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SCAN TO VISIT

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J&K people want stringent action against drug smugglers: LG Sinha

Says elements protecting narcotics mafia bound to face consequences | Slams people criticizing 'Nasha-Mukt Jammu Kashmir Abhiyan' | Asks them to name one innocent person targeted unfairly

Waris Fayaz

Srinagar, May 13: Asserting that when masses unite, no force can stop them, Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Wednesday said that people of Jammu and Kashmir are very clear and firm that they want stringent action against drug smugglers.

LG Sinha, according to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) joined 'Nasha-Mukt Jammu Kashmir Campaign' Padyatra in Kupwara and also addressed a public gathering.

Taking a dig at those who are criticizing 'Nasha-Mukt Jammu Kashmir Abhiyan,' he said, "They should name just one innocent person who was unfairly targeted and effective action will be taken. If anyone is trying to protect drug smugglers, we must ask ourselves should they face consequences or not?"

The Lieutenant Governor said that people of Jammu Kashmir are very clear and firm and they want stringent action against drug smugglers and when the people unite, no force can stop us.

He said by dismantling drug smuggling networks, the administration is cutting the lifeline that feeds the fire of terror. "In Kupwara and Handwara areas combined, 28 drug smugglers are now behind bars. I want to urge our police officers, the soldiers guarding Kupwara's borders, and the Anti-Narcotics Task Force warriors that not a single guilty should escape. As a border district, Kupwara must stay extra vigilant and take the harshest action against drug smugglers," the Lieutenant Governor said.

It is pertinent to mention that every police station in Kupwara has been directed to gather full details on active drug smugglers and peddlers in their areas and launch decisive action within the next 68 days.

The Lieutenant Governor also urged citizens of Kupwara to participate in awareness drive. He also | More on P6

Modi Govt committed to all-round dev of border villages: LG Sinha

» Visits 'Vibrant Village' Trehgam in Kupwara » Highlights three key pillars for holistic growth

Sajid Raina

Srinagar, May 13: Reiterating that Government of India is fully committed to the all-round development of border villages, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Wednesday said the 'Vibrant Village' Phase-2 program would focus on three key pillars for holistic growth.

LG Sinha, according to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) visited 'Vibrant Village' Trehgam in Kupwara. During his visit, The Lieutenant Governor inaugurated and laid foundation stones for various projects. He also discussed needs and concerns of the villagers.

While addressing the gathering LG Sinha said, "Under the leadership of PM Modi, Government of India is fully committed to the all-round development of border villages."

He said that the Vibrant Village Phase-2 program outlines three key pillars for holistic growth. First, securing livelihoods | More on P6

Omar govt's hqrs between marathon tracks & Gulmarg's ski slopes: LoP

'NC sinking ship; govt meant for elites, not common man'

KNO Special Correspondent

Srinagar, May 13: Leader of Opposition Sunil Kumar Sharma on Wednesday slammed the Omar Abdullah-led government over governance in Jammu and Kashmir, saying its headquarters seem to lie somewhere between marathon tracks and Gulmarg's ski slopes.

Speaking to news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), Sharma alleged that misgovernance and corruption have peaked during Omar Abdullah's government.

"If you are looking for Omar Abdullah or his ministers, don't go to the Civil Secretariat. You should look for them somewhere between marathon tracks and Gulmarg's ski slopes," he said.

He further alleged that Omar Abdullah's government is only concerned with the interests of elites, and not with the common man.

"Omar Abdullah–led government allowed the introduction of the lease extension bill to protect the interests of Kashmir's rich, | More on P6

PM Modi's appeal

LG, DGP, top officers cut convoy size by 50%

KNO News Desk

Srinagar, May 13: Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha has decided to cut the size of his official convoy by half following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent appeal to conserve fuel and promote efficient resource use, officials said on Wednesday.

Officials at Lok Bhavan told news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) the move comes in response to the PM's call to reduce unnecessary fuel consumption and improve overall operational efficiency.

In line with this, officials said, J&K Director General of Police (DGP) Nalin Prabhat, IGP Kashmir V K Birdi and several top officers have also reduced the size of their convoys by 50 per cent.

Officials said the steps reflect broader push towards prudent and efficient utilisation of resources, rather than any policy of spending cuts.

The reduction in convoy sizes is expected to not only lower fuel usage but also streamline movement, particularly in sensitive regions where large convoys have traditionally been maintained for security reasons, they said.

Meanwhile, officials said the Prime Minister's remarks were being misunderstood and incorrectly described in some quarters as "austerity measures". There is no proposal to cut government spending, reduce welfare schemes or curb infrastructure investments, they said.

The government's focus remains | More on P6

Controversy erupts over constitution of House Committees

Ruling alliance MLAs bag chairmanship of 8 out of 9 MLA-headed committees; LoP accuses Speaker of bias

KNO Special Correspondent

Srinagar, May 13: A major controversy erupted over the constitution of House Committees in Jammu and Kashmir on Wednesday, with Leader of Opposition Sunil Kumar Sharma accusing the Speaker of bias and charging him with preferring ruling alliance MLAs in allocating the chairmanship of the panels.

Speaker of the Legislative Assembly Abdul Rahim Rather on Wednesday constituted 13 House committees.

As per news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), the Speaker constituted 13 House committees, including three financial committees.

According to notifications, the Speaker will be the ex-officio chairman of four committees, while nine committees will be headed by MLAs from different parties.

Of the nine committees to be headed by MLAs, five will be chaired by legislators belonging to the ruling National Conference, and one each by the BJP, Congress, CPI(M), and an independent supporting the ruling alliance.

According to the notifications, NC's Nazir Gurezi, Mir Saifullah, Justice (Retd.) Hasnain Masoodi,Farooq Ahmad Shah and Ali Muhammad Sagar will helm, respectively, the Estimates Committee, Public Undertakings Committee, Privileges Committee, Petitions Committee, and Assurances Committee.

The notifications further state that BJP's Surjeet Slathia, CPI(M)'s | More on P6

CM thanks EAM for repatriation of J&K residents' mortals

KT NEWS DESK

Srinagar, May 13: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah has expressed gratitude to External Affairs Minister (EAM) Dr S. Jaishankar for facilitating the repatriation of the mortal remains of six residents of Jammu & Kashmir who lost their lives in a tragic road accident in Kuwait.

The CM also appreciated the efforts of the Indian Embassy in Kuwait for extending timely assistance and support to the bereaved families during this difficult time.

The deceased, all residents of Rajouri and Poonch districts, were killed in a road accident on April 8 in the town of Saad Abdullah near | More on P6

J&K emerges 'High Performer' in LEADS 2025 rankings

KT News Desk

Srinagar, May 13: Jammu and Kashmir has been recognised as a "High Performer" in the prestigious Logistics Ease Across Different States (LEADS) 2025 Report, released today by Union Minister for Commerce and Industry, Piyush Goyal at a function held at Vanijya Bhawan, New Delhi.

The achievement marks a significant progression for Jammu and Kashmir, which was placed in the "Aspirers" category among Union Territories till 2023 and subsequently recognised as a "Fast Mover" in 2024. The latest recognition as a "High Performer" reflects the sustained improvements achieved in the logistics ecosystem, infrastructure development, policy support and regulatory framework across the Union Territory.

In Jammu and Kashmir, the Department of Industries & Commerce, functioning as the nodal department, has been actively monitoring and evaluating performance | More on P6

Northern Army Commander chairs security review, coordination meeting in Sgr

Rehan Qayoom Mir

Srinagar, May 13: Northern Army Commander Lt Gen Pratik Sharma on Wednesday chaired a security review and coordination meeting here.

The Army's Northern Command in a post on X, according to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) said, "Lt Gen Pratik Sharma, #ArmyCdrNC, chaired a security review and coordination meeting at #Srinagar, where he was briefed | More on P6

Rainfall activity to continue across J&K till May 20: MeT

Sajid Raina

Srinagar, May 13: The Meteorological Department on Wednesday forecast light rain, thundershowers and gusty winds at scattered places across Jammu and Kashmir over the next few days.

The MeT Department, according to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), advised people to avoid boating and shikara rides during afternoon hours due to the possibility of strong winds and lightning.

According to the MeT Srinagar on Wednesday recorded a maximum temperature of 22.5 Degrees Celsius, 1.8 notches below normal, while the minimum temperature settled at 10.2 Degrees Celsius. | More on P6

Govt to provide additional food grains during Eid, Muharram

KT News Desk

Srinagar, May 13: Minister for Food, Civil Supplies & Consumer Affairs, Transport, Youth Services & Sports, Information Technology, and Science & Technology, Satish Sharma on Wednesday chaired a review meeting to assess the preparedness and ensure seamless availability of essential commodities and public services ahead of the forthcoming Eid and Muharram observance across Jammu and Kashmir.

The meeting was attended by MLA Zadibal Tanvir Sadiq, Commissioner Secretary, FCS&CA, Saurabh Bhagat, VC LCMA, MD RTC, RTO Kashmir, Senior officers of the administration, officers of the Food, Civil Supplies & Consumer Affairs Department, representatives of the Food Corporation of India (FCI), Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs), Legal Metrology Organization (LMO), Food Safety Department, PDD, R&B, PHE, SMC, district administration and other concerned agencies.

During the meeting, the Minister stressed the importance of maintaining uninterrupted supply of essential commodities. He directed the concerned departments to work in close coordination to ensure that the public does not face any inconvenience during the festive period.

The Minister

Hailstorm-hit growers say govt ignoring crop insurance, loan waiver pleas

'They're not serious about safeguarding horticulture sector'

Waris Fayaz

Srinagar, May 13: Growers across Kashmir have demanded immediate government intervention after severe hailstorms and heavy rainfall caused widespread damage to orchards and standing crops in several districts, including Baramulla, Bandipora and parts of south Kashmir.

President of Sopore Fruit Mandi, Fayaz Ahmad Malik @ Kaka Ji, told the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) that repeated appeals for crop insurance, implementation of the Market Intervention Scheme (MIS) and waiver of Kisan Credit Card (KCC) loans up to Rs 3 lakh have gone unheard despite continuous losses suffered by farmers and orchardists over the years.

"We have been time and again urging governments to launch crop insurance and MIS schemes, and waive off KCC loans up to Rs 3 lakh, but nobody is listening to us," Malik said.

He said the agriculture and horticulture sector remains the backbone of Kashmir's economy at a time when unemployment is rising.

"Agriculture and horticulture are the only sectors providing livelihood to people amid a job crisis, but the government does not seem serious about safeguarding this sector," he rued.

Malik said growers have not received adequate compensation or meaningful relief since 2014 despite facing recurring natural calamities and market distress.

"Till now, only estimates and survey teams have visited affected areas, but nothing concrete has happened on the ground. The question is, how will a grower survive? The government doesn't seem to be concerned about us?" he asked.

He urged the government to immediately announce compensation for affected growers and introduce long-pending welfare measures for the horticulture sector.

"We want loan waivers so that growers who are suffering continuously get some relief. The government must intervene without further delay," Malik said. | More on P6

Gulmarg not only a symbol of Kashmir's natural beauty but driver of region's tourism economy: Javid Dar

Inspects facilities at Gulmarg Convention Centre, stresses enhanced tourist services

KT NEWS DESK

GULMARG, MAY 13: Minister for Agriculture Production, Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Cooperative and Election Department, Javid Ahmad Dar, Wednesday visited the Gulmarg Convention Centre and conducted a detailed inspection of the facilities available there.

During the visit, the Minister, as per an official statement, reviewed the existing infrastructure and directed the concerned officers to ensure effective projection and wider dissemination of information regarding the tourist-friendly facilities and services being provided by the Jammu and Kashmir government. He emphasized the need for seamless coordination among the departments to ensure that the visitors are well-informed about the amenities and services available in the world-renowned tourist destination.

Speaking on the occasion, the Minister said that Gulmarg, being one of the country's premier tourist destinations, holds immense significance for Jammu and Kashmir's tourism sector. He underscored the importance of continuously upgrading the infrastructure and strengthening visitor-centric services to further enhance the overall tourist experience.

"Gulmarg is not only a symbol of Kashmir's natural beauty but also a key driver of the region's tourism economy. It is imperative that we ensure world-class facilities and efficient service delivery for the tourists visiting this iconic destination," the Minister stated.

Javid Dar hears public grievances, assures time-bound redress

KT NEWS DESK

SRINAGAR, MAY 13: Minister for Agriculture Production, Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Cooperative and Election Department, Javid Ahmad Dar, Wednesday held an extensive public grievance hearing at the Civil Secretariat, Srinagar, where he interacted with scores of delegations and individuals and heard their concerns and demands.

During the public interaction, a delegation from Tuzer Sharief, Zainapora projected issues related to macadamisation of roads and installation of drinking water pipelines to strengthen basic public infrastructure in the area.

