

REGION

2

## ATISHI VIDEO: DELHI BJP FLAYS AAP LEADERS FOR TWISTING COURT ORDERS



# Delhi Assembly seeks video clip's forensic report by Jan 22

**NEW DELHI:** The Delhi Assembly Secretariat, on Friday, asked the Punjab government to submit by January 22 the forensic report on a video related to the House proceeding in which Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader and Leader of the Opposition (LoP) Atishi allegedly used objectionable words while referring to a Sikh Guru. The development coincided with Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta hinting that a special session of the House may be convened on the matter.

Delhi Assembly Secretary Ranjeet Singh, in a letter sent to Punjab government's Forensic Science Laboratory in SAS Nagar (Mohali), said, "Enclosed is a copy of the press statement stated to have been issued by the Jalandhar Commissionerate of Police. It mentions that a FIR has been lodged in the matter of a video clip of the proceedings of the Delhi Assembly dated January 6, 2026." He added: "The press statement issued in Punjab also stated that the video was forensically examined and found to have been deliberately

doctored. The press statement was brought to the notice of the Assembly Speaker during the sitting of the House held on January 9, 2026." "In view of the facts, you are hereby directed to submit a written statement in this regard along with the complete records, including the application received from the Police authorities and the Report issued by your Office, to the undersigned on or before January 22, 2026."

Addressing media persons, Assembly Speaker Gupta said, "In view of the gravity of the issue, the dignity of the Delhi Legislative Assembly, and the

need to uphold democratic accountability, a special session of the House may be convened if required, as all decisions in this matter must be taken by the House itself and nowhere else." "Enclosed is a copy of the Press statement stated to have been issued by the Jalandhar Commissionerate of Police. It mentions that a FIR has been lodged in the matter of a video clip of the proceedings of the Delhi Assembly dated January 2026. The Press statement also states that the video was forensically examined and found to have been deliberately doctored," the Secretariat letter said.



BANKING & FINANCE

6

## GOLD, SILVER PRICES EASE MODERATELY AS US DOLLAR GAINS



# Air quality slips to 'very poor' category; cold wave, dense fog grips Delhi-NCR



**NEW DELHI:** The air quality deteriorated sharply on Friday morning in Delhi-NCR, with several areas recording Air Quality Index (AQI) levels in the "very poor" category, according to data from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). The worsening pollution coincided with cold wave conditions and dense fog across the city, adding to health and travel concerns. At 7 a.m., Anand Vihar recorded an AQI of 354, placing it firmly in the "very poor" category. Other pollution hotspots also reported alarming levels, with Ashok Vihar at 367, ITO at 362, RK Puram at 374, and Patparganj at 372. Wazirpur and Chandni

Chowk recorded AQI readings of 374 and 370, respectively, while Dwarka Sector 8 stood at 369. An AQI reading between 301 and 400 is classified as "very poor" and can cause respiratory illness on prolonged exposure. According to the AQI scale, values between 0-50 are considered 'good', 51-100 'satisfactory', 101-200 'moderate', 201-300 'poor', 301-400 'very poor' and 401-500 'severe'. The spike in pollution levels has come amid cold wave conditions prevailing over the national capital. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) said Delhi experienced minimum temperatures significantly below normal for mid-January. While temperatures hovered around

POTPOURRI

8

## STRATEGIC PREPARATION FOR INDIAN NURSES IN LIGHT OF GCC HEALTHCARE EXPANSION



## UP Varsities Must Nurture Youth to Win Medals in 2036 Olympics: CM Yogi



**LUCKNOW:** Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Friday called upon universities and schools in the state to promote sports culture and help the country win a large number of medals in the 2030 Commonwealth Games and the 2036 Olympics. Inaugurating the East Zone Inter-University Women's Basketball Championship at Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gorakhpur University, the Chief Minister said, "Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the country is preparing to bid for hosting the 2036 Olympics, and we must begin preparing today to win a handsome number of medals in that event." Highlighting the state government's efforts to promote sportspersons, he said more than 500 medal winners have been given government jobs in various departments, and over 96,000 sports kits have been distributed to youth at the district level. Sharing details of encouragement of medal winners with awards, he said, "Now, not only the Union government but also state governments provide awards to athletes who win medals in the Olympics, Commonwealth Games, Asian Games, or World Championships." "In Uttar Pradesh, our government provides special support to young athletes from the state. If a youth from Uttar Pradesh qualifies for the Olympics and participates in the team, we provide them with financial assistance of Rs 10 lakh to support their participation," he said. Chief Minister Yogi said, "There is visible enthusiasm here to promote sports. I believe that when we talk about sports, over the past 11 years, we have witnessed the birth of a new sports culture in the country." "Before 2014, sports and athletic competitions were not a priority on the government's agenda. People felt that there was no focus on this area, and often it was neglected," he said. He hailed PM Modi's initiatives like 'Khelo India', 'Fit India Movement' and 'Khelo MP Youth Games' as milestones in taking the country towards becoming a sports superpower. The Chief Minister said sports not only keep the body and mind healthy but also serve as a foundation to build a strong nation. He also recalled how sages under Indian tradition followed discipline and pursued physical activities to lead a healthy life and maintain a fit body.

# Closely Watching Situation in Iran, Will Take all steps for Welfare of Indians: MEA

**NEW DELHI:** The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Friday that India is closely watching the fast-developing situation in Iran and assured that it will take all necessary measures for the welfare of Indians. While addressing a weekly media briefing in New Delhi on Friday, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal stated that around 9,000 Indian nationals reside in Iran, which include students, people connected to business, professionals, pilgrims and seafarers. "Given the situation there, we have issued a few advisories, asking Indian nationals to avoid all travel to Iran and Indian nationals who are already resident in Iran, to leave Iran by available means, including by commercial flights. We continue to closely watch



the unfolding situation there and will take all necessary steps for the welfare of our people," said Jaiswal. Protests in Iran were initially triggered by severe economic conditions, including record inflation and currency collapse, and have since spread across the country. Protesters are expressing dissent and calling for significant political and governance-related changes. On January 5, India advised

its nationals to avoid non-essential travel to Iran until further notice, owing to the recent developments in the country. Furthermore, it asked Indian nationals living in Iran on resident-visas to register with the Indian Embassy, if they had not done it already. When asked about reports claiming that India has exited Chabahar Port project, Jaiswal stated, "On 28 October, 2025,

as you are aware, the US Department of Treasury had issued a letter outlining the guidance on the conditional sanctions waiver which is valid till 26th April, 2026. We remain engaged with the US side in working out this arrangement." Last year, the US extended a six-month sanctions waiver for India to continue its operations at the Chabahar port, effective from October 29. In 2024, India and Iran signed a 10-year agreement to develop the Shahid Beheshti terminal. However, the US Secretary of State revoked the sanctions exception issued in 2018 under the Iran Freedom and Counter-Proliferation Act (IFCA) for Afghanistan reconstruction assistance and economic development, effective September 29.

## India Attaches Highest Priority to Working with Japan in International Forums: EAM Jaishankar



**NEW DELHI:** Hailing the ties between India and Japan, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said on Friday that New Delhi attaches the highest priority to working with Tokyo in international forums such as the Quad, the United Nations and the G20. In his opening remarks during the 18th India-Japan Strategic Dialogue with his Japanese counterpart Toshimitsu Motegi in New Delhi, EAM Jaishankar noted that the ties between the two nations have transformed from an economic relationship to one which is "broad, comprehensive and strategic". "Let me today as I welcome you underline that India attaches very great priority to its friendship with Japan, and over the last two decades, we have been successful in transforming the relationship from what was primarily an economic relationship into one that is broad, comprehensive and strategic in its focus. We attach the highest priority to working with Japan in international forums, and immediately, Quad, the United Nations, our G4 membership, and the G20 come to mind," EAM Jaishankar said.

## Startup India: Indian Youth Focused on Solving Real Problems: PM Modi

**NEW DELHI:** The Indian youth is focused on solving real problems, said Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while celebrating the milestone of 10 years of the Startup India mission, on Friday.



Speaking at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, PM Modi lauded the country's startup founders and innovators who chartered a path for themselves and boosted the country's image globally. "India's youth are focused on solving real problems. Driven by innovation and enterprise, India's Startups are shaping a self-reliant and resilient economy," PM said. "In just 10 years, the Startup India Mission has become a revolution. Today, India is the world's third-largest startup ecosystem," he added. He noted that a decade ago, there were fewer than 500 startups in the country. "Today, that number has soared to over 2,00,000. In 2014, India was home to just four unicorns, but now it boasts more than 125 active unicorns. This remarkable growth has captured the world's attention," the Prime Minister said. These startups work in over 50 areas, including deep tech, space tech, drone tech, quantum tech, agritech, and AI/ML, among others. He said the startups are now becoming Unicorns, and the existing Unicorns are now launching IPO and creating several jobs in the country. "I see before me the future of

a new and emerging India," he said, while appreciating those who showed the courage to dream. Recalling the situation a decade ago, he said there was no scope for individual effort and innovation at all. "We challenged those circumstances, we launched Startup India, and we gave the youth an open sky, and today the result is in front of us. This 10-year journey is not just the story of a government initiative's success; it is the journey of thousands and lakhs of dreams like yours. It is the journey of countless dreams coming to life," PM Modi said. He stated that earlier startups were often perceived as a path to failure, and were limited to children belonging to the rich class. But the Startup India programme enabled youth in tier-2 and 3 cities, as well as in villages, to dream. It led to inclusive growth. "Women are major contributors to the Startup India mission. In about 45 per cent of recognised startups, there is one woman director or partner. India now has the second-largest global ecosystem for women-led startup funding," the Prime Minister said.

# India and EU likely to sign Free Trade Pact this month



**NEW DELHI:** India and the European Union may sign the proposed free trade agreement as early as this month during the official visit of the top EU leaders to New Delhi, who will also be the chief guests at the prestigious Republic Day parade on January 26. Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal told journalists that the India and EU negotiators were very close to finalising a trade agreement and were looking at wrapping up the loose ends before the top leadership meeting scheduled for January 27, a day after the Republic Day parade. He said that as many as 20

of 24 chapters under the India-EU FTA have been finalised, and the few remaining issues were being discussed in the ongoing negotiations. European Council President Antonio Luis Santos da Costa and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen will be on an official visit to India from January 25 to 27 at the invitation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and will also officiate as Chief Guests of India's 77th Republic Day celebrations on January 26. The two leaders will then attend the India-EU Summit the next day. German Chancellor Fried-

rich Merz, during his visit to India this week, had also indicated that the India-EU trade pact could be signed by the end of January. Merz said Germany strongly supports the free trade agreement. He urged the European Union and India to expedite the signing of the free trade agreement, as this would help fix supply chains that have faced disruptions over the past year. Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal on Tuesday listed the trade talks with the EU in Brussels as a "major highlight" from his Ministry. "Held a productive dialogue with the European Union Trade and Economic Security Commissioner, Mr Maros Sefcovic, in Brussels. We conducted detailed deliberations on key areas of the proposed India-EU FTA. Also emphasised the strategic importance of concluding a fair, balanced, and ambitious agreement that aligns with their shared values, economic priorities, and commitment to a rules-based trading framework," the minister said. He further stated that he visited Liechtenstein and reviewed the implementation of the India-EFTA Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement with the top political leadership.

## A simple rickshaw enabled a poor painter to become a winner in politics

**DOMINICK RODRIGUES**  
Mumbai

Anil Baburao Bhosle, hailing from village Latur in Maharashtra, came to Mumbai over three decades ago and took up social work to help people from different walks of life, while also continuing to work as a painter. He joined the BJP and worked there for 32 years before deciding to take the plunge into politics by contesting the Mira-Bhayander municipal Corporation elections in Thane district adjoining Mumbai. However, when he was refused a party ticket by the BJP twice, he decided to contest as an independent by choosing the rickshaw as his election symbol. Then, when he held a public rally, he was surprised to see host of around a 100 to 150 rickshaws following him in support of his candidature. Another surprise came in the form of local people including women in large numbers walking in his rally. Bhosle defeated the three time sitting corporator Mira Devi Ramlal Yadav with a difference of 881 votes when he secured 6141 votes against his rival's 5260 votes. His supporters attributed his win to his attitude of being like a «Big brother» giving generous support and standing up for poor people at any time of the day or night.

# EU leaders to be Chief Guests at Republic Day celebrations

**NEW DELHI:** European Council President Antonio Costa and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, who will be on a three-day State Visit to India from January 25-27 at the invitation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, will also be the Chief Guests at the 77th Republic Day celebrations, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) announced on Thursday. During the visit, Antonio Costa and Ursula von der Leyen will co-chair the 16th India-EU Summit set to be held on January 27. "During the visit, President Costa and President von der Leyen will meet Hon'ble Rashtrapati, and hold restricted and delegation level talks with Prime Minister Modi. An In-



dia-EU Business Forum is also expected to be organised on the sidelines of the India-EU Summit, " read a statement issued by the MEA. India and the European Union are strategic partners since 2004. The 15th India-EU Summit was held virtually in 2022. Bilateral ties between two sides have deepened across various sectors, particularly following the historic visit of EU College of Commissioners

to India in February, 2025. "Participation of EU leaders as Chief Guests at the 77th Republic Day and the 16th India-EU Summit will further deepen the India-EU Strategic Partnership and advance collaboration in priority areas of mutual interest," the MEA stated. Republic Day celebrations mark the adoption of the Constitution of India on January 26, 1950, and are among the country's most significant national events. The Republic Day Parade, held annually at Kartavya Path in the national capital, features marching contingents, tableaux and displays by the armed forces and other participants, and is attended by large numbers of spectators.

# Atishi video: Delhi BJP flays AAP leaders for twisting court orders

**NEW DELHI:** Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva has said that the party respects the court order related to the direction to social media platforms to take down a video linked to the Leader of Opposition Atishi's remarks in the city Assembly but criticised the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leaders for twisting facts about the matter.

He said the BJP respects all court orders but it is unfortunate that the AAP-led Punjab government filed a petition in the Jalandhar court without making the Delhi BJP leaders — who had shared the concerned video clip on social media platform X — parties to the case.

In its petition, the Punjab government claimed that the said video could lead to riots in Punjab and, therefore, sought its removal from various social media platforms such as



Facebook, X, and Instagram, the Delhi BJP said.

Sachdeva said the Jalandhar court, without conducting any independent examination of the concerned video, directed the social media companies to block the video solely on the basis of the Punjab government's claim regarding the possibility of law-and-order disturbances.

The Delhi BJP President

added: "If the AAP and its Punjab government believe that the video released by Delhi Minister Kapil Mishra on social media is fake, then they must answer my question: If AAP considers the video to be fake, why did it not file a complaint regarding the incident that occurred in the Delhi Assembly with the Delhi Police or before any court in Delhi?"

He also asked: "When the

Speaker of the Delhi Legislative Assembly had already ordered a forensic examination of the concerned video, why did AAP leaders file a complaint with the Punjab Police and initiate an investigation without first examining the original Assembly recording?"

Sachdeva hit out at the Punjab government and AAP leaders for misinterpreting the court's order, claiming that the court has declared the video fake which clearly indicates that the AAP leadership is shaken by the political damage caused in Punjab due to the controversial remarks made by Atishi against Sikh Gurus during a discussion.

