

KU concludes week-long entrepreneurship training on ornamental plants, mushroom cultivation

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SRINAGAR: The University of Kashmir (KU) on Monday concluded week-long entrepreneurship training programmes on "Nursery & Post-Harvest Management of Commercially Important Ornamental Plants" and "Cultivation & Commercialization of Edible and Medicinal Mushrooms in Kashmir" at the Main Campus. Organised by the varsity's Department of Botany, the programmes aimed to equip participants with practical skills and technical knowledge in nursery management, mushroom cultivation and post-harvest handling, while encouraging entrepreneurship and livelihood generation in the floriculture and mushroom sectors. Speaking at the valedictory session, Vice-Chancellor KU, Prof. Nilofer Khan, said



that skill-oriented training programmes play a crucial role in linking academic knowledge with practical enterprise opportunities. "Such initiatives help build entrepreneurial capacity among participants and encourage them to explore

sustainable livelihood avenues by applying scientific knowledge to local resources," she said. Registrar KU, Prof. Naseer Iqbal, said that the University remains committed to promoting innovation, entrepreneurship and skill development through focused training programmes that address local needs and economic opportunities.

Dean, School of Biological Sciences KU, Prof. Abdul Hamid Wani, highlighted the growing potential of floriculture and mushroom

cultivation in the region and emphasised the importance of scientific training and capacity building in strengthening these sectors. Earlier, Head, Department of Botany KU, Prof. Aijaz Ahmad Wani, said the programme was designed to provide participants with practical exposure and scientific understanding necessary for developing entrepreneurial ventures in ornamental plant nurseries and mushroom production. The training programme included 12 expert sessions and five practical training sessions, providing hands-on learning opportunities for participants. The sessions focused on nursery management, climate-controlled cultivation environments, floriculture systems suited to Kashmir's conditions, and post-harvest innovations aimed at extending

the vase life and market value of flowers. Participants also undertook field visits to the Division of Floriculture (SKUAST-K), Government Hi-Tech Nursery at Polo View, and several private nurseries to gain practical insights into commercial nursery management and cultivation practices. Entrepreneurs from nursery management and mushroom cultivation programmes, along with participants, shared their feedback and expressed satisfaction with the training programme. On the occasion, the 'Botanical Society Bulletin' was also released, and certificates were distributed among the participants. The formal vote of thanks was delivered by Prof. Manzoor Shah, faculty at the Department of Botany KU.

Anantnag hosts Gender Sensitisation Workshop to empower rural women



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ANANTNAG: In continuation to International Women's Day celebrations aimed to promote inclusivity and empower rural women, the Agriculture Production Department Anantnag, on Monday organized a "Gender, Targeting & Inclusion Sensitization Workshop" at Town Hall Anantnag.

The workshop was held on the theme "Rights, Justice, Action for all Women and Girls," under the aegis of the IFAD-JKICP Project. District Development Commissioner (DDC), Dr. Bilal Mohiud Din Bhat, graced the event as chief guest, which also witnessed the participation by Chief Agriculture Officer, DD Fisheries, officers from agriculture and allied sectors, officials and women from different walk of life.

The main objective of the program was to sensitize officers and field functionaries on the importance of gender mainstreaming in agricultural projects. Discussions primarily centered on ensuring women farmers and girls have equitable access to resources, technology, and decision-making processes within the farming

community. Addressing the gathering, the DDC called women as leaders and drivers of change who are committed to excel in all sectors including agriculture, adding they deserve due recognition for their gender specific and general roles in the society. He encouraged women to choose suitable lines of activity in agriculture and allied sectors and generate employment for themselves and others as well, through flagship initiatives like HADP, JKICP and Mission YUVA. Dr. Bilal stressed that farmers and prospective beneficiaries must come forward and take full advantage of various government schemes aimed at strengthening the agriculture sector and improving livelihoods. On the occasion, the CAO briefed participants about different schemes of the department, which have been designed to enhance agricultural productivity and boost livelihood opportunities. These schemes can have a positive effect on economic upliftment and social empowerment of women associated with agriculture and allied sectors, he noted.