Another delegation, as per an official statement, comprising carpenters from across Kashmir Division urged the Minister to extend welfare schemes' benefits to them on the lines of construction workers registered under the Labour Commissioner J&K, emphasizing the need for greater social security and institutional support for the community.

Several individuals also raised concerns regarding execution of civil works, construction of sheds and bund walls besides seeking release of pending payments under Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G) and other development schemes.

Taking immediate cognizance of the issues projected during the hearing, the Minister issued on-the-spot directions to the concerned officers for prompt resolution of the genuine public grievances. He reiterated that public grievance redress remains a top priority of the government and assured the delegations that all their demands would be addressed on priority through coordinated and time-bound action.

Shaleen Kabra reviews Jal Jeevan Mission works in Kupwara

KT NEWS DESK

SRINAGAR, MAY 13: Additional Chief Secretary Jal Shakti Department J&K, Shaleen Kabra, Wednesday conducted an extensive inspection of various Water Supply Schemes in Kupwara to review the progress, functioning and quality of drinking water supply infrastructure being developed under Jal Jeevan Mission in the district.

During the visit, the Additional Chief Secretary inspected the ongoing and completed works. He appreciated the work done under the scheme and directed to complete and commission the same as soon as the funds are released by the government.

The officers and engineers, as per an official statement, from the Jal Shakti Department briefed the Additional Chief Secretary on the status of execution, water supply position, challenges faced and measures being taken to improve services. Emphasis was laid on maintaining quality standards, ensuring timely completion of works and adhering to a proper timeframe, as funds are expected to be released in the coming months.

The Additional Chief Secretary directed the concerned officers to expedite pending works, strengthen monitoring mechanisms and ensure optimum utilization of resources. Emphasis was also laid on public welfare, transparency and adherence to technical specifications in all development works.

The Additional Chief Secretary appreciated the efforts of the field staff and Engineers working for augmentation of drinking water facilities in the district. He reiterated the government's commitment towards providing safe and sustainable drinking water to every household.

Senior officers of the Jal Shakti Department including Chief Engineer PHE Kashmir, Director Planning Jal Shakti Department and Superintending Engineer Hydraulic Circle Kupwara accompanied the Additional Chief Secretary during the inspection.

Union Joint Secretary W&CD reviews education initiatives in Doda

KT NEWS DESK

DODA, MAY 13: Union Joint Secretary, Ministry of Women & Child Development and Member of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), Dr. Sanjeev Kumar Sharma, Wednesday chaired a comprehensive review meeting of the School Education Department at DC Office Complex Doda.

The meeting, as per an official statement, was attended by Deputy Commissioner Doda Krishan Lal, SSP, CPO, Joint Director Education, CEO, DSWO, State Coordinator Samagra Shiksha PM Shri Schools besides other officers and staff of the Education Department.

During the meeting, Dr. Sanjeev Kumar Sharma directed the Chief Education Officer Doda and heads of institutions to enhance year-wise student enrollment in PM Shri Schools. He asked for intensifying awareness campaigns among the local population regarding the facilities and benefits being provided under the PM Shri initiative.

The CEO highlighted the issue of shortage of Principals and Headmasters in schools across the district.

Responding to the concern, Union Joint Secretary assured that the matter would be taken up at the appropriate level for necessary action.

The CEO informed the meeting that PM Shri Schools are functioning as exemplary institutions by sharing human resources, digital learning facilities and educational activities with nearby schools under a cluster-based approach.

Dr. Sharma directed the CEO to ensure continuous monitoring and evaluation of these clusters for improving the overall academic performance and governance.

Emphasizing the importance of cyber awareness among the students, Union Joint Secretary directed all the school heads to make cyber safety, cyber security and responsible use of social media a regular part of morning assemblies. He further stressed that every teacher should undergo cyber safety and security training to effectively guide students. Union Joint Secretary also underscored the importance of vocational education and directed that vocational training opportunities be extended to all students to equip them with practical skills and career-oriented knowledge. The CEO informed the meeting that several innovative initiatives have been undertaken by PM Shri Schools, including Green School initiatives, field and exposure visits, Bal Sansad programmes, drug abuse awareness campaigns and science exhibitions aimed at promoting environmental awareness, leadership qualities, healthy lifestyles, practical learning and scientific temperament among students.

Union Joint Secretary further directed the Education Department to organize regular career counselling programmes in schools to help students explore future career opportunities. He emphasized that such guidance sessions should also be conducted during study sessions for maximum outreach and effectiveness.

Highlighting the importance of child rights protection, Dr. Sharma emphasized the collective responsibility of institutions, parents, teachers and society in ensuring a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for every child. He stressed the need to create greater awareness regarding children's rights and to ensure their access to quality education, healthcare and holistic development.

During the meeting, Deputy Commissioner Doda Krishan Lal submitted proposals regarding capsule courses and specialized training programmes for heads of schools to strengthen institutional leadership and improve the overall quality of education in the district.

NOTICE

I have changed my name from (Old Name) Amaar Azim Pandith to new name Mohammad Amaar Pandith. In future I will be known as (New Name)Mohammad Amaar Pandith. If anybody is having any objection, he or she may contact Passport Office Srinagar within 07 days. After 07 days no objection will be accepted.

IN THE COURT OF EXECUTIVE MAGISTRATE 1st CLASS SOPORE

In the case of: Rehana Bashir w/o: Javid Ahmad Wani R/o: Lalab 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 Daughter namely Sidra Wani D/o: Javid Ahmad Wani as 20-02-2018 at Mother and Child Hospital 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: Nasreena Bano w/o: Ab. Rouf Dar R/o: Rakh sultanpora.

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 Daughter namely Aliza Jan D/o: Ab Rouf Dar as 27-09-2021 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: Rubeena Bano w/o: Khursheed Ahmad Bhat R/o: Shirhama Lasha.

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 Daughter namely Zainab Khurshid D/o: Khursheed Ahmad Bhat as 20-05-2020 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

Principal Census Officer (Urban) visits Census Training Centres to review ongoing training

KT NEWS DESK

SRINAGAR, MAY 13: Principal Census Officer (Urban) (Commissioner, Srinagar Municipal Corporation), Faz Lul Haseeb,, Wednesday visited the census training centres at Kashmir Government Polytechnic College Gogji Bagh and Government Women's College M.A. Road to review the ongoing training programme being imparted to Supervisors and Enumerators in connection with Census 2027. During the visit, the Commissioner, as per an official statement, inspected the training sessions to assess the preparedness and ensure that the training programme is being conducted smoothly and in accordance with the prescribed guidelines.

Interacting with the trainers and participants, the Commissioner highlighted the significance of the census as a vital national exercise that plays a crucial role in planning and policy formulation. He urged the trainees to thoroughly understand the procedures and responsibilities associated with the enumeration process and to perform their duties with utmost accuracy, transparency, and dedication. He also expressed satisfaction over the arrangements and the overall conduct of the training sessions and appreciated the efforts of the officers and staff involved in successfully organizing the programme.

DC Srinagar takes onsite review of proposed fencing, allied works along Budshah, Noor Jehan Bridges

KT NEWS DESK

SRINAGAR MAY 13: Deputy Commissioner(DC) Srinagar, Akshay Labroo Wednesday conducted an onsite review of the proposed fencing along the sides of Budshah Bridge and Noor Jehan Bridge (Cement Kadal) to review measures aimed at enhancing public safety along the bridges.

The DC, as per an official statement, assessed the planned infrastructure upgradation works to ensure improved safety for pedestrians and commuters using the bridges.

During the visit, the Deputy Commissioner was accompanied by Additional Deputy Commissioner, Mir Imtiyaz Ul Aziz, IAS Probationer, Alfred Thomas, Chief Planning Officer, Fayaz Ahmad Dar, Superintending Engineer R&B, Tatheer Manzoor, Executive Engineer R&B, Khalid Mehmood, Executive Engineer R&B, Arif Hazari, Tehsildar South, Sajad Rasool Shah and other concerned. While reviewing the plan of fencing of the bridges, the DC was informed that the Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) have been formulated for fencing the sides of both these bridges. He was briefed on the status of the works, project timelines and measures being undertaken to ensure public safety. Emphasizing quality execution, durability and timely completion, the DC directed the concerned executing agency to ensure that the fencing not only strengthens safety measures but also maintains the aesthetics, surrounding visibility and heritage value of the structures.

The DC further instructed the executing agencies to incorporate all necessary safety measures and complete the works within the stipulated timelines while minimizing inconvenience to commuters.

Speaking on the occasion, the DC underscored that public safety remains a top priority of the administration and said that the proposed fencing of bridges is being undertaken as a preventive safety measure in view of rising concerns over suicide incidents from bridges, as well as in response to public demand.

He added that the District Administration Srinagar has already taken several similar measures, particularly at vulnerable bridges over the river Jhelum including New Zaina Kadal, Aali Kadal, Old Zaina Kadal, Nawakadal and Safakadal in the Shahr-e-Khaas areas of the District, aimed at creating a safer environment for pedestrians and commuters by ensuring the installation of necessary safety safeguards.

Nasha Mukt Jammu & Kashmir

DIPR organises symposium-cum-cultural programme for students

KT NEWS DESK

JAMMU, MAY 13: Continuing its outreach under the "Nasha Mukt Jammu & Kashmir – 100 Day Campaign", the Cultural Unit Jammu of the Department of Information & Public Relations (DIPR) Wednesday organised a Symposium-cum-Theme Based Cultural Programme at National Public School Bari, Samba.

The programme, as per an official statement, was aimed at sensitising students about the harmful effects of drug abuse and motivating them to adopt a healthy and responsible lifestyle. Students actively participated in the symposium and shared insightful views on the issue, reflecting awareness and concern towards building a drug-free society.

The Chief Guest, Principal Farman Ali, appreciated the initiative and encouraged students to act as responsible citizens by spreading awareness against drug abuse. In the competition, Sanchit Singh secured the first position for an impressive presentation, whereas Kaleef and Indrani were adjudged second and third, respectively.

Symposium was judged by Nasreen Bibi, Shashi Shekhar and Tilak Raj.

Adding further impact to the programme, a Nukkad Natak on Nasha Mukti was presented by the students of the school, effectively conveying a strong social message. The artists of the Cultural Unit Jammu also presented theme-based songs in Hindi and Punjabi, which inspired the audience and reinforced the campaign's message through engaging performances.

Govt, mutton dealers at odds over Eid preparedness

REHAN QAYOOM MIR

Srinagar, May 13: A disagreement has emerged between government assurances and ground concerns ahead of Eid-ul-Adha, with the administration claiming sufficient stock and advance preparedness while mutton dealers allege exclusion from stakeholder consultations and unresolved livestock movement issues from Punjab.

Food, Civil Supplies & Consumer Affairs, Satish Sharma, said the government has ensured adequate availability of essential commodities and strengthened departmental coordination well ahead of the festival.

"We have sufficient stock. All department officers came to the fair price shops. We could not reach due to some other meetings," the minister said after reviewing arrangements for Eid-ul-Adha.

Sharma said preparations for key festivals were initiated in advance to avoid last-minute shortages and disruptions.

"This is the first time we have prepared for Muharram nearly two months in advance. We have also prepared for Eid-ul-Adha," he said, adding that preparedness has become essential due to global uncertainties.

"We have to do everything in advance due to the geopolitical situation. The world is unpredictable, but we have to be ready," he added.

The minister assured strict action against hoarding, black marketing and irregularities in essential commodity markets. "There is sufficient stock. Some complaints have been received, but strict action will be taken. This time, we will set an example," he said.

However, mutton dealers in Kashmir said the ground situation does not reflect official claims, alleging that stakeholders have not been taken into confidence ahead of Eid-ul-Adha.

They said no structured pre-Eid meeting has been held yet, leaving traders without clarity on supply planning, pricing coordination and livestock management strategies.

General Secretary of the Kashmir Mutton Dealers Association (KMDA), Mehraj-ud-Din, speaking to KNO, questioned the status of communications sent to Punjab authorities regarding livestock movement for months, saying there has been no update shared with stakeholders.

"What happened to the letters sent to Punjab? Has there been any response? We are not being informed about anything," he said.

Mehraj-ud-Din said that expected pre-Eid stakeholder meetings had not taken place yet this year, and no formal consultation was held with mutton dealers.

He said issues related to livestock movement from Punjab, including delays and stoppages, remain unresolved despite repeated complaints.

"The J&K administration says it has written three times to Punjab, while we have received no response or update. As Eid-ul-Adha approaches, the government claims sufficient stock and preparedness, but questions remain over earlier concerns and demands," he said—(KNO)

CM Omar praises UMEED for boosting rural livelihoods

KT NEWS DESK

Srinagar, May 13: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Wednesday congratulated the Rural Development Department and J&K Rural Livelihoods Mission (UMEED) for their remarkable contribution towards transforming rural livelihoods and empowering women across Jammu & Kashmir.

