!! Continuations from Page 1 !!

Eight soldiers injured...

Advanced surveillance equipment, including drones, and sniffer dogs have been deployed to speed up the operation.

This is the third encounter between the security forces and terrorists in the Jammu region this year. Encounters broke out in Kahog and Najote forests in the Billawar area of Kathua district on January 7 and 13, respectively.

On December 15 last year, a police officer was killed in an encounter with terrorists at Soan village in the Majalta area of Udhampur district. The terrorists managed to escape, taking advantage of thick foliage and darkness.

The encounters followed a major counter-terrorist operation launched in the forest belts of the Jammu region in December last year to flush out nearly three dozen holed-up terrorists.

Operations have been further intensified in the run-up to Republic Day to ensure peaceful celebrations, amid intelligence inputs about desperate attempts by Pakistan-based handlers to push more terrorists, the officials said.

'Crypto Hawala' may...

money is sent through non-banking channels, this digital version uses the anonymity of unregulated cryptocurrency to erase the financial trail and inject cash into the domestic economy.

While India requires all Virtual Digital Asset Service Providers (VDA SPs) to register with the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU), this shadow network operates entirely off the grid.

For the 2024-25 fiscal year, only 49 exchanges have registered as legal reporting entities, prompting the government to come out with fresh guidelines that include a mandatory liveness detection and geographical tracking, besides asking users to take a "live selfie" using software that verifies their presence, typically through eye-blinking or head movement.

The "penny-drop" method, which involves processing a nominal Re 1 transaction to confirm that the bank account is active and belongs to the registrant, is required. In addition to a Permanent Account Number (PAN), users must provide a secondary ID, such as a Passport, Aadhaar or Voter ID, verified via OTP.

A detailed study done by the Jammu and Kashmir Police, along with central security agencies, identified people in countries like China, Malaysia, Myanmar and Cambodia directing people in the union territory to create private crypto wallets, which are often set up using a Virtual Private Network (VPN) to avoid detection and require no Know Your Customer (KYC) or identity verification.

The Jammu and Kashmir Police has already suspended the use of VPNs in the valley as registering in crypto wallets was increasingly seen in the region of late. The VPN is a handy tool for terrorists as well as separatists to avoid detection.

The officials said the foreign handler sends cryptocurrency directly into these private wallets, placing the funds under local control without involving a regulated financial institution, and the wallet holder travels to major cities like Delhi or Mumbai to meet unregulated peer-to-peer (P2P) traders and sell crypto for cash at negotiated rates.

This effectively "breaks the financial trail," allowing foreign money to enter the local economy as untraceable cash, the officials said.

The key to this network is the use of "mule accounts," which are parking accounts that layer transactions. To keep the system running, syndicates have set up a structured commission system where such an account holder earns anywhere between 0.8 to 1.8 per cent per transaction. The officials said that mule accounts belong to ordinary people who are motivated by the promise of commission and are assured that their role is safe and they are merely allowing their accounts to be used temporarily as parking accounts. All control of their bank accounts, including net banking usernames and passwords, is handed over to the scammer.

A single scammer is typically provided with multiple mule accounts, often ranging from ten to thirty accounts at a time, the officials said.

The officials said the rise of crypto hawala throws a new challenge of off-exchange trading and, by operating in the "grey market," these traders evade the anti-money laundering laws that apply to registered entities. Officials warn that the "crypto-hawala" method is designed to bypass formal banking systems and avoid leaving any financial traces. By moving money from a digital private wallet to a physical cash transaction in a different city, the "financial trail" is effectively cut off. Despite the FIU's efforts to regulate 49 major exchanges, the rise of "crypto hawala" presents a significant challenge for enforcement agencies since it allows foreign-sourced funds to enter the local economy without going through a regulated financial institution.

War now complex...

approach has developed in the private defence sector is very laudable," he said.

The private sector is now ahead of the public sector with regards to research and development, the Union minister pointed out.

India is moving fast towards becoming a major arms exporter, Singh asserted.

Shortage in ammunition supply was felt but the government has brought in self-reliance in the sector, he said while lauding Solar group for its various defence production capacities like Pinaka missiles as well as Nagastra drone used in Operation Sindoor.

The government's ambition is that India should become the global hub of ammunition production, Singh added.

"Wars are becoming very complex and its intensity is also increasing continuously. In such a scenario, the preparation for war should be on war footing. The nature of war is changing very fast. New methods are coming forth which were never there in traditional war," he said.

