

Nasha Mukt J&K Abhiyan

Govt committed to reintegrate drug abuse victims into mainstream: LG Sinha

Says anyone connected to drug network will face strict legal consequences

Jahangeer Ganaie

Srinagar, May 23: Asserting that the government is preparing a comprehensive rehabilitation policy for the youth addicted to drugs, Lieutenant Governor, Manoj Sinha on Saturday said that our aim is to free addicted youth through de-addiction programs and also to reintegrate them into the mainstream by providing employment and jobs.

The Lieutenant Governor, according to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) joined Nasha Mukt Jammu Kashmir Padyatra in Shopian where citizens from all walks of life vowed that narco-terrorists will be driven out from every corner of UT of Jammu Kashmir. Addressing the gathering, the Lieutenant Governor said, “The poison of drugs is diverting our youth from the path of progress. He said terrorist groups use proceeds from drugs to buy weapons, and with those weapons the blood of ordinary Kashmiris is being spilled.”

“Today I want to state unequivocally: whether an official or anyone in public life, if they are in any way connected to the drug network or lend it support, they will face strict legal consequences. I assure the people that if even the slightest trace of this infection has seeped into our system, it will be mercilessly cut out without hesitation,” he said.

The Lieutenant Governor said that by destroying the lives of our children, thousands of smugglers and narco-terrorists have built their own dark fiefdoms. He said each brick of that sordid realm is being pulled down. The cup of suffering borne by the people at the hands of drug smugglers has overflowed; their collective cry of “no more” has risen into an unstoppable roar. He further stated that every drug sold in our towns and villages is like a



bullet pressed against the chest of the people.

“Wherever drug smugglers and drug traffickers take root, their first victims are our youth. I know that many parents across Jammu Kashmir live under this shadow of fear, constantly worried that their family could be the next target. We must banish that fear completely and ensure safety for every household in the Union Territory,” the Lieutenant Governor said.

He said the collective resolve heralds the dawn of a new era. “From every lane and by-lane of

UT, voices are rising in unison, demanding that not a single drug smuggler be spared. What began 43 days ago in Jammu has now surged into a powerful grassroots movement, echoing across communities with unstoppable force,” the Lieutenant Governor said.

He stated that united by a single purpose and a common goal, millions across Jammu Kashmir are determined to eradicate narcotics-terrorism from this land of paradise.

“It is now firmly etched in the minds of | More on P6



Man offering prayer at Khanqah-e-Moula shrine in old Srinagar on the Urs of Hazrat Mir Syed Ali Hamadani, popularly known in Kashmir as Shah-e-Hamadani (RA). Pic: Jahangir Shah (KNO/KT)

Nasha Mukt Jammu & Kashmir Abhiyaan turns into ‘Jan Andolan’

Campaign mobilizes lakhs of citizens, strengthens institutional response mechanisms, intensifies anti-narcotics ops

KNO Desk

Srinagar, May 23: The ongoing anti-drug campaign, ‘Nasha Mukt JK Abhiyaan’ has turned into a ‘Jan Andolan (people’s movement).’

According to the details available with the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) the campaign has recorded remarkable achievements and impact across awareness generation, rehabilitation, law enforcement, treatment, surveillance and prevention initiatives, reflecting an unprecedented whole-of-government approach against the menace of substance abuse in Jammu and Kashmir.

As on today, the campaign



has mobilized lakhs of citizens, strengthened institutional response mechanisms, intensified anti-narcotics operations and expanded rehabilitation support systems throughout J&K.

Under the Drug free J&K

-100 days campaign, massive Public Outreach and Awareness Drives are being held across the length and breadth of Jammu and Kashmir.

As part of the extensive awareness | More on P6

J&K Govt imposes austerity measures

Curtails official expenditure across depts, restricts foreign travel, vehicle purchases, official function

Sajid Raina

Srinagar, May 23: The Jammu and Kashmir government has imposed a series of austerity measures for the financial year 2026-27, including a ban on official dinners, restrictions on purchase of new vehicles and foreign travel, and a freeze on creation of new posts.

According to the details available with the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), the Finance Department has been directed to enforce fiscal prudence and rationalise expenditure across departments and government agencies.

The departments have been directed to observe “utmost economy” in organising conferences, seminars, | More on P6

Encounter underway in Rajouri forests

2–3 terrorists believed trapped

Yogesh

Jammu, May 23: An encounter broke out between terrorists and security forces in the forest area of Jammu’s Rajouri district on Saturday.

An official told the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) that the gunfight erupted in the Dorimal forests after security forces launched a cordon and search operation based on specific intelligence inputs about the presence of terrorists in the area.

“At least two to three Pakistani terrorists are believed to be trapped. The operation is underway,” officials said.

“The hiding terrorists opened fire as security forces tightened the cordon, triggering an exchange of fire. The intermittent firing was continuing when reports last came in.”

In a post on X, the Army’s White Knight Corps said, “Today at around 11:30 AM, contact was established with terrorists in the general area of Gambhir Muglan, Rajouri during an intelligence-based joint operation conducted along with Jammu and Kashmir Police and CRPF. Troops responded swiftly with calibrated action. Firefight ensued and a cordon has been effectively established. Operations | More on P6

Jmu–Sgr Vande Bharat carries over one lakh passengers in record 22 days

Jammu, May 23: Marking a historic milestone for Indian Railways and Jammu & Kashmir, the state-of-the-art Jammu–Srinagar Vande Bharat Express has successfully carried more than 1,01,050 passengers within just 22 days of its commercial operations, reaffirming its growing popularity as a fast, safe and reliable transport link between Jammu and the Kashmir Valley.

According to a statement issued to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), the indigenous semi-high-speed train commenced regular commercial operations on May 2, 2026, after being flagged off by the Union Railway Minister on April 30.



Since then, the Vande Bharat Express has rapidly emerged as a preferred mode of travel for passengers, setting a new benchmark in seamless rail connectivity in the region.

The achievement is being viewed as a landmark moment

in the history of rail connectivity in Jammu and Kashmir, where travel between Jammu and Srinagar traditionally depended on National Highway-44, frequently disrupted by landslides, snowfall and adverse | More on P6

Short-term power markets to rescue ‘J&K’s 300 MWs gap’

Riyaz Bhat

Srinagar, May 23: With authorities projecting power deficit Upto 300 Megawatts (MWs) on the horizon, J&K State Load Despatch Center (SLDC) has decided to rely on short-term power markets to bridge the gap.

According to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), Joint Electricity Regulatory Commission (JERC) in a meeting held in April, said that the authorities from Jammu and Kashmir have indicated that the region may face a minor power deficit of 100–300 MW.

“SLDC indicated a minor deficit (~100–300 MW) to be managed through short-term markets. Revised figures to be

submitted,” NRPC said. J&K SLDC has further informed the regulatory commission that J&K may face a power deficit of 152 MWs in the ongoing month and 103 MWs in the month of June.

The NRPC was further informed that there was a 79 MWs power deficit in the month of April.

Earlier in April KNO reported that in the peak winters of 2025–2026, Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh were utilizing nearly 1,000 Megawatts (MWs) of coal and gas energy amid dip in hydel power generation.

The official figures in this regard had revealed that in the month of January-2026, Jammu and Kashmir | More on P6

Repeated weather disasters shatter harvest hopes: Orchardists, say ‘survival difficult’ as loans mount

Union slams govt’s ‘slow response’; says official assessments yet to be completed in many affected areas

Jahangeer Ganaie

Srinagar, May 23: Fresh spells of intense hailstorms and strong winds have wreaked havoc across major horticulture belts of Kashmir, causing extensive damage to fruit orchards in north and south Kashmir and pushing thousands of orchardists deeper into financial distress.

The latest hailstorm, which struck on Friday evening, lashed several villages of Sopore and Rafiabad in Baramulla district, besides parts of Tral in south

Kashmir’s Pulwama district and some areas of Shopian, leaving behind scenes of devastation in orchards considered the backbone of the Valley’s rural economy.

The growers told the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) that the hailstorm continued for several minutes with such intensity that developing apples began falling from trees instantly, while fruit-bearing branches suffered severe damage at a crucial stage of the fruit season. The worst-hit areas in



Rafiabad included Watergam, Hadipora and adjoining villages, where orchards turned

white under heavy hail accumulation. Similar damage was reported from several horticulture zones of Sopore, Bandipora and parts of Central Kashmir’s Ganderbal district.

This was the third major hailstorm to hit many of these districts in recent weeks and the second consecutive spell to batter Rafiabad, compounding the losses already caused by severe weather on April 18 and May 12 this year.

Fruit growers said the repeated weather disasters have shattered hopes for | More on P6

‘Hailstorms damage 30% of Kashmir’s agri, horti sector’

Waris Fayaz

Srinagar, May 23: Kashmir’s horticulture and agriculture sector has suffered nearly 30 percent damage due to repeated hailstorms across the Valley this year, leaving growers in deep financial distress and pushing many



towards mounting debt, growers on | More on P6

Javed Rana reviews implementation of Forest Rights Act in J&K

KT NEWS DESK

SRINAGAR, MAY 23: Minister for Jal Shakti, Forest, Ecology & Environment and Tribal Affairs, Javed Ahmed Rana, Saturday chaired an exhaustive meeting to review implementation of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

The Minister, as per an official statement, took a comprehensive review of the status of claims filed under the Forest Rights Act (FRA), functioning of various committees constituted under the Act and measures being taken for safeguarding the rights of tribal communities.

Emphasising the need for greater public outreach, the Minister directed the concerned officers to intensify awareness campaigns among tribal communities regarding the provisions of the Forest Rights Act and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. He said that the eligible beneficiaries must be made fully aware of their legal and constitutional rights so that they can avail the benefits guaranteed under the law.

The Minister also reviewed the nomination of members to Block,



District and UT-level committees constituted under the Act. He stressed the need for timely nomination and effective functioning of these committees to ensure prompt disposal of claims and transparent implementation of the Act. During the meeting, the Minister directed that all unattended claims be examined on priority and due action be taken strictly in accordance with the provisions of law. He reiterated that the objective of the Act is to protect the legitimate rights of forest dwellers and ensure justice to tribal communities. The meeting was informed that Forest

Rights Committees have largely been constituted across the Union Territory and the implementation process is underway in different districts.

The Minister further directed that any step regarding eviction, wherever required, must strictly follow due procedures established under law and in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Supreme Court. He said that the rights and dignity of tribal communities must be protected at all costs.

"The basic rights of tribal communities cannot be snatched and every action must remain within

the framework of law and justice," the Minister asserted while reiterating the government's commitment towards safeguarding the rights and dignity of Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers.

The meeting was attended by Commissioner Secretary, Forest, Ecology & Environment; Principal Chief Conservator of Forests; Secretary, Tribal Affairs Department; Director, Tribal Affairs J&K; Chief Conservator of Forests, Jammu; Chief Conservator of Forests, Kashmir; and Director Tribal Research Institute, J&K and other senior officers.

Javid Dar tours hailstorm hit Rafiabad, assures relief to affected farmers

KT NEWS DESK

BARAMULLA, MAY 23: Amid growing concerns over weather-induced losses to the Horticulture and Agriculture sectors, Minister for Agriculture Production, Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Co-operative and Election Department, Javid Ahmad Dar, on Saturday undertook an extensive tour of hailstorm-affected areas in Rafiabad constituency of Baramulla district to assess the damage caused to crops and orchards.

During the visit, the Minister, as per an official statement, conducted on-the-spot inspection of affected agricultural fields and orchards, where the standing crops and fruit-bearing plants have suffered extensive damage following the recent hailstorm and inclement weather conditions. He interacted with the farmers, orchardists and local residents, who apprised him of the scale of losses incurred and sought immediate government intervention.

Expressing deep concern over the hardships faced by the farming community, Javid Dar assured the affected families that the government remains fully committed to support them during this challenging period. He said that all genuine cases of crop and orchard damage would be thoroughly assessed and relief measures extended in accordance with government norms.

"The welfare of farmers remains the government's top priority. Every possible support will be provided to mitigate the losses suffered by the affected growers," the Minister said while interacting with locals.

He directed the officers of the Agriculture and Horticulture Departments to immediately undertake a



comprehensive field survey and submit a detailed assessment report at the earliest to facilitate timely compensation and relief measures.

The Minister also instructed the concerned departments to intensify awareness campaigns among the farmers regarding modern crop protection measures, disaster mitigation practices and various government-sponsored schemes aimed at safeguarding the agricultural produce from weather-related calamities. He further stressed the need for ensuring maximum coverage of farmers under crop

insurance schemes as per the prescribed guidelines.

