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Next target to link Rajouri-Poonch to rail network: Vaishnav

The prime minister inaugurated this train service between Katra and Kashmir last year. This train is very popular with 100 per cent occupancy and has become a lifeline for Jammu and Kashmir," Vaishnav said.

He said there was a huge demand for increasing the passenger-carrying capacity of the train.

"The eight coaches ran at 100 per cent occupancy, and there was demand to increase the capacity. Now, it has been made into a 20-coach train," he said, and noted that the train service benefited the people of Kashmir as it had been used for ferrying goods like cement, cars and bikes.

"I have been told that the prices of cement have dropped by Rs 50 (per bag). Around 2 crore kg (20,000 tons) of apples and other fruits have been transported through train to other parts of the country," he said.

Vaishnav said the Vande Bharat Express between Jammu and Srinagar can operate in all weather conditions.

"We can run this train in minus 10 degrees Celsius. You saw there was one foot of snow last winter, but the trains still operated. The design of this train incorporates all facilities and advanced features for passenger comfort, making it an all-weather train," he said.

The minister said this was the first time that a train was being operated at such a high altitude. "This train will facilitate the easy movement of fruits, goods and all other items," he added.

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah and Union Minister Jitendra Singh were among those present at the flagging off ceremony.

The work on the Rs 43,780-cr rail project, linking Kashmir to the rest of the country, began in the late 1990s, with the first train operating in the valley in October 2008.

In his address, the chief minister described the occasion as "a day long-awaited by the people of Jammu and Kashmir, emphasising that the extension of the Vande Bharat Express to Jammu marks not just improved connectivity, but the beginning of a transformative phase in the region's development.

Congratulating the union government and the railway ministry, he recalled the inauguration of key infrastructure projects, including the iconic Chenab Railway Bridge and Anji Khad Bridge, nearly ten months ago. He noted that what was once seen as a major engineering feat had now evolved into a highly popular and widely utilized mode of transport.

Highlighting the overwhelming response to the rail service, he said the demand has grown so significantly that the train's capacity has been expanded from 8 coaches to 20 coaches, increasing passenger capacity from around 500 to nearly 1,400 in a single journey. With two such trains operating, nearly 2,800 passengers will now be able to travel daily between Jammu and Srinagar, significantly easing travel and enhancing convenience.

"The success of this railway is not merely in passenger travel," the Chief Minister remarked, underlining its growing role in freight movement. He pointed out that the rail network has already begun facilitating the transportation of goods, including cement, food supplies and vehicles, into the Valley. Notably, automobiles are now being transported directly to Srinagar by rail, marking a significant logistical breakthrough.

Equally important, he added, is the outbound movement of goods from Jammu and Kashmir. "Our fruits, milk and dairy products are now reaching markets outside J&K efficiently through this rail network," he said, stressing that this enhanced connectivity will strengthen local industries and open new economic avenues for farmers and producers.

In a forward-looking appeal, the Chief Minister urged the railway minister to consider establishing an inland dry port in Jammu and Kashmir. He said such a facility would enable customs clearance and streamline export processes within the region, eliminating the need to route goods through other cities. "This will not only benefit our businesses but also contribute to the country's overall economic growth," he asserted.

Calling the day historic, the Chief Minister said that for the first time, people of Jammu and Kashmir can seamlessly travel between Jammu and Srinagar by train, reducing dependence on road transport and significantly improving accessibility.

"This is the day we had been waiting for years," he said. "Today, a dream has been realized. With this rail link, Jammu and Kashmir is more connected than ever before."

India known for IT, Pak for 'international terrorism': Rajnath

anti-national act; it has multiple dimensions- operational, ideological, and political. It can only be dealt with if we tackle all these dimensions," he said.

Dubbing Operation Sindoor as a shining example of jointness and synergy of the Indian Defence Forces, he stated that the Indian Army, Indian Navy, and Indian Air Force acted in concert and under a unified plan, demonstrating conclusively that India's military might no longer operates in silos; instead, it has emerged as a joint, integrated, and global power.

He also stated that India executed Operation Sindoor on its own terms and at a time of its own choosing, and halted it strictly on its own terms. "During the course of the operation, we targeted, with absolute precision, only those who had perpetrated the attack against us. We did not halt the operation because our capabilities had been exhausted or diminished. We halted it entirely on our own terms. We were fully prepared to sustain a prolonged conflict. We possess the requisite surge capacity, and the inherent strength to rapidly scale up our capabilities in moments of sudden crisis," he said.

