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BLAZING TALES

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Message from the Editor

Dear Esteemed Readers,



It is with immense pride, humility and gratitude that I welcome you to the inaugural edition of Blazing Tales. This moment marks the culmination of a dream that has been close to my heart for more than two decades—a dream shaped by dedication, perseverance, continuous learning and an unwavering belief in the power of responsible journalism.

My professional journey began in 2005 as a young reporter with an eagerness to learn and a passion to serve society through truthful and meaningful journalism. Like every aspiring journalist, I started from the grassroots, covering stories that taught me the true essence of reporting—listening to people, understanding their concerns and presenting facts with honesty and integrity.

A significant chapter of my career was my tenure as a Sports Correspondent with Daily Excelsior, one of Jammu and Kashmir's most respected English newspapers. Those years enriched my understanding of journalism and taught me the values of discipline, hard work and accuracy.

The next milestone came when I joined The Tribune, one of India's most prestigious national mainstream newspapers. Becoming a part of The Tribune was nothing less than a dream come true. It was an opportunity that every young journalist aspires to achieve. Working with such an esteemed institution broadened my perspective, strengthened my professional abilities and reinforced my commitment to ethical and responsible journalism.

Every organisation where I have had the privilege to work has contributed immensely to my growth. I remain deeply indebted to my editors, senior colleagues, mentors and fellow journalists whose guidance, encouragement and invaluable experiences have shaped me both professionally and personally. Whatever I have achieved today is, in many ways, a reflection of the lessons I learned from each one of them.

Since my early twenties, I carried a vision that the first phase of my life would be devoted to establishing myself as a credible and respected journalist. I believed that after gaining sufficient experience and understanding of the profession, I would dedicate the next phase of my journey to mentoring young minds and sharing the knowledge, ethics and practical skills that journalism had gifted me.

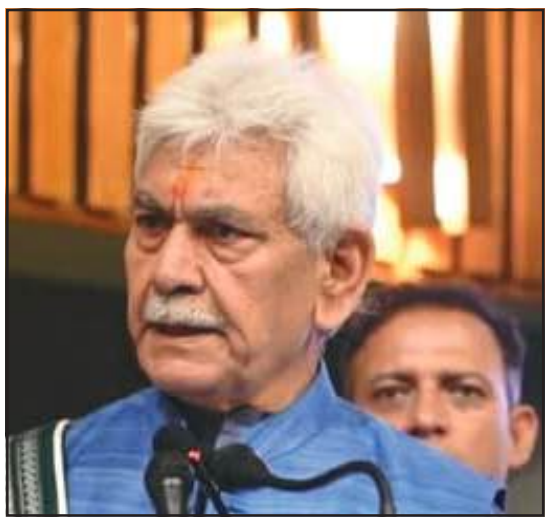
Today, that vision is taking shape through the Institute of Mass Communication and Skill Development (IMCSD), where I have the privilege of training and mentoring aspiring journalists, writers and communication professionals. Watching young people discover their potential and develop confidence in their abilities has become one of the most fulfilling chapters of my career.

The launch of Blazing Tales, registered with the Press Registrar General of India (PRGI), is another significant milestone in this journey. More than just a newspaper, it is a platform built on the principles of credibility, fair

(Contd on Pg 2)

We are absolutely resolved to dismantle the terror network: LG Sinha

BLAZING TALES NEWS SERVICE



SRINAGAR, AUGUST :"Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha reaffirmed the administration's determination to eradicate terrorism from Jammu and Kashmir, declaring that the government is firmly committed to dismantling the terror network, bringing its perpetrators and enablers to justice, and ensuring a future of peace, equality and dignity for every citizen of the Union Territory."Addressing a function after handing over appointment letters to 37 next of kin (NoKs) of civilians killed by terrorists, the Lieutenant Governor said justice for terror victims is now being delivered with speed and sincerity after decades of neglect suffered by affected families.""We are absolutely resolved to dismantle the terror network, to bring its perpetrators and enablers to justice and to secure for every citizen of the UT a life of peace, equality and hope," Sinha said."Paying tribute to innocent civilians killed in terrorist violence, he said the appointment letters symbolised much more than government jobs, representing remembrance, justice and the nation's commitment to stand with families that had endured years of pain and uncertainty.""My heartfelt tribute to the innocent civilians martyred by terrorists. I

(Contd on Pg 2)

Despite approval for 317 Anganwadi-cum-Creches, not a single centre operational in J&K

VIKAS SHARMA



JAMMU, AUGUST: Despite receiving approval for 317 Anganwadi-cum-Crèche Centres (AWCCs) from the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development, not even a single centre has become operational in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

Union Minister for Women and Child Development Annapurna Devi informed the Lok Sabha recently during a written reply that, as of January 31, 2026, 317 Anganwadi-cum-Crèche Centres had been approved for Jammu and Kashmir, but none had become functional.

The data places Jammu and Kashmir among several States and Union Territories where sanctioned crèche centres are yet to become operational. Andhra Pradesh (108 approved), Gujarat (25), Himachal Pradesh (152), Lakshadweep (8), Madhya Pradesh (448), Maharashtra (345), Manipur (702), Odisha (1,000), Tamil Nadu (600) and West Bengal (10) have also failed to operationalise any of their approved Anganwadi-cum-Crèche Centres.

Among the neighbouring regions, Ladakh has operationalised six of its seven approved centres, while Punjab has made 144 of its 148 sanctioned centres functional, reflecting significantly better implementation than Jammu and several other States and Union Territories.

The Government further informed the Lok Sabha that Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh had not submitted any proposal for setting up

(Contd on Pg 2)

Message from the Editor...

ness, independence and public service. It represents my belief that journalism must continue to serve as the voice of the people, the conscience of society and a catalyst for positive change.

Our commitment to our readers is unwavering. Blazing Tales will continue to highlight the pressing issues confronting society, bring neglected concerns into public discourse and encourage constructive conversations that contribute to meaningful progress. At the same time, we will celebrate excellence by showcasing the achievements of individuals, institutions, entrepreneurs, educators, sportspersons, artists, innovators and organisations whose inspiring work deserves recognition.

We firmly believe that journalism should not merely report events—it should educate, inspire, empower and create awareness. Every story we publish will be guided by the principles of truth, accuracy, fairness, accountability and public interest. We shall always strive to uphold the highest standards of professional journalism while remaining sensitive to the aspirations and concerns of our readers.

As we embark on this new journey, I sincerely seek your trust, support and blessings. Your encouragement will inspire us to strive for excellence, while your valuable feedback will help us grow stronger with every edition.

Thank you for becoming a part of this historic beginning. Together, let us build a publication that informs minds, inspires hearts and contributes meaningfully towards a more aware, progressive and compassionate society.

With warm regards,
Vikas Sharma
Senior Journalist
Editor, Owner & Publisher
Blazing Tales

We are absolutely resolved to ..

salute the families who, after decades of anguish
and wait, now hold appointment letters that restore dignity and livelihood," he said."The Lieutenant Governor said the constitutional changes of August 5, 2019 had ushered in a new era of social justice and inclusive development by removing discriminatory barriers and extending equal rights to all sections of society.""Today, Jammu and Kashmir is advancing with renewed confidence and all-round development is driving peace and prosperity," he said."Sinha said the people of Jammu and Kashmir had chosen peace over violence, education over indoctrination and employment over dependency, while reaffirming the government's commitment to creating greater opportunities for youth through development and economic growth."He said justice delayed had caused immense suffering to terror victim families, but their grievances were now being addressed in a humane, responsive and consistent manner.""This day also sends a message to the enemies of peace that terrorism cannot defeat a determined nation. Terrorist handlers from across the border may conspire in darkness, but the light and long arms of justice will find them," he said."Highlighting the government's development agenda, the Lieutenant Governor said industrial investment, improved connectivity, expansion of airports and major infrastructure projects were transforming Jammu and Kashmir's economy. He added that the region's future would be shaped by its youth, workers, farmers, teachers, women and all those committed to peace and progress."Recalling the case of Wali Mohammad Wani of Shopian, who was killed by terrorists in 1993, Sinha said that after 33 years a "lamp of hope and prosperity" had finally been lit in his family's home, reflecting the government's commitment to restoring dignity to victims of terrorism."The Lieutenant Governor also handed over appointment letters to 32 beneficiaries under the Compassionate Appointment Rules (SRO-43) and the Rehabilitation Assistance Scheme (RAS)."Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo, Director General of Police Nalin Prabhat, Principal Secretary Home Chandraker Bharti, Commissioner Secretary GAD M. Raju, IGP Kashmir V.K. Birdi, Divisional Commissioner Kashmir Anshul Garg, Save Youth Save Future Foundation Chairman Wajahat Farooq Bhat, senior officials, representatives of social organisations and family members of terror victims attended the programme.

Despite approval.....

Anganwadi-cum-Crèche Centres during the Programme Approval Board (PAB) meetings. The Minister said the Ministry of Women and Child Development has been implementing the Palna Scheme under the Samarthya Vertical of Mission Shakti since April 1, 2022, to provide day-care facilities and protection to children while enabling more women to participate in the workforce. She said the lack of accessible child-care facilities often discourages women, particularly those employed in the unorganised sector, from taking up work. The scheme aims to formalise child-care services, reduce the burden of unpaid care work on women and contribute towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 8 relating to decent work and economic growth. At the national level, the Government has envisioned the establishment of 17,000 Anganwadi-cum-Crèche Centres during the 15th Finance Commission period. States and Union Territories have been encouraged to submit proposals for opening more centres during the annual Programme Approval Board (PAB) meetings. The Minister informed the Lok Sabha that 14,599 Anganwadi-cum-Crèche Centres had been approved across the country, but only 2,820 had become operational as of January 31, 2026, indicating that a large number of sanctioned centres are yet to be commissioned.

The Government also informed the House that Anganwadi Workers receive an honorarium of ?4,500 per month, while Anganwadi Helpers receive ?2,250 per month under Mission Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0. Those working in Anganwadi-cum-Crèche Centres are entitled to an additional ?1,500 per month for workers and ?750 per month for helpers, besides performance-linked incentives. The Minister said the Centre has also introduced several welfare measures for Anganwadi Workers and Helpers, including enhanced promotional opportunities, 20 days of annual leave, paid maternity benefits, enrolment under the Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maandhan pension scheme, life and accident insurance, and annual health insurance coverage of up to ?5 lakh under the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY).

J&K to implement Forest Rights Act in true spirit, says Javed Rana

BLAZING TALES NEWS SERVICE

JAMMU, JAMMU, AUGUST: The Jammu and Kashmir Government has decided to implement the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006 in its true spirit to ensure justice for eligible forest dwellers, with the Tribal Affairs Department designated as the nodal agency for its implementation, Forest, Ecology and Environment Minister Javed Ahmed Rana said.

Addressing a press conference in Jammu, Rana said that although the Act was extended to Jammu and Kashmir in 2019, many deserving beneficiaries were unable to avail its benefits due to ineffective implementation.

He said the Omar Abdullah-led Government has taken a landmark decision to enforce the legislation in accordance with its objectives. The Tribal Affairs Department recently issued a circular directing that no eviction of eligible forest dwellers should take place without following the due legal process.

The Minister said one of the government's first decisions was to designate the Tribal Affairs Department as the nodal department for implementing the Act, replacing the earlier arrangement under which the Forest Department handled FRA-related matters.

To strengthen implementation, the government has established a Project Management Unit (PMU) and appointed three experts representing the Jammu, Kashmir and Poonch regions. District-level implementation cells will also be established within the next 7 to 10 days to facilitate timely disposal of claims and assist applicants, particularly tribal families living in remote areas.



Rana said Deputy Commissioners have been directed to expedite all pending and fresh claims through the statutory three-tier mechanism prescribed under the Act. He noted that the process of recognising forest rights begins at the Gram Sabha level before progressing through the prescribed legal stages.

Clarifying the government's stand on eviction notices, the Minister said the Forest Department cannot issue notices under the Forest Rights Act, as its implementation now rests exclusively with the Tribal Affairs Department.

He reiterated that no eviction would be carried out without following the prescribed legal procedure and made it clear that no fresh encroachments on forest land would be permitted.

However, he said people who have been residing on or cultivating forest land for decades and are eligible under the Act would not be disturbed until their claims are examined and decided in accordance with the law.

The Minister also announced that the government has ordered inquiries into alleged excesses during previous eviction drives involving tribal communities. Two committees, including one headed by the Director of Tribal Affairs, have been constituted to examine complaints. The report submitted by the Tribal Affairs Department will be examined to identify any illegal actions or injustices.

Rana said appropriate action would be taken against those found responsible and assured that all genuine claims under the Forest Rights Act, whether in municipal, town or rural areas, would be processed expeditiously to ensure justice for eligible beneficiaries.

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Excessive screen time linked to poorer skin-related quality of life in adolescents: *Study*



NEW DELHI, AUGUST: Spending more time on digital screens may negatively affect the psychological well-being and body image of adolescents living with chronic skin diseases, according to a new study.

The research, conducted among 208 adolescents aged 11 to 18 years with chronic dermatological conditions, found that longer screen time was associated with poorer dermatology-related quality of life, lower self-esteem, a more negative body image and higher levels of anxiety.

The participants were recruited during routine dermatology consultations between September 2024 and March 2025. Acne vulgaris was the most common condition, affecting 61.1 per cent of participants, followed by atopic dermatitis (18.3 per cent) and psoriasis (10.6 per cent). The average age of participants was 15.3 years.

Researchers assessed dermatology-related and overall quality of life, anxiety, self-esteem, body image, life satisfaction and health behaviours using validated questionnaires. They also examined digital media habits, including screen time, social media use, short-form video viewing and exposure to skincare-related content.

The study found that adolescents spent an average of 4.5 hours daily on screens. YouTube was the most widely used platform, followed by Instagram and TikTok. Most participants reported spending less than two hours a day watching short-form videos.

The findings showed that greater impairment in dermatology-related quality of life was closely associated with poorer overall well-being, reduced self-esteem, dissatisfaction with body image and increased anxiety. Higher anxiety levels were also linked to lower life satisfaction and poorer perceptions of personal health.

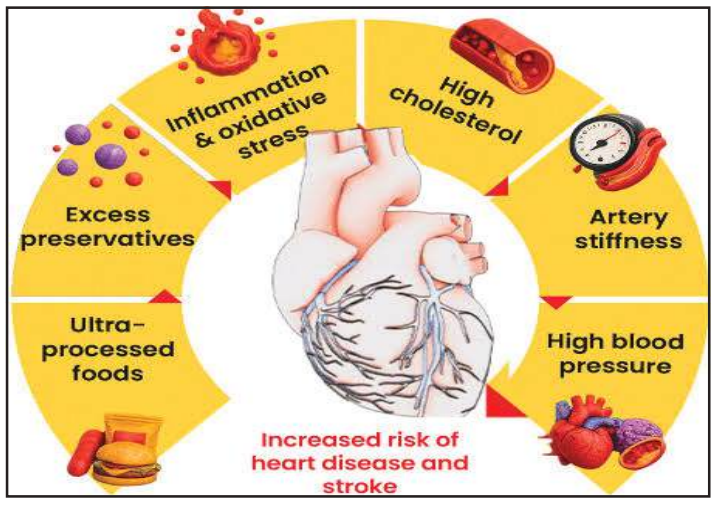
Researchers observed that adolescents who placed greater importance on health-related values generally reported healthier behaviours and better overall well-being. Health, family, security, happiness and honesty were among the values considered most important by participants.

The study recommends incorporating routine screening for anxiety, self-esteem and body image concerns into adolescent dermatology care. It also highlights the importance of media literacy education to help young people critically assess skincare information on social media and distinguish scientifically accurate medical advice from influencer-driven content.

The researchers cautioned that the cross-sectional nature of the study does not establish whether increased screen time directly causes poorer skin-related quality of life or psychological distress. They also noted limitations, including reliance on self-reported media habits, recruitment from a single clinical centre, the absence of objective measures of disease severity and the use of a non-validated questionnaire on media use.

The authors called for long-term studies to better understand how chronic skin conditions, digital media exposure and psychological well-being influence one another over time.

— Agencies



preservatives in processed foods to higher heart disease risk

NEW DELHI, AUGUST: Regular consumption of certain preservatives commonly found in ultra-processed and packaged foods may increase the risk of high blood pressure and heart disease, according to a recent study published in the European Society of Cardiology.

The study found that people with higher intake of some non-antioxidant food preservatives had a significantly greater risk of developing hypertension and cardiovascular disease, highlighting the importance of limiting consumption of highly processed foods.

The research analysed dietary and health data from 1,12,395 adults participating in France's NutriNet-Santé health study over a period of approximately eight years.

Researchers examined the health effects of 17 commonly used food preservatives, including sodium nitrite, potassium sorbate, potassium metabisulfite, citric acid, ascorbic acid (vitamin C), sodium ascorbate and sodium erythorbate.

According to the findings, individuals consuming higher amounts of non-antioxidant preservatives, such as nitrites, sorbates and sulfites, had a 29 per cent higher risk of developing high blood pressure and a 16 per cent greater risk of heart disease. Higher intake of antioxidant preservatives, including ascorbic acid and citric acid, was also associated with a 22 per cent increased risk of hypertension.

Cardiologist Sanjeev Aggarwal, Director of Cardiology at Shri Balaji Action Medical Institute, Delhi, said preservatives are added to processed foods to extend shelf life by preventing the growth of bacteria, fungi and other microorganisms while maintaining the food's taste, colour and quality.

He explained that some preservatives may contribute to inflammation and oxidative stress in the body, damaging the inner lining of blood vessels and increasing blood pressure over time. Persistent vascular damage can elevate the long-term risk of heart attack and stroke.

However, he noted that the study establishes an association rather than direct causation, and the overall risk also depends on an individual's diet, lifestyle, physical activity and the quantity of processed foods consumed.

Health experts advise consumers to reduce intake of ultra-processed foods, read ingredient labels carefully and choose fresh, minimally processed foods whenever possible to support long-term heart health.

H5N1 bird flu kills seabirds in Australia's first mass mortality event

CANBERRA, AUGUST: Australia has warned that the highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza virus is likely to spread further after the country's first mass mortality event among wild seabirds claimed the lives of about 50 greater crested terns off the coast of South Australia.

Agriculture Minister Julie Collins said laboratory testing confirmed H5N1 infection in 49 dead and 35 sick greater crested terns discovered on rocky outcrops near Cape Jaffa, about 250 kilometres south of Adelaide, during helicopter surveillance on Friday.

The minister cautioned Australians to expect more outbreaks among wild birds and increasing numbers of affected wildlife as migratory and native bird populations continue to move across the country.

Environment Minister Murray Watt said it is impossible to prevent wild birds and animals from moving freely, making additional outbreaks and mass mortality events likely. Despite the outbreak among wild seabirds, authorities said there is no evidence that the virus has spread to commercial poultry farms, many of which have strengthened biosecurity measures since H5N1 was first detected in Australia in June. — Agencies

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BLAZING TALES NEWS SERVICE

Traditional Radio, CRT TV Repair Trade Struggles in Digital Age



VICKY VERMA

JAMMU, AUGUST, 2026 : - Once a common feature in almost every household, radio was the most trusted source of news, information and entertainment. Families gathered around radio sets to listen to news bulletins, cricket commentary and music, while CRT (box) televisions were the main source of home entertainment. Today, smartphones and LED televisions have largely replaced these devices.

Although radio broadcasting continues through FM and internet platforms, most people now listen to it on their mobile phones instead of using standalone radio sets. This shift has significantly affected the traditional radio and television repair trade.

The change is clearly visible in Jammu city and nearby villages, where repair shops that once remained busy fixing radios, transistors and CRT televisions now receive only a few customers. The shortage of spare parts has made repairs even more difficult.

Seventy-year-old Ajit Kumar, who has been repairing radios, transistors and televisions for the past 40 years, said the demand for radio sets began declining after 2015-16 as smartphones became more popular. At the same time, LED televisions replaced CRT sets, reducing repair work further.

According to Ajit Kumar, customers bringing old radios and CRT televisions for repairs have become rare, while spare parts for these devices are now difficult to source. Based on his experience, he estimates that around 100 to 150 technicians in Jammu have left the traditional repair trade due to declining demand, with many shifting to repairing mobile phones, LED TVs and other electronic devices.

As technology continues to evolve, the demand for traditional radio sets and CRT televisions is steadily declining, leaving a decades-old repair trade struggling to survive.

MY Bharat organises 'Nasha Mukt Yuva for Viksit Bharat' programme

BLAZING TALES NEWS SERVICE

KATHUA, AUGUST 2026: - Mera Yuva Bharat (MY Bharat), Kathua, under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, organised the "Nasha Mukt Yuva for Viksit Bharat" programme at Government Degree College (Women), Kathua, with around 170 participants taking part in the anti-drug awareness initiative.

The programme witnessed enthusiastic participation from students of the Gujjar and Bakarwal Hostel, NSS volunteers and NCC cadets of the college.

The event began with the rendition of Vande Mataram and the National Anthem, followed by the administration of the "Nasha Mukt Yuva for Viksit Bharat" pledge, reaffirming the participants' commitment to remain free from substance abuse and contribute towards building a healthy and developed India.

Addressing the gathering, Deputy Director, MY Bharat Kathua, Jigmat Spaldon, highlighted the crucial role of youth in combating drug abuse and achieving the vision of Viksit Bharat. She urged the participants to become ambassadors of the anti-drug campaign in their communities.

The participants also joined the nationwide virtual programme, during which Union Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports and Labour and Employment Mansukh Mandaviya called upon young people to lead the movement against substance abuse and actively contribute to nation-building.

As part of the event, a Nukkad Natak depicting the harmful effects of drug addiction was presented to spread awareness and reinforce the message of collective responsibility in creating a drug-free society.

The participants later watched the virtual address of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who encouraged the youth to play a proactive role in building a drug-free India and emphasised their responsibility in shaping the nation's future.

Faculty members, NSS Programme Officers, MY Bharat officials and staff of Government Degree College (Women), Kathua, were also present.

The programme concluded with a collective pledge by the participants to spread the message of "Nasha Mukt Yuva for Viksit Bharat" among their families, friends and communities and contribute towards the vision of a drug-free and developed India.

Jammu Railway Division collects nearly Rs 78 lakh in fines in July

BLAZING TALES NEWS SERVICE

JAMMU, AUGUST, 2026: - The Jammu Division of Northern Railway collected nearly Rs 78 lakh in penalties after detecting more than 10,000 cases of ticketless and irregular travel during a month-long special enforcement drive conducted in July.

According to an official spokesperson, the special drive was launched across the division to curb ticketless travel, unauthorised travel in higher classes, carriage of unbooked luggage and other violations of railway rules through intensive ticket-checking operations.Ticket-checking staff carried out surprise and routine inspections in mail, express and passenger trains, besides conducting checks at major railway stations across the division under the supervision of Senior Divisional Commercial Manager Uchit Singhal.

The spokesperson said the drive resulted in the detection of 10,014 cases of ticketless and irregular travel during July.

Penalties imposed under railway rules generated revenue of Rs 77,97,430.

