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NEW DELHI | FRIDAY, JANUARY 30, 2026 | PAGES 16 | ₹5.00

PUBLISHED FROM: DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL RAIPUR BHUBANESWAR RANCHI CHANDIGARH DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYAWADA

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# Central Secretariat station set to become triple interchange hub

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

The Central Secretariat Metro station will soon emerge as a triple interchange hub with the addition of the Magenta Line extension of the Central Vista Corridor from RK Ashram Marg to Indraprastha under Delhi Metro's Phase V(A).  
Currently functioning as an interchange between the Yellow Line and the Violet Line, the Central Secretariat Metro station, with the integration of the new Magenta Line corridor, will facilitate passengers to commute between three major routes at a single point, Anuj Dayal, Principal Executive Director,

Corporate Communications of DMRC, said.  
Now with the approval of Phase V (A), the Central Secretariat station will provide connectivity to the Yellow Line, the Violet Line and the Magenta Line extension (Central Vista Corridor from RK Ashram Marg — Indraprastha). This will provide connectivity to all the Kartavya Bhawans, thereby providing doorstep connectivity to the officegoers and visitors in this area.  
With this connectivity, around 60,000 officegoers and 2 lakh visitors will benefit on a daily basis.  
This will further reduce pollution and usage of fossil

fuels, enhancing ease of living," Dayal said. Triple interchange stations enable seamless transfers between three metro corridors at a single location, substantially reducing travel time and making cross-city journeys faster, smoother, and more convenient for commuters.  
Dayal said the upcoming corridor will directly connect Central Secretariat with key administrative zones along the Central Vista, offering doorstep metro access to nearly 60,000 office-goers and around two lakh visitors every day.  
There will be nine stations between R K Ashram Marg and Indraprastha with a total



length of 9.9 kilometres that will connect all Kartavya Bhawan complexes, including Bharat Mandapam, courts, and India Gate, among others, he said.  
The Metro currently has

29 interchange stations across its network. This number is expected to rise to 43 after the completion of Phase IV and further to 46 with the addition of Phase V(A), he added.

"The enhanced connectivity is expected to ease road congestion in central Delhi, reduce travel time for commuters and contribute to lower vehicular pollution, aligning with the broader goal of promoting public transport usage in the city," he said.  
According to Dayal, Central Secretariat will be the only triple interchange station to come up under Phase V(A) of the Metro expansion.  
Several other triple interchange stations are planned under Phase IV. Azadpur will connect the Yellow Line, Pink Line and Magenta Line, strengthening north Delhi's links with other parts of the

city. New Delhi station will integrate the Yellow Line, Airport Express Line and Magenta Line, offering smoother transfers for both daily commuters and air travellers, he said. Dayal said that Lajpat Nagar will emerge as an interchange between the Violet Line, Pink Line and the upcoming Golden Line linking Lajpat Nagar with Saket G Block, while Inderlok will connect the Red Line, Green Line and Magenta Line corridor.  
At present, Kashmere Gate Metro Station is the only operational triple interchange station in the Delhi Metro network, linking the Yellow, Violet and Red lines

and serving as one of the system's busiest transit hubs, he mentioned.  
The DMRC said triple interchange stations allow commuters to shift between three corridors at one location, substantially reducing travel time and improving network efficiency. On December 25, the cabinet approved three new corridors of 16 kilometres to curb pollution levels, which would cost around ₹12,015 crore.  
The DMRC operates a vast network with around 289 stations on its 12 lines serving Delhi-NCR cities, making it one of the largest systems in India, with its total length around 395 kilometres.

## Govt to construct rehabilitation complex for 700 children

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta announced on Thursday that the Government will construct a modern, integrated rehabilitation complex for children in conflict with the law. The facility will be developed on about eight acres of land in Alipur and will have a capacity to house around 700 children.  
This initiative will focus on the protection, reform, and reintegration of children into mainstream society, rather than punishment.  
The decision was taken at a high-level meeting chaired by the Chief Minister with members of the Juvenile Justice Committee. Senior officials from the Department of Women and Child



The Delhi Government believes that children in conflict with the law are not criminals but individuals who need protection, guidance, and an opportunity to reform

— REKHA GUPTA, CHIEF MINISTER

Development were also present. The meeting involved detailed deliberations on the legal, social, and humanitarian issues related to children in conflict with

the law and the need for a comprehensive and modern system in Delhi.  
The proposed complex will accommodate children whose cases are pending

before the Juvenile Justice Board under the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015, as well as those who have completed legal proceedings.  
At present, such children are housed in multiple homes across different parts of Delhi, many of which are several decades old. The Government has now decided to replace this fragmented system with a single, state-of-the-art integrated facility.  
According to the Chief Minister, the new complex will provide a safe, structured, and child-friendly environment with comprehensive facilities for education, sports, yoga, mental health counselling, behavioural correction, and skill development. These provisions are aimed at building self-confidence and equipping children

with the skills required to lead a normal life after rehabilitation.  
"The Delhi Government believes that children in conflict with the law are not criminals but individuals who need protection, guidance, and an opportunity to reform," the Chief Minister said. She emphasised that the integrated complex will not function as a punitive institution. Instead, it will be designed as a secure protection and reform system that ensures dignity, care, and opportunities for personal growth.  
Children housed at the facility will follow age- and need-appropriate daily routines and will be encouraged to participate in creative, educational, and physical activities.

## Parvesh Verma orders suspension of three DJB revenue officers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Delhi Water Minister Parvesh Sahib Singh Verma on Thursday ordered the suspension of three Delhi Jal Board (DJB) zonal revenue officers following a surprise inspection. During his visit across Rajendra Nagar, Kanhaiya Nagar, and Ashok Vihar, the minister took firm action over alleged administrative lapses, delays in grievance redressal, and supervisory failures.  
The zonal revenue officers of Rajendra Nagar, Kanhaiya Nagar, and Ashok Vihar were suspended with immediate effect. In addition, the assistant sub-officer (ASO) of the



Kanhaiya Nagar zone was also placed under suspension. The action was taken after several public complaints were received regarding poor service delivery and unresolved grievances in the concerned areas.  
According to officials, the minister undertook the inspection to assess field-level functioning and verify whether departmental standards were being followed.

During the visits, Verma examined attendance registers, complaint records, and operational procedures to evaluate responsiveness and accountability within the DJB offices. "Public offices must function with discipline, responsibility, and transparency. Any lapse in duty or supervision will invite strict action. Accountability is non-negotiable," the minister said, warning officials that negligence in public service would not be tolerated.  
Residents of the affected zones had flagged issues related to delays in addressing complaints, lack of responsiveness from officials, and irregularities in administrative functioning.

## CM Rekha outlines roadmap to strengthen women's safety

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Thursday outlined a multi-pronged roadmap to strengthen women's safety, economic empowerment, and leadership.  
She announced fast-track courts, large-scale installation of surveillance cameras, and smart lighting as key measures to make the capital safer for women.  
The Chief Minister addressed the inaugural session of 'Shakti Samvad: A Two-Day Capacity Building and Training Programme' organised by the National Commission for Women

(NCW) at Bharat Mandapam. The Chief Minister said the focus has shifted from women's empowerment to women-led governance.  
Speaking as the chief guest, Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said Delhi would be made safer through the creation of fast-track special courts, the installation of 10,000 state-of-the-art cameras, and one lakh smart, sensor-based LED lights across the city.  
Approval has already been granted for 53 new judicial posts, she said, paving the way for faster justice delivery in cases involving women.  
"Shakti Samvad' is not



Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, center, releases a book with National Commission for Women Chairperson Vijaya Kishore Rahatkar and others during the Shakti Samvad programme in New Delhi

just a theme but a platform where dialogue and collective strength shape the future of women," the Chief Minister said, stressing that women's safety, dignity, and participation in decision-making remain the government's top priorities. The programme was attended by National Commission for Women Chairperson Vijaya Kishore Rahatkar, Additional Secretary in the Ministry of Women and Child Development B Radhika Chakravarthy, and chairpersons, members, and officers of State Women's Commissions from across the country.  
Highlighting steps taken

by the Delhi government, the Chief Minister said women have been permitted to work night shifts, subject to strict compliance with safety norms.  
To support working mothers, particularly women workers, 500 Palna Kendras (crèches) have been established for child-care, enabling women to pursue employment with greater peace of mind.  
On economic empowerment, the Chief Minister announced that women would be eligible for collateral-free loans of up to ₹10 crore to help them start and expand their own businesses.

## Session on AI in dental education organised

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

A contact session on artificial intelligence in dental education for third-year students and interns of the Faculty of Dentistry, Jamia Millia Islamia, was organised. The session was conducted under the SPARC-UKIERI project titled: "Integrating Artificial Intelligence in Dental Education: Addressing a Critical Global Oral Health Challenge through Transformative Capacity Building."  
The project is being carried out under the visionary lead-



ership of the Principal Investigator, Prof. Dr Mahesh Verma, Vice Chancellor, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University. The lead investigators are Prof. Dr Vikrant Mohanty, MAIDS, Prof. Dr Manu Mathur, Institute of Dentistry, QMUL, Dr Vartika Kathuria Monga, GGSIPU, according to a university press release.

<div> <b>GOVERNMENT OF HARYANA</b> <b>TENDER NOTICE</b> </div>						
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# Global media hail India–EU FTA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

The conclusion of the India–EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) has drawn strong and positive reactions globally, cutting across international media, foreign political leadership, global business heads and respected policy experts.

The deal is widely being described as historic, strategic and timely, both economically and geopolitically. Leading global media outlets have highlighted the scale, ambition and strategic timing of the India–EU FTA.

*The Telegraph*, in an article titled ‘Modi is real winner in ‘mother of all trade deals’ with EU’, described the agreement as the “mother of all trade deals”, arguing that India has emerged as the real strategic winner. The paper noted that the deal eliminates or reduces tariffs on 96.6



per cent of EU exports to India, while the EU will cut tariffs on 99.5 per cent of Indian goods over seven years.

While *Bloomberg* in an article titled ‘All Roads Lead

to Modi as World Hedges Trump’, said that the “mother of all deals” concluded between India and EU, The Wall Street Journal framed the agreement as a response

by middle powers to global tariff disruptions, highlighting how India and the EU are expanding alliances amid uncertainty created by US trade policies. *The New York Times* stressed that the deal brings together the world’s largest economic bloc and the fastest-growing major economy after nearly two decades of negotiations. The Washington Post called it a historic deal with its headline saying ‘India and EU clinch the ‘mother of all deals’ in a historic free trade agreement’.

*The Guardian* referred to it as ‘Mother of all deals’: EU and India sign free trade agreement’. A similar headline was also reported by *BBC* - India and EU announce ‘mother of all trade deals’. The scale has also been highlighted by *Al Jazeera*, which said “Mother of all deals”: How India-EU trade deal creates

\$27 trillion market’. *Fox News* said India is set to benefit from this agreement, as tariffs will be reduced to zero in several key sectors. He said that neighbouring countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh will no longer be able to compete with India in the European market. Global policy experts and think tanks described the agreement as substantively strong and strategically well-timed.

Richard Rossow, Senior Advisor at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), said the deal brings together a quarter of the world’s population and a massive share of global trade, adding that the positive optics reflect strong substance. He also noted that India’s recent FTAs show a clear shift toward deeper and more ambitious trade commitments.

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# Nuclear sector reforms to scale up atomic power capacity: PK Mishra

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

PK Mishra, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, on Thursday said India’s decision to open up the nuclear energy sector for private participation is expected to scale up nuclear capacity significantly by 2047 and provide firm and zero-carbon baseload power.

Mishra was addressing the inaugural Session of the International Conference on ‘Sustainable Energy Transition — Global Perspective’ at IRADe. “India has undertaken a historic reform by opening nuclear energy to private participation through recent legislative initiatives. This is expected to scale nuclear capacity significantly by 2047 and provide firm, zero-carbon



PK Mishra, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister

baseload power,” he said. Mishra noted that these measures align energy transition directly with energy security and import reduction, enhancing India’s strategic autonomy.

He said that clean energy was deeply embedded in India’s vision of Viksit Bharat (developed India) and was central to growth, competitiveness, social inclusion and energy security. Mishra said ambitious targets gain

credibility only when supported by institutional architecture, sustained financial commitment and consistent execution.

“India’s ability to achieve 50 per cent of installed capacity for clean energy by 2025 instead of 2030, and 100 GW of solar capacity well ahead of earlier expectations, demonstrates the importance of policy continuity and institutional strength,” he said.

Mishra said energy transitions are most durable when they deliver tangible welfare gains. He said that India has already reduced the emissions intensity of its GDP by about 36 per cent between 2005 and 2020 and became the first G20 country to meet its Paris Agreement commitments nine years ahead of the 2030 timeline.

# ‘Record the call, I’m killing her,’ recalls brother of SWAT commando murdered by husband

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

A desperate phone call, a husband allegedly announcing a killing in real time, and a brother forced to listen helplessly to his sister’s screams — these were the chilling final moments of a 27-year-old Delhi Police SWAT commando who later died after being brutally assaulted at her Delhi home.

“He told me to put the call on recording, said it could be



Ankur and his wife Kajal

PTI

used as police evidence; (then) told me he was killing her. And then, I heard her screams,” recalled Kajal Chaudhary’s brother Nikhil, his voice trembling as he described the horror of January 22, when Kajal’s husband allegedly smashed her head with a heavy dumbbell. Kajal, posted with the Special Cell of Delhi Police, was at her residence in Mohan Garden when the attack took place.

Her husband, Ankur, a clerk in the Ministry of Defence

and posted in Delhi Cantt, was arrested hours later. After battling for life for five days, she succumbed to her injuries at a hospital in Ghaziabad on the morning of January 27. Nikhil, a constable posted at Parliament Street Police Station, said that the sequence began with a call from Ankur. “He called me and said, ‘Apni behen ko samjha le’ (Make your sister understand). I asked him to calm down and immediately called my sister,” he said.

“She normally wouldn’t tell us much about what was happening, but that day she was sharing her ordeal. While we were speaking, he got angry that she was telling me things and snatched the phone from her,” Nikhil said.

“Then he said to me, ‘Is call ko recording perakh, police evidence me kaamaayega. Main maar raha hoon teri behen ko. Police mera kuch nahi kar payegi’ (Put this call on recording, it will be useful as police evidence.

I am killing your sister. Police won’t be able to do anything). Then I heard her screams. The call ended abruptly,” he said, shuddering. Barely five minutes later, Nikhil’s phone rang again. “He (Ankur) said, ‘Ye marg gayi hai. Hospital aajao’ (She is dead. Come to the hospital). We rushed there with police personnel. He and his family were already present. When I saw my sister not even an enemy kills someone like this,” he said. According to the

family, Kajal’s head was severely smashed, and she had multiple injuries across her body.

Nikhil said they tried to get her admitted to several hospitals but were allegedly told her chances of survival were minimal. She was finally admitted to a Ghaziabad hospital, where she died. The family has accused Ankur and his relatives of prolonged torture and dowry harassment, including during her pregnancy.

## India can grow 7.5%-8%: CEA

Luckily, allied activities like livestock and fisheries have grown at stable rates of 5-6 per cent.

Although, there is no decline in the contribution of manufacturing, whose value added is up to over six per cent in this financial year, its share remains “steady” at 17-18 per cent, and the gross value of output is “stable” at 38 per cent.

This may be a matter of concern as manufacturing is the key to upgrade India’s standing as a global economic superpower. It is manufacturing that can aid exports.

However, the Survey warns about “one wrinkle in the ointment.” The paradox of 2025, it states, is that “India’s strongest macroeconomic performance in decades has collided with a global system that no longer rewards macroeconomic success with currency stability, capital inflows, or strategic insulation.”

India’s economic ambitions will, therefore, confront “powerful global headwinds.” But taking a positive note, the Survey states, “These same (headwind) forces can be turned into tailwinds if the State, the private sector, and households are willing to align, adapt, and commit to the scale of effort that the moment demands. The task will be neither simple nor comfortable, but it is unavoidable.”

The Survey sketches three global scenarios for 2026 (calendar year). The best-case one, with 40-45 per cent probability, is that 2026 will be “business as in 2025, but one that becomes increasingly less secure, and more fragile.” The margin of safety will thus be “thinner,” and “minor shocks can escalate into larger reverberations.”

In the second scenario, with a similar 40-45 per cent probability, policy will become national, nations will face “sharper trade-off between autonomy, growth, and stability.” In the third one, with 10-20 per cent possibility, there is a risk of a “systemic shock cascade,” whose macroeconomic consequences may be “worse than those of the 2008 global financial crisis (Great Recession).”

On the positive side, low inflation will continue, and the outlook seems benign, “supported by favourable supply-side conditions, and the gradual pass-through of GST rate rationalisation.” The problem is that while consumer inflation is down to 1.7 per cent, due to better farm conditions, and corrections in the prices of vegetables and pulses, core inflation has “exhibited persistence.” However, the Survey contends that the latter is due to price spikes in precious metals (gold and silver), and if adjusted for them, “underlying inflation pressure appears materially softer,” with limited overheating.

Unemployment is down over the first three quarters of this financial year, from 5.4 per cent in the first quarter to 4.9 per cent in the third one. India’s poverty rate is just above five per cent, with another nearly 24 per cent for lower-middle-income poverty. But these figures are not comparable to the earlier poverty lines.

The current global order, states the Survey, faces three challenges, which include trade policy uncertainty, strategic decoupling among major economies, and migration of national security into the trade domain. Couple this with the geopolitical realignment, as supply chains are evaluated as per strategic autonomy, not cost efficiency. Nations “exercise greater caution regarding who they trade with, how they source inputs, and which partners they depend upon.”

This is why manufacturing, and manufacturing-driven exports are crucial. India’s exports depend on goods that “fall into low- and mid-complexity categories” such as petroleum, medicines, rice, and diamonds. The nation needs a “significant structural shift towards high-complexity categories” like electronics, precision engineering goods, and high-value services. In electronics, India has made huge strides, as

exports in this segment grew by more than 35 per cent year-on-year between April and December 2025.

The fate of the rupee, which has tumbled in the recent past, is linked to merchandise exports. Cross-country experiences show that durable currencies are grounded in the “gradual build-up of export capabilities, particularly in manufacturing.” For India, “this implies that improving medium-term exchange rate outcomes is inseparable from building a strong and competitive manufacturing base anchored in export growth.” They remain the reliable channel for productivity gains, scale economics, and global demand for Indian products.

Reforms are crucial. GST still needs re-imagining, and policy design must rely on “trust-based, and technology-driven compliance models.” Although, expenditure on subsidies are down as a percentage of GDP, and direct benefit transfers have rooted out corruption and wastages, there is scope for improvement. Cross subsidies in railways between freight and passengers needs to go. “High freight rates... distort competition with roads, inflating... prices, as well as logistics costs.” The same is true of the power sector, where domestic users pay below costs. In sectors such as insurance, which are crucial for citizens, there are miles to go. Insurance is saddled with high costs, which results in a paradox. Insurance density has risen, which means better spending by households, but “penetration has stagnated and declined to 3.7 per cent. This paradox indicates that while the sector is successful in deepening revenue from existing customers, high distribution costs are preventing a widening of the risk pool.” (With PTI inputs)

## The Arab-India partnership...

**Energy Transition & Hydrocarbons Cooperation — As India balances energy security with decarbonisation, how can Arab producers reposition themselves as partners in green hydrogen and renewables rather than just hydrocarbons? And in the shorter run, how Arab countries can ensure seamless supply of oil and gas for the ever growing demand of India?**

On one hand, India’s energy policy is geared towards ensuring the availability of oil and gas resources in the short term, while on the other hand, it is focused on promoting the use of low-carbon fuels. The Arab region is very important to India’s energy security, as the oil and gas-producing Gulf states account for about 35 per cent-40 per cent of India’s oil and gas imports from the Arab region.

Concurrent with this, the new horizon of cooperation in hydrogen, solar, and renewable energy offers an exciting new frontier. The ambitious renewable energy plans of India to increase capacity over the next decade, combined with the capital and resource advantages of Gulf countries, can help develop a decarbonised energy value chain that can mutually benefit both regions.

The Arab countries can effectively reposition themselves as partners in the export value chains of clean energy, green hydrogen, and integrated power projects.

**Food & Water Security: Technology Cooperation - Can deeper Indo-Arab collaboration in agri-technology and food processing address shared vulnerabilities in food and water security?**

Food and water security are common policy concerns for both regions, which are marked by growing populations, climate change, and changing food demands. Indo-Arab cooperation in agritech, climate-resilient agriculture, and food processing technology can help both regions address challenges in productivity and

supply chain efficiency.

For instance, the recent economic cooperation between Egypt and India focused on connecting entrepreneurship platforms and encouraging agritech partnerships that facilitate innovation and market access for small farmers.

Leveraging Indian strengths in agricultural research and digital farming, together with Arab investments, can deliver scalable solutions for food security and water management in both regions.

**Digital Trade: Regulatory Harmonisation - What regulatory harmonisation is needed to unlock the full potential of digital trade, fintech and e-commerce between India and Arab markets?**

To fully tap the potential of digital trade, fintech, and e-commerce between India and Arab markets, several areas of regulatory harmonisation are required. These include harmonization in cross-border data flows, cybersecurity standards, electronic authentication, and secure digital payment systems that conform to global best practices.

Initiatives that make it easier to mutually recognize digital identities and e-signatures, together with regulatory discussions on consumer protection and competition policy, will lower barriers and mobilize the private sector’s engagement in fintech and platform trade.

CEPA-related initiatives, such as specific startup series and innovation corridors, highlight the progress

toward a more substantial digital economic integration.

**“MSME Integration: Shared Growth & Jobs — How can MSMEs from India and the Arab world be better integrated into each other’s value chains, beyond large conglomerates largely to address the ever growing unemployment issue?”**

Enhancing MSME integration goes beyond trade headline numbers and requires systematic investment in entrepreneurship linkages, financial solutions, and joint business platforms. We are already witnessing progress in this area, such as platform interconnectivity between Indian and Egyptian startup ecosystems, which can be extended to the broader Arab region.

The Arab-India economic frameworks should focus on accessible credit, risk-sharing facilities, regulatory facilitation for cross-border activities, and capacity-building programs tailored to specific needs. This will enable MSMEs and startups to engage with regional value chains, thereby addressing unemployment and increasing job opportunities in both markets.

### Closing Outlook

The Arab-India partnership is on the cusp of a more strategic era. Trade agreements, investment commitments in the billions, digital collaboration, and energy transition frameworks all point to a future of mutual growth.

Our shared challenge and opportunity is to make sure that this partnership is inclusive, sustainable, and founded on shared prosperity for business communities and citizens on both sides.

## From Resilience to Results: India’s...

These episodes underscore that India continues to finance a portion of its growth through volatile portfolio flows.

This vulnerability becomes more significant in a world where trade and finance are increasingly shaped by strategic rivalry. The survey observes that global commerce is now influenced by “geopolitical alignments and economic statecraft,” weakening the predictability of export markets. Protectionism, immigration controls, and supply-chain realignments threaten

both merchandise exports and remittance inflows. While India’s services sector has so far cushioned these shocks, dependence on services alone cannot guarantee long-term stability.

The deeper structural challenge, therefore, lies in manufacturing competitiveness. The Survey argues that sustained export growth requires deeper integration into global value chains, supported by efficient logistics, predictable regulation, and competitive input costs. Yet, high transport expenses, fragmented supply networks, and uneven enforcement continue to limit scale economies. It also acknowledges that advanced manufacturing allows little room for regulatory discretion and demands strict productivity discipline. In effect, industrial success now depends less on incentives and more on institutional performance.

This gap has broader implications for employment. Services-led growth, while profitable, generates fewer mass jobs than manufacturing. India’s labour market remains characterised by high informality and uneven productivity. The Survey estimates that effective implementation of labour reforms could raise formalisation from 60.4 per cent to 75.5 per cent and generate 77 lakh jobs in the medium term. However, progress has been slow, with uneven adoption across states and persistent compliance uncertainties. Without execution coherence, the demographic dividend risks dissipating into low-wage, insecure work.

These pressures intersect with growing concerns over state finances. While central government balances have improved, the Survey warns of fiscal populism, rising revenue deficits, and the crowding out of capital expenditure by cash transfers at the sub-national level. Since states are responsible for much of India’s health, education, and infrastructure spending, fiscal stress at this tier can quietly erode productivity. In poorer regions, development needs coexist with limited borrowing capacity, compounding regional disparities.

Financial markets, too, remain exposed to global turbulence. The survey documents how episodes such as the “taper tantrum” and pandemic volatility triggered capital flight from emerging markets, including India. Although large reserves provide temporary insulation, they cannot permanently offset dependence on foreign risk appetite. A stronger domestic bond market and long-term savings ecosystem remain unfinished priorities.

