



Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Mohsin Naqvi has reiterated that the women's team will not travel to India for the ICC Women's World Cup 2025. While India hold the hosting rights for the prestigious

PAGE 08 | SPORTS

With food scarce in the besieged and war-battered Gaza Strip, some desperate families have turned to eating sea turtles as a rare source of protein. Once the shell has been removed, the meat is cut up, boiled and cooked in a mix of onion, pepper, tomato and spices. "The children were afraid of the turtle, and we told them it tasted as delicious as

PAGE 02 | WORLD

kashmirreader.com

facebook.com/KashmirReader

@Kashmir\_Reader

+Kashmirreader

Published from Srinagar

## Soldier Injured After Tree Falls On Bunker

Srinagar, Apr 19: A CRPF personnel was injured on Saturday after a tree fell on a bunker and gate near Amar Singh Club in Srinagar.

An official said that a tree, which was uprooted due to strong winds, crashed onto the CRPF installation, resulting in injuries to one jawan.

He was immediately shifted to a

## 3 drug peddlers held with 22 gm heroin

Jammu, Apr 19: Three alleged drug smugglers including two residents of Delhi were arrested along with 22 grams of heroin worth lakhs in Jammu and Kashmir's Udhampur district on Saturday, police said.

Another drug peddler was booked under the stringent Prevention of Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (PIT-NDPS) Act in the

# Will not allow 'conflict entrepreneurs' to raise their heads again: LG

Srinagar, Apr 19: Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Saturday said that spilling the blood of innocents had become the biggest business for the "masters of terror" and "conflict entrepreneurs" in the Union Territory as he vowed not to allow them to raise their heads again.

Sinha said that in the last five years, police, security forces and administration, with the support of the people, have succeeded to a large extent in taking J-K out of that phase, but there is still a long way to go.

"I want to say this with responsibility that murdering innocents had become the biggest business for the masters of terror and conflict entrepreneurs. Conflict entrepreneurs had created a huge ecosystem around terror (in J-K), the LG said addressing an event here.

"There are still some conflict entrepreneurs who are trying to be active, but I assure you that no such person will be allowed to

# Heavy Rains Drench Valley, Hit Normal Life

Flight Operations Hit, Some Roads Closed Amid Snowfall; Hailstorm Damages Orchards In South Kashmir

Srinagar, Apr 19: A few areas in the higher reaches of Kashmir received fresh snow while rain lashed the other parts, including the plains, of the valley on Saturday, officials said.

Tulail and Gurez in Bandipora district of north Kashmir and Sinthan Top in south Kashmir received fresh overnight snow.

While the Jammu-Srinagar highway remained open for traffic, other roads, including Srinagar-Sonamarg-Gumuri (SSG) road that connects Srinagar to Leh, Bandipora-Gurez road in north Kashmir, Mughal road which connects south Kashmir with Pir Panjal region of Jammu division, Sinthan road that connects Anantnag with Kishtwar are temporarily closed due to snow accumulation.

Officials said traffic on these roads will be allowed after getting green signal from road maintenance agencies as per advisory.

Amid inclement weather conditions, authorities in Bandipora district suspended classwork up to Class VIII



in Tulail and up to Class 5th in Tehsil Gurez on Saturday as a precautionary measure to ensure the safety of students.

In Kashmir several districts received significant precipitation, with tourist resort of Gulmarg recording the highest rainfall.

According to the data from the Meteorological Department, Gulmarg in north Kashmir received

35.2 mm of rain, followed closely by Kokarnag in south Kashmir with 33.2 mm, Kupwara 20 mm, and Qazigund at 27.4 mm. Srinagar, the summer capital, recorded 18.3

mm of rainfall.

In Jammu division, Batote received 15.4 mm of rain- the highest in the region. MeT said the Jammu and Kashmir is likely to experience widespread light to moderate rain and thunderstorms over the next 24 hours. During this period isolated areas may witness heavy rainfall accompanied by thunderstorms and gusty winds reaching speeds of 50-60 kmph. The weather is expected to improve gradually with a significant decrease in precipitation from the evening of April 20 onwards.

The downpour brought a significant

Div Com assesses restoration of essential services

## No flood threat in Valley: I&FC



Srinagar, April 19: Respond immediately to distress calls if any, monitor the emergent situation on ground following incessant rains, gusty winds & hailstorm, and activate control rooms for effective assessment & response, directed. Divisional Commissioner (Div Com) Kashmir, Vijay Kumar Bidhuri to Deputy Commissioners & officers while chairing an emergency meeting, here today.

Div Com convened

## Govt committed to fostering business-friendly environment: Omar

Jammu, Apr 19: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Saturday reiterated his government's commitment to fostering a business-friendly environment and streamlining regulatory frameworks across various sectors in the Union Territory.

He was addressing a high-level meeting convened here to review the progress on compliance reduction and deregulation under the Ease of Doing Business (EoDB) framework aimed at making the regulatory environment more conducive for businesses.

The meeting was part of the national initiative led by the Union cabinet secretariat in collaboration with key institutions including the PMO, NITI Aayog, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) and the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME), an official spokesman said.



The initiative focuses on eliminating redundant regulations, reducing compliance burdens, particularly for MSMEs, promoting digitisation and single-window clearances, and decriminalising business laws wherever necessary.

Instructing all officers to break down the identified action plans - most of which have timelines of five to six months - into smaller, achievable deliverables on a fortnightly basis, Abdullah emphasised the need to track progress closely and examine reasons for any delays.

He directed that finalised action plans be promptly uploaded on the MIS portal and that implementation should begin without delay.

Stressing the importance of accountability, Abdullah laid down a review mechanism under which the progress of reforms will be evaluated every two months.

## Three engineers arrested as ACB files FIR in dredging project

Srinagar, Apr 19: Anti Corruption Bureau has unearthed a major corruption in the dredging of the flood spill channel of the Hokersar wetland- a Ramsar-designated wetland of international importance on Srinagar outskirts.

The dredging project was initiated to enhance the flood-carrying capacity of the spill channel in the aftermath of the devastating 2014 floods, aiming to mitigate future flood risks in Srinagar. Known as

the "Queen of Wetlands," Hokersar plays a critical ecological role and is home to numerous migratory bird species.

The ACB, acting on credible inputs, conducted a joint surprise check that revealed serious irregularities and professional misconduct in the execution of the project. Following the investigation, an FIR was registered, and three officials—two Executive Engineers and the then Assistant Executive Engineer of

## JKRLM Engages OMPLIS Kudumbashree NRO To Bolster Institutional Support

CS Takes Stock Of Proposals Put Forth By These National Organizations

Jammu, April 19: In a significant stride towards strengthening the Jammu & Kashmir Rural Livelihoods Mission (JKRLM), Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo, chaired a high level meeting with representatives of renowned national organizations, Kudumbashree National Resource Organization (NRO) and Organisation for Management of Poverty and Livelihood Improvement Society (OMPLIS).

The agenda centered around leveraging national expertise for institutional support, training and capacity building of Self Help Groups (SHGs) across the Union Territory.



The meeting besides Principal Secretary, APD; Principal Secretary, Finance; Secretary, RDD; Secretary, Cooperatives; MD, JKRLM was attended by other concerned

officers of the department.

The Chief Secretary acknowledged the transformative role of both the organisations in their respective geographies and invited

them to extend their human resources and technical know-how to the UT. He emphasized the need for robust training of JKRLM staff and a strategic realignment of the mission to fully realize its potential in empowering women and alleviating poverty across the rural areas of the UT.

A detailed presentation by OMPLIS shed light on their impactful journey since inception in 1995, outlining how the organization has enabled thousands of women to break free from poverty. Their model, deeply rooted in financial empowerment

## Earthquake Jolts Kashmir

Srinagar, April 17: A 5.8 magnitude earthquake struck Afghanistan on Saturday afternoon, sending tremors across parts of Jammu and Kashmir and triggering panic among residents.

According to the National Centre for Seismology (NCS), the earthquake occurred at 12:17 PM IST, with its epicenter located in the Hindu Kush region of Afghanistan at a depth of 130 kilometers.

The tremors were felt in several parts of the Kashmir Valley, including Srinagar, Baramulla, Anantnag, and Kupwara. However, there were no immediate reports of casualties or damage to property.

Earthquakes originating in the Hindu Kush region are known to affect northern India, including Jammu and Kashmir, due to the region's complex tectonic activity.

More on Page 6

## Mehbooba Welcomes SC Stay On Nashik Dargah Demolition



Srinagar, Apr 19: Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) chief Mehbooba Mufti on Saturday welcomed the Supreme Court's stay on demolition of Hazrat Saatpeer Sayed Baba Dargah in Nashik and said judiciary remains the last and most critical institution capable of upholding the secular spirit of the Constitution.

"The Supreme Court's stay on the demolition of the Nashik Dargah, a crucial

More on Page 6

## J&K's progress lies in cooperation with Central Govt: CM

KATHUA, APRIL 19: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah today reiterated that the progress and development of Jammu and Kashmir lies in cooperation between the J&K Government and the Central Government.

The Chief Minister made these remarks while jointly inaugurating a new multi-storeyed Municipal Parking Complex in Kathua, alongside

More on Page 6

## Parliamentary Panel To Visit J&K For 6 Days From April 26

Jammu, Apr 19: A Parliamentary Committee of Ministry of Home Affairs is visiting for six days to Jammu and Kashmir from April 26 to May 1. The Government appointed 15 Liaison officers for the scheduled visit.

Sources within the government said that the six days visit of Ministry of Home Affairs panel of Parliamentary Committee to Jammu and Kashmir will commence on 26th April.

Meanwhile, the Jammu and Kashmir government on Saturday issued an official order which says, in view of the upcoming visit of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs to

More on Page 6



# Gazans resort to turtle meat in hunt for food

**KHAN YUNIS:** With food scarce in the besieged and war-battered Gaza Strip, some desperate families have turned to eating sea turtles as a rare source of protein.

Once the shell has been removed, the meat is cut up, boiled and cooked in a mix of onion, pepper, tomato and spices.

"The children were afraid of the turtle, and we told them it tasted as delicious as veal," said Majida Qanan, keeping an eye on the chunks of red meat simmering in a pot over a wood fire.

"Some of them ate it, but others refused."

For lack of a better alternative, this is the third time 61-year-old Qanan has prepared a turtle-based meal for her family who were displaced and now live in a tent in Khan Yunis, southern Gaza largest city.

After 18 months of devastating war and an Israeli blockade on aid since March 2, the United Nations has warned of a dire humanitarian situation for the 2.4 million inhabitants of the Palestinian territory.

Israel has accused Hamas of diverting aid, which the Palestinian militant group denies.

The heads of 12 major aid organizations warned on Thursday that "famine is not just a risk, but likely rapidly unfolding in almost all parts" of the territory.

"There are no open crossings and there is nothing in the market," said Qanan.

"When I buy two small bags (of vegetables) for 80 shekels (\$22), there is no meat," she added.

Sea turtles are internationally protected as an endangered species, but those caught in Gaza fishermen's nets are used for food.

Qanan mixes the meat with flour and vinegar to wash it, before rinsing and boiling it in an old metal pot.

"We never expected to eat a turtle," fisherman Abdel Halim Qanan said.

"When the war started, there was a food shortage. There is no food. So (turtle meat) is an alternative for other sources of protein. There is no



meat, poultry or vegetables."

The UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has warned that Gaza is facing its most severe humanitarian crisis since the war began on October 7, 2023, triggered by Hamas's attack on Israel.

Fighting has raged in Gaza since then, pausing only twice — recently during a two-month ceasefire between January 19 and March 17, and in a previous one-week halt in late November 2023.

The World Health Organization's regional chief Hanan Balkhy said in June that some

Gazans were so desperate that they were eating animal food, grass, and drinking sewage water.

Hamas on Thursday accused Israel of using "starvation as a weapon" against Gazans by blocking aid supplies.

Fisherman Qanan said the turtles were killed in the "halal" method, in accordance with Islamic rites.

"If there was no famine, we would not eat it and leave it, but we want to compensate for the lack of protein," he said.

—Agencies

## India slams Bangladesh on Hindu leader's killing

**NEW DELHI:** Bhabesh Chandra Roy, a prominent Hindu community leader was allegedly abducted from his home and beaten to death in Dinajpur district in north Bangladesh.

India on Saturday condemned the killing of prominent Hindu community leader Bhabesh Chandra Roy in Bangladesh. "We have noted with distress the abduction and brutal killing of Shri Bhabesh Chandra Roy, a Hindu minority leader in Bangladesh. This killing follows a pattern of systematic persecution of Hindu minorities under the interim government even as the perpetrators of previous such events roam with impunity," ministry of external affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal wrote on X.

"We condemn this incident and once again remind the interim government to live up to its responsibility of protecting all minorities, including Hindus, without inventing excuses or making distinctions," the MEA spokesperson added.

Bhabesh Chandra Roy, a 58-year-old Hindu community leader was allegedly abducted from his home and beaten to death in Dinajpur district in north Bangladesh, PTI quoted local media reports.

Roy's body was recovered on Thursday night, The Daily Star said quoting police and family members. His wife Shantana said he received a phone call around 4:30 pm and claimed the call was made by the perpetrators to confirm his presence at home.

