

Slight respite from cold conditions in Kashmir Valley

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There was a slight respite from cold conditions in Kashmir as the minimum temperature improved on Saturday night due to a cloud cover, even as the MeT Office predicted heavy rains or snowfall till Tuesday. The night temperature rose across the Valley on Saturday night as a thick cloud cover enveloped Kashmir, a MeT Department official said. There was intermittent light snowfall in most parts of Kashmir, including the plain areas, he said. The Valley witnessed a cloudy but dry morning on Sunday, the official said. The MeT Department has forecast widespread rain and

snow over the state with heavy falls at isolated places till Tuesday. Meanwhile, the minimum temperature in Srinagar on Saturday night settled at minus 0.3 degrees Celsius — up from minus 2.0 degrees Celsius on the previous night, the official said. Qazigund, the gateway town to the Valley, in south Kashmir recorded a low of 0.4 degrees Celsius, while the nearby Kokernag town registered a low of minus 1.0 degrees Celsius on Saturday night. The mercury in Kupwara town in north Kashmir settled at a low of minus 0.5 degrees Celsius. Gulmarg ski-resort in north Kashmir recorded a low of minus 4.6 degrees Celsius Saturday night, while

Pahalgam tourist resort in south Kashmir recorded a low of minus 3.0 degrees Celsius, the official said. He said Leh recorded a low of minus 9.7 degrees Celsius, while the mercury in Drass registered a low of minus 12.8 degrees Celsius. Drass was the coldest recorded place in Jammu and Kashmir. Kashmir is currently under the grip of 'Chillai-Kalan' — the 40-day harshest period of winter when the chances of snowfall are most frequent and maximum and the temperature drops considerably. 'Chillai-Kalan' ends on January 31 but the cold wave continues even after that in Kashmir. The 40-day period is followed by a 20-day long 'Chillai-Khur' (small cold) and a 10-day long 'Chillai-Bachha' (baby cold).

Trump offers protection to undocumented immigrants in exchange of border wall funding

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US President Donald Trump has launched a new plan to end a government shutdown, which has been ongoing for nearly a month, by offering protection from deportations for some undocumented immigrants in exchange for USD 5.7 billion for constructing a wall on the US-Mexico border. The Democrats, however, rejected the deal as a "non-starter" and called on Trump to open the government before negotiations on immigration could start. Trump, who made his offer during a televised speech from the White House, offered that he would give protection from deportation for young people brought to the country illegally as children — also known as 'Dreamers' — and also extend it to those with temporary protected status after fleeing countries affected by natural disasters or violence. The president also called for USD 800 million in "urgent humanitarian assistance" and USD 805 million for drug detection technology to help secure US ports of entry. Trump also proposed a slew of measures to increase border security, including an increase in law enforcement, saying he was offering a "commonsense compromise" both parties (Republicans and Democrats) should embrace. The president said these concessions would "build the trust and goodwill necessary to begin real immigration reform." The divide between the Trump-led Republican Party and the Democratic Party led by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi over the border wall led to the partial shutdown, which has rendered 800,000 federal government workers without work and crippled key departments. The shutdown — the longest in the US history — entered its 29th day, as Trump Saturday made the announcements. "Both sides in Washington must simply come together," Trump said in a White House speech, adding he is trying to "break the logjam." "It is time to reclaim our future from the extreme voices who fear compromise and demand open borders, which means drugs pouring in, human trafficking and a lot of crime," he said.

Trump said he is here today to "break the logjam" and provide Congress with a path forward to end the shutdown and solve the crisis on the border. Defending his plan for the border wall, he said, "The radical left can never control our borders. Walls are not immoral, in fact they are the opposite of immoral because they will save many lives." Trump said he proposes "three years of legislative relief for 700,000 DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) recipients brought here unlawfully by their parents at a young age many years ago". This extension will give them access to work permits, social security numbers and protection from deportation, he said. The DACA allows such people to receive a renewable two-year period of deferred action from deportation and become eligible for work permit. Our proposal provides a three-year extension of Temporary Protected Status. This means, 300,000 immigrants whose protected status is facing expiration will now have three more years of certainty so that Congress can work on a larger immigration deal, which everybody wants — Republicans and Democrats," Trump said. He said farmers and vineyards will not be affected because lawful and regulated entry into the country will be easy and consistent. The president pushed for the USD 5.7 billion to fund the "strategic deployment" of a barrier system or wall on the US' southern border, saying this is not a 2,000-mile concrete structure from sea to sea. "These are steel barriers in high priority locations" and much of the border is already protected by mountains and water," Trump said. Trump said said that once the government is open, he will hold weekly bipartisan meetings to reform the immigration system. The divide between the Republicans and Democrats, and the shutdown are fallout of Trump refusing to sign spending bills without the USD 5.7 billion to start constructing the border wall. The Democrats appeared unimpressed by his proposal and dismissed it. The president has taken pride in shutting down government. Now, he must take action to open