Highlighting the increasing vulnerability of the agriculture sector to extreme weather events, Javid Ahmad Dar emphasized the importance of strengthening the crop protection infrastructure and improving disaster response mechanisms to minimise future losses.

Senior officers accompanied the Minister during the tour included Director Horticulture Kashmir Vikas Anand, Deputy Director Agriculture Kashmir and other officials from the concerned departments.

Sakeena Itoo inaugurates Primary School Satrajan Bangiward

Holds massive Public Darbar, takes stock of public grievances, developmental issues

KT NEWS DESK

KULGAM, MAY 23: Minister for Health and Medical Education, Social Welfare and Education, Sakeena Itoo Saturday visited DH Pora Kulgam and inaugurated Primary School at Satrajan Bangiward.

She also laid foundation stone for construction of Additional Classroom (ACR) building at Government Middle School (GMS) Bangiward.

Speaking on the occasion, the Minister, as per an official statement, reiterated the government's commitment towards upgrading educational institutions across Jammu and Kashmir, particularly in rural and far-flung areas. She emphasized that quality infrastructure is essential for creating a conducive atmosphere for effective teaching and learning.

"Strengthening education sector and ensuring access to quality education in far-flung and underserved areas is what our Government strives for", she stated.

The Minister underlined that the educational infrastructure forms the backbone of social and economic progress and the government is prioritizing the development of schools across Jammu and Kashmir.

The Minister said that the inauguration of the Primary School at Satrajan Bangiward will significantly benefit local students by providing better academic facilities closer to their homes, while the additional classroom block at MS Bangiward will help improve the overall learning environment and accommodate increasing student enrolment.

Emphasizing the importance of holistic educational development, she directed the concerned officers to ensure timely completion of all ongoing educational projects and maintain high standards in implementation.

Later, the Minister held a massive Public Darbar at Bangiward, where people from



various adjoining areas projected a range of public issues and developmental demands. Residents highlighted concerns related to road connectivity, drinking water supply, healthcare facilities, electricity, school infrastructure and other civic amenities.

Sakeena Itoo gave a patient hearing to the grievances and assured the public that all genuine issues would be addressed in a phased and time-bound manner. She directed the concerned officers to take immediate action on pressing matters and ensure better public service delivery at the grassroots level.

The Minister emphasized that public outreach programmes and direct interaction with people are essential for responsive

governance and help bridge the gap between the administration and the public. She added that the government remains committed to equitable development and inclusive progress across all regions.

During the interaction, several delegations and individuals also submitted memorandums highlighting local developmental requirements. The Minister assured them that their concerns would be examined on priority in coordination with the concerned departments.

Locals, parents and school staff appreciated the initiatives and expressed gratitude to the government for addressing the educational and infrastructural needs of the area.

Director Census Operations J&K reviews Census-2027 preparations at JMC

KT NEWS DESK

JAMMU, MAY 23: A review meeting regarding the progress of Self Enumeration (SE) and preparations for the smooth conduct of Census-2027 was held on Saturday in the conference hall of the Jammu Municipal Corporation under the chairmanship of Chief Principal Census Officer/Director Census Operations, J&K Amit Sharma.

The meeting, as per an official statement, was attended by Principal Census Officer-(JMC Commissioner) Dr. Devansh Yadav, besides all Census Charge Officers of the Jammu Municipal Corporation.

During the meeting, the Chief Principal Census Officer/Director Census Operations, J&K reviewed the overall progress achieved by JMC in connection with the preparations for Census-2027 within the JMC jurisdiction and its outgrowth areas.

Detailed discussions were held regarding the implementation of Self Enumeration (SE), mapping of House Listing Blocks and other preparatory activities being undertaken by the charge officers.

The Chief Principal Census Officer-Director

Census Operations expressed satisfaction over the efforts and preparedness displayed by the officers and officials of JMC for the successful conduct of Census-2027. He appreciated the coordination among various departments and emphasized the importance of timely completion of all census-related activities.

He further directed the officers of JMC to intensify the Self Enumeration process through extensive public awareness campaigns and wide publicity so that the maximum number of citizens may register themselves through the SE platform. Stress was also laid on ensuring accuracy and transparency during the census exercise.

During the meeting, several technical issues related to House Listing Blocks and overlapping of maps for Census-2027 were also discussed and resolved on the spot in consultation with the technical team of the Census Department, Government of India.

The meeting concluded with an assurance from all concerned officers to work in close coordination for ensuring the successful and smooth conduct of Census-2027 in Jammu city and adjoining outgrowth areas.

Satish Sharma addresses NCC Cadets at SNIC 2026

Hails youth as pillars of national unity, progress

KT NEWS DESK

SRINAGAR, MAY 23: Minister for Food, Civil Supplies & Consumer Affairs, Transport, Youth Services & Sports, Information Technology, ARI & Trainings, Satish Sharma, Saturday addressed a grand gathering of NCC cadets and Associate NCC Officers (ANOs) from across the country at the Special National Integration Camp (SNIC) 2026 organised at Badamibagh Cantonment, Srinagar.

The prestigious camp, being attended by nearly 340 NCC cadets representing all 17 NCC Directorates of the country, was attended by the young participants from diverse cultural, linguistic and geographical backgrounds on a common platform of unity, discipline, leadership and national integration. Senior civil and military dignitaries were also present on the occasion.

The programme, as per an official statement, commenced with a ceremonial Guard of Honour presented by NCC cadets, followed by a vibrant cultural programme showcasing the rich traditions, heritage and cultural diversity of various states and union territories of India.

The colourful performances reflected the spirit of "Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat" and highlighted the role of youth in strengthening emotional and national integration.

Maj Gen Anupinder Bevli, VSM, Additional Director General, NCC Directorate Jammu, Kashmir & Ladakh, in his address, highlighted the significance of the Special National Integration Camp in promoting cultural exchange, mutual understanding and lifelong bonds of friendship among the youth. He also appreciated the support and cooperation extended by Chinar Corps, 31 Sub Area and 216 Transit Camp towards the successful conduct of the camp.

Addressing the cadets, Satish Sharma extended a warm welcome to all participants visiting Jammu & Kashmir and expressed happiness over the enthusiasm and discipline displayed by the young cadets. He said that the National Cadet Corps has emerged as one of the country's most influential youth organisations, playing a pivotal role in shaping responsible, patriotic and socially conscious citizens.

The Minister observed that camps such as SNIC provide a unique opportunity to



young cadets to experience the cultural richness and diversity of India while fostering brotherhood, unity and national pride. He remarked that the youth are the true ambassadors of peace, progress and harmony and have a crucial responsibility in building a strong, prosperous and inclusive

India. Recalling his personal connection with the armed forces as the son of a soldier, Satish Sharma lauded the role of NCC in instilling values of discipline, dedication, leadership and selfless service among the younger generation. He said that the organisation continues to inspire lakhs of youth across the country to contribute positively towards society and nation-building.

The Minister urged the cadets to remain committed to the ideals of discipline, integrity and social responsibility and encouraged them to become active participants in developmental and nation-building initiatives. He stressed that youth empowerment through sports, education, technology and skill development is essential for building a progressive and self-reliant nation.

Highlighting the growing menace of drug abuse among youth, Satish Sharma called upon the cadets to become ambassadors against drugs and spread awareness about healthy lifestyles, fitness and constructive social engagement. He said the discipline and leadership qualities imbibed through NCC can play a transformative role in guiding society towards a positive direction. The

Minister also appreciated the initiative of organising the "NCC Unity Run - Run with Pride, Run for India" scheduled to be held at Nishat on May 24, stating that such activities promote fitness, unity and patriotic spirit among the youth.

Interacting with the cadets, Satish Sharma appreciated the warm camaraderie and enthusiasm witnessed during the camp and commended the efforts of NCC authorities, Army personnel and organisers for providing meaningful exposure to the participants regarding the culture, heritage and scenic beauty of Jammu & Kashmir.

The cadets reiterated their commitment towards the ideals of national service, unity and discipline. Many participants described the camp as a memorable experience that strengthened their understanding of India's cultural diversity and national spirit.

The Special National Integration Camp 2026 continues to serve as an important platform for cultural exchange, youth engagement and strengthening the bonds of emotional and national integration, reaffirming the vision of a united, progressive and empowered India.

CS reviews performance of Transport Department

Stresses safer roads, smarter enforcement

KT NEWS DESK

Srinagar, May 23: Chief Secretary, Atal Dulloo, chaired a comprehensive review meeting of the Transport Department to assess the progress achieved in road safety, traffic enforcement, technology integration and implementation of key recommendations aimed at improving traffic management and reducing road accidents across Jammu and Kashmir.

The meeting besides ACS PWD and Principal Secretary, Home was attended by Commissioner Secretary, Health; Commissioner Secretary, Law; Secretary, Transport; JGP, Traffic; Transport Commissioner; SIO, NIC and other concerned officers.

The meeting focused on the implementation status of the recommendations of the Supreme Court Committee on Road Safety (SCORS), functioning of road safety mechanisms, enforcement initiatives, PM-RAHAT scheme, electronic monitoring systems and other flagship interventions being undertaken by the Transport Department in coordination with allied agencies.

Expressing concern over the recent tragic road accident in Udhampur district in which around 21 people lost their lives, the Chief Secretary directed the Deputy Commissioners to submit comprehensive Annual Action Plans regarding implementation of SCORS recommendations in their respective districts. He also called for fixing responsibility in the recent Udhampur accident and directed the concerned authorities to furnish detailed accident reports from each district for proper analysis and corrective interventions.

Reviewing the implementation of the hit-and-run compensation mechanism,



the Chief Secretary sought detailed action taken reports in all such cases and stressed upon ensuring timely disposal and assistance to affected families. While reviewing the functioning of the e-Challan system, the Chief Secretary directed the concerned departments to immediately identify and address all bottlenecks hindering its successful implementation. He emphasized that technology-driven enforcement must be made fully effective to ensure greater transparency, accountability and compliance with traffic regulations.

The Chief Secretary also directed the authorities to explore the feasibility of creating a separate fund head within the Public Works Department (PWD) for rectification of accident-prone blackspots and hotspots across the road network.

He further stressed that executing agencies including

BRO, NHAI and NHIDCL should also earmark dedicated resources for roads being maintained by them to undertake corrective measures in a mission-mode. He also emphasized development of passenger zones and designated stopping areas wherever feasible for ensuring safer public transport operations.

Taking serious note of traffic congestion caused by encroachments in urban areas, the Chief Secretary directed the Jammu Municipal Corporation (JMC) and Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC) to intensify anti-encroachment drives in the twin cities for smooth traffic movement and better pedestrian safety.

The meeting also reviewed safety measures concerning school transportation. The Chief Secretary directed for conducting a comprehensive audit of school buses to ensure strict adherence to prescribed safety norms and

operational standards.

Reviewing the status of trauma care facilities in the UT, the Chief Secretary directed the Commissioner Secretary, Health Department to examine the upgradation of services in Government Medical Colleges for establishment of robust trauma and critical care systems. Emphasizing the importance of scientific road safety management, the Chief Secretary also directed for extensive training of stakeholders under the i-RAD system and called for comprehensive auditing of roads across Jammu and Kashmir to identify deficiencies and undertake timely remedial measures.

The Secretary, Transport Department, Avny Lavasa apprised the meeting that the J&K Road Safety Policy-2025 had already been notified and a detailed Road Safety Action Plan Matrix formulated with clearly defined timelines and

responsibilities for various departments.

She added that the action plan envisages interventions including black spot rectification, strengthening of traffic control systems, road safety audits, bus route restructuring, parking policy implementation, installation of crash barriers and scientific traffic calming measures.

The Transport Commissioner, Vishesh Paul highlighted that under the Road Accident Victim Fund, an amount of Rs 1226.10 lakh had been received so far, out of which Rs 1218.10 lakh was released to districts for providing timely assistance to accident victims and their families.

He further informed that under the hit-and-run compensation mechanism, financial assistance is being extended in accordance with Government of India guidelines and cases are being regularly monitored by district administrations.

The Chief Secretary also reviewed the operational status of Integrated Traffic Management Systems (ITMS) in Jammu and Srinagar. The meeting was informed that all ITMS equipment in Jammu had become fully operational since June 2024, while Srinagar ITMS was functioning successfully after rectification of initial technical issues. Hundreds of cameras including ANPR, RLVD, PTZ and surveillance cameras have been installed under these systems to strengthen electronic monitoring and automated enforcement.

It was further informed that over 5.34 lakh challans had been issued through ITMS Jammu since June 2024, while more than 60,000 challans had been generated through Srinagar ITMS since December 2024, resulting in substantial fine realization and improved enforcement coverage.