Underlying many of these challenges is the issue of governance capacity. The survey emphasises that “policy credibility, predictability and administrative discipline” must become strategic assets in an uncertain world. Regulatory overlaps, judicial delays, and coordination failures continue to raise transaction costs. Infrastructure projects face delays, contracts are disputed, and policy signals are frequently revised. Without institutional strengthening, even well-designed reforms yield suboptimal results.

It is in this context that the survey’s metaphor - that India must “run a marathon and sprint simultaneously” - acquires practical significance. The country must pursue long-term structural transformation while responding rapidly to short-term shocks. Yet ambition alone cannot substitute for sequencing, prioritisation, and administrative capacity. Trying to advance on multiple fronts without institutional consolidation risks overextension.

India’s economic strengths are real and hard-won. Stable external accounts, improving fiscal credibility, rising exports, and expanding reserves have created a platform for sustained growth. But these buffers are only means, not outcomes. The next phase of development will depend on whether India uses this stability to deepen manufacturing capabilities, execute labour reforms, restore state-level fiscal discipline, and build governance institutions that match its aspirations.

The survey’s message is therefore not one of complacent optimism but of conditional opportunity. The coming decade will be won not in headline growth rates, but in the harder terrain of productivity, competitiveness, and administrative credibility. Stability has given India time. What it does with that time will determine whether resilience evolves into enduring economic leadership.

(The author is PT Member-Prime Minister Economic Advisory Council and Professor of Finance)

## SC stays new UGC norms, says may divide society

The CJ suggested that the matter be revisited by a committee comprising eminent jurists and experts familiar with social realities. “Some committee should be there with two or three eminent persons who understand social values and the ailments society is facing. How society should grow, and how people are going to behave outside the campus if we create such a framework, they must apply their mind,” the CJ said.

At the outset, the bench flagged concerns with the 2026 regulations and questioned the need for a separate definition of “caste-based discrimination” under regulation 3(1)(c), when regulation 3(1)(e) already provides a broad definition of “discrimination”. It also questioned why ragging had been left out of the scope of the regulations, despite being a common form of harassment within educational institutions.

“Why is caste-based discrimination separately defined when the definition of discrimination already takes care of all forms of discriminatory treatment? And why is ragging not addressed at all,” the bench asked.

The bench said the language of the regulations appeared to be “prima facie vague” and “capable of misuse”.

Advocate Vishnu Shankar Jain, appearing for one of the petitioners, assailed Regulation 3(1)(c), which defines caste-based discrimination as discrimination “only on the basis of caste or tribe” against members of SCs, STs, and Other Backward Classes. Jain said the definition excludes discrimination against persons belonging to the general category and creates a presumption that only certain sections face caste-based discrimination.

He contended that the provision violates Article 14 of the constitution and sought a stay on its operation. The CJ posed a hypothetical scenario involving regional discrimination and said if a student from South India faces humiliation in a northern Indian institution where caste identities are unknown and asked whether new regulations would address such situations.

Another counsel highlighted a scenario where a general category fresher faces ragging at the hands of a senior belonging to a SC, submitting that the present regulations offer no remedy and may even expose the victim to retaliatory proceedings. “Most harassment happens on junior-senior lines.

Why is it assumed that only caste-based discrimination exists,” the bench asked, adding, “Whatever we have gained in terms of achieving a casteless society, are we now becoming regressive?” The bench expressed strong disapproval of measures such as separate hostels for different castes.

“For God’s sake, don’t do this! We all used to stay together. There are inter-caste marriages also,” the CJ said. Justice Bagchi said the ideal of “unity in India” must be reflected in educational institutions. Senior advocate Indira Jaising, appearing in the 2019 PIL filed by the mothers of Rohith Vemula and Payal Tadvi, which led to the framing of the 2026 Regulations, defended the regulations. The bench was hearing pleas challenging the validity of the regulations filed by Mritunjay Tiwari, advocate Vineet Jindal and Rahul Dewan.



# Maharashtra bids a tearful adieu to Ajit Pawar

SANDIP KOLHATKAR ■ Baramati

Chants of “Ajit Dada Amar Rahe” (Ajit Dada is immortal) rent the air on Thursday as Maharashtra bid a final and tearful farewell to Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar.

The 66-year-old NCP chief, popularly known as ‘Dada’ (elder brother) in Baramati, was cremated with full State honours at the Vidya Pratishthan college ground here, a day after he along with four others died when the chartered plane carrying them crashed on Wednesday. The college has been founded by the Pawar family.

As thousands gathered to pay their last respects, Pawar’s sons, Parth and Jay, lit the funeral pyre in the presence of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, BJP president Nitin Nabin, and Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis.

Sharad Pawar, the patriarch and uncle of the departed deputy chief minister, sat

quietly watching a legacy he helped build become a memory.

Thousands of mourners gathered for Ajit Pawar’s last rites chanted “Ajit Dada amar rahe”, when his mortal remains, draped in the national flag, were brought from his village Katewadi to the Vidya Pratishthan ground, located 100 km from Pune.

Ajit Pawar’s cousin Supriya Sule, the NCP (SP) Lok Sabha member from Baramati, stood with his wife Sunetra Pawar, who is a Rajya Sabha member, to console her as she paid tributes to her late husband.

NCP working president and former Union minister Praful Patel was also present.

Announcements over loudspeakers urged people to maintain silence and discipline, and to pay their respects to the late leader from their seats, calling it the greatest tribute to Ajit Pawar, known for his strict sense of discipline.



Mortal remains of Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar being brought to Vidya Pratishthan college ground for his funeral at Baramati in Pune district on Thursday

Shah, Gadkari, Nabin, Fadnavis, Union minister Ramdas Athawale, Goa CM Pramod Sawant, Maharashtra Deputy CM Eknath Shinde,

State assembly speaker Rahul Narwekar, former Union minister Sushilkumar Shinde, and Andhra Pradesh minister Nara Lokesh were

among the leaders who placed floral wreaths on Pawar’s mortal remains.

Ajit Pawar’s younger brother Shriniwas Pawar,

sisters and other family members, including cousin Abhijit Pawar, also paid tributes to their late brother.

Former CM Ashok Chavan, State Congress president Harshwardhan Sapkal, party leader Manikrao Thakare and actor Riteish Deshmukh also paid homage.

Earlier, Shiv Sena (UBT) head and former CM Uddhav Thackeray and MNS chief Raj Thackeray offered floral tributes at Ajit Pawar’s residence in Katewadi. On Thursday morning, the mortal remains of Ajit Pawar were taken from the Punyashlok Ahilyadevi Hospital in Baramati, where they were kept overnight, to his village.

Pawar and four other persons on board the aircraft were killed after it crashed barely 200 metres from the edge of the tabletop airstrip.

The others killed in the tragedy were Captain Sumit Kapoor, who had a flying experience of 15,000 hours, co-

pilot Capt Shambhavi Pathak, with 1,500 hours of flying experience, Personal Security Officer Vidip Jadhav and flight attendant Pinky Mali.

Their mortal remains have been handed over to their families. Police have registered an accidental death report (ADR) case in connection with the plane crash, an official said. The Government on Wednesday released a statement detailing the sequence of events that led to the crash and Ajit Pawar’s death.

The aircraft was cleared for landing after a go-around due to poor visibility, but having finally received a clearance, it did not give any read-back to the ATC, and moments later burst into flames near the edge of the airstrip. The Civil Aviation Ministry on Thursday said the ‘black box’ (comprising the Flight Data Recorder and Cockpit Voice Recorder) of the Learjet aircraft has been recovered. (PTI)

## Plane pilot cremated; locals recall him fondly

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

A heavy silence hung over a nondescript lane in Delhi’s Rajouri Garden on Thursday. Just a day ago, it lost its affable resident Captain Sumit Kapoor to the air crash in Baramati that claimed the life of Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar.

Now, it was time to bid the seasoned pilot a final farewell. Amid quiet tears and folded hands, the mortal remains of Kapoor were consigned to flames at the Punjabi Bagh crematorium.

With the body not taken to the Kapoor residence, family and friends gathered at the crematorium ground to pay their last respects. Several mourners recalled Kapoor, who was in his 50s, as a warm-hearted neighbour and a committed professional whose sudden death has left the locality in shock.

## Gloom grips Safdarjung Enclave as pilot Shambhavi Pathak laid to rest

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

A pin-drop silence enveloped Delhi’s Safdarjung Enclave on Thursday as the mortal remains of young pilot Shambhavi Pathak were brought to her residence.

Curtains remained drawn and gates shut, and residents spoke in hushed tones as grieving relatives began arriving at the family’s home. Many paused to ask media-persons about the address of Pathaks’ new residence, as the family recently shifted to a new block within the locality.

Pathak, around 25 years old, was among the five people killed when a VSR Ventures Learjet 45 crashed near Baramati in Maharashtra.



Family members paying their last respects to the mortal remains of Captain Shambhavi Pathak during her funeral in New Delhi

wiping tears. Shortly thereafter, the family left for Lodhi Road crematorium, where Pathak was cremated amid the presence of close relatives and friends.

“This locality has never seen such silence,” said a resident, adding that people were just standing, not speaking, as if words had failed everyone.

Pathak’s mother, a teacher at the Air Force Bal Bharati School, remained inconsolable, relatives said. Her father, a retired Army pilot who had rushed to Pune following news of the crash, returned to Delhi for the final rites. The couple, both in their late 40s, had been preparing for their daughter’s wedding, neighbours had recalled.

## Family, friends bid farewell to flight attendant Pinky Mali

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

The last rites of flight attendant Pinky Mali, who died in a plane crash that also killed Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar and three others, were performed on Thursday at central Mumbai’s Shivaji Park crematorium, officials said. Pinky Mali’s family broke down in grief as they gathered around her funeral pyre, the sombre moment marked by quiet sobs and loud wails.

Earlier, her mortal remains were brought in an ambulance from Baramati, where she died in the air tragedy, to the Kharigaon locality in neighbouring Thane city. Pinky (29), who got married three years ago, had been living in the area with her husband for the past four months.

The remains were then taken to her maternal home at Prabhadevi in central Mumbai, where she grew up from childhood, the official said. Neighbours and friends struggled to hold back tears as they paid their last respects to her. Speaking to media persons earlier, Pinky’s father Shivkumar Mali had recalled that she wanted to make her elder brother a pilot.

Pinky had been working as a flight attendant for the last five years. She started with Air India and moved to private chartered flights after a couple of years, he had said.

She had flown with the President, chief ministers and several political leaders, the father had said, adding that she was flying with Ajit Pawar for the fourth time.

Her husband works in a managerial post in an Indian



Bereaved family members paying their last respects to the mortal remains of flight attendant Pinky Mali, who was killed in the Baramati plane crash, during her funeral in Mumbai on Thursday

multinational company engaged in EPC (Engineering, Procurement, and Construction) projects, hi-tech manufacturing and services, the official said. Pinky, Pawar and three others were trav-

elling on a chartered aircraft when it crashed barely 200 metres from the edge of a table-top runway at Baramati airport in Pune district on Wednesday, leaving no survivors.



### ERRATA

In the news item ‘Rajya Sabha pays tributes to former MPs L Ganesan, Suresh Kalmadi’, an incorrect photograph of former Rajya Sabha member Late Shri L Ganesan was erroneously published. The error is regretted. The actual photograph of late L Ganesan is being published herewith. (Executive Editor)



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Narendra Modi  
Prime Minister



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ECONOMIC SURVEY 2025-26

# India emerging as ray of hope for world: PM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday asserted that the country was emerging as a "ray of hope" for the world and pointed to the free trade pact with the European Union, saying it was for an "ambitious India" and manufacturers should seize this opportunity to enhance capacities.

Addressing the media at the beginning of the Budget session of Parliament, Modi said India was moving rapidly on the Reform Express and thanked parliamentarians for contributing their positive energies to the unveiling of reforms.

Modi said even his critics acknowledge the Government's focus on last-mile delivery, and this tradition will continue with the

next generation reforms. India's democracy and demography, he said, offer great hope for the world.

"In this temple of democracy, India has the opportunity to send a message of strength, commitment to democracy, and respect for decisions taken through democratic processes "messages welcomed and accepted globally," Modi said.

He asserted that the present time is not for disruption but for solutions, not for obstacles but for resolution.

The PM said the Budget session marked the culmination of the first quarter of the 21st century and the beginning of the next quarter.

"The year has begun on a very positive note, with a confident India emerging as a ray of hope and a centre of attraction for the world,"



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressing the media during the Budget session of Parliament in New Delhi

he said. Modi said the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and the European Union at the start

of this quarter reflected the bright future of India's youth and the promising directions ahead.

"This agreement is free trade for an ambitious India, for aspirational youth, and for an Atmanirbhar Bharat

(self-reliant India)," he said. The Prime Minister expressed firm belief that India's manufacturers will seize this opportunity to enhance their capacities.

Modi said the "mother of all deals" with the European Union has opened up a vast market and Indian goods will reach there at lower costs.

He asked industry leaders and manufacturers to guard against complacency and instead focus on quality.

Entering this open market with the best quality products will not only earn profits from buyers across 27 EU countries but also win their hearts, creating a long-lasting impact for decades, the Prime Minister said.

He noted that companies' brands, aligned with the nation's brand, will establish new prestige.



## ‘Need to retain students beyond class 8’

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New Delhi

There is a need to retain school students beyond Class 8 as the secondary age-specific net enrolment remains low, the Economic Survey 2025-26 said.

According to the survey tabled in Parliament on Thursday by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, while India has improved enrolment at early levels, the secondary age-specific net enrolment rate (NER) remains low at 52.2 per cent.

It said the scenario highlights the need to retain students beyond Class 8.

"A key issue is the uneven distribution of schools as 54 per cent of schools offer only foundational-prepara-

tory education, while just 17.1 per cent provide secondary education in rural areas," it noted.

Urban areas have a higher share of secondary schools (38.1 per cent). This disparity, the document highlighted, limits rural students' access to higher-level classes, resulting in "transition losses, increased travel time, and higher dropout rates". "These structural imbalances are reflected in enrolment patterns, with a drop from the foundational and preparatory levels to the middle and to secondary levels in rural areas," it pointed out. In urban

areas, though, enrolment rises from the middle to the secondary level. Grade-wise enrolment trends further highlight the decline at the secondary stage.

The survey also said that India has made notable gains in school enrolment by strengthening infrastructure and teacher capacity, with schemes like

Poshan Shakti Nirman and Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan promoting access and equity. "Further action is required, especially as the focus shifts from enrolment to learning outcomes. Policy interventions to expand composite and integrated schools,

upgrading schools up to Class 7, and strengthening open schooling are vital for improving retention and optimising resources," it said.

Improving infrastructure, teacher skills through strengthened District Institute of Education and Training and State Council of Educational Research and Training, and involving parents and communities in governance can create an inclusive, learner-focused environment, it suggested.

Combining these strategies with curriculum and assessment reforms aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP) and the use of digital platforms such as PM e-Vidya can provide high-quality, equitable education, even in remote areas, it is underlined.

## ‘Ban advertising of ultra-processed food’

PIONEER NEWS SERVICEN  
■ New Delhi

The Economic Survey 2025-26 raised concerns on the growing consumption of ultra-processed foods containing high fat, salt and sugar amid India becoming one of the fastest growing markets for such items in the world and pitched for a ban on their advertisements from morning to late night.

The pre-Budget document tabled in the Lok Sabha on Thursday also suggested restrictions on the marketing of infant and toddler milk and beverages, while flagging growing obesity among children. "More troubling still, the prevalence of excess weight among children under five has risen from 2.1 per cent in 2015-16 to 3.4 per cent in 2019-21," it said.

According to estimates, over 3.3 crore children in India were obese in 2020, and it is projected to reach 8.3 crore children by 2035. The 2019-21 National Family Health Survey (NFHS) reports that 24 per cent of Indian women and 23 per cent of Indian men are overweight or obese," it added.

Among women aged 15-49 years, 6.4 per cent are obese, and among men, 4.0 per cent are overweight,



THE 2019-21 NATIONAL FAMILY HEALTH SURVEY (NFHS) REPORTS THAT 24% OF INDIAN WOMEN AND 23 PER CENT OF INDIAN MEN ARE OVERWEIGHT OR OBESE

the survey said. Suggesting measures to address the challenge of ultra-processed foods (UPF), it called for a "front-of-pack nutrition labelling" of high-fat, sugar and salt (HFSS) food with a warning, restricting marketing to children, and ensuring that trade agreements do not undermine public health policy.

Stating that improving diets cannot depend solely on consumer behaviour

change, the survey said it will require coordinated policies across food systems that regulate UPF production, promote healthier and more sustainable diets and marketing.

"The option of a marketing ban on UPFs from 6.00 hours to 23.00 hours for all media, and enforcing restrictions on the marketing of infant and toddler milk and beverages, could be explored," according to the

survey. Besides traditional media, it has also recommended UPF marketing restrictions to be mandatory and include digital media.

It cited examples of Chile, which has integrated laws, along with Norway and the UK, where advertisement restrictions are in place for UPFs.

"Recently, the UK has banned junk food advertising before 9 pm on TV and online to reduce children's exposure and curb childhood obesity. Further action on other marketing activities, including school and college sponsorship of events by UPF manufacturers, can be designed," it said. According to the survey, Rule 7 of the Advertisement Code prohibits misleading, unverified, or unhealthy advertisements; it does not define "misleading" with measurable or nutrient-based criteria, leaving interpretation subjective and inconsistent.

Similarly, the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) Guidelines for Prevention of Misleading Advertisements (2022) mandate that advertisements must not exaggerate health benefits or exploit children. "...Yet they lack clear nutrient thresh-

olds or a framework for identifying misleading claims in food marketing," it said, adding that "this regulatory ambiguity allows companies marketing UPFs to continue making vague 'health', 'energy', or 'nutrition' cues without violating any clearly defined standard, highlighting a critical policy gap that needs reform".

The survey expressed concern that India is one of the fastest-growing markets for UPF sales, which is contributing to chronic diseases worldwide and widening health inequalities.

It also suggested a "multi-pronged approach" for tackling the increase of human intake of UPF — popularly known as junk foods — which includes burgers, noodles, pizza, soft drinks, etc., and said it is contributing to chronic diseases worldwide and widening health inequalities.

Sales of UPFs in India grew more than 150 per cent between 2009 and 2023. Retail sales of UPFs in India surged from \$0.9 billion in 2006 to nearly \$38 billion in 2019, a 40-fold rise. "It is during the same period that obesity has nearly doubled in both men and women", the survey said.

## India's macroeconomic fundamentals stronger than ever, says Sitharaman



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New Delhi

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday said India's macroeconomic fundamentals are 'stronger than ever' and the country has successfully navigated global headwinds, improving its potential GDP growth rate to 7 per cent. In a post on X, Sitharaman said in a world defined by geopolitical fragmentation and economic turbulence, India stands as a global bright spot — resilient, stable, and surging forward.

"Our macroeconomic

fundamentals are stronger than ever. We have successfully navigated global headwinds to place India on a high-growth trajectory, improving our potential GDP growth to 7 per cent," Sitharaman said after the presentation of the Economic Survey 2025-26 in Parliament.

According to the survey, amid global uncertainties, the Indian economy has maintained robust momentum, and projected India's GDP growth for the next fiscal year in the range of 6.8-7.2 per cent.

As per NSO estimates, the Indian economy has

grown at 7.4 per cent in the current fiscal, reaffirming India's status as the fastest-growing major economy for the fourth consecutive year.

The survey has raised the country's potential growth forecast to 7 per cent from the earlier projection of 6.5 per cent estimated three years earlier.

The FY27 GDP growth projections in the Economic Survey compare with 6.4 per cent growth projections by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), 6.5 per cent by the World Bank and Asian Development Bank (ADB).

## ‘Open heritage monuments, ease forex payments for concert market’

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

The Economic Survey 2025-26 on Thursday flagged the lack of live event venues and restrictions on foreign payments as impediments to the growth of the concert economy and suggested opening up heritage monuments to boost the sector.

According to the survey, India's concert and live entertainment economy crossed ₹10,000 crore in 2024. The impact goes beyond ticket sales. Large events act as short-duration demand boosters for airlines, hotels, restaurants and city transport systems.

The survey, tabled by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Parliament, said that with appropriate facilitation, the concert economy can become a meaningful driver of growth for Media and Entertainment (M&E), tourism and allied services.

"In India, there is a lack of live event venues and restrictions on the foreign payments that can be made to artists coming from abroad," the Survey said. Globally, live music accounts for about one-third of total music revenues; in the US, it generated over \$130 billion and supported more than 900,000 jobs in 2019.

In the UK, music tourism alone contributed 6.6 billion pounds in 2022, which was about 0.3 per cent of GDP, reflecting strong spillovers to hospitality, transport and retail. It suggested that opening up heritage monuments for such events and facilitating the visa and foreign exchange permissions for the foreign performers and artists could be considered in this regard.

The Survey said the concert economy in India was nascent but scaling, supported by a young population, rising incomes, digital ticketing platforms and improving urban infrastructure. International



experience underscores that economic gains depend on urban readiness and facilitative governance, including streamlined permissions, predictable regulations, efficient crowd management, last-mile connectivity and coordination across city authorities and tourism bodies.

Considering that anywhere between 10 and 15 clearances are required, the Ministry of Information and Broad casting is working on a Single Window Mechanism for Live Entertainment Permissions, including those needed from State Governments.

With appropriate facilitation and integration into tourism and city branding strategies, the concert economy can become a meaningful driver of growth for M&E, tourism and allied services. Concerts also serve as short-duration tourism demand amplifiers, being labour-intensive and creating jobs across various sectors, including event operations, logistics, hospitality, security and media, particularly for young people and creative professionals.

According to UNCTAD estimates, the creative industries contribute between 0.5 per cent and over 7 per cent of GDP across countries.



ECONOMIC SURVEY 2025-26

AI Economic Council to calibrate adoption pace: Survey

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New Delhi

The Economic Survey, tabled in Parliament on Thursday, favoured an 'AI Economic Council' for India to calibrate the pace of adoption of Artificial Intelligence in the country, as it spotlighted the impact of the transformational technology on critical thinking and jobs.

By embedding labour realities and social stability priorities into AI policy, the AI Economic Council can ensure that AI advances productivity without eroding employment and the dignity of work, it said.

The institution must work closely with private sector firms to develop a roadmap for AI deployment over the next decade, outlining crucial details such as the profile of jobs affected, the geographies where displacement will be most concentrated, and the magnitude of jobs that will be both auto-

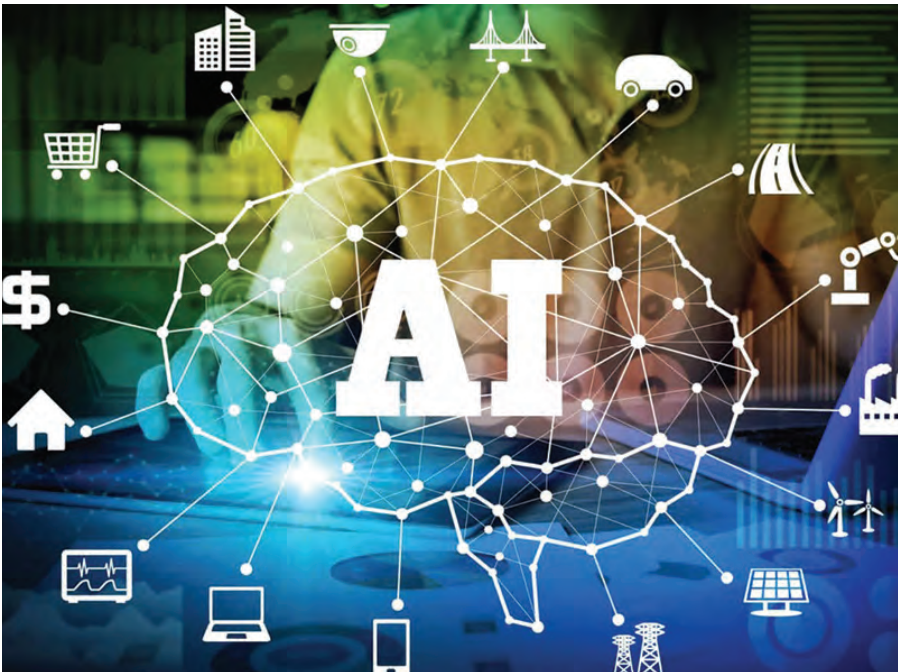
mated and augmented due to AI, the survey mooted.

"The AI Economic Council must ensure that deployment of 'Artificial Intelligence' does not come at the cost of 'Human Intelligence'," it asserted.

India is a labour-rich economy, and the unchecked replacement of the workforce by automation has destabilising effects, the survey cautioned.

"In this context, one of the most urgent responsibilities of an AI Economic Council is to calibrate the pace of AI adoption within the country," said the Survey, which highlighted the power of transformational technology and its many nuances in a chapter dedicated to AI.