He added that instead of misrepresenting the court's order, it would be better if AAP leaders ask Atishi to issue a public apology for her controversial statement.

# Court Orders to Remove, Block 'Doctored' Video of Ex-Delhi CM Atishi



**NEW DELHI:** A trial court in Punjab's Jalandhar, on Thursday, ordered the removal and blocking of a "doctored" video featuring former Delhi Chief Minister Atishi.

The video clip, which purportedly showed her making controversial remarks about the ninth Sikh master, Guru Tegh Bahadur, was found to be digitally manipulated to incite communal tension.

Acting on an application of the cybercrime police, the court

of Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate in Jalandhar said the video's circulation posed a threat to public order and religious harmony in the state.

The court invoked Rule 3(d) of the Information Technology Rules, 2021, and directed Meta (Facebook and Instagram), X, and Telegram to pull down the objectionable content.

"The allegedly offensive material is directed to be removed forthwith and in any event within 24 hours of the receipt

of the court order," the court ruled and sought a compliance report within 10 days.

It, however, mandated that all identical, mirror, or derivative versions of the content be blocked as and when identified by the state Cybercrime department.

Responding to the court order, Aam Aadmi Party's national media in-charge Anurag Dhanda told the media that the Jalandhar court gave a major judgment in the matter in which Delhi Minister Kapil Mishra had released a fake video and disrespected gurus.

He said the court, in its judgment, said the video shared by Delhi Minister Mishra was found to be doctored.

Last week, the Jalandhar Police Commissionerate said that an FIR has been registered on a complaint by Iqbal Singh regarding uploading and circulating edited and doctored video of Atishi.

# Delhi HC Issues Notice to CBI on Rabri's Plea Challenging Framing of Charges



**NEW DELHI:** The Delhi High Court on Friday issued notice to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on a plea filed by former Bihar Chief Minister Rabri Devi challenging a trial court order that directed the framing of criminal charges against her and her family members in the IRCTC hotel scam case.

After briefly hearing the matter, a single-judge Bench of Justice Swaruna Kanta Sharma sought the response of the CBI and listed the petition for further hearing on January 19.

In her plea, Rabri Devi, wife of Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) chief Lalu Prasad, contended that the trial court, without properly appreciating the material on record, had erroneously framed charges against her merely on presumptions.

The development comes days after the Delhi High Court issued notice on a similar plea filed by her son, RJD leader and former Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav, challenging the trial court's order directing the framing of charges against him and his family members in the same case.

While issuing notice on Tejashwi Yadav's criminal revision petition and his application seeking a stay on the trial court proceedings, Justice Sharma sought the response of the CBI and directed that his plea be heard along with a similar petition filed by Lalu Prasad Yadav.

In an order passed on October 13, 2025, Special Judge (PC Act) Vishal Gogne of the Rouse Avenue Courts paved the way for the trial of Lalu Prasad Yadav, his wife Rabri Devi, his son Tejashwi Yadav, and other accused under Sections 420 (cheating) and 120B (criminal conspiracy) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) as well as provisions of the Prevention of Corruption Act, after they pleaded not guilty to the charges.

The special court had reserved its order on May 29 after hearing detailed arguments on the issue of framing of charges against Lalu Prasad Yadav, his family members, Prem Gupta, Sarla Gupta and Railway officials Rakesh Sakseena and P.K. Goyal.

The alleged scam dates back to the period between 2004 and 2009, when Lalu Prasad was the Railway Minister.

During his tenure, two IRCTC hotels were allegedly given on lease without following prescribed norms. One of the hotels was allotted to Sarla Gupta, wife of Prem Gupta, a close associate of the RJD chief and a Rajya Sabha MP at the time. As per the prosecution, the RJD leader got three acres of prime land through a benami company.

# Organized GST scam worth Rs 8 crore, issued 700 fake bills hacking a woman entrepreneur's ID



SATISH HANDA  
Panipat

A major scam has come to light in Panipat, where a woman entrepreneur's GST ID was hacked, showing a fake turnover of over Rs 8 crore issuing over 700 fake bills. The victim, Sushila Devi, was having a plastic recycling firm. After the scam was exposed, in which a woman entrepreneur's GST ID was hacked showing a fake turnover of over Rs 8 crore issuing over 700 fake bills the Model Town police station has registered an FIR under sections of organized cyber-crime and economic crime and started investigation.

Sushila Devi, a resident of Sugar Mill Colony, stated that she started a plastic recycling business in 2019 under the name Raj & Sons, which was closed down in 2023 after the COVID-19 outbreak. It is alleged that in March 2025, documents were handed over to Himanshu Sharma, a CA, in the name of handling ITR and GST. After this, her GST ID was misused and between May and October 2025, nearly 700 fake bills related to cement and sanitary goods were issued to 27 construction companies, even though the victims woman entrepreneurs had no involvement in such businesses. When the GST portal reopened on November 26-27, instead of a nil return, entries worth lakhs of rupees with a turnover of over eight crore rupees were found. An investigation by the CGST office confirmed that the victim's mobile number and email address had been deleted from the GST records, allowing all OTP alerts and login access to the accused.

Investigation revealed that fake bills were issued in the name of 27 firms including in the name of municipal corporations, district councils, irrigation departments, water resources, the Prime Minister's Rural Road Scheme and several other departments. The most crucial evidence is an audio recording from November 30, 2025, in which Himanshu and his associates, Harsh and Arpit, are heard admitting to fraudulent billing, changing ID passwords, and gaining access to GST.

# Safe roads are a Human Right—HHRC

AAYUSH GOEL  
Gurugram

Declaring that the safe use of public roads is inseparable from the Right to Life guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution, the Haryana Human Rights Commission (HHRC) on Thursday took a stern and uncompromising stand on road safety, holding that negligence in road

# Women entrepreneurs press for strong policy action at Haryana Pre-Budget meet

AAYUSH GOEL  
Gurugram

Women entrepreneurs called for strong and time-bound policy action to help women-led businesses grow into large, job-creating enterprises as Haryana prepares its economic roadmap towards Haryana Vision 2047, at the State's Pre-Budget Consultation held earlier this week in Gurugram. The consultation, chaired by Nayab Singh Saini, saw active participation from women entrepreneurs led by PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry Women Entrepreneurs, along with industry bodies and grassroots business leaders.

Placing clear demands before the government, the women entrepreneurs said they no longer want policies limited to startups alone. They stressed the need for government support that enables women to build large enterprises, become part of domestic and global supply chains, and generate sustained employment, positioning women as a key growth force in Haryana's economy over the long term.

Aligning their suggestions with Vision 2047, the delegation urged the State to identify priority industries and service sectors for women-led businesses and



back them with focused incentives, easy access to finance, and stable policies. They strongly recommended setting up Centres of Excellence in future-focused areas such as artificial intelligence, electronics, and deep technology, along with incubation centres offering co-manufacturing and shared facilities to support product development, quality control, branding, and commercial-scale production. From capacity-building to market integration, the entrepreneurs also pressed for a state-wide micro-business programme to promote self-employment and formal entrepreneurship among women at the grassroots level. The programme, they said, should offer structured training, mentoring, seed funding, and as-

sured market linkages to ensure sustainable outcomes. Market access and assured demand were highlighted as critical growth drivers. The delegation demanded strict implementation of the 3% public procurement mandate for women entrepreneurs across State departments and PSUs, creation of dedicated export support systems, and regular buyer-seller meets to help women-led businesses expand beyond local markets. To encourage private sector participation, they suggested tax incentives on purchases from women-owned enterprises and SHG-linked initiatives.

The women entrepreneurs further called for end-to-end, market-linked support covering certification, logistics, fi-

nance, branding, and compliance, backed by clear impact measurement. They also sought scholarships for women in higher education and STEM disciplines, leadership development programmes, and large-scale awareness campaigns to encourage women's education and workforce participation, especially in Tier-3 and Tier-4 cities.

Linking growth with sustainability and welfare, the delegation proposed involving Self-Help Groups and Farmer Producer Organisations in increasing green cover through plantation and livelihood-based environmental initiatives. They also recommended workplace health measures, including preventive healthcare and screening programmes, to support women in the workforce.

Emphasising accountability, the women entrepreneurs urged the government to make these measures mandatory, ensure coordination across departments, and put strong monitoring systems in place. Welcoming the State government's consultative approach, they reaffirmed their commitment to work closely with Haryana to translate Vision 2047 into a practical, inclusive, and women-led growth agenda.

# Infrastructure push puts SPR on investors' radar as prices jump 125% in three years



AAYUSH GOEL  
Gurugram

Gurugram's Southern Peripheral Road (SPR) has moved decisively into the spotlight as one of Delhi NCR's most compelling investment-led residential corridors, as a sustained government infrastructure push, large-scale connectivity projects and institutional-grade development drive strong capital appreciation and long-term visibility. Property prices along SPR have risen nearly 125 per cent between December 2022 and December 2025, with average values now crossing Rs 17,000 per sq ft, according to Magicbricks.

Market participants see the sharp rise not as a specula-

tive spike, but as a structural repricing backed by execution-heavy public investment and employment-led demand.

SPR's investment appeal begins with its strategic positioning. The 16-kilometre arterial stretch links Gurgaon-Faridabad Road with NH-48, while connecting Golf Course Road and Sohna Road at Badshahpur Chowk, effectively stitching together Gurugram's most active residential and commercial zones. This role as a mobility spine has allowed SPR to absorb new supply without stress, while steadily pushing up land and asset values.

The government-led infrastructure pipeline along the corridor is now emerging as the dominant forward-looking

trigger. Gurugram Metro Rail Limited (GMRL) has proposed a 36-kilometre Sector 56-Pachgaon metro corridor with 28 elevated stations, a project expected to sharply improve public transport penetration across emerging residential belts. A key investment signal is the planned double-decker viaduct between Ghata Chowk and Vatika Chowk, integrating a metro line and an elevated road on common piers, with an estimated outlay of Rs 8,500 crore.

In parallel, the Gurugram Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA) has approved a redesigned Vatika Chowk cloverleaf, integrating both ends of the elevated SPR with Sohna Highway. The 5.3-kilometre elevated SPR stretch from Vatika Chowk to NH-48, costing around Rs 750 crore, is expected to unlock uninterrupted movement from Sector 58 to Sector 115, while strengthening access to Delhi, Sohna and the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway — a combination that significantly enhances rental and resale prospects.

# Government begins investigation against Al Falah University



SATISH HANDA  
Faridabad

The Haryana government will now tighten its grip on Al Falah University (AFU), situated in Faridabad district, has been in the news for allegations of involvement in terrorist activities. Following numerous controversies and complaints, the Haryana government has initiated an investigation into Al Falah University. A committee headed by IAS officer Shyamal Mishra has been formed for the investigation. An official from the Higher Education Department has also been included in the committee. The committee has submitted complaints and other documents related to the college. The committee is thoroughly investigating all aspects, will submit its report to the Haryana government as soon as possible. Only then will the state government be able to make any decision on the university. Three prominent doctors named in the November 10 Delhi bomb blasts near Red Fort were faculty members at Al Falah University in Faridabad. These included Dr. Shaheen, Dr. Umar, and Dr. Muzammil. The bombings claimed the lives of more than 15 people. Following the controversy, several central agencies launched investigations. Parents of some students also submitted complaints to the Haryana government, alleging suspicious activities, a lack of faculty and a threat to students' education.

# Gurugram stays red hot as Rs 86,588 crore investment surge signals sustained real estate upcycle



AAYUSH GOEL  
Gurugram

Gurugram has witnessed a sharp surge in real estate investment over the past year, with Rs 86,588 crore worth of projects approved in 2025, reinforcing its position as one of the country's leading property destinations.

Regulatory oversight by the Real Estate Regulatory Authority (RERA), Gurugram has played a central role in sustaining investor confidence, with the Authority positioning itself as a bridge between buyers and builders.

Emphasising the regulator's role in maintaining market discipline, Arun Kumar, Chairman of Gurugram RERA, said the Authority remains focused on protecting stakeholder interests while ensuring compliance with established norms. "With the Authority safeguarding investor and homebuyer interests, Gurugram has reflected strong investor confidence and sustained market momentum. The Authority acts as a bridge between buyers and builders and works to preserve the interests of both while upholding bylaws and norms," Kumar said.

Official data shows that during calendar year 2025, Gurugram RERA approved 131 projects involving a cumulative investment of Rs 86,588 crore. These approvals translate into the proposed development of

35,455 units, underscoring the scale of construction activity underway in the city. Notably, 28 of the 131 projects alone accounted for investments worth Rs 59,360 crore, highlighting the increasing dominance of large, capital-intensive developments.

Residential projects continue to anchor Gurugram's real estate pipeline, with 31,455 units approved across a broad spectrum of housing categories. The mix includes 17,405 group housing units, 5,720 mixed land use units, 4,040 residential group units, 2,122 affordable group housing units, 1,954 Deen Dayal housing units and 214 RPC units, reflecting an emphasis on planned, inclusive urban growth.

Commercial real estate has also seen steady traction. Of the 4,000 commercial units approved during the year, 168 units are dedicated to IT parks, reinforcing Gurugram's growing stature as a commercial and technology hub alongside its residential expansion.

To enhance transparency and credibility in the project approval process, Gurugram RERA rolled out several institutional reforms in 2025. These included stricter scrutiny of information submitted by developers, mandatory site inspections by domain experts and the introduction of public consultation through official notices as a prerequisite for project registration.

# Haryana chokes as NCAP fights dust, not emissions



AAYUSH GOEL  
Gurugram

India's National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) is ending its first full cycle with a hard truth staring policymakers in the face: Haryana and the National Capital Region remain among the country's worst pollution hotspots despite years of funding, plans, and targets. A new assessment by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air shows that the problem is

a seasonal winter phenomenon. The rankings underline the scale of failure. Delhi recorded an annual PM10 average of 197 µg/m³, over three times the legal limit. Ghaziabad and Greater Noida followed close behind, while Gurugram and Noida consistently featured among India's most polluted cities for PM2.5. These are not marginal exceedances; they represent sustained exposure to harmful air for millions.

Yet NCAP's design and execution have failed to match this reality. Although Rs 13,415 crore has been released nationally under NCAP and Finance Commission grants, only 74% of funds have been utilised, and Haryana's utilisation stands at just 59%, while Delhi's is a strikingly low 33%. This underuse is not due to lack of need, but administrative bottlenecks, weak planning, and low project readiness, particularly in non-million-plus cities such as Faridabad and Gurugram.

Across NCR, which includes Gurugram, Faridabad, Ghaziabad, Noida, Greater Noida and Delhi, air quality breaches are near-universal. In 2025, all NCR cities with adequate data exceeded the national PM10 standard, and 12 of 14 NCR cities also breached PM2.5 limits, confirming that pollution here is chronic and year-round, not

## BMC Poll Results: BJP-Led Alliance Crosses Majority Mark; Thackeray Cousins Fall Behind

**NEW DELHI:** The BJP-led alliance has surged past the majority mark in the high-stakes Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) elections, according to counting trends, dealing a setback to the Thackeray cousins' efforts to retain control of India's richest civic body.

