

Decades old dream realized; LG lays foundation for Shankaracharya Temple at SMVD Foothills

Soul of J&K deeply rooted in India’s rich civilizational heritage

■ EARTH NEWS SERVICE

KATRA: Marking a historic milestone, Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha laid the foundation stone Wednesday for the much-anticipated Sri Shankaracharya Temple.

Perched on hillocks beside the revered Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine, this project takes root after decades, realizing a vision first envisioned in the 1960s.

Total expenditure for the temple complex, amounting to Rs. 31.51 crore, will be fully borne by Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board.

The Lieutenant Governor announced that the Shrine Board will construct 50 commercial shops within the Temple complex, which will be allotted to the landowners who donated it for sacred cause.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between



the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board (SMVDSB) and the concerned landowners was executed in 2025, wherein the landowners have consented to donate 41 Kanals for sacred cause.

“In the years ahead, the Sri Shankaracharya Temple will serve as a spiritual anchor for millions of devotees. It will be a living emblem of India’s eternal culture, collective faith, resilience, and profound

spiritual-cultural consciousness.

Devotee visiting Shri Mata Vaishno Devi for darshan will also come to Sri Shankaracharya Temple, generating significant economic

momentum across the region. This influx will create employment opportunities, strengthen local enterprises, and inject fresh energy into overall regional development,” the Lieutenant Governor said.

During his visit to the holy town of Katra, the Lieutenant Governor presided over the ‘Samridh Nari, Samridh Bharat’ program at the Spiritual Growth Centre, where he interacted with the women entrepreneurs of Self-Help Groups of Reasi and adjoining areas.

The Lieutenant Governor reiterated the commitment of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board towards keeping spiritual hubs vibrant while prioritizing every devotee’s comfort, safety, and dignity.

He said when sacred sites thrive with vitality, they spark renewed faith and ► P11

CM Tables 13 Demands, 19 supplementary grants



■ EARTH NEWS SERVICE

JAMMU: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah Wednesday moved 13 Demands and 19 supplementary Demands in the Legislative Assembly which was subsequently presented before the House for discussion by Speaker Abdul Rahim Rather.

“I move that a sum not exceeding the aggregate amount mentioned in Demand Nos. 1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 14, 19, 20, 24, 31 and 33 be granted to Government to defray the charges which

will come in course of payment during the year ending 31st March, 2027 in respect of Heads indicated in the List of Business against each demand,” Chief Minister said.

These Demands for Grants pertain to General Administration Department, Planning, Monitoring and Development, Information, Power, Finance, Parliamentary Affairs, Law & Justice, Revenue, Housing, Tourism, Hospitality & Protocol, Estates, Culture and Disaster ► P11

Assembly adjourned after noisy scenes

JAMMU: The Jammu and Kashmir Assembly on Wednesday was adjourned after witnessing noisy scenes as BJP MLAs protested the alleged police use of force against students who were demanding the establishment of a National Law University (NLU) in Jammu.

The uproar erupted when the House was discussing grants related to Chief Minister Omar Abdullah. BJP members rose from their seats and raised slogans against the police action near the Civil Secretariat and in support of the demand for NLU in Jammu.

Carrying pamphlets which read “NLU for Jammu”, the BJP legislators strongly pitched for the setting up of the law university in the Jammu region.

Besides, they sought a reply from the government over police action against the protesting students.

Amid high-pitched exchanges, treasury ► P11

Ramazan begins today; LG, CM extend greetings

JAMMU: The holy month of Ramazan 1447 AH will commence across Jammu and Kashmir on Thursday, February 19, 2026, following confirmation of the crescent sighting on the evening of 29th Sha’ban.

With the sighting confirmed, the faithful will begin fasting at dawn on Thursday, marking the start of a month dedicated to prayer, reflection, and community service.

The Ramzan moon was sighted in Kashmir, the valley’s Grand Mufti Nasir-ul-Islam said here ► P11

AI Impact Summit: Modi holds bilateral meetings with 7 PMs, Prez & two CEOs

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday welcomed world leaders, including UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva, for the ongoing AI Impact Summit here and held nine bilaterals with heads of state and CEOs.

