

J&K HIMALACHAL

BJP, Cong spar over central aid

Bindal says, the state received ₹1,603 cr from Centre in 2023-24 fiscal; Pratibha terms ₹633 cr for disaster relief 'a drop in the ocean'



HT Correspondent letters@hindustantimes.com

SHIMLA: Castigating chief minister (CM) Sukhvir Singh Sukhla-led Congress government for blaming the previous ruling party Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for the poor fiscal health of Himachal, state party chief Rajiv Bindal on Friday claimed that Centre has released a total amount of ₹3,378 crore for the state's development in past one year.

The figures that we shared today are not small, and the Congress leaders should be grateful to the Centre for sending the aid.

RAJIV BINDAL, BJP state party chief



HT Correspondent letters@hindustantimes.com

The BJP-led central government is discriminating against the Congress-ruled state by announcing a meagre relief fund.

PRATIBHA SINGH, state Congress president

Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government at the Centre has allocated a substantial sum of ₹3,378 crore to the state from December 11, 2022, till date, claimed Bindal. In a statement issued here on Friday, Bindal highlighted that during the financial year 2023-24, the state has received a total of ₹1,603.8 crore from the Central government. Out of this, over ₹140 crore has been provided to the state between December 11, 2022, and March 31, 2023. However, Bindal clarified that these figures do not encompass funds dedicated to social development and public welfare schemes such as Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, Ayushman Bharat, National Nutrition Mission, and education campaign.

lined by Bindal, fall under various categories, including state disaster fund, district magistrate projects, compensation for revenue losses, special assistance to the state, elections, rural and urban local bodies grant, national disaster relief fund, and assistance in the form of loans. Bindal revealed that the Union ministry of home affairs approved additional financial assistance of ₹633.73 crore from the National Disaster Response Fund for Himachal Pradesh on December 12. Taking a dig at the opposition, Bindal accused the Congress government of habitually disseminating false information and denying the financial assistance provided by the Centre. He emphasised the significant impact of the allocated funds on the state's development and urged Congress leaders to acknowledge and appreciate the Central government's support. "The figures that we shared today are not small, and the Congress leaders should be grateful to the Centre for sending this amount. The Congress party will get nothing by misleading the public," said Bindal.

Pratibha accused Centre of discrimination Himachal Pradesh state Congress president and Member of Parliament, Pratibha Singh, criticised the Central government's allocation of ₹633 crore. Singh accused the BJP-led Centre government of discriminating against the Congress-ruled state. She said the estimated loss due to rains and landslides in the state exceeds ₹12 thousand crore. In a statement issued here on Friday she argued that the amount released by the Central government so far represents the standard share that all states receive annually to address natural disasters.

State govt to strengthen SDRF, says revenue minister Negi

SHIMLA: State revenue minister Jagat Singh Negi on Friday said so far ₹227 crore has been distributed to the affected families under special disaster relief. He also gave instructions to provide timely benefits to all the affected people. The SDRF has an important role in the state which carries out rescue operations during disasters, said the Minister and added that SDRF personnel were being provided modern training to deal with various disasters. A plan has been made to deploy trained personnel at the time of need, he said. All necessary equipment is being provided to the SDRF Jawans for which the government's order has been released, said Negi.

despite borrowing over ₹1,200 crore in the 12th month of its tenure, the government is lagging behind in terms of tangible development. Jaiaram also criticised the deteriorating fiscal condition of the state. He claimed that ongoing development projects have come to a standstill, and budget provisions for critical initiatives are being neglected. He lamented the government's attempt to reclaim funds allocated to municipal bodies, asserting that such actions have not been witnessed before in the state. Regarding the recent financial assistance from the Central government, Thakur acknowledged the support received during the disaster under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He mentioned that the Centre has provided Himachal Pradesh with ₹3,378 crore in financial aid since CM Sukhla assumed the office.

Nine villas to come up for devotees at Katra base camp

Ravi Krishnan Khajuria

www.khajuria.com

JAMMU: In a bid to further streamline Vaishno Devi pilgrimaging, a Delhi-based company of architects and planners engaged by Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board is coming up with nine villas at the base camp of Katra at a cost of ₹40 crores. The three-bed-room villas will be available for rent to the pilgrims.



The site where villas are being constructed at Katra in Reasi district of Jammu and Kashmir.

The Delhi-based company, GPM Architects and Planners, has also undertaken projects at the cave shrine in Trikuta hills and Shankaracharya Temple besides Ban Ganga at Katra town. "We are currently working on a mess-block and four three-bed-room villas out of nine in Katra at a cost of nearly ₹40 crores," said spokesperson of the GPM Architects and Planners, Gyan P. Mathur.

approached as a social initiative with the aim of designing spaces that can provide ease of access, safety and holistic wellness to the huge number of devotees that visit the temple each year. Similarly, the Shankaracharya Temple in the Katra town is also being spruced up at a cost of ₹20 crores.