As votes were counted for elections to 29 municipal corporations across Maharashtra, the Bharatiya Janata Party emerged as the single largest force in Mumbai's civic polls, with its alliance gaining a decisive edge.

In the BMC, the BJP-led combine was ahead in 119 wards, with the BJP leading in 88 wards and Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena faction ahead in 31.

In contrast, the Thackeray family's combined strength



appeared to fall short of expectations.

Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena (UBT) was leading in 64 wards, while Raj Thackeray's Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) was ahead in six, taking the combined tally of the cousins to 70 wards.

Despite their attempts at political consolidation, the duo

held after a prolonged delay of nearly nine years, adding to their importance.

Beyond Mumbai, trends across the state also tilted strongly in favour of the BJP-led alliance. In the 29 municipal corporations, the BJP was leading in 909 wards, while its ally, the Shiv Sena led by Shinde, was ahead in 237 wards, reinforcing the ruling alliance's dominance in urban local bodies.

Pune emerged as another major battleground, where the two rival factions of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) — led by Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar and his uncle, Rajya Sabha MP Sharad Pawar — joined hands for the municipal polls. The outcome in Pune is being seen as a test of the alliance's electoral viability at the grassroots level.

appeared sluggish in matching the BJP alliance's momentum. The BMC election is being closely watched due to the civic body's immense political and financial significance.

With an annual budget exceeding Rs 74,400 crore, control of the BMC has long been a key prize in Maharashtra politics. The polls were

## Faltering Hizbul Mujahideen: ISI Sidelines Terror Group in Face Of India's Effective Kashmir Operations



**NEW DELHI:** Post Operation Sindoor, there was a considerable amount of damage that was caused to ISI's favourite proxies, the Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Jaish-e-Mohammad. Since then, both groups have been trying to regroup, but the progress has been slow.

Recently, the ISI got the two outfits together and directed them to carry out rebuilding and orchestrating terror attacks jointly. However, the Hizbul Mujahideen, which also suffered losses during Operation Sindoor, has been kept out of almost all processes. Despite it being a homegrown terror outfit, the ISI wants to keep it out of all operations. A counterterrorism expert says that this strategy is deliberate. The ISI has started to realise that the locals in Jammu and Kashmir are not inclined towards violence any longer. This has led to a major drop in the number of local terrorists.

While the issue of overground workers does exist in Jammu and Kashmir, recruitments have slowed down largely. Post the abrogation of Article 370 by the Narendra Modi government, the security forces have been operating with a free hand, and this has led to the neutralisation of many terrorists. The operations have not just targeted terrorists, but their ideological and logistical networks. With separatism almost coming to a close, there is no one to instigate the youth into taking up arms or indulging in stone pelting. This separatist network was the backbone of the Hizbul Mujahideen, and with the ecosystem dead, the outfit would find it very hard to make a comeback in the Valley.

Further, the manner in which the Indian security forces wiped out the entire leadership in Jammu and Kashmir in hardly anytime, the new recruitments have gone down largely as none subscribe to this outfit. They have started to realise that the Syed Salahuddin-led outfit is a weak one. In recent times, the ISI has urged the Hizbul Mujahideen to carry out a propaganda drive online. However, this has failed to gain much traction in the Valley. It had even made calls to the youth of Kashmir to join the outfit and revive it, but the response was very cold, an Intelligence Bureau official said.

While the Jaish and the Lashkar have been the biggest threats in the Valley, agencies say that the Hizbul Mujahideen was a more dangerous force. It was capable of recruiting with

ease, and its ideology rang a bell with the youth. Another official said that the entire command structure of the outfit was wiped out in very little time. This has played on the psychology of the youth who have now realised that the life span of a terrorist is very low and hence joining the Hizbul Mujahideen makes no sense.

Officials contend that the youth have realised that there is no future in this business.

The ISI realises that all attempts that the Hizbul Mujahideen is making in Jammu and Kashmir have been futile. Hence, it feels that having the Hizbul Mujahideen alongside the Jaish and the Lashkar would be more detrimental rather than beneficial, counterterrorism experts say. Another major reason why the Hizbul Mujahideen has failed is because it is unable to drum up a narrative of discrimination and mindless killings by the Indian state. If one takes note of the recent operations that the security forces have carried out, then they have been clean ones. This meant minimising the collateral damage, while also enhancing surveillance.

Today, the reliance is more on human intelligence, and this has become strong thanks to the support of the local communities. The locals are today more loyal to the security forces as they have realised that the clean-up of J&K has, in fact, been more beneficial for them. Issues such as discrimination and the need for autonomy are not issues that the Hizbul Mujahideen can raise any longer. This has made the group completely ineffective, as a result of which the ISI is not granting the outfit any major role.

While the Jaish and the Lashkar have been the biggest threats in the Valley, agencies say that the Hizbul Mujahideen was a more dangerous force. It was capable of recruiting with

## PM Modi wishes for prosperity and success of everyone on Magh Bihu



**NEW DELHI:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday extended his greetings to the people of Assam on the occasion of Magh Bihu and expressed hope that the festival would bring peace, good health, and happiness to everyone's lives.

In a letter addressed to the people of Assam, the Prime Minister conveyed his warm wishes and highlighted the cultural and social significance of the festival.

"Dear fellow citizen, warmest greetings to you and your family on the joyous occasion of Magh Bihu. Embodying the best of Assamese culture, this beautiful festival is indeed an occasion of joy, warmth, and brotherhood," PM Modi wrote.

Elaborating on the spirit of the festival, the Prime Minister said that Magh Bihu symbolises contentment and gratitude.

"The essence of Magh Bihu lies in contentment and gratitude. It marks the completion of the harvest season and offers an opportunity to appreciate the efforts of those who enrich our lives, particularly our hardworking farmers. It also encourages generosity and care among us. May this Magh Bihu bring peace, good health, and happiness to everyone's lives. I wish that the year ahead is filled with prosperity and success," he added.

Magh Bihu, also known as Bhogali Bihu or Maghar Domahi, is one of the most important festivals of Assam.

Celebrated in the Assamese month of Magh, which usually falls between January and February, the festival marks the successful completion of the harvest season and the beginning of a new agricultural cycle.

This year, Magh Bihu will be celebrated on Thursday. The festivities begin a day earlier with Uruka, the last day of the Poush month, when communities come together to mark the onset of celebrations. On Uruka, people build temporary huts known as Meji using bamboo, leaves, and thatch. Women prepare traditional bhog in the Bhelaghar, which includes special rice-based delicacies such as sunga pitha, til pitha, and coconut laddus. Families and villagers gather inside the Meji to dine together, sing, and celebrate, reflecting a strong sense of unity, togetherness, and cultural pride. On the morning of Magh Bihu, the Meji huts are ceremonially burnt as part of a sacred ritual. The ashes are later scattered across farmlands, symbolising prayers for fertile soil and abundant crops. Various traditional rituals, including Tekeli Bhonga, buffalo fights, and prayers to ancestral deities, are also performed to seek blessings.

The President said that in recent years, the problem of drug abuse has emerged as a serious challenge in Punjab, affecting the youth the most. This problem is impacting not only health but also the social, economic, and moral fabric of society. A lasting solution to this problem is essential for a healthy society. In this context, the role of educational institutions like Guru Nanak Dev University is crucial. All stakeholders of this university should make every possible effort to guide the youth in the right direction. The President said that the next two decades are very important in making 'Viksit Bharat'.

## VB-G RAM G Bill carries Gandhian spirit, and not fake jobs says Jitendra Singh



**KAVITA SHARMA**  
New Delhi

The Union government's move to repeal the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005, and replace it with the Viksit Bharat—Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Bill, 2025, marks one of the most significant shifts in India's rural welfare architecture in two decades. Tabled in Parliament last week, the proposed legislation aims to realign rural employment with the Centre's "Viksit Bharat @ 2047" vision, emphasising technology-driven planning, infrastructure creation and fiscal discipline. While explaining the rationale behind the overhaul, Minister of State of the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, Jitendra Singh, while addressing a press conference at Kartiya Bhawan in New Delhi on Tuesday, argued that the new framework seeks to address long-standing issues of leakages, inefficiencies and poor asset creation under MGNREGA. "The more effort we put into going deeper into this, the better it will be," Singh said, describing the Bill as part of a broader campaign to improve transparency, accountability and outcome-based governance through an integrated information system.

## CCPA Cracks Down on E-Commerce Giants for Illegal Sale of Walkie-Talkies

**NEW DELHI:** The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has taken suo motu cognisance of the large-scale illegal listing and sale of walkie-talkies (personal mobile radios) on e-commerce platforms and has imposed monetary penalties on leading online marketplaces such as Amazon, Flipkart, and Meta for violations of consumer protection laws and telecom regulations, according to an official statement issued on Friday.

Many of these devices were found to operate in the ultra-high frequency (UHF) band, which is a regulated spectrum also used by police, emergency services, disaster response



agencies and other critical communication networks. The action follows the identification of over 16,970 non-compliant walkie-talkie listings across platforms. Notices were issued to 13 e-commerce entities, including Amazon, Flipkart, Meesho, JioMart, Meta (Facebook Marketplace), Talk Pro, Chimiya, MaskMan Toys, India Mart, TradeIndia, Antriksh Technologies, Vardaanmart, and Krishna Mart, the state-

ment said. The Authority found that several platforms were facilitating the sale of walkie-talkies operating on restricted and sensitive radio frequency bands, without mandatory statutory approvals or disclosures. These devices were sold without informing consumers about the radio frequency range on which the device operates, whether the device requires a government licence or whether it has obtained Equipment Type Approval (ETA). This is a mandatory technical approval issued by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) to ensure that wireless devices are compliant, safe and permitted for use in India.

## 'Double-Engine' Rule Performance Powers BJP-Led Mahayuti's Maha Civic Polls Sweep

**MUMBAI:** Maharashtra's "double engine" Centre-state leadership seems to have laid the track for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party-led Mahayuti alliance's urban sweep in civic body polls, consolidating the bloc's post-Assembly election momentum.

The civic elections indicate the state's ruling alliance remains popular in most parts of the state despite "friendly contests", challenge from the reunited Thackeray cousins, and Congress's efforts at revival amidst Rahul Gandhi's "vote theft" slogan.

The Mahayuti has established itself across major municipal corporations, eroding space for the Thackeray camp and Congress in key cities. It is set to secure a majority in Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), ending the long-standing dominance of the then-undivided Shiv Sena, with the BJP emerging as the single largest party.



Similar scores marked in Pune, Thane, Nashik, among others.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has thanked the people of Maharashtra in a social media message, posting on X in Marathi: "Thank you, Maharashtra! The enthusiastic people of the state have blessed the NDA's agenda of public welfare and good governance!"

He added, "The results of various municipal corporation elections show that the bond between the NDA and the people of Maharashtra has become even stronger. The experience of our performance and the vision of development have touched the hearts of the people."

## Education is not merely a means of livelihood; it is also a means of serving society and the nation: President Droupadi Murmu

**JAGMOHAN SINGH**  
Amritsar

The President of India, Smt Droupadi Murmu, graced and addressed the convocation ceremony of the Guru Nanak Dev University at Amritsar, Punjab on January 15.

Speaking on the occasion, the President said that after completing formal education, students will embark on their journeys in different directions. Some will serve in the government or private sector, others will pursue higher education or research, while many will establish their own ventures or build their careers in teaching. While each field requires different types of qualifications and skills, some qualities are equally essential and helpful for progress in every field. These are - a continuous desire and inclination to learn; firm adherence to moral values, integrity, and honesty, even in



adverse and difficult circumstances; the courage to embrace change; the determination to learn from failures and move forward; a spirit of teamwork and collaboration; disciplined use of time and resources; and using knowledge and abilities not for individual gain, but for the greater good of society and the nation. She stated that these qualities will not only make them a good professional but also a responsible citizen.

The President advised students to remember that edu-

cation is not merely a means of livelihood. It is also a means of serving society and the nation. She said that they owe a debt to the society which has contributed to their education. Making efforts to uplift those who have been left behind in the development journey can be one of the ways of repaying the debts.

The President said that in the last decade, India has made remarkable progress in the fields of technology development and entrepreneurship culture. Today, numerous entrepreneurial opportunities from Agriculture to AI and from Defence to Space are

available to young people. Our higher education institutions can further accelerate this progress by promoting research, strengthening industry-academia collaboration, and encouraging socially relevant innovations.

The President said that in recent years, the problem of drug abuse has emerged as a serious challenge in Punjab, affecting the youth the most. This problem is impacting not only health but also the social, economic, and moral fabric of society. A lasting solution to this problem is essential for a healthy society. In this context, the role of educational institutions like Guru Nanak Dev University is crucial. All stakeholders of this university should make every possible effort to guide the youth in the right direction. The President said that the next two decades are very important in making 'Viksit Bharat'.

## How the GOI Bills Forcing Farmers' Unions to Adopt Agitational Path?



**JAG MOHAN THAKEN**  
The Indian farmers' unions are once again girding up their loins, but why? Why do they term the Seeds Bill -2025 a corporate charter disguised as reform, and not a farmers' law? Why does the Electricity Bill 2025 irritate the farmers' unions? Why do they think that this Bill will reduce the states as mere spectators and create a central-controlled Electricity Council? Let us analyse.

The unions allege that the Government of India (GOI) is hammering the interests of the farmers through newly drafted bills- Electricity Bill 2025, VB GRAMG Act 2025, Seeds Bill 2025, and 4 Labour Codes, and so they are demanding repeal of all these bills.

Here we will discuss the Two Major Bills affecting the farmers the most -- Electricity Bill 2025 and the Seeds Bill. All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) has critically analysed these bills.

Seeds Bill-2025: The Government of India has proposed to replace the old Seeds Act (1966) with the modernised

Seed Bill -2025 arguing it wants to regulate seed quality, registration, labelling and compensation for poor-quality seeds.

But AIKS reacts that the Seeds Bill -2025 is a corporate charter disguised as reform, and not a farmers' law. Pushed as "modernisation", it actually centralises and weakens farmers' agency. It will open the seed sector to deepen corporate capture, risking India's seed sovereignty. It is designed for ease of doing business, not ease of surviving as a farmer.

Now the question arises— 'Who will get benefits? AIKS comments— 'Multinational seed giants already dominate a market worth \$ 3.82 billion. The Bill expands their control, ensures price freedom, and weakens oversight. Though heavy penalties exist, but no guaranteed compensation when seeds fail. Corporates profits will rise, while farmers will have to shoulder all risks and losses.

What does Bill leave out deliberately? There is no statutory, time-bound compensation for crop failure in the Bill. It pushes farmers back to slow, costly consumer courts. A 'good faith' clause

protects corporates, and not farmers. No strong support for community seed banks or PPVFR protections. (Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights).

