

# 26th National Theatre Festival: World Theatre Day honour for Balwant Thakur

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**AMRITSAR/JAMMU:** On the eve of World Theatre Day 2026, the vibrant cultural city of Amritsar witnessed a moment of profound artistic recognition as the legendary theatre director and playwright Balwant Thakur was felicitated at the 26th National Theatre Festival held at Virsa Vihar.

The honour was conferred by noted theatre personality Shromani Natakak Director Manch-Rangmanch, Kewal Dhalwal, adding further gravitas to an already momentous occasion.

The ceremony was not just a felicitation, it was a celebration of legacy, perseverance, and the transformative power of theatre. As the audience erupted into thunderous applause, the atmosphere turned electric upon recalling a poignant historical connection: twenty-five years ago, this very prestigious festival had opened with Mahabhoj, a Dogri play directed by Balwant Thakur himself.



circle from inaugurating the festival to being honoured at its grand stage reflected not just personal achievement but the evolution of Indian theatre as a whole.

Balwant Thakur's journey is nothing short of extraordinary. With an astounding record of over 7,500 performances across India and the globe, he has carved a unique space as

one of the most prolific and influential theatre makers in the country.

His work transcends boundaries, geographical, linguistic, and cultural, bringing Indian theatre to international prominence while staying deeply rooted in indigenous traditions.

What truly distinguishes Thakur is not just the scale of his artistic output, but the depth of his impact. Over a span of 45 years, he has trained more than 50,000 actors, directors, and cultural practitioners.

These individuals today form the backbone of India's performing arts ecosystem, carrying forward his vision and discipline into diverse creative fields. His role as a mentor has arguably been as significant as his contributions as a director and playwright.

Equally remarkable is his rare dual mastery in both artistic creation and arts administration. In a field where creative brilliance and organizational acumen seldom coexist at the highest level, Thakur stands as a singular figure.

His ability to innovate while managing large-scale cultural institutions has set benchmarks that remain unmatched. This unique blend of creativity and leadership has made him not just an artist, but a true institution builder.

One of his most enduring contributions is the establishment of Natrang, a globally recognized cultural organization that has placed the region of Jammu and Kashmir firmly on the international arts map.

Through Natrang, Thakur has nurtured talent, promoted regional theatre, and created platforms that celebrate artistic diversity and excellence.

The honour bestowed upon him on World Theatre Day is therefore deeply symbolic. It is not merely a recognition of an individual's achievements, but a tribute to the countless artists who dedicate their lives to theatre, the "mother of all arts." It acknowledges the relentless spirit of those who strive to keep this profoundly human form of expression alive and relevant.

## Torchbearers of Santmat illuminate path of inner awakening; Santmat Satsang from March 29, 30

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**RSPURA:** A two-day Santmat Satsang is scheduled to be held on March 29 and March 30 at Swarn Palace, Miran Sahib, Jammu, under the guidance of Swami Vyasand Ji Maharaj of Maharishi Mehi Brahm Vidyapeeth, Haridwar. The spiritual congregation will be followed by the celebration of the foundation day of the Ashram at Badyal Brahmana on March 31, bringing together devotees and seekers for a collective journey toward inner awakening and spiritual enlightenment.

In an era marked by rapid change, material pursuits, and growing mental unrest, the timeless teachings of Maharshi Mehi Paramhans and his illustrious disciple Swami Vyasand Ji Maharaj stand as a beacon of hope and spiritual clarity. These revered saints have played a pivotal role in preserving and propagating the sacred path of Santmat, guiding countless seekers toward inner peace and self-realization.

Born in 1885 in Bihar, Maharshi Mehi Paramhans Ji exhibited deep spiritual

inclination from an early age. Renouncing worldly life in pursuit of truth, he eventually came under the guidance of his Guru, Baba Devi Sahab, and devoted himself to intense meditation and spiritual discipline. His years of seclusion and meditation, particularly at Kuppghat in Bhagalpur, shaped his profound realization of the divine.

Maharshi Mehi simplified the essence of ancient Indian scriptures, including the Vedas and Upanishads, presenting them in a practical and accessible manner. Through the practice of Surat Shabd Yoga—focusing on inner light (Bindu Dhyana) and inner sound (Naad-Anusandhan)—he emphasized direct spiritual experience over ritualism. His teachings centered on Nirgun Bhakti, advocating devotion to the formless God, alongside values of non-violence, ethical living, and service to humanity.

