

## !! Continuations from Page 1 !! Sonamarg Tunnel will...

Makar Sankranti, and Pongal. He extended his best wishes to everyone celebrating these festivals. The Prime Minister acknowledged the challenging 40-day period of Chillaikalan in the Valley and praised the resilience of the people. He highlighted that this season brings new opportunities for tourist destinations like Sonamarg, attracting visitors from across the country who enjoy the hospitality of the people of Kashmir.

The Prime Minister announced a significant gift for the people, highlighting



the recent foundation stone laying of the Jammu Rail Division. He remarked that this was a long-standing demand of the people.

Referring to the inauguration of the Sonamarg Tunnel and fulfilling a long-standing demand of the people of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, Modi highlighted that this tunnel will significantly ease the lives of people in Sonamarg, Kargil, and Leh. He remarked that the tunnel will reduce the difficulties faced during avalanches, heavy snowfall and landslides, which often led to road closures. He emphasized that the tunnel will improve access to major hospitals and ensure the availability of essential supplies, thereby reducing the challenges faced by the residents.

The Prime Minister noted that the actual construction of the Sonamarg Tunnel began in 2015 after their Government came into power. He was pleased that the tunnel's construction was completed under their administration. He remarked that the tunnel will maintain connectivity to Sonamarg during the winter season and boost tourism in the entire region. He emphasized that numerous road and rail connectivity projects are set to be completed in Jammu and Kashmir in the coming days.

The Prime Minister mentioned another major connectivity project underway nearby and noted the excitement surrounding the upcoming rail connection to the Kashmir Valley. He highlighted the development of new roads, railways, hospitals, and colleges as part of the new Jammu and Kashmir.

The Prime Minister extended his heartfelt congratulations to everyone for the tunnel and the new era of development.

Highlighting India's progress towards becoming a developed nation by 2047 and emphasizing that no region or family should be left behind, Modi remarked that the government is working with the spirit of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas" and over the past 10 years, more than 4 crore poor families across the country, including Jammu and Kashmir, have received permanent houses. He announced that an additional 3 crore new houses will be provided to the poor in the coming years.

The Prime Minister noted that millions of people in India are receiving free medical treatment, benefiting the people of Jammu and Kashmir as well. He highlighted the establishment of new IITs, IIMs, AIIMS, medical colleges, nursing colleges, and polytechnic colleges across the country to support the education of the youth.

In Jammu and Kashmir, he added that several top-notch educational institutes were established in the past decade, greatly benefiting the local youth.

Emphasising the extensive infrastructure development from Jammu and Kashmir to Arunachal Pradesh, the Prime Minister remarked that Jammu and Kashmir is becoming a hub of tunnels, high bridges, and ropeways, with some of the world's highest tunnels and highest rail-road bridges being constructed here. He noted the engineering marvel of the Chenab Bridge, where a passenger train trial was recently completed. He mentioned several key projects, including the cable bridge enhancing Kashmir's railway connectivity, the Zojila, Chenani Nashri, and Sonamarg tunnel projects, and the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla rail link project. The Prime Minister also mentioned the schemes for the Shankaracharya Temple, Shikhori, and Baltal-Amarnath ropeways, as well as the Katra-Delhi expressway. He emphasized that over Rs 42,000 crore worth of road connectivity projects are underway in Jammu and Kashmir, including four national highway projects and two ring roads.

The Prime Minister remarked that more than 14 tunnels like Sonamarg are being constructed, making Jammu and Kashmir one of the most connected regions in the country.

Underlining the significant contribution of the tourism sector to India's journey towards becoming a developed nation, the Prime Minister remarked that improved connectivity will allow tourists to reach previously untouched and unexplored areas of Jammu and Kashmir. He said the peace and progress achieved in the region over the past decade, which has already benefited the tourism sector.

"In 2024, more than 2 crore tourists visited Jammu and Kashmir, with Sonamarg seeing a six-fold increase in tourists over the past ten years", noted Modi, emphasizing that this growth has benefited local businesses, including hotels, homestays, dhabas, clothing shops, and taxi services.

"Jammu and Kashmir of the 21st century is scripting a new chapter of development", said Modi, adding that the region is regaining its identity as "Paradise on Earth," leaving behind the difficult days of the past. He noted that people now enjoy ice cream at Lal Chowk even at night, and the area remains lively. He praised the local artists for transforming Polo View Market into a new habitat center, with musicians, artists, and singers frequently performing there.

