THE BUS INSIDER

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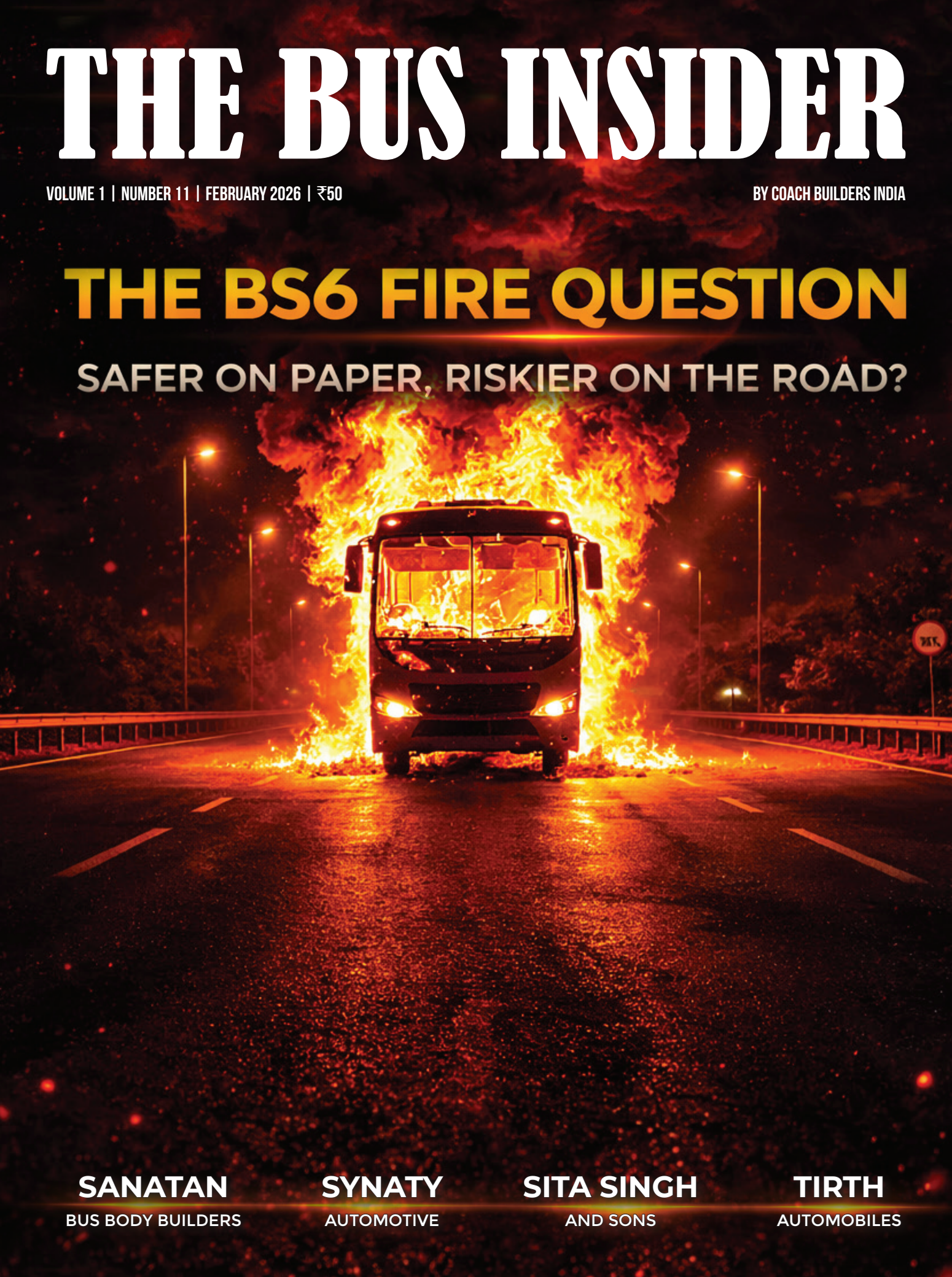
BY COACH BUILDERS INDIA

THE BS6 FIRE QUESTION

SAFER ON PAPER, RISKIER ON THE ROAD?



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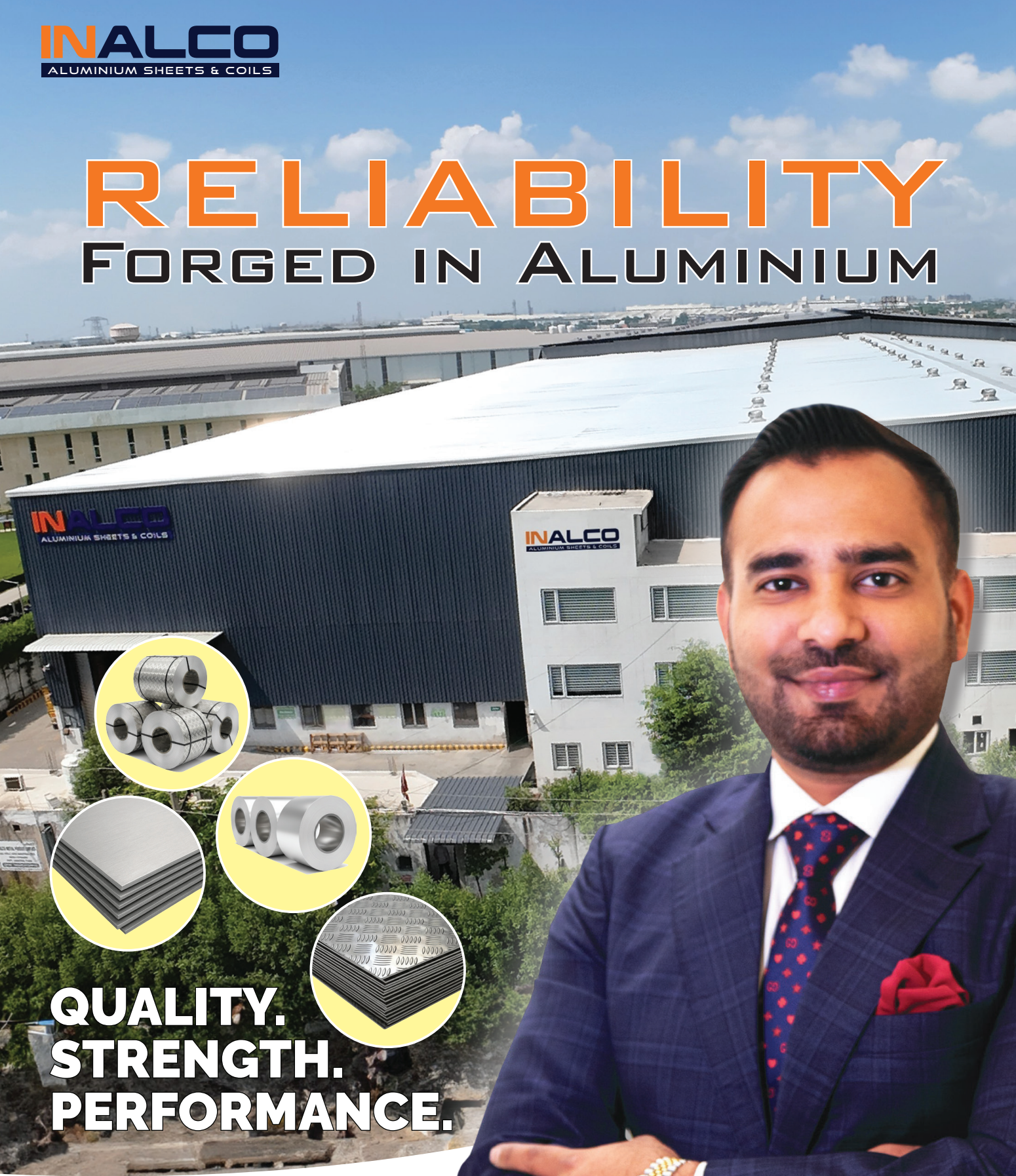

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EDITORIAL

Hello everyone,

As bus fires continue to rage unabated, the conversation has moved beyond operators and body builders. It has now turned toward the machines themselves. A large proportion of reported fire incidents involve BS6 vehicles - a fact many industry stakeholders acknowledge, yet one that has not been adequately analysed or discussed in the public domain.

BS6 was not a cosmetic upgrade. It marked one of the most significant engineering transitions in India's commercial vehicle history. Higher exhaust temperatures. DPF regeneration cycles. Increased fuel pressures. Denser electronics. Tighter packaging. The machines became cleaner. They also became more complex.

The question we explore in this issue is simple but critical: did the ecosystem transition alongside the technology?

In our cover story, we speak to bus body builders and operators across the country who unanimously agree that BS6 requires a fundamentally different approach to safety and integration. By most accounts, the industry is still in a learning and stabilisation phase.

Veterans like Shivakumar V of the MG Group make a strong case for a comprehensive, independent, and technically robust investigation into bus fire incidents. Voices such as Nataraja Sharma, President of the Karnataka State Bus Operators Association, and Dr. Harish Sabharwal, President of the All India Motor Congress, add further depth to the debate. Their message is clear: integration practices, training, diagnostics, and real-world validation must keep pace with technological advancement.

At the same time, this issue is not only about scrutiny. It is also about progress.

We spotlight Synaty Automotive, Sanatan Bus Body Builders, Sita Singh and Sons, and Tirth Automotive — four manufacturers who have secured the now-mandatory AIS 153 certification. These milestones are not regulatory check-boxes. They represent a decisive shift toward professionalisation and higher safety standards within India's mid-sized bus body building ecosystem.

The industry is under pressure. But pressure forces clarity. If BS6 has introduced new engineering realities, then the response must be stronger integration, deeper collaboration, and scientific evaluation — not speculation.

The path forward lies not in blame, but in collective accountability.

As we share these stories, I also wish you all a very happy Navratri. May this festive season bring growth, resilience, and above all, safe journeys.

Here's to new rules, new technologies, and new opportunities.

Till next time.

Cheers!!!

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FEBRUARY 2026

Ashok Leyland Posts Record Q3 FY26 Results, Retains 40% Bus Market Share

Ashok Leyland, the flagship commercial vehicle manufacturer of the Hinduja Group, reported its strongest-ever third-quarter performance for FY26, driven by robust demand, operational efficiencies and sustained focus on profitable growth.

For the quarter ended December 2025, the company recorded its highest-ever Q3 revenue of ₹11,534 crore, reflecting a 22% increase over ₹9,479 crore in Q3 FY25. EBITDA rose 27% year-on-year to ₹1,535 crore, with margins improving to 13.3%, marking the twelfth consecutive quarter of double-digit EBITDA performance.

Q3 FY26 Performance Snapshot

Metric	Q3 FY26	Q3 FY25	Growth
Revenue	₹11,534 Cr	₹9,479 Cr	0.22
EBITDA	₹1,535 Cr (13.3%)	₹1,211 Cr (12.8%)	0.27
Net Profit	₹796 Cr	₹765 Cr*	0.04
MHCV Volume	32,929 units	26,692 units	0.23
LCV Volume	20,518 units	15,754 units	0.3
Exports	4,965 units	4,151 units	0.2
Net Cash	₹2,619 Cr	₹958 Cr	—

FY25 net profit derived based on 4% growth.

Net profit stood at ₹796 crore despite a one-time charge of ₹308 crore linked to the implementation of the new Labour Code. The company significantly strengthened its balance sheet, ending the quarter with net cash of ₹2,619 crore.

Volume growth remained strong across segments. MHCV volumes rose 23% to 32,929 units, while LCV volumes increased 30% to 20,518 units. Exports grew 20% to 4,965 units. The company maintained over 30% domestic MHCV market share and retained leadership in the bus segment with a 40% share.

Recent product launches, including the HIPPO and TAURUS ranges, aim to strengthen its presence in infrastructure and long-haul logistics. Meanwhile, Switch Mobility has commenced international bus deliveries and reported positive performance over the first nine months, supporting the group's transition toward alternative propulsion platforms.

Credit: Hemant M. Bhatt

Tata Motors Bags 70,000-Vehicle Order in Indonesia to Boost Rural Logistics

Tata Motors has secured its largest-ever commercial vehicle order in Indonesia, signing a contract to supply 70,000 vehicles to support the country's agricultural and rural logistics network. The order marks a significant milestone in the company's international growth strategy.

The contract was secured through PT Tata Motors Distribusi Indonesia, a wholly owned indirect subsidiary, with vehicles to be supplied to PT Agrinas Pangan Nusantara. The state-owned enterprise is leading initiatives to modernise agricultural supply chains and strengthen national food security.

Under the agreement, Tata Motors will deliver 35,000 units each of the Tata Yodha pick-up and the Tata Ultra T.7 truck. The fleet will be deployed under Indonesia's Koperasi Desa and Kelurahan Merah Putih Project, a government programme aimed at improving farm-to-market connectivity, reducing logistics costs, and enhancing rural livelihoods. Deliveries will be carried out in phases to ensure smooth operational integration.

The Yodha is positioned as a rugged last-mile solution for challenging rural terrain, while the Ultra T.7 is engineered for higher uptime, durability, and driver comfort across mixed-use logistics applications.

The order strengthens Tata Motors' footprint in Southeast Asia and reinforces the growing global acceptance of Indian commercial vehicle platforms across agricultural and mass mobility segments.

Ashok Leyland and PT Pindad Partner for Electric Bus Development in Indonesia

Ashok Leyland has entered into a strategic partnership with Indonesia's state-owned PT Pindad to co-develop electric buses and defense vehicles. The Memorandum of Understanding, signed on February 4, 2026, at Pindad's headquarters in Bandung, establishes a framework for technical cooperation and local manufacturing in the Southeast Asian nation. This landmark agreement aims to strengthen bilateral ties while addressing Indonesia's growing requirements for sustainable mobility and advanced security solutions.

The collaboration focuses on leveraging Ashok Leyland's global expertise in commercial EV platforms primarily through its subsidiary, Switch Mobility alongside PT Pindad's established engineering and defense infrastructure. Key signatories included Amandeep Singh, President of International Operations at Ashok Leyland, and Prof. Sigit P. Santosa, CEO of PT Pindad. The joint venture is specifically designed to engineer products suited to Indonesia's unique terrain and operational needs, supporting the country's national push for electric vehicle adoption and modernized, locally produced platforms.

