



Rain fury claims nine more lives, toll reaches 21; seven of two families buried in Poonch landslide

Search on for missing, LG announces relief measures; CM sanctions 6 lakh ex gratia; political leaders express grief; widespread heavy rain, flash flood forecast over next two days; KPDCL issues safety advisory

Sajid Raina

Jammu, Jul 20: Nine people were killed in separate rain-related incidents in Jammu and Kashmir on Monday, including seven members of two families who died after a flash flood and landslide buried a house in Poonch district and two persons killed when shooting stones struck a passenger bus in Doda district, officials said.

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah announced an ex gratia of Rs 6 lakh for the next of kin of each person killed in the rain-related incidents in Rajouri and Poonch, comprising Rs 4 lakh from the SDRF and Rs 2 lakh from the CMRF.

The fresh deaths came as search operations continued for those missing in Sunday's devastating flash floods, taking the overall death toll from the two-day spell of heavy rain,



flash floods and landslides in the Union Territory to 21, officials said.

The latest tragedy struck the Domail Dhok area of Loran in

Poonch district, where a residential house was buried under debris after a flash flood and landslide triggered by heavy rainfall.

The deceased were identified as Zaida Begum (35), wife of Mohammad Rafiq and a resident of Lopadi, Loran; her son Adnan Rafiq (4); daughter Irzaa (2); Shamim Akhter, wife of Rayaz Ahmad; Tanvir (22), son of Ghulam Mohammad; Irfan (22), son of Subhan Dar; and Sabina (30), wife of Abdul Majid.

Police, SDRF and local rescue teams rushed to the spot and retrieved all the bodies from the debris.

"Police are on the spot, and further details are being ascertained," an official said.

Officials told the news agency - Kashmir News Observer (KNO) that the latest fatalities came a day after 12 people were killed in flash floods and other rain-related incidents in Poonch and Rajouri districts on Sunday, raising the overall death toll from the ongoing spell of inclement

weather to 19.

Search operations continued on Monday at multiple locations along the Suran river in Surankote to trace people who went missing during Sunday's flash floods.

Officials said teams of the police, State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) and other agencies were carrying out coordinated searches despite difficult terrain and adverse weather conditions.

"All available resources have been deployed to trace the missing persons, and the operation will continue until everyone is accounted for," an official said.

Expressing grief over the loss of lives, Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha said the tragic landslide in Poonch had claimed seven precious lives. "I express my deepest condolences to | More on P6

CM Omar: Safety of people highest priority

Chairs high-level meet; directs swift restoration, relief; assures power by evening

KT News Desk

New Delhi, Jul 20: Continuing his close monitoring of the situation arising from the recent heavy rains across Jammu and Kashmir, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Monday chaired another high-level review meeting through video conference from New Delhi to assess restoration works, relief measures and overall preparedness across Jammu and Kashmir.

The meeting comprehensively reviewed the latest ground situation,



including restoration of essential services, road connectivity, availability of food and other essential supplies, healthcare arrangements, relief operations and the preparedness of all departments in view of continuing adverse | More on P6

NC takes statehood battle to New Delhi

Dr Farooq, Omar lead protest in national capital; CM hires auto-rickshaw to reach venue, accuses Centre of renegeing on promises; says statehood first, Assembly resolution on 'special status' next



Rehan Qayoom Mir

New Delhi/Srinagar, Jul 20: Intensifying its campaign to seek restoration of Jammu and Kashmir's statehood, the ruling National Conference (NC) on Monday took its battle to New Delhi, with party president Dr Farooq Abdullah and Chief Minister Omar Abdullah leading a protest at Jantar Mantar.

According to the details available with the news agency-Kashmir News Observer (KNO), NC leaders accused the Centre of failing to honour commitments made in Parliament and before the Supreme Court following the 2019 reorganisation of the erstwhile state.

Similar demonstrations demanding restoration of statehood were held by NC workers across several districts of J&K, including Srinagar, Baramulla,

Budgam, Bandipora, Kupwara and Kishtwar.

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah briefly returned to Jammu earlier in the day to review relief and rescue operations following flash floods before flying back to Delhi to join the protest. He later marched towards Jantar Mantar carrying a placard reading, "Restore rights and dignity of J&K people."

"The Central Government has forced us to come to Delhi and protest. For the past two years, we have only been reminding them to fulfill the promises made to the people in Parliament and the Supreme Court," Omar told reporters as per KNO.

He said the Centre had repeatedly assured that statehood would be restored 'at the appropriate time' but had failed to define that timeline.

"The | More on P6



Hours of intense rainfall on Monday left several parts of Srinagar submerged, disrupting traffic and inundating roads.

In 20 days, J&K records over 20 cloudbursts

» Pir Panjal, Kishtwar, Kathua, Gurez worst-hit » Amarnath, Mata Vaishno Devi, Shiv Khori Yatras temporarily suspended

Sajid Raina

Srinagar, Jul 20: Jammu and Kashmir has witnessed an unprecedented spell of extreme weather this month so far, with more than 20 cloudbursts reported across the Union Territory, triggering flash floods, landslides and widespread destruction that have claimed several lives and damaged public infrastructure.

Officials told the news agency-Kashmir News Observer (KNO) that at least

15 cloudbursts were reported during the first 14 days of July, affecting several parts of Kashmir and the Jammu region. The worst-hit areas included the Tulail Valley and Gurez in North Kashmir, besides the upper reaches of Thathri and the Bhalesa in Doda district.

"The weather activity intensified further over the weekend, with at least two major cloudbursts striking Chasoti in Kishtwar and Kathua districts, while multiple cloudbursts were also reported from the Pir

Panjal districts of Poonch and Rajouri," they said, adding, "The cloudbursts triggered flash floods and mudslides, resulting in multiple fatalities in Kathua, Kishtwar, Poonch and Rajouri, besides leaving several people missing, officials said.

The disasters also caused extensive damage to infrastructure, with more than 100 houses damaged, bridges washed away and several roads, including stretches of the Jammu-Pathankot National Highway, affected by floods and

landslides."

Pertinently, continuous spell of inclement weather has also forced authorities to temporarily suspend the Amarnath Yatra and pilgrimages to the Mata Vaishno Devi and Shiv Khori shrines as a precautionary measure.

The India Meteorological Department has forecast more heavy rainfall over the next two days, prompting authorities to maintain a high alert across vulnerable districts and advise people to avoid | More on P6

MONSOON SESSION

PM urges constructive, fact-based debates

Says every voice deserves respect



KT News Desk

New Delhi, Jul 20: Transitioning to the legislative agenda, Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged parliamentarians to harness the rapid national momentum, pleading for constructive, fact-based debates that prioritise patriotism and ensure every voice receives respect.

"Where there are strong facts and logic, there is absolutely no place for disruptions; a powerful voice can be raised even with a calm mind to confidently guide the nation forward," Modi said.

"We pray that the monsoon remains proactive, and the monsoon session also remains productive," the PM remarked, emphasizing the profound impact of proactive and forward-thinking actions on the nation's overall well-being.

Highlighting a continuous series of extraordinary national and international achievements over the past month, the Prime Minister expressed immense pride in the country's rising global stature. Recalling how an Indian | More on P6

Tourism employment in J&K rises to 10.78 lakh in 2025: Govt

Raja Syed Rather

Srinagar, Jul 20: The Central Government on Monday informed the Lok Sabha that tourism employment in Jammu and Kashmir has increased from an estimated 10.42 lakh in 2021-22 to 10.78 lakh in 2025, while reiterating that the identification, development and promotion of tourism destinations remain a continuous process undertaken primarily by the Union Territory Administration with support from the Ministry of Tourism.

Replying to an unstarred question by MP Jugal Kishore, Union Tourism Minister



Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, as reported by the news agency-Kashmir News Observer (KNO), said the Ministry compiles tourist arrival data received from

the respective State and Union Territory administrations, and such data is available only at the State/UT level.

According to | More on P6

10 properties of drug peddlers attached in Sgr: Police

Srinagar, Jul 20: Continuing its crackdown on narcotics trafficking under the Nasha Mukti Jammu Kashmir Abhiyan, Police in central Kashmir's Srinagar district on Monday attached 10 immovable properties worth approximately Rs 8 crore belonging to alleged drug peddlers in the district.

According to a police statement issued to the news agency-Kashmir News Observer (KNO), the properties were attached by Police Station Nowhatta under Section 68-F of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act. The

assets were identified during the investigation as having been acquired from proceeds generated through alleged illicit drug trafficking.

The attached properties include residential houses located at Zahidpora Sheikh Colony Hawal, Tujgari Mohalla Sheikh Colony Nowhatta, Androoni Kathidarwaza, Kathidarwaza Rainawari and Barthana Qamarwari. The properties comprise single-storey to four-storey houses built on land measuring between four and seven marlas, with individual values estimated between | More on P6

SFs recover 2 IEDs, pistols, 530 rounds in B'la forests

Waris Fayaz

Baramulla, Jul 20: Security forces on Monday recovered a massive cache of war-like stores, including Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), pistols and ammunition, during a joint search operation in the Kandi forest area of Baramulla district, officials said.

An official told news agency-Kashmir News Observer (KNO) that the operation was jointly conducted by the Indian Army's 52 Rashtriya Rifles, Baramulla Police, 53 Battalion of the CRPF and the Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB).

During the search, the joint



team recovered two Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), two pistols and 530 rounds of 7.62 mm ammunition concealed in the forest area.

Officials described the recovery as a major operational success, saying the seizure is believed to have averted potential terror activities in the region.

Further | More on P6

Execute timely measures to enhance pilgrim safety, Yatra management: CS Atal Dulloo

Reviews implementation of CAPF recommendations for upgrading SANJY facilities

KT News Desk

SRINAGAR, JULY 20: Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo chaired a high-level review meeting on Monday to assess the implementation of the recommendations put forth by the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) for further improving and upgrading the facilities at the Shri Amarnath Ji Yatra Base Camps and Transit Camps, stretching from Lakanpur to the Holy Cave Shrine. The recommendations were based on extensive ground assessments carried out by the CAPF teams during the ongoing Shri Amarnath Ji Yatra-2026.

The meeting, as per an official statement, was attended by senior officers from the Civil Administration, Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board and the security establishment, including Administrative Secretaries, senior officers of the Police, Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs), BRO/BEACON, Heads of Departments, Divisional Commissioner, Kashmir, Deputy Commissioners and Senior Superintendents of Police of the concerned districts, Director, Information, besides other senior officers.

During the meeting, the Chief



Secretary undertook a comprehensive review of the recommendations and observations highlighted by CEO, SASB, Dr Mandeep K.Bhandari as contained in the reports submitted by the CAPF teams.

Regarding the same the respective Administrative Secretaries and Deputy Commissioners concerned presented the status of implementation of each recommendation, outlining the measures already

undertaken and the timelines for completion of the remaining works.

The recommendations covered a wide spectrum of interventions aimed at further enhancing the safety, convenience and overall experience of the pilgrims. These included upgrading accommodation facilities and other basic amenities at the Base and Transit Camps, improving sanitation, cleanliness and hygiene standards, strengthening disaster preparedness

through enhanced firefighting arrangements and waterproofing of tents, besides ensuring reliable power and water backup at identified locations. The meeting also reviewed measures for maintaining hygienic conditions at community kitchens (langars), washrooms and bathing facilities, improving drainage systems, and ensuring safe electrical wiring of tents and camp infrastructure to prevent any untoward incidents.

In addition, emphasis was laid on improving queue management at key locations, preventing overcrowding, streamlining traffic regulation, augmenting parking facilities and creating additional rain shelters at vulnerable stretches of the Yatra route to provide greater comfort and convenience to the pilgrims.

Stressing that the safety and well-being of the pilgrims remain the foremost priority of the Government, the Chief Secretary directed all the concerned departments and district administrations to critically examine each recommendation and ensure its expeditious implementation.

He emphasized that every feasible measure should be taken to strengthen the existing arrangements so that devotees undertaking the pilgrimage are provided with safe, seamless and hassle-free facilities throughout their journey.

He further impressed upon all the departments to maintain close coordination and regularly monitor the progress of the identified works, ensuring that any shortcomings noticed during the ongoing Yatra are promptly addressed through corrective measures before the next yatra here.

JKBOSE postpones exams scheduled for July 20

KT News Desk

JAMMU, JULY 20: The Jammu and Kashmir Board of School Education (JKBOSE) has postponed the Annual (Private)/Bi-Annual 2026 examinations of Class 10 (SSE), Class 12 and Jammu & Kashmir State Open School (JKSOS Class 12) scheduled for July 20, in view of heavy rains and floods.

The fresh dates, as per an official statement, for the postponed exams shall be notified separately.

Gold Category TB Free Panchayat Awards

DC Bandipora felicitates 25 Gram Panchayats

KT News Desk

BANDIPORA, JULY 20: Deputy Commissioner (DC) Bandipora, Indu Kanwal Chib, Monday presided over the TB Free Panchayat Award Ceremony 2025 held at the Conference Hall of the DC Office, Bandipora, under the TB Mukht Bharat Abhiyan. The programme, as per an official statement, was attended by Chief Medical Officer Bandipora, Dr. Bhajan Kour, senior officers of the Health Department, representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions, and other stakeholders.

On the occasion, 25 Gram Panchayats of the district were conferred with the Gold Category TB Free Panchayat Award for achieving and sustaining TB Free Panchayat Status during the year 2025.

Addressing the gathering, the Deputy Commissioner congratulated the award-winning Panchayats and appreciated the dedicated efforts of the Health Department, Panchayati Raj Institutions, frontline health workers, and the community in strengthening tuberculosis prevention, early detection, treatment adherence, and public awareness under the National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP). She said the recognition reflects the collective commitment of all stakeholders towards the goal of a TB-Mukt Bharat and urged all Panchayats to sustain the momentum through active community participation, timely diagnosis and quality healthcare services.

