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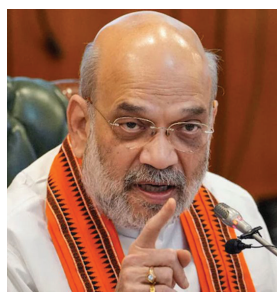
**DENGUE WARNING SIGNS**  
 Many people with dengue can be cared for at home with adequate rest and hydration. But, if you experience any warning signs, go immediately to the nearest medical center.  
 Watch out for dengue warning signs!  
 A drop in body temperature accompanied by any of the following symptoms:  
 • Increase in body temperature  
 • Persistent vomiting  
 • A sharp rise in temperature  
 • Dizziness  
 • Bleeding from gums or nose, blood in stool  
 • Redness in eyes  
 If you have any of these symptoms, go to the nearest medical center IMMEDIATELY.

# JINDRAH IMAGES

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## B.R. Ambedkar was greatest opponent of Article 370: Home Minister Amit Shah

**JI NEWS SERVICE**  
 SRINAGAR, DEC 18  
 Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday addressed a press conference at the BJP headquarters, highlighting B.R. Ambedkar's strong opposition to Article 370, which had accorded special status to Jammu and Kashmir. The Minister's statement comes amid controversy over his remarks regarding Ambedkar and the Congress party's historical stance on constitutional values. According to the news agency correspondent, in



the press briefing, Shah criticized the Congress for its alleged distortion of facts during the parliamentary debate on the 75 years of India's progress, referred to as the Gaurav Yatra and Vikas Yatra. He emphasized that discussions in democratic

forums like Parliament should always be rooted in facts and truth, which he claimed the Congress had failed to uphold. "The Congress Party has consistently undermined the values of B.R. Ambedkar. From opposing Ambedkar during his lifetime to leaving no stone unturned to defeat him in the elections of 1951-52 and 1954, the Congress has shown its anti-Ambedkar stance," Shah alleged. He further accused the Congress of being anti-reservation, anti-constitution, and of repeatedly

## Amit Shah likely to review J&K situation today

**JI NEWS SERVICE**  
 NEW DELHI, DEC 18  
 Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday is likely to review the security situation in Jammu and Kashmir, the first such meeting after the last assembly elections held in September-October, sources said. Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha, top officers

of the Army, paramilitary forces, JK administration, intelligence agencies and Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) are expected to attend the meeting. "The home minister will review the security situation in Jammu and Kashmir. He will be briefed about the prevailing situation in the Union Territory (UT) and the situation along the

## CM Omar refutes meeting with Home Minister during recent Delhi visit

**JI NEWS SERVICE**  
 SRINAGAR, DEC 18  
 Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Wednesday denied reports of meeting the Union Home Minister Amit Shah, clarifying that no such meeting has taken place yet. He, however, stated that given the current circumstances in which JK is a Union Territory, the Home Minister has a crucial role in running its affairs. As per the news agency Correspondent, speaking to reporters, Omar said, "I don't know where these reports originate. If there



is any meeting, you will be informed, either by me or by the Home Minister's office." He, however, acknowledged the critical role of the Home Minister in Jammu and Kashmir's affairs. "Jammu and Kashmir is currently a Union Territory, and as such, the

Home Minister has a significant role to play. There are several issues we need to discuss with him, and I plan to meet him in the future," he said. Speaking about his recent comments regarding Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), Omar said he had made no new statement. "I've consistently maintained that if someone has concerns about EVMs, they should express them year-round, not just when they lose elections. Complaints should persist even after victories, or else we must return to ballot

## LG chairs 73rd Meeting of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board

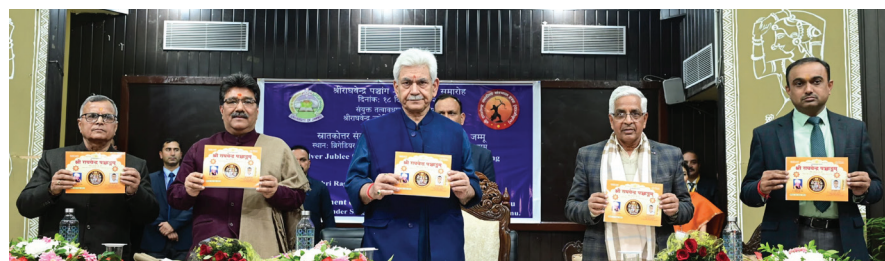


**JI NEWS SERVICE**  
 JAMMU, DEC 18  
 Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha chaired the 73rd Meeting of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board (SMVDSB), Wednesday at Raj Bhawan. The meeting was attended by Members of the Board- Mahamandleshwar Swami Vishveshvaranand Giriji Maharaj;

Baleshwar Rai, Dr Ashok Bhan, Kul Bhushan Ahuja, Dr Neelam Sareen, K.K Sharma, Suresh Kumar Sharma and Raghu K. Mehta. Dr Mandeep K. Bhandari, Principal Secretary to Lieutenant Governor and Anshul Garg, CEO, SMVDSB also attended the meeting. On the sidelines of the meeting, the Lieutenant

Governor inaugurated and dedicated various pilgrims-centric facilities including Yatri Facilitation Centre at Railway Station Katra and Yatri Facilitation cum Staff Accommodation Complex (Shubhra Bhawan) at Banganga. He laid e-foundation stone of the new Exit Track at Bhawan aimed at decongesting the

## LG unveils Silver Jubilee Issue of Shri Raghvendra Panchang



**JI NEWS SERVICE**  
 JAMMU, DEC 18  
 Lieutenant Governor Shri Manoj Sinha today unveiled the Silver Jubilee Issue of Shri Raghvendra Panchang, at University of

Jammu. In his address, the Lieutenant Governor congratulated Sh Chander Mouli Raina, the editorial team of the Panchang and all the members of Shri Raghvendra Jyotish Sansthan

Trust on the occasion. He also commended the efforts of the Trust on making people aware about traditions and for carrying forward the legacy of Panchang

## 6 die, 4 injured in Kathua fire incident

LG, CM grieved over loss of lives

**JI NEWS SERVICE**  
 JAMMU, DEC 18  
 Six persons of a family including two children died while four others were injured due to suffocation allegedly caused by a fire incident in a residential house in Kathua on Wednesday, officials said. According to the news agency, the incident took place in the mid night at a residential house in ward number 16, Shiva Nagar Kathua. As per the initial reports, the fire started

from a rental room due to a lamp and spread to other parts of the room, resulting in the death of six persons, who were inside the room. The six persons died of suffocation caused by the smoke. The victims have been identified as the owner of the house Avatar Krishan, 81, Ganga Bhagat, 17, Danish Bhagat, 15, Barkha Raina, 25, Takash Raina, 3 and Advik Raina, 4. They were taken to the hospital but were declared dead. Four others were injured in the

## PDP Chief criticizes Govt's development model, warns of ecological disaster

**JI NEWS SERVICE**  
 SRINAGAR, DEC 18  
 Former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti on Wednesday launched a scathing attack on the government during a press conference, accusing it of destroying the region's unique identity and natural resources through large-scale infrastructure projects. Mufti, while speaking to the media as per the news agency, highlighted three major projects—the Rajouri-Baramulla Highway, the Ring Road project from Galandar

to Ganderbal, and railway expansion projects—claiming they are causing extensive damage to agricultural land, forests, and water resources. She alleged that these projects, under the guise of development, were resulting in large-scale deforestation, displacement of farmers, and depletion of water levels. "Jammu and Kashmir's identity is tied to its natural beauty, environment, and unique cultural heritage. These projects are putting tremendous pressure on our

## Katra observes complete shutdown against proposed ropeway project to Vaishno Devi Shrine

**JI NEWS SERVICE**  
 JAMMU, DEC 18  
 Katra town, which serves as the base camp for the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Yatra, observed a complete shutdown on Wednesday in protest against the proposed Rs 250-crore ropeway project connecting Tarakote Marg to Sanji Chhat. The shrine, located in Reasi district, attracts millions of devotees each year. According to the news agency, the Mata Vaishno Devi Sangharsh Samiti, representing shopkeepers, pony operators and palanquin owners, led the



protests, claiming that the ropeway would destroy the livelihoods of local business owners. Protesters demanded that the project be scrapped. To ensure law and order, the administration deployed additional police forces in

Katra. The Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board announced the ropeway project last month, saying it would ease access to the temple for senior citizens, children and others who find it difficult to climb

the 13-km-long track to the cave shrine. However, those opposing the project say the ropeway will divert pilgrims from Katra's market, leaving thousands of shopkeepers and service providers economically vulnerable. The shutdown disrupted normal life in the town, with reduced vehicular traffic and all businesses closed. A large rally, supported by various organisations, was held by the Samiti from Shalimar Park, with protesters carrying placards, wearing black armbands and raising

## In four years, JK sees power consumption surge by 13 Pc

**JI NEWS SERVICE**  
 SRINAGAR, DEC 18  
 Amidst growing demand for power, the electricity consumption in Jammu and Kashmir has increased by more than thirteen percent in the past four years. The official documents accessed by the news agency states, "Over the span from 2020-21 to 2023-24, Jammu and Kashmir saw a steady increase in electricity consumption per capita, rising from 1,322 Kilowatt-Hour (KWhr) to 1,507KWhr." "This trend reflects a growing demand for power amidst a popula-

tion increase from 13.41 million to 13.70 million, with units purchased and consumed escalating from 17,721.76 million to 20,644.47 million units over the period," it reads. Currently, there are 23.45 lakh electric connections and consumers of different categories in JK who are being catered electric power supply. "At least 14 lakh smart meters are targeted to be installed, 7.27 lakh smart meters are targeted to be installed by March 2025 out of which 5.78 Lakhs stand installed," reads the document. It also said that the government will

## Salal-Haimana shows potential for lithium, titanium resources: Govt

**JI NEWS SERVICE**  
 SRINAGAR, DEC 18  
 The Union Government has confirmed that the Salal-Haimana area in Jammu and Kashmir's Reasi district holds significant resources of lithium and titanium. According to the Ministry of Coal and Mines, G. Kisshan Reddy, the Geological Survey of India (GSI) conducted preliminary exploration (G3 stage) primarily for bauxite, during which additional resources of lithium and titanium were also identified. The GSI has submitted mineral samples to the Indian Bureau of Mines, Nagpur, and the Institute of Minerals and Materials Technology, Bhubaneswar, for beneficiation studies. In addition, two other preliminary exploration

## J&K cancelled over 1.27 lakh fake ration cards since 2013: Centre

**JI NEWS SERVICE**  
 SRINAGAR, DEC 18  
 The Central government has cancelled over 1.27 lakh fake and duplicate Public Distribution System (PDS) ration cards in Jammu and Kashmir since 2013 as part of a broader initiative to ensure the rightful targeting of food subsidies. This action per minister of state, Nimuben Jayantibhai Bambhaniya, is in line with a nationwide effort to eliminate ineligible beneficiaries through digital verification methods, including Aadhaar linking, digitisation, and e-KYC. According to details available with news agency, in Jammu and Kashmir, nearly 100% of ration cards have been Aadhaar-seeded, allowing the identification and removal of ineligible

## J&K has 28 lakh bank accounts under PMJDY, over 10 lakh active Kissan credit cards: Govt

**JI NEWS SERVICE**  
 SRINAGAR, DEC 18  
 Jammu and Kashmir has 28.05 lakh bank accounts under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojna (PMJDY), with 22.14 lakh accounts in rural areas and 5.91 lakh in urban areas, according to a government data. The data available with news agency reveals that RuPay debit cards have been issued to 66% of these account holders, facilitating easier access to banking services. In terms of employment generation, 50,418 cases have been sanctioned under various major schemes, including the Prime Minister's Employment

## JK Bank reports Rs 320.42 cr fraud over 3 years: GoI

**JI NEWS SERVICE**  
 SRINAGAR, DEC 18  
 Bank frauds in Jammu and Kashmir Bank Limited over the last three financial years have seen fluctuating amounts but the number of such incidents has also reduced, Minister of State (MoS) for Finance, Pankaj Chaudhary informed Parliament. Between 2021-22 and 2023-24, a total of 32 fraud cases were reported, involving Rs. 320.42 crore, he said in a written reply as per the news agency. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) data also shows a nationwide decline in the amount involved in banking frauds above Rs 1 lakh, decreasing from Rs 9,298 crore in FY 2021-22 to Rs 2,715 crore in FY 2023-24. Year-wise, J&K Bank Limited reported 11 fraud cases in FY 2021-22 involving

## J&K contributes 0.8% to national GDP: Govt report

**JI NEWS SERVICE**  
 SRINAGAR, DEC 18  
 Jammu and Kashmir is making a proportional contribution to the country's economy, with its share in the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) standing at 0.8 per cent, according to the government data. According to data obtained by the news agency, this aligns closely with J&K's population share of 0.98 per cent in the country. The report states that J&K's economic growth has been steady, with the tertiary sector contributing 61 per cent, followed by the secondary and primary sectors. For the financial year 2023-24, the Union Territory's Real Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) is projected to grow by 7.41 per cent, with a Nominal GSDP estimated at Rs 2.46 lakh crore.

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## DC Bandipora conducts surprise visit to CHC Hajin, reviews facilities

J1 NEWS SERVICE  
BANDIPORA, DECEMBER 18

The Deputy Commissioner (DC) Bandipora, Manzoor Ahmad Qadri today conducted a surprise visit to the Community Health Center (CHC) Hajin to evaluate the quality of healthcare services and facilities provided to the public.

During the visit, the DC inspected the infrastructure, reviewed the availability of medical equipment, and assessed staff readiness. He interacted with staff of CHC Hajin to gather first-hand feedback.

On the occasion, the Medical Officer apprised the DC regarding the current status of the healthcare services, including staff availability, equipment functionality, and patient care measures.

Qadri emphasized the importance of deliver-



ing quality patient care and directed the hospital administration to address any gaps in services promptly.

He instructed the staff to ensure round-the-clock availability of essential services and urged them to remain committed to

enhancing healthcare standards to improve healthcare delivery and ensure that every patient has access to quality medical services.

During the visit, the DC was accompanied by SDM Sumbal, CPO and other concerned.

## DC Kulgam reviews progress on key dev. projects

J1 NEWS SERVICE  
KULGAM, DECEMBER 18

The Deputy Commissioner (DC) Kulgam, Athar Aamir Khan today chaired a review meeting to assess the progress of important developmental projects in the district, including the construction of the Government Degree College (GDC) building at Frisal and the T-3 quarters at Eklavya Model Residential School (EMRS) at Tangmarg.

During the meeting, the DC in detail took stock of progress of ongoing construction work on the GDC building at Frisal. He instructed executing agencies to expedite the work and ensure its timely completion without compromising on quality standards.

The progress on Type-3 quarters at EMRS Tangmarg was also reviewed



in detail.

The DC further reviewed the functioning of EMRS Tangmarg, emphasizing the need to ensure all necessary facilities for the students.

Additionally, the DC instructed the concerned committee to prepare and submit the requisition for furniture procurement for EMRS Tangmarg at the earliest to facilitate the smooth functioning of the

institution.

Discussions were also held regarding staff outsourcing and other requirements for the EMRS School to enhance its overall operational efficiency.

The meeting was attended by the ADDC, Bashir Ahmad Wani; JDP, ACR, SDM, Principal GDC Frisal, CEO, Ex. Engineer R&B, officers from SICOP and other officers.

## Transporters' delegation calls on new Transport Commissioner



J1 NEWS SERVICE  
JAMMU, DECEMBER 18

A delegation of Transporters today called on Transport Commissioner J&K Vishesh Paul Mahajan here in his office chambers to project their demands and problems. They welcomed the new Transport Commissioner and expressed hope that their long pending issues will be resolved with his active intervention. The trans-

porters were assured by Transport Commissioners that all their issues will be taken up at the appropriate forums for early resolution of grievances. It was also decided that there will be regular interaction with the transporters.

Joint Transport Commissioner Vinay Samotra; Assistant Transport Commissioner Dr Punika Pandita and other functionaries of the department were also present.

## DC Bandipora inspects under-construction Arin-Balhama-Palkar Road



residents of the area.

Interacting with the locals, Qadri emphasized the administration's dedication to address public grievances and fulfill genuine public demands. He said, the construction of the Arin-Balhama-Palkar road was a long-pending demand of locals and this road will significantly improve connectivity and enhance the socio-economic development of the area.

The DC said that the District Administration is committed in its mission to ensure holistic development and improve infrastructure across the district.

The DC was accompanied by DDC Arin Ghulam Mohiudin, Assistant Commissioner Development, Chief Planning Officer, Tehsildar Bandipora, Block Development Officer Arin and other concerned.

J1 NEWS SERVICE  
BANDIPORA, DECEMBER 18

The Deputy Commissioner (DC) Bandipora, Manzoor Ahmad Qadri on Wednesday conducted an on-site inspection of the under-construction Arin-Balhama-Palkar road, a vital connectivity aimed at linking the unconnected area

of Palkar with Balhama Arin.

During the inspection, the DC was apprised by officials that the road is being constructed at an estimated cost of Rs. 5.70 lakh under MGNREGA. The road is expected to enhance connectivity and facilitate better access to essential services for the

## DC Bandipora inaugurates two-day Taekwondo Championship at Hajin

J1 NEWS SERVICE  
BANDIPORA, DECEMBER 18

The Deputy Commissioner (DC) Bandipora, Manzoor Ahmad Qadri, on Wednesday inaugurated a two-day Taekwondo Championship at Government Higher Secondary School Hajin.

The championship is being organized by the Taekwondo Association of Bandipora and has brought together 230 Boys and Girls of all age groups from across the district to compete and showcase their skills.

Addressing the participants, the DC highlighted the increasing participation of students from Jammu and Kashmir in sports like Taekwondo and gymnastics. He remarked that this shift underscores the immense talent and potential of the youth in the area.

Qadri emphasized the importance of harness-



ing the energy of young people and channeling their abilities into constructive activities such as sports.

He stated that sports not only enable youth to achieve excellence but also serve as a crucial tool in steering them away

from harmful influences, including substance abuse. He reiterated the administration's commitment to supporting sports and youth-oriented initiatives, adding that such events play a vital role in promoting physical fitness, discipline, and teamwork among young individuals.

Among others the inaugural ceremony of taekwondo

## Awareness camps organized by DIC Ramban to promote self-employment schemes

J1 NEWS SERVICE  
RAMBAN, DECEMBER 18

As per the directions of Deputy Commissioner Ramban, Baseer-Ul-Haq Chaudhary, and Director, Industries and Commerce, Jammu, Dr. Arun Manhas, the District Industries Centre (DIC), Ramban, organized awareness camps today at Block Development Offices in Khari and Ramsoo. The aim was to inform the public about various schemes implemented by the Industries and Commerce Department to encourage youth to become job providers rather than job seekers. The events commenced with a welcome address, followed by a detailed presentation by officers from the DIC. Under the guidance of GM, DIC, Ravinder Anand, the Project Manager, Kuldeep Singh, highlighted the features and benefits of the Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP). Participants were informed about the application procedures, benefits of enrollment with the DIC, and the financial assistance available for ventures in the manufacturing and service sectors.

Awareness about the PM Vishwakarma Scheme was also a key focus of the camps. The educated unemployed youth were motivated to explore self-employment opportunities through these schemes. Queries regarding the application process and portal registration were addressed on the spot. The aspiring youth expressed keen interest in availing the benefits of the PMEGP and PM Vishwakarma schemes. The sessions concluded with a vote of thanks from the Project Manager, who expressed gratitude to the staff of the Rural Development Department and the public for their participation and support.

## Mega Public Outreach Programme held at Khanetar-Poonch

J1 NEWS SERVICE  
POONCH, DECEMBER 18

Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) Surankote, Choudhary Mohammad Akram and District Development Commissioner Vikas Kundal today conducted an extensive tour of Tanda Khanetar in Poonch and attended a mega Public Outreach Programme.

The outreach program aimed to redress and resolve public Grievances and improve service delivery in District Poonch.

