

!! Continuations from Page 1 !! Three killed, over...

They said Chief Minister Omar Abdullah had convened a meeting later in the day to assess the situation.

Union Minister Jitendra Singh appreciated the district administration headed by Deputy Commissioner Baseer-ul-Haq Chaudhary for prompt action in saving precious lives.

"There was a heavy hailstorm, multiple landslides and fast winds throughout the night in the Ramban region, including the areas surrounding the Ramban town. The national highway stands blocked and unfortunately there have been three casualties and loss of property for a couple of families," he said in a post on X.

"I am in constant touch with the deputy commissioner. The district administration deserves appreciation for timely and prompt action, which helped save several precious lives," he added.

The Udhampur MP said every kind of relief -- both financial and otherwise -- was being provided.

"The deputy commissioner has been conveyed that, if need be, whatever more is required, can be provided from the MP's personal resources as well. The request is not to panic. We shall all, together, overcome this natural calamity," Singh said.

Meanwhile, the District Administration Ramban has launched an extensive rescue and relief operation amidst devastating rains and flash floods.

Deputy Commissioner Baseer-UI-Haq Chaudhary is personally monitoring the ongoing operations in the affected areas. Accompanied by SSP Ramban Kulbir Singh and other senior officers, the Deputy Commissioner reviewed the ground situation and coordinated with the specialized teams engaged in relief efforts.

Teams from the Police, SDRF, Civil QRTs, ARMY and other stakeholder departments and agencies, besides volunteers from the local NGOs are actively engaged in rescue and restoration operations across the affected areas.

Expressing deep sorrow and grief over the tragic loss of three lives, including two children and an elderly person, the Deputy Commissioner conveyed heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families. He affirmed that rescue of precious lives and restoration of the essential services are the topmost priorities of the District Administration.

The Deputy Commissioner highlighted that the Administration is implementing Government directives with utmost urgency to intensify rescue operations and ensure the safety and welfare of the affected people.

He appreciated the public response in adhering to advisories issued through social media and other communication channels, noting that people's alertness played a vital role in minimizing the loss of lives during the calamity.

While confirming that huge loss of property and damage to infrastructure has been reported from various parts of the district, he appealed to the public to avoid venturing into risky areas, including nallahs and landslide-prone zones, and to remain in safer locations.

The Deputy Commissioner also urged the public to rely only on authentic sources of information and refrain from spreading or believing in rumours.

LG, CM grieve...

was extremely anguished by the tragic landslides and flash floods in Ramban that caused considerable damage to life and property.

"My thoughts are with the affected families in this difficult hour. We are in touch with the local administration to ensure immediate rescue efforts wherever needed. Later today, I will be reviewing restoration, relief, and repair plans," he said.

"For now, the focus remains on managing the situation on the ground. Citizens are advised to follow travel advisories and avoid non-essential movement in vulnerable areas," the chief minister added.

Abdullah's deputy Surinder Choudhary said he was rushing to Ramban to take stock of the situation.

"We are standing with the affected population in this hour of grief. The chief minister was supposed to visit the affected areas himself but since he had reached Delhi very late due to a flight diversion, I am going there and reviewing the situation," he told reporters on the sidelines of a function organised by the National Conference.

Farooq Abdullah, who was also present at the function, said there was huge damage reported in the Ramban and Banihal areas.

"The government is rushing its ministers to the affected areas and we will also request the Centre for financial assistance so that adequate relief is given to the people hit by the disaster," he said.

School teacher held...

Act was registered against the accused at the Bhaderwah police station and he was taken into custody for further investigation, the spokesman said.

Search operation underway...

CRPF troops immediately cordoned off the area and launched a massive search operation to track down the suspected persons.

However, there was no trace of the suspected persons so far, the officials said, adding the search operation was continuing deep inside the forest area when last reports were received.

Modi-Vance talks...

market access. Hours after arriving in Delhi, Vance and his family are scheduled to visit the Swaminarayan Akshardham temple and could visit a shopping complex selling traditional Indian handcrafted goods, people familiar with the matter told PTI.

The Vances will be welcomed on their arrival at the Palam airbase by a senior Union cabinet minister.

Besides Delhi, Vance and his family will travel to Jaipur and Agra.

Vance is expected to be accompanied by at least five senior officials, including from the Pentagon and the State Department, people familiar with the matter said.

At 6:30 pm on Monday, PM Modi will welcome Vance and his family at his 7 Lok Kalyan Marg residence that will be followed by official talks.