For the international bus and mobility sector, this move signifies Ashok Leyland's aggressive expansion into the Southeast Asian market. By integrating Indian EV technology with Indonesian manufacturing strength, the partnership secures a strategic entry point into a region prioritizing zero-emission urban transit. This cooperation is expected to accelerate the deployment of high-performance electric buses, setting a benchmark for international industrial synergy and enhancing fleet reliability across Indonesia's public transport network.

GreenCell Mobility to Deploy 570 Electric Buses in Delhi

GreenCell Mobility, India's leading electric bus platform and a key Eversource Capital portfolio company, has announced the deployment of 570 electric buses in Delhi over the coming months. This expansion is backed by a USD 89 million investment from the International Finance Corporation, British International Investment, and Tata Capital, marking a major step in Delhi's shift toward zero-emission public transport.

The fleet includes 12-metre, air-conditioned electric city buses with enhanced batteries designed for Delhi's demanding roads and heavy operational cycles. The buses feature advanced safety and operational technologies, including Integrated Transport Management Systems, real-time tracking, Passenger Information Systems, internal and reversing cameras, and accessibility-friendly infrastructure.

Devndra Chawla, MD & CEO of GreenCell Mobility, stated that Delhi's electric bus rollout represents the next phase of India's public transport transition from pilots to scaled, city-wide adoption, showcasing how institutional capital, policy intent, and operational capability can deliver clean mobility at scale.

This deployment is part of GreenCell Mobility's national expansion, with projects in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Andhra Pradesh, targeting a fleet of over 3,700 electric buses. Through technology-driven solutions and institutional investment, the company is reducing urban emissions while setting a benchmark for high-capacity, reliable, and zero-emission public transport across India.

Olectra Bags LOI for 1,085 E-Buses from TGSRTC Under CESL's PM E-DRIVE Programme

Olectra Greentech Ltd. has received a Letter of Intent (LOI) for 1,085 electric buses from Telangana State Road Transport Corporation (TGSRTC) under the PM E-DRIVE initiative administered by Convergence Energy Services Limited (CESL). The award has been routed through Evey Trans Pvt. Ltd..

This large-scale order marks a decisive push toward electrifying public transport fleets and is set to significantly expand zero-emission bus operations in Telangana, particularly in Hyderabad. The development further consolidates Olectra's leadership in India's electric bus segment.

Based in Hyderabad, Olectra has emerged as a dominant force in the electric commercial vehicle market, consistently leading in electric bus deployments. In addition to e-buses, the company manufactures electric tippers, supporting sustainable urban and infrastructure projects.

Nationwide, Olectra has deployed more than 3,600 electric vehicles, while its confirmed order pipeline now exceeds 10,000 units. Its operational fleet has surpassed 500 million cumulative green kilometres, demonstrating proven reliability, localized engineering expertise, and scalable manufacturing capabilities.

According to Mahesh Babu, Managing Director of Olectra Greentech Ltd., the new order represents a pivotal milestone in the company's mission to accelerate India's transition to electric mobility. He noted that participation in the PM E-DRIVE programme reinforces the company's commitment to domestic manufacturing excellence under the Make in India initiative.

The buses to be supplied will be 12-metre low-floor models, available in both AC and non-AC formats. Purpose-built for Indian urban conditions and high-frequency operations, they will incorporate advanced air suspension systems at both front and rear to enhance ride stability and passenger comfort.

Powered by high-capacity lithium-ion battery systems capable of delivering more than 250 kilometres per charge, the buses will also feature fast opportunity charging of around 45 minutes, enabling improved fleet utilization. Dedicated wheelchair access spaces will further ensure inclusive and accessible public transport services.

SWITCH Mobility Deploys 272 Electric Buses under CESL Tender

SWITCH Mobility Ltd has achieved a significant milestone in India's green transition by flagging off 272 units of the EiV12 low-floor electric bus in New Delhi. This deployment, conducted under the Convergence Energy Services Limited (CESL) tender, marks Phase 2 of a comprehensive 950-bus contract for the national capital. The ceremony was held at Ramlila Maidan on February 9, 2026, and was attended by Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, BJP National President Nitin Nabin, and Delhi Transport Minister Pankaj Singh.

The project is central to the Delhi government's strategy to establish the largest electric bus fleet in the country. Following an initial delivery of 93 buses in Phase 1, the new units will be distributed across strategic hubs including the Okhla Srinivas Puri (SNP) Depot, Grand Trunk Road Depot, and Rajghat Bus Terminal. Operational integration is being managed by Ohm Global Mobility to ensure service readiness and seamless inclusion into the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) network.

Manufactured at SWITCH Mobility's Tamil Nadu facility, the EiV12 buses are engineered specifically for urban accessibility. The low-floor design features kneeling and tilting mechanisms, manual or automated wheelchair ramps, and floor-mounted batteries that provide a low centre of gravity for enhanced stability. Safety is addressed through a Fire Detection and Suppression System (FDSS), while operational efficiency is managed via the proprietary SWITCH iON telematics platform. This system monitors 140 parameters in real-time, complemented by dual-gun fast charging to minimize turnaround times.

This large-scale induction strengthens the Hinduja Group subsidiary's global footprint, which now exceeds 1,250 electric buses. For the Indian mobility sector, the phased rollout sets a benchmark for high-capacity, zero-emission urban transit. By replacing conventional diesel units, the fleet is expected to significantly reduce tailpipe emissions and noise pollution while improving commuter comfort for millions of daily passengers in the capital.

Redington and AWS Launch 'Innovation on Wheels' Bus Yatra to Drive Cloud and AI Uptake in Tier 2 and 3 Markets

Redington Limited has partnered with Amazon Web Services (AWS) to launch 'Connecting India – Innovation on Wheels', a nationwide Bus Yatra aimed at accelerating cloud computing and artificial intelligence (AI) adoption among startups, SMBs and MSMEs in emerging Indian markets.

The initiative was inaugurated in Bengaluru by Rajat Vohra, India CEO of Redington, and Sandeep Dutta, President – India and South Asia at AWS, along with senior leadership from both organisations. The multi-city programme seeks to deliver hands-on technology guidance, cloud expertise and digital transformation use cases directly to enterprises operating beyond metropolitan centres.

Starting from Bengaluru, the Bus Yatra will travel to Chennai, Mumbai, Indore, Chandigarh, Jaipur and Kolkata. At each location, businesses will receive expert consultations, live technology demonstrations and advisory sessions focused on modernising legacy IT systems and transitioning to cloud-first architectures. The programme will also showcase AI-driven analytics, secure cloud environments and data-led decision-making frameworks to improve operational efficiency and resilience.

The campaign targets rapidly expanding Tier 2 and Tier 3 markets, where enterprises are increasingly investing in digital tools. Over the coming months, the Yatra will host interactive workshops, partner engagements and sector-focused discussions across industries including manufacturing, BFSI, retail and SaaS, supporting broader digital transformation across India's business ecosystem.

Image for representational purposes only.

JSW Motors Partners with Tata IIS to Build Skilled Workforce for EV Manufacturing

JSW Motors Limited, the new energy vehicle (NEV) manufacturing arm of the JSW Group, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Tata Indian Institute of Skills (Tata IIS) to develop a structured technical talent pipeline ahead of its greenfield plant commissioning in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar.

The collaboration marks a key step in JSW Motors' ambition to create an industry-leading skilling ecosystem that spans the entire manufacturing value chain, beginning at the plant floor. Under the MoU, Tata IIS will co-develop a JSW Motors-specific curriculum covering EV systems, automation, welding, CNC operations, battery systems, and advanced manufacturing. JSW Motors retains hiring control and curriculum validation rights, ensuring alignment with evolving production requirements and plant ramp-up timelines.

Rupam Singh, Chief Human Resources Officer, JSW Motors Limited, said, "At JSW Motors, skilling is not an HR function; it is a business imperative. This partnership provides structured capability, relevant curriculum, and execution rigour aligned to our timelines, acting as a bridge toward establishing our world-class training academy."

Tata IIS was selected following a competitive evaluation of leading skilling institutions across India, with its strengths in industry-grade infrastructure, OEM engagement, and application-based training methodology cited as differentiators. Venguswamy Ramaswamy, CEO Designate, Tata IIS, added, "This partnership is a significant step toward solving India's skill challenges. By equipping youth with high-precision advanced manufacturing skills, we ensure a robust talent pipeline for the next generation of automotive excellence."

JSW Motors' skilling vision extends beyond the factory floor, encompassing suppliers, vendor partners, dealer networks, and end customers. The company also plans to establish a dedicated in-house training academy focusing on advanced manufacturing and future mobility technologies, positioning JSW Motors as a capability leader in the EV manufacturing sector.

Tata Motors Partners with VOCPA to Deploy 40 Green Hydrogen Trucks at Tuticorin Port

Tata Motors, India's largest commercial vehicle manufacturer, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with V.O. Chidambaranar Port Authority (VOCPA) to deploy 40 Green Hydrogen Internal Combustion Engine (H2 ICE) prime movers at the port, marking a key milestone in India's net-zero emissions journey. The MoU was signed in the presence of Shri Sarbananda Sonowal, Hon'ble Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways.

Under the agreement, Tata Motors will first commence trials with a hydrogen-powered prime mover, followed by a phased deployment of H2 ICE trucks over the next two years. Funded by the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, the project reinforces India's commitment to sustainable energy adoption and future-ready maritime logistics.

Mr. Susanta Kumar Purohit, Chairperson, VOCPA, said, "This partnership marks a transformative step in VOC Port's push to achieve net-zero emissions. The green hydrogen-powered fleet will decarbonise cargo handling operations while setting a benchmark for sustainable port-led logistics. Plans are also underway for a 2 MW electrolyzer and a dedicated hydrogen refueling station, reinforcing our commitment to a robust green hydrogen ecosystem."

Mr. Rajesh Kaul, Vice President and Business Head – Trucks, Tata Motors, added, "Our collaboration demonstrates the potential of hydrogen trucks in real-world cargo operations and will help assess total cost of ownership parity with green hydrogen, supporting India's ports in transitioning to cleaner logistics solutions."

The fleet will feature the Tata Motors Prima 55-tonne prime mover, designed for high performance, safety, and driver comfort, with advanced driver-assist systems and premium cabin features. Tata Motors continues to lead in alternative fuel mobility, offering vehicles powered by battery-electric, CNG, LNG, hydrogen ICE, and hydrogen fuel cells. The company is already conducting hydrogen truck trials on key freight corridors and has deployed 15 hydrogen FCEV buses on Indian roads.

This collaboration positions VOC Port as a pioneer in sustainable maritime operations while further strengthening Tata Motors' role as a frontrunner in green commercial vehicle solutions.

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ARE BS6 BUSES MORE FIRE-PRONE?

INDUSTRY VOICES CALL FOR DEEPER SCRUTINY

Higher exhaust temperatures, regeneration cycles, complex electronics, and field-level preparedness gaps are reshaping safety conversations in India's bus industry, prompting calls for rigorous investigation and preventive design reform.

BY **SHIVAM GAUTOM**

Over the past months, a pattern has begun to draw attention across India's bus industry. Several fire incidents that made national headlines involved BS6 buses. What started as quiet discussion has now evolved into a serious technical question - is BS6 inherently more vulnerable to fire risk, or is the ecosystem still adapting to a far more complex generation of machines?

The shift to BS6 marked one of the most significant engineering transitions in India's commercial vehicle history. To meet tighter emission norms, manufacturers introduced higher exhaust temperatures, diesel particulate filter regeneration cycles, increased fuel injection pressures, and a denser network of sensors and electronic systems.

On paper, it represents technological advancement. In practice, it has created a more thermally intense, electronically complex, and maintenance-sensitive operating environment.

To understand whether this emerging pattern is incidental or indicative of deeper integration challenges, we spoke to bus body builders and fleet operators across regions.

While stakeholders stopped short of attributing direct causation, most acknowledged that the concentration of recent fire incidents in BS6 vehicles can no longer be dismissed as mere coincidence. The issue, they argue, introduced engineering variables that demand closer scrutiny under real-world Indian operating conditions.

Patterns the Industry Can't Ignore

"It is a fact that a large proportion of reported fire incidents involve BS6 vehicles, though this has not been adequately analysed or discussed in the public domain," said Sivakumar V, President, Strategy & Sales at MG Group.

"WHEN YOU COMPARE BS4 AND BS6 ENGINES, THE DIFFERENCE IN OPERATING TEMPERATURES IS SIGNIFICANT. BS6 ENGINES RUN CONSIDERABLY HOTTER. AT THESE ELEVATED TEMPERATURES, WIRING HARNESSES ARE SUBJECTED TO MUCH GREATER THERMAL STRESS, INCREASING THE RISK OF INSULATION DEGRADATION AND POTENTIAL SHORT CIRCUITS."

SHIV NARAYAN SHARMA
DIRECTOR
SANATAN BUS BODY BUILDERS

According to him, BS6 technology introduced a set of engineering shifts that significantly altered the operating environment of buses.

- Higher exhaust temperatures
- DPF regeneration cycles
- Tighter packaging constraints
- Complex electrical and electronic systems

"These factors demand a much higher level of integration, validation, and operating discipline," he explains.

Higher Operating Temperatures

Shiv Narayan Sharma, Director, Sanatan Bus Body Builders Pvt. Ltd., echoes similar thoughts.

"Due to higher exhaust gas temperatures and after-treatment regeneration cycles, under-hood heat loads are substantially elevated. This increases thermal stress on wiring harnesses and associated electrical systems, accelerating insulation ageing and raising the probability of short-circuit events," he notes.

Suresh Selvaraj, Director, Swamy Ayyappa Travels, points out that this heat affects other critical systems like radiators. "Due to high temperatures, radiators frequently develop small leaks or require replacement because they cannot withstand sustained heat. This shows that the additional heat generated by BS6 engines is a key factor behind component stress and, potentially, fire risks," he explains.

"DPF REGENERATION PRODUCES EXTREMELY HIGH LOCALIZED TEMPERATURES TO BURN SOOT, FAR EXCEEDING BS4 EXHAUSTS. IF NEARBY COMPONENTS LIKE FUEL OR HYDRAULIC LINES AREN'T PROPERLY SHIELDED, THIS INTENSE HEAT CAN TRIGGER LEAKS OR FAILURES, CREATING A REAL FIRE RISK."

