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Department of Information & Public Relations, J&K

Mediation for Nation 3.0

Referral Judges training held at J&K Judicial Academy

Referral Judges are gatekeepers, must refer right case at right time: Justice Rajnesh Oswal

KT News Desk

SRINAGAR, SEPTEMBER 06: A one day training programme for the Referral Judges was conducted Sunday at the Jammu & Kashmir Judicial Academy, Srinagar, in hybrid mode under the aegis of the Mediation & Conciliation Committee (MCC), High Court of J&K and Ladakh, in compliance with the directions of the Supreme Court in view of the "Mediation for the Nation 3.0" Drive.

In the inaugural address, Justice Rajnesh Oswal, as per an official statement, while addressing the participants described the programme as a focused "Judicial Master Class" aimed at equipping the Referral Judges with the practical tools for effective case referral. He emphasized that mediation is relevant across all spheres of life and highlighted the crucial role of Referral Judges as the primary gatekeepers of justice delivery system, responsible for identifying disputes that are better suited for mediation rather than formal adjudication. He stressed that mediation adopts an interest-based approach, offering parties faster, confidential and relationship-preserving solutions, particularly in complex human and commercial disputes. Mr. Justice Oswal cautioned that Referral Judges must exercise careful judicial screening to ensure that appropriate cases are referred and unsuitable matters are not. He



identified the commercial, matrimonial, family, property, neighbourhood and suitable chequedishonour disputes as having good potential for mediation. He stressed caution in cases involving power imbalances, settled law, serious fraud or urgent intervention. He highlighted the

importance of judicial communication in encouraging the litigants to opt for mediation. He concluded that referring the right case to the right forum at the right time can reduce docket congestion, save litigants' time and costs and enhance the quality of justice. Earlier, an

introductory address was presented by Mr. Naseer Ahmad Dar, Director, J&K Judicial Academy. He emphasised that Mediation is an important instrument for achieving fair, expeditious and cost-effective justice. He said that mediation transforms disputes from adversarial contests into processes of dialogue and mutually acceptable resolution. He underscored the pivotal role of Referral Judges in identifying the suitable cases, making thoughtful and timely referrals, sensitizing litigants and advocates and ensuring meaningful participation in the mediation process.

The technical sessions of the day were conducted by Mr. Justice Bashir A. Kirmani, Former Judge, High Court of J&K. He elaborated on the relevance and importance of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), particularly with reference to Section 89 of the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908 and discussed the various modes of ADR. He explained the basic concept, nature and advantages of mediation, emphasizing its role in facilitating amicable and mutually acceptable resolution of disputes. He also dwelt upon the different stages of the mediation process and the role of the mediator, highlighting the importance of communication, voluntary participation and a constructive approach towards settlement. These themes corresponded to the first

session of the programme, which specifically focused on ADR, Section 89 CPC and the fundamentals of mediation.

In the second session, Justice Kirmani focused on the practical role of Referral Judges, stressing the need for judicial officers to exercise proper discretion while deciding when and which cases should be referred to ADR. He dealt with the appropriate stage of referral, consent of the parties, identification of cases suitable for mediation and the importance of avoiding unnecessary delay in trial. He further highlighted the role of the Judge in motivating and preparing lawyers and litigants for mediation, framing appropriate referral orders and understanding the court's responsibilities after the conclusion of mediation proceedings. His deliberations thus provided the participating Judicial Officers with practical guidance for making effective, timely and case-sensitive referrals and for strengthening the use of mediation as an integral part of the justice delivery process. The programme was moderated by Mr. Faizan ul Haq Iqbal, Coordinator, Main Mediation Centre (Registrar Rules), High Court of J&K and Ladakh.

The programme remained interactive and participatory throughout, with the Judicial Officers actively engaging in discussions on the Guidelines for Referral Judges and the Do's and Don'ts checklist. The deliberations provided a practical platform for sharing experiences and addressing issues relating to timely, informed and appropriate referrals to mediation.

VC SKUAST-K chairs 20th SAC meeting of KVK Bandipora

KT News Desk

BANDIPORA, SEPTEMBER 06: The 20th Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) Meeting of Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) Bandipora, SKUAST-Kashmir, was held Sunday under the chairmanship of Prof. Nazir Ahmad Ganai, Vice-Chancellor, SKUAST-Kashmir, with a focus on strengthening farmer-centric extension, promoting agricultural diversification and expanding technology-led interventions in the district.

Indu Kanwal Chib, Deputy Commissioner, Bandipora, attended the meeting as Guest of Honour, while Prof. Raihana Habib Kanth, Director Extension, SKUAST-Kashmir, participated in the deliberations.

The meeting, as per an official statement, began with a presentation on the Annual Progress Report 2025-26, highlighting the major activities and achievements of KVK Bandipora during the year. Dr. Tariq Sultan, Programme Coordinator, KVK Bandipora, subsequently presented the Action Plan for the forthcoming period and outlined the KVK's proposed thrust areas, including crop diversification, aquatic agriculture, horticulture, protected cultivation, value addition, technology demonstrations, farmer training and capacity building.

Dr. Sultan also apprised the Committee of the ongoing initiatives and proposed programmes aimed at addressing the emerging production and livelihood needs of farmers in the district.

In his address, Prof.



Nazir Ahmad Ganai appreciated the efforts of KVK Bandipora in implementing farmer-oriented extension programmes and stressed the need for stronger technology dissemination, adoption of innovative and climate-resilient agricultural practices, and interventions focused on enhancing farm income and improving farmers' livelihoods.

Indu Kanwal Chib appreciated the KVK's contribution towards agricultural development in Bandipora and called for continued coordination between KVK Bandipora and the district administration to strengthen farmer-oriented initiatives.

Prof. Raihana Habib Kanth emphasised the importance of need-based extension programmes,

field demonstrations, capacity building and effective farmer-scientist interaction.

Progressive farmers participating in the meeting shared their field-level experiences, observations and suggestions on agricultural production and emerging challenges in the district.

The SAC members held detailed discussions on the Annual Progress Report and Action Plan and offered suggestions for further strengthening the activities of KVK Bandipora.

The meeting concluded with an emphasis on strengthening farmer-centric extension, promoting innovative agricultural technologies, diversifying farming systems and addressing the priority needs of the farming community in Bandipora.

AgriStack: DC Rajouri reviews progress of digital crop survey



KT News Desk

RAJOURI, SEPTEMBER 06: Deputy Commissioner Rajouri Abhishek Sharma Sunday chaired a meeting to review the progress of the Digital Crop Survey (DCS) being conducted under the AgriStack framework in the district.

During the meeting, the Deputy Commissioner took a detailed assessment of the progress achieved by the concerned departments and reviewed the status of field-level data collection and other related activities.

The Digital Crop Survey (DCS), as per an official statement, is an initiative of the Government of India under the AgriStack framework, aimed at creating a verified and reliable digital database of farm plots, crops sown and farmer-related information. The initiative seeks to facilitate better agricultural planning, improve delivery of farmer-centric services and ensure effective implementation of

various government schemes.

The DC stressed upon the concerned officers to ensure accurate, comprehensive and timely collection and updation of data. He directed them to closely monitor the field-level progress, identify and address bottlenecks promptly and ensure achievement of the assigned targets within the stipulated timelines.

He further emphasised the need for close coordination among all stakeholders to ensure smooth and effective implementation of the Digital Crop Survey across the district.

The meeting was attended by ADDC Malikzada Sheraz Ul Haq; ADC Ravi Kumar Sihag; ADC Kalakote Mohammad Tanvir; ADC Nowshera Pritam Lal Thapa; ADC Sunderbani Ramkesh Sharma; ADC Koteranka Dil Mir; ACR Mohd Jahangir Khan; SDM Thanamandi Abid Hussain Shah; CAO Rajesh Verma; Tehsildars and other concerned officers.

DM Doda orders complete ban on use of VPNs

KT News Desk

DODA, SEPTEMBER 06: District Magistrate (DM) Doda Krishan Lal has ordered a complete prohibition on the use of Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023.

The order has been issued following reports of misuse of VPNs by certain individuals and groups to circumvent lawful cyber restrictions and access prohibited applications, websites and digital content, posing a potential threat to public order, tranquility and national security.

The District Magistrate, as per an official statement, observed that such activities have the potential to be exploited for unlawful and anti-national purposes, including inciting unrest, disseminating inflammatory material and coordinating activities prejudicial to the maintenance of law and order.

The prohibition shall apply to all individuals, institutions, cyber cafés, business entities and Internet Service Providers (ISPs) operating in the district, except in cases explicitly authorised by the Government through an official order.