He also strengthened the Akhil Bharatiya Santmat Satsang, spreading the message of unity, compassion, and spiritual awakening across the country. His literary

contributions continue to guide spiritual aspirants, reinforcing the belief that true realization lies within oneself through disciplined meditation and the guidance of a true Guru.

Carrying forward this rich spiritual legacy, Swami Vyasand Ji Maharaj has emerged as a dedicated torchbearer of Santmat. Initiated into the spiritual path at a young age, he undertook rigorous meditation and penance in the Himalayas and along the Ganga, attaining deep spiritual insight. His life reflects unwavering commitment to his Guru's teachings and the mission of spiritual upliftment.

Through the establishment of Satsang centres in regions such as Jammu, Haridwar, and Dehradun, he has made spiritual teachings accessible to people from all walks of life. His discourses, rooted in sacred texts like the Bhagavad Gita and Upanishads, offer practical guidance for leading a balanced and meaningful life. His literary work "Chala Hansa Nij Desh" has further expanded the reach of Santmat philosophy.

## Army organizes poem competition at Banihal

**BANIHAL:** A cultural and literary competition was organized on Thursday at the Girls Higher Secondary School, Banihal, under the aegis of the Indian Army.

The event aimed to promote patriotism and encourage creative expression among students. The competition featured activities such as poetry recitation, skits and speeches, all centered around the theme of patriotism.

Through these engaging formats, participants had the opportunity to showcase their talent, confidence and understanding of national values. The primary objective of this initiative was to empower young women and foster self-confidence among the girls of Banihal.

By providing a platform for expression and participation, the event sought to inspire a sense of pride, leadership and social awareness.

The Indian Army continues to actively engage with the local community through such initiatives, contributing to youth development and women's empowerment in the region.

## SRS celebrates Ram Navami in Jammu

**JAMMU:** On the auspicious occasion of Ram Navami, Shri Ram Sena (SRS) celebrated the festival with great devotion and enthusiasm in Jammu.

The celebration was led by Rajiv Mahajan, President J&K UT, along with party members and devotees. Special prayers, bhajans, and religious activities were organized to mark the birth anniversary of Lord Shri Ram.

Speaking on the occasion, Rajiv Mahajan said that Lord Ram symbolizes truth, righteousness, and ideal governance, and his teachings continue to inspire society. He urged people to follow the path of dharma and work towards unity, peace, and harmony.

Devotees participated in large numbers, offering prayers and seeking blessings. The event concluded with distribution of prasad among the attendees.

## ARMY organize lecture on impact of women equality

**BANIHAL:** The Indian Army organized a significant event at the Government Middle School Fagow, Banihal, focused on promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

The initiative aimed to emphasize the importance of empowering women through education, skill development and equal opportunities. The program brought together educators, social workers and community leaders who highlighted that women's empowerment is crucial for societal progress.

Sessions on financial literacy, digital skills and self-employment opportunities were held, encouraging women to become self-reliant and pursue their goals with confidence. The chief guest stressed that women's empowerment is not just a social responsibility but vital for national progress.

The event showcased success stories of women entrepreneurs, inspiring young girls and aspiring leaders.

Workshops on legal rights, health, and safety were conducted, engaging participants in meaningful discussions on building an equal and just society.

## Army-Awam meet held at Mundomar, Poonch

**POONCH:** In a continued effort to strengthen the bond between the Indian Army and the local populace, an Awam Meet was organized at Mundomar, District Poonch.

The event saw active participation from Sarpanches, Numberdars, Chowkidars and Maulvis, highlighting strong community involvement and cooperation.

The interaction provided an open platform to discuss mutual concerns, developmental needs and ways to enhance civil-military synergy in the region. A shared commitment to peace, security and overall progress was evident, with participants appreciating the Indian Army's ongoing efforts to engage with the local population.

The meet concluded with a tea session, further strengthening the rapport between the Army and the local community, fostering trust, goodwill and partnership.

## Congress criticizes, seeks answers to selective downgrading of security cover to Cong, others

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**JAMMU:** Hitting hard the Home Ministry and the LG administration for withdrawal of security escort and downgrading of the security of congress MLAs and others on selective basis, congress has sought answers over this vindictive and discriminatory approach of the authorities in the duel control system in absence of any accountability due to the failure of the centre government to restore the promise statehood.

