

Cont. From Page 1

Direction of India's rise clear, unstopppable: Jaishankar

countable to its people."

The government has also faced criticism in recent days after US treasury secretary Scott Bessent's announcement on Friday of a temporary 30-day waiver from American sanctions to "allow" Indian refiners to purchase Russian oil. The opposition Congress party, in particular, has accused the government of allowing the US to dictate the country's foreign and economic policies.

Bessent followed up on his announcement by telling the media on Saturday that the US treasury department is letting India to start buying Russian oil as part of Trump's policy of "American energy dominance".

Shiv Khori's awakening begins, want to make J&K nation's spiritual heart: LG

is experiencing a genuine spiritual, cultural, and social renaissance. The UT is now re-emerging as a center of knowledge, art, music, and philosophy," he said.

"We are relighting with full conviction the flame of tapas and dharma, for which this land was once renowned across the world," the LG said and called upon youth to create balance in inner and outer life.

"This renaissance is for you. Come to the sacred shrines of this land and allow yourself to feel what centuries of unbroken devotion feel like when it meets you in silence. That energy does not belong to the past. It flows still- and it is yours to draw from," he said.

The LG also highlighted a series of upcoming facilities designed to enhance the safety and convenience of pilgrims at visiting the holy Shri Shiv Khori shrine.

"The new helipad is slated for completion this month. Heli-services for the devotees of Shri Shiv Khori is also expected to start from the month of April. To protect pilgrims from unpredictable weather and shooting stones, a protective track shed will also be completed soon," he said.

"A future development roadmap has also been prepared. Recognizing the heavy footfall during festive seasons, an alternative track between Ram Mandir and Shiv Khori will be constructed for decongestion. Comprehensive repair and renovation work of the Ransoo Shrine building and existing tracks will be taken up, while adequate sanitation facilities will be provided along the track. A serai and langar facility will also come up for pilgrims in Ransoo," he added.

"The time has come for the Shri Shiv Khori Shrine Board to introduce a 'Sound and Light Show' to enrich the experience of the devotees. With the collective interest and consensus, the feasibility of a ropeway project may also be explored," he said.

"We are fully committed to creating a thriving ecosystem where local traders, artisans, youth, and women can access new opportunities, ensuring prosperity for every family," he said.

Sinha also flagged off garbage collection vehicle donated by J&K Bank to Shri Shiv Khori Shrine Board.

The works inaugurated today include renovation of Shivam Dwar (Darshani Deodi); repair and renovation of Mahadev Bhawan including Yatra Registration Counter; existing Ghat refurbishment (near Shivam Dwar); Gazebos near bathing Ghat and near Shani Mandir; Toilet Complexes; renovation of Medical Kiosk near Ram Mandir; construction of Pony Shed at Ransoo near Darshani Deodi and installation of Lights at various locations.

MLA Kuldeep Raj Dubey, JSW group's CMD Sajjan Jindal, divisional commissioner Ramesh Kumar, Udhampur-Reasi range DIG Sarah Rizvi, Reasi DC Kumar Abhishek, senior officials, prominent citizens from different walks of life and devotees in large number were among those present on the occasion.

Sinha extends greetings on Int'l Women's Day

as vital partners in country's development journey," he said in his message.

"Women's empowerment stands as the strongest catalyst for development and poverty eradication. Today, our women tirelessly work to reshape society into a fairer, more equitable order. Countless talented women from the Union Territory are excelling in their fields, each poised to help build a peaceful and prosperous Jammu Kashmir. International Women's Day offers us a vital moment to reaffirm our dedication to upholding women's rights, ensuring justice, safeguarding their security, and advancing their well-being," the LG added.

"Let us unite in building a society where women enjoy equal chances, advancing and thriving through their true potential. I extend my best wishes to everyone for a truly successful observance of this special day," he said.

Forester placed under suspension

The action follows a seizure report submitted by Forest Protection Force (FPF) after a raid in compartment 21 of Rajwar forests on March 5. During the operation, the FPF team detected large-scale illegal felling of Deodar and Kail trees, officials said.

