





# From ‘Udta Punjab’ to ‘Badalta Punjab’: AAP Turns Drug Hotspots Into Drug-Free Zones says Arvind Kejriwal

**CHANDIGARH:** In a step aimed at making Punjab completely drug free, former Delhi Chief Minister and National Convener of Aam Aadmi Party Arvind Kejriwal on Friday announced to take war against drugs at village and street level with active support of people.

Addressing the gathering at Langroya (SBS Nagar) today, the former Delhi Chief Minister said that the state government has cracked the backbone of drugs and now the day is not far when it will be eliminated soon. He said that the Nasha Mukti Yatra will touch every village and town of the state to galvanize people in this war against drugs, so that Punjab can be made completely drug free. Arvind Kejriwal categorically said that the day is not far when due to the strenuous efforts of the state government, Punjab will not only be drug free but also will be a frontrunner state in the country.

The former Delhi Chief Minister congratulated Bhagwant Singh Mann led state government for the resounding success of Yudh Nasheyana Virudh. He said that it is heartening to see that the villages that were hotspots of drugs are now turn-



ing drug free due to concerted efforts of the state government. Arvind Kejriwal said that earlier Bollywood movies were made to highlight the scourge of drugs but now the times have changed and youth of state are excelling in the arena of sports.

Former Delhi Chief Minister said that earlier the Ministers of previous regimes used to patronize drug lords and even sell/ supply the drugs in their government vehicles. However, he said that now drugs even upto quintals are being seized by the Police and strict punitive action is being taken so that it acts a deterrent for others. Arvind Kejriwal said that con-

trary to earlier times when drug lords were shielded by the state, now 10, 000 drug smugglers have been arrested out of which 8500 are big fishes. The former Delhi Chief Minister said that it was the firm resolve of the state government that no one will be allowed to sell drugs and they have been successful in it. He said that the drug smugglers are dreaded criminals but we have taken strict action against them without even bothering about our lives. Arvind Kejriwal said that we may lose our lives in this fight against drugs but we will ensure that drugs are completely wiped out from the state.

The national Convener of

AAP said that the time has come when all of us should come forward and contribute in this war against drugs even if there was a threat on the life of the AAP leaders. He said that properties of the drug smugglers have been confiscated/ destroyed adding that this campaign will be continued in coming times adding that now Yudh Nasheyana Virudh is being transformed into a full scale mass movement against the drugs for which active support of the people is required. Arvind Kejriwal said that the war against drugs will be taken to ground level and interactions will be held in all the around 13000 villages of the state.

The former Delhi Chief Minister said that in order to channelize the unbounded energy of the youth in a positive manner, the state government will construct a stadium in every village of the state. Likewise, he said that 3000 gyms will be constructed in 3000 big villages of the state to promote sports in the state in a big way. Arvind Kejriwal said that the state has already given around 54000 jobs to the youth in the state and now foolproof planning has been made to ensure employment to youth in every village.

# Punjab Police busts ISI controlled narco smuggling module; 85 kg heroin seized



**CHANDIGARH:** In the biggest drug seizure of this year, Punjab Police busted a cross-border ISI-controlled and narco-smuggling module operated by UK-based drug handler Lalli, police said on Friday.

Director General of Police, Gaurav Yadav, said that police have arrested Lalli's India-based operative, Amarjot Singh, alias Jota Sandhu, a resident of Bhittevad village Amritsar district, and recovered 85 kg heroin from his possession.

Amarjot was receiving consignments from Pakistan-based smugglers and supplying drugs across Punjab. His residence served as a ma-

jor stash point for the network, said DGP Yadav.

A First Information Report (FIR) has been registered, and further investigations are ongoing to trace backward and forward linkages.

"We are actively pursuing leads and expect more arrests and recoveries in the coming days," added DGP Yadav.

With the state's ongoing war against drugs 'Yudh Nashian Virudh' entering the 75th day on Thursday, the police conducted cordon and search operations (CASOs) at bus stands across the state.

Special Director General of Police, Law and Order, Arpit

## MP Gurjeet Aujla writes letter to the Prime Minister



JAGMOHAN SINGH  
Amritsar

Post ceasefire announcement between India and Pakistan, MP Gurjeet Singh Aujla has demanded that drug and arms smuggling from across the border should also be considered as a part of terrorism. Efforts should also be made to stop it.

Aujla has written a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, said that drug and arms smuggling from across the border is continuing in the border areas of Amritsar district of Punjab. More than two lakh people have lost their lives so far due to the drug menace spreading in this region. The shocking thing is that more than 90% of the deceased are from the Sikh community, which shows the disproportionate impact of this crisis on the people of Punjab. This is a continuous and deliberate attack on the youth, families and future of our state. He said that the government of the country has announced that terrorism will now be considered a sign of war, so at such a time, smuggling on the border should also come under terrorism. This is no less than a terrorist act, and in every sense, it is an act of war.

## Nearly 6,000 abortion kits seized from a medical representative at Kaithal in Haryana



SATISH HANDA  
Kaithal

A joint team of the health department comprising of food and drug administration (FDA) Kaithal district, Nodal officer of the PNDT (Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques) and Haryana State Narcotics Control Bureau (HSNCB) acting on a tip-off raided a private residential house near Bal Sadan Senior Secondary School in Kaithal on Tuesday morning seized 5,805 Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) kits. In a drive launched by the state health department Haryana Govt Officials to curb increasing illegal sale of MTP kits have Conduct at Least 30 raids in the last three months and registered at least 20 FIRs against MTP kit sellers, said a spokesperson of state health department. Dr Gaurav Punia, Kaithal district nodal officer of the PNDT (Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques) said the joint team of the health department, food and drug administration (FDA), Haryana State Narcotics Control Bureau during raided at a private residence in Kaithal seized the total seized 5,805 MTP kits of value worth Rs 25 lakh of different batches and manufacturers, sealed 5,745 kits were sealed and 60 MTP kits were taken for sampling. Punia said in the last three months, Haryana's health department has conducted over 30 raids at places allegedly involved in the illegal practice of gender detection. He said that this was the largest such haul ever in the state struggling to 'save the unborn girl child'.

# Punjab Govt Provides Compensation to Families Affected by Liquor Tragedy in 48 hours - Dhaliwal

JAGMOHAN SINGH  
Amritsar

Cabinet Minister Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal today distributed cheques of Rs 10 lakh each to the families of those who died after consuming toxic liquor in villages of the Majitha constituency. These Cheques were distributed to the families of the victims, as announced by Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann.



Mr Dhaliwal said that Punjab Police has arrested 16 individuals connected to the case, in-

cluding some from Delhi and Ludhiana. He said that The government is providing free medical treatment to those hospitalized and will grant them financial assistance of Rs 2 lakh each.

Minister has assured justice and strict action against all culprits involved in the tragedy. Cabinet Minister Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal said that "No amount of money can compensate for the loss of a family's breadwin-

ner, but it is the government's responsibility to do whatever possible to support the surviving members." "We will take strict action against all those involved in drug trafficking, including confiscation of their properties."

Jagwinder Pal Singh Jagga Majitha, Majitha constituency in-charge, SDM Mrs. Harnoor Kaur, Assistant Commissioner Khushpreet Singh, Village head of Marrari and other officials also present here.

## Majitha spurious liquor case: kingpin among 10 accused arrested, DSP and SHO suspended for negligence

JAGMOHAN SINGH  
Amritsar

Taking swift action after a tragic loss of lives due to spurious liquor in Majitha in Amritsar, Punjab Police has arrested 10 persons including the kingpin of the racket along with several local distributors in connection with the illicit liquor trade and main suppliers of Methanol — a fatal chemical used in industrial products, said Director General of Police (DGP) Punjab Gaurav Yadav here on Tuesday.

The arrested kingpin of the racket has been identified as Sahib Singh, while, main suppliers of methanol have been identified as Pankaj Kumar alias Sahil and Arvind Kumar, owners of Sahil Chemicals at Sukh Enclave in Ludhiana. Police have also arrested local distributors — identified as Prabhjit Singh and Kulbir Singh; and local sellers — identified as Ninder Kaur, Sahib Singh, Gurjant Singh, Arun alias Kala and Sikander Singh alias Pappu.

DGP said that preliminary investigation has revealed that the Methanol chemical, after being procured online by Kingpin Sahib Singh, was being used for manufacturing spurious liquor. Investigation is underway to uncover the entire modus operandi and to bring all involved



to justice, he said. The DGP informed that DSP Subdivision Majitha Amolak Singh and SHO Police Station Majitha SI Avtar Singh have been suspended for gross negligence in discharging their official duties, which resulted in the fatal incident. Departmental inquiries have been initiated against the delinquents, he added. "We all stand united in grief and in our resolve to ensure justice is served and such tragedies are prevented in the future," reaffirmed DGP Gaurav Yadav. Sharing details of modus operandi, Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Amritsar Rural Maninder Singh said that the investigations have revealed that the local distributor Prabhjeet Singh had received methanol chemical filled in 50 litre jerry can from kingpin Sahib Singh. During questioning, the

latter revealed he has ordered the methanol from a Ludhiana based chemical firm, Sahil Chemicals, via online platform, he said.

The SSP said that the probe has also revealed that another consignment of methanol, ordered by kingpin Sahib Singh, from the Delhi-based firm is also in transition. Excise and Police teams have been dispatched to retrieve and seize the consignment as soon as it arrives, he said, while adding that all the culprits involved in this racket will be arrested. Two separate cases FIR no. 42/25 at Police Station Majitha and FIR no. 16/25 at Police Station Kathunangal in Amritsar Rural have been registered under sections 105 and 103 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), section 61A of the Excise Act and section 3 of the SC/ST Act.

## SGRD Int'l Airport is now ready and open for all commercial/civil, domestic and international flight



JAGMOHAN SINGH  
Amritsar

Residents of Punjab having relatives in abroad heaved a sigh of relief with the announcement that all flights from Shri Guru Ramdas International Airport would resume operation. In a statement to media here today, the Airport Authority in Amritsar stated, "It is intimated to all concerned that Amritsar International Airport is now ready and open for all commercial/civil, domestic and international flight operations since 1018 hrs IST on 12.05.25". However, in a separate statement issued by the Corporate Communications Directorate, AAI stated "Reference notice issued for temporary closure of 32 Airports for civil Aircraft operations till 05:29 hrs of 15 May 2025. It is informed that these Airports are now available for civil Aircraft operations with immediate effect.

## Portraits of Giani Mohan Singh, Dr Manmohan Singh and 3 more Sikh personalities to be displayed in Central Sikh Museum



**\*SGPC striving to build public consensus on mercy petition regarding Balwant Singh Rajoana**  
**\*\*SGPC to provide Rs 5 lakh each to families of 4 Sikhs killed in Poonch**

JAGMOHAN SINGH  
Amritsar

The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has announced that it will soon take a decision regarding the mercy petition filed by Sikh body in the matter of Bhai Balwant Singh Rajoana. During a meeting of the SGPC's Executive Committee (EC), held under the leadership of SGPC President Harjinder Singh Dhani, a serious discussion was held on a three-page letter written by Rajoana to the SGPC President. The SGPC affirmed its commitment to resolving this significant community issue at the earliest. Speaking to the media after the meeting, Dhani stated that Rajoana had written a detailed letter to the SGPC in which he highlighted the discrimination faced by Sikhs at the hands of governments. The letter also mentions Rajoana's request for the SGPC to withdraw the mercy petition filed on his behalf. Calling it a matter of com-

munity's concern, Dhani said the SGPC is making efforts to build a consensus by holding consultations with Panthic representative bodies, Nihung Singh groups, and Sikh sampradas. Two meetings have already taken place, and another meeting is scheduled for May 17 in Chandigarh with Sikh judges and lawyers. After that, a representative Panthic gathering will be convened, and a decision will be made in line with Panthic sentiment.

Sharing details of other decisions made during the meeting, Dhani said the SGPC has decided to give Rs 5 lakh aid to the families of the four Sikhs killed recently in an attack in Poonch, Jammu amid India Pakistan tensions. He said this is an extremely painful time for the bereaved families, and the SGPC will extend all possible help to them.

Additionally, he informed that the SGPC EC approved the display of portraits of Giani Mohan Singh (ex-head granthi of Sachkhand Sri Harmandir Sahib), former Prime Minister of India Dr. Manmohan Singh, Baba Inderjit Singh Raqbewale, Baba Bishan Singh (Tarna Dal, Baba Bakala), and SGPC member Randhir Singh Cheema at the Central Sikh Museum.

## No one has caused as much harm to the country as Indira Gandhi did during her tenure: Anil Vij



PARVESH HANDA  
Chandigarh

Haryana's Energy, Transport and Labour Minister, Anil Vij strongly criticized the Congress party, stating that "No one has harmed the country as much as Indira Gandhi did during her time in power." Responding to the opposition's demand for a special session post-ceasefire, he said that "If there are secret matters, they cannot be disclosed there." Regarding the meeting between the DGMOs (Director Generals of Military Operations) of India and Pakistan, he said that "Only a ceasefire has taken place, the war has not ended." Vij was interacting with Media persons today. Commenting on the posters put up by Congress, Anil Vij reiterated that "No one caused more harm to the country than Indira Gandhi during her prime ministership. Never mind the Emergency she imposed, but she can never be forgiven for the Shimla Agreement."

## Hooch tragedy in Punjab: Death toll rises to 27

JAGMOHAN SINGH  
Amritsar

The death toll in the hooch tragedy here climbed to 27, with four more people dying in the Majitha area, police said on Wednesday.

The District Health Department said four more deceased hailed from village Bhangwan village, Bhagali Kalan and Gallowali Kullian.

Four more people have died in Majitha Assembly constituency after drinking spurious liquor, taking the death toll to 27, a official said.

Amritsar District administration also confirmed the death toll has reached 27.

Those who died after allegedly drinking spurious liquor in Majitha were mostly daily wagers.

The deaths were reported in Bhangali, Patalpuri, Marari Kalan, Talwandi Khumman, Karnala, Bhangwan and Tharawal villages, officials said.

Police have already arrested 16 people, including the alleged kingpin, in the incident



and two more accused yet to be arrested, said DIG Border Range Satinder Singh.

Deputy Superintendent of Police (Majitha) Amolak Singh and Station House Officer of Majitha police station Avtar Singh for negligence, police said. Two officers of the excise department have also been suspended.

A police probe revealed that

methanol — a chemical used in industrial products — was procured in bulk online to prepare the toxic brew.

Methanol is a light, colourless organic chemical compound which is poisonous when ingested and is illegally added to alcoholic beverages as a cheaper alternative to ethanol, which is the normal consumable alcohol.

# Hooch tragedy: Families still inconsolable

JAGMOHAN SINGH  
Amritsar

The families who have lost their members due to turbulent sale of illegal spurious liquor in the Majitha Assembly constituency still inconsolable as death toll rose to 23.