up government, Pelosi said. Trump's proposal is a compilation of several previously rejected initiatives, each of which is unacceptable and in total, do not represent a good faith effort to restore certainty to people's lives, she said. It is unlikely that any one of these provisions alone would pass the House, and taken together, they are a non-starter. For one thing, this proposal does not include the permanent solution for the Dreamers and TPS recipients that our country needs and supports, Pelosi said. Senate Minority Leader Senator Chuck Schumer said it's clear the president realizes that by closing the government and hurting so many American workers and their families, he has put himself and the country in an untenable position. Trump's remarks failed to acknowledge the pain and suffering he has caused to federal workers, contractors, and millions of US citizens, Democratic senators Mark R Warner and Tim Kaine said.

Rape accused among two absconders held in J-K

Agency
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Two absconders, including a man accused of raping a woman 21 years ago, were arrested in separate operations in Jammu and Kashmir, police said Sunday. The rape accused, identified as Shadi Lal, a resident of Butla village, was arrested from Baderwah in Doda district Saturday, a police official said. He said Lal was wanted in a case registered by Baderwah police station in 1997 under Sections 376 (rape) and 323 (voluntarily causing hurt) of the Ranbir Panel Code. In another operation, police arrested another absconder Joginder Singh of Maira Jagir village of Akhnour in the outskirts of Jammu. Singh, who was presently living in Delhi, was arrested by a special team after a long hunt of over 24 years, he said.

Cong must be large-hearted for allies, best equipped to lead alliance against BJP: Tejashwi

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The Congress is "best equipped" to lead the opposition's charge against the BJP in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav said Sunday, asserting that the grand old party will have to handle its leadership role with "large-heartedness" and accommodate regional parties. Yadav also hailed the Samajwadi Party-Bahujan Samaj Party alliance in Uttar Pradesh and emphasised that his "courtesy call" meetings with Akhilesh Yadav and Mayawati post the tie-up should not be construed as a "pressure tactic" aimed at the Congress. In an exclusive interview to PTI, the Rashtriya Janata Dal leader said since Congress is India's oldest and currently the

Opposition has united fearing PM Modi's popularity: Haryana CM

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Opposition parties have united out of "fear" of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's popularity and their togetherness is not going to last, Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar said Sunday. He was speaking on the sidelines of a seminar on investment opportunities organised by the Haryana government as part of the 9th edition of Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit. "This (opposition) unity is not going to last. They have united out of fear of Narendra Modi's popularity and the country's growing position in the world. This (opposition unity) is going to make no difference to the people," Khattar claimed. "They (opposition parties) had looted the country for several years. They have united as they are not getting the opportunity to loot the country," Khattar added. He was responding to a query on the Trinamool Congress-led mega opposition rally, titled 'United India Rally', held in the Brigade Grounds in Kolkata on Saturday. He also mocked the opposition parties' lack of a leader acceptable to all constituents, and claimed it was a "baraat" (marriage procession) without a groom. Speaking on economic issues, Khattar said his state was looking at investments and added that it had climbed up the ladder as far as ease of doing business rankings were concerned. He said Haryana was now third on the ease of business ranking. "We want to make use of Haryana's locational advantage to bring in investments. We took steps to make clearances and licences simple, from which people have benefited," he said.

second-biggest political party having a pan-India presence, it is in a very strong position to win maximum number of seats among the opposition parties. In 2014 Lok Sabha polls, among the prospective opposition grand alliance parties, the Congress had won 44 seats, the Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress won 34, the Samajwadi Party won five, while the RJD had bagged four seats. "I don't find anything wrong if the Congress plays a pivotal role in forming the alliance or taking the leadership role of the alliance into the elections. But having said that, they have to accept that each state has different ground realities," Yadav said. The Congress, being the party with national acceptance and maximum footprint in the opposition, is "undoubtedly best equipped" to lead the opposition's charge against the Bharatiya Janata Party or the National Democratic Alliance, the former Bihar deputy chief minister asserted. "However, the Congress will have to handle their leadership role with large-heartedness and play a proactive role by accommodating regional parties with their agenda. "In states where Congress don't have a robust base, it must allow regional outfits to occupy the front-line position against the BJP," Yadav said, emphasising that regional parties have a greater ability to transfer votes. The concentration is on winnability, hence the coalition must be decided state-wise and seat wise, said the 29-year-old son of former Bihar chief minister Lalu Prasad. Every party will have to compromise or lend space to

