

■Contd on P-6

President, PM express grief over Air India crash in Ahmedabad



NEW DELHI, JUNE 12

President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi have expressed deep sorrow over the tragic crash of Air India flight AI171, which went down shortly after take-off from Ahmedabad on Thursday afternoon.

In a post on X, President Droupadi Murmu said she was "deeply distressed" to learn about the incident and called it a "heart-rending disaster."

"I am deeply distressed to learn about the tragic plane crash in Ahmedabad. It is a heart-rending disaster. My thoughts and prayers are with

the affected people. The nation stands with them in this hour of indescribable grief," the President said.

Meanwhile, Modi also conveyed his anguish, calling the tragedy "heartbreaking beyond words".

"The tragedy in Ahmedabad has stunned and saddened us. It is heartbreaking beyond words. In this sad hour, my thoughts are with everyone affected by it," the Prime Minister said.

He further added, "Have been in touch with Ministers and authorities who are working to assist those affected".

The Air India flight bound for London with 242 people on board crashed near Ahmedabad airport.

Sources said the aircraft lost contact within minutes of takeoff and went down in the Meghani Nagar area.

Kharge seeks SC-monitored probe into Air India crash

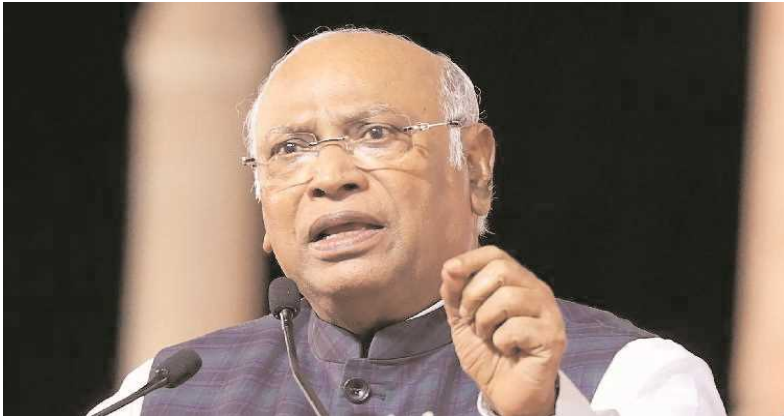
KALABURAGI, JUNE 12

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Thursday expressed deep grief over the Air India flight crash in Ahmedabad and urged the Union Government to expedite relief efforts while demanding a Supreme Court-monitored investigation into the tragedy.

Addressing the media, Kharge said, "To those in London, I wish to convey that the Indian Embassy is present and actively working on the ground. I offer my heartfelt condolences to the families of those who lost their lives in this unfortunate incident."

Calling for swift governmental response, Kharge stressed that the survivors, the injured, hostel students, and the affected local population must be provided immediate financial and medical assistance. "Every person impacted by this tragedy must receive full support - emotional, financial, and medical," he said.

The Congress chief also



appealed to all NGOs and party leaders to extend their support in managing the aftermath of the crash. "This is a time to come together and provide help in any way possible," he noted.

Kharge emphasised the need for a thorough investigation to identify the cause of the accident. "Whether the fault lies with the pilot, or with those issuing instructions, or if anyone was under pressure to operate the

flight - all facts must be brought to light," he said.

He further demanded that the inquiry be conducted either by a sitting or retired judge of the Supreme Court to ensure credibility and transparency. "We urge the government to speed up the process and uncover the truth," Kharge added.

Sustained efforts needed to implement and adopt are NEP 2020: AICTE Chairman

HYDERABAD, JUNE 12

All India Council for Technical Education Chairman T G Sitharam on Thursday called for sustained efforts to implement and adopt the New Education Policy (NEP), 2020, which were crucial to realise the fruits of the policy.

Addressing after inaugurating the two-day International conference on "Transformative Reforms in Higher Education - Best Practices in Implementation of NEP 2020", Sitharam said "NEP's vision is of a holistic, inclusive and technology-integrated education system. Its success can be measured by the impact it creates on students, especially first-generation learners, rural girl children, aspiring researchers, and aspiring entrepreneurs."

Calling NEP 2020 a watershed reform and a vision document

for India's future, he described it as a long-overdue and much-needed change aimed at positioning India as a knowledge superpower and equipping the youth with proficiency and skills.

The policy replaces rote learning with experiential and conceptual learning, and it promotes multidisciplinary and flexible education.

Highlighting the achievements in the nearly five years since NEP's implementation, he noted progress in linguistic inclusivity, digital equity, universal access to digital content, an improved research ecosystem, and enhanced accessibility. Dr. Sitharam emphasised the need for collaboration over competition and encouraged students to make a mark globally while remaining rooted to the Indian ethos.

He urged them to focus on

skill development, stating that being proficient is as important as earning a degree.

He encouraged them to upskill for the new global landscape and work toward making Viksit Bharat 2047 a reality.

He elaborated on various initiatives under NEP like Ausandhan National Research Foundation for research funding, One nation One subscription giving access to e-journals, new R&D cells, Swayam + Platform for online courses, Bharatiya Bhasha Pustak scheme to digitize Indian language textbook for school and university students, Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities, Idea Labs for experiential learning, employability training through career portal, Dx-EDGE for digital transformation of MSMEs.'

Autopsy report of Raja Raghuvanshi clearly describes injuries as "homicidal"



SHILLONG, JUNE 12

The autopsy report of Raja Raghuvanshi, who was allegedly murdered during his honeymoon in Meghalaya, revealed that he died of severe head trauma inflicted by a moderately heavy, sharp-edged weapon.

The autopsy was conducted at North East Indira Gandhi Regional Institute of Health and Medical Sciences (NEIGRIHMS), Shillong, and classified the nature of Raja's injuries as "homicidal".

A copy of the autopsy report is only available with UNI.

"The death is due to head

injury resulting from the injury No. 1 and fracture of the skull as described. Injury No. 1 and fracture to the skull are antemortem and caused by a moderately heavy, sharp cutting weapon and homicidal in nature. However, the viscera are also preserved for toxicological analysis to rule out poisoning," the autopsy report stated.

The post-mortem revealed that Raja's scalp is missing from the parietal areas, right temporal, and part of the occipital area due to decomposition.

"Skull cut fracture over the left parietal bone and part of the

frontal bone of size 7 cm x 0.1 cm, 4.5 cm left to midline and 8 cm above left supraorbital ridge. The area is depressed. Behind this fracture, the outer table of the skull is missing of size of 4.5 cm x 1.5 cm and continues as a linear fracture. Cut fracture over the occipital bone on the midline of sizes 5.5 cm x 0.1, 1 cm below external occipital protuberance," the autopsy report explained

Further, the report stated that the dura mater, the tough outer membrane protecting the brain, was severed beneath the parietal fracture, indicating the depth and force of the injury.

Due to advanced decomposition, the condition of the neck could not be fully assessed. There was no visible injury to the vertebrae, and soft tissue damage in the neck area could not be confirmed as the skin and connective tissue were missing.

Raja was reported missing on May 23, along with his newly wedded wife, Sonam Raghuvanshi. Eight days later, Meghalaya police found his partially decomposed body on June 2 near Wei Sawdong Falls during an extended search operation.

Meghalaya police registered a murder case following the recovery of Raja's decomposed body

British PM declines to meet Bangladesh's



LONDON, JUNE 12

In a major diplomatic snub, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer has reportedly refused to meet Bangladesh interim government's Chief Advisor Muhammad Yunus, who is currently visiting the United Kingdom.

UK government officials, several media reports cited, have confirmed the development, saying that Starmer has no plans to meet Yunus. They did not comment further on the matter.

Yunus on Wednesday met UK

National Security Advisor Jonathan Powell at his hotel.

Local media in Bangladesh has been showing great enthusiasm over Yunus's UK visit, even widely publicising his possible meeting with the British Prime Minister.

However, in an interview with a British daily, Yunus admitted that Starmer had not yet agreed to meet him.

Hundreds of protestors had gathered outside the Heathrow Airport and also at a Central London hotel where he is staying as Yunus began his four-day

visit to the United Kingdom on Tuesday.

Carrying black flags and banners - many of which read "Yunus is a killer of freedom fighters of Liberation War" - protestors shouted slogans like "Go back Yunus", labelling him as a promoter of militancy and radicalism in Bangladesh.

Many also demanded immediate release of detained Hindu priest Chinmoy Krishna Das, asserting that it should be Yunus instead who should face the trial and be behind the bars.

Several eyewitnesses said that demonstrators, most of them from the Awami League and comprising of Bangladeshis living in the UK after being forced to flee the country since Yunus' accession to power 10 months ago, even hurled shoes and eggs at the convoy of Yunus as it moved from the airport to the hotel.

Also, a formal letter from the Awami League's UK branch was sent to Downing Street, the Speaker of the House of Commons, the King's Foundation, and the Commonwealth Secretariat, urging British officials not to recognise the Yunus administration.

The letter stated that at a time when Bangladesh is experiencing economic decline, escalating political repression, and growing human rights abuses - particularly against women and girls - the UK government's decision to engage with Yunus threatens to send a damaging signal about the primacy of democracy and

South Korean President Lee vows to swiftly restore dialogue channels with North Korea

SEOUL, JUNE 12

South Korean President Lee Jae-myung on Thursday vowed to pursue a swift restoration of dialogue channels with North Korea, a day after his country halted loudspeaker broadcasts against the North in his first concrete measure to ease tensions with Pyongyang.

In a speech marking the 25th anniversary of the 2000 inter-Korean summit, Lee said he will "stop the exhausting hostilities" with North Korea and resume inter-Korean dialogue and cooperation.

"We will swiftly restore a crisis management system that prevents accidental clashes and avoids escalating tensions," Lee said.

"To that end, we will make efforts to quickly restore the suspended inter-Korean communication channels."

Still, it remains to be seen how North Korea will react to Lee's dialogue overture as Pyongyang has appeared to have little appetite for engagement with either Seoul or Washington amid its deepening alignment with Russia.

"I will make every effort to promote peace, coexistence and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula," Lee said in the speech delivered on his behalf by Woo Sang-ho, Presidential Secretary for Political Affairs, during a commemorative event.

Lee praised the June 15 Declaration signed by former South Korean President Kim Dae-jung and North Korean leader Kim Jong-il during the 2000 summit as a milestone



that laid the groundwork for peace and pledged to uphold the spirit of the landmark agreement, Yonhap news agency reported.

"Let's transform the Korean Peninsula risk into a Korean Peninsula premium. That is the path forward for both the South and the North," he said.

Earlier, the South Korean military said that North Korea appears to have paused its broadcasts of loud noises toward South Korea on Thursday, a day after Seoul suspended its yearlong anti-Pyongyang broadcasts along the border.

"There were no areas where North Korea's loudspeaker broadcasts were detected Thursday," the South's Joint Chiefs of Staff said, adding it is closely monitoring related movements in North Korea.

The North's broadcasts of loud noises were last heard in the western border area late

Wednesday night, a military official said on condition of anonymity.

On Wednesday, President Lee had ordered the suspension of loudspeaker broadcasts targeting North Korea in a move aimed at easing tensions and rebuilding trust, according to Yonhap news agency.

The presidential office also cited the need to ease the suffering of border area residents who have been severely affected by the noise, including the sounds of sirens and traditional drums.

Upon Lee's order, the military has halted its loudspeaker broadcasts in the border areas since 2 p.m. on Wednesday.

The suspension came a year after the military resumed the campaign for the first time in six years in June last year, under the former Yoon Suk Yeol government, in response to the North's repeated launch of trash-carrying balloons across

Air Force grounds KF-16 fighter jets following Alaska accident



SEOUL, JUNE 12

The South Korean Air Force said on Thursday that it has temporarily grounded KF-16 fighter jets following an accident involving the aircraft during the US-led multinational Red Flag air exercise in Alaska earlier this week.

On Tuesday (US time), two pilots ejected from the twin-seat fighter after an emergency situation occurred during takeoff from Eielson Air Force Base. The pilots did not suffer major injuries, but the aircraft was partially damaged due to a fire.

The Air Force has dispatched

a 20-member team to Alaska to probe the accident and carry out emergency maintenance, amid efforts to determine the exact cause of the accident under close cooperation with the US side. In a press briefing, an Air Force official said the service has yet to decide whether to participate in the air exercise that runs through June 27 as planned or call in the deployed aircrew.

In a separate statement, the US 354th Fighter Wing confirmed the incident occurred on base within the fence line of the Eielson Air Force Base, while departing the prepared surface.

The scope of the aircraft damage and the circumstances lead-

ing to the accident were not immediately known.