Tears rolled down from the eyes of Manjit Kaur who lost her brother and said her brother Joginder Singh succumbed to spurious liquor courtesy to the police station concerned which utterly failed to curb their illegal activities in the Majitha belt. "My brother who was already struggling hard to get two square meals had lost his wife to metastasis cells in her chest". Now after his demise to get two square meals seems difficult un-

less grant come from the Punjab Government as announced by the Chief Minister on Tuesday, added she. Almost all the 23 families who lost their family members due to consumption of spurious liquor were living in the temporary mud houses even though many don't have regular electric connections. All belonged to the labor class working at Brick Kiln in the nearby villages. Pall of gloom descended in the family of Ramandeep Singh 38 of Bhangali Kalan village who lost his life to spurious liquor was survived by his wife and two children. His wife slipped into deep shock and was under treatment after the demise of her husband.

The role of lady Amritsar Deputy Commissioner Mrs. Sakshi



Sahwney came into limelight as she herself while ignoring her status hugged the mothers who had lost their sons. She herself wiped the tears with her own dupatta besides offering a glass of water to drink. She even squatted on the mud with the old ladies

consoling them and spent a long time with them. She was the lady who was proved down to earth as pacified all the mothers with her personal touch before the arrival of the chief minister and by the time the chief minister reached the village she managed to cool

down the inconsolable mothers and wives.

Many IPS and PCS officers who were present on the spot but she (DC) took the lead while hugging the old ladies as tears were rolling down their cheeks. All the officers were looking at her but nobody came forward to copy her act. All the ladies with writ large anger on their faces were seen cooled down when Sakhshi Sahwney mixed up with them like an ordinary person even arranged food and tea for them. She even kept her security guards at distance as none of the security guards was seen nearer to her when mingling with ladies and children in the Majitha belt as a reason all were silent when CM was addressing the victim families.





# India Exposes Pakistan’s S-400 Lies with One Picture from Adampur

**ADAMPUR:** Pakistan claimed it destroyed India’s premier airbase in Adampur. It also claimed that its China-made JF-17 jets wiped out the Russian-origin S-400 missile defence system stationed there. It claimed it took out fighter jets, radar stations, and killed 60 Indian soldiers.

But one image from this morning has silenced all of it. A photo of Prime Minister Narendra Modi standing at Adampur Air Force Station — saluting soldiers with a fully operational S-400 system clearly visible behind him — came as India’s most direct rebuttal to Pakistan’s disinformation campaign.

“This isn’t just a picture. It’s a message. A takedown. A fact check Pakistan wasn’t prepared for,” said sources.

Sources added that Islamabad’s claims were based on



morphed satellite imagery. The truth is that Adampur played a key role last week in intercepting waves of missiles and drones fired by Pakistan in retaliation for Operation Sindoor — India’s tri-service strike against terrorist bases across Pakistan and Pakistani Occupied Kashmir (PoK).

“Earlier this morning, I went to Air Force Station Adampur

and met our brave air warriors and soldiers. It was a very special experience to be with those who epitomise courage, determination and fearlessness,” PM Modi posted on X.

Officials said this is likely the first time India has publicly released a photograph showing its S-400 system, widely regarded as one of the most advanced

missile defence platforms in the world. In last week’s 100-hour escalation, Pakistan targeted multiple military installations across Punjab, Jammu & Kashmir, Rajasthan, and Gujarat. It also launched attacks on civilian areas in Ferozepur, Punjab. Indian forces, however, reported minimal damage.

Meanwhile, India backed its own precision strikes with evidence — satellite visuals confirming hits on at least 11 Pakistani military installations, including the Nur Khan airbase in Rawalpindi, just 10 km from Pakistan’s army headquarters.

As for Pakistan’s claims? Government sources had one word: “Lies.” And the image from Adampur — the Prime Minister saluting the soldiers, the S-400 standing tall in the background — says everything else.

## PM Modi expresses pride and gratitude to scientists, remembers Pokhran tests



**NEW DELHI:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday remembered the 1998 Pokhran nuclear tests, calling them a landmark event in India’s growth trajectory, expressing pride and gratitude towards the Indian scientific community on National Technology Day.

Taking to the social media platform X, PM Modi wrote in a post, “Best wishes on National Technology Day! This is a day to express pride and gratitude to our scientists and remember the 1998 Pokhran tests. They were a landmark event in our nation’s growth trajectory, especially in our quest towards self-reliance.”

The Prime Minister said that India is emerging as a global leader in the field of technology and reaffirmed the government’s commitment to further it. “Powered by our people, India is emerging as a global leader in different aspects of technology, be it space, AI, digital innovation, green technology and more. We reaffirm our commitment to empowering future generations through science and research. May technology uplift humanity, secure our nation and drive futuristic growth.”

National Technology Day is observed every year on May 11 to commemorate the successful nuclear tests at Pokhran in 1998, a historic moment that established India as a nuclear power and showcased its scientific capabilities to the world. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh also extended his wishes and lauded the contributions of Indian scientists. In his post on X, he stated, “On National Technology Day, India salutes the scientists, engineers and technicians who contribute by developing new technologies for bringing positive change in our lives. We proudly recall the exceptional efforts of our scientists that led to the successful Pokhran tests in 1998. It was a defining moment in India’s history.”

## J&K CM Omar Abdullah promises financial relief for tourism sector

**SRINAGAR:** Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah has assured tourism stakeholders that he will seek financial support and loan relief from the Centre to help revive the region’s struggling tourism sector following the recent terrorist attack in Pahalgam that killed 26 people, most of them tourists.

At a high-level meeting with tourism industry representatives, Abdullah pledged to raise the matter with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. “We will approach this in a structured and result-oriented manner,” he said.

Senior officials including Advisor to the Chief Minister Nasir Aslam Wani, Additional Chief Secretary Dheeraj Gupta, Divisional Commissioner Kashmir Vijay Kumar Bidhuri,



IGP Kashmir VK Birdi, Commissioner Secretary Tourism Yasha Mudgal, and Director of Tourism Raja Yaqoob were also present.

“I understand the challenges many of you are grappling with, be it managing establishments, retaining employees, or dealing with fixed overheads. Many among you are under

pressure due to bank loans,” Abdullah told the gathering. He particularly highlighted the concerns of small-scale entrepreneurs who had recently taken loans for tourist vehicles or home-based guest accommodations.

“In this regard, I plan to engage with the Tourism Department and relevant authorities

## Congress flays BJP for ‘politicising’ Operation Sindoor

**NEW DELHI:** The Congress has criticised the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) accusing it of “politicising” Operation Sindoor for its own benefit. The party has already planned nationwide rallies to demand answers from the Prime Minister, particularly on US President Donald Trump’s claims of mediating a ceasefire between India and Pakistan and the alleged “suspension of the operation”.

Speaking at a press conference, senior Congress leaders, including Jairam Ramesh and Pawan Khara, voiced their concerns over the “BJP’s attempt to claim credit for a military action that rightfully belongs to the armed forces and the country as a whole”.

The Congress leadership declared its intent to hold ‘Jai Hind’ rallies across different states, with LoP in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi expected to lead the movement and address the media later in the week.



Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, K.C. Venugopal, Sachin Pilot, and other leaders attended the meeting, resulting in a resolution reaffirming the party’s commitment to unity in the wake of the Pahalgam terror attack.

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge and party MP Rahul Gandhi extended full support to the government and the armed forces.

Congress leaders have also sought a special Parliamentary session to discuss the security situation and reiterate the historic 1994 resolution on Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

They questioned why Trump made an unprecedented “ceasefire announcement”, while the Prime Minister remained silent.

Further raising concerns, Ramesh pointed to reports that the Prime Minister would meet only NDA chief ministers on May 25, excluding those from opposition-led states. He condemned what he described as the BJP’s strategy of “maximum silence on real issues and maximum politicisation”.

The Congress has repeatedly demanded an all-party meeting chaired by the Prime Minister to clarify India’s stance on external involvement in its security affairs. Despite their calls for unity, they lamented the Prime Minister’s continued reluctance to engage. The party remains firm in its stance against the “politicisation of national security”, demanding transparency and collective resolve.

## EAM Jaishankar’s security cover upgraded amid India-Pak tensions



**NEW DELHI:** The security detail of External Affairs Minister (EAM), S. Jaishankar has been further strengthened with the deployment of two additional bullet-resistant vehicles to his convoy, official sources confirmed on Wednesday.

The move follows a recent review of his ‘Z’ category protection, undertaken by central Intelligence agencies in light of heightened tensions in the region. This enhancement comes in the wake of the recent India-Pakistan military escalation and New Delhi’s firm diplomatic response to Islamabad following the April 22 terrorist attack in Pahalgam, which claimed the lives of 26 people. Intelligence agencies re-evaluated EAM Jaishankar’s threat perception and recommended bolstering his security convoy. Seventy-year-old Jaishankar has been at the forefront of India’s international engagement in the aftermath of the crisis.

As the External Affairs Minister, he has led discussions with several global leaders and foreign ministers regarding ‘Operation Sindoor’, India’s military response to the Pahalgam attack. His central role in shaping India’s diplomatic strategy amid regional instability has placed him under increased security focus. This latest upgrade builds on a previous enhancement in October 2024, when Jaishankar’s security cover was raised from the ‘Y’ category to ‘Z’ category, the second-highest tier in the central VIP protection system. The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), through its VIP security unit, is tasked with providing armed cover to individuals under this list.

Currently, the CRPF secures around 200 high-profile people, including Union Home Minister Amit Shah and prominent Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra. The VIP security categories under the central list include Z-plus, Z, Y-plus, Y, and X, with Z-plus being the most elite tier.

## BJP to launch nationwide campaign highlighting success of ‘OP Sindoor’

**NEW DELHI:** The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will launch a nationwide campaign to showcase the success of ‘Operation Sindoor’, the Indian military strikes carried out in response to the terrorist attack in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir.

The decision was taken during a high-level meeting chaired by BJP National President J.P. Nadda in New Delhi on Monday.

Senior party leaders and office-bearers attended the meeting, where strategies were discussed to communicate the operation’s achievements to the public and counter misinformation being circulated across the country.

As part of the outreach, BJP workers will organise Tiranga Yatras in various parts of the country. These events will see the participation of Union ministers, Members of Parliament, elected representatives, and party functionaries at all levels.

The yatras are aimed at invoking national pride, honouring the armed forces, and reinforcing public support for the government’s decisive actions on national security.

Sources within the party said the campaign will focus on underlining the bravery of the Indian



armed forces and the government’s unwavering commitment to protecting the nation.

The BJP also plans to address the “misleading narratives” surrounding the operation and provide factual details about the mission and its objectives.

‘Operation Sindoor’ was launched by the Indian government on May 7, following the brutal massacre of tourists by terrorists in Pahalgam on April 22. The operation targeted nine terror camps located in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir, which were identified based on Intelligence inputs.

The government said the precision strikes led to the elimination of over 100 terrorists. Officials described the mission as “measured, non-escalatory, proportionate and responsible,” emphasising that it was carried out in line with India’s policy of zero tolerance towards terrorism.

## J&K CM Omar Abdullah visits shelling-hit Uri, assures relief

**SRINAGAR:** Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on May 14 visited shelling-affected areas in Uri and assured government help to rebuild damaged homes.

“The pain of my people is deeply personal,” he said.

CM Omar Abdullah, accompanied by his advisor Nasir Aslam Wani and local officials, visited Salamabad, Lagama, Bandi, and Gingal in north Kashmir’s Baramulla district. Interacting with affected families, he said, “It is our responsibility to provide you with help from the government so that your houses are rebuilt.”

Chief Minister promised to raise the demand for individual bunkers with the Centre. “Wherever I went, be that in Jammu or Kashmir, there is a demand for more bunkers... we will immediately provide relief to the people first and then take up the issue,” he said.



On X, Abdullah posted, “This land has endured so much, from the impact of the 2005 earthquake to the pain of cross-border shelling. Yet, its people rise every time, with courage in their hearts and resilience in their spirit.”

Referring to the intensity of the recent shelling, he said, “There was ruthless shelling on our civilian areas for 2-3 days.

It seemed that there was a deliberate attempt from across to inflict maximum harm on the civilians.”

J&K Chief Minister also met the family of Nargis Begum, who died in the shelling. “No words can express the depth of their grief or the magnitude of this tragedy. We stand with them in this hour of grief,” he wrote on X.

## Rajnath Singh Raises Concern over Security of Pakistan’s Nuclear Weapons, Calls for Int’l Oversight



**MANPREET SINGH Srinagar**

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday expressed serious concern over the security of Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal while speaking in Srinagar. He stated that a country like Pakistan, which he described as “irresponsible and rogue,” possessing nuclear weapons is a matter of grave danger for the entire world. He called for international monitoring of Pakistan’s nuclear assets by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

“India has never been in favor of war, but if our sovereignty is attacked, we will not hesitate to respond,” Singh said. “Pakistan’s nuclear weapons are not safe. The entire world must keep an eye on the weapons held by such a nation.” He further accused Pakistan of sheltering terrorists and allowing its soil to be used for anti-India activities, which he said is completely unacceptable. The Defence Minister also praised the recently concluded ‘Operation Sindoor’, calling it India’s biggest counter-terrorism action to date. He highlighted how terrorists had targeted innocent civilians in Pahalgam based on their religion, and the Indian forces responded with decisive action to eliminate the threat. Singh described this as a reflection of “Indian Dharma” — a commitment to justice and protection of the innocent.

“For the past 35–40 years, India has been facing cross-border terrorism. But now we have shown the world that India will go to any extent to eliminate terrorism,” he declared. He urged Pakistan to stop giving shelter to terrorist organizations and to ensure its land is not used for anti-India operations.

Rajnath Singh visited Jammu & Kashmir to review the security situation and the combat readiness of the armed forces.

## BSF Jawan repatriated to India

**JAGMOHAN SINGH Amritsar**



The family of a BSF jawan heaved sigh of relief when he was repatriated to India through the land transit route of Attari Wagah border of Indo-Pak on May 14.

In a statement issued here today by the BSF stating “Today BSF Jawan Purnam Kumar Shaw, who had been in the custody of Pakistan Rangers since 23 April 2025, was handed over to India at about 1030 hours through the Joint

peacefully and in accordance with established protocols”.

## Congress condemns Bihar govt attempt to stop Rahul Gandhi



**KAVITA SHARMA New Delhi**

The Congress party has condemned the JDU-BJP government in Bihar for trying to stop and prevent Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi from interacting with the Dalit, OBC, deprived and marginalised students.

Addressing a press conference at the AICC office here today, Chairman of the OBC department Anil Jaithind

and AICC Communication Coordinator for Bihar Ritu Choudhary asked whether there was an Emergency in Bihar for trying to stop and prevent Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha cannot interact with the students.

