



A Landmark Reform for Parents, Schools and the Education System

Punjab Moves to Regulate Private School Fees

A Response to Years of Public Concern...

CHANDIGARH

Punjab's decision to regulate annual fee hikes in private schools marks one of the most significant policy interventions in the state's school education sector in recent years. With the Governor approving the Punjab School Education (Fee Regulation) Ordinance, 2026, the government has introduced a framework aimed at bringing greater transparency and accountability to private school fee structures while protecting parents from frequent and steep increases in educational expenses.

Under the new ordinance, private schools will ordinarily not be permitted to increase tuition fees by more than five per cent in a single academic session. While the policy does not prohibit fee revisions altogether, it establishes a clear ceiling for routine increases and prescribes a structured mechanism for schools seeking approval in exceptional circumstances. The reform represents the culmination of a long-standing public demand. For years, parent associations across Punjab had repeatedly raised concerns over what they described as arbitrary annual fee hikes, compulsory charges under multiple heads, and the absence of an effective regulatory mechanism. Successive governments faced pressure to address the issue, but the demand for a comprehensive legal framework remained largely unresolved. The ordinance is therefore being viewed as a significant attempt to balance the interests of families, educational institutions and the state.



PUNJAB CAPS PRIVATE SCHOOL FEE HIKE AT 5%, CM MANN ORDERS REFUND OF EXCESS FEES

The regulation did not emerge in isolation. Over the past decade, education costs have steadily increased for many middle-class and lower-middle-class families, with school fees becoming one of the largest recurring household expenditures. Besides tuition fees, parents often expressed concerns about additional charges related to admission, development funds, annual activities, technology, transportation and other mandatory payments.

Numerous parent bodies and civil society groups argued that many private schools revised fees almost every academic year without adequate justification or transparency. Although several disputes reached administrative authorities and courts, the absence of a uniform legal framework often resulted in prolonged disagree-

ments. The ordinance seeks to address these concerns by introducing predictable rules rather than leaving fee revisions entirely to institutional discretion. The government's stated objective is to prevent arbitrary increases while safeguarding the financial interests of parents and ensuring that access to quality education does not become increasingly difficult due to escalating costs.

The 5% Cap: What It Means: One of the ordinance's most widely discussed provisions is the restriction on annual fee increases. Under normal circumstances, private schools cannot raise fees by more than five per cent during an academic session. Importantly, the policy does not impose an absolute freeze on fees. Instead, it recognises that educational institutions may face rising opera-

tional costs while also ensuring that parents are protected from sudden and disproportionate financial burdens.

Where schools believe exceptional circumstances justify a higher increase, they will be required to follow the procedure laid down under the ordinance and obtain approval through the prescribed regulatory process. This provision introduces institutional oversight into decisions that were previously, in many cases, made independently by school managements.

-Greater Transparency in Fee Structures: Beyond limiting annual fee hikes, the ordinance places considerable emphasis on transparency.

Schools will be expected to clearly disclose their fee structure and provide detailed information regarding various charges collected from students. This is intended to reduce ambiguity and help parents understand precisely what they are paying for. Transparency has long been a central demand of parent organisations, many of which argued that charges under multiple heads often made it difficult to determine the actual cost of education. A more structured disclosure system is expected to make fee calculations easier to understand and reduce disputes arising from unclear billing practices. Government officials have also indicated that implementation will be supported by stronger district-level monitoring

systems and a structured grievance redressal mechanism to ensure complaints are addressed within a defined process.

-Why the Decision Matters: Education experts believe the ordinance has significance beyond fee regulation alone. It reflects a broader effort to redefine the relationship between private educational institutions, parents and the government.

Private schools have become an indispensable part of Punjab's education landscape, educating a substantial proportion of students across urban and semi-urban areas. At the same time, increasing dependence on private education has intensified concerns regarding affordability. By introducing statutory regulation, the state has attempted to strike a balance between institutional autonomy and public accountability. Rather than treating education solely as a commercial service, the ordinance reinforces the principle that education also carries an important social responsibility.

For many families, especially those with two or more school-going children, even modest annual fee increases accumulate into a substantial financial commitment over time. A predictable regulatory framework may therefore improve long-term household financial planning.

-Relief for Thousands of Families: Perhaps the greatest impact of the ordinance will be felt by parents. For many households, educational expens-

es account for a significant share of annual income.

Rising inflation, increasing healthcare costs and other living expenses have already placed pressure on family budgets. In such circumstances, repeated fee hikes often forced parents to reconsider educational choices or reduce spending in other essential areas.

Parent associations had for several years demanded that the government intervene to establish transparent and reasonable norms governing fee revisions. Many had argued that while quality education deserves appropriate investment, fee increases should remain fair, justified and subject to oversight.

The new framework is expected to provide psychological as well as financial reassurance. Families will now have greater certainty regarding likely annual increases and a formal mechanism through which grievances can be raised if they believe regulations have been violated. While implementation will ultimately determine the ordinance's effectiveness, the introduction of clear legal standards itself represents a significant policy shift.

-The Government's Position: The Punjab Government has consistently maintained that the objective of the ordinance is not to undermine private educational institutions but to ensure fairness within the education system. Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann and Education Minister Harjot Singh

Bains have repeatedly emphasised that education should not be treated merely as a commercial enterprise. According to the government, private schools continue to play an important role in delivering quality education, but commercial considerations should not outweigh the interests of students and parents.

The administration has also stressed that the ordinance aims to promote transparency, accountability and balance rather than unnecessary regulation. Officials have indicated that district authorities will be responsible for monitoring compliance and handling complaints under the new legal framework.

-Concerns Raised by Private Schools: Private school associations have welcomed dialogue with the government while expressing reservations about certain provisions of the ordinance.

School managements argue that operational costs have risen considerably in recent years. Teacher salaries, employee benefits, electricity, transportation, digital infrastructure, maintenance, security and compliance expenses have all increased. Representatives of some private institutions contend that applying a uniform cap across schools with differing financial structures may not adequately reflect actual expenditure. They argue that schools vary significantly in size, facilities, staffing patterns and educational models, making operational costs uneven.

