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## PIONEER IN SHORT

### GIG WORKERS CALL NATIONWIDE STRIKE

Delivery and gig workers from major e-commerce, food delivery, and home service platforms, including Swiggy, Zomato, Zepto, Blinkit, Amazon, Flipkart, and other e-commerce aggregator companies, are observing an all-India strike on December 25 and 31. The workers are protesting against the worsening working conditions and the denial of fair wages, safety, dignity, and social security. "Despite being the backbone of last-mile delivery, especially during peak seasons and festivals-delivery workers are forced to endure long working hours, falling earnings, unsafe delivery targets, arbitrary ID blocking, lack of job security, and absence of basic welfare protections," said the Telangana Gig and Platform Workers Union (TGPWU) and the Indian Federation of App-Based Transport Workers (IFAT) in a statement. Along with a fair and transparent wage structure, the workers want an immediate withdrawal of the "10-minute delivery" models. Additionally, the workers also called for government intervention and urged both the Central and State Governments to immediately regulate the platforms.

### The Bystander



### 6 killed after truck collides with bus in Karnataka

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
■ Chitradurga (Karnataka)

At least six persons, including a child, were killed when a speeding truck crashed into a luxury sleeper bus that caught fire under the impact in this district in the wee hours of Thursday, a senior police official said.

While the East Zone Inspector General of Police Ravikanth Gowda had earlier said nine people were killed, citing preliminary investigation, later he and the district police chief said that five persons lost their lives. President Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah consoled the deaths. Both the PM and the CM announced ex gratia to the next of kin of the deceased.

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah also said a proper probe would be conducted into the fatal accident. The accident happened after the container truck jumped a road divider and collided with the oncoming bus, Gowda told reporters. Based on the initial investigation, Gowda had said that three people were untraceable, but Bandaru said only two were missing.

According to him, a couple from Sira who were missing have been identified and are safe.

FULL REPORT ON >> P4

## BJP proud of removing Article 370: PM

**VIRENDRA NATH BHATT**  
■ Lucknow

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said the BJP took pride in having the opportunity to "tear down the wall of Article 370" and slammed the Congress "dynastic politics", accusing it of "one family glorification".

Modi said this after inaugurating the Rashtra Prerna Sthal in Lucknow on the 101st birth anniversary of former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The Rashtra Prerna Sthal features 65-foot bronze statues of Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Syama Prasad Mookerjee and Pt Deendayal Upadhyaya, and a lotus-shaped museum spread over 98,000 square feet, which Modi later visited.

Addressing a public gathering after the inauguration, Modi said, "The BJP is proud that our Government had the opportunity to tear down the wall of Article 370," adding that the legacy of good governance created by the BJP-led NDA Government was now being taken to new heights at both the Centre and State levels. "We must



Prime Minister Narendra Modi paying tribute to former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee on his 101st birth anniversary at Sadaiv Atal in New Delhi on Thursday

not forget how, after independence, a tendency developed to attribute every positive achievement to a single family," he said.

The Prime Minister said his

Government had made Pt Deendayal Upadhyaya's Antyodaya vision its mission to ensure that Government schemes reached to the poor without any discrimination.

"Before 2014, about 25 crore people were covered under social security schemes, while today this number has increased to 95 crore," he said. Modi also said that the

day was not far off when Uttar Pradesh's defence corridor would be known globally for defence manufacturing.

PM was accompanied by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Governor Anandiben Patel, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and other senior leaders. He was warmly welcomed by people who waved the Tricolour and raised slogans in his honour. The PM said the Rashtra Prerna Sthal symbolises the ideals that have guided India on the path of self-respect, unity and service, and called for collective efforts towards nation-building.

Addressing the gathering, Modi extended Christmas greetings to people in India and across the world, saying, "This festival should bring happiness into everyone's lives." He said December 25 marks the birth anniversaries of Bharat Ratna Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Bharat Ratna Madan Mohan Malaviya, adding that both leaders "protected India's identity, unity and pride and left an indelible mark on nation-building".

CONTINUED ON >> P4



BNP acting chairman, Tarique Rahman, waving to supporters at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka on Thursday

## BNP leader returns to Bangladesh, urges peace

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
■ Dhaka

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) acting chairman Tarique Rahman on Thursday urged people to maintain peace as he presented a vision of an inclusive society, saying the country belongs to people of all faiths, including Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and Christians.

Rahman's remarks in his first address to party supporters after arriving in Dhaka for the first time in 17 years came as minorities, especially Hindus, have been affected by a series of inci-

dents against them in Bangladesh since the interim Government assumed power in August last year.

"The time has come for all of us to build the country together. This country belongs to people of the hills and the plains, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and Christians.

We want to build a safe Bangladesh, where every woman, man, and child can leave home and return safely," he told thousands of supporters gathered at the July 36 Expressway in the Capital, where he went straight after arriving at the airport.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

## ED raids 11 locations in SP Oswal digital arrest case

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
■ New Delhi

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has conducted searches at 11 locations across five States — Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Assam — as part of an anti-money laundering investigation into a digital arrest scam. Ludhiana-based industrialist SP Oswal was duped of over ₹7 crore in this scam, officials said on Thursday.

"Various incriminating documents and digital devices were recovered and seized during search proceedings," an ED

spokesperson said. The ED had arrested Rumi Kalita from Assam on Tuesday after it surfaced that she allegedly offered her mule account for transferring funds in the case.

"The amounts cheated from victims were immediately diverted by a group of persons in various mule accounts and credentials of those accounts were being used by one Rumi Kalita instead of a certain percentage of the cheated money to be given to her as her share," the spokesperson said.

Kalita has been sent to ED custody till January 2, 2026.

## Top Maoist leader killed in Odisha encounter

**ABHINAV KUMAR JHA**  
■ Bhubaneswar/New Delhi

Top Maoist leader Ganesh Uike, who carried a reward of ₹1.1 crore on his head, was among six red rebels killed in gun battles with security forces in Odisha's Kandhamal district, police said on Thursday. Union Home Minister Amit Shah called it a "breakthrough," while Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi described it as a "remarkable success" to build a Naxal-free India.

CPI(Maoist) central committee member Uike, 69, was the chief of the banned outfit in Odisha, a senior officer heading anti-Naxal operations in the state said.



Two Maoists from Chhattisgarh were killed in an exchange of fire with security forces in Gumma forest in the Belghar police station area on Wednesday night. Fresh gun battles took place in a forest in the Chakapad

police station area on Thursday morning, in which four other Maoists, including Uike, were killed, he said.

"Four Maoists were killed in the gunfight. One of them was identified as 69-year-old Ganesh Uike, who is also

known by his aliases Pakka Hanumantu, Rajesh Tiwari, Chamru and Rupa. He was a native of Pullemala village under Chendur mandal in Telangana's Nalgonda district," he said. The identity of the other three Naxals, including two women, was yet to be ascertained, the officer said.

Addressing a press conference, DGP Y B Khurania said, "Two Maoists were gunned down on Wednesday, and four were neutralised this morning. The killing of a central committee member is a big success for Odisha Police. It has broken the backbone of the Maoists in the State."

CONTINUED ON >> P4

## ₹5 meals for all in Atal Canteen Scheme

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
■ New Delhi

The Delhi Government on Thursday launched the Atal Canteen scheme on the 101st birth anniversary of former Prime Minister and Bharat Ratna Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The canteens will provide nutritious meals at a nominal cost of ₹5 to workers, the poor and other needy citizens of the Capital.

Speaking at the inauguration event, Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said 45 Atal canteens are being inaugurated in line with the Government's election promise, while work on the remaining 55 will be completed soon.

"Under the scheme, labourers, needy people and families living in *jhuggi* clusters will get a full meal for ₹5. The idea is to ensure that people eat with dignity," she said, adding that lakhs of residents would benefit from the initiative. Recalling Vajpayee's contribution to Delhi's infrastructure, the CM said the former prime minister flagged off the Delhi Metro on December 24, 2002, when Kolkata was the only city with a metro system.

Highlighting welfare measures, she said ₹700 crore has been earmarked this year for improving living conditions in *jhuggi* clusters, and regular meetings are being held to facilitate housing for slum dwellers.

FULL REPORT ON >> P3

## Army revises social media policy

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
■ New Delhi

The Army has amended its social media policy for Instagram, WhatsApp, LinkedIn and others, allowing the personnel to have access to Instagram, but strictly in a view-only mode.

Under the revised guidelines, the soldiers and officers are permitted to view and monitor content on Instagram solely for information awareness.

Posting, commenting, sharing, reacting or sending messages on the platform remained prohibited. For



messaging apps such as Skype, WhatsApp, Telegram, and Signal, personnel are allowed to exchange unclassified information of a general nature, but only with known contacts, sources said, adding that users are responsible for ensuring they are sending

information to the correct recipient. The move, however, comes with strict guidelines, allowing personnel to only view and monitor content while prohibiting posting, commenting, or online interaction, to safeguard operational security.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

## India to head global efforts to prevent trade in 'blood' diamonds

**RAJESH KUMAR**  
■ New Delhi

A global player in diamond cutting and polishing, India will now head the prestigious Kimberley Process to prevent the trade in "conflict or blood" diamonds.

These diamonds are illegally traded to fund conflict in war-torn areas, particularly in central and western Africa, according to the World Diamond Council, which represents the commercial diamond trade.

"Conflict diamonds" are rough diamonds used by rebel groups or their allies

to finance conflicts that undermine legitimate Governments, as defined in the United Nations Security Council resolutions. India is a global player in diamond cutting and polishing.

They are generally in "rough" form, meaning they have recently been extracted and not yet cut. The Kimberley Process is a joint initiative of more than 60 countries, industry and civil societies to control the flow of conflict diamonds, which are used by rebel movements to finance wars against legitimate Governments in the world.

"India will take over as KP Vice-Chair from December 25, 2025, before assuming the chairmanship in the New Year. This will be the third time India has been entrusted with the chair of the Kimberley Process," the commerce ministry said.

During its tenure, India will focus on strengthening governance and compliance, advancing digital certification and traceability, enhancing transparency through data-driven monitoring, and building consumer trust in conflict-free diamonds.

"As a leading global hub for diamond manufacturing and



trade, India's leadership comes at a time of shifting geopolitics and growing emphasis on sustainable and responsible sourcing," it said.

The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS), established pursuant to a UN resolution, came into effect on 1 January 2003 and has since evolved into an effective mechanism for curbing the trade in conflict diamonds.

It currently has 60 participants, with the European Union and its member states counted as a single participant. Together, the participants account for over 99 per cent of the global rough

diamond trade, making it the most comprehensive international mechanism governing this sector.

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# Delhi breathes better air, quality improves as AQI drops to 234

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

The Capital breathed slightly easier for the second consecutive day, with the air quality improving to the 'poor' category and an AQI of 234 recorded on Thursday. Transport emissions and pollution from neighbouring cities continued to contribute significantly to the capital's air pollution load, according to official data.

Delhi's 24-hour average air quality index (AQI) stood at 234 at 4 pm, remaining in the 'poor' category, compared to 271 recorded at the same time a day earlier, according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).

This marked a significant improvement from the 'severe' AQI of 412 recorded at 4 pm on Tuesday. Out of the 40 functional air quality monitoring stations in the city, 10 recorded moderate AQI levels below 200, including Lodhi Road, IIT Delhi, Indira Gandhi International Airport and Aya Nagar, while 27 stations remained in the poor category.

Two stations — Jahangirpuri and Bawana — recorded very poor air quality with AQI readings above 300. Data from the Decision Support System (DSS) for Air Quality Management showed vehicular emissions were the largest contributor to Delhi's pollution load on



Wednesday, accounting for 18.5 per cent. This was followed by industries in Delhi and adjoining areas (9.5 per cent), construction activities (2.5 per cent) and waste burning (1.6 per cent).

Among the NCR districts, Jhajjar in Haryana contributed the highest share to Delhi's pollution at 17.6 per cent, followed by Rohtak (5.9 per cent) and Sonapat (3.1 per cent), the data showed. The predominant surface wind was from the north-

west, with wind speeds reaching up to 10 kmph during afternoon hours on Thursday, according to the Air Quality Early Warning System.

The air quality is likely to deteriorate to the very poor category in the coming days, according to the forecast. On the weather front, Delhi recorded a maximum temperature of 22.6 degrees Celsius on Wednesday, 1.9 degrees above normal, while the minimum temperature settled at 6.5 degrees Celsius.

## Kiran Bedi seeks public participation to protect air quality

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Retired IPS officer Kiran Bedi on Thursday called for a partnership-based approach to sustain the recent improvement in air quality, seeking greater citizen participation through joint control rooms. In a video message posted on X, Bedi said, "It is time to

sustain the progress we have achieved in improving air quality, and the only way to do that is by working in partnership." She added that the Government has control rooms, and their numbers should be made public so that people can participate. "Wherever citizens see pollution from industries, construction sites or vehicles, they

## Minister Sirsa urges vigilance against pollution despite recent improvement

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Even as Delhi witnessed a brief improvement in air quality over the past few days, Environment Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa on Thursday urged citizens not to lower their guard against pollution, saying sustained vigilance is crucial to winning the battle for clean air.

In a post on X in Hindi, Sirsa said the recent improvement in the AQI and the relief from pollution were "comforting", but warned that it was not the time to relax.

He asserted that the Government would continue its strict action against polluting industries and vehicles.

The minister also called on citizens to actively support the measures taken by the government under the leadership of Chief Minister Rekha Gupta to curb pollution.

He appealed to people to avoid burning waste in the open, comply strictly with pollution-control norms, ensure timely renewal of vehicle PUC certificates, and opt for carpooling and public transport.

Emphasising that the fight against pollution was a collective responsibility, Sirsa said it was about safeguarding the future of children and protecting every breath they take.

"Even a small lapse can have serious consequences," he said, urging people to follow rules for the sake of their families. Calling for responsible civic behaviour, the minister said small individual efforts could together bring about a significant change and reaffirmed the Government's commitment to continue the fight until Delhi's air becomes clean.

## National Poets' meet marks Vajpayee's 101st birth anniversary; leaders recall his politics of dignity

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

A National Poets' Meet was organised in the Capital on Thursday to mark the 101st birth anniversary of Bharat Ratna and former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, with political leaders and poets recalling his unique blend of statesmanship, poetry and moral politics.

The event, organised by the Hindi Academy, Delhi, was held at Bharat Mandapam, Pragati Maidan, and brought together Cabinet ministers of the Delhi government, MLAs, litterateurs, poets and poetry enthusiasts from across the country. A special issue of the Hindi Academy's monthly magazine Indraprastha Bharti was also released on the occasion.

Addressing the gathering, BJP National Executive President Nitin Nabin said Vajpayee had transformed politics into a practice rooted in dignity and restraint. "Atal ji taught us that power must always be used as a means of service. Even his political opponents admired him," Nabin said, adding that a poet's meet was a fitting



tribute to a leader who was equally known for his poetry and public life.

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said Vajpayee's life and ideas continue to guide public life and governance. "Atal ji's life is a philosophy. His ideals are our guiding light," she said. Recalling his contribution to Delhi, the Chief Minister said the Delhi Metro was one of Vajpayee's lasting gifts to the city. "He bought the first Metro ticket himself in 2002. Today, the Metro spans nearly 400 km and serves around 3.5 million passengers every day," she said.

The Chief Minister said her Government draws inspira-

tion from Vajpayee's emphasis on consensus, dialogue and inclusive leadership. She also quoted lines associated with Vajpayee to underline resilience and collective resolve, saying obstacles and storms should not deter progress. Earlier, a documentary tracing Vajpayee's journey from childhood to his role as prime minister was screened. It highlighted his work in journalism, his parliamentary conduct, key decisions taken during his tenure and his role in shaping India's modern political culture.

Minister for Art, Culture and Language Kapil Mishra said December 25 was special

as it marked the birth of both "a poetic mind and a great soul". He said Vajpayee's words and vision continued to resonate in public life.

"His poetry and politics were never separate. They flowed from the same moral core," Mishra said, urging the audience to participate with patriotic slogans. Mishra also welcomed poets from across the country, noting that several of them had recited poetry in Vajpayee's presence in the past. He described the gathering as historic and said such platforms keep India's literary and cultural traditions alive.

## Vijender Gupta pays tribute to Madan Mohan, Vajpayee

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta on Thursday paid floral tributes to Bharat Ratna Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya on his 165th birth anniversary and to former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on his 101st birth anniversary.

Deputy Speaker Mohan Singh Bisht, MLAs Sanjay Goyal and Ashok Goyal, former North Delhi mayor Jayprakash and senior officers of the Delhi Assembly Secretariat were also present on the occasion.

Speaking to reporters, Gupta said the Delhi Legislative Assembly building once served as the Central Legislative Assembly, where Malaviya himself took part in debates that helped shape India's political history.

"We have preserved nearly 440 speeches delivered by Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya in this very House — each a testament to his intellectual depth, moral courage, and commitment to India's freedom struggle," he said. The Speaker added that Malaviya's vision



of an India led by education, character and national purpose continues to inspire the country's democratic journey. Referring to the day also marking Vajpayee's birth anniversary, Gupta described the former prime minister as a leader whose "inspiring leadership, poetic statesmanship and democratic values remain a moral compass for the nation".

"This day, observed as Sushasan Diwas, reminds us that good governance is the greatest service to the nation. As we remember Pandit Malaviya's role in

nation-building, we also salute Shri Vajpayee's contribution in shaping a confident, modern India," he said.

Reaffirming his commitment to the ideals of the two national icons, the Speaker said, "Today, we take a sankalp to uphold their principles. I firmly believe that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of good governance and Viksit Bharat 2047 will be realised. Their legacy inspires us to work tirelessly for transparent, accountable and citizen-centric governance."

## NGT orders expeditious action against illegal borewells

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed authorities to pass the final order on the action to be taken against the operation of several illegal borewells in multiple dyeing units in Delhi within two months.

The green body was hearing a matter alleging that several dyeing units operating in Narela, Bawana, Mayapuri and Lawrence Road were functioning without mandatory consents. It was also alleged that the units had been discharging untreated toxic effluents into drains and open land, causing groundwater contamination and health hazards.

Earlier, the Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPPC) had filed an action taken report on February 17, this year, disclosing that in the inspection carried out at all the 61 locations, they had found 18 units to be complying with the environmental norms, while 28 units were not complying, 6 were found to be locked, and one was untraceable.

On May 29, the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) had filed a reply disclosing that a joint inspection was carried out at different sites of Lawrence Road, Mayapuri, Narela and Bawana.

It said some of these units were found to have illegal borewells. While some of these illegal borewells had been sealed, action against the others remained pending.

THE PIONEER

CLASSIFIEDS

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Gulab Cor, Mother of JC-472647X Sub Suresh Kumar R/o- Vill & PO- Buroli, Teh & Dist- Rewari, Haryana-123401, declare that in my Son's service record my name is wrongly recorded as Gulab Devi whereas my correct name is Gulab Cor, which may be amended accordingly.  
PD(37469)C  
I, Raghubir Singh, Father of No.16018535Y L/Hav Vir Singh, R/o- VPO- Satnali, Dist- Mahindergarh, Haryana-123024, have changed my name from Raghubir Singh to Raghuvir Singh, vide affidavit dated 25/12/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.  
PD(37470)C  
I, Bimla Devi, Mother of No.16018535Y L/Hav Vir Singh, R/o- VPO- Satnali, Dist- Mahindergarh, Haryana-123024, have changed my name from Bimla Devi to Bimla, vide affidavit dated 25/12/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.  
PD(37471)C  
I, Sharwani Devi, Mother of No.16021386F Hav Ramavater, R/o- Vill- Kansarda, Teh- Shrimadhopur, Dist- Sikar, Rajasthan-332722, have changed my name from Sharwani Devi to Sharvani, vide affidavit dated 25/12/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.  
PD(37472)C

I, Nirmala Kanwar, W/o- No.16021466Y Hav/Clk Surendra Singh Shekhawat, R/o- Vill- Roru Bari, Teh- Laxmangarh, Dist- Sikar, Rajasthan-332317, have changed my name from Nirmala Kanwar to Nirmla Kanwar, vide affidavit dated 25/12/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.  
PD(37473)C  
I, Seema Devi, W/o- No.16018535Y L/Hav Vir Singh, R/o- VPO- Satnali, Dist- Mahindergarh, Haryana-123024, have changed my name from Seema Devi to Seema, vide affidavit dated 25/12/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.  
PD(37474)C  
I, Neelam Devi, W/o JC-813159L Nb/Sub Mukesh Chandra, R/o- Vill- Merura, PO- Dhauntyal, Teh- Lansdowne, Dist- Pauri Garhwal, Uttarakhand-246155, have changed my name from Neelam Devi to Neelam Jadli, vide affidavit dated 25/12/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.  
PD(37475)C

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
Known to all that my Client Smt. Urmila Devi owner of Property No. B-251, Area 50 Sq Yds., Kharsa No. 371, Bhajanpura, Shahdara, Delhi., and Smt. Urmila Devi purchase property from Smt. Virmali vide GPA, AT&S & Will dated 18.08.1994, now Smt. Urmila Devi wants to sell aforesaid property. And it is informed that any deal with said documents by any person except my said client and said institution regarding said property, shall be deemed as null and void. If any person having any claim, right in said property then he may contact and handover the same and apprise his claim to undersigned within 15 days of this publication.  
**AD REM LEGAL SOLUTION**  
Ch. No. 760 - Dwarka Court Sector-10, Dwarka, New Delhi-75  
**Mobile :- 9899013918**

**TENDER NOTICE**  
Bids are Invited for Security Agency in Amrapali Empire, Crossing Republik, Ghaziabad.  
For more visit our website [www.amrapaliempire.com](http://www.amrapaliempire.com) or call 9156994523 or email : [amrapali.aoa@gmail.com](mailto:amrapali.aoa@gmail.com)

**BHAKRA BEAS MANAGEMENT BOARD**  
**NOTICE INVITING E-REVERSE BIDDING TENDERING**

Name of Office	NIT No. / Name of Work	Starting Date (Time) Ending Date (Time) Closing Date (Time) Opening bid Date (Time)	Estimate Cost/ Earnest Money
Sr Executive Engineer Township Division, BBMB, Sundernagar	NIT No.13/2025-26 Name of Work- Design and construction of main gate/entrance with exclusive wooden and craftsmanship and installation of garden light in VVIP Rest House and Field Hostel in BBMB Colony, Sundernagar.	16.12.2025 upto 17.00 PM 19.01.2026 upto 15.30 PM	₹47.05 lac ₹9,418/-
	NIT No.14/2025-26 Name of Work- Roof replacement providing fencing along periphery and renovation of car shed in DYCAO Office complex at BBMB Sundernagar	18.12.2025 upto 17.00 PM 19.01.2026 upto 15.30 PM	₹24.99 lac ₹49,990/-
Senior Executive Engineer, O&M, Division, BBMB, Delhi	E-NIT-11/OMD/2025-26 Dated: 17.12.25 / M/c. of Non-Residential Building at 220 KV sub-station, BBMB, Delhi	17.12.2025 (18.00 hrs.) onwards/ 14.01.2026 (upto 12.00 hrs.)	₹9,41,769 ₹9,418/-
	E-NIT-12/OMD/2025-26 Dated: 24.12.25/Mtc. & white washing of residential quarters in colony at 220 KV sub-station, BBMB, Delhi.	24.12.2025 (18.00 hrs.) onwards/ 14.01.2026 (upto 12.00 hrs.)	₹6,69,330 ₹6,699/-
Senior Executive Engineer, R.M. Division, BBMB, Nangal	NIT No.42/2025/ RM Providing and fixing false ceiling and modular lighting in Publico Model shed at Nangal Township	24.12.2025 at 09.00 hrs. 27.01.2026 at 15.00 hrs.	₹9.83 Lacs ₹19,660/-
Senior Executive Engineer, O&M, Division, BBMB Kurukshetra	NIT No.41/2025-26 dated 23.12.2025	23.12.2025 (17.00 hrs.) 12.01.2026 (13.00 hrs.)	₹6.73 Lacs NIL
Adtl. Supt. Engineer/O&M Division BBMB Jamalpur (Ludhiana)	NIT No.05/2025-26 dated 23.12.2025	24.12.2025 (10.00 hrs.) 27.01.2026 upto (15.00 hrs.)	₹69,36,850/- ₹3,47,000/-

For detailed NIT/terms & conditions etc. please visit/downloaded from BBMB website [www.bbmb.gov.in](http://www.bbmb.gov.in), [www.etenders.gov.in](http://www.etenders.gov.in)  
NOTE: if any, Corrigendum, shall be uploaded on website only.  
210/PR/bd sect/4 FOR YOUR BETTER TOMORROW SAVE ENERGY TODAY

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
This is to inform to the public at large that my client Mr. Kish S/o late Shri H.C. Singh R/o 16/902, East End Apartments, Mayur Vihar Phase-I Extension, Delhi-110096 lost the Packet containing the original allotment letter of Apartment No. STK0091502 IN STAR COURT TOWER-09, JAYPEE GREENS, Greater Noida, UP while he was going by Metro from New Ashok Nagar Metro Station, Delhi to Rajiv Chowk, New Delhi on 28.10.2025. He has already got registered a police report bearing L.R.No.3316944/2025 on 31.10.2025. Anybody managing to get a hand on the said document is warned from not using it and if the same is misused, that will be at the cost and risk of the wrongdoing person.  
**L.K. Singh Advocate 81, F.F., Riddhi Siddhi Complex, Vikas Marg, Laxmi Nagar, Delhi-110092**

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
My Client Mr. Sandipan Kayast S/o Sh. Nan Gopal Kayast R/o Flat No.466 1st Floor Rosewood Apartment Pocket Phase 2 VTC Dwarka Sector 13, PO: N.S.I.T Dwarka District South West Delhi Pincode : 110079 Mobile: 7603071720 Aadhar No.492209931386 have has severed all relationship with his wife namely Mrs Vijaya Kayast O/o Ranjit Kumar Ray W/o Sandipan Kayast Date of Birth 07/03/1987 Aadhar Card No.822581056699, therefore my client debarred his wife from all his movable and immovable properties due to her misconduct and hostile behaviour towards my client. Hence my client shall not be liable/responsible for any acts and deed of his wife whatsoever in manner. Thanks  
**Kamal Anand (Advocate) Ch.No. 802, Saket Courts**

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
General Public is hereby informed that my clients Shri Ashok Kapoor son of Late Prem Nath Kapoor and his wife Mrs. Arvind Kapoor both residents of Shop No. 125, Ambiedkar Market, Opposite Block B-1, Raghubir Nagar, Tagore Garden, New Delhi-110027, have severed all relations with their son Shri Khilash Kapoor due to personal and family reasons. Accordingly, Shri Khilash Kapoor has been disowned and disinherited from all movable and immovable properties of my clients and he shall have no right, title, interest, or claim of any nature in any of the movable and immovable properties owned or possessed by my clients. The General Public is hereby cautioned not to deal with Shri Khilash Kapoor in any manner on the representation of being the son or legal heir of my clients, failing which they shall do so at their own risk and responsibility.  
**Mahesh K. Chaudhary (Advocate) 129, Arhant Nagar, Punjabi Bagh West, New Delhi-110 026.**

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E-Auction programme for the month of JANUARY & FEBRUARY-2026			
JANUARY e-Auction-2026		FEBRUARY e-Auction 2026	
DATE	DIVISIONS/DEPOTS	DATE	DIVISIONS/DEPOTS
01.01.26	SECUNDERABAD, RAYANAPADU	02.02.26	SECUNDERABAD, TIRUPATI
02.01.26	HYDERABAD, TIRUPATI	03.02.26	HYDERABAD, RAYANAPADU
05.01.26	GUNTAKAL, LALLAGUDA	04.02.26	GUNTAKAL, LALLAGUDA
06.01.26	GUNTUR, NANDED	05.02.26	GUNTUR, NANDED
07.01.26	VIJAYAWADA	06.02.26	VIJAYAWADA
08.01.26	SECUNDERABAD, TIRUPATI	09.02.26	SECUNDERABAD, TIRUPATI
09.01.26	HYDERABAD, RAYANAPADU	10.02.26	HYDERABAD, RAYANAPADU
12.01.26	GUNTAKAL, LALLAGUDA	11.02.26	GUNTAKAL, LALLAGUDA
13.01.26	VIJAYAWADA, GUNTUR	12.02.26	GUNTUR, NANDED
16.01.26	NANDED	13.02.26	VIJAYAWADA
19.01.26	SECUNDERABAD, TIRUPATI	16.02.26	SECUNDERABAD, TIRUPATI
20.01.26	HYDERABAD, RAYANAPADU	17.02.26	HYDERABAD, RAYANAPADU
21.01.26	GUNTAKAL, LALLAGUDA	18.02.26	GUNTAKAL, LALLAGUDA
22.01.26	GUNTUR, NANDED	19.02.26	GUNTUR, NANDED
23.01.26	VIJAYAWADA	20.02.26	VIJAYAWADA
27.01.26	SECUNDERABAD, TIRUPATI	23.02.26	SECUNDERABAD, TIRUPATI
28.01.26	HYDERABAD, RAYANAPADU	24.02.26	HYDERABAD, RAYANAPADU
29.01.26	GUNTAKAL, LALLAGUDA	25.02.26	GUNTAKAL, LALLAGUDA
30.01.26	GUNTUR, VIJAYAWADA	26.02.26	GUNTUR, NANDED
		27.02.26	VIJAYAWADA
A2123	Principal Chief Materials Manager/Secunderabad		

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
Known to all that my Client Sh. Vikas Singh Bhadoria & Sh. Adesh Yadav owner of Plot No. 102, Area 75 Sq. Yds Kharsa No. 16/25/1, Vikas Nagar, Uttam Nagar, New Delhi-110059, & my Client purchase property from Sh. Subodh Devi vide GPA, AT&S & Will dated 13.08.2025, now My Client wants to sell aforesaid property. And it is informed that any deal with said documents by any person except my said client and said institution regarding said property, shall be deemed as null and void. If any person having any claim, right in said property then he may contact and handover the same and apprise his claim to undersigned within 15 days of this publication.  
**AD REM LEGAL SOLUTION**  
Ch. No. 760 - Dwarka Court Sector-10, Dwarka, New Delhi-75  
**Mobile :- 9899013918**

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
Known to all that my Client Sh. Vikas Singh Bhadoria & Sh. Adesh Yadav owner of Plot No. 102, Area 75 Sq. Yds Kharsa No. 16/25/1, Vikas Nagar, Uttam Nagar, New Delhi-110059, & my Client purchase property from Sh. Subodh Devi vide GPA, AT&S & Will dated 05.03.2025, now My Client wants to sell aforesaid property. And it is informed that any deal with said documents by any person except my said client and said institution regarding said property, shall be deemed as null and void. If any person having any claim, right in said property then he may contact and handover the same and apprise his claim to undersigned within 15 days of this publication.  
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# Govt launches Atal Canteens on Vajpayee’s birth anniversary



Union Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs Manohar Lal, Delhi CM Rekha Gupta and minister Ashish Sood during the inauguration of an 'Atal Canteen' to commemorate the birth anniversary of former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in New Delhi on Thursday

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

The Delhi Government on Thursday launched the Atal Canteen scheme on the 101st birth anniversary of former Prime Minister and Bharat Ratna Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The canteens will provide nutritious meals at a nominal cost of ₹5 to workers, the poor and other needy citizens of the capital.

Speaking at the inauguration event, Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said 45 Atal Canteens are being inaugurated in line with the government’s election promise, while work on the remaining 55 will be completed soon.

“Under the scheme, labourers, needy people and families living in jhuggi clusters will get a full meal for ₹5. The idea is to ensure that people eat with dignity,” she said, adding that lakhs of residents would benefit from the initiative.

Recalling Vajpayee’s contri-

bution to Delhi’s infrastructure, the chief minister said the former prime minister flagged off the Delhi Metro on December 24, 2002, when Kolkata was the only city with a metro system.

She said the capital now has a 394-km metro network, which was expanded further under Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

She also took a swipe at previous governments, alleging they made promises without releasing funds. She said the present Government is releasing ₹2,700 crore even for projects pertaining to earlier periods.

Highlighting welfare measures, she said ₹700 crore has been earmarked this year for improving living conditions in jhuggi clusters, and regular meetings are being held to facilitate housing for slum dwellers.

The chief minister also announced administrative reforms, including increasing the number of revenue

districts in Delhi from 11 to 13.

“With the power of a single vote, we are working to strengthen facilities and governance for the people,” she said.

Union Minister for Power and Housing & Urban Affairs Manohar Lal, along with Rekha Gupta, inaugurated an Atal Canteen near ‘Apna Bazaar’ in Nehru Nagar, Lajpat Nagar. Delhi Government Cabinet Minister Shri Ashish Sood, MLA Tarvinder Singh Marwah and several other dignitaries were present on the occasion.

The Chief Minister, along with ministers and dignitaries, also partook of a meal at the Atal Canteen and directed officials to ensure the highest standards of food quality and hygiene.

Union Minister Manohar Lal said Delhi’s people suffered in the last 20 years. “The previous governments did not do anything. For the last 20 years, Delhi has been crying and asking for facilities.

## CM RIDES METRO TO PROMOTE CLEAN TRAVEL

**New Delhi:** Chief Minister Rekha Gupta travelled by Metro to convey the message of environmental protection. She travelled from Delhi Gate Metro Station to Lajpat Nagar Metro Station. During the journey, she interacted with fellow commuters, listened attentively to their experiences and sought feedback on Government schemes.