—Agencies

## KASHMIR READER EXPRESSES CONDOLENCES

Kashmir Reader expresses condolences to its senior employee, Showkat Hafiz, on the sad demise of his uncle. Chief Editor Haji Hayat Mohammad Bhat chaired a condolence meeting at the office during which the participants prayed for Jannat-ul-Firdous to the departed soul and patience to the bereaved family members, especially Showkat Hafiz. Kashmir Reader Manager Feroz Ahmad Najar also expressed condolences to Showkat Hafiz and the bereaved family.

## SAD DEMISE

With deep sorrow and heartfelt grief, we inform of the sad demise of our beloved uncle, **Abdul Rehman Hafiz**, son of Late Mohd Abdullah Hafiz, a resident of Tarabal Nawakadal Srinagar, who left for heavenly abode on Saturday after a brief illness. May Almighty Allah grant Jannat-ul-Firdous to the departed soul!

The congregational Fatiha Khawani will be offered on Tuesday, April 22, 2025, at 10:30 am at Wantipora near Ahad Zarger graveyard.

## Driving Institutional Quality

# IUST conducts workshop on NAAC reassessment under BAF

**AWANTIPORA:** In line with its commitment to institutional excellence and quality enhancement, the Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST) held a workshop to prepare for the upcoming NAAC reassessment under the Binary Accreditation Framework (BAF). Organized by the Directorate of Internal Quality Assurance (DIQA), the workshop brought together academic heads from across the University to strategize for the reassessment due in late 2025.

DIQA Director Dr. Peer Bilal Ahmad, provided a comprehensive roadmap focused on institutional strengths, actionable in-



sights, and sustainable quality practices. Dr. Farooq Hussain Bhat, Deputy Director, DIQA, highlighted the critical role of academic leadership in advancing the University's quality goals. The workshop fostered constructive dialogue, col-

lective introspection, and departmental alignment with the BAF criteria. Participants expressed strong support for the DIQA-led initiative and reaffirmed their commitment to enhancing IUST's accreditation outcomes.

## Govt calls for unified approach to earthquake risk reduction in J&K

### Pr Secy chairs review meet on 'Earthquake Risk Reduction & Management'

**JAMMU:** Principal Secretary, Department of Disaster Management, Relief, Rehabilitation & Reconstruction on Saturday chaired a review meeting regarding 'Earthquake Risk Reduction and Management in Jammu and Kashmir' here at Civil Secretariat. Experts and faculty members from various institutes including University of Kashmir, University of Jammu, NIT Srinagar, IIT Jammu, Islamic University of Science and Technology, Awantipora and representatives of Administrative Departments like Housing & Urban Development, Health & Medical Education Department, School education, Rural development department, Divisional and District management authorities and SDRF attended the meeting. The meeting had a comprehensive review of preparedness and mitigation efforts undertaken by different departments, district disaster management authorities and response forces. Since UT of Jammu and Kashmir is located in a seismically active region and is susceptible to earthquakes. Most parts of the region fall under Seismic Zone V (very high damage risk zone) and Seismic Zone IV (high damage risk zone).

"The government of J&K is committed to mitigate the damage and destruction caused by natural and man-made disasters through sustained and collective efforts by all stakeholders, maintained the Principal Secretary. The Principal Secretary took comprehensive review of preparedness measures for

earthquake risk reduction in UT of J&K being adopted by various departments and Agencies. During the meeting, experts from different institutions and universities shared their valuable insights into Earthquake hazards and its management in Jammu and Kashmir. Besides, a detailed strategy was discussed and devised for Earthquake risk reduction which included multi stakeholder participation and proactive efforts.

The Principal Secretary asked all emergency support functionaries, line departments, Divisional & District Disaster Management Authorities, SDRF, Fire & Emergency Services and other agencies to adopt a proactive approach regarding preparedness, mitigation, prompt and effective response to deal with any earthquake eventuality. He asked the officers to focus on developing earthquake management plans in every department, district and organisation besides conduct of capacity building & trainings, regular mock drills in Schools, Colleges, Hospitals, Panchayats, Airports, Government & Semi-Government, agencies and disaster-prone areas. He also directed to ensure training to the front-line workers of all the departments on regular basis with involvement of community, youth, Aapda Mitras in all the Disaster preparedness programs at Ward/ Village/ Panchayat/ Block/ Tehsil level and community level.

## Trump to recognise Russian control of Crimea as part of Ukraine peace framework

**WASHINGTON:** The Trump administration is prepared to recognise Russian control over Crimea as part of a broader peace proposal aimed at ending the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, according to a US official familiar with the framework.

The proposed concession marks a shift in American foreign policy and signals President Donald Trump's increased eagerness to secure a ceasefire.

Both Trump and secretary of state Marco Rubio have expressed readiness to abandon the administration's mediation efforts if no swift progress is achieved.

According to CNN, the peace proposal, which includes an immediate ceasefire between the two nations, was shared with European and Ukrainian officials during a meeting in Paris on April 18.

The framework, while incomplete, outlines potential measures to de-escalate the conflict and encourage negotiations.

One of the elements of the proposal is the US's reported willingness to acknowledge Crimea — annexed by Russia in 2014 following an invasion and referendum conducted under occupation — as Russian territory.

The international community has so far resisted recognising the annexation to avoid legitimising what is viewed as an illegal seizure of land by force.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has rejected any move to cede Crimea to Russia.

Speaking in Kyiv Thursday, he criticised Trump's envoy, Steve Witkoff, for allegedly displaying a pro-Russian stance.

"We will never consider



Ukrainian lands as Russian," Zelensky declared. "There can be no discussion about our territory before a ceasefire."

US secretary of state Marco Rubio and Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov have reportedly discussed the proposed framework over a call.

But Russian President Vladimir Putin has yet to agree to Trump's vision for a broad peace agreement.

Rubio, speaking in Paris, underscored the urgency of determining whether a peace settlement is achievable.

"We need to determine very quickly now, and I'm talking about a matter of days, whether or not this is doable," he told reporters before leaving Paris.

Trump echoed the sentiment, suggesting that if negotiations become too difficult, the US may walk away.

"If, for some reason, one of the two parties makes it very difficult, we're just going to say, 'You're foolish, you're foolish. You're horrible people,' and we're just going to take a pass," Trump said.

The Trump administration is also organising another meeting between their Middle East envoy

Steve Witkoff and Russian officials to seek Moscow's support for the peace framework, CNN reported.

The US plan presented in Paris proposes freezing current battle lines, relaxing sanctions on Russia if a permanent ceasefire is reached, and removing Ukraine's bid for NATO membership from negotiations — a longstanding Russian demand.

The Paris discussions involved officials from the US, France, Germany, the UK, and Ukraine.

French President Emmanuel Macron and US envoy Witkoff reportedly held private talks on the logistics of peacekeeping and ceasefire monitoring in case an agreement is reached.

The Kremlin recently ended a 30-day truce and resumed attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure.

Last week, a Russian missile strike killed 35 people in Sumy.

Despite US pressure, Kyiv has maintained that talks can only proceed if Moscow halts its attacks.

The US, along with European allies, is expected to continue consultations on the peace framework in London next week.

—Agencies

## KU's NSS organises awareness camp on women's health

**SRINAGAR:** To promote health awareness and encourage open conversations on women's health-related issues, the National Service Scheme (NSS), University of Kashmir (KU), organised a one-day awareness camp on 'Reproductive Health and Menstrual Hygiene' at Pazalpura, Shalimar, Srinagar.

The camp was aimed at educating women, particularly adolescent girls, about the importance of menstrual hygiene and reproductive health.

The initiative focused on dispelling myths and misconceptions surrounding menstruation, encouraging informed and respectful dialogue.

Participants were given demonstrations on the correct use and safe disposal of sanitary products. Free sanitary napkins were also distributed to women and girls of reproductive age.

In her message Vice Chancellor KU Prof Nilofer Khan said "At KU we remain deeply committed to addressing critical health and



social issues, particularly those impacting women's health and overall well-being. Through our sustained community engagement and awareness programmes, we aim to break stigmas, educate and empower individuals—especially women—with knowledge and support that fosters a healthier and more inclusive society."

The awareness session included an interactive Q&A segment where attendees asked questions in a supportive and respectful environment.

"The purpose of this camp was to break the si-

lence and stigma surrounding menstrual health and create awareness among women across age groups," said Dr. Waqar Amin Zargar, Coordinator, NSS, KU.

Dr. Iqra Mehraj, Medical Officer, Health Centre, KU, delivered an informative session highlighting key aspects of reproductive health, menstrual hygiene, and the importance of debunking common myths.

The programme was managed by NSS Programme Officers KU and saw enthusiastic participation from the local women of the area.

## China holds world's first humanoid robot half-marathon

**BEIJING:** China on Saturday held the world's first marathon of humanoid robots running together with human runners, showcasing progress in AI technologies amid Beijing's deepening rivalry with the US in robotics.

Twenty-one humanoid robots, accompanied by their tech handlers from top universities and firms ran over a 21-km race through Beijing's Economic-Technological Development Area. The robots in different shapes and sizes running along with humans created a spectacle, drawing greetings from large crowds gathered on the sidewalks. The robots were launched sequentially at intervals exceeding one metre, confined to dedicated tracks where battery swaps mirror Formula 1's pit stops.

In the end, awards were distributed not

just for speed but for categories like Best Endurance, Best Gait Design, and Most Innovative Form - celebrating both athletic performance and engineering ability.

State-run Xinhua news agency, which described it as the world's first such race, also released a video footage in which several robots including one wearing a black sun hat and white gloves ran in along with the competitors. However, videos posted on social media showed that it was not a smooth race as some robots experienced technical hitches at the start and even crashed. Among 20 competing teams, Tiangong Ultra from the Tiangong Team won the race among the robots with a timing of two hours 40 minutes, slower than over an hour and two minutes clocked by Elias Desta of Ethiopia who was declared the winner of the men's race.



# Kulgam, Shopian admins directed to assess hailstorm damages for compensation: Minister Itoo

Says govt stands with farming community in this difficult time

**SRINAGAR:** Minister for Health and Medical Education, Social Welfare and Education, Sakeena Itoo has expressed deep concern over the widespread damage caused by recent hailstorm which severely impacted orchards and farmlands in several areas of Kulgam and Shopian districts.

The Minister said that this weather calamity has dealt a significant blow to thousands of orchardists and farmers, many of whom are completely relying on the upcoming harvest season for their livelihood. "Our Government completely stands with the farming community in this difficult time. The loss is not just of produce, but of months of hard work and hope", Sakeena said.

The Minister said that the administrations of affected districts have been mobilized and directed to carry out immediate ground assessments of damages caused and ensure timely compensation is provided.

She further said that relevant departments have been directed to prioritize transparent coordination with local representatives and community leaders to expedite assessment of losses and necessary compensation to affected families.

The Minister reiterated the commitment of Omar Abdullah led government towards uplifting the conditions of orchardists and farmers by smooth implementation of various beneficiary oriented schemes like HADP, RKVY, KCC and others.

## Shopian: MLA, DC visit hail-affected areas

**SHOPIAN:** Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) Shopian, Advocate Shabir Ahmad Kullay on Saturday visited several hail-affected areas of the Shopian constituency, to assess the extensive damage caused to orchards and crops by the hailstorm.

MLA was accompanied by officials from the Horticulture and Revenue Departments.

Adv. Kullay visited Manloo, Narapora, Keller, K-Hallan, Gatipora, Mujpathri, Kral Chak, Berthipora, Kanipora Balapora, Wathoo, Shirmal, Tengwani, Tukroo, Pashpora, Mispora, Audora Rampathri, Ahagam, Nazneenpora and many other affected villages.

During the tour, MLA interacted with the distressed orchardists, witnessed firsthand the widespread losses, and offered his unwavering support. Expressing deep concern, he stated that the pain and hardship of the growers at this crucial stage of flowering is a collective loss for the entire region.

He urged the district administration to immediately assess the damages and ensure prompt and adequate relief to the affected farmers. He reiterated his commitment to standing shoulder to shoulder with the farming



community during these testing times and ensuring that no grower is left unheard or unsupported.

Deputy Commissioner (DC) Shopian, Shishir Gupta also conducted an extensive tour of various villages of the district which reported damage to fruit orchards particularly, apple, cherry and pears.

DC visited Ganowpora, Manloo, Mujpathri, Watho, Shirmal, Poterwal and other adjacent hailstorm hit villages, interacted with affected farmers and locals to take stock of the situation on ground.

During his interaction, DC assured farmers of the district administration's full support and emphasized that every effort

would be made to ensure timely relief and compensation.

He instructed the field officers to finalise immediate damage assessment and submit comprehensive reports detailing loss.

The district administration stands with the affected families in this difficult time. "We are committed to a swift and transparent process of assessment and relief distribution," DC said.

Furthermore, the Horticulture department has been directed to assist farmers in post hail damage control and to provide necessary technical guidance to mitigate further losses.

DC was accompanied by ADC, Dr. Zakir Hussain Faaz; CHO, CAO, Tehsildars and other concerned.

