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Business & Entertainment

Highways to Growth: India's Infrastructure Transformation

Editorial

Road infrastructure has emerged as one of the defining pillars of India's development strategy over the past decade. While highways have traditionally been viewed as transport assets, they are now increasingly seen as catalysts for economic growth, regional integration and improved connectivity. The rapid expansion of the national highway network under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari reflects this broader shift in policy.

India today possesses one of the world's largest highway networks, supported by an ambitious pipeline of expressways, economic corridors and greenfield projects. Flagship initiatives such as the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway, the Delhi-Amritsar-Katra Expressway, the Bengaluru-Chennai Expressway and the Nagpur-Mumbai Samruddhi Mahamarg represent more than engineering achievements. They seek to reduce travel time, improve logistics efficiency and stimulate economic activity across regions.

The government's infrastructure strategy has also evolved in its approach. Through the PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan, roads are being integrated with railways, ports, airports and logistics hubs to create a multimodal transport ecosystem. This reflects a recognition that efficient connectivity is central to manufacturing competitiveness, supply-chain resilience and balanced regional development.

A notable aspect of the ministry's functioning has been its emphasis on faster execution and technological adoption. Digital monitoring, FASTag-based toll collection, improved project management practices and the use of innovative construction materials have helped accelerate project delivery while reducing operational bottlenecks. The focus has increasingly shifted from merely constructing roads to improving the overall efficiency of transport infrastructure.

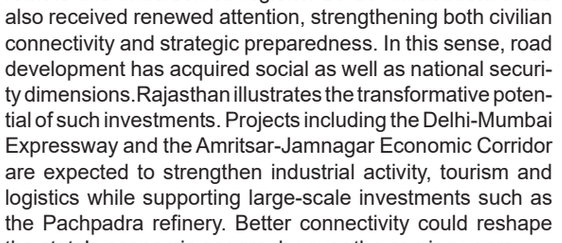
The economic implications are significant. Better highways reduce freight costs, shorten travel time and improve market access for industries and agricultural producers alike. Tourism receives a boost as destinations become more accessible, while smaller towns gain opportunities to integrate with larger economic centres. Improved logistics also strengthen India's efforts to enhance manufacturing competitiveness and attract greater investment.The benefits extend beyond economics. Improved road connectivity facilitates better access to healthcare, education and public services, particularly in remote and underserved regions. Border infrastructure has also received renewed attention, strengthening both civilian connectivity and strategic preparedness. In this sense, road development has acquired social as well as national security dimensions.Rajasthan illustrates the transformative potential of such investments. Projects including the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway and the Amritsar-Jamnagar Economic Corridor are expected to strengthen industrial activity, tourism and logistics while supporting large-scale investments such as the Pachpadra refinery. Better connectivity could reshape the state's economic geography over the coming years.

Yet the scale of expansion also raises important questions. Land acquisition, environmental sustainability, road safety and long-term maintenance remain continuing challenges. Infrastructure growth must be accompanied by safeguards for ecological conservation, responsible rehabilitation, improved engineering standards and effective traffic management. Sustainable development demands that speed of construction be matched by quality and environmental responsibility.India's highway programme has undoubtedly altered the country's infrastructure landscape. The challenge now is to ensure that this momentum translates into durable economic gains while balancing development with sustainability. If future expansion continues to combine efficient execution with responsible planning, India's highway network could become not only one of the world's largest but also one of its most efficient and resilient, supporting the country's long-term aspirations for inclusive and sustainable growth.

- Gopendra Nath Bhatt
Guest Editor

Rotary Club Marks Charter Day Celebration

Udaipur: Rotary Club Udaipur Vasudha celebrated its ninth Charter Day and installed its new leadership for the 2026-27 Rotary year during a ceremony at Hotel Golden Tulip. Rotarian Deepti Lodha assumed office as president, while Rotarian Ekta Solanki was installed as club secretary. The event was attended by senior Rotary leaders, including Past District Governors Nirmal Singhvi and Nirmal Kunawat. Charter President Shakuntala Porwal highlighted the club's achievements over the past nine years. Rotarian Sharad Rathore received the prestigious Major Donor Recognition for his humanitarian contributions.