"The two pilots visited a US Army hospital and are currently recovering. No major injuries were reported other than minor burns and lacerations," the Air Force said in a notice.

The KF-16 fighter, which was partially damaged due to a fire, remains parked on the grass near the runway, it added.

The Air Force plans to dispatch a team to probe the accident and carry out emergency maintenance later in the day, amid efforts to determine the exact cause of the accident under close cooperation with the US side.

The incident is the first known accident involving a South Korean fighter jet overseas.

Launched in 1975, the Red Flag-Alaska exercise is designed to provide realistic training in a simulated combat environment, according to the US military.

South Korea has deployed fighter jets to the exercise since 2013. This year, the South's Air Force mobilised 11 aircraft, including the KF-16 fighter and the KC-330 transport plane, and some 100 airmen.

Arvind Gupta holds public darbar at BJP headquarters



**BN CORRESPONDENT
JAMMU, JUN 12**

Arvind Gupta, Secretary BJP J&K and MLA from Jammu West, conducted a well-attended Public Darbar at the party headquarters in Trikuta Nagar, Jammu.

The Public Darbar attracted a large number of people from Jammu city and surrounding areas, with various deputations representing different sections of society. Deputations presented a range of pressing civic and administrative concerns, highlighting the everyday challenges faced by the people, particularly related to basic services and

infrastructure.

Key issues raised during the interaction included the deterioration of road infrastructure, chronic water shortages, frequent electricity outages, non-functional or absent street lights, and the urgent need for repair and maintenance of lanes and drains. Citizens also brought attention to problems related to ration card discrepancies, delayed implementation of welfare schemes, and lack of responsiveness from some government departments.

Addressing the grievances with promptness, Arvind Gupta assured the attendees that all issues flagged during the Darbar

would be taken up with the concerned departments on priority. In many cases, immediate written communications were issued to the relevant officials, urging swift action and accountability. He reiterated that the BJP is committed to ensuring that no citizen is left unheard and no issue is left unresolved.

Speaking to the media after the event, Gupta stated, "The BJP has always believed in direct engagement with the people. The Public Darbar is an effective platform for citizens to voice their concerns and for us to respond in real time. Under the visionary leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi, our government remains deeply rooted in grassroots democracy and is focused on delivering effective, transparent, and responsive governance."

He further emphasized that the overwhelming participation in the Public Darbar reflects the deep trust and confidence that people place in the BJP. "It is a matter of pride and responsibility for us. We are determined to live up to the expectations of the public and ensure that governance is both inclusive and result-oriented," Gupta added.

IIM Jammu concludes 4th Batch of CBP for J&K Finance Officials under CITaG initiative

**BN CORRESPONDENT
JAMMU, JUN 12**

The Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Jammu hosted the Valedictory Ceremony of the Capacity Building Program (Batch-4) for officials of the Finance, Planning & Monitoring Department, Government of Jammu & Kashmir at Vice Chancellor's Conference Hall, SKUAST Kashmir, Srinagar. The program was organized under the aegis of the Centre for Innovation and Transformation in Governance (CITaG) and concluded on 12th June 2025. The valedictory ceremony was graced by Prof. B.S. Sahay, Director, IIM Jammu (Online Mode).

Present on the occasion were Prof. Jabir Ali, Dean, Faculty and Research. Also present on the occasion were Dr. Sanjay Pathak, Chairperson, Executive Education & Consultancy (joining online), along with Program Directors Prof. Ravij Seth, Dr. GuanguanangKahmei, and Dr. Garima Maurya. Dr. Kapil Gumte and Dr. Chinmaya Kumar Swain are also serving as Program Directors for the training program under CITaG. The Capacity Building Program features 94 participants from officials of the Finance and Planning & Monitoring Department of the Government of Jammu and Kashmir. Participants shared their reflections and valuable insights on the training program, highlighting its relevance and impact on their professional roles.

In his address, Prof. B.S. Sahay, Director, IIM Jammu, commended the active participation of officials and reaffirmed IIM Jammu's commitment to fostering efficient, transparent, and citizen-centric governance. He emphasized the vision of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi for a Viksit Bharat by 2047, stressing the need for well-



defined goals and timelines in governance reforms. He expressed confidence that the program would enhance administrative capacity in the Union Territory and position CITaG as a national model for good governance. He highlighted the importance of lifelong learning and invited participants to visit the IIM Jammu, Jammucampus. He underlined the potential of new train (Vande Bharat) connectivity to boost tourism and proposed conducting training programs onboard. Stressing future-ready governance, he called for embracing innovation, emerging technologies, and Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs). He noted that 57 PPP projects across 11 critical sectors have been identified to be taken up through CITaG. He urged officials to focus on policy formulation, sector identification, and viability gap funding to attract investments. He called for collective commitment to make Jammu and Kashmir a model Union Territory aligned with the vision of Viksit Bharat.

Prof. Nazeer Ahmed Ganai, Hon'ble Vice Chancellor, SKUAST Kashmir emphasized the importance of redefining one's role in governance and

development. He urged participants to align their work with national goals, especially the vision of a Viksit Bharat. Highlighting the value of lifelong learning, he cited global examples and encouraged setting clear objectives to improve the economy and governance in Jammu and Kashmir. He appreciated IIM Jammu for hosting the program and congratulated Prof. B.S. Sahay, Director, IIM Jammu and the Government of J&K for their commitment to transformative change, expressing confidence in their ability to drive progress in the region.

Prof. Jabir Ali, Dean Research and Faculty, IIM Jammu, emphasized that this program marks the beginning of a transformative journey with a strong mandate. He highlighted the need for future-ready officials, stressing the role of AI-based learning and PPP models in driving economic change. Noting the absence of PPP projects in J&K, he urged proactive identification and proposal development, citing SKUAST Kashmir's submission of proposals as a positive step.

He stated that the three-day training program aimed to spark curiosity and initiate economic transformation in the region.

Indian Army Organized an Amity Meet with Local Community at Haribudha



**BN CORRESPONDENT
POONCH, JUN 12**

The Indian Army organized an Amity Meet at Haribudha village in the Poonch District. The meeting witnessed enthusiastic participation from the local community, including civil administration representatives, the

Sarpanch, Nambardar, and village elders from Haribudha and surrounding areas. The Amity Meet marked a significant step towards fostering consistent and constructive engagement between the Indian Army and civil society. During the event, the villagers shared the challenges they encounter in their

daily lives. The Indian Army assured them that their concerns would be addressed on a priority basis. The youth were also briefed on the qualifications required to join the Indian Army and were encouraged to contribute positively to the progress of the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir.

The local residents expressed their appreciation for the Indian Army's continuous support and emphasized the importance of organizing such interactions regularly to strengthen the bond between the Indian Army and Awam. They lauded the Indian Army's unwavering support during times of need and reiterated their trust in its efforts. The meeting concluded with a community lunch, providing an opportunity for informal interaction and strengthening the spirit of camaraderie between the Indian Army and the villagers.

Arun Gupta begins third term as CCI Jammu president, pledges round-the-clock support to traders



**BN CORRESPONDENT
JAMMU, JUNE 12**

In his first interaction with the media after being re-elected as the President of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI), Jammu, for the third consecutive term, Sh. Arun Gupta addressed a press conference at the Chamber House today. Expressing gratitude to the members for reposing faith in his leadership, he assured the business fraternity of his full-time availability and commitment towards addressing their issues and advancing the overall interests of the region.

Gupta emphasized that while the Chamber primarily advocates for the welfare of trade and industry, it has also remained actively engaged in raising

broader socio-economic concerns confronting the people of Jammu. He said that although several issues were highlighted during the Chamber's previous term, many still require focused attention-particularly the long-pending Industrial Package for existing units and turnover-based incentives to revive and sustain industrial growth.

Highlighting infrastructural and urban concerns, Gupta urged the government to take concrete steps for decongesting the old city by developing new commercial markets. He also stressed the urgency of resolving issues pertaining to leasehold industrial properties and called for expedited completion of important developmental projects such as the River Tawi Front and the Artificial Lake, which

have been languishing for years. Reaffirming the Chamber's commitment, he said, "As a responsible organization, the Chamber of Commerce & Industry will continue to guard the interests of Jammu and fight for the cause of the region. Our goal is to help Jammu emerge as a prominent tourist hub, and for that, we seek the collective support of all stakeholders."

During the briefing, Sh. Arun Gupta also raised strong objections to the recent notification making Urdu a mandatory qualification for the post of Naib Tehsildar, terming it discriminatory against the educated youth of Jammu. He questioned the rationale behind this move, pointing out that all revenue records are already available in English, Hindi, and Urdu, and urged the government to rectify the notification without delay.

Before concluding, Gupta extended heartfelt thanks to Sh. Shiv Partap Gupta, Election President; Sh. Prithvi Raj Gupta, Chief Election Observer; and Members of the Election Committee-Sh. Manmohan Singh, Sh. Vijay Gupta, and Sh. Kulbhushan Gupta (Manu)-for conducting free, fair, and peaceful elections to the Chamber.

Prominent office bearers who accompanied the President during the press conference included Sh. Anil Gupta (Senior Vice President), Sh. Rajeev Gupta (Junior Vice President), Sh. Rajesh Gupta (Secretary), and Sh. Rajesh Gupta (Treasurer).

J&K Bank organises Customer Meet at Toph Sherkhanian Branch; Highlights 888 Days Deposit Scheme and Digital Services

**BN CORRESPONDENT
JAMMU, JUNE 12**

Jammu & Kashmir Bank's Toph Sherkhanian Branch organized a Customer Meet to strengthen ties with its clientele and enhance awareness about its latest financial products and services. The event was chaired by Mr. Arjun Singh Rathore, Cluster Head Jammu, and Mr. Sanjeev Singh, Assistant General Manager (AGM), in the presence of valued customers from various sections of society.

The program commenced with a warm welcome address by Mr. Sunil Kumar, Branch Manager, who expressed gratitude to the attendees for their continued trust in the bank.

During the interaction, customers were extensively apprised of the bank's offerings, with special emphasis on the 888 Days Term Deposit Scheme, which currently offers the highest rate of interest in the banking sector. The scheme provides an attractive interest rate of 7.30% for general customers, with additional benefits of 0.50% for senior citizens and 0.75% for super senior citizens. The scheme drew significant interest from participants for its lucrative returns and flexibility.

Another product that gained attention was the Smart Saver Scheme, aimed at providing a



combination of savings and liquidity. In addition, loan products such as car loans and housing loans were discussed in detail, with several customers expressing keen interest and seeking clarifications on eligibility and terms. The Cluster Head personally addressed queries raised by attendees, ensuring clarity and customer satisfaction.

The session also included a detailed presentation on digital banking products, where customers were encouraged to make use of the bank's robust digital platforms for a more convenient banking experience.

Speaking on the occasion, the Branch Head reiterated J&K Bank's commitment to transparency, customer satisfaction,

and promoting financial literacy. He urged customers to share their feedback and suggestions to help improve service delivery further.

The event concluded with a vote of thanks presented by the AGM of the Branches Department, Zonal Office Jammu, who appreciated the customers for their enthusiastic participation and assured them of continued support.

Such interactive initiatives underscore J&K Bank's dedication to building stronger community relations and ensuring that banking remains accessible, customer-friendly, and responsive to the evolving financial needs of society.

Viksit Krishi Sampark Abhiyan Programmes held at several locations in Kishtwar



**BN CORRESPONDENT
KISHTWAR, JUNE 12**

During the ongoing 15 days massive pan India programme on Viksit Krishi Sankamlp Abhiyan being organized by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Govt. of India and ICAR, New Delhi, the awareness programmes were held at 9 different locations across district Kishtwar by different teams under the leadership of Dr Narinder Paul Head KrishiVigyan Kendra Kishtwar and KushalChandel, Chief Agriculture Officer Kishtwar.

In one of the programmes

held at Nagra Village of Kwar Panchayat of Nagseni Tehsil, Dr Narinder Paul, Head KVK Kishtwar and KushalChandel CAO Kishtwar along with the officers of Padyarna Zone and allied departments participated. Dr Paul while educating the farmers about the different schemes of the Govt. of India on financial inclusion called for the significant use of the PM KisanSammanNidhi financial support and loans of Kissan Credit Cards for the purchase of the high quality critical inputs for scientific and sustainable agriculture. He suggested for diversification in the agriculture

for raising farm income.

KushalChandel CAO, Kishtwar, called for adoption of soil and water conservation practices to adapt to the existing climate changes. He also called for cultivation of high value crops and take benefits from CSS and HADP schemes. He informed that the KissanKidmatGhars (KKGs) are being set up across the Kishtwar District for meeting out the Information Technology related needs of the farming community. Besides these KKGs are being strengthened by providing seed and fertilizer licences to ensure the timely availability of quality agriculture inputs at the doorsteps of the farmers.

