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NIA raids in 3 States
 NEW DELHI/CHENNAI, Feb 15:

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) conducted searches in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka today in connection with two cases of blasts in Coimbatore and Mangaluru, its official spokesperson said.

The searches were carried out at 40 places -- 32 in connection with the Coimbatore car bomb blast and eight linked to the Mangaluru blast.

One of the cases relates to a (Contd on page 4 Col 1)

Bhandari posted in J&K

Excelsior Correspondent

JAMMU, Feb 15: Dr Mandep Kumar Bhandari, a senior IAS officer of erstwhile Jammu and Kashmir cadre (now AGMUT) was today posted to Jammu and Kashmir from the Central deputation.

However, Bhandari will join after two months as he has been sanctioned 60 days Earned Leave as end tenure leave.

He is 2001 batch IAS officer and has held various prestigious posts in Jammu and Kashmir (Contd on page 4 Col 1)

Mehbooba opposes action on BBC

Excelsior Correspondent

SRINAGAR, Feb 15: PDP President Mehbooba Mufti today said there was "nothing

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new" in the Income Tax department's survey operations at BBC offices as the BJP-led Government had allegedly adopted similar measures against journalists in Kashmir.

However, Mehbooba said (Contd on page 4 Col 3)

Sohail Kazmi booked for cheating

Excelsior Correspondent

JAMMU, Feb 15: Sohail Kazmi, Editor-in-Chief, Daily Taskeen newspaper and member, Waqf Board, has been booked in a case of cheating here today.

A police spokesperson said that the accused was booked under Section 420 at Police Station Peer Mitha, Jammu on the basis of an audio recording produced by the complainant, Dr KL Sharma, wherein the former (Kazmi) could be heard of (Contd on page 4 Col 1)

Landmines explode amid forest fire on LoC

Excelsior Correspondent

JAMMU, Feb 15: Several landmines exploded following a forest fire along the Line of Control in Poonch district today.

The fire started in the forest area across the border and spread to the Balakot sector of Mendhar subdivision on the Indian side. The fire also prompted a security alert, they said.

At least half-a-dozen land- (Contd on page 4 Col 1)

Will be constructed at the cost of Rs 1681.51 cr

Ladakh to get all-weather connectivity by Dec 2025, CCS nod to Shinkun La tunnel

ITBP gets 7 new bns, operational border base

Sanjeev Pargal

JAMMU, Feb 15: In a major step aimed at providing all-weather connectivity to Ladakh, the Union Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi today approved a proposal for construction of 4.1 kilometer long tunnel under Shinkun La on Manali-Darcha-Padam-Nimu axis which will also ensure uninterrupted supply to the troops in Eastern Ladakh where Sino-Indian troops are engaged in eyeball-to-eyeball position at various friction points on the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

The Cabinet also sanctioned seven new battalions and an operational border base with a fresh strength of 9400 personnel for the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), which guards the India-China LAC.

Official sources told the

Excelsior that it was Darcha-Padam-Nimu route which was used by the troops for transporting weaponry to Eastern Ladakh after confrontation with China in the Eastern Ladakh in May 2020. The BRO constructed black top road on this route in 2019 but it could not be used in winter months due to heavy snow on 16703 feet high Shinkun La.

The road is critical to the defence of Ladakh as it is sheltered from both Pakistani and Chinese long range artillery or missile firing unlike the exposed Srinagar-Drass-Kaksar-Kargil highway near LoC and the Manali-Upshi-Leh highway near the LAC respectively.

However, construction of tunnel under Shinkun La will be of immense help to the troops guarding LAC in Eastern Ladakh as it will provide all-weather connectivity to Ladakh and help troops move along with all kind of

Rs 4800 cr for Vibrant Village Scheme in Ladakh, 4 States

supplies including weaponry.

The Union Cabinet cleared the tunnel and the approach roads on both sides at the cost of Rs1681.51 crore. It will be completed by December 2025. Since the BRO has already done road cutting and black topping of the approaches on both sides to Shinkun La, the Government will now only have to complete the 4.1 km underground pass, sources said.

Nimu in Ladakh is close to Kargil as well as Leh. This means that the Indian Army can do faster deployment of forces and equipment if a situation flares up in Kargil-Siachen sector or in Eastern Ladakh.

