



Editor

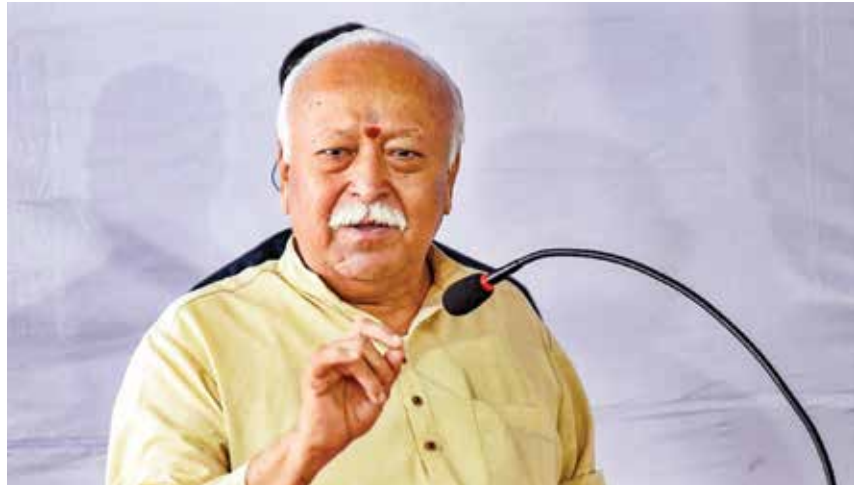
New Facets Of RSS Revealed

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Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, a neo-convert to the Hindutva parivar, is engaged in a competition with himself in alienating a section of his own people. History, past and present, has several instances that betray the disconnect between what the RSS preaches and what its foot soldiers practice on the ground

For all those who think

the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) represents an idea that is antithetical to the idea of India, its chief Mohan Bhagwat has something to say. In a speech that is part of the centenary celebrations of the organisation, he said the leadership of the RSS is open to people from all castes, including the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and the only requirement for the post is that

the person must be a Hindu.

He said the Uniform Civil Code, a contentious issue which several sections of the people think violates several constitutional provisions, should be framed by taking everyone into confidence and must not lead to divisions.

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It is not very clear what prompted the head of the Sangh Parivar to project an idea of inclusiveness when the government it hand-holds at the Centre works towards undermining the very idea of diversity and federalism in the country. While Bhagwat wants the UCC to be a friendly exercise, the BJP government in Uttarakhand has implemented one which destroys his idea of it.

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It's highly unlikely that the Sangh feels the need for a change in tack, though his terse reaction to a question whether good days for the RSS came after the BJP came to power can arouse curiosity among the

Sangh observers. "It's the other way round," he said, making it amply clear the organisation is not dependent on the comforts the BJP can offer. It may be remembered that the RSS' response was not very muted when then BJP president J.P. Nadda said his party was able to stand on its own. Fraternal fracas, perhaps.

Chhattisgarh will Carve a Distinct National Identity in Knowledge, Technology and Innovation: CM Sai

Historic MoU Signed Between Chhattisgarh's Electronics & IT Department and STPI in the Presence of the Chief Minister

Centre of Entrepreneurship (CoE) and Electronics System Design and Development (ESDD) Centre to be Established in the State

Chhattisgarh is a state rich in natural resources. Our objective is to ensure that Chhattisgarh also establishes a distinct identity across the country in the fields of knowledge, technology and innovation. Chhattisgarh Government is moving steadily in this direction to position the state as a leader in knowledge-driven and technology-led development.

Driven by modern infrastructure, an effective e-governance framework and investor-friendly policies, Chhattisgarh is today emerging as a reliable and attractive destination for IT, IT-enabled services (ITES) and emerging technology-based industries.

Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai stated this while addressing a programme held at his residence office on Tuesday February 10, 2026, following the signing of an important Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Electronics and Information Technology Department, Government of



Chhattisgarh, and the Software Technology Parks of India (STPI).

Chief Minister said that this initiative has been undertaken with the aim of fostering entrepreneurship among the youth and providing world-class opportunities in sectors such as IT and ITES within the state itself. Under the MoU, a Centre of Entrepreneurship (CoE) and an Electronics System Design and Development (ESDD) Centre

will be established in Chhattisgarh.

He explained that through the proposed Centre of Entrepreneurship, innovation and start-ups will be promoted in four key sectors—Artificial Intelligence, forest and medicinal product-based MedTech, smart city solutions, and smart agriculture. In addition, a state-of-the-art Electronics System Design and Development (ESDD) Centre will be set up, which will

provide facilities for product design, prototyping, skill development and capacity building to approximately 30 to 40 hardware start-ups and MSMEs every year.

Chief Minister Sai said that this initiative will ensure that the youth of the state have access to incubation, mentorship, funding and advanced laboratories within Chhattisgarh itself. This will help curb the migration of highly skilled youth to larger cities and promote employment and entrepreneurship at the local level. Describing the collaboration with a nationally reputed institution like STPI as highly significant, he noted that STPI's extensive experience, with 68 centres and 24 sector-specific Centres of Entrepreneurship across the country, will take Chhattisgarh's start-up and innovation ecosystem to new heights.

Expressing confidence, the Chief Minister said that this MoU would prove to be a milestone in the state's economic development and would give Chhattisgarh a new identity on the national map in the fields of digital innovation, technological entrepreneurship and start-ups.

On the occasion, Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister Subodh Kumar Singh, Secretary of the Electronics and Technology Department Ankit Anand, Director STPI Ravi Verma, CEO of ChiPS Prabhat Malik, along with other senior officials, were present.

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Union Home Minister Amit Shah, attended the closing ceremony of Bastar Pandum 2026 in Chhattisgarh on Monday February 9

In the next five years, Bastar will become the most developed region among all tribal areas, and new tourism activities will enrich Bastar with employment opportunities

Declaring the birth anniversary of Bhagwan Birsa Munda as Tribal Pride Day and his 150th birth anniversary as the Year of Tribal Pride is a clear testament to Modi Ji's respect for the tribal community

Core basis of the fight against Naxalism is the protection of tribal farmers, innocent children, and women

New industrial area being developed on 118 acres will become a strong foundation for employment for the people of Bastar

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision is to showcase Bastar's culture to the nation and the world

On this occasion, several dignitaries, including the Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh, Vishnu Deo Sai, and Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma, were present.

Raipur : In his address, Union Home Minister and Minister of Cooperation, Amit Shah, said that Bastar, which till a few years ago lived in fear of Naxalites, where mortar shells, gunfire, and IED



- Bastar's identity is not 'Barud'; its true identity is its rich culture and heritage
- Bastar Pandum' has revived the local culture by encompassing 12 categories, including Bastar's cuisine and dances
- Participation of 55,000 tribal people in Bastar Pandum is proof that Bastar is becoming free from the fear of Naxalism
- Fully committed to the protection of tribal communities, the Modi govt is giving global recognition to Bastar's dances, arts, and tribal culture
- Those Naxalites who surrender will be rehabilitated by the govt, but any use of weapons will be met with a response in kind

blasts spread terror among our tribal brothers and sisters. Today in the same Bastar 55 thousand people revived the local culture across 12 disciplines such as cuisine, songs, dance, drama, attire, traditions, and forest-based

medicines. He said that this is a very significant achievement. Amit Shah said that the Chhattisgarh government has breathed new life into the culture of Bastar. In the previous Bastar Pandum festival, competitions were held

in 7 categories, and this time, by adding five new categories, Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai has worked to promote tribal and Bastar culture. He said that this time, 55,000 participants from seven districts, 1,885 gram panchayats, and 32 block headquarters took part across 12 categories.

Union Home Minister said that the culture and art of Bastar are unparalleled across any tribal region of the world, and we want to preserve them for hundreds of years to come. He added that Bastar's art, culture, songs, and dances are not only the pride of Bastar but also a jewel in the crown of India's culture, and the Bastar Pandum festival has further promoted this rich heritage. Shri Shah said that the tribes of Bastar have their own distinct culture. He said that since the time of Lord Ram, they have preserved their culture. The region's major dances are also gaining recognition on the national platform in the coming days.

Union Home Minister and Minister of Cooperation said that Pandit Ram Mandavi of Narayanpur, Hemchand Manjhi, Ajay Kumar Mandavi of Kanker, and Bhudhari Dati of Dantewada have been honored with Padma awards in the fields of art, health, and education, thereby gaining recognition across the country. He added that Prime Minister Narendra Modi Ji has launched a comprehensive programme to honour more than 700 tribal commu-

nities. The Prime Minister initiated the Tribal Museum with a cost of ₹200 crore, which preserves the memories of all tribal leaders who participated in the freedom struggle.

Home Minister thanked the President of India for attending the inauguration ceremony of Bastar Pandum. Shah said that he had requested that the participants who secured the first three positions in all 12 categories be invited for a meal at Rashtrapati Bhavan, which the President has accepted. He added that these participants will showcase their culture and art at the President's House, which is a matter of great honour.

Union Home Minister, Shri Amit Shah, said the core basis of the fight against Naxalism is the protection of tribal farmers, innocent children, and women. He said that when Naxalites plant IEDs, don't they realize that tribal farmers may step on them and become permanently disabled? Don't they realize that an innocent child could be devastated by this? Where do the Naxalites get such cruelty from? Appealing to the remaining Naxalites to lay down their arms, Union Home Minister said that the government will take care of those who surrender in every way and will rehabilitate them with dignity. Shri Shah added that the rehabilitation package prepared by the Chhattisgarh government is very attractive.

Amit Shah said that he

wants to appeal to all Naxalites to send their daughters for rehabilitation, because the girls have their whole lives ahead of them. He said that those who have surrendered on a large scale will not face any harm. The Home Minister said that those who fire bullets in villages, plant IEDs in fields and on roads, burn schools and hospitals, and shut down mobile towers will not be spared. He said that weapons will be met with weapons.