Farmers raised the issues of renovation of existing khools as their dilapidated condition has affected the irrigation of their farms for which he ensured that the matter will be taken up on priority basis with the concerned department. He also distributed the Portable vermibeds to the beneficiary farmers for production of vermicompost as part of the organic farming. Vikram Bhandari, Amit Kumar, Sandeep Anand and other officers of Agriculture department also spoke on the occasion.

BOLD NEWS

TRIBUTE TO HAMLE BULBUL: KASHMIRI MUSIC ICON

The passing of UstadGhulamNabi Shah, fondly known as Hamle Bulbul, marks the end of a golden era in the history of Jammu and Kashmir's rich cultural and musical heritage. His demise not only leaves a void in the world of Kashmiri folk music but also compels us to reflect deeply on the fragile state of traditional art forms and the immense value of individuals who dedicate their lives to preserving them. A true cultural icon, Hamle Bulbul was more than a performer-he was a custodian of Kashmir's indigenous music traditions and an embodiment of the region's soulful artistry.

Hailing from the serene village of DangiwachaRafiabad in Baramulla, Bulbul brought national attention to the nuanced beauty of Kashmiri folk music. His voice, steeped in the essence of the valley, reverberated across generations. Whether it was his mastery over the sarangi, his unique glass-balancing dance performances, or his emotive renditions of BachaNagma-Bulbul's art was both deeply traditional and extraordinarily personal. It captured the ethos of Kashmir's centuries-old cultural rhythm while engaging

new audiences with its authenticity and passion. Serving for over three decades in the Department of Information, his role extended beyond performance. He represented the essence of Kashmiri music on national and international stages with dignity, humility, and unflinching commitment. His artistic journey was as much about excellence as it was about service-to art, to the state, and to the people. In doing so, he not only earned personal accolades such as the prestigious Sher-e-Kashmir Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Award in 2011 but also elevated the profile of Jammu and Kashmir's performing arts across the country. Bulbul's contributions were not confined to the stage. He inspired fellow artists, mentored aspiring performers, and worked closely with cultural institutions to ensure that Kashmiri music was not just preserved but celebrated. His artistry was rooted in the lived experiences of his people, which is why it resonated so deeply. Each performance was a tribute to the land, its stories, its joys, and its sorrows. His presence in cultural outreach events organized by the Information Department was a highlight for many, and his collaborations served as a bridge between tradition and evolving contemporary sensibilities. What made Bulbul's persona so remarkable was not only his prodigious talent but also his humility. In a world increasingly defined by celebrity culture and fleeting fame, he remained

grounded, accessible, and deeply respected by all who worked with him. His colleagues, superiors, and fans recall a man who carried his fame lightly and his responsibility to culture seriously. The condolence meeting organized by the Information Department and heartfelt tributes from cultural bodies like AdbiMarkazKamraz are testimony to the indelible mark he left on Kashmir's cultural consciousness. As we mourn his passing, it becomes imperative for both society and institutions to ask: who will carry this legacy forward? The life of Hamle Bulbul serves as a poignant reminder that while artists may depart, their art lives on only if it is nurtured, documented, and passed to future generations. The government and cultural organizations must take concrete steps to archive his work, support traditional artists, and promote music education that includes regional folk traditions. Kashmir's artistic identity is a tapestry woven from countless threads like his, and we must not allow them to fray. In celebrating the contributions of Hamle Bulbul, we are not merely paying tribute to a beloved artist-we are reaffirming our commitment to cultural sustainability. His music was more than entertainment; it was an act of resilience, of remembrance, and of resistance against the tides of cultural amnesia. Let this moment not be defined by mourning alone, but by a renewed dedication to protect and promote the indigenous artistic traditions he lived and loved.

The silence left by Bulbul's passing is profound. But within it lies an echo-a call to action to recognize the artists among us, to honour their contributions in their lifetimes, and to ensure that their legacy continues to inspire. In the melodies he gave us and the traditions he revived, UstadGhulamNabi Shah will always remain the eternal voice of Kashmir's musical soul.

Trump’s tariffs and a U.S.-India trade agreement

R.V. ANURADHA

At the end of the day, it was not the big fight between nations, but a case brought by five small U.S. businesses that presented the biggest challenge yet, to U.S. President Donald Trump's sweeping tariffs.

Tariffs are the substance of laws and regulations formulated after highly rigorous trade negotiations. The binding of tariffs through schedules of commitments in trade agreements, offers much needed certainty and predictability to businesses trading across borders. Which is why Mr. Trump's sweeping tariffs — 10% to 135%, over 100 countries worldwide — were a stunning repudiation of the rules of trade. That it also extended to the barren Arctic marine reserves of Heard and McDonald Islands, uninhabited by humans, just highlighted the irony of a bizarre executive order.

This sweeping executive action also upended the fundamental principle of separation of powers between the three branches of government — the legislature, the executive and the judiciary — which lie at the heart of any democratic constitutional framework. That such an exercise of executive authority could happen without any checks and balances in the U.S., widely regarded as among the modern world's oldest democracies with a strong constitutional framework, was another point of reckoning.

Five small and mid-sized U.S. businesses, dealing with wines, plastics, bicycles, musical circuits, and fishing equipment, took on the U.S. administration, and challenged the presidential executive order at the U.S. Court of International Trade (U.S. CIT), stating that the tariffs were unlawfully harming their operations and economic viability.

A closer look at ‘trade deficits’

The Trump administration argued that the tariffs were necessary to address the “national emergency” created by U.S.’ trade deficits with all countries worldwide. Trade deficit occurs when imports exceed exports. A “deficit” is not necessarily bad for a country's economic health. It only demonstrates the availability of consumer wealth to purchase imported goods. In any event, the U.S. administration, bizarrely, did not account for U.S. export of services in its calculation. For example, the U.S. has cited the \$44.4 billion trade deficit with India. This, however, does not consider trade in services (which includes digital services, financial services, education) and arms trade, after considering which, the Global Trade Research Initiative has estimated that the U.S. actually runs a \$35 billion-\$40 billion overall surplus with India.

The U.S. CIT, in its judgment dated May 28, 2025, ruled that the worldwide and retaliatory tariffs exceeded any authority under law. The court cautioned against the blatant and overarching use of “national emergency” powers by the President. It noted that the mere incantation of “national emergency” cannot sound the “death-knell of the Constitution”, and, additionally, cannot enable the President to rewrite tariff commitments in international agreements.

The strong and powerful ruling, so far, has had little practical impact, having been stayed the very next day by a U.S. appeals court. The tariffs and the threat of tariffs, therefore, continue, and so does the pressure to conclude a trade deal with the U.S. The Trump administration had in fact, argued before the U.S. CIT that the enhanced tariffs provided it leverage in trade negotiations — an argument which

the CIT ruled does not in any manner mitigate its legal infirmity. More egregious U.S. executive actions are promised as part of the Trump One Big Beautiful Bill (OB BB) — a proposed omnibus law which would reportedly also grant the executive immunity from enforcement of judicial orders.

Where India stands
Where does all this really leave India? The governments of both countries have been indicating an early conclusion of a trade agreement, before the U.S. threat of the July 8 deadline. Despite ongoing negotiations, the U.S. has enhanced its existing punitive tariffs of 25% on steel and 10% on aluminium imports (in force since Mr. Trump's first term), to 50% on both. Pursuant to complaints initiated at the World Trade Organization by Switzerland, Norway, China and Türkiye, WTO panels had ruled (in 2022) that the tariffs imposed during Mr. Trump's first term, do not meet the proposed justification of national security. India too had initiated a WTO dispute, but withdrew this on the basis of a “mutually agreed solution” with the U.S. in 2023. That mutual solution clearly did not prevent Trump administration extending the new 50% tariffs on steel and aluminium to India as well. India's contemplated retaliation at the WTO has been resisted by the U.S. A purported target of the Trump administration's ire is China's rise. The argument that the U.S.-China trade impasse presents a possible strategic advantage for India, however, is made uncertain by two recent developments: the U.S. and China's truce, pausing their retaliatory tariffs against each other and working towards a negotiated solution; and, more importantly, the U.S. administration's threats to impose tariffs on Apple's products, should it manufacture in India. Mr.

Trump's transactional approach also indicates that there is no guarantee that the U.S. will intervene in India's favour should there be a military standoff with China.

The path ahead
In any trade agreement with the U.S., therefore, a careful balancing of India's interests is paramount. Any deal would need to ensure the removal of all additional tariffs on India's exports, allay concerns about retaliatory tariffs on U.S. investments, such as that from Apple in India, and ensure that the proposed OB BB Act's 3.5% tax on remittances sent from the U.S. does not apply to remittances by Indian citizens. India should also seek assurance that there would be no retaliation against India's digital services taxes. A long-standing concern for India is also the fears and backlash against H-1B visas, used widely by tech companies for their Indian employees. It is critical for a trade deal to address the issue of visas required for services trade.

It is equally important for both sides to iron out the delivery of cross-border trade in services, which includes aspects relating to data flows and their regulation.

Above all, any trade agreement that India negotiates with the U.S. needs to be fully aligned with India's commitments under the WTO. The U.S. disregard for multilateral institutions, notwithstanding, WTO's multilateral set of rules is the only real safeguard in an uncertain world, and India needs to do much more to preserve its foundations, as committed during its G-20 presidency.

Finally, India should have the ability to stay out of any sub-optimal deal. Mr. Trump's tariffs, while painful, are likely to have a short lifespan with the biggest challenge emerging from within the U.S. itself.

Urbanisation and the challenge of ideal transit solutions

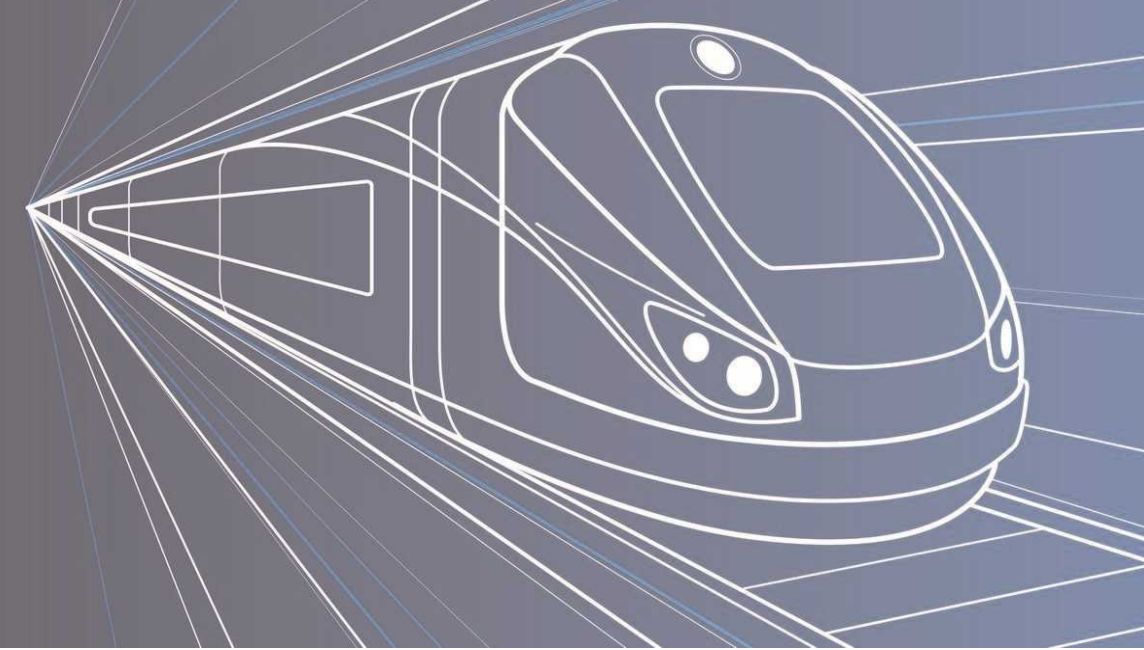
SANJIB POHIT,SOVINI MONDAL

Among the various aspects of Viksit Bharat by 2047, an urbanised India is sure to be a principal one as it is expected that urban India will be the engine of growth in this transformation. Let us note that over 60% of India's population would move from low-productive rural India to highly productive urban India by the 2060s.

Clearly, the mobility of people on such a large scale within cities, from their residential quarters to work areas, will be a test for urban planners. While policymakers have plans to construct smart cities, where the need for the mobility of workers will be substantially reduced, the fact remains that, unlike China, we do not see many of the newly emerging smart cities coming of age. In contrast, the metros/existing tier 1 cities are on an ever-expanding spree, leading to rising challenges for policymakers, such as meeting the transportation demand of workers.

