





# CM Rekha flags off 500 electric buses, Delhi-Panipat bus service

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Sunday flagged off around 500 electric buses and the Delhi-Panipat bus service to mark the BJP-led Government's first year in office. The Capital's total electric bus fleet is now over 4,000.

The flag-off by BJP National President Nitin Nabin and Chief Minister Rekha Gupta marked a significant milestone in Delhi's move towards clean public transport and coincided with the first anniversary of the BJP government in the Capital.

Speaking at the event, Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said the addition of 500 buses at one go was unprecedented in Delhi's transport history. "With this induction, Delhi has become the state with the largest electric bus fleet

in the country. This is a decisive step towards clean, modern, and accessible public transport," she said. The Chief Minister also inaugurated the Delhi-Panipat inter-state electric bus service, calling it a significant boost to regional connectivity and pollution-free travel.

BJP National President Nitin Nabin said the achievement reflected decisive and accountable governance under Gupta's leadership. "For years, people saw announcements and hoardings but little change on the ground. In the last year, Delhi has seen visible, result-oriented governance with zero tolerance for corruption, digital transparency, and accountability," he said, congratulating the Delhi government on completing one year in office.

The ceremony was attended by Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva, Cabinet



Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, second left, with BJP National President Nitin Nabin, and others, at an event to flag off 500 new electric vehicle (EV) buses, in New Delhi

ministers Pravesh Sahib Singh, Ashish Sood, Dr Pankaj Kumar Singh, Ravinder Indraj, and Kapil Mishra, along with MLAs and senior officials.

The Chief Minister said the

government aims to expand the electric bus fleet to 7,500 by the end of 2026 and to 14,000 by 2028. She said the focus was not only on numbers but also on improv-

ing the commuter experience. "Assessment should be based on buses running on roads and better facilities for the common people, not just files," she said.

Highlighting policy measures, the Chief Minister said a comprehensive electric vehicle policy would be introduced soon to promote clean fuel in transport. She added that while EV subsidies announced earlier were not disbursed, the present government has cleared payments worth ₹40 crore. Work is also underway on initiatives such as Pink Cards and Mobility Cards for women commuters.

Transport Minister Dr Pankaj Kumar Singh said the induction of 500 buses would significantly strengthen Delhi's public transport system. "This step will modernise DTC and move it firmly in a clean and sustainable direction," he said.

He added that the new Delhi-Panipat e-bus service would offer a safe, comfortable, and environmentally friendly travel option.

## DELHI EMERGES AS STATE WITH LARGEST E-BUS FLEET IN COUNTRY

**New Delhi:** Delhi has emerged as the state with the largest electric bus fleet in the country, overtaking Maharashtra after the induction of 500 new electric vehicles into the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) fleet.

With the latest addition, the total number of electric buses operating in the national capital has reached 4,286, placing Delhi at the top of India's e-bus chart.

The milestone was achieved after the new buses were flagged off at a ceremony held at Ramilla Maidan earlier this week. Maharashtra, which previously held the top position, now stands second with 4,001 electric buses.

Other states trail at a considerable distance, with

Karnataka operating 1,989 e-buses, followed by Gujarat with 1,041, Telangana with 875 and Uttar Pradesh with 874, according to official data.

The latest induction marks a significant push by the Delhi government towards clean and sustainable urban transport. Officials said the expansion of the electric bus fleet is aimed at reducing vehicular emissions, improving last-mile connectivity and strengthening the public transport system in a city that continues to battle high levels of air pollution.

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said Delhi's top ranking in electric bus deployment reflects the government's sustained focus on green mobility.

# Sood meets family of youth who died in Janakpuri pit mishap

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Delhi Urban Development Minister Ashish Sood on Sunday met the family of a 25-year-old youth who lost his life after falling into an excavated pit in west Delhi's Janakpuri.

The minister assured them of strict action against those found responsible and all possible assistance from the Delhi Government. Terming the incident "deeply painful and unacceptable", the minister said the case was being treated as one involving suspected administrative negligence rather than a routine accident.

During his visit to the family's residence, Sood expressed condolences and said the government stood firmly with the bereaved family in their pursuit of justice. "This is an extremely tragic incident that has shaken society. The Delhi government will provide every possible support to the victim's family and ensure that accountability is fixed," the minister said.



He made it clear that no individual or agency responsible for lapses in public safety would be spared. "If negligence or dereliction of duty is found at any level, strict and exemplary action will be taken. There will be no compromise when it comes to the safety of citizens," Sood said.

The Janakpuri incident, which occurred earlier this week, involved the death of a young motorcyclist who fell into a deep excavation pit allegedly dug as part of infrastructure-related work. The incident has triggered public

outrage and renewed scrutiny of safety measures at construction and excavation sites across the capital, particularly those located along busy roads and in residential areas.

According to the Urban Development Minister, instructions have already been issued for a comprehensive investigation into all aspects of the incident. The probe will examine whether mandatory safety protocols, including barricading, warning signage, and lighting, were properly followed at the site.

## SUBCONTRACTOR'S LABOURER HELD FOR NOT REPORTING FALL OF BIKER KILLED IN PIT

**New Delhi:** Delhi Police on Sunday arrested a labourer employed by the subcontractor who was held in connection with the death of a 25-year-old biker who fell into an uncovered 15-foot-deep pit in Janakpuri, officials said.

The labourer, identified as Yogesh (23), was arrested for allegedly not informing the police or emergency authorities regarding the biker's fall and also for misleading the victim's family when they came inquiring about him, Deputy Commissioner of Police (West) Darade Sharad Bhaskar said.

Yogesh was present at the spot at the time of the accident and was among the first to become aware that a biker had fallen into the pit dug by the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) for a sewer-related project, the DCP said.

"Yogesh had informed the sub-contractor, Rajesh Kumar Prajapati, about the incident during the night

but did not alert the police or any emergency agency. When the victim's family reached the spot later that night, searching for him, Yogesh misled them by claiming he had no knowledge," the DCP said. Yogesh subsequently fled the area. He was arrested from Firozabad in Uttar Pradesh, the DCP added.

This comes a day after police arrested Prajapati, 47, for failing to inform authorities despite knowing about the fall hours before the police were alerted. The duty magistrate has granted one day of police custody for further investigation.

Police on Saturday said that call detail records showed Yogesh had contacted Prajapati around 12.22 am, following which the sub-contractor reached the site within 15-20 minutes. However, police were informed about the incident only around 8 am the next morning, by which time the biker had died.

# Power, public office meaningful only when rooted in service, says Speaker

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta on Sunday said that power and public office derive their true meaning only when they are rooted in service and compassion. The Speaker was addressing a large spiritual gathering at the Jain Teerth Veeroday Nirman Vihar in the national capital.

Gupta was the chief guest at the Panch Kalyanak Pratishtha Mahotsav, held for the Pran Pratishtha of Lord Rishabhdev, the first Tirthankara and Vishwakarma of Jain philosophy.

Addressing the gathering, the Speaker described the occasion as more than a religious ceremony, calling it a moment of spiritual reflection and inner peace. Gupta said Lord Rishabhdev, also known as Adinath, laid the foundations of civilisation by teaching the values of labour, duty and discipline.



"Through this Pran Pratishtha, those eternal values are being revived in modern life. Lord Rishabhdev showed the world how work, responsibility and ethics can coexist with spirituality," he said.

Highlighting the contribution of the Jain community, Gupta said it has consistently played a constructive role in nation-building through its commitment to simplicity, self-discipline and non-violence. He said these princi-

ples remain deeply relevant at a time when society is grappling with conflict, intolerance and material excess.

Gupta said governance and public service must ultimately focus on the welfare of the most marginalised sections of society.

The Speaker also thanked the Panch Kalyanak Pratishtha Mahotsav Samiti for organising the event, saying their efforts had enhanced the spiritual and cultural stature of Delhi.



Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena during the flagging-off ceremony of the 59th Statesman Vintage and Classic Car Rally at Statesman House in New Delhi on Sunday

PIONEER PHOTO

# Massive rush at Surajkund Mela despite swing collapse accident

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

The tragic events of the previous day, in which a police officer lost his life, did not seem to affect the ongoing Surajkund International Self-Reliant Crafts Mela, as the fair witnessed a massive surge on Sunday, with people barely having room to stand due to the rush, officials said.

As the mela opened a day after Saturday's tumultuous incidents, attendance at the fair was low, with only a smattering of people visible on the grounds.

However, as word spread that the fair was still open despite the earlier accidents, the crowd began to swell rapidly. By 2 pm, the number of attendees had reached staggering proportions.

According to the fair management, approximately 50,000 people showed up on Saturday. In stark contrast, the attendance of over 2.25 lakh people has been recorded at the mela so far on Sunday. Officials noted that extra gates had to be opened on Sunday to regulate the massive influx of visitors.

"Over 15 lakh tourists had arrived in the 38th edition, whereas this time, in just 9



People visit the Surajkund fair a day after a swing fell down at the spot in Faridabad on Sunday

PTI

days, 7.28 lakh tourists have become a part of the fair. The upcoming Valentine's week is expected to further increase the number of tourists, which could lead to the fair breaking all previous records," Heritage and Tourism Minister Dr Arvind Sharma said.

The ninth day of the fair began in a sombre atmosphere, with a two-minute silence held in tribute to Inspector Jagdish Prasad, who lost his life while on duty, an official said.

After 3 pm, the stage seats were completely filled, with attendees even lining up in the last row to witness the

fair unfold, he added. "In light of the recent unfortunate incident, the swing area has been temporarily closed as a precaution pending further investigation. Authorities are reviewing safety standards rigorously. All other cultural, craft, food, and entertainment events within the festival complex remain safe and are operating smoothly," the authorities said in a statement.

Around 19 people were riding the swing when it tilted around 6 pm on Saturday before crashing onto the ground, leaving 12 injured and one dead.

The deceased was identified as Jagdish Prasad, a 58-year-old on-duty police inspector, who was awarded the Police Medal by the Haryana governor in 2019-20.

The accident occurred barely an hour after a gate collapsed at the fairground, injuring two, including a child, officials said.

## POLICE ARREST RIDE OPERATOR, STAFF IN SURAJKUND SWING COLLAPSE CASE

**Faridabad:** Police on Sunday arrested a swing operator and one of his staff members, a day after an on-duty inspector died and 12 others got injured when a giant 'tsunami' swing snapped mid-air and collapsed at the Surajkund fairgrounds. The tragedy struck the 39th Surajkund International Crafts Mela on Saturday evening, when about 19 people were riding the swing before it suddenly tilted and then crashed onto the ground.

"A special investigation team formed to probe the incident has arrested two accused: Mohammad Shakir, a resident of Himachal Pradesh's Sirmour district and the proprietor of Himachal Fun Care that operated the giant swing, and Nitesh from Meerut in Uttar Pradesh, who worked under Shakir. The role of others is being examined,"

Yashpal, a spokesperson for Faridabad police, said.

A total of 12 people were injured in the accident, including female ASI Neelam, female constable Sharmila, SPO Rajesh, Harsh Prakash, Prashant, Amisha, Parvinder, Sunil, Shivani, Balbir, Anuj and Pooja, Yashpal said, adding that five of them have been discharged from the hospital after treatment. Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Sunday directed the concerned officials to ensure strict adherence to safety standards in the fair and other public events.

"The Government stands firmly with the family of Jagdish Prasad in this difficult time. Those seriously injured in the accident will receive financial assistance of ₹1 lakh each from the State Government," Saini said.

# Two held in digital arrest scam linked to 190 complaints: Police

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

The Delhi Police has arrested two men in connection with a digital arrest scam linked to at least 190 cyber fraud complaints and suspected proceeds of over ₹100 crore.

The accused, identified as Anish Singh and Mani Singh, were arrested after a woman filed a complaint that she was subjected to psychological intimidation for nearly two months and coerced into transferring ₹40 lakh under the guise of a fake cybercrime investigation.

"The victim was kept under digital arrest between October 15 and December 12 last year. During this period, she was threatened with



arrest, legal action and social disgrace by fraudsters impersonating senior police officers," the officer said.

The complainant, a homemaker, was initially contacted by a caller posing as an IPS officer from Mumbai Cyber Crime, who falsely accused her of involvement in criminal activities using her Aadhaar credentials.

The call was later transferred to a woman claiming

to be a police officer, who used video and audio calls to show forged FIRs and arrest warrants, the officer said.

Police added that the accused warned the victim that her husband and son would also be implicated in criminal cases if she did not cooperate. She was instructed not to speak to anyone and was forced to report daily to the fraudsters to confirm her silence.

"Under sustained fear and psychological pressure, the victim transferred Rs 40 lakh in multiple transactions. Even after receiving the money, the fraudsters continued to control her by giving false assurances of verification and refund, prolonging her mental distress," he said.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

In compliance with the directions issued by the **Haryana Real Estate Regulatory Authority (HARERA)**, Gurugram in the Proceedings of the Day dated **07.01.2026** in **Execution Complaint No. E/4939/2025** titled "**Rajat Jain vs. Ninaniya Estates Limited**" and in other connected 22 execution matters, which are mentioned in the paragraph below, wherein the Authority directed that a public notice be issued to the Judgment Debtor (JD) **M/s Ninaniya Estates Limited**, the following notice is hereby issued:

Take notice that **M/s Ninaniya Estates Limited**, through its present Directors and Key Managerial Personnel (KMP) namely: **Prateik Rao (Managing Director)**, Vijay Singh Rao (Director), Kamal Bajaj (Director), Jai Prakash Sharma (Director), Sri Kant (Director) and Rahul Kumar Pathak (Director), **are required to file their written response and appear before HARERA, Gurugram on 01.04.2026, failing which the Authority may proceed ex parte in accordance with law.**

**For and on behalf of the Decree Holder (DH)**  
**Through Attorney: Adv. Gopal Singh Advocate, Delhi High Court**  
**Mobile: 8368838850**  
**Email: centralis.gsy@gmail.com**

**Issued on: 07.02.2026**  
**Place: Gurugram**

**THE SIRSA CENTRAL COOPERATIVE BANK LTD; H.O SIRSA**  
**SHORT TERM E-TENDER NOTICE**

Sr. No.	Name of Work	Start Date & End Date	Opening of Technical & Financial Bid
1	Supply and Installation of 54 Desktop complete computer set (Dell ECS1250 i5 14400, 8 GB RAM, 512 GB SSD Win11 Professional) OEM Monitor (Dell 22 Monitor-SE2225HM), Keyboard, Mouse Approx Amt. Rs. 3900000/- Earnest Money Deposit Rs. 50000/-	09.02.2026 At 10.00 AM To 23.02.2026 upto 5.00 PM	24.02.2026 At 11.00 AM & 24.02.2026 At 12.00 PM

The Tender forms (non transferable) contains terms & conditions and specifications/job descriptions of the above mentioned work may be downloaded from website <https://etenders.hry.nic.in> and [www.sirsadccb.bank.in](http://www.sirsadccb.bank.in)

**General Manager**  
**CB Sirsa**

**ARIAS SOCIETY**  
*(An Autonomous Body of the Govt. of Assam)*  
**Project Management Unit of the Asian Development Bank financed Assam Sustainable Wetland and Integrated Fisheries Transformation (SWIFT) Project Agriculture Complex, Khanapara, G.S. Road, Guwahati-781022 (Assam, India)**

**INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB) PROCUREMENT OF WORKS**

The Government of Assam through the Government of India has applied for a loan from the Asian Development Bank for the proposed Assam SWIFT project. The ARIAS Society now intends to apply a portion of the loan for the Conservation, Restoration and Rejuvenation works for the following selected beels:

1. Tatinga Mekheli Barbeel, Majuli (IFB No: ARIAS /ADB-SWIFT/CW10-03)
2. Morakollong Beel, Morigaon (ARIAS /ADB-SWIFT/CW10-20)
3. Mer Beel. Dibrugarh (IFB No: ARIAS /ADB-SWIFT/CW10-23)
4. Tinsukia Beel. Sivasagar (IFB No: ARIAS /ADB-SWIFT/CW10-34)
5. Bor Beel, Karimganj (IFB No: ARIAS /ADB-SWIFT/CW10-38)

Interested bidders may download and submit their bids electronically using the e-Procurement portal <https://assamtenders.gov.in/>.

**Sd/-**  
**State Project Director,**  
**ARIAS Society**

**DIPR/CF/PIO/38079-Feb-26**



# CM calls Govt’s first anniversary emotionally charged milestone

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Sunday said the completion of one year of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Government in the national Capital was not merely a political milestone but an emotionally charged moment shaped by struggle, trust and a commitment to service.

She described the formation of a BJP Government in Delhi in 2025 after 27 years as a victory of public aspirations, adding that this mandate represented not just a change in power but a decisive shift in the direction of development.

Rekha Gupta noted that strong coordination between the Central and Delhi Governments, along with a sound financial framework, has given new

momentum to infrastructure development in the Capital.

Referring to flyovers, roads, metro expansion and the large fleet of electric buses, she said Delhi is steadily moving towards a modern, clean and environmentally sustainable future.

Rekha Gupta made these assertions after inaugurating a new development chapter in her Assembly constituency, Shalimar Bagh.

While launching several public welfare projects at the District Park in Pitampura and addressing residents, her words reflected not just achievements but deep emotion and personal warmth. The Chief Minister also presented a detailed report card of development works undertaken in the constituency.

Recalling memories from her childhood, Rekha Gupta



said a simple girl travelling from Tri Nagar to Pitampura could never have imagined that those very streets would one day give her the highest opportunity to serve Delhi.

Memories of her school and college days, the bustle of local markets and the close-knit warmth of neighbourhood life repeatedly moved her as she spoke. She said that becoming the MLA of the area that shaped her childhood, identity and

values and later its Chief Minister was the result of divine grace and the people's love.

Referring to her long political journey, Rekha Gupta said electoral defeats never held her back, because her relationship with the people has always been built on trust, not on position.

Sharing the report card of the past year, the Chief Minister stated that development works worth nearly ₹250 crore have been initiated or completed in the Shalimar Bagh Assembly constituency alone, while large-scale projects amounting to several thousand crore rupees are underway.

She linked the redevelopment of the District Park, new gates, fountains, toilets, footpaths and civic amenities to the dignity of the area and the everyday happiness of its residents.

She described upcoming initiatives such as the proposed ₹5,000 crore elevated road along the Munak Canal, canal-side beautification and Chhath ghats, a modern auditorium, model schools, new community halls, an expanded Ayurvedic hospital, upgraded mother-and-child care centres and new sports complexes as historic steps connected to the future of coming generations.

She also termed the extensive improvement of roads, drains, street lighting, parks and markets as development that truly reaches every household.

Calling Prime Minister Narendra Modi her source of inspiration, the Chief Minister said his work ethic and energy constantly motivate her to serve. She emphasised that this journey goes beyond development schemes; it is a collective

effort driven by public trust, the dedication of party workers and shared resolve.

In the closing moments of her address, Rekha Gupta grew deeply emotional. Calling the residents of the area her family, she said even after becoming the Chief Minister, her identity in Shalimar Bagh would always remain that of a sister, a daughter and a neighbour.

Reaffirming her commitment to new schemes, continuous inaugurations and accelerated development in the days ahead, she said this journey has only just begun.

Expressing gratitude to citizens, party workers and colleagues, she concluded by saying that the people's love is her greatest strength, and with this trust, the resolve to build a developed, compassionate and proud Delhi will continue to move forward.

## CM Rekha approves ₹1,200 crore funds for DTC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Sunday said that her Government has approved a grant of ₹1,200 crore for the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC). Out of the total allocation released by the Finance Department, ₹1,100 crore has been earmarked for payment of salaries, pensions and other statutory dues of DTC employees and pensioners, she said.

The Chief Minister said the remaining ₹100 crore has been allocated for transport modernisation and adoption of advanced technologies to ensure smoother traffic flow and promote sustainable mobility.

The Chief Minister said the grant reflects the Government's commitment to the dignity and financial security of DTC employees



and pensioners. She stated that DTC employees work tirelessly in all conditions to keep Delhi moving, and the government has ensured that senior pensioners and serving staff never have to wait for their rightful dues.

She said that DTC and its workforce are the lifeline of

Delhi's public transport system. Timely payment of salaries and pensions will provide financial stability to employees and their families and reinforce confidence in the system.

In addition to employee welfare, the Chief Minister informed that ₹100 crore has

been allocated for two key strategic initiatives. These include the implementation of an Advanced Traffic System (ATS) to improve traffic flow through modern technology and the development of commercial electric vehicle charging infrastructure under the Scheme for Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment (SASCI).

The Chief Minister said that these initiatives align with the objective of making Delhi a technology-driven, pollution-free city with safe, efficient and world-class public transport facilities.

She further emphasised that DTC is not merely a fleet of buses but a system that enables the daily lives of millions of citizens. The Government remains committed to strengthening this system while upholding the welfare and dignity of its employees and pensioners.

## 3 found dead inside car near Peeragarhi flyover

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Three people, including a woman, were found dead inside an abandoned car near the Peeragarhi flyover in outer Delhi on Sunday, police said.

Prima facie, the case appears to be of a suicide pact. However, no such note has been recovered so far, they said.

A PCR call was received at 3.50 pm informing the police that three people were sitting inside a car with locked doors and were not responding, they said.

On reaching the spot, police personnel found three occupants sitting motionless inside the car parked near a service lane next to the flyover, they said, adding that emergency services were alerted and a forensic team rushed to the spot.



The area was immediately cordoned off, they said.

"The bodies were found inside the car with doors closed, and no signs of struggle were noticed at the spot. No visible external injuries were found on the bodies, and all valuables, including mobile phones and personal belongings, were found

intact inside the vehicle," the police officer added.

According to the police, all three victims have been identified as Randhir (76) and Shiv Naresh Singh (47), both residents of Baprola, and Laxmi Devi (40).

The vehicle belonged to Randhir.

It was not immediately

known if the deceased persons belonged to the same family, they said.

Preliminary inquiry suggested that the car had been parked at the spot for some time before being noticed by passersby, who alerted the police after seeing unresponsive occupants, they said.

The investigators are examining all possible angles to ascertain the exact circumstances leading to the deaths.

The bodies have been sent for post-mortem to determine the exact cause of death, the police said.

Police are also verifying the relationship between the deceased persons and checking call detail records, CCTV footage from nearby areas and the vehicle's movement prior to the incident to reconstruct the sequence of events.



# FROM LICENSE RAJ TO EASE OF BUSINESS: DELHI'S BIG BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION

### Business Without Barriers: Delhi's One-Year Reform Story Under CM Rekha Gupta

For decades, Delhi's economy has been powered by small traders, factory owners, and startup founders who struggled more with complex procedures and licensing than with actual market competition. Endless forms, confusing rules, and vague guidelines slowed them down far more than their competitors.

This story has taken a clear turn in the past year. Under the leadership of Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, the Delhi Government has moved away from license-heavy control and embraced a culture of trust. Inspired by the vision of Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi, "Minimum Government, Maximum Governance," Delhi is no longer standing over entrepreneurs as a regulator. It is standing beside them as a partner in progress, helping businesses focus on what they do best for building, growing, and creating jobs.

Delhi Simplifies Business with Bold Reforms: Ends Decades-old Licensing Barriers

For entrepreneurs, the biggest obstacle was navigating the bureaucratic paperwork. The Delhi Government has addressed this problem with bold reforms. The Delhi Police licensing system for operating establishments such as swimming pools, hotels, guest houses, eating houses, discotheques, video game parlors, amusement parks, and auditoriums has now been abolished.



Similarly, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) has rationalised its licensing framework, freeing factories in notified industrial areas from the need to obtain separate licences.

From 120 to 20 Days: Delhi Accelerates Licences with Time-Bound Reforms Recognising the importance of time for businesses, the government has reduced the licence approval timeline for Green Category industries from 120 days to just 20 days. It is important to note that, if a department fails to decide within the stipulated period, the licence is automatically granted under the deemed approval provision.

To further streamline operations, a robust single-window digital system has been launched. As an integrated platform, it brings together 49 services across 21 departments, removing the



need for multiple visits and ensuring faster approvals and compliance. Designed in line with DPIIT and BRAP standards, the system strengthens

transparency and ease of investment. Record GST Refunds: ₹994 Crore Returned to Traders Pending GST refunds had long put

pressure on traders' working capital. Addressing this as a priority, the Rekha Gupta Government acted in mission mode. From April 2025 to December 2025, ₹994 crore in GST refunds were directly released to traders, improving liquidity across markets. In September 2025 alone, a record ₹227 crore was refunded in a single month.

Infrastructure Push to Power Industry

Policy reform goes hand in hand with infrastructure development. On similar lines, the government is upgrading industrial areas through stronger roads, improved stormwater drainage, and better street lighting. The development is focused on solving day-to-day operational challenges for businesses.

Notably, the development of three new industrial areas has also started

THE IMPACT SO FAR:

☐ Significant savings of time and cost

☐ Elimination of unnecessary inspections

☐ Reduced scope for corruption

☐ Easier and faster business start-up opportunities

INDUSTRIAL ACHIEVEMENTS AT A GLANCE

☐ ₹1,000 crore+ investment in industrial infrastructure

☐ ₹994 crore GST refunds released

☐ Licence approval timeline cut from 120 days to 20 days

☐ ₹Collateral-free loans up to ₹10 crore for small industries

☐ ₹Police licensing for businesses abolished

to keep future industrial needs firmly in view. Collateral-Free Loans up to ₹10 Crore for MSMEs

To empower Micro and small enterprises, the Delhi Government has signed MoUs with Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE), to enable collateral-free loans of up to ₹10 crore for entrepreneurs. Another MoU with the Reserve Bank of India integrates Delhi into a more organised banking and credit management framework.

Traders' Welfare Board: Dialogue that Delivers

To institutionalise engagement with the trading community, a Traders' Welfare Board has been constituted with an initial grant of ₹10 crore. The board serves as a direct bridge between the government and nearly eight lakh registered traders in the capital-turning dialogue into solutions.