Appreciating the efforts of the ticket-checking staff, Singhal said the objective of the Jammu Division is not only to enhance revenue but also to create awareness among passengers and encourage them to travel in accordance with railway regulations.

He credited the success of the campaign to the dedication and vigilance of the ticket-checking staff and said the division would continue to organise intensive checking drives in the future to improve passenger convenience and safeguard railway property.



MLA Yudhvir Sethi announces Rs 20 lakh grant for GGM Science College

BLAZING TALES NEWS SERVICE

JAMMU, AUGUST, 2026: - MLA Jammu East Yudhvir Sethi announced a grant of Rs 20 lakh from his Constituency Development Fund (CDF) for the infrastructure development and overall strengthening of Government Gandhi Memorial (GGM) Science College during the launch of the nationwide 'Nasha Mukt Yuva for Viksit Bharat Sankalp Abhiyan'.

The campaign was launched across the country by Prime Minister Narendra Modi through video conferencing with the objective of encouraging youth to stay away from substance abuse and contribute towards building a developed and drug-free India.

Addressing students, faculty members and other dignitaries at GGM Science College, Sethi lauded the Government's efforts to safeguard the future of the younger generation through initiatives aimed at combating drug abuse. He urged students to remain vigilant against the menace of drugs, become role models in society and actively spread awareness among their peers.



Emphasising the role of youth in nation-building, the legislator said the campaign seeks to inspire young people to become ambassadors of positive social change and support the vision of a developed India free from substance abuse. Vice Chancellor of Cluster University of Jammu, K. S. Chandrasekhar, who attended the programme as the Guest of Honour, highlighted the responsibility of universities and colleges in shaping socially responsible citizens.

He stressed the need for educational institutions to strengthen awareness programmes, counselling initiatives and community outreach activities to tackle the growing challenge of drug addiction.

Earlier, Principal of GGM Science College Romesh Kumar Gupta welcomed the guests and underlined the increasing threat posed by substance abuse. He said educational institutions, parents, civil society and government agencies must work collectively to create awareness and promote a healthy, disciplined and drug-free society.

The event witnessed enthusiastic participation from undergraduate and postgraduate students, faculty members, staff, deans of Cluster University of Jammu and NCC cadets. The programme concluded with participants taking a pledge to support the objectives of the 'Nasha Mukt Yuva for Viksit Bharat Sankalp Abhiyan' and work towards building a drug-free and developed India.

Vriddhi – The Digital Beti' empowers 25 more girls with digital skills

BLAZING TALES NEWS SERVICE



JAMMU, AUGUST :- A special facilitation ceremony was organised at Hotel Hari Niwas to recognise the contribution of 'Vriddhi – The Digital Beti', a digital empowerment initiative conceptualised by Kunwrani Ritu Singh under the Ashok Kapur Foundation in collaboration with NIIT, New Delhi. The programme celebrated the successful completion of the third batch of 25 girls from villages around the Marh block, who received training in digital and computer skills as part of the initiative.

The event was attended by Anjali Khosla, Nandita Baig, Principal DPS Nagbani R.K. Verma and other distinguished guests. The participants were trained by Rohit Charak, computer instructor at DPS Nagbani.

The initiative aims to bridge the digital divide by providing quality digital education, computer literacy and technology-based learning opportunities to girls, particularly those from underserved communities. Through digital learning facilities, the programme seeks to equip young girls with the knowledge and skills required to thrive in the 21st century.

Speakers at the ceremony appreciated the efforts of Kunwrani Ritu Singh for promoting women's empowerment and inclusive education through digital learning. They also lauded the Ashok Kapur Foundation and NIIT, New Delhi, for creating meaningful opportunities that enable girls to become confident and self-reliant. Addressing the gathering, Ritu Singh reaffirmed her commitment to expanding the initiative so that more girls can benefit from digital education, skill development and holistic empowerment. She said investing in the education and digital capability of girls is an investment in the nation's future. She also announced that the Ashok Kapur Foundation will soon launch an in-house skill training programme for marginalised sections of society.

The programme will focus on enhancing employability by equipping participants with relevant skills and making them job-ready, thereby promoting greater social and economic inclusion.

Article 370 abrogation ensured constitutional equality: Purnima



BLAZING TALES NEWS SERVICE

JAMMU, AUGUST: BJP spokesperson and former Deputy Mayor of Jammu, Advocate Purnima Sharma described the abrogation of Article 370 as a historic decision that ensured constitutional equality, social justice and the complete integration of Jammu and Kashmir with the rest of the country."Addressing a press conference at the BJP headquarters along with party spokesperson Rajni Sethi, Sharma credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah for taking what she termed a landmark constitutional decision on August 5, 2019."She said the move fulfilled the vision of "One Nation, One Constitution and One Flag," adding that Amit Shah played a key role in translating that vision into constitutional reality."Sharma said the Constitution of India became fully applicable to Jammu and Kashmir following the decision, extending to the people of the Union Territory the same fundamental rights and constitutional safeguards available across the country."She said several central laws relating to education, women's safety, child protection, social justice, disability rights, transparency and accountability were extended or adapted to Jammu and Kashmir. Among the legislations she highlighted were the Right to Education Act, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, the Juvenile Justice Act and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act."Highlighting women's empowerment, Sharma said laws relating to domestic violence, workplace sexual harassment, maternity benefits, property and succession now provide uniform legal safeguards. She added that Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Economically Weaker Sections and other marginalised communities have also benefited from expanded constitutional protections, reservation provisions and welfare schemes, including EWS reservation."She further said the implementation of anti-corruption laws had strengthened transparency and accountability in governance, while a uniform judicial framework had clarified the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court and other constitutional institutions in Jammu and Kashmir."Referring to local governance, Sharma said the three-tier Panchayati Raj system had strengthened grassroots democracy by enhancing the participation of elected representatives in planning, financial decision-making and developmental activities."She also stated that national economic legislations, including the Companies Act and the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, have created a more uniform framework for investment, entrepreneurship and employment. Greater clarity in property and inheritance laws, she added, has further strengthened the rights of women and other lawful heirs."According to Sharma, national welfare provisions for minorities, senior citizens, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable sections have become more accessible following the constitutional changes."Referring to the Supreme Court's Constitution Bench judgment delivered in December 2023, Sharma said the court upheld the presidential measures that rendered Article 370 inoperative, affirming their constitutional validity."Speaking on the occasion, BJP spokesperson Rajni Sethi described August 5 as a turning point for women, children and marginalised communities."

She said the Modi government removed constitutional barriers and ensured equal access to progressive national laws, describing the development as a reflection of the Prime Minister's resolve and the Union Home Minister's leadership.

"Both leaders maintained that the abrogation of Article 370 had strengthened the vision of "Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat" and laid the foundation for peace, transparent governance, investment and inclusive development in Jammu and Kashmir.

Drugs-free youth crucial for developed India, says PM Modi



NEW DELHI, AUGUST: Prime Minister Narendra Modi has launched the 'Nasha Mukt Yuva for Viksit Bharat Sankalp Abhiyan', calling for a nationwide movement against drug abuse and asserting that a healthy, drug-free youth population is essential to achieving the goal of a developed India by 2047.

Addressing the launch programme virtually, Modi said India's demographic strength could become its greatest asset only if young people remained physically and mentally fit and stayed away from substance abuse.

"As India has set the goal of becoming a developed country, it is essential for the youth to remain physically and mentally fit, and therefore stay away from drug abuse," he said.

The nationwide campaign, backed by more than 125 spiritual organisations, educational institutions, industrial associations and public bodies, was organised at over 28,000 locations across the country. More than one crore young people participated, while several Chief Ministers and Governors also joined the initiative. Participants took a pledge to work towards making India drug-free.

The Prime Minister announced that the campaign would continue for the next 100 weeks, with activities every Sunday focusing on sports, art, culture, meditation, spirituality and community service to spread awareness about the dangers of drug addiction.

Highlighting the role of youth in nation-building, Modi said today's young generation would lead India into the era of a developed nation and would be the primary beneficiaries of that achievement by 2047.

He noted that Indian youth were excelling in startups, artificial intelligence, sports, science and space, and said the country needed their energy, innovation and talent to realise its development goals.

Warning against the growing menace of drug abuse, the Prime Minister said addiction destroys individual aspirations, breaks families and weakens society. He also alleged that hostile forces use drug trafficking as a means to undermine the country's future by targeting its youth.

Modi urged families not to hide cases of addiction and instead seek timely professional help. He said rehabilitation centres had been established across the country to help affected individuals recover and rebuild their lives.

"A person who defeats addiction is a true warrior. Society should respect them and give them a second chance.

— Agencies

Pakistan dismantled goodwill behind Indus Water Treaty, says India's US envoy



WASHINGTON, AUGUST: India's Ambassador to the United States, Vinay Mohan Kwatra, has said Pakistan spent decades eroding the goodwill and friendship that formed the foundation of the Indus Water Treaty (IWT), asserting that India's decision to keep the treaty in abeyance merely recognised a reality created by Pakistan's own conduct.

In an article published in Newsweek magazine, Kwatra said the treaty, signed in 1960, was concluded in a spirit of goodwill and friendship, but Pakistan consistently undermined that spirit through wars, cross-border terrorism and obstruction of India's legitimate rights under the agreement.

Referring to India's decision to place the treaty in abeyance following the April 2025 Pahalgam terror attack, in which 26 people, mostly tourists, were killed, he said the move acknowledged what Pakistan had already destroyed through its actions over several decades.

Kwatra noted that the treaty allocated about 80 per cent of the Indus basin waters to Pakistan while India retained control over rivers carrying roughly 20 per cent of the basin's water. Despite this asymmetry, he said, India honoured its commitments under the agreement.

He alleged that Pakistan responded with repeated military conflicts in 1965, 1971 and 1999, besides supporting cross-border terrorism, including the attacks on Parliament in 2001, Mumbai in 2008, Pathankot and Uri in 2016, Pulwama in 2019 and Pahalgam in 2025.

The Ambassador also accused Pakistan of repeatedly delaying and obstructing India-initiated projects permitted under the treaty and blocking efforts to modernise the agreement in line with technological advancements and contemporary requirements.

"If Pakistan sincerely wants India's cooperation on bilateral issues, it must first dismantle the terror infrastructure it has built over the years," he said.

Kwatra said repeated calls for dialogue ignored the history of failed initiatives and reiterated Prime Minister Narendra Modi's position that "terror and talks cannot go together, terror and trade cannot go together, and water and blood cannot flow together."

He further argued that Pakistan's water scarcity stemmed primarily from poor domestic water management rather than India's actions, urging Islamabad to improve water productivity instead of blaming New Delhi.

(Agencies)

Odisha Cabinet approves Bill to create Economic Region Development Authorities

BHUBANESWAR, AUGUST: The Odisha Cabinet has approved a proposal to introduce the Odisha Development Authorities (Amendment) Bill, 2026, paving the way for the creation of Economic Region Development Authorities to plan and manage multi-district economic corridors across the state.

The proposed legislation seeks to amend the Odisha Development Authorities Act, 1982, enabling the state government to notify and establish new economic regions without requiring separate legislation on each occasion.

Following approval of the amendment by the Odisha Assembly, the state will establish its first City Economic Region — the Bhubaneswar-Kataka-Puri-Paradeep Economic Region (BKPPER).

Developed as a pilot project in collaboration with NITI Aayog, BKPPER aims to integrate ports, industrial clusters, urban centres, logistics infrastructure and major cultural and religious destinations into a unified economic region to accelerate investment and development.

The Union Budget 2026-27 has recognised BKPPER as one of the country's four key City Economic Regions expected to drive India's economic growth, alongside Varanasi, Surat and Visakhapatnam.

Chief Secretary Anu Garg said regional master plans would extend beyond conventional municipal boundaries to harness the economic strengths of adjoining districts, improve transport connectivity, enhance housing infrastructure and attract large-scale investments.

The Cabinet also approved the second phase of the Mukhya Mantri Janajati Jeevika Mission (MMJJM 2.0), expanding the flagship tribal livelihood programme to benefit around eight lakh Tribal and Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) households.

The programme, which earlier covered 1.5 lakh households across 13 districts, will now be implemented in 19 districts covering 134 Tribal Sub-Plan and Micro Project Area blocks, 23 Integrated Tribal Development Agencies and 20 Micro Project Areas.

Scheduled to run from 2026-27 to 2030-31, the mission has a total financial outlay of ?2,995 crore, fully funded by the State Government. Under the programme, each beneficiary household will receive financial assistance of ?30,000 through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) in two instalments.

Beneficiaries will be free to select livelihood activities suited to local resources, including agriculture, horticulture, livestock rearing, fisheries, sericulture, non-timber forest produce, handlooms, traditional crafts and rural entrepreneurship.

(Agencies)

EDITORIAL

Skill Education Key to J&K's Growth Agenda

JAMMU and Kashmir stands at a crucial stage in its development journey. With a young population, expanding educational institutions and growing opportunities in sectors such as tourism, hospitality, healthcare, information technology, media, agriculture and entrepreneurship, the Union Territory has the potential to emerge as a skilled workforce hub. However, this potential can only be realised if skill education becomes an integral part of mainstream education rather than an optional add-on.

For years, thousands of young graduates in Jammu and Kashmir have entered the job market armed with degrees but lacking industry-relevant skills. The result is a widening gap between education and employability. While government employment continues to be the preferred choice for many, the availability of such jobs remains limited. This mismatch calls for a fundamental shift in the way education is delivered and perceived.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has laid a strong foundation by promoting vocational education, experiential learning and multiple pathways for students. Jammu and Kashmir has also witnessed encouraging initiatives under Mission YUVA, skill development programmes, Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), Polytechnics and various Central and Union Territory-sponsored schemes. Yet, much more needs to be done to ensure these initiatives reach every student and translate into meaningful employment opportunities.

Schools and colleges across the Union Territory should actively integrate skill-based courses into their academic framework. Communication skills, digital literacy, journalism, content creation, artificial intelligence, data analytics, tourism management, hospitality, renewable energy, agriculture, healthcare support services and entrepreneurship are among the sectors that hold immense promise for the region. These courses should not remain confined to theory but must include internships, field visits, practical assignments and regular interaction with industry professionals.

Jammu and Kashmir possesses unique strengths that can be transformed into employment opportunities through focused skill development. The tourism sector requires trained guides, hospitality professionals, travel writers, photographers and digital marketers. The horticulture and agriculture sectors need skilled professionals capable of adopting modern technologies and value-addition practices. The growing startup ecosystem demands young entrepreneurs equipped with business management and digital skills. Similarly, media, sports, handicrafts and information technology offer significant avenues for self-employment and enterprise.

Industry participation is equally important. Educational institutions should establish stronger partnerships with industries, startups, media organisations, hospitals and service providers so that students receive hands-on exposure before completing their studies. Apprenticeships and internships should become a regular feature of higher education, enabling students to understand workplace expectations while building confidence and practical competence.

Equally important is changing societal attitudes towards vocational education. Skill-based careers should not be viewed as secondary to conventional academic degrees.

Beyond the Whistle: The Hidden Physical Demands of Football Refereeing

By Mudasir Bashir

REHBAR-E-KHEL (Physical Education Teacher), Department of Youth Services & Sports, J&K

When we watch a football match, our attention is usually focused on the players, goals and exciting moments. But one of the most physically and mentally demanding roles on the field often goes unnoticed and that is the football referee. Modern referees are not just officials who enforce the Laws of the Game. They are highly trained professionals who must constantly move with the play, stay close to the action and make quick and accurate decisions under pressure. During a 90-minute match, elite referees cover around 10 to 13 kilometres.

Their movement includes walking, jogging, sprinting, running backwards and sideways, and repeatedly accelerating, slowing down and changing direction. Unlike players, referees cannot be substituted when they become tired. They must remain alert and physically active until the final whistle. A referee's fitness is directly linked to the quality of officiating.

If a referee cannot keep up with the game, it may become difficult to maintain the right position to judge important incidents such as fouls, offside situations and penalty decisions. Therefore, modern referees need good endurance, speed, strength, agility and the ability to perform repeated high-intensity movements.

To prepare officials for these demands, football organisations use fitness assessments to measure their endurance, speed, acceleration and ability to change direction. Regular fitness testing helps identify areas for improvement and allows coaches to develop training programmes according to individual needs.

Referee training may include endurance exercises, high-intensity interval training, sprint drills, agility exercises, strength training and mobility work. Proper recovery, nutrition and hydration are equally important. Modern technology, including GPS tracking and heartrate monitoring, can also help coaches understand a referee's workload and plan training more effectively.

However, refereeing is not only about physical fitness. Referees must constantly watch the game, anticipate what may happen next and make decisions within seconds. They must also remain calm and focused while dealing with pressure from players, coaches and spectators.

This makes mental strength, concentration, communication and decision-making equally important. As football becomes faster and more competitive, the role of the referee is becoming increasingly demanding.

Successful officiating requires a combination of physical fitness, knowledge of the Laws of the Game, mental strength and confidence. Adopting a more scientific approach to referee development can help improve the quality of football officiating. Regular fitness assessments, structured training, sports-science support and continuous capacity-building can help develop a stronger pool of physically fit and technically competent referees.

The work of a referee goes far beyond carrying a whistle. Behind every correct decision is an official who has trained hard to be in the right place at the right time. Recognising and supporting referees is therefore not only about developing match officials, it is about strengthening the fairness, integrity and overall quality of football.

Disclaimer:

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the editorial policy or official position of Blazing Tales.

Pakistan's Hindu body seeks implementation of constitutional safeguards for minorities

PESHAWAR, AUGUST: A Hindu rights organisation in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province has announced a statewide outreach campaign to press for the implementation of constitutional guarantees aimed at protecting minority communities and ensuring equal rights.

The announcement was made after Haroon Sarab Dayal was unanimously elected president of the All Balmik Hindu Community Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (ABHCKP) during the organisation's provincial consultative meeting held in Kohat.

Addressing the gathering, Dayal said the Balmik Hindu community continued to face challenges related to legal protection, civil registration, education and equal opportunities. He urged the provincial government to strengthen mechanisms for safeguarding minority rights.

The meeting brought together community elders, religious leaders, lawyers, social activists, government officials, educationists, businesspersons and youth representatives from across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to discuss constitutional safeguards, legal reforms, social inclusion and the future welfare of the community.

Dayal announced the formation of a provincial cabinet and outlined priorities including promoting youth and women's leadership, improving access to birth and marriage registration, national identity cards and inheritance rights, strengthening policy advocacy and encouraging interfaith harmony through education and media.

He called upon the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government to fully implement constitutional provisions relating to fundamental rights and minority protection, including Articles 9, 10, 20, 25, 27 and 36 of Pakistan's Constitution.

He also appealed to the federal government and Parliament to expedite minority personal laws and strengthen legal protection mechanisms. In addition, he urged international human rights organisations, United Nations agencies, diplomatic missions and civil society groups to support vulnerable minority communities in Pakistan.

During the ceremony, community elders honoured Dayal with a traditional tilak, flower garlands and a Pashtun turban, while prayers were offered for peace, equality and prosperity.

According to Pakistan's 2023 Digital Population and Housing Census, the Hindu population in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa stands at about 5,090. Small Hindu communities are primarily concentrated in Peshawar, Kohat, Bannu, Dera Ismail Khan and parts of the Hazara region.

(Agencies)

Iran vows stronger military preparedness despite Trump's pause on fresh strikes

TEHRAN, AUGUST: Iran has declared that it will continue strengthening its military capabilities despite US President Donald Trump's decision to pause fresh military strikes to allow negotiations over Tehran's nuclear programme and the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz.

Acting Defence Minister Majid Ibn al-Reza said Iran regarded every threat from its adversaries as "real and credible" and would not lower its guard under any circumstances.

Speaking to state media, he said Tehran would neither be "caught off guard" nor remain passive, even if such threats were intended as psychological pressure. Instead, Iran would use them to further enhance its military readiness, deterrence and defence capabilities.

His remarks came a day after Trump announced that the United States would suspend plans for another military strike while diplomatic efforts continued to secure an agreement on Iran's nuclear programme and ensure the reopening of the strategically important Strait of Hormuz.

In a post on Truth Social, Trump said several Middle Eastern countries, along with Iran, had requested additional time to finalise an agreement that would ensure the "immediate, complete and total" reopening of the waterway and eliminate what he described as Iran's nuclear threat. Trump said he had agreed to cancel the planned attack, provided a deal could be reached quickly. He also claimed that Israel supported the decision. According to Saudi Arabia's official SPA news agency, Trump and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman also discussed efforts to reduce regional tensions, with the Crown Prince stressing the importance of dialogue and diplomatic solutions. The latest diplomatic initiative follows more than five months of conflict that began in February after the United States and Israel launched strikes on Iranian targets. An earlier ceasefire had collapsed, leading to renewed hostilities and heightened tensions across the region.

The conflict has disrupted stability in the Middle East, pushed global oil prices higher and raised concerns over maritime security in the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's busiest energy shipping routes.

(Agencies)

US advises citizens to consider leaving Middle East

WASHINGTON, AUGUST: The United States has advised its citizens to consider leaving the Middle East or be prepared to depart if the regional security situation deteriorates, as President Donald Trump warned that Iran would face severe military action if tensions continue to escalate.

The US State Department issued the advisory amid rising hostilities across the region, including drone attacks in Kuwait and fresh security incidents involving commercial vessels near the Strait of Hormuz.

Speaking during a Cabinet meeting at the Camp David presidential retreat, Trump indicated that Washington was prepared for a sustained military campaign against Iran.

"We just want to win," Trump told reporters, adding that the United States would hit Iran "very hard" until it could no longer sustain the conflict.

White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt later accused Tehran of violating last month's memorandum of understanding that had temporarily halted hostilities.

She alleged that Iran had attacked commercial shipping and was responsible for the deaths of American soldiers, warning that Tehran would continue to face consequences until it returned to negotiations in what President Trump considered a meaningful manner. Meanwhile, Kuwait's armed forces said they had detected and destroyed hostile drones that entered the country's airspace. According to Kuwaiti authorities, the drones struck a government facility in the north and civilian property on Bubiyan Island, causing material damage but no casualties.



The attacks came days after Iran expanded retaliatory operations against US allies in the Gulf following renewed American strikes.

Commercial shipping also remained under pressure. Britain's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) reported that a tanker was hit by an unidentified projectile northeast of Lima, Oman, damaging its engine room. In a separate incident, another tanker reported an explosion northwest of Khasab, Oman. No casualties were reported in either case.

The renewed tensions have also affected Gaza and Lebanon, where Israel carried out fresh military strikes despite Hamas indicating its willingness to disarm under a US-backed ceasefire framework.

(Agencies)

CWG medalists receive grand welcome on return

NEW DELHI, AUGUST: Indian athletes returned home to a rousing reception after a successful campaign at the 2026 Commonwealth Games, with hundreds of fans gathering at the Indira Gandhi International Airport to welcome the first batch of medal winners.

Among those who arrived were Olympic medallist Mirabai Chanu, Lovepreet Singh, Bindyarani Devi, Rishikanta Singh, Harjinder Kaur, Raja Muthupandi, Valluri Ajaya Babu and Martina Devi.

Mirabai Chanu, who won her third successive Commonwealth Games gold medal in the women's 49kg weightlifting event, said she felt proud to have contributed to the country's success.