Rising to the challenge
The government is increasingly focused on augmenting the public transport system to meet the urban mobility challenge. This year's Budget saw the launch of the PM e-Bus Sewa-Payment Security Mechanism, with the aim of improving urban bus transportation in India (nearly 10,000 urban buses). The PM Electric Drive Revolution in Innovative Vehicle Enhancement (PM e-Drive) scheme was introduced, which will support the procurement of 14,000 new e-buses, 1,10,000 e-rickshaws, e-trucks, and e-ambulances. However, according to estimates, India needs 2,00,000 urban buses, but only 35,000 are operational (including e-buses). This is far below the requirement.

Another initiative has been the greater emphasis on building metro networks and a higher allocation of funds in multiple metro/tier I cities to cater to the high density. This is in line with the trend seen



in the recent Budget.

However, as the Economic Survey that was released on the eve of the Budget on January 31, has cited, only 37% of urban residents in India have easy access to public transportation. In contrast, in Brazil and China, more than 50% of urban residents have convenient access to mass transit. Clearly, India is too far behind in developing an efficient public system.

The development of a metro network is a long-term and costly venture. Much of it has been developed with the Centre's funding. And invariably, most have yet to recover their total costs (which includes fixed and operational costs). In almost all metros, the ridership projected in the project document has still to be matched. So, recovering the cost may be a difficult proposition unless the route lies along a high-density route. Also, it has been observed that users are extremely fare sensitive — a fare rise invariably leads to a fall in footfalls. Invariably, consumers seek out their ways keeping in mind comfort, time and cost due to the high cost of last-mile connectivity from metro stations to their work/residence points.

Unlike in some developed

countries where public transport is highly subsidised in order to make metro transportation cheap, our government is not financially rich enough to dole out recurrent and large subsidies.

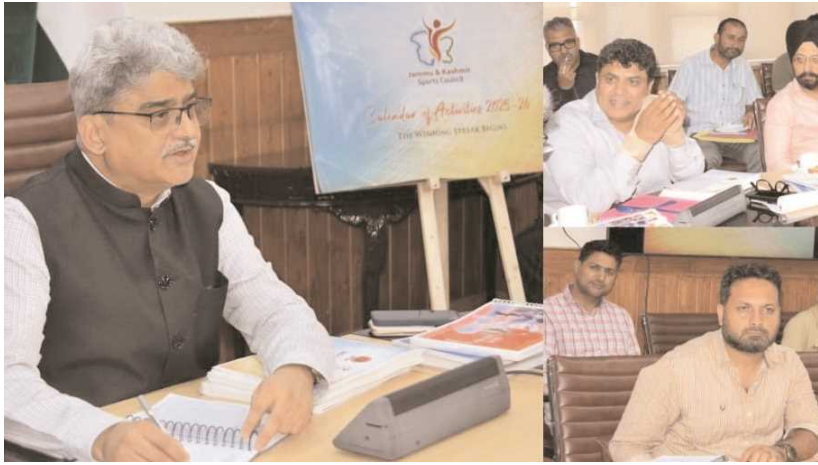
Seeking alternatives
India also needs cost-effective, road-based public transport for better last-mile connectivity. This year's Budget has increased allocations for urban bus systems, thus continuing efforts to boost capacity, especially in the metros. However, private investment remains limited due to uncertain returns. Government funds have shifted from CNG to more expensive e-buses. Future bottom-up transport models may focus on road-based modes that use electric, CNG, hydrogen, or biofuel technologies. Yet, they often overlook trams and trolleybuses, which, based on a life cycle cost and revenue analysis, can outperform e-buses in financial terms and deserve serious policy consideration in India's urban transport planning.

Some estimates
Revenue generation and economic viability over time are the necessary parameters to estimate whether urban road-based public transport has a financial deficit or is making a profit in its life cycle.

Analysing the profit and loss (P&L) percentages for various public transport modes will help in accurate decision-making on adopting a future transit. We find that trams show a 45% long-term profitability over seven decades, the usual life cycle of the tram, along with scalability and alignment with climate goals. In contrast, an e-bus system, which is currently the preferred mode on Indian roads, fails to maintain profitability due to high operational and replacement costs, resulting in a net loss of 82% over seven decades. Though moderately efficient, trolleybuses fall short of matching the overall benefits of trams, incurring a minimal loss over the specified time frame.

This raises a critical question. Are we truly investing in the most sustainable and cost-effective transit solutions, or are we chasing a future dependent on continuous public subsidies? The planned introduction of trams in Kochi could mark a game-changing moment in India's urban mobility story. Reviving our past is not just a nostalgic choice of what Kolkata thinks — it is a smart and timely move toward a more sustainable and financially viable transport future.

Give top priority to youth fitness and nurturing sporting excellence: CS



BN CORRESPONDENT SRINAGAR, JUN 12

In a significant move to harness the power of youth and channel their energies into productive and health-enhancing pursuits, Chief Secretary, Atal Dulloo, today chaired a high-level meeting to review the performance and roadmap of the Youth Services & Sports Department (YS&S). The meeting witnessed vibrant discussions on expanding the sporting landscape of the Union Territory and enhancing youth engagement through structured and inclusive initiatives.

Calling the Department's role vital in building a fit, focused, and drug-free society, the Chief Secretary underlined the transformative power of sports in shaping personalities, cultivating discipline, and deterring youth from harmful distractions like substance abuse. He emphasized that increased community participation in sports must become a key pillar of public health and social development in the UT.

The Department should aim to bring every young person into the fold of some sporting discipline. This not only nurtures physical well-being but fosters a

sense of purpose, teamwork, and self-control, Dulloo remarked.

He applauded the strides made in strengthening sports infrastructure* which he said now rivals national benchmarks. Encouraging the optimal utilization of newly created stadiums, indoor arenas, and playgrounds across the UT, the Chief Secretary urged the department to aspire towards organizing more mega sporting events that can spotlight local talent and inspire wider participation.

Recognizing the natural water bodies as untapped potential for adventure and water sports, Dulloo also directed officials to **initiate water-based sporting activities at Manasbal Lake and to explore competitive events at Ranjit Sagar Lake in Kathua, adding a thrilling dimension to the UT's sports repertoire.

The meeting also marked a milestone celebration with the release of the Annual Sports Calendar, alongside beautifully curated coffee table books and compendiums that capture J&K's remarkable journey in sports. These publications showcase the Department's achievements, the growth of infrastructure, and the rising graph of talent emerging from every corner

Reviews Functioning of the Youth Services & Sports Department

of the UT.

The Commissioner Secretary, YS&S, Sarmad Hafeez, in his remarks, gave a panoramic view of the sporting ecosystem in the UT. He informed that millions of youth have been directly or indirectly engaged in various sports activities organized at the block, district, and UT levels. The Department, he noted, has created dozens of world-class infrastructure facilities over the past few years, many of which now align with national and even international standards.

He reiterated that the day is not far when Jammu & Kashmir's sports infrastructure will be counted among the best in the country, adding that the Department is also collaborating with national sports associations to host major events in the region.

Secretary of J&K Sports Council, Nuzhat Gul, also made a detailed presentation outlining the Council's efforts in tournament organization, grassroots coaching, and infrastructure upgradation. She highlighted the impact of trained coaches across disciplines and expressed confidence that, with continued support and planning, J&K's athletes will soon rank among the country's finest. With a renewed commitment to nurture sporting talent, promote physical fitness, and build a robust sports infrastructure here.

JU Law School hosts client counselling competition to foster real-world legal skills



NIWA NEWS JAMMU, JUNE 12

The Law School, University of Jammu, successfully organized an engaging Client Counselling Competition, designed to simulate critical attorney-client interactions for its students.

The event provided participants with a platform to demonstrate essential skills in conducting initial client interviews, assessing complex legal issues, and formulating strategic advice—all centered around a client-focused approach. It specifically aimed to hone crucial abilities like active listening, empathy, teamwork, and time management, vital for future legal professionals.

Prof. Seema Rohmetra, Director of The Law School, in her welcome address expressed that, "This competition bridges the gap between theoretical learning and real-world legal

practice. By engaging in simulated client interactions, our students develop not just legal acumen but also the human touch required in the profession. Such initiatives align with our vision of producing socially responsible and practice-ready lawyers."

A distinguished panel of High Court advocates, including Adv. Rajnish Raina, Adv. Meenakshi Slathia Kaur, Adv. Aarti Bahl, Adv. Geetanjali Goswami, Adv. Kiran Thakur, and Adv. Deepak Sangral, adjudicated the competition, bringing invaluable real-world insights. Additionally, Adv. Amit Gupta and Adv. Ilesh Sharma witnessed the proceedings and interacted with participants.

The event was coordinated by Dr. Monica Narang and Dr. Nitin Sharma of the Legal Aid and Legal Literacy Committee, fostering a meaningful exchange of knowledge among students, faculty, and legal experts.

Shri Shiv Kumar Sharma, DIG Jammu-Samba-Kathua Range, graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. Emphasizing the societal impact of legal counselling, he commended the Law School for integrating practical simulations into legal education, stating, "Such initiatives empower students to navigate real-life disputes with sensitivity and professionalism."

Faculty mentors, including Dr. Monika Bhardwaj, Dr. Bindu Sangra, Dr. Shubha Vats, Dr. Mrinalini Atrey, Dr. Vandita Sharma, Dr. Upasana Sharma, Dr. Pallvi Mathavan Puri, and Dr. Nitin Sharma, played a pivotal role in guiding participants and upholding academic rigor.

The student organizing committee comprising Navneet Bhagat, Aditi, Simran Sharma, Aamna Sadiq, Musafir, Palak, and Rupal ensured the event's seamless execution.

Certificates of Appreciation were awarded to winning teams, judges, participants, and volunteer clients.

The knowledge partner Mr. Kamal Taneja (J&K & Ladakh Law Journal & LEGAL EAGLE E-Library) and Mr. S. Randhir Singh (Study IQ IAS) engaged with students, offering support for competitive exam preparation and legal updates.

The event concluded with a formal vote of thanks by Dr. Monika Bhardwaj, who acknowledged the collective efforts that made the competition a success.

MLA declares open Inter-Zonal District Level Sports Tournament at Ramban

Over 335 student athletes from all six zones participate on inaugural day

BN CORRESPONDENT RAMBAN, JUN 12



The Department of Youth Services and Sports Ramban, today inaugurated the Inter-Zonal District Level Sports Tournament for Under-14 and Under-17 boys and girls in the disciplines of Kabaddi, Kho-Kho and Volleyball here at District Police Lines (DPL) Ground.

The tournament was declared open by Member Legislative Assembly Ramban Advocate Arjun Singh Raju as the Chief Guest. The event is being held under the direction of the Director General, YSS J&K and the guidance of District Youth Services and Sports Officer (DYSSO) Jagdesh Raj Sharma.

The opening ceremony witnessed an enthusiastic participation of over 335 student athletes from all six zones of the district, accompanied by their respective Zonal Physical Education Officers, Physical Education Teachers, Rehbar-e-Khel instructors and field staff. The ground buzzed with energy as young athletes showcased

their passion for sports in an environment filled with discipline, sportsmanship and zeal. An anti drug pledge was also administered to the participants. Addressing the gathering, the MLA lauded the Youth Services and Sports Department for providing a platform to youth to showcase their talent and energy through sports. He emphasized that such events are crucial for identifying grassroots-level talent and fostering a spirit of unity and teamwork among youth. He also advised the youth to remain focused on their goals and to stay away from negative influences, urging them to take full advantage of such opportunities for personal development.

The DYSSO highlighted the

transformative power of sports in shaping character and promoting a healthy lifestyle. He urged the youth to embrace sports as a positive alternative to harmful habits particularly substance abuse and as a means to develop self-confidence, leadership, and resilience.

Prominent among those present were ZEPO Banihal Saidullah Mir; ZEPO Khari, Fayaz Ahmed Mir; ZEPO Batote, Joginder Paul Gupta; ZEPO Ukhral, Mohd Haroon Bhat, and Activity Incharge, Arun Kumar Sharma, who expressed their appreciation for the smooth conduct of the tournament and the commendable performance of the participants.

JMC, Urban Forestry Division launch 'Clean Jammu Green Jammu' Campaign



Target to plant 60,000 saplings before August 15, 2025

BN CORRESPONDENT JAMMU, JUN 12

In a significant step towards promoting environmental sustainability, Jammu Municipal Corporation (JMC), in collaboration with the Urban Forestry Division Jammu, launched the 'Clean Jammu Green Jammu' campaign today.