Officials said timber and firewood amounting to around 410 cubic feet were seized from the spot, including nine logs measuring 207 cubic feet and about 15 quintals of firewood. The team also reported damage to a Deodar tree with an estimated standing volume of 155 cubic feet, whose timber was found missing. An illegal motor chain-saw was reportedly used in the operation.

The report alleged that the beat staff, including the Block Officer, did not cooperate with the FPF team during the seizure operation. Malik was also accused of refusing to take custody of the seized timber despite directions from senior officers and allegedly misbehaving with officials at the site.

Authorities said the scale of damage suggested serious negligence or possible connivance of the officer responsible for protecting the forest area.

Pending inquiry, Malik was attached to the Forest Circle Office, Baramulla, and directed not to leave the headquarters without prior permission.

Educated, self-reliant women contribute to progressive nation: Murmu

dogra airport.

She noted the absence of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and her ministers, saying, "Mamata Banerjee is like my younger sister, but I don't know why she didn't come."

According to protocol, the chief minister or a minister of the state government is usually present to receive the President. Siliguri Mayor Gautam Deb was the only state government representative present at the airport to receive her.

Murmu suggested the venue change might have been intentional, stating, "Perhaps the state government does not want the welfare of tribals, and that is why they were prevented from coming here."

She also highlighted broader challenges, saying, "Someone was not willing for this event to take place. It seems that some do not want the Santals to progress, to learn and to unite to be strong."

However, citing security and other logistical reasons, authorities shifted the venue to Goshapur, officials said.

DDOs asked to follow rules while processing payments

contractors procure raw materials and consumables in ways that do not match the scope and specifications mentioned in the Bill of Quantities (BOQ) or without proper documentation, leading to violations of statutory provisions and possible loss of government revenue.

To ensure transparency and financial discipline, DDOs have been instructed to obtain valid tax invoices and related documents while processing bills, verify that materials and services match the approved contract specifications, and ensure compliance with GST rules, including proper mention of GSTIN, invoice number, date, description of goods or services, taxable value and tax amount.

The circular further states that verified copies of invoices must be kept on record along with the contractor's bill for audit and verification purposes, and no payment will be released unless these requirements are fully met.

'Illegal mining razed Budgam's Sukhnag river'

According to the report, the river-recognised as a designated trout fish stream-has suffered severe ecological degradation due to extensive and illegal mining operations.

To restore the water body, the committee, led by the Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM), Beerwah, and the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO), Pir Panjal, has recommended filling the deep trenches created by mining, levelling the riverbed, and constructing gabion structures and check-dams. The panel has also suggested the creation of artificial pools to facilitate trout breeding.

The NGT, which is hearing a petition filed by Dr. Raja Muzaffar Bhat, had previously constituted a supervisory committee to oversee the investigation. This panel includes the Member Secretary of the JKPC, the Regional Officer (Chandigarh) of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC), and a nominee from the GB Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment (NIHE).

In a virtual meeting held on February 24, members of the supervisory committee noted that the report is largely qualitative. Dr. Sandipan Mukherjee, a Scientist with the NIHE, stressed the need for a physical spot visit to assess the damage accurately. Dr. Khurshid Alam Khan from the MoEF&CC pointed out that additional quantitative data is required to determine the exact extent of the damage and fix responsibility.

During the recent hearing on February 26, the NGT directed the expert panel to visit the site within weeks. The tribunal specifically ordered the committee to assess the losses suffered by Peerzada Rayees, a local trout fish farmer from Sail Beerwah, whose farm was reportedly damaged. The directive references a communication from the J&K Director of Fisheries confirming the loss.

"The expert committee is expected to visit the site shortly as the case is listed for the next hearing on March 27, 2026," said the petitioner, Dr. Raja Muzaffar Bhat. He added that the report must be submitted to the tribunal a week prior to the hearing.

The NGT had previously imposed a complete ban on mining in the Sukhnag river in January 2025 after a joint fact-finding team reported extensive devastation during a site visit in December 2024.

Man on run after killing daughter held

J&K police, who formally arrested him in the case. According to police, Kumar was working as a construction labourer in Jammu when he allegedly hit her daughter on the head with a stick, suspecting that she was not his biological child, officials said.

The girl later succumbed to her injuries during treatment, the officials added.

After committing the crime, the accused fled Jammu and remained absconding for several years. He later started living under the false name "Rajveer" in Delhi.