By encouraging greater use of public transport, especially the Delhi Metro, the Chief Minister conveyed the message that increased reliance on public transport can significantly help reduce air pollution in Delhi.



CM Rekha Gupta interacts with people during a metro ride in New Delhi

But now that there is a BJP Government at the Centre and in Delhi, work is happening for the welfare of people,” he added.

He said the Atal Canteens launched across Delhi on the birth anniversary of Atal Bihari Vajpayee represent a historic initiative inspired by the ideals of service, good governance and human sensitivity.

He said that the scheme is not merely a welfare programme, but a strong commitment to extending dignified support to citizens at the last mile. By providing nutritious meals for ₹5, the spirit of public service is being strengthened.

Delhi Cabinet Minister Ashish Sood said that the day is particularly significant as it marks the birth anniversary of Bharat Ratna and former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

He stated that launching the Atal Canteen on this sacred day is a true tribute to the former prime minister.

Sood said that Atal Bihari Vajpayee’s life teaches the true values of good governance, where compassion is more important than power and sensitivity more important than authority.

Delhi Government’s Social Welfare Minister Ravinder Indraj Singh inaugurated the Atal Canteens along with local residents at A-Block SRS/JJ Colony, Bawana and C-Block, Shahbad Dairy.

Delhi Health and Transport Minister Pankaj Kumar Singh, on Thursday inaugurated an Atal Canteen at JJC, Indra Camp-3, Vikaspuri.

He also announced that three Atal Canteens will be opened in the Vikaspuri Assembly constituency in the coming days.

As a gesture of inclusivity and solidarity, the Minister also sat and shared a meal with beneficiaries at the canteen, including a woman resident, interacting with them and receiving first-hand feedback on the initiative.

## ₹5-meal scheme to serve 1 lakh people daily

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Backed by a budget of ₹104.24 crore, the Atal Canteen Scheme began with the inauguration of 45 canteens, with plans to scale up to 100 locations across the capital.

Under the programme, each meal will cost ₹30, of which beneficiaries will pay ₹5 while the Government will bear the remaining ₹25. Officials said the scheme is designed to address hunger, ensure nutrition, and reduce the daily food burden for low-income families, daily wage workers, and migrants.

Once fully operational, the network of 100 Atal Canteens is expected to serve over one lakh people every day. Each canteen will prepare around 1,000 meals daily, making the initiative one of the largest subsidised food programmes in the city. The remaining 55 canteens will be rolled out in phases in the

coming months.

According to the government, the canteens will offer a standardised, nutritious menu that meets prescribed dietary norms. Each meal will weigh about 600 grams and provide an estimated 700-800 calories along with 20-25 grams of protein. The menu includes chapati or roti, dal or rajma or chole, a seasonal vegetable, rice, and pickle. Meals will be served twice a day, with lunch available from 11.30 am to 2 pm and dinner from 6.30 pm to 9 pm.

Officials said the focus is not only on affordability but also on food safety and hygiene. To ensure quality, samples of cooked food and raw ingredients will be collected every fortnight and tested in DUSIB-authorised laboratories accredited by FSSAI and NABL. In addition, the Food Safety Department of the Delhi Government will conduct regular inspections and quality checks at canteen



CM Rekha Gupta, minister Ashish Sood with others having a meal during the inauguration of an 'Atal Canteen' on the birth anniversary of former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in New Delhi on Thursday

## AAP leaders booked for hurting Christian sentiments

ABHINAV KUMAR JHA  
■ New Delhi

Delhi Police have registered an FIR against senior Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leaders Saurabh Bharadwaj, Sanjay Jha, and Adil Ahmad Khan for allegedly hurting the religious sentiments of the Christian community by using the image of Santa Claus in a “derogatory manner” in a political skit.

The case was registered at Connaught Place police station after advocate Khushbu George alleged that a video, shared from the leaders’ official social media accounts on December 17 and 18, depicted Santa Claus in an insulting manner.

Police said the video was part of a political skit performed in Connaught Place during the Christmas season.

In her complaint, the complainant stated that Santa Claus, regarded as a sacred



cultural and religious symbol linked to St Nicholas and the spirit of Christmas, was portrayed as lying unconscious on a road and being used merely as a prop to deliver a political message.

She alleged that in one scene, the character was shown being given “mock CPR, which she said amounted to ridicule of a symbol deeply revered by Christians.

Police officials stated that the FIR has been registered under relevant provisions of

the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), which deal with acts intended to outrage religious feelings and disturb public harmony.

“The complaint alleges deliberate and malicious intent to insult a religious symbol at a sensitive time. We are examining the video content, social media posts, and other digital evidence,” a senior police officer said.

The FIR records that the alleged act took place during the final days of Advent, a

period considered sacred by Christians in the run-up to Christmas.

The complainant argued that releasing such content at this time showed disregard for religious sentiments and was aimed at drawing political mileage by trivialising a holy symbol.

Responding to the FIR, AAP leader Saurabh Bharadwaj hit back on the social media platform X, calling the police action politically motivated and an attempt to silence dissent. He said the skit was meant to draw attention to pollution and governance issues and not to hurt any religious community.

“Thanks to social media and people’s collective strength, the BJP Government is troubled today.

“This is the power of social media: that the Government is being forced to respond to pollution and AQI,” Bharadwaj wrote.

## Over 23,000 persons missing in 2025; women, girls account for majority

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

The Delhi police data shows that Women accounted for more than 60 per cent of the 23,340 people reported missing in the national capital till December 15 this year. Of the total missing persons, 14,166 were women, accounting for around 61 per cent, while 9,174 were men or around 39 per cent, the data showed.

Police records show that 14,389 missing persons were traced during the year. Of them, 8,672 were women, or around 60 per cent, and 5,713 were men or around 40 per cent. The data indicated that 8,955 people were yet to be traced till December 15. This included 5,494 women or a little more than 61 per cent, and 3,461 men or nearly

39 per cent. Adults accounted for a bulk of the missing cases. A total of 17,623 adults aged above eighteen were reported missing in 2025, including 10,020 women, (about 57 per cent) and 7,603 men (about 43 per cent).

Of these, 10,173 were traced, comprising 5,653 women and 4,520 men. The number of adults yet to be traced stood at 7450, with women accounting for 4,367 cases. Children accounted for 5717 of the total missing persons reported during the year. Girls formed a large share, with 4,146 cases, or around 73 per cent, while 1,571 boys accounted for around 27 per cent, the data showed.

Among the missing children, 4,212 were traced, including 3,019 girls and 1,193 boys. At the same time, 1505

children remained untraced, of whom 1,127 were girls and 378 were boys.

Age-wise break-up showed that 360 children aged up to eight years were reported missing in 2025, including 143 girls and 217 boys.

Of them, 214 were traced, while 146 were yet to be located, according to the data. In the eight to twelve years age group, 444 children went missing, comprising 154 girls and 290 boys. Police traced 362 children in this category, while 82 remained untraced, the figures showed.

The highest number of missing children was recorded in the twelve to eighteen years age group, with 4913 cases, including 3849 girls and 1064 boys. Of these, 3636 were traced, while 1277

were yet to be found.

A comparison with 2024 showed that 24,893 people were reported missing in Delhi last year, including 14,752 women, or about 59 per cent, and 10,141 men, or about 41 per cent. Of them, 15,260 were traced, while 9633 remained untraced, the data showed.

In the adult category, 19,047 people were reported missing last year, while 5,846 children went missing during the year.

Of the missing children, 4,496 were traced and 1,350 remained untraced. A decadal analysis covering the period from 2015 to 2025 showed that 2.5 lakh people were reported missing in Delhi. Of these, 2.1 lakh were traced, while nearly 54,000 cases remained unresolved, Delhi Police records added.

## LG, CM inaugurate Atal Bihari Vajpayee Sadbhavana Udyan



(Left) Newly-inaugurated Atal Bihari Vajpayee Sadbhavana Udyan and (Right) LG VK Saxena with CM Rekha Gupta during the renaming of 'Sadbhavana Udyan' as 'Atal Bihari Vajpayee Sadbhavana Udyan' on the 101st birth anniversary of former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in New Delhi on Thursday



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Delhi Lt Governor Vinia Kumar Saxena on Thursday dedicated a green space near the walled city here and formally named it 'Atal Bihari Vajpayee Sadbhavana Udyan', on the occasion of the birth centenary of former Prime Minister. Chief Minister Rekha Gupta was also present at the function.

The 11-acre green space in the heart of the national capital is a lasting tribute to the visionary leader. A statue/bust of the legendary former Prime Minister, will also be soon installed at the location. Saxena and Rekha Gupta took entry tickets of the park and appealed to the people of Delhi to visit the

park to spend quality time with their friends and family members.

Chief Secretary Delhi Rajeev Verma, and other senior officers of Delhi Development Authority (DDA) were also present on the momentous occasion, DDA said. The park is strategically located along Mahatma Gandhi Marg (Ring Road), parallel to the historic Walled City. It has formal lawns, white marble pathways, shaded eating plazas, baradaris, sculptured fountains, public amenities like toilets, and open recreational zones.

One of the key attractions of the garden is a striking sculpture depicting five white horses steered by a sarathi, symbolising leadership,

momentum, and progress. The sculpture is encircled by a water body and fountains, enhancing the visual grandeur of the park.

Further enriching the cultural character of the space, four Yakshini sculptures created by renowned Padma Vibhushan awardee sculptor Sudarshan Sahoo have been installed in the linear lawns. With its majestic design, the park stands as a first-of-its-kind development in the National Capital and will provide much-needed recreational green space for the residents of Delhi, particularly those in the Daryaganj and Old Delhi areas.

A clock tower is currently under construction to further enhance the park’s visual appeal in the near future.

Additionally, a proposed food van facility near the parking area will provide refreshment options for visitors, thereby improving their overall experience.

The DDA said under the consistent guidance of the Lt Governor, the park was conceptualized as part of a scheme to decongest Kartavya Path lawns. It is a part of a larger landscape redevelopment project comprising three parks along Mahatma Gandhi road.

The project aims to become a vibrant urban hub where visitors can immerse themselves in nature while enjoying the amenities of a well-maintained park. Kranti Udyan, the first park in the series, was inaugurated in January this year. The scheme

integrates green belt spread over 35 acres area, running around 1.7 km length along ring road.

The Sadbhavana Udyan will be the green public space that will be a permanent memorial that vividly reflects the thoughts, values and life-long dedication of Atal Bihari Vajpayee to the nation, and will continue to inspire generations to come.

In line with the mission of the Lt. Governor to expand the public recreational avenues in Delhi, DDA has undertaken various redevelopment and beautification projects across the city to preserve its heritage and increase green spaces, providing the public with more sites for recreation and cultural experiences.

## Police launch festive campaign *Santa ki seekh*

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

On a winter evening in Delhi, as fairy lights twinkled across markets and shoppers moved between stalls heavy with festive bargains, a familiar red-and-white figure appeared, not to hand out gifts, but to deliver a warning. Santa Claus, flanked by police volunteers and curious children, was talking about cyber safety.

This was part of Delhi Police’s citywide cyber awareness campaign, aptly titled “Santa Ki Seekh”, rolled out across all 15 police districts during the festive season.

The aim was simple yet urgent: reach people where they gather in large numbers and remind them that online fraud does not take a holiday.

From busy malls to crowded neighbourhood markets, one prominent public location in each district was turned into a learning space. Instead of lectures behind closed doors, the police took cyber awareness to the streets.

Loudspeakers crackled, posters went up, and colourful standees carrying cyber safety tips stood alongside food stalls and shopfronts.

At several locations, the campaign unfolded like a small festival within the



larger festive rush. Police teams organised quizzes on digital safety, asking shoppers how to spot fake links or what to do if a UPI payment goes wrong. Children tugged at their parents’ sleeves, eager to answer questions and win small gifts printed with cyber awareness messages. Laughter often followed wrong answers, but the lessons stayed.

The heart of the outreach was its interactive approach. Police personnel spoke in simple language, explaining common online scams, fake customer care calls, and phishing links.

Question-and-answer sessions drew in passers-by who shared their own stories: a missed delivery scam, a suspicious OTP request, or a relative who lost money to a fake investment scheme.

In some markets, the message came alive through nukkad natak. Local performers enacted short street plays showing how easily a moment of carelessness online can turn into financial loss. A character clicking on a fake link would freeze mid-scene as a police officer stepped in to explain what went wrong. Applause often followed, along with thoughtful nods from the crowd.

The festive timing was deliberate. With online shopping, digital payments and holiday offers at their peak, cybercriminals are most active. Delhi Police used this moment to urge citizens to stay alert.

People were advised not to share personal details, PINs or OTPs, and to report cybercrime incidents without delay through official channels.

## IN FOCUS



A child dressed as Santa Claus posing for a picture during the Christmas celebrations in Shimla

PTI

## Kharge, Rahul greet people on Christmas

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New Delhi

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and former party chief Rahul Gandhi greeted people on Christmas with Kharge saying the occasion strengthens the party's collective resolve to build a more humane and harmonious society. The Congress also shared a video showing some people vandalising Christmas decorations in Raipur in Chhattisgarh, and alleged that it “exposes the true face of the BJP Government”.

“On the joyous occasion of Christmas, I extend my warm greetings to all fellow citizens. This sacred festival, marking the birth of Jesus Christ, inspires us to uphold the timeless values of love, compassion, forgiveness, peace, and unity.” May this blessed occasion strengthen our collective resolve to build a more humane and harmonious society and bring renewed hope, happiness, and prosperity to all,” Kharge said in a post on X. Wishing everyone a merry Christmas, Gandhi posted a video message on X and said, “May this season bring joy, happiness, and prosperity, and fill your lives with love and compassion.” The Congress, meanwhile, posted

a video on X showing some people vandalising Christmas decorations in Raipur in Chhattisgarh.

“This video shows right-wing goons vandalising Christmas decorations in Raipur. It exposes the true face of the BJP Government.

“This is not an isolated incident. Across India, people are being targeted and terrorised simply for celebrating Christmas. From Jabalpur and Delhi to Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Odisha and Uttarakhand, and in many other places, we are witnessing an organised targeting of minority communities,” the party wrote on X.

The opposition party said such incidents raise serious concerns about the state of the nation, which has always been defined by its strength in unity and diversity. “PM Modi, these incidents are a direct reflection of your ideology. The world is watching the targeting of minorities in India. We will not remain silent. We stand firmly with our brothers and sisters in every community against hatred and violence,” the Congress said. In a post on X, Congress leader Pawan Khara said on Ram Navami and Hanuman Jayanti, “these people go outside mosques and play DJ, blaring provocative songs”.

# Bollywood continued to dominate OTT platforms

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Bollywood continued to dominate the OTT this year as Indian audiences watched a wide range of films on it from classics like Amitabh Bachchan's *Don* and Raj Kapoor's *Mera Naam Joker* to Aamir Khan-fronted *Sarfarosh* and Sanjay Dutt's *Munna Bhai MBBS* — with a strong focus on post-2000 Hindi blockbusters.

It reflected growing preference for legacy films and restored classics. This trend was mentioned in “The Ultra Media OTT Insights Report 2025”, which offered a comprehensive, data-led view of how Indian audiences consumed digital content this year. Ultra Media & Entertainment Group released this report.

According to it, era-wise consumption patterns in 2025 favoured post-2000 Hindi blockbusters, which emerged as the strongest performers on Hindi-language OTT platform Ultra



Play, capturing the largest audience share and driving the highest engagement metrics, including watch time and completion rates. Films from the 1990s followed closely, delivering strong viewership retention and repeat consumption, while classics from the 1950s to the 1970s continued to attract loyal audiences.

Within the classic Hindi cinema segment of pre-1980, *Don*, *Amar Prem*, *Bobby*,

*Aradhana* and *Mera Naam Joker* emerged as the five most-watched titles on Ultra Play in 2025, consistently outperforming other catalogue films.

Among films from the 1990s and early 2000s are *Munna Bhai MBBS*, *Andaz Apna Apna*, *Tezaab*, *Sarfarosh*, *Koi Mil Gaya*, *Khalnayak*, *Karan Arjun* and *Ghayal* delivered the highest watch time and strongest repeat viewing, according

to the report.

Restored titles such as *Rangeela* and *Sarfarosh* outperformed comparable mainstream catalogue films, delivering above-expected engagement and strong completion rates, the report said, adding, other restored films including *Half Ticket*, *Pyaasa*, *Pardes* also contributed to catalogue.

The report further stated that classic film consumption is no longer limited to older viewers. Younger audiences, particularly Gen Z, were discovering legacy cinema. This shift signals a widening audience base for classic content, transforming nostalgia into first-time viewing rather than mere revisitation.

The report also reveals strong pan-India engagement led by metros such as Delhi and Mumbai, followed by Pune, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Jaipur and Patna. Viewership across regions showed a clear preference for post-2000 blockbusters, action-thrillers, South Indian dubbed films

and legacy Hindi cinema.

Demographically, the audience skewed young and male, with an 80:20 male-female ratio, and nearly 70 per cent of total viewership coming from audiences below 44 years, led by the 18 to 24 age group, the report added. From a growth standpoint, Ultra Play recorded 250 per cent year-on-year growth in 2025, supported by the addition of over 700 new titles, and festive-period consumption surged by nearly 300 per cent.

Sushilkumar Agrawal, CEO, Ultra Media & Entertainment Group, said the data reflects the growing love of audiences for “legacy films and restored classics”.

“This year's data makes clear that audiences don't see cinema in eras—they see stories. Whether it's revisiting the emotional depth of ‘Amar Prem’, the romance of ‘Bobby’, the cultural imprint of *Don* or the timeless scale of *Mera Naam Joker*, legacy films, when restored, curated and presented right,

can compete head-to-head with modern blockbusters. That belief has guided Ultra for decades, and 2025 only strengthened it,” Agrawal said in a statement.

Rajat Agrawal, COO & Director, said they've always aimed to have a bouquet of great stories. “Ultra's journey mirrors the evolution of Indian content consumption itself from the VHS era to television, digital syndication and now OTT. What has remained constant through every phase is our focus on owning, preserving and monetising great stories,” he said.

In terms of their subscriber base, Ultra expects continued momentum with numbers projected to cross 5,00,000 by 2026 and one million by 2027 and with platform upgrades including smoother navigation, offline viewing, multi-device access and enhanced streaming quality, they are expecting to further strengthen engagement and retention of audiences, the release said.

## 6 killed after truck collides with bus in Karnataka

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Chitradurga

At least six persons, including a child, were killed when a speeding truck crashed into a luxury sleeper bus that caught fire under the impact in this district in the wee hours of Thursday, a senior police official said.

While the East Zone Inspector General of Police Ravikanth Gowda had earlier said nine people were killed, citing preliminary investigation, later he and the district police chief said that five persons lost their lives. President Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah condoled the deaths. Both the PM and the CM announced ex gratia payments to the next of kin of the deceased.

Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah also said a proper probe would be conducted into the fatal accident. The accident happened after the container truck jumped a road divider and collided with the oncoming bus, Gowda told reporters. Based on the initial investigation, Gowda



had said that three people were untraceable, but Bandaru said only two were missing. According to him, a couple from Sira who were missing have been identified and are safe.

The bus with 32 occupants, including 30 passengers, was on its way from Bengaluru to Gokarna. The vehicle was engulfed in flames under the impact of the collision, and most of the deceased were burnt alive inside the bus at Golarthi in Hiriyur Taluk, he added.

According to Bandaru, 29 people had booked the bus. One did not turn up for the journey. So there were 30

people comprising 28 passengers, the bus driver and the cleaner when the bus left Bengaluru. On the way, two people boarded the bus. The bus driver and cleaner escaped.

“As per the investigation so far, it (container lorry) directly hit the diesel tank (of the bus), leading to diesel tank leak and fire,” Gowda said. According to police sources, three friends were among the survivors. Two other passengers saved their lives by jumping from the vehicle. “Of

the 12 injured, nine have been shifted to Sira and three to Tumakuru. One of the patients with critical burn

injuries has been taken to Victoria Hospital in Bengaluru,” Gowda added.

Except for the one who has been shifted to Bengaluru, the rest of the injured are out of danger, the IGP said. Another bus from T Dasrahalli to Dandeli with 42 school children that was behind the ill-fated bus just escaped the accident.

“The bus carrying school-children hit the bus (involved in the accident) from behind, turned to the other side and veered off the road. Fortunately, no one sustained even a minor injury,” Gowda said.

The children continued

their journey in another bus, he said, adding that the school bus driver is an important eyewitness whose statement will be recorded. Most passengers of the bus that was involved in the accident had booked their tickets online.

“We have got their phone numbers. We are trying to contact their families,” he said. The officer said a DNA test would be performed to identify the bodies.

Recalling the horror, the driver of the bus, Rafiq, said the truck came from the other side of the road divider and hit his vehicle.

“It was overspeeding. I was maintaining the speed at 60-70 (km/hr) at that time. I saw the vehicle coming from the front.

I know only the vehicle (truck) hitting the bus, after that I don't know what happened and how I was brought out.” A badly injured Rafiq told reporters in the hospital that he tried to control the bus on seeing the vehicle approaching from the opposite direction. “My bus even grazed a vehicle moving next to us. I don't know what vehicle it was. But, couldn't (control).”

## Attack on minorities unacceptable: TN CM Stalin

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Chennai

Tamil Nadu CM MK Stalin on Thursday asserted that attacks on minorities are unacceptable and said curbing riotous groups is a shared and urgent duty to be enforced with firm resolve.

Stalin said the true strength and character of the majority lies in ensuring that minorities lived without fear. “When a few right-wing violent groups, acting in the name of the majority, indulge in attacks and riots, even as the PM participates in Christmas celebrations, it sends a disturbing message to the nation,” he said. After Manipur, alleged “reports of attacks on minorities are unacceptable to anyone who values harmony. Curbing riotous groups that divide society is therefore a shared and urgent duty, to be enforced with firm resolve.

Claiming a reported “74 per cent rise” in hate speech against minorities since the BJP assumed office at the Centre, he said it signalled “grave danger ahead.”

## FROM PAGE - 1

## BJP proud of removing Article 370: PM

He also paid tributes to Maharaja Bijli Pasi on his birth anniversary. “I bow in reverence to Mahamana Malaviya ji, Atal ji and Maharaja Bijli Pasi,” the Prime Minister said. The PM said the newly inaugurated Rashtra Prerna Sthal reflects the ideals guiding India on the path of self-respect, unity and service, and called for collective efforts in nation-building.

Modi also extended Christmas greetings, saying, “This festival should bring happiness into everyone's lives.” He noted that Vajpayee and Malaviya “protected India's identity, unity and pride and left an indelible mark on nation-building,” and paid tributes to Maharaja Bijli Pasi. “I bow in reverence to Mahamana Malaviya ji, Atal ji and Maharaja Bijli Pasi,” Modi said. He added that the Rashtra Prerna Sthal reflects India's path of self-respect, unity and service. Referring to the statues of Mookerjee, Upadhyaya and Vajpayee, he said, “Their statues may be tall, but the inspiration we receive from them is even higher.”

Quoting Vajpayee, Modi said the memorial shows that “every step, every effort must be dedicated to nation-building.” He also highlighted that over 30 acres of land, earlier covered with garbage, were reclaimed in three years and congratulated Chief Minister Adityanath and his team for the efforts.

Recalling Mookerjee, Modi said he opposed “two constitutions, two flags and two prime ministers, adding that the abrogation of Article 370 strengthened India's unity.” “Today, the Constitution of India is fully applicable in Jammu and Kashmir,” he said.

On Upadhyaya, Modi said his Antyodaya vision measured progress by the smile of the last person in the queue. “We have expanded Antyodaya through saturation, covering every needy person without discrimination. This is good governance, true social justice and true secularism,” he said, noting that crores have benefited from housing, utilities, food and medical schemes. Calling December 25 “a day of good governance”, Modi credited Vajpayee with laying the foundation for digital identity, telecom reforms, road connectivity and metro rail projects. He said Vajpayee would have been pleased to see India emerge as the world's second-largest mobile phone manufacturer, with Uttar Pradesh becoming the top mobile manufacturing State.

Aiming at dynasty-driven politics, Modi said several national leaders were ignored or their legacies diluted. He cited the renaming of the

Andaman Island where Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose hoisted the Tricolour and recalled “attempts to erase the legacy of BR Ambedkar”. He alleged that the “Congress' royal family” and the Samajwadi Party had done so, but said the BJP ensured Ambedkar's legacy was protected.

Modi said Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who united hundreds of princely states, was also undermined after Independence, and claimed it was the BJP that restored his stature through initiatives such as the Statue of Unity and Ekta Nagar. He described dynastic politics as “driven by insecurity” and said it promoted “political untouchability, alleging that Congress and its allies treated the BJP in this manner.

He said the NDA honoured leaders across party lines, noting Bharat Ratna awards to PV Narasimha Rao and Pranab Mukherjee and national honours for Mulayam Singh Yadav and Tarun Gogoi. Modi said the NDA “corrected historical neglect” of former prime ministers through the Pradhanmantri Sangrahalaya.

Referring to UP, Modi said the “double engine Government” had transformed the state from being known for poor law and order to development, citing the Ram temple, Kashi Vishwanath Dham and Rashtra Prerna Sthal.

## Top Maoist leader killed in Odisha encounter

“Operations are underway at different places along the Kandhamal-Ganjam inter-district boundary, and we hope to get more success. This is one of the biggest operations against Maoists in Odisha in recent times. We thank the security personnel involved in the operation. We are determined to meet Union Home Minister Amit Shah's target of eliminating Naxalism by March 2026,” he added.

Based on intelligence inputs, a joint operation involving 23 teams - 20 of the Special Operations Group of Odisha Police, two of the CRPF and one of the BSF — was launched in the Chakapad police station area in Kandhamal district and bordering Rambha forest range in Ganjam district, another officer said.

“Multiple gunfights were reported on Thursday in different areas. Later, four bodies of Maoists — two men and two women each — were recovered. Two INSAS rifles and a .303 rifle were also seized,” he added.

The Naxals killed on Wednesday night were identified as CPI(Maoist)'s area committee member Bari alias Rakesh, and Dalam member Amrit, both from Chhattisgarh, a senior police officer said, adding they carried a cumulative

bounty of ₹23.65 lakh on their heads.

The gunfights took place after 22 Maoists surrendered before Khurania in neighbouring Malkangiri district on Tuesday. The DGP on Thursday again issued an appeal to the Maoists to return to the mainstream.

“Odisha's surrender and rehabilitation policy is the best in the country under which surrendered Maoists get many benefits, including cash and social security like houses, ration cards, cash to do business and above all, skill training,” he added. Home Minister Shah said Maoist Central Committee member Ganesh Uike and five other Naxalites have been neutralised so far in a major operation in the forests of Kandhamal, Odisha. In a social media message, Shah termed it a “significant milestone towards Naxal-free Bharat”. “In a major operation in Kandhamal, Odisha, 6 Naxalites, including Central Committee Member Ganesh Uike, have been neutralised so far. With this breakthrough, Odisha stands at the threshold of becoming completely free from Naxalism. We are resolved to eliminate Naxalism before the 31st of March 2026,” he said.

## Army revises social media policy

The directive has been issued by Army Headquarters through the Directorate General of Military Intelligence (DGMI) branch and has been implemented with immediate effect.

The move also reflected the Army's attempt to balance digital awareness with operational security, allowing soldiers to stay informed without exposing themselves or their units to potential vulnerabilities.

For platforms such as YouTube, X (formerly Twitter), Quora and Instagram, only passive use for accessing information and knowledge is allowed. The Army has described the permitted access as “passive participation,” making it clear that engagement of any kind is not allowed. The letter issued by the army authorities states that, with immediate effect, the use of Instagram, for purposes of viewing and monitoring only, by personnel of the Indian Army has been permitted. “No comments, views will be communicated on Instagram,” the letter stated.

Further, listing the limited use of social media, the army has instructed to use Skype, Telegram, WhatsApp, and Signal for the exchange of unclassified information of a general nature, contents permitted.

The letter further stated that the contents were to be exchanged only with known persons, with the responsibility of correctly identifying

the recipient lying with the user.

For microblogging platforms X, Quora, Instagram, and YouTube, only passive participation to obtain knowledge or information has been permitted. The new guidelines restrict the uploading of user-generated content and messages. The army has authorised its personnel to use LinkedIn, the employment-oriented social networking service primarily used for professional networking and career development. However, the platform is to be used only for uploading a resume for obtaining information on potential employees and employers.

However, prior permission must be sought from the Directorate General of Military Intelligence (DGMI).

The recent amendment also advises the personnel not to access or use generic sites, those with cracked, pirated software, free movie, Torrent & VPN Software, and web proxies, anonymised websites, chat rooms and file transfer sites. “The cloud data storage sites may also be used with extreme caution,” the letter read. Existing social media guidelines have been updated to formally include Instagram under restricted-use platforms. The Army has also reiterated its warning against the use of VPNs, torrent websites, cracked software and anonymous web proxies, citing security risks linked to such tools. The move reflected the Army's attempt to balance digital awareness with operational security, allowing soldiers to stay informed without exposing themselves or their units to potential vulnerabilities.

These instructions have been issued to every army unit and department, sources said, adding the aim is to allow soldiers to view and monitor content on social media for their own awareness and information gathering.

Soldiers will also be able to flag fake or misleading posts that they find to senior officers. The army has periodically issued guidelines on using social media platforms like Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram. Restrictions were previously imposed on their use for security reasons.

## BNP leader returns to Bangladesh, urges peace

The Hindu population in Bangladesh has been affected by a series of incidents against minority communities in the country after the ouster of then-prime minister Sheikh Hasina in August last year. Recently, a 25-year-old Hindu worker was lynched by a mob in Mymensingh city.

India has been expressing concerns over attacks on minorities, especially Hindus, in Bangladesh. On Monday, minority groups in Bangladesh held a protest in Dhaka over the interim government's failure to prevent the persecution of minorities.

Rahman's call for unity came as the hard-line Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami, the BNP's coalition partner during its 2001-2006 tenure in power, has emerged as its main rival in the upcoming polls after the interim Government banned the Awami League. “Whatever political party we belong to, whatever religion we believe in, whether we are non-partisan individuals — all must join hands to maintain law and order,” said Rahman, the 60-year-old son of ailing former prime minister Khaleda Zia, who has emerged as a leading contender for prime ministership in the polls. A fresh wave of unrest and political instability has gripped Bangladesh following the killing of radical youth leader Sharif Osman Hadi, a prominent face in last year's mass protests that forced the collapse of the Hasina Government. Referring to a popular quote from US civil rights activist Martin Luther King, “I Have a Dream”, Rahman said, “I have a plan for the people of my country and for my country,” state-owned Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha reported. “This plan is for the interest of the people, for the development of the country, for changing the lot of the country. To implement the plan, I need the support of all the people of the country. If you stand beside us, God willing, we will be able to implement my plan,” Rahman added. Referring to the 1971 liberation war, Rahman said, “Our loving motherland was achieved through the blood of lakhs of martyrs in the 1971 Liberation War,” he said.

He also recalled the Sepoy-People's Revolution of November 7, 1975, the 1990 anti-autocracy movement, and the uprising of August 5, 2024, as struggles to protect the country's freedom and sovereignty.

“In 2024, the students and masses from all walks of life protected the independence and sovereignty of this country on that day,” he said. He said the people of Bangladesh now want to regain their democratic rights and right to speak. Rahman also urged people to pray for her ailing mother Zia, whom he met at the Evercare hospital in Dhaka after his address. Zia, a three-time prime minister, has been undergoing treatment at the intensive care unit (ICU) at the hospital.

## Odisha pays rich tributes to former PM on 101st birthday



Odisha's leaders, including Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi and Leader of Opposition in state assembly Naveen Patnaik paid rich tributes to former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on his 101th birth anniversary on Thursday.

## Indore stretch of Agra-Bombay Road to be named after Vajpayee

The Indore Municipal Corporation on Thursday decided to name an arterial road after Atal Bihari Vajpayee to mark the 101th birth anniversary of the former prime minister and Bharat Ratna awardee. The decision to rename AB Road (Agra-Bombay Road) as 'Atal Bihari Marg' was unanimously taken at the Mayor-in-Council meeting, Mayor Pushyamitra Bhargava told reporters. "A PM, Vajpayee strengthened infrastructure, connecting rural roads to major highways.



## President Murmu releases Constitution in Santhali



President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday released the Constitution of India in the Santhali language at a function held at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. The Santhali language, which was included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution through the 92nd Amendment Act, 2003, is one of the most ancient living languages of India. It is spoken by a significant number of tribal people in Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal and Bihar.

## RN Ravi hails former PM's unity and democratic values

Tamil Nadu Governor RN Ravi and several leaders paid tributes to former Prime Minister AB Vajpayee on his birth centenary on Thursday. BJP chief Nainar Nagenthran on Thursday said the former Prime Minister firmly protected national unity and democratic values without losing balance and compassion even in difficult moments.



# Leaders honour Atal Bihari Vajpayee

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

President Droupadi Murmu, Vice President CP Radhakrishnan and Prime Minister Narendra Modi were among the dignitaries who attended a prayer ceremony at 'Sadaiv Atal', the memorial of former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, on Thursday to pay tributes to him on his 101st birth anniversary.

Former vice president M Venkaiah Naidu, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, Union Ministers J P Nadda, Nirmala Sitharaman, NDA ally JD-U leader and Union Minister Rajiv Ranjan Singh, several other ministers, MPs, Delhi Chief Minister

Rekha Gupta, and BJP working president Nitin Nabin were among those who attended the event.