Independence Day Arrangements: DC Pulwama chairs preliminary meeting

KT News Desk

PULWAMA, JULY 20: Deputy Commissioner Pulwama, Dr. Basharat Qayoom Monday convened a preliminary meeting of officers at Circuit House Pulwama to discuss the arrangements for the smooth and enthusiastic celebration of Independence Day 2026 across the district.

At the outset, Dr. Qayoom emphasized the importance of the national event and directed all departments to ensure timely and coordinated preparations. He stressed the need to create a festive atmosphere while maintaining the decorum and dignity of the occasion.

The DC, as per an official statement, further emphasized the importance of the National Flag hoisting and instructed officers to ensure strict adherence to the Flag Code and the National Anthem protocol. He also stressed the need to incorporate cultural activities that reflect the



rich diversity of the nation.

The meeting included a review of necessary infrastructure and facilities, including seating arrangements, traffic management, medical aid stations, Public Address System installation and logistical support. It was informed that the main functions will be held at District Police Lines (DPL) Pulwama, DPL Awantipora and Sub-Division Tral, while parallel events will also be organised at Block and Tehsil levels.

The Deputy Commissioner directed all district and sectoral officers to

ensure their presence, along with their subordinate staff, at both district and sub-divisional events. He reviewed arrangements related to flag hoisting, march pasts, cultural performances, seating, stage setup, venue decoration, and refreshments.

Directions were also issued to ensure fool-proof security, uninterrupted power and water supply, sanitation, traffic regulation, and the illumination of major government buildings and public assets.

Furthermore, directions were also imparted for the smooth conduct of activities under the Har Ghar Tiranga Campaign and the 150 years of Vande Mataram Celebrations.

The meeting was attended by Additional Deputy Commissioners of Pulwama, Awantipora, and Tral; General Manager DIC Pulwama; Chief Planning Officer, Pulwama; and Officers from Police, CRPF and District Administration.

District Capex Budget: DDC Doda reviews progress of development works

KT News Desk

DODA, JULY 20: District Development Commissioner (DDC) Doda Krishan Lal Monday chaired a comprehensive review meeting at the Conference Hall, DC Office Doda, to assess the progress of development works being executed under the District Capex Budget.

During the meeting, the DDC, as per an official statement, reviewed the physical and financial progress of works being implemented by various departments, including Elementary Education, Secondary Education, Health Department, Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), Jal Shakti Department, Rural Development Department (RDD), Power Development Department (PDD), BDC Grants and PRI Grants. Officers concerned presented department-wise updates on the status of sanctioned works, expenditure incurred and projects completed, besides highlighting the issues affecting implementation.

The DDC directed all departments to expedite the pace of work and ensure all sanctioned projects are completed within the stipulated timelines, stressing that there should be no unnecessary delays and asking officers to closely monitor the progress of ongoing works. He instructed that all works completed physically must also be completed financially without delay by ensuring timely submission of bills and completion of financial formalities and directed the departments concerned to submit all pending Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) at the earliest so that no project is delayed due to procedural bottlenecks.

JJM: DDC Kulgam reviews works progress

KT News Desk

KULGAM, JULY 20: District Development Commissioner (DDC) Kulgam, Shahzad Alam Monday chaired a review meeting at the Mini Secretariat Kulgam.

A detailed review of the progress of Jal Jeevan Mission works was conducted. It was informed that out of 221 sanctioned works, 139 have been completed, while 109 out of 143 water supply schemes have been

commissioned till date.

The DDC, as per an official statement, reviewed the physical and financial progress of water supply works and emphasised on inter departmental coordination and proper supervision of ongoing works.

The Chairman directed all concerned officers to expedite the execution of works with special emphasis on the completion and commissioning of Rapid Sand Filtration Plants (RSFPs) and achieving

100% Har Ghar Jal certification at the earliest.

The meeting was attended by the Superintending Engineer Hydraulic Circle Anantnag/Kulgam, Chief Planning Officer Kulgam, DPMU team Kulgam, Executive Engineers of Jal Shakti Divisions Kulgam and Qazigund, Executive Engineer PHE Mechanical Awantipora, Assistant Executive Engineer's of Kulgam and Qazigund and Assistant Executive Engineer, Ground Water Division Srinagar.

Government of Jammu and Kashmir

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER HYDRAULIC DIVISION URI

NOTICE INVITING e-TENDER

e_NIT_No. 06/Hyd/Uri_of_2026-27,Dated: 15/07/2026

For and on behalf of Hon'ble Lieutenant Governor of Jammu & Kashmir Union Territory, e-Tenders on percentage basis are invited from approved and eligible contractors registered with Jammu and Kashmir UT Government, for the following works: -
Position of AAA =Accorded Vide No. 121/DDC of 2026 Dated:- 08/07/2026.
Position of funds: Budgetary provision 2026-27

S. No.	Name of work	Adv. Cost (Rs. in Lacs)	Earnest Money (In Rupees)	Time of Completion	Class of Contract	Major Head	Cost of Tender document (In Rs.)	TENDER-ID
1	Stabilization of existing pipe network of Village Peerniya	15.00	30000/-	30-days	BEE/ CEE/ DEE	District Capex	600	2026 IFC_316166_1
2	Improvement to water supply network by way of providing and fixing of G.I Pipes at Nowbalan, Chotali	15.00	30000/-	30-days	BEE/ CEE/ DEE	District Capex	600	2026 IFC_316166_2
3	Improvement to water supply for Chowala, Thajal by construction of Collection Chamber and other allied works.	3.00	6000/-	15-days	DEE	District Capex	200	2026 IFC_316166_3
4	Providing of One Inch Dia Pipe Line to H/O Mohammad Rustum Naik and others at Salamabad Dachina A	1.91	3820/-	10-days	DEE	DDC Grants	200	2026 IFC_316166_4
5	Construction and Improvements to Mastan Bandi Shadra Irrigation Khul at Kamalkote at spots.	9.90	19800/-	25-days	BEE/ CEE/ DEE	District Capex	600	2026 IFC_316166_5

The NIT consisting of Qualifying information, eligibility criteria specifications, bill of quantities (B.O.Q), set of terms and conditions of contract and other details can be seen/downloaded from the departmental website www.jktenders.gov.in from: -

1	Publishing Date	15/07/2026 from 05.00PM
2	Download Date Start	15/07/2026 from 05.00PM
3	Tender Submission date Start	15/07/2026 from 05.00PM
4	Tender Submission date Ends	28/07/2026 up to 04:00 PM
5	Date of Opening	29/07/2026 at 12:00PM, in the Office of the Executive Engineer Hydraulic Division Uri (H.Q. Chandanwari)

Note:-

1) :-The Bidders are advised to read all conditions laid down in the eNIT carefully before uploaded soft copy any shortfall if any found in the soft copy the tender shall be rejected

2) As per Circular issued by the Government of Jammu and Kashmir Civil Sectt. Finance department vide No.OM No.A/24(2017)-651 added 07-06-2018 which reads as under :-
a) Furnishing of Hard Copies of bids immediately after submission of E-tenders is dispensed with. The same should be obtained only from the Bidder who's declared 1st Lowest(L-1) after opening of financial bids.

1) The Cost of tenders should be collected by uploading a copy of necessary Treasury Challan/Receipt.

a) Bids must be accompanied with cost of Tender document in shape of Treasury Challan/Receipt (Debited to Debited to M.H.0215 -Rev.Misc in respect of PHE Sector and M.H.0702-Rev. Misc in respect of I&FC Sector) and Earnest Money in the shape of CDR/FDR in favour of Executive Engineer Hydraulic Division Uri failing which the tender will be rejected outrightly. The issuing date of CDR/FDR uploaded must be between issuing date to Bid Submission end date of eNIT. CDR/FDR(Earnest money/Bid security) and relevant bid document shall be obtained from the lowest bidder before the fixation of contract.

2. The date and time of opening of Bids shall be notified on Web site www.jktenders.gov.in and conveyed to the bidders automatically through and e-mail message on their e-mail address. The bids of responsive bidders shall be opened online in the office of Executive Engineer Hydraulic Division Uri

3. The bids for the work shall remain valid for a period of 90 days from the date of opening of bids.

4. The normal deposits to be deducted as per GFR2017 rules from running bills to be released after total completion of the work.

5. The tender opening authority reserves the right to accept or reject any or all tenders or any part of any tender without assigning reason thereof.

All other terms and conditions same as laid down in the PWD Form 25 Double/GFR-2017 and Manual for Procurement of work 2022 read with upto date amendments shall also remain in force. For and on behalf of the Hon'ble Lieutenant Governor of Jammu & Kashmir.

No: HDU/CC-02/980-1000
DATED: -15/07/2026

DIPK-3466/26
DATED: 20-07-2026

Sd/-
Executive Engineer,
Hydraulic Division Uri

Crores down the drain

Srinagar submerged after hours of rain

Rehan Qayoom Mir

Srinagar, Jul 20: Hours of intense rainfall on Monday left several parts of Srinagar submerged, disrupting traffic, inundating roads and reviving questions over the city's drainage infrastructure despite years of investment under the Smart Cities Mission.

Waterlogging was reported from several areas, including Khanyar, Sada Kadal, Nalamar, Rajbagh, Dalgate, Bohri Kadal, Jawahar Nagar, Bemina, Residency Road and parts of the city centre, with commuters stranded for hours and vehicles crawling through inundated roads. Residents in some areas also staged protests, demanding immediate measures to address the recurring problem.

As criticism mounted, Srinagar Smart City Limited (SSCL) distanced itself from the waterlogging and drainage issues reported in several parts of the city, saying many of the affected roads were not executed under the Smart City project.

An official of SSCL told KNO that media reports linking the flooding to Smart City works are "incorrect".

"The roads at Khanyar, Sada Kadal and several other places where drainage failures



occurred were not executed under the Srinagar Smart City project," the official said.

He said the Smart City project had executed redevelopment works on the Dal

Gate-Gojwara corridor, M.A. Road, Residency Road and Karan Nagar. "We have executed these roads, but the drainage and sewerage network there was already existing. We did

not undertake drainage works," the official said. Referring to the inundation on Nalamar Road, the official said the stretch was constructed by the Roads & Buildings (R&B) Department and not by Srinagar Smart City Limited. "The Nalamar Road was executed by the R&B Department. It is not a Smart City road," he added.

Earlier in the day, SMC Commissioner Faz Lul Haseeb said the rainfall had exceeded the city's drainage carrying capacity, adding that authorities had identified nearly 60 waterlogging hotspots across Srinagar where dewatering teams had been deployed.

"Rainfall was more than the drainage capacity. We have identified almost 60 hotspots in the city and teams are being deployed wherever required," the Commissioner had said.

The flooding has once again brought into focus the condition of Srinagar's ageing underground drainage network, with residents questioning why roads continue to get submerged despite years of urban redevelopment.

Srinagar was selected under the Smart Cities Mission in 2017, following which Srinagar Smart City Limited was constituted to

implement projects related to urban mobility, road redevelopment, heritage conservation, public spaces and civic infrastructure. Major works gathered pace after 2018 and accelerated ahead of the G20 meetings in 2023. Alongside the Smart City Mission, the Centre sanctioned nine stormwater drainage projects worth Rs 76.79 crore for Srinagar under the AMRUT scheme to strengthen the city's drainage network.

The J&K Government recently ordered an external audit of the Srinagar Smart City project to examine its implementation, expenditure and project outcomes. Monday's flooding has renewed scrutiny of the city's drainage infrastructure even as SSCL maintains that several inundated roads were outside its scope.

"Every spell of heavy rain leaves these roads submerged. People don't care which department built the road; they want roads that don't flood every time it rains," said Zubair Ahmad, a resident of Khanyar.

"We have seen new roads, footpaths and beautification, but if rainwater remains on the roads for hours, commuters continue to suffer," said Aamir Ahmad, a commuter from Rajbagh—(KNO)

CS reviews PMG framework for J&K infra boost

KT News Desk

Srinagar, July 20: In a major step towards strengthening governance and ensuring time-bound execution of infrastructure projects in Jammu and Kashmir, Chief Secretary, Atal Dulloo on Monday chaired a high-level meeting with senior officers of the Project Monitoring Group (PMG), Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Government of India, at New Delhi to deliberate upon the establishment of a Union Territory-level Project Monitoring Group (UT-PMG) on the lines of the Central PMG mechanism here.

The proposed JK-PMG aims to institutionalize a technology-driven project monitoring system for expediting implementation of major developmental projects across Jammu and Kashmir. The Central PMG is designed to facilitate milestone-based monitoring and resolution of regulatory bottlenecks in large infrastructure projects through coordinated engagement with Central Ministries and States.

The Chief Secretary observed that Jammu and Kashmir is presently witnessing an unprecedented pace of infrastructure development under various Central and UT-sponsored programmes, making it imperative to establish a robust institutional mechanism capable of continuously monitoring project progress and resolving implementation bottlenecks before they result in delays or cost overruns. He stated that the



proposed PMG would significantly enhance transparency, accountability and efficiency in project execution by providing senior functionaries with real-time information regarding project milestones, physical and financial progress, pending approvals, inter-departmental dependencies and issue resolution timelines.

Emphasizing the importance of technology-driven governance, the Chief Secretary said that the portal should evolve into a comprehensive decision-support system capable of generating analytical reports,

monitoring key performance indicators and facilitating evidence-based policy interventions for timely completion of developmental projects.

