for filing claims. He emphasised the need for district-level awareness drives and training programmes to educate the communities about their entitlements under the Act.

Reaffirming the government's commitment to protect the rights and welfare of tribal populations, the Minister called for regular monitoring, periodic reviews and strict adherence to timelines to ensure effective and timely implementation of the Forest Rights Act across Jammu and Kashmir.

Udhampur Accident

Deputy CM, Health Minister expresses grief

Satish Sharma reviews treatment facilities for accident victims

KT NEWS DESK

JAMMU, APRIL 20: Deputy Chief Minister, Surinder Choudhary, Minister for Health and Medical Education, Sakeena Itoo, and Sports Minister Satish Sharma on Monday expressed deep sorrow and anguish over the tragic loss of lives in the unfortunate bus accident at Jalo on the Ramnagar-Udhampur route.



for the grieving families to endure this irreparable loss.

Deeply saddened by the incident, the Deputy Chief Minister conveyed his heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families and prayed for eternal peace to the departed souls. He also extended his sympathies to those injured in the accident and wished them a speedy and full recovery.

He assured that the administration is extending all necessary medical care to the injured and that every possible support will be provided to the affected families during this difficult time.

The Deputy Chief Minister prayed for strength and courage

In a separate statement, Minister for Health and Medical Education, Social Welfare and Education, Sakeena Itoo expressed deep sorrow and anguish over the tragic loss of lives in the unfortunate bus accident on the Ramnagar-Udhampur route.

The Health Minister conveyed her heartfelt sympathies to the bereaved families and prayed for eternal peace to the departed souls. She also expressed solidarity with the injured

passengers, wishing them a speedy and complete recovery.

Taking immediate cognizance of the incident, the Minister issued urgent directions to the Principals of Government Medical College Jammu and Government Medical College Udhampur to ensure swift and coordinated medical response for all those injured.

She instructed the Principals of both medical facilities to keep emergency services on high alert and ensure prompt admission of all referred patients without delay.

"Deploy dedicated teams of senior doctors, trauma specialists, surgeons and paramedical staff for continuous monitoring and treatment. Maintain round-the-clock availability of specialist care, including critical care and surgical interventions wherever required", Sakeena Itoo directed both Principals.

Continued on www.kashmirthunder.in

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF PROJECT OFFICER NATIONAL FISH SEED FARM, MANASBAL.

email:-cponfsmanasbal@gmail.com

QUOTATION

On behalf of His Excellency, the Lt. Governor of Jammu and Kashmir Dasti Quotations with revenue stamp of Rs. 5/- affixed are invited from local Mahigeers of Manasbal Area of J&K UT for offering rates for supply of Aquatic Weed (CERATOPHYLLUM & MYRIOPHYLLUM) on daily basis to National Fish Seed Farm, Manasbal during upcoming Grass/Silver Carp breeding operations. The Quotations shall reach to this office within Seven days from the date of publication of this notice. The rates shall be valid up to 31/03/2027. The demand for supply of Aquatic weed depends upon the availability of Funds.

No: CPO/NFSF/M/26/451

Dated: 20/04/2026

Terms and Conditions:

01. The Quotations shall be opened in the next working day on completion of stipulated time (07 Days) in the office of the undersigned at 2 p.m.

02. The undersigned reserves the right to reject any quotation partly or in full without assigning any reason thereof.

03. No additional charges shall be paid so rates be furnished inclusively all charges.

Chief Project Officer
National Fish Seed Farm
Manasbal.

DIPK-588/26 Dated: 20-04-2026

Kashmir Thunder



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IN THE COURT OF EXECUTIVE
MAGISTRATE 1st CLASS SOPORE
In the case of: **Mohammad Shasan Para S/o: Ghulam Rasool Para R/o: Adipora Sopore**
Versus
C.E.O Municipal Council Sopore/BDO Sangrama/BDO Sopore
(Registrar of Birth and Death) ...Non Applicant

NOTICE TO PUBLIC AT LARGE

Whereas, the above titled case is under process in this court, seeking direction therein to the non-applicant u/s 13(3) of the Registration of Births & Deaths Act, 1969 for registration of Birth event of the applicant's Son namely Shaker Shasan Para S/o: Mohammad Shasan Para as 02-03-2009 at Adipora Sopore (Home).

Whereas through the medium of this proclamation the public at large is informed that in case any one has any objection for issuance of direction with respect to the registration of aforementioned Birth event he /she shall file the same before this court in person or through counsel within 7 days from the date of the publication of this proclamation. If the date fixed is declared holiday, the matter will be taken on the next working day.

Executive Magistrate 1st Class, Sopore

IN THE COURT OF EXECUTIVE
MAGISTRATE 1st CLASS SOPORE
In the case of: **Tanveer Ahmad Wani S/o: Ghulam Hassan Wani R/o: Botingoo**
Versus
C.E.O Municipal Council Sopore/BDO Sangrama/BDO Sopore
(Registrar of Birth and Death) ...Non Applicant

NOTICE TO PUBLIC AT LARGE

Whereas, the above titled case is under process in this court, seeking direction therein to the non-applicant u/s 13(3) of the Registration of Births & Deaths Act, 1969 for registration of Birth event of the applicant's Son namely Tanveer Ahmad Wani S/o: Tanveer Ahmad Wani as 26-04-2018 at M.C.H Sopore

Whereas through the medium of this proclamation the public at large is informed that in case any one has any objection for issuance of direction with respect to the registration of aforementioned Birth event he /she shall file the same before this court in person or through counsel within 7 days from the date of the publication of this proclamation. If the date fixed is declared holiday, the matter will be taken on the next working day.

Executive Magistrate 1st Class, Sopore

IN THE COURT OF EXECUTIVE
MAGISTRATE 1st CLASS SOPORE
In the case of: **Gulshana Begam S/o: Ab Hamid Dar R/o: Nowpora Kalam**
Versus
C.E.O Municipal Council Sopore/BDO Sangrama/BDO Sopore
(Registrar of Birth and Death) ...Non Applicant

NOTICE TO PUBLIC AT LARGE

Whereas, the above titled case is under process in this court, seeking direction therein to the non-applicant u/s 13(3) of the Registration of Births & Deaths Act, 1969 for registration of Birth event of the applicant's Son namely Rawhaan Bini Hamid S/o: Ab Hamid Dar as 23-05-2017 at M.C.H Sopore

Whereas through the medium of this proclamation the public at large is informed that in case any one has any objection for issuance of direction with respect to the registration of aforementioned Birth event he /she shall file the same before this court in person or through counsel within 7 days from the date of the publication of this proclamation. If the date fixed is declared holiday, the matter will be taken on the next working day.

Executive Magistrate 1st Class, Sopore

ZONAL HEADQUARTERS POLICE TELECOMMUNICATION KASHMIR

Email:-telkmrzone@ikpolice.gov.in
Phone No. (office) 0194-2452698
(Fax) 0194-2506526

PUBLIC NOTICE

Mohd Lateef Mir S/o. Habib Ullah Mir R/o Dalhasanyar sofa Kadal Srinagar A/P Budshah Nagar "C" Natipora Srinagar working as HC/ Telecom in J&K Police Telecommunication Kashmir under No. 2292/PW (Tel-993714) has represented for correction in his name in the service records of the officer.

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/2299/K-Z-2026/7015
Dated: 20/04/2026

DIPK-581/26
DATED: 20-04-2026

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER JAL SHAKTI (PHE) DIVISION, PULWAMA

GIST
NOTICE INVITING TENDERS
Maintenance, Repairs and other emergent works of
"Jal Shakti (PHE) Division Pulwama"
For the year 2026-27
E-NIT S. No. 04/PHEP of 2026-27

For & on behalf of the Lieutenant Governor of Jammu & Kashmir (UT) e-tenders in single cover system on overall percentage rate basis are invited from Registered PWD Contractors whose registration cards are valid in terms of standing rules & are active for the following works:-

Job No	Name of work	Ceiling (in lacs)	Cost of TD (in)	EMD @ 3% (in)	Validity of Contract	Class of Contractor	Head of Account
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Annual Maintenance, Repairs and other emergent nature of works for various Water Supply Schemes of PHE Sub-Division Pulwama for the year 2026-27. (Part 1 st -Pulwama Town)	3.00	200	9000	31/03/2027	DEE	MH 2215 Non Plan (M&R)

The NIT consisting of qualifying information, eligibility criteria, bill of quantities (BOQ), terms and conditions of contract can be seen/downloaded from the departmental web site (jktenders.gov.in) as per the dates shown below:-

S. No.	Description	Date			Time
		DD	MM	YYYY	
1	Publishing date of NIT	18	04	2026	5:00 PM
2	Download start date	18	04	2026	5:00 PM
3	Bid submission start date	18	04	2026	5:00 PM
4	Bid submission end date	25	04	2026	12:00 PM
5	Bid opening date	25	04	2026	01:00 PM

- > Bidders are advised to download bid submission manual from the "download bid submission".
- > To participate in bidding process bidders, must get digital signature certificate (DSC) as per information technology-2000 bidders can get digital certificate from approved option as well as from "Bidders Manual Kit" on website (jktenders.gov.in) to acquaint vendors.
- > The bidders have to submit their bids online in electronic format with digital signature.
- > Bids must be accompanied by bid security deposit & cost of tender document as specified in column (4&5) of the above table. Bid security will be in the shape of CDR/FDR pledged in favour of Executive Engineer, Jal Shakti (PHE) Division, Pulwama and the cost of tender document shall be deposited in the Treasury under MH 0215 PHE in favour of Executive Engineer, Jal Shakti (PHE) Division, Pulwama. (Name of work to be mentioned on the Treasury Challan / Receipt)
- > Bidders must ensure to upload their bids in SINGLE COVER containing documents as under:
 - i) Scanned copies of Treasury Challan/Receipt and Earnest Money Deposit CDR/FDR
 - ii) Scanned copy of Valid Registration Card.
 - iii) Scanned copy of Latest GST Clearance.
 - iv) Rates submitted by the bidders in the BOQ.
- > Bidders must ensure to upload scanned copy of all necessary documents in terms of soft copies with the technical bid and no documents in terms of hard copies shall be entertained. However, in case of any clarification the bidders shall have to produce original documents in support of soft copies if need arises.
- > The original instruments in respect of Treasury Receipt, EMD and relevant attested copies of Technical Bid Documents as specified above must be submitted by Lowest Bidder (L1) to Executive Engineer, Jal Shakti (PHE) Division Pulwama by hand or by speed/registered post before the allotting of work or as and when demanded. If the bidder fails to produce the same within the prescribed time period, he will be debarred from taking part in tendering process in this division for at least one year.
- > No financial bid will be accepted in physical form.
- > The bid shall be deposited in electronic format only on the web site of (jktenders.gov.in) till the end date mentioned in bid submission.
- > The bid(s) shall be opened online on above mentioned date or any other subsequent date in presence of the bidders who may wish to be present.
- > No claim shall be entertained on account of disruption of internet services being used by bidders and are advised to upload their bids well in advance to avoid any technical snags in last hours.
- > The department will not be responsible for delay in online submission due to any reason whatsoever claimed by the bidder.

NO: PHEP/257-267
Dated:-18.04.2026

DIPK-555/26
DATED: 20-04-2026

Sd/- Executive Engineer,
Jal Shakti (PHE) Division,
Pulwama

CM Omar inaugurates Nowshera key road, upgraded hospital

KT NEWS DESK

Nowshera, Apr 20: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Monday inaugurated the upgraded road from NH-144A Bridge to Nowshera town and the 100-bedded Sub-District Hospital during his extensive tour of the area.