The prime minister said he had the privilege to pay tributes to Vajpayee by visiting his memorial 'Sadaiv Atal' in Delhi on his birth anniversary. "His life, dedicated to public service and service to the nation, will always continue to inspire the people of the country," PM Modi said.

He said Vajpayee's personality, work and leadership will continue to be a guiding light for the all-round development of the nation. He said Vajpayee dedicated his entire life to good governance and nation-building. "He will always be remembered as a brilliant

VAJPAYEE WAS BORN ON 25TH DECEMBER IN GWALIOR IN 1924 AND PASSED AWAY IN NEW DELHI ON AUGUST 16, 2018

orator as well as a spirited poet. Vajpayee's personality, work and leadership will continue to be a guiding light for the all-round development of the nation," PM Modi said in a message earlier.

Vajpayee was born on this day in Gwalior in 1924 and passed away in New Delhi on August 16, 2018. The Government observes his birth anniversary as Good Governance Day.

The BJP marked the day with its leaders commemorating Vajpayee's legacy in nationwide events. Its chief ministers, Union ministers and MPs, besides organisational leaders, are part of these programmes held across the country.

Vajpayee, India's 13th prime minister, served the country for three terms between 1996 and 2004.

He is known for his valuable contribution to India's economic growth. The 'Operation Vijay', commonly known as the Kargil War, was fought against Pakistan and won during his tenure as prime minister. He made India a nuclear weapons power. He had a distinguished four-decade parlia-

mentary career, was elected nine times to the Lok Sabha and twice to the Rajya Sabha.

Rising from humble beginnings in Gwalior (Madhya Pradesh) to the post of prime minister, he received the Padma Vibhushan in 1992 for his selfless dedication to the nation and was conferred with Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honour, in 2015.

Vajpayee championed democratic ideals, women's empowerment, and social equality. As prime minister, he prioritised good governance and economic development, building national highways, rural roads, expanding telecom, and improving infrastructure.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Uttar Pradesh Governor Anandiben Patel, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, MoS and State BJP President Pankaj Chaudhary, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Deputy CMs Keshav Prasad Maurya and Brajesh Pathak during the inauguration of Rashtriya Prerna Sthal on the 101st birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in Lucknow

## Haryana to name public places after Vajpayee in 87 urban bodies: CM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Panchkula

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Thursday said to commemorate the birth centenary of former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the State Government has decided to name at least one public place in each of the state's 87 urban local bodies after him.

He said that statues of Vajpayee will also be installed at these locations, so that his ideals of democracy, national unity, and transparent governance continue to guide society.

The chief minister said that, in addition, several institutions will be established in the name of Vajpayee to spread awareness about his life, thoughts, and invaluable contributions, especially among the youth. Saini paid



tributes to Bharat Ratna Vajpayee, describing him as a visionary statesman whose life symbolised integrity, democratic values, and people-centric governance. Saini was addressing a gathering during the State-level Good Governance Day programme.

The chief minister, while remembering Vajpayee, said that he was not only steadfast in his thoughts but also

unwavering in his values and principles. He emphasised that though governments may come and go, Atal ji always remained firm in his ideals, noted Saini.

Describing his life as a source of continuous inspiration, the chief minister said Vajpayee's journey teaches the nation the importance of values, integrity, and principled leadership.

## Shah praises nationalistic politics of Vajpayee

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Union Home Minister Amit Shah paid tributes to former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on his birth anniversary on Thursday, saying that he provided Indian politics with a political alternative that prioritised national interest and cultural nationalism.

In a social media message, Shah said the NDA government led by BJP founder and Bharat Ratna awardee Vajpayee presented the country with a governance model that advanced both heritage and science simultaneously.

The minister said, "With the founding of the BJP, Atal ji provided Indian politics with a political alternative that prioritised national interest and cultural nationalism.

"Whether it was making India a nuclear power or realising good governance, under his leadership, the



NDA government presented the country with a governance model that advanced both heritage and science simultaneously," he said.

Shah said, "Atal ji is a powerful and unforgettable figure in Indian politics, known for his dedication to public service and organisational strength."

Vajpayee was born on this day in Gwalior in 1924 and passed away in New Delhi on August 16, 2018. The government observes his

more terms, lasting for 13 days and 13 months, during which he conducted nuclear tests and won the Kargil War.

The home minister also paid tributes to the founder of Banaras Hindu University (BHU) and social reformer Bharat Ratna Mahamana Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya on his birth anniversary.

In a post, Shah said considering education as the fundamental principle of social reform, Malaviya inspired the youth to pursue modern education based on Indian cultural values through the establishment of Banaras Hindu University.

"Mahamana also made a significant contribution to making the press a medium for nation-building. Mahamana's lifelong commitment to the eradication of untouchability and his pro-farmer initiatives will always be remembered," he said.

## BIHAR CM, SENIOR BJP OFFICIALS HONOUR FORMER PM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Patna

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and senior State BJP leaders on Thursday paid tributes to former prime minister, the late Atal Bihar Vajpayee, on his 101st birth anniversary.

Kumar, along with his deputies Vijay Sinha and Samrat Choudhary, and State BJP president Sanjay Saraogi, paid floral tributes to a statue of Vajpayee at Patliputra Atal Park.

"We came here to bow before the poet, the nation-builder and the leader who gave the message to the nation on how it can stand strongly on its feet. We are working to materialise his resolve to make India the best among nations," Choudhary said.

Later, addressing BJP MLAs and party workers at a conference-cum-exhibition on Vajpayee's life at the state party headquarters, Sinha said, "Politics is often described as a 'kajal is kothri' (kohl-lined chamber). Anyone who enters it is bound to be stained. To emerge unstained from such a chamber is a rare achievement. Bharat Ratna awardee Atal ji stands among the foremost who managed to do so impressively."

He said Vajpayee had no enemy, and enjoyed respect across the political spectrum. "He was called 'Ajatshatru', one without enemies. He was respected by Opposition party members even though he was in the BJP," Sinha said.

## Naidu hails impact of strong ideals on India's governance



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Venkatapalem

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday said former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's ideals, integrity and national vision continue to inspire India's governance and democratic values.

The Atal-Modi Good Governance Yatra, launched by Andhra Pradesh BJP on December 11, which culminated today, after statewide programmes highlighting Vajpayee-Prime Minister Narendra Modi governance ideals and values.

Participating as the chief guest of Atal-Modi Good Governance Yatra, Naidu addressed a public meeting after the unveiling of a statue of Vajpayee at Atal Smruthi Vanam here in Guntur district.

"Vajpayee's ideals, integrity and national vision continue to guide India's governance and strengthen its democratic values," said Naidu, addressing the

gathering.

He said farmers' sacrifices inspired the establishment of Vajpayee Smruthi Vanam, envisioned as a historic memorial educating future generations about leadership, governance, and patriotism.

Recalling Vajpayee as poet, orator and statesman, Naidu cited Golden Quadrilateral highways, telecom reforms, nuclear tests, and Kargil leadership, strengthening India's global stature and influence.

Drawing parallels, Naidu said Prime Minister Narendra Modi accelerated reforms through infrastructure, Public Private Partnership (PPP) initiatives, defence strength, and technology, positioning India toward top global rankings steadily.

He said the development of greenfield capital city Amaravati is progressing rapidly with farmer support, Centre's cooperation, highways, industries, Quantum Valley plans, shifting from IT speed to quantum momentum era.

## PM Modi fulfilling Vajpayee vision: Nitin Nabin

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Atal Bihari Vajpayee laid the foundation for a new era of development and good governance through his "unwavering commitment" to ideology and value-based politics, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi is fulfilling his vision, BJP national working president Nitin Nabin said on Thursday.

After inaugurating an exhibition showcasing the personality and contributions of Vajpayee on the 101st birth anniversary of the former prime minister

at the BJP headquarters here, Nabin exhorted people and party workers to "work together" to fulfil Prime Minister Modi's resolve to make India a developed country.

"This will be our true tribute to Atal ji," Nabin said. The event was attended by BJP national general secretary and Rajya Sabha MP Arun Singh, former Union minister Satyanarayan Jatiya, national media co-charge Sanjay Mayukh and several other party leaders. Highlighting the life and policies of Vajpayee, Nabin said, "Through his unwavering

commitment to ideology and value-based politics, Atal ji laid the foundation for a new era of development and good governance in the country."

Vajpayee was a symbol of the consciousness, which taught democracy the "culture of dialogue, not just noise", he said.

"Vajpayee's life, dedicated to public service and the all-round development of the country, is an inspiration to all of us. His vision of good governance and development is being fulfilled by our illustrious prime minister, Narendra Modi, who successfully implemented



BJP National Working President Nitin Nabin paying tribute to former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee during a party meeting in New Delhi

the concepts of service, good governance, and welfare of the poor," Nabin added. The BJP leader also said that the goal of a devel-

oped India that PM Modi has set must be achieved by "all of us working together", which will be a true tribute to Atal ji.

## Hoisting Mahayuti flag at BMC is a true tribute: Fadnavis

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Mumbai

Hoisting the Mahayuti's flag on the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) will be true tribute to former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said on Thursday on the occasion of the stalwart's birth anniversary. Polls to 29 municipal corporations in the state, including Mumbai, will take place on January 15, while results will be declared the next day.

"There is a resolve to form a Mahayuti government in the Mumbai Municipal Corporation and make the slogan 'Darkness will fade, the sun will rise, and the lotus will bloom' a reality.

This election is being fought with the aim of establishing transparent and honest governance in the civic body," Fadnavis said while addressing 'Atal Good Governance Conference' organised at the Mumbai BJP office. Atalji's legacy continues to inspire the nation and laid the foundation for the 'New India' being shaped under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the CM said.

"Vajpayee provided a new direction to India's foreign policy as external affairs minister, strengthened the economy despite global sanctions imposed after nuclear tests, and promoted national unity through infrastructure projects such as the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana and world-class highways," he added.



Fadnavis noted that Vajpayee was the first PM to address the United Nations in Hindi, giving global recog-

nition to Indian languages.

Describing him as a scholar with deep knowledge of literature and lan-

guages, the CM said the ideology, resolve and nationalism shown by Vajpayee are being carried forward by

PM Modi, enabling India to emerge as a leading global power. "The Mahayuti is contesting the Mumbai municipal polls with the aim of establishing transparent and honest governance. The real tribute to Atalji will be paid on January 16, when the Mahayuti's flag flies atop the Mumbai Municipal Corporation," Fadnavis asserted.

Fadnavis said even though the Mumbai Trans Harbour Link (MTHL) has been named 'Atal Setu', there is a collective demand for a grand memorial in Mumbai to honour Vajpayee's memory. This would be realised in the future, Fadnavis said while asserting that Vajpayee's legacy is an inspiration for national service.

## States Focus



### LEADERS EXPRESS GRIEF OVER CHITRADURGA ACCIDENT

President Droupadi Murmu, Vice President CP Radhakrishnan and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday condoled the loss of lives in road accidents in Karnataka's Chitradurga and Tamil Nadu's Cuddalore and prayed for the speedy recovery of the injured. At least five people were killed when a sleeper bus burst into flames after it was hit by a speeding truck in Chitradurga district early Thursday. The bus was carrying 30 passengers and most of them were burnt alive, according to police. In Tamil Nadu, nine people were killed near Cuddalore on Wednesday after a Government bus swerved to the opposite side and collided with two vehicles. "Deeply pained by the tragic bus fire incident in Chitradurga, Karnataka, which has led to the loss of lives. My heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families. I pray for speedy recovery of the injured," President Murmu said in a social media post. Vice President Radhakrishnan expressed grief over the loss of lives in the two accidents.



### HINDU GROUPS PROTEST IN JAMMU OVER MEDICAL ADMISSIONS

Several right-wing Hindu groups held a protest in Jammu on Thursday evening, demanding the shifting of Muslim students from the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Institute of Medical Excellence and reservations for Hindu students. They also warned of intensifying the agitation if their demands are not met. The controversy began after admissions for the inaugural MBBS batch of 50 students were completed through the NEET merit list last month. This batch includes 42 Muslim candidates, mostly from Kashmir, seven Hindu students from Jammu and one Sikh candidate. Protesters, including members of trade associations, the Bar Association, social organisations and religious bodies, gathered under the banner of the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Sangharsh Samiti, a recently-formed conglomeration of organisations. They held a demonstration against the Shrine Board and the Jammu and Kashmir administration. Led by Samiti convener Colonel Sukhvir Singh Mankotia, the protesters raised slogans against Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha, Shrine Board members and Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, and burnt an effigy of the LG, calling for what they described as the fulfilment of the Hindu community demands.

# Court stay blocks Karbi eviction demand: Himanta

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Guwahati

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the demand by the Karbi people to evict alleged Hindi-speaking encroachers from grazing lands cannot be accepted immediately, because of a stay by the Gauhati High Court.

The two communities have been at loggerheads in West Karbi Anglong district over allegations of encroachment on Village Grazing Reserve (VGR) and Professional Grazing Reserve (PGR) lands in the tribal belts by the Hindi-speaking people.

Two persons were killed, and at least 45 others, including 38 police personnel, injured on Tuesday in violence in Kheroni area in West Karbi Anglong district in central Assam. "A section of the Karbi people made demands to evict people living in VGR and PGR. There is a stay order by the Gauhati High Court in this regard. No one can ignore the court. If I try to do something, it will be contempt of court," Sarma told reporters on the sidelines of an official function in Naharkatia on Wednesday evening.

In fact, all the evictions the Assam Government has carried out so far in different forests were done only after fighting cases in the high court and the Supreme Court, and the administration proceeded only after the courts said yes to its move, he added.



People at a vandalised area following violent protests demanding eviction of encroachers from tribal belts at Kheroni in Karbi Anglong district, Assam, (Inset) Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma

PTI

The Chief Minister also pointed out that the rights of the people settled in PGR and VGR lands will also have to be discussed in the court. Sarma said that many times, people ask him to evict encroachers instantly, but he always tells them that no Government can work by disregarding the law and the court.

"Even if we say we will evict, the police cannot do it because contempt of court will be applicable to them. I cannot say why these things are not understood. We will certainly talk face-to-face, and if they have misunderstood anything, we will address those issues. Usually, if there is a court order,

people do not force things. We will have to look into the incidents of the last two days," Sarma said. He, however, asserted that the first priority is normalisation and let the situation become peaceful, and the Government will examine the matter thereafter. "Peaceful protests are different, but nobody can solve any problem through violence," Sarma said, appealing to all to shun violence.

Agitators from the Karbi community had been on a hunger strike for the last 15 days, demanding the eviction of alleged illegal settlers, who mostly hail from Bihar, from the VGR and PGR lands in the two districts — Karbi Anglong and

West Karbi Anglong.

They went on a rampage on Monday after police took away three agitators from the protest site during the wee hours, a move which the administration later claimed was for their hospitalisation.

The badly affected Kheroni area in West Karbi Anglong district witnessed massive violence on Tuesday, as one person was killed in police firing and another was burnt alive inside his house, while 45 others, including 38 police personnel, were injured. Assam Police DGP Harmeet Singh was hit on the shoulder with a stone, while IG (Law and Order) Akhlesh Kumar Singh suffered injuries on his leg.

## Bhupender Yadav attacks Congress over Aravalli mining claims

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav on Thursday rejected allegations levelled by the Congress that more than 90 per cent of the Aravallis will not be protected under the redefinition of the hills, saying the party is "rattled" because the Government has issued a total ban on mining in the Aravallis.

The Congress on Thursday claimed that more than 90 per cent of the Aravallis will not be protected under the redefinition of the hills and will open them up for mining and other activities.

"No FSI study has been conducted saying what you are claiming. But I know the reason you are spreading these lies despite FSI issuing a categorical denial. Maybe your 'environmentalist hat' would be credible if you questioned your party colleague Ashok Gehlot about who destroyed the Aravallis," Yadav wrote on social media responding to a post by Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh.

"You and your coterie are rattled because we have issued a total ban on mining in the Aravallis from Gujarat to Delhi. We will not allow you, Gehlot or anyone else in your party to plunder the sacred Aravalli



range ever again. Will continue to work for the restoration of what your party has ravaged," Yadav attacked.

Jairam Ramesh accused the Government of launching a "determined assault" on ecological balance by weakening environmental protection laws and loosening pollution norms.

Under the new definition, an "Aravalli Hill" is a landform with an elevation of at least 100 metres above its local surrounding terrain and an "Aravalli Range" is a cluster of two or more such hills within 500 metres of each other.

After a row over the redefinition of the Aravallis, the

Centre on Wednesday issued directions to states for a complete ban on granting new mining leases within the mountain range.

The Ministry of Environment and Forests has also directed the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education to identify additional areas and zones in the entire Aravallis where mining should be prohibited over and above the areas already prohibited for mining by the Centre.

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav, Deputy Chief Minister Rajendra Shukla, minister Prahlad Patel and several other leaders were present at the event.

## BSPCB to launch night drive against loudspeakers in Patna

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Patna

The Bihar State Pollution Control Board (BSPCB) will launch a special drive on Thursday night against the use of loudspeakers after 10 pm in Patna, a senior official said.

BSPCB Chairman Devendra Kumar Shukla said the decision was taken after a large number of complaints were received against the use of loudspeakers and high-decibel sound boxes at night. "After receiving a lot of complaints, the BSPCB has decided to initially launch a 20-day drive to strictly enforce the ban on loudspeakers and DJ boxes after 10 pm. Three teams have been formed, and they will start conducting raids from tonight," he said.

"Use of loudspeakers after 10 pm is already banned, but it is not being strictly fol-



lowed. Initially, the team will impose a hefty fine on the violators," he added.

Shukla said not only the ban, but prescribed noise limits under the Noise Pollution (Regulation and Control) Rules are being violated.

"The rule is simple, follow permissible sound levels and timings," he said.

Shukla said noise pollution has an adverse impact on

health, and uncontrolled use of loudspeakers has become a matter of concern, especially in Patna.

"Noise pollution causes irritability, hearing loss, high blood pressure and heart problems. The BSPCB monitors noise pollution levels at more than 950 locations in Patna," he said.

He said that later, other agencies will also be engaged in the drive.

## DK Shivakumar meets Kharge, denies CM post talks

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Bengaluru

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Thursday met Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge at his residence here, leading to speculations linking it to the ongoing power tussle in the State for the CM post.

However, speaking to reporters after the meeting, Shivakumar said he did not discuss anything political and has only shared his thoughts with the Congress president, as a State unit chief, regarding the law enacted by the centre replacing the MGNREGA, ahead of the Congress Working Committee meeting on December 27.

He said he has not discussed any other issue with Kharge. "There is no need to do it, I will not do it, there is no such thing for now. Siddaramaiah and I have said that we will work abiding by the high command's decision, and

we are committed to it."

Responding to a question on his statement that he will remain a party worker, Shivakumar said, what he meant was being a lifetime member of the party and serving the organisation, irrespective of the post or the position he holds. "I'm a lifetime worker of the party. Whatever the post may be, I'm a worker of the party. I have tied the party flag, both as a party worker and President. I have pasted party posters, and I have done the sweeping work. I have done all things for the Congress party. I have not come just to sit and make speeches on the stage. I have done all the work for the party," he said.

When asked as to when he will get a reward for his hard work, he said, "I won't answer such things."

The power tussle within the ruling party has intensified amid speculations about a change in chief minister in the State, after the Congress



Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar meets AICC President Mallikarjun Kharge at his residence in Bengaluru

PTI

Government reached the halfway mark of its five-year term on November 20.

The meeting with the AICC chief has gained significance as Kharge on Sunday had said that the confusion over the leadership issue in the party's Karnataka unit exists only at the local level and not in the party's high command.

Kharge had also said that the local leaders should take ownership of the internal disputes rather than blaming the high command.

Asked about Kharge's statement, Shivakumar said, "As a senior leader, he has given his guidance."

Kharge's statement had come at a time when it was widely expected in the Congress and the political circles that the party high command would call both Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar to Delhi, to put an end to the leadership issue in the State, after the legislature session concluded on December 19.

## Chitradurga accident to be probed: Siddaramaiah

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Bengaluru

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Thursday said that a proper investigation will be conducted into the Chitradurga bus accident in which at least five people were killed.

Expressing grief over the loss of lives in the accident, he said, the families of those who died in the horrific accident will be given a compensation of ₹5 lakh each, and those injured will be given ₹50,000 each.

"My heart shook hearing the news of the horrific accident involving a lorry and a bus near Chitradurga in which many passengers were burnt alive. It is regrettable that the journey of those who were going home for the Christmas holidays ended in such a tragedy," Siddaramaiah posted on 'social media.

He said, "A proper investigation into the accident will be conducted, and the cause will be found out. I pray that the souls of the deceased may rest in peace. I also share the grief of the families of those who died

in the accident." "I have obtained information from the authorities about the incident and have instructed them to come to the aid of the victims. An investigation will be conducted into this matter, the cause of the accident will be found and necessary action will be taken," he added.

Expressing shock over the accident and loss of lives, Deputy CM DK Shivakumar said, "I express my condolences to the deceased. I wish the injured a speedy recovery. May such tragedies not recur."

Former prime minister H D Deve Gowda, Leader of Opposition R Ashoka, Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy, and state BJP President BY Vijayendra too have expressed shock over the incident. They have offered condolences to the families of the deceased and wished a speedy recovery for the injured.

While police had initially said nine people were killed in the accident, citing preliminary investigation, later they confirmed that only five persons lost their lives.



## Shubhanshu Shukla highlights importance of dental care for astronauts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Mumbai

Dental health is extremely important for astronauts, Shubhanshu Shukla, the first Indian to reach the International Space Station, has said, recalling that he had two wisdom teeth extracted while preparing for his space journey. Shukla said that although astronauts are trained to handle emergency medical situations, they cannot perform dental

surgery on a spacecraft.

He was speaking at the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay on Wednesday, along with Group Captain Prasanth Nair and Group Captain Angad Pratap, who have been short-listed for 'Gaganyaan', the country's first human spaceflight mission. Nair explained why test pilots of the Indian Air Force (IAF) are the natural choice for space trips.

Group Captain Shukla, an Indian Air Force (IAF) officer

and test pilot, completed his maiden space voyage as part of the Axiom-4 mission, a commercial spaceflight supported by ISRO and NASA, and operated by Axiom Space, earlier this year.

"Your dental health is extremely important. During the selection, a lot of aspiring astronauts got their teeth extracted," he said. Explaining further, Shukla said wisdom teeth are removed when one is trained to go to space.



"You are trained medically to take care of any emergency or any situation that comes on board because there is no ready help available. If there is one thing you cannot do is dental surgery. So they make sure that you will not have any problem before you launch," he said. "I have had two of my wisdom teeth extracted," the astronaut added.

He said Nair has three of his teeth extracted, while Pratap has four molars

removed. "If you want to be an astronaut, you have to give up on your wisdom," Shukla quipped.

He said the ace IAF pilots selected for the Gaganyaan mission underwent several psychological and physical evaluations before they were finally cleared for the mission. Group Captain Nair said that by the end of 2019, they were sent to Russia, where Russian doctors also carried out medical evaluations.

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### Order Order

## Delhi HC asks authorities to take action against illegal shops in Majnu ka Tila



The Delhi High Court on Wednesday directed authorities to take action against various cafes, bars and restaurants in Majnu ka Tila area here which are operating without sanctioned building plans and safety measures. A bench of Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela disposed of a petition which contended that various unauthorised restaurants are operating in multi-storey buildings in Majnu ka Tila, which is situated on the Yamuna river bank, and that they are being used for commercial purposes.

The court noted that a suo motu complaint has already been registered by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) and said "we dispose of the petition with a direction to the authorities to take appropriate action which may be warranted under law after reviewing the grievances of the petitioner." It also directed that the decision and action as may be warranted in the complaint filed by DDA be taken with expedition, preferably within three months.

## CBI to move SC against suspension of Kuldeep Sengar's life sentence



Kuldeep Sengar

The CBI will immediately challenge the suspension of life sentence and bail to former BJP MLA Kuldeep Singh Sengar in the Unnao rape case in the Supreme Court, officials said on Wednesday. The decision was taken after studying the orders of a division bench of the Delhi High Court in the Unnao rape case of 2017, a CBI spokesperson said in a statement.

It was decided to file an SLP before the Supreme Court at the earliest against the orders of the High Court, which granted bail to Sengar after suspending his life sentence, the CBI spokesperson said. Sengar, however, will remain in jail as he is also serving a 10-year term for the custodial death of the rape survivor's father.

The Victim already announced that she will approach the Supreme Court after meeting Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday evening. She met the leaders at Sonia Gandhi's residence and told media that they assured all support. Sengar's sentence has been suspended by the High Court till the pendency of his appeal challenging his conviction and sentencing in the rape case. He challenged a December 2019 trial court verdict in the case.



# Court's rejection of State's plea in Akhlaq lynching case restores faith in justice system, say experts



RANJIT  
KUMAR  
SINHA

December 23, 2025, is a landmark moment for the Indian judiciary. A Court in Uttar Pradesh has set a major precedent, especially in cases where judicial independence is tested against executive (State) power. The case was the 2015 Mohammed Akhlaq lynching of Dadri, in which the Surajpur Court in Gautambudh Nagar rejected the Uttar Pradesh Government's attempt to withdraw the case in which the Muslim man was killed over suspicions of cow slaughter and beef consumption.

Additional District Judge Saurabh Dwivedi, who dismissed the plea, calling it "baseless" and lacking legal merit, acted as a "check and balance" by scrutinising the State's move to drop charges, ensuring that the executive branch cannot unilaterally end a murder trial without merit.

The decision and court's observation that "murder is a grave offence against society, and for this reason, the State prosecutes such cases so that the fear of law is maintained in society," has come for appreciation from legal experts like Senior Advocates Siddharth Luthra and Vikas Pahwa.

Both Luthra and Pahwa, who are experts in criminal law, stated that the withdrawal of cases involving serious offences cannot be based on political or administrative reasons.

Luthra said withdrawal of prosecution is an "extreme step" and the Public Prosecutor has to decide under Section 321 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, and "in any crime, withdrawal is permitted if there is a social purpose. This was not apparent (in the present case). A political decision cannot be the basis for withdrawal of prosecution."

Welcoming the trial court decision to dismiss the Prosecution's



Additional District Judge Saurabh Dwivedi

Victim Mohammed Akhlaq

application, Pahwa said, "I feel that the Criminal justice cannot be subordinated to political or administrative considerations." "The State Government's decision to seek withdrawal was legally untenable," he said, adding that "Once a chargesheet has been filed, charges have been framed, and the trial is underway, withdrawal under Section 321 CrPC can be permitted only in the rarest of circumstances and strictly in public interest. The Court has rightly found that the reasons cited by the State — such as alleged inconsistencies in evidence — are matters for trial and adjudication, not grounds for abandoning prosecution altogether."

Pahwa said as far as the State is concerned, the lawful course now is clear: to proceed with the trial in accordance with law, assist the prosecution, ensure witness protection, and allow the court to decide the matter on merits." The State Government had cited "social harmony" and alleged "inconsistencies" in witness statements as reasons for the withdrawal.

The victim's family and complainants opposed the

prosecution's application, alleging that the plea was based on misleading facts and was contrary to social harmony. They alleged that the application in question is motivated by political reasons in the matter of serious offences. Pahwa said the decision reaffirms a fundamental principle of criminal jurisprudence, viz that offences like murder, particularly arising out of mob violence, are crimes against society and cannot be treated as matters of executive discretion or convenience. "There are very few, if any, credible precedents where prosecutions for offences under Section 302 IPC have been withdrawn at such an advanced stage, and courts across the country have consistently cautioned against executive overreach in serious criminal cases," the senior advocate said.

Pahwa said recent judicial trends clearly show that attempts to withdraw cases involving grave offences, communal violence, or public disorder are being subjected to strict scrutiny and often rejected.

"Allowing withdrawal in a case of this nature would have caused immense hardship and injustice to

the victim's family. They have already suffered the trauma of loss and prolonged litigation. Forcing them to repeatedly approach courts to oppose the State's own attempt to abandon prosecution would amount to further harassment and a denial of meaningful access to justice," the senior advocate said.

"The Court's order protects them from that ordeal and restores faith in the justice delivery system," Pahwa said, adding that "This order sends a strong message that the rule of law must prevail over expediency, and that the State has a duty not only to maintain order but also to stand with victims of grave crime. The judiciary has once again acted as the constitutional sentinel, ensuring that justice is neither diluted nor derailed."

Since politics has already erupted over the outcome of the application, Luthra is of the view that the State Government may make an attempt before the Allahabad High Court by challenging the order of the Surajpur Court (Greater Noida), which said the evidence provided so far, including the testimony of Akhlaq's daughter, supports the

prosecution's case. Minor contradictions in early police statements are common in such traumatic events and do not justify dropping a murder charge, the judge observed while categorising the case as "most important."

While dismissing the State Government's application, the Court noted that charges had already been framed in the case and that the witnesses in their police statements had supported the prosecution's case.

It held that an examination of these statements did not indicate that the prosecution's case had been demolished. Rather, the evidence supported the prosecution's version of events, the Court remarked.

While rejecting the State's plea, the Court noted that the case had been pending since 2015, despite the charges being framed in 2021. The Court has directed that the trial proceed on a day-to-day basis to ensure an expedited verdict, nearly a decade after the incident occurred. The judge has ordered the Police Commissioner of Gautambudh Nagar and the DCP of Greater Noida to ensure the absolute safety and security of all witnesses and to protect the physical evidence related to the case. There are 14 surviving accused currently out on bail (originally 18 were arrested, including three minors; one died in 2016). The main accused include Vishal Rana, the son of a local political leader.

The 2015 Dadri mob attack remains one of India's most high-profile cases of vigilante violence. After villagers accused Mohammad Akhlaq's family of storing beef, a mob stormed their home, killing the 50-year-old and leaving his son fighting for his life.

The case took a controversial turn this past August when the Uttar Pradesh Government sought to drop all charges against the accused, citing their constitutional rights as a justification for ending the prosecution.

The writer is senior journalist covering legal affairs

## Allahabad HC quashes forgery case against international shooter Vartika Singh

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
■ Lucknow

The Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court has quashed criminal proceedings against international shooter Vartika Singh in a case alleging preparation of forged letters at the behest of a Union Cabinet Minister.

A bench headed by Justice Rajeev Singh on December 19 observed, "There is no evidence of cheating against the applicant, Vartika Singh, in the entire material available before the court."

The documents which were forwarded to her were also provided to the officials and other dignitaries for an enquiry.

However, no enquiry was made as to who had prepared the fake documents, the court held.

In the same matter, the investigating officer filed a closure report after no alleged offence was made out against Vartika Singh, the court

noted. Consequently, the court held that the ongoing criminal proceedings against Vartika Singh were liable to be set aside.

The incident occurred in April 2020, when Rajneesh Singh, claiming to be close to the secretary of the then Cabinet Minister Smriti Irani, allegedly lured Vartika Singh and promised to nominate her as a member of the National Commission for Women, New Delhi.

According to her lawyers, Rajneesh Singh shared unsigned documents with the international shooter over WhatsApp, indicating her appointment and later demanded ₹25 Lakh from her.

When she refused to pay the money, a case was lodged against her in 2020 under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code at Musafirkhana police station in Amethi district, her lawyers said.

After the investigation, police



Vartika Singh

filed a chargesheet against her, and a judicial magistrate had issued a process for her trial.

Challenging the proceedings, her counsel, Mahendra Bahadur Singh and Rohit Kumar Tripathi,

argued that she was falsely implicated after refusing to pay ₹25 lakh to Rajneesh Singh for the alleged appointment.

They contended that Vartika Singh had handed over the

documents to the police, and without an enquiry to identify the person behind the fraudulently prepared documents, a chargesheet was filed against her without any evidence.

## How law determines the validity of a will: The legal principles in Sunjay Kapur case



ARUN  
PANWAR

"Facts remain true even when overlooked" Aldous Huxley observed. This concept lies at the core of succession law: a Will is dismissed based on proof, not feelings and Indian legal tradition has consistently protected testamentary intention, from the upheaval of family disputes.

As, per Section 63 of the Indian Succession Act, 1925 a lawful Will needs to be (1) signed by the testator and (2) witnessed by two individuals who observed the testators signature. The Supreme Court through rulings has consistently maintained that minor typographical mistakes, layout problems or stylistic imperfections do not invalidate a Will when the legal conditions are met.

The Court's role is not to look for suspicion but to evaluate the document based on clear evidence of intent, ability



Karisma and kids, Sunjay Kapur, Priya Kapur

and proper execution. This legal principle is explicitly shown in the timeline submitted to the Court in the Kapur case.

The List of Dates outlines a chain of custody: Sunjay Kapur directed the preparation of a draft; the draft was produced on 10 February 2025 using a prior family template; Sunjay examined it around 10 March instructed the inclusion of Safira and named Shradha Suri as executor; the

document underwent revisions, until 17 March and was ultimately signed on 21 March in the presence of both attesting witnesses.

This continuous sequence is the type of documentary evidence that courts depend on to confirm the intention, behind a will. Philosopher John Locke maintained that property represents an extension of one's autonomy. This concept is reflected in law: an individual holds the complete

right to allocate their self-owned property according to their preference even if this allocation upsets heirs. Courts refrain from altering Wills based on ideas of equity; they respect the testator's autonomy provided the requirements, for execution are met.