CM's calendar packed with foreign tours, not disposal of files: LoP Sunil

REHAN QAYOOM MIR

Srinagar, May 23: Describing Chief Minister Omar Abdullah as a "tourist-in-chief," Leader of Opposition Sunil Kumar Sharma on Saturday said the CM's calendar is packed with foreign tours rather than the disposal of files to address issues faced by the common man.

Sharma said the Chief Minister is missing over the past 10 days and he is behaving more like a globetrotting traveler than the elected head of a sensitive state like Jammu and Kashmir.

"Omar Abdullah seems to be under the delusion that he is a tourist 24x7 or running a travel blog, not a state. While the Chief Minister is busy on foreign tours, the common man in Jammu & Kashmir is facing a plethora of problems ranging from the absence of electricity, water, and health facilities," he said.

He said the CM is behaving like a tourist even as he himself is minister in-charge of 18 departments, including Finance, Power Development, General Administration, Tourism, Revenue, and several others. "A normal human being like me cannot do justice to



more than one or two departments, but he is a 'superman' and he himself controls 50 percent of the administrative departments. How can you abandon the Civil Secretariat and rush off on foreign tours to London and other high-end destinations when you are in control of 50 percent of departments," Sharma said.

The LoP added that Omar Abdullah's non-seriousness could be imagined by the fact that a few months ago he wanted to rush to Paris in the middle of Kashmiri growers facing an unprecedented crisis with apple consignments stranded on the highway.

"When the highway

was shut and our growers were crying and wailing, our CM planned to proceed on a sightseeing tour to Paris, but he had to abandon the plan after facing criticism," Sharma said.

He further said that the BJP will soon lodge a missing report over the disappearance of CM Omar Abdullah. "We are going to file a missing report at police station Ram Munshi Bagh over Omar Abdullah's disappearance. We are also consulting legal experts to discuss whether we can file a Habeas Corpus petition to produce Omar Abdullah before the public of Jammu and Kashmir," he said—(KNO)

Sunil Sharma himself was absent : Dy CM counters LoP



REHAN QAYOOM MIR

Srinagar, May 23: Deputy Chief Minister Surinder Choudhary on Saturday hit back at Leader of Opposition (LoP) Sunil Sharma over his "missing complaint" remark targeting Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, saying the BJP leader himself remained absent during the crucial budget session.

Speaking to reporters here, Choudhary said the LoP has a major responsibility during the budget session as legislators are expected to raise issues concerning people from their respective constituencies.

"The Leader of Opposition said he would lodge a missing complaint against Omar Abdullah for not being

seen for the past 10 days. But Sunil Sharma was also not seen during the budget session, and we too were looking for him," he said.

The Deputy CM said the budget session is an important platform where public issues are discussed in the Assembly and questioned Sharma's absence from the proceedings. "Where was the LoP during such an important session? We can understand he may have had some work, but the people of Jammu and Kashmir also wanted to know where he was at that time," he said.

Choudhary said if Sunil Sharma is personally attacking CM Omar today, then he should first answer where he was during the budget session. "Why should we not have filed a missing report or even an FIR against you then?" he asked.

He further alleged that LoP had left behind the people of hilly and backward areas during that period. "Those poor, backward and mountainous people, where did you go, leaving them behind?" he asked.

Defending the Chief Minister, Choudhary said Omar Abdullah had gone out for work, and there was nothing unusual about it.

"Omar sahib has gone for work. Just as I or anyone else can travel elsewhere for personal work, he too can go. Making an issue out of it is not healthy politics," he added—(KNO)

Govt announces summer break for Jammu schools

YOGESH

Srinagar, May 23: The government Saturday announced summer vacation for schools in summer zones of Jammu division from June-01 for primary level.

The government also said that the classes from 6th to 12th standard shall observe the vacation from June-08.

Education Minister Sakina Itoo on X posted, "Keeping in view the prevailing weather conditions, summer vacations for schools falling under Summer Zone of Jammu Division shall commence w.e.f. 01.06.2026 for Primary Classes and w.e.f. 08.06.2026 for students of Classes 6th to 12th."

The minister wished a safe and enjoyable vacation to the students. Pertinently, on May-18, Jammu Municipal Corporation (JMC) issued a heat wave advisory post rise in temperatures.

In this regard, authorities in Jammu had urged the people, particularly the elderly and small children, to stay indoors—(KNO)

Ladakh's struggle exposes failure of J&K leaders: MP Ruhullah

REHAN QAYOOM MIR

Srinagar, May 23: Member Parliament and senior National Conference leader Aga Ruhullah Mehdi on Saturday said the Centre's decision to grant constitutional safeguards and a legislative body to Ladakh is "a slap on the face" of Kashmir's leadership, which he accused of failing to fight for the rights of the people after the abrogation of Article 370.

Speaking to reporters here, MP Ruhullah said the leadership and people of Ladakh have shown how sustained political resistance could force the Government of India to concede demands.



"This is a slap on the face of the leadership of Kashmir. If a small region like Ladakh and its leadership can fight against the Government of India and get their rights, then there is no justification for the

leadership of Kashmir," the Srinagar MP said.

He said he had been repeatedly asserting over the last five to six years that Kashmir's leadership was not fighting politically for the restoration

of the rights of the people. "This is what I have been saying for the last five to six years, that the leadership of Kashmir is not fighting. The people of Ladakh have shown how to fight," he said.

Referring to the Centre's move to provide constitutional protections and a legislative structure to Ladakh, Ruhullah said the development had politically exposed mainstream parties and leadership in Kashmir.

Reacting to BJP leaders' remarks about filing a missing report to seek Chief Minister Omar Abdullah's whereabouts,

Continued on www.kashmirthunder.in

BJP has 'solid evidence' of paid transfers: Raina

REHAN QAYOOM MIR

Srinagar, May 23: Senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Ravinder Raina on Saturday said the party possesses "solid evidence" regarding alleged corruption and money taken from government employees for transfers. He urged Chief Minister Omar Abdullah to provide them with an opportunity to present the proof.

"We have solid evidence of the allegations. Not just one, but a lot of evidence. And certainly, if the government wants, that evidence will be given," Raina said while talking to reporters here.

The BJP leader said he had raised the issue seriously and responsibly and had even requested the Prime Minister to look into the matter.

"I have said this with great seriousness and responsibility. I requested the Honourable Chief Minister and also



requested the Prime Minister that there are a large number of people involved in corruption and transfers. Some ministers are also involved," he said.

Continued on www.kashmirthunder.in

Elderly devotees lead spiritual fervour at Khanqah-e-Moula Urs

REHAN QAYOOM MIR

Srinagar, May 23: At the revered Khanqah-e-Moula on Saturday, age appeared to be just a number as 80-year-old Mohammed Salam sat in the front row among devotees, immersed in prayers and devotion to Hazrat Ameer Kabir Mir Syed Ali Hamdani (RA).

The historic shrine witnessed thousands of devotees offering prayers and seeking blessings in an atmosphere filled with spirituality, emotion and unity.

Devotees from different parts of Kashmir reached the shrine from early morning hours, participating in special prayers and religious



gatherings while remembering the teachings of Shah-e-Hamdan (RA).

Amid the rush of worshippers, Mohammed Salam emerged as a symbol of

unwavering faith and devotion. Despite being in his 80s, he sat quietly inside the shrine

premises with prayer beads in his hands, deeply lost in devotion and remembrance of Shah-e-Hamdan (RA).

"I have been coming here every year for more than 40 years now. No matter how difficult the situation was, I never stayed away from this sacred place," Salam told KNO in a soft voice, his eyes fixed on the prayer beads in his hands.

He said the Urs is not merely a ritual for him, but a lifelong spiritual connection. "Whenever I come here, I feel peace in my heart. I pray for my family, for Kashmir and for humanity. This place gives strength to the soul," he said.

Continued on www.kashmirthunder.in

EDITORIAL

Ebola: India Must Stay Alert, Not Alarmed

The World Health Organization's declaration of Ebola as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern is a clear warning that the world remains dangerously connected, and a virus outbreak in Africa can quickly become a threat to India. The Government of India has responded swiftly by issuing Standard Operating Procedures and tightening surveillance at all airports and seaports. This is a welcome and necessary step. But preparedness on paper

must translate into flawless execution on the ground. The Bundibugyo virus disease, a strain of Ebola with mortality rates between 30 and 50 per cent, has already claimed lives in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda. The virus does not respect borders. International travellers can carry it across continents within hours. India, with its high population density and vast network of domestic and international travel, cannot afford any complacency. The Ministry

of Health's directive to intensify screening of passengers arriving from affected countries, mandatory disclosure of travel history, and isolation protocols for suspect cases are all essential measures. However, the real challenge lies in implementation. Are our airports equipped with adequate thermal scanners and isolation bays? Are our health-care workers trained to handle Ebola cases safely, given that the virus spreads through bodily fluids and requires strict protective

gear? Are our state governments ready with identified quarantine centres, isolation hospitals, and rapid response teams? These are not rhetorical questions. They demand immediate answers and action. Ebola is not airborne. It spreads through direct contact with infected bodily fluids. The public must be educated without being terrorised. India has faced health emergencies before – from COVID-19 to Nipah. Each time, the country has shown resilience. But resilience cannot be

an excuse for reactive chaos. The time to act is now, before the first case lands on our shores. Surveillance must be rigorous. Training must be intensive. Public awareness must be clear. And every state must be held accountable for its preparedness. Ebola is a test not just of our health infrastructure but of our ability to act collectively and calmly. Let us not fail. Let us prepare, not panic. Let us protect, not postpone. The virus is far away, but its shadow is already at our doorstep.

India's Maritime Ambitions Begin In Waste Bins

Deepak Baidur and Samrat Banerjee

On 19 February, as India celebrated the legacy of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, a wooden sailing vessel named INSV Kaundinya was completing a remarkable voyage across the Arabian Sea to Oman. Built using the ancient Tankai technique i.e. stitched planks and coconut coir, not a single nail, the ship carried on board the economist and EAC-PM member Sanjeev Sanyal. It was a journey connecting India's maritime past to its blue-water present. And what a present it is.

At Visakhapatnam, the International Fleet Review, Exercise MILAN, and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium brought together over 70 nations, a scale unprecedented in India's maritime history. But India's ocean ambitions extend well beyond naval strength. 95 per cent of our trade by volume moves by sea. The Maritime India Vision 2030 targets Rs 3.5 lakh crore in investment across ports, shipping, and waterways. Port capacity has nearly doubled in a decade. Four landmark maritime reform bills replaced colonial-era legislation in 2025. A Rs 25,000 crore Maritime Development Fund and a Rs 69,725 crore shipbuilding package are on the table.

India's coastline is no longer a boundary; it is the launchpad for the next phase of economic growth. One question, that refuses to go away: How do we sustain a trillion-dollar trade corridor without energy independence? India imports 88 per cent of its crude oil which is a bill north of \$130 billion a year. By 2035, that dependence is projected to

cross 90 per cent. Heavy fuel oil, the viscous sludge from crude refining, powers 95 per cent of global shipping. Every Indian vessel that sails on imported fuel is a floating reminder of this vulnerability. And the clock is ticking.

The International Maritime Organisation's Net-Zero Framework, effective January 2028, will impose the world's first carbon pricing on shipping – \$100 per tonne of CO₂ for moderate non-compliance, \$380 for the worst offenders. The global frontrunners are green ammonia and e-methanol that come with a staggering price tag, two to three times that of conventional fuel. For a nation aspiring to be the world's third-largest economy, draining foreign exchange on imported green molecules is replacing one dependency with another. That is not Aatmanirbharta. The answer is not in our deserts or our research labs.

It is in our garbage. Urban India generates between 1.3-1.5 lakh metric tonnes of municipal solid waste every day which amounts to roughly 50 million tonnes a year, forecast to jump to 125 million tonnes by 2031. Half of this is biodegradable organic waste. Our port cities are among the worst affected: Mumbai produces 11,000 tonnes a day, Chennai 6,000, Visakhapatnam and Mangaluru thousands more. Despite the Swachh Bharat Mission, only a quarter is scientifically treated. The rest festers in landfills. Chazipur's 65-meter dumpsite in Delhi catches fire with grim regularity.

These are surely civic embarrassments, but they are also untapped fuel reserves. A ship engine does not care whether its fuel

began as crude oil in the Persian Gulf or as kitchen waste in Dharavi. It needs carbon-and-hydrogen-rich molecules in liquid form. Municipal waste is precisely that. Through gasification – heating waste in a low-oxygen environment, it becomes syngas, which is catalytically converted into green methanol, a clean-burning fuel that existing ship engines can use with minor modifications. Alternatively, the organic fraction can undergo anaerobic digestion to produce compressed biogas. This is not speculative technology.