## IN FOCUS



People taking part in a religious procession in Moradabad

PTI

# US-India deal to allow structural support to MSMEs: CM Adityanath

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Lucknow

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has said the proposed India-US trade agreement would significantly strengthen the State's export-based economy, provide structural support to MSMEs and labour-intensive industries, and create long-term opportunities for investment and employment.

Reacting to the tariff joint statement issued under the proposed agreement, the chief minister said the framework was the result of the "strong and visionary leadership" of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and would expand global opportunities for Indian exporters while safeguarding farmers' inter-



Speaker Satish Mahana with Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath during an all-party meeting ahead of the Budget Session in Lucknow

PTI

ests and the rural economy. "Under the strong and visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has reached a framework for an interim trade agreement with the United States. This framework expands global opportunities for Indian exporters and

MSMEs, while simultaneously safeguarding India's agriculture sector, food security, the interests of our farmers and the strength of the rural economy," Adityanath said in a statement. He said the agreement would also strengthen the 'Make in India' initiative and generate

employment opportunities for women and youth. The tariff joint statement has provided an important policy signal for Uttar Pradesh at a time when the State Government is working on a strategy to link labour-intensive industries, MSMEs and cluster-based manufacturing with global supply chains, officials said. Under the framework, US tariffs on Indian products are proposed to be reduced from an average of about 50 per cent to 18 per cent, with zero duty in selected categories.

The reduction in tariffs on textiles and apparel, and zero-duty benefits for silk-based products, is expected to benefit labour-intensive and cluster-based regions of the State.

# TMC councillor held on charge of assault

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Kolkata

An elderly man died in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district after being allegedly assaulted by a TMC councillor for protesting illegal construction, his family alleged in a police complaint on Sunday.

Rabindra Nath Bhattacharya, the councillor of North Barrackpore Municipality's ward number 23, was arrested after interrogation by police following registration of a case of unnatural death.

Eighty-year-old Tulsi Adhikari, the deceased, was protesting the illegal construction in front of his house, which has been underway for days. On Saturday, Bhattacharya

arrived at the spot, and a heated exchange started with Adhikari, his family alleged in the police complaint. As the situation escalated, Bhattacharya allegedly assaulted Adhikari and his son, Hemanta, according to the police complaint.

Bhattacharya repeatedly punched, slapped and kicked the elderly man, following which he collapsed, the complaint said, quoting charges of the family members of the deceased.

Tulsi Adhikari was taken to Jagadish Chandra Bose Hospital in Barrackpore Cantonment, where doctors declared him dead, the family claimed. Before the arrest, the TMC leader denied the allegations, calling them baseless and politically motivated.

# Minor dies of suspected acid ingestion in Delhi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New Delhi

A 16-year-old girl died under suspicious circumstances in east Delhi's Geeta Colony area, prompting police to investigate allegations of sexual assault and forced acid ingestion, an official said on Sunday.

According to the police, the statements given by the girl's mother are also contradictory and are being probed. On July 3, the girl, a resident of Geeta Colony, was married to a 22-year-old man from Rampur in Uttar Pradesh in the presence of members of both families, they said.

"The two families are distant relatives. On October 29, last year, a medico-legal case (MLC) was received at the Geeta Colony police station from Maulana Azad Hospital, Delhi, about the girl. The MLC mentioned acid ingestion and did not record any history of assault," a police officer said.

At the time, the girl and her mother had told doctors and police that she had consumed acid on her own after an argument with her husband, he said. "However, on January 23, the girl's mother lodged a fresh complaint at Geeta Colony police station, alleging that her daughter had been sexually assaulted by her husband

and was forced to consume acid on October 29," the officer added. In view of the age of the girl at the time of marriage, police registered FIR on January 23, under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita sections 65 (rape) and 351(2) (criminal intimidation) and Section 6 of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act at Geeta Colony police station, officials said. The victim later gave a contradictory version regarding the ingestion of acid during her statement before a magistrate. Based on her statement, appropriate sections of law were invoked, and the matter was probed from all angles, they added.

"In the alleged incident of acid ingestion, the girl was not admitted to any hospital for a prolonged period.

Instead, she remained at her parental home. On February 7, her father took her to Lok Nayak Jai Prakash (LNJP) Hospital in an emergency condition, where doctors declared her dead," the police officer said.

He further said that an autopsy was conducted on Sunday at the hospital, but the surgeon conducting the post-mortem could not arrive at a definitive opinion regarding the cause of death, citing the considerable time gap and the long duration since the alleged acid ingestion.

# Agencies targeting booths where SP won elections: Akhilesh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Lucknow

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday alleged large-scale misuse of the Special Intensive Revision exercise in Uttar Pradesh, claiming that professional agencies hired by the Government were selectively targeting booths where his party had won elections.

Addressing a press conference here, Yadav said, "The Government has hired certain agencies comprising professionals sitting in Delhi, Lucknow and other places



across the country.

"They have access to the entire electoral roll data and, using that, they are identifying booths where the Samajwadi Party won elections previously. Form-7 is being systematically filled and sent from such booths."

# Mathura principal gets clean chit in forced *namaz* row

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Mathura (UP)

The principal of a Government primary school was reinstated after an inquiry found that the allegations of him asking students to offer namaz was false, an official said.

"The inquiry committee found him to be innocent, and we have reinstated him (Jan Mohammad)," Basic Education Officer of Mathura Ratan Kirti said on Saturday.

Principal Jan Mohammad was suspended on January 31, and an inquiry was initiated against him for allegedly asking students to offer namaz. BJP's Naujheel block president, Durgesh Chauhan, had lodged a complaint



against the headmaster on January 30, Basic Shiksha Adhikari (BSA) Ratan Kirti had said. Chauhan claimed that the parents of students had approached him alleging that the principal asked students to offer namaz and that the national anthem was not being sung in the school. Taking cognisance of the complaint, the Basic Education Department sus-

pending the principal and constituted an inquiry committee, Kirti had earlier said.

On January 31, a two-member inquiry committee was constituted with education officers from Chhata and Mant blocks. The committee was initially asked to submit its report within a month.

However, seeing the seriousness of the matter, the committee was asked to submit the report within three days, on February 4, the BSA said.

The committee submitted its report on Friday and found the allegations made against the headmaster to be baseless and false, she added. "The inquiry committee found him to be inno-

cent, and we have reinstated him. We will inform the district magistrate, and the administration may take action against the complainant, as this is not under our jurisdiction," Kirti said. Uttar Pradesh Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Basic Education Sandeep Singh, who was on Saturday, said that this is a matter of investigation, and if it is a conspiracy by the complainant, action will be initiated. The headmaster has been reinstated, he said.

Senior Congress leader Pradeep Mathur demanded that strict action be taken against the complainant who wilfully planted the entire scandal, as the principal was Muslim.

# Southern Army Command chief reviews operational preparedness in Gujarat

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Pune

Lieutenant General Dhiraj Seth, General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Southern Command of the Indian Army, conducted a comprehensive operational review in Gujarat, with a particular focus on preparedness along the Creek and Kutch sectors, a defence release said on Sunday.

During the visit, he observed the large-scale Defence of Gujarat Exercise, which validated operational readiness, multi-agency coordination and rapid response mechanisms in challenging terrain and operational environments, it said. The exer-



cise reaffirmed Southern Command's capability to safeguard national interests across Gujarat's diverse operational domains.

At Bhuj Military Station, the Army Commander inaugurated a mega surgical eye camp outreach programme organised with the support of specialist ophthalmic teams from Army Hospital (Research & Referral) in New Delhi, it said. The camp

screened over 2,500 patients from more than 120 remote villages, restoring vision to over 200 beneficiaries through advanced diagnostic and surgical interventions. This initiative reflected the Army's commitment to delivering quality healthcare to the farthest frontiers and underserved communities of Gujarat, the release said.

Later in Ahmedabad, the Army Commander and Komal Seth, Regional President of Southern Command Army Women Welfare Association, interacted with and facilitated *Veer Naris* and *Veer Matas*, acknowledging their courage and sacrifice.

# Bengaluru metro fare hike put on hold after political row

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Bengaluru

Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRL) on Sunday said it has put on hold the implementation of the annual fare revision, which was scheduled to come into effect from February 9.

In a statement, the BMRL said the earlier announcement regarding the fare revision would not be implemented until further orders, indicating that a final decision is still pending. Clarifying its position, BMRL said, "The media release dated February 5 announcing the implementation of the annual fare revision with effect from February 9 has been kept on hold till further orders." The corporation added that the matter would be taken up by its board before any final decision is



made. "The decision on the revised fare will be communicated after the board's review," the release added. Earlier in the day, BJP MP Tejasvi Surya spoke to commuters to gauge their views.

Later, he told reporters that they were upset over frequent fare revisions and accused Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and his deputy DK Shivakumar of "misleading the public by blaming the Centre" for the hike.

In the country. The project has faced prolonged delays over the past several decades due to various reasons. Last year, the cancellation of tenders shortly after their issuance in July 2025 had caused widespread disappointment among the people of Jammu & Kashmir, especially unemployed youth awaiting job opportunities.

India suspended the Indus Waters Treaty with Pakistan in April last year as a punitive measure against Islamabad following the terror attack in Pahalgam that killed 26 people. The Pakistan-backed attack led to a sharp escalation in diplomatic tensions between the two countries.

Under the 1960 treaty, India has control over the eastern rivers -- Ravi, Beas and Sutlej -- while Pakistan receives the bulk of waters from the western rivers -- Indus, Jhelum and Chenab -- though India retains limited usage rights over the western rivers.

# Opposition slams DMK for TNPSC exam cancellation

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Chennai

The statewide cancellation of the Tamil Nadu Public Service Commission (TNPSC) Group II and II A main examinations on Sunday triggered a massive political firestorm, with opposition leaders, including Edappadi K Palaniswami and TVK founder Vijay, accusing the DMK Government of "administrative incompetence". The TNPSC, which cited technical software glitches for the centre-allocation chaos, has promised a re-examination with a 15-day prior notice.

Controller of Examinations, TNPSC, A Shanmugasundaram, told reporters that the confusion and chaos were due to the wrong assignment of exam halls at several Chennai centres, including two prominent city colleges. "This is a huge mistake, and we regret the inconvenience. To ensure candidates do not suffer due to the panic caused, we have cancelled today's sessions statewide," Shanmugasundaram told reporters.

While Palaniswami called the postponement "unprecedented" in the history of the State's public service commission, Vijay labeled the DMK a "hollow advertisement model" that has shattered the dreams and hard work of thousands of youth.

The examinations, which were scheduled to take place across Tamil Nadu on Sunday, were deferred at the last minute due to irregularities in hall tickets and confusion in the allocation of examination centres.

In a statement, AIADMK general secretary Palaniswami said the postponement on the day of the exam exposes the "administrative collapse" under the current regime.

"For the first time, a highly significant examination like TNPSC Group II has been postponed on the very day it was to be held. This single incident reveals the true state of governance



under the DMK regime," the AIADMK leader said in a statement. Palaniswami highlighted the distress caused to aspirants, citing reports that some candidates had already begun writing the exam before being informed of the postponement.

He criticised the Government for attributing the lapse to a "technical fault," stating that it trivialises the years of preparation and sacrifice made by lakhs of young aspirants.

Directly addressing Chief Minister MK Stalin, the former chief minister questioned the Government's claims of transforming Tamil Nadu into a "superstar" State.

"Your Government cannot even conduct a single competitive examination properly. What greater proof is needed for this administration's incompetence?" he asked.

Palaniswami further alleged that the DMK has failed to fulfil its 2021 election promise of providing 5.5 lakh jobs. He urged the State Government to move beyond "eyewash action" against lower-level officials and instead implement systematic safeguards to prevent such blunders in the future.

Reaffirming his party's commitment to the youth, he appealed to the candidates to remain steadfast, promising that an AIADMK Government in 2026 would protect their aspirations.

FROM PAGE - 1

# India-Malaysia economic ties...

The two countries also pledged zero tolerance towards terrorism in all its forms, including cross-border terrorism.

According to a joint statement, both sides noticeably condemned terrorism and agreed to work together to counter radicalisation, violent extremism and the financing of terror.

They also resolved to prevent the misuse of emerging technologies by terrorist groups and to enhance cooperation in multilateral platforms such as the UN and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

On regional issues, Modi reaffirmed India's strong support for ASEAN centrality and said the Indo-Pacific is emerging as the world's next major growth engine. He added that India and ASEAN share a commitment to peace, stability and

development, and agreed that the review of the ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement should be completed at the earliest.

The Prime Minister also announced India's decision to establish a Consulate General in Malaysia, a move welcomed by the Indian diaspora. During his visit, Modi met ministers, parliamentarians and senators of Indian origin, praising their role in Malaysia's development and their contribution to strengthening bilateral ties.

# Bhagwat calls for inclusive UCC

He also asserted that India can no longer be weakened. "India cannot be broken now. Those who try to break India will be broken," he added.

Asked whether "acheche din" (good days) for the RSS came after the BJP came

to power, Bhagwat said it was the "other way round", noting the Sangh had remained committed to the construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya and those who supported it benefitted.

"Acheche din" for the RSS came because of the hard work of the volunteers and commitment to Referring to work in Muslim-dominated areas, Bhagwat said the Sangh avoids confrontation. The remarks on Sunday followed Bhagwat's address on Saturday, the first day of the lecture series, where he said the RSS is not "against anyone" and does not seek power or function as a pressure group.

# NHPC invites tender for mega dam ...

Conceived over six decades ago, the project, once completed, will become the largest hydropower project in Jammu & Kashmir and the third largest



## India-US trade agreement in nation’s favour: Sunil Jakhar



Punjab BJP president Sunil Jakhar on Sunday said the India-US trade agreement would boost the State’s industrial development and create new employment opportunities for the youth. He also thanked PM Modi for safeguarding farmers’ interests in the deal. The BJP leader said all crops produced in Punjab have been kept out of the agreement.

## Prioritise environment in stone mining: Governor Bagde

Rajasthan Governor Haribhau Bagde on Sunday called for prioritising environmental protection and ecological balance along with safe mining in the stone industry. Addressing the closing ceremony of India Stonemart 2026, he said Rajasthan was not only a leader in stone mining but also in diversity and exports.



## KT Parnaik reviews welfare measures of ex-servicemen



Arunachal Pradesh Governor Lt Gen KT Parnaik (Retd) reviewed the welfare measures taken up by the State’s Rajya Sainik Board at Lok Bhavan. According to an official report on Sunday, the Governor, in a meeting with Rajya Sainik Board director and also secretary, Air Commodore RD Mosabi (Retd) on Saturday, had a detailed discussion on the welfare of ex-servicemen.

## Congress burns Nitish’s effigy over Pappu Yadav’s arrest

The Opposition Congress on Sunday held a demonstration in Patna, protesting the arrest of Independent MP Rajesh Ranjan, popularly known as Pappu Yadav, in a forgery case dating back to 1995. Congress workers burnt an effigy of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar outside the party headquarters, Sadaqat Ashram, accusing the NDA Government in the state of political vendetta.



# Gaurav Gogoi, wife has ‘deeper connection’ with Pak agent: Himanta

TONY DAS ■ Guwahati

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday accused that Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi, his British wife Elizabeth Colburn and Pakistani national Ali Tauqeer Sheikh had a “deeper connection”, and that information from the Intelligence Bureau was secretly passed on to the neighbouring nation.

Addressing a press conference here ahead of the Assembly polls, Sarma also said that Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) rules were violated when Colburn was paid salary by Sheikh while she was working in India.

Conducting two and half hour long press conference, displaying the finding of the Special Investigation Team (SIT), the CM also alleged that Gogoi undertook a “very con-



Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma addressing a press conference in Guwahati on Sunday

fidential” visit to Pakistan in 2013 and was believed to have undergone “some kind of training” there, during the Congress leader to come clean on the trip or face charges of “rashtra-droh” (treason). Gogoi, also the state Congress chief, termed Sarma’s presser “worse than a C-grade cinema” a “super flop”.

“We believe there is a deeper connection between

Gogoi, Colburn and Sheikh. We believe that Colburn and Sheikh were part of an international conspiracy,” said Chief Minister, adding that SIT findings will be submitted to Union Home Ministry for further action against Gogoi. Sarma said that Colburn had worked with LEAD Pakistan, an organisation run by Sheikh, before being transferred to India to work with

the same group. “But her salary continued to be paid by Sheikh,” he said.

LEAD Pakistan sent money to LEAD India, and the latter paid to Colburn bypassing FCRA regulations, the CM alleged. “Pakistani agencies cannot donate to an Indian entity as it’s an enemy nation. Probably special permission was obtained in UPA time to pay Colburn,” he added. The CM claimed that after working in India, Colburn started gathering information surrounding India and used to give reports to Sheikh.

“Colburn got information from IB sources about climate action after Narendra Modi came to power. She sent a 45-page report to Sheikh,” he added. He also alleged that Colburn travelled to Islamabad six times while working with LEAD India and visited Pakistan thrice after joining another NGO.

## SMVDSB approves international museum on Maa Shakti’s heritage

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

The Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board (SMVDSB) on Sunday gave its formal nod to proposals for establishing an international museum dedicated to Maa Shakti’s spiritual heritage, a sound-and-light spectacle modelled on global pilgrimage sites, and a documentary on the Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine.

The Shrine board took a series of high-impact decisions to completely transform Mata’s Shrine and its surrounding region into India’s leading and most vibrant spiritual destination, earning worldwide acclaim.

Emphasising on pilgrim safety, the Board also approved the enhancement of insurance cover from ₹5 lakh to ₹10 lakh per pilgrim.

Since Mata’s abode puts Katra city on the global map, the board has decided to contribute directly to the

city’s transformation.

“It’s the Board’s resolve to make Katra clean, vibrant, and equipped with modern infrastructure for residents and the millions who arrive as pilgrims,” Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha, who

Shrine Board endorsed the preliminary concept for constructing an International Museum with the consultation of the Asian Heritage Foundation dedicated to Mata Vaishno Devi at Natali, Katra. The proposed Shakti



is also the Chairman of the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board, said while chairing the meeting of the board in Jammu.

A statement issued by the office of the Lieutenant Governor on Sunday stated, “The members of the

The Lieutenant Governor requested the Board to provide concrete suggestions, enabling the project to be initiated in the coming months and completed within a two-year timeframe. The meeting was attended by all Board Members, including Mahamandleshwar Swami Vishveshvaranand Giriji Maharaj, Baleshwar Rai, Dr Ashok Bhan, Sudha Murty, Gunjan Rana, Dr KK Talwar, Kulbhushan Ahuja, Lalit Bhasin and Suresh Kumar Sharma.

In another important initiative, the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board has decided to fill vacant positions, with the recruitment process set to begin shortly.

According to the spokesman, the SMVDSB has also given its formal nod towards the establishment of coaching centres offering free NEET preparation to youth from surrounding areas.

## Gujarat: Spice racket busted in Mehsana, 5 held

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mehsana (Guj)

A lawyer and four others have been arrested for allegedly looting godowns in Unjha town of Gujarat’s Mehsana district, Asia’s largest cumin trading centre, and stealing spice stock worth ₹3 crore, police said on Sunday.

The accused, including a Patan-based lawyer, allegedly used duplicate keys to break into two godowns on the Unawa Highway between

prices, Chauhan said.

“Based on the CCTV footage and information received by the police, a truck driver was identified and questioned. This led the police to one of the accused, Jumma Khan, after which the entire network was uncovered,” he said.

He said that the police have arrested the main accused, Ikram Memon, a lawyer practising in the Patan district court, along with Wajahat Khan, Jumma Khan, Sadiq Memon and Gaurav Patel.

Two others, Delhi-based



December 12, 2025 and January 2, and stole several hundred sacks of cumin trucks at night, Mehsana Deputy Superintendent of Police Dinesinh Chauhan said.

Following investigations, the accused were arrested in the last month, he said. The stolen spice belonged to two traders who lodged complaints at the Unawa police station on January 4 after they discovered the stock missing, and two FIRs had been registered, the official said.

The local crime branch received information that some men had been contacting traders in Unjha, offering cumin at unusually low

Imran Jamil and his unidentified accomplice, are absconding, he added. “From mid-December to January 2, traders had deployed a security guard at the godowns. However, instead of staying put, he would leave after checking the locks every day,” Chauhan said.

Investigations revealed that the accused had prepared duplicate keys after examining the original locks, and they entered the godowns at night using these, he said. “Labourers and trucks were brought in, and cumin worth nearly Rs 3 crore was stolen in 10 trips,” the official said.

## Congress MP seeks CBI probe in corrupt contracts in NLC’s Ghatampur power project

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Chennai

Congress MP MK Vishnu Prasad has urged Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) conduct a probe on the corruption in awarding contracts in Neyveli Lignite Corporation (NLC).

In a detailed complaint, a Congress MP alleged that tenders illegally awarded to the PSU’s thermal power project in Ghatampur in Uttar Pradesh have caused huge loss to the public exchequer to the tune of more than ₹1500 crore due to the corrupt practices of top officials in connivance with private contractors.

“Criminal Complaint filed under section 30 of BNSS, 2023

against Prasanna Kumar Mottupalli (CMD) Chairman cum Managing Director, NLCIL (Neyveli Lignite Corporation India Limited) and other officials namely M Venkatachalam (Director/Power), Samir Swaroop (Director/HR), Prasanna Kumar Acharya (Director/Finance), Suresh Chandra Suman (Director/Mines and P&P i/c), Appakannu Govindarajan (CVO/NLCIL), K Matlii (ED/NTTPP), along with private individuals, contractors and legal entities represented by the respective private individuals conspired to do an illegal act to commit criminal misconduct, breach of trust, cheating, fabrication of documents and false implication of accounts and thereby caused



Neyveli Lignite Corporation’s Ghatampur power project in Uttar Pradesh

wrongful loss to the NLC, owned by Government of India comes under the Ministry of Coal and Mines and thereby correspondingly caused wrongful gain to the private individuals, contractors and legal entities represented by the respective private indi-

viduals through the tune of ₹1,567 crores (₹1357 crore + ₹210 crore),” said Vishnu Prasad in a complaint to CBI Director.

“NUPPL — (3X660MW), Ghatampur, Uttar Pradesh—A huge amount given to M/s BGRE contractor against the contract without any Bank

## India-US trade deal poses serious threat to economy, sovereignty: CPI(M)

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) on Sunday claimed that India has made “sweeping concessions” to the US in the interim trade agreement between the two nations, posing a “serious threat to our economy, agriculture, and national sovereignty”.

In a statement, the Left party said the Narendra Modi Government should not go ahead with the deal, and it should be presented before Parliament. India and the US announced on Saturday that they have reached a framework for an interim trade agreement, under which both sides will reduce import



duties on a number of goods to boost the two-way trade.

“As details of the Indo-US trade deal slowly emerge, it is becoming evident that the BJP-led Union Government has made sweeping concessions to the United States in the so-called ‘interim deal’. These concessions pose a serious threat to India’s economy, agriculture, and national sovereignty,” the CPI(M) said in a statement

issued by its Politburo.

“Even according to the partial information available in the public domain, the Indian Government has agreed not to levy any tariff (zero tariff) on US exports of fruits, cotton, tree nuts, soybean oil, and certain other food and agricultural products.” This decision will severely damage the livelihoods of lakhs of apple growers, cotton and soy farmers across the country, the party said. The CPI(M) said apple farmers from Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, and other states are already suffering due to trade agreements signed earlier with countries such as New Zealand.

## INS Sudarshini completes maiden port call at Salalah and Oman

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Indian Navy’s Sail Training Ship INS Sudarshini successfully concluded her first port call at Salalah, Oman, on February 5, defence ministry said on Sunday.

The visit marked a key milestone in the ship’s ambitious ten-month trans-oceanic voyage, Lokayan 26, aimed at showcasing India’s rich maritime heritage and the ethos of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (The World is One Family) across the globe.

During the visit, the Commanding Officer of INS Sudarshini interacted with Captain Mohammad Al



Ghailani, Southern Naval Area Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), and Captain Mohammad Al Mahari, Commanding Officer of Royal Navy of Oman Vessel Al Moazer.

The interactions highlighted historic seafaring links between India and Oman

and reinforced the ‘Bridges of Friendship’ between the two navies. Continuing the professional engagement, the ship also hosted officers from the Royal Navy of Oman for a guided tour of the ship.

In a vibrant display of people-to-people connect, the sail training ship was open to visitors. More than 600 visitors, including schoolchildren, were provided a firsthand glimpse of the three-masted barque and were familiarised with the nuances of ocean sailing.

INS Sudarshini now proceeds on her next leg of Lokayan 26, carrying forward India’s timeless seafaring legacy across the oceans.

## PM’s ‘no policy ping-pong’ doctrine anchors Budget; focus on stability, Viksit Bharat: Sitharaman

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s emphasis on avoiding “policy ping-pong” has shaped the Union Budget 2026-27, which is anchored in policy stability while laying the pathways for the long-term vision of a ‘Viksit Bharat’ at its core, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said.

Framed as the first Budget of a new five-year fiscal cycle and the second quarter of the 21st century, it prioritises capital expenditure, infrastructure expansion and structural reforms over populist measures, while maintaining fiscal discipline. By emphasising predictable

policymaking, sustained investment and multi-year planning extending to 2047 and beyond, the Budget seeks to strengthen economic resilience, crowd in private investment and position India for durable, export-led growth.

“People want stability, and that is why they have elected Prime Minister Modi for the third time. Stability is inherent in that vote, and it is equally reflected in the way policies are executed through successive budgets,” Sitharaman said in an interview to PTI.

She said the Prime Minister’s third consecutive electoral victory represented a clear public endorsement of political and policy stability,



Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman outside the Ministry of Finance before the presentation of the ‘Union Budget 2026-27’ in New Delhi on last Sunday

which the Government sees as central to India’s long-term growth strategy.

Emphasising the Government’s focus on policy continuity, she said the Prime Minister has consistently stressed the need to avoid abrupt shifts in direction.

“The Prime Minister always speaks of avoiding ‘policy ping-pong’. Once a policy direction is announced, the Government remains steady in its execution,” she said.