The campaign was inaugurated by Commissioner, Jammu Municipal Corporation, Dr. Devansh Yadav, who led the initiative by planting a sapling, symbolizing the start of a city-wide plantation drive. The event witnessed enthusiastic participation from Swachhata Champions of various wards, media personnel from print and electronic media, and officers from both departments.

Addressing the gathering, Dr. Yadav emphasized the urgent need for enhancing green cover in the city, especially in light of rising temperatures. Under the joint initiative, around 60,000 saplings will be planted across Jammu city before August 15, 2025, he informed and urged upon the citizens to actively participate in this noble campaign and contribute towards making Jammu a cleaner and greener city.

Delegation from Ward No. 58 call on Div Com, demands urgent redressal of civic issues



BN CORRESPONDENT JAMMU, JUN 12

In a proactive move to address multiple civic challenges plaguing their locality, a delegation of residents from Jeevan Nagar, Ward No. 58, met with the Divisional Commissioner Jammu today. The delegation highlighted the pressing issue of waterlogging in the area, especially during the rainy season, due to the overflow of a nearby nallah. They strongly demanded the immediate construction of a reinforced cement concrete (RCC) wall along the nallah to prevent further overflow and protect residential areas from flooding. The Divisional Commissioner gave a patient hearing to the grievances and assured the delegation that the matter would be taken up on priority.

During the meeting, the dele-

gation also raised concerns over the deteriorating power supply in the Babliana area. They informed the Commissioner that the current 6.3 MVA transformer at the local power station is unable to bear the existing load, leading to frequent electricity cuts to protect the equipment. The residents requested the replacement of the existing transformer with a 10 MVA unit to resolve the issue and ensure a stable power supply, especially during the peak summer season.

In addition to power concerns, the delegation expressed serious worry over the issue of water scarcity and leaking pipelines in the locality. They urged the Divisional Commissioner to intervene and ensure immediate replacement of damaged pipelines to restore proper and consistent water supply to the residents.

transparency," Chandan noted.

He further highlighted the transformative impact of digital infrastructure, such as the Digital India initiative and the widespread adoption of Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), which have streamlined the delivery of welfare services. "The Prime Minister's focus on leveraging technology has revolutionized governance, making it more efficient and accessible. Today, citizens in even the remotest corners of India can access government services with ease," he added. Chandan also commended the government's efforts in promoting sustainable development and economic empowerment through programs like Make in India, Skill India, and Startup India. These initiatives, he said, have created opportunities for the youth and strengthened India's position as a global economic powerhouse. The Prime Minister's resolve to build an inclusive and prosperous India inspires us all. Together, we will continue to work tirelessly to ensure that the fruits of development reach every household," he concluded.

Following the meeting with the Divisional Commissioner, the delegation also approached officials at the Jammu Municipal Corporation. They brought to notice the poor maintenance and choked condition of drains and nallahs in various areas including Akali Kour Singh Nagar, Roop Nagar, Digiana, Dashmesh Nagar, Digiana Camp, and Jeevan Nagar. The residents urged the municipal authorities to carry out timely de-silting and proper cleaning of drains to prevent further health hazards and ensure proper drainage, especially before the onset of monsoon.

Prominent citizens who were part of the delegation included Narinder Gupta, Anil Sani, Rakesh Choudhary, Sukhwinder Singh, Priya Kumari, Lokesh Mahajan, Harvinder Singh, Neeraj Gupta, Harjeet Singh, and Narinder Singh. Their unified efforts to bring attention to long-standing public issues were appreciated by the local population.

The people of Ward No. 58 also lauded the continuous and dedicated efforts of Parvinder Singh Happy, who has been at the forefront of raising public concerns with the authorities. Residents acknowledged his commitment towards public service, noting that his active involvement and sincere approach have brought much-needed focus to their civic issues. His role in facilitating these meetings and standing with the community has earned him widespread respect and appreciation across the ward.

CM Omar fulfils.....

marriage assistance for AAY-category girls. The revised scheme will take effect from April 1, 2025.

To ensure transparency and efficiency, the financial aid will be directly transferred to the beneficiary's bank account through the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) system before the marriage.

In another major welfare initiative, the J&K government has approved the distribution of additional food grains free of cost to AAY households with four or more members under the Public Distribution System (PDS).

This move aims to strengthen food security for the region's most vulnerable families and fulfills a key commitment made in Budget 2025-26.

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah hailed the initiative as a significant pro-people decision, emphasizing that the government is delivering on its promises. "We are committed to ensuring food security for our most vulnerable families. Under this initiative, all AAY households will receive additional food grains free of cost. Each beneficiary in a family with 4 or more members will get up to 10 kg of food grains, reinforcing our commitment to social welfare," he stated.

Furthering his Government's commitment to women's empowerment, the Chief Minister had also flagged off the Zero-Ticket Travel Initiative—a free Government bus service for women—on April 1 from the Sher-i-Kashmir International Convention Center (SKICC).

Speaking at the launch event, CM Omar Abdullah said, "This initiative will create an environment where women feel empowered to travel freely, without financial constraints. It marks another step towards ensuring gender equality and mobility for women across Jammu and Kashmir." The Omar Abdullah-led Government has fulfilled yet another promise by implementing Zero Stamp Duty on property transfers through Gift Deeds within blood relations. In this regard, the Government of Jammu and Kashmir has issued S.O. 75, dated 27th March 2025, under Section 9(a) of the Stamp Act, 1977, to remit Stamp Duty on such transfers.

The term "Blood Relations" includes parents, siblings, children, and grandparents. This notification has come into force w.e.f. 1st April 2025.

In a significant step towards social welfare, the Jammu and Kashmir Government, under the leadership of Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, has ordered the enhancement of pensions under the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) and Integrated Social Security Scheme (ISSS).

This move marks the fulfillment of a key commitment made by the Chief Minister in the J&K Legislative Assembly on March 7.

As per the revised structure, effective from April 1, 2025, pension beneficiaries will receive increased financial assistance.

"This is not just assistance—it's our commitment to an inclusive and caring welfare state," Chief Minister Omar Abdullah stated.

Individuals below 60 years of age will now receive ₹1,250 per month, while those aged between 60 and 79 years will be entitled to ₹1,500 per month.

Senior citizens 80 years and above will receive a monthly pension of ₹2,000, ensuring better support for the elderly.

As per the order, the government has announced significant enhancements in social pensions under the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) and the Integrated Social Security Scheme (ISSS) to provide better financial support to vulnerable sections of society.

Under the Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS), the pension for individuals aged 60-79 years has been increased from ₹1,000 to ₹1,500, while those aged 80 years and above will now receive ₹2,000 instead of ₹1,000.

Similarly, under the Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme (IGNWPS), widows aged 40-59 years will receive ₹1,250 (earlier ₹1,000), those aged 60-79 years will receive ₹1,500 (earlier ₹1,000), and widows 80 years and above will now receive ₹2,000.

Additionally, the Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme (IGNDPS) has been revised, with pensions for disabled individuals in the 18-59 years category raised to ₹1,250, those 60-79 years receiving ₹1,500, and those 80 years and above now receiving ₹2,000.

Furthermore, under the Integrated Social Security Scheme (ISSS), which is UT-funded, pension rates have been revised across multiple beneficiary groups.

Old Age Pensions have been increased to ₹1,250 for females aged 55-60 years, ₹1,500 for those 60-79 years, and ₹2,000 for those aged 80 years and above.

Similarly, Widow/Divorcee Pensions have been enhanced to ₹1,250 for widows below 60 years with a legal marriageable age, ₹1,500 for those 60-79 years, and ₹2,000 for those 80 years and above.

The Disability Pension has been revised to ₹1,250 for those below 60 years, ₹1,500 for those 60-79 years, and ₹2,000 for those 80 years and above.

A similar structure applies to the Transgender Pension, ensuring increased financial assistance across all age categories.

Govt Tables.....

Tabling the bill in the Upper House, which was examined and redrafted by a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC), Rijiju said the proposed legislation has nothing to do with religion, but deals only with properties.

The minister informed the House that there were 4.9 lakh Waqf properties in 2004, which have now increased to 8.72 lakh.

Seeking the opposition's support to pass the bill, Rijiju said it aims to accomplish the unfulfilled tasks of the previous governments.

He also said Waqf owns the largest chunk of properties in the country, leaving aside those owned by Defence and Railways.

"It has been said here that Muslims will be harmed by the step we are taking. Many people said this is unconstitutional, illegal and the right of Muslims is being snatched away... Very categorically, I want to reject all these allegations," Rijiju said.

Speaking on 'Waqf by User', the Minority Affairs Minister said properties already registered with proper documentation will not be dealt with retrospectively.

"In Waqf By User, the properties already registered and cases that have already been settled, we won't go prospectively and deal with that. It would be with a prospective effect.

"However, if there is any disputed land or any matter that is sub judice, then we cannot do away with the right of the courts. So all the Waqf proper-

ties which are registered with proper documentation, they will remain so," Rijiju said.

He stressed that the entire exercise was aimed at bringing in the three pillars of transparency, accountability and efficiency.

"We are not here to damage anybody's religious affiliation," Rijiju said.

Citing a previous court judgment, the minister said it makes it clear that Waqf is a statutory body and not a representative body of Muslims.

"In the amendment, we have made it clear that any person practising Islam for more than five years can dedicate properties to Waqf. There is no iota of doubt in who can create Waqf," he said.

"The new provisions that we have brought in, is that all the recognised sects of Muslims will constitute the Waqf Board — there will be Shias, there will be Sunnis and other backward classes will also be there in the Waqf Board as members so that the interests of all would be taken into account and I don't think there should be any opposition to that. We are making it so inclusive," Rijiju informed.

He further said out of 22 members in the Central Waqf Council, not more than four will be non-Muslims including ex-officio members, besides three members of Parliament who can be of any religion. The Council must include two women members, he added.

The question of the majority being non-Muslims does not arise, he reiterated.

"If we develop a Waqf property properly in the next few years, Muslims will prosper," said the minister, appealing to the members in the Upper House to engage in a productive discussion and extend support to the bill.

Rijiju said 31,999 cases are pending in the Waqf Tribunal and more than 14,000 litigants are Muslims, adding that the right to appeal has also been added.

"We have not done this for any personal gain," said the minister, as he emphasised that the intent behind the proposed legislation was to put an end to the malpractices of people grabbing other people's property.

"We should not say anything which creates a furore or gives rise to a conflict," Rijiju said, urging members to share perspectives on the bill in a manner that enhances the quality of the debate.

He expressed the hope that all members would extend support to the proposed legislation.

LG Sinha.....

values and a sense of determination to contribute towards building an equitable, inclusive and pluralistic society," he further added.

The Lieutenant Governor asked the educational institutions to focus on developing personalities that are perfect blend of compassion and innovation.

"This 'H'- Head, Heart and Heritage- will help in this mission and they will also restore the broken moral link in the education system.

We need students who are proficient in algorithms, talented in their chosen field, sensitive towards social issues and also realise their duty towards nation building.

Our students should be a selfless individual as well as a skilled researcher, writer or artist, deeply connected to their roots. This perfect balance in personality could be transformative for students, educational institutions and the society," the Lieutenant Governor said.

The Lieutenant Governor emphasised that the teachers need to integrate moral values with skills needed in the modern world so that qualities like strong character and intellectual curiosity can be nurtured.

"Without unprecedented inventions, moral values alone will have no value. But it is also true that without ethics and values, cutting-edge education and skills would be aimless.

There should be conversations and not monologues in the classroom. There is a need to link innovation and growth with the ethical values of the society and integrate them with the course curriculum," the Lieutenant Governor said.

The Lieutenant Governor further called for encouraging hands-on, experiential and project-based learning. The young minds should be exposed to challenges of the real world. Now the time has come to take education out of the lab and into the real world, he said.

During an interactive session, the Lieutenant Governor also spoke on the educational reforms taking place in J&K, under the guidance of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, in the past few years. He said the innovative programmes launched in the UT have ensured inclusive and quality education for all.

"The talent pool within Jammu Kashmir is being provided with better opportunities. Dedicated efforts have been made to promote multidisciplinary learning, and skill development of youth. We have also actively initiated campaigns to bring dropout students back to school. Through Mission Yuva, we have prepared a blueprint to foster entrepreneurship culture at college and university level.

Schools, colleges and universities are functioning without any disturbances. Earlier practice of hartals, strikes, stone pelting and bandhs are things of the past now. Today, J&K, with its full potential, is moving ahead towards a prosperous and brighter future," the Lieutenant Governor said.

On the occasion, the prominent personalities and institutions are also conferred with the Bharat Shiksha Samman for their valuable contribution in the field of education.