The visit of the Chief Minister, along with his Cabinet colleagues, marked a major push towards strengthening connectivity and healthcare infrastructure in the region.

The Chief Minister received a rousing welcome on his arrival, with people lining both sides of the road and showering flower petals, jostling to see the chief minister, reflecting overwhelming public enthusiasm and support.

The upgraded road project, executed by the PWD (R&B) Department at a cost of 7.99 crore, is expected to significantly improve connectivity, streamline traffic movement, and reduce travel time for commuters.

Later, the Chief Minister inaugurated the upgraded 100-bedded Sub-District Hospital, developed at an estimated cost of 18.18 crore. The facility is equipped with modern healthcare infrastructure aimed at enhancing patient care and expanding access to quality medical services for the people of Nowshera and adjoining areas.

He was accompanied by Deputy Chief Minister Surinder Choudhary, Minister for Health and Medical Education Sakeena Itoo, and Advisor to the Chief Minister Nasir Aslam Wani.

During his visit, the Chief Minister took a detailed tour of the hospital and inspected key sections, including X-ray, ECG and ultrasound rooms, examination rooms, and the blood



storage unit. He interacted with doctors, staff, and patients, enquiring about the availability and quality of healthcare services.

Addressing a massive public gathering, the Chief Minister emphasized that public office is a responsibility to serve the people and improve their quality of life.

"Positions of power are not meant for personal comfort but to bring relief to the people and make their lives easier. Our priority is to strengthen schools, hospitals, roads, and address unemployment and poverty," he said.

Amid an enthusiastic turnout, he highlighted key initiatives aimed at boosting connectivity, healthcare, and overall socio-economic growth in Rajouri and adjoining areas. Interacting warmly with the public, he assured that the voices and aspirations of the people of the Pir Panjal region would

continue to guide policy decisions and drive responsive governance on the ground.

He reiterated the government's commitment to regularizing daily wagers and ensuring justice for Anganwadi and ASHA workers through improved and increased wages and stipends. He also highlighted various welfare initiatives, including the provision of free gas cylinders to the poorest households, electricity support, and free bus travel for women.

Referring to broader political commitments, the Chief Minister underscored the need to restore statehood to Jammu and Kashmir, stating that it was a promise made to the people and must be fulfilled.

Highlighting recent developmental achievements, he noted that projects like the Nowshera road and hospital, which had remained pending for years,

were completed due to the focused efforts of the present government.

The Chief Minister expressed gratitude to the people for their warm reception and overwhelming support. "The love and affection shown by the people of Nowshera is deeply humbling. I assure you that we will continue to work tirelessly to address your concerns and build a prosperous Jammu and Kashmir," he said.

Earlier, on his way to Nowshera, the Chief Minister inspected the ongoing works on the Sungal Tunnel project and reviewed progress at the site. He was briefed by officials on excavation, structural works, and associated road development.

He was informed by the Project Sampark of the Border Roads Organisation that the total length of the tunnel is 2.79 km across the Kalidhar Range, with a reduction in travel time of 40-45 minutes, and that it is scheduled to be completed by June 30 this year.

Speaking on the occasion, Deputy Chief Minister Surinder Choudhary said that key infrastructure projects in the region have been realized under the leadership of the Chief Minister, reaffirming the government's commitment to balanced and equitable development across Jammu and Kashmir. Minister for Health and Medical Education Sakeena Itoo, while addressing the gathering, announced the establishment of a Government Degree College at Seri block of Nowshera.

Advisor to the Chief Minister Nasir Aslam Wani and other leaders also addressed the gathering, highlighting the government's development agenda and commitment to public welfare.

Search underway for leopard that hurt 6 in Khansahib

NAVEED UL HAQ GANAIEE

official said.

Budgam, Apr 20: A day after a leopard attack left several persons injured in Batpora and Sheikhpora areas of Khansahib in central Kashmir's Budgam district, wildlife teams on Monday said that search operations are underway to trace the animal.

Bashir Ahmad, an official from the Wildlife Department, told the media persons that they received information about the leopard's presence on Sunday and rushed to the spot to assess the situation.

"We received a call informing us that the animal had been sighted and required intervention. We immediately rushed to the location. However, there was a slight delay in our response as we were engaged in an operation at another site, and the distance between the two locations is considerable," the

Ahmad said the leopard managed to escape after the incident, and teams have since been engaged in continuous efforts to track its movement. "We have launched a search operation and installed traps in the area. We are hopeful of capturing the animal soon," he said. According to the official, leopards generally move within a radius of 10 to 12 kilometres and are likely to remain within that range in search of food, adding that the animal may have been disturbed in its natural habitat and acted in self-defence.

Meanwhile, the department has issued an advisory urging residents to remain vigilant, avoid venturing out alone, keep children under close supervision, and properly dispose of kitchen waste to prevent attracting stray dogs, which could draw the leopard into residential areas—(KNO)

Police register FIR over chopping of apple trees

KNO

Sopore, Apr 20: Police in Sopore have registered an FIR after unidentified persons chopped down dozens of apple trees in an orchard at Bohripora area in Baramulla district, causing significant loss to the owner. Family said that the incident took place during the night when miscreants entered the orchard and cut several apple trees, many of them high-density plants nearing harvest.

The orchard owner, Qalbi Hussain Mir, said around 55 plants were destroyed. He termed the act deliberate and said the orchard was the family's main source of income. "We have suffered a loss of around Rs 5 to 8 lakh. These were high-density apple plants, and we were expecting nearly 800 to 900 boxes this season," Mir said.

Continued on www.kashmirthunder.in

Kashmir transport strike paralyzes valley

REHAN QAYOUM MIR

Srinagar, Apr 20: Kashmir Valley witnessed a near-complete halt in public transport on Monday as transporters enforced a valley-wide "chakka jam" against the expansion of Smart City bus services into district routes, bringing normal life to a standstill across several parts of the Valley.

From Srinagar city to south, north and central Kashmir, major roads were a deserted look with buses, minibuses and taxis largely off the roads.

Transport hubs, including Parimpora, Batamalo, Nowgam, Sopore and Anantnag, witnessed suspended activity, leaving commuters stranded and forcing many to rely on limited private arrangements or travel on foot.

The shutdown was called by transport unions under the banner of All Jammu and Kashmir Transport Welfare Association, who allege that the expansion of Smart City bus services into non-urban and inter-district routes has severely impacted traditional transport operators.

Transport Association



Kashmir President Shabir Matta, said the protest reflects growing unrest in the transport sector over what they describe as "unconsulted and unregulated expansion" of Smart City bus operations.

He said transporters from north, south, central and other regions of Kashmir have repeatedly sought dialogue but feel ignored in the decision-making process. "We are not against modern transport or development. But when routes that have supported thousands of families for decades are taken

away without safeguards, it becomes a question of survival," he said.

Matta said that repeated assurances regarding route rationalisation, fleet coordination and regulatory balance have remained unimplemented on the ground.

Silence, uncertainty and fear of future at Parimpora At Parimpora Bus Stand, one of Kashmir's busiest transport hubs, rows of parked vehicles and silent booking counters reflected the scale of the shutdown.

Transporters said the

sector is already under severe pressure due to rising fuel prices, loan repayments, insurance costs and declining passenger flow.

A driver, Mushtaq Ahmad, said the situation has become unbearable. "We are not big companies. We are ordinary people running vehicles on bank loans," he said. "Every day feels uncertain. If passengers disappear, our families disappear with them."

Another operator said the system that sustained transporters for decades is now under stress. "There was a rhythm to this work. Now everything is breaking suddenly without transition," he said.

Kashmir University steps in for affected students In view of the transport shutdown, Kashmir University authorities announced a separate examination arrangement for students who were unable to reach exam centres on April 20 due to the unavailability of transport.

Officials said the decision was taken to ensure no student suffers academic loss because of the valley-wide disruption.

Continued on www.kashmirthunder.in

Six hotels sealed in Tangmarg for illegal constructions

WARIS FAYAZ

Srinagar, Apr 20: Authorities on Monday sealed six hotels in Tangmarg for carrying out illegal constructions.

An official of the Gulmarg Development Authority (GDA) said that the action was taken as part of the drive against unauthorised structures in the Tangmarg-Gulmarg belt.

The sealed units had allegedly violated approved building norms and expanded structures without permission, he said.

The official said enforcement teams headed by the Tehsildar Tangmarg, with support of local police unit, carried out the sealing after identifying clear violations during inspections. "Similar actions will continue in other areas to check unplanned construction," he said.

Chief Executive Officer of GDA, Tariq Hussain Naik, issued a stern warning, saying there will be zero tolerance for violations. He urged people to refrain from undertaking any unauthorised construction. "Illegal constructions will invite strict action. People must follow approved norms or face consequences," the CEO told KNO.

Officials said the drive is aimed at regulating construction activities and preserving the fragile environment of the tourist zone—(KNO)

ACB convicts five in Pahalgam food grains scam

KNO

Jammu, Apr 20: The Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) on Monday secured conviction of five former storekeepers in a long-pending food grains misappropriation case of Pahalgam circle, while also filing a charge-sheet against the then BDO Kupwara and four others in a separate funds embezzlement case.

In a statement, a spokesperson said court of Special Judge Anti-Corruption Court Anantnag Convicts 1. Abdul Khaliq Shah S/O Mohd Abdullah Shah R/O Ashmuqam the then Store Keeper Food supplies Sale Center Pahalgam and Laripora. (2) Gh Nabi Mir S/O Gh. Mohd Mir R/O Ashmuqam the then Store Keeper Food Supplies Sale Center Dawatoo and Aru. (3). Mohd Shafi Rather S/O Gh. Mohd R/O Devaroo Pahalgam the then store keeper Ashmuqam. (4). Gh. Hassan Hajam S/O Gh. Ahmad R/O Kathsoo the then store Keeper Food supplies sale centre Katsoo and (5). Muzaffar Ahmad Bichoo S/O Gh. Mohd Bichoo R/O Malaknag Anantnag the then store keeper Food supplies Sale centre Laripora and Pahalgam in a misappropriation case.

He said, in a significant verdict reinforcing the commitment

to combating corruption, the Hon'ble Special Judge Anti-Corruption Court Anantnag, Ms Masarat Roohi convicted aforementioned accused persons, in a misappropriation case registered under FIR No. 09/1990 U/S 5(2) of J&K P.C. Act-2006 read with Sec. 409/RPC of P/S VOK (now ACB).

"The accused persons, then-serving in Food and Supplies Department Kashmir Pahalgam Circle as store keepers were found guilty under Sections U/S 5(2) of J&K P.C. Act-2006 read with Sec. 409/RPC, for misappropriation of Food grains/Empty Bags by these store keepers of Pahalgam Circle for the period w.e.f. 04/1989 to 11-09-1989," said the spokesperson.

He said, following a complaint filed by Dy. Director Food and Supplies Department Srinagar vide No DFSK/Adm/SA-468 dated 02-11-1989 reporting therein about the embezzlement of Food Grains/Empty Bags to the tune of Rs 364235.84/- on the hands of aforementioned five accused persons, the aforementioned case was registered in P/S VOK (now ACB) on 07-06-1990.

Continued on www.kashmirthunder.in

CS outlines digital vision for J&K at Tech Saksham workshop

KT NEWS DESK

Jammu, Apr 20: Presiding over "Tech Saksham", a landmark capacity-building workshop jointly convened by the National Informatics Centre (NIC) and NICS of Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) at the Convention Centre, Chief Secretary, Atal Dulloo on Monday set a resolute tone for the digital future of Jammu and Kashmir.

He emphasised that digital governance is no longer a mere supporting function, but the absolute backbone of transparent, efficient and responsive public service delivery mechanism.