The focus of the meeting is likely to be on early finalisation of the proposed bilateral trade pact as well as ways to boost overall trajectory of ties between the two countries, the people cited above said.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, NSA Ajit Doval, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and Indian ambassador to US Vinay Mohan Kwatra are expected to be part of the Indian team to be led by PM Modi, they said.

Following the talks, Modi will host the Vances and the accompanying American officials for dinner.

The people cited above said Vance and his family will leave for Jaipur on Monday night.

In Delhi, the US Vice President and his family are set to stay in ITC Maurya Sheraton hotel.

On April 22, the Vances will visit a number of historical sites, including the Amer Fort, also known as Amber Fort. The fort is a UNESCO world heritage site.

In the afternoon, the US Vice President is scheduled to address a gathering at the Rajasthan International Centre in Jaipur, they said.

Vance is expected to delve into broader aspects of India-US relations under the Donald Trump administration during his speech that is expected to be attended by diplomats, foreign policy experts, Indian government officials and academia.

The US Vice President and his family are expected to travel to Agra on the morning of April 23, the people cited above said.

In Agra, they will visit Taj Mahal and Shilpgram which is an open air emporium showcasing various Indian artefacts, they said.

After concluding their visit to Agra, the Vances will return to Jaipur in the second half of April 23.

The US Vice President and his family will depart for the US from Jaipur on April 24, according to the people cited above.

In Jaipur, the Vances are set to stay at the elegant Rambagh Palace, a luxury hotel that once served as a royal guesthouse. Vance is arriving in Delhi after concluding his trip to Italy.

CS maps out...

the Bhaskaracharya National Institute for Space Applications and Geo-informatics (BISAG-N) for this initiative.

While taking stock of enrolment figures at the primary and middle school levels across the government and private institutions, Dulloo expressed concern over the stagnation in student enrolment in government schools. He noted that despite significant higher investments and nearly three times more government primary schools compared to private ones, enrolment figures remain nearly the same. He called for a comprehensive study to understand this trend and come up with actionable recommendations to reverse it.

To enhance governance and real-time monitoring, the Chief Secretary directed the department to create a comprehensive dashboard providing a bird's eye view of each school. This digital platform should include data on class-wise student enrolment, availability of teachers, results from periodic assessments, and infrastructure status, enabling data-driven decision-making related to imparting of quality education in these schools.

Reviewing the basic amenities in schools, the Chief Secretary took note of the status on availability of essential utilities such as water supply, electricity, washrooms and other infrastructural facilities. He stressed that no school should be left without these fundamental amenities, as their absence hampers the delivery of quality education.

The Chief Secretary advised the department to explore mechanisms for deploying vocational and subject-specific teachers in schools with critical requirements. He recommended utilizing provisions under the Samagra Shiksha scheme or revisiting the freezing period associated with the recruitment of general line teachers to ensure adequate staffing.

On the occasion, ACS, SED, Shantmann, detailed out a comprehensive progress report on implementation of education related schemes in the UT. He highlighted significant strides made across various dimensions of the education sector.

The review meeting focused on ongoing projects, civil infrastructure, digital transformation, NEP-2020 implementation and other reforms undertaken to elevate the quality of education across the districts of the UT.

About the implementation of PM SHRI scheme, the ACS informed that 396 schools have been designated as PM SHRI Schools, featuring advanced infrastructure and experiential learning facilities in these schools.

He also informed that establishment of 45 Atal Tinkering Labs, 159 STEM Labs and 188 Robotics Labs are underway. Additionally, sports equipment, green initiatives like vermicomposting and clean-up drives have been incorporated to make the school environment more amenable towards imparting inclusive education in these schools.

With respect to establishment of Vidya Samiksha Kendra and Digital Reforms, it was given out that state-of-the-art Vidya Samiksha Kendra has been established in Teachers Bgawan, Jammu modelled after the Gujarat initiative, enabling real-time data analysis for informed decision-making.

Moreover, innovations like the JK Attendance App (geo-tagged facial recognition), Parent Pulse Bot and Smart Attendance System have revolutionized the monitoring and feedback mechanisms. Notably, 74% of schools have adopted the Smart Attendance system across the districts.

As far as the civil works are concerned, it was revealed that out of 8,902 projects approved under Samagra Shiksha since 2018-19, around 4,691 works have been completed including buildings, toilets and boundary walls.

It is significant to mention that in 2024-25 alone, 980 works were completed with an expenditure of Rs. 94.8 crore. Under PM SHRI, 250 works are under execution and additional 316 smaller works have been entrusted to the Rural Development Department.

Regarding establishment of Girls Hostels and KGBVs, it was said that 89 Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs) are fully functional, enrolling 5,012 students. Out of 85 sanctioned girls hostels, 41 have been completed and 22 more are targeted for completion by August 2025. Besides, establishment of 25 additional hostels is underway with funds already released, the meeting was informed.