Lovepreet Singh, who secured silver in the men's +110kg category after narrowly missing gold by one kilogram, said his next target is the Asian Games in Japan. He thanked the Indian Navy, his coaches and supporters for their encouragement.

Bronze medallist Bindyarani Devi said the warm reception had motivated her to work even harder for future competitions, while silver medallist Rishikanta Singh pledged to return stronger with the aim of winning gold at upcoming international events.



Appealing for peace in his home state of Manipur, Rishikanta said a peaceful environment would help nurture more sporting talent from the region.

India's weightlifting contingent concluded its Commonwealth Games campaign with eight medals comprising one gold, six silver and one bronze.

Chief National Coach Vijay Sharma expressed satisfaction with the overall performance, saying the team would work on areas of improvement to convert silver medals into gold in future competitions. He also praised Mirabai Chanu for her consistency and discipline.

Harjinder Kaur said her goal is to upgrade her silver medal to gold at the 2030 Commonwealth Games in Ahmedabad.

Raja Muthupandi described his silver medal as the reward for years of perseverance after overcoming multiple surgeries. He said his immediate focus would be the Asian Games before beginning preparations for qualification for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.

Silver medallist Valluri Ajaya Babu also set his sights on qualifying for the Los Angeles Olympics and the 2030 Commonwealth Games, while Martina Devi, who finished fifth in the women's +86kg category, termed her maiden Commonwealth Games appearance a valuable learning experience.

Meanwhile, Boxing Federation of India President Ajay Singh said the management of a popular Indian restaurant in Glasgow had assured the Indian boxing contingent that it would correct a map of India displayed on its premises after boxer Lovlina Borgohain pointed out that the country's Northeast was missing from it. Singh said the issue was resolved amicably after the management acknowledged the mistake.

In another development, reigning world champion Jaismine Lamboria was named India's flag-bearer for the Commonwealth Games closing ceremony. India will host the next edition of the Commonwealth Games in Ahmedabad in 2030, with the official handover taking place during the closing ceremony.

— Agencies

J&K pacer Auqib Nabi earns maiden India Test call-up

BLAZING TALES NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 3: Jammu and Kashmir fast bowler Auqib Nabi has earned his maiden call-up to the Indian Test team after being named as the replacement for injured pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah for the two-match Test series against Sri Lanka beginning on August 15.



The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) announced the change after Bumrah was ruled out due to persistent discomfort in his left knee while recovering from an injury sustained during the ODI series against England. Despite rehabilitation at the BCCI Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru, the senior pacer failed to regain full fitness in time for the tour.

The 29-year-old seamer from Baramulla has been rewarded for his outstanding domestic performances over the past two seasons. Nabi claimed 104 wickets across the last two Ranji Trophy campaigns, including 60 wickets in the 2025-26 season, playing a key role in Jammu and Kashmir's historic maiden Ranji Trophy title. Nabi further strengthened his case during the recent India A tour of Sri Lanka, where he picked up six wickets in two first-class matches.

His inclusion marks a major milestone for cricket in Jammu and Kashmir, with Nabi becoming the first cricketer from the Union Territory to receive a call-up to India's senior Test squad.

India, led by Shubman Gill, will begin the two-Test series against Sri Lanka in Galle on August 15, with the second Test scheduled to be played in Colombo from August 23. The series is crucial for India's campaign in the ongoing World Test Championship.

India finish fourth in Common wealth Games medal standings



GLASGOW, AUGUST: India concluded its campaign at the 2026 Commonwealth Games with an impressive fourth-place finish on the medals table, winning a total of 39 medals despite the absence of several disciplines that have traditionally contributed to the country's success.

The Indian contingent secured 13 gold, 17 silver and nine bronze medals during the 11-day event. Australia topped the medal standings with 171 medals, including 70 gold, followed by England with 110 medals and Canada with 62. Hosts Scotland also finished with 39 medals but ranked below India due to a lower silver medal count.

India delivered notable performances across boxing, athletics, judo, para sports and weightlifting, reaffirming its position among the Commonwealth's leading sporting nations.

Boxing emerged as India's most successful discipline, contributing 10 medals, including seven gold and three silver. Indian athletes also excelled in athletics and para sports, while the judo team added valuable medals to the overall tally.

The absence of sports such as shooting, badminton, wrestling, hockey and table tennis, along with the reduced competition programme, impacted India's overall medal prospects compared to previous editions. However, the contingent adapted well and remained among the top-performing nations at the Games.

India's campaign also faced setbacks. Judoka Tulika Maan missed the Games after being provisionally suspended over three whereabouts failures under anti-doping regulations.

With the Glasgow Games coming to a close, attention now turns to the 2030 Commonwealth Games, which will be hosted in Ahmedabad. The official handover ceremony during the closing event marked the beginning of preparations for the centenary edition of the Games, which India will host for the second time after New Delhi in 2010.

— Agencies

GDC Kathua XI lift maiden Kathua Cricket League title

BLAZING TALES NEWS SERVICE

KATHUA, AUGUST: The first-ever Kathua Cricket League, organised under the Nasha Mukt J&K Abhiyan, concluded with Government Degree College (GDC) Kathua XI defeating Young Gun XI by eight wickets in the final to lift the championship trophy.

Deputy Commissioner Kathua Rajesh Sharma, who attended the closing ceremony, congratulated the winners, runners-up and all participating teams for making the inaugural edition of the tournament a success. He said the league witnessed participation from 24 teams comprising players below the age of 35, reflecting the district's sporting talent and enthusiasm among youth.

Emphasising the role of sports in steering young people away from drug abuse, the Deputy Commissioner announced that the District Administration would organise more sporting events, including a district-level football tournament. He urged the youth to channelise their energy towards sports and other constructive activities to help build a drug-free Jammu and Kashmir and a drug-free India.



Rajesh Sharma also appreciated the efforts of Chief Planning Officer Ranjit Thakur and the District Administration team for successfully organising the tournament.

In the final, Young Gun XI opted to bat first after winning the toss and posted 169 for 9 in the allotted 20 overs. Ladda top-scored with 73 off 43 balls, while Ritik made 29 and Rahul Choudhary contributed 26. For GDC Kathua XI, Nanav claimed four wickets for 36 runs, while Rishabh Bhargav took three wickets.

In reply, GDC Kathua XI chased down the 170-run target comfortably, reaching 172 for 2 in just 15.2 overs to seal victory with 28 balls to spare. Dhruv remained unbeaten on 66 off 39 deliveries, Dhanveer scored 54 off 39 balls, while Nanav provided a brisk start with 24 off 12 balls. Rahul Singh remained unbeaten on 13 off three balls to complete the chase.

Nanav was named Man of the Match for his all-round performance in the final. Dhruv was adjudged Man of the Tournament and also received the Best Batsman of the Tournament award, while Sahil of Kathua Blasters XI was declared the Best Bowler of the Tournament.

Physical Director GDC Kathua Sandeep Sharma, Chief Agriculture Officer Jatinder Khajuria, Prof. Goutam Singh, District Information Officer Gurpreet Singh and other officers were present on the occasion.

Ashutosh Jamwal wins GH Raisoni Memorial Jammu

BLAZING TALES NEWS SERVICE

JAMMU, AUGUST: Ashutosh Jamwal emerged champion in the GH Raisoni Memorial Jammu Open Chess Tournament, organised by the Jammu District Chess Association at the LA-VEERAZ Chess Hall, Khara Madana.

A total of 71 players participated in the tournament, which witnessed keen competition among players from different age groups.

Senior Vice President of BJP J&K UT Rekha Mahajan inaugurated the tournament by making the ceremonial first move along with Atul Kumar Gupta, Chairman of the Planning and Development Commission of the All India Chess Federation. She appreciated the organisers for providing a regular platform to young chess players to showcase their talent and channelise their energy in a positive direction.

Pazhany Kohli secured the second position, while Sumit Grover finished third. Ravi Kumar, Paras Sharma, Aarav Gupta, Garv, Sahil Mahajan, Imtiaz Lone and Mansoor Ahmed Mir completed the top ten standings.

In the special category awards, Amrita Gupta was declared the Best Woman Player, Manoj Kohli received the Best Veteran award, Ashman Upmanyu won the Best Under-11 prize, while Vaibhav Dwivedi was adjudged the Best Under-15 player.



The tournament was organised under the supervision of Meenal Gupta, President of the All J&K Chess Association. Stuti Gupta officiated as the Chief Arbiter, while Mansha Mahajan served as the Deputy Chief Arbiter.

Cash prizes worth Rs 50,000 along with trophies were presented to the winners at the concluding ceremony.

Over 200 players participate as District Badminton Tournament concludes

BLAZING TALES NEWS SERVICE

KATHUA, AUGUST : The District Badminton Tournament, organised by the District Administration Kathua under the Nasha Mukt Jammu Kashmir Abhiyan, concluded at the Indoor Sports Stadium, Kathua, with Deputy Commissioner Rajesh Sharma felicitating the winners and runners-up in various categories.

The tournament attracted an overwhelming response, with more than 200 players competing in Under-14, Under-19, Senior and Veteran categories for boys and girls. A total of 211 matches were played during the competition, providing a platform for young shuttlers from across the district to showcase their talent.

Addressing the participants, the Deputy Commissioner said the tournament was organised to engage youth in constructive activities, promote sports as a healthy lifestyle and encourage optimum utilisation of the sports infrastructure available in the district.

Highlighting the growing participation of girls in sports, Rajesh Sharma said women are excelling alongside men in every field. He added that Kathua is emerging as a sporting hub and assured that facilities at the Indoor Sports Stadium would be further strengthened.

The Deputy Commissioner appreciated the efforts of Chief Planning Officer Ranjeet Thakur, Assistant Director Fisheries Pawan Paul Sharma and their team for successfully organising the tournament. He also acknowledged the support extended by former Municipal Councillor Rahul Dev and the management of Kartar Public School, Kathua.

In the finals, Priyashi and Sunshine won the Under-19 Girls' Doubles title, while Kulbhandu emerged champion in the Men's Singles event. Akshay and Nitish claimed the Men's Doubles title.

Manyata secured double honours by winning both the Women's Singles and Under-19 Girls' Singles titles.

NCVET, Skill Universities discuss strengthening vocational education ecosystem

NEW DELHI, AUGUST: The National Council for Vocational Education and Training (NCVET), under the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), convened a meeting with Skill Universities to strengthen India's vocational education ecosystem through greater collaboration, quality assurance and policy convergence.

The meeting, held at Kaushal Bhawan, New Delhi, was chaired by Secretary, MSDE and NCVET Chairperson Debashree Mukherjee. Additional Secretary, MSDE and NCVET Executive Member N.K. Sudhanshu, Executive Member Ashok Kumar Gaba, Economic Advisor Archana Mayaram and NCVET Directors Vikram Singh Bhati and Saurabh S. Bisht also attended.



More than 25 senior academic leaders representing 14 Skill Universities from 10 states and one Union Territory participated in the consultation. The universities included Delhi Skill and Entrepreneurship University, Symbiosis Skills and Professional University, Medhavi Skills University, Shri Vishwakarma Skill University, Ratan Tata Maharashtra State Skills University, Assam Skill University, Kaushalya – The Skill University, Young India Skills University, Bhartiya Skill Development University, Scope Global Skills University, Centurion University of Technology and Management, Sikkim Skill University, Lamrin Tech Skills University and Vishvakarma Skills University, Jaipur.

The consultation was organised in line with the vision of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which seeks seamless integration of vocational education with higher education, enhanced learner mobility, multiple academic pathways and lifelong learning opportunities.

Addressing the meeting, Debashree Mukherjee highlighted the critical role of Skill Universities in developing a future-ready workforce and reiterated NCVET's commitment to building a transparent, quality-driven and outcome-based regulatory framework. She stressed the need for closer collaboration among institutions to promote innovation, strengthen quality assurance and expand the adoption of the National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF).

Representatives of the participating universities presented their institutional initiatives, innovative models of skill delivery, industry partnerships and experiences in implementing vocational education programmes. They also highlighted operational and regulatory challenges and suggested measures to strengthen the country's vocational education framework.

The discussions focused on integration of vocational education with higher education, quality assurance, NSQF-aligned qualifications, academic credit mobility, apprenticeship integration, industry collaboration, micro-credentials, technology-enabled learning, faculty development, learner progression pathways and improving employability outcomes.

The participating universities appreciated NCVET's efforts to establish a transparent regulatory system and called for simplified regulatory processes, enhanced institutional capacity and greater collaboration across the skill development ecosystem.

Concluding the meeting, Debashree Mukherjee reaffirmed NCVET's commitment to continued engagement with Skill Universities and other stakeholders to develop an integrated, flexible and globally benchmarked vocational education system aligned with the goals of the National Education Policy 2020 and the vision of Viksit Bharat.

NEET-PG 2026 introduces candidate-friendly reforms, enhanced security measures

NEW DELHI, AUGUST: The Centre has introduced a series of reforms for the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test for Postgraduate (NEET-PG) 2026, including more time per question, examination centres closer to candidates' homes and enhanced security measures to make the examination more transparent, secure and candidate-friendly.

Union Health Minister J.P. Nadda reviewed the preparations for the examination, scheduled to be held on August 30, and assessed the arrangements for its smooth conduct.

A total of 2,73,183 candidates have registered for NEET-PG 2026, an increase of more than 12.5 per cent over the previous year. The examination will be conducted in a single shift across nearly 340 cities at more than 1,300 examination centres.

One of the major changes this year relates to the allotment of examination centres. Candidates will now be required to indicate three state preferences, with their correspondence state as the mandatory first preference, increasing the likelihood of being allotted a centre closer to their residence. The examination city intimation slip will also be issued nearly three weeks before the test to provide candidates sufficient time to plan their travel.

The examination pattern has also been revised. NEET-PG 2026 will comprise 180 questions to be answered in 210 minutes, providing candidates with more time per question while keeping the overall duration of the examination unchanged.

To strengthen the integrity of the examination process, the government has introduced Aadhaar-based authentication during the application process as well as on the examination day. In cases where fingerprint verification is unsuccessful, iris-based biometric authentication will be used as an alternative.

The Health Minister was briefed on comprehensive security arrangements, including advance sealing and verification of examination centres, CCTV surveillance, biometric verification, frisking of candidates, deployment of signal jammers, dynamic computer allocation, live monitoring through central and regional command centres and supervision by independent observers.

More than 60,000 examination personnel will be deployed to ensure the smooth and secure conduct of the examination.

According to the government, the end-to-end question paper preparation and delivery process has been further strengthened through multiple layers of encryption, secure offline preparation, time-bound finalisation of the question paper shortly before the examination and controlled digital decryption only at the scheduled commencement of the test.

Urging candidates not to believe rumours or fraudulent claims, J.P. Nadda said the final question paper is selected through a highly secure, encrypted and time-bound process shortly before the examination begins.

GDC Majalta concludes internship on AI and computer applications

BLAZING TALES NEWS SERVICE

MAJALTA, AUGUST: Government Degree College (GDC) Majalta concluded a 15-day Summer Internship on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Computer Applications, aimed at equipping students with practical knowledge of emerging technologies, digital skills and modern computer applications.

The internship, held from July 16 to August 1, was organised under the guidance of Principal Alpana Vohra, who highlighted the growing importance of artificial intelligence and digital literacy in higher education. She encouraged students to embrace technological innovations to enhance their academic and professional careers.

The programme featured interactive sessions by Ravia Gupta, Assistant Professor, University of Jammu and Certified FactShala and AI Trainer, and Divya Vasu, entrepreneur, IT expert and Guest Faculty at IIMC Jammu. Through lectures, practical demonstrations and discussions, they introduced students to the fundamentals of artificial intelligence, AI-powered tools, digital productivity, automation, computer applications and the ethical use of emerging technologies.

The internship was coordinated by Krishana Kumar Pangotra of the Department of Computer Applications, who supervised the programme and ensured its smooth conduct.

During the internship, students participated in practical exercises, demonstrations, group discussions and hands-on activities designed to strengthen their understanding of AI and computer applications. The sessions focused on improving digital skills, problem-solving abilities and the effective use of modern technology in education and professional life.

Participants appreciated the programme, describing it as informative, interactive and relevant to the rapidly evolving technological landscape.

SKUAST-K becomes first university in Kashmir to conduct paperless postgraduate examination

BLAZING TALES NEWS SERVICE

SRINAGAR, AUGUST: Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology of Kashmir (SKUAST-K) has become the first university in the Kashmir Valley to conduct a completely paperless postgraduate semester examination, marking a significant milestone in the digital transformation of higher education in the region.

The university successfully conducted a tablet-based examination for around 150 postgraduate students enrolled in the course Statistical Methods for Applied Sciences, replacing the conventional pen-and-paper system with a secure digital examination platform.

The initiative was introduced under the leadership of Vice Chancellor Nazir Ahmad Ganai as part of the university's efforts to modernise academic administration through technology-driven, sustainable and student-friendly practices. The move is aimed at creating a future-ready academic ecosystem in line with global standards in digital education.



The examination was coordinated under the supervision of Controller of Examinations K.N. Qaisar, Dean, Faculty of Horticulture, Raihana Habib Kanth, and Head, Division of Agricultural Statistics, Imran Khan, who ensured the smooth conduct of the examination while maintaining academic standards and data security.

The examination process was monitored by Aziz Mujtaba Aezum, M. Iqbal Jeelani and Immad A. Shah, who supervised classroom operations, provided technical assistance and facilitated students throughout the examination.

Describing the initiative as a landmark achievement, Vice Chancellor Nazir Ahmad Ganai said the successful conduct of the digital examination reflects the university's commitment to adopting innovative technologies that enhance academic quality while promoting sustainability and operational efficiency.

He said the transition represents more than replacing paper with digital devices, adding that it is an important step towards making academic processes more transparent, efficient and environmentally responsible while preparing students for a technology-driven future.

SKUAST-K had earlier introduced paperless examinations for undergraduate end-term assessments.

Extending the system to postgraduate programmes marks another major step towards fully digitising the university's examination and evaluation process.

According to the university, the digital platform significantly reduces paper consumption, printing and physical storage requirements, supporting environmental sustainability. It also enables secure digital distribution of question papers, encrypted submission of answer scripts and faster evaluation, resulting in quicker declaration of results.

To ensure the integrity of the examination, the platform operates in a secure locked environment that prevents access to external resources during the test. Digital audit trails, automated timestamps and activity logs further strengthen transparency and accountability throughout the assessment process.

The initiative is also expected to familiarise students with computer-based examinations, preparing them for national-level competitive examinations such as ICAR-NET, GATE, CSIR-UGC NET and the Civil Services Examination. The platform includes accessibility features such as adjustable font sizes and enhanced screen visibility to improve the examination experience.

Following the successful conduct of the postgraduate examination, SKUAST-K plans to gradually extend the paperless examination system to all undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, further strengthening its position as a leader in technology-enabled agricultural education and academic innovation.

Emerging trends in biotechnology discussed at GCW Parade awareness programme

BLAZING TALES NEWS SERVICE

JAMMU, AUGUST: The Science Club and Department of Biotechnology, Government College for Women (GCW), Parade Ground, Jammu, in collaboration with the J&K Science, Technology & Innovation Council (JKSTIC), Department of Science & Technology, organised a one-day awareness programme on "Emerging Trends in Biotechnology" at the college auditorium.

More than 150 students and faculty members participated in the programme, which focused on creating awareness about recent advancements, research opportunities and career prospects in biotechnology.

Welcoming the participants, Science Club Convener Aasia Rashid Bhat highlighted the importance of exposing students to emerging scientific developments and career opportunities in the rapidly evolving field of biotechnology. The proceedings were jointly conducted by Aasia Rashid Bhat and Head of the Department of Biotechnology Kaurab Singh.

Presiding over the inaugural session, Principal Naveen Anand stressed the significance of such programmes in promoting scientific awareness and nurturing a research-oriented mindset among students. He reiterated the college's commitment to strengthening the Department of Biotechnology through collaborations with leading research and innovation institutions to enhance opportunities in research, skill development, innovation and entrepreneurship.

Deputy Director, JKSTIC, Shruti Khanna and Accounts Officer Ieshita Choudhary also attended the programme and appreciated the college's initiative while assuring continued support for promoting scientific education and innovation.

The programme featured two expert lectures. Director, School of Biotechnology, University of Jammu, Madhulika Bhagat delivered a lecture on the latest advancements and emerging opportunities in biotechnology. She highlighted cutting-edge research trends, interdisciplinary learning and expanding career avenues, encouraging students to contribute to scientific research and innovation.

Business Manager, Technology Business Incubator (TBI), CSIR–Indian Institute of Integrative Medicine (CSIR-IIIM), Jammu, Vidushi Abrol spoke on emerging trends in research, technology translation and their applications in academia and industry. She explained the role of the Technology Business Incubator in promoting innovation, supporting startups, encouraging entrepreneurship and translating scientific research into commercially viable technologies.

The programme concluded with an interactive session during which students sought guidance on higher education, research opportunities, startup incubation, innovation ecosystems and career prospects in biotechnology.

Manjulla Gupta from the Department of Chemistry presented the vote of thanks, expressing gratitude to the resource persons, JKSTIC officials, the Principal, faculty members and participants.

The event was organised by Science Club members Harmanmeet Kour, Aasia Rashid Bhat, Usha Devi, Sarita Parihar, Tishu Devi, Kaurab Singh, Manjulla Gupta and Pervaiz Ahmad Pervaiz.

Climate change threatens every child's future, says UNICEF

NEW DELHI, AUGUST: Climate change is no longer only an environmental issue but a growing child rights crisis that is reshaping every aspect of children's lives, from health and education to nutrition and protection, according to UNICEF.



In its latest assessment on Climate Change and the Environment, UNICEF warned that millions of children across Asia and the Pacific are already facing the devastating consequences of a crisis they did not create. Rising temperatures, floods, droughts, storms, wildfires, air pollution and disease outbreaks are disrupting education, increasing malnutrition and displacement, exposing children to child labour and child marriage, and threatening their physical and mental well-being.

UNICEF noted that Asia and the Pacific remains one of the world's most climate-vulnerable regions, with the largest number of children exposed to multiple climate hazards. Countries such as Pakistan and Myanmar face some of the highest levels of combined climate risks, while low-lying island nations including Tuvalu and the Maldives confront existential threats from rising sea levels.

The report said children born in East Asia and the Pacific today are expected to experience six times more climate-related disasters than their grandparents did, as floods, storms, droughts and landslides have increased dramatically over the past five decades. Repeated disasters continue to interrupt education, healthcare and social protection while placing additional psychological and economic burdens on families.

UNICEF also highlighted environmental degradation, particularly air pollution, as one of the greatest threats to children's health. Nearly every child in Asia is exposed to unhealthy air, with South Asia remaining the world's most polluted region. In East Asia and the Pacific, more than 100 children under the age of five die every day from illnesses linked to air pollution.

The agency warned that polluted air affects children even before birth by increasing the risks of premature delivery and low birth weight. As children grow, prolonged exposure can lead to asthma, lung damage, developmental delays and chronic illnesses, including cardiovascular disease and diabetes, while also affecting cognitive development and academic performance.