Such an exercise will help moderate the uncertainties surrounding the deployment of AI and inform about the roadmap and design of policies required to mitigate the adverse effects of AI on the economy. An exercise like



this would also help in informing policymakers on the necessary developments to reinforce the education

system in a way that makes students more capable in an AI-driven world. Regulations, the Survey

said, need to evolve and necessitate transparency reporting requirements similar to those for social

HIGHLIGHTS

- One of the most urgent responsibilities of an AI Economic Council is to calibrate the pace of AI adoption within the country
- The institution must work closely with private sector firms to develop a roadmap for AI deployment over the next decade
- The AI Economic Council must ensure that the deployment of Artificial Intelligence does not come at the cost of Human Intelligence
- Need to evolve and necessitate transparency reporting requirements similar to those for media
- Policymakers must also manage where and how AI is deployed

media, as well as product registrations, to help track the rate of deployment. Policymakers must also

manage where and how AI is deployed. The manner in which AI is used will dictate the nature of the benefits accrued, it pointed out. For instance, AI in education holds a lot of potential, provided it is used as a supplementing tool for teachers and students. "The widespread use of Generative AI by students as a substitute for creative and critical thinking ultimately does more harm than good in the long run," it said. The Survey also echoed issues long-talked about by critics, including the impact of AI on cognitive and original thinking.

It sounded an alarm over the "skyrocketing" use of AI by students in universities and observed that a significant portion of cognitive tasks is being offloaded to language models. "Combined with the anxiety and depression inducing social media usage, students shirking the acquisition of skills such as sustained

reading, critical thinking and analytical writing is only expected to make mental health issues much worse in the future. This will ultimately impact their productivity and their ability to contribute meaningfully to any work undertaken, perhaps even permanently denting their employment prospects," the Survey warned.

It outlined the myriad challenges that policymakers will have to contend with as AI capabilities improve and applications proliferate. "Given the many uncertainties that loom over the horizon, governance will remain a continuous process of monitoring, learning, and course correction. MeitY's proposed AI Governance Group, along with the technical committee assisting the group, establishes a strong foundation on which India can develop a light, incentive-based and risk-weighted governance approach," it said.

Key Takeaways from the Economic Survey 2025-26

The GST rejig and reforms converted global uncertainty into opportunity; **FY27 to be a year of adjustment** as the economy adapts to these changes.

Cautions against broader financial contagion if **AI boom fails to deliver** the anticipated productivity gains; could lead to a correction in overly optimistic asset valuations.

Rupee valuation **does not accurately reflect** India's stellar economic fundamentals.

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Fiscal indiscipline of States to have impact on sovereign borrowing costs: CEA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New Delhi

With State after State splurging on populist electoral doles, the Economic Survey on Thursday warned that States' fiscal indiscipline will hurt the sovereign borrowing costs.

In the post-Economic Survey interaction with media, Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran said income transfers to households play a role, but their impact is highest when complemented by productivity-enhancing investments.

"Sustaining growth requires careful re-prioritisation within revenue spend-

ing by the States, so that short-term income support does not erode the very investments on which inclusive, medium-term prosperity ultimately rests," he said. "...Any fiscal indiscipline at the State-level also casts a shadow on the sovereign borrowing costs," he said.

While the Centre has achieved consolidation, alongside record public investment, rising revenue deficits and unconditional cash transfers in several States pose emerging risks by crowding out growth-enhancing spending, according to the Economic Survey tabled in Parliament earlier in the day.



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**INCOME TRANSFERS TO HOUSEHOLDS PLAY A ROLE, BUT THEIR IMPACT IS HIGHEST WHEN COMPLEMENTED BY PRODUCTIVITY ENHANCING INVESTMENTS AND SUSTAINING GROWTH REQUIRES CAREFUL RE-PRIORITISATION WITHIN REVENUE SPENDING BY THE STATES**

”

With Indian Government bonds now globally indexed and investors increasingly assessing general Government finances, weak fiscal discipline at the State-level can no longer be treated as locally contained; it increasingly affects the cost of sovereign borrowing, he said. India's 10-year bond yield is 6.7 per cent, while Indonesia's is 6.3 per cent, even though both countries have the same credit rating of BBB.

"States' fiscal priorities, perhaps, are casting a shadow on the sovereign's borrowing cost, as investors focus on the fiscal parameters of the general

Government rather than just those of the Union Government," it said.

More importantly, it said, the economic costs of the insidious impact that unconditional fiscal transfers have on the incentives for self-improvement, upskilling, and employability may be more significant in the long term, it added.

Speaking about the easy money era, Nageswaran said years of ultra-loose monetary policy have resulted in stretched asset valuations, rising concentration risks, and a growing reliance on less regulated sources of capital.

US tariffs as most disruptive in global economy: Survey

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New Delhi

India must focus on building enduring national capabilities and economic sovereignty in the face of shrinking space for rules-based trading, anti-immigrant stance, weaponisation of energy sources and growing use of export controls in critical sectors, the Economic Survey said on Thursday.

It said the global economy has been subjected to "multiple upheavals" and the "most disruptive" among these disturbances was the imposition of tariffs by the US on imports from its trade partners.

In a world where economic relationships are increasingly strategic and contested, the ability to learn becomes a core element of "Statecraft", it said, noting that India must build enduring national capabilities to deal

with the challenging geopolitical scenario.

The assessment comes against the backdrop of growing concerns over the Trump administration's policies on trade, tariffs and immigration, China's export control measures relating to critical minerals and increasing disquiet in the West over India's energy ties with Russia.

The Economic Survey 2025-26, which was tabled in Parliament, referring to geopolitical and economic turbulence, said strategic competition is increasingly fuelling trade wars, while nations vie for access to critical minerals and technological resources in a manner "reminiscent of a new colonial scramble".

The recent experience illustrated that "economic interdependence, once viewed as a source of mutual stability, is now increasingly perceived as a channel of vulnerability", it said.



‘40% gig workers earn below ₹15K/month’

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New Delhi

Stating that about 40 per cent of gig workers in India earn below Rs 15,000 per month, the Economic Survey 2025-26 called for significant policy interventions in the gig economy, suggesting the setting of "minimum per-hour or per-task earnings", which includes compensation for waiting time, to ensure fair wages and reduce the cost disparity between regular and gig employment.

Tabled in Parliament on Thursday, the Survey said the aim of the gig-economy policy should be to reshape terms, allowing workers to exercise genuine choice instead of being forced into gigs by weak demand, skill mismatches, or the lack of a safety net.

The gig economy continues to expand rapidly, yet income volatility remains a key issue, creating obstacles to credit access. Financial inclusion for gig workers also trails behind; they face limited 'thin-file' credit options, which continue to raise concerns.

Platform algorithms control work allocation, performance monitoring, wages, and supply-demand matching, raising concerns about algorithmic biases and burnout.

"About 40 per cent of gig workers report earnings below



THE 2019-21 NATIONAL FAMILY HEALTH SURVEY (NFHS) REPORTS THAT 24 PER CENT OF INDIAN WOMEN AND 23 PER CENT OF INDIAN MEN ARE OVERWEIGHT OR OBESE

₹15,000 per month," the Survey said, adding that limited skilling and fears of job losses due to technological advances such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) exacerbate worker vulnerability.

"Platforms have become essential gig-market infrastructure for finding workers and work. This concentration of power raises concerns over fees, algorithms, and worker protections. Policy should address this through competition rules, data access, and algorithmic transparency, while reorganising the social con-

tract so that gig work benefits workers more fairly.

"Policy can reduce the cost gap between regular and gig work by limiting incentives to avoid mandatory benefits and by setting minimum per-hour or per-task earnings (including waiting time), encouraging formal employment and raising incomes for low — and medium-skilled gig workers," the Survey noted.

Identifying limited access to productive assets as a major hurdle for upward mobility, the Survey suggested that platforms and employ-

ers should be encouraged to "co-invest" in assets and training.

"Many cannot upgrade from low-to medium-skilled gigs because they lack tools (for example, a bike, car, or specialised equipment)," the document observed.

It argued that such co-investment would help workers progress into more secure, higher-quality jobs. Gig workers in India — including quick commerce and food delivery riders — recently staged strikes and protests through their unions to demand better payouts, improved working conditions, formal recognition under the country's labour laws and removal of tight 10-minute delivery deadlines, with their unions taking up the issue with the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment.

Consequent to the agitation, the Government asked e-commerce players to remove 10-minute delivery branding from their platforms. India's gig economy has undergone a structural shift, with the workforce expanding 55 per cent to ₹1.2 crore in FY25 from ₹77 lakh in FY21. It now accounts for more than 2 per cent of the total workforce in India.

Growth in gig workers has outpaced overall employment, with non-agricultural gigs forecast to make up 6.7 per cent of the workforce by 2029-30 and contribute ₹2.35 lakh crore to the GDP.

Economic Survey calls for social media age limit

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

The Economic Survey 2025-26 has called on the Government to implement age-based limits for social media usage for children and digital advertisements targeted at them, a proposal that could shake up companies like Meta and Google in what is their biggest user base market in the world.

According to the Economic Survey 2025-26, social media addiction is strongly linked to anxiety, depression, low self-esteem and cyberbullying-related stress among young people, and it warned, flagging digital addiction as a growing public health and

defaults, particularly for social media, gambling apps, auto-play features, and targeted advertising," the Survey said.

The Survey has called for educating families and encouraged them to promote screen-time limits, device-free hours, and shared offline activities.

It has called for conducting parental workshops through schools and community centres to train guardians in setting healthy boundaries, recognising signs of addiction, and using parental control tools effectively.

"Promoting simpler devices for children, such as basic phones or education-only tablets, along with



social concern with implications for India's demographic dividend.

The Survey's recommendation stems from the larger concerns surrounding "digital addiction" among young users. The Survey tabled in Parliament has identified digital addiction as a rising problem impacting the mental health of youth and adults.

It noted measures by various countries, including Australia, China, and South Korea, and called for several interventions, besides the ongoing efforts of various Government departments. "Policies on age-based access limits may be considered, as younger users are more vulnerable to compulsive use and harmful content. Platforms should be made responsible for enforcing age verification and age-appropriate

enforced usage limits and content filters, can further reduce exposure to harmful material, including violent, sexual, or gambling-related content," the Survey said.

It said network layer safeguards, such as internet service provider-level interventions that can complement such measures by offering family data plans with differentiated quotas for educational versus recreational apps and default blocking of high-risk categories, with opt-in overrides available to guardians.

Taking cognisance of the rise in digital addiction, the Survey has called for comprehensive interventions to address the problem, which is adversely impacting academic performance, workplace productivity, and mental health of youth as well as adults.



‘Honest officials to be protected from vexatious prosecution’

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New Delhi

Honest officials must be protected from vexatious prosecution for India to have the entrepreneurial State it sorely needs, according to the Economic Survey 2025-26 tabled in the Parliament on Thursday. It also said legal and institutional frameworks must codify protection for good-faith decision-making and clearly separate error from corruption.

The survey, tabled by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, suggested re-orientation of the approach of agencies like the Comptroller & Auditor General (CAG), besides a balance in laws relating to the prosecution of public servants.

It said not every adverse outcome is a failure of intent or competence, as some are failures of hypotheses, timing, coordination and temporal dimension of accountability. "Ex ante (based on forecasts) clarity and ex post proportionality matter more than real-time scrutiny. This may require an explicit re-orientation of the approach of agencies like the Comptroller & Auditor General and of vigilance systems.

It will also need an appropriate balance in laws relating to the prosecution of public servants," the survey said. For India to have the entrepreneurial state it sorely needs, honest officials must be protected from vexatious prosecution, it said in a chapter titled "Building strategic resilience and strategic indispensability: The role of the State, the private sector and the citizens".





Editor's  
TAKE

## A fatal crash, a political void

The death of Maharashtra stalwart Ajit Pawar in a tragic air crash leaves a vacuum in Maharashtra politics and raises many questions about air safety

The stalwart of Maharashtra, Ajit Pawar, is no more. His life came to an abrupt end when his private plane crashed near Baramati airport, the city which had elected him eight times to the Assembly, and where he was a local hero for the people. His death comes at a time when rumours were rife that he would reunite with the other faction of the NCP led by Sharad Pawar, which he broke with in 2023.

Ajit Pawar's death alters Maharashtra's power equation. After the 2023 split in the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), Pawar had emerged as its most powerful leader, second only to Sharad Pawar. He took the bulk of legislators and redefined state politics by siding with the BJP and settling as Deputy Chief Minister. However, after the recent civic election results in Pune and Mumbai, where Ajit Pawar came out strong, he might have been contemplating reuniting with the other faction of the NCP.

Ajit Pawar was, no doubt, a well-respected leader who commanded authority in several regions, but his name had appeared in numerous cases of corruption which were closed or abandoned after he joined hands with the BJP.

He will be cremated with the Prime Minister and Union Home Minister in attendance, underlining the weight he carried in state and national politics. The accident occurred early Wednesday morning as the Learjet carrying Pawar attempted to land at Baramati airport but failed to land on the runway, hitting the ground instead and turning into a ball of fire. Preliminary information from the Civil Aviation Ministry suggests poor visibility at the airport. Investigators from the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) will be investigating the crash, but the absence so far of pilot-ATC communication recordings raises troubling questions. This is not the first time that India has lost a senior leader in an air crash. The previous accidents that claimed the lives of Sanjay Gandhi and Air Chief Bipin Rawat are still being probed.

The fear is that this probe, too, may add to a growing list of reports that identify 'procedural lapses' without assigning institutional accountability. Beyond politics, Ajit Pawar was widely seen as the bridge between the two Pawar camps. That role will now fall on the shoulders of his wife, Sunetra Pawar, and his cousin, Supriya. The crash also sharpens concerns about aviation safety in India, already heightened after the recent Air India tragedy in Ahmedabad.

From Sanjay Gandhi to Madhavrao Scindia to Bipin Rawat, India's history is marked by the loss of influential figures in air accidents whose causes remain opaque. Each unresolved mystery deepens public unease. Ajit Pawar's death is thus more than a political tragedy; it would recalibrate the politics of Maharashtra. The sad part is that such an influential person died in an air crash – a flight that was flawless and error-free in every respect. Every aspect of the crash must be thoroughly investigated, and any culpability or negligence must be met with the strictest punishment.



ASHOK  
KUMAR

Imagine a father standing in the cold and watching his young son die, for two hours. Not suddenly. Not instantly, but slowly, minute by minute, while his voice echoed in the dark. "Papa, please save me." The death of a bright young software engineer, 27-year-old Yuvraj Mehta, who met a preventable death-not on a battlefield, not in an unpredictable natural calamity, but on a road we travel every day without even a second thought-reminds us of the callous attitude of civic and development authorities (Indore and Noida both are victims of poor management by development authorities). Similarly, in another incident in seemingly pristine Indore-a city the nation has applauded as among its cleanest-a wholly different hazard struck: contaminated drinking water in Bhagirathpura that led to dozens of deaths, hundreds of illnesses, and widespread anguish. These two tragedies-one of infrastructure negligence, another of civic system failure-are stark reminders that the safety of our citizens is not merely an administrative accountability but a moral obligation of one and all, including political and administrative executives and the public at large.

Both incidents have rightly captured public outrage and temporarily become headlines, but allow me to assert, as a former police officer who has seen the best and worst of our systems: these are not isolated events. They are symptoms of deeper, systemic inertia. Incidents like Noida and Indore may be the ones that caught the limelight, but they are not one-offs. Such incidents keep occurring across the country, in different forms, every single day. The overall scenario is that we, as a society, are not bothered enough-until tragedy strikes our doorstep.

### A Disturbing Pattern: Government Agencies and Public Safety

When we talk of tragedy, we must look not only at the moment it occurs but at the long stretch of policy, practice, and inaction that preceded it. In the Noida case, the ditch into which Yuvraj's car fell was part of an open excavation associated with construction work. Despite warnings raised in the past about the danger of water accumulation and road edge erosion at the site, no effective corrective action was taken. There were no reflectors, no warning signs, no barricades, and minimal lighting to alert even a cautious driver navigating dense winter fog. The



THE NOIDA TRAGEDY WAS INTENTIONAL NEGLIGENCE; IT WAS NEGLIGENCE. A 27-YEAR-OLD TECHIE NAVIGATING A FAMILIAR ROAD SHOULD NEVER ENCOUNTER A DEEP, WATER-FILLED PIT WITHOUT WARNING

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boundary wall was damaged, the excavation remained open, and a death was waiting silently. Our government agencies-be they urban development authorities, municipal bodies, public works departments, or other construction wings-often display a careless attitude towards safety norms. Open drains, uncovered sewage lines, and road-side excavations without protective barriers have become routine sights. Deep potholes on roads act as open invitations for accidents. Construction material lying on roads further narrows carriage-ways, creating chaos for commuters and lethal conditions at night.

The situation becomes more alarming when one observes how the PWD, municipal corporations, and other agencies carry out construction work. Roads are dug up for laying sewage or utility pipelines and left open for weeks. Heavy material lies scattered without reflectors. Suddenly, large boulders or concrete blocks appear on poorly lit roads, offering no warning to oncoming vehicles. These are not minor oversights; they are systemic failures. We as a society, on both the administrative and public sides, do not take serious note of such administrative lapses or safety hazards unless tragedy strikes deeply.

### Private Negligence and Administrative Silence

Government agencies alone are not responsible. Private players are equally culpable. Builders frequently violate safety standards.

Mining mafias destroy roads with overloaded vehicles. Even small truck owners overload vehicles without caring for braking limits or road safety. Profit is prioritised over safety, and accountability is treated as an inconvenience.

What makes the situation worse is that the administration often keeps its eyes closed. The reasons are many-general apathy, public pressure, corruption, political influence, and the strong nexus between builders, contractors, mining lobbies, and political and administrative executives. These influential forces silence enforcement. As a result, violations continue unchecked.

I recall lodging an FIR against the Public Works Department in Udham Singh Nagar, Uttarakhand, for dangerous road conditions. Instead of rectifying the mistake, the entire department closed ranks against the action. The system protected itself rather than the public. This mindset remains deeply entrenched.

The problem is deeply rooted. Our tolerance level-whether as administrators or citizens-is dangerously high. We accept negligence as normal. Perpetrators walk free because punishments are mild, delayed, or diluted.

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<https://dailypioneer.com>

## PIC TALK



Brides during a mass marriage ceremony in Kolkata.

PHOTO: PTI

## DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

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## GOLD VERSUS BLUE-CHIP EQUITIES: LESSONS FROM YEAR GONE BY

The recent surge in gold prices has once again drawn attention to how Indian households view safety and returns. Gold has traditionally been a hedge against uncertainty, and over the past year it has rewarded that instinct. An investor who bought gold a year ago would today be sitting on clear gains, supported by global tensions, currency movements and steady central bank buying. The rise has been gradual but reassuring, especially for those seeking capital protection rather than excitement.

By contrast, an investor who put the same money into blue-chip stocks a year ago would have seen a mixed picture. Some frontline companies delivered respectable returns, but overall market volatility meant gains were uneven and, in many cases, more modest than gold. Equity

investors had to endure sharp swings, policy concerns and global cues, testing patience and risk appetite. Over a short horizon like one year, blue chips did not fully display their long-term strengths.

This contrast highlights a familiar lesson. Gold works well as a stabiliser, not as a growth engine. Equities, even blue chips, need time to reward investors and cannot be judged by brief periods. The practical solution for ordinary savers is balance. Chasing gold after a sharp rise carries risks, just as abandoning equities during uncertainty can hurt long-term wealth creation. A disciplined mix – some gold for stability, quality equities for growth, and regular review – remains the most sensible path for households navigating uncertain times.

A MYLSAMI | TAMIL NAIDU

Please send your letter to the [info@dailypioneer.com](mailto:info@dailypioneer.com). In not more than 250 words. We appreciate your feedback.

# Samta Sakhis are transforming lives of rural women's



SWAPNA  
MAJUMDAR

## 2ND OPINION THE PIONEER

Members of women's collectives (self-help groups) in Madhya Pradesh, known as *Samta Sakhis*, have been playing a crucial role in addressing gender-based violence, ensuring women's rights and entitlements, and empowering communities to take action. Part of an initiative promoting transformative change through women's leadership, they spread awareness about gender equality and mobilised women to hold local authorities accountable.

Coming from marginalised economic and social backgrounds, the *Samta Sakhis* have faced many challenges in their own lives. This enables them to relate closely to the struggles of other women and fuels their desire for change. Their lived experiences of hardship have strengthened their empathy and helped them fight for

women's rights with resilience and determination.

A clear sign of change in Sheopur district, where the initiative began in 2019, emerged when women decided they would no longer spend hours collecting water due to the absence of nearby drinking water. *Samta Sakhis* mobilised 40 women to present their grievances to the sarpanch. Initially reluctant, he eventually gave in to the collective pressure and ordered the construction of a borewell. They conducted training sessions on women's rights, laws related to violence against women, and entitlements to land, housing, and pensions for widows, the elderly, and persons with disabilities.

They supported widowed women facing violence from marital families to secure their share of land and rightful pensions. They also pursued complaints regarding roads, streetlights, and primary health centres. *Samta Sakhis* guided women in obtaining identity and job cards for government schemes, as well as caste certificates required for ration cards. They established Lok Adhikari Kendras and block gender forums to facilitate access to entitlements.

Their success lies in working beyond their own groups and villages. When they learned that a Panchayat Secretary in a nearby village was taking bribes to issue caste certificates, they intervened. After he refused to

listen, they waited for the Janpad CEO's visit. Upon hearing their complaint, the CEO reprimanded the Secretary and ordered immediate action. Certificates were issued within minutes – a resolution unlikely without their persistence. The *Samta Sakhi* initiative began in 2019 as a pilot by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) under the gender justice programme of the

National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM). It was implemented by ANANDI, a not-for-profit organisation, in partnership with ICRW and IWWAGE, in collaboration with the Madhya Pradesh State Rural Livelihoods Mission (MPSRLM). Its success led to expansion into 18 districts in 2023. Despite its impact, the programme has since been absorbed into another scheme due to resource constraints, weakening its focused approach. Strengthening women's collectives is vital for implementing the RESPECT Women framework by UN Women and WHO to end violence against women. As a signatory to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, India has committed to achieving gender equality (SDG 5) by 2030. Expanding the proven *Samta Sakhi* model with adequate funding would advance this commitment.

The writer is journalist writing on development and gender

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## New markets bring new responsibilities

This refers to the report *US admits India gains more access in EU FTA* (January 29). Washington's admission that India has emerged favourably from the EU trade agreement is significant, not for its tone but for what it signals about changing trade alignments. With the US turning inward and Europe seeking reliable markets, India is increasingly viewed as a necessary partner. Greater access to the EU offers opportunities for exports, jobs and technology inflows, but also raises domestic expectations.

Market access alone will not deliver gains unless Indian industry improves scale, compliance and competitiveness. References to labour mobility and surplus production elsewhere must be read carefully, as trade openings can bring pressure alongside promise. India must balance strategic autonomy, including energy choices, with global scrutiny.

The real test lies in execution - how quickly exporters adapt to EU standards and how effectively the government supports them through infrastructure, credit and regulatory clarity. Used wisely, this opening can strengthen India's economy without deepening external dependence. The focus must now be on preparation, not celebration.

M BARATHI | BANGALORE

## Ajit Pawar's legacy remembered

With the untimely demise of Maharashtra's Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, the state has lost a 'Dada' – a symbol of dynamic and fearless leadership. His passing is an immense loss to rural Maharashtra. A visionary leader with a deep understanding of rural issues and the mindset of ordinary people has been lost not only to rural regions but to the entire state. Speaking the language of the people, blessed with a sharp sense of humour and natural wit, Ajit Pawar stood firm despite numerous allegations and counter-allegations. He never faltered or lost focus. Although official work at Mantralaya begins at 10 am, his day often started as early as 7 am. His command over the bureaucracy and his distinctive style of ensuring public work was completed were remarkable.

Coming from a rural background, he remained closely connected to village life. Because he spoke in the people's language, he felt like one of their own. Maharashtra showered him with affection. His demise is an irreparable loss to the state, and a profound one to rural Maharashtra.

Leaders with such deep public understanding are rare today. HHis legacy will continue to inspire public service rooted in humility and action.

DATTAPRASAD SHIRODKAR | MUMBAI

## Delivery will define reform success

The President's recent speech presented a broad overview of the government's reform narrative, emphasising outcomes rather than intent. The reference to next-generation GST reforms and the claim of ₹1 lakh crore in savings highlight the scale of fiscal restructuring, particularly for the poor and middle class. Her emphasis on digital public infrastructure, welfare delivery through direct benefit transfers, and expanded financial inclusion signals a state increasingly driven by data and systems. Mentions of infrastructure expansion, women-led development, start-up growth, and support for aspirational districts balanced the economic message with social reach.