As part of the celebration, Dr. Rotarian Preeti Singh donated hygiene and healthcare essentials to children at Prayas Sansthan. The program also featured cultural performances by club members and recognized volunteers for their contributions. Club leaders reaffirmed their commitment to Rotary's motto, "Service Above Self," and pledged to expand community service initiatives in the coming year.

Kharatargachh Parishad Chief Honored in Udaipur

Udaipur: Members of the Akhil Bharatiya Kharatargachh Mahila Parishad, KharatargachhYuvak Parishad and the local trust felicitated National President Saroj Bahen at a ceremony held at Dadawadi in Udaipur. Addressing the gathering, she stressed the importance of women's empowerment, social harmony and community service, urging members to preserve cultural values and strengthen organizational unity. Former and current office-bearers, trustees and community leaders attended the event. Organizers said the ceremony reaffirmed the organization's commitment to social service and expressed confidence that its activities would expand further under Saroj Bahen's leadership.

Padmavibhushan Dr. Teejan Bai : The Eternal Voice of Pandavani

The news of the passing of Padma Vibhushan Dr. TeejanBai deeply saddened me. It felt as though Indian folk culture had lost one of its brightest stars. She was not merely a performer of Pandavani; she was its living soul. Through her extraordinary voice, powerful acting, and unmatched storytelling, she transformed the ancient tales of the Mahabharata into unforgettable experiences for audiences across the world.

Teejan Bai devoted her entire life to preserving and promoting the centuries-old tradition of Pandavani. Her commanding voice, expressive performances, exceptional singing, and rare ability to captivate audiences earned her immense respect and admiration. She mastered the Kapalik style of Pandavani, presenting episodes from the Mahabharata with remarkable intensity and emotion.

One of the most fascinating aspects of her performances was her peacock-feather-adorned tambura. In her hands, it became whatever the story demanded—a mace, a bow and arrow, a plough, an axe, or a sword. Like a consummate actor, she brought every character to life on stage. Her ability to weave contemporary references into ancient stories made audiences laugh one moment and move them to tears the next. Through her performances, she effortlessly traversed the emotions of heroism, compassion, humour, wonder, anger, fear, and devotion before finally leaving the audience in a state of serenity. Even her graceful gesture of greeting the audience at the end of every performance reflected her warmth and humility.Teejan Bai visited Shilpgram Utsav in Udaipur on several occasions, performing under the auspices of the West Zone Cultural Centre (WZCC). Each visit left audiences spellbound and reaffirmed her stature as one of India's greatest folk artists.

During my tenure as Programme Officer at the West Zone Cultural Centre, Udaipur, I also had the privilege of serving as the compere for many prestigious cultural events. I always believed that introducing an artist required much more than reading a biography. Before every performance, I would spend time with the artist, learning about their life, philosophy, artistic journey, and creative process. This preparation allowed me to present meaningful introductions that connected audiences with the performers before they even stepped onto the stage.

I was fortunate to interact closely with Teejan Bai on several occasions. I became an ardent admirer not only of her singing and acting but also of her extraordinary gift for making every listener a participant in her storytelling. Throughout my career, I introduced numerous distinguished folk and classical artists, but introducing Padma Bhushan Dr. Teejan Bai remains one of my most cherished memories.

After presenting the background of Pandavani and acknowledging her accompanying musicians, I would conclude by saying, "Please join me in welcoming Padma Bhushan Dr. Teejan Bai." As the music began and she strode onto the stage with the confidence and energy of a warrior, the entire atmosphere transformed. The audience erupted in applause, and within moments, they were transported into the world of the Mahabharata. Listening to her narrate those timeless stories was nothing short of a blessing.Over the years, I had the privilege of witnessing her performances at Shilpgram Utsav in Udaipur, Basant Utsav in Gandhinagar, Lokotsav in Goa, Delhi, and Mumbai. Every performance carried the same passion, authenticity, and spiritual depth. She never merely narrated a story; she made history breathe before the audience's eyes.Among my most treasured memories is an unforgettable evening at the University of Mumbai's Kalina campus, where I had the rare privilege of listening to her perform the episode of Karna in the august presence of Sangeet Martand Padma Bhushan Pandit Jasraj. Her portrayal of Karna's dignity, anguish, and sacrifice was so deeply moving that even Pandit Jasraj was visibly emotional. Watching these two legendary artists express mutual admiration and gratitude after the performance was a profoundly touching experience. I, too, found myself overwhelmed with emotion.

