

MEA inks pact with TCS for 2nd phase of Passport Seva Programme

NEW DELHI, Jan 7:

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Friday signed an agreement with Tata Consultancy Services Ltd for the second phase of the Passport Seva Programme (PSP-V2.0) that envisages increasing data security and roll out of the next level of customer experience.

The MEA said it is working towards the opening of one passport services centre in every Lok Sabha constituency where there is no Passport Seva Kendra (PSK) or Post Office Passport Seva Kendra (POPSK).

It said the government plans to embark on technology upgrades with the use of biometrics, artificial intelligence, advanced data analytics and auto-response under the Passport Seva Programme (PSP).

Tata Consultancy Services Ltd has been involved as a service provider in the Passport Seva Project for over 10 years.

The PSP-V2.0 is a continuation and enhancement of PSP-

V1.0, an e-governance instrument that the MEA said introduced "unprecedented" transformation in the delivery of passport related services to citizens.

It said the project design ensured that support functions like citizen interface, technology backbone, call centres, training and change management were provided by the service provider, and the government continued to exercise all sovereign and security-related functions in the passport issuance process.

"The key elements of PSP-V 2.0 are setting up of a state-of-art digital ecosystem, process overhauling and integration among various stakeholders and database, improving citizen interface, upgrading technology, adopting best practices and strengthening data security," the MEA said in a statement.

At present, 93 PSKs, 428 POPSKs and 36 passport offices are operational across the country.

The programme has recently been connected to more than

176 Indian missions/ posts under the Global Passport Seva Programme (GPSP).

The MEA said security aspects, including strategic assets such as data centres, database and the application software will be owned by the government, adding there would be strict access controls across the system, incorporating biometrics.

It said to improve the quality of Government to Citizen (G2C) services, the "Passport Seva Programme would be embarking on technology upgrade with the use of biometrics, artificial intelligence, advance data analytics, chatbot, auto-response, natural language processing, cloud enablement."

"The issuance of e-Passports for enhanced customer satisfaction, increased security and next level of citizen experience will also be unveiled in the upgraded PSP-V 2.0," it said.

The MEA said the attributes of being responsive, caring, considerate, and transparent would continue to be the guiding principle of the passport seva programme. (PTI)

SC strikes down condition in CBSE policy

NEW DELHI, Jan 7:

The Supreme Court on Friday struck down a condition specified in a clause in the CBSE's evaluation policy of June last year which stated that marks obtained in the later examination will be considered as final for assessing class 12 students.

A bench of Justices A M Khanwilkar and C T Ravikumar said the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) shall provide an option to the candidate to accept the better of the two marks obtained in the subject for final declaration of his or her results for the last academic year.

The apex court, which was hearing a plea filed by some students who had appeared in the CBSE exams last year for improving their marks in class

12, noted that a grievance has been made about the provision in clause 28 of the June 17, 2021 policy which stated that "...As per this policy, marks scored in later examination will be considered final."

"As a result, we have no hesitation in striking down the condition specified in clause 28 that as per the policy, marks scored in later examination will be considered final," the bench said.

The top court noted that the petitioners have the grievance that this condition has been inserted in departure of the earlier schemes where the better of the two marks obtained by a candidate in a subject was to be considered for final declaration of results.

It observed that the CBSE has not given any justification for such a departure. (PTI)

DDC Rajouri for expeditious completion of works

Excelsior Correspondent

RAJOURI, Jan 7: District Development Commissioner Rajouri, Vikas Kunal today asked for the timely allotment of all the tenders for the expeditious completion of works in the district.

He was chairing a meeting of the concerned officers to review the physical and financial achievements of the RDD sector under various schemes. Officers who attended the meeting included ACD, Sushil Khajuria; CPO, Mohammad Khurshid; ExEn REW, Bashir Ahmed and Block Development Officers.

The meeting held detailed discussion on a number of points including Persons days generation, PMAY, MGNREGA, timely payment, tendering of works, aadhar seeding, bunkers, FTOs generation etc.

Taking stock of progress achieved under mandays generation, the DDC sought a detailed report from the concerned officers in this regard who in turn briefed about the same. He asked the concerned officers to achieve the yearly target of PDs generation by 21 January, 2022.

Regarding blockwise geo-tagging, the concerned officers were directed to work on a war footing basis to ensure that all the assets are geo-tagged at the earliest.

Taking stock of aadhar seeding, it was informed that the progress in this regard is 89.1 percent. DDC asked the concerned officers to maintain a close liaison with the banks and the beneficiaries to get the accounts of all the job card holders linked with Aadhar within the shortest possible time.

