



# THE LONGEST SHORTCUT EXPRESSWAY THAT HAS LEFT JAMMU-KATHUA STRANDED

The Delhi–Amritsar–Katra Expressway has broken the clock: what was once a 90-minute drive from Kathua to Jammu now drags on for over four hours

ANUJA KHUSHU

Launched with great fanfare under the Bharatmala Pariyojna in 2020, the Delhi–Amritsar–Katra (DAK) Expressway was meant to cut travel time from Delhi to Katra by half. For Jammu & Kashmir, it promised economic uplift, seamless connectivity, and enhanced pilgrimage and strategic mobility. Five years later, in the Kathua–Samba–Jammu stretch, it has delivered little but dust, delays, and daily gridlock.

This once manageable 90-minute drive now routinely stretches into three to four-hour slogs through dangerous diversions, open trenches,

Details of five packages:				
Package	Length	Awarded	Work Started	Completion Target
Package 14	44.6 km	Dec 2021	Sept 2022	July 2025
Package 15	35.15 km	Dec 2021	Sept 2022	Sept 2025
Package 16	20.38 km	Oct 2021	Sept 2022	Sept 2025
Package 17	28.92 km	Aug 2022	June 2023	Feb 2026
Package 18	15.30 km	Mar 2023	Nov 2023	March 2026

incomplete bridges, and barren work zones. What should have been a flagship of infrastructure now looks like a monument to mismanagement.

## Construction Delays: What's Really Happening?

The DAK Expressway's 144-km segment in Jammu and Kashmir is divided into five construction packages

(14 to 18), forming part of the larger 670-km corridor. While Union Minister Nitin Gadkari has stated that the expressway is on track for completion by March 2026, ground realities challenge this assertion.

Though construction was initiated across all five, progress remains patchy. Several segments, particularly between Dayalachak, Ghagwal, Hiranagar, and Samba, show little or no ongoing activity. Massive cranes lie idle, roads remain dug up, and flyovers stand half-built. The sight of stalled machinery has become part of the landscape, eroding public confidence.

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Land Acquisition Woes

One of the primary culprits is land acquisition delays. Despite notifications and surveys, hundreds of landowners in Samba and Kathua claim they haven't received fair or full compensation.

Disparities in compensation rates, especially varying depreciation deductions, have created further confusion. Internal memos reportedly questioned why Samba district used "different yardsticks" from neighboring districts. As a result, contractors are often forced to work in disconnected patches, compounding inefficiency.

A Highway Without Safety

The absence of proper traffic diversion plans has jeopardized public safety. Diversions lack basic signage, barricading, or lighting — forcing two-way traffic onto single-lane dirt roads full of craters. There are no emergency lanes, no GPS-based updates, and no marshals to manage peak-hour snarls.

Commuters speak of overloaded trucks getting stuck, of ambulances delayed, and of school buses inching forward through dust clouds. One small transporter from Kathua, Ravinder Singh, shared: "Earlier I made two trips to Jammu. Now I barely manage one. And my suspension's gone. Fuel costs have doubled."

Public frustration has erupted into action. In August 2025, residents of Samba blocked the highway for four hours, demanding audits and emergency traffic protocols. In September, similar protests were seen in Chadwal, where one protester said: "This isn't protest. This is survival."

Natural challenges multiply risks

The topography of Jammu-Kathua-Samba is climatically and geologically fragile. In August 2025, landslides and flash floods washed away parts of temporary detours. One key bridge on the Jammu-Pathankot highway collapsed, throwing regional logistics into chaos.

These aren't isolated incidents. In hilly corridors, slope stability, erosion, and drainage need expert handling. Locals allege these aspects have been overlooked in the rush to meet deadlines.

Recently in Parliament, Minister Gadkari has reaffirmed that all five J&K packages are underway, with three to finish by September 2025 and the rest by March 2026. He also clarified that there is no plan for differential tolls or EV exemptions on the expressway.

On the administrative side, J&K's Chief Secretary had recently called for accelerated execution and instructed NHAI to reduce public inconvenience. But beyond such statements, no concrete traffic relief has been provided to residents.

Where the Gaps Lie : Here's a breakdown of the key failures hampering the project:

- 1. Disjointed Construction: Contractors working in isolation due to incomplete land possession.
- 2. Poor Diversions: Roads torn up without parallel functional diversions in place.
- 3. Lack of Safety: No night lighting, signages, or safety marshals at dangerous junctions.
- 4. Compensation Disparities: Arbitrary calculations lead to resentment and legal delays.
- 5. Weak Communication: No real-time progress updates, helplines, or grievance redress systems.
- 6. Disaster Vulnerability: Designs inadequate to handle monsoon, erosion, or landslides.

Strategic and Economic Stakes:

The Kathua-Jammu corridor isn't just a local concern. Its impact is far-reaching:

- Pilgrimage: Delays affect access to Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine, crucial for religious tourism.
- Defence Mobility: The expressway lies close to border zones;

delays risk national preparedness.

- Trade & Industry: Freight delays impact J&K's industries, especially in Kathua and Samba.
- Public Trust: Eroding faith in governance and institutions is perhaps the most critical loss.

What the Public Demands

Citizens, civil society groups, and local businesses are calling for:

- Safe, functional diversions before existing roads are disrupted.
- Weekly visual progress reports via geotagged updates.
- Fair compensation with uniform criteria and quick redress of disputes.
- Dedicated traffic teams to manage choke points during peak hours.
- Ambulance/emergency lanes in ongoing construction areas.
- Independent audits and third-party oversight of project timelines and safety.
- Local consultation forums to build transparency and accountability.

The Delhi-Amritsar-Katra Expressway could have been a model for connectivity, faith tourism, and regional inclusion. Instead, it currently functions as a case study in how lack of planning, poor communication, and administrative delay can derail public trust. Yet, it's not too late.

With focused intervention, especially on land issues, safety protocols, and citizen communication, this project can still reclaim its promise. But for that to happen, decision-makers must walk the route they plan to build, see what commuters face, and respond not with press releases, but with urgency and empathy.

Until then, the people of Kathua, Samba and Jammu continue to pay the cost, not in money alone, but in time, frustration, lost opportunity, and rising risk.

Meanwhile, when contacted NHAI

VOICES FROM PEOPLE:

"A college student, Suhani, expressed the challenges of leaving early to ensure timely arrival at the institution, highlighting the risk of missing classes due to prolonged traffic delays."

Mahi, a regular commuter between Jammu and Kathua, lamented: what should have been a 1-hour 45-minute journey now takes three hours due to expressway works at Chadwal, Dyala Chak, and Rajbagh areas. Our lungs are affected now due to dust and frequent traffic congestion.

**"Emergency vehicles can't pass. It's a risk to life every day." – Local Resident, Ghagwal**

Traders and manufacturers in Kathua and Samba report rising costs and broken supply chains. Transporters say they can no longer make two round trips a day; many now attempt just one. Vehicles face higher maintenance costs because of constant rough diversions. For perishable goods, delays destroy value before delivery.

they were not available for the comments.

A Crumbling Economic Artery

The economic impact is no less severe. Kathua Industrial Estate, home to dozens of small and mid-sized units, has seen a 40–50% increase in transportation costs over the past year. Suppliers from Punjab now refuse to dispatch goods via this route unless paid extra.

In Samba, raw material delays have caused contract penalties and cancelled orders. Tour operators ferrying pilgrims to Mata Vaishno Devi report avoiding the Kathua entry point altogether, opting instead for longer but more reliable routes via Pathankot or Punjab's internal highways.

"This is not just inconvenience. This is economic strangulation," says a local transporter Ravi Manhas. "If they can't finish the highway, at least fix the existing one."

Major Bottlenecks on the Route

These locations are reported to have the worst traffic gridlocks and diversion issues:

Dayalachak – Cratered diversions, overloaded truck jams

Ghagwal – Incomplete bridge, both lanes dug up

Hiranagar – Single-lane diversions with no lighting

Samba – Open pits and flyover delays causing detours

Chadwal – Site of public protest in September 2025



# Civil Aviation Ministry pilots fixed airfare on Alliance Air flights

Alliance Air's ensures predictable ticket prices · "Fare Se Fursat Scheme" by Alliance Air targets stress-free last-minute bookings

THE CHANCELLOR NEWS SERVICE  
JAMMU

Minister of Civil Aviation, Rammohan Naidu Kinjarapu, inaugurated 'Fare Se Fursat,' a pioneering initiative by government-owned regional carrier Alliance Air. The scheme aims to relieve passengers from the uncertainty of fluctuating airfares and promote affordable flying across India.

The launch event was attended by Secretary, Civil Aviation, Samir Kumar Sinha; Chairman, Alliance Air, Amit Kumar; and CEO, Alliance Air, Rajarshi Sen.

Under this pilot scheme, running from October 13 to December 31, 2025, on select routes, Alliance Air will offer a single, fixed fare that remains constant regardless of booking date, even on the day of departure. This approach eliminates the stress of price volatility and ensures predictable travel costs.

Speaking at the launch, the Minister said, "Fare Se Fursat" perfectly aligns with the core principles of the UDAN scheme. Alliance Air is



advancing Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's vision of democratizing aviation and making it affordable for the middle, lower-middle, and neo-middle classes." He added that the static fare system addresses a major concern by offering fare predictability, even for last-minute travelers.

The Minister also highlighted broader efforts to make Indian avia-

tion more passenger-friendly:

"Since taking charge, my focus has been on making aviation more people-oriented. Inspired by Prime Minister Modi's UDAN vision, we launched Udan Yatri Cafes offering tea at Rs 10, coffee at Rs 20, and snacks at Rs 20 at airports—making air travel dignified and affordable. Now, with 'Fare Se Fursat,' we address the biggest pas-

senger worry: airfare."

Describing Alliance Air's role, Rammohan Naidu said, "Alliance Air is the backbone of the Regional Connectivity Scheme UDAN, linking Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities with the national network. This bold step of 'One Route, One Fare' reflects the spirit of 'Naye Bharat ki Udaan,' prioritizing public service over profitability."

Currently, India's aviation market mostly uses dynamic pricing, where fares fluctuate based on demand, season, and competition. While efficient for revenue, it often frustrates passengers with unpredictable last-minute prices. 'Fare Se Fursat' aims to introduce transparency and pricing stability.

The initiative is also expected to encourage first-time flyers from smaller towns, advancing PM Modi's vision to make air travel accessible and affordable for every Indian.

Alliance Air continues to play a vital role in last-mile connectivity and the realization of 'Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik'—bringing air travel within reach of all citizens.

# Nationwide digital life certificate campaign 4.0 to begin from Nov 1

Largest DLC outreach ever, covering 2,000 districts & sub-divisions across India

THE CHANCELLOR NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI

The Department of Pension & Pensioners' Welfare (DoPPW) is set to roll out the 4th Nationwide Digital Life Certificate (DLC) Campaign from November 1 to 30, 2025, in a major push to ensure pensioners across the country can easily submit their life certificates.

This will be the largest-ever DLC campaign, with coverage across 2,000 districts and sub-divisional headquarters. The initiative is a collaborative effort involving 19 Pension Disbursing Banks, India Post Payments Bank (IPPB), Pensioners' Welfare Associations (PWAs), the Controller General of Defence Accounts (CGDA), Department of Telecommunications (DoT), Indian Railways, UIDAI, and MeitY.



The previous DLC Campaign 3.0, held in 2024, achieved a record 1.62 crore DLCs, including over 50 lakh through Face Authentication Technology. More than 1,900 camps were organized across 800+ districts and cities, thanks to the active participation of multiple stakeholders.

This year too, India Post Payments

Bank (IPPB) will play a key role, leveraging its network of 1.8 lakh Postmen and Gramin Dak Sevaks (GDS) to provide doorstep DLC services, regardless of the pensioner's bank.

These field agents are equipped with mobile devices that support both fingerprint and facial recognition-based DLC generation. More details on this service are available at [ippbonline.com](http://ippbonline.com).

The 19 Pension Disbursing Banks will set up DLC camps across 300 cities, and will also make home and hospital visits for aged, sick, or disabled pensioners.

In addition, 57 registered Pensioners' Welfare Associations (PWAs) will mobilize pensioners and support the

campaign in coordination with banks and IPPB.

**To ensure maximum participation, an awareness drive will be carried out through:**

- SMS and WhatsApp messages
- Social media platforms
- Local newspapers, banners, and radio
- Support from DD, AIR, and PIB teams

This outreach aims to eliminate confusion and ensure pensioners are well-informed about the multiple options available for submitting their Digital Life Certificate.

The 2025 campaign targets the generation of 2 crore DLCs, with a particular focus on Face Authentication technology, ensuring convenience, ease of use, and inclusion for even the most remote or mobility-constrained pensioners.



# PM Modi launches Rs 42,000 Cr boost for agri sector with new schemes

THE CHANCELLOR NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI

In a major push towards strengthening India's agricultural economy, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday launched two landmark initiatives—Pradhan Mantri Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana and Self-Reliance in Pulses Mission—aimed at transforming the rural sector and ensuring food security.

At an event held at Pusa, New Delhi, the Prime Minister also inaugurated and laid the foundation stones for 1,100 projects worth over Rs 42,000 crore under the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF), animal husbandry, fisheries, and food processing sectors.

The mega initiatives are being seen as a significant move towards boosting productivity, improving supply chains, and promoting self-sufficiency in critical crops such as pulses.

The Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana is a comprehensive scheme bringing together 36 sub-schemes across 11 central ministries, focused on aspirational districts. The goal is to ensure holistic agricultural development, improved income for farmers, and enhanced rural infrastructure.

The Self-Reliance in Pulses Mission aims to reduce India's dependency on pulse imports by significantly boosting domestic production through support for seeds, irrigation, and improved market access.

PM Modi interacted with farmers from across the country, including beneficiaries of the AIF, pulses cultivators, and stakeholders from the animal husbandry and fisheries sectors. During the session, he also paid rich tributes to Lok Nayak



Jayaprakash Narayan and Nanaji Deshmukh on their birth anniversaries, acknowledging their contributions to rural empowerment.

The newly launched projects under the AIF include modern cold storage units, warehouses, agro-processing facilities, and logistics hubs, which are expected to significantly cut post-harvest losses and generate rural employment.

Recognising the grassroots change-makers, the Prime Minister felicitated outstanding farmers, Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs), and agri-innovators for their contributions to sustainable and progressive farming practices.

Speaking at the event, Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan expressed gratitude to the Prime Minister on behalf of the farming community. He highlighted that despite global price hikes, fertilisers like urea and DAP remain affordable

due to government subsidies.

"A bag of urea is still priced at Rs 266, and DAP at Rs 1,350, thanks to the government absorbing the rising costs," said Chouhan. He also welcomed the reduction in GST on agricultural machinery, calling it a boost for mechanisation and productivity.

**Major Increase in MSPs**  
Chouhan further pointed to historic hikes in Minimum Support Prices (MSPs):

Wheat up by Rs 160/quintal  
Gram by Rs 200+  
Lentil by Rs 300  
Mustard by Rs 250  
Sunflower by Rs 600

"These increases reflect the government's commitment to farmer welfare," he said.

