



LG to administer oath to new J&K ministers today

- ▶ 4 MLAs likely to be sworn in as ministers
- ▶ Ali Sagar, Altaf Kaloo, among frontrunners
- ▶ Satish Sharma likely to be dropped

Rehan Qayoom Mir

Srinagar, Oct 26: Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha will administer the oath of office and secrecy on Tuesday morning to the legislators being inducted into the council of ministers headed by Chief Minister Omar Abdullah.

Sources told the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) that National Conference veteran leader Ali Muhammad Sagar and legislator Altaf Ahmad Kaloo are among the frontrunners for the ministerial berths.

The swearing-in ceremony will be held at Lok Bhavan Auditorium, Srinagar on Tuesday at 10.30 am and will be attended by J&K's top politicians and bureaucrats.



Sources disclosed that four MLAs are being inducted into the council of ministers — three from the Valley, one each from north, south and central Kashmir, and one from the Jammu province.

They said Ali Muhammad Sagar and Altaf Kaloo are being inducted into the cabinet while Satish Sharma could be dropped from the council of ministers.

It has been learnt that Chief Minister Omar Abdullah had approached the Congress high command in August to ask whether they would like to avail a berth in the ministry, but they have not responded to the offer.

Sources said that the Jammu and Kashmir Pradesh Congress Committee was divided over whether to be part of the government. | [More on P6](#)

J&K's Shadow Wage Rate Factor falls sharply to 0.47 in 2023-24 from 1.00

NITI Aayog study flags wide rural-urban labour gap | Daily wages at Rs 162 in rural areas, Rs 554 in urban

Raja Syed Rather

Srinagar, Oct 26: Jammu and Kashmir witnessed a sharp decline in its Shadow Wage Rate Factor (SWRF) for unskilled workers during 2023–24, with the overall figure falling to 0.47 from 1.00 in the previous financial year, according to a study supported by NITI Aayog.

The findings, published in the report Reassessment of National Parameters for Appraisal of Public Investment Programmes/Projects in India, reveal significant differences between rural and urban labour markets in the Union Territory.

As per the study, accessed by the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), the SWRF in rural Jammu and Kashmir was estimated at 0.36, considerably lower than the urban figure of 0.96.

The report places average daily earnings of unskilled



workers at Rs 162 in rural areas and Rs 554 in urban areas. It also estimates that rural areas account for 81.01 per cent of the working population, compared to 18.99 per cent in urban areas.

The assessment further highlights variations in wages and economic labour costs between male and female workers.

For male unskilled labourers, the study records average daily wages of Rs 162 in rural

areas and Rs 564 in urban areas. Their respective shadow wage factors stand at 0.36 and 0.96, bringing the combined figure to 0.47.

In comparison, female workers have been assigned average daily wages of Rs 343 in rural areas and Rs 498 in urban areas. Their corresponding factors are estimated at 0.78 and 0.96, with an overall SWRF of 0.81.

Historical figures presented in the study indicate

considerable fluctuations in Jammu and Kashmir's labour-related economic parameters over the past five financial years.

The overall SWRF remained at 0.97 during both 2019–20 and 2020–21 before declining to 0.85 in 2021–22. It subsequently reached 1.00 in 2022–23 but dropped substantially to 0.47 in 2023–24.

A similar trend was observed in rural areas, where the factor stood at 1.00 in 2019–20, slipped to 0.96 in 2020–21 and 0.81 in 2021–22, and returned to 1.00 in 2022–23 before falling to 0.36.

The urban factor, meanwhile, was recorded at 0.87 in 2019–20 and remained at 1.00 for the next three financial years before marginally declining to 0.96 in 2023–24.

The shadow wage rate factor is an economic assessment tool used to estimate the opportunity cost of employing labour in | [More on P6](#)

Massive fire guts 40 shops near Jammu Railway Station

CM Omar expresses anguish, directs assistance to traders

Div Com, DC visit spot, assure all possible support to victims



Yogesh

Jammu, Oct 26: Around 40 shops were gutted in a massive fire at Shiv Market near Jammu Railway Station late Sunday night, causing extensive damage to merchandise and property, officials said on Monday.

An official of the Fire and Emergency Services told the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) that no casualties were reported in the incident, which occurred around

10.45 pm on Sunday. "It took more than five hours to douse the flames," he added.

The official said fire tenders from seven fire stations were rushed to the spot after information about the blaze was received. "The fire was brought under control around 4 am on Monday, following which a cooling operation was launched to prevent it from reigniting. One fire tender remained stationed at the site as a precautionary measure, while | [More on P6](#)

Dr Farooq seeks relief, rehabilitation for affected



KT News Desk

National Conference (NC) president Dr Farooq Abdullah on Monday expressed deep grief and sorrow over the fire incident at Shiv Market near Jammu Railway Station, in which around 40 shops were gutted. Dr Farooq, in a statement issued here, said | [More on P6](#)

Kashmir shivers as Shopian dips below freezing

Dry weather likely to continue | Cold nights persist in higher reaches

Sajid Raina

Srinagar, Oct 26: Cold conditions continued across Kashmir and Ladakh on Monday, with Shopian recording the lowest minimum temperature in the Valley at minus 0.1 degrees Celsius, while Nyoma was the coldest among the reported stations in Ladakh at minus 8.4 degrees Celsius.

As per the meteorological data accessed by the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), temperatures in Kashmir remained close to the freezing point at several places, particularly in the higher reaches and tourist destinations.

Pahalgam recorded a minimum temperature of 0.2 degrees Celsius, while Sonamarg



and Gulmarg registered 0.5 and 0.6 degrees Celsius, respectively.

Srinagar recorded a minimum temperature of 3.3 degrees Celsius, while the mercury settled at 1.8 degrees

Celsius at Srinagar Airport. Pulwama recorded 0.6 degrees Celsius, Awantipora 1.0 degree, Budgam 2.0 degrees, Konibal in Pampore 2.1 degrees, Qazigund 2.6 degrees, | [More on P6](#)

MP Ramzan speaks to EAM over stranded Kashmiri Umrah pilgrims

Seeks special flights, financial aid

KT News Desk

Srinagar, Oct 26: National Conference Additional General Secretary and MP Chowdhry Mohammad Ramzan on Monday spoke over the telephone with Union External Affairs Minister Dr S. Jaishankar regarding the difficulties faced by Kashmiri Umrah pilgrims stranded in Saudi Arabia, seeking immediate intervention to ensure their safe and early return.

He also took up the matter with Fahad Ahmed Khan Suri, Consul General of India

in Jeddah, urging prompt action to facilitate the return of the stranded pilgrims to their homeland.

Ramzan expressed deep concern over the hardships faced by the stranded pilgrims and their families, particularly elderly persons and those experiencing medical and financial difficulties. He said the uncertainty surrounding their return, coupled with additional expenses on accommodation, food, medicines and alternative travel arrangements, had caused severe distress among the affected pilgrims.

He urged the concerned authorities to coordinate closely with relevant agencies and airlines and arrange special



flights to facilitate the return of the stranded pilgrims. He also

called for financial assistance for those unable to bear the

additional expenses associated with their return.

Further, he stressed the need to ensure adequate accommodation, food and medical facilities for the pilgrims until their return, with particular attention to elderly persons and those with health concerns.

The intervention comes amid mounting concern over the plight of the pilgrims, with the Jammu and Kashmir Association of Hajj and Umrah Companies having already opened a helpline and Chief Minister Omar Abdullah stating that the J&K Government is in active co-ordination with the Ministry of External Affairs to facilitate their safe and early return.



reportedly seen shooting in the Kaksar area of Kargil, Ladakh, | [More on P6](#)

Bollywood's Singham arrives in Kashmir

Sonamarg resort welcomes Ajay Devgn

Rehan Qayoom Mir

Srinagar, Oct 26: Bollywood actor Ajay Devgn, popular for his role as Singham, arrived in Kashmir on Monday.

As per details available with the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), Devgn, known for playing Bajirao Singham in the 'Singham' franchise, visited Sonamarg where he was warmly welcomed at Sindh Resorts & Spa.

In a social media post, the resort said it was delighted to host the actor, adding that some moments make a stay truly unforgettable.

Earlier, Devgn was

Breast cancer emerging as major health challenge in Kashmir: Expert

Calls for early detection, timely consultation, access to comprehensive care

Jahangeer Ganaie

Srinagar, Oct 26: Breast cancer is emerging as a major health challenge in Kashmir, with medical experts stressing the need for greater public awareness, early diagnosis and timely treatment to improve survival rates.

Although breast cancer is one of the most common cancers affecting women worldwide, experts say the challenge in Kashmir extends beyond the disease burden, as many patients approach hospitals only after the cancer has progressed to an advanced stage. Doctors said that breast cancer is often treatable, particularly when

detected early, and that timely medical intervention can significantly improve outcomes and quality of life.

Speaking to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), Dr Shabnam Bashir, Director of Surgical Oncology specialising in breast and colorectal cancers at New City Hospital, Tengpora Bypass, said understanding the disease, recognising its warning signs and seeking medical advice without delay are essential to reducing its impact. "Breast cancer develops when cells in the breast grow abnormally and uncontrollably, usually originating in the milk ducts or lobules. Although it

predominantly affects women, men can also develop the disease," he said.

Global and national burden

Breast cancer remains one of the most frequently diagnosed cancers worldwide and the leading cancer affecting women in many countries. Millions of women are diagnosed every year, while hundreds of thousands lose their lives to it. The burden varies across countries, with differences in awareness, screening facilities, access to diagnostic services and availability of timely treatment contributing to variations in survival rates. In countries with well-established screening programmes, more cases



are detected early, allowing treatment to begin before the disease spreads. In settings with limited screening or delayed access to specialist services, women are more likely

to be diagnosed at advanced stages.

In India, breast cancer has emerged as the leading cancer among women, surpassing cervical cancer in incidence.

A considerable proportion of Indian patients continue to reach healthcare facilities after the disease has progressed. Social stigma, fear of diagnosis, lack of awareness about symptoms and delays in seeking medical attention are among the factors contributing to late presentation. Experts say these challenges underline the importance of making breast health a routine part of women's healthcare rather than seeking medical assistance only when symptoms become severe.

Rising concern in Kashmir
Studies conducted at tertiary-care centres in Kashmir have reported that approximately 70–73 per cent of

breast cancer patients presented with stage III disease, highlighting the need for earlier detection and faster referral for specialist assessment. A late diagnosis can limit treatment options and increase the complexity of care, whereas cancers detected early generally offer better prospects for successful treatment.

Why is breast cancer a growing concern?

Experts say the burden is influenced by a combination of reproductive, biological, genetic, lifestyle and healthcare-related factors. No single factor can explain the trends observed in Kashmir.

Changing | [More on P6](#)

North Forest Circle

PCCF reviews developmental works, forest protection measures

KT News Desk

KUPWARA, OCTOBER 26: Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF) and Head of Forest Force (HoFF), Jammu and Kashmir, Sarvesh Rai, undertook a two-day tour of North Kashmir on October 25 and 26 to review developmental works, forest protection measures, eco-tourism initiatives and infrastructure development across forest divisions of the North Forest Circle.

On the first day of the tour, the PCCF, as per an official statement, visited JV Forest Division, Baramulla, where he inaugurated the Trumgund Forest Check Post and inspected the ongoing construction work of the DFO office at Baramulla. He subsequently visited Langate Forest Division, where he laid the foundation stone for the second storey of the DFO office at Langate and inspected the Reshwari Eco-Tourism site.

During the visit, the PCCF emphasised the importance of developing eco-tourism in a planned and sustainable manner, with a focus on responsible visitor management, conservation of natural landscapes and creation of livelihood opportunities for local communities.

The tour further covered eco-tourism works in Bangus Valley, where the PCCF took stock of ongoing eco-development initiatives in the Dringyari-Bungus area and reviewed the progress of works being undertaken to promote responsible eco-tourism and enhance visitor amenities.

Emphasising effective implementation, he directed the concerned officers to ensure the timely and quality completion of all ongoing projects. He also stressed the need to strengthen forest protection measures, enhance field-level preparedness and intensify preventive interventions in view of the forthcoming forest fire season.

At Lakut Bangus, the PCCF inspected the Forest Staff Quarters and Jungle Training Centre and released "Mountain Trails of Kehmil," a publication highlighting trekking routes and nature-based tourism opportunities in Kehmil Forest Division. He also inaugurated the Range Office at Ramhall.



The office will strengthen field-level administration and coordination, enabling more effective monitoring of forest resources and implementation of protection and developmental activities in the range.