He further stressed that regular review meetings at different administrative levels should be institutionalized through the portal. Under the proposed framework, departmental reviews would be held on a fortnightly basis, meetings under the Chief Secretary every month, while high-level reviews under the Chief Minister could be convened periodically to assess progress of strategically

important projects and remove critical bottlenecks.

The Chief Secretary also directed that the proposed system should ensure seamless coordination among all stakeholders by integrating departments, district administrations and project implementing agencies on a common digital platform, thereby improving accountability and reducing procedural delays.

During the meeting, the PMG team made a comprehensive presentation on the architecture, operational framework and technological capabilities of the proposed UT-level PMG portal, highlighting its potential to transform project monitoring through real-time digital tracking, structured review mechanisms and seamless inter-departmental coordination.

The meeting was informed that the proposed PMG would function as an institutional mechanism responsible for fast-tracking approvals, facilitating resolution of project-related issues, monitoring implementation milestones and ensuring timely execution of infrastructure projects and flagship schemes across the Union Territory.

The presentation outlined the proposed roadmap for operationalizing the JK-PMG. It envisages issuance of a Government Order for constitution of the Project Monitoring Group, appointment of a dedicated PMG team comprising domain experts and project management professionals, onboarding of nodal officers from all departments

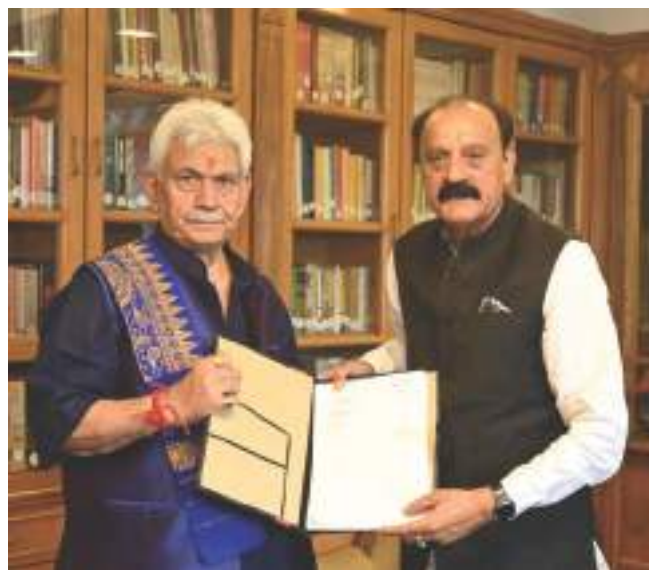
and districts, activation of the portal with support from the Central PMG, extensive stakeholder training and capacity building, uploading of all eligible projects on the portal and institutionalization of periodic review meetings under a structured escalation mechanism.

The PMG officials further informed that the proposed team would undertake creation and management of user groups, onboarding and training of stakeholders, identification and updation of departmental nodal officers, issue and project tracking, conduct of review meetings, documentation and record management, reporting and analytics, stakeholder outreach, coordination with the Central PMG and overall management of project proponents using the portal.

The Chief Secretary directed the concerned officers to prepare a detailed proposal for early establishment of the UT-level Project Monitoring Group by adopting the best practices of the national PMG framework while suitably customizing it to meet the specific administrative and developmental requirements of Jammu and Kashmir.

He expressed confidence that the proposed JK-PMG would emerge as a robust governance platform for ensuring timely completion of infrastructure projects, improving inter-departmental coordination, enhancing ease of doing business and accelerating socio-economic development across the Union Territory.

Several MLAs, delegations call on LG Sinha



KT News Desk

Srinagar, July 20: Surjit Singh Slathia, Member of Legislative Assembly, Samba on Monday called on Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha and put forth various issues of public importance of his constituency.

Dr Devinder Kumar Manyal, Member of Legislative Assembly from Ramgarh also called on the Lieutenant Governor.

In the meantime, Balwant Singh Mankotia, Member of Legislative Assembly from Chenani called on Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha and discussed various developmental issues of Chenani-Ghordi constituency.

Meanwhile, a delegation of law students from School of

Law, University of Kashmir, called on Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha and submitted a memorandum highlighting various welfare issues of students' community.

Further, Murtaza Ahmed Khan, former MLC and senior BJP Leader called on Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha.

He discussed various important matters pertaining to relief and restoration works following the recent flash floods in Rajouri and Poonch districts.

Tawab Aijaz, BJP Youth District Secretary, Srinagar also called on the Lieutenant Governor.

Suparna Sapru and Gopi Sapru, Directors, Pumbuch Cultural Heritage Foundation also called on Lieutenant Governor.

'Ladakh achieves 91% banking coverage'

Raja Syed Rather

Srinagar, Jul 20: The Central Government on Monday informed Parliament that 91 per cent of inhabited villages in the Union Territory of Ladakh are covered by banking outlets, while banking services in remote and inaccessible areas are being strengthened through Business Correspondents (BCs), Aadhaar Enabled Payment System (AePS) and India Post Payments Bank (IPPB).

Replying to an unstarred question by MP Mohmad Haneefa in the Lok Sabha, Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary said the government ensures that every inhabited village has access to a banking outlet—either a bank branch, IPPB or Business Correspondent—with in a radius of five kilometres. The availability of banking services is monitored through the GIS-based Jan Dhan Darshak (JDD) application.

The Minister informed the House that Ladakh presently has 145 bank branches, 105 Business Correspondents (BCs), 127 India Post Payments Bank (IPPB) outlets and 118 ATMs, significantly

improving financial access across the Union Territory.

The government further stated that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) allows Scheduled Commercial Banks, except Regional Rural Banks, to open branches anywhere in the country without prior approval, provided 25 per cent of new branches are established in unbanked rural areas.

Expansion of banking outlets in uncovered areas is a continuous process carried out by the State Level Bankers' Committee (SLBC) or Union Territory Level Bankers Committee (UTLBC) in consultation with the respective governments and other stakeholders.

The Centre also said banks assess proposals for new banking outlets based on RBI guidelines, business plans and commercial viability, while banking services in remote and difficult areas are being facilitated through alternate delivery channels such as BCs, Aadhaar Enabled Payment System and India Post Payments Bank wherever feasible to improve access to banking and Aadhaar-enabled financial services—(KNO)

Wrong parking top reason behind Srinagar traffic jams: RTO Kashmir



Rehan Qayoom Mir

Srinagar, Jul 20: Wrong parking is the biggest reason behind the worsening traffic congestion in Srinagar, Regional Transport Officer (RTO) Kashmir, Qazi Irfan Rasool Zargar, said on Monday, asserting that enforcement against traffic violators will be intensified to improve

traffic flow in the city.

Speaking to reporters here, Irfan said traffic congestion is a shared responsibility and requires cooperation from all stakeholders.

He said the department has found that indiscriminate and improper parking is the primary factor contributing to traffic bottlenecks.

"People either do not use designated parking spaces or fail to

park vehicles properly. This is the biggest cause of traffic congestion in Srinagar," he said.

The RTO said over-speeding and other traffic violations also pose challenges, adding that efforts are underway to improve traffic management and ensure smoother movement of vehicles across the city.

"We are working to facilitate smoother traffic flow. We hope the situation will improve in the coming days," he said.

The RTO said a multi-department committee is regularly meeting to formulate and implement a comprehensive decongestion strategy for Srinagar.

The authorities have already notified nine e-rickshaw zones and parallel routes as part of traffic management measures, while accident-prone black spots are also being identified and rectified to improve road safety, he added.

He reiterated that strict action against wrong parking and other traffic violations will continue as part of efforts to ease congestion and streamline traffic movement across the city—(KNO)

Amid inclement weather, KPDCL issues safety advisory

Field Machinery placed on High Alert

KT News Desk

Srinagar, July 20: In view of the India Meteorological Department's (IMD) forecast of heavy to very heavy rainfall, thunderstorms, lightning and gusty winds, the Chief Engineer, Distribution, Kashmir Power Distribution Corporation Limited (KPDCL), has issued a comprehensive advisory for the general public and directed all field functionaries to remain on high alert to safeguard public life, protect electrical infrastructure and ensure continuity of essential power supply services.

The advisory stated that adverse weather conditions may lead to uprooting of trees, landslides, waterlogging and flooding, which could damage overhead power lines,

distribution transformers, electric poles and other power infrastructure.

It further noted that temporary interruptions in power supply may be necessary at certain locations to ensure public safety and facilitate emergency restoration works.

The general public has been strongly advised not to touch or approach electrical conductors, poles, transformers, feeder pillars or any other electrical installations during inclement weather, as these may become live due to leakage of electric current. Every fallen conductor or damaged pole should be treated as live and dangerous.

People have also been advised to avoid waterlogged areas where

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EDITORIAL

Time To Move From Disaster Response To Disaster Preparedness

The devastation unleashed by flash floods and landslides in Poonch and Rajouri is a grim reminder of Jammu and Kashmir's vulnerability to nature's fury. At least twelve lives have been lost, several missing, entire families have been buried under debris, and countless homes have been washed away. They are the shattered dreams of families who woke up to a nightmare on Sunday morning. The heart-wrenching incident in Surankote, where eight members

of a single family were buried alive, underscores the fragility of life in the region's mountainous terrain. A two-year-old boy among the dead, a mother and her children trapped under collapsed houses – the tragedy is compounded by the knowledge that the Meteorological Department had already warned of heavy rainfall till July 23. Yet, the scale of destruction suggests that warnings alone are not enough. Chief Minister Omar Abdullah's decision to cut short his Delhi visit

and personally monitor the situation reflects responsible leadership. His directive for six-hourly situation reports, deployment of rescue teams, and assurances of swift relief are commendable. Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha's assurance of immediate aid and the evacuation of 130 people to relief centres are steps in the right direction. However, the question that must be asked is: why are such disasters repeatedly met with reactive responses rather than proactive prevention?

The vulnerability of the Poonch-Rajouri belt is well-documented. Landslides, flash floods, and cloudbursts are recurring phenomena in the region. The government must invest in early warning systems, strengthen disaster-resilient infrastructure, and enforce strict building regulations in vulnerable areas. The clearance of roads, restoration of power and water supply, and prevention of water-borne diseases must be prioritised in the immediate term. The administration must ensure

that compensation reaches affected families without delay, that missing persons are traced, and that the injured receive quality medical care. As the weather advisory warns of more rain, the government must remain on the highest alert. The tragedy of Poonch-Rajouri should not be repeated. It is time to move from disaster response to disaster preparedness – to build a Jammu and Kashmir that can withstand nature's fury rather than merely react to it.

White Gold: India's Cotton Story – From Seed To Shirt

Press Information Bureau

Cotton occupies a unique position in India's agricultural and industrial economy. India is the only country cultivating all four recognised cotton species. It ranks first globally in acreage and second in production and consumption. Cotton production stood at 290.91 lakh bales in 2025-26 (provisional). Domestic consumption reached 328 lakh bales during the same period. The sector contributes nearly 19 percent of global fibre production. Recent interventions focus on productivity, quality, market access and value addition. MSP operations continue to provide price support during market downturns. The Mission for Cotton Productivity aims to raise output to 498 lakh bales by 2031. Technology demonstrations, digital procurement and traceability initiatives are strengthening competitiveness. These efforts are enhancing productivity, improving quality and reinforcing India's position in the global cotton economy.

The Thread That Connects Millions

Imagine fields stretching across India where tiny white blossoms slowly turn into soft clouds of fibre under the sun. From these fields begins a journey that threads through spinning mills, handlooms, and finally reaches wardrobes across the world. Cotton is not merely a crop. It is a thread that binds agriculture, industry, and trade into one continuous story.

Cotton is one of the most important commercial crops cultivated in India. It accounts for around 23 percent of global fibre production. The crop supports the livelihoods of around 6 million cotton farmers. It also sustains employment for another 40-50 million people engaged in related activities such as cotton processing and trade. Beyond clothing, cotton plays a vital role in earning foreign exchange through exports of fibre, yarn, fabrics and garments. Due to its economic importance in India, it is also termed as “White-Gold”.

India's cotton sector reflects both depth and dynamism. Its strength lies in biological diversity, extensive cultivation, and a robust textile ecosystem. Policy interventions, including MSP operations, the Mission for Cotton Productivity, and Kasturi Cotton Bharat, are reinforcing this foundation. Technology adoption, market reforms, and quality enhancement efforts are further shaping the sector's future trajectory.

From Swadeshi to Atmanirbhar Bharat

India's association with cotton stretches back thousands of years. The subcontinent was once a global centre for cotton textiles, trading its fabrics across Eastern and European markets. In ancient times, cotton cloth even functioned as a medium of exchange. This highlighted its economic value and widespread acceptance.

The modern cotton industry began taking shape in the 19th century with the establishment of textile mills in Kolkata, Mumbai, and Ahmedabad. The latter earned the title “Manchester of India”. Expansion gathered pace in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Swadeshi movement promoted the establishment of Swadeshi Mills to contest against British goods. Global demand during the World Wars further boosted the domestic industry. By the mid-20th century, the number of textile mills had risen steadily across the country. This resulted in a significant increase in cotton cloth production in the years leading up to Independence. This reflected the expanding scale and resilience of India's cotton industry.

The Many Dimensions of India's Cotton Sector

India is the only country that cultivates all four recognized cotton species. These include G. Arboreum and G. Herbaceum, commonly referred to as Asian cotton. The other species are G. Barbadense, known as Egyptian cotton, and G. Hirsutum, known as American upland cotton. Among these, G. Hirsutum accounts for nearly 90 percent of hybrid cotton production in India. All Bt

cotton hybrids currently cultivated in the country belong to this species.