The workshop was also attended by Shantmanu, State Election Commissioner, J&K; Chandraker Bharti, Principal Secretary, Home Department; Dr. Piyush Singla, Secretary Information Technology Department; and Mahima Madan, Chief Executive Officer JaKeGA.

Varindra Seth, Deputy Director General NIC, Alok Tiwari, MD NICS; Jaskaran Singh Modi, State Informatics Officer; and Sanjay Gupta, ASIO NIC, were also present.

The Chief Secretary announced that the



administration is firmly shifting towards a "Whole-of-Government" approach. This strategic move is designed to break down departmental silos through interoperability and shared digital architecture, ensuring seamless and accelerated service delivery for all citizens.

The Chief Secretary highlighted that for a region defined by its geographical diversity, digital platforms serve as essential bridge. He stressed that robust digital systems

are instrumental in significantly reducing administrative barriers, compressing service timelines, curtailing corruption and ultimately sustaining the bond of trust between citizens and the administration.

He favoured that digital platforms must feature user-friendly interfaces and local language support to ensure no citizen is left behind in this revolution. He further noted that structured, well-governed data will serve as the bedrock for deploying Artificial

Intelligence in public administration, turning raw information into actionable intelligence for better governance.

The Chief Secretary made it clear that strict adherence to cybersecurity protocols and the development of comprehensive crisis management plans across all departments are non-negotiable imperatives. He called for continuous capacity building of government personnel and urged robust collaboration between government departments, NICS/ NIC and premier academic institutions to accelerate the digital roadmap.

The Chief Secretary's address highlighted two major milestones in the shape of MeitY sanctioned Centre of Excellence in AI, which will be hosted at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Jammu through a Special Purpose Vehicle to drive region-specific research and innovation. Additionally he made out that the Government is actively contemplating to establish two dedicated IT Parks at both Jammu and Srinagar. These parks are envisioned as vital catalysts for nurturing the local start-up ecosystem and driving large-scale employment generation for the youth.

Addressing the gathering, State Election Commissioner J&K, highlighted the

all-pervasive role of information technology across all sectors of governance.

Offering a thought-provoking analogy on Artificial Intelligence, Shantmanu cautioned that while AI should be embraced as a tool, it must also be studied with the rigorous vigilance reserved for a potential adversary. He stressed the need to thoroughly understand AI to harness its full potential while proactively mitigating the risks of its misuse. Drawing on his recent observations of election management frameworks in other states, he further underscored the transformative impact of IT tools in enhancing transparency for voters, candidates and the electoral machinery.

The workshop comprised specialised knowledge-sharing sessions on vital frontier technologies, starting with a crucial deep-dive into Cyber Security led by National Cyber Security Expert Amit Dubey, followed by an exploration of Cloud capabilities by Rajendran Dandapani, Director and President, Zoho Corporation. The technical agenda culminated in a dedicated session on Artificial Intelligence by Alok Tiwari. Vote of thanks was presented by Jaskaran Singh Modi, State Informatics Officer NIC J&K at the culmination of the session.

EDITORIAL

Delaying Women's Reservation Serves No One

The government's decision to issue a set of Frequently Asked Questions on the women's reservation bills is a welcome step toward transparency. It effectively addresses the unfounded narratives put forward by the opposition. By clearly explaining the rationale behind the proposed constitutional amendment, delimitation changes, and seat expansion, the government has demolished the myth that these measures were designed for political advantage. The truth is simple: the

government wants to deliver 33 per cent reservation for women at the earliest possible opportunity. The opposition's claim that the government was trying to carry out delimitation based on the 2011 census for political gain collapses under factual scrutiny. No changes were proposed to the Delimitation Commission Act. The existing legal framework remains intact, and any recommendations of the commission would require parliamentary approval and presidential assent. Ongoing elections

in states like Tamil Nadu and West Bengal would not be affected, as elections up to 2029 will be conducted under the current system. The fear of political manipulation is entirely baseless. The core objective of these bills is to ensure that women do not have to wait indefinitely for their rightful representation. The 'Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam', passed unanimously in 2023, provides that reservation will be implemented based on delimitation after the Census conducted post-2026. Had the

government waited for the Census and subsequent delimitation, women would not have benefited even in the 2029 general elections. The decision to delink implementation from this condition is not a political manoeuvre but a practical necessity. The proposal to increase Lok Sabha seats from 543 to 850 is based on a proportional expansion approach that treats all states uniformly. Southern states, which the opposition claimed would be disadvantaged, would actually see their seats increase

proportionally. Tamil Nadu's seats would rise from 39 to 59, Karnataka's from 28 to 42, and Kerala's from 20 to 30. There is no reduction, no disadvantage, and no political targeting. The government has done its duty by introducing these progressive bills. The opposition must now set aside baseless fears and support legislation that will transform the political landscape for women. Delaying women's reservation serves no one except those who benefit from the status quo.

From Margins To Mainstream How SMILE Is Transforming Lives Across India

Press Information Bureau

What is SMILE? A Bridge to Belonging India is a country of a billion stories – and a government committed to ensuring that every one of them is heard. The most important are the stories of communities that have long remained at the margins of opportunity. Two groups prominent among them are transgender persons, navigating a world not always designed with their needs in mind; and individuals engaged in begging, whose circumstances often reflect a lack of support and opportunity.

These communities are defined by the immense potential that can be unlocked through the right support and intervention.

India already has a strong ecosystem of welfare programmes – for health, housing, education, and livelihoods. What was missing was a dedicated bridge – one that could connect marginalised communities to these existing opportunities while addressing the barriers they face, such as lack of documentation, limited awareness, and restricted access.

SMILE – Support for Marginalized Individuals for Livelihood & Enterprise scheme – serves as that bridge. Launched on 12th February 2022 by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment[1], it is India's first unified national framework designed to support these communities at every stage: from identification and rescue, through access to healthcare and education, to counselling, skill development and long-term economic independence.

The Investment Behind the Intent

The SMILE scheme has a total outlay of 365 crore for the period 2021–22 to 2025–26, with 265 crore allocated for transgender welfare and 100 crore for beggary rehabilitation[2]. Allocations rise progressively each year, reflecting the government's commitment to scaling up both sub-schemes.

In the first year, 2021–22, the scheme allocated 25 crore for transgender welfare and 10 crore for beggary rehabilitation, bringing the total to 35 crore. The following year, 2022–23, saw an increase to 46.31 crore for transgender welfare and 15 crore for beggary rehabilitation, totaling 61.31 crore. In 2023–24, the allocation rose further to 52.91 crore for transgender welfare and 30 crore for beggary rehabilitation, with a combined total of 82.91 crore. The upward trend continued in 2024–25, with 63.90 crore set aside for transgender welfare and 33 crore for beggary rehabilitation, amounting to 96.90 crore. In the final year of the period, 2025–26, transgender welfare received 76.88 crore while beggary rehabilitation got 37 crore, taking the annual total to 113.88 crore.

Over the five-year period, the total allocation for transgender welfare stood at 265 crore, while beggary rehabilitation received 125 crore, bringing the overall expenditure under the scheme to 390 crore.

Standing With India's Transgender Community

India has made significant strides in addressing the historical marginalisation of the transgender community through comprehensive legal protections, welfare schemes, and digital accessibility. This shift reflects growing awareness and efforts to promote inclusivity and equality in Indian society.

Recognising that this community deserves protection and support from the state, the Government of India enacted the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, which prohibits discrimination and guarantees access to education, employment, healthcare, and other public services. The SMILE sub-scheme for Comprehensive Rehabilitation of Transgender Persons, is a key government initiative operationalised to align with the Act[3].

Key Components:[4]

Scholarships for Transgender Students
The scheme offers financial assistance to transgender students from Class IX through post-graduation (including secondary, higher secondary, undergraduate, postgraduate, and recognized technical/vocational courses under UGC, AICTE, or NCVT).

Eligibility requires a valid Transgender Certificate from the National Portal, full-time enrollment in a recognized institution

(including approved distance/correspondence programs), and no receipt of other Central/State scholarships. It covers one academic year per class/level only (no repeated years).

Skill Development and Livelihood
PM-DAKSH (Pradhan Mantri Dakshata Aur Kushalta Sampann Hitgrahi Yojana) is a national skill development scheme providing vocational training and livelihood support to marginalized communities, including SCs, OBCs, EBCs, Safai Karamcharis, and transgender persons, to boost employability and income.

Training aligns with industry needs via National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and Sector Skill Councils, with entrepreneurship programs delivered by IIE and NIESBUD. It integrates with the PM-DAKSH IT platform and National Portal for Transgender Persons for transparent monitoring. On a pilot basis, 18 Entrepreneurship Development Programmes have been launched nationwide to train 1,800 transgender persons in business planning, market assessment, regulatory compliance, financial access, and linkages to incubation centers/banks.

Composite Medical Health
A comprehensive health package is provided in convergence with PM-JAY (Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana / Ayushman Bharat), covering general healthcare as well as gender-reaffirmation procedures through empanelled hospitals, and strict non-discrimination policies.

Garima Greh (Shelter Homes)

Piloted in 2021, Garima Greh shelter homes provide safe, dignified accommodation to transgender persons who face homelessness as a result of family rejection or social stigma. Each home offers food, medical care, recreational facilities, and on-site skill-building support, and is run by Community Based Organisations (CBOs) with financial assistance from the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment (DoSJE).

Transgender Protection Cells
Each State must establish a dedicated Transgender Protection Cell to monitor offences against transgender persons and ensure prompt registration, investigation, and prosecution of such cases. These cells act as the key enforcement mechanism for the rights under the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, translating legal provisions into effective on-ground redressal.

National Portal and Helpline
The National Portal for Transgender Persons (transgender.dosje.gov.in) serves as the single digital gateway for issuing Transgender Certificates and Identity Cards, which are essential for accessing the SMILE scheme and other government entitlements.

All SMILE-funded Garima Grehs have been geotagged for monitoring and accountability[5].
Legislative and Policy Backbone: Other key central government interventions for transgender persons in India[6]:
Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights)

Act, 2019: The foundational legislation that legally recognises transgender identity, prohibits discrimination across education, employment, healthcare and public services, and mandates government welfare obligations – with violations punishable by up to 2 years imprisonment.

Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Rules, 2020: Operationalises the Act by mandating Transgender Protection Cells (set up in 20 States/UTs) and Transgender Welfare Boards (set up in 25 States/UTs) to monitor offences, protect rights, and facilitate access to schemes.

National Council for Transgender Persons: A statutory body constituted that advises the Central Government on policies and legislation, monitors welfare scheme implementation, coordinates across departments, and redresses grievances of transgender persons.

PM-DAKSH: National Backward Classes Finance & Development Corporation (NBCFDC) skill development programme extended to transgender persons, offering vocational training with a monthly stipend of 1,000 for eligible trainees with 80%+ attendance.

Beyond Begging: The Road to Rehabilitation
The SMILE sub-scheme for Comprehensive Rehabilitation of Persons Engaged in the Act of Begging, is aimed at achieving the Government's objective of Bhiksha Vritti Mukta Bharat (Begging-Free India) through comprehensive rehabilitation measures.

How Does the Scheme Work?
The scheme is run at multiple levels



Key Takeaways

- For 2021–2026, ₹390 crore was allotted by the government for the SMILE scheme.
- 31,055 individuals identified and 9,935 rehabilitated under the beggary sub-scheme as on March 2026, reflecting on-ground implementation at scale.
- 21 Garima Grehs are currently operational across 17 states, with 3 more sanctioned in August 2025.
- ₹5 lakh health coverage per year for every transgender person under Ayushman Bharat TG Plus – covering gender-affirming care, hormone therapy, and sex reassignment surgery at empanelled hospitals.

