

## !! Continuations from Page 1 !! Asaf Mehmood appointed...

and Order issued in terms of sub-clause (i) of clause (c) of the Proclamation issued by the President dated 31 October, 2019, the Lieutenant Governor of Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir is pleased to appoint Asaf Mehmood Sagar, IPS (AGMU:1992), as Member of the Public Service Commission for the Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir," reads S.O 360 notification issued by Sanjeev Verma, Commissioner Secretary, General Administration Department.

It added, "Asaf Mehmood Sagar shall hold the position of the Member, Public Service Commission, till he attains the age of sixty two years." His appointment shall take effect from the date he assumes the office, the order added.

## Five JKAS, 20...

Department; Deepak Kumar, JKAS, Deputy Secretary, Skill Development Department, has been transferred and posted as Assistant Commissioner, Relief Organization (Migrants), Jammu; Kailash Devi, JKAS, CDPO, Jammu, has been transferred and posted as Assistant Commissioner, Relief Organization (Migrants), Jammu vice Riaz Ahmed, JKAS, who has been posted as Deputy Secretary, Culture Department.

Meanwhile, According to another order issued by Vikramjit Singh, Commissioner/Secretary, Industries and Commerce Department, Pardeep Shan, Jr KAS posted as AD Handloom Kathua has been transferred and posted as Assistant Director Handicrafts Doda. He shall hold the additional charge of the post of AD Handloom Doda and AD, Handicrafts and Handloom Ramban and Kishtwar, in addition to his own duties, till further orders.

Sadia Ahmed, Jr KAS Functional Manager, DIC Srinagar, has been transferred and posted as Assistant Director Handloom, Srinagar; Bushra Ashraf Shah, Jr KAS, awaiting orders of adjustment, in DIC Ganderbal; Zeeshan Elyas, Jr KAS, awaiting orders of adjustment, in DIC Srinagar; Zahoor Din, Jr KAS has been posted in DIC Samba.

Toyba Kousar Malik, Jr KAS, awaiting orders of adjustment, in DIC Anantnag. Her services will also be utilized in any other DIC, in addition to her duties, where felt necessary by Director I&C Kashmir.

Lylooma Wani, Jr KAS, awaiting orders of adjustment, has been posted in DIC Budgam and her services will also be utilized in any other DIC, in addition to her duties, where felt necessary by Director I&C Kashmir; Suryavanshi Manish Bhagat, Jr KAS, awaiting orders of adjustment, has been posted in DIC Kathua; Mohd Ajaz Ul Rehman, Jr KAS, awaiting orders of adjustment, in DIC Reasi. His services will also be utilized in JKPTO in addition to his duties in DIC.

Sabha Sarwar, Jr KAS, awaiting orders of adjustment, has been posted in DIC Poonch and her services will also be utilized in any other DIC, in addition to her duties, where felt necessary by Director I&C Jammu.

Baby Pallavi, Jr KAS, awaiting orders of adjustment, has been posted in DIC Kathua; Radhika, Jr KAS, awaiting orders of adjustment, in DIC Udhampur. Her services may, however, be also utilized in addition to her duties in any other DIC where felt necessary by Director I&C Jammu.

Rafaqat Aziz Jr KAS, awaiting orders of adjustment, has been posted in DIC Rajouri and his services may, however, be also utilized in addition to his duties in any other DIC where felt necessary by Director I&C Jammu.

Jasif Amin Sheikh, Jr KAS awaiting orders of adjustment, has been posted in DIC Anantnag; Ekshu Sharma, Jr KAS, awaiting orders of adjustment, has been posted as Assistant Director Handicrafts Samba.

Sheikh Hemayun Javaid, Jr KAS, awaiting orders of adjustment, has been posted as Assistant Director Handicrafts & Handloom Kulgam with additional charge of Assistant Director Handicrafts & Handloom, Shopian. Rohini, Jr KAS, awaiting orders of adjustment, has been posted as Assistant Director Handicrafts & Handloom, Kathua; Tarun Sudan, Jr KAS, awaiting orders of adjustment, has been posted as Assistant Director Handicrafts & Handloom Udhampur. His services will also be utilized in JKPTO, in addition to his duties in the district.

Ahbinandan Magotra, Jr KAS awaiting orders of adjustment, has been posted as Assistant Director Handicrafts & Handloom Rajouri; Ujwal Singh Sambyal, Jr KAS, awaiting orders of adjustment, has been posted as Assistant Director Handicrafts & Handloom Reasi.

