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Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman chairs 55th GST Council meeting in Jaisalmer

attract a GST rate of 18 per cent. GST rates and exemptions are prescribed on the recommendations of the GST Council, which is a Constitutional body comprising representatives from States/UTs and the Centre. Many leaders from opposition-ruled states have requested Finance Minister Sitharaman to reduce GST on medical insurance and premiums. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is one of them. The INDIA alliance leaders held a protest against the Central government outside the Parliament during the monsoon session of Parliament in August, demanding to roll back GST on health and life insurance products. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi had also joined the protest. The issue of GST on life and health insurance was placed before the GST Council in its 54th Meeting held on September 9, 2024, in New Delhi. After detailed deliberations, the GST Council recommended to constitute a Group of Ministers (GoM) to holistically look into the issues pertaining to GST on life insurance and health insurance.

Meanwhile, The 55th GST Council meeting which is expected to decide on reducing tax rate on health and life insurance, besides considering rate rejigs on 148 items began here on Saturday. The GST Council, chaired by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and comprising her state counterparts, is also expected to deliberate on bringing Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) in Goods and Services Tax fold. One of the major items on the agenda of the Council is to decide the GST rate on health and life insurance. A Group of Ministers (GoM) set up by the Council under Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Chaudhary, in its meeting in November had agreed on exempting insurance premiums paid for term life insurance policies from GST. Also premium paid by senior citizens towards health insurance cover has been proposed to be exempted from the tax. Besides, GST on premiums paid by individuals, other than senior citizens, for health insurance with coverage of up to Rs 5 lakh is proposed to be exempted. However, 18 per cent GST will continue on premiums paid for policies with health insurance cover of over Rs 5 lakh. A final decision of the insurance taxation under GST is likely on Saturday as most states are in favour of lowering taxes on premium to give relief to the common man. Several proposals of Fitment Committee, comprising officials from the Centre and states GST department would come up for review before the Council. One of the proposals include cutting taxes on food delivery platforms like Swiggy and Zomato, to 5 per cent (without input tax credit), from the current 18 per cent (with ITC). It is likely to have proposed a rate hike on sale of used EVs as well as small petrol and diesel vehicles to 18 per cent from the current 12 per cent. This hike would bring used and old smaller cars and EVs at par with old larger vehicles, according to sources. Also, the GoM on GST compensation cess is likely to get a six-month extension till June 2025, to submit their report. The compensation cess regime comes to an end in March 2026, and the GST Council has set up a panel of ministers, under Union Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary, to decide the future course of the cess. Another major item before the Council is the GST rate rationalisation panel's report, which has suggested rate tweaks in 148 items. The GoM earlier this month decided to submit before the Council their recommendation to hike tax on sin goods, like aerated beverages, cigarettes, tobacco and related products, to 35 per cent from the present 28 per cent. The four-tier tax slab of 5, 12, 18 and 28 per cent under GST will continue and a new rate of 35 per cent is proposed by the GoM only for sin goods. The GoM also decided to propose rationalising tax rates on apparel. As per the decision, ready-made garments costing up to Rs 1,500 would attract 5 per cent GST, those between Rs 1,500 to Rs 10,000 would attract 18 per cent. Garments costing above Rs 10,000 would attract 28 per cent tax. Currently, garments costing up to Rs 1,000 attract 5 per cent GST, while those above that attract 12 per cent. The GoM also proposed hiking GST on shoes above Rs 15,000/pair from 18 per cent to 28 per cent. It also proposed hiking the GST rate on wrist watches above Rs 25,000 from 18 per cent to 28 per cent. "Some of the low hanging fruits in the 148 items that rate rationalisation panel has suggested may be decided in the meeting. But, no major big ticket rate rationalisation is expected," an official said. Asked about his views on rate rationalisation and whether he is in favour, Telangana Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka said: "Taxation system should be more flexible and not be a burden on people. We will present our views." The GoM had proposed reducing GST on packaged drinking water of 20 litre and above to 5 per cent from 18 per cent, and reducing tax rate on bicycles costing less than Rs 10,000 to 5 per cent, from 12 per cent. Also, GST on exercise notebooks would be reduced to 5 per cent from 12 per cent.

