

MGNREGA Bachao Sangram intensified at Rangpur Sidhra; Bhalla demands statehood, jobs

STATE TIMES NEWS

R S PURA: The ongoing "MGNREGA Bachao Sangram" was intensified at Rangpur Sidhra in RS Pura, where Raman Bhalla, Working President of the JKPC, led a protest programme demanding protection of rural employment rights, restoration of statehood to Jammu and Kashmir, and urgent economic relief for vulnerable sections of society.

Bhalla, accompanied by District Jammu Rural President Neeraj Kundan and several senior Congress leaders, addressed a large gathering and asserted that the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme is a statutory right of rural workers. He said any attempt to weaken or dilute the scheme directly affects the dignity and livelihood of poor households. He demanded the immediate release of pending



JKPC Working President, Raman Bhalla leading rally at Jammu on Monday.

wages, restoration of full workdays under the scheme, and strict monitoring to ensure transparency and effective implementation.

Raising the larger political issue, Bhalla strongly reiterated the demand for the restoration of full statehood to Jammu and Kashmir, stating that governance under the Union Territory framework has led to administrative centralisation and delays in decision-making. He said restoration of statehood is essential to strength-

en democratic institutions, ensure accountability, and address local development priorities effectively.

Highlighting economic challenges, Bhalla said farmers are facing rising input costs, lack of irrigation facilities, irregular power supply, and inadequate compensation for crop losses.

He added that daily wagers, casual labourers, and contractual employees continue to struggle with job insecurity, low wages, and delayed regularisation. He

also expressed concern over the conditions of Anganwadi and ASHA workers, stating that despite their crucial role in public health and nutrition, they remain underpaid and deprived of service benefits.

The senior leader also pointed to the difficulties faced by small traders, shopkeepers, and self-employed youth due to declining purchasing power, limited access to credit, and lack of supportive economic policies. He emphasized the urgent need

to revive recruitment drives, expand skill-development programmes, and promote entrepreneurship to address rising unemployment among youth.

District Jammu Rural President Neeraj Kundan, while addressing the gathering, said the movement is aimed at protecting the livelihood rights of rural workers and ensuring effective implementation of employment guarantee provisions. He stated that the party would continue to raise the concerns of farmers, workers, women, youth, and marginalized communities until their grievances are addressed.

The programme, organised by RS Pura Block President Yash Pal, was attended by several local leaders, panchayat representatives, and workers, who pledged to continue the campaign for strengthening rural employment guarantees and ensuring justice for the rural poor.

TUCC holds first convention, adopts key workers' resolutions



Syed Ghulam Rasool Geelani, National Secretary and President TUCC J&K (UT) chairing a convention.

STATE TIMES NEWS

JAMMU: The Trade Union Coordination Centre (TUCC), a Central Trade Union Organisation recognised by the Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India, on Monday held its first Jammu Division Convention at the Convention Centre, Jammu.

The convention was presided over by Syed Ghulam Rasool Geelani, National Secretary and President, TUCC J&K (UT).

The convention was organised by Nazir Ahmad Moulvi, recently elected President of the J&K ITI Employees United Front, while the organisational

report was presented by Muzaffer Ahmad Ganie, General Secretary, TUCC J&K State Committee.

More than 600 delegates from across the Union Territory participated, reflecting strong grassroots representation. S.P. Tiwari, National Secretary, TUCC and Member, CBT-EPFO, Government of India, inaugurated the programme as Chief Guest.

The convention unanimously adopted a 25-point resolution demanding regularisation of temporary and seasonal workers, implementation of minimum wages, removal of pay anomalies related to the 6th and 7th Pay Commissions, restoration of the Old

Pension Scheme (OPS), implementation of the 8th Pay Commission, and extension of social security benefits to all informal and contractual workers. The resolutions will be forwarded to the concerned Central and UT authorities for immediate action.

Addressing the gathering, S.P. Tiwari highlighted the historic implementation of the Code on Wages and Code on Social Security, terming them potential game changers for workers in J&K. He cautioned workers against politically motivated unions calling unjustified strikes and assured that all genuine issues would be taken up at the national level with appropriate authorities.

