

BILATERAL PARTNERSHIPS

India has emerged as a key global player in recent years, not just through its economic growth and technological advancements but also through its robust and strategic bilateral partnerships.

At the heart of India's foreign policy is the vision of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam-the world is one family. This philosophy underpins India's approach to international cooperation, where bilateral ties are cultivated based on trust, shared interests, and developmental goals.

One of the cornerstones of India's bilateral diplomacy is its comprehensive strategic partnership with the United States. Over the past two decades, India-U.S. ties have evolved from limited engagement to a broad-based relationship covering defense, trade, technology, education, and climate action.

Equally significant is India's all-weather friendship with Russia. Despite evolving geopolitical tensions, India has maintained a balanced and independent approach, sustaining defense, energy, and space cooperation with Moscow.

India's strategic and economic ties with France, Australia, Japan, and Germany are also deepening. The India-France partnership has expanded into defense manufacturing, space cooperation, and climate action.

India's growing engagement with Middle Eastern nations-especially the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Israel-reflects its pragmatic and multifaceted foreign policy. These ties are driven by energy security, trade, diaspora welfare, counter-terrorism cooperation, and emerging technology partnerships.

In Africa, India has cultivated strong ties through developmental diplomacy, capacity building, and health cooperation. With initiatives such as the Pan Africa e-Network, concessional credit lines, and vaccine diplomacy during COVID-19, India is recognized as a trusted partner in the Global South.

India's bilateral engagement with its immediate neighbors-Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and the Maldives-is grounded in the "Neighbourhood First" policy. While challenges exist, especially with China and Pakistan, India continues to offer support through infrastructure development, energy sharing, and disaster relief efforts in South Asia, reinforcing its role as a net security provider.

Government issues model rules for felling of trees on agricultural land to promote Agroforestry

DR RAKESH VERMA

The Government of India's recent promulgation of model rules governing the felling of trees on agricultural land marks a significant milestone in the nation's agroforestry policy framework. This regulatory intervention is designed not only to promote the adoption of agroforestry practices at scale but also to strategically align with broader national objectives encompassing agricultural sustainability, rural livelihood enhancement, climate change mitigation, and industrial development.

Introduction

Agroforestry, the integration of trees within agricultural landscapes, offers multifarious benefits, including diversified income sources, improved ecological resilience, and enhanced carbon sequestration. Recognizing these advantages, the Government of India has crafted a regulatory framework to streamline tree felling on agricultural land, thus enabling farmers to participate more actively in agroforestry production systems without cumbersome administrative burdens.

Policy Context and Regulatory Innovations

The model rules, issued under the aegis of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), primarily aim to simplify the procedural requirements related to tree harvesting on farmlands. Central to this regulatory reconfiguration is the empowerment of the State Level Committee, originally constituted under the Wood-Based Industries (Establishment and Regulation) Guidelines, 2016. Its expanded composition now includes revenue and agriculture department officials, enhancing its capacity to undertake integrated oversight of agroforestry initiatives.

A key procedural innovation is the mandatory registration of agroforestry plantation lands on the National Timber Management System (NTMS) portal. This digital registry serves as an authoritative platform for recording land ownership details and plantation specifics, fostering transparency and traceability in timber production and transit. By digitizing these records, the government enhances compliance monitoring and reduces illicit tree felling, thereby strengthening environmental safeguards.

Implications for Small and Marginal

Farmers

Small and marginal farmers constitute approximately 85% of India's farming community and collectively manage the majority of agricultural landholdings. These stakeholders often face constraints related to limited capital, fragmented land parcels, inadequate access to technology, and poor market linkages. The new model rules have the potential to transform agroforestry adoption among this demographic through several mechanisms:

Lowering Entry Barriers: The streamlined regulatory pathways reduce bureaucratic delays and ambiguities that previously deterred smallholders from planting commercially valuable tree species. The ability to legally fell and commercialize timber from their plantations incentivizes farmers to diversify cropping systems by incorporating woody perennials.