Later in the evening, the PCCF visited the Army Headquarters at Zangli, Kupwara, where he held an interactive session with the General Officer Commanding (GOC) of the Army's 28 Infantry Division and other Army officers. Discussions included forest diversion proposals associated with Army requirements and their progress.

On the second day, the PCCF visited Kamraj Forest Division, Kupwara, to review

field-level infrastructure, forest protection preparedness, livelihood initiatives and conservation-related activities. The visit commenced at Batpora Block, where he inaugurated the Block Officers' Hut, a facility catering to three forest beats comprising 16 compartments. The infrastructure is expected to strengthen field coordination, monitoring and protection of forest resources.

The PCCF subsequently visited Nagriwari Eco-Park at Hatmulla, where he inaugurated the Van Posh Mela, showcasing the linkages between forest conservation, traditional skills, local livelihoods and eco-tourism. A

1.5-kilometre student trekking route was also inaugurated, and students were flagged off for the trek to promote environmental awareness and appreciation of the region's natural heritage.

During the programme, the PCCF initiated Resham Vann, a mulberry plantation initiative within an existing plantation closure, aimed at promoting location-specific livelihoods through mulberry cultivation and potential linkages with Bamboo and Mulberry Clusters (BMCs). He also inspected thematic stalls showcasing traditional crafts and products made from locally sourced raw materials, including Indigofera-based crafts, wood carving and pottery. Craftspersons demonstrated the use of tools provided under the livelihood initiative of the Green India Mission (GIM), highlighting opportunities for traditional skill development, value addition and income generation.

Poplar saplings were also distributed among beneficiaries under the Social Forestry Department's agroforestry programme to encourage tree cultivation on private and agricultural lands.

Students from local schools presented an environmental debate and skit highlighting the importance of forest conservation and biodiversity protection. Appreciating their awareness and understanding of environmental issues, the PCCF felicitated the participating students and encouraged them to continue promoting conservation awareness in their communities.

A tribal heritage presentation showcased the traditional lifestyle, culture and indigenous practices of local tribal communities. Traditional beverages and a customary tribal dwelling, locally known as a Dhoka, were demonstrated, highlighting their potential to enrich eco-tourism experiences. Such structures could also serve as guidance points, rain shelters and camping facilities along trekking routes, creating livelihood opportunities while preserving tribal heritage, subject to appropriate planning and environmental safeguards.

The PCCF also attended a forest fire mock drill organised by Kamraj Forest Division

to assess preparedness for the ensuing fire season. The forest fire control team demonstrated firefighting equipment, response procedures and first-aid techniques for injured personnel. The exercise highlighted the importance of timely response, field coordination, equipment readiness and staff training in mitigating forest fires.

Later, the PCCF released the Forest Protection Plan of Kamraj Forest Division for 2026-27, outlining the division's priorities and planned interventions for strengthening forest surveillance, preventing forest offences and safeguarding forest resources. He also released the booklet "A Portrait of Paradise - The Enchanting Forests of Lolab Valley," documenting the valley's ecological richness and the Forest Department's interventions in forest conservation, restoration, plantation development and eco-tourism promotion.

The two-day tour highlighted the Forest Department's focus on strengthening field infrastructure, improving forest protection and fire preparedness, promoting sustainable livelihoods and developing responsible eco-tourism opportunities while conserving the rich ecological and cultural heritage of North Kashmir.

The PCCF was accompanied during the tour by Irfan Rasool Wani, Chief Conservator of Forests, Kashmir; Dr. M. K. Kumar, Chief Conservator of Forests, Central; Irfan Ali Shah, Conservator of Forests, North Circle; Rafi Ahmed Bhat, Joint Director, Forest Protection Force; Zahid Mughal, Divisional Forest Officer, JV Forest Division; Owais Mir, Divisional Forest Officer, Kamraj Forest Division; Ahzah Pajwari, Divisional Forest Officer, Langate Forest Division; Faisal Farooq, Divisional Forest Officer, Kehmil Forest Division; Noorul Amin, Divisional Manager, Forest Development Corporation; Bilal Mir, Divisional Forest Officer, Social Forestry; Jan Mohd, Deputy Director, Forest Protection Force, Kehmil; and Javed Sheikh, Deputy Director, Forest Protection Force, besides Range Officers of the Forest Department and Assistant Directors of the Forest Protection Force.

DC Kishtwar administers Integrity Pledge as Vigilance Awareness Week 2026 commences in district



KT News Desk

KISHTWAR, OCTOBER 26: Vigilance Awareness Week 2026 commenced on Monday across district Kishtwar with a pledge ceremony at the Conference Hall, New DC Office Complex, Mini Secretariat Kishtwar.

Deputy Commissioner Pankaj Kumar Sharma presided over the ceremony and administered the Integrity Pledge to officers and officials of the line departments, who reaffirmed their commitment to integrity, transparency, accountability and ethical conduct in public service.

Vigilance Awareness Week is observed annually to commemorate the birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. It aims to strengthen the culture of integrity, promote preventive vigilance, enhance transparency in public administration and foster public trust in governance through active citizen participation.

This year, the week is being observed from October 26 to November 1, 2026, under the theme "" (Probity for Prosperity).

During the ceremony, the Deputy Commissioner outlined the activities and guidelines issued by the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) for the week-long observance. In accordance with these guidelines, all government offices in the district will focus on five key preventive vigilance parameters: disposal of pending complaints, disposal of pending cases, capacity-building programmes, digital initiatives and contract

management systems.

Administering the pledge, the DC called upon all officers and officials to uphold the highest standards of honesty, impartiality and accountability in discharging their official duties. He emphasised the importance of translating the principles of integrity into everyday administrative practice and ensuring that public service delivery remains transparent, efficient and citizen-centric.

As part of the public outreach and participatory initiatives planned for the week, district and sectoral heads of the line departments concerned will organise awareness campaigns, seminars and interactive workshops focusing on the five parameters. These activities aim to sensitise officials and the public to the importance of ethical governance, encourage transparency in administrative processes and promote collective responsibility in preventing corruption. The observance will reinforce the district administration's commitment to probity, accountability and good governance, and strengthen public confidence in the administration through sustained vigilance and transparent practices.

Among those present were Assistant Commissioner (Revenue) Mohammad Idrees Lone, Assistant Commissioner (Development) Manoj Kumar, Assistant Commissioner (Panchayat) Neeraj Sharma, Chief Medical Officer Dr Sanjay Bhat, Chief Education Officer Sanjay Dogra and Tehsildar Nirbhay Sharma, besides other officers and officials.

Pathan Panthers Lolab wins Kilo North Kashmir Cricket League 2026 title



KT News Desk

LOLAB, OCTOBER 26: Pathan Panthers Lolab emerged champions of the second edition of the Kilo North Kashmir Cricket League (KNKPL) 2026 after defeating Sopore XI by a narrow margin of four runs in a thrilling final at Chandigam Cricket Ground, Lolab, on Monday.

Organised by the Indian Army, the tournament witnessed enthusiastic participation from

across North Kashmir, providing a vibrant platform for budding cricketers to showcase their talent, competitive spirit and sporting excellence.

The league, as per an official statement, was conducted in two phases, with 101 teams participating in Phase I and 12 teams advancing to Phase II, reflecting the growing popularity of cricket and the enthusiasm of young sports enthusiasts across the region. In recognition of their

outstanding performance, Pathan Panthers Lolab were awarded a cash prize of 2 lakh, while runners-up Sopore XI received 1 lakh. The Player of the Tournament was felicitated with an e-scooter for his exceptional performance and contribution throughout the competition.

The successful culmination of the league underscored the vital role of sports in channelising youthful energy, promoting discipline, nurturing grassroots talent and fostering a spirit of healthy competition among young people.

The initiative also highlighted the Indian Army's efforts to encourage youth engagement through sporting activities, while strengthening community bonds and promoting the enduring values of peace, unity and harmony across Kashmir.

The nail-biting final brought the tournament to a memorable close, celebrating not only the triumph of Pathan Panthers Lolab but also the passion, talent and sporting spirit of North Kashmir's cricketing fraternity.

GMC Srinagar observes vigilance awareness week



Speaking on the occasion, the Administrator said that integrity and transparency are essential for efficient public service and for strengthening public confidence in government institutions. He called upon all employees to perform their duties with sincerity, dedication and professionalism while maintaining the highest standards of ethics and accountability.

KT News Desk

SRINAGAR, OCTOBER 26: Government Medical College (GMC) Srinagar Monday observed Vigilance Awareness Week by organizing an Integrity Pledge ceremony on the college premises.

The pledge was administered by Masarat Hashim, Administrator Associated Hospitals Government Medical College Srinagar in the presence of officers and officials of the institution. Nausheen Mushtaq, Chief Accounts Officer was also present on the occasion.

The programme, as per an official statement, was organised to promote awareness about the importance of integrity, transparency and accountability in public service. During the ceremony the officers and officials took the Integrity Pledge and reaffirmed

their commitment to honesty, ethical conduct and zero tolerance towards corruption in the discharge of their official duties.

Speaking on the occasion, the Administrator said that integrity and transparency are essential for efficient public service and for strengthening public confidence in government institutions. He called upon all employees to perform their duties with sincerity, dedication and professionalism while maintaining the highest standards of ethics and accountability.

The programme concluded with all participants reiterating their commitment to uphold the values of integrity, transparency and good governance in line with the objectives of Vigilance Awareness Week.

Promoting Integrity, Probity Vigilance awareness week begins across Shopian



KT News Desk

SHOPIAN, OCTOBER 26: Vigilance Awareness Week 2026 commenced across Shopian Monday with a series of awareness activities aimed at promoting integrity, transparency, accountability and ethical conduct among officials, stakeholders and the general public.

The Vigilance Awareness Week, as per an official

statement, is being observed from October 26 to November 1, 2026, under the theme "Probity for Prosperity."

As part of the opening-day activities, an Integrity Pledge was administered at Town Hall Shopian.

The event was presided by Additional Deputy Commissioner Shopian, Dr. Zakir Hussain Faaz.

CEO MC and other officers were also present on the occasion. The participants reaffirmed their commitment to upholding honesty, integrity, transparency and accountability in the discharge of their responsibilities and contributing towards a corruption-free society. Similar activities were also organised at various locations across Shopian, with officials, employees and members of the community participating in initiatives aimed at creating greater awareness about ethical governance, prevention of corruption and the importance of probity in public life.

The week-long observance will feature various awareness programmes, outreach activities, sensitisation sessions and other initiatives to engage employees, stakeholders, students and citizens on issues relating to integrity, transparency and accountability.

Bigg Boss 20

Qazi-Farrhana's Kashmiri chat goes viral

Rehan Qayoom Mir

Srinagar, Oct 26: Kashmiri language found a place on national television as 'Bigg Boss 20' contestant Qazi Touqeer and Farrhana Bhatt, an actress from the Valley, switched to their mother tongue during the show's 'Weekend Ka Vaar' episode on Sunday, sharing a light-hearted exchange that brought a taste of Kashmir's everyday conversations to the national audience.

According to the details available, Farrhana appeared on the show on October 25 to promote her song "Shahiba", but her interaction with Qazi also turned into a moment of cultural connection as the two exchanged greetings

and spoke in Kashmiri.

"Every Kashmiri is so proud of you. I'm loving you and whatever you're doing. You're so entertaining!" Farrhana told Qazi, praising his personality and performance on the reality show.

She also encouraged him to bring the season's trophy to Kashmir, saying, "Make sure trophy Kashmir aaye!"

During their Kashmiri exchange, Qazi asked Farrhana, "Wari chukh theeek chukh?" (How are you? Are you well?). Farrhana replied, "Shukar, shukar, Hazrat, tuhi chiv theeek," saying she was doing well by God's grace.

Qazi then asked, "Yeti chhu Tachar chalan, Kashmir manz chha jari?" referring to whether

the "Tachar" trend was also going on in Kashmir. Farrhana replied, "Jari."

The exchange offered viewers a glimpse of colloquial Kashmiri and the familiarity of everyday expressions used in the Valley.

The conversation later turned to music, with Qazi joining Farrhana in singing "Shahiba". Farrhana also suggested that the two collaborate on an official song after Qazi leaves the Bigg Boss house.

Their interaction brought Kashmiri language and cultural familiarity to a national entertainment platform, giving viewers beyond Jammu and Kashmir a glimpse of the Valley's everyday conversation—(KNO)



"Every Kashmiri is so proud of you. I'm loving you and whatever you're doing. You're so entertaining!" Farrhana told Qazi, praising his personality and performance on the reality show.

