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## Landmark achievement in Zojila tunnel; blast breaks through last 2.5 mt

metre high, 13.153 km long - is a horseshoe-shaped single-tube, a two-lane road tunnel built at the height of around 11,578 feet above sea level.

The geographically important tunnel on the Srinagar-Leh National Highway will provide year-round, all-weather connectivity to Ladakh, reducing the travel time from 1-1.5 hours to 15 minutes, officials said.

The tunnel from Baltal in the Ganderbal district of central Kashmir to Minimarg in Drass district of the Union Territory of Ladakh has an 18-km approach road. Megha Engineering and Infrastructure Limited (MEIL), the agency executing the project, used the New Austrian Tunnelling Method (NATM) to pierce through the Himalayas and navigate the fragile geology. The entire project is 31 km long, including the approach road and bridges, stretching from Sonmarg to Minimarg.

Once operational, the tunnel would enhance both civilian and military mobility across the treacherous Zojila Pass that is usually rendered shut for traffic for three winter months due to heavy snowfall.

## Z-Tunnel will usher in new era of development in J&amp;K, Ladakh

Leadership of PM Modi and the relentless efforts of Gadkari, the Zojila Tunnel will emerge as a lifeline for the region, strengthening supply chains, boosting tourism and providing vital strategic support to our Armed Forces," he said.

The LG along with the union minister inspected the tunnel and expressed his deepest appreciation and commendation to all the engineers, personnel and workforce who had worked day and night under extremely challenging weather conditions at such a high altitude.

"Connectivity drives development and brings economic prosperity. Over the last 12 years, unprecedented work has been done in this sector across the country. There has been a significant improvement with regard to road, air and rail connectivity in these regions," he said.

"Given the scale of ongoing projects in Jammu Kashmir and Ladakh, I am confident that this will not only boost trade and tourism but will also significantly strengthen national security, especially in border areas. I hope this project will be completed at the earliest and dedicated to the people of Ladakh and Jammu Kashmir," the LG said.

He also stated that the completion of this infrastructural marvel would offer immense convenience to devotees of Baba Amarnath coming to Jammu & Kashmir from across the country.

"As chairman of Shri Amarnath Ji Shrine Board, I once again extend my gratitude and congratulations for this achievement," he said.

The approximately 14-kilometre bi-directional tunnel is being developed at a cost of around Rs 6,800 crore. Situated at elevations ranging from 2,900 metres to 3,310 metres, the project represents one of the most challenging mountain infrastructure undertakings in the world and showcases India's remarkable engineering prowess.

The tunnel will be equipped with state-of-the-art safety and operational features, including an advanced ventilation system, automatic fire detection system, modern CCTV surveillance, and cross-passages for pedestrian safety. The project also incorporates eight cut-and-cover sections, four bridges, forty culverts, snow galleries, catch dams, avalanche protection structures, approach roads, and other modern safety measures.

Upon completion, the Zojila Tunnel Project will reduce travel time between Sonamarg and Minimarg from nearly two hours to approximately thirty minutes, resulting in substantial savings in both time and fuel.

## Over 30 killed, 200 injured in police firing in PoJK

headed protests over economic and political grievances in the region.

The JAAC was outlawed on Friday by authorities, citing concerns over public order and security. Clashes broke out in the city of Rawalakot after tensions flared over the death of a trader, who was allegedly shot during a confrontation with law enforcers on Friday night.

Commissioner Sardar Waheed Khan, the top civilian official in Rawalakot, told a news agency that the JAAC protesters had gathered outside a hospital mortuary on Sunday, where the body of another group member was taken after his death in a firing by police.

When security forces tried to disperse the protesters, the group's activists used automatic rifles, petrol bombs and other weapons to target them.

"As a result of the law enforcers' response, six protesters were killed," Khan added. He also confirmed multiple arrests during the operation.

However, local residents and JAAC supporters disputed the official account and claimed that the number of civilian casualties was much higher.

The clashes occurred a day ahead of planned protests by JAAC, which had called the strike to protest against the reservation of 12 seats for refugees in July 27 elections to the region's legislative body, out of 45 up for grabs.