The event witnessed an overwhelming turnout of enthusiastic locals, availing the opportunity to voice their demands and seek immediate redressal to their problems.

Local raised a wide range of issues seeking completion of lift Scheme from Tanta to Mohalla Pallani, Completion of High school Building at Kalsaan, maintenance of the roads connecting adjoining areas, meeting shortage of staff in Government High School Kalsaan, Building completion of Middle School Duprian and other issues pertaining to infrastructure, education, health, water supply, Electricity, .

MLA Surankote Choudhary Mohammad Akram



emphasized the government's commitment towards making the public administration more transparent, accountable and responsive to the needs of the people.

"The government is fully aware of the challenges faced by the people in rural areas and this camp is an opportunity for us to listen to their issues at their doorsteps and also take immediate actions to resolve the same" the MLA said. He assured the gathering that their demands would be met with tangible actions, resulting in visible improvements and benefits for the community. MLA asked PDD (RDSS) to prioritize execution of

work in snow prone areas so as to ensure power supply to citizens during the ongoing winter season.

The DDC Vikas Kundal assured that all demands and issues will be addressed in a time bound manner and ongoing projects will be completed well in time. He further instructed district officers to adopt an efficient and responsive mechanism for addressing public grievances. He called upon them to work with dedication and ensure timely redressal of the issues brought to their notice.

The DDC also urged the tribal community to get maximum benefits under Dharti Aaba Janjatiya

Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan, the centrally sponsored flagship scheme launched by the Prime Minister to improve their living conditions. The DC highlighted the central government's efforts towards development of these communities and the initiatives aimed at enhancing infrastructure, education, and healthcare services in tribal regions.

The DDC urged citizens to complete the e-KYC process for their ration cards to facilitate the efficient distribution of essential supplies.

During the event, the DDC also emphasized the critical role of renewable energy, urging all citizens of Poonch to embrace solar technology under PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana -a government scheme that aims to provide free electricity to households all over India. Under the said scheme, households will be provided with a subsidy to install solar panels on their roofs.

The event was attended by Ex-Sarpanches, CMO, CEO, AD, DSWO, POICDS, DIO, SDM Skt., Tehsildar, Xen JPDCL, PDD, PWD, ACD, various concerned officials/officers, public representatives and a large gathering of the general public.

## Ramban administration gears up for "Prashasan Gaon Ki Ore" campaign during Good Governance Week-2024

J1 NEWS SERVICE  
RAMBAN, DECEMBER 18

The District Administration Ramban, held a meeting today to review the preparations for the "Prashasan Gaon Ki Ore" campaign, scheduled to be conducted from December 19 to 24, 2024 under the leadership of Deputy Commissioner Ramban, Baseer-Ul-Haq Chaudhary, as part of Good Governance Week 2024.

The arrangements and activities for the same were finalized here at a meeting chaired by Additional District Development Commissioner Roshan Lal. The attendees included ACD Srinath Suman; CPO Shakeeb Ahmed Rather; ACP Ashfaq Ahmed; BDOs, Executive Engineers from PWD and PHE, CMO, CEO, and other district and sectoral officers.

The ADDC emphasized the importance of covering all parameters and targets through a block-level schedule for the campaign. A mega event under the initiative will be held on December 23, 2024, at Khari, showcasing developmental progress and



governance initiatives.

The ADDC directed officers to highlight achievements and best practices through video presentations in sectors like Rural Development (RDD), Health, Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM), Holistic Agriculture Development Programme (HADP), and others. The officers were also instructed to expedite project execution, meet financial targets, and adhere to timelines to ensure the timely delivery of benefits to the public.

Key discussions focused on ongoing developmental projects, including healthcare, educational infrastructure, road construction, accelerated JJM implementation, and enhancements in power

infrastructure. The ADDC urged BDOs and other officers to closely monitor developmental projects; ensuring progress aligns with district goals.

The departments were directed to set up their stalls at identified locations as per schedule to be implemented in various blocks from December 19 to 24, 2024. They were asked to focus on spot redressal of public issues and grievances.

The "Prashasan Gaon Ki Ore" campaign aims to reinforce the principles of good governance and improve service delivery at the grassroots level, reflecting the commitment of the District Administration to the overall development of Ramban.

## GMC Anantnag organizes one-day CME program on 'First Ortho Edge: Advancing Surgical Excellence'

JINews SERVICE  
ANANTNAG, DECEMBER 18

The Department of Orthopaedics and Spine Surgery at Government Medical College (GMC) Anantnag Wednesday organised a one-day Continuing Medical Education (CME) program titled 'First Ortho Edge: Advancing Surgical Excellence'.

The event, convened under the patronage of Principal and Dean, Prof. Dr. Rukhsana Najeeb, focused on advances in Hip and Pelvic Orthopedic surgeries, featuring scientific talks by renowned experts in the field.

Prominent orthopedic specialists from leading medical colleges and institutions shared their insights and experiences. The list of distinguished speakers included Dr. Altaf Kawoosa, HOD Orthopaedics, GMC Srinagar; Dr. Saheel Majid, HOD Orthopaedics, SKIMS Medical College; Dr. Shabir Ahmad Dhar, SKIMS Medical College; Dr. Riyaz Dar, SKIMS Medical College; Dr. Zameer Ali, HOD Orthopaedics, GMC Baramulla;



Dr. Javid, HOD Orthopaedics, GMC Handwara; Dr. Asif Baba, GMC Srinagar; Dr. Ifikhar Hussain Wani, GMC Srinagar; Dr. Asif Sultan, GMC Srinagar; Dr. Ansar, GMC Srinagar; Dr. Mudasar, GMC Srinagar; Dr. Nisar, GMC Handwara; Dr. M Haseeb Gani, Paras Hospital Srinagar and Dr. Adnan Zahoor, Shifa Hospital Srinagar

Experts from GMC Anantnag also delivered insightful talks, including Dr. Younus Kamal, Dr. Nawaz Ahmad Bhat, Dr. Murtaza Fazil Ali, and Dr. Tabish Tahir.

Speaking on the occasion, Principal and Dean Prof. Dr. Rukhsana Najeeb congratulated the Department of Orthopaedics and Spine Surgery for the grand success of the

CME. She emphasized her commitment to supporting all departments in organizing academic events such as conferences, workshops, and CMEs to foster academic growth and enhance patient care.

The organizing team included Dr. Younus Kamal, Associate Professor and HOD Orthopaedics GMC Anantnag, as the Organizing Chairman; Dr. Nawaz Ahmad Bhat, Co-Organizing Chairperson; Dr. Tabish Tahir, Organizing Secretary; Dr. Murtaza Fazil Ali, Co-Organizing Secretary and Dr. Kaleemul Haq as Treasurer.

The event was lauded for its high-level academic discussions and its contribution to advancing surgical excellence in orthopedic care.

## Block Diwas sessions held across Doda District to address public grievances, developmental demands

JINews SERVICE  
DODA, DECEMBER 18

The Block Diwas program was successfully organized today at multiple locations across Doda district under the guidance of the Deputy Commissioner Harvinder Singh to listen to public grievances and expedite redressal. The program witnessed enthusiastic participation from local residents, PRI members, former sarpanchs, panchs, and representatives from different departments. Sittings were held at Panchayat Ghar Soura Bhalla in Sub Division Baderwah, Panchayat Budli in Block Jakyas of Sub Division Gandoh, Panchayat Ghar Chill in Sub Division Assar, and Rokali Kalan in Tehsil Chiralla.

At Panchayat Ghar Soura Bhalla, the program was chaired by Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) Baderwah, Sunil Kumar. The residents



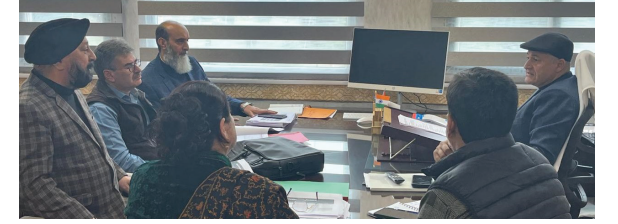
brought up issues related to road connectivity, the need for new transformers and electric poles and seeking timely implementation of PMAY and PMGSY schemes. The ADC assured attendees of prompt actions through a collaborative approach, emphasizing the district administration's dedication to grassroots governance. Directions were given to ensure that pending developmental works are completed without delay and essential services like electricity, clean water, and healthcare are prioritized.

Similarly, at Panchayat Budli, Block Jakyas, and other locations, local representatives highlighted demands seek-

ing up-gradation of schools, establishment of healthcare facilities, availability of agricultural subsidies, and better internet connectivity. Participants also emphasized the need for improving public transport facilities, expediting compensation for land acquisition, and ensuring adequate staff in government offices. Officials present at the events took note of the grievances and committed to forwarding them to the concerned departments for early resolution.

The Block Diwas program underscores the administration's proactive approach to inclusive development and public service delivery. The initiative not only fosters transparency but also builds trust between the government and the rural population, ensuring that governance reaches the remotest corners of the district.

## Javid Dar chairs budgetary meeting on Animal Husbandry, Sheep Husbandry departments



JINews SERVICE  
JAMMU, DECEMBER 18

Minister for Agricultural Production and Rural Development, Javid Ahmad Dar, today chaired a comprehensive budgetary meeting for the Animal Husbandry and Sheep Husbandry departments at the Civil Secretariat.

The Minister, while reviewing overall functioning of both the departments, emphasised focus on timely projection of works, estimate formation and assessment of implementation of various schemes and initiatives aimed at farmers in the livestock sector. He conducted a detailed assessment of department specific schemes, ensuring their alignment with welfare of farmers and livestock. He asked the officers for efficient execution and timely delivery of benefits to the stakeholders.

Javid Dar underscored the importance of engag-

ing in meaningful consultations with stakeholders, including farmers, to ensure that the policies and programs are both practical and beneficial.

"Comprehensive consultation with farmers and other stakeholders will lead to effective budgetary formation and work prioritisation besides robust implementation of schemes, fostering sustainable growth in the livestock sector," maintained the Minister.

The Minister directed the departmental heads to strengthen coordination mechanisms and address challenges to enhance productivity and welfare in the livestock sector. He also stressed the need for continuous monitoring of schemes to ensure enhanced transparency and accountability.

Present in the meeting were Director Animal Husbandry, Director Sheep Husbandry and other concerned officers and officials.

## Distt Admin G'bl organizes Mega Grievance Redressal Camp at Harran

JINews SERVICE  
GANDERBAL, DECEMBER 18

In a concerted effort to address public grievances and promote government welfare schemes, the District Administration Ganderbal today organized a mega Grievance Redressal Camp under the weekly Block Diwas initiative at the Employment Office building, Harran, for Block Sherpathri.

The camp was presided over by Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) Ganderbal, Gulzar Ahmad, who is also holding the charge of ADDC. The event witnessed enthusiastic participation from local residents who raised various issues and demands related to their areas.

During the interactive session, the ADC actively listened to the concerns of the attendees, assuring them of timely redressal and issuing on-the-spot directions to officers to expedite pending works. He also instructed officials to submit action-taken reports to ensure account-



ability and transparency. Addressing the gathering, the ADC reaffirmed the district administration's commitment to addressing public grievances effectively and delivering tangible outcomes. He urged citizens to continue engaging with such outreach programs to strengthen the bond of trust between the administration and the public.

Various departments, including Employment, Agriculture, Social Welfare, and banks, participated in the camp, briefing attendees about government schemes such as PMSBY, PMJJBY, PMSGP, and other social security programs. Eligible citizens were encouraged to avail benefits of these welfare schemes.

The initiative garnered appreciation from the attendees for its proactive approach and direct engagement, fostering a collaborative environment between the administration and the community.

The camp was attended by Assistant Commissioner Revenue, Assistant Commissioner Development, Assistant Commissioner Panchayat, and other district and sectoral officers.

The District Administration reiterated its dedication to fostering citizen welfare and addressing grievances in a time-bound manner. Citizens were encouraged to actively participate in such initiatives to ensure inclusive and equitable development.

## Mission Director reviews key projects under Holistic Agriculture Development Program (HADP)

JINews SERVICE  
JAMMU, DECEMBER 18

Mission Director Holistic Agriculture Development Programme (HADP) and Competitiveness Improvement of Agriculture and Allied Sectors Project in J&K (JKCIP) Rahul Yadav today conducted a comprehensive review of three crucial HADP projects here at a meeting held in the Conference Hall, Directorate of Agriculture, Krishi Bhawan.

The meeting was attended by key stakeholders, including the project grounding and monitoring committees of the respective projects, besides Director Agriculture Jammu, Director Horticulture Jammu/Kashmir, Director Animal Husbandry Jammu/Kashmir, Director Sheep Husbandry Jammu/Kashmir, and representatives from SKUAST Jammu and SKUAST Kashmir. Officers from Jammu also participated virtually.

The projects under review were selected for their multi-stakeholder involvement and regional importance. These include Rainfed Area Development (RAD) P15, Promotion of Floriculture P14 and Fodder Development in J&K P28.

The Mission Director focused on assessing the performance of each project, particularly the need to expedite the establishment of the centres for



project activities. Elaborating the objectives of the Rainfed Area Development project, Mr. Yadav stressed the importance of interventions specifically designed to enhance rainfed areas. He directed that future presentations must clearly reflect these targeted activities. He also reviewed the expenditure and implementation of various activities under the project to ensure their timely execution.

The Floriculture project under HADP was also reviewed thoroughly. The Mission Director highlighted the importance of accelerating progress in this area and emphasized the need for strategic planning to meet project targets.

On the Fodder Development project, Mr. Yadav

underscored the significance of inter-departmental collaboration and urged all stakeholders to work closely and provide a prioritized action plan for effective implementation. He also directed that the expenditure be reviewed and improvements be suggested to further enhance the implementation process.

Concluding the meeting, the Mission Director reaffirmed the commitment of the HADP to expedite project activities and ensure effective collaboration between all stakeholders. He stressed the need to overcome challenges through coordinated efforts and achieve the overarching objectives of the HADP in enhancing the agricultural and allied sectors in Jammu and Kashmir.

## DC Shopian chairs meeting on successful conduct of 'Prashasan Gaon Ki Ore' program



JINews SERVICE  
SHOPIAN, DECEMBER 18

In line with the Government of India's flagship initiative for Good Governance, a crucial meeting on 'Prashasan Gaon Ki Ore' was today chaired by the Deputy Commissioner (DC) Shopian, Mohammad Shahid Saleem Dar at Mini-Secretariat, here.

The meeting aimed at strengthening grassroots administration and ensuring transparent, efficient service delivery to the rural population.

The DC stressed the importance of delivering government services in a time-bound and hassle-free manner to the people. Special focus was laid on ensuring equitable access to schemes and benefits for all citizens, especially marginalized communities.

Strategies were discussed and threadbare discussion was held to improve inter-departmental coordination for effective implementation of programmes in this regard.

The DC directed for holding awareness camps in rural areas at Panchayat and Blocks to educate citizens about available government schemes.

This meeting underscores the district administration's commitment to fostering Good Governance, ensuring the benefits of development reach the last mile, and bridging the gap between government and the people.

ADC, Dr. Zakir Hussain Faaz, CPO, ACD, District Officers and other concerned were present.

## Samba Admin organises public awareness camp on Govt schemes

JINews SERVICE  
SAMBA, DECEMBER 18

The District Administration Samba, under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner Rajesh Sharma, organized a Multi-Departmental Awareness Camp at Block Rajpura.

The awareness camp was aimed at empowering residents by promoting self-reliance and sustainable livelihoods launched by the government.

The event witnessed the presence of SDM Ghagwal, Tehsildar Rajpura and BDO Rajpura, along with a large number of local



residents. The Chief Agriculture Officer, Chief Horticulture Officer, Officers from Revenue Department and others, directly interacted with community members. They provided comprehensive details about government-sponsored schemes and programs, enabling citizens to harness these opportunities for their socio-economic upliftment.

The initiative underscored the administration's commitment to grassroots-level development and good governance. By bringing departmental resources and expertise directly to the people, the camp served to bridge the information gap and create awareness about accessible government benefits.

## Revenue Department refutes allegations circulating on Social Media

JINews SERVICE  
KATHUA, DECEMBER 18

The Revenue Department Kathua has strongly contested the allegations made in a video circulating on social media, claiming that the department operates under the influence of certain influential individuals.

Refuting the allegations Tehsildar Bani Pradhym Attri said "the accusations made by the person in the video are entirely

unfounded and are hereby categorically denied".

"It is clarified that the land demarcation referred to in the video was conducted solely on the basis of an online application bearing number 1190141220242, dated 14.12.2024. The demarcation was carried out as per due process and had no connection with any influential person, contrary to the claims made in the video," a departmental handout said.

## FROM THE FRONT PAGE...

**B.R. Ambedkar was...**

distorting Ambedkar's legacy for political gain. Reiterating Ambedkar's role in opposing Article 370, Shah said, "B.R. Ambedkar was the greatest opponent of Article 370. He believed in the unity and integrity of India.

The Minister also launched a scathing attack on the Congress for its imposition of the Emergency, undermining the judiciary, and "insulting martyrs of the army" by compromising India's territorial integrity. According to him, these actions reveal a pattern of the Congress prioritizing political expediency over national interest. "The BJP has always been the true defender of Ambedkar's legacy while the Congress's misrepresentation of history has been exposed during the recent parliamentary debate".

Shah furthermore, condemned the Congress for allegedly attempting to spread misconceptions in society by "dressing the truth in the garb of falsehood.". KNO

**Amit Shah likely...**

border areas," sources said.

This will be Shah's first meeting after the assembly elections conducted in the UT where a National Conference (NC) government, headed by Chief Minister Omar Abdullah assumed charge.

After the abrogation of the Article 370 and bifurcation of the erstwhile state into two UTs in 2019, the law and order is the direct responsibility of the central government.

The home minister is likely to have a detailed discussion on the security roadmap ahead for the 2025, the sources said.

Sporadic incidents have been continuing in Jammu and Kashmir. On October 20, seven people were killed in a terror attack in central Kashmir. Before that, there were attacks on outsiders working in Kashmir.

The meeting is expected to take note of recent terror incidents and possible steps to be taken on how to stop such attacks in the coming days, the sources said.

According to official data, 142 terrorists were killed in JK in 2019 and the number is around 45 so far this year.

Fifty civilians were killed in 2019 in the UT while the figure came down to 14 by the first week of November this year.

**CM Omar refutes...**

papers. But have we forgotten the manipulations that occurred with ballot papers, like ballot stuffing? I experienced those issues in my early elections before EVMs were introduced," he said.

Asked about allegations from Congress leaders that some alliance members adopt a different tone after assuming ministerial roles, the Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister dismissed the claims, reiterating his praise for the Congress party's leadership. "In the same interview, I appreciated Sonia Gandhi's leadership and stated that Congress has a natural role in leading the opposition, given its pan-India presence. This is not BJP's language but the truth. I won't stop speaking the truth just because I've held a leadership position," he said.

On speculation of a leadership change in the INDIA alliance, Omar said, "There is no such discussion taking place.". KNO

**LG chairs 73rd Meeting...**

Bhawan area and also launched Digital initiatives of the Shrine Board including ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) system and AI-enabled Chatbot "Shakti" on the official website of the Board. Panchang Calendar 2025 and diary of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board were also released.

The Board held comprehensive and critical review of its past decisions, ratified the actions taken after its last Meeting and took several new decisions against 25 key Agenda Items having far reaching implications for functioning of the Board and augmenting pilgrim services.

Important decisions were taken in respect of new and underway projects of the Board such as construction of Exit Track from Durga Bhawan to Manokamna (a part of the Master Plan for Bhawan area), development of helipad in collaboration with Shri Shiv Khori Shrine Board in village Hutt at Katra, construction of temples in District Reasi, review of projects and status of operationalization of Medical College of the Board at Kakryal etc.