Sitharaman said the Budget should not be viewed merely as a one-year financial exercise, but as part of a longer planning horizon.

The finance minister noted that the Budget marks the

first year of the second quarter of the 21st century, the first year of a new Government term, and the beginning of a new five-year fiscal cycle.

“We are also looking ahead to 2047 and beyond, up to 2050. The focus is on building a Viksit Bharat by the centenary year of Independence and preparing India over the next 25 years for future challenges and opportunities,” she said.

According to the finance minister, this long-term perspective will guide policy-making across sectors, with an emphasis on sustained growth, institutional strength and economic resilience in the decades ahead.

Speaking about public expenditure towards infrastructure development, Sitharaman said capital expenditure is one of the success stories of this Government.

The CPSE route and budgeted provisions for various Government departments have yielded remarkable results in infrastructure development after the COVID pandemic, she pointed out.

However, the role of states in utilising 50-year interest-free loans has been equally impressive, with many states showcasing signature projects and demonstrating their capacity to absorb more funds, she added.



## States Focus



### PUNJAB LAUNCHES OPERATION PRAHAR-2 TO CURB CRIME

The Punjab Police will launch "Operation Prahar-2", a statewide drive against wanted criminals from Monday, said Director General of Police Gaurav Yadav here on Sunday. The 72-hour operation focuses on wanted criminals and will start from Monday, Yadav said. Our purpose is to make Punjab safe and secure by giving a sense of security to common people, the DGP said while speaking to reporters here. He said 12,000 officers, who will be part of 2,000 teams, will be deployed under this operation. "Our aim is to make Punjab crime and gangster-free. There is zero tolerance for crime and organised crime," Yadav said.



### ODISHA GOVT PLANS OILSEEDS, PULSES ON RICE FALLOW LAND

Odisha Deputy Chief Minister KV Singh Deo said the state Government was working to convert vast stretches of rice fallow land into productive areas by promoting short-duration pulses and oilseeds during the Rabi season. Singh Deo made the remarks while addressing a national-level workshop on pulses organised under the Rashtriya Dalhan Atmanirbharta Mission in Madhya Pradesh on Saturday, according to an official statement.

# India-US trade deal not *saudebaazi*: Chouhan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Bhopal

Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Sunday asserted the India-US trade deal was reached through constructive dialogue, not "*saudebaazi*" (bargaining), while hitting out at the Congress over its allegations that it was a surrender. The pact provides complete protection to the agriculture sector and keeps farmers' and the national interests paramount, Chouhan said, asserting that key agricultural products vital to cultivators have been excluded from the agreement.

"No product that would cause even the slightest harm to Indian farmers has been included in this agree-

ment," the senior BJP leader said at a press conference at his residence here.

He further slammed the Congress, pointing out that despite ruling for years, the party had failed to connect farmers to global markets or bring stability to the Indian economy.

"The India-US trade deal has sent a message to the world that Bharat's policy is one of commitment, not compromise. With self-confidence, we take decisions in the country's interest," the Union minister said.

The Congress on Saturday claimed that India has not benefited from the trade agreement and that it is "not a deal but a surrender" of the country's self-esteem and interests.

Dismissing the Opposition



Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan addresses a press conference in Bhopal on Sunday

PTI

party's claim, Chouhan said, "We did not do '*saudebaazi*' (underhand dealing or bargain) but did it (reached the deal) by a balanced approach with constructive

dialogue."

The pact was a unique example of India's diplomacy, development and dignity, he asserted.

"Diplomacy means nation

## Will step down when Sangh directs: Bhagwat

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Mumbai

Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh(RSS)chief Mohan Bhagwat on Sunday said the Sangh had asked him to continue working despite his age, while stressing that he would step down from the post whenever the organisation directs him to do so.

He also said that the person heading the Sangh will always be a Hindu, irrespective of his caste, with the top post going to the best available candidate.

"There is no election to the post of RSS chief. Regional and divisional heads appoint



RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat addressing a '100 Years of Sangh Journey' lecture series marking the organisation's centenary year in Mumbai

PTI

the chief. Generally, it is said that after turning 75, one should work without holding any post," Bhagwat said.

He was responding to questions during an interactive session with attendees here at a programme to mark the Rashtriya Swayamsevak

Sangh's (RSS) centenary.

"I have completed 75 years and informed the RSS, but the organisation asked me to continue working. Whenever the RSS asks me to step down, I will do so, but retirement from work will never happen," he said.

## Tamil Nadu CM Stalin urges PM to expedite sanctioned rail projects

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Chennai

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Sunday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, seeking his urgent intervention to direct the Ministry of Railways to expedite sanctioned projects in the state by releasing required funds and reviving those kept in abeyance.

Stalin highlighted that the progress of several crucial railway projects is being hindered by "delays in releasing funds by the Ministry of Railways" and the practice of providing partial funding for



individual projects.

He noted that while the state Government has granted administrative approval for acquiring 2,500.61 hectares

for various federal railway projects, the Railway Department is yet to allocate funds for 931.52 hectares, an official release said.

"The delays in releasing funds and the piecemeal allocation... have hindered the progress of railway projects in Tamil Nadu," the chief minister stated, adding that this has created a state of "prolonged uncertainty" for affected landowners.

Stalin pointed out that land acquisition is 94 per cent complete for 19 major projects, with 1,198.02 hectares already handed over to the Railways.

## Andaman celebrates Phaag music festival

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Sri Vijaya Puram

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands administration has organised a festival to celebrate the traditional Phaag music. Artists from the archipelago enthralled the audience with folk music that narrates tales from the Ramayana, Mahabharata and Krishna Leela.

"Andaman and Nicobar Islands is like mini India where you can find diverse cultures and traditions. The administration aims to protect and promote all such traditions and provide a platform to grow," Director Tourism, Vinayak Chamadia, said at the event held on Saturday evening.



"It is also aimed towards recognising the original Phaag traditions and songs of the islands that date back to pre-independence times," he said.

A large number of local people and tourists experienced the vibrant folk

musical tradition.

"Our aim is to revive and preserve a rare folk tradition that is now gradually fading, while offering both residents and tourists an authentic glimpse into the islands' living cultural legacy," said Rohit Mohan Lal, general secretary of co-organiser Kalapani Phaag Mandali.

Phaag is a traditional form of folk songs brought to the Andaman & Nicobar Islands prior to the year 1900 and is closely associated with the festive period from Vasant Panchami to Holi, he said.

"The festival reflects the rich social and cultural fabric of the islands and has been an integral part of community celebrations in the past," Lal said.

## Gram Utthan camps ensure welfare outreach: Rajasthan CM Sharma

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Jaipur

Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma on Sunday said '*gram utthan*' (village development) camps were being organised across the state to ensure that government's welfare schemes reach farmers, labourers, livestock-rearers, and even those living in the most remote areas.

Addressing a camp at Bahala village in Ramgarh of Alwar district, he said the Government was reaching out to eligible beneficiaries and resolving issues at the grassroot level.



Union Environment, Forest and Climate Change Minister Bhupender Yadav was also present at the programme.

The 'Gram Utthan Shivar' initiative was helping

smooth implementation of schemes related to dairy, solar energy and rural development, asserting that Rajasthan was moving steadily on the path of inclusive development, the Union minister said in his address. Sharma inaugurated development projects, worth over ₹152 crore, related to education, health, energy, infrastructure and civic amenities for Alwar city. He said villages form the soul of the country and the state Government was working in line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of self-reliant and empowered villages.

## Khattar hails Budget 2026-27 as 25-year vision document

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Raipur

Hailing the Budget 2026-27 as a 25-year "vision document," Union Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Sunday said the exemption of customs duty on rare minerals is expected to boost Chhattisgarh's mining and industrial sectors, strengthen investment prospects and economic activity in the state.

Addressing a press conference here on the Budget 2026-27, Khattar said the document has been framed around three key duties aimed at strengthening the nation economically and socially.

He said that the budget should be viewed not merely as an annual financial statement but as a "vision document" that will guide the country's development over the next 25 years.

It presents a clear vision for a developed India by 2047, he said.

Khattar, who handles the portfolios of power, housing and urban affairs, said the budget has accepted the recommendations of the 16th Finance Commission, which

will provide direction for development over the next five years.

Explaining the three focus areas, he said that the first relates to India's economic position in the global context and the goal of becoming the third-largest economy in the world, surpassing Germany.

The second focus is on infrastructure development, industrial expansion and employment generation within the country, and the third emphasises inclusive growth by supporting deserving sections of society, including the poor, women and the underprivileged, the Union minister said.

Khattar said, "The exemption of customs duty on minerals, especially rare ones, is expected to boost Chhattisgarh's mining and industrial sectors."

He further pointed out that since 2014, national highway development has been prioritised in the state, with over 3,400 km of roads constructed.

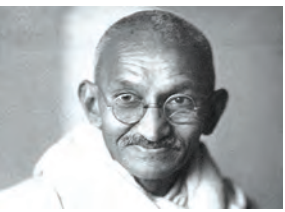
Under the Bharatmala Pariyojana, more than 571 km of national highway corridors have been approved to improve connectivity in the state, he said.

## KGSN condemns misuse of Mahatma Gandhi's image in advertisement

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Bengaluru

The Karnataka Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi (KGSN) has condemned the alleged misuse of Mahatma Gandhi's image in a recently published advertisement in Karnataka, calling it an affront to the Father of the Nation's core ideals and a matter of serious national concern.

The Congress and the Opposition BJP engaged in a spat through an advertisement using a cartoon of Gandhi. In its full page advertisement on the front page of the leading vernacular and English dailies on



February 3, the Congress-led Karnataka Government showed Gandhi admonishing 'Sangh-Appa' wearing a white shirt and a Khaki pant for scrapping the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

The advertisement takes a potshot at the Centre for replacing the MGNREGA with

Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajjivika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G).

In retaliation, the BJP put out a full-page advertisement on February 7, where Gandhi is shown as lifting his stick to hit Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Congress MP Rahul Gandhi and Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and calls them all 'Nungappa' (The one who squanders everything).

"To you, the Nungappa who are using Mahatma as your property," Gandhi is shown as telling the trio who pose, requesting him not to hit them. In a statement, KGSN president

Wooday P Krishna and honorary secretary MC Narendra expressed alarm over the portrayal of Gandhiji and said it was derogatory and contrary to his philosophy, warning that such representations could mislead the younger generation and damage the sanctity associated with his legacy.

The statement further said, "An advertisement that has recently appeared in leading daily newspapers of Karnataka depicts the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, in a manner that would shock anyone who understands Gandhiji's philosophy."

## Poor-performing States get larger share of tax revenue: Naidu

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Amaravati

Poor-performing states of the country have inevitably ended up with a higher share in the Centre's devolution of tax revenues at the expense of better performers such as Andhra Pradesh, Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu said on Sunday, acknowledging that it is a good sign that the laggards are gradually getting their act together.

For the country to prosper, all its regions have to prosper, Naidu said in an interview with PTI Videos, adding that the states are allies, not enemies.

"Deliberately, they (the Centre) do not want to do

any injustice. There are some parameters of backwardness, population -- all these things. South India has gone ahead with population control. Because of economic reforms, south India has taken the lead in technology and the growth rate. The per capita income is very high in south India. Because of that, devolution is a problem. Population poverty is (among) the criteria for devolution," Naidu said.

"Naturally, there will be heart burning. Our policy should not always be for non-performing states. At certain times, protection is okay. Ultimately, everybody has to perform. I am confident now that every state is moving forward. That is the



responsibility of the respective state governments or political parties. They have to perform," he added.

The prevailing view on population, he said, has moved from "population control" to "population management".

"We are now facing the

problem of an ageing population and also, loneliness. Look what is happening in Europe, Japan and South Korea. I was the first to say that our people should have more children, after which (RSS chief) Mohan Bhagwat and (Tamil Nadu Chief Minister) M K Stalin said the

same thing," Naidu said.

Asked if he sees a role for himself in central politics at any point in the future, the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) president ruled out the possibility.

"Never have I expected any role at the Centre. I am always interested to work in Andhra, either combined Andhra, or now, the new Andhra Pradesh.

"Hyderabad was agrarian when I became the chief minister in 1995. Consciously, I built a technology and industrial ecosystem. Today, Telangana is the richest state in terms of per capita income. I am representing one more state now. But I have that satisfaction that I produced a model. I have

done my best for the nation and that will continue," he said.

Asked whether his party and other constituents in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) deserve credit for the ruling coalition at the Centre functioning seamlessly as it did when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had a majority on its own in the two previous terms, Naidu said the support is mutual.

"We support the Government of India. In turn, they are also extending support. That is why we call it a double-engine sarkar. There is no policy difference between the Government of India and the Government of Andhra Pradesh," he said.





## Your Trusted Management Advisory

[www.transglobeadvisors.in](http://www.transglobeadvisors.in)

### Order Order

### Unnao rape: Sengar moves Supreme Court seeking bail



The Supreme Court is likely to hear on Monday expelled BJP leader Kuldeep Singh Sengar's plea seeking bail in the custodial death case of the Unnao rape survivor's father. On January 19, the Delhi High Court had refused to suspend Sengar's 10-year jail term in the case on the grounds of delay in trial, saying it was partly caused by the multiple applications he had filed in the matter.

On March 13, 2020, Sengar was sentenced to 10-year rigorous imprisonment by a trial court, along with a fine of ₹10 lakh, in the case. The trial court had said "no leniency" could be shown for killing a family's "sole bread earner".

The trial court, which did not hold the accused guilty of murder in the father's case, awarded him the maximum sentence for the offence of culpable homicide not amounting to murder after holding that there was no intention to kill. Sengar's appeals in the main rape case against the December 2019 judgement convicting him and sentencing him to imprisonment for the remainder of his life, as well as the father's case, are pending in the High Court.

His sentence was suspended by the High Court on December 23, 2025, till the pendency of his appeal challenging his conviction and sentence in the rape case. The Supreme Court stayed the suspension on December 29, 2025.

## Conference of chief justices holds discussions on people-centric judiciary, ways to cut backlog

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
■ Bhopal

A two-day conference of chief justices of High Courts at the National Judicial Academy here focused on building a modern and people-centric judiciary and deliberated on "stale litigations filed by the State", an official statement said.

The event, which concluded on Sunday, was guided by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and senior Supreme Court judges, and discussed ways to institutionalise judicial administration and formulate a National Judicial Policy, it said.

Chief Justices of 25 High Courts took part in the conference. The discussions centred on transitioning judicial governance from a traditional framework



CJI Surya Kant

to a strategic, data-driven system to help High Courts address contemporary legal challenges while maintaining institutional integrity, it said.

A strategic roadmap to reduce case backlogs was deliberated, including streamlining procedures and prioritis-

ing trials in cases involving offences punishable with imprisonment of up to seven years.

The conference also discussed the issue of "media trials", underlining that justice must be delivered in court-rooms to safeguard the presumption of innocence.

Issues related to "stale or unnecessary litigations filed by the State" were examined, with emphasis on reducing the Government's role as a frequent litigant, it said.

The top judges also discussed reforms through digital innovation and linguistic inclusivity to strengthen access to justice.

"The conference reaffirmed a collective commitment to creating a modern, accessible, uniform and citizen-centric justice system," it added.



## After 11 years, law ministry hikes fees of advocates in Govt cases

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
■ New Delhi

The Union Law Ministry has increased the fees of advocate, who represent the central Government in courts across the country, after a gap of nearly 11 years. In a notification issued on February 5, the department of legal affairs in the law ministry said that now group 'A' counsels appearing for regular appeals and defended petitions for final hearing will get ₹21,600 per case per day, while group 'B' and 'C' counsels will be paid ₹14,400.

Earlier, the fee stood at ₹13,500 for group A counsels and ₹9,000 for group B and C counsels. The fee payable to Government counsels was last revised in October 2015. Fees for other category of cases and setting up conferences with various central ministries has also been revised.

Fee payable to counsels appearing in courts outside their headquarters — which



could be Delhi or State capitals — has also been hiked. A top official said the hike was long overdue keeping in mind inflation and rising costs of hiring professionals.

"The fee revision notification for central Government counsel, an exercise initiated during my tenure as Law Secretary, has come into

effect. Congratulations to all counsels. This was long overdue, for over a decade. I'm glad the effort has reached its rightful conclusion," former Union law secretary Anju Rathi Rana posted on X.

Rana, who is now member secretary, Law Commission, said the hike was must to

retain talented advocates to represent the Union Government in courts.

Besides law officers comprising the attorney general, the solicitor general and various additional solicitors general, the central Government also hires advocates to represent it in judicial fora as legal counsels.

## Two rice company promoters declared fugitive economic offenders in bank fraud case

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
■ New Delhi

A special court here has declared two promoters of a Delhi-based rice company as fugitive economic offenders in connection with an alleged ₹1,200 crore bank loan fraud case against them.

The court of special judge Rajesh Malik declared Karan A Chanana, chairman and managing director of Amira Pure Foods Pvt Ltd (APFPL) and Anita Daing, the whole-time director of the said company, as offenders under the

Fugitive Economic Offenders Act (FEOA), 2018 on Friday, according to an order.

The court also directed the confiscation of assets worth ₹123 crore of the accused, ED officials said. Chanana is stated to be based in the UK, while Daing is located in Dubai.

The money laundering case of 2022 stems from a 2020 CBI FIR registered against APFPL, Chanana, Daing, and others for allegedly committing fraud, criminal misappropriation, criminal breach of trust, cheating, etc. And causing

wrongful loss to the tune of ₹1,201.85 crore to the consortium of banks led by Canara Bank. Chanana is the head of the global rice brand Amira that has business in the US, UK, UAE, Germany, Mauritius and in some other countries, according to the ED.

"Both the respondents, being abroad, have refused to return to India to face criminal prosecution. They have also left India so as to avoid criminal prosecution.

"The notices of the present petition could not be served upon the respondents in spite

of best efforts," the court said.

Accordingly, it said, both the respondents are declared fugitive economic offenders (FEO) under Section 10 of the FEOA 2018. The FEOA was brought in by the Union Government with an aim of bringing to justice those people who have left India to evade the clutches of law after committing fraud with a benchmark value of at least ₹100 crore.

Liquor baron Vijay Mallya and UK-based arms consultant Sanjay Bhandari have been declared FEOs in the past.

## Muzaffarnagar riots: UP court acquits 22

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
■ Lucknow

A Muzaffarnagar court has acquitted 22 people in connection with a murder, loot and arson case linked to the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots, citing lack of evidence.

Additional District and Sessions Judge Kanishk Kumar acquitted the accused on Saturday, observing that the prosecution had failed to prove the charges beyond reasonable doubt, Government counsel Narendra Sharma said.

He said a Special Investigation Team (SIT) had filed a chargesheet against 26 people in the case related to incidents reported from



Muzaffarnagar riots of 2013

Mohammadpur Raisingh village on September 8, 2013.

During the pendency of the trial, four of the accused died, leaving 22 to face the proceedings.

According to the prosecu-

tion, a complaint was lodged by one Haneef, alleging that hundreds of rioters attacked houses in the village, looted property and later set homes on fire.

It was alleged that the

complainant's father, Rahishuddin, was beaten to death during the attack. The rioters were also accused of damaging a mosque and setting ablaze a motorcycle belonging to a police constable.

The acquitted accused are Anil, Subhash, Sanjeev, Karan, Sher Singh, Rishipal, Hansarpal, Pramod, Vikki, Badal, Madan, Jainarain, Brijvir, Vinod, Kala, Parveen, Jagpal, Prempal, Pappu, Nitu, Bhura and Harender Singh, all residents of Mohammadpur Raisingh village. More than 60 people were killed and over 40,000 displaced during the Muzaffarnagar riots in 2013.



Fire broke out at TGFSL on Saturday

## TGFSL fire: Director rules out loss of evidence in key cases

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
■ Hyderabad

TGFSL Director Shikha Goel on Sunday ruled out the destruction of evidence related to high-profile cases, including the cash-for-vote and phone-tapping cases, in the fire that broke out at the laboratory.

A fire that broke out on Saturday caused damage to the computer forensics laboratory, its associated facilities, the training hall and certain other areas located on the first floor of the Telangana Forensic Science Laboratory building.

No loss of life or injuries were reported, officials said. Addressing a press conference here, Goel said a complaint had been lodged and a case registered at the

Nampally police station. She said the extent of damage was being assessed and added that while police were examining the scene of the occurrence, a large portion of the case property had already been retrieved and placed under proper security.

"Most of the case, property material available in the area affected by the fire has been retrieved.

This process is currently ongoing at the FSL," she said.

Goel said that since Saturday, "wild and preposterous" speculation had appeared in certain sections of the media, including social media, regarding the cause of the fire and the alleged loss of case property.

## Consumer panel stays warrant against Salman Khan in pan masala advt case

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
■ Jaipur

The Rajasthan Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission on Friday stayed the issuance of a non-bailable warrant against actor Salman Khan by the district consumer commission in a case of misleading advertisement. The state commission on Friday heard revision petitions filed by a pan masala company and Khan.

Separately, the presiding officer of the District Consumer Commission, Jaipur-II, heard a contempt

petition filed by Yogendra Singh. Khan's counsel told the state commission that the District Consumer Commission, Jaipur-II, had issued a bailable warrant without serving summons, and was now proceeding to issue a non-bailable warrant.

The counsel said an application seeking cancellation of the bailable warrant is also pending before the commission.

Taking note of this, the state commission directed the district commission to hear the pending application expeditiously and



restrained it from issuing a non-bailable warrant until the bailable warrant is exe-

cuted. District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission, Jaipur-II, had

## Delhi court seeks police report on plea against promoters of 32nd Milestone

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
■ New Delhi

A court here has sought an action-taken report from police on a plea seeking the registration of an FIR and stringent action against the promoters of the Gurugram-based "32nd Milestone" commercial project over alleged cheating, fund diversion and large-scale financial irregularities. Judicial Magistrate Devanshi Janmeja issued a notice on the application on February 5 and directed police to submit an action-taken report. The matter has been listed for further hearing on March 13.

Hours after the Delhi Court's order, Gurugram Police on Saturday evening arrested the real estate company's owner Dhruv Sharma. Gurugram Police said that Sharma sold same property to 25 persons, involving cheating case of more than ₹500 crore.

In Delhi court, application was filed by investor Arvind Gupta, a senior citizen who has accused the promoters and entities associated with the project of cheating, forgery, criminal conspiracy and criminal intimidation.

The plea names 32nd Vistas Private Limited, Growth Hospitality LLP and their pro-

moters, including Dhruv Dutt Sharma, Shirin Sharma and Mamta Sharma. It seeks directions for the registration of an FIR, freezing of bank accounts, attachment of assets, a forensic audit of finances, suspension of passports and issuance of look-out circulars to prevent the accused from leaving the country.

According to the complaint, Gupta purchased a commercial unit in the project after being assured that the area would be demarcated shortly. The promoters allegedly offered guaranteed lease rentals for 30 years, along with a



buyback option at any stage. A long-term lease agreement was executed, with assurances of regular monthly rental income, the plea says.

However, the complainant has alleged that the lease-

rental payments stopped from August 2025. It has further been claimed that the promoters failed to deposit the Tax Deducted at Source (TDS) from September 2024 and defaulted on the

Goods and Services Tax (GST) dues, statutory filings and employee-related contributions, such as ESI and PF, resulting in losses to investors, employees and the public exchequer.

The plea alleges that the investors were repeatedly assured that rentals and the TDS amounts were credited but were not reflecting due to "technical issues", claims that later turned out to be false.

It also alleges that fabricated TDS certificates were circulated among the investors to show statutory compliance, despite no such deposits reflecting in official records.





Editor's  
TAKE

## A New high in India–Malaysia ties

Amid deepening Indo-Pacific economic and security ties, PM Modi's visit highlights Malaysia's growing centrality to India's Act East policy

For the last few years, India has been aggressively pursuing the Act East policy. It has been a paradigm shift in its approach to grow and prosper with its eastern neighbours. Conventionally, India has aligned itself with the West, and most of its economic and strategic manoeuvres primarily made keeping in mind its synergy with the Western world. However, of late, India has realised that economic and strategic synergy with the East Asian countries is equally, if not more important, for serving the country's interests. These nations provide not only economic avenues but also help keep the strategic buffer against dominant nations like China in the region. Thus was born the 'Act East' doctrine, which is nothing but India's bid to engage with the ASEAN nations and redefine the regional politics of the Asia Pacific. Another chapter to this is being written by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's two-day visit to Malaysia.

The visit marks a decisive moment in the evolution of India's engagement with Southeast Asia. The ceremonial welcome at Putrajaya, the joint outreach to the Indian diaspora, and the wide-ranging delegation-level talks with Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim go well beyond symbolism and anchor India as an important player in the South East Asia. Indeed, India and Malaysia share a long and layered history. From ancient maritime trade routes and the spread of Indic culture, a vibrant Indian diaspora, the ties between the two nations run deep. Nearly three million Malaysians of Indian origin today act as a living bridge between the two nations, strengthening cultural, economic and political links.

These ties find resonance in renewed political and economic convergence, culminating in a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2024. PM Modi's visit reflects the priority India now accords to Malaysia. The agenda of the talks - defence, counter-terrorism, maritime security, clean energy, semiconductors, digital economy and skills - shows that India and Malaysia are not just trade partners but have deeper strategic ties. Malaysia is strategically situated along key sea lanes, and that can come in handy for India in ensuring an uninterrupted supply chain. The quantum of trade has also increased manifold. Bilateral trade crossed \$18 billion in 2025, and both sides are now aiming higher by using their currencies for trade. The hi-tech sectors like biotech, artificial intelligence and semiconductors are also in the ambit of cooperation.

However, the biggest advantage Malaysia can give to India is in its status as an ASEAN country, thereby giving access to a wide market in Southeast Asia. Malaysia's proximity to the Malacca Strait gives it a distinct advantage in ensuring Indo-Pacific security. Closer cooperation in maritime security, intelligence sharing and counter-terrorism will help both countries to deal with threats of piracy, smuggling and extremist networks. Modi's Malaysia visit is a reminder that India is diversifying its economic and strategic imperatives and hedging its relations with nations in the Pacific region. And Malaysia happens to be one of the important factors in its geostrategic planning.