– Implementing Authorities (IAs) namely District Administration/ Urban Local Bodies/ Municipal Corporations and other agencies working in the field of beggary prevention. This ensures that help reaches people where they are, in a way that suits local needs.

What Does the Scheme Do?
Survey & Identification: First, local teams go out and identify people engaged in begging in their area.

Mobilisation & Counselling: Then, mobilisation of the identified persons engaged in begging with spot counselling and training to people who are doing the mobilisation. Crucial support comes from police, volunteers, other agencies.

Shelter & Care: People are rescued and brought to shelter homes, where they receive food, safety, and basic care. **Skill Development:** They are then offered skill training – in carpentry, tailoring, cooking, gardening, security work, sanitation, and even e-rickshaw driving – so they can earn a living. **Self-Help Groups** are formed, and people are connected to banks so they can access financial support and start their own small work.

Convergence & Rehabilitation: For those who need more specialised care – such as the elderly or those recovering from addiction – the scheme connects them to Old Age Homes, De-addiction Centres, and other government programmes. Even after rehabilitation, the scheme follows up to make sure people are doing well and do not slip back. Provisions are also there for individual counselling, group therapy, re-educative sessions, and family classes.

The SMILE Beggary sub-scheme is currently operational in 181 selected cities across the country[7]. Details of rehabilitation centres and shelter homes are collected, registered and monitored through the SMILE-Beggary National Portal.

Stories of Rescue and Rehabilitation
The SMILE scheme measures its progress in the number of cities covered, individuals identified, and persons rehabilitated. But behind every number is a journey – from the streets to self-sufficiency, from despair to dignity. Jyoti and Sunil are two such journeys.

The Road Ahead
SMILE represents a decisive shift in how India approaches the welfare of its most marginalised citizens – not through isolated schemes targeting single problems, but through a converged architecture that addresses identity, health, education, livelihood, and shelter in one coherent framework. The logic is deliberate: because exclusion is multi-dimensional, the response must be too.

What distinguishes SMILE from earlier welfare efforts is its insistence on structural change. Each component is designed not merely to provide relief, but to build the conditions under which relief is no longer necessary. The goal, ultimately, is not dependency on a scheme but full participation in society.

That ambition is reflected in the scheme's steadily expanding budget, its growing network of implementation partners, and the increasing number of lives it is reaching year on year. SMILE is, in the truest sense of its name, a programme built on the belief that dignity is not a privilege to be granted selectively – it is a condition that belongs to every person, without exception.

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

Committee on Ease of Doing Business & New Industrial Policy begins stakeholder talks in Jammu

Promises competitive, investor-friendly J&K

KT News Desk

JAMMU, APRIL 20: The Committee on Ease of Doing Business and revision of the New Industrial Policy for Jammu and Kashmir held its first meeting with the stakeholders at Udyog Bhawan here on Monday.

The Committee, as per an official statement, chaired by Additional Chief Secretary, Finance, Shailendra Kumar, met the representatives and office bearers of various industrial and trade associations from the Jammu Division.

Committee members Vikramjit Singh, Commissioner Secretary, Industries and Commerce Department and Amitava Chatterjee, Managing Director & CEO, J&K Bank, attended the meeting.

This was the committee's first stakeholder consultation on revising the J&K Industrial Policy and improving the Ease of Doing Business in the Union Territory. The next meeting will be held in Kashmir.

During the deliberations, industry representatives gave detailed feedback on a wide range of issues. Suggestions focused on regulatory simplification, reducing the compliance burden, improving access to finance, upgrading



infrastructure and building mechanisms to attract fresh investment while supporting the growth of existing units.

The stakeholders also proposed specific amendments for incorporation in the new Industrial Policy.

The Committee underlined the importance of continuous stakeholder engagement in policy formulation and assured that all constructive suggestions would be examined. It stated that the forthcoming Industrial Policy will aim to create a competitive, transparent and investor-friendly ecosystem in Jammu and Kashmir.

The meeting was also attended by Director, Industries and Commerce-Jammu, Dr Arun Manhas; Chairman, Federation of Industries Jammu, Virender Jai; Arun Gupta, President, Chamber of Commerce & Industry Jammu, Arun Gupta; National Chairman, D2C Industry Association, M A Alim; Vice President, CII, Sidhant Choudhary; Chairman ICC, Rahul Sahai; President-ASSOCHAM Manik Batra; Chairman FICCI, Rakesh Bhat; President BBIA Lalit Mahajan; President, PHDCCI Rakesh Wazir; Chairman, FICCI FLO, Varsha Bansal besides officers from the Directorate of Industries and Commerce.

Cath Lab, other facilities renew hope for patients of South Kashmir, parts of Chenab valley at GMC Anantnag

KT News Desk

JAMMU, APRIL 20: Government Medical College (GMC) Anantnag has rapidly emerged as a vital centre for advanced cardiac care, offering renewed hope to patients across South Kashmir and parts of the Chenab Valley.

The recent establishment of a state-of-the-art Cath Lab at the institution marks a significant milestone in strengthening tertiary healthcare services in the region.

Commissioned in April 2025, the high-end Cath Lab established by Omar Abdullah led Government has transformed the cardiac care landscape in South Kashmir. In a short span of just nine months, the Department of Cardiology has successfully conducted over 3,000 procedures, including more than 1,000 critical life-saving interventions such as primary angioplasties and pacemaker implantations.

The Cath Lab, as per an official statement, has significantly strengthened timely and life-saving interventions like coronary angiography, angioplasty, pacemaker implantation, electrophysiological studies, and other advanced cardiac procedures. This facility has brought critical cardiac care closer to the people of South Kashmir and other adjoining districts, eliminating the need for patients to travel long distances for specialized treatment.

The facility, functioning under HoD, Dr. Syed Maqbool and other cardio specialists like Dr. Shamim Iqbal; Dr Showkat Hussain Shah and Dr Shahood



is currently performing an average of 10-15 procedures and is catering not only to patients from South Kashmir but also from several districts of the Jammu division, including Banihal, Ramban, Doda, Kishtwar, Rajouri, and Poonch.

Demonstrating high efficiency and preparedness, the cardiology also achieved a door-to-balloon time of just 15-20 minutes in eight primary angioplasty cases handled within a 12-hour window, an indicator of adherence to top clinical standards in emergency cardiac care.

Prior to the establishment of this facility, patients from South Kashmir, home to an estimated population of 25 lakh, were compelled to travel nearly 70 kilometers to Srinagar for specialized cardiac treatment. This often led to critical delays during emergencies and adversely impacted patient outcomes.

The Cath Lab at GMC Anantnag has effectively bridged this crucial gap,

significantly improving accessibility and timely intervention.

In a further boost to its growing reputation, the National Board of Examinations in Medical Sciences (NBEMS) has granted accreditation for three DrNB (Doctorate of National Board) super-specialty seats in cardiology to GMC Anantnag. This recognition, awarded to the Department of Cardiology on February 17, underscores the institution's advanced medical infrastructure and clinical capabilities.

Notably, GMC Anantnag has become the first among newly established medical colleges in the country to receive such accreditation, marking a historic achievement.

Recently, Minister for Health and Medical Education, Sakeena Itoo also dedicated 1.5 tesla MRI facility for the public use at the associated hospital of GMC Anantnag, describing the development as a landmark moment for both treatment and specialist care at the facility.

She described the MRI facility as a major milestone and a long-pending addition that will significantly improve diagnostic services at the hospital. "The facility will benefit patients across South Kashmir by providing timely and advanced diagnostic services locally, reducing the need for referrals to Srinagar hospitals," she said.

Apart from these advanced facilities like Cath Lab and MRI facility, other facilities like advanced modular OTs and free diet for patients have also been started by the present Government.

Moreover, a Sarai is also being established in the Associated Hospital of GMC Anantnag to provide support to attendants during their stay in hospitals.

A recent news report published in a local daily has presented a one-sided and incomplete picture of Cardiac facilities and services available at GMC Anantnag. The report fails to acknowledge the substantial progress made in upgrading healthcare infrastructure and expanding specialized services at the institution.

The Government reiterates that continuous efforts are underway to enhance medical facilities and ensure optimal patient care. Recruitment of necessary medical and paramedical staff is being carried out on a regular basis to further strengthen service delivery. The achievements of GMC Anantnag, particularly in the field of cardiology, reflect a committed approach towards improving public healthcare and addressing long-standing regional gaps.

DC Kulgam reviews projects under NABARD sector



KT News Desk

KULGAM, APRIL 20: Deputy Commissioner (DC) Kulgam, Shahzad Alam Monday chaired a review meeting of NABARD funded RIDF Projects in the district.

The meeting, as per an official statement, was attended by JD Planning, ACR, ACD, SE R&B, DDM NABARD, District Sectoral Officers and Executive Engineers of R&B, Jal Shakti, IFC and KPDC.

Giving out the details, AGM, NABARD, Rouf Zargar informed that NABARD has sanctioned 115 projects worth Rs 362.66 Cr since inception out of which 25 are ongoing projects with total outlay of Rs 113.56 Cr, under different

sectors. The DC took the detailed physical and financial review of individual projects directing the executing departments to expedite the works and clear all the bottlenecks in the projects.

He took stock of new projects formulated by the departments which could be considered under RIDF under various sectors in view of the operational guidelines of NABARD including the funding modalities, and sectoral priorities of the scheme.

The DC laid emphasis on the Executive Engineers to complete the projects under timelines and expedite submission of project completion reports for completed projects.

Nasha Mukht J&K Campaign gains momentum in Shopian

KT News Desk

SHOPIAN, APRIL 20: In continuation of the ongoing Nasha Mukht Jammu and Kashmir Campaign, a series of awareness programmes were conducted across district with active participation from different departments and educational institutions in Shopian.

Health and Wellness Center, GDC Shopian organized an awareness programme focusing on sensitizing students about the harmful effects of drug abuse and promoting a culture of healthy and responsible living.

The programme, as per an official statement, began with an address by the Convenor, who highlighted the growing concern of substance abuse among youth and emphasized the importance of awareness, prevention, and collective responsibility.

An expert talk was delivered by Dr. Alamgeer from District Hospital Shopian, who elaborated on the medical and psychological impacts of drug addiction, early warning signs, and the need for timely intervention.

He also informed that District Hospital Shopian has a dedicated Addiction Treatment Facility providing professional support and treatment to affected individuals.

Similarly, the Department of Horticulture organized pledge ceremonies at fruit plant nurseries in Zainapora and Keegam, where officials and staff reaffirmed their commitment towards building a drug free



society and spreading awareness at the grassroots level.

An awareness programme was also held at HSS Kapran, where medical experts delivered informative sessions on drug addiction and its harmful effects.

The speakers highlighted the physical, psychological, and social consequences of substance abuse and urged students to stay vigilant and make informed life choices.

At HS Tekipora, an awareness programme featuring painting and slogan writing activities was held to sensitize students about the dangers of drug abuse.

The creative participation of

students helped in effectively conveying strong anti-drug messages. Similarly, Government Polytechnic College Shopian organized a pledge ceremony wherein students and staff collectively took an oath to stay away from drugs and contribute towards a healthier society.

These activities form part of the district's sustained efforts under the Nasha Mukht Jammu and Kashmir Campaign to engage communities, especially youth, through awareness, education, and collective responsibility.

At other places, similar awareness activities were held.

Baramulla ramps up preparations for Census 2027



KT News Desk

BARAMULLA, APRIL 20: Chief Planning Officer (CPO) Baramulla, Nisar Ahmad Monday chaired a review meeting of charge officers at the DC office meeting hall here to assess the preparedness for the upcoming Census 2027 exercise in the district.