Similarly, for seamless and eco-sensitive ventilation of the cave, exhaust outlets and fresh air inlets were carved into the top of the cave through core cutting and finished with a false ceiling of perforated aluminium sheet coated with PU finish. "A special emergency exit is planned near the main temple to enhance safety and ensure a seamless experience," said Mathur. Contributing to a higher socio-cultural cause, we are working with Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board on various design and structural interventions across the holy shrine, he added.

A total of 12 acres of land has been acquired for the purpose of constructing villas near Shrine Board's sports stadium in Katra. The project is being implemented under the control and supervision of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board. "The project is currently under construction and by renting out these villas to pilgrims and visitors, it aims to generate revenue in the area," said the spokesperson. The project is being

J&K BANK LOAN FRAUD CASE | SRINAGAR

ED attaches property worth over ₹193 crore

HT Correspondent

letters@hindustantimes.com

SRINAGAR: Directorate of Enforcement (ED) on Friday provisionally attached immovable property in the form of land measuring 257 kanal and 19 marlas at Shivpora, Srinagar, which is valued at ₹93.64 crore, in a Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) case related to the financial fraud committed with Jammu and Kashmir State Cooperative Bank (JKSCB).

then chairman of JKSCB). ED investigation revealed that the money derived out of the said fraud was utilised for acquiring the above-mentioned immovable property. The ED said in a statement adding that earlier searches and surveys were also conducted at different locations and evidence in the form of incriminating documents and digital devices were seized. Two persons, Mohammad Shafi Dar, chairman of JKSCB and Hiral Ahmad Mir, chairman of fake River Jehlum Co-operative House Building Society, Shivpora, Srinagar, (J&K) by the then Chairman of JKSCB.

CHALLAN FILED AGAINST TWO WOMEN COPS IN ₹1.88-CR CHIT FUND FRAUD

JAMMU: The Jammu crime branch on Friday produced a chargesheet before a local court here against two women police constables in ₹1.88 crore chit fund fraud case. The accused women police constables were identified as selection grade constables Nirmal Kour Saini, wife of Mohinder Singh of Koi Kaban Buznah in Jammu district and Arti Sharma, wife of Sunil Sharma of Ghara Sotli village in Jammu district of Katra district. The two were booked in under recent sections of cheating the IPC. "A ₹82 page chargesheet was produced before court. The accused cops had entered into a criminal conspiracy and cheated the complainant along with other co-employees of Indian Reserve Police (IRP) of 15th Battalion of ₹17,64,000 after luring them on the pretext of hefty returns for investing money and gold with them," said an official statement issued here. The case stems from an enquiry report forwarded by Commandant of the 15th Battalion through JCP Armed/IBP Jammu Zone, to crime branch, Jammu in 2014, which revealed that written complaints were filed by women constables wherein they accused Nirmal Kour of having received ₹1 lakh each from them fraudulently on the pretext that she would repay an interest of ₹50,000 per month on the investment. However, neither such interest nor the principal amount was paid back to the complainants. During enquiry it was found that the Kour in conspiracy with her husband had collected a huge amount of cash and gold not only from the complainants but from other women officials of the 15th IB and security wing. ntc

AHEAD OF LS POLLS | KASHMIR

Four BJP dist units get new presidents

Mir Ehsan

www.ehsan.com

SRINAGAR: Ahead of Lok Sabha polls, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has changed presidents of four districts of Kashmir including, Baramulla, Kupwara, Budgam and Anantnag. The change in district presidents has come at a time when BJP is trying to make its impact felt in all the districts of UT, especially Kashmir where the party is still considered weak. The appointment of new district presidents, many leaders say, could boost the morale of party cadres ahead of Lok Sabha polls in which the party will try to improve its voter base. The party according to its leaders have already begun preparations for Lok Sabha polls. "It's an exercise to keep the party ready for any challenges. The new district presidents are all experienced and strong leaders and under their leadership party will get more strength," said BJP state spokesperson Anil Thakur while reacting on recent appointments.

in north Kashmir's Baramulla district. With appointment of Raja Waqar as the district president, BJP is eyeing on the vote bank of the 'Poonch' community especially in north Kashmir. Sufi has been made member of the state working committee of the party. Another vocal leader Javed Qureshi had been appointed as the district president of Kupwara unit in place of Abdul Bahar Lone, who also has been adjusted in the state unit as member. Qureshi who hails from Kandi Kupwara region is currently based in Handwara and had joined party in 2018. Qureshi is one of the most vocal faces of the BJP in north Kashmir who has been openly endorsing and advocating party programmes on social media. Advocate Wajhat Hussain has been nominated as the district president of Anantnag district replacing Nazir Ahmad Gania who has been appointed as the vice-president of Minority Morcha BJP J&K UT. Hassan has been an old party leader who had good connections within the party's rank and file. Another young leader, Hakeem Rehman Gani has been appointed as district president of Budgam replacing Sameer Shah who has been also adjusted in the state working unit of party.