Sajad Lone asks J&K Govt to review EWS criteria for reservation in jobs, admissions

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SRINAGAR: Citing official figures of Below Poverty Line (BPL) population in Kashmir Valley, Peoples Conference president Sajad Gani Lone has asked the J&K government to reconsider the asset-based criteria under the Economically Weaker Section (EWS) category for reservation in jobs and admissions.

In a post on X, Lone said that the BPL population in Kashmir exceeds that of Jammu, yet only one out of nine qualifiers in the EWS category in the recent KAS examination was from Valley. "The number of souls in the Below Poverty Line Category (Antyodaya

Anna Yojana + Priority Households) in Kashmir Valley exceeds that in Jammu," Lone said, citing official figures of 37.71 lakh in Kashmir compared to 29.81 lakh in Jammu. He pointed out that in response to his questions in the Assembly, the government revealed that only 7.7% and 8.6% of certificates issued under the EWS category were from Kashmir. He said the problem lies in the criteria for granting these certificates. "While almost all BPL population in Kashmir falls within the income criteria for issuing these certificates, the asset-related conditions, especially the size of the residential house and residential plot en-

sure exclusion of Kashmiris from the EWS category," he said. Citing the district-wise BPL population of Kashmir, Lone said that asset-based criteria is grave injustice with people of the Valley. "It is grave injustice with people of Kashmir. We have 5.09 lakh BPL souls in Srinagar, 5.21 lakh in Kupwara 5.79 lakh in Baramulla and 5.76 lakh in Anantnag," he said, adding that EWS certificates could have been a major confidence building measure for old city Srinagar, old town Baramulla, Anantnag, Budgam and parts of Sopore. Lone appealed to the Chief Minister to address the issue urgently, stating that continuing recruit-



ment without correcting the criteria would amount to injustice. "All reservations are heavily tilted towards Jammu. This particular

category is tilted towards Jammu because of government norms, not because Kashmir is rich and Jammu is poor," he said.

DC Bilal reviews progress of Land Record Digitization

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ANANTNAG: Deputy Commissioner (DC) Anantnag, Dr. Bilal Mohiud Din Bhat, on Monday reviewed the status of the district on land record digitization during a meeting with the concerned officers at Dak Bungalow Khanabal. The meeting was attended by the ADC, ACR, SDMs besides the Tehsildars, Naib Tehsildars and other officials of revenue department. At the outset, the DC conducted Tehsil-wise evaluation of the progress of verification and uploading of Jamabandies on PM Gati Shakti Portal and issued specific directions to

the Tehsils, showing pendency, to ensure the verification of the remaining Jamabandies immediately. Dr. Bilal emphasized that the digitization initiative is aimed at enhancing transparency and directed the officers to take appropriate action on non-quasi judicial errors within the stipulated timeframe. Simultaneously the work on back log mutations be taken up so that maximum updation is achieved, he remarked. The DC enjoined upon the Tehsildars to start the grievance collection work, with respect to last updated Jamabandies and ensure the process along with data capturing is completed within the stip-

ulated timeframe of next 3-4 weeks. To achieve this, special camps be conducted and field functionaries be tasked to collect the data from the land holders during regular and scheduled visits to the Revenue Villages, he added. Directing ADC, ACR and SDMs to monitor the process, the DC asked them that a proper mechanism and format be devised to receive the information on grievances from every Revenue Village and Tehsil on a daily basis. Reviewing implementation of the Public Services Guarantee Act, the DC directed the officers that benefits of all revenue services that come under

the ambit of the Act be provided to the eligible applicants in a fair, transparent and time bound manner. The meeting was informed that verification of digitized Jamabandies is nearing completion and the district has achieved above 99% progress so far, with possibility of achieving 100% this week. Also updated geo-referenced digitized maps showing attributes such as Khasra Number and area stand prepared besides appreciable progress has been made on sub-parcellation of maps. Further, the work on the pending mutations which will update the current revenue records, is also being carried out.