The film based on the life of human rights activist Jaswant Singh Khalsa has reopened painful memories of Punjab's turbulent past

'Sutlej' Controversy: History, Politics and the Debate Over Freedom of Expression

CHANDIGARH :

Few issues have generated as much discussion in Punjab in recent months as the controversy surrounding *Sutlej*, the film starring Diljit Dosanjh and inspired by the life of noted human rights activist Jaswant Singh Khalsa. What initially appeared to be a dispute over the release of a film has evolved into a much broader national conversation involving history, politics, freedom of expression, censorship, national security and human rights. The controversy acquired greater significance after the film, which became available on an OTT platform following years of delays and legal hurdles, was reportedly removed within less than two days of its release. The development immediately triggered criticism from filmmakers, civil rights advocates and sections of the political spectrum, while others questioned the historical claims presented in the film. As a result, *Sutlej* has become much more than a cinematic work—it now symbolizes the continuing struggle over how one of Punjab's most turbulent chapters should be remembered and interpreted. The film's journey to audiences was unusually long and contentious. It was originally discussed under the title *Ghallughara* before later being renamed *Punjab 95*. During this period, it remained entangled in prolonged certification proceedings with the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC), which reportedly suggested numerous modifications before granting clearance.

Following years of uncertainty, the filmmakers eventually changed the title once again to *Sutlej*.

-Who Was Jaswant Singh Khalsa:

At the centre of the film is the life of Jaswant Singh Khalsa, one of Punjab's most prominent human rights activists. During the 1990s, Khalsa examined cremation records, municipal documents and official registers relating to cremation grounds in Amritsar, Tarn Taran and surrounding districts.

Based on his research, he alleged that during the anti-insurgency operations, numerous unidentified bodies had been cremated as "unclaimed" without proper identification or documentation. His findings attracted widespread attention within India and internationally, bringing renewed focus to allegations of enforced disappearances and human rights violations during Punjab's militancy years.

In September 1995, Khalsa was abducted. He was later killed, and subsequent investigations resulted in the conviction of several Punjab Police personnel for their roles in the case. His life has since become a symbol for many human rights campaigners seeking accountability and transparency regarding alleged abuses during that period. The film attempts to portray not only Khalsa's personal struggle but also the difficult political and social circumstances prevailing in Punjab during one of the most violent periods in its modern history. Consequently, nearly every scene and narrative claim has become a subject of intense public debate.

-Why the Removal Intensified the Controversy:

*The removal of *Sutlej* from the OTT platform proved to be a turning point.*

Government representatives referred to securi-



ty-related concerns, while individuals associated with the film argued that the episode raised serious questions about freedom of expression. Director Honey Trehan publicly expressed disappointment, stating that the film had reached audiences only after years of effort and legal obstacles, making its removal particularly disheartening.

Several filmmakers also questioned the manner in which the episode unfolded, arguing that creative works should not be withdrawn without a transparent process. Actor Diljit Dosanjh similarly expressed disappointment and remarked that he had anticipated the possibility of the film becoming controversial. His comments on social media drew widespread public attention, with supporters campaigning for the film while critics challenged its historical interpretation.

-Ravneet Singh Bittu's Objections: Union Minister of State Ravneet Singh Bittu emerged as one of the most vocal political figures commenting on the controversy.

He questioned the film's references to allegations involving thousands of disappearances and unlawful cremations. Bittu publicly stated that if such claims

were supported by official records or documentary evidence, those materials should be made available. Otherwise, he argued, viewers should be informed through an appropriate disclaimer that the figures presented had not been officially verified.

He further maintained that Punjab's history should not be viewed exclusively through a single perspective. According to him, any portrayal of the militancy period must acknowledge the broader historical context rather than presenting only selected aspects. Bittu also clarified that neither the Central Government nor the Bharatiya Janata Party had any role in the film's removal from the OTT platform, stating that streaming services make independent commercial decisions regarding the content they host. His remarks intensified political debate, with supporters describing his position as a call for factual accuracy while critics accused him of politicising a sensitive human rights issue.

-Human Rights Versus National Security:

Perhaps the most significant dimension of the controversy lies in the renewed debate over balancing national security with human rights.

Punjab endured one of the most violent insurgencies in independent India's history during the 1980s and early 1990s. Thousands of civilians, police personnel, security forces and political workers lost their lives in militant violence. At the same time, national and international human rights organisations documented allegations relating to fake encounters, enforced disappearances, unlawful detentions and custodial abuses.

The differing interpretations of this period continue to influence public discourse even decades later. For some, the priority remains acknowledging the immense sacrifices made in defeating terrorism and restoring normalcy. For others, genuine reconciliation also requires confronting allegations of human rights violations and ensuring institutional accountability wherever wrongdoing occurred.

*It is within this historical context that *Sutlej* has become more than a film—it has become a focal point for competing narratives about Punjab's past.*

-The Constitutional and Legal Debate:

The controversy has also revived discussion about India's constitutional framework governing freedom of

expression.

*Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution guarantees every citizen the right to freedom of speech and expression. However, Article 19(2) permits the State to impose reasonable restrictions in the interests of public order, national security, sovereignty, integrity and other specified grounds. Legal experts note that these constitutional provisions require a careful balancing exercise. If a film has completed the statutory certification process and has been permitted for public exhibition, any subsequent restriction or removal should ideally follow a transparent legal procedure supported by clearly stated reasons. Government authorities, on the other hand, have consistently maintained that preserving public order and preventing situations capable of disturbing communal harmony remain legitimate constitutional responsibilities, particularly in matters involving historically sensitive issues. The *Sutlej* episode may therefore serve as an important reference point for future debates concerning digital streaming platforms, certified films and the scope of executive intervention.*

-Reactions from Sikh Organisations:

The film's removal prompted responses from several Sikh organisations and gurdwara management bodies. Many supporters described the film not merely as a work of cinema but as an attempt to document an important chapter of Punjab's history and the broader human rights discourse associated with that period. In some places, community organisations reportedly arranged public

screenings after the film disappeared from digital platforms.

Supporters argued that audiences should have the opportunity to examine historical narratives and participate in informed public discussion. Others, while not opposing such films, emphasised that any portrayal of a sensitive historical period must remain balanced, factually rigorous and inclusive of multiple perspectives.

-Paramjit Kaur Khalsa's Appeal:

Paramjit Kaur Khalsa, widow of Jaswant Singh Khalsa, publicly supported the film, stating that it reflected the version previously viewed by the family and that its essential message had not been compromised. She also reiterated her long-standing demand for the establishment of an independent People's Commission to investigate allegations relating to enforced disappearances, fake encounters and unlawful cremations during the militancy years. According to her, affected families continue to seek not only justice but also an authoritative historical record acknowledging their experiences.

-Calls for a Truth Commission:

The controversy has also revived demands for a broader truth-seeking mechanism. Shiromani Akali Dal (Re-Surjit) has called for the creation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Punjab on the lines of South Africa's post-apartheid model. The party argues that all aspects of the militancy period including terrorist violence, police operations, alleged human rights abuses and civilian deaths should be examined through an impartial and comprehensive process.