The Prime Minister observed that people in Srinagar now comfortably watch movies with their families in cinema halls and shop with ease. He emphasized that such significant changes cannot be achieved by the government alone and credited the people of Jammu and Kashmir for strengthening democracy and securing their future.

Highlighting the bright future for the youth of Jammu and Kashmir and emphasizing the numerous opportunities in sports, the Prime Minister remarked about the first international marathon held in Srinagar a few months ago, which brought immense joy to those who witnessed it. He also recalled the viral video of the Chief Minister participating in the marathon and their enthusiastic discussion about it during a meeting in Delhi.

Acknowledging that it was truly the new era of Jammu and Kashmir, Modi mentioned the recent international cricket league held in the region after forty years and car racing scenes around the beautiful Dal Lake. He said that Gulmarg was becoming the winter games capital of India, having hosted four Khelo India Winter Games, with the fifth edition starting next month. Over the past two years, the Prime Minister noted that 2,500 athletes from across the country have participated in various sports tournaments in Jammu and Kashmir. He highlighted the establishment of over 90 Khelo India Centers in the region, providing training to 4,500 local youth.

Touching upon the new opportunities emerging for the youth of Jammu and Kashmir, the Prime Minister remarked that the construction of AIIMS in Jammu and Avantipora was progressing rapidly, reducing the need to travel to other parts of the country for medical treatment. He noted that IIT, IIM, and Central University campuses in Jammu were providing excellent education. He emphasized the role of local artisans and craftsmen, supported by the PM Vishwakarma scheme and other initiatives by the Jammu and Kashmir government.

The Prime Minister highlighted the continuous efforts to attract new industries to the region, with investments of around Rs 13,000 crore, creating thousands of jobs for the youth. He also lauded the improved performance of Jammu and Kashmir Bank, with its business growing from Rs 1.6 lakh crore to Rs 2.3 lakh crore in the past four years. He remarked that the bank's increased capacity to provide loans benefits the youth, farmers, orchardists, shopkeepers, and entrepreneurs in the region.

Remarking on the transformation of Jammu and Kashmir's past into a present of

development, Modi said that the dream of a developed India will be realized when its crown, Kashmir, is adorned with the jewels of progress. He expressed his desire for Kashmir to become even more beautiful and prosperous. He noted the continuous support from the youth, elders, and children of the region in this endeavor.

The Prime Minister emphasized that the people of Jammu and Kashmir are working diligently to turn their dreams into reality, contributing to the progress of the region and the nation.

Concluding his address, the Prime Minister assured the people that he will support them unflinchingly in all their endeavours and extended his heartfelt congratulations to every family in Jammu and Kashmir for the development projects.

Background  
The Sonamarg Tunnel project, around 12 km long, has been constructed at a cost of over Rs 2,700 crore. It comprises the Sonamarg main tunnel of 6.4 km length, an egress tunnel and approach roads. Situated at an altitude of over 8,650 feet above sea level, it will enhance all-weather connectivity between Srinagar and Sonamarg enroute to Leh, bypassing landslide and avalanche routes and ensuring safer and uninterrupted access to the strategically critical Ladakh region. It will also promote tourism by transforming Sonamarg into a year-round destination, boosting winter tourism, adventure sports, and local livelihoods.

Along with the Zojila Tunnel, set for completion by 2028, it will reduce the route length from 49 km to 43 km and boost vehicle speed from 30 km/hr to 70 km/hr, ensuring seamless NH-1 connectivity between Srinagar Valley and Ladakh. This enhanced connectivity will boost defense logistics, drive economic growth and socio-cultural integration across Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh.

## Sonamarg tunnel is...

tunnel, likely to be completed by 2026, will also ensure connectivity to Ladakh throughout the year and uninterrupted essential services to remote areas.

The unprecedented expansion of infrastructure, new industrial revolution, large network of highways, strengthening of democracy at the grassroots level, new revolution in agriculture and horticulture sector, rejuvenation of socio-economic sectors and upliftment of deprived sections have laid a strong foundation for a developed, self-reliant Jammu Kashmir.

Peace and stability have transformed the tourism sector. The number of foreign tourists has increased by 300 %. J&K has recorded 2.35 crore tourist visits in 2024, while 2.11 lakh tourists visited Jammu Kashmir in 2023.

