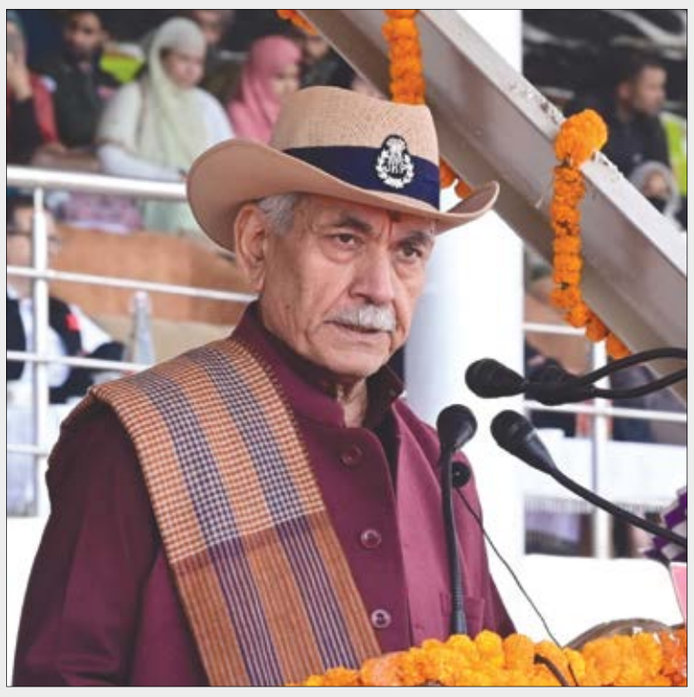
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Nation Recognises J&K Police's Role In Maintaining Peace: LG Sinha

FE NEWS NETWORK

Pays homage to fallen personnel on Police Commemoration Day



SRINAGAR: The Lieutenant Governor, Manoj Sinha paid homage to the J&K Police martyrs on Police Commemoration Day at the Police Memorial in Zewan, Srinagar.

In his address, the Lieutenant Governor said the J&K Police is epitome of duty, discipline, loyalty and selfless service. He said that our brave J&K Police personnel have always prioritized nation's development and lives of their fellow citizens above their own.

"They have kept tricolor flying high even at the cost of their own life," the Lieutenant Governor said.

The Lieutenant Governor also expressed his deepest gratitude to J&K Police's brave police personnel and their families for keeping citizens safe and upholding the rule of law.

"While fighting terrorism, enforcing laws, investigating crimes or responding to emergencies like the recent natural calamities, the J&K Police's commitment is to their duty first," the Lieutenant Governor said.

The Lieutenant Governor also stated that the deep love for the tricolor is a fundamental reason for our brave J&K Police personnel to serve the motherland with utmost devotion and dedication and to make supreme sacrifices.

"The glorious legacy of our police personnel lives on and their supreme sacrifices are inspiring future generations to serve and uphold the values of our great country. J&K Police need to be always be ready to eliminate terrorist threats," the Lieutenant Governor said.

The Lieutenant Governor called upon the five pillars of the criminal justice system—police, prosecution, judiciary, forensics, and prison to actively support development and ensure justice for all.

He also stressed the need to adopt innovation and smart technology to strengthen policing, and enable an effective response to new crime trends, drug smuggling, and false narratives in Jammu Kashmir.

The Lieutenant Governor reaffirmed his commitment to the welfare of police personnel and their families. He highlighted that J&K Police is implementing numerous programs to

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LG SINHA DESCRIBED J&K POLICE AS AN EPITOME OF DUTY, DISCIPLINE, LOYALTY AND SELFLESS SERVICE. "The glorious legacy of our police personnel lives on and their supreme sacrifices are inspiring future generations to serve and uphold the values of our great country.

IGP Asks Officials To Take Proactive Measures To Strengthen Security Grid

Chairs security review meeting at PCR Kashmir

FE NEWS NETWORK

SRINAGAR: Inspector General of Police (IGP), Kashmir Zone, V.K. Birdi, chaired a security review meeting at the Conference Hall of Police Control Room, Kashmir.

The meeting was attended by senior officers from J&K Police, CAPFs, Army, and Intelligence agencies, including IGs, DIsG, and district SSsP of Kashmir Zone, a police spokesman said.

During the meeting, IGP Kashmir reviewed the prevailing security scenario and emphasized proactive measures to strengthen the security grid. He directed officers to intensify patrolling, enhance night checking at vulnerable points, and ensure real-time intelligence sharing for coordinated operations to prevent any potential threats.

Stressing the importance of sustained vigilance and area domination, IGP Kashmir urged officers to maintain robust inter-agency coordination and chalk out effective strategies to tackle emerging security challenges.

The meeting concluded with a collective resolve to enhance vigilance, strengthen coordination, and ensure effective implementation of security measures to maintain peace and public order across the Valley—(KNO)



Speaker Admits PDP Resolution Seeking One-Time Exemption For Electricity Dues

FE NEWS NETWORK

SRINAGAR: Speaker of J&K legislative assembly, Abdul Rahim Rather, on Tuesday admitted a private resolution by a Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) MLA seeking a one-time exemption for electricity tariff outstandings to consumers.



The resolution was submitted by PDP MLA from Kupwara, Mir Fayaz.

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Proud of Ladakh Police's unwavering commitment: LG Gupta

Leads Police Commemoration Day; Urges youth to uphold values of service

LEH: Lieutenant Governor of Ladakh, Kavinder Gupta, on Tuesday led a solemn ceremony to commemorate the supreme sacrifices of police personnel across the country. He said that he is proud of Ladakh Police's unwavering commitment.



Addressing a gathering of officers, soldiers, and dignitaries, the LG, paid heartfelt tribute to those who laid down their lives in the line of duty.

"Today, we remember our martyrs with gratitude and humility," the LG said, adding that Police Commemoration Day is not merely a formal observance but a moment to reaffirm the ideals of duty,

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Operation Underway to Hunt Down Foreign Terrorists in Jammu: IGP

FE NEWS NETWORK

JAMMU: Asserting that more than 100 anti-terrorist operations are being carried out on daily basis across Jammu division, a top police officer on Tuesday said the presence of foreign terrorists in the dense forests is a major challenge and efforts are underway to neutralise them.



Inspector General of Police, Jammu Zone, Bhim Sen Tuti was speaking to mediapersons after leading a wreath-laying ceremony at Police Martyrs Memorial near Jammu railway station to pay tributes to brave hearts who have sacrificed their lives for the country on the occasion of Police Commemoration Day.

The day is observed in commemoration of 10 valiant martyrs of the CRPF who made the supreme sacrifice in the line of duty on October 21, 1959. They laid down their lives in an ambush laid by heavily armed Chinese troops at Hot Springs, Ladakh, at an altitude of 4681 metres.

"For the past two years, foreign terrorists have been a major challenge (in Jammu). But we are strengthening our counter-terrorism and border protection grid.

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CM Omar pays tribute to police martyrs on Commemoration Day at Zewan

FE NEWS NETWORK

SRINAGAR: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah led a solemn ceremony at the Police Martyrs Memorial in Zewan, paying homage to the police personnel who laid down their lives in the line of duty on the occasion of Police Commemoration Day.



The ceremony was addressed by Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha, who graced the occasion as the Chief Guest.

Accompanied by Council of Ministers Sakina Itoo and Javid Ahmad Dar, along with Advisor to the Chief Minister Nasir Aslam Wani, the Chief Minister offered floral tributes at the memorial in honor of the courage and supreme sacrifice of the martyrs.

The commemoration ceremony was also attended by several Members of the Legislative Assembly, who joined in laying wreaths as a mark of respect to the fallen heroes.

Senior government functionaries and police officers were also present, including Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo, Director General of Police J&K Nalin Prabhat, Additional DGP (Armed) Anand Jain, and Principal Secretary, Home Department.

> The **commemoration** ceremony was also attended by **several Members** of the Legislative Assembly, who joined in **laying wreaths** as a mark of respect to the fallen heroes.

Following the wreath-laying ceremony, the Chief Minister, who was also Guest of Honour,

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'Power Generation In J&K Dips By Nearly 45%'

Additional allocation of central pool in place: Officials

FE NEWS NETWORK

SRINAGAR: With the onset of winters, the local hydro power generation has taken a dip by nearly 45 percent.



Top officials said, that the hydel power generation from the local plants has reduced by nearly 500 Megawatts (MWs).

The official said, "As of now, on an average, we are generating nearly 500-600 MW of power. From the Baglihar power project, we are on an average generating nearly 300 MWs. This too depends on the functioning of machines."

"During the peak season, we were generating over 1100 MWs of power from the total generation capacity of 1197.4 MW of Jammu and Kashmir power plants," the official said.

It also said, "Due to the reduced water levels some of the small power projects in Kashmir were usually not generating any power in the month of October but this year due to the late monsoon in Jammu and Kashmir, they are doing very well in comparison to the previous years."

The official further informed KNO that there were additional 800 MWs allocated from the centre. "From this year, we have 1300 MW from the central pool. We have started banking with other states."

> "During the peak season, we were generating over 1100 MWs of power from the total generation capacity of 1197.4 MW of Jammu and Kashmir power plants," the official said.

Pertinently, till the third week of February, an official had said that Jammu and Kashmir was relying on more

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Society Facing New Kinds of Crime, Terrorism, deological Wars: Rajnath

FE NEWS NETWORK

NEW DELHI: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday emphasised the shifting landscape of country's security challenges, noting that while the nation grapples with border instability, society faces a new surge in sophisticated crimes, terrorism and "ideological wars".



Speaking on the occasion of Police Commemoration Day, Singh underscored the critical need to balance external and internal security to achieve the vision of a 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047.

"Areas that were once known as the red corridor have now transformed into growth corridors," the defence minister said, highlighting the significant progress made against the Naxal problem, long a major internal security challenge, and credited the concerted and organised efforts of the police, CRPF, BSF and local administration in preventing the problem from escalating.

Police Commemoration Day is observed annually to honour the memory of 10 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel who were killed in an ambush by Chinese troops in Ladakh's Hot Spring area on this day in 1959.

Addressing an event at the National Police Memorial, Singh asserted that despite functioning on different platforms, the military and police share the singular mission of national protection.

The Defence Minister cautioned that while there is instability on the borders, new types of crimes,

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Police Commemoration Day...

Their steadfast dedication keeps nation safe: PM Modi

NEW DELHI: Vice President C P Radhakrishnan, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union ministers Rajnath Singh and Amit Shah on Tuesday extended greetings on Police Commemoration Day, saying police personnel exemplify bravery, compassion and an unyielding sense of duty.

In a post on X, the vice president said he solemnly pays tribute to the exemplary courage and supreme sacrifice of police personnel. "Their unwavering commitment to safeguard the nation and ensure the security and well-being of our people commands our deepest respect," he said.

Radhakrishnan said that through steadfast dedication and readiness to serve even in times of crisis and humanitarian need, they exemplify bravery, compassion, and an unyielding sense of duty.

Prime Minister Modi lauded the police personnel, saying their steadfast dedication keeps the nation and its people safe.

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GDC (Women) Anantnag hosts Cultural Programme Celebrating India's Unity in Diversity

ANANTNAG: As part of the ongoing Deepavali celebrations, Government Degree College(Women), Anantnag in collaboration with Media Student Association Haryana organised a one day cultural program on the theme "Diversity Unites India: A Journey through Cultures" today at the college auditorium.

The program aimed to provide a platform to the students to showcase their artistic talent and to strengthen cultural awareness and national integration by bringing together people from different regions.

Principal of the college, Prof(Dr.) Masood Ahmad Malik, Head Debates and Seminars Committee, faculty and non teaching staff of the college, President and members of Media Student Association Haryana alongwith the students and local artists participated in the event.