PGIMER Expansion Boosts North India Healthcare

With nearly ₹1,200 crore worth of new healthcare projects, PGIMER Chandigarh is preparing to redefine tertiary care

CHANDIGARH :

The Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER), Chandigarh, is set to enter a new phase in its six-decade journey with the inauguration of two state-of-the-art healthcare facilities and the foundation stone laying of a new critical care hospital by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 17 July 2026. Collectively valued at nearly ₹1,200 crore,

the projects are expected to substantially expand the institute's capacity for patient care, specialised treatment, medical education and advanced clinical research.

The projects include the Advanced Mother & Child Centre (AMCC), the Advanced Neurosciences Centre (ANC) and a 150-bed Critical Care Hospital Block to be developed under the Pradhan Mantri



Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission. Together, they represent one of the largest infrastructure expansions undertaken by

PGIMER in recent years. Addressing the media ahead of the Prime Minister's visit, PGIMER Director Prof. Vivek Lal described

the occasion as a defining milestone in the institute's evolution. He said the new facilities should not be viewed merely as

additional buildings but as infrastructure that will significantly enhance access to specialised and affordable healthcare for millions of patients from Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan and other neighbouring regions. Over the decades, PGIMER has emerged as one of India's premier tertiary healthcare institutions, attracting

patients from across northern India. The institute handles an exceptionally high patient load every day, particularly in super-specialty disciplines where advanced treatment options remain limited in many states. Health experts believe the new facilities will help reduce waiting periods, improve treatment outcomes and create additional capacity for complex medical procedures.

A Major Investment in Maternal Child Healthcare

Among the projects to be inaugurated, the ₹505-crore Advanced Mother & Child Centre is expected to have one of the most direct impacts on patient care. The 300-bed facility has been designed as a comprehensive centre for maternal and neonatal healthcare, bringing together advanced obstetric, gynaecological and paediatric services under one roof. Equipped with modern neonatal intensive care units (NICUs), modular operation theatres and specialised facilities for managing high-risk pregnancies,

the centre is expected to strengthen PGIMER's ability to handle more than 6,000 high-risk deliveries annually. The integrated model is expected to improve coordination among specialists while reducing delays in treatment for mothers and newborns requiring critical medical attention. For families travelling long distances to Chandigarh in search of specialised care, the new centre is expected to provide faster diagnosis, improved emergency response and more comprehensive treatment.

Advanced Neurosciences Centre to Strengthen Specialised Care

The second major facility to be dedicated to the nation is the 300-bed Advanced Neurosciences Centre (ANC), a project expected to significantly improve the diagnosis and treatment of complex neurological disorders. The new centre brings together neurology, neurosurgery, neuroradiology, neuroanaesthesia, neurocritical care and rehabilitation services within a single integrated facility—an approach that is increasingly recognised as the global standard for comprehensive neurosciences care.

Equipped with 61 intensive care beds, modular operating theatres and advanced imaging and diagnostic technologies, the centre is designed to manage a wide range of neurological emergencies and complex conditions, including brain tumours, strokes, spinal disorders, epilepsy and traumatic brain injuries. According to PGIMER Director Prof. Vivek Lal, the integrated model will substantially reduce treatment delays, improve survival rates and enhance long-term neurological outcomes.

New Critical Care Block

During his visit, the Prime Minister will also lay the foundation stone of a 150-bed Critical Care Hospital Block, which will be developed at an estimated cost of ₹244 crore under the Pradhan Mantri Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission. The project reflects lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the need for dedicated critical care facilities became evident across the country. Once completed, the new block will strengthen PGIMER's capacity to respond to medical emergencies.

Growing Patient Load Seen as a Reflection of Public Trust

Responding to questions about the increasing number of patients visiting PGIMER every year, Prof. Lal observed that rising patient footfall should not be viewed as a burden but as a reflection of the confidence people have in the institution. He said the institute considers it its responsibility to continuously expand infrastructure and strengthen services so that patients are not denied timely access to quality healthcare. This philosophy, he added, has guided every major expansion undertaken by PGIMER in recent years.

As one of India's foremost referral hospitals, PGIMER receives patients from Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan and several other states. Many of these patients require highly specialised treatment that is either unavailable or difficult to access closer to their homes. The expansion of infrastructure is therefore expected to reduce waiting times, improve patient flow and enhance the institute's ability to accommodate the growing demand for advanced medical care.

Ayushman Bharat: improving access to advanced healthcare

Prof. Lal also highlighted the role of the Ayushman Bharat programme in improving access to advanced healthcare. According to him, the scheme has enabled thousands of economically disadvantaged patients to undergo treatments that were previously beyond their financial reach. These include organ transplantation, cancer therapies, complex cardiac procedures and advanced neurological interventions. By reducing out-of-pocket expenditure, the scheme has widened access to tertiary healthcare and strengthened the role of public institutions like PGIMER in delivering specialised medical services.

The Director further pointed out that affordability remains central to PGIMER's healthcare philosophy. Through the institute's AMRIT pharmacies, several high-end medicines are available at a fraction of international prices, ensuring that life-saving treatment remains accessible to patients from diverse economic backgrounds.

He said PGIMER continues to demonstrate that world-class healthcare does not necessarily have to be prohibitively expensive if supported by strong public investment, efficient administration and well-designed national health programmes.

A Boost for Medical Education and Research

Beyond expanding clinical services, the new projects are expected to significantly strengthen PGIMER's academic and research ecosystem. As one of India's premier postgraduate medical institutions, PGIMER plays a crucial role in training specialists, conducting advanced research and developing treatment protocols that influence healthcare practices across the country.

The Advanced Mother & Child Centre and the Advanced Neurosciences Centre will provide students, resident doctors and researchers with access to modern operating theatres, sophisticated diagnostic technologies and multidisciplinary clinical environments. Such facilities are expected to improve hands-on training while creating opportunities for collaborative research in maternal health, neonatal medicine, neurology, neurosurgery and critical care.

Medical experts believe that integrating patient care, education and research within the same infrastructure enables faster adoption of new technologies and improves clinical outcomes. The expansion is therefore likely to benefit not only current patients but also future generations of healthcare professionals.

Transforming Healthcare Across Northern India

PGIMER has long served as the principal referral hospital for much of North India. Every day, thousands of patients travel from Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan and parts of Uttar Pradesh seeking specialised treatment unavailable elsewhere.