Govt committed to smooth winter tourism in Sonamarg: Lavasa



Raja Syed Rather

Ganderbal, Oct 26: Secretary Tourism, Avny Lavasa, on Monday said that issues related to electricity supply, snow clearance and other requirements would be taken up with the Ganderbal district administration to ensure smooth tourism activities during the upcoming winter season in Sonamarg.

Talking to reporters here Lavasa said, representatives of the Hotel and Market Association met her and raised several concerns, particularly regarding power

supply and snow clearance during the winter. "These issues require coordination among multiple departments. We will take them up with the district administration and make every possible effort to support winter tourism activities and the local tourism industry," she said.

Lavasa said the government would examine the concerns raised by local stakeholders and take necessary measures to promote tourism in the area.

Regarding the sewage treatment facility, she said the plant was expected to

be commissioned soon and would help ensure scientific treatment of sewage and septage waste. "The connectivity network to the plant is yet to be completed. However, waste collected through municipal suction and jetting machines will be treated at the facility," she said.

On winter tourism activities, Lavasa said the CEO has already briefed her about the proposed initiatives. "We will hold a joint meeting with the Directorate and work out a plan to promote and support winter tourism activities," she added—(KNO)

J&K people still where they were in 1947: PDP Chief

Rehan Qayoom Mir

Srinagar, Oct 26: Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) president Mehbooba Mufti on Monday said India is a great country, but the people of Jammu and Kashmir stand where they were in 1947.

Addressing a party gathering here on Accession Day, Mehbooba Mufti urged people across the country to remember the circumstances and conditions under which Jammu and Kashmir joined India, saying the decision was based on trust in the country's secular leadership and assurances that the region's identity and rights would be protected.

"The people of Jammu and Kashmir are still where they were kept in 1947," she said adding that residents continued to face restrictions and difficulties in exercising their rights.

Mehbooba said Jammu and Kashmir had joined the India envisioned by Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, B R Ambedkar and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, which she described as a country founded on



secularism and equal rights. "We joined the India of Gandhi, Nehru, the India of Ambedkar and Azad, India which gave us all the rights which we are being deprived of right now," she said, urging people to remember the promises made to people of Jammu and Kashmir.

The PDP chief said the region had acceded to India with certain conditions, including

safeguards intended to protect its land, employment opportunities and distinct identity.

She said that these assurances stand weakened, particularly after the abrogation of Article 370 and the reorganisation of the erstwhile state in August 2019.

She also expressed concern over difficulties faced by young people seeking passports for education and

employment. She said that people continue to face restrictions on their movement and freedom of expression.

She said the silence in Jammu and Kashmir should not be mistaken for peace or normalcy, arguing that people needed space to express their concerns and discuss the region's political future.

The former chief minister further called for dialogue and a political approach to address the situation, invoking former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's emphasis on humanity, democracy and Kashmiriyat.

"If you want to keep Jammu and Kashmir together, don't drag it. Don't drag it with your arms. Instead, hold its hand and teach it to walk with you," she said.

Mehbooba urged people across the country to reflect on the assurances and circumstances surrounding Jammu and Kashmir's accession, saying the region's relationship with the country should be guided by constitutional values, dignity and the rights of its people—(KNO)

Probe ordered into Anantnag R&B tender irregularities

Jahangeer Ganaie

Anantnag, Oct 26: The Jammu and Kashmir government has ordered an in-depth fact-finding inquiry into alleged irregularities in the allotment of works by the Public Works (Roads and Buildings) Division, Anantnag, directing a four-member committee to examine the tendering process and identify officials responsible for any violations.

As per government order, the R&B Department has constituted a preliminary enquiry committee to scrutinise the procedure adopted in the allotment of works under NIT No. 168/Anantnag/2026-27/E-Tendering/1717, issued on August 24, 2026, by the Executive Engineer, R&B Division Anantnag.

According to the terms of reference, the committee will examine the award of a contract to the L2 bidder, allegedly in violation of the guidelines issued by the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) and the provisions of the General Financial Rules (GFR). The panel has also been tasked with reviewing other tenders issued by the division during the financial year 2026-27 in which contracts were awarded to bidders other than the L1 bidder.

The inquiry will assess whether such allotments resulted in any financial loss or potential loss to the public exchequer and determine the circumstances under which the

*Continued on
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Kunmulla Titans win Kangan Historic Night Cup Cricket Tournament

RAJA SYED RATHER

Kangan, Oct 26: Kunmulla Titans emerged champions of the first-ever Kangan Historic Night Cup Cricket Tournament, organised by the Kangan Cricket Board (KCB), which concluded at Sheikh-ul-Alam Sports Ground in Kangan on Sunday evening.

The historic day-night cricket tournament witnessed enthusiastic participation from 16 teams, drawing a large number of cricket lovers and sports enthusiasts from across the area.

The final match was played between 11 Friends Kangan and Kunmulla Titans.

After winning the toss, 11 Friends Kangan elected to bat first but were bowled out for 140 runs in 16 overs.



In reply, Kunmulla Titans successfully chased down the target in 16 overs to lift the championship trophy.

Chairman of the Kangan Cricket Board, Shah Ashraf, said the tournament was organised to promote cricket and provide a platform for emerging talent in the region.

"The overwhelming participation and enthusiasm

of players and spectators have made this historic night tournament a success. We will continue organising such events to encourage young cricketers and promote sportsmanship in Kangan," Ashraf said.

Cricketer Tawfeeq Sidiq, while speaking with KNO, expressed happiness over the successful conclusion of the tournament and

appreciated the efforts of the organisers.

"Such tournaments provide a great opportunity for local players to showcase their talent. Playing under floodlights is a wonderful experience, and we hope more such events will be organised in Kangan to encourage young cricketers," Sidiq said.

Meanwhile, Shah Ashraf congratulated Kunmulla Titans on their victory and appreciated all participating teams for displaying competitive spirit and sportsmanship throughout the tournament.

He said the Kangan Cricket Board would continue its efforts to promote sporting activities and provide more opportunities for young players in the region—(KNO)

People demand widening of 22-km Shopian-Aglar road

Jahangeer Ganaie

Shopian, Oct 26: Residents of several villages in South Kashmir have urged the government to widen the 22-km long Shopian-Aglar road to ensure smooth traffic movement and reduce the risk of accidents on this important thoroughfare.

Residents said, "Narrow stretches of this road frequently lead to traffic congestion and increase the risk of accidents."

They said the road serves as a vital link connecting dozens of villages across Shopian and adjoining areas of Pulwama and Anantnag districts.

Residents said the route witnesses heavy traffic throughout the day. "Hundreds of employees, labourers and other people travel to the Industrial Estate SIDCO Laspipora through this road," they said.

Residents of Aglar, Nikloora, Shirmal, Heff, Chillipora, Sugan, Turk-wangam, Molu, Dangerpora, Trenz, Pahnoo and several other villages



said the road has become increasingly narrow to accommodate the heavy volume of vehicular traffic.

They said that although the authorities have undertaken maintenance work on the road, its limited width at several places continues to cause inconvenience to commuters, with vehicles often getting stuck while attempting to pass each other.

Fayaz Ahmad of Heff, said the government has done commendable work in maintaining the vital road, but its existing width is insufficient to accommodate the heavy rush of vehicles.

"The Shopian-Aglar road is an important route for people travelling between Shopian, Kulgam and

*Continued on
www.kashmirthunder.in*

EDITORIAL

A Race That Puts Kashmir On The World Map

For many years, when the world heard the word Kashmir, it heard only one kind of story. This Sunday, it heard something different — the sound of 2,000 people running on the streets of Srinagar. The third edition of the Kashmir Marathon was not just a sports event. It was a message, said quietly but strongly, that this Valley can host the world, and host it well. The numbers tell their

own story. More than 2,000 runners took part, including 73 from 12 other countries, and 1,221 from Jammu and Kashmir itself. The prize money was 3.17 crore. The route passed through Lal Chowk, Zero Bridge, the Jhelum riverfront, Dal Lake and the Mughal Gardens — places that once made news for other reasons. Today, they made news for running and for joy. Both the Lieutenant Governor

and the Chief Minister deserve credit for this. LG Manoj Sinha spoke about the marathon's growing name in the world and, more importantly, about helping local talent. He asked the Tourism Department and the Sports Council to train and guide local winners, so that today's medal can become tomorrow's career at the national and international level. Chief Minister Omar Abdullah called

it a flagship event that strengthens Kashmir's place as a sports tourism destination. Their words were matched by their presence, and by the smooth conduct of the event. But the real heroes were on the road. A 20-year-old young man with both arms amputated finished the race. A 10-year-old girl ran for the third year in a row. A 70-year-old man urged the young to put down their

phones and move their bodies. These are not just participants. They are the new face of Kashmir — determined, hopeful and full of life. The LG rightly praised the police and security forces for creating the atmosphere that made such an event possible. Six years of calm have not come easily. They have come at a cost, and they have brought a reward: a Valley that can now invite the world to

run with it. There is still work to do. Facilities can improve, the event can grow bigger, and the world can be told more loudly. But the direction is right. Kashmir is no longer only a place people read about. It is a place people now travel to — to run, to see and to remember. Let the marathon become a tradition. Let it become a symbol. And let the message go out from Srinagar: this Valley is ready.

Immersive Technologies: Blending Physical And Virtual Worlds

Immersive technologies are a strategic lever for India's creative economy, education system and cultural preservation. As India strengthens its AVGC-XR ecosystem through coordinated national and state-level efforts—Karnataka, Maharashtra, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and other states have introduced dedicated policies—it is well-positioned to become a global hub for immersive content and innovation. This convergence of creativity and cutting-edge technology aligns closely with the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, where a technologically empowered, self-reliant India leads in emerging sectors.

Press Information Bureau

Immersive technologies are expanding across India's education, industry and creative sectors. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting is promoting the Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming, Comics and Extended Reality (AVGC-XR) ecosystem through initiatives such as the Indian Institute of Creative Technologies (IICT) in Mumbai. Established as a National Centre of Excellence, IICT collaborates with global technology companies, including Google, Meta, Adobe and Netflix, to strengthen creative education, skills and innovation. Further supporting this ecosystem, the Union Budget 2026–27 allocated 250 crore for AVGC Content Creator Labs in 15,000 secondary schools and 500 colleges across India.

From Digital to Immersive: India's Next Leap

Over the last decade, India has built a strong digital ecosystem that has transformed everyday interactions with technology. Platforms such as UPI, Aadhaar, Digilocker, UMANG and BHASHINI have expanded access to services and information. As digital platforms become more widespread, the next opportunity is to make these interactions more interactive, visual and experiential. Rapid advances in Artificial Intelligence, high-speed connectivity and computing are enabling this shift from simply accessing digital services to experiencing them. Click to Read More: India's Digital Public Infrastructure and Transforming India with AI

This emerging phase is being shaped by immersive technologies, which bring digital content closer to the way people experience the physical world. Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality, Mixed Reality and 360-degree experiences can create interactive environments and enable users to engage with digital content in new ways. These capabilities can transform education through virtual simulations, healthcare through immersive training, and tourism through virtual exploration. They can also create more engaging experiences across culture, gaming, entertainment, retail and other sectors. In doing so, immersive technologies can expand the impact of India's existing digital ecosystem beyond conventional screen-based interactions.

The scale of this opportunity is reflected in India's rapidly growing immersive technology market. The market generated USD 1,259.5 million in revenue in 2023 and is projected to reach USD 7,818.7 million by 2030, growing at a CAGR of 29.8 per cent. India is projected to be the fastest-growing regional market in Asia Pacific, supported by its digital ecosystem, expanding middle class and rising e-commerce adoption. This growth presents an opportunity for India to move beyond being a large market and emerge as a global hub for immersive technology. Building capabilities in research, startups, talent, content and indigenous technologies can help India shape the next generation of immersive experiences and strengthen its position in the global digital economy.

Creative Minds, Catalyzing Science, Empowering Technologies

ESTIC-2026, the second edition of India's Emerging Science, Technology and Innovation Conclave, will be held from 27–29 October 2026 at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi. The event will be organised under the theme “Creative Minds, Catalyzing Science, Empowering Technologies.” Organised by the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR), ESTIC-2026 will bring together ministries, researchers, innovators, industry leaders, deep-tech start-ups and global experts to advance emerging science and technology. The conclave will feature 12

thematic areas, including Immersive Tech: Generative XR and Spatial Computing. The event will feature plenary sessions, technical discussions and exhibitions. Read More on Agenda: ESTIC 2026

Understanding Immersive Technologies

Immersive technologies are an emerging suite of technologies that create interactive, engaging and realistic digital experiences. Immersive technologies can combine the physical and digital worlds. They enable users to interact with digital content in ways that feel more natural and experiential. Users can interact with digital objects and respond to simulated situations. Unlike conventional digital media, these technologies can engage multiple senses and create a stronger sense of presence. For example, a student can explore a virtual laboratory instead of only viewing diagrams on a screen. Similarly, a tourist can virtually explore a heritage site before visiting it physically. The three most common forms of immersive technology are Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), and Mixed Reality (MR). Collectively, these technologies are often referred to as Extended Reality (XR).

