

'Narrative vs Reality': Bali Bhagat slams Omar over Bengal stand

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JAMMU: Launching a fierce and detailed attack, senior BJP leader and former Health Minister Bali Bhagat on Saturday slammed Omar Abdullah for backing Mamata Banerjee, accusing both leaders of "undermining democratic institutions while defending controversial governance."

Bhagat said Omar Abdullah's support to Mamata Banerjee exposes a "dangerous political mindset where leaders justify each other's actions instead of standing with institutions and constitutional values."

Referring to the recent controversy during the visit of Droupadi Murmu to West Bengal, Bhagat pointed out that serious questions were raised over protocol lapses, including sudden venue changes and absence of top state leadership to receive the President, which triggered a nationwide political storm.

He said such incidents were not minor administrative issues but reflected "systemic disregard for



constitutional norms." Reports had highlighted that the President herself expressed displeasure over the handling of her visit, including mismanagement and deviation from protocol.

"Instead of introspection over such serious lapses involving the highest constitutional office, there is an attempt to divert attention and attack institutions like the Election Commission," Bhagat said.

Targeting Omar Abdullah, Bhagat said his remarks backing Mamata

Banerjee and questioning institutional processes reflect a "deeply irresponsible approach that borders on endorsing authoritarian tendencies."

"Omar Abdullah's statement is not just political support—it is a clear attempt to legitimise a style of governance where institutions are questioned, protocols are ignored, and accountability is avoided," he added. Bhagat further alleged that repeated controversies in West Bengal—from administrative lapses during high-profile visits to incidents of political violence—paint a troubling picture. He cited past incidents where political leaders and convoys faced attacks in the state, leading to serious law-and-order concerns. Taking a sharp dig, Bhagat said, "When leaders begin to defend such governance models, it raises serious concerns about their own political intent. This is how democratic systems are weakened—by systematically discrediting institutions and normalising irregularities." He also attacked Omar

Abdullah's remarks on elections, stating that "belittling the role of institutions like the Election Commission is a direct challenge to free and fair elections."

"Omar Abdullah and his political legacy in Jammu and Kashmir have already been questioned in the past. Instead of learning from history, he is now openly backing a governance model that thrives on confrontation with institutions," Bhagat said. Concluding his statement, Bhagat warned that "attempts to centralise power, undermine institutions, and dismiss accountability are clear signs of authoritarian tendencies." "India's democracy is strong, and no amount of political alignment or narrative-building will weaken the constitutional framework. The people will respond decisively to such politics," he asserted. The remarks come amid intensifying political confrontation over the Election Commission's actions in West Bengal, with sharp exchanges continuing between leaders across party lines.

'Jammu & Kashmir Cultural Festival' to be held on Mar 31

His Holiness Swami Avdheshanand Giri, LG Manoj Sinha will preside as chief guests



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JAMMU: On Tuesday, 31st March 2026, a grand "Jammu & Kashmir Cultural Festival" will be held at the Majestic Grand Banquet Resort, Mishriwala (Jammu North Assembly constituency) to showcase the rich culture, traditions, and spiritual heritage of Jammu & Kashmir. This was announced today by Mahant Rohit Shastri, President of Shri Kailash Jyotish avim Vedic Sans-than Trust, during a meeting held in Mishriwala. The festival will be held from 11:00 AM to 1:00 PM. The event will be presided over by His Holiness

Swami Avdheshanand Giri, while the Lieutenant Governor of Jammu & Kashmir, Shri Manoj Sinha, and other dignitaries will attend as chief guests. During the meeting, Mahant Rohit Shastri stated that the festival aims to provide a vibrant display of the region's traditional arts, folk costumes, handicrafts, and cultural heritage. Attendees will get an opportunity to experience the rich culture of Jammu & Kashmir firsthand. The festival will also feature cultural exhibitions, a community feast (preeti bhoj), and other engaging activities, making it a

memorable event. Dignitaries present at the meeting included Master Vijay Kumar Sharma, Rakesh Singh, Joginder Singh, Bhushan Jambwal, Purn Chand Sharma, Nirmal Singh, Randeep Singh, Ramesh Kumar, Lucky Sharma, and several others. The organisers appealed to the public to attend the festival with their families and help make it a successful and grand celebration. Mahant Rohit Shastri added that the event will not only promote Jammu & Kashmir's cultural and spiritual heritage but also foster cultural awareness and harmony within society.

Directions given to expedite completion of BRO projects

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RAJOURI: Deputy Commissioner Rajouri, Abhishek Sharma, chaired a meeting in his office chamber to review the progress of key road projects being executed by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) across the district. During the meeting, the

Deputy Commissioner undertook a comprehensive review of the status of major road stretches including the Akhnoor-Poonch NH-144A road, Budhal-Mohar-Gool road, Beripattan-Challas road and Rajouri-Thanamandi-Suran-kothe road. He assessed the pace of execution, quality parameters and

bottlenecks, if any, affecting the progress of these strategically important projects. Emphasizing the critical role of road connectivity in boosting economic growth and improving public access to essential services, the Deputy Commissioner directed the concerned agencies to expedite the pace of work while

strictly adhering to quality standards. He also stressed the need for close coordination among departments to resolve on-ground issues in a time-bound manner. The concerned officers provided detailed updates on the progress achieved so far and highlighted key challenges requiring immediate interven-

tion. Senior officers including the ACR Rajouri Mohd Jahangir Khan, SDM Thanamandi, Abid Hussain, Additional SP Bikram Kumar, Officer Commanding 57/58 & 110 RCC (GREF), District Mining Officer Rajouri and Executive magistrates of Rajouri and Thanamandi attended the meeting.

