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Sisodia arrested by CBI

NEW DELHI, Feb 26: The CBI this evening arrested Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia in connection with alleged corruption in the formulation and implementation of the now-scrapped excise policy for 2021-22 after nearly eight hours of questioning as his answers were not satisfactory, officials said.

Sisodia arrived at the CBI headquarters around 11.12 am for the second round of questioning, they said.

(Contd on page 4 Col 5)

Pak funding Khalistan supporters: Mann

BHAVNAGAR, Feb 26: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann today said Khalistan supporters were getting funding from Pakistan and other countries, amid the ongoing turmoil in his state surrounding the recent activities of Khalistani sympathiser Amritpal Singh and his supporters.

Without revealing any concrete strategy to tackle Khalistani elements, Mann, who was in Gujarat, said the Punjab Police were capable of handling the issue

(Contd on page 4 Col 5)

Rahul acknowledges Modi's achievements in Kashmir: BJP

NEW DELHI, Feb 26: Rahul Gandhi acknowledged for the first time what the Narendra Modi Government has achieved in Kashmir, BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra said today, reacting to the Congress leader's remarks about people in the region hoisting the national tricolour.

Addressing a press conference at the BJP headquarters, Patra hit out at the Congress and said the party was practising "negative"

(Contd on page 4 Col 3)

MeT forecasts rain, snowfall

SRINAGAR, Feb 26 : The Weatherman today forecast scattered to fairly widespread light rain and snowfall in Kashmir for next two days.

A Meteorological department official said that scattered light rain and snow was also expected on February 28.

"From March 1-2nd, light rain is expected in plains and light to moderate snow/rain over higher reaches at many places," he said, adding, "Dry weather is expected during 3rd to 7th March."

(Contd on page 4 Col 3)

Ex BJP MLA cuts odd figure at exam centre

BAREILLY (UP), Feb 26: Holding a writing pad with a laminated admit card clipped to it in one hand and a water bottle in the other, a middle-aged man became the object of attraction of many students, who were intrigued by the odd sight at an Uttar Pradesh Class 12 board exam centre here.

Appearing for the exam on February 16, the man waiting outside the centre was former

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Security forces have free hand to deal with militancy: LG
Pandit bank guard shot dead in Pulwama

Fayaz Bukhari
SRINAGAR, Feb 26: A Kashmiri Pandit working as a security guard at a bank was shot dead by militants in Pulwama this morning.

Masked militants fired at Sanjay Sharma in Achan village, Pulwama who along with his wife were on way to a nearby health facility. Sharma, who was critical-



Family members and relatives waiting near the body of Sanjay Sharma killed by militants in Pulwama on Sunday.

ly injured in the attack, was rushed to the hospital where he succumbed to injuries.

DIG South Kashmir, Rayees Ahmad Bhat who visited the spot

where the incident took place. "However, the circumstances under which the incident took place is part of the investigation which is underway," he added.

of residents held candle light protest against killing and demanded that the killers should be brought to justice.

In October last year, a

Soon after, the police, Army and paramilitary forces cordoned off the area to arrest the suspected militants.

The residents of the area in large numbers gathered at the residence of Sharma and expressed sympathies with the bereaved family. Some residents came out on the main road and protested against the killing.

Later in the evening, a group

*Watch video on www.excelsiornews.com

other members of the minority community in the Valley since the abrogation of Jammu and Kashmir's special status in 2019. The attacks have picked up since October 2021.

Killing of Sharma is the first fatal attack on a Kashmiri Pandit in the Valley since October last year.

Meanwhile, Lieutenant Governor, Manoj Sinha strongly condemned the dastardly attack on Kashmiri Pandit in Pulwama district and said that administration has given free hand to the security forces to deal with the militants.