Income Diversification and Risk Mitigation: Agroforestry provides supplementary income streams beyond conventional crops, mitigating risks posed by price volatility and climatic uncertainties. For small farmers with limited off-farm income sources, this diversification enhances economic resilience.

Enhanced Land Productivity: Integration of trees improves soil structure, moisture conservation, and nutrient cycling, positively influencing adjacent crop yields. These agroecological benefits translate into sustained productivity gains essential for smallholders' food security.

Challenges and Support Needs: Despite regulatory simplification, small and marginal farmers require capacity building to adopt suitable tree species, manage intercrops, and navigate market complexities. Extension services, affordable credit, and aggregation mechanisms are critical to overcoming informational and financial barriers.

Impact on Wood-Based Industries

The wood-based industrial sector, encompassing sawmills, furniture manufacturing, paper production, and biomass energy, stands poised to reap substantial benefits from the expanded availability of plantation-grown timber sourced from agricultural landscapes. The impact can be articulated through the following dimensions:

Supply Chain Stabilization: The incorporation of agroforestry-derived timber introduces a more predictable and decentralized raw material supply, reducing dependence on forest produce and imports. This diversification enhances industry stability and planning.

Cost Reduction: Simplified felling and transit regulations decrease compliance costs and risks of legal entanglements, optimizing operational efficiencies for both primary producers and downstream processors.

Quality and Species Diversity: Agroforestry plantations encourage the cultivation of high-value timber species traditionally absent or underutilized. This diversification can upskill industries by enabling the

manufacture of specialized products catering to market niches.

Innovation and Value Addition: Reliable access to timber incentivizes investment in modern processing technologies, fostering product innovation and quality enhancement, which can improve competitiveness domestically and internationally.

Sustainability Credentials: By sourcing timber from sustainable agroforestry systems, industries can enhance their environmental credentials, appealing to increasingly eco-conscious consumers and complying with evolving regulatory frameworks.

Effects on Medium and Small-Scale Industries

Medium and small-scale industries form the backbone of India's manufacturing sector, contributing significantly to employment generation and GDP. The model rules impact these enterprises through several pathways:

Resource Accessibility: By facilitating lawful access to timber resources on farmlands, the rules reduce raw material scarcity that often constrains production scales, especially for small-scale furniture workshops, handicraft units, and biomass-based energy producers.

Market Linkages and Integration: Enhanced timber supply chains create opportunities for SMEs to establish forward and backward linkages with agroforestry farmers, promoting rural industrialization and entrepreneurship.

Reduced Transactional Frictions: Simplified regulatory compliance reduces administrative overhead for SMEs, enabling more rapid turnaround times and cost-effective operations.

Employment Generation: Expansion of agroforestry-linked industries catalyzes job creation in rural and peri-urban areas, supporting livelihood diversification among local populations.

Capacity Building Needs: SMEs require access to technical training, design innovation, and market development support to fully capitalize on the availability of agroforestry timber.

Environmental and Climate Change Implications

The regulatory framework's facilitation of widespread agroforestry adoption complements India's national commitments to reduce carbon emissions and enhance biodiversity. Trees on agricultural land function as important carbon sinks, absorbing atmospheric carbon dioxide and aiding soil carbon sequestration. Moreover, agroforestry enhances landscape heterogeneity, providing habitats that promote fauna diversity and ecological connectivity between forest fragments. The reduction in pressure on natural forests due to increased timber production from plantations also contributes to conserving primary forest ecosystems. By embedding environmental safeguards within the digital NTMS system and multi-departmental over-

sight, the policy ensures that increased tree felling activities adhere to sustainable harvesting norms. The net result is a synergistic advancement of rural economic development with ecological restoration goals.

Challenges and Recommendations

Despite the potential of the model rules, several challenges must be addressed to realize their transformative impact:

Awareness and Training: Targeted extension services are vital to disseminate knowledge on agroforestry species selection, sustainable harvesting, and regulatory compliance, especially among smallholder farmers and SMEs.

