

LG Kavinder inaugurates Parallel Taxi Track Project worth approx Rs 452 cr at Air Force Station Leh

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

LEH: Lieutenant Governor of Ladakh, Kavinder Gupta, on Wednesday inaugurated the Parallel Taxi Track Project at Air Force Station Leh, marking a significant step towards strengthening the operational capability of the Indian Air Force and enhancing air connectivity in the Union Territory of Ladakh.



LG Ladakh, Kavinder Gupta inaugurating Parallel Taxi Track Project at Air Force Station Leh.

The PTT project, initiated in 2023 and completed at a cost of approximately Rs 452 crores despite inclement weather and limited working season, has potential to serve as main runway, significantly improving air connectivity, boosting air traffic flow, and increasing tourist footfall via air travel.

The Lt Governor said that Leh Airfield holds immense strategic importance for national security along the northern borders and also serves as a vital lifeline for the people of Ladakh, especially during the winter months when road connectivity through Srinagar-Leh and Manali-Leh remains closed. He asserted that the Parallel Taxi Track Project

includes the construction of a parallel taxi track, two large aircraft dispersals and five taxi links, all designed to support operations of heavy aircraft. The project will significantly improve operational efficiency, safety and responsiveness of the airfield for both military and civil aviation.

The Lt Governor maintained that military aircraft operations on the new taxi track have already commenced with certain restrictions, and the UT Ladakh Administration will take necessary measures to remove obstacles near Glory Hill to make the facility fully functional for civil air traffic. He added that the parallel taxi track will also prove extremely useful during future resurfacing of the main runway, for which directions have already been issued to the concerned departments.

Highlighting the importance of the Leh Airfield for Ladakh's tourism-based economy, the Lt Governor said that year-round safe civil air operations enable the flow of tourists to the region, supporting the local economy and directly benefiting residents through improved connectivity. He added that the Indian Air Force has consistently played a crucial role in assisting the people of Ladakh, particularly during civilian medical emergencies, by airlifting critical patients to advanced

hospitals in Delhi and Chandigarh. He also acknowledged the Air Force's humanitarian efforts under Operation Sadbhavana, including winter air connectivity, medical camps and community outreach programmes. The Lt Governor said the excellent coordination and bonhomie between Air Force Station Leh and the UT Ladakh Administration is a rare and exemplary model of civil-military cooperation. He added that the successful execution of key infrastructure projects in areas such as Leh, Nyoma, Taru Thang, Khardungla Top and Niddar reflects this strong synergy and cooperative governance.

Expressing confidence in the Indian Air Force's continued contribution to national security and regional development, the Lt Governor extended his best wishes to all Air Warriors for success in their noble mission of service to the nation.

Among those present were Chief Secretary Ashish Kundra, Air Senior Air Staff Officer of Western Air Command Marshal Jasvir Singh Mann, Administrative Secretary Bhamu Prabha, senior officials from Indian Army, Indian Air Force, Ladakh Police and UT Administration.



J&K Bank celebrates 77th Republic Day with patriotic fervour

Economic self-reliance is both a national imperative and a moral responsibility : MD & CEO

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

JAMMU: As part of country-wide festivities, J&K Bank celebrated the 77th Republic Day with great fervour across its areas of operations.

MD & CEO Amitava Chatterjee unfurled the national tricolour during the main function held at the Bank's Jammu Divisional Office, in the presence of Executive Director Sudhir Gupta, Chief General Manager Sunit Kumar, General Managers, DGMs, senior officers amid a large gathering of Bank staff.

Addressing the gathering on the occasion, MD & CEO Amitava Chatterjee said, "On this solemn occasion, we reaffirm our commitment to the constitutional ideals that continue to guide India's march towards progress, prosperity and self-reliance. Economic self-reliance, therefore, is both a national imperative and a moral responsibility - one that places people, productivity and purpose at its core."

Highlighting the relationship between Bank's rich legacy and national vision, he added, "For J&K Bank, this vision resonates deeply with our legacy. Established with the mission of 'serving to empower,' the Bank has, for decades, functioned not merely as a financial institution but as a development partner in the socio-economic transformation of Jammu & Kashmir with emphasis on self-reliance. Our journey has been shaped by the aspirations of our people and the belief that sustainable growth must be inclusive, equitable, and rooted in local strengths."

