

WELCOME MOVE : White Coats Under Siege: Confronting epidemic of violence against doctors

In a major international move that underscores growing global concern over South Asia's emerging terror networks, the United States today designated The Resistance Front (TRF) as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation (FTO) and a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT).

The Resistance Front is a Pakistan-backed terror outfit that has emerged as a significant threat in Jammu and Kashmir since its appearance in 2019. Although relatively new on the scene, TRF is widely believed to be a proxy for Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), one of the most notorious terrorist organizations operating out of Pakistan. Indian intelligence agencies and counter-terrorism forces have consistently linked TRF with LeT, suggesting that its creation was part of an effort to rebrand terror activities in Kashmir under a more "secular" and "local" image, thereby misleading international observers and reducing pressure on Pakistan.

The group primarily aims to incite violence in Jammu and Kashmir, disrupt peace, and project the narrative that the insurgency is indigenous. Unlike older terror groups like Hizbul Mujahideen or Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), TRF operates largely in the digital realm, using encrypted messaging apps and social media to radicalize youth, coordinate attacks, and claim responsibility.

Despite claiming to be a homegrown group, TRF's ties to Lashkar-e-Taiba are well-documented. Many of its cadres are former LeT operatives or have received training in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). The group operates under the guidance of LeT handlers, with funding, weapons, and strategic instructions flowing from across the border.

Indian security agencies believe that TRF was formed to circumvent the scrutiny of international watchdogs such as the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), which has repeatedly put Pakistan on its grey list for supporting terrorism. By projecting a new outfit with no formal ties to banned organizations, Pakistan aims to create plausible deniability and reduce global condemnation.

TRF has claimed responsibility for a series of targeted killings, particularly against members of minority communities, migrant workers, political party members, and security forces. These attacks are part of a broader effort to instill fear, drive demographic change, and derail the democratic process in the Union Territory.

One of TRF's primary tactics has been the targeted killing of Kashmiri Pandits and local Muslims who support India's democratic structure. The killings are aimed at polarizing the region, creating communal discord, and instigating panic among residents.

TRF is also known for recruiting vulnerable youth through online propaganda and by exploiting local grievances. It uses high-quality videos, social media posts, and encrypted apps to avoid detection and create a false narrative of local resistance.

Recognizing its growing threat, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), Government of India, already declared TRF a terrorist organization under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) in January 2023. The designation allows Indian agencies to freeze assets, arrest operatives, and crack down on TRF's support network.

■ DR. GAURAV VAID

On July 16, at Government Medical College (GMC) Jammu, a young female doctor was allegedly kicked in the abdomen by a patient's attendant. Her "crime"? Informing the family of a cardiac arrest. She was doing her job. She was trying to save a life. She was on duty, not in hiding. And yet, in a moment of grief, rage turned to violence-against the very hands that serve, often thanklessly, at the edge of life and death.

Today, doctors across Jammu are on strike. OPDs are suspended. Services are scaled back. This isn't a dereliction of duty. It's a warning flare. Because once again, a brutal cycle resumes: assault, outrage, silence, apathy.

This is not an isolated aberration-it is a national syndrome. It reflects not merely the failure of law, but the collapse of societal ethics, institutional accountability, and the basic compact of trust between healer and patient. A healthcare system can survive shortage and strain. But it cannot survive when its caregivers are under siege.

A Crisis in the Emergency Room

According to the Indian Medical Association (IMA), over 75% of doctors in India have faced some form of workplace violence. The assaults range from verbal abuse and threats to physical attacks and mob lynchings. In some tragic cases, doctors have been killed while on duty.

The geography doesn't matter-Delhi, Chennai, Ranchi, or Jammu-the crisis is universal. Public hospitals have become battlegrounds, not just for survival of the sick, but survival of the staff.

In this context, the strike in Jammu is not a gesture of protest-it is a cry for help. It is a demand not for privilege, but for basic dignity and protection. For the right to serve without fear. For the right to survive the night shift.

Why Is This Happening?

The violence is not senseless. It is systemic. And it stems from a convergence of five interlocking failures-structural, cultural, legal, and ethical.

1. A System in Collapse

India's public health infrastructure is chronically underfunded. Hospitals are overburdened, understaffed, and often under-equipped. Doctors manage with limited resources, stretched manpower, and round-the-clock shifts. They become the face of a system that often fails its patients-not out of intent, but out of inertia.