The farmers' union fears that this will result in -Risky Seed, and Weak Safeguards'. Because the Bill allows reliance on foreign certification and imported trial data, but ignores India's diverse Agro-climate needs. It opens pathways for unproven GM seeds without proper accountability. No wonder, scientists are calling it - "Facilitation, Not Regulation". Electricity (Amendment) Bill -2025: Farmers union-AIKS analyse that under the provisions of this new Bill, private DISCOMs will be allowed to use government-built lines for cheap, cherry-pick rich consumers, and walk away with profit. This will push public DISCOMs into collapse, while blaming them for the 'losses' by World Bank-style policies. The Bill ends a decade-old system where big consumers helped subsidise poorer households. Now it is proposed to have the same tariff, whether one switches on a single bulb or has a luxury hoarding. Electricity usage bills will now be



set strictly on- 'Cost to Service'—meaning steep hikes for ordinary farm class.

This Bill will reduce the states as mere spectators and create a central-controlled Electricity Council. Part of this-- "One Nation, One Policy" will push uniform control over state electricity decisions. If this Bill gets implemented as an Act, the states will have to pay subsidies in advance, but this is unrealistic given their current finances. If states fail, then subsidies will vanish, bills will rise, and distress will deepen. It reintroduces what mass protests defeated earlier, now with more draconian clauses.

Why do the farmers' unions term this Bill as a threat to farmers and vulnerable consumers?

AIKS states that free/subsidised power for farmers, Dalits, Tribals, aquaculture and more will become uncertain. This Bill is structurally next to push corporate profits over farmers' interests. Therefore, the Farmers unions are demanding its withdrawal, and are planning to protest across the country to force the GOI to repeal these draconian Bills.

An umbrella of all major farmers' unions, Samyukta Kisan Morcha's (SKM) National Council meeting held on January 11, 2026, at HKS Surjeet Bhawan, New Delhi adopted a resolution warning the NDA Government against signing a Free Trade Agreement with the USA to open agriculture and dairy sectors. The resolution called upon the farmers and the people in

general to rally against compromising the interests of the country under the pressure of US Imperialism and the corporate forces and declared farmers will unleash widespread and militant struggles larger than the 2020-21 historical farmers' struggle.

The meeting called upon farmers and workers to organise immediate militant protest actions across India if the NDA Government enact the Electricity Bill 2025 in the forthcoming Budget session of the Parliament.

A press statement of SKM reveals that the meeting decided to ensure massive participation of farmers on 16 January, All India Resistance Day protest actions including district level demonstrations, block/village level public meeting and New Year's pledge of "build continuous, united pan-India struggle till victory" on the demands of repeal the Electricity Bill 2025, the VB GRAMG Act 2025, the Seeds Bill and 4 Labour Codes.

The demand charter includes the long-term demands of enact laws for MSP@ C2+50% for all crops with guaranteed procurement, comprehensive loan waiver

to liberate farmers from indebtedness and end peasant suicides, implement LARR Act 2013 and protect the federal rights of the states by restoring the taxation power by amending the GST Act and provide 60% share of divisible pool (including the revenue through cess and surcharge) instead of the current share of 31%.

The meeting also decided to observe 26 January 2026, the Republic Day in support of all the above-mentioned demands and to endorse the constitutional rights of freedom of expression, right to protest and repeal authoritarian laws including UAPA. A resolution on democratic rights urged the NDA Government to immediately release all in prison including Sonam Wangchuk of Ladakh and those remains in jails without trials even after five years. The state leadership will work out the protest "People's March" in the afternoon without affecting the official Republic parade and in coordination with the workers and agricultural, rural workers and organise tractor parade, vehicle rally, motorcycle rally and mass demonstrations.

The meeting endorsed the call of General Strike on 12th

February 2026 demanding repeal of 4 Labour Codes and called upon farmers to come out on street and organise massive demonstrations on that day and the details will be worked out in the respective states. The meeting declared unconditional support for the workers and resolved to fight till the demands are achieved.

The meeting urged all the member organisations and all the state coordination committees of SKM to organise widespread struggles and campaigns at the block and village level explaining the series of corporate attacks on the working people and prepare for a long haul of massive pan India struggles with determination. The next national Council meeting will be held on 24th February in Haryana and will resolve to undertake a concrete plan of actions if the NDA Government is not ready to start discussion with the leadership of the workers, farmers and agricultural and rural workers on the genuine demands.

Jag Mohan Thaken is a Senior Journalist, Columnist & Political Analyst, views are personal



## Drug norms need sunlight, not silence

The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO)'s new standard operating procedure, released in January 2026, finally gives shape to a long-pending idea: allowing "compounding" of minor offences under drug law. The enabling rules came into force in April 2025, but only now has compounding become a working tool. Applicants may seek it before or after prosecution, provided they cooperate fully and disclose all facts. Immunity is conditional—and rightly so. This is a practical step forward. Regulators must focus their energies on the biggest threats: spurious, adulterated, misbranded, or unsafe drugs. Criminalising clerical errors or labelling slips wastes capacity. But compounding must not become a backdoor escape. The Jan Vishwas Act expanded the list of compoundable offences. With that wider scope comes greater discretion. That discretion must be exercised transparently. The CDSCO should publish a redacted, searchable register of all compounding decisions. It should include the type of offence, product category, licence holder, amount compounded, corrective action taken, and whether the offence was a first. Riskier cases must be tied to real-world remedies—corrective action plans, follow-up inspections, and public alerts or recalls where needed. Penalties should be scaled. Bigger firms and bigger risks should attract higher fines. Repeat violators should face escalating sanctions. A limited window for consumer representatives to submit comments in high-risk cases would also enhance accountability. Above all, the system must not rely on private file notes. It must show its workings. Done right, compounding can reduce judicial burden, promote self-correction, and improve safety. Done opaquely, it will only shift the problem out of view. The test of regulatory reform is not how much is permitted—but how clearly the public can see what is being done, and why.



SANTOSH MEHROTRA EXPLAINS HOW DEGRESSIVE PROPORTIONALITY OFFERS FAIRER SEAT ALLOCATION MODEL

## Why South must unite before 2029



The southern States have found that reducing population growth and improving health and education have led to serious disadvantages. The immediate fallout is that the Finance Commission (FC) has reduced allocations to the south as population size carries 50 per cent weight in the redistribution of Union tax revenue among States. The longer-term implication is more serious: according to the current proposals, the proportion of seats will remain the same but the gap in the absolute number of seats will widen in the run up to the 2029 elections, impacting southern States. Delimitation will be decided by a Delimitation Commission (DC) before 2029. Should the southern States be punished for having invested better in health and education that helped reduce population growth, by having their Lok Sabha seats reduced and thereby losing relative political and fiscal power? Most of the population increase since 1991 has happened in the northern States, such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Chhattisgarh.

### The possible solutions

The 84th Constitutional Amendment (2001) on delimitation has implications for representation, and the south needs to make its case urgently. The 84th Amendment Act extended the freeze on the number of seats from 2000 to 2026. It stated, "Keeping in view the progress of family planning programmes in different parts of the country, the government... decided... as a motivational measure to enable State governments to pursue the agenda for population stabilisation," that Lok Sabha seats shall "remain unaltered till the first census to be taken after... 2026."

That is why the Census was delayed from 2021. The results are now expected by October 2028, after which the DC will be constituted and its recommendations announced, ahead of the 2029 Lok Sabha elections. Clearly, New Delhi always had this strategy of ensuring permanent power, by controlling the northern, more populous, States.

What are the solutions to prevent the unfair outcomes of delimitation to the south? Four alternative methods are conceivable. The first is to increase the total number of Lok Sabha seats, while retaining the current proportional distribution among States, using the 2011 Census as the basis. A redistribution based on the 2011 population, with no State losing seats, would result in a Lok Sabha of about 866 members. This might cause the least disruption. But it still does not solve the problem of States with higher population growth gaining more MPs.

The second is to raise the total number of Lok Sabha seats and also introduce equal-

ity among States in the Rajya Sabha (as is the case in the U.S. Senate), with each State having the same number of seats — for example, 10 seats per State — raising the total number of Rajya Sabha seats from 245 to 290. But the ruling party will oppose this as it would interfere with its goal of dominating the Lok Sabha.

The third is to raise the number of seats in Vidhan Sabhas to equalise representatives per 1,000 population for each State, leaving the Lok Sabha intact. In a large, federal country, this would improve representation in more populous States, particularly at the State level. But the ruling party will oppose this as well, since its eyes are on the Lok Sabha.

The last is to raise the total number of Lok Sabha seats, but change current ratios so that 60 per cent of seats are allocated according to population size and 40 per cent depend on efforts to reduce population growth. This would benefit States that have reduced their population growth (using a downward sliding scale). This could be a united negotiating position for the south.

This is comparable to the principle for representation of 27 member States to the European Parliament (called the Degressive Proportionality principle). It ensures fair representation in legislative bodies such as the EU Parliament by giving larger countries more seats but fewer per person and giving smaller countries fewer seats but more representation per person. It bal-

ances population size with state equality to prevent total domination by large nations. It is a compromise between pure population proportionality (one person, one vote) and equal representation for all states. It means a vote in a small country has more weight than in a large one.

### The principle to be used

This will also rely on a principle used in India by the FCs. The FCs have had to deal with complaints of unfairness: the legitimate complaint by the southern States is that they contribute the most, but receive less over time from each FC. To address this, FCs use multiple criteria to allocate funds. The first is income distance (equity) (with 50 per cent weight). This means that States with lower incomes receive higher transfers. The second is population size, which reflects the expenditure needs of the States. Here, the FCs have used either the 2011 Census population to reflect current needs or the 1971 population to reward population control efforts. So, if the FC, a constitutional body, uses a method to reward population control, why can't the DC? The third is demographic performance. This rewards States that have successfully reduced fertility rates. The fourth is tax effort. The FC rewards States that mobilise their own tax revenues effectively and thus encourages responsible financial management. The southern States have no choice but to join hands around the Degressive Proportionality principle, and build consensus before the Centre constitutes the DC.

Santosh Mehrotra, Former Professor of Economics, JNU, and currently Visiting Professor, Higher School of Economics, Moscow. Views are personal.



T. T. SREEKUMAR EXPLAINS WHY CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT ENRICHES, NOT ENDANGERS, INDIAN ACADEMIA

## Denying scholars diminishes India's academic vitality

The recent denial of entry to noted Hindi scholar Francesca Orsini from the U.K., despite holding a valid visa, has brought to light the need for a more balanced and thoughtful approach to understanding and assessing the role of critical academic engagement, and to recognising the broader value of scholarly exchange both within and beyond India.

It seems that a rather difficult situation is emerging for international scholars who have critically engaged with Indian society, politics, or history. Entering on a tourist visa and participating in academic events can expose them to procedural complications related to visa regulations, while applying for an academic visa may itself become challenging in light of their critical scholarly work. This places such scholars in a constrained position, limiting opportunities for academic exchange and dialogue.

The long-term consequence of this paradox is clear: independent and critical voices from abroad will gradually be silenced, rendered rare, and eventually made invisible in India's academic landscape. This situation raises a fundamental question about the spirit of inclusiveness in Indian academia. Universities and research institutions have historically thrived on exchange, critique, and intellectual diversity. The presence of global scholars — sometimes sharply critical, sometimes sympathetic — has enriched debates, introduced new frameworks, and helped Indian academics situate their work in global conversations.

### Sign of vitality

In a democracy, criticism is not a threat; it is a sign of vitality. From anthropologists studying caste to historians revisiting colonial legacies and economists questioning policy



orthodoxy, these critical engagements in Indian academia have helped refine national self-understanding. India's reputation as a vibrant democracy has never been undermined by such scholarship. On the contrary, it has been strengthened by the openness with which these voices were received and debated. It is important to recall that no government in India has ever fallen because of academic criticism. Universities and research programmes across the country have long demonstrated maturity in accommodating a spectrum of ideas, including those critical of state policies. Research funding agencies such as the UGC, ICSSR, ICHR, and DST have historically supported projects examining sensitive social and political questions without censorship or hostility.

### Intellectual loss

The danger today is not only administrative. When international scholars with a critical perspective grow hesitant to apply for visas, when Indian researchers hesitate to engage with interrogative frameworks, and when

conferences avoid certain topics to ensure permissions, academic life itself becomes impoverished. The loss is not merely institutional but intellectual and moral. Nations that have prized only conformity have rarely advanced in the long run, either in knowledge or in innovation. India, which has always projected itself as a civilisation rooted in dialogue, samvad, must not turn its back on this tradition.

Furthermore, academic collaboration today operates in a deeply interconnected global environment. Research in areas such as digital culture, climate change, migration, artificial intelligence, and postcolonial theory cannot be meaningfully pursued in isolation. When certain scholars are denied access, entire research networks fragment. Students lose opportunities to interact with international peers; projects lose comparative depth; and the overall quality of scholarship declines. The effect is cumulative, slow but lasting. Inclusiveness in academia, hence, is not simply a matter of hospitality but of democratic responsibility. A confident democracy has nothing to fear from critique; in fact, it thrives on it. The most effective way to counter misunderstanding or misrepresentation is through open dialogue, not exclusion.

The history of Indian scholarship offers numerous examples of such engagement. The work of sociologists, historians, and anthropologists, both Indian and foreign, has shaped global understanding of caste, gender, religion, and modernity. These studies have sometimes been uncomfortable for

those in power but have helped India appear as an intellectually vibrant society fearless of bureaucratic scrutiny. This pluralism is a hallmark of democracy, and it has always coexisted with patriotic commitment.

### Risk of echo chambers

If it begins to appear that India is using visa restrictions as a means of selective control over academic engagement, the message sent to the world will be unfortunate: that India no longer welcomes the exchange of ideas unless they conform to official narratives. Over time, the space for independent thought would shrink, and universities would risk becoming echo chambers. What India needs instead is a renewed commitment to academic openness, a framework that differentiates between political subversion and intellectual dissent, that trusts scholars to engage in debate without ulterior motives, and that recognises the long-term benefits of a plural academic environment.

It is not that there are no initiatives to promote international academic collaboration; the Global Initiative of Academic Networks (GIAN) is a notable example of such efforts. However, for initiatives like GIAN to be truly meaningful, they must also create space for critical scholars to engage freely and thoughtfully with Indian academia, enriching dialogue through diverse and independent perspectives. To build a future-oriented, knowledge-driven society, India must invite all serious thinkers to participate in its academic life, irrespective of their critical positions.

An inclusive and confident academic culture is the best reflection of a mature democracy, one that listens, argues, and learns.

T.T. Sreekumar is a professor and writer based in Hyderabad. Views are personal.



### BOOKS: REVIEW

## Margaret Atwood's memoir is anything but straightforward

Margaret Atwood has spent much of her career evading the traditional memoir form, famously declaring that a straightforward autobiography would be "dead boring." With *Book of Lives: A Memoir of Sorts*, she both honours and subverts that claim. True to form, Atwood sidesteps the expected confessional arc and instead delivers a kaleidoscopic, genre-bending narrative — part scrapbook, part life lessons, part literary excavation. The result is deeply personal, frequently wry, and unmistakably Atwood.

