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Regularisation to begin this yr;
30,000 vacancies to be filled: Omar

for decades. These employees have been struggling for 20, 30 and even 40 years. No government has been able to fully resolve the issue," the chief minister said.

"During discussion on the lieutenant governor's address and later during the Budget session, I clearly stated that we will begin the process of regularisation of these employees in a legally and financially viable manner this year. God willing," he added.

The chief minister said, "A committee, under the supervision of chief secretary, has been constituted to examine the matter to ensure that any policy framed does not get stuck in courts or in the finance department. Once the committee submits its report and the groundwork is completed in a transparent manner, we will place everything before people," he said.

Rejecting any suggestion of a hurried decision, Omar said regularisation could not be done overnight.

"I am not willing to mislead these employees by merely signing a paper without proper preparation," he said, adding that the number of such workers, whether 70,000, 80,000 or one lakh, would be worked out through a proper timetable.

"Over one lakh daily wagers and casual labourers are currently engaged across government departments in Jammu and Kashmir," the chief minister had informed the legislative assembly on Tuesday, assuring that a legally sustainable approach was being adopted on the issue of their regularisation.

On the matter of employment generation, the chief minister mentioned that there was a clear distinction between the creation of posts and appointments.

"We have created posts, but filled far more - around 6,000 to 6,500 posts," he said, reiterating that the government aimed to fill nearly 30,000 vacant posts this year without creating new positions.

He also assured the House that all vacancies would be filled in a transparent and time-bound manner in coordination with the selection board and the public service commission, to avoid legal challenges that had derailed recruitment processes in the past.

Speaking department-wise, he said the core purpose of the GAD was to ensure smooth functioning of administration without difficulties.

Highlighting the financial constraints, the chief minister noted that tax and non-tax revenue covers only about 25 pc of expenditure, while 75 pc comes through central share and assistance.

"This is not a situation created today, it has been inherited," he said, adding that efforts were underway to improve financial self-reliance.

"The new system of centrally sponsored schemes, where each scheme now operates through a separate RBI account, require the UT's matching share before funds can be utilised. This has reduced financial flexibility, and many states and UTs have faced similar consequences," he said, expressing confidence that implementation would improve next year.

He also underlined the importance of SASCI, calling it one of the best schemes for J&K, especially due to the provision of 50-year interest-free loans.

"If we take a loan of Rs 3,000 cr today, after 50 years it will be equivalent to about Rs 97 crore," he said, urging maximum utilisation of such funding for development.

He strongly asserted that the government has ended off-budget borrowing practices.

"Today, in J&K, not a single penny is off-budget borrowing. Whatever debt we take is fully recorded. There is no HUNDI system," he said.

Acknowledging delays in retirement benefits, Omar Abdullah said the government had significantly increased disbursements.

"In 2026, we released Rs 3,173.39 cr in GPF, Rs 1,170.21 cr in gratuity, Rs 838.28 cr in commutation, and Rs 425 cr in leave salary," he informed the House.

He emphasised that climate response was now a compulsion for J&K, especially after the impacts of drought and heavy rains last year.

He said a fund for climate change mitigation had been prepared, and stressed the need to assign departmental responsibility for studying and addressing climate change impacts before undertaking further budgetary measures.

Calling tourism a vital sector, Omar said the government successfully revived the industry despite difficult circumstances, following the tragic Pahalgam incident.

He expressed hope that by May, all remaining closed destinations would be reopened.

He also spoke about projects like the Jammu Riverfront, envisioning its development similar to Ahmedabad's Sabarmati Riverfront.

He emphasised the need to expand tourism into remote areas where industrial scope was limited, particularly in Jammu, which already attracts over one crore pilgrims annually to Mata Vaishnodevi.

"If we can retain even 10 pc of these tourists for 6-7 days, it can transform Jammu's economy," he said.

He termed power both a challenge and an opportunity, noting that J&K consumes more electricity than it generates.

He said J&K has an 18,000 MW power potential, of which only 3,000-3,500 MW has been developed.

"Our intention is that in the next 2-3 years, we will add another 3,000-3,500 MW," he said, with a long-term goal of developing the remaining 11,000 MW over the next 10-15 years.

He assured full implementation of the RDSS scheme to improve distribution infrastructure and reiterated that the government has no intention of privatising distribution companies.

