

India to help Nepal with cheap fertiliser even as PM Balen raises Lipulekh dispute

Nepal, under PM Balen Shah, has revived its push over the contested Lipulekh Pass. At the same time, India, which is absorbing soaring global fertiliser costs, is helping Nepal by supplying urea and DAP at below-market prices. New Delhi is providing Kathmandu a crucial economic lifeline at a time when Nepal is facing a fertiliser shortage ahead of the planting season.

New Delhi.(Agency)

With the US-Iran war having driven up the price of fertilisers, an essential input in modern agriculture, India is reportedly stepping up to provide its Himalayan neighbour, Nepal, with fertilisers at below global prices, even as it is paying double the price to acquire the same. This comes even as Nepal, under the leadership of Prime Minister Balen Shah, is raising up a diplomatic stink over the Lipulekh Pass, used by the pilgrims of the Kailash Manasarovar yatra. The pass has always been Indian territory, since the days of the British Raj, but Nepal has claimed it for three decades. According to a report in the Nepal-based paper, The

Kathmandu Post, the government on Monday granted in-principle approval to the Agriculture Inputs Company (a state-owned enterprise responsible for supplying the nation's farmers with inputs like fertilisers) to procure 80,000 tonnes of chemical fertiliser from India under a government-to-government (G2G) arrangement.

NEPAL FACES FERTILISER SHORTFALL AHEAD OF PLANTATION SEASON

This deal comes as Nepal faces a shortfall of fertiliser supplies ahead of the country's plantation season. While the government had projected a requirement of 250,000



tonnes of chemical fertilisers, it only had 171,000 tonnes in stock, with further contracts for 94,450 tonnes from private tenders unlikely to materialise, The Kathmandu Post reported.

Speaking to the paper, Ram Krishna Shrestha, joint secretary at the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development, stated that given the current global prices of chemical fertilisers, "It is beyond the government's capacity to fully subsidise fertiliser at current global prices, as it would require nearly Rs 80 billion".

Currently, the price of urea and Diammonium Phosphate (DAP) is Rs 160 and Rs 162 per kg, respectively. In response, the Agriculture Inputs Company, moved to sign a G2G agreement with India's state-owned Rashtriya Chemicals and Fertilisers

Limited to acquire 60,000 tonnes of urea and 20,000 tonnes of DAP at below market prices. The G2G deal comes as the current amount of Rs 28.82 billion, allocated by Nepal to import half a million tonnes of fertiliser via private tenders, is no longer enough as the global price of these inputs keeps increasing, The Kathmandu Post reported. The purchase is being made as part of an MoU signed between Delhi and Kathmandu in 2022, wherein India agreed to guarantee at least 30% of Nepal's annual fertiliser requirement, with volumes rising from 150,000 tonnes in the first year to 210,000 tonnes by the fifth year, reported The Kathmandu Post.

B'desh unbans E-Cigarettes & heated tobacco products-6.2 million smokers could benefit

On April 11, 2026, the Bangladesh Parliament passed an amended Tobacco Control Act formally withdrawing the ban on next-generation nicotine products- heated tobacco products (HTPs) and e-cigarettes among them. It was not a quiet administrative tweak. It was a policy reversal of real consequence, one that places Bangladesh ahead of far wealthier, supposedly more sophisticated nations still clinging to blanket prohibitions that have demonstrably failed.

The numbers behind this decision are not abstract. According to research by the U.S.-based Consumer Choice Center, more than 6.2 million smokers in Bangladesh could potentially quit smoking if smokeless products were responsibly regulated and promoted as cessation tools.

For context, that is a population larger than New Zealand's, individuals currently denied access to demonstrably lower-risk alternatives, not because those alternatives don't work, but because policymakers elsewhere chose ideology over evidence.

Bangladesh has now chosen differently. Its amended legislation establishes a government-controlled regulatory framework with explicit protections: safeguarding adult smokers seeking alternatives, protecting public health, and preventing youth access to nicotine products. This is not deregulation. It is smart regulation, the kind the WHO and its affiliated organisations have been slow to endorse, much to the detriment of public health globally.

The case for regulated smokeless alternatives has been building for years. Heated tobacco products eliminate combustion, the primary source of the toxic chemicals in cigarette smoke. E-cigarettes contain no tobacco leaf whatsoever, operating instead on nicotine solutions that generate aerosol rather than smoke.

These are not cigarettes rebranded. They are categorically different products, and the regulatory frameworks governing them should reflect that difference.

The United States finally arrived at this understanding, and the results are measurable. According to the 2025 National Youth Tobacco Survey, youth tobacco use in the U.S. fell to 7.5 percent, the lowest recorded since 2011, down from a peak of 23.3 percent in 2019. E-cigarette use among youth fell from 5.9 percent to 5.2 percent in a single year. Combustible cigarette use hit an all-time low.

