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# Swadeshi PATRIKA

January 2026



Declaration of Swadeshi  
in the bastion of Globalization

# Swadeshi Activities

# Swadeshi Mela

## Pictorial Glimpses



Bokaro, Jharkhand



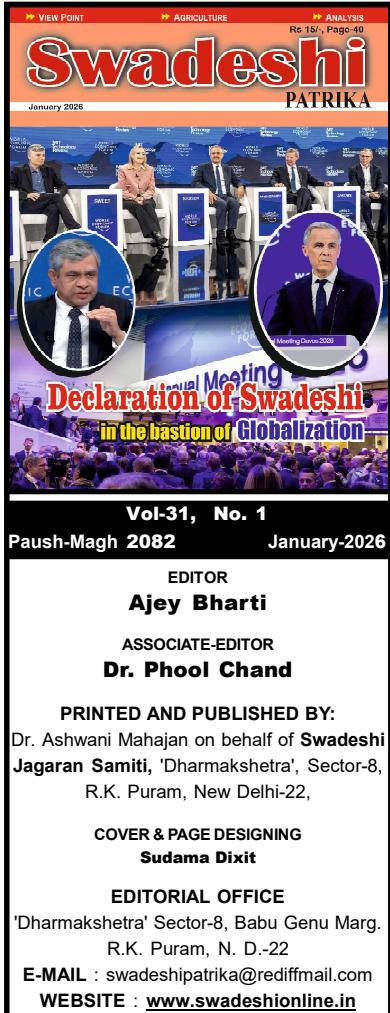
Bengluru, Karnataka



Prayagraj



Sitamarhi



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Dr. Ashwani Mahajan



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## Swadeshi Reborn: GI Glory Boosts Ponduru Weavers' Prosperity

The Geographical Indication (GI) tag awarded to Ponduru Khadi from Andhra Pradesh's Srikakulam district brings transformative economic benefits to local artisans, safeguarding their unique handspun cotton fabric and boosting livelihoods. By legally protecting the product's origin and traditional production methods—such as cleaning cotton with Valuga fish jawbones and spinning on charkhas—the GI prevents cheap imitations, enabling premium pricing that directly increases artisan incomes. This recognition, under KVIC's oversight, aligns with national self-reliance goals, creating jobs and revitalizing rural economies through heightened demand for authentic Swadeshi products?

Promoting Swadeshi through Ponduru Khadi's GI success involves multifaceted strategies rooted in Gandhi's vision of self-sufficiency. Governments and organizations like KVIC can organize awareness campaigns via digital platforms and events, highlighting its superior quality and cultural heritage to urban consumers. Collaborations with e-commerce giants for GI-branded sales, coupled with fashion shows featuring Ponduru sarees, expand market reach while educating youth on indigenous crafts?

Educational tie-ups with schools and universities foster pride in local products, integrating Swadeshi narratives into curricula. Incentives like subsidies for artisan cooperatives and tourism circuits around Ponduru villages attract buyers, blending economic growth with preservation. Media partnerships amplify stories of empowered weavers, inspiring consumer shifts toward ethical, sustainable purchases. Ultimately, leveraging GI tags revives Swadeshi as a modern movement, ensuring artisans thrive amid globalization.

— Vijeet Kumar, *Swadeshi Shodh Sansthan, Delhi*

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## Quote-Unquote



**India has proved that democratic institutions and democratic processes provide stability, speed, and scale to democracy.**

Narendra Modi, Prime Minister, Bharat



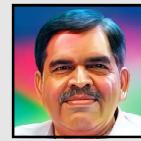
**Artificial intelligence is developing rapidly across the world. It is a proud moment for India that the Stanford AI index has placed the country among the top three globally.**

Ashwini Vaishnaw, Railway Minister, Bharat



**India today has a strong and well-balanced approach to striking a balance between ecological stability and economic aspirations.**

Bhupendra Yadav, Environment Minister



**Globalization is being explicitly rejected, not only by those who were forced to embrace it, but also by those who first advanced its agenda.**

Dr. Ashwani Mahajan, National Co-convenor, SJM

## **With End of the 10-Minute Era, It's Time For Protecting Interests of Gig Workers**

On January 13, 2026, a major quick-commerce app, Blinkit, removed the claim of 10-minute delivery from its app. Similarly, other players have also indicated that they intend to stop mentioning 10-minute delivery on their respective apps. With this, it is being widely believed that the era of 10-minute delivery has come to an end. Quick commerce is a new form of e-commerce, comparable to fixed-time, app-based delivery of grocery items. The idea of delivering goods within 10-20 minutes through dark stores (warehouses not open to customers) did not originally emerge in India. The modern quick-commerce model first appeared in Europe and West Asia. Examples include Getir (Turkey), which started in 2015; Gorillas (Germany), launched in 2020; Flink (Germany); and Gopuff (USA), among others. These companies popularized dark stores with promises of extremely fast delivery, largely backed by venture capital funding. It is believed that Indian startups and platforms adopted these models around 2020-21, especially during the COVID period. One interesting aspect was that this model was generally liked by consumers, and it quickly attracted the market. After initial losses, players began to make money under this format. Increasingly, more and more players in e-commerce started adopting the quick-commerce model. While shortcomings of this model were observed in other countries where it had been introduced earlier, in the Indian context it has faced sharp criticism-because the pressure of 10-minute delivery places enormous stress on delivery personnel, sometimes even leading to accidents. With the advent of app-based systems in e-commerce, we now see the emergence of a new class of workers known as "gig workers." As is evident, many unemployed or underemployed youth-and even some students seeking additional income-are easily drawn to this work. This is followed by a cycle of squeezing workers through low pay. This happened in 2023, when e-commerce companies reduced payments to delivery agents, triggering widespread anger and strikes. Recently, once again, gig workers went on a brief strike against their working conditions, and one of their key demands was ending 10-minute delivery to reduce the pressure on them. The current government has paid attention to the difficulties faced by gig workers. For the first time, the Government of India has formally recognized gig workers and platform workers in labor laws. The Code on Social Security, 2020 provides clear definitions of gig workers, platform workers, aggregators, and related categories. Earlier, gig workers were neither considered employees nor fully classified as self-employed. The government's stance is that gig workers should be provided minimum social security, even if they are not regular employees. This includes health insurance, accident insurance, life insurance, maternity benefits, and, in the future, pension coverage. Gig workers have been given the facility to register on the e-Shram portal. After registration, they receive a unique ID, enabling them to access several social security schemes of the central and state governments. The government is also working on a plan to create a National Social Security Fund, to which the central government, state governments, and digital platforms/aggregators may contribute.

Recently, when the current Union Labour Minister suggested that platforms should end 10-minute delivery, taking into account the difficulties faced by delivery agents, Blinkit removed the 10-minute delivery offer from its app, and other companies have also decided to make similar changes. While quick-commerce players accepted the government's justified request to modify the 10-minute delivery model, on 13 January the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) sought an unusual clarification from Eternal Limited (the parent company of Blinkit, earlier known as Zomato) regarding reports of the removal of the "10-minute delivery" promise. This raised an important question about the market's interventionist role when business practices are made more humane. Does the BSE not understand that this model was dangerous for delivery agents, and that the company's decision-taken in response to public concern-was a humane and correct step?

This new class of labour, known as gig workers, is a product of the emerging gig economy, which is based on new technologies. This class has emerged through online platforms, cloud work, freelancing, e-commerce, supply chains, and similar systems. In other words, new technologies and new business models themselves have created this new working class. These workers, who perform tasks based on work or orders assigned through apps, clearly operate under the instructions of e-commerce platforms. Yet, under earlier official definitions, they were not considered workers and were instead labelled as "freelancers." While the government has taken several steps to provide relief and facilities to gig workers, and the new labour laws have also offered them some protection, it must be ensured in the future that platform-owning companies take concrete steps to safeguard their interests.

# Somnath Swabhiman Parv: 1,000 years of unbroken faith

Somnath... hearing this word instils a sense of pride in our hearts and minds. It is the eternal proclamation of India's soul. This majestic temple is situated on the western coast of India in Gujarat, at a place called Prabhas Patan. The Dwadasha Jyotirling Stotram mentions the 12 Jyotirlings across India.

The stotram begins with "Saurashtra Somnatham Ch", symbolising the civilisational and spiritual importance of Somnath as the first Jyotirling.

It is also said: *Somalingam Naro Drishtva Sarvapataih Pramuchyate, Labhte Phalam Manovaanchitam Mritab Svargam Samaashrayet.*

It means: Just the sight of Somnath Shivling ensures that a person is freed of sins, achieves their righteous desires and attains heaven after death.

Tragically, this very Somnath, which drew the reverence and prayers of millions, was attacked by foreign invaders, whose agenda was demolition, not devotion.

The year 2026 is significant for the Somnath Temple. It has been 1,000 years since the first attack on this great shrine. It was in Jan of 1026 that Mahmud of Ghazni attacked this temple, seeking to destroy a great symbol of faith and civilisation, through a violent and barbaric invasion.

Yet, one thousand years later, the temple stands as glorious as ever because of numerous efforts to restore Somnath to its grandeur. One such milestone completes 75 years in 2026. It was during a ceremony on May 11th, 1951, in the presence of the then President of India, Dr Rajendra Prasad, that the restored temple opened its doors to devotees.

The first invasion of Somnath a thousand years ago in 1026, the cruelty that was unleashed upon the people of the town and the devastation that was inflicted upon the shrine have been documented in great detail in various historical accounts.

When you read them, the heart trembles. Each line carries the weight of grief, cruelty and a sorrow that refuses to fade with time.

Imagine the impact it had on Bharat and the morale of the people. After all, Somnath had great spiritual significance. It was also on the coast, giving strength to a society with great economic prowess, whose sea traders and seafarers carried tales of its grandeur far and wide.

Yet, I am proud to state unequivocally that the story of Somnath, a thousand years after the first attack, is not defined by destruction. It is defined by the unbreakable courage of crores of children of Bharat Mata.

The medieval barbarism that began a thousand years ago in 1026 went on to 'inspire' others to repeatedly attack Somnath. It was the start of an attempt to enslave our people and culture. But, each time the temple was attacked, we also had great men and women who stood up to defend it and even made the ultimate sacrifice. And every single time, generation after generation, the people of our



*With the blessings  
of Shree Somnath  
Mahadev, we move  
forward with a  
renewed resolve to  
build a Viksit  
Bharat, where  
civilisational  
wisdom guides us  
to work for the  
welfare of the  
whole world.*

**Narendra Modi**

great civilisation picked themselves up, rebuilt and rejuvenated the temple. It is our privilege to have been nurtured by the same soil that has nurtured greats like Ahilyabai Holkar, who made a noble attempt to ensure devotees can pray at Somnath.

In the 1890s, Swami Vivekananda visited Somnath and that experience moved him. He expressed his feelings during a lecture in Chennai in 1897 when he said, "Some of these old temples of southern India and those like Somnath of Gujarat will teach you volumes of wisdom, will give you a keener insight into the history of the race than any amount of books. Mark how these temples bear the marks of a hundred attacks and a hundred regenerations, continually destroyed and continually springing up out of the ruins, rejuvenated and strong as ever! That is the national mind, that is the national lifecurrent. Follow it and it leads to glory. Give it up and you die; death will be the only result, annihilation, the only effect, the moment you step beyond that life current."

The sacred duty of rebuilding the Somnath Temple after Independence came to the able hands of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. A visit during Diwali time in 1947 moved him so much that he announced that the temple will be rebuilt there. Finally, on May 11th, 1951, a grand temple in Somnath opened its doors to devotees and Dr Rajendra Prasad was present there. The great Sardar Sahib was not alive to see this historic day, but the fulfilment of his dream stood tall before the nation.

The then Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, was not too enthused with this development. He did not want the honourable Pres-

ident as well as ministers to associate with this special event. He said that this event created a bad impression of India. But Dr Rajendra Prasad stood firm and the rest is history. No mention of Somnath is complete without recalling the efforts of KM Munshi, who supported Sardar Patel very effectively. His works on Somnath, including the book, 'Somanatha: The Shrine Eternal', are extremely informative and educative.

Indeed, as the title of Munshi Ji's book conveys, we are a civilisation that carries a sense of conviction about the eternity of spirit and of ideas. We firmly believe that that which is eternal is indestructible, as outlined in the famous Gita verse "Nainam Chhindanti Shastraani...". There can be no better example of our civilisation's indomitable spirit than Somnath, which stands gloriously, overcoming odds and struggles.

It is this same spirit that is visible in our nation, one of the brightest spots of global growth, having overcome centuries of invasions and colonial loot. It is our value systems and the determination of our people that have made India the centre of global attention today. The world is seeing India with hope and optimism.

They want to invest in our innovative youngsters. Our art, culture, music and several festivals are going global. Yoga and Ayurveda are making a worldwide impact, boosting healthy living. Solutions to some of the most pressing global challenges are coming from India.

Since time immemorial, Somnath has brought together people from different walks of life. Centuries ago, Kalikal Sarvagna Hemachandracharya, a respected Jain monk, came to Somnath. It is said

that after praying there, he recited a verse, "Bhavabijaankurjananaaraagaadyaah Kshayamupagataa Yasya" . It means: Salutations to That One in whom the seeds of worldly becoming are destroyed, in whom passion and all afflictions have withered away. Today, Somnath holds the same ability to awaken something profound within the mind and soul.