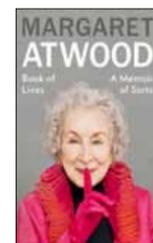
Calling it "a memoir of sorts" is no casual subtitle. The phrase is a signal — a shrug, a provocation, and a boundary. This isn't a linear march through childhood, career, and retirement. Instead, Atwood offers fragments: vignettes from her wilderness child-

hood, snapshots of literary life in Toronto, lists, photos, reflections on writing, grief, and fame. What emerges isn't a fixed portrait but a textured, prismatic account of a life lived with constant observation and creative resistance.

Atwood's voice is the binding thread — wry, incisive, and allergic to sentimentality. She writes with the clarity of someone who has spent a lifetime watching human nature closely, and the humor of someone who doesn't take her myths too seriously. The strongest sections of the book dwell in the spaces where the public and private meet: the early forest years that shaped her independence and ecological consciousness, her experience navigating Canadian literary politics, and the complicated legacy of *The Handmaid's Tale* becoming cultural prophecy. There's an unflinching

intimacy in her treatment of love and loss. Atwood's reflections on her partner Graeme Gibson's decline and death are striking for their plain-spoken power. She doesn't dramatise grief — she measures its weight against the rituals of daily life and the peculiar solace of work. The juxtaposition of personal devastation with professional duty feels painfully real, never performative.

But *Book of Lives* also bristles with edge. Atwood admits the memoir's delayed arrival was partly to avoid the temptation of score-settling — and partly because she was finally ready to indulge it. She doesn't shy away from taking clear, occasionally scathing, aim at former colleagues and critics. These moments are less about personal vendetta than literary territory-marking — a reminder that the cultural sta-



*Book of Lives: A Memoir of Sorts* By Margaret Atwood Chatto & Windus/Penguin Random House; 624 pages; Rs1,999.

tus of "Margaret Atwood" was not handed to her gently.

Still, the book is not without its flaws. At over 600 pages, it sprawls — deliberately so. Readers who prefer a tight narrative arc may find themselves disoriented. But the book's meandering structure is also part of its argument: that identity is not linear, that memory is unreliable, and that life — especially a literary one — is made not of grand revelations but of the cumulative weight of moments, decisions, and minor absurdities. Atwood writes of "body doubles" and multiple selves; the memoir doesn't try to unify them — it lets them co-exist.

If the book has a core thesis, it's that being a writer — and a

woman writer especially — is a constant act of translation: of experience into story, of private doubt into public voice. Atwood offers no tidy lessons, but she leaves plenty to chew on. She shows how a mind processes life, grief, politics, and prose not through certainty, but through craft and wit.

In the end, *Book of Lives* is not a confession or a legacy document. It is, instead, a kind of annotated life — a curated archive of what Margaret Atwood noticed, endured, fought against, and found funny. She steps into the memoir form in her own unorthodox way, not to preserve herself in amber, but to let us watch the mind at work. Readers looking for intimacy will find it in her voice; those looking for insight will find it in her method.

The book is "engaging, wise, and marvelously witty." But that understates its bite. *Book of Lives* is Atwood as she's always been — sharp-eyed, shape-shifting, and entirely in control of the narrative. This time, the life she's turning into literature is her own.

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## 'National Startup Day' Celebrates Courage, Spirit of Innovation, Entrepreneurial Zeal of Our People, Says PM Modi

**NEW DELHI:** On the occasion of National StartUp Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday extended his best wishes to everyone associated with the startup ecosystem and said the day celebrates the courage, spirit of innovation and entrepreneurial zeal of the people of India.

Taking to the social media platform X, the Prime Minister wrote, "Best wishes to everyone associated with the world of StartUps on the occasion of National StartUp Day. Today is special because we mark a decade since the launch of StartUp India. This day is about celebrating the courage, spirit of innovation and entrepreneurial zeal of our people, especially our youth, who have powered India's rise in the global StartUp ecosystem."

PM Modi will participate in an event to mark a decade of the Startup India initiative at Bharat Mandapam in Delhi.

During the programme, the Prime Minister will interact with members of India's vibrant startup ecosystem. Select startup representatives will share insights from their entrepreneurial journeys, highlighting challenges, innovations and success stories. The Prime Minister will also address the gathering on the occasion.

The Startup India initiative



was launched by the Prime Minister on January 16, 2016 as a transformative national programme aimed at nurturing innovation, promoting entrepreneurship and enabling investment-driven growth. The initiative was launched with the objective of making India a nation of job creators rather than job seekers.

Over the past decade, Startup India has emerged as a cornerstone of the country's economic and innovation architecture. It has strengthened institutional mechanisms, expanded access to capital and mentorship, and fostered an enabling environment for startups to grow and scale across sectors and geographies.

India's startup ecosystem has witnessed unprecedented expansion during this period, with more than 2,00,000 startups

recognised across the country. These startups have emerged as significant drivers of employment generation, innovation-led economic growth and the strengthening of domestic value chains across diverse sectors.

The country will mark National Startup Day, celebrating a landmark decade for startups not just as economic engines but as enduring symbols of India's innovation-led growth story.

Aligned with India's march towards a Viksit Bharat by 2047, the movement has had a transformative impact on India's entrepreneurial and innovation ecosystem.

Startups have become engines of economic transformation by driving technological innovation and productivity, creating large-scale employment opportunities, enhancing financial inclusion

and digital access, and promoting grassroots entrepreneurship.

The initiative, led by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) under the Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry, has evolved from a policy-focused framework into a comprehensive, multi-dimensional platform supporting startups at every stage from ideation to scaling operations.

This progress is reflected in India's high-value startup ecosystem, which has expanded from just four privately held companies valued above \$1 billion in 2014 to over 120 such firms today, with a combined valuation exceeding \$350 billion.

Since its launch on January 16, 2016, the Startup India initiative has transformed from a policy framework into one of the world's largest and most diverse entrepreneurial ecosystems.

With over two lakh DPIIT-recognised startups as of December 2025, India now stands firmly among the top global hubs for innovation, job creation, and inclusive growth.

Women-led ventures are a striking feature of this landscape, where, as of December 2025, 45 per cent of recognised startups have at least one female director or partner.

## Government Inks Pacts with Damodar Valley Corporation for Coal Production in 3 Blocks



**NEW DELHI:** The Ministry of Coal has executed coal mine development and production agreements with Damodar Valley Corporation for three commercial coal blocks — Dhulia North, Mandakini B, and Pirpainti Barahat — in a significant step towards reinforcing India's energy security and accelerating economic growth, according to an official statement issued on Thursday.

The execution of these agreements represents a significant milestone in India's journey towards self-reliance in the coal sector. All three coal blocks are fully explored and together account for a cumulative Peak Rat-

ed Capacity (PRC) of 49 million tonnes per annum (MTPA), underscoring their strategic importance in meeting the country's growing energy requirements, the statement said.

The projects are envisaged to generate an estimated annual revenue of Rs 4,621 crore, while attracting a capital investment of approximately Rs 7,350 crore, thereby contributing substantially to economic activity and industrial growth, the statement said.

In addition to strengthening energy availability, the development of these coal blocks is expected to deliver significant socio-economic benefits. The three projects are projected to create around 66,248 direct and indirect employment opportunities, fostering livelihood genera-

tion and regional development in the coal-bearing areas.

In 2025, the Ministry of Coal launched the 13th round of commercial coal block auctions in August and successfully auctioned seven coal blocks. It also issued vesting orders for eight more blocks earlier in October. The 13th round of auctions offers both fully and partially explored blocks, and includes reforms like incentives for early production and updated penalties for delays.

As part of the coal sector reforms, the government has moved from an earlier restrictive model to granting coal mining blocks pursuant to a competitive bidding process, and from prescribing specific end-use to permitting commercial sale of coal. The auction-based regime introduced in 2014 allowed private sector participation, however it was limited to captive usage in own end-use plants. Now, the sector has been opened up for commercial coal mining by private players in 2020.

Commercial coal block auctions are conducted in a two-stage online bidding process, which involves technical screening and submission of competitive initial price offers in the first stage, and a second and final stage where better price offers are intended to be received.

## Capital Inflows in India's Real Estate Sector at All-Time High of \$14.3 Billion in 2025



**MUMBAI:** Capital inflows into the country's real estate sector reached an all-time high of \$14.3 billion in calendar year 2025, registering a 25 per cent year-on-year growth, a report showed on Wednesday. During the October-December (Q4) quarter, the sector attracted \$3.3 billion worth of investments, recording a 30 per cent on-year increase, according to the report by CBRE South Asia Pvt. Ltd. Institutional investors from Canada and US accounted for 52 per cent and 26 per cent of the foreign capital inflows, respectively, during Q4. Land/development sites dominated the investment landscape, attracting over 46 per cent of total inflows in 2025, followed by investments into built-up office assets (28 per cent). For Q4 2025, land/development sites accounted for a share of over 45 per cent, followed by built-up office assets at 24 per cent, said the report.

## Duroflex Group Appoints Arkadeb Chakraborty as Chief Human Resources Officer

**FW DESK**  
**New Delhi**

Duroflex Group, one of India's leading sleep solutions brand, has announced the appointment of Arkadeb Chakraborty as its Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO). With over 16 years of experience across business and HR leadership roles, Arkadeb brings deep expertise in building scalable people systems, leading complex transformations, and partnering closely with leadership teams to drive sustainable growth.

His appointment is part of Duroflex Group's focus on bringing top industry talent to its leadership bench to support the company's next phase of growth. In his new role, he will lead the people strategy with a focus on talent excellence, governance and strengthening future-ready capabilities of the organisation.

Arkadeb brings a rare dual competency to the table: deep functional HR expertise combined with proven core business execution. His experience spans industry giants like the Escorts Group, ICICI Bank, Ruchi Soya, Godrej Group & Darwinbox.

Most notably, in his recent tenure at Darwinbox, Arkadeb successfully broke the mold of a traditional HR leader by pivoting into a core business role. As Director-Customer Success he owned a \$6 million+ P&L, steering revenue growth and retention while driving HR technology transformation for over 130 organizations. Previously, as CHRO at Capital Foods, he partnered with the leadership team and the investors to steer the company through critical M&A integrations and business continuity phases.

## PFCL raising Rs 5,000 crores via Secured NCDs

**DOMINICK RODRIGUES**  
**Mumbai**

Power Finance Corporation Limited (PFCL) — a GOI undertaking with +Maharatna+ status — has announced that it is looking at tapping the Capital Market to raise upto Rs 5,000 crores via public issue of Secured NCDs.

The Tranche I NCD issue opens on January 16, 2026 and closes on January 30, 2026. The NCDs are proposed to be listed on the NSE. Parminder Chopra, Chairman & Managing Director, PFCL, told media here recently that the Tranche I issue of NCDs is for a Base Issue Size of Rs 500 crore with a 'green' shoe option of upto Rs 4,500 crores — aggregating upto Rs 5,000 crore, which is within the shelf limited of Rs 10,000 crore.

She said that of the Tranche



I Issue proceeds, 75% shall be utilized for: onward lending, financing/refinancing existing indebtedness of the company; debt servicing, while 25% will be used for onward lending.

Replying to questions, Chopra said this is the Company's 3rd issue, while PFCL remains the "engine powering transformation in the power sector" with 50% of India power sector capacity financed by it.

While PFCL raised Rs 1-1.5 lakh crores yearly, the Company has been also tapping

the international market with 19-20% borrowings coming in from investors supporting "Green" energy.

The Company believes that its NBFC and IFC classifications enable it to effectively capitalize on available financing opportunities in the Indian power sector.

The Company's consolidated revenues from operations were: Rs 57,429.28 crores for the six months ended September 30, 2025 and its Net Profit was Rs 16,815.84 crores.

## CII Urges Centre to Fast-Track Privatisation of PSUs

**NEW DELHI:** Apex business chamber CII, in its proposals for the Union Budget 2026-27, has urged the Central government to mobilise resources through a calibrated approach to privatisation to unlock the value of public sector enterprises.

Chandrajit Banerjee, Director General, CII, said, "India's growth story is increasingly being powered by private enterprise and innovation. A forward-looking privatisation policy, aligned with the vision of Viksit Bharat, will enable the government to focus on its core functions while empowering the private sector to accelerate industrial transformation and job creation." Against this backdrop, CII has called for accelerating the implementation of the Government's Strategic Disinvestment Policy, which envisions an exit from all Public Sector Enterprises (PSEs)



in non-strategic sectors and a minimal presence in strategic ones. To strengthen and expedite the privatisation programme, CII has outlined a four-pronged comprehensive strategy.

First, CII recommends a shift to a demand-based approach in selecting PSEs for privatisation. Presently, the government identifies specific enterprises for sale and subsequently invites investor interest. However, when sufficient demand or valuation is not achieved, the process often stalls. CII suggests reversing this sequence by first gauging investor interest across a broader set of enterprises and then prioritising those that at-

tract stronger interest and meet valuation expectations. Such an approach, CII believes, would ensure smoother execution and better price discovery.

Second, to provide investors greater clarity and planning time, CII recommends that the government announce a rolling three-year privatisation pipeline, outlining which enterprises are likely to be taken up for privatisation during this period. This visibility would encourage deeper investor engagement and more realistic valuation and price discovery. Third, an institutional framework can strengthen oversight, accountability, and investor confidence, making privatisation predictable and professionally managed. CII has recommended a dedicated body with a Ministerial Board for strategic guidance, an Advisory Board of industry and legal experts for independent benchmarking, and a pro-

fessional management team to handle execution, due diligence, market engagement, and regulatory coordination. Besides, CII has recommended a calibrated disinvestment approach combined with a three-year roadmap, as an interim measure. The government could reduce its stake in listed PSEs in a phased manner to 51 per cent initially, allowing it to remain the single largest shareholder while releasing significant value into the market. Over time, this stake could be brought down further to between 33 and 26 per cent. According to CII, reducing the government's stake to 51 per cent in 78 listed PSEs could unlock close to Rs 10 lakh crore. In the first two years of the roadmap, the disinvestment strategy could target 55 PSEs where the government holds 75 per cent or less, mobilising around Rs. 4.6 lakh crore.

## DGCA Probing Air India A350 Engine Damage After Baggage Container Ingestion



**NEW DELHI:** An Air India flight returned to Delhi and New York returned to the airport after the Iranian airspace closure impacted its route and later, an engine damage occurred as it sucked in a baggage container at the Delhi airport.

The incident occurred when the Airbus A350 was taxiing in dense fog at the airport, the airline said, confirming the damage. The Directorate of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has launched

a probe into the incident and is trying to ascertain how a foreign object got lodged inside the engine.

"Air India confirms that Flight AI101, operating from Delhi to New York (JFK), was forced to return to Delhi shortly after take-off due to the unexpected closure of Iranian airspace, which impacted its planned route," said an Air India spokesperson.

"Upon landing in Delhi, the aircraft encountered a foreign

object while taxiing in dense fog, resulting in damage to the right engine," the spokesperson added.

During the incident, the plane was safely positioned at designated parking, ensuring the safety of all passengers and crew on board, the airline added. The aircraft has been grounded for a thorough investigation and necessary repairs, Air India said.

This may cause potential disruptions on select A350 routes, the airline has warned, assuring that it is working on alternative travel arrangements and refunds for affected passengers.

"Air India regrets the inconvenience caused to our passengers and is proactively assisting them with alternative travel arrangements and refunds, as preferred. Safety remains the paramount priority for Air India, and the airline is committed to providing support during this time," said the airline.