The Chief Minister said that the sustained efforts of the Rural Development Department and UMEED have brought about a significant socio-economic transformation in rural areas by strengthening women-led Self Help Groups (SHGs) and promoting financial inclusion and entrepreneurship.

The Chief Minister's remarks came in the back drop of growing national recognition received by Jammu & Kashmir's women-led rural development initiatives under UMEED.

Union Minister for Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Shivraj Singh Chouhan also commended the leadership of the Jammu & Kashmir Government and the J&K Rural

Livelihoods Mission (UMEED) for the remarkable achievements across Jammu and Kashmir.

In a letter addressed to the Chief Minister, the Union Minister stated that continued focus on scaling high-value enterprises, strengthening market ecosystems and deepening convergence would further accelerate the progress achieved under UMEED. Expressing confidence in the future trajectory of the programme, Shivraj Singh Chouhan said that Jammu & Kashmir would continue to set benchmarks in women-led rural development.

In his communication, the Union Minister observed that Jammu & Kashmir has emerged as a strong example of inclusive and women-led rural transformation under UMEED.

Highlighting the financial inclusion component, the Union Minister said that the progress has been complemented by over 3,106 crore in bank credit and 820 crore in capitalization support facilitated under the programme.

During his Budget Speech 2026-27, the Chief Minister had reiterated that under the Lakhpati Didi initiative, 2,00,952 SHG women had already become Lakhpati Didis, while the remaining 32,048 potential households would be covered by June 2026 to further enhance women's economic empowerment and rural enterprise.

Over 8.10 lakh women have been mobilised into more than 96,000 SHGs, with over 3,106 crore in bank credit facilitated and more than 2.30 lakh women achieving annual incomes above 1 lakh under the Lakhpati Didi initiative.

The Chief Minister had also stated that the government would proactively increase the number of Lakhpati Didis by converging the initiative with Mission Yuva.

CS reviews PM-SYM scheme progress in J&K

KT NEWS DESK

Srinagar, May 13: Chief Secretary, Atal Dulloo on Wednesday chaired a meeting to review the progress achieved under the Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maandhan (PM-SYM) scheme across the districts of Jammu and Kashmir, with emphasis on expanding social security coverage for unorganised workers through sustained awareness and registration drives.

The meeting was attended by Additional Chief Secretary, Finance, Shailendra Kumar; Commissioner Secretary, Forests; Labour Commissioner, Charandeep Singh and other concerned officers, while Deputy Commissioners participated through video conferencing.

During the meeting, the Chief Secretary directed the Labour Department to make dedicated efforts for reaching out to all eligible unorganised workers for their registration under the scheme so that they are able to avail the benefits envisaged under it. He asked the Labour Commissioner to furnish weekly progress reports indicating district-wise registrations and the incremental achievements made from today onwards.

Highlighting the significance of the scheme, the Chief Secretary observed that the benefits enshrined under PM-SYM are highly attractive for workers engaged in the unorganised sector. He said that the scheme, along with other social security initiatives such as PM Kisan Maandhan and the National Pension Scheme for Traders and Self-Employed Persons, guarantees old-age financial security to vulnerable sections of society.

He also called upon the Finance Department to closely monitor the implementation of these schemes and directed the Deputy Commissioners to assist in increasing registrations in their respective districts to ensure saturation of benefits.

Additional Chief Secretary, Finance, Shailendra Kumar, on the occasion, stated that Jammu and Kashmir possesses immense scope for the successful implementation of such schemes as a large section of the population is associated with the unorganised sector. He stressed the need for widespread awareness regarding the benefits of these schemes so that more eligible workers are encouraged to enrol themselves.

Labour Commissioner, Charandeep Singh, while apprising the meeting about the scheme, informed that PM-SYM is a flagship pension scheme of the Government of India launched in 2019 to provide old-age social security to workers in the unorganised sector, including street vendors, construction workers, domestic workers, agricultural labourers, ASHA workers, Anganwadi workers, hotel industry workers and other vulnerable categories earning up to Rs 15,000 per month.

He further informed that a total of 99,722 unorganised workers have so far been registered under the scheme across all the 20 districts of Jammu and Kashmir, reflecting significant expansion in pension coverage among vulnerable sections of society. Srinagar district recorded the highest number of registrations with 10,312 beneficiaries, followed by Poonch with 9,251 and Pulwama with 7,180 registrations.

Continued on www.kashmirthunder.in

Census crucial for accurate planning, policy making: SMC Commissioner

REHAN QAYOOM MIR

Srinagar, May 13: Principal Census Officer (Urban) and Commissioner Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC), Faz Lul Haseeb, on Wednesday said the upcoming Census 2027 will play a decisive role in strengthening governance, improving planning frameworks and addressing long-standing data gaps at the ground level.

Speaking during an inspection visit to ongoing census training centres at Kashmir Government Polytechnic College, Gogji Bagh and Government Women's College, M.A. Road, the Commissioner said supervisors and enumerators are being trained ahead of the nationwide enumeration exercise. He said the census is being conducted after a significant gap of nearly 16 years. "It is constitutionally held every ten years, the scheduled 2021 exercise was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic," he said.

He said the government has now directed preparations for the census, with Srinagar actively engaged in multiple training phases.

Continued on www.kashmirthunder.in

Tanvir Sadiq takes dig at LoP Sharma over Assam remark

REHAN QAYOOM MIR

Srinagar, May 13: National Conference chief spokesperson and MLA Tanvir Sadiq on Wednesday took a sharp dig at Leader of Opposition Sunil Sharma, saying he would offer him coffee and remind him that this is Jammu and Kashmir, not Assam.

Speaking with reporters, Tanvir Sadiq said the BJP was disconnected from the political realities of Jammu and Kashmir and asserted the National Conference would continue to remain the people's choice in the Union Territory.

He said some BJP leaders were making statements without understanding the political realities and public

mood of Jammu and Kashmir. "They are dreaming. They have come from Assam and forgotten the politics of Jammu and Kashmir. I will go to his house and offer him coffee so that he wakes up and understands this is Jammu and Kashmir, not Assam."

"The National Conference is in government because people have voted for it. InshaAllah, when elections are held again after five years, the National Conference will return to power again. Without NC, nobody can form the government here," he said.

Continued on www.kashmirthunder.in

CM's advisor calls on Rana

Discusses J&K's development priorities

KT NEWS DESK

Srinagar, May 13: Advisor to the Chief Minister, Nasir Aslam Wani on Wednesday called on Minister for Jal Shakti, Forest, Ecology & Environment and Tribal Affairs, Javed Ahmed Rana, at the Civil Secretariat, Srinagar and held discussions on a range of development issues concerning the Jammu and Kashmir Union Territory.

The two exchanged views on accelerating development across various sectors and deliberated upon measures to further strengthen public service delivery and administrative responsiveness in the UT. They reaffirmed the government's unwavering commitment to the welfare of the people and stressed that developmental initiatives must reach every section of society, particularly those in remote and underserved areas.

Both emphasized that the administration remains firmly focused on translating policy intent into ground-level outcomes. They said that sustained coordination among the departments and leadership would be key to achieve the development aspirations of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Similarly, several delegations also called on the Minister at his office chamber and apprised him of various issues and demands pertaining to their respective departments and communities.

Among them, the DFO Forest Association projected matters relating to the grant of non-functional promotions and other service-related issues concerning the departmental employees, seeking the Minister's intervention for their early resolution.

The Minister gave a patient hearing to all the delegations and assured them that their genuine concerns would be examined sympathetically and pursued for appropriate consideration at the relevant forums.

Budshah bridge to get safety fencing after suicide attempts

Public safety priority, project design will be aesthetic: DC Sgr

REHAN QAYOOM MIR

Srinagar, May 13: The administration on Wednesday announced that safety fencing will be installed at Budshah Bridge in Srinagar, acknowledging rising incidents of suicide attempts and public demand for safety measures at the vital city bridge. Deputy Commissioner (DC) Srinagar, Akshay Labroo, speaking with reporters here, said Budshah Bridge has emerged as a vulnerable point in recent days, with multiple suicide attempts and safety-related incidents being reported.

Referring to the situation, the DC said police inputs and ground reports confirmed a worrying trend.

"You must have seen in the last few days that there have been incidents at Budshah Bridge where people have attempted to jump into the water. Police reports also confirm that this has become a vulnerable point where suicide attempts are increasing," he said. Labroo said that in the last few days alone, at least three such incidents have been reported from the site, raising serious concern among authorities.

"Along with that, when people walk here, due to a lack of safety measures, there is also a risk of accidental falls. So, whether it is police, public representatives or citizens, everyone has suggested that this stretch should be fenced," he said.

The DC said the administration has now initiated formal steps to address the issue, including site inspections by senior officials. "Today, along with

our team, including R&B officials and senior officers, we visited the site to see how soon we can fence Budshah Bridge," he said. He added that the project will be designed carefully, keeping in mind both safety requirements and aesthetic value, as the bridge lies in the heart of Srinagar city.

"Now we have to be careful because it is in the middle of the city. We will design it in an aesthetic manner as well as from the point of view of public safety," he said.

He said preliminary designs have been reviewed, and the administration will move ahead once final approvals are secured. "We have seen the designs today. We will try to start work as soon as possible.