When care fails-when there's a death, a delay,

or a denial-it's the doctor, not the system, who takes the fall.

2. Communication Breakdown

In high-pressure environments, communication with patients' families is often rushed, blunt, or nonexistent. Grief needs compassion. Medicine needs consent. But when explanations are scarce and empathy absent, families feel blindsided-and that emotional vacuum often fills with rage.

Doctors are not trained in crisis communication, yet they are expected to convey life-altering news with saintly grace under extreme stress. That is an unfair burden.

3. Misinformation and Moral Panic

The digital era has not necessarily made the public better informed. Misinformation spreads faster than facts. WhatsApp forwards fuel suspicions of "negligence," "organ theft," or "intentional killing." Medical complexity is reduced to conspiracy. Distrust festers-and when patients die, accusations fly.

4. Media's Role in Framing the Narrative

Mainstream and local media often sensationalise medical incidents without adequate understanding of clinical realities. Headlines like "Negligent Doctor Kills Baby" dominate. The burden of proof shifts unfairly onto the caregiver before any investigation. The social licence to practice medicine is revoked overnight-trial by media, sentence by mob.

5. Legal Vacuum and Impunity

India has no central law that criminalises violence against medical professionals. Some states like Kerala, Odisha, and Karnataka have Medical Protection Acts (MPA), but implementation is patchy. Jammu & Kashmir has no specific law offering robust protection to doctors and nurses. The attacker at GMC Jammu may be booked under general IPC provisions-if at all. But the deterrence is weak, the process slow, and justice, uncertain. Meanwhile, the message is clear: you can assault a doctor and get away with it.

The Law Has Flatlined

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the government introduced a temporary ordinance under the Epidemic Diseases Act (2020), criminalising violence against healthcare workers. It included imprisonment of up to 7 years and compensation for damage to property or injury. But like many emergency measures, this expired with the crisis. It was never codified into permanent law.

In 2019, the Union Health Ministry drafted the "Healthcare Service Personnel and Clinical Establishments (Prohibition of Violence and Damage to Property) Bill," proposing up to 10 years of imprisonment. It was shelved, reportedly due to inter-ministerial objections that it "created a special category of citizens."

But this argument misses the point. Doctors are not demanding privilege-they are demanding parity with other frontline personnel. Just as assaults on police, judges, or public servants carry stricter penalties, so should violence against those who hold lives in their hands.

If protecting doctors makes them a special class, then who will volunteer to serve the sick at 3 a.m., in a crumbling ward, surrounded by chaos?

The Human Cost: Seen and Unseen

The psychological and strategic costs of this violence are devastating:

i. Defensive Medicine: Doctors increasingly avoid high-risk procedures or terminal cases, fearing violence or litigation. This affects patient care and delays critical intervention.

ii. Burnout and Exit: Chronic stress, moral injury, and trauma have led to rising cases of depression, anxiety, and suicide among doctors. Many are quitting government service-or leaving India altogether.

iii. Loss of Talent: Young students once called medicine a "noble calling." Today, it feels like a hazardous gamble. Who will fill this vacuum tomorrow?

iv. Erosion of Trust: The doctor-patient relationship, once sacred, is now increasingly adversarial. We are becoming a society where faith in medicine dies before the patient.

What Must Be Done-Now

The Jammu strike must not end in shallow promises or suspended FIRs. It must become the trigger for long-overdue reform. India needs a Central Law for Protection of Medical Professionals, with:

► Minimum 7-10 years' imprisonment for assault;

► Compulsory FIR registration and fast-track judicial process;

► CCTV surveillance and biometric access in emergency units;

► Deployment of trained security staff in high-risk hospital zones;

► Legal protection extended to nurses, paramedics, interns, and ambulance staff;

► Compensation to victims of violence and suspension of licences of attackers (if registered caregivers or staff);

This law must be uniform, non-negotiable, and enforced with seriousness.

Beyond Law: Rebuilding the Ethics of Care

While legal reform is necessary, rebuilding the moral architecture of care requires more:

► **Curriculum Reform:** Medical training must integrate empathy, patient communication, and grief management-not just diagnostics and procedures.

► **Hospital Protocols:** Grievance redressal cells must exist for both families and staff. Security escalation protocols should be standardised.