## SEBI May Explore Regulating Unlisted Share Market says Tuhin Kanta Pandey

**MUMBAI:** India's market regulator, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), is considering whether it should start regulating the country's unlisted share market, which currently operates largely outside its direct control, chairperson Tuhin Kanta Pandey said on Thursday.

Speaking on the sidelines of the Association of Investment Bankers of India's annual convention for 2025-26 here, Pandey said the issue is being discussed with the Ministry of Corporate Affairs. "SEBI first needs to examine whether it has the legal authority to regulate



companies that are not listed on stock exchanges and how far such regulation can extend," he explained. The unlisted share market includes shares of companies that are not traded on stock exchanges. Investors usually buy these shares through private deals, employee stock option plans or intermediaries.

Since these companies are not

listed, they are not required to follow strict and continuous disclosure rules, which often leaves investors with limited or delayed information about a company's financial health and business risks. Pandey said one of SEBI's main concerns is the large difference between prices in the unlisted market and the valuations that emerge when companies come out with an initial public offering. "Prices agreed upon in private deals often do not match the prices discovered during the IPO book-building process, creating confusion and potential risks for investors," he stated.

## Adani Group to Invest Rs 1.5 Lakh Crore in Gujarat's Kachchh



**AHMEDABAD:** The Adani Group will invest Rs 1.5 lakh crore in Gujarat's Kachchh region over the next five years, underlining its long-term commitment to the state, Adani Ports and SEZ Limited Managing Director Karan Adani said on Sunday. The investments reflect India's message to the world that economic growth, climate responsibility and energy security can move forward together, Karan Adani said. In his remarks at an event in Rajkot, attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he said Gujarat is not just a state of investment for the Adani Group, but the very foundation of its journey. "Our Chairman, Gautam Adani, has always believed that the growth of our group must be inseparable from the growth of the nation," Karan Adani stated. "Gujarat is where our journey began, and Gujarat is where our long-term commitment remains anchored. Building on this foundation, the Adani Group commits to invest Rs 1.5 lakh crores over the next five years in the region of Kachchh," he added. Highlighting Gujarat's governance model, he said the state demonstrated ease of doing business in practice long before it became part of the national policy vocabulary. "We will also double our port capacity at Mundra in the next 10 years' time," Karan Adani mentioned. He noted that faster decision-making, strong institutions and respect for enterprise created a growth-friendly ecosystem, which was later expanded across the country under Prime Minister Modi through cooperative and competitive federalism.

## Indian Oil JV Discovers Oil in Abu Dhabi Exploration Block

**NEW DELHI:** Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas Hardeep Singh Puri announced on Wednesday that in a major development, India's oil companies have struck oil in an onshore hydrocarbon block in Abu Dhabi.

The discovery was made by Urja Bharat PTE Ltd (UBPL), a 50:50 JV between India's energy Maharatna Indian Oil Corporation and Bharat PetroResources Ltd (BPCL). The successful discovery of light crude oil in both the Shilaif play (XN 76) and the Habshan reservoir (XN 79 02S) marks an important milestone in Indian Oil's expanding global upstream journey, the minister said in a post on X.



"We look forward to advancing and unlocking further hydrocarbon potential in the concession," the minister remarked.

The minister said that the discovery marked "a new milestone in India's quest towards energy self-sufficiency

under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi."

He further stated that these breakthroughs reflect the dedication and technical excellence of our teams and reinforce our commitment to strengthening India's energy security through

strategic international partnerships.

Meanwhile, on the domestic front, India's energy journey is entering a new era as seven sedimentary basins are under study with advanced technology for the exploration of oil and gas across the country.

Mission Anveshan, one of the largest seismic mapping programmes for oil and gas in India's history, has been launched, targeting 20,000 ground-line kilometres (GLK) of seismic surveys, of which over 8,000 GLK have already been surveyed.

While 1 million square km offshore area is now open for oilfield exploration, 99 per cent of 'No-Go' areas have been cleared.

## India's Total Exports Clock 4.33 per cent Growth At \$634.26 Billion in April-Dec

**NEW DELHI:** India's total exports during the nine months this fiscal (April-December) is estimated at \$634.26 billion, registering a positive growth of 4.33 per cent compared to \$607.93 billion in April-December 2024, despite US tariffs and geo-political uncertainties, the government data showed on Thursday.

India's total exports (merchandise and services combined) for December is estimated at \$74.01 billion. Merchandise exports during December were \$38.51 billion as compared to \$37.80 billion in December 2024, according to Ministry of Commerce and Industry data.

As per the official data, the cumulative value of merchandise exports during April-December 2025 was \$330.29 billion, as compared to \$322.41 billion during April-December 2024, registering a positive growth of 2.44 per cent.



Meanwhile, the estimated value of service exports during April-December 2025 is \$303.97 billion as compared to \$285.53 billion in April-December 2024. The estimated value of service imports during April-December 2025 is \$152.23 billion as compared to \$150.01 billion in April-December 2024. Also, the cumulative non-petroleum exports in April-

December 2025 was valued at \$288.16 billion, registering an increase of 5.51 per cent as compared to \$273.12 billion in the April-December 2024 period.

Major drivers of merchandise exports growth in December 2025 include electronic goods, meat, dairy and poultry products, drugs and pharmaceuticals, engineering goods and marine products.

## Gold, Silver Prices Ease Moderately as US Dollar Gains

**MUMBAI:** Gold and silver prices fell on MCX and global markets on Friday as the US dollar strengthened, following weaker than expected weekly jobless claims.

Further, a softer tone from US President Donald Trump on Iran reduced safe haven demand for the precious metals.

MCX gold February futures dipped 0.26 per cent to Rs 1,42,743 per 10 grams in morning trade, while MCX silver March futures eased 0.94 per cent to Rs 2,88,824 per kg.

Spot gold eased about 0.29 per cent to \$4,602.43 an ounce, though it remained around 2 per cent higher for the week. Spot silver fell roughly 0.8 per cent to \$91.69 an ounce after earlier touching an all time high of about \$93.57-\$93.70 during the session.



Analysts said the pull-back came as the dollar index climbed toward 99.49, its strongest level since early December.

Market watchers said that rising geopolitical risks stemming from unrest in Iran and tensions involving Venezuela and Greenland continue to

provide demand for precious metals. Gold and silver prices are expected to remain volatile this week amid volatility in the dollar index, ahead of the US Supreme Court decision on tariffs, they added.

The Augment Bullion report said that silver retreated sharply from its record high

of \$93 after Trump refrained from announcing new tariffs on critical mineral imports. Instead, he said the US keeps negotiations open with foreign countries to secure supplies and swiftly cut supply-chain risks, while considering import curbs only if talks fail to yield timely results.

The report predicted that traders can witness some profit-taking and retrace, before prices move higher again.

Investors are looking for cues from the US Federal Reserve for a potential easing amid global uncertainty. Softer-than-expected November producer inflation, both headline and core, alongside mild December consumer inflation data, has increased hopes of the US Fed implementing multiple rate cuts later this year.

## World Bank Estimates India's Growth in FY25-26 at 7.2 %

**NEW DELHI:** India's economy is projected to remain among the world's fastest-growing major economies, with growth estimated at 7.2 per cent in FY2025-26, supported by strong domestic demand despite rising global trade tensions, the World Bank said on January 13.

In its latest Global Economic Prospects report, the World Bank said India's resilience helped lift overall growth in South Asia in 2025, offsetting the impact of heightened policy uncertainty and global trade frictions. Growth in South Asia strengthened to 7.1 per cent in 2025, "mainly because of resilient activity in India", the report noted. The World Bank does not include Pakistan and Afghanistan in South Asia, and their economies are included in the Middle East and North Africa division.



India's expansion is "mainly reflecting robust domestic demand, including strong private consumption, supported by earlier tax reforms and improvements in real household earnings in rural areas", the bank said.

India's growth is projected to slow modestly to 6.5 per cent in FY2026-27, assuming higher US import tariffs remain in place, before edging up to 6.6 per cent in FY2027-28, the report said. The bank attributed this to strong services activity, a recovery in exports, and improved investment flows. The report

said that despite higher tariffs on certain exports to the United States, India's growth forecast is unchanged from earlier projections because "the adverse impacts of higher tariffs will be offset by stronger momentum in domestic demand than previously anticipated". Across South Asia, India remains the region's primary growth engine. Excluding India, growth in South Asia is forecast to strengthen to 5.0 per cent in 2026 and 5.6 per cent in 2027, while the region as a whole is expected to slow to 6.2 per cent in 2026 before rebounding. Globally, the World Bank said easing financial conditions and fiscal expansion in major economies are helping cushion the impact of softer trade and demand. However, it warned that the 2020s are on track to be the weakest decade for global growth since the 1960s.

## RBI Compounds FEMA Violations in Elsteel Modular Case



**NEW DELHI:** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has issued a compounding order under Section 15 of the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA), in the case of Elsteel Modular India Private Limited, which has resulted in termination of proceedings against the company for alleged contraventions of the law, according to a statement issued by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Monday.

The order was passed by the RBI on December 12, 2025 after the Directorate of Enforcement (ED) issued a "No Objection" in the matter, the statement said.

The ED had taken up the case for investigation, based on credible information received against Elsteel Modular India Private Limited.

After completing the investigation, ED filed a complaint under Section 16 of FEMA before the Adjudicating Authority. The contraventions under FEMA, for which compounding has been done, include late reporting of foreign inward payments, covering a sum of over Rs. 1.21 crore.

As per the provisions of FEMA, the adjudication proceedings were initiated by the Adjudicating Authority by issuance of Show Cause Notice dated September 7, 2023 under Section 6 of FEMA to the company and its directors/officers who were in charge and responsible for the conduct of the business of the company during the relevant period of contravention. The company, later on, filed an application before the RBI for compounding contravention under FEMA as per the provisions of Section 15 of the Act. After the reference from RBI, the ED issued its "no objection" for the compounding in line with the true spirit of the Act, the statement said. Accordingly, the RBI, on the basis of no objection issued by ED, has compounded the contravention vide compounding order dated December 12, 2025 with a one-time payment of Rs.14,200.

## RBI Issues Norms for Internal Ombudsmen in Banks, NBFCs



**MUMBAI:** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Wednesday issued guidelines for the appointment and functioning of internal ombudsmen in banks and NBFCs, aimed at strengthening the mechanism for resolution of customer grievances. The RBI has issued separate directions for commercial banks, small finance banks, payments banks, non-banking financial companies, non-bank prepaid payment instrument issuers, and credit information companies to ensure specific clarity to each category. The directions have been issued with a view to strengthening the internal grievance redress mechanism within regulated entities and ensuring a speedy. The guidelines state that in order to be eligible for appointment as internal ombudsman, the candidate shall either be a retired or serving officer, in the rank equivalent to a General Manager in the regulated entity of the Reserve Bank under the purview of the internal ombudsman framework or a financial sector regulatory body, having necessary skills and experience of minimum seven years of working in areas such as banking, non-banking finance, regulation, supervision, payment and settlement systems, credit information or consumer protection.

## RBI gives In-Principle Nod to Japan's SMBC to Set Up Wholly-Owned Subsidiary in India

**MUMBAI:** India's central bank on Wednesday announced that it has given in-principle approval to Japan's Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corp (SMBC) to set up a wholly owned subsidiary in the country — marking an important step in the bank's expansion plans in the Indian market. In a statement, the Reserve Bank of India said the approval allows SMBC to move from its current branch-based operations to a locally incorporated subsidiary. Until now, the Japanese lender has been operating in India through a branch.

"RBI has decided to grant 'in-principle' approval to SMBC, Japan for setting up a Wholly Owned Subsidiary (WOS) in India," the central bank said in the statement. Setting up a wholly owned subsidiary will



give SMBC greater operational flexibility in India. As a locally incorporated entity, the bank will be treated on par with domestic banks, including the ability to open branches more freely without the restrictions that apply to foreign bank branches. "SMBC is currently carrying on banking business in India in branch mode

through its four branches located in New Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Bengaluru," it added. The structure also ensures that the subsidiary's capital remains ring-fenced from its parent, helping protect the Indian financial system from external shocks.

"The 'in-principle' approval has been granted to the bank for

setting up a WOS through conversion of its existing branches in India," RBI stated. SMBC already has a growing presence in India. In 2024, the bank acquired a 24 per cent stake in Yes Bank, strengthening its footprint in the country's banking sector.

The move to set up a wholly owned subsidiary is expected to further support SMBC's long-term strategy in India, one of the world's fastest-growing major economies. "The RBI would consider granting a licence for commencement of banking business in WOS mode under Section 22 (1) of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949 to SMBC on being satisfied that the bank has complied with the requisite conditions laid down by RBI as part of 'in-principle' approval," the central bank mentioned.

## Net Direct Tax Collection Rises by 8.8 Per Cent in FY2026

**NEW DELHI:** The Central government's net direct tax collections touched Rs 18.37 lakh crore between April 1 and January 11 of the current financial year (2025-26), according to data released by the Income Tax Department on Monday.

The figure represents an 8.82 per cent increase over the next direct tax collections in the same period of the previous year.

Net corporate tax collections till January 11 stood at Rs 8.63



lakh crore, which represents a robust 12.41 per cent over the same period of the previous year.

Net non-corporate tax collections, which include personal income tax and securities

transaction tax, stood at Rs 9.29 lakh crore, which translates to a 6.39 per cent rise over the corresponding figure of the previous year. The lower increase reflects the tax concessions announced in the Budget for 2025-26 for the middle class, which exempted all those earning an income of Rs 12 lakh a year from paying tax. This limit works out to Rs 12.75 lakh for salaried taxpayers, due to the standard deduction of Rs 75,000.

The new structure was aimed to substantially reduce the taxes of the middle class and leave more money in their hands, boosting household consumption, savings and investment to boost economic growth.

The limits for Tax Deducted at Source (TDS) have also been raised for various sections, such as on interest for senior citizens to Rs 1 lakh from Rs 50,000 and on rent to Rs 6 lakh annually from Rs 2.40 lakh.

## Why cheaper capital is key to India's next growth phase



SATISH SINGH

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is actively purchasing government bonds to lower borrowing costs for banks and foster economic growth. Government bonds are financial instruments issued by both state and central governments, designed to facilitate their fiscal needs by raising funds. Investors, in return for purchasing these bonds, receive a predetermined fixed interest rate over the bond's term. This mechanism allows the government to tap into market resources, financing a range of projects, welfare initiatives, and developmental activities that contribute to national progress.

Since April 2025, the RBI has significantly invested more than Rs 5 lakh crore in bonds through Open Market Operations (OMO). This strategic move aims to enhance cheaper liquidity in the banking sector and, in turn, lower lending interest rates. However, despite these efforts, the rising bond yields present a formidable hurdle for the RBI. When bond yields are elevated, the likelihood of a rate cut diminishes, which in turn restricts the flow of credit in the economy. Recent data indicate that the yield on 3-month government bonds rose by 0.57%, while the yield on 10-year bonds rose by 0.80%. Notably, yields on government bonds have averaged only 6.7% in 2025, marking the lowest level in 3 years. As bond yields continue to climb, the anticipated reduction in borrowing costs remains elusive.