## FCIK announces strategic revamp plan to reinvigorate Kashmir's industrial sector

**SRINAGAR:** In a significant move aimed at revitalizing the economic landscape of the Kashmir Valley, the Federation of Chambers of Industries Kashmir (FCIK) has announced a comprehensive revamp strategy to boost the industrial sector across the Kashmir Valley. The initiative is set to address long-standing challenges, unlock new opportunities for entrepreneurs, and create sustainable employment.

The announcement was made during a day-long meeting of industry leaders and stakeholders, presided over by FCIK President Shahid Kamili. The event, organized by a Group of committed and forward-thinking members, focused on shaping a transparent, dynamic, and united future for FCIK, particularly in light of the upcoming elections.

The meeting saw active participation from a wide range of industrial leaders and association heads, including Presidents of industrial estates, District Presidents, and representatives from various sectors across Kashmir, all of whom are eligible to contest for positions in the Administrative Council. The meeting also facilitated introduction of these business leaders under "Know your candidates" programme. During the session,

members raised concerns over long-standing issues hindering Kashmir's industrial growth, including policy neglect, lack of public procurement representation, limited access to affordable finance, ailing industrial units, and outdated infrastructure. These challenges, they noted, have significantly stifled economic development.

They emphasized that the proposed revamp is not just a plan but a vision to make the region's industries resilient, competitive, and future-ready. The strategy includes proactive engagement with government bodies to streamline policies, simplify clearances, and ensure timely incentives for entrepreneurs.

It also calls for stronger collaboration with banks and financial institutions to improve credit flow to MSMEs and find viable solutions for reviving debt-ridden units. Promoting local manufacturing and securing a fair share in public procurement were identified as key priorities, along with expanding access to national and international markets through exhibitions, digital platforms, and export facilitation.

Members further stressed the need to upgrade existing industrial estates and develop new ones with modern infrastructure, reliable power supply, and im-

proved connectivity. With economic recovery seen as vital for long-term regional stability, FCIK plans to roll out the roadmap in phases, starting with stakeholder consultations and on-ground implementation in the coming months.

Senior industry leaders Shakeel Qalandar and Zahoor Ahmad Bhat underscored the pressing need for a vibrant and dynamic leadership team at FCIK—one that reflects integrity, inclusivity, and regional representation. They emphasized that the future of the organization hinges on the induction of individuals with proven honesty, professional credibility, and a deep-rooted commitment to industrial development.

FCIK President briefly outlined the challenges and achievements of his tenure, noting that despite an adverse environment, his team remained committed to addressing entrepreneurs' concerns. He highlighted efforts to safeguard their interests and push for policy reforms, expressing pride in the progress made and confidence in the resilience of Kashmir's industrial sector.

The meeting entrusted Mohammad Yousuf Techo with the responsibility of coordinating with the Election Commission to address members' grievances related to their enlistment in the electoral rolls.

## Commissioner SMC inspects dewatering operations



**SRINAGAR:** In a decisive move to address waterlogging caused by heavy rainfall, Commissioner Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC), Dr. Owais Ahmed conducted a thorough inspection of dewatering operations across key areas of Srinagar.

Accompanied by the Superintending Engineer (SE) Drainage Circle, Executive Engineers, and senior officials, the Commissioner reviewed the effectiveness of current drainage management measures to ensure swift and efficient water removal.

During the inspection, Dr. Owais personally examined vulnerable hotspots and evaluated the operational strategies employed by field teams. He inspected permanent dewatering stations and assessed the deployment and functioning of advanced Mobile Pumping Units, which play a crucial role in controlling urban flooding.

In addition, the Commissioner monitored the dewatering system through the SCADA (Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition) system—an advanced technology that enables real-time monitoring and management of drainage infrastructure. This integration aims to optimize water removal processes and prevent urban waterlogging during adverse weather conditions.

Expressing his appreciation for the dedication and hard work of the ground teams, Dr. Owais emphasized the importance of maintaining vigilance and seamless teamwork, especially during heavy rains. He also urged residents to avoid disposing-off waste into drainage networks, as blockages caused by litter significantly exacerbate flooding issues.

Citizens are advised to stay alert and can contact the SMC's 24x7 Control Room for emergencies or SOS situations.

## Welfare of tribals govt's top priority: Minister Rana

**JAMMU:** Minister for Jal Shakti, Forest, Ecology & Environment and Tribal Affairs, Javed Ahmed Rana on Saturday held detailed interaction with prominent citizens of tribal community from different districts at Panchayat Bhavan, Jammu. The meeting was convened to get firsthand appraisal of issues faced by the Tribals from Jammu, Udhampur, Reasi, Kathua and other areas.

The tribal community leaders highlighted the pressing issues faced by them and sought intervention of the Minister for resolution.

The Minister gave a patient hearing to the issues raised by the delegations and individuals and assured them that the same will be given due prominence for redressal.

Choudhary Basharat Ali from Samba raised the issue of absence of lack of educational facilities for the tribal people. He also demanded provision for slaughter houses and mandis at district level for their livestock in order to get better market prices.

Choudhary Dawood from Udhampur raised the issue of water shortage in his area and demanded sustainable solution for water supply. He said the Gujjar basti lacks basic road facilities in his area that puts huge inconvenience to the people.

Advocate Mehmood Rizvi raised the issue of improving educational facilities for tribals saying that we need to lay more stress on education. Shamim Begum DDC Dansal, Jammu raised the issues pertaining to her constituency and submitted a memorandum of demands.

Shama Akhter from Sidhra emphasised on the education and said that more efforts should be initiated towards improving access to education for upliftment of the people. She added that though the water issues



have been solved in her areas but certain areas still remain uncovered.

Choudhary Sharief Hussain from Udhampur also raised certain developmental issues pertaining to his area.

Mushtaq Ahmad khatana raised the issue of basic health facilities in the tribal areas.

Razaq Choudhary from Jammu demanded full implementation of Forest Rights Act saying that most of the issues of tribals will be resolved.

Similarly, other individuals also raised issues pertaining to their areas and demanded an early resolution.

The Minister, while listening to the issues, issued directions to the concerned officers to resolve these issues in a time bound manner.

Rana assured the participants that the government is fully committed to the overall development of tribal population, prioritizing their welfare. He emphasized that the rights of tribals, as guaranteed under the Constitution, shall be enforced and protected.

Rana reaffirmed that improving the lives of Scheduled Tribes (ST), Scheduled Castes (SC) and other downtrodden sections of society is top priority of the government led by Omar Abdullah. He also sought details from the concerned officers about the landless families in the district and said the same should be submitted to the tribal department.

Regarding the easing of tribal movement, Rana said that the government will provide facility at all routes and ease the process for permission during migration. He said that the government is particular about the development of tribal routes and significant steps have been taken in this regard.

He said that UT CAPEX and district CAPEX budget will be finalised only after holding consultation with the tribal people so that aspirations and developmental needs of the tribal people are reflected.

Rana said that Forest Rights Act will be implemented in totality while giving due prominence to grazing rights and community benefits.

## Power shutdown

**SRINAGAR:** According to the Chief Engineer, Distribution, KPDCL, in order to carry out the work of conductor stringing under RDSS at BK Pora to Khanda Tap line, the shutdown of 33KV Khanda Tap line shall be observed due to which 33/11KV Receiving Station at Khanda shall remain off while power supply to Chattergam, Magrapora, Suthsoo, Gowherpora and adjoining areas will be affected from 10:00 AM to 05:00 PM on 21 & 23 April, 2025.

Similarly, to facilitate works related to construction (widening/ strengthening of 02 lane National Highway Rafiabab-Kupwara-Chowkibal- Tangdhar) by BEACON Authorities, the shutdown of 33KV Kupwara Hot, Kupwara Old & MES shall be observed due to which 33/11KV Receiving Stations at Tikker, Galizoo, Drugmulla, Khumriyal, Krusen, Diver, Sogam, Machil shall remain off while power supply to Kupwara town, Gulgam, Pazipora, Drugmulla, Nagri, Arampora, Whole Lolab Valley, Machil and adjoining areas will be affected from 11:00 AM to 05:00 PM on 22 April, 2025.

## Incessant rainfall: Bla admin issues advisory

**BARAMULLA:** In view of the ongoing incessant rainfall across Baramulla district, the District Administration has issued a precautionary advisory to ensure the safety and well-being of residents.

The advisory has been issued with a focus on preparedness and public awareness.

Due to continuous rainfall, water levels in various water bodies including Ferozpora Nallah, Ningli Nallah, Jhelum River, Pohru Nallah, and other local streams have increased. Residents in low-lying and water-accumulation-prone areas such as Tangmarg, Pattan, Sopore, Rafiabab, and parts of Uri are advised to stay alert and observe necessary precautions.

People have been advised to avoid going near Nallahs, canals and other water bodies during this period. It is also recommended to stay updated with local weather information and maintain regular contact with local authorities in case of any assistance.

For queries or help, residents may contact the following helpline numbers: District Control Room: 01952-234343

The District Administration Baramulla urges the public to cooperate and follow advisories issued from time to time for collective safety and preparedness.

## SDM Kangan issues weather advisory amid forecast of intense rainfall, thunderstorms

SHEIKH ANEES ■ KANGAN

SDM Kangan have issued a weather advisory on Saturday urging residents to take necessary precautions in light of an impending spell of inclement weather.

The advisory, released by the Office of the Sub-Divisional Magistrate, Kangan, follows a forecast by the Meteorological Centre Srinagar predicting moderate to intense showers of rain accompanied by moderate to severe thunder-

storms, lightning, and gusty winds across Jammu and Kashmir.

The advisory specifically cautions the general public of Sub Division Kangan, particularly those residing in hilly terrains, to keep children and elderly individuals safe indoors and to avoid venturing outside unnecessarily.

Recognizing the potential for disruption and emergencies, the SDM Kangan has also directed key executing agencies to remain on high alert.

Agencies such as Roads and Buildings (R&B), Beacon, Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), MEIL, APCO, and the Irrigation & Flood Control Sub Division Kangan/Ganderbal have been requested to maintain a state of readiness to respond effectively to any eventuality that may arise due to the severe weather.

Furthermore, a specific directive has been issued to the Officer Commanding of Beacon's 122 RCC Haripora to maintain strict vigilance

over the damaged Kijpara Bridge. Concerns have also been raised regarding the alternate road, where the water level of Nallah Wangath has reportedly risen.

The advisory emphasizes the need for immediate reporting of any untoward incident to the undersigned's office.

In anticipation of potential medical emergencies, the Superintendent of Trauma Hospital Kangan and the Block Medical Officer Kangan have been advised to sensitize

their medical and para-medical staff to ensure the provision of round-the-clock (24x7) healthcare facilities.

To ensure seamless coordination and response during this period of heightened risk, all Heads of Departments (HODs) within the subdivision have been instructed to remain stationed in Kangan and to refrain from leaving their posts without prior permission from the Sub-Divisional Magistrate's office.

The public has been urged to re-

main vigilant and to feel free to contact the Control Room Kangan at the provided numbers, 8491029969 and 7889504595, in case of any emergency or need for assistance.

This proactive measure by the Kangan administration underscores the commitment to ensuring the safety and well-being of its residents in the face of challenging weather conditions. Residents are advised to heed the advisory and take all necessary steps to mitigate potential risks.



## Commodifying Labour

## Urban Company's Insta Help: A Quick Solution Or Modern-Day Slavery?

As Urban Company launches its Insta Help programme promising rapid home maid services, questions arise about the implications of worker exploitation and the true cost of convenience in today's capitalist society

Arooj Ahmad Wani  
aahmadarooj@gmail.com



Urban Company, formerly known as UrbanClap, has launched its new pilot programme, Insta Help, aimed at revolutionising home services. Previously known as Insta Maids, this service now promises to deliver home maid services in just 15 minutes. With this, Urban Company seeks to address the increasing demand for quick, reliable, and hassle-free domestic assistance, ensuring that busy individuals can effortlessly maintain clean and organised homes. Some see it as the modern social trend as “technologia”, and some see it as a capitalistic revolution to ease our lives and assist those in need. Is it the whole picture? No, I believe. The entire picture is hidden behind the well-fantasised, psychologically appealing advertisements and start-ups, and it is something that we call modern-day slavery.

Modern socialisation has, no doubt, helped us to integrate all the levels of institutions of our social structure in various forms. One example is the “instahelp” service, which has integrated the domestic workers’ force into the mainstream, but at the expense of what? It may look to us that “Instahelp” has eased life in urban hubs, as well as helping those in need of jobs. However, the cultivation of this capitalistic start-up is harbouring the old slavery as modern-day slavery. Long before, humanity faced itself in the chains, and today, it is in the chains of profit margins of start-ups. Yesterday, I was a Chattel Slavery; I fought and transitioned from that phase. Today, they

manifested it by polishing them in various forms, one of which is InstaHelp. Slavery was never abolished; rather, it has redefined itself in newer forms. One of which is in the form of worker exploitation.