Today, both of these towering cultural icons are no longer with us. Yet their artistry, humility, and devotion to Indian culture continue to inspire generations. Their memories remain indelibly etched in my heart.

For me, Teejan Bai was far more than an accomplished folk artist. She was a living institution, a guardian of India's oral traditions, and a symbol of unwavering dedication to cultural heritage. Every interaction with her deepened my appreciation of folk art and reaffirmed my belief that true artistry lies in touching the human soul.Though Teejan Bai has departed from this world, her resonant voice, her iconic tambura, and her unforgettable performances will continue to echo through the cultural landscape of India. Future generations will remember her not only as the greatest exponent of Pandavani but as one of the finest storytellers our nation has ever produced.

My heartfelt tribute to an immortal legend whose art will continue to illuminate India's cultural heritage forever.

- Vilas Janve

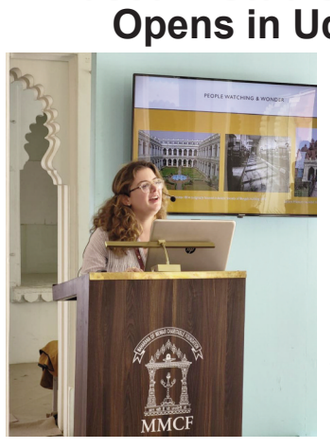
Central Public School Organises 'Adhyaksharam Ritual' for Nursery Students

Udaipur: Central Public Senior Secondary School, New Bhupalpura, organized its annual 'Adhyaksharam Ritual' on Friday, July 10, marking the ceremonial beginning of formal education for nursery students. The tradition aims to help young children write their first letter in a sacred and auspicious environment, making the milestone memorable as they embark on their academic journey.

The programme began with Saraswati Puja, after which School Chairperson Dr. Alka Sharma and Administrative Director Anil Sharma addressed the gathering. They highlighted the significance of the occasion, stating that writing the first letter under an auspicious muhurat, with the blessings of parents and teachers, symbolizes the beginning of a child's pursuit of knowledge.During the ceremony, Chairperson Dr. Alka Sharma, Administrative Director Anil Sharma, Director Dr. Deepak Sharma, Principal Poonam Rathore, Joint Director Vikramjeet Singh Shekhawat, Administrator Sunil Babel, and Headmistress Krishna Shaktawat guided the children in writing their first letters on trays filled with rice grains (Akshat), following the traditional ritual.Parents present at the event blessed the children as they took their first step into the world of education. The students later rewrote the letters on special sheets using turmeric, which will be preserved as a cherished keepsake.

The entire ceremony was conducted amidst Vedic chants, creating a deeply spiritual atmosphere. School authorities noted that such traditional ceremonies help lay a strong cultural and educational foundation for children while making the beginning of their academic life both meaningful and memorable.

Museum Studies Course Opens in Udaipur



Udaipur: A 10-day museum studies training program aimed at promoting heritage conservation and museum management opened Monday at Khush Mahal in Udaipur's City Palace. Titled "Curating Udaipur: A Course in Museum Studies," the program is jointly organized by the Rajasthani Language Academy and the Maharana Mewar Charitable Foundation and will continue through July 22. Held under the guidance of Dr. Lakshyaraj Singh Mewar, the initiative seeks to preserve Rajasthan's linguistic and cultural heritage while providing participants with practical and academic training in museum studies. The curriculum includes lectures on the Mewar school of painting, palace architecture, cultural heritage, museum curation and digital preservation. Fifty-six participants are attending the course. On the opening day, Professor Hayley Neal Swanson of London spoke on museum architecture, followed by a guided tour of the City Palace Museum led by Vishesh Kothari, focusing on collections, interpretation and heritage management.

