

India to receive its 1st Bullet Train on August 15 next year: Ashwini Vaishnaw

NEW DELHI, Jan 1 (IANS)

RAILWAYS Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Thursday indicated that India is likely to receive its first Bullet Train on August 15, 2027. The country is going to witness its first Bullet Train running on tracks next year, Vaishnaw said. "Buy a Bullet Train ticket as on the Independence Day in 2027, the country will get its first Bullet Train," he said.

Vaishnaw also said that the Vande Bharat Express chair car has created a new sense of confidence across the country, and people have appreciated it a lot.

"Requests are now coming in from all over India to run Vande Bharat trains, and almost every MP wants one. With the same comfort, safety, and standards, a new overnight journey will begin with the Vande Bharat Sleeper," he mentioned.

India's first Bullet Train project spans 508 kms between



Mumbai and Ahmedabad. Of this, 352 km lies in Gujarat and Dadra & Nagar Haveli, and 156 km in Maharashtra.

According to the Government, the corridor will connect major cities such as Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Bharuch, Surat, Vapi, Thane, and Mumbai, and is expected to cut travel time between the two metros to around two hours, significantly boosting inter-city mobility.

As per the National High-Speed Rail Corporation Ltd. (NHSRCL), over 85 per cent of the corridor—around 465 km—is being built on elevated viaducts, with 326 km already completed. In November, Prime Minister Narendra Modi under-

took a detailed review of the Mumbai–Ahmedabad High-Speed Rail (MAHSR) project during his visit to Gujarat, marking a key moment in India's push towards next-generation transport infrastructure.

During the visit, the Prime Minister inspected the Surat station—a structure inspired by the city's globally renowned diamond industry. With a height of 26.3 metres and a built-up area of 58,352 square metres, the station includes three levels: The ground floor for parking and security checks, the concourse level for lounges, restrooms, kiosks and ticketing, and the platform level for passenger boarding. While structural work is complete, finishing touches such as interiors and station amenities are currently underway. Track works, including RC track-bed construction and temporary track installation, have also been completed at the site.

Jaishankar meets Pak's Speaker in Bangladesh



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar meets Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan, Sardar Ayaz Sadiq in Dhaka on Wednesday. (ANI)

DHAKA, Jan 1 (IANS)

EXTERNAL Affairs Minister (EAM) S Jaishankar briefly met Pakistan's National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq in Dhaka on Wednesday, just ahead of funeral of Bangladesh's former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia.

The social media account of Bangladesh's Chief Advisor Muhammad Yunus shared the picture of Sadiq and EAM Jaishankar

meeting. Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan, exchanges greetings with Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar in Dhaka on Wednesday ahead of the funeral programme of former Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia," it wrote on X.

Earlier in the day, EAM Jaishankar arrived in Dhaka to represent India at the funeral of Khaleda Zia, the first woman Prime Minister of Bangladesh. He conveyed the Indian Government's condolences to Rahman on the passing of his mother and former Bangladesh PM.

Upon arrival in Dhaka, EAM Jaishankar said that he met with Tarique Rahman and handed over to him a personal letter from Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"Conveyed deepest condolences on behalf of the Government and people of India. Expressed confidence that Begum Khaleda Zia's vision and values will guide the development of our partnership," he added.

EAM Jaishankar acknowledged Zia's contribution to democracy and expressed optimism about strengthening India-Bangladesh ties in the wake of a democratic transition following the upcoming elections.

Gaganyaan uncrewed mission, private rocket launches highlight of India's space sector in 2026

NEW DELHI, Jan 1 (PTI)

BUILDING on the success of Shubhanshu Shukla's maiden journey to the International Space Station, India is set to take its first steps towards its own human space flight when the uncrewed Gaganyaan mission soars to the skies later this year.

Skyroot Aerospace and Agnikul Cosmos – private players in the space sector – are also gearing up for launching satellites on the home-built rockets Vikram-1 and Agnibaan, as they eye a foothold in the burgeoning small satellites launch market.

The new year will also witness the launch of the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV), built entirely by HAL and L&T after bagging the contract from ISRO in 2023. The first orbital test of Gaganyaan, called G-1, with a humanoid robot Vyommitra onboard, is expected to be launched by March this year, Science and Technology Minister

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Jitendra Singh told Parliament last month.

The humanoid robot will simulate the functions of an astronaut, and the spacecraft will validate critical crew systems in low Earth orbit before India eyes a human space flight sometime in 2027.

“(Year) 2026 will solidify India's global stature through breakthroughs in quantum technologies via PSLV-N1, Agnikul's 3D printed engines and Pixxel's hyperspectral constellations, even as we bridge infrastructure

needs like dedicated private launch pads,” said Lieutenant General A K Bhatt, Director General, Indian Space Association (ISpA). Last year, Shukla scripted history when he became the first Indian to travel to the International Space Station (ISS) as part of the Axiom-4 commercial mission.

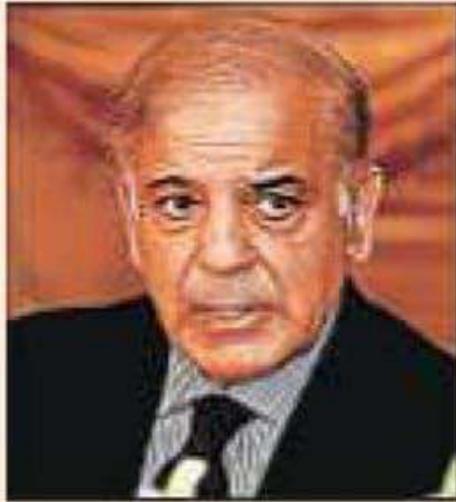
The astronaut spent 18 days at the orbital laboratory, conducting micro-gravity experiments, an experience that will prove immensely valuable for India's human spaceflight.