► **Public Education:** National campaigns must sensitise the public about the complexity of medicine and the limits of intervention. Death is not always a failure. Survival is not always guaranteed.

► **Responsible Media:** Coverage must offer balanced, medically informed narratives. Report violence against doctors with the same urgency as reports of negligence.

► **Shared Healing:** When a patient dies, the doctor grieves too. Families must be allowed to ask questions-but not to wield fists.

A Moment of Reckoning

To the patients who are inconvenienced today, we understand your pain. We are sorry you are caught in this moment. But please know: this is not about ego or entitlement. We stopped not out of arrogance-but out of fear. Because when doctors are attacked, hospitals become unsafe-not just for staff, but for every patient who walks through the door. This is not merely a healthcare issue. It is a national emergency.

Final Word: Who Heals the Healers?

The assault at GMC Jammu is not just an incident-it is a warning. A system that fails to protect its healers will one day find itself without any left to heal the sick. No medical college, policy paper, or AI solution can replace the judgment, resilience, and care of a human doctor.

To lawmakers: pass the law now.

To the public: protect those who serve you.

To the media: dig deeper than headlines.

And to my fellow doctors: your quiet courage is our last line of defence. Stand firm.

Let this be the last strike. Because when the healers begin to fall, who will be left to save us?

(The writer is Freelance Writer & Analyst)

'Motor Vehicle Aggregator Guidelines'

■ AJAY TAMTA



The promise of flexibility, independence, and technological ease attracted millions of drivers to app-based ride-hailing platforms in recent years. However, rising commissions, unclear policies, arbitrary suspensions, and lack of protections turned that promise into frustration for many. These challenges, experienced by over three million gig drivers across India, highlighted the urgent need for comprehensive and enforceable regulation.

In response, under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and guidance of Nitin Gadkari, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) had earlier released the "Motor Vehicle Aggregator Guidelines, 2020" under the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988. These offered a regulatory framework empowering State Governments to license and oversee aggregators fuelling the growth of the ride-hailing industry. Yet, with growing concerns over safety, fairness, and accountability for both drivers and passengers, MoRTH has now introduced the Motor Vehicle Aggregator Guidelines, 2025: a major policy update to bring structure, safeguards, and inclusivity to India's digital mobility ecosystem.

These guidelines, built on the legal foundations of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 aim to regulate the operations of app-based cab aggregators such as Ola, Uber, Rapido, and others. More importantly, the guidelines seek to provide balanced benefits to both drivers and passengers, while aligning with constitutional mandates and judicial directives.

One of the most notable aspects of the 2025 guidelines is protection of drivers' interests. Until now, drivers associated with aggregator platforms often found themselves in precarious situations with low earnings, arbitrary off-boarding, lack of insurance, and insufficient legal recourse. The new rules guidelines seek to address these systemic gaps.

The guidelines require aggregators to ensure a minimum guaranteed earning per hour or day based on base fares notified by the States. It also mandates that fare settlement between aggregator and driver must be done on a daily, weekly, or fortnightly basis, depending on mutual agreement. This move is expected to eliminate the earnings volatility faced by thousands of drivers, especially during lean periods. In addition, the government now requires every aggregator to provide health insurance of at least Rs 5 lakh and term insurance of Rs 10 lakh. These protections bring gig workers into the fold of formal labour structures.

Further, the new guidelines introduce transparency in commissions, capping

the aggregator's share at 20% of each fare in most cases. This ensures drivers retain a fair portion of their earnings. Aggregators must also provide clear and itemized information regarding payment deductions, fare splits, and penalties.

The guidelines also require each aggregator to establish a formal grievance redressal system, where issues like ride cancellations, payment disputes, or suspensions can be addressed in a time-bound and transparent manner. Drivers will also receive periodic training including a 40-hour induction programme covering app usage, emergency response, road safety, traffic rules, gender sensitization, Divyangjan awareness, customer interaction, digital literacy, and more., making them better equipped for future mobility challenges.

For passengers, the guidelines are equally transformative. With rising concerns around ride safety, data privacy, and fare manipulation, the new guidelines bring in much-needed safeguards.

All drivers on aggregator platforms must undergo mandatory police verification, health check-ups, and behavioural training. Furthermore, every vehicle must be equipped with in-app emergency buttons, GPS-based tracking, and trip-sharing features, all of which enhance the safety of riders, particularly women and children. A 24x7 control room and helpline system must be established by aggregators under state supervision.

