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Efforts on to...

establishing a three-tier Panchayati Raj system in J&K, the Lt Governor said that under the guidance of PM, we have been strengthening the roots of PRIs to build an inclusive society.

"Our effort is to remove the gap between rural and urban, so that prosperity reaches the home and heart of every citizen of J&K", the Lt Governor added.

While appreciating the initiative taken to bring the PRIs on a common platform, the Lt Governor said that the unprecedented participation of PRI representatives reflects the untiring efforts of the government to make Panchayati Raj Institutions more empowered, participatory and vibrant.

The Lt Governor observed that the effective devolution of three F's- funds, functions and functionaries has established the centrality of Panchayats in governance and implementation of public welfare schemes.

It will bring effective social and economic empowerment, besides ensuring that the benefits of rapid economic growth actually reach the last person in the queue, he further added.

A historical decision was taken to involve PRIs to formulate District Capex Budget to effectively plan and carry out development works. Funds are also being provided to the PRIs to evolve their development schemes as per the needs of local population, observed the Lt Governor.

The Lt Governor said that special efforts are being made to ensure smooth functioning of offices of PRIs. Recently, 1889 Panchayat Accounts Assistants have also been recruited.

"On average, about Rs 1.47 crore has been given to each panchayat for developmental works, besides in this year's record budget of Rs 1.13 lakh crores for J&K, an amount of Rs 1000 crore has been allocated to all panchayats, Rs 200 crore for Development Fund for 20 District Development Councils (Rs 10 crore for each DDC) and Rs 71.25 crore for Block Development Councils (Rs 25 lakh each). Apart from this, Rs 313 crore has also been given to local bodies and about Rs 1727 crore has been given to all panchayats under MGNREGA, 14th Finance Commission, Mid Day Meal and Integrated Child Development Scheme", he added.

The Lt Governor called for invoking a renewed sense of Jan Bhagidari in the socio-economic development process to make villages of J&K AatmaNirbhar.

A vibrant and productive agrarian economy is the foundation of high and sustained economic growth. As a watchdog of developmental activities, PRIs can help in making the governance more transparent and accountable to the citizens, the Lt Governor added.

The Lt Governor also laid stress on continuous capacity building of the elected members and termed it a key aspect of better service delivery at the grass root level.

'Capacity building of elected PRIs will yield productive capacities of agriculture, rural employment, access to basic services like education, health, nutrition, safe drinking water supply, swachhata, social security & transforming rural J&K a business hub', said the Lt Governor.

He further advised the District Administrations, DDCs, and Panchayats to replicate the best practices of others and make concerted efforts to meet the aspirations of people.

Dr Arun Kumar Mehta, Chief Secretary said that the Sarpanches, Panches are the foremost priority of the administration. He hoped that the UT of J&K will lead by example for other UTs/ States in the Panchayati Raj system in the coming months.

Mandeep Kaur, Administrative Secretary, Department of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj highlighted the reforms being undertaken by the department to change the rural landscape of J&K.

She also gave a detailed briefing on the capacity building and training programmes of PRIs, 100 point programme for Gram Swaraj Month, measures taken to ensure proper fund utilization etc.

Saurabh Bhagat, Director General, Institute of Management, Public Administration and Rural Development J&K delivered the welcome address, Dr Ruchi Gupta conducted the proceedings, while Prof Reva Sharma, Director Training IMPARD presented the Vote of Thanks.

DDC Chairpersons, Sarpanches, and other PRI members shared the development transformation taking place in their respective areas.

On the occasion, the Lt Governor released a Coffee Table Book on IWMP sector achievements of District Udhampur. PRI members, officials of UT Administration took pledge to 'Save Water' and a success story of pilot project on Rooftop Rainwater harvesting in District Udhampur was also showcased. The Lt Governor complimented the District Administration Udhampur for the good work done under IWMP.

Atal Dulloo, Additional Chief Secretary, Finance Department; Vivek Bhardwaj, Additional Chief Secretary, Health and Medical Education Department; Nitishwar Kumar, Principal Secretary to Lt Governor, Administrative Secretaries, HoDs, senior officials also attended the Conference, in person and through virtual mode.

Sinha visits Vaishno...

commence on April 2.

"Took the blessings of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Ji by paying obeisance at the Holy cave shrine. Prayed for J&K's development and well-being of citizens. Reviewed the arrangements made by the Shrine Board for upcoming Chaitra Navratri," the LG said in a tweet.

Army Chief to...

with a view to progressively increase own capabilities through force level optimisation, technology adoption, induction of force multipliers, as also modernisation and improvement of infrastructure," said the source.