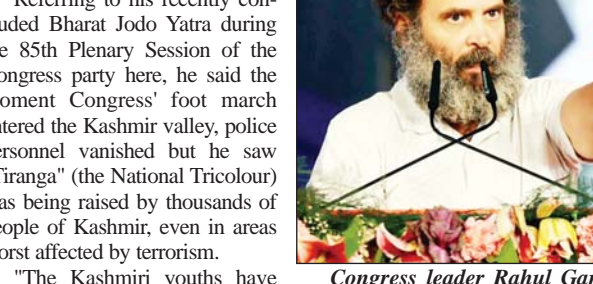
The LG said the administration is standing strong with the bereaved family. "My heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family," he said.

'We awakened feeling inside Kashmiris'
'Tiranga' raised by thousands of people in Kashmir during BJJ: Rahul

CHHATTISGARH, Feb 26: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi today said that it was Congress party that made thousands of Kashmiris unfurl tricolour in the Valley on their own.

Referring to his recently concluded Bharat Jodo Yatra during the 85th Plenary Session of the Congress party here, he said the moment Congress' foot march entered the Kashmir valley, police personnel vanished but he saw "Tiranga" (the National Tricolour) was being raised by thousands of people of Kashmir, even in areas worst affected by terrorism.

"The Kashmiri youths have Tiranga in their hands now and



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi addressing the party's 85th plenary session in Raipur on Sunday. (UNI)

SRINAGAR, Feb 26: CRPF people told me in Kashmir that they had never seen this before... We saw the PM's speech in Parliament and he said he also unfurled the National Flag in Srinagar's Lal Chowk along with a few BJP people... I said he did not understand the issue.

"Narendra Modi hoisted the flag at Lal Chowk, but the Bharat

Jodo Yatra made thousands of Kashmiris unfurl the National Flag. PM did not understand (it)... You took away the feeling of love for Indian Tricolour from the people of Kashmir, but we made them unfurl it," he further said.

"The love for the National Flag comes from the heart and we made Kashmiris unfurl the flag on their own after we awakened the feeling inside them as they trusted us," Gandhi said, amid a loud applause.

The former Congress president, Rahul Gandhi said that lakhs of people participated in his foot march during the Bharat Jodo Yatra and he learnt a lot during it.

Gandhi said that earlier he

(Contd on page 4 Col 1)

3 Govt employees sacked for anti-national activities

SRINAGAR, Feb 26 : Government today sacked three employees for their involvement in anti-national activities, taking the number of terminated employees in the last few years to around four dozen.

These employees were sacked under Article 311 of the Constitution of India which enables the Government for termination of a Government servant without an inquiry.

These employees were sacked as their activities had come to the adverse notice of law enforcement and intelligence agencies. They have been found involved in activities prejudicial to the interests of the J&K UT, such as involvement in militant related activities and

drug trafficking.

Those who have been sacked are Manzoor Ahmad Ito, Junior Engineer (Public Works Department) in PMGSY, Bandipore; Syed Saleem Andrabi, Orderly in Social Welfare Department, teshil Handwara, in district Kupwara and Mohammad Aurif Sheikh, Teacher in Government Middle

*Watch video on www.excelsiornews.com

School, Pagihalla, Mahore, Reasi district.

As per the police dossier, Manzoor Ahmad Ito had played an important role in mobilizing people in support of the militants and also motivating youth to join their ranks, which posed a serious threat to the security of the Indian

(Contd on page 4 Col 1)

State.

Syed Saleem Andrabi has been found involved in drug trafficking. In December 2020, the National Investigating Agency (NIA) had filed charge sheet against Andrabi and six others for drug smuggling.

The NIA investigations revealed that they including Andrabi, were involved in cross-border smuggling and supply of the narcotic drug heroin in Jammu and Kashmir and other parts of the country after procuring the same from their associates based abroad, including Pakistan.

As per the charge sheet, members of the group visited Pakistan several times during 2016-17 to meet the operatives of Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) and Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM). It said that the

(Contd on page 4 Col 1)

Central funds were stopped in absence of Property Tax
NITI Aayog, Union Ministries to release ULB grants blocked for last 4 years

Sanjeev Pargal
JAMMU, Feb 26: The National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog and the Union Ministries have agreed to release all grants to the Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) which had been blocked for last four years ever since elections were held to Municipalities in the absence of imposition of Property Tax in Jammu and Kashmir.