Talking about the timely payments, the DDC asked the concerned to ensure timely payment of wages to the beneficiar-

Govt should fix norms for fee of private schools: PRS

Excelsior Correspondent

JAMMU, Jan 7: Peoples Revolutionary Society (PRS) J&K has urged the Education Department to regulate the tuition fee and other charges of private schools in J&K. In a statement issued here, today chairman of the Society, Mir Ghulam Rasool Butwani, its senior officer bearers, D N Sadhu and Pran Nath Raina said that there should be proper check on the tuition fee and other charges demanded by private schools in J&K who have commercialised the education.

They said that they are not against the interests of private school proprietors or management but at the same time the Government should ensure that the parents of the students are not being fleeced by the private schools management.

The Society said that in the ensuing meeting convened by the Administrative Secretary Education in next week the views of representatives of the parents associations as well as members of civil society be also taken into account so that a workable fee structure can be formulated keeping in view the interests of private schools as well as parents so that they are not being fleeced on the name of tuition fee. They also demanded that every thing in this regard should be in black and white and donation system should be permanently discouraged.

Defence Accounts Pensioners Asso elects new Executive

Excelsior Correspondent

JAMMU, Jan 7: Defence Accounts Pensioners Welfare Association Jammu in its meeting here, today convened under the presidentship of Ashwani Trisal its chairman, held the elections for the new Executive Board of the Association.

The Association elected same office bearers except two members for the fourth consecutive term.

Ashwani Trisal was re-elected as chairman, Darshan Grover as vice chairman, Rashpal Digra as general secretary, Yash Pal Sharma joint

general secretary, Raj Singh, finance secretary, Usha Gupta, S K Sharma, Krishan Gopal and H R Bhardwaj as members. Addressing the members later Ashwani Trisal highlighted various activities carried out by the Association during the last year. He threw light on the revised pension procedure for Defence by PCDA (P) Prayag Raj UP. Mementoes were also given to 59 members who also renewed their membership. Earlier R K Dogra Association patron started the proceedings and highlighted the achievements of the previous Executive.

2 drug peddlers arrested, 50 grams Heroin recovered

Excelsior Correspondent

UDHAMPUR, Jan 7: Continuing its drive against drugs abuse, Udhampur Police today arrested two more drug peddlers and recovered 50 grams of contraband Heroin like substance from their possession.

The accused, identified as Avinash, son of Rajinder Kumar of Chopra Shop and Pawan Kumar son of Sham Lal of Garhi, were riding a Scooty, which was intercepted by a Police party of PS Udhampur, under the supervision of Addl SP Udhampur Anwaar Ul Haq and DySP Hqs Udhampur Sahil Mahajan during a surprise naka near Birma Bridge.

During frisking of the accused and their Scooty, bear-

ing registration number PB03AQ-0746, Police recovered 50 grams of contraband Heroin like substance.

In this regard, case FIR number 16/2022 under relevant sections of NDPS Act has been registered in PS Udhampur and investigation taken up.

During the current week, this is third consignment which has been recovered and seized. Earlier in two different FIRs, three persons were apprehended and significant quantity of narcotics was recovered.

Udhampur Police is also working on the involvement of others in this illegal narcotic trade so that the youth of Udhampur and its surroundings could be saved from the menace of drug addiction.

3007 Omicron cases, 302 deaths

COVID cases cross one lakh after nearly 7 months

NEW DELHI, Jan 7:

The daily rise in coronavirus infections was recorded above one lakh after 214 days, taking India's total tally of COVID-19 cases to 3,52,26,386 which includes 3,007 cases of Omicron reported across 27 states and UTs, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated today.

Out of the total Omicron cases reported so far, 1,199 people have recovered or migrated. Maharashtra recorded the maximum number of 876 cases followed by Delhi at 465, Karnataka 333, Rajasthan 291, Kerala 284 and Gujarat 204.

The country saw a single day rise of 1,17,100 new coronavirus infections, while the active cases increased to 3,71,363, the highest in around 120 days, according to the data updated at 8 am.

The death toll climbed to 4,83,178 with 302 fresh fatalities, the data stated.

The country last reported over one lakh cases on June 7

last year when 1,00,636 infections were recorded.

The active cases comprise 1.05 per cent of the total infections, while the national COVID-19 recovery rate has decreased to 97.57 per cent, the Ministry said.