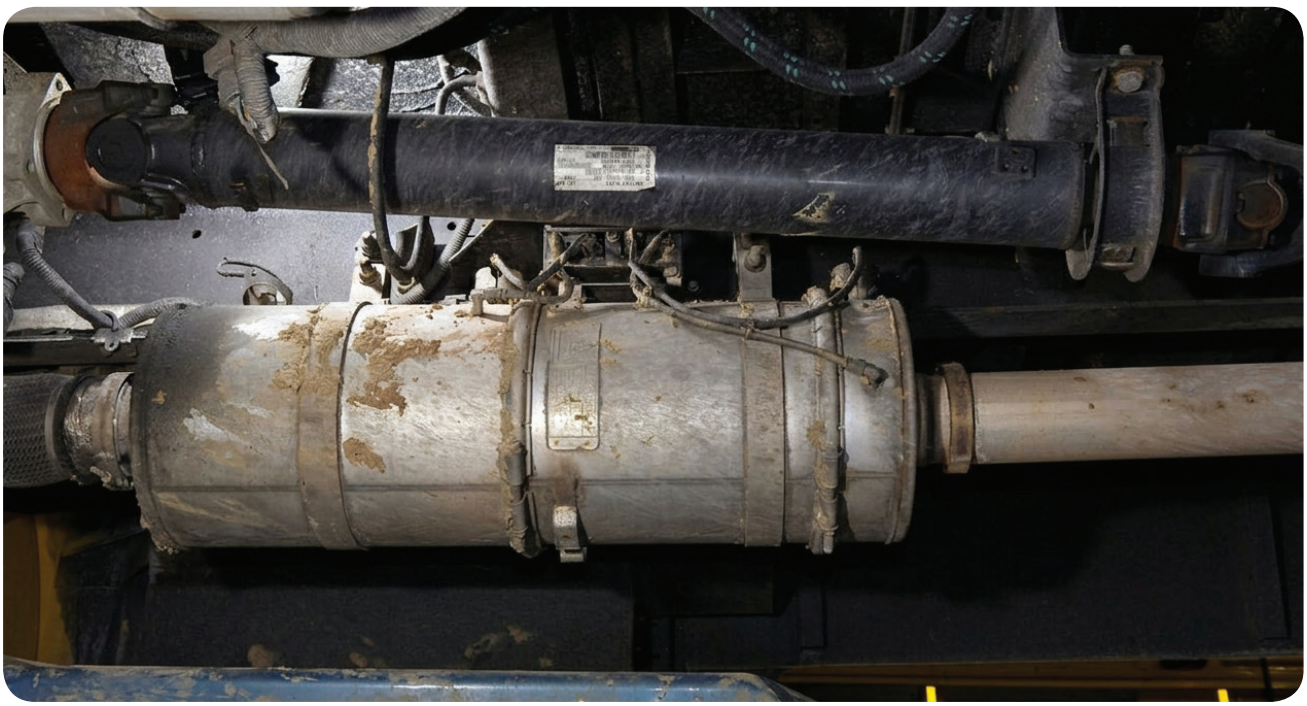
SUNNY TOMAR,
DIRECTOR,
SAGAR TOURIST BUS

He adds that heat management is critical to safety. "When heat-related component failures occur, they can trigger fires. Even collisions are more hazardous, as the thermal stress in these vehicles makes them more prone to ignition."

DPF Regeneration and Fire Risk

Beyond baseline engine temperatures, stakeholders have highlighted diesel particulate filter (DPF) regeneration cycles as a significant source of localized heat, sometimes reaching 600–700°C.

"The DPF regeneration process generates extreme localized heat to burn accumulated soot, far hotter than BS4 exhausts," explains Sunny Tomar, Director, Sagar Tourist Bus. "This intense heat can pose a fire risk if nearby components, such as fuel or hydraulic lines, are not properly shielded, as it may lead to leaks or failures that could ignite."



Yash Sharma, Director, Damodar Group, cautions that the risk increases significantly when the exhaust or DPF system becomes heavily choked. “During active regeneration, DPF temperatures typically range between 600–700°C, and in severe or abnormal conditions can approach 1,000°C. Such extreme thermal loads can become a critical factor in fire incidents,” he explains.

He further notes that while these systems are engineered to withstand high temperatures, danger arises if overheating leads to exposure of nearby diesel lines, plastic components, insulation materials, or AdBlue and fuel tanks.

At elevated temperatures, polymers can soften or melt rapidly, potentially creating conditions conducive to ignition if fuel or combustible materials are present.

A KEY DESIGN CHANGE IS THE FUEL TANK. WHILE BS4 TANKS WERE METAL, MANY BS6 TANKS USE MATERIALS MORE PRONE TO LEAKAGE. WITH THE SILENCER LOCATED NEARBY, ANY LEAK CAN QUICKLY IGNITE, SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASING FIRE RISK.

YASH SHARMA,
DIRECTOR,
DAMODAR GROUP

Diagnostic Complexity and Field-Level Electrical Challenges

BS6 buses introduce a denser network of sensors, control units, emission modules, and wiring than their BS4 predecessors, significantly increasing operational complexity. Each additional system adds monitoring circuits, feedback loops, and electronic integration, making the entire bus more sensitive to minor faults.

Suresh Selvaraj, Director, Swamy Ayyappa Travels, explains, “Dashboard alerts often appear unpredictably, even during night operations. At workshops, a scan tool may clear the error, but the root cause is rarely explained. Operators are left uncertain whether the problem is truly resolved or likely to recur.”

Repeated warnings, intermittent sensor failures, and cascading alerts are now a routine operational challenge. “Even minor faults can trigger multiple alerts simultaneously, disrupting operations and creating confusion for drivers and fleet managers,” Selvaraj adds.

The concern, therefore, is not just the sheer number of electronics, but whether field-level support has kept pace. Technician training, diagnostic transparency, and service infrastructure must evolve alongside the technology. Otherwise, temporary resets replace long-term solutions, leaving buses vulnerable to repeated failures and safety risks.

Tighter Packaging Constraints

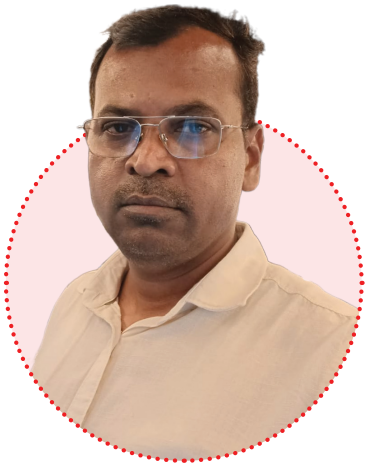
Multiple stakeholders observed that compared to BS4 platforms, BS6 engines are far more tightly packaged and this density creates a heat retention effect.

“The engine area is tightly packed now,” says Najruddin Mujawar, Owner and Head of Marketing, Sahara Coach. “What used to be relatively open space for airflow is now occupied by additional systems. Heat dissipation is not what it used to be.”

Some builders also pointed to layout changes around fuel systems. Compared to earlier BS4 platforms, certain BS6 configurations place high-temperature exhaust components closer to fuel tanks and lines. In the event of a collision or even a minor leak, the proximity of high heat and pressurised fuel increases ignition risk, they argue.

THERE IS A STRONG NEED FOR A COMPREHENSIVE, INDEPENDENT, AND TECHNICALLY ROBUST INVESTIGATION INTO BUS FIRE INCIDENTS. IT SHOULD EXAMINE BODY–CHASSIS INTEGRATION, BS6 ENGINE AND AFTER-TREATMENT DESIGN, THERMAL MANAGEMENT, ELECTRICAL SYSTEMS, MATERIALS, MAINTENANCE PRACTICES, AND DRIVER AWARENESS TO ADDRESS ROOT CAUSES.

SIVAKUMAR V,
PRESIDENT,
STRATEGY & SALES, MG GROUP



MY SUGGESTION IS THAT WE SHOULD FOCUS ON WHY FIRES OCCUR IN THE FIRST PLACE, SO THEY DON'T START AT ALL. CURRENT TECHNOLOGIES, LIKE FDSS, ACT ONLY AFTER A FIRE HAS BEGUN - THE EMPHASIS MUST SHIFT TO PREVENTION.

NAJRUDDIN MUJAWAR,
OWNER AND HEAD OF MARKETING,
SAHARA COACH

Complex Electrical and Electronic Systems

If heat was the first concern, electrical complexity was the second and most consistently emphasised.

BS6 buses carry a far denser network of sensors, control units, emission modules, and wiring harnesses than BS4 models, each adding circuits and feedback loops. Builders also note that complexity extends to the body: modern sleeper buses can have hundreds of LED lights, charging points, entertainment systems, and inverter-based power supplies, all significantly increasing the electrical load.

According to Yash Sharma, even a single LED destination board contains thousands of diodes. "Sleeper buses can have 200 to 300 internal lights plus charging points. If wiring capacity is not aligned with the load, overheating becomes a risk," he adds.

Aftermarket modifications often exacerbate these risks. Most aftermarket electricians are not trained on BS6 systems, and inconsistent wiring practices can increase circuit loads, create localized overheating, and compromise overall system reliability. Inadequate technician training and ad hoc modifications therefore raise the probability of electrical faults and operational failures.

BS6 Fire Risks: Insights, Responsibility, and the Path Forward

Experts agree that the prevalence of fire incidents in BS6 buses can no longer be dismissed as coincidence. While no single factor alone explains the phenomenon,

BS6 technology introduces several engineering challenges - higher exhaust temperatures, extreme DPF regeneration cycles, more complex electrical and electronic systems, and tighter packaging constraints.

"These factors demand a higher level of integration, validation, and operating discipline," says Shivakumar V.

He further explains that BS6 buses require:

- Enhanced thermal shielding
- Rerouted wiring and fuel lines
- Improved heat management strategies
- Better driver training on regeneration behaviour.

"The industry is still in a learning and stabilisation phase, and OEMs and bus body builders must work collectively to improve practices," he adds.

"My suggestion is that we should work on why the fire happens in the first place so that it doesn't catch fire at all," adds Najruddin Mujawar. "All the technology we are adding now, like FDSS, only acts after a fire has started. The focus must shift to prevention."

Shivakumar V further stresses the need for a comprehensive and technically robust investigation. "This should examine body–chassis integration practices, compliance with bus body code specifications, chassis and engine design including BS6 after-treatment systems, thermal management, electrical architecture and wiring protection, material flammability, interior layouts, operating conditions, duty cycles, maintenance practices, and driver awareness alongside early-warning systems."

Yash Sharma emphasises that safety is a shared responsibility and the entire ecosystem should collaborate, from OEMs to bodybuilders and operators, to ensure robust design, proper integration, and preventive practices.

"BS6 ENGINES HAVE STRUGGLED ON INDIAN ROADS. FUEL EFFICIENCY IS POOR, ELECTRICAL ISSUES PERSIST WITHOUT IMMEDIATE SOLUTIONS, AND REPEAT BREAKDOWNS ARE COMMON. OPERATORS ARE FACING SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES, AND MANY FEEL THESE VEHICLES DO NOT DELIVER VALUE FOR MONEY."

SURESH SELVARAJ,
DIRECTOR,
SWAMY AYYAPPA TRAVELS

"OEMs must rethink engine layouts and the integrity of wiring systems. Too often, blame is shifted to bus body builders, but the root issues may lie in the original chassis and engine design," he adds.

Taken together, these observations underline a simple truth - BS6 buses are not inherently unsafe, but they require a fundamentally different approach to design, integration, and operation.

Combined with hardware density and diagnostic complexity, BS6 buses demand not only better design and integration but also robust maintenance practices, field-level preparedness, and heightened operational vigilance."

Tirth Automobiles Secures AIS 153 Certification, Setting a New Benchmark in Bus Safety

BY **VIOLINA PEGU**

Tirth Automobiles, a prominent bus body builder and fleet operator based in Gujarat, has achieved the AIS 153 certification from ICAT (International Centre for Automotive Technology), reinforcing its commitment to passenger safety and regulatory compliance.

"This certification reflects our commitment to safety and quality in every bus we build," said Nirmal V. Shah, Managing Director of Tirth Automobiles. "It is a proud moment for our team and for the passengers who rely on our buses daily."

He further adds that this milestone doesn't just represent a regulatory "check-box" - it signals a significant leap in how mid-sized Indian manufacturers are professionalizing the bus body-building sector.

From Facility management to Fleet Operator to Certified Bus Body Builder

VC Shahpatel Services Pvt. Ltd., a facility management company was founded in 1996, and in 1999 it began as a specialized operator in staff transportation, gradually building a reputation for reliability and efficiency. Today, the company manages a fleet of over 250 vehicles under its operational arm, Tirth Travels, serving corporate clients and institutions across the Bharuch and Narmada districts.

In addition to fleet operations, Tirth Automobiles is an authorized dealer for Force Motors and Eicher trucks and buses in the Bharuch region. This dual expertise, as both manufacturer and operator, provides the company with a unique perspective on bus design, maintenance, and operational safety.

"Our focus has always been on delivering vehicles that meet the highest standards of safety and reliability," Shah said.

Scaling Up: From 100 to 500 Buses per Month

To support this new era of certified manufacturing, Tirth Automobiles has invested heavily in its infrastructure. The company currently operates a modern manufacturing facility in the Bharuch region spanning over 50,000 square feet, equipped with dedicated bays for structural fabrication, paneling, and interior fit-outs.

The facility's current capacity stands at 100 units per month, but the company has set its sights on a massive expansion. By the end of 2026, Tirth aims to scale production to 500 units per month. This expansion involves the integration of more automated welding processes and standardized jigs to ensure that every bus rolling off the line meets the exact tolerances required by ICAT.

> **"THE AIS 153 CERTIFICATION REFLECTS OUR COMMITMENT TO SAFETY AND QUALITY IN EVERY BUS WE BUILD. IT IS A PROUD MOMENT FOR OUR TEAM AND FOR THE PASSENGERS WHO RELY ON OUR BUSES DAILY."**
>
> **NIRMAL V. SHAH,**
> MANAGING DIRECTOR, TIRTH AUTOMOBILES

With the AIS 153 certification from ICAT, Tirth Automobiles can manufacture buses that comply with India's most stringent safety norms, covering multiple chassis and body configurations for popular OEMs. The certification ensures adherence to strict benchmarks for structural integrity, fire safety, occupant protection, and electronic stability - factors critical to fleet operators and passengers alike.

