

**BLUE MOON**  
Banquets & Conventions  
THE BANQUET WITH A DIFFERENCE

National Highway, Near Thandi Khul, Jammu  
Contact: 9866035550, 9866035551

# STATE TIMES

THE BOLD VOICE OF J&K

**J.K. PUBLIC SCHOOL**  
KUNJWANI, JAMMU  
The School with a Difference

**SOWING SKILLS**  
SHAPING INDIA

RNI No. : 66908/96  
Regd. No. L-29/JK-346/2025-27

Vol. 31 Issue 51 • Jammu • Saturday • February 21, 2026 • Pages 12 • ₹ 3.00  
Air surcharge 50 paise for Leh

**03** India scripting economic growth, civilisational resurgence under PM Modi: LG

**03** Shrine Board invites pilgrims suggestions to enhance footfall, strengthen yatra facilities

**10** Volleyball teams named for Sub-Junior Nationals

Website : www.statetimes.in, Email: statetimes1@gmail.com

## 30,000 vacancies to be filled this year: Omar

### Reaffirms commitment to time-bound recruitment

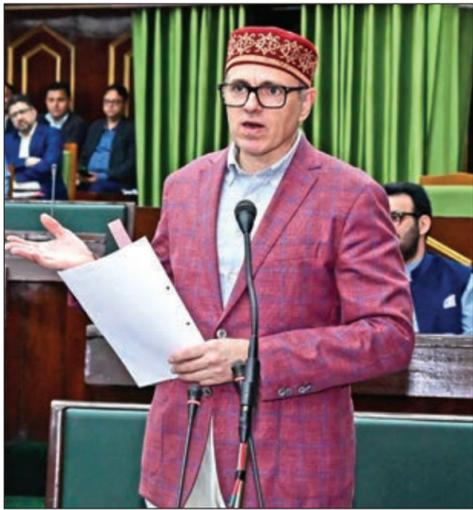
**STATE TIMES NEWS**

JAMMU: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Friday reiterated that his government is committed to filling vacancies in a time-bound manner, announcing that over 30,000 vacancies will be filled during current year.

The Chief Minister made these remarks while replying to a question raised by member Prof. Gharn Ram Bhagat during the Question Hour of the ongoing Budget Session of the Legislative Assembly.

He said that vacancies arise from time to time in various Government Departments, including field-level posts, due to, retirements, promotions, resignations and other administrative reasons. "There are institutional mechanisms in place for periodic assessment of vacancies and timely referral to the concerned recruiting agencies in accordance with the statutory provisions," he said.

He further noted that to



ensure essential services and field-level functions are not adversely affected, adequate staff strength is maintained across departments. Wherever necessary, interim administrative arrangements

are adopted in accordance with established rules. The Government, he said, has taken several measures to expedite the filling up of vacancies. These

■ CONTD ON PAGE 9

### No power tariff hike since Dec 2023: CM

JAMMU: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Friday said that there has been no hike in power tariff since December 2023.

"Billing in metered areas is carried out strictly as per actual electricity consumption, while in non-metered areas, bills are raised on a flat-rate basis in accordance with the agreed load, without any arbitrariness", the Chief Minister said while replying to a question raised by Dr. Bashir Ahmad Shah Veeri during the Question Hour of the ongoing Budget Session of the Legislative Assembly.

Responding to a supplementary question regarding rationalisation of power tariff, the Chief Minister informed the House that tariff determination falls within the domain of the regulatory authority, namely the Joint

■ CONTD ON PAGE 9

### NH toll plazas may go cashless from April 1

**STATE TIMES NEWS**

NEW DELHI: Highways authority NHAI is considering discontinuing cash payments at highway toll plazas from April 1, requiring commuters to use only digital modes such as FASTag or UPI for toll payments.

Post implementation, all toll payments at National Highway fee plazas will be processed exclusively through digital modes, using FASTag or Unified Payments Interface (UPI), the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) said.

The authority said it is contemplating completely discontinuing cash transactions at the National Highway fee plazas across the country from April 1, 2026, in order to develop a fully digital National Highway tolling ecosystem.

The proposed measure is aimed at consolidating the gains achieved in Electronic Toll Collection and strengthening the efficiency & reliability of National

■ CONTD ON PAGE 9

## Major reshuffle in J&K; 20 IAS, 2 JKAS officers transferred

**STATE TIMES NEWS**

JAMMU: In an administrative reshuffle, Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha ordered the transfer and posting of 22 IAS officers across Jammu and Kashmir

of the post of Administrative Secretary, Mining Department, in addition to his own duties, till further orders.

Dr. Ashish Chandra Verma, IAS (AGMUT: 1994),

has been transferred and posted as Financial Commissioner (Additional Chief Secretary), Finance Department; M. Raju, IAS (AGMUT: 2005), Commissioner/Secretary, GAD, shall also hold the

**Ashwani Addl CS PDD; Shailendra Kumar Addl CS Finance; Raju gets Additional charge of H&ME; Alice Vaz Comm Secy Planning (additional charge of Admn Secy Information Deptt); Yasha Comm Secy Cooperatives; Shahid Comm Secy Youth Services & Sports; Babila Rakwal Comm Secy S&T; Nidhi Insp Gen Registration; Abhishek DC Reasi; Sherpa DC Udhampur; Krishan Lal DC Doda; Athar DC Budgam; Dr Bilal DC Anantnag; Hamid DC Baramulla; Shahzad Kulgam**

with immediate effect.