Extended Reality (XR)

Extended Reality (XR) refers to technologies that combine real and digital environments through computer systems and wearable devices. It creates different levels of interaction between people and digital content. XR includes Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR) and Mixed Reality (MR).

Virtual Reality (VR) creates a completely digital environment that surrounds the user. It mainly engages sight and sound to create a strong sense of presence. Users can explore and interact with this simulated environment using specialised devices.

Augmented Reality (AR) adds digital information to the user's existing physical surroundings. It can engage sight and sound, while keeping the real-world environment visible. For example, AR can display directions, information or digital objects over the physical world.

Mixed Reality (MR) combines the physical and digital worlds in an interactive environment. It can engage sight and sound, while allowing digital objects to interact with physical surroundings. Users can see and interact with digital objects as if they were part of the real environment.

Other related tech, such as 360-degree video and Haptic Technology, also form part of the wider immersive technology ecosystem. 360-degree video allows users to view a scene in every direction. Users can change their viewing direction and explore different parts of the recorded environment. Haptic Technology uses vibrations, pressure or other physical sensations to provide touch-based feedback. It can make digital interactions feel more realistic by simulating physical sensations during virtual or interactive experiences.

Stepping Into the Experience: How India Is Using Immersive Technology

Education

Researchers at IIT Madras are developing AR/VR-enabled learning solutions for rural schools. The initiative uses digital technologies to improve teaching and learning for secondary school students. It aims to create immersive, VR-based learning environments where students can explore subjects such as history, social science, science and languages through interactive experiences.

These technologies can make classroom learning more engaging. For example, an AR-based mobile application could bring 500 years of Indian history to life through animated photographs, interactive maps and archival documents. Similarly, VR

simulations could allow students to explore the solar system or study the human body through three-dimensional models. By making abstract concepts easier to visualise and understand, these approaches can enrich learning and help students prepare for higher education.

Heritage and Tourism

The Government is using Extended Reality (XR) and other digital technologies to make India's cultural heritage more accessible and engaging. The Ministry of Culture has adopted digital tools to improve visitor experiences and preserve information about museum collections. One such tool is JATAN software, which helps digitise museum artefacts and their records. So far, eight national-level museums and two Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) museums have been digitised using JATAN. Their collections are accessible through the Museums of India digital repository, enabling people to explore India's heritage online.

Building on this digital foundation, museums are also introducing interactive experiences for visitors. The Indian Museum in Kolkata has introduced AI-based interactive features and AR tools to enrich gallery visits. It has also collaborated with Google Arts & Culture on a virtual exhibition showcasing cultural heritage through digital technology. Similarly, ASI museums at Hampi in Karnataka and Nalanda in Bihar offer mobile-based virtual tours of their collections. These initiatives help visitors explore artefacts digitally, making cultural experiences more engaging and accessible beyond the museum premises. Click for the Virtual Tour of the Indian Museum, Kolkata

Governance and Infrastructure

Immersive technologies are also shaping how India plans and manages its infrastructure. The Department of Telecommunications launched the “Sangam: Digital Twin” initiative, combining digital twin technology with 5G, IoT, and AI for better infrastructure planning. Digital twin mapping is already supporting city planning, as seen in the Varanasi Urban 3D Spatial Planning project. By 2035, India aims to build a National Digital Twin for major urban centres, creating digital replicas to improve city planning and management.

What is Digital Twin?

A digital twin is a virtual model of a real-world object, system or place. It uses data from the real world to represent conditions and behaviour, helping users monitor situations and test possible changes digitally. For example, a digital twin of a machine can help identify potential faults, while a city model can help planners assess the likely impact of infrastructure projects before implementation. One example is the Mobility Digital Twin showcased by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) at India Mobile Congress 2025. It uses telecom-derived mobility data to analyse how people travel and move through different areas. Demonstrations in Vasant Kunj and Central Vista in Delhi examined commuting patterns and helped assess metro station catchment areas. In Ayodhya, mobility data was used to study tourist flows, travel modes and stay patterns. These insights can help authorities plan transport links, improve tourism infrastructure and make better-informed decisions before finalising projects.

Creative Economy and Entertainment

Immersive technology is a growing part of India's media and entertainment sector, closely tied to the AVGC-XR framework. India's gaming sector is projected to grow from \$3.8 billion in 2024 to \$9.2 billion by FY29, according to an independent report,

reflecting the scale of this emerging economy. National platforms such as the WAVES summit are further showcasing India's creative and immersive media capabilities to a global audience.

Powering Immersive Technology: India's Key Initiatives

Immersive technology is supported through the Government's broader AVGC-XR framework. This framework covers Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming, Comics, and Extended Reality. India's policy support for immersive technology comes as part of the larger, unified push, not as a standalone scheme. Click to Read More: Powering the AVGC-XR Revolution

AVGC-XR Promotion Task Force

The AVGC Promotion Task Force was constituted by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) in April 2022. It brings together representatives from the Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming and Comics (AVGC) industry, academia and Government. The Task Force provides a platform for coordinated efforts to strengthen the sector's growth and development. Its mandate is guided by three key principles. These include public-private collaboration, inter-ministerial convergence and an integrated approach to sectoral development.

Indian Institute of Creative Technologies (IICT)

On the Task Force's recommendation, the Government set up a National Centre of Excellence (NCoE) to build skilled talent for the AVGC-XR sector. This took shape as the Indian Institute of Creative Technologies (IICT), established in 2025. As of March 2026, IICT has introduced 18 courses across various domains of the AVGC-XR sector, with over 135 students enrolled.

GENESIS (Gen-Next Support for Innovative Startups)

To boost the startup ecosystem in Tier-II and Tier-III cities, MeitY approved the GENESIS Scheme. Launched in 2022, it aims to support around 1,600 tech startups over five years. This includes startups working in immersive technologies like AR, VR, and spatial computing. Through the MeitY Startup Hub, the scheme currently supports 84 AR/VR startups. It also backs 106 incubators across the country.

AVGC Content Creator Labs

Under the Union Budget 2026–27, the Government allocated 250 crore to establish Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming and Comics (AVGC) Content Creator Labs in 15,000 secondary schools and 500 colleges. The Indian Institute of Creative Technologies (IICT), Mumbai, will serve as the nodal agency for planning, coordinating and implementing the initiative. These labs aim to equip students with practical skills in animation, visual effects, gaming and digital content creation. They will provide opportunities to develop creative ideas and gain hands-on experience using industry-relevant tools and technologies. The initiative seeks to nurture young talent and prepare students for emerging careers in India's growing creative economy.

WaveX

WaveX is a dedicated media-tech startup accelerator and incubator launched by the MIB. It supports startups working in AVGC-XR and other emerging media technologies. WaveX aims to help startups strengthen their technologies, develop market-ready solutions and explore global opportunities.

States Leading India's AVGC-XR Growth Story

Karnataka's AVGC-XR Policy 3.0 supports skill development, infrastructure, production grants and financial incentives for AVGC-XR companies. The state also operates the KITVEN AVGC Fund, with a 20-crore corpus to invest in companies working in AVGC and related sectors.

Maharashtra's AVGC-XR Policy 2025 has a financial plan of 3,268 crore and a vision extending to 2050. The policy provides a dedicated framework for expanding the state's AVGC-XR ecosystem through government-backed support and infrastructure.

Telangana's 2016 IMAGE Policy established a dedicated framework for Animation, VFX, Gaming and Comics, anchored by Hyderabad's IMAGE Tower. The ecosystem features 150+ AVGC/VFX companies, 140+ gaming and animation companies, 30,000 direct jobs and 100 startups onboarded through Software Technology Parks of India (STPI)-IMAGE, supported by production infrastructure, training and global cloud access.

Tamil Nadu's AVGC-XR Policy 2026 targets 200+ startups, around 2 lakh jobs and up to 20% of India's AVGC-XR market by 2030. It also provides a support for the “ELCOT Viyan AVGC-XR Centre of Excellence” in Chennai as a hub and spokes at Coimbatore, Madurai, Tiruchirappalli, Salem and Tirunelveli regions over the next three years.

Kerala's AVGC-XR Policy 2024 focuses strongly on building a specialised talent pipeline. It proposes industry-aligned job roles, faculty development and AVGC-XR courses covering VR, AR, gaming, VFX and digital art, from schools through higher education. The mission aims to create 50,000 new jobs in the AVGC-XR industry, by 2029, solidifying Kerala's commitment to fostering a thriving knowledge-based economy.

Madhya Pradesh's AVGC-XR Policy 2025 combines Centres of Excellence, AVGC-XR labs and targeted skilling with investment incentives. The policy also supports capital investment, employment generation, production costs, quality certification and IP creation.

Uttar Pradesh is developing an AVGC-XR Park in Jewar, near Noida International Airport and the proposed International Film City. The park will integrate animation, VFX, gaming, motion capture, virtual production and XR facilities. It aims to attract investment, support startups, create skilled employment and strengthen the state's digital creative economy.

Rajasthan announced its AVGC-XR Policy 2024 in the State Budget 2024-25 to strengthen the animation, VFX, gaming, comics and immersive technology ecosystem. The policy provides production incentives of up to 50 lakh for eligible animation/VFX/AR/VR projects and 1 crore for eligible game development.

Gujarat is actively positioning itself as a key AVGC-XR hub through focused government initiatives. The state is in an advanced stage of preparing a comprehensive AVGC-XR policy supporting infrastructure, skilling, and startups. Moreover, the state already has a strong educational base - 16 institutions offering Animation, VFX and Gaming courses - providing a ready talent pipeline.

Way Forward

Immersive technologies represent more than a new entertainment medium. They are a strategic lever for India's creative economy, education system, and cultural preservation. As India strengthens its AVGC-XR ecosystem through coordinated national and state-level efforts, it is well-positioned to become a global hub for immersive content and innovation. This convergence of creativity and cutting-edge technology aligns closely with the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, where a technologically empowered, self-reliant India leads in emerging sectors.

Courtesy: The Telegraph India

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AI Courses Bank On Economics Of Fear

Scroll through any social media feed or You Tube reel today and a familiar figure appears between the cricket reels and the travel vlogs

Sagar Gambhir

Scroll through any social media feed or You Tube reel today and a familiar figure appears between the cricket reels and the travel vlogs. He is a confident young mentor with a glowing laptop and a promise: “Learn AI in weeks. Become future-proof.” The vocabulary keeps changing, from prompt engineering to generative mastery to AI-powered income. The pitch itself is old. It is the coaching-class pitch, repackaged for an anxious age. Anxiety is the real product on sale. The buyer is rarely a curious tinkerer.

He is a final-year student who suspects his degree is already obsolete. She is a mid-career professional who has watched a colleague's job vanish. He is a graduate still unemployed after years of applications. For each of them, the question “Will AI take my job?” has become a private dread, and dread is the easiest thing in the world to monetise. The marketing leans on a convenient confusion. Brochures speak of “industry-recognised” and “globally valued” certificates, words that sound like regulation but mean nothing in law.

Several IITs, among them Madras, Kharagpur, Guwahati and Bhilai, offer B.Tech degrees in artificial intelligence. AICTE has also allowed AI and data science B.Tech programmes in accredited colleges. These are re al, examine d, accountable qualifications, and they sit at one end of the spectrum. At the other end is the private “certificate of completion”, which is a receipt for attendance and not a credential. It carries only the weight of the brand that issued it, and many brands are a few months old. The tragedy is that the buyer, seeing both on the same screen, cannot tell them apart.

That is not an accident of design. It is the business model. The most embarrassing fact for the paid-course industry is that the state has already built an on-ramp, and it costs nothing. The government's YUVA AI for ALL course is a free, self-paced, six-module



programme that gives completers an official Government of India certificate. It is deliberately modest, aimed at literacy and not at careers. But that modesty is its virtue. It tells the learner honestly what a beginner needs: understanding, not a miracle. Government relations consulting

A private seller will never say this. Nobody ever bought a lakh-rupee package after being told the basics are free. The sales funnel depends on the learner not knowing where the free road begins. India is not without law here. The consumer protection authority's guidelines for the coaching sector prohibit false claims about faculty credentials, fees and refunds, selection rates, and guaranteed job security or salary increases. That sentence, read slowly, describes the entire

AI-course advertising genre. “Placement assistance with top companies” and “career switch guaranteed” are exactly the promises a regulator has told coaching sellers not to make.

