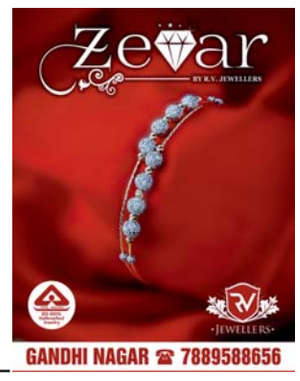
daily
# Excelsior

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## *EPFO retains 8.5% interest*

NEW DELHI, Mar 4:

Retirement fund body EPFO today decided to retain 8.5 per cent annual rate of interest on provident fund deposits for the current financial year for its more than five crore active subscribers.

The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation's (EPFO) apex decision-making body Central Board of Trustees decided to fix 8.5 per cent rate of interest for 2020-21 at its meeting in Srinagar today.

"The Central Board of Trustees (CBT) recommended 8.50 per cent annual rate of interest to be credited on EPF accumulations in members' accounts for the financial year 2020-21," a Labour Ministry statement said.

According to the statement, the 228th meeting of the CBT, EPFO was held today in Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir under the chairmanship of Union Minister

*(Contd on page 11 Col 3)*

## *US hails steps to restore normalcy in J&K*

WASHINGTON, Mar 4:

The United States welcomed the steps taken by New Delhi to return the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir to full economic and political normalcy consistent with India's democratic values.

State Department Spokesperson Ned Price said the US, at the same time, continues to follow developments in Jammu and Kashmir closely.

The US policy with regard to Kashmir has not changed, Price told reporters at his daily news conference.

"We welcome steps to return the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir to full economic and political normalcy consistent with India's democratic values. As we've said before, Secretary (of State Tony) Blinken has had a couple opportunities to speak to his Indian counterpart, both bilaterally and in the context of the Quad,"

*(Contd on page 11 Col 5)*

## *Shab-i-Miraj holiday on Mar 12*

***Excelsior Correspondent***

JAMMU, Mar 4: The Government today postponed the holiday on account of Shab-i-Miraj from March 11 to March 12.

According to an order issued by the General Administration Department, the holiday on account of Shab-i-Miraj will now be observed on Friday, March 12 instead of March 11.

## *MeT forecasts wet weather on March 6, 7*

***Excelsior Correspondent***

SRINAGAR, Mar 4: As the weatherman forecast wet weather on March 6 and 7, the minimum temperatures increased in Kashmir valley today.

A Meteorological Department official said that Srinagar recorded a low of 3.9 degree Celsius against 2.8 degree Celsius the previous night. The temperature was 1.7 degree Celsius above normal for this time of the year in Srinagar.

Qazigund recorded a low of 2.2 degree Celsius against 1.4 degree Celsius the previous night while the mercury settled at 2.1 degree Celsius at the famous resort of Pahalgam against 0.5 degree Celsius the previous night.

Kokernag recorded a low of

*(Contd on page 11 Col 5)*

**WEATHER**

**JAMMU:**
Mainly dry
**TEMPERATURE**

| | |
|---|---|
| Max: | 27.8 Degree C |
| Min: | 12.6 Degree C |

**RELATIVE HUMIDITY**

| | |
|---|---|
| RH-I (Morning): | 56.0 per cent |
| RH-II (Evening): | 41.0 per cent |
| Sunset on Friday: | 06.28 p.m. |
| Sunrise on Saturday: | 06.54 a.m. |

**SRINAGAR:**
Partly cloudy
**TEMPERATURE**

| | |
|---|---|
| Max: | 19.6 Degree C |
| Min: | 3.9 Degree C |

**RELATIVE HUMIDITY**

| | |
|---|---|
| RH-I (Morning): | 76.0 per cent |
| RH-II (Evening): | 28.0 per cent |

**LEH:**
**TEMPERATURE**

| | |
|---|---|
| Max: | 6.8 Degree C |
| Min: | -6.5 Degree C |

***Centre extends Delimitation Comm term by one year***

# Assembly elections in J&K unlikely to be held for one-and-half year

*Only one meeting conducted in one-year term of Panel*

**Sanjeev Pargal**

**JAMMU, Mar 4: With the Central Government extending term of the Delimitation Commission set up for Jammu and Kashmir for one more year, Assembly elections for first Legislative Assembly of the Union Territory are unlikely to be held for another one and a half year in view of follow up procedure after the Panel submits its report to the Union Ministry of Law and Justice.**

The Ministry last night issued an order substituting words "two years" as against "one year" as term of the Delimitation Commission for Jammu and Kashmir. The Panel's one-year term was due to expire tomorrow.