Safety drive conducted at Jammu, Katra railway stations amid Navratras

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JAMMU: With the objective of making the journey of the lakhs of devotees visiting Mata Vaishno Devi during Chaitra Navratri safe, smooth, and pleasant, a comprehensive campaign was organized today—March 21—by the Jammu Division at the Jammu and Katra railway stations. Under the able leadership of the Senior Divisional Commercial Manager, Shri Uchit Singhal, special arrangements were put in place at the Jammu and Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra railway stations to ensure the service and safety of passengers.



Scouts and Guides provided proper guidance to passengers on the platforms, with a special focus on the elderly, women, and persons with disabilities. They sensitized passengers regarding important safety precautions, such as refraining from traveling on the footboards and avoiding boarding a moving train. Intensive ticket checking was conducted by the ticket-checking staff on trains

and platforms. During this drive, a strict crackdown was initiated against those traveling without tickets to ensure that passengers in the reserved categories did not face any inconvenience. To help passengers avoid long queues, they were apprised of the benefits of using the 'RailOne' app and utilizing digital payment methods. The checking staff explained the process of booking tickets via the mo-

bile app to the passengers. Through the Public Announcement (PA) system, a heartfelt appeal was made to passengers to keep railway property clean and to travel only with a valid ticket. 'Help Desks' were also set up at the railway stations to provide guidance and assistance to passengers. Speaking on the special drive launched to prioritize passenger amenities during Navratri, Senior Divisional Commercial Manager Uchit Singhal stated, "The volume of passenger traffic increases significantly during Navratri. Our objective is not merely to boost revenue, but to ensure that every devotee completes their pilgrimage in a safe and dignified manner. With the assistance of the 'RailVan' app and our Scouts, we are effectively managing these crowds. We appeal to passengers to cooperate with the Railways by adhering to safety regulations."

BJYM holds introductory meet

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JAMMU: Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM), Jammu & Kashmir, under the leadership of its President Arun Prabhat, organized an introductory meeting at the BJP Headquarters, Trikuta Nagar, Jammu, marking the formal interaction with its newly constituted team.

J&K BJP President and MP (Rajya Sabha) Sat Sharma CA, General Secretary (Organization) Ashok Koul, BJP Vice President & Prabhari BJYM Rakesh Mahajan, BJP General Secretaries Baldev Singh Billawaria, and Gopal Mahajan congratulated the newly constituted team, including State Office Bearers, State Executive Members, District Presidents, and District General Secretaries. While addressing the BJYM team, Sat Sharma emphasized the rich ideological legacy of the Bharatiya Janata Party and urged BJYM workers to act as the driving force at the grassroots level. He called for immediate organizational momentum from the newly formed team and stressed the need to expand the Morcha's reach to every section of society while working with dedication for the welfare of the people of Jammu & Kashmir. He further guided the youthful team on organizational discipline, effective work-



ing style, and commitment towards public service. Ashok Koul, in his address, highlighted the importance of strengthening the organization at the booth level, terming it as the backbone of the party's structure. He also emphasized increasing youth participation in social and political activities, encouraging them to take active roles in nation-building through the party platform. Rakesh Mahajan motivated the young cadre, stating that the enthusiasm, innovation, and energy of youth are the greatest assets of the organization, and reaffirmed that

the future leadership of the nation lies in capable young hands. Earlier speaking on the occasion, Arun Prabhat reiterated BJYM's commitment towards youth empowerment and societal development. He assured that the Morcha will actively work to address the concerns of the youth and extend the party's activities across all sections of society with renewed vigor. BJYM General Secretary Anant Khajuria conducted the proceedings of the meeting, while General Secretary Ranjit Singh was also present on the occasion.

Mandeep Choudhary's appointment as Kissan Congress National Coordinator wins praise



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JAMMU: The appointment of Mandeep Choudhary as National Coordinator of the All India Kissan Congress has triggered a wave of appreciation across Jammu & Kashmir, with farmers and political leaders hailing him as a "true farmer's voice" and a grassroots representative of the agricultural community.

The appointment, announced by Sukhpal Singh Khaira, has been described as a recognition of dedication, hard work, and deep connection with farming traditions. Widely known as a "farmer's man" and "son of the soil," Mandeep Choudhary is regarded as someone who has remained closely associated with agriculture and rural life. Members of the farming community said his elevation reflects the aspirations of those who are directly engaged in cultivation and understand ground realities. Farmers praised his simplicity, accessibility, and consistent engagement with agricultural issues, calling him a leader who "speaks the language of the fields and understands the pain and potential of farmers." Many described him as a bridge between policy-making and grassroots farming communi-

ties. Senior Congress leaders including Yashpal Kundal, T S Tony, Neeraj Kundan and Jitendra Chib, along with several sarpanches and local representatives, welcomed the move and termed it a "boost to farmer representation."