Valley's winter holiday spots drawing tourists in droves

Ashiq Hussain

letters@hindustantimes.com

SRINAGAR: The winter tourist footfall has started to increase earlier this year in Kashmir than last year as the authorities started various events and opened more destinations. Tourist players say that the arrival of tourists this season started on November 15 and has gained pace with hopes for good bookings on Christmas and New Year in the ski resort of Gulmarg in North Kashmir and Pahalgam in South Kashmir.



Tourist year this year so far has already crossed the figures of last year, say officials.

"Tourism is doing wonderfully well. Gulmarg is being prepared for winter. Bookings are good," said Akh Chayra, president of J&K Hoteliers Club, Gulmarg chapter. "This year saw good arrival of tourists all over the country including in the last month of November. People from northern and southern sides across the country came and this year November was good owing to Diwali. Now we are waiting for snowfall," he added. The authorities have started many events as a precursor to the Christmas and New Year and have also opened offbeat destinations besides deciding to keep the central tourist resort of Sonamarg open in winter which witnesses heavy snowfall. "Winter tourism is going well this year," said tourism director Raja Yaqoob Farooq. "Christmas

and New Year are coming and we are planning many events throughout the valley," he said. "We will celebrate New Year in Gulmarg, Pahalgam, Doodhpatthi and Sonamarg and in some offbeat destinations. Gulmarg will witness skiing, skating and winter sports," he said. He said that the tourist number this year has already crossed the figures of last year. "Last year we had roughly 19 million arrivals and this year we have crossed those figures in November already. We are crossing the 20 million tourist number this year," he added. The numbers include the Amanrant Yatra and Vaishno Devi shrine pilgrims. "Tourism is moving towards betterment in Kashmir... We are waiting for the heavy snowfall on which skiing happens. Earlier we would receive domestic skiers, our expectation is of an increase in foreigners, particularly skiers. G20 summit helped increase in foreign tourist inflow," said hotelier Mufdar Shah. Abdul Rashid, general secretary of houseboat owners association on Dal Lake in Srinagar, said that tourists came early this winter after break in September. "Tourists from countries like Singapore and Malaysia are coming in big groups and booking helikopters," Rashid added. Government is aiming to keep the picturesque summer tourist resort of Sonamarg in central Kashmir's Ganderbal, which receives heavy snowfall, open during winter much like the ski resort of Sonamarg in north Kashmir. The action plan for keeping Sonamarg open during winter has been decided.

CHANDIGARH ELECTRICITY DEPARTMENT CHANDIGARH ADMINISTRATION Press Tender Notice The Executive Engineer, Electricity 'OP' Division No. 4, Sector-34, Chandigarh, invites on the behalf of the President of India Online percentage rate tenders from approved & eligible Enlisted Contractors for Chandigarh Administration ONLY, under three bid system for the following work. The website for online bidding is www.eleedc.chd.nic.in/tenders/ops

BACK IN THEIR NATURAL HABITAT

Pair of 'vulnerable' cheer pheasants released into wild near Shimla

Had been reared at Khundian pheasantry as part of programme to conserve, breed and reintroduce them into their habitat amid concerns of dwindling numbers

any near the tourist destination, Chail. Divisional forest officer Ravi Shankar, said. The released birds will now be monitored intensively by a team of research assistant, forest guard and field assistant. Pursuant to this purpose, 12 camera traps have been laid across the habitat in the radius of 1-2 square kms from the soft pen.



A total of 12 cheer pheasants have been released into the wild in the last two years.

released into the wild in the last two years. These birds were shifted into the soft pen at the site a month before after safe transportation in padded wooden boxes from the breeding centre in Khundian, Chail and veterinary screening of blood samples. The department has since established breeding paddles in Seri village. An intensive site survey to identify a suitable release site was also carried out and Shilli-Mehla was found conducive for survival of pheasants as it has ideal grassland and roosting habitat.

population in the Chail Sanctuary. The surveys found 40 pairs of pheasants in the sanctuary area. Four years later, the population declined by 50%. Birds to be tracked using VHF tags The birds released in the wild have been fitted with VHF tags emitting a signal that enables the wildlife team to track them through radio surveillance. "We are hopeful that birds adapted to the wild habitat conditions and are able to survive till the next breeding season - April-June," said Shankar. All the birds were ringed with colour-codes based on family and one bird of each family was tagged with VHF tag. The forest department held training programmes for the wildlife staff ahead of the release.

Gaurav Bisht gaurav.bisht@hindustantimes.com SHIMLA: Amid dwindling population, the forest department released a pair of cheer pheasants, categorised as vulnerable under The International Union for Conservation of Nature, into the wild in Shilli Mehla, a village in Chail near Shimla. The pair had been reared at the Khundian wildlife pheas-

aviary at Khundian village near Chail. It then drew up a project with help of John Cooper, a breeding expert from the World Pheasant Association and achieved 'parent rearing' of cheer pheasant in captivity at Chail. The Central Zoo Authority then gave its nod for the conservation breeding project in 2006. A total of 13 birds have been