Digital proof now constitutes an element of this investigation. The metadata in the Word document (created on February 10, 2025) and PDF (created on March 24, 2025),

with WhatsApp logs indicating Sunjay accessed the signed Will at 5:01 pm on 24 March confirm the legitimacy of the procedure. Indian courts recognise these records if backed by Section 65B certificates — a fact regularly upheld in current case law.

The general philosophical and legal principle is straightforward: A Will holds validity not due to family consensus. Because the law acknowledges an individual's right to determine what happens to their estate. In the Kapur case the evidence — traces, testimonies, metadata and witness statements — fully complies, with legal standards.

As Justice Holmes once said, "The life of the law has not been logic; it has been experience." And experience shows that a Will grounded in clear facts, documented steps, and lawful execution withstands rhetoric, suspicion, and sentiment alike.

The writer is an Advocate having expertise in civil, property and transactional disputes

## Delhi HC refuses to halt release of web series on Vikas Dubey

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
■ New Delhi

The Delhi High Court refused to stay the release of web series "UP 77", which is reportedly based on the life of slain gangster Vikas Dubey. Justice Sachin Datta, who was hearing a plea by Dubey's wife Richa seeking to stop the release, said the court is not inclined to interfere with its release at this stage. "UP 77" is released on the Waves OTT platform on Thursday.

The court recorded the statement of the web series' producers that it is a work of pure fiction and has nothing to do with the real life story of any person, including Dubey. It also asked the producers to issue an undertaking or public statement to this effect to allay the petitioner's concerns.

"Let an affidavit be filed to this effect within two weeks," the court said and listed the matter for further hearing on January 7, 2026.

The court also directed that none of the promotional material in relation to



the series should refer to the name of Dubey and that a disclaimer be added that it has nothing to do with Vikas Dubey.

In her plea, Dubey's wife urged the court to stay the release of the web series, otherwise it would cause trauma and harassment to her. Dubey was gunned down by Uttar Pradesh Police in an encounter in 2020.

The main accused in the killing of eight police personnel in Kanpur, Dubey was being brought to Kanpur from Ujjain, where he had surrendered, when he attempted to flee after the vehicle carrying him

overturned, according to police. During the hearing, the court asked the producers whether there was any hint in the promotional material that the web series has anything to do with Dubey.

The counsel for the producers replied in negative and added that it was a work of fiction and the name of the character in the web series was Vishal Dubey.

As the petitioner's counsel insisted that the release of the series be postponed, the judge said, "after taking their statement on record, I cannot interdict now."



Editor's

TAKE

## India's coming of age in space

What sets ISRO apart is its ability to achieve more with less, to innovate under constraint, and to democratise access to space-derived benefits

If there is one Indian institution that has consistently delivered excellence and steadily raised benchmarks, it is ISRO. What began as a modest space agency has today evolved into one of the world's most respected space organisations, bringing pride to the nation and tangible benefits to every Indian. From accurate weather forecasting and disaster management to communication and surveillance, ISRO's contributions quietly underpin daily life. Its journey has been all the more remarkable because space research and development is an unforgiving arena, fraught with technological risks and setbacks at every stage-challenges that ISRO has repeatedly met with resilience, innovation, and resolve.

With the successful launch of BlueBird Block-2 aboard the LVM3-M6 aptly nicknamed Baahubali-the Indian Space Research Organisation has once again reaffirmed its place among the world's serious space powers. Lifting off from Sriharikota with a 6,100-kg payload, the heaviest ever placed into Low Earth Orbit by an Indian rocket, the mission marks not merely a technical triumph but a decisive moment in India's evolving space journey-from capability to credibility.

The significance of the launch lies as much in what was carried as in who carried it. BlueBird Block-2, developed by US-based AST SpaceMobile, was launched under a commercial agreement facilitated by ISRO's commercial arm, NewSpace India Ltd. What is important here is not only the feat but also the trust and respect the Indian space agency commands across the world. That a foreign private entity entrusted its most ambitious next-generation communication satellite to an Indian launcher speaks volumes about the capabilities of ISRO. Indeed, ISRO has matured into a reliable service provider and a money-spinner. The LVM3 rocket itself stands as a symbol of ISRO's quiet maturation. Standing 43.5 metres tall and powered by indigenous cryogenic technology, it is a dependable heavy-lift vehicle capable of complex commercial and strategic missions. From Chandrayaan-2 and Chandrayaan-3 to LVM3, it has demonstrated consistency-an attribute that matters as much as innovation in the unforgiving realm of space.

Commercial launches translate into revenue and strengthen India's strategic autonomy by ensuring that critical launch capabilities remain sovereign. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi noted, the mission reflects the spirit of Aatmanirbhar Bharat-self-reliance anchored not in isolation, but in global competitiveness.

ISRO's growing technological depth also finds resonance beyond civilian space. The recent successful test launch of an indigenous missile system-enabled by advances in guidance, propulsion, and tracking technologies developed with ISRO's support-highlights the agency's broader contribution to national security. While ISRO has been pivotal in strengthening India's growth and strategic capabilities, satellites launched by ISRO power weather forecasting, disaster management, navigation, agriculture, telecommunications, and education across India, quietly improving the lives of every Indian citizen.

# A substantive reading of VB-G RAM G

The VB-G RAM G Act deserves to be judged not by the volume of protest it has generated, but by its design logic and implementation outcomes. It attempts to reconcile social protection with fiscal responsibility, and employment assurance with developmental purpose



HEMANGI SINHA



PRAVIN KUMAR SINGH

When the Viksit Bharat — Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act, 2025 finally received Presidential assent, it arrived amidst considerable political clamour. Parliamentary disruptions and social media outrage quickly framed the law as either an ideological rupture or a cosmetic rebranding of the rural employment guarantee. In this din, however, the most important aspect of the Act has been largely missed: its substantive attempt to recalibrate rural employment policy through fiscal prudence, normative funding, and developmental alignment.

Public discourse has focused disproportionately on symbolism and legacy, leaving little room for a serious examination of what the law actually does and why it has been designed the way it has. Yet, for a country aspiring to become a Viksit Bharat, the question that should matter most is not who claims ownership of past programmes, but whether new legislation meaningfully strengthens state capacity, improves outcomes, and remains fiscally sustainable.

### From Entitlement Expansion to Responsible Design

At first glance, the Act appears to be an expansion rather than a contraction of the rural employment guarantee. The statutory assurance of work has been enhanced from 100 to 125 days per rural household annually. This is not a trivial change. In regions prone to agrarian distress, climate variability, or seasonal unemployment, the additional 25 days provide a critical buffer against income volatility.

But the real shift lies not in the number of days guaranteed, but in the architecture of the guarantee. Unlike its predecessor, which operated largely as an open-ended, demand-driven entitlement with contingent fiscal liabilities, the new Act consciously embeds employment assurance within a more structured and predictable financing framework. This design choice reflects a sober recognition of macroeconomic constraints and the necessity of balancing welfare commitments with fiscal responsibility.

Far from diluting the guarantee, this recalibration seeks to protect it from the very risks that plagued earlier models-chronic delays in wage payments, mounting arrears, and periodic budgetary shortfalls that undermined credibility at the grassroots level.

### Why the Earlier Model Became Unsustainable

What is often forgotten in the current debate is that the earlier model of rural employment operated under an open-ended, demand-driven fiscal architecture that, over time, revealed serious structural limitations. While the intent was to provide a justiciable right to work, the absence of predictable annual allocations converted the programme into a contingent liability on the Union exchequer. In practice, this led to chronic under-budgeting, repeated supplementary demands, accumulation of wage arrears, and delayed payments to workers-undermining the very dignity the scheme sought to guarantee. Fiscal uncertainty also weakened planning at the state and panchayat levels, encouraging reactive execution rather than purposeful asset creation.

### Normative Funding as Fiscal Prudence, Not Retrenchment

Perhaps the most misunderstood provision of the Act is its move towards normative funding. Under the new framework, the Central Government determines annual state-wise allocations based on objective criteria, with a clearly defined cost-sharing formula-60:40 between the Centre and the states (and 90:10 for special category states). Expenditure beyond these allocations must be borne by the states themselves.

This has been criticised as an erosion of the demand-driven principle. Yet such criticism overlooks the fiscal logic underpinning normative funding. Open-ended guarantees, while morally appealing, often translate into uncertain liabilities



ities that strain public finances and ultimately weaken implementation. Normative allocations, by contrast, introduce predictability, incentivise planning, and allow both tiers of government to align employment provisioning with broader development priorities.

Crucially, the Act retains the statutory obligation to provide unemployment allowance where work is not offered within the stipulated time. The guarantee, therefore, is not abandoned; it is embedded within a framework that encourages states to plan works efficiently rather than rely on perpetual fiscal overruns.

In an era where public resources are finite and competing demands-from health to education to climate adaptation — are growing, such fiscal discipline is not ideological parsimony but responsible governance.

The shift to normative funding under the Act must therefore be read not as a dilution of commitment, but as a corrective-one that seeks to preserve the employment guarantee by anchoring it in budgetary realism, planning discipline, and long-term sustainability.

### Employment with Purpose: Linking Wages to Assets

Another substantive departure under the Act is its renewed emphasis on asset-linked employment. Rural works are explicitly tied to the creation of durable assets: water conservation structures, rural connectivity, land development, and climate-resilient infrastructure. This marks a deliberate shift away from employment as a purely consumptive transfer towards employment as a means of building productive capacity. This orientation responds to long-standing critiques that rural employment programmes, while valuable for income support, often failed to generate assets with lasting economic value. By anchoring wage employment in projects that enhance agricultural productivity, ecological resilience, and rural infrastructure, the Act attempts to extract greater developmental returns from every rupee spent. In doing so, it reframes rural employment not as a residual safety net, but as an integral component of local economic development. Employment generation and development are no longer parallel objectives; they are explicitly fused.

### Decentralisation with Accountability

The Act also places renewed emphasis on decentralised planning through Gram Panchayats and Gram Sabhas, reinforcing the constitutional vision of local self-government. Local bodies are entrusted with identifying works, preparing annual plans, and ensuring implementation aligns with local needs.

Yet decentralisation here is not romanticised. It is accompanied by strengthened accountability mechanisms-digital attendance systems, social audits, transparency requirements, and clearer administrative ceilings. These measures aim to address one of the most persistent challenges of large-scale welfare programmes: leakage and inefficiency.

By combining local discretion with systemic oversight, the Act seeks to strike a balance between empowerment and accountability. This is an important, if under-

appreciated, institutional refinement.

### Seasonality, Agriculture, and Rural Realities

A particularly pragmatic feature of the new law is its sensitivity to agricultural cycles. The Act allows for the suspension of works during peak sowing and harvesting seasons, recognising that rural labour markets are not static and that public employment should complement, not distort, agricultural productivity.

This acknowledgement of rural economic rhythms reflects a maturation of policy thinking. Rather than treating employment generation as an abstract entitlement detached from local economies, the law situates it within the lived realities of rural livelihoods.

### Beyond Ideological Binaries

Much of the criticism directed at the Act stems from an ideological framing that views any departure from earlier models as inherently regressive. Such binaries-rights versus prudence, welfare versus discipline-are analytically unhelpful.

The truth is that unsustainable welfare architectures ultimately undermine the very rights they seek to protect. Delayed payments, uncertain funding, and administrative overload erode trust and reduce programme effectiveness. By contrast, a fiscally grounded, normatively funded framework enhances credibility and longevity.

### A Quiet but Significant Pivot

In the larger narrative of India's development journey, the Act may not lend itself easily to slogans. It lacks the dramatic flourish of sweeping announcements or headline-grabbing fiscal expansions. Yet its significance lies precisely in its restraint.

By expanding employment guarantees while tightening fiscal design; by decentralising planning while strengthening accountability; and by linking wages to assets rather than mere transfers, the Act signals a quiet but consequential pivot in welfare governance.

As India charts its course towards becoming a developed nation, such policy choices matter more than rhetorical battles. Development is built not on noise, but on institutions that endure, finances that sustain, and programmes that deliver.

### Judging the Law by Its Substance

The VB-G RAM G Act deserves to be judged not by the volume of protest it has generated, nor by the symbolism attached to its name, but by its design logic and implementation outcomes. It attempts to reconcile social protection with fiscal responsibility, and employment assurance with developmental purpose.

Whether it ultimately succeeds will depend on execution, political will at the state level, and continuous course correction. But to dismiss it as mere rebranding is to ignore the substantive rethinking it embodies.

In a time when public policy debates are increasingly reduced to slogans, the Act invites a more demanding exercise: to read, to analyse, and to engage with substance over sound.

The Pioneer

SINCE 1865

PIC TALK

Lions inside an enclosure at the Alipore Zoological Garden in Kolkata. PHOTO: PTI

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

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## HEIGHT-BASED ARAVALLI CRITERIA ENDANGERS ECOLOGY AND JUSTICE

The recent verdict on the Aravalli range has raised serious environmental concern, chiefly because it relies on a height-based definition to decide legal protection. Such a narrow test may exclude long stretches of this ancient mountain system, despite repeated scientific warnings about its fragility. The Aravallis recharge groundwater, moderate local climate and slow the creep of desertification — functions that cannot be captured by elevation alone. The ruling also appears to dilute earlier judicial intent that treated the range as a continuous ecological and geological entity. Fragmenting protection by height invites loopholes for construction, mining and land-use change, and weakens conservation in practice.

The criteria therefore deserve reconsideration through wider consultation with geologists,

environmental scientists, planners and local administrations. Transparent, updated mapping of the entire range is essential to avoid ambiguity and misuse. Public access to maps, along with periodic review, would strengthen accountability. Equally important is rigorous monitoring and enforcement on the ground, for laws have little value if violations persist. It should be treated as a national priority.

Protecting the Aravallis does not mean stopping development; it means ensuring that development is carefully regulated, environmentally sensitive and legally defensible. A balanced, science-led approach can safeguard this vital ecosystem while still addressing legitimate developmental needs.

A MYILSAMI | TAMIL NADU

Please send your letter to the [info@dailypioneer.com](mailto:info@dailypioneer.com). In not more than 250 words. We appreciate your feedback.

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VIJAY SINGH ADHIKARI | NAINITAL

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Leaders who shaped India

December 25 is no ordinary date in India's civilisational calendar. It marks the birth of two visionaries — Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and Atal Bihari Vajpayee — whose lives, though separated by decades, converge in their commitment to a sovereign, self-respecting and spiritually rooted nation.

Malaviya, the "Mahamana", was more than a freedom fighter; he was a cultural architect. Through Banaras Hindu University, he imagined education not merely as utility, but as a means to awaken national consciousness. His advocacy of unity, free expression and social reform blended moral clarity with institution-building.

Vajpayee inherited that mantle in independent India. As Prime Minister, he balanced economic liberalisation with national dignity, strengthened infrastructure and asserted nuclear sovereignty. Yet it was his poetic restraint, belief in dialogue and deep civilisational awareness that distinguished him. His politics was defined not simply by power, but by dignity, discourse and destiny. Their lives remind us that India's journey is not only about GDP or geopolitics; it is about rekindling a civilisational flame. Malaviya gave it form; Vajpayee gave it voice. Let December 25 be not merely remembrance, but recommitment.

### A Tribute to Vinod Kumar Shukla

With the passing of Vinod Kumar Shukla, the nation has lost not merely a writer, but a way of seeing. Poet, novelist and chronicler of the ordinary, he spent five decades shaping the emotional grammar of Hindi literature and expanding its global reach.

For the first time, Hindi prose began to enjoy sustained international readership and meaningful royalties. His translations, including *Naukar Ki Kameez* and *Deewar Mein Ek Khirkee Rehti Thi*, quietly changed the economics of literary work. Yet Shukla never wrote for markets. He wrote for attention — to small towns, clerks, teachers, widows and households whose heroism lay in endurance.

His fiction resisted spectacle. In *Deewar Mein Ek Khirkee Rehti Thi*, the professor's elephant ride arrives like a passing thought, turning daily life into meditation. He did not escape reality; he inhabited it more deeply.

Shukla refused ideological enlistment. His fidelity was to lived experience, where silence often spoke louder than slogans. In doing so, he widened Hindi's expressive range and proved that literature need not shout to last. He leaves not a void, but a lens through which the world remains quietly illuminated.

### When politics chokes the air

Delhi's pollution crisis cannot be separated from political dysfunction. For decades, governments have relied on quick fixes — odd-even schemes, smog towers, school closures and work-from-home advisories — while deeper structural change remains neglected. The Graded Response Action Plan escalates restrictions as the AQI worsens, yet improvements are fragile and temporary. Courts have grown impatient. The Supreme Court has condemned reactive measures as ineffective, while the High Court's call to reduce GST on air purifiers reflects an unsettling reality: clean air now feels like a commodity rather than a right. Purifiers may help indoors, but they cure nothing outdoors.

Into this atmosphere came the Lieutenant Governor's strongly worded letter accusing prolonged neglect, followed by political counter-attacks blaming the Centre, neighbouring states and one another. Instead of cooperation, citizens witness accusation and evasion.

Delhi's air is poisoned not only by dust and smoke, but by incision and partisanship. Technical, infrastructural and behavioural solutions are essential — yet without political will and accountability, they will fail. If politics is polluting the city, then a political solution is indispensable.

# Tanzania’s diplomatic balancing act after a contested mandate

As Tanzania seeks to recalibrate its global engagements in a multipolar world, the success of this outward-looking diplomacy will ultimately hinge on whether internal legitimacy and democratic stability can be restored

SHISHIR PRIYADARSHI

The recent general elections held in Tanzania saw a landslide victory for President Samia Suluhu Hassan. Official returns indicated she secured over 97 per cent of the vote. But the electoral process itself was marred by serious controversy, as the key opposition challengers were barred from standing, the main opposition party was disqualified, and many candidates and activists were already detained.

In the aftermath, large-scale protests erupted across major cities. Police and security forces, according to multiple observer reports, responded with excessive force: tear gas, live ammunition, and crackdowns. There were credible allegations of deaths and mass arrests. There was an internet shutdown for several days, including during and after the voting, making independent reporting and transparent communication difficult.

Internationally, observers condemned the election. The African Union (AU) said the 2025 election “failed to comply with democratic standards”, citing ballot-stuffing, curbs on free information (internet blackout), excessive use of force, and “a climate not conducive to peaceful conduct and acceptance of electoral outcomes”. The European Union (EU), among others, threatened sanctions and a funding freeze over post-election abuses. Charges of treason were filed against dozens of protesters and opposition figures, and national civil society organisations demanded transitional justice and fresh elections.

It is against this background that President Hassan’s turn toward a diversified foreign policy becomes especially interesting - and, arguably, necessary. As major and middle powers compete for influence across Africa, Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu Hassan is attempting to chart an approach that is neither confrontational nor passive — but deliberately plural. Since taking office, she has repositioned Tanzania not as a country aligned with any single external actor, but as one that seeks strategic autonomy through diversification. Her emerging foreign policy is built on the simple premise that no nation should place all of its geo-



AS MAJOR AND MIDDLE POWERS COMPETE FOR INFLUENCE ACROSS AFRICA, TANZANIAN PRESIDENT SAMIA SULUHU HASSAN IS ATTEMPTING TO CHART AN APPROACH THAT IS NEITHER CONFRONTATIONAL NOR PASSIVE — BUT DELIBERATELY PLURAL

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litical eggs in one basket. For Tanzania, a country of immense natural wealth and strategic geography, the stakes of overdependence are too high and the world too fluid for narrow alignments.

The starting point for understanding this shift is the legacy she inherited. Under President John Magufuli, Tanzania enjoyed strong but uneven external relationships - particularly a heavily China-centric orientation in large-scale infrastructure and investment. While these delivered substantial benefits, they also created perceptions of imbalanced dependency. One of Hassan’s first moves, therefore, was to widen Tanzania’s diplomatic bandwidth. She neither abandoned the Chinese relationship nor embraced an alternative bloc; instead, she began systematically broadening the country’s engagement with India, Japan, the US, the EU, the Gulf states, and multilateral financial institutions. This reset was not cosmetic — it signalled a recalibration of Tanzania’s place in an increasingly multipolar world.

A crucial pillar of this approach has been Hassan’s outreach to Western partners. Relations with the US and the EU, strained in earlier years due to governance and investment concerns, were quickly revived. This shift became visible in 2025, when Tanzania and the US moved to

finalise major investment agreements in Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), nickel, and graphite, building on a commercial landscape where over 400 US companies already operate in Tanzania. At the same time, the EU deepened its economic partnership with Dar es Salaam, anchoring cooperation through a US\$85 million development package focused on green transition, governance reforms, and digital and transport infrastructure under the Global Gateway framework. These renewed development compacts, business missions, and governance dialogues reflect a deliberate strategy to re-anchor Tanzania within the global trade and financial networks. By expanding Western economic footprints alongside those of Asian partners, Tanzania gains negotiating leverage and reduces the risk of any single external actor becoming indispensable.

Yet diversification does not mean dilution of existing friendships. Tanzania has maintained and deepened its partnership with China — but on more balanced and interest-driven terms. The most emblematic moment in Tanzania’s rethinking of its China relationship actually came even in 2019, when it suspended the US\$10 billion Bagamoyo port project, one of the largest planned Belt and Road investments in Africa. Tanzania publicly denounced its proposed terms as

“exploitative and awkward”, including a 99-year lease and sweeping tax exemptions for the Chinese operator. However, the decision did not sever Tanzania-China ties, but it sent a clear message: while Chinese capital would be welcomed, Chinese control would not. Bagamoyo has since resurfaced periodically in negotiations, including under President Samia, but always with the explicit caveat that the terms must be revised to protect national interests.

At the same time, Tanzania has not walked away from China. President Samia paid a high-profile state visit to Beijing in 2022, upgrading bilateral relations to a “Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership” and signing agreements across trade, infrastructure, agriculture, and the digital economy. This illustrates the calibrated nature of her strategy: Tanzania continues to engage China as a major development partner, but within a broader foreign-policy framework that prioritises diversification and avoids the structural overexposure that has constrained many other African economies.

Nowhere is the pluralistic foreign-policy orientation more visible than in Tanzania’s growing ties with India. New Delhi has quietly become one of Dar es Salaam’s most significant partners: India was Tanzania’s second-largest trading partner in 2024-25, with bilateral trade

reaching about US\$8.6 billion, covering pharmaceuticals, machinery, consumer goods, and more, and Indian companies are among the top investors in sectors such as telecommunications, energy, steel, and agro-processing in Tanzania. Defence cooperation, ranging from capacity-building to maritime security, has expanded as both countries recognise the importance of the Western Indian Ocean. Therefore, India’s rise in Tanzania’s external matrix is not accidental; it reflects Hassan’s calculus that a diversified Asia policy strengthens national resilience.

Rhetoric matters in foreign policy — and Hassan’s messaging reinforces her strategic direction. Her consistent emphasis on “economic diplomacy”, “diversified partnerships”, and “strategic autonomy” is not mere wordplay; it is a declaration that Tanzania intends to navigate the great-power competition on its own terms. In a world where external pressure can easily skew national choices, articulating a strategic diversification approach gives Tanzania a conceptual anchor for policy continuity.

But if Tanzania wants to project stability and credibility abroad and avoid becoming isolated or reliant on a single partner, it must first settle its internal affairs, as internal stability and diversified external engagement must go together. A stable domestic environment underpins external credibility. International partners, investors, and multilateral lenders will be wary of deep cooperation while reports of rights abuses and political repression dominate headlines. For diversification to work, concerns regarding governance and rule of law must be addressed. Diversified diplomacy can provide an external buffer and leverage, but only if domestic legitimacy is restored.

At present, the overriding priority for Tanzania should therefore be domestic healing and institutional reform, ideally alongside a recommitment to political pluralism, press freedom, and independent scrutiny. Only then will Tanzania’s broader diplomatic ambitions stand on a solid footing.

If and when that happens, Hassan’s diversified foreign-policy approach could yet emerge not as a distraction or a payoff for international capital, but as a genuine path toward a resilient, independent, globally engaged Tanzania — one whose foreign policy rests on stable domestic governance, not on transactional expedience.

# How a Christmas celebration marks an elephant calf’s fight back from a train tragedy

SWAPNA MAJUMDAR

The trees are decorated with bells, stars, and miniature Santa ornaments. Maya, Phoolkali, Emma, Tara, and Suraj wait patiently nearby. But little Bani cannot hide her excitement. The moment she is given her surprise box with her favourite nutritious and colourful fruit feasts, there is no stopping her. The Christmas party has begun for the rescued elephants at India’s first Elephant Hospital run by Wildlife SOS, a not-for-profit, in Mathura, Uttar Pradesh.

The idea behind these celebrations is to support both the physical and psychological well-being of rescued animals, both at the Elephant Hospital and the Elephant Conservation and Care Centre, while creating a nurturing environment, says Kartick Satyanarayan, co-founder, Wildlife SOS. Just how important this fostering environment is for the elephants can be seen in the remarkable progress made by Bani, the two-year-old who defied all odds to stand up on her own feet, 18 months after she was hit by a speeding train in Uttarakhand, leaving her with severe spinal injuries and little chance of survival.

Train hits have been the second-highest cause of the death of elephants, the first being accidental electrocution, according to the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change. On 21 December 2025, seven wild Asian elephants, including four calves, were tragically killed when a high-speed express train collided with a herd crossing the tracks in Assam. Already classified as endangered, the number of elephants in India has been on the decline, according to a 2024 assessment by the Wildlife Institute of India and various State Forest Departments, with over 200 elephants killed in train collisions between 2010 and 2020. Though 150 elephant corridors have been validated by the government across 15 elephant-range states, train collisions caused the death of more than 50 elephants in the last four years.

In Uttarakhand, where a train collision critically injured Bani and instantly killed her mother, the population of elephants has shown a decline of 2.6 per cent between 2017 and 2023, many of whom have died due to critical injuries and a lack of adequate medical care.

Bani, too, was precariously close to becoming another statistic on the death list. In January 2024, when Uttarakhand forest officials found Bani, then a nine-month-old elephant calf,



lying with grievous multiple injuries near her dead mother, they were convinced the orphan wouldn’t survive. However, they were unwilling to give up. Determined to take their chances, officials reached out to Wildlife SOS, running a state-of-the-art Elephant Hospital in the neighbouring State of Uttar Pradesh. This was to be a life-changing decision for Bani.

When the Wildlife SOS team led by Dr Ilayaraja Selvaraj, Deputy Director, Veterinary Services, assessed Bani’s condition, they found she was unable to stand, with complete loss of movement in her right hind limb. Her condition was critical. Unless she received more intensive and long-term treatment, it was clear to the team that Bani was unlikely to survive. Uttarakhand forest officials also agreed that this would only be possible collaboratively at the Wildlife SOS hospital. So, after all transfer protocols were completed and the team ensured she was stable enough to travel, their ambulance was specially modified in keeping with her severe injuries. The floor was layered with soft hay for cushioning. Gunny sacks filled with hay served as pillows to support her legs to prevent sores. Blankets to keep her warm and bananas, papaya, and sugarcane leaves, along with milk and water bottles, were stocked to ensure she remained nourished during the 10-hour journey to Mathura.

Based on the advice of orthopaedics, neurosurgeons, and Ayurveda practitioners, Bani’s initial treatment at the hospital included photobiomodulation therapy, laser therapy, hydrotherapy, and Ayurvedic hot-oil massages. However, it was the brainwave to provide acupuncture that led to the breakthrough. Dr

Porrakote Rungsri, veterinary acupuncture specialist from Thailand’s Chiang Mai University, flew in to share expertise and give hands-on training to the hospital team. Interestingly, a stuffed toy of the exact size and shape of Bani was used to demonstrate the exact points to insert the needles.

Given for the first time to any elephant in India, the innovative acupuncture therapy has been administered to Bani over the past 20 months as part of a comprehensive veterinary care programme tailored to Bani’s specific paralytic condition. Acupuncture needles are gently put in to stimulate nerve function, reduce pain, and support the healing of her hind legs. Electro-acupuncture therapy promotes nerve regeneration, diminishes inflammation, and speeds up the healing process after injuries through electrical stimulation. The two-hour electro-acupuncture therapy, reduced now to once a fortnight for 120 minutes, varies in intensity under close supervision and monitoring to ensure it doesn’t cause any discomfort or pain.

Bani’s tenacity, resilience, and determination to stand on her feet surprised the hospital team. Now they are hoping that the success of electro-acupuncture in Bani’s inspiring recovery will help to save the hundreds of others of this endangered species, critically injured in train collisions.

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# The future of growth lies with small borrowers in small towns

DEEPAK AGGARWAL

India’s economic narrative has long been dominated by metropolitan centres — Bengaluru’s tech campuses, Hyderabad’s new projects, Pune’s IT prowess, Mumbai’s financial hubs, or Delhi’s corporate corridors. These cities drove growth through concentration of capital, talent, and infrastructure, yet the model seems to have reached saturation. The next growth story is not coming from the metros but the small villages where Bharat thrives.

**Small But Impactful**

Nearly 65 per cent of India’s population lives in small towns and rural areas, yet they contribute only 45 per cent to GDP, showing massive untapped potential. Credit growth in tier-2 and tier-3 cities rose 14-17 per cent year on year in FY24 versus 9 per cent in metros (RBI). Micro and small enterprises now generate over 30 per cent of manufacturing output and 40 per cent of exports. Studies show that for every ₹1 lakh in microcredit there is the creation of 1.5-2 local jobs. With digital penetration at 75 per cent and UPI transactions exceeding ₹19 lakh crore monthly, small borrowers in smaller towns are driving the next wave of inclusive economic expansion.

There is also growing evidence that rising costs and competitive intensity are compressing returns in the metros. And on the other side of the demography? Well, there are themes that indicate a resurgence in small towns.

A recent BCG report highlights that 50 per cent of online shoppers were located in small cities, a number anticipated to reach 60 per cent by 2030. In smaller towns and semi-urban centres, rising aspirations, improving connectivity, and untapped entrepreneurial energy are creating fertile ground for expansion.

The next wave of sustainable growth will emerge not from further densification of metros but from distributing capital and opportunity across India’s smaller towns, where small borrowers represent the engine of tomorrow’s economy. Small borrowers in these contexts are not marginal actors; they are the economic backbone of local communities.

**Capitalising the Unbanked**

In a country with a population exceeding 1.4 billion, the RBI’s latest Financial Inclusion Index highlights that barely 64.1 per cent have access to essential financial services. This means that two-fifths of the

country do not have access to essential services. And if that is the case, how does the system enable the person at the last mile — or the town or the district? Contemporary data also points out why there is a need for new-age start-ups and fintechs to plug the gaps. In addition to vast segments that are unbanked, more recent microfinance data indicates a decrease in gross loan portfolio. The data shows that banks and financial institutions are pulling back on loans below ₹50,000. Overall disbursements have reduced by nearly 16 per cent in FY25. On the positive side, there is a trend of a rising share of loans above ₹1 lakh.

**Why Microfinance?**

The unbanked and unfunded include vast segments such as provision-store owners, neighbourhood essential-service providers, tailors, repair-shop operators, dairy farmers supplying cooperatives, and transport operators connecting villages to towns. These entrepreneurs possess market knowledge, customer relationships, and operational skills. What they lack is access to affordable, timely credit.

Microfinance has served this segment partially, but gaps remain — particularly in the ticket sizes between microloans and small-business lending. Digital adoption is rising rapidly in tier-2 and tier-3 towns. But as formal credit availability lags behind, it constrains businesses that could otherwise scale, hire, and contribute to local prosperity. When credit reaches these borrowers, multiplier effects follow. Credit acts as a catalyst, setting off chain reactions that strengthen entire ecosystems. Each transaction generates income and tax revenue.

Microfinance studies have repeatedly documented how access to credit correlates with entrepreneurship rates, employment growth, and poverty reduction. The mechanism is straightforward — capital deployed productively generates returns that circulate through local economies. The lending landscape serving these borrowers is evolving rapidly. Digital platforms have dramatically reduced the cost of origination and servicing. Where physical bank branches struggle to justify operations in smaller towns, mobile-first lenders operate efficiently at scale. Peer-to-peer lending models connect urban capital with rural borrowers, bypassing intermediaries. Banks themselves are adopting new underwriting approaches, using transaction data, GST returns, and utility payments to assess creditworthiness without requiring extensive documentation. Real-time risk scoring enables faster approvals and more flexible terms.

Please read the complete article online at <https://www.dailypioneer.com>

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India's crude oil sector is trending toward continued growth in 2026, driven by robust domestic demand, even as global price dynamics point to moderation and oversupply risks, according to market experts. According to the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), India's oil demand will rise sharply in 2026, increasing to 6 million barrels per day (bpd) from 5.74 million bpd in 2025, an increase of over four per cent year-on-year. This growth outpaces that of China, and many other major economies, which underlines India's emergence as a key driver of fuel consumption. The rising demand is fuelled by transport fuels such as diesel and gasoline, expanding road networks, stronger activity in manufacturing and services, and supportive government policies.

For India, the implication is a mix of opportunities and challenges. Lower global prices can further curb inflation, and reduce pressure on current account deficit, freeing up fiscal space for strategic investments. At the same time, India remains heavily dependent on imported crude to meet more than 85 per cent of its energy needs, exposing the economy to external prices, and geopolitical swings. us

Global prices are heading toward a prolonged phase of oversupply, with weakening demand signals, and expanding production weighing more heavily than geopolitical risks. Oil benchmarks have logged sharp declines in 2025, and market participants expect the surplus conditions to persist in 2026. Brent crude slipped below the \$60-a-barrel mark, while West Texas Intermediate (WTI) is trading near \$56. Both are down by nearly 20 per cent this year, which reflects a market increasingly dominated by excess supply.