"Achieving AIS 153 certification is not just about meeting regulations; it is about creating a culture of safety and excellence across every bus we deliver," Shah noted.

A New Benchmark: Safety and Compliance in Bus Building

AIS 153 certification is the highest safety standard for bus body builders in India. With regulations tightening across the country, certified manufacturers are increasingly favored by corporate and government fleets.

For companies like Tirth Automobiles, this opens doors to larger fleet contracts, institutional clients, and higher market credibility.

The certification also highlights the growing importance of OEM collaboration. By aligning body design with manufacturer specifications from Ashok Leyland, Tata, BharatBenz, and Eicher, Tirth Automobiles ensures that buses not only meet regulatory standards but also deliver consistent performance, durability, and passenger comfort.

The Road Forward: Safety, Innovation, and Expansion

As India's bus industry evolves, Tirth Automobiles is preparing to scale production, expand its fleet, and continue investing in safety and technology. The company's experience as a fleet operator gives it valuable insights into practical safety requirements, from ergonomic design to vehicle stability under real-world operating conditions.

"Safety, reliability, and customer trust are the foundation of everything we do," Shah emphasized.

"The AIS 153 certification from ICAT is a milestone, but it is also a starting point for continuous improvement in design, operations, and service," he adds.

With this certification, Tirth Automobiles joins a select group of manufacturers setting new benchmarks for safety and quality in India's bus body-building sector, reaffirming its role as a trusted partner for both fleet operators and passengers.

Why Are BS6 Buses Catching Fire?
Separating Fact From Fiction

Since the rollout of Bharat Stage 6 (BS6) emission norms, bus operators, workshops, and regulators have fielded a steady stream of anecdotal reports linking newer BS6 buses to a rise in engine-room fires.

BY **ADV. NATARAJA SHARMA,**
PRESIDENT, KARNATAKA STATE BUS OWNERS ASSOCIATION

Separating perception from reality matters - modern emission controls introduce new hardware and complexity that change failure modes, but that does not automatically mean BS6 buses are inherently unsafe.

Let's take a look at the technical drivers, real risk vectors, and practical steps manufacturers, bodybuilders, fleet operators, and regulators should take to reduce fire incidents.

What Changed with BS6? And Why Bus Fires Suddenly Seem Common

BS6 brought significant additions to the powertrain: diesel particulate filters (DPF), selective catalytic reduction (SCR) systems, additional sensors and wiring harnesses, and often higher fuel injection pressures and more complex exhaust aftertreatment plumbing. Combined with tighter packaging in modern buses, these changes alter where heat and fault energy are concentrated.

That matters for perception - a bus with visible extra plumbing, black boxes, and underfloor modules looks more complicated to an operator used to older BS4 layouts. When something goes wrong, faults may burn through plastic harnessing or produce flames around new components - which then get linked in people's minds to BS6 itself, rather than to specific causes such as poor installation, maintenance lapses, or component defects.

BS6 vs BS4: What Changed in Engine Heat Levels?

BS6 combustion control aims to reduce particulates and NOx - sometimes by changing injection timing, increasing exhaust gas recirculation (EGR), or using aftertreatment regeneration cycles.

These introduce higher localized exhaust temperatures at certain times (for example, during DPF regeneration) and can increase thermal stresses in exhaust components. However:

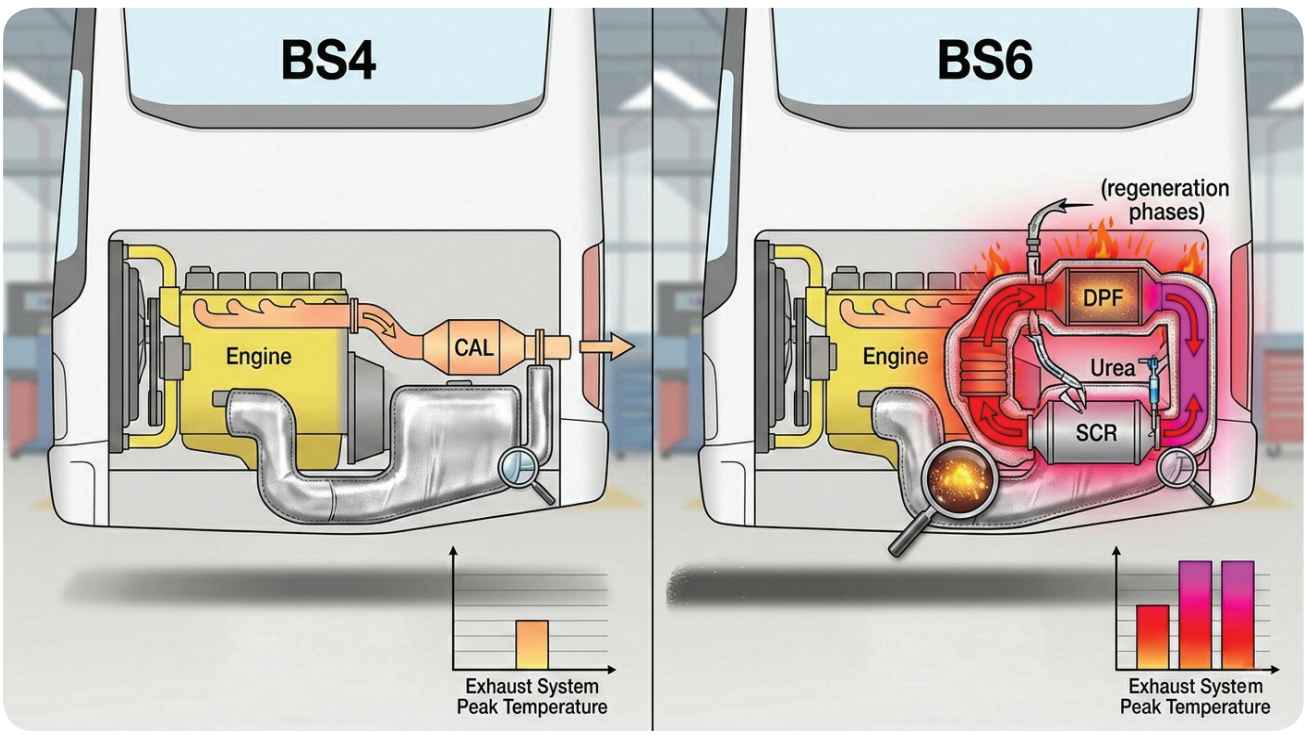
- The engine block and coolant circuits typically operate in the same temperature bands as before; core combustion temperatures are tightly controlled by engine management.
- The exhaust and aftertreatment path can see brief periods of much higher temperatures (hundreds of degrees Celsius) during active DPF regeneration or SCR dosing reactions.

So yes, exhaust-system temperatures can be higher intermittently in BS6 buses, but that alone does not create fires unless heat is allowed to accumulate near combustible materials, or protective measures are missing. Good thermal shielding, routing, and insulation are the countermeasures - and when they're absent or compromised, risk rises.

BS6 Add-Ons: Do DPF and SCR DPF, SCR & Sensors Raise Fire Concerns?

New parts increase complexity, and complexity increases the number of potential failure points:

- **DPF:** Requires occasional active regeneration where the substrate is heated to burn off soot. If the regeneration system malfunctions (stuck-open valves, clogged sensors, or shorted heaters), heat can be applied to components not designed to withstand it.



- **SCR:** Urea (AdBlue) dosing introduces a chemical system; leaks themselves are not flammable, but corrosive deposits can degrade nearby components, and failed dosing injectors can cause unintended reactions or hot spots.
- **Sensors & Wiring:** More sensors and electronic control units (ECUs) mean more wiring looms, connectors, and fuses. Poor routing, low-quality insulation, unsecured harnesses, or workmanship errors during body-building can allow chafing, short circuits, or water ingress — typical ignition sources for fires.
- **Electrical Loads:** Increased electrical demand, additional lights, full-body LED' TV's in each berth, Laptop & Mobile Charging (aftertreatment heaters, additional pumps) can overload circuits if not sized correctly, leading to overheating.

In short, the presence of these components raises the potential for fire-causing failures, but does not make fires inevitable. The difference between a safe bus and a hazardous one is how well components are integrated, installed, protected, and maintained.

Engine Packaging and Heat Management: The Hidden Fire Risk

Modern buses strive to optimize space, reduce weight, and improve aesthetics; this pushes powertrain and aftertreatment modules into tighter envelopes. Poor packaging choices can harm:

- Heat sources located adjacent to fuel or oil lines, wiring harnesses, or polymer components create ignition opportunities.
- Inadequate ventilation around aftertreatment modules prevents convective cooling during long idles or high-load conditions.
- Bodybuilder modifications, additional fuel tanks, auxiliary heaters, and in-cabin electrical installations are often the weakest link when not reconciled with OEM thermal layouts.

Therefore, heat management must be considered holistically: ducting, heat shields, temperature-rated harnesses, and scheduled checks for insulation integrity are non-negotiable.

High-Pressure Fuel: Small Leaks, Big Risks

Modern common-rail diesel systems operate at much higher injection pressures than older mechanical systems. Benefits include cleaner combustion and lower emissions, but there are implications:

- High-pressure leaks produce fine sprays that can atomize fuel in confined engine bays. While diesel's flash point is higher than gasoline's, atomized fuel can ignite if it contacts hot surfaces or electrical arcs.
- High-pressure lines, fittings, and quick-connectors must be rated, installed, and maintained properly. Corrosion, vibration fatigue, or improper torquing can produce microscopic leaks that escalate into hazards.

Meticulous fuel-system assembly, routine leak checks, and use of fuel detection technologies (where feasible) reduce risk.

BS6 Design Features That Need a Safety Check

A few specific areas merit re-examination by OEMs and regulators:

1. **Exhaust component placement and shielding:** Ensure DPFs and catalysts aren't adjacent to combustible structures or vulnerable wiring runs.
2. **Harness routing standards:** Require temperature rated insulation and mechanical protection in engine bays and underfloor runs.
3. **DPF regeneration control logic:** Include robust interlocks to prevent regeneration in unsafe conditions and clear, actionable operator alerts.
4. **Fuel line routing and protection:** Mandate double-clamp routing away from hot zones; improve leak detection in maintenance protocols.
5. **Bodybuilder integration protocols:** Formalize interface specifications so third-party fitments don't violate OEM thermal and electrical designs.

These will close the gap between emission-compliant design and real-world operational safety.

Stakeholders: Who's Responsible for Fire Safety?

Fire safety is a shared duty:

- OEMs must design with realistic packaging and service environments in mind: provide detailed harness and heat-shielding layouts, specify temperature-rated materials, and build in diagnostics for regeneration and electrical faults.
- Bodybuilders must follow OEM interface drawings, use specified clamps and grommets, and route additional services only after heat- flow and vibration analysis. Certification or a formal sign-off from the OEM should be required for major modifications.
- Fleet operators must invest in training (what DPF regen looks like, smells, and sounds), scheduled inspections (harness integrity, hose fittings, and evidence of overheating), and preventive replacement intervals for vulnerable parts. Quick, clear SOPs when a regeneration fault or warning appears can prevent escalation.
- Workshops and technicians must be qualified for high-pressure diesel systems and proven diagnostics. Sloppy repairs or improper splicing of harnesses are frequent proximate causes of thermal events.

- Regulators and standards bodies should publish clear installation and post-manufacture modification standards for modern aftertreatment systems and mandate logging of major retrofits. Periodic audits of bodybuilder facilities and mandatory operator training certifications will raise the baseline.

Fire-Safety Checklist for BS6 Fleets

1. Verify DPF regen logic and ensure operator warnings are prominent and actionable.
2. Inspect exhaust mounts, heat shields, and proximity to plastic/fuel lines every 6 months.
3. Use heat-rated wiring harnesses and protected conduits in engine bays and underfloor areas.
4. Conduct pressure-leak tests on fuel systems during routine maintenance.
5. Require bodybuilders to submit a thermally-reviewed integration sign-off before vehicles enter service.
6. Train drivers to stop and report abnormal burns and smells. or warning lights during regeneration.
7. Implement a documented corrective-action protocol after any overheating or fuel leak event.

In view of the above, considering the recent fire accidents, specifically in BS6, brought necessary and challenging technical changes to reduce emissions. Those changes altered where heat and failure energy are concentrated, and that can amplify the consequences of poor installation, maintenance, or design choices.