Sleep deprivation fuels diabetes, heart disease, depression, say doctors

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SRINAGAR: Chronic sleep deprivation is quietly driving a surge in diabetes, obesity, depression, heart disease and weakened immunity, and most people do not take it seriously enough, doctors warn. Health experts say adults need seven to nine hours of sleep every night, teenagers eight to ten hours, and younger children even more, yet insufficient sleep has become increasingly common across all age groups. Dr. Yasir Ahmad, a doctor at Directorate of Health Services Kashmir (DHSK), said sleep was as important as diet and exercise but far more underestimated. "Sleep is a

complex biological process controlled by the brain, where the body enters cycles of light sleep, deep sleep and rapid eye movement sleep. Each stage plays a different role in maintaining physical as well as mental health," he said. Dr. Murtaza Wani, a senior physician, described sleep as the body's natural recovery mechanism. "During deep sleep, tissues grow and repair, hormones are regulated, and the immune system becomes stronger. The lack of proper sleep disrupts these processes and can lead to several health problems," he said. Doctors said the brain used sleep to consolidate memories, clear toxins that accumulated during the day and

restore cognitive function. "Good sleep improves learning ability, decision-making and overall cognitive performance," they said. On the cardiovascular front, studies show that people who regularly get adequate sleep have a lower risk of developing heart disease, high blood pressure and stroke. Doctors warned that chronic sleep deprivation was linked to diabetes, obesity, depression and weakened immunity. "When a person does not get enough sleep, the body's immune system weakens, making it easier to catch infections. Long-term sleep deficiency can also contribute to metabolic disorders and mental health issues," they said.

Lack of sleep also raises stress hormone levels in the body, increasing the risk of anxiety, mood disorders and reduced productivity, according to experts. Doctors advised going to bed and waking up at the same time every day, avoiding heavy meals and caffeine before bedtime and limiting screen exposure at night. "Creating a calm sleep environment by reducing noise and light, and maintaining regular sleep schedules, can significantly improve sleep quality," they said. "Sleep must be treated as a priority rather than a luxury. A good night's rest is one of the simplest and most effective ways to safeguard overall well-being," doctors said.

PDP criticizes Sakina Itoo's remarks on private teachers, calls for unity in education sector

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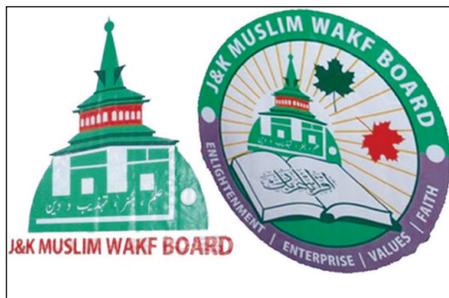
SRINAGAR: The Jammu and Kashmir Peoples Democratic Party on Tuesday criticized Education Minister Sakina Itoo over her remarks on the qualifications of private school teachers, calling them "unfortunate" and raising concerns over their impact on the education sector. In a statement, PDP spokesperson Syed Tajamul said such comments risk creating divisions within the teaching community and undermine the role played by private school educators in the region. The remarks have triggered a broader debate on the contribution of private institutions to education in Jammu and Kashmir, where both government and private schools cater to a large number of students. Tajamul said private school teachers, despite working with limited resources and comparatively lower salaries, have made a significant contribution to the development of education in the region. "Much of the progress visible in the sector can be attributed to their dedication and perseverance," he said. He added that the teaching profession should not be

divided along institutional lines, as educators across both sectors share a common responsibility. "Teachers, whether in government or private institutions, are engaged in nurturing young minds. Drawing comparisons or creating divisions sends a negative message," he said. The PDP leader also questioned public perceptions regarding qualifications, pointing to what he described as a contradiction in societal choices. "If private school teachers are perceived to be less qualified, why do many government employees, including teachers, choose private schools for their children?" he asked. He said the issue reflects broader realities in the education system and the level of trust placed by families in private institutions. Tajamul also linked the discussion to wider concerns about employment in the region, saying Kashmir has no shortage of qualified individuals but faces a lack of adequate job opportunities. He said it is increasingly common to find highly educated youth working in unrelated or low-paying jobs, describing it as a concerning trend.