Under PM-Kisan, over Rs 3.90 lakh crore has been directly transferred to farmers' accounts. The Kisan Credit Card (KCC) scheme disbursed loans

■ 'Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana' to integrate 36 schemes under one agri framework

■ 'Self-Reliance in Pulses Mission' aims to reduce import dependency

■ PM interacts with farmers, FPOs, and innovators during Pusa event

■ Over Rs 3.90 lakh crore transferred to farmers under PM-Kisan so far

■ 1,100 'crorepati' FPOs clock Rs 15,000 crore turnover, says Shivraj Singh Chouhan

worth Rs 10 lakh crore in 2024-25, alongside Rs 1.62 lakh crore in interest subsidies. The PM Fasal Bima Yojana has so far compensated farmers with claims worth Rs 1.83 lakh crore.

Over 52 lakh farmers are now members of FPOs, with 1,100 FPOs achieving 'crorepati' status. Their combined turnover has crossed Rs 15,000 crore, aided by support for branding, innovation, and market linkage.

Reiterating the government's resolve to build a self-reliant, developed India, Chouhan said the schemes reflect PM Modi's vision of "Atmanirbhar Krishi" and rural innovation. "Together, we are laying the foundation of a strong, self-sufficient agricultural economy," he said.

## e-NAM Platform Expanded: 9 new commodities added to boost digital agri-trade

THE CHANCELLOR NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI

In a significant move to empower farmers and deepen digital market integration, the Government of India has expanded the National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) by adding nine new agricultural commodities, increasing the total number of tradable commodities on the platform to 247.

The initiative, led by the Depart-

ment of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, aims to enhance transparency and competitiveness in agri-trade, allowing farmers and traders to access a unified, national digital marketplace.

The Directorate of Marketing and Inspection (DMI) developed the tradable parameters for the newly added commodities after extensive consultations with state agencies, experts, and traders. These were approved by Union Agriculture Minister Shri

Shivraj Singh Chouhan.

The newly added commodities are: Green Tea, Tea, Aswagandha Dry Roots, Mustard Oil, Lavender Oil, Mentha Oil, Virgin Olive Oil, Lavender Dried Flower and Broken Rice

The introduction of standardized, quality-linked parameters for these commodities is expected to help farmers receive better prices and reduce their dependence on middlemen.

"The expansion of e-NAM strength-

ens farmers' ability to access wider markets and benefit from transparent, quality-driven trading," said an official statement. "It also aligns with the government's vision of promoting inclusive growth in the agriculture sector."

With the updated parameters now live on the e-NAM portal, the platform continues to play a key role in connecting mandis nationwide, improving market access and ensuring fair pricing for producers.





# Union Health Secy chairs meet on cough syrup safety

Warns against unnecessary cough syrup use in children

THE CHANCELLOR NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI

In response to recent concerns over the quality and safety of cough syrups, particularly those administered to children, the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare convened a high-level meeting chaired by Union Health Secretary Punya Salila Srivastava. The meeting brought together senior officials from all States and Union Territories to review compliance with drug manufacturing standards and promote the rational use of cough syrups across the country.

In a statement issued by PIB, the discussions followed a directive from Union Health Minister J.P. Nadda, who called for urgent measures to address the issue after reports emerged of child deaths in Chhindwara district, Madhya Pradesh, linked to contaminated cough syrups. A central team comprising experts from the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), National Institute of Virology (NIV), and Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) conducted field investigations in coordination with state authorities. Laboratory analysis revealed that out of ten syrup samples tested, nine met quality standards. However, one brand, 'Coldrif', was found to contain Diethylene Glycol



(DEG) in concentrations exceeding permissible limits. The manufacturing unit in Kancheepuram, Tamil Nadu, has since faced regulatory action including a recommendation for license cancellation and initiation of criminal proceedings.

During the meeting, the Union Health Secretary stressed the importance of strict adherence to the Revised Schedule M regulations for good manufacturing practices by all pharmaceutical companies. States were also urged to ensure the rational use of cough syrups, especially in children, noting that most coughs are self-limiting and do not require pharmacological treatment. Emphasis was placed on enhancing surveillance

systems, improving timely reporting from both public and private health facilities, and promoting the wider use of the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP-IHIP) community reporting tool. The need for stronger inter-state coordination was also highlighted to enable swift joint action during outbreaks and unusual health events.

Health experts present at the meeting echoed these concerns. Dr. Rajiv Bahl, Secretary of the Department of Health Research and Director General of ICMR, cautioned against unnecessary prescription of cough syrups to children, highlighting potential risks and side effects. Dr. Sunita Sharma, Director General of Health

Services, pointed out that cough medicines have minimal proven benefits in pediatric populations and carry significant risks, underscoring the need for guidelines to be issued soon for parents, pharmacists, and doctors. Dr. Rajeev Raghuvanshi, Drugs Controller General of India, reiterated the imperative for manufacturers to comply fully with GMP norms and noted that some firms availing government support under the Pharmaceutical Technology Upgradation Assistance Scheme have been granted extensions till December 2025.

States shared updates on their ongoing investigations and measures. Rajasthan authorities indicated that their probe so far does not link recent deaths to syrup quality but confirmed steps to raise awareness on rational pediatric drug use and implementation of regulatory actions. Maharashtra officials assured that children affected in Nagpur are receiving the best possible medical care.

Reaffirming its commitment to patient safety and drug quality, the Union Health Ministry directed all States and Union Territories to undertake swift and coordinated efforts to prevent such incidents in the future. The Ministry called for sustained vigilance, rigorous inspections, and collaborative action to safeguard public health, especially among vulnerable populations such as children.

## Ahead of national DGP-IGP conference, IGP Jammu reviews policing preparedness

THE CHANCELLOR NEWS SERVICE  
JAMMU

Inspector General of Police (IGP) Jammu Zone Bhim Sen Tuti conducted a comprehensive review of the Action Taken Reports (ATRs) on various recommendations related to multi-sectoral policing in the Jammu region.

He stressed the need to align all police initiatives with the national vision of transforming India into a developed nation by 2047.

The review meeting, held at the Zonal Police Headquarters in Jammu, comes as part of the preparations for the 60th edition of the All-India DGPs and IGPs Conference, scheduled to be

held in Chhattisgarh next month.

The meeting was attended by senior police officers from different districts and ranges, both in person and through video conferencing.

According to officials, the IGP reviewed the progress made on the recommendations from previous DGP-IGP conferences, focusing on contemporary challenges and reform measures in internal security and law enforcement.

"During the session, the IGP reviewed the Action Taken Reports on key areas such as cybercrime, technology integration in policing, counter-terrorism measures, capacity building, and the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learn-

ing (ML) in law enforcement," an official said.

He added that the discussions also covered emerging security threats, community-oriented policing, and modernisation of police infrastructure to meet the demands of dynamic security scenarios.

IGP Tuti directed officers to devise innovative and result-oriented strategies at the national level to enhance the efficiency of police operations and strengthen internal security.

He called for timely compliance with pending directives and the effective implementation of national-level policing guidelines in both letter and spirit.

"The police force must not only

address present-day challenges but also prepare for future security dynamics by leveraging technology and data-driven policing," he said, emphasising the need for synergy across units and departments.

The forthcoming 60th All-India DGP-IGP Conference, to be hosted by Chhattisgarh for the first time, will deliberate on critical issues such as internal security, Naxal operations, border management, and cybersecurity.

The three-day event, beginning November 28, will be inaugurated by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, while the valedictory session is expected to be attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.





# Cabinet clears 57 New Kendriya Vidyalayas across the country

Rs 5,862 Cr budget to boost education nationwide • Focus on inclusive growth with new schools in remote and conflict-affected regions

THE CHANCELLOR NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI

In a major boost to government schooling, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved the establishment of 57 new Kendriya Vidyalayas (KVs) under the civil sector. The move aims to better cater to the educational needs of children of Central Government employees.

In a statement issued by PIB, the total projected outlay stands at Rs 5,862.55 crore over nine years (2026–35), split between Rs 2,585.52 crore in capital expenditure and Rs 3,277.03 crore for operational costs. In a first for KVs, all 57 new schools will include Balvatikas (three years of foundational stage/pre primary) under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.



As of now, 1,288 KVs are functional (including three overseas schools in Moscow, Kathmandu, and Tehran), with 13.62 lakh students enrolled as of June 30, 2025.

These 57 additions will span 17 States and Union Territories, with a focus on districts presently lacking a KV, aspirational districts, Left Wing Extremism (LWE) regions, and hilly

or North-Eastern areas. Notably, 20 KVs are slated for districts currently without any, while 14 are in aspirational districts, 4 in LWE zones, and 5 in hilly/NER areas.

Of the 57 schools, 7 are sponsored by the Ministry of Home Affairs, and the remaining 50 by state/UT authorities. When fully functional, each KV — catering to around 1,520 students — will employ 81 persons, leading to 4,617 direct permanent jobs. In all, the expansion is expected to benefit 86,640 students, with ancillary construction generating further employment.

The decision builds on the 85 KVs sanctioned in December 2024 and aligns with the government’s goal to expand quality education across underserved regions. The new schools are expected to enhance access in areas previously unrepresented in the KV network while reinforcing presence in high-demand zones.

# Political parties crucial pillars of democracy: CEC Gyanesh Kumar

THE CHANCELLOR NEWS SERVICE  
JAMMU

As part of a two-day visit to Bihar to assess preparations for the upcoming Assembly elections, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar on Saturday reaffirmed the vital role of political parties in upholding the democratic process. Describing them as “significant stakeholders of a strong democracy,” he urged parties to actively engage in every phase of the election process, including the appointment of polling and counting agents.

In a statement issued by PIB, the Election Commission of India (ECI), led by the CEC along with Election Commissioners Dr. Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Dr. Vivek Joshi, conducted a comprehensive review of election readiness in Patna. The first day of the visit included interactions with representatives of major national and state political parties, including the BJP, Congress, RJD, JD(U), AAP, BSP, CPI(M), CPI(ML)-Liberation, NPP, LJP (Ram Vilas), and RLJP.

During the meeting, the Commis-



sion encouraged political parties to approach the upcoming elections with enthusiasm and to promote democratic participation as a celebration of civic duty. Parties, in turn, expressed appreciation for the Commission’s successful completion of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise, which led to a significant purification of the electoral rolls. They reaffirmed their trust in the Commission’s ability to conduct free, fair, and transparent elections.

Among the suggestions put forth by party representatives was the proposal to schedule elections immediately after the Chhath festival, a major cultural event in the state. They also recommended that the election be conducted in as few phases as possible to ensure efficiency and reduce logistical complexities.

The political representatives welcomed several recent electoral reforms introduced by the Commission. These include capping the number of voters per polling station at 1,200, ensuring that postal ballot counting concludes before the penultimate round of EVM counting, and mandating the distribution of Form 17C (statement of votes recorded)

by the Presiding Officer to polling agents before leaving the station.

The CEC and his team also chaired detailed meetings with top administrative and police officials, including Commissioners, IGs, DIGs, DEOs, SSPs, and SPs. These sessions focused on critical aspects such as election planning, EVM management, logistical arrangements, rationalisation of polling stations, training of polling personnel, voter outreach, law and order, and seizure management.

Based on suggestions received from political parties, the Commission issued clear directives to district election officers and law enforcement to maintain complete impartiality and ensure swift resolution of party grievances. Special emphasis was placed on monitoring social media for fake news and misinformation, with instructions to take prompt legal action wherever necessary.

As Bihar gears up for a crucial electoral exercise, the Commission’s engagements highlight a commitment to transparency, inclusion, and robust democratic practice. The visit continues tomorrow with further reviews and strategy sessions.



# UIDAI waives Aadhaar biometric update fees for children aged 7–15

THE CHANCELLOR NEWS SERVICE  
JAMMU

In a major citizen-centric move, the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) has announced a one-year waiver of charges for Mandatory Biometric Updates (MBUs) for children between the ages of 7 and 15. The decision, effective from October 1, 2025, is expected to benefit nearly six crore children across the country.

The waiver, which removes the existing Rs 125 fee per update, aims to make it easier for children to

access key services such as school admissions, entrance exams, scholarships, and Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) schemes that require an updated Aadhaar. The initiative is part of UIDAI's continued effort to enhance ease of living through Aadhaar-enabled services, as per the statement issued by PIB..

Under the current Aadhaar enrolment process, children below the age of five are issued an Aadhaar based on demographic data and a photograph, as their biometric features, fingerprints and iris, are not mature enough for reliable capture. Once the child turns five, biometric

data must be mandatorily updated ,this is known as the first MBU. A second biometric update is required at the age of 15.

Until now, the first and second MBUs were free if carried out between the ages of 5–7 and 15–17 respectively. Beyond these age windows, a fee of Rs 125 was applicable for each update. With this new decision, UIDAI has extended the free update window, effectively making biometric updates free for all children aged 5–17 for the next one year.

Officials said this move is aimed at ensuring that children have uninterrupted access to critical govern-

ment services that require biometric authentication. It also supports smoother transitions through educational and welfare systems by ensuring that Aadhaar records are current and valid.

Parents and guardians have been encouraged to prioritise updating the biometric details of their children at the nearest Aadhaar Seva Kendra or authorised centres.

This initiative is seen as part of UIDAI's broader strategy to increase Aadhaar's utility in everyday governance and public service delivery, especially among younger beneficiaries.

## Centre tells States, UTs to crack down on unsafe cough syrups

‘Ensure rational use among children’ □ Holds high-level meeting amid deaths linked to contaminated syrup

THE CHANCELLOR NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI

Amid rising concerns over the safety of paediatric cough syrups, the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare on Saturday held a high-level meeting with States and Union Territories to review compliance with drug manufacturing norms and promote the rational use of cough syrups, especially among children.

Chaired by Union Health Secretary Punya Salila Srivastava, the meeting followed a directive from Union Health Minister J.P. Nadda, after recent reports linked the death of four children in Chhindwara, Madhya Pradesh to the consumption of contaminated cough syrup.

In a statement issued by PIB, Health authorities have identified one brand, ‘Coldrif’, as containing diethylene glycol (DEG) beyond permissible limits. The syrup, manufactured by a unit in Kancheepuram, Tamil Nadu, has led to the recommended cancellation of the company's licence by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO). Criminal proceedings have also been initiated.

Officials were directed to take action against non-compliant drug manufacturing units and prevent the sale of irrational or unapproved combinations, particularly in retail pharmacies.

The Health Ministry informed states that Risk-Based Inspections



(RBI) had already been initiated at 19 drug manufacturing units in six states to detect systemic violations.

Experts also flagged the limited benefits and potential risks of cough syrups in children. “Children should not be routinely prescribed cough formulations, especially those with multiple drugs,” said Dr Rajiv Bahl, DG ICMR. He added that a national outbreak response team was in place to support states.