The gateway argument the claim that regulated smokeless products funnel young people toward cigarette smoking did not survive contact with real-world data. It rarely does.

Bangladesh's lawmakers read the evidence and acted on it. That deserves to be said plainly.

The alternative to Bangladesh's new approach is not some clean, smoke-free utopia. It is India. It is Thailand. It is the cautionary tale that prohibition advocates never seem to want to tell.

India has maintained among the strictest bans on next-generation nicotine products in the world. The result? A recent analysis of household consumption data found that approximately 5.5 million new households adopt tobacco use every year, bringing the total to around 180 million tobacco-consuming households nationally. Products like gutkha, a smokeless chewing tobacco linked to oral cancers remain freely available through illegal channels. E-cigarettes continue to circulate outside any regulatory framework, with no age verification, no quality controls, no consumer protections whatsoever.

Over a decade of prohibition has not reduced consumption. It has simply removed the state from any meaningful role in managing it.

Thailand, frequently held up by the WHO as a model of tobacco control rigour, is confronting the same paradox: its e-cigarette market is expanding rapidly, and the government has forfeited more than a decade of potential tax revenue to enforce a ban that has not worked.

More than 100 countries now permit the regulated sale of smokeless nicotine products to varying degrees. That is not a fringe position. That is the emerging global consensus one Bangladesh has now joined.

Bangladesh's decision does not exist in a vacuum. Across South and Southeast Asia, governments are watching. Policymakers in markets where combustible tobacco use remains stubbornly high and where illicit product circulation is endemic will be measuring what happens next in Dhaka.

If Bangladesh's regulatory model succeeds in shifting adult smokers toward lower-risk alternatives while keeping youth access restricted, it will become a reference point. A proof of concept. An inconvenient data point for every health ministry that has staked its credibility on prohibition.

And if it works- when it works- the pressure on holdout governments will be difficult to ignore.

Bangladesh has not legalised harm. It has chosen to regulate it - which is an entirely different thing, and a far more honest response to the reality of nicotine use in a country of 170 million people.

The amended Tobacco Control Act is not a concession to the tobacco industry. It is a concession to evidence.

Balipara Foundation and community-led biodiversity survey identifies potential vulture habitat in Majuli Island

Dr. Bidyut Sarania and Dr. Subham Mondal
Balipara Foundation

In a promising development for Assam's wildlife conservation efforts, a joint biodiversity assessment carried out by Balipara Foundation, in collaboration with the Mising community of Dhapak village in Majuli Island, has revealed a potential island habitat for critically endangered and threatened vulture species. The initiative forms part of an assisted natural regeneration project under CSR support, aiming at ecological restoration of the island ecosystem.

Conducted in March 2026, the survey enlisted active par-

ticipants, underscoring the conservation importance of these observations.

The survey also recorded the Swamp Francolin (*Ortygornis gularis*) and Oriental Darter (*Anhinga melanogaster*), both listed as Near Threatened. Slender-billed Vulture, Himalayan Griffon and Swamp Francolin are protected under Schedule I species of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

"Finding such significant numbers of vultures is crucial," said Dr. Pulakeswar Basumaty, wildlife researcher and part of the assessment team, who previously reported the rare winter migratory bird Naumann's Thrush from Assam.

"The population of Slender-billed Vultures has seen a drastic decline in recent decades, and their presence here underscores the ecological importance of Majuli's habitats."

The village head, Nahorjyoti Satula, remarked that the vulture sightings are closely linked to the community's traditional cattle rearing practices, where cattle carcasses serve as a key food source. He emphasized the need to promote awareness and tree plantation along village edges to aid roosting and nesting opportu-



Camera trap photograph of critically endangered Slender-billed Vultures (*Gyps tenuirostris*) and near threatened Himalayan Griffons (*Gyps himalayensis*) at the

participation from local youth, who were trained by Dr. Subham Chandra Mondal, Sr. Environment Specialist at Balipara Foundation in basic wildlife survey techniques such as camera trapping and line transect methods. Covering around 200 hectares of grassland-woodland habitat, the team documented 55 bird species, 5 mammals, and 20 butterfly species, highlighting the island's rich biodiversity.

Among the avian records, two sightings stood out for their conservation value — 10 Slender-billed Vultures (*Gyps tenuirostris*), classified as Critically Endangered by the IUCN, and 60 Himalayan Griffons (*Gyps himalayensis*), a Near Threatened species. The population of Slender-billed Vultures in India is estimated at around 1,000 individuals (BirdLife International, 2021). A recent report by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII, 2025) further highlights that only about 40 breeding individuals of this species remain in Assam. The same WII (2025) report estimates the population of Himalayan Griffon in India at approximately 890 indi-

viduals for the birds.