These increased bond yields have raised the operational costs for banks seeking low-cost capital. Consequently, interest rates for various loans, including home loans, auto loans, and corporate financing, remain high, which adversely affects consumer spending, investment activities, and overall economic growth. In light of this scenario, the Reserve Bank is contemplating further bond purchases to rectify these financial conditions. Rising prices of gold and silver in global markets, coupled with geopolitical uncertainties and policy shifts from international figures such as President of USA Mr. Trump, have prompted foreign investors to withdraw capital frequently, thereby amplifying pressure on the central bank to inject additional liquidity into the banking system.

OMO serve as a vital mechanism for managing liquidity in the economy. During periods of market strain, the central bank injects liquidity into the financial system by acquiring government bonds. This process enriches the banking sector with capital, enabling lenders to extend credit to businesses, individuals, and industries needing financial support. However, amidst global uncertainties and a drop in foreign investments, experts forecast that the central bank may need to purchase an excess of Rs 2 lakh crore in bonds by March 2026. It is essential to highlight that since April 2024, the RBI has successfully infused Rs 7.7 lakh crore into the banking system through OMOs, while simultaneously reducing the repo rate by 1.25%, reflecting a concerted effort to buttress



liquidity.

On the other hand, state governments are persistently borrowing from the market, exerting additional pressure on overall liquidity. To tackle this escalating situation, the RBI has scaled back state borrowing plans by Rs 10,000 crore, even as state governments aim to borrow an ambitious Rs 5 lakh crore by March 2026. It is crucial to understand that a persistent influx of bonds can drain market liquidity. Excessive government borrowing reduces market liquidity, complicating banks' lending and raising loan interest rates.

Banks currently face a crisis in capital availability for several reasons. One significant factor is the persistently low interest rates offered on bank deposits, which have diminished their attractiveness to investors. Additionally, recent changes placing bank deposits under the income tax purview have further dissuaded savers. Compounding this issue is the rise of enticing investment opportunities in the stock market and mutual funds, drawing potential investors away from traditional savings. Another critical element is bank staff actively selling various insur-

ance products, resulting in customers using their bank deposits to pay lump sums or in flexible instalments, thereby reducing available deposits. This confluence of factors has led to a growing disillusionment among investors regarding the reliability of bank deposits. Additionally, the soaring prices of gold and silver in recent years have further contributed to the downturn in bank deposit growth.

A striking disparity has been evident for an extended period between the growth rates of bank deposits and loan issuance. Specifically, the growth rate of bank deposits has lagged that of loans, resulting in a significant shortfall in the availability of affordable capital for banks. Bank deposits can be categorized into three main types: savings accounts, current accounts, and fixed deposit accounts. Currently, banks provide interest rates on savings accounts that typically range from 2.5% to 7%. However, many banks are offering the minimum rate of just 2.5%. In contrast, no interest is accrued on current accounts, while fixed deposit accounts yield a more attractive average interest rate of

between 5% and 8%.

As of December 12, the growth rate for deposits has softened to a mere 9.7% year-on-year, while loan growth has surged to 11.7%. This divergence has resulted in a notable 200-basis-point gap between the development of loans and deposits. According to data from the RBI, the total volume of loans disbursed by banks reached an impressive Rs 196.5 lakh crore by December 12, a substantial increase from Rs 175.86 lakh crore recorded during the same timeframe the previous year. This signifies a remarkable rise of Rs 1.2 lakh crore in loans within just a fortnight. In tandem, total deposits stood at Rs 242.14 lakh crore, up from Rs 220.06 lakh crore a year earlier. Nevertheless, it is essential to note that total deposits declined by Rs 45,344 crore during the same fortnight. For context, in the fortnight ending November 28, the growth rates were slightly better, with loans growing at 11.5% and deposits at 10.2%.

In light of these trends, to stimulate economic activity, elevate growth rates, and realise India's aspiration of becoming a developed nation by the year 2047, both the government and the Reserve Bank of India must facilitate the provision of capital at more affordable interest rates. Additionally, banks must innovate and develop new strategies to attract deposits by offering lower interest rates, thus securing a more cost-effective source of capital.

Satish Singh is a Senior Columnist based in Mumbai, and the opinions expressed in the article are personal.

## Increase in Standard Deduction, Ease of Doing Biz among Top Budget Expectations



**NEW DELHI:** The government should consider enhancing standard deduction for salaried employees, allowing more time for belated tax returns and several measures to improve ease of doing business in the upcoming Union Budget, a report has said.

The report from KPMG India said India's top expectations from the budget include a raise in the standard deduction for salaried employees to Rs 1 lakh and extension of timelines for filing revised or belated returns to help taxpayers with cross border income reporting obligations, the report said.

"In cases, especially when individuals with cross border investment and income file tax returns their home or host country are not finalised, which may lead to under-reporting and over-reporting of income," the report explained the rationale for allowing more time for revised or belated returns. The business advisory firm also recommended allowing housing loan interest deductions against salary income, including for self-occupied property.

"Considering the significant burden of home loan repayments and the goal of promoting home ownership, it is recommended that the Government allows such interest deduction on self-occupied property under the new tax regime," the report said.

## India's Merchandise Exports Rise to \$38.51 Billion in December Despite Global Uncertainties



**NEW DELHI:** India's merchandise exports rose to \$38.51 billion in December from \$38.13 billion in November despite the uncertainties in the global market triggered by the US tariff turmoil and geopolitical tensions, according to data released by the Ministry of Commerce on Thursday.

The government data showed December services exports were estimated at \$35.50 billion and imports at \$17.38 billion, suggesting a services trade surplus of \$18.12 billion. However, merchandise imports rose to \$63.55 billion from \$62.66 billion, which led to a marginal widening of the merchandise trade deficit to \$25.04 billion.

Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal said that India's overall exports have risen by 4.33 per cent in the first nine months of the current financial year, and total exports for FY26 are set to touch the \$850 billion mark.

In addition, India's exports to the US increased 9.8 per cent during April-December of FY26 compared to the same period of the previous year. As part of the strategy to diversify exports, India is forging new trade partnerships with friendly countries, while talks with the

US to resolve the tariff deadlock are also ongoing.

Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal on Tuesday listed the trade talks with the EU in Brussels and the rollout of the Export Promotion Mission in a round-up of "major highlights" from his Ministry in the last 10 days.

"Held a productive dialogue with the European Union Trade and Economic Security Commissioner, Mr Maros Sefcovic, in Brussels. We conducted detailed deliberations on key areas of the proposed India-EU FTA. Also emphasised the strategic importance of concluding a fair, balanced, and ambitious agreement that aligns with their shared values, economic priorities, and commitment to a rules-based trading framework," the minister said. He further stated that he visited Liechtenstein and reviewed the implementation of the India-EFTA Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement.

Besides, the minister highlighted that as part of the initial rollout of the Export Promotion Mission, two key interventions under the NIRYAT PROMOTIONS sub-scheme have been launched to strengthen MSME exports and improve access to trade finance.

## INTERNATIONAL

## President Trump Says US Enters New Gaza Phase, Backs Technocratic Rule

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump said the United States has officially entered the next phase of its Gaza peace plan, backing a newly appointed Palestinian technocratic administration and calling for full demilitarisation of Hamas, including the surrender of all weapons and the dismantling of tunnel networks.

"As (Special Envoy) Steve Witkoff announced, we have OFFICIALLY entered the next phase of Gaza's 20-Point Peace Plan," Trump said in a post on Truth Social, referring to the US Special Envoy for Peace Missions. Trump said the move follows what he described as record humanitarian gains achieved since the ceasefire. "Since the Ceasefire, my team has helped deliver RECORD LEVELS of Humanitarian Aid to Gaza, reaching Civilians at HISTORIC



speed and scale," he said, adding that even the United Nations had acknowledged the effort as "UNPRECEDENTED."

"These results have set the stage for this next phase," the President said. Trump said Gaza would now be governed during its transition by a Palestinian technocratic administration, the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza, operating with the backing of the US-led

Board of Peace, which he chairs. "As Chairman of the Board of Peace, I am backing a newly appointed Palestinian Technocratic Government, the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza, supported

by the Board's High Representative, to govern Gaza during its transition," he said. Trump described the Palestinian leaders involved as "unwaveringly committed to a PEACEFUL future."

The President said the next phase would focus on securing a comprehensive demilitarisation agreement with Hamas, with support from regional partners. "With the support of Egypt, Turkey, and Qatar, we will secure a

COMPREHENSIVE Demilitarization Agreement with Hamas, including the surrender of ALL weapons, and the dismantling of EVERY tunnel," he said.

At the same time, Trump warned Hamas and asked it to comply immediately. "Hamas must IMMEDIATELY honor its commitments, including the return of the final body to Israel, and proceed without delay to full demilitarization," he said, adding, "They can do this the easy way, or the hard way."

Senior US administration officials said on Wednesday that phase two of the plan shifts the focus from ceasefire management to governance, demilitarisation and reconstruction. They said a transitional technocratic administration would replace both Hamas and the Palestinian Authority in Gaza, marking a significant departure from past arrangements.

## IMF Says No Major Oil Price Impact Yet From Venezuela, Iran Tensions

WASHINGTON: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) on Thursday said it is closely watching global energy markets amid tensions around Venezuela and Iran, but noted that oil prices have not yet seen "very significant impacts."

Asked how serious the current tensions surrounding Venezuela and Iran could be for global energy markets, Julie Kozack, Director of the IMF's Communications Department, said: "What I can say for now is that obviously we're monitoring all of this closely."

She added: "We pay close attention to what happens in global energy markets and oil prices in particular."

"Right now, there haven't been very significant impacts on oil prices, but as I said, we'll closely monitor, and we'll look for signs of changes in those markets,"



Kozack said at the IMF press briefing.

The questions came as Kozack outlined the Fund's assessment of the economic situation in Venezuela and the conditions under which the IMF could resume engagement with Caracas, given the recognition-related pause.

"Since late 2024, our assessment is that imbalances and vulnerabilities have reemerged, driven by lower oil revenues, a widening fiscal deficit," she said, adding that the situation has been shaped by "a scarcity of US dollar liquidity."

## Great Honour, Says Trump after Venezuela's Machado Presents her Nobel Peace Prize to Him

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump has described his meeting with Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado as a "great honour", saying she presented him with her Nobel Peace Prize during their closed-door talks at the White House.

"It was my Great Honor to meet Maria Corina Machado, of Venezuela, today," Trump said in a social media post after the meeting. "She is a wonderful woman who has been through so much." Trump said Machado presented him with her Nobel Peace Prize "for the work I have done", calling it "such a wonderful gesture of mutual respect".

He added: "Thank you Maria!" The meeting, held over lunch in the White House's Private Dining Room, marked the first in-person encounter between Trump and Machado.



Machado later told reporters that she had presented Trump with the Nobel Peace Prize medal, framing the act as a symbolic gesture rooted in shared democratic traditions between Venezuela and the United States. She said she told Trump that 200 years ago, French General Marquis de Lafayette presented Venezuelan independence leader Simon Bolivar with a medal bearing the likeness of George Washington, which Bolivar kept for the rest of his life.

"Two hundred years in history,

## Rights Group Alleges Killing of 15 Minority Hindus in Bangladesh in 45 Days

NEW DELHI: A New Delhi-based rights group, the Rights and Risks Analysis Group (RRAG), has claimed that at least 15 members of the Hindu minority community were killed in Bangladesh over the past 45 days, allegedly by individuals belonging to the Muslim majority.

RRAG Director Suhak Chakma said on Thursday that "in the last 45 days between December 1, 2025 to 15 January 15, 2026, at least 15 minority Hindus were murdered by persons belonging to the majority Muslims in Bangladesh — murder of one Hindu every third day".

"The murdered victims included elderly women like Suborna Roy and youth like 18-year-old Shanta Chandra Das. All the cases of murder were premeditated, often targeting the assets of the victims such as Samir Das and Shanta Chandra Das whose auto-rickshaws were taken away.



A number of murders were committed in a Taliban style by slitting the throats, such as, of Rana Pratap Bairagi, Shanto Chandra Das, Jogesh Chandra Roy and Suborna Roy," Chama added.

According to the RRAG Director, these murders are just tip of the iceberg on other daily acts of violence against Hindus and other minorities across Bangladesh and no news of these violence appeared in the media.

"This extreme vulnerability of the Hindu minorities in Bangladesh faces a new challenge. Unlike the previous governments, whether the Awami League or the Bangladesh Nationalist Party

(BNP), the Interim government led by Chief Advisor Muhammad Yunus has been dismissing any religious angles to these attacks, often before inquiry into the murders," he said.

Chief Advisor Yunus, RRAG report said has been building such a narrative to dismiss attacks on Hindu minorities as a disinformation campaign by India.

He (Yunus) went a step further — on January 13, 2026, when he approached the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk for technical assistance to address disinformation campaigns during elections.

"The attacks on the Hindu minorities during the election campaign will be dismissed as "disinformation campaign" in otherwise friendly elections between erstwhile alliance partners, the BNP and the Jamaat-e-Islami," Chakma also said.

## India Slams Pakistan for 'Abusing' Concept of Self-Determination for Attacks on Democracies



UNITED NATIONS: India has slammed Pakistan for misusing the concept of self-determination to attack democratic and pluralistic nations by harping on Kashmir with falsehoods.

"At a time when member states have to rise beyond their narrow considerations, Pakistan continues to misuse all platforms and processes in the UN to drive their divisive agenda", Eldos Punoose, a counsellor at India's UN Mission, said on Thursday at the General Assembly. "The right to self-determination is a fundamental principle enshrined in the UN Charter. However, this right must not be abused to encourage secession in pluralistic and democratic states," he said.

Punoose declared, "Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, an integral and inalienable part of India". He was responding to Pakistan's Permanent Representative Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, who referred to Kashmir when the Assembly was discussing Secretary-General Antonio Guterres's report on the work of the UN in the past year. Regardless of the topic on the agenda, Pakistan repeatedly brings up Kashmir, even though other members ignore its fulfilments, letting them slip into irrelevance. "This forum is no exception either, and Pakistan made an unwarranted reference to the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, an integral and inalienable part of India", Punoose said. "Though habituated, Pakistan would do well if they do not resort to baseless allegations and falsehoods and portrays a picture that is completely detached from reality," he added.

CPC DELEGATION IN INDIA  
Indian Confusion Exposed, BJP and Congress Indulge in Futile Rhetoric

GOPAL MISRA

The political and diplomatic response of India's two major political parties, the BJP and the Congress Party, towards China during the recent visit of the delegation of the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) to India appeared to be pathetic, if not reprehensible.

It was pathetic because no serious studies and proposals appeared to have been worked out before the historical interaction between the delegation of the CPC after a prolonged gap of nearly five years.

Indeed, it was an internal issue for India's two major political outfits to work in unison for evolving new sustainable arrangements with the ruling party of China. China has emerged as the economic super power, industrial hub. It is ahead of India in science and technology in decades, if not by half-a-century even in the areas such as nuclear technology and space research in which India was much ahead of China just a decade ago.