Anil Jaithind said that the BJP and the JDU were scared of Rahul Gandhi as what he promises, he gets delivered. He pointed out that Gandhi had said in the Parliament that he would ensure that the caste census is carried out during

the current tenure of the Lok Sabha, and it has already been announced.

The OBC department Chairman accused the Modi government of sitting over the implementation of the Article 15(5) of the Constitution that provides for reservations in the private educational institutions.

Maintaining that social justice was a transformative idea, he said, its time had come and nobody can stop it. He said, after a long time, the Dalits, the Backward Classes and Extremely Backward Classes have got a leader and voice in Rahul Gandhi.

Speaking on the occasion, Ritu Choudhary asked why Modi government and Nitish government feel scared whenever Rahul Gandhi speaks of the deprived and downtrodden people.

Condemning the attempts by the Bihar government to stop Rahul Gandhi from interacting with the marginalised students, she remarked, Nitish had surrendered his conscience to the BJP.

## PM Modi’s speech is deeply disappointing, says Congress

**KAVITA SHARMA New Delhi**

The Congress party said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had deeply disappointed the nation with his speech last evening as he did not clarify so many things for which the country was waiting for the answers.

The party reiterated that there was shock and surprise across the country over the sudden ceasefire and that too announced by the US President.

“The government has lost both, the moral courage and moral authority”, senior party leader and former Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot remarked while addressing a press conference at the AICC office here today.

Observing that the US President’s statements were disturbing and dangerous, he took strong objection to his suggesting mediation in solving the Kashmir issue. He asked whether Trump was making those remarks on his own or he had the consent of the government of India. He pointed out,



Trump had started equating India with Pakistan.

He observed that the US has always tried to pressurise India, pointing out how it threatened India during 1971 War by deploying the Seventh Naval Fleet in the Bay of Bengal. He pointed out, despite that the then Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi went ahead and broke Pakistan into two parts, besides forcing 93,000 Pakistani soldiers to surrender.

Asserting that the Prime Minister needs to explain and clarify before the nation that when everything was going so

well and our defence forces had the upper hand, making the Pakistani forces bite the dust, what happened all of a sudden that ceasefire was announced so spontaneously. He observed that a golden opportunity to settle the issue of terrorism once and for all was lost.

Gehlot strongly disapproved of Trump speaking just ahead of the Prime Minister’s address to the nation and saying that the US threatened both the countries that in case they do not go for ceasefire, trade will be stopped.

He observed that the Prime

Minister should have responded and clarified the statements made by Trump. He said, our government’s silence had further emboldened Trump and he was making statements one after another to the extent of involving himself in the Kashmir issue, which is very dangerous. He made it categorically clear that no third-party mediation, not even of the United Nations, is acceptable.

Observing that a golden opportunity to completely dismantle the terror infrastructure in Pakistan was lost, Gehlot expressed concern that there was no guarantee that Pakistan will not resort to acts of terror like those in Pahalgam and Pulwama again.

He maintained that if the ceasefire had to be reached, it should have been initiated at the level of the Prime Minister or the External Affairs Minister, not by a third party. He said, there should have been concrete guarantees ensuring that in future, Pakistan and its army will not allow terrorist incidents against India.

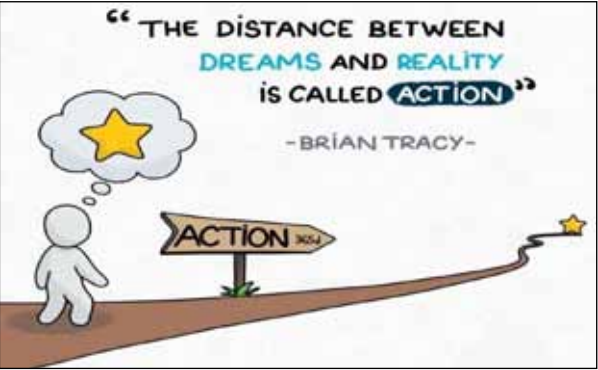




# Trade with the UK, but on India’s terms

The India–UK Free Trade Agreement (FTA) is a landmark development in India’s trade diplomacy. At a time when global trade is increasingly fragmented, this deal brings clarity and opportunity. Most notable is the duty-free access granted to 99% of Indian exports to the UK — a major boost for sectors like engineering, apparel, and gems and jewellery. Industry optimism is high, and projections suggest bilateral trade could double to \$120 billion by 2030. The FTA offers several gains. Engineering exports may nearly double within five years. Social security exemptions for Indian workers in the UK will ease hiring costs, while improved mobility for professionals and investors could help revive India’s flagging foreign direct investment. For a government often critical of earlier FTAs, this agreement presents a confident, forward-looking alternative. Yet caution is essential. India has agreed to eliminate tariffs on 90% of its imports from the UK, 85% of which will become zero-rated within ten years. That includes luxury goods such as whisky and gin — likely to benefit British exporters more than Indian consumers. Indian farmers, already operating on thin margins, are justifiably concerned about reduced duties on lamb, salmon and other imports. Their interests must not be overlooked. More broadly, this deal is likely to serve as a template for future agreements with the EU and the US — both much larger trading partners. The stakes will be higher, and India must learn from its recent trade experience. FTAs with the UAE and Australia have led to widening trade deficits and limited export gains. The India–UK FTA opens doors. But to ensure lasting benefit, India must approach future deals with clarity, strategy and a firm commitment to support its domestic producers — especially its farmers and manufacturers. The time for trade-offs without safeguards must end.

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**DN GUPTA** SAYS GLOBAL SHIFTS DEMAND FOCUS ON ENGINEERING, EDUCATION, INNOVATION



Global manufacturing and trade is shifting rapidly toward innovation-driven, medium-high- and high-tech products. It is driven by advanced research and development (R&D), technological sophistication, high skills and a complex network of supply chains. In addition, there are the current high tariffs introduced by the United States. It is likely to redefine the manufacturing sector. Irrespective of whether there are tariffs or not, the fundamentals need to be set right. This demands policies that address challenges squarely.

India has a challenge at hand. Realising the criticality of manufacturing in the economy, the country has been making consistent efforts since the economic reforms in 1991 together with renewed efforts using flagship programmes such as the National Manufacturing Competitiveness Programme (NMCP) in 2005 and Make in India in 2014. Multiple initiatives have provided impetus to the electronics, pharmaceuticals and automobile sectors.

A close examination of basic indicators such as per capita value added in manufacturing and productivity provide useful pointers. For India, in 2023, the per capita value added has been \$0.32 K (K: 1000) and productivity stands at \$8.9 K, while the same figures are \$2 K and \$32 K, respectively, for the world average, which are significantly high in comparison, as in World Bank data on manufacturing. The total value added for India stands at \$461 billion, while that for China is \$4,658 billion and the U.S. is \$2,497 billion. On productivity linked to R&D and innovation, developed economies lead significantly (\$159 K for the U.S., \$103 K for Germany); Asian countries such as Taiwan (\$79 K), Malaysia (\$36 K), and China (\$21 K) have moved ahead. Thus, it requires raising per capita value addition to expand and focus on enhancing productivity to be competitive.

**New approach to technical education**  
The world over, manufacturing has lever-

# Innovate, build and compete



aged R&D, skill development, and progressive university education. In India, engineering educational institutions have played an important role. Still, in response to emerging needs, there is a need to institute changes to advance innovation. There is a need to look at basic features such as how students are selected for admission, which laboratories and workshops are set up in departments, and which skills for medium- and high-tech manufacturing processes are imparted.

It should begin with the entrance examination. There is a need to move beyond the notion of how tough an entrance examination is. It should encourage interest in fundamental knowledge, creativity and problem-solving skills. During graduation, an over-reliance on heavy academic inputs, a culture of notes, and a focus on the 10-point grade take up most of the time and the energy of students, which should be also spent on creative problem solving. At the end of graduation, they are good at solving problems quickly that have defined contours or proven concepts. But there is also the need for an ability to visualise bigger engineering problems and undertake innovation, which demand higher-order thinking and research skills. The focus should be on the application

of science and technology in solving industry problems. There should be more weightage (50%) given to practical work. This demands the development of advanced laboratories and workshops, which include tool rooms to impart skills for different manufacturing processes and product design and development. Assembly lines for select products should be set up for R&D.

**Building core engineering**  
Semiconductor, information technology (IT), and artificial intelligence (AI) are of strategic importance. These are needed on the top of engineering systems. However, let us not get bogged down with AI and IT. These are imperative, but engineering is much bigger. Core engineering is a must. We need strong engineering skills in core streams such as civil, mechanical, automobile, production, electrical, electronics, chemical, metallurgy, textiles, and biotechnology.

There is a need in the country to have robust engineering units to build equipment and machinery first and then a focus on technical and management capabilities to develop a variety of products, infrastructure, and transportation systems at a much higher

speed for different terrain – the plains, mountains, deserts, and oceans. It will necessitate big engineering and R&D infrastructure with a sophisticated supply chain.

**Ecosystem for innovation**  
The success of the Silicon Valley in the U.S. is attributed to the innovation ecosystem, marked by high-skilled manpower and R&D infrastructure. Many East Asian countries have benefited from policies for the creation of an innovation system and industrial infrastructure. If one looks at the success of startups in the country, it is due to the existing ecosystem, mainly in the service sector. Similarly, an industrial ecosystem needs to be created for manufacturing, which will need more capital and entail a multi-pronged systemic approach.

State-specific manufacturing parks should be set up with state-of-the-art facilities to plug and play, or quick ways to set up new units. For developing prototypes, in-house capabilities should be created within parks. The facilities for design software, measurement instruments, performance testing and product certification should be provided. Engineering institutes should focus on enhancing R&D and aligning the curriculum with skill development and innovation. Manufacturing startups should be encouraged around engineering infrastructure and labs.

To transform manufacturing, the strategy should include, first, developing advanced research labs and, second, building industrial infrastructure. This will call for raising R&D expenditure from current 0.65% of GDP to 2%, besides additional expenditure of 1% of GDP for industrial infrastructure. Finally, it necessitates a sound policy system to design innovative policies in an evolving global environment.

*D.N. Gupta is a former IAS officer and currently Adjunct Professor, National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), Bengaluru. Views are personal.*



**LISA MARIAM VARKEY** EXPLAINS WHY INDIA MUST STRENGTHEN POLICIES TO MANAGE WATER WISELY

# A death that spotlights irrigation problems



On March 13, 2025, Kailash Arjun Nagare, a 2020 Young Farmer Award recipient, from Maharashtra, died by suicide, citing unaddressed irrigation demands. While India reports the highest water usage in agriculture globally, access to water for irrigation remains a contentious issue. Nagare’s death points towards the inequity in distribution, with social inequalities, water governance mechanisms, and policies determining the contours of allocation. The problem of water scarcity in India is thus multifaceted, indicating the co-existence of actual physical shortage with economic scarcity due to inequitable access and management.

The agricultural sector accounts for almost 80% of the water withdrawal in India. Every year, 688 billion cubic metres of water is consumed by the farm sector, the highest in the world. Irrigation is an inevitable input for increasing agricultural production. However, its expansion has been highly untenable. The majority of the area under water-guzzling crops such as rice, wheat, and sugarcane is currently in the water-scarce north-west and sub-tropical belts of the country. According to a study published in Nature Water (2024), India alone accounted for 36% of global unsustainable irrigation expansion that happened between 2000 and 2015, with environmental and socio-economic implications.

Even as irrigation has been proven to drive economic prosperity, various studies have reported that uneven progress has reinforced existing inequalities, between and within



States. Considering that ground water is the dominant water source for irrigation in India, property rights, energy pricing policy, and the existence of well-functioning water markets have remained critical in determining water access to farms. Accordingly, while inequity has declined in canal, tank, and well irrigated systems, it has increased in the tube well irrigated system. Marginalised groups, especially women, are also disproportionately affected by increasing deprivation and decline of water tables with climate change intensifying disparities.

The environmental and financial consequences of aggressive groundwater extraction have also been profound. Due to over extraction, almost 17% of India’s groundwater assessment units are deemed ‘over-exploited’ while 3.9% are in a ‘critical’ state. Intensive pumping has also resulted in massive energy consumption resulting in excessive carbon emissions. As per the latest data, 45.3–62.3

MMT of annual carbon emissions is attributed to groundwater irrigation, which constitutes 8-11% of India’s total carbon emissions.

The operating efficiency and water use efficiency has also remained sub-optimal in Indian agriculture. While irrigation systems in India report an operating efficiency of 38%, in developed countries it is 55%. Coupled with misaligned cropping patterns and inefficient water use practices, irrigation water productivity (IWP) has also remained low in the major irrigation belts of the country. For example, Punjab, which claims the highest land productivity in rice, has one of the lowest IWPs for the crop. Similarly, in sugar cane, Tamil Nadu records the highest land productivity with IWP being dismally low. Besides water wastage, the adoption of non-optimal water management practices have been causing other negative externalities such as high GHG emissions as well. For example, with continuous flooding of rice as the major water management practice, paddy rice is the biggest contributor to global cropland emissions.

Considering the over-exploitation of ground water resources, impending water scarcity and environmental externalities, further attempts to improve the irrigation system of the country should be built on efficient water-saving technologies, improved irrigation efficiency, and alternative sources of irrigation.

**The way forward**  
While change in cropping patterns and ground water usage regulations through policy

decisions should also be aimed at in the medium and long term, advancing irrigation technologies and practices based on sustainable intensification should be prioritised. Better irrigation efficiency may be aimed through the improvement of conveyance and application efficiency of irrigation systems. In geographies where water withdrawals and GHG emissions have been highest, alternative water management technologies such as alternate wetting and drying, which can result in significant water saving and reduced emissions, may be popularised. Similarly, micro-irrigation systems such as drip irrigation, with minimal application losses, may be popularised in crops such as sugar cane. Promoting solar-powered irrigation and/or bundling solar pumps with micro-irrigation systems is another promising option. However, with the marginal cost of pumping being zero, this should not result in increased groundwater depletion and should be regulated through initiatives such as assured grid connection offering economic incentives for efficient utilisation. Rain water harvesting structures and tail water storage pits may be popularised as supplementary irrigation sources. Since traditional supply-based mechanisms do not necessarily promote equitable distribution of irrigation water, initiating demand-driven allocation systems run by participatory irrigation management structures should be widely promoted.

*Lisa Mariam Varkey, Senior specialist, Socio-Economics, International Rice Research Institute. Views are personal.*



## BOOKS: REVIEW

# An elegant tale of memory, morality, and human bonds

Abdulrazak Gurnah’s first novel since winning the Nobel Prize in 2021, *Theft*, confirms his place among the great literary chroniclers of displacement, memory, and fractured relationships. Set against the backdrop of Zanzibar and Dar es Salaam in the 1990s, the novel follows three young people—Karim, Badar, and Fauzia—as they navigate family, education, loyalty, and love in a society marked by lingering colonial hierarchies and shifting social norms.