Singh underlined the fact that India's military-industrial complex has consistently demonstrated, time and again, that it stands ready to meet not only the requirements of peacetime, but also the demands for rapid supply and logistics during times of war. He asserted that, during that period, India did not fall for the bluff or a threat of a nuclear strike and accomplished the set objectives. "This is the 'New World Order'; the 'New India' of this new global era. This is an India which makes no distinction between terrorism and those who sponsor it. This is the unequivocal policy of our Prime Minister, which has transformed India amidst the shifting global landscape," he

Lightning Strike Claims Life of Class 5 Student in Bani; Another Injured

BANIHAL, April 30: A tragic incident occurred in Panchayat Douka of Bani tehsil in Kathua district on Wednesday evening when a lightning strike hit a residential house, leaving a minor boy dead and another child injured.

According to official details, the lightning struck the house of Tulsu Ram, son of Jagat Ram, a resident of Bhandar presently living in Khoran for the past 10 years, at around 5:47 PM. The lightning reportedly entered the house through a window and affected two children who were inside the room.

One of them, Arjun Singh (11), a Class 5 student of Primary School Khoran, sustained critical injuries. He was immediately rushed to Community Health Centre (CHC) Bani by family members, where doctors declared him brought dead.

Another child, Sapna Devi (14), a student of Class 6 at High School Ghutu, also sustained injuries in the incident. However, officials said she is now stable and out of danger.

said.

Describing Operation Sindoor as an embodiment of deterrence, the defence minister stated that although the operation was concluded within a span of just 72 hours, the preparatory work preceding it was extensive and protracted. He pointed out that India's surge capacity and its ability to rapidly mobilise resources, strategic stockpiles, and the proven credibility of indigenously-developed weaponry have all become integral components of deterrence posture.

Sinha extends Buddha Purnima greetings

peace," he said in his message.

"In a world of great change, we are reminded not only of the challenges before us but also of the immense strength that lies in our unity. On this auspicious festival, I pray that through solidarity and shared resolve, we may continue our steadfast journey towards the welfare of all humankind," the LG said.

"May the celebrations on Buddha Purnima awaken within us the resolve to walk the path of enlightenment shown by Lord Buddha, and inspire a collective pursuit of universal harmony and peace," he added

Earthquake of magnitude 4.1 hits Leh

shallow depth of 150 km, with the epicentre located at latitude 36.722 N and longitude 74.456 E.

Earthquakes can occur anywhere between the Earth's surface and about 700 km below the surface. For scientific purposes, this earthquake depth range of 0 - 700 km is divided into three zones: shallow, intermediate, and deep, as per USGS data.

Shallow earthquakes are between 0 and 70 km deep; intermediate earthquakes, 70 - 300 km deep; and deep earthquakes, 300 - 700 km deep. In general, the term "deep-focus earthquakes" is applied to earthquakes deeper than 70 km, the United States Geological Survey (USGS) states.

15-day extension for filing of APRs

The government noted that such non-compliance results in a default under the mandatory filing process.

It warned that failure to submit property returns may invite punitive action under the Jammu and Kashmir Public Men and Public Servants Declaration of Assets Act and relevant rules. Defaulting employees may also face action under the Prevention of Corruption Act and could be denied vigilance clearance.

The GAD has directed all departments and Drawing and Disbursing Officers (DDOs) to ensure strict compliance and submission of returns by their employees within the extended period.

Employees facing technical issues, including OTP-related problems, have been advised to update their contact details on the CPIS portal or seek assistance through the official support email.

The government said that no further extensions were likely, urging all employees to utilise this final window to complete their mandatory filings.

Farooq asks Pak to end violence in J&K

"While terrorism has largely subsided, Pakistan's refusal to accept Jammu and Kashmir as an integral part of India continues to fuel violence in the region," he said.

"My humble advice to both these nations, my own nation and Pakistan, is that the time has come. Let us leave the path of violence and start finding ways of peace so that we can live with honour and dignity," Farooq added.

Discussing the Pahalgam terror attack, he said it was a "big blow" to efforts of rekindling brotherhood in the region. However, it also brought the people of Jammu and Kashmir on the streets in protest. This was, Abdullah said, a clear signal to Pakistan that terror was being rejected.

The pain was not felt only by the families who lost their dear ones but also by the people of Jammu and Kashmir, he said.

Expressing deep regret that some locals were involved in drug trade for monetary gain, Abdullah said he favoured a crackdown so severe that "no one dares to continue this menace".