They said Choudhary's appointment will not only strengthen the organisation but also ensure that real issues of farmers—ranging from crop support, irrigation, and market access—get proper attention at the national level. Speaking on the occasion, T S Tony thanked the party's top leadership, including Mallikarjun Kharge, Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi, for placing trust in a grassroots farmer leader. Tony said the decision reflects the Congress party's commitment to empowering those who are directly connected with agriculture. "It is a proud moment for the farming community, and we are confident that Mandeep Choudhary will work tirelessly to raise farmers' issues at every platform," he said. Across districts, farmers expressed optimism that his leadership would bring renewed focus on agricultural reforms, rural development, and welfare of farming families, calling his appointment "a voice of the fields reaching the national platform."

Glorification of Jinnah will not be tolerated: Shiv Sena

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JAMMU: Shiv Sena (UBT) has strongly opposed the inclusion of a chapter on Pakistan's founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah in the new postgraduate Political Science syllabus (2026-2028) at University of Jammu. During a special interaction with journalists at the party's central office, Shiv Sena (UBT) Jammu & Kashmir chief Manish Sahni said that the chapter on Jinnah introduced under "Modern Indian Political Thought" should be removed immediately. He alleged that on



one hand, appreciation is gained in the name of "purification of history" by removing the Mughal period from the syllabus and re-

naming roads and public places, while on the other hand, teaching a figure associated with the country's partition reflects a serious

contradiction. Sahni said that presenting Jinnah, who promoted the Two-Nation Theory, in any form is inappropriate. Ac-

cusing the BJP of double standards, he added that this is an insult to the nation's unity, integrity, and the sacrifices of martyrs. He also announced full support for the students' protests. He urged the university administration and the Lieutenant Governor to immediately withdraw the chapter, warning that otherwise they would be compelled to take the path of agitation. On this occasion, Sanjay Bhatt (General Secretary - Organization), Raju Kapoor (Vice Chairman), and Aditya Mahajan (Vice President) were present.

Mar 31 set as deadline for completion of pending works under Capex

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KISHTWAR: Deputy Commissioner Kishtwar, Pan-kaj Kumar Sharma today chaired a comprehensive review meeting held virtually to assess the progress of various developmental works being executed under the UT Capex Plan 2025-26 across the district. During the meeting, the Deputy Commissioner took a detailed review of the ongoing infrastructure projects aimed at strengthening administrative functioning and improving public service delivery across the district. The projects discussed included the construction of Tehsil Office Machail, Tehsil Office Mughal Maidan, SDM

Office Marwah, Tehsil Office Drabshalla and Naibat Offices at Palmar, Dool, Ded-peth and Saroor along with several other important developmental initiatives. While reviewing the progress of these works, the Deputy Commissioner directed the concerned Sub-Divisional Magistrates and Tehsildars to pull up the executing agencies and ensure that all the works are completed by March 31, 2026. The Deputy Commissioner directed all the concerned departments to achieve physical and financial targets under CAPEX works and submit the bills in respective treasuries before March 28 following the circular issued by the Finance

Department UT of J&K. He emphasized the importance of timely execution of works, adherence to quality standards and optimal utilization of allocated funds. He also stressed that the allocated funds must be utilized properly and should not lapse under any circumstances. The Deputy Commissioner reiterated that all projects must be implemented efficiently, with transparency and accountability, so that the people of the district receive real and timely benefits from these developmental initiatives. The meeting was attended by all concerned SDMs, Tehsildars, Accounts Officer, DC Office Kishtwar, Satender Singh and other officers.

Preparedness of divisional level awareness prog assessed

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UDHAMPUR: To ensure the smooth and successful conduct of the upcoming three-day Divisional-level awareness programme, the Additional Deputy Commissioner Udhampur, Prem Singh, chaired a meeting of officers from various line departments at Mini Conference Hall, DC Office Complex Udhampur. The School Education Department is set to organize the three-day awareness programme commencing from March 24, 2026. The programme will focus on key social issues such as mental health, drug de-addiction, career counselling, traffic awareness and environmental protection—areas that directly impact students and society at large. The meeting was attend-

ed by Joint Director School Education Udhampur-Reasi, Dr. Jagdish Chander Mehra, Assistant Commissioner Revenue, Dr. Umesh Shan, Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Anil Manhas, District Information Officer, Neeraj Bhargava and other district officers. The programme aims to sensitize students, teachers and stakeholders, while promoting responsible citizenship and overall well-being among the youth. At the outset, the Chief Education Officer delivered a detailed PowerPoint presentation outlining the structure and execution plan of the three-day Divisional-level awareness programme. He informed that a series of awareness activities will be conducted across all schools of the Education Department in the district during the programme.