

SHEETAL DEVI

Our own, the daughter of the soil Sheetal Devi has been named Para Archer of the Year 2025 by the World Archery. This is stupendous! Simply amazing and calls for a celebration of the human spirit. Sheetal Devi, the girl with steely determination and ambitions as high as the mountains around which she was born — armless — is pride of J&K. Today it is no exaggeration to say that Sheetal Devi is the biggest youth icon of India. Winning gold medals in international para-achery championship is great indeed but far greater is journey of her life. She symbolizes the triumph of human spirit over adversities, disadvantageous lineages and lack of resources. Sheetal Devi went to a regular school where the village community accepted her as she was. People around her didn't judge her not did anyone discriminate against her so she grew up with the confidence of being born with special abilities. She could write with her toes as efficiently as other can do it with their hands. Her life was to change for better when the local army unit spotted her determination and began her training in archery. Life didn't become better in a jiffy since Sheetal endured a lot of pain and strain of training. The rest is history. She is the only para archer without limbs in the world. When she was in the arena for the Paris Olympics, her archery came in for praise from audiences as well as experts. At the stage of Olympic Games, there is a tiny difference between winning at losing; the winner is one who had dedicated more time to practice when off the pressure and Sheetal Devi is one such person. Her calm demeanor, herm sharp focus and her charm won over the world and the experts. The daughter of J&K must be celebrated and felicitated by the people of Jammu and if possible by the J&K Sports body. She can inspire a lot of young men and women.

Justice for CAPFs, stability for the nation

Ashok Kumar

At a time when India faces increasingly complex internal and border security challenges, the country cannot afford a debate that confuses genuine service grievances with structural injustice, or institutional reform with institutional weakening. The discussion around the CAPF (General Administration) Bill, 2026 has, in some quarters, been framed as if India must choose between the dignity of CAPF officers and the relevance of IPS leadership. That is a false and dangerous binary.

Having served for over 34 years in uniform, including tenures in the CRPF and BSF, in Naxal-affected areas and along the Pakistan and Bangladesh borders. I say with full responsibility that this Bill is not an attack on anyone. It is a balanced reform. It addresses the legitimate concerns of CAPF officers while preserving the institutional structure that has served India's national security interests for decades. In my view, it deserves clear support.

To understand why this Bill matters, one must look beyond promotions, postings, and cadre sensitivities. The issue is larger than administrative preference. It goes to the heart of how India has remained governable, secure, and united despite its diversity, regional complexity, and federal structure.

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel did not create the All India Services as a bureaucratic convenience. He envisioned them as the steel frame of a unified India. He understood that a country as vast and varied as ours could not be held together through fragmented loyalties, isolated administrative cultures, or region-bound thinking. Without a disciplined and nationally oriented service structure, India

risked administrative fragmentation and weak central coordination. In the security domain, such a danger can be disastrous.

It is because of this vision that the IPS has, for decades, functioned not merely as a cadre service but as an institutional bridge between the Union and the states, between intelligence and enforcement, and between state police and CAPFs. This steel frame has helped hold India together.

Those who reduce this debate to a simple question of cadre advancement overlook a basic operational truth: internal security in India cannot be managed as a patchwork of disconnected forces. A threat in one district can affect another state. An intelligence input from one agency may require immediate action from another. In such a system, speed, trust, and coordination are essential.

An Intelligence Bureau assessment may need to be translated into field action by a CRPF company in Chhattisgarh, a BSF formation in Jammu, or a state police unit in a sensitive district. Such coordination cannot depend on ad hoc communication or institutional ego. It requires a command ecosystem where officers understand the operational cultures of multiple agencies and can work across them seamlessly.

That is where IPS officers play a vital role. Their professional journey often takes them through state police, CAPFs, and central police organisations such as the CRPF, BSF, IB, and CBI. Coordination between IPS officers of equivalent batches commanding state police and CAPFs is often quicker and more natural because they are institutionally connected. This wider exposure gives them a broader operational perspective and strengthens inter-agency syn-

ergy. In a federal democracy like India, that is not an administrative luxury. It is a national security necessity.

I write this not from theory, but from personal experience. I have served in both the CRPF and BSF. I have seen the harsh realities of Naxal-affected terrain, the sensitivity of the Pakistan border, and the complexity of the Bangladesh border. In each of these theatres, one lesson became repeatedly clear: operations succeed when institutions work together, and falter when services function in compartments.

