

Excise Commissioner reviews functioning of excise deptt

HIMALAYAN MAIL NEWS
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goods.

In a significant move aimed at strengthening regulatory and intensifying enforcement activities, the Excise Commissioner of Jammu and Kashmir convened a review meeting of the Jammu Division of the Excise Department on April 18, 2026. The Excise Commissioner evaluated the department's performance, identified operational gaps and outlined a forward-looking strategy to enhance enforcement activities against illicit distillation and public awareness against ill effects of drug abuse.

The review meeting was attended by Principal Excise and Taxation Training Institute Nagrota, Deputy Excise Commissioner (Executive) Jammu, Deputy Excise Commissioner (Distilleries), Deputy Excise Commissioner (Accounts), as well as Excise and Taxation Officers of the Jammu Division.

At the outset, the Excise Commissioner emphasized the critical role of the Excise Department in maintaining lawful trade practices, safeguarding public health, and contributing to Government revenue. Stressing the need for a proactive and vigilant approach, the Commissioner called upon all officers to redouble their efforts in curbing any illicit trade and ensuring strict compliance with excise laws.

A major highlight of the meeting was the directive issued by the Excise Commissioner to enhance enforcement activities across the Jammu Division. Officers were instructed to intensify inspections, conduct surprise checks, and strengthen surveillance mechanisms to detect and prevent illegal manufacturing, transportation, and sale of liquor and other excisable

The Commissioner further directed that enforcement operations should be intelligence-driven and coordinated, involving close collaboration between different wings of the department. Officers were encouraged to leverage technology, data analytics, and field intelligence to identify hotspots of illegal activity and take timely action. Emphasis was also laid on maintaining transparency and accountability in enforcement processes to build public trust.

Another key area of focus during the meeting was the implementation of the "Nasha Mukht Abhiyaan," a government initiative aimed at eradicating drug abuse and promoting a drug-free society. Recognizing the Excise Department's pivotal role in this mission, the Commissioner instructed all officers to actively organize and participate in awareness programmes under the campaign.

The meeting also reviewed the performance of various units within the department. The Principal Excise and Taxation Training Institute Nagrota presented updates on capacity-building initiatives, including training programmes for officers

and staff. The Commissioner stressed the importance of continuous skill development to keep pace with evolving challenges in excise administration. Training modules.

The Deputy Excise Commissioner (Executive) Jammu provided an overview of enforcement activities carried out in the division, including seizures, inspections, and legal actions taken against violators.

Similarly, the Deputy Excise Commissioner Distilleries discussed regulatory measures related to distillery operations, including quality control, production monitoring, and compliance with licensing conditions. The Commissioner emphasized the need for stringent oversight to prevent any diversion or misuse of products.

The Deputy Excise Commissioner (Accounts) presented a review of audit activities conducted by the Wing.

The Commissioner concluded the meeting by reiterating the importance of teamwork, integrity, and dedication in achieving the department's objectives. Officers were urged to work with a sense of purpose and commitment, keeping in mind the larger goal of public welfare and government revenue.

The directives issued during the meeting reflect a clear and focused strategy to strengthen the Excise Department's role in enforcement, revenue generation, and social responsibility. By emphasizing both strict regulatory action and proactive awareness initiatives under the Nasha Mukht Abhiyaan, the department aims to strike a balance between control and prevention.

The review meeting has set the tone for a more dynamic and responsive excise administration, one that is better equipped to address emerging challenges and contribute to the overall development and well-being of society.

DIG reviews working of SDRF, Civil Defence components at Udhampur

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Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Civil Defence & SDRF Anita Sharma today paid an official visit to the HG/CD & SDRF Component Udhampur where she carried out a comprehensive inspection of the Civil Defence building complex and reviewed the functioning of the unit.

During the course of the visit, the DIG undertook a thorough assessment of the existing infrastructure, including office facilities, training areas, storage arrangements and accommodation provisions. She also examined the availability, condition and operational readiness of rescue equipment and other logistical resources maintained by the unit. Emphasis was laid on ensuring that all resources are maintained in optimal condition to meet any emergency or disaster situation effectively.

Anita Sharma interacted with SDRF personnel, Home Guards and Civil Defence volunteers and

appreciated their unwavering dedication, discipline and commitment towards public service. She encouraged the personnel to continue working with professionalism and to regularly upgrade their skills through training and mock exercises.

The DIG also held an interactive session with the Chief warden Surinder Kumar Khajuria; Deputy Chief warden Ved Parkash; Deputy chief warden Swatantra Dey Kotwal along with other Civil Defence Wardens.

During the interaction, various operational aspects, administrative matters and field-level challenges were discussed in detail. The wardens high-

lighted key issues related to manpower, training requirements and resource management, to which the DIG assured appropriate consideration and necessary action.