According to Riya Singh, research analyst (commodities and currency), Emkay Global Financial Services, concerns around a structural supply glut are firmly anchoring market sentiment. "Oil prices moved toward a second consecutive weekly decline, as persistent concerns over a structural supply glut continued to outweigh geopolitical risks," she says. She adds that the market will remain oversupplied into early 2026, and Trafigura projects Brent crude prices to stay in the \$50 range through mid-2026.

Supply additions from both OPEC+, and non-OPEC producers have outpaced demand growth, while consumption expansion remains muted amid slower economic momentum in major economies. Although tensions surrounding Russian and Venezuelan crude have provided intermittent support, they have not been sufficient to reverse the broader surplus narrative. Thin holiday trading volumes have amplified the near-term price swings, reinforcing the downside pressure on prices in an already-fragile market.

Signs of oversupply are becoming increasingly visible in global crude trade flows, particularly for Russian oil. Singh points to growing dislocations in shipments of Urals crude, traditionally a key grade for the Indian refiners. "A growing number of tankers carrying Urals oil are idling off China's coast as Indian demand fades under tighter US sanctions," she notes. Data from Kpler shows that 3.4 million barrels of Russian crude are currently floating near China's Shandong province, the highest level seen in over five years.

New sanctions on major Russian producers such as Rosneft and Lukoil, apart from the earlier ones on Russia, disrupted oil supply flows, while Indian refiners, including the private giant, Reliance Industries, remained cautious. Russian sellers reportedly offered Urals crude at steeper discounts than Iranian oil to attract Chinese refiners, underscoring how oversupply is reshaping trade dynamics.

Weak macroeconomic data from the US and China further clouded the demand outlook. According to a Tata Mutual Fund research note, MCX crude oil prices are likely to slip back toward the ₹4,950 level, as concerns grow over the economic health of major consuming nations. The report highlights that the efforts by the US to push for an end to the Russia-Ukraine war can add to the downside risks. Any easing of sanctions on Russian energy exports will potentially bring additional supply into an already-crowded market, and this will further intensify the global oversupply concerns.

Despite the bearish backdrop, some factors may cushion sharper declines. OPEC+ has agreed to keep oil output levels unchanged for the first quarter of 2026, providing a degree of supply discipline. A weaker US dollar, and rising expectations of interest rate cuts by the Federal Reserve can lend near-term support to prices. OPEC estimates that global supply exceeded demand by around 500,000 bpd, reversing earlier deficit forecasts. However, it has lowered its outlook for crude demand from OPEC+ member nations in 2026 by 100,000 bpd, reinforcing the longer-term surplus view. Inventory data offers a mixed picture. US crude oil inventories are four per cent below the five-year average, while gasoline and distillate fuel stocks are also lower, signalling underlying demand resilience.

In 2026, crude oil markets will remain volatile but broadly range-bound. Persistent oversupply, subdued demand growth, and evolving geopolitical developments will continue to cap price recovery. While temporary rallies may emerge on supply disruptions or policy shifts, the balance of risks remains tilted toward lower prices. For major oil-importing countries like India, a softer crude environment may help further contain inflation, and improve external balances. However, global producers and exporters may face sustained margin pressure as the market adjusts to a new phase of structural surplus.

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BUSINESS10

# He desires, and you better agree

*After trade, the US wants to correct EU's political trajectory*

OUR TAKE

United States President Donald Trump is standing with a club and spade to build his private-public boulevard. He has decided that playing merely with the king of hearts would not land aces up his sleeve, which has two tattoos, "America First," and "Make America Great Again." While Trump jauntily works the path, the rest of the world, including powerful allies, is left to wonder what and when they will be told (or ordered) to work on the proposed building, or even plant trees to construct a "beautiful" MAGA drive.

After the trade deal between the US and European Union (EU), which many of the latter's members showed disgust for, a 32-page American security document, "National Security Strategy (NSS) of the United States of America", reflected the diplomatic design of Trump's realpolitik architecture. Whatever the rest of the world may say about him, he cannot be called coy or innocuous. Much of the content of the security document derives from the US Vice-President JD Vance's speech on February 14 at the Munich Security Conference. There, he talked about the erosion of democratic norms in Europe. He argued that the danger to that continent came from internal factors, and not the external ones like Russia or China.

The NSS adopts a paternalistic attitude towards the EU. "Our goal should be to help Europe correct its current trajectory. We will need a strong Europe to help us successfully compete, and to work in concert with us to prevent any adversary from dominating Europe," it states. One of its pillars is to rediscover the more than 200-year-old foreign policy statement known as the Monroe Doctrine, with a "Trump Corollary," that the 'The Economist' magazine termed the "Donroe doctrine." The aim: politics and commerce on White House terms.

"After years of neglect, the United States will reassert and enforce the Monroe Doctrine to restore American preeminence in the Western Hemisphere, and to protect our homeland and our access to key geographies throughout the

region. We will deny non-Hemispheric competitors the ability to position forces or other threatening capabilities, or to own or control strategically vital assets, in our Hemisphere. This "Trump Corollary" to the Monroe Doctrine is a common-sense and potent restoration of American power and priorities, consistent with American security interests," explains the NSS. According to 'The Economist,' this perception is a "further reason for America's friends to plan for the worst."

Like Vance's speech, the NSS was met with strong protests from the European leaders. They accused the vice-president of interfering in internal matters, and supporting the populist-right parties. The NSS "provoked yet more outrage in Europe. European Council president Antonio Costa and Germany's chancellor Friedrich Merz have both described parts of the document as 'unacceptable,' with much criticism geared towards the blatant political interference the strategy suggests the US plans to conduct in Europe," observes the global think tank, European Council on Foreign Relations.

"The NSS has also delivered a harsh diagnosis about the continent's economic decline, although these issues (for example, Europe's lack of competitiveness, its declining share of global tech revenues, and dependence on China for green-tech supply chains) are also being acknowledged and documented by Europeans," it adds. The doctrine of President James Monroe was foreign policy created in 1823 against European colonialism in the Western Hemisphere. It viewed any intervention by foreign powers in the political affairs of the Americas as a hostile act against the US.

Much of the NSS reads like a minder's list of do's-and-don'ts to the class, where White House clearly spells out. "We want to support our allies in preserving the freedom and security of Europe, while restoring Europe's civilisational self-confidence and Western identity...." It adds,

"We will oppose elite-driven, anti-democratic restrictions on core liberties in Europe, the Anglosphere, and the rest of the democratic world, especially among our allies." Of course, "mass" migration is the greatest threat to the West, and the NSS pledges to secure the US borders, as well as support Europe's populist-right parties in their similar pursuits.

Europe comes for criticism over climate change concerns, and policies aimed at developing alternative energies. In no uncertain terms had Trump decried these issues in his controversial speech at the United Nations General Assembly in end-September. "This 'climate change,' it is the greatest con job ever perpetrated on the world, in my opinion," he said. He maintained that such statements about climate change were made by "stupid people that have cost their countries fortunes, and given those same countries no chance for success."

European nations, which have recently experienced floods, hurricanes, and heat waves that have forced them to develop ways to battle climate change, found themselves snubbed by the NSS. The US document declares that Washington rejects "the disastrous 'climate change' and 'Net Zero' ideologies that have so greatly harmed Europe, threaten the United States, and subsidise our adversaries." It did not mince words in its critique of Europe. For, according to the NSS, the "larger issues facing Europe include activities of the European Union and other transnational bodies that undermine political liberty and sovereignty, migration policies that are transforming the continent and creating strife, censorship of free speech and suppression of political opposition, cratering birthrates, and loss of national identities and self-confidence."

The NSS states that Europe's lack of self-confidence is evident in its relationship with Russia, where due to the war in Ukraine, its relations are deeply attenuated, and many Europeans regard Russia as an existential threat. Thus, "Managing European relations with Russia will require significant US diplomatic engagement, both to reestablish conditions of strategic stability across the Eurasian landmass, and to mitigate the risk of conflict between Russia and European states." It is ironic that Trump stands accused of similar charges: Press censorship, undermining political liberty, and playing a love-hate game with Russia's Vladimir Putin.

Trump's "America First" diplomacy seeks to "rebalance global trade relationships," as the NSS claims. "We have made clear to our allies that America's current account deficit is unsustainable. We must encourage Europe, Japan, Korea, Australia, Canada, Mexico, and other prominent nations in adopting trade policies that help rebalance China's economy toward household consumption, because Southeast Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East cannot alone absorb China's enormous excess capacity." Hence, America must sell more to the rest of the world, which needs to buy less from China, and other competitors. In effect, Monroe is now Donroe.

KS CHALAPATI RAO AND KVK RANGANATHAN

India's defence industrial policy is undergoing a profound transformation. In 2025, designated as the 'Year of Reforms', the Ministry of Defence announced updates to the Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) through a three-pillared strategy. This includes: (a) less ownership constraints to allow foreign-led firms to act as primary contractors, (b) priority to delivery speed and export capacity over traditional domestic preferences, and (c) new sovereign oversight through mandatory tech transfer disclosures, and indigenous content verification. We examine the policy in the light of India's experience, and that of other latecomers.

Little FDI despite liberal norms: India opened the defence manufacturing to foreign ownership in 2001, and progressively liberalised the regime. In 2020, foreign ownership up to 74 per cent was permitted under the automatic route, with provision for 100 per cent where access to modern technology was anticipated. The underlying expectation was that the higher ownership caps would attract global defence majors, enable technology transfer, and strengthen the indigenous manufacturing capability.

According to the official figures, between 2001 and September 2025, cumulative FDI inflows into defence manufacturing amounted to \$26.5 million, of which \$16.4 million came after the 2020 liberalisation. This is striking given that the foreign investors generally show a strong preference for unambiguous control. Thus, the liberal ownership norms, by themselves, do not work, at least in defence manufacturing sector.

**Defence is different:** This is because investment decisions are strategic rather than market-driven, and are embedded in the national security frameworks of investors' home nations. Tech transfer is circumscribed by export controls, licensing regimes, and geopolitical considerations. This divergence has sharpened in recent years as advanced economies expanded national security screening to cover dual-use technologies, electronics, data, artificial intelligence, and advanced manufacturing. They began to monitor outward investments. One of the recent cases is that of the UK which under its National Security and investment Act, 2021, screens outward investment in 17 areas which include defence, and dual-use technologies. In this global context, expectations that advanced defence technologies will flow freely into India through the FDI route are increasingly unrealistic, irrespective of ownership thresholds.

**Reliance on control measures:** India has focused largely on formal parameters such as equity caps, board composition, and the

## Make-in-India via foreign tech

*Low FDI inflows due to strategic constraints, control over tech*

nationality of directors. Effective control resides not in equity shares but in control over technology, software, upgrades, compliance systems, and export permissions. These are governed through shareholder agreements, licensing contracts, and internal compliance regimes that lie largely outside routine regulatory scrutiny.

The governance structures of defence and aerospace joint ventures (past and present) illustrate this reality. Even where the Indian partners hold majority equity, key strategic decisions often require unanimity, effectively conferring veto power on the foreign collaborator. Compliance systems and export-import controls are frequently required to be acceptable to the foreign partner, thus entrenching technological and operational dependence. The result is foreign control over critical technologies, and future developments, irrespective of the extent of Indian ownership. This is a standard governance design in most of the sensitive sectors.

The proposed safeguards in the 2025 framework face a dual-track failure. If enforced strictly, they will deter foreign participation by scaring away risk-averse OEMs. If applied leniently, they will remain "paper tigers", delivering assembly lines without the underlying design authority. In a crisis, a foreign OEM's first loyalty is invariably to its home government's export controls.

**Tight-fisted tech control:** India's experience in civilian manufacturing offers a parallel. In the auto sector, which has received substantial FDI, leading Indian subsidiaries invest little in in-house R&D while making sizable royalty and technical fee payments to the parent firms. Advanced design capabilities, and core technologies remain concentrated abroad, with Indian operations functioning largely as long-term technology users. Many leading firms in other industries follow a similar pattern. In sectors such as machinery, and electrical equipment, technology agreements routinely impose restrictions on exports, modifications, and third-country sales. Similar but more stringent conditions apply in defence collaborations, further constraining learning, reverse engineering, and the development of independent export capability.

**Global experience:** South Korea combined procurement, R&D, offsets, and exports under strong state coordination, with tech transfer explicitly staged and enforceable, and lifecycle autonomy treated as non-negotiable. Türkiye treated joint ventures as transitional arrangements, enforced offsets aggressively to localise electronics and systems integration, and nurtured national champions through assured demand and patient capital. In both the cases, foreign participation was instrumental but time-bound, and not permanent. In the cases of Brazil, Israel, and Singapore, the state-owned sector played important roles.

**Risks in FDI-dependence:** The argument is not against foreign participation per se but that FDI can play a supporting or transitional role. Genuine capability building requires a decisive shift in policy focus: from ownership to effective control, value addition to design and lifecycle autonomy, and capital accommodation to tech mastery. The question is about who controls technology, upgrades, and exports. Unless the policy is anchored around this, further liberalisation in policy and procedures risks deepening strategic dependence

rather than advancing Atma-Nirbharta.

A foreign OEM does not share its core IP because it owns 74 per cent or even 100 per cent. It is shared if its home government allows it, and because the host nation makes it a non-negotiable condition. Indigenous content norms must insist on design ownership, source-code access, and upgrade rights, not merely value addition. Strengthening domestic players should be the topmost priority.

The views expressed by the prime minister's group (2008), which was set up under the National Manufacturing Competitiveness Council, are still relevant. It stated that "many of the technologies in the fields of Defence, Aero Space, IT, Atomic Energy and other high technology areas are not available either through the liberalised FDI route or for buying them outright. Clearly for a major country like India, in the long term, it is necessary to have the state-of-the-art technologies, and also a programme to develop the next generation technologies internally through vigorous R&D effort. Many developing countries including China have worked towards this end by putting in place appropriate FDI and industrial policies."

**India needs to follow a strategy, which may include:**

- Preference to joint ventures with sunset clauses on foreign technological control rather than to foreign-owned subsidiaries
- No policy or procedure to undermine the development of indigenous capabilities; far from providing a level-playing ground, domestic manufacturers should always be preferred
- State to retain special rights or golden shares in critical platforms
- FTAs to be used strategically to negotiate technology access even without equity participation
- Priority to patient, long-term capital rather than short-horizon financial investors
- Shun progressive liberalisation of FDI policy and procedures, on one pretext or the other.

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# Beyond Bus Fare Subsidy Schemes: Tracing Urban Women’s Access to Gender-Responsive Mobility

Although bus fare subsidies eliminate the economic barrier, major gaps in public transport infrastructure and services continue to strain women’s access to the city



Several Indian states now provide fare-free bus travel for women, and this has a measurable impact on labour force participation, health-seeking behaviour and overall mobility, studies show. But that is not enough. Buses and other modes of public transport are overcrowded, street sexual harassment is common, and women face hostility from male passengers and staff for being beneficiaries of perceived freebies. In addition, the schedules of public transport are often dictated by peak hours, while many women need to travel at off-peak hours-and in patterns distinct from men. Addressing these problems can help more women benefit from free bus travel.

Women are more dependent on public transport than men, a December 2017 study by the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP) found. Although transportation-related barriers restrict travel for both men and women, they disproportionately impact the latter. Inefficiencies in public transit systems often translate into girls missing school, women limiting themselves to opportunities closer to home, unemployment, and the inability to access health or childcare services. Conveyance accounts for 8.5 per cent of household expenditure in urban India, the biggest share of non-food spending during 2023-24, according to the Survey on Household Consumption Expenditure. However, fully or partially subsidised bus rides have cut urban women's transport expenses thereby increasing their employment outcomes, healthcare budgets and overall savings, as per a 2025 report by Nikore Associates that surveyed women across ten cities.

**Gendered mobility patterns**

As much as 84 per cent of women's work-related travel is done using informal modes of public transport, including buses, autos, tempos, etc. besides walking, as per Census 2011. However, public transport services are not traditionally designed to cater to their distinct mobility patterns. For instance, women are more likely to “trip chain”, i.e., combine multiple tasks and destinations within one trip, as compared to men, as IndiaSpend reported in April 2018 based on the ITDP study. This results in frequent but shorter trips, shaped by their employment status and mobility of care. Consequently, trip chaining makes travel costlier since women usually use multiple modes of transport-and may have to pay numerous single fare tickets during such a chained trip. Studies suggest that women end up spending additional time and money for a ‘safe’ and ‘convenient’ mode of transport which imposes a “pink tax” on their mobility.

**Perception of Bus Availability:**

Mumbai, Bengaluru, Pune top response to the statement ‘public buses are easily available between any two points in the city’

CITY	AGREE	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL
Mumbai	39.0	40.6	20.3
New Delhi	24.3	57.1	18.6
Bengaluru	39.5	41.4	19.1
Kolkata	24.7	55.9	19.4
Chennai	25.2	60.2	14.6
Hyderabad	25.3	51.7	23.0
Pune-Pimpri	39.8	40.7	19.6
Chinchwad			

(Source: Ease of Moving Index 2022 city profiles for Mumbai, New Delhi, Bengaluru, Kolkata, Chennai, Hyderabad, Pune-Pimpri Chinchwad)

Urban India's labour force participation rate stood at 25.8 per cent for females and 75.6 per cent for males during 2024. Transport infrastructure influences whether women work outside the home or not, the State of Working India 2023 report found. Women are time-poor-owing to the

burden of unpaid care work and weaker access to household resources-and often depend on cheaper and slower modes of transport, especially when they belong to lower-income groups. This is why an efficient first- and last-mile connectivity-their journey from the starting point to the nearest bus stop, and from the bus stop to the final destination-is one of the most critical links of their day-to-day travel. Intermediate Public Transport (IPT) is extensively used by urban women due to its availability, convenience, and wide network, especially in areas outside formal public transport's coverage. In India, IPT options include auto-rickshaws, shared rickshaws, e-rickshaws, private buses and tempos. They remain indispensable for making short trips of less than 2 km. Vandana Vasudevan, doctoral researcher and author of a book on gig workers, highlighted that every city



tailors local solutions. “Noida's e-rickshaws ferry people to and fro, while some cities have bus shuttles. Further, some transport authorities have tied up with ride-sharing providers like Uber, Ola and Rapido,” she said. IPT sees lower levels of sexual harassment compared to buses, but Sonali Vyas, Director of Programs and Operations at Safetipin, warns that the safety aspect is still missing. “Our study assessing women's mobility in Gwalior, Bhopal and Jodhpur observed high dependence on IPT which is often overcrowded, and therefore unsafe. But since they're not operated by the government, female commuters would take the harassment silently due to lack of complaint channels and better public transport options,” she said.

**Continued battles**

Delhi's fare-free public transport (FFPT) scheme launched in 2019, aimed to enhance women's empowerment and safety in public transport systems. It offers free bus rides for women on all government-owned buses within city limits by issuing pink tickets, for which the Delhi government reimburses the bus operators with Rs 10 per ticket. Between 2019 and 2023, women's share of total daily ridership increased by 20 per cent. Furthermore, the ‘pink ticket’ scheme enabled 50 per cent of respondents to save at least ₹500 per month, primarily benefiting low-income women, a March 2025 study by WRI India, which surveyed over 2,010 women bus users in Delhi, found. By providing financial relief, it has allowed urban women to reclaim time typically spent on domestic and caregiving responsibilities-also known as “mobility of care” — and redirect it toward greater socio-economic participation that benefits them, their households and the economy alike. Broader social implications of Delhi's scheme include stronger female presence in public buses and higher travel flexibility. While 73 per cent of surveyed women were already bus riders, another 21 per cent shifted to using buses after the introduction of FFPT, the WRI India

study found. It also noted the scheme's role in easing the financial burden on college students. Among women from economically marginalised groups, a 2023 study revealed an increase in average employment by 24 percentage points and their time spent on paid work by 2.5 hours. **Other states follow** Several states including Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka have implemented similar schemes, while Maharashtra has introduced bus fare concessions. Launched in 2023, Karnataka's Shakti programme provides free bus travel to women and transgender residents. A 2024 JustJobs Network study, which surveyed over 780 women across five districts, found that for over 80 per cent of the respondents, buses were the preferred means of transport. And 62 per cent respondents reported the scheme

often face ‘taunts’ from male co-passengers and frontline workers alike,” says Shah. For instance, 54 per cent of women reported receiving insulting remarks from both the transport staff and male passengers while 42 per cent faced discriminatory behaviour, including bus drivers refusing to stop for them or stopping far from the bus stop, or being asked to take the next bus, found the WRI India study. Women, particularly from low income groups, often travel during off-peak hours. Owing to domestic responsibilities, they leave their homes after the men have left for work and before the children come back from school-when the frequency of public transport is lower and waiting time is higher. To better serve marginalised groups, there are opportunities to partner with the private sector. Since standard buses cannot operate in neighborhoods, such trips can be accommodated by shared autos. “While advising Jagori on their 2023 study, we found that street vendors living in Ranchi's outskirts would collectively hire an auto at 4 am to travel within the city,” said Shah. Alternatively, with clearer communication on routes and timings, subsidy schemes can include neighbourhood bus services for trips within 4 km. “This would not only improve last-mile connectivity but also reduce distances travelled by women on foot. Cities must ensure dignity of service to all, especially the disabled and marginalised women,” she added. Rajagopalan said that careful route planning to low-income neighbourhoods and city outskirts can boost FFPT schemes' benefits. “For example, domestic workers may have to travel relatively short distances many times a day; this requires short distance stops and higher frequency buses,” she added.

**Recurring issues in bus transport planning**

Street sexual harassment is one of the most significant challenges hindering urban women's mobility. A 2021 study by the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) found that 56 per cent of women across 140 cities reported being sexually harassed while using public transport. “Sexual harassment due to overcrowding is directly linked to the number of available buses (and their schedules),” highlighted Shah.

**Overcrowding Of Buses Across Indian Cities**

Response to the statement ‘Public buses are overcrowded and congested’

CITY	AGREE	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL
Mumbai	39.8	40.3	19.9
New Delhi	24.3	50.3	25.4
Bengaluru	40.3	39.2	20.5
Kolkata	24.7	49.7	25.6
Chennai	25.2	48.8	26.0
Hyderabad	25.3	49.5	25.2
Pune-Pimpri	40.8	39.5	19.7
Chinchwad			

(Source: Ease of Moving Index 2022 (City Profiles) - Mumbai, New Delhi, Bengaluru, Kolkata, Chennai, Hyderabad, Pune-Pimpri Chinchwad)

While these schemes help remove the economic barrier to accessing the city, they do not make travel safe, Vyas said, adding that several infrastructural gaps still exist. It is commonly perceived that women are misusing bus fare subsidies to cover short distances or for leisure activities. “These schemes are funded through taxes that citizens already pay. Providing free or highly subsidised mobility is simply a way of returning value to taxpayers by ensuring that everyone benefits from a service that is essential for daily life, economic participation, and social inclusion.” Despite its critical role, India's current public transport infrastructure indicates serious inequities. “Women do not fall under a homogeneous category as their travel-related trends differ across age, socio-economic groups and disability. However, a fundamental barrier that almost every woman faces is physical access,” said Vyas. Resource-poor women and women with disabilities often face discrimination in public spaces. “Street vendors are usually not permitted to carry their goods on the bus and female passengers

often face sexual harassment while travelling,” said Shah. The fear of sexual harassment is closely linked to deficient infrastructure. In 2019, Safetipin assessed over 3,000 bus stops across Delhi and highlighted poor lighting and damaged footpaths as major concerns. Multiple studies by Safetipin have consistently observed that women across cities feel unsafe when traveling from their house to the bus stop, while waiting at the bus stop and inside the

bus, especially at evening hours, Vyas said. Moreover, lack of street lights, opaquely designed bus stops with inadequate shelter as well as absence of designated waiting areas increase vulnerability to assault. For women with disabilities, these barriers are far more acute, said Aishwarya Agarwal, lead at Centre for Inclusive Mobility, OMI Foundation. Inaccessible bus stops, lack of low-floor fleets, broken sidewalks, and the absence of assistive features make buses extremely difficult to use, noted the OMI Foundation's report. “Many also report heightened risks of harassment when they require assistance to board or alight,” she added. “Most tier-2 and tier-3 cities still have high-floor buses and often lack ramps at bus stops,” said Vyas. Another persistent issue is the lack of real-time information on bus arrivals or communication around a possible bus breakdown, as per Shah. “To counter this, a number of cities have introduced audio announcements of the upcoming bus stop as well as buses, however we don't have a consistent level of service responsiveness across India,” she added. Furthermore, women living along the city's periphery complained of low-frequency bus services and distant bus stops. “Despite women's heavy reliance on public transport, urban bus networks are still largely designed around peak-hour, heterogeneous-working, non-disabled male commute patterns, rather than the multi-stop, care-related trips that women frequently undertake,” said Agarwal.

**Need for gender-responsive policies**

Improvements in safety, reliability and convenience of public transit systems are aligned with India's broader developmental goals of promoting gender equality (UNSDG 5), ensuring sustained economic growth and decent work for all (UNSDG 8), and creating inclusive, safe and sustainable cities (UNSDG 11). Fare subsidies are but one piece of a giant puzzle. “To retain female commuters, states must focus on developing what we call an ‘ACSAR’ (translates to frequent in Hindi) public transport

system, i.e., affordable, connected, secure, accessible and reliable,” suggested Shah. An ORF report found that almost 50 per cent of respondents turned down work or educational opportunities due to safety concerns. Additionally, Shah emphasised the need for schemes that combine fare subsidies with other critical interventions, facilitating women's switch from being captive to choice users. “If we look at marginalised women who commonly travel by buses, the moment they have access to a two-wheeler, most will skip the bus,” she explained. Highlighting the importance of women's participation in urban transport planning and design, Agarwal underscored the need for gender-responsive budgeting and a systematic collection of gender-disaggregated data. Simultaneously, Shah called for a realistic assessment of the FFPT schemes' impact. “We must look for correlations between increased ridership and different socio-economic variables to show a direct impact on women's lives (improved employment and education outcomes, reduced time-poverty, etc.), and not just households,” she suggested. The design of bus systems and their supporting infrastructure significantly impacts women's level of safety, confidence, and comfort. “Both buses and bus stops must comply with universal principles of design to aid all types of passengers, whether physically challenged, seniors, children, women or men,” said Vasudevan. In favour of women-only buses, she highlighted how steep steps of public buses are particularly antagonistic to women who often wear saris or travel with grocery bags or small children. In addition, recruitment of female service providers at every level is key to not only challenge cultural biases but also promote a gendered lens to management and operations. “We need to see more women as frontline workers, depot managers, maintenance supervisors, etc. and not just as drivers, conductors or the cleaning staff,” she added. Apart from operational improvements like bigger fleet size and peak capacity planning, Vyas highlighted the role of mandatory gender sensitisation training for the entire transport personnel, functional emergency helplines, robust grievance redressal mechanisms and regular audits at bus depots. “During our assessment of Delhi's Mehrauli bus terminal, a bus conductor shared that passenger complaints can take over a month to reach the depot and at times, the staff must pay the penalties due to lack of timely verification with the complainants,” she explained.

**Buses Per 100,000 Population**

City	Recommended Bus Count	Actual Bus Count
Mumbai	50	22.9
New Delhi	50	44.9
Bengaluru	50	67.1
Kolkata	50	80.7
Chennai	50	43.5
Hyderabad	50	39.9
Pune-Pimpri	50	34.2
Chinchwad		

(Sources: Ease of Moving Index 2022 (City Profiles) - Mumbai, New Delhi, Bengaluru, Kolkata, Chennai, Hyderabad, Pune-Pimpri Chinchwad; Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs)

“There are women who choose not to travel just to save the cost of a Rs 10 bus ticket,” shared Vasudevan. To maximise the impact of FFPT schemes, governments and other stakeholders can undertake extensive awareness campaigns, particularly for marginalised women. “State governments must ensure that subsidies come across as policy initiatives instead of ‘freebies’. These schemes have a larger role in these women's economic empowerment so let's talk about what we stand to lose without such schemes in place,” Vyas added.

he added. At CES, Samsung will unveil upgrades across its AI appliance lineup, including the AirDresser, Laundry Combo, WindFree Pro Air Conditioner, and the flagship Jet Bot Steam Ultra robot vacuum. The improvements combine AI-powered customisation with hardware enhancements to offer smarter fabric care, intuitive temperature control, and seamless cleaning experiences tailored to user lifestyles. In the kitchen, Samsung will showcase the upgraded AI Refrigerator Family Hub, integrating Google Gemini for the first time. The new AI Vision

improves on-device food recognition, expanding the types of fresh and processed foods the refrigerator can identify and manage, offering a more flexible and comprehensive kitchen experience. Samsung will also expand its Micro RGB TV lineup, introducing the next generation of display technology aimed at setting new standards for premium home viewing. Highlighting its global AI ambitions, Park noted that Samsung employs over 10,000 engineers in India across three R&D centres and a design centre, contributing to both local and global product innovations.

## Samsung to focus on AI-integration, interest-free finance to fuel growth in India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New Delhi

Samsung Electronics has ruled out listing of its India business for now, saying it will instead focus on accelerating artificial intelligence adoption across its products and expanding its consumer finance arm to drive sales in one of the most important growth markets. In an interview with PTI, JB Park, President and CEO of Samsung Southwest Asia, said the South Korean giant is looking to deepen its manufacturing footprint in India and has applied under the production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for com-

ponents to manufacture mobile phone displays in India. Samsung runs its largest smartphone manufacturing facility in the world in Noida, which has evolved into a key export hub in recent years. When asked about any possibility of IPO, Park said: “No, we do not have any such plans as of now”. While other South Korean peers like Hyundai Motor India and LG Electronics have tapped public markets to raise capital and strengthen their local footprint, Samsung places a preference on internal growth over market-funded expansion. The strategy reflects a dual aim - leveraging AI to differentiate

products in a crowded consumer electronics market while using financing solutions to boost sales amid slowing global demand. Park said Samsung would be adequately funded through its capital requirement for investment in growth opportunities. Besides IPO, there are different means to acquire capital, such as institutional borrowings or through corporate bonds, among others. “So, there are multiple options that you can get the working capital in place. So, IPO is not the plan for Samsung,” he said. By prioritising operational expansion over a public listing, Samsung is signalling confidence

in long-term growth potential in India while maintaining tighter control over its strategic and financial direction. Park said Samsung is looking to expand its interest-free finance scheme to home appliances. It currently sells smartphones on interest-free monthly EMIs, and the same is now being expanded to televisions and washing machines. “More than 40 per cent of smartphones have been sold on Finance + (Samsung EMI scheme),” he said. When asked what growth Samsung expects in this segment, Park said: “This segment (Finance +) is growing 10 per cent every

year”. This scheme is a very big “growth engine” for Samsung India to grow in the rural markets of the north and northeast. Park said AI will be a cornerstone for future Samsung products. Some of these will be showcased at the CES 2026, the world's largest consumer electronics and IT exhibition, in Las Vegas next month. He said the company's AI appliances are entering a “new turning point”, delivering smarter, more personalised experiences that enhance everyday living. Samsung will also highlight innovations in TV technology at its “The First Look” event on January 4, 2026, in Las Vegas,

first time. The new AI Vision

THE PIONEER

CLASSIFIEDS

CHANGE OF NAME

My minor daughter Himanshi Fulfagar (old name) aged 9 years, daughter of Arvind Fulfagar and Shobha Fulfagar, residing at H no. 220, 3rd Floor, Gali No. 6, Opp. Saini Enclave, Karkardooma, Delhi-110092, shall henceforth be known as Himanshi Jain.

PD(3476)C

**SOUTH CENTRAL RAILWAY**

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Details of the Tender Notices of S C Railway can be seen on our website : [www.scr.indianrailways.gov.in](http://www.scr.indianrailways.gov.in)

**e-Tender Notice No.DRM/Works/SC/180-187/2025/OT, Dt: 23.12.2025**

For and on behalf of President of India, the undersigned invites e-tender for the following works up to 14.00 hours on dt: 21.01.2026.