Principal of the college in his inaugural address briefed the audience regarding the theme of the event and spoke on length about the diverse cultures thriving in the country. He also highlighted the historical, cultural and plural ethos that have united the nation for ages.



Elaborating the importance of the event, Head of the Debates and Seminars Committee, provided an insightful account of the rich cultural diversity and range of festivals celebrated across India.

Speaking on the occasion, President of the Student Media Association informed about the active role of the association in connecting the student fraternity and cultures of different regions of the country.

During the program, student artists mesmerised the audience through a series of vibrant performances including vocal music, instrumental music, group dance (classical/folk/modern) and patriotic songs reflecting Haryanvi and Kashmiri cultural landscape as well as the national art and heritage.They also delivered presentations on national unity and integrity with the focus to foster an environment of cooperation and harmony in the society.

The participants hailed the initiative and stressed the importance of organising such programmes to celebrate cultural diversity and promote national integration.

Several Houses Gutted in Nocturnal Fire Incident in Srinagar

Srinagar: A massive fire broke out late Monday night at Narparistan area of Fatekadal in Srinagar, damaging multiple residential structures and prompting a large-scale firefighting operation by the Fire and Emergency Services Department.



Officials said the fire tenders from Babdem and the department headquarters were dispatched to the spot to contain the fire.

Given the intensity of the blaze, additional reinforcement was rushed from multiple fire stations including MR Gunj, Habakadal, Safakadal and Rainawari.

Officials added that at least six residential houses were damaged in the fire incident. They said firefighters engaged in dousing the flames amid narrow lanes and congested structures faced a very tough time.

The evacuation of families and the belongings added to the chaos, they said adding that local people and police also played a key role in dousing the flames.

The fire caused significant property loss while dozens of families lost their shelter.

Police have taken cognizance while teams of officials have rushed to the spot to assess the damage caused by the blaze.

Police Commemoration Day Observed with solemn respect at DPL Poonch



POONCH: District Administration and District Police Poonch today observed Police Commemoration Day 2025 at the Parade Ground, District Police Lines (DPL) Poonch with profound respect and reverence to honour the supreme sacrifices made by brave police personnel in the line of duty.

The ceremony was attended by District Development Council (DDC) Chairperson, Tazim Akhtar, Deputy Commissioner, Ashok Kumar Sharma, Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Shafket Hussain Bhat, other officers, police personnel and family members of the martyrs.

During the event, rich tributes were paid to the valiant police martyrs who laid down their lives in the service of the nation.

A solemn wreath-laying ceremony was held at the Martyrs' Memorial, followed by the reading out of names of those who made the ultimate sacrifice during the past year.

The DDC Chairperson, Deputy Commissioner, and SSP Poonch paid floral tributes and garlanded the memorial as a mark of respect to the departed heroes.

Speaking on the occasion, Deputy Commissioner, Ashok Kumar Sharma highlighted the supreme martyrdom of the police personnel who sacrificed their lives while safeguarding the nation and ensuring public safety. He lauded their courage, dedication and unwavering commitment towards maintaining peace and harmony.

Addressing the gathering, the SSP commended the selfless devotion and bravery of the police personnel who continue to uphold law and order, often at the cost of their own lives. He reaffirmed the department's firm resolve to support the families of the martyrs and preserve their legacy of valour and sacrifice for future generations.

The event concluded with an emotional interaction with the families of the martyrs, reaffirming the police department's enduring bond, gratitude and commitment towards their welfare.

JMC Conducts Draw of Lots for Allotment of Newly Constructed Modern Kiosks at Below Gummat Steps

Plans Beautification, Cafeteria Facilities for Visitors

JAMMU: In continuation of its ongoing efforts to modernize urban infrastructure and rehabilitate street vendors in a structured and transparent manner, the Jammu Municipal Corporation (JMC) organized a draw of lots for the allotment of newly constructed modern kiosks at Below Gummat Steps, Jammu.

Earlier, a total of 82 existing old kiosks located at the site were dismantled by the Corporation to pave the way for the development of a new and upgraded vending zone. The initiative was undertaken with the objective of providing improved, aesthetically designed, and hygienic kiosks to small traders and vendors operating in the area.

The newly constructed kiosks have been designed in three different standardized sizes — 4x10 ft, 6x10 ft, and 8x10 ft — to cater to the varied business requirements of vendors. Each kiosk has been constructed using modern building techniques to ensure durability, better ventilation, and uniformity in appearance, contributing to the city's visual appeal and organized vending environment.

The allotment process was carried out through a transparent draw of lots under the chairmanship of the JMC Commissioner in the presence of Joint Commissioner (Revenue & Enforcement), Joint Commissioner (Administration), Joint Commissioner (Works), Deputy Commissioner (S), Chief Accounts Officer, Deputy Legal Remembrance and Chief Revenue Officer. The event witnessed the gracious presence of Member Legislative Assembly (MLA) Jammu (East) Yudhvir Sethi as the Chief Guest, who appreciated JMC's efforts to provide modernized vending facilities to eligible beneficiaries while maintaining fairness and transparency in the process.



The MLA commended the Corporation for aligning its initiatives with the principles of Smart City Development and promoting livelihood opportunities alongside urban aesthetics.

On the occasion, the Commissioner, JMC emphasized that the newly built kiosks represent a model of urban renewal aimed at balancing vendor welfare with city beautification.

The Commissioner further announced that the modern market area will soon undergo additional beautification measures, including the installation of sitting benches for visitors, placement of flower pots, and development of an open cafeteria on the terrace to serve the general public. These additions are expected to transform the area into an attractive and people-friendly urban space.

The beneficiaries, who were earlier displaced due to the removal of old kiosks, expressed their heartfelt gratitude to the JMC for providing them with well-designed vending spaces through a transparent and equitable system. They lauded the Corporation's initiative as a step toward promoting both livelihood and dignity for small traders.

The Jammu Municipal Corporation reiterated its commitment to upgrading civic infrastructure, improving public amenities, and ensuring inclusive urban growth under its mandate.

The Corporation assured that similar modernization projects would continue to be taken up in other parts of the city to enhance Jammu's overall urban experience.

Further all the allottees were apprised about keys alongwith allotment orders were handed over to them after completing the codal formalities under rule.

After ABC, Alumni Outreach Program (AOP) Rolled Out at NIT Srinagar

Workshops and hands-on academic programs to remain a key focus

Srinagar: Following the success of the Alumni Back to Classroom (ABC) initiative, the Alumni Outreach Program (AOP) is being rolled out at the National Institute of Technology (NIT) Srinagar with the objective of extending practical knowledge and exposure to students and teachers across the Valley.

The program will include workshops, symposia, and hands-on training sessions in emerging and interdisciplinary areas to strengthen the link between academia, industry, and society.

Established in 1960, NIT Srinagar (erstwhile REC Srinagar) has made remarkable progress in academics, research, and innovation. Its distinguished alumni — a global community of nearly 40,000 professionals — continue to be the proud torchbearers of this legacy. Their achievements mirror the aspirations and advancement of the nation.

Through AOP, these accomplished alumni will share their expertise, industry experience, and practical insights with students and faculty, enriching the Institute's academic ecosystem and promoting a culture of applied learning.

The outreach initiative also includes a School Connect Program for high school and college students, Online Executive Education for teachers, and Community Engagement activities aimed at nurturing scientific curiosity and bridging the gap between academia and the public.



As World Science Day will be observed on November 11, 2025, NIT Srinagar plans to align the AOP activities with this occasion to celebrate the spirit of knowledge sharing and innovation.

Speaking on the launch, Prof. M A Shah, Dean Alumni & International Affairs), NIT Srinagar, said,

"Our Alumni Outreach Program reflects the Institute's commitment to fostering collaboration and continuous learning. It connects experience with aspiration — the wisdom of our alumni with the curiosity of our students — to build a stronger and more vibrant academic community.

We envision AOP as a sustained bridge linking classroom learning with the frontiers of professional practice and societal need."

The Alumni Affairs Office at NIT Srinagar continues to serve as a vital platform for promoting lifelong learning and knowledge exchange across the domains of science, technology, academia, and industry.

Hakeem Yaseen Seeks Reopening Of Doodhpathri, Yousmarg, Tosamaidan

Budgam: President of the People's Democratic Front (PDF) and former Minister Hakeem Mohammad Yaseen on Tuesday launched a strong attack on Chief Minister Omar Abdullah and the four MLAs representing Budgam district, accusing them of neglecting the local tourism sector and ignoring the severe economic distress faced by people dependent on it.



Yaseen said that despite the security situation in the Valley improving significantly after the Pahalgam attack, the government has failed to reopen major tourist destinations such as Doodhpathri, Yousmarg and Tosamaidan, which remain closed without any justification.

"There is no reason to keep these prime tourist spots shut when peace and normalcy have largely returned to Kashmir," he remarked.

The PDF chief said the prolonged closure of these scenic destinations has crippled the local economy.

"Thousands of people in these areas depend on tourism for survival — including drivers, ponywalas, guides, hoteliers and small traders. Many have taken bank loans to sustain tourism-linked businesses and are now facing financial hardship due to government indifference," Yaseen stated.

A delegation of stakeholders from Doodhpathri, Yousmarg, Tosamaidan, Khag and Nilnag called on Yaseen today, pressing for the immediate reopening of these tourist spots.

They expressed concern that despite the improved security environment, authorities have failed to resume tourism activities, depriving thousands of locals of their livelihoods.

Hakeem Yaseen said tourism remains the backbone of Jammu and Kashmir's economy and urged the government to give equal attention to Budgam's scenic attractions as it gives to destinations like Gulmarg and Pahalgam. "It is unfortunate that the Chief Minister, who also holds the Tourism portfolio, along with the MLAs and MP from Budgam, have done little to represent the concerns of their people. Their silence reflects complete indifference towards public suffering," he said.

The PDF President said he has already met Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha twice over the issue and plans to meet him again soon to press for urgent action.

"The Lieutenant Governor earlier assured me that the matter would be considered, and I will once again urge immediate reopening of these destinations.

The government must stop delaying and revive these vital tourism hubs," Yaseen added.

He appealed to Union Home Minister Amit Shah and LG Manoj Sinha to personally intervene and direct the reopening and development of Budgam's tourist sites. "Restoring tourism in these areas will not only revive the local economy but also send a powerful message of peace, stability and progress from Jammu and Kashmir," he said. [KNT]

Khyber Cement Advances Its People First Vision with the Launch of Darwinbox HR Platform

Srinagar: In line with its continued journey of growth and transformation, Khyber Cement has implemented Darwinbox, an advanced Human Resource Management System designed to simplify workflows, enhance transparency, and strengthen employee engagement across all levels.



Over the past few years, Khyber Cement has been investing significantly to modernise its operations, strengthen its infrastructure, and align itself with global best practices.

The introduction of Darwinbox marks another major milestone in this journey, reflecting the company's commitment to combining operational excellence with a peoplefirst approach and building an organisation that is truly future ready.

Trusted by several Fortune 500 companies, Darwinbox represents an advanced, techdriven and datadriven HR platform. By adopting this globally recognised system, Khyber Cement brings worldclass standards of efficiency and employee experience to Jammu and Kashmir, reaffirming its belief that empowered teams drive sustainable success.

Riaz Tramboo, Director Operations, said, "Our employees are the backbone of Khyber Cement. This initiative is about creating an environment where every individual feels valued, connected and enabled to bring their best to work every day."

Umar Tramboo, Director Corporate and Strategy, added, "Integrating Darwinbox is part of our broader vision to evolve as a modern, technologydriven and peoplefirst organisation. We are continuously upgrading our systems and investing in innovation that keeps Khyber Cement future ready."

AhtishamImtiyaz, Group Head HR, stated, "Darwinbox will unify the entire employee lifecycle from onboarding to performance and growth, enhancing accessibility, decisionmaking and engagement across the organisation."