Yet the gap between a guideline and a lived reality is wide. The Education Ministry's own definition of coaching, in instruction to more than fifty students, invites an obvious question about small-batch “bootcamps” and mentor-led cohorts, which may fall outside the net. Implementation of the ministry's coaching framework has not been uniform across states, and education is a shared responsibility between the Centre and the states. A student cheated by a course run through Instagram stories and a payment link will find that no obvious door

exists to knock on.

There is a deeper, quieter fraud: the pedagogical one. Artificial intelligence tools change faster than any printed curriculum can follow. A course that sells a fixed set of tools and tricks is teaching an interface, and interfaces expire. What endures is unglamorous: mathematics, statistics, programming discipline, and above all deep knowledge of a field such as law, medicine, accounting, farming or design. A person who knows the field and learns to use AI inside it becomes more valuable.

A person who knows only the tool, whatever the tool is this season, is easily replaced by the next tool. The seductive lie is that AI is a separate profession one can buy entry to. For most workers it is a skill to be

folded into the work they already do. That is a harder, slower and far cheaper message, which explains why it never trends. Notice who is being targeted. The unemployed, the recently retrenched and the first-generation learner are the people with the least cushion and the most urgency. A household that stretches itself to pay for a course is spending savings meant for rent or a sibling's fees. When the promised job does not materialise, the blame is quietly transferred: you did not practise enough, you did not network, you did not “apply the learning”.

The seller keeps the fee and the customer keeps the guilt. Those who sell hope to the desperate should expect scrutiny, not applause. Before paying anything, ask five plain questions. Who issues the certificate, and is that body accountable to anyone? Can I see the full syllabus and the instructors' verifiable work, not just their follower count? Is the refund policy in writing, in simple language? Does any promise of jobs or salary appear, and if so, is it in the contract? And have I tried the free government course and the open courses offered by public institutions first? Government relations consulting

If the seller grows irritated by these questions, the questions have done their job. India's young are not foolish for wanting to learn AI. They are sensible, and that is exactly why they are being hunted. The remedy is not to mock the aspiration but to protect it: stronger enforcement against false placement claims, clearer public labelling of what is and is not a recognised qualification, and loud, unashamed promotion of the free options that already exist. Until then, the cheapest lesson in artificial intelligence remains a very natural one. When someone guarantees a future for a fee, check the guarantee before the fee.

The writer is a Chartered Accountant from India and a Certified Public Accountant from the USA. Courtesy: The Statesman

Books Travel

The fetishists will collect books while the rest of us will read in the normal way (whatever that normal is) because in the beginning was the word, not the means by which it was read

Mukul Kesavan

Last week, a school friend returned a book he had borrowed fifty-six years ago. It had belonged to my brother (his name was written in unsteady capitals on the free endpaper), a hardbound novel that my parents must have bought for him for eight rupees and sixty-five paise because that was the price pencilled into the corner. It was a terrible novel, part of the Hardy Boys Mystery Stories, an early example of packaged juvenile fiction where the main characters were created by a syndicate and then ghost-written by several hands under a collective pseudonym, in this case Franklin W. Dixon.

I was delighted to have it back because it had been fun reading the Hardy Boys then. Novel reading as a boy had been like chewing gum: a mechanical, indiscriminating business where I didn't much care about the taste so long as I had a wad to chew on. Also, The Viking Symbol Mystery was a hefty little hardcover with the title properly embossed on its spine which made it more precious than if it had been a dog-eared paperback of the same vintage. How much we fetishise books varies, but most of us have felt that spasm of possessiveness that some books induce.

I have a friend who, from the time he was a student, had to own novels to read them, an affliction that made libraries useless. Books can be aspirational. In college, I remember a suspiciously large number of undergraduates carrying the yellow Penguin paperback of Neruda's Selected Poems in their jholas. For young desis of my cohort, Penguin's fiction list with its matched orange spines cast a peculiar spell that the blue of its Pelican non-fiction didn't. Rows of Penguins on our shelves were our first stab at interior decor. Anthony Powell's twelve-volume roman-fleuve (ponderously named A Dance to the Music of Time) has a novel called Books

Do Furnish A Room, and they absolutely do.

People don't ask to borrow books as much anymore. I don't know if this is a trend or a general decline in reading or just a function of more disposable income, but I no longer have to worry about books I'm particularly attached to disappearing into other people's shelves. To lend or not



to lend was a real question when I was younger. My mother, who treated books like other things we owned, advised me to keep a little register with a list of lent books and the names of their borrowers. My father, who was a librarian, saw this as a low form of book-keeping unworthy of books. Good books, he'd say philosophically, travel.

He once asked a very distinguished writer for the loan of a book and she refused on the reasonable ground that people weren't good at returning books. This disappointed him; he felt that such hoarding was beneath her. I'm still not sure who was right. Many of my shelves are barren, stripped of the books I really loved because they were readable; they travelled.

I've lost count of the number of copies of Lucky Jim and Tom's Midnight Garden that I've bought to replace the ones light-fingered friends have decamped with. On the other hand, many of the readable books I have at hand are indefinite loans from my friends, so there's that.

Stealing books is wrong but it isn't a crime. My father had a story about book theft in the National Library when he was the librarian there. There was a set of books that, unusually for reference work, were paperbacks. The bada babu or head clerk reported that three volumes had disappeared and he thought he knew who was taking them. He was told to bring the culprit to the librarian's office if he caught him in the act. A week later, a respectable,

middle-aged man was escorted to his office. He had opened out the book to reduce its bulk, tucked it into the waistband of his dhoti, and then arranged his vest and kurta over it. My father proposed that he voluntarily return that volume and the others he had 'borrowed' and no more would be said about it. This he did. There was a moral to the story. The bureaucrats my father answered to in Delhi would periodically argue that the National Library ought to be moved to the national capital. The bhadralok gent's bid to decamp with an encyclopedia proved them wrong. Who in Delhi, my father would ask rhetorically, loved books enough to steal them?

I once helped the historian, William Crawley, who was a fellow at the college

I was affiliated to as a research student, catalogue his books. He was very old and he lived with his wife in a large house and an enormous collection of books. My job was to climb a ladder, open the books, and read out the title, author's name and so on while he scribbled the citation on to an index card. The Crawleys had been clergymen and academics for many generations so I got to handle books that were several centuries old. I remember opening out a three-hundred-year-old Bible and wondering nervously if its brittle pages would come apart in my hands. Some of the Crawleys named in the bookplates had been contemporaries of Cromwell. This was a library that had accumulated over generations and here was its current owner unsentimentally cataloguing it so that after him, his children had the information to keep the books they wanted and get rid of those they didn't.

If I had to choose, I'd get rid of most of my non-fiction without a pang, especially the scholarly books and monographs. Most historical and social scientific scholarship is read to improve your mind or your arguments, not for pleasure. There are some exceptions; I read and re-read E.P. Thompson and James Baldwin with anticipation. But mostly I'd keep the fiction, the verse, the memoirs, some cookbooks, a couple of books on cricket and cull the rest. Our shelves must say something about us. In my case, they would testify to my alienation. Nearly all the books I own are in English. This wasn't true of my father; he was literate in several Indian languages and his shelves were scattered with books in Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Bengali and Sanskrit. It's remarkable how much can be lost in a generation.

There will come a time when books become digital figments, shucking off their paper bodies entirely. It has happened to music already. Tapes and records are legacy decor; we mainly listen to music off streaming services. The books that continue to be published in a world which is digital by default will be luxury collectibles, like illuminated Bibles before movable type. And that will be fine too. The fetishists will collect books while the rest of us will read in the normal way (whatever that normal is) because in the beginning was the word, not the means by which it was read.

EC defends SIR in SC, says Form 6 unchanged, justifies documentation framework

PTI

New Delhi, Oct 26: The Election Commission on Monday strongly defended its Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls before the Supreme Court, maintaining that the exercise was authorised by law and the relevant orders were approved unanimously by all three members of the Commission.

Rejecting the allegations that Form 6 had been amended, the poll panel, in its 248-page response to the petition against the chief the election commissioner (CEC) and the decisions taken by it, said that no changes were made to the statutory Form 6 used for voter registration.

A bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant is scheduled to hear on Tuesday petitions against CEC Gyanesh Kumar and the decisions taken by the poll panel during the SIR.

In a counter affidavit, the poll body sought summary dismissal of the petitions and called the allegations "misconceived" which rested on a single newspaper report.

"The attempt to make aspersions against the Election Commission is unfortunate," said the affidavit, filed by Deputy Election Commissioner Bhanu Prakash Yeturu on behalf of the Commission.

The EC said the affidavit itself had been approved for filing by a unanimous decision of all three members of the Commission.

It said the SIR orders of June 24, 2025, October 27, 2025 and May 14, 2026 were issued on unanimous decisions taken in compliance with Article 324 of the Constitution and Section 18 of the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023.

Section 18 requires the Commission's business to be transacted unanimously as far as possible, and by majority where members differ.

It said the three SIR orders



were issued in accordance with decisions of the EC arrived at unanimously and taken in due compliance of Article 324 of the Constitution of India read with Section 18 of the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023.

The poll body said any suggestion, observation or query raised by a commissioner while a file is being processed "does not constitute a decision" of the Commission.

It explained that files move first to one election commissioner, then to the other and finally to the CEC, and that approved decisions bear the signatures of all three. Where urgent orders are needed and members are not available in person, approval is taken by electronic means and recorded on the file later, it said.

On the Form 6 row, the EC said it "unequivocally rejects the misleading contention" that the statutory form had been changed.

Form 6 is an application through which an eligible person seeks inclusion in the electoral rolls, it said.

According to the affidavit, the declaration attached during the SIR is a separate document provided by the SIR orders and "is not a part of Form 6".

It said the declaration used in the Bihar SIR was later replaced in the subsequent orders so that applicants could give details of themselves, their parents or grandparents from the 2002-03 rolls and avoid submitting

further documents once successfully mapped.

The Commission, however, admitted that the way the declaration was displayed on its online platform "could be construed as though an amendment of Form 6 had been made".

It said the declaration had been merged into the online Form 6 page so that applicants would need only one OTP and one e-sign instead of two.

After deliberation, the Electoral Rolls Division decided on October 21 that online applications will now also be in two parts, as is the case with physical forms.

Responding to allegations concerning communications between the election commissioners and the cabinet secretary, the poll body said an office order on internal work allocation was issued on July 28 by an IAS officer of additional secretary rank posted on deputation to the Commission.

The two election commissioners wrote separate letters to the cabinet secretary the next day about the order and the officer's conduct, and the order "was never implemented" in view of their joint direction of July 30, the EC said.

The affidavit also said that the Commission decided unanimously on September 26 that booth level officers (BLOs) will visit the homes of persons who received notices during the on-going SIR to collect documents, so that they need not appear in person for hearings. Hearings will be held only in exceptional cases and preferably online, it said.

On concerns about its ECINET

portal, the EC said no entry is added, deleted or modified except by order of the electoral registration officer (ERO).

A committee headed by a senior deputy election commissioner, with independent experts from IIT Bombay and IISc Bengaluru, was constituted on October 14 to check the portal's compliance with the law, it said.

The poll body also said that appeals filed in West Bengal against orders including electors in the rolls were filed by officers of the state chief electoral officer's office acting as statutory authorities in line with the apex court's orders, and that "these matters were not brought to the Commission".

Questioning the maintainability of the pleas, the Commission said, "In the eyes of law, a newspaper report is not treated as evidence of the facts it narrates."

The Commission added that it has "neither released nor authorised the release of any internal note/ file to any news agency".

Citing Article 324(5) of the Constitution, which protects the CEC from removal except in the manner of a Supreme Court judge, the EC said any prayer to restrain the CEC from functioning was not maintainable.

Such a prayer would frustrate decision-making under the 2023 Act, it said.

It also rejected the petitioner's contentions on electronic voting machines (EVMs).

The EC said similar challenges were being rejected by the top court several times.

The pleas were filed after The Indian Express reported on September 25 that Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi objected on record at least 14 times over the last 10 months to decisions and orders on SIR of electoral rolls that they said were issued without their knowledge or recommendation. The claim has sparked protests by opposition parties and the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), demanding removal of CEC Kumar.