**S.No.: 01 e-Tender No.: 180\_CR\_SC\_25\_OT** **Name of the work:** SC-KZJ Section: Proposed safety related yard improvements and upgradation works at various yards under SSE/P.Way/SC section. **Approx. Tender Value in (₹):** 6,47,50,281/- **EMD (₹):** 4,73,800/- **Completion period in Months:** 12 **Maintenance period in Months:** 45 (Days)

**S.No.: 02 e-Tender No.: 181\_CR\_SC\_25\_OT** **Name of the work:** WD-SC-KZJ Section: Proposed safety related yard improvements and upgradation works at various yards under SSE/P.Way/SNF section. **Approx. Tender Value in (₹):** 4,51,30,374/- **EMD (₹):** 3,75,700/- **Completion period in Months:** 12 **Maintenance period in Months:** 45 (Days)

**S.No.: 03 e-Tender No.: 182\_CR\_SC\_25\_OT** **Name of the work:** SC-KZJ Section: Proposed safety related yard improvements and upgradation works at various yards under SSE/P.Way/CR/KZJ section. **Approx. Tender Value in (₹):** 4,56,06,150/- **EMD (₹):** 3,78,100/- **Completion period in Months:** 12 **Maintenance period in Months:** 45 (Days)

**S.No.: 04 e-Tender No.: 183\_N\_SC\_25\_OT** **Name of the work:** KZJ-BPQ Section: SW 1) Proposed ancillary works for LC No. 33 at Km.307/15-13 (RUB 81A) Jacketing of approach retaining walls etc. between KOLR-PTKP stations. SW 2) Proposed ancillary works for LC No. 30 at km. 311/15-17 (RUB 74 A) Jacketing of approach retaining walls etc. between OEA-PTKP stations under Sr.DEN/North/SC Jurisdiction. **Approx. Tender Value in (₹):** 5,38,39,042/- **EMD (₹):** 4,19,200/- **Completion period in Months:** 09 **Maintenance period in Months:** 36

**S.No.: 05 e-Tender No.: 184\_NW\_SC\_25\_OT** **Name of the work:** VKB-PRLI Section: SW 1) SSE/P.Way/UDGR Jurisdiction - Proposed safety related yard improvement and upgradation works at various yards. SW 2) BDR-GR Section: SSE/P.Way/HMBD Jurisdiction - Proposed safety related yard improvement and upgradation works at various yards. **Approx. Tender Value in (₹):** 2,72,84,458/- **EMD (₹):** 2,86,500/- **Completion period in Months:** 12 **Maintenance period in Months:** 45 (Days)

**S.No.: 06 e-Tender No.: 185\_NW\_SC\_25\_OT** **Name of the work:** SW 1) VKB-PRLI Section: SSE/P.Way/BIDR Jurisdiction - Proposed safety related yard improvement and upgradation works at various yards. SW 2) BIDR-GR Section: SSE/P.Way/HMBD Jurisdiction - Proposed safety related yard improvement and upgradation works at various yards. **Approx. Tender Value in (₹):** 2,72,84,458/- **EMD (₹):** 2,86,500/- **Completion period in Months:** 12 **Maintenance period in Months:** 45 (Days)

**S.No.: 07 e-Tender No.: 186\_NW\_SC\_25\_OT** **Name of the work:** PDPL-NZB Section: SW 1) SSE/P.Way/ARMU Jurisdiction - Proposed safety related yard improvement and upgradation works at various yards. SW 2) SSE/P.Way/KRMR Jurisdiction - Proposed safety related yard improvement and upgradation works at various yards. **Approx. Tender Value in (₹):** 3,00,63,943/- **EMD (₹):** 3,00,400/- **Completion period in Months:** 12 **Maintenance period in Months:** 45 (Days)

**S.No.: 08 e-Tender No.: 187\_NW\_SC\_25\_OT** **Name of the work:** Repairs to Road surfaces and Service buildings and Painting to FOBs under ADEN/BIDR Jurisdiction. **Approx. Tender Value in (₹):** 2,72,02,313/- **EMD (₹):** 2,86,100/- **Completion period in Months:** 09 **Maintenance period in Months:** 06

1. Tenderers should participate through e-tendering only and no manual offers may be considered.

2. Tender conditions/other particulars are available in the Tender documents on IREPS website at [ireps.gov.in](http://ireps.gov.in) which can be downloaded, can be Participated and can view any modifications if any.

3. All the prospective tenderers are requested to remit EMD through online payments/BG only.

4. All the prospective tenderers are advised to get GSTIN identification Nos. and submit along with their offer.

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For further tender conditions / details and for downloading the tender documents, Please visit website at <https://www.ireps.gov.in> or [www.scr.indianrailways.gov.in](http://www.scr.indianrailways.gov.in)

# Suspected suicide bomb kills 5 at Nigerian mosque

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Lagos

Five people have been killed in Nigeria's northeastern Maiduguri after a bomb exploded during prayer at a mosque on Wednesday night, a police statement said. Police added that 35 people were injured in the attack, which it said is likely a suicide attack.

"Preliminary investigations further suggest that the incident may have been a suicide bombing, based on the recovery of fragments of a suspected suicide vest and witness statements recorded, while investigations are ongoing to establish the exact cause and circumstances," Nahum Daso, spokesperson for Borno state police command,

NO GROUP HAS CLAIMED RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ATTACK, BUT BOMBERS HAS BEEN ATTRIBUTED TO BOKO HARAM

seid in the statement. Daso said police were conducting a sweep of the area in search of secondary devices. The Christmas Eve attack is the latest in a series of attacks in Nigeria's troubled northern region, where the country is battling multiple armed groups, including Boko Haram and its splinter group, Islamic State West Africa Province, among others. Several thousand people

have been killed, with millions displaced from their homes since 2009, according to the United Nations.

No group has claimed responsibility for the attack, but the use of suicide bombers has been heavily attributed to Boko Haram, the Islamic militant group that has previously claimed responsibility for many such attacks across the northeastern region.

Analysts say the group's use of suicide bombers has subsided over the past few years, but it still has the capacity to launch such attacks. In July 2024, a three-pronged suicide attack on a wedding ceremony in Borno raised the specter of a renewed use of the method by the militant group.

Pope Leo XIV celebrating the Christmas Eve Mass in St Peter's Basilica at The Vatican

PT1

# Few more weeks to finish releasing Epstein files, says DOJ

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Washington

The Justice Department (DOJ) said on Wednesday that it may need a "few more weeks" to release all of its records on the late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein after suddenly discovering more than a million potentially relevant documents, further delaying compliance with last Friday's congressionally mandated deadline.

The Christmas Eve announcement came hours after a dozen US senators called on the Justice Department's watchdog to examine its failure to meet the deadline. The group, 11 Democrats and a Republican, told Acting Inspector General Don Berthiaume in a letter that victims "deserve full disclosure" and the "peace of mind" of an independent audit.

The Justice Department said in a social media post that federal prosecutors in Manhattan and the FBI "have uncovered over a million more documents" that could be related to the Epstein case — a stunning 11th-hour development after department officials suggested months ago that they had undertaken a comprehensive review that accounted for the vast universe of Epstein related materials.

In March, Attorney General Pam Bondi told Fox News that a "truckload of evidence" had been produced after she ordered the FBI to "deliver the full and complete Epstein files to my office." She issued the directive after saying she learned from an unidentified source that the FBI in New York

was "in possession of thousands of pages of documents." In July, the FBI and Justice Department indicated in an unsigned memo that they had undertaken an "exhaustive review" and had determined that no additional evidence should be released — an extraordinary about-face from the Trump administration, which for months had pledged maximum transparency. The memo did not raise the possibility that additional evidence existed that officials were unaware of or had not reviewed. Wednesday's post did not say when the Justice Department was informed of the newly uncovered files.

In a letter last week, Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche said Manhattan federal prosecutors already had more than 3.6 million records from sex trafficking investigations into Epstein and his longtime confidant Ghislaine Maxwell, though many were copies of material already

turned over by the FBI.

The Justice Department said its lawyers are "working around the clock" to review the documents and remove victims' names and other identifying information as required by the Epstein Files Transparency Act, the law enacted last month that requires the Government to open its files on Epstein and Maxwell.

"We will release the documents as soon as possible," the department said. "Due to the mass volume of material, this process may take a few more weeks."

The announcement came amid increasing scrutiny on the Justice Department's staggered release of Epstein-related records, including from Epstein victims and members of Congress.

Republican Rep. Thomas Massie, of Kentucky, one of the chief authors of the law mandating the document release, posted Wednesday on X: "DOJ did break the law by making illegal redac-

tions and by missing the deadline." Another architect of the law, Rep. Ro Khanna, D-Calif, said he and Massie will "continue to keep the pressure on" and noted that the Justice Department was releasing more documents after lawmakers threatened contempt.

"A Christmas Eve news dump of a million more files only proves what we already know: Trump is engaged in a massive cover-up," Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-NY, said after the DOJ's announcement. "The question Americans deserve answered is simple: WHAT are they hiding — and WHY?"

The White House on Wednesday defended the Justice Department's handling of the Epstein records.

"President Trump has assembled the greatest cabinet in American history, which includes Attorney General Bondi and her team — like Deputy Attorney General Blanche — who are doing a great job implementing the President's agenda," spokeswoman Abigail Jackson said in a statement. After releasing an initial wave of records on Friday, the Justice Department posted more batches to its website over the weekend and on Tuesday. The Justice Department has not given any notice when more records might arrive.

Records that have been released, including photographs, interview transcripts, call logs, court records and other documents, were either already public or heavily blacked out, and many lacked necessary context. Records that hadn't been seen before

include transcripts of grand jury testimony from FBI agents who described interviews they had with several girls and young women who described being paid to perform sex acts for Epstein. Other records made public in recent days include a note from a federal prosecutor from January 2020 that said Trump had flown on the financier's private plane more often than had been previously known and emails between Maxwell and someone who signs off with the initial "A." They contain other references that suggest the writer was Britain's former Prince Andrew. In one, "A" writes: "How's LA? Have you found me some new inappropriate friends?"

The senators' call Wednesday for an inspector general audit comes days after Schumer introduced a resolution that, if passed, would direct the Senate to file or join lawsuits aimed at forcing the Justice Department to comply with the disclosure and deadline requirements. In a statement, he called the staggered, heavily redacted release "a blatant cover-up."

Republican Lisa Murkowski of Alaska joined Sens. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn and Jeff Merkley, D-Ore, in leading the call for an inspector general audit. Others signing the letter were Democratic Sens. Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota, Adam Schiff of California, Dick Durbin of Illinois, Cory Booker and Andy Kim, both of New Jersey, Gary Peters of Michigan, Chris Van Hollen, of Maryland, Mazie Hirono, of Hawaii, and Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island.

# India-born physician appointed to State nutrition advisory panel

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Houston

Indian-origin physician Padmaja Patel has been appointed to the Texas Nutrition Advisory Committee by Governor Greg Abbott. Midland-based physician, Patel, will serve on the committee through September 1, 2029.

The panel advises the state on diet and nutrition and examines the role of food in preventing and managing chronic diseases.

Members are appointed by the governor for staggered terms and represent a range of medical and public health disciplines, the statement said. The

appointment was part of a broader slate of selections announced by the governor's office. Patel joins Cheryl Sew Hoy, Jaclyn Albin and Kathleen Davis, who were also appointed to terms ending in 2029. Ann Shippy, Commissioner Sid Miller and Natalie Bachynsky were named to terms expiring in 2027.

India-born Patel earned her medical degree from the Medical College of Baroda and later completed her medical training in the United States.

she serves as chief medical officer at Nudj Health and is president of the American College of Lifestyle Medicine.

# Algeria votes to declare French colonisation a crime

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Algiers

Legislators in Algeria voted to declare France's colonisation of the North African country a crime, approving a law that calls for restitution of property taken by France during its 130-year rule, among other demands seeking to redress historical wrongs. France slammed the law as a "hostile act" threatening bilateral efforts to heal wounds of the past. The two countries retain close cultural and economic ties but have troubled diplomatic relations.

In a solemn ceremony steeped in symbolism, 340 of 407 members of Algeria's National Assembly voted late Wednesday to approve the law. The move came just a few weeks after African countries made a collective resolution for recognition and reparations for colonial-era crimes. The law covers the period from the landing of King

FRANCE SLAMMED THE LAW AS A "HOSTILE ACT" THREATENING BILATERAL EFFORTS TO HEAL WOUNDS OF THE PAST

Charles X's army on the beaches of Sidi Ferruch west of Algiers in 1830 to July 5, 1962, the date of Algeria's official independence.

The text provides for the restitution of Algerian archives and property moved to France during the colonial period, and the transmission to Algiers of detailed maps of French nuclear tests conducted in Algeria from 1960 to 1966.

It also calls for the repatriation of the remains of some Algerian resistance fighters taken to France. The law stipulates prison sentences for any action by an Algerian celebrating French colonialism,

for attacks on symbols of the Algerian resistance, and "remarks with colonial connotations." France is unlikely to heed the demands in the law.

The law is "a manifestly hostile initiative," the French Foreign Ministry spokesperson's office said. It noted efforts under French President Emmanuel Macron to address colonial-era grievances, and added: "We continue to work toward the renewal of dialogue," notably about security and migration issues.

Macron, in 2017, described elements of France's history in Algeria as a crime against humanity, but stopped short of an official apology. Meanwhile, the resurgent far right in France celebrates colonialists. The economic cost of colonialism in Africa is believed to be staggering. Algeria suffered some of the most brutal forms of French colonial rule.

Nearly a million European

settlers held greater political, economic and social privileges, even though Algeria was legally part of France and its men were conscripted in World War II. Hundreds of thousands died in Algeria's revolution, during which French forces tortured detainees as part of a counter-insurgency strategy to maintain their grip on power.

Huge Algerian flags adorned the lower house of parliament as speaker Mohamed Bougali delivered his opening address. "Today, December 24, 2025, is a historic day, to be written in letters of gold in the national narrative," he began, before being interrupted by lawmakers intoning an excerpt from the Algerian national anthem: "O France, the hour of reckoning has arrived. We have sworn to revive Algeria, bear witness! Bear witness!"

The speaker called the law, "a political message and an explicit moral stance."

# Pope remembers Gaza's suffering in first Christmas

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Vatican City

Pope Leo XIV during his first Christmas Day homily on Thursday remembered the people of Gaza "exposed for weeks to rain, wind and cold" and said the world's many conflicts can only be silenced through dialogue.

Leo led the Christmas Day Mass from the central altar beneath the balustrade of St Peter's Basilica, adorned with floral garlands and clusters of red poinsettias. White flowers were set at the feet of a statue of Mary, mother of Jesus, whose birth is celebrated on Christmas Day.

Recalling that God was made flesh through Jesus' birth in a manger in Bethlehem, Leo likened God's word to "a fragile tent among us." "How then can we not think of the tents in Gaza, exposed for weeks to rain, wind and cold; and of those so many other refugees and displaced persons on every continent' Leo said.

The pontiff also recalled the fragility of "defenceless populations, tried by so many wars," and of "young people forced to take up arms, who on the front lines feel the senselessness of what is asked of them, and the falsehoods that fill the pompous speeches of those who send them to their deaths." Leo underlined that peace can emerge only through dialogue. "There will be peace when our monologues are interrupted and, enriched by listening, we fall to our knees before the humanity of the other," he said.

Thousands of people packed the Basilica for the pope's first Christmas Day Mass, holding aloft their smartphones to capture images of the opening procession. Leo will later deliver the traditional Christmas message from a loggia overlooking St Peter's Square, where the faithful were gathering beneath a steady rain. The "Urbi et Orbi" blessing — Latin for "to the City and the World" — serves as a summary of the woes facing the world this year. This Christmas season marks the winding down of the Holy Year celebrations, which will close on Jan. 6, the Catholic Epiphany holiday marking the visit of the three wise men to the baby Jesus in Bethlehem.

# Jazz concert cancelled over Trump name remaining

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ New York

A planned Christmas Eve jazz concert at the Kennedy Center, a holiday tradition dating back more than 20 years, has been cancelled. The show's host, musician Chuck Redd, says that he called off the performance in the wake of the White House announcing last week that President Donald Trump's name would be added to the facility. As of last Friday, the building's facade reads The Donald J. Trump and The John F. Kennedy Memorial Center for the Performing Arts. According to the White House, the president's handpicked board approved the decision, which scholars have said violates the law. Trump had been suggesting for months that he was open to changing the centre's name. "When I saw the name change on the Kennedy Center website and then hours later on the building, I chose to cancel our concert," Redd told.

# Al-Shabab extremists pose greatest threat in Somalia: UN

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ United Nations

The Al-Shabab extremist group remains the greatest immediate threat to peace and stability in Somalia and the region, especially Kenya, UN experts said in a report. Despite ongoing efforts by Somali and international forces to curb operations by al-Qaida-linked al-Shabab, "the group's ability to carry out complex, asymmetric attacks in Somalia remains undiminished," the experts said. They said the threat comes not only from al-Shabab's ability to strike — including within the capital, Mogadishu, where it attempted to assassinate the president on March 18 — but from its sophisticated extortion operations, forced recruitment and effective propaganda machine. The UN Security Council on Tuesday voted unanimously to extend authorisation for the African Union's support.

# Police reward announced in Chattogram hindu home fire

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Dhaka/New Delhi

Bangladesh police announced a reward for information on attackers who set on fire a Hindu-owned house near the southeastern port city of Chattogram, as mob violence emerged as a major crisis in the changed political landscape. Chattogram range’s police chief Ahsan Habib offered the bounty on Wednesday night without specifying the amount during his visit to the burned-down house of Qatar expatriate workers Shukh Shil and Anil Shil at Raojan area on the outskirts of the city, Ittefaq newspaper reported on Thursday. According to reports, unidentified miscreants set the home on fire on Tuesday night, but the residents managed to come out of the house unharmed. Family members said they woke up after sensing the heat of the fire in the predawn hours, but were initially unable to come out as the doors were locked from the outside. The eight members of the two families escaped the burning house after cutting through tin sheets and bamboo fencing. A series of arson attacks targeting the homes of Hindu families took place in the past week in the same area. Police said they have arrested five suspects and formed a “special security team” to ensure safety in the neighbourhood, The Business

Standard newspaper reported. “Houses of seven Hindu families were burned in three separate localities (at Raojan)” in five days, the report read. Raozan Police Station chief Sajedul Islam said so far, five suspects were arrested in police raids, and manhunts were underway for others. The police held a meeting with local influential people to ensure interfaith harmony and social vigilance against perpetrators of such “heinous crimes”. A mob last week lynched 28-year-old Hindu factory worker Dipu Chandra Das in central Mymensingh over alleged defamation of the religion, sparking a widespread protest in the country. Muhammad Yunus’ interim Government said it would take care of the minor child, wife and parents of Das. Police and other law enforcement agencies said they arrested 12 of the mobbers so far, while a senior adviser to the Government visited the bereaved family to offer support. The mob violence and arson attacks exposed Bangladesh to a sense of fright, especially after the death of Inqilab Mancha leader Sharif Osman Hadi at a Singapore hospital six days after he was shot by masked gunmen in Dhaka. The mob set alight the offices of the mass circulation Daily Star and Prothom Alo and two leading cultural groups, Chhayanot and the Udichi Shilpi Goshti, which were founded in the 1060s.

## SECTION WITHIN YUNUS GOVT PLOTTED OSMAN HADI’S KILLING TO DERAIL ELECTIONS, SAYS BROTHER

**Dhaka:** Bangladesh’s slain radical leader Sharif Osman Hadi’s brother has alleged that a section within the interim Government of Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus plotted the killing to derail the upcoming general election. Hours after his claim, Md Khuda Baksh Chowdhury, Special Assistant (Ministry of Home Affairs) to the Chief Adviser, resigned from the position. “It is you who got Osman Hadi killed, and now you are trying to foil the election by using this as an issue. Those who are in power when Osman Hadi was killed, you won’t be able to evade the responsibility,” Hadi’s brother Omar Hadi told a protest rally in the capital staged by Inqilab Mancha on Tuesday. Omar said that the Government must “immediately expose the entire group involved” in his brother’s killing to the nation. Hadi, a staunch critic of India alongside the Awami League, was one of the leaders of last year’s violent student-led street protest dubbed the July Uprising that toppled the Hasina-led Government and later floated the Inqilab Mancha. The Cabinet division issued a notification, saying the President has accepted the resignation of Chowdhury, a former police chief. “Md

Khuda Baksh Chowdhury, special assistant (Ministry of Home Affairs) to the chief adviser, has resigned from his post. The president has accepted his resignation,” an official statement said. Hadi, a candidate for the scheduled parliamentary election in February, was shot in the head by masked gunmen on December 12 in Dhaka. Six days later, he died at a Singapore hospital. Omar alleged that a section of the Government got his brother killed at the direction of an “agency or country”. He said Hadi wanted the national election to be held by February and asked authorities not to disrupt the election environment. The Inqilab Mancha has demanded the immediate resignation of Home Adviser Jahangir, Law Adviser Asif and Khoda Baksh, holding them accountable for the murder. The law adviser has promised to hold the trial in Bangladesh’s Speedy Trial Tribunal, which requires hearings to be completed in 90 days. After Hadi’s death, mobs in Dhaka staged a mayhem, setting alight the main offices of mass circulation Prothom Alo and Daily Star newspaper, two progressive cultural groups Chhayanat and Udichi Shilpi Goshti in Dhaka.

## Pak security forces kill 10 terrorists during separate operations

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Peshawar

Pakistani security forces neutralised at least 10 terrorists, including a high-value target, during separate intelligence-based operations in the restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, the army said on Thursday. In a statement, the army said that two terrorists, including the ring leader Dilawar, were killed during an operation in the Kulachi area of Dera Ismail Khan. Dilawar was a high-value target wanted by law enforcement agencies for his involvement in multiple terrorist activities, with a bounty of PkRs 4 million placed on his head by the Government, it said. Weapons and ammunition were recovered from the slain militants, who were actively involved in attacks against security forces and civilians. In a separate statement, the army said security forces conducted another operation on Wednesday in Kalat district, Balochistan, on the reported presence of terrorists. During an intense exchange of fire, eight terrorists were killed, it said, adding that a large cache of weapons, ammunition, and explosives was recovered from the site. “These terrorists remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities in the area,” the army said, adding that a sanitisation operation was underway to eliminate any remaining militants.

# China hits out at Pentagon report alleging bid to weaken US-India ties

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Beijing

China on Thursday denounced a Pentagon report, which accused Beijing of leveraging reduced border tensions with India to undermine US-India ties while deepening defence ties with Pakistan as an attempt to sow discord with false narrative. The Pentagon’s report distorts China’s defence policy, sows discord between China and other countries, and aims at finding a pretext for the US to maintain its military supremacy,” Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian told a media briefing here when asked about the US Department of War report submitted to the American Congress. China firmly opposes the report, Lin said. Separately, Chinese Defence Ministry spokesman Zhang Xiaogang denounced the Pentagon report, which also highlighted the cooperation between China and Pakistan in sectors such as defence and space, with plans to set up a military base. The US releases such reports year after year, grossly interfering in China’s internal affairs, Zhang told a separate media briefing. The US report maliciously misinterpreted China’s national defence policy, made unfounded speculations about China’s military development, slandering and smearing the normal



Chinese Defence Ministry spokesman Zhang Xiaogang

actions of the Chinese military, he said, declining to directly respond to a question on the report alleging China’s expanding defence and cooperation with Pakistan. The report is full of erroneous understandings of China and geopolitical biases, exaggerating the so-called “Chinese military threat” to mislead the international community, Zhang said. “We express our strong dissatisfaction and firm opposition to this,” he said and urged the US to stop fabricating false narratives and provoking confrontation and antagonism. In his response to the Pentagon report on India-China ties, Lin stated that Beijing views and handles its relations with New Delhi from a strategic height and a long-term perspective. “We stand ready to strengthen communication, enhance mutual trust, promote cooperation, and properly handle differences with India, and advance a sound and stable bilateral relationship,” he said. On the references to the Line of Actual Control in the US report, Lin said, “the boundary question is a matter between China and India, and the current border situation between the two countries is generally stable with smooth communication channels”. “China opposes relevant country’s groundless and irresponsible comments,” he said. In its annual report to Congress on Tuesday on ‘Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2025’, the US Department of War said China probably seeks to capitalise from the deescalating tensions along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with India to stabilise bilateral relations and to prevent the deepening of US-India ties. The report referred to a meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit in October 2024.

# Albanese announces bravery award for heroes of Bondi

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Newcastle

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced plans for a national bravery award to recognise civilians and first responders who confronted “the worst of evil” during an antisemitic terror attack that left 15 dead and has cast a heavy shadow over the nation’s holiday season. Albanese said he plans to establish a special honors system for those who placed themselves in harms way to help during the attack on a beachside Hanukkah celebration, like Ahmed al Ahmed, a Syrian-Australian Muslim who disarmed one of the assailants before being wounded himself. Sajid Akram, who was killed by police during the December 14 attack, and his 24-year-old son Naveed Akram are accused of perpetrating Australia’s worst massacre since 1996. Speaking at a press conference after a Christmas Day lunch at a charitable foundation in Sydney, Albanese described a Christmas defined by a sharp contrast between extremist violence and the “best of humanity.” “This Christmas is a different one because of the anti-terror and the terrorist attack motivated by ISIS and antisemitism,” Albanese said. “But at the same time as we have seen the worst of humanity, we have seen the bravery and kindness and compassion. From those who rushed to danger.” The proposed

## AHMED AL AHMED, WHO DISARMED ONE OF THE ASSAILANTS BEFORE BEING WOUNDED HIMSELF

honours would recognize those who are nominated and recommended for bravery or meritorious awards under the existing Australian Honors and Awards system for their actions during and after the attack. Just a day after pushing through the country’s toughest firearm laws, New South Wales state leader Chris Minns issued a plea for national solidarity, urging Australians to support their Jewish neighbors during what he described as a fortnight of “heartbreak and pain.” “Everybody in Australia needs to wrap their arms around them and lift them up,” Minns said at the same press conference Thursday. “I want them to know that Australians have got their back. We’re in their corner and we’re going to help them get through this.” The gun reforms which passed through the New South Wales state legislature on Christmas Eve include capping individual gun ownership at four and reclassifying high-risk weapons like pump-action firearms. The legislation also tightens licensing by reducing permit terms to two years, restricting ownership to Australian citizens, and removing the review pathway for license denials.

# North Korea displays apparent progress in construction of nuclear-powered submarine

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Seoul

North Korea on Thursday displayed apparent progress in the construction of a nuclear-powered submarine, with state media photos showing a largely completed hull, as leader Kim Jong Un condemned rival South Korea’s push to acquire the technology. North Korea’s official Korean Central News Agency said Kim visited a shipyard to inspect the construction of what the North describes as an 8,700-ton-class nuclear-propelled submarine, which the leader has previously called a crucial step in the modernisation and nuclear



armament of North Korea’s navy. The North has indicated it plans to arm the submarine with nuclear weapons, calling it a “strategic guided missile submarine” or a “strategic nuclear attack submarine.” During the visit, Kim

described South Korea’s efforts to acquire a nuclear-powered submarine, which have been backed by US President Donald Trump, as an “offensive act” that severely violates the North’s security and maritime sovereignty.

He says the South Korean plan further underscores the need to modernise and nuclear-arm North Korea’s navy, and claimed that the completion of his nuclear-powered submarine would be an “epoch-making” change in strengthening its nuclear war deterrent against what he called enemy threats. The agency did not specify when Kim visited the shipyard, but released photos showing him inspecting a huge, burgundy-colored vessel, coated with what appears to be anti-corrosion paint, under construction inside an assembly hall with senior officials and his daughter. It was the first time North Korean state media had

released images of the submarine since March, when they mostly showed the lower sections of the vessel. It was not immediately clear how close North Korea is to completing the vessel. But because submarines are typically built from the inside out, the release of what appears to be a largely completed hull suggests that many core components, including the engine and possibly the reactor, are already in place, said Moon Keun-sik, a submarine expert at Seoul’s Hanyang University. “Showing the entire vessel now seems to indicate that most of the equipment has already been installed and it is just about

ready to be launched into the water,” said Moon, a former submarine officer in the South Korean navy, who believes the North Korean submarine could possibly be tested at sea within months. A nuclear-powered submarine was one item on a long wish list of sophisticated weaponry that Kim announced during a major political conference in 2021 to cope with what he called growing US-led military threats. Other weapons were solid-fuelled intercontinental ballistic missiles, hypersonic weapons, spy satellites and multi-warhead missiles. North Korea has since performed a run of testing activities to acquire them.

# UN turns 80 in 2025 amid global crises, India says ready to play greater role

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ United Nations

The UN marked its 80th anniversary in 2025 amid global conflicts, financial crisis, and US President Donald Trump’s criticism, as India urged the world body to focus on “leadership and hope” and expressed willingness to take on a greater role. The conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza, along with several others around the world from Sudan to Myanmar, raged unabated in 2025, yet again highlighting the ineptitude of the UN and its powerfull, but polarised, Security Council in addressing global challenges. As nations continue to grapple with humanitarian emergencies, climate chaos and economic inequality, questions are raised over



the relevance of the UN and whether the 80-year-old organisation, founded in 1945, has solutions for the problems of a world in flux in the 21st century. Against this backdrop, India gave a clarion call for reformed multilateralism. Addressing world leaders from the UN General Assembly podium in September, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar stressed that an “objective

report card” will show that the UN is in a state of crisis. “When peace is under threat from conflicts, when development is derailed by lack of resources, when human rights are violated by terrorism, the UN remains gridlocked. As its ability to forge common ground diminishes, belief in multilateralism also recedes,” he said. India categorically told the world that central to the erosion of the UN’s credibility has been resistance to reform, and Delhi stands ready to assume greater responsibilities in an expanded UNSC, which, with its current 15 members, is not representative of the world of 2025. “Both permanent and non-permanent membership of the Council must be expanded. A reformed Council must be truly representative. And India stands ready to assume greater responsibilities,” Jaishankar said. “The ninth decade of the UN must be one of leadership and hope. Bharat will do its fair share, and more,” he said. In the fight against terrorism, India continued to lead from the front in combating the scourge. India exercised its right to defend its people against terrorism through Operation Sindoor that targeted terror infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir in the wake of the Pahalgam terror attack in April perpetrated by The Resistance Front. At a time when Pakistan was sitting in the UNSC as a non-permanent member, the organisation issued a statement condemning in the strongest terms the Pahalgam attack.



## Turkiye begins black box analysis of jet crash

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Istanbul

The technical analysis of the recovered black boxes from a jet crash that killed eight people, including western Libya’s military chief, began as the investigation proceeded in cooperation with Libyan authorities, the Turkish Ministry of Defence said on Thursday. The private jet with Gen. Muhammad Ali Ahmad al-Haddad, four other military officials and three crew members crashed on Tuesday after taking off from Türkiye’s capital, Ankara, killing everyone on board. Libyan officials said the cause of the crash was a technical malfunction on the plane. The high-level Libyan delegation was on its way back to Tripoli after holding defence talks in Ankara aimed at boosting military cooperation between the two countries.



## Helicopter crashes on Mount Kilimanjaro, five dead

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Dar Es Salaam

Five people have died after a helicopter crashed on Africa’s highest mountain, Mount Kilimanjaro, in Tanzania. The accident Wednesday evening happened on one of the most popular tourist climbing routes, in what police said was a rescue mission to pick up patients on the mountain. Two foreigners, who police said had been picked up in a medical evacuation, were among those killed. A local doctor, a tour guide and a pilot were also killed in the crash. The accident happened between the mountain’s Barafu Camp and Kibo Summit at an altitude of more than 4,000 metres (13,100 feet). Kilimanjaro regional police commander Simon Maigwa told journalists the aircraft belonged to the Kilimanjaro Aviation company, which conducts medical evacuation services, among others.

## PROSPECT

### India's petrol pump count crosses 1 lakh, doubles in a decade

India's petrol pump network has crossed the 1,00,000-mark, doubling since 2015 as State-owned fuel retailers aggressively expanded outlets to defend market share and push fuel access deeper into rural and highway corridors amid a sustained boom in vehicle ownership.

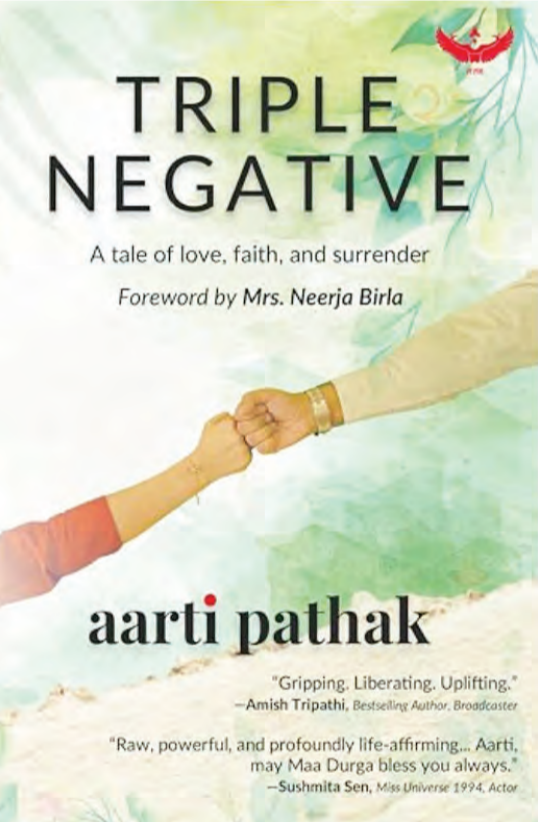
At the end of November, the country had 1,00,266 petrol pumps - the third largest after the US and China with a much bigger geographical area, according to data available from the Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell of the Oil Ministry. Over 90 per cent of the pumps are owned by State-owned firms such as Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL).

Russia's Rosneft-backed Nayara Energy Ltd is the largest private fuel retailer with 6,921 outlets, followed by 2,114 stations owned by a joint venture of Reliance Industries Ltd and BP. Shell has 346 outlets. The petrol pump network has almost doubled from 50,451 stations in 2015, PPAC data showed. That year, 2,967 outlets owned by private companies made up almost 5.9 per cent. Presently, they account for 9.3 per cent of the total market. Participation by the private sector in the fuel retail outlet business started in FY2004 with 27 pumps.