With this step, Khyber Cement reinforces its position as a digitally empowered and futureready industry leader, staying true to its 'Dil Se Banao' philosophy, where every effort from production to people development is driven by sincerity, innovation and purpose.

Shopian Police Crack Theft Case Within 24 Hours, Recover Stolen Apple Crates



Shopian: Shopian Police have solved a theft case within 24 hours of its reporting and arrested two accused involved in stealing apple crates from a local premises in Imam Sahib area.

Police said that a case under FIR No. 31/2025 was registered at Police Station Imamsahab following a written complaint lodged by Nazir Ahmad Ganai, a resident of DK Pora. In his complaint, Ganai stated that during the intervening night, unknown thieves had stolen several apple crates from his premises. Acting swiftly, a special investigation team was constituted to probe the case. Through technical analysis and sustained efforts, police succeeded in identifying and apprehending the accused duo involved in the theft. They have been identified as Mohd Altaf Bakshi, son of Mohd Afzal Bakshi, resident of Rambirpora, Kehribal Mattan, and Adil Gulzar Ganie, son of Gulzar Ahmad Ganie, resident of Chee, Anantnag. During the course of investigation, police recovered the stolen apple crates along with the auto-load carrier used in the commission of the crime. Officials said the quick recovery was made possible due to coordinated efforts and timely intelligence gathering by the investigation team. A police spokesperson said the swift resolution of the case reflects the department's continued commitment to prompt action and professional investigation. "Shopian Police remain steadfast in their mission to curb criminal activities and ensure a peaceful, crime-free environment for all citizens," the spokesperson added. Locals have appreciated the timely intervention of police and the recovery of stolen goods, saying it reinforces public confidence in law enforcement agencies operating in the district. [KNT]

Deputy Commissioner Poonch Extends Diwali Greetings to people

POONCH: Deputy Commissioner (DC) Poonch, Ashok Kumar Sharma has extended his warm greetings and good wishes to the people on the auspicious occasion of Diwali — the festival of lights.

In his message, the Deputy Commissioner said that Diwali signifies the illumination of people's lives through good deeds and symbolizes the victory of good over evil and the triumph of truth. He added that the festival is a time to eradicate negativity from society and adopt a virtuous and harmonious lifestyle.

The DC prayed for the well-being of all citizens, wishing that this Diwali brings renewed joy, enthusiasm and hope, along with good health, prosperity and happiness for the people of the district. Earlier, Deputy Commissioner Poonch visited various market areas of Poonch town to interact with the local populace and review on-ground arrangements and safety precautions ahead of the celebrations. He urged the public to celebrate Diwali in an eco-friendly manner and refrain from practices harmful to the environment.



Saffron growers begin harvest amid fears of declining production

Growers seek govt intervention, warn of possible extinction of saffron cultivation in Pampore by 2030 if no action taken

JAHANGEER GANAIE

SRINAGAR: As saffron growers in the Pampore area of south Kashmir's Pulwama district begin harvesting the world-famous spice, concerns are mounting over dwindling production despite timely rainfall this year.

Growers fear that if immediate steps are not taken, saffron cultivation in the region — known as the "saffron town of Kashmir" — may vanish completely within the next few years.

Growers told the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO) that production had fallen drastically last season, with only 30 to 40 per cent yield compared to normal years.

They attributed this decline to multiple factors, including changing weather patterns, lack of irrigation facilities, land conversion, and the unavailability of healthy saffron corms.

Abdul Ashiq Hussain, a saffron grower from Pampore, said that although rainfall arrived on time this season, it failed to significantly improve crop output.

"Last year, the saffron corm didn't grow properly due to a prolonged heatwave, and this year, despite rains, the plants didn't recover as there was a prolonged dry spell this year as well. The situation is worsening each year," he said.

He added that government interventions have remained mostly on paper. "There is a spice park in Dusoo Pampore and GI tagging for Kashmiri saffron, but what's the use of such initiatives if production keeps falling? For the past 15 years, we've been hearing about the National Mission on Saffron, but on the ground, there are no functional irrigation facilities," Hussain said.

Another grower, Ghulam Rasool, warned that if urgent measures aren't taken, saffron cultivation in Pampore could disappear altogether by 2030. "Every year, production declines. The government must wake up from its deep slumber. Instead of indulging in blame games, there should be concrete steps to revive this heritage crop, which is the pride of Kashmir," he said.



Growers said that the main obstacles facing the industry are the lack of irrigation infrastructure, the conversion of saffron fields into residential or commercial land, and the shortage of quality corms.

This year also on a large portion of saffron land, people have sown mustard and other crops as they are fed up with saffron cultivation now, they added.

"Many farmers have now started cultivating mustard or shifted to horticulture due to consistent losses in saffron," said another farmer from the Lethpora area. "If this trend continues, Pampore's saffron legacy will be just a memory."

The growers have appealed to Chief Minister Omar Abdullah and the Agriculture Minister to address the crisis. They demanded restoration of traditional irrigation channels, regular monitoring of saffron fields, and measures to prevent illegal corm extraction.

Official records reveal a consistent decline in saffron production over the past two decades. The area under saffron cultivation shrank from 5,707 hectares in 1996–97 to just 2,387 hectares in 2019–2020, marking a 65 per cent drop.

Government data shows that production fell from 17.33 metric tonnes in 2021 to 14.87 MT in 2022, and marginally rose to 14.94 MT in 2023. However, last year's output has been reported to be only around 30 per cent of normal production. Growers expect similar production this year.

They said that due to repeated prolonged spells, corms have not grown well in the last few years, and there is a need for quality saffron corms to revive this crop.

While the National Mission on Saffron (NMS) has revived some fields through sprinkler irrigation systems and farmer awareness programs, experts caution that the impact remains limited. "The siphoning off of corms and poor land management practices continue to negate the gains achieved under the mission," said an agricultural scientist from SKUAST-K.

Pampore's saffron, known for its rich colour and aroma, has been a symbol of Kashmir's cultural and economic identity for centuries. However, with a changing climate, inadequate policy implementation, and shrinking cultivation areas, the livelihood of thousands of families dependent on this crop is at stake.

"Revival of saffron isn't just about saving a crop — it's about preserving a tradition, a culture, and an identity," said a group of worried growers. "If immediate and effective measures aren't taken now, by 2030, there may be no saffron left in Pampore."—(KNO)

Srinagar Police Conduct Surprise Checks In Lal Chowk Amid Security Alerts



Srinagar: Srinagar Police on Tuesday carried out speculative CASOs (Cordon and Search Operations) and surprise frisking drives at multiple crowded locations in and around Lal Chowk. The police said that the exercise was aimed at maintaining heightened vigilance and ensuring public safety in the city's commercial hub.

Officials said the operations were conducted at key points including Koker Bazar, Court Road and Regal Chowk areas that witness heavy pedestrian and vehicular movement throughout the day. Police teams stopped vehicles, checked identification documents, and conducted frisking of individuals as part of the enhanced security drill.

The measures, according to officials, are part of regular preventive operations undertaken to deter any potential subversive activity in Srinagar. "These checks are routine but essential in maintaining law and order, especially in view of certain inputs received from intelligence agencies," a senior police officer told the news agency Kashmir News Trust.

The official added that the police remain committed to ensuring that such operations cause minimum inconvenience to the public. "Our focus is to keep the environment safe and secure for everyone. Citizens have generally cooperated with the police during these checks," he said.

Officials confirmed that similar operations are likely to be conducted in the coming days as part of the broader security plan for Srinagar city. [KNT]

Protests in Budgam against Deputy CM's remarks on MP Ruhullah

Choudhary issues clarification, says comments were misinterpreted



BUDGAM: Protests broke out in Ichgam, Budgam, and several other areas of central Kashmir on Tuesday following a viral video of Jammu and Kashmir Deputy Chief Minister Surinder Kumar Choudhary. In the footage, he was purportedly heard saying, "Who Agha? I don't know him, I know only Agha Mehmood, who is our candidate for the Budgam by-elections."

The remarks triggered widespread anger among locals and supporters of National Conference MP Aga Syed Ruhullah Mehdi, who took to the streets demanding an apology from the Deputy CM for what they termed as a "disrespectful" statement against a senior political leader.

According to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer, visuals from protest sites showed large crowds chanting slogans and expressing strong opposition to Choudhary's comments.

Amid mounting backlash, the Deputy CM issued a clarification, stating that his remarks were "misinterpreted" and taken out of context. Speaking to reporters in Srinagar, Choudhary explained that there was "a lot of rush, noise, and commotion" at the venue when he made the statement, which led to confusion over whom he was referring to.

"Yesterday's statement was not about Aga Ruhullah. There was a huge rush and noise at that time. I was speaking about the BJP candidate. Aga Ruhullah Sahib is an honourable MP and senior leader of the National Conference," Choudhary clarified.

He further said that someone at the venue had asked him a question about "Aga", to which he responded about the BJP candidate, not the MP. "Someone asked me a question about Aga... oh, the BJP candidate. I replied that I don't know that Aga, I don't recognise him. But as far as Aga Ruhullah Sahib is concerned, he's a respected MP, I know him personally and have even visited his house," he added.

The Deputy CM also accused sections of the media of distorting his comments to "increase TRPs". "The media's job now seems to be to twist statements for headlines. I have nothing to do with that," he said.

Speaking on the upcoming Budgam by-election, Choudhary expressed confidence in the National Conference's prospects, saying, "Budgam has always been a National Conference seat. Aga Ruhullah Sahib and Aga Mehmood Sahib will work together to ensure victory for the party. Under Aga Ruhullah Sahib's leadership, we are confident that the NC candidate will win."

Despite his clarification, protests continued across several parts of Budgam throughout the day, with demonstrators insisting that the Deputy CM should offer a public apology to quell the growing outrage—(KNO)

Will make Zadibal a model constituency: MLA Tanvir Sadiq

Says 90% of CDF released, CM has major plans for this constituency, many projects coming up in next one month

SRINAGAR: National Conference (NC) Chief spokesperson and MLA Zadibal, Tanvir Sadiq has said that he will make Zadibal a model constituency in five years of the tenure.

MLA Zadibal said that he has so far released 90 per cent of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) for different projects.



"I have inaugurated a sports facility at Mir Behri Dal where a pitch is being constructed. The area didn't see any sports facilities for the last 70 years. In Shaheed-e-Millat stadium also, I have laid a stone for the upgradation of the sports facility. Similarly the macadamization in Zadibal constituency has been completed in the majority of the areas," he said.

He added that the day he assumed the office as MLA, he had promised the people here that he would knock every door and make sure that their demands are fulfilled and fill the vacuum created in the last several years.

"In the next one month, you will see the new dawn of development here. The Chief Minister is having some plans for this constituency and the projects will come up soon. I want to apple to the people to support me during these five years of tenure and I assure them that I will make Zadibal a model constituency," he added—(KNO)

J&K Police Observes 'Police Commemoration Day' Across Kashmir Valley

SRINAGAR: Jammu and Kashmir Police today observed Police Commemoration Day across the Kashmir Valley to honour the brave martyrs who laid down their lives in the line of duty. The solemn observances were marked by wreath-laying ceremonies, commemorative parades, and tributes to the valiant police personnel whose courage and sacrifice continue to inspire the force.

Across all districts, floral tributes were paid and two minutes of silence observed in memory of the martyrs. District heads read out the roll of honour of police personnel from across the country who made the supreme sacrifice while serving the nation. Gifts were distributed among the Next of Kin (NoKs) of police martyrs, and interactive sessions were held to address their concerns. As part of the observance, J&K Police is also organizing cultural and sports events under the Civic Action Programme in memory of the fallen heroes.

In Anantnag, the main function was held at District Police Lines (DPL) where DIG SKR Javed Matoo-IPS and SSP Anantnag Amrit Pal Singh-IPS took the salute. The event was attended by DC Anantnag Fakhrudin Hamid-IAS, officers from Police, CRPF, Civil Administration, and families of martyrs. A wreath-laying ceremony at the Martyrs' Memorial marked the tribute to the fallen heroes.