Bt refers to Bacillus thuringiensis, a naturally occurring soil bacterium. Bt cotton is a genetically modified cotton crop that incorporates genes from this bacterium. These genes provide resistance against bollworms, a major pest affecting cotton cultivation. Introduced commercially in India in 2002, Bt cotton significantly reduced bollworm infestation and lowered the need for insecticide sprays. The combined effect of higher yields and reduced pest control costs contributed to improved farm incomes following its adoption.

In addition to botanical diversity, cotton in India is also classified by staple length. This length determines fibre quality and end use. The country produces the full range of staple categories:

Staple Categories	
Staple Length (in mm)	
Short Staple	
20 and below	
Medium Staple	
20.5 to 24.5	
Medium Long Staple	
25.0 to 27.0	
Long Staple	
27.5 to 32.0	
Extra-Long Staple	
32.5 and above	
Geographical Spread of Cotton Cultivation	

Cotton production in India is largely concentrated in 9 major states, grouped into 3 distinct agro-ecological zones:

- Northern Zone comprising Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan
- Central Zone comprising Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh
- Southern Zone comprising Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka

In addition to these states, cotton is also grown in Odisha and Tamil Nadu.

India's Cotton Strength in Area, Production, and Consumption

India ranks first in the world in cotton cultivation area (in hectares), with 114.84 lakh hectares devoted to the crop. This accounts for around 38 percent of the global cotton area of 304.08 lakh hectares. A large share of the country's cotton production depends on rainfall, with approximately 62 percent grown in rain-fed regions. The remaining 38 percent is cultivated under irrigated conditions.

India ranks second globally in both cotton production and consumption. This shows the scale of its cultivation base and the strength of its textile industry. Cotton production is commonly reported in bales; it is the standard unit used in the cotton trade. One bale is equivalent to 170 kg. During the 2024-25 cotton season, cotton production pegged at 297.24 lakh bales (5.06 million tonnes). This accounts for nearly 20 percent of global cotton output.

For 2025-26 (provisional), cotton production stood at 290.91 lakh bales (4.95 million tonnes). Domestic consumption, including Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME), non-MSME, and non-textile segments, stood at 328 lakh bales (5.58 million tonnes). These reflect India's prominent position in the global cotton economy.

Cotton Exports and India's Trade Footprint

India continues to maintain a strong presence in the global cotton trade. In 2024-25, the country exported an estimated 18 lakh bales, equivalent to 0.31 million metric tonnes. This accounts for about 3.37 percent of total world exports, amounting to 541.69 lakh bales (9.21 million metric tonnes). This reflects India's role as a significant exporter in the international cotton market.

Further, India exports cotton to several major global markets, reflecting strong and diversified international demand. In value terms, cotton exports reached US\$ 11.49 billion in FY25. The United States of America emerged as the largest destination for Indian cotton fabrics and made-ups exports, accounting for 26.35 percent of cotton exports. This was followed by Bangladesh at 19.81 percent and Sri Lanka at 5.11 percent. Other important

destinations included the United Kingdom, with a share of 2.38 percent, and the United Arab Emirates, at 2.32 percent.

These export patterns highlight the diverse global demand for Indian cotton and reinforce its importance in the country's agricultural and textile economy.

Building a Competitive Cotton Ecosystem A multi-pronged strategy has driven the development of the cotton sector. Key priorities include price support, productivity enhancement, technology adoption, and market strengthening. To safeguard farmer incomes and improve the competitiveness of Indian cotton, several targeted initiatives have been undertaken, as outlined below.

Minimum Support Price Operation

Stable returns are essential for sustaining cotton cultivation. The Minimum Support Price (MSP) system serves as a key safeguard for cotton farmers. It ensures remunerative prices when market rates fall below the announced support level. Before each cotton year (Oct. to Sept.), MSP is recommended by the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP). It is announced for Medium Staple and Long Staple varieties of seed cotton (kapas). The objective is to ensure that farmers receive at least 50 percent of their returns on production costs.

Cotton MSP Operations and the Role of CCI

The government has designated the Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) to undertake MSP operations for cotton procurement. It intervenes when seed cotton prices fall below the MSP level. As the central nodal procurement agency, CCI has steadily expanded its operational network. The number of procurement centres increased from 508 in 2024-25 to 571 in 2025-26. These centres cover 152 districts across 11 cotton-growing states.

Strengthening Cotton Farmers through MSP

For 2025-26, the MSP for cotton was fixed at Rs. 7,710 per quintal for medium-staple cotton and Rs. 8,110 per quintal for long-staple cotton. For 2026-27, it was increased to Rs. 8,267 per quintal for medium-staple cotton and Rs. 8,667 per quintal for long-staple cotton. This marked an increase of Rs. 557 per quintal for both varieties.

During the Cotton Season 2025-26, the Cotton Corporation of India Ltd. (CCI) procured 105.09 lakh bales of cotton, valued at Rs.41,530 crore, through 24 lakh procurement transactions with cotton farmers under MSP operations.

Mission for Cotton Productivity

Sustained growth in the cotton sector depends not only on remunerative prices but also on higher productivity. To address this, a five-year Mission for Cotton Productivity was launched in 2025-26 to strengthen cotton production nationwide.

With the provision of Rs. 5,659.22 crore, the mission focuses on research, innovation, and field-level extension support. It aims to develop climate-resilient, pest-resistant, and high-yielding cotton varieties. Special emphasis has been placed on Extra Long Staple (ELS) cotton. These efforts will be supported by advanced breeding and biotechnology tools.

Aligned with the ‘5F’ vision of farm, fibre, factory, fashion and foreign, the initiative seeks to enhance farmer incomes and ensure a steady supply of quality cotton. The mission will cover nearly 24 lakh hectares across 140 districts in 14 cotton-producing states and is expected to benefit around 32 lakh farmers. The Mission also sets ambitious production targets for the coming years. Cotton production is targeted to increase from 297 lakh bales to 498 lakh bales by 2031. Higher productivity is expected to improve domestic cotton availability. It will also reduce dependence on imports and strengthen the textile sector.

Special Project on Cotton under National Food Security Mission

The field-level demonstrations play an important role in improving cotton productivity. Since 2023-24, a Special Project on Cotton has been implemented under the National Food Security Mission (NFSM). It focuses on large-scale demonstrations of technologies suited to different agro-ecological zones. It covers 8 major cotton-growing states across the country. The pilot interventions focus on three key technologies. These include the High-Density Planting System and the Closer Spacing Planting System. Production technology for Extra Long Staple (ELS) cotton is also being promoted. The objective is to improve productivity, fibre quality, and farmer incomes.

In 2023-24, an outlay of Rs. 41.87 crore covered 9,175 hectares. During 2024-25, Rs. 50.98 crore supported about 14,740 hectares. Field demonstrations recorded yield gains of about 40 percent under the High-Density Planting System (HDPS) and more than 32 percent under the closer spacing planting system. Encouraged by these results, the project was extended to 2025-26 with a total outlay of Rs. 60.32 crore, including committed liabilities. These encouraging field-level outcomes demonstrate the tangible impact of targeted technology interventions on cotton productivity and farmers' incomes.

Success Stories of Special Project on Cotton

High-Density Planting Improves Cotton Yield in Rajkot

High-Density Planting System adopted by farmers in Rajkot, Gujarat

Shri Vinodbhai Virjibhai Vadodriya, a cotton grower from Gujarat's Rajkot district, adopted the High-Density Planting System under the Special Project on Cotton. He planted cotton at a spacing of 90 cm x 15 cm between plants. This increased the number of plants per acre compared to his earlier method of 135 cm x 45 cm spacing. The intervention resulted in a cotton yield of 15 quintals per acre, with productivity increasing by about 30-35 percent over traditional planting. Early harvesting also helped him reduce losses from pink bollworm. The gains improved farm income and encouraged neighbouring farmers to adopt the technology.

Closer Spacing Transforms Cotton Productivity in Jalgaon

Closer Spacing in Cotton adopted in Jalgaon district of Maharashtra

Shri Bhaskar Tapiram Chaudhary, a cotton farmer from Jalgaon district, Maharashtra, adopted closer spacing at 90 cm x 30 cm under the Special Project on Cotton. Improved crop management, recommended fertiliser application and integrated pest and nutrient management were adopted. This intervention strengthened crop growth even under dry spell conditions. The demonstration recorded a yield of 11 quintals per acre compared to 8 quintals under farmer practice. It marked a 37.5 percent increase and improved overall profitability.

Kapas Kisan App

Technology is also being leveraged to make cotton procurement more transparent and efficient. The Kapas Kisan mobile application has been introduced to streamline procurement under the MSP system and place farmers at the centre of the process. The platform enables cotton growers to complete self-registration and book procurement slots on a four weeks rolling basis. This has significantly reduced waiting time and eliminated long queues at procurement centres.

With over 41 lakh farmers registered so far, the application has strengthened transparency and efficiency in MSP operations. It facilitates advance slot booking, Aadhaar-linked payments, and real-time SMS updates. These provisions are provided at every stage, from registration and procurement to final payment. By digitizing the process, the app has transformed cotton procurement into a paperless and farmer-friendly system.

Branding of Indian Cotton - Kasturi Cotton Bharat

Kasturi Cotton Bharat is a flagship initiative of the government. It seeks to enhance the value and global positioning of Indian cotton through traceability, certification, and branding. The programme is implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Textiles, the Cotton Corporation of India Limited, and the Cotton Textiles Export Promotion Council (TEXPROCIL). It has a total outlay of Rs.30 crore, with Rs.15 crore contributed by trade and industry bodies and an equal share from the Ministry of Textiles.

Key Highlights

The Kasturi Cotton Bharat website (<https://www.kasturicotton.com/>) has been launched as a digital platform for information, updates, and ginners registration. It also highlights the unique processes that set Kasturi Cotton Bharat apart.

116 units, including 41 ginners and 75 supply chain members, have renewed registration.

As of 30 June 2026, 3,29,550 bales have been certified, including 3,22,400 bales from CCI.

Certification covers long-staple cotton with a staple length of 28 mm or more and extra-long staple (ELS) cotton with a staple length of 35 mm or more. National Accreditation Board tests these varieties for Testing and Calibration Laboratories (NABL) accredited agencies.

QR-based certification and blockchain technology ensure end-to-end traceability. Further initiatives, such as Kasturi Villages, awareness workshops, branding, traceability, and sustainability practices, strengthen the program. Thus, positioning Indian cotton as a global symbol of purity, quality, and sustainability.

Cotton Beyond the Loom: The Versatility of Cotton

Cotton is far more than a source of fibre for clothing. The crop also generates valuable by-products that contribute to food, feed, and rural energy needs. Raw cottonseed comprises roughly one-third lint and two-thirds seed. The seed contains about 18 percent edible oil, while the remaining meal is widely used as nutritious feed for cattle, poultry, and fish.

Cottonseed oil is often referred to as “heart oil”. It contains nearly 50 percent essential polyunsaturated fatty acids compared to about 30 percent in many traditional oils. This composition is associated with supporting heart health. After oil extraction, the residue is processed into Deoiled cake for animal feed. Other by-products include linters and hulls, while dried cotton stalks serve as biomass fuel in rural areas.

Cotton fibres also have medical applications. Short-staple fibres unsuitable for spinning are processed into absorbent or surgical cotton. These are therefore used in healthcare due to their high absorbency and purity.

These diverse uses highlight cotton's role in supporting nutrition, livestock, industry, and healthcare. Its broad utility underscores the crop's importance to the agricultural economy and everyday life.

Threads of Continuity and Change

India's cotton story is one of continuity and change. Rooted in centuries of cultivation and trade, the sector continues to evolve through advances in science and technology and targeted policy support. Efforts to improve productivity, strengthen farmer incomes, modernize procurement, and enhance global competitiveness are shaping a more resilient cotton ecosystem. From the farm to the global marketplace, cotton remains deeply woven into India's agricultural and industrial landscape. As new initiatives expand quality, sustainability, and value addition, the sector is well-positioned to support livelihoods, industry, and economic growth in the years ahead.

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

INCLEMENT WEATHER FORECAST

DC Srinagar directs inter-departmental coordination, swift response mechanism

Conducts DDMA meeting, reviews readiness measures of all line departments

KT News Desk

SRINAGAR JULY 20: In view of incessant rainfall and prevailing inclement weather conditions, Deputy Commissioner (DC) Srinagar, Akshay Labroo, who is also the Chairman of the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) on Monday chaired a comprehensive review meeting here at Meeting Hall of the DC Office Complex to assess the preparedness and mitigation measures put in place by all line departments across the district in view of the inclement weather forecast & prevailing weather conditions.

The meeting, as per an official statement, was attended by Additional District Development Commissioner, Rifat Aftab Qureshi, Additional Deputy Commissioner, Mir Imtiyaz Ul Aziz, CEO DDMA, Aadil Fareed, IAS Probationer, Alfred Thomas, Regional Transport Officer, Qazi Irfan, SP Headquarter, Umar Shah, SP Traffic, Zaheer Abbas, Joint Commissioner SMC, Nuzhat Khurshid, Secretary SMC, Tahir Ahmad Magrey, Chief Planning Officer, Fayaz Ahmad



Dar, Director IMD Srinagar Station, Mukhtar Ahmad, Superintending Engineers of R&B, PHE Hydraulic, KPDCI, UEED, Mechanical Irrigation, I&FC, SMC, SDM West, Assistant Commissioner Revenue, Executive Engineers, all Tehsildars, Officers from NDRF, SDRF, Health, Legal Metrology, Fire & Emergency, Forest, FCS&CA, Civil Defence and other Departments.

