

# India sends essential medicine to Sri Lanka, Army Field Hospital team returns

■ **STATE TIMES NEWS**  
COLOMBO: India on Sunday donated a 25 tonnes shipment of 17 essential medicines and over 14,200 kilograms of dry food items to Sri Lanka's Ministry of Health to help it cope better after the devastating Cyclone Ditwah, officials said here.

The essential medicines and dry food items were donated on a request by Sri Lanka in wake of the catastrophic cyclone that has left over 640 dead.

Widespread flooding, landslides and severe infrastructure collapse across the island nation severely strained the country's disaster-response capacity since mid-November.

India was the first country to respond to Sri Lanka's international appeal for assistance under its Operation Sagar Bandhu.

A special Indian Airforce aircraft brought the supplies



following a meeting between Health Minister Nalinda Jayathissa and the Indian High Commissioner Santosh Jha, officials said.

The same aircraft took home a team that helped Sri Lankans with a field hospital.

Days after the cyclone made a landfall, India has sent a Mobile Field Hospital and over 70 medical personnel to Sri Lanka as part of its humanitarian assistance following the devastating

floods and landslides triggered by Cyclone Ditwah.

"As the Indian Army Field Hospital team concludes its mission and returns home today under #OperationSagarBandhu, the Hon. Minister @NalindaJay conveyed appreciation for the team's dedicated service," the Indian High Commission said in a post on X.

As much as 10 tonnes of medicines and 15 tonnes of dry rations, as requested by

Colombo, "were delivered through @IAF\_MCC C17 Globemaster, in which the team returned, for providing relief to affected communities," the Indian mission said in the post.

The 17 essential drugs relate to heart disease, diabetes and complications and treatment for other medical conditions.

They are to be used in the main health system in the state hospitals.0

Jayathissa appreciated much needed Indian health assistance and noted that India had consistently supported Sri Lanka in times of crisis.

Local media reports said that the minister was himself present at the airport to appreciate the work carried out by the departing Indian medical team. The hospital team, including Indian doctors, provided medical treatment, including emergency care to 7,000 patients, news

portal Adaderana said.

Earlier on Friday, Jha visited one of the hardest-hit areas in the island nation's central province.

India will stand by Sri Lanka during the relief, recovery, and long-term rehabilitation efforts in the aftermath of Cyclone Ditwah, the Indian envoy said during his visit to the Nelumala village in the Kandy district.

As of Sunday 5 pm, as many as 644 people had died and 183 were still missing since November 16 as landslides, floods and rainfall caused widespread destruction.

While 6,163 houses were fully damaged, 1,12,171 houses were damaged partially, data from the Disaster Management Centre in Colombo showed.

A total of 22,638 families and 70,359 people were still residing at 766 shelters, the data showed.

# Accountability, responsibility key: Vice President tells civil service trainees



■ **STATE TIMES NEWS**

NEW DELHI: Vice President C P Radhakrishnan on Sunday told a group of civil service officer trainees that responsible and accountable actions are crucial in public service, as he called for the timely disposal of files and cases.

He also stressed on effective use of technology to improve efficiency and service delivery.

The vice president reminded the young officers that in the age of social media, where loud voices often gain traction, such popularity is usually temporary.

Radhakrishnan said patience and attentive listening are essential tools of effective and humane governance.

According to an official statement, he told the trainees that listening to public grievances often resolves a large part of the problem.

Responding to queries from the officer trainees, the vice president emphasised the importance of constant learning, adherence to dharma and patience.

He also spoke on the challenge of information overload, misinformation and negative news on social media, advising officers to promote positive and constructive stories.

Radhakrishnan underlined the need for social responsibility before sharing content online and called for appropriate action to encourage responsible digital behaviour.

# Navy to commission second MH-60R helicopter squadron on Dec 17

■ **STATE TIMES NEWS**

NEW DELHI: The Indian Navy will commission its second MH-60R helicopter squadron -- INAS 335 (Ospreys) -- on December 17, boosting its aviation capabilities, officials said on Sunday.

The advanced weapons, sensors and avionics suite make the helicopter a versatile and capable asset for the Navy, offering enhanced capabilities to address conventional as well as asymmetric threats, they said.

Accordingly, the Navy's second MH-60R helicopter squadron -- INAS 335 (Ospreys) -- will be commissioned on December 17 at INS Hansa, Goa, in the presence of Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Dinesh K



Tripathi, a Navy spokesman said.

The occasion will mark a "pivotal moment" in the Navy's continued efforts towards modernisation and capability enhancement, he said.

The MH-60R helicopter

has been fully integrated with fleet operations and has proven its worth on numerous occasions.

The Navy will receive a significant fillip in its integral aviation capabilities with the commissioning of the squadron, the official said.

# Uttarakhand govt to soon launch 'Snow Leopard Tour'

■ **STATE TIMES NEWS**

DEHRADUN: To give a new direction to winter tourism in Uttarakhand, the government will soon launch a "Snow Leopard Tour", State Tourism Secretary Dhiraj Garbhal said.

Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami chaired a meeting on late Saturday night of senior state government officials and district magistrates to promote winter tourism in the state, he said.

Under the tour, high Himalayan regions like Gangotri will be opened to tourists in a controlled manner during winter, Garbhal said, adding that the "snow leopard tourism" will be conducted on a pilot basis in Uttarkashi's Gangotri National Park.

The tour, implemented on the chief minister's instructions, aims to promote winter tourism and encourage homestays, local guides, adventure tourism, and other activities, boosting the economy of the border areas, the tourism secretary said.

A comprehensive action plan is being implemented for winter tourism in the state, including the Char Dham Yatra, adventure tourism, cultural festivals, and wildlife tourism, he said. Garbhal said under the action plan, adventure sports such as skiing, trekking, paragliding, and rappelling will be held in various areas, including Auli, Khaliya Top, and Bedhidhar.

Winter carnivals will be

organised in Mussoorie, Nainital, and Uttarkashi, and an International Yoga Festival in Rishikesh. The wildlife tourism activities will be held in Jim Corbett, Nanda, and Gangotri areas, he said.

The tourism secretary said that the government's objective is to establish Uttarakhand as a year-round tourist destination. During the meeting, the chief minister directed the immediate resumption of snow leopard sighting, helicopter skiing, and the Himalayan Car Rally to boost winter travel in the state.

He directed officials to ensure all arrangements and facilities of the Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam and Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam are in place by

December 20th, and to hold a meeting with hoteliers in this regard. The chief minister also directed that a meeting be held in Delhi with various stakeholders involved.

He instructed all District Magistrates to ensure restoration of roads, hotels, and other infrastructure related to major tourist destinations, and said that he will personally travel by road to inspect the arrangements.

Dhami directed the organisation of a grand festival in each district of the state, with the participation of public representatives and residents, under

the "One District-One Festival" initiative, to create a unique identity for each district.

He also asked the officials to organise an international festival at the state level.

During the meeting, the chief minister also directed that the development of the Saryu Corridor and the Saryu origin point in Bageshwar, the beautification of the Rahu Temple in Pithani, Pauri, and the Lakhamandal Temple should be implemented quickly and effectively, and that grand aartis should be organised at various confluences and ghats of the state, including Desprayag.

# Our vision is to transform book festivals into a 365-day reading culture: NBT chief

■ **STATE TIMES NEWS**

PUNE: The National Book Trust plans to expand book festivals to tier-3 cities and strengthen libraries across the country to build a sustained reading culture beyond annual events, NBT chairperson Milind Marathe said here on Sunday. Speaking to PTI on the sidelines of the Pune Book Festival, also known as 'Pune Pustak Mahotsav', Marathe said the third edition of the festival has grown into a people's movement, drawing around 750 publishers offering books on virtually every subject.

"This is no longer just NBT's book festival. The people of Pune have adopted it wholeheartedly, reflected in the huge footfall, enthusiastic participation in events and strong book purchases," he said.

The nine-day festival features a dedicated Children's Corner with programmes aimed at students from Classes 1 to 8, focusing on reading habits, storytelling, cartoon and poster making, and book appreciation. An Author's Corner will host the launch of around 54 books, along with multiple discussion sessions. Marathe said the Pune Literature Festival, from December 16 to 21, will be a major highlight. "It will be held over six days, with three days dedicated exclusively to Marathi literature and three to Hindi and English. Bihar Governor Arif Mohammed Khan will inaugurate the festival," he said.

Outlining NBT's future plans, Marathe said the Trust intends to take book festivals to districts and smaller cities, where access to such platforms is limited. "Tier-1 cities have facilities, but tier-3 cities need focused intervention. These festivals may be shorter, but the idea is to reach new readers," he said. The National Book Trust is a government body under the Ministry of Education, established in 1957 to promote books and reading habits.

Marathe said the Goa Book Festival will be held in Panaji from February 4 to 9 next year, catering to Konkani, Marathi, Hindi and English readers, followed by similar initiatives in cities such as Sambalpur in Odisha. Emphasising sustainability, he said libraries would play a key role in converting nine-day festivals into a year-round reading movement. He said over 200 librarians attended a workshop during the Pune festival and committed to

organising activities to promote reading in their communities.

The NBT chairperson also appealed to readers to use the 'Rashtriya e-Pustakalaya' app, which offers over 5,500 free digital books in 22 languages from 150 publishers, supported by the Ministry of Education.