During the meeting, as per an official statement, detailed discussions were held on the roles and responsibilities at the charge level to ensure smooth and timely execution of the census operations.

Emphasis was laid on the creation of House Listing Blocks (HLBs) and accurate mapping of villages to facilitate systematic enumeration. The officers were directed to ensure that all necessary groundwork is completed well in advance to avoid any last-minute challenges.

During the meeting, the CPO stressed on the charge officers to finalize the list of supervisors and enumerators, ensuring that the selected personnel possess a basic understanding of technology to effectively handle digital tools and applications associated with the

census process. To strengthen capacity building, the CPO highlighted the need for organizing training sessions in batches for enumerators and supervisors which will focus on familiarizing field staff with census procedures, digital platforms, and data collection methodologies.

Underscoring the importance of public participation, the CPO called for a robust Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) campaign at the grassroots level and hold Special Gram Sabhas across all the 402 panchayats and municipal wards to raise awareness about the significance of the census and to encourage active public participation.

The CPO reiterated the importance of coordinated efforts, timely execution, and community involvement in making Census 2027 a success, urging all stakeholders to work with commitment and diligence towards achieving the objectives of this vital national exercise.

The meeting was attended by the District Coordinator for census Baramulla and all the appointed charge officers.

Chess, indoor games energise inter-school competitions across Baramulla

KT News Desk

BARAMULLA, APRIL 20: District Youth Services and Sports (DYSS), Baramulla continues to witness enthusiastic participation as Inter-School Zonal Level Competitions progress across multiple zones of the district in line with the annual sports calendar.

The competitions, as per an official statement, are being successfully conducted in Zones Dangiwaicha, Dangerpora, Chandanwari, Singpora Pattan, and Kunzer, drawing active involvement from students of various government and private educational institutions.

In Zone Dangiwaicha, Inter-School Zonal Level Chess competitions for Under-14 and Under-17 girls were held,



witnessing participation of 43 students who showcased remarkable skill and strategic thinking.

Similarly, Zone Dangerpora conducted the second day of its Chess competition for Under-14 girls, where 34 students participated with great enthusiasm and competitive spirit.

Zone Chandanwari, on the third day of competitions, organized Chess and Table Tennis

events for both boys and girls. The competitions witnessed an overwhelming participation of 210 students, reflecting the growing interest of youth in indoor sports.

Meanwhile, Zone Kunzer conducted Inter-School Zonal Level Chess competitions for boys in Under-14 and Under-17 categories, with 72 students actively competing.

The events across all zones

were conducted under the supervision of field staff and were marked by discipline, sportsmanship, and vibrant participation.

Speaking on the occasion, DYSSO Baramulla, Sheikh Shafiq Iqbal, stated that these competitions are being organized strictly as per the annual calendar issued by the Directorate of Youth Services and Sports, J&K. He emphasized that such activities play a vital role in honing the talent of young students and providing them a platform to excel at higher levels.

He further appreciated the efforts of the organizing staff and encouraged students to actively participate in sports for their overall physical and mental development.

Awareness programme on drug de-addiction held at GDC Sumbal

KT News Desk

BANDIPORA, APRIL 20: Government Degree College (GDC) Sumbal on Monday organised an awareness programme on drug de-addiction at its auditorium under the guidance of Principal Prof. (Dr.) Shabeena Iqbal Shawl, featuring a powerful theatrical performance aimed at sensitising students about substance abuse.

Sub-Divisional Magistrate Sumbal, Murtaza Ahmad, attended the programme as chief guest, urged students to stay vigilant and committed towards a drug-free society.

The Principal underscored the role of educational institutions in promoting awareness and responsible citizenship.

The highlight of the



programme, as per an official statement, was the staging of the play "Kanjoos" by Karam Buland Folk Theatre, introduced by Nissar Naseem. The performance effectively depicted the harsh realities and far-reaching impact of drug addiction, leaving a strong impression on the audience.

As part of the event, video clips under the Nasha Mukht Bharat Abhiyan (NMBA) were presented by Convenor NMBA, Prof. Aijaz ur Rehman, highlighting the serious consequences of drug abuse.

The event reinforced awareness and collective resolve to combat drug abuse.

Principal Secy Culture calls for collective action to eliminate drug menace

Youth, officers join padyatra
KT News Desk

Ganderbal, Apr 20: As part of the Nasha Mukta Abhiyan (NMBA @100), the District Administration Ganderbal on Monday organized a padyatra cum mega awareness rally to sensitize the public, particularly the youth, about the harmful effects of drug abuse and the need for united efforts to eliminate the menace.

The rally commenced from the Mini Secretariat Lawns and culminated at Qamaria Park, witnessing enthusiastic participation from officers, students, and members of civil society.

The event was flagged-off by Principal Secretary, Culture, Brij Mohan, in the presence of Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Ganderbal, Sudhanshu Dhama; Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) Ganderbal, Syed Faheem Bihari, Assistant Commissioner Revenue, and other district officers.

Addressing the gathering, the Principal Secretary emphasized that drug abuse destroys families and stressed that the



fight against drugs must begin at home.

Highlighting the crucial role of parents in prevention, he urged citizens to report cases of drug abuse or trafficking through the district administration's helpline. He called for active public participation and reiterated the commitment to make Ganderbal a drug-free district.

Students from various schools and colleges actively participated in the rally, raising slogans and carrying placards to spread awareness. The Department of Art and Culture

also presented a skit depicting the adverse impact of drug addiction and the importance of prevention and rehabilitation. A play depicting the harmful effects of drug abuse was also presented on the occasion.

On the occasion, the ADC administered a pledge to the participants, reaffirming their commitment to stay away from drugs and contribute towards a drug-free society.

SP Ganderbal, while addressing the youth, encouraged them to adopt positive role models and make constructive

life choices. He stated that police are taking effective measures to curb drug trafficking and highlighted the importance of rehabilitation for affected individuals. He also advised students to use social media responsibly.

In his concluding remarks, the ADC Ganderbal expressed gratitude to the chief guest, officers, students, and participants for their active involvement. He appreciated spreading awareness and reiterated the administration's resolve to make Ganderbal a drug-free district.

DC Bandipora interacts with coaching centre owners on drug abuse prevention

KT News Desk

Bandipora, Apr 20: Deputy Commissioner Bandipora, Indu Kanwal Chib, on Monday chaired a meeting with coaching centre owners at the Conference Hall to review measures for curbing drug abuse in the district.

It was informed that 14 registered coaching institutions are functional in the district, providing academic support to students from classes 8th to 12th, including JEE and NEET preparation. Coaching centre owners apprised that CCTV surveillance systems have been installed and are functional at key points including corridors, gates, and classrooms.

During the meeting, concerns were raised that some coaching institutions are increasingly becoming vulnerable spaces for substance abuse due to limited surveillance. The DC stressed the need for strict monitoring, including bag checking and frisking, and underscored that both men and women are involved as users as well as peddlers.

Referring to directives of the Home Department, the DC reiterated that strict action will be taken against any violation.



A presentation on drug abuse awareness was also delivered during the session.

Padma Shri awardee, Faisal Ali Dar addressed the gathering and highlighted the rising trend of substance abuse, urging coordinated preventive efforts.

Coaching centre operators shared that measures such as regular attendance sharing with parents are being implemented. Suggestions were put forth to ban the sale of cigarettes and tobacco in and around institutes and to involve private skill development institutes in

awareness initiatives.

The DC observed that while systems are in place, the desired outcomes are yet to be achieved, emphasizing the need to involve every stakeholder. She directed coaching institutions to conduct regular Parent-Teacher Meetings (PTMs) and stated that Action Taken Reports (ATRs) will be reviewed in next week.

Stressing vigilance and accountability, the DC called for a proactive approach, urging stakeholders to "respect all, suspect all" in the collective fight against drug abuse.

Google denies involvement in USD 125 million Chromebook graft case in Indonesia

PTI

Jakarta, Apr 20: Former Google executives on Monday denied the company's involvement in a massive procurement project at Indonesia's Education Ministry that prosecutors say caused USD 125 million in state losses.

Nadiem Anwar Makarim, 41, a co-founder of Indonesia's ride-hailing and payment company Gojek, was arrested in September as a former education minister following an investigation into the alleged corruption linked to the procurement of Chromebook laptops.

Scott Beaumont, former president of Google Asia Pacific in

2019-2021, Caesar Sengupta, former general manager and vice president from 2018 to 2021, and William Florence, a former executive, testified at Jakarta's Corruption Court on Monday via Zoom.

The laptop procurement was part of the government's digitalisation of schools.

Makarim, who was the education minister between 2019 and 2024, allegedly favoured Google's Chromebook despite a ministry research team refusing to recommend the laptop model due to ineffectiveness in regions lacking internet access.

Makarim is accused of abusing his authority by steering



the nationwide procurement in 2020-2021 "entirely for personal business interests," prosecutors said. They said he pressed Google to invest in PT Aplikasi

Karya Anak Bangsa, known as PT AKAB, the parent company of Gojek.

The purchase of more than 1.2 million Chromebooks was

designed to strengthen Google's dominance in Indonesia's educational sector. The program was linked to Google's investments of about USD 787 million in PT AKAB through Google Asia Pacific, lead prosecutor Muhammad Fadli Paramajeng said.

Makarim received about 809 billion rupiah (USD 48.2 million) in connection with the program, prosecutors alleged.

Beaumont denied the allegation. "There was no connection at all between Google's investment in GoTo and any of the conversations with the Ministry of Education," he told the panel of three judges. Makarim's

Gojek merged with the country's biggest e-commerce firm, Tokopedia, to form the GoTo Group in 2021.

Sengupta also denied the charges.

Google has previously stated that Chromebooks are designed for the realities of the classroom, including those in remote areas. While optimised for the cloud, they are offline-capable even without connectivity. It also said that Google licenses software and does not dictate Chromebooks' pricing.

Makarim, a Harvard University graduate, co-founded Gojek in 2009 and remained until 2019, when the company was

valued at over USD 10 billion. He stepped down to join the cabinet of former Indonesian President Joko Widodo.

Prosecutors allege his resignation from PT AKAB and Gojek was a "strategic concealment" to mask conflicts of interest while Makarim appointed close associates as directors and "beneficial owners," allowing him to maintain indirect control over company decisions.

He faces a possible sentence of life imprisonment.

Makarim has previously denied any wrongdoing, saying he did not personally receive funds from Chromebook procurement or related services.

CONTD. FROM FRONT PAGE

21 killed, 51 injured

fully engaged with utmost promptness in relief and rescue operations. I pray for the speedy recovery of the injured" he said.

Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha expressed his deep anguish and grief over the loss of lives in the tragic road accident in Ramnagar, Udhampur.

In a post on X, the Lieutenant Governor has said: "Tragic road accident in Udhampur is heartbreaking. My deepest condolences to the bereaved families. May God grant them strength. Praying for speedy recovery of the injured. I have directed the district administration, Police, SDRF and Health Department to provide every possible assistance to those affected".

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah in a message of condolence extended his heartfelt sympathies to the bereaved families and prayed for the speedy recovery of those injured in the accident.

He assured that the government stands firmly with the victims and their families in this hour of grief, and that all necessary assistance is being extended to ensure proper medical care and support to the affected.

The Office of the Chief Minister also announced financial assistance from the CM Relief Fund, including 2 lakh for the families of the deceased, 1 lakh for the seriously injured, and 25,000 for those with minor injuries.

Earlier, Union Minister Jitendra Singh said he spoke to Deputy Commissioner, Udhampur, Minga Sherpa following the accident, informing that arrangements are being made to airlift the seriously injured victims.