At the outset, the Chairman DDMA emphasized the need for close coordination among all line departments and formulating an efficient plan to ensure prompt response to any

weather related eventuality in the District. He directed the Officers to remain in a state of readiness by mobilising all men and machinery on ground particularly at vulnerable spots to prevent any damage. The DC stressed the importance of round-the-clock monitoring and close monitoring of identified vulnerable areas and taking swift action in case of any embankment breaches or flood-related emergencies. He underscored the need for seamless coordination and effective communication among Officers, field functionaries and with the public during

any emergencies to ensure swift response and minimize inconvenience. The DC emphasized undertaking advance dewatering measures and ensuring prompt intervention to prevent waterlogging, particularly at critical infrastructure and essential public facilities, including major hospitals, power stations, Government Offices, major roads and other vulnerable low-lying areas across the City

The DC further underscored the importance of seamless coordination among the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), District Police and the District Administration to ensure a swift, coordinated, and effective response to any eventuality. He directed the concerned agencies to pre-position adequate manpower, rescue teams, and essential equipment, besides mobilizing field staff well in advance, particularly in the vulnerable areas of Fakir Gujri, Hawan, and other higher reaches of the district, to effectively deal with any situation arising from any weather-related emergencies.

DC Bandipora inspects vulnerable areas, reviews preparedness



KT News Desk

BANDIPORA, JULY 20: In view of the prevailing weather situation and continuous rainfall, Deputy Commissioner (DC) Bandipora, Indu Kanwal Chib, on Monday conducted an extensive inspection of vulnerable locations across the district to assess the situation on the ground and review preparedness.

During the visit, the Deputy Commissioner, as per an official statement, inspected the Receiving Station Ajas, Tangwani Bridge, and Aragam Bridge, besides reviewing the condition of other adjoining areas vulnerable to weather-related incidents.

The DC took stock of the impact of the inclement weather,

inspected the status of critical infrastructure, and directed the concerned departments to remain on high alert and ensure close monitoring of all vulnerable locations.

She emphasized prompt response, inter-departmental coordination, and immediate action in case of any emergency to safeguard public life and property. The DC also instructed officers to keep men and machinery in readiness and maintain round-the-clock vigil in view of the prevailing weather conditions.

The District Administration continues to monitor the situation closely and has urged the public to remain vigilant, avoid unnecessary travel to vulnerable areas, and follow official advisories issued from time to time.

DC Budgam stresses round-the-clock monitoring of upper reaches, flood-prone areas

KT News Desk

BUDGAM, JULY 20: In view of the weather advisory issued by the Meteorological Department, Deputy Commissioner (DC) Budgam, Athar Aamir Khan, Monday called for robust preparedness and coordinated response to tackle any weather-related emergency across the district.

The Deputy Commissioner, as per an official statement, issued these directions while chairing a high-level meeting to review the district's preparedness and response measures in light of the prevailing weather forecast. He directed all concerned officers to maintain strict and continuous monitoring of upper reaches, low-lying areas and other vulnerable locations to facilitate timely relief and response operations in the event of any adverse weather situation.

The Deputy Commissioner instructed that the District Control Room shall remain operational round the clock, with similar control rooms functioning effectively at the Sub-Divisional level. He emphasized regular assessment of the situation and seamless coordination among all departments.

The Deputy Commissioner instructed for that advance precautionary measures, including the relocation of families residing in highly vulnerable



locations, particularly along the river belts of Doodganga, Shaliganga and Nallah Sukhnag, wherever necessary to safeguard lives and property.

He directed the immediate mobilisation and readiness of Police, SDRF, Civil Defence, I&FC, R&B, KPDCI, Jal Shakti teams, besides keeping men and machinery in complete readiness across the district.

The DC also instructed concerned departments to ensure the availability and operational readiness of dewatering pumps in flood-prone and low-lying areas to respond promptly in case of waterlogging caused by heavy rainfall. He further directed that temporary shelter facilities, along with essential arrangements, be kept ready for the safe and comfortable accommodation of any affected families.

The DC emphasized that all departments must ensure the prompt restoration of roads and

Commissioner SMC conducts extensive City tour to review waterlogging situation

KT News Desk

SRINAGAR, JULY 20: In view of the persistent rainfall and the resultant waterlogging in several parts of Srinagar, Commissioner, Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC), Faz Lul Haseeb, Monday conducted an extensive tour of vulnerable areas and key public establishments to assess the prevailing situation and review the Corporation's dewatering and emergency response measures.

He was accompanied by Joint Commissioner (Administration), Nuzhat Qureshi; Executive Engineers of the Drainage Circle, and other senior officers of the Corporation.

During the visit, the Commissioner, as per an official statement, inspected several waterlogging-prone locations, including Government Medical College (GMC) Srinagar, Eidgah, Khanyar, Hari Singh High Street (HSHS) and other low-lying areas across the city.

The Commissioner reviewed the functioning of dewatering stations, mobile pumping units, stormwater drainage infrastructure, and the deployment of field teams engaged in round-the-clock operations. He directed the concerned officers to ensure uninterrupted functioning of all dewatering facilities, maintain continuous



surveillance of vulnerable locations, and respond promptly to reports of water accumulation, particularly around hospitals, major roads, commercial hubs, and other critical public infrastructure.

Emphasising the importance of proactive field management, the Commissioner instructed officers to intensify monitoring during the ongoing spell of inclement weather, strengthen coordination among all engineering wings, and ensure that pumping stations, drains, and stormwater drainage networks remain fully functional to facilitate the swift discharge of rainwater and minimise inconvenience to the public.

The Commissioner also reviewed the preparedness of emergency response teams and directed officials to keep adequate manpower, machinery, and mobile pumping units

readily available for immediate deployment wherever required. He stressed that uninterrupted civic services and public safety must remain the Corporation's foremost priority during the prevailing weather conditions.

The Srinagar Municipal Corporation's 24x7 Control Room continues to remain fully operational to receive and address public grievances related to waterlogging and other civic emergencies. Citizens have been advised to report incidents of water accumulation, blocked drains, or related issues through the SMC Helpline Numbers: 0194-2474499, 0194-2470465, or the Toll-Free Helpline: 1800-180-7038. Dedicated emergency response teams have been deployed across the city to ensure timely intervention and effective grievance redressal.

Sub-Divisional Administration Karnah issues advisory to nomadic families

KT News Desk

KUPWARA, JULY 20: In view of the forecast of continued adverse weather conditions and heavy rainfall during the coming week, the Sub-Divisional Administration Karnah has intensified preparedness measures and initiated proactive steps to safeguard the lives and property of residents, particularly nomadic families residing in vulnerable areas.

The administration, as per an official statement, has mapped all nomadic/migratory families of the Sub Division and issued advisories to them to avoid camping near nallahs, water channels, landslide-prone locations and other vulnerable areas for the next one week. The families have been advised to remain vigilant, follow safety precautions and immediately inform the administration in case of any emergency.

Meanwhile, due to heavy rainfall during the night, the seasonal hut of a nomadic family belonging to Altaf Ahmad, son of Kaloo Chachi, resident of village Nachiyar, was damaged. On receiving information, the Sub-Divisional Administration responded promptly and provided immediate assistance to the affected

family, including a kitchen set, tarpaulin and ration kit. Altaf Ahmad, who sustained minor injuries, was shifted to Sub-District Hospital Tangdhar for medical examination and necessary treatment and was discharged after being attended by the medical team.

SDM Karnah, along with SHO Karnah, visited the affected site, assessed the damages and interacted with the nomadic families residing in the area. The families were sensitized about the precautionary measures to be adopted in view of the prevailing weather conditions and the advisory issued by the administration.

The SDM Karnah also inspected a minor landslide triggered on the CTC Road due to rainfall. The road stretch had been temporarily restored by Beacon authorities, and necessary directions were issued for early clearance of debris and ensuring uninterrupted vehicular movement.

The Sub-Divisional Administration Karnah continues to closely monitor the situation and has activated all field-level mechanisms to ensure timely response, emergency assistance and public safety during the ongoing spell of inclement weather.

District admin Rajouri intensifies flood response

KT News Desk

RAJOURI, JULY 20: In response to the heavy rainfall and flash floods that affected several parts of the district, the District Administration Rajouri has launched an extensive relief, rescue and restoration operation to ensure the safety and well-being of the affected population.

Deputy Commissioner Rajouri Abhishek Sharma and SSP Gaurav Sikarwar jointly visited various flood-affected areas to assess the ground situation, review the damage and interact with affected residents.

During his visit, the DC, as per an official statement, assured the public that the district administration stands firmly with every affected family and that all possible assistance is being extended. He directed all departments concerned to ensure timely relief, rehabilitation and restoration of essential services.

To provide immediate shelter and support to displaced families, the District Administration has established



a Relief and Rehabilitation Centre at Government Boys Higher Secondary School (BHSS), Rajouri. The centre has been equipped with all essential facilities, including accommodation, food, drinking water, sanitation, medical assistance and other basic amenities to ensure the comfort and safety of affected families. The Deputy Commissioner personally visited the centre, interacted with the families taking shelter there and instructed officers to

address their needs promptly.

Rescue operations were carried out successfully in different parts of the district through the coordinated efforts of the Revenue Department, Police, Indian Army, SDRF and other response agencies. A major rescue operation at Dhangri was executed under the close supervision of the DC and SSP Rajouri, who personally monitored it on the ground.

In another significant operation, the District Administration

rescued a person stranded in the flooded Dandani Nala in Lamberi, Nowshera, through the coordinated efforts of the Revenue Department, Police and SDRF teams.

Simultaneously, restoration work has been taken up on a war footing across the district. Road clearance operations were carried out at multiple locations and landslides on different routes across various subdivisions were cleared to restore connectivity and facilitate the movement of emergency services and the general public.

The district administration has appealed to the public to remain vigilant and strictly avoid venturing near rivers, nallahs and other flood-prone areas until conditions improve. Citizens have also been advised to follow official advisories and cooperate with the administration.

For any flood-related emergency or assistance, the public may contact the District Emergency Operation Centre (DEOC), which is functioning round the clock, at 01962-263100.

DC Bandipora reviews preparedness for weather advisory, flood mitigation measures

KT News Desk

BANDIPORA, JULY 20: Deputy Commissioner (DC) Bandipora, Indu Kanwal Chib, who is also the Chairperson, District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA), Monday chaired a meeting to review the district's preparedness and flood mitigation measures in view of the weather advisory issued by the India Meteorological Department (IMD), Srinagar.

The meeting, as per an official statement, was attended by senior officers of various departments to assess the preparedness for dealing with any eventuality arising from the prevailing weather conditions.

During the meeting, the Deputy Commissioner directed all concerned departments to remain on high alert and ensure effective inter-departmental coordination for prompt response. She stressed the need for maintaining adequate



stocks of rescue and relief material at all Block and Niabat offices to minimize response time during emergencies.

The DC also instructed all Revenue and Disaster Management officers not to leave their respective stations without prior permission from the competent authority so that emergency response mechanisms remain fully functional at all times.

She reviewed the availability and operational status of dewatering pumps across the district on a zone-wise basis and directed the concerned

departments to ensure that all equipment remains functional and readily deployable.

The DC further reviewed the stock position of essential commodities and medical supplies and directed the concerned departments to maintain sufficient reserves to meet any emergency requirement.

Reiterating that public safety remains the top priority, the DC urged all departments to remain prepared, ensure round-the-clock monitoring of vulnerable areas, and respond swiftly to any weather-related incident.

President Murmu concludes Moldova visit; pitches India as investment destination

PTI

Chisinau (Moldova), Jul 20: President Droupadi Murmu on Monday concluded her historic state visit to Moldova, during which discussions were held on several bilateral matters, including boosting trade and investment, and reforms of the UN Security Council.

Murmu, the first Indian head of state to visit the eastern European country, was accompanied by a high-level business delegation from India.

Addressing the India-Moldova Business Forum, the president highlighted the vast potential for collaboration in sectors such as digital technologies, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, fintech, and digital public infrastructure.

Other key sectors include infrastructure development, renewable energy, advanced manufacturing, agriculture, food processing, pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, healthcare, and

logistics.

"India also offers good business opportunities for Moldovan companies for trade and investment. We remain committed to fostering a transparent, predictable and investor-friendly business environment. I invite Moldovan businesses to come and explore India," Murmu said.

She also encouraged Indian companies to explore investment opportunities in Moldova.

The two countries also discussed reforms of multilateral organisations, including the UN Security Council, and cooperation in the fight against terrorism, among other key areas.

As a special gesture of friendship, Murmu presented a bust of Mahatma Gandhi to Moldovan President Maia Sandu.

As part of her day-long visit, the president laid a wreath at the Monument of Stefan cel Mare si Sfânt (Stephen the Great), paying tribute to one of Moldova's most revered national figures. Murmu also met Igor Grosu,



Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, and interacted with members of the India-Moldova Parliamentary Friendship Group.

These engagements highlighted the important role of parliamentary diplomacy in deepening mutual understanding, strengthening institutional

linkages and bringing the two democratic societies closer together, Secretary (West) in the Ministry of External Affairs Sibi George said.

Later, Murmu and Sandu jointly addressed the India-Moldova Business Forum, which brought together leading business representatives from both countries to explore fresh opportunities in trade, investment, innovation and technology.

George said one of the most important focuses of the visit was on 3Ts -- trade, technology and tourism.

He also said India and Moldova had finalised a memorandum of understanding on co-operation in higher education, which is expected to be signed shortly.

The state visit reaffirmed the shared resolve of India and Moldova to build a stronger, broader and more substantive partnership, George said.

Rooted in democratic values, mutual respect and a common aspiration for peace and prosperity, India-Moldova relations are poised to enter a new era of closer engagement and enduring friendship, he added.