"This journey finds strong expression in our proactive engagement with the UT Government's flagship program, Mission YUVA. By facilitating entrepreneurship, nur-



Bank's MD & CEO Amitava Chatterjee unfurling the National Flag.

turing self-employment, and enabling access to timely and affordable credit, the Bank is proud to play a pivotal role in transforming job-seekers into job-creators", MD and CEO said.

Meanwhile, on the occasion, the Bank also organized a Blood Donation-cum-Health Screening Camp in collaboration with the Directorate of Health Services and Unmeed Foundation, reaffirming the Bank's commitment to community welfare and preventive healthcare. Demonstrating a strong sense of social responsibility during the camp, the Bank staff voluntarily donated blood in large numbers. Additionally, health screening of more than 100 persons was

conducted, with special emphasis on cardiac health, enabling early identification of potential health risks.

In his remarks on the occasion, MD & CEO Amitava Chatterjee underscored the relevance of organizing such initiatives in the present times. It was emphasized that such initiatives were essential in promoting awareness, encouraging preventive healthcare practices, and strengthening community well-being.

MD & CEO asserted that in collaboration with government departments and credible non-profit organizations, the Bank plans to expand the reach of such impactful health and wellness interventions through its CSR program to

continue making valuable contributions toward a healthier society.

Notably, in a function held at the Bank's Corporate Headquarters in Srinagar, Chief General Manager Intiyaz Ahmad Bhat unfurled the national flag in the presence of General Managers, DGMs, senior officials and other staff members.

Similar functions were held at the divisional and the zonal levels of the Bank across its areas of operations.

The celebratory functions concluded with a collective pledge to contribute meaningfully to the country's progress by serving the people with renewed purpose and dedication.

CS reviews Shri Amarnathi Yatra preparedness' directs early completion of works for smooth conduct of SANJY-2026

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

JAMMU: Chief Secretary, Atal Dulloo on Wednesday chaired the 15th High-Level Committee (HLC) meeting of the Shri Amarnathi Ji Shrine Board (SASB) and impressed upon all line departments and stakeholders to ensure that comprehensive arrangements for the annual Shri Amarnathi Ji Yatra (SANJY)-2026 are put in place well ahead of its commencement.

Besides the DG Police the meeting was attended by the Administrative Secretaries of all the Departments, Senior officers from the civil administration, police, and other concerned departments.

Deputy Commissioners attended the meeting through video conferencing.

Emphasising advance planning and timely execution, the Chief Secretary directed departments including Tourism, PWD, PDD, Jal Shakti, RDD, H&UDD, Animal & Sheep Husbandry, BRO, Telecommunication and others to complete all tendering, procurement and contract-related processes within the coming month. He stressed that early finalisation of works is critical to ensure seamless arrangements before the onset of the yatra.

Highlighting safety as the top priority, the Chief Secretary instructed the Divisional Administrations and Deputy Commissioners of Anantnag and Ganderbal to identify and mark all disaster-prone and vulnerable areas along both the Baital and Pahalgam routes. He categorically directed that no utilities, including tents and temporary structures, be installed in such high-risk zones.

The Department of Disaster Management, Relief, Rehabilitation & Reconstruction (DMRR&R) was asked to



CS Atal Dulloo chairing meeting in Jammu on Wednesday.

coordinate closely with district administrations to frame and implement robust Standard Operating Procedures (SoPs) to ensure the safety of pilgrims. He also called for an assessment and augmentation of holding capacities at camps and transit points both within and outside the yatra area. The Chief Secretary asked the Deputy Commissioners to facilitate all service providers and ensure that facilities created at every location are adequate, appropriate and sufficient for pilgrims as well as service personnel. He urged inter-departmental coordination and optimal utilisation of the available work window so that all infrastructure and services are fully ready well before the scheduled yatra dates.