PTI

Thiruvananthapuram, Oct 26: Kerala on Monday became the first state in the country to unanimously pass a comprehensive law to protect senior citizens from abuse and exploitation, and ensure better access to healthcare and social security, with Chief Minister V D Satheesan vowing to build a model for elderly care that would draw global attention.

The Kerala Senior Citizens (Care and Protection of Rights) Bill, 2026, was passed unanimously by the state Assembly after the government accepted several amendments moved by members of both the ruling and opposition benches.

The legislation seeks to establish a legal framework for elderly care and safeguard the rights of senior citizens. It provides for imprisonment and fines for offences such as abusing senior citizens, illegally possessing their property and running unregistered elderly care centres.

The bill will become law after receiving the Governor's assent.

Moving the motion for its passage, Satheesan said he felt proud to pilot a law that would protect people who might otherwise be left isolated.

"I stand here with a sense of pride that we have been able to pilot a law that can embrace many people who might otherwise have been left isolated, and that assures them that their rights will be protected," he said.

The Chief Minister said the legislation was also a political commitment and an election promise, but the government wanted to take it beyond that.

"Our dream is to create a model in Kerala that will be among the best in the country and one that the world will look at with great interest," he said.

Satheesan thanked members of both the ruling and opposition benches for their cooperation and amendments, saying they had helped improve the original draft.

The Chief Minister said the law was needed in a world undergoing major demographic

changes, with advances in medical science and technology expected to increase life expectancy further.

Satheesan referred to the possibility of future generations living beyond 100 years and said developments in artificial intelligence, nanotechnology and healthcare were changing the way people understood ageing and disease.

"We are witnessing a knowledge revolution," he said, adding that the law was also a preparation for the changing world.

The Chief Minister stressed that senior citizens should not merely receive protection and care but should also be helped to remain active and contribute to society.

He urged MLAs to develop innovative programmes in their constituencies in consultation with colleagues and local bodies to make elderly people more active and productive.

"I can assure you of one thing. If you, as MLAs, come up with good and noteworthy schemes in your constituencies and take up this challenge, the state government will adopt them," he said.

The Chief Minister said passing the law alone would not be enough and that innovative schemes were needed to translate it into action. He also referred to the introduction of old-age pensions in Kerala in 1963 under the leadership of Chief Minister R Sankar, describing the new legislation as a continuation of that initiative.

Home Minister Ramesh Chennithala said the bill fulfilled one of the five guarantees presented by Rahul Gandhi before the people of Kerala during the last Assembly election. Chennithala said he had chaired the manifesto committee at the time.

He congratulated Satheesan for piloting the legislation and described its passage as a moment of historic importance.

Chennithala referred to incidents in which elderly parents were allegedly abandoned by their children at railway stations and other public places. He also spoke about the difficulties faced by elderly

people living alone after their children moved abroad for employment.

"Kerala has today paved the way for legislation that is extremely necessary," Chennithala said.

CPI(M) leader K N Balagopal said the legislation was a continuation of Kerala's commitment to the welfare of elderly people.

He recalled that Kerala had been the first state in India to introduce welfare pensions for elderly agricultural workers. The pension was Rs 45 when the scheme was introduced in 1980, he said.

Balagopal, who held the finance portfolio in the previous Left government, also referred to the state's elderly policy and the role of the Elderly Commission, saying the existing mechanisms should be strengthened to make their implementation more effective.

He said Kerala had also introduced an elderly budget and a programme called 'Second Innings' to help retired people use their experience and expertise for productive activities.

"Words and statements alone are not enough. We must all think together with a sense of compassion. We must be able to intervene effectively to resolve the problems faced by these people," Balagopal said.

Speaker Thiruvanchoor Radhakrishnan said the Assembly was opening a new chapter in history by passing the legislation unanimously.

The law provides for jail terms and fines for offences such as abusing senior citizens, illegally possessing their property and operating unregistered care centres.

It focuses not only on welfare and care but also on developing a "silver economy" by using the knowledge and professional experience of people aged 60 and above.

The law also envisages a system of registration, regulation and monitoring of institutions providing care to senior citizens, with the aim of improving service standards and ensuring transparency and accountability.

CONTD. FROM FRONT PAGE

LG to administer

Following the swearing-in ceremony tomorrow, there would be a massive rejig in the portfolios of ministers, they said

"The Chief Minister would relieve himself of few portfolios as well as effect massive changes in the portfolios of his council of ministers," they said. (KNO)

J&K's Shadow Wage

public investment projects in relation to the applicable minimum wage. It does not represent the actual wages paid to workers.

The NITI Aayog-supported exercise seeks to improve the evaluation of government-funded projects by examining the economic value of resources, including labour, rather than relying solely on prevailing market prices.

By assessing differences across regions, gender categories and states and Union Territories, the study aims to provide policymakers with parameters for evaluating project viability, estimating economic costs and improving public investment decisions.

However, the rural wage estimates presented in the overall and gender-specific tables differ, making verification of the original figures necessary before drawing conclusions about wage disparities.

The findings underline the substantial variation in estimated labour costs between rural and urban Jammu and Kashmir and their relevance in the economic appraisal of public development projects. (KNO)

Bollywood's Singham

'wearing an Army uniform', for his upcoming film 'Chauhaan', the source said.

The action drama is directed by Neeraj Yadav and is scheduled for release on October 1, 2027. (KNO)

Kashmir shivers as

Kupwara 2.8 degrees, Bandipora 3.3 degrees and Baramulla 4.2 degrees Celsius.

In Ladakh, Nyoma recorded a maximum temperature of 8.1 degrees Celsius and a minimum of minus 8.4 degrees Celsius. Leh recorded a maximum of 11.4 degrees Celsius and a minimum of minus 4.1 degrees Celsius, while Kargil registered a high of 16.4 degrees Celsius and a low of minus 1.4 degrees Celsius.

Among other stations, Tangste recorded a minimum temperature of minus 5.4 degrees Celsius, followed by Padum at minus 4.6 degrees, Stakna at minus 4.3 degrees, Drass at minus 4.0 degrees, Upshi at minus 3.7 degrees and Chuchot at minus 3.6 degrees Celsius.

Diskit in Nubra Valley recorded a low of minus 1.3 degrees Celsius, while Khalitse and Garkon registered minimum temperatures of 0.2 and 5.1 degrees Celsius, respectively.

In the Jammu division, Jammu city recorded a minimum temperature of 14.4 degrees Celsius, while Jammu Airport and Kathua registered 16.3 and 15.2 degrees Celsius, respectively. Among the higher-altitude stations, Bhadarwah recorded 4.2 degrees Celsius, Banihal 6.0 degrees, Rajouri 7.6 degrees and Kishtwar 7.9 degrees Celsius.

Meanwhile, the Meteorological Department has forecast mainly dry weather over the coming days, although brief spells of light rain may occur in a few districts. Residents, particularly in higher-altitude areas, are likely to continue experiencing cold nights as temperatures remain low. (KNO)

Massive fire guts

firefighting personnel continued to monitor the affected area," he added.

Bitu Sharma, a shopkeeper, said traders were left helpless as the fire spread from one shop to another within a short time. He alleged that fire tenders reached the spot nearly one-and-a-half hours after the blaze broke out, claiming that the delay hampered efforts to contain the fire and salvage goods.

The shops, dealing mainly in food supplies, dry fruits and blankets, were gutted in the blaze. The exact extent of the damage was being assessed, and officials said it was too early to estimate the total value of the property and goods destroyed.

Preliminary investigations indicated that a short circuit in one of the shops might have triggered the fire, which subsequently spread to adjoining establishments. However, the exact cause of the blaze is yet to be conclusively established.

The narrow approach road leading to the market posed a major challenge for firefighting teams, forcing them to approach the affected area from the rear side to tackle the flames and prevent the fire from spreading further, officials said.

As the fire spread rapidly, shopkeepers made desperate attempts to salvage their merchandise. However, the intensity of the flames left many with little time to retrieve their belongings.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah expressed deep anguish over the devastating fire and the extensive losses suffered by traders.

He directed the administration to extend all

possible assistance to the affected shopkeepers.

Divisional Commissioner Jammu Vikas Kundal, along with Deputy Commissioner Jammu and senior district administration officers, visited Shiv Market, the site of the fire, to assess the damage.

The Divisional Commissioner assured the affected traders of full administrative support and prompt assistance.

Arun Gupta, President of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry also visited the site alongside MLA Vikram Randhawa, who earlier visited the spot late Sunday night and monitored the situation. He assured the affected shopkeepers of all possible assistance in the aftermath of the incident.

Moreover, Mehraj Malik, MLA from Doda and J&K AAP President wrote to Chief Minister Omar Abdullah and called for immediate compensation for affected traders and an impartial, time-bound inquiry into the alleged delay in the arrival of the fire services team to control the blaze. (KNO)

Dr Farooq seeks

the unfortunate incident had caused huge financial losses to the affected shopkeepers and adversely impacted their livelihoods. He urged the government to provide immediate relief to the victims and take concrete measures to ensure their rehabilitation and the restoration of their businesses.

The NC chief appealed to the government to assess the losses suffered by the affected shopkeepers and provide them with adequate financial compensation. He called for loans at low interest rates and on easy terms to help them rebuild their businesses and restore their livelihoods, enabling them to stand on their feet as soon as possible.

Expressing solidarity with the affected shopkeepers during this difficult time, Dr Farooq Abdullah urged the government to take priority measures to address their hardships and ensure their economic rehabilitation.

National Conference General Secretary Haji Ali Muhammad Sagar, Additional General Secretary Ajay Kumar Sadhotra, and Provincial President Advocate Rattan Lal Gupta also expressed grief and sorrow over the fire incident.

Breast cancer

reproductive patterns — early onset of menstruation, later age at first childbirth and having fewer children — may influence risk through hormonal pathways, while breastfeeding is associated with a protective effect. Obesity and sedentary lifestyles, particularly

excess body weight after menopause and insufficient physical activity, are recognised risk factors. Women with close relatives who have had breast or ovarian cancer may face a higher risk, and inherited genetic alterations, including those involving BRCA1 and BRCA2, can substantially increase susceptibility in some families.

Limited knowledge about early symptoms, fear of a cancer diagnosis and hesitation in discussing breast-related problems can delay consultation, while travel costs, geographical challenges and delays in reaching specialist services can make timely diagnosis difficult, particularly for those in remote and rural areas. Greater public awareness, better diagnostic facilities and improved cancer registration may also contribute to the increased number of cases identified over time. Experts caution that breast cancer can develop even in women with no identifiable risk factors, making awareness and timely evaluation important for everyone.

Warning signs

One of the most common signs is a new lump or thickening in the breast or underarm. Importantly, a cancerous lump may be painless in its early stages, and the absence of pain should never be a reason to ignore a new abnormality. Women should seek medical assessment if they notice a new lump or thickening in the breast or armpit, a change in the size, shape or appearance of a breast, dimpling, puckering, redness or thickening of the skin, a newly inverted or retracted nipple, unusual nipple discharge, particularly if blood-stained, a wound or sore that does not heal, or swelling around the armpit or collarbone. While many lumps are caused by non-cancerous conditions, any new or persistent abnormality warrants medical evaluation.

Risk factors and lifestyle
Age and sex remain important risk factors, with the likelihood generally increasing as women grow older. Other factors include a strong family history of breast or ovarian cancer, inherited genetic mutations, dense breast tissue, previous radiation exposure to the chest, early menstruation and late menopause. Lifestyle and reproductive factors such as obesity after menopause, physical inactivity, alcohol consumption and combined menopausal hormone therapy can also influence risk. However, having one or more risk factors does not mean a woman will develop breast cancer, and women without a known family history can also be diagnosed.

Although breast cancer cannot be prevented

in every case, experts recommend maintaining a healthy body weight, regular physical activity — at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity each week — and a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains and pulses. Limiting highly processed foods, avoiding tobacco and limiting alcohol are also important. Breastfeeding, where possible, is associated with reduced risk. Those with a strong family history should seek advice on individual risk assessment, genetic counselling and surveillance.

Early detection and treatment

Early detection is among the most effective ways to improve outcomes. Doctors emphasise breast awareness — becoming familiar with the normal appearance and feel of one's breasts and promptly reporting unusual changes — while noting it is not a substitute for clinical examination or imaging. Clinical breast examination and mammography may help identify abnormalities depending on age, individual risk and available guidance. Women with a strong family history may require an individualised screening plan, potentially starting earlier.

For Kashmir, experts say awareness campaigns must be accompanied by accessible diagnostic facilities and reliable referral systems so that women with suspicious findings undergo further investigation without delay. Mobile screening initiatives and peripheral camps can help, but their effectiveness depends on ensuring timely diagnostic confirmation and treatment. Any suspicious lump or persistent change should be evaluated promptly rather than waiting for a routine screening appointment.