The sources said that operational readiness of troops and equipment to match the strategy and tactics of the adversaries are also being reviewed to respond to the emerging threats and challenges.

India has been maintaining a strict vigil along the 3,400-km-long LAC for nearly two years after the military standoff in eastern Ladakh.

During Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit to Delhi last week, India pressed China to complete the disengagement process in the remaining friction points in eastern Ladakh as soon as possible.

In the talks, India asserted that bilateral ties cannot return to normal if the situation in the border areas is "abnormal"

After talks with Wang, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said that the frictions and tensions triggered by China's military deployments in the region since April 2020 cannot be reconciled with a normal relationship between the two neighbours.

India and China have been holding high-level military talks to resolve the face-off in the remaining friction points in eastern Ladakh. Both sides have already withdrawn troops from some areas following the talks.

4.3-magnitude quake...

kilometres below the surface of the earth at latitude 35.87 degrees north and longitude 77.47 degrees east. Its epicentre was 186 kilometers north of Alchi in Leh, officials said.

Parliament passes Budget...

are caught up in a situation where nothing is normal.

The minister said that while 32 countries (as per an OECD report) resorted to taxation to revive their economies, the Modi-led government did not increase taxes.

"So you are in a situation where like during the pandemic we came up with a Budget and then came the second wave. This time we came up with budget continuity aimed at recovery...and then Omicron and now we also have war whose impact has been felt by all of us," she said.

Sitharaman said the government did not resort to taxation for resource mobilisation to deal with the impact of the Covid pandemic.

"Last year we did not fall back on any increase in taxation rates in the name of Covid tax or in the name of any other element of tax to have the resources mobilized for the sake of meeting the challenges of recovery, so we did in this budget as well," she stressed.

She further said the Prime Minister had directed that the Budget should not draw on resources by taxing people at this time when recovery is the most important element and that "we should find resources and fully continue with the predictable recovery that we were aiming at".

Referring to issues concerning private investment, Sitharaman said following the pandemic, the government had stepped up the investment with a view to creating an environment to revive and sustain the economy.

"...we believe that the government and the private sector are partners in assuring development in this economy. There is no 'us versus them' when it comes to government and the private sector," the minister said and highlighted measures like the PLI scheme, and PM Gatishakti, to attract private investment.

The government is conscious of the need to balance the growth and also make sure India's recovery post-Covid is sustainable, she said and added the budget reflects this commitment and outlays the way forward.

During the discussion, several members had raised concerns over the price situation in the country.

To this, the minister said the government was conscious of inflation.

She expressed hope that the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) will shrink going forward.

The finance minister further said that in spite of all the uncertainty and all the self-doubting eminent persons, who have been commenting saying the Indian economy has a problem, the FDI inflow into India in 2020-21 was USD 81.72 billion and USD 74.39 billion in 2019-20.

She said India has continued to remain in the top five foreign direct investment (FDI) recipient countries as per a UNCTAD report.

The minister said that in the seven years and nine months of Prime Minister Modi's government till December 2021, FDI inflows have been USD 500.5 billion and that is about 65 per cent higher than FDI inflows during the entire 10-year regime of the UPA.

"I think that reflects how honestly both the Indian investors and investors from abroad have trusted the economic management of this government under Prime Minister Modi and that is why you find 10 years of more than 65 per cent FDI in the seven years and nine months has come into this country," Sitharaman said.

Referring to the states' share for devolution in central taxes, Sitharaman said it was projected at Rs 6.66 lakh crore as per Budget Estimates of 2021-22, and Rs 7.45 lakh crore as per Revised Estimates.

"What I have actually devoted is Rs 8.35 lakh crore, Rs 1.69 lakh crore more than the BE and Rs 90,000 crore over the RE has been given," the finance minister said.

Giving more financial details, she said from 2013-14 to 2022-23, the actual utilisation of health and education cess is expected to be Rs 3.94 lakh crore as against an estimated collection of Rs 3.77 lakh crore.

This cess, she said, is primarily funding centrally sponsored schemes that happen in the states, wherein the funds are being transferred to the state governments.

She also spoke about steps that are aimed at making ease of living for the middle class, related to the Pradhanmantri Garib Kalyan Yojana, statutory PF contribution, and construction of housing units, among others.

Sitharaman had presented the Union Budget on February 1. The Lok Sabha approved the two bills on Friday.

Petrol hits Rs 100...

the country and vary from state to state, depending upon the incidence of local taxation.

Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata already had petrol prices of over Rs 100 per litre, and most state capitals now have rates higher than that.