This is why extreme positions on either side are unhelpful. Neither are 100 per cent IPS officers best suited for every role, nor are 100 per cent CAPF officers. Like every institution, every service has highly capable officers and a few black sheep. The mature way forward is not to indulge in absolutist claims, but to build a structure that uses the strengths of both while reducing friction. That is exactly what this Bill seeks to do. The strongest argument in favour of the CAPF (General Administration) Bill, 2026 is that it does not force the country to choose between fairness and functionality. It seeks to provide both. It codifies essential service rules, creates greater transparency in promotions, provides for fixed tenures, institutionalises grievance redressal, and creates additional senior posts to address longstanding career stagnation.

This is not a token gesture. Career progression has been a real concern for many officers within the CAPFs, and any honest observer must acknowledge that. The Bill responds meaningfully. It creates hundreds of new senior posts at the levels of DIG, IG, and Additional DG. It also implements the Supreme Court's OGAS ruling on orderly gradation

and seniority. This is structural reform.

In my own career, I have seen a significant evolution in the service conditions of CAPF personnel. There was a time when many of their institutional concerns remained inadequately addressed. Over the years, however, the system has improved. Facilities, recognition, promotional avenues, and welfare measures have all progressed. This Bill carries that process forward in a codified and transparent manner. It addresses longstanding concerns not through slogans, but through law.

At the same time, the Bill wisely preserves IPS leadership at the top level within the larger internal security architecture. This has become the most politically and emotionally charged aspect of the debate, but it should not be. Preserving IPS leadership in key senior roles is not a slight to CAPF officers. It is a recognition of how India's federal security system actually works.

The CAPFs do not function in isolation. In many situations, they assist state police and operate within local and district-level command environments deeply rooted in the state policing framework. Officers who have experience in both state police and central forces are naturally better positioned to sustain that bridge. This is exactly what the Bill protects. By preserving IPS leadership in senior roles while simultaneously expanding opportunities and correcting stagnation for CAPF cadre officers, it balances service justice with national institutional coherence. That is statesmanship, not discrimination.

Unfortunately, some of the public discourse around this issue has been shaped less by institutional seriousness and more by grievance-driven rhetoric.

Reform is legitimate and necessary, but reform cannot become a pretext for attacking institutions that have long been central to national security and federal coordination.

India today faces a far more complicated threat environment than it did even a decade ago. Border infiltration, radicalisation, terrorism, left-wing extremism, organised crime, cyber-enabled networks, and communal volatility all demand a high degree of institutional integration. At such a time, weakening inter-service coordination would be a strategic mistake.

To dismantle 75 years of institutional memory in order to solve a promotional bottleneck would be deeply unwise. One cannot repair a staircase by demolishing the building. Administrative reform must improve the structure, not fracture it. The strength of this Bill lies precisely in the fact that it offers reform without rupture.

It recognises the bravery and sacrifice of CAPF personnel. It addresses their legitimate service concerns. It opens pathways for growth and fairness. But it also understands that national security is too serious a matter to be held hostage to narrow institutional rivalry. India needs both genuine welfare and a strong command architecture. This Bill provides both. For all these reasons, I strongly support the CAPF (General Administration) Bill, 2026. It gives promotional relief and administrative clarity to CAPF personnel while preserving the continuity, coordination, and institutional synergy essential to India's internal security system. That is the right balance. It is fair to CAPF officers, faithful to Sardar Patel's vision, and above all, in the national interest.

(The writer is former DGP Uttarakhand; views are personal)

FROM DREAM TO REALITY: NOIDA AIRPORT TAKES OFF

Vivek Shukla

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to inaugurate the Noida International Airport at Jewar on March 28, marking a historic milestone for Uttar Pradesh, Delhi-NCR and the nation. Just days away from this grand launch, the airport — popularly known as Jewar Airport — will commence operations as India's newest and one of its most ambitious aviation hubs. Located in Gautam Buddha Nagar district, approximately 75 km from Delhi, this greenfield facility is poised to become the second major airport serving the National Capital Region (NCR). With its inauguration, India takes a significant leap towards addressing the growing demands of its booming aviation industry.