Members of the JAAC have also called their listing as a "terror" group "oppression", saying they are demonstrating for legitimate economic and political rights.

Meanwhile, India came down hard on Islamabad for

its "brutality" against people in Pakistan-Occupied Jammu-Kashmir (PoJK) and called on the international community to hold that country accountable for its "abuses".

External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal, slamming Pakistan said, there have been "desperate" attempts by Islamabad to cover-up its "failings" and deflect attention away from its alleged human rights abuses.

"We continue to see in this context, a pattern of fake news and videos emanating from Pakistan. It is a desperate attempt by Pakistan to cover-up its own failings and deflect attention away from its human rights abuses," he said. "There are reports of severe police brutality in Pakistan Occupied Jammu-Kashmir in which several protestors have been killed and many injured. We hope the international community will hold Pakistan accountable for its misdeeds and abuses," Jaiswal added. He was responding to a question at a media briefing.

## Shah hails govt's welfare, infra achievements

hailed the prime minister's leadership, saying the country has witnessed the simultaneous realisation of welfare for the poor and unprecedented development.

In a post on X, he said Modi had served the nation and its citizens tirelessly and highlighted a range of welfare and infrastructure initiatives undertaken during his tenure.

"Under Modi's leadership, over these 12 years, the country has witnessed for the first time the parallel realization of poor welfare and unprecedented development," Shah said.

The home minister cited measures such as free ration for 80 crore people, pucca houses for more than four crore poor families, health insurance cover of Rs 5 lakh for 50 crore people and LPG connections for over 10 crore households. He also referred to the launch of more than 90 airports and over 140 Vande Bharat trains, besides the construction of 1.45 lakh km of roads and 3,000 km of modern expressways.

Referring to India's economic growth, Shah said the country had become the world's fastest-growing major economy under Modi's leadership.

"Modi ji has served the nation and its citizens tirelessly through these 12 years without taking even a single day off," he said.

Shah said such transformation was possible only when leadership's intent was pure, goals were in the national interest and dedication was complete. Modi was sworn-in as prime minister for the third consecutive time on June 9, 2024, following another decisive victory in the 2024 Parliamentary elections. He took oath as prime minister for the first time on May 26, 2014. His second term began on May 30, 2019.

## Zojila tunnel game changer for Ladakh: Saxena

development. Calling the project a dream initiative of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he said the tunnel would provide year-round connectivity between Ladakh and the rest of India while significantly improving access to border areas.

"The historic breakthrough of Zojila tunnel, a dream project of the prime minister, will prove to be a game changer in the development journey of Ladakh. This would significantly strengthen connectivity in the border regions of Ladakh and provide year-round connectivity with rest of India," Saxena said in a post on X.

Responding to a post shared by Union Minister Nitin Gadkari who described the breakthrough as an important chapter in India's infrastructure development journey and all-weather connectivity between J&K and Ladakh, he thanked him for making the project possible and for supporting Ladakh with key road infrastructure projects.

Saxena said enhanced connectivity would boost tourism, create new livelihood avenues and bolster the collective efforts for sustainable development in the high-altitude regions of Ladakh.

## HC extends manual acceptance of ACB challans

608 of 2026/RG/GS dated April 23, 2026. The order states that the manual acceptance of ACB challans will continue under the same terms and conditions laid down previously.

However, the High Court made it clear that no further extension shall be granted beyond July 31, 2026, directing the concerned authorities to resolve all bottlenecks related to the submission of challans through the online portal within the stipulated period.

The order, issued by Registrar General MK Sharma, has been circulated among judicial officers, the Anti-Corruption Bureau, Crime Branch, and other concerned departments for information and necessary action.

The move is aimed at ensuring a smooth transition to the online filing system while preventing disruption in the processing of ACB cases during the interim period.

## Govt rescinds amendments to Engineering Recruitment Rules

taken in exercise of the powers conferred under Article 309 of the Constitution of India and comes into effect through S O 160 issued by the government.

## Rlys to run special Katra-Haridwar service

will leave Haridwar at 5.20 pm on June 15 and reach Katra at 7 am the next day, a railway spokesperson said.