She stressed the critical importance of maintaining a high degree of preparedness at all times, particularly in view of the increasing frequency of natural and man-made disasters. She directed the unit to conduct regular mock drills, awareness programmes and capacity-building initiatives to enhance coordination and response efficiency during emergencies. Furthermore, she emphasized strengthening community outreach programmes aimed at

spreading awareness about disaster management, first aid and emergency response among the general public. She highlighted that public participation and awareness play a vital role in minimizing risks and ensuring effective disaster mitigation.

Concluding her visit, Anita Sharma assured all ranks, wardens and volunteers of full administrative and operational support from higher headquarters. She expressed confidence that the HG/CD & SDRF Component Udhampur shall continue to perform its duties with excellence and uphold the highest standards of service in safeguarding life and property.

Ahead of US-Iran talks, Pak authorities take stringent security measures

ISLAMABAD, APR 19: Despite no official announcement about a second round of talks between the US and Iran, Pakistani authorities have begun taking stringent security measures for the safety of foreign delegates.

The US and Iran held rare direct talks in Pakistan on April 11 and 12 aimed at ending their conflict, but the talks ended without any agreement.

Pakistan re-launched its diplomatic efforts to facilitate another round of talks in Islamabad for a final agreement to end the war between Washington and Tehran.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif visited Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkiye while Chief of Defence Forces Field Marshal Asim Munir spent three days in Iran to create a consensus on contentious issues.

More than 10,000 police personnel have been deployed and over 600 checkpoints have been established across Rawalpindi, the sprawling city adjacent to Islamabad, the Express Tribune newspaper reported.

The security protocol is also being implemented in the capital city ahead of the possible talks.

Authorities have announced that from Sunday midnight, several sensitive areas surrounding Nur Khan Airbase and Islam-



abad International Airport will be sealed.

The Nur Khan Airbase is located in Rawalpindi while the Islamabad International Airport falls in the territorial jurisdiction of Attock district of Punjab but the passengers have to pass through the Rawalpindi district area to reach Islamabad.

Hence mega security arrangements in Rawalpindi make sense and authorities are not taking any chances after US President Donald Trump said he may visit Pakistan for the signing of the agreement with Iran.

The Express Tribune reported that a complete ban has been imposed on drone flights, pigeon flying and aerial firing in Rawalpindi. Officials say these measures are aimed at ensuring the security of aircraft carrying high-level foreign delegations.

Police confirmed that a red alert has been declared in Rawalpindi, particularly

in the vicinity of Nur Khan Airbase and Islamabad Airport. Officers will also be stationed on rooftops as part of heightened vigilance.

Special security measures have been enforced within the jurisdictions of New Town, Sadiqabad and Chaklala police stations.

In the first phase, authorities have ordered the closure of restaurants in these areas from midnight until further notice. In addition, parks, beauty parlours, markets, snooker clubs, fitness centres, paan shops, kiosks, barber shops, banks and bakeries will remain closed.

No decision has yet been made regarding the suspension of public or goods transport.

A police spokesperson said that the extraordinary measures are in response to the movement of foreign delegations.

A high-level meeting, chaired by Rawalpindi City Police Officer (CPO) Syed

Khalid Mehmood Hamdani, was held at Police Lines Headquarters, where directives were issued to ensure foolproof security.

Security measures also include the closing down of all boys' and girls' hostels within Rawalpindi until further notice.

The Express Tribune reported that security has been put on high alert on sensitive routes in Islamabad as well, with the administration having begun the process of obtaining security certificates from the owners of buildings located on these routes.

The authorities say that special measures have been taken for the security of the delegations. The owners of houses, shops, plazas and hotels situated along sensitive routes have been bound by specific security instructions.

According to the police, there will be a complete ban on parking along these routes, while entry of unrelated persons will not be allowed.

In addition, hotels and guesthouses have been instructed to keep a complete record of guests and submit reports to the relevant police station on a daily basis.

According to sources, movement on roofs, balconies and windows has also been restricted and, in case of any violation, the building owner will be held responsible.

North Korea launches multiple short-range ballistic missiles toward sea

SEOUL, APR 19: North Korea launched multiple short-range ballistic missiles toward the sea on Sunday, its neighbours said, days after the UN's nuclear watchdog warned that North Korea was making "very serious" advances in efforts to build nuclear weapons.

The missiles fired from the North's Sinpo area flew about 140 kilometres (87 miles) each in a direction toward the country's eastern waters, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said. It said South Korea maintains a readiness to repel any provocations by North Korea and is closely exchanging information with the US and Japan.

In an emergency meeting of the National Security Council, senior South Korean officials expressed concerns about North Korea's repeated ballistic missile tests and urged it to stop them immediately. Sunday's launches came hours before South Korean President Lee Jae Myung left the country to visit India and Vietnam.

The US and Japanese militaries also said they detected the launches. The US Indo-Pacific Command said it remains committed to the defence of the US homeland and its allies in the region. Japan's Defence Ministry said Tokyo strongly protested to Pyongyang, saying the launches threaten regional and international peace and violate UN Security Council resolutions that ban any ballistic activities by North Korea.