Dulloo reviewed the specific roles and responsibilities assigned to each department and district administration, and took note of the budgetary requirements for execution of various works and procurements. He laid special emphasis on the Power Development Department for timely maintenance of HT/LT power lines and on the Jal Shakti Department for completing the requisite works along the yatra routes. Traffic management also came under

detailed discussion, with the Chief Secretary directing preparation of comprehensive traffic plans to avoid congestion and ensure smooth movement of pilgrims and locals alike. The Police Department was asked to ensure deployment of adequate manpower to facilitate a safe, secure and hassle-free yatra. Health preparedness formed another key focus area, with directions issued to ensure adequate deployment of medical manpower and functionality of base hospitals at Chandanwari and Baital, besides strengthening health facilities enroute. The Health Department was asked to initiate the process of engaging additional medical staff from outside, as per established practice. The meeting also deliberated on ensuring that only RFID-registered pilgrims possessing valid health certificates are allowed to undertake the pilgrimage. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) was enjoined to provide daily weather updates to registered pilgrims to enable informed movement decisions. The Divisional Administrations assured the Chief Secretary that fool-proof arrangements would be made at all identified locations.

MLA Jammu East, Div Com inaugurate Tawi boating Festival



Divisional Commissioner Jammu, Ramesh Kumar along with MLA Yudhvir Sethi inaugurating fest. (Pic by Ashok Anand)

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

JAMMU: In a major initiative to promote tourism and reconnect people with the Tawi riverfront, the first-ever Tawi Boating Festival was inaugurated on Wednesday at the Artificial Lake developed under the Jammu Smart City project.

The festival was inaugurated by Divisional Commissioner Jammu, Ramesh Kumar and MLA Jammu East, Yudhvir Sethi in the presence of Deputy Commissioner Jammu, Dr Rakesh Minhas, Jammu Municipal Corporation Commissioner and CEO, Jammu Smart City Limited, Dr Devansh Yadav and officials of Jammu Smart City Limited (JSCL) and the Jammu Municipal Corporation (JMC).

The two-day festival, being held on Wednesday and Thursday, marks the formal beginning of boating activities in the heart of Jammu city. The event is open to the pub-

lic free of cost from 3:30 pm to 6:30 pm, allowing residents to experience the newly developed riverfront up close.

Residents turned up in large numbers on the opening day, describing the initiative as a historic moment for Jammu and a long-awaited recreational attraction for both locals and visitors.

Addressing the gathering, MLA Jammu East, Yudhvir Sethi, termed the initiative a historic step for Jammu, saying the boating facility would emerge as a major attraction and significantly boost tourism and economic activity in the region.

Divisional Commissioner Jammu, Ramesh Kumar, said the riverfront development under the Smart City initiative would provide a new recreational space for residents and help attract tourists to the city.

Speaking on the occasion, Jammu Municipal Corporation Commissioner and CEO, Jammu Smart

City Limited, Dr Devansh Yadav, said the festival is aimed to introduce residents to the newly developed artificial lake and assess the feasibility of regular boating operations.

"Suryaputri Tawi has been the centre of Jammu's devotion and with this project it will become the centre of tourism also in Jammu city" Dr Yadav said.

He added that State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) teams have been deployed with life jackets, rescue boats along the stretch to ensure safety of the visitors and as per the standard operating procedures. Jammu Municipal Corporation will invite tenders to engage local tourism entrepreneurs for running boating & other water sports activities at river front from March, 2026 onwards, he added.

To enhance the festive ambience, the riverbank has been illuminated with decorative lighting. Local bands and stalls offering traditional Dogra cuisine are other major attractions of the event.

The riverfront project, developed under the Smart Cities Mission on the lines of the Sabarmati Riverfront in Gujarat has been executed at a cost of around Rs 180 crore.

Additional CEO, Jammu Smart City Limited, Subha Mehta and other officials from JSCL and JMC were also present on the occasion.

HC to hear NIA's plea for death penalty for Yasin Malik on April 22

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: The Delhi High Court on Wednesday granted four weeks to the National Investigation Agency (NIA) to respond to a reply filed by separatist leader Yasin Malik to its appeal seeking death penalty for him in a terror funding case, and listed the matter for hearing on April 22.

As Malik, who is virtually appearing from Tihar jail where he is serving life sentence in the case, accused the agency of "wasting time" and causing him "trauma" by "taking dates" in the appeal filed in 2023, a bench of Justices Navin Chawla and Ravinder Dudeja said there was no urgency in the case.

"There is no urgency. This is for enhancement of sentence. You are already on life sentence," the bench remarked.