An increase of 85,962 cases has been recorded in the active COVID-19 caseload in a span of 24 hours.

The daily positivity rate was recorded at 7.74 per cent while the weekly positivity rate was recorded at 4.54 per cent, according to the Ministry.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 3,43,71, 845, while the case fatality rate was recorded at 1.37 per cent.

The cumulative doses administered in the country so far under the nationwide COVID-19 vaccination drive has exceeded 149.66 crore.

India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 2020, 30 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on

September 16. It went past 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, crossed 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and surpassed the one-crore mark on December 19.

India crossed the grim milestone of two crore on May 4 and three crore on June 23

The 302 new fatalities include 221 from Kerala and 19 from West Bengal.

A total of 4,83,178 deaths have been reported so far in the country including 1,41,594 from Maharashtra, 49,116 from Kerala, 38,358 from Karnataka, 36,825 from Tamil Nadu, 25,127 from Delhi, 22,917 from Uttar Pradesh and 19,846 from West Bengal.

The Ministry stressed that more than 70 per cent of the deaths occurred due to comorbidities.

"Our figures are being reconciled with the Indian Council of Medical Research," the Ministry said on its website, adding that state-wise distribution of figures is subject to further verification and reconciliation. (PTI)

Duty-free Iranian apple causing heavy losses in J&K, growers seek Govt intervention

Suhail Bhat

SRINAGAR, Jan 7: The duty-free import of Iranian apples through Afghanistan under the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) is impacting the Kashmiri market in India and causing heavy losses to apple traders.

Apple growers said that an "illegal" supply of cheap Iranian apples has lowered demand for Kashmiri apple, putting a damper on the Valley's estimated three crore apple boxes, which includes 1.5 crore boxes in cold stores and 1.5 crore boxes in godowns.

Farmers have written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, pleading with him to assist in the worst circumstance that has snatched their market share.

The Kashmir Valley Fruit Growers and Cum Dealers Union, a conglomerate of all fruit growers associations in Kashmir, wrote in their letter that the "illegal and unlawful" import of Iranian apples into India could be "disastrous for small and marginal growers of J&K and Himachal Pradesh, as

well as result in huge losses to the exchequer".

According to Bashir Ahmad Basheer, president of the KVFGDU, the arrival of Iranian apples has resulted in a decline of over 50 per cent in demand for Kashmiri apple, which are now selling for significantly lower prices than last year. "The apple box, which was being sold for around Rs. 1200, is being sold at half the price", he added.

Imports of cheaper Iranian apple has wreaked havoc on Kashmir's Agricultural sector, which has already sustained massive losses due to natural disasters and two consecutive lockdowns.

The Hill States Horticulture Forum, founded to address the problem, described it as "catastrophic" for small and marginal fruit growers.

"The sale of Iranian apples in Mandis has resulted in a 30 percent to 40 percent decrease in prices for domestic farmers this year, and there is an expectation that if this continues, farmers will have no market and no means of sustenance," said Harish Chauhan,

president of the Hill States Horticulture Forum.

He said that they had engaged the Government in the hope of resolving the important issues. "We hope the administration will take our demand into account. Import duties on apples should be levied at 100% realistically to protect the rights of domestic growers and affiliates, and imports should be limited. Otherwise, the appropriate government will lose income due to the undervaluation of duty", he said.

He, however, pointed out that the import of apples would have an impact on other states. He said that states such as Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand will be affected as well and that growers will have an even more difficult time during the main season if imports are not restricted.

Horticulture accounts for roughly 8% of Jammu and Kashmir's GDP. Official statistics reveal that the horticultural business supports seven lakh families directly or indirectly.

SC grants bail to Royal Singh in Amandeep murder case

Excelsior Correspondent

JAMMU, Jan 7: In the much publicized Amandeep Singh murder case, a three Judges Bench of Supreme Court comprising Chief Justice N V Ramana, Justice Surya Kant and Justice Hima Kohli has granted bail to Royal Singh.

After hearing the counsel for Royal Singh, the Supreme Court observed, "the petitioner has already suffered incarceration for a period of more than 12 years and more particularly the fact that there is not much likelihood of the hearing of the appeal preferred by him before the High Court in near future, we deem it appropriate to grant bail to the petitioner".

The Supreme Court directed that the petitioner be enlarged on bail on terms and conditions to be imposed by the trial court.

Missing minor girl from Jharkhand reunited with family

Excelsior Correspondent

JAMMU, Jan 7: Child Welfare Committee Jammu reunited a missing minor girl from Jharkhand with her family.