Dr. Bidyut Sarania, Lead (Research & Development) at Balipara Foundation, noted that biodiversity surveys of such riverine ecosystems offer insights into habitats supporting not just avifauna but also endangered mammals like the Asian Elephant (*Elephas maximus*) and Bengal Tiger (*Panthera tigris*). "Our aim is to create a network of community youth for long-term conservation through ecological restoration," he said, adding that a systematic nest survey of vultures will soon be undertaken across island and riverine habitats along the Brahmaputra.

Home to diverse ecosystems, Majuli is already recognized as a Biodiversity Heritage Site, a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA), and an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA). This recent survey reinforces its standing as one of Assam's most vital natural landscapes — a fortress for vulture recovery and broader ecological resilience in the Brahmaputra basin.

Delhi police arrests boxer murder accused after eight months on the run



New Delhi.(Agency)

The Delhi Police has arrested a 38-year-old man allegedly involved in the murder of a national-level boxer in outer Delhi last year, an official said on Wednesday. The accused, Sumit Rana alias Chhotu (38), was arrested from Adarsh Nagar after evading arrest for more than eight months in connection with the killing of boxer Vikas Dagar, alias Bhinda, he said. "Rana is a member of the Sonu gang, also known as the 'thekedar gang'. He was wanted in a case registered at Baba Haridas Nagar police station on July 30, 2025," the police officer said. According to the police, Vikas Bhinda, a national-level champion and resident of Nangli Sakrawati in Najafgarh, was shot dead on July 29, 2025, by assailants allegedly acting on a pre-planned conspiracy stemming from an old rivalry. Four accused—Vikas Dahiya, alias Sonu Thekedar, Akash Gahlot, Krishan and Sumit Rana—were involved in the attack in Baba Haridas Nagar area.

Police said Sonu allegedly opened fire at the boxer, who sustained multiple bullet injuries and died on the spot. After the attack, all the accused fled.

"During the investigation, Akash was arrested by the local police, while the remaining accused absconded and were later declared proclaimed offenders by a Delhi court on October 18, 2025," the officer said. On April 12 this year, the Crime Branch arrested gang leader Sonu Thekedar from Chandigarh. Police then traced Rana to Punjab's Zikarpur, but he escaped from there before the raid was conducted. The Crime Branch then got a tip-off and arrested Rana in Adarsh Nagar.

During interrogation, Rana allegedly admitted to his role in the conspiracy and told police that he had been frequently changing hideouts across different states with the help of associates to evade arrest. Police said Rana is a diploma holder in hotel management and had studied and worked in Malaysia between 2016 and 2021 before shifting to Dubai, where he started a trading company.

Pakistan renews proxy war in Punjab? 3 blasts in 10 days raise security concerns

New Delhi.(Agency)

Two IED explosions struck near the BSF headquarters in Jalandhar and Khalsa Military Camp in Amritsar within hours on May 5. The blasts have prompted a statewide alert as investigators examine suspected ISI-linked hybrid terror networks.

Punjab witnessed two IED explosions within hours on the night of May 5, 2026, both occurring near sensitive installations — the BSF headquarters in Jalandhar and Khalsa Military Camp in Amritsar. These incidents have triggered a statewide high alert and heightened security around border and defence sites, while also pointing to Pakistan ISI's alleged insidious plans for Punjab. Punjab DGP Gaurav Yadav called it an ISI plot to "keep the Punjab pot boiling". A string of three blasts in under 10 days, including the April 27 Patiala railway track IED attempt, has also pointed to serious security lapses.

A deeper probe shows that Punjab has been hit by a wave of hybrid terror-gangster incidents involving alleged ISI-backed modules, low-



level local operatives, and Khalistani extremists. These include the Gurdaspur cop killings in February, the Bhindi Saldan grenade attack in March, the Patiala railway blast in April, and now the twin May 5 attempts.

While Bhagwant Mann's statement may have triggered a political slugfest, India Today has

learnt that central agencies had issued an alert regarding a likely attack on the BSF camp in Jalandhar around the first anniversary of Operation Sindoor on May 7. Hours later, a blast near a scooter at the BSF headquarters in Jalandhar injured one BSF personnel, who suffered splinter injuries to his thigh.

The Khalistan Liberation Army (KLA) claimed responsibility, while Punjab Police believe the outfit is a Sikh extremist organisation with alleged involvement of Pakistan-based gangster Shehzad Bhatti. Police said the attack was carried out in retaliation for the death of 19-year-old Ranjit Singh. The KLA labelled the attack "Operation Nawa Savair," calling it revenge for Singh's death in a controversial police encounter in Gurdaspur, Punjab, on February 25, 2026.