"Wars are now not limited to borders but its effect are felt directly by the common public. Energy, trade, tariff, supply chains, technology and information have become the new dimensions of conflict," he added.

In the face of these changes, the country's alertness on the borders, weapons, hardware and defence industrial manufacturing have increased, he emphasised.

"Whatever be the form of war, the need of the hour is a strong defence industrial base, research and development and production by private sector. The government wants contribution of private sector in defence manufacturing sector to be at least 50 percent of production," he said.

Domestic defence production had risen from Rs 46000 crore in 2014 to more than Rs 1.50 lakh crore now, of which the private sector's contribution is Rs 30000, Singh informed.

Defence exports were just Rs 1000 crore 10 years ago, but has now increased to Rs 25000 crore, with the government's target being Rs 50000 crore by 2029-30, the Union minister said.

He also praised Solar group's ongoing development of Bhargavastra anti-drone system, a micro-missile-based hard-kill solution that has already undergone successful test launches.

In a statement, the company said medium-calibre ammunition (23 mm to 40 mm class) forms the backbone of infantry combat, armoured vehicles, naval gun systems, and aircraft-mounted cannons, and currently a significant proportion of these critical munitions is imported. This exposes India to risks from export controls, geopolitical uncertainties, and logistics disruptions, it added. "To address this vulnerability, the Solar group has set up a fully automated, state-of-the-art manufacturing facility for 100 percent indigenous 23 mm, 30 mm, and 40 mm ammunition and also a fully instrumented in-house firing test range for dynamic evaluation of 30 mm ammunition and 40 mm grenades," the release said. A dedicated range for 23 mm ammunition is slated to become operational within the next three months, the company statement added.

Solar group has launched a major programme for Medium Altitude Long Endurance (MALE) and High Altitude Long Endurance (HALE) class UAVs for surveillance and combat roles, it said.

During his visit to Nagpur, Singh visited Union minister Nitin Gadkari at his residence here.

TMC protecting infiltrators...

West Bengal and the country. They protect infiltrators because they form their vote bank," Modi said, alleging that illegal immigration along Bengal's borders had been allowed to flourish under the state government's watch.

Stressing infiltration for the second consecutive day, Modi said border fencing had been stalled for years and fake documents were being prepared with political patronage. "It is time to completely stop infiltration and identify and send back those who entered using forged papers. A BJP government would ensure this," he said.

He alleged that despite repeated appeals, the TMC government had failed to cooperate with the Centre on border fencing. "For the last 11 years, the central government has repeatedly written to the state government saying barbed-wire fencing must be erected along West Bengal's borders and land is required for it. But the TMC has shown no concern," he said, accusing the ruling party of helping those who prepare fake documents for infiltrators.

"The TMC can go to any extent to protect infiltrators by giving them shelter and creating fake documents," Modi said, urging voters to back the BJP to "secure borders, restore law and order and put Bengal back on the path of growth".

Sharpening the battle lines and setting the tone for the upcoming assembly elections, where the BJP is the principal challenger to Chief Minister Mamata

Banerjee's TMC, Modi called for a change of guard, saying it was necessary to oust the TMC's "maha jungle raj" and bring in a government committed to good governance.

"Shouldn't such a government be punished for acting against the interests of the people of Bengal?" he asked, claiming that voters across the country were increasingly voting out governments that blocked development and welfare delivery.

Even as the BJP sought to sharpen its industrialisation narrative by choosing Singur, Modi stressed that restoring law and order was the first step towards creating an investment-friendly environment.

"Investment will come only when the law and order situation improves. Syndicate tax and mafia rule will end only under the BJP. This is Modi's guarantee," he said, alleging that rioters, syndicates and mafias enjoyed a free run in Bengal under TMC rule. He claimed Bengal's industrial decline was rooted in "syndicate raj", alleging that even the smallest TMC leaders had begun treating areas as their fiefdoms.

Accusing the TMC of being "enemies of women, youth and farmers", Modi claimed daughters were unsafe in the state and the future of the youth was being compromised. He also alleged that the state government was deliberately blocking central schemes out of political hostility.

"If they have a problem with Modi or the BJP, that is understandable, but they are taking revenge on the people," the PM said.