Yet such claims demand scrutiny. Savings on paper must translate into visible price relief, simpler compliance for small businesses, and fewer disputes. GST, despite improvements, still burdens smaller firms with complexity and delayed refunds. The speech sets direction, but delivery remains the true test. Transparent review mechanisms, regular consultation with states and traders, and timely course correction would strengthen trust. Reforms gain credibility consistency and everyday impact that citizens can genuinely experience in their lives.

K SAKUNTHALA | COIMBATORE



# Why the Supreme Court’s scrutiny of Haryana’s Zoo Safari matters

With global precedents warning of irreversible damage to arid ecosystems, the Court’s scrutiny brings into sharp focus a fundamental dilemma: can commercialised safari tourism coexist with the long-term survival of the Aravallis, or does this project risk tipping a vital ecological spine beyond repair?



The Supreme Court of India's recent directive to the Central Empowered Committee to scrutinise the proposed Zoo Safari project in the Haryana Aravallis marks a critical juncture in the preservation of one of India's most fragile ecological spines. Spanning a massive 10,000-acre enclosure on forest land, the project has come under intense legal and environmental scrutiny, with the strategic transfer of its jurisdiction from the Tourism Department to the Forest Department in January 2025 being seen as a tactical attempt to bypass the approval requirements of the Van Sanrakshan evam Samvardhan Adhiniyam, 1980 (VSSA).

The project prioritises tourist “dwell time”, night safaris, the development of permanent infrastructure, and entertainment. It clearly risks violating the Public Trust Doctrine, which mandates that such vital natural ecosystems cannot be traded off for commercial gain. The State's subsequent stand to proceed with a first phase of about 3,300 acres serves as a textbook example of ‘salami slicing’, where a large-scale intervention is presented in smaller, seemingly more palatable portions to mask its cumulative impact. The impacts of some projects in similar areas around the world cannot be overlooked.

Global precedents, such as the Tucson case in the United States, illustrate the severe risk of hydrological depletion. To maintain lush, visitor-friendly enclosures in the arid Sonoran Desert, deep wells led to a “cone of depression” in the water table. In the Aravalli context, diverting limited sub-surface water for a massive safari project could similarly desiccate the ecosystem, including the surrounding village commons, or bani, which millions rely on for ground-water recharge.

The imposition of artificial boundaries triggers the ‘Island Syndrome’ and changes in microclimate, as seen in Middle Eastern desert projects and Nairobi National Park. Fencing for controlled areas disrupted wildlife movement, and fragmentation led to overgrazing, soil degradation, and genetic isolation of species. In the Gurgaon-Alwar stretch, such fencing could restrict apex predators like leopards to smaller, unsus-



THE PROJECT MUST BE ASSESSED IN TERMS OF NET BIODIVERSITY GAIN, IMPROVEMENT OF NDVI IN BUFFER ZONES, AND ITS FUNCTION AS AN IN-SITU NURSERY FOR ENDANGERED ARAVALLI FLORA

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tainable pockets and inevitably escalate human-wildlife conflict.

Middle Eastern desert projects have shown that microclimate alteration killed sensitive xerophytic flora unable to withstand sudden temperature spikes caused by asphalt and concrete — a necessity for roads and administrative blocks. The localised heat island effect can effectively neutralise the Aravallis’ role as a natural cooling barrier for adjacent areas, including the National Capital Region.

The Florida precedent warns of ‘pathogen spillover’, where the disposal of organic waste from exotic captive animals introduced foreign diseases to native populations. Compounding this is the visual and acoustic pollution documented in South African private reserves, where tourist vehicles and artificial night lighting disrupt the mating and hunting cycles of nocturnal arid-zone wildlife. This sensory intrusion often leads to a ‘silent extinction’ in which, despite the physical presence of animals, the population's reproductive viability crashes. The project, notably, does not categorically state that exotics shall not be introduced into the safari zoo.

In essence, global evidence suggests that the massive footprint required to support safari-related mass tourism in

dryland ecosystems is fundamentally at odds with the preservation of natural capital. To honour the Public Trust Doctrine and ensure long-term resource sustainability, the focus must shift away from permanent entertainment infrastructure.

While traditional zoos and safaris in arid regions have been found to trigger ecological decline, transitioning to a ‘Living Natural History Museum’ with a ‘Native Only’ policy, minimal permanent structures, a xeriscaping approach, rigorous water frugality, avoidance of deep-aquifer extraction, and banning energy-intensive climate control systems has been successfully implemented at the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum. The Al Ain Zoo in the UAE utilises a ‘Safety Net’ model to breed desert ungulates like the Arabian oryx in semi-wild paddocks for reintroduction into the wild. Focusing on desertification education rather than mere animal display, the facility functions as a zero-waste nursery. In California, The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens operates as a renewable energy hub, minimises the urban heat island effect, and converts animal waste into compost for native reforestation projects, thus moving beyond the ‘commodification trap’ to nourish the surround-

ing landscape.

With apparently no link between the project and any in-situ government conservation programme, and with the project's core vision tethered to a commercial tourism agenda aimed at creating the country's premier tourism destination, the evident fragility of the xerophytic landscape cannot withstand the attempted commodification of nature. Establishing the truthfulness of the State's claim that the project is aimed at ecological restoration and sustainable eco-tourism warrants a critical examination of whether rigorous scientific data — pertaining to vegetation inventory, tourist carrying capacity, hydrology of surrounding water-stressed landscapes, sub-surface geological connectivity, sustainability of biodiversity corridors, and the imminent increase in human-wildlife interface — justifies the proposed diversion of land use.

In a project of this scale, upholding the Public Trust Doctrine requires expanding the project's ‘event horizon’ beyond its physical boundaries to the entire ‘provision shed’. The project must respect the carrying capacity of the xerophytic landscape to prevent pollution and animal disturbance. It must comply with the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, the

National Zoo Policy (1998), and the Recognition of Zoo Rules (2022). Under Section 38H of the WPA and NZP 3.1.4, any zoo's primary mandate is to complement and strengthen national conservation by prioritising local and regional species over exotic displays. Schedule I of the RZR and NZP 3.3.3 further mandates that establishments must be congenial to animal welfare on appropriate-quality land.

Considering the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, Central Ground Water Authority notifications, and the National Capital Region Planning Board Act, 1985, the project must ensure the long-term resource sustainability of the Aravallis as an integrated ecological spine for air and water security.

Developing a zoo safari within a xerophytic and ecologically sensitive zone like the Aravallis risks an ‘ecological mismatch’ of catastrophic proportions. In view of global examples and the precautionary principle, the project report deserves a complete overhaul if outright rejection is not pursued. As an alternative, a suitably located ‘Native Biodiversity Park’ on a limited area could be planned after due consultation with local populations and settlement of rights.

The park should have zero permanent structures, infrastructure on less than 5 per cent of the area, no obstructive fencing, commitment to in-situ conservation, a low-impact model prioritising ecological integrity over commercial density, a 100 per cent water-neutral footprint relying on advanced rainwater harvesting and recycling, and a strictly native species policy. It should ensure zero fencing along migratory paths, use sunken barriers allowing wildlife movement, adopt off-grid renewable energy, implement waste systems supporting forest restoration, regulate sensory pollution through Dark Sky-compliant lighting, use non-motorised internal transport, and train local communities including Gujjar and Meo youth as naturalists and digital stewards.

The project must be assessed in terms of Net Biodiversity Gain, improvement of NDVI in buffer zones, and its function as an in-situ nursery for endangered Aravalli flora and fauna. It is high time there was a paradigm shift in our treatment of the Aravallis — from commercial commodification to serious conservation.

## Martyrs’ Day: Sacrifice, memory, and the moral repair of a nation



The bullet fired on the evening of January 30, 1948 did not merely end the life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. It struck a nation already wounded — politically free, yet morally bruised and spiritually exhausted. India had emerged from nearly two centuries of imperial domination only months earlier, but freedom had arrived soaked in blood. Partition displaced more than ten million people; hundreds of thousands were killed or maimed. Women were widowed and violated, children orphaned, families torn apart and scattered like sand slipping through an open palm. The proud were reduced to paupers, entire populations forced into refugee camps and tents, many clustered around Delhi, carrying their lives in bundles and their grief in silence.

Partition was a political reality. For those who endured it, it was surreal. Why had this happened to them? What crime had they committed? Trauma demands explanation; grief seeks a target. Hatred, once ignited and fed, annihilates the moral inheritance of centuries. Poison injected into the veins of a society does not remain contained — it festers, spreads, and seeks new sites of destruction. The thirst for vengeance becomes indistinguishable from the pain that produced it. It was in this moral atmosphere that Gandhi was killed. Some years ago, Ms Surekha Sharma — now an octogenarian and retired principal of a college in Punjab — recounted a memory that continues to unsettle. As a child during Partition, she lived in a refugee camp in Gurdaspur. On the evening of January 30, while children were playing outside their tents, someone came running through the camp with a packet of sweets, announcing news from Delhi. By six o'clock, the radio confirmed it. “We children began dancing,” she said. “Soon, the whole camp gathered. It became an impromptu celebration.” No historical explanation could dislodge that memory. She was unequivocal: that was how it felt; that was what happened.

We know such sentiments existed among the traumatised, but hearing it spoken plainly by someone long known to you brings home a harsher truth. When people are bruised beyond endurance — physically and morally — the mind circles endlessly, seeking meaning for its helplessness. It looks for an act that promises closure. Gandhi's assassination appeared, to some, as such a release. Yet what Gandhi could not fully

achieve in life, he accomplished in death.

As The Guardian observed on January 31, 1948, Gandhi's death might bring about ‘that change of heart for which he laboured and gave his life’. In India's moral imagination, sacrifice has long meant the willingness to absorb suffering rather than pass it on. Gandhi embodied that idea. By laying down his life, he drew the poison of hatred into himself and gave the nascent nation a moment to pause, to reflect, and to recover its moral balance. Violence did not vanish overnight, but something essential was arrested. One life may indeed have saved thousands — homes from burning, minds from surrendering permanently to hate. This is the work of martyrdom: not the taking of life, but the offering of one's own; not destruction, but moral repair. The Isha Upanishad captures this ethic with austere clarity: Tena tyaktena bhunjitha — by renunciation alone does one truly live. At its most luminous moments, India's freedom struggle remained anchored in this principle. This tradition of sacrifice was not confined to one path or belief. It spanned philosophies and temperaments. Gandhi practised sacrifice through moral resistance; others chose revolutionary defiance. Yet all shared one truth: freedom demands a price paid in one's own blood, not that of others.

During the Lahore Conspiracy Case trial, Bhagat Singh and BK Dutt began a hunger strike against the discriminatory treatment of political prisoners. Their comrades debated the move. Jatindranath Das cautioned that once begun, such a strike must be carried through, as breaking it would weaken the cause. He eventually joined, vowing not to end his fast until the demands were met — something he believed the government would never concede.

Others broke their fast under medical compulsion or at the urging of nationalist leaders. Das did not. During force-feeding, the tube accidentally entered his lungs; his health deteriorated irreversibly. He refused all appeals, even rebuking Bhagat Singh for attempting persuasion. Often, he sang Tagore's *Ekla Chalo Re*. After sixty-three days, he died on September 13, 1929.

His funeral procession — from Lahore to Calcutta — became a rolling awakening. Never before had the city witnessed such crowds. In death, he ignited a flame that speeches could not.

A day before his execution, Bhagat Singh received word that an escape could be arranged. He refused. His reply has since become iconic: his name, he said, had become an emblem of the Indian revolution; the ideals and sacrifices of the movement had placed him on a pedestal he could never have reached in life. His only regret was that he had not achieved even a thousandth part of what he wished to do for his country and humanity. He asked that the execution not be delayed. What followed was extraordinary. In death, Bhagat Singh became larger than any living

leader. The nation rose as one. His martyrdom continues to nourish the political imagination of generations yet unborn.

Khudiram Bose was barely seventeen when arrested. His associate, Prafulla Chaki, chose death over capture. Initially, no lawyer came forward to defend Khudiram until Kalidas Bose took up his case. Throughout the trial, Khudiram remained cheerful. On the day of his execution, crowds gathered outside the jail. With the Gita in hand, he embraced the gallows, smiling. Witnesses spoke of a radiance that defied explanation. Was he dead — or did he live more intensely in the conscience of his people? Kartar Singh Sarabha was not yet twenty when executed. He had gone to America to study and prosper, but returned to liberate his country. A pillar of the Ghadar movement, his discipline and energy were legendary. When sentenced to death, he thanked the judge. He sang of the hardship of serving the nation, of the countless trials borne by those who choose that path. He could have stayed abroad. He chose otherwise. Madan Lal Dhingra, too, had gone to London for education. There, confronted by colonial domination, he chose sacrifice. Before the court, he accepted responsibility without fear. India, he said, needed to learn how to die; only by dying could one teach it.

There are countless such stories: the dead of Jallianwala Bagh, the victims of martial law, the prisoners of the Cellular Jail in the Andamans — broken in body but unbowed in spirit — and the soldiers of the Azad Hind Fauj. Freedom was not gifted; it was purchased.

Martyrs' Day is not a ritual of sentiment. It is a summons to memory and responsibility. To remember Gandhi on this day is not to turn him into an icon sealed in reverence, but to recall the discipline he demanded of himself — and of us. He did not offer comfort; he offered responsibility. He lived by the Gita's injunction that one's duties lie in action, not in the assurance of results: *Karmany evadhikaraste, ma phaleshu kadachana*. For him, non-violence was not a tactic but a way of seeing the other, even the adversary, as human. Gandhi warned repeatedly that means are inseparable from ends, that what we do in moments of fear and anger determines the world we will inhabit afterwards. Hatred, once normalised, hollows societies from within. His life was an argument against that erosion; his death, a final reminder of its cost. Martyrs' Day is not only about the dead, but about the living — the nation we continue to build. To remember Gandhi truly is not to repeat his name, but to ask whether our words, choices and silences still carry the moral weight of the values he lived and died for.

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## Budget allocations can realise India’s energy ambitions



The Union Budget for FY26-27 arrives at a critical moment for India's energy transition. After several years of rapid policy expansion, the challenge is no longer one of intent or ambition, but of execution. Flagship programmes across power distribution, rooftop solar and agricultural energy have laid strong foundations, yet they remain constrained by gaps between financial allocations, institutional capacity and last-mile delivery.

How the upcoming Budget responds to these constraints will determine whether India's clean energy push continues as a collection of schemes or evolves into a coherent, system-level transformation. At the heart of this transition lies the Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS), which is meant to restore the financial health and technical efficiency of power distribution companies (DISCOMs). Over the past few years, RDSS has seen wide coverage, but FY26-27 must mark a shift from expanding scope to accelerating execution. Faster rollout of smart meters, feeder upgrades and loss-reduction measures is now more important than adding new components.

Experts suggest that the next Budget should link allocations more closely to outcomes, such as the pace of smart meter installations, reduction in Aggregate Technical and Commercial (AT&C) losses, and the modernisation of feeders. Flexible funding, especially for weaker states, will be critical to avoid widening disparities in distribution infrastructure. Stronger central procurement frameworks and standardised total-expenditure (TOTEX) contracts could further de-risk private participation, while transitional financing can help utilities move faster on the ground. Equally important is preparing RDSS for the digital and renewable-heavy grid of the future.

Dedicated budgetary support for cybersecurity, data governance and workforce capacity would allow RDSS to function as the backbone for integrating decentralised and rooftop solar systems being rolled out under various MNRE schemes.

Rooftop solar, especially under the PM Surya Ghar programme and the existing RTS Phase II pipeline, is another area where continuity and clarity in the FY26-27 Budget will matter. With the government targeting one crore households under PM Surya Ghar, allocations need to

reflect the scale of installations required to meet that ambition. More importantly, the Budget must clearly define how RTS Phase II projects are to be absorbed into PM Surya Ghar, reducing administrative duplication and streamlining DISCOM processes.

Access to finance will remain a key constraint. While early adoption has been driven largely by households that can self-finance, expanding rooftop solar to middle- and lower-income groups will require credit guarantees, interest subventions and other financial instruments. In parallel, DISCOM-focused performance incentives linked to approval timelines, net metering and billing integration could ease the last-mile bottlenecks that currently slow down rooftop installations.

Agriculture-focused solarisation under PM-KUSUM is another flagship scheme that needs recalibration rather than mere expansion. FY26-27 should prioritise components that are performing well, adjust Component A to better suit small and marginal farmers, and strengthen Components B and C through higher support and faster feeder upgrades. Aligning PM-KUSUM with water management, micro-irrigation and agrivoltaics can also improve farm incomes while building climate resilience.

A crucial shift that the Budget could signal is the adoption of a “separate-strengthen-solarise” approach under Component C. This would mean prioritising feeder separation and network strengthening before adding solar capacity. Using budgetary support upfront to improve lines, transformers and metering ensures that when solar power is added, it flows into systems capable of handling it. The result would be more reliable daytime electricity for farmers, lower losses for DISCOMs, and better alignment between PM-KUSUM and distribution reforms under RDSS.

Taken together, the FY26-27 Budget has the potential to act as a catalyst for India's energy transition by moving beyond piecemeal, scheme-by-scheme expansion. By integrating flagship programmes, strengthening institutional capacity, and aligning financial allocations with realistic delivery pathways, the government can ensure that clean energy growth supports both economic resilience and long-term sustainability.

The real test of the Budget will not be how many schemes it funds, but how effectively it turns those schemes into a connected and reliable energy system for the country.

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MARKET ECHOES



It is finally the sentiments, stupid! Whatever one may exude about corporate earnings, profitability visibility, macros, headwinds, and so on, recent volatility in specific stocks and stock markets show that emotions are as important, if not more, as the fundamentals. For example, look at the mayhem in Indonesia. For the second day, there was a rout, and the circuit breaker came into play as the stock market index slid by 10 per cent on Thursday. The ostensible reason was that the index service provider, MSCI, warned about the “invest-ability potential” of the nation’s stocks. What this implied was that there were terrible issues with the functioning of the market, which led to non-professionalism, manipulations, credibility, and transparency. Other global institutions like Goldman Sachs and UBS downgraded their respective ratings on Indonesian stocks. Just warnings, and change in perceptions were enough.

However, analysts claim that one of the major issues with Indonesia is about the free float of shares in the cases of most of the listed firms. This means that the number of shares, or percentage of the equity capital, that is available for sale in the open market is limited. The bulk is owned by either the promoters, their loyalists, institutions, and others, who hold on to the shares, and are not sellers. Hence, it is easier to manipulate prices by buying or selling a small number of shares, and indulge in possibly circular trading, i.e., trading among the members of a cartel to show liquidity, and influence prices either up or down. Experts contend that the Indonesian stocks, including the big names, are controlled by a handful of wealthy persons, who can bend the index at their will.

India is considered a highly-mature market, and much-better than, say, Indonesia. Over the past four decades, since the reforms, credibility and transparency are up, and foreign investors seem quite comfortable with the way Indian exchanges are managed. Yet, there are cases, where sentiments and emotions overpower fundamentals, not once by dozens of times, and pertain to specific stocks. After the Hindenburg report on the Adani Group, the stocks of the latter took a huge beating. But, within months, as Sebi gave a clean chit to the group, and the Supreme Court did not pinpoint wrongdoings, the share prices jumped. One of the reasons, say some experts, was that the stocks were thinly-traded, like in Indonesia, and promoters and their friends held 60-70 per cent of the shares. The public float was minimal. It was easy to rev up prices through smaller volumes. In fact, this has become a pattern since then in Adani’s case.

America’s Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) told a court that India has refused to serve summons to Adani family on a case related to bribing politicians and officials to get nods for green energy projects. Indian officials rejected the summons on grounds like the absence of a seal. The US regulator decided to serve the summons through channels such as emails. Immediately, the stock prices of Adani Group firms tanked by five per cent and more. The group clarified that the SEC summons had nothing to do with the firms like Adani Green Energy, and immediately the stock recovered by five per cent, and more. The point is that the news did not drive the stocks up and down. This is because the Adani clarification was the same that it had issued months ago, and repeated each time there was any movement on the SEC case. It was just pure emotions, not facts, which possibly led to the volatility in the stocks.

Or there may be another reason. A few analysts feel that the up-and-down movements are being synchronised by interested parties. They know that if the stocks gyrate on a whiff of a news, and clarifications, even if they are old or incremental, they can pull gullible investors to buy or sell the stocks. This gives them the advantage to do the opposite, and sell and buy stocks in the opposite vein. For example, the moment SEC stated that it will send summons via emails, the interested parties goad the investors to sell, and get out. The former instead sell at the higher prices, and buy at the lower ones to make a profit, and then wait a day or two for the clarification, and sell again at higher prices. The show goes on and on. The drama never ends. Each time, the foolish get trapped, and the savvy make the moolah.

This has happened in several other instances. In this column, we have talked about the stocks related to the Anil Ambani Group. After declaring bankruptcy in an English court a few years ago, Ambani attempted to revive the group. His sons took control of some firms. Indeed, the share price of a group firm, Reliance Power, has rocketed to new heights in the past 1-2 years. But its story is like that of the Adani stocks. Each time, the banks or Enforcement Directorate (ED) makes a statement, initiates a move, or freezes some assets, Reliance Power slumps, and there is a near blackout. Each time, the Anil Ambani Group issues a denial, or clarification, which is essentially the same that Reliance Power is not involved in the cases, and the firms involved went bankrupt and were sold, the share price props up. This too goes on and on, dozens of times, without reprieve.

The Pioneer

NEW DELHI | FRIDAY | JANUARY 30, 2026



BUSINESS

10

# New head to coax Fed to see red?

After Jerome Powell, will the board see Trump’s truth?

The metaphorical concept of a red pill possibly became famous because of ‘Total Recall,’ a Hollywood flick where the protagonist, Arnold Schwarzenegger, is asked to swallow a red pill if he wishes to return to reality, and shed the dream-like fantasy. But it became acceptable after ‘The Matrix’ movie, when Keanu Reeves (Neo) is offered a choice by Laurence Fishburne (Morpheus), “You take the blue pill... the story ends, you... believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill... you stay in Wonderland, and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes.” Fishburne, or Morpheus, tries to tell that Neo lives in a simulated computer-game-like world, and the red pill will allow him to see the reality as it exists, and gets ‘unplugged’ from the make-believe world that we see, live in, and accept. Both Jerome Powell, the existing head of the Federal Reserve Board, and Donald Trump, the US president, have different interpretations.

Powell believes he swallowed the red pill, and sees the real world of America’s growth, jobs, and inflation. Trump, with his blue pill fascination, is cut off from it. Trump thinks that Powell has ingested the blue pill, and needs to take the red one. For months, ever since Trump returned to power, he has belittled Powell for making the wrong choices, and not reducing the interest rate faster than he should. The Fed chief has resisted, countered, fought back, and stuck to his thinking. With a new head of Fed imminent by May 2026, and Trump, as he claims, ready with a new name, experts feel that the board may change track immediately, go down the interest rate rabbit hole, so to say, and slash rates. However, it will not be an easy task for several reasons.

Trump may still have another fight ahead. The interesting tussle for interest rates may continue.

Although, generally, and over time, Trump does get what he desires, at least in most cases, and with most people, even nations. But the fact remains that, at present, Powell has the upper moral hand. In the last press conference, after the Fed decided to ‘pause’ on any rate cuts, he gave a ‘strong defence’ of why the central bank needs to be independent of the legislative, and executive, and why the central bank is a “cornerstone of modern democracies, a safeguard against the politicisation of the monetary policy.” He added confidently, as he strode ahead on his moral high-horse, “The point of independence is not to protect policy-makers.... It is just an institutional arrangement that has served the people well, and that is to have a separation between (central bank and other branches), to not have direct elected official control over the setting of monetary policy).”

Apart from the Democrats, and some Republicans, a section of the public believes in such an independence. Trump, obviously, wishes to bulldoze people and institutions, and force them to do his bidding. But only the judiciary can stop the president. Three seminal cases will decide his future fate. The first is when the Supreme Court delivers its verdict on whether the unilateral and singularly-decided tariffs against nations were constitutional. The fact that the court has sat on its decision for weeks may imply both outcomes. The ruling is against the president and, hence, the delay. The ruling is in

favour, but may attract criticism and, hence, the delay. The second case will deal with the Department of Justice’s criminal case against Powell, which may enthuse future Fed heads, or instill them with the potential wrath of the presidents. The third is the one that is cooking headily, and involves Lisa Cook, a former Fed governor, who was sacked by Trump on allegations related to mortgage fraud.

In January 2026, before the interest rate pause, Powell attended the oral arguments in the Cook’s case in the Supreme Court. Media reports stated that this was an “unusual step for a Fed chair to take.” At the latest press conference, Powell responded, “I would say that case is perhaps the most important legal case in the Fed’s 113-year history. In addition, Paul Volcker (the former head) went to a Supreme Court case.... I guess, 1985 or so, so it is precedent-ed, and I thought it was an appropriate thing, and I did.” Although a president can remove a Fed governor, it needs to be only “for cause.” One is not sure if a cause is one that relates to a ‘technical’ fraud, which was committed before Cook became a member of the board. If Cook wins, Trump will find it difficult to berate, and brow-beat the Fed Board in the future. His new nominee as the chair may not be able to influence the various governors, some of whom may oppose the former.