For 2023-24, the average monthly per capita expenditure (MPCE) in urban India is estimated at Rs 6,996, according to the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) conducted by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI). Now imagine a worker working under this company for 24 days a month for about 5 hours @ 49/hour a day will earn about 5880 rupees per month, which doesn't fall under the average MPCE of 6996. Our society has been on the path of development, including our social institutions, but it is our material conditions in life that determine our consciousness. A person ready to work at this rate doesn't mean they accept it, but as Marx argued in “Ger-

man Ideology”, it is not consciousness that determines life, but it is your material condition in your life that determines your consciousness. This exploitation is not only profound in the markets, but the very human nature has been restricted to this notion of self-interested and self-centric individuals. It has caused humans to constantly demand more and more, and there is no end to these wants. There is only one element that differentiates humans from animals, i.e. consciousness, the ability to think critically. And thus, if one loses this human ability, it is just another form of slavery that capitalism has produced.

At this juncture, there have been a lot of cries from the unions and other activists, but it needs a look from the government agencies and civil societies. As the Indian constitution integrates the principle of economic justice, it shouldn't be merely on paper, but it should be integrated into the policy framework of the

nation. India lacks a uniform national minimum wage, apart from other steps taken by other nations concerning the domestic workforce. Well, the fabric of capitalism is densely packed with complexities and conspiracies that have taken their roots in our international economic model, social institutions and political institutions.

Describing historical context accurately and understanding what is happening at a given spatial and temporal location is a fundamental prerequisite for good writing. The root cause of the worker's exploitation is not a lack of unions or activism but the very embedded structure in which we, our intrinsic human nature, and our existence lie. It should be at the helm of our Social Consciousness rather than within the limits of unions and social activism.

The social revolution of philosophers and social theorists has been at the very end of

this struggle. Our moral values and norms have been demoralised and devalued due to the lack of social consciousness. At this very juncture of time, we should educate ourselves and others about the working of our material conditioning and how this has been violated by the multi-national Companies (MNCs) and Global corporations. It is not “they” but “we” who can challenge and break this system of modern slavery by acting and choosing consciously; it is we who are responsible for “we” and who account for this fabric. If we act rightly now by using our choices and social consciousness, we can rebuild our society on the values of a sound foundation and judgments rather than on the vulnerability of being exploited by ourselves. Today, it is domestic workers; tomorrow, it can be us. So, the choice remains ours to act, to choose, to rebuild and to strive.

In conclusion, this opinion wants to explain the workings of our system. We should not allow others to be our masters; rather, we should be the masters of our actions and choices, particularly our consciousness. In the forthcoming world of affairs, the power dynamics of the social structure will entail social consciousness, the whole foundation of our moral values, social development, and the functioning of power today reside in social consciousness.

As of now, social consciousness has been a tool of the larger interest groups of our society, but it is rebounding in the structure, bypassing the larger interest groups and leading to the minority hands such as Global corporations and international mafias. In essence, the above statement suggests that as power dynamics become more complex and visible, there will be a greater need for individuals to be aware of their place within society and the impact of social structures on their lives.

—The writer is a student at the Department of Philosophy at Aligarh Muslim University. He works on public policy and governance. He can be reached at [www.linkedin.com/in/aawani2000](http://www.linkedin.com/in/aawani2000)

## Beneath The Surface: Is The Trump-Netanyahu ‘Unthinkable’ About To Erupt?

Ramzy Baroud

*Trump's willingness to openly challenge Netanyahu's policies remains unclear. His conflicting statements, such as calling for an end to the Gaza war while simultaneously advocating for the expulsion of Palestinians, add to the ambiguity. However, recent reports suggest a determined US intention to end the war in Gaza as part of a broader strategy, linking Gaza to Yemen, Lebanon, and Iran. This aligns with Washington's need to stabilize the region as it prepares for a new phase of competition with China, requiring comprehensive economic, political, and military readiness.*

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's recent visit to Washington was no ordinary trip. The consensus among Israeli analysts, barring a few remaining loyalists, is that Netanyahu was not invited but, rather, summoned by US President Donald Trump.

All evidence supports this assertion. Netanyahu rarely travels to the US without extensive Israeli media fanfare, leveraging his touted relationships with various US administrations as a “hasbara” opportunity to reinforce his image as Israel's strongman.

This time, there was no room for such campaigns. Netanyahu was informed of Trump's summons while on an official trip to Hungary. There, he was received by Hungarian President Viktor Orbán with exaggerated diplomatic accolades, signaling defiance against international condemnation of Netanyahu, an accused war criminal wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC), and portraying him as anything but an isolated leader of an increasingly pariah state.

The capstone of Netanyahu's short-lived Hungarian victory lap was Orbán's announcement of Hungary's withdrawal from the ICC, a move with profoundly unsettling implications.

It would have been convenient for Netanyahu to use his Washington visit to deflect from his failed war in Gaza and internal strife in Israel. However, as the Arabic saying goes, “the wind often blows contrary to the ship's desires.”

The notion that Netanyahu was summoned, not invited, is corroborated by Israeli media reports that

he attempted to postpone the visit under various pretexts. He failed, ultimately flying to Washington on the date determined by the White House. Initially, reports circulated that no press conference would be held, denying Netanyahu the platform to tout Washington's unwavering support for his military actions and to expound on the “special relationship” between the two countries.

A press conference was held, though it was largely dominated by Trump's contradictory messages and typical rhetoric. Netanyahu spoke briefly, attempting to project the same confident body language observed during his previous Washington visit, where he sat with an erect posture and spread out legs, as if in command. But this time, his body language betrayed him; his eyes shifted nervously, and he appeared stiff and surprised, particularly when Trump announced that the US and Iran would begin direct talks in Oman soon.

Trump also mentioned the need to end the war in Gaza, but the Iran announcement clearly shocked Netanyahu. He desperately tried to align his discourse with Trump's, referencing Libya's disarmament under Muammar Gaddafi. But that was never part of Israel's official regional plan. Israel had consistently advocated for US military intervention against Iran, despite the certainty that such a war would destabilize the entire region, potentially drawing the US into a conflict far more protracted and devastating than the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Further evidence of the US diverging views from Israel's regional ambitions—centered on perpetual war, territorial expansion, and geopolitical dominance—lies in the fact that

key political and intellectual figures within the Trump administration recognize the futility of such conflicts. In leaked exchanges on the encrypted messaging platform Signal, JD Vance protested that escalating the war in Yemen benefits Europe, not the US, a continent with which the US is increasingly decoupling, if not engaging in a trade war.

The Yemen war, like a potential conflict with Iran, is widely perceived as being waged on Israel's behalf. Figures like Tucker Carlson, a prominent commentator, articulated the growing frustration among right-wing intellectuals in the US, tweeting that “anyone advocating for conflict with Iran is not an ally of the United States, but an enemy.”

Trump's willingness to openly challenge Netanyahu's policies remains unclear. His conflicting statements, such as calling for an end to the Gaza war while simultaneously advocating for the expulsion of Palestinians, add to the ambiguity. However, recent reports suggest a determined US intention to end the war in Gaza as part of a broader strategy, linking Gaza to Yemen, Lebanon, and Iran. This aligns with Washington's need to stabilize the region as it prepares for a new phase of competition with China, requiring comprehensive economic, political, and military readiness.

Should Trump prove capable of doing what others could not, will Netanyahu finally submit to American pressure?

In 2015, Netanyahu demonstrated Israel's unparalleled influence on US foreign and domestic policy when he addressed both chambers of Congress. Despite a few insignificant protests, Republican and Democratic

policymakers applauded enthusiastically as Netanyahu criticized then-President Barack Obama, who did not attend and appeared isolated by his own political class.

However, if Netanyahu believes he can replicate that moment, he is mistaken. Those years are long gone. Trump, a populist leader, is not beholden to finding political balances in Congress. Now in his second and final term, he could, in theory, abandon the US's ingrained reliance on Israel's approval and its aggressive lobby in Washington.

Moreover, Netanyahu's political standing is diminished. He is perceived as a failed political leader and military strategist, unable to secure decisive victories or extract political concessions from his adversaries. He is a leader without a clear plan, grappling with a legitimacy crisis unlike any faced by his predecessors.

Ultimately, the outcome hinges on Trump's willingness to confront Netanyahu. If he does, and sustains the pressure, Netanyahu could find himself in an unenviable position, marking a rare instance in modern history where the US dictates its terms, and Israel listens. Time will tell.

—Dr. Ramzy Baroud is a journalist, author and the Editor of *The Palestine Chronicle*. He is the author of six books.

His latest book, co-edited with Ilan Pappé, is *Our Vision for Liberation: Engaged Palestinian Leaders and Intellectuals Speak Out*. His other books include *My Father was a Freedom Fighter* and *The Last Earth*. Baroud is a Non-resident Senior Research Fellow at the Center for Islam and Global Affairs (CIGA). His website is [www.ramzybaroud.net](http://www.ramzybaroud.net)

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed on this editorial page are those of the individual writers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the newspaper or its management. The newspaper assumes no responsibility for the content and accuracy of the articles published herein.

PRINTER, PUBLISHER & EDITOR: Haji Hayat Mohammad Bhat, LEGAL ADVISER: Manzoor Ahmad Dar

PUBLISHED FROM: 2nd Floor, Doodh Ganga Complex, SDA Building, Batmaloo, Srinagar (J&K) PRINTED AT: K.T PRESS PVT. LTD. 120-ELECTRONIC COMPLEX INDUSTRIAL ESTATE RANGRETH, BUDGAM, J&K.

R.N.I. No: JKENG/2011/38357, POSTAL REGISTRATION NO: L/SK-144/2012-2014, EMAIL: [kashmirreader@gmail.com](mailto:kashmirreader@gmail.com), [editor@kashmirreader.com](mailto:editor@kashmirreader.com), [adv@kashmirreader.com](mailto:adv@kashmirreader.com)



# These harmless white flowers can cause serious respiratory illness in just anyone

**NEW DELHI:** You’ve probably walked past it without even knowing. That bushy, white-flowered weed growing by the roadside, in open plots, or in your garden? That’s *Parthenium hysterophorus*, also called Congress grass. Looks harmless, right? But don’t be fooled—this green invader is a silent troublemaker. Especially for your lungs.

Let’s break it down and see how this common plant can cause serious respiratory illnesses—and what you can do to stay safe.

**What is Parthenium?**  
*Parthenium* is a fast-growing weed originally from Central America. It found its way to India in the 1950s and has since spread like wildfire. It’s now one of the most hated weeds in the country. You’ll see it sprouting along highways, railway tracks, farmlands, parks, and even in cities.

The worst part? It releases a toxic chemical called *parthenin*, which can seriously irritate your skin, eyes, and especially your respiratory system. So even if you’re not touching it directly, just breathing in the air around it can be enough to trigger health problems—particularly if you’re allergic or have asthma.

**How does it affect your lungs?**  
Here’s where things get serious. When *Parthenium* plants bloom, they release pollen grains and fine airborne particles that float around in the air. These can easily be inhaled by people nearby. For someone with a sensitive immune system or a history of respiratory issues, this can spell trouble.

Some common respiratory issues caused by *Parthenium* exposure include allergic rhinitis (sneezing, nasal congestion, and runny nose), asthma (wheezing, breathlessness, chest tightness), chronic cough and throat irritation and sinusitis and post-nasal drip. In severe cases, hypersensitivity pneumonitis – a lung condition where tiny air sacs get inflamed, making it hard to breathe.

You might think it only affects people who



work outdoors, like farmers or gardeners, but that’s not true. Even urban dwellers are at risk, especially during windy seasons when pollen spreads easily.

**Who’s most at risk?**  
*Parthenium* doesn’t discriminate, but some

people are more vulnerable than others: people with asthma, bronchitis, or a history of allergies; children and elderly, whose lungs are more sensitive; gardeners, farmers, or outdoor workers who come into regular contact with the plant and people living in areas

where *Parthenium* grows unchecked.

If you’ve been sneezing a lot lately, have itchy eyes, or feel breathless for no obvious reason, you might want to check if this weed is lurking near your home or office.

**How to spot the symptoms early**

Not everyone reacts the same way, but here are some warning signs your lungs might be reacting to *Parthenium*:

- Persistent sneezing or nasal congestion, especially in the morning
- Breathlessness even without exercise
- Dry, irritating cough that won’t go away
- Itchy throat or watery eyes
- Increased use of asthma inhalers without a clear trigger

If you notice these symptoms flaring up around the same time every year (especially post-monsoon), *Parthenium* could be a hidden culprit.

**So... what can you do about it?**

While you can’t completely control what grows in public spaces, you can take steps to protect yourself and your loved ones. Avoid direct contact with the plant. Don’t try to pull it out bare-handed. Always wear gloves, masks, and long sleeves if you’re removing it. Keep windows shut during early mornings and evenings when pollen levels are high. Install air purifiers at home, especially if someone has asthma or allergies. Use saline nasal sprays to rinse out pollen from your nostrils. If you’re already allergic, antihistamines or inhaled corticosteroids prescribed by a doctor can help manage symptoms. Push for community clean-up drives. The best way to manage *Parthenium* is to prevent its growth. Local authorities can help remove infestations from public places.