Roadmap for operationalisation of IBPs discussed

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JAMMU: Commissioner Secretary, Science and Technology Department, Dr. Shahid Iqbal Choudhary, on Monday convened a review meeting of Industrial Biotech Park, Ghatti, Kathua, held at CSIR-IIIM, Jammu. Director, CSIR-Indian Institute of Integrative Medicine (IIM), Jammu, Dr. Zabeer Ahmed, was present in the meeting among other senior officials. The main objective of the meeting was to discuss the future roadmap for operationalisation of Industrial Biotech Parks (IBPs). Dr. Zabeer Ahmed presented an overview of the Biotech Parks, infrastructure and ongoing activities. He highlighted that IBTP houses specialised facilities including fermentation units, phytopharmaceutical extraction systems, plant tissue culture laboratories, quality testing and analytical labs besides pilot-scale processing units. These facilities are enabling startups and researchers to carry out product development, validation and scale-up under scientific guidance. He noted that the IIM-Technology Business Incubator (BioNEST) at the park is actively mentoring startups and providing them with laboratory access, workspace and technical handholding. Several startups, including

women-led enterprises and agri-biotech ventures, are currently registered and utilising the facilities for developing biotech-based products. Commissioner Secretary stressed the importance of building strong public-private partnerships to ensure higher investment and better market linkages. He called for a structured operational framework with defined timelines, monitoring mechanisms and convergence with government schemes to maximise the park's impact. He also emphasised outreach to youth, farmers and entrepreneurs from across districts so that the benefits of biotechnology reach grassroots levels. Skill development and entrepreneurship were identified as key pillars for making the biotech park economically relevant. Dr. Shahid Iqbal underscored the active participation from CSIR-IIIM and JK ST & IC team to make these facilities fully functional. Earlier, Dr. Saurabh Saran, Senior Principal Scientist, Fermentation and Microbial Biotechnology Division and Principal Investigator, IIM-Technology Business Incubator (BioNEST), gave a detailed presentation on incubation and soft initiatives taken by CSIR-IIIM at Industrial Biotech Park, Ghatti, Kathua.

Three-Day Hands-On Training Program on Quantitative RT-PCR commences at CSIR IIM Srinagar



Participants posing with CSIR-IIIM Srinagar faculty.

STATE TIMES NEWS

SRINAGAR: CSIR-Indian Institute of Integrative Medicine (CSIR-IIIM), Srinagar Branch on Monday inaugurated a three-day hands-on training programme on quantitative real-time PCR (qRT-PCR) to build practical competencies in modern molecular biology techniques among students, researchers, and laboratory professionals. The programme is designed to equip

participants with comprehensive, bench-level proficiency in gene expression analysis from sample to result.

In his virtual message, Dr. Zabeer Ahmed, Director, CSIR-IIIM, underscored the central importance of qRT-PCR in molecular biology, noting its role in sensitive transcript quantification, validation of high-throughput data, and support for translational research and diagnostics.

Across three immersive days, the curriculum takes participants through the full experimental arc. From careful isolation of high-quality RNA and contamination control to optimized reverse transcription with considered primer strategies, assay design, and chemistry selection (including SYBR Green and probe-based approaches), rigorous instrument setup and run execution. The programme emphasizes

practical mastery and extended wet lab sessions on RNA isolation, cDNA synthesis, and qRT-PCR, paired with structured troubleshooting to resolve low yields, non-specific amplification, efficiency anomalies, and inter-run variability, as well as good laboratory practices.

The training highlights include hands-on RNA isolation, cDNA synthesis, and qRT-PCR, end-to-end data analysis, and a dedicated trou-

bleshooting clinic, reflecting CSIR IIIM's commitment to skill development and capacity building in cutting-edge molecular techniques. The programme is being organized at CSIR-IIIM Srinagar (Br.) by Dr. Nasheem Ashraf, Senior Principal Scientist, and co-organized by Dr. Syed Reyaz ul Hassan, Senior Principal Scientist, and Dr. Phalesteen Sultan, Principal Technical Officer, under the patronage of Er. Abdul Rahim, Chief Scientist and Head, IIM Srinagar Br.

The programme runs from February 9 to 11, 2026 Under CSIR-Integrated Skill initiatives and around 20 participants from different parts of country are participating in said program.

One-Week faculty induction programme on GIS begins at JU

STATE TIMES NEWS

JAMMU: The Department of Geography, University of Jammu, today commenced a one-week Capacity Building Faculty Induction Programme (FIP) workshop on "Application of Geographic Information System (GIS) using Open-Source Software in Geographical Studies." The programme is being organised in collaboration with the Malaviya Mission Teacher Training Centre (MMTTC), University of Jammu, and will focus on enhancing both



Dean Research Studies, JU, Prof. Neelu Rohmetra lighting a lamp.

conceptual and practical competencies in GIS. The inaugural function was

held in the Seminar Hall of the Department of Geology and began with the ceremoni-

al lighting of the lamp followed by the recitation of Saraswati Vandana.

Prof. Neelu Rohmetra, Dean Research Studies, University of Jammu, graced the occasion as the Chief Guest.

Addressing young faculty members and research scholars, she urged them to remain committed to academic excellence and innovation. She observed that the present generation is fortunate to have access to advanced technologies, which provide immense opportunities for learning and research. However, she emphasised that impactful research demands dedication, creativity and strong interdisciplinary collaboration.

