The Earth News

Merchant Asso raises alarm over illegal sale of drugs and tobacco in Leh villages

EARTH NEWS SERVICE

LEH: The Merchant Association Leh on Wednesday expressed serious concern over the growing menace of illegal transport and sale of drugs and tobacco products in remote villages of Ladakh.

Addressing a press conference in Leh, the President of the association, Tsering Angchuk, along with other office bearers, highlighted the alarming trend of unauthorized vehicles allegedly transporting and selling harmful substances across villages in the region.

Tsering Angchuk informed the media that the association has submitted a formal representation to the Deputy Commissioner of Leh, urging the administration to take immediate action to curb the illegal trade. He said the issue has been observed for several years but has recently intensified, raising serious concerns among traders and the wider community.

According to the association, some private vehicles coming from long distances—particularly from Jammu—are reportedly bringing small consignments of goods in vehicles such as Eco vans, small vans and camper vehicles. These vehicles then travel across Ladakh and enter remote villages where they allegedly sell tobacco products such as "Cool Lip" and other harmful substances, including drugs.

Angchuk said such activities pose a significant threat to society, especially to teenagers and young children who are vulnerable to addiction. He emphasized that the increasing accessibility of tobacco and drugs in rural areas could have long-term social and health consequences for the youth of Ladakh.

The association urged the district administration to implement strict monitoring mechanisms to control the movement of unauthorized traders. They suggested that only properly registered wholesale vehicles with valid documentation and wholesale certificates should be permitted to transport goods within the region.

The association also recommended that village sarpanches and local police chowkis be directed to prevent unauthorized vehicles from entering villages for the purpose of selling such substances.

The office bearers stated that these measures would help safeguard rural communities and prevent the spread of drug addiction among the younger generation. They called upon the administration to take urgent and coordinated action to protect the future of Ladakh's youth and maintain the social well-being of its villages.

Rana welcomes CM Nod for Helipad facility in Mendhar

EARTH NEWS SERVICE

JAMMU: Minister for Jal Shakti, Forest, Ecology and Environment and Tribal Affairs, Javed Ahmed Rana, on Wednesday expressed gratitude to Chief Minister Omar Abdullah for approving the construction of a helipad along with a waiting lounge facility at Qasab in Mendhar area of Poonch district.

The project has been sanctioned at an estimated cost of ₹3.35 crore and is aimed at strengthening infrastructure in the border belt along the Line of Control. Representing the Mendhar Assembly constituency, Rana said the proposed helipad facility would improve accessibility in the region and enable faster response during medical emergencies, disaster management operations and other urgent situations. According to the Minister, the addition of a waiting lounge alongside the helipad will support administrative coordination and relief efforts in the remote and hilly terrain of the area.

He noted that several localities in Mendhar face logistical challenges due to their geographical location, where road connectivity can be disrupted during adverse weather conditions. In such circumstances, air access becomes crucial for evacuations, supply of relief material and movement of officials during emergencies.

Rana said the approval of the project reflects the Chief Minister's focus on extending infrastructure development to remote and border regions. He added that improved air connectivity facilities can prove life-saving for residents of areas where access by road is often limited.

"The approval of this project will enhance the administration's ability to respond quickly during emergencies and provide improved connectivity for the people of Mendhar and nearby areas," the Minister said while acknowledging the Chief Minister's support for development initiatives in the region.

The Minister reiterated that the government remains committed to expanding infrastructure and ensuring that development programmes reach underserved and border areas of Jammu and Kashmir.

BJP submits Memorandum to Div Com opposing proposed fuel price hike in JK

EARTH NEWS SERVICE

JAMMU: The Bharatiya Janata Party on Wednesday lodged a strong protest against the proposed increase in petrol and diesel prices by the Omar Abdullah-led government in Jammu and Kashmir, submitting a memorandum at the office of the Divisional Commissioner in Jammu.

A BJP delegation led by Jammu East MLA Yudhvir Sethi and party All Cells Incharge Ved Sharma handed over the memorandum to officials at the Divisional Commissioner's office in the absence of the Divisional Commissioner.