# What India must fix before embracing free trade

Free trade only magnifies a truth India has postponed for decades – that the real risk to its economy is not global competition, but the failure to move millions of its people from farms into more productive futures.



SANTHOSH  
MATHEW

When the proposed India-US interim trade agreement was hailed as the "father of all free trade deals," it sounded impressive-almost civilisational in scale. But from an Indian perspective, the phrase raises an uncomfortable question: what kind of economic child is this father expected to produce? For Western economies, such trade deals are engines of growth. For India, they often feel like threats. The reason lies not in the agreement itself, but in the structure of India's economy-still weighed down by an excessive dependence on agriculture for employment. Every trade negotiation with the United States or Europe eventually circles back to one flashpoint: agriculture. Soyabean oil, dairy products, fruits, animal feed, genetically modified crops-each item triggers anxiety, protests, and political assurances. Commerce ministers promise protection, farmers fear displacement, and the nation debates food security as if it were under siege. Yet the deeper truth is rarely stated openly. India's problem is not trade liberalisation; \*\*it is that too many Indians are still trapped in farming.

Nearly 45 percent of India's workforce depends on agriculture, while the sector contributes only around 16 percent of GDP. No major economy in the world carries such an imbalance. In the United States, agriculture employs barely 1.2 percent of the workforce; in the European Union, about 1.6 percent. Even countries that loudly defend farmers-France, Germany, Japan-do so with a small, technologically empowered agricultural population. Their farms are productive; their farmers are few. India's farms, by contrast, are crowded. Millions work on tiny, fragmented plots that cannot generate sustainable incomes. Climate uncertainty, volatile prices, rising input costs, and shrinking landholdings have turned agriculture into a livelihood of last resort rather than choice. People remain on farms not because farming is profitable, but because alternatives are scarce. This is why free trade agreements appear frightening. When half the population depends on agriculture, even modest imports can disrupt millions of lives. What is a routine policy adjustment for Washington becomes an existential issue in rural India. From a Western lens-where agriculture barely registers in GDP-calling an India-US FTA the "father of all deals" makes sense. From India's vantage point, it exposes how long we have delayed our economic transition.

Modern technology has fundamentally changed agriculture. Precision farming, mechanisation, artificial intelligence, improved seeds, and data-driven irrigation mean that "a very small



MOVING  
PEOPLE OUT OF  
AGRICULTURE  
DOES NOT  
MEAN  
ABANDONING  
FARMING. ON  
THE CONTRARY,  
IT IS THE ONLY  
WAY TO  
RESCUE IT.  
FEWER  
FARMERS MEAN  
LARGER  
HOLDINGS,  
BETTER  
TECHNOLOGY  
ADOPTION,  
HIGHER  
PRODUCTIVITY,  
AND DIGNIFIED  
INCOMES

The writer is Professor at Centre For South Asian Studies, School of International Studies & Social Sciences Pondicherry Central University

dailypioneer

@veranani

santhosh-mathew-8170925a

percentage of people can now feed entire nations". Globally, food security is no longer a function of manpower, but of technology and logistics. In pure economic terms, India needs "no more than 1 percent of its population in agriculture" to ensure food security-perhaps 5 percent if one accounts for transition and diversity. Anything beyond that is disguised unemployment. Yet we continue to hold nearly half the workforce on the land.

The result is predictable: low incomes, high distress, and generational stagnation. Agricultural growth struggles to cross 4-4.5 per cent even when the overall economy grows above 7 percent. This gap is not accidental; it is structural. The greatest casualty of this delay is India's youth. Every year, millions of young Indians enter the labour market. Encouraging them-directly or indirectly-to remain in agriculture is an economic injustice.

Landholdings are shrinking, not expanding. Farming incomes remain unstable. Climate risks are intensifying.

India's youth belong in industry and services, not on ever-smaller farms. The country's global reputation today is not built on wheat or rice, but on software engineers, doctors, nurses, technicians, managers, and service professionals. Services already contribute more than half of India's GDP and dominate export earnings. Manufacturing, too, holds enormous potential to absorb semi-skilled labour if supported by infrastructure, investment, and policy clarity. India's true natural resource is not land; it is human capital.

Unlike land, it multiplies when invested in. Skill development, vocational training, digital literacy, and industry-linked education must therefore be treated as national infrastructure. In a globalised economy, skill is the new land, and productivity is the new harvest. Manpower export, often viewed with suspicion, is actually a strategic advantage. Remittances already form a critical part of India's foreign exchange earnings. This is where the irony of the "father of all trade deals" becomes clear. Free trade agreements are

designed for economies where agriculture is marginal, productivity is high, and labour is mobile. India enters these agreements carrying the weight of an unfinished transition. That is why every FTA feels unequal, every tariff cut appears dangerous, and every import triggers panic. Protectionism may seem comforting, but it is not a long-term solution. No country has ever grown rich by shielding low-productivity sectors indefinitely. Tariffs can buy time, but they cannot buy prosperity. Without structural change, protection merely delays the inevitable-and increases the eventual cost.

Moving people out of agriculture does not mean abandoning farming. On the contrary, it

is the only way to rescue it. Fewer farmers mean larger holdings, better technology adoption, higher productivity, and dignified incomes. Agriculture must evolve into a high-value, high-tech sector,

not a social safety net for surplus labour. India's own experience proves this point. Operation Flood transformed the country into the world's largest milk producer not by employing more people, but by improving efficiency, supply chains, and market access. The Green Revolution succeeded through science, not numbers. The next transformation must reduce manpower while increasing value.

As long as half the population depends on agriculture, India will negotiate trade deals from a position of fear. A confident India, by contrast, would enter global markets knowing that most of its people work in services and industry, while a small, skilled farming population ensures food security efficiently. The plough fed India for centuries. But the future will be built by skills, machines, and services. The real challenge before India is not whether to sign the "father of all trade deals," but whether it is ready to raise a new economic generation-one that earns its living not from protection, but from productivity. Or, as one blunt economic truth puts it, "Nations do not grow rich by protecting old livelihoods forever, but by creating better ones for the next generation."

The Pioneer  
SINCE 1865

PIC TALK

A participant guides his buffaloes on a slushy track during a buffalo race, on the outskirts of Mangaluru, Karnataka

PHOTO: PTI

## The ancient art of becoming a ‘Sahrudaya’



NEELIMAA  
SONA

### 2ND OPINION

It's 1:00 AM on February 14th. You're continuously staring at the screen and doom-scrolling through endless "same-day delivery" roses and exotic gift boxes. There is numbness, hollowness and heavy pressure to perform to make something BIG enough for an Instagram post. While sitting there, you might feel or realise that you can buy the bouquet, but you can't buy the link. In an era where the web of optics fibers more than by actual feeling with depth, we've ignored a profound secret from our own roots, "the art of becoming a Sahrudaya". This isn't just about just one bad date; it's an indication of a deeper crisis. While global trends push a transactional version of love measured in "likes" and surface aesthetics, our teachings provide a much stronger and sexier alternative. True Connection is not found in a Hallmark store. It is found when we trade Romantic

Drama for Relationship Dharma. Let's learn how to find the Sahrudaya, a person who is "of the same heart" as you.

In modern dating, we've intentionally or unintentionally turned love into a math problem. Youngsters been told that an expensive dinner is the ultimate proof of how much we care and love. When you simply go buy a gift just because a calendar date says you have to, it's a calculation, not a connection. The Bhav, an Indianised version of Emotional Intelligence and the Indian concept of love, teaches us the ability to stop "spending" and start "sensing." A Sahrudaya understands that a twenty-minute, engaged conversation over a cup of chai carries more weight than a 5-star gala if the intent is genuinely present. The Bhav isn't about the size of the gesture; it's about the depth of the awareness behind it.

#### Navigating through the Nava Rasas

We try to force romance to live in a permanent state of Shringara, the rasa of beauty and attraction. But life isn't an Instagram post. Real relationships are a messy weave of the Nava Rasas, the nine fundamental emotions we all carry. There will be days of Karuna (compassion) when someone fails despite efforts, and even moments of Bibhatsa (frustration) when clashes occur. An Indian classic approach to Emotional Intelligence teaches us the maturity to navigate these shifts without hitting the "exit"

button when relationships and situations get complicated. Instead of chasing a constant, artificial "spark," a Sahrudaya or real partner uses their emotional depth and maturity to hold space for their partner's bad days.

#### Relationship Dharma

We often think of Dharma as a heavy, ancient burden.

In modern love, it's actually quite simple: it's Emotional Responsibility. Valentine's Day has become a "Drama" day with lots of emotion spilling around at high intensity and a 24-hour performance that leaves everyone exhausted. Relationship Dharma is the quiet,

invisible work you do on the other 364 days of the year. It's the daily choice of a partner to be present, to listen, and to stay attuned to who your partner is becoming. This is the "human premium" that no AI or digital substitute can ever touch. A machine might script a perfect romantic message, but it can't provide the comfort of a "same-heart" connection during a relationship crisis. Being a Sahrudaya is something you earn through practice, not a product you purchase. This February, don't just be a romantic for a night; strive to be a Sahrudaya for a lifetime. Logic might make you think, but only emotion will make you link. The future belongs to the pure connections.

The writer is Emotional Intelligence Expert

### TRADE DEAL SHOCK: MAHARASHTRA'S FARMERS FACE A DOUBLE WHAMMY

The India-US interim trade deal could prove detrimental to farmers in Maharashtra. Zero-duty agricultural imports from the United States may severely hurt domestic producers. While duty on Indian exports to the US will be 18 per cent, American agricultural products may enter India at zero duty. This imbalance could have a disastrous impact when new crops reach the market.

Key crops such as soybean, wheat, cotton and corn may suffer from price crashes due to cheaper imports. Farmers already struggling with rising costs and uncertain weather will find survival harder. The agreement appears to have been signed under pressure, and the consequences may soon be felt by farming communities.

The state government had promised a farm loan waiver

before the elections, yet even after one-and-a-half years, no concrete steps are visible. The Centre reportedly rejected a loan waiver proposal sent by Maharashtra.

Additionally, the recently enacted VB-GRAM-G Act could weaken rural employment guarantees. Unlike MGNREGA's 100-day assurance, the new framework may adversely affect livelihoods.

Together, skewed trade terms, delayed loan waivers, and weakened rural job guarantees form a perfect storm for Maharashtra's farmers. Unless corrected urgently, the India-US deal could trigger price crashes, deepen agrarian distress, and push vulnerable rural households further into debt, uncertainty, and economic insecurity.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

#### Teen star stuns world

At an age when most children are still adjusting to competitive sport, this 14-year-old walked in and tore the game apart. Vaibhav Suryavanshi lit up the biggest stage with fearless intent, clearing the boundary rope 30 times - 15 fours and 15 sixes - in a breathtaking display of power and confidence. It was not just shot-making; it was domination without hesitation.

The U-19 World Cup final in Harare was expected to test temperament and nerves. Instead, Vaibhav turned it into a one-man showcase. His explosive century came with authority far beyond his years, blending raw aggression with sharp cricketing intelligence. He read bowlers with ease, picked his moments to attack, and controlled the tempo like a seasoned professional.

What truly separated him was maturity. Beyond the boundaries was a young player performing for the team, not milestones. His presence brought belief and momentum. Dedicating his award to support staff showed character. A star was not just born - a leader emerged. Vaibhav's innings signalled not just prodigious talent, but the arrival of a future Indian cricket leader with rare composure and fire.

A P THIRUVADI | CHENNAI

#### Parliament events raise concerns

Recent developments in the Lok Sabha are difficult for democracy-loving citizens to accept. For the first time, the Motion of Thanks to the President's Address was passed without the Leader of the House delivering a speech. The Speaker cited security concerns and political tension as reasons for the Prime Minister's absence, but the situation remains worrying.

The Leader of the Opposition was not given an adequate opportunity to present his views on record. However, he, too, shares responsibility for repeatedly raising a serious issue based on an unpublished book. Parliamentary discussions should focus on people-centric matters rather than political confrontation. The Lok Sabha is a platform meant for reasoned debate and national interest. Disruptions, speculation and partisan exchanges weaken democratic values. Citizens expect maturity, restraint and dignity from their elected representatives. Parliamentary traditions must be upheld to maintain public trust in democratic institutions. Unless decorum, dialogue and accountability return to Parliament, such precedents will steadily erode public trust and weaken the foundations of India's democracy.

DR DVG SANKARA RAO | SRIKAKULAM

#### Doubts about electoral fairness raised

The Supreme Court has refused to hear a petition filed by the Jan Suraj Party seeking to annul the Bihar Assembly elections. The Court reportedly observed that Prashant Kishore's party appeared to be using the judiciary to gain publicity, even asking how many votes it secured and whether it won any seats. However, the central purpose of the petition was to allege that the elections were won through fraudulent means and to seek judicial scrutiny.

The refusal raises important questions. Does winning an election grant a party immunity from examination of electoral probity? Does a party that performs poorly lose the right to question the fairness of the process? Do ordinary voters not deserve to know whether elections were conducted in a free and fair manner?

At a time when public perception suggests that the Election Commission's neutrality is under scrutiny, citizens naturally look to the judiciary as the ultimate guardian of democratic integrity. In such circumstances, institutions must not only be impartial but also be seen to be beyond doubt - like Caesar's wife, above suspicion. Even fringe challengers deserve their claims examined, because democracy survives not on victories alone but on faith in the fairness of elections.

ANIL BAGARKA | MUMBAI



www.dailypioneer.com

facebook.com/dailypioneer @TheDailyPioneer  
instagram.com/dailypioneer linkedin.com/in/The Pioneer

Please send your letter to the info@dailypioneer.com. In not more than 250 words. We appreciate your feedback.



# How India is reclaiming its economic destiny

With rapid growth, bold reforms and rising global trust, India is once again positioning itself as a central pillar of the world economy — this time not just as a trading hub, but as a technological, manufacturing and geopolitical powerhouse.

FIRST  
Column



“India has boarded a speedy reforms express.....” ..” The world is tilting towards India ..” commented the Prime Minister of India. India's historical trajectory from antiquity to the early modern period was marked by multiple phases of progress. A striking feature common to these phases was the development of institutional frameworks and technological innovations that integrated large parts of South Asia with Africa, West Asia and Europe. India emerged as a major producer of textiles, spices (notably black pepper), aromatics, precious stones and metals, all of which were in high global demand. The subcontinent functioned as a central hub of the Indian Ocean trade.

Trade in the Indus Valley civilisation was largely organised, with a wide range of goods circulated across regions. The presence of standardised weights and seals suggests a regulated internal trade system.

The sixth century BCE marked a decisive phase with the emergence of janapadas and mahajanapadas, signalling a shift from lineage-based societies to territorial states. Urban centres initially developed in the middle Gangetic plains and later spread to the Deccan and South India. Trade operated at local, regional, interregional and international levels.

A notable development was the localisation of industries. The growth of guilds (shreni, gana, puga, sangha) further strengthened commerce. Trade also benefited from improved transport, with large caravans of carts moving goods across regions.

The diffusion of literacy and the circulation of punch-marked coins enhanced commercial transactions, although barter continued alongside monetisation. From the first century BCE, long-distance maritime trade expanded significantly.

The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea documents regular traffic between Indian ports, Arabia, and Egypt, with Bharuch emerging as a major hub. Indian and



THE NEXT GENERATION OF GST REFORMS — GST 2.0 — WILL CATAPULT INDIA TO PARITY WITH ADVANCED ECONOMIES

The author is Director Bharat Ki Soch. He is former Chairman, Haryana Public Service Commission and Chairman, Haryana Electricity Regulatory Commission, former DG ITBP, DG NDRF and Commissioner of Police, Kolkata.

bharatkisoch\_

@BharatKiSoch\_

p/DRmXqKZmBtR/

foreign vessels shared commercial traffic, and Indian goods--especially textiles and spices--were exported to the Roman world. Until about 1800, international exchange was concentrated in littoral and river-delta regions, while inland areas participated indirectly through riverine and caravan networks. Premodern trade was characterised by monsoon-driven seasonality, reliance on river-port complexes, preference for high-value-to-bulk commodities, and trading practices centred on fairs, auctions, and short-term transactions.

Indian states periodically facilitated trade by integrating land and maritime zones, as seen under the Satavahanas, Kushanas, Guptas and especially the Cholas. Most states remained agrarian and land-revenue based, with inland capitals and limited direct involvement in commerce.

Maritime commerce expanded as a consequence of inland stability rather than naval innovation.

According to Angus Maddison's estimates, India accounted for approximately 22 - 24 per cent of world GDP around 1600 CE, reflecting the scale of production, manufacturing (especially

textiles) and commercial integration achieved before European political dominance. With the advent of the British, the Indian economy was subsumed by the imperialist economy and drastically fell to 4.2 per cent by 1950.

However, today, India has resurged in its economic power and has become the fastest growing economy in the world. In the words of IMF, India is the 'only bright light in the otherwise dark horizon'. India is all set to become the third-largest economy in a few years. The last decade has witnessed a truly transformational change, marked by focused and sustained execution.

This transformation has been built on four key pillars. The first is public investment in physical, digital, and social infrastructure. The second pillar is inclusive growth, ensuring that the benefits of national growth are shared across society. The third pillar is manufacturing and innovation, while the fourth is simplification. Together, these pillars, supported by a strong technological base, are enabling robust real growth in the range of 7 to 8 per cent. India achieved

a growth rate of 8.2 per cent in the last quarter, proving our mettle and economic buoyancy.

What is working particularly well is that the benefits of growth are being experienced across society. India has therefore emerged as a long-term anchor for global investment, with investors increasingly viewing the country as a driver of sustained growth.

India is also universally recognised as a credible and reliable trade partner, with consistent delivery strengthening global confidence. Rapid AI adoption under Industry 5.0 is transforming Indian industries, while digital public infrastructure is enabling innovation at scale.

As a result, India is emerging as a global hub for technological transformation driven by the application of AI and advanced digital technologies.

The next generation of GST reforms--GST 2.0--will catapult India to parity with advanced economies. Enhanced simplification and improved compliance frameworks for MSMEs will strengthen India's manufacturing capabilities, while enforcing strategic disinvestment and

asset monetisation will propel the growth of free enterprise. India's demographic dividend, supported by a large and increasingly skilled workforce, is widely seen as a global advantage. Corporate giants increasingly view India as central to their long-term growth strategies, as stability and resilience make the country a dependable market that combines high growth with long-term reliability. India is also shaping global collaboration by playing a key role in building global platforms and is increasingly perceived as a strategic alternative to China.

Atmanirbhar Bharat transformed the crisis into an opportunity during COVID-19, leading to a leap in economic growth. 250 million people have been lifted above the poverty line.

Our infrastructural progress is equally remarkable: from constructing 14 km of road space per day in 2014, we now achieve over 34 km per day. India emerged as the 'Vishwamitra'--the pharmacy of the world--during COVID-19, showcasing our pharmaceutical capabilities on a global scale.

The continued momentum of our 'Make in India' initiative will culminate in achieving 500 GW of clean green energy by 2030. The IMF projects a growth rate of 7 to 7.5 per cent for India over the next two to three years. The government has also built a strong JAM Trinity--Jan Dhan accounts, Aadhaar-enabled payment systems and mobile connectivity.

India has navigated global tariff pressures with considerable astuteness by diversifying its trade partnerships. The country has signed free trade agreements with New Zealand and Oman, CETA with the UK as well as the landmark FTA with the European Union, regarded as the largest trade agreement in India's history; and now the trade pact with USA. It is because of the sagacious economic policies and economic resilience that, despite tariff pressures in certain sectors, trade figures have continued to grow. India has always come out victorious in every crisis, irrespective of global vicissitudes and challenges.

India will continue to rise in economic stature, for economic strength is the true currency of global dominance. Anchored in Atmanirbhar Bharat, the vision of a Viksit Bharat places India firmly on course to become a USD 30-35 trillion economy by 2047.

## Fallout of India's bold move to privatise investment on degraded forests



Early this month, in 2026, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), Government of India had issued a significant amendment in its guidelines under the Forest Conservation Act 1980 on January 2, 2026, allowing private and government entities to undertake afforestation and plantations on forest land. It means that afforestation and plantation activities undertaken by the private entities are now classified as 'forestry activities' within the purview of the Forest Conservation Act which earlier were recognised as 'non-forestry' activities. This action is part of the implementation of the 2023 amendments to the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, formerly the Forest Conservation Act (FCA). The guidelines inter alia states that the plantations must be carried out in association with State Governments or Union Territories, typically on a revenue-sharing basis, and must align with an approved Working Plan or Management Plan. All activities shall be done under the supervision of the State Forest Department. State governments can now lease degraded forest land to private players based on a Detailed Project Report (DPR) without the previously mandatory approval under Forest Conservation Act.

The guidelines stipulate for the involvement of non-government entities, including private companies and NGOs, in the restoration of degraded forest lands. This question of involvement of inviting investments from the private sector on rehabilitation of degraded forests has been in discussions for the last three to four decades in various forums both within and outside the government. The proponents of the proposal argue that unless private investment is forthcoming, it will be difficult to achieve the target of 33 per cent of the land mass under forest and tree cover. The government thus desires to leverage private capital for afforestation that the public exchequer cannot afford alone. A proposal to have a tripartite agreement with government, industry and local people through JFM committees did not find favour in past as the government opted out of it due to livelihood interests of forest-dependent communities and opposition from a large section of civil society for the fear that commercial interests of industry will dominate the people's livelihood

interests.

However, environmentalists argue that this move may lead to rampant commercialisation of forest land and promote monoculture plantations at the cost of natural forests, which could threaten biodiversity, water recharge and undermine the rights of forest-dependent communities. Already, the Forest Survey of India in its State of Forest report of 2023 had highlighted the glaringly poor condition of natural forests. One of the main reasons of criticism is the fact that if these activities are considered now as "forestry," they will automatically be exempted from paying the Net Present Value (NPV) and would not be required to undertake Compensatory Afforestation (CA). These were previously mandatory requirements for utilising forest land. Let us examine it from the perspective of a resource manager.

The supporters of this decision argue that India is a major importer of timber and pulp. By facilitating commercial "tree crops" on degraded forest land, the policy aims to boost domestic wood production, supporting the "Atmanirbhar Bharat" (Self-Reliant India) mission and reducing the carbon footprint associated with international shipping. It further tries to incentivise "Green Credits". The order thus aligns with the Green Credit Program as the companies can now generate credits by restoring degraded lands, which can later be traded or used to offset their own environmental obligations, creating a market-driven incentive for ecological restoration.

However, this writer, based on his around 40 years of experience in various capacities and his knowledge of India's ecology, believes, along with several other that the guidelines should have been framed with far more diligence. The past experience leasing out forests to paper mills before the enactment of the Forest Conservation Act 1980 had proved disastrous, and the order may effectively "privatise" public forests and prioritise profit over biodiversity through greed and lack of vision among many powerful people who make decisions in states.

Degraded forests have their own ecological value with native species but a "plantation" is not a "forest." Natural forests are complex ecosystems with diverse species, layered canopies, and rich soil microbiomes. The private bodies would focus on commercial plantations of fast-growing, high-value monocultures like eucalyptus, teak, or acacia. This will lead to native Biodiversity Loss as plantations do not support the same variety of birds, insects, and wildlife as native forests. The lack of water-holding capacity of monoculture depletes local groundwater tables, harming nearby agriculture. And the biggest casualty if local people are not taken

The Pioneer  
SINCE 1865

on board would be the depletion or decimation of non-timber forest products, which form the bedrock of livelihoods in tribal and rural areas specially of the poor. The lurking fear in the mind of people is about the end of NPV and Compensatory afforestation (CA) if the plantations raised are allowed to offset these two fundamental requirements before diversion of forestland.

NPV was designed to capture the value of oxygen production, carbon sequestration, maintaining the hydrological cycle and soil conservation and help people to be compensated for many things. Waiving these fees allows companies to profit from public land without compensating the public for the loss of these natural services. Apart from this, a significant point of contention is how "degraded forest" is defined. In many states, lands that are ecologically vibrant but have low canopy density (like scrublands or grasslands) are labelled "degraded." This order could lead to the conversion of these unique ecosystems, which are vital for species like the Great Indian Bustard or various medicinal herbs available in dry and semi-dry forests, into industrial wood lots.

Having said that about the inaccuracies in approach, this writer is not opposed to enlisting support for the rehabilitation of some identified refractory forest lands with less than 10 per cent density over the 4 million ha of scrub forests, provided the industry brings in superior technologies and through a tripartite agreement with local stakeholders and the government agencies. DPRs should mandate a high percentage of indigenous trees rather than 100 per cent monocultures.

No commercial lease should be granted without the explicit, informed consent of local communities. Periodic third-party audit and monitoring to ensure that "restoration" is actually happening, rather than just timber mining. The NPV must not be exempted and the requirement of CA can be assessed on a case-by-case basis depending on the actual situation on the ground. Otherwise, the best approach is to pool up funds through the corporate social responsibility route to enrich the natural forests of the country and save our biodiversity. For the industries, the government should instead incentivise the farmer-industry relationship rather than eyeing forestlands. Let us see what is in store for forests if this relaxation results in a "Greener India" or a "Greener Balance Sheet" for corporations as also for or at the cost of the locals, remains to be seen.

The writer is former IFS officer and Chairman of Centre for resource Management and Environment

dailypioneer

@VKBahuguna2

bahuguna-vk-39b46350/

## A lost orbit: How Budget lets India's geospatial momentum drift

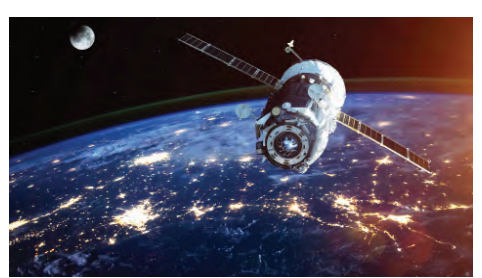


SAURABH  
RAI

India's Union Budget for 2026 dropped like a damp squib for the geospatial sector. Last year, under Modi 3.0's early buzz, we saw real hustle. GIS mapping is exploding in rural land records, drones swarming surveys, and states like UP and Karnataka are digitising millions of acres. Momentum was building after decades of bureaucratic foot-dragging. But this budget? It barely nods at it, opting instead for a tepid pat on the back for space tech. That's not just shortsighted, it's a recipe for squandering India's edge in a global geospatial gold rush.