The functioning of various services such as Jammu-Bhawan-Jammu Heli Service, Smart Lockers at Durga Bhawan, Vishram Ghar near Ram Temple, Jan Aushadhi Kendra, Health ATMs, Hawan & Nav Chandi Path at New Yagyashala, Virtual Darshan facility near Bathing Ghat, Garbhjoon Aarti Darshan and Langar Sewa at Adhkuwari, were thoroughly reviewed by Board and appropriate directions were issued. The Board exuberated the confidence that the seamless delivery of approved services shall surely enhance overall experience and comfort of devotees visiting the revered Shrine.

The Lieutenant Governor, the Chairman of the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board, reiterated the commitment of the Shrine Board to offer enriching experience to the visiting Pilgrims by improving transparency and efficiency of all services.

He directed for detailed analyses of the services, security & disaster management; strengthening of mobile connectivity and enhancing pilgrim feedback mechanism.

The Meeting accorded approval to tripartite Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Geological Survey of India (GSI) and THDC India Limited (THDCIL) with an aim to identify and treat slopes that are vulnerable to landslides and rockfalls along the Yatra Route between Adhkuwari and Bhawan. The collaboration will focus on ensuring the safety of pilgrims by mitigating the risks associated with unstable slopes.

To address congestion issues near Battery Car Point at Bhawan, the Board approved measures to improve the area's infrastructure by developing a dedicated parking facility for Battery Cars opposite to Parvati Bhawan, constructed atop a 3-storey structure. This will provide a convenient and organized space for Battery Cars to operate from, reducing congestion and enhancing the

overall ambiance of the area.

The Board also approved the Master Plan for the Sanjichhat Area addressing augmentation of key sectors like Accommodations, Toilets, Water Points, Food Points, Queue Management, Holding Area etc.

The Board observed that the Shrine Board has significantly developed the Kakryal area by creating facilities like Hospital, University, Nursing College and Medical College and desired the CEO to explore the modalities to address educational needs of the employees associated with these facilities.

The meeting also reviewed the progress of ongoing works and emphasized on timely completion of all projects for the ease of pilgrimage. The important projects in this regard were New Vaishnavi Bhawan at Bhawan, Covered Holding Area at Adhkuwari, Exit Track & Remodelling of Manokamna Area at Bhawan, Queue Complex at Darshani Deodi, Banganga and Cottages (near Sport Stadium), Katra.

The Board appreciated façade lighting project initiated for enhancing the Shrine's aesthetics and ambience in different sector of Shrine and approved revamping of lighting at the facade of the old Gufa in the Atka area, inside the three caves and the sanctum sanctorum through a combination of LEDs and optic fibre lighting.

The Board also gave its approval to the additional Grant-in-Aid for Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Charitable Society to support the operation of the Board's peripheral institutions such as the Medical College, Hospital, Gurukul, Sports Complex, and College of Nursing, all of which are managed by the SMVD Charitable Society.

Earlier, Anshul Garg, CEO, SMVDSB, gave a detailed presentation on varied activities of the Shrine Board and the action taken as regards the implementation of various decisions of the previous meetings of the Board.

'Shubhra Bhawan' at Banganga, Katra built at a cost of Rs. 6.50 crore includes holding area for disaster management, a comfortable and spacious waiting lounge, lactating mothers' zone, a centralized information and registration centre, souvenir shop, refreshment kiosks, Bank and Water ATMs etc. 18 modern staff quarters have also been provided in the complex. A well-equipped disaster management store is a key feature of Shubhra Bhawan that is expected to serve as a 'critical resource for emergency response and disaster mitigation'. KNO

**LG unveils Silver...**

which reflects the composite culture and rich heritage of the country.

"I believe our research on astrology and ancient scriptures should touch the lives of people from all walks of life. We must promote global good. We need to focus on spreading the importance of a spiritually rich life and value-based living among our citizens," the Lieutenant Governor said.

He emphasized that we should understand history to develop our thinking and decision-making capabilities to build a better future. "One should get back to the roots for a clear vision and goals of the future," he said.

The Lieutenant Governor also advised the Shri Raghvendra Jyotish Sansthan Trust for digital publishing of the Panchang and mobile application for value addition.

The knowledge and wisdom present in our ancient traditions should be made easily accessible to the people, especially the young generation, he added.

On the occasion, the Lieutenant Governor felicitated several organizations and individuals for their contribution towards promotion of Sanskrit.

Prof. Umesh Rai, Vice Chancellor University of Jammu; Prof. Devi Prasad Tripathi, former Vice Chancellor, Uttarakhand University; Chandra Mouli Raina, President, Shri Raghvendra Jyotish Sansthan Trust; Prof Ram Bahadur Shukla, Head, Department of Sanskrit, Jammu University and prominent citizens were present.

Ramesh Kumar, Divisional Commissioner Jammu and Rajinder Sharma, former Mayor, JMC were also present on the occasion—(KNO)

**6 die, 4 injured...**

incident, who have been identified as Swarna, 61, Neetu Devi, 40, Arun Kumar and Kewal Krishan, 69.

All the injured are undergoing treatment at Government Medical College and Hospital, Kathua.

Giving details, Principal GMC Surinder Atri said that the incident related to the recently retired Assistant Matron, who had been living in a rented house. He said six persons were brought dead and four others were injured in the incident.

He further said the incident reports at around 2 am in the night and prima facie, it has been established the fire was caused due to a lamp at Pooja room (jot) and the person died due to suffocation. He said there is no burn mark on the dead persons, while all four injured are stable.

Meanwhile, the Lieutenant Governor, Manoj Sinha expressed grief over the loss of lives in the incident. "Extremely saddened by the loss of lives due to a tragic fire in Kathua. My thoughts are with the bereaved families. I wish the injured a speedy recovery," the office of LG J&K wrote on X.

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah expressed deep sorrow over the tragic loss of six lives in a devastating fire incident in Kathua district. In his condolence message, the Chief Minister described the incident as deeply painful, particularly as it claimed the lives of six people and injured another four.

"It is heartbreaking to learn about this tragedy where six precious lives were lost. I pray for eternal peace to the departed souls and for the swift recovery of those injured in this unfortunate incident," he said.

The Chief Minister extended his heartfelt sympathies to the bereaved families, praying for strength and forbearance to help them endure this difficult time. The fire, which broke out early Wednesday morning in a rented accommodation, led to the death of six individuals, including two minors, due to suffocation. The victims were rushed to the Government Medical College (GMC) Hospital in Kathua, where they were declared 'brought dead.' Four others injured in the incident are currently undergoing treatment.

The Chief Minister assured that the best possible medical care is being provided to the injured. "I have directed the concerned authorities to ensure that the

injured receive best possible treatment for a smooth recovery," he said. KNO

**PDP Chief criticizes...**

environment, destroying lakhs of kanals of agricultural land and forests," she said.

Expressing her support for development, Mehbooba said that it should not come at the cost of the region's scenic beauty, agriculture, horticulture sectors, and livelihood.

Citing examples from other regions, Mufti expressed fears of ecological disasters similar to those in Joshimath, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand. "They are making decisions without considering the long-term impacts. Mining is already lowering water levels, leaving orchards and farms without irrigation," she stated.

Compensation & Township Projects  
Mufti also criticized the government for offering meager compensation to farmers affected by these projects. Referring to the Ring Road project, she pointed out that landowners were given outdated rates far below the current market value. She accused the authorities of exploiting laws to deprive people of fair compensation.

On the proposed establishment of 30 satellite townships requiring over 1.2 lakh kanals of agricultural land, Mufti questioned the government's motives.

She said if they have township plans, they should focus on upgrading the villages instead of such projects. "Who are these townships for? Why is agricultural land being taken away from our farmers when they can't even build homes or shops in these areas due to restrictive regulations?" she asked.

Criticism of Railway Expansion

The former chief minister expressed strong concern about the expansion of the Baramulla-Banihal railway line and other routes to tourist destinations like Pahalgam. She warned that these projects would devastate fertile land in key districts, including Pulwama, Baramulla, and Ganderbal.

"During militancy, when everything else failed, our horticulture and handicrafts kept our economy alive. Destroying our agricultural base now will be catastrophic for our future," Mufti cautioned.

Mufti urged the opposition to hold the government accountable for its environmental and economic policies. She stressed that while larger constitutional issues may take time to resolve, immediate steps should be taken to protect the region's natural resources and livelihoods.

"Jammu and Kashmir's unique identity and prosperity depend on its land, water, and forests. This government must stop its policies and prioritize the welfare of local farmers and the environment," she said. KNO

**Katra observes complete...**

slogans against the shrine board and the ropeway project.

"The Sangharsh Samiti is fighting for our rights as the board is snatching the bread and butter of over 60,000 families. Everyone—hoteliers, shopkeepers, pony operators, labourers and transporters—has come out to the streets against the ropeway project. We want the project shelved," said Bhupinder Singh Jamwal, president of the Vaishno Devi Trek Mazdoor Union.

Jamwal said that all political parties, except the BJP, and several social organisations in Jammu and Kashmir have extended their support. "We will fight for our rights. We will not tolerate this," he asserted.

Leaders of the group announced that five of its members would go on a hunger strike to demand a written assurance from Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha or Home Minister Amit Shah that the ropeway project would be scrapped.

Former minister Jugal Kishore Sharma, who joined the protest, criticised the government for failing to fulfill its commitment to resolve the issue by December 15. "The Samiti suspended its protests earlier based on assurances from local authorities, but no action has been taken," Sharma said. "We are not against the shrine board, but its ill-conceived project could devastate livelihoods and religious sentiments."

Pilgrims to Vaishno Devi faced hardships as all shops and businesses remained closed. Auto rickshaws were off the roads and pony operators and porters joined the strike. Pilgrims said they struggled to find food, water or transport. Many were seen wandering around Katra's streets, unable to commute or begin their journey to the shrine.

Hundreds of people had earlier taken out a rally on December 15, demanding the release of those arrested following a clash between anti-ropeway protesters and police. Last month, similar protests by shopkeepers, labourers and pony and palanquin operators lasted for four days after the shrine board decided to proceed with the ropeway project.

While the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board claims the ropeway will enhance safety and convenience for pilgrims, local stakeholders say it threatens the town's economic fabric and undermines the traditional pilgrimage experience. KNO

**In four years, JK sees...**

complete the loss reduction infrastructure projects by March 2025.

About the renewable energy sector in Jammu and Kashmir, the document states that it is advancing significantly with a focus on solar and small hydro power projects.

"Jammu and Kashmir Energy Development Agency (JAKEDA) has allocated 35 Mini Hydel Projects (MHPs) with a capacity of 103.05 MW under Independent Power Producer (IPP) mode, already commissioning projects like 5 MW SHP Bultikulan and 3.75 MW SHP Khari," it reads.

The documents further reveal that an additional 37 small hydro projects totaling 107 MW are planned under IPP mode and 13 projects with 112.50 MW capacity are earmarked under EPC mode pending funds release.

"Solar energy initiatives have seen the development of 27.85 MW capacity, including projects under schemes like Grid Connected Rooftop Solar Power Plant and PM-KUSUM. Future plans include achieving 500 MW of grid-connected solar power and installing 15,000 solar

**Driving trials, vehicle inspections for Nowshera, Sunderbani to be conducted locally**

JJ NEWS SERVICE  
RAJOURI, DECEMBER 18

For the convenience of the general public of Tehsil Nowshera and Sunderbani, the Assistant Regional Transport Officer (ARTO) Rajouri has announced that driving trial tests will now be conducted every Saturday and vehicle inspections every Monday at the SSB Ground Nowshera, near Government Degree College Nowshera.

This initiative comes as a result of directions issued by the Deputy Chief Minister, Surinder Choudhary, to the Transport Commissioner during a meeting held on December 16, 2024.

Previously, residents of Nowshera and adjoining

areas had to travel over 60 to 70 kilometers to Rajouri for driving trials and vehicle fitness inspections. With the introduction of these services locally, the move is expected to save significant amounts of time and fuel, while providing greater convenience to the public.

The general public has also expressed their gratitude to Deputy Chief Minister Surinder Choudhary for this decision, recognizing it as a major relief for the region.

The ARTO Rajouri has urged residents of Nowshera, Sunderbani, and nearby areas to avail this facility and ensure compliance with all traffic and vehicle fitness regulations.

pumps by 2026," it reads. KNO

**Salal-Haimana shows...**

projects (G3 stage) for lithium are underway in the Salal East and Panasa areas of Reasi district as part of the current field season for 2024-25, he said.

Regarding the timeline for exploration and auctioning, the government as per the news agency has not specified a fixed period for the area to reach the G1 or G2 exploration stage, which would be necessary for the auction process and commercial mining to begin.

Efforts to reduce India's dependence on lithium imports have been a key focus. The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957, has been amended through the MMDR Amendment Act, 2023, introducing major reforms in the mining sector, he said.

Reddy added the amendments include the addition of 24 critical minerals, including lithium, to the First Schedule of the MMDR Act, empowering the Central Government to auction mineral concessions exclusively for these minerals.

Also, the government has set up a joint venture company, Khanij Bidesh India Limited (KABIL), which aims to secure critical mineral assets abroad. KABIL has already acquired a 15,703-hectare area in Argentina's Catamarca province for exploration and mining of lithium, he said. KNO

**J&K cancelled...**

beneficiaries due to reasons such as migration, duplicate entries, and deaths. The minister said that 65% of beneficiaries under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) have completed their e-KYC verification. He said that the government is also focused on improving food security by introducing fortified rice under schemes like Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and PM Poshan. "Jammu and Kashmir has fully implemented this initiative, ensuring the distribution of fortified rice to all districts under the Targeted Public Distribution System," he said. KNO

**J&K has 28 lakh bank...**

Generation Programme (PMEGP), National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), National Urban Livelihood Mission (NULM), Jammu and Kashmir Rural Employment Generation Programme (JKREGP), and Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY), it shows.

It shows Jammu and Kashmir also recorded 10.84 lakh active Kissan Credit Cards as of March 2024, with 8.83 lakh for crop loans and 2.01 lakh for animal husbandry and fisheries.

In the field of self-help groups (SHGs) and joint liability groups (JLGs), 53,016 SHGs (Rs. 1,942.90 crore) and 1,982 JLGs (Rs. 38.23 crore) have been brought under financial inclusion, receiving credit-linked facilities.

The data shows that financial discipline and close monitoring have led to a significant increase in the completion of projects, rising from 9,229 projects in 2018-19 to 71,858 projects in 2023-24. KNO

**JK Bank reports...**

Rs 14.23 crore. In FY 2022-23, the number of cases rose to 13, but the amount involved escalated significantly to Rs 298.09 crore. However, FY 2023-24 saw a notable reduction with only eight cases reported, involving Rs 8.10 crore, the reply reads.

The Reserve Bank of India attributes the overall decline in banking frauds to comprehensive measures, including revised Master Directions on Fraud Risk Management issued in July 2024. These measures emphasize strengthening the governance role of bank boards, instituting robust internal audits, and improving frameworks for early warning signals and red flagging of accounts. The introduction of dedicated data analytics and market intelligence units in banks has also been mandated to aid in early detection and prevention of fraudulent activities, he said.

"These reforms have significantly enhanced the ability of banks, including J&K Bank Limited, to deter fraudsters and safeguard financial transactions effectively," the MoS added. KNO

**J&K contributes...**

J&K's share in the national economy reflects its efforts to strengthen various economic sectors while addressing challenges such as inflation and fiscal deficits, according to the report.

It adds, "The government is committed to improving revenue performance and reducing the debt-to-GSDP ratio, reflecting fiscal discipline and efficient management." KNO

## Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Awareness Program on Girl Child Empowerment held at Barnoti



**JNEWS SERVICE**  
KATHUA, DECEMBER 18

The Child Development Project Office (CDPO), Barnoti, in collaboration with the Social Welfare Department, Kathua, organized an awareness program on girl child empowerment under the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBB) initiative at Government Higher Secondary School, Chandwan. The highlight of the event was a powerful Nukkad Natak performed by the renowned theatre group Rangyug. The street play effectively conveyed messages about the importance of educating girls, ending gender discrimination, and ensuring equal opportunities for their growth and success. Addressing the gathering, Child Development Project Officer, Barnoti Barsha Rani, emphasized the significance of promoting gender equality. "The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao program encourages communities to celebrate the girl child and prioritize her education.

Campaigns like today's Nukkad Natak by Rangyug play a key role in inspiring change and raising awareness on critical social issues," she said.

The CDPO also underlined the importance of initiatives like Poshan Bhi, Padhai Bhi, which integrates child nutrition with early education. "The holistic development of children, especially girls, remains central to our efforts. By ensuring proper nutrition and access to quality education, we aim to build a healthier and more empowered society," she added.

The program saw enthusiastic participation from students, teachers, and local community members. Interactive discussions and heartfelt pledges of support highlighted the collective commitment to promoting girl child empowerment. The impactful street play left a lasting impression, inspiring everyone to work toward ensuring a more inclusive and equitable society.

## Transport Commissioner felicitates Jatin Sabarwal



**JNEWS SERVICE**  
JAMMU, DECEMBER 18

Transport Commissioner J&K Vishesh Paul Mahajan today felicitated Associate Law Officer of the Motor Vehicles Department Jatin Sabarwal for his recent achievements in sports.

Sabarwal is one of the team members of J&K Roller Skating team which won Silver and Bronze medal in Senior Men Roller Hockey National Championship held at Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu. Jatin, along with his team members from Jammu and Kashmir participated in 62nd National Roller Skating Championship 2024. In the Senior Men Category, J&K Team won the silver medal and in the Senior Mixed Category it won Bronze medal.

Vishesh Mahajan applauded the efforts of Jatin and his team for bringing laurels to the UT of Jammu and Kashmir. He also appreciated the dedication, playing skills and commitment to sports by the team.

Jatin has already won Silver medal in the Asian Roller Skating Championship 2012 and is also Sher-e-Kashmir Awardee.

## Mega Block Diwas held at Zainapora

**JNEWS SERVICE**  
SHOPIAN, DECEMBER 18

Block Diwas, a weekly outreach initiative aimed at addressing public grievances and ensuring effective governance at the grassroots level was today held at Zainapora subdivision.

The Deputy Commissioner (DC) Shopian, Mohammad Shahid Saleem Dar presided over the event, emphasizing the government's commitment to public welfare and encouraged citizens to engage in developmental initiatives.

He said the programme provides a platform to residents to voice their concerns and seek redressal.

During the event, the people of various Villages of Zainapora put forth their issues of public importance which includes upgradation of PHC Zainapora, completion of Indoor Stadium, desilting of Irrigation canal, construction of Community Bore Well, ensuring uninterrupted



power supply, maintenance of Public Park, cleanliness of lanes and drains, staff for PHC Aweera, etc.

The DC heard them patiently and assured that all their genuine issues of public importance would be redressed in a phased manner within a stipulated time frame.

Speaking on the occasion, the DC emphasized for making judicious use of electricity for having uninterrupted power supply in the area.

He appealed to the people to keep vigil on

their children and make efforts to keep them away from drugs.

He added that the people can also contact (24x7) Help Line No: 1933 and share any information in this regard of reporting the drug peddling cases.

Shahid encouraged people to register for PM Surya Ghar and other schemes of employment & labour departments.

ADDC, Dr. Nasir Ahmed Lone; ACR, SDM Zainapora, ACD and other district/sectoral officers and other concerned officials were present.

## Preparations for Good Governance Week-2024 activities finalized in Reasi



**JNEWS SERVICE**  
REASI, DECEMBER 18

Deputy Commissioner Reasi Nidhi Malik on Wednesday chaired a meeting to review the activity plan for Good Governance Week 2024 and launch of "Prashasan Gaon ki Ore" Campaign in the District. She directed officials to organize awareness and grievance redressal camps in a decentralized manner to reach out to remote and inaccessible areas. The initiative aims to enhance citizens' engagement and ensure equitable access to government services.

Emphasis was laid on the qualitative and timely resolution of grievances

registered on platforms like CPGRAMS and JKSA-MADHAAN and improving public services delivery. Officials were instructed to align grievance redressal with the broader goals of transparency and accountability during the week-long campaign.

