

3 JeM terrorists gunned down in twin encounters at Kishtwar, Udh

Ongoing joint operation Trashi-I continues



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JAMMU: Three Pakistani terrorists affiliated with the Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) were killed in two separate encounters in Kishtwar and Udhampur districts, marking a major success for security forces who had been hunting them for the past three

weeks, officials said. While one terrorist was killed in a gunfight in the snow-bound Chatroo belt of Kishtwar on Wednesday evening, two others -- both self-styled JeM commanders -- were neutralised this morning after they were trapped inside a natural cave in Udhampur district, the officials said.

The success of security forces came ahead of Union Home Minister Amit Shah's three-day visit to the Union Territory beginning Thursday.

“In the continuing search and elimination of terrorists in the Kishtwar region, where the hunt has already led to several contacts in the dense forests and challenging terrain, a contact was re-established with the terrorists on the run in the ongoing joint operation (Trashi-I) by the troops of Counter-Insurgency Force Delta, White Knight Corps, J&K Police and CRPF at around 5.45 pm today in the general area of Dichhar, Kishtwar.

“One terrorist has been successfully neutralised. Operation is in progress,” Army’s White Knight Corps said in a post on X.

The officials said the latest encounter started when a joint search party was carrying out searches in Sanjinala-Dichhar in Chingam forest.

In Udhampur, two Pakistani terrorists, identified as Rubani ► P11



Amit Shah to begin 3-day J-K visit today

JAMMU: Union Home Minister Amit Shah will begin a crucial three-day visit to Jammu and Kashmir union territory from February 5 to conduct a comprehensive security review, assess developmental projects and engage with political stakeholders.

The visit is expected to include high-level meetings with security agencies and administrative officials to evaluate the overall law and order situation and the progress of ongoing governance and infrastructure initiatives.

Meanwhile, security forces on Wednesday carried out a surprise cordon and search operation in the Ab Guzar area of Srinagar, officials said.

The operation comes just three days ahead of the scheduled visit of Union Home Minister Amit Shah to the valley. Security forces sealed ► P11

Ballots without potential: Missing Panchayat-ULB link in J-K, Ladakh



Shivang Satya Gupta
Editor-in-Chief

Country’s democracy has always drawn strength from taking power closer to the people. Panchayats and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) were created so that decisions about daily life are made in villages, towns and neighbourhoods, not only in distant Capitals. But in the frontier Union Territories (UTs) of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh, this idea remains only partly realised. Local body elections were held long ago, people have chosen their representatives and their term ends, yet the real authority still lies elsewhere.

This gap between election and empowerment is clear on the ground. Jammu & Kashmir today lacks elected Gram Panchayats, Block Development Councils, District Development Councils and municipal bodies.

One reason for this problem lies in the region’s past. For many years, Jammu & Kashmir was outside the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments that strengthened Panchayats and urban bodies across the country. Even when local elections were held, powers were not clearly transferred. After 2019, these constitutional

provisions were extended to the region, raising hopes that villages and towns would finally get real authority. However, the change has been slow and incomplete.

Bureaucratic hurdles have played a major role in this delay. Decisions about elections, powers and funds are often held up by files moving between departments, repeated requests for clearances and concerns over law and order. Officials tend to prefer “administrative control” over political decision-making at the local level. As a result, elections are delayed, rules are framed slowly, and the transfer of powers is postponed. What should be a routine democratic process turns into a long administrative exercise.

Even after elections, bureaucracy continues to dominate. Development plans are largely prepared by officials, with elected representatives asked to sign off on them. Funds flow through departments rather than directly to Panchayats or municipal councils. Local representatives often complain that they are informed about projects, not consulted. Officials report to higher offices, not to elected bodies. This makes local democracy weak and people’s representatives dependent.

The missing link between Panchayats and Urban Local Bodies adds to the problem. Rural and urban areas in Jammu & Kashmir are closely connected. Many villages lie next to towns; people use the same roads, water sources and health facilities. Yet Panchayats and municipal bodies work separately, with little coordination. There is no clear system for joint planning. As towns expand, nearby

villages are left confused about who is responsible for services. This gap leads to delays, overlap and neglect.

Ladakh faces even bigger challenges. Despite its size and strategic importance, it does not yet have a fully empowered Panchayat Raj system like other parts of the country. Village-level elections with clear powers, regular terms and financial control are missing. Administration is mostly run by officials. Distance, tough terrain and harsh weather are often cited as reasons for delay, but these cannot justify the long absence of elected village bodies. In remote border areas, where people already feel cut off, this lack of local representation deepens the sense of neglect.

The impact of this situation is felt in everyday life. Small problems like broken roads, water shortages, poor sanitation, delayed welfare benefits and others remain unresolved for long periods. Earlier, villagers could approach their sarpanch or ward member. Now they are often told to visit block or district offices. This creates frustration and distance between people and the system. When elected representatives have no power, people lose faith in the value of voting.

