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Silkyara Tunnel Rescue: The Sarvottam Jeevan Raksha Padak

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Silkyara Tunnel Rescue: The Sarvottam Jeevan Raksha Padak

Twelve rat-hole miners received the Sarvottam Jeevan Raksha Padak for their role in the Silkyara tunnel rescue. Union Minister **Nitin Gadkari** gave the medals on **5 August 2026**.

The rescue happened earlier. All **41 trapped workers** emerged safely on **28 November 2023**, day 17 of the effort.

The central distinction is between **the rescue date** and **the award event**. The award honours life-saving courage under very great danger to the rescuer.

Sources: pib.gov.in; xn--i1b5bzbybhfo5c8b4bxh.xn--11b7cb3a6a.xn--h2brj9c

1. What happened at Silkyara?

A collapse blocked the way out

On **12 November 2023**, part of the under-construction **Silkyara–Barkot tunnel** collapsed in Uttarkashi district, Uttarakhand. Debris blocked the exit for 41 workers.

The workers remained inside a built-up section beyond the blockage. Rescue teams supplied essentials while searching for a safe route through the debris.

The tunnel belongs to the **Char Dham highway project**. It lies on the Dharasu–Yamunotri section of **National Highway 134**. The wider programme improves roads towards Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath.

A road tunnel carries traffic through a hill. A blocked section can therefore cut off workers even when the space behind it remains usable.

Sources: uaoa.gov.in; pib.gov.in

Rescue, medical transfer and honours are different events

28 November 2023: all 41 workers were rescued. Counting 12 November as day one makes 28 November day 17.

29 November 2023: the Indian Air Force airlifted the rescued workers to **All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Rishikesh**. Health checks followed their escape.

21 December 2023: Chief Minister **Pushkar Singh Dhami** honoured the 12 miners with shawls and cheques of **₹50,000 each**.

5 August 2026: Gadkari presented their life-saving medals in New Delhi. The state reward and the central award were different honours.

For a rescue-date question, choose 28 November. The next day's medical airlift should not replace the date when the workers left the tunnel.

Sources: pib.gov.in; tribuneindia.com

> **Quick check 1.** Check 1: All 41 workers were rescued on 29 November 2023. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

2. How did the miners reach the workers?

Small-space skills finished the final passage

An **auger** is a spinning drilling tool. Rescuers used an auger machine to advance through the blockage, but blocks and equipment failure stopped progress.

The rat-hole miners then removed the remaining debris by hand. Their work finished the final stretch of roughly **15 metres**, inside a narrow space.

Workers excavated through the rescue pipe as the passage advanced. Steel pipes formed the escape route; the pipes were not substitutes for digging tools.

The trapped workers were brought out one by one on stretchers. The miners' skills in tight spaces helped complete the last link to them.

Rat-hole mining involves working through narrow passages, commonly associated with coal extraction. Honouring a rescue skill does not make hazardous mining safe.

Sources: uaoa.gov.in; tribuneindia.com; pib.gov.in

A lifeline pipe and an escape pipe do different jobs

A lifeline pipe carries supplies. Food, water and medicines helped sustain the workers before rescue became possible.

An escape pipe carries people. The larger passage had to connect rescuers with the trapped group before stretchers could pass through.

On 20 November, a new **six-inch lifeline** was finished. That supply line was not the passage used to bring out the workers.

Think of delivering food through a small opening in a locked room. Delivery helps the person survive, but a larger opening is needed for escape.

Rescue therefore required two linked tasks: keep the workers supplied, then create a safe exit. Completing one task did not automatically complete the other.

Sources: pib.gov.in; uaoa.gov.in

Keep workers supplied Food, water and medicines
Complete the passage Drilling, then manual digging
Bring out safely Workers leave on stretchers
The diagram separates life support from bringing workers out. Several rescue options were developed alongside the passage that ultimately reached the workers.