India has the world's third-largest petrol pump network. The US has the highest. While there is no official data on the number of outlets in the US, a 2024 report put the number of retail gas stations in the country at 1,96,643. Some outlets would have shut down since then. For China, a report last year put the number at 1,15,228 gas stations. Sinopec on its website says it is China's largest fuel retailer with more than 30,000 in-service gas stations. Though China Petrochemical Corporation (Sinopec) is larger in size, its number of outlets looks dwarfed in front of 41,664 outlets of the Indian market leader IOC. BPCL has the second-largest network with 24,605 stations, followed by HPCL with 24,418 outlets.

Rural outlets account for almost 29 per cent of the total pumps, up from 22 per cent a decade ago. The outlets have also undergone a change, now selling alternative fuels like CNG and hosting EV charging stations, alongside regular petrol and diesel dispensers.

## Triple Negative: A tale of love, faith and surrender



BY AARTI PATHAK

Within hours of losing her mother Aarti discovered she had cancer.

Triple Negative: A tale of love, faith and surrender, is a memoir that chronicles two years of her life—from the time she lost her mother, got diagnosed with an aggressive form of cancer, underwent treatment, to the year that followed as she regained her mind, body and life.

Even so, the book is not a memoir of illness or grief. It is a simple, unfiltered, profoundly personal, honest account of love, loss and the peace that followssurrender.

Aarti underwent a seven-month-long treatment involving surgeries, chemotherapy and radiation as shegrappled with the grief of losing her oldest relationship, her mother.

Through her treatment, she journaled herexperiences, both physically and emotionally and those notes eventually transformed into the memoir, allowing her to tell her story in real time.

The experience was intense. It had the power to break her in mind and body. The grief of losing her mother was overwhelming.

The thought of having to leave her young chil-

dren and husband behind was too frightening to contemplate. The physical pain and discomfort were intense; every muscle, bone and joint ached agonisingly. The loss of hair shook her confidence.

By the end of treatment, she had to build herself breath by breath, cell by cell. But a host of things held her together from the beginning.

She got strength from her devatas, who wouldn't let hercollapse. She found inner calmness through early morning pranayama.

Ayurveda helped fight the toxicity of the treatment. Yoga helped her rebuild her body.Humour kept things real. Intimate conversations with her husband and his unwavering support gave her the strength and clarity to keep fighting.

As mentioned earlier, this book is not about cancer. It's not about grief either. It is about a mix of life's inevitable trials and the quiet strength that carries us through them, the invisible hands that guide us and the divinity that reveals itself in our darkest times.

It is about the futility of worry and fear, the joy of surrender, the luxury that love is and the superpowers that faith bestows.

# India to export semiconductors soon: Shah

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Gwalior

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday said India's entry into the semiconductor industry was strong though a bit late, but exuded confidence that the nation would soon be self-reliant in the sector and start exporting.

He also said the geographical location of Madhya Pradesh is so attractive and its land so fertile that one can earn crores of rupees by investing even a small amount in the State.

Addressing the 'Abhyudaya Madhya Pradesh Growth Summit' here, he said, "We have made a strong entry into the semiconductor industry, although a bit late. In no time, we will not only become self-reliant in the semiconductor sector, but will also start exporting it." On the occasion, Shah also inaugurated as well as performed the groundbreaking ceremony of industrial projects of ₹2 lakh crore to mark the 101st birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Atal Bihar Vajpayee.

Remembering Vajpayee, he said, "Atal ji was a great orator, a sensitive poet, a leader dedicated to public welfare and remained 'ajatashatru' (person without enemies) in politics."

Shah also paid tributes to Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya on his birth anniversary and

C Rajagopalachari on his death anniversary. Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav, Union Communications Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia, Assembly Speaker Narendra Singh Tomar and several other leaders were present on the occasion. The Union Home Minister praised CM Yadav for organising regional investment conferences and said when a State develops with regional balance, the public and investors benefit the most.

He said, "When industries with regional characteristics develop, they are sustainable and successful. May this new idea be auspicious for Madhya Pradesh. Best wishes to those who have invested." Referring to the "Vibrant Gujarat" investor summit held during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's tenure as Chief Minister of Gujarat, Shah said that he had initiated a systematic and scientific initiative of such events in the State capital. He said, "This attracted investment to the State. It was a very good initiative and was successful. But Mohan Yadav has initiated a new initiative: a regional investment conference for the State's balanced development. This initiative will greatly benefit all States in the future for their balanced development." Shah said that Madhya Pradesh's greatest advantage is its geographical

संवर 2025 | स्थान: मेला ग्राउंड, ग्वालियर



Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Union Minister of Communications Jyotiraditya Scindia, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav and State Assembly Speaker Narendra Singh Tomar during the 'Abhyudaya Madhya Pradesh Growth Summit' organised on the occasion of the 101st birth anniversary of former prime minister Atal Bihar Vajpayee in Gwalior on Thursday

location, which reduces transportation costs.

He added that this potential can only be fully exploited if industries are established throughout Madhya Pradesh. He said that a multimodal logistics park is being built in Indore, encouraging companies from across the country to establish warehouses and hubs.

The senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader also Stated that his party has shown Madhya Pradesh the path to development, as it was once a "BIMARU" (economically ailing) State when the Congress government was in power under the leadership of former Chief Minister Digvijay

Singh of the Congress. He said that former Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan worked to remove Madhya Pradesh from the "BIMARU" category. Shah said, "Now Mohan Yadav is working to advance this with even more energy than Shivraj Singh Chouhan. This will certainly transform Madhya Pradesh into a developed State."

He said that Madhya Pradesh was once lagging behind in the electricity sector, but today it produces surplus electricity and has surpassed the entire country in terms of cleanliness. MP has industries in agriculture, food processing, pharmaceuticals, IT and many other

sectors and is also a leader in startups, he added. "Nearly 50 percent of our startups are run by our women and girls. Madhya Pradesh has set a record in India by registering 4.57 lakh new MSME units in just one year. It is also poised to become a hub for medium, small and cottage industries. Now, startups and innovation will take it to new heights," Shah said.

He said favourable infrastructure is being developed in the State for textile and tourism industries and excellent work has been done in the ease of doing business here. Under Prime Minister Modi's leadership, a strong foundation is being laid in many new areas, which will

make India a global leader in the future, Shah asserted. "Our foreign exchange reserves have crossed \$700 billion. We have also made a strong entry into the semiconductor industry. We will become self-reliant in this sector and will also export it. India has also made huge strides in the field of digital transactions and fintech.

In 2024-25, 46 per cent of global digital transactions took place in India," Shah pointed out. He said, "There is a saying in our Gujarat: 'Ek par gaam, dusri par Ram'. Similarly, on one side there are the digital transactions of the entire world and on the other side there are the digital transactions of India alone."

An official said industrial projects worth more than ₹2 lakh crore, for which Shah performed the ground breaking and inauguration, are from the industry, energy, new and renewable energy, tourism and health sectors and these will generate around 1.93 lakh jobs.

According to officials, 25,000 beneficiaries and thousands of entrepreneurs and investors are participating in the Growth Summit, organised to mark the birth anniversary of former PM Vajpayee. Shah also inaugurated the Gwalior Fair and dedicated to people the renovation work carried out at the Atal Museum.

## CCPA slaps ₹11 lakh penalty on Vision IAS for misleading ads

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has fined coaching institute Vision IAS ₹11 lakh for publishing misleading advertisements about its students' performance in the UPSC Civil Services Examination, a first case of penalty for repeat offence under consumer protection laws. The CCPA found that the institute, officially registered as AjayVision Education Pvt Ltd, deliberately concealed information about which courses successful candidates had actually enrolled in, creating a false impression that all toppers had taken its expensive foundation courses running into lakhs of rupees.

"This is the first case of penalty on the second offence," CCPA Chief Commissioner and Consumer Affairs Secretary Nidhi Khare told PTL.

"Despite regulatory intervention and caution, the institute continued to make similar claims in its subsequent advertisements, demonstrating a

lack of due diligence and regulatory compliance."

The institute's advertisements prominently claimed "7 in Top 10 and 79 in Top 100 selections in CSE 2023" and "39 in Top 50 selections in CSE 2022," featuring photographs, names and ranks of successful candidates.

However, the CCPA's investigation revealed that of the 119-plus successful candidates Vision IAS claimed for UPSC CSE 2022 and 2023, only three had enrolled in foundation courses. The remaining 116 had merely opted for services such as test series for preliminary and mains examinations, one-time Abhyaas tests and mock interview programmes.

The Authority noted that, while the institute disclosed that Shubham Kumar (AIR 1, UPSC CSE 2020) had enrolled in the GS Foundation Batch (Classroom Student), it deliberately concealed similar information about other successful candidates displayed alongside him. This created a misleading impression that all featured candidates were enrolled in



the same premium course.

"In view of the recurring nature of the violation, the present instance was treated as a subsequent contravention, warranting the imposition of a higher penalty in the interest of protecting consumers," the CCPA said in a Statement.

The Authority observed that such deliberate concealment of material information misled aspirants and parents into believing

Vision IAS was responsible for candidates' success across all stages of the examination, constituting a misleading advertisement under Section 2(28) of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019.

The CCPA also highlighted that unlike print media, websites remain accessible globally for extended periods and serve as the primary platform through which aspirants research coaching institutes in the digital era.

Projecting claims without proper authorisation or consent from students further compounded the misleading nature of the advertisements.

"In highly competitive examinations such as the UPSC Civil Services Examination, where lakhs of aspirants invest substantial time, effort and financial resources, such incomplete and selective disclosures mislead students and parents by creating false expectations regarding outcomes and the effectiveness of coaching services," the authority Stated.

So far, the CCPA has issued 57 notices to various coaching institutes for misleading advertisements and unfair trade practices. Penalties totalling ₹1.09 crore have been imposed on 28 institutes, along with directions to discontinue such misleading claims.

The Authority emphasised that all coaching institutes must strictly ensure truthful and transparent disclosure of information in their advertisements, enabling students to make fair and informed academic decisions.



Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman Harivansh Narayan Singh, Union Ministers JP Nadda, Kiren Rijiju, Ministers of State Arjun Ram Meghwal, Jitendra Singh, BJP MP Anurag Thakur and others during a ceremony to paying tribute to Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya on his birth anniversary, at Samvidhan Sadan in New Delhi on Thursday

## Results of PM-YUVA 3.0 declared: 43 young authors chosen in 22 Indian languages and english

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

The results of the Prime Minister's Scheme for Mentoring Young Authors (PM-YUVA 3.0), implemented by the National Book Trust, India, under the Ministry of Education, have been announced on the website of NBT-India. Aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the scheme aims to encourage young writers to contribute to nation building through their writing and ideas.

Under this edition, book

proposals by 43 young authors below the age of 30 years were selected through an All-India contest, in 22 official Indian languages and English, including Assamese, Bangla, Bodo, Dogri, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Maithili, Nepali, Odia, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Santali, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu.

This broad language participation strengthens the scheme's objective of promoting inclusive literary development across India. Of the 43 selected authors, 19

are women and 24 are men.

These selected book proposals will be developed into books under the six-month mentorship of eminent scholars. Each selected author will also receive a scholarship of ₹50,000 per month and a lifetime royalty of 10per cent on their published book.

The themes for PM-YUVA 3.0 were: Contribution of Indian Diaspora in Nation Building, Indian Knowledge System and Makers of Modern India (1950–2025). The selected manuscripts are non-fiction works that

reflect India's past, present and future through topics like history, culture, science, philosophy, governance, social reform and India's global engagement.

A National Camp of the selected authors will be organised during the upcoming New Delhi World Book Fair (10-18 January 2026).

The first set of books under PM-YUVA 3.0 will be published next year, with the objective of nurturing a new generation of writers to represent Indian literature and thought in India and abroad.

## SBI Life unveils savings-cum-protection plan with assured benefits

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

SBI Life Insurance has launched 'New Smart Samridhhi', an individual, non-linked, non-participating life insurance savings plan designed to provide assured benefits along with disciplined, goal-based savings.

According to SBI Life, the plan offers a simple and reliable way to accumulate wealth while ensuring financial protection for loved ones. It enables policyholders to plan their future with confidence, balancing growth and security.

Key benefits Guaranteed savings: Enables systematic savings to meet both short- and long-term financial goals. Reliable protection: Life cover ensures financial stability for the family in case of unforeseen events. Dual advantage: Combines savings and protection in a single plan, simplifying financial planning. Peace of mind: Guaranteed returns allow policyholders to plan confidently.

Key features Guaranteed additions: Accrue every year at a simple rate of 5.5per cent or 6per cent of cumulative premiums paid, based on the annualised premium. Assured maturity benefit: Offers 133per cent –214per cent of the total annualised premiums, depending on the policy-



holder's age, premium amount and chosen term.

No medical examination: Hassle-free enrolment with minimal documentation. Flexible terms: Options of 6-, 7-, or 10-year premium payment terms with policy durations of 12, 15, or 20 years respectively.

Life cover throughout term: Financial protection available throughout the policy duration. Tax benefits: Available as per prevailing income tax laws. The company said the plan caters to diverse financial goals — from funding a child's education to long-term wealth creation. Its guaranteed additions and maturity payouts offer clarity on future funds, while the assured benefits provide a stable safety net independent of market fluctuations.

Designed to encourage early and disciplined saving habits, SBI Life-New Smart Samridhhi reflects the insurer's philosophy of empowering individuals to pursue their dreams while securing their family's aspirations.

# Sports no longer waste of time, irregularities in team selection ended: PM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said irregularities in team selection and sports that often happened before 2014 came to an end a decade ago, and now children from even the poorest families can rise to the top levels purely through hard work and talent.

Addressing the 'Sansad Khel Mahotsav', a sports and fitness festival aimed at promoting a sporting culture and leadership among the youth, PM Modi said the scale of the Mahotsav is as vast as its impact. Through this initiative, he said, the nation is discovering thousands of talented sportspersons. "The festival is steadily emerging as a strong pillar of youth empowerment and nation-building. Another special aspect of the 'Sansad Khel Mahotsav' is the way it is playing a transformative role in changing societal mind-sets," he said.

The prime minister said that before 2014, irregularities in team

selection and sports infrastructure often took place in sports. "Today, those practices have come to an end. Even children from the poorest families can now rise to the highest levels purely through hard work and talent," he said.

PM Modi also referred to the allocation of more than ₹3000 crore for the country's sports budget, which was less than ₹1200 crore before 2014. He said that through a special scheme, athletes are being provided monthly financial assistance ranging from ₹25,000 to ₹50,000 each.

"Today, I want to tell every athlete of the country that you are not just playing for your own victory, you are playing for the country, you are playing for the honour and dignity of the tricolour," he said.

The prime minister also requested all parents to encourage their children to take part in sports and give them opportunities to participate in sporting activities. Sports is not just a part of learning, it is also important for a healthy body



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and former Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu during a ceremony to pay tribute to former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on his 101st birth anniversary at 'Sadaiv Atal' in New Delhi on Thursday

and a healthy mind, he said. Describing how sports culture is growing in the country, the prime minister said that from every corner of the country, inspiring examples are emerging that motivate the nation. He said that in some places, differently abled athletes are defying limitations and reaching new heights, while on sports grounds elsewhere, young girls are striving tirelessly to turn their dreams into reality.

"Today, India's athletes are breaking records, setting new benchmarks, and taking India to new heights on the global sporting map," he said. PM Modi said that until a few years ago, family members would scold and reprimand the child for playing too much as it was then considered a waste of time. Today, he said, society, and even parents, have realised that playing does not ruin one's life.

"Now they understand that their children, by excelling in sports, can change not only their own and their family's fate, but also that of the entire village and

society. Today, opportunities in sports are not limited, but unlimited," he said. The prime minister said that in 2030, India will host the Commonwealth Games in Ahmedabad and then the eyes of the entire world will be on India. "Not only that, India is also making efforts to host the biggest sports event, that is, the Olympics in 2036," he said.

The 'Sansad Khel Mahotsav' is a sports and fitness festival aimed at promoting a sporting culture and leadership among the youth.

A key objective is to bring the community together through sports and fitness and to take the message of 'Fit India' to every home. The festival features a three-level competition, including games at the village, block/ward, and parliamentary constituency levels.

The sports categories include traditional games, football, volleyball, and cricket. The event also includes fun activities like tug of war, lemon spoon race, and sack races to ensure wider participation.

## Divya Deshmukh makes right moves; Gukesh fails to impress

AJAI MASAND  
■ New Delhi

A starry-eyed teenager Divya Deshmukh winning the Women's Chess World Cup in faraway Batumi this year not only showcased India's unfathomable depth of talent in the sport but also reaffirmed the country's status as the new hub of the game in the world.

Just when it seemed the aura of D. Gukesh, who became world champion in 2024, was on the wane after suffering a string of losses this year, the 19-year-old Nagpur girl emerged from nowhere and achieved three career milestones with one signature triumph.

Divya not only became the first Indian woman to win the FIDE Women's World Cup, she also instantly secured the prestigious Grandmaster title, bypassing the usual "norms" required to earn it.

Divya, whose parents are doctors, also secured an automatic qualification for the 2026 Candidates tournament, where the winner will earn the right to challenge the reigning Women's world champion Ju Wenjun of China.

On that eventful day in July, Divya's victory also shifted the contours of women's chess in the country, which relied on two-time world rapid champion Koneru Humpy and Dronavalli Harika.

The two women have been the torchbearers of the sport in the country for nearly two decades. (PTI)

## No room for spin: Australia goes into 4th Ashes against England

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Melbourne

Australia won't attempt to replace injured Nathan Lyon with another spin bowler for the fourth Ashes test against England and will go into Friday's start of the match with a 12-man, pace-heavy squad.

After Lyon suffered a long-term hamstring injury in the Ashes-clinching win in Adelaide and later underwent surgery, offspinner Todd Murphy was called into the squad. But with the MCG pitch showing plenty of grass, Australia opted to leave Murphy out when it named its squad Thursday.

Captain Steve Smith will wait until the toss at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Friday before confirming a starting XI. England lost each of the first three tests to allow Australia to retain the Ashes in just 11 days of on-field action. It's unusual for an Australian team not to

select a spinner at the MCG, a place where Shane Warne and Lyon have had success.

"A lot of the wickets we're playing on at present are certainly more seam-friendly than spin-friendly," Smith said on Thursday.

"Last week (in Adelaide) was an anomaly; we saw some rough and we saw Nathan come in to play big-time. "It's a tricky one. You've just got to play what surface you're presented with, and this one out here looks like it's going to offer a fair bit of assistance for the seam bowlers."

Joining Lyon and captain Pat Cummins on the sidelines are Josh Inglis, with fast bowlers Jhye Richardson, Brendan Doggett and Michael Neser included. Left-handed veteran Usman Khawaja was preferred to Inglis after making 82 and

40 in the third test in Adelaide. Richardson is in contention to play his first test in more than four years after a bad run of injuries. Doggett and Neser played in the second test in Brisbane, but were left out in Adelaide when Cummins and Lyon returned. England named its team on Wednesday with the big news the loss of star bowler Jofra Archer for the rest of the series, including the fifth and final test starting January 4 in Sydney.

Australia squad: Travis Head, Jake Weatherald, Marnus Labuschagne, Steve Smith (captain), Usman Khawaja, Alex Carey, Cameron Green, Michael Neser, Mitchell Starc, Jhye Richardson, Brendan Doggett, Scott Boland.

England team: Zak Crawley, Ben Duckett, Jacob Bethell, Joe Root, Harry Brook, Ben Stokes (captain), Jamie Smith, Will Jacks, Gus Atkinson, Brydon Carse, Josh Tongue.



## India look to seal series with another dominant show against Sri Lanka

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Thiruvananthapuram

A dominant India will look to seal the five-match series with another ruthless display when they take on a low-on-confidence Sri Lanka in the third women's T20 International here on Friday.

India have been outstanding with both the bat and the ball in the first and second T20Is, registering comprehensive eight-wicket and seven-wicket wins respectively in Visakhapatnam to underline their overall dominance over Sri Lanka.

It was India's ninth win in their last 11 T20Is against the island nation, who last tasted victory against the hosts in July 2024 at Dambulla.

India boast of an enviable batting line-up, with different players stepping up in the two games. While newly-appointed Delhi Capitals captain Jemimah Rodrigues starred in the opening T20I, opener Shafali Verma finished the job in the second.

The bowling unit has been equally sharp, with the spinners calling the shots by restricting Sri Lanka to 121 for 6 and 128 for 9 in the two matches. Youngsters N Shree Charani, Vaishnavi Sharma and Kranti Gaud have shared the workload effectively, bowling with discipline and control.

India's bowling depth was on display when experienced all-rounder Deepti Sharma missed the second T20I with a mild fever and Sneha stepped up with a frugal 1 for 11 in four overs. Fielding was the lone area



of concern in the opening game, where India dropped five catches, but they showed marked improvement in the second match with three sharp run-outs. Led by Harmanpreet Kaur, India will aim to continue raising their standards as the series moves to Thiruvananthapuram, which will host the next three matches.

Sri Lanka, meanwhile, will hope that the change of venue brings a change in their fortune for a side battered by back-to-back heavy defeats. While the gulf in quality has been evident, Sri Lanka will be particularly disappointed by the manner of their batting collapses.

Asked to bat first in both matches, Sri Lanka failed to post competitive totals. They showed some promise early on but lost momentum as wickets tumbled in clusters

during the latter half of their innings. In the opening game, Vishmi Gunaratne laboured to 39 off 43 balls, while Hasini Perera and Harshitha Samarawickrama also struck under a run-a-ball, denying the innings any late acceleration.

The second T20I followed a similar script. Sri Lanka appeared on track before losing captain Chamari Athapaththu, after which they collapsed spectacularly, losing six wickets for 26 runs, including three run-outs, to finish with another sub-par total.

Their bowling, too, has lacked the penetration required to trouble India's deep batting line-up.

"We had a good power play but lost a couple of wickets, then struggled in the middle overs," Athapaththu said after the second T20I.

"Batters played too much with the horizontal bat,

which is an area for improvement. We need to score more than 150 batting first. We are trying to rotate strike, but we need to hit more boundaries."

**The squads:**

**India:** Harmanpreet Kaur (C), Smriti Mandhana (VC), Deepti Sharma, Sneha Rana, Jemimah Rodrigues, Shafali Verma, Harleen Deol, Amanjot Kaur, Arundhati Reddy, Kranti Gaud, Renuka Singh Thakur, Richa Ghosh (WK), G Kamalini (WK), N Shree Charani, Vaishnavi Sharma.

**Sri Lanka:** Chamari Athapaththu (C), Hasini Perera, Vishmi Gunaratne, Harshitha Samarawickrama, Nilakshika de Silva, Kavisha Dilhari, Imesha Dulani, Kaushini Nuthyanganra, Malsha Shehani, Inoka Ranaweera, Shashini Gimhani, Nimesha Madushani, Kawya Kavindi, Rashmika Sewwandi,

## Jaiswal: Have selectors told him where he stands in white ball cricket?

KUSHAN SARKAR  
■ Jaipur

You don't want to be Yashasvi Jaiswal these days. You would perhaps feel that you are caught in the middle of a constant state of flux that Indian cricket is, and would probably be more unsure than ever after being pigeonholed as a "one-format specialist".

And that too after being the only young cricketer in the post-Rohit Sharma-Virat Kohli generation, who has shown perfect qualities of being an all-format regular. Yet it can't be a mere coincidence that every time India has gone for a major white-ball assignment in the last two years, the rub of the green has always decided to play hide and seek with the Bhadohi-born man.

In 2024, he had to accept that Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma's experience on those tacky American and Caribbean tracks was valued more. That was the T20 format. Within another seven months, Jaiswal would first find himself in the 15 for the Champions Trophy, but then, on the insistence of head

coach Gautam Gambhir that a fourth spinner was required, he once again became disposable. That was a 50-over format.

And when Shubman Gill, perceived as India's next all-format captain, was dumped by the wayside in the 20-over format, the selectors suddenly felt that the second wicketkeeper should be an opener too, hence in comes Ishan Kishan, who smashed a 49-ball century against Haryana in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy final.

No one bothered that Jaiswal also scored a 50-ball ton against the same opponents in a chase of 230-odd only days before. And within another two and a half weeks, we will again find Jaiswal out of an Indian ODI playing eleven come January 11, despite scoring a hundred in the national team's previous game against South Africa.

This time, he will have to make way for regular ODI skipper Shubman Gill.

He will turn 24 on Sunday and has enough years to make up for the chances he

is forced to miss, but he needs to be told where he is going wrong. These are times when self-belief does take a hit. "It is unfortunate that Yashasvi is being left out time and again for no fault of his.

He has been in tremendous form across all formats of the game, and I don't know what else he has to do to get into the team," Dilip Vengsarkar, perhaps the finest chairman of

selectors in the last three decades, said when asked how he looks at it. He last played T20Is in Sri Lanka in July 2024, after which India prioritised Test cricket for the next six months, and Jaiswal was also asked to concentrate in red ball cricket.

His last five T20I scores read 93, 12, 40, 30 and 10—all while



opening the innings—and at a strike-rate of close to 200, conforming to the current team's philosophy of attack at all costs without worrying about volume of runs. "Nobody should leave a match-winner out of the team," Vengsarkar said in a forthright assessment.

Vengsarkar, who basically pushed a 19-year-old Virat Kohli into the Indian side back in 2008, however,

agreed with the current selection committee on Shubman Gill's exclusion as he feels current form does play a huge role in picking a particular cricketer. But, he is also clear in his mind who would have been his first choice, while excluding Gill.

"They are all excellent players, but I am with the selection committee when they judge players based on current form and fitness. Current form does play an important role in the context of selection.

And if you ask whom I would have picked instead of Gill, my choice would have been Jaiswal. He has proven time and again what a class performer he is and has always given the team the kind of starts required these days," said the former India skipper and a veteran of 116 Tests and 129 ODIs.

The T20 format doesn't reward absence. Rhythm is the main currency, and visibility does matter.

While others stayed in the white-ball loop, rotating through bilateral series, staying familiar to selectors, Jaiswal slipped out of sight.

## Shayan Jahangir, Jordan Cox take Dubai Capitals to play-offs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Dubai

Shayan Jahangir and Jordan Cox struck fifties to help defending champions Dubai Capitals advance to the play-offs with a six-wicket win over Sharjah Warriorz in the World ILT20.

Jahangir also impressed behind the stumps, getting dangerman Tom Kohler-Cadmore stumped-out, showcasing an all-round performance at the Dubai International Stadium on Wednesday.

Chasing 135, Dubai Capitals made light work of the target with an early

blitz by Jahangir, and an unbeaten Jordan Cox (61 not out off 50 balls; 4x6, 1x6) finishing the job with ease. Jahangir and Cox set up a partnership of 76 runs off 63 balls after Capitals lost opening batter Sediqullah Atal with just 17 on board.

It was Harmeet Singh who bowled him out, but it took the Warriorz a lifetime to find another breakthrough.

However, Sikandar Raza's over made up for the long wicket-less spells as he picked up two crucial back-to-back wickets—that of half-centurion Jahangir and Mohammad Nabi in the 14th over.







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“ वीर बाल दिवस भारतीयता की रक्षा के लिए कभी न हार मानने वाले मनोभाव का प्रतीक है। यह दिन हमें स्मरण दिलाता है कि जब वीरता की पराकाष्ठा की बात आती है तो उच्च कोई मायने नहीं रखती है। ”

- नरेन्द्र मोदी

## सदा अमर रहेगा अस्तित्व आजादी के दीवानों का



### Nation Remembers Shaheed Udham Singh

on his Birth Anniversary

December 26, 2025

“ शहीद उधम सिंह की वीरता हर भारतीय की स्मृति में अंकित है। मैं भारत के इस वीर सपूत को नमन करता हूँ। ”

- नरेन्द्र मोदी



# Mission Biogas: Mission Possible

World Biogas Association INDIA Congress 2025 calls for a transformative biogas decade

The World Biogas Association INDIA Congress 2025 took place on 3-4 December at the India Habitat Centre, New Delhi, bringing together over 250 delegates and 70 speakers from government, international organizations, industry, and academia. High-level participation included Shri Yesso Sripad Nayak, Minister of State for Renewable Energy; Mr. Pankaj Jain, Secretary, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas; Mr. Sarangi, Secretary, MNRE; Ms. Mary Burce Warlick, Deputy Executive Director, IEA; Ms. Gauri Singh, Director-General, IRENA; Mr. Tarun Kapoor, Advisor to the Prime Minister; and Dr Meenesh Shah, Chairperson, National Dairy Development Board. The Congress also featured a special address by Shri Hardeep Singh Puri, Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas.

Senior representatives from the IEA, World Bank, UNIDO, public sector undertakings, industry associations, EPC contractors, state governments (Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra), and leading academic and think tank institutions, including TERI, Chintan Research Foundation, and Amity University, actively participated in the discussions. The Pioneer, a major print media group, worked closely to promote advocacy, outreach, and networking.

KEY DISCUSSIONS

The Congress examined pathways to position India as a global hub for biogas and biomethane production, focusing on enabling policies, investment frameworks, infrastructure development, and scalable business models to convert organic waste into clean energy. Discussions emphasized biogas as a strategic pillar for energy security, climate mitigation, waste management, and the circular economy. Across 11 policy sessions, two fireside chats, two technical workshops, and seven thematic sessions, participants highlighted the cross-sectoral role of biogas in addressing decarbonization challenges, particularly in hard-to-abate sectors such as heavy industry, transport, maritime, and aviation. The plenary session on ‘Unlocking Private Financing for India’s Vibrant Biogas Sector’, chaired by Ms. Charlotte Morton OBE, CEO, WBA, discussed investment opportunities, focusing on mobilizing private equity, blended finance, and guarantees to scale India’s CBG ecosystem. The plenary session on ‘Biogas for Decarbonising Maritime, Aviation, and Transport Sectors’, chaired by Dr C V Raman, explored biomethane as part of these transition pathways. The Congress explored mechanisms to unlock blended finance, including risk-sharing instruments, guarantees, and insurance solutions. Strong emphasis was placed on developing robust standards,



“ Since India is a major natural gas importer, CBG offers a path towards energy security and sustainability. Currently, India has nearly 900 commercial biogas plants and over 5 million small-scale ones, while more than 1,000 new CBG plants are in the pipeline, supported by government schemes such as SATAT and blending obligations. – Hardeep Singh Puri, Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas

certification and compliance frameworks, lifecycle assessment (LCA) methodologies, and integrating biogas value chains into voluntary and compliance carbon markets. Participants also underscored the need for policy harmonization across ministries, increased public-private partnerships, and strengthened North-South and South-South cooperation to accelerate deployment at scale.

KEY MESSAGES

A clear call emerged to move from policy dialogue to decisive implementation of long-term policies, regulatory framework, and associated infrastructure. Delegates stressed the importance of breakthrough technologies, strengthened PPP models, women’s empowerment, green job creation, and sustained capacity-building at national and local levels. Ensuring a reliable feedstock supply and expanding markets for digestate and fermented organic manure (FOM) were identified as critical to enhancing project bankability and long-term financial viability.

The main recommendations endorsed by participants at the Congress included, among others, the following:

- Supporting a National Mission on Biogas
- Developing a National Biogas Roadmap
- Establishing a National Fund for Biogas
- Rolling out the #MakingBiogasHappen Programme across all key states
- Promoting Anaerobic Digestion (AD) Standards and Certification, and

- Strengthening industry engagement and building local capacity.

CONCLUSION

Bringing the two days to a close, the WBA INDIA Congress 2025 reaffirmed that biogas is more than an energy solution; it is a transformative catalyst for sustainability, waste management, economic growth, and rural prosperity in India. The discussions signaled India’s readiness to lead globally in clean energy solutions, charting a clear path for the country’s biogas decade. Participants at the Congress noted that the building blocks for scaling up India’s biogas sector are already in place. India has ample feedstock, supporting gas infrastructure, strong industrial demand, and a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem. What is needed is a cohesive policy and regulatory framework to coordinate policy, capital, infrastructure, human skills, and markets on scale.

The key outcomes of the Congress, as endorsed by all participants, included, among others, launching the National Mission on Biogas, developing the National Biogas Roadmap, establishing the National Fund for Biogas, rolling out the #MakingBiogasHappen Programme in all states, building local communities, and promoting AD Standards and Certifications for all CBG plants in India. The Congress also focuses on decarbonizing hard-to-abate sectors such as heavy industry, transport, maritime, and aviation and to explore possibilities for establishing a National Biogas Fund to provide blended financing, risk guarantees, and insurance coverage. Congress also advocated to promote public-private partnerships, north-south



“ India stands uniquely positioned in the global landscape with enormous volumes of agricultural residues, livestock waste, municipal solid waste and industrial organic waste. – Shripad Yesso Naik, Minister of State, Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, Government of India

and south-south cooperation, alliances, and consortia.

The Congress gave a clarion call that if India is serious about becoming a global leader in clean energy while addressing its waste and climate issues, a National Biogas Mission is now essential. It is the logical

next step, and the time to act is now. The message from New Delhi was unequivocal: if India is serious about global clean energy leadership while addressing waste, climate, and development priorities, a National Biogas Mission is no longer optional—it is imperative.



(L-R) Shishir Priyadarshi, President, Chintan Research Foundation; Prashant Tiwari, from The Pioneer Group; Charlotte Morton OBE, Chief Executive Officer, World Biogas Association; Dr Meenesh Shah, Chairman, National Dairy Development Board (NDDB); Dr Pradeep Monga, Senior Advisor & Policy Director, World Biogas Association; Rajesh Kumar, Regional Head, NDDB; Dr Dilip Kumar Khare, Technical Advisor, World Biogas Association. An MoU was signed between World Biogas Association (WBA) and National Dairy Development Board (NDDB). This MoU strengthens India’s biogas ecosystem by combining global best practices with NDDB’s nationwide dairy network to scale sustainable CBG and waste-to-wealth solutions.