Naveen Jindal, Member of Parliament; Dr Pankaj Mittal, Secretary General, Association of Indian Universities; Rajshri Rai, Chairperson, Balaji Foundation; educationists, experts, heads of various institutions, teachers and youth in large number were present.

Two suspected.....

ediately." According to sources, the two suspected terrorists fled with food and a phone.

It appears that these are the same terrorists who were spotted in the Panjtirthi area of Billawar (Kathua district), where security forces had a brief encounter on Monday night, they said.

Meanwhile, the multi-tier operation to track down three infiltrating terrorists, who escaped three encounters and are believed to be hiding in a forested area in Kathua, has entered its 12th consecutive day. Security agencies are also cracking down on terrorist supporters and setting up ambushes.

In the operation which commenced on March 23, two terrorists were eliminated, while the remaining escaped during an encounter with security forces in the Saniala area of Kathua district. Four policemen lost their lives during the exchange of fire, and three others were injured on March 27.

India, Thailand.....

education between India's northeastern states

and Thailand. We discussed enhancing mutual trade, investment, and exchanges between businesses," Modi said about his talks with Shinawatra.

Agreements have also been made for cooperation in MSME, handloom, and handicraft, he noted.

Modi asserted that Thailand holds a special place in India's 'Act East' Policy and the Indo-Pacific vision.

"Today, we have decided to elevate our relations to the level of a Strategic Partnership. Discussions were also held on establishing a 'Strategic Dialogue' between security agencies," Modi said.

He said India fully supports ASEAN unity and ASEAN Centrality.

"In the Indo-Pacific, we both support a free, open, inclusive, and rules-based order. We believe in the policy of vikaasvaad, not vistaarvaad (development-ism, not expansionism)," Modi said.

"I am grateful to the Thai government for issuing a special postage stamp based on the 18th-century 'Ramayana' mural paintings on the occasion of my visit," he said.

Modi said Prime Minister Shinawatra presented him with the Tripitaka.

"On behalf of the Buddha-land India, I accepted it with folded hands," he added.

The centuries-old relationship between India and Thailand is tied to their deep cultural and spiritual threads, he said.

The spread of Buddhism has connected our people at every level, Modi said.

"There has been an exchange of scholars from Ayutthaya to Nalanda. The tale of the Ramayana is deeply woven into Thai folk life," he said.

"And, the influence of Sanskrit-Pali is still reflected in the languages and traditions today," he said.

Modi also conveyed condolences on behalf of Indians on the loss of lives caused by the earthquake on March 28.

"We pray for the speedy recovery of those who were injured," he said.

Modi, who arrived here on a two-day visit to attend the 6th BIMSTEC summit, earlier received a Guard of Honour and also witnessed a mesmerising Ramakien — Thai Ramayana performance.

The Prime Minister will later join the BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) leaders from Thailand, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar and Bhutan to oversee the signing of the Agreement on Maritime Cooperation.

After concluding Thailand's visit, he will travel to Sri Lanka for his first visit to the island country since the election of its new president.

The BIMSTEC summit will bring Modi face to face with Nepal Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli, Bangladesh Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus and Myanmar military junta leader Min Aung Hlaing, among others.

In a departure statement, Modi described BIMSTEC as a significant forum for promoting regional development, connectivity, and economic progress in the Bay of Bengal region over the past decade.

Kathua combing.....

deployed to beef up the multi-tier cordon and set up ambushes over a 6-7 km radius in the region.

"The combing operation has been going on. It is underway to track down terrorists on the run," said an officer.

The search operation was intensified with aerial surveillance, including the use of choppers, UAVs, and sniffer dogs. Teams comprising joint operations of the army, NSG, Police, SoG, CRPF, and BSF are combing all areas to cover the region, officials said.

They said additional troops have been deployed in the rugged terrain and dense forested areas to ensure that terrorists do not escape towards upper reaches.

The troops have established multiple ambushes in a large area to apprehend the terrorists. They have further expanded the area of operation to include Billawar, Bhaddu, Ghatti, and Kog-Mandii.

To dismantle the overground network supporting terrorists, security agencies are focusing on OGWs and cracking down on them to cut off the supply of food, shelter, and guidance in the hills, the officials said.

Over 27 individuals have been questioned for gathering information about the terrorists' movements. Terrorists have entered two houses to get away with food too during the operations.

Security agencies emphasise that it is difficult for terrorists to survive without a network of overground workers who provide them with food, shelter, and guidance from the International Border (IB) to the hills of Kathua and other districts like Doda, Kishtwar, and Udhampur.

The forces have detained six individuals, including three females from a single family, for questioning. It is alleged that they provided assistance to terrorists operating in the region, officials said.

The detained persons belong to the family of suspected over ground worker Mohammad Latief, who is already in jail under the Public Safety Act (PSA) for aiding terrorists in Malhar during an attack on an Army truck last year, resulting in the deaths of six soldiers.

It is believed that the slain terrorist Abu Tala also stayed at Latief's house.

Officials said the three terrorists are believed to be part of a group that first engaged security forces in the Nursery area near the International Border on March 23. All terrorists managed to escape after a brief encounter, during which a girl was injured.

Four days later, security forces encountered them in a forested area of the Sanyal belt in Kathua. Two terrorists were eliminated, while the rest escaped. During the exchange of fire, three policemen were martyred and three others were injured.

With the hiding terrorists constantly changing their locations in the jungle, security forces are maintaining a high level of pressure in a multi-agency operation to track them down. This led to an encounter with terrorists in the Panjtirthi-Juthana on March 31, but they managed to escape.

Chief Secretary.....

"Delays are unacceptable. We must prioritise efficiency and public convenience in equal measure," he asserted.

The review encompassed critical infrastructure projects like Delhi-Amritsar-Katra (DAK) Expressway, four-laning of Banihal Bypass, Srinagar Ring Road, Jammu-Akhnour National Highway, Chenani-Sudhmahadev Road, Khellani Bypass Tunnel and various projects under Project SAMPARK.

Dulloo scrutinised the physical and financial

status of these projects, emphasising added accountability and swift resolution of any impediments.

Addressing the challenges posed by the region's unique topography, the Chief Secretary emphasised the need for proactive planning. "Weather conditions and natural challenges must be anticipated and integrated into our project timelines to prevent unnecessary delays," he directed the officers.

In a move to prevent resource-related delays, the Chief Secretary directed Director Geology and Mining, Suraj Parkash Rukwal, to conduct field visits and ensure that mining activities do not hinder the project progress.

Furthermore, he discussed the forest clearance issues with Commissioner Secretary, Sheetal Nanda.

Officers from the Roads and Buildings (R&B) Department Kashmir and R&B Pir Panjal also presented updates on their respective projects.

The Chief Secretary also reviewed the progress on Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) and engaged with Deputy Commissioners to identify and address district-specific challenges, particularly those related to land acquisition. He asked them to expedite the processes and resolve issues promptly to facilitate smooth project execution.

The meeting was attended by senior officers including Principal Secretary Agriculture Production Department, Shailendra Kumar; Commissioner Secretary, Forest, Ecology & Environment, Sheetal Nanda; Secretary, Public Works (R&B), Bhupinder Kumar and Divisional Commissioner Jammu, Ramesh Kumar while other officers participated online.

LMD penalises.....

commerce platform operating in the region. The step is a significant move to uphold consumer rights and ensure compliance with packaging regulations. The concerned e-commerce platform has recently expanded its services to Jammu by opening stores, including one in Jammu, primarily offering instant delivery of a wide range of products such as groceries, fresh fruits, vegetables, meat, stationery, bakery items, personal care, baby care, pet care products, snacks, and flowers.

The action was initiated following an inspection by the area Inspector, under the supervision of Assistant Controller Consumer Protection Jammu. During the inspection approximately 1200 packages were seized for failing to meet mandatory labelling requirements as stipulated under the Legal Metrology Act, 2009 and the Legal Metrology (Packaged Commodities) Rules, 2011.

The main violation includes non-declaration of exact net weight of pre-packaged fruits and vegetables for sale through the e-commerce platform.

Upon issuance of a show cause notice, the company acknowledged the offence and promptly submitted application for compounding of the offences which led to imposing a penalty and settling of case at department level on assurance of immediate corrective measures to align with the prescribed labelling norms.

Following the department's intervention, the e-commerce platform has removed the non-compliant products from its physical store shelves for re-labelling and has unlisted the violating items from its online platform to prevent further consumer inconvenience.

Rahul Slams.....

president said.

Referring to the Galwan incident, Gandhi said 20 jawans were martyred in 2020.

"There is a celebration taking place over their martyrdom by cutting a cake. We are not against normalcy but there should be status quo before that. We should get our land back. It has also come to my notice that the President and the Prime Minister have written to the Chinese," he said.

"We are not finding this out from our own people, it is the Chinese ambassador who is telling the people of India that the PM and the President have written to them," Gandhi said.

He said foreign policy is about managing external countries and pointed out that on one hand, "you have given China 4,000 sq km of our land", and on the other hand our ally US has suddenly decided to impose tariffs on us.

He said the tariffs imposed by the US are going to "completely devastate" the Indian economy, particularly sectors like the auto industry, pharmaceuticals and agriculture.

"Somebody once asked Indira Gandhi ji- 'In the matter of foreign policy you lean left or you lean right', and Indira Gandhi ji answered 'I don't lean left or right, I stand straight. I am Indian and I stand straight'.

"The BJP and the RSS have a different philosophy, when they are asked whether they lean left or the right, they say 'no, no, no, we bow our head in front of every foreigner that comes in front of us. This is something that is in their culture, in their history, we know that," Gandhi said.

He said the government of India must give answers as to "what is it doing about our land and about these tariffs that our ally has imposed on us".

The US has announced 27 per cent reciprocal tariffs on India, saying New Delhi imposes high import duties on American goods.

Sharing a video of his remarks in the Lower House, Gandhi said on X, "Cutting cakes with Chinese diplomats while they occupy our land amounts to nothing short of celebrating the sacrifice of our brave martyrs!" "Prime Minister Modi and the BJP's 'foreign policy' continues its spineless tradition - bowing before every foreigner, when we should be standing straight. When will the PM answer how the govt will get back the 4,000 sq. km. encroached by China or respond to the economically devastating 26% tariffs imposed by the United States?" the former Congress president said.

Speaking during the Zero Hour, BJP MP Anurag Thakur hit back at Gandhi, asking under whose rule did China occupied Aksai Chin area.

"They kept talking about Hindi-Chini bhai bhai and stabbed us in the back. Who was the leader that was having Chinese soup with Chinese officials at the time of Doklam and did not stand with the people of the Indian army. Which is the foundation which took money from Chinese officials. Question has not been answered whether Rajiv Gandhi foundation had taken that money or not, for what was the money taken?" Thakur said.

"Under Modi government, we can say the Indian army gave a befitting reply during Doklam. The PM went to the border and boosted the morale of the armed forces. The defence minister also went...not even a single inch of land anybody has been able to take. Some people level false allegations while colluding with China for their political advantage," he said, hitting out at Gandhi.

Smith hails Australia recovery on thrilling first day



LONDON, JUNE 12

Steve Smith is ruing a missed opportunity with the bat but insists Australia have rebounded into a promising position after a late surge of wickets put South Africa on the ropes at Lord's.

Smith hit a fluent 66 on the first day of the ICC World Test Championship Final 2025 but lost concentration when facing part-time spinner Aiden Markram and edged him to slip.

Australia were then bowled out for 212, Beau Webster top-scoring with 72, after losing their final five wickets for just 20 runs after tea.

But the defending champions roared back in the final session.

Mitchell Starc set the tone by clean bowling Markram in the first over before a run was on the board.

He should have had a second wicket when Wiaan Mulder edged

behind, only for Alex Carey to spill the chance, but did not have to wait long for it to arrive as Ryan Rickelton edged to Usman Khawaja.

Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood then joined the party, each snaring a late wicket to leave South Africa 43 for four - 169 runs in arrears - and the game finely poised.

"I think we are in a good spot, we had a few missed opportunities with the bat to try and get a bigger total," Smith said.

"The wicket offered something all day but we are in a pretty good position, 169 in front and they're four wickets down," he said.

"Hopefully it does a bit in the morning like it did today. It could have been a better day but we're in a decent position," Smith said.

"I felt good out there, I felt in a nice place. I love batting here at Lord's and I enjoyed my time out there while I was out there. I left a few in the shed unfortunately," he said.

"It felt quite tricky, it felt like wicket was doing enough all day. It was two-paced, at times it was slow and then at others it zinged through," Smith said.

"When I got out, I felt like the ball was softer but the wicket still offered something and hopefully tomorrow is the same," he said.