Petrol price in the national capital had last crossed Rs 100 a litre mark on July 7, 2021, and went on to touch an all-time high of Rs 110.04 before the Modi government on November 4 reduced excise duty on auto fuels. Most states matched that cut with a reduction in local sales tax or VAT.

Admission Scam: Bail...

investigation of the case is at its initial stage. In view of the serious nature of allegations and alleged active role played by accused in acts of cheating and spoiling career of students and unemployed youth, enlargement of accused persons on bail, would not only cause the impediment and obstacle in the completion of investigation but also shatter confidence of the duped complainant. The accused persons do not deserve any leniency in grant of bail. There is also apprehension that if accused/ applicants are released on bail, they will try to win over prosecution witnesses and tamper with the prosecution evidence. With these observations Court rejected the bail applications.

Plea in SC...

the year 2026 , the plea settled by senior advocate Ravi Shankar Jhandhyala said.

It sought declaring of the notification dated March 6, 2020, constituting the delimitation commission to take up delimitation in the UT of J&K and states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Nagaland by the Centre and consequential omission of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Nagaland from the process of delimitation vide., notification dated March 3, 2021 and conducting delimitation only for Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir is unconstitutional as it amounts to classification and violates Article 14.

On March 6, 2020, the Union Government, Ministry of Law and Justice (Legislative Department) had issued a notification in exercise of power under Section 3 of the Delimitation Act, 2002, constituting a Delimitation Commission, with former Supreme Court judge (Retd) Ranjana Prakash Desai as Chairperson, for the purpose of delimitation of Assembly and Parliamentary constituencies in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir and the state of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Nagaland, for a period of one year.

The plea said the notification has been speaking of two different population ratios as the delimitation in "UT of J&K" is to be done on the basis of the 2011 population while the delimitation in the four states of the North East is to be done on the basis of the 2001 population which is unconstitutional, violates Article 14 and attracts classification .

In fact, in the State of Jammu and Kashmir, the census operation was completed in 2001, but the delimitation was done in 1995. Even on this count, the entire process adopted is unconstitutional as there is no population census operation during 2011 at all for Jammu and Kashmir , it said.

The petitioners further sought declaration that the action of the Centre in issuing the notifications dated March 6, 2020, March 3, 2021 and February 21, 2022 for the delimitation of assembly constituencies for the UT of Jammu & Kashmir are without jurisdiction and nothing but usurpation of the jurisdiction of Election Commission of India.

The plea sought stay of the three notifications saying they are in utter violation of

statutory provisions particularly Section 63 of Jammu and Kashmir Re-organisation Act-2019 pending disposal of the present writ petition.

It said the constitution of the delimitation commission under section 3 of the Delimitation Act, 2002, which has become inappropriate by the year 2007 "when the Commission was wound up" and after which the delimitation order was issued in 2008 by duly following procedure, the issuance of these three notifications concerning Jammu and Kashmir are without power, jurisdictions and authority of the Centre, Union law ministry and the Election Commission of India.

According to Election Laws, it is only the Election Commission that must carry out the process of delimitation (necessary updation) after the Parliamentary and Assembly Constituencies Delimitation Order, 2008 is notified. Nobody is competent to carry out the delimitation process since the delimitation has been completed and the Delimitation Commission itself has become inappropriate, it said.

The plea added that the issuance of notification by the Law and Legislative Department appointing the Delimitation Commission is without jurisdiction, unconstitutional and ultra vires to the election laws apart from J&K Reorganisation Act, 2019.

Brig Sanjeev Kumar...

exceptionally brilliant career having qualified on all mandatory and selection-based courses," the spokesperson said.

Brig Kumar has rich professional experience having served in varied regimental, command and staff appointments, he said.

He holds triple Masters degrees Master of Science in Defence and Strategic Studies (Defence Services Staff College), Master of Management Studies (Higher Defence Management Course) and Master of Philosophy (National Defence College).

For his distinguished service, the spokesperson said, Brig Kumar has been awarded the Chief of Army Staff Commendation Card twice.

The NCC as an organisation is seeing a paradigm shift with focus on more enrolment, especially from border areas, he said.

Having been an active member of the NCC fraternity during his school days, Brig Kumar is well suited to motivate the youth and contribute meaningfully to the cause of the NCC in J&K and Ladakh, he said.

34 people from...

"As per the information provided by the government of Jammu and Kashmir, 34 people from outside the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir have bought properties in the UT of J&K after abrogation of Article 370," he said replying to a written question.

Rai said the properties are located in Jammu, Reasi, Udhampur and Ganderbal districts.