Incubated at IIT-Madras, space start-up Agnikul Cosmos also plans to launch reusable rockets and also convert upper-stages of its rockets, as functional satellites with an eye on reducing costs. “Our recently granted patents for converting upper stages into functional satellites represent a breakthrough in launch economics,” Srinath Ravichandran, founder and CEO Agnikul Cosmos, told PTI.

Pakistan PM Shehbaz Sharif launches governance reforms under IMF lens

ISLAMABAD, Jan 1 (PTI)

PRIME Minister Shehbaz Sharif has launched economic-governance reforms to address the vulnerabilities identified in the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) Governance and Corruption report.



The 186-page Governance and Corruption Diagnostic report launched late last year highlighted massive economic leakages due to bad governance and corruption.

Under the IMF conditions linked to its ongoing USD 7 billion bailout package, Pakistan was required to publish "governance action plan based on the recommendations of the Governance Diagnostic Assessment" to address critical governance vulnerabilities by December 31.

'The Express Tribune' reported that the 142-point reform plan launched on Wednesday envisaged undertaking national risk assessment on corruption, making rule-based appointments in key institutions, including the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) and improving its credibility in the eyes of the public.

Shehbaz said that the recommendations of the international institutions have been incorporated in his reforms' plan but it is fundamentally the government's home grown agenda to "shift from crisis management to institutional building".

Shehbaz said that under his governance plan, there are 59 priority actions and 83 complementary actions. This brings the total tally of these required actions to 142 that have to be implemented over a period of next three years. The Prime Minister said that the Government's focus would now shift from crisis management to institutional building. He said that people of Pakistan have paid a very heavy price during the past two years and "we cannot return to business as usual".

Air Marshal Nagesh Kapoor takes charge as Vice Chief of Air Staff



NEW DELHI, Jan 1 (PTI)

AIR MARSHAL Nagesh Kapoor on Thursday took charge as the IAF's Vice Chief of the Air Staff.

Prior to this appointment, he served as the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the South Western Air Command (SWAC).

He succeeds Air Marshal Narmadeshwar Tiwari, who retired on Wednesday after four decades of illustrious service to the nation.

"Commissioned into the Flying Branch of IAF in December 1986, he has a rich experience of flying on various fighter and trainer aircraft of the IAF," the IAF said. He took charge as the Vice Chief of the Air Staff at the Vayu Bhawan here.

Air Marshal Kapoor was accorded a Guard of Honour.

Ukrainian drone strike kills 24 people in Russia



KYIV, Jan 1 (AP)

RUSSIAN officials on Thursday said a Ukrainian drone strike killed 24 people and wounded at least 50 more as they celebrated the New Year in a Russian-occupied village in Ukraine's Kherson region, as tensions between the two nations continue to spike despite diplomats hailing productive peace talks.

Three drones struck a cafe and hotel in the resort town of Khorly

on the Black Sea coast, the region's Moscow-installed leader, Vladimir Saldo, said in a statement on Telegram. He said that one of the drones carried an incendiary mixture, sparking a blaze. Ukrainian officials did not immediately comment on the claim of a strike.

The attack was condemned by a number of Russian officials. Valentina Matviyenko, the chair of Russia's upper house of Parliament, the Federation Council, said that the strike "strengthened" Russia's resolve to quickly achieve its goals in its almost four-year invasion of Ukraine.

The strike "once again
(Contd on page 5)

Lokpal scraps controversial tender to buy 7 BMW cars

■ By Ashwini Shrivastava
NEW DELHI, Jan 1 (PTI)

ANTI-GRAFT ombudsman Lokpal has cancelled its controversial tender to procure seven luxury BMW cars, collectively worth around Rs 5 crore, two months after it was floated, officials said on Thursday.

The move assumes significance as Opposition parties and civil society activists had slammed the Lokpal's decision to procure the high-end vehicles.

Officials said the decision to cancel the procurement offer

was taken following a resolution of the full bench of the Lokpal, after which a corrigendum was issued by it dated December 16, 2025.

The Lokpal had, on October 16, 2025, floated a request for proposal seeking bids from reputed agencies for the supply of seven BMW 3 Series 330Li cars.

The procurement was intended to provide a vehicle each for the chairperson and six members of the Lokpal, currently headed by Justice A M Khanwilkar (retd). The Lokpal is headed by a chairperson and



The Lokpal had floated a request to procure seven luxury BMW cars, collectively worth around Rs 5 crore for its officials. The decision was severely criticised by Opposition parties and civil society activists.

can have a maximum of eight members -- four each judicial and non-judicial.

The tender had specified BMW 330Li "M Sport" models with "long wheelbase" in white colour for procurement. The on-road price of the proposed cars in New Delhi was estimated at around Rs 5 crore.

The Lokpal's decision had drawn sharp criticism from the Opposition parties, who accused the "guardians of integrity" of "chasing luxury over legitimacy".

Congress general secretary in-charge of communications,

Jairam Ramesh, had dubbed the institution "Shauq Pal", while former Niti Aayog Chief Executive Officer Amitabh Kant had demanded that the Lokpal cancel the tender and opt for electric vehicles manufactured in India.

According to the tender document, the selected vendor/firm was required to conduct a comprehensive practical and theoretical training programme for the drivers and other designated staff members of the Lokpal to ensure efficient, safe and optimal operation of the BMW vehicles.