According to a notification issued by the transport department, the revised fare will apply to big buses, medium and mini buses, taxis, maxi cabs, tourist cabs, auto-rickshaws and Tata Magic vehicles.

The order has been issued under the Motor Vehicles Act and partially modifies an earlier notification of March 19, 2021.

The government has also fixed separate fares for electric vehicles, with e-rickshaws to charge Rs 15 per km, while e-autos will charge Rs 25 for the first km and Rs 20 for each subsequent km.

Rail expansion accelerated after Modi took over as PM: Jitendra

reach Srinagar, as further expansion into the valley was taken up in right earnest only after Narendra Modi took over as Prime Minister in 2014.

"Significant progress has been achieved in last one decade, with railway infrastructure now being developed in Jammu & Kashmir at par with the rest of the country," he said in his address after Vande Bharat train was flagged off here.

Dr Singh said that commencement of the augmented 20-coach Jammu-Srinagar Vande Bharat Express marks a landmark achievement in the ongoing efforts to transform rail connectivity in the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir.

"The introduction of this direct train service between Jammu and Kashmir is set to significantly enhance ease of travel, improve logistics efficiency, and promote ease of doing business across the region," he added.

Shah reaches Ladakh to attend first-ever exposition of Buddha relics

found good fortune for me to be attending on the occasion of Buddha Purnima, the first ever international exposition of the holy relics of Lord Buddha, commencing on May 1," he said.

"In this exposition, devotees from different parts of the world will offer veneration to the relics of Lord Buddha," he added.

The sacred Piprahwa relics of Buddha were brought to Leh in a special Indian Air Force aircraft on Wednesday by Drukpa Thuksey Rinpoche and Khenpo Thinlas Chosal of Matho Monastery.

The sacred relics were accorded a ceremonial reception on arrival, with people pouring out of their homes and gathering along the roads to pay respect. The exposition to be held in the first two weeks of May marks the beginning of a rare and significant spiritual occasion in the Union Territory of Ladakh.

Piprahwa relics refer to the ancient remains and associated objects linked to Gautama Buddha, discovered at Piprahwa, an archaeological site in the present-day Uttar Pradesh, near the Nepal border.

The relics have gained renewed global significance in recent years, especially after a collection of associated gems and offerings was repatriated to India in July 2025 from a British family and a private collection, ending over a century of colonial possession.

The relics have been exhibited internationally in several countries; this is the first time they have been

brought out from their original place of preservation for exposition within India.

The Piprahwa relics have previously been exhibited in countries such as Thailand, Mongolia, Vietnam, Russia, Singapore, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Myanmar, attracting global attention and devotion, according to an official statement.

In Ladakh, the relics will be open for public veneration at Jivetsal from May 2 to 10. They will subsequently be taken to Zanskar on May 11 and 12, followed by exposition at the Dharma Centre in Leh from May 13 to 14, before being returned to Delhi on May 15, it read.

2 killed in factory steamer blast

last night while Shiv Kumar died this morning. They hailed from Uttar Pradesh.

Raj Kumar, who is also a resident of UP, was undergoing treatment, officials said.

All three workers are residents of Uttar Pradesh, they said.

LG calls drug abuse form of silent terrorism

less than terrorism and those involved in it will be given stringent punishment," the LG said in his address.

"I firmly believe that drug abuse is a form of silent terrorism, not merely a matter of law and order. The smuggling of narcotics represents terrorism in disguise. It is a hidden threat that devastates our youth, weakens families, and undermines the very foundations of society," he added.

"The people's movement against drug abuse reflects their determination and unity, and this menace can be eliminated when communities rise together and speak with one voice," he said.

"We have decided that drug traffickers in Jammu Kashmir will be treated under the law the same way terrorists are. They are enemies of society, enemies of humanity and enemies of our youth. We are committed to wiping out this threat," he said.

Sinha said that every drug smuggler, every local peddler, every member of a drug syndicate working to destroy society would be identified and put behind bars.

"I give you my word: we will not rest until the networks spreading this poison are completely dismantled," he said.

"Path to success in this campaign is demanding, and the challenge is significant. Of the 100-day effort, 80 days remain and each day is now vital," he added.

"Every moment must be used with purpose, and every citizen must take part in this jan-andolan. Together, we can make Jammu & Kashmir a shining example for the nation: a society free from the burden of drug addiction," the LG said.

He also underscored the importance of jan-bhagidari and said that this fight cannot rest on government machinery alone and society must actively participate.