On encroachments, Omar Abdullah assured that action would begin against "big sharks" and land grabbers rather than the poor.

Regarding solid waste management, he said legacy waste was a serious issue across cities and addressing it would bring major benefits.

He announced that 2-3 major vertical housing projects would be launched in Jammu and Srinagar this year, with special focus on Economically Weaker Sections (EWS).

On issues raised regarding CDF and related matters, he assured MLAs that savings under the scheme belong entirely to them.

"This money is yours. These savings will not go back to the treasury," he said, adding that a special order would be issued for clarity.

On the Information Department, Omar Abdullah said there would be further rationalisation in advertisements, ensuring transparency based on circulation, readership and reach.

"I don't believe in media censorship. I never asked any media house to not write against me or in my favour. I will never use advertisement as a pressure point," he asserted.

The MLAs withdrew their cut motions after Omar assured the House that all issues raised would be duly addressed.

J&K will very soon be freed from scourge of terrorism: LG

in the veins of displaced families even today," Sinha said.

"The younger generation must never forget that Pakistan-backed terrorists have also spilled the blood of thou-

sands of innocent Kashmiris. Many cases are so heartrending that words falter in their retelling. Justice has begun flowing to those families since last year, with efforts underway to fulfill their employment needs alongside other essentials," he said.

He said that in August 2019 when PM Modi abolished Article 370 and fully integrated J&K, that day instilled the faith that the young generation of Kashmiri Pandit Community could reclaim those roots without fear.

He was speaking at the release of the book titled "Kashmir-Nativity Regained", authored by Prof Ashok Kaul.

"Prof Kaul's book serves as a poignant reminder of Kashmiri Pandit community's resilience. This is an era of reconstruction. Through his words, Prof Kaul proclaims to the world that the Kashmiri Pandit community is at the very heart of J&K's narrative," the LG said.

Prof Umesh Rai, Vice Chancellor, University of Jammu; Shri Rajiv Jha, Publisher, Readers Press; Prof. Neelu Rohmetra; Dean Research Studies; Dr Neeraj Sharma, Registrar, Jammu University; eminent literary personalities, people from different walks of life and students attended the book release ceremony.

Divisional commissioner Ramesh Kumar, IGP Bhim Sen Tuti, deputy commissioner, Jammu, Rakesh Minhas and other senior officials were among those present on the occasion.

OBC quota in local bodies envisaged: Govt tells LA

for OBC reservation in both rural and urban local bodies.

The government stated that a three-member Commission, headed by Justice (retd) Janak Raj Kotwal, was constituted to determine the OBC reservation quota.

"The recommendations of the commission are currently under government consideration and no final decision has been taken yet," the government added.

Soldier shoots self dead

mortem, officials said.

The reason behind the soldier's extreme step was yet to be ascertained. Police had, however, initiated inquest proceedings in the matter, officials said.

Speaker admits PDP MLA's resolution

ernment of India and state governments to take immediate and effective measures to prevent, investigate and prosecute such offences with strict enforcement of law".

Man held with 2 pistols

magazines and 15 live rounds from his possession without any valid documents, officials said.

His sustained questioning was in progress and a case under relevant sections of law was registered against him at Nowshera police station, the officials added.

13,000 posts of teachers vacant: Itoo

4,992 in Kashmir division.

According to the district-wise data, Rajouri (1,416), Kathua (1,332), Jammu (1,234), and Poonch (946) are among the districts with the highest vacancies in Jammu division, while Anantnag (1,016), Budgam (797), Pulwama (764) and Kupwara (621) top the list in Kashmir.

Regarding promotional vacancies of masters, Itoo said 1,722 posts were vacant in Kashmir and 224 in Jammu division.

Itoo said all promotional vacancies were being filled through Divisional Level Departmental Promotion Committees (DPCs) in accordance with rules.

In response to another query, the minister said that no middle, high or higher secondary school had been upgraded since November 2024.

"There is no immediate proposal under consideration for upgradation of schools to the next level, particularly in hilly and remote areas of Doda district," Itoo said.

She added that upgradation requires the development of infrastructure and creation of teaching and non-teaching posts, which involves financial implications and requires concurrence from the Finance Department.