Record revenue, full transparency: Waqf Board strongly refutes allegations over Sumbal orchard lease

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SRINAGAR: The Jammu & Kashmir Waqf Board has firmly rejected allegations surrounding the leasing of Waqf land in Sumbal, describing the claims as misinformed and devoid of factual basis. The Board asserted that the process adopted represents one of the most transparent and revenue-optimised administrative interventions in recent years. According to officials, the allegations that the orchard was "secretly leased without advertisement or tender" are factually incorrect and misleading. Official records and on-ground verification show that the Board followed a documented and publicly verifiable process. Advertisements were issued through newspapers — copies of which are available with this publication — the same channels used for official notifications. In addition, the notice was uploaded on the Board's official website (www.jkwaqfboard.com) to ensure wider outreach and participation. Officials said such digital disclosure mechanisms represent a progressive transparency measure that was not practiced earlier. The decision to lease a por-



tion of the orchard, officials said, was the outcome of a detailed administrative and financial review aimed at addressing the long-standing decline of the property. Spread across 692 kanals, the orchard has suffered significant deterioration over the years, with hundreds of trees becoming unproductive annually and several patches turning disease-prone, at times posing risks even to adjoining private orchards. To address the situation, the Board identified 159 kanals of barren and least productive land for long-term leasing and divided it into four separate orchard patches to promote diversification and wider investor participation. Officials said this approach aligns with established horticultural and financial management practices. Documents reviewed by this

publication indicate that the financial framework introduced by the Board marks a substantial departure from earlier arrangements. For the land designated for high-density plantation, the Board fixed a base lease rate of Rs 25,180 per kanal per year with a 5% annual escalation, significantly higher than the prevailing private rate of around Rs 15,000 per kanal. Additionally, the Board introduced a premium component of Rs 1 lakh per kanal, amounting to approximately Rs 1.59 crore for 159 kanals as upfront revenue. Since this amount represents only the base premium, the final revenue gains are expected to be higher depending on bidding outcomes. Officials described this premium-based leasing model as unprecedented in Kashmir's

orchard leasing ecosystem and a structural reform aimed at enhancing Waqf revenues by ensuring both upfront capital inflow and sustained annual income. The remaining 533 kanals of the orchard have been placed under a three-year auction framework. According to officials, the previous auction for 692 kanals over three years generated Rs 2 crore. With the current auction covering 23 percent less land, the adjusted expected base value was estimated at Rs 1.44 crore. However, the Board introduced another major reform by shifting operational expenditures to the contractor for the first time. Under the new arrangement, the contractor will bear the costs of fertilisers, pesticides, oil, pruning, machinery, labour and other operational inputs — expenses that were previously borne by the Waqf Board. These expenditures were estimated at over Rs 21 lakh annually, amounting to Rs 63 lakh over three years, and had been a major factor contributing to the orchard's deteriorating condition. Taking these factors into account, officials said the realistic base price could have been around Rs 81 lakh for three years. Nevertheless, the Board fixed the base price at Rs 1.15 crore, signifi-

cantly higher than financial projections, reflecting an effort to maximise the value of the public asset. Officials indicated that the final revenues secured are substantially higher than this base figure. Financial records also reveal that over the past seven years the average annual income from the entire 692-kanal orchard stood at around Rs 64 lakh, while nearly 60 percent of this amount was spent on operational expenses, leaving a net annual return of roughly Rs 30 lakh. Officials described this model as structurally unsustainable due to high expenditure, staffing limitations and inadequate maintenance. Under the new leasing framework, if applied to the entire 692 kanals, the Board estimates that the orchard could generate approximately Rs 7 crore in upfront revenue, along with around Rs 2 crore in annual recurring income with a 5 percent escalation, without requiring the Board to incur operational costs. Officials said this represents a significant improvement in financial efficiency, transforming a low-yield, high-expenditure asset into a sustainable revenue-generating resource for public welfare. The Board also manages thousands of kanals of or-

chard land across Kashmir, many of which are reportedly in poor condition and generating heavy losses annually. According to internal records reviewed by this publication, revenues from conventional fruit auctions often fail to cover even the salaries of staff in the Board's horticulture wing. In light of these details, officials said the allegations circulating in certain quarters stand completely discredited. They maintained that every step — from advertisement to financial structuring — was conducted in accordance with established procedures. According to officials associated with the Board's orchard wing, the Sumbal initiative represents a significant institutional reform that combines transparency, fiscal prudence and long-term asset optimisation. By introducing premium-based leasing, digital disclosures and a rationalised financial structure, they said the Board has set a new benchmark for Waqf property management in Jammu & Kashmir. Officials directly managing the Orchard on ground added that what has been portrayed as a controversy is, in fact, a reform-driven initiative designed to safeguard and strengthen Waqf assets for future generations.