Dr Sunita Sharma, Director General of Health Services, noted that guidelines for parents, pharmacists, and doctors on safe paediatric use of syrups will be issued shortly.

Dr Rajeev Raghuvanshi, DCGI, urged states to ensure that all drug manufacturers comply with the revised Schedule M norms. He said

some companies had applied for infrastructure upgrades under the government's support scheme, which now has a compliance deadline extended to December 2025.

Officials from Rajasthan and Maharashtra briefed the Centre on local investigations and awareness drives. Rajasthan officials said their inquiry found no link between the reported deaths and cough syrup quality but that regulatory action had been taken as a precaution.

Maharashtra reported that children admitted in Nagpur are receiving full medical attention and care.

The Department of Pharmaceuticals said many firms have begun upgrades under the Revamped Pharmaceuticals Technology Upgradation Assistance Scheme (RPTUAS).

### Focus on Three Key Areas:

■ Strict enforcement of Revised Schedule M under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, which lays out Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP)

■ Rational prescribing of cough syrups in children, who often do not require pharmacological treatment

■ Enhanced surveillance and reporting by health facilities through the IDSP-IHIP platform

The Union Health Secretary underlined that while most paediatric coughs are self-limiting, indiscriminate use of syrups may do more harm than good. States and UTs were urged to step up monitoring, ensure rational prescribing, and act against violators of drug safety norms.

The Ministry reiterated its commitment to ensuring patient safety and directed states to maintain strict oversight and report unusual health events promptly, with joint inter-state response mechanisms where necessary.



# Historic Visit: Defence Minister to visit Australia on Oct 9 for strategic talks

THE CHANCELLOR NEWS SERVICE  
JAMMU

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will undertake a two-day official visit to Australia on October 09-10, 2025, at the invitation of Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister of Australia Richard Marles.

The visit comes at a historic moment when India and Australia commemorate 5 years of establishment of India Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP). This will also mark the first-ever visit of a Defence Minister to Australia under this government, since 2014.

The key highlight of the Defence Minister's visit will be the bilateral discussions with his Australian counterpart. He will chair a business roundtable in Sydney, which will be attended by industry leaders



from both sides. He will also call on other national leaders of Australia. The visit will provide an important opportunity for both sides to explore new & meaningful initiatives to further strengthen the bilateral relationship and the defence partnership.

During the visit, three agree-

ments are planned to be signed, which will further enhance cooperation in the areas of information sharing, the maritime domain, and joint activities. Defence engagements have expanded over time to include wide-ranging interactions between the services, military-to-military

exchanges, high-level visits, capacity-building and training programmes, cooperation in the maritime domain, ship visits, and bilateral exercises.

India and Australia elevated their bilateral relationship from a Strategic Partnership in 2009 to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) in 2020. The two nations share a deep bond rooted in common values—pluralistic, Westminster-style democracies, Commonwealth traditions, growing economic engagement, and increasing high-level interactions. Long-standing people-to-people connections, the presence of Indian students in Australian universities as well as robust tourism and sporting ties, have further strengthened the enduring partnership between the two countries.

Richard Marles last visited India in June 2025 and met his counterpart Shri Rajnath Singh, and also called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

# Regional Connectivity Boost: Udhampur Airport operational soon: Dr. Jitendra Singh

Says Kishtwar Airport included in UDAN Scheme · Rs 860 Cr Jammu Airport upgrade by 2026

THE CHANCELLOR NEWS SERVICE  
JAMMU

Union Minister Dr. Jitendra Singh announced the finalisation of operational plans for Udhampur airport, with the proposed Kishtwar airport also being incorporated into the Government's Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS) under the UDAN initiative. The move aims to boost regional connectivity and provide affordable travel options for residents, while strengthening security infrastructure in Jammu and Kashmir.

During a high-level review meeting held with key officials, including Secretary of Civil Aviation Samir Kumar Sinha and Airports Authority of India (AAI) Chairman Vipin Kumar, Dr. Singh emphasised fast-tracking approvals and technical clearances for aviation projects in the region.

"Udhampur airport will initially operate ATR 72-seater aircraft under UDAN, capping ticket prices at nearly half the current market rates," said Dr. Singh. Aviation sources confirmed that airfares on the Delhi-Udhampur route will be substantially lower than the Delhi-Jammu flights, offering a



cost-effective alternative even for passengers headed to Jammu.

Under the UDAN scheme, a significant portion of airfare will be subsidised through viability gap funding, making air travel more accessible, especially for students and young professionals who often face prohibitive travel costs.

The AAI will undertake necessary infrastructural development at

Udhampur airport without additional land acquisition, as apron space will be provided by defence authorities. Initial operations are expected within six months.

Regarding Kishtwar airport, Dr. Singh noted previous delays caused by complex land acquisition issues, including areas under Army possession requiring costly acquisition. New feasibility and land assessment

studies are underway to resolve these hurdles. Calling Kishtwar an "aspirational agricultural district," the Minister highlighted how an airport there would bolster the local economy, particularly benefiting saffron farmers and agricultural trade.

Dr. Singh pledged to personally coordinate with Chief Minister and Chief Secretary on land requisition matters, and proposed a joint meeting with the Divisional Commissioner and AAI officials to accelerate progress.

Meanwhile, the Rs 860 crore expansion of Jammu airport is on track for completion by June 2026, promising a significant boost in passenger handling capacity as part of a nationwide push to upgrade aviation infrastructure. Recent terminal inaugurations in Patna and Pune, along with Mumbai's near-complete airport expansion, underscore the government's commitment.

Dr. Singh underscored the broader significance of enhancing air connectivity in Jammu & Kashmir, stating it is vital not only for passenger convenience but also for economic development, tourism growth, and deeper integration of the region with the national mainstream.



# India–Qatar bilateral trade can be doubled by 2030: Piyush Goyal

**THE CHANCELLOR NEWS SERVICE**

DOHA/NEW DELHI

Union Minister of Commerce and Industry, Piyush Goyal, has said that India and Qatar can double their bilateral trade volume by 2030, identifying significant untapped potential in key sectors. The minister made the remarks during his official visit to Doha on October 6–7, where he co-chaired the India–Qatar Joint Commission on Economic and Commercial Cooperation along with Qatar’s Minister of Commerce and Industry, Sheikh Faisal bin Thani bin Faisal Al Thani.

The visit began with Goyal paying floral tributes at the statue of Mahatma Gandhi at the Indian Embassy in Doha. He also planted a sapling under the “Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam” initiative, highlighting India’s commitment to sustainability and environmental consciousness.

In a bilateral meeting held between the Commerce Ministers of both countries, the two sides reviewed the overall trade and economic relationship, discussed the removal of trade barriers, and explored new areas for collaboration in sectors including finance, agriculture, and healthcare.

Later, the two ministers jointly addressed the India–Qatar Joint Business Council (JBC) meeting, which was attended by senior representatives from FICCI, CII, ASSOCHAM,



the Qatar Chamber, and members of the business communities from both nations.

Addressing the gathering, Goyal said that despite global economic headwinds and supply chain disruptions, India continues to exhibit macroeconomic resilience and offers a thriving start-up ecosystem, making it a highly attractive destination for global businesses.

He highlighted that although bilateral trade currently stands at around

USD 14 billion, there is immense scope for growth. He called for enhanced Indian exports to Qatar and identified promising sectors such as electronics, automobiles, pharmaceuticals, processed food, textiles, gems and jewelry, IT, and emerging high-tech and solar industries as areas of potential collaboration.

During the Joint Commission meeting, both sides reiterated their commitment to deepen trade and investment ties and expressed inter-

est in negotiating a comprehensive India–Qatar Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA). Goyal also acknowledged Qatar’s crucial role as an energy supplier, particularly through the long-term agreement for the supply of 7.5 million tonnes of LNG per year beginning in 2028.

On the sidelines of the meeting, the minister held high-level discussions with Qatari dignitaries and business leaders, exploring opportunities for increased investment flows, technology partnerships, and joint ventures between companies from both countries. He also took part in the launch of the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) system at Lulu Mall on The Pearl Island, enabling seamless digital payments and marking a key step forward in India’s digital cooperation with Qatar.

During his visit, Goyal also addressed the Indian community in Qatar, praising their significant contribution to the country’s development and their role as a vital link in strengthening bilateral ties. He noted the recent decision to elevate India–Qatar relations to a strategic partnership, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and His Highness the Amir of Qatar. He reaffirmed India’s vision of becoming a developed nation (Viksit Bharat) by 2047 and urged the diaspora to continue acting as ambassadors of India’s growth and progress.

## ECI issues notifications for 4 RS seats from J&K

### Three separate notifications issued; Polling on Oct 24, nominations open till Oct 13

**THE CHANCELLOR NEWS SERVICE**

SRINAGAR

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has formally initiated the process to fill four vacant Rajya Sabha seats from Jammu and Kashmir, issuing three separate notifications inviting nominations.

The first notification pertains to the seat vacated following the retirement of Mir Mohammad Fayaz on February 10, 2021. According to the schedule, nomination papers may be submitted to the Returning Officer (Secretary of the J&K Legislative Assembly) or the Assistant Returning Officer (Additional Secretary of the Assembly) at the Civil Secretariat, Srinagar.

Nominations will be accepted from



11 a.m. to 3 p.m. on working days until Monday, October 13, 2025. Nomination forms are available at the same venue and during the same hours.

The scrutiny of nominations will be held on Tuesday, October 14, at 11 a.m., and the last date for withdrawal

is Thursday, October 16, up to 3 p.m. If necessary, polling will take place on Friday, October 24, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The second notification pertains to the seat vacated following the retirement of Shamsher Singh, also on Feb-

ruary 10, 2021. The nomination and polling schedule is identical to the first. For this election, Manoj Kumar Pandit, Secretary of the Legislative Assembly, has been appointed as the Returning Officer.

The third notification covers two seats that fell vacant following the retirement of Ghulam Nabi Azad and Nazir Ahmed Laway on February 15, 2021. The schedule for these two seats remains the same, October 13 for filing nominations, October 14 for scrutiny, and October 16 for withdrawal. If needed, polling will be held on October 24, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The ECI has emphasized that candidates must strictly adhere to the notified deadlines. Nominations can only be submitted personally by the candidates or through authorised proposers or election agents.



# Defence & security are a collective responsibility: Rajnath Singh

THE CHANCELLOR NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI

**D**efence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday emphasised that defence and security are the collective responsibility of the entire nation.

Speaking at the National Conference on 'Opportunities in Defence Manufacturing' held at Vigyan Bhawan, he stressed that strengthening the defence sector is not the duty of a single institution or government but a shared resolve of all Indians. The Minister called upon States and Union Territories to actively participate in building a robust and globally competitive defence manufacturing ecosystem.

Highlighting the importance of self-reliance, Singh said, "Self-reliance in defence is not just a matter of production or economy for us. It is first and foremost a matter of our strategic autonomy and is directly linked to our sovereignty." He recalled how during Operation Sindoor, state governments and their agencies came together for a mock drill, proving that unified efforts can overcome any challenge.

In a statement issued by PIB, the Defence Minister drew attention to India's growing defence industry, noting that defence production has witnessed unprecedented growth, rising from over Rs 46,000 crore in 2014 to more than Rs 1.5 lakh crore in 2025. He highlighted that the private sector now contributes over Rs 33,000 crore, signaling its emergence as an equal partner in the mission of Aatmanirbhar Bharat. Furthermore, defence exports have surged from less than Rs 1,000 crore in 2014 to a record Rs 23,500 crore in 2025, marking a significant shift from being one of the world's largest importers to a trusted exporter of defence equipment.

Reaffirming Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision, Singh set ambitious goals for the future, stating that India aims to achieve defence manufacturing worth Rs 3 lakh crore and defence exports worth Rs 50,000 crore by 2029. He underlined that self-reliance is about having the confidence that the weapons used by the Armed Forces are made on Indian soil by Indian scientists and engineers.

During the event, the Defence Minister released the Compendium of State Policies on Defence and Aerospace Manufacturing, which consolidates policies and best practices adopted by various States and Union Territories. He described the compendium as a critical step toward greater coordination between the Centre and



States and urged all regions to study and implement the best practices to strengthen the defence industrial base.

Singh also outlined the wide-ranging policy reforms undertaken to promote ease of doing business in the defence sector, including simplified quality assurance timelines through self-certification, the launch of a centralized Defence Testing Portal providing nationwide access to testing facilities, and the Defence Testing Infrastructure Scheme (DTIS) to support the creation of modern testing and certification centers. He noted that frameworks such as the Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) 2020, Defence Procurement Manual (DPM) 2025, Defence Offsets Policy, and Defence Investor Cell are continuously being refined to encourage investment, technology absorption, and innovation. He emphasized that these reforms are not merely regulatory but serve as enablers of opportunity.

Pointing to the importance of technological innovation in modern warfare, Singh highlighted frontier technologies including Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Robotics, Quantum Computing, Cybersecurity, and Space Technology. He stressed

that India must invest intellectually in these areas to combine traditional strengths with modern innovation to design and produce world-class defence systems.

The Minister also launched key digital initiatives such as the SRIJAN-DEEP portal—a digital repository mapping the expertise of Indian defence industries—and the Defence Exim Portal, a single-window platform to streamline authorisations related to defence exports and imports. To support MSMEs and start-ups, the Ministry is developing automated cash management tools and simplifying bill processing and payment systems.

Beyond manufacturing, Singh spoke of inclusive reforms and welfare initiatives, highlighting the Nari Shakti initiative to increase women's representation in the Armed Forces, allocation of 25% of the Defence R&D budget to industry, MSMEs, start-ups, and academia, expansion of the Border Roads Organisation's budget, and the approval of 100 new Sainik Schools under a partnership model to build discipline, leadership, and patriotism among youth.

The Defence Minister also called for improved coordination between the Centre and States on defence

land management, noting that an online portal has been launched to facilitate State proposals for public utility projects on defence land and expedite land exchange processes. With approximately 1.8 million acres of defence land across India, coordinated management is vital to prevent disputes and ensure security.

The event, organized by the Department of Defence Production (DDP), Ministry of Defence, was attended by senior officials including Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan, Chiefs of the Army, Navy, and Air Force, Secretary (Defence Production) Shri Sanjeev Kumar, Chairman DRDO Dr. Samir V Kamat, and representatives from central and state governments.

Singh also unveiled the latest edition of the iDEX Coffee Table Book, showcasing innovations by start-ups, MSMEs, academia, and individual innovators that address critical defence needs and have potential civilian applications.

The National Conference aims to align the efforts of the Centre and States to transform India into a globally competitive and self-reliant hub for aerospace and defence manufacturing, supporting the vision of Viksit Bharat by 2047.



# India-UK Trade ministers holds bilateral meet in Mumbai

Meeting aims at strengthening trade & partnership ties

THE CHANCELLOR NEWS SERVICE  
JAMMU

Union Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal and the UK Secretary of State for Business and Trade, Rt. Hon. Peter Kyle, held a bilateral meeting in Mumbai today to chart a renewed course for the India-UK trade and investment partnership.