In Shopian, SSP Shopian Mushtaq Ahmad Choudhary-JKPS took the salute at the Commemoration Parade at DPL Shopian. Officers from Police, CRPF, and Army joined martyrs' families in paying floral tributes at the memorial.

In Pulwama, SSP Pulwama Tanushree-IPS led the homage by laying wreaths and taking the salute at the parade. Officers from CRPF, Army, and civil society members also attended. On the occasion, SSP Pulwama inaugurated the Police Martyrs' Memorial Kabaddi Tournament to promote sportsmanship and commemorate the valour of police martyrs.

In Kulgam, the event was held at DPL Kulgam with participation from DC Kulgam Athar Aamir Khan-IAS, SSP Kulgam Inayat Ali Choudhary-IPS, senior police and CAPF officers, and family members of martyrs who paid floral tributes to the fallen personnel.

In Awantipora, SSP Awantipora along with senior police officers, AIIMS Management, retired personnel, and martyrs' families attended the ceremony. Contingents of JKP performed Shok Shastra



followed by a wreath-laying at the Martyrs' Memorial, DPL Awantipora.

In Budgam, SSP Budgam Nikhil Borkar-IPS led the function at DPL Budgam. DC Budgam Dr. Bilal Mohi-ud-din Bhat and senior officers from CRPF, IRP, and Home Guards attended. The ceremony concluded with floral tributes to the martyrs and interaction with their families.

In Ganderbal, the Commemoration Day was observed at the Sports Stadium near SSP Office, chaired by SSP Ganderbal Khalil Ahmad Poswal-JKPS. Contingents from District Police, JKAP, CRPF, SSB, and Sainik School Manasbal participated in the parade, followed by a wreath-laying ceremony and floral tributes.

In Bandipora, SSP Bandipora Ajaz Ahmad Zargar-JKPS led the wreath-laying ceremony at DPL Bandipora. Contingents from District Police, JKAP, CAPF, and Police Band participated. Officers, civil society members, and families of martyrs attended the event.

In Baramulla, DIG NKR Maqsood-ul-Zaman-IPS took the salute at the parade held at DPL Baramulla. Senior officers from Police, Army, and CAPFs paid floral tributes at the Martyrs' Memorial. Tokens of gratitude and sketches of martyrs were presented to the NoKs, and meritorious students from martyrs' families were felicitated for their academic achievements.

In Kupwara, Police Commemoration Day was observed at District Police Lines Kupwara with a Shaheedi Divas Parade. The parade was inspected by SSP Kupwara Al Tahir Gilani, who also took the salute. Contingents from District Police, CRPF, Armed Police, and Border Battalion participated, led by Raghav Choudhary as Parade Commander.

In Handwara, the commemoration was held at District Police Lines Handwara. SSP Handwara, along with DySP PC Hqrs, DySP DAR, CAPF officers, and police personnel, participated in the event. Members of civil society, retired officers, and families of police martyrs were also present. Contingents of J&K Police and CRPF offered a ceremonial salute to honour the martyrs.

In Sopore, Police Commemoration Day 2025 was observed at District Police Lines Sopore. The event was attended by the Hon'ble MLA Sopore, senior Army and CRPF officers, NOKs of martyrs, civil society members, and officers from Police District Sopore including Addl. SP, SDPOs, DySP Ops, and SHOs. A silent parade was presented by J&K Police, CRPF, and JKAP, followed by a ceremonial salute taken by SSP Sopore.

Hindus, Muslims celebrate Diwali together in Kathua, showcase centuries-old tradition of harmony

Festival unites communities across Jammu; People share joy, greetings, togetherness



SRINAGAR: The centuries-old practice of celebrating Diwali together by Hindus and Muslims was once again witnessed in Kathua district, where men and women, young and old, came together to celebrate the festival of lights, transcending faith and belief.

As per the news agency—Kashmir News Observer Correspondent, people in Kathua showcased this festival as a shining example of brotherhood beyond religion and community.

In Kathua and its nearby villages, Muslim residents joined their Hindu neighbours in celebrating Diwali, continuing their long tradition of communal harmony. The exchange of greetings and shared celebrations strengthened social unity across the region.

Meanwhile, across Jammu province, the festival of lights is being celebrated with full enthusiasm and joy.

Days before the festival, people cleaned and decorated their homes. Markets turned lively as shopping picked up pace. Sweet shops were decorated, and there was great hustle and bustle everywhere. From Jammu city, scenes of grand celebrations were visible, with the entire region glowing with lights.

Raghunath Bazaar, Residency Road, BC Road, Talab Tillo, Janipur, and Gandhi Nagar markets in Jammu were packed with people. Long traffic jams caused difficulties for both pedestrians and drivers.

Police personnel were deployed across the city to manage the situation and ensure smooth traffic movement. Despite the rush, people continued shopping eagerly before returning home.

In areas such as Arnia, Nagrota, Bari Brahmana, and Vijaypur, people celebrated Diwali with equal enthusiasm, exchanging greetings and congratulations. The business community appeared particularly cheerful.

The weather also added to the festive mood, with a slight chill in the air. October brought a series of festivals like Karva Chauth, Dhanteras, and Diwali, filling homes with joy and festivity.

Kathua markets were vibrant and crowded. Women, youth, and children were busy shopping, their faces glowing with happiness. Diwali symbolizes the victory of good over evil. Lord Ram, Sita, and Lakshman returned to Ayodhya after 14 years of exile, and lamps were lit to mark their return. Their obedience to their parents and endurance of hardship continue to inspire generations.

The Kathua district administration made all necessary arrangements for the festival, including security and traffic management. In the border area of Hiranagar, soldiers along the India-Pakistan border celebrated Diwali with great joy. The celebrations continued for two days. —(KNO)

Editorial

Saving Kashmir's Golden Heritage

At this time of year, the Pampore fields, which are typically bathed in purple, convey a message framed in worry. Now, growers harvesting the internationally recognized Kashmiri saffron are concerned not just for the yield of one crop season, but for the survival of the crop altogether, an essential element of the region's cultural and economic identity. The message from the farmers is sharp and clear; if action is not taken soon, saffron growing in its native region could disappear in several seasons. The figures are the manifestation of a decline. It is on record that the area of saffron cultivation has decreased by 65 percent since the late 1990s, from over 5,700 hectares to 2,387 hectares. However, producing saffron is down as well. Reports of last season's harvest yielded only 30 to 40 percent of normal production levels. This is not a seasonal be-back; it is the product of a long-term crisis brought about by government neglect, climate change, and a distressed economy for local farmers.

Growers have diagnosed the problem correctly. Changing weather patterns that include extended dry periods and unusual heat waves continue to stall saffron corm growth, the lifeblood of the plant. Serious lack of proper irrigation facilities notwithstanding grandiose programs like the National Mission on Saffron, are leaving farmers completely vulnerable to an increasingly mercurial monsoon weather system. Rainfall recovery, as in this year, is often too little to repair the damage caused from long term drying. The loss of saffron growing land to urban development, as well as the lack of access to healthy corms, also is putting this agrarian heritage crop into jeopardy. It is indeed a tragedy that farmers in Pampore are now growing mustard crops on land that was formally the supplier of 'red gold.' This is an act of economic desperation, meaning "I'm fed up with all the losses." When the keepers of many generations of tradition are moving to other crops, something has failed systematically.

The appeal to the Chief Minister and the Ministry of Agriculture represent a last attempt without much optimism. These are straightforward and achievable objectives, restore traditional irrigation channels, regularly monitor fields for illegal extraction, provide quality corms, and discourage illegal extraction. The this will necessitate more than funding; it will require enduring commitment, as well as expertise. Reviving saffron in Pampore is not merely an agricultural issue; it is a movement to save a piece of Kashmir's spirit. The government needs to stop playing and scrambling paper schemes, and practice now in earnest and with precision, so that the purple blooms of Pampore do not merely become a memory for the kids of 2030.

Sheikh Ul Alam (RA): Kashmir's Patron Saint



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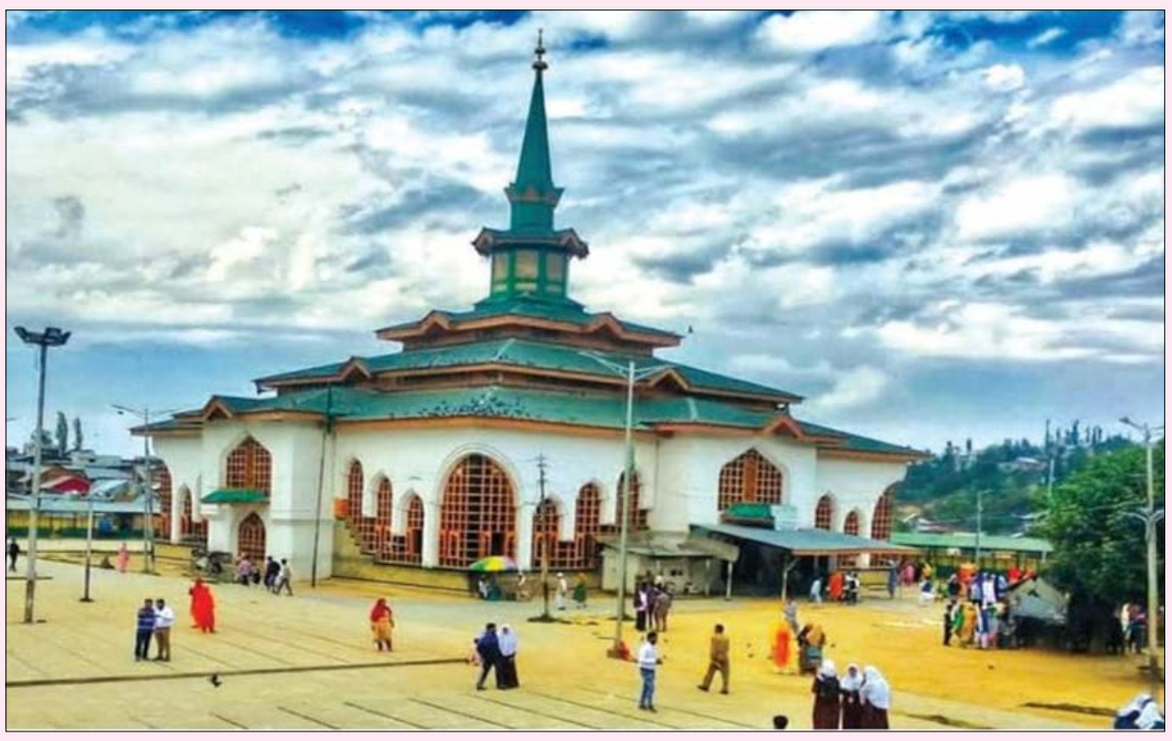
Sheikh Ul Alam (RA)Nund Rishi by name was one of the finest spiritual and moral reformers Kashmir ever had. His teachings and life transformed the moral, social and educational awareness of Kashmiri people. He instructed the values of simplicity, humility, truthfulness and virtue. He spoke not in verse but in maxims for human behavior, leading men onto the path of wisdom and virtue.

Sheikh Ul Alam (RA) used to think that education was not merely the uncovering of knowledge, but rather more an evolution of one's character. His idea of learning was both spiritual and worldly wisdom. He thought that education was a path for cleaning the heart and enlightening the mind. The true aim of education in his perspective was to guide a person towards truth, justiceand moral values.

The Notion of Education in His Thought.

Sheikh Ul Alam (RA) emphasized incredibly the fact that education should cultivate intellect as well as soul. He regarded ignorance as the cause of moral degeneration and evils of society. In his opinion, actual knowledge was not that which stuffed the mind with facts but that which changed human behavior. He had previously said that he who learns without doing is like a lamp with no light.