The arrest came, following a request from the Jammu and Kashmir police to trace the accused in the decade-old case, officials said.

Acting on the inputs regarding his stay in Sanjay Colony area of Bhati Mines, Delhi police apprehended him, officials said.

Prostitution racket busted; 3 girls rescued

teenage girls from the premises. Three persons were also apprehended for their alleged involvement in the illegal activities, officials said, adding that further legal proceedings under the relevant provisions of law had been initiated.

According to the preliminary information, the house was allegedly being used for carrying out trafficking activities. Certain individuals present at the scene were allegedly engaging the girls in prostitution, officials said.

A case under relevant sections of the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act was registered at Channi Himmat police station.

Iran will be hit very hard, says Prez Trump

structure over the last seven days.

There were air raid alerts and explosions heard above Jerusalem as well as Gulf cities Dubai, Manama and near Riyadh -- where Saudi Arabia intercepted a ballistic missile fired at an air base, housing US military personnel.

The UAE said it had intercepted 15 ballistic missiles and 119 drones on Saturday, but video footage showed one projectile crashing into Dubai airport, the world's busiest for international traffic in usual circumstances.

An explosion took place next to an airport building and parked planes close to a passing train.

Jordan also accused Iran of "targeting vital installations" inside the country with 119 missiles and drones over the last week, according to military spokesman Mustafa Hayari.

The Iranian health ministry put the civilian death toll at 926 on Friday, with around 6,000 injured.

Israel has also intensified its air strikes on Lebanon, repeatedly bombing and ordering the evacuation of Beirut's densely populated southern suburbs, where the Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah holds sway.

Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz on Saturday warned Lebanese President Joseph Aoun that his country would pay a "very heavy price" if it failed to disarm Hezbollah.

Israeli commandos also launched an unsuccessful mission overnight to try to retrieve the remains of a navigator lost in 1986.

Lebanon's health ministry said at least 217 people have been killed in Israeli air strikes over the last week, while Prime Minister Nawaf Salam has warned a "humanitarian disaster is looming".

The consequences of the conflict reach far beyond those in the immediate firing line, however.

Global stock markets have slumped, while crude oil prices have surged, with analysts warning that there appears to be no clear path to ending a conflict that US and Israeli officials have suggested could last a month or more.

Trump, who has given varying reasons for starting the war, has spurned fresh talks with Tehran, and said on Truth Social on Friday that "there will be no deal with Iran except UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER".

Trump has also promised to help rebuild the country's economy if Tehran installs someone "acceptable" to him to replace Iran's late supreme leader.

Amir Saied Irvani, Iran's ambassador to the United Nations, said the United States would have no role in selecting Khamenei's successor.

"The selection of Iran's leadership will take place strictly in accordance with our constitutional procedures and solely by the will of the Iranian people, without any foreign interference," he added.

Though Iranian retaliation has been inflicted widely across the Middle East, US rivals China and Russia have stayed largely out of the fray despite their ties to the Islamic Republic.

Russian President Vladimir Putin voiced support for an "immediate" ceasefire during a phone call with Iranian counterpart Masoud Pezeshkian on Friday, the Kremlin said.

US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said the United States is "not concerned" about reports that Russia is providing intelligence to Iran on US troop positions and movements.

The war has killed six US service members and Trump is to attend the return of their bodies at a transfer ceremony at Dover Air Force Base in Delaware on Saturday.

Judiciary must protect environment but not hinder development: CJI

we use our constitutional machinery to ensure that our economic goals are achieved, but not at the "irreversible" cost of our environmental capital.

"To appreciate the significance of this body of work, we must remember the economic context in which it was delivered. That was the late 90s and 80s, when India was entering an aggressive phase of industrialisation and liberalisation. The judiciary had a very genuine apprehension, namely that growth and infrastructure may not come at the cost of our rivers, forests, and air.

"At that time, environmental regulations were still relatively new. Like Impact assessments, public hearings, and scientific baselines were not as robust as they are today.

"In that setting, a strong rights-based environmental jurisprudence was not only natural but necessary. It served as a counterweight to unregulated exploitation," Kant said.