Sinpo, the launch site, is an eastern coastal city in



North Korea that has a major shipyard used for building submarines.

South Korea's military was analysing whether the latest launches were made from a submarine, a land-based launcher or both platforms, according to South Korean media. Asked about where the missiles were launched, Japan's Deputy Minister of Defence Masahisa Miyazaki told reporters that Japan was analysing launch details in coordination with the US and South Korea.

If the launches involved a submarine, it would mark North Korea's first submarine-launched ballistic missile test in four years.

North Korea obtaining a greater ability to fire missiles from underwater would be a worrying development because it's difficult for its rivals to detect such launches in advance. Last year, North Korea unveiled a nuclear-powered submarine under construction for the first time.

Sunday's launches were the latest in North Korea's run of weapons tests this

year.

Last week, North Korea said leader Kim Jong Un supervised missile tests from the country's destroyer. In the previous week, North Korea said it had three days of testing activities to examine ballistic missiles armed with cluster-bomb warheads and other new weapons systems. Last month, it said it tested an upgraded solid-fuel engine for missiles capable of reaching the US mainland.

Kim has focused on enlarging his nuclear and missile arsenals since his high-stakes nuclear diplomacy with US President Donald Trump collapsed in 2019. Trump has repeatedly expressed his desire to restore diplomacy with Kim, and the North Korean leader has recently left open the door for dialogue with Trump but urged Washington to drop demands for the North's nuclear disarmament as a precondition for talks.

Trump is to travel to Beijing for a rescheduled summit with Xi Jinping in May. Some observers believe

North Korea's recent testing activities were likely meant to increase its leverage in future dealings with the US, as the Trump-Xi meeting could provide a diplomatic opening with Pyongyang.

On Wednesday, International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Rafael Grossi said that his agency has confirmed "a rapid increase" in activities at nuclear manufacturing facilities in North Korea. Grossi told reporters in Seoul that activities in North Korea point to "a very serious increase" in its nuclear weapons production capabilities.

His comments echoed a view by many outside observers that North Korea has taken steps to expand its main Yongbyon nuclear complex and build additional uranium-enrichment sites in recent years. Last September, South Korea's Unification Minister Chung Dong-young said that North Korea was operating four uranium enrichment facilities and that they were running every day. (AP)

Russia has looted thousands of Ukrainian cultural objects in war, Finding them is challenge



KYIV, APR 19 : When Alina Dotsenko returned to her museum after Ukrainian forces retook the southern city of Kherson from Russian forces in late 2022, she found thousands of artworks

had vanished. "I walked in and saw empty storage rooms, empty shelves. My legs gave way, and I just sat down by the wall, like a child," the Kherson Art Museum director said.

Before Russia's full-scale invasion in early 2022, the museum held more than 14,000 works in a collection "ranging from America to Japan." As the Russians retreated, they loaded much of it onto trucks and took it to Russian-annexed Crimea, according to Dotsenko and video filmed by residents.

The fate of nearly 10,000 pieces remains unknown.

Ukraine is again raising its voice over the looting as Russia seeks to return to the world's cultural stage. Next month's Venice Biennale plans to allow Russian representatives to take part for the first time since 2022. Ukraine has said the event "must not become a stage for whitewashing the war crimes that Russia commits daily against the Ukrainian people and our cultural heritage."

A rare documented case of looting

The Kherson case stands out because Ukraine knows exactly what was lost.

Years before the war, Dotsenko began photographing every item in the museum's holdings, creating a digital archive. When Russian forces occupied Kherson, she hid the hard drives containing it. After Ukrainian troops returned, she retrieved them.

Today, that archive forms the most detailed record of looted cultural property during the war, allowing prosecutors to work with Interpol to trace missing works and pursue those responsi-

ble. Across much of Ukraine, however, such documentation does not exist. And cultural losses can only be pursued in court if they can be proved, item by item.

The Russian Culture Ministry did not respond to an Associated Press request for comment on the alleged removal of items from Ukrainian museums. In the past, Russian-appointed officials in occupied territories described the removal as protective measures.

Kirill Stremousov, the former Russia-installed deputy admin-

istrator in Kherson who died shortly before Ukrainian forces liberated the city, said removed statues would "definitely return" once fighting stopped.

Carrying catalogues through checkpoints

Halyna Chumak, former director of the Donetsk Regional Art Museum, fled Russian-controlled Donetsk in 2014, carrying what she could: catalogues documenting a fraction of the museum's roughly 15,000 artworks.

She spent a year transporting the catalogues through checkpoints into Ukrainian-controlled

territory, leaving most behind as she tried not to draw attention from pro-Russian forces who searched her at each crossing.

Those catalogues covering just over 1,000 items are the only surviving evidence. More than a decade later, Ukrainian entrepreneur Oleksandr Velychko is digitising them.

It took his team over three painstaking months to process about 400 works. Once completed, the database will be given to Ukrainian authorities, providing a partial legal basis to claim ownership of missing items.