other parties depending on the situation in a particular state for forming a winning alliance, Yadav said while replying to a question on whether the Congress has to be more giving to regional parties to strengthen the opposition coalition. Asked if leaving out the Congress from the SP-BSP tie-up will impact the opposition's national level coalition, he said the people of India feel they have been "duped badly" and have made up their mind to get rid of propagandists for their own well-being. The people are wise enough to understand which fighting block can be their best bet to defeat the BJP, he said. On whether the SP and BSP will be a part of the mahagathabandhan in Bihar, the RJD leader said principally all opposition parties are together against the BJP-led alliance. "You don't always need seats to contest to prove that you are part of an alliance. Sometimes lending unconditional support works wonders for sending the message across to the electorate. "It is true that the SP and the BSP aren't main political parties of Bihar, but we have high regard for them and their politics. We have seen that SP-BSP alliance has decided not to field their candidates in Amethi and Raebareli," Yadav said. Once arch-rivals, the SP and the BSP announced this month their tie-up in UP for the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, sharing 38 seats each and keeping the Congress out of the alliance. Tejashwi Yadav's remarks come amid hectic efforts by the opposition to forge a strong alliance to take on the BJP in the general election. Leaders from several opposition parties, including Yadav, came together Saturday, vowing at a mega

rally in Kolkata to put up a united front in the coming polls and oust Prime Minister Narendra Modi from power. Prime Minister Modi had earlier hit out at the Mahagathabandhan for the polls, saying it was an "unholy alliance" of various political parties for "personal survival". The BJP has also slammed the SP-BSP tie-up in UP. Yadav also hit out at those dubbing his meeting with SP chief Akhilesh Yadav and BSP supremo Mayawati in Lucknow as a pressure tactic aimed at the Congress, saying his family always had close ties with the two leaders and the meetings were courtesy calls. Akhilesh ji is part of our extended family and 'behen' Mayawati ji always had cordial relations with us. When she resigned from Rajya Sabha, my father publicly said RJD would always be ready to send her to Rajya Sabha if she agrees, Tejashwi Yadav said. Even last year during RS elections in Bihar, I called her to request her again to enter Rajya Sabha with RJD backing. So my courtesy calls to them shouldn't be construed as a pressure tactic, he said. As far as Bihar is concerned, irrespective of the number of MLAs in the assembly or being part of the government or opposition, everyone knows RJD is the biggest party, he said. It is RJD's fear that has kept the BJP and Janata Dal (United) together, he claimed. Everyone knows RJD brings major portion of the electorate support to the table in Bihar and no one denies that, he asserted. On BJP terming the SP-BSP tie-up an opportunistic alliance, Yadav hit out at the saffron party saying when it has tie-ups, it calls it "smart politicking", and asked what should its coalition of about 40 parties be called.

Huge Controversy Over BJP Lawmaker's Offensive Comments Against Mayawati

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A lawmaker of the ruling BJP in Uttar Pradesh has drawn severe criticism from the opposition for offensive comments targeting Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief Mayawati who, she said, "was a blot on womankind", accusing her of "selling her dignity for power". "She (Mayawati) has no self-respect... she was almost molested earlier and yet... in history, when Draupadi was molested, she took a vow to seek revenge... but this woman, she lost everything, but still sold her dignity for the sake of power. We strongly condemn Mayawati ji. She is a blot on womankind. A woman who gulped insults for comfort and power... is a blot on womankind," Sadhana Singh, the legislator from Mughalsarai, said at a rally on Saturday. The lawmaker's comments were in apparent reference to the infamous episode when Ms Mayawati was assaulted by Samajwadi Party workers at a guest house in Lucknow

in 1995 that triggered decades of animosity. That ended when the two parties decided to come together for the national elections in Uttar Pradesh, with a "gathabandhan" or alliance announced at a joint press conference by Mayawati and Akhilesh Yadav last week. The BSP chief said that she had decided to put the past behind her "for the sake of the nation", seemingly aimed at Prime Minister Narendra Modi who had, at a rally, taunted her for "forgetting" that episode while allying with the Samajwadi Party. The BJP lawmaker's comments drew a sharp reaction from Mayawati's party which said that the language reflected the party's "frustration with the SP-BSP alliance". "They have lost their mental balance in fear of losing the election in Uttar Pradesh," said the BSP's Satish Chandra Mishra. Akhilesh Yadav, who had declared that "insulting Mayawati ji is like insulting me" shortly after formalising their alliance, strongly

condemned the remarks, saying it was an "insult to the women of the country" and an indicator of the BJP's "moral bankruptcy and hopelessness". The Congress, cold-shouldered by Mayawati and Akhilesh Yadav for the alliance in UP, described the lawmaker's comments as "disturbing". "One may have differences on issues and ideas but it is disturbing - That this lady represents the ruling party in UP-BJP (not surprising) -To hear a lady speak in such a derogatory way about another lady -To see people in the audience cheering such words," Congress spokesperson Priyanka Chaturvedi tweeted. This is not the first time that a BJP leader has made objectionable remarks against Mayawati. In 2016, a senior UP BJP leader Dayashankar Singh was expelled for using "filthy language" against Mayawati. His wife Swati Singh, who defended him at that time, is now a minister in the Yogi Adityanath-led BJP government in the state.