Another major passenger benefit is the regulation of fares and surge pricing. The guidelines set clear limits: surge fares are capped at 1.5 to 2 times the base fare depending on State policy, ensuring that passengers are not exploited during high-demand periods. In addition, the platforms are required to display fare breakdowns transparently, including base fare, dynamic charges, aggregator share, and government taxes.

Crucially, the guidelines also take into account the privacy of users. Aggregators are instructed to store user data on servers located within India and to abide by data protection frameworks, including Digital Personal Data Protection Act, ensuring data is not misused or leaked and is retained according to India's sovereign data policies.

Aligned with Prime Minister Modi's vision of Viksit Bharat@2047, which emphasizes inclusive and sustainable growth, and his unwavering commitment to upholding the honour and self-respect of Divyangjan , the guidelines mandate that a portion of aggregator fleets be made Divyangjan-friendly and an appropriate representation of Divyangjan as drivers in the workforce is to be ensured. The exact number of such vehicles will be determined by individual States based on local needs and requirements.

In a major push for sustainability, aggregators are required to transition towards electric mobility, alternate fuel or zero emission vehicles in their fleet. Concerned air regulatory bodies will set

state-wise EV targets for ride-hailing platforms, and the same aligns with India's climate and clean air goals. Public transport systems such as Delhi's DEVI buses are already examples of EV integration.

The guidelines also align with Directive Principles of State Policy, particularly Article 39, which directs the State to ensure that citizens, including gig workers, have the right to an adequate means of livelihood. Additionally, Article 21 of the Constitution guaranteeing the Right to Life and Personal Liberty has been interpreted by courts to include the right to a safe working environment and the right to mobility with dignity.

Several judicial decisions have reinforced the need for proper regulation in the ride-hailing sector. In People's Union for Democratic Rights v. Union of India (1982) and Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation (1985), the Supreme Court emphasised the right to livelihood as an integral component of Article 2. In the case of Uber India Systems Pvt. Ltd. v. Union of India (2020), the Delhi High Court upheld the right of State Governments to regulate aggregator pricing and licensing, establishing that consumer interest must prevail over purely market-driven pricing models.

These judgments form the legal basis for many of the protections extended to gig workers under the 2025 guidelines which is an attempt to balance the passengers' interest with profitability for motor vehicle aggregators yet prioritising the rights of often-neglected gig workers.

On lines of the Hon'ble PM's approach of Minimum Government Maximum Governance, the new guidelines provide a light touch regulatory system. Now the aggregators can take single license for all types of motors vehicles applicable pan state within 60 days. It does away with the requirement for Ride-hailing companies to have arrangement for a driving test facility. Rather they are now encouraged to take benefit of the Ministry's Scheme for Institutes of Driving Training and Research (IDTR), Regional Driving Training Centres (RDTC), and Driving Training Centres (DTC). These centres, funded by the Central Government, aim to make scientific training accessible even in remote areas with grants up to Rs 17.25 crore for IDTRs, Rs 5.5 crore for RDTCs, and Rs 2.5 crore for DTCs based on population and geography.

These institutes are not only equipping individuals with high-quality driving skills but are also contributing to the creation of a pool of professionally trained drivers across the country. This initiative is expected to contribute significantly to enhancing road safety and reducing the incidence of traffic accidents on Indian roads. The Government has set an ambitious target of reducing road accident fatalities by 50% by the year

2030,acknowledging that road accidents currently result in an estimated economic loss of 3% of the national GDP.

The issuance of these guidelines reflects India's robust federal structure and constitutional provisions. As per the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution of India, transport falls under this Concurrent List and empowers States to create rules for the licensing and functioning of aggregators. Section 93 of the Act is particularly significant, as it enables the Central Government to issue such guidelines or licensing frameworks for this purpose.

Although issued by the Central Government, the Motor Vehicle Aggregator Guidelines, 2025 maybe followed by State Governments and Union Territories, ensuring local adaptability. States have inter-alia been given the authority to: issue licenses to aggregators; monitor fare structures and surge pricing; enforce driver training and verification; penalise non-compliant platforms, authorize use of non-transport motorcycles for passenger journeys under shared mobility models, set and enforce electric vehicle targets for aggregator fleets.