Addressing a press conference at PCC HQ Jammu today, JKPC Working President Raman Bhalla, Former Minister Mula Ram, Chief Spokesperson Ravinder Sharma,

Ved Mahajan along with others, the party strongly criticized the selective and vindictive actions in the matter of security and questioned if the lives of elected MLAs are less important than top ranking police and civil bureaucrats, who avail more security over than elected representatives and other veteran leaders of non-BJP parties.

They questioned the sudden withdrawal of security escort to PCC President and CLP Leader and other congress MLAs and also MLAs of other parties on selective basis on the eve of resumption of Assembly session and asked if the same yardsticks were applied to the high-ranking police and civil officers, as MLAs are elected representatives

and above Chief Secretary and DGP in protocol and facing risk to their lives.

Even middle rank police officers avail more security cover than MLAs and top-ranking political leaders of non-BJP parties. Such arbitrary selective and discriminatory actions are highly condemnable, even after Pehalgam attack and serious attempt on the life of Dr. Farooq Abdullah.

The senior congress leaders said that Assembly is resuming session for few days only and people of different suffering sections are keeping high hopes on positive discussions and outcomes in the Assembly debates, which should focus on urgent issues, rather than

playing to the gallery for cheap publicity by few parties. Explaining the burning issues, they said that war situation has hit the people hard and people are facing acute crises on various fronts, like LPG and fuel and here is a panic like situation after the speech of the Prime Minister referring to the Lockdown situation. The Assembly should debate on it and find out the steps to minimize the expected sufferings in the days to come.

They said that PCC Chief Tariq Hameed Karra had submitted certain resolutions on behalf of party regarding the regularisation of daily wagers, need based, contractual, temporary and other such workers and employees working on different

nomenclatures for years, besides the issue of refugees of 1947, 1965 & 1971 and the issues of KPs and the issues of flood affected people but these were not listed, due to some system of selection for listing.

We urge the Assembly to unanimously pass a resolution for sanction of full package of 2014 recommended by NC-Congress Govt. for refugees of 1947, 1965 and 1971 by the Centre and to release left out amount of 30 Lac per family and other components besides resolving their ST-2 status issue, the Assembly should also urge the Centre to grant adequate relief to e flood affected people waiting for relief and rehabilitation for nine months.

## Distinguished SL scholar Dr Medha visits SMVDU, explores academic collaborations

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**KATRA:** Shri Mata Vaishno Devi University (SMVDU) had the privilege of hosting Dr. Medha de Alwis, a distinguished scholar and post-doctoral researcher from Sri Lanka, known globally for her multifaceted contributions as a legal counsel, journalist, trainer, and public speaker.

During her visit, Dr. de Alwis actively engaged in a series of interactive sessions with faculty members, research scholars, and students across multiple departments.

These sessions were held at the Mechanical Engineering Department, the School of Architecture and Landscape Design, and included vibrant discussions with scholars and students on interdisciplinary learning, global exposure,



and professional excellence.

The visit was coordinated by the Office of International and Alumni Affairs, SMVDU, as part of its ongoing efforts to strengthen international academic linkages.

Vice Chancellor, Prof. Pragati Kumar, warmly felicitated Dr. de Alwis and held a detailed discussion on potential areas of collaboration between SMVDU and academic institutions in Sri Lanka. The discussions emphasized

shared cultural heritage and historical ties between India and Sri Lanka, paving the way for future partnerships.

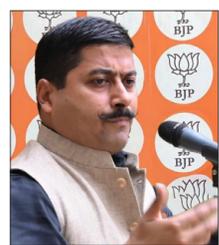
The interaction was also attended by Prof. Yugal Khajuria, Dean Alumni and International Affairs; Prof. Balbir Singh (Dean Academic Affairs, SMVDU), Dr. Yathesh Anand, Head, School of Mechanical Engineering; Ar. Abhinay Gupta, Head, School of Architecture and Landscape Design.

## From silence to celebration: Gaurav on Srinagar's Raghunath Temple revival

**JAMMU:** In a significant reflection of cultural revival and return to normalcy in Jammu & Kashmir, Ram Navami was celebrated at the historic Raghunath Temple after a gap of nearly 36 years.

The temple, located along the banks of the Jhelum River in the Fateh Kadal area of downtown Srinagar, was illuminated on the eve of the festival. Devotees gathered in large numbers as temple bells resonated, Vedic chants filled the air, and havan rituals were performed, creating a deeply spiritual atmosphere.