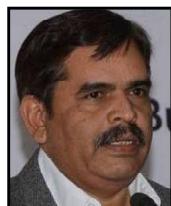
A thousand years after the first attack in 1026, the sea at Somnath still roars with the same intensity as it did back then. The waves that wash the shores of Somnath tell a story. No matter what, just like the waves, it kept rising again and again. The aggressors of the past are now dust in the wind, their names synonymous with destruction. They are footnotes in the annals of history, while Somnath stands bright, radiating far beyond the horizon, reminding us of the eternal spirit that remained undiminished by the attack of 1026. Somnath is a song of hope that tells us that while hate and fanaticism may have the power to destroy for a moment, faith and conviction in the power of goodness have the power to create for eternity.

If the Somnath Temple, which was attacked a thousand years ago and faced continuous attacks thereon, could rise again and again, then we can surely restore our great nation to the glory it embodied a thousand years ago before the invasions. With the blessings of Shree Somnath Mahadev, we move forward with a renewed resolve to build a Viksit Bharat, where civilisational wisdom guides us to work for the welfare of the whole world.

**Jai Somnath!**

(Narendra Modi is the Prime Minister of India and is also the chairman of the Shree Somnath Trust)  
<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/somnath-sabhirman-parv-1000-years-of-unbroken-faith/articleshow/126343568.cms>

# Declaration of Swadeshi in the bastion of Globalization



*At Davos 2026, global leaders openly questioned globalization, exposing its failures and weaponisation, and signalling a decisive shift toward self-reliance, strategic autonomy nation-first economic thinking.*

**Dr. Ashwani Mahajan**

For decades, the annual gathering of the World Economic Forum at Davos symbolised the high liturgy of globalization. It was a ritual reaffirmation of a particular economic faith: that ever-deeper global integration was both inevitable and desirable.

Heads of government and corporate leaders congregated to celebrate the dismantling of borders in trade, capital, and production, while reiterating that globalization was the only credible path to growth and prosperity. Developing countries, in particular, were repeatedly urged to align themselves fully with this vision by embracing the prescriptions of the Washington Consensus.

Global institutions acted as its principal evangelists. The World Trade Organization, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and several United Nations agencies argued with remarkable consistency that development required open markets, unrestricted capital flows, and the reconfiguration of domestic legal systems, including intellectual property regimes, to suit global capital.

Participation in global value chains was presented as a technical necessity rather than a political choice. It was claimed that only through such integration could poorer nations manufacture competitively, access global markets, and accelerate economic development.

Yet the mood at the World Economic Forum that opened in January 2026 was strikingly different. The confidence that once animated Davos had visibly eroded. Globalization, once treated as an unquestioned virtue, was now being subjected to open scepticism. Even leaders from countries that had long championed global integration were reassessing its consequences. The most resonant voice in the Davos corridors belonged to Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, whose intervention captured a wider unease.

Carney argued that the costs of deep global integration over the past two decades were now impossible to ignore. The promise of stability had instead given way to recurring crises—financial, health-related, energy-driven, and geopolitical. What had once been embraced as a source of collective strength had, in practice, become a systemic vulnerability. According to Carney, globalization had ceased to function as a neutral economic framework and had instead evolved into a strategic instrument wielded by major powers.

He warned that tariffs, financial systems, and global value chains were no longer merely economic mechanisms but had been weaponised. When integration is used to discipline, coerce, or subjugate other nations, it cannot plausibly be de-

fended as mutually beneficial. In such a world, the language of free trade masks a reality of asymmetrical power.

Carney also drew attention to the growing crisis of credibility confronting multilateral institutions. Middle powers such as Canada had traditionally placed faith in bodies like the WTO, the United Nations, and global environmental regimes as impartial platforms for dispute resolution and collective problem-solving. That faith, he suggested, is now badly shaken.

As rules are selectively enforced and routinely bypassed by powerful states, countries are increasingly compelled to pursue self-sufficiency in energy, food, finance, critical minerals, and supply chains.

The illusion that globalization would operate within a fair, rules-based order has been decisively shattered. At its height, the world was assured that open trade and investment would reduce conflict, smooth economic adjustments, and protect the interests of all participants. Instead, as Carney bluntly acknowledged, powerful countries have repeatedly bent or broken the rules to serve their own interests, while insisting on strict compliance from others. Neutrality, it turns out, was never more than a convenient myth.

Once this reality is recognised, the strategic implications become unavoidable. Nations that lack self-reliance in food, energy, and national security possess limited strategic autonomy. Dependence ceases to be a matter of choice and becomes a structural vulnerability. In such circumstances, middle powers cannot seek shelter under the shadow of major powers; they must instead derive strength from coordinated action and mutual cooperation.

It is in this context that India's growing pursuit of bilateral and plurilateral free trade agreements beyond the WTO framework becomes significant. Canada and several other middle powers are following similar paths. These efforts reflect not a retreat from engagement, but a recalibration of it. Collective action among middle powers is no longer optional; it is essential to counterbalance concentrated power and reclaim economic sovereignty.

While Carney articulated the concerns of much of the non-dominant world—carefully avoiding explicit reference to the United States—the United States itself offered a parallel critique at the same Davos summit. US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick openly acknowledged that globalization had failed not only America but Europe as well. Without naming China, he pointed to the dangerous dependence of Western economies on Chinese manufacturing.

Lutnick described a globalization model built on exporting production, dispersing manufacturing across distant geographies, elongating supply chains, and relentlessly chasing the lowest-cost labour. Though celebrated as efficient and growth-enhancing, this model hollowed out domestic industrial ecosystems. In the process, it weakened national resilience and left workers economically marginalised.

Excessive reliance on foreign production, he argued, has undermined economic security and eroded manufacturing capabilities. Entire industrial clusters have migrated offshore, creating a situation in which even essential goods depend on external supply chains. Such an arrangement, Lutnick contended, is

neither economically sustainable nor strategically defensible.

As an alternative, he advocated an “America First” economic framework that places domestic workers and industrial capacity at the core of policy-making. Efficiency, in his formulation, cannot be pursued at the expense of national resilience. A country that relinquishes its productive base in the name of low costs ultimately sacrifices both economic strength and strategic autonomy.

Crucially, Lutnick did not present this approach as uniquely American. He urged other nations to reassess their development models and prioritise self-reliance, domestic employment, and reduced exposure to fragile global supply chains. His call was, in effect, a rejection of blind globalization in favour of a more balanced and nationally grounded economic order.

The atmosphere at Davos, once a shrine to borderless capitalism, has unmistakably changed. Globalization is now being questioned not only by those who were compelled to accept it, but by those who once designed and defended it. Concerns over the weaponisation of currencies, payment systems, and supply chains are no longer whispered but openly debated. Calls for self-reliance, strategic autonomy, and a nation-first economic approach have entered the mainstream.

What emerged at the World Economic Forum was not merely a critique of globalization, but an implicit declaration of Swadeshi in its very heartland. The bastion of globalization has begun to echo with arguments for economic sovereignty, signalling a profound shift in the global intellectual climate. □□

# Venezuela and the Economic Colonialism of the 21st Century

## Oil, Dollar and the Rise of Multipolar Geopolitics (1976–2026)

Long before Venezuela became a symbol of global geopolitical tension in the early twenty-first century, its vast natural riches had already attracted the world's great industrial powers. In the early decades of the twentieth century, international oil giants such as Standard Oil and Royal Dutch Shell — and later American majors like ExxonMobil and Gulf Oil, which evolved into today's Chevron — dominated Venezuelan oil fields, extracting enormous quantities of crude to fuel industrial growth in the United States and Europe. These companies oversaw drilling, refining and export operations across Lake Maracaibo and beyond, shaping the nation's economy while channeling profits back to far-flung corporate headquarters. By the mid-1970s, a rising nationalist sentiment, fed by a sense of economic dispossession and resource exploitation, found voice in Caracas. Venezuela, sitting atop some of the largest proven oil reserves on the planet, decided to wrest control from foreign concessionaires. In a defining act of national assertion, the government nationalised the entire oil industry on January 1, 1976, creating Petróleos de Venezuela S.A. (PDVSA). This act did not merely shift ownership; it marked the beginning of Venezuela's long journey from peripheral resource provider to centre of global geopolitical contention.

To understand why Venezuela today occupies such a strategic place in global affairs, one must first understand the silent architecture of power that emerged in the 1970s. After the collapse of the Bretton Woods system in 1971, the U.S. dollar lost its tie to gold — yet paradoxically grew stronger. Through a series of strategic arrangements with major oil-producing countries, most notably within OPEC, oil began to be priced almost exclusively in U.S. dollars. Thus was born the petrodol-



*It is high time that Bharat takes lead in Global South Initiatives to combat the US hegemony and nip in the bud the nasty pursuit of neo colonialism.*

**Dr. Dhanpat Ram Agarwal**



lar system, in which energy, the life-blood of industrial civilisation, became the anchor of American financial dominance. Countries that needed oil had to hold dollars; countries that sold oil recycled those dollars into American banks and Treasury bonds. The dollar became not just currency, but the invisible infrastructure of global power.

Within this global structure, Venezuela's oil was once a reliable pillar of the U.S.-centred energy economy. But as the era of nationalisation matured, oil in Venezuela became more than a commodity; it became a political instrument. Under Hugo Chávez, who rose to power in 1999, Venezuela's foreign policy took a bold new direction. Chávez openly challenged U.S. dominance in the Western Hemisphere, rejected the conditionalities of Western financial institutions, and promoted a vision of South-South cooperation and resource sovereignty. His successor, Nicolás Maduro, continued in the same vein, strengthening ties with China, Russia, Iran and Cuba.

China's entry into Venezuela's energy landscape was neither accidental nor purely economic. Beijing offered something that Western governments rarely did — large infrastructure loans without political conditions, long-term energy purchase agreements, and a willingness to engage on Beijing's terms. Venezuelan oil began flowing eastward, often as repayment for Chinese credit. A new, informal energy corridor between Caracas and Beijing emerged, quietly reshaping trade patterns and strategic alignments.

At the same time, Venezuela began experimenting with mechanisms that challenged the centrality of the dollar. Some oil was traded

outside traditional dollar channels, alternative financial and barter arrangements were attempted, and crude shipments were routed through opaque "shadow fleets." While Venezuela alone could not dismantle the petrodollar system, these measures carried symbolic importance — especially for other countries seeking to lessen dependence on the U.S. currency. Russia, Iran and several BRICS nations were already exploring alternative settlement systems, and Venezuela's moves intersected with this broader trend of de-dollarisation.

The U.S. response to these developments was not diplomatic engagement but financial warfare. Over the past decade, sanctions became the primary tool of American statecraft. Venezuela's central bank, its national oil company, shipping networks and numerous officials were placed under sweeping sanctions. Similar blockades existed for Cuba and Iran, but Venezuela's case was unique in that it aimed not simply to punish misbehaviour, but to structurally constrain an alternative economic order. By restricting access to the global financial system — especially dollar clearing and SWIFT messaging — the United States wielded its currency dominance as a strategic instrument. Yet, rather than isolating Venezuela in a benign system, these sanctions helped propel Caracas deeper into alternative networks and further from Western financial orbit.

The internal consequences of economic sanctioning were stark. Venezuela's economy collapsed, leading to hyperinflation, widespread shortages, and a humanitarian crisis of historic proportions. Millions fled across borders, creating one of the most significant mi-

***The internal consequences of economic sanctioning were stark. Venezuela's economy collapsed, leading to hyperinflation, widespread shortages, and a humanitarian crisis of historic proportions.***

gration movements in the Western Hemisphere. Criminal networks expanded, and narcotics trafficking grew along fragmented supply corridors. And as Venezuela's internal stability deteriorated, Washington began framing the situation not merely as an ideological or economic dispute but as a security crisis — encompassing migration, drug trafficking, and state failure.

By the early 2020s, the international system itself was shifting beneath these regional dynamics. The post-Cold War belief in a stable, rules-based global order — anchored by institutions like the United Nations and the World Trade Organization — was fading. The WTO's dispute resolution mechanisms stalled. UN resolutions were often ignored. Under the leadership of President Donald Trump, the United States openly abandoned many multilateral commitments, embraced unilateral trade tariffs, and signalled a new era of transactional geopolitics. At the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2026, several Western leaders acknowledged that the rules-based order of the late twentieth century had given

way to a system governed more by power and negotiation than by universally accepted norms.

Within this turbulent global context, events in Venezuela reached a dramatic climax. On 3 January 2026, the United States carried out a large-scale military operation in Caracas and other locations as part of what officials called Operation Absolute Resolve, resulting in multiple explosions and strikes targeting military installations, and culminating in the capture of President Nicolás Maduro and his wife. Maduro was subsequently flown to New York to face federal charges related to drug trafficking, drawing intense global controversy and condemnation from many nations. The U.S. military also began an extensive campaign to seize oil tankers linked to Venezuelan crude, intercepting a series of sanctioned vessels as part of an effort to control the nation's energy exports.

In the weeks that followed, the United States asserted that it had taken custody of significant quantities of Venezuelan oil, applying U.S. refining capacity and planning large-scale sales in global markets — a move framed as stabilising supply but also as a strategic assertion over energy flows. Caracas and its supporters decried the actions as imperial aggression, while Washington characterised them as necessary to counter narcotics trafficking and restore order.

This intervention in Venezuela is unmistakably framed by its backers as a reassertion of the Monroe Doctrine, the centuries-old principle that the Western Hemisphere is within the United States' strategic sphere. Modern proponents of this doctrine argue that no external power — be it China, Rus-

sia, or others — should be allowed to exert hegemonic influence in Latin America. Yet the operation also exposes the contradictions of a world where military force and economic control increasingly replace diplomatic negotiation and institutional constraint.