Continued on www.kashmirthunder.in

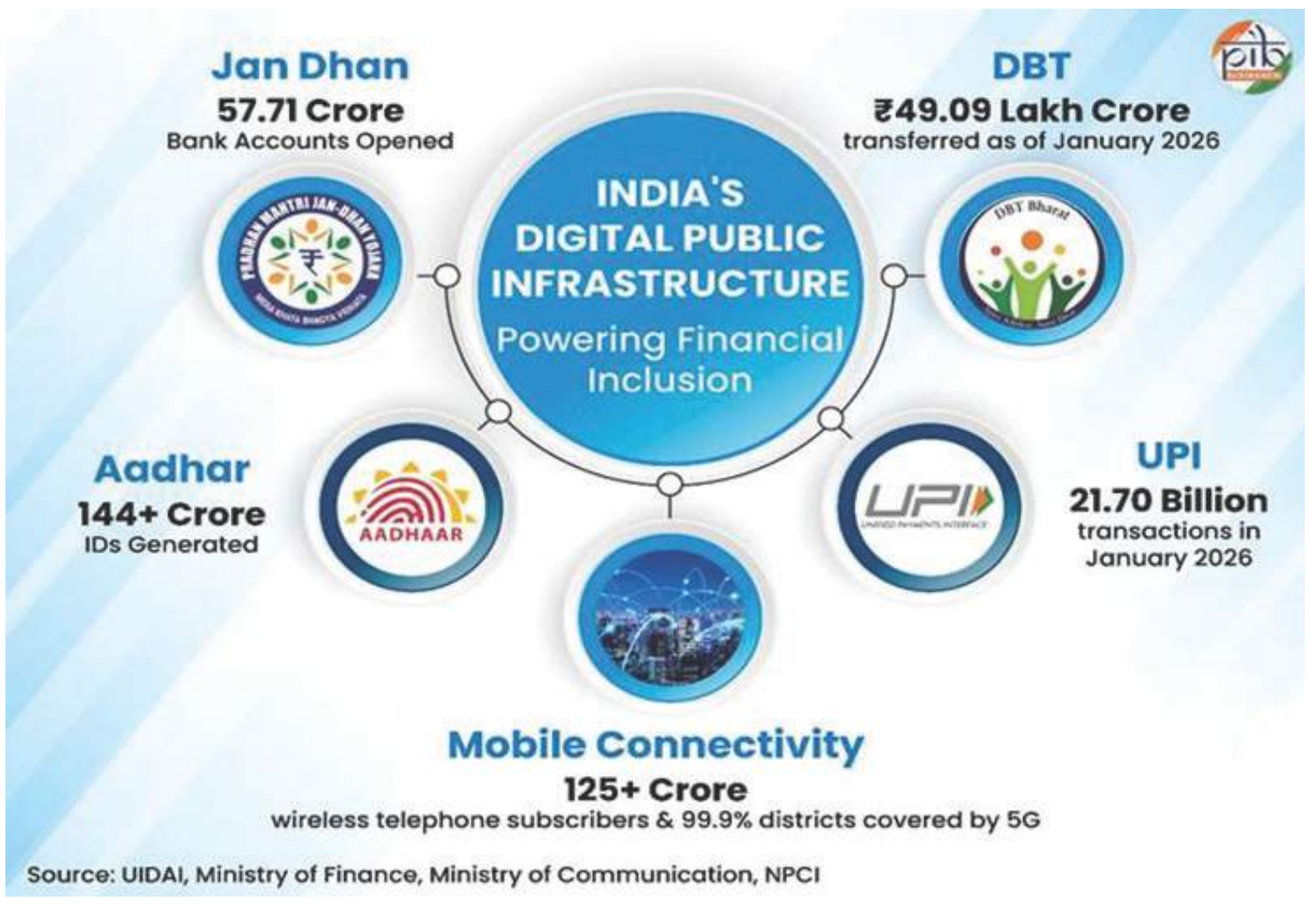
EDITORIAL

NEET Cancellation Demands Accountability

The cancellation of NEET-UG 2026 is a devastating blow to over 20 lakh students who spent years preparing for this single examination. For many, it was not just a test but the culmination of sleepless nights, sacrificed holidays, and family hopes. Now, because of a paper leak allegedly originating in Churu, Rajasthan, and spreading through WhatsApp groups, these students must again sit for the exam. This is unacceptable. The anger is justified. The demand for a thorough probe is not a political slogan; it is a moral imperative. The National Testing Agency claims it used GPS-tracked vehicles and AI-assisted CCTV surveillance. Yet, the leak happened. Some questions in a PDF circulating among students before the exam matched the actual paper. How did this happen? Who is responsible? Students deserve answers, not just assurances. The Director General of NTA said no irregularities will be tolerated. But the fact remains that an irregularity occurred on a massive scale. The time for promises is over. The time for accountability has begun. The Central Bureau of Investigation has been handed the case. That is a welcome step. But the CBI must go beyond catching a few scapegoats. It must investigate whether any NTA official was involved. It must examine how the security protocol failed. It must recommend systemic changes so that this never repeats. The DG said whoever is involved, inside or outside, will be arrested. That must happen swiftly and visibly. In the meantime, the government must ensure that the re-conducted examination is flawless. Students cannot be made to suffer twice. The dates should be announced with sufficient notice. Centres should be increased to avoid travel hardships. The anger of students is legitimate. They have worked hard. Their families have invested money and emotion. They deserve a system that is fair, transparent, and secure. The NTA must be restructured if necessary. Stringent punishment must be given to those who try to buy or sell unfair advantages. And the government must communicate clearly, not in press releases, but in actions that restore faith. This is not just about an examination. It is about the future of medical education in India. It is about whether hard work still matters or only connections and cash do. The NEET cancellation is a wake-up call. Let us not waste it. Probe, punish, reform. And give the students of this country the examination they truly deserve.

AI-Powered Financial Inclusion In India

Press Information Bureau



Key Takeaways

- Digital Public Infrastructure and Artificial Intelligence provide the backbone for scalable and secure AI-led financial services.
- ULI enables digital access to multiple data sources and UPI allows for instant money transfers between any two bank accounts via a mobile platform.
- The "Banking BHASHINI" model to be developed that integrates banking vocabulary, regulatory guidelines, and industry-specific applications.
- Enabling Framework for Regulatory Sandbox fosters responsible innovation, enhance efficiency, and benefit consumers in the fintech sector.
- AI-powered solutions move beyond conventional credit scoring models and reduce reliance on informal lending by MSMEs.

Reimagining Financial Inclusion in a Digital-First Economy

India's financial inclusion journey is undergoing a paradigm shift, driven by the convergence of a strong Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) and Artificial Intelligence (AI). What began as an effort to expand basic banking access has evolved into a technology-led ecosystem focused on delivering intelligent, inclusive, and real-time financial services at scale. Leveraging vast digital footprints, advanced analytics, and consent-based data-sharing frameworks, AI is transforming how financial services are designed and delivered- enhancing efficiency, expanding outreach, and enabling more personalized financial solutions.

The transformation is particularly impactful for the underserved and "new-to-credit" segments, including MSMEs, informal workers, rural populations, and women-led enterprises. By reducing information asymmetries and moving beyond traditional credit assessment models, AI is unlocking access to formal finance, strengthening risk management, and improving financial resilience. As India advances towards a digitally empowered economy, AI is not only accelerating financial inclusion but also reshaping the financial ecosystem into one that is more responsive, secure, and future-ready.

Digital Solutions Transforming Financial Access

Financial inclusion is the process of ensuring access to financial services, with timely, adequate and affordable credit primarily for vulnerable groups such as weaker sections and low-income groups. In India, this has evolved from a policy goal into a digital-first reality. Over the past decade, a suite of interoperable digital platforms has transformed financial access from a policy objective into a scalable, technology-driven reality.

This transformation is anchored in foundational systems enabling identity verification, seamless payments, and direct benefit delivery. These systems ensure that financial services are accessible, affordable, and efficient across geographies. Together, they form the backbone of an integrated ecosystem that supports last-mile connectivity and future innovations.

JAM Trinity (Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile)

JAM is a foundational convergence of universal bank accounts, biometric identity, and mobile connectivity. Its motive is to provide every citizen with a unique financial identity and a direct link to the state, ensuring that geography is no longer a barrier to financial access.

As of March 2026, over 144 crore Aadhaar numbers have been generated for secure authentication.

Jan Dhan accounts have grown to 58.16 crore (As of 29 April 2026) from 14.72 crore in 2015, with cumulative deposits totaling 3.02 lakh crore (As of 29 April 2026), bringing the unbanked into the formal economy.

Mobile connectivity completes the triangle, with 125.87 crore wireless telephone subscribers and 5G mobile services covering 99.9% of districts, covering 85% of the population.

Unified Payments Interface (UPI)

UPI is a real-time payment system that allows for instant money transfers between any two bank accounts via a mobile platform. It aims to democratize digital payments by offering a low-cost, interoperable, and secure experience for both small merchants and individual users.

In March 2026, approx. 29.53 lakh crore worth of 2,264.11 crore UPI transactions were carried out on the Unified Payment Interface (UPI).

With 691 banks live on the platform, it accounts for nearly 81% of total retail payment volume in India, becoming the primary digital rail for both person-to-person and person-to-merchant payments.

Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)

Under DBT system, government subsidies and welfare benefits are directly transferred into the bank accounts of beneficiaries. Its primary goal is to enhance transparency and efficiency by removing intermediaries, thereby eliminating leakages and delays in the delivery of social welfare.

The system has transferred a cumulative 49.09 lakh crore directly to citizens as of January 2026.

By eliminating duplicate and fake beneficiaries, it has saved the government over 4.31 lakh crore.

Together, these digital systems have created a robust, interoperable, and data-rich financial ecosystem. Such strong digital foundation not only enables inclusive financial participation but also generates the data and infrastructure necessary for AI powered innovation in financial services.

Enabling AI in Finance: Policy Push and Ecosystem Support

The integration of AI in financial services, backed by digital solutions, is supported by regulatory innovation, institutional initiatives, and financial literacy programs. These efforts are designed to strengthen risk management and consumer protection while ensuring that technology remains inclusive. Numerous initiatives have been taken that represent the core of India's policy-driven approach to creating a secure and inclusive AI-financial ecosystem:

BHASHINI

In February 2026, the Digital India BHASHINI Division (DIBD) and the RBI signed an MoU to collaborate on integrating BHASHINI's language AI models to enhance multilingual access to banking and financial services.

The initiative aims at promoting financial inclusion across India's diverse linguistic landscape by providing multilingual access to banking services in all 22 scheduled Indian language, thus removing literacy and language barriers.

BhashaDaan collects speech, text, and translations from people across India and uses them to train AI systems.

The MoU provides for the deployment of BHASHINI models within RBI's ecosystem. The model uses linguistic datasets through the Bhashadaan initiative to ensure high contextual accuracy for complex financial terminology and regulatory language.

DIBD and RBI will jointly develop a domain-specific language model for the banking industry, named "Banking BHASHINI," to integrate banking vocabulary, regulatory guidelines, and industry-specific applications.

By providing AI-powered solutions for communication and service delivery, it ensures that all citizens, regardless of language, can access essential services and information effectively.

RBI Regulatory Sandbox

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) introduced the Enabling Framework for Regulatory Sandbox (RS), to foster responsible innovation, enhance efficiency, and benefit consumers in the fintech sector.

Based on FinTech Working Group recommendations, it offers a controlled environment for testing new products/services under regulatory supervision before wider deployment.

The objective of the RS is to foster responsible innovation in financial services, promote efficiency and bring benefit to consumers.

It enables fintech startups and banks to test solutions such as Application Program Interface (APIs) services, digital KYC, and Cyber security products.

The framework allows regulators to assess the benefits and risks of new technologies while ensuring financial stability and consumer protection.

MuleHunter.AI

Launched in December 2024 by the Reserve Bank Innovation Hub (RBIH), MuleHunter.AI is an advanced AI-powered tool designed to identify and mitigate "mule" bank accounts used in cybercrimes.

Unlike traditional rule-based systems, it uses AI/ML-powered tool to analyze transaction patterns in real-time, detecting anomalies that indicate money laundering or illegal betting.

Successful pilot tests with large public sector banks have shown encouraging results, leading the RBI to encourage wider adoption across the banking ecosystem to strengthen national financial security.

Mule accounts, frequently used to launder money and facilitate cybercrime, have consistently posed difficulties for traditional detection approaches.

Digital ShramSetu

Mission Digital ShramSetu announced in October 2025, is a proposed national initiative to create an AI-driven ecosystem that makes technology accessible, affordable, and impactful for India's 490 million informal workers.

The mission harnesses AI, Blockchain, and Immersive Learning to dismantle structural constraints such as financial insecurity, limited market access, and lack of formal skilling.

It empowers workers with digital platforms to amplify their skills and increase productivity, ensuring they are integrated into the mainstream economy with dignity, thus ensuring financial inclusion.

By providing tools for social protection and real-time skill verification, the mission aims to turn the informal workforce into a primary driver for the Viksit Bharat 2047 vision.

Together, these policy initiatives ensure that AI adoption remains secure, inclusive, and transparent, aligning with India's long-term vision of a digitally empowered society.

AI-Based Credit Scoring: Expanding Access to Formal Credit

Digital advancements and AI are reshaping India's credit ecosystem by strengthening credit assessment and expanding lending access. Traditionally, access to formal credit was limited by the lack of verifiable financial histories, particularly for MSMEs, informal workers, and first-time borrowers. AI-powered solutions move beyond conventional credit scoring models and leverage alternative data such as digital payment transactions, GST filings, bank statements, and utility payments to assess creditworthiness. By converting digital footprints into dynamic risk profiles, AI enables faster, more accurate, and cost-efficient underwriting decisions. Moreover, AI-driven credit models have the potential to unlock an estimated credit gap of USD 130-170 billion in economic value thereby, reducing reliance on informal lending by MSMEs.

Alternative Credit Scoring (AI-Led Lending)

For the millions of Indians without a CIBIL score, AI serves as the new gatekeeper to credit. By leveraging the Unified Lending Interface (ULI), AI models analyze "digital footprints" to assess risk. ULI is a technology-based initiative to make frictionless credit available to every Indian and to further the Government's broader vision of digital empowerment, financial inclusion, and last-mile service delivery. It functions as a Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) in the lending space, integrating financial institutions and data providers through a standardised, API-based framework to support efficient and inclusive credit assessment.

Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) refers to interoperable digital systems- such as digital identity, payment platforms, and data exchange frameworks that enable secure and efficient service delivery.

Application Programming Interface (API) is a set of rules and protocols that allows different software applications to communicate and exchange data with each other.

CIBIL Score, issued by Credit Information Bureau (India) Limited (CIBIL), is a three-digit numeric summary of a user's credit profile and loan-worthiness, based on past repayment behaviour and credit records.

ULI enables digital access to multiple data sources, including authentication services, land records, satellite service, and other financial and non-financial datasets, to support loan processing.

As of December 12, 2025, 64 lenders (41 banks and 23 NBFCs) have been onboarded onto the platform. These lenders are utilising over 136 data services across 12 different loan journeys.

ULI is being expanded to include customers of Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) and District Central Co-operative Banks (DCCBs), enhancing credit access in rural and semi-urban areas.

Account Aggregator (AA) framework

Complementing these advancements is the Account Aggregator (AA) framework, introduced by the Reserve Bank of India as a financial data sharing system. The AA system enables consent-based, secure sharing of financial data across institutions, significantly reducing documentation requirements and turnaround time for loan approvals.

Account Aggregators (AAs) are NBFCs that facilitate the retrieval and consolidation of a customer's financial information. They transfer data from one financial institution to another based on an individual's instruction and consent.

The AA Framework, allows users to aggregate their financial information (like bank accounts, investments, loans, etc.) from multiple sources and share it with service providers (e.g., lenders, wealth managers) for services like loan applications or financial planning. Registration with the AA ecosystem is entirely voluntary for users. Currently, the RBI has granted Certificates of Registration to seventeen companies to operate as Account Aggregators.

It caters to the expanding market adoption across banking, securities, insurance, and pension sectors. With over 2.6 billion accounts enabled to share data, a total of 252.9 million users have linked their accounts on the AA framework (as on 31st December 2025). Notably, the AA ecosystem is strengthening the digital credit infrastructure and enhancing the effectiveness of AI-based credit models.

Conclusion

India's financial inclusion journey is transitioning from expanding access to enabling intelligent, AI-driven financial empowerment at scale. By leveraging advanced analytics, alternative data, and robust DPI, the focus is shifting towards deeper credit penetration, enhanced risk management, and stronger consumer protection. The evolving ecosystem anchored in collaborative efforts between regulators, financial institutions and fintechs, supported by frameworks such as the Account Aggregator is fostering a more transparent, efficient, and inclusive financial system.