The party objected to the proposed hike of ₹1 per litre on petrol and ₹2 per litre on diesel, warning that the move would place an additional financial burden on residents of Jammu and Kashmir who are already facing rising living expenses.

Members of the BJP Transport Cell were also present during the submission of the memorandum, including Convenor Ashu Mahajan and Cell Co-Convenors Roshan and Kamalpreet. Senior BJP leaders Sham Langer, K.L. Sharma, Mukherjee Sharma, Balvinder Singh and Karunesh Gupta joined the delegation.

Speaking to reporters, Sethi accused the government led by Chief Minister Omar Abdullah of failing to honour the commitments made to the electorate during the Assembly elections. He said the ruling party had assured relief for the public but was now moving to impose additional taxes on fuel.

Sethi argued that any increase in petrol and diesel prices has a cascading effect on the economy, pushing up transportation costs and eventually driving up prices of essential commodities and daily-use items. According to him, the proposed hike would directly affect traders, transporters, working families and other sections of society.

Ved Sharma also criticized the move, stating that the BJP strongly opposes the proposed increase in fuel prices. He said decisions of this nature, taken without assessing their wider economic consequences, demonstrate the government's failure to safeguard public interests.

Guv Kavinder Gupta outlines Himachal agenda on maiden visit to Jammu after oath

EARTH NEWS SERVICE

JAMMU: Kavinder Gupta, who recently assumed office as the 30th Governor of Himachal Pradesh, arrived in Jammu on Wednesday and outlined his governance priorities, including efforts to make the hill state free from drug abuse, strengthen youth engagement and promote organic farming and tourism.

Gupta reached Jammu a day after taking the oath of office at Raj Bhavan Shimla in Shimla on March 10. Hundreds of supporters gathered at the airport to welcome him during his first visit to the city following the swearing-in ceremony.

Speaking to media persons, the Governor expressed gratitude to Droupadi Murmu and Narendra Modi for entrusting him with the constitutional responsibility.

"I thank the Honourable President and the Prime Minister for giving me this opportunity. Their expectations are that every section of society should be taken along and that work should be done for the welfare of Himachal Pradesh," Gupta said. Addressing policy priorities, the Governor emphasised the need for coordinated action to combat substance abuse in the state. He said the administration, civil society organisations and communities must work together to protect the younger generation from drugs. Gupta also underlined the importance of youth engagement and skill development initiatives, stating that constructive participation of young people in social and economic activities would remain central to his approach.

Highlighting economic prospects, he pointed to Himachal Pradesh's potential in religious and adventure tourism, saying these sectors could generate employment and strengthen the state's economy if promoted in a planned manner.

He also advocated wider adoption of organic farming, noting that the state's terrain provides favourable conditions for sustainable agriculture. Encouraging farmers to adopt organic practices, Gupta said it would help protect the environment while improving farm incomes and strengthening rural livelihoods.

Reaffirming his commitment to impartial governance, the Governor said the constitutional office he holds does not belong to any political party and that he would work with both the ruling establishment and the opposition for the overall progress of the state.

Responding to queries about concerns faced by residents of Jammu and Kashmir in Himachal Pradesh, Gupta stressed the long-standing cultural and historical connections between the two regions.

SPF welcomes JU's 'Jammuiyat' Literary and Cultural Festival

EARTH NEWS SERVICE

JAMMU: The Sikh Progre ssive Front (SPF) on Wednesday welcomed the University of Jammu's initiative to organise a two-day literary and cultural event titled "Jammuiyat: Sahitya – Sanskriti Sam agam", scheduled to be held on March 13 and 14 at the University campus.

In a statement issued here, SPF President Balvinder Singh, along with Vice President Surinder Singh Wazir, Secretary Manjeet Singh Bali, Joint Secretary Rajinder Singh Sudan, and members Paramjit Singh and Janak Singh, praised the effort undertaken under the leadership of Vice-Chancellor Prof. Umesh Rai to create a platform celebrating the literary and cultural traditions of the Jammu region.