Edmonton, Canada ran the world's first commercial waste-to-methanol plant for eight years – processing 100,000 tonnes of municipal waste annually, producing ISCC-certified bio-methanol. Spain's Repsol is investing €800 million in Ecoplanta, which will convert 400,000 tonnes of waste into 240,000 tonnes of methanol by 2029. China accounts for 90 per cent of renewable methanol capacity currently under construction. Denmark's Kassø e-methanol plant went operational in 2025. Is India doing something on these lines? We have a 25-tonne-per-day pilot at Tuticorin and an MoU at Kandla. The economics, ironically, favours us more than anyone. Green hydrogen needs electrolyzers costing Rs 3-5 crore per megawatt. Green ammonia trades at Rs 60,000-1,00,000 per tonne.

Waste-based methanol benefits from a feedstock that is not just free, it comes with payment attached. Cities pay tipping fees of Rs 1,700-4,200 per tonne to dispose of garbage. This negative feedstock cost means green methanol from waste can be

produced at Rs 34,000-50,000 per tonne that is competitive with conventional heavy fuel oil, roughly half the price of its green rivals. Lifecycle emissions drop up to 90 per cent. Add carbon credits under India's PAT scheme, and the numbers improve further. Maersk has ordered 25 methanol-powered container ships but cannot find enough green fuel to fill them. Over 450 methanol-capable vessels are on order globally.

The demand exists. India, which handles 1.65 billion tonnes of port cargo annually, should be supplying it. So, what is stopping us? Two things. First, source segregation. Waste-to-energy works only with assured input of segregated biodegradable waste – a minimum 150-200 tonnes per day. Without it, plants run below capacity and die. Indore has cracked this: 100 per cent source segregation, 630 tonnes of biodegradable waste processed daily, a self-sustaining financial model funded through user charges and property taxes. A 100-TPD bio-methanation plant costs roughly \$5.7 million and breaks even in six years. The model works. It needs replication, not reinvention.

Second, nobody has stitched the ecosystem together. Municipalities handle waste. Port authorities handle fuel. Energy companies handle production. These three sit in different ministries, different budgets, different incentive structures. The PPP model is straightforward: municipalities deliver segregated waste; energy companies gasify it into methanol near port premises; port authorities anchor demand through long-term offtake contracts with coastal shipping lines, port craft operators, and the Navy. The policy

architecture exists now with the Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047, Harit Sagar green port guidelines, the Maritime Development Fund.

What is missing is one state or one port authority willing to be the first mover in this direction. Here is a concrete proposal: commission a 200-TPD waste-to-methanol demonstration plant at Paradip, Tuticorin, or Kandla – modelled on Edmonton, scaled for Indian waste characteristics, co-located with the existing Green Hydrogen Hub infrastructure. Capital cost: under Rs 50 crore. Timeline: 24 months. Output: enough methanol to fuel every tug and pilot vessel in the port, with surplus for coastal shipping. If Indore can fix segregation for a city of 35 lakh, a port city can fix it for a catchment zone. India achieved 50 per cent non-fossil energy five years early.

It crossed 100 GW of solar before anyone expected. When this country decides to move, it actually moves. The waste-to-fuel opportunity is no different – except here, India would not just meet a target but offer a replicable model for every coastal developing nation drowning in the same twin crises of imported fuel and unmanaged waste. The Indian Ocean is the only ocean named after a country. If India is to be truly Aatmanirbhara at sea by 2047, it must fuel the ships that sail these waters with its own resources – starting with the garbage it currently tries to wish away.

The writers are, respectively, Project Manager and Digital Advisor, GIZ India. The views are personal. Courtesy: The Statesman

IDY 2026: Nudging The World Towards Mindful Consumption

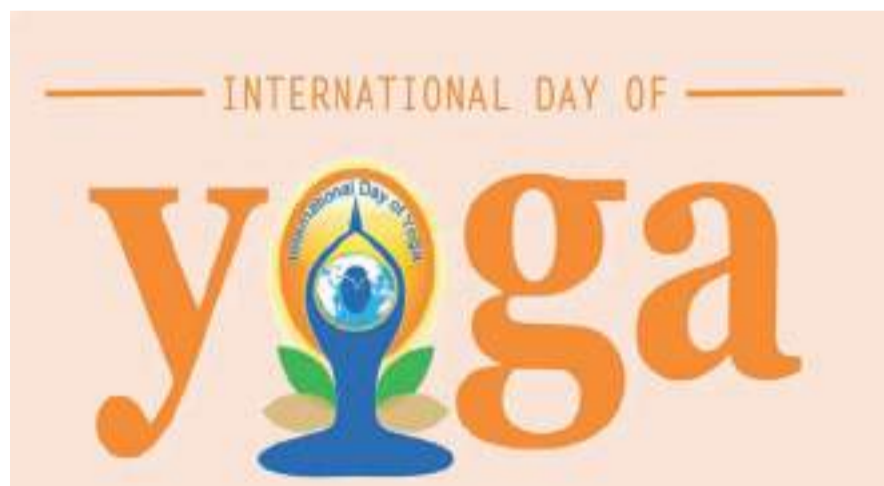
Today, Yoga has evolved into one of India's most influential contributions to the world—transcending geography, politics, language, and culture. Because Yoga touches millions of lives globally, it provides an unparalleled platform to inspire behavioural transformation at scale.

Prataprao Jadhav

As the world observes the International Day of Yoga (IDY) 2026, humanity stands at a defining civilizational moment. We are living in an age of remarkable technological and material advancement, yet we are simultaneously confronted with rising lifestyle disorders, mounting mental stress, ecological degradation, and unsustainable patterns of living. At the heart of many of these crises lies a common challenge – unchecked and mindless consumption.

From excessive exploitation of natural resources to overdependence on digital stimulation and unsustainable lifestyles, modern societies are increasingly drifting away from balance. It is in this context that Yoga emerges not merely as an ancient wellness practice, but as a timeless framework for responsible living. Yoga offers humanity a powerful pathway towards self-regulation, moderation, and conscious choices. It teaches us how to restore harmony – within ourselves and with the world around us.

The Call for Mindful Consumption
In addressing the global challenge of overconsumption, the visionary leadership of our Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has provided a compelling direction through Mission LIFE – Lifestyle for Environment. At COP26, the Prime Minister articulated a principle that resonates deeply with the philosophy of Yoga: "What is needed today is mindful and deliberate utilisation, instead of mindless and destructive consumption."



More recently, amid global economic uncertainties and supply-chain disruptions, the Prime Minister expanded this appeal into an everyday civic responsibility. He encouraged citizens to consciously moderate avoidable consumption – from conserving fuel and reducing unnecessary energy use to reconsidering non-essential expenditures. This appeal is not rooted in scarcity; rather, it is a strategic and ethical call for collective resilience, sustainability, and national responsibility. As he reminded us, "Every small and big effort matters; just as every drop fills a pot."

These ideas are deeply aligned with the foundational principles of Yoga. Yogic philosophy speaks of Aparigraha – restraint from unnecessary accumulation – and

Santosha – contentment with what one truly needs. Together, these principles cultivate a mindset that moves individuals away from compulsive consumption and towards conscious living. Yoga transforms us from passive consumers into responsible custodians of the planet.

Yoga as a Tool for Ecological Harmony
The planet possesses enough resources to meet human needs, but not enough to satisfy limitless greed. Yoga helps restore this awareness by deepening our sense of interconnectedness with nature. The air we breathe, the food we consume, and the stability we seek are all part of a shared ecological system.

The practice of Yoga gradually reshapes behaviour from within. It calms

mental restlessness, reduces impulsivity, and strengthens self-discipline. In a world driven by instant gratification and excessive consumerism, Yoga creates the inner clarity needed to distinguish between genuine need and endless desire.

As the Minister associated with both Health & Family Welfare and Ayush, I witness every day how Yoga serves as a preventive public health tool against non-communicable diseases (NCDs). By encouraging physical activity, mental balance, and disciplined living, Yoga reduces dependence on unhealthy habits and excessive medical interventions. A yogic lifestyle naturally encourages simplicity, moderation, balanced nutrition, reduced waste, and mindful use of resources – precisely the behavioural changes required for environmental sustainability.

Thus, Yoga is not only a pathway to individual wellness; it is also a practical framework for ecological responsibility.

India's Global Wellness Leadership
Today, Yoga has evolved into one of India's most influential contributions to the world – a powerful expression of wellness, harmony, and collective well-being. What began as an ancient civilizational practice has today become a global movement that transcends geography, politics, language, and culture.

Every year, millions across continents participate in Yoga celebrations, not merely performing asanas, but embracing a shared aspiration for healthier, more balanced, and sustainable lives. Yoga has emerged as a universal language of preventive healthcare,

mental well-being, and mindful living.

Through Yoga, India has offered the world a non-coercive and inclusive framework for holistic health – one that addresses modern anxieties with timeless wisdom. This is the deeper significance of IDY 2026. Because Yoga touches millions of lives globally, it also provides an unparalleled platform to inspire behavioural transformation at scale. Messages of sustainability, moderation, and conscious living can travel farther and resonate deeper through the collective spirit of Yoga.

A Collective Resolution for IDY 2026
True well-being cannot exist in isolation. Human health, community well-being, and planetary health are deeply interconnected. The challenges of climate change, lifestyle diseases, and environmental degradation demand not only policy interventions, but also behavioural transformation.

On this International Day of Yoga, let our commitment extend beyond the yoga mat. Let us embrace Yoga not only as a daily practice, but as a way of life – one that encourages mindful consumption, inner discipline, and ecological responsibility.

Let us answer the Prime Minister's call for conscious living and build a future where progress is measured not merely by what we consume, but by how responsibly we live.

By transforming our inner climate, we can together heal the outer climate of our planet.

The writer is Union Minister of State (IC), Ministry of Ayush, and Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare.

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

Earth's Dynamics May Extend To The Moon

The moon's south pole is a major target of all powers because scientists believe craters there may contain water ice

Khaled Abou Zahr

Following last month's successful Artemis II mission, which carried four astronauts around the moon and back, NASA has now shifted its full focus to Artemis III. This is the final planned test mission before humans return to the moon. The last time a human set foot on the moon was in 1972 with the US' Apollo 17 mission. At that time, the US was facing the Soviet Union in the Cold War. Tensions between China and the Soviets had escalated and Beijing's rapprochement with the US, led by President Richard Nixon, had begun. The Middle East was in turmoil.

Against this backdrop, space missions were guided by a race between the US and the Soviet Union. They wanted to show their technological superiority for many reasons, including, obviously, dual-use capabilities. Although the latest phase of achievements in space — since the success of Elon Musk's SpaceX — have been guided primarily by a commercial approach rather than great power competition, the latter has become more prominent recently. We are in a period that rhymes with the 1970s, but this time China has replaced the Soviet Union in the great power competition.

There is no doubt that this competition extends to space. Yet, while the past was also about dual-use technologies, it was also an extension of the Cold War and the two rivals proving their technological and, indirectly, moral superiority with each new breakthrough. Ultimately, the proposal known as the "Star Wars" program, announced by President Ronald Reagan, was intended as a shield against any nuclear or ballistic missile attack. It discouraged the Soviet Union in its global fight against the US. That program is now being revived as the "Golden Dome."

The space race clearly has a real objective and target in sight: the moon. Both China and the US see the potential for settlements there to gain a clear strategic advantage.



This new moon race is pushing NASA to rapidly prepare the Artemis III mission. It is planned as a crewed Earth-orbit test flight, rather than a direct moon landing. According to recent statements, the mission will focus on testing rendezvous and docking operations between NASA's Orion spacecraft and commercial lunar landers developed by Blue Origin and SpaceX. Astronauts are expected to attempt a lunar surface mission during Artemis IV.

Artemis III is seen as a critical step to reduce technical and operational risks before

returning humans to the moon's south pole and eventually building a long-term lunar base. As with all similar missions, the agency is still refining the details, including crew assignments, mission duration, science activities and testing. This is undoubtedly a highly complex rehearsal mission that will prepare NASA and its partners for the sustained human exploration of the moon and future missions to Mars.

China is not staying on the sidelines. Expected to launch in about 2029, the current mission in preparation is Chang'e-8,

which is due to investigate the presence of ice and other volatile materials at the moon's south pole.

An interesting move, led by the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and approved by the China National Space Administration, is the development of a robotic support vehicle for this mission. This is part of the country's long-term strategy to build a scientific base in this region of the moon. The 100kg robot is designed to support autonomous surface operations in harsh lunar conditions, including extreme temperatures, dust, uneven terrain and limited communication.