As India advances towards its Viksit Bharat 2047 vision, AI-led financial inclusion is set to play a pivotal role in driving sustainable economic growth, positioning the country as a global leader in building a resilient, future-ready financial architecture.

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The Past May Have Been Simpler And Happier, But It Was Not Better

Nostalgia is a great comfort but, if history is any guide, optimism and curiosity are what move societies forward

Arnab Neil Sengupta

There is a familiar complaint heard at family gatherings, in television studios and on social media feeds these days: the world is falling apart.

Wars rage in places such as Iran, Lebanon, Africa's Sahel region and Ukraine. Heavily armed states and militias compete for power, influence and territory. Immigration has become a source of political anger in Europe, the US, Canada and Australia. Faith in mainstream political parties has weakened. Populists thrive on public frustration. White-collar workers fear that artificial intelligence may replace them. Climate disasters seem to strike every season.

It is no wonder that, for many young people, the future appears uncertain, bleak and exhausting. Against this backdrop, nostalgia has become fashionable. Many people look back at the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s through rose-tinted glasses and conclude that the past was not only simpler and happier, but also better.

It was not.

The danger lies in "golden age thinking" — the belief that the best days are permanently behind us. That mentality encourages pessimism and hopelessness, especially among the young.

As someone who has lived the better of his life in "the past," it was certainly simpler. Before smartphones and social media, people lived quieter lives. They spent more time speaking to one another, sometimes across garden fences, instead of staring at screens. Neighborhood playgrounds were crowded with children. Young people disappeared outdoors for hours without parents worrying about their safety. News arrived at fixed hours through newspapers or evening radio or TV bulletins, not every minute through notifications.

There were fewer distractions and less information overload. The average person did not have to wade through dozens of spam emails, short videos, memes and political arguments on WhatsApp groups before breakfast. For better or worse, ordinary people shared nothing about their vacations, personal lives or children's achievements with strangers. Life moved at a slower pace.

In many countries, there was also greater social stability. Lifetime employment was not unheard of. A worker could join a company in their 20s and retire from the same place decades later. New technologies often created more jobs than they destroyed despite fears of mass layoffs. Laborious factory work gave way to office work. Starting in the 1950s, entire industries grew around electronics, computers, aviation, finance and telecommunications.

The collapse of Soviet communism settled the long-running debate over the merits of capitalism, free markets and globalization.

A Victory in Europe Day celebration in Chester. (AFP/File)

The world seemed to be opening up rather than closing down. Air travel became steadily cheaper. International trade expanded rapidly. Western pop culture flourished. Hollywood, TV networks and music companies had enormous audiences and huge revenues, producing stars from Harry Belafonte to Khaled, whose fame and appeal crossed continents.

The international media also enjoyed greater public trust, not to mention profitability. While bias certainly existed, there were fewer accusations of "fake news," fewer conspiracy theories and less political tribalism surrounding journalism. Social media had not yet fragmented public discourse into millions of competing arguments and podcasts.

People's expectations were often more modest as well. A middle-class life did not seem to require yearly vacations, constant and costly upgrades of electronic devices or carefully curated online lifestyles. Many people, including my family and friends, were satisfied with far less material consumption than is considered normal today.

And yet, despite all this, the past was not a better time.

One reason is simple: medicine. Millions of people alive today would not have survived in earlier decades. Treatments for cancer, heart disease, diabetes and countless other conditions have improved dramatically. Vaccines (think shingles) prevent or diminish the risks associated with diseases that once terrified entire societies. Surgical procedures are safer, less painful and more sophisticated. Premature babies survive in far greater numbers. Elderly people live longer and remain active for longer.

Even where cures do not exist, quality of life has improved enormously in all but the poorest countries. Hearing aids, joint replacements, advanced pain treatments, antidepressants, mobility devices and home-care services allow people with ailments or disabilities to live fuller and more independent lives. In earlier generations, many people simply suffered in silence.

The same applies to life expectancy. Across much of the world, people today live significantly longer than their parents and grandparents did. Infant mortality has fallen sharply. Extreme poverty has declined globally over the past few decades, despite recent setbacks and inequalities.

Travel and communication have also been transformed beyond recognition since my childhood. Long-distance travel was once prohibitively expensive and available mainly to the wealthy. International phone calls were costly luxuries even until the 1990s. Today, a student in Riyadh can video call relatives in London instantly and cheaply. Families separated across continents can remain emotionally connected in ways previous generations could scarcely imagine.

Knowledge itself has expanded dramatically. Modern computing power and space telescopes have deepened humanity's understanding of the universe. Scientists can now study black holes, distant galaxies and planetary systems with astonishing precision. The application of AI, despite the fears surrounding it, is accelerating medical research, language translation and scientific discovery, to name just three fields.

Modern forecasting technologies have also saved countless lives. In the past, tsunamis, hurricanes and typhoons often struck populations with little or no warning. Today, satellites, sensors and advanced climate models allow governments to evacuate millions of people before disasters arrive.

Equally important, many injustices that once remained hidden are now exposed. Domestic violence, workplace abuse, corruption and discrimination often went unreported in earlier decades because victims lacked platforms and institutions willing to listen. Social media can be harmful and addictive, but it has also made it harder for powerful people to conceal wrongdoing.

Nostalgia also tends to overlook unpleasant realities. The supposedly "golden" decades were not free from fear or instability. The Cold War carried the constant threat of ideological subversion and nuclear annihilation. Terrorism existed long before the present era. Racism, sexism and discrimination were more openly accepted in many societies. Mental health problems were often stigmatized instead of treated.

Even economy-wise, the past was far from an era of stability. Inflationary pressures, oil shocks, currency devaluation and recessions repeatedly disrupted ordinary lives. Many countries experienced political violence, authoritarian rule, communist insurgencies or severe restrictions on freedom.

What has changed most is that modern technology continuously exposes humanity to every crisis, everywhere. A war, riot, flood or economic panic instantly enters millions of homes on the opposite side of the planet through smartphones and screens. Earlier generations were often protected from this relentless stream of breaking news simply because they did not know about every international problem in real time.

None of this, of course, means that today's fears are unjustified. The concerns about conflict, AI-driven job losses, immigration tensions and climate change are real. But every generation, especially the one that lived through the Cuban Missile Crisis and the protracted Cold War, has faced its own anxieties and uncertainties. The euphoric "end of history" period following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 was an exception, not the rule.

To sum up, the past was indeed simpler and, in some ways, it was happier too. But it was not better. Humanity today is healthier, more informed, more connected and more capable than at any previous point in history. The challenge for younger generations is not to yearn for a world they never lived in, but to build a future that preserves the best elements of the past while overcoming its many limitations.

Nostalgia is a great comfort but, if history is any guide, optimism and curiosity are what move societies forward.

• Arnab Neil Sengupta is a senior editor at Arab News. X: @arnabnsg. Source: Arab News. Disclaimer: Views expressed by writers in this section are their own and do not necessarily reflect Arab News' point of view

ChintanShivir: Aligning India's Sporting Future Through Shared Vision

Under the leadership of Narendra Modi, sport in India has moved from the margins to the mainstream. The Chintan Shivir brings together state governments, NGOs, corporates, federations, and grassroots institutions onto a common platform. Medal aspirations and mass participation are no longer separate conversations—they are part of the same continuum.

Pullela Gopichand

Having had the opportunity to be part of two ChintanShivirs, I can say with conviction that this is one of the most timely and impactful initiatives in Indian sport today. We find ourselves at a significant moment in our nation's sporting journey—one where intent, investment, and inspiration are converging like never before.

Over the past decade, under the leadership of Narendra Modi, sport in India has moved from the margins to the mainstream. There is a palpable national awareness about its importance—not just as a competitive pursuit, but as a vehicle for health, discipline, and national pride. Today, we see an ecosystem that is both vast and diverse: state governments, NGOs, corporates, federations, and grassroots institutions are all actively contributing to the growth of sport.

What makes the ChintanShivir particularly valuable is its ability to bring all these stakeholders onto a common platform. Sport, by its very nature, intersects with multiple sectors—manufacturing, entertainment, fitness, media and

education. The Shivir helps align these moving parts, creating a shared vision that is essential for long-term success. It brings the country's collective perspective to the forefront while also showcasing best practices from different states, encouraging replication and innovation.

More than just a conference, the ChintanShivir is a learning ecosystem. It allows stakeholders to exchange ideas, understand challenges, and collaboratively build solutions. It also serves as a powerful motivator—highlighting success stories and reinforcing the idea that sport in India is not limited to elite medals alone, but is about participation, inclusivity, and nation-building.

Initiatives like Fit India Movement, the celebration of International Day of Yoga, and community-driven activities such as cycling events have helped redefine how we view sport. The emphasis is now on "sport for all" alongside excellence at the highest level. Medal aspirations and mass participation are no longer separate conversations—they are part of the same continuum.

Hosting the Shivir in Srinagar added another layer of significance. The city's serene beauty provides not just a picturesque backdrop, but also a sense of calm reflection—something that is essential for meaningful dialogue.

A particularly important outcome of this ChintanShivir was the adoption of the Srinagar Khel Sankalp. This Sankalp is more than a statement of intent—it is a unifying framework that binds together the aspirations of all stakeholders in Indian sport. By clearly outlining shared goals, priorities, and responsibilities, it creates a roadmap that encourages collaboration rather than fragmentation.

The true strength of the Srinagar Khel Sankalp lies in its ability to bring diverse partners—governments, federations, private sector, and civil society—onto the same page. It reinforces the idea that India's sporting rise cannot be driven by isolated efforts. Instead, it must be powered by a coordinated, collaborative approach where resources, knowledge, and expertise are pooled together.

This alignment is critical if India is to achieve its long-term ambition of becoming one of the top 10 nations at the Olympic Games by 2036. Building world-class athletes requires not just talent, but a seamless ecosystem—grassroots identification, scientific training, infrastructure, coaching excellence, competition exposure, and sustained financial and institutional support. The Sankalp provides the strategic glue that can connect all these elements into a cohesive system.

What stands out most from these interactions is the optimism across the ecosystem. There is a shared belief that India's sporting future is bright, and that through collaboration, we can build a robust, inclusive, and high-performing sporting culture.

The ChintanShivir is, in many ways, a unique experiment—but one that is already proving to be successful. It underscores the importance of dialogue, alignment, and mutual understanding. For a country as diverse as India, such platforms are not just beneficial—they are essential.

If we are to truly realise our ambitions on the global sporting stage, these conversations must continue—and be backed by collective action. The Srinagar Khel Sankalp gives us that direction. The ChintanShivir gives us that platform. Together, they provide India with a powerful foundation to transform its sporting aspirations into sustained Olympic success.

The author is Chief National Coach for the India national badminton team

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs headed by Dr Radha Mohan Das Agrawal called on Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha at Lok Bhavan on Wednesday

Aarohan 2026

Minister Sharma to youth: Lead fight against drug abuse

Urges young minds to 'Rise, Shine and Conquer' through innovation, discipline, purpose

KT News Desk

Srinagar, May 13: Minister for Food, Civil Supplies & Consumer Affairs, Transport, Youth Services & Sports, Information Technology, and Science & Technology, Satish Sharma on Wednesday called upon the youth of the nation to become torchbearers of a drug-free, progressive and empowered India.

Addressing participants, dignitaries and youth delegates from across the country at the closing ceremony of Aarohan 2026, the Minister lauded the Department of Youth Services & Sports for organising the national-level event which brought together more than 300 young participants from nine States and Union Territories in Jammu and Kashmir.

Speaking on the theme of the festival, "Rise, Shine and Conquer", the Minister said that Aarohan 2026 had emerged as a vibrant platform showcasing the energy, innovation and leadership potential of India's youth. He highlighted that through initiatives like the Young Leaders Dialogue, Cultural Track and Hackathon, the festival successfully channelised the creativity and aspirations of young minds towards nation-building.

Satish Sharma expressed deep concern over the growing menace of drug abuse, describing it as one of the greatest challenges confronting the society today. He said that substance abuse was no longer a distant issue but a harsh reality affecting the schools, colleges and neighbourhoods across Jammu and Kashmir and the country.

"Drugs do not offer escape; they offer destruction. One moment of curiosity or peer pressure can derail a lifetime of promise," the Minister remarked, while urging the youth to safeguard their lives, ambitions and talents from the trap of addiction.

Yasha Mudgal reviews Capex Budget 2026–27 for Cooperative Department

Sets June 2026 deadline for completion of projects with over 70% physical progress

KT News Desk

Jammu, May 13: Commissioner Secretary Cooperative Department, Yasha Mudgal on Wednesday chaired a meeting at the Civil Secretariat to review and finalize the Capex Budget proposals for the financial year 2026–27 pertaining to the Cooperative Department. The meeting was attended by Director Finance, Cooperative Department, Rashim Deepika and other senior officers of the Department.