However, whenever such a proposal is mooted, feasible schools in Doda district would be considered strictly in accordance with feasibility reports, existing norms and requirements, the minister said.

Modi unveils MANAV vision for AI, pitches for human control of technology

manity's welfare in the AI-driven world of the 21st century.

AI, he said, must be given an open sky, but command must remain in human hands.

Citing the example of GPS, the prime minister said the navigation tool gives suggestions on directions to take, but the final decision is that of the user.

"The direction in which humanity takes AI today will determine our future," Modi said.

Emphasising the importance of child safety, the prime minister said just as school syllabi are curated, the AI space must also be child-safe and family-guided.

"Today, there are two kinds of people - those who see fear in AI and those who see fortune. India sees fortune and future in AI, backed by talent, energy capacity, and policy clarity," Modi said.

The prime minister also noted that three Indian companies launched their AI models and apps during the Summit which reflect the talent of the youth and showcase the depth and diversity of solutions that India contributes to the global AI landscape.

"AI will make our systems smarter, more efficient and more impactful. It will open more opportunities for people to take up creative roles. It is a major opportunity for innovation, entrepreneurship and the creation of new industries," he said at the event attended by world leaders and CEOs of leading companies.

"Some countries believe that AI should be developed in a confidential and closed manner. But India is different. We believe AI will truly serve the good of the world when it is shared and its codes are open. Only then will millions of young minds be able to improve it further," he said.

He said the expo is taking place in India, which represents one sixth of humanity, and a country with the world's largest young population and a hub of the largest tech talent pool.

"Artificial intelligence marks a transformative chapter in human history. India is not just a part of the AI revolution, but is leading and shaping it," he said.

The prime minister said India not only builds technology but also adopts it at an unprecedented pace.

"Some people have doubts about new technology. But the way the younger generation is embracing AI is unprecedented. There has also been tremendous enthusiasm here regarding the AI Summit exhibition," he said.

"In the course of human history, there have been certain turning points that shaped entire centuries. These turning points set the direction of civilisation and transform the pace of development. Artificial intelligence is one such transformation in history," he noted.

Modi said India builds new technology and also adapts it rapidly but the real question is not what AI can do in future, "it is what can we do with AI in the present".

He said AI is a transformative power; if it strays away from its goals, it will lead to destruction and if used well, it

will give solutions.

"Welfare and happiness of all is our benchmark for AI to ensure that humans don't become a data point or raw material, we have to democratise AI. We have to give an open sky to AI, but at the same time we have to keep the reins in our hands," he said.

The prime minister said AI is making machines intelligent and at the same time, it is multiplying human capabilities many times over.

India's perspective on AI is reflected in the theme of this summit which is welfare and happiness for all, he said.

Modi said the present journey from machine learning to learning machine is not only rapid, but also profound and extensive.

"Therefore, we must keep our vision grand and fulfil our responsibility with equal magnitude. Along with the present generation, we must also be concerned about what form of AI we will hand over to the coming generations," he said.

"It must be made a means of inclusion and empowerment, and especially in the Global South," he said.

Sri Lanka President Anura Kumara Disanayaka and Bhutan Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay, Mauritius Prime Minister Navinchandra Ramgoolam, Croatia Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic, Serbia President Aleksandar Vucic, Seychelles Vice President Sebastien Pillay, Estonia President Alar Karis, and Finland Prime Minister Petteri Orpo were among others at the event.

Infiltration bid foiled along LoC

with swift and calibrated fire, successfully foiling the infiltration attempt, it added.

"Our troops suitably repositioned and re-oriented to ensure comprehensive domination of the area through integrated ground and aerial surveillance. A high state of operational alert continues to be maintained across the sector," the corps said in a post on X.

According to officials, a search operation was launched shortly after the foiling of the infiltration attempt, and it was continuing when reports last came in.

Govt initiates process for liquidation of SCARD bank

ture & Rural Development (NABARD) and limited financial assistance from the UT government, as the bank was largely dependent on refinance and government support, he said and added, "So, liabilities exceeded assets, severely affecting the bank's ability to meet depositor obligations."

"The bank has stopped payments of matured fixed deposits, including at Bishnah branch, due to acute liquidity constraints, leaving several depositors awaiting disbursement," he said.