*Parthenium* may seem like just another roadside weed, but it’s more dangerous than it looks—especially for your lungs. It’s like that silent guest who overstays their welcome and turns your health upside down. The more you know about it, the better prepared you are to fight back.

If you or someone you know has been having unexplained breathing issues or allergies, don’t just blame it on the weather. Sometimes, the culprit is growing right under your nose—literally.

—Agencies

## ChatGPT geolocation: The tool just got really good at finding where you are!

**NEW DELHI:** ChatGPT geolocation: Earlier this week, on April 16, OpenAI introduced o3 and o4-mini, the newest additions to the o-series models, designed to engage in deeper reasoning before generating responses.

These models are the most advanced OpenAI has released so far, marking a significant leap in ChatGPT’s capabilities for a wide range of users—from curious explorers to expert researchers.

Newest update in these visual reasoning models:

The newest visual reasoning models in ChatGPT are now capable of autonomously and intelligently using various tools—like

els, o3 and o4-mini, are capable of incorporating images directly into their chain-of-thought, enabling them to “think” with visuals as part of the problem-solving process.

With significantly improved visual intelligence, ChatGPT can now analyze images with greater depth, accuracy, and reliability. It effortlessly combines this capability with tools like web search and image editing—automatically zooming, cropping, flipping, or enhancing images as needed.

Depending on the task, the model intelligently decides which tools to use to generate the most helpful response.



web search, Python for analyzing data and files, generating images, and interpreting visual inputs.

What sets these models apart is their ability to determine when and how to use these tools to deliver clear, accurate, and well-formatted responses, usually in ‘under a minute’. This enables them to solve more layered and difficult problems with much ease. By combining advanced reasoning with full tool access, these models deliver significantly better results on both academic benchmarks and real-world applications, raising the bar for what’s possible in terms of intelligence and practical value.

OpenAI states that o3 is their most sophisticated reasoning model to date, setting new standards in areas such as coding, mathematics, scientific analysis, and visual comprehension.

**Thinking with images**  
The newly released visual reasoning mod-

els, o3 and o4-mini, are capable of incorporating images directly into their chain-of-thought, enabling them to “think” with visuals as part of the problem-solving process.

With significantly improved visual intelligence, ChatGPT can now analyze images with greater depth, accuracy, and reliability. It effortlessly combines this capability with tools like web search and image editing—automatically zooming, cropping, flipping, or enhancing images as needed.

Depending on the task, the model intelligently decides which tools to use to generate the most helpful response.

And if this level of detail is possible today, it’s easy to imagine the implications when AI becomes ten times more powerful.

—Agencies

## Musk denies reports of SpaceX building ‘Golden Dome’ missile defence system for US

**WASHINGTON:** SpaceX CEO Elon Musk has denied reports that his rocket company is currently providing technology for the proposed Golden Dome missile system for the US. However, Musk stated that SpaceX would be open to assisting if suggested by President Donald Trump. Musk’s clarification came after a Reuters report claimed that SpaceX, in partnership with two other firms, was a frontrunner for a significant role in developing the Golden Dome missile defence shield, which is reportedly considered a key part of Trump’s national security vision.

What Elon Musk said about ‘Golden Dome’ defence system

In a post shared on social media platform X (earlier Twitter), Musk wrote: “SpaceX has not tried to bid for any contract in this regard. Our strong preference would be to stay



focused on taking humanity to Mars. If the President asks us to help in this regard, we will do so, but I hope that other companies (not SpaceX) can do this.”

According to sources cited in the report, the companies had pitched a plan that involved building and launching between 400 and over 1,000 satellites into Earth’s orbit. These satellites would be used for real-time

detection and tracking of missiles.

Reuters further reported on details from the pitch that included a separate fleet of 200 attack satellites equipped with either missiles or lasers intended to intercept enemy missiles.

SpaceX has reportedly suggested an alternative approach. Instead of the government buying and fully owning the technology, the company may retain ownership under this plan, with the government paying a subscription fee to access and use it, the report continued.

The Golden Dome missile shield is a defence system intended to counter incoming threats, especially long-range missiles. It is expected to function similarly to Israel’s Iron Dome, which is built to detect and intercept short-range rockets.

—Agencies

## Instagram Blend: This invite-only feature is rewriting how you watch reels

**NEW DELHI:** Instagram has rolled out its newest social experiment called the ‘Blend’, an invite-only feature that creates a personalized, shared ‘Reels feed’ between two or more users directly within their DMs.

After over a year of internal trials, Blend officially rolled out on Thursday. The feature lets users invite a friend into a shared, private space where Reels suggestions are tailored to both individuals’ viewing habits. Once the invite is accepted, the duo gets a custom Reels feed that updates in real time as they watch or exchange new videos.



**How does Blend work?**

Blends are integrated directly into your Instagram messages. To create one, simply send an invite in a private chat or within a group conversation. Once the recipient accepts, a shared Blend is automatically set up for that thread.

The Blend updates daily with fresh Reels, curated based on the

activity of everyone in it. It also refreshes whenever a Reel is shared within the chat.

Each Reel in the Blend is tagged with the name(s) of the person or people it was suggested for and recommendations only appear for users who have accepted the invite.

Every chat can have its own unique Blend, depending on who is in it. Whenever new content is added, the chat gets a notification letting everyone know the Blend has been updated.

A step-by-step guide on how to start a Blend on Instagram

1. Launch Instagram and go to

your messages—this could be either a private chat or a group conversation.

2. In the top right corner of the chat, tap the new Blend icon.

3. You will see a preview explaining what the Blend includes. Tap ‘Invite’ to send the invitation.

4. Once one or more people accept the invite, the Blend will be created and start populating with shared Reels.

The Blend feature is now available worldwide. Whether you are an iOS user or an Android user, go try this today!

—Agencies

## Once in 500 billion years: New study reveals our universe could be spinning

**NEW DELHI:** A new study published in the Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society suggests that the universe may be rotating — albeit extremely slowly — a discovery that could help resolve one of astronomy’s most persistent puzzles, the “Hubble tension.”

The research was led by Istvan Szapudi of the University of Hawaii Institute for Astronomy.

Current cosmological models hold that the universe expands uniformly in all directions without any rotation. This framework explains much of what astronomers observe but fails to reconcile conflicting measurements of the universe’s expansion rate.

The so-called Hubble tension arises be-

cause two primary methods yield different expansion values: one based on distant supernovae and galaxy distances reflecting the recent universe, and another using the cosmic microwave background radiation from the early universe about 13 billion years ago.

Szapudi and his team developed a mathematical model that incorporated a tiny amount of rotation into the universe’s expansion.

Remarkably, this slight twist resolved the discrepancy between the two expansion rates without contradicting existing astronomical data. “Much to our surprise, we found that our model with rotation resolves the paradox,” Szapudi said, paraphrasing



the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus: “Panta Kykloutai”—everything turns.

Their model estimates that the universe could complete one full rotation every 500 billion years—far too slow to detect directly but sufficient to influence cosmic expansion over time.

Importantly, this idea does not violate any known physical laws.

The next phase of research involves creating comprehensive computer simulations to further test the rotating universe theory and identify observational signatures of this slow cosmic spin.

If confirmed, this paradigm shift could deepen our understanding of the universe’s dynamics and solve the longstanding Hubble tension that has puzzled astronomers for years.

—Agencies



## From the Front .....

### Heavy Rains

division, Sinthan road that connects Anantnag with Kishtwar are temporarily closed due to snow accumulation.

Officials said traffic on these roads will be allowed after getting green signal from road maintenance agencies as per advisory.

Amid inclement weather conditions, authorities in Bandipora district suspended classwork up to Class VIII in Tulail and up to Class 5th in Tehsil Gurez on Saturday as a precautionary measure to ensure the safety of students.

In Kashmir several districts received significant precipitation, with tourist resort of Gulmarg recording the highest rainfall.

According to the data from the Meteorological Department, Gulmarg in north Kashmir received

35.2 mm of rain, followed closely by Kokarnag in south Kashmir with 33.2 mm, Kupwara 20 mm, and Qazigund at 27.4 mm. Srinagar, the summer capital, recorded 18.3 mm of rainfall.

In Jammu division, Batote received 15.4 mm of rain- the highest in the region. MeT said the Jammu and Kashmir is likely to experience widespread light to moderate rain and thunderstorms over the next 24 hours. During this period isolated areas may witness heavy rainfall accompanied by thunderstorms and gusty winds reaching speeds of 50-60 kmph. The weather is expected to improve gradually with a significant decrease in precipitation from the evening of April 20 onwards.

The downpour brought a significant drop in temperatures across Kashmir. The night temperatures across Jammu and Kashmir, however, remained notably above normal, with several areas recording deviations ranging from 1°C to 7°C above the seasonal average, the MeT said.

In the Kashmir division, most places recorded minimum temperatures 1°C to 4°C above normal.

The ski resort of Gulmarg emerged as the coldest spot in the Valley, recording a minimum of 1.4°C.

In the Jammu division, night temperatures were even warmer, ranging 1°C to 7°C above normal.

Bhaderwah recorded the lowest temperature in the division at 11.2°C.

Most areas of Kashmir also witnessed thunderstorms and gusty winds during the night, with a few areas in south Kashmir receiving hail that damaged produce in orchards, the officials said.

Also, inclement weather conditions led to cancellation of flights to and fro at Srinagar international airport.

According to an official of Airport Authority of India, three Indigo flights schedule to come from Kolkata and Delhi respectively stand cancelled as a result of which its outgoing departures also stand cancelled.

Further, Indigo declared cancellation of its Srinagar-Jammu departure flight (6E 214) due weather conditions at Jammu, he said.

Few departures are holding at Srinagar Airport for weather improvement added.

### No flood

an emergency meeting in view of relentless rains to assess the overall situation and the damages caused to crops and structures by winds & hailstorm.

Taking the cognizance of various reports of damage to crops in Shopian district by hailstorm, and other minor damages to structures by wind in other places, Div Com directed concerned Deputy Commissioners to immediately provide relief to the affected persons following proper guidelines.

At the outset, the Irrigation & Flood Control Department shared the data of water level in different water channels & tributaries of Jhelum and dispelled any imminent threat of flood in the valley.

However, to address water logging issues in the city, Bidhuri instructed SMC for deployment & operation of dewatering pumps wherever required.

While reviewing the supply of essential services, he also directed CE KPDCI for immediate restoration of affected lines & reparation of transformers.

He also reviewed availability of essentials including food grains, LPG and Oil in the valley for the convenience of the general public.

To ensure safety of passengers, Div Com directed Traffic Police to issue advisory regarding traffic movement on hazardous or risky roads especially Gurez road, Mughal road, Sinthan Top, Razdan Top and other roads & passes so no one remains stranded.

Div Com also directed Health Department for smooth functioning of hospitals & other healthcare institutions to render uninterrupted medical services and treatment to patients.

Meanwhile, Director IMD informed meeting of the gradual improvement from late mid-night to afternoon tomorrow.

The meeting was attended by Commissioner SMC; Deputy Commissioners, SSPs, Directors of IMD, Health, Tourism, FCS&CA, VC LCMA, ULB, officers of various departments including Agriculture, Horticulture, School Education, Traffic, Transport, KPDCI, I&FC, PHE, PWD etc.

### Soldier Injured

winds, crashed onto the CRPF installation, resulting in injuries to one jawan.

He was immediately shifted to a nearby hospital for treatment, he said.

Authorities have taken note of the incident and launched clearance operations in the area.

### 3 drug peddlers

under the stringent Prevention of Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (PIT-NDPS) Act in the district, a police spokesperson said.

Three alleged inter-state narcotic smugglers were arrested after 22 grams of heroin were recovered from them during vehicle checking at Phalata in Rehambal on the Jammu-Srinagar national highway, the spokesman said.

## FROM FRONT PAGE....

to facilitate the proceedings.

According to the government order, the Parliamentary Committee is scheduled to visit the Union Territory from April 26 to May 1, 2025, it reads.

The appointed officers, drawn from various departments and ranks, have been tasked with coordinating and assisting the committee during its multi-day engagement across the region. Notable among them are Abhishake Abrol (Additional Secretary, School Education), Harpal Singh, Rachna Sharma (Information Technology), Sheetal Pandita (Rural Development), and Manisha (School Education Directorate) for Jammu Division. Meanwhile, officers like Owais Mushtaq (Health & Medical Education), Nuzhat Khurshid (Tourism), Atul Munim Tak, Shabnam Rashid (State Taxes), Raeis Ahmad Bhat, Shurjeel Ali Naiku, Mir Zahida (IMPA&RD), Najwan Nazki (FCS&CA), Suhail ul Islam (SMC Secretary), Sartaj Husain (Estates), Mantasha Binti Rashid (Rural Sanitation), Ajaz Ahmad Shah, Bashir Ahmad Lone (GM DIC Kulgam), Nasir Mehmood Khan (Tourism), and Syed Nadeem Iqbal Andrabi (Industries & Commerce) have been assigned responsibilities in Kashmir Division, it reads.

Order reads, further, the above officers are directed to report to the Divisional Commissioner, Jammu/Kashmir, respectively on 23.4.2025, for briefing on their roles and responsibilities

### Will not allow

with responsibility that murdering innocents had become the biggest business for the masters of terror and conflict entrepreneurs. Conflict entrepreneurs had created a huge ecosystem around terror (in J-K),” the LG said addressing an event here.