Union Home Minister and Minister of Cooperation said that today Bastar is shining before the entire country as an excellent brand. Many schools that had been closed for 40 years have been reopened by the Chhattisgarh government. Shri Amit Shah said he wants to ask tribal brothers and sisters: whom did the Naxalites benefit by shutting down schools? Our new generation was deprived of basic education. Shah said that in the next five years, Bastar will become the most developed region among all tribal areas, and new tourism activities will enrich Bastar with employment opportunities. All closed primary health centres, hospitals, and schools will be restarted, and higher secondary schools and colleges will also be built. He added that now post offices are opening in every village, mobile towers are being installed, and roads connecting villages are being built properly. The Home Minister said that in many villages, the national flag, the Tricolour,

has been hoisted after four decades.

Amit Shah said that every village will have connectivity, and a post office or bank branch will be opened every 5 kilometres. Paddy from every tribal farmer will be procured at the rate of ₹3,100, and each tribal person will be given 5 kg of rice per person per month free of cost. In addition, gas cylinders will be provided, every household will get tap connections, and water will flow from the taps. Elected representatives alone will represent panchayat, tehsil panchayat, and district panchayat. He said that once Naxalism ends, many new forms of tourism such as adventure tourism, homestays, canopy walks, and glass bridges will begin to develop, and very soon we will take Bastar far ahead. Shri Shah added that in Bastar, a new industrial area and an auto gig hub are being developed over 118 acres, which will provide employment to tribal youth.

Union Home Minister said that work on the Raoghat–Jagdalpur rail project, costing ₹3,500 crore, has begun. The river-linking project is also being taken forward, and efforts are underway to provide vocational training in various trades to more than 90,000 youths. A new irrigation project on the Indravati River, costing ₹36 crore, will also be introduced, which will generate 120 megawatts of power as well. Amit Shah said that today there is no cur-

few-like atmosphere in Bastar, and at night one can see glimpses of cultural dances in the villages—this is a very big change for Bastar. He said that the Bastar Olympics has been successfully held, and now we are thinking of expanding Bastar Pandum further. Home Minister thanked all the security personnel who took part

in the strong and decisive fight against Naxalism on behalf of the tribal people of Bastar, and expressed gratitude to the families of the brave security personnel who sacrificed their lives in this struggle. He said that Bastar will become Naxal-free within the stipulated time frame, and no one should have any doubt about this.

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Union Home Minister and Minister of Cooperation said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s vision is to take Bastar’s culture to the nation and the world. He said that Bastar’s identity should not be associated with ‘Barud’, but with its rich culture and heritage. Shri Shah also said that we are fully committed to the protection of tribal communities, the Modi government is giving global recognition to Bastar’s dances, arts, and tribal culture. Prime Minister Modi firmly believes that history is not only what is written in books; history is what lives on in the memories of the people.

Amit Shah said that declaring the birth anniversary of Bhagwan Birsa Munda as Tribal Pride Day and his 150th birth anniversary as the Year of Tribal Pride is a clear testament to Modi Ji’s respect for the tribal community. He said that Modi Ji has promoted the commercial use of tribal crafts, culture, cuisine, and forest produce, and put in place arrangements for the branding and marketing of around five lakh forest products and traditional handicrafts.

OF CABBAGES AND KINGS | Heralding Global Doom Or Bonanza? World In A Tizzy On Possibilities Of AI



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Every magazine or newssheet seems to feature deliberations on the powers, dangers, possibilities of AI. Some of them are apocalyptic predictions, others about the benefits that this undoubtedly huge scientific step promises

● **Farrukh Dhondy** | In his words: "I am just a professional writer, which means I don't do blogs and try and get money for whatever I write."

Im unique! As a drop is in an ocean?

But hear the words I write and speak! Really?

Have you no f***ing notion?

That a million scribblers have gone before — Some have written gospels to last for evermore

You are nobody, one in a crowd Say

'I am nothing!' proclaim it loud!"

From Goal Mall: Destination Shopping, by Bachchoo

It makes strides towards cures for cancer, provides photographs of Sir Keir Starmer in a bikini; undresses women and even children for perverts; answers examination or thesis questions; threatens mass unemployment; eliminates government bureaucracy all over the world; confuses Greenland with Iceland, Beijing with Taiwan, says Viktor Orban rules Turkey... No, sorry that last was not AI, that was the



President of the United States.

Nevertheless, AI is probably the most useful and threatening invention/discovery since science provided the key to splitting the atom — giving us nuclear energy, Hiroshima and Nagasaki and now the proliferating threat of undemocratic theocracies and autocracies acquiring nuclear bombs.

Every magazine or newssheet seems to feature deliberations on the powers, dangers, possibilities of AI. Some of them are apocalyptic predictions, others about the benefits that this undoubtedly huge scientific step promises. And there are articles about the criminal misuse of AI and then even funny pieces about AI's egregious blunders. Greenland as Iceland, anyone?

I haven't made use of AI, though a friend insistently downloaded an app on my phone and said I should get AI to write screenplays for me: "just give them the gist of a plot and AI will flesh it out and even write scenes".

I haven't done any of that but I know he uses AI to generate stories and refers to his "AI 'assistant'" by some cute female name. (Though I love and respect this friend, I find that in bad taste and really pathetic.)

Even so, a positive story: Together with several of my activist colleagues from the past decades, I belong to a group called the Darcus Howe Legacy Collective.

My late friend Darcus was one of the most prominent voices, in print, on TV and in the world of radical activist politics representing the black and Asian new communities of Britain.

The DHLC was formed to commemorate his achievements and keep his contribution to justice and progress in Britain's contemporary history

alive.

Towards this aim, perhaps with a certain degree of frivolity, one of our collective asked AI to write articles in Darcus' style and "voice" on a couple of contemporary political issues.

"This story unravels, not just as a narrative of individual failings, but as the symptoms of a system that shields its own, even as it devours the vulnerable.

"Andrew, the once-charismatic Duke of York, seemed for decades to skate untouchably on the water of royal immunity, his missteps brushed away like ephemeral smudges on the grandeur of monarchy. Enter Jeffrey Epstein, the enigmatic financier whose orbit was synonymous with exploitation and duplicity.

"The meeting of these two worlds — aristocratic privilege and sordid criminal enterprise — was less a collision and more a conflation of shared impunity..." And so, it eloquently goes on, using metaphors of skating on waters, etc, which wouldn't have occurred to me. The piece is also dotted with allusion to what AI (shall we call him "Ali"? —fd. Stop contradicting yourself —Ed) sees as my style: "With his trademark blend of social critique and cultural commentary..." Etc. OK, one is used to the occasional complimentary remarks from a generous book reviewer, but coming from the contemporary God-of-all-analytical-perception... Oh dear!

What is lacking in the piece is any new insight. It is an elegant summary of the character

and status of Andrew and Epstein but it doesn't tell the reader anything that he or she may not already know... I don't mean some new discovery, news or gossip.

I mean an analytical insight which is unique and fresh. And now to check if AI can solve mysteries? Readers of this column will know that each week it is prefaced with a quote from the copious library of works by Bachchoo.

Now nothing is known about Bachchoo, except that he lived in a place called

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I have to say, the results in two instances were convincing and even impressive. I could actually hear him formulating the opinions AI did on his behalf. Scary? Inspired by these, even as I write this, I thought I should try it out and ask AI to compose a column on a contemporary subject — let's say ex-Prince Andrew and the Jeffrey Epstein files, in the style of this very column: an AI-generated Cabbages and Kings. Hold your breath: "In the labyrinthine corridors of power and privilege, where secrets intertwine with silence, the saga of Andrew and Epstein emerge — not merely as tale of scandal, but as a stark reflection of the rot at the heart of the establishment.

"Bachchoo ka adda", so it was obvious that I would want to see if AI could solve the mystery.

I ventured to ask, and here's what I found: AI says that Bachchoo is the pseudonym of the last Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah Zaffar.

Really??? It also says that it is the name adopted by the Hindi satirist Shard Joshi or a Trinidadian writer called Satnarine Bachchoo... and a Mauritian politician and a Bulgarian wrestler... So that's solved. God bless AI!

Tharoor slams 'underwhelming' budget, likens it to 'rearranging air-bags on crashing car'

“These announcements are like modern courtships — promises without commitments.”

New Delhi : Describing the Budget as an “underwhelming” and a “squandered opportunity”, Congress MP Shashi Tharoor on Tuesday February 10, 2026 likened it to rearranging air bags on a crashing car while assuring the passengers that the chassis is sturdy and they will feel better afterwards.

Initiating the debate in Lok Sabha on the Union Budget, Tharoor quoted Mirza Ghalib's famous Urdu couplet — ‘Dil ko khush rakhne ko yeh khayaal achcha hai’ — to attack the government and said the real weakness of the budget lies in implementation as rhetoric is not matched by reality.

“This is headline management — where promises are loud like that horn, budgets are grand, but delivery is conspicuously absent. The Budget this year has landed with a thud, not because of what it contains, but because of what it omits. Behind claims of fiscal prudence lie a more uncomfortable reality: the Indian state is shrinking not by design, but by compulsion,” the Congress MP said.

Hitting out at the government for not meeting the promises it made in the agriculture sector, Tharoor said,



“These announcements are like modern courtships — promises without commitments.

This Budget is praised for prudence, but prudence without vision or fairness is hollow, he said.

“It ignores unemployment, rising living costs, and inequality, offering little to address the real struggles and aspirations of the aam aadmi,” the Congress leader said.

The government speaks endlessly of welfare, but its spending tells a very different story as behind flashy announcements lie chronic under-utilisation and administrative failure, he claimed.

“Media reports show that of over Rs. 5 lakh crore budgeted for 53 major welfare and infrastructure schemes last year,

barely 41% was spent in the first nine months of the fiscal year. Take the Jal Jeevan Mission – allocated Rs. 67,000 crore, it managed to spend an astonishingly low Rs. 31 crore in nine months. The much-touted PM Schools for Rising India scheme spent only Rs. 473 crore out of Rs. 7,500 crore.