"The repayment to depositors forms part of the overall liquidation and depositor-protection framework approved by the government. A comprehensive 'Know Your Customer' (KYC) verification exercise covering all branches, including Bishnah, has been completed to authenticate depositor claims," he told the House.

He said that upon the issuance of winding-up order and appointment of liquidator(s), duly verified claims would be settled in a phased manner strictly as per statutory provisions and the prescribed order of priority.

"The Deposit Insurance & Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC) mechanism has not been invoked as it applies only to banking institutions registered under the Banking Regulation Act, 1949, adding that J&K SCARD Bank is not covered under the Act," he added.

Reaffirming the government's commitment to safeguarding depositors' interests, the minister said a detailed projection of depositor liabilities had been compiled and submitted to the government for consideration, including provisioning through the budgetary process in accordance with law.

SC slams freebies culture in politics, says it 'hampers' economic growth

then free electricity, who will work? And what will happen to the work culture?" the CJJ asked, adding that States appeared to be doing little beyond paying salaries and distributing largesse.

At the same time, the court clarified that its concern was not directed at any one State but had wider national implications. Justice Bagchi said States should place planned and structured welfare expenditure before legislatures, with clear budgetary justification, particularly for unemployment and development-oriented schemes.

The observations came while hearing the Tamil Nadu power utility's challenge to Rule 23 of the Electricity (Amendment) Rules, 2024, framed by the Centre. The rule mandates cost-reflective tariffs and restricts the revenue gap between approved annual revenue requirement and estimated revenue from tariffs to 3%, except in cases of natural calamity.

The Tamil Nadu government has argued that the sustainability mandate directly affects its policy of providing free and subsidised electricity. In its plea, it has sought quashing of the rule, contending that it is arbitrary, unconstitutional, violative of Article 14 and ultra vires the Electricity Act, 2003.

The Supreme Court has issued notice to the Centre and other respondents on the plea and sought their response.

SC to start hearing petitions on May 5

and Justices Jyomlaya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi issued procedural directions with regard to final hearings on the petitions which are pending since 2019-2020.

The bench said it will hear petitioners including the lead the Indian Union of Muslim League (IUML) for one-and-a-half days and the Centre will be granted a day for advancing its arguments.

The CJJ said the bench would conclude the hearing on the petitions on May 12.

The bench asked the parties to file additional documents and submissions within four weeks.

The bench said it will hear the pleas related to pan-India application of the CAA first and then take note of the petitions pertaining to Assam and Tripura later.

EC asks 22 states, UTs to prepare for final phase of SIR

and three UTs has seen frequent tweaking in schedules. Like Bihar, political parties have approached the Supreme Court challenging SIR in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

Recently, TMC president and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee personally pleaded before a bench of the Chief Justice of India against the poll roll cleanup exercise in her state.

As the EC was preparing for SIR in Bihar, its officials had claimed that several nationals from Bangladesh, Nepal and Myanmar were found by its grassroots-level functionaries.

But eventually, the poll authority did not share any numbers or proof of such people who were not eligible to be on the voters' list.

Opposition parties had dubbed the EC's claims as a ploy

to carry out SIR to target electors not aligned to BJP and its allies.

'Bad things' will happen if 'meaningful deal' not made: Trump warns Iran

dent Trump."

Trump has repeatedly threatened military action against Iran.

Iran's atomic energy chief on Thursday said "no country can deprive Iran of the right" to nuclear enrichment, following fresh US warnings that there were "many reasons" to strike the Islamic republic.

A previous attempt at negotiations collapsed when Israel launched surprise strikes on Iran last June, beginning a 12-day war that Washington briefly joined to bomb Iranian nuclear sites.

Iran has insisted that the talks with the US be limited to the nuclear issue, though Washington has previously pushed for Tehran's ballistic missiles programme and support for armed groups in the region to be on the table.

The US has meanwhile been building up its military forces near Iran, including warships, fighter jets, and refuelling aircraft, laying the foundation for a potentially sustained campaign against Iran -- should Trump give the order.

Washington has ordered a second aircraft carrier to the region, with the first, the USS Abraham Lincoln and its nearly 80 aircraft, positioned about 700 kilometres (435 miles) from the Iranian coast as of Sunday, satellite images showed.