Financial Mechanisms: Access to credit and insurance is necessary to mitigate risks associated with longer gestation periods of tree crops and market fluctuations.

Market Development: Institutional support for market linkages, cooperative formations, and value chain integration can enhance price realization and bargaining power for farmers and small industries.

Monitoring and Enforcement: Strengthening the capacity of State Level Committees and digital monitoring systems is essential to prevent illegal felling and ensure equitable benefit-sharing.

Research and Innovation: Continued research into agroforestry models adaptable to diverse agroecological zones and scalable value-added technologies is recommended to optimize productivity gains.

The Government of India's promulgation of model rules governing tree felling on agricultural lands constitutes a pivotal policy intervention aimed at mainstreaming agroforestry as an instrument for sustainable rural transformation. By reducing procedural complexities, reinforcing cross-sectoral governance, and instituting digital traceability, the rules create an enabling environment for small and marginal farmers to integrate tree cultivation profitably into their farming systems. This shift promises enhanced income diversification, improved land productivity, and strengthened food security.

For wood-based industries and SMEs, the expanded and lawful availability of agroforestry timber presents opportunities to stabilize supplies, reduce costs, foster innovation, and generate employment, contributing positively to the national economy. Environmentally, this framework supports India's climate action commitments by enhancing carbon sequestration, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable land use patterns.

Realizing the full potential of these model rules necessitates concerted efforts towards capacity building, equitable access to resources, financial support, and market development. With such support mechanisms in place, India can harness agroforestry as a transformative lever for achieving inclusive economic growth and ecological sustainability.

Omar Abdullah referred Vajpayee on completion of USBR-National Project 2002 But forgot Manmohan's Jammu Poonch National Project 2012 This 6th June PM Modi made Nation to see a Train running on Track linking Kanayakumari with Baramulla

DAYA SAGAR

It is not out of place to mention here that it was as far back as 2012 (March 22, 2012) that the then Railway Minister Shri Mukul Roy while replying to the Railway Budget in Lok Sabha had said that the Jammu-Poonch rail link that will pass through treacherous hilly areas was first approved during the UPA-1 when Lahu Prasad Yadav was the Minister and a survey was also got conducted by him which was a long pending project of a railway line via historic township of Akhnor that will finally see light of the day with Centre deciding to include it in the list of national projects which are under this category are taken up on priority with special financial provisions.

The ceremony for flagging of Vande Bharat train on the remaining part of Udhampur-Baramulla rail line from Katra to Srinagar by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 6th June 2025 also had the presence of two MPs from the Jammu Region. While speaking on the occasion Omar Sahib did mention some other good project projects too, which were surely important, but Omar Sahib missed to refer the most important Jammu-Poonch National Status Rail Line

Project which is said to have been 'removed' from the priority list what to talk of requesting / demanding for taking up the said National Project on first priority, and that too when the occasion was of celebration of the completion of another National list Rail Project. It has surely disappointed many.

Member Parliament from Jammu-Poonch and senior BJP leader Jugal Kishore Sharma had on 15th March 2022 while appreciating 2022-23 Union Railway Budget as pro far flung area with huge amount of Rs 140367.13 crores for the development of Railways in the country had requested that since survey for laying of Jammu to Rajouri and Poonch railway line had been completed so provision of funds should be made available soon for laying that new railway line. People of J&K have been very hopefully waiting to see the inauguration for the laying of the project. It was on 7 Jan 2025 that LG J&K Shri Manoj Sinha, expressing gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for dedicating the new Jammu Railway Division, was quoted as having said on



A Look through the Mist Part-II

6th Jan 2025 that enhanced connectivity was unlocking J&K's potential and DPR is under examination for new line between Baramulla-Uri (46kms), Baramulla-Kupwara (39kms), Jammu-Poonch via Akhnor- Rajouri (223kms), Manwal-Talra via Ramkote, Billawar and Dunera (117kms), Sopore-Kupwara (37kms), Pathankot-Leh (664kms), Bilaspur-Manali-Leh (489kms) and doubling of Baramulla-Banihal line where as surveys were ongoing for the Anantnag-Bijbehara-Pahalgam (78km) and Avantipora-Shopian (28kms) rail lines.