## Modi meets Austrian...

Modi, who arrived here from Moscow after meeting Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday night on a two-day visit - the first by an Indian prime minister in over 40 years, earlier in the day met with Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer. "Had an excellent meeting with Chancellor @karlnehammer. This visit to Austria is very special because it is after several decades that an Indian Prime Minister is visiting this wonderful country. It is also the time when we are marking 75 years of the India-Austria friendship," Modi said in a series of posts on X.

"There are several shared principles that connect us such as democracy and rule of law. In the spirit of these shared values, Chancellor @karlnehammer and I agreed to further cement the India-Austria friendship across various sectors," he said.

"Stronger economic ties naturally featured in our talks but we do not want to limit our friendship to only this aspect. We see immense potential in areas like infra development, innovation, water resources, AI, climate change and more," he said in another post.

Modi also interacted with business leaders from the two countries and invited Austrian companies to invest in India in infrastructure, energy, emerging technologies and other sectors.

## Tarun Behl arrested...

was arrested and taken into Police remand for four days. Further investigation of the case is going on, said SSP Jammu Vinod Kumar.

"We have urged all not to upload and circulate any information and the documents that jeopardise the security and sovereignty of the nation, otherwise strict action will be taken against those who act irresponsibly," SSP said.

## Kathua ambush: Truck...

as it is perceived that the driver deliberately asked for a pass on the culvert. "Usually, army vehicles are given preference in these areas but the tipper still asked for a pass which slowed down both vehicles," an official said on condition of anonymity.

A massive search operation, conducted by the army and police, is on amidst heavy rain in dense forests across four districts.

The operation, launched from Kathua, Udhampur, and Baderwah, has resulted in the detention of 50 individuals for questioning in connection with the ambush, the officials said.

Efforts are being made to track down and neutralise the terrorists believed to be hiding in the forest, they said.

In a related development, a search operation is underway in the higher reaches of the Doda district following a gunfight between terrorists and security forces.

Army and police personnel are deployed in dense forests in various parts of Udhampur; Samba, Rajouri, and Poonch districts, with fresh searches initiated in several areas on Wednesday morning.

Residents of Badnota village and neighbouring areas have expressed concern over their safety in the aftermath of the ambush, calling for the establishment of village defence groups to combat terrorist threats.

Local residents have urged the government to provide weapons and training to enable them to support security forces in the fight against terrorism.

The search teams, supported by helicopter and UAV surveillance, are using sniffer dogs and metal detectors in dense forest areas. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) is assisting police in the probe, while special forces units are conducting surgical operations in specific locations.

"The residents, united in their resolve for peace and security, stand ready to assist security forces in eradicating terrorism from the region," an official said.

The call for empowerment through training and armament underscores the community's determination to safeguard their homeland against such acts of violence, the official said. "The government should provide weapons and training to us, we are ready to fight shoulder-to-shoulder with our forces against the terrorists," Jagdish Raj, a local, said. Punkaj, a 20-year-old student, said the terrorist ambush has caused fear among the local populace but "the situation changes altogether when you have weapons in your hands". "We can swiftly move into the forests and help tackle the threat of terrorism," he said, demanding a special recruitment drive for the local youths of the area. Shahid Ahmad, who claimed to have moved from the higher reaches to Machedi due to terror threat, said Muslims and Hindus of the area want peace and are ready to assist security forces in wiping out terrorism.

"Our eyes filled with tears at the loss of our soldiers. Such an attack had never happened (here) even during the peak of terrorism over two decades ago," he said, adding that the government should provide weapons and training to them to fight the menace. Ahmad said innocent villagers, who have moved with their livestock to the upper reaches, are compelled to provide food to terrorists as they are threatened at gunpoint.

"We are with our forces in the fight against terrorism," he said.

## Soldiers fired 5,189...

together the events - of what happened when the ambush took place and in the more than two hours of continuous gunfire that followed before reinforcements came in.

The terrorists opened fire on two Army vehicles on the Machedi-Kindli-Malhar mountain road near Badnota village, about 150 km from the district headquarters of Kathua in Jammu region. The soldiers facing heavy a barrage of bullets put up a stiff fight, firing incessantly to prevent more casualties and stop the terrorists from seizing their weapons and inflicting further harm.