Flash back to 2025. The Digital India Land Records Modernisation Programme (DILRMP) hit warp speed, with GIS tech overlaying satellite imagery on cadastral maps. In Haryana my backyard here in Gurugram farmers got unique parcel IDs, slashing land disputes by 40 per cent overnight. Drones? They weren't toys anymore. Rajasthan deployed 500+ units to map arid wastelands, feeding data into the SVAMITVA scheme that handed property cards to 1.5 crore villagers. This wasn't pie-in-the-sky; it was tangible. Crop yields up 15 per cent from precision farming insights, urban planners dodging billion-rupee snarls in metro expansions. The momentum screamed scalability: integrate it with PM-KISAN payouts, disaster alerts, even electoral rolls. Why pivot now? The budget whispers about "enhanced geospatial capabilities" but funnels just a 12 per cent hike to ISRO-led space initiatives, peanuts compared to the 25 per cent leap last year. Space is sexy: Gaganyaan dreams, Aditya-L1 selfies from the sun. But here's the rub--a lower budgetary rise won't ignite the industry. Private players are bootstrapping rockets, sure, but without fat R&D grants, they'll chase foreign contracts over domestic geospatial grunt work. India's space economy, pegged at \$8 billion, needs rocket fuel, not drips. A stingy bump means delayed satellites for real-time GIS feeds, think NavIC upgrades stalling, leaving drone operators blind in monsoons. It starves the ecosystem, pushing talent to Starlink gigs abroad.

Enter the National Geospatial Mission (NGM), the elephant the budget tiptoed around. Announced in 2025 with fanfare, it's supposed to be India's geospatial moonshot, a unified platform merging Bhuvan, NRSC data, and private APIs for everything from urban twins to climate modelling. Imagine Gurugram's traffic snarls predicted via drone swarms linked to GIS land records, no more pothole roulette. But without budget muscle, NGM



risks becoming another shelfware like the National GIS Policy of 2017. We need '5,000 crore annually to wire 10 lakh villages by 2030, train 50,000 drone pilots, and build hyperspectral imaging hubs. Last year's 2,200 crore allocation built the runway, this year's limp 8 per cent increase? It won't get planes off the ground.

Critics will holler, fiscal prudence amid deficits, but geospatial isn't spendthrift, it's ROI rocket science. Every rupee in GIS saves Rs 10 in disputes; drone-enabled irrigation in Bihar already boosted farmer incomes by 20 per cent. Momentum from 2025 could've turbocharged this: scale SVAMITVA nationwide, mandate GIS for all infra bids, unleash drone corridors from Kutch to Kohima. Instead, the budget yawns.

The saving grace? All these new infra initiatives '11 lakh crore outlay for roads, rails, green energy will desperately need geospatial smarts. High-speed rail from Delhi to Ahmedabad? It'll devour GIS for alignment, land acquisition, and drone-monitored progress. Gati Shakti's mega-push demands real-time land record overlays to avoid the usual acquisition quagmires that delay projects by years. Semiconductor parks in Gujarat? Drone surveys for seismic zoning. Even the '1 lakh crore urban redevelopment will lean on NGM-style mapping to dodge slum encroachments. These behemoths create pull: states scrambling for GIS talent, private firms pitching drone fleets. It's a backdoor boom budget skimps direct funding, but infra hunger forces adoption. We've seen it before: Demonetisation accidentally juiced UPI, COVID lockdowns birthed Aarogya Setu.

Still, this is no substitute for bold vision. FM Sitharaman could've doubled down: a Geospatial Development Fund, tax breaks for drone makers, NGM as a '10,000 crore mission mode project. Tie it to Atmanirbhar-export GIS tech to Africa, where land titling lags as ours did a decade ago. Momentum matters; last year's wins were fragile. Stall now, and we'll cede ground to China's BeiDou dominance or Europe's Copernicus. India's geospatial story isn't over; infra tsunamis will drag it forward. But the budget's timidity risks a lost decade. Time to rev the engines, not idle in neutral.

The writer is Geospatial Transformation thought leader. He is Chief Strategy & Growth Officer NeoGeoInfo Technologies

dailypioneer

@TheDailyPioneer

saurabhrai75



iexceed

Appzillon™

AI Powered Digital Banking Solutions

WWW.i-exceed.com

BLASÉ CAPITAL

BULLYING AHEAD

Every few months these days, as the Indian equities and indices struggle with their directions and journeys, and fluctuate wildly, experts and analysts come up with new narratives to predict a new bull run, or a demise. Last year, Morgan Stanley re-rated the Sensex, and predicted its rise to 1,07,000, or 25-30 per cent gain, by 2026 over its then-existing level. The ostensible reasons were a positive reversal in corporate earnings, lower valuations, local interest in equities, and a possible change in outlook among the foreign investors. Since then, the Sensex has heaved and weaved, gone up and down, and that by 1,000-2,000 points in a single trading session, and settled lower than what it was at the end of October 2025. It did inch towards 86,000, and is now lower than 83,600. However, in the past 12 months, the index has gained more than 6,000 points, or eight per cent higher, and it was up almost 4,000 points in the past six months, or five per cent higher.

So now, Morgan Stanley has woven a new narrative, comparing Sensex and equities in terms of gold prices, and reached the same conclusion. The Sensex is predicted to be 1,07,000 by the end of 2026. First, the brokerage house tracks the Sensex in terms of gold ounces, and traces the troughs and peaks. Either expectedly, or unexpectedly, the ups immediately followed the downs, or vice versa, depending on the starting point. Morgan Stanley starts with a trough in 1991, the steepest in the past 35 years. There were five more since then. The 1991 was logical given India's foreign exchange and economic crisis that resulted in wide-spread reforms. In 1994 or so, it was possibly after the impact of the Harshad Mehta scandal. In 2003-04, growth fell despite the grand slogan of 'Shining India.' There is no need to explain the downward movement in 2008-09 during the Great Recession. In 2012-13, India was hit by skyrocketing loan defaults, and twin-balance sheet paradox. There is now a comparable trough in 2025-26.

According to the brokerage house, this implies that Indian equities, and Sensex are "significantly undervalued compared to gold." The current levels coincide with similar troughs in 2003-04, 2008-09, and almost 2012-13. During the Great Recession, there was a major multi-year bull run for gold, which undermined the equities. Gold prices surged by almost a quarter within a year, as the yellow metal became a safe and risk-free asset for investors. "Historically, we have seen that economic crises have always favoured safe haven buying, and gold prices," states a media report. However, the flip side is that the troughs are instantly followed by peaks, 1992 after 1991, 1995 after 1994, and then in 2000, 2007 after 2003, a milder peak in 2010 after 2008, another one in 2016 after 2012, and two highest peaks in 2018 and 2021-22. Thus, one need not get too excited about the current trough, which may seem to make equities lower priced, and attractive, but can change in a year.

Morgan Stanley tries another logic to compare equities with gold. It tracks the five-year compounded annual growth rate of its MSCI India index relative to corporate earnings, book value, gold value, and inflation. This graph is "pointing significantly lower, closer to baseline" in 2025-26. It reiterates the same point as reflected by the first graph, which is that the Sensex is inexpensive compared to gold. However, there are two issues to consider. The troughs in the second chart do not always coincide with the first one. The deep troughs are 1999, 2002-03, 2005, 2009, 2013, 2016, and 2020. The current trough in 2025-26 is less deep, and higher, and came earlier only in one year, 2022-23. So, it does not reflect the bottom, and may indicate that the Sensex has some more way to go downwards. But this, according to Morgan Stanley, is a gauge of sentiments, not fundamentals, and the trajectory is downward, which will be substituted by an upward reversal in the future. Unlike the first graph, which is more conclusive, one is not sure of the second.

There is yet another measure that Morgan Stanley reckons with, and this has nothing to do with the Sensex, prices of gold, and stock valuations. It is about ownership and wealth of the Indian households. Cumulative gold wealth, at nearly \$3.7 trillion, more than three times the equity wealth at \$1.2 trillion. Gold savings annually too are generally twice that in equities, as gold accounts for six per cent of the annual saving allocations by the Indian households. However, structural changes are underway over the past decade or so. There is a "secular shift to equity savings," and the "Great Indian Wealth Boom" is ensuring an increase in allocations to the paper assets like the Sensex, compared to physical assets like gold, and real estate. Thus, there is bound to be a boom in equities because of preferences, which will shift further towards equities given the gold's high prices. It is high time that the Sensex reaches new highs, and crosses the 1,00,000-mark. Imagine, just two decades ago, we were talking of Sensex@10,000.

The Pioneer

NEW DELHI | MONDAY | FEBRUARY 9, 2026

BUSINESS10

# Bitcoin in free fall, not bit-by-bit

The crypto loses big time despite Trump's trumpet calls

In the recent past, Bitcoin, which began another rousing rise between April and September 2025, thanks to the backing of Donald Trump, the US president, slumped to a ridiculously-low level. In October 2025, at its height, it was priced over \$1,25,000. This week, it was down to \$60,000, "lower than what it was when Trump got reelected." As a media report states in an incredulous fashion, "It was not supposed to go this way." The president vowed to make the US the crypto capital of the world, appointed crypto-friendly regulators, and pushed the Congress to pass legislation that favoured the sector.

Investors are stunned because things seem to be going Trump's way. The economy is strong, the dollar has not slumped, stock markets have rebounded, inflation is not out of hand, investments are flowing, trade deals (including the one with India) will boost exports, and the local job market seems intact. Yet, for the crypto, there seems to be some invisible cryptic script that is being written for we-do-not-know-who. It is as if the gung-ho Bitcoin, which went up early last year with each passing day, has suddenly decided that enough is enough, the president's claims are not enough to walk the talk.

Crypto critics like Ben Schiffrin grin, and contend, "I told you so." Adds Schiffrin, "Bitcoin is anything but safe. It is the most speculative asset, and I think people are realising that that is the case." Indeed, speculation seems to be a consensual reason for the free fall this time. Initially, Trump's reelection, and the ensuing enthusiasm, created a buying mania. Of course, this was coupled with hoopla, and resulting spec-

ulation. Everyone got into the game, and many borrowed excessively, and recklessly to buy Bitcoins, and other cryptos. Well, if the president backed them, who could stop their rise and rise.

"All that borrowing juiced profits when Bitcoin and other cryptos were surging. But as soon as the value of Bitcoin started falling, the reverse happened, and it magnified the losses," explains a media report. This seems to be an explanation in retrospect. Possibly, the borrowing steam ended with a rise in interest rates. Probably, the short-sellers overwhelmed the buyers. Maybe, the market was spooked, especially when Trump announced an additional 100 per cent tariff on Chinese goods in October 2025, even though an interim one-year pact was inked the next month. It is likely that profit-taking and greed took over.

Whatever the reason, or combination of them, there was a crypto contagion due to the volatility. It caught on, and spread exponentially. Even the most ardent buyers turned sellers, and the sellers sold more. It was yet another lesson that no one has imbibed for centuries. What goes up fast, comes down faster, sooner than later. Once the Bitcoin was on a downward curve, there was no stopping, the same way it seemed when it was on the way up. This is the nature of a speculative asset that is not backed by macros or fundamentals, but sentiments.

One should have known the result. For, this is not the first time that Bitcoin and cryptos have soared and roared, and then whined and whimpered within a few months or a couple of years.

In the post-pandemic period, Bitcoin dropped by almost half between March and June 2021. It was down to less than a third of its value between November 2021 (when it regained its earlier losses) and June 2022. In April-September 2024, Bitcoin lost more than a fifth of its value. "The latest crash is a reminder of the... cycle that has afflicted the sector throughout its short history," states a media report.

"The crypto industry, for example, entered 2022 brimming with hope, as the pandemic helped spark a surge in trading from people stuck at home, leading to a frenzy that boosted all kinds of speculative investments, from cryptocurrencies to digital tokens called NFTs. But then a series of events, including rate hikes by the Federal reserve, ushered in a period of intense volatility that eventually led to the collapse of crypto exchange FTX, which in turn sparked a severe downturn, or 'winter,' in crypto parlance. In 2022, the value of Bitcoin fell from about \$50,000 a coin to under \$20,000," states a report.

Similarly, towards the end of 2017, the markets were excited by IPO-like (Initial Public Offering) issues related to crypto coin offerings. Cryptos were sold by firms, like others sold shares. Of course, there were huge queues to gobble them up, which led to all kinds of gains, and the mania spread to the entire sector. The CPOs (Crypto Public Offerings) peaked in January 2018, and fizzled out. The sizzling prices of cryptos bubbled, cracked, hissed, and cracked. It was the end of yet another short bitter-sweet story that helped some investors, and forced others to lose their shirts and trousers, and other clothes.

Going by past experiences, it is a matter of time, although we are not sure when, why, and how, before Bitcoin and cryptos rise from the ashes, like a never-dying Phoenix, and reach jittering heights. Anything can trigger a comeback out of nowhere. It can be something that Paul Atkins, Trump's handpicked consultant to head the Securities and Exchange Commission, says or does. It can be a passage of a bill backed by crypto-friendly legislators to decide who will regulate the currencies. In the 2024 elections, the crypto industry spent hundreds of millions of dollars to back loyal and supportive senators and Congresspersons. It can be a new crypto venture started by Trump's family.

Maybe the trigger will not be economic, regulatory, legal, or speculative. It may come in the form of politics, after the midterm elections later this year. If Trump and the Republicans capture the Senate and Congress, the cryptos, along with other pro-Trump assets, may be back with a bang. Even if nothing happens in real terms, the sentiments will be enough to make the virtual currencies fly to dizzy levels. The fact remains that Bitcoin is never in an uncertain plateau zone. It is either down in the dumps, where no one notices its existence, or up on the Rockies, where no one can see what is happening to it. There is no middle ground for the cryptos. They either attract the unquestioned passions of the investors, or absolute and unconditional hatred.

## A Contrarian Economist

# 'Energy' behind the India-US deal

Will it hurt or aid the country's high-tech moves and ambitions?

Donald Trump, the US president, confidently announced that India will buy \$500 billion worth of American goods over five years. Well, for the savvy observers, it meant an additional purchase. Indian officials, just to duck it, and Indian media, just to junk it, feel that it implies an annual American export of \$100 billion over the next five years. For simplicity's sake, let us consider the second statement. Going by current levels, \$100 billion means that American exports will more than double. Indeed, if Indian exports do not go up, or go up slowly, the existing trade surplus in India's favour will reverse, or be much lower.

Indeed, this will impact the country's trade deficit but if Indian exports to other nations and regions, like the European Union and Australia, with which it has signed trade deals, go up, and reciprocating imports remain in control, the US mismatch can be contained. Hence, what we are interested in knowing is what will India buy to double the imports from America, and that too mostly at zero per cent or low duties? According to media reports, ministers, and Indian officials, one of the immediate purchases will be in the energy sector, and include crude, petro-products, coal, and coke, among other products.

At present, in the first nine months of 2025-26 (April-December 2025), such purchases amounted to nearly \$14 billion, as oil shipments rose more than a third compared to the same period in the previous fiscal year. Energy purchases will be boosted as India reduces its reliance on Russian oil, which accounted for \$33 billion of imports in the relevant nine months. Logically, if India shifts its entire Russia burden on to the US, and Venezuela, it will add at least \$20-25 billion tag to the latter. This is enough to add more than 50 per cent to American exports.

India buys \$3 billion or so worth of coal and coke from America. This will increase, and officials contend that the country may substitute Indonesian imports with American ones. In any case, the US coking coal is cheaper, and of better quality, and will reduce import costs, and help the Indian end-users. In addition, there are plans to buy natural gas from the US, which will add to the imports. If things go according to plan, energy imports from the US will be enough to account for the bulk of the increase to help the US to reach the target of \$100 billion a year.

Hence, a mere substitution and re-jigging in the oil and energy sources will do most of the trick. India has no choice but to import. After the Russia-Ukraine war, as the Russian oil became cheaper by \$10-15 a barrel, India was successfully able to diversify the sources

to accommodate more imports from Russia. Now, all that it needs to do is to rework the sources to buy less, or nil, from Russia, and more from the US. The task is easy, and will not change other equations. Many Indian makers have the capacity to sell to India. The same is true of airplanes, as the major American maker, Boeing, has a huge order backlog. There are indications that India may order \$80 billion worth of new planes from Boeing. One will need to see how this will affect, if it does, the Adani Group's venture with a Brazilian plane supplier.

Second, there will be implications on the Indian manufacturers, including the foreigners who set up factories here, in segments such as cars (high cc), components, and motorcycles (high-end). The same is true for the grand Indian self-reliance plans to make semiconductors locally, with huge investments being announced. Indian policy-makers need to ensure that India

does not merely become an assembler of high-tech goods, as is the case now even with the much touted 'Made-in-India' iPhones, and was the case for several decades. We need to make-in-India, and not just assemble, or seem to make-it-here.

Third, across supply chains, and across boardrooms, there will be debates about cheaper imports versus local manufacturing. This will be true even in the farm sector, where some fruits, vegetables, and crops may come in directly, and some couched as processed food, and industrial inputs and intermediaries. Even foreign manufacturers, with bases in India, may find it cheaper to import, rather than make. Farmers, whose incomes from horticulture have substituted traditional crop incomes, and which is being touted as a success by the ruling regime, may suffer due to lower demand, and lower prices due to higher imports of the finished products like processed food, and fruit juices.

Of course, as the Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said at a press conference, the market dynamics will finally decide what India imports, and what India exports. "It is for them (American suppliers and makers) to make an offer that the (Indian) buyers cannot refuse. It is for the Indian importers and US sellers to work out the products where imports will increase. The increase to \$100 billion may not happen in the first year, but it will move in that direction," he said at a press conference that was held largely to dent the worries and concerns.

In essence, Goyal seems to have washed his hands away. According to his logic, India has signed a great deal, as it did with the EU, and safeguarded the most sensitive farm and dairy products. Now, it was up to the industry to work out the details. Some may get hurt in the process, but their percentage will be minimal. Indian industry needs to be ready to fight in the global arena, and cannot hide behind official protection for too long. It is another matter that the farmers seem unhappy, and the local makers seem apprehensive and cagey.

To be fair to Goyal, competition, or some semblance of it, will make Indian industry stronger. There will be opportunities for some segments of the farmers to hike exports, and earn more. There is nothing that is truly win-win, and there is never a free lunch.

The Pioneer

SINCE 1865





# A strange sense of déjà vu in India's AI moment

As AI reorders global power, there is an uneasy sense that India has seen this economic movie before



NISHANT SAHDEV

There is a strange sense of déjà vu in India's AI moment. The confidence feels familiar, the ambition unmistakable. History, however, has a way of whispering warnings when excitement outruns economic stability. Artificial intelligence promises transformation — but past turning points suggest that the real consequences often appear later, and linger longer, than the applause.

India today speaks of AI with justified ambition. New models, expanding data centres, rising investment, and bold policy signals suggest a country eager to claim its place in the next technological order. Yet beneath the optimism lies a harder, more consequential question: can India integrate artificial intelligence into its economy without destabilising it?

Buried in the Economic Survey 2025–26 is an important recognition: artificial intelligence is no longer just about faster productivity or smarter software. It is now influencing capital, jobs, and financial stability itself. Once AI begins to affect these fundamentals, the debate stops being technological and becomes unmistakably strategic.

India's AI moment, therefore, is not about who builds the biggest model or deploys the most computing power. It is about whether the country can manage AI in a way that strengthens economic resilience rather than undermines it.

Globally, AI is being built on an unprecedented scale. Large language models (LLMs) demand vast data centres, uninterrupted energy supply, and long-term capital commitments. To finance this expansion, companies have increasingly turned to complex financial arrangements — leveraged funding, special-purpose vehicles, and off-balance-sheet structures.

History has seen this pattern before. Technological revolutions do not usually trigger crises by themselves. Crises emerge when financial expectations race ahead of economic reality. The Survey openly notes concerns about the economics of large AI investments and warns that a sharp correction in AI infrastructure spending could spill over into wider financial markets.

In plain terms, AI is beginning to look less like a simple growth story and more like a systemic risk variable. For India, that distinction matters a lot. Our economy remains structurally sensitive to global financial cycles. Despite strong growth and improving fundamentals, the country runs a current account deficit and depends on foreign capital to finance investment and stabilise the rupee. When global investors become cautious — as they often do during periods of uncertainty — capital flows can reverse quickly. This explains a paradox many Indians have observed:



why the rupee can weaken even when growth is robust and inflation is under control. Markets today are not rewarding growth alone. They are pricing resilience, predictability, and shock-absorption capacity.

AI, if pursued without macroeconomic discipline, can weaken that resilience. Running large-scale AI systems requires imported hardware, enormous energy inputs, and sustained access to global capital. A country that imports all three does not gain strategic autonomy; it accumulates vulnerability. When global liquidity tightens or geopolitical tensions rise, those vulnerabilities surface abruptly. This is the correction India's AI narrative must confront: scale without stability is not strength.

## AI as strategic power — and strategic exposure

AI infrastructure is increasingly concentrated — geographically, financially, and technologically. A small number of countries control advanced chips. A handful of corporations dominate cloud infrastructure and foundational models. Energy-intensive data centres are now critical nodes in national power grids.

These realities carry direct geopolitical consequences. In a world marked

by sanctions, export controls, and technology weaponisation, dependence on external AI supply chains can quickly translate into strategic exposure. A disruption in chip availability, energy pricing, or capital flows can degrade a nation's AI capability almost overnight. Unlike traditional industries, AI systems deteriorate rapidly when starved of compute, power, or data access.

This is why the Survey's warning about AI-linked financial stress must be read alongside India's broader strategic



environment. A country that relies heavily on imported AI hardware, foreign capital, and overseas cloud infrastructure risks externalising its digital sovereignty. Economic instability, in this context, becomes a national security risk. Currency volatility, employment shocks, and sudden capital flight weaken strategic posture just as surely as conventional threats. Another assumption in the AI debate deserves

scrutiny: that AI will naturally extend India's services-led success. India's IT and services sector has been a pillar of growth and foreign exchange. But services can bypass weak infrastructure and uneven governance. Manufacturing cannot. It forces improvements in logistics, power reliability, labour regulation, and state capacity.

This distinction matters. Countries with strong manufacturing bases tend to enjoy more stable currencies and deeper institutional resilience. AI, if confined largely to services and digital platforms, risks repeating an old pattern—productivity gains concentrated in narrow segments, while employment disruption spreads faster than new opportunities emerge.

AI will not automatically solve India's jobs challenge. Without deliberate policy design, it may intensify inequality and social strain instead.

This is where the Economic Survey's emphasis on an "entrepreneurial State" becomes crucial. This does not imply state control over technology. It implies state capacity to manage uncertainty.

AI compresses time horizons, concentrates capital, and amplifies first-mover advantages. If the state responds late, adjustment costs fall on workers, small enterprises, and public finances.

A serious AI strategy therefore cannot be written by technologists alone. It must involve economists, labour planners, energy regulators, and financial authorities working together.

AI is not just a technical shift. It is a political-economy shock. India still retains an advantage. Unlike several advanced economies, it is not yet over-financialised.

Its AI ecosystem remains closer to practical deployment than speculative excess. This provides a narrow but valuable window to design an AI path that strengthens the economy rather than destabilises it. But that window will not remain open indefinitely. What would a stable and strategically sound AI approach look like?

First, AI infrastructure must be treated as national economic infrastructure, not a speculative arms race. Financial prudence matters more than speed. Excessive leverage today creates fragility tomorrow.

Second, AI deployment should prioritise sectors that strengthen India's economic foundations — manufacturing productivity, logistics efficiency, energy management, agriculture, and public service delivery. These improve competitiveness and reduce external vulnerability. Third, AI policy must be integrat-

ed with employment, skilling and social protection systems. Ignoring labour disruption does not prevent it; it merely postpones the cost. Finally, India must abandon the illusion that AI leadership is measured only by technological scale. In a fragmented and fragile global order, stability itself is a strategic asset.

The temptation to chase headlines will be strong. Bigger models, larger data centres, louder announcements are easy to celebrate. But nations do not rise on spectacle alone. They rise on discipline, institutions, and long-term thinking. India stands at a critical juncture. It has growth momentum, reform capacity, and the opportunity to integrate AI thoughtfully rather than reactively. The choice is between speed and strategy, between excitement and endurance.

The sense of déjà vu surrounding India's AI moment is not a reason for hesitation. It is a reminder. History rarely repeats itself exactly — but it often sends warnings first. Whether India listens will determine whether artificial intelligence becomes a source of lasting strength, or the next great stress test.

Author is a theoretical physicist at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, US, and the author of the forthcoming book *The Last Equation Before Silence*

## AI brings continuous medical supervision to patients at home



GYANVI SHARMA  
■ New Delhi

India has launched the world's first doctor-led, AI-driven continuous healthcare ecosystem, enabling monitoring of patients while they remain in the comfort of their homes.

Developed by iLive Connect, the system functions much like a medical surveillance network that constantly tracks vital health parameters and alerts doctors to early signs of illness.

At the first indication of a potentially harmful physiological change, doctors stationed at a central medical command centre notify the patient and their family within two minutes, along with clear guidance on immediate action.

Founder of iLive Connect, cardiothoracic surgeon Dr Rahul Chandola said the technology enables predictive monitoring that allows

early detection of illnesses and timely intervention, thereby significantly reducing the need for admission to any hospital.

The FDA- and CE-approved device consists of a chest-worn biosensor patch that is linked to a wearable wristband which continuously captures data such as two-lead ECG, heart rate, respiratory rate, oxygen saturation (SpO2), body temperature, blood pressure trends, physical activity and heart rate variability.

