

On Navratra, J&K Bank dedicates Special Cash Counter for pilgrims at Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Bhawan

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

KATRA: On the auspicious occasion of Navratra, J&K Bank dedicated a Special Counter at its Branch in Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Bhawan (SMVDB) to offer fresh cash currency and note exchange facility to the devotees visiting the revered Shrine.

CEO SMVDSB Anshul Garg along with MD & CEO J&K Bank Baldev Prakash inaugurated the Special Exchange Counter in presence of Zonal Head Udhampur Rajesh Gupta, SDM Bhawan Vikas Anand, Tehsildar Mukesh Thappa and other dignitaries from the shrine board and Bank officials. DSP Satyakam Sharma, SHO Khayati Maan Khajuria, Accounts Officer Sudershan Khajuria, Head



CEO SMVDSB Anshul Garg along with MD & CEO J&K Bank Baldev Prakash inaugurating the Special Exchange Counter at Katra.

Pandit Gopal Sharma and other officers of SMVDSB besides devotees from different corners of the country were also present on the occasion.

CEO SMVDSB Anshul Garg commended J&K Bank for its continuous efforts in serving the pilgrims and for providing essential banking services to Shri Mata Vaishno Devi

Shrine Board and its employees. He also acknowledged the Bank's commitment to facilitating pilgrims with conveniently accessible ATM services along the track to Bhawan.

Expressing gratitude, MD & CEO Baldev Prakash, extended a warm welcome to all attendees and applauded the Shrine Board for its efforts in

enhancing socio-economic infrastructure, thereby ensuring a comfortable and seamless experience for the multitude of pilgrims visiting the shrine from various parts of the country.

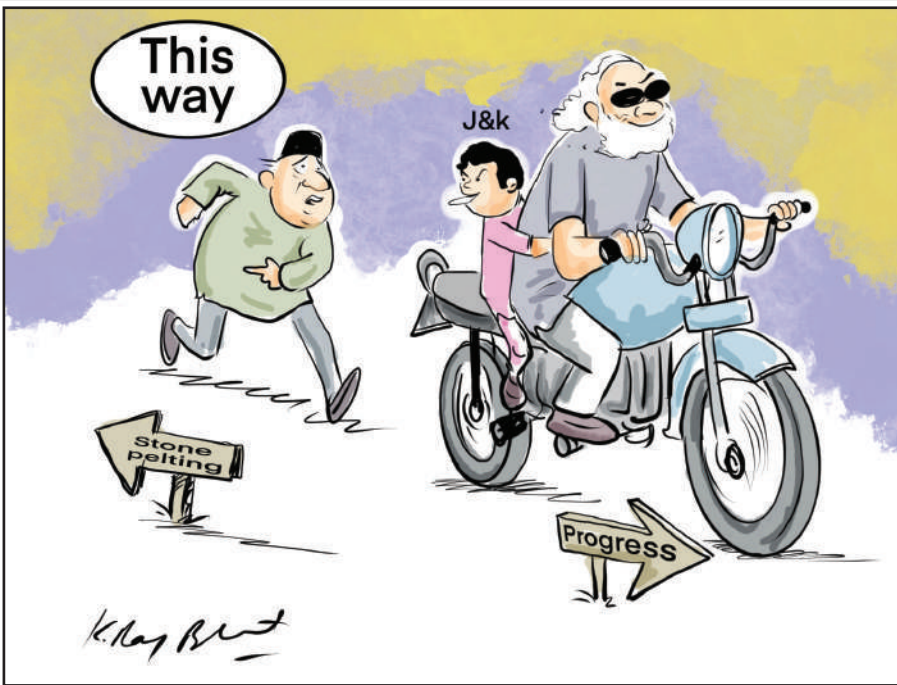
He said, "Operating at the Bhawan since the constitution of the SMVD Board, our branch has been serving the shrine board with dedication along with establishments at the Bhawan, people working there and all the devotees visiting the famous shrine. A team of officials has also been dedicated full time to assist the board for management of cash received as public offering at the shrine".