Under the leadership of the Prime Minister, we are witnessing an unprecedented road and tunnel infrastructure development", the Lieutenant Governor said while highlighting various other infrastructural initiatives.

► **Around Rs 1.5 lakh crores worth Road and Highways projects are underway in Jammu Kashmir.**

► **Work is going on at a fast pace on the Delhi- Amritsar- Katra Expressway. Baramulla-Kupwara-Trehgam National Highway, Baramulla-Uri Highway, Pattan Bypass, Baramulla Bypass and many other projects are aimed at strengthening the road connectivity in the UT.**

► **The construction work of 8 tunnel projects is going on at a rapid pace and is likely to be completed by December 2025.**

► **Work on Sudhmahadev-Dranga Tunnel and Singhpora-Velu Tunnel is being started.**

► **Around 144 road and bridge projects have been started under NABARD.**

► **We have succeeded in connecting more than 99% of the villages of Jammu Kashmir with road under PMGSY and connectivity will be established soon to the remaining 09 villages and they will be connected to the mainstream of socio-economic development.**

"The dream of connecting Kashmir to Kanyakumari through railway network will soon become a reality. The opening of the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla rail link will usher in a new era of socio-economic development and national integration.

The Sonamarg Tunnel project, around 12 km long, has been constructed at a cost of over Rs 2,700 crore. It comprises of the Sonamarg main tunnel of 6.4 km length, an egress tunnel and approach roads. Situated at an altitude of over 8,650 feet above sea level, it will enhance all-weather connectivity between Srinagar and Sonamarg enroute to Leh, bypassing landslide and avalanche routes and ensuring safer and uninterrupted access to the strategically critical Ladakh region.

## My heart says...

6)," Abdullah said.

In the presence of PM Modi, the Omar said, "You also promised (assembly) elections within four months and you stayed true to your words. People got an opportunity to take part in the voting and today I am participating in this programme as chief minister."

Referring to Modi's speech during his visit to Srinagar on International Yoga Day last year, the chief minister said, "My heart says that very soon, you will fulfil your third promise to the people of Jammu and Kashmir which is the restoration of statehood to the Union Territory."

The Chief Minister's statehood remark in the presence of the Prime Minister was welcomed by the audience with a round of applause.

Abdullah said the inauguration of projects like the 'Sonamarg Tunnel' tunnel would definitely bridge the gap between Jammu and Kashmir's "dil" (heart)" and Delhi.

He said the biggest positive of the election was that there was no complaint of rigging, misuse of official machinery or repoll anywhere and "the credit for it goes to you, your team and the Election Commission of India".

The Chief Minister said people, including his colleagues, ask him about statehood restoration. "I tell them that the Prime Minister kept his promise of elections and so my heart says that very soon, you will fulfil your third promise as well and Jammu and Kashmir will once again get the status of a state."

Abdullah read out the names of the seven victims in last year's terror attack near the tunnel and said they sacrificed their lives for this project and the development of Jammu and Kashmir and the country.

"I belong to a political regime whose thousands of leaders and workers have been killed in the last 35 years because we were... not ready to see the country being divided," the chief minister said.

He said the Prime Minister's presence in the tunnel inauguration programme is a testament to the fact that those who carried out the attack do not want the development of this region and the country.

"They do not want a peaceful atmosphere and democracy. But they can never be successful. They will always have to face defeat here and we will never allow them to cause any harm to democracy," he said.

Abdullah said there were many challenges in building the tunnel and the work on the project was also halted.

"The people of Jammu and Kashmir have been waiting for this tunnel for a very long time. Because of this tunnel, the people will not have to come to the lower parts. We will be able to develop Sonamarg as a tourist destination and this tunnel will also facilitate speedy work on the under-construction Zojila tunnel (to provide all-weather connectivity to Ladakh)," he said.

He thanked Prime Minister Modi for visiting Kashmir in the cold weather and said, "We hope that you will come again and again, and join in our happiness."

## Infra development imperative...

employment opportunities are created for the youth and poverty is eradicated. With that view, we are developing the infrastructure in J-K," he added.

Gadkari said the inauguration of the Sonamarg tunnel, which was previously known as the Z-Morh tunnel, was historic and would provide all-weather connectivity to the tourist resort town.