Any person found violating the order shall be liable for legal action under the relevant provisions of law. The Senior Superintendent of Police, Doda has been directed to ensure strict enforcement of the order.

Public Advisory issued for Kailash Yatra-2026 in Bhaderwah

KT News Desk

BHADERWAH, SEPTEMBER 06: Additional District Magistrate Bhaderwah Sunil Kumar Bhutyal has issued a Public Advisory for the safe and smooth conduct of the Kailash Yatra-2026, scheduled to be held from September 8 to September 10, 2026.

The advisory, as per an official statement, highlights the challenging nature of the pilgrimage to Kailash Kund, situated at an altitude of around 14,500 feet and urges devotees to undertake the Yatra with adequate preparation, caution and strict adherence to the instructions of the Yatra Administration.

Devotees have been advised to ensure their physical fitness, carry valid identity proof, begin the journey early, maintain a slow and steady pace, take adequate rest and stay properly hydrated. Pilgrims have also been advised to follow weather advisories issued by the IMD and District Administration and carry essential items including warm and waterproof clothing, rain gear, suitable footwear, torch, medicines, food items and other necessary supplies.

The advisory further stresses that pilgrims experiencing symptoms of high-altitude illness should immediately descend to a lower elevation

and seek medical assistance.

As part of the precautionary measures, persons above 70 years, children below 14 years, persons suffering from serious illnesses, pregnant women and lactating mothers with their babies have been advised not to undertake the Yatra beyond the specified points, keeping in view the difficult terrain and high-altitude conditions.

The administration has strictly prohibited intoxicants, narcotic drugs, alcohol, caffeinated drinks and tobacco products, with violators liable to action under relevant laws. Pilgrims have also been directed to use

only designated tracks, avoid shortcuts and refrain from activities causing pollution or damage to the local ecology, flora and fauna. Single-use plastics are strictly banned in the Yatra area.

The administration has urged all devotees to cooperate with the authorities and follow the prescribed safety and environmental guidelines for a safe, disciplined and spiritually fulfilling Kailash Yatra-2026.

For emergencies, pilgrims can contact the designated Tehsildars, Police, Block Development Officers, Medical Officer, Forest officials and Station House Officer, Bhaderwah.

DC Poonch conducts field visit to inspect progress of NH-144A

KT News Desk

POONCH, SEPTEMBER 06: In a significant initiative to accelerate the ongoing construction of the Akhnoor-Poonch National Highway (NH-144A), Deputy Commissioner Ashok Kumar Sharma undertook an extensive field inspection of the road stretch from Sanjot to Poonch, falling within the jurisdiction of Poonch District.

He was accompanied by the officers from the District Administration and representatives from the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) and other concerned agencies.

The comprehensive field visit, as per an official statement, covered various locations where land acquisition, compensation and other

administrative issues were resolved. The functionaries from BRO briefed the Deputy Commissioner and the district administration regarding the construction status, site constraints and locations where progress was being affected due to pending land acquisition and compensation matters.

The Deputy Commissioner reviewed the issues at each site and interacted with the affected landowners and other stakeholders. A large number of pending land acquisition and compensation-related cases were resolved on the spot, providing much-needed relief to the concerned landowners and simultaneously facilitating the handing over of obstruction-free stretches to the executing agencies.

Achieving 98.43% literacy rate fulfilment of Sher-e-Kashmir's dream: Choudhary Muhammad Ramzan

KT News Desk

Srinagar, 06 September: The Jammu and Kashmir National Conference Additional General Secretary and MP Rajya Sabha Choudhary Muhammad Ramzan Sunday congratulated the people of Jammu and Kashmir on achieving a 98.43% literacy rate under ULLAS-NBSK and becoming a fully literate region, describing the achievement as historic and a matter of immense pride.

He said that this achievement, as per statement issued by the NC, is not merely an increase in statistics, but the result of the tireless efforts, commitment and dedication of countless teachers, education officers, volunteers, social workers, students and learners who played their part in taking the light of education to every household and settlement, from the remote mountainous areas of Kashmir to the plains of Jammu.

He said that it is the collective responsibility of all of us to acknowledge and pay tribute to the services and sacrifices of everyone associated with this remarkable achievement, particularly the teaching community, as teachers play a fundamental role in building an aware and educated society.



IFFJK 2026 to bring together eminent jury of acclaimed filmmakers, cinema professionals

» All jury members to evaluate films of competitive sections, decide awards » Prominent filmmakers Vidhu Vinod Chopra, Ramesh Sippy to join as special guests

KT News Desk

Srinagar, Sep 06: The 1st International Film Festival of Jammu and Kashmir (IFFJK)-2026 is set to witness the coming together of an exceptional panel of filmmakers, cinematographers, sound designers, curators, producers and educators from India and abroad, reflecting the festival's commitment to showcasing cinema of the highest artistic and creative standards.

The festival will also bring together Padma Shri awardee Director and Producer, Ramesh Sippy, known for blockbuster movie Sholay as well as son of the soil, director, producer, screenwriter and editor, Vidhu Vinod Chopra, known for films like 3 Idiots, PK, Mission Kashmir, as special guests.

The maiden edition of IFFJK has brought an eminent jury



comprising Santosh Sivan, Dorothee Wenner, Keiko Bang and Himansu Sekhar Khatua together, professionals whose distinguished careers span Indian and international cinema, documentary filmmaking, film curation, production, cinematography, sound design and film education.

The composition of the jury brings together diverse cinematic perspectives and considerable international experience, adding prestige and credibility to the first edition of the festival.

Santosh Sivan

An acclaimed Indian cinematographer, filmmaker, producer and actor, Santosh Sivan is a founding member of the Indian Society of Cinematographers (ISC). An FTII alumnus and among the most awarded Directors of Photography in India, he became the first cinematographer from the Asia-Pacific region to join the American Society of Cinematographers (ASC).

His celebrated | [More on P6](#)



Farmers gather on Srinagar outskirts to harvest almonds from orchards
Pic: Jahangir Shah (KNO/KT)

Art 370 abrogation, Naxalism control, Northeast peace mark security transformation: Amit Shah Announces nationwide campaign to track down fugitives



KT News Desk

New Delhi, Sep 06: In a significant move to bolster national security and law enforcement, Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday announced the launch of a comprehensive, nationwide campaign aimed at tracking down fugitives who have fled India's jurisdiction after committing serious crimes. The initiative, which has been in progress since 2019, has already resulted in the extradition of 274 fugitives from 36 countries and the seizure of properties worth approximately Rs 17,874 crore.

Shah said the campaign is part of a broader effort to dismantle criminal networks involved in economic offences, terrorism, narcotics trafficking, and gang wars, all while reinforcing India's internal security framework.

Addressing a press conference in Panaji, Goa, Shah detailed the government's multi-pronged approach to tackling

these issues, highlighting recent successes and outlining future plans. He was joined by Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant, with whom he discussed progress in narcotics control and criminal justice reforms.

Shah noted that since Prime Minister Narendra Modi assumed office in 2014, India has witnessed a significant transformation in its internal security landscape. The challenges faced at that time included rising terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir, Naxalism, and unrest caused by armed groups in the Northeast. Since then, decisive actions, including the abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir, have substantially reduced separatist sentiments, with terrorism figures trending towards zero. The region has also seen considerable development and efforts to bridge social and mental divides.

Similarly, the decades-long Naxalite | [More on P6](#)

UN-backed proposed world map must depict J&K, Ladakh as per India's official map: MEA

PTI

New Delhi, Sep 06: India on Sunday said a UN-initiated proposed world map must depict Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh in accordance with the country's official map, and any "inaccurate" or "misleading" representation will be unacceptable.

New Delhi's assertion came two days after it voted in favour of a UN General Assembly resolution aimed at correcting the world map to promote a more accurate representation of continental landmasses.

The resolution titled "Correct the Map: Rebalancing Global Cartographic Representation and Promoting Equitable Representation of the World's Regions, Particularly Africa" was adopted on September 4.

External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal



said India highlighted that the resolution does not constitute endorsement of any specific map, projection or depiction of national boundaries.

"India voted in favour of the resolution and also made an explanation of vote stressing on the underlying principle

of promoting equal - area cartographic representation," he said.

Jaiswal was responding to a media query on the issue.

"India's sovereign territory, including the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, must be depicted in

accordance with India's official map. Any inaccurate or misleading depiction is unacceptable," he said.

"Our position on India's sovereignty and territorial integrity is clear, consistent and non-negotiable," he noted.