The Commission is headed by Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai, a retired Judge of the Supreme Court of India and comprised Sushil Chandra, Election Commissioner and KK Sharma, State Election Commissioner (J&K). Besides, it has five Associate Members, all of whom are Lok Sabha members from the Union Territory including Dr Jitendra Singh, Union Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and Jugal Kishore

**Watch video on www.excelsiornews.com*

Sharma, both from BJP, Dr Farooq Abdullah, Mohammad Akbar Lone and Hasnain Masoodi, all three from National Conference which has so far dissociated itself from the Panel on the ground that the party has challenged Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization Act in the Supreme Court under which the Commission has been set up.

Excelsior had last week exclusively reported that the Delimitation Commission's term is being extended as it was yet to complete majority of work pertaining to delimitation of Assembly constituencies in Jammu and Kashmir.

**"Even if the Delimitation Commission submits its report within stipulated period of one year, Assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir are unlikely to be held till 2022 end because of the follow-up procedure of the report," sources said, adding the elections can be held earlier only if the Commission submits its report well before the completion of term, the chances of which are remote as the Commission has to visit UT and interact with various stakeholders.**

They added that the Delimitation Commission's recommendations pertaining to constitution of new Assembly segments including reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes had to be put in public domain for inviting objections. The claims and objections on new seats had to be settled. This is further followed by revision in the voter lists.

"This means that Assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir are unlikely to be held for next one and half year," sources said.

They, however, attributed delay in the Delimitation Commission report to Coronavirus pandemic also as the Panel chairperson and members couldn't visit Jammu and Kashmir even once during first-year of their term. It was on February 18 i.e. the fag end of one-ear-term that the Commission held first meeting with Associated Members in New Delhi to take their opinion and brief them on the Commission's activities. The meeting was, however, attended by only two Associate Members belonging to the BJP and boycotted by three National Conference MPs.

Presently, the Commission has invited suggestions from the Associated Members in writing on delimitation of Assembly

*(Contd on page 11 Col 1)*

*BSF jawans patrol the International Border in Samba sector despite ceasefire between India and Pakistan.* *—Excelsior/Nischant*

***Many individuals with dubious character paid salaries, allowances***

# Several deptts ignoring mandatory CID verification of new entrants into service

**Mohinder Verma**

***Simplified mechanism devised to expedite process***

**JAMMU, Mar 4: Strange it may sound but it is a fact that several departments are continuously ignoring the repeated instructions regarding mandatory CID verification of new entrants into the Government service as a result of which many individuals with dubious character antecedents and conduct have been paid salaries and other allowances from the exchequer.**

This has been viewed seriously by the Government which has now devised simplified mechanism to expedite verification process and shared the same with the Financial Commissioners, Principal Secretaries, Commissioner Secretaries, Divisional Commissioners, Deputy Commissioners and Heads of the Departments for immediate adoption.

The Government vide Order No.1328-GAD dated December 7, 2016 had carried out amendments in the Jammu and Kashmir Civil Services (Verification of Character and Antecedents) Instructions, 1997.

**In the Instruction No.2 it was mentioned that the appointing authority shall issue conditional appointment orders to the selected candidates after receipt of an attestation form accompanied by an undertaking on a sworn affidavit clearly mentioning therein that the salary of the selected candidates will be drawn/disbursed only after receipt of satisfactory character and antecedents verification report.**

"In case of receipt of an adverse report and on confirmation thereof the appointment shall automatically stand cancelled without any notice", read the Instruction No.2

Similarly, Instruction No.3(C) read: "A person convicted by the competent court of an offence involving moral turpitude, heinous offences like murder, rape, robbery and offences under Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act (NDPSA) shall be regarded not fit for the Government service".

In the order of December 7, 2016 as well as the Government Order No.1918-GAD dated December 9, 1997 clearance from the Criminal Investigation Department was made mandatory for drawing salary and

*(Contd on page 11 Col 3)*

*Lecturer, student test +ve in Jammu; school shut*

# After taking jab, LG asks all eligible to take vaccine; says it's fully safe

*One dies, 79 fresh cases in J&K*

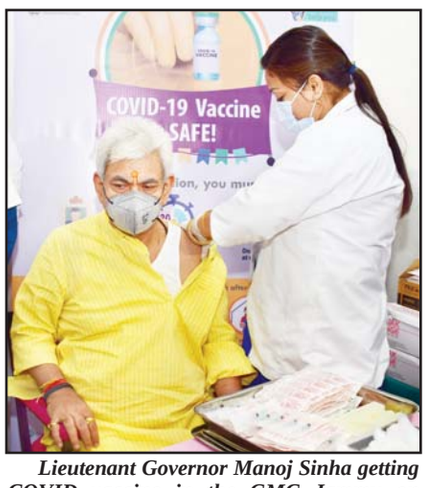
***Excelsior Correspondent***

**JAMMU, Mar 4: Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha today took first dose of COVID-19 vaccine in the Government Medical College (GMC) Jammu and called upon all eligible persons to take the jab saying it's fully safe while a Government School Lecturer in Bishnah**

**Watch video on www.excelsiornews.com*

**and a 12th class student in private school at Channi Himmat tested positive for the virus after which the private school has been closed for three days for testing of contacts.**

Sinha reached the GMC Jammu at 9 am and was given first dose of COVID-19 vaccine 'Covishield' by a Nurse of the GMC Jammu in the presence of Principal Dr Shashi Sudhan Sharma and Medical Superintendent Dr Dara Singh.




*Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha getting COVID vaccine in the GMC Jammu on Thursday.*

The Nurse explained to the Lieutenant Governor that he will have to take second dose of the vaccine after 28 days and stay for half an hour in the GMC Jammu's Observation room besides taking all COVID precautions which he was already taking.

Sinha stayed in the Observation room for half an hour before leaving the GMC Jammu.

Advisor Incharge Health and Medical Education Rajiv Rai Bhatnagar also took the COVID jab in the GMC Jammu today.

**"I have taken the vaccine today. It was a smooth process. I urge all the eligible persons to come forward and get the jab. The vaccine is safe and I**

*(Contd on page 11 Col 1)*

**Bengaluru, Shimla 'most liveable' cities**

# Srinagar ranked at 49th, Jammu 27th in Union Govt's 'Ease of Living Index'

**Gopal Sharma**

**JAMMU, Mar 4: The winter capital city- Jammu has been ranked at 27th position while summer capital-Srinagar of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir at 49th spot, in the Government's 'Ease of Living Index' (EoLI) for the year 2020.**

While Bengaluru was adjudged the most liveable city among 111 cities in India with top ranking, in the Govt's 'Ease of Living Index', followed by Pune, Ahmedabad, Chennai, Surat, Navi Mumbai, Coimbatore, Vadodara, Indore and Greater Mumbai in the list of top 10.

Of the total 49 cities ranked on livability index in the 'million-plus population' category, Delhi figured at the 13th spot with 57.56 score, Ludhiana at 14th spot, Jodhpur at 21st , Jaipur at 23rd, Chandigarh 29th, Agra 35th, Amritsar at 45th spot and Srinagar at the bottom, with a score of 42.95.

**According to the index released by Union Housing and Urban Affairs Minister, Hardeep Singh Puri today, Shimla topped the category of cities with 'population less than million' while Jammu ranked at 27th position with 52.49 score. Previously, Jammu had remained at 95th spot while Srinagar at 100th place in the list of 111 cities.**

Himachal's capital city-Shimla, with a score of 60.90, remained at Ist spot in the list of 62 cities while Muzaffarpur was at the bottom with a score of just 45.53.

In this category of 'less than million population', Bhubaneswar was ranked second, Silvassa third and they were followed by Kakinada, Salem, Vellore, Gandhinagar, Gurgaon, Davangere and Tiruchirapalli in the list of top 10 cities.

While Ghaziabad and Meerut in UP, figured at the 30th and the 36th spot in the 'million-plus population' category respectively, Allahabad is at the 32nd position and is followed by Patna (33rd). Faridabad is ranked 40th in this category.

Performance of the cities have been measured on four broad parameters - governance and social, physical and economic infrastructure.

The 'Ease of Living Index' is an assessment tool that evaluates the quality of life and the impact of various initiatives for urban development.

A total of 32.2 lakh people residing across 111 cities participated in a 'Citizen Perception Survey' holding a weightage of 30 per cent.

"These cities have emerged

*(Contd on page 11 Col 3)*

# Eyeing on Property Tax but hindering biggest source of revenue generation

*JMC losing more than Rs 33 lakh per month*

**Nishikant Khajuria**

**JAMMU, Mar 4: At the time when Government is devising mechanism for charging Property Tax in the name of generating funds for the municipal bodies, the Jammu Municipal Corporation (JMC), on the other hand, is intentionally hindering its biggest source of revenue generation.**

For extraneous considerations, the JMC authorities are allegedly delaying finalization of the bidding process for sole advertising rights through advertising and pole kiosks within the Municipal limits and thus losing income in crores of rupees.

While the concerned authorities are tight lipped over the reasons for delaying finalization of the bidding process, sources alleged that some vested interests in JMC are exploiting the situation for wrongful gain in connivance with the mafia illegally installing advertisement hoarding in Jammu city.

Pertinent to mention that the contract with the earlier approved firm for advertising rights through hoardings and pole kiosks with the Municipal limits had expired in June last year, when COVID lockdown was in force.