This data is transmitted wirelessly to a secure cloud-based platform and analysed in real time by doctors at the command centre. Senior interventional cardiologist and iLive Connect co-founder Dr Viveka Kumar described the system as the world's first doctor-led AI healthcare ecosystem that effectively brings an ICU-like facility into a patient's home.

He said medical decisions

are based on the continuous flow of data, allowing doctors to identify subtle changes such as prolonged sleep deprivation or early cardiac instability long before clinical symptoms appear which would help in preventing medical emergencies and repeated hospital admissions.

According to available data, a 10-week observational study involving 410 patients using iLive Connect recorded a 76 per cent reduction in repeated hospital admissions, with early detection of complications related to cardiac conditions, blood pressure instability, metabolic disorders and post-discharge risks.

The system has proven particularly effective for senior citizens, patients with chronic illnesses and those recently discharged from hospitals, a period that is considered critical once hospital care ends and home recovery begins.

## Indian engineers now designing 2nm chips: Vaishnaw

AGENCIES/NEW DELHI

Qualcomm is working with its Indian engineering teams on the design of its next-generation 2-nanometre chips. IT minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said gradually India is putting together infrastructure to manufacture high-end silicon chips in the country.

Silicon chip design work is not new for Indian engineers. But now they are doing it at the top level.

On Saturday Qualcomm highlighted that its India-based engineering teams are

directly involved in the design of its 2-nanometre silicon chips.

The company confirmed its Indian teams were developing chips that would be manufactured on the world's most advanced chip manufacturing technology.

While these chips will be made outside India, their design work has been done here in the country.

The company showcased the ongoing design work on its 2-nanometre chips at its Bengaluru facility during a visit by the IT



IT minister Ashwini Vaishnaw

## India's Sarvam AI beats Google Gemini and ChatGPT

AGENCIES/NEW DELHI

India finally has an AI model that seems to be world-class, at least for some India-specific tasks. Sarvam AI has come out with an OCR tool called Vision that beats the likes of Gemini and ChatGPT in reading documents in Indian languages, as well as Bulbul V3 that excels at AI voice generation. When it comes to AI models, the spotlight is mostly on the US and China.

India, despite its scale and deep talent pool, has rarely been seen as a source of core AI development. But Bengaluru-based startup Sarvam AI is changing that perception with what it calls a "sovereign AI". The company is creating foundational AI models from scratch in India. This week two of its tools, Sarvam Vision and Bulbul, are making a lot of buzz. All

for the right reasons. Sarvam Vision is apparently beating bigger and more talked about AI models such as ChatGPT, Google Gemini and Anthropic Claude on certain benchmarks in optical character recognition (OCR), which is its area of expertise. Its performance is seemingly so good that it is winning praise from users and experts alike.



Sarvam AI co-founder Pratyush Kumar recently shared details of the latest achievements from the company's in-house AI models in a series of posts on X. According to the company, Sarvam Vision has achieved an accuracy score of 84.3 per cent on the olmOCR-Bench.

## McLaren racing announces multi-year partnership with Rubrik

AGENCIES/NEW DELHI

McLaren Racing has entered into a multi-year technology partnership with Rubrik, the Security and AI Operations Company, in which Rubrik becomes an Official Partner of the McLaren Mastercard Formula 1 Team and the Arrow McLaren IndyCar Team.

The partnership brings together two industry leaders with a shared focus on engineering excellence, performance and resilience. With the relentless pressure on performance and races spanning the globe, ensuring the immediate access, availability and integrity of data is critical to McLaren Racing's success.

Rubrik, a leader in cyber resilience, delivers



outcomes for business and Governments world-wide. Rubrik's technology portfolio will help secure McLaren Racing's data to power critical technical development processes and operations. Both organisations share the belief that resilience — underpinned by confidence in recovery — is what keeps teams moving forward.

"We operate in one of the most data-driven sports in

the world. Data integrity is a competitive advantage and we partner with organisations who match our standards for speed, high performance and reliability.

Rubrik shares that mindset. Together, we're focused on strengthening the technological resilience that underpins performance across our racing programmes," said Zak Brown, CEO, McLaren Racing.



FROM THE WORLD

NIGERIA

President Bola to visit UK

Britain's Buckingham Palace said on Sunday that Nigeria's president is set to make a state visit to the UK in March. Officials said President Bola Tinubu and first lady Oluremi Tinubu will travel to the UK on March 18 and 19 in the first state visit to Britain by a Nigerian president in almost four decades. King Charles III and Queen Camilla will host them at Windsor Castle. Full details of the visit are expected at a later date. Charles, who visited Nigeria four times from 1990 to 2018 before he became king, previously received Tinubu at Buckingham Palace in September 2024. Previous state visits by a Nigerian leader took place in 1973, 1981 and 1989. A state visit usually starts with an official reception hosted by the king and includes a carriage procession and a state banquet.

PAKISTAN

Balochistan shuts down protests

Parts of Balochistan came to a standstill on Sunday after a call for a complete shutter down and traffic strike by an opposition alliance to mark the anniversary of February 8, 2024 Pakistan general elections, which they allege were rigged. The strike call was given by Tehreek-e-Tahaffuz-e-Aain Pakistan (TTAP), the united front of all opposition political parties, including incarcerated former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), in the country. After the February 8, 2024 general elections, Khan had called the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) as 'mandate thieves' alleging that they rigged the election to steal his party's seats by manipulating results to come to power. The TTAP leaders echoed the sentiment as they called for a nation-wide shutter down and traffic strike on Sunday.

4 injured in US store accident



ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Truckee (US)

A vehicle plowed into and injured pedestrians at the entrance of a grocery store in a scenic California mountain town on Saturday, police reported. Four people, including some children, were hurt when the 49-year-old man drove into the front of the Truckee Safeway in the afternoon, town police said in a statement.

Their injuries were said not to be life-threatening. Police said they believe the man, who is from the San Joaquin Valley city of Coalinga, intentionally struck the pedestrians and the store. Scotty Mathewson, 39, said he was shopping with his wife when he heard the crash and frantic screaming. While his wife called 911, Mathewson helped others make sure no one was trapped under rubble or the pickup. He said a boy's baseball team was raising money at a table in front of the store, and as he ran to help, parents were desperately trying to reunite with their kids. "We see things in the news, and we watch things on YouTube or TV and stuff, but it's all removed," he said.

Takaichi secures majority in lower house: Reports

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Tokyo

The governing party of Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi secured a more than two-thirds majority in a key parliamentary election on Sunday, Japanese media reported, citing preliminary results. Takaichi, in a televised interview with public television network NHK, said that after the sweeping victory she is now ready to pursue her policies. NHK, citing results of vote counts, said Takaichi's Liberal Democratic Party, or LDP, alone secured 316 seats by early Monday, comfortably surpassing a 261-seat absolute majority in the 465-member lower house, the

more powerful of Japan's two-chamber parliament. That marks a record since the party's foundation in 1955 and surpasses the previous record of 300 seats won in 1986 by late Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone. A smiling Takaichi placed a big red ribbon above each winner's name on a signboard at the LDP's headquarters, as accompanying party executives applauded. Despite the lack of a majority in the other chamber, the upper house, the huge jump from the preelection share in the superior lower house would allow Takaichi to make progress on a right-wing agenda that aims to boost Japan's economy and military capabilities as tensions grow



with China and she tries to nurture ties with the United States. Takaichi said that she would firmly push forward her policy goals while trying to gain support from the opposition. "I will be flexible," she said. Takaichi is hugely

popular, but the governing LDP, which has ruled Japan for most of the last seven decades, has struggled with funding and religious scandals in recent years. She called Sunday's early election only after three months in

office, hoping to turn that around while her popularity is high. The ultraconservative Takaichi, who took office as Japan's first female leader in October, pledged to "work, work, work," and her style, which is seen as both playful and tough, has resonated with younger fans who say they weren't previously interested in politics. The opposition, despite the formation of a new centrist alliance and a rising far-right, was too splintered to be a real challenger. The new opposition alliance of LDP's former coalition partner, Buddhist-backed dovish Komeito, and the liberal-leaning Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan, is projected to sink to half of

their combined preelection share of 167 seats. Takaichi was betting with this election that her LDP party, together with its new partner, the Japan Innovation Party, would secure a majority. Akihito Iwatake, a 53-year-old office worker, said he welcomed the big win by the LDP because he felt the party went too liberal in the past few years. "With Takaichi shifting things more toward the conservative side, I think that brought this positive result," he said. The prime minister wants to push forward a significant shift to the right in Japan's security, immigration and other policies. The LDP's right-wing partner, JIP leader Hirofumi Yoshimura, has said

his party will serve as an "accelerator" for this push. Japan has recently seen far-right populists gain ground, such as the anti-globalist and surging nationalist party Sanseito. Exit polls projected a big gain for Sanseito. Takaichi has pledged to revise security and defense policies by December to bolster Japan's offensive military capabilities, lifting a ban on weapons exports and moving further away from the country's postwar pacifist principles. She has been pushing for tougher policies on foreigners, anti-espionage and other measures that resonate with a far-right audience, but ones that experts say could undermine civil rights.

Russian General shooter detained in Dubai

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Moscow

Russia's Federal Security Service said on Sunday that the man suspected of shooting a deputy chief of Russia's military intelligence agency in Moscow was detained in Dubai and handed over to Russia.

Lieutenant General Vladimir Alekseyev was hospitalized after being shot several times on Friday by an assailant at an apartment building in northwestern Moscow, Investigative Committee spokesperson Svetlana Petrenko said. The attack followed a series of assassinations of senior military officers that Russia has blamed on Ukraine.

The Federal Security Service (FSB) said a Russian citizen, Lyubomir Korba, was detained in Dubai on suspicion of carrying out the shooting. In a statement on its website, FSB said it had also identified two "accomplices," one of whom was detained in Moscow and another who "left for Ukraine."

Asked about the shooting, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Friday it would be up to law enforcement agencies to pursue the investigation but described it as an apparent "terrorist act" by Ukraine intended to derail peace talks. There was no immediate response from Kyiv to a request for comment on the Russian allegations. The shooting



Lieutenant General Vladimir

came a day after Russian, Ukrainian and US negotiators wrapped up two days of talks in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates, aimed at ending the nearly 4-year-old conflict in Ukraine. The Russian delegation was led by Alekseyev's boss, military intelligence chief Adm. Igor Kostyukov.

Alekseyev, 64, has served as the first deputy head of Russia's military intelligence agency, known as the GRU, since 2011. He was decorated with the Hero of Russia medal for his role in Moscow's military campaign in Syria.

In June 2023, he was shown on state TV speaking to mercenary chief Yevgeny Prigozhin, when his Wagner Group seized the military headquarters in the southern city of Rostov-on-Don during his short-lived mutiny. Since Moscow sent troops into Ukraine in 2022, Russian authorities have blamed Kyiv for several assassinations of military officers and public figures in Russia.

Iraq traders protest new customs tariffs

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Baghdad

Hundreds of traders and customs clearance company owners protested in central Baghdad on Sunday, demanding that Iraq's government reverse recently imposed customs tariffs that they say have sharply increased their costs and disrupted trade. The new tariffs that came into effect on Jan. 1 were imposed as part of an attempt to decrease the country's debt and its reliance on oil revenues, as oil



prices have dropped. Iraq faces a debt of more than 90 trillion Iraqi dinars (\$69 billion) — and a state budget that remains reliant on oil for about 90 per cent of revenues, despite attempts to diversify.

But traders say the new tariffs - in some cases as high as 30 per cent - have placed an unfair burden on them. Opponents have filed a lawsuit aiming to reduce the decision, which Iraq's Federal Supreme Court is set to rule.

The demonstrators gathered outside the General Customs Directorate on Sunday, chanting slogans against corruption and rejecting the new fees.

Iran's top diplomat strikes hard line on US talks

JON GAMBRELL  
■ Dubai

Iran's top diplomat insisted on Sunday that Tehran's strength came from its ability to "say no to the great powers," striking a maximalist position just after negotiations with the United States over its nuclear program and in the wake of nationwide protests.

Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, speaking to diplomats at a summit in Tehran, signalled that Iran would stick to its position that it must be able to enrich uranium — a major point of contention with President Donald Trump, who bombed Iranian atomic sites in June



Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi heads to venue for talks between Iran and the US in Muscat, Oman file photo

during the 12-day Iran-Israel war. While Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian praised the talks in Oman with the Americans as "a step forward," Araghchi's remarks show the challenge ahead.

Already, the US moved the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, ships and warplanes to the Middle East to pressure Iran into an agreement and have the firepower necessary to strike the Islamic

Republic should Trump choose to do so. "I believe the secret of the Islamic Republic of Iran's power lies in its ability to stand against bullying, domination and pressures from others," Araghchi said. "They fear our atomic bomb, while we are not pursuing an atomic bomb. Our atomic bomb is the power to say no to the great powers. The secret of the Islamic Republic's power is in the power to say no to the powers." Araghchi's choice to explicitly use an "atomic bomb" as a rhetorical device likely wasn't accidental. While Iran has long maintained its nuclear program is peaceful. (AP)

Kim Jong Un to unveil policy goals at Party congress

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Seoul (South Korea)

North Korea will convene a major political conference later this month, the country's state media said Sunday, where leader Kim Jong Un is expected to outline his domestic and foreign policies for the next five years.

The ruling Workers' Party congress, which Kim previously held in 2016 and 2021, comes after years of accelerated nuclear and missile development and deepening ties with Moscow over the war in Ukraine that have increased his stand-



offs with the United States and South Korea.

North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency said the party's political bureau met under Kim's supervision and

decided the congress would be held in late February. State media did not immediately specify a date or release agenda details. The congress will likely continue for days as a highly choreographed display of Kim's authoritarian leadership. In recent weeks, Kim has inspected weapons tests and toured military sites and economic projects as state media highlighted his purported achievements, crediting his "immortal leadership" with strengthening the country's military capabilities and advancing national development.

Starlink entry into Pak's satellite internet market delayed over security concerns

SAJJAD HUSSAIN  
■ Islamabad

The licence to Starlink to enter Pakistan's satellite internet market is delayed over data security concerns, the ongoing Musk-Trump fallout and competition from Chinese firms, local media reported on Sunday. Starlink, owned by tech billionaire Elon Musk, is among several companies seeking approval to operate in Pakistan, but officials say unresolved security and geopolitical considerations have slowed the approval process. The Government has come to know that



Starlink could transmit certain data bypassing Pakistan's monitoring, regulatory and safety checks, reported the Express Tribune, citing sources. "We cannot allow a

license to Starlink without ensuring a safety check to ensure the safety of the data of consumers in Pakistan," a senior Government official was quoted as saying by Express

Tribune. According to the officials, the row between US President Donald Trump and Elon Musk is another reason the Pakistani establishment is not ready to grant security clearance, fearing it could provoke displeasure from Trump. The US president and Musk had enjoyed good rapport in the past but they later drifted apart. Pakistan and the US have enjoyed improved relations since Trump returned to power last year, and therefore, Pakistan does not want to take any step that could raise concerns in Washington. (PTI)

Venezuelans families demand release of detained activists

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Caracas (Venezuela)

Dozens of relatives and friends of Venezuelan opposition leaders, human rights defenders and others detained for their political activities protested Saturday outside a notorious prison in the capital to demand the immediate release of their loved ones.

The demonstration outside Helicoide prison in Caracas comes during mounting pressure on the Government of acting President Delcy Rodriguez to release all people whose detentions months or years ago have been linked by



their families and non-governmental organisations to their political beliefs. Her Government last month announced it would free a significant number of prisoners, but families and human rights watchdogs have criticised authorities for the slow pace of the releases.

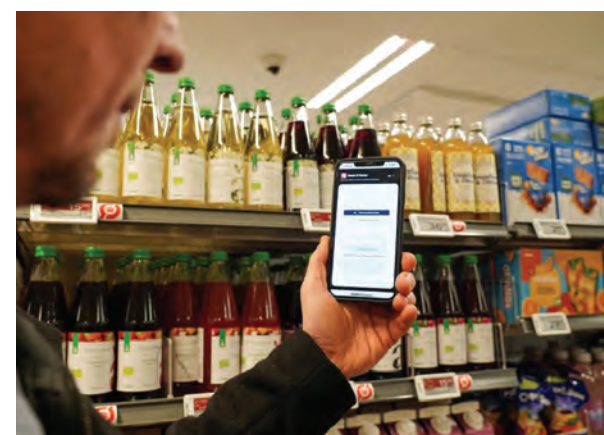
An American lawmaker has voiced concern over the "Islamisation" of areas in certain constituencies in the US state of Texas, saying visiting local malls there "feels like you're in Pakistan, not Dallas." "I hear from constituents all the time who are deeply and desperately concerned about the Islamisation of the Dallas area," Congressman Brandon Gill said during an interview with Real America's Voice. The Republican lawmaker said his constituents are hearing about "mosques that are popping up near land that they or their family have owned for generations. "We have entire communities who are being transformed. And you hear about constituents talking about going to their local malls, and you look around, and it feels like you're in Pakistan, not Dallas, Texas. That's a problem," he added. "Mass Islamic migration is killing the America we know and love," he said in a social media post. (PTI)

Greenland crisis boosted Danish apps designed to identify, help boycott US goods

JAMES BROOKS  
■ Copenhagen

The makers of mobile apps designed to help shoppers identify and boycott American goods say they saw a surge of interest in Denmark and beyond after the recent flare-up in tensions over US President Donald Trump's designs on Greenland. The creator of the "Made O'Meter" app, Ian Rosenfeldt, said he saw around 30,000 downloads of the free app in just three days at the height of the trans-Atlantic diplomatic crisis in late January, out of more than 100,000 since it was launched in March. Apps offer practical help. Rosenfeldt, who lives in

Copenhagen and works in digital marketing, decided to create the app a year ago after joining a Facebook group of like-minded Danes hoping to boycott US goods. "Many people were frustrated and thinking, How do we actually do this in practical terms?" the 53-year-old recalled. "If you use a bar code scanner, it's difficult to see if a product is actually American or not, if it's Danish or not. And if you don't know that, you can't really make a conscious choice." The latest version of "Made O'Meter" uses artificial intelligence to identify and analyse several products at a time, then recommend similar European-made alternatives. Users can set preferences, like "No USA-owned



brands" or "Only EU-based brands." The app claims over 95 per cent accuracy. "By using artificial intelligence, you can take an image of a product and it can make a deep dive to go out

and find the correct information about the product on many levels," Rosenfeldt told The Associated Press during a demonstration at a Copenhagen grocery store. "This way, you have informa-

tion that you can use to make decisions on what you think is right." Losing an ally' After an initial surge of downloads when the app was launched, usage tailed off. Until last month, when Trump stepped up his rhetoric about the need for the US to acquire Greenland, a strategically important and mineral-rich Arctic island that is a semiautonomous territory of Denmark. Usage peaked January 23, when there were almost 40,000 scans in one day, compared with 500 or so daily last summer. It has dropped back since, but there were still around 5,000 a day this week, said Rosenfeldt, who noted "Made O'Meter" is used by over 20,000 people in Denmark

but also by people in Germany, Spain, Italy, and even Venezuela. "It's become much more personal," said Rosenfeldt, who spoke of "losing an ally and a friend." Trump announced in January he would slap new tariffs on Denmark and seven other European countries that opposed his takeover calls, only to abruptly drop his threats after he said a "framework" for a deal over access to mineral-rich Greenland was reached with NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte's help. Few details of that agreement have emerged. The US began technical talks in late January to put together an Arctic security deal with Denmark and Greenland, which say sover-

eignty is not negotiable. Rosenfeldt knows such boycotts won't damage the US economy, but hopes to send a message to supermarkets and encourage greater reliance on European producers. "Maybe we can send a signal, and people will listen, and we can make a change," he added. The protest may be largely symbolic. Another Danish app, "NonUSA," topped 100,000 downloads at the beginning of February. One of its creators, 21-year-old Jonas Pipper, said there were over 25,000 downloads Jan. 21, when 526 product scans were performed in a minute at one point. Of the users, some 46,000 are in Denmark and around 10,000 in Germany. (AP)



# Thailand votes: Three-way battle for power

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Bangkok

Vote counting was under-way in Thailand's early general election on Sunday, seen as a three-way race among competing visions of progressive, populist and old-fashioned patronage politics.

The battle for support from 53 million registered voters comes against a backdrop of slow economic growth and heightened nationalist sentiment. While more than 50 parties are contesting the polls, only three — the People's Party, Bhumjaithai, and Pheu Thai — have the nationwide organisation and popularity to gain a winning mandate. A simple majority of the 500



Voters cast their ballot at a polling station during a general election in Bangkok

AP

electd lawmakers selects the next prime minister.No outright winner expected. Local polls consistently project that no single party will gain a majority, necessitating the formation of a

coalition Government. Although the progressive People's Party is seen as favoured to win a plurality, its reformist politics aren't shared by its leading rivals, which may freeze it out by

joining forces to form a Government.The People's Party, led by Natthaphong Ruengpanyawut, is the successor to the Move Forward Party, which won the most seats in the House of

Representatives in 2023, but was blocked from forming a Government by conservative lawmakers and then forced to dissolve.

"I think we will get the mandate from the people, and we promised the people that we will form the people's Government to bring policies that benefit all, not a few in the country," Natthaphong told reporters after casting his ballot in Bangkok.

Reformist party softens its pitch. His party's platform continues to promise sweeping reforms of the military, police and judiciary, appealing to youth and urban voters. Legal constraints have led it to set aside demands for reform of a law that metes out harsh penalties for criticism of the monarchy, while putting new emphasis on economic issues.

Softening its politics risks weakening its core support, already at risk because the last election had positioned it squarely as the alternative to nine previous years of military-led Government, a situation it can't fruitfully exploit this time.

At the same time, its positions critical of the military can be a political liability with the surge of patriotism that emerged during last year's border clashes with Cambodia, said Napon Jatusripitak, director of the Centre for Politics and Geopolitics at Thailand Future, a Bangkok-based think.

## Air quality in Kathmandu deteriorates to unhealthy level



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Kathmandu

Air quality in Nepal's Kathmandu Valley worsened on Sunday, touching an "unhealthy level" with an AQI of 175 being recorded in all the three districts. The Nepal government's Environment Department said Kathmandu ranked seventh among the most polluted cities in the world on Sunday. Egypt's capital Cairo topped the list of the most polluted cities during this period with an AQI of 273, it said. Dry weather, operation of factories and industries, vehicular smoke and unregulated construction works have contributed to the worsening of air condition of the Kathmandu Valley, according to Gyan Raj Subedi, Director General of the

Department of Environment. "There is a possibility of further deteriorating air pollution until rainfall occurs, he added. As the geographic structure of Kathmandu Valley is bowl shaped, once the air pollution is detected it won't go down immediately unless there is rain or sufficient wind, said Kanchan Kumar Nayak, information officer at the Department of Environment. "The situation will improve as soon as the summer season arrives in April," he added. According to experts, air quality of 0-50 AQI (green sign) is categorised good, 51-100 AQI (yellow signal) moderate, 101-150 AQI unhealthy for sensitive group, 151-200 AQI unhealthy, 201-300 AQI very unhealthy and above 301 AQI hazardous.

## France's ex-culture minister resigns over Epstein-linked tax fraud probe

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Paris

France's former Culture Minister Jack Lang has resigned as head of a Paris cultural centre over alleged past financial links to convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein that prompted a tax investigation.

Lang was summoned to appear at the French Foreign Ministry, which oversees the Arab World Institute, on Sunday, but he submitted his resignation. He is the highest-profile figure in France impacted by the release of Epstein files on Jan. 30 by the US



Department of Justice, known for his role as a culture minister under Socialist President Francois Mitterrand in the 1980s and 1990s.

The Foreign Ministry confirmed his resignation on Saturday evening. The financial prosecutors' office said it had opened an investiga-

tion into Lang and his daughter, Caroline, over alleged "aggravated tax fraud laundering." French investigative news website Mediapart reported last week on alleged financial and business ties between the Lang family and Jeffrey Epstein through an offshore company based in the US Virgin Islands in the Caribbean Sea.

Jack Lang's name was mentioned more than 600 times in the Epstein files, showing intermittent correspondence between 2012 and 2019. His daughter was also in the released files.

## Stabbed Indian students recover

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Moscow

Four Indian medical students, who were injured in a stabbing spree by a juvenile in a Russian university, are "stable and recovering well," the Indian mission said on Sunday.

These four Indians were among at least six people injured in the stabbing attack on Saturday at the State Medical University in Ufa, about 1,200 km east of the Russian capital, in Bashkortostan Republic. Indian Consular officials from Kazan on Sunday visited the four students at the hospital where they were taken after the stabbing incident.

"They are stable and recovering well. Our consul officer met them today in the hospital and also met other students in the hostel," the Indian mission here said. "We are in regular touch with them." The attacker, a 15-year old student of class IX of a local school, armed with a knife entered the medical university dormitory on Repina Street in Ufa and attacked the students living



there. Resisting arrest, the attacker also wounded two police officers and the hostel guard.

The attacker teen later tried to commit suicide by inflicting bodily harm on himself and is admitted to a hospital in serious condition, the official news agency of Bashkortostan, Bashinform, reported.

## US court upholds detention policy without bail bond



Protesters gathered outside the Bishop Whipple Federal building on in Minneapolis

AP

SAFIYAH RIDDLE  
■ Washington

President Donald Trump's administration can continue to detain immigrants without bond, marking a major legal victory for the federal immigration agenda and countering a slew of recent lower court decisions across the country that argued the practice is illegal.

A panel of judges on the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled on that the Department of Homeland Security's decision to deny bond hearings to immigrants arrested across the country is consistent with the constitution and federal immigration law.

regardless of how long they have resided inside the United States."

Under past administrations, most non-citizens with no criminal record who were arrested away from the border had an opportunity to request a bond hearing while their cases wound through immigration court.