Proposed 28% GST hike will destroy Kashmiri art, says Mehbooba Mufti

Kashmir's traditional textile and craft industries, leaving countless artisans and small businesses struggling to survive. The 28% tax hike proposal, currently under discussion at the GST Council's 55th meeting in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan, has drawn criticism from various quarters for its potential to harm regional economies reliant on handicrafts and textiles.

Govt committed to nurture, promote creative talent: Dy CM

While complimenting the film makers for undertaking such an initiative, the Deputy Chief Minister said that these types of movies would go a long way in promoting and giving a new lease of life to the local film industry in both the regions.

"Jammu and Kashmir has been the most preferred location for Bollywood for a long time and the government is making every effort to ensure that it regains its spot in the film tourist circuit," he added.

Dr Jitendra Singh chairs DISHA meeting; reviews progress on development projects in Doda

tunnel and Goha-Marmat Highway to further boost connectivity in the Chenab Valley region. He asked the concerned authorities to accelerate the execution of these projects for timely completion, without lapsing any funds.

The Union Minister instructed the officials to prioritize public participation in developmental initiatives in line with the spirit of Jan Bhagidari for their effective implementation.

Reaffirming government's commitment towards ensuring the district's holistic development, the Union Minister stressed the importance of implementing local benefit schemes, such as Ayushman Bharat and drug-free initiatives. He called for conductive regular awareness campaigns to educate the public. He also encouraged the officials to organize skill development programs to create job opportunities for unemployed youth besides intensifying sports activities in the district.

Dr Jitendra Singh proposed organizing another lavender festival in the district next year to promote its cultivation besides highlighting the tourism potential of pictureque Baderwah, which has gained wide recognition as a prominent tourist destination. He also called for organising workshops to enhance innovation strategies and improve the

district's agricultural practices.

During the meeting, Deputy Commissioner, Harvinder Singh, provided a comprehensive overview of the developmental activities including Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM), NABARD projects and PMGSY scheme. The meeting also addressed compensation issues for road construction under PMGSY and discussed challenges related to forest clearances for ongoing projects.

Present in the meeting were MLA, Doda West, Shakti Raj Parihar, MLA, Baderwah, Dalip Parihar, DDC, Chairman, Dhananter Singh Kotwal, Deputy Commissioner, Harvinder Singh, SSP, Sandeep Kumar Mehta and senior officials from several departments of the district administration.

Centre sanctions 9 projects worth Rs 85 cr for J&K Universities, Colleges under PM-USHA

commitment towards transforming higher education infrastructure and fostering inclusivity and excellence in the region. Among the sanctioned projects, Baba Ghulam Shah Badshah University in Rajouri will receive Rs 20 crore to strengthen its infrastructure.

Additionally, five new girls' hostels will be constructed in the focus districts of Bandipora, Baramulla, Gulgam, Ramban and Udhampur, each allocated Rs 10 crore to promote gender equity. Three Government Degree Colleges in Bandipora, Sogam Kupwara and Nowshera will also receive Rs 5 crore each for infrastructure development and upgradation.

PM-USHA, a Centrally Sponsored Scheme under the Ministry of Education, has been designed to address critical gaps in the higher education sector by enhancing infrastructure, curriculum reform, accreditation and employability. Aligned with the principles of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the scheme aims to ensure equitable access to quality education, particularly for underrepresented groups, thereby fostering a more inclusive and dynamic higher education ecosystem. These recent sanctions are part of a broader vision to make education a driver of social and economic transformation, bridging regional disparities and empowering students with the skills needed for a rapidly changing world.

The Higher Education Department of Jammu & Kashmir had earlier submitted a comprehensive proposal for 47 institutions, with a total estimated cost of Rs 585 crore. Including the latest approvals, 18 institutions including Shri Mata Vaishno Devi University and several colleges, have been sanctioned under PM-USHA across three PAB meetings held in 2024. The cumulative funding now stands at ₹155 crore, marking a significant milestone in addressing the infrastructural and academic needs of the region. The establishment of new hostels and upgraded facilities will not only enhance the quality of education but also support gender inclusion, a critical aspect of NEP 2020's vision for equitable development.

NEP 2020 emphasizes a holistic and multidisciplinary approach to education, prioritizing equity, inclusivity and excellence. PM-USHA serves as a key enabler in realizing this vision by bridging infrastructural gaps and promoting reforms that align with global standards. The projects sanctioned for Jammu & Kashmir will create an environment conducive to innovation, learning and employability, ensuring that students from all sections of society have access to quality education.