Sources: uaoa.gov.in

> **Quick check 2.** Check 2: The six-inch supply pipeline was the escape route used by the workers. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

3. Why did the rescue need several teams?

Manual digging depended on a wider effort

The miners finished the final link, but the rescue involved many organisations. Agencies supplied equipment, maintained life support and prepared alternative access routes.

The **National Disaster Response Force (NDRF)** and **State Disaster Response Force (SDRF)** supported rescue. The Indian Army and **Border Roads Organisation (BRO)** also helped.

Road access allowed heavy equipment to reach drilling positions. Vertical drilling provided another approach when horizontal work faced delays.

The **National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL)** coordinated tunnel-related work under the highway ministry. Technical specialists and experts from abroad helped assess rescue options.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi kept track of the effort. Uttarakhand's government, medical teams and district administration also supported the response.

The lesson is coordination under changing conditions. A skilled digging team still needs safe access, contact, medical support and equipment around it.

Sources: uaoa.gov.in; pib.gov.in

> **Quick check 3.** Check 3: The miners' final digging was part of a rescue involving several agencies. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

4. What does the Jeevan Raksha Padak recognise?

Life-saving courage has three grades

The **Jeevan Raksha Padak awards** were instituted in **1961**. The **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** runs the scheme.

The awards recognise humane acts that save lives. Examples include rescues during fires, drowning, accidents, natural calamities and mine emergencies.

Sarvottam Jeevan Raksha Padak: conspicuous courage under very great danger to the rescuer's life. Its one-time allowance is **₹2 lakh**.

Uttam Jeevan Raksha Padak: courage and prompt action under great danger to the rescuer's life. Its one-time allowance is **₹1.5 lakh**.

Jeevan Raksha Padak: courage and prompt action with the risk of grave bodily injury to the rescuer. Its one-time allowance is **₹1 lakh**.

Sarvottam is the highest grade within this scheme. It is not the name of India's highest civilian award overall.

Sources: xn--i1b5bzbybhfo5c8b4bxh.xn--11b7cb3a6a.xn--h2brj9c; pib.gov.in

The act and the danger matter

People from all walks of life are eligible. The awards can also be given posthumously.

Proposals go through an awards committee. The decoration includes a medallion and a certificate signed by the Union Home Minister.

The medal rewards an act of saving life, rather than a person's job title. A miner's ordinary occupation and a rare rescue are different reasons for honours.

Do not merge these medals with every gallantry award. Gallantry schemes have their own rules, and some also admit civilians.

The Home Ministry runs the life-saving scheme. The ministry or government presenting a decoration can be different from the ministry running its rules.

Sources: xn--i1b5bzbybhfo5c8b4bxh.xn--11b7cb3a6a.xn--h2brj9c; pib.gov.in

> **Quick check 4.** Check 4: Sarvottam is the highest of the three Jeevan Raksha Padak grades. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

5. What happened at the 2026 ceremony?

Gadkari gave the medals in New Delhi

Nitin Gadkari, Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways, presented the awards on **5 August 2026**. Minister of State **Harsh Malhotra** attended.

Each recipient received a medallion, certificate and miniature medal. Each was also granted **₹2,00,000**, disbursed online.

The 12 recipients were **Vaqeel Hasan, Munna, Ankur Kumar, Monu Kumar, Devendra and Mohd Rashid**. The others were **Firoz Qureshi, Jatin Kashyap, Shorabh Kashyap, Mohd Irshad, Nasruddin and Naseem**.

Keep three dates in sequence: the November 2023 rescue, December 2023 state honours and August 2026 national award event. A later award event does not change when the rescue happened.

Sources: pib.gov.in; newsonair.gov.in



The 5 August 2026 award ceremony in New Delhi. Credit: Press Information Bureau, Government of India. Official ceremony photographs. Reproduced under the PIB copyright policy; unmodified, displayed to fit.

> **Quick check 5.** Check 5: Harsh Malhotra, rather than Nitin Gadkari, conferred the awards at the 2026 ceremony. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

6. Review your understanding checks

This score lasts for this page session. The five practice MCQs below are a separate activity.

7. Questions and answers

Why is 29 November an easy date to confuse?