"In the remaining 80 days, a whole-of-government effort must confront and dismantle the web of drug addiction. This requires a change in mindset. Sometimes people say this is not my problem. This attitude must change. Drug smugglers thrive on public indifference and silence. We must remember: a drug-free society is built by those who resist this menace even when they are not directly affected. Every family must recognize that prosperity is not measured by economic growth alone, but by the vigilant and responsible choices of its citizens," he said.

The LG also highlighted that with the public support, in just the last 20 days around 350 FIRs were registered and 440 drug traffickers arrested. He also called upon schools, colleges, social organisations, and media to join this campaign.

"When communities stay alert, they can resist infiltration. When society is vigilant, addiction cannot spread," he asserted.

ECI rolls out QR code security system

bly constituencies across five states.

According to the commission, the initiative has been introduced through the ECINET platform and is part of a broader push towards modernising electoral processes. The QR-based identity system will be adopted in all future Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections, as well as by-elections.

The move is among more than 30 electoral reforms and administrative measures introduced by the ECI over the past year. These include the rollout of standardised QR-enabled identity cards for Booth Level Officers (BLOs).

To ensure robust security, a three-tier verification mechanism will be enforced at counting centres. At the first and second levels, Photo Identity Cards issued by the Returning Officer will undergo manual checks. At the third and innermost layer near the counting hall, access will only be granted after successful QR code authentication.

The QR-based Photo Identity Cards will be mandatory for all authorised individuals, including election officials, counting staff, technical personnel, candidates, and their agents.

Additionally, dedicated media centres will be set up near counting halls to facilitate journalists. Media personnel will continue to gain entry based on authority letters issued under existing guidelines.

The Commission has directed all concerned officials to ensure strict implementation of the system and deploy trained staff at checkpoints to maintain transparency, security, and efficiency.

Iran vows to protect nuclear, missile capabilities

tinue its blockade on Iranian ports, while coordinating with allies to impose higher costs on Iran's attempts to subvert the free flow of energy, according to a senior administration official who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to comment publicly.

The official added that it is just one of multiple diplomatic and policy efforts that Trump is weighing.

With a fragile ceasefire in place, the US and Iran are locked in a standoff over the strait. The US blockade is designed to prevent Iran from selling its oil, depriving it of crucial revenue while also potentially creating a situation where Tehran has to shut off production because it has nowhere to store oil.

The strait's closure is also problem for the US' Gulf allies, which use the waterway to export their oil and gas.

A recent Iranian proposal would push negotiations on the country's nuclear program to a later date. Trump said one of the major reasons he went to war was to deny Iran the ability to develop nuclear weapons. Iran long has maintained its program is peaceful, though it enriched uranium at near-weapons-grade levels of 60%.

Pakistan said it was still facilitating indirect talks between the US and Iran aimed at easing tensions, but Islamabad would also welcome direct communication between the two sides, even by phone.

"If the two parties can engage in real-time conversations, that could ease the sticking points," said Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Tahir Andrabi at a weekly news briefing. He declined to share details of any Iranian or US proposals.

Speaking to mark Persian Gulf Day in Iran, Khamenei's remarks signaled that nuclear issues and Iran's ballistic missile program wouldn't be traded away.

"Ninety million proud and honorable Iranians inside and outside the country regard all of Iran's identity-based,

spiritual, human, scientific, industrial and technological capacities - from nanotechnology and biotechnology to nuclear and missile capabilities - as national assets, and will protect them just as they protect the country's waters, land and airspace," Khamenei said.

Khamenei referred to America as the "Great Satan," a long hurled insult by Iranian leaders toward the US since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. He said Americans should have no business in the Persian Gulf.

"Foreigners who come from thousands of kilometres away to act with greed and malice there have no place in it - except at the bottom of its waters," said Khamenei, who was reportedly wounded in the Feb 28 attack that killed his father, the 86-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

In his remarks, Khamenei seemed to signal Iran would maintain its control over the waterway, which sits in the territorial waters of Iran and Oman. Iran had been charging some ships reportedly \$2 million apiece to travel through the strait.

He said that Iran's control of the Strait of Hormuz will make the Gulf more secure, and that Tehran's "legal rules and new management" of the strait will benefit all the region's nations.

However, the world considered the strait an international waterway, open to all without paying tolls. Gulf Arab nations, chief among them the United Arab Emirates, have decried Iran's control of the strait as akin to piracy.

Omar chairs cabinet meet, discusses governance priorities

held here to flag off Vande Bharat train services between Jammu & Srinagar, he thanked the railways minister and the Centre on behalf of the people of J&K for the extension of train services between the two capitals.