China is increasingly focused on infrastructure development rather than mere scientific observation. This is clear as Chang'e-8 will also test technologies for using lunar resources directly on the moon, such as 3D printing, with the goal of reducing dependency on materials transported from Earth. While the US is focusing on crewed missions, China has chosen, for now, a robotic approach.

The moon's south pole is a major target of all powers because scientists believe craters there may contain water ice, which could eventually provide drinking water, oxygen and, just as important, rocket fuel for future missions. This race is also taking place as the main conduit of global space cooperation is reaching the end of its life. The International Space Station, which has been an important focus of collaboration between all nations, will be decommissioned in 2030. This indirectly means that, for now, the mindset behind the moon missions is purely national in essence and with a competitive aspect.

China's approach is quite similar to the one it has for the Arctic. There, it is expanding its presence through scientific research stations, satellite infrastructure and frequent icebreaker expeditions under its "Polar Silk Road" strategy. Its key bases include the Yellow River Station in Svalbard, Norway, and the China-Iceland Arctic Science Observatory, while additional

influence comes from satellite ground stations, logistics investments and dual-use infrastructure in places like Greenland, combining scientific research with long-term commercial and strategic ambitions. Ultimately, it is marking its territory and establishing a long-term presence that will be difficult, if not impossible, to remove.

The US has established a framework for cooperation through the Artemis Accords, which outline the principles for peaceful and sustainable space exploration. Grounded in the 1967 Outer Space Treaty, they govern lunar and planetary activities and currently have 67 signatory nations. China has not joined this alliance and is collaborating with Russia to build the International Lunar Research Station, a joint permanent research base located at the moon's south pole. Plans for a joint nuclear plant are even being considered, according to Chinese officials.

UN treaties indicate that no single nation can claim territories on the moon. Yet, once a country has a settlement there, even if unmanned, it does not need to claim it. It is de facto its own territory. So, is there a risk of direct confrontation between China and the US for the prime spots? And what happens a decade down the line, when there are successful settlements and ongoing activities, both commercial and military, on the moon?

If the two sides' current plans succeed, and this is by no means guaranteed, they could both have a presence on the moon by the end of the 2030s or early 2040s. The risks are the same as on Earth and the same dynamics and rules of engagement will apply. For now, the risk is greater in the Arctic than on the moon. But what happens in one will no doubt extend to the other.

Khaled Abou Zahr is the founder of SpaceQuest Ventures, a space-focused investment platform. He is CEO of EurabiaMedia and editor of Al-Watan Al-Arabi. Courtesy: Arab News

Sustainable Economies Will Own The Future

The issue of sustainability is now as much about sovereignty and economic security as it is about the planet

Bruno Bouygues and Bertrand Badre

Environmental and climate concerns appear to be in retreat worldwide. The word sustainability has become politically charged, the Trump administration openly mocks corporate ESG (environmental, social, governance) criteria and many companies are shelving their net-zero emissions pledges.

But look beneath the surface and you will see something else. Though the political and cultural backlash against "sustainability" is real, so is the global economic transition toward cleaner energy technologies and electrification.

After all, the work of establishing corporate sustainability standards has continued. A growing number of jurisdictions are adopting the International Sustainability Standards Board's disclosure framework and, in Europe, the European Sustainability Reporting Standards remain in force. Despite their differences, such initiatives are converging into a single global architecture.

This convergence is driven not only by complementary regulations but also by the world's largest pools of capital. Pension funds, sovereign wealth funds, insurance balance sheets and development finance institutions are increasingly bound by net-zero commitments, taxonomy-aligned reporting and transition risk frameworks.

This is no passing trend. We are witnessing a fundamental repricing, one that is being applied gradually through fiduciary and prudential decisions. Companies that can produce credible carbon-reduction strategies are recognized as investable assets and can often borrow on more attractive financing terms. Those that cannot run the risk of being priced accordingly.

Such signals are unlikely to change. The COVID-19 pandemic and the wars in Ukraine and Iran have reframed the issue of sustainability, which is now as much about sovereignty and economic security as it is about the planet. Reducing dependencies on fossil fuels is the most direct route to energy security, just as shorter supply chains build industrial resilience and circular material flows ensure strategic autonomy. Captains of industry and national security strategists are increasingly



reading from the same playbook.

Of course, the West has been slow to come to this realization, whereas China made a deliberate strategic choice years ago to become the world's leading sustainable power. China now manufactures about 80 percent of the world's solar panels, dominates battery supply chains and is rapidly scaling up green hydrogen, offshore wind and electric mobility technologies. Clean technology is the global economy's competitive frontier and China intends to own it.

European and American manufacturers face a formidable, state-backed competitor — but the global energy transition is, by definition, an undertaking of enormous scale. The question is not whether that story will be written but how many leading authors it will have.

Europe is well positioned here. It boasts deep industrial expertise, world-class engineering institutions, a sophisticated

financial system and — crucially — the world's most developed regulatory framework for creating sustainable products and mobilizing sustainable capital.

The European Green Deal, the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive and the digital product passport are more than compliance regimes, they are the necessary infrastructure for building a sustainable industrial economy. Europe is the world's most demanding market. Any manufacturer that meets European standards holds a de facto credential that should be recognized anywhere.

Europe can treat this architecture as a defensive perimeter or it can deploy it as an open platform. The latter path — working with Japan, South Korea, Canada and willing emerging economies to build interoperable standards and share technical capacities — would position Europe as the convening authority of a genuinely global sustainable economy. That is a role worth playing.

But the global industrial transformation that is currently underway is not a matter of policy debate. It is part of a historical sequence. European industry has managed new quality certification processes in the 1990s, sustainability ratings in the 2010s and a steep tightening of product-level regulation through 2025. Now comes the fourth act, with the rollout of digital product passports, taxonomy-aligned financing and carbon accounting in procurement. The recent political backlash cannot be allowed to reverse this trend.

Three implications follow for policymakers, industrial leaders and financial institutions. First, manufacturers should be supported through the transition, not shielded from it. Europe needs a coordinated effort to help midsize industrial companies — the backbone of European employment and innovation — build digital and reporting capabilities, combining national development banks with

private capital and mentoring programs. Subsidies that merely delay progress are not the answer.

Second, Europe's digital product passport should be treated as shared infrastructure, not as a compliance burden. The mechanisms for issuing, verifying and exchanging product data across global supply chains will be for the new industrial economy what payment messaging networks are for finance. Europe can be a constructive standard-setter, but only if it works with its trading partners, not against them.

Third, European trade diplomacy should align with this regulatory architecture. Rather than treat environmental standards as bargaining chips, Europe should recognize equivalent frameworks where they exist and invite partners to converge on shared methodologies. The legitimacy of European standards rests precisely on their nondiscriminatory character.

The companies that will define industrial competitiveness a decade from now are already completing their fourth act: ensuring digital traceability, adopting carbon accounting, aligning with taxonomy criteria and turning compliance into a commercial advantage. They are emerging across France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, the UK, Japan, South Korea and other partner economies.

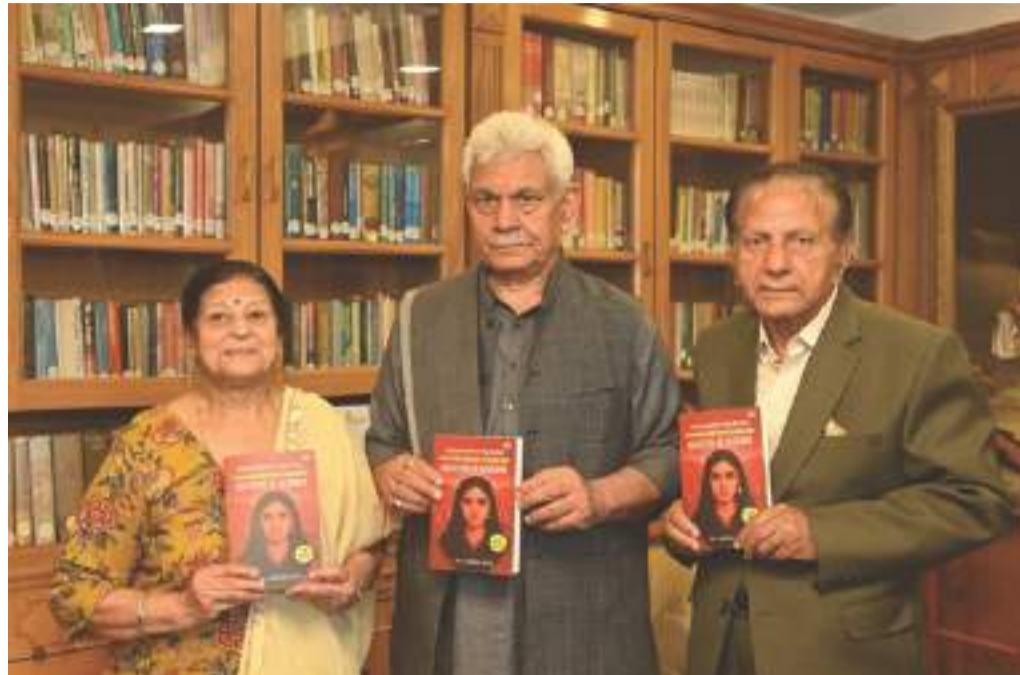
Sustainability and competitiveness are not competing priorities. They are the same project, viewed from two angles. Recognizing that this convergence is not a passing fashion but a structural shift is essential to implement the economic and financial policies that are best suited to the frontier ahead.

Bruno Bouygues is CEO of GYS, an industrial group specializing in welding equipment, battery chargers and automotive body repair systems, with operations in 132 countries.

Bertrand Badre, a former managing director and CFO of the World Bank, is Chair of the Project Syndicate Advisory Board, Founder and Managing Partner of Blue like an Orange Sustainable Capital, and the author of "Can Finance Save the World?" (Berrett-Koehler, 2018).

Source: Project Syndicate

LG Sinha presented with book 'Parmeshwari: Agitation of Kashmir'



KT News Desk

Srinagar, May 23: Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha was on Saturday presented with a book authored by Dr Ashish Kaul. The title of the book is

"Parmeshwari: Agitation of Kashmir". The book was presented by parents of the author Rattan Kaul and Pushpa Kaul.

Subsequently, a delegation of Save Youth Save Future

Foundation, comprising District Head Shopian Rasik Ahmed Sheikh, District Head Anantnag Adv Shahid-ul-Islam, and Zonal Coordinator South Kashmir Irshad Ahmad Bhat, called on LG Manoj Sinha.



A delegation of Deaf Cricket Association J&K led by Umar Ashraf Beigh also called on the Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Saturday

Big push to rural entrepreneurship: ₹36 cr SVEP projects approved in J&K Over 12,000 non-farm enterprises to be established over next four years: Aijaz Asad

KT News Desk

Srinagar, May 23: Secretary, Rural Development Department (RDD) and Panchayati Raj, Mohammad Aijaz Asad, on Saturday chaired a meeting of the UT-Level Steering Committee (Non-Farm Livelihoods) under the Jammu & Kashmir Rural Livelihoods

Mission's (JKRLM) Start-up Village Entrepreneurship Programme (SVEP), which accorded in-principle approval to six Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) worth 36 crore aimed at promoting rural entrepreneurship and sustainable non-farm livelihood opportunities across Jammu and Kashmir. The approved DPRs pertain to six

new SVEP blocks—Sogam-Wavoor, Pulwama-Litter, Chadoora-Surasyar, Khour-Paragwal, Pouni-Reasi and Bhadarwah-Bhalla—where over 12,000 enterprises are projected to be established over the next four years. The meeting was attended by Mission Director, JKRLM, Dr. Shubhra Sharma; Chief Operating Officer, HIMAYAT, Rajneesh

Gupta; besides representatives from the Forest, Ecology & Environment Department, Tribal Affairs Department, Social Welfare Department, Handicrafts & Handloom Department, Industries & Commerce Department, MSME, KVIC, NABARD, RSETIs, Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India (EDI) and other stakeholder institutions.

CONTD. FROM FRONT PAGE

Govt committed

our people that this is not a distant issue but a challenge confronting us at our very doorstep, one we must face head-on with courage and resolve," he said.

The Lieutenant Governor also highlighted that more than 7,000 women's committees have been formed in Jammu Kashmir and it is now the administration's duty to empower these committees and ensure they can work effectively. In the past 43 days, 797 FIRs have been registered and 894 drug smugglers and peddlers have been sent behind bars. 59 traffickers have been arrested under PIT-NDPS provisions. 81 narcotic palaces built with the traffickers' black money have been demolished. 101 immovable properties have been attached and seized. Other assets worth crores have been attached. 457 driving licenses have been suspended. Recommendations have been made to cancel passports of 22 smugglers and to cancel registrations of 606 vehicles. Large quantities of drugs have been seized. About 5,641 drug stores were inspected; licenses of 268 stores were suspended or cancelled, and FIRs filed against 6 drug stores. (KNO)

Nasha Mukht Jammu

and outreach campaign, authorities conducted an extraordinary 16,37,484 awareness events across Jammu & Kashmir, with a staggering public participation of over one crore people, indicating widespread community engagement and growing public support for the anti-drug movement.