“Most shocking of all, the Pradhan Mantri Anusuchit Jati Abhyuday Yojana, meant for the socio-economic upliftment of Scheduled Castes utilised merely Rs. 40 crore of its Rs 2,140 crore allocation,” he said.

This is not governance but headline management — where promises are loud, budgets are grand, but delivery is conspicuously absent, Tharoor said.

He said the reality of the government's tall promises and narratives of "model governance" was out in the open.

They are not policies grounded in outcomes, but carefully curated illusions, glossy schemes and utopian projections that might soothe the imagination but everyday life for the ordinary citizens of India remains unchanged, he said. "Hope is repeatedly sold, but delivery remains perpetually deferred. Viksit Bharat by 2047 is an admirable ambition, but this Budget offers no credible pathway to reach it," Tharoor said.

He further said unemployment continues to rise, poverty hardens, jobs remain scarce and wages stagnant.

"Small businesses, already gasping for relief, are smothered under layers of compliance, while informal workers, who sustain our economy with their labour, are pushed further into invisibility and insecurity. They promise railways, yet stations crumble. They speak of flight, yet UDAN has flown away. Our pepper, once celebrated as black gold, withers under neglect," he said.

Education is curtailed precisely when it should be expanded, he said.

"One and a half lakh schools still function without electricity, yet 'Viksit Bharat' is spoken of as if the lights are already on. When vision is severed from reality, it ceases to be aspiration and becomes merely an illusion," he said.

A truly Viksit Bharat will not be built on slogans, speeches or symbolism, but on delivery that reaches the last citizen of

India, Tharoor asserted.

"Turning promises into outcomes is not a favour. It is not a choice. It is our kartavya," he added. Tharoor pointed out that government expenditure as a share of GDP has declined over the past decade, briefly rising during the pandemic before reverting close to its 2016 level, driven by stagnant revenue mobilisation.

"Tax receipts have remained flat relative to GDP, disinvestment has underperformed, and non-tax revenues increasingly rely on extraordinary transfers such as RBI dividends — an unsustainable substitute for a stable revenue base. More troubling is the shift in

the tax burden towards individuals, bearing a greater share of the tax burden than corporations, despite sharp post-pandemic profit growth," he said.

Capital expenditure is emphasised, yet weak demand, stagnant wages, high youth unemployment, compressed welfare spending, and inadequate devolution to states, all persist — leaving India fiscally disciplined but developmentally constrained, without the revenue capacity or strategic clarity to deliver real economic security for the aam aadmi, he said, adding that this is why he calls it an "underwhelming budget".

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"I had remarked that the 2025 Finance Bill reminded me of the garage mechanic who said, 'I couldn't fix your brakes, so I made the horn louder.' Looking at the Budget this year, I am saddened to observe that though the horn has been muted, that there hasn't been enough movement: for this Budget too appears to be a squandered opportunity, equivalent to rearranging the airbags on a crashing car, while assuring the passengers that the chassis is sturdy and they will feel better afterwards," Tharoor said.

सुशासन से समृद्धि की ओर छत्तीसगढ़ विष्णु के सुशासन से संवर रहा छत्तीसगढ़



• छगन लोन्हारे उप संचालक (जनसंपर्क)

मुख्यमंत्री विष्णुदेव साय ने 2 वर्ष के मुख्यमंत्रित्व काल में छत्तीसगढ़ राज्य में विकास का एक नया आयाम गढ़कर राज्य के नागरिकों के दिलों में राज करने वाले मुख्यमंत्री के रूप में अपनी विशिष्ट पहचान स्थापित की है। विष्णुदेव साय जनता के बीच के एक ऐसे लोकप्रिय मुख्यमंत्री हैं जिनकी सदाशयता और दूरगामी योजनाओं से प्रदेश में विकास और प्रगति का राह आसान हुआ है। मुख्यमंत्री विष्णुदेव साय आदिवासी पृष्ठभूमि से आते हैं। इस दृष्टि से आदिवासी पृष्ठभूमि से आने वाले वे प्रदेश के प्रथम मुख्यमंत्री हैं। प्रदेश में हाल ही में पुलिस महानिदेशकों एवं पुलिस महानिरीक्षकों का सम्मेलन आयोजित किया गया। जिसमें प्रधानमंत्री श्री नरेंद्र मोदी एवं केन्द्रीय गृह मंत्री श्री अमित शाह शामिल हुए।

मुख्यमंत्री विष्णु देव साय की सरकार ने एक साल के भीतर छत्तीसगढ़ के किसान भाइयों के खाते में 52 हजार करोड़ रुपए अंतरित कर उन्हें उत्साह से भर दिया है। धान खरीदी समाप्त होने के एक सप्ताह के भीतर किसानों को भुगतान कर दिया गया है। 52 हजार करोड़ रुपए किसानों के खाते में आने से वे खेती किसानी में भरपूर निवेश कर रहे हैं और इससे बाजार भी गुलजार हुए हैं जिससे शहरी अर्थव्यवस्था पर सीधा असर दिख रहा है। ट्रैक्टर आदि की बिक्री ने रिकार्ड आंकड़ा छू लिया है। धान का उचित मूल्य मिलने से किसानों की संख्या में बढ़ोत्तरी हुई और गत वर्ष 25 लाख 72 हजार किसानों ने 149 लाख 25 हजार मीट्रिक टन रिकार्ड धान बेचा। सरकार बनने के दूसरे दिन ही केबिनेट की बैठक कर मोदी जी की गारंटी के अनुरूप 18 लाख 12

हजार 743 प्रधानमंत्री आवास उपलब्ध कराने की स्वीकृत करने का निर्णय लिया गया।

विष्णुदेव साय ने अपने दो साल के संक्षिप्त कार्यकाल में छत्तीसगढ़ को सम्पूर्ण देश में एक नई ऊंचाई पर पहुंचाया है। बहुत कम समय में मुख्यमंत्री विष्णुदेव साय ने प्रदेश की जनता के बीच जाकर पूरे प्रदेश की जनता का विश्वास जीता है और न केवल विश्वास जीता है बल्कि उनके हित को ध्यान में रखकर उन्होंने ऐसी योजनाओं का क्रियान्वयन किया है जिससे छत्तीसगढ़ का समग्र विकास सम्भव हो पाया है। यह केवल और केवल विष्णुदेव साय जैसे एक संवेदनशील, कर्मठ तथा ऊर्जावान मुख्यमंत्री ही सम्भव कर सकते हैं। नक्सल हिंसा प्रभावित गांवों में नियद नेल्लानार योजना के माध्यम से सड़क, शिक्षा, स्वास्थ्य और संचार जैसी मूलभूत सुविधाएं दुर्गम क्षेत्रों तक

पहुंच रही है। प्रदेश में अब तक कुल 69 सुरक्षा केंद्र स्थापित किए गए हैं।

मुख्यमंत्री विष्णुदेव साय ने मुख्यमंत्री पद का शपथ लेते ही प्रदेश की समस्त महिलाओं को महतारी वंदन योजना जैसी एक लाभकारी योजना का सौगात दिया है। महतारी वंदन योजना से प्रदेश की महिलाओं को हर माह एक हजार रुपए की राशि दी जाती है जिससे वे स्वावलंबी बन सकें एवं स्वयं का रोजगार भी प्रारंभ कर सकें। साथ ही प्रदेश भर के किसानों को 2 साल का बकाया बोनस और 31 सौ रुपए प्रति विंटरल की दर से धान खरीदी जैसे वादों को पूरा कर छत्तीसगढ़ के किसानों का मान बढ़ाया है। प्रदेश की नवीन औद्योगिक नीति से राज्य में अब तक 7.69 लाख रुपए के निवेश के प्रस्ताव मिले हैं।

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मुख्यमंत्री ने कहा कि हमारे जवानों के अदम्य साहस और सरकार के निरंतर प्रयासों से नक्सलवाद अब अंतिम सांस ले रहा है। केंद्रीय गृह मंत्री श्री अमितशाह का संकल्प है कि मार्च 2026 तक नक्सलवाद समाप्त कर देंगे। वो संकल्प पूरा होते साफ दिख रहा है विशेषकर बस्तर क्षेत्र में, जो वर्षों से विकास की मुख्यधारा से अछूता रहा है। वहां अब विकास की गंगा बहेगी।

मुख्यमंत्री श्री साय ने कहा कि प्रदेश में बीते 02 वर्षों में 529 नक्सली मारे जा चुके हैं, 1975 नक्सलियों को गिरफ्तार किया गया है और 2628 नक्सलियों ने आत्मसमर्पण किया है। प्रदेश के बस्तर अंचल में आतंक का पर्याय रहे हार्डकोर नक्सली लीडर बसवराजू, लक्ष्मी नरसिम्हा चालम उर्फ सुधाकर, और माडवी हिड़मा को न्यूट्रलाइज किया गया इन पर करोड़ों का इनाम घोषित था।

मुख्यमंत्री विष्णुदेव साय ने प्रदेश के हर वर्ग के लोगों को साथ लेकर चलने का बीड़ा उठाया है। उन्होंने प्रदेश के हर वर्ग की बुनियादी सुविधाओं और जरूरतों को ध्यान में रखते हुए पीएम आवास योजना, कृषक उन्नति योजना, नियद नेल्ला नार, अखरा निर्माण योजना जैसी योजनाओं का शुभारम्भ किया है और जनता के बीच अपनी एक अलग छवि निर्मित की है।

मुख्यमंत्री विष्णुदेव साय जनता के बीच और हर समुदाय के बीच एक ऐसा पुल बनाना जानते हैं जिससे सभी एक दूसरे से जुड़ सकें और सभी प्रदेश के हित में अपनी-अपनी जिम्मेदारियों का निर्वाह भी कर सकें। उन्होंने अपने जीवन का बहुमूल्य समय प्रदेश की जनता को समर्पित कर यह सिद्ध कर दिया है कि उनका जीवन केवल उनका नहीं है अपितु प्रदेश की जनता की निस्वार्थ सेवा के लिए समर्पित है। वे सही मायने में एक ऐसे जननेता हैं जिनके लिए जनता ही सब कुछ है। ऐसे सेवाभावी और लोकप्रिय जनसेवक बहुत कम होते हैं जिनके लिए जनता का विकास और जनता का साथ ही सबसे महत्वपूर्ण होता है। यह सभी प्रदेशवासियों के लिए गौरवान्वित होने का विषय है कि मुख्यमंत्री विष्णुदेव साय उनके अपने बीच के लोकप्रिय नेता हैं जिनके लिए प्रदेश की जनता की खुशहाली ही सर्वोपरि है।

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Don't Let America Decide From Where To Source Oil



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● **Pavan K. Varma** | The writer is an author, diplomat and former member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha)



The US government has issued a presidential order to set up a “monitoring committee” to ensure that India does not buy oil from Russia “directly or indirectly”

In the 19th century, colonialism overwhelmed and plundered nations through military power; later, neo-colonialism used military and economic power to co-opt

nations into servility; today, we have, in Trump’s doctrine and practice, the advent of tariff imperialism.