Later in the evening, President Murmu interacted with members of the Indian community and Friends of India.

The community welcomed the president with warmth and enthusiasm, the Rashtrapati Bhavan said in a social media post.

She also attended a banquet hosted in her honour by President Sandu before leaving for North Macedonia on the second leg of her three-nation visit.

Murmu's visit to North Macedonia will also be the first by an Indian President to the landlocked southeast European country. In the final leg of her tour, she will travel to Romania from July 23 to 25 at the invitation of Romanian President Nicusor Dan.

Union Minister of State for Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution Nimuben Jayantibhai Bambhaniya, Rajya Sabha member Dinesh Sharma and Lok Sabha member Vijay Baghel are part of the official delegation accompanying President Murmu.

CONTD. FROM FRONT PAGE

Rain fury claims

the bereaved families during this difficult time," Sinha said in a post on X.

He said senior officials had been directed to extend immediate relief and all necessary assistance to the affected families.

CM Abdullah, announcing an ex gratia, said, "While no amount of financial assistance can ever compensate for the irreparable loss of life caused by yesterday's flash floods, landslides and other rain-related incidents in Poonch and Rajouri, we are announcing an ex gratia relief of Rs 6 lakh for the next of kin of each deceased as an immediate measure of support."

He directed the district administration to ensure immediate relief and rehabilitation of affected families and asked all departments to work in coordination to restore essential services and expedite relief measures.

Meanwhile, two persons were killed and several others injured after shooting stones hit a passenger bus and multiple vehicles at Raggi Nallah in Doda district on Monday.

Officials said continuous rainfall triggered a slide of stones and debris, damaging several vehicles. The injured were shifted to nearby hospitals for treatment.

The Jammu-Srinagar National Highway was closed due to mudslides and continuous shooting stones, while restoration work was underway. Authorities advised commuters to avoid unnecessary travel until the road was declared safe.

Divisional Commissioner Jammu Ramesh Kumar and Inspector General of Police (IGP) Jammu Bhim Sen Tuti visited the flood-affected Bella area of Rajouri district to assess the situation in the aftermath of recent flash floods.

The senior officers reviewed the ongoing relief and restoration works, including road clearance and restoration of essential services, and directed the concerned departments to expedite the process to restore normalcy at the earliest, officials said.

They also visited the Relief and Rehabilitation Centre at the Government Boys Higher Secondary School in Rajouri, where they interacted with affected families and assured them of all possible assistance from the administration.

Later, the officers chaired a review meeting with district officials to assess the response measures, ensure better coordination among departments and identify vulnerable areas for timely evacuation in the event of future emergencies, they added.

In north Kashmir's Bandipora district, back-to-back cloudbursts struck the Tulail Valley area of Gurez on Sunday, triggering flash floods that damaged the Dawar-Tulail road and affected Burnai, Zadigey and Charwan villages.

Tehsildar Tulail Javid Ahmad said flash floods and debris damaged several stretches of the road, forcing authorities to suspend vehicular movement for several hours. Around 50 to 60 vehicles carrying tourists and local residents remained stranded during the closure.

"In Zadigey village, one cowshed was damaged and four goats were killed in the flash floods. Floodwaters also entered several residential houses, causing damage to property," Ahmad said.

He said no loss of human life or injuries were reported in the cloudburst incidents.

The official said a locally deployed earth-moving machine was used to clear the debris, enabling authorities to evacuate the stranded vehicles after the road was made temporarily passable.

Officials said damage assessment was underway while the situation continued to be monitored.

Meanwhile, Jammu and Kashmir is likely to witness widespread moderate to heavy rainfall over the next 48 hours as an approaching western disturbance interacts with the active monsoon system, significantly increasing the risk of flash floods, landslides and cloudbursts across the Union Territory, according to a weather forecast of Kashmir Weather.

The forecast said a surge of monsoon moisture is expected to reach Jammu and Kashmir from Monday night, with the interaction between the western disturbance and monsoon winds likely to enhance rainfall intensity in both the Jammu and Kashmir regions.

The most intense weather activity is expected during the next two days, although intermittent showers may continue later this week, it said.

Jammu region is likely to receive heavy to

extremely heavy rainfall, with a high possibility of flash floods, overflowing streams and nallahs, and landslides in vulnerable areas. Water levels in major rivers are also expected to rise rapidly and may approach or cross danger levels at some places, depending on the distribution of rainfall.

In Kashmir, widespread moderate to heavy rainfall with isolated spells of very heavy rain is forecast. The advisory warned of a very high risk of flash floods, particularly in hilly and mountainous areas, while localized cloudbursts cannot be ruled out.

It said water levels in tributaries such as the Lidder and Vishow nallahs, as well as the Jhelum river, are expected to rise significantly, warranting close monitoring.

People have been advised to avoid unnecessary travel through landslide-prone areas and remain alert near streams, nallahs and other vulnerable locations. Frequent thunderstorms accompanied by lightning are also likely during the period, the forecast added.

Furthermore, political parties across Jammu and Kashmir condoled the loss of lives in the rain-related incidents and urged the administration to ensure swift rescue, relief and rehabilitation measures for the affected families.

The People's Democratic Party (PDP), Jammu and Kashmir Apni Party and the Jammu and Kashmir People's Conference (PC) expressed grief over the deaths caused by flash floods and landslides in Rajouri, Poonch and other affected areas, and called for immediate assistance to those hit by the calamity.

The Kashmir Power Distribution Corporation Limited (KPDCL) issued a public safety advisory and placed its field machinery on high alert following the India Meteorological Department's forecast of heavy to very heavy rainfall, thunderstorms, lightning and gusty winds.

The utility warned that adverse weather could damage power infrastructure, including overhead lines, transformers and electric poles, and said temporary power shutdowns may be required to ensure public safety. It advised people to stay away from damaged electrical installations, avoid waterlogged areas with power infrastructure and immediately report snapped wires or leaning poles. Emergency response teams have been mobilised to ensure prompt restoration of essential services

CM Omar: Safety

weather conditions.

During the meeting, the Chief Minister was informed that restoration of power supply in Poonch district is progressing on a war footing and is expected to be completed by tomorrow evening. He directed the Power Development Department to ensure that restoration works are completed within the stipulated timeline and that any remaining issues are addressed without delay.

The status of roads affected due to landslides, flash floods and heavy rainfall also came under review. Stressing the importance of restoring connectivity at the earliest, the Chief Minister instructed the concerned departments to expedite restoration works, particularly on roads critical for movement of people, relief operations and essential services.

Emphasising the need for continued vigilance, the Chief Minister directed the district administrations to maintain focused attention on vulnerable habitations and take all necessary measures to safeguard residents living in flood-prone and landslide-prone areas. He instructed officers to use historical flood data to identify high-risk locations along rivers and streams and ensure timely evacuation wherever the need arises.

The Chief Minister further ordered strict regulation of traffic movement on landslide and shooting-stone-prone stretches to minimise the risk of accidents and ensure public safety.

He also directed the administration to ensure uninterrupted availability of food grains, medicines, drinking water and other essential commodities in affected areas. Stressing the importance of preparedness, he instructed that adequate stocks be maintained and advance distribution of rations be undertaken wherever continued rainfall may disrupt road connectivity.

Expressing concern over the widespread waterlogging witnessed in several parts of Srinagar city following today's rainfall, the Chief Minister directed the concerned departments, including the Srinagar Municipal Corporation, to adopt a proactive approach in preventing urban flooding. He instructed that

men, machinery and dewatering pumps be pre-positioned at identified vulnerable locations to ensure swift drainage of accumulated rainwater and restoration of normal public movement.

Reviewing the situation in Kashmir Division, the Divisional Commissioner informed the meeting that despite heavy rainfall, the overall situation remained under control and essential infrastructure, including roads and drinking water supply, continued to function normally. He said migratory families residing in vulnerable areas had been shifted to safer locations. In view of the forecast of intense rainfall across South Kashmir tomorrow, advance warnings have already been issued and the entire administrative machinery has been mobilised to respond promptly to any eventuality.

Briefing the meeting on Jammu Division, the Divisional Commissioner Jammu stated that major road stretches damaged during yesterday's rains have been restored, while work is continuing on a war footing to repair power transmission lines and restore drinking water supply, particularly in Poonch district. He informed that additional doctors, including gynaecologists, are being deployed to ensure uninterrupted healthcare services in remote areas. Relief centres providing food, drinking water and medicines are fully operational, while the process for disbursement of the Chief Minister's ex gratia relief announced earlier today has already commenced. He further informed that allocation of essential supplies, including three months' food grains, is being processed on priority, petroleum supplies are being closely monitored and restoration of mobile connectivity across affected areas is progressing steadily.

Providing a technical assessment, the Jal Shakti Department informed the meeting that localized damage has been reported to water supply infrastructure and irrigation channels in several parts of Jammu and Kashmir, particularly in Poonch and Rajouri districts. Restoration works are being carried out on a war footing, with adequate manpower, machinery and field response teams deployed across vulnerable locations in both Jammu and Kashmir divisions to restore water supply and irrigation facilities at the earliest.

The Chief Minister also directed all departments to strengthen inter-departmental coordination, closely monitor weather forecasts and remain fully prepared to respond swiftly to any emerging situation. He instructed the Divisional Commissioners to submit detailed situation reports every six hours to the Department of Disaster Management, Relief, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction to facilitate continuous monitoring and timely decision-making.

During the meeting, the Chief Minister reiterated that the safety and well-being of the people remain the Government's highest priority. He directed the administration to act proactively, efficiently and with empathy so that no citizen suffers during this critical period, while ensuring speedy restoration of essential services, timely relief to affected families and effective preparedness to deal with any further weather-related challenges.

The meeting was attended by Ministers Sakina Itoo and Satish Sharma, Advisor to the Chief Minister Nasir Aslam Wani, Additional Chief Secretaries, Commissioner Secretaries, Divisional Commissioners of Jammu and Kashmir, Deputy Commissioners and senior officers from key infrastructure departments and other concerned agencies.

PM urges constructive

citizen reached the International Space Station just prior to last year's session, he celebrated the recent historical milestone by the private space startup Skyroot. Lauding the fact that a team with an average age of merely 28 successfully propelled the nation into a new era of private space exploration, he emphasized how these achievements significantly boost national confidence.

"These startups driven by our youth have firmly embedded India's flag in space, making our country's profile universal and accepted across the globe," Modi said. He declared that the current generation's capabilities are completely unrestrained and positioned these historical successes as the ultimate source of motivation. "This is a very strong message that the capacity and aspiration of our youth are as limitless as space itself," he asserted.

Tracing the root cause of these unprecedented

entrepreneurial triumphs, the Prime Minister credited the government's rapid and transformative policy changes, emphasizing that this progressive environment directly enables young innovators to take massive risks and achieve groundbreaking victories. "It is the result of the reform express the country has embarked upon today that our youth are able to show such great courage and succeed," affirmed Modi.

Detailing a rapid succession of massive infrastructural and technological inaugurations, the Prime Minister cited the recent dedication of a major oil refinery in Rajasthan, the country's third semiconductor plant, and the launch of the world's longest and most powerful green hydrogen train. He attributed these highly advanced national assets to the unified dedication and relentless hard work of the nation's brilliant scientists, engineers, and laborers.

Acknowledging severe global anxieties stemming from ongoing conflicts in West Asia, the Prime Minister highlighted how massive disruptions across petrol, diesel, LPG, fertilizer, and chemical supply chains posed a threat to the energy-dependent nation. Despite these intense international obstacles, he proudly cited the country's phenomenal 7.7 percent growth rate as a testament to its resilience and capability.

In 20 days, J&K

travel through landslide-prone areas. (KNO) **NC takes statehood**

Supreme Court directed that statehood be restored at the earliest after the Assembly elections. If the government has no intention of restoring statehood, it should say so openly. Then we will decide our future course of action. But repeatedly saying 'at the appropriate time' without explaining what that means is unacceptable," he said.

Reiterating that the National Conference remained committed to its larger political agenda, CM Omar said the party would continue to pursue restoration of Jammu and Kashmir's constitutional rights.

"In the first Assembly session, we passed a resolution on Jammu and Kashmir's special position, special status and constitutional rights. We are not leaving that agenda," he said.

"The purpose of today's protest is to remind the Central Government of its promise. Everything will start from there—first statehood, then the resolution passed by the Assembly," Omar added.

He alleged that the party was prevented from holding a peaceful protest.

"We came to our country's capital to claim our rights. Unfortunately, we were not even allowed to hold a peaceful protest. Democracy is being strangled," he said.

He alleged that NC leaders and workers were stopped from reaching Jantar Mantar and later prevented from proceeding to the Constitution Club to continue their programme.

CM Omar alleged that tear gas was used during the protest. "Tear gas was also aimed at us. It is unfortunate. Young boys and girls from across the country had gathered only to seek justice, yet they too faced tear gas," he said, referring to students protesting over the NEET issue.

Later, CM Omar, who reached the protest venue in an auto-rickshaw after security restrictions disrupted his movement, wrote on X: "My walk from Jantar Mantar was about to turn into another procession so we grabbed the first available means of transport."

"We were stopped from getting to Jantar Mantar and stopped from protesting peacefully for what is rightfully ours, but we were not silenced. This is only the beginning of our struggle for statehood, our rights, our dignity and everything that was taken away from us," he posted.

National Conference president Dr Farooq Abdullah said the protest was aimed at reminding the Union Government of its promise to restore Jammu and Kashmir's statehood.

"Today, we are fighting for full statehood, which is a promise made by the Prime Minister and the Home Minister in Parliament, before the Supreme Court and to the people of Jammu and Kashmir. We are here simply to remind them of that promise," Farooq said.