Reiterating the Bank's commitment to strengthening its partnership with the Shrine Board and other

stakeholders in Katra, he further said, "We remain steadfast in our commitment to proactively extend the latest banking facilities and services, especially to the thousands of pilgrims who seek spiritual solace at Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine."

Notably, prior to inauguration on the auspicious occasion of first Navratra, MD & CEO Baldev Prakash performed Pooja within the branch premises along with Zonal Head (Udhampur) and all the staff members of J&K Bank.

The function concluded with vote of thanks from Zonal Head (Udhampur) Rajesh Gupta who extended gratitude to all the dignitaries for gracing the occasion with their presence.



Dr Andrabi visits Jinab Sahib Soura, Aali Masjid, Zaindar Sahib Tankipora for Eid preparedness

All arrangements are in place for Eid festival: Darakhshan

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

SRINAGAR: Chairperson of Jammu & Kashmir Waqf Board Dr Syed Darakhshan Andrabi on Tuesday visited Jinab Sahib at Soura, Aali Masjid at Eidgaah and the shrine of Khwaja Zaindar Sahib at Tankipora in Srinagar to take stock of the Eid-al-Fitr arrangements.

Dr Andrabi was accompanied by Waqf Board Officers and the local public representatives.

Speaking to media, Dr Darakhshan said that all arrangements have been put in place for special Eid congregations. "With public cooperation, Waqf Board is ready for special Eid prayers at all locations throughout J&K. We have completed the fresh furnishings at all major shrines under the Board's control. For the first time we did it out of the resources of the Board. Our development initiatives will



Chairperson JKWB Dr Syed Darakhshan Andrabi talking to reporters.

continue in the days to come too", said Dr Darakhshan.

Huge desperation among all sections to root-out BJP from J&K with ballot: Bhalla



JKPCC Working President Raman Bhalla addressing gathering at Samba.

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

SAMBA: Asserting that the people desperately waited elections for the first time in the history of Jammu and Kashmir, JKPCC Working President Raman Bhalla on Monday said that Jammu has major role to play in upcoming elections, promising the divisive forces that are bent upon destroying peaceful communal atmosphere.

This was stated by former Minister during series of election meetings in various parts of Samba District at Nud, Jatwal, Ghagwal, Rajpura, Vijaypur.

Bhalla highlighted a sense of desperation among the people of Jammu and Kashmir for elections, indicating a desire for political change and participation in the democratic process.

There's a perception of political alienation among

the people, with Bhalla suggesting that the BJP has failed to address the aspirations and concerns of the populace, particularly in Jammu.

Bhalla appealed to the electorate to support the Congress party in the upcoming elections, promising to address the socio-economic challenges facing the region if elected to power.

Bhalla underscored the importance of unity and peace in Jammu and Kashmir, condemning divisive politics and emphasizing the Congress party's commitment to fostering harmony among diverse communities.

He emphasized the need for development initiatives that prioritize local interests and create employment opportunities, suggesting a shift away from the perceived neglect under BJP

rule.

"If we come to power, we will undo wrongdoings in J&K," Bhalla said asking people to vote for the candidates of Congress Party in the upcoming Parliament elections as it would end their suffering and provide them an opportunity to get their issues resolved by their representatives.

Prominent among those who accompanied Bhalla include Neeraj Kundan, Vice President and Treasurer JKPCC Rajnish Sharma, Yashpal Kundal Ex Minister and District President Sanjeev Sharma.

Those present on the occasion include Ex MLA Davi Dass, Gurbanena Kumari Ex MLA, Subash Bhagat, Vijay Tagotra, Dewarka Choudhary, Rajinder Singh Randhawa Jatun Raina, Jatun Vashisht, Sarpanch Charan Dass, Som Nallo, Suresh Kumar, Patma Nand, Darshan Singh, Rarashpal Chand, Devi Dass, Kushal Sharma, Satpal Sharma, Chaman Lal, Sultan Singh, BD Sharma, Manjeet Barian, Shiv Ram, Baldev Singh, Deepak Badyal, Vinod Kumar, Barkhat Choudhary, Dhyan Singh, Subash Kumar, Vijay Kumar, Sandeep Kumar.



Senior BJP leader Devender Singh Rana paying obeisance at Kol Kandoli temple.