I do not make hasty judgements. The India-US trade deal would naturally involve some give and take, and I had cautioned against premature euphoria or blanket condemnation. But in the details subsequently made public, one issue is a matter of deep concern: Is America

putting a veto on India’s purchase of fuel from Russia?

The US government has issued a presidential order to set up a “monitoring committee” to ensure that India does not buy oil from Russia “directly or indirectly”. Such an arrangement is tantamount to a direct challenge to India’s sovereignty. Monitoring, in this context, is a euphemism for outside supervision. It implies suspi-

cion, conditional trust and the presumption that India must be kept under watch lest it deviate from an approved path. Such an arrangement, if accepted, would set a dangerous precedent. Sovereignty is rarely lost in one dramatic moment; it is more often diluted through small concessions presented as pragmatic compromises.

The minister of external affairs, in a statement after the US Monitoring Committee was announced, has not categorically asserted that India will exercise its sovereign right to decide where it sources its imports from. It has merely said that “national interest will be the guiding factor in our choices”, which would depend on “adequate availability, fair pricing, and reliability of supply”.

One would have thought that our response should have been far less ambivalent. In the past, India has always defined national interest in terms of the notion of strategic autonomy. It was never isolationism, nor was it naïve moralism. It was the recognition that a civilisational state, emerging from colonial subjugation, must preserve the right to decide for itself — who it trades with, whom it befriends and how it safeguards the welfare of its people. That principle has never been abandoned, but this is precisely what seems to have happened now.

The blunt question is: Can a third country dictate to a sovereign nation what commodities it may buy, from whom, in what quantities, and

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The blunt question is: Can a third country dictate to a sovereign nation what commodities it may buy, from whom, in what quantities, and at what price? To suggest that India should voluntarily restrict its energy options — particularly when discounted supplies are available — is to ask it to bend before a third country's fiat ignoring our sovereign rights. Even if cheaper oil is available elsewhere, the choice to avail it must be ours, not an order by an outside power. Besides, purchasing oil from Russia is not only an issue of fuel supplies. India-Russia relations are time-tested, and we have extensive and strategic tie-ups in the areas of security and defence. To put such a relationship in jeopardy, not because our national interest dictates it, but because a third country has so directed, is a challenge to our autonomy and dignity.

at what price? To suggest that India should voluntarily restrict its energy options — particularly when discounted supplies are available — is to ask it to bend before a third country's fiat ignoring our sovereign rights. Even if cheaper oil is available elsewhere, the choice to avail it must be ours, not an order by an outside power. Besides, purchasing oil from Russia is not only an issue of fuel supplies. India-Russia relations are time-tested, and we have extensive and strategic tie-ups in the areas of security and defence. To put such a relationship in jeopardy, not because our national interest dictates it, but because a third country has so directed, is a challenge to our autonomy and dignity.

The threat by America that punitive tariffs or additional sanctions will be reimposed if India does not comply, sharpens the sense of diktat. Sanctions, by definition, are instruments of coercion. When applied extraterritorially and unilaterally, they challenge the very notion of equal sovereignty among states. To acquiesce to such pressure would be to accept a hierarchy in which some nations legislate not only for themselves, but for others as well. For instance, would America accept a condition, under the trade deal, that India has the right to impose punitive tariffs on the US if it in any way bolsters Pakistan's military establishment and the terrorism infrastructure it openly supports against India? I think

not.

Supporters of acquiescence argue that the strategic partnership with the United States is too important to jeopardise. This is undoubtedly true — but partnerships, to endure, must be based on mutual respect. Strategic convergence cannot mean strategic submission. India has shown, time and again, that it can maintain strong relations with diverse powers without becoming an appendage of any. Indeed, it is precisely this independence that makes India a valuable partner, not a pliant one.

There is also a larger systemic concern. If India accepts restrictions today on oil from Russia, what prevents similar pressures tomorrow on defence procurement, technology partnerships, or relations with other countries deemed inconvenient? Once the principle of external veto over internal decision-making is conceded, the slope becomes perilously slippery.

Another argument often advanced is moral — that buying Russian oil indirectly supports its invasion of Ukraine, or any other actions that the so-called "rule-based international order" may not endorse. Morality in international relations, however, has always been selective, contextual and subordinate to national interest.

History offers no shortage of examples where today's moral arbiters have themselves traded with regimes of dubious virtue when it suited their strategic or economic

needs. India's position, even on Ukraine, has been consistent and transparent: It advocates dialogue, diplomacy, and de-escalation while keeping its national interest paramount.

This is not cynicism; it is realism tempered by restraint. India's rise in the world has been accompanied by a renewed assertion of its voice, conscious of its history and responsibilities, and not apologetic when defending legitimate national choices.

Nor should we hesitate in asserting that sovereignty is not a bargaining chip to be traded for short-term advantage. In the final analysis, this is not an argument against engagement with the United States, nor a defence of any particular supplier. It is an argument for first principles. India's national interest is best served when its choices are made in New Delhi, not ratified elsewhere. Trade deals must enhance prosperity, not circumscribe autonomy. Strategic partnerships must widen options, not narrow them.

The United States, for its part, must decide what kind of relationship it truly seeks with India. Is it one of partnership between equals, or one of alignment enforced through pressure? Trump is transient. But sovereignty is not. A free nation does not need permission to buy from wherever it wants. To accept otherwise would be to forget not only the lessons of history, but the meaning of independence.

Budget 2026: From Digital to Intelligent: India's Tax Confidence Takes the AI Leap



Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday February 1, 2026 proposed an outlay of ₹20,000 crore for a carbon capture and utilisation scheme spanning multiple sectors, including steel and cement, as part of the Union Budget for 2026–27.

At the Union Budget 2026-27, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman unveiled a significant Rs 20,000 crore is allocated for carbon capture and utilisation. Incentives will boost seaplane manufacturing for tourism and connectivity. A high-level committee will assess banking reforms for sustained growth. Seven high-speed rail corridors and a ship repair ecosystem are also planned.

As part of measures to boost economic growth, the Finance Minister said the government will set up a high-level committee on "Banking for Viksit Bharat" to assess reforms needed to sustain the sector's growth momentum.

Among other proposals, Sitharaman announced plans to develop seven high-speed rail corridors between cities as growth connectors, and to establish a ship repair ecosystem for inland waterways in Varanasi and Patna.

Highlighting the strength of the banking system, the Finance Minister said India's banking sector is marked by strong balance sheets, record



profitability, improved asset quality and higher coverage ratios. She said the sector is now well placed to take a forward-looking view on reforms required to continue on a path of reform-led growth, with the proposed high-level committee expected to guide future policy measures.

The World Economic Forum framed 2026 around responsible deployment of AI at scale and investing in people. At the 2026 World Economic Forum, AI dominated the agenda. Leaders across sectors emphasised

that AI is no longer a technology discussion but an economic and geopolitical one. AI is now foundational infrastructure, requiring massive investments in compute, talent, and energy. Safety, governance, and international coordination are critical, as capability outpaces governance. The IndiaAI Mission signals a clear shift from isolated AI adoption to a nationally anchored approach for building AI capabilities at scale. As we head into Union Budget 2026-27, a strong signal from the Government would be a stronger push for

'AI infrastructure and talent' – incentivising compute, high-quality data access, and industry-led skilling so India can move from AI consumption to AI creation at scale, while keeping compliance simple and future-ready.

The good part is that India's tax ecosystem, equipped with a mature digital backbone, is uniquely positioned to accelerate this momentum.

For tax leaders, that translates into a simple equation: use AI to orchestrate workflows end to end, pair it with skilled teams, and enforce governance that stands up to regulators and auditors. For tax functions, long burdened by documents and routine workflows, this is transformational. Structured compliance has become faster and cleaner, while narrative-heavy processes – submissions, notices, research and audit preparation – are being reimagined with AI's ability to synthesise, summarise and articulate complex tax concepts. The result is a new operating rhythm – faster, cleaner and increasingly predictable, benefiting both tax administrators and businesses.

India's Digital Tax Foundation: Ready for the GenAI Leap

Over the last decade, India has built one of the world's most advanced digital tax ecosystems – GSTN, e-invoicing, AIS/TIS, PAN–Aadhaar linkages and faceless assessments – expanding the tax net, improving data quality and accelerating processing.

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For tax leaders, that translates into a simple equation: use AI to orchestrate workflows end to end, pair it with skilled teams, and enforce governance that stands up to regulators and auditors. For tax functions, long burdened by documents and routine workflows, this is transformational. Structured compliance has become faster and cleaner, while narrative-heavy processes – submissions, notices, research and audit preparation – are being reimagined with AI's ability to synthesise, summarise and articulate complex tax concepts. The result is a new operating rhythm – faster, cleaner and increasingly predictable, benefiting both tax administrators and businesses.

This digital backbone is now enabling organizations to standardize data, automate reconciliations, and embed

governance into operations. Tax functions are shifting from periodic, year-end compliance exercises to continu-

ous discipline.

AI is making Tax Smarter, faster, and more efficient.