The meeting marked a key step in operationalising the India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA). Both ministers agreed to reposition the Joint Economic and Trade Committee (JETCO) as the primary mechanism to oversee the implementation and delivery of the agreement. They reaffirmed their shared commitment to ensuring that the rollout of CETA is swift, coordinated, and focused on tangible outcomes for businesses and consumers in both countries.

During the discussions, the ministers reiterated their ambition to double bilateral trade by 2030, emphasising the need to harness complementarities in sectors such as advanced manufacturing, digital trade, clean energy, and services. They recognised the transformative potential of CETA and discussed ways to maximise its impact through enhanced regula-



tory cooperation, addressing non-tariff barriers, and promoting deeper supply chain integration between the two economies.

In a statement issued here today, the ministerial meeting was preceded by a highly productive series of discussions at the level of Commerce Secretaries and Director Generals. These preparatory meetings helped set a constructive tone for the ministerial dialogue, which was described as forward-looking and collaborative.

Earlier in the day, a series of sectoral roundtables were held in Mumbai,

bringing together leading stakeholders from both countries. These focused discussions spanned priority areas such as advanced manufacturing, consumer goods, food and drink, science and technology, construction, infrastructure, clean energy, and professional services, including IT, education, and engineering. These interactions offered valuable industry insights and policy suggestions to guide the effective implementation of the trade agreement.

In parallel, the India-UK CEO Forum was also convened, drawing

participation from top business leaders from both sides. Co-chaired by prominent industry representatives, the Forum served as a platform to identify new avenues for trade, investment, and innovation. The dialogue reaffirmed the commitment of both countries to building a modern and mutually beneficial economic partnership anchored in the CETA framework.

The two ministers also exchanged views on the evolving global trade environment and the broader economic outlook. They stressed the importance of building resilient and diversified supply chains in the face of continued global uncertainties. Goyal underlined India's emergence as a key growth engine in the global economy, while Secretary Kyle described the UK's deal with India as the most comprehensive trade arrangement it has ever secured, positioning British businesses at the forefront of opportunities in one of the world's fastest-growing markets.

The meeting concluded with a joint business plenary attended by senior industry representatives. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to advancing a modern, inclusive, and high-impact trade partnership that unlocks new opportunities for growth, investment, and innovation.

# India to resume International Postal Services to USA from Oct 15

THE CHANCELLOR NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI

India will resume all categories of international postal services to the United States from October 15, the Department of Posts announced on Tuesday, according to a statement issued by the Press Information Bureau (PIB).

Postal services to the U.S. were suspended on August 22 following an executive order by the U.S. administration that withdrew de minimis treatment for postal shipments from India. The move came in response to new customs duty requirements introduced under American law.

According to the PIB, India Post has now implemented a compliant Delivery Duty Paid (DDP) system.



Under this mechanism, all applicable customs duties on shipments to the U.S. will be collected at the time of booking in India and directly remitted to the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) through approved Qualified Parties.

"This ensures full regulatory compliance, faster customs clearance, and seamless delivery to recipients in the USA—without any additional duty or

delay," the PIB statement said.

As per CBP guidelines, a flat 50% customs duty will be levied on the declared Free on Board (FOB) value of postal shipments, under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) tariff. Unlike courier or commercial consignments, postal shipments are not subject to base or product-specific duties—making them a more cost-effective channel for small exporters.

Significantly, India Post will not charge any additional fees for providing DDP or Qualified Party services. Postal tariffs remain unchanged, enabling MSMEs, artisans, and e-commerce exporters to access affordable and transparent international shipping.

Customers across the country

can now resume sending EMS, Air Parcels, Registered Letters/Packets, and Tracked Packets to the U.S. from any Post Office, International Business Centre (IBC), Dak Ghar Niryat Kendra (DNK), or through India Post's online portal at [www.indiapost.gov.in](http://www.indiapost.gov.in).

The Department has also instructed regional heads to launch awareness and outreach programmes to inform exporters, small businesses, and entrepreneurs about the resumed services.

The PIB described the move as a "major milestone" in expanding India's global postal logistics network and supporting flagship initiatives such as Make in India, One District One Product (ODOP), and Dak Ghar Niryat Kendras (DNKs).



## Jammu Jammed

Condition of roads in Jammu city and its interiors remains as usual dismal as neither the vehicles nor the pedestrians are safe. The reason being vandalization of roads and abandoned pot holed roads. Traveling on these roads is always challenging. It is difficult to maintain the balance while traveling on these damaged roads that are prone to accidents and damage to pedestrians. Whether it is winters or summers or for that matter the rainy season, the condition of the Jammu roads remains pathetic. It can be easily said that the traffic management on the Jammu's roads has turned criminal as the so called road widening has turned the city into a kind of inferno leaving no space for the commuters to travel with ease. Traffic jams are a norm. No one reaches his destination in time. In Spite of leaving their homes with proper planning being late is a norm in Jammu. What adds to this is the pollution and contamination of the air that people breathe, causing the respiratory issues. One wonders who is devising the policy to dig all the roads leaving no road for available for safe driving. The dismal condition of the Jammu's roads and inconvenience to the public has been well summed up by one of the Jammu's citizen's in his social media post, giving vent to the common man's grievance. He writes, "Accessing key destinations, Jammu Medical College Hospital, the airport, the railway station, or the High Court, has become an ordeal fit for an endurance test. Each route is a masterclass in administrative incompetence, where jams stretch longer than excuses, and detours lead everywhere except the destination." He does not stop here and emphasizes traffic chaos and devastation of roads writing, "The mayhem now appears to have achieved permanence. The roads are dug, barricaded, and blocked in the name of "development," but no one remembers when this endless development began, or if it ever intends to end. Highways leading to Pathankot, Delhi, or Srinagar tell the same story: dust, delays, and despair." Indeed the vandalization of Jammu's roads has reached the highways in the name of infrastructural development with alternate routes in mind for the traffic and commuters. Jammu-Kathua-Samba-Pathankot Highway has been reduced to rubble. At least from 2022 there is no considerable progress. Whole National highway from Lakhanpur and to Satwari has been dug with debris, dust, mud, rocks, pebbles scattered all around, leaving no space for traffic to ply. It takes more than three hours to reach Jammu from Kathua when Jam is at its peak and same applies to a commuter when he or she travels from Jammu to Kathua. The Bari Brahmana to Satwari stretch has been reduced to a virtual hell where people are stuck for hours with no sign of traffic police personnel managing the traffic efficiently. One fails to understand how the road widening plan has been executed when there is no alternate route in mind for the traffic movement. Now that the entire national highway has been dug, why is the road widening and construction work not being dug on the war footing? What is more surprising is that heavy trucks and numberless tankers are stranded on the highway leaving no space for the passenger transport to move smoothly. Not only that, these trucks and tankers could be allowed to play in the night when the passenger rush is low and the people going to offices are not plying their vehicles on the highway. The administration must set this traffic chaos right. Mere digging of roads and then making people fend for themselves is not the path towards the Jammu smart City. Jammu is jammed and is waiting for the end of traffic mis-management that is rendering Jammu redundant.

# Deepawali Signifies Prakash & Vimarsh

DR. MAHESH KAUL

Indian festivals are embodiments of progression and celebration. The intent of every festival is symbolised by the importance of life and its utility on the earth. Activity of life using material form is the highest celebration of the Divine and this has been well situated by Sri Aurobindo in his matchless contribution to humankind through his Integral Yoga. It lays emphasis on a comprehensive unitary goal of life. That is the realisation of Divine in human form. He situated this secret of the cosmic consciousness through his seminal works-Life Divine and the Synthesis Yoga.

Besides his various writings these works are his lifelong experiences with both Agamic and Nigamic experimentation. Those are usually known as Tantric and Vedic formulations respectively. In all his works he has focussed on the light. The light of the Divine and this light is not just the literal translation of the word light. But the internalisation of light as Divine and at the same time Divine as the celebration of light. For that he emphasises life as light. Deepawali must be seen as the light of the Divine that illuminates space and time; the expanse that we dwell in.

This internalisation of light as luminosity is not enough that dispels the darkness that we witness after the dreaded night having inauspicious connotations but light as the creator. Light creates. It creates space. The space that is not just tangible and having material life but the space that creates place consciousness that develops aesthetics of eternity.

What has been attributed above to Sri Aurobindo in terms of understanding the meaning of light as life and life as the Divine is not an isolated case of philosophy; attributed to Raj Rishi Sri Aurobindo. But it encompasses the occultism and tantric formulations of the age old seekers who experimented with the secrets of nature. To establish this one needs to delve deep into the reality of light and its celebration.

Deepawali is usually associated with these events that shaped the collective memories of the Hindus in Greater India. Greater India is not a mere geographical expanse but the cultural sphere of influence:

Lord Krishna Killed a demon called Narakasura. So we call that day Naraka Chathurdasi, literally Naraka's 14th day. Goddess Lakshmi came out of the Milky Ocean when Devas and Asuras churned the ocean for Amrutha, i.e. ambrosia. Rama returned to Ayodhya after defeating Ravana of Sri Lanka who abducted Rama's wife Sita. Pandavas came out of the forest after their 12 year banishment. So, to celebrate all these things they decorated the houses and streets with a row of lamps. The reason being, it was Amavasya-new moon day where there was no light. Most of the other Hindu festivals fall on Full Moon Day, so there is natural moon light. We have to remember there was no electric light thousands of years ago.

These events have one commonality and that is celebration. And in all the cases the celebration is for establishing the reign of prosperity devoid of regression. Another thing that is common is numerology and constellations. That is space and time. It has tantric significance. That marks these events to appear on the day or time.

Its answer lies in the origin of light and its domain. The question arises so what is light and how do we define it. Scientifically this can be explained with the concepts of Physics and space science. But still, we end up only measuring light and hence distance of

the planets and stars. That does not solve the problem. It only reduces the problem to the issue of calculating numbers and counting light years.

The answer lies in Kashmir Shaiv Darshan. Trika Parampara that originated in Kashmir dispels all cobwebs of illusion and darkness to open floodgates of secret behind light. It establishes that the whole cosmos and all the material entities are expressions of the Swatantra (loosely translated as independence or autonomy) of the Para Bhairava Shiva, who creates out of His free will. And as such He is known as Prakash (again the loose translation is light). Further, it does not end here. Prakash can be internalised through Vimarsh and that Vimarsh is His Shakti (power /energy). So, Kashmir Shaiv Darshan uncovers the hidden secret of this creation and clearly says the creator is Prakash and He can be realised through His Vimarshni Shakti.

It makes one arrive at the conclusion that Prakash that is loosely translated as light is actually the creator Himself. Who manifest as many and have the tendency to reduce many to one. Thus Deepawali or Diwali is the celebration of Prakash or the Prakash Utsav of Festival Light. It is not just lighting a lamp but to see each one of us as a lamp that has been ignited by the Para Bhairava Himself to celebrate His free will. It has a wider meaning. That is when all the creation belongs to the Para Bhairava then all of us are His expressions and as such we all have to keep this lamp of life ignited with His Prakash. So that darkness of regression and death does not engulf it and reduce it to a mere shadow of subverted unreality.

That is why this expression of Praksh as Deepawali has almost the same significance for all religious denominations in India that have the same Vedic and Agamic origin. That is why all these festivals converge on the same lines with Prakash.

Jains also celebrate Diwali, because one of the greatest Thirthankaras, Mahavira, a contemporary of Buddha, attained Nirvana- equivalent to Hindu Yogi's Samadhi on a Diwali day.

Sikhs also celebrate Diwali because the foundation for Golden Temple in Amritsar was laid on the day. Guru Amardas called all Sikhs to get Guru's blessings on that day, like Hindu's Vyasa Purnima. One of the ten Sikh gurus Hari Govinda Sing was released from imprisonment by Mughal emperor Jehangir on that day.

Arya Samaj followers consider it a holy day because its founder Dayananda Sarwati attained Samadhi on that day.

There are many more reasons. Greatest of the Hindu Kings Vikramaditya was crowned on a Diwali day. For Gujaratis and other business men it is a NEW YEAR DAY. They start their financial year on that day.

Lakshmi Puja and Kubra Puja are conducted during the four day celebrations. Gujaratis heap food and sweets like mountains in a festival called Anna-kut festival.

What emerges from the above is clear that Indic place consciousness internalises Prakash as the Divine and its aesthetics can be experienced in all parts of India across the geographical and linguistic divide. Thus, Deepawali is the celebration of Divine and His Divinity in this life as Prakash (that we loosely translate as light. Complete translation in full accuracy is not possible as Sanskrit words like Prakash are non-translatable).

(Author is Editorial Director, The Chancellor)





# Rani Durgavati

## Pioneering women's rights

SAVITRI THAKUR

Centuries before India's ministries, policies, and flagship programmes were ever imagined, a young queen rode to the frontlines, choosing honour, courage, and duty over surrender. Rani Durgavati — remembered across central India as a warrior-queen and a paragon of valour — continues to inspire a nation of women who are reshaping public life, business, science, and civic affairs. On her 501st birth anniversary, we are reminded of her story and the enduring values it embodies—a living thread connecting the battlefields of the 16th century to the policies shaping modern India.

### A Portrait of Courage

Rani Durgavati's life became legendary because she refused to be a passive figure in history. Faced with invading forces, she took on the responsibility of defending her realm and people. This image of a woman who led, decided, and sacrificed transformed her from a regional ruler into a national symbol. Today, whether remembered in stories, memorials, or local culture in cities such as Indore and across Central India, she stands as proof that leadership knows no gender boundaries.