“There are still some conflict entrepreneurs who are trying to be active, but I assure you that no such person will be allowed to reemerge. I am happy that the youths of J-K have started to understand their sinister plans,” he added.

Sinha appealed to Sufi scholars attending the event to make sure that such “conflict entrepreneurs” have no space in society.

“I also request the Sufi scholars that there is a need to make a long-term plan to make Sufism popular among the youth so that extremist ideology will not get a chance to flourish among the people,” he said.

The LG said if there is a need to make ideals of Sufism modern to achieve that, “then it is essential to work on that”.

“We have to take it (message of Sufism) to the youths through new mediums,” he added.

### Sufism is most

felicitations to the Sufi Scholars, members of Sufi Score Limited, Save Youth Save Future Foundation and everyone associated with the initiative.

“Sufism is the most powerful force for peace and harmony in society. Sufism means a way of life. It is a bond of love with the whole and a loving relationship with God. Sufism is the ultimate art of removing divisions and bringing hearts closer,” the Lieutenant Governor said.

The Lieutenant Governor highlighted that the ultimate aim of Sufism is to foster the awakening in the society and promote compassion and interconnectedness.

“Sufism emphasises inner purification, love, and deep relationship with the divine. The journey on this path has the potential to unite people across backgrounds,” he said.

The Lieutenant Governor spoke on the influence of Sufism in bridging social divides, and promoting peace and harmony within the communities.

“Since many centuries Sufism has acted as a bulwark against extremist ideology and Sufism’s narrative has been popular in counter-ing extremist propaganda.

Sufi teachings completely reject any kind of violence, and discrimination. The Sufi teaching is a counterforce to extremist ideology and its mystical traditions through poetry, music and other creative expressions will strengthen counter-radicalisation efforts,” the Lieutenant Governor said.

The Lieutenant Governor also recalled the invaluable contribution of saints from Jammu Kashmir in strengthening the bond of love, brotherhood, unity and harmony.

The Lieutenant Governor stated that few Conflict Profiteers, on behalf of the neighbouring country, are attempting to radicalize the youth for their own gain.

“I urge the people, especially the young generation to identify and isolate the divisive elements and ensure that such conflict profiteers have no place in the society,” he said.

The Lieutenant Governor also emphasized on a multi-pronged strategy to promote Sufi literature and Sufi education, and make Sufism popular among the youth to counter radical ideology. Sufi teachings, music, poetry should be conveyed to the youth through videos, podcasts and social media campaigns, he added.

He further called for connecting the youth influencers with the campaign to propagate Sufism and establishing a mentorship program where Sufi scholars guide young people, the Lieutenant Governor said.

Captivating performances by the Sufi Artists celebrating Jammu Kashmir’s rich Sufi culture and traditions, remained one of the highlights of the event.

Justice N. Kotiwar Singh, Judge, Supreme Court of India; Shri Justice Arun Palli, Chief Justice, High Court of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh; Shri Rajiv Agarwal from Sufi Score Limited; Shri Wajahat Farooq Bhat, Chairman, Save Youth Save Future Foundation, senior officials, Sufi scholars, members of Sufi Score and Save Youth Save Future Foundation, and people from all walks of life were present.

### ‘Peace would be

remarks at an interaction with the members of YPO-Global One, an international network of leaders and CEOs in business, here.

The lieutenant governor said that Jammu and Kashmir under Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s leadership has witnessed a transformative era, fostering peace and inclusive development.

“We don’t believe in buying peace but estab-

lishing peace. J&K Police and security forces are on the job. Soon we will completely eliminate terrorism and its entire ecosystem. With the ongoing efforts, I believe the Jammu region is on track to fully regain peace within the next six months,” he added.

Speaking to reporters at a separate event, the lieutenant governor said that separatism and terrorism have no future in Jammu and Kashmir.

Sinha categorically stated that Pakistan should stop exporting terror.

“There is no future of separatism and terrorism in J&K. I have said it several times that our neighbour is battling its internal issues, it is not even taking care of the basic rights of its citizens. It should stop exporting terrorism,” he said.

During an interaction with the members of YPO-Global One, the lieutenant governor highlighted the strategic, multi-faceted approach for Jammu and Kashmir’s holistic development over the last five years, including economic growth, sustainability and seamless implementation of social welfare schemes.

“Our aim is to achieve faster, sustainable and inclusive economic growth. A strategic, multi-faceted approach was adopted to tap the industrial potential of J&K so as to strike the right balance between economic growth, sustainability and social development,” he said.

The lieutenant governor shared the insights into Jammu and Kashmir’s evolving industrial landscape and the emerging opportunities in the sector.

“I want the industrial growth to benefit all the citizens of Jammu Kashmir. This is my resolve. My second resolve is to ensure that industrial growth is environmentally sustainable,” said Sinha.

“One of our objectives is to make J&K a leader in innovation to attract investments in research, IT and ITes (Information Technology enabled Services). We have analysed locally available skill set and natural resources in order to promote the relevant sectors as per our advantage,” he added.

For industrial growth of Jammu Kashmir, the lieutenant governor said the government has focused on sectors, which are the strength of the region.

“For example, the Tourism Sector has witnessed massive increase in tourist influx. There is immense potential in this sector for unexplored destinations, film tourism, entertainment sector, hotels and resorts and theme parks. Since we have given industry status to tourism, I am sure the tourism potential of Jammu and Kashmir can be tapped,” he added.

Sinha said the initiatives taken by the government in the past few years have doubled the export of handloom and handicrafts and horticulture products are reaching the global market.

“Today, J&K has no competition in handicraft, handloom and horticulture products,” he added.

During the interaction, the lieutenant governor addressed the queries from YPO members on Jammu Kashmir’s industrial growth.

“I think Jammu and Kashmir has many factors such as economic stability, skilled labour, raw material, better incentives, enabling a safe business environment, high productivity, high potential of value addition, strong infrastructure, transparency and high level of innovation, which makes it an attractive investment destination,” said Sinha.

“Public safety, strong healthcare system, higher education, low expense burden, high productivity, composite culture, all these systems are perfectly suitable for the operations of multinational companies in the J&K UT,” he added.

### Govt committed to

Doing Business (EoDB) framework aimed at making the regulatory environment more conducive for businesses.

The meeting was part of the national initiative led by the Union cabinet secretariat in collaboration with key institutions including the PMO, NITI Aayog, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) and the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME), an official spokesperson said.

The initiative focuses on eliminating redundant regulations, reducing compliance burdens, particularly for MSMEs, promoting digitisation and single-window clearances, and decriminalising business laws wherever necessary. Instructing all officers to break down the identified action plans - most of which have timelines of five to six months - into smaller, achievable deliverables on a fortnightly basis, Abdullah emphasised the need to track progress closely and examine reasons for any delays.

He directed that finalised action plans be promptly uploaded on the MIS portal and that implementation should begin without delay.

Stressing the importance of accountability, Abdullah laid down a review mechanism under which the progress of reforms will be evaluated every two months.

“My government is committed to fostering a business-friendly environment and streamlining regulatory frameworks across various sectors,” he said.

The Task Force has identified 23 priority areas covering land use, labour reforms, building regulations, utility permissions and broader governance practices, he said.

Sinh noted that action plans for each area have been developed in coordination with the concerned departments and include clear timelines and reform measures.

Key areas discussed during the meeting included the introduction of flexible zoning frameworks to allow mixed-use development, simplification and digitisation of the land use change (CLU) process, fire service department clearances and rationalisation of road width norms for rural industries along with updated building bylaws aimed at minimising land loss, the spokesman said.

He said the meeting also deliberated on GIS mapping of industrial estates and their integration with the India Industrial Land Bank (IILB), labour reforms enabling night-time employment of women and raising worker thresholds, decriminalisation of minor violations and simplification of licensing procedures.

Additionally, the integration of water and electricity services under the single-window system and the full linkage of J-K’s Single Window Portal with the National Single Window System (NSWS) were discussed in detail, he said.

The chief minister stressed adopting a proactive approach and reiterated the importance of uploading approved action plans on the MIS portal.

He underscored the need for continuous monitoring and periodic reviews to ensure timely and effective implementation of the reforms.

### Three engineers

capacity of the spill channel in the aftermath of the devastating 2014 floods, aiming to mitigate future flood risks in Srinagar. Known as the “Queen of Wetlands,” Hokersar plays a critical ecological role and is home to numerous migratory bird species.

The ACB, acting on credible inputs, conducted a joint surprise check that revealed serious irregularities and professional misconduct in the execution of the project. Following the investigation, an FIR was registered, and three officials—two Executive Engineers and the then Assistant Executive Engineer of the Flood Spill Channel Division Narbal—were arrested.

Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) ACB, Javid Hassan Bhat, said the enquiry conducted has uncovered serious lapses on the part of public officials and a private contractor company.

He said the findings reveal that tenders were invited in July 2018, for the work and construction of a channel across Hokersar Wetland.

The work was allotted in favour of M/S REACH Dredging Ltd. for Rs. 2055.565 lacs by Chief

Engineer Irrigation and Flood Control Kashmir with the provision that no material shall be dumped within the periphery of Wetland.

Despite major works being executed based on altered parameters through a Letter of Intent (LOI), the work was awarded based on original advertised quantities and costs, with no clarity on dumping sites or the disposal of excavated material.

The findings of the enquiry also revealed that significant variations in transportation leads (ranging from 8 km to 18 km) were clubbed together, allowing undue payments for transportation of excavated material, most of which was allegedly not disposed off as per the NIT, SSP Bhat said.

“The manipulation of the specifications of work and quantities resulted in financial loss amounting to Rs. 2.30 crores (approx.), to the state exchequer, excluding royalty and minor mineral costs and further damage to the ecology of the wetland. The losses will be over Rs 5 crore,” he said.

The three officials Siraj-Ud-Din Shah and Ghulam Ahmad Beigh, the then Executive Engineers Flood Spill Channel Division of Narbal and Irfan Ahmad Reshi, the AEE Flood Spill Channel Division Narbal among others, colluded with the contractor company M/S Reach Dredging Limited thereby caused huge loss of funds to the state exchequer and defeated the purpose for which the dredging in the wetland was initiated, he added.

Based on these findings a case under sections 5(1)(d) r/w 5(2) of the J&K Prevention of

Corruption Act and section 120-B/RPC has been registered and investigation set into motion,” the SSP said.

Meanwhile, the ACB registered another FIR in illegal building permissions that were issued by the then Lakes and Waterways Development Authority (LAWDA). The ACB initiated legal action following a verification prompted by a complaint from the Intizamia Committee of Masjid Shareef, Gagribal Boulevard.

### JKRLM Engages

realignment of the mission to fully realize its potential in empowering women and alleviating poverty across the rural areas of the UT.

A detailed presentation by OMPLIS shed light on their impactful journey since inception in 1995, outlining how the organization has enabled thousands of women to break free from poverty. Their model, deeply rooted in financial empowerment and collective savings, has generated Rs 73 crore in savings and earned Rs 58 crore in interest for SHG members. Notably, loans amounting Rs 478 crore, along with Rs 4.18 crore as Community Investment Funds (CIF) and Rs 15.28 crore as soft loans, have uplifted over 6,500 families.

In a landmark decision, OMPLIS agreed to adopt one block each in Jammu and Kashmir on a pilot basis. The initiative will support the training programs for the field staff, strengthen Cluster Model Training Centres (CMTCs) and provide mentorship to SHG members to channel their livelihoods towards high impact outcomes.

Kudumbashree NRO, known for its pioneering community-led models across 22 States and UTs, presented a tailored plan to support JKRLM through scalable, market-linked initiatives. Their proposal emphasized on establishing Community-Based Marketing Aggregator Models to bridge SHGs with mainstream markets and e-commerce platforms besides extending support for branding, packaging and digital marketing of farm and non-farm products made by these SHGs. They further proposed setting up of community-run food service enterprises, inspired by their India Food Court model, to integrate rural livelihoods with tourism and hospitality sectors in J&K. The overall implementation strategy involves cloud-based, three-tier monitoring system to track outcomes and ensure accountability besides developing 20 model enterprises in the first year and creating a comprehensive operational manual with localized training modules for JKRLM staff and cadres. The proposals by both the organizations received an encouraging response from the Chief Secretary, who underlined the UT Government’s commitment towards building resilient, self-sustained rural communities through structured collaboration and innovation rooted in empowerment, enterprise and experience-driven transformation of this livelihood mission across the UT.



# NCW team meets riot-hit people in Bengal's Murshidabad, TMC describes commission as BJP's wing

**KOLKATA:** A delegation of the National Commission for Women (NCW), led by its chairperson Vijaya Rahatkar, on Saturday met riot-hit people in West Bengal's Murshidabad district and assured them that the Centre would take necessary steps to ensure their safety.

The ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC), however, questioned the NCW's neutrality, accusing it of functioning as a "political wing of the BJP."

During the visit, affected women shared their harrowing experiences from the recent communal violence, which claimed three lives.