The world leaders, including Sri Lanka President Anura Kumara Dissanayaka and Bhutan Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay, were welcomed to an ensemble of traditional musical instruments, including drums, nadaswaram and tanpura, with the prime minister greeting them with a warm



handshake and exchange of pleasantries.

Mauritius Prime Minister Navinchandra Ramgoolam, Croatia Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic, Serbia President Aleksandar Vucic, Seychelles Vice President Sebastian Pillay, Estonia President Alar Karis, and Finland Prime Minister Petteri Orpo were among those welcomed by Modi at the brightly decorated Bharat ► P11

History made; J&K enter Ranji Final for first time in 67 years

KALYANI: Sixty-seven years after their maiden appearance, Jammu and Kashmir stormed into the Ranji Trophy finals for the first time on Wednesday, upstaging two-time former champions Bengal by six wickets in the semifinals here to add another historic chapter to a fairytale season so far.

Auqib Nabi’s stunning nine-wicket match haul and their IPL star Abdul Samad’s fearless strokeplay ensured that the side once labelled “perennial underachievers” now stands one step away from the title.

Chasing a modest 126 at the Bengal Cricket Academy ground, J&K rode on Samad’s unbeaten 30 off 27 balls (3x6, 1x4) and rookie Vanshaj Sharma’s composed 43 not out off 83 ball (4x4) as the pair stitched an unbroken 55-run stand for the fourth wicket to seal history on the fourth and penultimate day of the semifinal.

In a heartwarming gesture, Samad, who had done the bulk of the damage, allowed the 22-year-old Vanshaj to finish it in style and the youngster launched Mukesh Kumar over long-on for six to spark wild celebrations in the visiting camp.

Jammu and Kashmir had played 334 Ranji matches before this season, winning only 45. It took them 44 years to register their first victory, against Services in 1982-83.

Speaker Legislative Assembly, Abdul Rahim Rather, together with other Legislative Members congratulated the Jammu & Kashmir cricket team for scripting history in the prestigious Ranji Trophy 2026 by securing a berth in the final for the first time. ► P11

J&K crafts Cancer Control Strategy with top institutions

JAMMU: Jammu and Kashmir government is formulating a comprehensive cancer control strategy for the Union Territory in collaboration with NITI Aayog, ICMR and the Homi Bhabha Cancer Hospital and Research Centre, Punjab, officials said.

The initiative aims to establish a structured and coordinated framework for cancer prevention, early diagnosis, treatment, palliative care and research across J-K, they said.

Officials said the strategy will focus on optimal utilisation of existing ► P11

Doodhpathri reopens after Pahalgam attack closure, brings relief to tourism sector, visitors

■ ARSHID ALI

BUDGAM: After remaining closed for nearly ten months following last year’s deadly terror attack in Pahalgam, the picturesque meadow of Doodhpathri in central Kashmir has finally reopened, bringing much-needed relief to tourism stakeholders and renewed hope for economic recovery in the region.

The destination was shut in April 2025 after the attack in Pahalgam claimed the lives of 26 civilians, including 25 tourists. In the aftermath, the Jammu and Kashmir administration led by Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha ordered the temporary closure of several prominent tourist

spots across the Union Territory as a precautionary security measure.

Following a comprehensive security review, the Lieutenant Governor recently directed the reopening of 14 tourist destinations, including Doodhpathri, signalling improved ground conditions and a renewed push to revive the tourism sector.

Local stakeholders — including pony operators, hoteliers, guides, food vendors and transporters — welcomed the move, saying the prolonged closure had severely affected their livelihoods.

“The closure after the Pahalgam attack pushed many of us to the brink. We had no work for months. The reopen-

ing of Doodhpathri has finally given us hope that our livelihoods will revive,” said a local pony operator.

“Tourism is the backbone of our area. With Doodhpathri reopening, we expect business to slowly return, especially ahead of the summer season,” a hotel owner in Budgam said.