The Noida International Airport (IATA: DXN) has been developed in phases, with Phase 1 ready to handle 12 million passengers annually. It features a 3,900-metre runway capable of supporting up to 30 aircraft movements per hour, a state-of-the-art terminal spanning 100,000 square metres equipped with 48 check-in counters, 10 aerobridges, nine immigration lanes and advanced security systems. Cargo terminals are fully operational, and the airport will initially focus on both do-

mestic and international flights. Low-cost carriers like IndiGo (the launch airline), Akasa Air and Air India Express are gearing up to operate from here, connecting key cities such as Mumbai, Hyderabad, Kolkata and more. In the long term, the airport aims to scale up to 70 million passengers per annum across multiple phases, eventually featuring multiple runways and positioning itself as one of Asia's largest aviation gateways.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath personally inspected the site multiple times, reviewing progress on the domestic terminal, security arrangements, traffic management and inauguration preparations. He has chaired high-level meetings, directing officials to ensure quality, timeliness and zero laxity in execution.

The airport embodies Yogi's "Triple S" model - Safety, Stability and Speed — that has redefined Uttar Pradesh's development narrative. By prioritising infrastructure like the Jewar project, Uttar Pradesh attracts global partners and investors. Plans for a "Singapore City" near the airport, complete with world-class logistics and investor-friendly ecosystems along the Yamuna Expressway, highlight his forward-thinking approach to turning avi-

ation hubs into economic engines.

Land acquisition for the project, executed with sensitivity towards affected families (offering employment options alongside compensation), reflects his people-centric policies.

This development is not merely an addition to infrastructure; it is a strategic response to the crippling congestion at Delhi's Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport, which has long exceeded its designed capacity. "I feel by providing a modern alternative, Noida International Airport will decongest NCR's skies, reduce delays and enhance passenger experience. India's aviation sector has been on a rapid growth trajectory, with domestic passenger traffic surging post-pandemic and international connectivity expanding," says Ajit Dubey, an aviation sector expert.

Amrit Mann, Managing Director, Mann Fleet Partners Limited, said, "Noida International Airport represents the future of Indian aviation, and I foresee it will be one of the leading airports in the world." It may be recalled that Noida International Airport strengthened its passenger mobility ecosystem with the appointment of Mann Fleet Partners Limited as its official ground transportation services partner. The collaboration is aimed at delivering

seamless, efficient and integrated last-mile connectivity solutions for travellers, enhancing overall passenger convenience across the airport campus. Under the agreement, Mann Fleet Partners Limited will manage a comprehensive portfolio of ground mobility services designed to support smooth passenger movement.

The Noida International Airport's launch comes at a pivotal time for India's aviation ambitions.

With air traffic projected to grow exponentially over the next three decades, this facility will play a crucial role in realising the nation's vision of becoming a global aviation leader. It will generate employment on a massive scale, stimulate regional economies and enhance connectivity for millions.

As flights take off from Jewar soon, the airport will not only ease the burden on Delhi but also ignite a new era of prosperity. It stands as a testament to collaborative governance — between the Centre and the state — and Yogi's unwavering focus on transformative infrastructure. India's skies are set to expand, and Noida International Airport will be at the forefront, soaring high as a beacon of progress.

The writer is a senior journalist; views are personal

Lotus: The forgotten soul of India's cultural imagination

Raghendra Singh

To most of us in the Indian subcontinent, especially the younger generation, the Lotus as a flower occupies no special significance. It is appreciated as just another beautiful specimen of flora. A uniform ignorance exists about the fact that the Lotus (Kamal) is intricately connected not only with the Bharatiya, but many other cultural ethos across time and space. This flower is deeply embedded in India's historical psyche. Let us take the case of Bharatiya literature and art (paintings and sculpture), which denote our culture. Literature and art serve as a mirror of the glory of our nation. Through them, it is possible to understand our past. What is left unexplained in one realm is made clear through the other, for literature and art act as real mirrors, reflecting images that no longer exist. The ancient poet Dandin, in his famous work *Kavya Rasa*, talks of Bharat's historicity quite succinctly:

"The image of fame of early kings reflected in the mirror of literature does not disappear, even now, even in their absence."