Officials are looking at the evidence on the site, the bloodstained helmets, the bullet shells and the vehicles with smashed windscreens and flat tyres, and talking to the injured soldiers to understand how that fateful July 8 afternoon panned out.

The terrorists, believed to be a group of three, positioned themselves at two different locations and targeted the vehicles and the Army men, an official in the know said.

The attack, the fifth in Jammu in a month and signalling an escalation in violence in the relatively peaceful region compared to Kashmir Valley, started around 3.30 pm.

"Despite facing gruelling physical and mental challenges, the Garhwal regiment soldiers of the Indian Army unleashed a barrage of 5,189 rounds on the terrorists, forcing them to flee the scene," an official told PTI.

The injured jawans are undergoing treatment at the army hospital in Pathankot. Among them is rifleman Kartik Singh. His right arm was punctured in several places by shrapnel from a grenade launched by terrorists but he was undeterred and continued the fusillade with his left arm until his weapon jammed.

His was only one of the stories of courage. "The soldiers showed unwavering bravery and selfless dedication to duty, even in the face of grave injuries," said an official.

"The precise and relentless counterfire instilled panic among the terrorists who were forced to retreat, and allowed for reinforcements to secure the area," he added.

"Despite sustaining initial setbacks and injuries, the brave soldiers of the Garhwal regiment embodied their motto 'Yudhaya Krit Nishchaya' (Fight with determination), standing their ground for more than two hours," an official said.

Kashmir Tigers, a shadow outfit of the banned Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), has claimed responsibility for the attack.

The Jammu region has been shaken by a series of recent ambushes and terror attacks, particularly in the border districts of Poonch, Rajouri, Doda, and Reasi.

## Panel formed to...

coordinator, NIC.

According to the order, the committee is required to prepare a monthly report and submit it to the Union home ministry by the fifth day of each month.

The Home Department has also instructed the panel to coordinate and oversee efforts related to tracing and deporting foreign nationals residing illegally in the Union Territory.

Apart from it, the panel will monitor the progress made on these issues and report regularly to the Home department.

It is also responsible for disseminating information on ongoing cases in various courts, as well as monitoring and updating the status of these cases for relevant stakeholders.

The nodal officer will oversee the collection of biographic and biometric data of illegal migrants, compile progress reports, and maintain an up-to-date digital record of those illegally staying in Jammu and Kashmir on a regular basis, the order said.

In 2021, the Jammu and Kashmir Police conducted an operation against illegal immigrants, detaining more than 270 Rohingyas from Myanmar, including 74 women and 70 children, at the sub-jail in Kathua district's Hiranagar.

## CJ administers oath...

Justice Puneet Gupta, Justice Rahul Bharti and Justice Mohd. Yousuf Wani and virtually from Srinagar by Justice Sanjeev Kumar, Justice Rajesh Oswal, Justice Vinod Chatterji Koul, Justice Sanjay Dhar, Justice Javed Iqbal Wani, Justice Mohd. Akram Chowdhary, Ms. Justice Moksha Khajuria Kazmi and Justice Wasim Sadiq Nargal.

The proceedings of the Oath taking ceremony were conducted by Shahzad Azeem, Registrar General, who read the contents of the Notification received from Government of India, Ministry of Law & Justice, Department of Justice (Appointments Division), the Warrants of Appointment issued by the President of India and the Letter of Authorization issued by the Lieutenant Governor, Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir, authorizing the Chief Justice of the High Court of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh, to administer the Oath of office to Justice Rajesh Sekhri. The ceremony was also attended by the Former Judges of the High Court, Advocate General, Deputy Solicitor General of India, Jammu, Additional Chief Secretary, Jal Shakti, ADGP Jammu, Principal District Judge Jammu, Members of Bar, others Officers of Civil and Police Administration and Officers and Staff of the Registry.

## Govt waives off...

In a statement released to the press on Wednesday, a KPDCCL spokesman urged the domestic consumers to take benefit of waiver on late payment surcharge and settle their long pending bills. "Domestic consumers are advised to approach their concerned Electric Subdivision to settle their bills. They can pay principal amount due to KPDCCL in full or in equal instalments to claim the waiver," he said, while reiterating that the scheme shall not be extended further beyond March 31, 2025.

In order to provide succour to the domestic consumers, KPDCCL has so far collected a revenue of Rs.144 crore under the Power Amnesty Scheme, after forfeiting an amount of Rs.53.11 crore on account of late payment surcharge.