The Deputy Commissioner also urged the Departments to help eligible persons in availing different government schemes by facilitating online submission of applications. She also

directed Lead District Manager (LDM) Reasi to expedite the sanctioning and disbursement of pending credit linked scheme cases at banks. She called for proper scheduling of outreach programs to maximize awareness and participation, ensuring Good Governance Week reaches every corner of the district. ADDC Sukhdev Singh Samyal, ADC Kulbushan Khajuria, CPO Narinder Kumar and all district officers were present in the meet.

## Cultural Unit Kashmir, DIPR organizes awareness programme on 'Say No to Drugs' at SAMDC Budgam

**JNEWS SERVICE**  
BUDGAM, DECEMBER 18

A comprehensive 'Say No to Drugs' programme aimed at raising awareness among youth about the detrimental effects of drugs was today conducted by Cultural Unit Kashmir of Department of Information and Public Relation (DIPR) J&K at Sheikh ul Alam Memorial Degree College (SAMDC) Budgam. The programme, designed as an edutainment symposium, was organized in collaboration with the District Information Centre (DIC) Budgam, and the host college.

The event commenced with a warm welcome address by the Principal of the college, Prof. Dr. Mohammad Amin Malik.

Cultural Officer, Burhan Hussain delivered a detailed presentation, shedding light on the multifaceted aspects of drug abuse and its detrimental



effects on individuals and society.

The District Information Officer Budgam, Erim Aziz provided valuable insights into the government's proactive measures in combating drug addiction, with a particular focus on initiatives undertaken within the Budgam district.

Later, a speech competition was held on the given theme, during which students showcased their eloquence and understanding of the issue.

Syeda Hina Zainab student of BA 5th semester was adjudged as First posi-

tion holder in competition, while Sheeba Majeed student of BA 1st semester bagged 2nd position and Seerat Qayoom student of BA 1st semester secured 3rd position.

The symposium further engaged the audience with a thought-provoking drama and a poignant short film, both centered on the theme of drug abuse.

Today's 'Say No to Drugs' programme is part of the series of awareness programmes held on generating awareness on Drug Abuse by the Cultural Unit Kashmir of DIPR, J&K.

## SHEW Shopian organizes Nasha Mukta Awareness program at Keller Chowan

**JNEWS SERVICE**  
SHOPIAN, DECEMBER 18

In response to the alarming rise in drug abuse, Sankalp Hub for Empowerment of Women (SHEW) Shopian today organized a comprehensive 'Nasha Mukta Awareness Programme' at Keller Chowan, Shopian. The programme focused on educating the community about the dangers of drug addiction and the importance of collective efforts to eradicate this menace. Participants were informed about the importance of parental guidance, community support, and early intervention in preventing substance abuse among youth.

District Mission Coordinator, SHEW threw light on the physical, mental and social consequences of drug addiction, emphasizing its destructive



effects on individuals and families.

Attendees were made aware of the stringent legal actions against drug traffickers and the role of law enforcement in tackling the issue.

A call to action was issued for the community to play an active role in identifying and reporting drug-related activities to authorities.

During the event, it was emphasized that citizens

should immediately report any instances of drug trafficking or individuals involved in drug abuse. To facilitate this, a toll-free helpline number 1446 has been made available for anonymous reporting.

The SHEW reiterated its commitment to fostering a drug-free society and encouraged collective efforts from all sections of the community to safeguard the future of youth and society at large.

### UNION TERRITORY OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR OFFICE OF THE CHILD DEVELOPMENT PROJECT OFFICER POSHAN PROJECT DANSAL, DISTRICT JAMMU

E-Mail Id:-cdpodansal@gmail.com

Phone No. 0191-2669163

#### NOTICE ANNEXURE B

Whereas vide this office advertisement notification issued, applications for the post of Sanginis (Anganwadi Workers) were invited from the eligible female candidates for various vacant posts in Municipal/ Panchayat wards under the jurisdiction of Poshan Project Dansal.

Whereas after receiving application forms, scrutiny was conducted by the members of the selection committee as per laid down guidelines in the New Human Resource Policy issued vide Govt. order no-222- JK SWD of 2022 Dated 30.11.2022 and provisional selection list has been framed at annexure A and objection notice at annexure B is now issued.

Now therefore objections are invited with regard to residence/Ward No./date of birth etc from the general public/applicants of the concerned municipal/panchayat wards within 10 days from the date of issuance of this notice failing which no claim shall be entertained and the provisional selection list shall be treated as final without any further notice.

No: CDPO/D/412-416/2024  
Dated: 17/12/2024

Sd/-  
(Member Secretary)  
Child Development Project Officer  
Dansal

#### PANCHAYAT JAGTI MUNICIPAL WARD W.NO. 06 ANGANWADI CENTER JAGTI KHERI RECRUITMENT FOR THE POST OF SANGINIS (ANGANWADI WORKER) IN RESPECT OF POSHAN PROJECT DANDAL

S. No	Name of Applicant	Parentage		Residence	D.O.B	Aadhar No	Qualifications 12th			Points based on relative criteria of retiree	Total Points	Remark
		Father's Name	Husband's Name				M.M	Marks Obtained	Percentage 10+2			
1	Pooja Devi	Kishore Kumar	Jagti	02-03-1989	201675883248	600	296	49.33	0	49.33		

Miss/Mrs Pooja Devi at S.No C1 securing highest points 49.33 is recommended for provisional selection as Sangini (AWW) purely on Honorarium basis. The selection is subject to fulfilling of all codal formalities including verification of documents/antecedents & objections if any.

#### PANCHAYAT SAGOON MUNICIPAL WARD W.NO. 07 ANGANWADI CENTER KANGRAIL RECRUITMENT FOR THE POST OF SANGINIS (ANGANWADI WORKER) IN RESPECT OF POSHAN PROJECT DANDAL

S. No	Name of Applicant	Parentage		Residence	D.O.B	Aadhar No	Qualifications 12th			Points based on relative criteria of retiree	Total Points	Remark
		Father's Name	Husband's Name				M.M	Marks Obtained	Percentage 10+2			
1	Bandana Devi	Sanjay Kumar	Kangrail	10-10-1992	958298057995	750	483	64.4	0	64.4		

Miss/Mrs Bandana Devi at S.No 01 securing highest points 64.4 is recommended for provisional selection as Singhal (AWW) purely on Honorarium basis. The selection is subject to fulfilling of all codal formalities 750 including verification of documents/antecedents & objections if any.

Sd/-  
Chairman  
District Programme Officer  
Poshan Jammu  
DIP/J-8280/24  
Date: 18-12-24

Sd/-  
Member  
Assistant Director  
Employment Jammu

Sd/-  
Member Secretary  
Child Development Project Officer  
Poshan Project Dansal

Sd/-  
Member  
District Social Welfare Officer  
DIC Jammu

Sd/-  
Member  
General Manager  
DIC Jammu

### Notice

I, Ganga Dutt Sharma, S/o Late Baju Ram, R/o Jandrah, hereby declare that I am the owner and in possession of a piece of land located at Kharsa Number 384/1, Kewat Number II, Khata Number 94. The Girdwari for this land is currently recorded in the name of Tillu, S/o Baghu Masha, R/o Jandrah, in the revenue records. As there are no legal heirs of Tillu, I am applying to have the Girdwari updated in my name. Any objections to this change must be submitted to the concerned authority within seven days of the publication of this notice.

Sd/-  
Nitish Rajora IAS  
Sub-Divisional Magistrate  
Jammu North

## EDITORIAL

## Ropeway Project under criticism

The peaceful town of Katra, the base camp for the revered Vaishno Devi pilgrimage, witnessed a complete shutdown on Wednesday as locals expressed their opposition to a proposed Rs 250-crore ropeway project. The project, aimed at connecting Tarakote Marg to Sanji Chhat—leading to the cave shrine—has sparked intense debate, with locals voicing concerns over its potential to disrupt their livelihoods. The Mata Vaishno Devi Sangharsh Samiti, which claims to represent shopkeepers, pony operators, and palanquin owners, led the protest, highlighting the detrimental effects they believe the ropeway would have on their businesses. The proposed ropeway, approved by the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board, is intended to facilitate easier access to the shrine for the elderly, children, and others unable to navigate the 13-km trek up to the temple. While the Shrine Board's intent appears rooted in improving accessibility, local groups have raised alarms about the project's broader social and economic impact. For many in Katra, the livelihood of over 60,000 families depends on tourism-related activities, such as hotels, transport services, and pony rides, all of which stand to be significantly affected by the new ropeway system. The Sangharsh Samiti is fighting not only for their economic well-being but also for the preservation of their right to work. The protesters have made it clear that they demand the scrapping of the ropeway project, a stance that has been echoed by various political and social groups. The protest escalated further when five members of the Sangharsh Samiti began a hunger strike, demanding a written assurance from the lieutenant governor or the home minister that the project would be shelved. Former minister Jugal Kishore Sharma joined the rally, accusing the government of failing to honor its previous promises to resolve the matter by December 15. Despite assurances from local authorities, no tangible action has been taken to address the concerns of the protesting groups. The absence of a resolution has reignited anger among the locals, who see the project as not only an economic threat but also an emotional affront, as it could tarnish the religious significance of the Vaishno Devi pilgrimage. The ongoing protests have also caught the attention of political parties in Jammu and Kashmir, with both the Congress and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) seizing the opportunity to regain political relevance in the Jammu region. The two parties, which have struggled in recent elections, are attempting to rebuild their connections with the local populace by supporting the protestors. Former Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti of the PDP and senior Congress leaders have met with the Sangharsh Samiti and expressed solidarity with their cause. These visits signal a renewed focus on Jammu, a region where both parties have faced political setbacks. The Congress, in particular, is grappling with its diminished standing in Jammu, having failed to secure a single seat in the Hindu-majority areas during the recent assembly elections. The opposition of the Congress and PDP to the ropeway project also underscores the broader political dynamics at play. With local livelihoods at stake, the political messaging around this issue has become more than just about development; it is about the preservation of local identity and economic security. JKPC chief Tariq Hameed Karra has strongly voiced his opposition, urging Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha to consider the plight of the people who rely on the pilgrimage economy. Karra's statement underscores the political importance of aligning development projects with the concerns of the people, rather than imposing decisions that may alienate communities. The controversy surrounding the ropeway project highlights the delicate balance between development and the preservation of local interests. While accessibility to religious sites is crucial, the voices of the local community must be heard and their concerns addressed. The ongoing protests in Katra are a reminder to policymakers that economic decisions, especially those impacting livelihoods, should involve thorough consultation with all stakeholders. The government's response to this issue will determine whether the project can proceed smoothly or whether it will continue to fuel discontent among the locals who are at the heart of Jammu and Kashmir's tourism economy.

## India@2024: A resilient economy on the fast track to growth

KAJLEEN KAUR

India has firmly established itself as the fastest-growing economy among the G20 nations, with a projected GDP growth rate of 6.5 per cent-7 per cent for the fiscal year 2024-25. This remarkable trajectory underscores the nation's economic resilience and immense potential despite global challenges. The year 2024 presents a vivid picture of India's economic landscape, marked by notable achievements and emerging challenges.

One of the most significant indicators of progress is the substantial improvement in employment. The unemployment rate has decreased from 6 per cent in 2017 to an impressive 3.2 per cent in 2024, reflecting a robust job creation across sectors. Foreign direct investment (FDI) has also shown a dramatic surge, rising 45 per cent year-on-year to USD 29.79 billion in the first half of 2024-25, with key inflows in services, telecom, and pharmaceuticals. Complementing this momentum, India's foreign exchange reserves swelled to \$704.89 billion, driven by an \$87.6 billion

increase this year alone. This growth includes a \$10.468 billion boost in foreign currency assets and a \$2 billion rise in gold reserves, which now stand at \$65.7 billion.

India's fintech sector continues to shine on the global stage, ranking as the third-largest fintech economy after the USA and the UK. The country also boasts the fourth-largest stock market in the world, with a market capitalisation of \$4.33 trillion, surpassing Hong Kong. A significant milestone in digital payments was achieved with the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), which saw transaction values soar to an astounding Rs 200 trillion in 2024, compared to Rs 139 trillion in the previous year. India even showcased its UPI prowess on a global stage, introducing the system at the Eiffel Tower in Paris as part of a digital payments agreement with France.

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) revenue collection also reached unprecedented levels, hitting Rs 2.10 lakh crore—a substantial 12.4 per cent increase from the previous year. This growth was driven by a robust 13.4 per cent



rise in domestic transactions and an 8.3 per cent increase in imports, showcasing the strength of India's tax infrastructure.

Amid these promising figures, certain challenges continue to loom. Inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI), remains persistently high, exceeding 5 per cent. The banking sector has witnessed a slowdown, with credit growth declining to 11 per cent in November 2024 from 20.6 per cent the previ-

ous year. Deposit growth also moderated, with banks adding Rs 13.8 lakh crore in deposits between April and November, compared to Rs 16.1 lakh crore during the same period last year. In response, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) reduced the cash reserve ratio (CRR) by 50 basis points to 4 per cent in December to improve liquidity and stimulate credit growth.

Qualitative indicators present a mixed picture. India climbed 14 ranks

on the UNDP Gender Inequality Index, highlighting significant strides in bridging the gender gap. It also improved its position on the Global Innovation Index, rising from 40th to 39th among 133 global economies, driven by entrepreneurial activity, vibrant startups, and successful public-private partnerships. The Human Development Report 2023-24 placed India at 134th among 193 countries, reflecting gains in life expectancy, educa-

tion, and Gross National Income. However, no progress was seen in the Happiness Index, where India remains at 126th, largely due to dissatisfaction among older citizens, perceived discrimination, and poor health metrics. Moreover, India continues to struggle in environmental performance, ranking 176th out of 180 countries. Challenges such as air quality, biodiversity loss, and greenhouse gas emissions demand urgent attention.

As India navigates these complexities, it is also undergoing key transitions. The US economy has entered a new phase, and India sees a shift in RBI leadership, with Sanjay Malhotra taking over as the 26th Governor after Shaktikanta Das's tenure. While the final assessment of FY2024-25 remains pending, India's growth story offers optimism for a brighter future and a strong foundation for the vision of 'Viksit Bharat@2047'.

(The writer is an assistant professor at Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce, University of Delhi. Views expressed are personal)

## Nepal embraces China's BRI

PARUL CHANDRA

India has cause for extreme worry. In yet another indicator of China's growing sway over Nepal, the two are moving forward to implement Beijing's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in the Himalayan nation. India is not only opposed to this in principle on grounds of sovereignty but also fears it will enable China to increase its already considerable inroads into Nepal.

If 2017 marked Nepal's initial step to coming on board the BRI with an MoU, the year 2024 marks a giant leap for the Himalayan nation in that direction. A framework agreement for cooperation on the BRI was signed during Nepalese PM K P Sharma Oli's visit to China in early December, apart from nine other pacts. With the strategically located Himalayan nation having become a hub for Great Powers contestation, the US too would be uneasy with the

latest Beijing-Kathmandu tango. While the US had managed to get Nepal on board its own Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Compact to fund Kathmandu's power and transport infrastructure, the BRI seems far broader. Kathmandu is trying to play down the framework as just a continuation of the 2017 MoU. The framework, however, underlines Kathmandu and Beijing's renewed push for the BRI, an initiative on which New Delhi harbours deep suspicions for what it perceives as China's hegemonic ambitions through debt-trap diplomacy. Sovereignty is another major concern, with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), another project under BRI, passing through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

India is certainly worried about PM Oli-led Nepal once again moving into China's sphere of influence. The CPN-UML leader is widely seen as

being pro-China, and bilateral ties with India were prickly during his previous stints as the PM. India has yet to host Oli since he took charge as PM in July this year for the fourth time, with him first heading for Beijing, in a break from the tradition of visiting New Delhi. Also, showing scant regard for New Delhi's sensitivities, the Oli government recently allowed 220 Buddhist monks from China to travel to Lumbini, the birthplace of Gautam Buddha even as the Nanhai Buddhism Shenzhen roundtable was being held in Kathmandu.

Oli delivered the inaugural address at this roundtable. There were also reports the China-appointed Panchen Lama would travel to Lumbini, though it did not eventually happen. The Oli government's encouragement of Beijing's concerted moves to claim Buddhism as a shared heritage will not go down well with New Delhi,

which has been making its efforts to build on its shared Buddhist heritage with Nepal.

Kathmandu's thrust on greater economic cooperation with Beijing - the BRI is part of this endeavour - would also whittle down India's influence over Nepal. The BRI framework agreement, incidentally, also envisages the opening of branches of Chinese banks and financial institutions in Nepal. India has traditionally had deep economic linkages with Nepal, nurtured in no small measure due to reasons of geography - the two neighbours share a long and porous 1,751-km-long border.

This, along with the landlocked nature of Nepal, has helped India become its largest trading partner. During the 2022-23 fiscal, bilateral trade was pegged at \$8.85 billion. This included \$8 billion of exports from India to Nepal, with \$840 million of exports in the reverse

direction. As per the Nepal Rastra Bank, India's share in Nepal's trade accounted for 64.1% in 2022-23. PM Oli sees cooperation on BRI as a means to forge closer economic ties with China, with the framework agreement resolving to deepen the economic partnership by "injecting new momentum to trade, infrastructure and connectivity cooperation".

Not a single project under the BRI rubric has been executed in Nepal since the 2017 MoU. Nepal would be hoping that the 10 initial projects, including those meant to boost regional connectivity, will now see the light of day. India has its work cut out and should ensure it does not come across as overbearing. India's approach in the Kalapani-Lipulekh-Limpiyadhura border dispute, where New Delhi ignored Kathmandu's request for foreign secretary-level talks, is a case in point.

It led Oli, in his earlier

stint as the PM, to coddle a snook at New Delhi by changing his country's map showing the disputed territories as part of Nepal.

Neither did New Delhi show respect due to a close neighbour when it decided to give a quiet burial to the joint 2018 Eminent Persons Group (EPG) report, which suggested that the 1950 Treaty of Peace And Friendship be replaced with a new one?

Nepal has also been unhappy with India's refusal to give overflight rights for aircraft using the Chinese-built Gautam Buddha International Airport in Lumbini.

India would do well to remember that its domineering approach only serves to alienate a close neighbour further and push it into China's ever-willing embrace. India should not lose sight of its strategic imperatives.

(The writer is a senior journalist; views are personal)

## Why reading and writing matter more in the age of AI

BIJU DHARAMAPALAN

In an era increasingly defined by technological innovation, reading and writing—cornerstones of human intellect—are facing a profound transformation. While artificial intelligence (AI) bots like OpenAI's ChatGPT and Google Bard redefine the boundaries of information generation, the necessity of cultivating human literacy has never been more crucial. The transition from Neanderthals to modern humans (Homo sapiens) involved significant cognitive and cultural advancements, but Neanderthals themselves did not read or write. Reading and writing developed after modern humans became the dominant hominin species. These are not merely communication tools but exercises that keep our cognitive faculties sharp and resilient. When we read, our

brains decode symbols, conjuring vivid images, emotions, and concepts. This intricate process activates the left temporal cortex, which is responsible for language processing, and strengthens neural connectivity. Studies underscore that reading enhances memory, concentration, and analytical thinking. Engaging with diverse genres deepens empathy and broadens perspectives, fostering a nuanced understanding of the world.

Writing, on the other hand, is an intellectual partner to reading. Crafting words—whether in a journal, essay, or story—requires us to organise thoughts, synthesise ideas, and express them clearly. This process activates the prefrontal cortex, the brain's hub for decision-making and problem-solving. Writing is more than an intellectual task; it is therapeutic. Research



shows that expressive writing can alleviate stress, enhance mood, and even bolster the immune system.

The tactile act of writing also strengthens memory, embedding information deeply within our minds.