Gurnah’s great strength has always been his ability to create layered emotional landscapes. In *Theft*, he crafts a fictional world that is both intimate and expansive. It is a story where lives are shaped not only by individual choices but by the cruelty and kindness of others. At the heart of this novel is a complex moral terrain, where causality is never linear, and

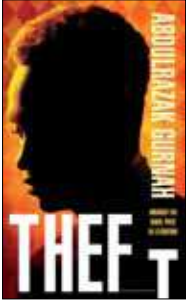
characters’ motivations are revealed gradually—often with great poignancy.

Karim is the centre of gravity for much of the novel. Reeling from his parents’ divorce, he is raised with care by his half-brother Ali, sister-in-law Jalila, and stepfather Haji. His life becomes entwined with that of Badar, a servant boy who has been raised without knowledge of his biological parents and is now working in the household of Haji’s father. Their friendship—tentative at first—blossoms into a bond marked by quiet acts of generosity and protection. Gurnah excels in portraying these understated dynamics of grace and obligation.

What makes the novel quietly radical is its commitment to exposing the complexities of kindness. When Badar is falsely accused of theft, it is Karim who defends him and later offers him not just shel-

ter, but dignity. But Gurnah is too honest a writer to settle for idealism. As the novel progresses, the pedestal Karim is placed on begins to wobble. His eventual outburst—bitter, surprising, and deeply revealing—casts doubt on the very foundations of his character. It is a bold narrative turn that upends reader assumptions and deepens the emotional resonance of the story.

Fauzia, the third voice in this triangle, is more than a narrative hinge between Karim and Badar. She is rendered with quiet brilliance as a woman of intellect and restraint, haunted by the fear of passing on a childhood illness. Her courtship with Karim begins with warmth and mutual admiration, but their marriage falters under the weight of unspoken fears and unmet expectations. The shift in tone—from breezy to bruising—is handled with subtlety, reflecting the emotional realism



*Theft* by Abdulrazak Gurnah: Bloomsbury, 251 pages; Rs. 699.

that Gurnah is known for.

What elevates *Theft* is its refusal to offer tidy moral lessons or sentimental conclusions. While the novel touches on themes of betrayal, sacrifice, and belonging, it resists the impulse to explain or resolve them too neatly. Even the romantic threads are handled with restraint. Badar harbours feelings for Fauzia, but his sense of loyalty to Karim prevails. Karim, meanwhile, finds himself drawn to another woman, Jerry, who enters the narrative through Badar’s workplace, adding another layer of quiet tension.

Gurnah’s command of structure and atmosphere is impeccable. His depiction of Zanzibar and Dar es Salaam is rich but never indulgent. Every setting

serves the emotional and social architecture of the novel—be it the familial chaos of Karim’s home, the rigid class structures in Uncle Othman’s household, or the subtle encroachments of capitalism on everyday life.

This novel is also a study in social commentary, delicately embedded in character-driven drama. Gurnah interrogates gender roles, social mobility, and the lingering scars of colonialism without ever stepping outside the story’s emotional arc. He celebrates women’s resilience and ambition but does not idealise them. His portraits are nuanced and real, as are the men in the novel—some noble, others flawed, most somewhere in between.

*Theft* is a novel of rare beauty and depth. It is about what is taken—childhoods, opportunities, trust—and what is quietly returned in the form of kindness, forgiveness, or love. In an age of spectacle, Gurnah reminds us of the quiet drama of ordinary lives, and of fiction’s power to illuminate them. This is a story to be savoured slowly, with empathy, and without judgement.





# 125 Top Indian Merchants Vow to Boycott Trade with Turkey, Azerbaijan

**NEW DELHI:** More than 125 top trade leaders from across the country on Friday resolved to boycott all forms of trade and commercial engagement with Turkey and Azerbaijan, including travel and tourism.

The trade leaders also appealed to the Indian film Industry not to undertake shooting of any film in Turkey or Azerbaijan and if any shooting is done, the business community and the people would boycott such films. The resolution also warns corporate houses not to shoot any product promotion film in Turkey or Azerbaijan.

The decision was taken at a National Conference of Trade Leaders convened by the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) here, where representatives from 24 states participated. It was strongly affirmed in the conference to stand in solidarity with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and to oppose stoutly anyone against India at this crucial juncture.



The resolution comes in response to the recent stand taken by Turkey and Azerbaijan in open support of Pakistan, at a time when India is facing a sensitive and critical national security situation. The collective Indian trading community views this as a betrayal, particularly considering the humanitarian and diplomatic support extended to both these countries in the past by India.

Addressing the gathering, CAIT Secretary General and Member of Parliament Praveen Khandelwal said: "It is deeply

unfortunate that Turkey and Azerbaijan, who have benefited from India's goodwill, aid, and strategic support in times of distress, have now chosen to side with Pakistan — a country known globally for its support to terrorism. Their position not only hurts India's sovereignty and national interest but also directly insults the sentiments of 140 crore Indians."

The conference noted that Turkey's repeated anti-India rhetoric at international platforms and its continued support for Pakistan's narrative

is unacceptable whereas Azerbaijan's alignment with Turkey and public endorsements of Pakistan's stand reflect a disturbing disregard for India's long-standing friendship and assistance.

CAIT National President BC Bhartia said the traders' community expressed strong resentment and disappointment against both countries, calling their actions "ungrateful and hostile." It was unanimously agreed that such nations do not deserve any economic co-operation or trade advantage from India.

The trade leaders acclaimed the decision of the government for revoking security clearance for Turkish company Celebi in the interest of national security which is handling services at nine major airports of India.

CAIT said it will also launch a nationwide awareness campaign to educate and mobilise traders, consumers, and travel professionals to join this boycott.

# India's Current Sugar Season to end with 52 Lakh Tonnes of Buffer Stock: ISMA

**NEW DELHI:** India's 2024–25 sugar season is projected to conclude with a net sugar production of approximately 261 to 262 lakh tonnes which will leave a comfortable buffer stock of 52 lakh tonnes to meet domestic demand, the Indian Sugar & Bio-energy Manufacturers Association (ISMA) said on Friday.

The production includes 257.44 lakh tonnes of sugar produced up to mid-May in the current season, along with an estimated 4 to 5 lakh tonnes anticipated from the special crushing season in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, the ISMA statement explained.

"The season commenced with an opening stock of 80 lakh tonnes. Considering the projected domestic consumption of 280 lakh tonnes and export estimates of up to 9 lakh tonnes, the closing stock is likely to be around 52 – 53 lakh tonnes. This reflects a comfortable buffer, ensuring that the country has a sufficient sugar stock to meet its domestic sugar demand,"



ISMA said.

Approximately 27 lakh tonnes of sugar has been diverted for ethanol production up to April 30, 2025, during the current season. An additional 6 to 7 lakh tonnes are expected to be diverted over the remaining season, ISMA further stated.

The latest figures show that as of May 15, 2025, sugar production in the ongoing 2024–25 sugar season has reached 257.44 lakh tonnes, with two sugar factories still continuing operations across the country. These two operational factories are located in Tamil Nadu, where the main crushing season is still underway. To augment production, several factories in South Karnataka and Tamil Nadu are expected to resume

operations during the special crushing season, which typically runs from June/July to September. Historically, the production in the special season in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu contributes approximately 4 to 5 lakh tonnes of sugar for the current season. The industry body also said that the 2025–26 sugar season is shaping up to be promising, buoyed by several positive developments across key sugar-producing regions.

In the southern states, particularly Maharashtra and Karnataka, sugarcane planting has shown significant improvement, thanks to a favourable south-west monsoon in 2024. Supported by strong cane availability, the stage is set for a timely start to the crushing season in October 2025.

In the northern belt, including Uttar Pradesh, varietal replacement initiatives are expected to yield tangible benefits. These efforts are expected to result in higher cane yields and improved sugar recovery rates.

# Bharti Airtel's Q4 net profit slips 23 pc, sales up as India market grows



**MUMBAI:** Bharti Airtel on Tuesday reported a 22.68 per cent sequential decline in its net profit for the fourth quarter (Q4) of FY25, as a sharp swing in tax expense weighed on earnings.

The company's net profit dropped to Rs 12, 475.8 crore from Rs 16, 134.6 crore in the previous quarter (Q3), according to its stock exchange filing.

The profit decline was largely driven by a shift from a tax gain of Rs 757.3 crore in Q3 to a tax expense of Rs 2, 891.9 crore in Q4, putting pressure on the bottom line despite revenue growth. The telecom major's revenue from operations grew 6.1 per cent quarter-on-quarter (QoQ) to Rs 47, 876.2 crore in Q4, up from Rs 45, 129.3 crore in Q3. The increase was supported by solid momentum in the India market, a rebound in Africa's reported currency revenues, and the full-quarter impact of Indus Towers consolidation. However, one segment that saw a pullback was Airtel Business, which posted a 2.7 per cent year-on-year (YoY) decline in revenue.

This was due to a deliberate move to phase out low-margin services like global wholesale commodity voice and messaging. The company said this strategic transformation is part of its broader goal to focus on higher-value, sustainable business areas.

In India, quarterly revenues grew by 6 per cent to Rs 36, 735 crore, supported by better realisations in the mobile segment and strong performance in the homes business. Average revenue per user (ARPU) rose to Rs 245 in Q4, up from Rs 209 in the same quarter last financial year — reinforcing Airtel's premiumisation strategy. The company's homes business saw impressive growth, with a 21.3 per cent jump in revenue YoY, helped by strong customer additions and accelerated fiber and home-pass expansion. The company added over 800, 000 new customers during the quarter, bringing the total base to 10 million. Vice-Chairman and MD Gopal Vittal said the company ended the financial year on a strong note, despite the dip in profit. He added that Airtel remains focused on premium growth areas, supported by solid cash generation and disciplined capital spending. Airtel also prepaid Rs 5, 985 crore in high-cost spectrum dues last quarter, bringing total prepayments to over Rs 42, 000 crore in the past two years, which has strengthened the balance sheet.

# Adani Airports snaps ties with Turkish Firm DragonPass



**NEW DELHI:** Adani Airport Holdings has scrapped its agreement with Turkish company DragonPass to provide the latter's customers access to its airport lounges. The move comes in the wake of Turkey's support to Pakistan after the Pahalagam terror attacks and Operation Sindoor launched by India to avenge the killings of 26 tourists. "Our association with DragonPass, which provided access to airport lounges, has been terminated with immediate effect. DragonPass customers will no longer have access to lounges at Adani-managed airports. This change will have no impact on the airport lounge and travel experience for other customers," the Adani Airport Holdings spokesperson said on Thursday. Meanwhile, the government has revoked the security clearance for Turkish ground-handling firm Celebi Airport Services at the Indian airports, as calls grew to ban Turkish businesses in the wake of their country supporting Pakistan.

In a notification, the Ministry of Civil Aviation said that "in the exercise of power conferred upon DG, BCAS, the security clearance in Celebi Airport Services India Pvt Ltd is hereby revoked with immediate effect in the interest of National Security."

# India is Increasingly Positioned as Apple's Most Viable Alternative to China

**NEW DELHI:** India's competitive edge makes it a natural choice for tech giants like Apple and the US-based company has assured the government of its commitment to manufacture its products and boost the 'Make in India' initiative.

The country has shown big companies like Apple the value of "Make in India", according to informed sources on Thursday. According to people close to the matter, "There is no change in Apple's investment plans in India". Earlier, US President Donald Trump said that he told Apple CEO Tim Cook to give up his plan of setting up more manufacturing facilities in India and focus on building these plants in the US instead. "Apple will be upping its production in the United States," Trump added



during a meeting in Doha, Qatar. India has become a key hub for Apple's global supply chain in recent years. Union Communications Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said earlier this month that global tech giants such as Apple see a lot of economic sense in setting up manufacturing facilities in India. "Apple has decided to source and produce

all its mobile phones in India in the years to come. Because when you invest in India, you are choosing affordability, you are choosing reliability, you are choosing originality," the minister remarked.

Apple CEO Tim Cook recently announced that the tech giant will source the majority of its iPhones for the US market from

India in the April-June quarter, while China will produce the devices for other markets. Apple registered the highest growth of 23 per cent among the top five brands in India in the January-March quarter, shipping a first-quarter record of three million units, an IDC report said on Monday. In the March quarter, iPhone 16 was the highest shipped model, accounting for 4 per cent of overall India shipments during Q1 2025. Prabhu Ram, VP at CyberMedia Research (CMR), told IANS that India is increasingly becoming a critical and strategic node in Apple's global supply chain — not just owing to its growing attractive domestic market, but also its expanding export capabilities and conducive policy environment.

# India Revokes Security Clearance of Turkey's Celebi Airport Services

**NEW DELHI:** The government on Thursday revoked the security clearance for Turkish ground-handling firm Celebi Airport Services at the Indian airports, as calls grew to ban Turkish businesses in the wake of their country supporting Pakistan which harbours terrorism.



In a notification, the Ministry of Civil Aviation said that "in the exercise of power conferred upon DG, BCAS, the security clearance in Celebi Airport Services India Pvt Ltd is hereby revoked with immediate effect in the interest of National Security." The Turkish company handles around 70 per cent of the ground operations at Mumbai airport, including passenger services, load control, flight operations, cargo and postal services, warehouses and bridge operations. Minister of State for Civil Aviation and Cooperation, Murlidhar Mohol, said in a post on X that we have received requests from across India to ban Celebi NAS Airport Services India Ltd, a Turkish company operating ground handling services at Indian airports.

"Recognising the seriousness of the issue and the call to protect national interests, we have taken cognizance of these requests and Ministry of Civil Aviation has revoked security clearance of the said company. Ensuring the safety and interests of the nation remains our top priority," the minister posted. Since its entry in 2008, Celebi

has expanded its presence in India's aviation sector. As per reports, the firm is partly owned by Sumeyye Erdogan, daughter of Tayyip Erdogan. Sumeyye Erdogan is married to Selcuk Bayraktar, the man who produces Bayraktar military drones which Pakistan used against India. This suggests that support to Pakistan is not just a matter of Turkish state policy, but one in which Erdogan's own family is directly involved, according to reports.

Meanwhile, BJP spokesperson Gourav Vallabh said on Thursday that with growing clamour for 'Turkey boycott' in the country, the Middle-East nation will soon face the heat and lose a major share of tourism business from India. Vallabh told to media that tourism remains one of the mainstays of Turkish economy and it has already lost 10 per cent of tourists for betraying India and it will take a further hit, soon. Notably, there has been a growing anger and outrage in the country over Turkey extending open support to Pakistan during the recent conflict, not just in the digital space but also militarily.