The institute's growing patient volume reflects both the increasing demand for advanced healthcare and the confidence people place in the institution. However, this demand has also placed considerable pressure on existing infrastructure. The newly developed facilities are expected to ease that burden by expanding bed capacity, reducing waiting periods and improving access to specialised services. The Advanced Mother & Child Centre will strengthen maternal and neonatal care, while the Advanced Neurosciences Centre is expected to improve treatment for complex neurological disorders that often require coordinated intervention by multiple specialists.

Punjab Congress Caught in a Leadership Crossfire as 2027 Poll Battle Begins Early

Congress factionalism and leadership rivalry deepen uncertainty in Punjab

CHANDIGARH :

The Punjab Congress is once again grappling with an internal power struggle at a time when the party is attempting to position itself as the principal challenger to the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in the 2027 Assembly elections. Instead of projecting organisational cohesion after the All India Congress Committee (AICC) finalised its state

leadership, the party has found itself embroiled in a fresh round of factional politics, with senior leaders openly disagreeing over appointments, leadership style and organisational strategy. The latest confrontation has exposed long-standing divisions within the state unit and raised questions about whether the Congress can effectively convert anti-incumbency against

the AAP government into electoral gains while remaining internally divided. Political observers believe that although factionalism has historically been a feature of Punjab Congress politics, the current dispute has assumed greater significance because it has emerged just as the party begins preparations for one of the most crucial Assembly elections in recent years.



-Leadership Formula Triggers New Discontent

The immediate trigger for the present crisis was the Congress high command's decision to retain Amarinder Singh Raja Warring as Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee (PPCC) president while continuing Partap Singh Bajwa as Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly. Former Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi was appointed chairman of the party's campaign committee, a move intended to give him an important electoral role without altering the organisational leadership. The arrangement was designed as a balancing exercise. However, instead of ending speculation, it generated fresh dissatisfaction among sections of the organisation that had expected broader leadership changes. Supporters of Channi argued that the former Chief Minister deserved a larger organisational role, while those backing the existing leadership maintained that continuity was necessary to prepare the party for the 2027 elections. The disagreement quickly evolved into an open political contest between rival camps.

-Channi Camp Challenges the Status Quo...

The strongest challenge has come from leaders aligned with Charanjit Singh Channi and former Deputy Chief Minister Sukhjinder Singh Randhawa. Dissident leaders have questioned the continuation of Raja Warring as the state party chief and have urged the Congress leadership to reconsider its organisational decisions. Reports indicate that several meetings held by the dissident group have conveyed the message that a leadership change is necessary to rebuild unity within the party. The disagreement became more visible when Channi and Randhawa chose not to participate in meetings convened by the party's Punjab in-charge, Bhupesh Baghel, instead holding separate consultations with their supporters.

-High Command Refuses to Yield...

Despite mounting pressure, the Congress high command has remained firm. Bhupesh Baghel has repeatedly stated that organisational decisions will not be altered under

pressure and that the leadership approved by the AICC will continue. At the same time, he has emphasised that dialogue with dissatisfied leaders remains open and expressed confidence that differences can eventually be resolved. This reflects the Congress leadership's broader strategy of preserving organisational stability while preventing the dispute from escalating into a full-scale split. Party insiders say the high command is keen to avoid repeating the instability that weakened the Congress before the 2022 Assembly elections.

-Raja Warring's Call for Unity: Punjab Congress president Raja Warring has consistently attempted to downplay reports of serious divisions. Publicly, he has maintained that all senior leaders, including Channi, will work together for the party's success in the Assembly elections.

He has described internal discussions as a normal feature of a democratic political organisation and insisted that the Congress remains united in its objective of returning to power in Punjab. However, political

analysts believe that the continuing public statements by rival camps indicate that reconciliation remains incomplete.

-Bajwa Seeks Balance...

Leader of the Opposition Partap Singh Bajwa has attempted to strike a conciliatory tone amid the dispute. He has publicly argued that no individual's political ambition should become bigger than either the Congress organisation or Punjab's interests. His remarks have been viewed as an appeal for collective responsibility at a time when the party is seeking to rebuild itself ahead of the elections. At the same time, Bajwa continues to remain one of the Congress's most prominent faces in the Assembly, making his role crucial in maintaining coordination between the legislative wing and the organisational structure.

-A History of Factional Politics...

The present conflict is not an isolated development. Punjab Congress has witnessed repeated leadership battles over the past decade. The disagreements between former Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh

and Navjot Singh Sidhu eventually resulted in Amarinder Singh's resignation in 2021, followed by the appointment of Charanjit Singh Channi as Chief Minister. Internal instability continued even after that transition and was widely viewed as one of the factors contributing to the party's defeat in the 2022 Assembly elections. Political observers note that the current dispute follows a familiar pattern in which competing leadership centres emerge before major elections. Unlike ideological disagreements, these conflicts generally revolve around organisational control, candidate selection and the projection of future chief ministerial leadership.

-Opposition Finds Political Opportunity

The Congress's internal divisions have provided political ammunition to its rivals. The Bharatiya Janata Party has claimed that the Congress is too preoccupied with internal conflicts to present itself as a credible alternative in Punjab. BJP leaders have argued that a party unable to maintain internal discipline would find it

difficult to convince voters that it can provide stable governance.

The ruling AAP has also sought to portray the Congress as a divided organisation more focused on leadership disputes than public issues, although Congress leaders maintain that internal debates should not be confused with organisational weakness.

-Electoral Stakes...

The timing of the dispute is particularly significant. With the Assembly elections approaching, the Congress hopes to capitalise on anti-incumbency sentiment against the AAP government while simultaneously attempting to consolidate its traditional support base among rural voters, urban middle-class constituencies, Scheduled Castes and sections of Sikh voters. However, electoral strategists argue that prolonged internal disagreements could weaken grassroots mobilisation, affect coordination among district units and complicate candidate selection. Even if differences are resolved before the campaign formally begins, public perceptions of disunity may take time to change.

-The Road Ahead...

The coming months are likely to determine whether the Punjab Congress can convert its multiple leadership centres into an electoral advantage or whether factional politics will once again overshadow organisational rebuilding. The high command appears determined to preserve its existing leadership structure while encouraging dialogue among competing groups. Whether this balancing strategy succeeds will depend on the willingness of senior leaders to place collective electoral interests above individual political aspirations. For now, the Congress continues to possess an experienced leadership, a sizeable organisational network and a strong presence in the Punjab Assembly. Yet it also faces a familiar dilemma: every election requires the party to first win the battle within before it can effectively fight the battle outside. As Punjab moves closer to the 2027 Assembly elections, the party's greatest political contest may well be the one unfolding inside its own ranks.