"Today is a historic day that the Sonamarg tunnel is being inaugurated by the Prime Minister. Due to the closure of this road (due to heavy snowfall), some areas remained closed for five to six months every year.

"It was started in 2012, but there were several difficulties. Today, I am happy that the work has been completed. By the opening of this tunnel -- Srinagar to Ladakh, Leh highway will especially be connected, which used to remain shut for 5-6 months," he noted.

He said the work on the nearby Zojila tunnel was going on and once open, it will reduce the travel time from Srinagar to Leh by 3.5 hours and keep the road open throughout the year.

"Zojila tunnel, which is 14 km with 18 km approach road, is being constructed at a cost of Rs 6,800 crore. When we floated the tender for the project for the fifth time, the government had fixed its cost at Rs 12,000 crore. However, I am happy to tell you (PM) that we are completing it under Rs 6,800 crore and have saved around Rs 5,000 crore," the minister said.

"Zojila tunnel is the highest tunnel in Asia, which will reduce the travel time between Srinagar and Leh by 3.5 hours and will give the people an all-season connectivity which will bring ease in their lives."

Speaking about other developmental projects in J-K, Gadkari said his ministry is building four corridors in the Union Territory at the cost of Rs 50,000 crore.

Jammu-Udhampur-Srinagar corridor, which is 250 km long, will be built at a cost of Rs 16,000 crores. We are trying to finish the project by the end of this year.

"There will be 33 tunnels in this corridor, out of which 15 have been completed, while 18 more are to be built in which the work is underway. It will reduce the distance by 70 km and save five hours of journey time. The 9 tunnels will be complet-

ed by December 2025," he said.

The second corridor is Jammu-Chenani-Anantnag, which is 202 km long and is being built at Rs 14,000 crore. It will be completed by December 2025, the minister said.

Five tunnels in this project will reduce the distance by 68 km, he added.

The third corridor is the Surankote-Shopian-Baramulla-Uri, which is 303 km long, being constructed at the cost of Rs 10,000 crore and will be completed by 2027, Gadkari said.

The fourth one is the Jammu-Akhnoor-Surankote-Poonch corridor, which is 203 km, and the project cost is Rs 5,000 crore. The DPR process has been started, he said, adding that all these corridors will be the lifeline of J-K.

He also announced that the DPR process has been started for another important corridor -- Kathua-Basohli-Bhaderwah-Doda.

It is a four-lane, 250 km long project at the cost of Rs 3,400 crore. People from Punjab can go directly from Kathua to Srinagar without having to go to Jammu once it is completed, the minister informed.

He also mentioned that the Srinagar ring road is to be built at a cost of Rs 7,200 crore.

It is a 104-km four-lane road and will be completed by this year-end, the minister announced.

People going to Gurez, Baramulla, or Ladakh will not have to enter Srinagar once this project is completed, Gadkari said.

Referring to Modi's dream of connecting Kashmir with Delhi and reducing the distance between hearts, Gadkari said the Delhi-Amritsar-Katra greenfield express highway, which is being constructed at a cost of Rs 41,000 crore and is 670 km long, will be completed by the year-end.

We are working to have you dedicate it to the nation by this year-end, he added.

"On your assurance to the people of J-K to reduce the distance between them and Delhi, I assure you that this dream will be realised soon and the road journey between Delhi to Srinagar will be completed in 8-8.5 hours soon, and this project will be completed in 1.5 years," Gadkari added.

He also said the government is undertaking five ropeway projects in J-K, including the Shankaracharya ropeway in Srinagar, Baltal to Amarnath cave shrine ropeway, and Sonamarg-Thajivas ropeway.

## A tale of...

seen significant changes, with peace prevailing over discord and stone-pelting and hartal culture becoming a nightmare of the past.

This shift in mindset can be attributed to the dawning realization of the benefits of peace and progress. Infrastructure projects like the Sonamarg Tunnel are no longer seen as impositions but as catalysts for growth and prosperity.

Tunnels, as symbols of progress, do more than shorten distances-they also strengthen integration, both emotional and physical. They connect people, enhance connectivity, stimulate economic growth, and promote cultural exchange. The Sonamarg and Chenani-Nashri tunnels are technological marvels that have significantly reduced travel time and made life easier for locals and tourists alike.