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

NAGROTA: On the auspicious onset of Navratra, Senior BJP leader Devender Singh Rana today joined a large number of devotees to pay obeisance at the historic, heritage and ancient Kol Kandoli Temple, the first spiritual destination on the ancient heritage Mata Vaishno Deviji yatra route, and prayed for peace and tranquility across the country as also in Jammu And Kashmir. "It's time for spiritual rejuvenation and devotion", Devender Rana said while interacting with the devotees and greeting them on the auspicious occasion.

He added, "As we embark upon the holy odyssey, let us uphold the values of unity, diversity, inclusivity and strive to create a world where everyone can live with dignity, respect, and equality in the true spirit of Vasudeva Kutumbakam."

He also wished Navratras to bring joy, fulfillment, and

blessings to everyone, with the people coming together to spread the message of peace, love and compassion.

Devotees flock Sukrala Mata, Bala Sundri Shrines as Chaitra Navratri begins in Kathua

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

KATHUA: The commencement of the Chaitra Navratri Festival in Kathua district on Tuesday saw an overwhelming turnout of devotees at various revered Shrines and Temples amid fervent prayers and devotion.

Among the most visited Shrines during the festival are the Sukrala Mata Shrine in Billawar and the Mata Bala Sundri Shrine in Sundrikote, where devotees thronged in large numbers.

Devotees hailing from different parts of Jammu Kashmir and neighboring states con-



Devotees paying obeisance at Sukrala Mata Shrine and the Mata Bala Sundri Shrine.

verged to pay obeisance, adding to the spiritual ambience of the Shrines. The pathways leading to the twin Shrines were adorned with vibrant floral decorations and illuminated with colorful lights, captivating the

devotees with the divine aura of Navratri. Deputy Commissioner Kathua Dr. Rakesh Minhas, informed that all necessary arrangements have been put in place to ensure the comfort and satisfaction of

the devotees during their pilgrimage. He emphasized the administration's commitment to provide a pleasant and memorable experience to the devotees, with ample facilities and assistance available at the Shrines. Additional Deputy Commissioner Billawar Vinay Khosla informed that the Sukrala Mata Shrine witnessed the visitation of thousands of devotees on the very first day.

Similar arrangements have been made at other Shrines and Temples across the district, anticipating the usual influx of pilgrims during the Navratri festival.

Dr Jitendra set new benchmarks in governance, addressing needs of masses: Priya Sethi

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

UDHAMPUR: Priya Sethi, National Executive Member, BJP and former Minister stated that the Modi Government has initiated a series of endeavors aimed at promoting tourism and fostering overall development.

The senior BJP leader was speaking while campaigning at Udhampur in support of Dr Jitendra Singh, Party's candidate for Udhampur; Doda and Kathua Lok Sabha seat.

The former minister emphasized the unwavering commitment of the Modi government to elevate the union territory to the pinnacle of development, on par with the most advanced states in the nation. She emphasized the seriousness of the Modi Government towards bringing unprecedented development to Jammu, which had suffered due to Kashmir-centric policies for more than 70 years. She said that people across Jammu and Kashmir; like other parts of the country, are convinced that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has shown real concern for the development and welfare of over 140 crore people of the country. She said that by his untiring efforts during the last ten years, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has achieved the distinction of being recognized as 'Man of Development in India'. During this period, Jammu and Kashmir has got numerous mega projects for the first time in health, education, road, air, train, connectivity and put J&K on the path of fast development, peace and progress, she added.

Priya Sethi also lauded Dr. Jitendra Singh for his exceptional dedication and commitment towards governance, setting new benchmarks in



Priya Sethi, National Executive Member, BJP speaking at public meeting at Udhampur.

addressing the needs of the masses. She expressed her admiration for Dr. Jitendra Singh's remarkable achievements, highlighting his significant contribution to the development landscape of the Union Territory. She emphasized that Dr. Singh's position as a "son of the soil" and his pivotal role in the PMO is a matter of immense pride for every resident of the Union Territory.

The senior BJP leader remarked on Dr. Jitendra Singh's transformative impact on the Udhampur; Doda, and Kathua Lok Sabha constituencies over the past decade. She commended his relentless efforts in spearheading massive developmental initiatives that have fundamentally altered the socio-economic fabric of these regions.

