



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 Sonipat (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.

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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.

Kiran Bedi seeks public participation to protect air quality

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi



should inform the municipal corporator, the police control room in case of traffic issues or the officers of the Pollution Control Committee," she said.

The retired bureaucrat posted that citizens should "text or WhatsApp them so that responsibility is fixed at the local level", adding that elected and appointed representatives must

take charge of their respective areas.

Calling for a system to be put in place even before curbs are eased, Bedi said, "A joint control room involving citizens, RWAs and pollution control officials can coordinate with municipal corporators, MLAs and MPs so that everyone takes responsibility for their area."

In a video message posted on X, Bedi said, "It is time to

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

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 (DPCC) 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.

PUBLIC NOTICE
Known to all that my Client Mr. Shashi Chaudhary & Sh. Pradeep Kumar owner of Plot No. 38, Area 47 Sq. Yds. Khasra No. 12/15, 27/18 Enclave, Mohan Garden, Utam Nagar, New Delhi-110059, and My Client purchase property from Sh. Sudhakar Gopal, GPA, ATS & Will dated 13.08.2025, now My Client wants to sell aforesaid property. And It is informed that an deal with said documents by any person except my said client and said person regarding a property, shall be deemed 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 Khasra No. 16/25/1, Virsa Enclave, Utam Nagar, New Delhi-110059, and My Client purchase property from Sh. Sukhdev Gopal, GPA, ATS & 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 person regarding a property, shall be deemed 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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PUBLIC NOTICE
Known to all that my Client Sh. Arvind Kapoor both residents of Shop No. 15, Ambikapur Market, Opposite Block B-1, Paghbir Nagar, Tagore Garden, New Delhi-110027, have severed all relations with their son Shri Khilesh Kapoor due to personal and family reasons. Accordingly, Shri Khilesh 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 Khilesh 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.

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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 govern-

ment, MLAs, litterateurs,

poets and poetry enthu-

siasts from across the country.

A special issue of the Hindi

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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

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

PIONEER PHOTO

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," he added.

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.

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 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.

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 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.

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₹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

sites. Implementation and day-to-day operations will be handled by 11 experienced agencies selected by the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB) through a transparent tendering process. These agencies will be responsible for cooking, serving, and maintaining hygiene standards at the canteens.

The scheme is also expected to generate employment. Around 700 people will be engaged across the canteens, including cooks, helpers, and support staff, providing livelihood opportunities along with social welfare.

Residents at some of the newly opened sites welcomed the initiative, saying affordable meals would ease daily expenses, especially for families struggling with rising food prices. "Getting a full meal for ₹5 makes a big difference," said a construction worker waiting in line at one of the canteens.



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

PIONEER PHOTO

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



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.

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.

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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 7,450, with women accounting for 4,367 cases. Children accounted for 571 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.

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Among the missing children, 4,212 were traced, including 3,019 girls and 1,193 boys. At the same time, 1,505

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. Children accounted for 2,544 cases, or about 51 per cent. 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.

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 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 963 remained untraced, the data showed.

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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 Vaj



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 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 Khera said on Ram Navami and Hanuman Jayanti, "these people go outside mosques and play DJ, blaring provocative songs".

Bollywood continued to dominate OTT platforms

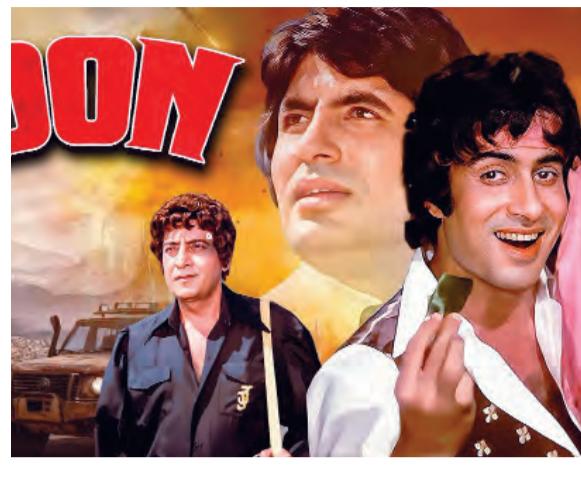
PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ 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 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.

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.

"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 hap-

pened 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)."

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

Dropadi 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 Sirsa 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 Golarithi 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 added.

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 Sirsa 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 schoolchildren 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

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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 as 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 hardline 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 minister 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 202



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 101st 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 101st 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' in 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 JP 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," PM Modi said in a message earlier.

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

PTI

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Panchkula

Haryana Chief Minister Nayan 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 birth anniversary as Good Governance Day.

birth anniversary as Good Governance Day.

Born in a humble Kanyakubja Brahman family in Gwalior, he remained a parliamentarian for more than five decades, having been elected ten times to the Lok Sabha and twice to the Rajya Sabha.