The outreach programmes included Mega pad-yatras, road shows, school and college campaigns, village-level awareness drives, signature campaigns, community meetings, youth engagement activities, sports events, cultural events, seminars, counselling sessions, and social media advocacy initiatives aimed at sensitizing society about the dangers of drug addiction.

Under this campaign, Mental Health and Counselling Support services have also been strengthened as through Tele-MANAS and Counselling Support initiative, around 3,572 calls were received from individuals seeking psychological support, counselling, and guidance related to mental health and substance abuse issues. Strengthening of accessible counselling services has become a critical pillar of the Administration's strategy to ensure early intervention and emotional support for vulnerable individuals and families affected by addiction.

Treatment and Rehabilitation Services have also been expanded across J&K. Addiction Treatment Facilities (ATFs) of Health department have reported substantial patient engagement during the campaign period. 58,603 patients were received at treatment facilities, with 58,138 patients availing OPD treatment services, 465 patients IPD intensive inpatient care, besides 192 patients were cured and released.

Simultaneously, the Social Welfare Department-operated DDAC Rehabilitation Centres provided Treatment and Rehabilitation Services to affected individuals. 634 patients received treatment support, 1,055 individuals underwent counselling sessions, 29 patients successfully recovered and 851 active patients continue to receive rehabilitation support in these centres.

Police department is also providing substantial Counselling and Rehabilitation Support services. Under Police run DDAC and counselling support initiatives, 451 patients were registered, 786 patients received counselling and 138 patients recovered successfully, besides 363 active cases remain under monitoring and rehabilitation support.

Under this ongoing campaign, an Aggressive Crackdown on Drug Networks has also been launched by the enforcement agencies. Police Department's NDPS operations witnessed extensive action against drug trafficking networks and peddlers across J&K.

During the ongoing campaign, 850 FIRs were registered under NDPS-related offences, 942 persons were arrested, 293 drug peddlers were apprehended and 49 drug hotspots were

identified for focused intervention.

The enforcement agencies have also intensified financial investigations against narcotics syndicates as authorities carried out major action against illegally acquired assets linked to drug traffickers.

As on date, 55 drug trafficker houses were sealed or demolished, 71 immovable properties were seized or attached valuing approximately 4,632.17 lakh, 34 immovable properties were demolished valuing around 1,648.50 lakh, besides 42 movable properties were seized or attached valuing around 214.93 lakh.

The campaign also targeted regulatory violations and logistical support systems associated with narcotics trafficking. 414 driving licences were suspended or cancelled, 13 vehicle RCs were cancelled, 118 drug store licences were suspended, 2 drug store licences were cancelled, besides 1,285 Aadhaar cancellation applications were processed and 119 passport impoundment applications were initiated.

During the ongoing campaign, Enforcement agencies achieved significant success in narcotics recovery operations, 6,416.070 grams and 8,019 milligrams of Herion, 47,206 grams and 871 milligrams of Charas and 251,697 grams and 1,116 milligrams of Ganja were seized till date.

Moreover, 22,474 tablets were seized besides 65 kilograms of Poppy plants were destroyed and 47 kanals of poppy cultivation was also destroyed. These seizures have led to a major setback to narcotics supply chains operating in the region.

Under this campaign, Surveillance and Institutional Monitoring has also been enhanced. As part of preventive surveillance measures, 6,436 chemists were checked, 6,881 CCTV cameras were installed and 2,127 schools and hospitals were inspected.

These surveillance measures are aimed at preventing illegal drug circulation near educational institutions and sensitive public areas.

The Intelligence-Led Prevention measures have also been strengthened under the campaign, with 386 suspects examined, 3,045 drug peddlers and smugglers identified and 36 PIT-NDPS detentions carried out.

These intelligence-based operations are being continuously strengthened to dismantle organized narcotics networks and prevent inter-district and cross-border drug trafficking.

Remarkably, under the campaign significant number of Padyatras have also been organised, witnessing enormous public support and participation, to generate awareness among the masses about the impact of drug abuse on the society. Sports and co-curricular activities are also being held in educational institutions as well as from block and local levels to push youth towards sports for maintaining physical and mental health.

"Nasha Mukht JK Abhiyaan" is not merely an enforcement exercise but a comprehensive program aimed at protecting youth, strengthening families, and building a drug-free Jammu & Kashmir.

The administration emphasized that the combined participation of government departments, law enforcement agencies, educational institutions, civil society organizations, health-care professionals, religious leaders, and local communities has played a decisive role in the campaign's success. (KNO)

J&K Govt imposes

workshops and training programmes and to explore virtual alternatives wherever possible.

The government has also banned holding meetings and conferences in private hotels and commercial venues, directing departments to use government buildings and conference halls instead.

Expenditure on ceremonial events, commemorative functions, souvenir printing, branding and promotional activities has also been curtailed, with departments asked to prioritise digital dissemination over printed publicity material.

A complete ban has been imposed on official lunches, dinners, receptions and similar

hospitality functions, except those hosted by the Lieutenant Governor and the Chief Minister.

Purchase of new vehicles has been "strictly discouraged" and will only be considered in exceptional cases involving critical operational requirements after concurrence from the Finance Department. Departments have also been directed to auction condemned vehicles before seeking replacements and ensure a 20 per cent reduction in fleet strength.

The order said all officers travelling within the country would have to travel in economy class irrespective of entitlement, while international travel would require specific approval from the Finance Department.

Departments have also been asked to increase the use of video conferencing and digital communication platforms to minimise avoidable travel and operational expenditure.

To conserve fuel and energy, offices have been directed to avoid unnecessary use of official vehicles, generators, air-conditioning systems and lighting equipment. Travel within the Union Territory has been advised preferably by road or rail.

The Finance Department has also barred hiring of new office accommodation without prior approval and restricted procurement of furniture except for newly established offices. Old furniture and condemned vehicles are to be disposed of through public auction.

The order said departments must adopt a "digital-first" approach by minimising physical meetings, printing of bulky documents and paper consumption through maximum use of e-Office and virtual platforms.

In another major decision, the government said no new posts would be created and departments would identify posts lying vacant for more than two years for surrender. Engagement of consultants, outsourcing agencies and contractual staff would also require assessment of necessity and prior approval.

The government further barred fresh financial commitments on schemes or proposals not included in the approved Budget Estimates for 2026-27.

Administrative Secretaries have been made personally responsible for ensuring compliance with the austerity measures, while Directors Finance and Financial Advisors have been asked to submit periodic compliance reports to the Finance Department. (KNO)

Short-term power

and Ladakh were utilizing 999.21 MWs of thermal energy including 870.14 MWs of coal and 129.7 MWs of gas energy from the allocated shares in joint and central sector utilities.

The figures reveal that Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh were allocated with a total of 3767.44 MWs of power from state, private and central share out of which 999.21 MWs were thermal energy and 2673.1 MWs were from renewable energy.

It also said that out of the total allocated energy, the regions were utilizing 95.13 MWs of nuclear and 1115.88 MWs of hydel energy.

The figures also reveal that Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh in the month of January-2026 were relying on nearly 66 per cent of imported power.

Pertinently, as already reported by this news agency Jammu and Kashmir was importing more than 95 per cent of its electricity in the month of December.

The officials earlier in the month had informed that Jammu and Kashmir is importing electricity ranging from 2900 MWs to 3100 MWs during the peak hours. (KNO)

Jmu-Sgr Vande Bharat

weather conditions.

Over the last 22 days, the train has maintained remarkable punctuality and operational reliability, providing commuters with a comfortable, efficient and dependable all-weather travel alternative.

Expressing satisfaction over the achievement, Senior Divisional Commercial Manager, Jammu, Uchit Singhal said the overwhelming public response reflects the trust passengers have placed in the service.

"Carrying over one lakh one thousand fifty

passengers in just 22 days is a moment of immense pride for Northern Railway.

This remarkable figure is not merely a statistic, but a reflection of our commitment to providing world-class rail infrastructure and services to the people of Jammu and Kashmir," he said.

Singhal added that passengers have responded positively to the train's comfort, hospitality, safety standards and travel efficiency, significantly reducing the fatigue traditionally associated with the Jammu-Srinagar journey.

"Our priority remains maintaining the highest standards of punctuality, cleanliness and passenger safety. We sincerely thank the people for making this service a success in such a short period," he added.

Officials said the Vande Bharat Express has not only strengthened year-round connectivity between the Kashmir Valley and the rest of the country, but has also given a major boost to tourism and trade in the region.

Improved rail connectivity is expected to facilitate faster transportation of Kashmir's apple produce and handicrafts to markets across India, benefiting local industries and businesses.

The successful operation of the Jammu-Srinagar Vande Bharat is being hailed as the realization of a long-cherished dream of establishing a reliable all-weather rail link connecting the Valley with the national railway network. (KNO)

Encounter underway

remain underway."

Security forces have intensified multi-agency search operations in the dense and mountainous terrain of Rajouri and neighbouring Poonch districts, which have witnessed a surge in counter-terror activities in recent years.

Earlier this month, a massive search operation was launched across more than 15 locations in Rajouri and Poonch following a foiled infiltration bid along the Line of Control in the Mankote and Krishna Ghati sectors, where an infiltrator was killed.

In March this year, joint forces carried out multiple combing operations in Rajouri's Khandli and Palma areas as well as parts of Poonch following reports of suspicious movement.

The twin districts have also seen several encounters in recent years, including operations in 2025 in the Bananthab and Piranhah areas, and a successful anti-terror operation in the Bajimalla forest that neutralised highly trained terrorists.

Security forces continue to maintain a high state of alert in the region as operations remain in progress. (KNO)

Repeated weather

this season's harvest and created panic among thousands of families solely dependent on horticulture for survival.

"We had already suffered huge losses earlier this month, and now whatever was left has also been destroyed. Months of hard work and heavy investment vanished within minutes," said an orchardist from Watergam.

Another grower from Sopore said the continuous hailstorms have made survival difficult for marginal orchardists who rely entirely on income generated from apple orchards to manage household expenses, the education of children and repayment of bank loans.

Earlier this week, several other horticulture belts of Baramulla district, including Sangrama, Wagura, Kreeri, Pattan, Kandi and Tangmarg, had also witnessed widespread destruction in orchards following severe hailstorms accompanied by gusty winds.

The repeated damage has triggered growing concern among horticulturists and traders, who warned that the fragile rural economy of Kashmir could face serious consequences if immediate relief measures are not taken.

The Kashmir Valley Fruit Growers Cum Dealers Union, an elected umbrella body representing fruit growers' associations across the Valley, strongly condemned what it termed as the government's "slow response" in assessing the losses suffered by orchardists.

The union said that despite massive destruction caused by hailstorms and storms during April and May, official teams had yet to conduct comprehensive damage assessments in many affected areas across Kashmir.

The growers' body stated that horticulture remains the backbone of Jammu and Kashmir's economy, with lakhs of people directly or indirectly dependent on the sector for livelihood and employment. However, repeated natural calamities coupled with the absence of a Crop Insurance Scheme and Market Intervention Scheme (MIS) are pushing orchardists into mounting debt.

The union emphasised that nearly 90 per cent of fruit growers in Kashmir are marginal orchardists who depend entirely on seasonal earnings from orchards to sustain their families.

"Whenever orchards are damaged due to natural disasters, these poor growers face severe hardships with no financial security mechanism available," the union said in a statement.

The growers reiterated their long-pending demand for inclusion of Kashmir's horticulture sector under a comprehensive Crop Insurance Scheme so that growers receive financial assistance during natural calamities. It also sought immediate restoration of the Market Intervention Scheme to safeguard growers from economic collapse during crises.

The union appealed to Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha and Chief Minister Omar Abdullah to announce a substantial compensation package for orchardists affected by the devastating hailstorms of April and May 2026.

Growers warned that if timely intervention is not made, repeated weather-related disasters may severely impact Kashmir's horticulture industry, which contributes significantly to the region's economy and employment sector. (KNO)

Hailstorms damage

Saturday said.

In a joint press conference in Sopore, President Kashmir Fruit Growers & Dealers Association, Fayaz Ahmed Malik @ Kaka Ji, as per the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) said 2026 has turned into a disastrous year for the agriculture as well as horticulture sector, with widespread damage reported from both South and North Kashmir following multiple hailstorm incidents over the past two months.