Similarly, skill education was imparted in 1,350 schools with over 1.41 lakh students enrolled in 15 vocational trades. The inclusive and skill-based education has enabled 17,901 Children with Special Needs (CWSN) to enrol themselves in schools besides assistive devices were provided to 4,990 students with special needs. Additionally, 1335 vocational labs were established and 1915 more to be set up by June 2025.

About implementation of NEP 2020, pre-primary classes started in 15,550 schools; "Phoolwari" activity books developed for the students enrolled there. For this purpose, 16,000 teachers were trained in FLN (Foundational Literacy and Numeracy) under the Vidya Pravesh module. It was divulged that SCERT J&K has developed comprehensive learning materials including Urdu and Dogri language content, toy-based pedagogy guides and non-academic books for the National Digital Library.

More than 1.14 lakh employees now mark attendance via the JK Attendance App. Under the NISHTHA program, nearly 1.5 lakh teachers have received training across various modules. Two DIETs (District Institutes of Education and Training) have been selected for transformation into Centres of Excellence with smart classrooms, research facilities, and ICT integration.

About the budgetary support & fund utilization, it was revealed that Rs. 411 crore under Samagra Shiksha, Rs. 43 crore under PM POSHAN, Rs. 2.51 crore under NILP and Rs. 51 crore under PM SHRI stands released. Moreover, Rs. 6.82 crore were utilized for green initiatives in PM SHRI schools and Rs3.15 crore annual school grant disbursed to 396 schools.

The department reaffirmed its commitment towards achieving 100% saturation of ICT Labs and Smart Classrooms in all higher secondary schools by FY 2025-26. Besides, introduction of vocational education in 550 more schools and establishment of additional innovative labs and digital infrastructure are also in pipeline, as was apprised in the meeting.

Pilgrimage sites in...

The Ziyarat Baba Ghulam Shah Badshah (R.A) Shahdara Sharief near Rajouri , Doodadhari Temple Rajouri, Gurudwara Chhati Padshahi, Balidan Bhavan,RamaTemple, Jama Masjid and Shiv Mandir. Kotranka Budhal 40 Km from Rajouri, Poonch Fort , Noori Chamb less than 46 km from Poonch Surankote, Bufiaz about 40 Km from Poonch, Nandishool waterfall 12 kilometres from Loran , Loran a small village 34 Km from Poonch, about 40 Km from Poonch is Than Pir, Dhanidhar Fort Rajouri Dist , like jas well as summer/ winter commercial tourism in upper reaches with enough possibilities of further connecting with Kashmir Division through Mugal road/ other routes (84 Km from Buffiaz is Shopian. Mughal road connects beautiful locations including Buffiaz, Behrangala, Chandimarh, Dugran, Pushana, Chatta Pani, Mansar, and Peer Ki Gali.). A good infrastructure would have been developed with just around INR 1000-1500 Crs had the areas been duly cared after independence /during earlier times but now incase in 2025 competitive tourism infrastructure & environment is to be created / for developed in areas in Jammu division outside kashmir valley , there may be utmost need to pump in around min of INR 20000 Crs to 25000 Crs out of the state exchequer in addition to private sector investments in next 5 to 10 years to catch on the lost pace. The locals of such area may have lost much more than even INR. 35000 - 40000 or that they would have earned through direct / indirect means over more than last 7 decades had the business in these areas been promoted with improved tourist flow as well better surface communication. Where as,so far no real benefit has come to the common people of such areas proportionate to thousands of crores of financial assistance extended over the years by Government of India .Surely only governments of the past like that of Mufti Mohd Sayeed and the Congress- NC Government that followed in 2008 cannot be solely blamed for all the fall back . New Delhi could argue that planning for local infrastructure is the responsibility of State Government. But New Delhi cannot deny that the superior civil servants in J&K are from GOI/ Central Government Services who hold the superior and decisive positions as regards planning and implementation of programmes. So some short fall as regards assessment of priorities has to be debited to the account of New Delhi as well. Leads need be taken from the Government of Himachal Pradesh and fellow Himachal citizens by the people outside Kashmir Valley as well as the J&K Government to make good the losses / shortfalls. The local civil society that also has many retired bureaucrats and technocrats too needs to work out and push in and follow proposals for sanction & implementation by the government. How serious and concerned are people of Himachal Pradesh could be seen from the way they handle huge tourist traffic in so narrow lanes and hilly roads in tourist destinations like Maledganj, Dalhousie, Dharamsala. The lack of concern on the part of local governments so far could be well gauged from the fact that every second day 'leaders' talk of Basoli Bani > Bhaderwah track and people have been receiving only statements and no meaningful progress on this 'road' atleast not even in last two decades. (of less than 100 km). Had British seen only commercial profitability there would have been no rail line to Shimla (Kalka Shimla Railway, a 96.6 kilometer long a single track working rail link was built in the mid-19th century), no line to Darjeeling (nineteenth century and like.