The Front said the concept of Jammuiyat reflects the region's long-standing ethos of coexistence, shared belonging and cultural harmony among diverse communities.

According to the statement, Jammu has historically remained a centre of cultural interaction and literary creativity. The region's cultural identity has evolved through several languages, including Dogri, Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Gojri, Pahari, Siraji and Paddari, alongside artistic traditions such as poetry, folklore, storytelling, theatre, folk music and devotional practices.

SPF noted that in the present era of globalisation and digital transformation, regional languages and traditional cultural expressions face increasing challenges. Events that bring attention to local literature and artistic traditions, it said, play an important role in preserving cultural heritage.

The Front expressed hope that the festival will bring together scholars, writers, artists, students and cultural practitioners from across the region, encouraging dialogue and exchange across generations.

It further stated that such forums can inspire emerging voices and promote engagement among youth with literature, creativity and cultural continuity.

The organisation expressed optimism that initiatives like this will help sustain the region's diverse cultural traditions while reinforcing the spirit of harmony and coexistence associated with Jammuiyat.

Two-Day Int'l conference on Digital and Distance Learning concludes at JU

EARTH NEWS SERVICE

JAMMU: A two-day international conference on the future of open, distance and online education concluded at the University of Jammu on Wednesday, with academicians and policymakers underlining the need for innovation, inclusivity and collaboration in strengthening digital learning systems.

Organised by the Centre for Distance and Online Education as part of its Golden Jubilee celebrations, the conference was held on the theme "Reimagining Open, Distance, Online, Blended and Self-Directed Learning: Innovations, Equity, and Impact in the Digital Era." Scholars, researchers and education experts from across India and abroad participated in the deliberations.

Former Vice-Chancellor of T. Ramesh attended the valedictory session as Chief Guest and highlighted the growing importance of flexible learning systems in expanding access to higher education. He referred to the role of the National Education Policy 2020 in improving the Gross Enrolment Ratio and strengthening open and distance education through initiatives of the University Grants Commission Distance Education Bureau.

Prof. Ramesh said technological progress has transformed the idea of openness in education, enabling learners to access academic programmes beyond conventional classroom settings. He noted that open learning systems allow students to study subjects of interest at their own pace while providing greater flexibility in learning pathways.

Sunita Siwach, who joined the session online as Guest of Honour, said that the expansion of digital technologies has reshaped the education sector and strengthened the reach of distance learning programmes. She observed that online education now offers accessibility comparable to traditional classroom-based systems.

Director of the Centre for Distance and Online Education and conference convener Pankaj K. Srivastava presided over the session and expressed gratitude to speakers, delegates and organising committee members. He said self-directed learning has emerged as an essential element of modern education, especially in technology-enabled learning environments.

Earlier, Anupama Vohra delivered the welcome address and presented a report on the academic sessions and pre-conference discussions held during the event. She outlined deliberations on the implementation of the National Education Policy in open and distance learning systems and highlighted challenges faced by the sector.

She also emphasised the need for innovation, inclusivity and collaboration in strengthening open and online education in the coming years.

The proceedings of the valedictory session were conducted by Neelam Choudhary, who presented the vote of thanks and acknowledged the contributions of speakers, scholars, volunteers and organising committee members. Participants concluded the conference by reiterating the importance of collaborative academic initiatives and technology-driven learning models in widening access to higher education. The event also formed part of the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Centre for Distance and Online Education, marking fifty years of its contribution to expanding flexible learning opportunities.

Drains, Transformer commissioned in Kathua Villages; Flood Survey ordered

EARTH NEWS SERVICE

KATHUA: BJP MLA from Jasrota, Rajiv Jasrotia, on Tuesday inaugurated a series of development works in Panchayat Sowla and Tridwan in the Keerian Gandyal block of Kathua district, including 16 covered lane drains, hard-facing of interior lanes and the commissioning of a new transformer aimed at stabilising electricity supply in the area.