Sonamarg, the "Meadow of Gold," remains a jewel of Kashmir's tourism landscape, while Jammu serves as a crucial gateway to northern frontiers, including Ladakh. By making these regions more accessible, these tunnels have paved the way for greater economic opportunities.

The jubilant response to the Sonamarg Tunnel stands in stark contrast to the demonstrations and skepticism that marked the Chenani-Nashri Tunnel's inauguration on April 2, 2017. At the time, vested interests exploited public fears to question the necessity of the project. Such resistance was an aberration of an era when skepticism toward large infrastructure initiatives was widespread, driven by mistrust and a polarized socio-political climate.

Today, however, the Valley's residents appear more forward-looking, seeing infrastructure projects as harbingers of hope and opportunity. Over the past five years, the region has increasingly embraced development as a pathway to economic prosperity and stability.

The welcoming attitude toward development initiatives signals a growing realization among the people of the Valley about the futility of the gun culture that once gripped the Valley. Decades of violence and turmoil rehabilitated graveyards for separatist and soft-separatist political leaders to exploit, while leaving ordinary Kashmiris struggling for survival.

Prime Minister Modi's vision for a peaceful and prosperous Kashmir hinges on aligning developmental efforts with the aspirations of the people. Whether this vision will be fully realized depends on the people to resist the narratives propagated by those who once thrived on exploiting emotions and divisions.

Post Sonamarg Tunnel inauguration symbolizes connectivity and progress; it also highlights the evolving mindset of the Valley's people-one that increasingly values peace, growth, and opportunity.

Time alone will prove whether the initiatives of the Modi government for peace, progress and development in the Kashmir Valley are taken in right perspective or the people will again surrender before the narratives being manufactured by the ecosystem, which continues to thrive on emotions of common Kashmiri like leeches.

## Poonch police recovers 105 grams of charas, one person arrested

### ■ STATE TIMES NEWS

POONCH: Continuing its crackdown against drug peddling, Poonch Police has achieved another success by recovering a consignment of narcotics in the Mandi area.

A police party from Police Station Mandi was conducting a routine naka checking on Aznabad Road, Mandi, at around 1500 hours. During the operation, one individual, identified as Mohd Rafiq, son of Ghulam Qadar, resident of Chamber Kanari, Tehsil Mandi, was intercepted by the police. Upon his personal search, 105 grams of Charas-like substance was recovered from his possession.

Following this, a case FIR No. 03/2025 U/S 8/20 NDPS Act has been registered at Police Station Mandi, and further investigation is underway.

## Rotary Club Jammu Elite donates bicycle to needy gardener

### ■ STATE TIMES NEWS

JAMMU: Rotary Club Jammu Elite extended a helping hand to a needy gardener from Sainik Colony, Jammu, by donating a bicycle to facilitate his daily commute to



work. Previously, the gardener had to walk from Sainik Colony to Gandhi Nagar, a considerable distance. This charitable initiative, led by President Dr. Davinder Kour, aims to alleviate his struggles and improve his daily life.

In a thoughtful gesture, club members respected the gardener's self-dignity by not taking group photographs during the donation. The act of kindness was widely appreciated by all club members.

## Jeevan Sangarsh Trust celebrates Lohri with cancer patients at GMC Jammu

### ■ STATE TIMES NEWS

JAMMU: The team of Jeevan Sangarsh Trust had the honor of celebrating the festival of Lohri with the cancer patients at Government Medical College (GMC), Jammu.

This heartfelt gesture is part of a tradition where Trust team celebrates Lohri, Diwali, Baisakhi, and other festivals with the patients every year. Over time, these patients have become like family to us.

"Witnessing the smiles on their faces, despite the hardships they face, brings us immense joy. We pray that God blesses them with good health and speedy recovery, so they can return home to celebrate every festival with their loved ones," Trust members said. They saluted the dedicated doctors and medical staff, who work tirelessly day and night to care for the patients.

"Our heartfelt thanks go to Dr. Ashutosh Gupta, Principal and Dean of GMC, and the Superintendent of the Oncology Department, Afroza, for joining us and support this initiative," they said.

The Jeevan Sangarsh Trust team came together with great enthusiasm to make this event a success, including Chairperson Rajni Sharma, Convenor Mukesh Gupta, ex-CMO Rajinder Thappa, Bhuvneshwar Gupta, Rajvinder Singh, Rekha Rajput, and the staff of GMC Jammu.