Reading and writing foster neuroplasticity, enabling the brain to adapt and form new connections. They are antidotes to cognitive decline and shields against neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's. Regular engagement with

these skills cultivates intellectual independence, creativity, and emotional depth—uniquely human attributes.

Yet, as AI bots revolutionise the way we consume and produce information, there is an alarming decline in human literacy. Tools like Book AI, which transforms any book into a conversational chatbot, exemplify AI's capacity to digest and reproduce complex information effortlessly. AI lacks the intrinsic human qualities of creativity, empathy, and ethical judgment. As AI literacy surges, the stagnation of human literacy risks creating a dangerous imbalance. Over-reliance on AI can diminish critical thinking and communication skills, weakening the very attributes that distinguish humans from machines.

While the fear of displacement is understandable, the answer lies in shifting our perspective.

AI is not an adversary but a powerful partner that can amplify human capabilities and drive innovation. Individuals can leverage their unique strengths to complement AI capabilities by prioritising the development of reading and writing skills. In an environment controlled by artificial intelligence, these abilities are necessary to navigate complicated concepts, understandably articulate them, and affirm human importance. The development of artificial intelligence highlights the significance of human expertise rather than diminishing it. By committing to studying throughout our lives, we can ensure that technology will not replace our humanity but rather improve it.

(The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies; views are personal)

## Distt Admin Kupwara launches mass awareness campaign on PMJJBY, PMSBY

**J1 NEWS SERVICE**  
KUPWARA, DECEMBER 18

The District Administration Kupwara has launched a mass awareness campaign regarding Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY) and the Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY) schemes.

These schemes were launched with the objective of providing life and accident insurance cover of Rs.2 lakh to the beneficiary. The schemes are particularly targeted at the poor and underprivileged sections of the society with an aim to offer financial security in case of death or disability.

To ensure grassroots level coverage of the beneficiaries under PMJJBY and PMSBY, the District Development Commissioner Kupwara, Ayushi Sudan has issued a Circular regarding conduct of Block wise awareness cum enrollment campaign to cover the targeted beneficiaries.

Nodal Officer for every block has also been designated to ensure the smooth and successful conduct of the awareness camps.

Assistant Commissioner



Development (ACD) Kupwara, who is also the Nodal Officer for conduct of the campaign in Kupwara Block, today organized an awareness cum enrollment camp at Town Hall Kupwara.

The camp witnessed the participation of a large number of stakeholders including Bankers, Anganwari Workers, VLWs, GRS and officials from line departments and general public.

Addressing the camp, the ACD said that PMJJBY and PMSBY are two social security schemes launched by the Government of India to provide affordable insurance coverage to people, especially from lower-income groups. He

highlighted the benefits of these schemes for the beneficiaries especially belonging to poor sections of the society.

He appealed to the participants to come forward in large numbers and enroll themselves for availing the benefit under the schemes. He also enjoined upon them to spread further awareness among the people and encourage them to register under these social security schemes. Meanwhile, experts from Lead Bank Kupwara and other departments provided detailed awareness to the participants regarding the modus operandi of the schemes and the procedure for getting enrolled.

## Work begins on the construction of Nayabat Office Nagam in Budgam

**J1 NEWS SERVICE**  
BUDGAM, DECEMBER 18



The Deputy Commissioner (DC) Budgam, Akshay Labroo today conducted an on-site review of the under-construction Nayabat Office Nagam, emphasising timely completion of the project.

During the inspection, the DC directed the concerned officials and executing agency to ensure strict adherence to the set deadlines. He reiterated the administration's commitment for delivering quality infrastructure within the stipulated time.

The Nayabat Office Nagam, recently approved, is aimed to enhance administrative efficiency and provide better services to the local population of Nagam area.

In addition to reviewing the project, the DC also reviewed the state of

approach road in the area and directed R&B Budgam to plan for upgradation of the approach road in the coming FY. He also interacted with local residents and listened to their suggestions & projected issues.

It is worth mentioning that approval has also been granted to construction of Tehsil Office BK Pora, Nayabat Soibugh, Nayabat Kachwari, Additional NT Complex Pakherpora in district Budgam under the larger objective of augmenting administrative infrastructure and public service delivery offices of Revenue functionaries in the district for swifter delivery of services to the citizens of Budgam.

The DC was accompanied by SDM Chadoora, CPO Budgam, Ex. Engineer R&B Chadoora, Tehsildar Chadoora and other officials during the visit.

## DC Kupwara chairs CLU meeting

**J1 NEWS SERVICE**  
KUPWARA, DECEMBER 18

The Deputy Commissioner (DC) Kupwara, Ayushi Sudan today convened a meeting of the District Level Committee regarding Change of Land Use (CLU) cases in the district.

At the outset, detailed discussion was held regarding comments submitted by various departments for the issuance of NOCs of pending cases of CLU in the district.

The DC directed the concerned departments to submit quality com-

ments/ concrete NOCs within stipulated time as per the provisions of PSGA Act to ensure timely disposal of CLU. She emphasized that since CLU cases involve comments from various departments, there is an increased need for inter-departmental coordination. She directed the officers to stick to the deadlines and conduct the joint site inspections of the cases. The meeting was attended by SE R&B, ACR Kupwara, Tehsildaras, Ex. Engineer I&FC and other concerned officers.

## Police arrest 06 drug peddlers; Contraband substances recovered

**J1 NEWS SERVICE**  
SRINAGAR, DEC 18

Continuing its efforts to eradicate the menace of drugs from the society, Police have arrested 06 drug peddlers in Srinagar, Kupwara, Shopian & Kulgam and recovered contraband substances from their possession.

In Srinagar, a police party of Police Station Nowhatta during routine naka checking at Malkha Chowk, apprehended an individual under suspicious circumstances. During search, approximately 40 grams of charas like contraband substance was recovered from his possession. He has been identified as Zubair Ahmad Ahanger son of Amin Ahanger resident of Kathi Darwaza. On his disclosure, another individual namely Bilal Ahmad Sheikh son of Gh. Qadir Sheikh resident of Tujgari Mohalla, was apprehended near old Malkha Chowk. Upon his personal search, approximately 80 grams of charas were recovered.

In Kupwara, a police party of Police Station Kralpora at a checkpoint established at Khazanmatti, intercepted two suspicious persons. During search, approximately 13 grams of heroin-like substance was recovered from their possession. They have been identified as Aasim Sultan Sheikh, son of Mohd Sultan Sheikh, resident of Treh-

gam, and Mujtahid Nazir son of Nazir Ahmad Lone, resident of Khumriyal. Further investigation has been initiated to establish the backward and forward linkages of the drug trade and uncover any networks involved.

In Shopian, Police Station Keller received an information that one person namely Gh Mohammad Parray son of Ab Ahad Parray resident of Chowan Keller has concealed Charas like contraband substance in his residential house. Acting swiftly, a police Party from Police Station Keller along with Executive Magistrate raided the said residential house. During search, 41 grams charas like contraband substance was recovered. Further investigation is underway to unearth the forward and backward linkages of the arrested individual. The operation was meticulously executed by SHO Police Station Keller under the supervision of SSP Shopian Shri Anayat Ali Chowdhary-IPS.

In Kulgam, a police party of Police post Mirbazar at a checkpoint established at Ganjipora, Mirbazar, intercepted a vehicle (Truck) bearing registration number PB07AF-2124 driven by Davinder Singh son of Karnail Singh resident of Rajpur safdarpur district Hoshiarpur Punjab. During search, 3.140 Kgs of poppy straw concealed in a bag, was recovered.

## DC Poonch assures early construction of Bridge at Village Tanda

**J1 NEWS SERVICE**  
POONCH, DECEMBER 18



Deputy Commissioner Vikas Kundal today visited Tanda village near Khanetar to address local infrastructure needs. Engaging directly with residents, he listened to their concerns regarding the long-standing demand for the construction of the Tanda Bridge.

During the visit, community members highlighted the urgent necessity of the bridge at the starting point of the road from Grid Station to

Mohalla Changla Qureshian. The Deputy Commissioner responded positively, directing the Executive Engineer of PWD (R&B) to prepare the Detailed Project Report (DPR) for the bridge.

The Deputy Commissioner assured the locals of early fulfillment of their

demand, emphasizing that the bridge would enhance connectivity to adjoining villages and facilitate easier access for children to attend school.

The residents expressed their gratitude to the Deputy Commissioner and hoped for timely construction of the Bridge.

## CU Jammu ISRO Centre Launches Radiosonde for Atmospheric Data Collection



**J1 NEWS SERVICE**  
JAMMU, DEC 18

The Eighth Radiosonde was successfully launched under The MOU between National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC, ISRO) and Central University of Jammu today from the Satish Dhawan Centre for Space Science, CU Jammu under the mentorship of Hon'ble Vice Chancellor Prof. Sanjeev Jain.

Prof. Vinay Kumar, Convener Satish Dhawan Centre for Space Science along with his dedicated Faculty, Students, Scholars and Staff successfully culminated the launch.

The Weather Balloon along with the Radiosonde will record the study of the atmospheric profiles of the humidity, pressure, temperature, wind speed and direction. This will contribute to the meteorological research related to the climate change and atmospheric conditions.

This Radiosonde Ground Station is an indigenous development in the Semiconductor Laboratory, Mohali, a make in India product under the Director General Dr. Kamaljeet Singh and Mr. Nemi Chand.

The launch is under the project with National

Remote Sensing Centre in collaboration with Dr. Hareef Baba, NRSC.

The event was coordinated by Dr. Haneet Kour, Dr. Sanjeev Yadav, Dr. Pravesh Pal, Faculty Department of Electronics and Communication Engineering, CUJ along with his team Mehak Mahajan (STA,CIF) Ayesha, Bandhna, Amrit, Bineesh, Prashant, Sonam, Pre-meeka, Pratyush, Hridayesh, Himanshu, Baibhav kumar, Baibhav Datta and the team. The data collected from Radiosonde will contribute in the field of atmospheric and Space research.

## DC chairs meeting for successful implementation of Mission-YUVA in Baramulla

**J1 NEWS SERVICE**  
BARAMULLA, DECEMBER 18

In order to ensure the successful implementation of Mission Yuva Udhayami Vikas Abhiyan (YUVA) in the district, the Deputy Commissioner (DC) Baramulla, Minga Sherpa chaired a meeting today at the Dak Bungalow, here.

On the occasion, the DC emphasized the objectives of the Mission YUVA, a government initiative aimed at fostering sustainable employment opportunities in J&K by supporting the creation of new micro-enterprises, expanding existing businesses and encouraging innovative entrepreneurial ventures.

He held an in-depth discussion with the officers on the mission's effective implementation which included strategies for providing necessary training, and fostering strong coordination and collaboration among departments and stakeholders.

The DC directed all the line departments to focus on the key action points and understand their roles to ensure the mission's



objectives are achieved effectively and efficiently.

Furthermore, Minga Sherpa urged the officers to prioritize efficient planning for conducting a comprehensive baseline survey of existing and potential entrepreneurs in the district.

Later, the DC briefed the press about the Mission YUVA initiative which will commence from December 21, aimed at fostering sustainable employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for the youth of the J&K.

Meanwhile, a comprehensive training program was held for Master Trainers and Supervisors, appointed for the conduct of Baseline Enumeration/ Survey to ensure there are no disruptions during the conduct of this extensive survey.

Additional Deputy Commissioner Baramulla, Dr. Zahoor Ahmad Raina; ADC Sopore, Dr. Shabir Ahmad Raina; Chief Planning Officer and officers from other line departments were present in the meeting.

## ONOE decision, is a revolutionary step for democracy, governance: Pawan Sharma

**J1 NEWS SERVICE**  
JAMMU, DEC 18

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Senior leader & Prabhari District Doda Pawan Sharma, has welcomed the Modi - Government's decision to implement "One Nation, One Election," terming it a revolutionary step towards strengthening democracy and ensuring efficient governance. He said that this initiative will help in improving the election process in the country and saving public money.

Pawan Sharma said that the main objective of the concept of One Nation, One Election is to improve the election process in the country and save public money. He said that this

concept will help in making the election process in the country more transparent and accountable.

Pawan Sharma said that, One Nation, One Election (ONOE) proposal envisions holding all elections - Lok Sabha, state assemblies, and local bodies - within the same year, if not simultaneously. The plan proposes a two-phase approach: the first phase would cover Lok Sabha and state assembly elections, followed by local body polls within 100 days.

Pawan Sharma further stated that this initiative is the need of the hour for a vast and diverse country like India. He emphasized that it will not only save valuable public resources but also ensure uninter-

rupted development and smooth functioning of administrative machinery. The move is expected to contribute significantly to achieving the country's socio-political, economic, and scientific developmental goals.

He further warned opposition parties against indulging in unnecessary politics on this issue of national importance. Sharma urged them to adopt a constructive approach and work collaboratively with the government to transform India into a fully developed nation. He reiterated that such reforms are essential for the nation's progress and reflect the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

## Guru Ravidass opposed caste based discrimination, preached equality: Balbir

**J1 NEWS SERVICE**  
JAMMU, DEC 18

Guru Ravidass Vishwa Mahapeeth National General Secretary & British Ravidassia Heritage Foundation Indian branch General Secretary, Balbir Ram Rattan, said that the followers of great saint Ravidass should uphold guru's vision of equality. The elders in the families should motivate young generations to read and adopt valuable teachings of the Gurus of their samaj.

Balbir Ram Rattan said this while discussing life of Guru Ravidass with a group of members of Ravidassia and saryara communities.

Balbir Ram Rattan shared with them that Guru Ravidass was a revered 14th-century spiritual poet, and social reformer, who remains a beacon of equality and universal brotherhood for



all the times. His teachings continue to inspire millions across the globe to work towards a more equitable and harmonious society.

He further told them Guru Ravidass emerged as a revolutionary thinker during a time of deep social and caste-based divisions. Guru Ravidass opposed caste based discrimination and advocated for a world where all individuals, regardless of caste, creed, or social status, are treated with

dignity and respect. His poetic verses too are filled with themes of oneness.

Guru Ravidass had a vision of "Begampura" - a city without sorrow, where there is no discrimination, fear, or suffering. This ideal underscores his unwavering belief in the equality of all human beings and the necessity of eradicating social injustice.

His universal message of equality has been a source of inspiration for social justice movements worldwide.

## Suri backs CCTV mandate for school buses

**J1 NEWS SERVICE**  
JAMMU, DEC 18

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) executive member Raman Suri has lauded the recent directive issued by Vishesh Mahajan, Transport Commissioner of Jammu and Kashmir, mandating the installation of CCTV cameras in school buses. He hailed this move as a significant step toward enhancing student safety and preventing tragic incidents involving school transport.

"Installing CCTV cameras in school buses will save

many precious lives, especially the lives of our children. In one heartbreaking incident, a young girl had lost her life under a school bus in her own school premises. Such tragedies can be avoided with stricter monitoring and safety measures," he stated.

This directive aligns with guidelines previously laid down by the Supreme Court of India, which emphasized the installation of CCTVs in school buses. Unfortunately, these instructions have yet to be fully implemented in

the region. Parents often express concerns about the safety standards of school buses, and accidents caused by speeding or negligence are not uncommon.

The installation of CCTV cameras will not only monitor the activities of drivers and co-drivers but also serve as a deterrent to over-speeding and irresponsible behavior. Additionally, it will bring accountability to private buses and other vehicles hired by parents, which have so far operated without proper safety regulations, Raman Suri said.

# As Veer Savarkar Airport begins international operations, PM Modi urges for a visit to Cellular Jail

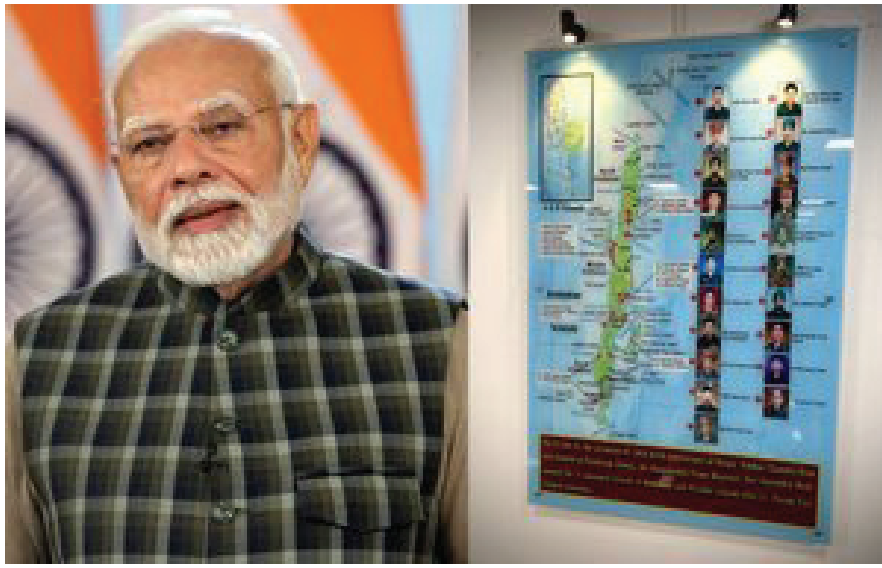
AGENCIES

NEW DELHI, DEC 18

Veer Savarkar Airport, previously known as Port Blair Airport, in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, has opened its runway for international flights, hence opening the region to tourists and visitors from across the globe.

The Archipelago, whose tourism potential has largely remained unexplored till date because of limited air connectivity, got a boost when the Veer Savarkar airport received its first international flight, last month. Experts see the island turning into a major tourist hotspot soon, with visitors arriving from across the continents.

Meanwhile, Prime Min-



ister Narendra Modi has made an appeal to tourists to pay a visit to the Cellular Jail, besides enjoying the serene and tranquil

islands. "Do visit the Cellular Jail as well and get inspired by the courage of the great Veer Savarkar," PM Modi

said in a post on X.

Notably, it was this infamous Cellular Jail, where Vinayak Damodar Savarkar was jailed for 11

years during India's freedom movement. Dubbed as 'Kala Paani', this was one of the harshest prison sentence, meted out by the Britishers.

PM Modi also noted the importance of preserving and celebrating the legacy of brave heroes who sacrificed their lives in the service of the nation.

His homage to the brave heroes came in response to an X user (a noted journalist) who described the 'naming of 21 Andaman islands after Param Vir Chakras' as his favourite part of Andaman tourism.

Last year, PM Modi had named 21 largest unnamed islands of Andaman and Nicobar Islands after Param Vir Chakra awardees. The christen-

ing of unnamed islands was done on the occasion of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's 126th birth anniversary, officially observed as Parakram Diwas.

In his post on X, PM Modi underscored the importance of remembering the brave heroes of the nation, who made supreme sacrifices for the nation.

"Naming the islands in Andaman and Nicobar after our heroes is a way to ensure their service to the nation is remembered for generations to come. This is also part of our larger endeavour to preserve and celebrate the memory of our freedom fighters and eminent personalities who have left an indelible mark on our nation," he said.

## MUDA petitioner not given any offer to withdraw plea for CBI probe: Siddaramaiah's son Yathindra

AGENCIES

BELAGAVI, DEC 18

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's son Yathindra Siddaramaiah clarified on Wednesday that Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA) case petitioner Snehamayi Krishna was not given any offer to withdraw a plea seeking the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)

probe into the alleged scam. Speaking to reporters in Belagavi, Yathindra said, "From our side, no offer has been made. We will face a legal battle and investigation. The political opponents of Chief Minister Siddaramaiah are behind these statements and they are supporting Snehamayi Krishna."

"Firstly, it is wrong to

say that the MUDA scam has occurred. Many people claim to be our close associates. There is no truth in MUDA petitioner's charges," Yathindra said.

Snehamayi Krishna had complained to the Enforcement Directorate (ED), the Lokayukta and also filed a petition seeking the CBI probe into the MUDA case.

"We will face the probe bravely. The political opponents want to bring down Chief Minister Siddaramaiah from his post by any means and it is also one of their ploys," Yathindra said.

Snehamayi Krishna claimed he was being offered large sums of money to withdraw his petition seeking a CBI probe into the case.