He also highlighted the railway connectivity's trade benefits and said goods like cement and cars can be transported, giving a huge boost to business and trade.

"The speciality of this train is that it has not only enabled people like us to travel but has also facilitated the transport of goods such as cement. I was surprised to see Maruti cars being transported to Srinagar and fruits from Kashmir by rail," he said.

Have no faith in exit polls: Congress

on, citing the 2021 West Bengal Legislative Assembly election 2021 as an example where predictions went wrong.

Commenting on voter turnout, Ramesh noted that West Bengal and Tamil Nadu have traditionally recorded high polling percentages and said the current figures are only marginally higher. "I don't read much into this."

He also targeted the Election Commission of India, alleging bias during the ongoing election process. "We were fighting against the Election Commission also, as the EC has not been a neutral party in this election. He has become a player in this election."

Ramesh accused Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar of lacking neutrality. "The Election Commission has never been a more compromised EC under (Chief Election Commissioner) Gyanesh Kumar," he told reporters, alleging that the "rot" began during the tenure of Kumar's predecessor.

"This man is not a neutral observer. There are nine charges against him in our notice given in Parliament for the removal of the CEC," Ramesh said.

Asked about the next steps if the removal notice is rejected, he said, "We will keep going against him till he is removed. We will continue our efforts to get him removed."

Ramesh alleged that voters' rights had been affected in West Bengal, claiming that lakhs of names were removed from electoral rolls.

In major reshuffle, govt orders transfers, postings of 179 officers

ment of Gujjars and Bakerwals, is transferred and shall await further orders of adjustment in GAD.

Nawab Din, Custodian General, J&K, is transferred and posted as Special Secretary, ARI and Trainings Department.

Mohammad Shahid Saleem Dar, Director, Hospitality and Protocol, J&K, is transferred and posted as Managing Director, SIDCO. He shall also hold the charge of the post of Managing Director, SICOP, in addition to his own duties.

Mufi-M-Farid-ud-Din, Additional District Development Commissioner, Kupwara, is transferred and posted as Director, SKICC, relieving Haris Ahmad Handoo, of the additional charge of the post.

Gulzar Ahmad Dar, Special Secretary, Planning, Development and Monitoring Department, is transferred and posted as Additional District Development Commissioner, Kupwara.

Ravi Shanker Sharma, Special Secretary, Department of Disaster Management, Relief, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction, is transferred and posted as Special Secretary, Agriculture Production Department.

Reyaz Ahmad Wani, Special Secretary, Science and Technology Department, is transferred and posted as Director, Rural Development, Kashmir.

Mohammad Younis Malik, Special Secretary, Power Development Department, is transferred and posted as Director, Entrepreneurship Development Institute, J&K, relieving Khalid Jehangir, Secretary in Industries and Commerce Department, of the additional charge of the post.

Subash Chander Chhibber, awaiting orders of adjustment in GAD, is posted as Special Secretary, General Administration Department.

Khurshid Ahmad Sanai, Additional Secretary, Social Welfare Department, is transferred and posted as Secretary, J&K Services Selection Board.

Raj Kumar Katoch, Administrator, Associated Hospitals, Jammu, is transferred and posted as Special Secretary, Planning, Development and Monitoring Department.

Rifat Kohli, awaiting orders of adjustment in the General Administration Department, is posted as Special Secretary, Housing and Urban Development Department.

Nagendra Singh Jamwal, Special Secretary in the office of Chief Secretary, is transferred and posted as Director, Floriculture, Jammu, against an available vacancy.

Pankaj Raj Katoch, Joint Financial Commissioner, Agrarian Reforms in the office of Financial Commissioner, Revenue, J&K, is transferred and posted as Director, Panchayati Raj and ex-officio Special Secretary, Department of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj.

Pawan Kumar Sharma, Managing Director, J&K Minerals Limited, is transferred and posted as Director, Geology and Mining, J&K.

Tassaduq Hussain Mir, Special Secretary, ARI and Trainings Department, is transferred and posted as Custodian General, J&K.

Narinder Khajuria, Special Secretary in the Chief Minister's Secretariat, is transferred and posted as Special Secretary, ARI and Trainings Department.

Shabir Hussain Bhat, Director, Rural Development, Kashmir, is transferred and posted as Vice Chairman, Srinagar Development Authority.

Ashwani Kumar Khajuria, Director, Estates, Jammu, holding additional charge of Director, Estates, Kashmir, is transferred and posted as Director, Hospitality and Protocol, J&K.

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