AI now performs tasks once handled only by tax professionals - reviewing documents, drafting responses, identifying risks, and producing high-quality summaries. The 2025 EY Tax & Finance Operate Survey underscores this shift, with 86% of leaders prioritizing data and AI, and 81% planning significant operational changes. Indian tax functions are already seeing the impact: greater agility, accuracy and stronger compliance readiness.

AI is also elevating audit preparedness through first-cut responses, judgment summaries and sector-focused analysis. As accuracy rises and costs fall, AI is moving from task automation to full workflow orchestration, creating faster, more predictable outcomes. But meaningful transformation requires disciplined prioritization, strong data foundations and a clear digital break. A disciplined framework that prioritizes ROI, scalability and measurable impact ensures AI is applied to the right problems. With thoughtful prioritization, adoption shifts from experimentation to meaningful, reliable outcomes.

Guardrails: 'Human in the loop'

With AI's ability to interpret, generate, and structure tax content, governance is

not optional - it is foundational. Therefore, three principles must anchor adoption : source-verified datasets, verifiable and traceable reasoning and a 'Human-in-the-loop' where GenAI drafts, professionals interpret, validate and refine. The objective is responsible augmentation with speed and efficiency but without compromising legal accuracy or judgment.

EY India has leapfrogged AI in Tax

At EY, we are building an ecosystem where AI augments human judgment, enhances quality and accelerates how teams plan, comply and defend in an AI-first era.

EY's global US\$1.4B investment in AI has enabled EY India Tax professionals to embed AI deeply into our delivery model. Our flagship AI solutions, EY India AI Tax Hub bring together a suite of AI tax agents built specifically for India's regulatory landscape and trained on authenticated statutory content. These agents now support the full tax lifecycle - research, compliance, data validation, assessments, litigation workflows and high-quality drafting - delivering consistent, verifiable outputs at scale.

By upskilling more than 5,000 tax professionals through structured AI literacy initiatives and hands-on adoption frameworks, EY India's Tax teams can today confidently integrate AI into day-to-day operations and provide sharper insights to

clients.

As we deepen our AI-led transformation, the next phase of our journey is about translating capability into domain-level impact. AI is already redefining tax research and litigation by rapidly synthesizing statutes and case laws, generating high-quality drafts, and enabling faster, more defensible responses. It is also reshaping tax compliances through automated reconciliations, real-time validations, and embedded governance across GST, TDS and corporate tax workflows. The EY India AI Tax Hub, with purpose-built agents trained on authenticated statutory content, is already enabling this shift at scale.

The Road Ahead: Intentional, Responsible, Scalable

AI is reshaping the future of tax - not by replacing expertise, but by amplifying it. With the right governance, clarity of purpose, and disciplined prioritization, tax functions can:

- Improve accuracy
- Reduce cycle times
- Strengthen compliance readiness
- Enhance predictability
- Operate with greater strategic confidence

The next chapter will be written by leaders who approach this technology shift with discipline, vision and accountability, and treat AI not as a shortcut but as a strategic partner.

After Ajit Pawar's Passing, Bjp Has New Compulsions in Maharashtra



Alliance politics in Maharashtra exposes BJP's search for a durable Maratha face

Sunil Gatade | The writer is a senior journalist based in New Delhi.

The desperation shows. The BJP's pulling out all the stops to project Ajit Pawar as one of the greatest leaders contemporary Maharashtra has produced looks more like the politics of its compulsions.

It may sound strange, but despite taking centre-stage in the premier state's politics, the world's largest party remains uncertain about its future in the land of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. Despite its dominance, the BJP remains unsure of its stability to remain for long at the top.

Three years ago, the RSS and a section within the BJP were adamant that the party had made a mistake when the ruling Mahayuti welcomed Ajit Pawar into its ranks.

They insisted that Ajit was the most corrupt leader around and that bringing him along would be a huge risk for the image-conscious BJP.

In fact, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had spoken out against Ajit and his alleged Rs 70,000-crore corruption just two days before admitting the NCP leader to the Mahayuti fold, ostensibly to teach Sharad Pawar a lesson. Another reason was that the BJP desperately needed a



credible Maratha leader on its side, and the only one available was Ajit Pawar. He was a secular leader acceptable to all communities.

Interestingly, Eknath Shinde of the Shiv Sena, who was leading the government at the time, was also a Maratha, but Ajit was in a completely different league in terms of stature.

Furthermore, the BJP needed Ajit's support to make inroads in sugar-rich western Maharashtra, from where Sharad Pawar was drawing his strength.

The BJP's tragedy is that it has failed to produce a Maratha stalwart or anyone who can compete with Ajit or Sharad Pawar, the Maratha

strongman of the past.

What the BJP's politics has done brick by brick over the last 40 years is to weaken Sharad Pawar's grip on the state, even in recent decades when Ajit was his prominent lieutenant in state affairs.

Saheb, as the senior Pawar is known in state affairs, and Dada, as Ajit is known, were essentially entrenched rivals for the BJP, knowing full well that unless they are marginalised, the path to power was unclear. So, the BJP deliberately allowed vicious campaigns against the Pawar duo. Whether Pawar Senior or Ajit were extreme villains was debatable, but a target was set.

Prior to making national headlines, Anna Hazare was involved in numerous activities in Maharashtra, most of which were directed against the Congress. Recognising that the former Jan Sangh and its successor, the BJP, had a predominantly Brahmin-Bania character, the party went to great lengths to appoint a diverse leadership.

The herculean effort culminated in 1995, when Gopinath Munde, the BJP's OBC face, was appointed deputy CM. However, the Pawar problem persisted and could not be eradicated. In fact, Munde's single focus before and after becoming Dy CM was to target Sharad Pawar.

This is despite the fact that Pawar Senior was instrumental in bringing the BJP, then a member of the undivided Janata Party, to power as part of the PDF coalition led by him. Sharad Pawar became the state's youngest chief minister at the age of 39 in 1980, following what then-Congress chief minister Vasantdada Patil described as "stabbing me in the back".

The Pawars have always hindered the BJP's growth in Maharashtra, owing to the fact that Pawar Senior was a well-connected individual and one of the state's most hard-working leaders. It is another matter that he has also remained controversial. When his NCP joined the ruling BJP-led Mahayuti three years ago, Ajit, 66, was always an outlier.

RSS functionaries at various levels had objected to the BJP's alliance with a "corrupt" Ajit, deeming it sacrilegious.

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The BJP's dual approach to Pawar Senior was visible in the 1990s, when Pramod Mahajan and Gopinath Munde were in charge of the Maharashtra BJP and took contradictory approaches to him in public. Mahajan was friendly with Pawar, the then CM, and would frequently meet him for extended periods of time. On the other hand, Munde, his brother-in-law and the face of the party in the state, was lethal against Pawar, whom he used to portray as the epitome of corruption. At the time, the Opposition used the wild allegations of a senior Maharashtra government official named G.R. Khairnar, a maverick, to relentlessly target Sharad Pawar.

Devendra Fadnavis' formation of the ill-fated government with Ajit as deputy CM in 2019 was no coincidence or accident. Fadnavis could not have committed the error without a green signal from Delhi.

Interestingly, the Sangh appeared to have supported the BJP's audacious act of causing a split in the Shiv Sena, the party's closest Hindutva ally until recently.

The essence of it all was that those who believed in the Sangh ideology were vehemently opposed to Ajit and his controversial past, believing that by aligning with the NCP, the BJP had unwittingly dug its own grave. The Congress was weakened by Sharad Pawar's parting of ways on the issue of Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin, and the BJP won half of the battle.

The world's oldest party attempted a self-goal in a

Congress-friendly state at a time when its support was dwindling. Post-Ajit Pawar, the BJP's attempt is to totally dominate the politics of the state. A weak and rudderless NCP allows the BJP to advance its agenda while marginalising its other ally, the Shiv Sena led by Eknath Shinde, who has his own mind and is signalling that he must be counted.

In fact, the politics of Maharashtra has come to a crossroads, and the nimble-footed BJP is making all attempts to turn itself into a "double engine" by speedily taking along the feeble post-Ajit NCP, in a shrewd move aimed at gobbling it up.

UGC: Hawkishly 'Woke' Or Just Politically Motivated?



Tea and coffee during mealtimes are not recommended -- much to the consternation of cultures, where tea is the lingua franca of bonhomie.

● Sanjeev Ahluwalia | The writer is adviser, Observer Research Foundation

These deficiencies were sought to be overcome by the new January 13, 2026 UGC regulation which was commendable in trying to deepen and institutionalise the mechanisms for embedding equity and ending discrimination in higher education. — Internet

There are 1,270 such universities and 14,725 colleges serving millions of students. Since 2012, the UGC has implemented a regulation titled "Promotion of Equity in Higher Educational Institutions". Teachers and parents have an overweight influence on shaping young minds by their thoughts and their behaviour. It is reasonable then to expect an elevated level of due diligence from both sets of "guardians" in discharging their responsibilities versus their wards. India is a land of divergent identities, religions, castes, languages and culture. Unsurprisingly then, "equity" is an abiding central theme in the Indian Constitution.

The University Grants Commission (UGC), created under a 1956 Union government legislation, regulates all



universities and colleges, collectively referred to as Higher Education Institutions (HEI). There are 1,270 such universities and 14,725 colleges serving millions of students. Since 2012, the UGC has implemented a regulation titled "Promotion of Equity in Higher Educational Institutions".

In January, this year a new UGC regulation was notified. It built upon the earlier regulation from 2012, that sought to safeguard the interests of students without any prejudice to their caste, creed, religion, language, ethnicity, gender or disability.

The earlier regulation was long on defining discrimina-

tion comprehensively, identifying the prohibited actions or behaviour as markers of active discrimination but was short on monitoring, measuring, reporting and dealing with discrimination.

These deficiencies were sought to be overcome by the new January 13, 2026 UGC regulation which was commendable in trying to deepen and institutionalise the mechanisms for embedding equity and ending discrimination in higher education.