"Just now spoke to DC Udhampur, Minga Sherpa after learning about a tragic road accident, less than an hour ago, at village Kanote, involving a public transport bus on way from Ramnagar to Udhampur.

"The rescue operation has been immediately undertaken. Heavy casualties are expected. All possible assistance is being provided. The injured will be shifted for medical aid. Arrangements being made to airlift the seriously injured," the minister said in a post on X. Singh said he is in constant touch with the local administration as well as the BJP local workers team involved in the rescue operation.

Former Chief Minister and PDP President Mehbooba Mufti also expressed grief over the incident.

"Deeply saddened by the tragic Udhampur-Ramnagar bus accident.

Condolences to the bereaved families and pray for the swift recovery of those injured," she said in a post on X.

Expressing grief over the incident, J&K Congress chief Tariq Hameed Karra urged authorities to immediately provide all possible relief, proper medical care, and necessary

support to the affected families in this hour of immense pain. (KNO)

CM Omar questions

fully align with such efforts.

On women's reservation in legislatures, the Chief Minister reiterated support for greater representation but questioned the timing of the exercise, arguing that delimitation without a fresh census raised procedural concerns.

He said the demand for statehood was not limited to any one party but reflected a broader aspiration across political lines. The National Conference, he added, would continue to press the issue and hold the Centre accountable. "Raising questions and seeking accountability is part of democratic responsibility," the Chief Minister said. (KNO)

Weather to remain

expected to remain "generally dry" from April 20 to 23, with a possibility of brief spells of light rain at isolated places.

From April 24 to 25, the weather is likely to turn partly to generally cloudy, with one or two spells of light rain or thundershowers at scattered to many places. Gusty winds are also expected at a few locations, particularly during the late afternoon and evening hours.

On April 26, brief spells of light rain or thundershowers are likely at a few places, while April 27 and 28 are expected to remain largely dry.

Another spell of light rain and thundershowers, accompanied by gusty winds, is forecast at isolated places on April 29 and 30, mainly during the late afternoon.

The MeT department has advised farmers to continue agricultural operations till April 23 in view of the largely dry weather conditions.

It also said that day temperatures are expected to rise by 2 to 4 degrees Celsius at many places across the Union Territory over the next few days. (KNO)

Security beefed

checkpoints and border police posts, including Koulpur and Kamore, and directed personnel to maintain heightened vigilance. He also visited Border Security Force outposts along the International Border and stressed coordination among agencies.

Officials said security forces have intensified anti-terror operations across Jammu and Kashmir over the past year. Around 46 terrorists have been killed since the Pahalgam attack, including those linked to the incident.

In the Jammu region, operations in Kishtwar, Udhampur and Kathua districts have yielded significant results despite difficult terrain and weather conditions.

In a major operation on February 22, security forces eliminated a group of Jaish-e-Mohammad terrorists, including commander Saifullah, in the Chatroo forests of Kishtwar district.

Earlier, on February 4, forces killed two terrorists in the Basantgarh area of Udhampur district after targeting a cave hideout. Another commander, Usman alias Abu Maviya, was killed in Kathua's Billawar area on January 23.

According to the Army's White Knight Corps, seven terrorists involved in attacks on civilians and security personnel have been neutralised in Kishtwar district in 2025 and 2026.

Officials said sustained operations, including winter deployments in higher reaches, have restricted terrorists' movement.

However, concerns remain over infiltration attempts along the International Border, with forces maintaining surveillance and conducting search operations based on inputs. (KNO)

Nearly 30%

deliberate on the growing burden of PCOS, endocrine disorders, and non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which are increasingly being termed a global epidemic.

The Chief Guest, Dr Manilka Sumanatilleke, Chair Elect of the International Diabetes Federation (South East Asia Region), President of the Sri Lanka Medical Association, and President of the Diabetes Association of Sri Lanka, highlighted that PCOS remains a neglected health issue in several countries. He noted that exposure to the scientific sessions and clinical research at SKIMS has provided valuable insights, which he intends to take back to strengthen healthcare responses in his country.

In his address, Prof M. Ashraf Ganie, Director of SKIMS and President of the M.P-PCOS Society, outlined key dimensions including the rising burden of non-communicable diseases, the societal role in addressing PCOS, and SKIMS' contributions through research and clinical excellence. He emphasised the need for evidence-based policymaking and highlighted the institute's growing academic stature at national and international levels.

As per the study published in JAMA, the weighted national prevalence of PCOS in India is remarkably high, reaching 19.6% according to the Rotterdam criteria.

The Phenotype C (hyperandrogenism and polycystic ovarian morphology) was found to be the most prevalent, accounting for 40.8% of cases.

As per the alarming burden of comorbidities revealed by the study, 91.9% of women with PCOS suffered from dyslipidemia, 43.2% were found to be obese, 32.9% had non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD), and 24.9% met the criteria for metabolic syndrome.

Experts said that a rapid shift to sedentary lifestyles, poor dietary habits, chronic stress, and environmental factors are contributing to high rates of insulin resistance and obesity, especially in young women.

They added that cultural changes leading to delayed marriage (sometimes past 30s) are thought to exacerbate symptoms and lower

fertility rates, further highlighting the prevalence. (KNO)

Fatty liver affects

persistent fatigue, yellowing of the skin or eyes, abdominal pain or swelling, unexplained weight loss, nausea or loss of appetite, dark urine and pale stool, and itchy skin.

KNO: Can all liver diseases be reversed?

Dr Wahid Akbar: Some liver conditions, such as fatty liver and mild fibrosis, can be reversed with lifestyle changes. However, advanced liver diseases like cirrhosis often cause permanent damage. Early diagnosis and timely intervention can help slow progression and improve liver function.

KNO: How does alcohol affect the liver?

Dr Wahid Akbar: Excessive alcohol consumption puts significant stress on the liver, leading to conditions like fatty liver, alcoholic hepatitis, fibrosis, and cirrhosis. The liver metabolises alcohol, but excessive intake can cause inflammation, scarring, and liver failure over time. Reducing or eliminating alcohol can prevent further damage and, in some cases, allow the liver to heal. Females are more prone to alcoholic liver disease as they are not able to metabolise alcohol as efficiently as males because they lack certain enzymes.

KNO: What is the burden of alcohol use disorder and alcoholic liver disease in Kashmir?

Dr Wahid Akbar: Alcohol intake has increased in Kashmir Valley, adding to the burden of liver disease, including cirrhosis. In one study, alcohol consumption was responsible for approximately 14 to 15 per cent of liver cirrhosis cases, with fatty liver being the predominant cause in Kashmir.

KNO: What tests help in diagnosing liver diseases?

Dr Wahid Akbar: Doctors may use various tests to assess liver health, including liver function tests to measure enzyme and protein levels, imaging tests like ultrasound, CT scan, or MRI to detect abnormalities, FibroScan to evaluate liver stiffness and fibrosis, liver biopsy to assess the extent of liver damage, and a hepatitis panel to check for viral infections.

KNO: When should I see a doctor for liver-related concerns?

Dr Wahid Akbar: It is important to consult a doctor if you experience persistent fatigue or weakness, yellowing of the skin or eyes, severe or unexplained abdominal pain, unexplained weight loss, dark urine and pale stools, or swelling in the legs or abdomen. Seeking medical advice early can help detect liver disease before it becomes severe.

KNO: Is liver transplantation the only treatment for severe liver disease?

Dr Wahid Akbar: Liver transplantation is considered in cases of end-stage liver disease or acute liver failure. However, many liver conditions can be managed with lifestyle changes, medications, and other non-surgical

treatments. Early diagnosis and proper medical care can prevent the need for a transplant in many cases, or postpone a liver transplant for some time.

KNO: Any final message?

Dr Wahid Akbar: The liver is not just an organ but a lifeline to our well-being. Understanding its functions, recognising common disorders, and adopting liver-friendly habits helps us be proactive about our health. As advocates for our own well-being, let us take proactive steps towards liver health. Hence the theme: Solid Habits, Strong Liver. (KNO)

11 drug peddlers

by two persons. During search, approximately 7.50 grams of heroin-like substance along with 1,500 cash was recovered from their possession. Both accused were arrested and taken into custody. In another operation, a police party from PP Rajpora at a checkpoint established at Rajpora Bridge intercepted two individuals riding on a motorcycle (Registration No. JK22C-2183). During checking, approximately 8.5 grams of brown sugar-like substance was recovered from their possession. Both the accused persons were arrested on the spot. Motorcycles used in the commission of crime was also seized.

In Handwara, a drug peddler was arrested during naka checking at Shahlaal Crossing in the JD of PS Handwara. Contraband charas like substance was recovered from his possession. The accused has been identified as Gh Mohi-ud-Din Dar, son of Ahsan Dar resident of Waskura, Handwara.

In Baramulla, two drug peddlers were arrested during routine naka checking at Wanigan Payeen in the JD of PS Kreeri. They have been identified as Danish Ahmad Parrey S/O Mohammad Maqbool, R/O Dargam Tilgam, and Shabir Ahmad Mir S/O Gh Mohammad Mir, R/O Fresthar Kreeri. During the checking, police recovered 18 grams of charas and 70 tablets of Tapentadol from their possession. The vehicle bearing registration number JK05D-2178, used in the commission of the offence, has also been seized.

In Bandipora, Police apprehended a notorious drug peddler during naka checking at Banyari Ajas identified as Suhail Ahmad Dar son of Abdul Ahad Dar resident of Banyari Ajas Sumbal. During search, 5.7Kgs of charas powder was recovered from his possession.

Accordingly, cases under relevant sections of law have been registered at respective police stations and further investigation have been initiated.

J&K Police reiterate its zero-tolerance policy towards drug menace. Stringent action against peddlers and smugglers will continue to safeguard the youth and society. General public is requested to cooperate with police and share information regarding drug peddling in their areas.

Always take decisions with comfort, dignity of passengers at centre: Prez Murmu to railway officers

PTI

New Delhi, Apr 20: President Droupadi Murmu on Monday asked a group of railway officers to always take decisions with the safety, comfort and dignity of passengers at the centre.

She also asked them to bring in fresh ideas and leverage technology to strengthen efficiency, improve safety and ensure smooth movement of passengers and freight.

Addressing probationary officers of the Indian railways, who had called on the President at the Rashtrapati Bhavan here, Murmu said railways has one of the largest and most complex networks in the world, carrying not just passengers and goods, but also the aspirations of millions.

"You will require not just technical skill but integrity, compassion and a deep sense of accountability to manage this system. You should always take decisions with the safety, comfort and dignity of passengers at



the centre," she said.

Murmu said infrastructure is the foundation upon which modern nations are built.

"Railways and highways are not merely systems of transport; they are instruments of economic expansion, social inclusion and national integration. When a train reaches a remote village or a highway connects a distant region, it opens immense

opportunities for socio-economic development of such regions," the President said.

She said that from modernisation of infrastructure and expansion of electrification to the introduction of advanced safety systems and improved passenger amenities, the railways is evolving to meet future demands.

"You can contribute

effectively to this transformation," Murmu said.

Murmu asked the officers to "remember that efficiency must go hand in hand with empathy".

"An effective system should be inclusive and accessible to all, especially the marginalised sections. True development is the one where no one is left behind," she said, addressing the officers of 2022 and 2023 batches.

Addressing a group of assistant executive engineers of the Central Engineering Service (Roads), who had also called on the President, Murmu said India's road infrastructure has witnessed rapid expansion in recent years.

Highways, expressways and economic corridors are redefining mobility and logistics, she said.

"These are vital building blocks in the journey towards Viksit Bharat, and you, the young officers, will play a significant role in this transformation," the President said.

Murmu said the officers should strive to build

infrastructure that is not only robust and efficient, but also sustainable and citizen-centric.