During the meeting, the Director Finance briefed regarding the proposed Capex Budget allocations for 2026–27 under various sectors and schemes of the department. The proposals covered ongoing works, proposed new projects, infrastructural upgradation, modernization initiatives and other development projects aimed at strengthening the cooperative sector across the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

A comprehensive review of the ongoing schemes, infrastructure projects, financial performance and administrative functioning of various cooperative institutions was also undertaken during the meeting.

Stressing the need for optimum and judicious utilization of Capex funds in a transparent and time-bound manner, Yasha Mudgal observed that the Capex Budget should focus on creation of durable assets, strengthening institutional infrastructure and enhancing service delivery mechanisms within the cooperative sector.

Expressing concern over the department's expenditure performance during the previous financial year, which stood at only 58 percent, Yasha Mudgal directed the officers to adopt a result-oriented approach and work tirelessly to achieve at least 80 percent expenditure during the next six months.

CONTD. FROM FRONT PAGE

J&K people want

emphasized on rehabilitation and asked the officers and stakeholders to treat drug addicts as a victim trapped in the dark web of narcotics.

"The drug addicts need our compassion. They are our responsibility. We have to support every young man and woman seeking counseling or treatment. We must ensure they return to society's mainstream. Senior officials must ensure swift action on every complaint and tip coming through the Manas portal and toll-free number. This has to be done with commitment. Every citizen of Kupwara must remember that we will reach every young person extending a hand for help. Together, we will dismantle the drug smuggling networks, free our youth from addiction's clutches, and reconnect them to the path of progress," the Lieutenant Governor said.

"In the days ahead, our crackdown against drug smuggling network will grow tougher and more powerful. The women of Dardpora village had met and they shared how drug smuggling funded weapons that slaughtered their families. That's why I say it loud and clear that drug traffickers and terrorists are inseparable partners in crime," the Lieutenant Governor said.

LG Sinha said that over the past 32 days, civil and police administration struck a devastating blow to the entire drug smuggling ecosystem and this people's movement is transforming into a revolution against narcotics.

"Our consistent action is crippling narco-terrorist networks. Properties worth crores have been seized, assets confiscated, and passports of 15 smugglers recommended for cancellation. Over 730 smugglers and peddlers have been arrested," he said.

The Lieutenant Governor stated that at the start of this campaign in April, many doubted the possibility of a mass movement against drugs and underestimated the strength of an awakened public and the impact of determined governance with citizen support.

"With people's participation and massive support across the Union Territory, a truly organic movement has emerged across villages, urban neighborhoods, schools, colleges, and the streets of Jammu Kashmir.

"This fight against drugs is a long one. For decades, people in Jammu Kashmir saw drugs and terrorism as separate threats. But they are not two problems but they are the two heads of the same snake. One head makes money through drugs while the other uses that money to fuel terrorism. Our terrorist neighbor is involved in financing terror through drug smuggling, turning both drugs and money against innocent Kashmiris," the Lieutenant Governor said.

He observed that the drug smuggling is destroying families and communities and it is providing terror groups their oxygen.

On the occasion, the Lieutenant Governor unveiled the trophies of Kupwara Forest League by Forest Department and Youth Service and Sports's Volleyball Championship under Nasha Mukt J&K Abhiyan.

He also felicitated the winner of reel making competition on drug abuse. (KNO)

Modi Govt committed

by launching new cooperative societies, self-help groups, tourism circuits, and cottage industries, especially empowering women and youth. Second, ensuring physical and digital connectivity to every Vibrant Village, while building strong educational infrastructure. Third, ensuring full saturation of all central government and UT administration schemes. The infrastructure focuses on 4 thematic areas- all-weather road connectivity, telecom, television access, and electrification.

"Every village deserves All-weather roads, modern schools & abundant opportunities for the youth that is the vision driving us to transform Kupwara's border villages into model villages post-2019. Together, we will turn our resolve into reality," the Lieutenant Governor said.

He said that it is Central Government's commitment to ensure that every child of Trehgam receives the same quality education available in J&K's cities.

I want farmers here to access superior seeds, reliable irrigation, and strong market linkages. Trehgam has made remarkable strides in self-employment, with 205 self-help groups and 85 units under Mission Youth already operational. The revival of the historic Sharda Temple in Teetwal has breathed new life into tourism sector. In 2018-19, only 6,900 tourists visited Kupwara, however, in 2024-25, that number surged to 3,77,000. I'm confident that in the next one or two years, every border village will script its own story of prosperity," the Lieutenant Governor said.

The Lieutenant Governor recalled that he had visited Machil on 5th October, 2020, and Keran and Machil areas were connected with Grid Power after 70 years of waiting.

"At that time, reliable power reached about 70% of families in Kupwara's other villages. In just four years, we have extended it to nearly 95% of households. Telecom connectivity in border villages now stands at 88%. Concerned officials should ensure 100% coverage by the end of this year. Every family in border villages is serving the nation, and that service deserves honor in a transformed quality of life. Through PMGSY and PWD, we have already provided all-weather roads to 15 out of 16 Vibrant Villages in the past. Funding for the last one has arrived from the central government, and work will commence soon. We had planned grid power for every household in all 16 Vibrant Villages and so far 95% saturation has been achieved," the Lieutenant Governor said.

The Lieutenant Governor said through a Whole of Government Approach, officials should dedicate themselves to achieve the target and link villages like Trehgam to the national mainstream.

The Lieutenant Governor highlighted that the administration is looking beyond the government schemes and programmes to create sustainable opportunities for the youth of the villages like Trehgam.

He emphasized that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds are being channeled into building stadiums and playgrounds across the region.

The Lieutenant Governor also reiterated that the Government of India is committed to complete rehabilitation of terror victims and flood affected families.

The project inaugurated by the Lieutenant Governor include establishment of 26 Smart Classrooms in 6 Vibrant Blocks under Aspirational District Programme. The projects for which the foundation stones were laid today are- development of Hill Top Playground, Trehgam, Kupwara at a cost of Rs 1.60 crore and development, renovation/construction and preservation of Cultural Heritage site Shiv Temple at Trehgam, costing Rs 1.94 crores.

The Lieutenant Governor handed over appointment letters to SPOs, jobs and sanction letters to local youth and beneficiaries under various schemes. He also flagged off mobile tuberculosis (TB) Diagnosis and Awareness vehicle.

Mir Saifullah, Member of Legislative Assembly Trehgam; Shaleen Kabra, Additional Chief Secretary, Jal Shakti Department; Ashwani Kumar, Additional Chief Secretary, Power Development Department; Anil Kumar Singh, Additional Chief Secretary, Public Works (R&B) Department; M Raju, Commissioner Secretary, GAD; Vikramjit Singh, Commissioner Secretary Industries; VK Birdi; IGP Kashmir; R. Alice Vaz, Commissioner Secretary to Government, Planning and Information; Amitava Chatterjee, MD & CEO, J&K Bank; kant Balasaheb Suse, Deputy Commissioner Kupwara, senior officials, and people from different walks of life in large number were present. (KNO)

Omar govt's hqrs

who have been provided land for peanuts. On the other hand, it has shut its eyes to the problems faced by the common people of J&K. You should visit the hospitals and see that there are no doctors or facilities. The roads across the Union Territory are in shambles, and instead of receiving 200 free units of electricity, people are burdened with hefty power bills," Sharma added.

On the controversy surrounding the demand for a liquor ban, the LoP said Omar Abdullah's statement on the issue reeked of arrogance. "This was not only a U-turn from promises made by the National Conference but also shows arrogant behaviour as usual. One of their MPs talked about a liquor ban during the campaign," he said.

On Sunday, Omar Abdullah said that no one was being forced to consume alcohol and that people visited liquor shops by their own choice. After facing criticism over the issue, the Chief Minister said his comments were being "twisted" by political opponents.

To a question about controversy over his remarks on emergence of Eknath Shinde in the National Conference, Sharma said the party is a sinking ship and will drown at any cost.

"The National Conference is a sinking ship. While its members are desperate to desert it, nobody is yet ready to accept them. I can tell you with authority this government will not last its full term and its downfall has begun," he said.

Sharma said it wouldn't be appropriate to speak on RS polls cross-voting at this stage. (KNO)

LG, DGP, top officers

on maintaining economic growth while encouraging citizens and companies to use resources more carefully.

PM Modi had recently appealed to people to reduce avoidable fuel consumption, use public transport where possible, and adopt work from home or virtual meetings in situations where physical travel can be avoided.

Officials said the appeal should be seen as a call for prudent and responsible consumption during a period of global uncertainty, especially due to tensions in the Middle East and fluctuations in international crude oil markets.

They stressed that the word "austerity" creates a wrong impression because it generally refers to fiscal tightening measures such as cuts in public expenditure, subsidies and welfare spending. "No such measures are under consideration," they added. (KNO)

Controversy erupts

Muhammad Yousuf Tarigami, independent Muzaffar Iqbal Khan, and Congress's Nizamuddin Bhat will respectively head the Public Accounts Committee, Environment Committee, Subordinate Legislation Committee, and Ethics Committee.

In a statement issued here this evening, Leader of Opposition Sunil Kumar Sharma said that Speaker Abdul Rahim Rather's decision to hand over the chairmanship of eight out of nine House committees to MLAs of the ruling National Conference-led alliance smacks of a move to turn the J&K Assembly into the National Conference's headquarters, Nawai Subah.

He said that the Jammu & Kashmir Assembly belongs to the people of Jammu and Kashmir and that the BJP will resist any move to turn it into the fiefdom of any party.

"The decision to appoint eight MLAs of the ruling party as heads of the committees is totally unjustified and an insult to the mandate of the people of J&K," he said, adding that the universally accepted principle of proportional representation has been trampled by the Speaker.

He said the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Jammu & Kashmir Legislative Assembly empower the Speaker to nominate chairman of House committees, but discretion must be exercised fairly in all decisions. (KNO)

Rainfall activity to

Qazigund recorded a high of 22.4 Degrees Celsius, Pahalgam 17 Degrees Celsius and Gulmarg 13.4 Degrees Celsius.

In the Jammu division, Jammu city recorded a maximum temperature of 34.7 degrees Celsius, while Katra registered 31.4 Degrees Celsius and Banihal 20.6 Degrees Celsius.

The MeT office said Jammu and Kashmir is likely to witness partly cloudy weather with spells of light rain and thundershowers at scattered to many places on May 14, accompanied by thunder and gusty winds at a few places during afternoon hours, while light rain and thundershowers are likely at scattered places between May 15 and 16.

The weather department has also warned of the possibility of thunder, lightning and gusty winds with speeds of 40-50 kmph at a few places in both Kashmir and Jammu divisions.

"People are advised to suspend boating and shikara riding generally towards afternoon and late afternoon hours," the advisory said.

The MeT office said weather conditions are expected to remain generally dry from May 21 to 23. (KNO)

Northern Army

by all Joint Control Centres (#JCC) and received comprehensive operational updates on the prevailing security situation in the presence of key stakeholders."

The Army said Lieutenant General Sharma emphasised strengthening inter-agency synergy to ensure rapid intelligence dissemination and effective execution of joint operations.

VISITS NORTH KASHMIR

Earlier the Army's Northern Commander visited forward areas along the Line of Control (LoC) in North Kashmir to review summer operational strategy and review operational preparedness across the region.

In a post on X, Army's Northern Command, as per KNO, said that Lt Gen Sharma visited forward areas along the LoC in north Kashmir to assess the prevailing security dynamics, review the summer strategy and evaluate operational preparedness across the region.

"During interaction with the troops deployed along the #LoC, the Army Commander appreciated their unwavering spirit, operational acumen and tireless commitment in service to the nation. He encouraged all ranks to pursue excellence in operational capability, remain vigilant, responsive and combat-ready at all times," the post said. (KNO)

J&K emerges 'High

across four key pillars, namely Logistics Infrastructure, Logistics Services, Operating and Regulatory Environment and Sustainable Logistics.

The recognition accorded to Jammu and Kashmir as a "High Performer" is a testament to the continuous and concerted efforts being undertaken by the J&K Government to strengthen connectivity, improve logistics infrastructure, facilitate trade and create an enabling business environment in the Union Territory.

The achievement is expected to further enhance investor confidence and support the Government's vision of promoting sustainable industrial growth, trade facilitation and economic development in Jammu and Kashmir.

Among the Union Territories, New Delhi was adjudged as an "Exemplar", while Jammu and Kashmir secured the status of "High Performer" alongside States and Union Territories including Gujarat, Kerala, Maharashtra, Haryana, Telangana, Chhattisgarh, Bihar and Puducherry.

The LEADS survey is a flagship annual assessment undertaken by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Government of India, to evaluate logistics performance across States and Union Territories with the objective of enhancing logistics efficiency and reducing logistics costs across the country.