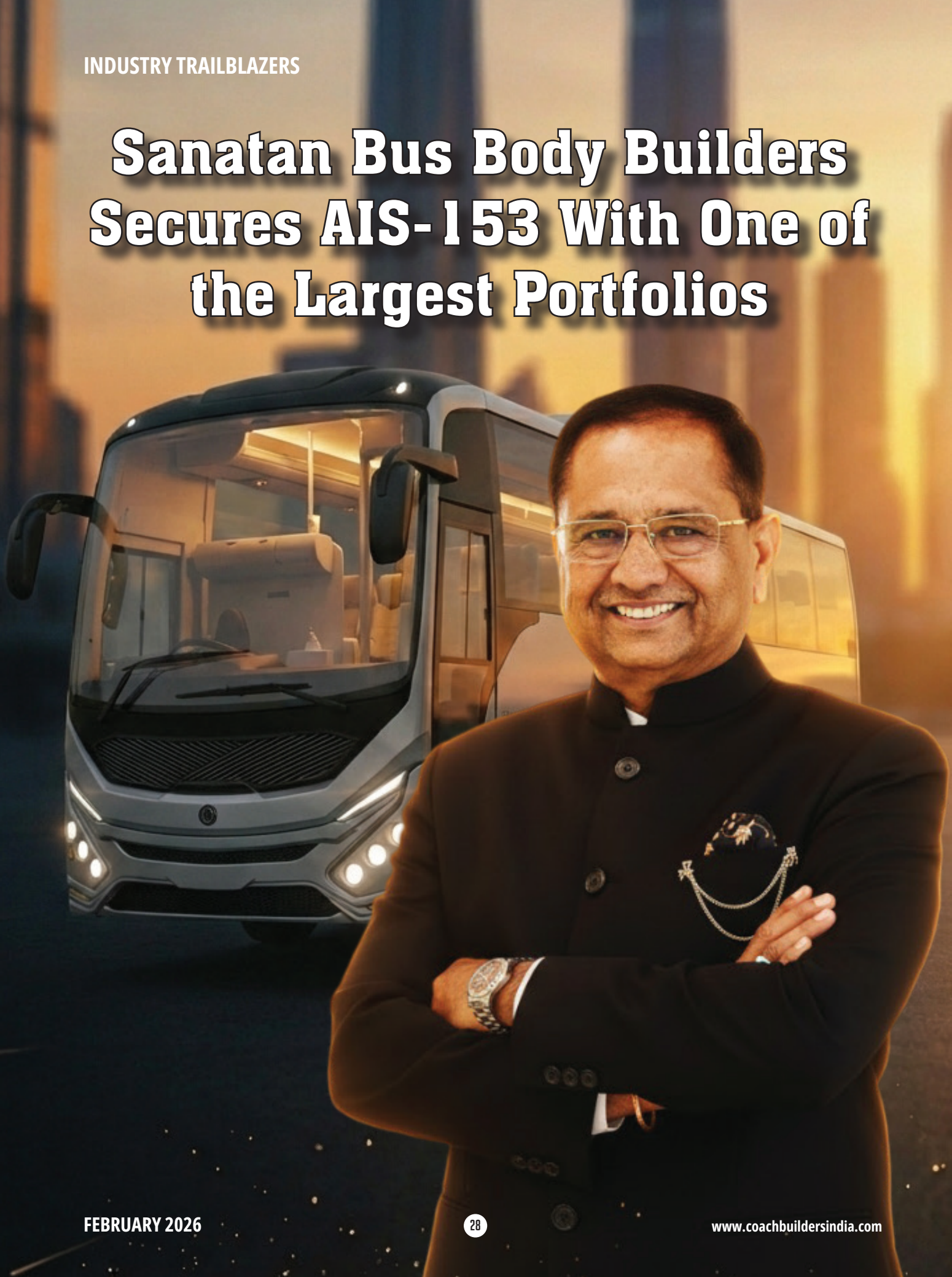
But BS6 itself is not a fire “cause” in isolation. The pathway to safer buses runs through disciplined OEM design, rigorous bodybuilder integration, trained operators, competent workshops, and effective regulation. If all stakeholders accept their part, the perceived spike in fires becomes a manageable safety engineering problem — not an unavoidable feature of cleaner buses.

As the President of Karnataka State Bus Owners Association and also as a responsible citizen interested in passenger safety, I demand that the Morth, ARAI, and Road safety committees understand the situation seriously and take necessary action.

About the Author

Advocate Nataraj Sharma S, a practicing lawyer at the High Court of Karnataka, specializes in criminal law, constitutional matters, and public interest litigation. Known for his commitment to social justice, he has played a key role in exposing major corruption cases in Karnataka. He has also held prominent leadership positions, including Trustee of New Mangalore Port Trust, President of the Karnataka State Bus Owners Association, and President of the Federation of Private Transport Associations.

Sanatan Bus Body Builders Secures AIS-153 With One of the Largest Portfolios



Indore-based Sanatan Bus Body Builders Pvt. Ltd. has successfully secured AIS-153 certification, marking a significant regulatory milestone for the company under India's new bus body code norms.

With a total of 284 AIS-153 certified variants, Sanatan now holds one of the largest certification portfolios in the country, further cementing its leadership position in bus body manufacturing and compliance with evolving safety standards. This achievement positions the company as a reliable partner for OEMs, state transport undertakings, and private fleet operators seeking fully compliant bus solutions.

Founded in 1999, Sanatan Bus Body Builders has grown into one of India's leading bus body manufacturers, operating a sprawling 15-acre production facility with an annual capacity of up to 7,000 buses. The company produces a diverse range of buses, including sleeper coaches, staff buses, school buses, luxury coaches, and specialized vehicles, catering to a wide variety of transportation needs across the country.

"Securing AIS-153 certification across 284 variants is a significant milestone for us. It demonstrates our preparedness to align with evolving safety regulations and reinforces our commitment to delivering compliant, high-quality buses to the industry," said Director Shiv Narayan Sharma.

The milestone highlights the company's proactive approach toward meeting the stricter safety requirements introduced to enhance passenger protection and standardize bus body construction practices nationwide. Achieving certification across such a wide portfolio reflects extensive engineering validation, rigorous testing, and meticulous documentation efforts.

As India's bus industry navigates the new regulatory landscape, companies like Sanata, with early and large-scale AIS-153 compliance, are expected to play a pivotal role in shaping safer, standardized, and more reliable bus operations, supporting the growth and modernization of both public and private transportation fleets.

"THIS ACHIEVEMENT REFLECTS THE COLLECTIVE EFFORT OF OUR ENGINEERING, COMPLIANCE, AND PRODUCTION TEAMS. BUILDING ONE OF THE LARGEST AIS-153 CERTIFIED VARIANT PORTFOLIOS POSITIONS US STRONGLY TO SUPPORT OEMS AND FLEET OPERATORS AS THE INDUSTRY TRANSITIONS TO THE NEW SAFETY STANDARDS."

UJJWAL SHARMA,
DIRECTOR, SANATAN BUS BODY BUILDERS PVT. LTD.

Prawaas 5.0 Aligns Industry for a Future-Ready Passenger Transport Ecosystem

The Bus & Car Operators Confederation of India (BOCI) has officially announced the 5th edition of Prawaas, India's premier platform for the bus and car operators ecosystem. Scheduled from 9–11 July 2026 at the Helipad Exhibition Centre in Gandhinagar, Gujarat, the event is hosted by the Akhil Gujarat Pravasi Vahan Sanchalak Trust and co-hosted by the Gujarat Tourist Vehicles Operators Association and the Gujarat Luxury Cab Owners Association.

The curtain raiser saw strong participation from industry leaders and host association representatives, underscoring widespread regional and national engagement. Over the years, Prawaas has evolved into a key convergence point for policymakers, fleet operators, OEMs, financiers, and technology providers, fostering dialogue and driving sectoral advancement.

Prawaas 5.0 will feature a comprehensive Global Exhibition, the Bharat Prawaas Awards, high-level conference sessions, technical workshops, and the BOCI Dialogue focused on policy reforms and industry growth. The event will also host startup pitch sessions spotlighting mobility innovation, curated B2B partnering meetings, and a networking dinner aimed at strengthening collaboration across the passenger transport ecosystem.

Industry response has been highly encouraging. Exhibition space is already nearly 50 percent booked well ahead of the show. Leading brands have confirmed their participation, with redBus returning as Awards Partner. JTAC and Zylog Composites have joined as Gold Partners, VinFast as Silver Partner, KRNSPH as Co-Lead HVAC Partner, and BITLA Software as Supporting Partner. Several OEMs, EV manufacturers, and component and technology companies are expected to be announced shortly.

With representation anticipated from all 36 States and Union Territories, Prawaas 5.0 is positioned to become India's largest gathering of bus and car operators and multimodal transport stakeholders. The event is expected to attract over 10,000 operators, 300+ exhibitors, 1,500 delegates, 60+ speakers, and more than 15,000 business visitors.

Aligned with India's Viksit Bharat vision, this edition will spotlight school bus safety, tourism mobility, electric vehicles, metro integration, fleet modernisation, and smart transport solutions—further reinforcing Prawaas as the definitive national platform shaping the future of passenger mobility.

Organiser

BOCI 10 YEARS
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Prawaas 5.0 brings together government, operators, startups, technology providers, financiers, & civil society to advance Desh Ki Raftaar by building a safe, smart, sustainable, & multimodal mobility ecosystem integrating buses, metro, taxis, and last-mile solutions.

Prawaas 5.0 Exhibition is the commercial and innovation engine of India's flagship multimodal transport platform. Designed as a high-impact B2B marketplace, the exhibition brings together vehicle manufacturers, mobility solution providers, technology companies, startups, financiers, and public authorities to showcase, connect and collaborate on the future of passenger transport in India.

Event Spectrum

- Global Exhibition
- Conference
- Workshops
- Bharat Prawaas Awards
- BOCI Dialogue
- Startup Pitches
- B2B Partnering
- Networking Dinners

Event Highlights

- **36** STATES & UTs OF INDIA
- **1500+** INDUSTRY DELEGATES
- **10000+** BUS & CAR OPERATORS
- **60+** EXPERT SPEAKERS
- **300+** LEADING EXHIBITORS
- **15000+** BUSINESS VISITORS

Host Association: AGPVST

Co-Host Association: GUJARAT TOURIST VEHICLES OPERATOR'S ASSOCIATION

Event Curator: MM ACTIV Sci-Tech Communications

Media Partner: COACH BUILDERS INDIA

Exhibitor Tariff

Category	₹/Sqm.	US $
Raw Space	₹ 13000/-	$ 175
Shell Space	₹ 14000/-	$ 190

Plus 18% GST

For participation opportunities please write to secretariat@prawaas.com

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Sita Singh & Sons Becomes First AIS-153 Certified Bus Body Builder in Haryana

Sita Singh & Sons Private Limited has become the first bus body builder in Haryana to secure AIS-153 certification, under the guidance of Deepak Rajput. The certification applies to school buses across all OEM platforms, covering both 3x2 and 3x3 seating layouts, demonstrating the company's unwavering commitment to passenger safety and regulatory compliance.

A long-standing name in the bus body building industry, Sita Singh & Sons operates one of North India's largest manufacturing facilities, a 20-acre plant in the Delhi-NCR region. Its

extensive capabilities include school and staff buses, luxury 12-metre coaches, 13.5-metre sleeper buses, load bodies, and in-house seat manufacturing, positioning the company as a full-spectrum bus body solutions provider.

“This certification marks a significant milestone for us. With this achievement, we are targeting a production of around 1,000 vehicles per month, further strengthening our ability to meet growing demand while maintaining the highest safety standards,” said CEO Samarth Barar.

Founded in 1965, Sita Singh & Sons has been a pioneer in Indian bus body manufacturing, blending decades of expertise with modern technology to deliver high-quality, safe, and compliant vehicles. Securing AIS-153 certification reinforces the company’s leadership in safety-focused bus manufacturing and positions it as a trusted partner for OEMs, state transport undertakings, and private fleet operators across India.

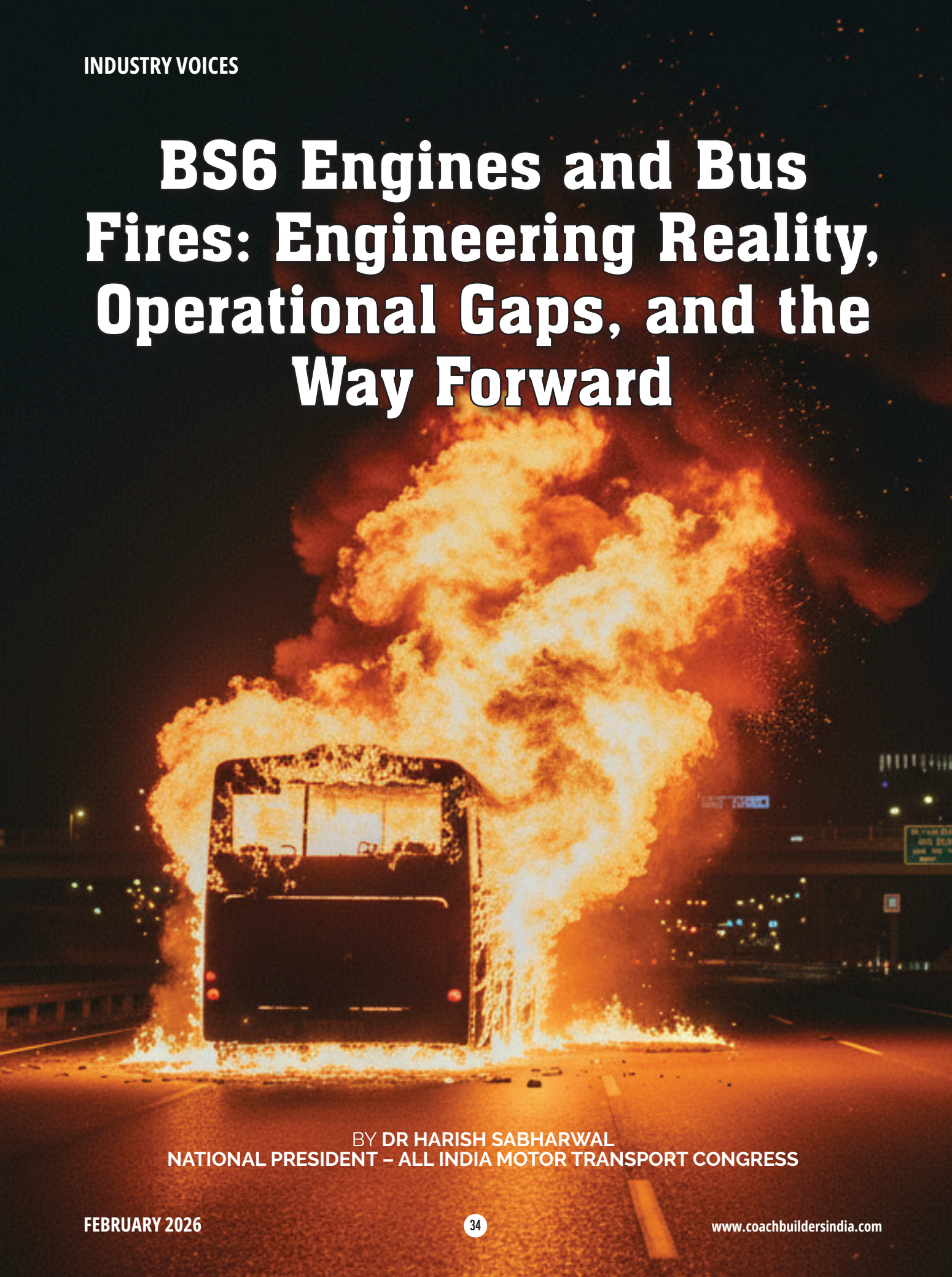
The milestone underscores the company’s proactive approach to regulatory compliance and passenger safety. By achieving certification across a diverse portfolio of school bus variants, Sita Singh & Sons not only validates its engineering, testing, and documentation processes but also sets a benchmark for other bus body builders in the region.