**Even as the business activities in Jammu had started limping back by September 2020, the JMC took another three months in inviting fresh tenders from registered firms for sole advertising rights in Ward number 1 to 75 within the Municipal limits. The online tenders complete in all respects along with scanned copy of Bank Guarantee amounting to Rs 4 lakhs were required to be uploaded on or before January 19, 2021. January 22, 2021 was the date of opening technical bid after which financial bids were also submitted by the participating firms. Rs 4 crores per year is the base price of bidding and the contract period will be for**

*(Contd on page 11 Col 3)*

# *1.2 million tulips to bloom in Srinagar*

**Fayaz Bukhari**

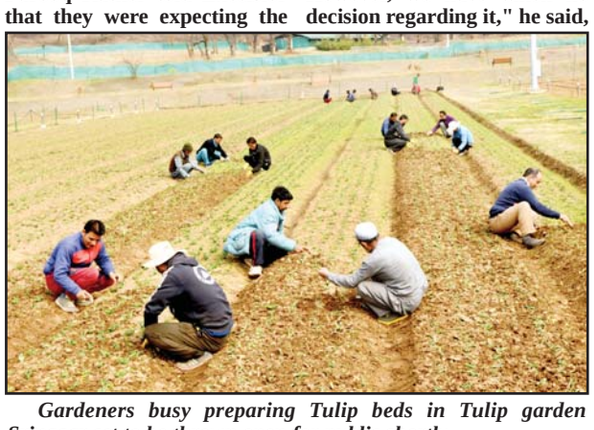
**SRINAGAR, Mar 4: Around 1.2 million tulips of 62-varieties will bloom in Asia's largest Tulip garden by the end of the month in Srinagar in the lap of Zabarwan hills overlooking Dal lake.**

**Watch video on www.excelsiornews.com*

Around 1.2 million tulips of 62-varieties are likely to bloom in the garden in the last week of March ahead of schedule and authorities are contemplating to open it for tourists on March 20.

Last year, the garden remained closed due to COVID-19 causing a loss of around Rs 5 crores. The opening of the garden will give impetus to tourism which has been badly hit by the two consecutive bad seasons.

**Director Floriculture, Farooq Rather told Excelsior that they were expecting the early opening of the tulip garden this year due to a slight temperature rise. "We are expecting an early opening if the temperature remains good. However, we have taken no decision regarding it," he said, adding that tulip bloom would also depend on the temperature.**



*Gardeners busy preparing Tulip beds in Tulip garden Srinagar set to be thrown open for public shortly.* *—Excelsior/Shakeel*

The work in Tulip garden is in full swing, with the department introducing new verities and designs to attract tourist to enjoy the spring bloom.

Around 100-gardeners who have been employed to take care of the flower beds said that they are working hard to make the garden more beautiful. "Last year we missed the admirers of our work as none visited the garden due to COVID-19. We are hopeful that the garden will attract more tourists as we have worked very hard on it," Mohammad Shafi, a gardener said.

This year, the Government is mulling to hold an 8-day tulip festival to attract more tourists. The department has also introduced new varieties and different themes for the beautification of the garden. In addition, the garden area has been extended

*(Contd on page 11 Col 3)*

# *COVID cases cross 17,000 after month*

NEW DELHI, Mar 4:

The daily new cases of COVID-19 in India were recorded above 17,000 after a little over a month taking the total tally of cases to 1,11,56,923, while the recoveries surged to 1,08,26,075, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated today.

A total of 17,407 infections were reported in a day. The death toll increased to 1,57,435 with 89 daily new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

On January 29, 18,855 new infections were recorded in a span of 24 hours.

The COVID-19 active caseload has increased to 1,73,413 which comprises 1.55 per cent

*(Contd on page 11 Col 1)*

# Two more Army jawans involved in data breach

***Excelsior Correspondent***

**JAMMU, Mar 4: After one of the Army soldiers, hailing from Amritsar district of Punjab posted in Northern Command, was arrested for leaking sensitive information to Pakistan's army, the authorities are investigating two more jawans of Northern Command headquarters data breach in which Pakistan drug racket is also under scanner.**

Reliable sources said two other jawans hailed from different battalions and were posted elsewhere.

Involvement of two more jawans reportedly surfaced during Court of Inquiry involving one soldier from the Northern Command. Two other jawans were reportedly in the drug trade as users or sellers, which is being probed.

Though posted at different places, all three Army soldiers were stated to be in touch with each other, sources said, adding that all three now have been arrested for cross-questioning.

"It was through the drug route that Pakistani intelligence operatives allegedly enticed the Army jawans into gathering intelligence," sources said.

It may be mentioned here that the General Officer Commanding Nagrota-based 16 Corps is the Presiding Officer of the Court of Inquiry along with two Major Generals as members of the inquiry team into the alleged breach.

*(Contd on page 11 Col 5)*