Providing details of the Cabinet decision, Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting Anurag Thakur said the tunnel will be completed by December 2025 at a cost of Rs 1,681 crore.

The length of the tunnel will be 4.1 km. An approach will also

be built by December 2025. The Shinkun La tunnel will provide all-weather road connectivity to Ladakh and this will be the shortest route to the border areas of the Union territory, Thakur said.

"This (project) is also very important as far as the security and safety of the country is concerned... It will also help in the movement of our security forces in that region," Thakur said.

Meanwhile, the Government today sanctioned hiring of 9,400 fresh troops for raising seven new border battalions apart from a new operational base for the India-China LAC guarding force ITBP.

The proposal was cleared during the meeting of the CCS that was chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

About 90,000 personnel strong ITBP was raised in the aftermath of the 1962 Chinese (Contd on page 4 Col 3)

Rahul Gandhi skis in Gulmarg, takes ride on Gondola Cable car

Fayaz Bukhari

SRINAGAR, Feb 15: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi went skiing in Gulmarg this afternoon soon after his arrival in Kashmir today.

Gandhi stopped for a brief period in Tangmarg town while on his way to Gulmarg skiing resort.

He arrived in Gulmarg under tight security and checked-in at

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Hotel Khyber. He took a ride on the first phase of the famous Gondola Cable car to Kongdoori after lunch. He was accompanied by his nephew on the ski slopes.

Before heading downhill, the



Congress leader posed for selfies with an excited bunch of tourists, giving a tough time to his security personnel. Gandhi was accompanied by police personnel and members of the ski patrol team as he glided down the Kongdoori mountains of Gulmarg. He again

went to Kongdoori in the cable car for the second run downhill. The tourists were upbeat on seeing Rahul Gandhi and they raised slogans in favour of him.

"We are lucky to have met Rahul Gandhi here. We saw him last time in Kerala but this time we saw him from very close distance," said a tourist couple from Kerala who met the Congress leader.

Another tourist said Gandhi deserved to enjoy his holiday after undertaking hectic Bharat Jodo Yatra.

Gandhi refused to take questions from the media. "Namaskar" was all he said when he was asked to comment.

In Srinagar at Congress headquarters large numbers of workers had gathered on hearing that Rahul Gandhi is arriving in Kashmir.

Ladakh Groups hold protest at Delhi for four-point agenda

Excelsior Correspondent

NEW DELHI, Feb 15: Representatives from Ladakh except the BJP today took their agitation to the Union capital by staging dharna at the Jantar Mantar in support of their four-point agenda.

Besides leaders from the Leh Apex Body (LAB) and Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA), the two groups spearheading agitation for Statehood, Sixth Schedule, two Lok Sabha seats and jobs to the Union Territory of Ladakh; many students and common Ladakhis also joined the protest which was held peacefully.

The BJP has dissociated itself from the LAB and KDA but is supportive of Sixth Schedule status to Ladakh say-

Demand Statehood, Sixth Schedule status



Ladakh leaders staging dharna at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on Wednesday.

ing the Central Government has already set up a High Powered Committee (HPC) for discussions on the demands.

Slogans demanding Statehood for Ladakh were

raised at the Jantar Mantar during the protest. Representatives of social, cultural and political organisations from Ladakh, as well as hundreds of common (Contd on page 4 Col 3)

Salary of 7 BDOs withheld

Excelsior Correspondent

DODA, Feb 15: District Development Commissioner, Doda Vishesh Paul Mahajan has withheld the salary of seven Block Development Officers (BDOs) for poor performance in achieving the targets under District Capex and Area Development Plan which was reviewed by him the other day.

"Subsequent to the review meeting of the progress of physical and financial achievements by the Rural Development Department and in view of poor performance, the salary of the seven Block Development Officers is stopped with immediate effect till further orders", an order issued by DDC read.

The officers, whose salaries have been withheld are, BDOs (Contd on page 4 Col 1)



A view of Dal lake on a winter sunny day in Srinagar. -Excelsior/Shakeel

LG administers oath to Justice Kotiswar as CJ of J&K & Ladakh HC

Excelsior Correspondent

JAMMU, Feb 15: Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha today administered the oath of office to Justice Nongmeikapam Kotiswar Singh as Chief Justice of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh High Court at an impressive oath ceremony.