He said the service will be operated as a fully reserved spe-

cial train and only one round trip has been scheduled to cater to the expected rush of devotees during Somvati Amavasya.

A total of 16 coaches will be attached, including Sleeper, General, AC 3-Tier and AC 2-Tier coaches, the spokesperson said, adding the train will halt at major stations en route, including Martyr Captain Tushar Mahajan, Jammu Tawi, Pathankot Cantt, Jalandhar Cantt, Ludhiana, Ambala Cantt, Saharanpur and Roorkee.

Senior Divisional Commercial Manager, Jammu Uchit Singhal said the special train has been arranged as Somvati Amavasya witnesses a significant surge in the number of devotees visiting the revered Vaishno Devi shrine atop Trikuta hills in Katra town of Reasi district.

"A huge increase in the number of devotees is witnessed on Somvati Amavasya for visiting Mata Vaishno Devi shrine. This special train is being run with the objective of facilitating passengers and managing the extra rush," he said. Singhal requested passengers to make reservations immediately and travel only with a valid ticket.

Passengers can contact 139 for information regarding ticket availability and reservation status, he said.

## New tunnel on Chenani-Nashri stretch approved: Jitendra

Prasad Mookerjee tunnel on the Chenani-Nashri stretch, connecting Udhampur with Ramban district, has been approved.

Describing the development as "another good news for Udhampur," he expressed gratitude to union transport minister Nitin Gadkari for accepting the proposal and said it will ease the increasing traffic load on the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway.

"Thanks to the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) and MoRTH Minister Nitin Gadkari for accepting our request and proposing the construction of a new two-lane tube tunnel parallel to the existing Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee Tunnel on the Chenani-Nashri route along NH-44 in Jammu and Kashmir. This will ease the increasing rush of traffic on this section and ensure ease of travel," Dr Singh said on X.

Formerly known as the Chenani-Nashri Tunnel, the 9.28-km-long twin-tube all-weather tunnel is located on NH-44 and passes through the lower Himalayas at an altitude of about 1,200 metres.

It is regarded as India's longest road tunnel and serves as a vital link on the Jammu-Srinagar highway, significantly reducing travel time and improving connectivity, officials said.

The tunnel was officially renamed in October 2019 in honour of Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee, founder of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh.

Officials said the proposed parallel tunnel is expected to enhance traffic capacity, improve road safety and strengthen the resilience of the strategic highway connecting the Kashmir Valley with the rest of the country.

## Omar welcomes Zojila breakthrough, demands direct air service to Kargil

realise this aspiration as well. Improved air services and road connectivity would benefit the region greatly." He also said that many people had dreamt of this project but could not realise it.

The Zojila tunnel connecting the Kashmir Valley with Ladakh took a crucial step towards completion on Tuesday with a blast breaking through the last 2.5 metres of the high-altitude infrastructure project that cuts through the Himalayas.

Gadkari pressed the remote button, blasting the breakthrough site near the East Portal of the tunnel at Minimarg in Ladakh, in the presence of Abdullah and J&K Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha.

With this, the two ends of the world's longest single-tube bi-directional bypass, which will cut travel time to cross the high-altitude pass from 1.5 hours to 15 minutes, have now been connected, officials said.

The successful breakthrough marked the realisation of a long-cherished dream - year-round connectivity between Kashmir and Ladakh.

"For decades, people of the region faced immense hardships due to the closure of the Zojila Pass in winter. The tunnel would significantly improve the lives of residents by facilitating easier access to education, healthcare, tourism, trade and commerce," Abdullah said.

He also expressed hope that the remaining work on the project would be completed at the earliest so that the tunnel becomes fully operational.

## India slams Pak, condemns its 'trade &amp; transit' terrorism

morality can justify such actions," he said at the UN horseshoe table.

With Pakistan listening, India strongly reiterated that "dressing up a massacre as a military operation does not absolve the perpetrator. Killing, maiming and orphaning civilians is not counter terrorism."

"Espousing high principles of international law and Islamic solidarity while mercilessly carrying out air strikes during the holy month of Ramadan is the perfect example of hypocrisy," Parvathaneni said.