Iran has sought to display its own military might, with its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps holding war games earlier this week in the Strait of Hormuz.

Iranian politicians have repeatedly threatened to block the strait, a major global conduit for oil and gas.

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said after the latest talks that Tehran had agreed with Washington on "guiding principles", but US Vice President JD Vance said Iran had not yet acknowledged all of Washington's red lines.

Speaking on Wednesday, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian insisted "We do not want war" but suggested Tehran could not give in to US demands.

Amid the escalating warnings, Poland on Thursday ordered all its citizens in Iran to "leave immediately".

Germany meanwhile moved troops out of northern Iraq, reducing its footprint to the minimum necessary to keep its base there functional, citing regional tensions.

Russia called for restraint, with a Kremlin spokesperson saying, "We are currently witnessing an unprecedented escalation of tension in the region, but we still hope that political and diplomatic means and negotiations will continue to prevail in the search for a settlement".

Lt Gen Pratik reviews combat preparedness at Siachen

deployed at one of the world's highest and coldest military zones and urged all ranks to embrace technology to effectively meet the challenges of modern warfare.

"Lt Gen Pratik Sharma, Army Commander Northern Command, visited Siachen Brigade to review combat potential and operational preparedness," the Northern Command Headquarters said in a post on X.

He also visited the Siachen Ski Node, where he evaluated the training infrastructure and skiing capabilities, and interacted with troops operating in the extremely harsh climate and terrain.

Commending their high morale and steadfast commitment, he reiterated the importance of technological adaptation in maintaining operational superiority in the Siachen glacier.

The Army commander yesterday visited forward posts in eastern Ladakh, where he had reviewed security situation and operational preparedness.

He also interacted with troops and commended their unwavering dedication, high state of combat readiness and professional excellence while operating in the challenging terrain.

HC to hear ED plea against Sonia, Rahul

Dotex Merchandise Pvt Ltd and Sunil Bhandari on the ED's plea.

The ED has accused Sonia and Rahul Gandhi, as well as late Congress leaders Motilal Vora and Oscar Fernandes, along with Suman Dubey, Sam Pitroda, and a private company, Young Indian, of conspiracy and money laundering.

It has been alleged that they acquired properties worth approximately Rs 2,000 crore belonging to Associated Journals Limited (AJL), which publishes the National Herald newspaper.

It further alleged that the Gandhis held the majority 76 per cent shares in Young Indian, which "fraudulently" usurped the assets of AJL in exchange for a Rs 90 crore loan.

In its order, the trial court has said that an investigation and the consequent prosecution complaint (equivalent to a chargesheet) pertaining to the offence of money laundering is "not maintainable" in the absence of an FIR for the offence mentioned in the schedule to the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

It said the agency's probe stemmed from a private complaint and not an FIR and despite receiving the complaint made by BJP leader Subramanian Swamy and the consequent summoning order in 2014, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) refrained from registering an FIR in relation to the alleged scheduled offence.

The ED, in its plea, has claimed that the trial court order has in effect given a hall pass to a category of money launderers only on the ground that the scheduled offence is reported by a private individual by way of a complaint to a magistrate.

It claimed there are such grave allegations levelled against Gandhis and others which cannot be brushed aside lightly by relying upon judicial precedents cited to conclude that the ingredients of the criminal offences alleged are lacking.

"The sole ground given for declining cognisance is that a prosecution complaint filed by an authorised officer under the PMLA cannot be based on a scheduled offence emanating from a private complaint filed by a private individual and such scheduled offence must be registered only by a law enforcement agency, that is, either by way of an FIR by the police or a complaint by a person authorised to investigate the scheduled offence," the plea said.

The ED said the special judge has failed to appreciate that cognisance taken by a competent court on a private complaint stands on a much higher footing than a mere FIR registered by police wherein there is a possibility that cognisance may be declined after filing of a chargesheet by police.

"In the present matter, cognisance of the private complaint constituting the scheduled offence had already been taken by the competent court. Hence, the scheduled offence stood on a much higher pedestal than a mere FIR lodged by police," it added.

The agency added that at the time of cognisance, the scope of inquiry is very narrow and the court has to strictly restrict itself to the averments in the complaint and has to only see whether there are sufficient grounds to initiate the process.