Parallel to the military developments, President Trump used the Davos platform in January 2026 to launch an initiative called the Board of Peace, presenting it as a new global mechanism to manage conflict and reconstruction in war-torn areas. The Board, which Trump pitched as a “nimble” alternative to traditional multilateral institutions, was met with indifference or outright scepticism from many world leaders, and some invited partners, such as Canada, declined to join. Rather than strengthening international cooperation, the Board's rapid formation, lack of statutory authority, and requirement of large financial commitments from permanent members highlighted how global governance is being reimagined as a voluntary, personality-driven forum rather than a framework with binding legal teeth.

Venezuela's journey over these five decades reveals much about the emergence of a multipolar world. Where once the U.S. dollar and American military and financial structures defined the global system, today multiple centres of influence collect and contest power. The United States retains significant capacity, but China dominates industrial supply chains and holds deep pockets for infrastructure finance. Russia asserts strategic military weight, especially in energy geopolitics. The European Union wields regulatory influence and large markets. India's demographic and civil-

isational weight adds a new dimension. Within this multipolar architecture, power is no longer guaranteed by any single actor; it is negotiated, contested and sometimes fought for.

In such a world, Venezuela occupies a paradoxical space: it is a relatively small country, yet its oil — and its political fate — touches the deepest fault lines of the global system. It is not important solely for the oil beneath its soil, but for what control over that oil implies: influence over currency, trade and strategic alignment. Its crisis is not a local event but a symbol of a transition, from a unipolar order anchored in American predominance to a multipolar system where energy, currency and power converge in new configurations.

Oil, in this new age, does not just fuel industries; it fuels geopolitical narratives. Currency no longer simply measures value; it denotes strategic positioning. And power no longer operates solely through international rules, but through the interplay of interests, leverage and realpolitik.

Venezuela's story — from a resource frontier exploited by foreign oil giants to a battleground of economic colonialism in the twenty-first century — thus offers a lens on the broader transformation of the global order. It is not merely a chapter in Latin American history, but a chapter in the history of the world — a story of how the control of resources and currency can shape the destiny of nations and the structure of international power.

It is high time that Bharat takes lead in Global South Initiatives to combat the US hegemony and nip in the bud the nasty pursuit of neo colonialism. □□

# Unlocking the Green Pharmacy of the Ashtalakshmi Region: The Need to Identify and Popularise Northeast India's Medicinal Plants

India's vision of Viksit Bharat (Developed India) rests not merely on industrial growth or digital expansion, but on the ability to generate context-specific livelihoods rooted in local strengths. While agrarian states prioritise farm-linked employment and metropolitan hubs flourish through technology and services, tribal and ecologically rich regions demand a development model aligned with their natural and cultural ecosystems. Nowhere is this more evident than in India's Northeast—the “Ashtalakshmi” region—whose forests, hills and valleys harbour one of the world's richest repositories of medicinal plants. Unlocking this green pharmacy is not only a matter of conservation, but a strategic pathway to inclusive growth, youth employment and global health innovation.

An Ancient Healing Tradition in practice for centuries seems to be at risk of extinction. Tribal communities such as the Nagas, Mizos, Khasis, Apatanis and Bodos have relied on forests as living pharmacies. Their healthcare systems, refined through observation and experience, use locally available plants to treat ailments ranging from fevers and gastrointestinal disorders to skin diseases and chronic conditions. The Khasi people use *Litsea monopetala* leaves to treat dysentery, while Mizo tribes employ *Houttuynia cordata* for skin infections and inflammation. These remedies are not mere folklore; they represent empirical knowledge accumulated over generations.

However, this legacy now stands on fragile ground. Rapid deforestation, climate change, shrinking forest cover and cultural erosion threaten both the plants and the wisdom surrounding them. Knowledge transmission has traditionally been



*Unlocking the Green Pharmacy of the Ashtalakshmi Region: The need to identify and Popularise Northeast India's Medicinal Plants.*  
Deepak Sharma



oral, passed from elders to apprentices. As elders age and younger generations migrate towards urban lifestyles, invaluable information risks being lost forever. Without timely documentation and validation, India may lose potential cures even before discovering them.

The Northeast lies within the Indo-Burma biodiversity hotspot, one of the most ecologically significant regions on the planet. It hosts over half of India's flowering plant species, many of which possess medicinal properties. Globally important drugs already trace their origins to this region. *Podophyllum hexandrum* (Himalayan Mayapple) is used in cancer therapy, while *Taxus wallichiana* (Himalayan Yew) is the source of Taxol, a breakthrough anti-cancer drug.

Yet these successes represent only a fraction of the region's potential. Numerous plants widely used in tribal medicine—such as *Achyranthes aspera*, known for its role in treating asthma and diabetes—remain under-researched. The absence of systematic ethnobotanical surveys and clinical studies has kept these plants outside mainstream medicine. Identification, cataloguing and scientific validation must therefore be the first step toward transforming traditional wisdom into globally relevant healthcare.

Preservation alone is insufficient unless it translates into tangible economic benefits for local communities. For the Northeast's youth—often excluded from urban-centric job markets—medicinal plant-based entrepreneurship offers a dignified and sustainable livelihood. Training programs focused on sustainable harvesting, organic cultivation, value addition, packaging and branding can em-

power communities to move up the value chain.

Imagine Khasi women cultivating *Gynura procumbens* (longevity spinach) for herbal anti-diabetic formulations, or Mizo youth producing *Centella asiatica* (Gotu Kola) extracts for the global wellness industry. Community-owned cooperatives and self-help groups can ensure income security while preventing over-exploitation of forests. Encouragingly, initiatives such as Meghalaya's Arogya project—which trains traditional healers in quality control and standardisation—demonstrate how tradition and modern markets can successfully converge.

Realising this vision requires coordinated institutional action. Research bodies like the Central Institute of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (CIMAP) and the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) should collaborate with regional universities to establish a Northeast Medicinal Plant Research Hub. This hub could integrate botanical surveys, ethnomedicine documentation, pharmacological studies and clinical trials.

Equally important is protecting tribal intellectual property. Digital documentation of traditional knowledge, along the lines of India's Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL), must ensure benefit-sharing mechanisms so that communities remain rightful stakeholders in commercial outcomes.

Policy support will be decisive. Arunachal Pradesh's "Mission 10X" for herbal cultivation is a promising start, but similar initiatives must be replicated across the region. Incentives for organic medicinal plant farming, subsidies for processing units, easier access to credit

***Equally important is protecting tribal intellectual property.***

***Digital documentation of traditional knowledge, along the lines of India's Traditional Knowledge Digital Library, must ensure benefit-sharing mechanisms so that communities remain rightful stakeholders in commercial outcomes.***

and inclusion of tribal medicine modules within AYUSH curricula can create a robust ecosystem linking forests, laboratories and markets.

Development must also revive cultural confidence. Festivals celebrating indigenous herbs, herbal gardens in schools, and media storytelling around tribal healers can re-ignite pride among younger generations. When youth see their heritage valued nationally and globally, they are more likely to preserve and innovate upon it rather than abandon it.

The medicinal plants of the Ashtalakshmi region are not relics of a fading past; they are keys to a sustainable future. By identifying, researching and popularising this green pharmacy, India can simultaneously preserve biodiversity, empower tribal communities and contribute to global healthcare. In doing so, Viksit Bharat moves beyond slogans—rooted instead in forests, traditions and people who have quietly healed generations. Unlocking this treasure is not just an opportunity; it is a responsibility. □□

*(Author is the purvottar kshera sanyojak, Swadeshi Jagran Manch)*

# Innovation Paradox: India's Unlikely R&D Success Story

*Jugadu* word carries multiple meanings depending on who uses it. To some, it implies clever improvisation; to others, a workaround culture born of scarcity. Indians have long been described as *jugadu*. Often, it is used patronisingly, as if innovation in India were accidental rather than deliberate. Yet India's achievements in space and defence over the last decade demand a reassessment of this label. What they reveal is not makeshift ingenuity but systematic excellence under constraint.

With one of the lowest R&D expenditures as a share of GDP among major economies, today, India stands among a small group of nations capable of lunar landings, interplanetary missions, advanced missile technologies and complex strategic systems. What makes this extraordinary is not just *what* India has achieved, but *how* it has achieved it. This is a paradox. As world-class outcomes from limited resources communicates us something profound about India's latent capabilities and the vast underutilised reservoir of talent that defines the country.

## The Numbers That Don't Tell the Whole Story

Through conventional metrics, India should not be where it is. Gross Expenditure on Research and Development (GERD) has hovered between 0.6% and 0.7% of GDP for years which is far below the global average and dramatically lower than countries like South Korea, the United States and China. Even as absolute R&D spending has increased, it has not kept pace with GDP growth. Moreover, India's private sector contributes only around 36% of total R&D, whereas in advanced economies private industry accounts for more than 70%. On paper, this is the profile of a country that should struggle to innovate yet India has repeatedly defied these expectations. To explain this paradox, the narrative hovers around clichés about frugality or cost-effectiveness. But the reality is deeper. India's success is not about spending less; it is about organising knowledge, talent, and purpose more effectively than the numbers suggest.

## Jugad as Discipline, Not Disorder

The popular caricature of *jugad* suggests shortcuts and temporary fixes. In India's space and defence programmes, however, *jugad* has taken on a very different meaning. It represents constraint-driven optimisation. In these sectors, India has never had the luxury of unlimited budgets. That reality forced a culture of precision. Engineers could not afford redundancy for its own sake. Each component, each test, each decision carried disproportionate weight. This environment cultivated a rare form of innovation: one that values robustness, learning and long-term capability. What outsiders dismiss as frugality is, in fact, a form of strategic discipline.

## Space & Defence: Proof That Constraints Can Sharpen Excellence

India's space programme offers the clearest demonstration of this philosophy. Over the years, it has built an ecosystem that emphasises incremental learning, reuse of proven technologies, and relentless systems integration. The successful



*The label jugâdu shows that India is not just making do with less but it is doing more with intent.*

**Annu Kumari**

soft landing of Chandrayaan-3 near the Moon's south pole was not merely a symbolic victory. It represented mastery over some of the most difficult aspects of spaceflight: autonomous navigation, real-time hazard detection, propulsion throttling, and precision control in an unforgiving environment. These are technologies that even well-funded programmes have struggled to perfect. Similarly, the insertion of Aditya-L1 into a halo orbit around the Sun-Earth L1 point showcased India's growing competence in deep-space navigation and long-duration mission planning. This was not an extension of low-Earth orbit operations; it was a fundamentally different class of challenge requiring advanced modelling, continuous course correction, and sustained operational discipline. Earlier, the Mars Orbiter Mission had already demonstrated India's ability to execute complex interplanetary missions on the first attempt which something few countries have managed. What stood out was not just the cost, but the reliability of execution. All these achievements are cumulative that implies India's space successes are not isolated miracles rather the outcome of decades of compounding competence.

If space represents India's scientific ambition, defence represents its strategic autonomy. As India's low aggregate R&D intensity has not prevented high-end capability building. The BrahMos missile is among the most visible examples of India's defence-technology stature. It is one of the world's fastest operational cruise missiles. Further, India's anti-satellite capability in 2019 demonstrated precision interception whereas the MIRV-enabled Agni-5 test in 2024 showed high-level sys-

### *The day India decisively increases its R&D expenditure will be the day it moves decisively ahead of its peers.*

tems integration. These indigenous advances have reduced reliance on foreign suppliers in some of the most sensitive areas of defence technology. These are not incremental upgrades but they are foundational capabilities that redefine strategic autonomy.

#### **The Quiet Paradox of Underutilisation**

And yet, even as India demonstrates extraordinary effectiveness in these mission-mode programmes, another reality persists: R&D funds are not always fully utilised, even when allocated. Official data shows gaps between budgetary allocation and actual expenditure under several major science and technology schemes. This underutilisation does not stem from lack of ideas or ambition. Instead, it reflects administrative friction and limited absorptive capacity in parts of the civilian research ecosystem. The paradox is striking. On one hand, India extracts world-class results from constrained budgets in strategic sectors. On the other, it struggles to fully deploy even the modest funds it allocates to broader scientific research. This contrast highlights a deeper truth: India's innovation challenge is not just about money but it is also about institutions.

Perhaps the most important lesson from India's R&D journey is what it reveals about the country's human capital. The engineers,

scientists and technicians who deliver these breakthroughs are not fundamentally different from their peers elsewhere. What is different is the context in which they operate. Additionally, India has no shortage of talent. What it has is a shortage of opportunity structures that consistently convert talent into discovery. As a result, large parts of India's scientific and technical talent remain underutilised.

#### **Imagining the Inflection Point**

The most compelling question: what happens when India decides to scale its R&D effort seriously? If India can achieve lunar landings, interplanetary missions and advanced strategic systems with GERD below 1% of GDP, what becomes possible when that figure rises to 1.5% or 2% with stronger private-sector participation? The answer is not incremental improvement; it is transformation. As increased R&D investment would unlock dormant capacity. It would allow India to move from isolated excellence to system-wide innovation.

India's achievements in space and defence are the natural outcome of a society that has learned to innovate under constraint over decades. The label *jugaad* shows that India is not just making do with less but it is doing more with intent. History shows that nations rise when latent capability meets sustained investment. India's record proves that the capability is already there. The effectiveness and efficiency demonstrated with limited funds are a baseline. So, the day India decisively increases its R&D expenditure will be the day it moves decisively ahead of its peers. When that happens, the world will no longer speak of Indian innovation as an anomaly. □□

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# Why govt got quick-commerce platforms to exit 10-minute delivery race



On January 13, the fervour of Lohri in the air, India's quick commerce revolution hit a regulatory moment. The likes of Blinkit, Zepto and Swiggy's Instamart, icons of ultrafast grocery delivery, began removing the "10-minute delivery" promise from their apps, ads and user interfaces after a direct request from the Mansukh Mandaviya-led Union labour ministry. The government's message was simple yet profound: delivery speed must no longer come at the cost of delivery personnel's safety and dignity or a fair digital marketplace.