# Govt approves 187 Startups for Tax Exemption to Boost Growth

**NEW DELHI:** In a significant boost to India's startup ecosystem, the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) has approved 187 startups for income tax exemption under the revamped Section 80-IAC of the Income Tax Act, according to an official statement issued on Thursday.

According to a DPIIT spokesperson, the tax benefit allows eligible startups a 100 per cent income tax deduction on profits for any three consecutive years within a 10-year window from the date of incorporation. The

scheme is designed to support emerging businesses in their formative years, encouraging innovation, job creation, and wealth generation. Of the total approvals, 75 startups were cleared during the 79th Inter-Ministerial Board (IMB) meeting and another 112 during the 80th such meeting held on April 30. With this, over 3,700 startups have now been granted exemptions since the scheme's inception.

In a key announcement during the Union Budget 2025–26, the government extended the eligibility window for startups



to claim benefits under Section 80-IAC. Startups incorporated before 1st April 2030 are now eligible to apply for the exemption, giving more time and opportunity to new ventures to benefit from this financial relief.

Perennially, the revised evaluation framework introduced by

DPIIT has made the application process more structured and transparent. Complete applications are now reviewed within 120 days, ensuring faster decision-making and reducing procedural delays.

Startups that were not approved in the latest round have been encouraged to reassess and refine their applications. The DPIIT has advised applicants to focus on demonstrating technological innovation, market potential, scalability, and a clear contribution to employment and economic growth.

# India–UK Free Trade Agreement: Data Exclusivity and Pharma Industry in India



**DR. ANIL KUMAR ANGRISH**

India is negotiating free trade agreement (FTA) with the European Union (EU). FTAs have implications for all those sectors which are export-intensive or import-intensive, and pharmaceutical sector is not an exception. European region is an important market for pharmaceutical exports from India. In FY25, India exported Drugs and Pharmaceuticals worth \$5.77 Bn to Europe. Europe is the second largest market for Drugs and Pharmaceuticals from India after NAFTA that comprises the United States of America (USA), Canada, and Mexico. Within Europe, United Kingdom (UK) is the major market for Indian pharma products. In FY25, export of Drugs and Pharmaceuticals from India to the UK stood at \$913.97 Mn.

In the wake of tariff war, bilateral trade agreements (BTAs) are being considered the way to go ahead in the new world order. India – UK Free Trade Agreement (FTA) is the move in that direction as it became India's 15<sup>th</sup> trade deal for which talks started in January 2022 and culminated on May 6, 2025. This comprehensive agreement covered 99 per cent of the tariff lines as stated by the President of Confederation of Indian Industry (CII). Implications are also wider as the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 6<sup>th</sup> largest economies in the world have come together for this FTA. Recently, International Monetary Fund (IMF) projected that India is poised to become the world's fourth largest economy in 2025, with India's projected GDP of US \$4,187.02 Bn at current prices, narrowly surpassing Japan's estimated GDP of \$4,186.43 Bn.

The UK is the second largest market for India's pharmaceutical exports. The UK remains the largest market for India's pharmaceutical exports in 38 European countries/territories. For FY25, UK's share stood at 3.01 per cent of India's total pharmaceutical exports to the world. The USA remained the largest export market for India's pharmaceutical products with a share of 34.61 per cent.

In this FTA, one key demand of 'data exclusivity' provision has not been accepted by India, and this provision has implications for Indian Pharmaceutical Industry. Data Exclusivity was extensively dealt by the Committee comprising Mrs. Satwant Reddy, Secretary and Mr. Gurdial Singh Sandhu, Joint Secretary in the Department of Chemicals & Petrochemicals, Ministry of Chemicals & Fertilizers

Table 1: India's Pharmaceutical Exports in different Regions in FY25

Group Description (No. of Countries/Territories)	Pharmaceutical Exports (\$ Bn)
North American Free Trade Agreement (03)	11.46
Europe (38)	5.77
Africa (48)	3.92
West Asia North Africa (WANA) (18)	1.75
Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (10)	1.76
Latin American Countries (LAC) (43)	2.04
Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) (12)	1.01
South Asia (08)	1.24
North East Asia (NEA) (08)	0.87
Oceania (12)	0.56

Source: Compiled from <https://niray.gov.in/>

in their report submitted on May 31, 2007, regarding 'Steps to be taken by Government of India in the context of Data Protection Provisions of Article 39.3 of TRIPS Agreement'. The Committee listed two types of protections, i.e., Trade Secret as a form of Protection and Data Exclusivity as a form of Protection.

Article 39.3 of the agreement on Trade-related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights provides – 'Members, when requiring, as a condition of approving the marketing of pharmaceutical or of agricultural chemical products which utilize new chemical entities, the submission of undisclosed test or other data, the origination of which involves a considerable effort, shall protect such data against unfair commercial use. In addition, Members shall protect such data against disclosure, except

where necessary to protect the public, or unless steps are taken to ensure that the data are protected against unfair commercial use.'

Satwant Reddy Committee stated that under Data Exclusivity as a form of Protection, the Regulatory Authority cannot rely on the data submitted by the Originator for approving the second and subsequent applications for the same product. This concept implied 'non-disclosure' as well as 'non-reliance' on the first applicant's data by the Regulatory Authority at the time of granting marketing approval to the subsequent applicants. Further, the Committee had underlined that under Article 39.3 of the TRIPS Agreement, India is under no obligation to provide Data Exclusivity as it may be TRIPS-plus as Article 39.3 contained two obligations namely 'Protection against Disclosure', and 'Protection

Table 2: Top 5 Destinations for India's Pharmaceutical Exports (FY25)

Country	Pharmaceutical Exports (\$ Mn)	Percentage Share in selected criteria's Total Exports (%)
USA	10,515.21	34.61
UK	913.97	3.01
Brazil	778.49	2.56
France	720.43	2.37
South Africa	678.20	2.23

Source: Compiled from <https://niray.gov.in/>



against Unfair Commercial Use'.

On pharma sector, the relevance of Data Exclusivity was highlighted when the Committee observed that 'over the years Indian pharma industry has developed a strong capability as a producer of good quality low priced generic medicines and any exclusivity provisions may adversely affect the interests of domestic industry and lead to increase in prices of medicines in the country.' Specific emphasis was laid on anti-HIV/AIDS drugs to be available at low prices.

Prominent UK-origin pharmaceutical companies

have presence in India. Companies such as AstraZeneca (Headquarters: Cambridge, UK), GSK (Headquarters: Brentford, UK) are innovator pharma companies and figure among top 20 pharmaceutical companies in the world. AstraZeneca Pharmaceutical AB, Sweden is the holding company of AstraZeneca Pharma India Limited (AZPIL). AstraZeneca PLC is the holding company of AstraZeneca Pharmaceutical AB, Sweden. AZPIL was established in 1979 with headquarters in Bengaluru, Karnataka.

Promoter and Promoter Group holds majority stake in GlaxoSmithKline Phar-

maceuticals Limited in India. Promoter and Promoter Group comprises Glaxo Group Limited, U.K. (35.99 per cent), GlaxoSmithKline Pte Limited, Singapore (28.10 per cent), Es-kaylab Limited, U.K. (6.94 per cent), and Burroughs Wellcome International Limited, U.K. (3.97 per cent). GSK has long association with Indian market as in 1924, H. J. Foster & Co. Limited introduced formula milk in India. Later, H. J. Foster & Co. became Glaxo Laboratories.

Data Exclusivity is not expected to be a material concern for those pharmaceutical companies which do not have significant investment in Research and Development (R&D) in India. For example, AstraZeneca has 6 strategic R&D centres in the UK (Cambridge), US (Gaithersburg, Maryland, and Boston, Massachusetts), Sweden (Gothenburg) and China (Shanghai, and Beijing). The company has an active R&D presence in 50+ countries worldwide.

Low Research & Development (R&D) expenditure by pharma companies in India reflects the relevance of Data Exclusivity for those pharma companies. So, the countries to which these companies belong, are also not likely to emphasize on Data Exclusivity. GlaxoSmithKline Pharmaceuticals Limited had a recurring expenditure on Research and Development

of Rs. 254.37 Lakhs in FY24, up from Rs. 190.99 Lakhs. This sum is meagre in comparison to the total sales of the company amounting to Rs. 3,385.94 Crore for the year ended March 31, 2024 (up from Rs. 3,181.40 Crore for the year ended March 31, 2023).

To conclude, India has successfully prevented the inclusion of 'Data Exclusivity' in UK FTA. In a way, interests of domestic pharma industry have been protected. This is worthwhile to note that UK FTA is second such agreement in recent past in which Data Exclusivity provisions have not been agreed upon. In 2024, India signed free trade agreement with European Free Trade Association (EFTA) that comprises four countries namely Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. In FTA with EFTA too, India had rejected the inclusion of Data Exclusivity clause. Among EFTA members, Switzerland is only major leading exporter of pharmaceutical products as the country is home to prominent pharma companies such as Roche, Novartis, Lonza, among others.

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**DISCLAIMER:** Views are personal and do not represent the views of the Institute.





# HDFC Bank Launches Biz+ Current Account Suite for Small Businesses

**NEW DELHI:** HDFC Bank has introduced a new suite of current account products called Biz+, specifically designed to support small businesses at various stages of growth. The Biz+ offering includes four variants tailored to different business growth phases: Biz Lite+ for setup, Biz Pro+ for growth, Biz Ultra+ for expansion, and Biz Elite+ for diversification. Each account comes bundled with services including cash handling, digital banking, and relationship manager support. New customers will also receive complimentary business and payment protection insurance for the first year.

Each variant provides tiered benefits with increasing advantages. Biz Lite+ offers a free cash deposit limit six times the account balance, tax savings through complimentary



debit cards, insurance, and shop-device rental waivers. Biz Pro+ increases the deposit limit to ten times and adds access to zero-collateral overdraft loans and PoS rental waivers. The premium variants offer more substantial benefits. Biz Ultra+ provides a cash deposit multiple of 12, benefits on a BizPower credit card worth up to Rs 1.3 lakh annually, and access to deals through the Preferred Program.

At the top tier, Biz Elite+ offers a 15X deposit limit, Imperia Program benefits, pan-India collections through cash management, and waiver of foreign bank charges on overseas remittances. The suite is designed to evolve with business growth, offering sector-specific solutions across HDFC Bank's network of 9,455 branches, targeting over 45 lakh small businesses. The bundled model integrates

liabilities, asset products, business cards, and digital payments under a single offering. Parag Rao, Country Head – Payments, Liability Products, Consumer Finance and Marketing, HDFC Bank, said, "This is a strategic shift towards offering a value-based engagement from a transactional one, and addresses both business and personal banking needs." He emphasised, "We are now delivering a more modular, scalable and business life stage-aligned proposition. Our Biz+ Account range is designed to be adaptive—with Dynamic Multiplier Benefits that scale with business growth, removing friction." The launch is part of the bank's One Bank approach and reflects its focus on supporting business growth and entrepreneurship through integrated banking services.

# Retail Inflation Hits 69-Month Low at 3.2% in April, RBI Rate Cuts Likely



**NEW DELHI:** Retail inflation in India eased to a 69-month low in April, primarily due to continued moderation in food prices, bolstering expectations that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) will maintain its interest rate-cutting trajectory in the coming months.

According to data released by the National Statistics Office (NSO) on Tuesday, retail inflation, measured by the consumer price index (CPI), declined to 3.2 per cent in April from 3.3 per cent in March, marking its lowest level since July 2019. Rural inflation stood at 2.9

per cent, while urban areas experienced a slightly higher rate of 3.4 per cent. This represents the third consecutive month that retail inflation has remained below the central bank's target of 4 per cent.

Food inflation decreased to 1.8 per cent in April from 2.7 per cent in March, reaching its lowest point since October 2021. The overall decline in inflation was largely attributed to reduced prices across several food categories, including vegetables, pulses and products, fruits, meat and fish, and cereals and products.

Notably, vegetable inflation contracted by nearly 11 per cent in April, while pulses and

products saw a decrease of 5.2 per cent. However, certain pressure points persisted, with fruits and oils & fats inflation remaining in double digits during the month.

Financial experts anticipate that the RBI will implement a rate cut in June during its next monetary policy review, given the additional leeway provided by the significant moderation in price pressures.

"We anticipate the CPI inflation to average 3.5 per cent in FY26, with the prints for Q2 and Q3 sharply trailing the MPC's projections for these quarters, allowing for an additional 75 basis points of rate cuts in this calendar year," said Aditi Nayyar, Chief Economist, ICRA.

She added, "A 25 basis points (bps) rate cut appears forthcoming in the June 2025 policy, followed by easing of 25 bps each in the August and October 2025 policy reviews."

# Sensex, Nifty End Lower as Investors Book Profits



**MUMBAI:** The Indian stock markets ended lower on Friday as investors chose to book profits after recent gains.

Both benchmark indices — Sensex and Nifty — closed in the red in the final trading session of the week. The Sensex dropped by 200.15 points, or 0.24 per cent, to settle at 82,330.59. During the day, it moved between a high of 82,514.81 and a low of 82,146.95. Similarly, the Nifty slipped by 42.30 points, or 0.17 per cent, to close at 25,019.80. The Nifty remained in consolidation mode, taking a breather after Thursday's rally.

"Indicators and overlays are consistently pointing towards further strength in the short term. Any dips are likely to be bought into, with support placed at 25,000/24,800," said Rupak De of LKP Securities. On the higher side, a move above 25,120 could take the index towards 25,250/25,350, he added.

While the headline indices saw declines, the broader market showed strong performance. Small-cap and mid-cap stocks outperformed, with the Nifty Smallcap100 gaining 1.86 per cent and the Nifty Midcap100 rising 0.94 per cent. Among the Sensex-listed companies, Eternal (formerly Zomato), Hindustan Unilever, Asian Paints, ITC, and IndusInd Bank were the top gainers. Their stocks rose between 0.60 per cent and 1.20 per cent.

# India's Outward FDI Doubles to USD 6.8 Bn in April 2025: RBI



**NEW DELHI:** India's outward foreign direct investment (FDI) commitments surged to USD 6.8 billion in April 2025, representing a near doubling from the USD 3.58 billion recorded in the same month last year, according to data released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). This also marks a sequential increase from March 2025's figure of USD 5.9 billion. The composition of India's outbound FDI, which is measured as financial commitment, consists of three key components: equity, loans, and guarantees. Equity commitments witnessed a dramatic rise, reaching USD 2.72 billion in April 2025, compared to just USD 740 million in April 2024. This represents a marginal increase from the USD 2.53 billion committed in March 2025. Loan commitments also showed significant growth, more than tripling to USD 1.16 billion in April 2025 from USD 687.33 million in April 2024. However, this figure represents a decline from the USD 2.12 billion committed in March 2025. Guarantees for overseas units increased to USD 2.98 billion in April 2025, up from USD 2.16 billion in the same month last year and substantially higher than the USD 1.23 billion recorded in March 2025, as per RBI data.