The Warrant of Appointment of Justice N Kotiswar Singh as 36th Chief Justice of the J&K and Ladakh High Court was read out by the Registrar General Shahzad Azeem.

The oath ceremony was attended by Justice Tashi Rabstan, Justice Sanjeev Kumar, Justice Sindhu Sharma, Justice Rajesh Oswal, Justice Vinod Chatterji Koul, Justice Sanjay Dhar, Justice Puneet Gupta,

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Justice Javed Iqbal Wani, Justice Mohan Lal, Justice Mohd Akram Chowdhary, Justice Rahul Bharti, Justice Moksha Khajuria Kazmi, Justice Wasim Sadiq Nargal and Justice Rajesh Sekhri and their spouses.

The ceremony was also graced by Advocate General D C Raina, Vishal Sharma, DSGI Jammu, Tahir Shamsi, DSGI, Kashmir, former Judges of the High Court, Senior Designated Advocates, Government Advocates, M K Bhardwaj,



LG Manoj Sinha with CJ Justice N Kotiswar Singh after oath ceremony on Wednesday.

President HCBA along with other office bearers, Sanjay Parihar, Principal District & Sessions Judge, Jammu, M K Sharma, Principal Secretary to Chief Justice, other Registry Officers as well as Senior Judicial Officers.

Among other dignitaries who attended the oath ceremony included spouse of Chief Justice Vijayalakshmi Brara, daughters Vasundhara Nongmeikapam and Vatsala Nongmeikapam, mother Gomati Devi Nongmeikapam and mother-in-law Kamlesh Rani besides close relatives and friends.

The ceremony was live streamed on YouTube and was also attended physically by the dignitaries and the senior officers/officials of the UT

Administration including the Chief Secretary, Additional Chief Secretary (Home), Director General of Police, Law Secretary and other officers.

Justice Kotiswar Singh was designated as a Senior Advocate in 2008 and served as the Advocate General of the State of Manipur from November 2007 till his elevation to the Bench in October 2011. He was appointed as a Judge of the Gauhati High Court in November 2012.

He was appointed as a Judge of the Manipur High Court upon its creation with effect from 23rd March, 2013. Later on, in 2017 he was appointed to perform the duties of the office of Chief Justice of the High Court of Manipur. On transfer to Gauhati High Court, (Contd on page 4 Col 3)

Liability by 2022 end liquidated FD releases Rs 714 cr for GPF, Gratuity bills

Excelsior Correspondent

JAMMU, Feb 15: A proposal to the directions passed by Chief Secretary, Dr Arun Kumar Mehta, the Department of Finance has cleared long pending liability on account of GPF/ Gratuity up to the end of previous year.

The Department has released an amount of Rs. 714.00 cr in lieu of clearance of GPF bills to the extent of Rs. 458.00 cr and Rs. 256.00 cr on

account of Gratuity thereby liquidating the liability accumulated on account of such bills received up to the end of year 2022.

Further, the Department is also ensuring that the Revised Death Cum Retirement Gratuity and Commuted value of pension is cleared on daily basis for the benefit of the supernannuating employees.

Moreover, the Government has given assurance to all the applicants that

the pending liability accumulated on account of GPF/Gratuity from January onwards will be cleared in due course of time.

This has given succor to thousands of employees who were facing difficulties on account of delay in the payment of their pensionary dues. It has also administered confidence among those whose cases are under process or who are going to retire in the months to come.

Mercury stays below sub-zero in Valley Traffic disrupted for 11 hrs on NH

Excelsior Correspondent

JAMMU, Feb 15: The vehicular traffic on Jammu-Srinagar National Highway remained disrupted for about 11 hours today in Ramban sector and a large number of vehicles were stranded.

Official sources said that due to major landslide at Mehr between Ramban town and new Chenab bridge, the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway was blocked at around 8 am today. A major portion of the road was affected.

With this, a large number of vehicles were stranded on both sides. The Light Motor Vehicles and ambulances were diverted via Maitra, through old bridge, but movement of heavy vehicles was not allowed on that bridge. The highway for one way traffic could be cleared at around 7.20 pm and the movement of stranded vehicles was allowed first. Frequent landslides at this

point continued for the last three days. Even on Tuesday, the highway remained disrupted for four hours. After road clearance this evening, a large traffic jam was reported.