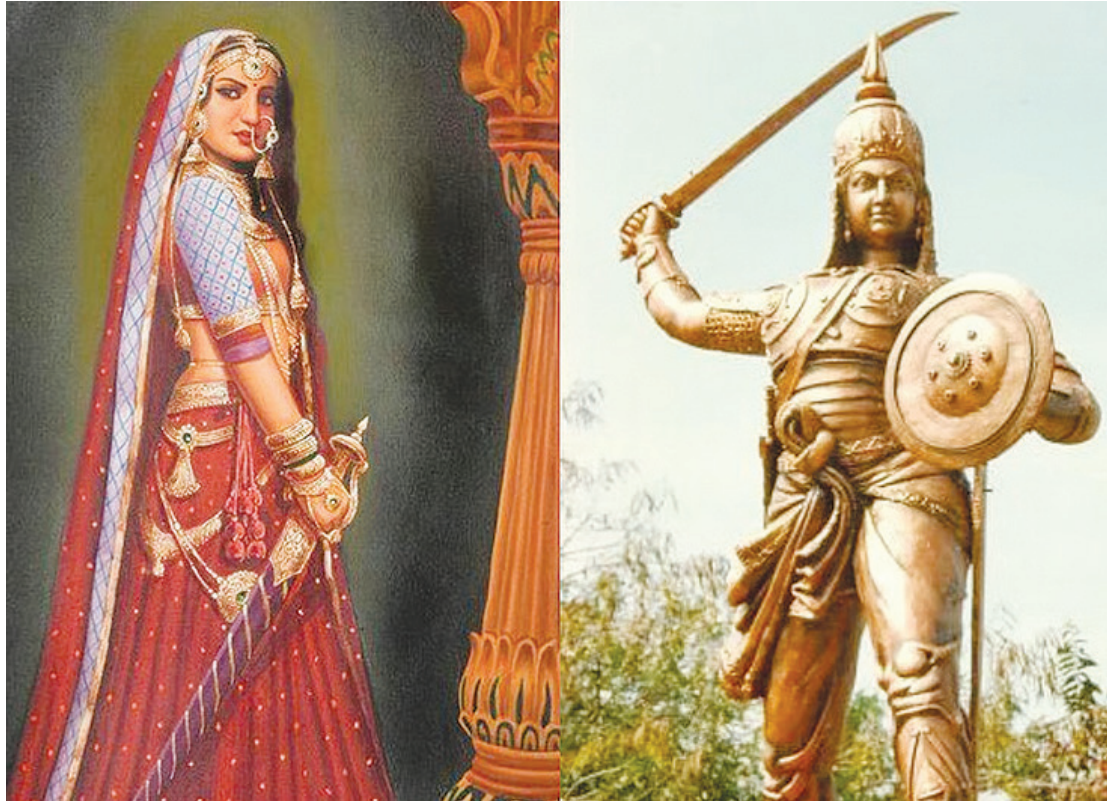
### From Symbol to Policy: How India Answers the Call

Modern India's framework for women's welfare and empowerment, championed by the Ministry of Women and Child Development and allied departments, draws inspiration from the blend of agency and public purpose that Rani Durgavati exemplified. Where the queen defended territory and people in her time, today the government strives to defend and expand women's rights, access, and opportunities across multiple fronts:

**Education and Social Parity:** Programmes aimed at improving girls' education and reducing gender gaps build the foundations of agency, as leadership grows where schooling, confidence, and aspiration flourish.

**Economic Empowerment and Entrepreneurship:** From skill-building initiatives to credit and market access, these efforts enable women to step into leadership roles in commerce and professions—the modern equivalents of ruling and decision-making.

**Safety and Legal Protection:** One Stop Centres and helplines have strengthened legal frameworks to secure women's bodily autonomy and civic participation, ensuring fear does not limit vocation or voice.



**Health and Maternal Care:** Schemes focused on maternal health and nutrition invest in women's wellbeing, enabling sustained public engagement and leadership.

**Grassroots Governance and Representation:** Efforts to expand women's participation in Panchayats and urban local bodies echo the political agency that Rani Durgavati exercised in her realm.

### Progress Measured in Lives and Milestones

The last few decades have witnessed unmistakable gains: rising female literacy and workforce participation in certain sectors, growing numbers of women in elected office, rapidly increasing female entrepreneurship, and more public conversations about safety and equal opportunity. These shifts are not mere statistics; they are modern manifestations of the principle Rani Durgavati's life taught—when women are equipped and empowered, they reshape society.

### Rani Durgavati's Legacy as a Foundation

What makes Rani Durgavati's example especially valuable is its dual nature: moral and practical. Morally, she stands for dignity, courage, and responsibility. Practically, her example normalizes women as decision-makers and protectors of public welfare. This dual legacy has been part of India's civic imagination for generations, nurturing the social soil in which policies for women's empowerment can take root.

### A New Lens for "Viksit Bharat"

As India pursues its vision of a developed nation—a "Viksit Bharat"—it needs a fresh perspective: viewing development through the scale, depth, and equality of women's agency. A "women-centred Viksit Bharat" would treat women's full participation not as an add-on, but as a central indicator of progress. Practically, this means measuring advancement by women's leadership across sectors—boards, public service, community institutions—not just by headline welfare indicators.

It also means designing infrastructure and urban spaces that enable safe mobility and economic participation for women. Investing in lifelong learning and reskilling will ensure women can access tomorrow's jobs and technologies.

Furthermore, prioritizing policies that reduce unpaid care burdens—childcare, eldercare, and community support—will unlock women's time for public and economic engagement.

When these choices are made, the nation honours the spirit of leaders like Rani Durgavati in the most meaningful way: by ensuring every woman has the capability to lead, protect, and build.

### Linking Past Courage to Future Promise

Rani Durgavati's story is not a relic; it is a living argument for what India can become. Her courage was an assertion of women's right to shape public destiny. Today,

India's ministries, civil society, and citizens are tasked with converting that assertion into everyday reality—through schools and hospitals, laws and livelihoods, safe streets and equal boards. If the pulse of a Viksit Bharat is measured by the strength of its women, then honouring Rani Durgavati means making that strength universal.

In the end, the queen's finest legacy may not be a monument of stone but a nation where millions of women lead from every podium life offers—be it at home, in markets, in science, or in governance—carrying forward a tradition of courage and stewardship into the 21st century.

(Author is Minister of State for Women and Child Development, Government of India ) Courtesy: PIB



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# ‘Op Sindoor 2.0’ will be more deadly, warns Lt Gen Katiyar

THE CHANCELLOR NEWS SERVICE  
JAMMU

General Officer Commanding-in-Chief (GOC-in-C) of Western Command, Lieutenant General Manoj Kumar Katiyar, called for a "deadlier" Operation Sindoor 2.0 if Pakistan continues terror attacks in India.

Speaking to reporters in Jammu, Lt Gen Katiyar said that India's response next time would be greater compared to the number of airbases and military posts destroyed during Opera-



tion Sindoor.

"Unless Pakistan's way of thinking changes, it will continue to take the actions it has taken. In Operation Sindoor, we destroyed its airbases and posts, but it may attempt something again. Whatever action we take this time will be more than last time... Operation Sindoor 2.0 has to be more deadly," he said.

Operation Sindoor was initiated on May 7, 2025, in response to the Pahalgam terror attack, which claimed the lives of 26 individuals. The operation

was conceived as a punitive and targeted campaign to dismantle terror infrastructure across the Line of Control (LoC) and inside Pakistan.

Multi-agency intelligence confirmed nine major camps that were targeted during the operation, according to a press release by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

Earlier today, Lieutenant General Manoj Katiyar praised Operation Sindoor, saying the Indian Army gave a befitting reply to Pakistan after the Pahalgam terror attack.

## Defence Minister calls on Prez of Mongolia in New Delhi

THE CHANCELLOR NEWS SERVICE  
JAMMU

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh called on the President of Mongolia, Ukhnaagiin Khurelsukh, in New Delhi. The two leaders acknowledged that the two democracies share a common interest in the peace and prosperity of the region, and expressed hope that their meeting would further diversify the relationship into new areas of cooperation.

In a statement issued by PIB, the Defence Minister and the Mongolian President highlighted that the two nations share a strategic partnership, with defence cooperation being a key pillar. Bilateral defence engagements have steadily expanded to include a wide range of initiatives such as Joint Working Group meetings, military-to-military exchanges, high-level visits, capacity-building, training programmes, and bilateral exercises.

The visiting President thanked India for its support in cybersecurity and in enhancing the capabilities of the Mongolian Armed Forces. He also recalled the ground-breaking ceremony of the Oil Refinery Project attended by Shri Rajnath Singh during his tenure as Home Minister, and extended an invitation to both the Defence Minister and Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi to visit Mongolia for the project's inauguration.

The Defence Minister fondly recalled the warmth and hospitality shown by the Mongolian President during his visits to the East Asian country in 2018 and 2022.

President Ukhnaagiin Khurelsukh is on an official visit to India from October 13-16, 2025, marking the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Mongolia.

## Make every city secure & inclusive, says MoS on World Habitat Day

Public-Private-People partnerships key to urban resilience

THE CHANCELLOR NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) commemorated World Habitat Day 2025 at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi, under the theme 'Urban Solutions to Crisis'. The event brought together key policymakers, experts, and stakeholders to reflect on how urban areas can better prepare to address emerging challenges such as climate change, rapid urbanisation, and migration, while striving to become more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable.

The event was graced by Minister of State for Housing and Urban Affairs, Tokhan Sahu, as the Guest of Honour. Also present were Srinivas Katikithala, Secretary, MoHUA; Satinder Pal Singh, Additional Secretary; Kuldeep Narayan, Joint Secretary and Mission Director, Housing for All; and Shombi Sharp, United Nations Resident Coordinator in India. Senior officials from MoHUA, heads of autonomous organisations, representatives from UN agencies, HUDCO, NHB, and other institutions also participated.

Delivering the keynote address, the MoS emphasised that sustainable urbanisation is central to India's development journey. He called for continued efforts to make every city dignified, opportunity-worthy, and resilient. He

noted that this year's theme is not merely a symbolic observance, but a reaffirmation of India's commitment to building cities that are secure, inclusive, and ready to face future crises.

"If we invest wisely in resilience, empower local governments, and harness the strength of Public-Private-People Partnerships, our cities will not only withstand crises but emerge as powerful engines of growth," the Minister stated.

In his address, Srinivas Katikithala, Secretary, MoHUA, highlighted the need for urban policy responses that prioritise infrastructure resilience, robust social systems, and adaptive economies. He acknowledged that while urban areas face significant challenges, they also offer unique opportunities for transformative action. "India's approach is guided by a clear vision to turn urban challenges into a foundation for future growth and prosperity," he said.

Referring to flagship schemes such as Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban (PMAY-U), AMRUT, PM SVANidhi, and the Swachh Bharat Mission, the Secretary stated that these initiatives focus on vulnerable and marginalised communities and represent a multi-pronged strategy that blends infrastructure development with social inclusion, climate action with economic empowerment.

The event also witnessed the release of key publications from organisations under MoHUA, including contributions from the Housing for All Division, HUDCO, NCHF, NHB, CGEWHO, and BMTPC. Notably, the HFA Division released a 'Compendium of Good Practices', showcasing successful implementation stories of PMAY-U across States and Union Territories.

Adding a celebratory element to the event, a prize distribution ceremony was held for winners of painting competitions organised by NHB, CGEWHO, HUDCO, and BMTPC. These competitions included participation from school children, including specially-abled students, underscoring the Ministry's commitment to inclusivity.

In alignment with the Viksit Bharat@2047 vision, a series of panel discussions were organised on pressing urban issues. Topics included 'Integration of Urban and Peri-Urban Areas into Metropolitan Cities,' 'Understanding and Responding to Urban Flooding,' and 'Equitable Cities.' These discussions brought together experts, policymakers, academics, and representatives from States and Union Territories to share insights and propose actionable strategies for building inclusive, liveable, and future-ready urban spaces where no citizen is left behind.



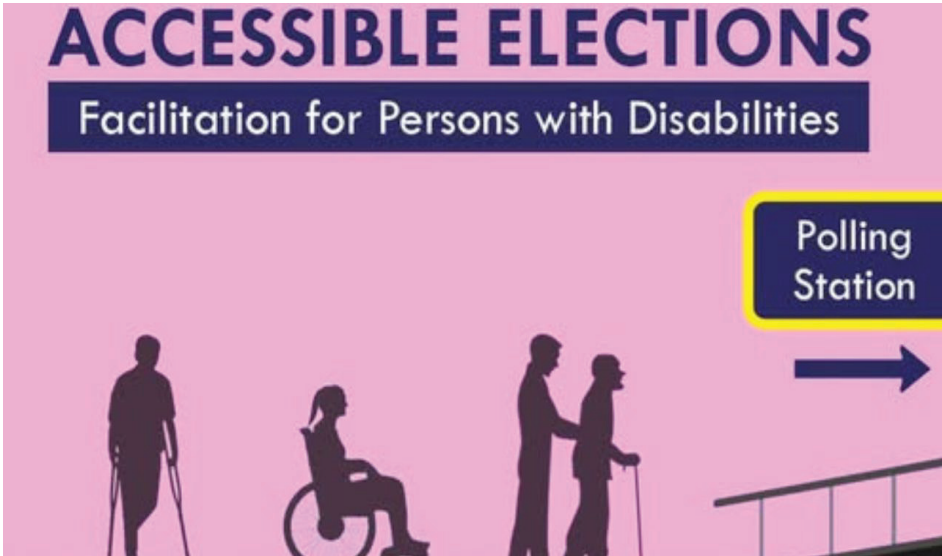


# ECI issues directions to ensure ease of voting for PwDs in Bihar polls

THE CHANCELLOR NEWS SERVICE  
JAMMU

In a significant move to promote inclusive and accessible elections, the Election Commission of India (ECI) has issued a series of directions aimed at facilitating voting for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) in the upcoming General Election to the Legislative Assembly of Bihar and bye-elections in eight Assembly Constituencies, scheduled for October 6, 2025.

According to the Commission, all polling stations across Bihar will be located at ground floor or road-entry level to ensure easy access. Ramps with appropriate gradients will be installed at each location to assist PwD voters and senior citizens, particularly those using wheelchairs. Further, these voters will be given priority access to enter polling booths



without having to wait in queues. To assist electors with visual impairments, the Commission has directed the issuance of Accessible Voter Information Slips in Braille, in

addition to the standard voter slips. Under Rule 49N of the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961, visually impaired voters are also allowed to bring a companion to help them cast their

vote if they so choose. However, in an effort to promote independent voting, dummy ballot sheets in Braille will be made available at all polling stations, enabling visually impaired electors to cast their votes independently using the Braille-enabled Ballot Units of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs).

The Commission has also emphasized the provision of transport facilities for PwD voters on polling day. To streamline this, electors with disabilities can pre-register for transport and wheelchair support through the Divyang (Saksham) module on the ECINET platform.

These facilities are set to be implemented at all 90,712 polling stations across Bihar. In a notable step toward empowerment and representation, 292 polling stations will be exclusively managed by Persons with Disabilities themselves.

# India and Saudi Arabia Strengthen Cooperation in Chemicals and Petrochemicals Sector

THE CHANCELLOR NEWS SERVICE  
JAMMU

India and Saudi Arabia have reaffirmed their commitment to deepening bilateral cooperation in the Chemicals and Petrochemicals sector during a high-level meeting held between the Department of Chemicals and Petrochemicals, Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers, Government of India, and the Ministry of Industry and Minerals, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The Indian delegation was led by Nivedita Shukla Verma, Secretary, Department of Chemicals and Petrochemicals, while the Saudi delegation was headed by H.E. Eng. Khalil bin Ibrahim bin Salamah, Vice Minister of Industry and Minerals.

In a statement issued by PIB, Saudi Arabia is India's fourth-largest trade partner, while India is Saudi Arabia's second-largest trade partner. Bilateral trade between the two nations stood at USD 41.88 billion in 2024-25, with chemicals and petrochemicals accounting for nearly 10% of this total—approximately USD 4.5 billion.

During the meeting, both sides discussed ways to enhance collaboration, promote bilateral investments, and explore emerging opportunities across the Chemicals and Petrochemicals value chain.