What the headlines didn't capture was the complex set of forces—social, political and economic—that shaped this shift. Beyond bureaucratic concern for safety lay the unmistakable imprint of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) affiliates, particularly the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) and Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM).

These groups had been working consistently and strategically with government agencies, gig-worker collectives, trade bodies and even key venture-capital (VC) and private equity (PE) investors' groups to build a case against rigid 'race against time' delivery targets. Their argument was both moral and economic: India's digital economy could sprint, but only if it first learned to walk responsibly.

For years, the promise of groceries at your doorstep within minutes was the emblem of India's tech transformation. In FY25, India's ecommerce platforms recorded gross orders worth Rs 64,000 crore, more than double the previous year. That figure is expected to nearly triple to Rs 2 lakh crore by FY28, with the sector booming at a stunning 142 per cent compound annual growth rate (CAGR) between FY22 and FY25.

Such growth reshaped how Indians shopped. Quick commerce, once the domain of dense metros, spread rapidly into Tier2 and Tier3 cities. During the 2025 festive season, quick commerce orders surged nearly 85 per cent even as overall ecommerce volumes grew at a more modest pace. It became the default for urban consumers to expect essentials in minutes, not hours. But beneath the surface gleam was a contentious truth: this speed was often achieved by algorithms that left delivery partners little room for nuance or safety.

By late 2025, rider unrest had reached a flashpoint. Reports of delivery partners protesting against unsafe work conditions and unsustainable delivery pressures circulated widely. A nationwide gig-worker strike on December 31, involving delivery personnel across major cities, amplified concerns about the human cost of promises of ultrafast delivery. In response, Mandaviya personally engaged with

*Amidst pressure from RSS affiliates, the government's move is a recalibration of India's digital commerce ecosystem to balance worker welfare, investor interests and the future of ONDC.*

**Anilesh S. Mahajan**



industry leaders, urging them to reconsider rigid time guarantees in favour of safer, more humane delivery practices.

BMS, long seen as the voice of organised labour, is shifting gears and is consistently raking up issues of gig workers, including delivery personnel. The organisation had been documenting these challenges for months. BMS organising secretary Surendran Bojji argued that a delivery model built around numerical deadlines did nothing more than shift all responsibility to the rider, who had no control over urban traffic, weather or customer availability.

SJM, drawing on its ideological emphasis on ethical markets and indigenous economic models, amplified the critique, framing ultrafast deliveries as an unsustainable byproduct of capital driven disruption. For them, technology was a means to elevate Indian commerce, not erode its social foundations.

Soon after the 'request' from Mandaviya was made public, SJM national co-convenor Ashwani Mahajan posted on social media platforms, referring to his meeting with industry leaders on the issue on January 9. These concerns found receptive listeners within the corridors of NITI Aayog and the ministry of commerce.

There was another, quieter narrative unfolding here—one about India's digital commerce architecture and how state backed alternatives to dominant platforms were struggling to scale up. The Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC), launched in late 2021 and operationalised through 2022, had been envisioned as India's answer to private platform dominance: an open protocol infrastructure that would democrat-

ise ecommerce for millions of small merchants and kirana stores.

ONDC's ambition was staggering: by March 2025, its leadership projected 30-40million monthly transactions, and by mid2025 it had onboarded over 760,000 sellers and service providers, processing an estimated 500,000-600,000 transactions daily. Some ecosystem projections suggested it could see nearly 6 million daily transactions by 2026 if growth continued at pace.

Yet q-commerce's dominance presented a paradox. While platforms with private warehouses and deep pocketed logistics networks were capturing urban consumers with speed and subsidies, ONDC's open network, designed for inclusivity and competition, began seeing stagnation and, in some categories, declines in retail order volumes as financial incentives were reduced.

Trade bodies aligned with SJM, including the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) and Retailers' Association of India, were vocal that quick commerce was creating structural distortions in digital retail that worked against ONDC's purpose. Small kiranas, they argued, were being bypassed not just by discounting but by a promise of speed that local stores could never economically match. With quick commerce models burning cash to buy market share, ONDC risked becoming a backwater in India's digital-commerce landscape.

The government's nudge to drop hard delivery timelines, therefore, served multiple strategic ends. It allowed policymakers to address genuine labour welfare concerns while also realigning incentives within the broader ecosystem. Quick commerce companies could con-

tinue to fulfil orders swiftly—typically within 15-20 minutes—but without the legally and ethically fragile promise of '10minute delivery'. This reframing reduces pressure on delivery partners and weakens the sort of marketing race that prioritised stopwatch over safety.

Industry watchers and investors took note. Elara Capital, for instance, described the removal of rigid time promises as a neutral to positive development for platforms like Swiggy and Eternal (Blinkit's parent), suggesting that core business strategies remain strong even as the public emphasis on stopwatch-delivery fades.

For ONDC and its proponents, the shift is a welcome leg up. With speed-based branding receding, ONDC's core value proposition—open competition, lower entry barriers, and equitable access to digital commerce—gains clarity and relevance. Platforms built on the network can now stress reliability, diversity of choice and fair economics instead of competing with private apps on a stopwatch.

For local kirana owners, the implications are profound. Ecommerce once seemed like an existential threat; now, under a more level competitive field, digital inclusion via ONDC may look more like opportunity than obsolescence. The quick commerce narrative taught Indian consumers that convenience matters. But what they wanted, in the end, was sustainable convenience, not speed at any cost.

In decelerating the race for 10minute deliveries, India is not slowing down digital transformation. It is, perhaps for the first time, humanising it, making speed subservient to safety, and innovation consistent with inclusion. □□

## UPF: A Zero-Sum Game

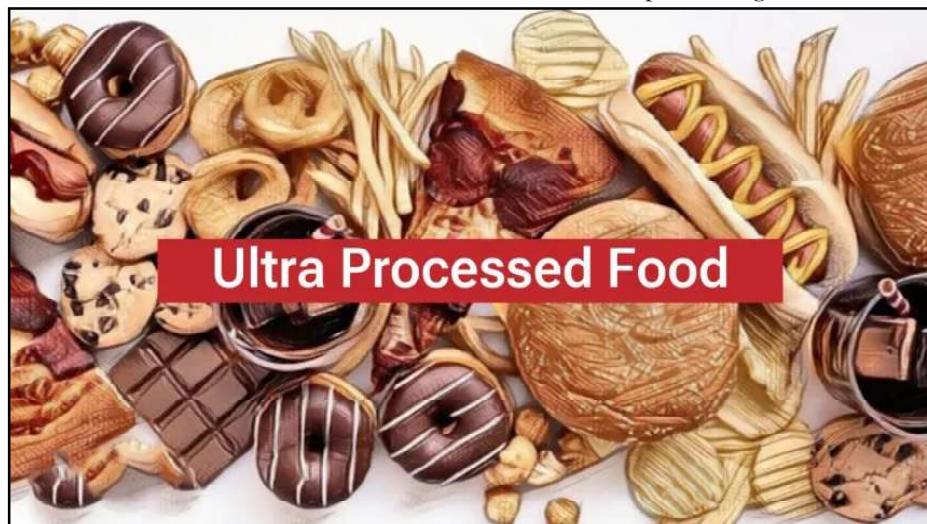
Ultra-processed food (UPF) is the subject of debate over its definition. The NOVA classification is widely used to understand and define UPF. NOVA is a noun; it's a name, it's not an acronym. The UPF is a ready-to-eat packaged item. It's an item, so it's not necessarily food people eat while eating. There is a need to further drop the term " food while discussing UPF, rather it can be another UPI, i.e., ultra-processed item. The success of Bharat's digital public infrastructure is the talk of the world. Its success gave birth to quick commerce. Quick commerce and the UPF are both unhealthy for the human mind, body, and heart.

Quick commerce is replicating the emergency services. An individual can have a medical emergency, a fire emergency, or a police emergency, but there is no way food can be an emergency service. The addiction can lead any individual to an emergency status. And if food is a behavioural emergency service, then it strengthens the scientific and social argument that UPF is an addiction. An individual knows when they will need their next meal; there is a margin of a few hours between meals, and the reinforcement of quick commerce is a hand in glove for the disaster. Ignorance is the key problem for many consumers of UPF. The foods have been classified at international forums. The international public policy community needs to be awakened against the monsters of human health.

The NOVA food classification was developed in 2009 in Brazil. It categorizes food based on the level of industrial processing. The first category is for unprocessed or minimally processed foods. The second category consists of culinary ingredients. The third category of food is processed food, and the last is ultra-processed food. Examples of unprocessed foods include fruits, vegetables, milk, and eggs. Examples of culinary ingredients include oils, butter, and other ingredients. Examples of processed food are prepared using unprocessed ingredients, such as freshly made bread and cooked vegetables. Examples of UPF include soft drinks, snacks, etc., that reach consumers after industrial processing.



*Food is a livelihood, not a gamble. The public policy, awareness campaign, and regulatory upgradation need immediate attention.*  
Alok Singh



The immediate challenge is to identify drinks and foods that are UPF and are clear to the satisfaction of statutory requirements. The primary reason for the rise in UPF is profit extraction by big companies. The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid, authored by Harvard-educated professor of corporate strategy C K Prahalad, is a well-recognized piece in any business school. This title, "Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid," clearly indicates the poor as stakeholders. The goal is to develop business models that serve the poor and, at the same time, are as profitable as any other business model. There is a success story of "Arvind Eye Hospital," which serves the poor and truly embodies CK Prahalad's concept of Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid. But unfortunately, there are big companies motivated to serve the poor by snatching their livelihoods.

The food being replaced by UPF is an example of exploitation of the poor in the name of serving the poor an affordable and accessible item, and positioning it as a food. The advertising industry itself needs strong regulation. For example, the advertisement by Nestle, having the punch line "Pappu Paas Ho Gaya, Kuch Meetha Ho jae", is to replace the traditional sweets with Cadbury's chocolates. The Chocolates are themselves an UPF.

Madras Cafe, established in 1964 in Green Park Main Market, New Delhi, serves only south Indian food, using ingredients sourced from Kanyakumari and cooked by chefs from Tamil Nadu, thus offering an authentic south Indian experience to people in North India. This ecosystem benefits all supply chain stakeholders, including farm-

ers, traders, and chefs from Tamil Nadu. In contrast, other restaurants in the market offer similar menus but rely on locally sourced ingredients marketed by large companies. This difference impacts taste, health, and society. The rise of UPF is harming small supply chain stakeholders. Referring to food as merely an industry underscores this problem.

Food should never ever be industrialized. Policymakers need to understand that granting industry status to everything is the core reason for the long-term problems. The expressways have been granted industry status, which is good because it curtails the role of black money in the infrastructure sector. Granting movie-making industry status is also beneficial, as it facilitates long-term financing for big-budget productions and reduces the role of dirty money in the industry. The due diligence needs to be extensive to grant industry status to any aspect of consumption, whether mobility, entertainment, food, energy, or healthcare.

The food industry requires significant resources and a range of profit-maximizing tools, including research and development, assembly-line manufacturing, large advertising budgets, diverse product lines, and marketing strategies such as product bundling or shrinkflation (reducing quantities instead of raising prices). Food technology enables companies to secure patents and profit from each sale through franchise or licensing models. Coca-Cola profits from proprietary soft drink formulas, while Pepsi generates revenue from potato chips. These affordable, accessible products target people at the Bottom of the Pyramid, ultimately enriching

***The food industry requires significant resources and a range of profit-maximizing tools, including research and development, assembly-line manufacturing, large advertising budgets, diverse product lines, and marketing strategies such as product bundling or shrinkflation.***

their parent companies. UPFs are highly addictive. The industry practices forward integration (ownership of wholesale and retail outlets) and backward integration (ownership of raw material sources), such as manufacturers owning farmland and last-mile connectivity like quick commerce.

A zero-sum game is one in which a fixed reward must be divided among stakeholders, so that one person's gain is another person's loss. The food industry, from farmland to plate, has many stakeholders in its supply chain. UPF involves additional stakeholders from the chemical, packaging, and logistics industries, creating a complex web of relationships. In a zero-sum game, weaker players are at a disadvantage. Giving the food industry official status can incentivize chicanery and deceit, making the landscape risky for those involved. Food is a livelihood, not a gamble. The public policy, awareness campaign, and regulatory upgradation need immediate attention. □□

(Alok Singh has a doctorate in management from the Indian Institute of Management Indore and is a promoter of Transition Research Consultancy for Policy and Management)

# Kashi-Tamil Sangamam - A Tribute to Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat

The Kashi Tamil Sangamam is a cultural initiative of the Government of Bharat, primarily envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, to celebrate the deep, historical, and civilizational links between Tamil Nadu and Kashi (Varanasi). The Kashi-Tamil Sangamam initiative has beautifully woven together the vibrant cultures of Tamil Nadu and Kashi, fostering a richer cultural tapestry. With thousands engaging in various events that honour Bharat's diverse knowledge systems and languages, this initiative is a testament to the unity in diversity. In our ethos, Sangam or confluence has a special place. Seen in this light, the Kashi-Tamil Sangamam stands out as a truly distinctive initiative, one that celebrates the living unity of Bharat's many traditions while honouring their unique identities.