South Africa captain Temba Bavuma won the toss and opted to bowl - Smith also added Australia would have batted had they won the toss - under cloudy skies.

Australia fell to 67 for four when Travis Head departed for 11, before Smith and Beau Webster put on 79

Come out of comfort zone, fight every ball to have memorable England tour: Gambhir

BECKENHAM, JUN 12

India head coach Gautam Gambhir has called on his team to move out of its "comfort zone" and make the upcoming Test series against England a "memorable" one, especially in the absence of retired stars Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma and R Ashwin.

India will search for their maiden series victory in England since 2007, when the five-match rubber starts with the first Test at Leeds on June 20.

"There are two ways of looking at this tour. One is we are without our three most experienced players or we got this phenomenal opportunity to do something special for the country," Gambhir told BCCI.tv, referring to the recent retirements of Ashwin, Rohit and Kohli.

The former India opener said he can feel the "passion and the commitment" to achieve something special flowing through the current bunch, led by Shubman Gill.

"When I look around in this group, I think I see the hunger, the passion and the commitment to do something special. If we make sacrifices, if we come out of our comfort zone, if we start fighting not every day but every session,



every hour and every ball, I think we can have a memorable tour," he added.

Gambhir welcomed the whole squad to the tour of England, and extended a special tribute to some of the members, starting with B Sai Sudharsan.

"First Test calls are always special, so I want to welcome Sai, who has a fabulous three months with the bat and make sure you have a very very successful red ball career." Gambhir hoped that pacer Arshdeep Singh would remain his impactful self in red-ball cricket as well.

"I want to welcome Arshdeep Singh. You have

been phenomenal with the white ball and I am sure you will make it count with the red ball in your hand." The 43-year-old then patted Gill and his deputy Rishabh Pant.

"I want to congratulate Shubman as well, captain for the first time. There is no bigger honour than leading your country's Test team. Congratulations. Rishabh Pant as well, who is part of the leadership group now," he noted.

Gambhir was lavish in his praise for Karun Nair, who stitched a stirring comeback to Team India on the back of a wonderful run in domestic cricket.

"Comebacks are never easy, someone who has made a comeback after seven years, had a phenomenal last year.

"The amount of runs that you have got, and most importantly that never say die attitude, which is something that got you back into the team, and that is something inspiring for everyone in this group. Welcome Karun Nair," said Gambhir.

Karun said he was "grateful" to get a second chance to play for India.

"Grateful for this opportunity again. I am really looking forward to grabbing this opportunity with both hands. I am sure there will be a lot of feelings, once I go out there but right now I can't express them," said Karun.

Put ourselves under pressure at nets: Gill — Skipper Gill urged his colleagues to put themselves under a bit of pressure so that they will not be overwhelmed by situations when the series starts.

"Let's make each and every net session meaningful. Let's put ourselves under a little pressure. When we are going out there, it's not about going out there and just surviving, let's find out our game, how we are going to play when we are put under pressure — be it bowlers or batters," he said.

Karun Nair 'excited to grab the opportunity with both hands' on England tour



NEW DELHI, JUNE 12

series of low scores.

The right-handed batter never lost hope of making a comeback into the Indian team. After switching his base from Karnataka to Vidarbha in 2023, he scored 690 runs in 10 games and followed it with 863 runs in nine Ranji Trophy games in 2024 with four centuries, including one in the finals, which carved the way for Vidarbha to lift the trophy.

Nair also showed signs of power-hitting in the Vijay Hazare Trophy, amassing 779 runs in just eight innings, including five centuries, which prompted the Delhi Capitals to pick him in the 2024 IPL mega auction for Rs 50 lakh.

"Feels really special, very grateful and very fortunate to be able to get this opportunity again and really looking forward and excited to grab this opportunity with both hands," Nair said in a video posted by BCCI on social media.

"Not sure actually, I've to experience that feeling myself and just go out there and feel it for myself. I'm sure there will be a lot of feelings, ones that I can't express right now and it will be a special feeling," he added.

In the pre-training huddle, head coach Gautam Gambhir praised Nair's comeback to the Test side after eight years and said, "Comebacks are never easy. Someone who has made a comeback after seven [eight] years had a phenomenal last year. Last year, no matter the runs you have got and most importantly, that never-die attitude, never-giving-up attitude, that is something which has got you back into the team. That is something which is inspiring for this entire world. Welcome, Karun."

With the Test retirements of stalwarts Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli, it is likely that Nair will get a chance

Nikitenko downs Paichadze, catches Abhijeet Gupta at summit in Round 8 thriller

NEW DELHI, JUNE 12

Belarusian Grandmaster Mihail Nikitenko, playing whites, downed Georgian GM Luka Paichadze in Round 8 of the 21st Delhi International Open Grandmasters Chess Tournament (Delhi GM Open) 2025 to join Abhijeet Gupta in a joint-lead at the top of the leaderboard. With only two rounds remaining in Category A, both Nikitenko and Gupta spearhead the competition with seven points apiece.

The 21st Delhi GM Open continues to be Asia's premier open chess tournament, drawing over 2,500 players from more than 20 countries, including 24 Grandmasters. Organised under the aegis of the All India Chess Federation, the event boasts a record prize pool of Rs 1.21 crore and remains a cornerstone of India's chess calendar.

Hitherto the sole leader, Gupta, three-time former champion of the Delhi GM Open—a record unmatched thus far in the competition's history—clashed with Armenian GM Manuel Petrosyan on Wednesday at the top board, aiming to add to his tally. However, the gritty contest, which saw the pair exchange

blows frequently in an attempt to gain the upper hand, resulted in a draw, adding half a point to their respective tallies.

At the vanguard of the chasing party, GM SL Narayan—the tournament's highest-rated player—also drew with International Master Neelash Saha of India, ensuring that the pair remain within touching distance of the joint leaders heading into the final two rounds. Indian IM Aronyak Ghosh and Swedish GM Vitaly Sivuk also played out a draw, while GM Diptayan Ghosh defeated GM Boris Savchenko of Russia, with all three ending Round 8 with six and a half points on board, just half shy of the Gupta and Nikitenko.

Joining the chasing pack were Grandmasters Aditya S Samant, Mamikon Ghariyban (Armenia), and Aleksej Aleksandrov (Belarus), each of whom won their respective matches in Round 8. GMs Venkataraman Kartik, Nguyen Doc Hoa (Vietnam), and MR Venkatesh also earned victories on the day, but remained a point or more adrift of the top of the table.

Meanwhile, Wednesday also saw the continuation of

Nitish can bowl magical balls, he's keen to work on bowling consistency, says Morkel



BECKENHAM (UK), JUNE 12

India's bowling coach Morne Morkel said Nitish Kumar Reddy can bowl magical balls, adding that the seam-bowling all-rounder is keen to work on his bowling consistency and bowl more overs in the upcoming Test series against England, starting on June 20 in Leeds.

Reddy made his Test debut on the tour of Australia last year and scored a Test hundred at the MCG in last year's Boxing Day Test. As of now, he is fighting for a seam bowling all-rounder's slot in the playing eleven alongside Shardul Thakur. In two red-ball games against England Lions, Reddy bowled 26.5 overs, though he didn't outrightly nail the all-rounder's slot.

"For sure, the more bowling options we can have, that's great. He's skilful. He's a guy who can bowl that magical ball, so for him it's about creating that consistency, it's something we want to work on, and it's important for his game as well. I've had conversations where I've challenged him to bowl a bit more."

"I want to see the ball more in his hands. We all know what he can do with the bat. For a team, if we can have the bowling options, especially in these conditions, I think he'll be exciting and can complement this

bowling attack," said Morkel to reporters on the sidelines of India's training session on Wednesday.

Asked what would be the balance of India's bowling combination, Morkel said, "In terms of the balance, we've been very happy with that. But for us as a bowling unit, finding that gear that we're going to need in Test matches is going to be important."

"We've spoken a lot about how we're going to go about playing and match-up with England. But I think so far we're on the right way in terms of doing the preparation. For us, like you say, when it comes to match day, with the ball, it's about execution."

Morkel also said he has been blown away by Jasprit Bumrah's rhythm and intensity in the practice sessions so far, but stated that the management would be smart in managing him through the summer. Before leaving for England, head coach Gautam Gambhir said Bumrah wouldn't play all five Test matches due to workload management.

"He knows how to get himself ready; he knows how to prepare. I was blown away to see the energy on the ball over the last three days. So, that's just very exciting to see. I'm happy his body is in good shape at the moment."

"We'll manage him with that. We'll be smart with him because he's obviously key for us, but in terms of the first three net sessions, a lot to be excited watching him bowl with the Dukes ball," he added.

According to Morkel, India's bowlers have to start strongly to overcome England's aggressive batting lineup, which is known to capitalise on any errors. "It's one thing judging a net session, but for our guys to stand in the field, getting used to doing 90 overs in the field, that's going to take some time."

"We need to realise that, and we need to be patient with that. We need to find a way to get up to speed as

Skoda to scale up pre-owned biz, bolster sales network to double sales this year

NEW DELHI, JUNE 12

Czech carmaker Skoda is looking to scale up its pre-owned car business, enter the CNG segment and expand sales network as it aims to double volumes in the Indian market this year, according to a top company executive.

The carmaker, which sold around 36,000 units in the country last year, expects its SUV portfolio, which now includes a compact SUV, to push its sales volume and market share in the country.

"We are looking to more than double our volumes this year. Our compact SUV will play a significant role and parallelly we are also expanding our sales network. Besides, we are also streamlining our product mix," Skoda Auto India Brand Director Ashish Gupta told PTI in an interaction.

He noted that the company ended last year with sub 1 per cent market share which has now grown to around 1.8 per cent of the domestic passenger vehicle segment.



"We expect it to be in the range of 2.5-3 per cent by end of this year," Gupta said.

He noted that the company aims to end the current year with around 350 sales outlets from 296 touch points across the country.

Gupta noted that from a ranking of 11th in the passen-

ger vehicle segment, the company has now improved its position to 7th.

"We would like to hold on to this position. Kylaq is going to play a pivotal role in the company's growth story," he noted.

Gupta stated that in order to scale up volumes, Skoda will scale up its pre-owned

business this year, with focus on many first time buyers from the semi urban areas to get into its fold.

"If you want to grow the new car business, one needs to make its pre-owned business very strong...right now almost 80 per cent of our facilities are equipped to handle certified pre-owned cars. Our network currently does around 3,000 cars a year. idea is to scale it up by almost three times this end of this year," Gupta said.

He noted that currently 60-65 per cent of the company's sales network is now based out of the semi urban areas.

When asked about the company's plans to introduce an EV in the domestic market, Gupta said the automaker is looking to launch a localised product.

On entering the CNG segment, he stated: "If we have to maintain relevance in the market share, we will have to evaluate various powertrain options and CNG is definitely one of them."

He however did not offer a timeline for foraying into the



MUMBAI, JUNE 12

The rupee declined 7 paise to close to 85.60 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday amid a steep fall in the domestic equity markets and a rise in global crude oil prices.

However, a weaker dollar against major currencies capped the losses, forex traders said.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 85.43 against the US dollar and traded in the range of 85.43-85.65 before closing at 85.60 (provisional), down 7 paise from its previous close.

The local unit had settled at 85.53 on Wednesday.

"The Indian rupee fell today (Thursday) after rising to 85.43 as oil companies bought the dollar after the

oil prices touched USD 70 per barrel," Anil Kumar Bhansali, Head of Treasury and Executive Director, Finrex Treasury Advisors LLP, said.

"The rupee is expected to be in the range of 85.35-95.95 on Friday as we get the US PPI number and our CPI number."

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was down 0.43 per cent at 99.20.

"The dollar fell on Thursday on further signs that the US president may adopt a softer stance in tariff negotiations and heightened expectations of FED Reserve rate cuts after a softer CPI inflation data yesterday (Wednesday). Trump also said he is willing to extend the July 9 deadline for completing trade talks with countries before higher US tariffs are imposed," Bhansali said.

Meanwhile, a London-bound Air India plane carrying 242 passengers and crew crashed in a residential area here minutes after taking off from the Ahmedabad airport on Thursday afternoon. Many people were feared killed.

In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex tumbled 823.16 points to settle at 81,691.98,

Dy CM pays surprise visit to Labour Commissioner Office in Srinagar



**BN CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR, JUN 12**

Deputy Chief Minister, Surinder Choudhary, today paid a surprise visit to Labour Commissioner Office in Srinagar, assessing the functioning of the organisation.

The Dy CM reviewed progress on various initiatives and schemes being implemented by the Labour Department to promote social security and welfare of employees/workers. He also took stock of issues being faced by the employees in performing their duties efficiently.