Special emphasis was placed on leveraging the natural complementarities between the two countries—Saudi Arabia's strength in petrochemicals and India's capabilities in specialty chemicals.

Opportunities for Saudi investment in India's Petroleum, Chemical and Petrochemical Investment Regions (PCPIRs) were also discussed, along with potential partnerships between major industry players from both nations.

In addition to investment and trade, both countries agreed to strengthen cooperation in research and development, as well as skill development within the sector.

The meeting concluded with both sides reaffirming their shared vision of building a sustainable, resilient, and mutually beneficial partnership in the Chemicals and Petrochemicals sector, further solidifying the strategic and economic ties between India and Saudi Arabia.



# Modi govt's crackdown pushes naxalism to the brink

THE CHANCELLOR NEWS SERVICE  
JAMMU

In a major achievement towards the Modi government's goal of building a Naxal-free Bharat, the number of districts classified as "most affected" by Left Wing Extremism (LWE) has been reduced from six to just three. As of now, only Bijapur, Sukma, and Narayanpur in Chhattisgarh remain in this category.

Further, the total number of LWE-affected districts across the country has been brought down from 18 to 11—a marked decline from the 126 districts that had reported Naxal-related violence in 2013.

The government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the guidance of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, has witnessed record-breaking operational successes in 2025. A total of 312 LWE cadres have been neutralised this year, including the CPI (Maoist) General Secretary and eight other top Polit Bureau or Central Committee members. Additionally, 836 cadres have been arrested, and 1,639 have surrendered and joined the mainstream,



including one Polit Bureau Member and a Central Committee Member.

The remarkable decline in Naxal influence has been attributed to the rigorous implementation of the National Action Plan and LWE Policy, which adopts a multi-pronged strategy. The approach combines precise, intelligence-based and people-friendly counter-LWE operations with rapid development initiatives and enhanced governance.

Once described as the "biggest inter-

nal security challenge" in 2010, the Naxal threat has significantly diminished. The so-called "Red Corridor," once envisioned by Naxals to stretch from Pashupati in Nepal to Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh, has now been effectively dismantled.

The Modi government remains firm in its resolve to completely eradicate the Naxal menace by 31st March 2026, marking a decisive step towards restoring peace and development in previously affected regions.

## Key components of the strategy include:

- Targeted action against top leadership and over-ground operatives
- Elimination of security vacuums through swift area domination
- Development of infrastructure and saturation of welfare schemes
- Financial chokehold on extremist networks
- Strengthened coordination between central and state governments
- Accelerated investigation and prosecution of Maoist-related cases
- Efforts to counter extremist ideology and rehabilitate surrendered cadres

# Centre launches "Tobacco Free Youth Campaign 3.0"

National initiative reinforces commitment to a tobacco-free generation

THE CHANCELLOR NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI

In a decisive step towards protecting the health of young citizens and fostering a tobacco-free environment in educational institutions, the Government of India will launch the "Tobacco Free Youth Campaign 3.0 (TFYC 3.0)" on 9th October 2025. This national campaign is a joint initiative of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, aimed at strengthening efforts to prevent tobacco use among school and college students.

Tobacco use remains one of the most pressing public health challenges in the country, accounting for over 13 lakh deaths annually. The Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS) 2019 revealed that 8.4% of Indian students aged 13–15 years are current users of tobacco products, with many initiating use as early as 10 years of age. Recognising the vulnerability of the youth and the urgency of the issue, the Government has adopted a comprehensive and collaborative approach to combat the menace of



tobacco through awareness, prevention, and enforcement.

TFYC 3.0 will be conducted over a 60-day period and will focus on educating and empowering students to resist the initiation of tobacco use, supporting those who wish to quit, and cultivating a culture of wellness across schools, colleges, universities, and vocational training institutions. As part of the campaign, States and Union Territories have been urged to intensify their implementation of the Guidelines for Tobacco-Free Educational Institutions (ToFEI) and conduct extensive awareness drives to sensitise students about the harmful effects of tobacco and other forms of substance abuse.

The campaign will involve various activities such as awareness drives, capacity-building workshops for educators, NSS and NCC volunteers, and counselling sessions to assist students in quitting tobacco. In addition, institutions will organise community outreach programmes to reinforce the 100-yard tobacco-free zones mandated around campuses. Efforts will also include educational video campaigns, national-level competitions to promote innovative anti-tobacco messaging, and digital initiatives such as the 'World No Tobacco Day Quiz' and the 'School Challenge: Towards a Tobacco-Free Generation' hosted on the MyGov platform.

The Government believes that pro-

moting a tobacco-free lifestyle among India's youth is integral to the larger vision of Viksit Bharat@2047—a roadmap for India's transformation into a developed nation. Through TFYC 3.0, the focus is not only on academic excellence but also on nurturing physically and mentally resilient young citizens capable of leading the country's journey towards inclusive growth and sustainable development.

This campaign underscores a clear message: a healthy and empowered youth population is at the heart of India's future. By protecting students from the dangers of tobacco, the Government continues to invest in a stronger, healthier nation.



# Digital innovation key to curbing illegal mining: CM Omar

- ❑ Calls for zero tolerance on illegal mining, highlights tech-driven monitoring
- ❑ Pushes for transparent, accountable mining sector with new surveillance tools



## THE CHANCELLOR NEWS SERVICE SRINAGAR

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah today chaired a comprehensive review meeting of the Mining Department at the Civil Secretariat to assess ongoing modernisation initiatives, regulatory reforms, and surveillance mechanisms in mineral management.

The meeting was attended by Deputy Chief Minister Surinder Kumar Choudhary, Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo, Additional Chief Secretary to the Chief Minister Dheeraj Gupta, Additional Chief Secretary of the Mining Department Anil Kumar, Director of Geology & Mining, Deputy Commissioners, Superintendents of Police, and other senior officials.

During the session, the Additional Chief Secretary (Mining) presented an overview of the department's recent performance, highlighting key technological advancements, regulatory reforms, exploration projects, and financial outcomes.

A major focus of the review was the presentation and live demonstration of the Integrated Mining Surveillance System (IMSS)—a digital initiative developed in collaboration with the Bhaskaracharya Institute for Space Applications and Geoinformatics (BISAG). The IMSS portal and mobile application enable real-time monitoring of mining activities through dashboards integrated with

e-Challan and e-Market systems. This innovation aims to enhance transparency, accountability, and compliance in mineral operations across Jammu and Kashmir.

The Additional Chief Secretary reported that over 243 triggers have been generated for field verification, utilizing features such as vehicle tracking, GPS-enabled monitoring, PoS-linked e-challaning (integrated with J&K Bank), and on-the-spot enforcement actions to curb illegal mining.

Appreciating the initiative, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah directed the developers to explore further delegation of PoS functions to broaden the scope of digital monitoring. He also called for the integration of the department's existing portals with the IMSS platform to ensure seamless implementation and enhanced results.

The Chief Minister suggested enabling citizens to register complaints via mobile devices, with integration of satellite imagery or other evidence, thereby strengthening public participation and grievance redressal.

He instructed the department to categorize active and inactive mineral vendors and suppliers and to establish a dedicated monitoring cell at the Directorate level for continuous data tracking and real-time oversight.

On reviewing reforms under the Special Assistance to States for Capi-

tal Investment (SASCI) 2025-26, the Chief Minister was informed of several initiatives designed to strengthen institutional capacity and transparency in the mining sector. These include a transition to an auction-based system for mineral block allocation, the introduction of mine closure and rehabilitation provisions, and the adoption of advanced survey and mapping techniques. The department has also operationalized the District Mineral Foundation Trust (DMFT) framework to ensure mining revenues directly support local development and welfare initiatives.

The meeting further discussed ongoing efforts to revise the royalty fee structure and penal provisions to better align with market conditions while encouraging compliance.

The Mining Department has mandated GPS-enabled transport and PoS-based transactions to track mineral movement and prevent leakages. Legal enforcement has been strengthened through mandatory royalty clearance certificates, in accordance with recent directives from the Hon'ble High Court, thereby enhancing regulatory oversight and promoting responsible mineral extraction.

Progress on auctioning and granting mining leases for major and minor mineral blocks across districts was also reviewed. The Chief Minister stressed that all necessary clearances and NoCs must be obtained prior to block allocation to avoid delays faced

by successful bidders.

Addressing illegal mining, Omar Abdullah emphasized the need to eliminate collusion within administrative levels, noting that illegal operations can only continue with internal complicity. He remarked, "During my previous tenure, illegal mining was never a concern. With today's technological tools, such activities are possible only if there is collusion at lower levels. The department must use these systems effectively to eliminate that possibility. The less collusion, the lesser the chance of illegal mining."

The Chief Minister also reviewed ongoing exploration projects by MECL and GSI, focusing on sapphire, lithium, lignite, and shallow biogenic gas reserves across various districts. He was briefed on the exploration of granite, graphite, gypsum, copper, and base metals, supported by detailed geological mapping, drilling, and feasibility studies.

He underscored the importance of strict compliance with environmental regulations, especially in eco-sensitive zones, while promoting sustainable expansion of mineral development.

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah commended the Mining Department for its adoption of digital innovation and institutional reforms, urging continued efforts toward transparency, efficiency, and environmental stewardship in the sector.



# Lt. Col. Narain Singh: The Hero Who Stood Alone in 1947

DR. MADHULIKA SINGH

In the annals of India's military history, few names stand out with such tragic heroism as that of Lieutenant Colonel Narain Singh, whose courage, conviction, and ultimate sacrifice during the Pakistani tribal invasion of 1947 remain etched in the nation's collective memory.

Born on March 11, 1907, in a proud military family of Shri Hira Singh in Samba district of Jammu and Kashmir, Narain Singh showed early promise of leadership. A graduate of Boys High School, Samba, he joined the 7th J&K Battalion of the State Forces, embarking on a military journey that would span over 25 years.

During World War II, Narain Singh earned acclaim for his role in the campaign against the Japanese Army. His exemplary leadership and bravery in combat were recognised by the British Government with the prestigious Order of the British Empire (OBE), a rare honour for an Indian officer of the time.

By 1947, he had risen to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, entrusted with the command of the 4th J&K Infantry Battalion, known reverently as 'Fateh Shibji', the oldest battalion in the State Forces.

As Partition tore through the sub-continent in 1947, communal tensions seeped into the ranks of military units. Lt. Col. Narain Singh's battalion comprised two Dogra companies and two Muslim companies, many hailing from the sensitive Mirpur-Poonch region.

The Muslim personnel of his battalion, mostly from Mirpur-Poonch area, were already disgruntled and had close affinities with their co-religionists living on the other side of the border. Additionally, owing to various intelligence reports regarding the plans of sabotage and desecration in collaboration with the Pakistani army, Maharaja Hari Singh was apprehensive of the loyalty of the Muslim companies of Narain Singh's battalion. But Colonel Narayan Singh, being a staunch patriotic army man, could never distrust the loyalties of soldiers on the premise of religion.

He categorically rejected the apprehension of distrust on the Muslim soldiers of his battalion as he had been commanding the Muslim troops of the state army for the last six years. Moreover, the 4th battalion had perhaps the best record of Hindu-Muslim unity among all ranks. However, Narain Singh was repeatedly warned to



**On the night of October 21-22, 1947, Pakistan launched Operation Gulmarg, a clandestine military campaign designed to seize Kashmir by force. Thousands of tribal raiders, backed by Pakistani Army regulars, crossed into Jammu and Kashmir, breaching the Standstill Agreement and descending upon Muzaffarabad.**

remain alert and careful about the religious inclination of the Muslim personnel towards Pakistan but he expressed his full faith in them and subsequently had to pay a heavy price.

On the night of October 21-22, 1947, Pakistan launched Operation Gulmarg, a clandestine military campaign designed to seize Kashmir by force. Thousands of tribal raiders, backed by Pakistani Army regulars, crossed into Jammu and Kashmir, breaching the Standstill Agreement and descending upon Muzaffarabad.

In a couple of hours that followed, hell was let loose in the city- arson, loot, massacre, rape and everything else that may be expected of the barbarians. Most of the houses in the town were set ablaze after looting and plundering. Narain Singh was ordered by Maharaja Hari Singh to march to the frontier region of

Muzaffarabad via Domel to defend Kashmir. As the apprehensions were, the Muslim element of the 4th battalion of JAK at Lohargali and Ramkote, swept by religious fanaticism, committed the pusillanimous act by joining hands with their co-religionists in the enemy force. They led the Pakistani invaders to pre-arranged positions in the areas around Muzaffarabad and Domel and liquidated the posts of the 4th battalion of the state armed forces that were holding out. The desertions by Muslim troops of the state battalion made the job of the invaders easy and the company of the state forces at the border could not give adequate resistance to the enemy.

Consequently, the raiders easily reached Muzaffarabad, where Lt. Col. Narain Singh with a company at Domel offered some resistance. Though shocked at the outlandish act of his trustworthy soldiers, he did not lose heart. Immediately pulling himself altogether, he planned the strategy to face this adverse challenge and outmaneuver the advancing danger. Although fighting against such a large force of the Pakistani dreaded tribals was a sure death, the courageous Colonel shunned all the fear and fought bravely. Fighting against the great odds with only a few of his Dogra soldiers, he swiftly made a move to join the company at Kohala. However, to the ill fate of the Colonel, the two Muslim Companies of 4th JAK battalion at Kohala and Domel acted in a coordinated move and switched sides to join hands with the Pakistani raiders.

Narain Singh, a valiant soldier and gritty officer, displayed great valour in the battlefield to overcome the marauding raiders and save his motherland. He boldly acted from the front and in a hand-to-hand fight that followed; the Muslim company commander Sher Singh killed his officer Lt. Colonel. Narain Singh and all other Dogra officers stationed there. It was a severe treachery and a great blow to the defense of J&K. The courageous Colonel gave the ultimate sacrifice in the service of the nation. His gallant action kept the enemy's forces engaged for the whole day that provided ample time to the state forces deployed in Srinagar Headquarters to plan strategy for the further course of action.

**Author is an Associate Professor, Department of History, University of Jammu**



# Kriya Yoga: The Science of Inner Worship and Divine Realization

S.K.KHUSHU

In every generation, seekers have turned toward the Divine — some through the chanting of hymns, others through temple rituals, and still others through silent meditation in distant caves. The human heart, though clothed in time and circumstance, has always yearned for the Eternal. Yet, in this age of noise and restlessness, Paramahansa Yogananda, the author of the immortal spiritual classic *Autobiography of a Yogi*, offered mankind a luminous path that unites ancient wisdom with the practical demands of modern life — the path of Kriya Yoga.

## The Eternal Quest and the Modern Mind

The modern individual, burdened by unceasing motion and mental turmoil, often feels that spirituality demands a retreat from the world — a life in monasteries, forests, or mountains. Yet Yogananda, echoing the ancient rishis, declared that God is as near in the marketplace as in the Himalayas. He taught that the divine experience does not depend on physical withdrawal, but on inner withdrawal — the inward turning of consciousness from the senses to the soul.