To address these challenges, UNICEF is implementing its Sustainability and Climate Change Action Plan 2023–2030, which focuses on making essential services such as schools, healthcare facilities, water and sanitation systems and social protection programmes more resilient to climate shocks.

The organisation is also working with governments across Asia and the Pacific to strengthen climate-resilient infrastructure, promote green skills among young people, place children at the centre of national climate policies and financing, and support youth-led climate action. During climate emergencies, UNICEF combines humanitarian assistance with long-term investments in disaster preparedness, climate adaptation and community resilience.

Warning that climate-related disasters will become more frequent and severe if global emissions are not reduced, UNICEF projected that by the 2050s, four times as many children in South Asia could be exposed to extreme heatwaves and twice as many to severe river flooding. Across East Asia and the Pacific, an estimated 243 million children are already exposed to increasingly intense and prolonged heatwaves.

Calling for urgent global action, UNICEF urged governments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, invest in climate-smart social services and ensure that children's needs and perspectives are fully integrated into climate policies and development planning.

The agency stressed that while children are among those most affected by climate change, they are also emerging as leaders in climate action and deserve greater support to build a safer, healthier and more sustainable future.

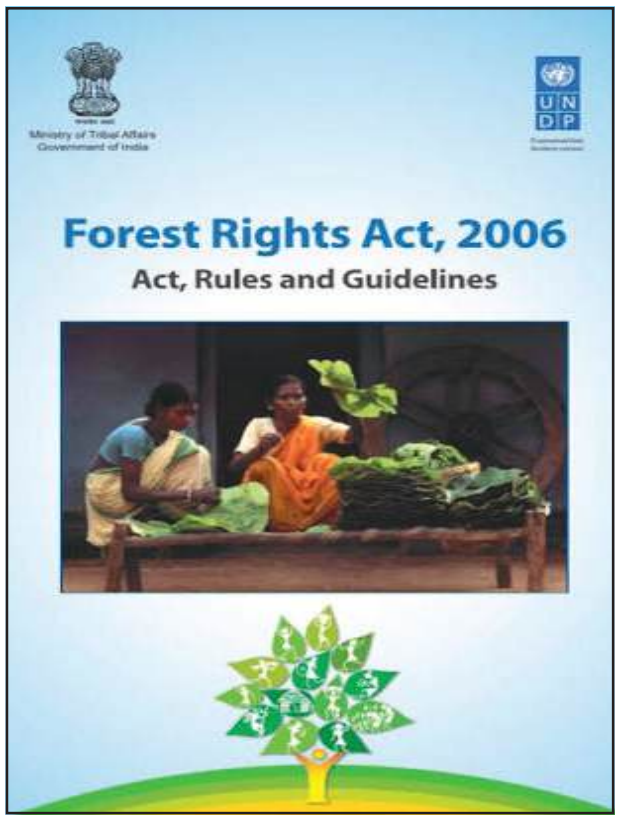
Agencies

J&K expedites Forest Rights Act implementation

SRINAGAR, AUGUST: The Jammu and Kashmir Government has accelerated the implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006, directing that no eviction notices be issued to eligible forest dwellers until the process of recognition and verification of claims is completed.

Announcing the decision, Minister for Forest, Ecology and Environment and Tribal Affairs Javed Ahmed Rana said the Tribal Affairs Department has been designated as the nodal agency for implementing the Act in the Union Territory.

He said the Forest Department will not issue eviction notices to Scheduled Tribe members or other traditional forest dwellers who have been residing on forest land for decades until all claims are examined under the provisions of the Act. Rana said a three-member Project Monitoring Unit has been constituted to oversee the implementation process and directed all Deputy Commissioners to expedite the disposal of pending claims under the Forest Rights Act. The move comes amid concerns over eviction drives in areas such as Sunjwan, Bathindi, Raika and Sidhra in Jammu, which had triggered protests and demands for strict adherence to the provisions of the Act. The government is expediting the process of receiving, scrutinising and settling claims through the statutory three-tier mechanism prescribed under the Forest Rights Act. According to an official spokesperson, the Gram Sabha has been designated as the statutory authority responsible for initiating the process of determining individual and community forest rights. The Gram Sabha will receive, scrutinise and verify claims, prepare maps of recommended claims and forward them to the Sub-Divisional Level Committee (SDLC) for further examination.As per the 2011 Census, Jammu and Kashmir has a Scheduled Tribe population of 12.75 lakh, including 8.10 lakh in the Jammu division and 4.64 lakh in the Kashmir division. Meanwhile, Speaker of the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly Abdul Rahim Rather, during a public outreach programme at Kanidajan in Charar-i-Sharief, assured villagers that no one would be allowed to violate the provisions of the Forest Rights Act. He said the rights of all genuine beneficiaries would be protected and warned that unnecessary harassment of forest dwellers would not be tolerated. At the same time, he cautioned against misuse of the Act for fresh encroachments on forest or government land, stressing that the law must be implemented fairly and transparently.



India ranks 176th in 2026 Environmental Performance Index

NEW DELHI, AUGUSGT: India has ranked 176th out of 177 countries in the 2026 Environmental Performance Index (EPI), showing only a marginal improvement from the bottom position while continuing to face major challenges in air quality, biodiversity conservation and environmental health.

The index, prepared by researchers from Yale and Columbia Universities, assesses countries across 47 indicators grouped under three broad categories—Ecosystem Vitality (45%), Climate Change (30%) and Environmental Health (25%).

Although India recorded an overall improvement of 7.47 points over the past decade and moved one place above Laos, the report notes that the country's environmental performance remains among the weakest globally.

India's poorest performance was recorded in Environmental Health, where it ranked 174th. The report identified air pollution as the country's most pressing environmental challenge, noting that despite the implementation of the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP), pollution levels remain alarmingly high, particularly across the Indo-Gangetic Plain during winter.

While government initiatives promoting cleaner cooking fuels have helped reduce household air pollution, the report said these gains have been offset by increasing outdoor pollution caused by industries, coal-fired power plants and growing vehicular emissions.

India also ranked 171st in Ecosystem Vitality, reflecting concerns over deforestation, habitat fragmentation, biodiversity loss, excessive use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides, groundwater contamination and mounting pressure on marine ecosystems due to overfishing.

The country's strongest performance came in Climate Change Mitigation, where it ranked 130th, largely due to rapid expansion of renewable energy, particularly solar power. However, the report observed that renewable energy capacity has expanded alongside, rather than replaced, coal-based electricity generation, resulting in continued growth in greenhouse gas emissions.

Regionally, India ranked below several neighbouring countries, including Bhutan (82nd), Sri Lanka (118th), Nepal (134th), Pakistan (148th) and Bangladesh (161st), indicating that economic development alone does not determine environmental performance.

The report attributed India's low ranking to factors such as weak enforcement of environmental regulations, inadequate pollution control measures and insufficient investment in regulatory institutions.

While acknowledging India's modest improvement over the past decade, the report cautioned against interpreting the movement away from the bottom of the rankings as a sign of substantial progress. It noted that the improvement may simply indicate a slower pace of environmental deterioration rather than a significant enhancement in environmental conditions.

— Agencies

Centre launches initiative to protect tigers outside notified reserves

NEW DELHI, AUGUST: The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has launched the Tigers Outside Tiger Reserves (TOTR) initiative to strengthen conservation efforts for tigers inhabiting forest landscapes beyond the country's notified tiger reserves.

The initiative follows findings of the All India Tiger Estimation 2022, which indicated that nearly 35 to 40 per cent of India's tiger population now lives outside designated tiger reserves.

According to the 2022 tiger census, India has an estimated 3,682 wild tigers, accounting for nearly three-fourths of the global wild tiger population. The assessment covered 51 tiger reserves and recorded tiger presence across 212 forest divisions.

The TOTR programme is being implemented as a pilot project in 40 forest divisions across nine states—Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Assam.

The Ministry has sanctioned ?88.70 crore for conservation activities under the initiative, with funds already released for implementation in the selected forest divisions.

The programme aims to improve monitoring, habitat management and protection measures in areas where tigers have expanded beyond notified reserves while addressing the growing challenge of human-tiger conflict.

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has also prepared a 'Roadmap to Rescue' framework outlining protocols for the rescue, rehabilitation and release of tigers. It is simultaneously strengthening rescue centres and establishing Rapid Response Teams to improve preparedness for emergencies involving human-tiger interactions.

Several regions selected under the programme have witnessed increasing incidents of conflict between humans and tigers. In Madhya Pradesh's Kanha-Pench landscape, forest divisions such as Seoni, Balaghat, Mandla and Chhindwara frequently report livestock depredation and the movement of dispersing tigers through agricultural areas.

Similarly, Uttarakhand continues to witness human-wildlife conflict in villages located along forest-agriculture interfaces, while in Assam, districts including Sonitpur, Silbori and Golaghat experience frequent encounters due to high wildlife density, seasonal floods and increasing human activity near forest fringes. The Ministry said the initiative aims to ensure better conservation of tigers beyond protected areas while promoting coexistence between wildlife and local communities through improved management, habitat protection and rapid response mechanisms.

Agencies

CAQM reviews air pollution enforcement, orders closure of 17 violating units in NCR



NEW DELHI, AUGUST: The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) in the National Capital Region (NCR) and adjoining areas has ordered the closure of 17 projects and industrial units besides sealing 11 diesel generator (DG) sets following enforcement inspections conducted across the region.

The action was reviewed during the 136th meeting of the Enforcement Task Force (ETF), which assessed inspections and compliance status for the period from July 14 to July 24.

During the 11-day reporting period, CAQM Flying Squads carried out 159 inspections, including 22 at Construction and Demolition (C&D) sites, 97 industrial inspections and 40 inspections related to diesel generator sets.

Based on reported violations, the Commission proposed closure of 11 construction projects and six industrial units, sealing of 11 DG sets, issuance of eight compliance directions, and imposition of environmental compensation in five cases. One construction project has been recommended for re-inspection, while an advisory has been proposed for one industrial unit.

The Task Force also reviewed compliance with decisions taken during its previous meeting and noted that all identified violations in the industrial, construction and DG set sectors had been acted upon. Following verification of compliance, seven resumption orders were issued, including two for industrial units and five for construction projects. Of these, two resumption orders were issued in Haryana and five in Uttar Pradesh.

Reviewing cumulative enforcement efforts up to July 31, the Commission noted that its Flying Squads have conducted inspections at 28,084 units, projects and other entities across the NCR. These inspections resulted in 1,805 closure directions, of which 1,456 resumption orders have been issued after compliance verification. Another 126 cases have been referred to the respective State Pollution Control Boards and the Delhi Pollution Control Committee for final decisions, while 223 entities remain under examination for possible resumption.

The Enforcement Task Force also assessed the implementation of CAQM's Standard Framework for redevelopment of roads. Inspections covered 106 road stretches spanning approximately 38 kilometres in Ghaziabad, Faridabad and Gurugram. According to the review, all 42 road stretches inspected in Ghaziabad had complete end-to-end paving. In Faridabad, only 38 of the 50 inspected road stretches met the prescribed standard, while in Gurugram, 11 of 14 road stretches were found to have complete paving. The concerned municipal corporations have been directed to undertake corrective measures in accordance with the Commission's guidelines.

The Commission reiterated the need for stricter enforcement, timely compliance verification and better coordination among implementing agencies. It stressed continued inspections and enforcement across industrial units, construction activities, diesel generator sets and road development projects to effectively curb air pollution across the National Capital Region.

J&K Higher Education Dept orders sweeping academic content audit across universities

VIKAS SHARMA

JAMMU, AUGUST: Following the recent book row that led to the blacklisting of three authors and two publishers over publications allegedly glorifying separatists and terrorists, the Jammu and Kashmir Higher Education Department has ordered a comprehensive Academic and Content Audit across all universities under its administrative control, directing them to review curricula, reference books, research publications, journals, dissertations, digital repositories and all other academic resources to ensure they conform to constitutional values and are free from objectionable content.

The move follows the controversy surrounding two books published under the Samagra Shiksha Mission, after which the School Education Department banned the authors and publishers. Acting on the government order, the University of Jammu had earlier directed all its teaching departments, campuses and libraries to immediately stop procuring books authored or published by the blacklisted individuals and ordered the withdrawal of any such material from the university.

It also initiated steps to frame a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for procurement of books and academic material, including a stringent screening mechanism and periodic scrutiny to prevent objectionable content from entering the university system.

Taking the exercise further, the Higher Education Department has now introduced a Union Territory-wide framework to institutionalise academic scrutiny in all universities through Circular No. 03-JK(HE) of 2026, laying down detailed procedures for auditing academic resources and establishing a permanent review mechanism.

According to the circular, every university has been directed to undertake a one-time comprehensive Academic and Content Audit covering curricula, syllabi, prescribed and recommended reference books, journals, periodicals, dissertations, theses, research publications, digital repositories and all other academic resources available in teaching departments and libraries. The exercise will cover both physical and digital material irrespective of the year of procurement or adoption.

The department said the objective is to preserve academic excellence while strengthening institutional accountability and ensuring that academic resources remain factually authentic, legally sustainable and consistent with the Constitution of India.

While recognising the academic autonomy enjoyed by universities under the University Grants Commission framework, the circular emphasises that such autonomy must be exercised with responsibility so that teaching and research material upholds constitutional values and does not undermine national interests.

The circular categorically states that no curriculum, publication or academic resource containing factually inaccurate, misleading, distorted, inflammatory or otherwise objectionable material shall be prescribed, recommended, retained or circulated in universities.

It further prohibits any content that directly or indirectly promotes, glorifies or legitimises terrorism, violent extremism, secessionism, radicalisation, anti-national ideology or activities prejudicial to the sovereignty, unity, integrity and security of India.

To ensure effective implementation, the department has constituted a two-tier Academic and Content Review Mechanism. At the university level, each institution will establish a University Academic and Content Audit Committee under the chairmanship of the Vice-Chancellor.

The committee will include the Dean Academic Affairs, Librarian, Deans of History and Political Science, and Heads of Sociology and the concerned language department.

It will review academic resources, particularly in disciplines such as history, political science, sociology, literature, languages and law, and recommend revision, replacement or withdrawal of any objectionable material.

At the Union Territory level, a Higher Education Academic Coordination and Review Committee headed by the Administrative Secretary, Higher Education Department, will monitor compliance by universities. The committee comprises Vice-Chancellors of the University of Jammu, University of Kashmir, Cluster University Jammu, Cluster University Srinagar, Islamic University of Science and Technology, Shri Mata Vaishno Devi University and Baba Ghulam Shah Badshah University, besides senior departmental officers.

It will review audit reports, address issues of wider legal or public significance and recommend policy measures for strengthening safeguards while preserving academic freedom.

The Higher Education Department has further directed that any academic material found during the audit to contain objectionable content or to be inconsistent with constitutional values, academic standards or research ethics must be withdrawn from academic use immediately and placed under safe custody pending further orders.

Vice-Chancellors have been made responsible for supervising the entire exercise and ensuring strict compliance with the prescribed guidelines.

Upon completion of the audit, every university will have to submit a Certificate of Academic and Content Verification, certifying that all retained academic material complies with constitutional values and accepted academic standards and that no publication promoting terrorism, extremism, secessionism, communal disharmony or activities prejudicial to India's sovereignty has been retained for teaching, research or reference purposes.

Universities have been asked to submit their Academic and Content Audit Reports and inventories of examined material to the Higher Education Department by July 31, 2026. The department will thereafter prepare a consolidated Union Territory Academic and Content Audit, Verification and Compliance Report.

The circular also makes it clear that after completion of the present exercise, such academic audits will become an annual institutional practice across all universities in Jammu and Kashmir.

J&K Government approves Rs 18.96 crore water supply scheme for Pulwama

BLAZING TALES NEWS SERVICE

SRINAGAR, AUGUST: The Omar Abdullah-led Jammu and Kashmir Government has approved an ?18.96 crore Water Supply Scheme for Pulwama town to strengthen drinking water infrastructure and ensure a reliable supply of safe drinking water to residents. The project aims to augment and modernise the existing water-supply network to meet the growing demand for potable water while improving the efficiency, sustainability and reliability of water services in the town.

According to the government, the scheme reflects its continued commitment to upgrading essential civic infrastructure and enhancing the quality of life by ensuring better access to basic public services. Once completed, the project will significantly strengthen the drinking water distribution network in Pulwama, improving water availability and service delivery for households across the town.

The government said the initiative forms part of its broader efforts to improve public infrastructure and provide efficient basic amenities to people across Jammu and Kashmir.

MVD Rajouri issues 55 challans, seizes six vehicles in traffic enforcement drive

BLAZING TALES NEWS SERVICE

RAJOURI, AUGUST:The Motor Vehicles Department (MVD), Rajouri, intensified its enforcement against traffic violations by issuing 55 challans, seizing six vehicles, recommending suspension of five driving licences, and imposing fines totalling ?1.11 lakh during a district-wide enforcement drive.

The special drive was conducted on the directions of higher authorities to ensure strict compliance with the Motor Vehicles Act and promote road safety. Led by ARTO Rajouri Ashiq Rafiq Malik, the enforcement covered Rajouri town, Potha, Dhandkote and adjoining areas.

During the operation, the enforcement team checked around 250 vehicles and initiated action against motorists found violating traffic rules.

On the day of the drive, officials issued 18 challans, imposed fines amounting to ?42,000, seized three vehicles for serious violations and recommended the suspension of one driving licence. Overall, the enforcement campaign resulted in 55 challans, fines totalling ?1,11,600, seizure of six vehicles, and recommendation for suspension of five driving licences for offences warranting strict action under the Motor Vehicles Act.

Ashiq Rafiq Malik said the department is committed to ensuring safer roads through sustained enforcement and stringent action against violators. He said such drives will continue regularly to deter traffic violations and promote responsible road use.

He appealed to motorists to carry valid vehicle documents, follow traffic rules, avoid overloading and overspeeding, and cooperate with enforcement teams in the interest of public safety.

The enforcement team included Motor Vehicle Inspector Lakhvinder Singh, Assistant Motor Vehicle Inspector Nitin, and other officials of the Motor Vehicles Department, Rajouri.

Dr Jitendra Singh reviews implementation roadmap of Ujh Multipurpose Project

BLAZING TALES NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, AUGUST: Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Science and Technology and Earth Sciences, Jitendra Singh, on Sunday reviewed the status and phased implementation roadmap of the Ujh Multipurpose Project (UMP) in Kathua district, describing it as a strategically important project that will enhance irrigation, power generation, water security and border management in Jammu and Kashmir.

The Minister held a detailed review meeting with officials of WAPCOS Ltd., a Government of India undertaking under the Ministry of Jal Shakti, which has been entrusted with implementing the project.

Stressing the need for expeditious execution, Singh directed the implementing agency to adopt innovative implementation strategies while ensuring the highest standards of quality, safety and efficiency.

Officials informed the Minister that the project will be executed in a phased manner.

Construction work will begin while acquisition of the remaining land continues simultaneously, avoiding delays associated with completing the entire land acquisition process before commencement of work. Preparations regarding the project site and related infrastructure are also underway.

During the meeting, Singh said the project, conceived nearly a century ago, had remained pending



for decades. He noted that the revival of the Ujh Multipurpose Project reflects the government's renewed focus on completing long-delayed national infrastructure projects.

He also referred to the Shahpurkandi Project, revived in 2019 and now nearing completion, saying both projects demonstrate the government's commitment to optimising India's water resources and delivering long-term benefits to the people.

The Minister observed that delays in implementing these projects had resulted in the waters of the Ravi River and its tributaries flowing into Pakistan. He said the Ujh project would help maximise utilisation of India's share of river waters.

The Ujh Multipurpose Project, being developed on the Ujh River, a major tributary of the Ravi, is expected to generate 186–212 MW of hydroelectric power. It will provide irrigation to nearly 90,000 hectares of agricultural land across Kathua and Samba districts in Jammu and Kashmir and Pathankot and Gurdaspur districts in Punjab.

Besides irrigation, the project will supply drinking water to Kathua district and ensure water availability for industrial use, contributing significantly to regional development.

According to the government, the project is expected to improve agricultural productivity, strengthen water security, generate employment opportunities and accelerate the socio-economic development of the Union Territory.

The project also carries strategic importance from a national security perspective.

Backed by the Ministry of Home Affairs, it is expected to help regulate river flows and reduce vulnerabilities along cross-border infiltration routes in the riverbed.

Reviewing implementation milestones, Singh emphasised the importance of close coordination among all stakeholders and effective monitoring to ensure timely completion. He assured WAPCOS of the Centre's full support for the successful execution of the prestigious project.

LG launches 'Nasha Mukt Yuva for Viksit Bharat Sankalp Abhiyan'

BLAZING TALES NEWS SERVICE



SRINAGAR, AUGUST: Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha launched the "Nasha Mukt Yuva for Viksit Bharat Sankalp Abhiyan" in Jammu and Kashmir, urging young people to lead the fight against drug abuse and actively contribute to nation-building.

The UT-level programme, organised by the Department of Youth Affairs and Sports in collaboration with SKUAST-Kashmir, coincided with the nationwide launch of the 100-week campaign, virtually inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Addressing the gathering, the Lieutenant Governor said India's greatest strength lies in its young population, with nearly 65 per cent of citizens below the age of 35 and around 37 crore youth in the 15–29 age group ready to contribute to the country's development.

"The Nasha Mukt Yuva for Viksit Bharat Sankalp Abhiyan seeks to energise this demographic, guiding them towards healthy lifestyles and active participation in development. Our youth must emerge like a cloud of energy and spread across the horizon of development," he said.

Sinha described the Nasha Mukt Bharat Abhiyan, launched in 2020, as not merely a government programme but a nationwide social movement against drug abuse. He said the initiative aims to promote self-discipline, positive thinking and determination among citizens.

He noted that more than one crore youth are participating in the campaign at nearly 10,000 locations across the country, while over 35,000 MY Bharat youth clubs, Nehru Yuva Kendras, educational institutions and industry organisations have joined the 100-week initiative, which will engage young people every Sunday.

Expressing confidence in the campaign's success, the Lieutenant Governor said it would become a significant milestone in eliminating the drug menace from society. Congratulating the youth of Jammu and Kashmir, Sinha lauded their active participation in the 100-day Nasha Mukt J&K Abhiyan, conducted from April 11 to July 20, describing it as a model for the rest of the country. He said the campaign demonstrated that major social challenges can be overcome through collective efforts by the administration, police, educational institutions, social organisations, religious leaders and citizens.

"A healthy youth, a strong family, and an aware public will become the identity of Viksit Bharat," the Lieutenant Governor said.

Tourism Ministry, IndiGo partner to promote India as a global tourism destination



NEW DELHI, AUGUST: The Ministry of Tourism has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with InterGlobe Aviation Limited (IndiGo) to promote India as a preferred global tourism destination through a strategic, non-exclusive and non-financial partnership.

The MoU was exchanged in the presence of Union Minister for Tourism and Culture Gajendra Singh Shekhawat. The event was attended by Tourism Secretary Bhuvnesh Kumar, Additional Secretary and Director General (Tourism) Suman Billa, senior officials of the Ministry, and senior representatives of IndiGo.