Himachal on the Frontline of Disaster

Himachal Pradesh faces a defining question: Is the Himalaya changing, or does the answer lie in the way development has been pursued?



SHIMLA : The tranquil valleys of Himachal Pradesh have once again found themselves battling a familiar yet increasingly severe crisis. Every monsoon brings its share of challenges, but the recurring pattern of intense rainfall, landslides, cloudbursts

and flash floods has raised a larger and more uncomfortable question: are these disasters merely a consequence of changing climatic conditions, or are they also a reflection of development policies that have failed to acknowledge the ecological fragility of

the Himalaya? Districts such as Mandi, Kullu, Kangra, Shimla, Sirmaur, Chamba and Kinnaur have repeatedly witnessed roads collapsing under debris, bridges sustaining damage, rivers swelling beyond their banks and entire communities becoming

temporarily isolated. National highways and rural roads have frequently remained blocked, disrupting transport, tourism and the movement of essential supplies. Drinking water schemes have suffered extensive damage, electricity networks have been inter-

rupted, and authorities have repeatedly advised residents and tourists to avoid unnecessary travel during periods of heavy rainfall. Experts increasingly argue that natural disasters in Himachal Pradesh can no longer be viewed as seasonal emergencies alone.

A Changing Pattern of Monsoon

According to Shobhit Katiyar, Director of the India Meteorological Department's Shimla Centre, the southwest monsoon has remained highly active across Himachal Pradesh, particularly over the state's mid-hill districts. Areas including Mandi, Kullu,

Kangra and Shimla continue to face the possibility of heavy rainfall, increasing the risk of landslides, flash floods and road blockages. The Meteorological Department has consistently advised residents and visitors to stay away from landslide-prone

slopes, overflowing streams and riverbanks during periods of intense rainfall. It has also been issuing regular nowcasts, daily forecasts and advance warnings to district administrations to facilitate timely preparedness. Meteorologists point out that

the nature of rainfall itself has changed over recent years. Instead of prolonged, evenly distributed precipitation, many regions now experience extremely heavy downpours within a few hours. Such concentrated rainfall weakens the soil's stability, triggering

massive landslides that damage roads, bridges and nearby settlements. Seasonal streams that once remained relatively harmless can transform into destructive torrents within a short period, leaving little time for evacuation or emergency response..

Districts Under Persistent Pressure...

Among the worst-affected districts this monsoon have been Mandi, Kullu, Kangra and Shimla. Roads in areas such as Thunag and Karsog in Mandi district have been blocked repeatedly due to landslides. In Kullu, routes through the Sainj and Parvati valleys have remained vulnerable to falling debris, while several locations in Kangra and Shimla have reported hill slope failures and uprooted trees. Extended highway closures have not only disrupted the lives of local residents but have also severely affected tourists travelling to the hill state.

-Development Under Scrutiny...

While extreme weather has intensified the frequency of disasters, environmental experts argue that rainfall alone cannot explain the scale of destruction witnessed in Himachal Pradesh. Increasingly, attention is being directed towards the state's development model and its compatibility with the fragile Himalayan

landscape.

Environmentalist Pradeep Sangwan, who has worked extensively on conservation and community participation in Himalayan regions, has repeatedly maintained that mountain ecosystems cannot be developed on the same principles applied to the plains. According to him, large-scale construction without a scientific assessment of the carrying capacity of mountain terrain is likely to increase the intensity and frequency of future disasters. Similar concerns have been expressed by Himalayan biodiversity expert Prof. Maharaj K. Pandit, who has consistently described the western Himalaya as one of the world's most ecologically sensitive mountain systems. In his view, climate change is only one part of the problem.

-Roads: The Lifeline of the Hills...

In Himachal Pradesh, roads represent far more than transport infrastructure—they are the backbone of daily life. When a major road is blocked, the consequences extend well

beyond traffic disruption. Essential supplies such as medicines, food grains, milk, vegetables and fuel often fail to reach remote villages. Patients struggle to access hospitals, schools are disrupted and local businesses suffer significant losses. During the monsoon, national highways frequently remain closed for several hours due to landslides and debris. Conditions become even more difficult in rural areas, where alternative routes are limited or non-existent. Entire villages can remain cut off until roads are reopened.

-Water Supply and Power Infrastructure...

The impact of prolonged rainfall extends beyond transportation. Drinking water schemes are frequently damaged as landslides clog water resources, pipelines break and pumping stations become inoperative. Electricity infrastructure is equally vulnerable, with fallen poles and snapped transmission lines causing prolonged outages across many villages. Restoring services in

remote mountainous terrain is often challenging because repair teams must first regain access to affected locations.

-Disaster Management Beyond Emergency Response...

Every monsoon serves as a crucial test of Himachal Pradesh's disaster management system. Once weather alerts are issued, the State Disaster Management Authority, district administrations, police, the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), the Public Works Department and the State Electricity Board shift into emergency mode. Heavy equipment is deployed at vulnerable locations, relief camps are prepared and restoration work begins immediately whenever roads are blocked. Yet recurring disasters indicate that reactive measures alone are insufficient. Disaster management specialists increasingly advocate a transition from response-based planning to risk-based planning. Clearing roads and distributing relief materials

remain essential, but long-term resilience requires scientific geological studies, continuous mapping of landslide-prone areas, stricter monitoring of construction activity and greater investment in community preparedness.

-Climate Change and Growing Vulnerability... Scientists studying Himalayan ecology identify the region as one of the first to experience the effects of global climate change. Rising temperatures, changing rainfall patterns and more frequent extreme weather events are significantly increasing natural risks.

Earlier, monsoon rainfall was generally spread over longer periods. Today, exceptionally heavy rainfall is often concentrated within just a few hours. Such intense precipitation rapidly weakens mountain slopes, increasing the likelihood of landslides and flash floods. Even seasonal streams and small rivers can swell suddenly into destructive torrents, posing serious threats to settlements and infrastructure located downstream.

-Horticulture Under Pressure...

Himachal Pradesh's economy is closely linked to horticulture, particularly apple cultivation, which supports the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of families directly and indirectly. Persistent rainfall during the monsoon has therefore become a growing concern for orchard owners. Excess moisture can affect fruit quality, while hailstorms and strong winds have caused damage to orchards in several districts. Transportation disruptions add another layer of difficulty. When roads remain blocked, harvested produce cannot reach wholesale markets on time, affecting both quality and prices. Orchardists have also highlighted concerns about the timely availability of packaging materials such as cartons and trays, whose supply often depends on uninterrupted road connectivity. Farmers continue to seek better transport support, efficient market access and policy measures that can reduce losses during periods of prolonged weather-related disruption.