Historically, bond was often granted to those without criminal convictions who were not flight risks, and mandatory detention was limited to recent border crossers. "That prior administrations decided to use less than their full enforcement authority under" the law "does not mean they lacked the authority to do more," Jones wrote. The plaintiffs in the two separate cases filed last year against the Trump administration were both Mexican nationals who had both lived in the United States for over 10 years and were not flight risks, their attorneys argued. (AP)

## Tributes to Sikh WWII heroes in Singapore

GURDIP SINGH  
■ Singapore

A Singapore minister and High Commissioners from seven Common wealth countries, including India, joined the Sikh community on Sunday to remember soldiers who laid their lives while defending Singapore-Malaya during World War II.

A Remembrance Day Memorial Service was held at Kranji War Memorial for honouring the lives and sacrifices of 3,318 fallen soldiers bearing the name "Singh", or Sikhs, drawn from communities across the then undivided Punjab, who served and fell defending Singapore and Malaya against the Japanese forces.



Senior Minister of State Murali Pillai joined about 400 community members and leaders at the memorial service and also in celebrating 100 years of a

Gurdwara built by the then immigrant Sikhs on the east coast. The High Commissioners of the United Kingdom, Australia, Malaysia, India, New

Zealand, Canada and Pakistan all the countries that were part of World War II laid wreaths at the Kranji War Memorial. Calling it a "very memorable and important event," the Indian High Commissioner to Singapore Shilpak Ambule noted the contribution of the slain soldiers and also of the Indian community to the redevelopment of Singapore and Malaya.

Echoed Ravinderpal Singh, secretary of the Pradeshi Khalsa Dharma Diwan that was founded 100 years ago by then Sikhs living in Singapore, "Their contribution forms an enduring chapter in both Sikh and global history" he said. (PTI)

## Palestinians attempt to use Gaza's Rafah border crossing

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Cairo

Palestinians on both sides of the crossing between Gaza and Egypt, which opened last week for the first time since 2024, were making their way to the border on Sunday in hopes of crossing, one of the main requirements for the US-backed ceasefire.

The opening comes as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is expected to travel to Washington this week, though the major subject of discussion will be Iran, his office said.

The Rafah Crossing opened to a few Palestinians in each direction last week,



after Israel retrieved the body of the last hostage held in Gaza and several American officials visited Israel to press for the opening. Over the first four days of the crossing's

opening, just 36 Palestinians requiring medical care were allowed to leave for Egypt, plus 62 companions, according to United Nations data. Palestinian officials say nearly 20,000 people in Gaza

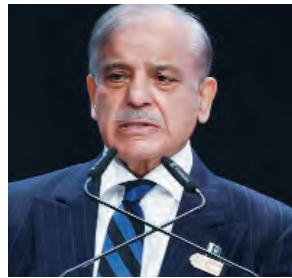
are seeking to leave for medical care that they say is not available in the war-shattered territory. The few who have succeeded in crossing described delays and allegations of mistreatment by Israeli forces and other groups involved in the crossing, including an Israeli-backed Palestinian armed group, Abu Shabab.

A group of Palestinian patients and wounded gathered on Sunday morning in the courtyard of a Red Crescent hospital in Gaza's southern city of Khan Younis, before making their way to the Rafah crossing with Egypt for treatment abroad, family members told The Associated Press. Amjad Abu

Jedjan, who was injured in the war, was scheduled to leave Gaza for medical treatment on the first day of the crossing's reopening, but only five patients were allowed to travel that day, his mother, Raja Abu Jedjan, said. Abu Jedjan was shot by an Israeli sniper while he was building traditional bathrooms in the central Bureij refugee camp in July 2024, she said. On Saturday, his family received a call from the World Health Organisation notifying them that he is included in the group that will travel on Sunday, she said.

"We want them to take care of the patients (during their evacuation)," she said.

## Pak to attend inaugural summit of Gaza peace board: Reports



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Islamabad

Pakistan has been invited to attend the inaugural summit of the Board of Peace for Gaza and the country is expected to attend the meeting to be held in the US on February 19, media reports said on Sunday.

US President Donald Trump unveiled the board in January as part of the second phase of a ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip. It is being projected by Washington as a new international body to usher in peace and stability in Gaza and beyond.

Pakistan Foreign Office on January 21 said it has accepted President Trump's invitation to join the Board of Peace for Gaza and that he had invited Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to become part of the body.

American media on Saturday reported that the US has sent invites for the February 19 event on Friday. It is slated to be held at the US Institute of Peace at Washington, the CNN said.

## Portugal chooses between moderate, populist in runoff presidential election

BARRY HATTON  
■ Lisbon



already a milestone for Ventura and his Chega (Enough) party, which has quickly grown into a significant force in Portuguese politics during a wider

European shift to the right. Seguro, a longstanding Socialist politician, has positioned himself as a moderate candidate who will cooperate with Portugal's centre-

right minority Government, repudiating Ventura's anti-establishment and anti-immigrant tirades.

In Portugal, the president is largely a figurehead with no executive power. Traditionally, the head of state stands above the political fray, mediating disputes and defusing tensions.

However, the president is an influential voice and possesses some powerful tools, being able to veto legislation from parliament, although the veto can be overturned. The head of state also possesses what in Portuguese political jargon is called an "atomic bomb," the power to dissolve parliament and call early elections. (AP)

## Netanyahu to meet US President Trump

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Jerusalem

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will meet with US President Donald Trump in Washington on Wednesday about the US talks with Iran, his office said, as concerns remain high about possible regional conflict.

"The prime minister believes that all negotiations must include limiting the ballistic missiles and ending support for the Iranian axis," Netanyahu's office said in a brief statement. The US and Iran held indirect talks on Friday in Oman that appeared to return to the starting point on how to approach discussions over Tehran's nuclear programme. Trump said the



United States had "very good" talks and said more were planned for early next week. The US was represented by Mideast special envoy Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law. Trump has repeatedly threatened to use force to compel Iran to reach a deal on the nuclear programme

after earlier sending the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln and other warships to the region amid Tehran's crackdown on nationwide protests that killed thousands and saw tens of thousands of others detained.

Gulf Arab nations fear an attack could spark a regional war that would drag them in as well, with memories fresh of Israel launching its 12-day war on Iran last June.

For the first time in negotiations with Iran, the US on Friday brought its top military commander in the Middle East to the table. US Navy Admiral Brad Cooper, head of the military's Central Command, then visited the USS Abraham Lincoln on Saturday with Witkoff and Kushner, the command said in a statement.



## PROSPECT

### Chinmaya mission gets ambulance for social service

JSW India, under its community initiative ‘MG Sewa’, has presented a retrofitted ambulance to Chinmaya Mission Delhi. The vehicle will provide immediate medical assistance during the Mission’s community health programmes and large public gatherings. The ambulance handover ceremony was attended by Padma Shri Ganesh Kumar Mani and Dr Manju Mani.

Dr Mani highlighted the importance of preventing heart diseases and the critical need for prompt response during the ‘Golden Hour’ in medical emergencies. Speaking on the occasion, Yashvinder Patial, Senior Official said that the Hector’s robust build, advanced technology and spacious design make it an ideal vehicle for emergency medical services.

He added that this initiative further strengthens access to healthcare. On behalf of Chinmaya Mission Delhi, Brahmachari Soham Chaitanya and Jatinder Dhir received the keys to the ambulance. The Mission’s activities cater to all age groups and continue its long-standing tradition of providing free or affordable healthcare services.

### Indo-US deal: TN garment exports to double to ₹30,000 cr

Exporters at the textile town in Tiruppur on Sunday indicated that the shipping of garments to the United States would double to ₹30,000 crore over the next three years following the signing of the India deal with the US. Tiruppur, located about 450 km west of Chennai, would also witness an increase of job creation to about 5 lakh during the period, Tiruppur Exporters’ Association president K M Subramanian told PTI. India and the United States announced on Saturday that they have finalised the framework for the first phase of the bilateral trade agreement under which both sides will reduce import duties on a number of goods to boost the two-way trade. Commenting about the deal, Subramanian said, “We welcome it. This deal assumes significance as it will give a huge growth for Tiruppur over the next 5 years.”

### UIDAI updates biometrics for 1 crore students in 83,000 schools

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Aadhaar custodian UIDAI has completed mandatory biometric updates (MBU) for one crore school children covering 83,000 schools across the country, an official statement said.

A child under the age of five can enrol for Aadhaar by providing the photograph, name, date of birth, gender, address and birth certificate but the fingerprints and iris biometrics of a child are not captured for Aadhaar enrolment below the age of five as these indicators are not mature by then.

Therefore, providing fingerprints and iris information in Aadhaar by following the process of MBU, upon crossing the ages of 5 and 15 years, is an essential requirement for children.

Lack of MBU in Aadhaar may lead to difficulties while carrying out authentication for receiving benefits under various Government schemes, registering in competitive and university examinations like NEET, JEE, CUET etc. “The UIDAI has crossed the milestone of completing over one crore Mandatory Biometric Updates (MBUs) for school-children studying in 83000 schools across the country,” the statement said. Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) has made MBU free for children in the age group of 7 to 15 years from October 1 for one year period.

“UIDAI had initiated this special MBU drive for



school-children in September 2025 after a successful technological integration with the Unified District Information System for Education Plus application, that enabled visibility of MBUs status of children at schools. This breakthrough helped the UIDAI and schools to jointly identify children who were due for an MBU, and hold camps at schools to complete the MBU,” the statement said.

UIDAI CEO Bhuvnesh Kumar has written to Chief Secretaries of all States and Union Territories about the initiative by the authority and requested their support in conducting focussed MBU camps at schools. “The mission mode campaign continues to be operational till such time all schools in the country are covered. This initiative has already benefited 1 crore children in 83,000 schools and many more are set to gain from it,” the statement said.

In addition to camps held at schools, children can also complete their MBU at any of the Aadhaar enrolment centres and Aadhaar Seva Kendras running across the country.

“About 1.3 crore MBU transactions have also been completed in the same period, by children visiting these centres,” the statement said.

### India-US embark on journey to \$500 billion trade

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Mumbai

World Trade Centre Mumbai warmly welcomes the announcement of the interim pact on the India–United States Trade Deal, marking a significant milestone in strengthening one of the world’s most consequential strategic and economic partnerships. In a joint statement released by both the countries followed by a press conference by Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal, the broader contours of the trade deal were specified along with a tentative deadline of completion of the final BTA by March this year.

Speaking on the interim trade deal, Dr Vijay Kalantri, Chairman, World Trade Center Mumbai and President All India Association of Industries said, “The announcement of the trade deal was met with calculated responses as the contours of the deal were not revealed.

With today’s joint statement, it is amply clear that this trade deal will support India’s long-term endeavour to Viksit Bharat strengthening our position in international trade while cementing our bilateral ties geopolitically and geoeconomically”.

Explaining the rationale behind the optimism Dr. Kalantri said, “The interim trade pact reduces the tariffs from 50% to almost zero for critical exports products like gems and jewellery, pharma, agri produces, auto components, smartphones, etc. This gives us a high tariff differential vis-à-vis other players, strengthening our export competitiveness supporting MSMEs and job creation”.

“Further, the impact of the deal is immediate as against other deals which we have signed with EU<UK and New Zealand which



Dr Vijay Kalantri, Chairman, World Trade Center Mumbai and President, All India Association of Industries

will take some time to fructify. Also, provisions regarding transfer of technology not only establishes US as a key ally but also helps in supporting domestic start up and innovation ecosystem.

Supply of critical ICT products will strengthen our India’s growth and national security. Most importantly, the reiteration that India has not compromised with critical sectors addresses the political economy and makes the deal all the more acceptable”, said Dr. Kalantri

### Bharat Taxi: Opening new dimensions in cooperative movement



On February 5, 2026, Home and Cooperative Minister Amit Shah, in collaboration with several cooperative organisations, including Amul, launched Bharat Taxi, an initiative of the Ministry of Cooperatives. Using technology, Bharat Taxi will provide taxi services similar to Uber and Ola. Passengers will now be able to book their trips using the Bharat Taxi app. The unique feature of Bharat Taxi is that it is not a company-run app, with drivers using the company’s services, but rather they will be owners of the enterprise; they will now be called Saarthi (sarthi), not drivers.

Rides booked through this app will not be subject to any fees. It’s worth noting that drivers currently pay a 10 to 30 percent fee on Uber, Ola, and other taxi apps.

This is a significant step towards a self-reliant India and prosperity through cooperation. Bharat Taxi, built on a cooperative model, is a platform where drivers are not just service providers but also stakeholders. Unlike previous app platforms, Bharat Taxi has a zero-commission model, ensuring that drivers receive their fair share of earnings.

The four pillars of the Bharat Taxi model are higher income, dignity, security, and profit sharing for drivers.

#### Increased Income

An example will illustrate how a driver who searches for trips on Uber, Ola, or another company’s app is subject to undue exploitation due to commissions and income loss. For example, if a driver makes 14 trips a day, covering approximately 250 kilometers, with an average fare of ₹300 per trip, which could mean working approximately 14-15 hours, he would get a revenue of Rupees 4,200. But this revenue does not belong to him; in fact, not even half of this income is The four pillars of the Indian taxi model are higher income, respect, security, and profit sharing for drivers.

#### How to Increase Income

An example will illustrate how a



driver who searches for trips on Uber, Ola, or another company’s app is subject to undue exploitation due to commissions and lost income. For example, if a driver makes 14 trips a day, covering approximately 250 kilometers, with an average fare of ₹300 per trip, which could mean working approximately 14-15 hours, he would earn ₹4,200. But this income is not actually his; in fact, not even half of this income accrue to him.

The fact is that the company takes away an average 25 percent of this revenue as platform fee, meaning thereby, Rupees 1,050 goes directly to the company. Then, the driver has to pay for petrol/CNG to operate the taxi, assuming this to be Rupees 4 per kilometer, translates to approximately ₹1,000. Or, if the vehicle is financed through a bank or o the financial institution, EMIs may need to be paid and maintenance may also be required. Therefore, a driver working 14-15 hours a day will get only Rupees 1,150, an average of ₹80-₹85 per hour.

Now, with the no-commission model, drivers joining Bharat Taxi will save a significant amount on account of commission, increasing their income from the same amount of work to ₹2,150 per day, or ₹160-₹170 per hour. This allows them to choose more leisure hours to spend with their families, improving both their comfort and income. Therefore, Bharat Taxi not only improves the driver’s income, who is now a Saarthi, but also increases

his and his family’s happiness.

**Dignity**  
Most importantly, drivers will now receive respectful work and will be members of the cooperative society formed for this cooperative taxi service. This restores the dignity they deserve.

**Security**  
Not only this, drivers associated with Bharat Taxi will now receive benefits such as free medical treatment up to Rupees 5 lakh, insurance, affordable loans, subsidies, and all schemes for gig workers.

**Profit Sharing**  
Since drivers, or Saarthis, will now be members of the Bharat Taxi cooperative, they will also receive an equal share in its profits. This sharing will be similar to the Amul model. It is well known that under the Amul model, dairy farmers not only receive fair prices for their milk but also share in the profits.

**Public Digital Infrastructure**  
Bharat Taxi is built on ONDC (Open Network for Digital Commerce), which is again a dream project of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It has been developed under the supervision of the Ministry of Cooperation. ONDC is an open, transparent, and non-monopolistic digital framework—aligned with India’s civilisational values of openness and fairness. ONDC breaks the dominance of closed platforms and ensures equal opportunities for small operators and cooperatives.

Bharat Taxi’s operation on the ONDC framework also strengthens

### CIABC urges Govt to ensure a fair and level-playing field against imports

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Domestic spirits makers’ body CIABC on Saturday said it expects tariffs on spirituous beverages to be aligned with India’s recently signed free trade agreements (FTAs) with the UK and the EU.

According to the framework finalised by India and the US for an interim trade agreement, American goods ranging from wines and spirits to dry fruits will enter India either duty-free or at reduced import tariffs.

Urging the Indian Government to ensure a “fair and level-playing field against imports”, the Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverage Companies (CIABC) said it hopes the deal will be “equitable and mutually beneficial” for both nations.

CIABC, which represents home-grown Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) players, said it is not against reduction in import duty, but wants it in a “phased manner”. “It hopes that the Government will address issues raised by CIABC relating to removal of non-tariff barriers across FTAs and ensure a fair and level-playing field against

imports,” said its DG Anant S Iyer.

CIABC further said the domestic industry is already at a disadvantage compared to manufacturers from developed countries due to high capital and operational costs and restrictive licensing regimes.

Last year in February, India had slashed import duty on bourbon whiskey from US to 50 per cent. On February 13, 2025, the Indian Government reduced the import duty on bourbon whiskey from 150 per cent to 100 per cent. Bourbon is a American whiskey made primarily from corn and aged in new, charred oak barrels.

Moreover, CIABC has also requested state Governments to “withdraw all excise concessions given to imported liquor” as cut in customs duties will further hit the Indian products - both in spirits and wine categories.

Highlighting the impact of duty cuts, CIABC has requested state Governments to withdraw excise concessions currently extended to imported liquor, warning that a simultaneous reduction in customs duties would deliver a “double whammy” to Indian producers in both

spirits and wine categories.

The Imported Bottled-Origin (BIO) spirits have a more favourable tax structure in some states, which is making the home-grown industry “less competitive”.

The association also demanded stringent measures to prevent dumping of imported spirits and called for improved international market access for Indian alcoholic products, which continue to face non-tariff restrictions in countries such as the EU, UK and Australia.

India and the US on Saturday announced they have reached a framework for an interim trade agreement under which both sides will reduce import duties on a number of goods to boost two-way trade.

Under the pact, the US will reduce tariffs on Indian goods to 18 per cent from the present 50 per cent, while India will eliminate or cut down import duties on all US industrial goods and a wide range of American food and agricultural products, including dried distillers’ grains, red sorghum for animal feed, tree nuts, fresh and processed fruit, soybean oil, wine and spirits.

the hope that in other areas of e-commerce, small private players such as traders and street vendors, and other workers like carpenters, electricians, and AC mechanics, can be organised through cooperative digital public infrastructure to increase their incomes and empower them to live with dignity.

**Benefit to Riders**  
In order to maximise their profits, Taxi platforms generally indulge in surge pricing, during peak hours, in the name of high demand, forcing riders to pay higher fare, sometimes 2 to 3 times of the normal fare. This practice would be done away with Bharat Taxi, freeing the riders from paying unfair fare for their rides during peak hours also.

Bharat Taxi’s operation on the ONDC framework also strengthens the hope that in other areas of e-commerce, private workers, such as small traders and street vendors, and other workers like carpenters, electricians, and AC repairers, can be organized through cooperative digital public infrastructure to increase their incomes and empower them to live with dignity.

**Bharat Taxi, a Game Changer**  
Bharat Taxi’s zero-commission model will ensure that companies like Uber and Ola reduce their commissions and ensure higher earnings for drivers. Furthermore, Bharat Taxi’s model can pave the way for other countries to adopt this model to end exploitation in mobility services.

The cooperative ownership model prevents exploitation and ensures a long-term, sustainable system. As Bharat Taxi plans to expand to smaller towns and rural areas, this model will enable cooperative drivers to participate in the digital economy.

This model, independent of data or capital control, promotes healthy competition based on service quality.

#### Role of the Ministry of Cooperation

The Ministry of Cooperation, under the leadership of Shri Amit Shah, has played a key role in incorporating the principles of cooperation into modern digital platforms. This initiative brings traditional cooperatives into a 21st-century digital framework.

#### National Impact

Bharat Taxi strengthens employ-

ment, mobility, tourism, and the local economy. It is a living example of how digital public infrastructure can work in the national interest. Just as UPI transformed payments, platforms based on ONDC like Bharat Taxi will transform services and e-commerce. We must understand that Bharat Taxi is not just a technology platform—it is a national movement for economic fairness. This initiative reflects the spirit of a strong, self-reliant, and equal India.

**Bharat Taxi, a Game Changer**  
Bharat Taxi’s zero-commission model will ensure that companies like Uber and Ola reduce their commissions and ensure higher earnings for drivers. Furthermore, Bharat Taxi’s model can pave the way for other countries to adopt this model to end exploitation in mobility services.

The cooperative ownership model prevents exploitation and ensures a long-term, sustainable system. As Bharat Taxi plans to expand to smaller towns and rural areas, this model will enable cooperative drivers to participate in the digital economy.

#### Role of the Ministry of Cooperation

The Ministry of Cooperation, under the leadership of Shri Amit Shah, has played a key role in incorporating the principles of cooperation into modern digital platforms. This initiative brings traditional cooperatives into a 21st-century digital framework.

**National Impact**  
Bharat Taxi strengthens employment, mobility, tourism, and the local economy. It is a living example of how digital public infrastructure can work in the national interest. Just as UPI transformed payments, platforms based on ONDC like Bharat Taxi will transform services and e-commerce.

We must understand that Bharat Taxi is not just a technology platform—it is a national movement for economic fairness. This initiative reflects the spirit of a strong, self-reliant, and equitable Bharat.

National Co-Convenor Swadeshi Jagran Manch Former Professor, PGDAV College, Delhi University

### ACA inaugurates cricket ground, pavilion and academy at Barpeta

TONY DAS ■ Guwahati

The Assam Cricket Association (ACA) on Sunday inaugurated a state-of-the-art cricket ground and pavilion- ACA Cricket Academy Lower Assam Zone at Satra Baradi in Barpeta, marking a major boost to cricket infrastructure in the State.

The facility has been developed to support both high-performance and grassroots cricket. The programme also saw the foundation stone laid for a proposed players’ hostel to provide residential support to emerging cricketers from the region.

BCCI honorary secretary Devajit Saikia attended the programme as chief guest, while IPL Governing Council member Shri M Khairul Jamal Majumdar was present as guest of honour.

Addressing the gathering, Devajit Saikia said the inauguration reflected the Assam Cricket Association’s sustained focus on strengthening infrastructure and promoting grassroots cricket.

He said modern facilities, structured coaching programmes and the proposed hostel would help identify and nurture talent from the region and prepare players for higher levels. The project includes five

centre pitches, 10 net practice pitches, dining facilities, match officials’ areas and infrastructure suitable for hosting domestic matches.

It was also announced that Barpeta will serve as the ACA Cricket Academy’s satellite venue for the Lower Assam Zone, while Umrangso will function as the satellite academy for the Southern Assam Zone.

Speaking on the occasion, M Khairul Jamal Majumdar said the development of quality infrastructure at district and zonal levels was crucial for the long-term growth of Indian cricket.

He praised the Assam Cricket Association for expanding facilities beyond major centres and said projects such as Barpeta would strengthen the state’s domestic structure and talent pipeline. He also appreciated the developmental work carried out by Hony. Secretary BCCI, Devajit Saikia in Assam and the Northeast.

The function was attended by several office-bearers of the Assam Cricket Association, including vice president Romen Dutta, secretary Sanatan Das, joint secretary Rajendra Singh, treasurer Anupam Deka, apex council member Mukuta Nanda Bhattacharyya and

former secretary Tridib Konwar, along with Barpeta District Sports Association president Gunindra Nath Das and distinguished guests.

Romen Dutta said the inauguration marked an important milestone in the association’s efforts to build a strong cricketing ecosystem across Assam and thanked Saikia for his guidance and support.

With the launch of the new ground, pavilion and academy, and the proposed hostel, the Assam Cricket Association aims to provide young cricketers with improved training, and competitive opportunities in a professional environment.





BRIEFLY

India U-19 WC-winning team receives grand welcome



The victorious U-19 World Cup-winning Indian team returned to a grand welcome with family members of the players and a large number of fans turning up to receive the young heroes here on Sunday.

India won a record-extending sixth title in Harare, Zimbabwe on Friday after defeating England by a massive 100 runs in the final. Ably led by Ayush Mhatre, India posted a commanding 411/9, powered by a stellar 175 off 80 balls from 14-year-old Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, and then restricted England to 311 all out in 40.2 overs to record a massive win. India had earlier won the tournament in 2000, 2008, 2012, 2018 and 2022.

Skipper Mhatre and star opener Sooryavanshi stole the limelight at the Mumbai airport while wicket-keeper Abhyam Kundu too grabbed some attention upon reaching here, with fans and family members waiting to welcome them. The entire family of Mhatre, including his parents, aunt and brother-in-law, was present at the airport. Mhatre had scored 53 off 51 balls in the final.

"We as parents don't have any words for this excitement because whatever hardwork they were doing for all these years it paid off," said Mhatre's proud father Yogesh Kamalakar Mhatre. "I am very happy that he is bringing the World Cup for his country. He is fond of cricket since childhood and the hardwork he has put in since childhood has bore fruit today. We will celebrate after reaching home," added Mhatre's mother.

Ganguly backs India's 'high-risk' batting template



Former captain Sourav Ganguly on Sunday backed the Indian team's aggressive batting template in the T20 World Cup, saying top-order players like Ishan Kishan and Abhishek Sharma should not curb their attacking instincts even on two-paced surfaces.

India were reduced to 77 for six after opting to attack from the outset before recovering to post a competitive total in their tournament opener against USA, a pattern Ganguly said is an inevitable by-product of modern T20 cricket.

"That's what T20 cricket is – you have to keep hitting. They are very good players and they have been doing this for a long period of time. It will happen.

"There will be some games where they miss out because they are human beings, and when you keep hitting all the time, you will miss," Ganguly said on the sidelines of the Bharat Corporate Premier League (BCPL) Season 4 here.

"This is a very powerful team, a very strong team with balance – bowling, batting, spin bowling, fielding. As the World Cup goes on, they will get better because once you get into the tournament, the rhythm comes back.

I consider India as favourites, and they will be a very hard side to beat."

Lovlina, Arundhati lead from the front

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ La Nucia (Spain)

Olympic medallist Lovlina Borgohain and former Youth World champion Arundhati Choudhary led from the front as India wrapped up a highly successful BOXAM Elite International 2026 tournament with a dominant show, clinching nine gold medals in the event here.

In a standout achievement, India was represented in seven elite women's finals on Saturday, including an all-Indian title clash in the 54kg division and emerged with gold in each of them.