Through Kriya Yoga, this inward journey becomes a scientific reality. It is not a matter of belief or dogma, but of direct perception — the yoga of divine communion through the control and redirection of life energy (prana). Yogananda called it “the airplane route to God,” a precise, sacred technique that accelerates spiritual evolution.

## Kriya Yoga – The Inner Temple of Realization

In temples and shrines across India, the devout pour water on the Shiva Linga, offer flowers, and light lamps — all acts of reverence symbolizing purification and surrender. Kriya Yoga transforms these symbols into inner processes. The devotee no longer offers water outwardly but pours the flow of life-force (prana) upward through the subtle spine, sanctifying the inner altar of consciousness.

This is inner worship — where each breath becomes an oblation, each heartbeat a mantra, and each moment of stillness an offering at the feet of the Infinite. As the practitioner advances, he experiences that the body itself is the true temple and the divine presence the ever-living deity within.



## Yogananda explained:

“Kriya Yoga is the science of controlling life-energy to unite the soul with the Spirit. It transforms ordinary living into a continuous act of worship.”

Beyond Ritual — From Form to Essence

Traditional temple worship, jal chadana, and pooja are deeply sacred when performed with devotion; they uplift the mind toward divine remembrance. Yet they remain symbolic — gestures of aspiration rather than realization. Kriya Yoga, on the other hand, leads the aspirant to experience that which rituals symbolize.

## Aspect Outer Worship Kriya Yoga

Nature Devotional ritual, symbolic offering Scientific method of inner communion

Focus External deity or symbol Indwelling Spirit within

Means Water, flowers, lamps, chants Breath, concentration, and life-force

Goal Blessings, peace, and merit Direct realization of God and soul-union

Dependency Priest or ritual form Guru's teachings and self-effort

Thus, Kriya Yoga is not a replacement for faith, but its fulfillment. It carries the seeker from the outer temple of stone to the living temple of

consciousness.

## No Need for Caves or Monastic Life

In earlier ages, spiritual attainment was often equated with renunciation of worldly life. The seeker would forsake home and hearth, retreat to the mountains, and spend years in meditation. But Yogananda's divine mission was to show that renunciation is not of duties, but of inner attachments.

He demonstrated that one can lead a family life, engage in work, and yet live inwardly free — practicing Kriya Yoga daily, turning the home into a hermitage and work into worship. In his own words:

“Be calmly active and actively calm. Be in the world, but not of it.”

In the quietude of dawn or in a brief pause after daily duties, the Kriya Yogi enters into communion with the Divine — not as a remote abstraction, but as an ever-living Presence that guides and sanctifies every action.

## A Path of Practical Spirituality

Kriya Yoga is uniquely suited for the modern age. It is a science, not bound by religion or nationality. Its practice brings tangible transformation — calmness of mind, clarity of thought, strength of will, and spontaneous love for God and all beings. It harmonizes the spiritual and the material, teaching balance rather

than escape.

As the practice deepens, the practitioner begins to feel divine joy independent of outer circumstances — the unchanging bliss that underlies life itself. In that state, worship becomes unceasing; every act becomes sacred.

## The Gateway to Kriya Yoga

Those who wish to follow this sacred path must first receive instruction in the preliminary meditation techniques, offered through Yogoda Satsanga Society of India (YSS) — founded by Paramahansa Yogananda in 1917 — or through its international counterpart, Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF), headquartered in the United States.

After sincere practice of these preliminary lessons, one becomes eligible for initiation into Kriya Yoga, a sacred ceremony of divine empowerment, linking the devotee spiritually with the great Gurus of this lineage — Mahavatar Babaji, Lahiri Mahasaya, Swami Sri Yukteswar, and Paramahansa Yogananda.

Interested seekers may visit:

Yogoda Satsanga Society of India: <https://yssofindia.org>

Self-Realization Fellowship: <https://yogananda.org>

The *Autobiography of a Yogi*, available both free online and in all major bookstores, is the ideal introduction to this sacred science. It is not merely a book, but a living spiritual vibration that awakens the soul's memory of its divine origin.

## From Outer Devotion to Inner Realization

The time has come for mankind to move from belief to experience, from outer symbols to inner realization. The spiritual renaissance of the modern age will not arise from only new temples or dogmas, but from awakened individuals who live by inner communion with the Divine.

Through the daily practice of Kriya Yoga, one discovers that the Infinite is not distant. God is not confined to images or rituals but breathes through every atom, lives through every soul, and waits within each heart to be realized.

## As Yogananda beautifully affirmed:

“Cease being a devotee at a distance; become a divine lover of God through the practice of Kriya Yoga.”

In this sacred realization, religion finds its fulfillment, worship finds its essence, and man finds his eternal Self.

(Author is a Editorial Advisor, The Chancellor)



# Why India Must Decouple Its China Policy From Pakistan



VIKAS KAPOOR

China's territorial disputes have been a major part of its foreign policy in much of the 20th as well as 21st centuries. As soon as People's Republic of China (PRC) was established in 1949, China declared that its land boundaries with almost all neighbouring countries were ill-defined & needed to be "renegotiated & redefined" then began a long & daunting task of negotiations with 14 countries, out of which only 02 countries left so far in dispute – India & Bhutan (Russia got settled in 1980). However, its SEA boundaries with 09 countries are yet to be resolved. China has a land border of approximately 20,000 Kms and a coastline of about 18,000 Kms. China settled amicably with the majority of the countries except Russia, Vietnam & India, depending on what is at stake.

China & Russia share 14 Nations international border, highest among the world, with China land locked from 03 sides. It was taken over from the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). China's PRC always maintain that Imperial countries (WEST) forcefully took territories of China during Qing dynasty through various treaties which they call it "Unequal Treaties" - Nanking Treaty 1842, Aigun & Tientsin Treaty

1858, Peking Convention 1860, Yili Treaty 1881, China- Portuguese treaty of Peking, Shimonoseki Treaty 1895, Convention for extension of Hong Kong territory 1898, Boxer Protocol 1901 etc.

China & India are two ancient civilisations whose relations date back to several centuries. China & India share historical, cultural and social linkages spanning the various facets of life while a majority of Chinese owe their knowledge of Buddhism to India, ancient Indian trade hugely linked with China. Infact China was a major hub for both land & sea-bound trade for Indians. In modern times, especially with the advent of the British to the Indian subcontinent, China & India lost direct contact with each other. It was only after India's Independence & China's Communists came to power in 1949, we started our diplomatic relationship in the 1950's onwards. Our relations were laid down on Five principles of Panch-Sheel with the notable slogan "Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai". However, the cordiality, warmth & trust shown by India was not reciprocated by China & McMahon Line as demarcated by British between India & China, negated by China as a result of British aggression against China & especially the Tibetan regime of China,

& with Tibet, Aksai Chin & parts of POK in its possession, make the issue even more complicated. India's after independence acquired a dispute with China on the east – the McMahon line & western side a more complex dimension was added on accession of J&K on October 26th, 1947. In 1950, Indian Govt brought into the notice of few Chinese maps showing Indian territory as theirs, on which Zhou Enlai assured our PM that these are old maps & needs to be revised after regime change in China. Our maps clearly show the McMahon line is the final boundary in the East. Despite assurances, China's incursions to our Bara Boti, Damzan, Nilang Shipki pass, Lapthal, Sangcha Malla & Dichu valley. The boundary disputes erupted into open on August 28th, 1959 when Nehru disclosed in Parliament that Chinese crossed over to the Indian side at Longju in Subansiri frontier division, at a place south of Mayyitun & opened fire. Subsequently Nehru & Zhou met in New Delhi from April 19th to 25th, 1960 to discuss differences related to border areas but finally of no avail.

Divergence over India – China boundary led to a brief but appalling war in October 1962 despite India submitted strong, valid & legally backed documents related to border territory,

China took away Aksai Chin (38,000 Sq Kms) in Ladakh which shares its border with Pakistan to China thus pave way for National Highway 219 through it to connect to Xinjiang & also to circumvent Tibetan rebels & Khampas to use this territory for Guerrilla activities against the Chinese regime.

**Major reasons led to China India war in 1962 enumerated as below :**

1. Forward Policy – By October 1961, China was trying to occupy all vacant areas on India's China boundary & have built 07 roads inside India's territory of Ladakh, several roads close to India's border in Punjab, HP, UP, Six to Sikkim & Bhutan borders & 08 roads to NEFA borders & have established as many as seven new posts in Ladakh, 14 in central sector of Punjab, HP & UP, 12 across Sikkim and Chumbi valley & three across NEFA. Chinese efforts had been directed at seizing more Indian territory to create evidence against the 1960 claim. In Retaliation against Chinese incursions, and on the advice of Lt Gen BM Kaul, India also started deploying its troops with a massive Outpost against China which led

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- to China's reaction in a very harsh way.
- Political asylum to Dalai Lama – Though India had given up all its extra – territorial rights on Tibet after signing the 1954 agreement on trade between Tibet region of China & India. Owing to China's crackdown in Tibet in 1950s, Dalai Lama, along with 80,000 Tibetans fled to India in 1959, of late, a movie has also been made – “Four rivers & Six ranges based on the book Flight at the Cuckoo's behest – the life & times of Tibetan freedom fighter by Kunga Samten Dewatshang”. Nehru did it on asylum given to KP Singh a communist leader of Nepal to China in 1954 under International Protocol which Zhou Enlai admitted. While all reports regarding asylum to Dalai Lama are classified till now, although we have been stating on humanitarian basis, some say on behest of US, asylum was given in India.
  - Burgeoning India – United States friendship – Mao replied to a question by President of Mongolia, Zedenbal, asking reasons for war on India in 1962, Mao replied to “Teach India a lesson” as moving very close to the United states of America, and as threat to China.
  - India's Influence – Nehru – Mao ideological rivalry played a role in the deteriorating China – India relations. He wanted to crush Nehru because of few reasons unpalatable to him, especially India getting Undue attention through International Community. Also ideological differences between two countries such as India Democratic socialism vs Mao's Sectarian communism, Non alignment & Alignment, Democracy & Dictatorship, therefore China vying for the Afro- Asian world, perceived it as a serious obstacle to China's ascendancy.
- Nevertheless, as expected War had an adverse effect on China – India Relation, it in fact further escalated over years and led to deep – seated mistrust of China in the Indian psyche.
- Both countries normalized their relations in 1976 when diplomat K R Narayan was appointed as India's first ambassador to China since 1962. Nonetheless, 10 years later in 1986, Chinese & Indian patrols again began confronting each other in Sumdorong Chu Valley of Tawang district of Arunachal Pradesh just east of Bhutan. Negotiations started with diplomatic visits of state heads like Rajiv Gandhi visit to china in 1988, Atal Bihari Vajpayee in 2003, Manmohan Singh in 2008 & 2013, Narendra Modi in 2015, Wen Jiabao to India in 2005 & 2010, Hu Jintao 2006, Li Keqiang 2013 & Xi Jinping in 2014 are few examples.

The Unresolved boundary dispute is still the biggest challenge to the relations between two countries. Fundamentally, the problem is two faceted : While China – India boundary is divided in three sectors – Western, Middle & Eastern sectors, however, disagreements are on western & eastern sectors. Out of the 4000 kms long China – India boundary, approximately 2000 kms of boundary is in the western sector that separates J&K from China's Xinjiang province. India's claim over Aksai Chin, illegally occupied by China during 1962 war, is a part of District Leh & also claim over Shaksgam valley (huge source of fresh water) was compromised by an agreement between China – Pakistan in 1963.

Non Resolution of the China- India boundary problem can largely be attributed to their symmetric capabilities to counter each other. Clearly, India's rising military profile, its status as “first among equals” in South Asia ( to the extent of being called as Big brother in the Indian Subcontinent) and remarkable presence in Bay of Bengal & the Indian Ocean have been major factors in shaping the Chinese approach towards India. With India's look East policy, rechristened as the act East policy under PM Narendra Modi's administration, and its efforts to reach out to the Southeast Asian countries, both countries' aspirations to establish economic dominance in the neighbourhood began to take centre - stage. Hence, India does not fit as a resource source for China or as an object of extractive resource diplomacy as in case of Myanmar and LAO PDR, Nor does India fall into the league of China's satellite states such as North Korea that is dependent on China. While rhetorically, China has been supporting a multilateral dialogue, It has never really favoured the multilateral approach to disputes. For India, the lesson is very clear : Handle all boundary issues Bilaterally. This means resolving Western sector dispute with Pakistan and China separately, not involving either of them.

**Exploring Options for India :**

- India's wish to resolve the boundary issue comprehensively by adopting a sector by sector approach which does not suit China but works to India's advantage in the long run.
- Separate China India issue out of Pakistan – India territorial dispute
- China – India border is by and large peaceful despite being volatile & exception to skirmishes in Doklam, Galwan and Chusul etc. The fine balance of strengthened military capabilities and Infrastructure along the border, along with diplomatic finesse is the need of hour for India.
- INFRASTRUCTURE Development on LAC will keep China

under Check & help India with immediate Reinforcement in case of any Misadventure by China -- Over the past five years, the BRO has completed over 450 projects worth Rs.16,000 crore. With the inauguration of these 75 projects, BRO has completed a total of 111 infrastructure projects in 2024 itself at an overall cost of Rs 3,751 crore. This includes 36 projects worth Rs 1,508 crore, such as the state-of-the-art Sela Tunnel in Arunachal Pradesh, the longest twin lane tunnel in the world, inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in March 2024. In July 2024, PM Modi conducted the “first blast” of the Shinkhun La Tunnel on the Nimu-Padam-Darcha Road which, along with Atal Tunnel, will provide all-weather connectivity to Leh. Constructed at an altitude of 15,800 feet, it will be the highest tunnel in the world. 4.1 kms long, it is a twin – tube tunnel, with unidirectional traffic and cross passages at every 500 metres. It will reduce the travelling time by about 30 minutes, and will also serve as a vital link connecting Lahaul Valley in Himachal Pradesh with the Zaskar Valley in Ladakh. It will boost the security and economy of Ladakh and promote trade, tourism and development in general, bringing new opportunities and improving livelihoods of the local people. The Chisumle-Demchok Road constructed by BRO at an altitude of 19024 feet is the world's highest motorable road over Umlingla, the world's highest mountain pass connecting Chisumle to Demchok in Southern Ladakh, has been recognised by the Guinness Book of World Records. On 23 August 2024 Rajnath Singh laid the foundation stone for India's highest airfield being constructed by the BRO at Mudh-Nyoma in Eastern Ladakh with a 2.743 kms runway and at an altitude of 13,710 ft. This airfield will be developed for wide ranging strategic air assets at a cost of Rs 218 crores. Considering the capability differential vis-à-vis the adversary, China in this case, it is proposed to develop the existing advance landing ground at Nyoma to a full-fledged airbase capable of undertaking operations by wide bodied aircraft like C-17/ IL 76 for large scale deployment of troops and their sustenance by air logistics operations, facilitate defensive and offensive operations by fighters and helicopters and operations by civil aircraft. The construction of this airfield

will tremendously boost air infrastructure in Ladakh and augment the IAF capability along India's northern borders. The runway of Mudh-Nyoma airfield has been completed in a record timeframe of just two working seasons and the entire project is expected to be completed by November 2025. The recently begun Arunachal Frontier Highway will provide inter valley connectivity in Arunachal Pradesh between Kameng, Subansiri, Siang, Lohit and Tirap valleys. Running parallel to the Line of Actual Control, it will provide induction routes and facilitate move and switching of resources for the Army, something which the Chinese are again already most miffed about.