## Anti-Dalit mindset: Mamata attacks HM Shah over Ambedkar remarks

AGENCIES

KOLKATA, DEC 18

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, on Wednesday, launched a scathing attack against BJP over Union Home Minister Amit Shah's remarks on B.R. Ambedkar, claiming that this is a "display of BJP's casteist and anti-Dalit mindset".

In a statement on Facebook, the Chief Minister claimed that as the Indian Parliament reflected on 75 glorious years of the Constitution, the Union home minister chose to tarnish this occasion with derogatory remarks against Ambedkar and that "too in the temple of Democracy".

"This is a display of BJP's CASTEIST and ANTI-DALIT mindset. If this is how they behave after being reduced to 240 seats, imagine the damage they would've inflicted if



their dream of 400 seats had been realised. They'd have rewritten history to entirely erase Dr Ambedkar's contributions," Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's statement read.

According to her, the Union Home Minister's remarks were an insult to the millions who look up to Ambedkar for guidance and inspiration.

"But what else can you expect from a party that has internalised hate and Bigotry?" the Chief Minister questioned.

Describing Ambedkar as the "Father of the Indian Constitution," the Chief Minister said in her statement that the "outrageous" remark is not only

an outright attack on him but all members of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution, which symbolised India's unity in diversity with members from all castes, creeds, ethnicities, and religions.

Earlier on Wednesday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched a blistering attack against the Congress party, accusing it of indulging in every possible dirty trick to obliterate the legacy of Dr Ambedkar and also humiliate the SC/ST communities.

PM Modi's tirade came on the back of Congress's demand for the resignation of Home Minister Amit Shah, whom they accused of disrespecting Dr Ambedkar during his speech in the Rajya Sabha.

In a series of posts on X, PM Modi lambasted the Congress, claiming the party had a long history of undermining Ambedkar's contributions.

## 'A SYNOPSIS CANNOT RUN INTO 128 PAGES!' SC FLAGS LENGTHY PLEADINGS

AGENCIES

NEW DELHI, DEC 18

After a petitioner-in-person filed a synopsis running into 128 pages, the Supreme Court said that the registry should have advised the litigant to trim down the lengthy synopsis, which was "loaded with details much of which was not relevant".

"The appellant, who has appeared in person, has filed a synopsis running into 128 pages, loaded with details much of which is not relevant for our purposes. We understand that the appellant is not a trained lawyer, but it is for the Registry to have asked the appellant to trim down the synopsis. A synopsis cannot run into 128 pages!" said a bench headed by Justice Sudhanshu Dhuliya.

The Bench, also com-



prising Justice Ahsanuddin Amanullah, asked the Registrar (Judicial) to take note of this, particularly the cases where litigants are allowed to appear in person.

The appellant, appearing in-person, challenged the validity of the Allahabad High Court order, which had set aside the 2019 decision of the Family Court and restored the

Section 125 CrPC petition.

The Allahabad HC also directed that the said petition should be decided on merits by the Additional Principal Judge of Agra Family Court.

Rejecting the special leave petition, the apex court said, the impugned order was in favour of the appellant and only directed the Agra Family Court to adjudicate the matter

afresh which was earlier dismissed for non-prosecution.

"The appellant instead of appearing before the Family Court, Agra has directly challenged this order of the High Court before this Court, which we think is not proper," it added.

In August last year, the top court had stressed that bulky synopsis in the pleadings ought to be avoided after a bench headed by Justice Abhay S Oka noted that while the impugned order of the high court had six pages, there were more than 60 pages of synopsis and 27 pages in the special leave petition filed.

The Supreme Court, in August 2023, had disposed of a public interest litigation (PIL) seeking guidelines for setting a page limit with regard to

petitions or written submissions filed in judicial proceedings.

"How can we say in all matters that there should be a word limit or a page limit on written submissions?" had asked a bench led by (then) CJI D.Y. Chandrachud to the PIL litigant.

The CJI-led bench had said that though the concern raised in the PIL is "laudable" but it is difficult to frame "one size fits all" direction of such nature.

It had clarified that if the petitioner has any concrete suggestions, he is at liberty to make a representation before the Secretary-General of the Supreme Court.

The plea had claimed that lack of any specific rules defining the page limit of petitions filed before the court results in delay in justice delivery.

## Apologise by midnight or resign from cabinet: Kharge to Amit Shah on Ambedkar row

AGENCIES

NEW DELHI, DEC 18

Congress party launched an all-out attack on Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday, demanding his apology for "disparaging" remarks on B. R. Ambedkar in the Rajya Sabha.

Speaking to the press, Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge hit out at Union Minister Shah and Prime Minister Narendra Modi and accused them of insulting and abusing B. R. Ambedkar, the chief architect of the Constitution.

"Amit Shah must apologise by midnight for insulting Ambedkar, else quit as the Cabinet minister," Kharge demanded.



He also took objection to the "shielding" of Amit Shah by Prime Minister Modi and asked why the latter made a series of tweets, in defence of the Home Minister.

"Instead of pulling up

the Union Home Minister for his "objectionable" and "unpleasant" comments on the Dalit icon, PM Modi went on supporting him with a series of tweets," he said.

Kharge's presser came

on the back of Amit Shah's comments during the Constitution debate in Rajya Sabha, where he said that it has become a fashion to name 'Ambedkar, Ambedkar' for furthering one's political interests.

The Congress party has been on the offensive since morning, accusing the Home Minister of casting aspersions at the Dalit icon. Earlier, in the day, Congress workers also gheraoed Union Minister Shah's residence and staged a demonstration.

Kharge said that PM Modi must remove Amit Shah as the Home Minister. "The one who takes the oath of office and then abuses the sacred book doesn't have any right to

stay in the Cabinet. He should be sacked with immediate effect," Kharge said, while adding that if it's not done, this will prove that all their talks are hollow.

The row over Ambedkar has become a political hot potato, as the opposition is looking to score political points while the BJP is trying to nip the issue in the bud.

AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal also led a protest over the alleged insult to Ambedkar inside Parliament and said that Prime Minister Modi's support to the Union Home Minister shows that it was a "planned conspiracy" by the BJP, to belittle Ambedkar's legacy.

## Home Minister to visit Reang tribal settlement camps in Tripura on Dec 22

AGENCIES

AGARTALA, DEC 18

Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who will attend the 72nd Plenary Session of the North Eastern Council (NEC) in Agartala on December 21, will visit the Reang tribal settlement camps in Dhalai district the next day, officials said on Wednesday.

Over 37,135 displaced Reang tribals migrated from Mizoram in 1997 after ethnic troubles there and settled in 12 locations in four districts of Tripura - North Tripura, Dhalai, Gomati, and South Tripura. After several years of tussles and agitations, a quadripartite agreement was signed in January 2020 between the Centre,

Tripura, and Mizoram governments and the Reang tribal leaders to resettle the 37,136 tribal immigrants comprising 6,302 families in 12 locations in four of Tripura's eight districts.

A Tripura government official said that the Home Minister would visit the Reang tribal settlement camp at Bruha para (Haduklau para) in Dhalai district on December 22 and he would address a public meeting at Masurai Para in the district.

Shah would also attend the National Cooperative Conference on the same day at Rabindra Satabarshiki Bhavan in Agartala.

Home Minister Amit Shah, Minister for Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) Jyotirad-

itya Scindia, and Governors and Chief Ministers of all eight northeastern states will attend the Plenary Session of the NEC in Agartala on December 21.

The official said that Governors, Chief Ministers, Deputy Chief Ministers, top officials of the Centre and eight NE states would attend the important NEC meeting.

The progress of various ongoing and proposed development projects will be discussed in the two-day vital meeting of the NEC, a regional planning body.

According to the official, a review meeting of the works and planning of the North Eastern Space Application Centre (NESAC) will be held on December 22.

## 91 pc of Smart Cities projects completed, Rs 1.47 lakh crore invested: Centre

AGENCIES

NEW DELHI, DEC 18

With 100 cities leading the initiative, the Smart Cities Mission (SCM) has completed 7,380 out of 8,075 projects, with an investment of Rs 1,47,704 crore, the government said on Wednesday.

As of December 13, 91 per cent of the total projects have been successfully completed, reflecting significant progress in reshaping urban landscapes across India, said the Ministry of Housing

and Urban Affairs in a statement.

Launched on June 25, 2015 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the 'Smart Cities Mission' aims to improve the quality of life in 100 cities by providing efficient services, robust infrastructure, and sustainable solutions.

Focused on economic growth, inclusivity, and sustainability, it addresses diverse needs such as housing, transport, education, healthcare, and recreation, with the goal of creating adaptable



urban spaces that serve as models for other cities.

All 100 smart cities have operational ICCCs, which

utilise data for making informed decisions. These ICCCs functioned as Civiwar rooms during the

pandemic and have significantly improved city operations such as transport, water supply, and

solid waste management by integrating emerging technologies like AI, IoT, and data analytics.

"Over 84,000 CCTV surveillance cameras have been installed in 100 smart cities, aiding in crime monitoring. Additionally, 1,884 emergency call boxes, 3,000 public address systems, and traffic enforcement systems for red light violations and automatic number plate recognition have been installed, enhancing public safety," according to the ministry.

More than 17,026 kilometers of the water supply system are being monitored through Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA), reducing non-revenue water and leakages.

Over 66 cities are managing solid waste with increased technology use, improving route management, efficiency of collection, and daily management.

Around 9,194 vehicles have been RFID-enabled for Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) to digi-

tise and improve solid waste management efficiency, the ministry data showed.

Over 1,740 kilometers of smart roads have been constructed or improved, and 713 kilometers of cycle tracks have been developed.

While 9,433 smart classrooms and 41 digital libraries have been developed, 172 e-health centres and clinics (without dedicated beds) have been developed, and 152 health ATMs also have been installed, said the ministry.

# Back in Colombo, Lankan President reflects on 'successful' India visit and 'productive discussions' with PM Modi

AGENCIES  
COLOMBO, DEC 18

Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake on Wednesday labelled his three-day visit to India as quite "successful", emphasising that he had "productive discussions" with the Indian leadership and business community during his trip which was also his first official foreign visit since assuming office in September.

"Returned last night after a successful 3-day official visit to India at the invitation of President Droupadi Murmu. Engaged in productive discussions with PM Narendra Modi, Indian ministers, and business leaders," the Lankan President posted on X

after returning home.

The delegation that accompanied Dissanayake also included Foreign Affairs, Foreign Employment and Tourism Minister Vijitha Herath, as well as Labour Minister and Economic Development Deputy Minister Prof. Anil Jayantha Fernando.

Later, while speaking in the Parliament, the Lankan President informed that his government has been able to reach an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) at the third review to raise the income tax threshold from Rs 100,000 to Rs. 150,000 per month.

"He also expressed firm confidence that the challenges faced in 2022 will not be repeated in the

country's future," local media reported while highlighting Dissanayake's speech in the Parliament on Wednesday afternoon where he also announced that the government aims to increase the nation's foreign exchange reserves to USD 15.1 billion by 2028.

On Monday, after holding bilateral discussions with PM Modi at New Delhi's Hyderabad House, the Lankan President asserted that his visit has paved the way for further development of cooperation between the two neighbouring countries.

"We faced an unprecedented economic crisis two years ago and India supported us immensely to come out of that quagmire. It has also helped



us immensely after that, especially in the debt-free structuring process. I know that Sri Lanka secures a very significant place in the foreign policy of India. PM Modi assured us full support and he also assured us that he will always protect the territorial integrity and sover-

eignty of Sri Lanka," said Dissanayake.

He had also reiterated Sri Lanka's stated position of not permitting its territory to be used in any manner inimical to the security of India as well as towards regional stability.

"I have given an assurance to the Prime Minister

of India that we will not allow our land to be used in any way in a manner that is detrimental to the interest of India. The cooperation with India will certainly flourish and I want to reassure our continued support to India," the visiting Lankan President stated during the joint press conference.

While speaking at the State Banquet hosted by President Droupadi Murmu, he spotlighted that the bonds between Sri Lanka and India transcend diplomacy and geographical proximity as the bilateral relationship is civilisationally linked and defined by mutual respect, cooperation, and a shared destiny.

"The strength of our

partnership lies in collective action. It is through collaborative efforts that we can address the new and evolving challenges that transcend borders, whether they be in addressing environmental concerns, combating terrorism, or ensuring economic growth that benefits all citizens globally. Sri Lanka remains committed to fostering deeper cooperation with India, as a leader of the global South, to harness the opportunities of the 21st century for future generations to thrive in an interconnected and interdependent world," said Dissanayake.

On Tuesday, the Lankan President visited Bodh Gaya and paid homage at the Mahabodhi Temple

and the sacred Sri Maha Bodhi tree, the site where Prince Siddhartha attained enlightenment, and received blessings.

"Bodh Gaya is one of the four main sacred sites associated with the life of Gautama Buddha, holding immense significance for Buddhists. In 2002, the Mahabodhi Temple in Bodh Gaya was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The General Secretary of Maha Bodhi Society of India, Venerable Pelwatte Seewalee Thero, and the Head of the Sarnath Centre, Venerable Rathmalwala Sumiththananda Nayake Thero, extended blessings to the President during the occasion," read a statement issued by the Lankan President's office.

## ZIMBABWE CRACKS DOWN ON SMUGGLING AS FESTIVE SEASON APPROACHES

AGENCIES  
HARARE, DEC 18

Zimbabwe is intensifying a campaign against the smuggling of goods through its borders as the festive season approaches, said Permanent Secretary for Presidential Affairs in the Office of the President and Cabinet Tafadzwa Muguti.

Speaking at an anti-smuggling coordination meeting held in the national capital of Harare, Muguti said Zimbabwe is losing up to 1 billion US dollars in revenue from smuggling along its borders.

Smuggling of goods across the borders peaks during the Christmas and New Year holidays as Zimbabwean expatriates return home and bring goods mainly from South Africa and other neighbouring countries.

Smuggled products on the market include a wide range of food items,



clothes, drugs, beverages, fertilizers, cement, vehicles, electrical gadgets, and solar panels, among other goods, said Muguti, Xinhua news agency reported.

To curb the illegal practices, the authorities launched an anti-smuggling campaign in Novem-

ber. Taskforce teams, including tax authorities, police, immigration officials, local authorities, consumer protection bodies, and monetary authorities, were set up to deal with the situation.

Muguti said smuggling affects the col-

lection of customs and excise duties, discourages investment, and negatively affects employment levels and job creation as smuggled goods flood the market.

"It has resulted in unfair competition which has curtailed growth of local industry, given the unfair

advantage in the form of tax evasion that illicit traders have over legitimate businesses, also negatively affecting employment levels and job creation," he said.

Smuggling not only undermines the economy but also threatens security and endangers public health and safety as smuggled food items, medicines, and alcohol are subject to health and safety controls, said Muguti, adding that it has also led to the rise of organized crimes, such as armed robberies linked to the smuggling of guns.

As part of the anti-smuggling measures, second-hand clothes will be confiscated and destroyed at the nearest police stations and all smuggled foodstuffs will be donated to charity, while drugs will be destroyed at the Ministry of Health and Child Care's district and provincial hospital incinerators, said Muguti.

## Bushfire in Australia's Melbourne triggers evacuation warning

AGENCIES  
SYDNEY, DEC 18

Residents and campers in a national park west of Melbourne, the capital city of Australia's state of Victoria, have been ordered to evacuate as a bushfire threatens property.

Victorian authorities on Wednesday afternoon issued an emergency alert for the small towns of Victoria Valley and Mirranatwa approximately 240 km west of Melbourne in the Grampians National Park.

The alert issued at about 4 pm local time said that a bushfire that has been burning since Monday is not yet under control and has now reached properties in Mirranatwa.

Residents and campers in the area have been urged to evacuate south to the town of Dunkeld where a relief center has been established.

"Leaving immediately is the safest option, before conditions become too dangerous," the alert said.



The fire ignited on Monday as temperatures across Victoria exceeded 40 degrees Celsius, the state's hottest December day since 2019, Xinhua news agency reported.

As of Wednesday, it had burnt 564 hectares of bushland in the national park's mountainous southern end.

VicEmergency incident controller Mark Gunning told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation that the fire was burning in inaccessible areas, making controlling it a challenge for fire crews.

He said authorities expect to be fighting the fire for several weeks.

Emergency services, earlier on Monday evening urged residents of the small towns of Creswick and Dean, approximately 100 km west of Melbourne, to immediately evacuate the area due to the threat posed by an out-of-control bushfire.

"Leaving immediately is the safest option, before conditions become too dangerous.

Emergency services may not be able to help you if you decide to stay," the alert said.

Nearly 60 vehicles and 250 firefighters from the Country Fire Authority in the state of Victoria were deployed to the fire.

## Parliament passes bill allowing foreign banks to operate in Ethiopia

AGENCIES  
ADDIS ABABA, DEC 18

The Ethiopian House of Peoples' Representatives (HoPR), the lower chamber of parliament, has passed a bill that allows foreign banks to operate in the country.

During its regular session on Tuesday, the HoPR reviewed and passed the Banking Business Proclamation, marking a significant step toward opening Ethiopia's banking sector to foreign investment, according to state-affiliated Fana Broadcasting Corporation. The proclamation, adopted with a majority vote, aligns with the Ethiopian government's prior policy decisions to liberalise the financial sector. It



is expected to attract foreign banks and investors, bringing much-needed capital to the East African nation's economy.

Mamo Mihretu, governor of the National Bank of Ethiopia (NBE), said the newly approved proclamation will enable the Ethiopian economy to remain stable, noting that the bill has clearly set out the NBE's core objectives, including ensuring price stability and fostering a robust financial system.

Historically, Ethiopia's

banking sector has been closed to foreign banks, Xinhua news agency reported.

The move signals the end of decades of exclusivity for local financial institutions, paving the way for foreign competition and innovation.

Since taking office in 2018, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has consistently advocated for liberalising the financial sector as part of broader economic reforms aimed at attracting foreign investment and driving economic development.

Ethiopia recently floated its foreign exchange, marking another significant shift from the central bank's strictly regulated interventions.

## Sweden to significantly expand defence capabilities by 2030

AGENCIES  
HELSINKI, DEC 18

Sweden's Parliament has approved a new defence plan, increasing the military budget from 125 billion SEK (11.42 billion US dollars) in 2024 to SEK 186 billion by 2030.

Sweden is among the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries that are increasing defence spending the most, said Defense Minister Pal Jonson, as reported by Swedish broadcaster SVT. The plan prioritises expanding supplies of ammunition, missiles, and spare parts. It also maintains the current structure of the armed forces: four brigades for the army, seven corvettes and five submarines for the navy, and six fighter divisions for



the air force.

Sweden's defence force is set to grow from 88,000 to 130,000 personnel by 2035. Annual conscription will increase from 5,000 to 12,000 recruits, alongside

significant investments in drones, long-range missiles, and advanced radar systems, Xinhua news agency reported.

On December 13, the Swedish lawmakers had

approved the country's long-term participation in NATO's multinational brigade in Latvia, the Latvian Defense Ministry had informed. Sweden plans to deploy a mechanized infantry battalion of up to 600 personnel to join the multinational unit in Latvia. The Swedish troops are scheduled to arrive at the beginning of 2025, marking Sweden's first deployment to another allied country since its accession to NATO in March 2024.

Upon joining the alliance, Sweden declared its intention to contribute a combat battalion to the NATO multinational brigade in Latvia.

Currently, the NATO brigade in Latvia comprises forces from 13 member states: Albania, the Czech

Republic, Denmark, Iceland, Italy, Canada, Latvia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Spain.

In November, Sweden and Poland had also announced a new strategic partnership between the two countries during the visit of Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk.

Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson's office detailed that the new partnership includes the two countries strengthening their cooperation within security and defence, innovation and competitiveness.

Kristersson said that closer cooperation on security and defence in a broad sense is the foundation of the renewed strategic partnership between Sweden and Poland.