The CJI said that though India's population has increased sharply and its aspirations have multiplied, the quantum of natural resources remains broadly the same.

He said the task before the courts is one of careful constitutional balance, ensuring that environmental laws are enforced with seriousness.

Kant rued that the focus is gradually shifting from merely addressing environmental harm after it has occurred.

"The judiciary in that sense has gone beyond mere saying 'if you pollute you will pay', rather now it asks 'have you done everything reasonably possible to avoid polluting in the first phase itself,'" he said.

The CJI pointed out that the burden is increasing on the project proponent to demonstrate strict compliance with environmental standards.

"So, how to strike a balance, the present needs, future rights and national aspirations," he said.

Justice Kuldeep Singh's environmental jurisprudence opens a template in that regard, and reminds us that the Constitution is not indifferent to rivers, forest and air, he said.

"Our task today is to carry forward that template, in the context of new technologies and new economic models, to ensure that law does not lag too far behind scientific realities," the CJI added.

Clash breaks out inside prison

Officials said additional personnel were deployed and security was tightened inside and around the prison premises as a precautionary measure.

Bid to smuggle phones to jail inmate foiled

Preliminary inquiry revealed that the parcel had been booked from south Kashmir's Pulwama district, officials said.

Following the recovery, the authorities seized the mobile phones and informed police.

A case was registered in this connection and further investigation had been initiated to ascertain the involvement of persons behind the attempt to smuggle the phones into the jail, officials said.

Kashmir was, is, will always be integral part of India: Kavinder

but a symbol of India's civilisation, spirituality and resilience."

He remarked that Kashmir holds an emotional place in the hearts of all Indians and that its culture, traditions and history are deeply connected with the idea of India.

Referring to the ancient origins of Kashmir associated with Maharishi Kashyap, he highlighted the region's rich heritage, reflecting India's ethos of unity in diversity.

"Sacred sites such as Sharda Peeth and Amarnath, along with revered Sufi shrines and Buddhist monasteries, have long represented spiritual harmony and cultural coexistence in the region," he said.

He also acknowledged the difficult decades experienced by the region due to turmoil and conflict. He said the suffering of people in Kashmir during those years should always be remembered with sensitivity and compassion.

The pain of mothers and families who lost their loved ones, he added, remains part of the collective memory and reinforces the need to build a peaceful and prosperous future.

Highlighting the historic decision of August 5, 2019, Gupta said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the abrogation of Article 370 marked a transformative moment for Jammu and Kashmir. The decision ensured that the same constitutional rights and legal protections available to citizens across India are fully applicable to the people of the region, he added.

Gupta said the change had ushered in a new era of opportunity, empowerment and development. Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, he said, were moving ahead with renewed confidence, with expanding opportunities and growing aspirations among the people.

He highlighted major infrastructure projects such as the Zojila Tunnel and Z-Morh Tunnel, which are improving connectivity and transforming seasonal routes into all-weather lifelines, bringing remote areas closer to the national mainstream.

He also pointed to the expansion of educational and healthcare infrastructure, including new medical colleges, IITs, IIMs and AIIMS, enabling youth from the region to access quality opportunities closer to home.

He noted that the successful hosting of a G20 meeting in Srinagar symbolised the region's growing confidence and global visibility. "Tourism in Jammu and Kashmir has also witnessed record numbers, reflecting renewed faith among visitors," he said.

Sharing his experience as LG of Ladakh since he assumed the charge in July 2025, Gupta said he had travelled extensively across remote and challenging terrains to understand the aspirations of the people.

He praised the resilience and courage of Ladakh's residents, who continue to thrive despite harsh climatic conditions.

"Since attaining Union Territory status in 2019, Ladakh has made significant progress in solar energy, sustainable tourism and entrepreneurship, while its youth are excelling in fields such as defence services, administration, sports and business," he added.

He emphasised that development and cultural preservation can progress together. Ladakh, he said, demonstrates that modern growth and ancient traditions complement each other and strengthen the nation.

Clarifying the idea of integration, he said harmony with the national mainstream does not mean loss of identity. India's strength lies in its diversity, where languages, traditions and cultures flourish while remaining united.

Invoking the vision of "Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat," he said that from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and Ladakh to Lakshadweep, India stands united, strong and indivisible. "Kashmir was, is, and will always remain an integral and proud part of India," he affirmed.