In order to facilitate the consumers, Power Amnesty Camps are also being held across all Electric Subdivisions of KPDCCL. "There has been an overwhelming response to the scheme in these camps, with many consumers settling their bills. However, still a large number of consumers with huge outstanding dues are yet to approach the concerned Subdivisions for settling their bills," he added. The KPDCCL spokesman further stated that as per the orders issued, KPDCCL shall intensify electricity disconnections of all those domestic consumers who are not willing to avail benefits of the Power Amnesty Scheme.

## 5 CPOs, 11...

as PP, Principal Sessions Court, Jammu; Ranjeev Kumar, CPO, PP, Principal Sessions Court, Reasi as Addl PP, Additional Sessions (NIA) Court, Budgam; Najeeb Hussain Nehvi, CPO, Addl. PP, Additional Sessions (NIA) Court, Pulwama as PP, Principal Sessions Court Pulwama in addition to his present assignment; and Mohd Rafiq, CPO, Addl. PP, Additional Sessions (NIA) Court, Budgam as PP, Principal Sessions Court, Reasi.

Yogesh Bamba, Sr.PO, Asstt. PP, Excise Magistrate Court, Jammu has been appointed as Addl. PP, Additional Sessions Court, Jammu; Reyaz Ahmad Bhat, Sr.PO, Asstt. PP, Forest Magistrate/Sub Judge Mobile Magistrate Court, Srinagar as Addl. PP, Additional Sessions Court, Srinagar; Anil Saini, Sr.PO, Asstt. PP, Electricity Magistrate Court/Spl. Mobile Magistrate (Traffic) Court, Jammu as Addl. PP, POCSO Court, Jammu; Arvind Rathore, Sr.PO, Asstt. PP, City Judge Court, Jammu as Addl. PP, 2nd Additional Sessions Court, Jammu; Noor Ul Sajad, Sr.PO, Asstt. PP, Addl. Spl. Mobile Magistrate Court, Pantha Chowk, Srinagar as Addl. PP, POCSO Court, Srinagar; Naveed Anjum, Sr.PO, Asstt. PP, Sub Judge Spl. Mobile Magistrate (13th FC Magistrate), Jammu as Asstt. PP, Spl. Mobile Magistrate (Traffic) Court, Jammu in addition to her present assignment; Pallavi Kesar, Sr.PO, Asstt. PP, 3rd Addl. Munsiff Court, Jammu as Asstt. PP, Electricity Magistrate Court in addition to her present assignment; Zaffar Iqbal Shaheen, Sr.PO, Asstt. PP, Juvenile Justice Board, Srinagar as Asstt. PP, Spl. Mobile Magistrate Court, Pantha Chowk, Srinagar, in addition to his present assignment;

Rohit Tidy, Sr.PO, Senior Prosecuting Officer DPO, Jammu as Asstt. PP, 1st Additional Munsiff Court, Jammu; Vinay Kumar, Sr.PO, Asstt. PP, JMJC/Addl. Mobile Magistrate Court, Kishtwar as Asstt. PP, Juvenile Justice Board, Kishtwar, in addition to his present assignment; and Ishiyaq Rashid Wani, Sr.PO, Asstt. PP, City Munsiff Spl. Mobile Magistrate (Traffic) Court, Srinagar as Addl. PP, 3rd Additional Sessions Court, Srinagar. Asifa Rashid Mir, PO, Asstt. PP, City Magistrate Court, Srinagar has been appointed as Asstt. PP, Sub-Registrar Court Srinagar; John Mohd Wani, PO Asstt. PP, Spl. Mobile Magistrate (13th FC), Srinagar as Asstt. PP, 2nd Addl. Munsiff Court, Srinagar in addition to his present assignment; Prabhjot Kour, PO, Asstt. PP, Municipal Magistrate Court, Jammu as Asstt. PP, Excise Magistrate Court, Jammu in addition to her present assignment; Chasfaeda Shafiq, PO, Asstt. PP, PT&E Court, Srinagar as Asstt. PP, City Munsiff Court, Srinagar in addition to her present assignment; Sabeel Kaavoosa, PO, Asstt. PP, 1st Addl. Munsiff Court, Srinagar as Asstt. PP, Forest Magistrate Court, Srinagar in addition to her present assignment; Ranjeet Singh, PO Asstt. PP, Juvenile Justice Board, Kishtwar as Asstt. PP, JMJC Court, Ukhral.