Speaking on the occasion, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat said the collaboration would strengthen India's tourism promotion by combining the Ministry's Incredible India campaign with IndiGo's extensive domestic and international flight network. He said the partnership would help expand the country's tourism outreach and reinforce India's position as a leading global travel destination.

Under the agreement, the Ministry and IndiGo will jointly launch a global communication campaign titled "Incredible India by IndiGo" to showcase the country's diverse tourism offerings, including cultural heritage, spiritual destinations, natural landscapes, wellness, adventure tourism, wildlife and other experiential travel opportunities. The campaign will be promoted through digital and print media, airport branding, in-flight platforms, social media, international travel exhibitions and other promotional channels.

The Ministry of Tourism will provide access to Incredible India brand assets, promotional content and facilitate coordination with relevant stakeholders to support campaign activities.

IndiGo will develop destination-focused content and promote India's tourism message across its customer engagement platforms. The collaboration also includes joint participation in tourism promotion initiatives, destination-specific campaigns and other mutually agreed activities aimed at increasing the visibility of India's tourism sector in domestic and international markets.

The MoU will remain valid for an initial period of two years. According to the Ministry, the partnership reflects the shared commitment of both organisations to enhance India's global tourism profile, increase international tourist arrivals and position the country as one of the world's leading travel destinations.

— Agencies

Tourism must be redefined as a responsibility towards nature, culture and society: LG

BLAZING TALES NEWS SERVICE



SRINAGAR, AUGUST: Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha called for redefining tourism as a responsibility towards nature, culture and society, stressing that the future of Jammu and Kashmir's tourism sector must be responsible, sustainable and inclusive.

Addressing the "Ethical Tourism Conclave" organised by the Tourist Trade Interest Guild, J&K, the Lieutenant Governor said tourism in the Union Territory should be guided by the principle of ethical and sustainable development.

Congratulating the organisers, he said the conclave was a significant step towards promoting tourism as a moral responsibility for all stakeholders. Referring to the theme, "Responsible Today, Sustainable Tomorrow, Beneficial for All," he said it reflects the collective duty to preserve the region's natural and cultural heritage for future generations.

The Lieutenant Governor observed that Jammu and Kashmir has long been recognised as "heaven on earth" because of the harmony between its natural beauty and cultural heritage.

He said tourism should celebrate this unique identity while ensuring environmental conservation and social responsibility remain central to future growth.

Highlighting the sector's progress in recent years, the Lieutenant Governor said tourist arrivals have reached record levels, confidence among domestic and international travellers has been restored, investments have increased and employment opportunities have expanded.

He, however, emphasised that success should not be measured only by visitor numbers but by ensuring that tourism benefits local communities and promotes inclusive development.

Calling for responsible tourism, the Lieutenant Governor said every visitor should leave with memorable experiences while forests, lakes, rivers and other natural resources are protected for future generations. He stressed that development and conservation must go hand in hand.

He also underlined the importance of inclusive growth, saying boatmen on Dal Lake, pony owners, artisans engaged in traditional crafts such as pashmina and papier-mâché, and families running homestays in Gurez and Bangus should all be equal partners in the tourism economy.

He said tourism must generate dignified livelihoods, training opportunities and fair economic benefits for all stakeholders rather than remaining concentrated among large businesses.

The Lieutenant Governor further said the success of tourism would be reflected when artisans, small entrepreneurs, youth and women receive sustainable livelihood opportunities and fair value for their work.

Describing sustainable tourism as a partnership between nature and development, he said infrastructure such as roads, hotels and tourism facilities should be created with minimal ecological impact. He urged stakeholders and visitors to adopt eco-friendly practices, including avoiding single-use plastics, proper waste management, efficient use of water and energy, and protection of wildlife.

The Lieutenant Governor also called for concrete action plans with measurable goals and timelines. He suggested introducing certification standards for eco-friendly homestays and hotels, organising training programmes for youth as ambassadors of nature and culture, and using digital platforms to connect tourists directly with local communities.

Tourism powers J&K economy with record growth, rising investments and employment

BLAZING TALES NEWS SERVICE



JAMMU, AUGUST: Tourism has emerged as one of the strongest pillars of Jammu and Kashmir's economy, contributing around 7 per cent to the Union Territory's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), generating employment for nearly five lakh people, and driving growth in hospitality, handicrafts, transport and micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

According to the Jammu and Kashmir Economic Survey 2025-26, the Union Territory's Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) is estimated at Rs 2.86 lakh crore (US$ 32.9 billion) in FY26, reflecting a growth rate of 5.82 per cent.

The report highlights that tourism has become a key engine of economic expansion, supported by sustained investments in roads, railways, airports, hotels, homestays, ropeways, wellness tourism and adventure tourism. Government policies promoting eco-tourism, winter tourism, rural tourism, religious tourism and film tourism are expected to further strengthen the sector.

Record tourist arrivals

Jammu and Kashmir witnessed a record 1.78 crore tourist arrivals during 2025-26, including around 36,000 foreign visitors, reflecting growing confidence among domestic and international travellers.

Religious tourism continued to dominate visitor numbers. More than 69.32 lakh pilgrims visited the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine, while over 10.56 lakh devotees paid obeisance at Shiv Khori.

The Economic Survey noted that the Union Territory registered a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 4.47 per cent in GSDP between 2019-20 and 2024-25.

Adventure and film tourism gaining momentum

Adventure tourism has emerged as one of the fastest-growing segments, with skiing, trekking, river rafting, mountain biking and camping attracting increasing numbers of visitors.

Gulmarg continues to be one of India's premier winter tourism destinations, while trekking routes across the Kashmir Valley and the Jammu region are witnessing growing popularity.

Film tourism has also gained momentum following the introduction of incentives for film production in Jammu and Kashmir, helping showcase the region's scenic beauty to national and international audiences.

Infrastructure boosting connectivity

Improved connectivity has played a crucial role in tourism growth.

The Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL) became fully operational in June 2025, providing seamless rail connectivity between the Kashmir Valley and the rest of the country.

The extension of the Jammu-Srinagar Vande Bharat Express, which commenced operations on May 2, 2026, has further enhanced accessibility for tourists.

Upgrades at Srinagar International Airport and Jammu Airport, including improved passenger handling capacity and enhanced night landing facilities, are expected to support higher tourist inflows.

Significant investment in tourism infrastructure

The government has made substantial investments in tourism infrastructure under the UT Sector Capex Budget 2025-26.

An allocation of Rs 390 crore has been earmarked for tourism infrastructure, while 611 tourism-related projects have been completed, including facilities linked to the annual Amarnath Yatra.

Central schemes such as PRASAD and Swadesh Darshan have also contributed to the development of pilgrimage centres and emerging tourist destinations.

Major infrastructure projects, including ropeways in Jammu and Patnitop, tourism facilitation centres, convention centres, waterfront development, Vista Dome Rail Services and the Sonamarg (Z-Morh) Tunnel, inaugurated in January 2025, are expected to improve year-round tourism.

The Tawi Barrage Project, which is over 84 per cent complete, is also expected to enhance tourism potential in the Jammu region.

Tourism driving inclusive growth

The Economic Survey underlines tourism's contribution beyond visitor numbers.

The sector supports hospitality, handicrafts, handlooms, transport, trade and local businesses, making it one of the largest employment generators in Jammu and Kashmir.

Tourism has significantly boosted demand for traditional products such as Kashmiri carpets, Pashmina shawls and papier-mâché crafts, creating livelihood opportunities for thousands of artisans. Hotels, guesthouses, resorts, restaurants and houseboats have reported improved occupancy, while the expansion of wellness tourism and luxury hospitality is attracting fresh investments. Employment opportunities have also increased in transport services, tour operations, photography, adventure sports and local cuisine, with growing participation of women entrepreneurs in handicrafts, hospitality and homestay ventures. With record tourist arrivals, expanding infrastructure and sustained government support, tourism is expected to remain one of the primary drivers of economic growth and employment generation in Jammu and Kashmir.

Forest Department introduces SOP to protect Kashmir's tourist destinations from waste pollution

BLAZING TALES NEWS SERVICE

SRINAGAR, AUGUST: The Jammu and Kashmir Forest Department has issued a comprehensive Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to tackle mounting waste and plastic pollution at tourist destinations in the Kashmir Valley by mandating scientific visitor-capacity studies, destination-specific waste management plans and strict restrictions on single-use plastics.

Issued by the Chief Conservator of Forests (CCF), Kashmir, the SOP applies to tourist destinations located within or adjoining Reserve Forests and aims to ensure sustainable tourism while protecting fragile ecosystems.

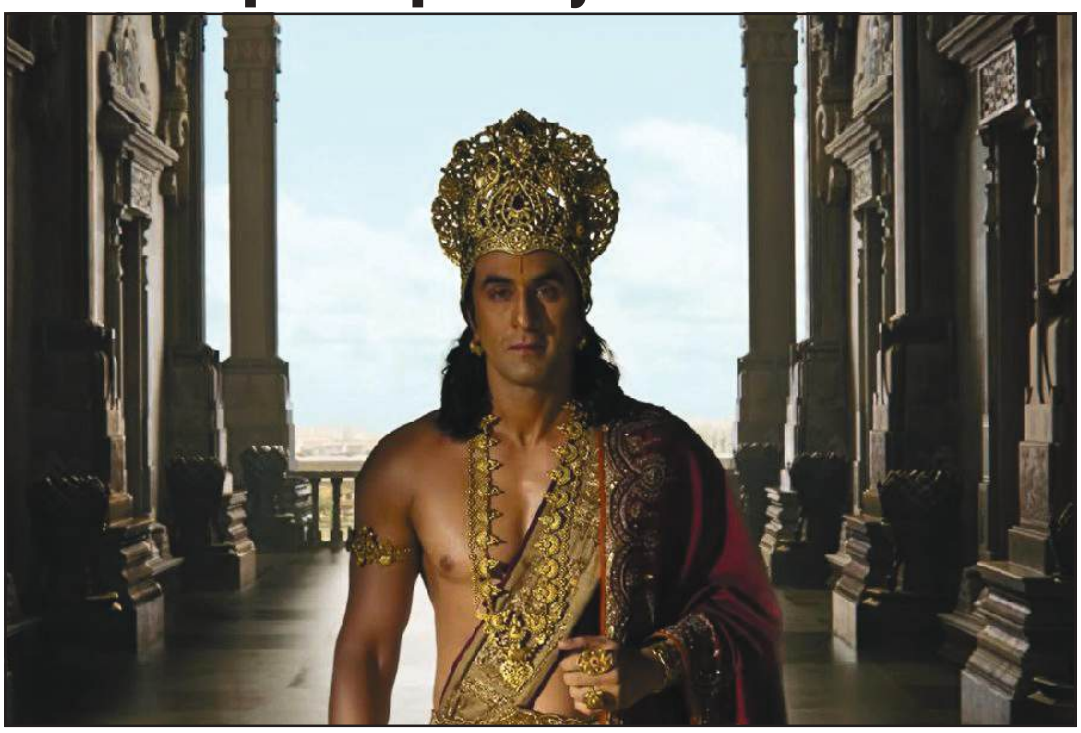
The department noted that increasing tourist footfall has resulted in the accumulation of plastic bottles, food packaging, disposable cutlery and other non-biodegradable waste at many popular destinations. The SOP has been framed in line with directions issued by the Supreme Court and the National Green Tribunal (NGT) on scientific solid waste management.

A key provision of the SOP is the preparation of comprehensive Eco-Tourism Master Plans for all major tourist destinations, integrating tourism development with ecological conservation.

The plans will include scientific carrying-capacity assessments to determine the maximum number of visitors each destination can sustain without causing environmental degradation. Institutions such as the Indian Institute of Forest Management, Indian Institutes of Management and other reputed organisations may be engaged to conduct these studies and prepare destination-specific management frameworks.

The SOP also requires every tourist destination to have a dedicated Solid Waste Management Plan covering waste generation, segregation, collection, transportation, processing and scientific disposal, with clear responsibilities assigned to all stakeholders.

Ramlila Mahasangh raises concerns over Ranbir Kapoor's portrayal of Lord Rama



NEW DELHI, AUGUST: The Shri Ramlila Mahasangh has sought a special pre-release screening of Nitesh Tiwari's upcoming film Ramayana for Hindu organisations and Ramlila committees, expressing reservations over Ranbir Kapoor's portrayal of Lord Rama in the recently released trailer.

The organisation has also warned that it will stage protests if its request is not accepted by the filmmakers.

Shri Ramlila Mahasangh president Arjun Kumar has written to the makers requesting a special screening for members of the Mahasangh, Ramlila committees and Hindu organisations in Delhi before the film's theatrical release.

According to Kumar, the screening is necessary to ensure that no scenes or dialogues hurt religious sentiments.

Addressing the media, Kumar said the trailer gave the impression that Ranbir Kapoor's portrayal of Lord Rama appeared "weak" and lacked the gravitas associated with the revered character.

Drawing a comparison with the 2023 film Adipurush, Kumar said the organisation had initially supported that film and even organised a promotional event, but later objected to what it described as objectionable content and inaccurate depictions. He said the Mahasangh is prepared to support and promote Ramayana, including arranging free screenings for thousands of people, provided the film remains faithful to the scriptures and avoids controversies similar to those surrounding Adipurush.

The organisation said that if a special screening is arranged and any objectionable content is found, it would request the filmmakers to make necessary changes before the film's release.

Kumar clarified that while the Mahasangh is not a film certification authority, it would raise objections if it believed the film distorted religious scriptures.

Directed by Nitesh Tiwari, Ramayana is a two-part mythological epic starring Ranbir Kapoor as Lord Rama, Sai Pallavi as Sita, Sunny Deol as Hanuman and Yash as Ravana. The cast also includes Ravie Dubey, Arun Govil, Vivek Oberoi, Lara Dutta, Rakul Preet Singh and Sheeba Chadha.

Produced by Namit Malhotra, the first instalment of Ramayana is scheduled for a worldwide theatrical release on Diwali 2026, while the second part is expected to release in 2027.

— Agencies

Kangana Ranaut responds to resurfaced 2018 Cannes video



MUMBAI, AUGUST: Actor and BJP MP Kangana Ranaut has defended her evolving political and religious views while responding to criticism over a resurfaced video from a 2018 Cannes after-party in which she was seen dancing.

In a video shared on social media, Kangana said she was once a "moderate Hindu" but now considers herself an "awakened Hindu," adding that she has chosen to embrace the ideology of the BJP and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

Responding to criticism over her political transformation, Kangana said people frequently question when she became a "Sanghi," asserting that she has the right to adopt the beliefs and ideology she identifies with.

She also referred to her past positions on issues such as pay parity in the film industry, opposition to nepotism and her criticism of item songs, saying these reflected her personal convictions.

Addressing the resurfaced Cannes party video, Kangana argued that people should not judge her present beliefs based on her past lifestyle. She said individuals should have the freedom to change their views and embrace a different way of life if they choose.

The actor further said society applies double standards by questioning women who decide to adopt a more disciplined or religious path later in life.

The video comes days after Kangana made headlines for a cryptic social media post that was widely interpreted as targeting actor Sonakshi Sinha.

Kangana, who was elected to the Lok Sabha in 2024, has frequently expressed her political views on social media and has remained vocal on issues related to politics, religion and the film industry.

— Agencies

Khatron Ke Khiladi 15 'Pain Auction' stunt sparks debate after contestants hit with rubber bullets

MUMBAI, AUGUST: The latest episode of Khatron Ke Khiladi 15 has sparked debate on social media after four contestants were repeatedly hit with rubber bullets during a "Pain Auction" challenge, with many viewers questioning the nature of the stunt.

Contestants Shagun Sharma, Gaurav Khanna, Vishal Aditya Singh and Karan Wahi took part in the task, which was filmed in Cape Town, South Africa.

During the challenge, the contestants stood with their backs facing a man carrying a gun that fired rubber pellets. They wore spine protectors and sleeveless vests while being repeatedly struck by the pellets as part of the endurance test.

Host Rohit Shetty told contestants that the firing would continue until two participants gave up, after which they would perform the elimination stunt. He later revealed that each contestant was hit by around 40 rubber pellets during the challenge.

As the firing continued from progressively shorter distances, the contestants were seen struggling with the pain. Shagun Sharma was the first to withdraw from the task, followed by Gaurav Khanna, while Vishal Aditya Singh and Karan Wahi completed the challenge.

The sequence triggered strong reactions online, with several social media users questioning whether such physically demanding challenges amounted to unnecessary suffering for entertainment. Others defended the format, noting that contestants voluntarily participate in the reality show's high-risk stunts. Khatron Ke Khiladi 15, hosted by Rohit Shetty, is known for its action-based challenges and is currently being broadcast after being filmed in South Africa.

— Agencies

Manushi Chhillar performs patriotic dance at Commonwealth Games 2026 closing ceremony

GLASGOW, AUGUST: Actor and former Miss World Manushi Chhillar delivered a special performance during the opening segment of the Commonwealth Games 2026 closing ceremony, presenting a dance sequence set to the patriotic anthem Vande Mataram before an international audience. Manushi appeared in a custom-designed Torani ensemble featuring a peacock blue and green lehenga inspired by traditional Indian craftsmanship with contemporary styling.



The performance was choreographed by Shiamak Davar and combined elements of patriotism, Indian culture and classical-inspired movement, drawing appreciation from spectators at the global sporting event.

Representing India on the international stage, Manushi's performance celebrated the country's rich cultural heritage while reflecting the confidence and diversity of modern India.

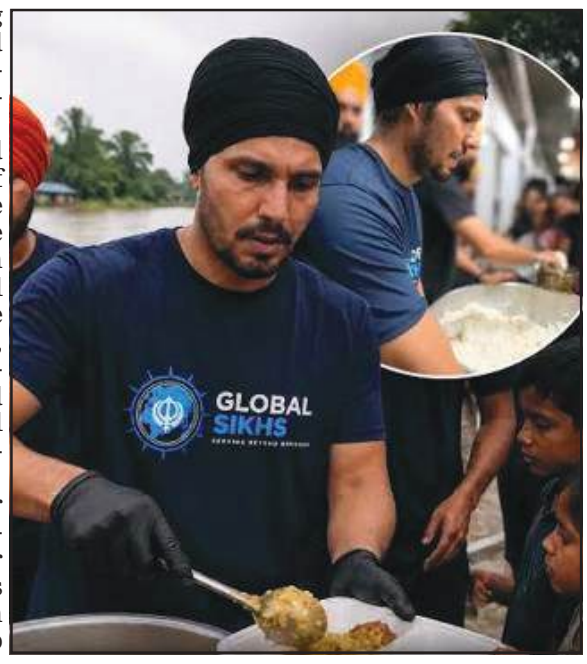
Since winning the Miss World title, Manushi has represented India at several international platforms and continues to promote Indian culture through her appearances at global events.

Her performance at the Commonwealth Games 2026 closing ceremony marked another significant moment in showcasing India's artistic traditions before a worldwide audience.

— Agencies

Randeep Hooda joins Assam flood relief efforts

GUWAHATI, AUGUST: Actor Randeep Hooda joined a flood relief drive in Assam's Sivasagar district, distributing essential supplies to affected families and urging people to extend support to those impacted by the devastating floods.



Hooda participated in the relief programme organised by the humanitarian organisation Global Sikhs in the Nimaijan area, where he distributed ration and other essential items among flood-affected residents.

Appealing for greater public participation, the actor said many families continue to remain stranded due to deep floodwaters and require immediate assistance.

He also visited Gurudwara Sahib in Sivasagar and offered prayers for the well-being of those affected by the disaster.

Speaking during the relief drive, Hooda said stagnant floodwaters and the sludge left behind after the water recedes could pose serious health risks.

He said the Global Sikhs team had assessed the immediate needs of the affected population and was supplying essential household items in addition to food, as many families already had access to dry ration.

Hooda noted that although several days had passed since the floods, many people in remote areas were still trapped and facing severe hardship.

He also participated in serving food through a langar at Sivasagar railway station, where several flood-affected families had gathered after being displaced from surrounding villages.

Describing humanitarian service as being above all else, Hooda praised the relief work carried out by Global Sikhs, saying he had been associated with the organisation for several years.

He added that relief teams were preparing kits containing basic household necessities, including mattresses, tarpaulins, toiletries and other essential items required for immediate rehabilitation.

According to the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA), 82 people have lost their lives in the floods so far. As of July 31, more than 1.92 lakh people across five districts remained affected by the disaster.

— Agencies

'Main Vaapas Aaunga' is a tribute to my grandparents, says writer Nayanika Mahtani

LONDON, AUGUST: London-based author and screenwriter Nayanika Mahtani has described the Partition-era romance Main Vaapas Aaunga as a deeply personal tribute to her grandparents, saying the film was inspired by an unfinished conversation with her grandfather and the untold stories of a generation displaced during the Partition of India.

The film, co-written by Mahtani and director Imtiaz Ali, stars Naseeruddin Shah, Diljit Dosanjh, Vedang Raina and Sharvari. Following a successful theatrical run driven by positive word of mouth, it is set to premiere on Netflix next week.

Speaking about the project, Mahtani said the story chose her because of a long-standing desire to preserve memories that her grandparents never had the opportunity to fully share.

She said the film draws inspiration from her family's roots in Sargodha, now in Pakistan, and incorporates several real-life anecdotes from her grandmother's childhood.

Mahtani, whose novel Across The Line received the South Asia Book Award in 2020, said she wanted to honour a generation that experienced Partition without carrying hatred despite immense personal loss.

According to the writer, her maternal grandmother's family survived the violence of Partition with the help of Muslim neighbours, but the upheaval permanently separated her from her birth family.

She said memories of Sargodha, including open-air tandoors and orchards of kinnow oranges, found their way into the screenplay, making it especially emotional to see those places recreated during filming.

Mahtani recalled that her collaboration with Imtiaz Ali began after a chance meeting at a literature festival in Dehradun, where the filmmaker felt they shared similar storytelling sensibilities.

Unlike many film writers who leave a project after completing the script, Mahtani said she remained closely involved during filming and was delighted to see the story brought to life by the cast and crew.

Before becoming a full-time writer, Mahtani worked as an investment banker. She later moved into storytelling, contributing to children's books, television projects and screenplays, including the Vidya Balan-starrer Shakuntala Devi.

She is currently working on two films and a web series and said she has now moved beyond writing about Partition after feeling that Main Vaapas Aaunga completed the conversation she had long wanted to have with her grandfather.

Mahtani expressed hope that the film's themes of home, identity, belonging and love would resonate with audiences around the world when it begins streaming.

— Agencies

Anup Soni lends voice to Karna in animated series The Legend of Karna

MUMBAI, AUGUST: Actor Anup Soni has lent his voice to the lead character in The Legend of Karna, a new animated series that presents the story of the Mahabharata's legendary warrior from his own perspective.

Created by Sharad Devarajan and Jeevan J. Kang and produced by Graphic India, the Sony LIV original premiered on the streaming platform.

The series traces Karna's journey from being raised as the son of a charioteer to becoming one of the greatest warriors in the Mahabharata. It explores his struggle for identity, acceptance and recognition despite possessing extraordinary archery skills.