Diagnosis generally begins with clinical examination, followed by imaging such as breast ultrasound or mammography, and a biopsy to confirm whether a lesion is cancerous and to determine hormone-receptor and HER2 status. Treatment is tailored to the patient and may involve surgery, radiation, chemotherapy, hormone therapy or targeted medicines, supported by rehabilitation, nutritional support, physiotherapy and psychological counselling. Doctors stress that breast cancer care requires a multidisciplinary approach.

Dr Shabnam Bashir said the availability of diagnostic and treatment facilities in Kashmir has made it possible for patients to access comprehensive breast cancer care within the region. She stressed that women should not delay seeking advice because of fear, stigma or the belief that treatment would require travelling outside Kashmir. (KNO)

Centre invites applications for two posts of information commissioners in CIC



PTI

New Delhi, Oct 26: The Centre has sought applications from eligible candidates to fill two posts of information commissioners in the transparency watchdog CIC, according to an official order.

The Central Information Commission, mandated to decide appeals and complaints under the Right to Information (RTI) Act, is headed by a chief information commissioner and can have a maximum of 10 information commissioners.

"It is proposed to appoint Information Commissioners, not exceeding two, as may be deemed necessary in the Central Information Commission," said the order issued by the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT).

Eligible persons can send their particulars in a prescribed proforma to the Department of Personnel and Training latest by November 20.

The CIC, at present, is working in its full strength -- that is, the chief information commissioner and 10 information commissioners, according to its website.

The RTI Act provides that the information commissioner "shall be a person of eminence in public life with wide knowledge and experience in law, science and technology, social service, management, journalism, mass-media or administration and governance".

Persons, who have attained the age of 65 years, shall not be eligible for appointment, said the order dated October 22.

Persons, who are serving under the state/central government or any other organisation, should send their particulars through proper channels (administrative ministry/department/state/UTs).

Rahul Gandhi acquitted in 2018 defamation case over remarks against Amit Shah

PTI

Sultanpur (UP), Oct 26: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi was acquitted by a special MP-MLA court here on Monday in a defamation case related to his remarks against then BJP president Amit Shah in 2018.

Gandhi, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha and Raebareilly MP, appeared before the court for the pronouncement of the verdict.

Plaintiff Vijay Mishra's lawyer Santosh Pandey said Gandhi has been acquitted by the court.

Congress workers celebrated the verdict outside the court complex with beating of drums and distributing sweets among themselves and chanting "Satyamev Jayate" (truth alone triumphs) as Gandhi emerged from the premises after his acquittal.

The matter was being heard in the court of Special Judge for MP-MLA cases Shubham Verma.

BJP holds nationwide protests over Kharge's remarks against PM Modi, demands apology

PTI

New Delhi, Oct 26: The BJP on Monday held nationwide protests over Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge's controversial remarks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi, demanding an apology from him and his party.

Kharge sparked a controversy on Sunday with his "Modi ka baap bhi jayega" remark in response to an audience member's comment that "the prime minister would not go anywhere", during an event in Patna.

Kharge was speaking at the programme to celebrate the 139th birth anniversary of Bihar's first chief minister, Shrikrishna Singh.

In Delhi, BJP leaders and workers staged a protest near Kharge's residence on Rajaji Marg. The protesters were stopped by the police when they tried to march from Sena Bhawan Circle towards his residence. They raised slogans and demanded an apology from Kharge and the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi.

In Bihar, BJP leaders and supporters, led by state unit president Sanjay Saraogi, took out a 'Jan Akrosh March'



from the party headquarters to Dak Bungalow Chauraha in Patna and burnt an effigy of Kharge.

"Yesterday, all limits were crossed when the platform to celebrate the birth anniversary of Shrikrishna Singh, the architect of modern Bihar, was used to make abusive remarks about the late father of the Prime Minister," Saraogi said.

He claimed that the Congress has been facing a "complete rout" in elections, and asked the party and the opposition INDIA bloc to "mend their ways".

In Jammu, BJP workers held a protest at Dogra Chowk under the leadership of party MLA Shagun Parihar and Bharatiya Janata Yuva

Morcha's Jammu and Kashmir president Arun Prabhat.

They raised slogans against the Congress and burnt posters of Kharge and Gandhi. According to reports, protests and demonstrations were held in Samba, Kathua, Poonch, Udhampur, Rajouri, Doda, Kishtwar and Reasi districts over the issue.

In Bengaluru, BJP leaders staged a protest at Freedom Park, demanding that Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge apologise to the people of the country.

The protesters raised slogans against Kharge, climbed barricades and attempted to march towards Vidhana Soudha, the seat of power.

Police detained several BJP leaders, including

Leader of Opposition in the Karnataka Assembly R Ashoka, Legislative Council Opposition leader Chhalavadi Narayanaswamy, Ashwath Narayan, C P Ramamurthy and MLC N Ravikumar, and took them to Upparpet police station.

Protests were also held in other parts of the country, including Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, West Bengal and Telangana.

In Jharkhand, hundreds of BJP workers and senior leaders of the party, including its state president Aditya Sahu and Leader of Opposition Babul Marandi, marched to the Congress office in Ranchi, raising slogans like 'Stop abusing the Prime Minister' and 'India will not tolerate insults to the Prime Minister'. "The Congress and its prominent leaders never let go of any opportunity to abuse our prime minister. Kharge made indecent and offensive remarks against the PM, invoking his late father. His comments have created a furore across the nation," Sahu said.

"Every party worker has taken to the streets against Kharge's derogatory remarks," he added.

Govt amends motor vehicle rules to permit pure ethanol flex-fuel vehicles

PTI

New Delhi, Oct 26: The Road Transport Ministry on Monday notified changes to the Central Motor Vehicles Rules 1989, allowing flex-fuel vehicles that can run on up to E100 (nearly pure ethanol).

E100 fuel allows vehicles to run on nearly pure ethanol.

A senior road transport ministry official said fuel beyond E20 (20 per cent ethanol-blended petrol) and up to E100 is intended only for vehicles designed and certified to use it and will not be applicable for other vehicles. Vehicles that use E20 or normal fuel can't use E85 or E100 fuel.

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) in a statement said the amendments update the emission certification provisions by expressly including E100 alongside E85.

"Vehicles certified for these fuels must meet the emission and safety requirements applicable to their category," it added. The notification also updates biodiesel-related provisions and makes technical corrections.

Additionally, the government has raised the vehicle weight limit to 3,500 kg from the previous threshold of 3,000 kg for light petrol and diesel vehicles affected by these changes.

In June this year, Maruti Suzuki India launched India's first flex-fuel passenger



vehicle, introducing Wagon R Flex Fuel capable of running on ethanol-petrol blends from E20 to E100.

The government has been promoting ethanol-blended petrol as part of its strategy to reduce dependence on imported crude oil, one of the biggest contributors to its current account deficit. The country has already rolled out E20 fuel, containing 20 per cent ethanol and 80 per cent petrol.

Flex-fuel vehicles are designed to run on higher ethanol blends such as E85 (85 per cent ethanol, 15 per cent petrol) and E100 (near 100 per cent ethanol), unlike conventional petrol vehicles currently approved for lower ethanol concentrations.

Major automakers, including Toyota Motor Corporation, Tata Motors, and Hyundai Motor Company, are also

developing flex-fuel vehicles for the Indian market as policymakers push to reduce the country's fossil fuel import bill.

In the current scenario, when the West Asia conflict has left many countries, including India, vulnerable to the energy crisis, flex-fuel vehicles assume all the more importance.

Earlier, MoRTH proposed amendments to vehicle emission rules to widen the scope for higher ethanol blends and alternative fuels, paving the way for flex-fuel and pure biofuel vehicles across vehicle categories.

The draft changes to the Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989, were aimed at providing for wider use of fuels such as E85 and E100, as well as B100 biodiesel and hydrogen-CNG combinations.

Flex fuel technology is already used in countries such as Brazil and the United States. These vehicles are designed to operate on a range of ethanol and petrol blends using a single fuel tank.

Depending on the vehicle's design and certification, this range may extend to E85 or E100, a fuel consisting predominantly of ethanol. Fuel system components and materials are selected for the approved blends, and engine controls automatically adjust operation to the fuel composition.

This gives users flexibility to choose fuels within the range certified and declared by the manufacturer.

PM interacts with parl delegations of BRICS nations



PTI

New Delhi, Oct 26: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday interacted with parliamentary delegations from BRICS nations, including Russia, China, Iran and the United Arab Emirates.

The 12th BRICS Parliamentary Forum, which is being held at the Samvidhan Sadan here, has brought parliamentary leaders from BRICS member and partner countries together to discuss ways to strengthen parliamentary cooperation and advance people-centric development.

The prime minister interacted with parliamentary delegations from BRICS

countries after the inaugural session of the 12th BRICS Parliamentary Forum, officials said.

Apart from PM Modi, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, Congress MP Shashi Tharoor and other Indian MPs interacted with the visiting parliamentary representatives from the BRICS member nations and partner countries.

The member nations which are participating in the two-day event are Brazil, Russia, China, Egypt, the UAE and Iran. The partner countries attending the meeting are Belarus, Cuba, Thailand, Uganda, Vietnam, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

Nadda calls for coordinated, whole-of-govt approach to tackle substance abuse

PTI

New Delhi, Oct 26: Union Health Minister J P Nadda on Monday called for a coordinated, whole-of-government approach to tackle substance abuse, stressing the need for different ministries and departments to work in synergy towards clearly defined objectives.

He was speaking at the launch of a capacity-building training programme for medical and allied healthcare professionals engaged in drug de-addiction services, according to an official statement.

The programme was launched in hybrid mode in the presence of the secretary and senior officers from the ministries of Health and Family Welfare, Social Justice and Empowerment, and Home Affairs, it said.

Nadda reiterated the government's commitment, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, to achieving the goal of a Nasha Mukta Bharat by 2029.

Centre committed to reducing fiscal deficit: FM

PTI

Tiruchirappalli (Tamil Nadu), Oct 26: Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday said the Centre is committed to reducing the fiscal deficit, as evidenced by the annual budgets, stressing that the national debt will be limited to 50 per cent of the GDP by 2030. Addressing concerns about the national debt, she said that since the post-COVID period, every nation has faced debt challenges.

"We are committed to reducing the fiscal deficit, as evidenced by our annual budgets. We have openly stated our goal that by 2030, the national debt will be limited to 50 per cent of the GDP. We are consistently putting in place measures to reduce the Union Government's debt, and international organisations have acknowledged India's disciplined approach to debt management," Sitharaman told reporters here. Responding to a question



regarding state finances, particularly the concerns raised by the former Tamil Nadu Finance Minister Thangam Thennarasu over the state's escalating debt trap, Sitharaman said that such matters be debated in the State Assembly so that the truth can reach the public. She maintained a similar neutral stance in respect of cases filed against former DMK ministers by the ruling TVK, terming it a state-level matter.

Highlighting inflation

management, the finance minister noted that a dedicated group of ministers has been working since 2014 to ensure price stability through efficient supply chain management. Citing tactical interventions like restrictions on rice exports, she emphasised that the Centre successfully insulated domestic consumers from price hikes while simultaneously ensuring that farmers received the Minimum Support Price (MSP). On the nature of

democratic dissent, Sitharaman remarked that utilising legal routes through courts or holding street protests are both standard methods being employed by various opposition groups to seek justice. "There are many methods, such as taking the legal route through the courts to seek justice or, as an opposition party, protesting on the streets. Both methods are being utilised by various groups," she replied when asked about the Opposition parties continuously protesting against alleged irregularities regarding the SIR and demanding action against the CEC.

Regarding per capita income, the Union Finance Minister said, "We are implementing various measures to increase it. Despite global challenges like the pandemic, economic recovery efforts, wars, and fluctuations in fuel and crude oil prices, we have worked to ensure these burdens do not fall heavily on the public.

India, US fine-tuning trade agreement: Goyal



PTI

Hague, Oct 26: India and the US have concluded most of the discussions for a proposed bilateral trade pact, and they are now fine-tuning the agreement, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Monday. "We have concluded most of the discussions and are fine-tuning the agreement," he said here while talking about the India-US trade pact.

The minister is here on a two-day official visit. He is accompanying a business delegation.

Addressing the India-Netherlands Business Forum here, he said India has concluded nine free trade agreements in the last four and a half years.

India and the US, in February, announced finalisation of the framework for the first phase of the bilateral trade agreement (BTA). However, changes in the tariff landscape in the US have led to further negotiations on the pact.