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

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 Malavina on his birth anniversary.

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

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

"As India's 13th prime minister, he led the first non-Congress government for full five-year tenure from 1999-04. He also served as the prime minister for two

years as the prime minister for two



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.



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

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

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) Akhilesh Kumar Singh suffered injuries on his leg.

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.

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 H D Kumaraswamy, and state BJP President B Y 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.



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



Bhupender Yadav

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.

JP Nadda greets people on Christmas, urges work for humanity

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

BJP National President JP Nadda on Thursday greeted people on Christmas and appealed to them to work together for the "betterment of humanity", taking inspiration from the preaching of Jesus Christ.

Addressing an event organised at Christian Higher Secondary School in Civil Lines here, Nadda, also a Union minister, said the Modi Government has taken various steps for development in the North East States following its 'Act East' policy.

"On behalf of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and as a representative of the Government of India, I can say that we have always taken steps following our 'Act East' policy. Keeping this factor in view, we have always tried to see that all the policies and programmes of the Government should focus on the north-east region, from where all of you come," the BJP chief told the gathering.

"You must have seen a lot of changes have taken place in the North East, especially in terms of development, be it air, road and digital connectivity. We are starting a medical college in Nagaland so that the people of the north-east get the benefit out of it," he added.

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

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's 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.

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

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.



"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.

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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



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.

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 testator's 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 and 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

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

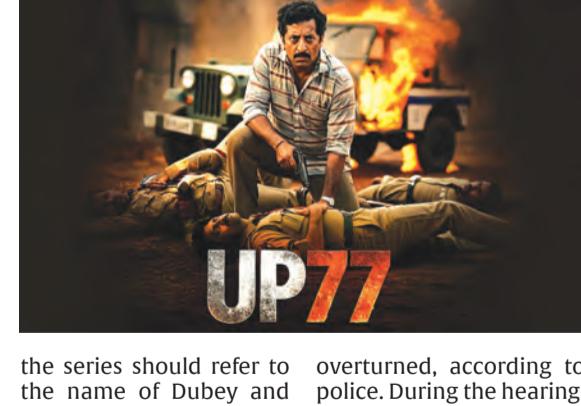
PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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 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."



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

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 derailed 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



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.

PIC TALK



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

PHOTO: PTI

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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.

AMYL SAMI | TAMIL NADU

Please send your letter to the info@dailypioneer.com. In not more than 250 words. We appreciate your feedback.

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.

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 Khriske 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.

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.

AMARJEET KUMAR | HAZARIBAGH



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 maturing 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 discipline, 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.

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.

AMARJEET KUMAR | HAZARIBAGH

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 Khriske 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 Khriske 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.

VIJAY SINGH ADHIKARI | NAINITAL

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 indecision 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.

O PRASADA RAO | HYDERABAD



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

FIRST
Column



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

The writer is President of the Chintan Research Foundation and former Director of WTO, with extensive experience in international trade, finance, and industry

✉️ dailypioneer
✉️ @priyadarshi_crf
✉️ shishir-priyadarshi-crf

itical 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 0.585 million development package focused on green transition, governance reforms, and digital and transport infrastructure under the Global Gateway framework. These renewed development compact, 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, Phookali, 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 Selvraj, 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.

The writer is journalist writing on development and gender

✉️ dailypioneer
✉️ @majumdar_swapna
✉️ The Pioneer

The future of growth lies with small borrowers in small towns



DEEPAK
AGGARWAL

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 unfinanced 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>

The author is Co-founder and Co-CEO of Moneybox Finance Limited
✉️ dailypioneer
✉️ @TheDailyPioneer
✉️ The Pioneer

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

BLASÉ CAPITAL

OIL SLICK



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 refineries. "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.

He desires, and you better agree

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

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,

OUR TAKE



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.



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



PRIYA VERMA

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 autorickshaws, 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

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

Moreover, underreporting of such incidents due to social stigma, limited information regarding grievance mechanisms, and lack of trust in authorities, further exacerbate security concerns. And 91% of female commuters who have faced sexual harassment never registered a complaint, found a 2024 study by TUC. In fact, women across cities with full, partial, and no fare subsidies reported similar rates of harassment, revealing that subsidy schemes alone do not guarantee a sense of safety.

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

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.

The writer is an independent researcher and writer based in Gujarat and a former intern with IndiaSpend



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.

ILT 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

had allowed them to travel for additional work.

"Both regular salaried and self-employed women reported on average saving over ₹1,000 per month which is reinvested into household expenses such as food and children's education," said Renjini Rajagopalan, research lead at the Centre for Gender Analysis at JustJobs Network.

The scheme has also enabled a greater sense of agency and empowerment. "A majority of women are now able to afford 'non-work' travel, including access to healthcare, pilgrimages, or other forms of recreation," she added.