-Government Response and Continuing Challenges...

The state government has been closely monitoring the evolving situation through regular review meetings involving departments responsible for disaster management, horticulture, public works, water resources and power supply. Officials have focused on maintaining the quality of horticultural produce, ensuring transportation to markets, restoring damaged roads, repairing drinking water schemes and re-establishing electricity services as quickly as possible. District administrations have also been instructed to assess local conditions continuously and explore alternative transport arrangements wherever necessary. Despite these efforts, restoration work often takes longer than expected because heavy rainfall continues even as repair operations are underway. This recurring challenge underlines the need for stronger infrastructure planning rather than relying solely on post-disaster recovery.

Haryana Tightens Focus on Infrastructure Delivery

Chief Minister Nayab Saini's review of projects worth over 75 crore underscores the government's emphasis on accountability, faster execution and improved public service delivery.

CHANDIGARH :

Infrastructure development has emerged as one of the central pillars of the Haryana government's governance agenda, with Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini recently conducting a comprehensive review of major public projects costing more than ₹75 crore. During the review, the Chief Minister directed officials to adhere strictly to project timelines, warning against avoidable delays and stressing that public infrastructure must be completed within the prescribed schedule.

The review meeting reflects a broader administrative focus on ensuring that large-scale investments translate into timely benefits for citizens. Roads, urban development, irrigation systems, drinking water projects, public buildings and other key infrastructure works are currently being monitored more closely as the government seeks to improve execution ahead of the next phase of the state's development agenda. The emphasis on timely project completion comes at a time when Haryana is witnessing rapid urbanisation, increasing industrial activity and rising demand for better public infrastructure. While the state has made significant investments in transport, urban expansion and irrigation networks over the past decade, delays in execution continue to pose administrative and financial challenges.

Delays Remain a Major Governance Challenge

Despite substantial public investment, delays in infrastructure projects remain one of the biggest concerns for policymakers. Large public works frequently encounter hurdles such as prolonged land acquisition, environmental clearances, utility shifting, contractual disputes, shortage of construction material, adverse weather conditions and coordination issues among multiple government departments. These delays often lead to cost escalation, postpone the delivery of public services and reduce the economic benefits expected from the projects. Every additional month of delay not only increases financial expenditure but also affects commuters, farmers, businesses and urban residents who depend on improved infrastructure.

-Accountability Takes Centre Stage...

During the review, the Chief Minister reportedly emphasised that every department must take ownership of the projects under its jurisdiction. Rather than allowing files to move slowly through multiple administrative layers, departments have been instructed to resolve pending issues through regular monitoring and inter-departmental coordination. Administrative experts believe such review meetings have become an important governance tool in recent years. By periodically assessing physical and financial progress, governments are better positioned to identify delays before they become major obstacles. The Haryana government



has increasingly relied on technology-based monitoring systems, digital dashboards and periodic review meetings to track the status of ongoing projects.

-Roads Continue to Receive Priority...

Among the sectors receiving significant attention is road infrastructure. Haryana's strategic location adjoining the National Capital Region has resulted in rapid growth in freight movement, industrial transportation and daily commuter traffic. Several highways, bypasses, flyovers and district road improvement projects are either under construction or in advanced planning stages. The government considers efficient road connectivity essential for sustaining industrial growth, facilitating agricultural marketing and improving access to education and healthcare.

-Urban Development Under Pressure...

Urban infrastructure has become another critical area of focus as Haryana's major cities continue to expand rapidly. Gurugram, Faridabad, Panchkula, Karnal, Sonapat, Hisar and other urban

centres have experienced increasing pressure on roads, drainage systems, water supply, sewerage networks and public transport. Population growth, industrial expansion and real estate development have significantly increased demand for modern civic infrastructure. Consequently, delays in urban development projects directly affect residents through traffic congestion, waterlogging, inadequate drainage and pressure on public utilities. Urban planners argue that infrastructure expansion must keep pace with population growth.

-Irrigation Projects Hold Strategic Importance...

Agriculture remains a major contributor to Haryana's economy, making irrigation infrastructure one of the state's most critical development priorities. Canal modernisation, water distribution systems, drainage improvement and irrigation efficiency projects directly influence agricultural productivity across large parts of the state. Climate variability and increasing pressure on water resources have made efficient irrigation management even more important.

-Infrastructure and Economic Growth...

Infrastructure investment is widely recognised as one of the strongest drivers of economic development. Improved roads, industrial corridors, logistics facilities and urban services encourage private investment while generating employment during both construction and operation. For Haryana, which has emerged as one of India's leading manufacturing and services hubs, timely completion of infrastructure projects is closely linked to economic competitiveness. Industrial clusters in Gurugram, Manesar, Panipat, Faridabad and other regions depend heavily on efficient transport networks, reliable utilities and well-developed logistics infrastructure.

-Financial Implications of Delayed Projects...

Infrastructure experts point out that delays often result in significant cost overruns. Inflation in construction material, labour costs and equipment rental increases project expenditure when timelines are extended. In many cases, revised project costs require

additional budgetary allocations, placing pressure on public finances. Delayed completion also postpones the economic returns expected from infrastructure investments.

-Better Coordination Among Departments...

One of the recurring causes of delay in public projects is inadequate coordination among government agencies. Road construction may require utility shifting by electricity departments, water supply agencies, telecommunications providers and local bodies. Similarly, irrigation projects often involve revenue authorities, environmental agencies and engineering departments. Administrative specialists argue that integrated planning and regular coordination meetings can significantly reduce implementation delays.

-Public Expectations Continue to Rise...

Citizens today expect governments not only to announce development projects but also to complete them within promised timelines. Improved digital communication and social media have increased public scrutiny of government

performance. Delays in visible infrastructure projects often become matters of public debate, influencing perceptions of administrative efficiency. As a result, governments across India are placing greater emphasis on measurable outcomes rather than merely announcing new initiatives. Haryana is no exception. The government's focus on monitoring high-value projects suggests an effort to improve implementation while demonstrating administrative responsiveness. -Challenges Beyond Government Control... While administrative efficiency can address many implementation issues, certain factors remain beyond governmental control. Unexpected weather events, legal disputes, environmental litigation, fluctuations in raw material prices and unforeseen technical complications can disrupt construction schedules despite careful planning. Experts therefore recommend incorporating greater flexibility into project management while strengthening risk assessment before work begins.

-Looking Ahead...