Consider that one anti-discrimination officer per HEI, under the 2012 regulation, was replaced by an Equal Opportunity Centre (EOC)

with a designated co-ordinator who doubles as the secretary of an Equal Opportunity Committee, chaired by the head of the HEI. Three internal faculty members and one staffer were members as were two meritorious students from the HEI and two external members from civil society. This single change, suitably broadened the structure for sharing administrative power and responsibility, including for adequately protecting a complainant.

Further, internal Equity Squads were envisaged to exercise vigilance and monitor vulnerable spots to prevent discrimination. An Equity Ambassador was to be nominated in each department and faculty of the HEI, thereby creating an ecosystem of equity supporters, all of whom would also feed ground-up information to the EOC.

Timelines for management of incidents of discrimination ensured quick redressal.

The EOC would meet within twenty-four hours of an incident of discrimination, report within fifteen days to the head of the HEI, who would act on the report within seven days.

All cases inviting penal action under the law would be reported forthwith to the police by the HEI.

The envisaged EOC was far more initiative-taking than earlier arrangements. It was expected to co-ordinate with civil society, local media, police, district administration, non-government organisations working in the field, fac-

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ulty members, staff, and parents to further its aims.

It would also coordinate with the District Legal Services Authority and the State Legal Services Authority to provide legal aid in deserving cases.

Monitoring arrangements to periodically ascertain the efficiency of the proposed institutional arrangements were also embedded. The EOC would publish a bi-annual report of its activities and make it available on the website of the HEI along with updates on the demographic composition of students and staff, dropout rates of the students for the previous academic year, grievances/complaints received under these regulations, and their status. Each HEI was expected to establish and operate a 24×7 "Equity Helpline".

If this was not possible, the equity helpline of the affiliating university must be accessible to the stakeholders of that college. Most importantly, the identity of a stakeholder (identified broadly to include faculty, staff and students) reporting a violation of equity was to be kept confidential if requested by the informant.

Implementation of the 2026 regulations would have been good for society, and the often-vitiated environment in colleges and universities. But this was not to be. There was an immediate negative reaction from upper caste students and supporters who labelled the new regulation as an attempt to sideline

upper caste interests.

What roused their ire? Four provisions of the regulations were objected against. First, that regulation 3 (c) defines caste-based discrimination "exclusively" as discrimination against Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Castes. By explicitly including Other Backward Castes but overlooking upper castes it promoted a perverted interpretation of the regulation, potentially enshrining rather than reducing discrimination.

This is more so as regulation 3 (e) defines "discrimination" more broadly and correctly as "any unfair, differential, or biased treatment or any such act against any stakeholder, whether explicit or implicit, on the grounds only of religion, race, caste, gender, place of birth, disability, or any of them. Second, with a spate of state-level elections during the year, the new regulation was identified as an attempt to woo the reserved categories of voters (OBC, SC and ST), who far outnumber the unreserved voters.

Third, since it enlarged the regulatory ambit significantly, it would have been appropriate to also discourage malicious complaints specifically, with punitive provisions to deter frivolous or motivated grievances and complaints.

Complaints have increased from 173 cases in 2019-20 to 378 in 2023-24, not too high versus the population of students which could be multiple millions. With more sup-

portive mechanisms for registering complaints, the numbers could explode.

Expectedly, the Supreme Court has stayed the 2026 regulation on January 29, responding to three petitions, and used its powers under Article 142 to revive the 2012 regulations which had been repealed when the 2026 regulations became effective.

This automatically puts in abeyance the attempt by the UGC to deepen the scope of prohibitions against discrimination in educational institutions and enlarge the apparatus for identification, monitoring and effective prevention of discrimination in higher education institutions.

Leaving aside the legal matter of the less than perfect drafting, which ignited the apprehensions of the upper castes, and caused the regulations to be put in abeyance, two issues remain unresolved.

Who done it? Was the drafting genuinely incompetent and muddled? If yes, how effective are our parliamentary systems, to prevent defective legislation from sailing through? Or was it a case of the executive turning a Nelson's eye to contradictory provisions within the same legislation, to cater to political messaging, at a time when state Assembly elections dominate, hoping that the judiciary would do the right thing and carry the political blame? The first is genuinely troubling.

The second, however, is somewhat oddly reassuring.

US Is Deploying Second Aircraft Carrier To West Asia, Amid Iran Tensions

The US president Donald Trump is increasing pressure on Iran to make a deal over its nuclear programme through deploying second aircraft carrier.

Second aircraft carrier, the USS Gerald R Ford, and its escort ships from the Caribbean to West Asia will be deployed

Washington DC : The United States is deploying a second aircraft carrier, the USS Gerald R Ford, and its escort ships from the Caribbean to West Asia, the New York Times reported on Friday.

The development comes as US President Donald Trump weighs military action against Iran as talks continue between Washington and Tehran over the latter's nuclear programme. The US is increasing pressure on Iran to make a deal over its nuclear programme. The NYT report said that four US officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity have confirmed this development and stated that the vessels are not expected to return to their home ports until late April or early May. The USS Ford strike group's new orders will have it join the USS Abraham Lincoln carrier strike group in the Persian Gulf. The USS Lincoln aircraft carrier and three guided-missile destroyers arrived in West Asia more than two weeks ago. The ship's extraor-



dinary deployment, which began June 24 when the Ford left port in Norfolk, Virginia, was originally meant to be a European cruise but was redirected to the Caribbean as part of Trump's pressure campaign on Venezuela, the New York Times reported.

The US news outlet reported that the USS Ford's warplanes participated in the January 3 attack on Caracas that captured President Nicolas Maduro. The strike group's current deployment has already been extended once, and its sailors were expecting to come home in early March.

Trump, after his meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday (local US time), said that Iran was struck by 'Midnight Hammer' previously when it failed to reach a deal and added that he hoped Tehran would act in a more reasonable and responsible way this time. On June 21-22, 2025, under "Operation Midnight Hammer," the United States conducted strikes

against Iranian nuclear infrastructure, targeting three key sites in Fordow, Natanz, and Isfahan. Iran strongly condemned the operations, denouncing them as a blatant violation of international law and the UN Charter.

Recently Iranian official Ali Larijani, in an interview with Al Jazeera, emphasized that indirect negotiations with Washington are ongoing in Oman and that no specific proposal has yet been received from the United States. Iran's state media reported that Larijani noted that the United States has reached the conclusion that it must adopt an approach toward Iran that differs from the military option, describing Washington's entry into the negotiation process as a sign of moving toward a "rational path." Further, he rejected any discussion about "zero enrichment," stating that Iran requires enrichment for the energy sector and the production of medicine. He warned: "If the United States attacks us, we will target its military bases in the region," a report in the IRNA news agency said.

India Aviation Reform Vital Before Reckless Expansion



The State has to come down hard and take control to ensure that flight safety gets top priority at all times

● **Abhijit Bhattacharyya** | The writer is a life member of the Aeronautical Society of India and an alumnus of the National Defence College, New Delhi.

The prospect of civil aviation spreading to every nook and corner of this country is a welcome development. This was evident at the just-concluded "Wings India" in Hyderabad, and acknowledged by both Airbus and Boeing, the two biggest players in the world passenger aircraft market. While Airbus predicted India's commercial aircraft fleet would triple to 2,250 by the next decade, Boeing claimed "India and South Asia will need 3,300 new aircraft by 2044".

Nevertheless, the reality of Indian aviation must be closely examined. Let's start with the State's foundational document, the Constitution of India, which prescribes the role and responsibility of various wings of the State: Parliament and state legislatures, the executive, judiciary and the overlapping Centre-state concurrent responsibilities. Under the Seventh Schedule, the "Union List" (Item 29) includes "airways, aircraft and air navigation of aerodromes, regulation and organisation of air traffic and of aerodromes; provision for aeronautical education and training and regulation of such education and provided by



states and other agencies". There is no mention of aviation in either the "State List" (containing 66 items) or the "Concurrent List" (of 47 items). Therefore, like control over the Railways, aviation is the sole prerogative of the Central government and its duties and responsibilities are clear and unambiguous. Aviation is a Central subject and not that of the states as it's a strategic asset of a continent-like-country of 1.42 billion people.

This issue has gained critical importance due to two recent accidents -- the first on June 12, 2025 at Ahmedabad airport after an Air India Boeing-787 "Dreamliner" crashed immediately after take-off, killing 260

people in air and on the ground; and the second on January 28, 2026, near Baramati airfield in Maharashtra, where a chartered Learjet-45 of a private non-scheduled operator crashed, killing the deputy chief minister of Maharashtra and his staff on board. In Ahmedabad, a big plane crashed within seconds of take-off. At Baramati, a small aircraft crashed seconds before landing. That means both take-off and landing in Indian aviation, along with the man-machine interface and overall airport infrastructure and management, deserve an in-depth re-look, and long-term reforms need to be initiated.

The expansion of aviation at

breakneck speed does not always work, mainly due to sheer complexities and sophistication of technology and the possible absence of adequate numbers of trained personnel in the apron, hangar, control tower and cockpit.

Aviation is essentially a capital, fuel, labour and tech-intensive industry, and the gestation period of each requires long-term expertise and impeccable professionalism. Hence, anyone with the sole motive of profit and cutting corners to fly high should never be allowed to operate. The State has to come down hard and take control to ensure that flight safety gets top priority at all times.

Since the vast majority of private airlines have clearly proved themselves to be less than competent, it is time for the Centre to get back into the aviation sector because a continent-like-country India should never be left without a strategic industrial asset like aerial route. Let the private firms continue to operate, but the field today needs sound operators with financial heft. The private operators, regrettably, have showed their ambition but not their ability. Without sound economics and deep pockets, operating in the aviation sector is hard to sustain. Quality control and flight safety being the top priority, financial shortcuts are bound to lead to avoidable disasters.