Jaiswal said the purpose of the UN resolution is "to encourage the use of equal-area map projections that preserve the relative sizes of continental landmasses." "The resolution neither adopts nor authenticates any particular world map, nor does it address political cartography, including international boundaries, disputed territories or place names," he said.

The resolution, sponsored by Togo, received 164 votes in favour, with abstentions from Estonia, Georgia, Lithuania, Moldova, Serbia and Ukraine, and a lone vote against from the United States.

Woman dies after e-rickshaw, load carrier collide in Kathua

KNO Correspondent

Kathua, Sept 06: A woman was killed and two others injured when a load carrier collided with an e-rickshaw on Dhar Road in the Billawar area of Kathua district on Sunday, officials said.

An official told the news agency-Kashmir News Observer (KNO) that the accident occurred near Darmani when the load carrier collided with an e-rickshaw carrying three passengers.

He said the trio sustained injuries in the accident and were shifted to Sub-District Hospital (SDH) Billawar, where doctors declared one of them brought dead. His identity is yet to be ascertained.

"The other two are being provided | [More on P6](#)

Bihar Governor Ata Hasnain meets CM Omar

KT News Desk

Srinagar, Sep 06: Governor of Bihar, Lieutenant General (Retd) Syed Ata Hasnain on Sunday called on Chief Minister Omar Abdullah at the latter's residence in Srinagar.

The two exchanged views on a range of issues of mutual interest during the meeting.

Former Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir Dr Farooq Abdullah and First Lady of Bihar were also present on the occasion.



SC to hear on Sept 7 plea seeking guidelines to control unpredictable fluctuations in airfare

PTI

New Delhi, Sep 06: The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday a plea seeking regulatory guidelines to control the "unpredictable fluctuations" in airfare and ancillary charges imposed by private airlines in India.

As per the apex court's cause list of September 7, the matter would be heard by a bench comprising Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta.

On August 17, the Centre had told the top court that it has fast-tracked the framing of rules under the Bharatiya Vayuyan Adhiniyam, 2024, which is aimed at modernising India's aviation sector, and the same would be finalised within three

weeks.

The government had placed the draft rules before the bench in a sealed cover and said some final discussions were going on.

The apex court had noted that Additional Solicitor General Anil Kaushik, appearing for the Centre, sought three-week time to get the draft rules finalised and place it before the court.

The top court is hearing a plea filed by social activist S Laxminarayanan, who has sought a robust and independent regulator that ensures transparency and passenger protection across the civil aviation sector and regulatory guidelines to control the "unpredictable fluctuations" in airfare and ancillary charges imposed by private airlines in India.



Senior advocate Ravindra Srivastava, appearing for the

petitioner, had argued before the bench that till the time the

new rules come into force, the old rules are operating.

Questioning the "lack of willingness" on the part of authorities and the effectiveness of the existing mechanism, he had argued that airlines were charging exorbitant fares.

On July 13, the top court had asked the Centre to place the rules framed under the Bharatiya Vayuyan Adhiniyam, 2024, before it.

It had said the rules be placed before it in a sealed cover, irrespective of whether those have been placed before Parliament.

While hearing the plea on May 15, the apex court said there should be some rationalisation of airfares and asked the Centre to provide relief to flyers. Solicitor General Tushar

Mehta, who was then appearing in the matter for the Centre, had told the bench that the new enactment of 2024 had come into effect in January 2025 and the corresponding rules were in the process of being prepared.

On November 17 last year, the top court sought responses from the Centre and others on Laxminarayanan's plea.

While hearing the matter in January, the top court said it would interfere with the "unpredictable fluctuations" in airfares and flagged the exorbitant rise during festivals.

It had termed the exorbitant rise in airfares by the airlines "exploitation" and asked the Centre and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation to file their replies on the plea.

The plea claims that all private airlines have, without any credible justification, reduced the free check-in baggage allowance for economy-class passengers from 25 kg to 15 kg, "thereby converting what was earlier part of the ticketed service into a new revenue stream".

It says the "new policy of permitting only a single piece for check-in and the absence of any rebate, compensation or benefit to passengers who do not avail themselves of check-in baggage demonstrates the arbitrary and discriminatory nature of the measure".

The plea claims that currently, no authority has the power to review or cap airfares or ancillary fees, allowing airlines to exploit consumers through hidden charges and unpredictable pricing.

EDITORIAL

Time To Prepare Against GLOFs And Avalanches

The Ministry of Home Affairs' directive to Jammu and Kashmir and other Himalayan states to strengthen monitoring and early-warning systems for glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs) and snow avalanches is a timely and necessary step. However, the real challenge lies not in issuing directions but in ensuring their effective implementation on the ground. The Himalayan region is one of the most ecologically fragile and climate-vulnerable areas in the

world. Changing weather patterns, rising temperatures, and rapid glacier melt are increasing the risks associated with unstable glacial lakes and snow avalanches. For Jammu and Kashmir, where several high-altitude areas remain vulnerable to such hazards, the threat is a recurring reality. The MHA's call for a shift from a response-based approach to one centred on advance risk assessment, preventive mitigation, and community-level preparedness is

the most important takeaway from the review meeting. For too long, disaster management has been reactive—waiting for an event to occur before mobilising resources. This approach is no longer sustainable in a region where extreme weather events are becoming more frequent and intense. The directions to plug gaps in early-warning systems, improve last-mile alert dissemination, and ensure that warnings generated by scientific agencies reach district

administrations and communities without delay are critical. An early warning is useless if it does not translate into timely action. Equally important is the need to review existing disaster management and evacuation plans, identify shortcomings, and take corrective measures before extreme events occur. The expedited implementation of GLOF mitigation projects sanctioned by the Centre in 2024 must also be prioritised. Delays in such projects could

prove costly, not just in financial terms but in lives lost. The MHA has done its part by issuing clear directions. Now it is up to the state administrations to translate these directives into concrete action. The Himalayan region cannot afford complacency. The time to prepare is not after the next disaster—it is now. Any delay is a gamble with lives and livelihoods. The message is clear: proactive measures today will save countless lives tomorrow.

India Post Could Rejuvenate Rural India

The functioning of post offices in India has silently undergone significant transformations over the last couple of years

Gautam Bhattacharya

The functioning of post offices in India has silently undergone significant transformations over the last couple of years. One notable change which is intriguing the public is the merger of the historic Registered Post service into Speed Post, alongside the rollout of two premium, time-definite offerings – “24 Speed Post” and “48 Speed Post” – across six major metropolitan cities, Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, and Hyderabad.

When India Post first introduced Speed Post on 1 August 1986, the service was confined to a restricted booking and delivery network operating on an assured D+2 (Day of Posting + 2 days) standard. However, by the first decade of the 21st century, as post offices were integrated into a Wide Area Network (WAN), Speed Post booking and delivery became nearly universal. Around the same time, real-time tracking became the global industry norm, prompting India Post to introduce tracking features for Registered Post as well. This technological parity erased the qualitative differences between Registered Post and Speed Post, leading to their eventual consolidation. Geographic Reference

Today, while standard Speed Post is considered to be a universal service which can be availed anywhere in India, 24 Speed Post and 48 Speed Post operate as premium, guaranteed alternatives within a dedicated network. The concept of Registered Post – which guarantees addressee-specific delivery as opposed to standard, address-specific Speed Post – now survives exclusively as a value-added feature under the Speed Post framework. South Asians & Diaspora

Old-timers may recall that a little more than three decades ago, India Post



introduced the 'Metro Channel' – a mail delivery service that guaranteed next-day delivery for ordinary household mail between six major metropolitan cities. Postcards, inland letters, and envelopes dropped into the blue-coloured street letterboxes in the morning were delivered at their destinations the following morning, while those posted after the cut-off hours arrived the next afternoon. The newly launched '24 Speed Post' appears to be a reincarnation of that classic Metro Channel.

The primary difference is that users must now pay a premium – though it remains much cheaper compared to the major private couriers (for retail users) – in exchange for a secured, money-back guarantee if the post office fails to meet its deadline. For this premium service, deliveries are fulfilled even on Sundays and public holidays, protected by secure OTP verification. This enhanced security and holiday distribution have truly become the new threshold for

industry standards nationwide. Enhanced security for self-booking, transit, and delivery has been made possible through a major digital transformation initiative launched by the Department of Posts in 2025, known as Advanced Postal Technology (India Post IT 2.0).

Backed by an investment of Rs 5,785 crore, the system replaced legacy infrastructure with an indigenously developed, cloud-native architecture hosted on the government's Megh Raj 2.0 Cloud platform. The new technology integrates dynamic QR code scanning to allow users to pay for postal services seamlessly via UPI. It enables retail and bulk customers to handle self-booking, select available time slots for pick-up, and complete digital payments. Customers can download and print generated shipping labels directly onto their packages, keeping them ready for pick-up by the designated Beat Postman.