CM thanks EAM for

Kuwait City while returning from work. Among the victims, five hailed from Surankote in Poonch district, while one belonged to Thanamandi in Rajouri district.

The Chief Minister conveyed his heartfelt condolences to the families of the deceased and prayed for eternal peace to the departed souls. He prayed for strength and fortitude to the bereaved families to bear the irreparable loss.

Hailstorm-hit growers

The recent hailstorm, accompanied by intense rainfall, caused extensive damage to apple orchards, vegetables and other standing crops across many areas of north and south Kashmir. Growers said the weather has shattered hopes of a stable harvest season.

Growers from Pattan said they had never witnessed such a destructive hailstorm before.

"We have never witnessed this kind of hailstorm. It lasted for nearly half an hour and destroyed everything," a group of growers from Pattan village said.

Ghulam Mohammed, a 65-year-old resident of Chanderseer, said the losses have pushed many families into uncertainty. "Our lives used to depend on it, but nothing remained. Where should we go and whom should we ask?" he said.

The affected growers appealed to the administration to understand the scale of damage and provide immediate support. (KNO)

Govt to provide

directed that adequate stock of food grains and other essential commodities under the Public Distribution System (PDS) and FCI be maintained at all depots and distribution points across Jammu and Kashmir. He emphasized that timely distribution and proper monitoring mechanisms should be put in place to avoid any shortage or disruption in supply.

Satish Sharma further stated that an additional quota of food grains would be made available in view of the increased demand during Eid and Muharram festivities so that people across Jammu and Kashmir receive adequate supplies without any inconvenience.

Reviewing the availability of LPG, the Minister instructed Oil Marketing Companies and allied agencies to ensure sufficient stock of both domestic and commercial LPG cylinders. He further directed the agencies to streamline the supply chain and distribution process to effectively meet the increased demand during the festive season.

The Minister also instructed the concerned authorities to explore the possibility of reducing the waiting period for booking and refilling domestic LPG cylinders in order to facilitate consumers during Eid and Muharram.

Directing for strict vigilance in markets, Satish Sharma asked the concerned enforcement agencies to undertake regular market checking drives across Jammu and Kashmir. He instructed the Food Safety Department and Legal Metrology Organization to intensify inspections to curb overpricing, hoarding, black marketing, and sale of substandard goods, while ensuring strict action against violators.

The Minister also directed the Srinagar Municipal Corporation and Lakes Conservation and Management Authority to undertake extensive cleanliness drives in their respective jurisdictions in view of the forthcoming religious occasions.

Further, the Minister directed the Power Development Department (PDD) and Public Health Engineering (PHE) Department to ensure uninterrupted supply of electricity and drinking water so that people do not face any inconvenience during Eid and Muharram.

Speaking during the meeting, Tanvir Sadiq emphasized the need for coordinated field-level monitoring to ensure that the benefits of government arrangements reach people effectively during the festive period. He stressed that special attention should be given to areas witnessing large public gatherings and religious congregations so that adequate civic amenities and essential supplies remain available at all times.

Tanvir Sadiq also called for enhanced sanitation measures, proper street lighting and improved water and electricity supply in areas associated with Eid and Muharram gatherings. He urged all departments to remain responsive to public grievances and ensure prompt redressal of issues during the upcoming religious occasions.

The Minister further directed officers to ensure adequate availability of essential commodities in accordance with anticipated demand and past consumption trends so that the public does not face any difficulty during the upcoming religious occasions.

PM Modi reduces convoy size as austerity step

Several BJP CMs follow suit

PTI

New Delhi, May 13: Prime Minister Narendra Modi has significantly reduced his convoy size, days after he made an appeal for austerity and urged the citizens to curb the use of fuel-driven vehicles.

The move has prompted several BJP chief ministers to similarly adopt measures and cut their respective vehicle fleets.

A downsizing in the prime minister's convoy was implemented in his recent domestic visits, official sources said.

The reduction was done while maintaining essential security components as per the SPG protocol.

Modi's convoy size was cut in Gujarat and Assam, immediately after his speech in Hyderabad -- during which he suggested an array of austerity measures.

Sources said the prime minister also asked for electric vehicles to be included in his convoy, wherever possible, without making new purchases.

Taking a cue, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has directed an immediate 50 per cent reduction in the fleet of vehicles accompanying the chief minister and ministers, and urged people to cut fuel consumption and avoid unnecessary gold purchases in view of the prevailing global situation.

Chairing a meeting of the chief secretary, DGP, additional chief secretaries and principal secretaries of all departments, Adityanath appealed to people to adopt the prime minister's call for austerity measures in a practical manner across the state.

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav has announced that he will use a minimum number of vehicles for his convoy and asked his ministerial colleagues to do the same. He also urged people for increased use of public transport.

"Until the next order, there will be a minimum number of vehicles in my cavalcade from a security perspective, and there will be no vehicle rallies. All ministers will also use a minimum number of vehicles while travelling," Yadav said. Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta has also announced limits on official vehicles used by ministers, MLAs and other public representatives.

She further urged Delhi residents to adopt carpooling and make greater use of buses and metro services instead of private vehicles in view of the prevailing global energy supply uncertainty.

Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma similarly directed that his convoy use be minimised and unnecessary vehicles should not be used, especially for security purposes.

He also instructed all officials and public representatives, including the chief secretary, to adopt similar practices.

The Maharashtra government has directed all ministers to obtain prior approval from Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis before using aircraft for official travel.

Gujarat Governor Acharya Devvrat announced that he will travel within Gujarat using trains, state transport buses and public transport instead of helicopters and flights, while also reducing the size of official convoys to save fuel.

Gujarat Deputy Chief Minister Harsh Sanghvi also cancelled his planned trip to the United States, after the prime minister's appeal for reducing foreign travel.

Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Kumar Chaudhary has announced that he has personally reduced the number of vehicles he uses by half and will undertake official travel only when necessary.

Bihar's two other ministers, Leshi Singh and Sheela Mandal, have also announced that they would personally initiate austerity measures.

Amid the crisis in West Asia, Modi on Sunday made a push for austerity while addressing a rally organised by the Telangana BJP in Hyderabad.

The prime minister suggested reducing petrol and diesel consumption, using metro rail services in cities, carpooling, increased use of electric vehicles, utilising railway services for parcel movement and working from home to conserve foreign exchange.

Govt raises import duty on gold, silver to 15 pc to curb non-essential imports

PTI

New Delhi, May 13: The government on Wednesday hiked import duties on gold and silver to 15 per cent from 6 per cent as part of measures to curb inbound shipments of precious metals amid a rising import bill due to the West Asia crisis.

Days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's clarion call for curbs on gold purchases, along with other austerity measures to save on foreign exchange, the Finance Ministry, in a notification, hiked the social welfare surcharge (SWS) and the agriculture infrastructure and development cess (AIDC), effective May 13.

The duty hikes will raise the overall customs duty on gold to 15 per cent.

India's gold imports surged more than 24 per cent to an all-time high of USD 71.98 billion in 2025-26. In volume terms, however, the shipments dipped 4.76 per cent to 721.03 tonnes in 2025-26.

The prices of gold have risen from USD 76,617.48/KG in FY25 to USD 99,825.38/KG in FY26.

In the national capital, the price of gold increased by Rs 1,500, or nearly 1 per cent, to Rs 1,56,800 per 10 grams on Tuesday from Monday's closing level of Rs 1,55,300 per 10 grams. Silver prices also advanced by Rs 12,000, or 4.53 per cent, to Rs 2,77,000 per kg.

In the international market, spot gold slipped USD 42.33, or 1 per cent, to USD 4,692.64 per ounce while silver fell 3.04 per cent to USD 83.49 per ounce.

The government in the 2024-25 budget had cut customs duty on gold to 6 per cent to boost the domestic gems and jewellery industry, curb illegal smuggling, and bring down local prices. India had, in 2022, raised gold import tax to 15 per cent to check CAD (capital account deficit) amid a falling rupee due to the Russia-Ukraine war that began in February 2022.

India is the world's second-biggest gold consumer after China. The imports are largely driven by the jewellery industry.

Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran, on Tuesday, said that the ongoing West Asia crisis is a "live balance of payments stress test", with direct consequences for inflation, the current account, and the exchange rate.

BoP (balance of payment) is the difference between inflows into and outflows of foreign exchange from the country in a particular period of time.

The Indian rupee hit a record low of 95.63 against the US dollar on Tuesday.

Modi, on Sunday, called for judicious use of fuel, postponement of gold purchases and foreign travel, among other measures, to conserve foreign exchange amid the West Asia crisis.

Addressing a rally organised by the Telangana BJP in Hyderabad, he suggested reducing petrol and diesel consumption, using metro rail services in cities, carpooling, increased use of electric vehicles (EVs), utilising railway services for parcel movement, and working from home to conserve foreign exchange amid the crisis in West Asia.

India is already battling a high import bill from oil and fertiliser due to the US-Iran war, which has been ongoing for the last 10 weeks, leading to the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz. India imports 60 per cent of its LPG usage, and of that, 90 per cent flows through the now-closed Strait of Hormuz.

Pure' inter-faith love fine, plot to lure Hindu girls problematic: RSS on 'love jihad'

PTI

New Delhi, May 13: No one can question "sheer pure love" even if it's between individuals of different religions, but any planned conspiracy to take away Hindu girls is definitely problematic, top RSS functionary Dattatreya Hosabale has said.

Speaking exclusively to PTI Videos, he said there are an umpteen number of cases among Swayamsevaks who have married across castes, religions and even nationalities for "pure love" and the Sangh has always accepted it as natural.

"We have welcomed, celebrated and attended those weddings," the RSS General Secretary said in a rare and free-wheeling interview.

"If it is sheer pure love, no question. When it is jihad, there is a question," he said.

Asked how he defines 'love jihad', a term often used by the Hindu right wing for companionship between a Muslim man and a Hindu woman, Hosabale said, "The thing is nobody has (defined it). Love jihad, the term, was first used by some high court judge. So it is not our contribution."

"The thing is that if two individuals are in love, then there is no religion, nationality, et cetera. So that love is pure."

But, he added, when this becomes an agenda and there is a planned conspiracy to take away Hindu girls, then it raises a question and causes friction.

"Then this DNA thing doesn't work. Because even with that (same) DNA, if somebody is hijacking a girl from some village, leave alone Muslims, it is not love," he said, referring to Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat's comments about Hindus and Muslims of India having the same DNA.

He stressed that he was not talking only about Hindu girls and it cannot be allowed even if a girl from any other community is kidnapped.

"You cannot say that 'as we belong to one DNA, it's okay'. It is not. That is why it should be a socially acceptable thing. Love is not barred in a society," he said.

Asked specifically whether he was saying that the Sangh was not against a love marriage between individuals of different faiths or communities, he said that there are many families of Swayamsevaks where people have married outside their caste, community or religion.

"We do not publicise it as we accept it as a natural thing," he said.

At the same time, he said, what is being referred to as 'love jihad' cannot be ignored, as such cases are being reported in large numbers and heard in courts every month.

"Many girls have come back and they have told their sad stories... There are around 20,000 cases that have been documented. All these things cannot happen," he said.

He also wondered whether love happens only one way. "All cases of Hindu girls and Muslim boys? So that means this love has only one dimension. Then it is not love. There is a conspiracy," he said.

On another question about Bhagwat's comments about the need for Hindus to have more children, Hosabale said it is important for family security and several other reasons.

"If there is only one child, one child norm, then if something happens to the child at some age, what will happen to the parents in their old age?

"Secondly, if there is only one child who gets all the love and everything, there is a risk that the child develops an ego or loneliness.

"Siblings help us learn love, sharing and compassion. But if a child grows without a sibling, there can be psychological problems or ego or loneliness," he said.

He further said that having more children is also important for the community and the nation.

"We are creating economy, we are creating wealth, we are growing everything. But in the future, if the nation becomes a nation of old people, there would be a problem," he said while referring to Japan.

Hosabale said India is an ancient nation, but it is also a young nation even after thousands of years.

"We should remain young as a nation," he said while advocating for people to have more children.

NEET paper leak: CBI visits NTA headquarters

Accused taken into custody

PTI

New Delhi, May 13: The CBI on Wednesday visited the National Testing Agency (NTA) headquarters to collect documents related to the NEET UG examination, which was cancelled following allegations of paper leak, officials said.

The team also spoke to officials involved in the examination process, they said. The agency has taken custody of several suspects who were arrested and detained by state police in connection with the paper leak case.

Shubham Khairnar (30), resident of Nandgaon in Nashik district, was sent to CBI transit remand by a local magistrate court there. Nashik Police had detained Khairnar on Tuesday following a request from Rajasthan Police.

Several suspects who were detained by Rajasthan Police were also examined by the CBI in connection with the case, according to officials.

The agency is also examining the groups on a messaging application on which the papers were circulated to several individuals.