Claiming that the crowd's enthusiasm reflected Bengal's resolve for "real poriborton" after 15 years of what he termed TMC 'maha jungle raj', Modi led supporters in raising the slogan, "Paltano darkar, chai BJP sarkar" (There is a need for change, we want a BJP government). The TMC hit back, accusing the Prime Minister of "letting loose a pack of lies" during the rally. The party claimed that contrary to Modi's assertions, no large number of Bangladeshi or Rohingya infiltrators had been detected during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise. "For the past 11 years, Modi-ji has been letting loose the same pack of lies about infiltrators, about Bangladeshis and Rohingyas without explaining how he arrived at this conclusion," TMC state president Joy Prakash Majumdar said. Before the rally, he inaugurated the Jayrambati-Barogopinathpur-Maynapur rail line, flagged off a train between Maynapur and Jayrambati, and laid the foundation stone for the Extended Port Gate System, including an Inland Water Transport terminal and a road over bridge, at Balagarh in the district.

CB registers FIR...

is underway to identify any other victims and bring all the accused to justice."

The Crime Branch has urged the public, especially unemployed youth, to exercise caution and not fall prey to such fraudulent schemes. "We advise everyone to remain vigilant against individuals or groups offering government jobs in exchange for money. Any suspicious activity should be immediately reported to the nearest police station or directly to the Economic Offences Wing to prevent further victimization," the official added.

This case highlights the growing trend of job-related scams in the region and the importance of verifying employment opportunities through official channels. Authorities have assured strict action against the accused and are working to trace and recover the defrauded funds.

Advocates cannot seek...

be used for personal ends and should not become a tool in the hands of the advocate for seeking all kinds of information in order to promote his practice".

Taking note of the claims made by the public authority that several records were destroyed in a fire and that personal information was rightly denied under exemptions, the CIC said it found "no infirmity in the reply furnished by the CPIO".

The appeal was accordingly disposed of, with a direction to share copies of written submissions with the appellant.

Over 92,000 units...

silos, HADP is structured along value chains. It simultaneously strengthens core systems such as quality seed and planting material, breeding and nurseries, feed and fodder, mechanisation and extension services, while also building downstream capacity in processing, storage, branding and marketing.

Climate resilience, diversification and technology-enabled advisory services are embedded within project design, rather than treated as peripheral components.

Equally significant is the programme's governance framework. HADP was conceptualised through an apex committee of nationally recognised experts and is being implemented in mission mode with phased roll-out, continuous monitoring and mid-course correction.

A robust digital backbone underpins this delivery architecture. Farmer onboarding and applications are routed through the Kisan Sathi portal, capacity building and decision support are delivered through Daksh Kisan, while last-mile facilitation is enabled through over 2,000 Kisan Khidmat Ghars-entrepreneur-driven, IT-enabled single-window centres operating across a wide panchayat network. Field verification and outcome monitoring are conducted through the Output Tracking App, enabling real-time tracking of assets and results.

As HADP advances into deeper stages of implementation, the transition from policy intent to on-ground delivery is clearly visible.

More than 3.7 lakh farmers have been registered under the programme, with around 171 activities opened for applications. Over 5.9 lakh applications have been received so far, of which nearly 4 lakh have been approved across districts. On the ground, more than 92,000 productive units covering farms, nurseries, livestock units, mushroom cultivation, poultry and value-addition enterprises have already been established, with over 86,000 units actively tracked through digital dashboards.

Capacity building has remained central to the programme. Through DakshKisan, over 3.5 lakh farmers have been onboarded for structured skilling and orientation, with nearly 3 lakh course completions recorded. This focus aims to strengthen on-farm decision-making related to crop selection, input optimisation, enterprise choice and risk management.

Monitoring under HADP extends beyond sanctions to measurable outcomes. Digitally tracked units have generated nearly Rs 350 crore in revenue and over Rs 125 crore in profit, along with more than 1.9 crore person-days of employment. In efficiency terms, this translates into over Rs 2 of revenue and nearly Rs 1 of profit for every rupee of subsidy deployed so far indicating that public investment is translating into tangible household-level economic activity.

Addressing a long-standing bottleneck, credit linkage has been integrated into the KisanSathi platform, enabling banks to access applications digitally. Thousands of cases have already been routed to financial institutions, marking a gradual shift from subsidy-centric support to enterprise-oriented financing.

While the breadth of HADP's panning crops, livestock, horticulture, fisheries, mechanisation, marketing and digital agriculture-may appear complex, its underlying logic is cohesive.