Automated SMS notifications are

triggered at every milestone – from pick-up to sorting, dispatch, subsequent handling at sorting hubs and transit points, right up to final delivery. In spite of India Post's strides to strengthen its technological infrastructure, there is hardly any indication of market share of Speed Post rising up. The organisation's financial health over the years indicates no improvement. Private commercial giants like DHL Express, FedEx and UPS command the high-value time definite global express market. India Post is yet to make any dent in that segment.

The post office network of Dak Ghar Niryat Kendras (Export Post Offices) primarily target MSMEs needing cost-effective, non-time-critical global parcel shipping. India Post recently introduced DIGIPIN, a 10-character alphanumeric digital postal index number. Based on latitude and longitude coordinates, DIGIPIN divides the country into a uniform 4x4-metre grid and identifies exact digital address for every physical location of the country. This infrastructure facilitates precise last-mile delivery within vast complexes like shipping ports, major railway stations, airports, and warehouse hubs.

Consequently, it significantly streamlines operations for logistics service providers and e-commerce platforms. However, the long-term effectiveness of DIGIPIN hinges on India Post's capability to educate and drive user adoption. To date, no visible public awareness campaigns have been seen to promote this initiative, or otherwise DIGIPIN could be an effective tool in House-listing in the current Census operations. Can DIGIPIN be a source of earning for India Post? The answer is 'No'.

The geo-coded addressing system developed by a government department for

public use can't be monopolised under copyright law. Some countries earlier developed a digital addressing system similar to India's DIGIPIN. However, India Post's DIGIPIN is unique because it is an entirely public, open sourced and native geospatial network. Google Maps is not open sourced; though publicly accessible for anyone to use via web-browsers and mobile apps, it's a proprietary item owned by Google. DIGIPIN lays the foundation for accurate parcel drops at designated spots laying the critical groundwork for autonomous drone deliveries in future.

Regarding the financial health of India Post, a notable highlight is the recent turnaround of India Post Payments Bank (IPPB) – a fully owned public sector undertaking set up under the Department of Posts in 2018. IPPB has recorded a net profit of Rs 134 crore. This may appear to be a paltry sum, but it is important that the bank has made the turnaround by leveraging the vast network of 1.65 lakh post offices to enable low-cost customer acquisition and high transaction volumes in rural areas.

Recognized for leading the industry in doorstep, bio-authenticated rural withdrawals, the IPPB generated its primary revenue by routing central and state government subsidy disbursements direct to the account of the beneficiaries, which currently average Rs 45,000 crore annually. The synergy of IPPB and post office can go a long way in strengthening rural financial infrastructure of the nation, not directly measurable in terms of profitability.

The writer is a former civil servant, and an independent commentator on socio-economic issues and public policies. Courtesy: The Statesman

Why Your Brain Needs Nature

The emerging science of how our surroundings shape attention, stress, and cognition

Michiko Kimura Bruno

We have all experienced it: stress at work. You are staring at your computer, deadlines mounting, stuck on a project. Taking a walk seems like a waste of time, but you decide to go outside anyway. Maybe there is a small park near your office or home. You breathe in the air, look at the sky and clouds, and notice some greenery; trees, grass, perhaps a few flowers. You hear a bird in the distance and feel the wind against your face.

And suddenly, you feel lighter. Your mood lifts. A random idea connects. You remember a coworker from a previous project whom you can ask for help.

Or, even better, you go for a hike on the weekend. The crisp air, the smell of trees, the chirping of birds, the sound of a stream all feel refreshing. Your worries begin to recede.

And the restorative effect lasts even after you come home and turn the computer back on. Sure, your legs are sore and your muscles a little tired, but mentally, you feel refreshed, ready to face the task that seemed so daunting before.

The Emerging Field of Environmental Neuroscience

Marc G. Berman, author of *Nature and the Mind*, studied this exact effect of nature on our brain in a scientific fashion.

In a now-classic experiment, participants first completed a cognitive task called the backward digit span, which requires them to listen to a series of numbers and repeat them in reverse order. Then, they took a walk outside for about an hour. One group walked in the Arboretum, in a trail following a river through the evergreens, and the other, in the busy part of the town, navigating

intersections along the commercial storefronts. When they returned, they repeated the same test. The participants who walked in nature significantly improved their scores, but those who did the urban walk did not.

Later, the researchers switched the routes, so the same people served as their own controls and the result was the same: nature walk improved attention and memory, but urban walk did not. The walking was similar. The people were the same. What changed was the environment.

The researchers suggested that nature captures our attention gently, without demanding it. Urban environments, in contrast, are filled with stimulation that demands our attention, such as traffic, signs, people, and potential hazards. Nature, they suggested, gives our directed attention a chance to recover.

Berman is now considered to be one of the leaders of an emerging field, environmental neuroscience, which studies how features of our environment influence the brain, including our attention, cognition, mood and stress. In retrospect, this seems obvious. Our brain is the interface between our inner world and the world outside us. Why wouldn't the environment in which it operates matter?

The idea that nature can help our health is not new. Research from another tradition suggests that nature's effects may extend beyond cognition into the body itself.

In Japan, interest in the health effects of shinrin-yoku, or “forest bathing,” has grown, alongside an emerging discipline known as “forest medicine.” Shinrin means “forest” in Japanese, and yoku means “bath.” It is specifically noted that Shinrin-yoku is not exercise, or hiking. Rather, it is the act of being

in nature, bathing in the forest atmosphere and connecting with it through our multi-sensory system of sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch.

Studies have associated forest exposure with lower cortisol levels, changes in autonomic measures, improvements in mood, and changes in measures of immune function.

One intriguing hypothesis involves phytoncides, volatile organic compounds released by trees. Laboratory and small human studies suggest that these compounds may contribute to some of the physiological effects associated with forest exposure, including changes in natural killer cell activity. But they are unlikely to explain the whole story.

Why Nature Helps our Brain

Recent studies using tools such as functional MRI and EEG are beginning to show that natural and urban environments engage the brain differently, including networks involved in attention, stress, emotion, and self-referential thought.

According to Attention restoration theory (ART), “attention” is a finite resource, that can be depleted by constant stimulation.

Modern life constantly demands directed attention: ignore the notification, answer the email, switch between windows, remember the deadline at work—while also scheduling the dentist appointment, arranging the car safety check, and figuring out the family vacation.

Our attention rarely gets to be off duty. Nature captures attention differently. A cloud moving, leaves rustling, water flowing, birds calling—these attract us without demanding that we concentrate on them.

This gentle capture of attention has been

described as “soft fascination”: interesting enough to engage us, but not so demanding that it taxes our directed attention. This may give our attentional resources an opportunity to recover.

In short, looking at trees may restore attention when scrolling through something entertaining on your phone does not.

One of the intriguing ideas that researchers have begun to ask is whether some of nature's restorative qualities lie in visual geometry. Built environments are often dominated by straight lines, sharp edges, and regular geometry. Natural environments tend to contain more curves, irregularity, and complex patterns. Nature also tends to contain repeating patterns at different scales: the branching of a tree, the veins of a leaf, the irregular edge of a coastline, what may be called as “fractal” patterns.

Studies suggest that people generally prefer natural images, and viewing them can improve mood. But preference alone does not appear to explain nature's cognitive benefits. In Berman's studies, participants did not necessarily have to enjoy their nature walk more to show improvement in cognitive performance.

In other words, nature's cognitive benefits may involve more than simply enjoying what we see. Something about how the brain processes natural environments may itself matter.

So the next time you are staring at your computer, stuck on a problem, going for a walk may not be procrastination. It may be exactly what your brain needs.

Neuroscience has historically spent far more time studying what happens inside the brain. Environmental neuroscience is beginning to change that. If our surroundings

influence attention, stress, mood, and cognition, then the environments we build are not simply backgrounds. They are part of the biological conditions in which our brains function.

Perhaps brain health begins not only with what we do to our brains, but with the worlds we ask our brains to live in.

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Owner & Editor, Printer, Publisher: Nasir Azam Khan, Published From Srinagar, Printed at K.T Press Pvt. Ltd 120-Electronic Complex, Industries Estate, Rangreth, RNI NO:-JKENG-2010/39938, Email:- Kashmirthunder123@gmail.com, Website: Kashmirthunder.com, Mobile: 9906797575, 9419006285 |

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Jal Sanchay Jan Bhagidari: From Local Action To Water Security

Every conserved drop becomes part of a larger effort to build resilient communities and strengthen India’s long-term water security

Press Information Bureau

For centuries, communities across India developed ways to capture, store and share water according to local needs. Stepwells, tanks, ponds, johads and traditional irrigation systems reflected a simple understanding: water security was a shared responsibility.