Strong local bodies also act as a check on misuse of funds. When decisions are taken in open meetings and works are monitored locally, there is more transparency. In Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh, weak Panchayats and ULBs mean weaker public oversight. This not only affects development but also trust in governance, which is crucial in sensitive border regions. What is needed is not new laws, but ► P11

Remarks on ‘Pir Panjal’ creates ruckus in Assembly

LoP objects referring Rajouri, Poonch as region; says it was called Chandrabhaga

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JAMMU: Members of the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly resumed discussion on the Motion of Thanks on Lt Governor Manoj Sinha’s address on Wednesday after a brief adjournment following an uproar over the LoP’s reported remarks on Pir Panjal.

Speaker Abdul Rahim Rather adjourned the House for 15 minutes after several members from the ruling coalition, mostly from Rajouri and Poonch districts, stood up to demand an apology from Leader of Opposition Sunil Sharma over his reported remarks that Pir Panjal does not ► P11



Rajouri-Poonch MLAs protest over remarks

JAMMU: Several MLAs from Rajouri and Poonch on Wednesday protested outside the Legislative Assembly complex, seeking an apology from the LoP for allegedly hurting the sentiments of people by claiming that the Pir Panjal region does not exist in Jammu and Kashmir. The protest followed the adjournment of the Assembly by Speaker Abdul Rahim ► P11

Govt steps up efforts to preserve heritage: CM

No end to encounters even in 2026: Omar's jibe at BJP on its 2019 claims

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JAMMU: Encounters are taking place even in 2026, Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said on Wednesday in a veiled jibe at the BJP over its claim that terrorism would end following the abrogation of Article 370 that happened in 2019.

Three Pakistani terrorists were killed in encounters with security forces in the higher reaches of Ramnagar in Udhampur and Chatroo in Kishtwar districts on Wednesday, taking the death toll in nine gunfights in the Jammu re-



gion in the past three weeks to five. Earlier, one Pakistani terrorist was killed in Kathua on January 23, while an Army paratrooper also laid ► P11

Two crucial Bills introduced in LA

JAMMU: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah today tabled Jan Vishwas and Anti-Discrimination Bills in the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly.

The Chief Minister introduced “The Jammu and Kashmir Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill, 2026” (L.A. Bill No. 1 of 2026).

The Bill seeks to amend certain enactments of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir by decriminalising and rationalising offences, with the objective of further strengthening trust-based governance and promoting ease of living and doing business. Similarly, the Chief Minister, ► P11

Night temps drop below freezing point

SRINAGAR: Night temperatures in tourist resorts of Gulmarg and Pahalgam in Kashmir fell several degrees below freezing point, while the rest of the valley enjoyed a warmer night, officials said on Wednesday.

Gulmarg, the popular ski resort located in the Baramulla district of north Kashmir, recorded a low of minus 8.0 degrees Celsius, marking a drop of 2.7 degrees compared to Tuesday night, they added.

Pahalgam, a tourist resort in south Kashmir that serves as the base camp for the Amarnath Yatra, saw its temperature dip by ► P11

BJP legislators blame Speaker of unfairness; stage ‘Dharna’

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JAMMU: BJP legislators on Wednesday staged a dharna outside the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly after staging a walkout from the House, alleging that Speaker Abdul Rahim Rather was “muzzling the voice of the opposition” and showing bias while allotting speaking time to members of the ruling party.

All BJP members walked out of the Assembly after protesting inside the House over the issue. The legislators, led by Leader of Opposition Sunil Sharma, later sat on a dharna outside the Assembly complex and raised



slogans against the Speaker and the government.

“We are sitting on a dharna after protesting against the biased manner in which the Speaker is granting

time to opposition members to speak. The Speaker is shielding the government from giving replies. This is muzzling the voice of the opposition,” Sharma ► P11

Govt committed to provide best facilities for cancer patients: CM

Inaugurates maternity block at SMGS Hospital

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JAMMU: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah today addressed a World Cancer Day event at Government Medical College (GMC), Jammu, reaffirming the Government’s proactive role in ensuring the best possible facilities for cancer patients as well as healthcare professionals.

The programme was organised by GMC Jammu under the theme ‘J&K Fights Cancer’ to mark World Cancer Day.

The event was attended by Minister for Health & Medical Education Sakina Itoo, Advisor to the Chief Minister Nasir

Aslam Wani, MLA Jammu West Arvind Gupta, MLA Uri Dr. Sajjad Shafi, Secretary Health & Medical Education Department Dr. Syed Abid Rasheed, Principal GMC Jammu Dr. Ashutosh Gupta, renowned oncologist Dr. Sameer Kaul, senior professors, doctors, faculty members and students.

Addressing the gathering, the Chief Minister expressed hope for a future when the world would truly be able to celebrate World Cancer Day as the day cancer is eradicated. “Till then, we have to manage this disease as best as possible,” he said.

Sharing personal experi-

ences, CM Omar Abdullah spoke with deep empathy about the emotional and psychological toll cancer takes on patients and their families. He recalled moments of waiting anxiously for scan results, witnessing loved ones undergoing chemotherapy and radiation, and the pain of losing family members to the disease.

“This disease terrifies people, it terrifies their family, not only because of the prognosis and treatment, but also because of the financial implications,” he remarked.

Highlighting the critical role of the ► P11

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