"We are also working to strengthen physical libraries. If

governments or organisations provide space and infrastructure, NBT will support them with books, activities and systems," he said. Marathe said vibrant library activities have begun in Budgam near Srinagar following book fairs in the region, while proposals are underway with the Nagpur Municipal Corporation. Similar

initiatives are planned for Pune and cities in Odisha, including Cuttack, Bhubaneswar or Sambalpur. "Our vision is to transform book festivals into a 365-day reading culture movement across the country," he said. Yuvraj Malik, the director of NBT, said the organisation has been holding book festivals across the country, and is gear-

ing up for the Goa Book Festival. "The Pune Book Festival has firmly established itself on the national stage. The time has come to take it global. We aim to scale up participation not only from across India but also from abroad, and we look forward to inviting leading literary nations to participate in the 2026 edition," Malik said.

# 'Proxy governance' case: NHRC issues conditional summons to top officials of 32 states, UTs

■ **STATE TIMES NEWS**

NEW DELHI: The NHRC has issued "conditional summons" to top officials of Panchayati Raj and urban local bodies departments of 24 states and eight Union territories, which "failed" to respond to an earlier notice by it on the alleged practice of "proxy governance" in such institutions.

The matter is related to a complaint filed by Sushil Verma, former member of Haryana State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, which was considered by a bench of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) headed by its member Priyank Kanoongo on December 12, officials said on Sunday.

After examining the complaint, the Commission observed that despite constitutional safeguards and judicial pronouncements, elected women representatives were often allegedly "reduced to nominal heads", while actual administrative and decision-making powers were "exercised" on their behalf by their husbands or male relatives, a practice commonly referred to as 'Sarpanch Pati', according to the proceedings of the case.

The complaint also highlights the alleged informal appointment of relatives of elected women representatives as liaison persons or representatives

of MPs and MLAs, leading to "undue interference" in the functioning of constitutionally mandated local self-governance institutions. The Commission noted that the Supreme Court, in an earlier writ petition, categorically deprecated this unconstitutional and unlawful practice. Such proxy representations undermine the spirit of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, defeats the objective of women's reservation under Article 243D, and violates fundamental rights guaranteed under Articles 14, 15(3), and 21 of the Constitution of India, the officials said.

The NHRC also observed that these acts may amount to criminal misconduct under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023, including offences relating to impersonation of public servants, criminal breach of trust, and unlawful assumption of public functions. In the proceedings, it was mentioned that on September 9, the bench presided over by Kanoongo already took cognisance of the matter under Section 12 of the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993, and directed all the states and UTs to submit action taken reports (ATRs).

However, responses were received only from the governments of Andhra Pradesh,

Bihar, Odisha and Uttarakhand, and from a few cities in Uttar Pradesh, while "32 states and UTs failed to respond".

In view of the seriousness of the issue and continued non-compliance, the Commission has now directed issuance of "conditional summons under Section 13 of the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993, to the principal secretaries of the departments of Panchayati Raj and urban local bodies of 32 states and Union territories", the proceedings said.

The authorities concerned have been directed to appear personally before the Commission at 11 am on December 30, along with detailed action taken reports, they said. If the requisite reports are received by December 22, personal appearance shall be dispensed with. Failure to comply without lawful excuse will invite action under Order XVI Rules 10 and 12 of the Civil Procedure Code, 1908, including issuance of warrants, they said.

The Commission has reiterated that women's reservation is meant to ensure real empowerment, dignity, and leadership, not symbolic representation, and that "any form of proxy governance strikes at the very root of democracy and the rule of law".

# SKUAST-K holds SAC meet of KVK Srinagar

■ **STATE TIMES NEWS**

Srinagar: Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology of Kashmir held the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) Meeting of Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) Srinagar for the year 2025-26 today. Vice Chancellor, SKUAST-K, Prof Nazir Ahmad Ganai, who chaired the meeting at KVK office Nadergrund Peerbagh, highlighted the launch of the Students' Rural Exploration Programme (SREP). He said the initiative will engage students from various agricultural and allied disciplines with approximately 400 village panchayats to collect real-time data on local challenges and opportunities. The aim is to generate data for evidence-driven policies and need-based

interventions at the grassroots level, he said. Prof Ganai urged participants to ensure the SREP's effective execution through field-level engagement.

The Vice-Chancellor also emphasised the importance of the Holistic Agriculture Development Programme (HADP) and the JKCIIP in providing financial support and strategic direction to boost farmers' income.

During the event, Prof Ganai inaugurated new facilities, including a NABARD-funded Farmer Facilitation Centre and a Hi-Tech Polyhouse, and inspected a stall showcasing technological interventions, products, and niche crops developed by Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and progressive farmers.

Dr SA Simmani, Head KVK,

presented the Action Taken Report for 2024-25 and the Annual Action Plan for 2025-26. Statutory members from line departments, including Agriculture, Horticulture, and Animal Husbandry, along with farmers, FPOs, and civil society representatives, provided valuable inputs for the plan's refinement. The meeting concluded with the Director Extension, Prof. Raihana Habib, acknowledging the KVK Srinagar's efforts in strengthening the connection between the research system and farmers' fields. The meeting saw participation from statutory officers, district heads, progressive farmers, SHGs, FPOs, civil society representatives, agri-preneurs, public representatives and KVK Heads of Kashmir division.



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