With AIS-153 certification, Sita Singh & Sons is well-positioned to lead the region in delivering school buses that meet the highest safety standards, enabling OEMs and fleet operators to upgrade their fleets confidently. The company’s achievement not only reinforces its reputation for quality and regulatory compliance but also sets a benchmark for safe and reliable bus manufacturing in Haryana and North India, supporting the broader modernization of the country’s school transportation ecosystem.

“WE NEVER COMPROMISE ON STANDARDS OR REGULATIONS. PASSENGER SAFETY, ESPECIALLY FOR SCHOOL BUSES, IS OUR TOP PRIORITY. OUR IN-HOUSE CAD AND CAE CAPABILITIES ENSURE EVERY VEHICLE MEETS THE LATEST NORMS AND REGULATORY STANDARDS.”

DEEPAK RAJPUT,
HEAD OF R&D AND HOMOLOGATION,
SITA SINGH & SONS PVT. LTD.

BS6 Engines and Bus Fires: Engineering Reality, Operational Gaps, and the Way Forward



BY **DR HARISH SABHARWAL**
NATIONAL PRESIDENT – ALL INDIA MOTOR TRANSPORT CONGRESS

India's transition to Bharat Stage VI (BS6) emission norms in April 2020 marked one of the most significant upgrades in the country's automotive history in reducing vehicular pollution and cleaner air.The move brought Indian standards closer to European benchmarks and drastically reduced permissible levels of particulate matter (PM) and nitrogen oxides (NOx). For public transport fleets, this transition meant adopting advanced combustion and emission-control technologies.

Yet, the recent bus fire tragedies in states like Rajasthan and Maharashtra have sparked a difficult question: are BS6 engines inadvertently contributing to fire risks, or are systemic safety failures to blame? The debate is not just technical—it touches on regulation, industry practices, and passenger safety. Concerns range from higher operating temperatures and increased wiring complexity to elevated fuel pressures and overall fire risks. A closer technical and operational examination is necessary to separate perception from engineering reality.

What Changed with BS6?

BS6 is not a minor calibration update; it is a systems-level transformation. Compared to BS4 engines, BS6 diesel engines incorporate high-pressure common rail fuel injection, advanced Exhaust Gas Recirculation (EGR), Diesel Particulate Filters (DPF), and in many heavy-duty applications, Selective Catalytic Reduction (SCR). These systems are monitored and controlled by sophisticated Engine Control Units (ECUs) supported by multiple sensors.

The result is cleaner combustion, better fuel atomization, and significantly lower emissions. However, these gains come with greater mechanical and electronic complexity. And complexity, if not supported by equally robust maintenance practices, can expose operational vulnerabilities.

Do BS6 Engines Run Hotter?

One of the most common concerns is that BS6 engines operate at higher temperatures, thereby increasing fire risk. This perception largely stems from two aspects: higher injection pressures and DPF regeneration cycles. High-pressure fuel injection improves combustion efficiency and reduces soot formation. Meanwhile, the DPF periodically undergoes regeneration - a controlled process where accumulated soot is burned off at elevated temperatures. During active regeneration, exhaust temperatures can exceed 500°C–600°C.

However, these processes are engineered within defined safety limits. Thermal shielding, calibrated cooling systems, and heat-resistant materials are integral to BS6 engine design. In well-maintained vehicles, temperature levels remain within controlled thresholds. The risk arises not from the technology itself but from improper maintenance. A clogged DPF, failed regeneration cycles, or neglected cooling systems can lead to abnormal heat accumulation. In fleet operations where downtime directly impacts revenue, preventive maintenance is sometimes delayed - and that is where vulnerabilities begin to surface.

- BS6 engines rely on Diesel Particulate Filters (DPF) and Selective Catalytic Reduction (SCR) to meet stringent emission standards.
- DPF regeneration cycles can push exhaust temperatures above 600˚C.
- In tightly packed bus engine bays, inadequate insulation or poor ventilation can turn these hotspots into ignition risks.
- Maintenance lapses—like clogged filters or faulty sensors—can exacerbate heat buildup, raising the probability of fire.

Wiring Complexity and Electrical Risks

BS6 compliance requires more sensors, ECUs, and wiring harnesses than older BS4 engines. BS6 buses rely heavily on sensors to monitor NOx levels, exhaust temperature, fuel pressure, air-fuel ratios, and after-treatment performance. This naturally means more wiring harnesses, connectors, and electronic control modules.

Greater wiring density does increase potential fault points. Electrical short circuits remain one of the most common causes of bus fires. Damaged insulation, loose connections, rodent interference, or exposure to moisture can create ignition sources within the engine bay.

- The complexity increases the chance of short circuits, especially when buses are built or retrofitted by local body builders with inconsistent quality standards.
- Fires often originate not from the engine itself but from faulty electrical installations, compounded by flammable interiors and overcrowding.

A critical distinction must be made between OEM-designed systems and post-delivery modifications. In many cases, additional lighting systems, entertainment units, or unauthorized retrofits add electrical loads that were not originally designed into the vehicle. Such modifications, particularly when executed without adherence to engineering standards, significantly elevate fire risk. Thus, the issue is not wiring complexity per se, but the quality of installation, inspection, and oversight.

High Fuel Pressure: A Cause for Concern?

BS6 engines operate with common rail systems exceeding 2,000 bar of fuel pressure. While this may sound alarming, high-pressure injection has been standard practice in Europe and other regulated markets for years. Under proper conditions, these systems are safe and reliable. However, fuel leaks in high-pressure systems can atomize diesel into fine

- High-pressure common rail systems make fuel leaks are more volatile.
- Poor-quality connectors or neglected maintenance can result in leakage or rupture in fuel lines can be catastrophic, as atomized fuel ignites more easily.

mist, increasing the possibility of ignition if exposed to hot surfaces. Again, maintenance is the determining factor. Degraded seals, improperly secured fuel lines, non-OEM spare parts, or contamination can create vulnerabilities. Routine inspection of fuel systems and adherence to manufacturer guidelines are critical to minimizing risk.

Are Bus Fires Increasing Because of BS6?

It is tempting to draw a direct link between BS6 adoption and bus fire incidents. However, bus fires are typically multi-factor events. They can be triggered by electrical short circuits, coolant system failures, brake overheating, accidental collisions, or poor-quality repairs. India's operating environment compounds these risks. High ambient temperatures, heavy traffic congestion, dust exposure, and long duty cycles place immense stress on vehicles.

In such conditions, even minor lapses in maintenance can escalate into serious incidents. Importantly, advanced technologies - whether BS6 diesel engines or electric drivetrains - demand ecosystem readiness. Upgraded hardware must be matched by upgraded service capabilities.

- The tragedies in Jaisalmer, Buldhana and others highlight that bus fires are rarely caused by a single factor.
- Flammable interiors, jammed exits, inflammable cargo and overcrowding make buses deathtraps once a fire starts.
- Thousands of small-scale body builders operate with limited oversight, making uniform safety enforcement difficult.
- Without a collaborative ecosystem approach—involving regulators, manufacturers, operators, and body builders—BS6 technology alone cannot guarantee safety.

The Maintenance Ecosystem Gap

The transition to BS6 significantly raised the technological threshold for heavy commercial vehicles. However, the supporting ecosystem has not always evolved at the same pace. Many fleet operators, including state transport undertakings, operate under financial pressure.

Preventive maintenance is sometimes deferred. Smaller workshops may lack advanced diagnostic tools. Technicians may not be fully trained to handle DPF systems or interpret ECU fault codes accurately. Precision engineering requires precision upkeep. When maintenance shifts from preventive to reactive, the margin for error narrows considerably.

Strengthening Fire Risk Mitigation

Rather than framing the debate as a technological flaw, the focus should be on systemic strengthening. India has already begun moving in this direction. The Automotive Industry Standard AIS-135 lays down requirements for Fire Detection and Suppression Systems (FDSS) in buses, reflecting a growing policy emphasis on early fire detection and automatic response mechanisms in passenger transport vehicles. The Ministry of Road Transport & Highways (MoRTH) has further amended AIS-135 to make fire alarm, fire protection, and suppression systems mandatory for passenger and school buses. AIS-153 (Bus Body Code) sets uniform standards for bus design, construction quality, and safety systems. It ensures structural integrity, emergency exits, seating, and ITS equipment across all manufacturers. These measures are specifically aimed at managing heat, smoke, and fire risks and significantly reducing occupant casualties in the event of an incident.

To prevent bus fires, India must:

- Mandate fire-resistant interiors and emergency exits.
- Enforce strict certification for bus body builders.
- Conduct regular audits of wiring and fuel systems.
- Define Luggage Limits as in Trains & Airplanes.
- Strict Enforcement & Ban on Carriage of Commercial Goods in Buses.
- Train operators and passengers in evacuation protocols.

- Stricter safety audits and certification for bus body builders.
- Mandatory fire-resistant materials in interiors.
- Regular maintenance checks on wiring and fuel systems.
- Greater awareness among operators and passengers about evacuation protocols.

However, regulatory mandates are only one layer of safety. Enhanced pre-trip inspection protocols - including thermal checks, inspection of fuel lines, and verification of electrical integrity - should become standard operational practice, particularly for long-distance and high-duty-cycle buses. Preventive inspections remain one of the most effective risk-reduction tools available to fleet operators. Technician upskilling programs focused specifically on BS6 after-treatment systems are equally essential. DPFs, SCR units, and electronically controlled fuel systems require precise diagnostics and calibrated servicing. Without adequate training and diagnostic tools, even minor faults can escalate into safety risks.

Conclusion

From an engineering standpoint, BS6 engines are not inherently more prone to fires. They are more advanced, more sensor-driven, and more maintenance-sensitive. Fire incidents are rarely the result of a single technological feature; they usually reflect a combination of operational stress, maintenance gaps, and oversight weaknesses.

Blaming emission norms oversimplifies a complex systems issue. Cleaner engines are a necessary step in India's environmental journey. Ensuring safety within that transition requires institutional strengthening - better training, stronger compliance, and improved operational discipline. BS6 represents technological progress. The real question is whether the ecosystem supporting it is progressing at the same speed.

Cleaner buses must also be safer buses. The ongoing discussion around BS6 engines and bus fires is not just about technology—it is about accountability, enforcement, and valuing human life.

About the Author

Dr. Harish Sabharwal is the National President of the All India Motor Transport Congress (AIMTC) and the owner of Sabharwal Travels. A veteran transport entrepreneur, he has decades of experience in the passenger transport sector and is a strong advocate for policy reforms, road safety, and the welfare of transport operators and drivers across India.

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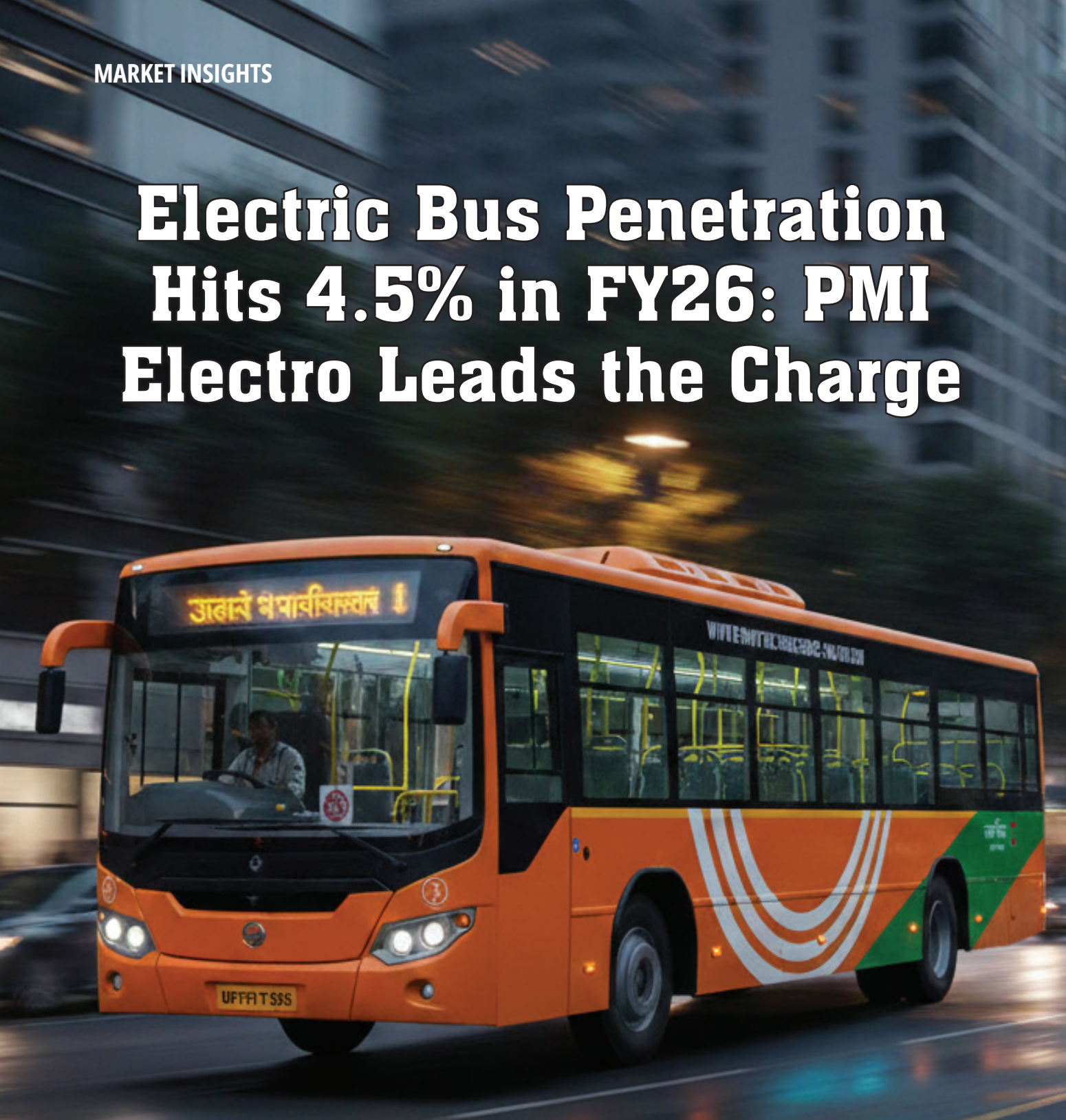
Electric Bus Penetration Hits 4.5% in FY26: PMI Electro Leads the Charge



Electric bus penetration rises to 4.5% in FY26 on steady fleet rollouts and strong order pipelines, with PMI Electro, Switch Mobility and Olectra driving adoption under FAME-II and PM e-Bus Sewa-backed tenders.