A food stall operator added, “We fully support security measures, but the long closure affected hundreds of families. We are relieved that authorities have restored access after reviewing the situation.”

Tourists visiting the meadow also expressed confidence in the security arrangements and described the destination as ► P11

Five detained as manhunt for juvenile home escapee widens

■ EARTH NEWS SERVICE

JAMMU: At least five suspected persons have been detained for questioning amid intensified search for a gangster who remained at large after escaping a juvenile home, along with two Pakistani inmates, in a border village of Jammu, officials said on Wednesday.

Both the Pakistani nationals were arrested on Tuesday, within 20 hours of the incident near Ambala railway station in Haryana, while they were heading for Nepal.

Karajeet Singh alias Gugga, a resident of Dablehar in R S Pura, and Pakistani citizens, Mohammad

Suna-ullah (20) and Ahsan Anwar (21), allegedly attacked police personnel and fled from the juvenile home around 5 pm on Monday (February 16). Two cops were injured in the incident.

A purported video of the gangster, said to be associated with the ‘Khauff’ gang, showing Singh resorting to a few rounds of firing inside the juvenile home, is circulating on social media, drawing public concern.

The officials said Singh, who is believed to be the mastermind of the escape, is still at large, and efforts are on to arrest him.

Special teams have been fanned out and are conducting raids at various ► P11

RSS Chief slams US, China approach, says World needs Bharat's solutions

LUCKNOW: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat on Wednesday took a swipe at the US and China, alleging that they tend to “finish those who come in their way” and asserting that India has the solutions to many of the challenges confronting the world.

Addressing a Shodharthi Samvad programme at the Malaviya Auditorium of Lucknow University, the RSS chief said, “Western countries spread fundamentalism. Their thinking is to become powerful, live on their own, and abandon the rest, eliminating those who become obstacles. This is what America and China are doing today.”

He asserted that solu-



tions to global problems lie in India. “Today, India has the answers to the problems facing the world. If we want to become a world leader, we must become powerful in all areas. The world only believes it when truth is backed by power,” he said.

Stressing the role of re-

search in nation-building, Bhagwat said, “Research plays a major role in changing India’s direction and condition. Truthful information should be brought to light. We will not be able to understand India through ignorance.”

He urged researchers to work selflessly for the country. “Whatever research you do, do it with excellence, authenticity, with body, mind, and money, and selflessly for the country. There is a lot of negative propaganda about the Sangh Parivar. Researchers should bring out the truth,” he said.

On education and health, the RSS chief said, “These are basic necessities. ► P11

J&K Saffron output drops to 19.58 MT in 2024-25

JAMMU: Saffron production in Jammu and Kashmir has declined from 23.53 metric tonnes in 2023–24 to 19.58 metric tonnes in 2024–25, according to official data.

In a written reply to a question raised by National Conference MLA Hasnain Masoodi, Deputy Chief Minister Surinder Kumar Choudhary said that the total area under Saffron cultivation in the Union Territory has remained constant at 1,116.27 hectares, but output and productivity have fluctuated.

According to the ► P11

‘ISKCON serving Humanity, promoting Sanatan Dharma’

MAYAPUR: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday said ISKCON was playing a significant role in carrying the flag of Sanatan Dharma across the world while serving mankind through relief operations during natural calamities, and social welfare initiatives.

Addressing devotees at the ISKCON temple in Mayapur in West Bengal’s Nadia district during celebrations marking the 152nd birth anniversary of Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur, Shah said he had come to the spiritual centre not in his official capacity but as a devotee of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

“Brothers and sisters,

you respectfully referred to me as India’s home minister, but I have not come here in that capacity. I have come here as a devoted follower of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu,” Shah said, adding that he had long wished to visit Mayapur but circumstances had delayed the trip.

The Union minister said the global spread of the ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness) movement was the result of the life work of Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur and A C Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, and credited the organisation with taking spiritual teachings to people ► P11

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