# Economists See RBI Dividend to Government Surpassing Record Rs 2.5 Lakh Cr in 2025-26

**MUMBAI:** Economists expect the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) dividend to the government to surpass a record over Rs 2.5 lakh crore this year as the central bank earnings, through the sale of dollars to prop up the rupee as it sharply depreciated during 2024-25, are reported to have shot up. This higher profit will be transferred to the government as a dividend in 2025-26.

The previous record dividend transferred to the government stands at Rs 2.1 lakh crore during 2024-25 which helped to keep the fiscal deficit in check, while enabling the Finance Ministry to continue with its expenditure on big ticket infrastructure projects to spur growth and social welfare schemes to uplift the poor.

This was a record jump from the Rs 87,416 crore transferred to the government in 2023-24 for the profit made in 2022-23. Similarly, the government is expected to get another booster shot through the RBI dividend in the current financial year as well. "Among the RBI's earnings, forex transactions are expected to be most significant in light of the in light of the central bank's measures to lower rupee volatility by strong dollar purchases earlier in fiscal 2025 and difference in the current versus historical

exchange rate. Add to this the interest income on government securities and earnings from funds extended to banks in midst of previous tight liquidity. "This transfer could amount to a record high at around Rs 2.5-2.7 lakh crore this year," said Radhika Rao, senior economist at DBS Bank.

Earnings on forex transactions are expected to be substantial with gross dollar sales tracking at \$371.6 billion in fiscal 2025 till February compared to \$153 billion in fiscal 2024, according to Gaura Sengupta, chief economist at IDFC First bank. She estimates the RBI dividend to be between Rs 2.6 lakh crore to Rs 3 lakh crore, according to an NDTV Profit report. The higher dividend creates fiscal space of 0.1 per cent to 0.2 per cent of GDP, estimates Sengupta. With support from the higher-than-budgeted RBI surplus and savings on a few expenditure heads, the central government is in a fairly strong position to counter the growth slowdown risks and any potential emergency spending requirements.

# Indian Private Sector Raised USD 11 Bn Through ECB Route in March 2025: RBI

**NEW DELHI:** India's private sector received approval to raise a record USD 11 billion through external commercial borrowings (ECBs) in March 2025, marking the highest monthly ECB inflow in more than five years, according to data released by the Reserve Bank of India.

Of the total approved amount, approximately USD 8.3 billion was sanctioned through the automatic route, while nearly USD 2.7 billion was approved through the approval route.

This significant surge in ECBs highlights growing international confidence in India's economic prospects and its ability to attract foreign capital.

Several prominent companies featured among the top recipients of ECB approvals in March. Yuzhan Technology (India), a subsidiary of Taiwan's Foxconn Group established in late 2023, received approval to raise USD 220 million for working capital requirements. The company specialises in the manufacturing of computer, electronic, and optical products.

JSW Steel secured approval to raise USD 900 million to refinance an earlier ECB, while ONGC Videsh and MRPL were granted approvals to raise USD 450 million and USD 500 million respectively for similar refinancing purposes.

Power Finance Corporation received approval for USD 250 million for on-lending activities, and Indian Oil Corporation was approved to raise



USD 400 million to refinance a previous ECB.

Other notable approvals included Tata Semiconductor securing USD 625 million for a new project, and the Nuclear Power Corporation of India receiving approval for USD 511 million.

JSW Neo was granted approval to raise USD 675 million for investment in an overseas joint venture, while Hero FinCorp and Nissan Renault Financial Services secured approvals for USD 250 million and USD 233 million respectively for on-lending activities.

For the complete fiscal year, total ECB proposals amounted to USD 61.8 billion, representing a significant increase from the USD 49 billion raised in FY24.

Nearly half of the approvals were allocated to ECBs by financial services companies.

The top recipients of ECB approvals in FY25 included major corporations such as Reliance Industries, which received approval for two substantial loans: nearly USD 3 billion for refinancing earlier ECBs and an additional USD 1 billion for local sourcing of capital goods. Both loans have maturities ranging from 5 to 12 years.

# Conflicts and tariffs will not negatively impact the economy



**SATISH SINGH**

**I**n February 2024, the Industrial Production Index (IIP) growth rate experienced a notable decline, dipping to 2.9%, the slowest growth in six months. This slowdown is particularly significant compared to January's growth rate of 5%. A troubling trend was also observed in September 2024, where the IIP growth rate marginally increased to 3.2%, following a concerning drop to zero in August.

The primary factor behind this reduction in the IIP growth can be traced back to unexpectedly low performance within the manufacturing sector, which constitutes a substantial portion—over 75%—of the overall IIP. The remaining contribution comes from the mining sector and includes goods that are consumed by the general public.

Looking ahead to January 2025, the situation worsened as the manufacturing sector's growth rate fell to 2.9%, representing the lowest level since August 2024, further highlighting the challenges faced in this crucial area of the economy.

In addition to domestic issues, external factors have also played a role, particularly the current trade policy adopted by U.S. President Donald Trump, which has cast a shadow over India's export performance. In fact, the global credit rating agency

Moody's has revised its growth rate forecast for India's economy downwards from 6.4% to 6.1% for the ongoing financial year, attributing this change largely to the implications of U.S. trade policies. Looking further ahead, they anticipate a 6.5% growth for the gross domestic product (GDP) in the financial year 2025-26.

Moody's also reported that the introduction of new tariff rates on significant Indian exports—specifically diamonds, clothing, and medical devices—could lead to a decrease in India's exports to the United States. This situation threatens to exacerbate India's trade deficit with the U.S. and could further hamper GDP growth.

Despite these challenges, India's GDP growth rate for the third quarter of FY 2024-2025 stood at 6.2%. This figure is a slight decline from the 6.7% growth recorded in the first quarter and a noticeable increase from the 5.4% witnessed in the second quarter. Nevertheless, India's position remains strong, as it continues to be the fastest-growing major economy worldwide. For comparison, China's GDP growth rate for the second quarter of FY 2024-2025 was 4.6%, while Japan's economic growth was significantly lower at just 0.9%.

A comprehensive report by Forbes, dated November 4, 2024, confirmed that the United States maintains its status as the world's strongest economy, boasting a monumental GDP of \$29.17 trillion. Following the U.S.,



China claims second place with a GDP of \$18.27 trillion, Germany follows at third with \$4.71 trillion, Japan holds the fourth position at \$4.07 trillion, and India ranks fifth among global economies with a GDP of \$3.89 trillion.

Several key factors contribute to the fluctuations in GDP, which include:

1. Personal consumption expenditure: This encompasses the spending habits of individuals and households, serving as a critical driver of economic activity.
2. The size of the private sector: Currently, this sector contributes around 32% to the overall GDP, underscoring its significance in the economic landscape.
3. Government expenditure on developmental projects: This investment accounts for approximately 11% of GDP and plays a vital role in driving economic growth through infrastructure and public service enhancements.
4. Net demand: This is determined by subtracting total imports from total exports.

When a country's imports exceed its exports, a trade deficit occurs, which can severely dampen GDP growth.

In India's case, the persistent imbalance where imports surpass exports has created a detrimental effect on the nation's GDP, posing ongoing challenges for economic stability and growth.

In February 2025, India experienced a notable decline in its trade deficit, which dropped to Rs 1.21 lakh crore from Rs 1.99 lakh crore in January. This represents the most favourable trade balance since August 2021. The reduction in the trade deficit can be attributed largely to a rise in goods exports, which reached Rs 3.20 lakh crore in February, reflecting a modest increase of 1.25% from Rs 3.16 lakh crore recorded in January. Conversely, imports totalled Rs 4.42 lakh crore in February, illustrating a significant decrease of Rs 73,000 crore compared to the January total of Rs 5.15 lakh crore.

Further, tax collection saw

a remarkable uptick as the government garnered Rs 2.37 lakh crore from Goods and Services Tax (GST) in April 2025. This figure represents a striking year-on-year increase of 12.6%, marking the highest GST collection on record. For comparative context, the GST collection for April 2024 was Rs 2.10 lakh crore, while it stood at Rs 1.87 lakh crore in April 2023. Noteworthy collections in the previous financial year also included Rs 1.87 lakh crore in October 2024 and Rs 1.82 lakh crore in November 2024. The total GST revenues for the financial year 2024-25 have reached an impressive Rs 22.08 lakh crore. This surge in GST revenue is a strong indicator of vibrant economic activity, suggesting robust consumer spending, flourishing industrial ventures, and enhanced tax compliance.

Moreover, a significant decrease in inflation in April has emerged as a beacon of positive economic sentiment. Retail inflation fell to 3.16%, the lowest level seen in the past 69 months, a point of reference being that it was at 3.15% in July 2019. Wholesale inflation mirrored this trend, dropping to a 13-month low of 0.85%, in contrast to 2.05% in March and 2.31% in January. The primary driver behind this decrease in both retail and wholesale inflation can be attributed to a substantial reduction in food prices.

It is vital to recognize that inflation remains a formidable obstacle to sustainable development. However, a decline

in inflation can catalyse an accelerated growth trajectory. The surge in GST collections reflects heightened business activity, suggesting more economic vibrancy. Increased tax revenues enhance the government's capacity to invest in crucial developmental projects, fostering further economic growth. Furthermore, the banking sector, which has historically played an instrumental role in propelling India's economy since independence, continues to provide essential momentum for this growth.

Despite the recent brief military engagement with Pakistan, it is anticipated that the economic impact will be minimal. Had the conflict continued, the repercussions could have included escalated defence spending, widening of the trade deficit, decline in stock market performance, currency depreciation, rising inflation, and escalating geopolitical tensions.

While the Industrial Production Index (IIP) growth has shown signs of slowing down, and previous tariffs imposed by former President Trump on Indian imports remain a concern, the overall effect on GDP growth and Indian exports is expected to be negligible. India's growth trajectory remains firmly intact, buoyed by rising GST revenues, declining inflation rates, and the enduring strength of its banking sector.

Satish Singh, Ahmedabad Based Senior Columnist, views are personal.

# India's Exports of Goods & Services Surge 12.7 Per Cent to \$73 Billion in April



**NEW DELHI:** India total exports of goods and services clocked a robust 12.7 per cent growth in April to touch the \$73.80 billion mark compared with the corresponding figure of \$65.48 billion during the same month last year, despite the global economic uncertainties triggered by the US tariff hikes, according to figures released by the Commerce Ministry on Thursday.

The country's merchandise exports shot up by 9.03 per cent to \$38.49 billion during the month with high-value electronics and engineering goods registering the highest growth.

Electronic goods exports increased by a whopping 39.51 per cent to \$ 3.69 billion in April from \$2.65 billion in the same month last year.

Engineering goods exports increased by 11.28 per cent to \$9.51 billion during the month from \$8.55 billion in April last year while gems and jewellery exports increased by 10.74 per cent to \$2.5 billion from \$2.26 billion.

Ready-made garments also registered a strong double digit growth of 14.43 per cent to \$ 1.37 billion during the

month from \$ 1.2 billion in April last year.

Similarly, rice exports increased by 13.63 per cent from \$0.95 billion to \$1.08 billion during the month, reflecting the better performance of the agricultural sector on the back of a better monsoon and adequate availability of fertilisers.

Marine products exports also performed well with a 17.81 per cent year-on-year increase from \$0.49 billion to \$0.58 billion during the month while drugs & pharmaceuticals exports grew by 2.37 per cent from 2.43 billion to \$ 2.49 billion.

India's services trade imports reached \$17.54 billion, up from \$16.76 billion in April 2024, leaving a surplus for services trade at \$17.77 billion during the month. This helped to reduce the country's overall trade deficit as the merchandise trade deficit rose to \$21.54 billion for April.

India's total imports of merchandise and services for April this year are estimated at \$82.45 billion, registering a growth of 15.72 per cent over the same month last year. The overall trade deficit works out to a manageable \$8.65 billion.



# INTERNATIONAL

## UAE, US Presidents hold talks in Abu Dhabi to boost Partnership

**ABU DHABI:** President of the United Arab Emirates Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan held talks with visiting US President Donald Trump at the Presidential Palace in Abu Dhabi, reaffirming the commitment of both countries to deepening their strategic partnership, media reported.

The two leaders on Thursday discussed ways to strengthen cooperation across a range of sectors, including investment, energy, advanced technology, artificial intelligence, and industry, according to UAE's state news agency WAM.

Sheikh Mohamed highlighted the depth of UAE-US relations, which he said span over five decades, Xinhua news agency reported. He reaffirmed the UAE's dedication to global peace, stability, and prosperity through multilateral cooperation and close coordination with international partners, especially the US. The two sides also exchanged views on regional and international developments of mutual concern, with particular attention to maintaining security and de-escalating tensions



in the Middle East.

Trump praised Sheikh Mohamed's leadership and noted that bilateral relations have continued to grow stronger under his guidance. Also on Thursday, the two Presidents jointly unveiled an artificial intelligence campus in Abu Dhabi, the largest AI campus outside the US.

Sheikh Mohamed underscored the UAE's commitment to deepening cooperation with the US in light of their long-standing efforts to promote peace, stability, and prosperity in the Middle East and around the world. This, he noted, is in line with the UAE's unwaver-

ing support for global stability, peace, and development through multilateral international cooperation. During the meeting, both leaders affirmed their joint aim to further enhance the UAE-US strategic partnership. Sheikh Mohamed also emphasised that over the years, the UAE has remained a reliable partner of the US in addressing common challenges.

The UAE, President Sheikh Mohamed said, is determined to continue strengthening this friendship for the benefit of both nations and their peoples while working together in support of peace and stability regionally and globally.

Sheikh Mohamed pointed to the future-focused partnership between the UAE and US that has been further strengthened by President Trump's support, particularly in the fields of the new economy, advanced technology, and artificial intelligence.

For his part, the US President praised the leadership of Sheikh Mohamed, affirming that relations between the UAE and US have reached new heights and continue to grow stronger.

To mark the state visit, Sheikh Mohamed hosted a dinner banquet in honour of President Trump and his accompanying delegation.

President Trump also signed the guestbook at Qasr Al Watan, expressing his pleasure at visiting the UAE and meeting with Sheikh Mohamed. He affirmed the enduring and strategic nature of US-UAE relations and the continued efforts of both nations to reinforce these ties in support of shared development, wishing the UAE and its people continued progress and prosperity.

## At least 80 Palestinians killed in Israeli Airstrikes, Cancer Hospital knocked out of Service



**GAZA:** At least 80 Palestinians were killed and dozens of others wounded in Israeli airstrikes across Gaza, said Palestinian medical sources.

The Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis reported that 54 people, including women and children, were killed in strikes on the southern city, according to a press statement on Thursday.