The core idea draws from the centuries-old cultural, spiritual, and scholarly exchanges between the two regions, which have been significant centres of learning and culture in Bharat. The historical connection is exemplified by tales such as the 15th-century King Parakrama Pandya's journey to Kashi to bring back a sacred *lingam*, leading to the establishment of the Kasi Viswanathar Temple in Tenkasi, Tamil Nadu. The initiative is a modern manifestation of the government's "Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat" program, which aims to enhance interactions and promote mutual understanding between people of different states to celebrate Bharat's unity in diversity. The first edition was launched in 2022 during the nationwide celebration of "Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav", marking 75 years of Indian independence and a time for rediscovering the nation's rich civilisational heritage. Scholars, artisans, students, farmers, writers, professionals and many others from Tamil Nadu travelled to Kashi, Prayagraj and Ayodhya. Subsequent editions of Kashi Tamil Sangamam expanded the scale and depth of this effort. The aim was



*In the coming times, Kashi-Tamil Sangamam will be made even more vibrant. Most importantly, it has furthered the spirit of 'Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat.'*

Vinod Johri



***Fortunately, over the last few years, the Government has had several opportunities to further popularise Tamil culture across Bharat and to deepen the spirit of 'Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat.'***

to keep introducing fresh themes, innovative formats and deeper engagement, thus ensuring that the Sangamam continued to evolve while remaining rooted in its core spirit. In the second edition in 2023, technology was used on a larger scale to ensure that language does not become a barrier for people. In the third edition, the focus was on Indian knowledge systems. At the same time, academic discussions, cultural performances, exhibitions and interactions witnessed greater participation. Thousands of people have taken part in these events.

The Sangamam was conceptualized to reaffirm and bring into public focus these existing bonds, ensuring that the younger generations are aware of the shared heritage and cultural continuity that has bound the country for millennia. There can't be a better place than Kashi to host such a Sangamam. The same Kashi, which has remained a civilisational anchor from time immemorial where, for thousands of years, people from all over have come in search of knowledge, meaning and Moksha. One of the things that makes us the happiest about the Kashi-Tamil Sangamam

is the participation of thousands of youngsters. It illustrates the passion among our Yuva Shakti to deepen their connect with our roots. It is a brilliant platform for them to showcase their talent and creativity during the various cultural programmes.

The program aims to foster national integration through various exchanges :-

1. Encouraging dialogue and interaction between scholars, students, philosophers, and artisans from both regions, in alignment with the National Education Policy's emphasis on integrating Indian Knowledge Systems.
2. Celebrating and promoting the art, music, handlooms, handicrafts, cuisines, and other distinctive products and art forms of both Tamil Nadu and Kashi.
3. Providing a platform for people from various walks of life to travel, experience, and learn from each other's cultures, thereby strengthening personal and community bonds.

The inaugural event in 2022 laid the foundation for an ongoing annual program, with subsequent editions continuing to build upon these objectives.

Kashi's connection with Tamil people and culture is very deep. It is in Kashi that Baba Vishwanath resides, while Tamil Nadu has Rameswaram. PM Narendra Modi hailed Tamil culture as a shared heritage of not only Bharat, but of all humanity. He noted that Kashi-Tamil Sangamam highlighted its greatness, celebrated the living unity of India's many traditions while honouring their unique identities, and reinforced the spirit of "Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat". He stated that the Kashi-Tamil Sangamam

stands out as a truly distinctive initiative, one that celebrates the living unity of India's many traditions while honouring their unique identities.

A few days ago, PM Modi was in the sacred land of Somnath to be part of the Somnath Swabhiman Parv, marking a thousand years since the first attack on Somnath, which took place in 1026. People from all across Bharat had come to be part of this moment of remembrance, united by a shared reverence for history, culture and the enduring spirit of the people of India. During the programme, he met a few people who had previously come to Somnath during the Saurashtra-Tamil Sangamam and had been to Kashi during the Kashi-Tamil Sangamam. Their words of appreciation for such platforms touched me and so, he thought of sharing a few thoughts on this subject.

During one of the Mann Ki Baat programmes, Prime Minister Shri Modi ji had said that not learning Tamil is a major regret of his life. Fortunately, over the last few years, the Government has had several opportunities to further popularise Tamil culture across Bharat and to deepen the spirit of 'Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat.'

Kashi's connection with Tamil people and culture is very deep. It is in Kashi that Baba Vishwanath resides, while Tamil Nadu has Rameswaram. Tenkasi in Tamil Nadu is known as Kashi of the south or Dakshin Kashi. Saint Kumanaguruparar Swamigal forged a lasting link between Kashi and Tamil Nadu through his spirituality, scholarship and institution-building. Mahakavi Subramania Bharati, one of Tamil Nadu's greatest sons, found in Kashi a space of intellectual growth and spiritual awaken-

ing. It was here that his nationalism deepened, his poetry sharpened and his vision of a free, united India took clearer shape. There are several such instances that highlight this close bond.

The fourth edition of the Kashi Tamil Sangamam commenced on 2nd December 2025. The theme picked was very interesting — Tamil Karkalam - Learn Tamil. It presented a unique opportunity for people in Kashi and other parts to learn the beautiful Tamil language. Teachers came from Tamil Nadu and the students of Kashi had a very memorable experience! Tholkappiyam, the ancient Tamil literary classic, was translated into four Indian languages and six foreign languages.

A unique event, Sage Agasthya Vehicle Expedition (SAVE), was undertaken from Tenkasi to Kashi. On the way, various initiatives such as eye camps, health awareness camps, digital literacy camps, among other things, were held. The expedition paid homage to King Adi Veera Parakrama Pandiyan, the great Pandya ruler who spread the message of cultural oneness. There were exhibitions at Namo Ghat, academic sessions at Banaras Hindu University, as well as cultural programmes.

In addition to the Sangamam, efforts have been made to make the journey to Kashi memorable for the participants. The Indian Railways operated special trains to take people from Tamil Nadu to Uttar Pradesh. In many railway stations, particularly in Tamil Nadu, they were cheered, and the train journey was marked by melodious songs and conversations.

Prime Minister Shri Modiji appreciated sisters and brothers of



***The Kashi Tamil Sangamam has delivered meaningful outcomes like strengthening cultural understanding, fostering academic and people-to-people exchanges and creating lasting bonds between parts of the country that share a civilisational ethos.***

Kashi and Uttar Pradesh for their warmth and hospitality shown to the delegates of the various Kashi-Tamil Sangamams. Several people opened the doors of their homes for the guests from Tamil Nadu. The local administration worked round the clock to ensure the guests had a seamless experience.

This time, the valedictory function of the Kashi-Tamil Sangamam was held in Rameswaram and it was graced by the Vice President of India, Thiru CP Radhakrishnan Ji, who is himself a proud son of Tamil Nadu. He delivered a very inspiring address, emphasising India's spiritual great-

ness and how such platforms deepen national integration.

The Kashi Tamil Sangamam has delivered meaningful outcomes like strengthening cultural understanding, fostering academic and people-to-people exchanges and creating lasting bonds between parts of the country that share a civilisational ethos. In the coming times, Kashi-Tamil Sangamam will be made even more vibrant. Most importantly, it has furthered the spirit of 'Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat.' This spirit has flourished for centuries through our festivals, literature, music, art, cuisine, architecture, systems of knowledge and more.

This time of the year is very auspicious for people across the length and breadth of Bharat. People are enthusiastically marking various festivals like Sankranti, Uttarayan, Pongal, Magh Bihu, which are, among other things, associated with the Sun, nature and farming. These festivals bring people together and deepen the spirit of harmony in our society. He conveyed his best wishes for these festivals and hoped they continue to inspire us to deepen national unity through our shared heritage and collective participation. □□

(Source: Articles and news in newspapers – The Hindu, BusinessLine, Times of India, The Week, The Economic Times in January 2026)

## Aravallis are vital for food security

In the 2021 Hollywood satire *Don't Look Up*, two American astronomers warn the world about a comet racing towards the planet. However, the US President is lured by a billionaire CEO, who claims that the celestial object contains trillions of dollars' worth of rare-earth elements. Eventually, the comet strikes Earth, triggering a global disaster.

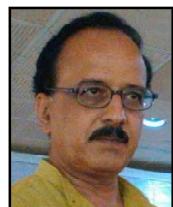
Had the protagonists flagged the dreadful consequences of the plunder of natural resources — evident from the proposed 100-metre definition of the environmentally sensitive and degraded Aravalli range, known as North India's green lungs — the film would have been titled *Don't Look Up, Look Down*. This is what Mahatma Gandhi had warned against when he said: "The world has enough for everyone's need, but not enough for everyone's greed."

Several years ago, I visited Bilaspur district in Himachal Pradesh for reporting on limestone quarrying at a site overlooking the Gobind Sagar reservoir in the fragile Himalayas. A cement company was steadily peeling, layer by layer, a limestone-bearing hill. When I asked the company's general manager whether he realised that severe ecological damage would be caused by levelling the hill, his answer reflected the dominant mindset: "What ecological damage are you talking about when the hill will no longer be there?"

This does not, however, mean that all development activities based on the exploitation of natural resources must stop. It only means that excessive mining for major nutrients, for instance, comes with severe environmental consequences, and there is a need for tougher regulations as well as an economic evaluation of ecosystem services. It has social implications for which no measurement formula exists. In such a scenario, even if the policymakers have to err, they need to err on the side of the people and the environment.

Similarly, when Himalayan glaciers began to melt, there was an effort to build a narrative challenging what were then referred to as highly misguided claims. Thank heavens the world is now awake to the catastrophic consequences of melting glaciers. Going beyond global warming, the world has already entered the global boiling stage. It implies reckless exploitation of hills and forests, which will only push the world towards a climate catastrophe.

Stretching across 1,44 lakh sq km in 37 districts of four states — Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana and Delhi — the Aravallis have abundant reserves of major minerals like lead, zinc, silver, copper and of course, marble. In addition, the hills are also rich in critical minerals like lithium, nickel, molybdenum, niobium and tin. Just as the US President in *Don't Look Up* was made to believe that the comet's economic wealth would bring in immense fortune, it is being acknowledged that the minerals present in the Aravallis are essential for the economic development of the country. If that be so, I don't know why massive #SaveAravalli protests are taking place. Don't people understand the economic value of the mineral wealth that needs to be extracted at any cost?



*There is a dire need to protect the hills that serve as a green wall against desertification.*  
Devinder Sharma

Over a billion years old, the Aravallis have served as a green wall against desertification of the north-western region. These hills are also a repository of rich biodiversity; they play a key role in recharging aquifers and have resisted the march of the desert into Delhi, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. But a lot of damage has already been done to the wildlife habitats and local livelihoods by human intervention and the development process in the Aravalli belt. As the desert expands, the country's hard-earned food security is under threat.

Parliament was informed in February 2025 that as per the 2021 Desertification and Land Degradation Atlas of India prepared by the Indian Space Research Organisation, deserts are fast creeping into the food bowl. Already, more than 3.64 lakh hectares in Haryana, 1.68 lakh hectares in Punjab and 1.54 lakh

hectares in Uttar Pradesh are under land degradation and desertification. If the Aravallis are made to conform to the new definition, land degradation will only hasten. It will open the floodgates for gushing hot winds, frequent dust storms, soaring temperatures; coupled with the depletion of deep aquifers due to exhausting crop farming, this will lead to rapid soil erosion, thereby degrading farming lands.

While the debate on the proposed new benchmark for the Aravallis is focused on mining and the environment, the emerging threat to long-term food security is getting sidelined. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification has warned that desertification deals a severe blow to soil fertility, turning fertile lands semi-arid. Surely, desertification is too serious an issue to be confined to claims and pledges. Putting a new

management plan into action and promises of 'robust protection' are no longer adequate safeguards.

The Aravallis are not just a natural reserve for strategic minerals; they also provide massive ecosystem services. The true economic cost of these ecological and environmental services has not been worked out. Once this cost is known, the nation will realise the economic necessity of keeping the hills intact, even as the economic cost of extracting minerals is overemphasised.

If national accounting as per the TEEB (The Economics of Ecosystem Services and Biodiversity) norms can ascribe an economic value to the religiously important Mount Kailash and the Dal Lake, a similar cost-benefit analysis must be done for one of the oldest hill ranges in the world.

<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/comment/aravallis-are-vital-for-food-security/>



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## The year of FTAs

As free trade agreements (FTAs) with Oman and New Zealand were concluded in the last fortnight of 2025, India rang out a year which was by far the most engaging for the country's trade negotiators. Besides the two recently concluded FTAs, the agreement with the UK was inked during the year, while the FTA with the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) entered the implementation phase. The year saw India engaged in intense negotiations with its two largest partners, the US and the EU. Although expectations ran high that these FTAs would be concluded in 2025, several contentious issues, especially opening India's agricultural market, caused a logjam in the negotiations. Yet another significant decision was the one taken at the end of President Vladimir Putin's visit to New Delhi that India and the Eurasian Economic Union would engage in FTA negotiations covering sectors of mutual interest.

The importance of bilateral FTAs has considerably increased after President Donald Trump's second coming on two counts. First, global trade rules overseen by the World Trade Organization are in serious jeopardy after Trump decided to script his own trade rules. Back in the late 1940s, the global community recognised that businesses thrive when predictable rules are in place and they therefore crafted the rules-based trading system. With the multilateral system in disarray, bilateral trade agreements have emerged as the sole option for setting trade rules. Countries are hence engaged in crafting trade rules with their chosen partners to support global trade. India too is walking down this path to promote its interests.