These initiatives reflect a sustained commitment of J&K Government towards building a robust higher education framework that not only addresses present challenges but also anticipates future needs, ensuring that the region's academic institutions are well-prepared to contribute to national and global progress.

GCW Parade mourns demise of Faculty member

excellence, compassion and indomitable spirit that touched the lives of many. The untimely demise of the faculty has deeply grieved those who know her personally and as a teacher. We extend our deepest condolences to her family during this time of immense grief.

DHSJ conducts Field Epidemiology Training Program in One Health to Build Integrated Response Preparedness

Jammu, Dr. Ata-Ul-Munim Tak, Deputy Secretary, Health & Medical Education Department; Dr. Rakesh Koul, Deputy Director Research, Department of Animal Husbandry, Jammu; Dr. Adhiraj Mishra, Assistant Commissioner, DAHD; Dr. Anil Kumar, Principal Advisor, NCDC, New Delhi and Dr. Ravinder Pal Singh, Public Health Consultant, CDC (US).

Dr. Harjeet Rai, State Surveillance Officer, Jammu highlighted the importance of inter-sectoral collaboration in tackling public health challenges and emphasized the pivotal role of the One Health approach in addressing emerging zoonotic diseases, environmental health issues, and other shared health threats. He also commended the active participation and engagement of attendees, stating, "This program has strengthened the foundation of integrated public health responses in our region. By fostering collaboration among various sectors, we are better equipped to manage and mitigate public health risks effectively."

The program featured technical sessions, case studies, and hands-on training that enhanced participants' skills in disease surveillance, data management, and public health communication. Experts from the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying (DAHD) led the sessions, ensuring the training was both comprehensive and impactful.

The success of the Sector Connect program reflects the commitment of all stakeholders to safeguarding public health through collaborative and proactive measures. Participants expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to gain valuable insights and skills that will enable them to contribute effectively to integrated public health strategies in their respective domains. This training marks a significant milestone in the journey towards building resilient systems for addressing One Health challenges in the region.

Judicial Academy holds workshop on "Leadership role of Judges; Court Management"

District & Session Judge and resource person, was also present.

In the first technical session, Justice Rahul Bharti explained that the judiciary today faces an ever-evolving legal landscape, marked by an increasing volume of cases, technological advancements and the growing complexity of legal issues. He stated that leadership within the judiciary is not merely about presiding over cases, it is about ensuring efficient administration of courts, inspiring confidence in the judicial process and fostering an environment where justice is accessible and timely. Justice Bharti explained that case management means every case getting full focus and attention at Court's hand. He also advised the participants to interpret KYC as Know your Case, Know your Court. He underscored that the work of District Judiciary is more demanding and the judges play as leaders within their courts.

The second technical session of the day was conducted by Bala Jyoti who explained the role of Judges in referral of cases for Mediation. The learned Resource Person addressed the mediation as a transformative mechanism that offers an alternative pathway to resolve disputes amicably. She added that mediation not only alleviates burden on courts but also empowers parties to reach mutually acceptable solutions. She

highlighted the key components of mediation, including drafting effective settlement and referral orders, as well as addressing challenges and exploring strategies to enhance its efficacy. The learned Resource Person also conducted three role plays, wherein the participants actively participated and were made aware about technique of mediation.

Sonia Gupta, Director J&K Judicial Academy, conducted the proceedings for the daylong workshop and presented vote of thanks.

All the sessions remained very interactive during which all the participants actively participated and shared their experiences, difficulties and also discussed various aspects of the subject topics. They also raised a number of queries which were answered satisfactorily by the resource persons.

Commissioner JMC takes stock of Christmas Eve arrangements

that are expected to see high foot traffic during the celebrations. He also inspected residential neighbourhoods and marketplaces in and around these areas, which are often crowded during the festive season. Emphasizing the proactive role of JMC in ensuring the smooth conduct of the festivities, the Commissioner assured that the civic body has made all necessary provisions for sanitation, street lighting, and public health. "The JMC is fully committed to providing a clean, safe, and well-lit environment for the citizens and visitors during this important time. Our teams are actively working on the ground to manage waste disposal, cleanliness, and street lighting," Dr. Yadav added.