"The roads should not just connect places, but enhance the opportunities of growth, and strengthen the foundations of a developed India," she said, addressing these officers belonging to 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024 batches.

The President said that robust infrastructure reduces logistics costs, boosts trade, attracts investment and enhances productivity.

"It strengthens national unity by bringing regions and people closer. But you need to remember that numbers alone do not define success. The true measure of your work lies in how it improves the lives of people," Murmu said.

She also urged them to uphold the values of public service such as integrity, accountability and commitment to excellence.

"You are not just administrators but the enablers of progress and guardians of public trust," the President added.

Shocking that well-educated people getting duped in digital arrest cases: CJI Surya Kant



PTI

New Delhi, Apr 20: Chief Justice of India Surya Kant on Monday said it was shocking that well-educated people were getting duped in cases of digital arrests.

The CJI, who was heading a bench which also comprised Justice Joymalya Bagchi, flagged the recent case of an old woman who was duped of her entire retirement benefits in one of such cases.

The observations came from the CJI after Attorney General R Venkataramani mentioned the suo motu case concerning victims of digital arrest before the bench.

"Meeting have taken place. We are moving very fast," the top law officer said, while requesting the bench to take up the suo motu case for hearing on May 12.

The CJI then referred to the case of the elderly woman whom he knows in his official capacity.

"Unfortunately, her entire retiral benefit has been duped," the CJI said.

One of the advocates told the bench that it was most unfortunate that despite the apex court hearing a suo motu case regarding digital arrest, such incidents were continuously coming to light.

"It is shocking that well-educated people are getting duped like this," the CJI observed.

The bench said it would list the matter for hearing on May 12.

Digital arrest is a growing form of cybercrime in which fraudsters pose as law enforcement officers, court officials or personnel from government agencies to intimidate victims through audio and video calls. They hold the victims hostage

and put pressure on them to pay money.

On February 9, the top court described the siphoning of more than Rs 54,000 crore by digital frauds as absolute "robbery or dacoity" and asked the Centre to draft a standard operating procedure (SoP) in consultation with stakeholders like the RBI, banks and the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) to deal with such cases.

The apex court had expressed grave concern over the "menace" of digital arrest scams and said banks must play a proactive role in preventing cyber-enabled fraud.

It had directed the CBI to identify digital arrest cases and asked the Gujarat and Delhi governments to accord sanction to the federal probe agency to proceed with the investigations in identified cases.

It had also asked the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the DoT, and others to jointly hold a meeting to come up with a framework for providing compensation in digital arrest cases.

The attorney general had informed the bench that the RBI has drafted an SoP for banks to deal with such cases and it, among other things, prescribes action by the banks where temporary debit holds can be placed to prevent cyber-enabled frauds.

Issuing a slew of directions, the top court had asked the Ministry of Home Affairs to formally adopt the RBI's SoP and issue directions for its implementation across the country.

On December 1, the top court asked the CBI to carry out a unified pan-India probe into digital arrest cases, and asked the RBI why it was not using artificial intelligence to trace and freeze bank accounts used by cyber criminals.

Northwest, central, adjoining east India to witness heatwave conditions for next 4-5 days: IMD



PTI

New Delhi, Apr 20: Heatwave conditions are very likely to prevail over isolated pockets of north-west, central and the adjoining parts of east India for the next four to five days, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Monday.

It said isolated pockets of Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Punjab, East Rajasthan, Vidarbha, Chhattisgarh, West Uttar Pradesh, West Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gangetic West Bengal, Jharkhand, Odisha and scattered pockets of East Uttar Pradesh are expected to witness heatwave conditions on different dates

between April 20 and April 25.

"Hot and humid weather conditions are very likely to prevail in isolated pockets over Gangetic West Bengal during April 20-26; Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Karaikal during April 20-22; Kerala and Mahe, Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Yanam during April 20-24; coastal areas of Gujarat on April 24 and April 25," the IMD said.

Also, warm night conditions are expected to prevail in isolated pockets over Haryana, Chandigarh, West Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Vidarbha on April 20 and April 21, Chhattisgarh on April 20, and Odisha between April 20 and April 22.

PM to inaugurate India's 1st greenfield integrated refinery-cum-petrochem complex in Rajasthan

PTI

New Delhi, Apr 20: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Rajasthan on Tuesday, during which he will inaugurate India's first greenfield integrated refinery-cum-petrochemical complex at Pachpadra in Balotra.



This landmark project, with an investment of more than Rs 79,450 crore, represents a significant milestone in India's energy and petrochemical sector, an official statement said.

Preparations are in full swing for the prime minister's visit to Pachpadra, during which he will address a public gathering, officials said.

Security arrangements have been significantly tightened for the event, with senior police officers and a large number of personnel deployed to ensure smooth conduct of the programme.

The inauguration and the public meeting are expected to draw a large crowd.

A fire at the refinery site on Monday, however, has raised security concerns. Fire tenders and emergency response teams have been

deployed and no immediate reports of casualties were available, officials said.

The state-of-the-art complex integrates refining and petrochemical production, with a petrochemical capacity of 2.4 MMTPA. The refinery features a high Nelson Complexity Index of 17.0 and petrochemical yields exceeding 26 per cent, aligning with global benchmarks for efficiency and sustainability.

The project is expected to play a pivotal role in strengthening India's energy security, enhancing petrochemical self-sufficiency, and driving industrial growth.

It will serve as an anchor industry for the development of a petrochemical and plastic park

in the region, promoting downstream industries and ancillary sectors, the statement said.

Additionally, the refinery is poised to generate significant employment opportunities, contributing to the socio-economic development of the region.

The prime minister will also address a public gathering and flag off LPG tankers from the refinery during the visit.

The 9 million metric tonnes per annum (MMTPA) greenfield refinery-cum-petrochemical complex has been developed as a joint venture between Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL) and the government of Rajasthan.

The HPCL Rajasthan Refinery Limited (HRRLL)

complex will produce petrol and diesel along with petrochemical products such as polypropylene, linear low-density polyethylene (LLDPE), high-density polyethylene (HDPE), benzene, toluene and butadiene.

On the security arrangements at the site, Inspector General of Police (Jodhpur Range) Satyendra Singh said elaborate arrangements are in place for the PM's visit, including the deployment of three deputy inspectors general (DIGs), 12 superintendents of police (SPs) and around 5,000 police personnel.

He said more than 100 CCTV cameras have been installed at and around the venue to monitor activities.

Officials said traffic management and route diversions have also been planned to facilitate traffic movement from different districts.

BJP committed to women's quota rollout; opposition delaying it: Smriti Irani

PTI

Kolkata, Apr 20: Senior BJP leader Smriti Irani on Monday reiterated the party's commitment to implementing the women's reservation law, while accusing the TMC and the Congress of adopting a "contradictory" stand and delaying its rollout.

Addressing a press conference here, Irani said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has already made the government's position clear, which is to ensure the implementation of 33 per cent reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and state Assemblies.

Highlighting the BJP's internal structure, Irani claimed, "We are a political organisation which has reserved seats for women within the party. Today, women are equal participants even in the parliamentary board that decides tickets."

Targeting the opposition, she questioned their shifting stance on delimitation, a prerequisite for implementing the reservation. "If they supported earlier, why did they suddenly make it an issue during the special session and withdraw support?" she asked, calling it a "serious question" for both the Congress and the TMC.

Irani alleged that the opposition's position amounted to misleading women.

"Were they deceiving the country then, or are they doing so now?" she said, referring to Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and other opposition leaders.

Taking aim at West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata



Banerjee, Irani said attempts to defer implementation of the women's reservation amounted to delaying women's rights. "How long should women of Bengal and the country wait? Irani asked, stating, "This is not just a betrayal of women in Bengal, but of women across the country."

She countered TMC's claim of having the highest number of women MPs, stating, "In absolute numbers, the highest representation of women in Parliament is from the NDA."

She also pointed to BJP-led initiatives such as gender budgeting and targeted fund allocations, claiming these demonstrate the party's commitment to women's empowerment.

Regarding TMC's allegations that the BJP was using women as a "shield" and attempting constitutional changes, Irani dismissed the charge.

Responding to alleged election Model Code of Conduct violations related to the distribution of 'Matri Shakti' and 'Yuva Shakti' cards, she rejected the claims, asserting that such outreach reflects policy intent rather than inducement.

'India's methane emissions lower than global inventory estimates; better monitoring needed'

PTI

Mumbai, Apr 20: Methane emissions over India are lower than what is reported in some widely used global emission inventories, according to a study, stressing the need for a stronger monitoring network.

Methane is one of the most powerful greenhouse gases driving global climate change. While it remains in the atmosphere for a shorter time than carbon dioxide, it heats the atmosphere far more effectively. This makes methane a prime low-hanging fruit for immediate action to combat warming and reduce climate risks in the coming decades.

In India, a rapidly developing economy where agriculture, waste management,



and energy production are significant sources of methane emissions, there is an urgent need for improved estimates and effective controls on these gases.

Addressing this is essential to significantly reduce both economic and environmental burdens, said Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Bhopal, Associate Professor Dhanya Lekshmi Pillai.

She, along with

and Jithin S Kumar from IISER Bhopal, and other national and international scientists, conducted an examination of India's methane emissions for 2018-201, recently published in the European Geosciences Union's Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics Journal.

"Strikingly, the study suggests that methane emissions over India are lower than the activity-based statistical estimates reported in some widely used global

emission inventories," Pillai said.

"That is a wake-up call: better measurements can significantly reshape our understanding of where the country stands," she added.

By advancing measurement and modelling techniques, the study finds that India annually emits between 21.9 and 24.9 teragrams of methane into the atmosphere. At the same time, the improved estimates are about 19 per cent higher than those reported in India's Fourth Biennial Update Report, which places methane emissions at 19.6 teragrams per year.

In other words, India appears to emit less methane than global databases claim, but more than the national report suggests, Pillai said.

Sensex, Nifty erase early gains to settle flat in volatile trade as crude oil rebounds

PTI

Mumbai, Apr 20: Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty closed almost unchanged in a volatile session on Monday as investors turned cautious amid mounting geopolitical headwinds and rising crude oil prices.

The 30-share BSE Sensex closed marginally up 26.76 points or 0.03 per cent at 78,520.30. During the day, it hit a high of 78,942.45 and a low of 78,203.30, gyrating 739.15 points.

The 50-share NSE Nifty edged up 11.30 points or 0.05 per cent to settle at 24,364.85.

Among the 30-Sensex firms, Trent, State Bank of India, Asian Paints, NTPC, Bajaj Finance and InterGlobe Aviation were the major winners.

Larsen & Toubro, Bharat Electronics, HCL Tech and Kotak Mahindra Bank were among the laggards. Brent

crude, the global oil benchmark, jumped 4.76 per cent to USD 94.68 per barrel.

"Renewed disputes over the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz injected volatility into global markets. Investors interpreted the recent disruptions in the Middle East as potential negotiation tactics rather than the onset of a full-scale conflict," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Ltd.

With the ceasefire set to expire this week, market participants remain cautious, awaiting further developments, he added.

In Asian markets, South Korea's benchmark Kospi, Japan's Nikkei 225 index, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index ended higher.

Markets in Europe were trading lower. US markets ended significantly higher on Friday.

Oil prices jump, Wall Street slides with US, Iran clashing in Strait of Hormuz

AP

Bangkok, Apr 20: Oil prices climbed more than 5 per cent, and Wall Street veered toward losses before the opening bell Monday as a standoff between Iran and the US prevented tankers from using the Strait of Hormuz.

Futures for the S&P 500 also fell 0.5 per cent while futures for the Dow Jones Industrial Average slid 0.6 per cent. Nasdaq futures were also off by 0.5 per cent.