- There is a need to formulate a concrete approach in dealing with the border issue at the political and ideological, military & socio-economic levels & shall also apply to disputes in the South China sea.
- Upgrading the bilateral relationship through the creation of more avenues of cooperation & more economic relations. During April-July 2025-26, India's exports to China rose 19.97% to \$5.75 billion, while imports increased 13.06% to \$40.65 billion. In the 2024-25 fiscal year, India exported goods worth \$14.25 billion to China, while imports reached \$113.5 billion, according to PTI. China accounted for around 35% of India's total trade imbalance, which stood at \$283 billion last fiscal. The deficit was \$85.1 billion in 2023-24. With more tangible stakes, China would be encouraged to settle boundary disputes.
- India Defence preparedness, Surveillance capabilities and swiftness in dealing with Potential threats from across the border. Recent show of Prowess during Operation “SINDOOR” further cemented our reputation.
- US – India souring of relations due to excessive tariffs imposed by the Trump administration, gave China an opportunity to leverage economics between two countries and showcasing its hegemony in the world by engaging Russia, India through the recent SCO summit at Tianjin.

Leaving the territorial dispute resolution for the next generation is intrinsic in China's approach while India finds it more feasible to resolve the boundary dispute first. In essence, both countries should make sure that neither country's approach hurts the other aspects of Bilateral relations.

**(Author is Columnist & Agripreneur)**



# Protect your glow this Diwali

## How to protect your skin from pollution, fireworks, & festive stress

DR. ENNAKSHEE SHARMA

Diwali is a celebration of lights, joy, and community. While it brings families together in warmth and festivity, it also comes with a hidden toll on your skin. Pollution from fireworks, late nights, heavy makeup, and even accidental burns can leave skin stressed, sensitive, or injured.

But with a little planning and mindful care, your skin can stay healthy, resilient, and glowing throughout the season. Here's your dermatologist-approved guide to navigating Diwali skincare, from prevention to post-festival recovery, and crucial first-aid for burns.

### 1. Pre-Diwali Skin Prep: Building a Strong Barrier

Healthy skin acts as your body's first line of defense. Strengthening your skin barrier before Diwali helps minimize the impact of pollution, makeup, and minor irritants.

**Moisturize generously:** Choose ceramide or hyaluronic acid-based moisturizers to lock in hydration. Well-moisturized skin is less likely to crack or become sensitive.

**Use sunscreen daily:** Even short bursts of sun exposure during festive shopping or outdoor rituals add up. A broad-spectrum SPF 30+ is a must.

**Boost antioxidants:** Apply a vitamin C serum in the morning to protect against free radicals released by pollution. Eating antioxidant-rich foods (oranges, pomegranates, spinach, nuts) also helps.

**Gentle exfoliation:** Use a mild chemical exfoliant (glycolic, lactic, or mandelic acid) 1–2 times a week to keep your skin smooth, but avoid harsh scrubs that can leave micro-tears.

### 2. Skincare Amidst Pollution and Fireworks

During Diwali, air pollution levels can spike dramatically, sometimes 4–5 times higher than normal. This can worsen acne, trigger eczema, and speed up skin aging.

#### Protection strategies:

**Cleanse twice daily:** Use a gentle, pH-balanced cleanser to wash away soot, dust, and pollutants. At night, follow double cleansing—first with an oil-based cleanser to remove makeup, then a foaming cleanser.

**Barrier creams:** If you're prone to eczema or sensitive skin, apply a barrier-protective ointment around vulnerable areas like lips, nostrils, and eyelids before stepping out.

**Antioxidant serums:** Vitamin C, niacinamide, or green tea extract



serums can help neutralize free radicals.

**Hydration spray:** A thermal spring water mist or plain rose water spray can help refresh skin after prolonged exposure to smoke.

### 3. Burn and Injury Prevention During Diwali

Accidental burns are unfortunately common during Diwali—whether from diyas, candles, or fireworks. While prevention is always better than cure, knowing first-aid measures is equally important.

#### Preventive tips:

**Clothing safety:** Avoid loose, synthetic fabrics that can catch fire easily. Choose cotton or silk blends when lighting diyas or crackers.

**Safe zones:** Keep fireworks away from children, balconies, and flammable decorations. Always light them in open spaces.

**Keep essentials ready:** Have a bucket of water, a fire blanket, and a first-aid kit handy.

**Handle diyas carefully:** Place them on stable, non-flammable surfaces and keep hair, dupattas, and sleeves away from open flames.

#### 4. First-Aid for Skin Burns

If despite precautions an accident happens, timely and correct first-aid can minimize damage and scarring.

#### Types of burns you may encounter:

**First-degree burn:** Redness, pain, mild swelling (like sunburn).

**Second-degree burn:** Blisters, more intense pain, possible oozing.

**Third-degree burn:** Deep skin damage, charred or white leathery skin, often painless due to nerve damage (requires emergency care).

What to do immediately:

**Cool the burn:** Hold under cool (not ice-cold) running water for 15–20 minutes. This reduces heat and prevents deeper injury.

**Do not apply butter, toothpaste, or oils:** These trap heat and increase risk of infection—a common mistake in households.

**Remove tight items:** Take off rings, bangles, or tight clothing near the burned area before swelling begins.

**Cover gently:** Use a sterile gauze or clean cotton cloth to loosely cover the area. This reduces risk of infection.

**Pain relief:** Over-the-counter pain relievers like paracetamol or ibuprofen can help with discomfort.

#### What NOT to do:

**Do not burst blisters—they act as natural protective dressings.**

**Do not apply powders, herbal pastes, or antiseptic creams without medical guidance.**

**Do not ignore burns on the face, hands, joints, or genitals—these need prompt medical care.**

### 5. Dermatological Care After a Burn

Once first-aid is done, professional care ensures proper healing and minimizes scarring.

**Topical antibiotics:** For second-degree burns with blisters, your dermatologist may prescribe a silver sulfadiazine cream or mupirocin to prevent infection.

**Moist wound healing:** Hydrogel dressings, silicone sheets, or medical-grade honey dressings can promote faster healing and reduce scarring.

**Scar prevention:** Once healed, use silicone gels/patches or prescribed creams with onion extract or vitamin E to minimize post-burn scars.

Laser or microneedling therapy:

For stubborn scars, dermatological procedures can help improve texture and appearance.

### 6. Dealing with Smoke-Induced Skin Flare-Ups

Beyond burns, Diwali pollution can worsen existing skin conditions.

**Acne breakouts:** Pollution clogs pores. Use a salicylic acid cleanser and apply a light, oil-free moisturizer.

**Eczema or dermatitis:** Keep your skin barrier strong with ceramide-based creams. Avoid scratching inflamed areas—apply cold compresses instead.

**Allergic reactions:** Contact with fireworks can trigger rashes. Apply calamine lotion or hydrocortisone cream (if advised by your dermatologist).

### 7. Post-Diwali Skin Detox

After the festivities, give your skin time to recover.

**Soothing masks:** Use aloe vera or oatmeal masks to calm irritated skin.

**Retinol for repair:** Night creams with retinol or peptides promote collagen regeneration and repair oxidative stress.

**Professional cleanup:** A hydrafacial, chemical peel, or oxyfacial with your dermatologist can help restore glow and clarity.

**Lifestyle reset:** Hydrate well, get adequate sleep, and return to a balanced diet with fruits, vegetables, and omega-3 fatty acids for inner healing.

### 8. When to Seek Medical Attention

Not all burns or rashes can be treated at home. Seek immediate dermatological or emergency care if:

The burn is larger than the palm of your hand.

It affects the face, joints, or genitals.

There are signs of infection (pus, foul smell, excessive swelling).

You notice breathing difficulty or eye injury due to smoke/firecracker accidents.

#### Final Thoughts

Diwali is a festival of positivity and light. With the excitement, however, comes an increased risk of skin damage from pollution, late nights, indulgent diets, and accidental burns. The key is prevention first, prompt first-aid when required, and professional follow-up care.

This festive season, remember: glowing skin is not just about looking radiant—it's about keeping it healthy and protected. May your Diwali be filled with joy, light, and safe celebrations—for you and your skin.

(Author is a Dermatologist, ASCOMS & Hospital, Jammu)





# The Hidden Struggles of PM Package Employees in Valley

S M PANDIT

In the wake of recent floods, landslides, and erratic weather patterns, the Education department’s directive for a safety audit of schools seems appropriate on the surface. However, whether this will be a genuine assessment or just a tick-box formality remains an open question. What cannot be ignored, however, is the chronic policy negligence that brought us here in the first place.

Historically, when there was a need for a new school building, locals were asked to provide land. Instead of the education or revenue departments identifying safe, government-owned land, communities often donated low-lying or flood-prone plots, some near rivers or on unstable slopes, without any environmental or safety assessments.

The result? Schools constructed on

vulnerable sites, using substandard material, and left without regular maintenance or upgrades. Today’s “safety audits” are essentially damage control for years of institutional oversight.

The migrant employees’ parallel struggle

The issues don’t end at schools. The plight of PM Package/Migrant employees, posted in Kashmir under various government rehabilitation schemes, echoes a similar lack of planning and compassion.

When the package was first introduced, it was clearly understood, formally or otherwise, that these employees would be posted at district headquarters due to security concerns. But that assurance collapsed at the implementation stage. Only after the tragic killings of employees like Rohit Bhat and Rajni Bala did the administration begin transferring vulnerable staff to safer

locations.

\*Security deflated by distance

\*What initially seemed like a security reprieve soon turned hollow. Many transferred employees were allotted accommodations far from their workplaces. For example, staff posted in Srinagar were sent to Odina in Bandipora, nearly 25 km away. Similarly, other locations like Zewan, Chowgam, and Van Trag are either situated on slopes or near rivers, areas vulnerable to both natural disasters and security threats.

The reality is stark: distance, terrain, poor connectivity, and fragile infrastructure make these colonies risky. Even though there’s relative security inside the colonies, vulnerability looms large outside their gates.

\*\*A history that still haunts\*

The decision to construct a colony at Wandhama, the site of a horrific massacre in the 1990s, may be symbolic for some. But for many in the

community, it’s a haunting reminder of past trauma. While some may see this as reclaiming the space, for the families expected to live there, the psychological scars remain raw.

The way forward: Vertical, not peripheral

This is not just about accommodation; it’s about dignity and security. Migrant employees are not just numbers, they are individuals who deserve empathy, not apathy. It is high time policy planners recognise that sending people to the proverbial “baathen tae baalan” (hillocks and slopes) is not just unwise, it is unjust.

There is no dearth of government land near city centres or district headquarters. Instead of expanding outward into unsafe zones, the government should focus on vertical housing solutions within secure, connected, and well-managed urban areas.

(Author is an educationist)

# Kashmiri Pandits & Aryan-Dravidian Divide

SHAILENDRA AIMA

Some time ago, while I was travelling in a flight, I overheard a Kashmiri Pandit conversing with his grown up son and instructing him about how the Kashmiri Pandits have great ancestry, owing to a distinct gene pool. I remembered how I had written some ten years ago on a similar subject regarding claims which suggested a distinct genetic Aryan-Dravidian divide, and how the so-called dwija had a different gene pool. So, I decided to write on the subject once more.

**Introduction**

The claim that Kashmiri Hindus, especially Kashmiri Pandits, possess a “superior” or “distinct” gene pool periodically resurfaces in popular discourse. Similar assertions extend to caste and tribal groups, often framed within the outdated Aryan Dravidian racial divide. Such ideas, while politically charged, lack grounding in scientific genetics. Instead, the genetic structure of Indian populations reveals a shared ancestry shaped by admixture and continuity, not separateness or hierarchy.

**Methods of Genetic Reconstruction**

Modern population genetics employs ancient DNA (aDNA) sequencing, statistical admixture modeling, and comparative studies across Eurasia and South Asia to infer ancestral components. Labels such as “hunter-gatherer-related,” “farming-related,” or “steppe-related” populations are not discrete races but statistical proxies for ancient lineages that contributed to modern populations (Reich et al., 2009; Narasimhan et al., 2019). These components highlight gene flow across broad regions rather than distinct biological categories.

**Results**

**1. Continuity of Indian Populations**

Archaeogenetic evidence confirms that the Indian subcontinent has been continuously inhabited for at least 50,000 years (Reich et al., 2009). Modern groups across India share ancestry from multiple ancient sources, which intermingled over millennia (Moorjani et al., 2013).

**2. Caste and Community Structures**

Endogamy within castes, including among Kashmiri Pandits, has reinforced community-specific patterns over the last 2,000–3,000 years (Moorjani et al., 2013). These differ-

ences are relative and recent, not absolute or ancient separations. No caste or tribe possesses a unique DNA lineage (Basu et al., 2016).

**3. Tribal Populations and Deep Lineages**

Many Scheduled Tribes retain some of the oldest genetic signatures in South Asia, indicating continuity rather than separateness. Their genetic makeup overlaps significantly with other Indian groups, confirming a shared ancestry (Basu et al., 2016).

**4. Debunking the Aryan-Dravidian Divide**

Ancient DNA shows that movements of people into South Asia were gradual and integrative, not large-scale replacements (Narasimhan et al., 2019). North and South Indians alike are mosaics of the same ancestral sources in varying proportions. Physical differences such as skin color are shaped by a handful of adaptive genes, not distinct “racial stocks” (Basu et al., 2016).

**Discussion**

The persistence of claims about “superior” or “separate” DNA reflects a misunderstanding of genetic science. Colonial-era racial classifications, once imposed to justify

social hierarchies, are resurfacing through misinterpretation of population studies. The scientific evidence clearly demonstrates:

- All Indians share a common ancestry stretching tens of thousands of years.
- Genetic differences between groups are gradual, overlapping, and shaped by endogamy, not markers of distinct races.
- Ancient migrations added to the genetic mosaic, but integration, not replacement, defined South Asia’s population history.
- Caste and tribe distinctions are social constructs, not biological divides.

**Conclusion**

Scientific genetics decisively rejects the notion that Kashmiri Pandits, or any other Indian community, possess a distinct or superior gene pool. Similarly, theories of caste- or tribe-based DNA differences, or of an Aryan-Dravidian racial divide, are unsupported by evidence. Instead, India’s genetic history is one of continuity, admixture, and unity within diversity. Recognizing this helps dismantle racialized narratives and affirms the shared heritage of all Indians.

(Author is an Eminent Educationist)





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