The Commissioner also highlighted the role of the JMC's health and sanitation teams, who are working tirelessly to ensure that all streets and public areas are properly cleaned and maintained. Special teams have been deployed to handle increased waste collection in high-footfall areas and to ensure that the churches and surrounding areas are hygienic. Streetlights have also been checked and repaired where necessary to provide adequate lighting.

During the tour Joint Commissioner (R&E), Rakesh Gupta, Health Officer, Dr. Vinod Sharma, Supdt. Engineer, PHE Sunil Gandotra, Ex. Engineer, UEED, Ex. Engineer, Yasir Bashir Kitchloo, Vijay Singh, Ex. Engineer (E), S. Simarpal Singh, CTOs, Zone-I, II & III, Talat Mehmood Khan, S. Dharamvir Singh and others accompanied the Commissioner.

DIPR empowers students by hosting seminars on Cyber Crime, health & hygiene

Information and Public Relations, Jammu organised a Symposium on the topic "Swachhta Dwara Bimarion se Bachav" at National Academy High School Udhampur.

Principal of the School Nisha Sharma was the chief guest. The students presented valuable information on the topic and also presented poems and songs etc.

Students were judged on parameters of Pronunciation, Modulation of Voice, Factual Representation, confidence etc. Vinay Gupta, Sancha and Pooja were the Judges for the day.

A total number of 13 students participated in Symposium in which first Position was bagged by Adhira Bhardwaj, second position secured by Moksha and third Position secured by Mandip Khushi Mahajan. Consolation prizes were given to Tanvi Thakur and Anshdeep Singh

Speaking on the occasion, the Principal of the School Nisha Sharma educated the students regarding the topic and lauded the Department of Information & Public Relations for organizing an informative event in the school.

Staff members and a large number of students witnessed the programme. Both the programs were conducted under the direction of Joint Director Information Jammu, Atul Gupta and the supervision of Cultural Officer Jammu, Mukesh Kumar Sharma.

Jammu & Kashmir leads in delivery of PM Vishwakarma Toolkits to artisans

with active participation of the Government of Jammu & Kashmir.

The scheme is meant for upliftment of skilled artisans of all 18 trades who preserve the cultural identity and are part of the economy in J&K.

The scheme offers benefits like training with stipend, Loan up to Rs 3 lakh, incentive of Re.1 towards digital transaction and toolkits worth Rs.15,000. Around 4, 66,667 artisans are registered in J&K under the scheme and training has been completed at various centers across the districts of J&K.

As per the scheme guidelines toolkits are being given to the Vishwakarmas for enhancing their production levels with enhanced quality fetching better value for their products. The delivery of Toolkits is implemented with the assistance of India Post.

Started recently, a detailed road map has been laid for delivery of Tool Kits at the doorsteps of the artisan which includes showing the toolkit to the artisans by open delivery method and recording, uploading of a video with 30 seconds duration before making payment to the vendor of the tool kit through DBT. The UT has recorded delivery of 4701 toolkits against the total deliveries of 12,517 made in the country, which is way ahead of other bigger states. This has been made possible with timely follow up in the implementation at all levels by G.Velladurai IEDS, Joint Director, MSME DFO, Jammu. As on date the total certified artisans in J&K are 1, 50,828 and artisans completed training with stipend are 1,27,192. Total loan sanctions in the scheme are 10,806 artisans with loan value of Rs 100 Cr Appx.

Mission YUVA

Udyam Jagriti campaign promotes rural entrepreneurship in Nagrota

JAMMU, DEC 21: The District self-reliance.

Employment and Counselling In his address, the DC said the core objective of Mission YUVA Centre Jammu on Saturday organised Panchayat-level Udyam Jagriti Awareness Campaign under Mission YUVA at the Common Facility Centre Panjgrain-Nagrota. He urged participants to fully utilise the opportunities offered by the government to achieve self-sufficiency and growth.

The event was inaugurated by Deputy Commissioner Sachin Kumar Vaishya. Additional District Development Commissioner Jammu, Sher Singh, who is the Nodal Officer for Mission YUVA in Jammu district, was also present as special guest.

The campaign aimed to promote entrepreneurship among rural youth by raising awareness about various government schemes and initiatives designed for skill development and

Assistant Director, District Employment and Counselling Centre, Mukhlis Ali delivered a comprehensive presentation on Mission YUVA, outlining its objectives of fostering self-employment through the creation of Nano Enterprises and establishing a supportive business ecosystem for the youth.