Some of the indications emanate from the way the Fed board voted in the last two meetings on interest rates. In both cases, Powell’s thinking was supported by a huge majority. In both the meetings, the majority was in favour of the decisions taken, the first time to cut the rate by a lower level, and the second time to maintain it at the current one. Stephen Miran, a Fed governor recently handpicked by Trump opposed the moves both times. At the last meeting, another governor, Chris Waller, sided with Miran. Still, a 10-2 consensus to opt for the pause implies that there are members of the board that still do not agree with Trump. Based on what the Supreme Court decides in Cook’s and Trump’s tariff cases, they may either be emboldened to pursue independence, or cow down to the president. Thus, the judiciary is more likely to decide the future course.

More importantly, as mentioned earlier, there is a growing dissenting voice within the Republicans against Trump’s incessant interference in the affairs of independent institutions. Many of them did not like the sacking of Cook, and the criminal case against Powell. They voiced their concerns publicly through the media. With the midterm elections this year, which will decide the new majorities in both the Senate and Congress, Trump feels that institutions need to do what he wants for the Republicans to win. Some Republicans, who oppose him gingerly, and publicly, think that Trump’s antics may derail the party’s electoral chances. It is an internal political tussle, as much as an open battle between the Democrats and Republicans. Maybe politics, and not judiciary or criticism, will be the final arbitrator.

Last week, a cousin visited us. She is a professional settled in New Jersey (US), and is a happy American, along with her husband and children. Together, the couple earns more than \$200,000 a year, or nearly ₹2,00,00,000, which is fantastic by Indian standards. Of course, their lifestyle is better than most Indians. Yet, my cousin was amazed that her sister, and brother-in-law together earn close to ₹4,00,000 a month, or nearly ₹50,00,000 a year, while being professors in a college in a small town in Odisha.

More importantly, the sister hired a full-time driver, a full-time maid, a part-time cook, and a weekly gardener. The cousin was unable to do any of these things in the US. Hence, she popped the question to me, given that I am a trained economist. Why do analysts, experts, and others call India a poor country, and say that apart from a few rich capitalists, most Indians live in poverty? It is an interesting question, and a difficult one to answer. For, it requires an insightful understanding of the economic meaning of the terms such as per capita incomes, individual and corporate wealth, living standards, GDP, inequalities, and purchasing power parity.

**Sutanu Guru**  
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Let me put this another way. A social media post by a renowned publication, hoping to shock and stun readers, wondered how India was a \$4-trillion economy, and \$2 trillion was owned by two capitalists, Mukesh Ambani, and Gautam Adani. Of course, there is no link, correlation, cause-and-effect, and proportionality between the two numbers. The first related to GDP, or the combined annual produce of the country, which changes every year. The second is about wealth, which is the sum of physical assets (real estate, bullion, commodities, art, etc.) and paper ones (shares, mutual funds) owned by the two individuals. The twain do not meet directly.

It is like the income you earn every month, and the assets you own. The incomes may give rise to the wealth, and vice-versa, but it does not mean that if Ambani-Adani wealth is \$2 trillion, it accounts for half of the country’s GDP, or annual income. Their wealth is largely based on the market cap of the equity that they own in their group firms, and the value of the equity can go up sky high,

## Wealth, GDP, PPP, per capita

It is easy to confuse these economic concepts. An explainer

and crash. Check out the Forbes real-time list of dollar-billionaires, and watch how the wealth and fortune of the rich falls and goes up by a few billion dollars, yes, a few billion dollars, every day.

So, what exactly do we mean when we talk and write about, and discuss the economy. Let me start with three things. The first is income, second is wealth, and the third is a largely-ignored thing called purchasing power parity (PPP). When it comes to wealth, India is not wealthy by any yardsticks. According to some estimates, the nation’s wealth is just under \$20 trillion, or \$12,500 per person, if we take the population as 1.6 billion. More importantly, there are vast inequalities, as the top one per cent owns 60 per cent. The 99 per cent own \$8 trillion, or just \$5,000 per person, or less than ₹5,00,000.

Remember, this is the amount that a person has saved or invested. This is the reserve that

she has for emergencies (health, loss of earning member), and crucial expenses (marriage, education). In today’s world, ₹5,00,000 is not enough for a critical illness, marriage, or higher education. Let us turn to incomes. It varies as per a person’s education, professional skills, and ability to perform in the markets. At present, millions of Indians do earn up to, or even more than, ₹2,00,000 rupees a month because they are either highly-educated, or run their own enterprises.

But there are huge disparities in incomes, as is the case with wealth. But they exist everywhere in the world. In recent times, a new superstar of socialism, French economist Thomas Piketty, has made inequalities, disparities, and socialism sexy and attractive again. Despite the disparities, the Indian economy grew at a healthy pace over the last three-and-a-half decades. It was not deemed possible when it became independent. The second important thing is that the

quality of life has improved for most households. The family of a driver, or maid in Delhi or Mumbai can buy a two-wheeler, compared to the 1970s, when a bicycle was tough to own.

Now, we come to the most important economic pointer, PPP. India’s purchasing power GDP is about \$20 trillion, compared to \$30 trillion for the US, and a higher \$40 trillion for China. PPP, or purchasing power parity, essentially means that if one earns ₹100 a day, what is it that one can buy with it? Obviously, it depends on the prices, and cost of living in the respective nations. In this sense, as the earlier example of my cousin shows, the top 250 million or so Indians are better in terms of finances, and living standards compared to their counterparts in Europe and North America.

The only difference is that the urban municipal governance, red tape, omniscent and rampant corruption, and poor overall governance push Indians to lead a difficult life despite some amenities. They can buy a car, but cannot ride them on proper roads. They can fine-dine at the best places, but not get clean drinking water in the kitchens. My cousin cannot think of a driver, domestic servant and, of course, a gardener. But what she enjoys is excellent infrastructure, civic services, access, and freedom from the drudgery. In India, you bear the bad things with headaches, stress, and bribes.

If you look at nations like South Korea and China, their per capita income, or income per person, may never reach the levels in the US (\$80,000 a year). China’s per capita income is \$12,000. But this does not mean that China is poor compared to the US. Maybe \$12,000 in China can buy more products and amenities than in the US, which depends on PPP. Maybe the South Koreans have better all-round access to excellent infrastructure, which is skewed in some American cities, including New York. Maybe, the happiness levels are the highest in Bhutan which, with a per capita of around \$4,000, cannot even compare with the US. What is important is not just economic growth, but better (maybe unequal) distribution of wealth and incomes, affordability in terms of PPP, and good governance.

The author has worked for leading media houses, authored two books, and is now Executive Director, C Voter Foundation



ECONOMIC SURVEY 2025-26

Economy on stable footing, GDP growth likely to be 6.8% to 7.2% in FY27

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■ New Delhi

The Economic Survey on Thursday projected the GDP growth in the range of 6.8-7.2 per cent for the next fiscal year on the back of the cumulative impact of reforms, and said the economy remains on a stable footing. The projection is a tad lower than the estimates of 7.4 per cent in the current fiscal. Amid the domestic currency depreciating steeply in recent months, the Economic Survey 2025-26 said the rupee's valuation does not accurately reflect India's stellar economic fundamentals

and that the rupee is punching below its weight. "Of course, it does not hurt to have an undervalued rupee in these times, as it offsets to some extent the impact of higher American tariffs on Indian goods, and there is no threat of higher inflation from higher-priced crude oil imports now. However, it does cause investors to pause. Investor reluctance to commit to India warrants examination," it said. The document, prepared by a team of economists led by Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran, however, added that a strong and stable curren-



cy is a natural corollary for achieving the goal of the Viksit Bharat and global influence. Rupee is a casualty of foreign capital flows drying up, it added. The document tabled in

Parliament by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman emphasised that India is relatively better off than most other countries due to its strong macro fundamentals. The cumulative impact of policy reforms over recent years appears to be lifting India's medium-term growth potential to near 7 per cent, it said, and made a strong case for a deeper system-level institutional capacity that factors in geopolitical implications of India's rise. India needs to prioritise domestic growth in an uncertain global environment, as well as greater emphasis on buffers and liquidity, it added.

The global environment is being reshaped by geopolitical realignments that will influence investment, supply chains and growth prospects, it added. On the price situation, it said a subdued trajectory of core inflation indicates strengthening of supply-side conditions across the economy. The pre-Budget document further said that based on the broad trends observed during the year, the central Government remains well on track to achieve its envisaged fiscal consolidation path, aiming to attain a fiscal deficit target of 4.4 per cent of GDP in 2025-26. As of November 2025, the

Union Government's fiscal deficit stood at 62.3 per cent of the Budget Estimates. "Markets have acknowledged and rewarded the Government's commitment to fiscal discipline through lower sovereign bond yields, with the spread over US bonds declining by more than half," it said. It noted that despite heightened tariffs imposed by the United States, merchandise exports grew by 2.4 per cent (April-December 2025), while services exports increased by 6.5 per cent. Merchandise imports during April-December 2025 increased by 5.9 per cent.

‘Rupee valuation does not reflect stellar economic fundamentals’

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■ New Delhi

The value of the rupee, which has slipped to the 92 per dollar mark, does not accurately reflect India's stellar economic fundamentals, the Economic Survey said on Thursday. "In other words, the rupee, therefore, is punching below its weight," it said, adding investor reluctance to commit funds to India warrants examination at a time when inflation is under control and growth outlook is favourable. India depends on foreign capital flows to maintain a healthy balance of payments. "The Indian rupee



underperformed in 2025. India runs a trade deficit in goods. Its net trade surplus in services and remittances is not enough to offset it... When they run drier, rupee stability becomes a casualty," said the pre-Budget document tabled in Parliament by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. The rupee hit

an all-time low of 92.00 against the American currency in early trade on Thursday, weighed down by steady dollar demand and a cautious global mood. On Wednesday, the rupee settled 31 paise down, revisiting its lowest-ever closing level of 91.99 against the greenback.

Centre remains well on track to achieve 4.4% fiscal deficit target for FY26

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■ New Delhi

The Government is well on track to meet the fiscal deficit target of 4.4 per cent of GDP estimated for the current financial year based on broad trends, the Economic Survey 2025-26 tabled in Parliament on Thursday said. According to the survey prepared by Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran and team, the central Government's fiscal trajectory stands out for combining consolidation with sustained public investment, earning three sovereign rating upgrades this year. Between FY20 and FY25 (Provisional Actual), the share

of capital spending in the total central Government expenditure increased from about 12.5 per cent to 22.6 per cent, while effective capex as a share of GDP rose from



roughly 2.6 per cent to 4 per cent, the survey said. Even as states are overshooting their revenue deficit, the central Government, through its

Special Assistance to States for Capital Expenditure / Investment (SASCI), has successfully incentivised states to maintain capital expenditure at around 2.4 per cent of GDP, it said, adding the expansion of unconditional cash transfers across several states has contributed to rising revenue expenditure, with implications for fiscal space and public investment at the State level. "Based on the broad trends observed during the year, the central Government remains well on track to achieve its envisaged fiscal consolidation path, aiming to attain a fiscal deficit target of 4.4 per cent of GDP in FY26," it said.

Labour codes to play key role in employment; private investment needed

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Effective implementation of Labour Codes will play a key role in boosting formal employment and enhancing security for women and gig workers, the Economic Survey for 2025-26 stated, while outlining the need for investment and coordination from private sector companies. The document, tabled in Parliament by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday, noted that four codes were notified (on November 21, 2025), and rules are expected to be in place in the next few months. The Survey suggested that as definitions of work continue to evolve, dynamic labour policy and flexible regulatory frameworks would ensure employment expansion, worker security and well-being. "Implementing the Codes marks the first step towards the labour market transformation. The transition will require coordination and

investment from the private sector," it pointed out. The pre-Budget document suggested that the companies must enhance their systems, update policies, reevaluate workforce models, and improve their digital readiness to remain competitive. While the Codes offer a unified framework, it is up to the private sector to integrate this framework into daily operations, it further suggested. The draft rules under the four codes — Code on Wages, 2019, Industrial Relations Code, 2020, Code on Social Security, 2020, and the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 — were pre-published on December 31, 2025, for stakeholder comments. India has recorded significant employment growth in recent years, supported by structural reforms, tax rationalisation, and a sustained focus on skill development, it noted. The employment and skilling ecosystem is being reshaped by demo-



graphic shifts, technological change, and evolving industry needs, including the expansion of gig and platform work, it pointed out. Amid these developments, "the effective implementation of Labour Codes would play a key role in supporting formal employment and improving security for women and gig workers", it stated. **Survey calls for targeted Skilling, Vocational pathways at school level:** On the skills front, the Survey stated that the flexible vocational path-

ways starting at the school level will be required, going forward. Targeted skilling for women and youth in high productivity sectors will be critical for inclusive outcomes, it suggested. This could set the stage for a sharper emphasis on industry-driven skilling, which remains central to building job-ready talent and strengthening skill-industry linkage, it pointed out. It noted that India's workforce of over 56 crore holds tremendous potential for its

economic growth. Labour market indicators point to a steady job market, with improving labour force participation, declining unemployment, and robust job creation in both the organised and unorganised sectors, it noted. To fully harness the demographic dividend, creating quality jobs with sustainable livelihoods is essential, it suggested. Structural barriers to female participation are being addressed through the provision of safe, affordable accommodation and flexible and hybrid work arrangements, it noted. There is a growing focus on expanding social security, income protection, and grievance redressal mechanisms for gig and platform workers to safeguard their well-being, it noted. While addressing the quantity of labour, it is equally important to improve its quality, as economic growth relies on both the size and capabilities of its labour force, it suggested. To achieve this, opportuni-

ties for vocational education at all levels are vital for strengthening the skill ecosystem and realising the Viksit Bharat's vision, it suggested. **Digitalisation, gig work drive structural shift in labour markets:** The labour markets in India are undergoing significant structural transformations driven by digitalisation, green energy transition, and emerging forms of employment such as gig and platform work, it noted. In the post-pandemic growth phase, the emphasis has shifted from the quantity of jobs to the quality of work, reflecting a more inclusive and sustainable vision of the labour market. It suggested that policies should promote flexible work, hybrid models, and gender-responsive standards, including maternity benefits, equal pay, and protections against harassment. The new codes now allow women workers to work from home after availing themselves of the maternity benefit.



proven economic management, FDI inflows remain below their potential, especially for infrastructure needs. "Proactive reforms are essential to attract more foreign investment," it said adding this approach involves developing a targeted strategy that identifies a specific set of GVC (global value chain) anchors and establishes a State apparatus that collaborates directly with them as partners. The direct engagement will help resolve cross-agency issues and provide customised and time-bound solutions. Additionally, it is also crucial for India not only to offer compelling incentives but also to ensure these incentives are reli-

offset tariff challenges. It added that India's task to attract FDI (foreign direct investment) is more complex than countries like Vietnam and Malaysia, as it is competing with emerging FDI destinations, which have already been wooing investors with interventions at the prime minister level. The survey suggested integration of efforts and robust centre-state coordination as it would make large investors believe in the country's intention to host them. Further, a strategic approach to identifying priority sectors, along with a mix of incentives and reforms, will help prevent the dilution of policy efforts and improve overall effectiveness, it added.



Critical minerals flagged for energy transition

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■ New Delhi

The global energy transition is no longer driven just by technology but increasingly limited by control over critical minerals, with metals like copper and rare earth elements emerging as "strategic chokepoints" that shape low-carbon economies, energy security and geopolitical influence amid export curbs by key supplier nations, the Economic Survey said on Thursday. Copper prices have turned highly volatile due to mine disruptions in Indonesia, Congo and Chile, fuelling fears of medium — to long-term supply shortfalls against surging demand from power grids

and data centres worldwide, compounded by protectionist trade barriers, the Economic Survey 2025-26 said. "Metals like lithium, cobalt, nickel, copper, and rare earth elements have become the new strategic chokepoints in shaping the contours of a low-carbon economy, influencing energy security, industrial competitiveness, and geopolitical power, as observed through several trade restrictions on export of critical minerals by source countries," it said. As demand accelerates, advanced economies are responding by promoting standards-based critical mineral markets, emphasising sustainability, traceability, and governance.

‘PPPs need to build system-level markets over transactions’

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New Delhi

India's public-private partnership (PPP) framework needs to move from transaction-centric execution toward system-level market building, with a sharper focus on reducing structural uncertainty, the Economic Survey 2025-26 suggested on Thursday. The pre-Budget document tabled in Parliament further said that this requires clearer sectoral pipelines with multi-year visibility, a tighter linkage between national programmes and bankable project preparation, as well as disciplined pre-construction risk closure by the public authority. The Survey noted that PPP outcomes have been weakest where land acquisition, statutory clearances, demand assessment, or utility shifting have remained unresolved. In the coming decade, it said a credible PPP regime will be defined less by risk transfer on paper and more by the State's capacity to absorb early-stage risks that private capital cannot efficiently price. "Accordingly, India's PPP framework needs to move



from transaction-centric execution toward system-level market building, with a sharper focus on reducing structural uncertainty," the Survey said. While PPP frameworks have matured at the central level and in select sectors, the pre-Budget document said challenges persist at the sub-national level. "The distinction between PPPs and Engineering Procurement and Construction (EPC) contracts—namely that PPPs are partnerships rather than vendor arrangements—is not always fully understood," it said. The Survey noted that trust deficits and a limited understanding of risk/reward principles continue to constrain the uptake of PPPs in several

states and urban local bodies. These challenges are compounded by uneven institutional capacity, even as states and cities account for a rising share of infrastructure demand, it said. The Survey said the next reform frontier lies in professionalising PPP cells, adopting programmatic approaches instead of project-by-project experimentation, and leveraging data platforms to track performance, renegotiation, and lifecycle outcomes. Referring to the highways sector, the Survey said to align freight speeds with global benchmarks, the High-Speed Corridor (HSC) network expanded from 550 km in 2014 to 5,364 km by December 2025.

‘India’s civil aviation sector on sustained growth trajectory’

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New Delhi

India's civil aviation sector is on a sustained growth trajectory, helped by a conducive policy environment, rising demand and steady infrastructure expansion, the Economic Survey said on Thursday. As the country aims to be a global hub for aviation activities, the Survey said Indian airports can aspire to become global aviation hubs by promoting layovers and enhancing the transit experience for international passengers. "While the sector remains sensitive to global economic cycles and the need for continuous capacity upgradation, the current passenger volumes represent only a fraction of India's potential," it said. India is the world's third-largest domestic aviation market and the number of airports increased to 164 last year from 74 in 2014. In FY25, Indian airports handled 412 million passengers, and the same is projected to increase to 665 million by FY31. However, the Survey said



the country currently operates approximately 0.11 airports per million people, significantly lower than the US (47.35) and China (0.39), signalling substantial headroom for further growth. "Expansion in India's airport and air navigation infrastructure and a growing ancillary ecosystem, including Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) and leasing, are strengthening the sector. "These developments, along with technology integration, positions civil aviation as a key driver of nationwide economic connectivity and integration," the Survey said. On Wednesday, Prime

Minister Narendra Modi highlighted the growth potential and policy stability as he wooed investors, saying that there are immense opportunities in aircraft manufacturing, pilot training, advanced air mobility and aircraft leasing areas in the country. Modi, in a special message at an aviation summit, had also said the Government is working on all necessary regulatory reforms to make cargo movement faster and more efficient. Meanwhile, the Survey said that aviation services have continued to play a key role in sustaining passenger mobility and air cargo flows.



FROM THE WORLD

THAILAND

2 pilots killed in plane crash

Two Thai Air Force pilots were killed on Thursday when their aircraft crashed outside the northern city of Chiang Mai during a training mission, the military said. The AT-6TH Wolverine light attack and reconnaissance plane went down in Chom Thong district, about 60 kilometres from Chiang Mai airport, in a military training area, spokesperson Air Marshal Jackrit Thammavichai said. The cause of the crash in the two-seater turboprop aircraft is under investigation. Thailand recently acquired the fighter-trainer, which is produced in the United States by Beechcraft, a part of Textron Aviation. The Thai Air Force commissioned the final of its eight AT-6TH planes in September.

NEPAL

Ex-PM Madhav hospitalised

Nepal's former prime minister Madhav Kumar Nepal has been admitted to a hospital in Kathmandu after a heart-related health issue, a party source said Thursday. Septuagenarian Nepal, who is the deputy coordinator of Nepali Communist Party (NCP) and a candidate for the March 5 Parliamentary election from Rautahat 1 constituency, was admitted on Wednesday. "He is suffering from heart-related problems and undergoing treatment at the Manmohan Cardiothoracic Vascular and Transplant Centre at Maharajgunj in Kathmandu," the party source said. Party colleagues, including another former Prime Minister, Pushpakamal Dahal 'Prachanda', have visited him.

Starmer and Xi call for deeper UK-China ties

KEN MORITSUGU  
■ Beijing

The leaders of Britain and China called Thursday for a "comprehensive strategic partnership" to deepen ties between their nations at a time of growing global turbulence and uncertainty.

Neither Prime Minister Keir Starmer nor President Xi Jinping publicly mentioned Donald Trump, but the US president's challenge to the post-Cold War order was clearly on their minds.

"I think that working together on issues like climate change, global stability during challenging times for the world is precisely what we should be doing as we build this relationship in the way that I've described," Starmer told Xi at the start of their meeting in Beijing.

The two met for 80 minutes — double the scheduled time — in the Great Hall of the People as their nations try to improve relations after several years of acrimony. Relations have deteriorated over allegations of Chinese spying in Britain, China's support for Russia in the Ukraine war and the crack-down on freedoms in Hong Kong, the former British colony that was returned to China in 1997.

Starmer is the first British prime minister to visit in

eight years. Xi said that "China-UK relations experienced setbacks in previous years, which was not in the interests of either country."

"In the current turbulent and ever-changing international situation, China and the UK need to strengthen dialogue and cooperation to maintain world peace and stability," he said.

Chinese state broadcaster CCTV said Xi had stressed, without mentioning the US directly, that "major powers" must adhere to international law or the world would regress into a "jungle."

Relationship is good

After the meeting, Starmer said the leaders had made "really good progress" on issues including slashing Chinese tariffs on Scotch whisky and introducing visa-free travel for British visitors.

"The relationship is in a good place, a strong place," the British leader said. Xi appeared to acknowledge the criticism that Starmer has faced for reaching out to China despite national security and human rights concerns. The UK recently approved controversial plans for a huge Chinese Embassy in London, removing a sticking point in relations but also overriding fears that the "mega-embassy" would make it easier for China to



Chinese President Xi Jinping and Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer attending a meeting at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing

conduct espionage and intimidate dissidents.

"Good things often come with difficulties," Xi said. "As long as it is the right thing to do in accordance with the fundamental interests of the country and its people, leaders will not shy away from difficulties and will forge ahead bravely."

Starmer's visit comes less than two months after a Hong Kong court convicted Jimmy Lai, a former newspaper publisher and British citizen, under a national

security law that Beijing imposed on the territory after massive pro-democracy protests in 2019.

Starmer said he raised human rights issues with Xi and the two men had a "respectful discussion." Starmer, who was elected in July 2024, has said he will protect national security while keeping up diplomatic dialogue and economic cooperation with China.

He told Xi that it has "been far too long" since a UK Prime minister visited. "I

made a promise 18 months ago when we were elected into Government, that I would make Britain face outward again," the leader of the center-left Labour Party said.

"Because as we all know, events abroad affect everything that happens back in our home countries, from prices on the supermarket shelves to how secure we feel," Starmer's Government has struggled to deliver the economic growth it promised and ease a cost-of-

11 dead in minibus, truck collision in South Africa

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Johannesburg

A collision involving a minibus taxi and a truck killed at least 11 people in South Africa on Thursday, a local Government official and emergency services said, just over a week after a similar road crash left 14 schoolchildren dead.

Thursday's crash happened near the city of Durban in the eastern KwaZulu-Natal province. Provincial transport department official Siboniso Duma said in a statement that 11 people, including a schoolchild, died at the scene, although that was according to preliminary information. "Witnesses have alleged that the truck driver made a U-turn resulting in a head-on collision," Duma said.

Garriith Jamieson, spokesperson for the

living crisis for millions of households and he sees China as a potential source of growth.

More than 50 UK business executives have joined him on the trip, along with the leaders of major cultural organisations, as he seeks to expand opportunities for British companies in China and secure Chinese investment in the UK.

Tariffs spur trade talks

The disruption to global trade under Trump has made expanding trade and investment more imperative for many Governments.

Vietnam and the European Union upgraded ties to a comprehensive strategic partnership Thursday, two days after the EU and India announced a free trade accord.