# Govt approves release of advance funds to FWD for FY 2024-25

## ■ STATE TIMES NEWS

SRINAGAR: In a first, Jammu and Kashmir administration on Wednesday accorded sanction to the release of funds amounting to over Rs 55.58 crore by way of advance positioning in favour of Family Welfare Division (FWD) under centrally sponsored scheme 'family welfare programme' for its utilization during the Financial Year 2024-25.

An order to this effect was issued by Secretary, Health & Medical Education Department, Dr Syed Abid Rasheed Shah.

"Sanction is hereby accorded to the release of funds amounting to Rs 5558.75 lakh in favour of Director Family Welfare, J&K as advance positioning under CSS 'Family Welfare Programme' through

Budget, Estimation, Allocation and Monitoring System (BEAMS)," the order read.

It said Finance department has sanctioned the amount in reference to the recent decision of the administrative council headed by Lt Governor Manoj Sinha.

The order said the funds shall be utilized subject to certain conditions like the expenditure shall be booked on admissible items as mentioned in the guidelines of CSS-Family Welfare Programme and after fulfilling all requisite formalities as per rules/norms.

The funds shall be utilized specifically for the purpose for which these have been authorized and no diversion of funds shall be permissible under any circumstances in the bank account unnece-

sarily, it said.

The order said the funds shall not be parked and the conditions stipulated in BEAMS may be adhered in letter and spirit.

Pertinent to mention that this was a long pressing burning issue of the employees of the family welfare department who did not get salaries on time before this decision and the decision is a major reform aimed at employee welfare for the department of health and medical education.

As per Secretary Health & Medical Education "This is for the first time that funds have been released in advance in favour of the family welfare department. This will obviate the chances of any delay in the release of salaries to the employees of family welfare department."

# Interrogation of Reasi terror attack accused points towards Pak-based LeT handlers: NIA

## ■ STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: The NIA's interrogation of an arrested accused in the attack on a bus carrying pilgrims in Jammu and Kashmir's Reasi last month has pointed towards the role of Pakistan-based handlers of banned terror outfit Lashkar-e-Taiba, officials said.

Nine people were killed and 41 injured on June 9 when terrorists opened fire at a 53-seater bus, which was on its way from the Shiv Khori temple to the Mata Vaishno Devi shrine in Katra, causing it to veer off the road and fall into a deep gorge in Reasi.

NIA officials said at least three terrorists could have been involved in the attack on the bus. Interrogation of Hakam Khan alias Hakin Din has revealed that he provided shelter, logistics and food to the terrorists, they said.

Khan also helped terrorists in conducting a recon of the area and even accompanied them, the officials said, adding the terrorists involved in the attack stayed with Khan on at least three occasions since June 1.

Based on details provided by Khan, the NIA on June 30, searched five locations linked with hybrid terrorists and their over-ground workers.

Khan's interrogation has also pointed towards the role of two Pakistan-based LeT commanders -- Saifulah alias Sajid Jutt and Abu Qatal alias Qatal Sindhi -- who might have acted as the attackers' handlers, the official said.

This aspect is being further verified, the official added.

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) took over the investigation into the case on June 15 orders from the Union Home Ministry.

LeT commanders Jutt and Qatal have also been named in a charge sheet filed this year by the NIA in connection with its probe relat-

ed to the attack on civilians in J-K's Rajouri district in 2023.

Seven people belonging to the minority community were killed and several others injured when terrorists attacked Dhangri village in Rajouri on January 1, 2023. While five civilians were killed in firing by terrorists, two lost their lives in an IED blast the next day.

The NIA said it was yet to ascertain any common angle in recent terror attacks carried out in Jammu and Kashmir.

The probe agency has also decided to register a case to investigate last year's terror attack on an Army convoy in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch that left five personnel dead.

The probe will look to ascertain any "common angle" in last year's attack with the recent terror attacks in Jammu and Kashmir, the officials said, adding the involvement of Pakistan-based handlers in the case cannot be ruled out.

Five Army personnel lost their lives and another was seriously injured after their vehicle caught fire following a terrorist attack on April 20, 2023, in the Bhata Dhurian area under Poonch district.