They demanded the establishment of permanent BSF camps in select areas and called for an NIA probe into the clashes.

Rahatkar said, "I am dumbfounded by the agony these women are having to suffer. What they went through during the violence is beyond imagination."

The NCW chief assured the victims that there was "no cause for worry" as the Centre is with you.

"We have come here to see your plight. Please don't worry. The country and the commission are with you. Don't think that you are alone," Rahatkar told the victims at Betbona village.

Many of the riot-affected women broke down in tears during their interactions with the NCW team.

The villagers were seen holding placards that displayed messages such as 'We don't want Lakshmir Bhandar, we want BSF camp. We want security'.

'We are under attack,' read another placard. 'We demand resignation of chief minister for her failure to protect us,' said another placard.

NCW member Archana Majumdar told reporters that the Commission would report the women's demands to Union Home Minister Amit Shah, especially regarding the deployment of BSF camps in the area.

BJP MLA Sreerupa Mitra Chaudhury, who was accompanying the NCW team, told PTI Videos, "This is my constituency, Dakshin Malda. I have been contesting from here for the last 12 years, and what I have seen this time is unprecedented. I had never seen violence on such a scale here in the last 12 years."

The NCW team also visited the Dhulian area of Murshidabad district, which witnessed violence on a massive scale during protests against



amendments to the Waqf Act on April 11 and 12.

They also visited a relief camp in Malda district on Friday and met those displaced by the Murshidabad riots.

"From what we've seen so far, the situation is extremely distressing. We can feel their pain and sufferings," the NCW chief said.

Slamming the NCW's visit, the TMC raised serious questions about the commission's neutrality and political motivations behind its narrative against Bengal.

Party's Rajya Sabha MP Saket Gokhale said NCW member Archana Majumdar, who has been prominently featured in media reports talking about the visit, is a "card-carrying BJP worker" who contested the 2021 Bengal elections on a BJP ticket before losing the race.

"What Modi's PR agency won't tell you is that this 'NCW member' Archana Majumdar contested the 2021 Bengal elections on a BJP ticket and lost. She's an active card-carrying BJP worker," Gokhale said, adding, "NCW has long been a political wing of the BJP. And they aren't even good at hiding it."

TMC state general secretary Kunal Ghosh drew parallels to previous NCW visits to the state, particularly to Sandeshkhali, claiming they followed a familiar pattern of spreading misinformation.

"When NCW visited Sandeshkhali the last time, that is when propaganda and misinformation began. The then-NCW chief Rekha Sharma and her team had designed anti-Bengal narratives to defame the state in multiple ways. They are now repeating the same playbook in Murshidabad."

Last year, residents of Sandeshkhali had raised concerns over how the commission and the local BJP unit collected signatures on blank papers that were later used to file fabricated rape complaints, he said.

"Why aren't they going to states other than Bengal? Where are they when there are atrocities against women in Manipur, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh? They have come on a political assignment here and are roaming around with BJP 'daladash' (sympathisers). They have their own interests at stake," Ghosh said.

"BJP has an annual quota of sending a certain number of central teams to Bengal like they did in Bogtui case, post-poll violence and Sandeshkhali, among others. No one knows about the outcome of these Central teams and the CBI-NIA investigation," TMC leader Debangshu Bhattacharya said.

Three people were killed and hundreds rendered homeless during the clashes, which occurred in Muslim-majority areas, amidst protests against amendments to the central Waqf Act. —PTI

# Rahul slams Modi's 'hugplomacy', warns of economic fallout from US tariffs

**NEW DELHI:** The leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi has said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's hugging US president Donald Trump will not help India deal with the economic crisis stemming from the US imposition of tariffs.

"India is not ready to face the truth now. You are going to have to develop the courage to face the truth. There is huge unemployment, your entire economic system has failed. You have a complete lack of harmony in the country," Rahul said in a conversation with Delhi Congress leader Sandeep Dikshit. "The US tariff is going to have huge economic consequences. Modi's hugging Trump is not going to resolve it. He bowed down his head and came back. Mahatma Gandhi, Jawahar Lal Nehru and Indira Gandhi would not have done that."

The conversation shared by the Congress on its social media handle delved deep into the influence India's first Prime Minister had on the leader of Opposition, the grandson of serving Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, while growing up in Lutyen's Delhi.

Replying to a question, Rahul repeated what he had once stated on the floor of the Lok Sabha after becoming the leader of Opposition post-2024 Lok Sabha polls.

"There are two religious philosophies in India. Shaiva philosophy is completely democratic. Guru Nanak, Kabir are completely democratic. They do not believe in a hierarchy, a caste system. Mahatma Gandhi, Ambedkar represented that strain. Nehru represented that strain."

Stretching the point further, Rahul said under the RSS it was not just institutions that faced a crisis.

"The ideas in our Constitution are 3,000 years old. What is under attack is not just a book. Rather, a set of philosophies that are inconvenient to the RSS," Rahul said.

He claimed the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi happened because he was defending the Indian philosophical tradition.

Rahul said he was unafraid of taking the hit for speaking the truth. "Nowadays people don't want to hear the truth. But somebody has to tell it," he said. "I will take the hit. I am happy to take the hit. But I am not going to veer off from the truth because you want me to."

Drawing comparisons between the situation now from the one 90 years ago when India was under the British yoke, Rahul said the times were much harder

then, though there are similarities.

"There was a partnership between the British and the Maharajas and their bureaucracies and armies. The Indian people were completely squeezed in some ways similar as to what's going on today with Adani, Ambani and stuff. But we were much more courageous at that time than we are today. Today what is missing is certainly at the leadership level and also overall people are scared," Rahul said.

The leader of Opposition, who has often been derided by the BJP as well as a section



of his own partymen for being a "part-time" politician, said he was keeping with the family tradition.

"There was no political Nehru. There was no political Indira Gandhi. They did no view themselves as politicians. This idea that is very deep in

my family is that politics is actually about truth," said Rahul calling himself a truth-seeker and not a politician.

He also added that like his illustrious ancestors he was not bothered by how people perceived him.

"I am not incentivised by what you will think of me 20 years from today or 30 years from today. So that other strain, right, that you are searching for your truth, which is why Mahatma Gandhi became such a big part of my great-grandfather's life," Rahul said. "Because it was a collective journey with Mahatma Gandhi as sort of in the Indian tradition as the Guru, as the guide."

In the last one decade and more the BJP-RSS combine have triggered discussions on Nehru's overriding other Congress stalwarts from the Indian freedom struggle like Vallabhbhai Patel and Subhas Chandra Bose.

"Patel and Nehru, they were friends and they were great friends, but they had disagreements on direction and that's perfectly fine. I mean even Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru had some differences on direction. But these two strains, I clearly see and I see them in myself also. They are damaging, also politically in today's context."

Rahul who was born years after the death of India's first prime minister said he did not have a clear memory of when he had first heard of his great-grandfather, though his grandmother often narrated stories.

—Agencies

# Uddhav agrees to join hands with Raj Thackeray against Hindi imposition on Maha, sets riders

**MUMBAI:** The Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) on Saturday invited Shiv Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray to join hands in opposing the imposition of Hindi in Maharashtra. Uddhav accepted Raj's offer, albeit with certain conditions, which he spelt out clearly.

It all began when actor-director Mahesh Manjrekar interviewed Raj Thackeray and asked him if it was possible for him to join hands with Uddhav Thackeray.

Replying to Manjrekar, Raj Thackeray said, "I am willing to set aside minor disputes to protect the interests of Maharashtra and preserve the Marathi language. This issue is very important for the existence of Maharashtra and the Marathi people.

Therefore, I do not think that coming together is a difficult thing. This is not a matter of my desire alone or my selfishness. I think it is necessary to look at



the larger picture. Marathi people of all political parties in Maharashtra should come together and form a single party".

When asked to respond to his estranged cousin Raj Thackeray's statement, Uddhav Thackeray said, "I am ready to put aside petty disputes. I appeal to all Marathi people to come

together for Maharashtra. But there is one condition, first decide that you will never invite home and serve food to those who act against Maharashtra's interests, and only then talk about the welfare of the state".

"When we raised the issue in the Lok Sabha that all industries were being shifted to Gujarat, we could have formed a government in Maharashtra's interest by opposing it then. It does not work if we support the

issue once, then oppose it later, and then compromise again. I will neither welcome nor invite anyone, nor sit beside anyone who comes in the way of Maharashtra's interests. Decide this first, and then talk about doing things in the interest of Maharashtra." Uddhav Thackeray said.

Uddhav's statement

referred to Raj Thackeray's previous political flip-flops of first opposing the BJP and then joining hands with the BJP or compromising with it.

"Hindi has been made compulsory. We will listen to everything with love, but if you force it on us, we will uproot your roots and throw you away. My cabinet decided to make Marathi compulsory in Maharashtra. Whoever resides in Maharashtra must learn Marathi. We will not allow Hindi to be forced upon Maharashtra," Uddhav Thackeray said.

Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena's Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Raut, speaking to media persons on Saturday, respectfully referred to MNS President Raj Thackeray as "Raj Saheb" and said, "Both are Thackerays and cousin brothers."

—Agencies

# CPI(M) writes to Jaishankar, urges him to raise student visa revocation issue with US

**NEW DELHI:** Communist Party of India MP John Brittas on Saturday wrote to External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, urging him to raise the issue of revocation of visas of Indian students with the US government at the "highest appropriate levels".

In a letter addressed to the minister, Brittas also urged him to ensure that legal and consular assistance is provided to the affected by Indian Missions there.

Brittas claimed a deeply distressing and increasingly alarming situation was being faced by hundreds of Indian students in the United States, whose visas have been revoked without prior notice or sufficient explanation.

"What deepens the distress is the nature of the reasons cited for these visa revocations - many of which are astonishingly petty, disproportionate, and wholly incongruous with the gravity of the action taken," he alleged.

He said students have reportedly faced cancellations for minor traffic violations such as speeding or misdemeanours, inadvertent lapses in documentation, unintentional academic infractions without formal



inquiry, social media expressions or journalistic writings-especially on issues like the Palestinian conflict-as well as minor incidents such as inadvertently failing to scan or catalogue items correctly while using self-checkout kiosks in stores.

Brittas also said denial of an opportunity to be heard is creating a "chilling atmosphere of fear and uncertainty among thousands of Indian students striving for legitimate academic pursuits in the United States".

"What is particularly troubling is the opaque and arbitrary nature of these actions, which appear to lack both procedural fairness and proportionality," he said.

He said the gravity and magnitude of the issue demand a robust and coordinated diplomatic response by

the Government of India.

"We must not allow our youth to be subjected to indignities and jeopardy on foreign soil. We need to stand firmly by them in their hour of crisis."

Brittas urged the External Affairs Minister to immediately take up the matter with the US Government "at the highest appropriate levels seeking clarity, reversal of unfair visa cancellations, and an assurance of non-discriminatory and transparent treatment of Indian students."

"I also request your goodness to give instructions to our Missions to provide all possible legal and consular assistance to those affected, including representation and welfare support," he added.

Amid instances of Indian students in the US receiving communications from local authorities on possible revocation of their visas, Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said on Thursday that Indian missions in the United States are in touch with Indian students facing issues relating to revocation of visas and extending possible support to them. —PTI

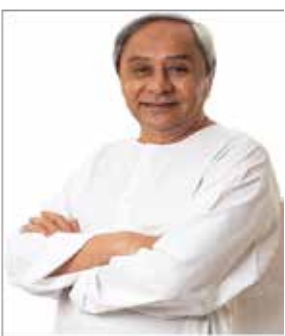
# Naveen Patnaik elected BJD President for 9th successive term

**BHUBANESWAR:** Leader of the Opposition in Odisha Assembly and Biju Janata Dal supremo Naveen Patnaik, on Saturday was elected unopposed to the post of BJD president for the ninth term in a row at the party headquarters here.

The regional party has been named after his late father Biju Patnaik. Naveen Patnaik has been elected unopposed as party president eight times in a row since the party's formation in 1997. He was last elected to the position in February 2020.

BJD lost the 2024 Assembly and Lok Sabha polls due to false narrative created by BJP Patnaik told reporters after getting elected as regional party's chief.

"We missed the last election with a narrow margin even though BJD got more popular votes. This is because we couldn't effectively



counter the false narrative. Even now creating false narratives is the main strategy against BJD. We should be aggressive in exposing this false narrative especially in social media".

Stating that BJD needs to strongly improve put social media presence, Patnaik observed that technology should be used to tell facts and without technology we can not reach out to people.

Naveen Patnaik-led BJD lost to BJP in both the Assembly polls and Lok Sabha polls in 2024. Patnaik, who never eyed on pan-India expansion of the party, failed to check the BJP's electoral juggernaut. The electoral loss put to an end Patnaik's 24-long-year eventful and largely clean stint at the helm of governance in Odisha.

—Agencies

# First commercial sea shipment of Indian Pomegranates from Maharashtra reaches USA

**NEW DELHI:** In a historic initiative towards introducing Indian Pomegranates to distant markets, a landmark commercial sea shipment of the prized Indian Bhagwa variety of Pomegranate has reached New York.