He added that "blaming neighbours for its own failures is an old Pakistani habit. This attempt to hoodwink the world will fail."

India also strongly rejected Pakistan's directives to start referring to groups inside its own borders as 'Fitna al Hindustan', calling it an outcome of an "organised factory of hate" against India.

"Coming up with official notifications, directing Pak-

istan's Government agencies to start referring to groups inside its own borders as 'Fitna al Hindustan' is nothing but officially sponsored misinformation and disinformation dressed in religious terminology," Parvathaneni said.

"This is an outcome of an organised factory of hate coming from the deep state of Pakistan, which aims to keep its citizens in a state of permanent hostility with India in order to perpetuate their stay in power and control of national resources and distract them from core political and economic problems," the Indian envoy said.

"The de facto coup by the military through the 27th Constitutional amendment is only its most recent manifestation," the Indian envoy said.

Parvathaneni was making a reference to the 27th Constitutional Amendment passed in November last year under Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif that gives Pakistan's Field Marshal Asim Munir lifelong immunity from any legal prosecution.

Further, India also condemned the "trade and transit terrorism" inflicted upon Afghan traders by Pakistan, calling it a violation of World Trade Organisation norms.

India, the top destination of Afghan exports, is offering tariff-free access for Afghan goods to Indian markets and has operationalised a dedicated air freight corridor between India and Afghanistan.

Parvathaneni said India is also supporting Afghan traders by issuing hundreds of gratis long-term business visas, who are "suffering under unprecedented 'trade and transit terrorism' inflicted upon them by Pakistan's denial of passage for trade.

"The cynical closure of access for this land-locked country is in total violation of UN declarations on Land Locked Developing countries (LLDCs) and a clear weaponisation of their trade and transit vulnerabilities. This blatant Pakistani violation of WTO norms and of the UN Charter and international law should be condemned by the global community," he said.

In his statement, Pakistan's Ambassador to the UN Asim Iftikhar Ahmad said that the most recent report of the Secretary General on the situation in Afghanistan seems to largely "externalise" the responsibility for Afghanistan's multifaceted challenges.

"The fatalities of terrorists and their supporters as a result of CT (counter-terror) operations are mentioned within the ambit of 'civilian casualties', posing serious questions on the credibility of UNAMA's reporting from Afghanistan and the nature of their engagement with the Taliban," Ahmad said.

On Pakistan questioning the intent of UNAMA and the veracity of the Secretary General's report, Parvathaneni said: "We would like to stress that support for multilateralism and the United Nations is not an a la carte menu."

India also voiced its steadfast position in rejecting terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

"Only coordinated efforts of the international community can ensure that ISIL and Al Qaida and their affiliates, including the Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and the Jaish-e-Mohammed and proxies of LeT such as The Resistance Front, along with those who facilitate their operations, no longer indulge in cross-border terrorism," he said, calling on the international community to work together towards this "noble goal."

## Kavinder emphasises need to align academic progs with NEP

riculum. He called for timely completion of the Board of Management's reconstitution and encouraged stronger partnerships with financial institutions and industry to enhance employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for students.

He also virtually inaugurated Nakshatra Vatika, Swa-Rozgar Dham and laid foundation stone of the Digital Knowledge Centre and launched several University-developed products on this occasion.

He also reviewed a presentation on the concept and objectives of Swa-Rozgar Dham.

Developed through a blend of Indian knowledge traditions, Ayurveda, biodiversity conservation and modern landscape design, the Nakshatra Vatika features 27 tree species associated with the Nakshatras, along-with medicinal gardens, meditation spaces, yoga facilities and sustainable infrastructure.

The governor also inaugurated the Digital Knowledge Centre at the Satyanand Stokes Library. Equipped with advanced digital resources and smart technologies, the facility will provide students and researchers access to over 1.3 million books and more than 500,000 journals, magazines and newspapers.

During his visit, he inspected various university facilities, including laboratories, the bakery unit, floral craft laboratory, terrarium site and Swa-Rozgar Dham, appreciating the University's efforts to promote practical learning, innovation and self-employment.