J&K Govt receives...

The new policy, which has been applicable till 2037, also paved the way for foreigners to invest in the region.

"As many as 4,226 proposals with an investment of Rs 47,441 crore have been received through online mode for allotment of land for setting up units in the Union Territory (UT), a senior government official said.

These proposals are estimated to generate 1.97 lakh employment, the official said, adding that the clearance process of these proposals has already been fast tracked.

A total of Rs 150 crore have been provisioned for the development of new industrial estates in 2022-23, and the government aims at generating employment for around 4.5 lakh people under the new policy, the official said.

He also said that Rs 1,003 crore allocated to the industries and commerce department will complement the ongoing efforts being made to take industrial development in the UT to new heights. "Substantial amount will be spent on establishing new industrial estates in Jammu and Kashmir. The industries department will also assist 2,000 self-help groups for promoting handicrafts," he said. In this year's budget, Rs 200 crore has been allocated to provide financial assistance to young aspiring entrepreneurs of J&K.

Govt closes inquiry against former SDPO with penalty

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

JAMMU: The Government on Tuesday closed the Departmental inquiry against Prithpal Singh (now retired), the then SDPO Akhnoor with a penalty equivalent to 'Fine of one month's pay'.

"Prithpal Singh (Retired I/c SP), was serving as SDPO Akhnoor during the year 2003. On March 11, 2003, a police party intercepted vehicle No.4333/JK02A, during routine checking at Muthi Bridge in the jurisdiction of SDPO Akhnoor, Jammu and narcotic substance was recovered from the possession of the two occupants of the car and a case FIR No.58/2003, under Section 20 of NDPS Act was registered in Police Station Domana against the accused, which further culminated in filing of charge-sheet under the NDPS Act. The case, however, ended in acquittal of accused by the Additional Sessions Judge, Jammu vide judgement dated August 25, 2009; and Whereas, the defence argued that the procedure provided under NDPS Act, was not followed by the Police during search, seizure and arrest of contraband and arrest of the accused, which resulted in acquittal of accused," reads govt order.

It added "Director General of Police (DGP), J&K was directed to institute an inquiry against the Investigating Officer and other officials involved with the case, so as to, ascertain that why the two samples weighing 100 grams each as were taken and sealed have not reached to FSL for analysis, etc."

"On April 27, 2016, V.K Singh, IPS, was appointed as Inquiry Officer, to conduct an inquiry in terms of Rule 33 of J&K Civil Services (Classification, Control and Appeal) Rules, 1956, into the charges framed against Prithpal Singh, and the Inquiry Officer in his report dated May 10, 2018, observed that the delinquent officer was duty bound to list the inherent defects in investigation (with regard to the variations in the weights of the samples sent to FSL for opinion) in light of FSL report with regard to the nature of contraband. The Inquiry Officer further concluded that the delinquent officer should have reflected this defect in his findings before passing the challan, for which he should be held responsible," it stated and added, "Keeping in view the fact that Prithpal Singh, the then SDPO Akhnoor, had a limited role in the investigation, but was duty bound in terms of Rule 658 of the Police Rule to fully satisfy himself and point out defects in investigation before approving challan, a minor punishment has been recommended by the Inquiry Officer."

The Inquiry Officer in his report concluded that the charges served upon the delinquent officer are established and recommended a Warning.

The report of the Inquiry Officer was examined with reference to the facts of the case, evidence brought on record, conclusions drawn by the Inquiry Officer, and opinion of the Department of Law, Justice & Parliamentary Affairs, and the matter was accordingly placed before the competent authority, which while conveying its decision to accept the findings of the Inquiry Officer and to close the inquiry against Prithpal Singh directed to impose a penalty, equivalent to 'Fine of one month's pay'(calculated as per last pay drawn), as provided under clause (ii) of Rule 30 of Jammu and Kashmir Civil Services (Classification, Control and Appeal) Rules, 1956, on the retired officer, to be deducted from his pension.

Two Under Secys posted in I&FC Deptt

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

JAMMU: The government on Tuesday transferred two Under Secretaries and posted in the Irrigation and Flood Control (I&FC) Department. According to the order issued by Manoj Kumar Dwivedi, Principal Secretary, General Administration Department, Rehmat-Ullah, Under Secretary, Social Welfare Department and Sahil Mahajan, Jr.KAS, Under Secretary, Mining Department have been posted in the Irrigation and Flood Control (I&FC) Department.