The keynote address was delivered by Prof. Milap Punia, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, on "National Geospatial Policy 2022 and Integrated Geographical Information Management Framework." He highlighted the increasing relevance of geospatial technologies and stressed the importance of adopting open-source software for inclusive development and evidence-based planning.

Dr. Rajender Singh, Organising Secretary of the workshop, outlined the objectives and structure of the programme, stating that it has been designed to familiarise participants with both theo-

retical concepts and hands-on applications of GIS using open-source platforms.

On the occasion, Prof. Neelu Rohmetra released a map prepared under a SERB (ANRF), DST, Government of India-sponsored research project titled "Mapping Geographical Inequalities in the Spatial Distribution of Healthcare Facilities and Appropriate Site Selection for New Healthcare Infrastructure in Rural Jammu District." The project has been undertaken by Dr. Rajender Singh, Senior Scientist, Department of Geography, as Principal Investigator.

The map was released in the presence of Prof. S.K. Pandita, Director, MMTTC and Guest of Honour; Prof. Milap Punia; and Prof. Sarfaraz Asgher, Head, Department of Geography. Earlier, Prof. Sarfaraz Asgher, Convener of the event, welcomed the dignitaries and emphasised the significance of open-source GIS tools in teaching and research. The programme concluded with a vote of thanks by Dr. Shashi Prabha.

The inaugural session was attended by Dr. Inderjeet, Dr. Yudhvir Singh, Dr. Ajay Taroor, Dr. Suman Kumari, Dr. Devinder Manhas, Dr. Narendra Sharma, and Dr. Rankush K. Dhalotra, along with faculty members, scholars, and participants.

MLA Yudhvir Sethi launches Water Supply Projects worth Rs 50 Lakh in Jammu East



MLA Jammu East, Yudhvir Sethi Launching laying of a distribution water supply system project.

STATE TIMES NEWS

JAMMU: MLA Jammu East, Yudhvir Sethi, inaugurated the laying of a distribution water supply system project in Ward No. 8 under the Jal Shakti (PHE) Department, marking the beginning of a development work worth Rs 29 lakh aimed at strengthening essential infrastructure and improving water supply services for residents. The project is expected to enhance the distribution network and ensure better access to drinking water for households in the locality.

Speaking on the occasion, the MLA said that providing improved civic amenities, particularly reliable water supply, remains a top priority for the constituency, and similar development initiatives will continue to be taken up in different areas to address public needs.

XEN PHE Tajinder Pal Singh and officials of the department were present during the inauguration and assured that the work would be

completed within the stipulated timeframe while maintaining quality standards.

Among those present on the occasion were former Corporators Suneet Raina, Nidhi Mangotra, and Dr. Akshay Sharma; Swati Sharma, Amphalla Mandal President; Raman Sharma, District Spokesperson; Ashok Salgotra, Karan Sharma, Sharda Devi, Rohit Gupta, Vicky Pandey, Robin, and several local residents who welcomed the initiative and expressed hope that the project would resolve long-standing water supply issues in the area.

Yudhvir Sethi also inaugurated the improvement work of the existing water distribution system from Purani Mandi to Mohalla Malhotra in Ward No. 11 (Parade) under the District Capex plan of the Jal Shakti (PHE) Department, Jammu.

The project, estimated at around Rs 5.5 lakh, aims to upgrade the existing pipeline network and ensure better and

more reliable water supply to residents of the area.

The inauguration was attended by XEN PHE 'Tajinder Pal Singh along with several public representatives and party leaders, including Savita Anand (District Secretary), Harvinder Singh (General Secretary), Arun Sethi (OBC Moreha District President), Anuradha (Mahila Moreha President), Preeti Sharma (Mahila Moreha Mandal President), former corporator Sanjay Mahey, Sudheer Anand, Sanjay Abrol, Nisha Bhatia, and other local residents.

Similarly, Yudhvir Sethi inaugurated the laying of a water supply pipeline project under the Jal Shakti (PHE) Department at Old Rehari, New Kashmiri Pandit Sabha area in Ward No. 8. The project, estimated at around Rs 15 lakh, is aimed at strengthening the local water supply infrastructure and improving basic civic facilities for residents.

IIM Jammu inaugurates Advanced Management Development Programme under ESDP



IIM Jammu faculty posing with participants.

STATE TIMES NEWS

JAMMU: The Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Jammu on Monday inaugurated an Advanced Management Development Programme under the Entrepreneurship Skill Development Programme (ESDP) of the Development Commissioner, MSME (DCMSME), Government of India, at its Jagti Campus. The five-day residential programme is being conducted from February 9 to 13, 2026, and is designed for existing entrepreneurs from diverse sectors.