For an appropriate understanding of one, the other acts as a supplement. A

ready example that comes to mind is that of Kamal: the Padmanabha aspect of Vishnu, the Lotus aspect as a seat (Kamalaasan), Charankamal, Lotus motifs and many such examples. Ajanta and Bagh Caves are regular art galleries (chitrashalas). We learn of Bharat's history from both Bharat's ancient literature and art.

Let me again quote from Dandin's *Dasakumarcharita*: "May the foot of Trivikrama render you good, the stalk of the Lotus residence of Brahma." Remarkably, Bharatiya Sabhyata is very much a living tradition wherein symbolism plays a great role. Aspects of nature contribute greatly to its rich tradition. As an emblem, the Lotus plays a key role in Bharatiya iconography. The Lotus' connection with Bharatiya culture is inextricable. Ancient texts contain repeated references to the Lotus, linking it to Hindu philosophy. The *Rig Veda*, *Atharva Veda*, *Chandogya Upanishad* and *Puranas* are replete with the metaphor of the Lotus. The Lotus has a long association with Brahma, Vishnu, Surya, Saraswati and Lakshmi. The importance and value of the Lotus can be discerned in temples across the globe. What is so important about the allegory of the Lotus that it enjoys such an ex-



alted status in Bharatiya ethos? Why is this resplendent aquatic flower so deeply entrenched in Bharat's cultural fabric?

The Lotus has been revered for its purity and spiritual significance in Bharat since ancient times. In the realm of art, the Lotus holds an esteemed place. The exquisite carvings of Lotus motifs have embellished the walls, pillars and ceilings of iconic temples for centuries. The recurring presence of Lotus designs in Bharat's architectural marvels signifies great aesthetic finesse and spiritual sanctity. The delicate beauty of the flower has made it a popular motif in

Bharatiya ancient paintings. It also has a special place in Bharatiya literature, where it figuratively represents elegance, purity and love.

Several Lotus motifs and themes abound in Bharatiya sculpture and paintings. The Lotus, in all its forms, has been used in medallion patterns in early Bharatiya stupas like Bharhut. The Amravati and Bharhut Lotus medallions are incomparable for their sheer grace and variety. Bharhut and Amravati display intricate depictions of Lotus blossoms in their sculptures and reliefs. These sites date back millennia.

In Ajanta, the motif of the Lotus has

been utilised in all possible ways, sometimes running the whole length of panels in a meandering creeper fashion, as buds, as flowers in bloom, in the most soothing ways. Ajanta Caves, as we know, are a great human experience, the only remaining evidence of styles of paintings that developed in Bharat and travelled with Buddhism to the Himalayan region and thence across Central Asia, China, Japan and Korea. They carried with them the motifs of the Lotus to all these countries. The caves of the earlier phase date from the 2nd century BCE. One feels a sense of awe looking at the remnants of these paintings.

The Lotus occurs as a central ceiling panel in the mandapams of temples. The Lotus, like the mandala, has a centre point, the source of creation, that expands outwards. In Lotus medallions, this is depicted through concentric circles having a distinct centre, the well-spring of life. The concentric rings are suggestive of fluidity and life's cyclical nature. The Lotus lies at the heart of the creation story in Bharatiya ethos. While Lord Vishnu lay asleep on his serpent bed, Adishesha, a Lotus emerged from his navel with Lord Brahma sitting on it. Even Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity, is believed to have emerged from

the Lotus.

There is practically no Bharatiya deity that is not shown holding or sitting on the Lotus seat. The Lotus represents eternity. The imagery of the Lotus in ancient Bharatiya sculpture is a testament to its enduring significance in guiding individuals towards higher consciousness.

The Chola bronzes, exemplifying exquisite craftsmanship, often feature deities standing or seated on Lotus pedestals. These bronze sculptures, intricately detailed with Lotus motifs that represent divine grace and purity, reflect the profound symbolism associated with the Lotus in Hindu mythology.

Bharatiya miniature paintings showcase the Lotus in various forms, capturing its grace and elegance. These delicate artworks, from the Mughal to Rajput schools, portray gods, goddesses and royal figures adorned with garlands of Lotus flowers, underscoring its association with beauty, grace and divinity. Sanskrit literature, especially the works of Kalidasa, often weaves the imagery of the Kamal into poetic verses, elucidating its significance as a metaphor for beauty and the blossoming of love and emotions.