

Pilgrims contributed crores to UP's economy, says Modi

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“These holy sites are now being connected through the Vande Bharat network. It marks a convergence of India's culture, faith, and development journey,” he said.

In India, he said, pilgrimage has long served as a medium of national consciousness. “In the past 11 years, developmental initiatives in Uttar Pradesh have elevated pilgrimage to a new level. In 2024, over 11 crore devotees visited Kashi Vishwanath Dham in Varanasi, while Ayodhya saw over 6 crore visitors after the Ram Lalla idol consecration. These pilgrims have contributed thousands of crores of rupees to UP's economy,” he said.

The PM said that this influx has provided sustained earning opportunities to hotels, traders, transport companies, local artists, and boat operators across the state. As a result, hundreds of youth in Varanasi are now launching new ventures — from transport services to Banarasi sarees. He affirmed that these developments have opened the doors of prosperity in Uttar Pradesh and Varanasi.

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi said robust infrastructure is a major driver of the economy for developed nations to achieve significant progress and development. “India, too, is rapidly striding on this path. Trains like Vande Bharat, Namo Bharat, and Amrit Bharat have laid the foundation for the next generation of Indian Railways

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With the launch of four new Vande Bharat trains, including Banaras-Khajuraho, Firozpur-Delhi Vande Bharat, Lucknow-Saharanpur, and Ernakulam-Bengaluru, the total number of operational Vande Bharat trains in the country has now exceeded 160, said Modi.

He described Vande Bharat as a train made by Indians, for Indians, and of Indians — one that fills every Indian with pride. Even foreign passengers are astonished upon seeing Vande Bharat, said Modi,

mentioning that India has embarked on a mission to enhance its resources for a developed India, and these trains are poised to become milestones in that journey.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and railway minister Ashwini Vaishnaw were present at the flag-off ceremony, while governor of Kerala, Rajendra Arlekar, Union ministers Suresh Gopi, George Kurian, Ravneet Singh Bittu, and UP deputy CM Brajesh Pathak were connected through video-conferencing to the event from the centres where the other three Vande Bharat trains started their maiden journey.

The new Vande Bharat trains launched to enhance regional mobility, promote tourism, and support eco-

nomic activity across the country will save time for travellers. The Banaras-Khajuraho Vande Bharat will connect India's most revered religious and cultural destinations, including Varanasi, Prayagraj, Chitrakoot, and Khajuraho.

The Lucknow-Saharanpur Vande Bharat will cover the journey in approximately 7.45 hours, saving nearly 1 hour of travel time. It will benefit passengers from Lucknow, Sitapur, Shahjahanpur, Bareilly, Moradabad, Bijnor, and Saharanpur, while also improving access to the holy city of Haridwar via Roorkee.

The Firozpur-Delhi train will be the fastest train on this route, completing the journey in just 6 hours 40 minutes. It will strengthen connectivity between the national capital and key cities in Punjab, including Firozpur, Bathinda, and Patiala.

In southern India, the Ernakulam-Bengaluru Vande Bharat will reduce travel time by over 2 hours, completing the journey in 8 hours and 40 minutes. It will connect major IT and commercial hubs, providing professionals, students, and tourists with a faster and more comfortable travel option. The route will promote greater economic activity and tourism between Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka, supporting regional growth and collaboration.