The inaugural ceremony was attended by Prof. Jabir Ali, Dean Faculty and Research, IIM Jammu, along with Dr. Mahesh Gadekar and Dr. Muqbil Burhan, Programme Directors of the initiative.

Addressing the participants, Prof. Jabir Ali appreciated the diversity of the cohort in terms of industry domains and age groups. He provided an overview of IIM Jammu's academic ecosystem, highlighting the Institute's strong focus on

entrepreneurship development and its incubation initiatives across Jammu and Kashmir. He emphasised that entrepreneurship is a core component of the Institute's curriculum and noted IIM Jammu's active collaboration with the MSME ecosystem and the Ministry of Skill Development. Expressing confidence in the programme, he stated that the one-week engagement would offer valuable insights and practical takeaways while encouraging participants to remain interactive and collaborative to co-create impactful ideas.

In his welcome address, Dr. Mahesh Gadekar, Programme Director, informed that the programme is being conducted under the aegis of DCMSME and is fully funded by the Government of India. He said the programme aims to strengthen and upscale existing entrepreneurs by enhancing their managerial, strategic and operational capabilities. Highlighting the pivotal role of MSMEs in India's economic growth, he referred to the Government of India's focused

initiatives in the current financial budget to promote the MSME ecosystem, alongside IIM Jammu's sustained efforts in capacity building.

Participants later introduced themselves and shared their expectations, expressing a strong desire to gain practical insights for scaling and sustaining their enterprises.

The session concluded with a vote of thanks by Dr. Muqbil Burhan, Programme Director, who acknowledged the support of DCMSME, the Government of India, the leadership and faculty of IIM Jammu, and the enthusiastic participation of the entrepreneurs.

The programme, themed "Capacity to Competitiveness: Strategize, Sustain and Scale," is organised by the Centre for Small Business Development Unit, IIM Jammu, and executed by Executive Education and Consultancy, IIM Jammu, reaffirming the Institute's commitment to empowering MSMEs and fostering resilient, growth-oriented entrepreneurs aligned with India's economic vision.

Amar Mahal gears up for Annual Tawi Festival of Arts & Culture

STATE TIMES NEWS

JAMMU: The iconic heritage and tourism landmark of Jammu, Amar Mahal, is all set to host its annual Tawi Festival of Arts and Culture, scheduled to be held from 13th to 15th March at the historic Amar Mahal Palace, Jammu. The festival marks the fourth edition of the Tawi Festival and Mela, jointly hosted by the Hari Tara Charitable Trust (HTCT) and the erstwhile Dogra Royal Family of Jammu & Kashmir. Dr. Jyotsna Singh, Director of the Amar Mahal Museum who is widely credited for the inception of Tawi Festival, stated that the Tawi

Festival features a rich and diverse programme including seminars, workshops, talks, folk music and street theatre performances, classical and folk dance and music, along with a vibrant Mela. The Mela places special emphasis on entrepreneurship, innovation, local cuisines, organic products, and crafts, sourced from NGOs and artisans across the Himalayan region.

She further noted that the region's vast diversity of languages, culture, architecture, and music remains underexplored, and the festival aims to generate greater appreciation and awareness,

both locally and beyond the region.

Dr. Jyotsna Singh also highlighted that art camps, immersive workshops, and exhibitions form an integral part of the festival. Artists associated with the Basohli School, supported by the Amar Mahal Museum, are encouraged to demonstrate their techniques and interact with visitors, offering insight into their artistic processes.

Dr. Jyotsna Singh further said that for the 4th edition of the Tawi Festival will see collaborations with the J&K Academy of Art, Culture & Languages, the Institute of Music & Fine Arts, Jammu,

INTACH Jammu and the Kala Kendra Jammu. She said that the Amar Mahal Museum is grateful for the support received from these fine cultural and heritage institutions of Jammu.

Martand Singh, Trustee of HTCT and grandson of Maharaja Dr. Karan Singh, said that the Tawi Festival has steadily grown into a vibrant cultural platform celebrating the rich artistic, cultural, and heritage traditions of the region. He recalled that last year, the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Amar Mahal Museum commenced, marking fifty years of the Museum and

Library, and were graced by the Lieutenant Governor of Jammu & Kashmir and the Union Minister for Culture and Tourism, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, underscoring the national importance of the institution.

He further added that since its inauguration in 1975, the Amar Mahal Museum has evolved into a prominent centre for tourism, art, culture, heritage, history, and the Dogra legacy of Jammu & Kashmir. The Hari Tara Charitable Trust, he said, continues to actively support socio-cultural initiatives across the region.