He also commended the humanitarian ideals of Rotary International, particularly its principle of "Service Above Self," and encouraged the organisation to expand initiatives in vocational training, healthcare and youth entrepreneurship in remote regions.

He expressed confidence that collective efforts by citizens, institutions and organisations like Rotary will continue to strengthen unity, development and harmony across the country.

Later, RI district governor Rohit Oberoi along with director Gurjeet Singh Sheiko presented 'Rotary World Change-maker Award' to Gupta for his outstanding public service and contributions towards development, good governance and nation-building.

Cong slams PM's 'deafening' silence over US 'permission' on Russian oil

supplied in oil. Yesterday, the Treasury (Department) agreed to let our allies in India start buying Russian oil that was already on the water," US treasury secretary Scott Bessent said on Friday.

"The Indians had been very good actors. We had asked them to stop buying sanctioned Russian oil this fall. They did. They were going to substitute it with US oil. But to ease the temporary gap of oil around the world, we have given them permission to accept the Russian oil. We may un-sanction other Russian oil," he said.

Bessent added that there are hundreds of millions of sanctioned barrels of crude currently on ships. He said that by removing sanctions on these shipments, the US treasury could quickly increase supply in the market.

"There are hundreds of millions of sanctioned barrels of sanctioned crude on the water, and in essence, by un-sanctioning them, Treasury can create supply. And we are looking at that. We are going to keep a cadence of announcing measures to bring relief to the market during this conflict," he said.

In an interview, Wright said global oil supplies are strong in the long term, but there is a need to quickly bring more oil into the market in the short term.

J&K Bank teams up with NBFCs for retail push in home, gold loan segments

Wani along with General Manager & Divisional Head (ROI) Khursheed Muzaffar also attended the signing ceremony virtually.

General Manager Rakesh Magotra signed both the MoUs on behalf of the bank while MD & CEO Manoj Viswanathan and Senior Vice President & Head - Strategic Alliances Kirti Timmanagoudar put in their signatures representing HFFC and IIFL respectively. HFFC's Deputy CEO & CBO Ajay Khetan, Head - Treasury & Investor Relations Sunil Anjana and Product Lead - Co-lending Ajinkya Chandorkar were also present at the signing ceremony.

Speaking on the occasion, MD & CEO Amitava Chatterjee described the initiative as an important milestone in the bank's retail growth journey.

He said, "Co-lending is a powerful model that blends the strength of our strong deposit franchise and wide branch network with the domain expertise and agile credit delivery mechanisms of the leading NBFCs. Through these partnerships, we aim to accelerate credit delivery, deepen financial inclusion and reach customer segments that require customised and timely financial solutions."

Highlighting the bank's retail growth focus in rest of India, Chatterjee added, "As we continue to sharpen our strategic focus on the RoI markets, partnerships with well-established players like Home First Finance Company India Limited and IIFL Finance will help us accelerate growth in key retail segments. This collaboration will enable us to tap into new customer segments, strengthen our presence in emerging markets and deliver faster, technology-driven lending solutions."

In his remarks on the occasion, Executive Director Sudhir Gupta extended his best wishes to both our partner institutions. He said, "As we embark on this collaborative journey, I am confident that these partnerships under the co-lending framework will create strong synergies, enabling us to expand responsible credit delivery while unlocking new growth opportunities for all stakeholders involved."

Earlier, GM Rakesh Magotra briefed the bank's leadership about the strategic significance of the collaboration. He said, "In today's evolving financial landscape, collaboration is no longer optional it is indeed a strategic imperative. And we are fully confident that will expand our credit outreach in rest of India in housing sector and gold loans for small enterprises."

He expressed hope that the collaborations will not only strengthen "our institutions but also transform lives through greater financial access and empowerment."

The representatives of both the NBFCs expressed their pleasure on the signing of co-lending framework saying that the Bank's strong credibility and strategically growing presence across the emerging business centres in the country make it an ideal partner for expanding responsible credit delivery under the key retail loan segments.

Notably, through these arrangements, the Bank aims to further strengthen its retail lending ecosystem while advancing its growth strategy across RoI markets.