(The writer is a Sr Journalist & a known analyst of J&K affairs)

Ramban cloudburst tragedy: Dr Jitendra Singh expresses grief, assures all possible relief

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

JAMMU: Union Minister and Member of Parliament Dr Jitendra Singh expressed grief over the tragic loss of three lives in the cloudburst that struck Ramban district.

Terming the incident as "unfortunate," Jitendra Singh assured that every possible form of relief-financial and otherwise-is being extended to the affected families.

Dr Singh stated, "There was a heavy hailstorm, multiple landslides, and fast winds throughout the night in the Ramban region, including areas surrounding the town. The National Highway remains blocked, and unfortunately, we have lost three precious lives, along with property damage to several families."

He lauded the swift response of the local authorities, adding, "I am in constant touch with Deputy Commissioner Baseer-ul-Haq Chaudhary. The district administration deserves appreciation for its timely and prompt action, which helped save many lives." Reiterating his commitment to the people of Ramban, Dr Jitendra emphasized that all kinds of relief are being provided. "The Deputy Commissioner has been informed that if more assistance is needed, it can also be provided from my personal resources," he said.

Omar Abdullah lambasts Delhi airport for flight diversion, DIAL says incorrect to blame airport

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: After Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Sunday lambasted Delhi airport after his flight was delayed and diverted to Jaipur, Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL) said it was incorrect to blame it for the current situation.

In an X post at 1.08 am on Sunday, Abdullah said, "Delhi airport is a bloody shit show (excuse my French but I'm in no mood to be polite). 3 hours in the air after we left Jammu we get diverted to Jaipur and so here I am at 1 in the morning on the steps of the plane getting some fresh air. I've no idea what time we will leave from here."

He also shared a selfie from Jaipur airport, standing on the steps of an IndiGo aircraft.

In another post at 3.40 am, Abdullah said in case anyone was wondering, he got to Delhi just after 3 am.

DIAL too took to X to respond. In a post at 8.09 pm, it said, "It is incorrect to blame Delhi airport for the current delays/diversions" and that airlines did minimal to no changes in their flight schedules despite capacity constraints due to runway upgradation works.

DIAL operates the Indira Gandhi International Airport, also the country's busiest airport.

Earlier in the day, DIAL regretted the inconvenience caused to Abdullah and said there are temporary capacity constraints due to runway upgradation and easterly winds.

It said the closure of runway 10/28 since April 8 for essential Instrument Landing System upgradation was planned well in advance four months ago, in consultation with all stakeholders and based on historical wind patterns.

It was agreed among all stakeholders including airlines and Air Traffic Control that whenever the easterly winds shift and the operational use of converging runways are limited, there will be temporary capacity constraints for arrivals, DIAL said.

"When these easterly wind situations have been arising in the past few days, airlines were advised, in accordance with pre-agreed plans, to adjust flight schedules. However, there was minimal to no changes made..."

"Unfortunately this limited action or non-action has led to significant operational challenges for all stakeholders including Delhi airport and Air Traffic Control, and in the end impacted passengers significantly," it said in a series of posts on X.

A source at IndiGo said the flight was diverted to Jaipur due to congestion at the Delhi airport.

In the recent days, there have been flight delays at the Delhi airport due to closure of one runway for maintenance work and easterly winds.

Rohit, Suryakumar guide Mumbai Indians to comfortable nine-wicket win over CSK

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

MUMBAI: Skipper Rohit Sharma (76 not out) and Suryakumar Yadav (68 not out) tore apart Chennai Super Kings to hand Mumbai Indians a commanding nine-wicket win in an one-sided Indian Premier League match here on Sunday.

Chasing a below-par target, the hosts faced absolutely no difficulties on a batting-friendly surface in swatting away the challenge as they went over the line making 177 for one to win by more than four overs to spare, and take a leap to sixth spot in the points table.

Rohit capitalised on anything short from the pacers in the powerplay and swept with command against the CSK spinners to notch up his maiden fifty of the season, which came off 33 balls.

On a six-hitting spree, Rohit finished at 76 not out off 45 balls with four fours and six hits over the fence.