For himeducation should bring about self consciousness and moral accountability. According to himevery human being should have knowledge about the goal of life and moral duty towards others. His messages remind us that knowledge without morality is risky. He always cautioned humanity against vanity and abuse of knowledge. Learning for him was divine only if it is utilized to serve humanity and pursue divine truth.



Moral Values in His Teachings.

Sheikh Ul Alam (RA) also gave great emphasis to values like honesty, humility, patience and sympathy. These were practiced in his life. He resided among the poor, sympathized with themand transformed them with wisdom and example. His poems always reminded people that wealth and power mean nothing without morality.

He commanded that the foundation for all virtues is truth. To lie, cheat or deceive was to murder the soul. A truthful man makes the world peaceful, but a dishonest man produces discord. His teaching was not intricate, yet powerful, change yourself before changing others.

His second chief virtue that he taught was humility. Sheikh Ul Alam (RA) cautioned against haughtiness and self glory. He asserted that pride shuts the door of wisdom, whereas humility opens the heart to be filled with divine light. He taught human beings to be humble, serve others and live a temperate life.

Education as a Path to Moral Development.

According to Sheikh Ul Alam's (RA) vision learning was not a right but a duty. He sought people to study for spiritual purification and not for fame or fortune. His learning theory was inextricably linked with moral action. Learning was only useful if it was acted upon.

He viewed each experience in life as a learning experience. Nature, society and life's problems were all teachers. He encouraged people to watch, ponder and learn from each experience. His educational vision was holistic in that it was larger than schools and textbooks. It was spiritual awareness, right living and service to others.

When during that time education was the privilege of a select few Sheikh Ul Alam (RA) educated everyone by opening doors to knowledge. He spoke in a tongue that everybody used so that everybody could hear him. His couplets defined tough moral and spiritual principles in easy language so that common minds could easily comprehend them.

Sheikh Ul Alam (RA) and Social Education.

Sheikh Ul Alam (RA) sermon was not restricted to personal morality. He wanted to create a humane and just society. He believed that education should yield responsible citizens who are respectful of other individuals and work for harmony. He opposed discrimination and injustice in any form.

By his practice and poetry he taught society about equality and respectful attitude. He never desired social distinctions and appealed to all to think about all human beings as a family of God. The educated person in his opinion is not the reader of many books but the fair and gentle one towards others.

His focus on moral education also sought to establish values in home and society. He reminded parents to raise honest, kindand respectful children. He imparted the lesson that moral rearing starts from home and that every kindness is worship.

Relevance in Today's Education System.

In the competitive world of todaywhere education is about competition and professional developmentthe message of Sheikh Ul Alam (RA) is more real than ever. His words remind us that without ethics, knowledge will only create imbalance and chaos. Contemporary systems of learning can learn a lot from his vision of morality in their systems.

Students must not only learn the way to think but also the way to live. Academic excellence in the classrooms must be blended with empathy, honesty and civic responsibility. Sheikh Ul Alam's (RA) ideology stimulates education that builds character, fosters peace and strengthens human values.

His message forces teachers to transcend teaching and become character builders. It forces students to appreciate humility more than pride service more than selfishness and wisdom more than information.

Sheikh Ul Alam (RA) was not only a saint but also a guide of the soul. His words still guide generations to lead their lives in honesty, simplicityand love. He made it clear that knowledge devoid of moral values is incomplete and moral values bereft of knowledge are incomplete.

His own life is an example of how morality and education can mold societies and people. According to his teachingswe should never forget that the real purpose of education is to produce good human beings and not mere expert performers. Sheikh Ul Alam (RA) taught us that if knowledge is employed for the sake of morality it will be the pathway to peace, justiceand eternal wisdom.

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Tobacco Rise And Public Health In J&K



MOHAMMAD HANIEF

Tobacco use has quietly become one of the most serious public health challenges facing Jammu and Kashmir. Despite awareness campaigns, government regulations, and warnings printed on every packet, tobacco consumption continues to rise across the region. From bustling city streets to quiet villages, smoking and other forms of tobacco use have become deeply embedded in daily life — cutting across class, gender, and age.

Recent national health surveys place Jammu and Kashmir among the states and union territories with the highest rates of tobacco consumption in India. The latest data from the Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS-2) and the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) show that 23.7 percent of adults in the region use some form of tobacco. Of these, 20.8 percent are active smokers, while 4.3 percent consume smokeless forms such as gutkha or snuff. These figures point to a worrying trend that shows little sign of slowing down.

The gender gap in tobacco use is substantial but telling. Nearly 35 percent of men in Jammu and Kashmir are smokers, compared with just 5 percent of women. While female smoking remains relatively uncommon, changing lifestyles and urban influences could shift this pattern in the future.

Equally striking are the district-level disparities. In some areas, tobacco use has reached alarming levels. Kupwara, at more than 56 percent, tops the list, followed by Shopian (52 percent), Bandipora (49 percent), and Anantnag (48 percent). In contrast, Jammu district reports significantly lower rates, suggesting that while intensity varies, tobacco use has spread across nearly every corner of the Union Territory.

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of this crisis is the growing prevalence of smoking among adolescents and young adults. A recent survey conducted in Srinagar revealed that nearly one in four school-going students — about 23 percent — are active smokers. The findings expose how early experimentation with tobacco often evolves into addiction, locking young people into a habit that may last a lifetime.

Despite the ban under the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA), students continue to report easy access to cigarettes and other tobacco products, often sold by local vendors near schools. The sale of single cigarettes allows minors to purchase discreetly, while the increasing popularity of hookah lounges — offering flavored tobacco marketed as a social pastime — has normalized smoking among the youth.



The long-term implications are profound. Early exposure to tobacco drastically increases the likelihood of chronic addiction and related health problems. In a region already burdened by unemployment and psychosocial stress, tobacco often becomes a coping mechanism — an illusion of relief that leads to greater physical and mental harm.

Tobacco's deep cultural roots in Kashmir further complicate the problem. For generations, the hookah has been a familiar presence in rural households, symbolizing hospitality and communal bonding. While modern cigarettes have replaced traditional hookahs, the underlying acceptance of smoking has endured. This social tolerance makes it difficult to stigmatize tobacco use or enforce restrictions, especially within close-knit communities where smoking is seen as a harmless social habit.

The health consequences are devastating. Tobacco is a leading cause of preventable deaths and a major contributor to cancers, heart disease, and respiratory illnesses. Hospitals across Jammu and Kashmir are witnessing a steady increase in cases linked to tobacco use, particularly among middle-aged men. The economic cost is equally staggering. It is estimated that residents spend hundreds of crores of rupees each year on tobacco products — a sum that does not include the medical bills, lost income, and long-term care that follow.

Although officials claim a slight decline in tobacco consumption — around two to three percent over recent years — the reality is far more complex. While urban centers show some improvement due to enforcement and awareness, rural and semi-urban areas remain deeply affected. Moreover, a drop among older smokers is often offset by rising use among younger people, threatening to undo any progress made.

The government has launched several initiatives under the National Tobacco Control Programme (NTCP). Cessation centers have been established, awareness campaigns intensified, and fines introduced for smoking in public places. Educational institutions regularly host anti-tobacco events, and advertisements warn about the health risks. Yet, enforcement remains inconsistent. Smoking in public spaces is still widespread, and sales near schools continue largely unchecked.

One major obstacle is easy availability. Cigarettes and bidis can be found in almost every neighborhood shop, often sold without regard for age or distance from schools. Their affordability also keeps demand high, particularly among lower-income groups. Many users underestimate the dangers of "occasional smoking," while cultural acceptance discourages people from quitting.

The problem extends beyond smokers themselves. Second hand smoke exposes countless non-smokers — including children and women — to harmful toxins at home and in public. Surveys indicate that more than half of adolescents in Jammu and Kashmir are exposed to secondhand smoke in public places, increasing their vulnerability to respiratory diseases and heart conditions.

Addressing this growing crisis requires sustained, multi-dimensional action. Stricter enforcement of existing laws must become a priority. Public smoking should be penalized more consistently, and sales of tobacco near educational institutions must be completely banned. Increasing taxes on tobacco products can make them less affordable, especially for young consumers.

Equally vital are education and awareness efforts that go beyond slogans. Schools, colleges, and community organizations must play a central role in teaching young people about the dangers of tobacco. Campaigns should highlight not only health risks but also the social and economic costs of addiction.

There is also an urgent need for accessible cessation support. Many smokers express a willingness to quit but lack guidance or counselling. Expanding cessation centers, integrating tobacco control into primary healthcare, and using digital tools for follow-up support can greatly improve outcomes. Community and religious leaders, too, can help by promoting a culture that discourages smoking and emphasizes self-discipline and health.

Accurate data and regular monitoring are essential for informed policymaking. Without updated statistics and local-level studies, interventions risk being sporadic and ineffective. Coordination between government departments, educational institutions, and health professionals can ensure that tobacco control efforts remain focused and evidence-based.

Tobacco addiction is not merely a personal habit; it is a social and economic epidemic. The rising rates of tobacco use in Jammu and Kashmir threaten to undermine years of progress in public health and place an enormous strain on the region's healthcare infrastructure. Every cigarette smoked and every hookah lit carries a cost — one paid not only in money, but in years of life and the health of future generations.

The fight against tobacco will not be won overnight, but it can be won through persistent effort and collective resolve. Jammu and Kashmir stands at a critical crossroads: either allow this silent epidemic to tighten its grip, or act decisively to protect the health and well-being of its people. The choice, and the responsibility, belong to all.

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Deploying Point-of-Care Diagnostics to **Beat TB**

BY SHOBHA SHUKLA / BOBBY RAMAKANT

An important scientific study published in The Lancet shows the strong public health impact of deploying molecular diagnostics closer to the people. This multi-country randomised controlled study shows that if we deploy battery-operated, laboratory independent and true point-of-care molecular test Truenat at the primary healthcare level, then same day test and treat can become a reality. Diagnosing TB early and accurately is a critical pathway towards right treatment as well as stopping the spread of infection.

The study enrolled around 4000 participants in 29 primary healthcare clinics of Tanzania and Mozambique during August 2022 and June 2023. In one study-arm, 2007 participants were accessing primary healthcare clinics equipped with point-of-care molecular test Truenat. In the second study-arm, 1980 people were served by primary healthcare clinics with no molecular test, but their samples were collected and sent to a laboratory with molecular test Gene Xpert (11-16 km away) and their test reports transported back. Both these molecular tests are WHO recommended ones.

The study found that 97% of TB patients could begin treatment within 7 days when point-of-care Truenat was deployed at the primary care level. But only 63% could do so when samples were sent to a remote lab where Gene Xpert was deployed. More importantly, 82.2% of the TB patients who were diagnosed with Truenat at the primary care level, could be initiated on right TB treatment on the same day – so, same day test and treat could become a reality in remote peripheral settings. But only 3% could get same day treatment initiation if tested by Gene Xpert deployed in a remote lab.

Study authors categorically state that "this study provides strong evidence supporting the placement of low complexity molecular TB diagnostics at primary care level, to enable same-day diagnosis and treatment initiation." TB deaths were 3-fold among those who were in the study-arm where samples were to be sent to a remote lab equipped with Xpert (2.1%) compared to those who were in the study-arm with Truenat deployed at the primary care level (0.7%). Eliminating diagnostic delays and delays between diagnosis and treatment can save lives.

By not deploying point-of-care molecular TB tests we are programming to fail on "same day test and treat" too – and thereby failing to reduce unnecessary human suffering and risk of untimely death due to TB. Also, we cannot break the chain of infection transmission unless we diagnose TB early and accurately and initiate right treatment without any delay.

