

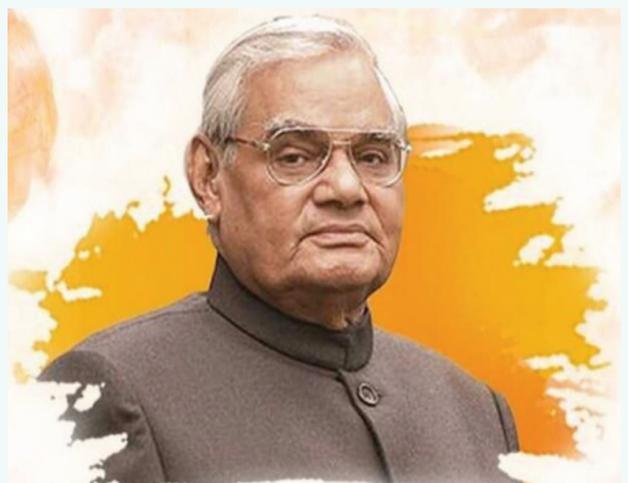
With 2025 rapidly drawing to an eventful conclusion, all that remains from the Confectionery Production team is to offer a note of thanks to all those who have played their part in our magazine, websites and event this year. We shall be offering a review of the year next week, but for now, it's safe to say that this has been a particularly memorable year in the grand scheme of things

the full value chain of the sweets and snacks industry. From major headaches caused by peak cocoa prices experienced in January, ongoing logistics uncertainties and heightened operating costs, EUDR's legislative sagas, through to the

## Bharat Ratna Atal Bihari Vajpayee Ji's An Enduring Inspiration of Dignity, Good Governance, and a Developed India

**Dr. Pankaj Shukla**

Today, December 19, 2025, as the nation stands in the final phase of the birth centenary year of Bharat Ratna Atal Bihari Vajpayee, this moment is not merely about recalling the past. It is a time for reflection, recommitment, and consciously carrying forward his ideals into the future. Atal Ji's life represents a rare and elevated tradition in Indian politics—one rooted in dignity, dialogue, restraint, tolerance, and an unwavering commitment to nation first. He was a leader who respected opponents, transformed disagreement into constructive debate, and treated politics as a moral and ethical responsibility. His legacy continues to shine like a guiding light in the hearts of Indians, particularly in Madhya Pradesh—his birthplace, Gwalior—where his memory is deeply embedded in public consciousness. In Bhopal, the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Hindi Vishwavidyalaya stands as a living testament to his farsighted vision. By strengthening higher education through the medium of Hindi, the university reinforces India's cultural roots and affirms Atal Ji's belief that national progress must be anchored in linguistic and cultural self-respect. As Dr. Pankaj Shukla, Founder, Chairman, and Managing Director of Gramya, President of the Association for Sustainable Rural Empowerment (ASRE), and National Vice President of the Karate Association of India, I feel a deep personal and professional connection to Atal Ji's ideals of good governance. Through Gramya and ASRE, we are committed to realizing the vision of "Samridhdh Gram, Samridhdh Bharat." Our work spans rural development, women's empowerment, agricultural advancement, environmental protection, expansion of healthcare services, and youth skill development—areas directly inspired by Atal Ji's inclusive and people-centric policies that brought rural India into the national mainstream. Today, we continue to advance along the same path by promoting digital literacy, self-employment, and rural entrepreneurship, ensuring that development reaches the last mile. Through my role in the Karate Association of India, I focus on nurturing discipline, self-confidence, physical strength, and leadership among rural youth. This aligns seamlessly with Atal Ji's vision of a strong



India built on healthy bodies, resilient minds, and responsible citizens capable of contributing meaningfully to nation-building. Atal Bihari Vajpayee's public life unfolded across some of the most challenging and transformative decades of independent India. From the 1950s until 2004, he consistently viewed politics not as a pursuit of power but as a sacred form of national service. His timeless declaration—"Governments will come and go, parties will rise and fall, but the nation must endure"—remains the moral foundation of Indian democracy. It is a reminder that political ambition must never supersede national interest. As Prime Minister, Atal Ji gave India a renewed and confident identity on the global stage. The Pokhran-II nuclear tests in 1998 firmly established India's sovereignty and national security. Yet, even while demonstrating strength, he emphasized peace. The historic Lahore Bus Yatra in 1999 reflected his belief that true power lies in dialogue, courage, and reconciliation. His tenure witnessed transformational infrastructure initiatives. The Golden Quadrilateral unified the nation through connectivity, rural road development linked villages to cities, the telecommunications revolution democratized information, and national highway expansion infused new momentum into the economy. In Madhya Pradesh, these initiatives revitalized rural economies, enabled farmers to access wider markets, expanded trade, and significantly improved the standard of living for millions of families. On December 25, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will further honor Atal Ji's long-term developmental vision by laying the foundation stone of the Ken-Betwa River Linking Project in Khajuraho and inaugurating the Omkareshwar Floating Solar Project. These initiatives will provide irrigation, drinking water, and clean energy to lakhs of people in Madhya Pradesh. Simultaneously, the foundation laying of 1,153 Atal Gram Sushasan Bhawans will strengthen good governance at the grassroots level, translating Atal Ji's vision of transparent and citizen-centric administration into reality. Programs such as Indore's "Shunya Se Shatak" and other statewide commemorations have kept his centenary vibrant, inclusive, and meaningful. Atal Ji was not only a statesman but also a sensitive poet and profound thinker. His poetry reflected nationalism, struggle, hope, and human resilience. His iconic lines—"I shall not accept defeat, nor engage in conflict; I shall keep moving forward, cutting through obstacles"—continue to inspire young Indians to face adversity with courage, determination, and optimism. In an era increasingly marked by polarization and harsh public discourse, Atal Ji's life offers a timeless lesson. Disagreement can remain constructive, and politics can—and must—be guided by ethics and constitutional values. His centenary reminds us that the dream of a developed India cannot be fulfilled by economic growth alone; it requires values, tolerance, dialogue, and good governance. Bharat Ratna Atal Bihari Vajpayee lives eternally in India's conscience, its democracy, and its collective self-confidence. His centenary calls upon us to remember that true politics unites the nation, empowers society, and builds a stronger, more just India for future generations. His ideals continue to guide us even today—let us collectively resolve to transform his vision into reality.