BJP Spokesperson and Convenor, International Affairs, Gaurav Gupta hailed the occasion as a historic milestone, stating that the revival of such celebrations clearly indicates that "Srinagar is firmly back on track towards peace, stability, and cultural resurgence."



He credited the leadership of LG Manoj Sinha for ensuring a secure and conducive environment that has made it possible for people to celebrate their religious traditions freely and without fear.

Gupta stated that for decades, such religious events had come to a halt due to terrorism and instability in the region.

"The resumption of Ram Navami celebrations at this historic temple after 36 years reflects a new era in Jammu & Kashmir, where cultural heritage is being restored and preserved," he

added. Gaurav Gupta also acknowledged the pivotal role of the Central Government under the leadership of Narendra Modi, stating that the revival of such cultural and religious traditions in Kashmir is the result of sustained efforts, close monitoring, and a clear vision from the Centre.

Gupta emphasized that the Centre's commitment towards preserving Kashmir's rich civilizational legacy and promoting inclusive development has played a crucial role in bringing back festivals like Ram Navami to historic shrines, sending a strong message of unity, stability, and cultural renaissance.

Highlighting the historical importance of the temple, Gupta noted that the Raghunath Temple, constructed in 1835 by Maharaja Gulab Singh and completed in 1860 by Maharaja Ranbir Singh,

## IIM Jammu organizes Hindi Workshop to strengthen official Language implementation

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**JAMMU:** The Indian Institute of Management Jammu organized a one-day Hindi Workshop under the aegis of the Official Language Office aimed at reinforcing the effective use of Hindi in official and administrative functioning.

The workshop witnessed enthusiastic participation and served as a significant step towards promoting linguistic inclusivity and administrative excellence.

The keynote session was delivered by Dr. Vichitrans Gupta, Deputy Director Implementation, Regional Implementation Office Eastern Region, Ministry of Home Affairs, Department of Official Language, Government of India. In a highly engaging and insightful address, he

spoke on recent amendments and progressive provisions introduced to strengthen the implementation of Hindi in official work. He emphasized the critical importance of adopting bilingual practices in administrative notings, official correspondence, and communications, including emails, underscoring that mool patrachar should be carried out in both Hindi and English. He further stressed the importance of trying to strike a balanced and harmonious use of Hindi and English in governance and administration. Reflecting on the linguistic heritage, he noted the foundational role of Sanskrit in the evolution of languages, while advocating for a practical and inclusive approach in contemporary official communication.

His session was enriched with simple, relatable

examples that enabled participants to better understand the practical application of official language policies. He also introduced useful digital tools such as Hindi Shabd Sindhu and Bahubhashi Anuvad Sarthi, encouraging their adoption for effective translation and communication.

Dr. Anuja Akhouri, Co-Chairperson, Hindi Rajbhasha Samiti, IIM Jammu emphasized that strengthening the use of Hindi in institutional processes enhances both administrative efficiency and cultural connectedness.

Dr. Ashish Isher, Hindi Rajbhasha Adhikari, IIM Jammu highlighted that consistent promotion of Rajbhasha fosters compliance with government norms while building a cohesive and inclusive work environment.

## Ashok Koul: BJP committed to empower every section, supports Divyang woman's self-reliance

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**SRINAGAR:** Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) J&K Cooperative Cell extended support to a Divyang woman in launching her pickle-making venture, an initiative aimed at promoting self-reliance and sustainable livelihood, committing itself to empowering marginalized sections of society.

J&K BJP General Secretary (Organization) Ashok Koul, along with senior party leaders Sofi Yousuf, Arif Raja, Altaf Thakur, Bilal Parray, and Co-Convenor of the Cooperative Cell Nisar Ahmad, were present on the occasion.

Ashok Koul, while addressing on the occasion, emphasized the party's deep-rooted commitment to social empowerment. He stated that true progress of society can only be achieved

when every individual, irrespective of physical or economic limitations, is given equal opportunities to grow and succeed.

He stressed that women empowerment is not merely a slogan but a continuous process that requires collective effort, policy support, and ground-level execution. Ashok Koul stressed that initiatives like these are crucial in transforming lives by instilling confidence and providing a source of steady income. He further added that the BJP-led vision focuses on creating an ecosystem where women and differently-abled individuals are not dependent but become contributors to the economy. He said that such small yet impactful steps strengthen the foundation of a self-reliant society and align with the broader goal of inclusive development.