The Persian Gulf's Strait of Hormuz — a passageway for 20 per cent of the world's oil — was closed again after Iran reversed a decision to reopen the strait and President Donald Trump said a US Navy blockade of Iranian ports remains in effect.

US benchmark crude gained USD 5.18, or 6.3 per cent, to USD 87.88 a barrel. Brent crude, the international standard, gained 5.3 per cent at USD 95.20 a barrel. President Donald Trump said Sunday that the US had seized an Iranian-flagged cargo ship that tried to get around a naval blockade. Iran's joint military command said Tehran would respond soon and called the US seizure an act of piracy.

A fragile, two-week ceasefire between the US and Iran is set to expire on Wednesday, while escalating



tensions in the Strait of Hormuz fueled pessimism over new talks to end the war. Since the war began, market sentiment has swung wildly. A strong start to the earnings reporting season for big US companies has helped support stocks. "The problem for markets is not the absence of hope; it is the overpricing of it," Stephen Innes of SPI Asset Management said in a commentary. "The latest move higher in equities has started to feel less like conviction and more like momentum feeding on itself." In equities trading early Monday, building insulation maker and

distributor TopBuild jumped nearly 19 per cent on news that it was being acquired by building materials company QXO for USD 17 billion, according to media reports. QXO shares dipped more than 4 per cent.

Airline stocks tumbled again, as they tend to when oil prices jump. American and Delta both fell 2.6 per cent while United fell 3.2 per cent. United may have taken the bigger hit after American shot down the notion of a merger with its rival, which was reportedly floated by United's CEO last week at the White House. On Friday,

oil prices had dropped back to where they were in the early days of the Iran war, and US stocks raced to a fresh record after Iran said the strait was open again for commercial tankers carrying crude from the Persian Gulf to customers worldwide.

A freer flow of oil could relieve pressure on prices for gasoline and all kinds of other products that get moved by vehicles. It could even ultimately help people pay less on credit-card interest and mortgage bills.

At midday in Europe, Germany's DAX lost 1.4 per cent, and the CAC 40 in Paris shed 1.1 per cent. Britain's FTSE 100 fell 0.7 per cent.

Despite renewed doubts about how soon ships will again transport the vast amounts of oil the world gets from the Middle East, share prices were mostly higher in Asia, though they gave up the bigger gains of earlier in the session.

In Tokyo, the Nikkei 225 rose 0.6 per cent to 58,824.89, while South Korea's Kospi picked up 0.4 per cent to 6,219.09. Hong Kong's Hang Seng added 0.8 per cent to 26,361.07, and the Shanghai Composite index advanced 0.8 per cent to 4,080.13. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 edged 0.1 per cent higher to 8,953.30.

In Taiwan, the Taiex jumped 0.4 per cent. India's Sensex rose 0.1 per cent, and the SET in Bangkok lost 0.2 per cent.

EU hosts Palestinian leader in conference about security, peace in Gaza and West Bank

AP

Brussels, Apr 20: More than 60 nations are sending representatives to Brussels to discuss with Palestinian Prime Minister Mohamed Mustafa stability, security and long-term peace in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, as global attention largely remains focused in the Middle East on the ongoing crises in Iran and Lebanon.

Ongoing attacks in the West Bank and continued devastation in Gaza dims the prospect for a two-state solution, said Belgian Foreign Minister Maxime Prévot ahead of the meeting Monday. He is co-hosting the meeting with the EU's top diplomat, Kaja Kallas.

"We observe without naivety that the two-state solution is being made more difficult by the day," Prévot said. "But Belgium and many European and Arab partners continue to believe that this remains the only realistic path to a lasting peace, for Israelis, for Palestinians and for the stability of the entire region."

The 27-nation European Union is the largest single donor to the Palestinian Authority, with its 90-year-old president Mahmoud Abbas ruling from Ramallah for two decades. And while the EU has avoided directly joining the Board of Peace created by United States President Donald Trump, preferring the multilateralism of the United

Nations and global legal norms, the bloc is eager to not be sidelined in diplomacy in a volatile region just across the Mediterranean.

Outrage in Europe over the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza drove many EU leaders to condemn Israel's war conduct and to pressure Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government. With the recent ouster of long-serving Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, a close ally of Netanyahu, there might now be enough political support within the bloc for stronger actions like targeted sanctions on Israeli settlers or even the suspension of some ties to Israel.

Palestinians in the West Bank say that Israel has used the cover of the Iran war to tighten its grip over the territory, as settler attacks surge and the military imposes additional wartime restrictions on movement, citing security.

Gaza requires "one state, one government, one law and one goal," Mustafa said on Monday in Brussels.

"Our common objective of achieving one security structure under the legitimate authority should guide the effective coordination between the International Stabilization Force, the Palestinian Authority, security institutions and other international actors. Security must not be fragmented," he said.

China calls Hormuz int'l waterway; Xi presses for reopening

PTI

Beijing, Apr 20: Chinese President Xi Jinping on Monday called for the opening of the Strait of Hormuz for normal passage of ships, as Beijing described it as an "international waterway" amid assertions by Iran that it has an inalienable right over it.

"The Strait of Hormuz should maintain normal passage, as this serves the common interests of regional countries and the international community," Xi told Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman during a phone call.

This is the first statement by the Chinese leader on the closure of the Strait of Hormuz by Iran, followed by the US blockade of Iranian ports in their current conflict.

The closure of the Strait has resulted in acute energy shortages across the world, especially in Asia, and China, which is a major importer of Iranian oil, is increasingly concerned about the prolongation of the US-Israel-Iran war.

China supports regional countries in building a common home of good-neighbourliness,



development, security and cooperation, holding their future in their own hands, and promoting lasting peace and security in the region, Xi said.

His comments were significant as China achieved a "major diplomatic success" in West Asia, bringing arch-rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia together in March 2023. As a result, the two countries restored diplomatic relations.

But the US-Iran conflict has changed all that with Iran attacking Saudi Arabia and other regional countries, besides closing the Strait of Hormuz to counter the US war against it. Separately, the Chinese

Foreign Ministry has expressed concern over the US Navy firing on a cargo ship travelling from China heading to an Iranian port, defying the American naval blockade.

The ship was subsequently seized by the US Navy.

"We are concerned over the US' forcible interception of the vessel and hope that relevant parties will honour the ceasefire agreement in a responsible manner, avoid aggravating disputes and escalating tensions, and provide necessary conditions for the restoration of normal passage through the Strait," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun told a

media briefing here.

He also called the Strait of Hormuz an international waterway in response to an Iranian official's assertion that Iran will not cede control over it, saying that Tehran has an "inalienable right" over it.

"The Strait of Hormuz is a strait for international passage. Keeping the area safe and stable and ensuring unimpeded passage serves the common interest of regional countries and the international community," Guo said.

For its part, Iran vowed retaliation and called it a piracy act. Tehran also said it will not participate in a second round of talks with the US in Islamabad.

Asked about Iranian security forces firing on Indian-flagged vessels in the Strait of Hormuz, Guo said, "I have already stated China's position on the Strait of Hormuz issue. We would like to reiterate that the Strait of Hormuz is an international waterway, and keeping it open to navigation serves the common interests of countries in the region and the international community."

Nepal's govt employees to get paid on fortnightly basis

PTI

Kathmandu, Apr 20: Nepal's Government has decided to give salaries to its employees on a fortnightly basis to boost spending and revitalise the economy.

The Ministry of Finance took a decision to this effect on Friday and circulated a letter to the Financial Comptroller General Office to make the necessary arrangements, Finance Ministry sources said on Monday. As per the new rule, the existing monthly salaries of the employees will be divided into two halves and paid twice a month on a fortnightly basis.

The Finance Ministry has already directed the relevant authorities to distribute salaries to the government staff every 15 days.

According to the Finance Ministry, the move aims to ensure that employees receive their payments on time, which will increase spending and revitalise the economy.

An official at the Comptroller General's Office has confirmed that a circular has been received from the ministry and that the decision will be implemented soon.

Atiqa Mir zooms to P2 in Italy for highest finish by an Indian in WSK history



PTI

Lonato (Italy), Apr 20: Racing prodigy Atiqa Mir keeps scaling new heights and on this occasion, the 11-year-old recorded the highest-ever race finish by an Indian in her category at World Series Karting (WSK) with a stellar P2 in Race 1 here.

Atiqa, the first Indian to be supported by Formula 1 Academy and the highest-ranked female worldwide in the OKNJ category (age 12-14), showed

scorching speed in the opening race of WSK Euro Series Round 2 at the South Garda Karting here.

This was also the second time ever that a female finished P2 in a race in OKNJ class at WSK.

Atiqa has been turning heads with the sheer weight of her performances on the European circuit and this weekend among the spectators in Lonato were Mercedes F1 boss Toto Wolff and their star driver George Russell.

Billion-dollar attack

France boasts rich scoring depth other World Cup teams only dream of



AP

Paris, Apr 20: France will have rich depth in attack at the World Cup.

About a billion dollars' worth. That's the estimated total value of the attacking players France is expected to bring to the tournament, from two-time World Cup final scoring sensation Kylian Mbappé to rising star Désiré Doué.

For coach Didier Deschamps the headache is not about who to choose, but who to leave out of his starting lineup for France's World Cup opener against Senegal on June 16.

He has a huge amount of talent to complement the prolific scoring of Mbappé, who is enjoying another prolific season with Real Madrid and needs one more goal to tie Olivier Giroud as France's

all-time leading scorer with 57 goals.

There's the speed and finishing of Ballon d'Or winner Ousmane Dembélé; the clinical scoring and exquisite passing of Michael Olise; the maverick skill of the technically gifted Rayan Cherki; or the fleet-footed runs of fellow newcomer Maghnes Aklouché.

According to estimates from soccer website transfermarkt and the CIES Football Observatory, which take into account the remaining time on a players' contract, France's 10 attacking players are worth 855 million euros, which is a fraction over \$1 billion.

Here's a look at the top players. Mbappé tops the list. Unsurprisingly, the 27-year-old Real Madrid superstar leads the way at 200 million euros

(\$236 million).

Mbappé is followed by the Bayern Munich star Olise at 140 million euros. The London-born Olise's form has been scintillating for Bundesliga champion Bayern with 18 goals and 25 assists in 44 games.

The 20-year-old Doué has three years left on his PSG contract and is valued at around 115 million euros compared to 100 million euros for Dembélé, who has two years left to run at PSG and is eight years older.

Their goal-scoring PSG teammate Bradley Barcola — who starred against Chelsea in the Champions League — comes in next at 70 million euros, followed by Cherki at 65 million.

Cherki's value could rise

Cherki first caught the eye six years ago when he was 16, scoring twice in a French Cup game for Lyon. He has entered a new dimension since joining Manchester City in the off-season for what is now looking like a bargain fee of 36 million euros. He scored a fine solo goal against Arsenal in their Premier League table-topping clash on Sunday.

His ability to create goals with his intuitive passing have surprised even City coach Pep Guardiola — who worked alongside two of the world's finest passers in Lionel Messi and Iniesta at Barcelona — and Cherki's value could rocket if he does well at the World Cup.

INOX SRINAGAR | **MOVIES SCHEDULE**
Tuesday, 21st April

LEE CRONIN'S THE MUMMY (A)
ENGLISH WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES
11:30 AM, 07:00 PM

BANGLA (U/A16+)

DHURANDHAR: THE REVENGE (A)

HINDI ATMOS - 12:00 PM, 03:15 PM, 06:30 PM
HINDI - 10:30 AM, 01:45 PM
HINDI - 02:30 PM, 05:00 PM