Study authors observed that "we found that the placement of the Truenat platform with MTB Plus and MTB-RIF Dx assays at clinics combined with rapid communication of results and same-day TB treatment initiation led to a 1.5 times higher proportion of people starting treatment for microbiologically confirmed TB within 7 days." It is also important to note that study researchers had found major problems with sputum transport systems which negatively impacted the TB programme. Study authors noted that "study site assessments revealed operational issues [with Gene Xpert] (for example, sputum container stockouts and delays in sample transport) leading to occasional referral of patients instead of samples. To address this issue, sputum containers were stocked throughout, and samples were collected at least twice weekly. Off-site laboratories received Xpert MTB/RIF Ultra cartridges for sample testing."

So, even if so-called hub-and-spoke model or sputum referral system works 'perfectly' (like in this study) then too TB programme outcomes are majorly compromised. One can imagine when real life problems mar this hub-and-spoke model then TB programme outcomes would be getting even more compromised. In the study-arm where Truenat was deployed at the primary care level, it took an hour to find if a person has active TB disease (and if so, then whether the TB bacteria is resistant to one of the two most effective anti-TB medicines, rifampicin). The person was asked to wait for one hour and if found positive for TB, then treatment could be initiated on the same day for over 82% patients.

This Lancet publication co-authored by Dr Celso Khosa of Instituto Nacional de Saúde in Mozambique, Dr Adam Penn-Nicholson of FIND in Geneva, and other researchers from several medical and scientific institutions, is among the very few studies that have compared the difference it makes by deploying molecular diagnostics at primary care level with off-site remote laboratory with centralised or semi-centralised molecular testing (and samples sent to the lab and reports back to the peripheral clinic). Most other studies have compared the difference between a bad TB upfront test (sputum microscopy, which badly underperforms in diagnosing TB) at primary care level with off-site molecular testing.

Truenat molecular test is also the largest used molecular test deployed in India – a nation home to world's largest number of people with TB. It is deployed in over 90 countries now. For example, the largest rollout of Truenat in Africa took place last year in Nigeria with AI-enabled handheld X-Rays and solar-power charging capabilities in remote peripheral areas.



> Study authors observed that "we found that the placement of the Truenat platform with MTB Plus and MTB-RIF Dx assays at clinics combined with rapid communication of results and same-day TB treatment initiation led to a 1.5 times higher proportion of people starting treatment for microbiologically confirmed TB within 7 days." It is also important to note that study researchers had found major problems with sputum transport systems which negatively impacted the TB programme...

Ahead of the world's biggest TB and lung disease conference (Union World Conference on Lung Health) that will be held next month, this study published in the Lancet provides potentially groundbreaking scientific evidence for high TB burden countries on the major difference it makes by deployment of WHO recommended point-of-care molecular test Truenat at the primary care level. If we are to serve the underserved, take best of healthcare and social support services with equity, rights and human dignity. If we are to end TB we cannot afford any delays – be they diagnostic delays or delays spanning many days between diagnosis and initiation of treatment. Moreover, deploying point-of-care health technologies at the point-of-need helps break the barriers people face in accessing centralised healthcare services.

All world leaders at the United Nations General Assembly High Level Meeting on TB in 2023 had committed to completely replace microscopy with upfront molecular TB tests by 2027. With the light this study shines on bringing molecular tests to the primary care level, all efforts must be full throttle to replace microscopy with point-of-care molecular tests that are deployable in high-burden settings.

Study authors stated: "Although Xpert MTB/RIF, endorsed by WHO in 2011, revolutionised TB and rifampicin resistance detection, its impact has been limited. High costs and operational requirements (eg, stable electricity, temperature control, and dust-free environments) have confined its use to centralised laboratories in hub-and-spoke models. New molecular and point-of-care diagnostics are emerging that might be deployed in primary care clinics or even in communities. Portable battery-operated molecular testing platforms, such as the Molbio Truenat platform (endorsed by WHO in 2020), offer the potential to further decentralise molecular testing."

This randomized control study provides pathbreaking science to call for transforming every 'spoke' into a hub by deploying WHO recommended point-of-care molecular tests like Truenat which are battery-operated (with solar power recharging capabilities), laboratory independent, and decentralised. More importantly, it is a multi-disease molecular testing platform for over 40 diseases, such as TB, HIV (including viral load, testing) hepatitis B and C virus, human papilloma virus (HPV – which causes a lot of cervical cancers), several sexually transmitted infections, leprosy, vector-borne diseases like malaria, among others.

Earlier this week while launching an important WHO report on antimicrobial resistance, WHO Director General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus too had underpinned the importance of "rapid and point-of-care molecular testing" for preventing AMR – because correct and timely diagnosis for multiple diseases must be made accessible to all equitably – especially those who are underserved. Linkage to standard treatment, care and support also should be made accessible to all if we are to prevent AMR, along with optimal infection prevention and control, vaccination, water, sanitation and hygiene, and other health and social support.

Shobha Shukla is the founding Managing Editor of CNS and Bobby Ramakant works as CNS Health Editor. Both are on the boards of Global Antimicrobial Resistance Media Alliance (GAMA) and Asia Pacific Media Alliance for Health, Gender and Development Justice (APCAT Media).

LG Sinha

ensure that the families of brave martyrs of J&K Police live a life of comfort and dignity.

Nalin Prabhat, DGP J&K Police read the names of bravehearts of Police who made supreme sacrifice in the line of duty. The arms were reversed and a two-minute silence was observed in the honour of the Martyrs. The Lieutenant Governor also visited the Blood Donation Camp organized to mark the occasion. (DIPR)

Speaker Admits

The resolution submitted by MLA will now move to the next stage and be subjected to the ballot procedure in the upcoming Assembly session.

The initiative aims to provide much-needed relief to households burdened by rising power costs and frequent billing disputes.

The resolution aims at one-time waiving off all outstanding dues with the consumers.

As per the rules of the Legislative Assembly, the resolution will be put to a vote through a ballot to decide whether or not it will be listed in the calendar of the assembly for seeking a vote to adopt or decline the resolution.

After the 2024 elections, in the 90-member J&K assembly, NC has 42 seats, BJP 29, Congress 6, PDP 3, CPI M 1, Aam Aadmi Party 1, Peoples Conference 1, Awami Ittehad Party 1 and 6 independents.

Congress later decided to support the Omar Abdullah-led NC government from outside without joining it.

Of the 90 assembly seats, two seats of Nagrota in the Jammu division and Budgam in the Valley fell vacant.

Nagrota seat was won in the 2024 elections by Devender Singh Rana for the BJP, who later passed away on October 31, 2024.

BJP has nominated Devyani Rana, the daughter of the late Devender Singh Rana, for the Nagrota by-election.

The Budgam seat fell vacant after Omar Abdullah resigned from this seat and chose to represent the Ganderbal seat in the assembly.

Omar had won the 2024 assembly election in two seats.

NC has nominated former minister, Aga Syed Mehmood, for Budgam and Shamim Begum for Nagrota by-poll.

The Election Commission has announced voting in the Nagrota and Budgam assembly polls on November 11. (PTI)

CM Omar

visited a blood donation camp organized as part of the commemoration. He interacted with volunteers and appreciated their humanitarian spirit, commending their selfless service towards community welfare. (DIPR)

Proud

discipline, and dedication that define India's police forces.

Highlighting the sacrifices made this year, Gupta noted that ninety-one personnel from various police and paramilitary forces had laid down their lives while serving the nation.

He paid special homage to Inspector Phang Namgyal of the Ladakh Police, who lost his life during a search-and-rescue operation in the Indus River. "His bravery, dedication, and spirit of public service will remain forever etched in the history of Ladakh Police," Gupta said, recalling that Inspector Namgyal was posthumously awarded the State Bravery Award on Republic Day 2012 — a matter of pride for Ladakh.

The LG commended the Ladakh Police, led by Director General of Police S.D. Singh Jamwal, for maintaining peace, harmony, and public confidence in the Union Territory despite its challenging terrain.

"Maintaining public trust and ensuring the safety of every citizen is the highest duty of the police, and I am proud of Ladakh Police's unwavering commitment," he added.

Gupta urged police personnel to emulate the ideals of Inspector Namgyal — dedication, public sensitivity, and loyalty to the nation — and appealed to Ladakh's youth to imbibe discipline and a spirit of service. "You are the guardians of Ladakh's future. Your efforts will make this land safer, stronger, and more respected," he said.

Expressing gratitude to the families of police and security personnel, Gupta said their patience and sacrifices form the backbone of the nation's security. Quoting former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, he remarked that India's strength lies in the dedication and sense of duty of its citizens.

Concluding his address, the LG said, "Let us honor our martyrs by rededicating ourselves to service, protecting citizens, upholding law and justice and strengthening the unity of our nation."

Meanwhile, Police Commemoration Day was also observed with pride and solemnity at the District Police Lines Kargil, along with the rest of the country.

Executive Councillors of LAHDC Kargil, Kacho Mohammad Feroz and Aga Syed Mujtaba, Deputy Commissioner Rakesh Kumar, Brigadier of 121 Infantry Brigade, SSP Kargil Shree Ram R, army officials, police personnel, and family members of martyrs paid floral tributes at the Martyrs' Memorial.

Speaking on the occasion, Executive Councillor Kacho Mohammad Feroz said the contribution of police martyrs and said Kargil has a glorious history of giving heroes to the nation. He also appreciated the efforts of District Police Kargil under SSP Shree Ram R for maintaining peace and conducting people-friendly initiatives.

SSP Kargil recalled the supreme sacrifices of police personnel and narrated the background of Police Commemoration Day, which is observed in memory of ten brave policemen who laid down their lives at Hot Springs, Ladakh, in 1959.

Special mention was made of Constables Zulfiqar Ali and Mohammad Raza of Kargil District, who sacrificed their lives in the line of duty. Their families were felicitated during the event.

A parade was held, followed by a two-minute silence in memory of the martyrs—(KNO)

Foreign Terrorists

I hope that soon we will be able to deal with the foreign terrorists hiding in forest areas and neutralise them," the Jammu police chief said.

said around 120 counter-terrorist operations are launched in the Jammu zone every day. "This is our daily duty, whether it is a speculative operation or a precise information-based operation, it is ongoing," he said.

He said fighting terrorism is an important part of their duties.

"The number of people who have been martyred fighting terrorism in the Jammu zone is just one part of our duty. Apart from this, we also perform other duties. For example, we should not forget those comrades who have been martyred after being run over while performing traffic duties or fighting criminals. Fighting terrorism is a prime duty, but there is a wide spectrum of duties. We salute all our brave comrades who have been martyred," Tuti said.

Paying his tributes to all police personnel who laid down their lives for the country, the IGP said the force is always grateful to their families.

On Monday, Jammu and Kashmir Police organised a blood donation camp as part of the Police Commemoration Day at police headquarters here. A total of 125 personnel from various wings, battalions, and district units across Jammu Zone voluntarily donated blood.

Meanwhile, commemorative events were held in all ten districts of Jammu, with a large number of senior police officers, retired personnel, members of martyrs' families, and representatives of civil society participating in the solemn functions. (PTI)

Power Generation

than 85 percent of coal and solar power amid acute deficit of hydro power generation.

Officials of PDD department had claimed that local hydro power generation from the local power plants have reduced by nearly 90 percent.

An official had informed that "At present Jammu and Kashmir is 85-90 percent dependent on coal and solar energy that is being procured from the other states because as of now we don't have a local power generation."

"In winters the local hydro power generation of Jammu and Kashmir power plants has reduced by almost 90 percent and in order to cater the requisite power demand, we need to have a base power availability that we procure from outside states. The energy is coal based energy," the official had said—(KNO)

Rajnath Singh

terrorism and ideological wars are emerging within society, as he detailed the complex nature of modern internal threats.

"Crime has become more organised, invisible, and complex, and its purpose is to create chaos in society, undermine trust and challenge the stability of the nation," Singh said.