Pankaj Jain, Secretary, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Government of India, addressing the WBA India Congress 2025



(L-R) Dr Pradeep Monga, Senior Advisor & Policy Director, WBA; Ms Charlotte Morton OBE, Chief Executive Officer, WBA; Shripad Yesso Naik, Union Minister of State, Ministry of New & Renewable Energy, and, Ministry of Power, Government of India; Prashant Tiwari, representing The Pioneer, at the WBA India Congress 2025



(L-R) Charlotte Morton OBE, Chief Executive Officer, World Biogas Association; Rajiv Kumar, Chairman, Pahle India Foundation & Former Vice Chairman, NITI Aayog; Kushan Mitra, Printer and Publisher, The Pioneer

# National Biogas Roadmap for India

The World Biogas Association INDIA Congress 2025, held on December 3–4 in New Delhi, delivered a clear, data-rich verdict on India’s renewable gas path: the country’s goal to become a global biomethane leader can only be achieved through a decisive shift toward research-driven innovation, unified regulatory standards, and top-tier operational skills. Over two days of intense policy and technical sessions, international experts, researchers, and policymakers conveyed a nuanced yet strong message that India has the biomass, the market, and the urgency. Still, it lacks the technical and financial depth needed for global leadership.

## A SECTOR HELD BACK BY FRAGMENTATION

The opening sessions highlighted a systemic policy challenge: India’s biogas ecosystem is hindered by inconsistent regulations and fragmented governance. Speakers emphasized that the country urgently needs a unified national biogas regulatory framework to reduce fragmentation and ensure long-term policy stability. WBA’s flagship #MakingBiogasHappen program is created to achieve this objective. A workshop on the #MakingBiogasHappen Global Biogas Regulatory Framework offers a solution to eliminate these divisions and foster an environment conducive to sector growth. **“Without an integrated policy architecture for the biogas sector, India will continue to build pilots, not momentum.”**

Experts compared India to success stories like Denmark and Germany, where consistent long-term mandates for renewable gas created predictable markets and reduced investment risks. The Congress warned that unless India builds similar coherence, its large feedstock advantage might not lead to global competitiveness.

## RAPID GLOBAL ADVANCES: INDIA’S BIOGAS SECTOR MUST CATCH UP

A recurring theme throughout the Congress was the technological revolution transforming the global biomethane industry. Presenters highlighted advancements that have improved efficiency and commercial viability. Next-generation upgrading systems now routinely reach 99.5 percent biomethane purity with minimal methane slip, greatly surpassing the PSA-based systems



commonly used in India. Liquefied Biogas (LBG) was identified as a game-changer, providing cost-effective transportation that doesn’t rely on pipelines—an important advantage for India, where pipeline infrastructure is still uneven. Hybrid biogas plants capable of producing biomethane, rDME, hydrogen, and bio-LPG were emphasized as the future of integrated biorefineries. As one speaker noted, “Next-generation technologies now enable high-purity biomethane and diversified fuel production. Hence, India must invest aggressively in localizing and adapting these systems.” **“If India wants to lead in biogas/biomethane, it must first lead in biogas/biomethane policy and technology innovations.”**

## FEEDSTOCK: INDIA’S GREATEST STRENGTH AND WEAKEST LINK

Despite abundant biomass, India faces challenges in ensuring a consistent, high-quality feedstock supply round the year. The Congress repeatedly highlighted feedstock accessibility, not just availability, as the country’s main structural obstacle. Fragmented farmer networks, moisture variability, transportation issues, and inadequate storage lower plant reliability.

Technical experts explained that AI-enabled predictive models, GPS-linked logistics, satellite imagery, and blockchain traceability are becoming indispensable globally for stabilising feedstock flows. **“India has a huge stock of biomass, but without reliable supply chains, it does not yet have the feedstock required to meet the year round requirements of the biogas plants.”**

## INDIA’S UNTAPPED DIGESTATE POTENTIAL

One of the most important insights from

the Congress was the economic and environmental potential of digestate/ FOM often overlooked despite making up 85 to 90 percent of a biogas plant’s output. The sessions showed how biotechnology can raise digestate from an underused by-product to a high-value agricultural resource. **“Digestate or FOM generally accounts for 85 to 90% of the total mass produced from anaerobic digestion, a fact well-supported by global literature, engineering mass-balance studies, and biogas plant operational data. Its nutrient-rich makeup makes it one of the most valuable yet underused parts of the biogas value chain, providing significant economic and environmental advantages when properly processed and marketed.”**

However, India’s heavy dependence on subsidized urea still limits its adoption. The Congress appreciated the inclusion of FOM and LFOM in the Fertilizer Control Order but pointed out that market development, farmer education, and quality testing remain inadequate. Experts urged for a national digestate strategy that views it as a key revenue source rather than an operational burden. **“Digestate/FOM is India’s biggest untapped wealth : 90% of the output should not be 0% of the strategy.”**

## BIO METHANE FOR INDUSTRIAL DECARBONISATION

The Congress highlighted that industrial fuel switching is one of the fastest and most scalable pathways to biomethane adoption. Industries in Punjab and Haryana have already demonstrated successful transitions from LPG, furnace oil, and diesel to CBG through burner modifications and flow-control adjustments. Presenters

noted strong central support through Gobardhan subsidies, dedicated pipeline schemes, and long-term OMC offtake contracts. Yet the conversation repeatedly returned to two unresolved issues: pricing clarity and supply reliability. Experts argued that WBA’s role in establishing standardized biomethane quality protocols, along with technical training for industrial operators. **“Decarbonising industry is not a technological challenge anymore, it is also a standard and certification challenge.”**

## BIO METHANE FOR DECARBONISING HARD-TO-ABATE INDUSTRIAL SECTORS

Biomethane has become a practical pathway for decarbonizing India’s steel, cement, chemical, and power sectors. Early industrial conversions have shown that CBG can reliably replace LPG, FO, and diesel when supported by strong supply chains and clear pricing frameworks. The panel highlighted that expanding pipelines, establishing industrial-grade standards, and valorizing digestate will be key to scaling adoption across hard-to-abate clusters. **“Biomethane is India’s most immediately deployable fuel for deep industrial decarbonisation.”**

**“Biomethane is no longer an experimental fuel. It is the most practical decarbonisation pathway for India’s hardest-to-abate industries.”**

## WBA’S ADCS AND GBRF

One of the Congress’s most significant contributions was a workshop presenting the Anaerobic Digestion Certification Scheme (ADCS) International, which is globally recognized for enhancing operational excellence, safety, and monitoring discipline. The scheme’s 11 modules cover everything from engineering documentation and SOP management to digester health, Health & Safety compliance, LDAR routines, environmental safeguards, and workforce skill development. For India, ADCS provides a blueprint to raise the national technical standard. When combined with traceability and carbon intensity tracking, WBA’s #MakingBiogasHappen program is positioned as an essential enabler for India’s entry into biomethane markets. **“Standards and Certification will unlock scale, safety, health, and investor confidence in the Biogas Sector”.**

## INDIA’S MOST URGENT GAP: A NATIONAL BIOGAS R&D HUB

The Congress ended with a clear and strong consensus: India’s future in biogas depends on creating a well-funded, coordinated, national R&D level institutional infrastructure. Experts noted that current research groups, whether at IITs, Kapurthala labs, or private facilities, operate in isolation, lacking coordination and practical integration. Equally concerning is the lack of laboratory testing capacity and data-driven monitoring, which weakens plant reliability and investment prospects. The Congress strongly advocated the establishment of a National Biogas R&D Hub bringing together academia, industry, financiers, and state governments to build an innovation corridor for biomethane technology, digestate biotechnology, feedstock digitalisation, and next-generation upgrading systems. **“India has the feedstock, the market demand, and the motivation. What it needs now is the technical innovation and R & D ecosystem, targeted financing, policy incentives, and local human resources to operate the plants efficiently and productively.”**

## A TRANSFORMATIVE DECADE OF BIOGAS AHEAD

As the World Biogas Association INDIA Congress 2025 concluded, one message echoed throughout the sessions: India’s biogas sector is ready for a big transformation, but its path will be shaped not only by policy announcements but also by technical rigor, global standards, digital integration, human skills, and ongoing innovation. The coming decade for biogas is not just about growth, it is a strategic necessity for energy security, climate action, rural development, waste management, industrial decarbonization, and circular economy. If India adopts standards, certification, research, and global alignment with the enthusiasm along with a strong public infrastructure, it can become one of the world’s most influential biogas gas markets. The Congress established the solid foundations; now, India’s policymakers, industries, innovators, and research institutions need to come together and take the next step to create a Transformative Biogas Decade in the years ahead.

# Why India Needs a National Biogas Roadmap?

Worldwide, humans directly or indirectly produce over 105 billion tonnes of organic wastes each year, which includes food waste, food and beverage processing waste, animal manures and slurries, crop residues, and human sewage. If left untreated, these wastes release methane as they decompose, which is 86 times more potent as a greenhouse gas than CO<sub>2</sub> during its first 20 years. This significantly contributes to climate change. When adequately treated, these organic ‘wastes’ could help meet half of the Global Methane Pledge, reduce global greenhouse gas emissions by 11%, and reduce global warming by 0.1 degrees. India has enormous biogas potential due to its status as the world’s most populous country and its agricultural strength. The available feedstock volumes suggest that approximately 62 MMT of bioCNG can be produced, which would sufficiently meet over 9% of India’s current energy demand.

## BIOGAS: AN IMPERATIVE FOR INDIA

India stands at a crucial crossroads concerning its energy and food security, waste management, and natural resource management. As the quality of life improves, India’s energy demand is projected to escalate from approximately 11,500 TWh to around 26,000 TWh by 2050. However, this increasing demand brings significant challenges, including energy and food security, environmental degradation, waste generation, and a heavy reliance on imported fossil fuels. In this context, investing in biogas represents a strategic step for India, as it provides an extraordinary economic opportunity for the country to become a world leader in this sector. The biogas sector would not only create over 1 million new jobs and generate 9% of India’s

energy demand, thereby improving its energy security, but it would also save \$27 billion in LNG imports.

## NATIONAL POLICIES

Multiple ministries, departments, and agencies are involved in promoting biogas at both national and state levels in India. The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, along with the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers, have enacted national policies and initiated several programs to scale up the biogas industry in the country. Some innovative national biogas programs include SATAT; Waste-to-Wealth plants under the GOBARDHAN Scheme; the National Biogas and Manure Management Programme; the Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban/Rural); the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation; and the National Biofuel Policy 2018-.

## RATIONALE

Existing policies and incentives have not catalyzed the desired growth in India’s biogas sector. Although the



government has initiated several innovative programs, targeted policies, and financial incentives, the biogas sector in India has not expanded or performed as expected. It is increasingly evident that the current national policy ecosystem and institutional framework are inadequate to meet the target of establishing 5,000 large-scale biogas plants by 2030, with only 94 biogas plants commissioned so far. The challenge remains to achieve the national goal of safely, commercially, and professionally delivering 5,000 large-scale biogas plants in just over five years. Developing a comprehensive biogas roadmap at the national level would represent a concrete step forward in harnessing the immense potential of biogas by 2030.

## PROPOSAL

The national biogas roadmap will envisage, among others, the following key elements:

- Aligning interests of multiple stakeholders across relevant ministries, departments, agencies, institutions, and sectors
- Developing a comprehensive policy regulatory framework covering all aspects

- Setting up standards and certification schemes to ensure high-performing biogas plants
- Highlighting financial incentives, investment and funding opportunities, and innovative financial tools to mitigate financial risks
- Analyzing life cycle assessment of the entire biogas supply chain and linking to emerging carbon markets
- Supporting a capacity-building programme to train the necessary workforce rapidly
- Modelling the supply chain requirements to ensure investment in the required supply chains
- Proposing robust Data and R & D strategies

## LEAD MINISTRY

The national biogas roadmap will be led by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas and facilitated by the WBA. Other key partner ministries include Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Ministry of Agriculture, Department of Fisheries, and Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers at the national level, along with the relevant nodal departments and agencies at the state level.



Maruti Suzuki, India’s largest carmaker,

is integrating biogas into its carbon-neutral strategy through multiple initiatives. The company has launched a pilot biogas plant at its Manesar facility, using in-house food waste and Napier grass to power operations under a zero-discharge model. Backed by a ₹450-crore investment in renewable energy over three years, Maruti Suzuki is also partnering with NDDB and dairy cooperatives like Banas Dairy to set up compressed biogas plants, converting cow dung into clean fuel for CNG vehicles.



in CO<sub>2</sub> solutions, the company delivers high-efficiency systems for Oil & Gas, Power, Cement, Steel and other hard-to-abate sectors. GAS LAB Asia supports industries in achieving Net-Zero goals, backed by longstanding partnerships with Solvay Vishnu, Assam Petrochemicals and National Fertilizers Ltd, and an operational footprint across more than 25 countries.



CEID Consultants & Engineering Pvt Ltd is a leader in India’s waste-to-energy transition, specialising in turnkey execution of Compressed Biogas (CBG) facilities. An MoPNG-approved technology provider, CEID delivers indigenous, high-efficiency process solutions aligned with SATAT and circular economy goals. With over 30 CBG plants commissioned and 40 under execution, CEID has pioneered milestones including India’s first CBG bottling plant and Asia’s largest multi-feedstock CBG facility.

# Key insights and takeaways: WBA India Congress 2025



Engaged delegates listen intently to insightful discussions at the Policy and Leadership Track sessions during the World Biogas Association's India Congress 2025, as industry leaders and policymakers shared perspectives on shaping India's biogas future

## CBGS - A TIMELY PARADIGM SHIFT FOR INDIA

- With only 2% of the world's 105 billion tonnes of annual organic waste currently utilised for energy, the biogas sector is a sleeping giant. Scaling this technology could single-handedly deliver half of the 2030 methane-reduction goals and generate 15 million green jobs, creating a cornerstone for climate-resilient development
- India holds 62 MMT biogas potential-enough to meet ~9% of national energy demand and significantly advance methane-reduction goals.
- Rapid scale-up underway: 175 CBG plants operational, 800 under construction, and 400 retail outlets established nationwide.
- Biogas offers a triple benefit of energy security, climate mitigation, and rural circular-economy growth, especially through dairy-linked models.
- Integrated biogas + bio-fertiliser value chains and unified regulatory frameworks are essential for commercial viability and sectoral acceleration.
- Strong alignment across WBA, NDDB, MOPNG, IEA, IRENA positions India to become one of the world's fastest-growing biogas markets.



(L-R) Ashish Kumar, Chief Executive Officer, VERBIO India; Jagjeet Sareen, India-Head, Dalberg Advisors; Dr Pradeep Monga, Senior Advisor & Policy Director, World Biogas Association; Col. Rohit Dev, Founder, Reville Energy; Mahesh Girdhar, Director & Chief Executive Officer, Ever Enviro Resource Private Limited

## DELIVERING ON INDIA'S BIOGAS VISION MAKING BIOGAS HAPPEN PROGRAMME

- Top-down implementation framework with specific, measurable targets and economically viable models— addressing delayed CBG cost recovery and ensuring seamless access to carbon markets.
- A partial risk-guarantee mechanism, integrated with carbon markets, is considered essential. Under the National Manufacturing Mission 2025, biogas can benefit from emerging technologies such as blockchain traceability systems and expansion of green-skills employment.
- India must accelerate home-grown biogas technologies, prioritizing rural socio-economic upliftment, biomass mapping at the regional level, storage infrastructure, and technological self-reliance with economic viability while investors seek predictable revenue streams, India must strengthen CBG equity and market confidence.
- Carbon markets must transition from purely voluntary to partially mandatory frameworks. Streamlined taxation, reduced fiscal burdens, and harmonized debt-financing norms are needed to avoid administrative bottlenecks.



(L-R) Charlotte Morton OBE, Chief Executive Officer, World Biogas Association (WBA); Ashu Shinghal, MD, Mahanagar Gas; Satyan Kumar, CEO, ONGC Green

## CITY GAS TO GREEN GAS – ROADMAP FOR A BIOMETHANE FUTURE

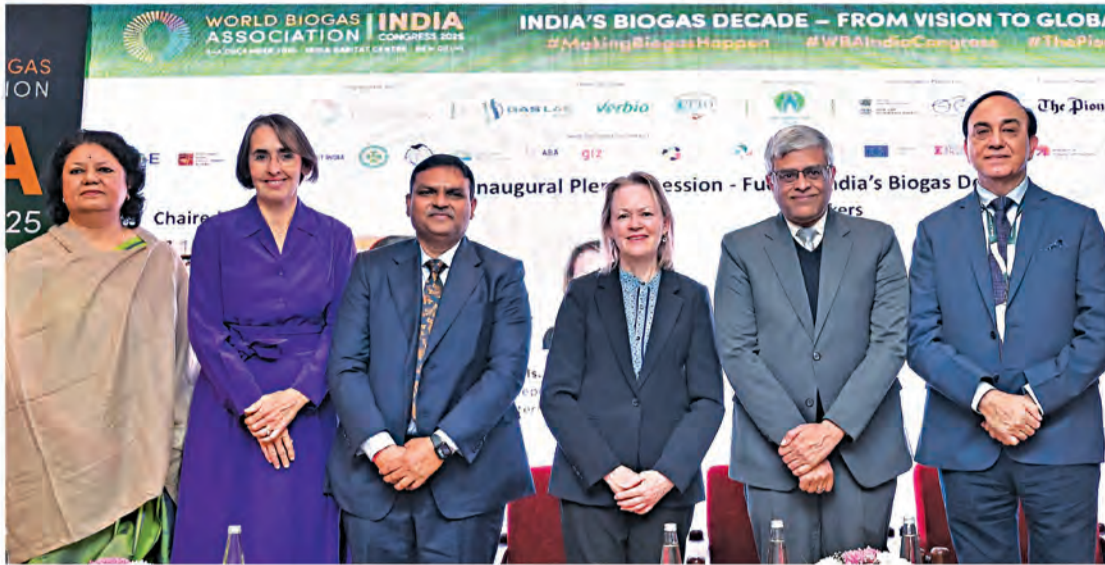
- The marine sector offers significant demand for green ammonia, clean fuels, and biogas, although challenges remain around developing viable refuelling infrastructure and feasibility models.
- Seasonal availability of agro-waste, variability in project economics, poc segregation of non-agro waste, and the need for initial premium pricing (with gradual, market-driven correction) were highlighted as key constraints.

**verbio**

Verbio India Private Limited, a wholly owned subsidiary of Germany's Verbio AG, is a pioneer in India's biogas sector. Its flagship Leharagaga plant in Punjab—Asia's largest straw-to-biomethane facility—processes 100,000 tonnes of paddy straw annually to produce BioCNG and bio-manure. Aligned with the SATAT scheme, the project addresses stubble burning, air pollution and energy security.

**MAHANAGAR GAS**

Mahanagar Gas Limited (MGL), established in 1995 with GAIL (India) Ltd as promoter, is a leading natural gas distributor in India. A pioneer of Mumbai's gas network, MGL supplies PNG and CNG to over 41 lakh consumers. The company delivers safe, efficient and reliable energy through a robust, SAP-enabled distribution system, while remaining environment-focused.



(L-R) Gauri Singh, Deputy Director General, International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA); Charlotte Morton OBE, Chief Executive Officer, World Biogas Association (WBA); Dr Meenesh Shah, Chairperson, National Dairy Development Board (NDDB); Mary Bruce Warlick, Deputy Executive Director, International Energy Agency (IEA); Pankaj Jain, Secretary, MoPNG, Government of India; Dr Pradeep Monga, Senior Advisor & Policy Director, World Biogas Association

## FUELLING INDIA'S BIOGAS DECADE

- India's mandate for CBG blending under SATAT remains pivotal, with the dairy sector projected to drive expansion as NDDB's Biogas Board scales up to 1,000 units per day. Bio mitigation alone could reduce methane emissions by up to 17%.
- The national biogas vision positions the dairy sector as the primary growth engine, leveraging 650 million tonnes of manure annually, with the potential to supply nearly 40% of India's fertiliser requirement.
- Support and blended financing models particularly via partnerships with multilateral development banks (MDBs)— are critical for accelerating plant deployment and ensuring commercial viability. The need for policy and blended finance mechanisms was further underlined, emphasising improved cost recovery and stable revenue frameworks.
- Advanced biogas ecosystems in Denmark, Germany, and Brazil offer relevant lessons; however, India's unique advantage does not lie in backyard but in centralised biogas systems.



(L-R) Sanjay Ganjoo, Director General, Indian Federation of Green Energy; Dr Shantanu Gupta, Director -Technical, Global Biofuels Alliance (GBA); Dr Vibha Dhawan, Director General, The Energy Resource Institute (TERI); Atul Kharate, Chief Operating Officer, Indian Oil Adani Venture; Ashish Chutani, National Policy Head, Maruti Suzuki India Ltd; Gaurav Kedia, Chairman, Indian Biogas Association (IBA)

## INDIA'S LEADERSHIP IN DELIVERING ON THE GLOBAL BIOGAS AGENDA

- CBG has transformative potential for clean cooking, with eventual substitution of LP Social-energy modelling shows India ranking third globally on the hunger-energy index, highlighting the urgency of affordable clean energy access.
- Sector leaders highlighted the need for SATAT 2.0, infrastructure optimisation, improved capex frameworks, enhanced R&D, and region-specific technological customisation.
- The inherent value of CBG is widely acknowledged; while prices may remain strong initially, they are expected to decline over time— provided there is a robust, predictable price-discovery mechanism.
- Existing policy gaps persist, but strong intent and progress are visible—for instance, Maruti Suzuki incorporating CBG into its mobility ecosystem.
- From technical and policy standpoints, support schemes must not rely solely on average revenue prices. Innovative mechanisms—such as executive cess (CES) or gra based levies—can help reduce the delta burden. Crucially, funding must be performance-linked to ensure public expenditure efficiency.



(L-R) Dr Pradeep Monga, Senior Advisor & Policy Director, World Biogas Association, Charlotte Morton OBE, Chief Executive Officer, WBA, Dr Suresh Chandra Sharma, Former Officer on Special Duty, Energy and Climate Change, Niti Aayog, Government of India; Dr Anil Jain, Chairperson, Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB); Ajay Shukla, Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh New and Renewable Energy Department

## STATE & SECTORAL ACTION PLANS, POLICIES & STANDARDS

- A dedicated National Biofuel Mission must define clear mandates, functions, and achievable targets.
- Biogas holds strong integration potential within the broader natural gas ecosystem, positioning itself as a credible, clean alternative to fossil fuels.
- Given the differences between central and state operational frameworks, establishing a national-state coordination committee could significantly enhance target achievement and policy alignment.

**EVER ENVIRO**

Meaningful CBG partnerships rely on proven operations, as shown by Ever Enviro's PPP-led plants. Urban projects need strong ULB alignment for MSW, while rural success depends on farmer-led biomass aggregation. Scaling requires viability gap funding, streamlined offtake for CBG and FoM, and financing frameworks tailored to biogas infrastructure.

**IndianOil Adani Ventures**

IAVL, a 50:50 joint venture focused on midstream infrastructure, operates in biogas through its subsidiary, IAV Biogas Private Limited. It runs a CBG plant in Namakkal, Tamil Nadu, converting chicken litter and agro-waste into BioCNG and organic manure. Aligned with the SATAT scheme, IAVL also provides biogas plant design, build and operations services.

# Key insights and takeaways: WBA India Congress 2025



(L-R) Charlotte Morton OBE, Chief Executive Officer, World Biogas Association; Dr Kalpesh Kumar, Chief Executive Officer, REFEX- Chennai; Dr N P Singh, Advisor, United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) India; Shishir Priyadarshi, President, Chintan Research Foundation; Shashi Shekhar, Former Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), Government of India; Dr Kiran Dighavkar, Deputy Municipal Commissioner Mumbai; Dr Pradeep Monga, Senior Advisor & Policy Director, World Biogas Association

## CITIES DRIVING THE CBG REVOLUTION

- Sustainable urban biogas ecosystems require robust PPP and private-private partnerships, traceable value chains, advanced segregation infrastructure, and incentives for waste segregation and processing.
- Technologies from other countries cannot be directly replicated due to India's unique waste characteristics- differences in moisture content, calorific value, and segregation efficiency.
- Strong government intervention is essential- particularly to ensure ease of doing business and reduce operational costs for market-led biogas enterprises.



(L-R) Charlotte Morton OBE Chief Executive Officer, World Biogas Association (WBA), Santosh Kumar Sarangi, Secretary, Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, Government of India

## STRATEGIC VISION FOR BIOGAS & BIOMETHANE - MARGIN TO MAINSTREAM (SPEAKERS FIRESIDE)

- India targets 5% CBG injection into city gas networks by 2027-28, modelled on the ethanol success framework. MNRE will support plant setup, while GAIL/CGD networks ensure offtake. Investors seek clarity on feedstock security, bid discounting norms, and interest subvention.
- A national feedstock survey, which shows over 220 million tonnes of agricultural residues (likely an underestimate), is being expanded into geographic cluster maps. FPOs and cooperatives will anchor long-term aggregation, with one-year inventory norms to enhance plant viability.
- Current subsidy schemes (MBOD+ gas producer subsidies) create perverse incentives, blocking entrepreneurial aggregation. A revised framework must ensure equal eligibility for all entities delivering feedstock or collection services.
- India reports 40,000 tons of biomethane from 140 MOPNG plants, against a target of 17 million tonnes, with no production data from bag digesters. A single source of truth for national biogas/CBG data will be established for 5-10 year planning.
- Agriculture, Cooperation, and Panchayats ministries will collaborate on feedstock chains and milk cooperative-linked distribution. An indigenous manufacturing ecosystem (standards + approved lists) will reduce equipment costs, following the solar-sector template.



(L-R) Rohit Kumar, Secretary General, Carbon Markets Association of India (CMAI); Jai Kumar Gaurav, Senior Advisor, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ); Saumya Gadnaik, Country Representative, Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI), India; Kevin Houston, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Carbon Masters; Zerín Osho, Director, India Programme, Institute for Governance & Sustainability Development

## CARBON MARKETS - INNOVATION & INTEGRATION

- India's carbon markets must evolve to support integrated trading platforms where multiple gases can be priced together-enabled through frameworks such as Radiative Forcing Accounting (RFA). The discussion also linked opportunities in green ammonia, marine decarbonisation, and national-level coordination.
- India's negotiating position in global carbon markets may weaken if the country cannot expand its portfolio of low-carbon export goods. Industries may hesitate to procure biogas without assured carbon credit benefits-making strong credit mechanisms indispensable.
- Biogas initiatives must be aligned with PM-PRANAM, leveraging the dual benefits of meeting energy demand and reducing chemical fertiliser dependency through organic inputs-supporting soil restoration and carbon regulatory compliance.



(L-R) Charlotte Morton OBE, Chief Executive Officer, WBA; Dr Peter Zeniewski, Senior Energy Analyst, International Energy Agency (IEA); Thierry Michel Rene Martin, Senior Urban Development Specialist, World Bank; Dr YB Ramakrishna, Senior Vice President, IFGE; Dr Pradeep Monga, Senior Advisor & Policy Director, WBA

## BIOGAS BEYOND BORDERS: GLOBAL DIALOGUE

- India can produce 100 billion cubic metres of biogas annually, but scaling is hampered by fragmented feedstock supply chains, weak segregation, and a lack of farmer-industry linkage, requiring entrepreneurs and startups to build the collection ecosystem that ethanol never had to solve.
- Indian CBG prices (1,485/mmBtu) are far below global levels, banks demand 50% equity, and long-term offtake contracts-critical for ethanol scale-up are largely absent, leaving small developers unbankable.
- Three major revenue streams remain uncaptured: bio-digestate, CO<sub>2</sub>, and carbon credits; 90 MMT of slurry from future plants lacks processing, storage, and state-certified bio-fertiliser markets despite proven 20% yield gains and large fertiliser subsidy-saving potential.
- Policy progress is significant, yet key gaps persist: inter-ministry coordination, payment security for municipal offtake, and financing solutions for 40M potential household biogas systems (current 2030 target too conservative).
- Next steps include soil health trials, World Bank credit-enhancement pilots, harmonised certifications, and exploring a revolving fund using 31.2 lakh crore LPG subsidy savings to finance household clusters with centralised slurry processing.
- Global best practices highlight systems thinking-centralised collection, storage technologies, cooperative models-and India must adapt these to its smallholder context to unlock biogas as a mainstream clean-energy and rural development engine.

## TECHNICAL SESSIONS: FROM VISION TO IMPLEMENTATION



(L-R) Flávio Ascenco, Senior Technical Lead, World Biogas Association; Dr Sarah Letsinger, MBH Policy Lead, World Biogas Association; Dr Dilip Kumar Khare, Technical Advisor, World Biogas Association

For the first time, the Congress hosted a dedicated technical room, designed to move beyond discussion and focus on actionable solutions for making biogas happen.

- GBRF Workshop
- Sustainable Fuels of the Future - Biomethane, rDME, BioLPG and Hydrogen
- Social and Economic Impacts of Biogas Industry
- Accelerating Research & Development, Innovation, and Sustainability through Public-Private Partnerships
- Biomethane for decarbonizing Hard-to-Abate

### Industrial Sectors

- Workshop on the ADCS International
- Feedstock Management : AI and Supply Chain Tools
- Digestate Valorisation and Biotechnology
- Policy alignment and implementation, less talk and more action...
- Breakthrough sustainable technologies that will shape the future and provide a bright future on the Biogas sector and consider Integration of the Public Private Partnerships
- Empowering Women and creating a more diverse industry are essential for a strong

### biogas industry

- Feedstock guarantee and Digestate usage considerations to ensure uptake of the sector, what works, who will do it, how to automate it and embed it in AI technology
- Promoting industry standards through ADCS International will ensure that the People, Planet and Profit are at the heart of sector operations.
- Policies, regulations, and engagement are needed to develop digestate/FOM market, which is seen as essential for financial viability of Biogas Industry.

# “Biogas Will Be the Next Rural Energy Revolution”

An in-depth conversation with Dr Meenesh Shah, Chairman, National Dairy Development Board (NDDB), on the sidelines of the World Biogas Association Annual Meet (India Congress 2025) in New Delhi

## What is NDDB's overarching vision for the country?

NDDB's vision is rooted in empowering the small and marginal dairy farmer, who forms the backbone of the rural economy. We seek to build a nation where farmers achieve sustainable prosperity through cooperative-led, technology-driven growth. At its core, the vision is about creating a self-reliant dairy sector that delivers nutritional security, rural empowerment, and environmentally responsible development. Our model is designed to ensure that prosperity flows not only to markets but reaches the grassroots where it matters most.

**Biogas has emerged as a major theme at this year's global meet. How do you see NDDB's role in scaling up biogas across India?**  
NDDB sees biogas as a natural extension of our dairy development mission. We play a pivotal role in India's biogas ecosystem by connecting dairy

cooperatives, rural households, gaushalas, and milk producers into an integrated waste-to-energy chain. Our approach ensures that renewable energy and dairy-sector development go hand in hand. Biogas is no longer just a clean fuel—it is becoming an economic opportunity, a climate solution, and a supplementary source of income for millions of rural families.

## One of NDDB's flagship efforts is the Manure Management Initiative. How does this programme work on the ground?

The Manure Management Initiative (MMI) is built on a simple yet transformative idea: cattle dung is not waste—it is a valuable resource. Under MMI, we promote the scientific collection



Dr Meenesh Shah, Chairman, NDDB

of dung, establish household, community and cooperative-run biogas plants, and ensure the production of high-quality bio-slurry and organic manure. Importantly, it creates an additional revenue stream for farmers, who are paid for the dung they supply. What MMI really does is convert dairy waste into a high-value circular economy product that supports energy, agriculture and livelihoods simultaneously.

**NDDB is also involved in larger biogas and Bio-CNG plants. What does that landscape look like?**  
NDDB facilitates biogas plants at multiple scales. At the village level, we help set up small digesters for households and milk producers.

At the cooperative level, we support medium-sized plants run by milk unions or federations. At the commercial level, we enable large Bio-CNG/CBG units under the SATAT programme, focusing on transport-grade CNG and bulk thermal energy. These plants supply clean cooking fuel, clean mobility fuel, and high-quality organic fertilizer. We aim to build a fully integrated ecosystem where every unit of dung and every litre of slurry is productively utilised.

## How are dairy cooperatives being reimagined as hubs for the biogas economy?

cooperative model lies at the heart of NDDB's strategy. Milk societies are being transformed into centres where farmers can supply dung, receive payments, access biogas or buy organic slurry. Biogas collection, distribution and slurry marketing are all integrated with the existing milk procurement network. This approach keeps the value addition within

the village and ensures that the energy economy is owned by the community. It creates a powerful incentive structure where both farmers and cooperatives benefit financially.

## What is the nature of NDDB's collaboration with government schemes like SATAT and GOBAR-Dhan?

NDDB works in close coordination with the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, the Department of Animal Husbandry, and state governments. Our collaborations help align policy frameworks, secure feedstock, establish financial viability and ensure market linkages for compressed biogas. Such inter-agency cooperation is vital for scaling up the biogas sector nationally. Together, we are creating an enabling environment where renewable energy, climate action and rural development reinforce each other.