Let's peruse an open-source Internet document. A letter dated March 5, 2019 by the chief electoral officer of Telangana, addressed to all state officials, forwarded information received from the

Election Commission on the "list of non-scheduled operators' permit-holders, as updated by the DGCA, New Delhi, up to 20.2.2019". There were 99 (NSOP) private carriers on the eve of India's 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

Today, the same "List of NSOP", as updated till 30.9.2025 and uploaded in its website, contains 133 carriers (all private, except Pawan Hans, which is the only government-owned helicopter service provider). The list contains a bewildering variety of aircraft and helicopters, virtually all of which are foreign-made, and thus imported at a huge cost. Cessna, Bell, Falcon, King-Air, Euro-copter, Beechcraft, Embraer, Challenger, Airbus, Ecureuil, Hawker, PC-12, AW (Augusta-Westland), Gulfstream, Robinson, Pilatus, Sikorsky, Bombardier, Dauphin, Leonardo, Mi-172 and Learjet-45 fill the inventory which criss-cross the Indian skies. This mushrooming growth of NSOPs requires

pilots, engineers, maintenance staff, mandatory check of flying machines, repair, overhaul, spare parts, flight testing, landing charges, parking charges and various other paraphernalia which require huge investment and an endless flow of cash because of the flight safety factor.

The off-line airfield at Baramati, where the January crash took place, is now in focus. Any serious person in the aviation world will always prefer to operate in a proper take-off/landing environment, with all equipment on the ground in order. Helicopters can of course be deployed from helipads; but if a fast-moving 15-year-old Learjet-45 with a VIP on board takes to negotiating an inherently challenging scenario, with manual helping hands on the ground or a rudimentary control tower, it may be time to first concentrate on arrival and departure facilities on the ground before going in for a reckless expansion of air assets.

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Aviation is the most unforgiving among all modern industries, and the way things have been run in India ever since the 1991-1992 liberalisation and privatisation means there is a vital need for course-correction by the Indian State. The skies can't be left solely in the hands of private players any longer. As is well known, over 34 non-scheduled private carriers have closed shop in last 34 years. On top of that, the Government of India was forced to privatise Air India owing to the recurring losses it was incurring.

Arundhati Roy Pulls Out of Berlin Film Festival Over Gaza Row

Roy said that she was “shocked and disgusted” by responses from Wenders and other jury members to a question about the Palestinian territory at a press conference on Thursday February 12, 2026 ,

Award-winning Indian writer Arundhati Roy said Friday she was withdrawing from the Berlin Film Festival over jury president Wim Wenders’s comments that cinema should “stay out of politics” when asked about Gaza.

Roy said in a statement sent to AFP that she was “shocked and disgusted” by responses from Wenders and other jury members to a question about the Palestinian territory at a press conference on Thursday February 12, 2026 .

Roy, whose novel “The God of Small Things” won the 1997 Booker Prize, had been announced as a festival guest to present a restored version of the 1989 film “In Which Annie Gives It Those Ones”, in which she starred and wrote the screenplay.

However, she said that the “unconscionable” statements by Wenders and other jury members had led her to reconsider, “with deep regret”.



When asked about Germany’s support for Israel at a press conference on Thursday, Wenders said: “We cannot really enter the field of politics”, describing filmmakers as “the counterweight to politics”.

Fellow jury member Ewa Puszczynska said it was a “little bit unfair” to expect the jury to take a direct stance on the issue.

Roy said in her statement that “to hear them say that art should not be political is jaw-dropping”.

She described Israel’s actions in Gaza as “a genocide of the Palestinian people by the State of Israel”.

“If the greatest filmmakers and artists of our time cannot stand up and say so, they should know that history will

judge them,” she said.

Roy is one of India’s most famous living authors and is a trenchant critic of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government, as well as a firm supporter of the Palestinian cause.

Restored versions of two films by late Egyptian directors, “Sad Song of Touha” by Atteyat Al Abnoudy and “The Dislocation of Amber” by Hussein Shariffe, have also been withdrawn from the festival over its stance on Gaza.

“The Berlinale respects these decisions,” a spokeswoman said in a statement sent to AFP. “We regret that we will not welcome them as their presence would have enriched the festival discourse,” she said. –

Shying away from politics

– The Berlinale traditionally has a reputation for topical, progressive programming, but so far this year's edition has seen several stars shy away from taking a stance on the big political issues of the day.

US actor Neil Patrick Harris, who stars in the film "Sunny Dancer" was asked on Friday if he considered his art to be political and if it could help "fight the rise of fascism".

He replied that he was "interested in doing things that are apolitical" and which could help people find connection in our "strangely algorithmic and divided world".

This year's Honorary Golden Bear recipient, Malaysian actor Michelle Yeoh, also demurred when asked to comment on US politics in a press conference on Friday, saying she "cannot presume to say I understand" the situation there.

This is not the first edition of the festival to run into controversy over the Gaza war. In 2024, the festival's documentary award went to "No Other Land", which follows the dispossession of Palestinian communities in the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

German government officials criticised "one-sided" remarks about Gaza by the directors of that film and others at that year's awards ceremony.

The war in Gaza was sparked by Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack on Israel, which resulted in the deaths of 1,221 people, according to an AFP tally based on official Israeli figures.

Israel's retaliation has left at least 71,000 people dead in Gaza, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory, whose figures the UN considers reliable.

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"The Berlinale respects these decisions," a spokeswoman said in a statement sent to AFP. "We regret that we will not welcome them as their presence would have enriched the festival discourse," she said. – Shying away from politics – The Berlinale traditionally has a reputation for topical, progressive programming, but so far this year's edition has seen several stars shy away from taking a stance on the big political issues of the day.

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Will BNP's Big Win Lead To Reset Of Delhi-Dhaka Ties?



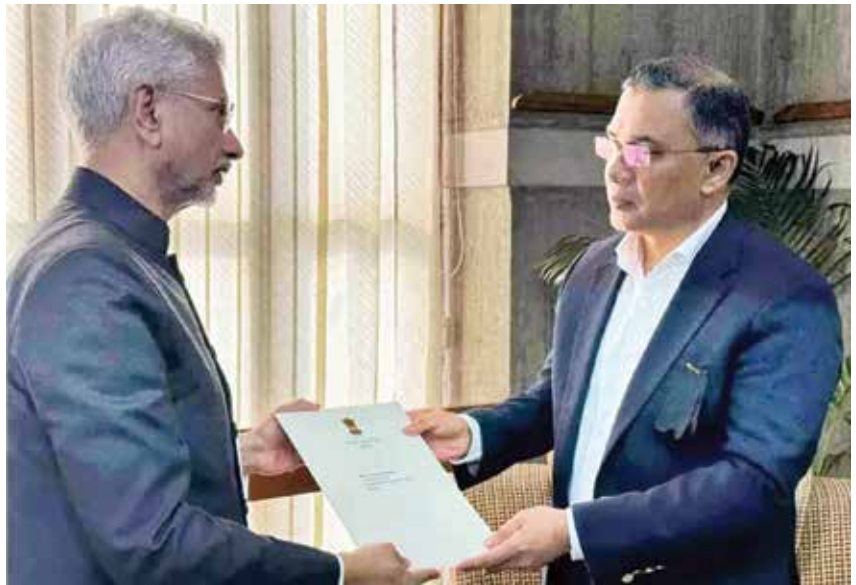
The BNP-led alliance reportedly leads with 216 seats out of 299 seats, with that led by Jamaat-e-Islami (Jel) having won 76 seats. Jel is questioning the election's integrity and not yet conceding defeat

● K C Singh | The writer is a former secretary in the external affairs ministry

The Bangladesh general election on February 12 was crucial for that country as well as all its South Asian neighbours, including India. The last election in January 2024 was followed by rising disenchantment with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government. As the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the then main Opposition, had boycotted the election, it had lacked legitimacy. This election ranks even worse as the Awami League, which ruled Bangladesh from 2009 to 2024, was barred from it.

The initial reports indicate the turnout was below 50 per cent. Former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, living in self-exile in India, saw the low percentage as a mass electoral boycott. She dubbed it a "voter-less, illegal and unconstitutional" election.

The BNP-led alliance reportedly leads with 216 seats out of 299 seats, with that led by Jamaat-e-Islami (Jel) having won 76 seats. Jel is questioning the election's integrity and not yet conceding defeat. The principal competition was between two alliances. One, led by the BNP, under the leadership of



Tarique Rahman, late Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's son. After a 17-year exile in Britain, he returned in December, five days before his mother's death. The other 11-party alliance is led by Jamaat-e-Islami, a traditionally pro-Pakistan Islamist right-wing party. That includes the National Citizens Party (NCP), formed by the student-protesters who brought Sheikh Hasina's government down in August 2024.

Before her ouster, Sheikh Hasina had said that a "white" nation was undermining her government. The United States was regularly criticising Bangladesh's weakened

democracy. Chief adviser and Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus sees the current election's outcome as a "new dawn". The "people have rejected the past", to "build a new Bangladesh". His leadership since the popular uprising of July-August 2024 does not inspire faith. He presided over an increasingly communally polarised nation, with the random targeting of minorities.

From India's perspective, the BNP's nearly two-thirds majority is the best possible outcome under the circumstances. Jel harbours strong anti-India feelings and has tra-

ditionally been under Pakistani influence. Any BNP alliance with them, as happened when the BNP last held power in 2001-06, would have made management of relations with Bangladesh more difficult, if not impossible.

India's external affairs minister S. Jaishankar had met Tarique Rahman, BNP's president, during his Dhaka visit on December 31, 2025 for the funeral of his mother, former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia. Mr Rahman has promised to put Bangladesh on a "new path". During the BNP's last stint in power, starting 2001, the nation suffered widespread corruption, violence and human rights abuses. He was generally accepted as the real power behind the throne. He was jailed by the military caretaker government in 2007 on corruption and terrorism charges. He was released in 2007, ostensibly for medical treatment abroad.