He commended the police for their dual role: carrying out their official duty of crime prevention while fulfilling the moral duty of maintaining societal trust.

"If people are sleeping peacefully today, it is due to their confidence in our vigilant armed forces and alert police," he added.

Exuding confidence, the Minister asserted that the Naxal menace is "on the verge of becoming history," echoing the commitment of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who has declared that the threat will end by March 2026.

"Several top Naxalites have been eliminated this year... Areas that were once Naxalite hubs are now becoming educational hubs. Areas that were once known as the red corridor have now transformed into growth corridors," Singh said and acknowledged the significant contribution of security forces to this success.

A joint parade of the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) and Delhi Police was held on the occasion.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, chief ministers and governors paid tributes to the police personnel for their role in thwarting internal security challenges and assured support to their families.

In a post on X, PM Modi said, "On Police Commemoration Day, we salute the courage of our police personnel and recall the supreme sacrifice by them in the line of duty. Their steadfast dedication keeps our nation and people safe."

Home Minister Shah conveyed his "warm greetings", recognising the police as first responders who have "scripted glory by thwarting crimes and threats to internal security, and by protecting citizens' rights with exemplary courage and commitment".

The defence minister also highlighted the Modi led government's commitment to bolstering national security and recognising the police forces and recalled that the government established the National Police Memorial in 2018 to honour their contributions.

He noted the various modernisation efforts, saying the police have been provided "state-of-the-art weapons and improved facilities", including modern equipment such as surveillance systems, drones, forensic labs and digital policing tools.

In a separate post, Home Minister Shah also paid tribute to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and the warriors of the Indian National Army (INA) on its foundation day, calling them an "eternal inspiration for the nation first ethos."(PTI)

PM Modi

"On Police Commemoration Day, we salute the courage of our police personnel and recall the supreme sacrifice by them in the line of duty. Their steadfast dedication keeps our nation and people safe," PM Modi said in a post on X.

"Their bravery and commitment in times of crisis and in moments of need are appreciable," the prime minister said.

Police Commemoration Day is observed on October 21 every year. This day is observed as Martyr's Day in all police forces of the country in the memory of 10 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel who were killed on this day in 1959 in an ambush by Chinese troops in Ladakh's Hot Spring area.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah said as first responders, the forces have scripted glory by thwarting crimes and threats to internal security, besides protecting citizens' rights.

"Warm greetings to the police personnel on Police Commemoration Day," Shah wrote on 'X'.

The home minister said that as first responders, the police forces have scripted glory by thwarting crimes and threats to internal security, and by protecting citizens' rights with exemplary courage and commitment.

"My solemn homage to the martyrs who laid down their lives serving the nation," he said.

Separately, the home minister also paid tributes to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and the "brave warriors" of the Indian National Army (INA).

"On the foundation day of the Indian National Army, salutations to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and the brave warriors of the INA.

"Through the INA, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose instilled a strong belief in the hearts of the revolutionaries that the countrymen could achieve freedom through their own army and military campaigns," he said in another post on 'X'.

The home minister said the soldiers of the INA, who under Netaji's leadership hoisted the tricolour in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in 1943 and declared India's independence, will remain an eternal inspiration for the nation-first ethos.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said while there is instability on the borders, new types of crimes, terrorism and ideological wars are emerging within society.

Laying a wreath at the National Police Memorial here on the occasion of Police Commemoration Day, Singh also said that the military and police function on different platforms, but their mission is the same -- to protect the nation.

To have a Viksit Bharat by 2047, the minister said, balancing the external and internal security of the nation is more important than ever.

A joint parade of the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) and Delhi Police was held as part of the event.

On the present-day challenges, the defence minister said while there is instability on the borders, new types of crime, terrorism and ideological wars are emerging within society.

Crime has become more organised, invisible and complex, and its purpose is to create chaos in society, undermine trust and challenge the stability of the nation, he said.

Singh commended the police for carrying out their official responsibility of preventing crime while fulfilling the moral duty of maintaining trust in society.

"If people are sleeping peacefully today, it is due to their confidence in our vigilant armed forces and alert police. This confidence is the foundation of our country's stability," he said, addressing the police personnel who attended the event.

Drawing attention to the Naxal problem, which had been a major internal security challenge for a long time, Singh asserted that the concerted and organised efforts of the police, CRPF, BSF and local administration ensured that the problem did not escalate and the people in the left-wing extremism-affected areas breathed a sigh of relief.

Exuding confidence that the Naxal problem will end by March next year, he said that due to the tireless efforts of the security forces, this problem is now on the verge of becoming history.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah has declared that the Naxal menace will end by March 2026.

"Several top Naxalites have been eliminated this year. Those who previously took up arms against the state are now surrendering and joining the mainstream of development. The number of districts affected by left-wing extremism has come down drastically.

"Areas that were once Naxalite hubs are now becoming educational hubs.

"Areas that were once known as the red corridor have now transformed into growth corridors. Our police and security forces have contributed significantly to this success," he said.

Singh reiterated the PM Modi-led government's commitment to ensuring national security.

"For a long time, we, as a nation, didn't fully recognise the contributions of the police. However, under the leadership of PM Modi, the government established the National Police Memorial in 2018 to honour the memories of our police forces," he said.

"In addition, the police have been provided with state-of-the-art weapons and improved facilities. They now have modern equipment such as surveillance systems, drones, forensic labs and digital policing," he added.

JKSA holds collective consultation on reservation policy

Forms 10-member committee for talks with Govt

SRINAGAR: The Jammu and Kashmir Students Association (JKSA) Tuesday conducted a comprehensive consultation with diverse stakeholders to discuss the reservation policy and the report submitted by the Cabinet Sub-Committee.

The meeting, as per a statement issued to the news agency—Kashmir News Observer (KNO), attended by representatives from various student associations including MBBS, Nursing and Agriculture graduates as well as community organizations and other stakeholders, aimed to deliberate on the critical aspects of the reservation policy and its implications for the region.

After extensive discussions, the stakeholders unanimously agreed to constitute a 10-member committee tasked with determining the future course of action. This committee comprises representatives from different associations, open merit and general category representatives, and key stakeholders to ensure inclusive representation and a balanced approach in addressing concerns surrounding the reservation policy.

The formation of the committee reflects the collective commitment to fostering dialogue, transparency, and consensus-building in resolving issues related to the reservation policy. The committee is mandated to review the sub-committee's report in detail, engage with government authorities, and propose actionable recommendations that align with the aspirations and rights of the students of Jammu and Kashmir.

The Association stated that the Cabinet Sub-Committee memo on the reservation issue is not what matters most, rather, the content of the report itself holds greater significance. It urged the government to make the report public to avoid confusion and apprehensions among students and to ensure clarity on the matter.

National Spokesperson of Association, Dr Zubair Reshi informed that the formed 10-member committee will hold talks with both the government and the Opposition on issues related to the reservation policy and the recruitment process.

It added that empowering young people to engage in open and constructive discussions strengthens democracy and builds trust between the administration and the younger generation.

Zubair added that, "Students are not seeking confrontation; they are seeking conversation. Allowing such platforms will send a strong message that the government stands for inclusivity, transparency, and participatory governance," it added.

The ten-member committee will commence its work immediately and is expected to present its feedback and recommendations within the stipulated time frame following consultations with the government and other stakeholders. Further updates on the committee's progress and decisions will be shared with the public in due course—(KNO)

Major Fire Damages Religious Seminary in Rahmoo Pulwama

SRINAGAR: A massive fire broke out early Monday morning at a religious seminary (Darsgah) in Bongam Rahmoo area of south Kashmir's Pulwama district, damaging a three-storey building before being brought under control by Fire and Emergency Services (FES).

According to official sources, the fire engulfed a three-storey concrete building belonging to the local Darsgah. Firefighters launched a coordinated operation to prevent the flames from spreading to adjacent structures. After continuous efforts, the blaze was brought under control.

An officer from the Drabgam Fire Station confirmed that the situation was contained in time and no casualties or injuries were reported. The extent of property damage, however, is yet to be fully assessed.

The cause of the fire remains unknown, though police have initiated an inquiry to ascertain how it started.

Authorities have urged institutions and the public to ensure basic fire safety measures, especially as colder months approach when the use of heating devices typically rises. [KNT]









Ashwini Vaishnaw Assesses On-Ground Arrangements for Passengers at New Delhi Railway Station

NEWDELHI: Union Minister for Railways, Information & Broadcasting, and Electronics & Information Technology, Ashwini Vaishnaw, visited the New Delhi Railway Station and conducted an on-ground assessment of the arrangements made by the Railways during this festive season. Interacting with the media later, he stated that 12 lakh railway employees are working day & night to ensure passengers reach their destinations safely. He added that more than 1 crore passengers have already been served by these special trains.



The Union Minister stated that, on average, around 4.25 lakh passengers are travelling daily outwards from the Delhi area. He highlighted that major stations such as at Surat, Mumbai, Coimbatore, Hyderabad, and Bengaluru are under continuous monitoring, and even trains in motion are being closely tracked. He said every division and zone has its own war room, ensuring round-the-clock monitoring, carried out with the dedicated efforts of all railway employees.

The Union Minister visited the RPF Control Room via Platform No. 1, which monitors the entire station, and interacted with passengers to review on-ground arrangements. The Union Minister also visited the First Aid Room and interacted with the doctors on duty.

The Minister also interacted with passengers of Patna bound Amrit Bharat Express at platform no 16 of New Delhi Railway station. The passengers applauded & praised the arrangements made by Indian Railways for them. He also visited the Holding area (ÀÀÀÀÀÀÀÀÀÀÀÀ) for the convenience of passengers.

Chairman and CEO, Railway Board, Satish Kumar, General Manager, Northern Railway, Ashok Kumar Verma and other senior officers were also present during the inspection.

The Hon'ble Union Minister also reviewed information on special trains from the Rail Bhawan War Room before visiting New Delhi Railway Station. Key instructions were issued to railway officials to ensure passenger convenience.

Indian Railways is operating 12,011 special trains during the festive season—a significant increase from 7,724 trains in 2024—to meet the sharp rise in travel demand.

In addition to regular train services, Indian Railways has successfully operated 4,211 special trains between 1st October and 20th October 2025, catering to over 1 crore passengers. To further cater to the expected surge in passenger traffic for Diwali, and Chhath, Indian Railways plans to operate around 7800 more special trains in coming days.

Between 1st and 20th October 2025, more than 1 crore passengers have already been served by these special trains. In the New Delhi area, 21.04 lakh passengers were facilitated between 16th and 20th October 2025, as compared to 19.71 lakh passengers during the corresponding period last year — an increase of 1.33 lakh passengers.

Passenger Facilities Strengthened Nationwide

Indian Railways is making extensive efforts to enhance passenger comfort and convenience. Passenger management has been streamlined across stations, with dedicated holding areas, additional ticket counters, potable water facilities, and clean washrooms provided to ensure a smooth travel experience.

Indian Railways has established a dedicated "War Room" at Rail Bhawan to monitor and manage the massive influx of festive travelers. This command center enables real-time monitoring and allows officials to quickly address congestion, passenger complaints, and potential incidents. The initiative was set up under the guidance of Union Minister for Railways, Information & Broadcasting, and Electronics & Information Technology, Ashwini Vaishnaw shortly after he took charge of the Ministry, with the goal of strengthening security and monitoring across the railway network.

Vaishnaw and Railway Board Chairman & CEO, Satish Kumar periodically visit the Rail Bhawan War Room to review passenger movements and provide necessary directives to officials. Today, the War Room has evolved into an effective system overseeing the entire Indian Railways network, with over 80 War Rooms active at the Railway Board, zonal, and divisional levels.