Input systems are being strengthened to reduce cost and risk. Competitive advantages such as niche crops, temperate vegetables, livestock and fisheries are being organised into viable enterprises. Value chains are being built to ensure that production is linked with storage, processing, branding and strategic market access. Technology is deployed not as a slogan, but as an enabler of transparency, advisory services and real-time decision-making.

This coherence allows HADP to function as an integrated system rather than a set of fragmented interventions. Though tailored to the unique agro-ecological realities of Jammu & Kashmir, elements of HADP's design are drawing attention beyond the Union Territory. Its emphasis on technology-enabled delivery, enterprise-linked support and outcome-based monitoring reflects a broader evolution in agricultural governance towards transparency, accountability and income-led interventions.

Officials note that the programme's focus on execution quality and measurable outcomes has generated interest in how similar models could be adapted to other climatically diverse and hill regions, where scheme-driven approaches have produced uneven results. With foundational systems now firmly in place, the focus under HADP has shifted towards scale and consolidation. Capacities created across seed systems, livestock development, protected cultivation, mechanisation and post-harvest infrastructure are expected to yield higher productivity and returns as utilisation deepens over the remaining programme period. Going forward, emphasis will be placed on expanding coverage, strengthening market linkages and ensuring commercial viability of enterprises already established. As outcomes compound across sectors, HADP is increasingly being positioned not merely as a programme, but as a long-term framework for agricultural transformation in Jammu & Kashmir-aligning public investment with farmer incomes, enterprise growth and food security objectives.

Sonamarg freezes at...

forecast spells of wet weather, especially in the higher reaches of the valley over the next few days. Shopian in south Kashmir recorded a low of minus 6.2 degrees Celsius, while Pahalgam recorded a minimum temperature of minus 6 degrees Celsius. The higher hills of Himachal Pradesh saw light snowfall at isolated places. The Shimla meteorological office stated that light snowfall occurred in Lahaul and Spiti district's Koksar and Hansa villages, while the weather remained dry in most parts of the state. Cold wave was also witnessed in Hamirpur, Una and Mandi, which recorded 2.1, 2.7 and 3.9 degrees Celsius, respectively.

KPs protest at Jagti, block National Highway

JAGTI: In a late-night protest, Kashmiri Pandits at Jagti township blocked the National Highway, bringing vehicular movement to a complete halt and triggering massive traffic jams that lasted for hours. The agitation, which continued into the night, highlighted the community's deep-rooted anger over what they described as 36 years of neglect and unfulfilled promises.

As soon as the highway was blocked, senior police officials and security personnel rushed to the spot. Authorities attempted to pacify the protesters and urged them to clear the road, citing inconvenience to the public and emergency services. However, the demonstrators remained firm, refusing to withdraw until their core demands were addressed.

The protesters demanded that the Union Home Minister personally visit Jagti and listen to their grievances. Their key demands included dignified rehabilitation, the establishment of a Kashmiri Pandit homeland, and the formulation of a clear, time-bound policy to ensure their safe and permanent return. Protesters said repeated assurances by successive governments had failed to translate into action, leaving the community feeling abandoned.

Raising slogans, protesters accused authorities of ignoring their suffering for over three decades. "We have been waiting for justice for 36 years. We are tired of false promises," several protesters said, expressing frustration and emotional distress.

The late-night blockade led to long queues of stranded vehicles on both sides of the highway, causing severe inconvenience to travelers. Till the last reports, the National Highway remained blocked, and discussions between the protesters and administration were ongoing, with no immediate breakthrough reported.

The protest underscores the growing anger within the displaced Kashmiri Pandit community, which has repeatedly warned that continued neglect could lead to intensified agitation in the coming days.

UAE President Al Nahyan to visit India today

NEW DELHI: President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan will visit India on Monday to explore new frontiers in further boosting the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries.

His visit to India comes amid the volatile situation in the Middle-East arising out of a sharp decline in Iran-US ties, simmering tensions between Saudi Arabia and the UAE over Yemen and the unsettling political scenario in Gaza.

People familiar with the UAE president's visit said trade and investment, defence industry cooperation and energy initiatives are expected to be on the agenda of his talks with the Indian leadership.

The situation in the Middle-east is also likely to figure in the talks, they said.