"The grants will now become an annual feature," official sources told the Excelsior.

"A number of Central grants running into hundreds of crores of rupees were not being released to Municipal Corporations, Municipal Councils and Municipal Committees of Jammu and Kashmir since the new bodies were constituted in January 2019 after elections were held to them in October-November 2018," sources said.

The grants pertained to different schemes being executed by the Municipalities for development, sanitation, poverty alleviation, social welfare etc.

The grants, as per the sources, were linked to imposition of Property Tax in Jammu and

*Dev, poverty alleviation, social welfare sectors to benefit

Kashmir. The administration repeatedly took up the issue with NITI Aayog as well as concerned Ministries which deal with the grants but there was no headway as imposition of Property Tax was made mandatory for release of the grants.

"However, now since Jammu and Kashmir has implemented Property Tax, the grants would start pouring in from April 1, 2023," sources said, adding the NITI Aayog as well as concerned Ministries have indicated that the funds blocked for last four years could also be released, sources said.

Both Urban and Rural Local Bodies will complete their five-year term by the end of this year and elections will become due to them in October-November just like they were held in 2018.

In October 2020, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) had empowered the J&K administration to impose Property Taxes through the Municipal Corporations, Municipal Councils and Municipal Committees in the Union Territory.

The MHA had issued several amendments in the Jammu and Kashmir Municipal Act, 2000 and

(Contd on page 4 Col 4)

Timber worth crores missing from Sales Depots in Pulwama

Excelsior Correspondent
SRINAGAR, Feb 26: A Committee of the Jammu and Kashmir Forest Development Corporation (JKFDC) has found timber worth crores of rupees missing from the sales depots of Pulwama district which has been illegally sold by the officials of these depots.

The J&KFDC South Kashmir formed a committee headed by Javid Ahmad Malik, Divisional Manager, Extraction Division, Anantnag for conducting enquiry as well as physical verification to look into the shortage of timber at sales depots of Pulwama, Panzgam and Litter in district Pulwama after it received complaints about shortage of timber.

The Committee, as per the

inquiry report, submitted last week to Managing Director J&KFDC detected a huge shortage of 6100.88 cusec feet of timber including Fir, Kail and Deodar in these three sale depots.

The missing timber include 23.40 cusec feet of Deodar, 189.74 cusec feet of Kail and 5887.74 cusec feet of Fir.

The market value of the missing timber is worth several crore rupees and the Committee has termed it highly alarming and disgusting.

The Committee report said that the Divisional Manager has not cooperated with the enquiry committee and he didn't produce necessary records before it during the inspection.

It said that earlier as well he had been cautioned by the General

Manager South, Firdous Ahmad Mir, to improve the working culture of the Division, but "unfortunately no good results, especially during the on-spot inspection of the records of the Division on 28.06.2022".

The Committee has raised questions over his role in monitoring the overall working of these depots where such wanton losses have taken place.

The committee has recommended that the cost of the shortage may be ordered to be recovered from involved staff as per prevailing auction and sale rates.

It has also recommended an exemplary punishment to those involved fraudulent officials to curb such tendency of misappropriating official position.

(Contd on page 4 Col 5)

Development Authorities constituted by H&UDD yet to start functioning in J&K

Mohinder Verma
JAMMU, Feb 26: Several Development Authorities constituted by the Housing and Urban Development Department have yet not started functioning as a result of which there is no headway in achieving the objectives of the Jammu and Kashmir Development Act, 1970.

The Section 3 of the Jammu and Kashmir Development Act states: "The Government may, by notification in the Gazette, declare any area to be local area for purposes of this Act and constitute therefore an Authority to be called the Development Authority".

Likewise, Section 4 of the Act read: "The Authority shall consist of 9 or more members including a Chairman, all of whom shall be

appointed by the Government on such terms and conditions as the Government may specify and members of Authority shall hold office for such time as the Government may by notification determine".

In view of these provisions of the J&K Development Act, the Housing and Urban Development Department through different notifications constituted several new Development Authorities last year. Moreover, the already existing Development Authorities were reconstituted through proper notifications.