BY **ABHISHEK NAIK**

Electric buses now account for 4.5% of India's total bus sales in FY26 so far, up from 3.5% in FY25, signalling steady progress in public transport electrification. The growth signals that central and state government tenders are increasingly translating into real-world fleet deployment.

According to Vahan data, 4,158 electric buses were sold out of 91,574 total buses in FY26 (till February 16). In FY25, electric bus sales stood at 3,317 units out of 95,641 buses sold. While overall bus volumes have remained broadly stable year-on-year, the share of electric buses has shown a clear upward trend.

PMI Leads Electric Bus Sales

PMI Electro Mobility emerged as the leading electric bus supplier in FY26 so far, delivering 1,006 units, nearly a quarter of total e-bus sales during the period. Switch Mobility followed with 879 units, while Olectra clocked 853 buses.

JBM Auto reported 817 units, placing it close behind the top three. Tata Motors and Volvo Eicher Commercial Vehicles recorded 175 and 42 electric bus sales, respectively.

Industry executives attribute the improved penetration to accelerated rollout under central government schemes such as FAME-II and the PM e-Bus Sewa Scheme, along with fresh state-level procurement programmes.

Deployment Momentum Builds

Deployment activity has gathered pace in recent weeks. Around 1,000 electric buses have been rolled out since January 1 across Delhi, Assam, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Odisha. Delhi alone inducted 500 buses on February 9, marking one of the largest single-day additions to a public transport fleet in the country.

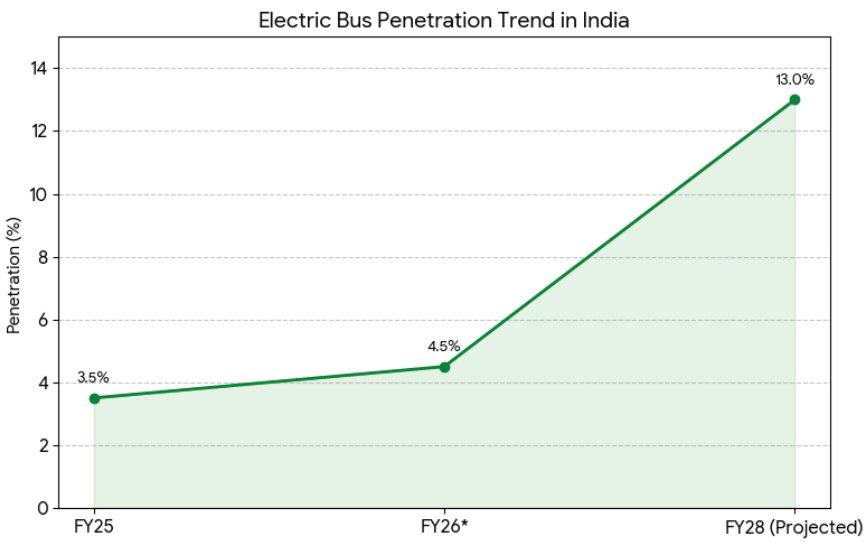
Sector experts highlight that the country's largest-ever electric bus tender for 10,900 units, which concluded in December 2025, is expected to further accelerate adoption. This tender builds on the momentum generated under the PM e-Bus Sewa Scheme.

Strong Order Pipeline

According to CareEdge Ratings, the combined annual production capacity of the four leading electric bus manufacturers stands at approximately 32,000 units. The sector is supported by an order book of around 31,000 buses across State Transport Undertakings (STUs), gross cost contract (GCC) arrangements and private fleet contracts.

The Centre has finalised tenders for over 16,568 electric buses across two major schemes. This includes 5,668 buses under the PM e-Bus Sewa Scheme (against a planned 10,000) and 10,900 buses under the PM E-Drive programme (against a target of 14,028). Deployment under the PM E-Drive initiative is expected to begin in FY27.

Beyond central initiatives, states such as Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu are actively advancing their own procurement plans. CareEdge Ratings projects electric bus penetration to reach 13% by FY28, with annual sales potentially touching 20,000 units as adoption expands into tier II and III cities.



Electric Bus Sales Numbers by OEM

PMI Electro	1,006
Switch Mobility	879
Olectra	853
JBM Auto	817
Tata Motors	175
Volvo Eicher	42

This report is based on a news article published by The Financial Express titled "Electric bus penetration rises to 4.5% in FY26".

Karnataka Bus Operators Allege Harassment Amid NHRC Safety Rule Rollout

Private bus operators in Karnataka have raised concerns over alleged harassment by the Transport Department as the February 28, 2026, deadline for compliance with new safety regulations approaches.

Following multiple fatal fire incidents, the state government, under the direction of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), has mandated strict structural changes for all buses. The new rules include:

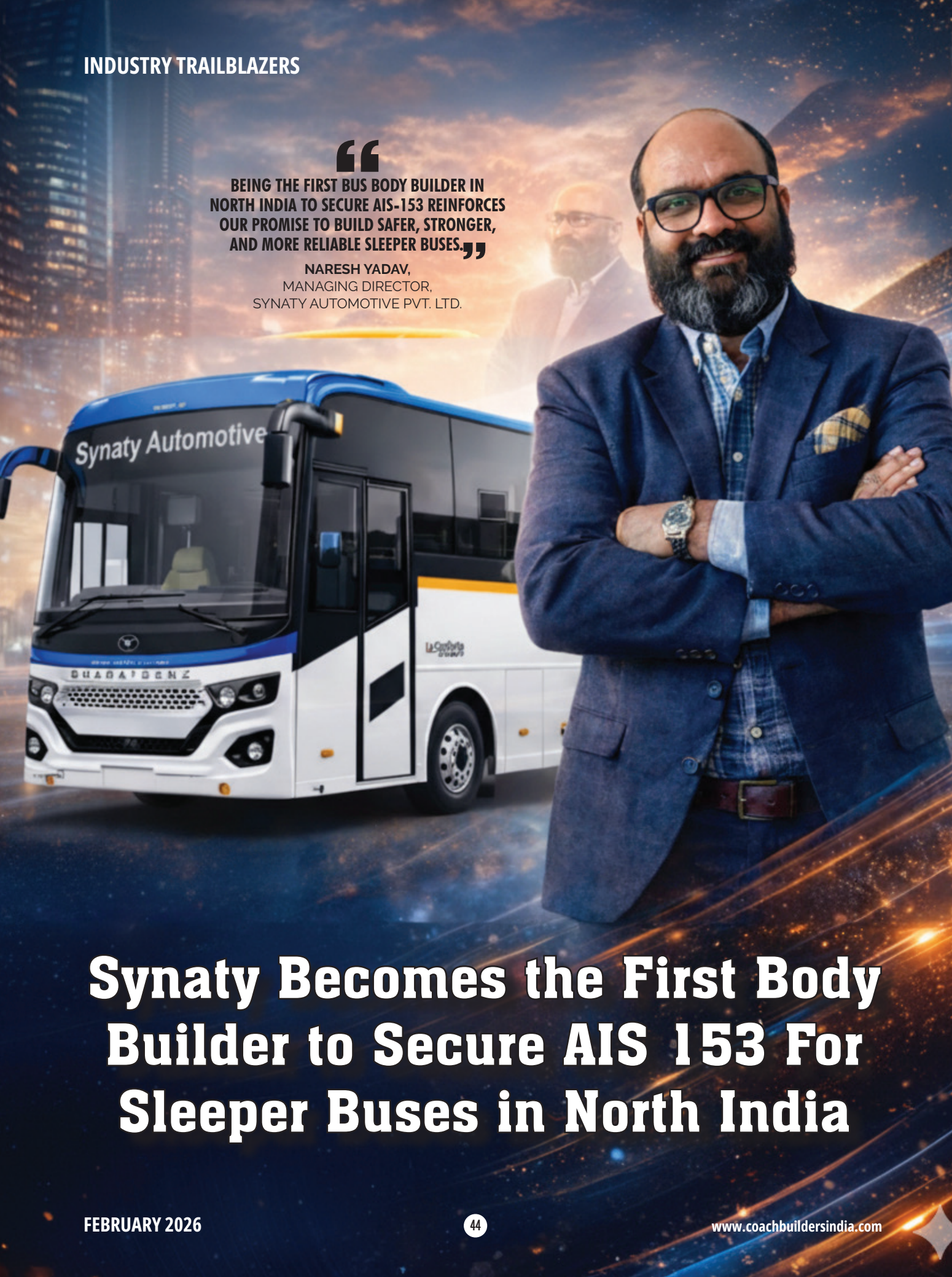
- Removal of driver partition doors
- Removal of sleeper berth sliders
- Installation of Fire Detection and Suppression Systems (FDSS)
- Minimum 10 kg fire extinguishers (Green Zone)
- Ban on commercial goods transportation
- Compliance with approved layouts, emergency exits, and safety signage
- Operators allege that officials have begun stopping buses and issuing fines even before the deadline, leading to delays and passenger harassment.
- Compliance Progress and Challenges

According to Nataraj Sharma, president of the Federation of Karnataka State Private Transport Associations, most vehicles have already met the directives. However, FDSS installation and renewal of permits for rooftop luggage carriers remain major hurdles for many owners.

“We have until the 28th to finish, and almost everything else is completed,” he said.

Operators have also questioned the practicality of the rules. The mandatory removal of partition doors in sleeper buses has been called “unscientific,” as it increases cabin noise and reduces air-conditioning efficiency.

The Federation is urging the government to form a research committee including technical experts, manufacturers, and bus builders to ensure safety measures, such as emergency exits and roof hatches, are truly effective.



> **BEING THE FIRST BUS BODY BUILDER IN NORTH INDIA TO SECURE AIS-153 REINFORCES OUR PROMISE TO BUILD SAFER, STRONGER, AND MORE RELIABLE SLEEPER BUSES.**
>
> **NARESH YADAV,**
> MANAGING DIRECTOR,
> SYNATY AUTOMOTIVE PVT. LTD.

Synaty Becomes the First Body Builder to Secure AIS 153 For Sleeper Buses in North India

Synaty Automotive Pvt. Ltd. has become the first bus body builder in North India to secure the AIS-153 certification for sleeper buses from the International Centre for Automotive Technology (ICAT). This achievement places Synaty among a select group of manufacturers nationwide who have obtained this now-mandatory safety standard.

The milestone underscores the company's commitment to safety, quality, and industry excellence, reinforcing its reputation as a leader in bus body manufacturing.

Located in Neemrana's industrial area, Synaty Automotive has steadily built a name for delivering robust and innovative bus body solutions. The company specializes in custom designs, including luxury coaches, sleeper buses, and seater-sleeper variants. Strategic investments in quality engineering, skilled talent, and stringent testing ensure that all products meet global standards.

Reflecting on the achievement, Naresh Yadav, Managing Director of Synaty Automotive, said, "This is more than a certification; it's a testament to our unwavering commitment to passenger safety and excellence in bus body manufacturing. Being the first bus body builder in North India to secure AIS-153 reinforces our promise to build safer, stronger, and more reliable sleeper buses."

The AIS-153 certification strengthens Synaty's standing alongside other leading bus body manufacturers in India with advanced compliance credentials. The achievement also enhances the company's profile among fleet operators, transport agencies, and OEM partners who prioritize certified safety standards.

Industry experts note that as regulations around bus body safety tighten, particularly for long-distance and overnight travel, AIS-153-certified bus body builders will lead market demand and set benchmarks in quality, durability, and passenger protection.

AIS 153 Raising the Bar for India's Bus Manufacturing Ecosystem

BY **MOHIT GARG**
CEO & MANAGING DIRECTOR, INALCO

From September 2025, AIS 153 will no longer be just a regulatory document, it will become the defining framework for how buses in India are engineered, built, and certified. At INALCO Private Limited, we see this not merely as a compliance requirement, but as a structural transformation of the entire bus manufacturing ecosystem.

AIS 153 represents a decisive move toward measurable safety, standardized engineering practices, and technology-led mobility. The emphasis on Noise, Vibration, and Harshness (NVH) limits introduces scientific benchmarks into passenger comfort - defining clear parameters for interior noise levels, vibration thresholds, and structural frequency performance. This shift encourages stronger body structures, better material integrity, and refined fabrication processes.

Equally significant is the integration of Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS), including GPS tracking, CCTV surveillance with 30-day recording, passenger information systems, and driver monitoring. These mandates signal that buses are no longer just transport vehicles - they are becoming connected mobility platforms aligned with global standards.