Sharing his experience, Anup Soni said Karna has always fascinated him because of the emotional depth and inner conflicts that define the character beyond his reputation as a fearless warrior.

He said the opportunity to portray Karna from the character's own perspective made the project especially meaningful, describing him as one of the most complex figures in Indian mythology.

According to Soni, Karna's lifelong battle with questions of identity, destiny and acceptance makes the character relatable even today. He added that bringing out Karna's pain, pride, courage and emotional conflict through voice acting was a rewarding creative experience.

— Agencies

Higher tobacco taxes hit cigarette makers' revenue, sales volumes and profits

NEW DELHI, AUGUST: India's leading cigarette manufacturers have reported declines in underlying revenue, sales volumes and profitability during the April-June quarter following the government's sharp increase in taxes on cigarettes and tobacco products earlier this year.

The impact was reflected in the first full quarter after the revised tax regime came into effect, affecting market leaders ITC, Godfrey Phillips India and VST Industries, which together account for more than 90 per cent of the domestic cigarette market.

In February, the government increased the Goods and Services Tax (GST) on cigarettes and tobacco products to a flat 40 per cent and replaced the compensation cess with an additional excise duty ranging from ?2,100 to ?8,500 per 1,000 cigarettes, depending on cigarette length.

While reported revenues rose because the higher tax component was included in sales figures, companies said their underlying net revenues and profits came under pressure due to weaker demand and lower sales volumes.

Market leader ITC reported a 73.71 per cent increase in cigarette business revenue to ?16,596.67 crore during the June quarter. However, its gross revenue, excluding tax pass-through, declined 31.45 per cent to ?3,769.11 crore, indicating pressure on actual cigarette sales.

The company said it had adopted a staggered pricing strategy to manage the impact of the unprecedented tax increase while balancing the interests of stakeholders.

Godfrey Phillips India reported a 44.3 per cent decline in consolidated net profit to ?198.39 crore during the quarter. Although its revenue from operations nearly doubled to ?3,819.56 crore, mainly due to higher excise collections, its net revenue excluding excise declined 18.8 per cent to ?1,206 crore.

VST Industries also reported pressure on its business, with profit after tax falling 24.42 per cent to ?42.42 crore despite reported revenue nearly doubling to ?881.49 crore.

The company's underlying net revenue declined 13.5 per cent to ?256 crore, while average monthly cigarette sales volume fell 14 per cent, from 714 million cigarettes in the corresponding quarter last year to 611 million during the April-June period. Industry analysts said the higher tax burden has increased retail prices, affecting demand and reducing sales volumes even as reported revenues have risen because of the higher tax component included in turnover.— Agencies

JPC recommends easing corporate compliance, strengthening governance

NEW DELHI, AUGUST: The Joint Committee of Parliament (JPC) on the Corporate Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026 has recommended a series of measures aimed at simplifying corporate compliance, promoting ease of doing business and strengthening corporate governance in the country.

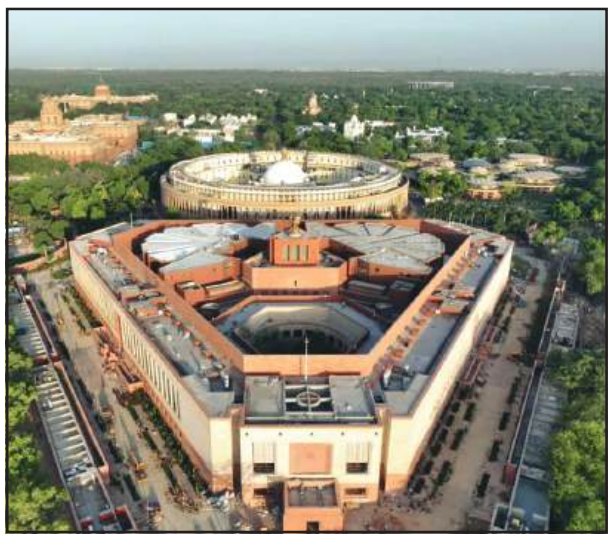
The Committee's report, presented in both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha, examined proposed amendments to the Companies Act, 2013 and the Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) Act, 2008 following consultations with government departments, regulators, industry representatives, legal experts and other stakeholders.

Among its key recommendations, the Committee proposed reducing compliance burdens for law-abiding companies, encouraging proportionate regulatory enforcement and replacing certain procedural offences with civil penalties instead of criminal prosecution.

The panel supported the government's proposal to decriminalise minor procedural defaults while ensuring that serious offences involving fraud and matters affecting public interest continue to attract stringent legal action.

It also endorsed measures to provide greater operational flexibility for One Person Companies (OPCs), small companies, start-ups and producer companies to improve the ease of doing business.

With regard to Limited Liability Partnerships, the Committee recommended



simplifying incorporation procedures by making professional certification mandatory only when professionals are actually engaged in the process. It observed that the change would reduce procedural requirements while retaining necessary safeguards.

The Committee also called for a transparent and coordinated regulatory framework for LLPs operating in International Financial Services Centres (IFSCs). It recommended timely framing of subordinate legislation and procedural guidelines in consultation with relevant ministries, regulators and stakeholders.

On Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), the panel supported relaxations for eligible small companies while emphasising the need to maintain transparency and accountability in CSR implementation.

The Committee further examined provisions relating to the conversion of certain trusts into LLP structures, stating that the proposed framework would improve flexibility in fund structuring and facilitate business operations.

Highlighting the importance of technology-driven governance, the report recommended greater use of digital processes, electronic communication systems and modern compliance mechanisms to improve regulatory efficiency while safeguarding stakeholder interests. It also called for strengthening the role of the National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA) and enhancing corporate reporting standards to improve investor confidence and governance practices. The Corporate Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026 seeks to simplify corporate legal procedures, reduce regulatory compliance burdens and align India's corporate regulatory framework with evolving business practices and global standards.

— Agencies

Country Club launches 'Master Card – Turkiye', plans hospitality expansion

MUMBAI, AUGUST: Country Club Hospitality & Holidays Limited has launched its Country Club Master Card – Turkiye, introducing a new international holiday membership as part of its expansion strategy in the Turkish hospitality market.

The company said the membership includes complimentary round-trip international flight tickets for a couple, a five-night, six-day holiday covering Istanbul and Cappadocia, and a 30-year holiday membership across Country Club's owned and franchise properties worldwide.

The launch follows the recent visit of the company's Chairman and Managing Director, Y. Rajeev Reddy, to Turkiye, where he held discussions with diplomats, tourism authorities, hospitality partners and business leaders to explore collaboration opportunities in the tourism and hospitality sectors.

According to the company, the discussions focused on strengthening tourism and business ties between India and Turkiye while exploring franchise opportunities in Istanbul and Cappadocia as part of its international expansion plans.

During the visit, Reddy toured several of Turkiye's prominent tourist attractions, including the Blue Mosque, Hagia Sophia, Dolmabahce Palace, the Grand Bazaar, the Spice Bazaar and the Bosphorus, besides witnessing the hot-air balloon experience in Cappadocia.

The company said the initiative aims to offer its members access to Turkiye's tourism experiences while expanding its global hospitality network through new partnerships.

Speaking on the launch, Reddy said Turkiye's blend of history, culture and hospitality makes it an attractive destination for Indian travellers. He added that the new membership programme would strengthen hospitality partnerships and create new opportunities for the company's more than two million members.

Country Club currently operates 30 owned properties and over 70 franchise properties across India and international destinations, delivering more than 70,000 room nights annually.

The company said it is also exploring franchise partnerships in Turkiye and has invited hotel owners, tourism entrepreneurs and investors to collaborate in expanding its hospitality presence in the country.

— Agencies

SEBI clears major hurdle for NSE IPO with Rs 1,491 crore settlement proposal

MUMBAI, AUGUST: The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has agreed in principle to settle all pending regulatory proceedings against the National Stock Exchange (NSE) for ?1,491.21 crore, clearing a major regulatory hurdle for the exchange's long-awaited initial public offering (IPO).

According to an NSE disclosure, the proposed settlement covers all outstanding regulatory matters, including the co-location and dark fibre cases, subject to the exchange complying with the settlement terms prescribed by the market regulator.

Under the proposal, SEBI has asked NSE to make a cash payment of ?714.74 crore, while ?776.47 crore already deposited by the exchange will be adjusted towards the total settlement amount.

NSE said it had already made financial provisions for the entire ?1,491.21 crore settlement in its accounts for the financial year ended March 31, 2026. As a result, the actual cash outflow will be limited to ?714.74 crore.

The exchange stated that the settlement would have no material adverse impact on its day-to-day operations.

The settlement relates to the long-pending co-location case, which involved allegations that certain brokers received preferential access to the exchange's trading systems, and the separate dark fibre matter concerning alleged preferential network access for select trading firms.

NSE further said that once SEBI issues the final settlement order, all related cases pending before the Supreme Court will be withdrawn.

The development is expected to significantly advance NSE's plans for its long-awaited IPO, which has remained on hold for several years due to unresolved regulatory proceedings.

The proposed NSE public issue is widely expected to be one of India's largest IPOs in recent years and is likely to attract strong interest from institutional as well as retail investors.

— Agencies

Closing auction session for equity cash segment comes into effect

NEW DELHI, AUGUSTThe Closing Auction Session (CAS) in the equity cash segment became operational on Monday, ushering in a new auction-based mechanism to determine closing prices of eligible stocks.

Introduced by markets regulator SEBI, the new framework is aimed at making the price discovery process more transparent and robust, and applies only to cash market stocks with derivative contracts, while the existing volume-weighted average price (VWAP)-based methodology will continue for other stocks.

Before this, closing prices were determined using the VWAP of trades executed during the last 30 minutes of continuous trading.

The auction-based mechanism brings India closer to global market practices, where closing prices are discovered through an auction that aggregates buy and sell interest into a single pool of liquidity.

SEBI has said the framework is expected to improve execution efficiency for large orders, support fair settlement of derivatives and indices, and enable passive funds to transact at closing prices with lower tracking error.

Under the new system, the CAS will run for 20 minutes from 3.15 pm to 3.35 pm on every trading day as a separate session after the close of continuous trading.

The session comprises a transition phase from continuous trading, an order entry period for market and limit orders, a limit-order-only phase with random closure during the final two minutes, and the order matching process.

— Agencies

Kerala to benefit across key export sectors under India-UK trade pact



THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, AUGUST: Kerala is expected to benefit across several export-oriented sectors under the India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), with lower tariffs making trade between the state and the United Kingdom faster, easier and more cost-effective, British Deputy High Commissioner Sutapa Choudhury has said.

Speaking during a visit to Thiruvananthapuram, Choudhury said the agreement, which came into force on July 15, is expected to significantly boost bilateral trade between India and the UK over the long term.

She said bilateral trade between the two countries is projected to increase by £25.5 billion in the long run, with Kerala expected to benefit in sectors such as marine products, textiles, yoga and wellness.

According to Choudhury, the agreement will eliminate or reduce tariffs on several products, creating new opportunities for exporters from the state.

She said the trade pact would provide a faster, easier and more economical framework for businesses engaged in trade between Kerala and the United Kingdom.

Highlighting Kerala's trade infrastructure, Choudhury said the state is well positioned to leverage the opportunities created under the agreement.

She referred to her visit to the Vizhinjam International Seaport, describing it as a project with significant potential not only for Kerala but also for India and the wider South Asian region.

The British envoy expressed confidence that exporters from sectors where Kerala has established strengths would benefit from improved market access under the agreement.

The India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, which came into force on July 15, aims to strengthen bilateral trade and investment by improving market access, reducing tariffs and creating new business opportunities across multiple sectors. — Agencies

China well placed to emerge as long-term AI leader despite chip market volatility

NEW DELHI, AUGUST: China is emerging as one of the strongest long-term contenders in the global artificial intelligence (AI) race despite continued volatility in semiconductor stocks, according to a report by global investment firm Jefferies.

The report said recent sharp declines in semiconductor shares have pushed many stocks close to their 200-day moving averages, raising questions over whether the correction reflects a temporary unwinding of leveraged positions or the beginning of slower capital expenditure by global technology companies.



Despite the market turbulence, Jefferies maintained that China remains particularly well positioned in consumer-focused AI applications.

The report said China is likely to be among the strongest competitors in the mass consumer AI market, even as concerns grow over the sustainability of massive investments in AI infrastructure.

Jefferies noted that the latest quarterly earnings of major technology companies have not yet indicated any broad-based slowdown in AI-related spending, and analysts have largely maintained their earnings forecasts for memory-chip manufacturers.

However, it observed that investors have become increasingly cautious about rising capital expenditure by major technology firms, viewing it as a potential risk.

The report highlighted varying market reactions to recent earnings announcements by leading global technology companies.

Alphabet came under pressure after reporting negative free cash flow in the second quarter of 2026 for the first time since its initial public offering in 2004.

Meta's shares also declined sharply in after-hours trading after its free cash flow fell 91 per cent year-on-year, even as the company raised its capital expenditure guidance for 2026.

In contrast, Microsoft gained in after-hours trading after maintaining its capital expenditure guidance for calendar year 2026 at around US$175 billion, with revisions attributed to accounting changes rather than reduced investment.

According to Jefferies, while hyperscale technology companies continue to invest heavily in AI infrastructure, demand for computing power is expected to keep expanding, although the profile of customers driving that demand may evolve over time. The report also suggested that the AI industry may ultimately resemble the airline sector rather than the internet economy's winner-takes-all model, indicating that heavy capital expenditure may not necessarily result in exceptional returns for every participant.

— Agencies

Apple may launch AI-powered camera-equipped AirPods as early as next month: Report



CUPERTINO (US), AUGUST: Apple could introduce a new generation of AI-powered AirPods equipped with tiny cameras as early as next month, according to a report by Bloomberg, marking a significant step in the company's artificial intelligence strategy.

According to Bloomberg's Mark Gurman, the long-rumoured earbuds—reportedly referred to internally as AirPods Ultra—are now closer to launch than previously expected.

Unlike conventional cameras, the built-in sensors are not designed to capture photographs or record videos. Instead, they are expected to provide visual information that will allow Siri to better understand a user's surroundings.

The report said the technology could enable Siri to identify landmarks, recognise everyday objects, provide information about products or food items, and answer questions based on what the user is looking at rather than relying solely on voice commands.

Apple is reportedly developing multiple versions of the device. While one prototype had previously been expected to launch in 2027, another version appears to be much further along in development.

According to the report, references to the new AirPods have been found in iOS 27, suggesting Apple is already preparing software support for the device.

The AI-powered earbuds are expected to complement Apple's recently announced accessibility features, including enhanced Live Recognition, which uses artificial intelligence to identify objects through a camera.

If introduced, the new AirPods would allow users to obtain visual information hands-free by asking Siri questions about their surroundings without having to point an iPhone camera at an object.

Bloomberg also reported that the camera-equipped AirPods form part of Apple's broader AI strategy, which includes the development of smart glasses and other wearable devices designed to understand and interact with the user's environment through artificial intelligence.

Apple has not officially announced the product or confirmed its launch timeline.

— Agencies

Sridhar Vembu says AI investment has slowed job creation in India's IT sector

NEW DELHI, AUGUST: Zoho founder Sridhar Vembu has said that India's information technology sector has largely stopped creating new jobs, attributing the slowdown to the rapid shift in corporate spending towards artificial intelligence (AI).



In a post on social media platform X, Vembu said the country's biggest challenge is creating employment opportunities for its growing youth population amid an uncertain global economic environment.

He acknowledged that while Zoho has not carried out layoffs, the company has also not added significant numbers of new employees in recent years.

According to Vembu, the wider IT industry is facing a similar trend, with companies focusing their investments on AI technologies instead of expanding their workforce.

His remarks come at a time when several global technology companies, including Microsoft, Oracle and Meta, have announced workforce reductions while increasing spending on AI infrastructure and automation.

Industry reports indicate that hiring activity has also moderated. According to Xpheno's Active Tech Jobs Outlook for August 2026, active IT job openings declined by 6 per cent year-on-year to around 44,000 positions, although overall technology job openings across sectors stood at approximately 1.09 lakh, reflecting a 6 per cent increase over the previous year.

Vembu's comments add to the ongoing debate over the impact of artificial intelligence on employment, with companies balancing automation, productivity gains and changing workforce requirements.

Industry experts note that while AI is reducing demand for certain traditional roles, it is also expected to create new opportunities in areas such as AI engineering, data science, cybersecurity and digital transformation.

— Agencies

Sony launches 'True RGB' Mini LED TVs in India, expands premium Bravia lineup

NEW DELHI, AUGUST: Sony has introduced its latest premium television lineup in India with the launch of the Bravia 9 II and Bravia 7 II series, featuring the company's new "True RGB" Mini LED backlighting technology aimed at delivering enhanced colour accuracy and brightness. The new televisions were unveiled at an event in New Delhi as Sony seeks to strengthen its position in India's growing premium television market.



According to the company, the new 4K HDR TVs are powered by Sony's proprietary RGB Backlight Master Drive Pro, which independently controls red, green and blue LEDs in the backlight instead of relying on conventional blue or white LED illumination with colour filters.

Sony claims the technology can deliver up to four times the colour volume of OLED televisions while offering higher brightness than traditional Mini LED TVs.

The flagship Bravia 9 II will be available in 75-inch, 85-inch and 115-inch variants, priced at Rs 5,39,990, ?6,69,990 and Rs 28,99,990, respectively.

The Bravia 7 II series will be offered in 55-inch, 65-inch, 75-inch, 85-inch and 98-inch models, with prices ranging from Rs 2,21,990 to ?8,71,990.

Sony said the Bravia 9 II is capable of reaching a peak brightness of 4,000 nits and features technologies including RGB Triluminos Max, Luminance Booster Pro, Immersive Black Screen Pro anti-reflective coating and built-in up-firing beam tweeters for Dolby Atmos audio.

The company also described the Bravia 7 II as the first RGB television series to include a 50-inch-class option, expanding access to the technology across multiple screen sizes.

RGB LED televisions are increasingly being viewed as the next major advancement in premium display technology, with manufacturers claiming improvements in colour reproduction and brightness over conventional Mini LED and OLED displays.

The launch comes amid rising demand for large-screen televisions in India. According to market research firm Counterpoint Research, shipments of premium televisions measuring 65 inches and above grew by 31 per cent in 2025, while the 55-64-inch segment recorded 14 per cent growth. Mini LED televisions were among the fastest-growing categories during the year.

— Agencies

Microsoft aims to optimise Windows 11 for PCs with 8 GB RAM

REDMOND (US), AUGUST: Microsoft has announced new efforts to improve the performance and efficiency of Windows 11, including optimising the operating system to deliver a smoother experience on computers equipped with 8 GB of RAM or more.

The announcement forms part of the company's broader initiative to improve Windows 11 following user feedback regarding performance, stability and resource usage.

In a recent update, Pavan Davuluri, Executive Vice President for Windows and Devices, said Microsoft has been working to improve memory efficiency across the operating system through a more efficient memory allocator, optimised WinUI 3 applications and enhancements to Chromium and WebView2 components.

Among four newly announced priorities, Microsoft said it will focus on reducing Windows' memory footprint to ensure a faster and more responsive experience on everyday PCs with 8 GB or more of memory.

The company currently lists 4 GB RAM as the minimum hardware requirement for Windows 11, while Copilot+ PCs designed for advanced AI features require at least 16 GB RAM.

Industry observers believe Microsoft's renewed focus on lower-memory systems reflects growing demand for affordable PCs as memory prices remain elevated and consumers continue to weigh the value of AI-focused hardware.

Alongside memory optimisation, Microsoft outlined three additional priorities: improving the out-of-box setup experience, simplifying device configuration and parental controls for families, and making voice interactions across applications more natural.

Davuluri acknowledged that some of the planned improvements are still under development and did not specify a timeline for their rollout. He said Microsoft remains committed to addressing user concerns and enhancing the overall Windows experience.

The announcement comes amid continued challenges in the global PC market, with industry analysts projecting slower shipments and higher hardware costs due to persistent memory supply constraints.

— Agencies

India's data centre boom expected to fuel housing demand around technology hubs

MUMBAI, AUGUST: India's rapidly expanding data centre industry is expected to trigger a new wave of residential development around emerging technology corridors as investments in digital infrastructure create thousands of jobs and reshape urban growth, according to a report by real estate platform Square Yards.



The report estimates that the country's proposed data centre pipeline of around 9,030 MW could generate nearly 4.33 lakh jobs across the data centre ecosystem, leading to demand for approximately 195 million square feet of residential space by 2030.

Unlike conventional IT parks, data centres are expected to stimulate investment in supporting infrastructure such as power supply, fibre-optic connectivity, logistics and ancillary services, gradually transforming surrounding areas into new residential and commercial growth corridors.

The report noted that the housing demand would not be limited to highly skilled technology professionals. It is also expected to be driven by engineers, construction workers, facility managers, security personnel, logistics operators and service providers supporting the expanding data centre ecosystem.

India's data centre industry has witnessed rapid expansion in recent years, fuelled by rising cloud computing adoption, artificial intelligence, digital payments, e-commerce, 5G services and increasing data localisation requirements. Major global technology companies and infrastructure investors have announced large-scale investments to expand data centre capacity across the country.

According to the report, this expansion is expected to generate broader economic activity, encouraging the development of housing, schools, healthcare facilities, retail centres and other urban infrastructure around data centre clusters.

Industry experts believe the trend could mirror the transformation witnessed around major IT hubs over the past two decades, with data centres emerging as new anchors of urban development and real estate growth.

— Agencies

Global tech layoffs surpass 124,000 in 2026 as AI investments accelerate

SAN FRANCISCO, AUGUST: Global technology companies have eliminated more than 124,000 jobs during the first seven months of 2026, exceeding the total number of tech layoffs recorded throughout 2025, even as the industry sharply increases investment in artificial intelligence (AI).

According to layoff tracking platform Layoffs.fyi, major companies including Oracle, Amazon, Dell Technologies and Meta have announced the largest workforce reductions this year, while firms such as Workday, GitLab and Robinhood have also cut jobs.

California alone has reportedly lost more than 16,000 technology jobs since the beginning of the year, with Meta accounting for nearly one-fifth of those layoffs.

The workforce reductions come as technology companies invest heavily in AI infrastructure, including data centres, advanced semiconductor chips and AI-powered software platforms.

Oracle has announced plans to invest US$90 billion in AI infrastructure during the next fiscal year, while Meta and Amazon have also significantly increased their capital expenditure plans to support AI expansion.

Companies have attributed the layoffs to multiple factors, including post-pandemic workforce restructuring, efforts to reduce bureaucracy and the growing use of AI to automate certain business processes.

Despite concerns that artificial intelligence could lead to widespread job losses, some studies suggest AI may ultimately generate more employment than it replaces.

A recent global analysis by professional services firm PwC found that organisations with greater AI adoption are creating jobs faster than those with lower AI exposure by improving productivity and developing new business opportunities.

The report also noted that San Francisco's unemployment rate declined to 3.7 per cent this year despite widespread layoffs, supported by continued hiring by AI-focused companies such as OpenAI and Anthropic.

Industry experts, however, say the long-term impact of artificial intelligence on employment remains uncertain as businesses continue to balance automation with the creation of new roles requiring advanced digital and AI skills.