According to the order issued by M. Raju, Commissioner/Secretary, General Administration Department, Ashwani Kumar, IAS (AGMUT: 1992), awaiting orders of adjustment in the GAD, has been posted as Financial Commissioner (Additional Chief Secretary), Power Development Department. He shall also hold the charge

of the post of Administrative Secretary, Tourism Department, shall also hold the charge of the post of Administrative Secretary, Agriculture Production Department, in addition to his own duties, till further orders.

Shailendra Kumar, IAS (AGMUT: 1995), Financial Commissioner (Additional Chief Secretary), Agriculture Production Department, has

charge of the post of Administrative Secretary, Health & Medical Education Department, in addition to his own duties, till further orders.

R Alice Vaz, IAS (AGMUT: 2005), awaiting orders of adjustment in the GAD, has been posted as Commissioner/Secretary, Planning, Development and Monitoring Department.

■ CONTD ON PAGE 9

## BJP MLA calls for use of AI in sports trials for fair selection

**STATE TIMES NEWS**

JAMMU: BJP MLA Devyani Rana on Friday suggested the incorporation of artificial intelligence (AI) during selection in sports trials in Jammu and Kashmir to promote transparency and ensure that the most deserving athletes are chosen.

Demanding transparency in sports trials, reports and livestreaming, Rana stated that AI tools could significantly improve sports training and performance monitoring.

Between December 2025 and January 2026, Jammu and Kashmir witnessed controversies over suspected

regional bias in sports, particularly in U-14 cricket and football, with allegations that teams were heavily dominated by Kashmir-based players while Jammu-based talent was ignored.

Addressing the Assembly on grants, the BJP legislator highlighted the scope of AI in sports. Referring to the Jammu and Kashmir cricket team's maiden entry into the Ranji Trophy final, she said that sports infrastructure in the region should be made AI-ready to enhance training and performance analysis.

The MLA urged the government to develop

■ CONTD ON PAGE 9

## Assembly passes Rs 1,652.78 crore in grants for 6 departments

**STATE TIMES NEWS**

JAMMU: The Jammu and Kashmir Assembly on Thursday passed Demands for Grants amounting to Rs 1,652.78 crore for six key departments.

The grants were approved for Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs, Youth Services and Sports, Transport, Information Technology, Science and Technology, and ARI & Training departments.

Winding up the discussion on grants of his department, Minister Satish Sharma said constructive criticism and dialogue were essential to improve governance and service delivery.

Of the total approved grants, Rs 74 crore was sanctioned for Information

■ CONTD ON PAGE 9



### Pak violates ceasefire along LoC

**STATE TIMES NEWS**

KUPWARA: Pakistan violated the ceasefire along the Line of Control (LoC) in Kupwara district on Friday, officials said.

"Ceasefire violation took place around noon at TMG (Toot Mar Gali) in Nowgam Sector of Kupwara (in north Kashmir) when PoK posts fired through small arms on Indian posts," the officials said.

The firing stopped after some time, they mentioned further, adding there was no loss of life or injury.

**ROZA TIMING**

SEHR TIME: 05:44 (FEB 22)  
IFTAAR TIME: 06:23 (FEB 21)

**WEATHER**

Temperature (Jammu)  
Max: 26.2°C Min: 12.5°C

Humidity  
Max: 84 Min: 79

Temperature (Srinagar)  
Max: 20.2°C Min: 0.7°C

Humidity  
Max: 94 Min: 82

Sunset: 18:20 Hours  
Sunrise: 07:09 Hours

## Medical college admission fraud case: 4 persons booked in J&K for cheating

**STATE TIMES NEWS**

SRINAGAR: The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of the Crime Branch Kashmir has booked four persons for cheating and criminal conspiracy after they were allegedly found involved in a medical college admission fraud case, officials said on Friday.

The case involves fraud in admissions to a medical college in Bangladesh.

The EOW has submitted a chargesheet before the court of Chief Judicial Magistrate, Srinagar, the officials said.

The complainant alleged

that he was introduced by his relative, Peerzada Aabid to Syed Wasim, who is the proprietor of M/s Europe Consultancy Centre.

The duo assured facilitation of admission of the complainant's son in a medical college in Bangladesh, the officials said.

The complainant was further introduced to Syed Suhail Aijaz and Zaigam Khan, the owners of Overseas Consultancy.

"On their assurances, the complainant paid lakhs of rupees as fee to be deposited with Park View Medical College," the officials added.

They said the investigation revealed that the accused persons fraudulently obtained lakhs of sums, but deposited only USD 8,000 (approximately Rs 6.04 lakh as per 2021 exchange rates) with the college.