At the invitation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the president of the UAE will pay an official visit to India on January 19, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Sunday.

It will be the UAE leader's third official visit to India since assuming the charge of the top office and the fifth to the country over the last 10 years.

There has been a significant upswing in bilateral trade and people-to-people ties after New Delhi and Abu Dhabi signed an ambitious comprehensive economic partnership agreement in 2022.

The visit builds on the strong momentum generated by recent high-level exchanges, including the visit of Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan to India in September 2024, the MEA said.

It also mentioned the visit to India by Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the deputy prime minister and defence minister of the UAE, in April last year.

"India and the UAE share warm, close, and multi-faceted relations, underpinned by strong political, cultural, and economic ties," the MEA said.

The two countries are among each other's top trading and investment partners, bolstered by the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), the local currency-settlement system and the bilateral investment treaty, it said.

India and the UAE also enjoy a robust energy partnership, including long-term energy-supply arrangements.

"The visit will provide an opportunity for the two leaders to chart new frontiers for the India-UAE comprehensive strategic partnership," the MEA said in a statement.

"It will also enable an exchange of views on regional and global issues of mutual interest, where India and the UAE share a high degree of convergence," it said.

Media bodies seek new PCI chairperson

NEW DELHI: Media associations on Sunday urged the government to appoint a new chairperson to the Press Council of India as the post fell vacant after Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai completed her tenure last month.

The Press Council of India (PCI), a statutory, quasi-judicial body to safeguard press freedom, has been without a chairperson for the first time in its history, the Press Association and journalists' bodies of Mumbai, Assam, West Bengal, Odisha and Chandigarh-Punjab said in a joint statement here.

"The term of the 14th Council ended more than a year ago, but the full 15th Council is yet to be formed, and the post of chairman has not been filled, while the last chairman's three-year extended term ended in December," the statement said.

Justice Desai, who has been appointed as chairperson of the Eighth Pay Commission, completed her tenure as Press Council of India chairperson on December 16.

The media bodies said the 15th Press Council of India was yet to be constituted completely, as appointments in the categories of editors and working journalists are still awaited.

The Press Council of India comprises 29 members, including the chairman, and has a tenure of three years. Currently, 14 people -- five MPs, three nominees and six in the category of owners and management -- have been appointed to the council.

In the absence of a chairperson, the process of the constitution of the Council cannot proceed further.

India will remain Vishwaguru as long as guided by dharma: Bhagwat

MUMBAI: RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat on Sunday said that as long as Bharat is guided by dharma, the country will remain a Vishwaguru, asserting that such spiritual knowledge is unique to India.

Dharma is the driver of the entire universe, and everything runs on that principle, he said at an event here.

Bhagwat said India had inherited a rich spiritual legacy from its ancestors and continued to receive guidance from saints and seers. He emphasised that dharma is not confined to religion, but it is the guiding principle of all creation.

He said as long as such dharma drives Bharat, it will remain Vishwaguru, adding the world does not possess this kind of knowledge because it lacks spirituality.

Bhagwat said this is the heritage of our ancestors.

"Whether it is Narendra bhai, me, you, or anyone else, there is one single force that drives all of us. If the vehicle is driven by that force, there will never be an accident. That driver is dharma," the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief said.

He emphasised that when the creation came into existence, the rules that governed its functioning became dharma. Bhagwat further said dharma was not confined to religion and that every entity in nature has its own inherent duty and discipline.

"Water has its dharma to flow, fire has its dharma to burn. There is a son's duty, a ruler's duty, and rules of conduct. Our ancestors understood these laws through spiritual research and great effort. Even a person living in a hut may not deliver a speech, but dharma flows in his veins," Bhagwat said.

He warned against arrogance that can spoil the holy work being done, stressing that we need to be freed of pride.

"The simple but difficult solution is to accept that it is God's work. Our body is his shop, and we are just doing his work. He is the owner, we should not forget it," the RSS chief added. He added an anecdote about a potter's donkey that, after being carried with an idol, mistakenly believed villagers bowed to it. The donkey began expecting homage and was miffed when it sought it.

Bhagwat said Bharat had given dharma to the world from time to time, noting that we have books and speakers, but dharma is actually put into practice and followed in life. "The dharma is based on some truth, and those who constantly live with such truth are seers. It is our duty to provide security and maintain the dignity of seers. Even our country's prime minister says that saying no to a seer is an awkward moment for him," he added.