The senior BJP leader also highlighted massive developmental works in the past 10 years in Jammu and Kashmir; especially in his Udhampur constituency.

To mention a few, she listed Udhampur railway station named after captain Tushar

Mahajan, Devika river rejuvenation project, first radio station in Udhampur; sanctioning of Rs 90 crore homeopathy college in Kathua's Jasrota, various hydel power projects, road and rail networks and Shahpur Kandi barrage, airfield in Kishtwar and Bladewah that emerged as lavender capital of India.

Pawan Khajuria, Vice President, BJP, J&K, in his address, said that Dr. Jitendra Singh has exemplified exceptional leadership and unwavering dedication to the welfare of the people. His visionary approach and tireless commitment to public service have brought about a positive transformation in our communities, fostering inclusive growth and prosperity," he added.

Arun Gupta, District President, BJP, Udhampur, asserted that people have made up their mind to vote BJP in the 2024 general elections and return Narendra Modi as PM for the third consecutive term as they want the nation keep marching to

become Vishwa Guru.

Nihsa Mahajan, District Vice President, BJP, Udhampur, asked the party cadre to devote more time to reach doorsteps of the people with the programmes and policies of Modi government, ensuring the resounding victory of BJP candidates in the ensuing Lok Sabha polls.

Among those who were present include Neha Mahajan, Mahila Morecha State General Secretary, Arti Sharma, District President Mahila Morecha and Vaishno Devi Prabhari.

Huge rush in markets ahead of Eid, sales not up to expectations

■ MASROOR AHMAD

SRINAGAR: Markets in Kashmir were abuzz with activity on Tuesday as people in large numbers were out to shop for Eid-ul-Fitr festival, to mark the culmination of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan.

According to officials, bakeries, confectioneries, mutton and chicken outlets, readymade garments and crockery stores witnessed a heavy rush of customers as Muslims started preparing for the festival. Some places in Kashmir even witnessed traffic snarls due to the Eid shopping rush, they said.

Traffic police personnel were deployed in strength in Srinagar and in other district headquarters to ease vehicle movement, the officials said.

However, markets in the downtown - the interior areas of Srinagar - witnessed sluggish sales due to the ongoing construction works under the Srinagar Smart City Project. The traders there alleged that many roads have either been dug up or blocked, which has hit their business ahead of Eid.

According to the traders the demand for edible items, particularly mutton, bakery goods, and con-



Markets in Kashmir abuzz with activity on Tuesday.

fectionaries, has soared, leading to long queues forming outside retail shops catering to Eid-ul-Fitr celebrations.

Major markets in Srinagar district along with district headquarters across the Valley, witnessed a surge in footfall as eager customers thronged to make their purchases.

Despite the bustling activity, traders have voiced concerns over lower-than-expected sales and decreased business. While the demand for mutton and bakery products remains high, other sectors of the market are experiencing

below-par sales.

According to traders, one of the contributing factors to this disparity is the rise of e-commerce, which has diverted a portion of local shoppers.

Additionally, skyrocketing prices have further hampered sales, with the government opting to eliminate price regulation mechanisms instead of decontrolling prices.

The combination of high prices and changing consumer habits has presented challenges for local businesses, impacting their sales during the festive season.

Kashmir Trade Alliance President, while commenting on the current situation in the markets, noting a discrepancy between increased footfall and sluggish sales, said, "Despite observing a rise in the number of people frequenting roads and markets. The heightened activity has not translated into brisk business." He attributed this trend primarily to the reduced purchasing power among the populace.

He highlighted that although the demand for food items remains robust, as in previous years, the overall demand for goods is lower than pre-COVID levels. "This indicates a prolonged impact of the pandemic on consumer spending habits, with certain sectors of the market facing lower demand than in pre-pandemic times," he said.

Traders Associations expressed concern over the government's handling of essential item prices.

He criticised the decision to decontrol prices, stating that since this move, there had been minimal control over the prices of essential goods. He emphasised that the rising prices of commodities were a significant factor contributing to the decreased demand observed in the market.