— Agencies

IISc develops technology to convert waste milk pouches into high-value engineering plastic

BENGALURU, AUGUST: Researchers at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru, have developed an innovative technology that converts discarded plastic milk pouches into durable engineering-grade plastic, offering a sustainable solution to one of the country's most common sources of plastic waste.

The breakthrough addresses the challenge of recycling multilayer plastic packaging, particularly used milk pouches, which are difficult to process through conventional recycling methods because they are made from different types of incompatible plastics.

The IISc research team has developed a special material known as a vitrimer, which acts both as a reinforcing agent and a compatibiliser, allowing different waste plastics to bond together and form a strong engineering material.

According to the researchers, the technology transforms low-value plastic waste into a high-performance material suitable for demanding industrial applications, significantly enhancing both its strength and durability.

Unlike traditional recycling, which often results in lower-quality plastic after repeated processing, the new technique produces engineering plastic with improved mechanical properties, extending the useful life of discarded plastic materials.

The researchers believe the innovation could help reduce plastic pollution while supporting India's circular economy by converting household plastic waste into valuable raw material for manufacturing.

Waste milk pouches are among the most widely discarded single-use plastic products in India. Their multilayer structure makes them difficult to recycle efficiently, causing large quantities to end up in landfills or the environment.

— Agencies

Beyond the Mountains: The enduring cultural soul of Jammu & Kashmir



VIKAS SHARMA

JAMMU, AUGUST: For many first-time visitors, Jammu and Kashmir begins with a postcard. Snow-covered mountains, the still waters of Dal Lake, colourful gardens in bloom and winding roads through pine forests have long defined the region in travel brochures and cinema. But to understand Jammu and Kashmir only through its landscapes is to miss its greatest treasure. Beyond the mountains lies a living culture shaped by centuries of faith, migration, craftsmanship, music and shared traditions—a culture that continues to evolve while remaining deeply rooted in its past.

Culture here is not confined to museums or heritage monuments. It is woven into everyday life. It echoes in the morning prayers rising from temples, mosques, gurdwaras and monasteries, in the laughter of artisans working patiently over intricate designs, in the aroma of freshly brewed kahwa, in the melodies of folk songs sung during weddings and harvests, and in the stories grandparents continue to narrate around evening hearths.

Stretching from the plains of Jammu to the alpine meadows of Kashmir and the rugged mountains of the Pir Panjal, the Union Territory is home to communities that have preserved distinct identities while sharing a common history. Dogras, Kashmiris, Gujjars, Bakerwals, Paharis, Sikhs and several tribal communities have together created one of India's richest cultural landscapes. Each has contributed its own language, customs, festivals, cuisine and artistic traditions, yet together they reflect a remarkable story of coexistence.

The cultural heartbeat of Jammu resonates through its historic towns, ancient temples and vibrant folk traditions. Often described as the City of Temples, Jammu is home to centuries-old places of worship that continue to draw pilgrims from across the country. The revered Mata Vaishno Devi shrine, Raghunath Temple, Bahu Fort, Purmandal and Sudh Mahadev are not merely religious landmarks; they are living centres of faith, history and community life.

The legacy of the Dogra rulers remains visible in the architectural elegance of Mubarak Mandi Palace and Amar Mahal Palace Museum. Their patronage nurtured literature, painting, music and education, leaving behind a cultural inheritance that continues to inspire scholars and artists alike.

Language forms an important pillar of this heritage. Dogri, recognised in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution, carries within it centuries of poetry, folklore and oral traditions. Its verses celebrate love, courage, devotion and the rhythms of rural life. Village fairs and seasonal festivals still come alive with traditional dances such as Kud, Fummani and Heren, where colourful costumes, rhythmic drums and spirited performances strengthen bonds within communities.

Cross the Pir Panjal and the cultural landscape transforms, yet the essence remains the same. Kashmir has long been celebrated for its artistic refinement and spiritual depth. Here, culture flows gently through every aspect of daily life. The intricate lattice windows of old Srinagar homes, wooden mosques adorned with exquisite craftsmanship, centuries-old shrines, bustling markets and tranquil gardens all speak of a civilisation that valued beauty as much as wisdom.

At the heart of Kashmir's cultural identity lies the philosophy often described as Kashmiriyat—a tradition of mutual respect, compassion and coexistence. Though tested by history, its influence continues to shape social life and collective memory. The shrines of revered Sufi saints such as Sheikh Noor-ud-din Noorani, Makhdoom Sahib and the historic Khanqah-e-Moula continue to welcome devotees from different walks of life. Nearby, ancient temples including Shankaracharya and the majestic ruins of the Martand Sun Temple stand as reminders of the Valley's layered civilisational journey.

Perhaps nowhere is the region's creativity more visible than in its handicrafts. Behind every handwoven carpet, every embroidered shawl and every carved walnut-wood panel lies years of patience and generations of inherited skill. A Kashmiri artisan often spends months—sometimes years—creating a single masterpiece. The delicate threads of a Pashmina shawl, the vibrant colours of papier-mâché, the intricate patterns of chain-stitch embroidery and the timeless beauty of copperware have earned admiration across the world.

Jammu too has its own artistic treasures. The celebrated Basohli School of miniature painting, known for its bold colours and expressive style, remains one of India's finest artistic traditions. Rural artisans continue to preserve bamboo craft, handloom weaving and woodwork, demonstrating that creativity flourishes far beyond urban centres.

The region's cuisine tells another compelling story. Food here is not simply nourishment; it is an expression of hospitality and identity. In Kashmir, guests are welcomed with steaming cups of fragrant kahwa or traditional noon chai before conversations begin. The elaborate Wazwan, prepared by skilled wazas, is more than a feast—it is a celebration of togetherness. Dishes such as Rogan Josh, Gushtaba, Rista, Yakhni and Dum Aloo reflect generations of culinary excellence.

In Jammu, traditional flavours are equally distinctive. Kaladi Kulcha, Rajma-Chawal, Ambal, Khatta Meat and a variety of locally prepared breads have become symbols of Dogra hospitality. Every festival and family gathering is marked by recipes handed down through generations, preserving memories as much as flavours.

Festivals across Jammu and Kashmir provide perhaps the clearest glimpse of its cultural diversity. Navratri, Lohri, Baisakhi and Diwali fill Jammu with colour, devotion and celebration. In Kashmir, Eid, Urs celebrations, Herath, the Tulip Festival and numerous local fairs bring communities together in shared joy. Across villages and towns, festivals continue to strengthen social bonds, reminding people that culture is ultimately about participation rather than performance.

Music and dance have long served as powerful storytellers. The graceful Rouf dance performed by Kashmiri women, the devotional strains of Sufiana Mausiqi, the energetic beats of Chakri, and the lively Dogra folk performances all preserve memories that written history often cannot. Instruments such as the Santoor, Rabab, Sarangi and Tumbaknari continue to echo through cultural festivals, family celebrations and traditional performances.

Equally significant are the nomadic communities who move with the seasons across the Himalayan landscape. The Gujjars and Bakerwals have preserved a way of life that reflects an intimate understanding of nature. Their seasonal migrations, oral traditions, folk music and livestock-based economy form an invaluable part of Jammu and Kashmir's cultural heritage. The Pahari communities of the Pir Panjal and Chenab regions likewise continue to enrich the region through their language, songs, festivals and oral literature.

Today's Jammu and Kashmir stands at an important crossroads. Rapid urbanisation, digital technology and changing lifestyles are transforming the way people live, work and communicate. Younger generations are increasingly connected to the world through smartphones and social media, yet many are also rediscovering pride in their roots. Young designers are reimagining traditional Pashmina for global fashion markets. Folk musicians are finding audiences on digital platforms. Artisans are selling handcrafted products directly to international buyers through e-commerce, while local entrepreneurs are promoting authentic regional cuisine and cultural experiences to visitors.

Conservation efforts are also gathering momentum. Historic temples, mosques, shrines, forts and heritage buildings are being restored. Museums are documenting disappearing traditions. Cultural festivals, literary events and craft exhibitions are providing platforms for artists and performers whose work represents the living heritage of the region. Educational institutions, researchers and community organisations are recording oral histories, documenting endangered dialects and encouraging younger generations to value the traditions inherited from their ancestors.

Yet the true strength of Jammu and Kashmir's culture lies not in monuments or museums but in its people. It lives in the hands of the elderly weaver tying thousands of knots into a carpet. It survives in the shepherd guiding his flock across mountain passes as his forefathers did centuries ago. It flourishes in the schoolchild learning Dogri or Kashmiri folk songs, in the family preparing festive meals together, and in the artisan who refuses to let ancient skills disappear despite changing markets.

The mountains may define the geography of Jammu and Kashmir, but they do not define its identity. That identity belongs to its people—their resilience, creativity, faith and ability to preserve traditions while embracing change. Every temple bell, every Sufi hymn, every brushstroke of a Basohli painter, every embroidered shawl, every shared meal and every village festival contributes another chapter to a remarkable cultural story.

In a world increasingly shaped by speed and uniformity, Jammu and Kashmir offers a quiet yet powerful reminder that heritage is not something locked away in history books. It is lived every day, carried from one generation to the next through language, art, music, faith and memory. Beyond the mountains lies a cultural soul that continues to inspire, endure and connect people across regions, religions and generations—a timeless legacy that remains one of India's greatest treasures.

Article 370 changes will be remembered by future generations: LG

BLAZING TALES NEWS SERVICE

SRINAGAR, AUGUST: Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha said the transformation witnessed in Jammu and Kashmir following the abrogation of Article 370 under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi would be remembered by future generations, describing the empowerment of the Pahari community and other marginalised sections as a significant milestone in India's democratic journey.

He was addressing the launch of "Sharda to Sansad", a book authored by Dr. A.H. Shah, in Srinagar.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi connected Jammu and Kashmir's aspirations with those of the nation. The empowerment of the Pahari community, along with other marginalised groups, marked a turning point in India's democratic journey. Future generations will remember this transformation well," the Lieutenant Governor said.

Congratulating the author on the publication, Manoj Sinha described Sharda to Sansad as more than a historical account, saying it represents a dialogue between heritage and hope, and between the wisdom of the past and the democratic aspirations of the present.

He said literature and scholarship illuminate the human spirit and connect different eras, drawing a parallel between the ancient seat of learning at Sharda Peeth and the Parliament of India.

"If Sharda nurtured the wisdom of society, Parliament has worked to fulfil the aspirations of the nation," he said.

Highlighting the rich cultural legacy of the Pahari community, the Lieutenant Governor praised its role in preserving its language, folklore, folk music and traditions over centuries. He said the journey from Sharda to Sansad symbolises India's own journey of carrying forward its ancient knowledge systems while strengthening democratic institutions.

Calling upon scholars, teachers, artists and citizens to preserve India's civilisational heritage, Manoj Sinha said many villages, dialects and folk traditions across the country remain undocumented.

"There are villages whose stories remain unwritten, dialects whose grammar is yet to be studied, and folk songs that have not been recorded. Each of these efforts will enrich our national archive," he said.

Emphasising the need to balance tradition with innovation, he said cultural heritage is a living force passed from one generation to another and forms the foundation of a strong and vibrant democracy.

Responding to concerns raised by J&K Pahari Welfare Society Chairman Zafar Iqbal Manhas regarding issues faced by members of the community following the implementation of the law, the Lieutenant Governor assured that a robust mechanism would be put in place to address their concerns.

The event was attended by Zafar Iqbal Manhas, Dr. A.H. Shah, Khush Dev Maini, Dr. Jahangir Danish, literary personalities and representatives of various Pahari organisations.

IIM Jammu hosts HR Conclave 9.0 on AI, innovation and workplace culture



BLAZING TALES NEWS SERVICE

JAMMU, AUGUST: The Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Jammu recently hosted the ninth edition of its flagship HR Conclave 9.0, bringing together industry leaders, human resource professionals, academicians and management students to deliberate on the theme, "The People Advantage: Navigating the Intersection of AI, Innovation & Workplace Culture." The conclave commenced with the traditional lighting of the lamp and Saraswati Vandana, followed by welcome and institutional addresses. Malvika Singh, Head of Campus Recruitment at BNY, attended the inaugural session as the chief guest, while IIM Jammu Director B.S. Sahay presided over the event.

Addressing the gathering, Malvika Singh said that while artificial intelligence and technological advancements are transforming workplaces, trust, empathy and human values will continue to form the foundation of resilient organisations and meaningful professional relationships.

She encouraged students to develop competencies that complement technology, including empathy, collaboration, adaptability, critical thinking and continuous learning, to succeed in the evolving world of work. She also urged them to make the most of opportunities at IIM Jammu and actively engage with industry leaders to enhance their professional growth. Highlighting the importance of industry-academia collaboration, she said institutions and industry must work together to nurture future-ready talent and described HR Conclave 9.0 as an important platform for knowledge exchange and meaningful dialogue on the future of work.

In his address, B.S. Sahay said the future of work would be shaped not by artificial intelligence alone but by its effective integration with human values. He observed that while AI is improving organisational efficiency and competitiveness, qualities such as creativity, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, adaptability and ethical leadership will continue to differentiate successful professionals. He stressed that academia and industry share the responsibility of preparing future leaders with these competencies to thrive in an increasingly dynamic global environment. Emphasising IIM Jammu's commitment to experiential learning, Sahay said management education should go beyond conventional classroom teaching and include live projects, internships, contemporary case studies and sustained engagement with industry to prepare students for real-world challenges.

— Agencies

JKAACL organises Sufi music programme on Urs of Hazrat Habibullah Najar (R.A.)

BLAZING TALES NEWS SERVICE

BUDGAM, AUGUST: The Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages (JKAACL) organised a Sufi music programme to mark the Urs Mubarak of revered Sufi saint Hazrat Habibullah Najar (R.A.), popularly known as Vasste Habib, at his native village, Wagar, in Budgam district.

The spiritual and cultural event witnessed enthusiastic participation from devotees, scholars, artists and admirers of Sufi music, reflecting the enduring influence of the saint's teachings of peace, humility and spiritual devotion.

Incharge Programme Officer, JKAACL, Dr. Shabnam Rafiq welcomed the guests, artists and the audience and highlighted the spiritual legacy and invaluable contributions of Hazrat Habibullah Najar (R.A.). He described the saint as a symbol of peace, humility and divine love whose teachings continue to inspire generations.

He also reaffirmed the Academy's commitment to preserving and promoting the rich Sufi heritage and cultural traditions of Jammu and Kashmir.

Renowned Sufi singer Ab. Rashid Hafiz attended the programme as the chief guest, while Khursheed Ahmad Zargar was the guest of honour.

To commemorate the occasion, JKAACL collaborated with local Sufi music groups, including the Faqeer Vasste Habib Committee and the Kashmiri Sufi Gulokaar Forum, to present devotional performances celebrating the spiritual legacy of the revered saint.

The programme featured soulful renditions by noted artists, including Ab. Rashid Hafiz, Farooq Ahmad Mazhami, Ghulam Mohi-ud-Din Sheikh, Khan Mufasal, Gulzar Ahmad Mir, Mohammad Ayoub Khan, Mohammad Iqbal Bhat, Athar Balpori, Ab. Rashid Muqami, Nazir Ahmad Shah, Ab. Rashid Kathwari and Ghulam Hassan Shah. Their performances created a spiritually uplifting atmosphere and were warmly received by the gathering.

The proceedings were conducted by Mohammad Ismail Soibugh, who coordinated the programme and introduced the participating artists.

The event concluded with prayers for peace, communal harmony and prosperity in Jammu and Kashmir, reaffirming JKAACL's continued efforts to preserve and promote the region's rich spiritual and cultural heritage.

J&K grapples with high unemployment as over 3.49 lakh youth remain on job rolls

BLAZING TALES NEWS SERVICE

JAMMU, AUGUST: Jammu and Kashmir continues to face a daunting employment challenge, with the Union Territory recording an unemployment rate of 6.7 per cent, significantly higher than the national average of 3.5 per cent, the government recently informed.

The disclosure came in response to a starred question in the House, painting a picture of a labour market where thousands of educated young people are still struggling to secure stable employment despite various government initiatives.

Official figures reveal that 3.49 lakh unemployed youth have registered themselves with District Employment and Counselling Centres (DE&CCs). However, the government admitted that the actual number of job seekers is likely to be much higher as registration with these centres is voluntary, leaving many unemployed youth outside the official database.

The unemployment estimates are based on the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) conducted by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation for people in the 15-59 years age group.

During the Assembly proceedings, concerns were also raised over the social impact of unemployment, particularly whether the lack of employment opportunities is contributing to rising drug abuse and mental health issues among young people. In response, the government said employment generation remains one of its key priorities and outlined several initiatives aimed at improving access to jobs and self-employment opportunities.

The government said it has been strengthening employment services through online registration, career counselling and regular dissemination of job opportunities in both the public and private sectors. Registered candidates are informed about available vacancies, while employers are provided access to the database to facilitate recruitment.

At the same time, the administration is placing greater emphasis on entrepreneurship through Mission YUVA (Yuva Udyami Vikas Abhiyan), a programme developed with technical support from institutions including IIM Jammu, NABARD and Jammu and Kashmir Bank.

According to the government, studies conducted while formulating Mission YUVA found that unemployment in Jammu and Kashmir is driven by more than just a shortage of jobs. Many young people face barriers such as limited career guidance, inadequate awareness of government support schemes, hesitation towards entrepreneurship and difficulties in accessing institutional finance.

The assessment also highlighted structural challenges, including weak industry-academia linkages, inadequate grassroots support systems and procedural hurdles in securing financial assistance for new business ventures.

To improve employment prospects, the government said recruitment drives and job fairs are being organised across sectors such as manufacturing, retail, healthcare and finance. These events provide a common platform where companies can directly interact with job seekers through interviews and screening processes.

The government maintained that such initiatives, coupled with entrepreneurship promotion and skill development programmes, are aimed at expanding livelihood opportunities and reducing unemployment among the youth of Jammu and Kashmir.

CM calls for expanding employment opportunities for youth through private sector, entrepreneurship

BLAZING TALES NEWS SERVICE

SRINAGAR, AUGUST: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah reaffirmed his government's commitment to expanding employment opportunities for the youth, asserting that while government jobs alone cannot solve unemployment, it is the government's responsibility to create more avenues through private sector recruitment, entrepreneurship and industry partnerships.

He was addressing the valedictory session of the 77th State-Level Mega Job Fair at Amar Singh College, Srinagar. The event was organised by Desh Bhagat University, Punjab, and Cluster University of Srinagar in collaboration with NIELIT, Nations Development Association (NDA) and MY Bharat.

Minister for Education Sakina Itoo, Commissioner Secretary School Education Ram Niwas Sharma, Vice Chancellor of Cluster University Srinagar, vice chancellors of several universities, President of Desh Bhagat University Dr. Sandeep Singh, principals, academicians and students attended the programme.

Addressing the gathering, the Chief Minister said institutions of higher learning have a responsibility that extends beyond awarding degrees and must actively facilitate students' transition from education to employment.

He appreciated Cluster University Srinagar and Desh Bhagat University for organising the mega job fair, describing it as an important initiative to bridge the gap between education and employment. Highlighting the outcome of the recruitment drive, Omar Abdullah said that of nearly 5,300 registered candidates, around 470 youth received job offers, while another 430 candidates reached the final stage of recruitment and were awaiting completion of interview formalities.

He said nearly 900 young men and women had either secured employment or were on the verge of getting jobs, describing it as an encouraging success rate for a relatively new initiative.

Expressing confidence that more such employment drives would improve placement numbers, the Chief Minister called the event a landmark initiative and stressed the need to institutionalise campus recruitment across all universities and colleges in Jammu and Kashmir.

He urged institutions, including the University of Kashmir, Islamic University of Science and Technology, University of Jammu, Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology and other higher educational institutions, to organise regular recruitment drives so that students receive employment opportunities before completing their studies.

The Chief Minister said simply stating that government jobs are not the solution to unemployment is not enough.

"If we cannot provide government employment to every young person, then it becomes our duty to open more doors of opportunity. We cannot simply tell our youth to look elsewhere; we must create opportunities for them through private sector engagement, skill development and industry partnerships," he said. Highlighting the entrepreneurial potential of the youth, Omar Abdullah said the government is taking steps to strengthen the startup ecosystem by connecting aspiring entrepreneurs with venture capital funding and providing institutional support for new enterprises.

He reiterated that the government would continue making every effort to ensure that the youth of Jammu and Kashmir receive opportunities comparable to those available elsewhere in the country and abroad.

Congratulating candidates who secured placements, the Chief Minister wished them success in their careers and encouraged those awaiting final selection to continue striving towards their goals.

During the programme, he also handed over appointment letters to selected candidates. An MoU was signed between Cluster University of Srinagar and Desh Bhagat University, Punjab, to promote academic collaboration, skill development and employment opportunities for students. More than 50 reputed employers from across India, including companies with operations in the Gulf and Middle East, participated in the mega job fair, offering employment opportunities to graduates, postgraduates, diploma holders and skilled youth through on-the-spot interviews, screening and recruitment.

Why Profitable Companies Are Cutting Jobs in 2026

FOR decades, layoffs were viewed as a last resort. Companies typically reduced their workforce during economic downturns, declining sales or financial crises. The formula was straightforward: when business slowed, jobs disappeared.

That equation no longer holds true.

In 2026, many of the world's most valuable corporations have announced thousands of job cuts despite reporting healthy revenues, strong profits and ambitious expansion plans. From technology giants and global banks to automakers, retailers and pharmaceutical companies, layoffs have become less about survival and more about transformation.

The shift signals a profound change in the way businesses are preparing for the future.

A different kind of restructuring

Unlike previous waves of layoffs triggered by recessions, today's workforce reductions are being driven by technological disruption, artificial intelligence, automation and changing business priorities. Companies are not necessarily shrinking; they are reallocating resources.

Instead of expanding payrolls, organisations are investing billions of dollars in AI infrastructure, cloud computing, robotics, cybersecurity and digital platforms. The objective is to build leaner, more technology-driven enterprises capable of operating with fewer employees while increasing productivity.

This marks a significant departure from traditional corporate strategy, where growth was often accompanied by large-scale hiring.

Technology leads the transformation

The technology sector remains at the centre of this global trend.

Several leading companies have announced major workforce reductions while simultaneously accelerating investments in artificial intelligence.

Microsoft, for instance, has continued restructuring its workforce even as it expands AI capabilities and cloud infrastructure. Meta has also prioritised AI development, reducing jobs while redirecting resources toward next-generation technologies. Cisco and Oracle have adopted similar strategies, focusing on AI-powered networking, cybersecurity and cloud services.

The contradiction is striking. Corporate spending continues to rise—but increasingly on machines, software and computing power rather than human labour.

For technology companies, artificial intelligence is no longer viewed as a support tool. It has become central to future business models.

Beyond Silicon Valley

The impact extends well beyond the technology industry.

Global automakers are restructuring as electric vehicles, autonomous driving and software redefine vehicle manufacturing. Traditional engineering roles are gradually giving way to demand for battery specialists, software developers and AI engineers.

Banks are also embracing automation. Routine administrative work, customer support and back-office operations are increasingly handled through AI-powered systems, allowing financial institutions to reduce staffing while improving efficiency.