## Wishing you all a **Happy Christmas** and festive season ahead



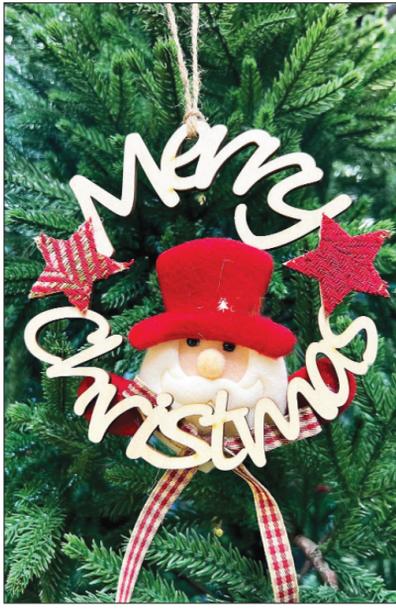
degree of industry resilience that I have personally witnessed on my travels around the world, which has been quite inspiring. So it has been all the more gratifying to see

deliver some genuine exclusives across this year, as well as looking to lead the way on coverage of events spanning everything from ISM and ProSweets in Cologne and its sister show in Dubai, through to Sweets & Snacks Expo, all of which have showcased the rich variety of our industry in its respective regions.

There's always something new, dynamic and interesting happening in these markets, and that has very much kept us on our toes – but we would love to hear from you all about your views. If there's something that you would like to see

more of, or that we perhaps haven't put under the microscope as a topic, please do get in touch with me, editor, Neill Barston, to express your views on any aspect of our combined industries.

For now, here's wishing you a fantastic festive season, and we hope you're able to enjoy a break over the Christmas period with friends and family,



## Winter Solstice 2025: Why Sunday Is The Shortest Day Of The Year

The Northern Hemisphere's winter solstice takes place this weekend on Sunday, Dec. 21, at 10:03 a.m. EST, according to Timeanddate.com, with only about eight or nine hours of daylight in many parts of North America.

It's simultaneously the summer solstice in the Southern Hemisphere.

Do you understand the solstices? How about the equinoxes? Despite determining the calendar and seasons, modern culture tends to forget these waymarkers, with the winter solstice often forgotten in the run-up to Christmas, even though it is an important reason we have mid-winter celebrations.

Here's everything you need to know about Sunday's winter solstice – explained in plain language.

### Understanding Solstice And Seasons

Earth spins on an axis tilted by 23.5 degrees — and this is the reason for the seasons. In December, Earth's northern axis is tilted away from the sun, with the midday sun hanging over the Tropic of Capricorn, a line 23.5 degrees south of the equator. The Tropic of Capricorn is the most southerly point on Earth where the sun can appear directly overhead.

While June's solstice is marked by viewing the rising sun, December's is associated with the setting sun at Stonehenge in Wiltshire, England, where the sun sets to the southwest of the stone circle on the winter solstice.

### Where And When To Look

December's solstice is when the sun reaches its southernmost position in the sky, directly above the Tropic of Capricorn. For people in the Northern Hemisphere, this means it's the shortest day of the year, with the fewest hours of daylight, and the beginning of astronomical winter. However, it also



signals a gradual return of light.

You won't notice anything special at the exact time of the solstice, but if you go outside during the day, you'll see that the sun stays low in the sky and sets early in the afternoon. Daylight hours will range from just over eight to nine hours, depending on your location.

### What You'll See

What makes this sky on the solstice interesting isn't what you see at noon, but what happens afterward. As night falls, some of the best features of the winter night sky come into view. Look to the southeast after sunset, and you'll see Jupiter shining brightly. Not far behind it is Sirius, the brightest star in the night sky, rising beneath the stars of Orion. As a bonus, the Ursid meteor shower will peak overnight on Sunday, Dec. 21, through Monday, Dec. 22, with about five to 10 rapid "shooting stars" from the northern sky. Though it's a modest shower, the moon will be a thin

crescent and set early, leaving dark skies overhead.

### Observing Tips

The best way to experience the solstice is simply to go outside at midday and in the late afternoon and notice how low the sun is, and how early the sunset arrives. Use a sunrise and sunset calculator to check exact times for your location. After the sun goes down, find a dark spot with a good view of the southeastern sky. Bring warm clothes and give your eyes about 20 minutes to adjust to the dark.

### What's Next In The Night Sky

From Dec. 22 to 24, a delicate crescent moon will hang low in the southwest after sunset, with subtle "Earthshine" visible on its dark limb. On Dec. 26, the moon will reach first quarter and appear near Saturn. The full wolf moon follows on Jan. 3 — the first of 13 full moons in 2026 — with Jupiter reaching its bright opposition on Jan. 10.