While the already existing Katra Development Authority, Udhampur Development Authority and Kathua Development were reconstituted, the Development Authorities

for Akhnoor and Reasi and other areas were also framed through different notifications. The concerned Deputy Commissioner, Additional Deputy Commissioner and Sub-Divisional Magistrate were made Member Secretary of these Development Authorities.

However, despite the lapse of several months neither the already existing Development Authorities nor the new ones have started functioning to achieve the mandate behind the J&K Development Act, official sources told EXCELSIOR.

Some of the officers, who are the members of these Authorities, on the condition of anonymity, said, "even formal meeting of any of these Authorities has not been con-

vened till date and the concerned Member Secretary of each Authority is responsible for the same as it is duty of Member Secretary to prepare the agenda and approach the Chairman for convening the meeting".

"Due to non-functioning of these Development Authorities, the areas which were brought under their jurisdiction by way of formal notifications have remained deprived of the proper development", sources said, adding "with the constitution of Development Authorities the Municipal Committees and Municipal Councils have also stopped looking after the needs of notified areas of these Authorities", sources further said.

As per the Development Act, (Contd on page 4 Col 1)

Yasha Mudgal fixes revised targets
54 branches of Coop Bank register profit first time in over 3 decades

Excelsior Correspondent

JAMMU, Feb 26: In a major achievement for the Cooperative Department, 54 branches of District Central Cooperative

Banks (DCCBs) have registered profit till January 31, 2023 as against none during closing of the previous financial year.

This was revealed at a meeting of the Cooperative Department chaired by Commissioner/Secretary Yasha Mudgal today.

"Out of 154 branches of all three DCCBs combined during closing of the previous financial years, zero branches were in profit whereas during the current year till 31st January 2023, 54 branches were already under profit," an official statement said.

It was revealed at the meeting that the Anantnag Central Cooperative Bank has already

registered a profit of Rs 70 lakh till January 2023, which is likely to go up to Rs one crore plus at the closing of current financial year.

"This is for the first time in more than 33 years that a DCCB has registered profit. The last when ACCB recorded profit was 1989-90 which was to the tune of Rs 28,000," the statement said.

Earlier, Yasha Mudgal chaired a meeting to review the financial status of branches of DCC Banks of J&K UT. The meeting was attended by Registrar Cooperative Societies, J&K; Director Finance Cooperative Department, Additional Registrar Cooperative Societies Jammu/Kashmir,

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Certificates acquired from un-recognized Boards
Services of 23 ReTs terminated for not possessing requisite qualification

Nishikant Khajuria

JAMMU, Feb 26: Directorate of School Education Jammu has ordered termination of services of 23 Rehbar-e-Talim (ReT) teachers for their required qualification certificate from un-recognized Boards.

These ReTs were posted in schools across Rajouri, Reasi, Doda, Kishtwar and Jammu districts. Necessary direction for termination of their services has been issued to the Chief Education Officers of these districts.

Confirming the action, Director School Education Jammu, Dr Ravi Shankar Sharma told the Excelsior that the termination has been ordered on the recommendation of a committee constituted to review the pending regulation cases of ReTs, which observed that these 23 teachers have acquired their qualification from the Boards, which are not recognized.

"These Board have not been recognized by the Council of Boards of School Education (COBSE) in India and hence not granted equivalence by the J&K Board of School Education Jammu as communicated vide number F(Acad-C) Recg-equ/21, dated 05-07-2021," he added.

Out of these 23 ReTs, 15 of them were engaged in Rajouri district, particularly in Khawas Zone of the district where number of such un-recognized qual-

ification holders was 12. Four such ReTs were engaged in Doda district, two in Reasi and one each in Jammu and Kishtwar districts.

Seventeen of these ReTs have acquired their Class 12th certificate from Bhartiya Shiksha Parishad, UP. Four others have acquired the certificate from Board of Higher Secondary Education, Delhi and one each from All India Board of Secondary Education, Delhi and Board of Secondary Education, Madhya Bharat, Gwalior.

All these Boards are not recognized by the COBSE and hence their qualification certificates have not been granted equivalence by

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