MI's impact substitute Rohit laid the foundation with a robust 63-run stand for the first wicket in the powerplay -- their best start undoubtedly in this IPL -- and ensured the hosts remained on track for a big win keeping them at a scoring rate of 10 per over.

For CSK, it was a challenge stopping the former MI skipper in his tracks especially with their seamers failing to make any impact and seasoned spinners in Ravichandran Ashwin (0/25) and Ravindra Jadeja (1/28) not able to extract anything off the surface either.

CSK also introduced their most successful bowler Noor Ahmad (0/36) as late as in the 10th over, by which MI were nearing the 100-run mark with consummate ease.

The writing was on the wall when Noor was hammered for 15 runs with Suryakumar hitting three fours in a row off the left-arm spinner in the 14th over.

A few narrow escapes notwithstanding, Rohit's blitz innings gave MI their most convincing win and finally a big score to the right-handed batter after a string of ordinary scores.

Suryakumar (68 off 30 balls, 5x4s, 6x6s) produced the most fluent knock in this season with the No. 3 batter being immaculate in clearing the leg-side boundaries as well as with his compelling sweep shots against the spinners.

His second fifty of the season came off 26 balls as Suryakumar forged a match-winning stand with Rohit for the second wicket to add 114 unbeaten runs off only 54 balls, finishing the game with two consecutive sixes.

Earlier, Shivam Dube and Ravindra Jadeja struck vital half-centuries while 17-year-old debutant Ayush Mhatre dazzled to guide Chennai Super Kings to 176 for five.

Sent in at No. 4 as early as in the seventh over, Jadeja (53 not out off 35 balls, 4x4s, 2x6s) hit his maiden fifty of the season alike Dube (50 off 32 balls, 2x4s, 4x6) to lift CSK after the five-time champions appeared to have lost their way.

Mhatre gave CSK the impetus early on with a 15-ball 32, studded with four boundaries and two sixes, to make an impact in his maiden outing but MI got things under control with some disciplined bowling.

But CSK, who appeared to be buckling under pressure, were rescued by Jadeja and Dube, whose fourth-wicket stand gave them a strong footing in the second half of the innings.

The limelight, however, was hogged by the young Mhatre who hit the second ball he faced past the non-striker for a four. He flicked the third delivery for a six over deep mid-wicket and pulled the fourth powerfully into the stands for another maximum off Ashwani Kumar.

MI had done well until the 13th over with CSK crawling to 92 for three, but Dube took charge thereafter. After smacking Hardik Pandya for a six over midwicket, Dube smashed Trent Boult (0/43) for a four and a six over fine leg to collect 15 runs off his third over even as the MI pacer erred with his line and length.

But it was Ashwani Kumar who bore the brunt of CSK's counterpunch in the 16th over, with Dube and Jadeja smacking the left-armer for 24 runs, including three sixes and a four. They added 79 runs for the fourth wicket.

Snow persistence in Hindu Kush hits 23-year low, south Asia's water security at risk: Report

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: Snow persistence -- or snow that usually stays on the ground between November and March -- was 23.6 per cent below normal levels in the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) region this year, a record low in the last 23 years, according to a new report published on Monday. This marks the third consecutive year of below-normal seasonal snow across the region, the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), an intergovernmental body, said in the 2025 HKH Snow Update report.

Snow that typically remains on the ground during winter months has been melting faster or not falling in expected amounts. This snowmelt is a crucial water source for rivers, especially during the dry season. The sharp drop in snow levels across the region could seriously affect water supply to nearly two billion people in India and neighbouring countries. ICIMOD's Director General Pena Gyamtsho said, "Carbon emissions have already locked in an irreversible course of recurrent snow anomalies in the HKH." "To tackle this regional snow crisis and the challenges it creates for long-term food, water and energy resilience, we urgently need to embrace a paradigm shift toward science-based, forward-looking policies and foster renewed regional cooperation for transboundary water management and emissions mitigation," Gyamtsho said. Sher Muhammad, remote sensing specialist at ICIMOD and the lead expert for the report, said, "We are observing such deficit situations occurring in continuous succession. This is an alarming trend. While our findings give a broad picture across the region, each must act based on the specific conditions of their river basins, particularly where seasonal snow melt is the major water source." On average, snowmelt contributes about 23 per cent to the total yearly water flow in major river basins. But this year, snow persistence was 23.6 per cent below normal levels, the lowest recorded in the past 23 years, according to ICIMOD. All 12 major river basins in the region, including those in India, China, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Southeast Asia, have recorded below-normal snow levels this year. The situation is especially dire in the Mekong and Salween basins, which recorded snow persistence levels 51.9 per cent and 48.3 per cent below normal, respectively.