Growing populations, expanding agriculture and rapid urbanisation have made water management increasingly complex. New technologies, infrastructure and institutional mechanisms have become necessary. Yet, community participation remains central to sustainable water management.

This tradition of collective actions found a new expression in Jal Sanchay Jan Bhagidari (JSJB). Launched on 6 September 2024, the initiative has placed community partnership and ownership at the heart of water conservation. The initiative focuses on constructing low-cost groundwater recharge and water storage structures and reviving defunct borewells. It also promotes scientifically designed, locally appropriate solutions through a Whole-of-Government and Whole-of-Society approach. JSJB is guided by the 3Cs – Community, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Cost.

Building on this approach, more than 27 lakh structures were constructed across the country under JSJB 1.0 by May 2025 to capture rainwater and replenish groundwater. Further, under JSJB 2.0, launched in June 2025, more than 1.5 crore groundwater recharge structures were constructed by May 2026. In June 2026, the scope of the Jal Sanchay Jan Bhagidari (JSJB) initiative was expanded. JSJB was integrated with the Jal Shakti Abhiyan: Catch the Rain (JSA: CTR) campaign as Jal Sanchay Jan Bhagidari: Catch the Rain (JSJB: CTR). As of 3 September 2026, more than 1.58 crore artificial groundwater recharge structures have been constructed.

A National Focus on Water Conservation and Collaboration

The Ministry of Jal Shakti’s Departmental Summit was held in New Delhi on 1–2 September 2026. It was the first in a series of Departmental Summits aimed at strengthening cooperative federalism and closer Centre–State collaboration. Jal Sanchay Jan Bhagidari: Catch the Rain was among the Summit’s four key thematic pillars, alongside water infrastructure projects, source sustainability of drinking water systems, and rural water supply under Jal Jeevan Mission 2.0.

Emphasising Jan Bhagidari (Public Participation), Prime Minister Narendra Modi suggested promoting “Jal Utsav” to create greater public awareness. The Prime Minister further called for strengthening knowledge and capacity on water management and governance in universities and higher educational institutions. He suggested structured inter-State study visits involving public representatives, officials and farmers to facilitate practical learning and replication of successful interventions. He also called for robust water data governance, with water-sector data brought together, systematically managed, analysed and effectively utilised.

The Summit brought together discussions on key aspects of water governance, marking a step towards realising the vision of a Water Secure India and Viksit Bharat 2047.

Across the country, these principles are being translated into local action, with communities and institutions adapting water conservation measures to native conditions.

Chhattisgarh: When Farmers Made Space for Water

In Chhattisgarh’s Korea district, farmers have set aside part of their own agricultural land for water conservation. Under the Aawa Paani Jhoki movement, farmers voluntarily dedicated 5 percent of their agricultural land for recharge ponds and terraced pits.

The model shows that sustainable water management does not require large-scale displacement or heavy capital investment. It requires collective will.

More than 1,260 farmers adopted the model, while more than 2,000 soak pits were created across the district. In many villages, groundwater levels rose by 3 to 4 metres, while springs were revived in 17 remote tribal hamlets. The government supported the effort through micro-watershed mapping, hydrogeological assessments and technical guidance. Farmer ownership remained central to the initiative.

Korea district, Chhattisgarh
Andhra Pradesh: Villages Take Charge of Their Water

In Prakasam district of Andhra Pradesh, villages such as Murugummi, Marella and Thangella, once faced erratic rainfall, declining groundwater levels and borewell failures. These challenges affected agriculture and livelihoods.

Under the JSJB initiative, the response began at the local level. Gram Sabhas, door-to-door campaigns, Kalajathas (traditional folk-theatre performances), and workshops were organised to raise awareness. These efforts brought farmers, women, youth and local institutions together to plan measures such as water budgeting, crop planning and groundwater sharing.

The image shows a large, colorful tent decorated with vibrant patterns, surrounded by a crowd of people gathered around a series of neatly stacked, red bricks. AI-generated content may be incorrect.

Prakasam District, Andhra Pradesh

Adopting a ridge-to-valley approach, the villages implemented measures to capture, store, and recharge rainwater. The ridge-to-valley approach involves managing rainwater as it flows from higher ridge areas towards the valley, strengthening soil and water conservation downstream.

In Murugummi, 71 water conservation

structures provided about 8.11 lakh cubic metres of cumulative storage capacity. They support protective irrigation across 264.5 hectares of agricultural land.

Marella had 53 structures with about 10.04 lakh cubic metres of cumulative storage capacity. Additionally, the renovation of community ponds and tanks contributed nearly 5.95 lakh cubic metres of additional storage capacity.

Thangella had 71 structures with around 5.89 lakh cubic metres of cumulative storage capacity. The revival of traditional water bodies further enhanced the storage capacity by approximately 3.98 lakh cubic metres.

Together, these efforts improved groundwater availability for about 5,900 people, strengthening agricultural and dairy livelihoods, restoring soil moisture and helping reduce distress migration.

The image depicts a series of aerial views showing an abandoned, partially developed land with an open pit, surrounded by natural vegetation and distant rural scenery. AI-generated content may be incorrect.

Prakasam District, Andhra Pradesh

Odisha: From Rooftops and Ponds to Aquifers

In Odisha, the JSJB initiative brings together schools, colleges, government offices and other institutions. They are capturing rainwater where it falls, facilitating its recharge into underground aquifers. Through the CHHATA Scheme, rainwater is captured from rooftops, while the ARUA Scheme facilitates recharge from water bodies into underground aquifers. Together, these interventions connect public infrastructure, local water bodies and community participation to strengthen groundwater conservation and water security.

In Jajpur district, 117 recharge shafts were constructed under the ARUA Scheme and 114 rooftop rainwater harvesting systems were installed under the CHHATA Scheme between 2022–23 and 2025–26.

These developments across government institutions and educational campuses cover high-priority blocks including Korei, Binjharpur, Bari, Rasulpur, Dasarathpur and Jajpur. The effort has contributed to steadier water supplies, greater agricultural resilience and less time spent by households, particularly women, fetching water.

The approach extends beyond Jajpur.

In Cuttack district, 57 rooftop rainwater harvesting systems were established under the CHHATA Scheme across government offices, educational institutions and public facilities. 35 recharge shafts were constructed under ARUA in ponds and water bodies to facilitate deep aquifer recharge. These efforts were supported by street plays, seminars and workshops involving self-help groups, students and Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Similarly, in Digapahandi, Ganjam district, groundwater levels fell by 1–3 metres between 2020 and 2022. Rooftop harvesting systems in government offices and schools channel rainwater into recharge borewells. Assessments show better post-monsoon recovery around intervention sites.

Digapahandi, Ganjam District, Odisha
Digapahandi, Ganjam District, Odisha

A Growing Movement for Water Security

The government’s approach is not merely about creating structures for water conservation. It is also about fostering a culture of responsibility around water. JSJB places Jan Bhagidari—people’s participation—at the centre of water management. It brings together communities, Panchayats, institutions and other stakeholders on locally appropriate solutions. Its larger significance lies in connecting traditional knowledge with scientific planning, local ownership with institutional support, and individual action with collective outcomes. Every conserved drop becomes part of a larger effort to build resilient communities and strengthen India’s long-term water security.

The Quiet Revolution In Services

The services revolution appears to be a global phenomenon that has already spread to developing countries

Dani Rodrik

In 2023, University of Chicago economists Chang-Tai Hsieh and Esteban Rossi-Hansberg published a study showing that services in the US were undergoing a radical transformation. Digital technologies and organizational innovations in retail, hospitality, personal services and medical services, they argued, had enabled some firms to become much more productive and expand their presence in local markets previously served by smaller, less efficient establishments. It was an “industrial revolution in services.”

Although Hsieh and Rossi-Hansberg suggested that much of the productivity gain from this trend did not show up in official statistics, even the measured upsurge in services productivity has been impressive. Between 2000 and 2024, labor productivity in the US grew at an annual average rate of 3 percent in food service establishments, 2.1 percent in accommodation services, 2.9 percent in retail trade and 4.4 percent in wholesale trade. Compared to manufacturing, where labor productivity growth has essentially stagnated at an annual rate of 0.2 percent, the record in services is nothing short of extraordinary.