A second, and perhaps a more important reason for India to engage in bilateral FTAs is to diversify its export destinations. Over the past decade, Indian exporters have increasingly become dependent on the US. In 2014-15, the US accounted for less than 14% of India's exports, but by the first half of 2025, this



*India has diversified export destinations, but should align with global standards too.*

**Biswajit Dhar**



figure increased to nearly 23%. With Trump's tariff war against India unlikely to end soon, diversification of India's export destinations has become an imperative like never before. Unlike China, which systematically explored markets in every region as a part of its global integration efforts, India has mostly been dependent on larger economies, including those with large concentrations of Indian diaspora. Trump's affront should be a wake-up call, and initiatives to expand India's footprint in global markets through the bilateral FTAs should therefore be considered as a step in the right direction.

The India-Oman Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) offers considerable opportunities for Indian businesses. Oman agreed to eliminate tariffs levied on 87% of its tariff lines and since 11% of Omani tariff lines are already duty-free, India's businesses would enjoy such access for 98% of tariff lines. In the services sector, Oman has taken commitments across a broad spectrum of sectors, including computer related services, business and professional services, audio-visual services, research and development, education, and health services, benefiting Indian service providers. A key feature of this agreement is the sizeable increase in temporary employment opportunities for Indians in Oman under Mode 4 market access.

India's CEPA with Oman—its second bilateral trade agreement with a trade partner in the Gulf region after the United Arab Emirates—may not contribute much to India's quest to diversify its exports, given Oman's nominal share in global merchandise and services im-

ports (around 0.2%). However, this agreement has immense significance as it enhances India's presence in a strategically important region. Moreover, India's larger objective is to forge a comprehensive agreement with the Gulf Cooperation Council. Its CEPA with Oman should be seen as an important step towards accomplishing this objective.

The contentious issue of opening India's dairy market was the main sticking point in its long-drawn FTA negotiations with New Zealand. Though India refused to lower tariffs on dairy products, the India-New Zealand FTA appears to have come through with India accepting two commitments pertaining to this sector. First, India has agreed to implement a "fast-track mechanism" to facilitate duty-free imports of New Zealand dairy products for further processing and export.

This would create new opportunities for New Zealand exporters in India's supply chains, including into its FTA partners. Secondly, India has committed that should it open its dairy market to other countries in the future, it would extend similar treatment to New Zealand dairy industry as well. The latter commitment in particular could open a pandora's box, as both the US and the EU have been demanding that India must lower tariffs on dairy products.

New Zealand has low average tariffs (1.9% in 2024) but it also has peak tariffs in several sectors, including those of India's export interest. This includes 45% on garments and 10% on electronic products, chemicals, and leather products. India's exports in these sectors should benefit from the lower tariffs that would soon be in place.

***While the newly-inked FTAs provide opportunities for expanding India's exports of goods and services, they also require the partner countries to ensure that their labour laws are in conformity with the Core Conventions of the International Labour Organization.***

Services trade between India and New Zealand should also expand, following extensive commitments for opening their respective service sectors. New Zealand has agreed to provide 1,667 three-year temporary employment entry visas annually (capped at a maximum of 5,000 at any point in time) to Indian professionals in skilled occupations. However, this number is less than 6% of the average number of total skilled visas New Zealand issues each year.

While the newly-inked FTAs provide opportunities for expanding India's exports of goods and services, they also require the partner countries to ensure that their labour laws are in conformity with the Core Conventions of the International Labour Organization. However, for India, which is implementing the new labour codes that have made labour market more flexible, implementing these FTAs could be challenging. □□

*Biswajit Dhar, Distinguished professor, Council for Social Development, New Delhi*  
<https://www.financialexpress.com/opinion/the-year-of-ftas/4094934/>

# Breakdown of multilateralism?

With the 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) of the World Trade Organization scheduled to be held in Cameroon in March-end, the diplomatic gloves are off and battle lines clearly drawn have been against India for persisting with its two-year-old opposition to the inclusion of the Investment Facilitation Agreement (IFA) in the WTO rulebook as a plurilateral accord. What is a plurilateral agreement at the WTO, what is the background of the IFA negotiations, who are its main proponents, what are their objectives, and why is India strongly opposing them almost single-handedly? Let us examine these issues.

At the WTO, there are two broad categories of agreements—multilateral ones, to which all its members have to mandatorily subscribe; and plurilateral ones, which only the willing countries, and not the entire WTO membership, sign on.

At this juncture, the WTO comprises 16 multilateral agreements and only two plurilateral accords. Clearly, multilateral agreements are the norm and plurilateral ones the exception.

It is relevant to note that while voting can be resorted to for deciding most issues at the WTO, the call on adding a new plurilateral agreement to the WTO has to be made exclusively by consensus of the entire membership.

Thus, countries that are not parties to a plurilateral agreement also have a say in deciding whether that agreement should be included in the WTO.

## IFA Negotiation Background

As regards the IFA, its text is an outcome of an initiative by a group of developed countries (except the US), China, and some other developing countries during the WTO Ministerial Conference held in Buenos Aires in 2017.

Having failed to get a consensus-based negotiating mandate on the issue from the entire WTO membership, the proponents decided to negotiate a text outside the WTO and bring back the final outcome to the WTO for its inclusion as a plurilateral agreement.

Their attempt to add the IFA to the WTO rulebook at the MC13th in 2024



*If India feels compelled to change tack on Investment Facilitation Agreement, it must seek guardrails.*  
Abhijit Das



failed, mainly on account of objections by India, South Africa, and Türkiye.

It is no secret that the IFA is mainly a China-led initiative aimed at securing its investments in the countries participating in its Belt and Road Initiative. It should not come as a surprise that China has been active in decisively influencing these countries to join the IFA and support its inclusion in the WTO rule-book.

However, some of the other proponents of the IFA, including the US, appear to be pursuing another objective with far-reaching systemic implications at the WTO. With almost 128 countries supporting the IFA, the developed countries seek to ignore the need for consensus and instead use the weight of numbers to add the IFA as a plurilateral agreement at the WTO.

Why is India persisting in its opposition, despite being overwhelmingly outnumbered by the proponents of investment facilitation? India's opposition stems mainly from systemic concerns about how negotiations at the WTO will be initiated and concluded if the IFA were allowed to become a part of the organisation at the MC14.

This would create a new paradigm for negotiations among WTO members—abandoning a multilateral consensus-based approach in favour of a cherry-picked plurilateral one, loaded in favour of developed countries.

With the US clearly envisaging the future of the WTO as a forum mainly for plurilateral negotiations, India's stand on the IFA will determine whether the already weak bargaining position of developing countries will be further eroded. This requires some elaboration.

***If India feels compelled to change its approach on the IFA, it must at least ensure that the WTO membership agrees to appropriate guardrails so that future plurilateral negotiations do not undermine the interests of a large number of developing countries and divert attention from core trade issues.***

#### **Changing Negotiating Dynamics**

The reality of the WTO negotiating table is that the negotiating agenda and the negotiated outcomes are largely determined by a handful of countries, mainly the rich ones with economic and political heft. It is only on rare occasions that developing countries such as India have been able to advance their agenda by linking issues of their interest with those of the developed countries.

To illustrate, in 2013-2014 India was able to secure some of its negotiating objectives in respect of food security and public stockholding by linking it with trade facilitation, which was being mainly pushed by the developed countries. If the opportunity for this linkage did not exist, it is unlikely that India would have succeeded on the issue of public stockholding.

How would the negotiating dynamics change if plurilateral negotiations become the norm at the WTO? Given the asymmetry in bargaining power at the negotiating table, rich countries would find it relatively less difficult to pursue issues of their interest in plurilateral negotiations, as amply evident in the IFA.

An argument could be made that even the developing countries can seek to negotiate new agreements on issues of their interest. However, this approach is largely flawed.

If a plurilateral negotiation requires developed countries to make

concessions or assume new obligations—say by cutting their agriculture subsidies—they would have the flexibility to not participate in such negotiations. Consequently, with developed countries opting out of plurilateral agreements on issues of interest to developing countries, these would be largely devoid of substance and practical utility.

Further, as plurilateral negotiations on different issues would proceed independently, the possibility of developing countries enhancing their negotiating leverage through creating linkages between different issues would go missing.

India is likely to be under considerable diplomatic pressure to soften its stand on the IFA. Bending under pressure would create an undesirable precedent, open the doors for new plurilateral agreements, and diminish the possibility of multilateral negotiations.

Consequently, India and most other developing countries would find themselves further marginalised at the WTO.

If India feels compelled to change its approach on the IFA, it must at least ensure that the WTO membership agrees to appropriate guardrails so that future plurilateral negotiations do not undermine the interests of a large number of developing countries and divert attention from core trade issues. □□

The writer is an international trade expert.  
<https://www.financialexpress.com/opinion/breakdown-of-multilateralism/>  
4115229

## Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose

# The Immortal Warrior of India's Freedom Struggle

**A**t a time when it was impossible to fight the British on Bharat's soil, Netaji dared to challenge the British Empire by raising an army overseas. A towering personality with extraordinary leadership, Netaji can rightly be called the greatest Kshatriya warrior after Chhatrapati Shivaji in Bharat's freedom struggle. He firmly believed that freedom is not begged for, but seized. Living up to this conviction, he united Indian soldiers captured by German and Japanese forces along with Bharatiyas' living in Southeast Asia and formed the Azad Hind Fauj. He sounded the war trumpet against the British who boasted that their empire was one on which the sun never set. Thus, Subhas Chandra Bose created a blood-stained yet glorious chapter in the history of Bharatiya's freedom struggle.

At a time when Bharatiyas' were crushed under British imperial rule, Swami Vivekananda had awakened lion-like courage in their hearts by sounding the conch of spiritual nationalism at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago. The sacred and divine day when he returned and touched Bharat soil was January 26, 1897. Just three days earlier, on 23-01-1897, like the dawn preceding Bharat's new sunrise, Subhas was born in Cuttack, Odisha, to Janakinath Bose and Prabhavati Devi—simple, righteous, charitable, and deeply cultured parents.

Subhas received his early education in an English-medium European school and later studied at Presidency College. Intelligent and energetic, he excelled both in studies and sports. Under the influence of Principal Benimadhav Das, he studied and absorbed the lives, thoughts, and ideals of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, and Sri Aurobindo. Inspired by Aurobindo's call—"You must become great not for yourselves, but to make India great. Be ready to sacrifice your lives to end India's slavery"—the young Subhas resolved to dedicate his life to the nation.



*Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose stands as an immortal hero of India's freedom movement.*  
**Mahadevayya Karadalli**



When a British professor at Presidency College, E. F. Oaten, insulted Indian students as unworthy and useless, Subhas led a protest and boycotted the class. He was expelled and later continued his education at Scottish Church College. In 1919, when his father asked whether he would go to England to prepare for the Indian Civil Services examination, Subhas initially refused. Challenged that he feared failure, he accepted the challenge, completed two years of preparation in just eight months, outperformed British candidates, and secured the fourth rank. Yet, rejecting all pressure to join British service, he resigned and returned to India on 16-07-1921 to meet Mahatma Gandhi. Disagreeing with Bose's views on non-violence, Gandhi advised him to work with Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das in Calcutta.

Between 1921 and 1941, Netaji was imprisoned eleven times in twenty years. After Congress won the Calcutta Municipal elections in 1924, Chittaranjan Das became Mayor and Netaji was appointed Chief Executive Officer. Though entitled to a salary of Rs. 3000, he accepted only Rs. 1500. He brought bold administrative reforms and openly challenged British authority. Elected Congress President in 1938 and again in 1939, he was forced to resign due to differences with Gandhiji and later formed the Forward Bloc.

Alarmed by his popularity, the British imprisoned him in Mandalay jail in Burma, where Bal Gangadhar Tilak had earlier been confined. Denied basic facilities, his health deteriorated. In protest, he undertook a six-week hunger strike. Fearing the consequences of his death, the British brought him back to Calcutta and placed him under

***Even today, Netaji's courage, indomitable spirit, and the visionary governance he established on foreign soil stand as a model for the world.***

house arrest. After forty days of silence, disguised with a beard and moustache, Netaji executed his daring escape in early 1941—vanishing before British eyes like a tiger in pursuit of its prey.

Travelling through Russia, Germany, and France, he finally reached Japan. In February 1942, after Japan captured Singapore, over 30,000 Indian soldiers became prisoners of war. Under Captain Mohan Singh, Netaji reorganized them into the Azad Hind Army. Thousands of civilians joined voluntarily, donating money and jewellery. In June 1942, the Indian Independence League of Southeast Asia invited Netaji to assume leadership, and Rash Behari Bose formally handed over command to him.

Netaji's stirring call—"Not everyone is blessed with the opportunity to sacrifice their life for the motherland. Better to fight and die in battle than live a hundred years as slaves. Give me your blood, and I will give you freedom"—moved soldiers so deeply that many signed their pledges in blood. He toured Thailand, Burma, China, and beyond with lightning speed, inspiring Bhartiya everywhere.

On 21-10-1943, at the Cathay Cinema Hall in Singapore, Netaji formed the Provisional Govern-

ment of Free Bharat, becoming its first Prime Minister—much before Jawaharlal Nehru—and gaining international recognition. Japan, Germany, Italy, Thailand, Burma, Philippines, and several other nations recognized this government. On October 24, Netaji, as Supreme Commander of the INA, declared war against Britain and America. His clarion call—"Chalo Dilli"—electrified the nation.

On 29-12-1943, the INA liberated the Andaman Islands, hoisted the tricolour at Port Blair, renamed Andaman as Shaheed Dweep & Nicobar as Swaraj Dweep. Azad Hind Radio broadcasts thrilled Indians everywhere. On 18-03-1944, INA troops entered Burma and later established the Azad Hind Bank in Rangoon. However, due to worsening war conditions and Japan's defeat following atomic bombings, INA forces were forced to retreat.