Meanwhile, the minimum temperature stayed below sub-zero level in Kashmir despite a

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slight increase today. The weatherman has already forecast mainly dry weather till the weekend.

Srinagar recorded a low of minus 0.2°C against the previous night's minus 1.6°C. Today's minimum temperature was below normal by 0.3°C for the city.

Qazigund recorded a low of minus 1.2°C against minus 3.0°C the previous night and it was 1.1°C below normal for the town. Pahalgam recorded a low of minus 3.6°C against minus 4.6°C the previous night and it

was 0.8°C above normal for the tourist resort.

Kokernag recorded a low of minus 1.5°C against minus 2.4°C the previous night and it was 0.6°C below normal for the place.

Gulmarg recorded a low of minus 4.2°C against minus 7.2°C on the previous night and it was 2.6°C above normal for the skiing resort.

In Kupwara town, the mercury settled at minus 1.7°C against minus 3.5°C the previous night and it was 1.5°C below normal for the town.

Leh and Kargil recorded a low of minus 10.4°C and minus 13.4°C respectively. While Chillai-Kalan, the 40-day long harsh winter period that started on December 21 has ended, Kashmir is under the grip of a 20-day-long period called 'Chillai-Khur'd'. It will be followed by a 10-day-long period 'Chillai-Bacha' (baby cold) which will end on February 28.

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INSIDE	WEATHER
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Army's LAC preparedness ...Page 6 Advisor emphasises on rationalisation of teaching staff in schools, regular capacity building ...Page 3 BJP committed to serve nation, society: Raina ...Page 3 Demolition drive another assault on J&K: JKPPC chief ...Page 5 Erudition of KPs has left indelible mark on J&K's social landscape: Rana ...Page 5 Deepiti, Richa shine as India beat West Indies by 6 wickets ...Page 10 	<p>JAMMU: Mainly dry TEMPERATURE Max: 26.2 Degree C Min: 9.8 Degree C</p> <p>RELATIVE HUMIDITY RH-I (Morning): 76.0 per cent RH-II (Evening): 44.0 per cent Sunset on Thursday: 06.18 p.m. Sunrise on Friday: 07.13 a.m.</p> <p>SRINAGAR: Mainly dry TEMPERATURE Max: 15.0 Degree C Min: -0.2 Degree C</p> <p>RELATIVE HUMIDITY RH-I (Morning): 89.0 per cent RH-II (Evening): 49.0 per cent</p> <p>LEH: TEMPERATURE Max: 5.0 Degree C Min: -10.4 Degree C</p>

KU's South campus fails to introduce Science stream 14 years after establishment

Suhail Bhat

SRINAGAR, Feb 15: For the last 14 years, students at Kashmir University's South campus have been deprived of the opportunity to study basic Science courses, forcing them to travel outside the Valley to pursue their academic aspirations.

The South campus was founded in 2008 with the goal of expanding the University's academic offerings and catering to students from the southern region of the Valley. However, since the campus's creation, it has not offered Science courses in chemistry, biology and physics, leaving students who are interested in obtaining degrees in these fields with no choice except to attend other

Universities. "The University was supposed to bring quality education to our doorstep, but the absence of a Science stream has left us with no choice but to send our children to other Universities, which is a huge financial burden," a local said.

The students expressed their disappointment with the lack of Science courses at the South campus. Many students expressed their frustration, saying that they had to travel long distances to attend other Universities for their Science subjects, which was both time-consuming and expensive.

"It is difficult to pursue a career in Science-related fields without a Science stream. We have to travel long distances and bear additional expenses

to attend other Universities, which affects our academic and personal lives," a student said.

Another student added: "We have been requesting the administration to introduce a Science stream for years, but they have not taken any concrete steps. It is frustrating and disappointing to see the lack of action on such an important issue."

The lack of a Science stream is also impacting the University's overall reputation, as it is failing to attract students interested in pursuing degrees in Science. The University administration has been criticized for not taking adequate steps to address this issue and expand the academic offerings at the South Campus. (Contd on page 4 Col 1)