The NIA on Tuesday also dispatched a team of its officers to assist the Jammu and Kashmir police in its probe into the terrorist attack on an Army convoy in Kathua that occurred on Monday.

Five Army personnel, including a junior commissioned officer, were killed, and as many were injured when a group of heavily armed terrorists ambushed a patrolling party on the rugged Machedi-Kindli-Malhar mountainous road near the Badnota village in Lohai Malhar, approximately 150 km from the Kathua district's headquarters.

This was the fifth terror attack in the Jammu region within a month.

# Use of M4 carbine assault rifles in terror attacks in J&K alarming: Experts

## ■ STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: For the last few years, terrorists have been found using the American-made M4 carbine assault rifles in Jammu and Kashmir, and more so during the recent attacks including in Kathua, a trend that experts say is "alarming" as the "leftover" weapons of the US Army after its pullout from Afghanistan in 2021 seem to have reached the ultras through Pakistani handlers.

M4 carbine is a lightweight, gas-operated, air-cooled, magazine-fed and shoulder-fired weapon with a collapsible stock in service since 1994. With over 500,000 units produced since the 1980s, the M4 is available in several variants. It is claimed that the rifle has a cyclic rate of fire of 700-970 rounds per minute and an effective firing range of 500-600 meters.

M4 carbine rifles were designed and developed in the 1980s and used extensively by NATO, including a variant reportedly in service with several militaries including Pakistani special forces and the Special Security Unit of the Sindh Police.

Offering greater manoeuvrability, the rifle has been used in several wars including the Syrian civil war, Iraqi civil war, Yemeni civil war, Colombian conflict, Kosovo war, Iraq and Afghanistan war after 9/11.

The frequent use of these assault rifles by terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir, according to experts, is a consequence of the US Army leaving behind arms and ammunition while pulling out from Afghanistan in 2021 and is a cause of con-

cern due to the more lethal nature of the steel bullets used.

"After the withdrawal of Americans from Afghanistan, they have left a huge stock of arms and ammunition. Though the Americans claim that they destroyed most of it. But I think with canonisation and things of that kind, these weapons have fallen into the hands of the terrorists," defence expert Lt Gen Sanjay Kulkarni said. Experts say that it is Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence that has been helping terrorists with sophisticated weapons like M4 carbine rifles to further their "nefarious designs" in Jammu and Kashmir.

Kulkarni, who has served in Jammu and Kashmir during his tenure in the Indian Army, believes that the US Army's leftover weapons have been now found by the ISI, which is using them to train terrorists.

He said that M4 rifles have steel bullets that have definite penetration and are generally not utilised because they come under various kinds of restrictions.

"But you find that the Americans have left such huge piles of ammunition (in Afghanistan), which are far more sophisticated," Kulkarni said. The first instance of recovery of the M4 carbine rifle in Jammu and Kashmir was reported on 7th November 2017, when a nephew of Jaish e Muhammad chief Masood Azhar, Talha Rasheed Masood, was killed in a gunfight in Jammu and Kashmir's Pulwama district. In 2018, the weapon was recovered by security forces in Kashmir's Pulwama for the second time

when Azhar's another nephew Usman Ibrahim was killed.

Later on July 11, 2022, one M4 carbine rifle was recovered from an encounter site in the Avantipora area of Jammu and Kashmir's Pulwama district where Jaish-e-Muhammad commander Kaiser Koka and one another terrorist were neutralized.

Shesh Paul Vaid, former Director General of Jammu and Kashmir Police, said there was no frequent use of M4 carbine rifles by terrorists in the region during his tenure - December 2016 to September 2018.

## Over 4,600 pilgrims leave Jammu to join Amarnath Yatra

### ■ STATE TIMES NEWS

JAMMU: Amid heavy rains, more than 4,600 pilgrims left Jammu city in the early hours of Wednesday for the twin base camps in Kashmir to join the annual Amarnath Yatra, officials said. This was the 13th batch of pilgrims that left the Bhagwati Nagar base camp here for Baltal and Pahalgam base camps in Kashmir. The batch of 4,627 pilgrims left in 185 vehicles around 3 am amid chants of "Bum Bum Bholey". They were escorted by a CRPF contingent amid area dominations by the Army, the officials said.

While 2,773 pilgrims left in 95 vehicles through the 48-km traditional Pahalgam route, 1,854 devotees left in 90 vehicles via the shorter but steeper 14-km Baltal route, they said.