Giving out the details, Chairperson Child Welfare Committee Jammu Shalini Sharma informed that a 15-year-old girl was found alone on Railway Station Jammu and accordingly a diary entry was registered with Railway Police Force on January 3 this year.

She said that the girl was shifted to Government Shelter Home at Trikuta Nagar for short till pending inquiry, adding that the girl shared that she left her house after an argument with her parents.

"After a counselling session, the girl shared the address and contact number of her family", Sharma said, adding that District Child Protection Officer Jharkhand was contacted, who reached to the family and further confirmed that the girl has been missing from her house since January 1 this year and a missing reports stands registered with Saria Police Station District Girdih Jharkhand.

Today, the parents of the girl along with the investigation office of the case reached Jammu to take the girl back, Chairperson CWC Jammu Shalini Sharma informed.

The parents thanked the Child Welfare Committee and District Administration for their efforts.

Shabnam posted as Asst Com State Taxes Deptt Kashmir

Excelsior Correspondent

JAMMU, Jan 7: Shabnam Rashid, General Manager, DIC Kulgam, has been transferred and posted as Assistant Commissioner in the State Taxes Department, Kashmir, against an available vacancy, with immediate effect.

According to an order in this regard, Surjeel Ali Naiku, Assistant Commissioner Panchayat, Kulgam, shall hold the charge of the post of General Manager, DIC, Kulgam, in addition to his own duties, till further orders.

Hawker killed by room-mate, accused held

Excelsior Correspondent

RAJOURI, Jan 7: A hawker was allegedly killed by his room-mate following a quarrel between them while watching a television show in Rajouri area.

The accused was traced from his native place in Punjab and arrested by police. The police said deceased Pawan Kumar, hailing from Udhampur in Jammu, was sharing a room with three others — Ashok Kumar, Narayan Das and Vishnu Das, in Rajouri.

On new year night, the four men were watching some programme on the television during which they resorted to abuses and a fight. In a fit of anger, Ashok allegedly attacked Pawan with an iron object, leading to his death.

Police said Ashok then fled to his native place Gurdaspur in Punjab and was arrested from there. He has confessed his crime.

IGNOU postpones exams

Excelsior Correspondent

JAMMU, Jan 7: Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) has postponed the upcoming examination in view of outburst and infectious growth of the new variant of Corona virus and the weekend curfews in the various parts of the country.

According to a handout, IGNOU has postponed the examinations for December 2021, which were scheduled to commence from 20th January onwards. The next schedule of the examinations will be notified 15 days before commencement of examination.

The learners have been advised to keep checking the university's website for examination related information and updates and frequent intervals.



J&K Housing Board

Jammu: A/D Block Green Belt Park, Gandhi Nagar, Jammu
Tel.: (0191) 2431044, Fax: (0191) 2431230
Srinagar: Habitat Centre, Bemina, Srinagar
Tel.: (0194) 2490421, 2490731



e-Auction of Housing Board Properties

J&K Housing Board invites bidders for **e-auction of different commercial and residential properties** (plots/shops/flats) on 'as is where is basis' in Jammu and Srinagar on 20 year lease basis.

For brochures visit <https://jkhousingboard.jk.gov.in>

The Bid for allotment shall be entertained only through

https://jkhm.auctiontiger.net

Closing date & time : 17th January, 2022, 6:00 PM
(Date and time extended in view of online payment issues)

ELIGIBILITY:

- a. The scheme is open to all
- b. The applicant must have attained the age of 18 years on the last date of submission of Application form.

- Applicants are advised to keep scanned copy of Photograph, Aadhar Card, PAN Card, signatures and cancelled cheque or passbook before starting the online application.
- The Application Form should be filled up online and the applicant should verify his/her details carefully before submitting application on auction website. Mere online submission of data will not be treated as an application and shall be liable to be rejected out rightly.
- Step by step procedure for filling the form and there after apply also available on the website.

NOTE:

- a. Area/sizes mentioned in the e-brochure of each auction site are tentative and the applicants have to accept the area/size as per availability at site.
- b. Registration fee shall be adjusted towards the cost of plot in case of successful bidders, refunded to unsuccessful bidders and shall be forfeited in respect of defaulter(s) as specified in relevant clauses of the Brochure.
- c. Non-refundable Application Fee of Rs. 1000/- is applicable for each event.
- d. Costs are exclusive of GST and other taxes if applicable.

DIP/J-5502-P
DT:- 07-01-22