"At a moment when the international rules-based order is under threat from multiple sides, we need to stand side by side as reliable and predictable partners," European Council President Antonio Costa said in Hanoi, Vietnam.

Starmer is the fourth leader of a US ally to visit Beijing this month, following those of South Korea, Canada and Finland. The German chancellor is expected to visit next month. (AP)



private paramedic service ALS Paramedics, said 11 were dead and several people were critically injured, including the driver of the minibus, who was trapped in the wreckage. The fatal collision came days after a deadly head-on crash between a minibus taxi being used to transport schoolchildren and a truck.

The driver of the minibus involved in that crash near Johannesburg on January 19 was arrested and charged with 14 counts of murder.

Heavy gunfire near Niger's airport

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Niamey (Niger)

There were loud explosions and heavy gunfire into near the main airport in Niger's capital of Niamey, residents said. Videos that appear to be from the scene captured loud blasts and the sky glowing following explosions that began around midnight and lasted about two hours in the area of Diori Hamani International Airport, a key military hub for the Nigerian army.

The Associated Press could not independently verify the videos that also showed military trucks and fires. It was not immediately clear what led to the



explosions and gunshots or if there were casualties or damage. Niger's military junta, which has run the country since a 2023 coup, did not immediately speak about the incident.

One resident said he learned gunmen attacked the airport but were repelled by soldiers. The resident, who lives in the airport district, spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of his life. The AP could not independently verify the resident's account.

Calm appeared to have returned to the city Thursday morning. The international airport in Niamey houses a military base and has held a significant shipment of uranium from Niger's mines meant for export. Niger has struggled to contain deadly jihadist violence that has battered parts of Africa's Sahel region, where neighboring Burkina Faso and Mali also are run by military juntas.

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM  
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER (ROADS). PUBLIC WORKS ROADS DEPARTMENT.  
ASSAM. GUWAHATI-03

No. CE/DEV/TB/120/2025-26/44

PRESS NOTICE INVITING TENDER

The Chief Engineer (Roads), PWRD, Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati-3 invites online bids on behalf of Governor of Assam for **3 (three)** nos. of packages for construction of Roads under SOPD-G for the year **2025-26 in Dibrugarh District** of Assam amounting to **Rs. 3.25 crores** (approx.) including GST etc. from approved & eligible Contractors registered with PWRD, Assam.

Details may be seen from **31-01-2026** at website **www.assamtenders.gov.in**. Amendment/Addendum to the SBD, if any, and further notifications shall appear in this website and also at the office of the undersigned during office hours. The contractor/bidder must be registered with the Electronic Tendering System (ETS) of PWRD, Assam website **www.assamtenders.gov.in**.

Scheme is not yet sanctioned by the competent authority. In the event of non- sanction of the scheme, the bid may be cancelled and no claim what so ever on this account shall be entertained from the bidders. (The Bid price may vary at the time of detail tendering for which no claim will be admissible)

Sd/-

Chief Engineer (Roads), PWRD

Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati-3

DIPR/C/PIO/815/30-Jan-26

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM  
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER: PWD: BUILDING:  
ASSAM: CHANDMARI: GUWAHATI-3

No. CE/TB-II(Bldg.)/01/2026/4

PRESS NOTICE

The Chief Engineer, PWD (Building), Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati-03 invites a fresh bid on behalf of the Governor of Assam through Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) Mode- I of contract for the work detailed in the table below, from eligible Firm/Contractor of repute having experience in similar nature of work.

Details of bid may be seen at e-procurement portal i.e **www.assamtenders.gov.in**.

The bidders must be enrolled with e-tendering web portal **www.assamtenders.gov.in**

Sl No.	Name of Work	Bid Value	Completion Period	Bid security	Cost of Bid
1.	Construction of new Court Building in the available vacant land in the Court complex at Dibrugarh town, Dist Dibrugarh, Assam.	Rs.48,30,33,741.00	24(Twenty-Four) Months	2% of Bid value for General Category and 1% of Bid value for reserved Category.	Rs.20,000/-(Rupees Twenty Thousand) only

The Bid price may vary at the time of uploading DNIT, for which no claim will be admissible.

The Press Notice will form part of the Bidding Document.

Sd/-

Chief Engineer, P.W.D. (Building)

Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati-3

DIPR/C/PIO/814/30-Jan-26

NORTHERN RAILWAY

Invitation of Tenders through E-Procurement system

Principal Chief Materials Manager, Northern Railway, New Delhi - 110001, for and on behalf of the President of India, invites e-tenders through e-procurement system for supply of the following items :-

S. No.	Tender No.	Brief Description	Qty.	Closing Date
01	82261035	Secukinumab 150mg Inj	341	18-02-2026

Note : 1. Vendors may visit the IREPS website i.e. www.ireps.gov.in for details. 2. No Manual offer will be entertained.

Tender Notice No. Tab/Inj. Medicines Date: 29/01/2026 325/2026

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

मुख्य अभियंता (पथ) कार्यालय  
पुणे महानगरपालिका

शुद्धिपत्रक  
(टेंडर क्र. PMC/ROAD/2025/231)

पुणे मनपा मुख्य अभियंता (पथ) कार्यालयाकडील बेल्सर रोड ते जनाई माता मंदिर ते बंडगार्डन पूल पर्यंत 30 मीटर रुंदीचा डी.पी. रस्ता विकसित करणे. या कामाची जाहिरात क्र. 3/1440 दि. 09/1/2025. रोजी प्रसिद्ध झाली आहे. वरील निविदेकरिता दिनांक 18/1/2025 रोजी निविदा प्रसिद्धीनुसार यापूर्वी नियोजित असलेली प्री बिटिंग घेण्यात आली आहे. प्रशासकीय कारणास्तव सदर निविदापूर्व बैठकीचा वृत्तांत व CSD ची प्रक्रिया अद्याप पूर्ण झालेली नाही. त्यानुषंगाने निविदा स्वीकृती कालावधीच्या सुधारित तारखा पुढील प्रमाणे.  
\* निविदा विक्री कालावधी दिनांक 16/02/2026 दुपारी 3:00 वाजेपर्यंत  
\* अंतिम स्वीकृती दिनांक 16/02/2026 दुपारी 3:00 वाजेपर्यंत  
\* निविदा उघडणे प्रक्रिया दिनांक 17/02/2026 दुपारी 3:00 नंतर  
या निविदे संदर्भातील यापूर्वी प्रसिद्ध झालेल्या इतर तपशील / मजकूर पूर्वी प्रसिद्ध केल्याप्रमाणे राहील. तरी सर्व संबंधितांनी या बाबीची नोंद घ्यावी.  
जाहिरात क्र. 3/1301. मुख्य अभियंता (पथ)  
दि. 29.01.2026 पुणे महानगरपालिका

SR. NO.	NAME OF DEPARTMENT	NAME OF WORK NOTICE TENDER	OPENING DATE CLOSING DATE	AMOUNT / EMD (APPROX.) IN RUPEES	WEBSITE OF THE DEPARTMENT	NODAL OFFICER/CONTACT DETAILS/EMAIL
1	PWD B&R, GURUGRAM	DEVELOPMENT OF LANDSCAPING WORK OF ADDITIONAL PART OF NEW DISTT. JAIL AT REWARI IN DISTT. REWARI (HOSPITAL BLOCK, COMMUNITY HALL AND WARDER'S HOSTEL MALE)	28.01.2026 09.02.2026	8.71 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in	9717214202 zilesinghnort@gmail.com
2	PWD B&R, HISAR	WIDENING AND STRENGTHENING OF ROAD GORCHI TO BARWA ROAD RD 0.00 TO 8.080 (ROAD ID 11567) IN HISAR DISTRICT. (PDG. SHIFTING OF HT/LT LINES)	22.01.2026 04.02.2026	61.53 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in	01662225651 pwd-eeed-hissar@hry.nic.in
3	AGRICULTURE & FARMERS WELFARE DEPARTMENT,BHIWANI	RECLAMATION OF SALINE AND SOIL WATER LOGGED AREA THROUGH VERTICAL DRAINAGE TECHNOLOGY, VILLAGE - KUNGAR ,BLOCK - BAWANI KHERA , DIIST - BHIWANI	27.01.2026 09.02.2026	251.86 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in	9215910040 ascobhiwani@gmail.com
4	AGRICULTURE & FARMERS WELFARE DEPARTMENT,BHIWANI	RECLAMATION OF SALINE AND SOIL WATER LOGGED AREA THROUGH VERTICAL DRAINAGE TECHNOLOGY, VILLAGE- MITHATHAL, BLOCK- BHIWANI, DIIST - BHIWANI	27.01.2026 09.02.2026	160.95 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in	9215910040 ascobhiwani@gmail.com
5	PANCHAYATI RAJ, FARIDABAD	CONSTRUCTION OF TYAGI WALA BARAT GHAR AT VILLAGE FATEHPUR TAGGA BLOCK FARIDABAD DISTRICT FARIDABAD HGVT CM + 2 WORKS	28.01.2026 04.02.2026	138.61 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in	9467905067 prexeeng.fbd1@gmail.com
6	PANCHAYATI RAJ, FARIDABAD	CONSTRUCTION OF DRAIN/NALA AT VILLAGE KOT BLOCK FARIDABAD DISTT. FARIDABAD (FROM H/O SHYAMI TO SHAMSHAN GHAT WALA RASTA) + 2 WORKS	28.01.2026 04.02.2026	81.75 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in	9467905067 prexeeng.fbd1@gmail.com
7	WOMEN & CHILD DEVELOPMENT, HARYANA BHIWANI	REGARDING TRANSPORTATION TENDRE WORK OF SNP SUPPLY TO AWCS	25.01.2026 25.02.2026	50000/-	https://etenders.hry.nic.in	9466150800 pobhw.wcd@gmail.com
FOR FURTHER INFORMATION KINDLY VISIT <a href="http://www.etenders.hry.nic.in">www.etenders.hry.nic.in</a> RO No:-11/2026/140/42512/II/27/7						

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM  
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER, PWD (ROADS)  
ASSAM, CHANDMARI, GUWAHATI-03

No. CE/CW/40/2025-26/3

PRESS NOTICE INVITING RE-TENDER

The Chief Engineer, P.W.D (Roads), Assam on behalf of the Governor of Assam invites Re-bid from approved and eligible contractors registered with Assam PWD (Roads) for 1 (One) no. of project for construction of Guwahati city roads/ drain etc. In Guwahati city under SOPD-G for the year 2025-26 pertaining to PWD, Dispur and Dimoria Territorial Road Division in Kamrup (Metropolitan) district of Assam.

Details along with Schemes for the works may be seen at website [www.assamtenders.gov.in](http://www.assamtenders.gov.in) and also at the office of the undersigned in the "City Works Cell". Amendment / Addendum to the SBD, if any, and further notifications shall appear in this website and also at the office of the undersigned during office hours. The contractor / bidder must be registered with the Electronic Tendering System (ETS) of PWRD, Assam website [www.assamtenders.gov.in](http://www.assamtenders.gov.in).

Note: NIT Value is inclusive of GST, Labour Cess, Night Charges etc.

Sd/-

Chief Engineer, PWD (Roads),

Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati-3

DIPR/C/PIO/818/30-Jan-26

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM  
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER. PWD (ROADS)  
ASSAM. CHANDMARI. GUWAHATI-03

No. CE/Commn/192/ PDNA/2025-26/ 31

PRESS NOTICE INVITING RE-TENDER

The Chief Engineer, P.W.D (Roads), Assam on behalf of the Governor of Assam invites Re- Bid from approved and eligible contractors registered with Assam PWD (Roads) for 2 (Two) nos. of project amounting to Rs 1250 Lakh (approx.) for Reconstruction & Recovery Window (Assam Flood and Landslides 2022) NDRF(PDNA- 2022) for the year 2025-26 in Dima Hasao district of Assam.

Details along with Schemes for the works may be seen at website [www.assamtenders.gov.in](http://www.assamtenders.gov.in) and also at the office of the undersigned in the "Communication branch". Amendment I Addendum to the SBD, if any, and further notifications shall appear in this website and also at the office of the undersigned during office hours. The contractor / bidder must be registered with the Electronic Tendering System (ETS) of PWRD, Assam website [www.assamtenders.gov.in](http://www.assamtenders.gov.in).

Note: NIT Value is inclusive of GST, Labour Cess etc.

Sd/-

Chief Engineer), PWD (Roads)

Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati-3,

DIPR/C/PIO/817/30-Jan-26

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM  
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER (ROADS), PWRD, ASSAM: GUWAHATI -3

No. CE/DEV/TB/116/2025-26/92

Cancellation Notice

This is for general information to all concerned that the following 1 (one) no. of work under Kokrajhar District under Asom Mala 3.0 for the year 2025-26 amounting to Rs. 4101.83 Lakhs (approx.) tender invited against Press Notice No. CE/DEV/TB/116/2025-26/05 dated. 16.08.2025 and DNIT No. CE/DEV/TB/116/2025-26/08 dated. 22.08.2025 is hereby cancelled due administrative reasons.

District	Name of Work	Tender ID	Package No.
Baksa	Improvement and Upgradation of Road from Merkuchi to Baganpara from ch.0.00 km(Merkuchi) to ch.12.00km (Baganpara) under Asom Mala 3.0 for the year 2025-26 (Phase-1)	2025_PWD 47259_1	ASOM_MALA_3.0_25_26_02

Details can be seen at [www.assamtenders.gov.in](http://www.assamtenders.gov.in) afterwards.

Sd/-

Chief Engineer (Roads), PWRD

Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati-3

DIPR/C/PIO/816/30-Jan-26



# Hasina denounces upcoming Bangladesh polls

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Dhaka

From her exile in India, Bangladesh's ousted leader Sheikh Hasina has slammed the country's upcoming election after her party was barred from the polls, remarks that could deepen tensions ahead of the pivotal vote next month.

Hasina, who was sentenced to death for her crack-down on a student uprising in 2024 that killed hundreds of people and led to the toppling of her 15-year rule, warned in an email to *The Associated Press* last week that without inclusive and free and fair elections, Bangladesh will face prolonged instability.

She also claimed that Bangladesh's interim Government led by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus deliberately disenfranchised millions of her supporters by excluding her party — the former ruling Awami League — from the election.

"Each time political participation is denied to a significant portion of the population, it deepens resentment, delegitimizes institutions and creates the conditions for future instability,"



Bangladesh's ousted leader Sheikh Hasina

she wrote. "A Government born of exclusion cannot unite a divided nation," Hasina added.

## A fraught election

More than 127 million people in Bangladesh are eligible to vote in the February 12 election, widely seen as the country's most consequential in decades and the first since Hasina's removal from power after the mass uprising. Yunus' interim administration is overseeing the process, with voters also weighing a proposed consti-

titutional referendum on sweeping political reforms. Campaigning started last week, with rallies in the capital, Dhaka, and elsewhere. Yunus returned to Bangladesh and took over three days after Hasina fled to India on August 5, 2024, following weeks of violent unrest. He has promised a free and fair election, but critics question whether the process will meet democratic standards and whether it will be genuinely inclusive after the ban on Hasina's Awami League.

There are also concerns over security and uncertainty surrounding the referendum, which could bring about major changes to the constitution. Yunus' office said in a statement to the AP that security forces will ensure an orderly election and will not allow anyone to influence the outcome through coercion or violence. International observers and human rights groups have been invited to monitor the process, the statement added.

The Election Commission says some 500 foreign observers, including from the European Union and the Commonwealth, are expected to watch the polls on February 12. Since Hasina's ouster, Bangladesh has faced a slew of political and security challenges. Human rights and minority groups have accused the interim authorities of failing to protect civil and political rights.

Hasina's party has alleged arbitrary arrests and deaths in custody of its members, claims that the Government has denied.

Critics have also voiced alarm over the growing influence of Islamist groups and attacks on minorities, particu-

larly Hindus. There are also growing concerns over press freedoms under Yunus, with several journalists facing criminal charges and the offices of the country's two leading dailies coming under attack by angry protesters. Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, led by Tarique Rahman, 60, has emerged as the leading contender in the vote.

Rahman, the son of former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia - Hasina's chief rival who died last month - returned home in December after more than 17 years in self-imposed exile. He has promised to work for the stability of this South Asian nation of 170 million people. Rahman's main rival in the February vote is a coalition of 11 allied groups headed by an Islamist party, the Jamaat-e-Islami.

Under Hasina, Jamaat-e-Islami was under severe pressure and barred from elections. Its top leaders faced executions or prison terms on war crimes charges related to Bangladesh's independence war against Pakistan 1971.

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party, or BNP, boycotted elections in 2014 and 2024. It took part in 2018 but later accused Hasina of rigging the polls. Hasina says the nation must

heal its wounds' Critics have long accused Hasina of presiding over an increasingly authoritarian system.

She also faced criticism over suppression of dissent and of her political opponents, with security agencies under her Government facing charges of enforced disappearances. Still, Hasina has dismissed the Bangladesh court that sentenced her to death in absentia on charges of crimes against humanity over the uprising killings as a "kangaroo court." International rights groups have raised concerns about the fairness of the trial. In her email to *the AP*, Hasina said that to move forward, Bangladesh needs to break the cycle of political bans and boycotts.

She contended that under her Government, some elections were "not truly participatory because major political parties chose to boycott democratic processes."

"I recognize this was far from ideal," she said, adding that Bangladesh's political parties must now end that cycle. "Otherwise, there will be no redemption." The country, she added, "needs a legitimate Government" that would govern "with the genuine consent of the people."

# China executes 11 members of Myanmar-based syndicate



ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Bangkok

China executed 11 members of a Myanmar-based family crime syndicate that killed 14 Chinese citizens and ran scam and gambling operations worth more than \$1 billion, authorities said. The Wenzhou city Intermediate People's Court announced the execution in a statement on Thursday morning. It sentenced the 11 people to death in September. They included Ming Guoping and Ming Zhenzhen, who the court found led the scam and gambling operations, as well as key group members Zhou Weichang, Wu Hongming and Luao Jianzhang. The

group filed an appeal that was rejected by the court in November. The family members were detained in November 2023 when Chinese authorities exerted pressure on authorities in the border areas shared with Myanmar to crack down on scams. Scam parks have become an industrial scale business in Southeast Asia, especially Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos, where a mix of trafficked and willing labour have carried out digital scams on victims around the world. Authorities in the region face growing international pressure from China, the US and other nations to address the proliferation of criminal activity.

# Car rams into Chabad headquarters in New York



ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ New York

A car crashed into the Chabad Lubavitch World Headquarters in New York City on Wednesday night, damaging some of the deeply revered Hasidic Jewish site's doors. There were no apparent injuries, and the driver was detained by police, Chabad Lubavitch spokesperson Motti Seligson said. "Those are the facts that we know at this point, and we hope to get clarity very soon," he said. Video of the crash that was posted online shows a car with New Jersey license plates

moving forward and backward on an icy driveway leading to a building in the complex and ramming its basement-level doors at least four times. The driver, who is wearing shorts, emerges, shouts to bystanders that "It slipped" and says something to police about trying to park. The Chabad Lubavitch World Headquarters in Brooklyn's Crown Heights receives thousands of visitors annually. Its Gothic Revival facade is very recognizable to adherents of the Chabad movement and has inspired dozens of replicas across the world.

# Vietnam and EU upgrade ties



ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL  
■ Hanoi

Vietnam and the European Union on Thursday upgraded ties to a comprehensive strategic partnership, Vietnam's highest diplomatic level, as both recalibrate trade amid disruptions to global finance driven by US Tariff pressure.

The upgrade places the EU on the same diplomatic footing as the United States, China and Russia and was announced during a visit to Hanoi by European Council President Antonio Costa.

"At a moment when the international rules-based order is under threat from multiple sides, we need to stand side by side as reliable and predictable partners," Costa said, adding that the partnership is about "developing spheres of shared prosperity." Costa arrived in the Vietnamese Capital Hanoi after India and the European Union reached a free trade agreement on Tuesday after nearly two decades of negotiation.

Vietnam's President Luong Cuong called the move a "historic milestone." The announcement comes less than a week after Vietnam reelected Communist Party General Secretary To Lam as the country's top leader, endorsing his vision of economic growth driven by

aggressive reforms. Vietnam has been a major beneficiary of globalization, emerging as a key export hub for electronics, garments and consumer goods as multinational firms shifted production away from China.

That export-led growth has helped lift incomes and transform the economy, but Vietnam's large and persistent trade surplus has drawn criticism, particularly from the US and increasingly from Europe, where officials have raised concerns about market access.

For the EU, the deal strengthens access to one of Asia's fastest-growing manufacturing hubs and supports efforts to diversify supply chains as trade tensions increase. Bilateral trade in the first 11 months of 2025 reached more than \$66.8 billion, up 6.6 per cent from a year earlier.

The EU is Vietnam's fourth-largest trading partner, third-largest export market and fifth-largest import source. Vietnam is the EU's biggest trading partner in Southeast Asia.

Vietnam hopes to continue growth to become a rich nation by 2045 and is aggressively seeking new markets to reduce reliance on the U.S., which is its largest export destination that absorbs about 30 per cent of the goods Vietnam sends abroad. (AP)

# Russian drone attack kills three in Ukraine

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Kyiv

A Russian drone attack killed three people in Ukraine's southern Zaporizhzhia region overnight, authorities said Thursday, as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy warned that Moscow is planning another large-scale barrage despite plans for further U.S.-brokered peace talks at the weekend.

The Zaporizhzhia strike caused a major blaze in an apartment building, according to emergency services.

Firefighters also worked through the night to put out fires in the central Dnipropetrovsk region, where two people were injured, officials said. Zelenskyy said Ukrainian intelligence reports indicate Russia is assembling forces for a major aerial attack. Previous large attacks, sometimes involving more than 800 drones as well as cruise and ballistic missiles, have targeted the Ukrainian power grid. The ongoing



Rescue workers clear the rubble of a residential building which was heavily damaged after a Russian strike in Odesa, Ukraine

attacks discredited the peace talks, Zelenskyy said. "Every single Russian strike does," he said late Wednesday.

Russia's daily bombardment of civilian areas behind the roughly 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line has continued despite international condemnation and attempts to end the fighting almost four years after Russia launched its devastating all-out invasion of Ukraine.

Negotiations between the two sides are poised to resume on Sunday amid doubts about Moscow's commitment to a

settlement. The European Union's top diplomat accused Russia of not taking the talks seriously, calling Thursday in Brussels for more pressure to be exerted on Moscow to press it into making concessions.

"We see them increasing their attacks on Ukraine because they can't make moves on the battlefield. So, they are attacking civilians," Kaja Kallas said of Russia at a meeting of EU foreign ministers. She stressed that Europe, which sees its own future security at stake in

# Imran Khan underwent medical procedure for eye ailment: Tarar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Islamabad

Pakistan's jailed former prime minister Imran Khan underwent a medical procedure for an eye ailment at a hospital last week and currently he is in "good health", Information Minister Attaullah Tarar confirmed on Thursday.

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party on Tuesday claimed that its jailed founder was suffering from a serious eye ailment that could cause permanent damage to his eyesight if not treated promptly. Khan, 73, was taken to the Pakistan

Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) in Islamabad from Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi, where he has been serving a sentence after his conviction in the Al-Qadir Trust corruption case. *Geo News* reported that Tarar, in an exclusive chat with the channel, said that eye specialists

first examined Khan at Adiala jail and advised that he should be shifted to PIMS for further assessment and treatment.

Khan was hospitalised on Saturday night on doctors' advice, Tarar said. He said that Khan's eyes were examined again in the hospital.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

Public is hereby informed that Mr. Shashank Kumar Gupta And Mr. Kamlesh Gupta has claimed to be the owner of Entire Ground Floor Now Known as Upper Floor of Residential Built-up, Property Bearing No. D-139 (Plot No. 139 And Block D) Area Measuring 125 Sq. Yds. Situated in the Layout Plan of Jhilmil Tahpur Residential Scheme, Colony Known as Vivek Vihar Phase - I, Delhi - 110095. And now, Mr. Shashank Kumar Gupta, Mrs. Prachi Gupta & Mr. Kamlesh Gupta has approached the IDBI Bank Ltd. for loan against mortgage of above said property, if any person has any right, claim, title or interest in any manner over the said property then intimate within 7 days to Vikas Shokeen, Advocate, H-20, BASEMENT, SALI NAGAR, NEW DELHI - 110015. Thereafter any kind of claim will not be accepted.