## Australian relief crew deployed to Vanuatu as earthquake death toll expected to rise

AGENCIES  
SYDNEY, DEC 18

Australian officials have departed for Vanuatu to aid search and rescue efforts following a major earthquake that killed at least 14 people.

Australia's Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) on Wednesday afternoon sent its first relief crews to Vanuatu on board a Royal Australian Air Force C-17 Globemaster

bound for Port Vila.

The government of Vanuatu earlier on Wednesday confirmed reports from the Red Cross that at least 14 people have died after the 7.3-magnitude earthquake struck on Tuesday.

Dickinson Tevi, Secretary-General of the Vanuatu Red Cross Society, told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation that he expects the death toll to increase.

DART's task force leader,

Douglas May, said that the relief crew, made up of firefighters, paramedics, engineers, doctors and canine search and rescue teams, expects a difficult job ahead.

"We expect as soon as we get there, we will be rescuing known live victims," he told reporters prior to departure.

"Ultimately, we know there are lives to be saved. So that is the priority, and after that it'll be helping to

locate the deceased and then providing services like water purification."

More than 200 people have been injured, and rescue efforts are focused on two buildings that collapsed in the capital of Port Vila, Vanuatu Police Commissioner Robson Iavro said.

The National Disaster Management office said that of the 14 confirmed deaths, six had died in landslides, four in a col-

lapsed building, and four at Vila Central Hospital, Xinhua news agency reported.

The ABC reported that some parts of the island nation were still without power and water as of Wednesday afternoon.

Tevi told ABC Television that the Red Cross had deployed volunteers to assist the Central hospital and to assess the extent of the damage around the island.

## US: Texas authorities reveal severe groundwater contamination

AGENCIES  
HOUSTON, DEC 18

Texas found 252 new groundwater contamination cases in 2023, nearly nine per cent of all open cases in the second-largest US state, said an official report. The latest Texas Groundwater Protection Committee annual report compiles 2,870 open cases of groundwater contamination. Public drinking water in almost every county of

the state is impacted by the problem, and some cases date back decades, said the report.

The top pollution source is gas stations, making up a third of all the cases, reported the Texas Tribune on Tuesday.

The most common contaminants, as the report showed, are gasoline, diesel, and other petroleum products, while in some cases the source of contamination is unknown.

Texas relies on groundwater from aquifers for about 55 per cent of its water supply, and agriculture is the biggest consumer of groundwater statewide.

On December 12, Xinhua news agency reported that Texas is suing companies including DuPont and 3M, charging them of having made products containing toxic "forever chemicals" commonly known as PFAS and falsely advertising over their safety.

# Centre pays Rs 4,820 crore to 2.75 lakh farmers for pulses under MSP scheme

AGENCIES  
NEW DELHI, DEC 18

The Centre, during the 2023-24 rabi season, has procured 6.41 lakh metric tonnes of pulses at an MSP value of Rs 4,820 crore which has benefited 2.75 lakh farmers, according to a statement issued by the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare on Wednesday.

The procurement to support the farmers included 2.49 lakh metric tonnes (LMT) of masoor, 43,000 MT of chana, and 3.48 LMT of moong.

Similarly, 12.19 LMT of oilseeds of Rs 6,900 crore of MSP value were procured from 5.29 lakh farmers. During the start of the ongoing Kharif season, market prices of soyabean were ruling much below MSP prices, leading to great hardship to farmers. With the intervention of the Centre under the



PSS scheme (a component of PM AASHA), 5.62 lakh LMT of soyabean has been procured at an MSP value of Rs 2,700 crore, as of December 11 this year which has benefited 2.42 lakh farmers. This is also the highest quantity of soyabean ever procured, the statement said.

The procurement data since 2018-19, shows that around 195.39 LMT of pulses, oilseeds, and copra have been procured at an MSP value of Rs 10.74 lakh crore benefiting 99.3 lakh

farmers under the Centre's Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay Sanrakhan Abhiyan (PM-AASHA) scheme.

The government is also promoting a Price Deficiency Payment Scheme (PDDS) as an option for oilseeds. This scheme aims at ensuring remunerative prices to the producers of oilseeds whose MSPs are notified by the Centre. The PDDS envisages the direct payment of the price difference between the MSP and the selling price in notified markets up to 15

per cent of MSP value by the Central government to the pre-registered farmers selling the oilseeds, the official statement said.

Another important component of PM AASHA is the Market Intervention Scheme (MIS) meant for perishable agricultural commodities such as tomato, onion and potato, known as TOP crops not covered under MSP. This scheme will immensely benefit the farmers growing these price-sensitive crops and consumers. The scheme is implemented at the request of the state/UT government when there is a reduction of prices in the market by at least 10 per cent over the rates of the previous normal season in the states/UTs, the statement said.

Under MIS, in place of physical procurement, states may have an option to make a differential payment between the market

intervention price and selling price, subject to coverage of 25 per cent of the production of crops and a maximum price difference up to 25 per cent of MIP. Further, in the case of TOP crops, where there is a price difference between the production and consuming states, in the interest of the farmers, the operational costs incurred by Central nodal agencies (CNAs) like NAFED and NCCF in storing and transporting crops from producing states to other consuming states will be reimbursed by the government, the statement said.

Moreover, there is a price disparity in these crops - prices are very low in producing states in contrast to very high prices in consuming states. This scheme will therefore play a critical role in bridging the price gap and countering the effect of price volatility, the statement added.

# 17.80 lakh new employees enrolled under ESIC in October, a 3 pc growth

AGENCIES  
NEW DELHI, DEC 18



As many as 17.80 lakh new employees were enrolled under the Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) scheme during October this year, the Ministry of Labour and Employment said on Wednesday.

The year-on-year analysis showed a growth of 3 per cent in net registrations compared to October last year.

The data showed that out of the total 17.80 lakh employees added during the month, 8.50 lakh employees amounting to around 47.75 per cent of the total registrations belonged to the age group of up to 25 years.

According to the Labour Ministry, 21,588 new establishments have been brought under the social security ambit of the ESIC Scheme in October, thus ensuring social security to more workers.

The gender-wise analy-

sis of the payroll data indicated that the net enrolment of female members was 3.52 lakh in October. Besides, a total of 42 transgender employees also got registered under ESIC Scheme, "which attests the commitment of ESIC to deliver its benefits to every section of the society," said the ministry, adding that the payroll data is provisional since the data generation is a continuous exercise.

Meanwhile, 20.58 lakh new employees were enrolled under the ESIC scheme during September, reflecting the higher number of jobs being created in the organised sector of the Indian economy. The government is also working on converging the ESIC with Ayush-

man Bharat- Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY).

The move will extend medical care benefits under the flagship programme to 14.43 crore ESIC beneficiaries. Once rolled out, the initiative will enable ESIC beneficiaries to avail of secondary and tertiary medical services at over 30,000 AB-PMJAY-empowered hospitals nationwide.

The benefits can be availed "with no financial ceilings on treatment costs."

The ESIC Scheme currently offers medical care under 165 hospitals, 1,590 dispensaries, 105 dispensary-cum-branch-offices (DCBOs), and around 2,900 empanelled private hospitals.

# Harnessing power of technology crucial to driving inclusive growth in India: Jeet Adani

AGENCIES  
MUMBAI, DEC 17

For a developing nation like India, harnessing the power of technology is crucial to driving inclusive growth, improving governance and tackling the long-standing challenges in areas like education, healthcare and financial inclusion, ensuring that technology benefits all segments of society, Jeet Adani, Director of Adani Airport Holdings Ltd (AAHL), said on Tuesday.

Delivering the keynote address at IIT Bombay's "Techfest" event, Jeet Adani said that India has already made significant strides in digital services with initiatives like Digital India,

which promotes internet connectivity, online services and digital literacy across the country - and these achievements are all rooted in the beneficial use of technology.

"India is in overdrive in many sectors. UPI, which we are all familiar with, is such a hit that other nations are coming to us asking for our advice. India does about 180 billion cashless transactions a year - and this is a far bigger number than every advanced economy out there, whether it is the US or the UK or Singapore or any of the developed countries in Europe," he emphasised.

In 2014, India's GDP was \$1.85 trillion - and it had

been built up over 66 years of independence.

"In the past decade, that number has more than doubled. While this growth is great news and we are also building the basic infrastructure India needs, the power-up our nation desperately needs to catch up with the developed world is high-end technology," he noted.

According to Jeet Adani, the Adani Group has also adopted a 'digital first' approach across its companies.

"In the ports and logistics sector, where we are one of the world's largest players, we use simulation-based training for complex roles - like crane operators and wharf checkers - to



exponentially enhance workplace safety and operational efficiency," he informed.

In the airports sector, where the company manages seven international airports and is building a new international airport

in Navi Mumbai, "we have placed our bets on technology to help us plan better and also improve operational efficiency all around".

In 2016, the company completed the 648 MW Kamuthi solar plant in

Tamil Nadu and it was then the world's largest single-site solar power project.

"Today, we are building another renewable energy plant - in Khavda, in western Gujarat. If you thought Kamuthi was big, this is super-massive, to say the least! It is more than 5 times the size of Paris - and when completed, it will generate 30 GW of clean energy, making it the world's largest man-made source of power - bigger than thermal, bigger than nuclear, bigger than even hydropower," said Jeet Adani.

"In Khavda, the beneficial use of technology is letting us add around 25 MW every single day - that

is almost 10 times what we were adding every day in Kamuthi - that is like building a Kamuthi every month!", he told the gathering.

The Adani Skill Development Centre runs Saksham, a great example of leveraging technology for social good. Using advanced training methods by integrating AI, Virtual Reality and simulation-based learning, Saksham provides access to high-quality skill development, allowing thousands of Indians from very diverse socio-economic backgrounds to achieve their aspirations.

"In another project called SuPoshan, a mobile-based application is used

to input screening data of children, adolescents and women. The app helps the village-level health volunteers to identify the status of undernutrition among the targeted beneficiaries and supports us in planning the course of action, helping track data in real time, remotely," said Jeet Adani.

All these instances show that the beneficial use of technology can truly be a powerful force for societal upliftment and economic growth, he said, stressing that as the scope and power of technology grows, "we must be careful not to let the harmful use of technology overshadow the beneficial use of technology".

# December 18: Indian stock market opens flat ahead of US Fed rate decision

AGENCIES  
MUMBAI, DEC 18

The Indian stock market opened flat on Wednesday as investors await the US Federal Reserve's interest rate decision.

At around 9:33 am, Sensex was trading at 80,651.44 after declining 33.01 points or 0.04 per cent, while the Nifty was trading at 24,328.75 after declining 7.25 points or 0.03 per cent.

The market trend remained negative. On the National Stock Exchange (NSE), 882 stocks were trading in green, while 1,306 stocks were in red.

The focus of global markets will be the Fed decision on Wednesday (US time). A 25 bp rate cut is priced-in by the market.

"The attention will be on the Fed commentary. A significant trend in the Indian market is the out-performance of the broader market where good results are getting appreciated by the market and



there is no concern of FII selling," said experts.

Nifty Bank was down 152.85 points or 0.29 per cent at 52,681.95. Nifty Midcap 100 index was trading at 58,900.55 after dropping 201.35 points or 0.34 per cent. Nifty Smallcap 100 index was at 19,346.40 after dropping 52.05 points or 0.27 per cent. In the Sensex pack, Tata Motors, Power Grid, L&T, Maruti, ICICI Bank, IndusInd Bank, UltraTech Cement, SBI and NTPC were the top losers. Sun Pharma, HCLTech, Tech Mahindra, TCS, ITC, Bharti Airtel and M&M were the top gainers.

In the Asian markets,

except Japan and Bangkok, the markets of China, Hong Kong, Seoul and Jakarta were trading in green.

In US stock markets, the Nasdaq Composite and S&P 500 ended 0.32 per cent and 0.39 per cent lower respectively and Dow Jones Industrial Average ended 0.61 per cent down in the previous trading session.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) sold equities worth Rs 6,409.86 crore in India on December 17, while domestic institutional investors bought equities worth Rs 2,706.48 crore on the same day.

# Real estate investments in India reach historic high at \$8.9 billion in 2024: JLL

AGENCIES  
MUMBAI, DEC 18

Driven by strong growth and political stability, real estate institutional investments in India reached historic high levels at \$8.9 billion across 78 deals in 2024, surpassing the previous 2007 record by 6 per cent (\$8.4 billion), a report showed on Wednesday.

This represents a substantial 51 per cent increase (to date) from the previous year's \$5.8 billion. Also, deal activity intensified, and the year saw an increase in the number of deals by 47 per cent, according to the report by JLL, a leading global commercial real estate and investment management company.

Foreign institutional investors accounted for 63 per cent of total investments, while domestic investors contributed 37 per cent.

Additionally, 2024 saw a total of \$2.4 billion in platform commitments. These funds are earmarked for gradual investment over



the coming 3-5 years, the report noted.

Government efforts to enhance transparency and accountability in real estate have given a boost to investor confidence in the last few years.

Qualified institutional placements (QIPs) emerged as a significant funding source, raising

USD 2.7 billion for the real estate sector.

Real estate investment trusts (REITs) in India have seen a substantial surge in activity recently. Their investments in 2024 reached nearly \$800 million, marking a more than threefold increase from 2023 levels.

"Strong growth, politi-

cal stability, and diverse investment opportunities positioned India favourably in the global economic context.

The real estate sector has seen a surge in institutional investments. Along with platform commitments, 2024 will see investor interest cross the \$11 billion mark," said

Lata Pillai, senior managing director and head of capital markets, India, JLL.

The year witnessed the residential sector with the highest amount of investments at 45 per cent share of the total investments, followed by office at 28 per cent.

"The residential sector has emerged as a stand-out performer, attracting more than \$4 billion across 49 deals, marking a 4-fold increase from the previous year and outpacing the office sector by 63% in transaction volume," said Dr Samantak Das, chief economist and head of research and REIS, India, JLL.

Emerging asset classes such as data centres, student housing, life sciences, and healthcare are gaining traction, reflecting investors' appetite for diversification and alignment with evolving market dynamics.

In 2025, the Indian real estate market is poised for further growth and diversification, said the report.

# Mobile data cost drops over 96 pc in 10 years, broadband speed up 72 pc: Centre

AGENCIES  
NEW DELHI, DEC 18

The cost of mobile data has reduced drastically from Rs 269 per GB (in March 2014) to Rs. 9.08 per GB now which is a massive 96.6 per cent decrease, the Parliament was informed on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, the median

mobile broadband speed increased from 1.30 Mbps in March 2014 to 95.67 Mbps (as of October)

which is up almost 72 per cent, Union Minister for Communications, Jyotiraditya Scindia, said in a statement in the Lok Sabha.

"The average wireless usage of data per subscriber has increased to

22.24 GB per subscriber per month," he informed.

As of October, the number of 4G Base Transceiver Stations (BTS) have reached 24,96,644, spread across 783 districts.

"India has seen the fastest rollout of 5G services in the world with 4,62,084 BTS deployed across 779 districts," according to the



minister. Last month, the country

climbed up 11 slots in the latest 'Network Readiness Index 2024' (NRI 2024), and is now placed at 49th rank globally.

India not only improved its ranking but also improved its score from 49.93 in 2023 to 53.63 in 2024, according to the index published by the Portulans Institute, an

independent non-profit research and educational institute based in Washington, DC.

The country currently leads in several indicators like AI, FTTH Internet Subscriptions and Mobile Broadband Internet Traffic, among others, according to the Ministry of Communications.

Over the past decade, tele-density increased from 75.2 per cent to 84.69 per cent, and wireless connections reached 119 crore. Furthermore, India launched 5G services in 2022, rapidly improving its global mobile broadband speed ranking from 118 to 15.

According to the latest

Ericsson Mobility Report, 5G subscriptions in India are projected to reach around 970 million by the end of 2030, accounting for 74 per cent of mobile subscriptions.

India has the highest average monthly usage per smartphone at 32 GB, which is expected to grow to 66 GB by 2030.

# R Ashwin retires from international cricket with immediate effect

AGENCIES  
BRISBANE, DEC 18

Veteran off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin has announced his retirement from international cricket with immediate effect. Ashwin revealed his decision at the end of the third Border-Gavaskar Trophy Test in Brisbane, which ended in a draw due to rain.

"This will be my last day as an Indian cricketer in all formats at the international level. I do feel there's a bit of punch left in me as a cricketer, but I would like to expose and probably showcase that in club level cricket, but this will be the last day. I've had a lot of fun.

"I must say I've created a lot of memories alongside Rohit and several of my other teammates, even though I've lost some of them over the last few years. We are the last bunch of OGs, if you can say that, left out of the dressing room. I'd be marking this as my date of having played at this level," said Ashwin in the



post-match press conference.

Ashwin ends his career with 537 wickets at an average of 24 in 106 Tests and becoming India's second leading wicket-taker after legendary leg-spinner Anil Kumble. He also scored six Test centuries and 14 fifties with the bat. His last international game was the day-night Test in Adelaide,

where he took 1-53.

His retirement announcement looked imminent once TV visuals showed an emotional Ashwin being given a hug by Virat Kohli on the balcony of the dressing room during the rain delay. Ashwin also played 116 ODIs for India, taking 156 wickets, and being a member of 2011 ODI World

Cup and 2013 Champions Trophy winning teams.

Ashwin also played 65 T20I matches and took 72 wickets. "Obviously, there are a lot of people to thank, but I would be failing in my duties if I didn't thank the BCCI and fellow teammates, several of them. I want to name a few of them.

"All the coaches who've been a part of the journey, most importantly, Rohit, Virat (Kohli), Ajinkya (Rahane), (Cheteshwar) Pujara, who've taken those spending catches around the back to give me the number of wickets I've managed to get over the years. Also, a big thank you to the Australian cricket team, who've been very fierce competitors. I've enjoyed my time playing against them," added Ashwin.

In Tests, Ashwin was one of the big figures in the Indian team's 12-year long home domination and played a starring role in the 2020/21 Border-Gavaskar Trophy win in Australia. Ashwin was one of 11 allrounders to clinch

the double of 3000 runs and 300 wickets in Tests. He also won a record 11 Player-of-the-Series awards, level with Muthiah Muralitharan.

"I think it's already getting long. I wouldn't be taking any questions, but it's truly a very emotional moment. I don't think I'm in a position where I would be answering the questions in the right way, so please pardon me for that. Once again, that's my time.

"Thanks for being the journalist that you've been, writing good things and, of course, writing nasty things on occasions. That's a relationship I think we would maintain forever. I hope the cricketers to come in the future will also get the same amount of love that you've given them.

"Once again, thank you all. See you all soon. As a cricketer, I've just stopped it. I might go on to be involved with the game because this is a game that's given me everything. Thank you," concluded Ashwin.

## Root comes back on top of Test batters rankings; Hosein new number one T20I bowler

AGENCIES  
DUBAI, DEC 18

England's premier batter Joe Root has made a return as the top-ranked Test batter in the ICC Rankings. Root, who made scores of 32 and 54 during the third Test against New Zealand in Hamilton, replaces his compatriot Harry Brook, who spent just one week as number one in the standings.

As per the latest update to the rankings, Root is now at 895 rating points, which is 19 points above Brook, who was dismissed for just zero and one as New Zealand beat England by 423 runs.

New Zealand batter Kane Williamson's scores of 44 and 156 helped him close the gap on the leading two while Tom Latham (up six places to 31st), Will Young (up 13 places to a career-best 36th), Tom Blundell (up three places to 37th) and Mitchell Santner (up 17 places to 76th) are other batter making jumps in the rankings.

New Zealand pacer Matt Henry's dominance over Zak Crawley has been a highlight as he dismissed the England opener in all six innings of the series,



while reaching a career-best ranking of third that he first attained in June 2021. He has also been a top 10 bowler in white-ball formats - achieving a career-high ninth position in ODIs and sixth in T20Is.

Meanwhile, in the T20I Rankings, West Indies' left-arm spinner Akeal Hosein's haul of 2-13 against Bangladesh in Kingstown has lifted him three places to being the new number one ranked bowler in the shortest format.