The rescued workers were airlifted for health checks that day. Their rescue from the tunnel had finished on 28 November.

Why honour miners when many agencies helped?

The miners faced danger while completing the final passage. Honouring their act does not erase the other teams' work.

Is the ₹50,000 state reward the central award allowance?

No. Dhami presented the state reward in December 2023. The national Sarvottam award carried a separate ₹2 lakh allowance.

Does Gadkari's role make this a highway-ministry award scheme?

No. The Home Ministry runs the scheme. Gadkari presented these medals as the Union road transport and highways minister.

8. Practice: 5 MCQs

Distinguish the rescue dates, supply route, award grades and presentation ceremony.

Practice MCQs

1. On 5 August 2026, which Union Minister conferred the Sarvottam Jeevan Raksha Padak on 12 rat-hole miners for the Silkyara tunnel rescue?

A. Harsh Malhotra

B. Rajnath Singh

C. Amit Shah

D. Nitin Gadkari

See answer ↓

2. When were all 41 workers evacuated from the collapsed Silkyara tunnel?

A. 12 November 2023

B. 5 August 2026

C. 28 November 2023

D. 29 November 2023

See answer ↓

3. Which distinction correctly describes the Silkyara rescue pipelines?

A. A supply pipe carried essentials; a larger rescue passage carried workers.

B. Both pipes were designed only for draining rainwater.

C. The six-inch supply line was the stretcher evacuation route.

D. The pipes replaced the need to remove debris.

See answer ↓

4. Which is the highest grade within the Jeevan Raksha Padak scheme?

A. Padma Shri

B. Jeevan Raksha Padak

C. Uttam Jeevan Raksha Padak

D. Sarvottam Jeevan Raksha Padak

See answer ↓

5. On which route was the Silkyara–Barkot tunnel being built under the Char Dham highway project?

A. Chennai–Bengaluru on National Highway 48

B. Dharasu–Yamunotri on National Highway 134

C. Delhi–Agra on the Yamuna Expressway

D. Mumbai–Pune on the Mumbai–Pune Expressway

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **D.**
   Nitin Gadkari conferred the decorations in New Delhi on 5 August 2026. He was the Union road transport and highways minister. Harsh Malhotra attended as Minister of State. Amit Shah and Rajnath Singh were not the presenters named for this ceremony.
   ↑ Q1
2. **C.**
   All 41 workers were rescued on 28 November 2023. The collapse occurred on 12 November. Their medical airlift followed on 29 November. The August 2026 date belongs to the award presentation, rather than the rescue.
   ↑ Q2
3. **A.**
   The lifeline pipeline carried food, water and medicines. Workers left through a larger rescue passage on stretchers. A six-inch supply line cannot serve the same purpose as a person-sized passage. Excavation was still needed to complete the rescue route.
   ↑ Q3
4. **D.**
   Sarvottam is the highest of the scheme's three grades. It recognises life-saving courage under very great danger to the rescuer's life. Uttam and Jeevan Raksha Padak are the other grades. Padma Shri belongs to a separate civilian award system.
   ↑ Q4
5. **B.**
   The tunnel lies on the Dharasu–Yamunotri section of National Highway 134 in Uttarakhand. It forms part of the Char Dham highway project. The other options name road corridors outside this tunnel's location. The similar names Yamuna and Yamunotri should not confuse the route.
   ↑ Q5

Quick-check answers

1. **False.** They were rescued on 28 November. The airlift to AIIMS Rishikesh took place on 29 November. ↑ 1

2. **False.** The small lifeline carried essentials. A separate, larger rescue passage allowed workers to leave on stretchers. ↑ 2
3. **True.** Manual digging finished the link. Other teams sustained the workers, moved equipment and supported safe rescue. ↑ 3
4. **True.** Sarvottam is followed by Uttam and Jeevan Raksha Padak. Their one-time allowances also differ. ↑ 4
5. **False.** Nitin Gadkari gave the medals. Harsh Malhotra attended as Minister of State. ↑ 5

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