According to Gaza-based health authorities, the Gaza European Hospital, the only hospital providing medical follow-up care to cancer patients in the enclave, was out of service due to recent Israeli attacks, Xinhua news agency reported.

The Israeli attacks "caused significant damage to infrastruc-

ture, such as sewage lines, damage to internal departments, and destruction of roads leading to the hospital," the authorities said in a press statement.

Meanwhile, medical sources told Xinhua news agency that 26 others were killed in Israeli airstrikes on Gaza City and other areas in northern Gaza. The airstrikes came after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned on Tuesday that the Israeli military would enter Gaza "with full force" in the coming days to press forward with efforts to defeat Hamas.

Israel resumed large-scale military operations in Gaza on March 18, ending a two-month ceasefire. Since then, 2,876

Palestinians have been killed and more than 7,800 injured, according to health officials in Gaza. The total Palestinian death toll since the war erupted on October 7, 2023, has reached 53,010, the officials said on Thursday. Israel is using a policy of "reducing space and emptying populated areas to pressure citizens," Mahmoud Basal, spokesperson for the Civil Defence in Gaza, told Xinhua on Thursday. He also claimed that thousands of people spent the night in the streets amid threats of strikes on schools and shelters housing the displaced, adding that Israeli forces were obstructing emergency teams from reaching victims and systematically destroying Civil Defence infrastructure. Since October 2023, the Israeli Army has pursued a brutal offensive on the Gaza Strip, killing more than 53,000 Palestinians so far, most of them women and children. A US-backed humanitarian organisation will start work in Gaza by the end of May under an aid distribution plan, but has asked Israel to let the United Nations and others resume deliveries to Palestinians now until it is set up.

## EAM Jaishankar congratulates Anita Anand on becoming Canadian Foreign Minister



**OTTAWA:** External Affairs Minister (EAM), S. Jaishankar extended best wishes to his Canadian counterpart, Anita Anand, on being sworn in as the Foreign Minister.

"Congratulate Anita Anand on your appointment as Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs," he posted on X. Indian-origin Canadian politician Anita Ananda has been sworn in as the country's Foreign Minister after a major Cabinet reshuffle by Prime Minister Mark Carney, focussing on "mandate for change." Taking to X, Anand posted, "I am honoured to be named Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs. I look forward to working with Prime Minister Mark Carney and our team to build a safer, fairer world and deliver for Canadians." One of Anand's missions will be to pilot the reset of the almost ruptured ties with India that Carney signalled, while managing the delicate relations with President Donald Trump's America.

Announcing the new Cabinet of 28 ministers, Carney instructed them to "bring new ideas, a clear focus and decisive actions to their work." He also appointed Maninder Sidhu as the international trade minister, and two others of Indian descent as secretaries of state, the equivalent of ministers of state.

Anand, who was the transport minister and had earlier held the Defence portfolio, said in January that she was leaving politics and returning to academia.

However, Carney persuaded her to return to the Cabinet and take the foreign affairs portfolio after she was re-elected in last month's election.

Carney, who inherited former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Cabinet, now has a chance to put his mark after having led the Liberal Party to victory, beating the odds in last month's election.

He cut the number of ministers from 39 in Trudeau's Cabinet to 28, and three politicians of Indian origin in the last Cabinet do not find a place now.

Anand replaces Melanie Joly, who has been moved to the transport and internal trade ministry that she had held.

Joly ratcheted up the tensions with India, expelling six Indian diplomats last year, alleging that they were "persons of interest" in the assassination of Khalistan leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar.

India has denied any involvement in the murky case where there were signs of gang warfare, and it expelled Canadian diplomats in retaliation.

## Pakistan welcomes Trump's willingness to 'mediate' on Kashmir



**ISLAMABAD:** Pakistan on Sunday welcomed US President Donald Trump's "constructive role" in brokering a ceasefire understanding between Islamabad and New Delhi.

In a statement issued by Pakistan's foreign office, Islamabad appreciated Trump's willingness to support efforts aimed at the resolution of the so-called Kashmir "dispute," terming it a "longstanding issue that has serious implications for peace and security in South Asia and beyond." Pakistan said that it reaffirms that "settlement" of the Kashmir "dispute" should be "in accordance with the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions," according to the statement. "Pakistan remains committed to engaging with the United States and the international community in efforts to promote peace, security, and prosperity in the region. We look forward to deepening our multifaceted partnership with the United States, particularly in the areas of trade, investment and economic cooperation," the foreign office statement added.

## Our relations with Pakistan will be strictly bilateral: EAM Jaishankar

**NEW DELHI:** Making India's longstanding position clear once again, External Affairs Minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar on Thursday said that any issues pertaining to Pakistan will be dealt with Islamabad bilaterally.

"Our relations, our dealings with Pakistan will be bilateral and strictly bilateral. That is the national consensus for many years and there is absolutely no change in that consensus," EAM Jaishankar told reporters after the inauguration of Embassy of Honduras in New Delhi. Over the last few days, US President Donald Trump has repeatedly referred to the India-Pakistan conflict essaying his role as a peacemaker who is committed to resolving conflicts in the world. Earlier this week, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) had cleared that any issues pertaining to the Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir have to be addressed by



India and Pakistan bilaterally.

"That stated policy has not changed. As you are aware, the outstanding matter is the vacation of illegally occupied Indian Territory by Pakistan," MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal told reporters during a weekly media briefing. The EAM also emphasised that India has achieved "key goals" that it set out to do by destroying the terrorist infrastructure during Operation Sindoor.

"I think the Prime Minister made it very clear that the only talks with Pakistan will be on terror. Pakistan has a list of terrorists who need to be handed over, they have to shut down the terrorist infrastructure. They know what to do. We are prepared to discuss with them what is to be done on terrorism. Those are the talks which are feasible," stated EAM Jaishankar.

Spelling out India's position on a host of issues following

the highly-successful Operation Sindoor, Jaishankar highlighted that New Delhi received massive international support after the heinous Pahalgam terror attack on April 22 which resulted in the death of 26 innocent civilians.

The Resistance Front (TRF), an international terrorist organisation affiliated to the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT), owned responsibility for the killings.

"Let me say a few things here. One, we actually got a lot of international support. Many ministers, many leaders called the Prime Minister, and many ministers called me as well. We had a Security Council resolution which very clearly stated that the perpetrators of this attack should be held accountable. On the morning of May 7, we held them accountable through the action that was taken through Operation Sindoor," the EAM said.

## Australian PM Albanese, ministers sworn in following election victory



**CANBERRA:** Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and his ministers have been sworn in after the Labor Party won a second term in power at the federal election.

Albanese, his Cabinet, outer ministry and assistant ministers were officially sworn in to their roles by Governor-General Sam Mostyn, the representative of the British monarchy in Australia, at a ceremony at Government House in Canberra on Tuesday morning.

During the ceremony, the 42 members of the ministry took an oath of office, declaring that they will "well and truly serve" the Commonwealth of Australia in their respective offices, reports Xinhua news agency. The 42 members consist of 23 members of the Cabinet, the innermost sanctum of the government, seven members of the outer ministry and 12 assistant ministers.

The Cabinet and outer ministry is largely unchanged from the end of Albanese's first term, with the vast majority of senior

leadership figures continuing in their roles, including Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Richard Marles, Treasurer Jim Chalmers and Foreign Affairs Minister Penny Wong.

Announcing the list of ministers on Monday, Albanese said that it was the largest Labor caucus -- referring to the number of the party's politicians elected to the federal parliament -- in history following the landslide result at the May 3 election.

He said the ministers and party had an "extraordinary opportunity" to change Australia "for the better." "I am deeply humbled by the trust that was put into my government with the election, and we certainly won't take it for granted," he said. Among the changes from Albanese's previous ministry is the appointment of Michelle Rowland as Attorney-General, replacing Mark Dreyfus, who was dumped from the ministry along with former Science and Industry Minister Ed Husic due to factional negotiations.

## Trump announces 'full and immediate ceasefire' between India and Pakistan

**WASHINGTON:** US President Donald Trump on Saturday announced a "full and immediate ceasefire" between India and Pakistan.

He shared no details of the negotiations or the ceasefire.

Secretary of State Rubio said in a State Department statement that he and Vice-President JD Vance conducted these talks.

"After a long night of talks mediated by the United States, I am pleased to announce that

India and Pakistan have agreed to a full and immediate ceasefire," President Trump wrote on Truth Social, the social media platform he owns.

"Congratulations to both Countries on using Common Sense and Great Intelligence. Thank you for your attention to this matter!" he added.

Secretary of State Rubio said in a separate statement: "Over the past 48 hours, Vice President Vance and I have engaged



with senior Indian and Pakistani officials, including Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Shehbaz Sharif, External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, Chief of Army Staff

Asim Munir, and National Security Advisors Ajit Doval and Asim Malik.

"I am pleased to announce the Governments of India and Pakistan have agreed to an immediate ceasefire and to start talks on a broad set of issues at a neutral site.

"We commend Prime Ministers Modi and Sharif on their wisdom, prudence, and statesmanship in choosing the path of peace."

## TRUMP LURES BILLIONS OF USD Ensures Huge Investments from the Gulf to the US, UAE to Get AI Chips



**GOPAL MISRA**

**F**or President Donald Trump the investments in the US have to be prioritized, however, if the Russian President Vladimir Putin personally comes to Turkey for the final negotiations with Ukraine, he might decide to be in Turkey for ending the fratricide.

After ensuring truce between India and Pakistan at least for a while, the US President Donald Trump was expected to be in Turkey this week for finalizing the mechanism of disengagement between Russia and Ukraine, but he dropped the visit following the reports that the Russian President Vladimir Putin would not be joining the high-profile negotiations. Instead, he would be represented by senior diplomats. Trump promptly dropped the idea of joining the peace talks. Instead he focused on huge investments from the Gulf region.

Before arriving in Qatar, Trump had already signed huge investment deals with Saudi Arabia. The total package has quickly built to more than 600 billion USD—the

largest set of commercial agreements on record between the two countries, according to a White House release. The release also stated that the deals celebrated were historic and transformative for both countries and represent a new golden era of partnership between them.

### The Saudi Investments

The wide-spectrum agreements included Saudi Arabian's DataVolt to invest \$20 billion in AI data centres and energy infrastructure in the United States. Google, Data-Volt, Oracle, Salesforce, AMD, and Uber were be committing to invest \$80 billion in cutting-edge transformative technologies in both countries.

Another milestone will be the iconic American companies including Hill International, Jacobs, Parsons, and AECOM would be participating in building key infrastructure projects like King Salman International Airport, King Salman Park, The Vault, Qiddiya City, and much more totalling two billion USD in U.S. services exports. The additional major exports include GE Vernova's gas turbines and energy solutions totalling 14.2 USD billion and Boeing 737-8 passenger aircraft for AviLease totalling 4.8 USD



billion. In the healthcare sector, Shamekh IV Solutions, LLC will be investing \$5.8 billion, including a plant in Michigan to launch a high-capacity IV fluid facility.

The Saudi investments also include several sector-specific funds with a strong emphasis on U.S. deployment—such as the five billion USD Energy Investment Fund, the five billion USD New Era Aerospace and Defense Technology Fund, and the four billion USD Enfield Sports Global Sports Fund.

The US and Saudi Arabia signed the largest Defense sales agreement in history—nearly 142 billion USD, providing Saudi Arabia with state-of-the-art warfighting equipment and services from over a dozen U.S. Defense firms.

### Trillion Dollar Deal with Qatar

After his tour of Saudi Arabia, Trump visited Qatar, where he signed agreements with Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani that would generate an economic exchange worth 1.2 trillion USD. Under the agreements the US would be supplying aircrafts and air defence systems. They include a 96 billion USD deal with Qatar Airways to buy up to 210 Boeing 787 Dreamliner and 777X aeroplanes, and a statement of intent for 38 billion USD in investments at Qatar's Al Udeid Airbase and other air defence capabilities.

### Sanctioned Lifted

The Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa has welcomed US President Donald Trump's "courageous" lifting of sanctions on his

country. He further stated that Trump's decision to drop sanctions against Syria "was a historic and courageous decision, which alleviates the suffering of the people, contributes to their rebirth and lays the foundations for stability in the region". Earlier, Trump met al-Sharaa in the Saudi capital Riyadh, thus, becoming the first US president to meet a Syrian leader in a quarter of a century.

His decision to allow UAE to import five lakh Nvidia's chips for developing artificial intelligence. In recent years, Nvidia, a public-traded semiconductor company, which is headquartered in Santa Clara, California. Its chips are considered most advanced AI chips in the world.

It was established in 1993 by a group of IT experts including Jensen Huang, Chris Malachowsky and Curtis Priem. Trump's decision to allow UAE to import chips has caused widespread criticism. Many believe, it would be threatening American security in future.

*Gopal Misra has been associated with national and international media. His books on journalism and geo-politics have been well-appreciated. Views are personal.*

## Maldives thanks India for offering \$50 million financial support

**MALE:** Maldives, on May 12, expressed gratitude to India for offering a Government Treasury Bill of \$50 million, which has supported the island nation in its fiscal reform efforts towards economic stability.

Maldivian Foreign Minister Abdulla Khaleel thanked External Affairs Minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar and the Indian government for offering the timely financial assistance.

"I express my sincere gratitude to EAM S. Jaishankar and the Government of India for extending crucial financial support to the Maldives through the rollover of the \$50 million Treasury Bill. This timely assistance reflects the close bonds of friendship between the Maldives & India and will support the government's ongoing efforts to implement fiscal reforms for economic resilience," Khaleel posted on X.

On the request of the Government of Maldives, the State Bank of India (SBI) has subscribed, for one more year, a \$50 million Government Treasury Bill issued by the Ministry of Finance of Maldives, said the High Commission of India, Maldives in a press release.

"Since March 2019, Government of India has been facilitating subscription of several such Treasury Bills by the SBI and rolling them over, annually, interest-free to the Government



of Maldives. This has been done under a unique Government-to-Government arrangement, as emergency financial assistance to Maldives," it stated.

India considers the Maldives as a key maritime neighbour and an important partner in its 'Neighbourhood First' policy and Vision 'MAHASAGAR' i.e. Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions.

"India has assisted Maldives in times of need and the subscription of this Treasury Bill, along with, the Government of India's decision earlier this year to extend the special quota for export of essential commodities for Maldives, reflect India's continued support to the Government and the people of the Maldives," it further added.

In February, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) allocated Rs 5, 483 crore for aid to

foreign nations, slightly higher than last year's Rs 4, 883 crore, which was announced in the Union Budget 2025-26.

The Maldives received the maximum increase in assistance, from Rs 470 crore in the revised 2024-25 budget to Rs 600 crore in 2025-26.