The recent review of projects costing over ₹75 crore indicates that the Haryana government intends to place greater emphasis on execution rather than announcements. By insisting on strict adherence to deadlines, the administration seeks to ensure that public investment produces visible improvements in infrastructure and public services within reasonable timeframes.

Ram Temple Donation Theft Row: Accountability and the Search for Institutional Transparency

Alleged Ram Temple donation embezzlement sparks probes and accountability concerns

Ayodhya : The alleged theft and misappropriation of donations offered by devotees at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya has evolved into one of the country's most closely watched controversies, extending well beyond a criminal investigation. What began as suspected irregularities in the handling of cash and valuables has developed into a case involving police action, a Special Investigation Team (SIT), judicial scrutiny and intense political debate. It has also raised broader questions about transparency, institutional oversight and the systems used to safeguard public donations at major religious institutions. For millions of devotees, contributions made at the Ram Temple represent an act of faith. Allegations that these offerings may have been siphoned off have therefore generated widespread public concern, making the issue as much about preserving public trust as about fixing criminal responsibility.

-How the Controversy Emerged...
The controversy surfaced after discrepancies were reportedly noticed in the accounting of donations received at the temple. According to the investigation, inconsistencies between the recorded collections and the actual deposits prompted closer scrutiny by temple authorities. Following preliminary findings, the Uttar Pradesh government constituted an SIT to examine the matter. The SIT's initial findings led to the registration of a First Information Report against eight individuals, including several persons entrusted with counting and handling devotees' offerings. The allegations include theft,



criminal breach of trust, cheating and criminal conspiracy. Police subsequently arrested all eight accused as the investigation widened. Investigators have indicated that the alleged irregularities involved both cash and valuables donated by devotees.

-CCTV Footage and Internal Monitoring...

One of the most significant aspects of the investigation is the reported use of surveillance footage. According to investigators, hidden CCTV monitoring was introduced after repeated discrepancies were observed during the counting of donations. The footage allegedly captured instances of employees diverting cash before it entered the official accounting system, providing investigators with crucial evidence. The case has highlighted the importance of internal audit mechanisms.

-SIT Flags Systemic Weaknesses...

Beyond the alleged criminal acts, the SIT has reportedly identified multiple procedural failures that allowed the irregularities to continue. According to reports, investigators found significant weaknesses in monitoring, documen-

tation and supervisory mechanisms, describing them as a near-complete breakdown of institutional safeguards. Governance specialists believe the findings are important because they shift attention from individual accountability to institutional responsibility. They argue that effective systems should be capable of detecting irregularities early rather than relying solely on criminal investigations after losses occur.

-Judicial Scrutiny Intensifies...

The controversy has now reached the Supreme Court, which has sought status reports from both the Uttar Pradesh government and the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust regarding the progress of the investigation. The court's intervention has added another layer of institutional oversight and is expected to ensure that the inquiry proceeds transparently. Legal experts say judicial monitoring often strengthens public confidence in sensitive investigations, particularly when matters involve institutions of national importance.

-Trust Under Public Spotlight...

The Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust has itself become the focus of public attention. While the Trust filed the complaint that led to criminal proceedings, questions have been raised about how the alleged irregularities escaped detection despite established administrative systems. Amid the controversy, the Trust has initiated the process of appointing a new Chief Executive Officer, a move viewed by many observers as part of broader efforts to strengthen institutional management and administrative oversight.

-Political Reactions...

As expected, the issue has generated sharp political responses. Opposition parties have demanded complete transparency in the investigation, arguing that every aspect of the alleged embezzlement should be examined independently and that responsibility should extend beyond those directly accused if systemic failures are established. The ruling establishment has maintained that the registration of criminal cases, arrests and the constitution of the SIT demonstrate that the law is taking its course.

Government representatives have emphasised that the investigation should be allowed to proceed without political interference. The controversy has therefore become both a legal issue and a political flashpoint, with competing narratives emerging over accountability and institutional responsibility.

-Faith and Public Confidence...

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the controversy is its impact on public confidence. Unlike ordinary financial crimes, alleged irregularities involving temple donations affect deeply held religious sentiments. Devotees contribute with the expectation that their offerings will be used for religious, charitable and institutional purposes. Experts on religious administration argue that maintaining transparency is essential not merely for financial accountability but also for preserving public faith in institutional management. Several religious bodies across India have strengthened digital accounting, independent audits and electronic donation systems in recent years precisely to minimise

such risks.

-Lessons for Religious Institutions...

The case has triggered wider discussion about governance practices at large religious institutions across the country. Financial experts recommend several safeguards, including- Complete digitisation of donation accounting. Independent third-party audits. Multiple-stage verification during cash counting. Continuous surveillance of counting centres. Rotation of personnel handling donations. Strong internal vigilance mechanisms. Public disclosure of audited financial statements. Many observers believe that institutions receiving large volumes of public donations require governance standards comparable to those followed by major public trusts and charitable organisations.

-Wider Administrative Questions...

The controversy has also highlighted the challenges associated with managing institutions that receive enormous daily inflows of cash and valuables. Large pilgrimage centres often process thousands of donations every day, making robust administrative systems essential. Experts note that rapid expansion in pilgrim numbers must be accompanied by corresponding improvements in financial management, security infrastructure and internal controls. The Ayodhya case is therefore likely to influence administrative practices beyond a single temple.

-Investigation Continues...

Police investigations remain ongoing, and authorities continue to examine financial records, CCTV evidence and the

role of those responsible for handling donations. Investigators are also assessing whether the alleged irregularities resulted solely from the actions of individuals or reflected broader systemic failures requiring institutional reforms. The outcome of the investigation may determine whether additional criminal proceedings or administrative actions become necessary.

-Looking Ahead...