"Hailstorm havoc has caused nearly 30 per cent damage to the Valley's agriculture and horticulture sector. Thousands of orchardists and farmers have suffered huge losses and are now left with no option except taking loans from banks and other sources," he said.

Kaka Ji, who heads Asia's second largest Fruit Mandi, Sopore said more than 12 lakh people associated with the horticulture sector are suffering immensely due to the destruction caused to orchards and crops.

According to Kaka Ji, major damage was reported in Kulgam, Nehama and Shopian areas in April, while hailstorms on May 12 affected orchards in Kreeri, Wagura, Kreeri Kandi belt, Kunzer, Andergam and Lolipora in Baramulla district.

He said another spell of hailstorm on the same day caused losses in Matrigam Bandipora, Dardpora and Sumlar areas.

Referring to the latest hailstorm on May 22, Kaka Ji said orchards in Rafiabad and Zaingeer areas including Bohripora, Chitloora, Hib Dangerpora, Lasser, Yarbugh, Watergam, Behrampora, Arampora Sopore, Seloo and Warpora were severely affected. He added that Hadipora and Rohama villages also reported damage.

He said growers have repeatedly appealed to the government for implementation of a crop insurance scheme, but no concrete action has been taken so far.

"If the crop insurance scheme had been implemented in March, the affected growers would have received compensation by now. We have been demanding it time and again," he said. (KNO)

Modi, Rubio discuss bilateral ties, West Asia crisis; Trump invites PM

PTI

New Delhi, May 23: India and the US will continue to work closely for the global good, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Saturday, after US Secretary of State Marco Rubio briefed him on the West Asia crisis and bilateral cooperation in defence, strategic technologies, trade and energy security.

Rubio, who met Modi shortly after landing in New Delhi, invited the prime minister on behalf of President Donald Trump to visit the White House in the "near future," according to US Ambassador Sergio Gor.

The US Secretary of State's four-day India trip is largely seen as an attempt to recalibrate bilateral relations that have faced headwinds since mid-last year.

"Happy to receive the US Secretary of State, Mr Marco Rubio. We discussed sustained progress in the India-US Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership and issues related to regional and global peace and security," Modi said on social media.

"India and the United States will continue to work closely for the global good," he said.

The US State Department said Secretary Rubio and PM Modi agreed to deepen trade and defence cooperation and accelerate collaboration on critical and emerging technologies.

After the meeting with the prime minister, Rubio, addressing an event at the US embassy, described India as an "incredibly important partner" for the US and indicated that the two sides are planning to make certain important announcements in the coming months to further solidify relations.

US State Department Spokesperson Tommy Pigott, referring to Rubio's meeting with Modi, said the Secretary of State underscored the



strategic importance of the US-India partnership, the strong personal ties between the US President and Prime Minister Modi, as well as the profound economic and commercial opportunities for the two sides.

"The Secretary and the Prime Minister discussed the current situation in the Middle East. The Secretary emphasised that the United States will not let Iran hold the global energy market hostage and affirmed that US energy products have the potential to diversify India's energy supply," Pigott said.

Modi and Rubio also reflected upon bilateral achievements including significant investments that advance the President and the Prime Minister's "Mission 500" to double trade by 2030, he said.

According to an Indian readout, Rubio briefed PM Modi on the "sustained progress in bilateral cooperation across a wide range of sectors, including defence, strategic technologies, trade and investment,

energy security, connectivity, education and people-to-people ties".

The US Secretary of State shared the US perspective on various regional and global issues, including the situation in West Asia, it said.

PM Modi reaffirmed India's consistent support for peace efforts and reiterated the call for peaceful resolution of the conflicts through dialogue and diplomacy, it said.

The readout from the Prime Minister's Office said Modi requested Secretary Rubio to convey his warm greetings to President Trump and said that he looked forward to their continued exchanges. Pigott said the Secretary of State shared his appreciation for India hosting the upcoming Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting and looked forward to advancing a free and open Indo-Pacific region alongside Australia, India, and Japan.

US Ambassador Gor, who was also part of the Rubio-led delegation, described the meeting with PM Modi as "productive". "We had

a productive discussion on ways to deepen US-India cooperation across security, trade, and critical technologies - areas that strengthen both our nations and advance a free and open Indo-Pacific. India is a vital partner to the United States!" he said on 'X'.

The US Secretary of State arrived in Kolkata this morning, visiting the Mother House -- the headquarters of Saint Teresa's Missionaries of Charity -- before flying to the national capital.

On Sunday, Rubio is scheduled for bilateral talks with Jaishankar. The Secretary of State will travel to Agra and Jaipur on Monday before returning to Delhi on Tuesday morning for the Quad foreign ministers meeting.

Rubio's trip to India comes over five weeks after Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri undertook a three-day visit to Washington DC that focused on stabilising the ties after a spell of uncertainty and strain.

The relations between the two countries witnessed a major downturn after Washington imposed punitive tariffs on India and President Trump made controversial assertions regarding his role in de-escalating the India-Pakistan military clashes last May.

Over the next few months, the US president repeatedly and publicly claimed that he had resolved the military conflict between the two neighbours and saved millions of lives as it was heading toward a full-scale war. New Delhi stoutly maintained that the cessation of the hostilities was a result of talks between India and Pakistan, and the US involvement had nothing to do with it.

However, both sides made efforts in the last few months to repair the ties. The two sides have resolved to firm up a mutually beneficial trade deal soon.

No power can stop India from being biggest exporter of weapons in 25-30 years: Rajnath

PTI

Shirdi (Maharashtra), May 23: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Saturday said no power can stop India, once considered an importer of weapons, from becoming the biggest exporter in 25-30 years.

After inaugurating an ammunition manufacturing unit in Shirdi, Singh said a nation that makes its weapons writes its own future.

He said the role of private players in defence manufacturing was negligible a few years back, which now stands at 25-30 per cent, while the government has set a target to increase it further to 50 per cent.

"The private sector is not just a supplier of nuts and bolts in defence, but also a producer of state-of-the-art weapons systems," he added.

Singh said India was considered a weapons importer, but no power can now stop it from being the biggest exporter in 25-30 years.

He said that when the government's vision and the private sector's innovation align, then the country reaches new heights.

"All have to work together to make India the hub of munitions and automation," he added.

During the rule of the British East India Company, potassium nitrate was used as raw material to make gunpowder, and the company strengthened its military capability, Singh said. He said India has come a long way as far



as its defence industry is

concerned. Singh said that while ordnance factories existed even before Independence and the defence industry is deeply rooted in the country, after Independence, there was no balance between the country's old capabilities and modern requirements.

The main reason behind this was that private players did not get the opportunities and the sector was restricted to defence PSUs and ordnance factories, the defence minister said.

He listed steps undertaken by the Central government to increase private participation in the defence sector, including policy-related reforms and liberalisation of foreign direct investment.

He said the government implemented a strategic partnership model, prepared a positive indigenisation list of 5,000 items, making it mandatory for armed forces to procure

them in India.

Young innovators, too, are being encouraged, Singh added.

On the defence manufacturing unit, Singh said a golden chapter of self-reliance is being written in India's defence and space sector.

Chief of Defence Staff Gen Anil Chauhan and Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis also attended the event.

The factory at Shirdi is built on 200 acres of land, and is expected to generate direct and indirect employment for 2,000 people and also support Medium, Small and Micro Industries. The unit will also export defence equipment to other countries, the chairman and managing director of Nibe Group, Ganesh Nibe, had said.

The unit in Ahilyanagar district will manufacture artillery bombshells and also support the aerospace segment.

Singh and Fadnavis also visited the Saibaba shrine in Shirdi.

Heatwave impacts brain, eye health; doctors advise caution amid soaring temps



PTI

New Delhi, May 23: As heatwave conditions intensify across several parts of the country, doctors are reporting a sharp rise in patients suffering from neurological and eye-related ailments linked to extreme temperatures, dehydration and prolonged sun exposure.

Health experts warned that soaring temperatures can disrupt the body's internal balance, triggering fatigue, dizziness, severe headaches, migraines, heat exhaustion and, in some cases, serious neurological complications, particularly among children, senior citizens and people with pre-existing medical conditions.

Hospitals across Delhi-NCR are witnessing an increase in cases involving dehydration-induced headaches, eye irritation and heat-triggered neurological symptoms.

"The ongoing heatwave is beginning to show an impact beyond routine heat-related illnesses, with a noticeable increase in neurological complaints in our OPD," Dr Vinit Suri, Senior Consultant - Neurology, Indraprastha Apollo Hospital, Delhi, said.

"We have seen nearly a 20 per cent increase in OPD patients over the past few days, with more people coming in with symptoms such as severe headaches, dizziness, disorientation, fainting episodes, worsening

of existing neurological conditions, and especially migraine flare-ups," he said.

According to Dr Suri, extreme heat and prolonged exposure to bright sunlight can trigger migraines in susceptible individuals. He added that dehydration and heat stress can alter electrolyte balance and blood flow to the brain, putting pressure on the nervous system.

Doctors cautioned that symptoms such as persistent confusion, slurred speech, unusual drowsiness, seizures or loss of consciousness should not be ignored, as they may signal a neurological emergency requiring immediate medical attention.

Dr Sushma Sharma, Director, Neurology, at Marengo Asia Hospitals, said people suffering from migraine, epilepsy and other neurological disorders are especially vulnerable during periods of extreme heat, poor sleep and power cuts.

"During extreme summer heat, it is important to avoid stepping out during peak afternoon hours whenever possible. If going outdoors is necessary, people should protect themselves by using umbrellas, sunglasses, and covering their heads. Staying hydrated is equally important because dehydration caused by excessive sweating can also lead to confusion and neurological complications," Dr Sharma said.

Centre notifies draft rules for VB-G RAM G rollout

Outlines transition from MGNREGA

PTI

New Delhi, May 23: The Centre on Saturday notified draft rules under the Viksit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act, 2025 (VB-G RAM G), laying down the institutional and administrative framework for rollout of the new rural employment programme that will replace MGNREGA from July 1, while inviting public feedback before finalisation. Framed under Section 33 and other relevant provisions of the Act, the draft rules have been placed in the public domain to facilitate wider consultation with states, institutions, experts, worker groups, civil society organisations and the public, officials said.

The proposed rules cover transitional provisions, the National Level Steering Committee, the Central Gramin Rozgar Guarantee Council, administrative expenses, grievance redressal, payment of wages and unemployment allowance, and expenditure incurred beyond normative allocations, including for Union Territories without legislatures.

Officials in the Ministry of Rural Development said the rules are aimed at establishing the institutional, financial and governance framework for implementation of the Act across the country and ensuring participatory consultation before the rules are finalised.

The draft Transitional Provisions Rules spell out the framework for shifting from MGNREGA to VB-G RAM G, which was notified on May



11 and is scheduled to come into force across states and Union Territories from July 1.

The rules provide for continuation of ongoing works, settlement of liabilities, transfer of records and continuation of worker rights during the transition period. Existing e-KYC-verified MGNREGA job cards will remain temporarily valid until new Gramin Rozgar Guarantee Cards are issued, while fresh works may also be opened if ongoing projects are insufficient to meet labour demand.

The VB-G RAM G Act replaces the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act with what the government describes as a "next-generation rural development framework" aligned with the Viksit Bharat 2047 vision.

The new law raises the annual employment guarantee from 100 to 125 days and links rural employment more closely with infrastructure creation,

climate resilience and village-level planning through Viksit Gram Panchayat Plans.

The proposed framework also envisages new oversight mechanisms. A National Level Steering Committee will provide strategic guidance on implementation, including normative allocations, convergence, monitoring systems and technology-enabled governance.

According to the draft rules, the committee will include representatives from the Department of Rural Development, NITI Aayog, central ministries, state governments and technical institutions.

The Central Gramin Rozgar Guarantee Council has also been proposed to support implementation, evaluation, monitoring and reporting under the Act, with the ministry saying the two bodies are intended to strengthen policy coordination, institutional oversight and participatory governance.

NTPC Q4 PAT jumps 75 pc on strong operational performance

IANS

New Delhi, May 23: State-owned energy services provider NTPC Limited on Saturday reported a strong financial performance for the fourth quarter and full financial year ended March 31, 2026, driven by operational gains, capacity additions and improved efficiencies. The public sector company reported a 75 per cent quarter-on-quarter (QoQ) growth in profit after tax (PAT) in the January-March quarter to Rs 8,747 crore from Rs 4,987 crore reported in the third quarter of FY2026. For the full financial

year, standalone PAT increased 18 per cent to Rs 23,162 crore, compared to Rs 19,649 crore in FY25. On a consolidated basis, NTPC's net profit for FY26 rose 15 per cent to Rs 27,546 crore from Rs 23,953 crore in the previous financial year.