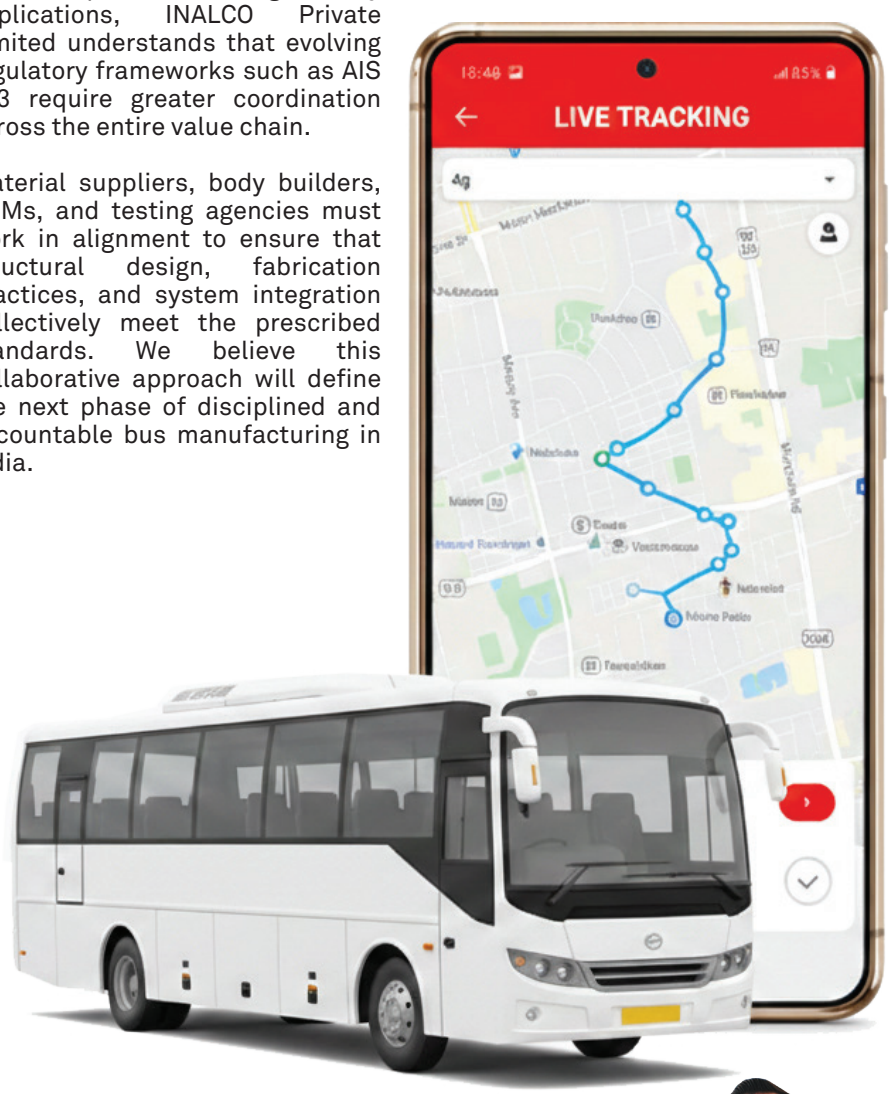
Fire safety provisions under AIS-135, along with stricter emergency exit norms and the prohibition of driver partition doors, reflect a deeper focus on occupant protection and evacuation efficiency. The structured requirements for escape hatches, emergency door placement, and roof equipment positioning demand careful design planning and disciplined execution.

For bus body builders, AIS 153 requires a more integrated engineering approach. Documentation, type approval testing through agencies such as ARAI, ICAT, and CIRT, and compliance validation will now be central to the manufacturing process. This formalization will elevate industry credibility while creating a level playing field built on quality and accountability.

As a manufacturer of aluminium flat rolled products serving mobility applications, INALCO Private Limited understands that evolving regulatory frameworks such as AIS 153 require greater coordination across the entire value chain.

Material suppliers, body builders, OEMs, and testing agencies must work in alignment to ensure that structural design, fabrication practices, and system integration collectively meet the prescribed standards. We believe this collaborative approach will define the next phase of disciplined and accountable bus manufacturing in India.

Regulations of this scale inevitably bring operational challenges and cost considerations. However, they also create an opportunity for modernization, consolidation, and global competitiveness. The industry now has a clear direction toward safer, smarter, and more passenger-centric buses. AIS 153 is not just a mandate; it is a milestone. The future of India's bus industry will be defined by those who embrace it with preparedness, technical clarity, and long-term vision.



About the Author

Mohit Garg is the CEO & Managing Director of INALCO and a recognised leader in India's aluminium sector. With over a decade of experience across ferrous and non-ferrous industries, he drives the company's strategic growth and industry influence. Known for his clarity of vision and decisive leadership, Mohit is shaping Inalco's role in the future of aluminium manufacturing.

MZA Warsaw Exercises Option for 79 Additional Solaris Electric Buses

Miejskie Zakłady Autobusowe (MZA), Warsaw's municipal transport operator, has exercised a contract extension option with Solaris Bus & Coach for an additional 79 electric buses. This follow-up order mirrors the initial agreement signed in September 2025, bringing the total procurement under this specific contract to 158 zero-emission vehicles. The expansion comprises 50 articulated Urbino 18 electric units and 29 standard 12-meter Urbino 12 electric buses.

The newly ordered fleet features Solaris's latest modular drive system architecture, which eliminates the traditional engine tower to maximize passenger capacity and interior space. Technical specifications include Solaris High Energy batteries with capacities exceeding 500 kWh for the 12-meter models and 700 kWh for the articulated versions. All vehicles

will utilize plug-in charging systems, with deliveries scheduled for completion in the first half of 2027.

This acquisition reinforces Warsaw's position as a European leader in sustainable transit. Solaris is currently fulfilling multiple orders for MZA, totaling 208 Urbino electric buses in various stages of production and delivery. Upon completion, these additions will significantly bolster MZA's existing fleet of 163 Solaris e-buses, advancing the city's transition toward a fully zero-emission public transport network.

Ashok Leyland to Export Electric Buses to Europe from UAE Manufacturing Hub

Ashok Leyland, the flagship of the Hinduja Group, has announced plans to commence production of electric buses for the European market at its Ras Al Khaimah (RAK) facility in the United Arab Emirates. Managing Director and CEO Shenu Agarwal confirmed that the plant will begin manufacturing battery-electric vehicles (BEVs) within the next 12 months. This strategic pivot positions the UAE facility as a central export hub for Western markets, effectively replacing original plans for a dedicated manufacturing site in Spain.

The production line will focus on the Switch Mobility E1, a model engineered specifically for European technical standards, alongside the EiV12. This expansion is backed by robust financial health, with the company reporting a Q3 profit of ₹796 crore. To support its electric vehicle vertical, Ashok Leyland

has earmarked ₹600 crore for its operational arm, OHM Global Mobility, while exploring external funding to fulfill a current order book of 1,350 units.

This move signals a significant shift in the global supply chain for Indian OEMs. By utilizing the UAE as a springboard into Europe, Ashok Leyland optimizes logistics and manufacturing costs while challenging established players in mature zero-emission transit markets. This development underscores the UAE's rising prominence as a specialized automotive manufacturing node for global distribution.

BYD Secures Contract for Electric Fleet Expansion in Taranto, Italy

BYD Europe has been officially awarded a tender by the Municipality of Taranto to supply six 12-meter electric buses and three charging units for the local operator, Kyma Mobilità. Following a ten-month evaluation period, the award decision confirms BYD's narrow victory, scoring 85.54 points to edge out KMobility (Karsan's Italian dealer) by a margin of just 0.37 points. Other bidders included Pagliani Service, Menarini Spa, and Iveco Spa.

The contract is valued at approximately €3.12 million, a competitive reduction from the original tender estimate of €3.81 million. BYD will deploy its eBus B12.b model, which features a low-floor design and the manufacturer's proprietary Blade Battery technology. These Class I vehicles are required to accommodate at least 80 passengers, utilize regenerative braking, and include dual Combo2 plug-in charging sockets to support an expected annual service of 80,000 km per unit.

This win solidifies BYD's presence in the Italian market, where the brand has recently achieved significant market share in the commercial vehicle segment. For the European bus industry, the result highlights the intense competition between Chinese OEMs and local distributors, emphasizing the growing demand for high-capacity, zero-emission transit solutions in Southern Europe.

Iveco Bus Launches 25 Articulated E-Buses for Saint-Nazaire BRT

Saint-Nazaire Agglomeration has officially inaugurated its first fleet of articulated electric buses, marking a milestone for the HélYce+ electromobility project. Supplied by Iveco Bus, the 25 battery-electric GX 437 ELEC LINIUM models (marketed as E-WAY LINIUM) entered service on January 24, 2026. This deployment serves the high-capacity Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) lines of the Stran public transport network in the French coastal region.

The delivery is the first phase of a larger electrification program. An additional 15 units are scheduled for delivery between 2027 and 2030, bringing the total dedicated fleet to 40 articulated e-buses. To support the rollout, Iveco Bus partnered with ABB E-mobility and Dalkia Electrotechnics to provide a turnkey solution. This includes five terminal charging stations featuring upward pantograph systems and a specialized depot equipped with 40 charging domes for overnight power management.

For the European transport sector, this project highlights the shift toward integrated "system-as-a-service" contracts, where OEMs manage vehicles, infrastructure, and smart charging software. By replacing diesel capacity with zero-emission articulated units, Saint-Nazaire aims to improve urban air quality and noise levels while increasing the resilience and inclusivity of its transit infrastructure.

Reading Buses Debuts First Electric Double-Decker Fleet via ZEBRA 2 Funding

Reading Buses has officially launched its first fleet of 24 Alexander Dennis (ADL) Enviro400EV battery-electric double-deckers into service. The vehicles, which entered operation on February 9, 2026, were funded through the UK Government's Zero-Emission Regional Bus Areas (ZEBRA 2) scheme in partnership with Reading Borough Council. These high-specification buses are deployed on the operator's flagship "purple 17" and "claret 21" routes, replacing existing biogas models which will be cascaded to phase out older diesel units.

Technically, the Enviro400EVs utilize the heavy-duty Voith Electrical Drive System (VEDS) paired with 472kWh battery packs, engineered for full-day operational autonomy. To support the transition, 13 dual-head fast chargers have been installed at the Great Knollys Street depot. The passenger experience is prioritized through a premium interior featuring social seating, glazed staircases, rooflights, and advanced audio-visual information systems.

This rollout marks a critical step in Reading's decarbonization strategy, with a further eight Enviro400EVs already on order for the "yellow 26" route. For the UK transport sector, the project highlights the continued efficacy of the ZEBRA funding model in enabling municipal operators to transition high-frequency urban corridors to zero-emission technology while maintaining premium service standards.

New Flyer Secures Order for 100 Low-Emission Buses from Washington Metro

New Flyer of America Inc., a subsidiary of NFI Group, has announced that the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (Metro) has exercised options for 100 forty-foot Xcelsior transit buses. The order, drawn from the manufacturer's Q4 backlog, includes 75 hybrid-electric units and 25 Xcelsior CHARGE NG battery-electric models. This procurement builds upon an initial base order of 100 hybrid buses established in February 2025 as part of a five-year contract.

Supported by a mix of federal, state, and local funding—including the FTA Low or No Emission grant program—the fleet expansion is a core component of Metro's Strategic Transformation Plan. The 40-foot CHARGE NG models feature a simplified propulsion architecture and next-generation high-energy batteries, which New Flyer indicates can reduce lifecycle maintenance costs by up to $140,000 per vehicle compared to traditional diesel assets.

This fleet modernization aligns with Metro's goal to transition to a 100% zero-emission fleet by 2045. For the North American bus industry, the deal emphasizes the continued reliance on hybrid-electric technology to maintain range security across expansive service areas while scaling up battery-electric infrastructure. The vehicles also satisfy Buy America requirements, supporting domestic manufacturing and the regional transit authority's modernization objectives.

FlixBus and Excelsior Deepen Partnership with New Yutong Fleet

FlixBus has announced an expansion of its partnership with Dorset-based operator Excelsior, part of the Go-Ahead Group, to bolster its network in the South of England. Following a successful collaboration launched in May 2025, the two companies have signed a long-term agreement to increase capacity ahead of the 2026 spring and summer seasons. The expansion is a direct response to exceptional passenger demand and aims to improve regional connectivity across Dorset, Hampshire, and London.

As part of this growth, Excelsior will integrate two new Yutong GT12 coaches into its FlixBus-branded fleet. These vehicles are built to FlixBus's premium specifications and will join the operator's four existing Temsa HD12 coaches. To support the increased service frequency, Excelsior is actively recruiting additional drivers at its Poole and Bournemouth bases.

For the UK coach industry, this development highlights the continued success of the FlixBus "partnership model," which leverages the local operational expertise of established firms like Excelsior. By utilizing the Go-Ahead Group's subsidiary, FlixBus is effectively scaling its footprint in the competitive express coach market, while Excelsior benefits from cross-promoting its local bus services to a broader national audience.

FlixBus Expands Welsh Network through Watts Coaches Partnership

FlixBus has announced a significant expansion of its Welsh operations, introducing six new daily return services between Swansea, Cardiff, Heathrow Airport, and Central London starting February 15, 2026. The move strengthens connectivity across the South Wales corridor, adding key stops at Newport, Bridgend, Bristol, Reading, and Swindon. This strategic growth is designed to meet surging demand for affordable long-distance travel, specifically targeting the school half-term period and the university population in Swansea.

The expansion is underpinned by a deepened partnership with Cardiff-based operator Watts Coaches, which joined the FlixBus network in early 2025. To support the increased frequency, Watts Coaches has added two new FlixBus-branded Temsa HD12 coaches to its fleet. These 12.2-meter vehicles are equipped with DAF MX11 Euro 6 engines and are fully PSVAR-compliant, featuring 53 seats, wheelchair lifts, and modern passenger amenities including USB charging ports and air conditioning.

For the UK coach industry, this development signals FlixBus's aggressive 2026 growth strategy, aiming to replicate its previous year's "hyper-growth" trajectory. By leveraging the local expertise of established B2B partners like Watts Coaches, FlixBus continues to challenge incumbent operators, positioning itself as a primary competitor in the UK's long-distance express coach market.

Equipmake Secures £2.4M Order for 23 Electric Drivetrains from Agrale

UK-based electrification specialist Equipmake has announced a new contract to supply 23 integrated electric drivetrain systems to South American vehicle manufacturer Agrale. Valued at £2.4 million, this follow-on order builds upon a previous agreement for 50 units currently being deployed in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The deal reinforces Equipmake's growing footprint in the South American zero-emission transit market.

The order features Equipmake's completely integrated electric drivetrain system, which includes a proprietary electric motor, inverter, and control systems, paired with a custom battery pack and select third-party components. These systems are designed to provide a turnkey solution for bus manufacturers, optimizing power density and energy efficiency for demanding urban transit cycles. CEO Ian Foley noted that the repeat order stems from the successful operational performance of the initial fleet in Buenos Aires.

For the global bus industry, this partnership highlights the increasing trend of OEMs outsourcing specialized EV powertrain technology to accelerate speed-to-market. By leveraging Equipmake's modular technology, Agrale can scale its electric bus production without the heavy R&D overhead of developing internal drivetrains, while Equipmake cements its position as a critical B2B supplier for sustainable transport networks in emerging markets.

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