He replaces England's Adil Rashid, who had been number one for a year - having taken over the top spot on December 14, 2023. Bangladesh spinner Mahedi Hasan has jumped a whopping 18 places to be at 23rd place in rankings for T20I bowlers.

South Africa batter Reeza Hendricks is back into the top 10 after notching a century against Pakistan in Centurion, and is at ninth place. West Indies' Rovman Powell (up 10 spots to equal 22nd), his team-mate Johnson Charles (up six places to 19th), and Pakistan's Babar Azam (up one spot to sixth) have also moved up in the batting rankings.

## Maharaj, Mulder picked in SA Test squad against Pakistan despite injuries

AGENCIES  
NEW DELHI, DEC 18

Keshav Maharaj and Wiaan Mulder have been included in South Africa's Test squad for the upcoming series against Pakistan, starting on December 26 in Centurion, despite being on varied stages of their respective injuries.

Maharaj sustained an acute groin strain on Tuesday during warm-ups ahead of the first ODI against Pakistan at Boland Park in Paarl. Cricket South Africa (CSA) said Maharaj will undergo a scan on Wednesday to determine the severity of the injury.

Mulder's inclusion comes as he completed the final phase of his recovery from a fractured right middle finger, which kept him out of the second Test against Sri Lanka. If Mulder is selected for the first Test, CSA said batter Matthew Breetzke will be released from the squad.

Seamer Corbin Bosch, 30, has earned his maiden call-up to the Test side. Bosch has been in fine form in first-class cricket, picking an overall tally of 72 wickets at an average of 36.75 and an economy rate of 3.24 across 34 matches.



He also averages over 40 with the bat, showcasing his all-round ability. Bosch recently featured in the SA Invitational XI side that defeated England Lions in Cape Town, where he took 1-21. Joining him in the squad is uncapped seamer Kwena Maphaka, who was part of the squad for the second Test against Sri Lanka.

"In terms of our own squad, we have added Corbin to the mix. His all-round ability with both bat and ball adds depth and his pace brings an extra bite to our attack, so we're excited to see him make that step up to Test

cricket.

"Dane Paterson really impressed us against Sri Lanka and we look forward to seeing him again. Overall, the pace attack is a really good one. We are keeping a close eye on Kesh (Keshav Maharaj) and hope his injury is not too serious," said head coach Shukri Conrad.

After facing Pakistan at SuperSport Park in the Boxing Day Test, South Africa will face off against them in the New Year's Test at Cape Town. South Africa just need one more win to guarantee their place in next year's World Test Championship (WTC)

final, whose tally they are currently leading.

"We head into this series with a clear focus, with a spot in the World Test Championship Final being the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. We've selected a squad which gives us the best chance to achieve that.

"It's an exciting time for South African cricket, and we're particularly looking forward to this battle against Pakistan. They always pose a strong threat with the talented fast bowlers they produce, and I expect it to be no different this time around.

"A lot of the batters stood up when they were needed against Sri Lanka, and this is another opportunity for all of them to showcase what they can do against a good Pakistan bowling attack," added Conrad.

South Africa Test squad: Temba Bavuma (captain), David Bedingham, Corbin Bosch, Matthew Breetzke, Tony de Zorzi, Marco Jansen, Keshav Maharaj, Kwena Maphaka, Aiden Markram, Wiaan Mulder, Senuran Muthusamy, Dane Paterson, Kagiso Rabada, Ryan Rickelton, Tristan Stubbs, Kyle Verreynne (wk)

## Your legacy will inspire one and all, says Tendulkar on Ashwin's retirement

AGENCIES  
NEW DELHI, DEC 18

Legendary India batter Sachin Tendulkar said the legacy of retired off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin will continue to inspire one and all while expressing his admiration for how the Chennai-based cricketer approached the game with mind and heart in perfect sync. Ashwin, 38, announced his decision to retire from international cricket with immediate effect after India's third Test against Australia, a game he was not selected for, ended in a draw at the Gabba, Brisbane.

"Ashwin, I've always admired how you approached the game with your mind and heart in perfect sync. From perfecting the carrom ball to contributing crucial runs, you always found a way to win."

"Watching you grow from a promising talent to one of India's finest match-winners has been wonderful. Your journey shows that true greatness lies in never being afraid to experiment and evolve. Your legacy will inspire one and all. Wishing you all the very best for your 2nd innings," wrote Ten-



dulkar in his post on 'X'.

Ashwin ends his 14-year international career with 537 wickets at an average of 24 in 106 Tests and becoming India's second leading wicket-taker after legendary leg-spinner Anil Kumble, including an incredible 37 five-wicket hauls in Tests, the second-most in the history of the game, along with eight ten-wicket hauls.

Roger Binny, BCCI President, also paid tribute to Ashwin's stellar international career. "Ashwin's brilliance has been a cornerstone of Indian cricket's success over the years. From being a prodigious talent to becoming one of the greatest off-spinners in cricketing history, his achievements are a source of immense pride."

"He redefined spin bowling and always sought to stay ahead of the curve. Ashwin is a perfect role model for young cricketers. I thank him for his invaluable contributions to Indian cricket."

Ashwin also scored six Test centuries and 14 fifties with the bat. His last international game was the day-night Test against Australia in Adelaide, where he took 1-53 in his 18 overs and made 29 runs with the bat, as India lost by 10 wickets. Ashwin retires with an impressive 115 Test wickets against Australia and 114 against England. Notably, he took 115 wickets in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, the second-most in the history of the contest.

"Ashwin's journey is a testament to the heights that dedication and passion can achieve. His ability to think ahead of the game has been a tremendous asset to Indian cricket. In Ashwin, we've witnessed a bowler who didn't just take wickets but dismantled batting strategies," added Rajeev Shukla, BCCI Vice-President. "His approach to the game, combined with his exceptional skills, has made him one of the most

respected cricketers of his generation. I congratulate him on an outstanding career," he said.

Ashwin also played 116 ODIs for India, taking 156 wickets, and being a member of the 2011 ODI World Cup and 2013 Champions Trophy winning teams. Ashwin also played 65 T20I matches and took 72 wickets.

Ashwin was one of 11 all-rounders to clinch the double of 3000 runs and 300 wickets in Tests. He also won a record 11 Player-of-the-Series awards, which is level with Sri Lanka's Muttiah Muralitharan.

"Ashwin has been a game-changer in every sense. Whether it was his magical spells on the field or his insightful discussions off it, he brought something truly special to Indian cricket."

"His ability to reinvent himself, develop new bowling variations, and consistently perform at the highest level makes him a true legend. His extraordinary career serves as an example for future generations of cricketers who will undoubtedly look up to him as an ideal role model," concluded BCCI acting secretary Devajit Saikia.

## PKL: Beating Haryana Steelers is a massive boost to our confidence, says UP Yodhas' Upendra Malik

AGENCIES  
PUNE, DEC 18

UP Yodhas did a world of good to their chances of qualifying for the playoffs in Season II of the Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) by Haryana Steelers, and the team's assistant coach Upendra Malik said the win gave their morale a massive boost.

In the post-match press conference, Malik offered deep insights into the team's remarkable performance and playoff aspirations.

The 31-24 victory against Haryana Steelers was UP Yodhas' seventh consecutive win and propelled them to third on the points table. After the

match, Malik was candid about the team's current form and approach.

"From the last 10-11 matches, our team has been doing very well," Malik emphasized. "Beating a team like Haryana Steelers gives us even more confidence."

Malik specifically praised Bhavani Rajput, who was instrumental in the victory with 11 crucial points.

Bhawani played an excellent game. He scored a lot of crucial points, and today he was very good for us, which helped us win."

The assistant coach revealed the team's philosophy. "Every day is a different player's day. If

Bhawani is performing today, we will support him. If Gagan is performing, we will support him," Malik explained.

With just three points separating them from securing a top-six position, Malik and the team remain focused and optimistic.

"We will absolutely try to win the next two matches. If we win these matches, we will definitely move forward," he stated confidently.

Addressing the competitive landscape, Malik noted, "No team is weak, no team is too strong. Everyone is equal. We just need to play well and execute our plans properly."

## Ashwin is undoubtedly one of the best spinners cricket has ever seen, says James Foster

AGENCIES  
NEW DELHI, DEC 18

After India's Ravichandran Ashwin bid farewell to international cricket on Wednesday, former England cricketer and coach James Foster lauded the Chennai-born spinner, terming him as "one of the best spinners of the game". Ashwin, 38, announced his retirement from international cricket with immediate effect after India's third Test against Australia, a game he was not selected for, ended in a draw at the Gabba, Brisbane.

Ashwin ended his 14-year international career with 537 wickets at an average of 24 in 106 Tests and became India's second leading wicket-taker after legendary leg-spinner Anil Kumble. He also

scored six Test centuries and 14 fifties with the bat.

His last international game was the day-night Test against Australia in Adelaide, where he took 1-53 in his 18 overs and made 29 runs with the bat, as India lost by ten wickets. Ashwin also played 116 ODIs for India, taking 156 wickets, and being a member of the teams that won the 2011 ODI World Cup and 2013 Champions Trophy. Ashwin also played 65 T20I matches and took 72 wickets.

"Ashwin is undoubtedly one of the game's greats. He is one of the best spinners cricket has ever seen. What stands out about him is his ability to continuously evolve. At the top level, players must adapt as opponents try to counteract them, whether through batting or bowling.

Ashwin consistently added new dimensions to his bowling and contributed significantly to his team, making him a top-class all-rounder. He should be incredibly proud of his achievements in Test cricket," Foster told IANS.

Ashwin's career highlights include being named ICC Men's Cricketer of the Year and Men's Test Cricketer of the Year in 2016, as well as being part of the ICC Test Team of the Decade (2011-2020). He was instrumental in India's dominance on home soil and played a starring role in the historic 2020/21 Border-Gavaskar Trophy victory in Australia. Ashwin's prowess was not limited to red-ball cricket, he also excelled in white-ball formats, taking 156 wickets in 116 ODIs and 72 scalps in 65 T20Is. A key member of

India's 2011 World Cup and 2013 Champions Trophy-winning squads, Ashwin's versatility and cricketing intelligence set him apart.

Foster, a veteran of the game himself, spoke candidly about his experiences in cricket, including his current stint coaching in the Lanka T10 Super League with the Jaffna Titans franchise. "It's been a very enjoyable week and a half here. This franchise has been fantastic to work for - it's well-run from top to bottom, and we're having a lot of fun," Foster said.

"The key with T10, given its short format, is creating a comfortable environment for the players. You have to bond players quickly, sometimes within a day or two, and in some cases, players might join on the match day itself.

## Satish Sharma reviews progress on RDD works in Chhamb constituency

JINNEWSERVICE  
JAMMU, DECEMBER 18

Minister for FCS&CA, Transport, YS&S, IT, S&T and ARI & Trainings, Satish Sharma, chaired a meeting of concerned officers to review the physical and financial progress on developmental works being executed by Rural Development Department in Chhamb constituency under different schemes,

The meeting focused on evaluating the progress and impact of ongoing projects in the constituency being executed under RDD schemes.

During the review, the Minister, who is also the MLA from Chhamb constituency, had a comprehensive assessment of various aspects of the RDD sector including implementation of MGNREGA, PMAY-G, Capex, rural sanitation and allied



programmes.

Satish Sharma emphasized transparency and accountability as central principles in RDD sector projects. He reviewed the status of RDD development works being executed across all blocks including Chowki Choura, Maira Mandrian, Samwan, Khara Balli and Khour. He laid stress on convergence with other departments in building community developmental assets.

Highlighting the impor-

tance of MGNREGA in socio-economic empowerment of rural areas, the Minister exhorted upon the concerned officers to facilitate smooth and effective execution of all development works being done under this ambitious scheme. He asked the officials to focus on employment generation and skill development as core aspects of RDD's mission.

Satish Sharma directed the ACD to focus on completion of pending works

besides expediting the tendering process and monitoring of departmental works on regular basis.

The Minister asked the BDOs to ensure completion of CAPEX works being executed under 2024-25 projects within the specific timeframe to avoid lapse of funds.

Earlier, Assistant Commissioner Development Jammu, Dr. Vikas Sharma, apprised the Minister of current status of different works being implemented by RDD in Chhamb constituency.

The meeting was attended by ACP Jammu, Executive Engineer REW, BDOs of Chowki Choura, Maira Mandrian, Samwan, Khour and Khara Balli along with other RDD officials.

## Commissioner JMC takes stock of developmental, Sanitation scenario in Jammu South

JINNEWSERVICE  
JAMMU, DECEMBER 18

Commissioner Jammu Municipal Corporation (JMC) Dr. Devansh Yadav today conducted a whirlwind tour of the Jammu South area to take stock of developmental and sanitation activities being carried out in the area by the Jammu Municipal Corporation. During the tour, the Commissioner visited various areas, including Trikuta Nagar and Khorana Marble Chowk and assessed the status of roads, lanes, drains, and waste management initiatives.

At Trikuta Nagar (Ward No. 52), the Commissioner began his inspection by closely examining the condition of the local lanes and drainage systems. He expressed concern over the clogged drains and directed the concerned authorities to prioritize



the cleaning of the same for free flow of water. He emphasized the importance of maintaining a proper drainage system to prevent waterlogging and ensure the safety and convenience of the residents. He also cautioned the local residents about the harmful practice of washing vehicles on blacktopped roads, urging them to refrain from doing so as it causes significant damage to the road surfaces. "The potholes in the drains should be filled promptly to avoid any disruptions in traffic flow and ensure smooth vehicular movement," he added.

At Khorana Marble Chowk, Dr. Yadav continued his inspection of the drainage infrastructure. He directed the concerned departments to clean debris and waste from deep drains thoroughly and undertake necessary construction work to restore their proper functioning.

Highlighting the importance of community participation, the Commissioner urged the residents to actively participate in keeping their surroundings neat and clean and cooperate with municipal authorities in their efforts to improve the infrastruc-

ture and sanitation in Jammu South.

Responding to the demands of locals regarding the construction of lanes and drains, particularly in areas where such infrastructure was either underdeveloped or in poor condition, the Commissioner said that their genuine grievances would be looked into, and necessary actions would be taken to resolve the issues at the earliest.

Among others, Deputy Commissioner (South) Lal Chand, Secretary, Chand Singh, Joint Commissioner (W) Firdous Ahmad Qazi, Health Officer, Dr Vinod Sharma, MVO, Dr Divya Sharma, AFO, Rabia Khan, Executive Engineer Lokesh Gupta, Executive Engineer (E) Simarpal Singh and other senior officers of Jammu Municipal Corporation accompanied the Commissioner during the tour.

## Sankalp Hub G'bl generates awareness on Women-centric schemes in a Camp held at Wakura

JINNEWSERVICE  
GANDERBAL, DECEMBER 18

Sankalp Hub for Empowerment of Women, under the Department of Social Welfare, organized an awareness camp at Wakura, Ganderbal, to educate women about various welfare initiatives aimed at their empowerment.

The event focused on key women-centric schemes and provisions under the POSH Act and SHE-Box initiative, conducted in collaboration with the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM).

During the camp, participants were informed about schemes like the Sukanya Samridhi Yojana (SSY), which promotes savings for a girl child's education and marriage, and the Tejaswini scheme,



designed to encourage women entrepreneurs. The State Marriage Assistance scheme and Sponsorship scheme were also highlighted, offering financial aid to economically weaker families and vulnerable children, respectively.

Additionally, the Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) and Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) were discussed, focusing on maternal health and institutional deliveries. The Integrated Dairy Development scheme (IDDS) was also briefed about, which promotes sustainable dairy farm-

ing by providing subsidies for setting up dairy units, purchasing milch animals, and processing infrastructure. It aims to enhance milk production, generate self-employment, and improve rural livelihoods, especially for women. The camp emphasized the role of these initiatives in empowering women, fostering entrepreneurship, and ensuring financial and social security. The event was well-received and showcased the commitment of the Department of Social Welfare and Sankalp Hub to uplift women and enhance their socio-economic status in the region.

## RTO Kathua conducts intensive vehicle checking drive, issues 193 challans

JINNEWSERVICE  
KATHUA, DECEMBER 18

The enforcement team of RTO Kathua conducted an extensive vehicle inspection drive, here the other day. The drive covered NHW Lakhanpur and several other routes across the district.

During the operation, a total of 530 vehicles were checked, out of which 193 were challaned for different traffic violations.

Besides, five buses, one maxicab, one load carrier and one three-wheeler were seized for operating without valid documents. The total fine collected through e-challans amounted to Rs 12,47,600.

While conducting the inspections, drivers were educated about essential road safety measures, including the importance of carrying valid vehicle documents, avoiding over-speeding and refraining from using mobile phones while driving—common



causes of road accidents.

ARTO Kathua urged drivers and vehicle owners to wear crash helmets and seat belts while driving two-wheelers and four-wheelers, respectively. He also instructed private and commercial vehicle owners to avoid wrong parking, particularly in congested areas like Kathua town and outside GMC Kathua, where improper parking obstructs ambulances and other emergency vehicles trans-

porting patients.

The public was further encouraged to adhere to traffic rules to reduce road accidents and safeguard human lives.

The Drive was conducted on the directions of Transport Commissioner J&K, Vishesh Paul Mahajan, and under the supervision of RTO Jammu/Kathua Pankaj Bhagotra,

The checking drive was led by ARTO Kathua Shammi Kumar, along with MVIs Surinder Kumar, Jatinder Singh, Rakesh Kumar, SMVIs Neeraj Kumar, Rajan Verma, ASMVI S.K. Rana, and MVTAs.

## DC inspects developmental works, addresses public grievances in downtown Doda

JINNEWSERVICE  
DODA, DECEMBER 18

Deputy Commissioner (DC) Harvinder Singh on Wednesday conducted a comprehensive visit to the downtown area of Doda to assess the progress of the ongoing developmental projects and engage with the local populace to address their grievances.

During the visit, DC Harvinder Singh inspected key infrastructural works, including the multi-storey car parking project, renovation of the drainage system at the old bus stand, and the shopping complex. He issued specific directions for speeding up the execution of these projects and ensuring their timely completion.

Emphasizing effective traffic management, he directed the concerned officers to operationalize the ground floor of the under-construction multi-storey car parking to reduce congestion in the town. He also interacted with shopkeepers in the vicinity, urging their cooperation in maintaining smooth traffic flow and orderly parking practices.

Accompanied by a team of officials, including ACR



Sunil Bhutyal; Executive Engineer PWD Sajjad Ahmed; Executive Engineer PDD Rouf Batt and Dy. SP Traffic KD Singh, the DC inspected the ongoing waste management efforts in the town. He directed the waste management team to implement sustainable solutions for the disposal of solid, liquid, and market waste. During his visit to the

Later, he inspected the Material Recovery Facility (MRF) center operated by the MC at Akramabad. He emphasized the need for optimal waste utilization and proper functioning of

the center. At the truck terminal in Akramabad, DC Harvinder Singh instructed officials to maintain cleanliness and ensure the smooth functioning of the facility.

The DC also inspected the slaughterhouse near DPL Doda and directed the municipal authorities to ensure its proper sanitation, water supply, and cleanliness of the nearby drainage (nallah). He stressed the need to avoid illegal parking in the vicinity and maintain hygienic conditions. Additionally, he instructed the PDD officials to remove unsym-

metrical electric poles obstructing roads and directed the constructing agency of the multi-storey car parking project to install foot tiles around the parking area for public convenience.

While addressing public grievances, DC Harvinder Singh emphasized strict enforcement against wrong parking and encroachments by shopkeepers storing goods on the roadsides. He reiterated the importance of ensuring a clean and organized town, urging all stakeholders, including traffic management, municipal authorities, and residents, to cooperate in the town's sustainable development. The visit highlighted the administration's commitment to addressing civic issues, expediting developmental works, and improving the overall infrastructure and living standards in Doda.



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District Employment & Counselling Centre,  
Model Career Centre, Jammu



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