Moreover, the company's total income for Q4 FY26 stood at Rs 44,030 crore, registering a 6 per cent growth compared to the previous quarter.

According to the company, the profit growth was primarily driven by gains from capacity additions, operational efficiencies, lower finance costs and revisions in deferred tax and regulatory deferred account balances.

India absorbs global crude shock with limited fuel price pass-through: Expert



IANS

New Delhi, May 23: The Indian government has effectively managed the impact of global crude oil volatility, maintaining stable fuel availability backed by strong refining capacity and supply systems that have ensured uninterrupted access to petrol and diesel, KPMG International's Global Head for Energy, Natural Resources and Chemicals (ENRC) Anish De said on Saturday.

In an exclusive interview with IANS, De said recent fuel price increases in India reflect the lag between global crude oil movements and domestic retail adjustments, while stressing that supply conditions remain steady across the country.

"There has been a roughly Rs 5 per litre increase in petrol and diesel prices, which is significantly lower compared to the nearly 70 per cent rise in crude oil prices globally,"

De said.

He added that further price adjustments cannot be ruled out if crude prices remain elevated.

"If oil continues to stay high, there is every possibility of further hikes," he said.

"Approximately 25 per cent of the losses would have been covered through recent price increases. Around 75 per cent is still being borne by the companies," he said, pointing to continued under-recovery in fuel pricing. However, he emphasised that India does not face any fuel shortage concerns at either the wholesale or retail level. "There is no shortage of crude availability in global markets, and India has sufficient refining capacity. Supply is not an issue," he said.

Responding to reports of fuel outages at some retail outlets, De clarified that he was not aware of specific cases and said such details are best addressed by oil companies.

NOTICE

This is to notify that an error has been found in the service records regarding the name of the undersigned.

The name was incorrectly recorded as "Ali Mohammad Mir" instead of the correct name "Ali Mohd Mir."

It is hereby requested that the necessary correction may kindly be made in the official service records at the earliest. Relevant supporting documents have been enclosed for verification and necessary action.

Name: Ali Mohd Mir
Designation/Rank: Head Constable Telecom
Belt No.: 2429/PW
Unit: APCR Kashmir

UN nuclear nonproliferation talks fail

United Nations, May 23: Talks at the UN to reaffirm nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament goals failed on Friday, according to the leader of the talks, after four weeks of negotiations held amid low expectations.

Vietnam's Do Hung Viet, the president of the conference, said that "despite our best efforts... it is my understanding that the conference is not in a position to achieve agreement on its substantive work."

"I do not intend to put the document forward for adoption," he added.

Negotiators were reviewing the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the cornerstone of nuclear weapons control, amid fears of a renewed arms race. Previous reviews in 2015 and 2022 were also unsuccessful.

With expectations low, participants negotiated over a repeatedly reviewed and watered-down text, which they ultimately failed to adopt.

Experts pointed out that even in the absence of a review agreement for the third time in a row, the treaty continues to exist, but with diminished legitimacy.

"The text keeps on becoming less and less anchored in the realities of current conflicts and proliferation risks," including North Korea and Iran, analyst Richard



Gowan of the International Crisis Group said before the outcome was announced.

The latest version of the text seen by AFP on Friday merely stated that Tehran must "never" develop nuclear weapons.

The paragraph was in brackets, signaling persistent disagreement, despite the removal of the reference to Iran's "non-compliance" with its obligations that appeared in the first draft.

Also gone were expressions of concern about North Korea's nuclear program, or

even any mention of the "denuclearization" of the Korean Peninsula.

Gone as well was the direct call on the United States and Russia to begin negotiations on a successor to the New START treaty limiting Russian and American arsenals, which expired in February.

The diluted text still covered "the risk of a resumption of nuclear testing by Russia, China and the United States, the growth of arsenals, and attacks on nuclear infrastructure," Heloise Fayet of

the French Institute of International Relations said earlier on Friday.

Exactly why the review failed isn't yet known.

"The majority of countries are indeed working in good faith for disarmament," said Seth Shelden of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), commenting on the failure of the talks.

"But the small handful of nuclear-armed states, and certain of their allies, are undermining the NPT, frustrating disarmament efforts, expanding arsenals and provoking proliferation, and pointing the world toward catastrophe," he added.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), the nine nuclear-armed states — Russia, the United States, France, the United Kingdom, China, India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea — possessed 12,241 nuclear warheads in January 2025, 90 percent of which were in American and Russian hands.

Some countries are modernizing their arsenals or even increasing their stockpiles.

The NPT, which entered into force in 1970 and has been signed by almost all states — with notable exceptions including Israel, India and Pakistan — aims to prevent proliferation, promote complete disarmament and encourage cooperation for the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

Coal mine gas explosion in China kills 90



PTI

Beijing, May 23: Ninety miners were killed in a gas explosion in a coal mine in north China's Shanxi Province, while all-out rescues are underway to reach those still unaccounted for, official media in Beijing reported on Saturday.

A total of 247 workers were underground when the accident occurred on Friday evening at the Liushenyu coal mine in Qinyuan County, Changzhi.

Mining disasters are common in energy-hungry China, and are largely attributed to poor working conditions and a weak regulatory framework.

The death toll rose to 90 following the accident, while around 123 people of those rescued are receiving treatment at hospitals, including two in critical condition and two in serious condition.

Nine people remain unaccounted for as rescue operations continue to locate them, state-run media reported.

"As long as there is hope, we will make every possible effort," one rescuer told Xinhua.

Chinese President Xi Jinping has issued instructions for a comprehensive rescue operation and treatment of the injured.

He has called for proper handling of the aftermath of the accident and sought a thorough investigation into its cause, with accountability pursued in accordance with the law.

Xi has stressed that authorities across the country must learn from the accident, remain vigilant on workplace safety, and intensify efforts to identify and eliminate potential risks to prevent major accidents.

As China enters its flood season, Xi also called for strengthened emergency preparedness and solid flood control and disaster relief measures to safeguard people's lives and property.

Vice Premier Zhang Guoqing has led a team to the site to oversee the rescue efforts.

While such incidents take place almost every year, the worst mining disaster was in 2005, resulting in the death of 214 people, following a gas explosion at the Sunjiawan coal mine in Liaoning province in China's northeast.

'Gambhir likely to have last word on Suryakumar's future as captain'



PTI

New Delhi, May 23: Suryakumar Yadav's future as India's T20 captain could primarily be decided by head coach Gautam Gambhir as the national selection committee is not entirely convinced that he can make it to the team purely as a batter, according to a senior BCCI source.

Suryakumar, who was given the moniker SKY by Gambhir, has been struggling for form for a year now.

Within the BCCI, it is understood that the selection panel is in favour of moving on from him but the Board hierarchy also recognises that the coach-captain equation is integral to the dressing-room environment.

And Gambhir's stated

comfort with Suryakumar will make him a key figure in the final call.

For close to a year now, Suryakumar's place in the side has remained under scrutiny. At the moment, it is understood that all five selectors largely believe that the current T20 captain should be dropped from the XI.

The view has been gaining ground ever since the emotional dust of the T20 World Cup triumph settled. The selectors, it is learnt, began seeing the future of Indian cricket through a wider lens instead of focussing on the glow of a single tournament.

"Initially the selectors thought that IPL would help Suryakumar regain form like last edition when he crossed 700 runs. But strangely there

hasn't been any technical course correction in his game.

"Even the roughest of pacers are just bowling straight hard lengths and he has no answer. Selectors don't see him playing the Los Angeles 2028 Olympics. It is as simple as that," a senior BCCI source told PTI.

The numbers do make for a grim reading.

Suryakumar managed only 210 runs from 12 innings at a strike-rate of 148 but, more alarmingly, averaged below 18 -- statistics that have sharply contrasted with the aura surrounding one of modern T20 cricket's most inventive batters.

"If someone can't earn his place as a batter, how can he be a leader? Hence it is difficult to retain him but Ajit (Agarkar) and Gautam need to be on same page," the source said.

And therein lies the intrigue. Gambhir is not known to operate as a ceremonial head coach.

Those familiar with his working style insist that in any set-up he oversees, the final word often rests with him. More importantly, his relationship with Suryakumar has remained exceptionally warm.

This means that if Gambhir chooses to back Suryakumar and veto the move to sack him, the selection committee may be forced to postpone the inevitable.

France bans Israeli security minister Ben Gvir from country



AFP

Paris, May 23: France announced on Saturday it had banned Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir from entry for a video mocking bound activists seized by Israeli soldiers on a Gaza-bound aid flotilla.

"From today, Itamar Ben Gvir is banned from entering French territory" after "his reprehensible actions toward French and European citizens" who were part of the humanitarian flotilla, French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot said on X. He added that, with Italy, he was also calling for European Union-level sanctions against the far-right Israeli minister.

The ban follows a global outcry after Ben Gvir published a video on Wednesday showing the heavy-handed treatment of foreign activists from the flotilla.

They were detained by Israel in international waters and were awaiting deportation at the southern port of Ashdod.

In the video, dozens of activists are seen forced to kneel with their foreheads to the ground and their hands tied. The clip, which was captioned "Welcome to Israel," also showed Ben Gvir heckling the activists while waving an Israeli flag. Spain has also urged the EU to sanction Ben Gvir while the United Kingdom summoned Israel's most senior diplomat in Britain following "the inflammatory video."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Ben Gvir's treatment of the activists was "not in line with Israel's values and norms."

Netanyahu had earlier denounced the humanitarian aid mission as a "malicious scheme" intended to support Hamas.

The activists had departed from Turkey last week on around 50 vessels under the Global Sumud Flotilla. It was the latest attempt by activists to breach Israel's blockade of Gaza, after Israeli forces intercepted a previous convoy last month.

'Mumbai Indians neither had individual brilliance nor collective effort this year'



PTI

Mumbai, May 23: Coming back into the competition from the brink is something that has been in the nature of Mumbai Indians but they neither had individual brilliance nor any collective effort in the 2026 I.L season, said head coach Mahela Jayawardene here on Saturday.

The five-time IPL winners Mumbai Indians were among the first teams to be knocked out from the playoffs race this year, despite having four of India's T20 World Cup winning squad members, including skipper Suryakumar Yadav.

With Jasprit Bumrah (4 wickets), Hardik Pandya (172 runs, 4 wickets), Suryakumar (210) and Tilak Varma (356), MI had a healthy chunk of Indian players. Jayawardene said MI's ordinary run this year cannot be put on the disappointing show from these four players alone.

"It's not fair just to bring up (only) those four guys. As a group, a lot of the guys haven't been able to consistently perform -- that's how I see it," Jayawardene told reporters on eve of their last match in IPL 2026 against Rajasthan Royals here. "Yes, they came from a very high level (of competition) in the World Cup and all that. (But)

what you have to understand is that how you play for your national team and how you play for the IPL franchise, sometimes it is different because the personnel is different."

"The roles can be different, how you want to go about, so they had to switch up and there's nothing wrong with the effort that they put off the field training-wise and what they needed to do, and the conversations that we had with them," he added.

Jayawardene continued, "It's just that they were not able to go out there in the middle and execute. That is something that happens in a game of cricket and that's something we also need to understand."

Jayawardene said MI's failure to make the playoffs was due to a lot of other factors working together.

"I can't just say one thing affected, but it's a combination of a lot of things. We needed a lot of the other players and the entire squad to be in a very positive frame of mind, performing at least for seven, eight games," he said.

"In the past, we had individual players winning matches by themselves and we haven't had that happening this year with the prominent players we had. That can happen."

"... so that means that collectively the team has to then perform to win some matches, and that also did not happen because a lot of the players did not perform to our expectations. We tried some youngsters also, but they also struggled in the heat of the moment. It's that sort of a season and that's something that we have to reflect on," Jayawardene said.

The Mumbai Indians head coach said Rohit Sharma is 100 per cent fit but is being used as an impact substitute due to team combination factors. The former captain was picked in the Indian squad for the three-match ODI series against Afghanistan, but his availability is subjected to fitness.

Movies Watchlist

SUNDAY, 24TH MAY

	BHOOTH BANGLA (U/A16+) HINDI - 03:45 PM		
	PATI PATNI AUR WOHO DO (UA16+) HINDI ATMOS - 04:45 PM, 07:15 PM		
	CHAND MERA DIL (U/A16+) HINDI ATMOS - 02:00 PM, 04:45 PM, 07:30 PM HINDI - 10:45 AM		
	DRISHYAM-3 (U/A16+) MALAYALAM WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES - 01:30 PM		
	DHURANDHAR THE REVENGE (UA16+) HINDI - 11:20 AM		

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