Similarly, at New Delhi Railway Station, a mini control room has been set up to closely oversee passenger arrangements, ensuring smooth operations and enhanced convenience for travelers. (PIB)

Japan's First Female Leader Is Ultraconservative Star From Male-Dominated Party

TOKYO: Sanae Takaichi, a star of ultraconservative Japanese politics and a rare woman to rise in its male-dominated hierarchy, has been elected the country's first female prime minister.



Takaichi, 64, is also the first woman to lead the Liberal Democratic Party that has dominated Japan's postwar politics almost without interruption. She admires former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and is a proponent of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's conservative vision for Japan.

A China hawk, she is a regular at Yasukuni Shrine, seen by China, the two Koreas and other Asian victims of Japan's World War II aggression as a place that glorifies the country's wartime past. The leader of a country that ranks poorly internationally for gender equality, Takaichi had rarely mentioned the issue during the campaign. She did remark after winning the presidency of the ruling party: "Now that the LDP has its first female president, its scenery will change a little."

First elected to parliament from her hometown of Nara in 1993, she served in key party and government posts, including minister of economic security, internal affairs and gender equality, though her diplomatic experience is thin.

She has called for a stronger military, more fiscal spending for growth, promotion of nuclear fusion, cybersecurity and tougher policies on immigration.

Takaichi is a known hard worker

As a student, Takaichi was a drummer in a heavy-metal band and rode a motorcycle.

She says she's a workaholic who would rather work at home than go out and socialise. But after two unsuccessful bids to lead the LDP, she says she's made efforts to build more connections with colleagues.

She asked all party lawmakers to "work like a horse."

"I will abandon the word 'work-life balance.' I will work, work, work and work" — she said in comments that sparked strong, if mixed, online reactions.

Struggling for recognition in the male-dominated party

Female lawmakers in the LDP have often been passed over for ministerial posts, or been pushed aside if they spoke up about diversity and gender equality.

Women hold only about 15 per cent of the seats in Japan's lower house, the more powerful of the two parliamentary chambers. Only two of Japan's 47 prefectural governors are women.

Takaichi has avoided talking about gender issues in the past, sticking with old-fashioned views favoured by male party heavyweights.

She has vowed to significantly increase the number of women in her government, but she supports the imperial family's male-only succession, and opposes both same-sex marriage and amending the 19th-century law that requires married couples to have the same surname.

"Ms. Takaichi's policies are extremely hawkish, and I doubt she would consider policies to recognise diversity," said Chiyako Sato, a political commentator and senior writer for the Mainichi newspaper.

Takaichi has backed financial support for women's health and fertility treatment as part of the LDP policy of having women serve in their traditional roles of being good mothers and wives. But she also acknowledged her struggles with menopause symptoms and stressed the need to educate men about female health to help women at school and work.

The prime minister's hard-right views on history and security

Takaichi is expected to move the government to the right, especially after forming an alliance with the right-wing Japan Innovation Party, or Ishin no Kai. The previous partner, the Buddhist-backed moderate Komeito, left the coalition in protest of Takaichi's ultraconservative views.

She has resisted acknowledging Japanese wartime aggression and atrocities and denied that coercion was used against Korean labourers and women held as sexual slaves for Japanese troops. She was part of a campaign to remove references to wartime sexual slavery from school textbooks. (PTI)

Ayurveda Day transformed from national observance into a global health movement: CSIR-NIScPR

NEWDELHI: CSIR–National Institute of Science Communication and Policy Research (CSIR–NIScPR) celebrated 10th Ayurveda Day on 17th October 2025. The occasion marked a significant milestone in promoting Ayurveda, as a holistic approach to health and well-being rooted in sustainability and natural living. The celebration was commemorated by conducting a NIScPR SVASTIK lecture under the umbrella of the national initiative #SVASTIK (Scientifically Validated Societal Traditional Knowledge) to communicate scientifically validated traditional knowledge to society, and a free health check-up camp for CSIR-NIScPR staff

Dr Kishore Patel from the CCRAS-Central Ayurveda Research Institute (CARI), New Delhi delivered an insightful NIScPR SVASTIK lecture on the foundational principles of Ayurveda. He discussed the causes of diseases linked to lifestyle and stress, and underscored the importance of balanced nutrition, mindful eating, and ethical living through the concepts of Āhāra Rasāyana and Sadvṛtta for achieving holistic well-being.

Dr Naresh Kumar, Chief Scientist, CSIR-NIScPR highlighted the remarkable global expansion of Ayurveda, noting that within less than a decade, Ayurveda Day has transformed from a national observance into a global health movement. He emphasized the need for Ayurvedic practitioners and researchers to counter misinformation and prevent adulteration, advocating for standardized formulations, evidence-based integration, rational marketing, and public awareness. He also appreciated the #SVASTIK initiative, which disseminates traditional knowledge among the public with a scientific outlook.

Rajesh Kumar Singh Roshan, Controller of Administration, CSIR-NIScPR elaborated on the historical roots of Ayurveda and the contributions of ancient physicians such as Āchārya Nāgārjuna. He also spoke about the growing global recognition of Ayurveda as a comprehensive system of health care.

Dr Suman Ray, Sr Principal Scientist, CSIR-NIScPR commended this year's theme, "Ayurveda for People and Planet," which reflects a shared commitment to leveraging Ayurveda's potential for global health and environmental harmony.

Dr Charu Lata, Principal Scientist and Coordinator SVASTIK, and Nodal Officer for the 10th Ayurveda Day celebrations at CSIR-NIScPR proposed the Vote of Thanks, expressing gratitude to the Director of CSIR–NIScPR and all distinguished speakers and participants for making the celebration a success. (PIB)

Trump set to travel to Malaysia, Japan, S Korea; says "wants to be good to China"

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump on Monday said that he wants "to be good to China" as he announced that he is soon travel to Malaysia, Japan and South Korea.

"I have been invited to go to China and I will be doing that sometime fairly early next year," Trump said while addressing reporters as he met with Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese.



"I'll be in Malaysia, I'll be in Japan, I'll be in a couple of others. We'll be sort of doing a little bit of a tour," Trump said.

He said that US and China have a "great relationship" and he anticipates a "fair deal" for both countries.

"I think we're going to end up having a fantastic trade deal with China," Trump told reporters.

"We're going to have a fair deal. I want to be good to China. I love my relationship with president Xi," Trump said on his ties with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping.

His comments come amid trade tensions between the United States and China. Trump imposed 57 per cent tariffs on Chinese imports and China on October 9 announced restrictions on the exports of rare-earth minerals. Trump said that unless a deal is reached by November 1, the US tariffs on China could rise significantly, as announced, to 157 per cent.

"And I'm meeting with President Xi. We have a very good relationship. We're going to be meeting in South Korea in a couple of weeks, and we will see what we can do," Trump said.

"I believe after leaving South Korea…We thought that would be a good place to meet, and we're going to be meeting ," the US President said. South Korean city of Gyeongju is hosting the the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) gathering from October 31- November 1.

"I think China's been very respectful of us. They are paying tremendous amounts of money to us in the form of tariffs. As you know, they are paying 55 per cent; that's a lot of money," Trump said.

The US President also added that many countries had previously taken advantage of the United States but emphasised that such practices were no longer tolerated. "A lot of countries took advantage of the US and they are not able to take advantage anymore. China's paying 55 per cent and a potential 155 per cent come November 1st unless we make a deal," he said.

"If they don't want to do business with us, China is in big trouble," Trump said. "I don't want them to be in trouble. I want them to thrive. We want to thrive together. It is a two-way street."

Malaysia is scheduled to host the the 47th Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit from October 26-28.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent had on Friday said that he and China's Vice Premier He Lifeng are likely to hold talks in Malaysia this weekend to "prepare for the two presidents to meet." (ANI)

Centre releases over Rs 730 crore to strengthen rural local bodies in Gujarat, Haryana

NEWDELHI: The Union Government has released over Ã730 crore under the 15th Finance Commission (XV-FC) grants to strengthen Rural Local Bodies (RLBs) in the states of Gujarat and Haryana for the Financial Year 2025–26.

According to an official statement, Gujarat has received the second installment of Untied Grants for FY 2024–25 amounting to Ã522.20 crore. The funds have been released to all 38 District Panchayats, 247 eligible Block Panchayats, and 14,547 eligible Gram Panchayats across the state.

Additionally, Ã3.5989 crore from the withheld portion of the first installment of Untied Grants for FY 2024–25 has been released to six District Panchayats, five Block Panchayats, and 78 Gram Panchayats that have now become eligible.

For Haryana, the Union Government has released the first installment of Untied Grants for FY 2025–26, amounting to Ã95.129 crore. The grant covers 18 District Panchayats, 134 Block Panchayats, and 6,164 Gram Panchayats in the state.

The XV Finance Commission grants are recommended jointly by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj and the Ministry of Jal Shakti (Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation) and are disbursed by the Ministry of Finance in two installments each financial year.

These grants aim to empower Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Rural Local Bodies to address local developmental needs under the 29 subjects listed in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution, excluding salaries and establishment costs.



While Untied Grants can be used to meet location-specific needs identified by local bodies, Tied Grants are earmarked for basic services such as sanitation, maintenance of Open Defecation Free (ODF) status, waste management, fecal sludge treatment, supply of drinking water, rainwater harvesting, and water recycling.(PIB)

H-1B fee of USD 100,000 won't apply to status change or extension cases: USCIS

NEW YORK: The USD 100,000 fee imposed by the Trump administration on new H-1B visa petitions will not apply to applicants seeking a "change of status" or "extension of stay", according to fresh guidelines.

Issued by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) on Monday, the guidelines clarified the exemptions to President Donald Trump's September 19 proclamation, 'Restriction on entry of certain nonimmigrant workers', which will raise the fee for new H1-B visas to a steep USD 100,000 (approx INR 88 lakhs).

"The Proclamation does not apply to any previously issued and currently valid H-1B visas, or any petitions submitted prior to 12:01 a.m. eastern daylight time on September 21, 2025," the USCIS said.

It added that the proclamation also does not prevent any current H1-B holder from travelling in and out of the US.



The USCIS clarified that the fee does not apply to "change of status" cases where individuals switch categories without leaving the country, such as moving from F-1 student status to H-1B status.

"It says the fee only applies to cases filed for people outside the United States, so they can come in," Dan Berger of Green & Spiegel told Forbes in an interview. "Employers were nervous about doing change of status because the $100k might apply if they travel," he added.

The proclamation does not apply to a petition filed at or after "12:01 a.m. eastern daylight time on September 21, 2025, that is requesting an amendment, change of status, or extension of stay for an alien inside the US where the alien is granted such amendment, change, or extension.

"Further, an alien beneficiary of such petition will not be considered to be subject to the payment if he or she subsequently departs the United States and applies for a visa based on the approved petition and/or seeks to reenter the United States on a current H-1B visa."

However, if the USCIS determines that the person is "ineligible for a change of status or an amendment or extension of stay", then the fee would apply.

A beneficiary will not be considered to be subject to the payment if they subsequently depart the US and apply for a visa based on the approved petition and/or seek to re-enter the US on a current H-1B visa, it said.

The proclamation signed by the US President raised the fee for H1-B visas to a staggering USD 100,000 annually, in a move that could adversely impact Indian professionals on visas in the US.

Indians make up an estimated 71 per cent of all approved H-1B applications in recent years, according to the USCIS. Companies pay to sponsor H-1B applicants.

The guidelines were issued days after the US Chamber of Commerce filed a lawsuit against the Trump administration's decision to impose the fee, describing it as "misguided policy and plainly unlawful" action that could cripple American innovation and competitiveness.

The lawsuit, filed on October 16 in a district court in Columbia, challenged the proclamation and said it exceeded the president's lawful authority.

Tens of thousands of highly skilled people in specialised fields boost the American economy each year after obtaining H-1B status, it said.

Under a Congressional-mandated cap, the US can issue a maximum of 65,000 H-1B visas every year and another 20,000 to those who have obtained master's and higher degrees from the US. (PTI)

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