Retailers face another challenge altogether. As consumers shift towards online shopping and digital commerce, companies are streamlining physical operations, investing in automated warehouses and redesigning supply chains.

Telecommunications, pharmaceuticals, hospitality and media organisations have followed similar paths, demonstrating that workforce transformation has become an economy-wide phenomenon.

The rise of AI-driven workplaces

Artificial intelligence is undoubtedly the defining force behind much of this restructuring.

Tasks once performed by large teams—including data analysis, customer service, coding assistance, content generation, financial reporting and operational planning—can now be completed more quickly with AI-assisted tools. However, experts caution that AI is not eliminating work altogether. Instead, it is changing the nature of work.

History offers similar examples. The Industrial Revolution reduced manual labour but created manufacturing jobs. The internet replaced certain occupations while generating entirely new industries.

The AI revolution appears to be following a comparable pattern, although the transition may be faster and more disruptive than previous technological shifts.

A growing skills gap

Perhaps the greatest challenge is not unemployment itself but employability.

Many organisations are reducing positions that involve repetitive or routine tasks while actively recruiting professionals with expertise in artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, cloud computing, machine learning, robotics, data science and digital engineering.

This widening skills gap means that university degrees alone may no longer guarantee employment.

Continuous learning, professional certifications and the ability to adapt to emerging technologies are becoming essential career requirements. For young graduates entering the workforce, technical knowledge must increasingly be complemented by creativity, critical thinking, communication skills and emotional intelligence—qualities that remain difficult for machines to replicate.

Lessons for the future workforce

The new corporate landscape sends a clear message to employees across industries: job security can no longer depend solely on experience or tenure. Professionals who continuously upgrade their skills, embrace technological change and remain adaptable will be better positioned in an evolving labour market.

Educational institutions, too, must rethink traditional curricula by integrating AI literacy, digital skills and interdisciplinary learning into academic programmes. Governments and businesses will need to invest in large-scale reskilling initiatives to ensure workers are not left behind as automation accelerates.

A permanent shift

The defining feature of 2026 is not simply the scale of layoffs but the reason behind them.

Companies are no longer cutting jobs because they are struggling financially. Many are doing so while recording strong profits and investing heavily in future technologies. Workforce reduction has become a strategic business decision rather than an emergency response.

Whether this transformation ultimately creates more opportunities than it eliminates remains uncertain. What is clear, however, is that the relationship between technology and employment has entered a new era.

For businesses, efficiency has become as important as expansion. For workers, adaptability has become the most valuable career asset. And for the global economy, 2026 may well be remembered as the year layoffs stopped being temporary responses to crisis and became a defining feature of modern corporate strategy.

Agencies

40% of young graduates remain unemployed as job creation lags, says report

NEW DELHI, AUGUST: Nearly 40 per cent of young graduates in India remain unemployed, highlighting a persistent mismatch between higher education and employment opportunities, according to the State of Working India 2026 report released by Azim Premji University.

The report states that graduate unemployment among people aged 15 to 29 years has remained consistently high for four decades. Around 40 per cent of graduates aged 15 to 25 years and 20 per cent of those aged 25 to 29 years are unemployed despite possessing higher educational qualifications. According to the report, graduate unemployment has remained between 35 and 40 per cent from 1983 to 2023, even though the number of graduates in the country has increased substantially over the years.

The study also highlights that securing stable employment remains a major challenge for young graduates. Tracking graduate men over a one-year period, researchers found that while nearly half managed to find some form of employment, only about seven per cent secured permanent salaried jobs within a year.

The findings come at a crucial stage for India, which is currently experiencing one of the world's largest youth populations.



The report estimates that the country's share of the working-age population will begin declining after 2030, making the next few years critical for employment generation.

With nearly 367 million people aged between 15 and 29 years, the report says India's ability to create quality jobs will determine whether its demographic advantage translates into long-term economic growth.

Researchers also noted a worrying decline in educational participation among young men. The proportion of young men pursuing education fell from 38 per cent in 2017 to 34 per cent in late 2024, while an increasing number reported leaving their studies to support their families. Among young men aged 15 to 24 years, the proportion citing financial responsibilities as the reason for discontinuing education rose from 58 per cent in 2017 to 72 per cent in 2023. The report further points out that although employment increased after the COVID-19 pandemic, much of the growth occurred in the agriculture sector. Of the 83 million jobs added between 2021-22 and 2023-24, nearly 40 million were created in agriculture, reversing the earlier trend of workers moving towards manufacturing and services. The report concludes that India faces the challenge of bridging the widening gap between rising educational attainment and the availability of quality employment opportunities, particularly as the country's demographic dividend begins to narrow.

— Agencies

LG calls for nature-based solutions to build climate resilience in the Himalayas

BLAZING TALES NEWS SERVICE

SRINAGAR, AUGUST: Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha called for placing nature-based solutions at the centre of development planning to strengthen climate resilience in the Himalayan region, stressing that conservation and development must go hand in hand.

He was addressing a conference on "Strengthening Climate Resilience and Livelihoods in the Himalayan Region through Nature-based Solutions" organised by the Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST).

During the visit, the Lieutenant Governor also inaugurated the Civil and Mechanical Engineering Block at the university's main campus, the IUST Larmoo Campus and the Law School. He congratulated the university for its academic initiatives and lauded its policy brief on the Drug-Free Jammu Kashmir campaign.

Highlighting the growing impact of climate change in the Himalayan region, Manoj Sinha said the Himalayas witnessed a natural disaster almost every day between January and August last year. He noted that in Jammu and Kashmir, flash floods and cloudbursts have caused extensive damage to public infrastructure, disrupting roads, water supply schemes and power feeders.

He observed that there is no conflict between development and environmental conservation, asserting that nature itself is a vital form of infrastructure.

Explaining the concept, the Lieutenant Governor said watersheds function as natural flood-control systems while also purifying water and supporting irrigation. Wetlands, he said, serve as natural reservoirs by absorbing excess monsoon water and gradually releasing it during dry periods, while dense forests on mountain slopes act as protective barriers against landslides and soil erosion.

He cautioned that destroying such natural systems would jeopardise future generations, whereas conserving and restoring them represents an investment in a sustainable future.

Calling upon scientists, engineers and policymakers to integrate nature-based solutions into mainstream development planning, the Lieutenant Governor also presented six key recommendations for strengthening climate resilience in the Himalayan region.

Among the recommendations, he stressed the need to harness modern technologies such as remote sensing, geospatial mapping and artificial intelligence to monitor glacier retreat, spring discharge, soil health and forest cover, enabling more effective planning and disaster preparedness.

He said scientific innovation, environmental conservation and community participation must work together to safeguard the fragile Himalayan ecosystem while ensuring sustainable livelihoods for people living in the region.

Director Information reviews preparations for 1st International Film Festival



BLAZING TALES NEWS SERVICEe

SRINAGAR, AUGUST: Director Information Shreya Singhal reviewed the preparations for the forthcoming 1st International Film Festival of Jammu & Kashmir (IFFJK) and directed officers to ensure fool-proof arrangements and seamless coordination among all stakeholders for the successful conduct of the prestigious event.

The review meeting was held at the Media Complex in Srinagar and was attended by senior officers of the Department of Information and Public Relations (DIPR), including Joint Directors, Deputy Directors, the Film Production Officer, District Information Officers and other officials, both in person and through video conferencing.

During the meeting, the Director conducted a comprehensive review of arrangements related to venue management, delegate facilitation, hospitality, media management, transportation, cultural programmes, technical support, logistics and other allied aspects of the festival.

She instructed officers to complete all preparations well within the stipulated timelines, leaving no scope for lapses.

"Ensure fool-proof arrangements and seamless coordination among all stakeholders for the successful conduct of the prestigious event," she said.

Highlighting the significance of the inaugural edition of the festival, Shreya Singhal said it marks an important milestone in Jammu and Kashmir's cultural and cinematic landscape. She said the festival would provide a global platform to showcase the Union Territory's rich heritage, scenic beauty, artistic excellence and growing potential as a preferred destination for film production and creative collaborations.

The Director directed all officers and committees concerned to maintain close coordination and ensure effective synergy among departments and agencies associated with the festival.

She stressed that meticulous planning, prompt execution and continuous monitoring of preparations would be essential for organising the event in a smooth, professional and befitting manner.

Shreya Singhal also instructed officers to regularly review the progress of works assigned to them and resolve emerging issues through coordinated action. She laid special emphasis on strengthening media and publicity arrangements to ensure extensive outreach and wider visibility of the festival at the national and international levels.

Reiterating the commitment of the Department of Information and Public Relations to host the event to the highest professional standards, she said the festival is expected to become a landmark celebration of cinema, reflecting the cultural vibrancy, creative aspirations and growing global profile of Jammu and Kashmir.

The meeting was informed that the 1st International Film Festival of Jammu & Kashmir has received more than 1,100 film entries from over 50 countries, underscoring the enthusiastic global response to the inaugural event.

SC seeks Centre's response on plea to shift Delhi's designated protest venue

NEW DELHI, AUGUST: The Supreme Court has sought the Centre's response to a petition questioning the continued use of Jantar Mantar as Delhi's designated site for public protests and demonstrations, observing that the issues raised deserve serious consideration.

A three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant issued notice on the plea and asked Solicitor General Tushar Mehta to obtain instructions from the Union Government before the matter is taken up separately.

The petition contends that Jantar Mantar is no longer suitable for large-scale demonstrations due to inadequate space and growing logistical challenges. It argues that the venue struggles to accommodate increasing crowds and poses difficulties related to traffic movement, emergency access, sanitation and public safety. The petitioner has urged the court to direct the authorities to identify a larger and better-equipped venue, suggesting Ramlila Maidan or any other suitable public ground that can safely accommodate large gatherings without causing major disruption to the city.

During the hearing, the Bench observed that the concerns raised regarding access, public convenience and civic infrastructure appeared to be important and required the government's response.

According to the petition, the nature of public protests has changed significantly in recent years, with social media enabling rapid mobilisation of thousands of participants within a short period. It argues that a venue originally identified decades ago for relatively smaller gatherings may no longer be adequate to handle present-day demonstrations. The plea also states that Jantar Mantar's location in the heart of the national capital, close to Parliament, the Central Vista, government offices and diplomatic establishments, raises concerns over security, crowd management and disruption of normal public movement.

It further points out that large protests frequently lead to traffic congestion and inconvenience for commuters and residents in central Delhi.

The matter was mentioned in the backdrop of recent demonstrations in the capital, with the petitioner arguing that a more spacious venue would help ensure both the right to peaceful protest and the smooth functioning of civic life. The Supreme Court has, on several occasions, reiterated that while citizens have a fundamental right to protest peacefully, that right must be exercised without unduly affecting the rights of others. In earlier judgments, including those concerning protests at Jantar Mantar and the Shaheen Bagh demonstrations, the apex court held that the right to dissent must be balanced with the rights of commuters and residents, emphasising that public protests should take place at designated locations without resulting in prolonged occupation of public spaces. Agencies

Delhi court acquits Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh in women wrestlers' sexual harassment case

NEW DELHI, AUGUST: A Delhi court acquitted former Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) chief and former BJP MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh in the sexual harassment case filed by several women wrestlers, bringing an end to the criminal proceedings arising from allegations made in 2023. Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate Ashwini Panwar of the Rouse Avenue Courts pronounced the verdict, acquitting Singh as well as co-accused Vinod Tomar, the former Assistant Secretary of the Wrestling Federation of India.

The detailed judgment was not immediately available, but lawyers representing Singh described the verdict as an "honourable acquittal." Media personnel were not permitted inside the courtroom during the proceedings.

The case stemmed from complaints lodged by six women wrestlers, following which Delhi Police registered an FIR against Singh. After completing its investigation, the police filed a chargesheet in June 2023 alleging offences under various provisions of the Indian Penal Code, including sexual harassment, outraging the modesty of a woman, stalking and criminal intimidation. In May 2024, the trial court had found sufficient material to frame charges against Singh under Sections 354 and 354A of the IPC relating to allegations made by five women wrestlers. Charges of criminal intimidation under Section 506(1) of the IPC were also framed in connection with complaints made by two wrestlers. Co-accused Vinod Tomar had faced trial on allegations of criminal intimidation concerning one of the complainants. The allegations against Singh had triggered nationwide protests by some of India's leading wrestlers in 2023, drawing widespread public and political attention and prompting calls for action against the then Wrestling Federation of India chief.

A separate case involving allegations made by a minor wrestler under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act had earlier been closed after the complainant withdrew her allegations. — Agencies

SC summons Arunachal Chief Secretary, Home Secretary

NEW DELHI, AUGUST: The Supreme Court directed the Chief Secretary and Principal Secretary (Home) of Arunachal Pradesh to personally appear before it after the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) alleged that the State Government was not cooperating with an inquiry into allegations involving Chief Minister Pema Khandu.

A Bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta passed the order while considering a status report submitted by the CBI regarding its preliminary enquiry into the allotment of public works contracts in the State.

Taking note of the agency's submissions, the Bench observed that the investigation was facing difficulties because the required official records had allegedly not been made available by the State authorities.

"The status report reflects non-cooperation on the part of the State Government in furnishing records," the Bench noted while issuing notices to the two senior officials.

The court directed the Chief Secretary and the Principal Secretary (Home) to remain personally present on the next date of hearing, scheduled for August 24, along with their responses explaining the alleged non-compliance with the court's earlier directions.

The matter arises from a public interest litigation filed by the Save Mon Region Federation, which sought an independent probe into allegations of irregularities in the award of public works contracts in Arunachal Pradesh.

The petition alleges that contracts worth more than ?1,245 crore, along with additional work orders valued at around ?25 crore, were awarded to firms allegedly linked to members of Chief Minister Pema Khandu's family and close associates, raising concerns over conflict of interest and transparency in the tendering process.

The petition specifically names firms allegedly owned by the Chief Minister's wife and his nephew, who is also an MLA, and claims that the contracts were awarded in violation of established norms. The allegations have been denied by the State Government. — Agencies

Special Lok Adalat settles 14 matrimonial disputes in Srinagar



BLAZING TALES NEWS SERVICE

SRINAGAR, AUGUST: The District Legal Services Authority (DLSA), Srinagar, organised a Special Lok Adalat for matrimonial disputes, enabling several families to resolve their differences through conciliation and mutual agreement.

The Lok Adalat was conducted in accordance with the directions of the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) and the Jammu and Kashmir Legal Services Authority to encourage amicable settlement of family disputes through alternative dispute resolution mechanisms.

The proceedings were held under the guidance of Chairman, DLSA Srinagar and Principal District & Sessions Judge, Haq Nawaz Zargar, and under the supervision of Secretary, DLSA Srinagar.

To ensure the smooth conduct of proceedings, two benches were constituted. One bench was headed by Principal Judge, Family Court Srinagar, Mehreen Mushtaq, with PT&E Magistrate Massarat Jabeen as member. The second bench comprised 4th Additional Sessions Judge Preet Simran Kaur as presiding officer and Municipal Magistrate Fida Hussain Nayak as member.

During the Special Lok Adalat, 85 matrimonial cases were placed before the two benches for consideration. After counselling and mediation, 14 disputes were resolved amicably, allowing the parties to reach mutually acceptable settlements without undergoing prolonged litigation.

Officials said the initiative was aimed at promoting peaceful resolution of family disputes in a time-bound and cost-effective manner while reducing the pendency of matrimonial cases in courts.

The District Legal Services Authority reiterated its commitment to encouraging mediation and conciliation as effective tools for resolving disputes and ensuring easier access to justice for citizens.

VC outlines roadmap for SKUAST-Jammu

Prof. (Dr.) B. N. Tripathi
Vice-Chancellor, SKUAST-Jammu

Blazing Tales launches "In Conversation with", an exclusive interview series featuring eminent personalities who are making significant contributions in their respective fields and shaping society through leadership, innovation and public service. As one of the newspaper's unique editorial features and a key USP, the series aims to bring readers closer to policymakers, administrators, academicians, scientists, entrepreneurs, sportspersons and other distinguished personalities through insightful and candid conversations.

In its inaugural edition, Blazing Tales Editor and Senior Journalist Vikas Sharma speaks with Prof. (Dr.) B. N. Tripathi, Vice-Chancellor of Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology of Jammu (SKUAST-Jammu), on the university's vision, achievements, research, innovation, farmer-centric initiatives, challenges and the future of agricultural education in Jammu and Kashmir.

VIKAS SHARMA



Blazing Tales Editor and Senior Journalist Vikas Sharma in Conversation with Prof. (Dr.) B. N. Tripathi, Vice-Chancellor, SKUAST-Jammu.

Enhancing the quality of education, strengthening research infrastructure, promoting innovation and extension activities, and implementing other key academic initiatives are among the top priorities of Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology of Jammu (SKUAST-Jammu), Vice Chancellor Prof. (Dr.) B. N. Tripathi has said.

In an exclusive interview with Vikas Sharma, Senior Journalist and Editor of Blazing Tales English Monthly Newspaper, Prof. (Dr.) Tripathi expressed confidence that SKUAST-Jammu is on course to emerge as a globally recognised Institution of Excellence in agricultural education, research, innovation, and extension.

Prof. (Dr.) Tripathi, who served as Deputy Director General (Animal Science), Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), New Delhi, from January 30, 2020, to June 19, 2023, before assuming charge as the Vice Chancellor of SKUAST-Jammu, spoke extensively about the university's academic programmes, research initiatives, achievements, future roadmap, and the challenges facing the agricultural education sector.

Profile: Prof. (Dr.) B. N. Tripathi

Prof. (Dr.) B. N. Tripathi is a distinguished veterinary scientist, academician and administrator with over three decades of experience in agricultural education, research and institutional leadership.

Born on July 20, 1962, in Uttar Pradesh, Prof. Tripathi graduated in Veterinary Science from the College of Veterinary Science, Mathura, and earned his M.V.Sc. and Ph.D. from the Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI), Izatnagar.

Before assuming charge as Vice Chancellor, he served as Deputy Director General (Animal Science), Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), New Delhi, from January 2020 to June 2023, besides holding several key leadership positions in premier national research institutions. Internationally recognised for his contributions to animal health, veterinary sciences and agricultural research, he has authored over 200 research papers, developed several diagnostic and vaccine technologies, secured multiple patents, and received numerous national and international honours. He is also a Fellow of several prestigious scientific academies and has represented India at leading global forums, including FAO, WHO, SAARC and BIMSTEC meetings.

Vision for SKUAST-Jammu

"My vision is to transform SKUAST-Jammu into a National level Centre of Excellence by 2030", Prof Tripathi told Blazing Tales Editor.

"The way we are working all day and night for fulfillment of vision and objectives I am pretty hopeful that by 2035 we shall definitely gained global recognition as well. Infact, we are empowering youth through entrepreneurship, enhancing famer-centric technologies, fostering international collaborations thereby making SKUAST-Jammu a catalyst for rural prosperity and sustainable development in Jammu and Kashmir", veteral agricultural scientist said.

He futher stated that one of the majo contributions is to provide quality and competent human resources to the state and nation.

"Our other major contributions has been ensuring the timely availability of quality seeds. The University develops breeder seed, which is subsequently multiplied into foundation and certified seed through our research stations, government departments and seed agencies before reaching farmers", Prof Tripathi added.

Vice-Chancellor further said the varsity is focussing on industry-academic collaborations to promote agripeneurship.

"SKUAST-Jammu has also emerged as a catalyst for agripreneurship and rural development. Through incubation, skill development and startup promotion programmes, the varsity has supported more than 300 agripreneurs across different districts of Jammu and Kashmir besides creating employment opportunities for educated rural youth", SKUAST-Jammu Vice Chancellor said.

Empowering Farmers through Research and Extension

"Today, a substantial portion of quality seed sown in the Jammu region originates from technologies developed by SKUAST-Jammu. One quintal of breeder seed generates about 6400 quintals of cerified seed in rice and 3600 quintals in wheat", Prof Tripathi stated.

"In traditional Basmati cultivation, nearly 80 percent of the seed used by farmers is sourced from SKUAST-Jammu developed seed chains. Further, more than 75 percent of the wheat and paddy seed requiement of the region is met through seed produced from University developed breeder seed. Since its inception in 1999, SKUAST-Jammu has contributed to substantial gains in crop productivity in the Jammu region", he added.

"SKUAST-Jammu has developed 50 improved crop varities, with additional varities in the advanced stages of release, addressing the needs of productivity enhancement, climate resilience, quality improvement and market competititveness. The University has also successfully modernised the world famous traditional Basmati-370 by developing improved varities such as Basmati-118, 123 and 138, which retain the superior grain quality, aroma and cooking characterstics preferred in domestic and international markets but mature 15-20 days before", Dr Tripathi said.

SKUAST-Jammu Achievements

"SKUAST-Jammu has made significant strides in research and innovation. During the last two years, the university executed as many as 84 externally funded research projects worth Rs 136 crore, developed improved crop varities, filed 21 patents (with 10 granted), published 324-high quality National Academy of Agricultural Sciences (NAAS)-rated research papers and developed technologies ranging from AI-based irrigation systems to biodegradabe films, microbial consortia and rapid diagnostic kits", SKUAST-Jammu VC said.

Prof Tripathi infomed that the university has established the Bayer Learning Centre under a Public-Private Partnership model to meet the highest standard of research followed by multinational agri companies. Other achivements for SKUAST-Jammu include Sustainable Aquaculture Innovation Centre, Basmati Rice Research Centre, Artificial Intelligence Laboratory, Remote Sensing and GIS Laboratory, Gene Bank, Cold Storage Facilities, Quality Control and Pesticide Residue Laboratory, Centre for Innovation and Entrepeneurship Development, Walnut Processing and Packaging Centre at Doda and Pasteurization Plant at Mushroom Centre besides other many achievements.

Challenges

"It is only that there are achievements, but at the same time there are many challenges also confronting us. We are addressing these through climate-resilient crop varities, precision agriculture, digital advisory services, value addition, mechanization and continuous capacity building through our Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) and extension programmes", Dr B N Tripathi said.

"We are very much aware that farmers in Jammu and Kashmi are confronted with multiple challenges like increasing climate variability, shrinking landholdings, rising input costs, labour shortages, declining natural resources and volatile market prices. Another major concern is that less than 2 percent of agricultural produce in the region undergoes value addition, resulting in significant post-harvest losses and lower returns to farmers. We are on the job already to address all these valid concerns of farmer community in Jammu and Kashmir", Dr Tripathi maintained.

New Initiatives

"We are not just focussing on enhancing agricultural education but at the same time taking many other initiatives beyond that. One such initiative is launching on National cadet corps (NCC) in the campus. NCC plays an important role in leading a disciplined life and for our young promising scientiests (men and women) NCC will be a blessing", said the SKUAST-Jammu Vice Chancellor.

Concluding Remarks

Calling agriculture the backbone of India's economy, Prof. (Dr.) B. N. Tripathi said the future of the sector depends on scientific innovation, sustainable farming practices and the active participation of young professionals. "SKUAST-Jammu is committed to transforming agriculture through quality education, cutting-edge research, technology-driven extension services and strong partnerships with farmers, industry and national as well as international institutions.