On March 28, 2025 in a written reply to unstarred Q 3314 by Rajay Sabha MP Shri Gulam Ali from Jammu & Kashmir asking < "Will the Minister of Railways be pleased to state: (a) whether Government has a proposal to establish railway connectivity to Jammu- Rajouri-Poonch? and (b) if so, the towns to be connected under the project and the proposed timelines?" > Railway Minister Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw has been quoted as having said on March 28, 2025 that a survey for a new 223-km rail line between

Jammu and Poonch via Akhnor and Rajouri was carried out and the project cost was assessed as Rs 22,771 crore but it has low traffic projections.

Before that according to PTI input of 17th March, 2025 it was also reported that 223-km Jammu-Poonch railway line project had been shelved 'again' for being 'financially unviable' by the central government as per the information given by The Ministry of Railways in response to two applications filed by Jammu-based activist Raman Sharma under the Right To Information (RTI) Act for which the final survey report (estimated cost of Rs 22,771 crore) for laying broad-gauge line between Jammu & border district of Poonch via Rajouri was submitted in 2018. In was on 13 March 2025 also that the Railway Minister was quoted as having said in Lok Sabha that Rajouri and Poonch districts continue to lack railway connectivity and there was no immediate plans to prioritize a rail link between Reasi-Katra and Rajouri; a survey for a new Jammu-Poonch rail line via Akhnor and Rajouri (223 km) had been completed earlier, with an estimated cost of Rs 22,771 crore and that had not moved forward due to low passenger demand.

Earlier also Railway Minister Shri Ashwini

Vaishnaw had said in Lok Sabha on 31-07-2024 that a survey for the railway line between Jammu and Poonch via Akhnor and Rajouri was carried out, and the cost of the 223 km long project was assessed at Rs 22,771 crore and while responding to a question raised by Anantnag-Rajouri MP Mian Altaf from J&K about the Government's plans to connect the twin districts of Rajouri-Poonch by way of railway he did not quote any plans for implementing the project.

But as per information shared and inferences that could drawn from the disclosures made by RTI Raman Sharma it could be said that the J&K leadership was not aware of the Jammu Poonch rail project having been dropped 'for the time being' by the implementing authorities in spite of the project being a National project since it was even in March 2025 that a J&K MP belonging to areas outside Valley had asked for information on the project vide Rajay Sabha unstarred question No.3314 on 28 Mar 2025 whereas the said National Project had been held quite some time back.

To be continued (The writer is a Sr Journalist & a known analyst of J&K affairs)

GL KHAJURIA

Ladakh Range is located at an elevation of 7,650 mts from mean sea level (MSL). Situated between, 76 Latitude and 350 Longitude is renowned as the 'Roof of the world', HimisGumpa in its internee interlaces the most striking element in the snow-capped landscape and its interiors are paradisaical with exquisite, the most sizzling amidst rocky landscape.

Ladakh is a remote paradise which glimpses a mighty matrix of massif renowned world over. It is a treasure trove of unique art and craftsmanship. The people of Ladakh are having their own matrix with untiring eye and dew-eyed appearance together with their art and craft. Lamas are unambiguously still silent to outsiders and look into their vignette and native art and their objectives owing to some superstitions and affiliations best known to them alone and this pride of theirs is created to go to monasteries of Hemis, Thiksay and Alehie in unison having their rebalance.

Geographically speaking, the Jammu and Kashmir as a whole is virtually divided into four prominent zones: first, The mountainous and semi-mountainous plains often spoken as kandi belt, second being

Shivalk range and the third the Kashmir valley and Pir-panchal range and the fourth and last being Tibetan tract of Ladakh and Kargil.