The BOXAM Elite 2026 featured over 200 boxers from 20 nations, providing a high-quality international test early in the season. India finished as the competition's



most successful team with nine gold, three silver and seven bronze medals.

"BOXAM Elite offered exactly the kind of exposure

we were seeking at this stage of the season, including strong international opposition, depth across weight categories, and high-pres-

sure bouts. The performances in Spain, particularly the conversion rate in finals, reflect the progress of our programme," Boxing Federation

We want to start well, and that's the focus: SA skipper Aiden Markram ahead of Canada match

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Ahmedabad

South Africa captain Aiden Markram is in no mood to take Canada lightly in their T20 World Cup opener on Monday, insisting that he's just looking for a positive start to their campaign here.

The two teams will face each other in their opening Group B match.

They may be considered one of the favourites, but Markram said the close matches in the last two days already indicated that no team can take any opposition lightly.

"You don't want to jinx



anything. We've already seen some close games, and it doesn't look like there will be any straightforward or easy matches. But I have faith in our team. If we put together a really good game of cricket, we give ourselves

a strong chance of a good result," Markram said at the pre-match press conference on Sunday.

"That's something you want to do in a competition like this, you want to start well and carry that momentum forward. So that's where a lot of the focus has been for us as a group, and hopefully we can put together a really good performance."

Markram said the gap in terms of performance in T20 format among top teams and associate nations has narrowed considerably, resulting in upsets and that's why there is no room for being complacent.

"If you look at the games that have already happened, and at previous World Cups, there have been upsets. The gap between Associate nations and the other countries has become much smaller.

Auqib Nabi strikes again as J&K close in on stunning Ranji Trophy win over MP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Indore

Auqib Nabi has once again proved to be the nemesis of Madhya Pradesh, as the Jammu & Kashmir pacer tore through the top order to leave the former champions in dire straits, with the odds heavily stacked against them on Day 3 of the Ranji Trophy quarterfinal here on Sunday.

After limping to 84 for 5 at Saturday's close, Jammu & Kashmir fought back to post 248 all out in their second innings, with Abid Mushtaq (41 off 73) and Vanshaj Sharma (54 not out off 92)



playing crucial knocks to rescue the team from a difficult spot. The duo's grit and enterprise propelled J&K to set the former Ranji Trophy champions a daunting target of 291.

By the close on Sunday, Madhya Pradesh's top order had crumbled to 87 for 5,

with Auqib Nabi (3/23) once again tormenting the opposition after claiming seven wickets in the first innings.

It was complete submission by the 2021-22 Ranji champions Madhya Pradesh, with opening stalwart Yash Dubey, who has struggled this season, falling for 20, followed by partner Himanshu Mantri (31), as Auqib and left-arm spinner Abid Mushtaq (2/19) ran through the top order.

With a daunting 204-run deficit, MP still have a long way to go, as Shubham Sharma (11 not out) and Venkatesh Iyer (7 not out) attempt to steady the

innings. But the day belonged to the lanky 29-year-old pacer Auqib Nabi, who had already caught attention off the field after being snapped up by Delhi Capitals for a multi-crore contract ahead of the upcoming IPL season.

Returning to the crease after a sensational 7/40 in the first innings that skittled MP for just 152, Auqib Nabi struck early by dismissing opener Yash Dubey, then delivered a crushing blow in the 27th over by removing skipper Rajat Patidar (8) and Kumar Kartikeya for a first-ball duck off successive deliveries, reducing MP to 76 for 5.

of India (BFI) president Ajay Singh said. "With a demanding year ahead, this tournament has been a valuable step in preparing our boxers for the challenges to come. Congratulations to the entire contingent on an outstanding campaign."

Indian women set the benchmark on the final day. Manju Rani (48kg) and Nitu (51kg) opened proceedings with emphatic unanimous wins over Spain's Marta Lopez and Noelia Gutierrez respectively, before Poonam (54kg) edged past compatriot Preeti in a hard-fought all-Indian final.

Priya (60kg) and Arundhati (70kg) followed with commanding 5:0 victories over Ukrainian opponents, while Lovlina (75kg) displayed her trademark control and com-

posure to defeat England's Mary-Kate Smith 4:1. Naina (80kg) completed the sweep with a measured win over Ukraine's Raisa Piskun.

Reflecting on the women's performances, Indian women's head coach Santiago Nieva said, "This was an exceptional showing from the women, not just in terms of medals, but in how they boxed with discipline, clarity, and confidence. Reaching seven finals and winning all seven speaks volumes about the work being done across the system."

"Credit also goes to the entire Indian team, the men and women pushed each other throughout the tournament, and that collective environment is key to sustained success."

Man United wins again to make it four in a row for Carrick

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Manchester

It's four Premier League wins in a row for Manchester United under Michael Carrick and a season that was unraveling just weeks ago now looks full of promise.

United won 2-0 against Tottenham on Saturday to extend Carrick's 100 per cent start as head coach and boost hopes of a return to the Champions League after missing out for the last two

Is Carrick the leading contender for Man United job? Victory for United will further strengthen Carrick's case to be given the job on a long-term basis.

"Michael has won everything here and he knows what it means for these fans, what it means for the club to win and how much is needed to win at this football club. I think that adds something special to the team," United captain Bruno Fernandes told TNT Sports.



years. Arsenal powered nine points clear at the top, with Viktor Gyokeres coming off the bench to score two goals in a 3-0 win against Sunderland.

Second-place Manchester City plays Liverpool on Sunday while Aston Villa, in third, slipped further adrift after a 1-1 draw at Bournemouth.

Cole Palmer scored a first-half hat trick in Chelsea's 3-1 win at last-place Wolves.

Bryan Mbeumo and Fernandes scored in each half at Old Trafford after Spurs went down to 10 men when captain Cristian Romero was sent off in the 29th minute.

It is the first time in two years that United has won four straight Premier League games.

Carrick has transformed United's fortunes since he was parachuted in to replace the fired Ruben Amorim last month.

T20 WC: Sri Lanka beat Ireland by 20 runs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Colombo

Tournament co-hosts Sri Lanka produced a clinical, all-round performance to begin their campaign in the T20 World Cup with a 20-run victory over Ireland here on Sunday.

Asked to bat first, Kamindu Mendis' scintillating 19-ball 44 and Kusal Mendis' unbeaten half-century lifted Sri Lanka to 163 for six after a slow start.

Sri Lanka were also helped by a few dropped catches by the Irish fielders in the floodlit R Premadasa Stadium.

In reply, Ireland were all out for 143 in 19.5 overs.

Ross Adair struck 34 off 23 balls, while Harry Tector made 40 off 34 deliveries.

Maheesh Theekshana (3/23 in 4 overs) and Wanindu Hasaranga (3/25 in 4 overs) were excellent with the ball, playing vital roles in the Sri



Lankan victory.

In the chase, Ireland lost skipper Paul Stirling (6) in the fourth over with just 24 runs on the board, but Ross Adair looked in good touch and was dealing in boundaries to quickly move to 29 off 16 balls as his team reached 45 for one at the end of power play.

Stirling was dropped by Kusal Mendis on 1, but he could not capitalise

on the life offered to him and was bowled by a fine yorker from Maheesh Theekshana.

Sri Lanka got the big wicket of Adair when Wanindu Hasaranga bowled him with an excellent googly, the experienced leg-spinner striking in his first over.

Harry Tector continued to hold the Ireland innings thereafter as they reached 72 for two at the halfway stage, needing another 92 runs in 60 balls.

However, Hasaranga struck again as Tector was dismissed in the 16th over. Ireland's innings fell apart after that as they lost quick wickets to get bowled out.

Earlier, wicketkeeper Kusal made 56 off 43 balls with the help of five boundaries and added 67 runs for the fifth wicket with Kamindu, who smashed four fours and two sixes, to lift Sri Lanka after they were struggling at 86 for four in the 14th over.

Late Guirassy goal seals Dortmund win

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Berlin

Serhou Guirassy scored late for Borussia Dortmund to cut Bayern Munich's Bundesliga lead to three points with a 2-1 win at Wolfsburg.

Wolfsburg dominated the second half with Mohamed Amoura missing several good chances and Maximilian Arnold striking the crossbar.

Dortmund's Maximilian Beier hit the underside of the bar with a deflected shot in the first half, when Julian Brandt opened the scoring with a header from Julian Ryerson's corner in the 38th for the visitors.

Konstantinos Koulierakis replied in similar fashion



after the break with a header from Arnold's free kick, but Wolfsburg was to rue not taking its chances to score more.

Guirassy pounced for the winner in the 87th after good

play between Fabio Silva and Felix Nmecha. "That's part of football," Dortmund coach Niko Kovac said of his team's scrappy win.

"But then to decide it with one action is also a quality."

Yamal atones for bad miss with classy goal as La Liga leader Barcelona beats Mallorca 3-0

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Madrid

Teenage star Lamine Yamal made up for missing an open goal with a trademark curler from outside the penalty area as Barcelona beat Mallorca 3-0 to move four points ahead at the top of La Liga.

Robert Lewandowski had put Barcelona ahead and 18-year-old homegrown player Marc Bernal scored his first career goal late on to seal a convincing win. Yamal and Lewandowski have scored 10 league goals each this season.

Second-place Real Madrid can close the gap to one point if it wins at Valencia on Sunday.

Lewandowski pounced from close range in the 29th minute following good work down the left from Marcus Rashford. His shot was blocked and Lewandowski showed typically cool composure to control the ball and guide it past a defender before picking his spot.

Rashford's form has improved throughout the season and he came close to scoring in first-half injury time when his curling free kick produced a brilliant save from Leo Roman.

The ball fell to right back Jules Kounde near the penalty spot and his scuffed shot landed at the feet of Yamal, who somehow skewered wide from almost on the



goal line. The 18-year-old prodigy was given a pat on the back by Lewandowski, who is one of the modern era's most prolific scorers with over 650 club goals – including 344 with his former club Bayern Munich and more than 100 for Barca.

Yamal showed his class in the 61st minute with a brilliant strike, ghosting past one defender on the edge of the area and then planting a powerful dipping shot into the bottom corner, a strike hit so cleanly with his left foot that Roman did not even move.

Yamal and Lewandowski were replaced and both applauded Bernal's excellent goal in the 83rd.

Barca sliced Mallorca open in midfield with four quick passes to send Bernal racing through, and he showed good composure to cut inside a defender and stroke the ball into the post.

In Saturday's only other game, Real Sociedad beat Elche 3-1 to move into eighth place. Goals from Croatia midfielder Luka Sucic and Spain forward Mikel Oyarzabal put Sociedad 2-0 up, only for Portugal striker Andre Silva to pull one back close to halftime.

Iceland captain Orri Stein Oskarsson replaced Oyarzabal near the end and netted his side's third goal in the 89th. Matches postponed Two matches were called off. Rayo

Vallecano's home match against Oviedo was postponed at short notice because of safety concerns over the field at Valdecas Stadium.

The league also called off Sevilla vs. Girona due to adverse weather conditions. While Oviedo said it understood the decision, the team criticized the short notice and was considering legal action.

Cutting ties Barcelona became the latest club to cut ties with a proposed breakaway European Super League.

It had previously led the fight to get a rival competition to the Champions League off the ground.



# England survive massive scare against Nepal, win by 4 runs

DEVARCHIT VARMA  
■ Mumbai

Two-time champions England survived a massive scare against a doughty Nepal in their Group C clash of the T20 World Cup, clinching a narrow four-run win in a tense finish to their tournament opener here on Sunday.

Nepal came within touching distance of creating history as they nearly upset one of the teams to beat in the competition, scoring 180/6 in reply to England's 184/7. Lokesh Bam (39 not out off 20 balls) kept Nepal in the hunt for an upset victory but could not finish the game in the final over after a heroic effort. Needing 10 runs off the last over, Nepal could-

n't find a boundary as their inspired show with the bat ended in a narrow loss. Sam Curran nailed his yorkers relentlessly as all that Nepal could manage were five runs.

Nevertheless, more than 17,000 fans thronged the iconic Wankhede Stadium and witnessed Nepal punching far above their weight, with majority of them being from the Himalayan nation.

Skipper Rohit Paudel (39), Dipendra Singh Airee (39), Kushal Bhurtel (29) and Lokesh, who smashed four boundaries and two sixes in a late assault, fought valiantly but they could not take their side over the line.

Lokesh went hammer and tongs when Nepal's backs



England's players celebrate a wicket during an ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 cricket match between England and Nepal at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on Sunday

were against the wall, hitting two sixes off Jofra Archer's 18th over and two consecutive fours off Luke Wood's penultimate over when they needed 46 runs off the final three overs. Bhurtel had provided early fireworks while a robust 82-run stand for the third wicket between Paudel and Airee consolidated Nepal.

Even as Nepal lost an early wicket in the form of Aasif Sheikh (7), Bhurtel cut loose to score a 17-ball 29 with four boundaries and a six to set the tone. But his promising start came to a meek end when Bhurtel couldn't keep it down, giving a simple return catch to Will Jacks in the sixth over. Nepal's run-chase got a much-needed impetus in the 14th

over when skipper Paudel tore into the seniormost England bowler Rashid Khan, pulling a wrong-un into the stands for a six and driving down the next ball powerfully through covers for four. Paudel then produced the 'shot of the match' when he executed the perfect switch-hit, middling the ball which went sailing over the fielder at deep square leg.

However, a drinks break broke the momentum which Airee and Paudel were attaining, with the former mis-hitting one off Sam Curran in the 15th over. Soon after, Paudel departed when he swept one straight to Phil Salt at deep midwicket off Liam Dawson after playing a fine knock which raised Nepal's

hopes. Earlier, Jacob Bethell (55) and skipper Harry Brook (53) peeled off attacking fifties to power England to a formidable 184 for seven.

The young left-handed Bethell gave a fine example of himself on T20 World Cup debut in front of a partisan crowd with his rapid half-century — off 35 balls — with four sixes and as many fours, while skipper Brook got back among runs in his bid to change the narrative around him. Brook fell after making a vital knock that came off 32 balls with four sixes and three fours, putting on a 71-run stand for the fourth wicket with Bethell as Nepal bowlers presented a strong challenge on their part.

## BCB chief in Lahore as ICC, PCB hold talks over India match boycott



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Karachi

Bangladesh Cricket Board president Amin ul Islam has arrived in Lahore ahead of a virtual meeting involving the PCB and ICC, amid efforts to resolve the standoff over Pakistan's proposed boycott of its T20 World Cup match against India.

A former Test cricketer, Amin ul Islam met Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Mohsin Naqvi in Lahore and is expected to be part of the virtual discussions aimed at persuading Pakistan to reconsider its decision not to play India in the World T20 Cup clash scheduled for February 15. Naqvi has not commented much on the instructions from the government to boycott the India match but a reliable source said the situation has changed after the Sri Lankan cricket board sent an email to the PCB, urging them to end the boycott.

ICC CEO, Sanjog Gupta has also been to Colombo to meet with the President of

the Sri Lankan board, Shammi Silva who sent the email to Naqvi to play the India match in the World Cup.

The ICC has already sought an explanation from Pakistan on how the 'Force Majeure' clause can be invoked to justify the team's refusal to play the T20 World Cup match against India after the PCB tried to wriggle out of the situation by putting the onus on its government.

But there is a glimmer of hope now as PCB has approached the ICC for deliberations, as per an ICC Director, who feels that the marquee clash will eventually take place. The ICC is currently engaging with the board in a structured manner to explore possible resolutions, with a view that interest of the game must supersede unilateral action. Pakistan decided to boycott the India match in solidarity with Bangladesh, who were replaced by Scotland after they refused to travel to India for the World cup matches citing security concerns.

## Seifert's fifty carries NZ to 5-wicket win over Afghanistan

G UNNIKRISHNAN  
■ Chennai

Tim Seifert's typically aggressive fifty was the moving force behind New Zealand's five-wicket victory over Afghanistan in a Group D match of the T20 World Cup on Sunday.

Seifert (65, 42b, 7x4, 3x6) showed why he has been nicknamed 'Bam Bam' in Kiwis' circles, helping his side go past the target of 183 with considerable ease. Seifert had an equally single-minded partner in Glenn Phillips (42, 25b) as the third wicket pair added 74 runs in 47 balls to rescue New Zealand from a wobbly 14 for two. The turbulence was the after result of the little passage of magic by spinner



New Zealand's Tim Seifert plays a shot during the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 cricket match between Afghanistan and New Zealand at the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai on Sunday

Mujeeb ur Rahman, who dismissed Finn Allen and Rachin Ravindra off successive balls in the second over. But the Antipodeans clawed back through Seifert, who fetched

his fifty off 39 balls with a six off off-spinner Mohammad Nabi. As the noon moved on, the assistance for spinners from the pitch was reduced to a good extent. Phillips

focused more on Rashid Khan, slamming him for a four and six as New Zealand got a real move-on.

However, Nabi had the last laugh, dismissing Seifert, and Rashid too got his revenge through the wicket of Phillips. Seifert was dropped on 48 by Rashid off his own bowling, and the wicketkeeper batter maximised the let-off. But by then, New Zealand were so close to home and reached there through Daryl Mitchell and Mitchell Santner, who knocked off the remaining 28 runs without much ado. Earlier, seasoned Gulbadin Naib made a free-flowing fifty but Afghanistan had to settle for slightly below-par total of 182 for six. Naib (63, 35 balls) and Sediqullah Atal

(29, 24b) added 79 runs off 51 balls for the third wicket but the general sense was that of labour on a pitch that had a hint of slowness. It reflected in Afghanistan's scoring pattern — steady rather than flashy: 44/2 in Power Play, 77/2 after 10 overs and 130/3 after 15 overs.

The last five overs produced further 52 runs, but ideally the Afghans would have wanted a few more on the board. Opener Rahmanullah Gurbaz (27, 22b) looked in fine fettle, but a slower delivery from pacer Lockie Ferguson disturbed his furniture in the sixth over. In the same over, Ferguson, who used leg-cutters to good effect, jettisoned opener Ibrahim Zadran to peg back Afghanistan. Naib, who

brought up his fifty in 29 balls, played a forceful innings, tonking pacer Jacob Duffy for two sixes and a four as Afghanistan seemed to have found some momentum in the middle overs.

Atal played a good supporting role, but could not force the pace on his own and his stay was curtailed by Duffy. But his dismissal came as a blessing in disguise as Naib and Darwish Rasooli (20, 13b) added 33 in 17 balls as Afghanistan crossed the 150-run mark. However, Naib fell to part-time spin of Rachin Ravindra in the 18th over as Afghanistan could not get a desired death over flourish. Azmatullah Omarzai hit a couple of sixes to push his side past the 180-run mark.

## Team surprised by nature of Wankhede pitch: Axar Patel

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Mumbai

India vice-captain Axar Patel said the team was surprised by the nature of the pitch in its T20 World Cup opener against USA at the usually high-scoring Wankhede Stadium. Despite the batting collapse on a tricky pitch, Axar said the team was confident of putting a competitive total on board.

After put in to bat, India slipped to a dangerous position of 77/6 against the USA but skipper Suryakumar Yadav's 49-ball 84 not out bailed them out, propelling the hosts to a match-winning 161/9.

India restricted USA to 132/8 to win the contest by 29 runs. "The planning is

according to the match situation. Generally, the wicket in Mumbai is flat (and) we took about three overs to determine what would be a good score," Axar told the reporters after the match. "The dressing room atmosphere was like that... The kind of confidence with which we are coming in, we knew even if one batter gets going we would reach around 140-150. The wicket was also behaving (differently)."

"We were surprised because we thought that this is a flat wicket which generally in Mumbai is," he added. Axar added that the dressing room did feel a little pressure given India suffered a batting collapse that too in the opening



match of the T20 World Cup. "Obviously, you feel that because in last (so many) tournaments there has been such an early collapse. Cricket is like this, (but then) it's good that it happened in the first match," he said. "It is important to understand the nature of the wicket and the type of

cricket we have been playing, we were not able to execute the shots. If it happens again, we will have the experience to take it to 160-170."

"You have to change your style looking at the wicket but we were playing attacking cricket only and not just playing defensively or taking

singles or doubles. You have to hit the way the wicket is behaving," Axar said. Axar said the plan was to put a score in the vicinity of 140, adding that in such situations the team ends up getting a total in excess. "We (Suryakumar and I) talked about taking it till the end because we had no batter left. We wanted to stick around for the next 2-3 overs and then accelerate," he said.

"The player that he is, you know what happens when he is in form. After last year, the form he showed in the New Zealand series and is continuing to show it and he knows what his game is, which he showed in a big match today (Saturday), Axar added.

## SOORYAVANSHI HEADLINES U-19 WORLD CUP TEAM OF THE TOURNAMENT



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Dubai

Batting sensation Vaibhav Sooryavanshi was among the three Indians named in the Team of the Tournament for the ICC Under-19 World Cup on Sunday. The 14-year-old Sooryavanshi, who scored a majestic 175 from 80 balls in the final against England and was subsequently crowned Player of the Tournament, is joined by compatriots Kanishk Chouhan and Henil Patel in the 12-member team.

India won the title for a record extending sixth time. Chouhan made consistently valuable contributions with bat and ball, while Patel's 11 wickets included a superb spell of five for 16 against the USA. Runners-up England are also represented by three players, with Thomas Rew named as the captain and wicketkeeper. Rew scored 330 runs at an average of exactly 66, including a match-winning century in the semi-final against Australia.

Manny Lumsden, who was the tournament's top wicket-taker with 16, and Ben Mayes, the competition's leading run-scorer with 444, including 191 against Scotland, join Rew in the team.

## South Africa aim to reverse recent form against Canada



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Ahmedabad

South Africa would need to raise their recent form to challenge for the title as they open their T20 World Cup campaign against Canada, a team short on match practice but looking to make a strong impression, here on Monday.

South Africa have only managed to win 12 out of the 32 games they have played since losing the 2024 T20 World Cup final to India in June 2024.

However, they now do have the emboldened belief of winning a world title, having ended the trophy drought with the World Test Championships triumph last year.

Ryan Rickleton and Tristian Stubbs were not part of the original squad but have rightfully included following injuries to Donovan Ferreria and Tony de Zorzi.

## I wanted to stick to Ranji Trophy line and lengths: Siraj

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Mumbai

India pacer Mohammed Siraj said he was clear about his preparation for the shortest format on his return to T20Is after June 2024, adding that sticking to the line and lengths he bowled in the Ranji Trophy was his plan against the USA in the T20 World Cup opener.

Siraj, who was not part of India's build-up to the World Cup which got underway on Saturday, returned to the squad and the playing eleven to take 3/29 in the hosts' 29-run victory at the Wankhede Stadium.

"The emotions are always there because as a player when you are playing in a



World Cup, the dream is different as a professional as well for the tournament," Siraj told reporters after the match.

"I was coming off the Ranji Trophy, so my line and lengths when we were batting it was not easy to hit the new ball and it was

important to stick to the wicket-to-wicket (length) and if you got wickets, it would be good for the team. So that was the plan and I was able to execute and got the wickets as well!"

Siraj, who came into the squad as a last-minute replacement for an injured

Harshit Rana, said he did not think he would get into the playing XI immediately but the experience of captaining Hyderabad in the Ranji Trophy helped.

"First of all, I did not know I would play. I was happy being called-up but I got to know in the morning that I am playing, so I was a little more excited because I had only arrived yesterday (Friday)," he said. "The way I was playing in the Ranji Trophy, I was captaining (Hyderabad) as well, so I wanted to keep myself calm and I was only thinking about how I can put pressure and attack. Whatever I could think of, I was able to execute. "Of course I watched the videos after

arriving here at 3:00pm. Without any preparation you cannot take the field, it is a World Cup after all." Siraj, who revealed he still has the Cristiano Ronaldo wallpaper on his phone which he had famously shared during the England tour, said he knows how to prepare for the format despite not playing regularly.

"The wallpaper is still the same. You have to be mentally ready a lot, especially when you are playing in a World Cup. I am nearing 10 years of playing for India, so when you are getting the opportunity you do not need that much time," he said. "As I am playing regularly for India, I know how I have to prepare myself for

the format and what mindset to keep. When I went to bed last night, the plan was to use my weapons and I will stick to those (plans) with which I have got success."

Siraj said the wicket was two-paced as India slipped to a precarious 77/6 at one stage in the first half, but the dressing room never felt the pressure of the situation. "Ishan (Kishan) said it was a two-paced wicket and we had lost wickets (at the start). We thought 170 would be a very good score because there was not much dew and we thought taking as many wickets as possible in the powerplay would put the pressure on the opponent," he said.

## We have to do our homework: Shadley

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Mumbai

USA bowler Shadley van Schalkwyk said it is imperative for Associate nation cricketers to do their homework, adding that his side surprised India with their field placements in the T20 World Cup opener here.

Van Schalkwyk returned figures of 4-0-25-4, with his three-wicket burst in the sixth over leaving India



reeling at 46 for four at the end of the powerplay.

## Jaspreet Singh's journey from Phagwara to Italian cricket team

G UNNIKRISHNAN  
■ Chennai

"Chalo! Hum Hindi mein baat karenge (let's talk in Hindi)." One won't get to hear that line often ahead of an interview with an Italian cricketer.

But Jaspreet Singh has neither forgotten the language or connection with his home town Phagwara, Punjab, despite moving to Bergamo 22 years ago as a 10-year-old with his parents. The early days in Italy



were not precisely smooth as his father Tirath Singh and mother Jasvir Kaur had to settle down in an unfamiliar town as factory workers.

"It was a big day for my family when we got the chance to migrate to Italy. But we were a bit anxious too as it was a new country, new language and new culture.

Everything was new for us. But I was thinking about how to play cricket which I used to do as a kid in my town," Jaspreet told media.

For a beginner, the journey to Italy, a cricketing outpost, was tough as the European nation hardly had any proper infrastructure in place.

He enrolled into the local Bergamo Cricket Club, a meagre facility at the best, but also completed a two-year electrician course to assist his father in his works.

However, Jaspreet soon found a way to develop his cricketing skills with some help from the Indian expats whom he met at the local gurudwara.