The works were launched in the presence of field teams from the Rural Development Department, Flood Control, Public Works Department, Public Health Engineering, PMGSY and the Power Development Department, who also attended a public interaction with residents.

Officials said the new transformer would help improve voltage stability for households, agricultural tubewells and small enterprises. The drainage network and strengthened lanes are expected to ease water flow during heavy rainfall and improve internal connectivity within the villages.

During the interaction, residents raised concerns about low water pressure in parts of Sowla, pending compensation related to flood breaches reported in 2022 and vulnerable culverts ahead of the upcoming monsoon season.

Responding to the issues, the Public Health Engineering department assured that a defunct standpost would be revived and chlorination checks of the water supply would be carried out. The Power Development Department announced plans for load-balancing measures and tripping audits to improve the reliability of electricity supply.

Flood Control officials agreed to undertake a joint survey of weak embankments within fifteen days, while engineering teams from PMGSY and the Public Works Department noted proposals for additional lanes under the next phase of infrastructure works.

Addressing the gathering, Jasrotia said the projects were intended to improve everyday living conditions by strengthening drainage for monsoon safety, improving road access and ensuring stable electricity for households and local businesses.

He also directed the Rural Development Department to maintain weekly photographic records of works to ensure transparency in monitoring and payments.

The MLA said follow-up inspections would be conducted regularly and added that Phase-II lanes and additional culverts would be prioritised in consultation with residents to ensure that development plans reflect local requirements.

DC Kishtwar distributes CFR certificates to 86 tribal families

EARTH NEWS SERVICE

KISHTWAR: The district administration in Kishtwar on Wednesday distributed Community Forest Rights (CFR) certificates to members of 86 Scheduled Tribe households, formally recognising their collective rights over traditional forest lands.

Deputy Commissioner Pankaj Kumar Sharma handed over the certificates during a function held in the district, marking the recognition of community rights under the provisions of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006.

Officials said the certificates acknowledge the long-standing association of tribal communities with forest resources and grant them collective rights over community forest land, particularly for grazing and other customary uses permitted under the Act.

Addressing the gathering, the Deputy Commissioner said the initiative aims to ensure social justice for tribal groups while reinforcing their role in managing forest resources. He added that the administration remains committed to protecting the rights of indigenous communities and supporting their socio-economic progr ess. Beneficiaries welcomed the move and expressed appreciation to the district administration for formally recognising their traditional relationship with the forests. They said the recognition would allow them to manage and utilise forest resources in a responsible manner. Officials noted that the issuance of Community Forest Rights certificates is expected to encourage greater community participation in forest conservation efforts while also strengthening liveli hood opportunities for tribal households in the district.

CEO Doda conducts surprise inspections of Educational institutions in Assar Zone

EARTH NEWS SERVICE

DODA: Chief Education Officer (CEO) Doda, Bhushan Kumar Pathak, on Wednesday carried out surprise inspections of several educational institutions in Assar zone to review their functioning and evaluate compliance with academic and administrative standards.

During the visit, the CEO inspected Government Middle School Trungal, Government Lower High School Jathi, Government Higher Secondary School Assar and the Zonal Education Office Assar.

Officials said the inspection focused on several operational aspects, including staff punctuality, attendance records, student enrollment strength, staff availability and the condition of infrastructure and basic facilities within the institutions.

The CEO reviewed academic functioning and administrative practices during the visit, seeking detailed inputs from school authorities regarding the current status of teaching staff and resources.

Pathak directed the concerned officials to address any shortcomings related to infrastructure and staffing on priority to ensure smooth functioning of the institutions. He reiterated the department's commitment to maintaining institutional accountability and improving the overall quality of education across the district.

NOTICE

I, Lobzang Tsultim S/o Rinchen Angchuk R/o Tingmosgang, Leh-Ladakh UT A/P Choglamsar, Leh-Ladakh UT do hereby inform that I have lost my Contractor Card No. A-350. Missing report in this regard stands registered at PS Leh. Now, I am applying for re-issuance of Contractor Card. Objection, if any, conveyed to concerned authorities within seven days of this publication.