This performance is as unexpected as it is welcome. It is unexpected because the traditional view holds that services are a drag on the economy’s productivity (what economists call Baumol’s cost disease); and it is welcome because services now dominate economic activity and provide the bulk of jobs. Higher productivity is a necessary (if not sufficient) condition for turning precarious jobs in services into the good jobs that inclusive prosperity requires.

Even better, the services revolution appears to be a global phenomenon that has already spread to developing countries. While economists and policymakers debate whether industrialization can still play its traditional growth-promoting role in the current global and technological context, services have quietly turned into an engine of economic development around the world.

When services are discussed in the



context of economic growth in developing countries, the focus tends to be on tradable, skill-intensive activities such as information technology, business processing or financial services. But by their very nature, these services are not well suited to low-income contexts. They can absorb only a small share of the labor force – the same disadvantage (from a development standpoint) as manufacturing today.

Instead, the current revolution is happening in the considerably less glamorous but more consequential services: restaurants, deliveries, ride-hailing, grocery stores, gig work and even care. Recent academic research has shown that the expansion of middle-class services has been an important driver of economic growth in India, sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America.

In India, for example, advances in IT and business process outsourcing have certainly been important for graduates of the country’s technology institutes. But

the vast, less-educated majority of the workforce has benefited primarily from the expansion of what Yale economists Zianyu Fan, Michael Peters and Fabrizio Zilibotti call consumer services sold on local markets.

Moreover, a November 2025 International Monetary Fund report finds that the marginal product of labor in India’s services now exceeds that in manufacturing, partly because labor productivity in the manufacturing sector has stalled in recent years. Taken at face value, this means that moving a worker from manufacturing to services would increase India’s overall income.

To be sure, even if manufacturing firms do not directly generate much employment, they can have indirect effects on the economy through linkages to other firms and the technological spillovers they often generate. This point is often used to counter the argument that services offer a

viable development model. But the manner in which global value chains are organized today almost guarantees negligible spillover benefits from export-oriented manufacturing. Since the bulk of intermediate and capital inputs are imported, only a thin segment of value added is generated domestically and any backward spillovers are minimized.

By contrast, modernized service establishments can offer significant linkage opportunities. For example, discount retail chains typically operate under private label, which means that they offer predominantly locally manufactured goods. In Colombia, retailers such as D1 and Ara rely almost exclusively on local sourcing. They work with hundreds of local suppliers across the food and grocery value chain, providing them with the benefits of scale and access to larger markets.

Importantly, these supply chains enable technological upgrading in areas such as

packaging, traceability and cold chains, as well as stronger enforcement of quality standards. They have been shown to increase formal employment in manufacturing and agriculture by several percentage points, without adverse effects on employment in general.

Unpublished work by Victo Silva, a visiting researcher at Harvard’s Center for International Development, documents a similar phenomenon in food delivery services in Brazil. Consider the platform firm iFood, which serves 400,000 restaurants of all sizes. Beyond delivering meals, it provides financial, logistical, customer service and market analysis tools to food service establishments, enabling productive upgrading throughout the sector.

As this evidence shows, the potential for productivity gains in labor-absorbing services is real and significant. The risk is that the benefits will be appropriated by employers, especially large chains and platforms that can exert market power over their employees, customers and suppliers. In the US, Uber drivers or Amazon warehouse workers have not experienced major improvements in wages and working conditions despite the remarkable productivity gains these platforms have enabled.

This is no different from what happened in manufacturing industries in their early days. For the gains of workplace productivity to be widely shared, corporations must face countervailing power. Competition policy, regulation and a stronger voice for workers will be as important in services as they were in manufacturing. In the absence of productivity gains, demands for higher labor standards may conflict with overall employment. But if the productivity revolution in services can be sustained, it will help developed and developing countries alike avoid this cruel tradeoff.

Dani Rodrik, professor of International Political Economy at Harvard Kennedy School, is past president of the International Economic Association and the author of “Shared Prosperity in a Fractured World: A New Economics for the Middle Class, the Global Poor, and Our Climate” (Princeton University Press, 2025). Courtesy: Arab News

CONTD. FROM FRONT PAGE

Art 370 abrogation, Naxalism

insurgency has been brought under control, with most militants surrendering and joining the mainstream. In the Northeast, over 11,000 youth have laid down arms, leading to more than 14 agreements signed with various groups. These steps have fostered regional development and stability.

The campaign against fugitives, Shah explained, has been a key pillar of this security drive. Since 2019, authorities have extradited 274 individuals involved in serious crimes, including economic offences, terrorism, narcotics, and gang-related violence. The government's efforts have been supported by technological innovations, notably the creation of 'BHARATPOL', a digital platform that connects more than 14 central agencies and police forces across all states. This integrated mechanism facilitates the tracking, legal action, and extradition of fugitives, streamlining processes that previously faced bureaucratic hurdles.

In addition to extradition, the government has taken measures to confiscate or seal properties linked to fugitives. Since 2019, assets worth approximately Rs 17,874 crore have been seized, underscoring the commitment to dismantling illegal financial networks associated with criminal activities.

Shah highlighted the improved legal framework, including new criminal laws and justice codes, which have simplified procedures for legal action against fugitives. Cybercrime, a growing concern in modern security, has also been addressed through a systematic mechanism monitored directly by the Prime Minister. The 1930 helpline has become an effective tool for cybercrime reporting and assistance.

In the realm of narcotics control, Shah emphasized that drugs pose a grave threat to India's future generations and are often used to fund terrorism. Since 2019, the government has adopted a coordinated, national-level campaign to combat drug trafficking, moving beyond small seizures to dismantle entire networks. A four-tier NCORD (National Committee on Drug Abuse) mechanism was established, involving dedicated anti-narcotics task forces, joint coordination committees, and a national

database of offenders called NIDAAN.

The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) has been restructured, and investigations have become more scientific and data-driven. Seizures have increased dramatically—from 26 lakh kilograms seized between 2004 and 2014 to over 119 lakh kilograms from 2014 to 2026, with a value of approximately Rs 1.89 lakh crore. The destruction of drugs has also surged, from 3.36 thousand kilograms to nearly 49 lakh kilograms in the same period.

Shah pointed out that the fight against drugs is now a continuous, coordinated effort involving multiple agencies and international cooperation. Agreements have been signed with 46 countries to facilitate extradition and intelligence exchange, while over 25 crore citizens have taken an oath under the Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyan to stay drug-free. Rehabilitation efforts have helped 5.7 lakh individuals become drug-free.

Looking ahead, Shah revealed a detailed three-year roadmap from July 2026 to July 2029, aiming for aggressive, measurable outcomes. The strategy is based on four pillars: intelligence-led enforcement, control of precursor and synthetic drugs, demand and harm reduction, and capacity building through training and coordination. The plan involves deploying advanced surveillance at borders, ports, and airports, and leveraging financial investigations to target drug kingpins.

The government is also focusing on community engagement through programs like NCC, NSS, and My Bharat to create 'Nashamukti Mitras'—volunteers dedicated to drug prevention. Efforts include increasing de-addiction centers to 1,751 nationwide and training volunteers to ensure community participation.

Shah reaffirmed that India welcomes foreigners but not with drugs, asserting that the country's resolve to eliminate drug trafficking is as strong as its fight against Naxalism. The government is employing a "Quadrangular Approach" to address drug smuggling routes, especially through the so-called 'Death Triangle' and 'Death Crescent' regions, which are known hubs for international drug trafficking.

Concluding his remarks, Shah emphasized that the government views the fight against drugs as one of the most critical national

security battles. The coordinated efforts across multiple agencies and levels of government aim to fulfill Prime Minister Modi's vision of a drug-free, developed India by 2047. With the new initiatives and the upcoming timeline, authorities are determined to eradicate the menace of drugs and ensure a safer, more secure future for the country.

IFFJK 2026 to bring

body of work includes The Terrorist, for which he received international recognition, and his contribution to world cinema was further acknowledged with the Pierre Angénieux Tribute at the Cannes Film Festival in 2024.

Sivan has also served in several prestigious international jury capacities, including as Chairperson of the Best Debut Director of Indian Panorama Jury at IFFI 2024, besides serving on the International Jury of the Chennai Film Festival and the New Currents Jury at the Busan International Film Festival.

Dorothee Wenner

Adding a strong international and cross-cultural dimension to the jury is Dorothee Wenner, a German filmmaker, curator, writer and journalist renowned for her contribution to international cinema and cultural exchange. Associated with the Berlin International Film Festival since 1990, Wenner has served as a programmer and delegate for India and Sub-Saharan Africa. She was also associated with the Berlinale Talent Campus, serving as its Director for the 2006 and 2008 editions.