**Vikas Shokeen (Advocate)**

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

NOTICE is hereby given that Mr. Bipendra Nagar (hereinafter referred to as the said Mortgagee/Borrower), is purchasing Apartment No. 1410A, 13th floor, Block C, adm. 1550 Sq. Ft., in Gaur Valerio (Opp. Delhi Public School) situated at Mohiuddin Pur Kanawani, G.B. Nagar (hereinafter referred to as the said property) from Mr. Ruchi Srivastava, who became the owner of the said property vide Sale Deed dated 18.04.2013 regd. as Doc. No. 4503 read with Will dated 24.04.2013 regd. as Doc. No. 1238, Legal Heirs Certificate dated 21.07.2025 and NOC Affidavits dated 27.07.2015 & 31.07.2025. The Borrower will create mortgage in respect of the said property in favour of our clients Axis Bank Ltd., Axis House, Sector 128, Noida - 201306. Any person, body, individual, institution having any claim and/or objection in respect of the said property by way of sale, exchange, lease, lien, mortgage, charge, encumbrance, gift, trust, assent, maintenance, inheritance, testamentary disposition or otherwise or having in their custody any title documents pertaining to the said property shall communicate the same to the undersigned at our address within 07 days from the publication of this notice with documentary evidence in support thereof, failing which all the claim, of such person shall be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned. Any objections raised after the completion of the 07 days shall not be binding upon the said property or my client.

Adv. Shweta Garg  
100.1st Floor, Okhla phase II New Delhi - 110020  
Phone: +91 11 49774545/99

**GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM**

**OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, PWD,**  
**BARPETA DISTRICT TERRITORIAL BUILDING DIVISION, BARPETA**

**PRESS NOTICE FOR RE-TENDER**

The Executive Engineer, PWD, Barpeta District Territorial Building Division, Barpeta on behalf of Governor of Assam invites fresh item rate bids In electronic tendering system for the work "Construction of Tarun Ram Phukan Smriti Rangamancha at Barpeta under MPLAD scheme" with an approximate value of work of Rs. 1,25,66,741.00 from APWD registered Class-I (A/B/C) having experience of similar nature of work. Details of the bids may be seen at e-procurement portal website: [www.assamtenders.gov.in](http://www.assamtenders.gov.in) and also in the office of the undersigned during office hours. The bidders must be enrolled in [www.assamtenders.gov.in](http://www.assamtenders.gov.in) for participating in the bidding process.

Note:-  
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Executive Engineer, P.W.D.  
Barpeta District Territorial Building Division, Barpeta

DIPR/C/PIO/819/30-Jan-26

The Pioneer

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CHANGE OF NAME

I, Urimila, Mother of- No.16014596Y Hav Monu Singh Kushwah R/o- B-23 Shatabdi Puram DD Nagar, Gird, PO- Maharajpura A.F. Dist- Gwalior, M.P.- 474020, declare that in my Son's service record my name is wrongly recorded as Urmula, whereas my correct name is Urimila, which may be amended accordingly.

PD(271)C

I, Km Anshu, W/o- No.16027133H RFN Arvind Malik R/o- Vill & PO- Lisarh, Teh & Dist- Shamli, U.P.- 247776, declare that in my husband's army service record my name is wrongly recorded as Anshu whereas my correct name is Km Anshu, which may be amended accordingly.

PD(272)C

Due to an error in my son Ayansh Tanwar birth certificate, my name has been recorded as Varsha Tanwar, whereas my correct name is Varsha Singh. Both names refer to the same woman. Varsha Singh W/o- Pankaj Tanwar, R/o- RZ-101/46/1A, Gali No. 13, Mohan Nagar, New Delhi- 110046

PD(273)C

I, Kankata Swapna, W/o- No.15493487H Hav Vijaya Bhaskar Kankata, R/o- Vill- Martur, PO- Marturu, Teh- Martur, Dist- Bapatla, Andhra Pradesh- 523301, have changed my name from Kankata Swapna to Pentyla Swapna, vide affidavit dated 29/01/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(274)C

I, JC-709137A Nb Sub(Amb Asst) Upendra Singh, Unit- Army Hospital R&R Delhi Cantt- 110010, have changed my Father's name in my Army service record from Beerendra Singh to Birendra Singh, vide affidavit dated 29/01/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(275)C

I, JC-709137A Nb Sub(Amb Asst) Upendra Singh, Unit- Army Hospital R&R Delhi Cantt- 110010, have changed my Mother's name in my Army service record from Bindu Singh to Vidyawati, vide affidavit dated 29/01/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(276)C

I, Kirpa Devi, Mother of- No.15802002X NK(OCC) Surendra Singh, R/o- Vill & PO- Kamar, Teh- Chhata, Dist- Mathura, U.P.- 281403 have changed my name from Kirpa Devi to Kripa, vide affidavit dated 29/01/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(277)C

I, No.15435655L Nk Sudarshan Paswan, Unit- Army Hospital R&R Delhi Cantt- 110010, have changed my Mother's name in my Army service record from Bindu Devi to Vidyawati, vide affidavit dated 29/01/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(278)C

I, No.14863749W Sep Shivanand A Mutnal, R/o- Vill & PO- Suldhah, Dist- Belgaum, Karnataka- 591101, have changed my Father's name in my Army Service Record from Arjun to Arjun Mutnal, vide affidavit dated 29/01/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(279)C

I, No.14863749W Sep Shivanand A Mutnal, R/o- Vill & PO- Suldhah, Dist- Belgaum, Karnataka- 591101, have changed my Mother's name in my Army Service Record from Siddavva to Siddavva Mutnal, vide affidavit dated 29/01/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(280)C

I, Sampo, Mother of- No.16018623P Hav Gyan Singh R/o- Vill- Panhori, Teh- Deeg, Dist- Bharatpur, Rajasthan- 321203, declare that in my Son's service record my name is wrongly recorded as Sampo Devi whereas my correct name is Sampo, which may be amended accordingly.

PD(281)C

I, Raghuvver, Father of- No.16018623P Hav Gyan Singh R/o- Vill- Panhori, Teh- Deeg, Dist- Bharatpur, Rajasthan- 321203, declare that in my Son's service record my name is wrongly recorded as Raghuvver Singh whereas my correct name is Raghuvver, which may be amended accordingly.

PD(282)C

I, hitherto known as HEENA D/O RAJENDRA PRASAD W/O RAHUL SINGH R/O 25-D, NAVYUG ADARSH APARTMENTS, F-BLOCK, K R MANGLAM SCHOOL, VIKAS PURI, WEST DELHI, DELHI- 110018 have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as HEENA SINGH.

PD(283)C

I hitherto known as SHOBITHA MADHAVAN W/O SH. MADHAVAN SRIVATSAN R/O B-1, TYPE-4, TOWER-6, KIDWAI NAGAR, EAST, NEW DELHI-110023, have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as N. SHOBITHA.

PD(284)C

I, Vikas, S/o Vijender Singh Dabas R/o- H.No-400, Village Sultanpur Dabas, North West, Delhi, Delhi-39, have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Vikas Dabas.

PD(285)C





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## Order Order

## SC directs Sonam Wangchuk’s medical examination by specialist



The Supreme Court on Thursday directed medical examination by a specialist doctor of climate activist Sonam Wangchuk after he complained of stomach issues due to water contamination. Fifty-nine-year-old Wangchuk is under detention in the Jodhpur Central Jail. A bench of Justices Aravind Kumar and PB Varale also directed the jail authorities to furnish Wangchuk’s medical report in a sealed cover by Monday.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Wangchuk’s wife Gitanjali Angmo, told the court that an application seeking directions to jail authorities for immediate medical examination of the activist has been filed. “He has problems in his stomach because of the water. He has been wanting a doctor to check. But nobody comes. Let him have a weekly check. And let him have the water we provide,” Sibal submitted.

The counsel appearing for the Rajasthan Government, however, said that he has been examined by the jail doctor 21 times in the past four months.

The Supreme Court, however, said that he needs a specialist doctor such as a gastroenterologist.

## Delhi court acquits LG Saxena in 2000 defamation case filed by Medha Patkar



A court here on Thursday acquitted Delhi Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena in a 25-year-old defamation case filed by activist Medha Patkar, stating that the complainant failed to prove her charges against him.

The order was pronounced by Judicial Magistrate First Class Raghav Sharma. In March 2025, the court had dismissed Patkar’s application to examine additional witnesses in the case, terming it a “deliberate attempt to delay the trial, rather than a genuine necessity”.

Patkar and Saxena had been locked in a legal tussle since 2000 after she filed a suit against him for publishing advertisements against her and the ‘Narmada Bachao Andolan’.



# SIR: SC directs poll panel to display names for ‘logical discrepancies’

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Thursday asked the Election Commission to display the names of those on the “logical discrepancies” list at gram panchayat bhavans and block offices, where documents and objections will also be submitted, during the ongoing special intensive revision of electoral rolls in various States.

After the completion of the revision in Bihar, the second phase of the exercise is being carried out across nine States — Chhattisgarh, Goa, Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal and three Union territories — Andaman and Nicobar, Lakshadweep and Puducherry.

On Thursday, a bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi was hearing the submissions of senior advocates Kapil Sibal, Amit Anand Tiwari and lawyer Vivek Singh, on behalf of the DMK, that the electors, who have been put in the “logical discrepancies” list, be given adequate time and opportunity to claim inclusion in the electoral rolls in poll-bound Tamil Nadu.

The Supreme Court was hearing pleas alleging arbitrariness and procedural irregularities in the ongoing special intensive revision (SIR) exercise in Tamil Nadu, including those related to the “logical discrepancies” category.



Passing general directions for the states where SIR is underway, the bench noted that EC notices have been issued and they are broadly classified in three categories — mapped, unmapped and logical discrepancy.

The Supreme Court added that under the ‘logical discrepancy’ category, mismatches in father’s name or parents’ age, and a difference in the age of the grandparents were noticed by the authorities.

“The documents brought on record by the parties indicate that, within the category of logical discrepancies include, inter alia, a mismatch of the father’s name, a mismatch of parents’ ages, a difference in parents’ ages of more than 50 years, a difference in grandparents’ ages of less than 40 years, and those having more than six progeny,” the bench noted.

With a view to enabling the persons who are as of now included in the category of

logical discrepancies, the bench issued certain directions. “The names of the persons figuring in the logical discrepancies may be displayed at the Gram Panchayat Bhawans, public places in every Taluka (Sub-Division), as well as in the Ward Offices in the cities of the urban areas,” it ordered.

People likely to be affected are permitted to submit their documents or objections through their authorised representative, it said. “Such an authorised representative can even be a Booth Level Agent (BLA). There shall be an authority letter in favour of such representative, whether signed or thumb-marked,” it said.

The bench said documents and objections may be permitted to be submitted at the Panchayat Bhawans or ‘Taluka’ offices. It asked the poll panel to issue instructions for providing an additional 10 days’ time from the date of displaying the lists in the

Panchayat Bhawans to all persons who have not yet submitted their claims, documents, or objections to do so within the extended period.

“The State Government shall provide adequate manpower to the Election Commission of India and the State Election Commission for deployment at Panchayat Bhawans to handle documents/objections and hear persons likely to be affected,” it directed.

It also directed district collectors to “meticulously” follow the instructions issued by the Election Commission for deploying adequate staff and forces to ensure smooth functioning.

It also directed the DGPs of States, Superintendent of Police and the Collector of states, where SIR is underway, to ensure that there are no law and order problems.

“All affected persons may, in addition to being given an opportunity to submit documents, materials, or objections, also be heard at that same time either in person or through the authorised representative accompanying them, for the purpose of making an appropriate decision,” it said.

The official, who will receive documents or accord a hearing to the affected persons, may also certify the receipt of papers and the conduct of such a hearing, it said. The bench passed similar directions on January 19 on the pleas pertaining to SIR in West Bengal.

## SC reserves verdict on pleas challenging EC’s SIR of electoral rolls in Bihar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Thursday reserved its verdict on a batch of pleas including the one filed by NGO Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) challenging the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar.

The Supreme Court is examining the pleas that claimed that the poll panel does not have powers under Article 326 of the Constitution, the Representation of the People Act, 1950 and the Rules made under it to carry out the SIR on such a larger form.

The SIR in Bihar was conducted in the first phase. The second phase of the electoral roll revision is being carried out across nine States, namely Chhattisgarh, Goa, Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal and three UTs, Andaman and Nicobar, Lakshadweep and Puducherry. A separate ‘special revision’ of electoral rolls is in progress in Assam.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi concluded the final hearing after a battery of lawyers including Kapil Sibal, Abhishek Singhvi, Prashant Bhushan and Gopal Sankaranarayanan argued in

the matter. The poll panel was represented by senior advocates Rakesh Dwivedi and Maninder Singh.

The bench heard rejoinder submissions on behalf of the petitioners before reserving the verdict.

The court had commenced final arguments in the matter on August 12 last year, when it observed that inclusion or exclusion of names in electoral rolls falls within the constitutional remit of the Election Commission of India (ECI).

The poll panel came out with the names of 65 lakh people who were removed from the draft electoral rolls published as part of the SIR exercise.

According to the SIR notification, voters who were not present in the 2002 or 2003 rolls have to show ancestral linkage with someone present in the rolls then. Eleven documents were specified by the poll panel as documents which could be used to verify identity.

The ECI has defended the SIR exercise, maintaining that Aadhaar and voter identity cards cannot be treated as conclusive proof of citizenship.

It was alleged by the petitioners that the electoral rolls revision was an ‘NRC-like process’ where the poll panel was verifying citizenship, a power which vests in the central Government.

## NHAI may ask contractors to setup gaushalas for stray animals on highways: SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Thursday told the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) to consider asking concessionaires involved in construction of roads to set up a gaushala (cowshed) under CSR responsibility to take care of stray animals entering the highways.

A bench of justices Vikram Nath, Sandeep Mehta and NV Anjaria which reserved its verdict on a batch of petitions seeking modification of the November 7 order of the Supreme Court on relocation and sterilisation of stray dogs expressed its unhappiness over the efforts of Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu in complying with its direction.

The Supreme Court said the efforts of the Punjab Government in sterilising 100 stray dogs a day was inadequate and said it is “needle in a haystack”.

The bench asked the counsel appearing for NHAI to also develop an app where people can report



sightings of stray animals on the national highways. “You can also ask the concessionaires to setup a gaushala after say 50 km where these stray animals can be taken care of under the corporate social responsibility,” the bench told the counsel.

The counsel agreed to look into the possibility of developing the app and asking the concessionaire to set up gaushalas. The NHAI counsel pointed that there were over 1300

vulnerable locations on the National Highways and the authority is dealing with it to avoid any road mishaps. He said that most of the states have taken steps in removing stray cattle from the highways but still few like Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Rajasthan are yet to come forward to deal with the issue.

Dealing with the compliance of its earlier directions, the Supreme Court was told by Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati, appearing

for Rajasthan that sterilisation centres and fencing of education institutional areas have been done in the State. The bench pointed out that as per the affidavit of the state Government only 45 vans are there for catching stray dogs and said it was insufficient.

“Around 20 vans will be required for Jaipur alone. You need to ramp up the facilities and increase the number of vehicles for different cities.

The arguments have been made that the CSVR (Capture, Sterilise, Vaccinate and Release) formula under the ABC rules has to be implemented. Unless there are more vehicles and manpower, how will you manage that,” Justice Mehta asked. Bhati said, “We have sought more budgetary allocations to deal with the issue.”

The bench said, “If you don’t tackle this problem today it will keep on magnifying. Every year the population of stray dogs will go up by 10-15 per cent. You are increasing your own problems by avoiding this. As Punjab said, they are doing sterilisa-

tion for 100 dogs a day. This is no use. It is a needle in a haystack.” The counsel for the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) informed the bench that after November 7, last year, order of the Supreme Court there was surge in applications from NGOs and private parties for opening of sterilisation centres and animal shelters.

“There are certain pending applications. There are more than 250 applications filed after the November 7 order...They have not yet been given recognition by us,” the counsel said.

She pointed out inaccuracies in data reported by many state Governments on sterilisation of stray dogs and said that in one State the dog population is less while the data for sterilisation is more.

Justice Nath while asking the parties to file their written submissions as early as possible asked the AWBI, “Our only request to the AWBI is whatever applications are pending, you should process them expeditiously. Either you accept it or reject them but take a decision.”

## Special prosecutor appointed in Sabarimala cases

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Thiruvananthapuram

The Kerala Government has appointed NK Unnikrishnan as Special Public Prosecutor to lead the prosecution in the Sabarimala gold theft cases, an official said on Thursday.

The appointment was made through a Government order issued on Wednesday.

Unnikrishnan will lead the prosecution for the Special Investigation Team in two cases related to the loss of gold from the Dwarapalaka idols and the doorframes of the Sreekovil (sanctum sanctorum).

He will also provide legal advice during the investigation and scrutinise the charge sheets before they are filed in



court. Unnikrishnan, who is from Thrissur, had earlier served as Special Public Prosecutor in the rape and murder case of law student Jisha at her residence in Kuruppampady in April 2016.

The prosecution led by

him secured the conviction and death penalty for the sole accused, Ameerul Islam.

He is also serving as Special Public Prosecutor in the serial killing cases against Jolly of Koodathai in Kozhikode.

Meanwhile, the Kollam

Vigilance Court on Thursday granted bail to Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) former administrative officer S Sreekumar in the case related to gold lost from Dwarapalaka idol plates.

Sreekumar is the sixth accused in the case.

He was not arraigned as an accused in the second case involving the loss of gold from the doorframes of Sreekovil. Sreekumar is the second accused to be released from jail in the case.

The bail plea was heard by Kollam Vigilance Court Judge CS Mohit, who considered arguments from both the prosecution and the defence before granting bail.

The defence counsel argued that the allegation

against Sreekumar was limited to signing documents related to the shifting of gold-clad plates of the Dwarapalakas in 2019 and was not part of the conspiracy. His counsel submitted that Sreekumar had been in judicial custody for over 40 days. The prosecution opposed the bail plea, contending that the investigation was at a crucial stage.

The court, in its order, found that the prosecution failed to substantiate Sreekumar’s role in the conspiracy behind the removal of Dwarapalaka plates in 2019.

Apart from SIT, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) has started a money laundering probe into the Sabarimala gold loss incident.

## SC refuses to issue directions in domestic workers’ case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Thursday refused to entertain a PIL seeking a comprehensive legal framework and enforcement of minimum wages for domestic workers, saying it cannot issue a writ asking the Centre and states to consider amending existing laws.

The Supreme Court also observed that trade unionism has been largely responsible for stopping the industrial growth in the country. “How many industrial

units in the country have been closed thanks to trade unions? Let us know the realities.

All traditional industries in the country, all because of these ‘jhanda’ unions have been closed, all throughout the country.

They don’t want to work. These trade union leaders are largely responsible for stopping industrial growth in the country,” Chief Justice Surya Kant said.

“Of course exploitation is there, but there are means to address exploitation. People should have been

made more aware of their individual rights, people should have been made more skilled, there were several other reforms which should have been done” the CJ said.

While acknowledging the “plight” of millions of domestic helps across the country, a bench comprising CJ Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi maintained that the judiciary cannot encroach upon the legislative domain to mandate the enactment of laws.

The bench, in its order, said, “No enforceable decree


or order can be passed unless the legislature is asked to enact a suitable law. Such a direction we are afraid ought not to be issued by this court.”

It, however, asked petitioners, including Penn Thozhilalargal Sangam, a domestic workers’ union, to highlight the plight of domestic helps to States and the Union to take a suitable decision in the matter.

“We observe that petitioners may continue to highlight the plight of domestic helps and impress

upon the stakeholders to take a final call in relation thereto.. And the correspondence shows it is under active consideration by states and we are hopeful that a suitable mechanism shall be deployed for their help and to prevent exploitation,” the bench said while disposing of the PIL.

The petition sought, among other reliefs, recognition of non-payment of minimum wages to domestic workers as a violation of fundamental rights and enforcement of minimum wage regimes across States.



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POSTAL BALLOT NOTICE AND REMOTE E-VOTING INFORMATION

The members of “Orissa Sponge Iron & Steel Limited” (“the Company”) are hereby informed that in compliance with the provisions of Section 108 and 110 of the Companies Act, 2013 (“the Act”) read with Companies (Management and Administration) Rules, 2014, read with General Circular No. 14/2020 dated April 08, 2020, 17/2020 dated April 13, 2020, 22/2020 dated June 15, 2020, 33/2020 dated September 28, 2020, 39/2020 dated December 31, 2020, 10/2021 dated June 23, 2021 and 20/2021 dated December 08, 2021, 3/2022 dated May 05, 2022 and 11/2022 dated December 28, 2022, General Circulars No. 20/2020 dated May 05, 2020, 09/2023 dated September 25, 2023 issued by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (“MCA Circulars”) and other applicable provisions including any statutory modifications or re-enactment thereof for the time being in force and as amended from time to time, a Postal Ballot Notice (“Notice”), seeking consent of the members on the resolution as set out in the said Notice has been send electronically to the members whose e-mail address are registered with the Depository Participants/ Registrar & Share Transfer agent i.e. Skyline Financial Service Private Limited (“RTA”), as on Friday, January 23, 2026 (**Cut-off Date**). The dispatch of the said notice through e-mails has been completed on Thursday, January 29, 2026.

The Postal Ballot Notice (“Notice”) is available on the website of the Company at <https://orissasponge.com/docs/Postal%20Ballot%20Notice%20Jan%202026.pdf> and on the website of the National Securities Depository Limited (“NSDL”) at [www.evoting.nsdl.com](http://www.evoting.nsdl.com).

Members holding shares either in physical form or dematerialized form, as on the Cut-off date i.e Friday, January 23, 2026, may cast their vote electronically on the business item set out in the notice of the Postal Ballot dated Friday, January 23, 2026, through electronic voting system (remote e-voting) of National Security Depository Limited (“NSDL”).

The members are further informed that:

a) The special business set out in the notice of the Postal Ballot is to be transacted through voting by electronic means.

b) The remote e-voting begins at 9:00 a.m. (IST) on Saturday, January 31, 2026.

c) The remote e-voting ends at 5:00 p.m. (IST) on Monday, March 02, 2026.

d) The cut-off date for determining the eligibility to vote by electronic means is Friday, January 23, 2026.

e) The members may note that i) the remote e-voting module shall be disabled for voting and the voting by electronic means shall not be allowed after the date and time mentioned under point ‘c’ above; and ii) once the vote on resolution cast by a member, the member shall not be allowed to change it subsequently;

f) The manner of remote e-voting for the members holding shares in physical mode or dematerialized mode or who have not registered their email address with the Company/Depository Participant, is provided in the notice of the Postal Ballot as available on the Company’s website [www.orissasponge.com](http://www.orissasponge.com) and NSDL’s website [www.evoting.nsdl.com](http://www.evoting.nsdl.com).

g) Manner of registering/ updating email address:

i. Members holding shares in physical mode, are requested to get their email ids registered by writing to the RTA at [compliances@skyllinertta.com](mailto:compliances@skyllinertta.com) or to the Company at [corporate@orissasponge.com](mailto:corporate@orissasponge.com) along with signed request letter mentioning the name and address of the Member, scanned copy of the share certificate (front and back), self-attested copy of the PAN card, and self-attested copy of Address proof.

ii. In case shares are held in demat mode, members are requested to register / update their e-mail addresses with the relevant Depository Participant(s)

iii. Alternatively, members may send a request to [evoting@nsdl.co.in](mailto:evoting@nsdl.co.in) for procuring user id and password for e-voting by providing above mentioned documents. The members may also refer the said Notice.

h) In case of any queries, the members may refer to the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for shareholders and e-voting user manual for Shareholders available at the download section of [www.evoting.nsdl.com](http://www.evoting.nsdl.com) or call on toll free no.: 022-48867000 or send a request to Pallavi Mhatre, Senior Manager, NSDL at [evoting@nsdl.com](mailto:evoting@nsdl.com). Further, for any grievance regarding e-voting the members may also write to Mr. Suraj Kumar Thakur at email id: [corporate@orissasponge.com](mailto:corporate@orissasponge.com).

i) The Company has appointed Mr. Neeraj Jain, Practicing Company Secretary (Membership No. FCS 9599, COP 26163), Proprietor of M/s. Neeraj Jain & Associates, Company Secretaries, to act as the Scrutinizer for conducting the Postal Ballot including e-voting process in a fair and transparent manner. The Scrutinizer will submit his report to the Chairman / any other Director / person as may be authorized by the Chairman, on or before Tuesday, March 03, 2026. The results of the voting conducted by Postal Ballot along with Scrutinizer’s Report will be made available on the website of the Company at [www.orissasponge.com](http://www.orissasponge.com) and on the website of NSDL at [www.evoting.nsdl.com](http://www.evoting.nsdl.com). Additionally, the results will also be displayed at the Registered Office of the Company.

For Orissa Sponge Iron & Steel Limited

Sd/-

Suraj Kumar Thakur

Company Secretary

Place: New Delhi

Date: January 29, 2026



BRIEFLY

Emanjot frustrates Karnataka



Emanjot Singh Chahal made a gritty 77 not out in his first-class comeback to lift Punjab to a competitive 303 for nine against Karnataka on the opening day of their final league Ranji Trophy Group B fixture here on Thursday.