The BNP's manifesto states the party's policy preferences. It promises a monthly cash payment to women and the unemployed, echoing the BJP's Bihar electoral promises, albeit in breach of the election code. Women voters were in any case alienated from Jel's Islamic, anti-feminist agenda. The other promises relate to digital innovation and entrepreneurship, a "Bangladesh before All" foreign policy, implementation of the July Charter (voted on separately in a parallel referendum), and the Teesta waters' dispute with India. The BNP is also reiterating the defence of democracy and human rights. But it also

advocates the repatriation of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar. Pakistan and China had been cultivating the interim government of Muhammad Yunus. In April 2025, delegations of the Jel and the Communist Party of China had met. In June, the Chinese vice-minister for foreign affairs met the BNP's secretary-general Mirza Fakrul Islam Alamgir. Pakistan's deputy prime minister and foreign minister Ishaq Dar was in Bangladesh in August 2025. The Bangladesh Air Force Chief visited Pakistan, where he met Pakistan's three service chiefs. For the first time in over four decades, Bangladesh is electing a male Prime Minister. India faces an already expanding role of China as well as greater Pakistani influence. The US supported Muhammad Yunus' heading of the interim government. They may support his continuing, perhaps as President. By quickly approving a trade deal, the US has achieved dual objectives. The US gets access to Bangladesh's cotton imports market, at India's cost, by removing tariffs from garments produced from that cotton. Indian exports of cotton fabrics to Bangladesh touch half a billion dollars. Besides rebalancing trade with Bangladesh, the US gets a toe-hold diplomatically, to counter the rising Chinese presence.

At present, the top six export destinations for Bangladesh are the United States, Britain and the countries in the European Union, with Japan next. On the other hand, the countries that export

to Bangladesh in 2024 were led by China (\$22 billion), India (\$11.3 billion), Indonesia (\$3.04 billion) and Singapore (\$2.93 billion). Bangladesh's largest import is of refined petroleum, which gives India an edge as a next-door supplier.

However, a return to the Sheikh Hasina period of bonhomie is impossible in the immediate future. Both because of past proximity to her and her father and her continuing exile in India, reestablishing trust will be tough. India will first have to help her move to another safe location. In addition, India must stop mixing domestic politics with foreign policy. The looming Assembly elections in West Bengal and Assam have led BJP to ignore communal polarisation. Unnecessary controversy over a Bangladeshi cricketer, chosen by Shah Rukh Khan's IPL team Kolkata Knight Riders, demonstrates this mix-up. An already narrowing space for people-to-people links via sports was further shrunk. While the Indian media and public opinion explode over the lynching of Hindus in Bangladesh, similar ire is missing when Muslims similarly die in India. While Sheikh Hasina tolerated this paradox, the new BNP government will be unwilling or unable to do so. The new context demands an evolved foreign policy in dealing with India's neighbours. It also requires the containment of communal polarisation in India, especially at the leadership levels. A new dawn in India-Bangladesh relations is possible, but requires statesmanship at home and abroad.

Urban Land Institute's India Chapter to Convene Global and



Attendees will include CEOs, CXOs, partners, investors, planners, policymakers, and senior leaders from real estate, infrastructure, finance, technology, architecture, and government bodies, reflecting the breadth of stakeholders shaping India's urban future.

Urban Land Institute (ULI), a global non-profit and the oldest, largest network of cross-disciplinary land use experts, is set to host the fourth edition of its flagship ULI India Annual Conference in February. Scheduled for 26 February 2026 at the Four Seasons, Worli, Mumbai, the conference is anchored around the theme "Big Ideas Shaping Indian Cities." It will bring together senior leaders from India and across Europe, the US, and Asia to examine the forces redefining the country's urban future.

The ULI India team committed to advancing best practices in urban development and fostering meaningful industry dialogue

Established with the backing of ULI India's founding partners Anarock, Blackstone, Brookfield, Hines, K Raheja Corp, RMZ Corp, and Xander, the ULI India Annual Conference has, in just four years, evolved into one of the country's most influential independent platforms for urban dialogue. Supported in 2026 by a coalition of leading industry sponsors – led by Platinum Sponsor EAAA Alternatives; Gold Sponsors Arcadis, CapitaLand, Cushman & Wakefield, Gensler, and



Phoenix Workspaces; and Silver Sponsors Aedas and Perkins Eastman – the conference comes at a pivotal moment, as Indian cities navigate global fragmentation, shifting capital flows, technological disruption, climate risk, and demographic change. The forum will move beyond projects and transactions to focus on how leadership, policy, and innovation can enable cities to adapt with purpose and resilience.

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This year's conference forms part of an expanded

three-day experience, featuring curated study tours, UrbanPlan workshops, education roundtables, leadership engagements, and a full-day conference. A central highlight of the experience will be the ULI India Project Showcase, presenting 20 leading projects from across the country that reflect best practices in design, sustainability, and urban impact.

The programme will open with global and India-focused perspectives from Angela Cain, Global Chief Executive Officer, Urban Land Institute, and Dr. Parag Khanna, Founder and CEO, AlphaGeo, alongside a distinguished line-up of speakers including Amit Grover, Chief Executive Officer – City Side Development, Adani Airport Holdings Limited, Rohan Sikri, Managing Partner, The Xander Group Inc, Sandra

Lee, CEO, Asia, BMS Group, and Jane Drummond, Chief Commercial Officer at Aon, APAC. Together, they will examine India's position in a fragmenting global order and its implications for cities, capital, and long-term growth, setting the course for India's urban future.

Throughout the day, over 20 senior industry leaders, policymakers, and global experts will address critical themes including domestic capital's growing role in real estate, city-level transformation, the future of downtowns, emerging technologies, risk and insurance, and urban regeneration. Sessions will draw on both international experience and India's evolving development models to offer actionable insights for decision-makers. The conference will also feature a special collaboration with the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA), reinforcing ULI India's commitment to strengthening dialogue between public institutions and private-sector leaders.

Speaking about the conference, ULI India's Executive Director Manasvini Hariharan said, "Creating transformation in built environment is a long-term game. The impact isn't visible tomorrow, but the conversations we have today will shape how our cities look 20 years from now. India has already entered a defining urban decade. The way we invest, govern, insure and design today will determine whether our cities offer real opportunity and quality of life for ourselves and the next generation. This conference is a convening catalyst, a space

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to challenge thinking, spark ideas, and turn dialogue into action that endures."

Since its launch in 2023, ULI India has built a strong community of professionals committed to advancing responsible, inclusive, and resilient urban development. Through its research, convenings, and global network, ULI continues to position India within international conversations on city-making and sustainable growth.

With its most ambitious programme to date, the 2026 Annual Conference reinforces ULI India's role as a neutral, high-trust platform shaping the future of Indian cities

through collaboration, insight, and long-term thinking.

About Urban Land Institute
The Urban Land Institute (ULI) is a nearly 100-year-old, global, member-led, multidisciplinary organisation dedicated to shaping the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide. Founded in 1936, ULI brings together professionals from across the real estate, finance, public, design, and academic sectors to advance responsible land use, foster better-planned and more liveable cities, and share practical knowledge through research, education, and convenings.

Kohli, Rohit Demoted to Group B in BCCI's Annual Contracts



The cycle for new central contract is based on performance and volume of games played during the preceding season



Senior superstars Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma were on expected lines downgraded to group B of the latest annual central contract awarded by the BCCI which also abolished the prevailing A+ category carrying a retainership fee of Rs 7 crore.

The BCCI on Monday February 9, 2026 awarded central contract to 30 men and 21 women cricketers classified in group A, B and C. The cycle for new central contract is based on performance and volume of

games played during the preceding season.

Two-format skipper Shubman Gill along with senior pacer Jasprit Bumrah and premier Test all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja were retained in group A. However, the BCCI didn't mention the quantum of retainership fees for the three categories. With A+ being done away, in the earlier seasons, group A was valued at Rs 5 crore, group B at Rs 3 crore annually, and group C at Rs 1 crore.

As far as Kohli and Rohit are concerned, their retirement from Tests and T20Is effectively makes them one-format players and hence as per criteria, they couldn't have been retained in the top-most category.

It is understood that A+ was a gradation that was introduced by the erstwhile Committee of Administrators (COA) at the behest of former India skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni. It was meant for excellence across three formats and

all these years, only four people qualified — Kohli, Rohit, Jadeja and Bumrah — in that category.

But, with three of the four retiring from one or two formats, the BCCI didn't want just Bumrah to be kept in A+ as the national selection committee isn't convinced that Test and ODI skipper Gill is an all-format certainty after being dropped from the T20 World Cup squad.

One interesting aspect, however, will be whether Bumrah is paid the earlier retainership amount (Rs 7 crore) as he is still an automatic choice across all formats and it is not his fault that the highest category has been done away with.

Mohammed Shami dropped from contracts

During the last cycle, 34 players were awarded contracts but this time the list has been pruned to 30. Veteran pacer Mohammed Shami, keeper-batter Ishan Kishan, seamer Mukesh Kumar and Mumbai batter Sarfaraz Khan didn't figure in the list.

The reason being during the said cycle, they didn't play a single international game across any format. Shami's exclusion is an indication that he is no longer in the selectors' scheme of things. While Kishan made a spectacular comeback in T20Is, it was only in the new cycle. In case of Mukesh, he is no longer in the radar and didn't play last season.

Ditto for Sarfaraz, who was part of the squad in Australia but did not play a single

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game. He had no matches to show for contract retention. In the 30 names, only three have got grade A, 11 had been listed in grade B and 16 others in grade C.

The only surprise, although of minor proportions, is senior player Axar Patel, who regularly plays ODI and T20Is and is part of Test squad, being relegated to group C with one format players.

Jemimah upgraded to group A

While skipper Harmanpreet Kaur, Deepti Sharma and

Smriti Mandhana retained their top billing in the women's list, India's World Cup star Jemimah Rodrigues got a promotion from group B to A for her stellar semi-final show against Australia.

Sneh Rana has also got a promotion and is now in group B along with Shafali Verma, Richa Ghosh and Renuka Singh Thakur.

There were 13 cricketers in group C. As of now, women's central contract retainership fees are Rs 50 lakh, Rs 30 lakh and Rs 10 lakh respectively.