Flipkart Food Business Grows 50%

BENGALURU, Flipkart said its food and nutrition business grew 50% year over year, driven by Gen Z consumers and shoppers in Tier 2 and smaller cities as demand for healthier food options continued to rise. The company said Flipkart Minutes accounted for 25% of overall demand, while searches for products such as cold-pressed oils, protein oats, protein muesli, premium dry fruits and olive oil increased 80% over the past year. Gen Z accounted for 60% of the category's annual growth, with protein-rich foods, gourmet chocolates and Korean-inspired snacks among the fastest-growing segments.

The trends were highlighted at Flipkart Food Fest 2026, which featured more than 50 brands, 1,000 creators and celebrity chefs, along with new product launches and brand showcases. Flipkart said digital commerce is expanding access to healthier food choices across urban and non-metro India.

Anokhi Exhibition Promotes Women Entrepreneurs

Udaipur: A two-day Anokhi Exhibition promoting women entrepreneurship opened at Hotel Golden Tulip, providing women artisans and entrepreneurs with a platform to showcase and sell their products ahead of Raksha Bandhan. Inaugurating the event, social worker Rashmi Pagaria said such initiatives help women achieve financial independence through direct market access. More than 100 stalls feature handmade rakhis, ethnic wear, textiles, jewelry, accessories, bakery products and other handcrafted items. Social media influencer Varsha Rao attended as guest of honor. Organizers said the exhibition has drawn enthusiastic visitors and aims to strengthen women-led entrepreneurship and local businesses.

Jain Monk's Chaturmas Begins in Udaipur

Udaipur: Thousands of Jain devotees are expected to participate in the ceremonial arrival of Digambar Jain monk Muni 108 Shri Adityasagar Maharaj and his monastic order in Udaipur on July 12, marking the beginning of the annual Chaturmas observance. The procession will begin from Sub City Centre and conclude at Shri Adinath Digambar Jain Temple in Hiran Magri Sector-11, followed by a religious discourse and blessings.

Muni Adityasagar Maharaj will be accompanied by Muni Apramitsagar Maharaj, Muni Sahajsagar Maharaj and Muni Shreyashsagar Maharaj. During the four-month Chaturmas period, devotees will participate in daily discourses, scriptural study, meditation, worship and other spiritual programs.

Organizers said the Guru Purnima Mahotsav will be celebrated on July 29, followed by the ceremonial Kalash Sthapana marking the formal commencement of Chaturmas. Around 6,000 devotees, including pilgrims arriving by a special train from Indore, are expected to attend.

Born in Jabalpur in 1986, Adityasagar Maharaj earned an MBA before embracing monkhood in 2011. Known for his scholarship and proficiency in 16 languages, he has authored numerous works on spirituality and Jain philosophy. He also announced youth and value-education camps during Chaturmas, emphasizing knowledge, meditation, ethical living and character building for younger generations.

Mall Hosts Kids Pizza Workshop

Udaipur: More than 500 children participated in the Domino's Junior Pizza Chef Workshop at Urban Square Mall, where they learned the basics of pizza making through a fun, hands-on experience.Held over two days, the workshop attracted enthusiastic participation from children and their families. Domino's culinary experts guided young participants through every step of the pizza-making process, allowing them to prepare their own pizzas. Each child received a Junior Pizza Chef certificate along with a special four-course meal.

Parents praised the initiative for combining education with entertainment, calling it a unique opportunity for children to develop practical skills in an engaging environment. The overwhelming response has also encouraged several schools to join the initiative. Domino's has begun extending the workshop through schools to give more students access to the interactive learning experience.

Nandini Taneja, CEO of Bhumika Enterprises, said the participation of more than 500 children reflects the growing popularity of experiential events that offer both learning and entertainment. She said the involvement of schools is an encouraging development and reaffirmed the mall's commitment to hosting family-oriented programs.Urban Square Mall regularly organizes cultural, entertainment and experiential events for children, youth and families, reinforcing its position as one of Udaipur's leading lifestyle and entertainment destinations.