J&K reports 13 fresh COVID cases, Ladakh 2

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

SRINAGAR: Jammu and Kashmir's COVID-19 caseload increased to 4,53,690 on Tuesday with 13 fresh infections while the death toll remained unchanged at 4,750, officials said. Of the fresh cases, one was reported from the Jammu division and 12 from the Kashmir division of the union territory, they said.

Srinagar district recorded the highest number of fresh cases at 11, followed by one each in Kishtwar and Kulgam. Seventeen of the 20 districts in the union territory did not report any fresh cases.

There are 142 active COVID-19 cases in Jammu and Kashmir: So far, 4,48,798 people have recovered from the viral disease, the officials said.

Meanwhile, Ladakh has reported two fresh Covid cases that took the infection tally to 28,220, officials said.

The number of active cases stands at 15. All these cases are from Leh, they said. The Union Territory has recorded 228 Covid-related deaths -- 168 in Leh and 60 in Kargil, they said, adding that no Covid-related fatality was reported on Wednesday. Three more Covid patients were cured in Leh, taking the overall recoveries to 27,977, they said.

District Level Committees for implementation of NBHM constituted

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

JAMMU: The Government on Tuesday constituted District Level Committees for implementation of National Beekeeping and Honey Mission (NBHM) in the UT of J&K.

"In terms of clause 3.13 of section 3 of guidelines of National Beekeeping and Honey Mission (NBHM), sanction is accorded to the constitution of District Level Committees for implementation of National Beekeeping and Honey Mission (NBHM) in the Union territory of Jammu & Kashmir," reads an order issued by Manoj Kumar Dwivedi, Principal Secretary, General Administration Department.

The District Level Committee will be headed by District Development Commissioner (Concerned) as its Chairperson while Chief Agriculture Officer will be its Member secretary and

Chief Horticulture Officer, General Manager, District Industries Centre (DIC), representative from J&K KVIB (Concerned District), District Lead Bank Officer concerned, Programme Coordinator KVK (Concerned District) and any other member to be co-opted by the chairman will be its Members.

The Committee shall implement the Mini Mission-I, II and III as per the guidelines of National Beekeeping and Honey Mission at the district level and also to look after the priority activities under the new Mission National National Beekeeping and Honey Mission being led by National Bee Board (NBB) at the district level.

"It shall also implement, monitor and supervise the programme of National Beekeeping and Honey Mission at the district level," the order stated.

Sikh organisations flay Admn for demolishing houses, shops on name of anti-encroachment drive

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

JAMMU: To condemn the anti-encroachment drive held by Government wherein some shops and houses were demolished at Sunjwan & Bathindi and at Karnaila Chak Satwari, a meeting of various Sikh leaders and organizations J&K were held in Jammu on Tuesday under leadership of Mohinder Singh, Chief Organizer Bhai Kanaiya Nishkam Sewa Society J&K.

Speaking on the occasion, Sikh leader said that administration without prior notice or information, started dismantling shops and homes in wee hours on March 27, 2022. "The owners of property are living there for more than 40 to 50 years and have permanent electricity and water connection. This action in the name of

anti-encroachment drive has made people homeless and jobless, as those shops were their only source of livelihood," they added, urging LG Manoj Sinah to ensure rehabilitation of victims at the earliest.

Those who participated

in the meeting included Darbinder Singh, Rajinder Singh, Raja Singh, Ravinder Singh, Kulwant Singh Khajuria, Gajan Singh, Kuldeep Kour, Gurmeet Kour, Charanjeet Singh, Prof Yudhvir Singh Corporator,

Charan Singh Bali, Harpreet Singh Chhotu, Surjeet Singh Kukoo, Mannmohan Singh, Kuldeep Sing Malik, Kulwant Singh, Rasbir Singh, Paramjeet Singh Raina, Tejpal Singh and Kultar Singh.

AIBEA holds protest against proposed privatisation of banks

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

JAMMU: A number of bank employees under the banner of All India Bank Employees Association (AIBEA), the largest national trade union of bank observed strike on Tuesday and held a protest in front of Punjab National Bank Circle Office Building, Bahu Plaza. The protesters were opposing Government's proposed move to privatize Nationalised banks, as

announced by the Union Finance Minister in recent budget.

While addressing agitating employees, State affiliate of All India Punjab National Bank Employees Federation, Punjab National Bank staff Union JK, General Secretary Davinder Kumar said that government's move of privatizing banks will have dangerous consequences as it will not

only destroy entire public sector but will also sought to ease out a strong public sector industry into private hands clandestinely.

The employees further warned that if Government will remain adamant, the strike will be intensified in coming days Others who spoke on the occasion included Ganesh Sharma, Gaganpreet Singh, Ajay Sharma.