After Japan's surrender on August 15, 1945, Netaji left for further assistance with Colonel Habibur-Rahman. What followed remains one of history's greatest mysteries. On 22-08-1945, Tokyo Radio announced that Netaji had died in a plane crash on 18-08-1945. The news shocked the nation like a lightning bolt. Yet, inspired by Netaji, naval mutinies and widespread resistance erupted across India, hastening the end of British rule.

Even today, Netaji's courage, indomitable spirit, and the visionary governance he established on foreign soil stand as a model for the world. When we remember Subhas Chandra Bose, we recall Bharat's valour, heroism, and patriotism all at once.

Let us remember Netaji. Let us strive to make Bharat a Vishwaguru once again. □□

# Protecting Agriculture and Dairy in Free Trade Agreements

A few days ago, India signed a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with New Zealand. Prior to this, India has already signed FTAs with Australia, the United Kingdom (UK), the UAE, the European Free Trade Association, Oman, and others. In international circles, this development is being viewed with some surprise: while India withdrew from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in November 2019 — an agreement that included both Australia and New Zealand — how has India now gone on to sign separate FTAs with these two countries?

The RCEP was a proposed comprehensive agreement, among 16 countries: the 10 ASEAN nations, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea, China, and India. Negotiations on this agreement continued for nearly eight years. It is widely believed that India decided to exit RCEP because the final draft of the agreement did not align with India's expectations. While attending the RCEP summit on 4 November 2019, the Prime Minister made it clear that his conscience did not permit him to sign the agreement. He also stated that Mahatma Gandhi's teachings inspired him to step away from the pact.

The question, therefore, is: what compelled the Prime Minister to withdraw from the agreement at the very last moment? Perhaps for the first time in the world, a head of government, after years of negotiations and even after the final draft had been prepared, announced before all other leaders at the summit that his country would not join the agreement. This sparked global discussions about the issues on which India kept itself away from RCEP.

In reality, dairy and agriculture were the two critical sectors on which India adopted a firm stance. New Zealand and Australia demanded that RCEP member countries open their dairy and agricultural markets to other nations. It is important to note that nearly half of India's population depends on agriculture, and more than 80 million households depend on dairy. While farmers are directly engaged in the dairy sector, a large number of landless people also depend on it for their livelihoods.

To resolve the apparent contradiction of why India exited RCEP earlier but has now signed FTAs with both Australia and New Zealand, one must understand the structure of the proposed RCEP. Of the 16 countries involved, India already had FTAs with the 10 ASEAN nations, as well as with Japan and South Korea. Negotiations for FTAs with New Zealand and Australia were also underway separately. In this context, there was only one country left, and that was China — with which entering into a free trade agreement was considered a serious risk. Therefore, India acted prudently by withdrawing from the RCEP agreement, and instead chose to ink agreements with Australia and New Zealand.

When India inked FTA with Australia in April 2022, many eyebrows were raised, that how an agreement was signed, keeping agriculture and dairy away. It was widely appreciated as well. Now when free trade agreement has been signed with New Zealand also, again keeping agriculture and diary out of the same, this

*We see that in the recent time, government has been able to easily sail through the negotiation in different FTAs; and was able to protect the interest of our agriculture and Dairy, and at the same time could negotiate aggressively on other issues.*  
**Swadeshi Samvad**

view is cemented, that while negotiating free trade agreements, India has been very keen and was also successful in keeping out the sensitive sectors like agriculture and dairy. The question is why protection of dairy and agriculture has been considered important for a country like India. Critics generally argue that

bringing in Dairy and agriculture into free trade agreements would improve competitiveness of Indian agriculture and dairy at the same time. They also argue that India is the largest producer of Milk in the world, then why it should be afraid of the competition coming from overseas.

#### **Livelihood and Food Security**

According to Food and Agriculture Organisation data, around 70 percent of India's milk production comes from small and marginal farmers and landless labourers who own, on average, just one or two milch animals. For them, milk is not just an additional source of income but the foundation of daily survival. In contrast, in countries such as the US and New Zealand, dairy is a trade-driven business.

No doubt India has the distinction of being the largest producer of Milk in the world. In terms of production of milk in litres, is more than any agricultural crop in kilograms. The incentive to produce more milk comes from the remunerative prices for dairy products in the country, especially milk. We understand that there is a huge price difference between the milk products, especially milk powder between India and New Zealand; and therefore, if New Zealand milk powder lands into India without tariffs, reduction in prices will force many of



our small Milk producers to shut down. In this case, India will cease to be the largest producer of Milk in the world, and we should understand that no country in the world, whichsoever can feed India, whether it is agricultural produce or Milk?

#### **Agriculture Major Sore Point with US**

Post-Trump tariffs, efforts are on from both India and the US to arrive at a Trade agreement, but the major hurdle is coming due to agriculture. It's notable that US is the second largest producer of Soya, after Brazil. After the Trump tariffs, China, which was the largest buyer of US Soya, has significantly scaled down its import from US. Similarly, US is producing many agricultural produce in surplus for which it is in search of foreign markets. US is therefore desperate for market access in India for its agricultural produce, whereas, India is totally opposed to the same. India's opposition to giving access to US agricultural produce comes from two reasons.

One, if India allows market access to US agriculture produce, which are heavily subsidised by US government, Indian farmers would not be able to withstand the competition and will be forced to shut production, which may cause loss of livelihood and unemployment;

and at the same time loss of production due to unequal competition, may even push India to food insecurity. Unplanned opening up of agriculture will expose farmers to subsidy-supported US products. This could worsen the rural distress, create political instability and weaken the food security & MSP system.

Second, opening the Indian market to US agricultural products could adversely impact India's bio-safety and seed sovereignty, as most US agricultural products are genetically modified (GM), and subject to patents. India has long maintained a cautious approach to GM foods. Without strong domestic controls, adopting GM crops could increase farmers' input costs, increase seed dependence, and create ecological risks that cannot be remedied later. It is essential for India to prioritise scientific prudence and indigenous research rather than the haste arising from any US trade deal.

We see that in the recent time, government has been able to easily sail through the negotiation in different FTAs; and was able to protect the interest of our agriculture and Dairy, and at the same time could negotiate aggressively on other issues. But in case of FTA with USA, despite best efforts and sincere attempts of India, the agreement with US is in trouble. The reason, is that the government cannot give up on agriculture and Dairy, while US administration is adamant of including the same in the FTA. If US takes cue from India's FTA with Australia and New Zealand; and scale down its demand, we can easily find solutions to the problems coming In the Trade between US and India. □□

# The Grand Swadeshi Sankalp Daud

With the slogan of “Jai Swadeshi-Jai-Jai Swadeshi”, from the birth anniversary of the brilliant light of the Indian cognizance, the eternal monk Swami Vivekananda, 12 January till 23 January 2026 the birth anniversary of Subhash Chandra Bose, a vigilant soldier of the freedom struggle, 52635 programmes of Swadeshi Sankalp Daud were organised across 564 districts of all 45 prants of the country, in which a record 68 lakh 29 thousand 360 youth have participated.

On the occasion of 164th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda (12 January 2026) which is being celebrated as National Youth Day since 1984, the National Convener of Swadeshi Jagran Manch Sri. R Sundaram Ji flagged off the Swadeshi Sankalp Daud in Kanyakumari. On this occasion, All India Co-Organizer Satish Kumar Ji and Executive Member Deepak Sharma Ji were also present. In Lucknow, in the presence of Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Brijesh Pathak, All India Organiser of Swadeshi Jagran Manch, Sh. Kashmiri Lal Ji, flagged off the race. Further, Uttarakhand Chief Minister Hon'ble Pushkar Singh Dhami, Rajasthan Education Minister Hon'ble Madan Dilawar, Chhattisgarh State Minister Hon'ble Tankaram Verma led the program in their respective states. Dr. Rajiv, All India Prachar Pramukh of Swadeshi Jagran Manch, Shashankmani Tripathi, Member of Parliament from Deoria, Ritesh Gupta in Moradabad along with Suresh Saini, General Secretary of Jaipur Vyapar Sangh, Sunil Sindhi, President of National Trade Welfare Board, Subhash Goyal etc. of Jaipur Vyapar Mandal also participated enthusiastically by leading various programmes.

The main objective of the program organised on the occasion of Swamiji's birth anniversary under the leadership of Swadeshi Jagran Manch and Swavalambhi Bharat Abhiyan is to increase Swadeshi awareness support Bharatiya products, healthy lifestyle, discipline and also to create a culture of teamwork, strengthen national integration and community participation and inspire students through the teachings of Vivekananda to play an active role in building Naya Bharat.

During the program, inspiring addresses were given in respect of Swadeshi, self-employment, and the role of youth in Naya Bharat, calling for adopting Swadeshi,

and moving towards self-reliant India. Speaking at the program organised in Lucknow, the capital of Uttar Pradesh, Sh. Kashmiri Lal Ji said that Swadeshi is an idea linked to the soul of India. Vivekananda ji had said that ‘a nation which cannot stand on its own feet can never progress’. Swadeshi is an effective step to take in this direction. He further said that the use of indigenous products, promotion of local industries, self-reliance and self-sufficiency, employment generation and economic empowerment and the feeling of equality and justice in the society are the basic elements of Swadeshi. Swadeshi means respecting the country's farmers, artisans, laborers, industrialists as well as our culture and skills etc. Also, he said that the Swadeshi Sankalp Daud is rooted in economic empowerment, respect for skills, self-reliance, environmental protection and patriotism.

Paying tribute to Vivekananda ji by chanting slogans like ‘Vivekananda in thoughts, Swadeshi in deeds’ and ‘Run for Swadeshi, Run for Bharat’, inspirational discussions were held on the topics of Swadeshi, youth power and self-reliance. Cultural programmes consisting of patriotic songs, speech competitions and short plays were held in various parts of the country. Interactive discussions were also held on topics important for youth and a large number of students took the Pledge to adopt Swadeshi.

Across the events, various speakers said that the purpose of Swadeshi Sankalp Daud and Swadeshi Sankalp Sabha is not just to organize an event but to revive the spirit of Swadeshi among the people and make the concept of a self-reliant India a movement of public participation. This marathan is not just a physical activity but a series of thoughts, the focus of which is the permanent shift from dependence to self-reliance, from consumer mentality to nation building.

From 12 January to 23 January 2026, more than one lakh Swadeshi Sankalp Daud and Swadeshi Sankalp Sabhas combined were organised across Bharat. More than 50 million people across the country have participated in the twelve-day event. In addition, large-scale Swadeshi Sankalp Daud events were organized in various parts of the country. During this, special certificates were also given to the participants of Swadeshi Sankalp Daud. □□

## Blinkit, Zepto, Swiggy to Stop 10-Minute Delivery Claims

E-commerce platforms like Blinkit have been asked to remove 10-minute delivery claims after Union Labour Minister Mansukh Mandaviya met representatives of these platforms and told them to prioritise the safety of delivery partners.

According to government sources, the minister met executives of several aggregators, including Zomato, Swiggy, Blinkit and Zepto, regarding concerns about delivery timelines. The sources have said that Blinkit has revised its tagline from “10,000 plus products delivered in 10 minutes” to “30,000 plus products delivered at your doorstep”.

<https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/blinkit-stops-10-minute-deliveries-feature-in-relief-for-gig-workers-sources-10741276>

## Swadeshi Sangalp Yatra

The Swadeshi Sangalp Yatra entered its third day today, radiating the unyielding spirit of self-reliance and igniting a wave of enthusiasm among the people of Kerala. With the clarion call of “Self-Reliant India by Self-Reliant Citizens,” the yatra continues to weave a tapestry of grassroots empowerment, drawing overwhelming support from streets, colleges, schools, vyaparis (traders), farmers, and forums of Ex-Servicemen. The day’s proceedings commenced with great fervour as National Joint Organization Secretary, Mananaya Satish Kumar Ji, flagged off the yatra in Payyanur. The ceremony unfolded in the presence of Shri Deepak Sharma Ji and other senior karyakarthas, whose words resonated with the crowd, underscoring the yatra’s mission to foster economic sovereignty through local initiatives, cooperative models, and Swadeshi values. “This is not just a journey; it is a pledge for Atmanirbhar Bharat, where every citizen becomes the architect of our nation’s progress,” proclaimed Mananaya Satish Kumar Ji. From dawn till dusk, the yatra traversed vibrant locales, met with unprecedented response. Students in colleges and schools lined the routes, chanting slogans and pledging to champion local products over imports. Vyaparis from local markets, inspired by the vision of self-sustained economies, extended warm welcomes and shared testimonies of how Swadeshi principles have bolstered their businesses amid global uncertainties. Farmers, the backbone of our agrarian heritage, gathered in large numbers, voicing support for policies promoting indigenous seeds, biofuels, and rural cooperatives—echoing Kerala’s rich

legacy of self-governance from the Travancore era. Particularly heartening was the solidarity from Ex-Servicemen forums, whose disciplined zeal infused the yatra with a sense of national duty. Veterans, drawing parallels to defence self-reliance, committed to mobilizing communities for skill development and local manufacturing. “Just as our armed forces embody Atmanirbharta, so must every Indian,” remarked one senior Ex-Serviceman, symbolizing the yatra’s broad coalition. In its truest spirit, the yatra marches on successfully, fuelled by full zeal, responsibility, and commitment. This overwhelming public embrace reaffirms that the dream of a self-reliant India thrives not in distant policies, but in the hands of its empowered citizens. As the yatra progresses, it promises to deepen roots in education, trade, agriculture, and veteran affairs, paving the way for a Viksit Bharat.