This division of responsibilities reflects India's model of cooperative federalism, where policy formulation is centralised, but implementation is context-sensitive and state-specific.

The Motor Vehicle Aggregator Guidelines, 2025 represent a progressive and timely step towards reforming India's digital mobility ecosystem. The success of this initiative will hinge on effective enforcement, public awareness, and platform compliance. If, followed by States, it has the potential to transform ride-hailing services into a safer, more accountable, and more inclusive mode of urban transportation, creating a win-win scenario for both drivers and riders across the nation.

In a country where informal workers often remain invisible in policymaking, these guidelines mark a pivotal shift. They treat the app-based driver not just as a service provider, but as a worker with rights, dignity, and aspirations. They recognize the passenger not merely as a consumer, but as a citizen entitled to safe, affordable, and transparent services.

The Motor Vehicle Aggregator Guidelines, 2025 represent a significant milestone for the digital mobility sector in India. By setting clear standards and responsibilities for aggregators, the guidelines emphasize fair earnings and social security for drivers, improved safety and convenience for passengers, and environmentally sustainable practices. This balanced and inclusive framework not only reinforces the foundation of India's growing gig economy but also aligns seamlessly with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of Viksit Bharat @2047.

(The writer is Minister of State Road Transport and Highways, Govt of India)

Drug-Free Youth, Driving Force of Viksit Bharat

■ DR. MANSUKH MANDAVIYA



Their energy, innovation, and determination will shape the country's growth story in the decades to come. However, one of the most pressing challenges facing the nation today is keeping our youth away from the grip of substance abuse. An increasing number of young individuals are falling into addiction, which not only affects their health but also threatens their future, and the strength of the nation. According to a study, 1 in every 5 Indians aged between 10 and 24 has used drugs at some point. A report by the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) further reveals that over 8.5 lakh children in India are struggling with drug addiction. These figures are deeply alarming and call for urgent, collective action. Over the past 11 years, Modi Government has taken several decisive steps to combat this issue. In 2020, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment launched the Nasha Mukht Bharat Abhiyan. To support prevention and rehabilitation, the government established Integrated Rehabilitation Centres for Addicts (IRCA) and Outreach-cum-Drop-In Centres (ODICs). Schools and colleges have seen intensified awareness campaigns, while the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) has launched strong operations against drug mafias. Additionally, Health and Wellness Centres across the country are providing critical counselling and support. These national efforts have been complemented by grassroots campaigns led by state governments, NGOs, and local communities.

Taking this mission forward, MY Bharat has taken a significant initiative, the "Yuva Spiritual Summit", to be held from 19 to 20 July on the sacred Ghats of Kashi, the land of Baba Vishwanath. Themed "Drug-Free Youth for a Viksit Bharat," the summit seeks to lay the foundation for a youth-led national movement against substance abuse. The summit will bring together youth representatives from over 100 spiritual organisations across India. Key government bodies, including the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Ministry of Culture, Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), and others will actively participate. This unique platform will enable young people to share their voices, perspectives, and solutions directly with policymakers, contributing meaningfully to a national strategy.

The summit will feature sessions on the nature and patterns of addiction, its demographic impact, international dimensions, and the roles of government, civil society, and youth volunteers. Personal stories of young individuals who have successfully overcome addiction will also be shared to inspire others.

The summit will conclude with the release of the Kashi Declaration, which will serve as a five-year roadmap for the drug-free India campaign. This declaration will outline strategies to prevent youth from falling into substance abuse, provide support mechanisms for those already affected, and accelerate awareness campaigns across the country to build a stronger, more resilient movement against addiction.

Prime Minister Modi has always envisioned an India that reflects the dreams and aspirations of the Amrit Peedhi. In alignment with that vision, this initiative by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports stands as a powerful step toward not only protecting young lives from addiction but also empowering them to lead the nation-building journey. The responsibility of transforming India into a developed nation rests with its youth. The Yuva Spiritual Summit is not just an event-it marks the beginning of a new national awakening. It will ignite a spirit of discipline, moral integrity, and social responsibility among young citizens, enriching their lives and strengthening the country's future. From the sacred soil of Kashi will rise a call that will light a flame of awareness, patriotism, and purpose in every young heart. This collective resolve will serve as the cornerstone of a strong, self-reliant, and Viksit Bharat by 2047.

(The writer is Union Minister of Youth Affairs & Sports and Labour & Employment)