The court gave four weeks as "last opportunity" to the NIA to file its rejoinder.

NIA counsel submitted that Malik filed a lengthy reply to the agency's appeal, which even had content "not related" to the case, and the rejoinder was being vetted.

He also objected to Malik's claim of NIA seeking repeated adjournments, and said Malik himself took one year to file his reply to the appeal.

He further informed the court that the agency was seeking an in-camera hearing in the matter.

A trial court in Delhi awarded Malik -- chief of the banned Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF)-- life sentence on May 24, 2022, after holding him guilty of various offences under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

The NIA filed an appeal in 2023 in the high court seeking enhancement of his life term to the maximum punishment of death penalty.

In its plea before the high court for enhancement of sentence to death penalty, the NIA said if such "dreaded terrorists" are not given capital punishment on account of pleading guilty, there would be complete erosion of the sentencing policy and the terrorists would have a way out to avoid capital punishment.

A life sentence, the NIA asserted, is not commensurate with the crime committed by terrorists when the nation and families of soldiers have suffered loss of lives and the trial court's conclusion that Malik's crimes did not fall within the category of the "rarest of the rare cases" for grant of death penalty is "ex-facie legally flawed and completely unsustainable".

In his reply filed to the NIA's appeal, Malik said that he spent nearly three decades as a key figure in a state-sanctioned "backchannel" mechanism, working with a succession of prime ministers, intelligence chiefs, and even business tycoons to foster peace in Jammu and Kashmir.

In an 85-page affidavit submitted before the Delhi High Court, Malik shared details about his journey from his school days to links with terrorists and meetings with political leaders.

He claimed the state was attempting to "erase" the history of engagement.

Malik said "being a scapegoat in politics isn't a new thing, it's a kind of a new normal but being a sacrificial goat is something which goes beyond the shard of high handedness of morality, if at all politics had one".

Over 3,000 passengers used special train between Katra, Srinagar in 2 days

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

JAMMU: More than 3,000 passengers travelled on a special train between Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra and Srinagar in two days, providing relief to the people stranded due to heavy snowfall that disrupted road and air connectivity in Jammu and Kashmir, an official said on Wednesday.

Jammu Division of Northern Railway operated the special reserved train on January 27 and 28 between the two stations. Due to the large number of tourists visiting Kashmir, two additional AC coaches were also added to the special reserved train on Wednesday, the official said, adding the addition of these two coaches provided 144 extra berths. Senior Divisional Commercial Manager, Jammu, Uchit Singh said more than 3,000 passengers travelled on these special trains and expressed their gratitude to the railways. "The occupancy of these special trains was 100 per cent, and the revenue generated from these trains increased due to the addition of two

extra AC coaches," he said.

He said such initiatives will build confidence in the railways among travellers and tourists visiting Kashmir, and will lead to an increase in the number of tourists visiting Jammu and Kashmir in the future.

Regarding the operation of the special train on Wednesday, the official said it departed from Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra at its scheduled time of 10:30 am, carrying over 800 passengers.

Similarly, a special reserved train departed from Srinagar at its scheduled time of 3:00 pm, carrying over 850 passengers to Katra, the official said.

The Kashmir valley was cut off from rest of the country on Tuesday following snowfall which led to the cancellation of all 50 flights to and from Srinagar airport and suspension of traffic on Jammu-Srinagar national highway -- the only all weather road linking Kashmir with rest of the country. The air and road connectivity was, however, restored on Wednesday.

Delhi HC dismisses Er Rashid's plea challenging framing of charges in terror funding case

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: The Delhi High Court on Wednesday rejected a plea by jailed Lok Sabha MP from Jammu and Kashmir's Baramulla, Sheikh Abdul Rashid alias Engineer Rashid, challenging the framing of charges against him in a terror funding case.

A bench of Justices Prathiba M Singh and Madhu Jain said the appeal by Rashid against the trial order was not maintainable.

It noted that a coordinate bench of the high court has already, in another case, held that an appeal was not maintainable against an order of framing charges as the same was not a final order.

"The present appeal would also not be maintainable and is dismissed as being not maintainable," said the bench. The senior counsel appearing for the National Investigation Agency (NIA) said that Rashid's appeal was filed after a delay of 1100 days, which should not be condoned.