He also extended support to students protesting over the NEET issue.

"These children are the future of India. They are demanding their rights, and we stand with them. The Government of India should pay

attention to their concerns. At the same time, it should also address the issues of Ladakh. Sonam Wangchuk should be released from the hospital," he said.

Deputy Chief Minister Surinder Choudhary termed it unfortunate that an elected government from Jammu and Kashmir had to protest in Delhi for restoration of statehood.

"It is a matter of misfortune for the people of Jammu and Kashmir that they are forced to stage a protest in Delhi today. We are here to remind the Prime Minister and the Home Minister of the promise they made that statehood would be restored after the Assembly elections. This is a promise that must now be fulfilled," he said.

The protest was also attended by Jammu and Kashmir Pradesh Congress Committee (JKPCC) president Tariq Hameed Karra and senior Congress leader Ghulam Ahmad Mir. CPI(M) MLA M Y Tarigami who was not present in the protest, later addressing press in Srinagar said the protest was meant to convey to the Centre that there had been a "breach of trust" with the people of Jammu and Kashmir over the delay in restoring statehood.

Throughout the day, NC leaders and workers raised slogans demanding restoration of full statehood while carrying placards reading "Restore Rights and Dignity of the People of J&K" and "We Want Statehood."

The protest marked the first major political demonstration by the ruling National Conference in the national capital since assuming office after 2024 Assembly elections. (KNO)

SFs recover 2 IEDs,

investigation has been initiated in this regard, they added. (KNO)

10 properties of

Rs 55 lakh and Rs 95 lakh.

Police said the attachments were made in connection with multiple FIRs registered under various provisions of the NDPS Act against the property owners.

The action, police said, is aimed at dismantling the financial infrastructure of drug trafficking networks and depriving offenders of assets allegedly generated through the illegal narcotics trade.

"Srinagar Police remains steadfast in its commitment to the Nasha Mukti Jammu Kashmir Abhiyan and will continue to take stringent legal action against drug peddlers and all those involved in the narcotics ecosystem," a police spokesperson said.

Police also appealed to the public to support the anti-drug campaign by sharing information on narcotics trafficking through the nearest police station or dedicated helplines, assuring that the identity of informants would be kept strictly confidential. (KNO)

Tourism employment

the data shared in Parliament, Jammu and Kashmir recorded 113.15 lakh domestic tourist visits (DTVs) and 0.02 lakh foreign tourist visits (FTVs) in 2021. The figures rose to 184.99 lakh DTVs and 0.20 lakh FTVs in 2022, 206.79 lakh DTVs and 0.55 lakh FTVs in 2023, and 230.13 lakh DTVs and 0.65 lakh FTVs in 2024. In 2025, the UT registered 177.29 lakh domestic tourist visits and 0.36 lakh foreign tourist visits, reflecting a decline of 22.96 per cent in domestic and 44.62 per cent in foreign tourist visits over the previous year.

The Minister said no specific formal study has been conducted to assess tourism's economic impact in Jammu and Kashmir. However, based on the Periodic Labour Force Survey, the Ministry has estimated tourism employment in the UT at 10.42 lakh in 2021-22 and 10.78 lakh in 2025.

On the development of new tourism circuits, the Centre said the responsibility primarily rests with the concerned State Government or Union Territory Administration, while the Ministry supports these efforts through central sector schemes such as Swadesh Darshan 2.0 and PRASHAD.

The government also informed the House that steps have been taken to strengthen tourist safety and convenience by encouraging the deployment of dedicated Tourism Police. It added that digital initiatives include the revamped Incredible India Digital Portal, offering curated travel content, real-time weather and event updates, AI-based personalised services and integrated booking facilities. The Centre further said the e-Visa facility is available to nationals of 174 countries through 33 airports, 35 seaports and four land ports. (KNO)

Govt reaches out to CJP; Nadda holds talks with 2-member team



PTI

New Delhi, Jul 20: A two-member delegation of the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) on Monday met Union Health Minister JP Nadda, who initiated the dialogue on behalf of the government as protesters led by the outfit stormed into central Delhi and tried to march to Parliament.

The CJP said Nadda has assured them that he would hold internal talks and has requested some time to align with the government leadership on the CJP's demands, including the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over alleged examination irregularities.

Official sources confirmed that the CJP representatives met Nadda, who initiated

the government outreach towards the protesters. They said talks within the government on the CJP protest were underway and there is a possibility of the government issuing a formal statement.

CJP chief spokesperson Saurav Das said he, along with CJP's national spokesperson Ashutosh Ranka, met the health minister at his residence for about 10 minutes.

"After waiting for more than 2 hours, @AshutoshRanka and I just met J.P. Nadda ji at his residence for 10 minutes. While we submitted a written letter with our demands, he has assured us that he will meanwhile speak internally. We are in that process. There is news of mass detention etc," Das said in a post on 'X'.

This comes as thousands of protesters

gathered near Parliament Street here and tried to march towards Parliament to demand accountability over alleged examination irregularities and the resignation of Education Minister Pradhan, braving baton-charge by security personnel.

Ranka said Nadda has requested some time to align with their leadership on the CJP's "following demands: Immediate release of Sonam Wangchuk, Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation, 1Cr compensation for all NEET aspirants who committed suicide".

Ranka said it was only late Sunday night that the Deputy Commissioner of Police, New Delhi, reached out for opening a communication channel with the government.

He said there were more serious discussions only from 6 am on Monday, and only at around 11:45 am, there was "an alignment on meeting Nadda ji".

"We finally met Nadda ji 10 mins ago and he is checking with the leadership internally wrt our demands. @DelhiPolice should immediately stop using brute force on peaceful protestors," Ranka wrote on 'X' at 2:48 PM

Protesters participating in the Cockroach Janta Party's Parliament march on Monday refused to disperse despite heavy police barricading, lathicharge and use of tear gas, and raised slogans demanding the resignation of Pradhan.

The march, which witnessed participation of students and people from across Delhi, was stopped near Parliament Street, where police had put up multiple layers of barricades.

Many protesters said they had anticipated resistance but were determined to continue their demonstration.

Court's concern is to 'save' Wangchuk's life, says HC seeking his medical reports, bulletins

PTI

New Delhi, Jul 20: The Delhi High Court on Monday asked the Safdarjung Hospital here to file Sonam Wangchuk's pathological reports and health bulletins and said that it would take a call on Tuesday on the plea by the fasting activist's wife Gitanjali Angmo to shift him to a private facility.

Asserting that its concern was to "save" Wangchuk's life, the court asked Solicitor General Tushar Mehta to bring on record a complete compilation of his medical reports.

The bench of Chief Justice D K Upadhyaya and Justice Tejas Karia was hearing an appeal by Angmo against a Sunday order of the high court refusing to interfere with his ongoing treatment at the central government hospital.

"We direct that all pathological reports of the husband of the appellant, based on samples analysed at the labs of Safdarjung and AIIMS and a private lab, shall be filed on an affidavit sworn by the director of respondent no. 4 (Safdarjung Hospital)," the court ordered."It is directed that the respondent no 4, while filing the affidavit, will also bring on record all the medical bulletins issued by it from time to time," it added.

"The report should include today's sample analysis", said the bench.

It asked the In-charge director of AIIMS as well as the AIIMS emergency doctor treating Wangchuk to be present at the hearing on Tuesday, and also sought the presence of the doctor who was treating him earlier.

The Safdarjung hospital had on Sunday said Wangchuk had been given required medical care by the treating teams of doctors from VMMC and Safdarjung Hospital and AIIMS, New Delhi.

"The court's concern is to save his life first. We are not concerned with any other thing. Therefore whatever samples you have analysed... please compile these report and file it on affidavit," the court said.

The bench also asked Angmo to file the reports of Wangchuk's blood analysis, which were stated to have been undertaken at her behest at a private lab.

Senior advocate Akhil Sibal, arguing on behalf of Angmo, said Wangchuk was picked up from Jantar Mantar on Saturday and taken to Safdarjung without any consultation and in the absence of any medical emergency, purportedly under the bench's July 16



order asking the authorities to monitor his health and medically intervene if necessary.

Asserting the right to accept medical treatment or oversight at a hospital of one's choice and bodily autonomy, Sibal said the sequence of events has resulted in a "loss of trust", and Wangchuk, who was not under any detention, should be permitted to be discharged from Safdarjung Hospital.

He emphasised that even at present, Wangchuk was not in an ICU, was cogent and conscious, and should not be coerced into staying at Safdarjung Hospital.

The court was also informed that Wangchuk wrote a letter to the hospital to permit him to participate in the Cockroach Janta Party-led march to the Parliament, which was not acceded to.

Sibal further said that a hunger strike was a recognised mode of protest in a democracy.

The bench said that while it agreed that Wangchuk's reports ought to be shared with his family, it cannot comment on the opinion of doctors who are experts.

It also questioned whether doctors should wait for a patient to be admitted to the ICU before administering any treatment.

Responding to the appellant's claim of discrepancy in test reports with respect to his potassium levels, the bench observed that there was bound to be some difference in reports prepared by different labs and any report has to be corroborated by clinical examination of the patient.

India gets USD 20.72 bn forex inflows under swap facility since Jun: RBI



PTI

Mumbai, Jul 20: The Reserve Bank on Monday said its concessional swap facility, introduced to encourage foreign currency inflows, has attracted USD 20.72 billion till July 17.

The swap facility has seen avid interest and attracted steady forex inflows since June 8, 2026, the central bank said in a statement.

A strong mobilisation was witnessed through Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank) or FCNR (B) deposits.

Of the total inflows, FCNR (B) deposits accounted for USD 17.406 billion, while Overseas Foreign Currency Borrowings (OFCBs) contributed USD 1.97 billion and External Commercial Borrowings (ECBs) amounted to USD

1.342 billion.

"With a view to strengthening our balance of payments and incentivising capital inflows, the RBI had announced a series of measures, including a facility for offering concessional swaps for fresh FCNR(B) deposits, OFCB and ECB inflows on June 5, 2026," the central bank said.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had introduced the swap facility on June 5, 2026, as part of a host of measures to strengthen India's balance of payments and incentivise capital inflows.

The facility was operationalised on June 8, 2026, and is available up to September 30, 2026, for the FCNR (B) deposits and up to December 31, 2026, for the OFCBs and ECBs.

Collective responsibility to debate, decide on issues of national importance: RS Chairman to MPs

PTI

New Delhi, Jul 20: Rajya Sabha Chairman C P Radhakrishnan on Monday said it is the collective responsibility of MPs to utilise the valuable time to debate and decide on issues of national importance as he urged them to remain focused on timely disposal of business.

In his opening remarks on the first day of Monsoon session, Radhakrishnan appealed to all House members to uphold the dignity, discipline and decorum of the institution and said every disruption delays discussion on matters affecting the nation and the people.

He welcomed the members on the first day of the Monsoon session, including the new members.

"This house has a proud tradition of meaningful deliberations, and I am confident this session will uphold that legacy. We have 19 sittings before us, and it is our collective responsibility to utilise this valuable time to debate and decide on issues of national importance," he said.

"While differences of opinion are integral to parliamentary democracy, they must be expressed in a manner that preserves the sanctity of the House. Disruptions should not



be allowed to undermine its functioning," he said.

Noting that this session has an important legislative and deliberative agenda, the chairman said, "I urge members to remain focussed on the timely disposal of business, as every disruption delays discussion on matters affecting the nation and the people we represent."

The House witnessed repeated adjournments during the day as Opposition members led by the Congress demanded action against the guilty in the medical entrance examination question paper leak.

The House was later adjourned for the day without conducting any substantial business.

The chairman also informed the House that from the current session, the Secretariat has introduced live AI-based

simultaneous interpretation of the proceedings in nine languages through the Multi-Media Devices at members' seats.

This facility will gradually be expanded to all 22 scheduled languages. Members are requested to share their feedback for its further improvement, he added.

Earlier, the Chairman administered oath/affirmation in the Chamber to nine newly elected/ re-elected members.

Those administered oath were: Mukeshbhai J Rathwa, Pawan Khera, Mahesh Kewat, James Pangsang Kongkal Sangma, Khiantge Lalitluangkima, Satish Poonia, Prakash Chik Baraik, Sushmita Dev and Sukhendu Sekhar Ray.

Five members took oath in Hindi, two in English and two in Bengali. Three members are from West Bengal and one each from Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Rajasthan.

The Chairman made obituary references on the passing away of former members -- Balbir K Punj, Swapan Sadhan Bose, Rangasayee Ramakrishna, and H Hanumanthappa.

The House also paid homage to Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Father Amir of the State of Qatar.

He passed away on July 12, 2026 at the age of 74.

Stock markets tumble in early trade

PTI

Mumbai, Jul 20: Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty tumbled in early trade on Monday, dragged by heavy selling in blue-chip HDFC Bank and a sharp spike in crude oil prices due to the ongoing tensions between the US and Iran.

The 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 523.22 points to 77,628.23 in early trade. The 50-share NSE Nifty declined 134.10 points to 24,198.25.

From the Sensex pack, Axis Bank and HDFC Bank declined nearly 5 per cent after announcing their quarterly earnings over the weekend.

"HDFC Bank has disappointed, particularly on the NIM front," VK



Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Investments Limited, said. Kotak Mahindra Bank, InterGlobe Aviation, Maruti and Bajaj Finance

were also among the laggards from the blue-chip pack.

Bharti Airtel, Tech Mahindra, NTPC, Reliance Industries and ICICI Bank were among the gainers.

Reliance Industries Ltd, India's most valuable company, traded nearly 1 per cent higher after it reported record quarterly core profit and EBITDA for the June quarter, powered by strong performances across its oil-to-chemicals and telecom businesses.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, quoted 2.41 per cent higher at USD 90.22 per barrel.