A founding jury member of the Africa Movie Academy Awards and an experienced international film curator, Wenner has worked extensively with feature films and filmmakers from India, Africa and Germany. Her filmmaking and curatorial work includes Peace Mission, Drama Consult and Kinshasa Collection. She is widely recognised for building cross-cultural collaborations and championing emerging voices in world cinema.

Keiko Bang

Keiko Bang, a Japanese media entrepreneur, documentary filmmaker, producer and international curator, brings more than three decades of experience in the global media industry to IFFJK.

As founder and CEO of Bang Singapore Pte.

Ltd., she has produced more than 50 award-winning documentaries, including Zheng He: Emperor of the Seas, Guge: The Lost Kingdom of Tibet and Secrets of the Samurais.

A leading advocate of international co-productions across Asia, Bang has worked with governments, broadcasters and media organisations in more than 25 countries. Her extensive experience in documentary production, international programming and film curation has seen her serve on juries and selection committees of major international film festivals.

She served as a Jury Member at MIFF 2024 and was appointed to the Institutional National Selection Committee at MIFF 2026. She has also served as a primary coordinator and selection leader for the premier factual programming forum of Asian Side of Doc.

Sriram Raghavan

Sriram Raghavan is an acclaimed Indian filmmaker and screenwriter known for his distinctive neo-noir style and gripping action thrillers. Born on 22 June 1963, he has directed critically acclaimed films including Ek Hasina Thi, Johnny Gaddaar, Agent Vinod, Badlapur and Andhadhun. Renowned for his sharp storytelling, atmospheric visuals and complex characters, Raghavan is regarded as one of the leading auteurs of contemporary Hindi cinema.

Himansu Sekhar Khatua

Completing the distinguished panel is Himansu Sekhar Khatua, a National Film Award-winning filmmaker, director, educator and journalist with a strong record of contribution to Indian cinema and film education.

An alumnus of FTII, Pune, Khatua has directed acclaimed films including Shunya Swaropa and Ishanu, besides several award-winning regional productions. He has also served as faculty member and mentor, influencing successive generations of filmmakers through teaching and practical engagement.

Khatua has served as Director of Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute (SRFTI) and has previously been associated with prestigious film juries, including the Indian Panorama Feature Films Jury at IFFI 2024 and the Kautik International Film Festival 2021, where he served on the Features Award Jury.

The eminent jury of acclaimed filmmakers and cinema professionals reflects the global

spirit of 1st IFFJK. The diversity and stature of the proposed jury underline the vision behind the first International Film Festival of Jammu and Kashmir, which seeks to create a meaningful platform for cinematic excellence, cultural dialogue and international exchange.

With expertise ranging from cinematography and sound design to documentary filmmaking, film curation, production, direction and education, the jury represents multiple dimensions of contemporary cinema. Their collective experience across prestigious film festivals and international institutions is expected to bring nuanced, independent and globally informed perspectives to the evaluation of films at IFFJK.

The presence of such distinguished cinematic personalities is also expected to strengthen Jammu and Kashmir's emergence as a vibrant destination for filmmakers, artists, storytellers and cinephiles from across India and the world.

The 1st International Film Festival of Jammu and Kashmir (IFFJK), being organised by the Department of Information and Public Relations, Jammu and Kashmir, is envisioned as a landmark cultural initiative that celebrates the universal language of cinema while providing a platform for established as well as emerging filmmakers to connect, collaborate and share their stories with a wider audience.

With an accomplished jury, a diverse cinematic programme and participation from the wider film community, IFFJK 2026 is poised to mark a significant new chapter in Jammu and Kashmir's cinematic journey.

Woman dies after

medical care and will be referred to GMC Kathua for further treatment. Their condition was not immediately known," the official said.

Meanwhile, police have taken cognisance of the incident and initiated an investigation. (KNO)

Man dies after falling

of Mohammad Ramzan Ganie, a resident of Untoo Hamam, Sopore.

Meanwhile, police have taken up an investigation to ascertain the exact circumstances of the incident. (KNO)

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Building collapses in south Delhi's Satya Niketan; 3 dead, 5 critical

PTI

New Delhi, Sep 6: An around 50-year-old five-storey building housing a boys' hostel in a congested bylane in Satya Niketan near Delhi University's South Campus collapsed on Sunday afternoon, leaving three students dead and many trapped.

Locals claimed that there could be between 30 and 50 people in the building at the time. Authorities, however, gave no figure for those trapped.

Eight people have been pulled out of the debris so far, of whom two were brought dead to the hospital, while a third died during treatment. Five are critical, the police said.

Repair work was underway in the basement of the five-floor structure, which was used as a paying guest (PG) accommodation, when it collapsed at around 1.30 pm, a senior officer said.

Several vehicles also came under the rubble as the structure crashed.

Locals claimed that the collection of water over days of rain in the basement had weakened the building's foundation, leading to its eventual collapse.

Delhi has seen spells of heavy rain since Friday.

A police officer said the structure was nearly 50 years old.

Two NDRF teams comprising 70 personnel and a canine squad have been deployed to look for signs of life. Oxygen cylinders were dropped under the rubble for those stuck to breathe, an NDRF officer said. Fire tenders have been stationed at the site.

The area is marked by narrow, congested bylanes lined with eateries and PGs.



Densely packed buildings often leave little room for movement, with locals saying most of the students staying in the locality were from Kerala, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh and study at colleges across the road.

Residents joined the rescuers in their frantic efforts, using their bare hands and whatever tools they could find to search for the buried. Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, Lieutenant Governor Taranjeet Singh Sandhu, Police Commissioner Anurag Kumar, and MP Bansuri Swaraj rushed to the spot after the incident.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah expressed his grief at the deaths.

He said he spoke to the chief minister, the police commissioner, and the NDMA director general for the situation on the ground.

"The injured are being provided with all necessary medical assistance. Praying for the speedy recovery of all those injured," he wrote on X.

Union Health Minister J P Nadda spoke to Gupta, offering help, official sources said.

The Joint Commissioner of Police, New Delhi Range, DCP Southwest and Additional DCP are supervising the operation, an officer said, adding that the building was known as 'Hostel Daze' and its owner is based in Gurugram. The process to register an FIR is underway, and seven to eight teams are searching for the building's owner.

"The exact number of persons trapped/injured is still not known at present. Further details will be shared as and when confirmed," Delhi Police said in a statement said.

Rajen Chhetri, a local who works with the Delhi Police, said the building housed around 15 rooms, with two to three students sharing each room.

"Most of the students staying here are from Kerala, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh and study mainly at Motilal Nehru College,

Atma Ram Sanatan Dharm College and Sri Venkateswara College. They were paying around Rs 12,000 per bed," Chhetri said.

"I have been living here for the last 20 years. Some construction work was going on in the basement, where water had started accumulating. The foundation was also extremely weak," he added.

An eyewitness said the tragedy could have been much worse had it occurred on a working day, as many students had returned home for the weekend.

"Very few were here," he said.

The locals also raised concerns over the condition and maintenance of other buildings in the area, where several houses have been converted into PGs.

Priyanka, who has lived in the area for over two decades, said, "Buildings here are being constructed up to five-six floors. Many houses have been converted into boys' PGs, with the owners shifting elsewhere. They simply name the properties as PGs, take the rent online and leave the area without even checking back."

She added, "I have not seen any maintenance work ever being carried out. Since it was raining, most of the students were inside rooms, while some had gone home as it was the weekend."

BJP MLA Anil Sharma, who was at the spot, said, "We are even getting calls from those who are trapped inside."

The police have advised locals and onlookers to stay away from the site.

Paramilitary has been deployed to ensure unobstructed movement of ambulances.

Ganga swells in Patna, areas downstream on alert; 22 lakh hit by floods in Bihar

PTI

Patna, Sep 6: More than 22 lakh people in 12 districts of Bihar have been affected by a deluge as rivers overflowed following heavy rain in the state and neighbouring Jharkhand, with authorities sounding an alert as the water level in the Ganga crossed the highest flood level in Patna on Sunday.

In a notification, the East Central Railway cancelled and diverted some trains because of the alarmingly high water level at a bridge that connects Punpun and Parsa Bazar stations on the Patna-Gaya section.

A total of 190 community kitchens were being operated in various districts for flood-affected people, while 1,429 boats have been pressed into service to take marooned people to safety, officials said.

Besides, 27 teams of the State Disaster Response Force and 10 from the National Disaster Response Force have been deployed in various districts.