During the visit, the Dy CM held a detailed discussion with the officials regarding the steps aimed at to streamline the functioning of the department. He was briefed about the ongoing activities, achievements and challenges facing the department.

The Deputy Chief Minister emphasized the importance of ensuring effective implementation of labour laws and regulations to protect the rights of workers. He stressed on maintaining cleanliness, ensuring quick disposal of public grievances and enforcing punctuality

Emphasizes public convenience, efficient service delivery

in government offices.

He also interacted with the public who were waiting to resolve their grievances at the Regional office EPFO, GoI, housed in the Labour Commissionerate Headquarters.

The Dy CM listened to their concerns and assured them of prompt resolution. He also asked the officers to ensure official files are processed without any delay. He stressed the need for efficient and citizen-centric service delivery, directing the officials to expedite the grievance redressal process and maintain transparency in their functioning.

Choudhary asserted "it is essential that citizens do not have to wait unnecessarily and services are provided strictly according to the scheduled time frame".

He maintained that the benefits of all government schemes should reach the last person in line in real-time. He directed for conducting awareness programs to educate the general public about the government schemes.

The Deputy Chief Minister highlighted the achievements of the Omar Abdullah led government, underscoring the commitment to public welfare. He assured the public that the government is working tirelessly to meet their expectations and fulfill all promises.

Bhalla leads Jai Hind Yatra of Congress at Doda



**BN CORRESPONDENT
DODA, JUN 12**

The District Congress committee Doda today organised an impressive Jai Hind Sabha followed by Jai Hind Yatra at Doda today which was led by Working President Shri Raman Bhalla accompanied by Former MLA Incharge Doda Shri Dina Nath Bhagat DCC President Sheikh Mujeeb, Former MLC Sham Lal Bhagat, IYC Secretary Man Singh Rathore & other senior leaders.

The rally was part of the nation wide campaign of the party to pay respect to the armed forces for their bravery and valour in carrying out operation Sindhoor besides questioning the flip flop foreign policy & other policies of Modi government including denial of statehood to J&K.

Addressing the gathering Shri Raman Bhalla said that BJP has been politicizing the achievement & bravery of armed forces in carrying out operation Sindhoor but the Modi govt is escaping from answering vital questions relating to the security and integrity and honour of the country.

He lashed out at the Modi government for betraying the

faith of the people of Jammu and Kashmir after getting mandate on the basis of assuring early statehood, after Assembly elections. More than eight months have passed to Assembly elections but the Prime Minister didn't utter a word on restoration of statehood during his recent visit in Jammu.

Bhalla said that BJP's lust for power even after failing to secure mandate in Jammu and Kashmir, despite all sorts of opportunist alliances, has kept a mess in government but dual control system under UT. He said a parallel system of government despite Assembly elections to fulfill lust of BJP to run government through remote control system, is harmful to democracy & to the overall interest of people.

He also referred to the present mess of the issue of Naib Tehsildar selections, Bhalla said that it was the result of the same dual control system on the administration otherwise it should not have resulted into lot inconvenience to the candidates. He said during Congress NC government, when he was Revenue minister, the candidates for this post were exempted from Urdu. It was settled then by Congress and now, when other official languages are there along with

BJP led centre responsible for creating mess by dual control system & demand-ed restoration of statehood

Urdu, all languages should be at par to give equal rights to all class of people.

He asked BJP to explain why the non urdu knowing candidates faced discrimination in Naib Tehsildar selections in 2019, when BJP was at the helm of affairs in J&K and at centre. It was during Governor's rule controlled by BJP led centre that Jammu candidates suffered injustice.

In his address Former MLA vDina Nath Bhagat questioned the silence of PM Modi over the barbaric treatment of Indians by the trump administration and their repatriation in chains besides Trump's insulting language against India claiming ceasefire by him.

Former MLC Sham Lal Bhagat questioned how terrorist state Pakistan is getting full financial support and recognition at International levels but Modigovernment is not acting against it. Our people are getting worst ever treatment in US under Donald Trump but Modi ji describes him as friend.

DCC President demanded immediate restoration of statehood as promised otherwise people will launch a struggle for getting their rights.

Others who spoke include District Vice President Ranjeet Manhas Ji, Swarn Veer Singh Jara, State General Secretary JKPYC, Mudassar Bandey, Anju Jara, Shivam Sharma, Koshal Parihar, Seva Dal District President, Incharge NSUI Chenab Valley and Others.

Rana reviews progress on implementation of Jal Jeevan Mission

**BN CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR, JUNE 12**

Minister for Jal Shakti, Forest, Ecology & Environment and Tribal Affairs, Javed Ahmed Rana, today chaired a meeting at Civil Secretariat Srinagar to review progress on implementation of Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) in PHE division Chadoora and other areas.

The meeting was attended by MLA Chadoora, Ali Mohammad Dar, MLA Beerwah, Dr Shafi Ahmad Wani, MLA Khan Sahib, Saifud Din Bhat, MLA Sopore, Irshad Rasool Kar and senior officers from Jal Shakti department.

While reviewing various ongoing JJM projects in Chadoora, Budgam, Sopore, Khan Sahib and Beerwah, Javed Rana exhorted upon the officers to expedite pace of progress on these works for timely completion. He directed the officers to personally monitor the execution of works in their respective divisions.

He instructed the concerned officers to ensure pace of work is expedited to ensure speedy construction of filtration plants, civil works and other related works at all water supply schemes. He stressed that work on all JJM projects be carried out in full



swing without any delay. He exhorted upon the officers to work in mission mode so that safe and adequate drinking water is made available to all citizens of Jammu and Kashmir.

He enjoined upon the officers to maintain coordination and better synergy between executing agencies to ensure timely and effective implementation of Water Supply Schemes. He further said that work should be resumed on the water supply schemes wherever it has been stalled so that people don't have to face any problems.

MLA Chadoora, while speak-

ing on the occasion, said that certain water supply schemes in his constituency are nearing completion and require little attention from the officers so that they can be dedicated to public use.

The MLAs raised various issues related to water supply and irrigation pertaining to their constituencies and demanded immediate attention of the Minister for early resolution.

The officers assured that most of the WSSs are nearing completion and will be put to public use at an earliest.

Fostering environmental stewardship among youngsters, reconnecting with nature, need of the hour: Sakeena Itoo



**BN CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR, JUNE 12**

Minister for Health and Medical Education, Social Welfare and Education, Sakeena Itoo today emphasised on the urgent need of reconnecting with nature and foster environmental stewardship among the young generation, especially college and school going students.

The Minister made these remarks while addressing a gathering held in the backdrop of World Environment Day-2025 week celebrations at Government Girls Higher Secondary School (GGHSS) Kothibagh here today.

Director School Education Kashmir, Dr. G.N Itoo; Chief Education Officer, Srinagar; Principal GGHSS Kothibagh, Heads of various institutions of Srinagar district, faculty members and large number of students were also present on the occasion.

Addressing the gathering, Education Minister said that Kashmir's weather is witnessing drastic changes due to deforestation and other allied activities. She emphasized on the urgent need of the hour is to reconnect with nature and foster environmental stewardship among the younger generation as well as

school and college going students.

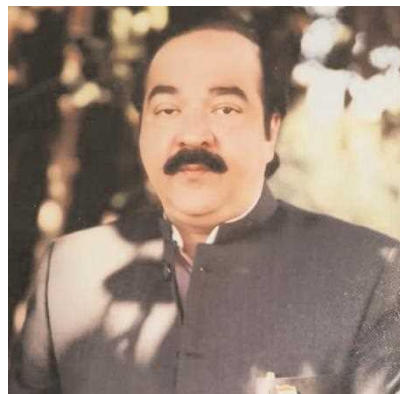
"Environmental preservation is not just a policy issue, it is a personal responsibility. Each of us has the power to influence change, starting with our homes, schools and communities", Sakeena Itoo stated.

The Minister called upon all the participants to make plantation of trees a routine habit, highlighting that we need to work collectively to bring back the charm and environmental conditions our Kashmir was known for across the globe.

On the occasion, Education Minister also praised GGHSS Kothibagh for academic excellence, highlighting that Government institutions are at par with Private schools in these days. She added that the position holders of various government institutions felicitated today reflect this.

The Minister also said that selections in prestigious examinations like IAS and KAS as well as professional exams like NEET, GATE and others are usually alumni of Government institutions. She added that the Chief Minister, Omar Abdullah is giving more impetus to education and health sectors as they form the pillars of any developed society.

M.K Ajatshatru Singh expresses grief over Air India Tragedy



**BN CORRESPONDENT
JAMMU, JUN 12**

Senior BJP leader and former minister M.K Ajatshatru Singh

Ranvijay Singh mourns Air India tragedy

**BN CORRESPONDENT
JAMMU, JUN 12**

Ranvijay Singh, scion of the revered Dogra Royal Family, has expressed deep sorrow and anguish over the horrific crash of the Air India flight that tragically claimed over 200 lives shortly after takeoff from Ahmedabad. The London-bound aircraft was carrying 242 passengers and is being described as the worst aviation disaster globally in the past ten years.

In a heartfelt condolence message, Ranvijay Singh said, "This unimaginable tragedy has left the entire nation in mourning. The pain of losing so many lives in a single moment is overwhelming and irreparable."

Calls for Aviation Safety Overhaul after Air India Crash

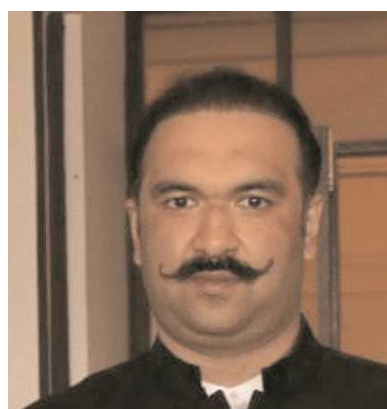
has expressed his profound anguish over the fatal crash of an Air India flight, which resulted in the deaths of over 200 passengers. The aircraft, carrying 242 people on board and bound for London, crashed minutes after taking off from Ahmedabad on Thursday, in what is being termed the deadliest air disaster in the past ten years.

In a press release issued here today, the former Minister said "This horrific tragedy has left the nation mourning. I offer my deepest condolences to all those

who lost their loved ones."

He also expressed grief over the untimely death of former Gujarat Chief Minister Vijay Rupani, who was on board the ill-fated aircraft.

He urged the Civil Aviation Ministry to conduct a thorough investigation and ensure that stringent safety measures are enforced. He added that the incident underscores the pressing need for reforms in flight operations and passenger safety management.



He extended his sympathies to the bereaved families, praying for courage and strength in their hour of grief. He urged the government to declare a national day of mourning and ensure that the families of the victims receive timely support, both emotional and financial.

ernment to declare a national day of mourning and ensure that the families of the victims receive timely support, both emotional and financial.

Ranvijay Singh also highlighted the broader implications of the crash. "Such a large-scale aviation disaster raises serious questions about operational safety and technological preparedness. It is imperative that a comprehensive and transparent probe is initiated without delay," he stated.

He further suggested the formation of a national aviation safety commission comprising independent experts to regularly audit flight safety standards and infrastructure across all airlines.

Cyber awareness programme held in Srinagar

**BN CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR, JUN 12**

Amid the rise in cyber fraud cases across the Union Territory, the Crime Branch Kashmir now the Economic Offences Wing (EOW)-organized a cyber awareness programme in Srinagar on Thursday.

The initiative aimed to bolster the capabilities of law enforcement officials in combating cybercrimes and safeguarding citizens against digital threats, officials said.

Organized under the supervision of Inspector General of Police, Crime Branch J&K, Sunil Gupta the programme brought together investigative officers from the Crime Branch and the Cybercrime Investigation Centre for Excellence (CICE).



The event was moderated by SSP EOW Abdul Waheed Shah.

Delivering a key address during the session, Chief Information Security Officer (CISO) of J&K Bank, Muneer Hassan Konga Wani, provided expert insights into the evolving cyber threat landscape.

He emphasized the need for advanced investigative tools and techniques to respond effectively to complex online frauds.

The programme was designed build investigative officers'

knowledge on various forms of cyber frauds, including phishing, online banking scams, and social media exploitation.

It was also aimed at share actionable counter measures to safeguard citizens and prevent victimization.

The other objectives included promote the adoption of robust online security practices, including maintaining cyber hygiene and digital resilience; and develop investigative competencies to effectively handle, analyze, and resolve cybercrime cases.

"This initiative reflects commitment of Crime Branch J&K in fostering a secure digital ecosystem and enhancing institutional preparedness against the growing menace of cyber frauds," the officials said.