He also commended the university's contribution towards supporting farmers through the supply of quality planting material, seeds and modern agricultural technologies. He stressed the importance of research excellence, climate-resilient agriculture, entrepreneurship and stronger collaboration between farmers, academia and industry.

Expressing confidence in the institution's future, he said the university was well positioned to achieve new milestones of excellence at both national and international levels.

## FTA utilisation low in India; compliance cost is a hurdle: GTRI

**NEW DELHI, JUNE 9:** India's utilisation of free trade agreement benefits remains low at just 20-30 per cent of eligible exports, compared with 60-70 per cent by the FTA partners, due to high compliance costs and already low tariffs in partner countries, think tank GTRI said on Tuesday.

It also said that Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) have made the inverted duty structure issue harder to fix because many finished goods now enter India at low or zero duty from partners such as ASEAN, Japan, South Korea, the UAE and Australia.

As a result, Indian manufacturers often pay high duties on imported inputs, especially those sourced from non-FTA countries, while competing against finished products imported duty-free under FTAs, the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said.

Citing an example, it said steel and aluminium attract MFN (duty applicable for all countries) duties of 7.5-10 per cent, but machinery, industrial equipment and engineering products made from these materials can enter India duty-free under several FTAs.

Indian manufacturers, therefore, face higher input costs when competing with tariff-free imported machinery pro-

duced with globally priced inputs, it said.

"Just 20-30 per cent of India's eligible exports utilise FTA benefits, compared with 60-70 per cent utilisation by exporters shipping to India. High compliance costs and low foreign tariffs discourage Indian exporters from using FTA preferences. Many small firms prefer to avoid the compliance burden for modest tariff savings," it said, adding most of India's FTA partners are already open economies with low tariffs.

Average MFN tariffs are close to zero in Singapore and below 4 per cent in Japan, Australia, Malaysia and the UAE.

In contrast, India's trade-weighted MFN tariff is about 12.6 per cent, with rates ranging from zero to 150 per cent. "As a result, when India cuts tariffs under an FTA, exporters from partner countries gain a significant price advantage in the Indian market. A 50 per cent tariff reduction, for example, can translate into a major cost advantage over competing suppliers," GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said.

He said that FTAs are no longer limited to reducing tariffs; they increasingly shape how governments regulate businesses, manage data, design industrial policies, support domestic industries and pursue broader development ob-

jectives.

"While presented as modern trade rules, such provisions can reduce India's policy flexibility, create new compliance burdens for exporters, and constrain future industrial and development strategies," he said.

Traditional trade pacts focused mainly on reducing tariffs and expanding trade, while the new-generation deals increasingly regulate how governments design policies in areas such as procurement, healthcare, environment, digital governance, and intellectual property, he added.

He further noted that over the past three years, India's average annual trade deficit with ASEAN, Japan and South Korea has reached about USD 62 billion.

To deal with these issues, Srivastava suggested that tariff schedule revision, addressing inverted duty structure, strengthen domestic manufacturing ecosystems and supply chains, setting up of an FTA Impact Monitoring Authority to track utilisation, and prioritise mutual recognition of standards, testing and conformity assessment to reduce non-tariff barriers faced by Indian exporters.

"Most of India's FTA partners had already rationalized their tariff structures before embarking on the FTA journey, ensuring that trade pacts led tariff cuts did not trigger im-

port surges or worsen inverted duty structures. India continues on these deals without reviewing its regular tariff structure," he said.

After nearly a decade of limited FTA activity, India resumed negotiations with a stronger focus on strategic partners, investment and supply-chain integration.

The new generation agreements include: Mauritius Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (2021); UAE (CEPA - 2022); Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA - 2022); EFTA Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA - 2025); and Oman CEPA (2026).

USA, Israel, Canada, Peru, Chile, Gulf Cooperation Council (Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and Saudi Arabia), Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU - Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia).

India now has 15 implemented FTAs covering 27 countries, while another 9 agreements are pending implementation or under negotiation, covering 42 additional countries.

Together, these 69 countries account for more than three-quarters of India's exports, highlighting how central FTAs have become to India's trade strategy. (PTI)