This marks a significant milestone for India's fresh fruit exports. With growing international demand for premium quality of fresh fruits, the arrival of this shipment heralds the potential of Indian Pomegranates becoming a preferred choice in the competitive U.S. market, the Ministry of Commerce said on Saturday.

The Pomegranate season, which traditionally saw air freight as the

primary mode of transportation,

shifted gears in recent weeks to



embrace the cost-effective and sustainable sea freight mode.

After India had been granted market access by the US for Pomegranates, during the season in 2023, the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority

(APEDA) in collaboration with the United States Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA APHIS), National Plant Protection Organisation (NPPO-India) and the National Research Centre for Pomegranate, Solapur (NRCPP) successfully conducted the trial shipment of Pomegranate to the US by air.

Owing to the success of the static trial to enhance the shelf life of Pomegranates for up to 60 days by APEDA in collaboration with ICAR-National Research Centre for Pomegranate, India had successfully flagged off its first trial commercial sea shipment of Pomegranates comprising of 4200

boxes i.e. 12.6 tons to the U.S. in collaboration with Inl Farms from Irradiation Facility Center (IFC), Maharashtra State Agricultural Marketing Board (MSAMB), Vashi, Navi Mumbai in February, 2024.

APEDA facilitated the USDA pre-clearance program for Pomegranates in December 2024, which played a pivotal role in easing the logistical and regulatory hurdles for Indian agriculture exporters and enabled them to enter the U.S. market.

APEDA's proactive approach in inviting the USDA inspectors for the pre-clearance process three months in advance ensured the smooth and timely arrival of the shipment.

—PTI

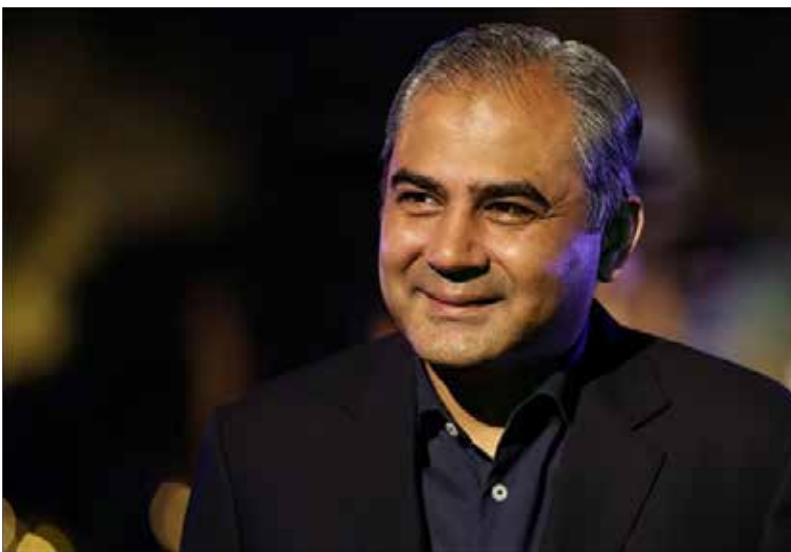


# Pakistan won't travel to India for Women's World Cup 2025: PCB chief

**NEW DELHI:** Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Mohsin Naqvi has reiterated that the women's team will not travel to India for the ICC Women's World Cup 2025. While India hold the hosting rights for the prestigious 50-over tournament, Naqvi confirmed that Pakistan would participate under a hybrid model, playing their matches at a neutral venue as per an agreement reached earlier this year.

India are set to host the eight-team Women's ODI World Cup from September 29 to October 26, 2025. Pakistan secured qualification for the tournament after topping the qualifiers held in Lahore in March, winning all five of their matches. Bangladesh also qualified from the same event.

"Just like India didn't play in Pakistan during the Champions Trophy and were allowed to compete at a neutral venue, we will do the same. When there is an agreement, it must be honoured," Naqvi said, as



quoted by the PTI news agency.

Naqvi also noted that since India are the official hosts of the Women's World Cup, they will be responsible for selecting the neutral venue.

India, Pakistan and the Interna-

tional Cricket Council (ICC) previously agreed on a hybrid hosting model for major global tournaments held in either country until 2028. India had refused to travel to Pakistan for the Champions Trophy in Febru-

ary, resulting in their matches being relocated to Dubai following extended negotiations.

Though initially hesitant, Pakistan ultimately agreed to the hybrid model after discussions facilitated by the ICC. The same arrangement is expected to be in place for the Men's T20 World Cup in 2026, which will be co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka.

In the Women's World Cup qualifiers hosted in Lahore, Pakistan delivered dominant performances, beating Ireland, Scotland, West Indies, Thailand, and Bangladesh to finish unbeaten.

"The team showed how to make the most of home advantage and play as a collective unit. I am pleased to see women's cricket thriving," Naqvi said.

The 2025 Women's World Cup will feature eight teams: hosts India, England, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

—Agencies

## Buttler's blazing 97 powers Gujarat Titans to commanding win over Delhi Capitals

**NEW DELHI:** Star batter Jos Buttler played a sensational match-winning knock of 97 not out to guide Gujarat Titans (GT) to a commanding seven-wicket victory over Delhi Capitals (DC) in a high-scoring IPL 2025 clash at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad on Saturday.

With this emphatic win, Gujarat not only handed DC their second loss of the season but also soared to the top of the points table. All three of GT, DC, and Punjab Kings (PBKS) now have 10 points from seven matches, but GT's superior net run rate (+0.984) pushed them above DC (+0.589) and PBKS (+0.308).

Chasing a daunting target of 204, Gujarat were dealt an early blow when skipper Shubman Gill was run out for just 7 in the second over. However, Buttler, at his vintage best, stepped up with a composed yet authoritative innings. After adding a brisk 60-run partnership with Sai Sudharsan (36), Buttler took complete charge of the chase.

Mixing calculated aggression with calm composure, Buttler carved the DC bowling attack with finesse. His unbeaten 54-ball knock, studded with 11 fours and four sixes, was the backbone of GT's chase. Despite Sudharsan's dismissal in the 8th over, the Englishman never let the momentum dip.

Partnering with Sherfane Rutherford (43 off 34), Buttler forged a match-winning 119-run stand for the third wicket that left DC



bowlers searching for answers. By the time Rutherford fell in the 19th over, GT were firmly in control, needing just 10 off the last over.

While the crowd eagerly anticipated a Jos Buttler century, it wasn't to be. Rahul Tewatia ensured a swift finish, smashing a six and a four off Mitchell Starc to complete the chase with four balls remaining, leaving Buttler stranded at 97.

Earlier, DC posted a competitive 203/8, thanks to handy contributions from Karun Nair (31), KL Rahul (28), Axar Patel (39), and Ashutosh Sharma (37). But it was Prasidh Krishna's fiery spell of 4/41 that pegged DC back in crucial phases, denying them a bigger total.

The Titans' clinical all-round display — highlighted by Buttler's brilliance — saw them leapfrog their rivals and issue a strong statement in the race for playoff spots.

—Agencies

## Vaibhav Suryavanshi, 14, becomes youngest player to make IPL debut

**NEW DELHI:** Rajasthan Royals handed a debut to youngster Vaibhav Suryavanshi in the team's match against Lucknow Super Giants. Vaibhav, 14, became the youngest player to make an Indian Premier League debut. He replaces Rajasthan captain Sanju Samson, who was ruled out due to injury.

Vaibhav, born in 2011, was born after the inception of the Indian Premier League in 2008. This also set a unique record as he became the first player to

feature in the IPL to be born after the start of the tournament.

Stand-in captain for Rajasthan, Ravi Parag confirmed the player's but against LSG. Vaibhav was named in the Impact Subs since Rajasthan were sent to bowl first at the Sawai Man Singh Stadium in Jaipur.

Vaibhav Suryavanshi rose to prominence in the 2024 season after raking in some impressive performances in age group cricket. He broke a string of records by becoming the youngest In-



dian player to feature in List A cricket. He also became the youngest player to make his debut in the Ranji Trophy at

the age of 12 years and 284 days.

Vaibhav was picked up by Rajasthan Royals in the IPL 2025 mega auction, going with the ethos of franchise to invest in young and upcoming talents. Rajasthan beat Delhi Capitals for the signature of the then 13-year-old, picking him up for Rs 1.10 crore.

In the build-up to the IPL season, Vaibhav hit the fastest hundred by an Indian at the U19 Tests. The youngster smashed his century in just 58 balls, which lies only behind Moeen Ali's all-

time record (56 balls).

Vaibhav Suryavanshi, born in Samastipur in 2011, played for Bihar in the 2023 edition of the Cooch Behar Trophy. In one of the games against Jharkhand, he scored 151 runs off 128 balls, an innings that included 22 fours and 3 sixes. Suryavanshi also played in a quadrangular series involving India U19 A, India U19 B, England U19 and Bangladesh U19. He got scores of 53, 74, 0, 41 and 0 in the tournament.

Vaibhav's father described his son as

an explosive batter and had confidence that his son would one day showcase his batting skills for India. He also revealed that Rajasthan Royals had called him for trials in Nagpur in 2024.

"Rajasthan Royals had called him for trials in Nagpur. Vikram Rathour sir (batting coach) gave a match situation where he had to score 17 in an over. Bituwa ne 3 chakka mara. Trials mein aat chakka aur char chauwaa mara (He smashed three sixes. At trials, he hit eight sixes and four fours). —Agencies

## Smriti Mandhana launches academy in Dubai to nurture future stars

**NEW DELHI:** In a heartening step for aspiring cricketers, Indian women's batter Smriti Mandhana has partnered with acclaimed UK-based coach Don Bhagawati to launch the City Cricket Academy by Smriti Mandhana at Dubai International Academy Al Barsha. Unveiled during a press conference hosted by Cricket Predicta, this cutting-edge facility is set to become a premier cricket development hub in the region.

Tailored for boys and girls of all age groups, the academy blends Don's two decades of top-tier coaching expertise with Smriti's firsthand knowledge of the modern international game. Adding further depth to the mentoring team is Don's wife—a former England cricketer—whose experience and empathetic approach help create a holistic environment for young talent to grow and thrive.

At the press conference, Smriti Mandhana shared insights into the personal beliefs and professional principles fuelling this dis-



tinctive global initiative: "Don and his family have always welcomed me like one of their own. City Cricket Academy by Smriti Mandhana isn't just a training facility—it's a place where young cricketers are encouraged to dream big, think deeply, and grow as individuals. Don and his wife truly understand both the mindset of young aspirants and the challenges of elite-level cricket. For me, this is a heartfelt way to give back to the game that's given me everything."

Coach Don Bhagawati, beaming with pride as the academy comes to life in Dubai, applauded Smriti's exceptional and well-timed dedication "Smriti personifies the highest level of dedication

and integrity in cricket. It's heartening to see that even while performing at the highest level, she has the desire to give back. Since the first women's match since the 1700s, this may well be one of the first times a global icon has stepped into a grassroots leadership role while still playing. I'm incredibly proud of her, and I believe City Cricket Academy will enrich the game for generations to come."

The academy aims to provide structured coaching programs, mentorship from current and former players, and international exposure through exchange programs with partner academies in the UK and India. With a focus on character, confidence, and cricketing excellence, the academy is poised to become a regional benchmark.

As young cricketers cheered and posed for photos with Smriti and Don, the atmosphere captured exactly what this academy stands for—hope, ambition, and a deep love for the game. —Agencies

## Diamond Harbour FC clinch I-League 2 title; Chanmari FC also promoted

**AIZAWL:** Diamond Harbour FC of West Bengal clinched the I-League 2 title after defeating hosts Chanmari FC 1-0 here on Saturday. Both teams were promoted to the I-League as the top-two finishers in the standings.

Despite the loss, Chanmari were assured of a top-two finish after their nearest challengers Sporting Clube de Goa dropped points in a 1-1 draw against FC Bengaluru United in another match on Saturday in Bengaluru.

Diamond Harbour FC have already secured promotion on April 11 when they were assured of a top-two finish. They sit pretty at the top with 37 points (11 wins and four draws). They will hope to finish the season unbeaten when they face Bengaluru United on April 26 in Naihati.

With Chanmari FC now joining Aizawl FC in the I-League, it will mark the first time two clubs from Mizoram will be part of the I-League.

With just one round to go, Chan-



mari FC have 30 points from 15 matches (nine wins, three draws and three losses) in the I-League 2 this season.

Sporting Clube de Goa have 26 points and will finish in third place.

While the champions and promotion spots have been decided, the relegation battle has been pushed to the final day after TRAU FC's 3-2 win over Sports Academy Tirur at Manjeri, Kerala, on Sat-

urday.

Needing a win to keep survival hopes alive, TRAU clinched their first away victory of the season after a superb first-half display. They are now in eighth place with 12 points, two less than seventh-placed NEROCA FC.

It will all come down to the Imphal derby between TRAU and NEROCA on April 26 to decide who get relegated from the I-League 2.

—PTI

## LED Signage with Innovative Technology

# KASHMIR READER

For the READER  
Who seeks the TRUTH

## digital dreams

Glowing Signage Solution Experts

Rangreth Industrial Area, Budgam-191132-J&K ☎ 9596 261 113 | 8082 888 049