"But the real question is whether the change has been from walking to bus because that might be a really impactful shift, in terms of reducing women's time-poverty," noted Sonal Shah, founder of The Urban Catalysts (TUC) and executive director at the Centre for Sustainable and Equitable Cities.

The gaps 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

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)

bus, especially at evening hours, Vyas said.

Moreover, lack of street lights, poorly 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.

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


THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS
CHANGE OF NAME

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

PD(37476)C

SOUTH CENTRAL RAILWAY

Follow us on @SCRailwaysIndia
Details of the e-Tender for
S.C.Railway can be seen on our
website : 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: KZ-KJ 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-KJ 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-KJ Section: Proposed

safety related yard improvements and

upgradation works at various yards

under SSE/P.Way/CR/KJ 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: KZ-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 (₹):

3,38,39,042/- EMD (₹): 4,19,200/-

Completion period in Months: 12

Maintenance period in Months: 45

(Days)

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)

SSE/P.Way/PRLI jurisdiction -

Proposed safety related yard

improvement and upgradation works

at various yards. Approx. Tender

Value in (₹): 3,25,14,980/- EMD (₹):

3,12,600/- 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. 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

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.

Sr.DEN/Co-ordination/

A2105 Secunderabad

For further tender conditions /

details and for downloading the

tender documents,

Please visit website at

<http://www.ireps.gov.in> or

www.scr.indianrailways.gov.in

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Police reward announced in Chattogram hindu home fire

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Dhaka/New Delhi

Standard newspaper reported. "Houses of seven Hindu families were burned in three separate localities (at Raiganj)" 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 mobsters 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.

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

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 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 Goshthi 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 PKR 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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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.

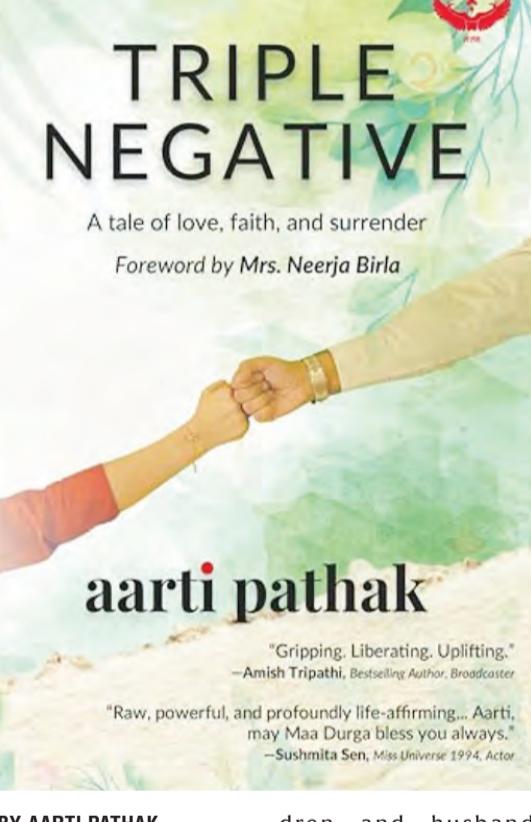
At the end of November, the country had 1,00,266 petrol pumps - the third largest after the US and China with a much bigger geographical area, according to data available from the Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell of the Oil Ministry. Over 90 per cent of the pumps are owned by State-owned firms such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

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

Through her treatment, she journalized her experiences, 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 her collapse. 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 Bihari Vajpayee.

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

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 multi-modal 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.

संबर 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 Bihari Vajpayee in Gwalior on Thursday

PTI

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 PTI.

"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 111-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 Abhyas 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.



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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

SBI Life Insurance has launched 'New Smart Samriddhi', 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 5.5 per cent or 6 per cent of cumulative premiums paid, based on the annualised premium. Assured maturity benefit: Offers 133 per cent -214 per 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's New Smart Samriddhi reflects the insurer's philosophy of empowering individuals to pursue their dreams while securing their family's aspirations.

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 10 per 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.



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 pay tribute to Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya on his birth anniversary, at Samvidhan Sadan in New Delhi on Thursday

PTI



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," 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

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.

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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 'Sadaa 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 2024, 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 Sneh Rana 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 bat collapses.

"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, Sneh 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, Vishni Gunaratne, Harshitha Samarakkrama, Nilakshi de Silva, Kavisha Dilhari, Imesha Dulani, Kaushini Nuthyangana, Malsha Shehani, Inoka Ranaweera, Shashini Gimhani, Nimesha Madushani, Kavya Kavindi, Rashmika Sewwandi,

and 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 Warriors 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



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,

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.