Due to non-payment of the remaining amount, the student was asked to leave the institution, the officials said.

On the basis of bank records, official communication from the medical college and statements recorded during investigation, the allegations against all four accused stands substantiated, the officials said.

### Kashmir sees warmest February in decade

**STATE TIMES NEWS**

SRINAGAR: Kashmir is experiencing an unusually warm winter, with day temperatures settling 9-11 degrees above the normal in several areas making the month of February so far the warmest in about a decade, officials said on Friday.

The day temperature has been hovering several degrees above the seasonal average for the last few days as bright sunshine marks the winter days, they said.

On Thursday, the maximum day temperature remained 9-11 degrees above the normal in many parts of Kashmir, Srinagar

■ CONTD ON PAGE 9

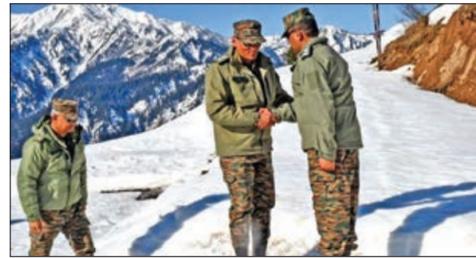
## Northern Army Commander reviews anti-infiltration grid in Kashmir

**STATE TIMES NEWS**

SRINAGAR: Northern Army commander Lt Gen Pratik Sharma on Friday reviewed the anti-infiltration grid in Kashmir and assessed the operational preparedness of the forces along the Line of Control (LoC).

"Lt Gen Pratik Sharma, #ArmyCdrNC, visited #NorthKashmir to review the anti-infiltration grid and assess operational preparedness along the #LoC," the army's Northern Command said in a post on X.

It said that during his visit, the army commander interacted with the troops, com-



Northern Army Commander Lt Gen Pratik Sharma during visit to a forward post along LoC in Srinagar.

mending them for their battle-hardened resilience, indomitable courage and unwavering commitment to duty.

"He exhorted all ranks to relentlessly refine their professional acumen and harness emerging

■ CONTD ON PAGE 9

## Modi holds roundtable with 16 heads of AI, deeptech startups

### Nine bilaterals with leaders, CEOs held

**STATE TIMES NEWS**

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday held a series of meetings that included a roundtable with CEOs and founders of 16 AI and deeptech startups, seven back-to-back bilaterals and separate meetings with heads of two leading firms.

During the roundtable, the prime minister discussed the potential of harnessing artificial intelligence (AI) in different sectors, such as agriculture and environmental protection, and promoting higher education in the mother tongue, among others, with the CEOs and founders of 16 AI and deeptech startups.

The CEOs and founders presented their ideas and



PM Narendra Modi in group photograph with CEOs of AI in New Delhi on Friday.

work during the interaction, officials said.

The dignitaries and tech leaders are here to attend the India AI Impact Summit being held at the Bharat Mandapam from February 16-20, in which more than 500 global AI leaders, 150

academicians and researchers, and 400 chief technology officers, vice-presidents, and philanthropists are taking part.

Modi also held bilaterals with the leaders of four countries - Sri Lanka President Anura Kumara Disanayake,

Slovakia President Peter Pellegrini, Alois, Hereditary Prince of Liechtenstein, and Mauritius Prime Minister Navinchandra Ramgoolam.

Modi said he had a "wonderful" meeting with Disanayake during which the two leaders took stock of

the progress in India-Sri Lanka relations in recent times.

"Strengthening friendship with a valued neighbour.. We also discussed avenues of cooperation in areas such as energy, connectivity, infrastructure, healthcare, skilling, culture, blue economy and more," Modi said.

On his meeting with Pellegrini, the prime minister said the recent India-EU free trade agreement (FTA) will create several opportunities to boost trade and investment between India and Slovakia.

"Other subjects we discussed included cooperation in digital technology, startups, digital public infrastructure, defence, space

■ CONTD ON PAGE 9

## IGP reviews security in Kashmir ahead of Vice-President's visit

**STATE TIMES NEWS**

SRINAGAR: IGP Kashmir V K Birdi on Friday reviewed the security measures in the Valley ahead of Vice President C P Radhakrishnan's visit to attend the 21st convocation of the University of Kashmir on February 26.

Senior officers from various security and intelligence agencies attended the security review meeting chaired by Birdi, a police spokesman said.

At the meeting, detailed security plans were presented and reviewed to ensure comprehensive arrangements for the VVIP visit, he said.

The IGP stressed the need for heightened alertness to counter potential terrorist threats and under-

scored the need to strengthen intelligence gathering, reinforce security at vulnerable locations, and ensure effective area and night domination, the spokesman said.

Special emphasis was laid on securing critical infrastructure and safeguarding the vital installations. The strategic deployment of counter-insurgency and quick reaction teams (CI/QRTs) was also discussed to ensure a swift response to any emerging situation, the spokesman added. Birdi directed the officers to intensify round-the-clock patrolling in both urban and rural areas and strengthen surveillance at the key entry and exit points, among other measures.