## Urge youth to embrace values, not just self-interest: Dhanda Ji

State Education Minister Mahipal Dhanda today said that values are the greatest inheritance, rooted in education and knowledge, and stressed that India should not emulate nations driven solely by self-interest. Expressing concern over declining social sensitivity, he urged students to understand their responsibilities and connect with India’s cultural and ideological roots. He was speaking on the occasion of an event organised to mark Kurukshetra University’s Foundation Day and Swami Vivekananda Jayanti (National Youth Day). The university also organised a Run for Swadeshi on this occasion.

The Minister reaffirmed the vision of making India a developed and powerful nation by 2047, where youth will become job creators rather than job seekers. He expressed confidence that by 2037, Indian youth will excel across sectors, and by 2047, India will guide the world.

Sh. Satish Kumar (Akhil Bharatiya Sah Sangthak, SJM), noted that the nationwide initiative across 1,167 universities and 5.5 lakh colleges is being launched from Kurukshetra University. Recalling Swami Vivekananda’s 200th birth anniversary, he highlighted Vivekananda’s historic 1893 Chicago address, which gave India global recognition despite his short 39-year life.

The Vice-Chancellor, Prof Som Nath Sachdeva, highlighted the significance of the day’s events, which included a Havan-Yajna, the Swadeshi Sankalp Run

and the inauguration of new university buildings, describing them as symbols of the institution's commitment to cultural values, self-reliance and academic growth. Established initially as a Sanskrit University, KU has grown into a comprehensive institution with 49 departments, offering over 200 academic programmes and having 295 affiliated colleges, contributing significantly to quality higher education.

Deputy Director (Public) Relations Dr Jimmy Shar- ma said that during the event, alumni Gopi Malik and Naresh Nain were honoured for their successful entrepreneurship skills. KUTIC and UIET organised an exhibition at the event showcasing startups working in AI, agriculture, healthcare, sustainability and digital solutions.

## **Students & professors run for 'Swadeshi Sankalp' in Panipat**

Students and staff members of SD PG College celebrated National Youth Day with great enthusiasm on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. A 'Swadeshi Sankalp Run' was also organised, in which hundreds of students participated in a five-kilometre run to express their patriotism.

Chandrashekhar, District Coordinator of Swavalambi Bharat Abhiyan; Vikram Chawla of the Swadeshi Jagran Manch; Jitender Gupta, District Coordinator of Swadeshi Mela; along with Sunil Grover and Ajay Antil, were present on the occasion.

The run began from the college campus and passed through various parts of the city, including NH-44, spreading awareness among the public before concluding back at the college. Participants highlighted that the use of indigenous products helps preserve India's culture and traditions. After the completion of the run, a programme was organised in the college auditorium, during which students and staff members took a pledge to adopt and promote swadeshi products.

Notably, Swami Vivekananda Centres have been established in the college for many years and programmes are organised annually to mark his birth anniversary. College president Dinesh Goel and General Secretary Mahender Aggarwal welcomed the guests.

Addressing the gathering, Principal Dr Anupam Arora said adopting swadeshi products is crucial for strengthening the country's economy, enhancing self-reliance, generating employment and fostering national pride. He emphasised that the use of products made

in India encourages local industries and artisans while reducing dependence on foreign goods, thereby contributing to the nation's economic and social progress.

He added that swadeshi promotes local industries and small businesses, creating employment opportunities, especially significant in the current global scenario, when economies are under pressure due to factors such as US tariffs. Referring to India's relations with neighbouring countries, Dr Arora maintained that national stability and strength depend on indigenous production, consumption and research.

<http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/haryana/students-professors-run-for-swadeshi-sankalp-in-panipat/>

## **CUJ hosts 'Run for Swadeshi' on National Youth Day**

Mark-ing National Youth Day and the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda, the Central University of Jammu, in collaboration with Swadeshi Jagran Manch, Jammu & Kashmir, on Monday organized a "Run for Swadeshi" with enthusiasm and a strong spirit of nationalism at the Brigadier Rajinder Singh Auditorium, DDE Building.

The programme began with a traditional lamp-lighting ceremony led by Vice Chancellor Prof. Sanjeev Jain, who paid tributes to Swami Vivekananda and described youth as the back-bone of the nation. He urged students to imbibe the ideals of self-belief, self-reliance and Swadeshi, stressing that India's goal of becoming a developed nation by 2047 can be achieved only through responsible use of technology and promotion of Make in India products.

Prof. Jain said excessive dependence on foreign products hampers true development and called upon youth to adopt Swadeshi not just in thought but also in daily practices to strengthen the economy and national self-reliance.

Prant Sanyojak, Swadeshi Jagran Manch, Vipin Ji, exhorted youth to follow Swami Vivekananda's teachings and actively contribute to nation-building with a Swadeshi mindset. Registrar Prof. Yashwant Singh administered a pledge for adopting a Swadeshi life-style for Atmanirbhar Bharat.

Prof. Asit Mantry high-lighted Swami Vivekananda's role as a youth icon and urged students to engage in innovation, research and social service. The event saw enthusiastic participation from faculty, staff and students. Dean Students Welfare Prof. Ritu Bakshi presented the vote of thanks.

<http://www.persreader.com/india/the-northlines/20260113/281642491560394>

## Tech-Enabled Goods Transportation Services Reduce Logistics Costs for MSMEs: C-DEP-IIT

The Centre for Digital Economy Policy Research (C-DEP), in collaboration with IIT Delhi, today released its report titled “Study of Technology-Enabled Intra-City Logistics for MSMEs” at India Habitat Centre, New Delhi. The report assesses the role of tech-enabled goods transportation services in improving the logistics cost and efficiency for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). The report was released by the Shri Praveen Khandelwal, Member of Parliament and Secretary General of Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) and Shri Ashwini Mahajan, Co-Convenor of Swadeshi Jagran Manch.

MSMEs contribute to nearly 30% of India's GDP and 45% of industrial output, yet face persistent challenges in intracity goods movement, including high transport costs, unreliable vehicle availability, and delays in transportation of goods. Based on interviews with MSMEs, tech-enabled goods transportation service providers, and analysis of aggregated data from these service providers, the study finds that technology-enabled goods transportation services have become a key enabler of day-to-day business operations for small businesses.

Speaking at the report release, the honourable Chief Guest, Shri Praveen Khandelwal said “The key to India becoming a developed nation depends on lowering logistics costs for our MSMEs.” He mentioned that “A significant part of logistics costs in India can be attributed to road transport. If India is to bring logistics costs down to 4-5% of GDP, improving cost efficiency in road-based and intracity logistics will be key.”

Dr. Ashwini Mahajan said, “MSMEs have always been the backbone of our economy, and today with intervention of technology, they have proven their mettle—from developing anti-drone systems to strengthening our defence sector, things we couldn't imagine years ago. India's tech ecosystem, exemplified by UPI and our space capabilities, has grown so strong that other nations now seek to collaborate with us. India as a country has immense potential to lead, and our rising global ranking signifies the same.”

Speaking at the report release, Dr. Jaijit Bhattacharya, President of the Centre for Digital Economy Policy Research (C-DEP), observed that, “A significant share of logistics costs within road transport arises from intra-city goods movement. Technology-en-

abled goods transportation services are delivering tangible benefits for MSMEs by reducing intra-city logistics costs. Beyond cost savings, these services improve operational reliability and time efficiency, creating scope for higher MSME earnings and measurable gains in labour productivity. If higher taxes make these services unaffordable, MSMEs lose a tool that improves efficiency and customer trust. Better clarity would ensure that technology adoption is not penalised.”

Key findings show that business users account for approximately 71% of users on tech-enabled goods transportation services, while contributing nearly 97% of all intra-city goods transportation orders across two-wheeler, three-wheeler and four-wheeler vehicle categories. Among surveyed MSMEs, 73% reported lower transportation costs, 95% experienced improved on-time transportation of goods, and nearly 27% expanded their customer reach due to access to on-demand logistics. Faster vehicle availability and access to right-sized vehicles enable MSMEs to complete more order per day, reduce coordination time, and manage priority consignments without investing in owned fleets.

The study also highlights emerging policy and regulatory risks that could undermine these efficiency gains. In particular, GST 2.0 risks misclassifying digitally booked goods transport services as “Local Delivery Services,” potentially increasing the tax burden from 5% to 18% for many MSMEs. Such an increase could raise per-trip logistics costs by over 12%, disproportionately affecting small businesses operating on thin margins. The report cautions that higher costs may push small businesses back towards informal, cash-based transport options, reversing progress on formalisation, transparency, and service reliability.

Speaking at the report release, Professor P. Vigneswara Ilavarasan, Department of Management Studies, IIT Delhi, noted: “MSMEs are greatly benefited by the tech-enabled goods transportation services by increasing their market reach, enhancing operational efficiency and helping achieve significant cost savings thereby contributing to sustainable growth. The extant regulatory environment should be an enabler to amplify the benefits.” The report also draws attention to broader ecosystem transition considerations. Small independent transporters face significant barriers in moving toward formalisation, including navigating compliance processes, documentation requirements, and access to digital infrastructure.

<https://indiaenvironmentindia.in/tech-enabled-goods-transportation-services-reduce-logistics-costs-for-msmes-c-dep-iit-delhi-study/>

## SJM inspires young innovators on National Startup Day

In a bid to bolster the 'Startup India' initiative, a special program was organized at Usher: The School of Robotics in Ferozepur to commemorate National Startup Day. The event, held under the inspiration of the Swadeshi Jagran Manch, focused on fostering entrepreneurship, innovation, and a "Swadeshi" (indigenous) mindset among young students. As India marks National Startup Day 2026, the focus shifts to the founders and startups redefining how the nation builds, scales, and competes. From solving grassroots challenges to creating globally relevant businesses, India's entrepreneurs are driving transformation through innovation, resilience, and execution-led thinking.

Addressing the gathering, Umesh Bajaj, CEO and Mentor of the school, emphasized that the modern era belongs to innovation and startups. "If children are provided with the right guidance and resources, they can bring about significant change even at a young age," Bajaj stated. He encouraged students to work on fresh ideas, utilize technology positively, and aspire to launch their own ventures in the future. He also made a strong plea for adopting indigenous products to strengthen the national economy.

A remarkable highlight of the center is that even students from the 4th grade are demonstrating exceptional proficiency in robotics, coding, and innovation. This serves as a testament to the fact that a startup culture can be nurtured early with the right training.

<https://www.babushahib.com/view-news.php?id=216074&headline=Swadeshi-Jagran-Manch-inspires-young-innovators-on-National-Startup-Day>

## Rising smuggled cigarette threat to govt revenue, public health: SJM

Expressing grave concern, the Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM), affiliated with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, has warned that the increasing influx of smuggled foreign cigarettes is severely affecting both government revenues and public health.

High taxes on sin goods have historically led to expansion of the black market, with smuggled products - often benefiting foreign producers - filling the gap created by unaffordable legal prices, Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM) national Co-Convenor Ashwani Mahajan said. There is a need to have a balanced approach, he said, making a case for stronger enforcement against smuggling networks.

These concerns assume significance as the country prepares for a sharp increase in cigarette taxes effective February 1. As authorities impose more taxes on sin goods, it leads to a surge in illegal trade and dumping of sub-standard products in the market.

It not only impacts the health of people in general but also results in revenue loss for the government and domestic manufacturing capacity, Mahajan said.

He further said policymakers should consider ground realities and avoid creating conditions where smuggling becomes the only alternative, undermining domestic producers and honest retailers.

"The majority of small retailers wish to earn an honest livelihood, but the unchecked spread of illegal products by unscrupulous elements distorts the market and creates unfair competition," SJM pointed out.

Talking about other sectors, he said some issues of circumvention of customs duties by misclassification have come to light in the case of e-rickshaw, apart from illegal import of cheaper footwear and many more items from China. Even the retailers' bodies and the Indian Sellers Collective warned of the wider impact of illicit trade on livelihoods and the country's vast retail chain.

According to Abhay Raj Mishra, Member and National Coordinator of Indian Sellers Collective, the latest hike in tobacco taxes could worsen the already serious problem of smuggling and illicit sales.

In the past, he said, increased taxes on gold led to a huge surge in smuggling of the yellow metal.

<https://www.millenniumpost.in/business/swadeshi-jagran-manch-says-rising-smuggled-cigarette-threat-to-govt-revenue-public-health-644601>

## Run for Swadeshi held at Thuvakudi

The Tiruchi District Small Industries and Micro Manufacturers Association (TIDISIMMA) organised a rally at the SIDCO industrial estate at Thuvakudi on Tuesday to promote use of indigenous products.

More than 150 persons, including entrepreneurs, industrialists, students and members of Swadeshi Jagran Manch, participated in the rally, christened as 'Run for Swadeshi'.

Tiruchi MP Durai Vaiko inaugurated the rally. Swami Vimurtananda of Sri Ramakrishna Math, Thanjavur, and G.B. Ram Prakash of TIDISIMMA were among those participated. □□

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Tiruchirappalli/run-for-swadeshi-held-at-thuvakudi/article70533919.ece>

Swadeshi Activities

# Run for Swadeshi Sanklap

## Pictorial Glimpses



Uttar Kashi



Udaipur



Gorakhpur



Chhattisgarh



Jhunjhunu



Dehradun



Nainital



Pacific University



Bageshwar



Bijnore



Imphal



Meerut



Ranikhet



Lucknow



Sawai Madhopur

## Swadeshi Udhama Manthan, Tripura



Swadeshi Activities

# Run for Swadeshi Sanklap

Pictorial Glimpses