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Sh. Nayab Singh Saini

Chief Minister, Haryana

December 26, 2025 | 12 PM | Sirsa



“वीर बाल दिवस भारतीयता की रक्षा के लिए कभी न हार मानने वाले मनोभाव का प्रतीक है। यह दिन हमें उमरण दिलाता है कि जब वीरता की पराकांड की बात आती है तो उम्र कोई मायने नहीं रखती है।”

- नरेन्द्र मोदी

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सदा अमर रहेगा अस्तित्व आजादी के दीवानों का



Nation Remembers Shaheed Udham Singh on his Birth Anniversary

December 26, 2025

“राहीद उधम सिंह की वीरता हर भारतीय की सृति में अंकित है। मैं भारत के इस वीर सपूत को नमन करता हूँ।”

- नरेन्द्र मोदी



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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 (LPG) 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 stabilizing 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 CO₂ 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.



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.

Maruti Suzuki, India's largest carmaker,



With over six decades of expertise in industrial decarbonization, GAS LAB Asia presents fully indigenous carbon capture technology designed and manufactured in India. A global leader in CO₂ 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 facilities commissioned and 40 under execution, CEID has pioneered milestones including India's first CBG bottling plant and Asia's largest multi-feedstock



Key insights and takeaways: WBA India Congress 2025

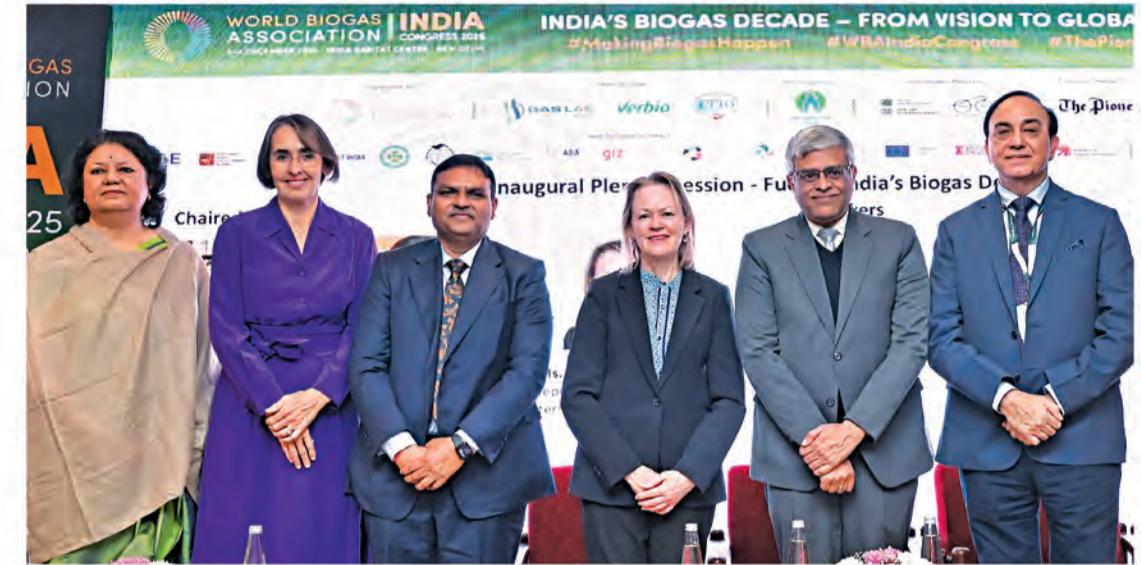


Engaged delegates listen intently to insightful discussions at the Policy and Leadership Track sessions during the World Biogas Association's India Congress 2025, as industry leaders and policymakers shared perspectives on shaping India's biogas future.

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) 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

FUELING 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) 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, Reveille 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) 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) 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.



(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.



Verbio India Private Limited, a wholly owned subsidiary of Germany's Verbio AG, is a pioneer in India's biogas sector. Its flagship Lehragaga 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.

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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.

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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.



IAVL, a 50:50 joint venture focused on midstream infrastructure, operates in biogas through its subsidiary, IAVL 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, RELEX-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) 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 (GGI), India; Kevin Houston, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Carbon Masters; Zerin 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, 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) Charlotte Morton OBE, Chief Executive Officer, WBA; Dr Peter Zeniewski, Senior Energy Analyst, International Energy Agency (IEA); Thierry Michel René 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, CO2, 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.



(L-R) Flávio Ascencio, 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 (NDB), on the sidelines of the World Biogas Association Annual Meet (India Congress 2025) in New Delhi



Dr Meenesh Shah, Chairman, NDB

What is NDB's overarching vision for the country?

NDB'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 NDB's role in scaling up biogas across India?

NDB 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 NDB'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

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.

NDB is also involved in larger biogas and Bio-CNG plants. What does that landscape look like?

NDB 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 NDB'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 NDB's collaboration with government schemes like SATAT and GOBAR-Dhan?

NDB 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.