The Ladakh region is having its prominence in that the river Sindh which gushes out from Lake Mansarovar encompasses through Nanga Parbat amidst the pride Himalayas surrounded by glittering glaciers.

Ladakh region from the east and through high mountainous meanders down through various glaciers. The river Indus is the longest one in the entire Indian sub continent having a length around 2900 kms out of which 970 kms passes through state and rest through Pakistan and finally drains down into the Arabian sea.

Amongst the most striking abject of Ladakh is 'd' art of 'HemisGumpa' the biggest Monastery of Ladakh, some 40 Kms away from 'Leh', alongside Leh Manali road were exist numberless golden statues of 'Buddha' and 'Stupas' embedded and studded with precious stones and pearls. This monetary is having twin routes of entrance to holy worship. The walls of the monastery have been decorated wonderfully of its unique paintings and that is why this monastery is having an unutterable regard.

AmongstLadakhies over the remote past these paintings are the most revered deity by name "Bhavachakras" and are also nomenclaturised as wheel of life to whom they pay utmost reverence, obeisance and obtain blessings on all ritualistic occasions by all and sundry of Ladakh region.

Amongst all these, the most enchanting paintings are of Bhava-Chakras (wheel of Life) which apparently depicttransmigration existence and the wheel is held by dragon- demon symbolism having hideousness of clinging of life.

The centre of the wheel is having the monogram of cock, snake and pig indicating thereby three virtuous sins of the lust, the anger, ignorance and the dark side (half) of the circle boarding these symbols have the relevance of dark down path which signifies that all the three images bring to downside of life.

The rim of the Bhava Chakra is having five sections or segments indicative of five routes of existence of every individual's life, whereas the lower half of the chakra signify gate of hell. The left region indicate all form of miseries and punishment, The birth and death, young and old age and re-incarnation etc.

Whereas the outer circle is divided into as many as 12 parts indicating the sequence of events leading to every human's life span in the chronicles of Buddhism. In so far as Hemis monastery is concerned, it was constructed some 450 years back and is a hie to the main image of great " Guru Pekarayapoh" who is believed to have come from 'Lahsa' some 540 years baed apart from this mage, there are countless statues of Guru NangLehotrumGrolma and the step of worship is deep rootedly embedded with brass, precious stones, pearls and are painted with protective deity of utmost prominence amongst Buddhists.

However, some of the Buddhists have with the passage of time migrated to China on one hand and Paddar-Gulab garh (Kishtwar) on the other hand where there is a hugeassemblage of the Buddhists and their Monasteries which can be most conveniently seen while waying to Chandni Mata Ji at Machail during yatra in August every year.

AlachiMonastery is another prominent one in Ladakh which is wondrous of fresco art and it is else than thousands and thousands of paintings ranging from as small as few inches and are Jampaering the walls, playfounds and to the huge statues.

This monastery is situated arounding 75kms from Leh itself on the otherside of Sindh.

In almost all monasteries, there is a whizmaeleerie of objects 'd' which are defacto, small as well as large. One becomes wonderstruck and bewildered on having a glimpse of wide-arrayed artistic wealth one can ever imagine in so greater part of Himalayas right from areas which has four large carved stoned. The group of Monasteries at Mulbectare having their own charming beauty.

As a corollary, therefore, it is being concluded that pre-Buddhist hynms, such as ballads in praise of Kesar, the legendryhero are sung to the compliment of music and dance at the time of Kesar festival.

General Zorawar Singh, The prominent warrior is Legendry in Ladakhi folklore and he died while an expedition against Tibet. The Ladakhies still admire the general in their mind and heart and sing song of Zorawar's wife who accompanied him to Ladakh which reads: A Lama Can't help taking his fee and a wolf cannot help eating lamb; the fire is in front of you, and the sun is in the distance. The poor friend near you is better than a relation far away.

(The author is former Deputy Conservator of Forest, J&K)