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is notified for the information of general public that my NAME mentioned in PAN card is FATIMA which is wrong however my actual NAME is FATA BEGUM. Now I intend to rectify my name in my PAN CARD. In this regard if anybody having any objection may file the same before the concerned authorities within a period of 7 days. After that no objection shall be entertained. NAME: FATA BEGUM D/O MOHD SHABAN BHAT R/O BAMLLOORA SALOORA GANDERBAL.PAN CARD AEGPF5210D

PUBLIC NOTICE

This information is for the general public, that in my Daughter's J&K Bank Account Branch-Ganderbal bearing Account No. 0081040800028190, Her name was wrongly mentioned as SANIA SHAFI M/TF while actual/correct name is SANIYA SHAFI D/O: MOHAMMAD SHAFI TANTRAY R/O: GADOORA GANDERBAL 191131 as per her Aadhaar Card, Pan Card and School Admission Record, Now it needs to be corrected as per said Documents in my account number, Anybody having objection may contact J&K Bank Branch Ganderbal within (7)seven days No, objection shall be accepted after said time period.

MOHAMMAD SHAFI TANTRAY
F/O: SANIYA SHAFI
R/O: GADOORA GANDERBAL 191131
Contact: 6006751828

PUBLIC NOTICE

This information is for the general public, that in my J&K Bank Account Branch-Ganderbal bearing Account No. 0081040150001538, My name was wrongly mentioned as NAYEEMA AKHTAR while actual/correct name is NAYEEMA AKHTER W/O: AAZAD AHMAD MALLA R/O: DAGPORA ANCHER SRINAGAR 190011 as per my Aadhaar Card and Pan Card Record, Now it needs to be corrected as per said Documents in my account number, Anybody having objection may contact J&K Bank Branch Ganderbal within (7)seven days No, objection shall be accepted after said time period.

NAYEEMA AKHTER
W/O: AAZAD AHMAD MALLA
R/O: DAGPORA ANCHER SRINAGAR 190011
Contact: 6006316477

Quick Read

US congressional delegation meets Nepal Speaker to discuss economic ties

PTI

Kathmandu, Oct 26 : A US congressional delegation on Monday met Nepal's House of Representatives Speaker Dol Prasad Aryal and discussed bilateral relations, economic cooperation, climate-related disasters and parliamentary ties, according to the Speaker's secretariat.

During the meeting, Aryal thanked the US government for its solidarity and support following the flash floods in August, which killed around 1,450 people and left more than 5,000 missing. He briefed the delegation on Nepal's efforts to manage the situation, the secretariat said in a statement.

The speaker also highlighted the need for greater international and inter-parliamentary cooperation to mitigate losses from climate-related disasters, improve preparedness and strengthen resilience in vulnerable areas, it said.

Aryal told the delegation - led by House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Jason Smith - that Nepal's emergency agenda on climate-related disasters was adopted by more than a two-thirds majority at the 153rd Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in Arusha, Tanzania, it said.

The agenda called for parliamentary action to address climate-related disasters and strengthen resilience in the Himalayan region and other vulnerable areas.

He called for expanding Nepal-US relations beyond traditional grant assistance to promote investment and economic partnerships, and pledged necessary policy and legal reforms to create an investment-friendly environment in Nepal and boost investor confidence.

Israel votes amid uncertainty over Netanyahu's future and coalition numbers



PTI

Jerusalem, Oct 26 : Israel will hold parliamentary elections on Tuesday, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu seeking to retain power amid debate over the government's handling of the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack, the subsequent wars and its domestic and foreign policies.

The election is widely seen as a test of Netanyahu's leadership, as opposition leaders, including former military chief Gadi Eisenkot and former prime minister Naftali Bennett, seek to challenge his right-wing coalition.

Opinion polls indicate neither bloc is assured of the parliamentary majority needed to form a government.

Israel, roughly the size of north-eastern India's Mizoram state, uses a nationwide proportional representation system, with the entire country serving as a single electoral constituency to elect the 120 members of the Knesset, Israel's parliament.

Voters do not elect individual members of parliament. Instead, they vote for closed party lists. This system allows numerous political parties to compete for seats in the legislature.

To enter the Knesset, a party must cross the 3.25 per cent electoral threshold, a requirement that often prompts pre-election alliances and mergers.

The Knesset serves a four-year term, but elections can be held early if it votes to dissolve itself, fails to approve the state budget within the prescribed period, or a new government cannot be formed.

The party winning the most seats does not automatically form the government. After the election, the president consults political factions and appoints a lawmaker to form a government. The candidate must secure the support of at least 61 lawmakers to form a government.

Netanyahu, leader of the right-wing Likud party, has served as Israel's prime minister for nearly 19 years across three separate periods since 1996.

He seeks to retain power after a period marked by the October 7 attack, which took place three years ago, and the multiple military campaigns that followed.

The Hamas-led assault in 2023 killed around 1,200 people in Israel and triggered the war in Gaza, which subsequently widened into a broader regional conflict involving Israel, Iran and other armed groups.

Following the attack, Israel launched a large-scale military campaign in the Gaza Strip, involving airstrikes, ground operations and restrictions that severely disrupted civilian life.

According to Gaza's health ministry, more than 74,000 Palestinians have been reported killed and over 175,000 injured since the start of the war.

Security and accountability for the October 7, 2023, attack are central issues in the campaign.

Saudi-led coalition says it destroyed Yemeni rebels' missile facilities

AP

Dubai, Oct 26 : The Saudi-led coalition battling Yemen's Houthi rebels said Monday it has degraded their ability to strike targets inside the kingdom after destroying tunnels used to store ballistic missiles and missile launchers.

In Israel, the country's defence minister strongly denied that the military has clashed with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over his reported instructions for an "action" against Iran ahead of national elections on Tuesday.

Here is the latest news from the Middle East on Monday. Read our full coverage here.

Saudi-led coalition says it destroyed Houthi missile launchers and storage facilities

The spokesperson for the Saudi-led coalition fighting the Iran-backed Houthis said an operation in Houthi-controlled territory in Yemen destroyed five tunnels used for storing ballistic missiles, four ballistic missile launchers and another missile storage facility.

Spokesperson Maj. Gen. Turki Al-Malki said in a post on X that the operation also aimed at cutting off the Houthis' supply lines between areas under their control and targeted rebel fortifications and military



equipment along the front lines inside Yemen.

Al-Malki said the coalition would continue to use "deterrent operational measures" to protect against the Houthis' "brutal attacks" inside the kingdom and in Yemen.

Houthis say they fired missiles at Yemeni government forces

Yemen's Houthi rebels claimed Monday that they struck military gatherings and weapons depots belonging to Saudi-backed government forces in Aden and Lahj provinces.

The Houthi military spokesperson Yahya Saree said in a statement that the rebels fired ballistic missiles at the sites, inflicting losses. The Associated Press couldn't independently verify the claims.

The Houthis continue to target government forces and their allies inside Yemen. The Yemeni government accused the rebels late on Sunday of targeting

the nature of the action.

Netanyahu's office later described the report as "fake news."

"There has been no intention by Israel of initiating an attack on Iran before the elections in Israel," Katz said. "We made it clear that should Iran attack Israel, we would respond with great force."

Israeli president says he won't bow to US pressure on the next government

Israel's President Isaac Herzog said on Monday he won't bend to pressure from US President Donald Trump on which party he will select first to form a government after Tuesday's national elections.

Herzog's role is largely ceremonial.

No single party is expected to outright win control of the country's parliament, or Knesset. The president is expected to tap the leader of the party with the most support to try to build a governing coalition, a process that could drag out for days or weeks, or fail entirely and force Israel to return to the polls to vote again.

Herzog's remarks came after Trump reiterated his endorsement for Netanyahu, who is in a tight race to remain in power.

Herzog told the MS NOW cable news network that neither Trump nor anyone else "can intervene" and that it was up to him to see "what the facts are."

World shares mostly rise after Wall Street decline as oil prices fall over 1%



AP

Tokyo, Oct 26: World shares were mostly higher Monday and oil prices fell after rising last week to their highest level in more than four years.

Investors were bracing for earnings reports of big companies and central bank decisions this week that could shake markets, analysts said.

Several influential AI-related companies report their latest financial results this week, including Google's parent, Alphabet, along with Microsoft and Amazon. In early European trading, Germany's DAX surged 0.7% to 25,363.59, while the CAC 40 in Paris picked up 0.9% to 7,848.62. Britain's FTSE 100 added 0.5% to 10,742.88.

The future for the S&P 500 was up 0.2% while that for the Dow Jones Industrial Average gained 0.4%.

Asian markets started the day off with losses, though some benchmarks bounced back. Tokyo's Nikkei 225 slipped 0.8% to 62,189.65 as shares of computer chipmakers and

other tech firms came under renewed selling pressure. Advantest, which makes testing equipment for computer chips, fell 3.9%, while chip- and flat-panel production manufacturer Tokyo Electron lost 3.7%.

The Bank of Japan is due to announce a decision on its key interest rate later in the week.

The Kospi in Seoul dropped 1.5% to 5,469.47. Memory chipmaker Samsung Electronics lost 1.1%.

In Hong Kong, the Hang Seng picked up 0.5% to 23,211.81, while the Shanghai Composite index rebounded from early losses to gain 0.2%, closing at 3,697.52. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 likewise reversed its losses to advance 0.2% to 8,809.90.

The price of Brent crude, the international standard, fell 1.7% to \$109.86 a barrel. US benchmark crude sank 2.1% to \$101.08 a barrel.

On Friday, the price for a barrel of Brent crude rose 3.1% to settle at \$116.72, its highest level since June 2022. It has surged from less than \$97 since early October.

Indian motorsport needs someone to break the ice for F1 breakthrough, says Gaurav Gill



PTI

Coimbatore, Oct 26 : India's most decorated rally driver Gaurav Gill is mighty impressed by the growing interest in motorsport among youngsters and believes the country has the talent to reach Formula One, but needs someone to "break the ice" at the highest level to turn that potential into reality.

A seven-time Indian national rally champion and three-time Asia-Pacific Rally Championship (APRC) winner, Gill became the first Indian driver to win the overall FIA APRC title in 2013.

"Somebody has to just break the ice and find a way to go out to the top," Gill told PTI in an interview on the sidelines of the Indian National Car Racing Championship at Kari Motor Speedway here.

An Arjuna Award recipient, he has spent years competing at the highest levels of international rallying and believes Indian motorsport has made considerable progress in developing talent.

The journey from Narain Karthikeyan, India's first Formula One driver, and Karun Chandhok, who followed him to the sport's top tier, to the current generation reflects that progress.

Kush Maini is competing in Formula 2 and has also served as an F1 reserve driver, while young

karting sensation Atiqa Mir has made strides on the international stage, including entry into the F1 Academy's development pathway.

Gill's own career, which began in single-seater racing before he made his mark in rallying, is another example of the range of talent India has produced.

He believes the challenge now is to create a stronger route for drivers to move from domestic competition to the global stage.

"It's quite interesting. I grew up rallying on these tracks. I spent a lot of my childhood driving these single-seater cars and, from there, developed into Formula 3 and F2000 cars. So, obviously, there is a lot of scope," the 44-year-old said.

"It's incredible how many people have been supporting people like me, Narain and Karun. We have developed so much talent around the country, and they continue to do that. There is always an opportunity, but somebody has to just break the ice and find a way to go out to the top."

Gill continues to compete in rallying and is looking for opportunities in cross-country rallying and international events, including the World Rally Championship and regional championships in Asia-Pacific and the Middle East.

Defence is India hockey's priority, says skipper Harmanpreet ahead of ACT opener

PTI

Jalandhar, Oct 26 : The Indian hockey team is striving to become a better outfit defensively, skipper Harmanpreet Singh said on Monday as he downplayed the favourites' tag given to his side which is chasing a record-extending sixth Asian Champions Trophy title here.

India will take on Bangladesh in their ACT opener at the Surjit Singh Hockey Stadium here on Tuesday. Bangladesh replaced Pakistan in the draw after the latter withdrew citing security concerns.

"Defence, that is our priority. We have very



skilful forwards who create good opportunities. If we perform well in both

defence and attack, we can become a better team," Harmanpreet said at the

pre-tournament captains' press conference here.

"When we attack, we must ensure that we convert our opportunities into goals," he added.

Harmanpreet said an improved defensive performance could make a significant difference to India's overall showing.

"I would focus on our defensive performance. The way we defend as a team can make a significant difference to our overall performance. There are some areas where we need to improve, but we will analyse our performances and work on those aspects during the tournament," he said.

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