Having reduced Punjab to 168 for six, Karnataka were left frustrated by the Punjab lower-order mainly Emanjot who stood firm against a formidable opposition. Abhijeet Garg (81) and captain Uday Saharan (44) contributed at the top of the order before the middle-order collapse took the momentum away from the home team. However, Emanjot seized the momentum from Karnataka who are in the hunt for a knock-out berth while Punjab are out of contention. Primarily a left-arm spinner with a free flowing action, the 21-year-old who bat right handed negated the threat from Karnataka spinners on helping surface brilliantly. His two games from Punjab previously came in 2024. Emanjot employed the sweep regularly to counter the turn, while played an attractive back foot punch off India pacer Prasidh Krishna towards close of play.

Chatterjee's unbeaten fifty steadies Bengal



Veteran Sudip Chatterjee struck a resolute half-century to hold the Bengal innings together as the visitors recovered to 168 for five on a curtailed opening day of their Ranji Trophy Group C match against Haryana here on Thursday.

Only 58 overs were possible after a delayed start due to dense fog, but Chatterjee stood firm with an unbeaten 78 off 177 balls, hitting five fours, even as wickets fell at regular intervals at the other end.

Sabalenka slams into 4th straight Australian Open final

JOHN PYEAP ■ Melbourne

Not even a point penalty for hindrance slowed Aryna Sabalenka's run to a fourth consecutive Australian Open final. The top-ranked Sabalenka overpowered Elina Svitolina 6-2, 6-3 Thursday night to move within one victory of a third Australian Open title in four years.

A rematch of the 2023 final against Elena Rybakina was set up when the No. 5 seed ousted No. 6 Jessica Pegula 6-3, 7-6 (7) in the second semi-final. "It was a great battle (against Sabalenka in 2023)," Rybakina said. "In the end, she played a bit better and it was well deserved. I want to enjoy the final and hopefully I can serve better than today. I am so excited."

Her semifinal was mostly one way until Rybakina had match point. The 2022 Wimbledon champion missed three match points on Pegula's serve and then was broken twice while serving for the match. Pegula rallied and had two set points in the

tiebreaker but wasn't able to convert, and Rybakina finally clinched it 29 minutes after her first match point.

"Really, really stressful," Rybakina said. She admitted to flashbacks from the 2024 Open when she lost the longest women's tiebreaker ever at a Grand Slam to Anna Blinkova 22-20 in a three-set defeat. "I'm proud no matter the situation. It got very tight, I stayed there," she said of the win over Pegula. "I was fighting for each point." All four players reached the semi-finals without dropping a set - in Australia for the first time in 56 years - and Sabalenka and Svitolina were each on 10-match winning streaks to start the season after titles in warmup events.

Sabalenka kept both of her streaks alive. She hit 19 winners and broke Svitolina's serve twice in the first set. She finished with 29 winners to 12 for her Ukrainian rival. As has become customary for Ukrainians against players from Russia and Belarus, there was no handshakes at



the net. There was also no group photo before the match. Sabalenka is the third woman in the Open era to reach four consecutive singles finals at the Australian Open after Evonne Goolagong and Martina Hingis. "It's an incredible achievement but the job's not done yet," an emotional Sabalenka said in her on-court TV interview. "I've been watching her game, (Svitolina) was playing incredible. I felt like I had to step in

and put as much pressure as I could back on her. I'm glad the level was there. I think I played great tennis."

**The hindrance call:** The only hiccup was the hindrance to start the fourth game. Hindrance is called for a distraction that prevents a player from making a shot, and can include an opponent's loud noise.

Umpire Louise Azemar Engzell deemed Sabalenka made a prolonged grunt after she shanked a forehand. The

shot seemed to be going long but landed inside the baseline, giving Svitolina the chance to play on. That's when the umpire intervened.

Sabalenka asked for a video review but, after going to the tape, Azemar Engzell confirmed her decision that the grunt was more elongated than usual. It didn't hurt Sabalenka. She broke serve in that game. "That's actually never happened to me ... Especially with my grunting," Sabalenka said. "Then she called it, and I was, like, What? What is wrong with you?"

Sabalenka said it aggravated her but worked as motivation. "It actually helped me — I was more aggressive. I was not happy with the call, and it really helped me to get that game," Sabalenka said. She added with a laugh, "So if she (Azemar Engzell) ever wants to do it again - like, I want to make sure that she's not afraid of it - go ahead, call it. It's going to help me."

**Svitolina's exit:** After reaching her first semifinal in

Australia and winning a title in a warmup tournament in New Zealand, Svitolina will return to the top 10 for the first time since she took a maternity break in 2022.

The Auckland title was her first foray back on tour after an early end to the 2025 season for a mental health break. She said the rest and time out prolonged her career. "Definitely very, very happy with the two weeks here and in New Zealand, as well, winning," she said. "Gutted to not make it through tonight but it's very difficult when you're playing the world No. 1, who is really on fire." Svitolina was playing her fourth semifinal at a major — 2019 and 2023 at Wimbledon and the 2019 US Open — but again wasn't able to go to the championship match.

"It was really complicated for me today," she said, "but, yeah, I just want to take positives from the past weeks, the beginning of the year, and just carry them through for the season."

Avasthi negates Sangwan's ton against Mumbai

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Sanat Sangwan struck a fine hundred for Delhi against Mumbai before the visitors were shot out for 221 on day one of their Group D Ranji Trophy contest, with Mohit Avasthi claiming 5/62 here on Thursday. While Sangwan (118) stood tall with a resolute ton — his third this season — Delhi's other batters cut a sorry figure.

Mumbai were 13/1 in reply with Divij Mehra removing Akash Anand (4). The hosts trail by 208 runs in first



innings. Sangwan mixed caution with aggression to negate early seam movement and testing spells from

Mumbai pacers to produce a quality century. He scored his runs off 218 balls, hitting 11 fours and two sixes. The 25-year-old Sangwan had fortified Delhi's position with a solid 100-run stand for the second wicket with Vaibhav Kandpal (32), keeping Mumbai at bay against the new ball.

"It's been a good season for me, I wanted to play long innings. The Delhi-Mumbai contest is always a tight match, so I will call it one of my best hundreds," Sangwan told the media after end of play. Delhi had lost only one

wicket in the morning session and were 111/1 at one stage in the second when after lunch, Avasthi ripped through the visitors in his third spell of 6-0-17-3. Avasthi had Ayush Doseja (0), captaining Delhi in his debut season, and Sumit Mathur (2) caught behind in similar fashion. He cramped both the batters for room with deliveries angled across the southpaws and had them caught behind.

Before that, Avasthi had debutant Aryan Rana caught by Sarfaraz Khan at first slip off an innocuous delivery outside off.

Jurel misses out on ton as UP manage only 237

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Nagpur

India international Dhruv Jurel missed out on a deserving ton by just four runs as his team Uttar Pradesh was bowled out for 237, courtesy a six-wicket haul from Vidarbha left-arm spinner Harsh Dubey on day one of their final Group A Ranji Trophy league fixture here.

At stumps, hosts Vidarbha (25 points), who are looking at an outright win to qualify



for the knock-outs, were 33 for no loss.

Opting to bat, UP were struggling at 109 for 6 at one stage before Jurel and seamer Shivam Mavi (47) added 92 runs for the seventh wicket in a recovery act that enabled the visitors to cross the 200-run mark.

Delhi Government's Mega Solarisation Drive

In line with the Government of India's green energy initiative, the Delhi Government is pushing for a mega solarisation drive across Delhi

In Delhi, the initiative encompasses every element of the city's landscape, with solar installations being promoted across residential, commercial, industrial, government, and agricultural land.

**Present installed solar Capacity:** 407 MW  
**Residential Buildings:** PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana

A government subsidy of ₹1,08,000 on a 3 kW solar PV system is available to consumers under the PM Suryaghar Scheme of the Government of India and the Delhi Solar Energy Policy.

In addition, the Delhi Government provides a Generation-Based Incentive (GBI) for solar power generation ₹3 per unit for solar plants up to 3 kW, and ₹2 per unit for systems ranging from 3 kW to 10 kW, applicable for a period of five years. This incentive amounts to approximately ₹900 per month for a 3 kW solar plant. Consumers also benefit from net metering, which significantly reduces their monthly electricity bills. Moreover, they can earn additional income from surplus solar power generation, which is settled on an annual basis.

**Government Buildings**

The Delhi Government is committed to solarising all feasible government buildings and offices. At present, 1,718 government buildings in Delhi have been solarised, with a total installed capacity of 143 MW.

Indraprastha Power Generation Company Limited (IPGCL), a Delhi Government power-



generating company, is installing solar power plants on the rooftops of all feasible Delhi Government buildings. Over the past two months, 130 government buildings have been solarised, and solarisation work is currently underway at more than 450 Delhi Government buildings.



**Agrivoltaics Solar**

In a major push for solar installations on agricultural land, the Delhi Government has waived the requirement for a No Objection Certificate (NOC) for elevated solar plants, allowing agricultural activities to continue alongside solar power generation.

This initiative will provide farmers with an additional and assured source of income from solar power while preserving the agricultural landscape in the outer areas of Delhi. The availability of low-cost solar power will benefit all categories of consumers under the Group Net Metering (GNM) and Virtual Net Metering (VNM) frameworks.

**Commercial and Industrial Consumers**

Commercial and industrial (C&I) consumers can avail of a Generation-Based Incentive (GBI) at the rate of ₹1 per unit on solar power generation for a period of five years. In addition, C&I consumers can also take advantage of agrivoltaics solar projects, enabling access to cost-effective solar power through agricultural land-based installations.



STATUS OF SOLARISATION IN DELHI

Cumulative Target 750 MW by March 2027		Present installed capacity 407 MW in 20894 number of consumers	
<b>PM Suryaghar Scheme (PMSG) status in Delhi:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Empanelled Vendors: 309 numbers</li><li>Total installation: 5945 consumers of cumulative capacity 28.16 MW</li><li>Total Capital Subsidy disbursed: ₹42.51 Crore to 5120 consumers</li></ul> <b>Delhi Govt Subsidy under Delhi Solar Energy Policy:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Capital Subsidy disbursed: ₹7.05 Cr to 4951 consumers</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Generation Based Incentive (GBI) disbursed: ₹10.4 Cr</li></ul> <b>Subsidy Structure in Delhi:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1 KW: ₹40,000</li><li>2 KW: ₹80,000</li><li>3 KW &amp; above: ₹1,08,000</li><li>GHS/RWA: ₹20000/KW up to ₹10 lakh</li><li>Capital Subsidy disbursal through DBT</li></ul>	<b>Benefits of Solar</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Free solar electricity for 25 years and more</li><li>Avail loans from major banks on easy terms</li><li>Additional income through Generation-Based incentive</li><li>Income from Surplus solar power</li><li>Reduction in Electricity Bill</li><li>Run your ACs &amp; other appliances at no extra Cost</li></ul>	
<b>How to Apply Online</b> <b>STEP 1:</b> Register on the PM Surya Ghar portal by visiting <a href="https://pmsuryaghar.gov.in">https://pmsuryaghar.gov.in</a> <b>STEP 2:</b> Select a vendor for installation <b>STEP 3:</b> Your application will be further processed on your DISCOM Portal by the selected vendor, including subsidy management		<b>CONTACT US AT</b> Toll-Free. 19122 (BYPL), 19123 (BRPL) & 19124 (TPDDL)	

IP/Shabdarth/Advertisorial/O122/25-26

GREEN ENERGY CURRENTLY MEETS ONE-THIRD OF DELHI'S ELECTRICITY DEMAND. THE DELHI GOVERNMENT IS COMMITTED TO INCREASING THE CITY'S SOLAR POWER CAPACITY TO 750 MW WITHIN ONE YEAR





# Renewed diplomatic engagement between India and Arab nations

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

Building on centuries-old civilisational links and two decades of structured dialogue, India will host the 2nd India-Arab Foreign Ministers' Meeting (IAFMM) on 31 January 2026. The gathering will reflect the evolving partnership between India and the League of Arab States in a rapidly changing geopolitical landscape.

India is set to host the 2nd India-Arab Foreign Ministers' Meeting on 31 January 2026, marking another milestone in its expanding partnership with the League of Arab States (LAS). The ministerial meeting will be preceded by the 4th India-Arab Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM) on 30 January 2026 at Bharat Mandapam, with participation from Foreign Ministers of Arab League member States and the LAS Secretary General, Ahmed Aboul Gheit.

The League of Arab States, formed in Cairo on 22 March 1945, initially comprised seven members-Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Syria-to promote cooperation and safeguard the interests of Arab nations. Today, the LAS has 22 member States spanning North Africa and the Middle East, including Syria, which has been reinstated, and maintains observer status for countries such as India, Brazil, Armenia, Greece and Venezuela.

The League aims to strengthen political, economic, cultural and social coordination among its members while mediating disputes internally and with external parties. Its institutional structure includes the Council, Special Ministerial Committees, the General Secretariat and Specialised Agencies. The Council, the principal decision-making body, comprises foreign ministers of all member States and meets biannually. While decisions are taken by majority vote, they are binding only on consenting States-a limitation that has often drawn criticism over collective inaction on major international issues.



Warm welcome to Foreign Minister Mbaw Mohamed of Comoros on his arrival in New Delhi on Thursday to attend the 2nd India-Arab Foreign Ministers' Meeting



Warm welcome to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of State of Palestine H.E. Varsen Aghabekian Shahin, as she arrives in India to participate in the 2nd India Arab Foreign Ministers' Meeting



H.E. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary General of the League of Arab States, who arrived in New Delhi for the 2nd India-Arab Foreign Ministers' and related meetings being welcomed by MEA official

## From Ancient Ties to Modern Diplomacy: India to Host India-Arab Foreign Ministers' Meet

Globally, the LAS maintains multilateral ties with organisations such as the African Union (AU), European Union (EU), ASEAN, and the Union of South American Nations (USAN). It has also developed strong engagement with major powers, including China, which established an institutional dialogue mechanism with the LAS in 2008, as well as Russia, France and Brazil. The League maintains missions in over 20 countries, including India, the US, Russia, China, the UK and Germany.

### Deepening India-Arab Ties

India's relations with the Arab world are rooted in centuries-old civilisational exchanges through trade, scholarship and diplomacy. Recognising the strategic importance of the region as part of India's extended neighbourhood, New Delhi and the LAS signed a Memorandum of Understanding in March 2002 to institutionalise dialogue. This was followed by the establishment of the Arab-India Cooperation Forum in 2008, revised in 2013. India has held Observer Status at the LAS since 2010.

The 1st India-Arab Foreign Ministers' Meeting, held in Manama, Bahrain, in January 2016, adopted the Manama Declaration and an Executive Programme structured around five key verticals-Economy, Education, Energy, Media and Culture.

Progress under these verticals has been steady. In the economic domain, the Sixth India-Arab Partnership Conference was held in New Delhi in July 2023, with the next edition to be hosted by the Arab side. In education, the 1st India-Arab Universities' Presidents' Conference took place in New Delhi in February 2025, focusing on higher education collaboration, emerging technologies such as AI and Quantum Computing, skill development, and academic exchanges. The second edition is scheduled for Ajman in early 2026.

Energy cooperation has also gained momentum, with the first Arab-India Energy Forum held virtually in June 2021, and an Energy Symposium planned on the sidelines of India Energy Week 2026 in Goa. Media and cultural exchanges continue through symposiums and the Arab-India Cultural Festival, with India slated to host the third edition in 2026.

### Strong Economic and People-to-People Linkages

India-Arab trade has crossed \$240 billion, with hydrocarbon trade alone exceeding \$107 billion. Arab League countries supply a significant share of India's crude oil, LNG, LPG and fertilisers, while Indian companies have made substantial investments across the region's energy sector. Over 9 million Indians live and work in Arab League countries, forming a vital bridge between the two regions.

Cooperation also extends to capacity building, with Arab diplomats participating in training programmes at Indian institutions such as the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) and the SSIFS. Several Arab countries are also members of the International Solar Alliance, underscoring a shared commitment to renewable energy.

The relationship has been further strengthened by political solidarity. The LAS strongly condemned the April 2025 Pahalgam terror attack and expressed support for India. During a high-level Indian delegation's visit to Cairo in June 2025, Secretary General Aboul Gheit reiterated the League's stance against terrorism, emphasising that the LAS is not a religious organisation, but a political body united by shared regional interests.

As India prepares to host the upcoming ministerial and senior officials' meetings in January 2026, the engagements are expected to give fresh momentum to the India-Arab partnership.

## Forum Represents India's Multi-faceted Cooperation With the Arab World

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

India is set to host the second India-Arab Foreign Ministers' Meeting (IAFMM) in New Delhi on January 31, reviving a high-level diplomatic dialogue with the Arab world after a gap of nearly a decade, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) announced on Thursday.

As many as 10 foreign ministers — from Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, Sudan, Palestine, Somalia, Mauritania, Comoros and Libya — are expected to attend the India-Arab foreign ministers' meeting on Friday-Saturday.

India and the United Arab Emirates will co-chair the meeting, which will bring together foreign ministers and senior representatives from member States of the League of Arab States (LAS), along with the Secretary-General of the Arab League. This forum represents the highest institutional mechanism guiding India's multifaceted cooperation with the Arab world.

The dialogue traces its roots to March 2002, when India and the LAS signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to institutionalise structured engagement. The relationship gained further momentum in December 2008 during a visit to India by then Arab League Secretary-General Amre Moussa, when both sides established the Arab-India Cooperation Forum through a Memorandum of Cooperation. The framework was revised in 2013 to align with evolving structural needs. India continues to hold Observer status in the 22-member Arab League.

The first edition of the India-Arab Foreign Ministers' Meeting was held in Bahrain in 2016, where the two sides identified five priority areas for deeper collaboration: Economy, Energy, Education, Media, and Culture. They also outlined concrete activities across these sectors. Officials expect the upcoming second meeting to build

### BACKGROUND OF INDIA-ARAB FOREIGN MINISTERS' MEET

The IAFMM was formalised in 2002 following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between India and the League of Arab States to institutionalise structured dialogue. The first ministerial-level meeting was held in Bahrain in 2016, where both sides agreed to deepen cooperation across five priority sectors: Economy, Energy, Education, Media, and Culture. The framework was further strengthened through the Arab-India Cooperation Forum, established in 2008 and revised in 2013.

### FOCUS AREAS: ENERGY, TRADE AND EDUCATION

The upcoming meeting is expected to place strong emphasis on energy security, trade facilitation, and educational collaboration. With West Asia remaining a critical energy partner for India, discussions are likely to cover long-term oil and gas supply arrangements, renewable energy cooperation, and investment partnerships. Trade and investment ties, including supply chains and digital connectivity, are also expected to feature prominently, alongside initiatives in higher education, skill development, and academic exchanges.

### PARTICIPATION AND DIPLOMATIC SIGNIFICANCE

All 22 Arab States are expected to be represented by foreign ministers, ministers of state, or senior officials, underlining the collective importance attached to the dialogue.

The meeting will be preceded by the fourth India-Arab Senior Officials' Meeting on January 30, 2026, aimed at setting the agenda and consolidating outcomes. The event also builds on recent high-level engagements, including interactions between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, highlighting the strategic depth of India-Gulf relations.

### INDIA'S EXPANDING ROLE IN THE ARAB WORLD

By hosting the IAFMM, India aims to project itself as a reliable economic and strategic partner in West Asia. The forum provides an opportunity to align political dialogue with economic priorities and people-to-people ties, reinforcing India's broader West Asia policy amid evolving regional and global dynamics.

directly on that foundation, review progress, and expand engagement in these and potentially new areas.

This time, India will host the Foreign Ministers' meeting in New Delhi for the first time. Representatives from all 22 Arab League member countries are expected to participate at the level of foreign ministers, ministers of State, or senior officials. To prepare the ground, the fourth India-Arab Senior Officials' Meeting is scheduled to take place a day earlier, on January 30.

Preparations are already underway, with several visiting dignitaries having arrived in the Capital. Welcoming the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Sudan, H.E. Mohieldin Salim Ahmed Ibrahim, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal wrote on X, "Delighted to welcome H.E. Mohieldin Salim Ahmed Ibrahim for the second India-Arab Foreign Ministers' Meeting. The visit will further strengthen people-to-people ties between India and Sudan."

In another message, he extended greetings to the Palestinian delegation, "Warm welcome to the Minister of

- IAFMM was formalised in 2002 through an MoU between India and the League of Arab States
- India is an Observer to the League of Arab States, which has 22 member countries
- The first IAFMM was held in Bahrain in 2016
- Priority cooperation sectors include economy, energy, education, media, and culture

Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the State of Palestine, H.E. @VarsenAghShahin, as she arrives in India to participate in the 2nd India Arab Foreign Ministers' Meeting. The visit reaffirms India's partnership with the people of Palestine and the Arab world."

The meeting is widely seen as an important opportunity to reinforce India's longstanding ties with the Arab region, deepen strategic partnerships, and advance cooperation across economic, developmental, and cultural domains.

# Rebuilding Gaza, Regional Conflicts to Take Centrestage at Meeting

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Senior diplomats from across the Middle East began arriving in the Indian Capital this week as India prepares to convene the second India-Arab League Foreign Ministers' Meeting, reviving the high-level dialogue after a ten-year hiatus. The gathering comes against the backdrop of an uneasy ceasefire in Gaza and continuing instability across parts of West Asia and North Africa.

The ministerial summit, scheduled for Saturday, will focus on expanding cooperation between India and Arab League member States while addressing pressing regional challenges, most notably the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip. Conflicts in Yemen, Sudan, and Libya are also expected to feature prominently in deliberations.

A joint declaration is likely to be adopted at the conclusion of the meeting, carrying forward collaboration in five priority sectors-Economy, Energy, Education, Media, and Culture-first

agreed upon at the inaugural summit in 2016.

All 22 members of the League of Arab States will be represented at the meeting. While seven to eight countries are expected to send their foreign ministers, others will participate through deputy ministers, ministers of state, or senior officials. The United Arab Emirates will co-chair the discussions alongside India.

The diplomatic engagements will be preceded by the fourth India-Arab Senior Officials' Meeting on Friday. Delegations are also scheduled to call on Prime Minister Narendra Modi later the same day, highlighting the strategic importance New Delhi attaches to its engagement with the Arab world.

Describing the forum as the highest institutional mechanism guiding India-Arab relations, the Ministry of External Affairs said the partnership was formalised in March 2002 through a Memorandum of Understanding with the League of Arab States. India currently holds observer status in the 22-member organisation. One of the notable visitors to New Delhi is

Eltaher S.M. Elbaour, Foreign Minister of Libya's internationally recognised Government of National Unity. His visit marks the first by a Libyan minister since the 2011 overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi. The visit follows reports suggesting Pakistan is exploring the sale of JF-17 fighter jets to eastern Libyan strongman Khalifa Haftar. Trade and energy security form a critical pillar of India's engagement with the region. More than half of India's trade with Arab League countries involves hydrocarbons, with bilateral trade valued at around \$240 billion in the last financial year. Major shipping routes vital to India's commerce-the Suez Canal, the Red Sea, and the Gulf of Aden-are all bordered by Arab League members.

Syria will also be represented at the meeting by Mohamad Zakaria Lababidi, Director of the Afro-Asian and Oceania Department in its Foreign Ministry, signalling a gradual diplomatic re-opening between New Delhi and Damascus following a change in Government just over a year ago.

### Gaza reconstruction takes centre stage

For Palestine, represented by Foreign Minister Varsen Aghabekian Shahin, the summit offers a key platform to seek international support for rebuilding Gaza. With a fragile ceasefire holding between Israel and Hamas, Palestinian officials are expected to press for humanitarian, development, and reconstruction assistance.

Shahin said India's longstanding support for a two-State solution and its voting record at international forums make it an important partner in advancing Palestinian aspirations. She added that discussions on Gaza's future and post-war reconstruction would be central to the deliberations.

India recognised Palestine in the late 1980s and has consistently backed its statehood. The reconstruction of Gaza is expected to be discussed alongside the role of the UN-mandated Board of Peace, which has been tasked by the Security Council to oversee stability and rebuilding efforts in the territory until 2027.

### Regional conflicts in focus

Beyond Gaza, the ongoing civil wars in Sudan and Yemen are also expected to draw attention. Sudan will be represented by Foreign Minister Mohieldin Salim Ahmed Ibrahim, while Yemen is sending Vice Foreign Minister Mustapha Ahmed Mohamed Noman.

Sudan has been locked in a brutal conflict for nearly three years after the Rapid Support Forces seized Khartoum and large parts of the country's west.

In Yemen, the war that began in 2015 continues to reshape regional alignments, with recent tensions emerging between Saudi Arabia and the UAE over their respective roles in the conflict.

As foreign ministers gather in New Delhi, the summit is being closely watched as a test of India's growing diplomatic engagement with the Arab world-one that now extends beyond trade and energy to some of the region's most complex political and humanitarian crises.