In January, EAM Jaishankar, during his meeting with Abdulla Khaleel, said that the Maldives remains a "concrete expression" of India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy and New Delhi has always stood by the Indian Ocean archipelago, especially when it comes to giving financial support during challenging times.

"We have increased our engagements in various sectors, and I want to emphasise that India has always stood by the Maldives. You are a concrete expression of our 'Neighbourhood First' policy," said EAM Jaishankar.



# India announces squads for white-ball tour to England

**MUMBAI:** India unveiled the squad for the white-ball series against England away from home starting from June 28 onwards, with Harmanpreet Kaur set to lead both the sides. The tour to England will consist of five T20Is and three ODIs. The series will kickstart with the first T20I at Nottingham, and the final T20I will be at Birmingham from July 12. On the other hand, the first ODI will be on July 16 at Southampton, and the series will conclude with the third ODI at Chester-le-Street on July 22 onwards.

Renuka Singh and Shreyanka Patil are both missing from the lineups. In their previous outing, Team India secured the ODI tri-nation series featuring Sri Lanka and South Africa, beating SL in the final at Colombo. A 116-run knock from Smriti



Mandhana guided India to 342/7 and Sneha Rana (4/38), Amanjot Kaur (3/48) helped India bundle out SL for 245 in 48.2 overs.

**India's T20I Squad:** Harmanpreet Kaur (C), Smriti Mandhana (VC), Shafali Verma, Jemimah Rodrigues,

Richa Ghosh (WK), Yastika Bhatia (WK), Harleen Deol, Deepti Sharma, Sneha Rana, Sree Charani, Shuchi Upadhyay, Amanjot Kaur, Arundhati Reddy, Kranti Gaud, Sayali Satghare.

**India's ODI Squad:** Harmanpreet Kaur (C), Smriti

Mandhana (VC), Pratika Rawal, Harleen Deol, Jemimah Rodrigues, Richa Ghosh (WK), Yastika Bhatia (WK), Tejal Hasabnis, Deepti Sharma, Sneha Rana, Sree Charani, Shuchi Upadhyay, Amanjot Kaur, Arundhati Reddy, Kranti Gaud, Sayali Satghare.

## Vicky Kaushal salutes brave soldiers of India: 'We exist because of you'



**MUMBAI:** Bollywood actor Vicky Kaushal, who climbed up the ranks owing to his latest film 'Chhaava', is saluting the brave personnel of the Indian Armed Forces. On Tuesday, the actor took to his Instagram, and shared pictures of the men and the women in uniform. While the first picture is of a brave soldier from one of India's elite forces taking blessings from Lord Hanuman, the second picture is of Colonel Sofiya Qureshi and Wing Commander Vyomika Singh, who gave precise briefing during Operation Sindoor, India's counter-terror operation after the Pahalgalam attacks in April. Vicky also penned a long note in the caption, as he expressed his gratitude to the soldiers, who protect India. He wrote, "The way to peace is through strength. Saluting the unmatched bravery and precision of our Indian Armed Forces. No words can ever describe the gratitude and pride we feel in our hearts for our true heroes. We exist of you. Jai Hind".

## Akshay, Abhishek and Riteish's 'dil' just got a foot-tapping 'bewafa twist'



**MUMBAI:** The "Housefull 5" makers on Thursday unveiled a new track titled "Dil E Nadaan," which is every bit a foot-tapping dance number sprinkled with an extra scoop of oomph. Akshay and Riteish took to Instagram, where they shared the dance number and wrote in the caption section: "This Dil just got a bewafa twist." The song features Akshay, Abhishek Bachchan, Riteish, Jacqueline Fernandez, Sonam Bajwa and Nargis Fakhri are seen in the song Dil E Nadaan, composed by White Noise Collectives. The track is penned by Kumaar, and sung by Madhubanti Bagchi and Sumonto Mukherjee, Dil E Nadaan is a celebration of impulsive hearts and dramatic love. It was on May 3, when the makers dropped the hip-swaying number "Laal Pari" by Yo Yo Honey Singh and the entire cast was seen grooving to the high-energy party number on a cruise. The track, which is set against the backdrop of a luxurious cruise, is sung by the ever-popular Yo Yo Honey Singh and the dynamic Simar

Kaur. It is also composed by the "Millionaire" hitmaker with lyrics penned by him and Alfaaz. "Laal Pari" showcases the sparkling chemistry of the film's massive ensemble cast Akshay Kumar, Abhishek Bachchan, Riteish Deshmukh, Jacqueline Fernandez, Sonam Bajwa, Nargis Fakhri, Sanjay Dutt, Jackie Shroff, Nana Patekar, Chitrangada Singh, Chunky Pandey, Johnny Lever, Shreyas Talpade, Soundarya Sharma, Nikitin Dheer, and Akashdeep Sabir. Directed by Tarun Mansukhani, Housefull 5 is produced by Sajid Nadiadwala under the banner of Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment. The film will be released on June 6. "Housefull" first released in 2010 and the second installment came out in 2012. The first two films were directed by Sajid Khan. The third film, Housefull 3, which was directed by Sajid-Farhad, hit the screens in 2016. The fourth film came out in 2019 and was directed by Farhad Samji. "Housefull 5" is scheduled to hit the cinemas worldwide on June 6.

## Haryana CM meets newly elected members of Haryana Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee

State government will give full support to HSGPC to work for welfare of society

GULSHAN KUMAR Chandigarh

A delegation of the Haryana Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (HSGPC) met Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini at his residence here today. On this occasion, the Chief Minister congratulated the newly elected members of the committee and said this is a historic moment for the Sikh community. For the first time after the formation of the present government for the third time, the elections of HSGPC have been conducted peacefully. This committee will play an important role in the operation and management of Sikh gurdwaras in the state. It is noteworthy that earlier, 40 members of the committee were elected. Now, 9 other members have been unanimously chosen, many of whom came to meet the Chief Minister today. During the meeting, the Chief Minister expressed hope that the delegation will do the work of 'Guru Ghar' with transparency and selflessness. The Chief Minister assured that the state government will provide all possible support to the committee so that it can work in the interest of the society and establish a unique identity for itself. The Chief Minister said whatever work will be done for the Sikh community through this committee will become a source

## Sonali Bendre shows her gratitude towards our Armed Forces: 'We are forever grateful'

**MUMBAI:** Actress Sonali Bendre shared her gratitude towards our Armed Forces, who risk their lives to protect everyone else. Sonali penned a heartfelt note on her Instagram handle that read, "The grace and dignity of our armed forces can never be overlooked. They risk their lives for everyone in this nation, only driven by unwavering duty and love for the land." "We are forever grateful for the burden they carry, so we may sleep in peace, unafraid of tomorrow. Their courage humbles us. Their sacrifice unites us. Proud of our armed forces. #Jai Hind," the 'Hum Saath Saath Hain' actress wrote. Before this, television actress Karishma Tanna also prayed for the safety of our brave hearts. The 'Scoop' actress penned on her Instagram, "At this moment, while we go about our lives, there are brave hearts standing at our borders, risking everything so we feel safe. To



every soldier, every officer, every family silently holding on while their loved ones fight for our nation- thank you feels too small. I stand with India. With every jawan. With every heartbeat that beats for our country. Praying for your safety. Saluting your courage. Indian is because of you." Furthermore, actress Aditi Rao Hydari prayed for peace in the light of the ongoing conflict between India and Pakistan. Hydari took to her IG and wrote, "Please let us all pray for our country. Salute and pray for our brave armed forces, for every innocent life that is at risk, for every anxious heart. Please let us pray for peace. Jai Hind."

Not just them, but other members of the film fraternity, including Sanjay Dutt, Akshay Kumar, Ajay Devgn, Chiranjeevi, Mahesh Babu, Kangana Ranaut, Anupam Kher, and Kareena Kapoor, saluted the bravery of the Indian Armed Forces. Things have been tense between India and Pakistan ever since the Indian forces conducted 'Operation Sindoor' on May 7, to avenge the terrorist attack in Pahalgalam, J&K.

## Wamiqa Gabbi is glad that she's learned to say 'no'



**NEW DELHI:** Wamiqa Gabbi, who will next be seen in the film "Bhool Chuk Maaf", has talked about that one "mistake" she made and is thankful for. The actress said it was learning to say "no". Asked if there is a "Bhool Chuk" that she made and is thankful for, Wamiqa told to media "It's saying no." The 31-year-old actress is now glad that she's getting comfortable with saying no, when needed. "At that time it feels like such a mistake. Saying no at times feels like such a... It feels like I hope I am not doing something wrong by saying no. But that is something that I'm so glad that getting comfortable with saying no is such a nice thing."

The film is produced by Dinesh Vijan under the Maddock Films banner, with music by Tanishk Bagchi, lyrics by Irshad Kamil, and vocals by Tanishk Bagchi and Madhubanti Bagchi. Talking about "Bhool Chuk Maaf", directed by Karan Sharma, the film revolves around Ranjan, a small-town romantic boy from Banaras, who lands a government job to marry Tili but forgets his vow to Lord Shiva-only to be trapped until he fulfills his promise. A hilarious tale of love, fate, and redemption unfolds.

Director Karan Sharma started his journey from Delhi and stepped into Mumbai in 2005. His short film christened Black Holl is internationally acclaimed as a best narrative short film. The film was supposed to hit the screens on May 9, however the makers on May 8 announced that it would now release digitally on Prime Video on May 16, in "light of recent events and the heightened security drills across the nation" after the Indian Air Force targeted the terrorists' sites without crossing the Pakistan airspace. However, the release of the film has now hit the pause button. The Bombay High Court granted an ad-interim injunction restraining Maddock Films from releasing Bhool Chuk Maaf on OTT platforms before completing its agreed-upon 8-week theatrical run with PVR Inox. PVR Inox, in its court plea, argued that the last-minute change was a breach of the contract signed between the parties on May 6, 2025. The agreement specified that the film must have an 8-week window before it can be released online.

## Pakistani actress Mawra Hocane won't be part of 'Sanam Teri Kasam 2'

**MUMBAI:** Director duo Radhika Rao and Vinay Sapru have confirmed the ousting of Pakistani actress Mawra Hocane from 'Sanam Teri Kasam 2' in the wake of skirmishes between India and Pakistan. In a statement, the directors said that the silence on the actors' part (Pakistani actors, who work in India) against the Pakistan sponsored acts of terror in Pahalgalam is deeply concerning. They also stated that their remarks against India have come

across as highly misplaced, and demand condemnation. They said, "Terrorism of any kind, against any nation, state, or people must be condemned unequivocally. What's even more disheartening in this case is the silence or worse, the statements of certain actors who have worked in India, received immense love, respect, and opportunity, yet failed to condemn such acts of terror against India. In fact, some have gone so far as to criticise India's



legitimate steps to fight terrorism. In light of this, we stand by our government and fully support its decision. Nation first and always. Jai Hind". Earlier, actor Harshvardhan decided

to step down from the sequel to the film if the producers go ahead with the same cast. The actor took to the Stories section of his Instagram on Saturday, and wrote, "While I am grateful for the experience however as things stand, and after reading the direct comments made about my country, I have made a decision to respectfully decline to be a part of 'Sanam Teri Kasam' part 2 if there is any possibility of the previous cast being repeated".

## Genelia Deshmukh Calls Working with Aamir Khan on 'Sitaare Zameen Par' Incredibly Special

**MUMBAI:** Bollywood actress Genelia Deshmukh has opened up about her experience working alongside Aamir Khan in the much-anticipated film "Sitaare Zameen Par." Calling the collaboration "incredibly special," Genelia expressed her excitement about being part of a project that reunites her with meaningful cinema and a powerhouse performer like Aamir. Speaking about the film, Genelia shared, "Collaborating with Aamir Khan Productions after all these years feels incredibly special. This role is unlike anything I've done before! It's emotional, layered, and deeply human. I'm truly grateful for the love the trailer has received, and I can't wait for audiences to experience the film."



This role is unlike anything I've done before! It's emotional, layered, and deeply human. I'm truly grateful for the love the trailer has received, and I can't wait for audiences to experience the film"

Nikumbh we once knew. This time, he plays a weary, short-tempered basketball coach, seemingly at odds with the world and himself. Tasked with training a team of intellectually disabled youngsters, his journey promises growth, not just for his players, but for him as well. Besides Aamir and Genelia, the film stars 10 debutant actors: Aroush Datta, Gopi Krishna Varma, Samvit Desai, Vedant Sharma, Ayush Bhansali, Ashish Pendse, Rishi Shahani, Rishabh Jain, Naman Mishra, and Simran Mangeshkar. "Sitaare Zameen Par," which marks Aamir's return to the silver screen after his 2022 film "Laal Singh Chaddha," is slated to hit theatres on June 20.

## From Rickshaw Puller to Global Innovator- The Inspiring Journey of Dharambir Kamboj

GULSHAN KUMAR Chandigarh

In the small village of Damla in Haryana's Yamunanagar district, a remarkable story of resilience and innovation is unfolding, one that has not only transformed the life of Dharambir Kamboj, a farmer from Damla village, but has also made a global impact. Despite having formal education only up to the 10th grade, Dharambir has developed a multipurpose food processing machine that is now used in 18 countries across the world. Dharambir's path to success was anything but easy. Due to financial struggles, he moved

to Delhi in the 1980s and took up work as a rickshaw puller. After a life-changing accident, he returned to his village and turned to farming, cultivating aloe vera and tulsi on his ancestral land. However, low returns from selling raw produce led him to a pivotal realization: to increase profits, he needed to process the crops himself. Unable to afford expensive equipment, Dharambir did the unthinkable—he built his own machine. With support from the horticulture department, which provided Rs. 25,000 in initial funding, he developed a rosewater extraction device. Through persistent experimentation and innovation, he



transformed it into a versatile machine capable of handling over a dozen food processing tasks. Today, Dharambir's multi purpose food processing machine can extract juice without crushing seeds, grind, mix,

extract oils, distill rosewater, prepare aloe vera gel, roast, peel vegetables, make khoya, gajar ka halwa, and much more. Products like amla murabba, candies, soaps, herbal gels, juices, and even gular for Holi can be prepared using this invention. Recognizing the significance of his work, the Haryana government announced a subsidy of Rs. 80,000 to Rs. 1,00,000 for farmers and self-help groups purchasing his Rs 2 lakh machine, making it more accessible

to those who need it most. Supported by the National Innovation Foundation and Chaudhary Charan Singh Agricultural University, Dharambir's innovation journey has gained global recognition. His machines are now used in countries like the USA, Italy, Kenya, Australia, and Nigeria, among others. In 2013, his efforts were honored by the President of India, Pranab Mukherjee. His story was also featured in Bollywood film Padman alongside Akshay Kumar, and in 2022, it found a place in the NCERT Class 12 Business Studies textbook, becoming an inspiration for students nationwide.