The CBI had registered an FIR and formed teams to probe the NEET UG alleged paper leak case, which resulted in the cancellation of the paper held on May 3.

The NEET-UG 2026 was conducted across 551 Indian cities and at 14 overseas centres. Nearly 23 lakh candidates had registered for the test, which was administered by the NTA at centres across the country. According to the NTA, information relating to alleged malpractice was received on the evening of May 7, four days after the examination was held. The NTA said the inputs were escalated to central agencies the following morning for "independent verification and necessary action".

The Rajasthan Police's SOG claimed that a "guess paper" for chemistry, allegedly circulated among students ahead of the examination, had approximately 410 questions, including roughly 120 questions that appeared in the test.

TVK regime wins trust vote in TN Assembly

PTI

Chennai, May 13: Chief Minister C Joseph Vijay-led TVK government won the trust vote in the Tamil Nadu Assembly on Wednesday with support from parties including the Congress, VCK, and the AIADMK rebel faction led by leaders SP Velumani and C Ve Shanmugam.

As soon as the House convened, Chief Minister Vijay moved a vote of confidence resolution, and the MLAs belonging to all parties spoke on the motion.

Speaker JCD Prabhakar, after conducting division-wise voting, declared that the resolution moved by the chief minister seeking vote of confidence of the Assembly has won, and as many as 144 MLAs voted with the government, 22 MLAs opposed and five took a neutral stand, including the PMK and BJP.

The main opposition DMK staged walk out before voting on the resolution.

MLA S Kamaraj, expelled from AMMK, was among those who voted in favour of the government.

Hinduism way of life, not mandatory to go to temple to prove belief: SC

PTI

New Delhi, May 13: Observing that Hinduism is a way of life, the Supreme Court on Wednesday said it is not necessary for a Hindu to mandatorily go to a temple or perform a ritual in order to remain a Hindu and even lighting a lamp inside house is enough to prove one's belief.

The observation of a nine-judge constitution bench headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant came while hearing petitions related to discrimination against women at religious places, including the Sabarimala temple in Kerala, and on the ambit of religious freedom practised by multiple faiths, including Dawoodi Bohras.

Justices B V Nagarathna, M M Sundresh, Ahsanuddin Amanullah, Aravind Kumar, Augustine George Masih, Prasanna B Varale, R Mahadevan and Joymalya Bagchi are also part of the nine-judge bench.

As the hearing commenced on 15th day of hearing, advocate Dr G Mohan Gopal, appearing for one of the intervenors submitted that there has been demand for social justice emerging from within religious communities.

"Hinduism was defined as a religious category. Thereafter, in 1966, it was held that a Hindu is one who accepts the Vedas as the highest authority in all matters religion and philosophy. They never asked me. None of us ever said that.

"Now, I have the highest respect for the Vedas and great admiration for it. But is it a fact that every person today classified as Hindu accepts the Vedas as the highest authority in all spiritual and philosophical matters?" he asked.

Responding to his submission, Justice Nagarathna said, "That is why Hinduism is called as a way of life. It is not necessary for a Hindu to mandatorily go to a temple or perform a ritual in order to remain a Hindu."

She said one need not be ritualistic and nobody can come in the way for people having their faith.

CJI also remarked, "Even if an individual lights a lamp inside his hut is enough to prove his religion."

Assam cabinet approves implementation of UCC, bill in assembly on May 26: Himanta

PTI

Guwahati, May 13: The Assam Cabinet on Wednesday approved the implementation of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in the state, but the tribal population will be kept outside its purview, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

The UCC Bill will be laid before the new legislative assembly on May 26, the chief minister said at a press conference here after chairing the first cabinet meeting of his second term as the head of the government.

"This is a major decision taken in the first cabinet meeting and aligns with the commitment we made during the elections," he said.

Sarma said Uttarakhand, Goa and Gujarat have already implemented the UCC, but his government has customised it for the requirements of Assam.

"We have completely exempted the tribal population from the purview of UCC. All rituals, traditions and customs practised by the people of Assam outside the scope of UCC," he said.

Trump vows to push Xi to 'open up' China at superpower summit

AFP

Beijing, May 13: US President Donald Trump said he would ask Xi Jinping to "open up" China to American firms as he headed to Beijing on Wednesday for a high-stakes summit that will also bring up the Iran war.

In a sign of Trump's focus on business, Nvidia chief Jensen Huang boarded Air Force One during a stopover in Alaska, with Tesla's Elon Musk also traveling on the presidential plane to China.

"I will be asking President Xi, a Leader of extraordinary distinction, to 'open up' China so that these brilliant people can work their magic, and help bring the People's Republic to an even higher level!" Trump wrote on social media after departing Washington.

A host of other top CEOs, including Apple's Tim Cook, will also be in Beijing for the visit, the first by a US president to China in nearly a decade.

But Trump's ambitions to ramp up trade will have to contend with political frictions over Taiwan and the war in the Middle East, which already delayed the trip from March.

As he departed the White House, Trump said he expected a "long talk" with Xi about Iran, which sells most of its US-sanctioned oil to China.

But he also downplayed disagreements, telling reporters that "I don't think we need any help with Iran" from China and that Xi had been "relatively good" on the topic. The Chinese foreign ministry said Wednesday it "welcomes" Trump's visit and that "China stands ready to work with the United States ... to expand cooperation and manage differences."

Yet Beijing is growing impatient for peace, with Foreign Minister Wang Yi urging his Pakistani counterpart on Tuesday to step up mediation efforts between Iran and the United States.

This week's trip — the first since Trump visited Beijing in 2017 — will involve highly anticipated talks with Xi on Thursday and Friday, as well as lavish pomp and ceremony.

The packed itinerary includes a state banquet in Beijing's Great Hall of the People and a tea reception.

Trump said Monday he would speak to Xi about US arms sales to Taiwan, the self-governing democracy claimed by China — a departure from historic US insistence that it will not consult Beijing on its support to the island.

China reiterated its strong opposition to the arms sales on Wednesday, calling on Washington to honor its commitments ahead of Trump's arrival for the summit.

The US is bound by law to provide Taiwan with the means to defend itself, despite a lack of formal diplomatic ties. In December, the Trump administration announced an $11 billion weapons package for Taiwan, the largest ever.

Zhang Han, a spokesperson for China's Taiwan Affairs Office, said Taiwan is an internal issue and a matter for the Chinese people.

'Stopping Iran's nuclear program outweighs Americans' economic pain'

REUTERS

Washington, May 13: US President Donald Trump said that Americans' financial struggles are not a factor in his decision-making as he seeks to negotiate an end to the Iran war, saying that preventing Tehran from acquiring a nuclear weapon is his top priority.

Asked by a reporter to what extent Americans' financial situations were motivating him to strike a deal, Trump said: "Not even a little bit."

"The only thing that matters, when I'm talking about Iran, they can't have a nuclear weapon," Trump said before departing the White House for a trip to China. "I don't think about Americans' financial situation. I don't think about anybody. I think about one thing: We cannot let Iran have a nuclear weapon. That's all. That's the only thing that motivates me."

Trump's remarks are likely to draw scrutiny from critics who argue the administration should balance geopolitical objectives with the economic impact on Americans, particularly as cost-of-living concerns remain a top issue for voters ahead of the November midterm elections.

Asked to elaborate on the president's comments, White House Communications Director Steven Cheung said that Trump's "ultimate responsibility is the safety and security of Americans. Iran cannot have a nuclear weapon, and if action wasn't taken, they'd have one, which threatens all Americans."

Trump is under growing pressure from fellow Republicans who fear economic pain caused by the war could spark a backlash against the party and cost it control of the House of Representatives and possibly the Senate in November.

Russia to fulfil all agreements on energy supply to India: FM Lavrov

PTI

Moscow, May 13: Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has pledged that agreements on energy supplies to India will be fulfilled despite unfair external competition, as he underlined that the relations between the two countries are based on friendship and there is no scenario in which their paths would diverge.

In an interview with Russia Today-India ahead of his visit to New Delhi this week, Lavrov also praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying he is one of the most energetic leaders the world has ever seen.

"I can guarantee that India's interests as they apply to Russian supplies will not suffer. We will do everything to ensure that this unfair and dishonest competition does not damage our agreements," he said.

Lavrov pointed out that Russia has never failed to fulfil its obligations to India or anyone else when it comes to energy supplies.

"The Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant is our flagship project. It meets a significant share of India's needs," he said. "Cooperation on the construction of new power units for this nuclear plant is continuing. Even so, India needs more. We continue supplying hydrocarbons such as gas, oil, and coal." The Kudankulam nuclear power plant is being built in Tamil Nadu with the technical assistance of Russia. The construction began in March 2002. Since February 2016, the first power unit of the Kudankulam NPP has been steadily operating at its design capacity of 1,000 MW.

The plant is expected to start operating at full capacity in 2027, according to Russian state media.

Lavrov said Prime Minister Modi is "one of the most energetic leaders the world has ever known."

"He possesses great energy and channels it towards extremely important goals such as achieving maximum sovereignty across all spheres: the economy, the military, defence, culture, and the preservation of India's civilisational wealth, which is unmatched by any other country."

Lavrov said the relations between India and Russia are based on friendship and there is no scenario in which their paths would diverge.

"There isn't just one word for these relations. Not because human languages aren't rich enough, but because it is hard to imagine a relationship so full and deep," he said while replying to a question.

"A situation where our paths diverge simply does not exist — it is unthinkable. We began our conversation with the very foundation of Russian-Indian relations: friendship," Lavrov noted.

Stating that 'Hindi-Rusi bhai bhai' (Indians and Russians are brothers), Lavrov said that's not just a fun slogan to chant, it has become part of our culture.

ICC Test Rankings

Bumrah maintains top spot, Jaiswal, Gill placed at No. 8, 9 respectively

PTI

Dubai, May 13: India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah maintained his pole position among Test bowlers in the latest ICC rankings published on Wednesday.

Yashasvi Jaiswal and Shubman Gill were placed 8th and 9th among the batters respectively with former England Test skipper Joe Root leading the charts with 880 points.

Jaiswal has 750 points and Gill, who has climbed a spot, has accumulated 730 points. Harry Brook is second in the list followed by Travis Head and Steve Smith respectively.

It must be noted that India is yet to play any of their WTC matches in 2026 having last played against South Africa at home in the month of November.

In the bowlers' list, Bumrah is still leading the charts with 879 points while the next best Indian is Mohammed Siraj placed 12th. Ravindra Jadeja and Kuldeep Yadav are currently placed 14th and 15th respectively.

Australia's Mitchell Starc and Test captain Pat Cummins have gained to spot to second and fourth place respectively, while New Zealand's Matt Henry also leapfrogged to third spot.

England's cricket team announces new selector, new-look test squad in post-Ashes rebuild

PTI

London, May 13: England's cricket team has emerged from its post-Ashes self-reflection with a new national selector — a foreigner, for the first time — and a new-look test squad. Marcus North, a former Australia batter, was confirmed in the key position on Wednesday by England, which said he "will contribute to the selection of all England men's squads" from the senior teams through to youth programs.

North has a long history in English domestic cricket, having played for six county teams and, since 2018, been director of cricket at Durham — where he has worked alongside England test captain Ben Stokes.

England selectors have been criticized by some pundits for ignoring county form when picking who plays for the national team, so that might have been a factor behind North's appointment in the wake of the embarrassing 4-1 loss to Australia in the Ashes.

England already has a foreign-born head coach in Brendon McCullum.

North replaces Luke Wright after his three years in the role.

Mbappe can show 'commitment' to Real Madrid: Arbeloa

AFP

Madrid, May 13: Real Madrid coach Alvaro Arbeloa called on French striker Kylian Mbappe on Wednesday to show "his commitment" to the team in the last three matches of the season.

Mbappe has faced criticism from the club's own fans in recent weeks, in part for going on holiday to Sardinia during his recovery from a thigh injury.

The forward missed Madrid's Clasico defeat by Barcelona on Sunday which confirmed the Catalan giant as La Liga champion for a second season running and ensured Los Blancos finish the season empty-handed.

"If he's there and can complete the training session and is available, then he'll definitely get some minutes... and the chance in these three games to keep showing the commitment he has to the club," Arbeloa told reporters.

READ: Preliminary squad of Brazil for FIFA World Cup 2026 — Why was Neymar selected? Ancelotti reveals

The Spanish coach said he hopes top scorer Mbappe can play and keep "scoring goals, showing, as I've said, the commitment he has to Real Madrid, and that, as a coach but above all as a Madridista, is what I'd like to see". Arbeloa said he believes France captain Mbappe has given 100 per cent to the team ahead of Thursday's La Liga match against relegated Real Oviedo.

Mbappe is likely to be the target of whistles from Madrid supporters at the Santiago Bernabeu. "I couldn't believe that a Real Madrid player doesn't give absolutely everything he has for the club, because then he wouldn't know where he is," said Arbeloa.