"There are near-term headwinds and tailwinds for the market now. The strongest headwind is Brent crude spiking above USD 90 on escalating

tensions between the US and Iran. If this trend continues, India's vulnerability to energy shock will resurface with negative implications for the rupee and FPI flows," Vijayakumar said.

On the positive side, the weakening of the AI trade continues in markets like the US, South Korea and Taiwan, he said, adding that this can make markets like India attractive to the FPIs.

In Asian markets, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index quoted higher, while South Korea's KOSPI tanked 4.35 per cent. US markets ended lower on Friday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 376.41 crore on Friday, according to exchange data.

Int'l tourist arrivals increased from 1.31 crore in 2014 to 2.06 crore in 2024: Govt

PTI

New Delhi, Jul 20: International tourist arrivals (ITAs) in India increased from 1.31 crore in 2014 to 2.06 crore in 2024, registering a growth of 56.93 per cent, the government informed Parliament on Monday.

Union Tourism Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat shared the data in a written response to a query in Lok Sabha.

Also, according to the latest UN's World Tourism Barometer, India's global share of international tourist arrivals has seen an increase from 1.15 per cent in 2014 to 1.41 per cent in 2024, he said.

According to data sourced from UN's World Tourism Barometer 2026, the ITAs for the top five countries in 2024 stood at -- France (102 million), Spain (93.8 million), the US (72.3 million), Turkey (60.6 million) and Italy (57.7 million), the government said in its response. The government said the Ministry of Tourism maintains the data on ITAs and domestic tourist visits (DTV) as provided by the Bureau of Immigration (BoI) and states and UTs, respectively.

"The ITAs increased from 1.31 crore in 2014 to 2.06 crore in 2024 registering a growth of 56.93 per cent. Similarly, the DTVs have also increased from 128.28 crore in 2014 to 294.53



crore in 2024 thereby registering a growth of 129.60 per cent," the minister said.

The data indicates "substantial improvement" in tourist footfall during the last decade.

Further, in the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Travel and Tourism Development Index (TTDI) 2024, India improved its position significantly, ranking 39th globally out of 119 countries (up from 65th in 2013) and holding the first position among SAARC countries, Shekhawat said.

"To conduct comparative assessments and identify structural barriers, the Ministry of Tourism has undertaken a detailed analysis of the TTDI 2024 edition to identify data gaps, methodological limitations, and areas requiring policy and institutional interventions," he said.

ASI received 121 nods for archaeological projects in 5 years: Govt

PTI

New Delhi, Jul 20: There were 121 instances when permission was granted for the ASI to carry out archaeological projects in the country in the last five years, the government informed Parliament on Monday.

Union Culture Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat shared the data in a written response to a query in Lok Sabha.

He was also asked for details of any court orders regarding the continuance or closure of any archaeological projects during the last five years and the action taken thereof.

"There is no court order regarding the continuation or closure of any archaeological projects during the last

five years," Shekhawat said.

There are 3,686 centrally protected monuments and sites under the care and maintenance of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) across the country.

The Union minister was also asked about the sites where the ASI is doing excavation across the country along with expenditure incurred thereon and the timeline set for completion of works; and the details of historical findings discovered from the archaeological projects carried out during the last five years and scientific validations thereof.

In tabulated data, he shared that 121 instances of permission were issued for carrying out archaeological projects by the ASI in the last five years.

Andy Burnham set to take over as new British PM

AFP

London, Jul 20: Andy Burnham will on Monday become Britain's seventh prime minister in a decade, with an in-tray overflowing with challenges that have trounced his predecessors and little time to make his mark.

The new leader takes over from the unpopular Keir Starmer just two years after the outgoing prime minister led Labour to power in a landslide election victory after 14 years of Conservative rule.

After being asked by King Charles III to form the next government, Burnham, 56, is due to make his first speech Monday outside 10 Downing Street shortly after Starmer has said his farewells.

He will set out "priorities for restoring confidence in government and giving Britain more breathing room" amid the cost-of-living crisis, his team said. Delivering growth and devolving power to regional communities are also expected to feature.

An announcement on his senior cabinet appointments is also expected on Monday with all eyes on who will replace Rachel Reeves as finance minister.

The former mayor of Greater Manchester, nicknamed the



"King of the North," has been parachuted in by the Labour Party, after Starmer resigned last month, with MPs viewing him as the party's best chance of reining in Nigel Farage's anti-immigration Reform UK party.

'Bigger, bolder'

Deputy Labour Party leader Lucy Powell said on Sunday Burnham's mayoral experience away from the London center of government meant he understood the "bigger, bolder measures" needed to deliver on Labour's election manifesto

promises.

Among Burnham's most urgent challenges will be a tepid economy, high government borrowing costs, a ballooning welfare bill and irregular migrants arriving in small boats that have fueled support for Reform.

Unpredictable energy prices due to the US-Iran war and a volatile American president in Donald Trump also threaten to buffet his premiership.

The new prime minister wanted to "radically" rewrite an "over-centralized" political

system and an economic model that had put vested interests ahead of ordinary people, Powell told BBC television.

"It's about giving ordinary people security in work, security in their home, a home they can afford and live in a community that they can feel proud of and knowing that their children are going to have opportunity for the future," she said.

Starmer announced that he would resign as prime minister and Labour Party leader in late June after a string of scandals, missteps and policy U-turns blighted his leadership.

But Burnham, who only returned as a member of parliament four weeks ago, has little room to maneuver amid sluggish economic growth, high public debt and strict financial rules requiring him to balance government spending against tax revenue.

Monday's handover will begin with Starmer visiting Buckingham Palace to formally tender his resignation to the king before making a brief statement outside 10 Downing Street. Burnham will then make his own trip to Buckingham Palace, before his first speech as prime minister which will be a moment of "reflection and resolution," he will say, stressing Britain must be honest about

the challenges it faces.

'Last chance'

Burnham was an MP between 2001 and 2017, serving as a minister the governments of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown.

He has since reinvented himself as a man of the people, melding a relaxed, folksy style with slick social media videos.

But he has only three years to turn things around, with Reform tipped in polls to win the next general election expected in 2029.

Burnham told supporters on Friday his Labour takeover was the "last chance" for the party to get things right.

Critics have accused Starmer's government of being under-prepared for power when he was elected in July 2024.

Burnham has insisted he has a "plan."

But his swift "coronation" as Labour leader has raised questions on how he will achieve his aims.

His first policy announcement came on Saturday when he scrapped Starmer's flagship nationwide digital ID scheme, estimated to cost £1.8 billion over three years.

A spokesperson said the time and resources would be diverted "to where it's most needed, such as helping with the cost of living."

Rubio says Iran using Hormuz as leverage, calls on other countries to 'step up'



AFP

Joint Base Andrews (United States), Jul 20: US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Sunday that Iran is using the Strait of Hormuz as leverage in the ongoing Middle East conflict, adding that other countries needed to step up pressure to protect global shipping.

"It's clear that Iran, at least some people in Iran, want to control the straits and hold that as leverage against the world," Rubio told reporters ahead of traveling to the Philippines for a meeting of foreign ministers with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

"The United States will do and continue to do what it needs to, to protect global shipping, but other countries need to begin to step up and provide, whether it's hardware or finances, to help carry that burden," he continued.

When asked if there was still a diplomatic off-ramp to the escalating conflict, Rubio said: "I think we're always open to diplomacy. It has to be real. It has to be a deal that they're willing to live by."

A fragile truce between Iran and the United States broke down after reported attacks by Iran on ships in the Strait of Hormuz, the critical international waterway through which a fifth of the global oil and gas supply transited prior to the war.

"They can't have an MOU that's alive if they're violating the terms of it," Rubio said.

"What I will say is that the United States always remains open to a diplomatic solution. We've tried multiple times with Iran, and we'll continue to try."

AICF disburses Rs 42.3 lakh in quarterly stipends to 42 promising young players

PTI

New Delhi, Jul 20: The All India Chess Federation (AICF) on Monday disbursed quarterly stipends worth Rs 42.3 lakh to 42 of the country's most promising young players, a first-of-its-kind initiative aimed at easing the financial burden on talented youngsters and helping them compete at the highest level.

The beneficiaries, selected on the basis of their performances in the 2024 National Championships, are the top players across the Under-7 to Under-19 categories in both Open and Girls sections. The quarterly stipends range from Rs 60,000 to Rs 1.5 lakh. Announcing the release on the occasion of World Chess Day, AICF president Nitin Narang said the initiative marked a historic moment for Indian chess.

"Today is World Chess Day, and the All India Chess Federation (AICF) is pleased to release the another instalment of quarterly stipends, ranging from 60,000 to 1,50,000, totalling 42,30,000, to 42 top players across the U7 to U19 categories (Open and Girls), based on their performances in the 2024 National Championships," Narang said in a statement on X.

"This is the first time in the history of Indian chess that our players and prodigies are receiving such financial support, so they do not have to give up their passion due to financial constraints," Narang added in the statement.

Global Chess League launches Road2GCL initiative ahead of Season 4



PTI

Mumbai, Jul 20: The Global Chess League (GCL) on Monday launched Road2GCL, a six-week community engagement initiative featuring competitions, community events and creator collaborations ahead of the fourth season of the league in Bengaluru from September 3 to 14. The initiative, announced on World Chess Day, aims to engage players, clubs, schools, creators and chess enthusiasts through a series of activities leading up to the franchise-based tournament.

A key feature of the programme is Road2GCL Contenders, a multi-stage competition that will give aspiring players an

opportunity to earn a chance to compete against Global Chess League stars.

Season 4 of the league will be held in Bengaluru from September 3 to 14 and will feature 36 Grandmasters across six franchises.

World No. 1 Magnus Carlsen will return to the league and compete in India for the first time, while reigning FIDE Women's World Cup champion Divya Deshmukh is set to make her league debut.

Apart from the Contenders competition, Road2GCL will include Shining Stars, which will organise chess activities at clubs and educational institutions, and Road2GCL Creators, a programme aimed at engaging new audiences through content creators.

Spain win World Cup by beating Argentina 1-0

AP

East Rutherford (New Jersey), Jul 20: Ferran Torres' first goal of this year's World Cup was the goal of his life, and it put Spain back atop the soccer world.

Denying Lionel Messi a second straight title in what he has indicated would be his final World Cup match, Torres came off the bench and scored in the 106th minute and Spain — in a match it simply dominated — ended Argentina's reign with a 1-0 win on Sunday.

Torres pounced on a bouncing ball in the box and used his left foot to bury a shot just under the crossbar and into the back of the net. "It was a goal scored by 47



million people," Torres said, referring to Spain's population. Maybe not by them — but certainly for them.

It was Spain's second title, this trophy getting added to the one claimed in 2010. And there's no question about the center of the soccer universe now, not after this display.

Spain allowed only one goal in eight matches at the tournament, setting a World Cup record for fewest goals allowed by a champion. And this title, combined with the World Cup won by Spain's women in 2023, makes the European nation the first to hold both the men's

and women's titles simultaneously. "I feel sad," said Messi, who was moved to tears after receiving his runner-up medal and staring into the crowd at Argentina supporters. "They were better, to be honest."

The score indicates this match was close, but only one team was in command. Spain took the game's first 20 shots on goal before Argentina — desperate for an equalizer — got its first attempt off in the second half of extra time. Spain took nine of the game's first 10 corner kicks, and only a World Cup final-record 12 saves by Argentina goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez gave the 2022 champions a shot at going back-to-back.

Spain is now unbeaten

in its last 38 matches — 29 wins, nine draws — and now is the outright holder of the longest such streak by any European team ever. Italy went 37 matches (28 wins, nine draws) from October 2018 through September 2021, before Spain ended that streak.

And for the last two-plus years, nobody has beaten Spain. Not even Messi. An Argentina team that was the kings of the late-game rally in this tournament had no answer this time.

Messi took a corner kick with about four minutes left before the final whistle and the ball took a fortunate skip toward reserve Giuliano Simeone — who sent it high and over the crossbar, holding his head in disbelief afterward.

India to play four-day warm-up game in Colombo ahead of Tests against Sri Lanka



IANIS

New Delhi, July 20: The Indian men's cricket team will play a four-day warm-up game in Colombo starting on August 7 ahead of facing Sri Lanka in a two-match Test series starting on August 15. The Shubman Gill-led visitors are scheduled to land in Colombo on August 4 and will go through some practice sessions before playing the warm-up game at the Nondescripts Cricket Club (NCC).

"Yes, the Indian team

will have its practice game from August 7 to 10 at NCC, Colombo. It will help all players to adjust to the local conditions on offer before the main series gets underway," said a source familiar with the development to IANS on Monday.

Following the conclusion of the four-day tour game, the Indian team will travel to Galle, where the opening Test match will be played at the picturesque Galle International Cricket Stadium (GICS) from

August 15 to 19.

The second and final Test is scheduled to be held at the Sinhalese Sports Club (SSC) in Colombo from August 23 to 27. Both matches are scheduled to commence at 10 am local time. The series is crucial for both teams as they look to climb the WTC standings.

As of now, India has a points percentage (PCT) of 48.15 after nine matches and is in fifth place. Sri Lanka, meanwhile, is in sixth spot with a PCT of 44.44. A series victory will provide a much-needed push for either side in their bid to secure a top-two finish and make the final.

The tour will also mark India's return to Sri Lanka for playing Tests after 2017, when, under the captaincy of Virat Kohli, they managed to get a 3-0 victory. India's last Test assignment saw them get an emphatic innings victory over Afghanistan in June, while Sri Lanka suffered a 2-0 series defeat to the West Indies.

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