In Patna's Gandhi Ghat, the Ganga was flowing at 50.57 metres at 6 am on Sunday, which is 0.05 metres above its previous highest flood level (HFL) of 50.52 metres, recorded on August 21. In Pandarak, the river was flowing at 43.92 metres at 6 am, which is 0.19 metres above its previous HFL of 43.73 metres on August 16.

Several rivers such as the Gandak was flowing above the danger mark at Dumariaghat and Hajipur, the Kosi at Baltara and Kursela, the Budhi Gandak at Khagaria, the Ganga at Hathidah, Bhagalpur, Kahalgaon, Buxar and Munger, the Punpun at Sripalpur,

US envoys hold ‘important’ talks in first trip to Kyiv

AP

Kyiv, Sep 06: KYIV: US envoy Steve Witkoff said he and fellow emissary Jared Kushner held “important” talks Sunday with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on ending the war with Russia — but offered no sign of a breakthrough.

The envoys met with the Ukrainian leader on their first trip to Kyiv, a day after meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in the Kremlin.

Witkoff, President Donald Trump’s business ally, and Kushner, Trump’s son-in-law, have been to Moscow several times, but had never held talks in the Ukrainian capital — hit by deadly Russian strikes for more than four years.

“We’ve had a very meaningful discussion, substantive, important, and we are very encouraged and we look forward to continuing this as long as it takes,” Witkoff said after the talks.

“Hopefully this trip has come out with some new ways to advance forward. I think we’ve learned a lot from the trip,” Kushner said after the meeting with Zelensky.

Witkoff and Kushner traveled to the region hoping to revive the Trump administration’s push for peace in Europe’s worst conflict since World War II, after a summer of escalation.

Another round of talks in the presence of British, French and German representatives was still ongoing. “We are grateful that the Europeans are with us today and that we are in such a coalition of countries,” Zelensky said.

“Here we are all on the same side.” “Peace Express” Like all visiting officials, the



American delegation arrived by train, with “Peace Express” written on the platform at Kyiv Central Station.

Zelensky said Kyiv had “prepared everything to make our airports operational,” but that Russian strikes made arriving by plane impossible. Ukrainian airspace has been closed since Russia launched its invasion in 2022.

Russia and Ukraine have vowed not to strike each other’s capitals during the US envoys’ trip.

“Substantive plans” Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine has killed hundreds of thousands of people and displaced millions.

A White House official said in a statement to AFP that in Moscow the envoys had “discussed substantive

plans which will be announced in the coming weeks.”

The Kremlin said the Americans “put forward a number of ideas on possible routes to a settlement,” but did not elaborate.

Putin has repeatedly said Moscow intends to seize the rest of eastern Ukraine, and Russia increased deadly strikes this summer.

Since Putin launched the invasion in February 2022, the war has dragged on with no end in sight.

In Kyiv, many welcomed the fact the Americans even made it to Ukraine, but few believed in a breakthrough.

Nataliia Lipekh, 67, said it was “absolutely necessary (for them) to be here” and to see that “our land is already soaked with this blood and

that we need some help.”

“At the moment, I have no grounds for hope,” said 29-year-old Yaroslav, saying he had seen “far too many of these negotiation processes.”

“Idea for peace”

Putin on Saturday told the US envoys that Moscow would ensure their safety in Kyiv.

Just days ago, Russia struck the headquarters of the SBU security building in central Kyiv.

Trump has said his envoys were bringing a “proposal” to end the fighting.

“We have an idea for peace,” he said, without elaborating.

Undercutting Trump’s vow to end the war quickly, US peace efforts have stalled, in part because of Washington’s war with Iran.

“Deceived us”

Despite the ceasefire pledges for the capital cities, fighting continued elsewhere.

Ukraine’s air force said Russia had attacked overnight with 108 drones and missiles, while Moscow said it had shot down 258 drones.

Ukraine said Saturday that 10 people were killed by Russian strikes, including an 11-year-old boy.

With the war in its fifth year and thousands dead, peace seemed out of reach for most.

Yulia, a 41-year-old who came from a town now occupied by Russia and worked as a cleaner in Kyiv, said it was a “positive step” the Americans were in Kyiv.

“But taking our opponent into account... I can’t put my hopes on this, because for thousands of years they have deceived us with their empire and imperial habits,” she said, adding:

“We want to believe in it, but it’s very difficult.”

Fuel tanker explosion in Iran kills 11



AP

Tehran, Sep 06: A fuel tanker exploded in western Iran, killing 11 people and injuring seven others, state media said. IRNA reported late Saturday that the tanker hit other cars before bursting into flames near a traffic police station close to the Kurdish city of Sanandaj, some 400 kilometers (248 miles) west of the capital, Tehran. The report cited a faulty brake system.

The injured were transferred to hospitals.

In 2018, a similar road accident between a fuel tanker and an intercity passenger bus near Sanandaj killed 15 people and injured four.

Road and traffic accidents annually leave more than 17,000 dead in Iran. Experts blame the high fatality rate on unsafe vehicles, disregard for traffic rules, and inadequate emergency services.

Iran arrests alleged opp supporters after video circulates

AFP

Tehran, Sep 06: Iranian authorities arrested individuals in a video appearing to support a banned opposition group

Tehran: Iranian authorities have arrested a number of people accused of appearing in a rare video waving the flag of an outlawed opposition group, state television said Sunday.

Videos circulating online in recent days showed individuals riding motorbikes on empty streets in Iran while waving the white-and-red banner of the banned People’s Mujahedin Organisation of Iran (MEK).

On Sunday, state television said authorities had identified and arrested “all the individuals who appeared in this clip” and that they were “associated” with MEK, without specifying how many.

It said the motorcade had been travelling near the city of Karaj, west of Tehran, but it was not clear when the footage was recorded.

India qualify for AFC U20 Asian Cup main tournament after 20 years with 3-0 win over Bangladesh



PTI

Tashkent (Uzbekistan), Sep 06: India qualified for the AFC U20 Asian Cup main tournament for the first time in 20 years after a commanding 3-0 win over Bangladesh in their final group match of the qualifying event here on Sunday.

The win, their second in the qualifiers, took India to six points from three matches. They had to wait for the result of Syria vs Uzbekistan match played later on

Sunday to know their fate.

With Syria losing 0-3 to Uzbekistan, India finished second in Group B and qualified for the AFC U20 Asian Cup main tournament after 20 years as one of the seven best runners-up teams across the eight groups. India last played in the AFC U20 Asian Cup main tournament in 2006.

Uzbekistan also qualified as group toppers with nine points. Syria finished third with three points, and bottom-placed Bangladesh

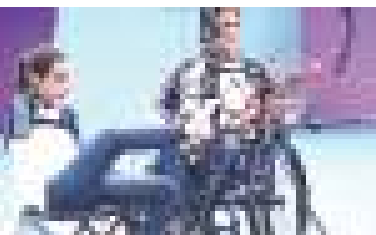
were relegated to the Development Phase after losing all three games. The main tournament will be held in China from March 24 to April 10, 2027.

Danny Meitei Laishram opened the scoring in the 25th minute before Vishal Yadav doubled India’s advantage with an acrobatic finish on the hour mark. Substitute Md Arbash then sealed the contest with a powerful strike in the 79th minute.

The match began on an even keel, with neither side able to establish control during the opening exchanges.

India took the lead in the 25th minute through an excellent piece of coordinated pressing and attacking play. Danny put Md Abdul Riyad Fahim under pressure and forced the Bangladesh defender into conceding possession cheaply to Hateem Ali.

India seal two VII medals; Sheetal Devi leads dominant compound qualification show



PTI

Ahmedabad, Sep 06: India were assured of at least two medals in the Visually Impaired 1 category after Yugal Garg, Pawan Kumar and Tanvi Ingale advanced to the semifinals on the second day of the third stage of the World Archery Para Series, here on Sunday.

The strong showing in the VII event came along with a dominant qualification display by India’s compound archers, with world No. 1 and reigning

world champion Sheetal Devi topping the women’s standings and the Indian men’s and women’s teams securing top seeding.

Sheetal, the armless Indian para archer from Jammu, shot 698 out of a possible 720 to claim the top seed in the women’s compound qualification.

Four Indians advanced to the second round of 16, with Lalpati seeded 11th, Sarita 12th and Payal Nag 14th. Payal also progressed after defeating Slovakia’s Dominika Petrovicova 140-131.

India also topped the women’s compound team qualification, with Sheetal, Lalpati and Sarita combining for 1,368 points to finish two points ahead of China.

With five teams in the draw, India received a direct berth in the semifinals and will face the winners of the quarterfinal between fifth seeds Slovakia and fourth seeds Kazakhstan.

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7th September	8th September	9th September
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