The Ram Temple donation controversy has become much more than a criminal case involving alleged theft. It has evolved into a broader discussion about transparency, governance and accountability in institutions that command immense public trust. For devotees, the central concern remains safeguarding the sanctity of their offerings. For administrators, the episode serves as a reminder that even the strongest institutions require continuous oversight and modern financial controls. For policymakers, it highlights the importance of ensuring that governance mechanisms evolve alongside the growing scale and significance of India's major religious institutions. Whatever the final findings of the investigation, the controversy is likely to leave a lasting impact on how donations are managed at large temples across the country. If the lessons emerging from the probe lead to stronger audit systems, greater transparency and improved institutional safeguards, the case could ultimately prompt reforms that reinforce public confidence rather than diminish it. At the same time, the criminal investigation and judicial scrutiny will continue

Subsidy quota exhausted, EV policy nearing end; new car incentives unlikely

Chandigarh May End E-Car Purchase Incentives

CHANDIGARH :

Chandigarh's ambitious push towards electric mobility may be entering a new phase, with the Union Territory Administration unlikely to continue financial incentives for the purchase of new electric cars during the remaining period of its current Electric Vehicle (EV) Policy. While the city will continue to offer non-monetary benefits such as free vehicle registration and

road tax exemptions, the possible discontinuation of purchase subsidies has triggered a wider debate on whether the policy has achieved its objectives or whether incentives remain essential to accelerate the transition to clean transportation. The development is significant because Chandigarh has often been projected as one of India's leading cities in EV adoption. Since the launch of the Chandigarh Electric

Vehicle Policy 2022, the Administration has promoted electric mobility through direct financial incentives, tax benefits, charging infrastructure and regulatory support. However, with the five-year policy approaching its final year and the quota earmarked for electric cars already exhausted, officials are now considering whether extending subsidies remains financially and administratively justified.



Why the Incentives May End

Under the existing EV Policy, buyers of electric four-wheelers were eligible for financial incentives ranging from ₹1 lakh to ₹1.5 lakh, depending on battery capacity. The incentive applied only to a fixed number of vehicles rather than all future registrations. Initially, subsidies were available for the first 2,000 electric cars registered in Chandigarh.

When this quota was exhausted much earlier than anticipated, the UT Electric Vehicle Advisory Committee recommended increasing the cap by another 1,500 vehicles in July 2025. Although the Administration approved the proposal and forwarded it for further processing, the required approvals were not completed before the enhanced quota itself effectively became unavailable for implementation.

-Existing Benefits Will Continue...

Even if purchase incentives are discontinued, the Administration has clarified that several other benefits under the EV Policy will continue.

Electric vehicle owners will continue to enjoy free registration through the Registering and Licensing Authority (RLA), exemption from registration charges

and several regulatory advantages designed to encourage cleaner mobility. Officials maintain that these benefits, combined with lower operating costs of electric vehicles, continue to make EV ownership financially attractive despite the possible withdrawal of direct subsidies.

-A Policy That Changed Chandigarh's EV Landscape...

When Chandigarh introduced its EV Policy in September 2022, it was among the most comprehensive city-level electric mobility initiatives in India. The policy sought to reduce vehicular pollution, improve air quality and promote sustainable urban transport by encouraging citizens to shift from conventional fuel-powered vehicles to electric alternatives.

Over nearly four years, the city has witnessed a steady increase in EV adoption. According to official figures, nearly 21,000 electric vehicles have been registered so far, including around 7,500 electric two-wheelers and more than 4,000 electric cars. The Administration aims to raise the share of electric vehicles in new registrations to 18 per

cent, making Chandigarh one of India's leading cities in clean mobility adoption.

-Will Demand Slow Without Financial Incentives?...

The possible withdrawal of incentives has nevertheless raised concerns among automobile dealers and prospective buyers. Industry representatives point out that purchase subsidies played a crucial role in narrowing the price gap between electric vehicles and conventional petrol or diesel cars.

Although operating costs of EVs remain significantly lower, their initial purchase price continues to be higher in many cases. Several dealers believe that the removal of subsidies could discourage first-time buyers, particularly middle-income families who calculate total ownership costs carefully before making purchasing decisions.

-Administration's Perspective...

Officials within the Chandigarh Administration maintain that the market for electric vehicles has matured considerably since the policy was introduced.

They argue that buyers today choose EVs not only because of subsidies

but also because of lower running costs, expanding charging infrastructure, improved battery technology and increasing confidence in electric mobility. Another factor influencing the Administration's thinking is the broader policy landscape. Officials have noted that very few governments continue to offer direct purchase subsidies for private electric cars on the same scale as earlier years, with many shifting their focus towards charging infrastructure and ecosystem development rather than consumer incentives.

-Impact on the Automobile Market...

The decision is expected to affect multiple stakeholders. For consumers planning to purchase electric cars, the absence of a subsidy may increase the effective acquisition cost by up to ₹1.5 lakh.

This could influence buying decisions, particularly among customers comparing electric models with conventional internal combustion engine vehicles. Automobile dealerships may also witness short-term fluctuations in demand as buyers reassess purchase plans. However, industry experts note that long-term EV adoption increasingly depends on

battery prices, charging convenience, financing options and resale value rather than subsidies alone.

-Charging Infrastructure Continues to Expand...

One of the strengths of Chandigarh's EV programme has been the parallel development of charging infrastructure. The Administration has established public charging stations across different parts of the city while encouraging private participation in charging networks. Digital platforms now help users locate available charging stations and monitor charging status more efficiently. Experts believe that charging accessibility will remain one of the most important determinants of future EV adoption.

-Environmental Considerations...

The debate over incentives also has environmental implications. Chandigarh has consistently ranked among India's better-planned cities but faces increasing challenges from traffic growth and vehicular emissions. Electric mobility remains one of the key strategies for improving urban air quality and reducing dependence on fossil fuels. Environ-

mental specialists argue that government support should gradually shift from purchase incentives towards creating a comprehensive ecosystem that includes charging stations, battery recycling facilities, renewable energy integration and efficient public transport.

-A New EV Policy on the Horizon:

Perhaps the most important reason behind the Administration's current approach is the impending expiry of the existing five-year EV Policy. Officials are expected to undertake a comprehensive review of the policy before introducing a revised framework. The next-generation policy is likely to incorporate lessons learned over the past four years while responding to the rapidly changing electric vehicle market. Industry stakeholders are expected to recommend continued support for selected vehicle categories, expansion of charging infrastructure, incentives for commercial fleets, battery recycling measures and stronger integration with renewable energy systems.

-Looking Ahead...

The possible discontinuation of purchase incentives for electric cars represents

an important transition rather than an end to Chandigarh's electric mobility ambitions. The city has already established itself as one of India's leading adopters of electric vehicles, supported by progressive policy measures and growing public acceptance. The coming months will determine whether the Administration's confidence that the EV market can sustain itself without direct financial incentives proves correct. If registrations continue to rise despite the withdrawal of subsidies, it would suggest that electric mobility in Chandigarh has reached a stage where consumer confidence, lower operating costs and improved infrastructure have become stronger drivers than government grants. At the same time, the forthcoming revision of the EV Policy presents an opportunity to redefine Chandigarh's clean mobility strategy for the next decade. A carefully balanced policy that combines infrastructure development, regulatory support, targeted incentives and environmental sustainability could ensure that the city remains at the forefront of India's transition towards cleaner and more sustainable transportation.