For the country's civil society, this behaviour of the political parties was 'reprehensible', because an impression is being percolated down that the 148-billion strong India is being led either by self-serving politicians or people without vision for modernizing India.

The political leadership has not only been depriving adequate financial support to the IITs and other institutions engaged in research in the crucial fields of science and technology, it has also ended any meaningful dialogues regarding development and enhancing wealth of citizens. Apart from weaving interesting narratives, these parties have also unleashed a political culture criticising each other in not so civil language instead of working out a common national strategy for upgrading technology while exploring better sustainable relationships with the country's cunning northern neighbour.

For this negative perception of common people towards their leadership, the BJP and the Congress Party have to blame themselves for their failure to take the country into confidence regarding key development issues before the country and their respective Chinese policy. Instead, they were being seen accusing each other of having a secret or clandestine affair with Beijing. The truth, however, perhaps, confirms that the BJP and RSS on one side and the Congress Party on the other hand were hobnobbing with the Chinese without taking the people in confidence. Many believe that their accusative behaviour could be a strategy to divert the attention of the common people from how much they were succumbing to the pressure of the Dragon.

There is a general impression among strategic and foreign affairs scholars in New Delhi that the BJP and the Congress should have evolved a common strategy to deal with Beijing. The recent unnecessary exchanges of abuses have given an unfortunate impression that the BJP and the Congress Party appeared to be vying with each other to submit before Beijing, which is under an autocrat, Xi Jinping, an ambitious leader, who wants to be admired like Mao Zedong in Chinese history.

There is unanimity among foreign affairs experts in New Delhi that the visit of the CPC delegation to New Delhi during mid-January 2026 should be studied in the context of Jinping's agenda of annexing Taiwan. It is for China to decide whether it should grab the Indian state of Arunachal or invade Taiwan immediately. For annexing Taiwan, China needs a friendly leadership in New Delhi, which could resist the American pressure to resist the aggression against Taiwan.

The recent India visit of the CPC delegation could also be an attempt to ensure that India should remain neutral while the peace-loving people of Taiwan are being finally



subjugated by Beijing. Unfortunately, neither the US-led West nor other democracies has any information regarding the timeline of the possible Chinese aggression in the region. However, it is certain that Beijing would undertake the military mission according to a timeline suitable to it.

It may be noted that for establishing himself within the power-structure of the party, Jinping had destroyed the democratic institutions of Hong Kong without any hesitation. Thus, China under Jinping violated its promises given to the UN and the British crown regarding the autonomy of Hong Kong. It means that while dealing with China, India has to be alert, cautious and vigilant. China under Jinping cannot be trusted, he had not only engineered the end of democracy in Hong Kong, but helped Pakistan during the Sindoor Operations with its state-of-the-art communication technology, have been opposing India's entry to the UN Security Council as a permanent member and openly supports Pakistani terrorists by getting U.N. clearance to Pakistan. Also, Jinping has become the unquestioned leader of China by outwitting his political rivals within the CPC.

In this context, India has to study the implications of the visit of the delegation of the CPC to New Delhi with the wider global agenda of Xi Jinping.

**Decline of the US**  
Within two weeks of the

and Rahul has failed to get the mandate of the people during the past 12 years. Thus, most of the support they had inherited either by marrying in the country's first political family, Nehru-Indira or being born in it, has lost its pre-eminence in the country's new political spectrum.

In spite of these recent setbacks, the BJP and the Congress Party are trying to weave narratives without substantial facts and studies to occupy the country's central political stage. They appear to be scared of the anger of the common people for their poor strategy towards China and the growing influence of Beijing in the region. It, perhaps, has prompted the BJP and the Congress Party not to share their recent interactions with the CPC delegation.

However, it is to be ascertained whether the Indian politicians are under some unknown fear or could be driven by greed like American academia and media. It is quite known for some time that the CPC and People's Liberation Army (PLA) have substantial investment in American newspapers like the Washington Post and New York Times. Also, there are reports that a number of academics have received unaccounted funds from their Chinese hosts. If they could bribe Americans and others, they may soon be applying the same tricks in India.

During the past 10 years, under the BJP, the Chinese have already succeeded in eroding the Indian influence substantially in the Indian subcontinent from Bangladesh to Maldives. The frivolous approach of the country's two political parties towards the strategic issues must have amused the Chinese delegation.

The truth is that during the past several years, the BJP, its mentors in the Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh (RSS) and the Congress Party have been moving towards maintaining relationships with the CPC, but not sharing details of their interactions with the

common people.

**Political Considerations**

The time chosen by Beijing to send the CPC delegation to India could not have been more opportune or better, according to the foreign affairs experts. They point out that it is the period suitable for China to woo India, especially when peace continues to be elusive in Eastern Europe, and an uprising is threatening the Mullah regime in Iran.

Also, the global outcry over the US abduction of Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro may not appear to be effective. Experts on international affairs stress that countries cannot use their own indictments to attack another state, rejecting Maduro's "capture" as a legal arrest. Meanwhile, the policy of Trump to 'Blow hot and Blow cold' against China appears to have petered out in the current global play of forces. The repeated threats of enhanced tariffs against India are also losing their effective edge. Therefore, the visit of the Chinese delegation to India during the contemporary geo-political situation is not just offering an olive branch to India, but it may trigger a new chapter in the cooperation in Asia. Interestingly, the Congress Party's criticism of the visit of the CPC delegation at the BJP headquarters and the RSS office, could not serve any political purpose. Later, the delegation also visited the Congress Party office.

**The Old Love**  
The criticism of the Congress Party regarding the visit of the Chinese delegation was an effort to put BJP and RSS on defensive mode, but the party also didn't share the contents of its discussion with the representatives of the Chinese party, when they signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed in Beijing on August 7, 2008. It was signed by the then-Congress Party General Secretary Rahul Gandhi and the then-Chinese Vice-President Xi Jin-

ping, who now rules China. The then-Congress president Sonia Gandhi was present at the signing ceremony.

Interestingly, neither Rahul nor Sonia cared to discuss the contents of the MoU within the party or discussed it later in the party's working committee.

The BJP has criticised the signing of the MoU between the INC and CPC, but three years later in 2011, the then BJP president, Nitin Gadkari led his party's delegation on a five-day goodwill visit to China starting from January 20, 2011, at the invitation of the CPC. It is not known whether he shared his experience with the party leaders or even cared to spell out the details of the visit to the South Block, which houses the key ministries of defence and foreign affairs in New Delhi. In 2026, the historic visit of the CPC delegation had taken place on Tuesday, 13 January, on the eve of Sankranti when the Sun moved to the northern axis; thus preparing us for pleasant weather in the coming weeks.

During the current visit of the delegation of the CPC, its members not only visited the offices of the BJP and the RSS headquarters in New Delhi, they also held an hour-long meeting with the Sangh's general secretary Dattatreya Hosabale. The details of the discussion were not revealed. Also, two years before Gadkari's visit to Beijing, on four January 2009, a saffron delegation had also visited China.

The recent visit of the CPC delegation has taken place after the deadly Galwan Clashes of June 2020 between Indian and Chinese troops in the Galwan Valley, part of their Line of Actual Control (LAC), resulting in the death of 20 Indian and four Chinese soldiers.

**The RIC Bonding**  
It is often being asked why Russia's getting involved in the China-India border dispute and trying to bring them together. One argument could be that Moscow is keen to regain its influence in South Asia,

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

## Strategic Preparation for Indian Nurses in light of GCC healthcare expansion



LALIT PATTANAİK  
CO-AUTHOR,  
PARAMANANDA SANTRA

As the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and other member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) embark on ambitious economic diversification initiatives, such as the visionary 'We the UAE 2031' and the comprehensive National Strategy for Nursing and Midwifery (Roadmap 2025), a striking contradiction has emerged. This region is experiencing rapid and expansive growth in healthcare infrastructure, with state-of-the-art hospitals and advanced medical facilities being developed at an unprecedented pace. However, this progress is overshadowed by a significant shortage of skilled healthcare professionals, a challenge that poses risks to the quality and sustainability of healthcare services.

Despite the broader global obstacles to mobility and stringent visa regulations that have hindered the movement of professionals, the GCC has proactively sought to attract international healthcare talent. By implementing policies that facilitate easier visa acquisition and offering a wealth of employment opportunities, the region has become a promising destination for healthcare workers from around the globe, eager to contribute to and benefit from this thriving healthcare landscape. This juxtaposition of rapid infrastructural development alongside a workforce gap highlights both the potential for growth in the region's healthcare sector and the urgent need for strategic solutions to address human resource challenges.

"The region is currently facing a pivotal moment in its healthcare landscape," emphasises Lalit Pattanaik, Founder and CEO of Global Nurse Force (GNF). "It is crucial to go beyond merely expanding the workforce; there is an urgent need for a well-rounded array of highly skilled professionals. These individuals must possess diverse expertise and competencies to navigate and address the growing complexities of healthcare delivery. As patient needs evolve and challenges in



the healthcare system become more intricate, the demand for professionals who can adapt and provide innovative solutions is more important than ever."

In response to this evolving landscape, GCC countries are actively seeking to broaden their talent pool and reduce dependence on any single nation. Traditionally, Kerala has been the leading source of nursing professionals for the region, but new policy frameworks are adopting a more diverse approach. This change involves attracting talent from Northern and Northeastern India and recruiting skilled professionals from South Africa, several other African countries, and Eastern European nations.

Paramananda Santra, GNF's Chief Business Officer and an authority on healthcare mobility, highlights this transformative approach. "The India-GCC corridor is evolving from a phase of 'brain drain', where talent leaves the country, with a focus towards 'brain circulation'," Santra elaborates. "Indian nurses can leverage their experiences abroad to generate substantial savings and acquire advanced skills, which they can either utilise upon returning home or pursue further opportunities in the West." The economic incentives are substantial; a nurse in India can anticipate a staggering 400% to 500% increase in tax-free salary in the GCC, often supplemented with housing benefits. To facilitate this significant movement of healthcare professionals, GNF leadership, including Pattanaik, embarked on a strategic tour of the UAE and GCC in late 2025. This visit involved discussions with healthcare authorities to establish safe, ethical, and efficient pathways for nurses, directly linking open hospital positions to qualified candidates from India.

However, the journey to deployment has become increasingly intricate, necessitating navigation through a complex

regulatory landscape. GNF, recognised as a leading global recruitment agency, has already begun offering a robust suite of preparatory courses to equip the Indian healthcare workforce with the skills needed to meet the essential eligibility criteria: Clinical Experience, Primary Source Verification, Licensure Examinations, and Good Standing Certification. To assist candidates in overcoming these regulatory challenges, GNF has launched several training initiatives that cater specifically to the needs of GCC-targeted recruitment:

### GCC Prep Program:

This comprehensive refresher course is tailored to help candidates master the clinical reasoning and knowledge required to succeed in the licensure exams administered by the Dubai Health Authority (DHA), the Ministry of Health (MOH), and the Health Authority Abu Dhabi (HAAD).

### Arabic for Healthcare Professionals:

This practical language course is designed to empower Indian nurses with essential communication skills, enabling them to understand clinical instructions and cultural subtleties. By bridging this communication gap, the course addresses a crucial factor impacting patient safety and care quality. For Indian nurses, this represents a unique and opportune "golden window" to penetrate burgeoning healthcare markets across the GCC, including Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. Success in this endeavour hinges on equipping themselves with the appropriate skills, cultural competencies, and an ethical framework that supports their professional journey in these rapidly developing regions.

**Lalit Pattanaik** - Founder and CEO of Global Nurse Force (GNF)

**Paramananda Santra** - GNF's Chief Business Officer

## 80-85% of Indians with mental illness go untreated, warns psychiatric body

OUR CORRESPONDENT  
New Delhi

Nearly 80-85 per cent of Indians suffering from mental health disorders do not receive timely or appropriate treatment, the Indian Psychiatric Society (IPS) has warned, calling the situation a serious public health challenge that requires urgent national attention.

The concern was raised at the curtain-raiser event of the 77th Annual National Conference of the Indian Psychiatric Society (ANCIPS 2026), scheduled to be held from January 28 to 31 at Yashbhoomi in Delhi. Mental health experts said that despite advances in treatment and growing awareness, a vast majority of people with psychiatric illnesses remain outside the formal healthcare system.

Citing data from the National Mental Health Survey (NMHS), IPS said India continues to have one of the widest mental health treatment gaps globally, with over 85 per cent of people suffering from common mental disorders not seeking or receiving care. Globally, more than 70 per cent of individuals with mental illness do not receive treatment from



trained professionals, while in many low-income countries, fewer than 10 per cent of those in need access care.

Addressing the gathering, IPS President Dr Savita Malhotra said mental illnesses are among the most treatable health conditions if detected early. "Mental health disorders are highly treatable, yet most patients in India continue to suffer in silence. The fact that over 80 per cent do not receive timely psychiatric care reflects deep-rooted stigma, lack of awareness and poor integration of mental health services into primary healthcare," she said, describing the issue as social, economic and developmental in nature.

Experts said delays in seeking psychiatric care often stretch from months to years due to a combination of stigma,

misinformation and fear of social discrimination. Many individuals fail to recognise early symptoms as medical conditions, instead attributing them to stress, personal weakness or temporary emotional

issues. The treatment gap is further widened by a severe shortage of mental health professionals. Psychiatrists, psychologists, psychiatric social workers and mental health nurses remain grossly inadequate in number, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas where a large part of the population resides.

Dr Nimesh G. Desai, chairperson of the ANCIPS 2026 organising committee and former director of the Institute of Human Behaviour and Allied Sciences (IHBAS), warned that delayed treatment often leads to chronic illness, greater disability and increased risk of self-harm and suicide. "Mental health must be addressed with the same urgency as physical health. Strengthening community-based services, training primary care doctors and

improving referral systems are critical to bridging this unacceptable gap," he said.

Highlighting the objectives of the upcoming conference, organising secretary Dr Deepak Raheja said ANCIPS 2026 would focus on practical, evidence-based solutions. "Integration of mental health into primary healthcare, higher budgetary allocation, expansion of the workforce and sustained awareness campaigns are essential to reduce stigma and improve access," he said, adding that the conference would bring together professionals, policymakers and stakeholders to address these challenges.

Experts also flagged the disproportionate impact of untreated mental illness on vulnerable groups. Studies indicate that nearly 80 per cent of children and adolescents with diagnosable mental disorders in some regions receive no treatment, affecting education and long-term outcomes. Similarly, about 84 per cent of older adults with mental health conditions remain untreated due to neglect, social isolation and the misconception that psychological symptoms are a normal part of ageing.

### A 'NANHI PARI' PROMPTS

## Two Ever Green Hit Songs of Bollywood



NISHI MISRA

The dawn of 2026 has become memorable not only for me, but also an event to be remembered by my family, when we realized that in the get-together hosted by a pretty winsome lady of the House, Rakhi, is credited with two evergreen Bollywood songs.

Rakhi, now a proud grandmother, is known for her spiritual life within her family, but regularly invites her close friends and family members at her delightful vast residence in Meerut, where she is known for hosting the New Year parties regularly. She, however, seldom shared her inner thoughts and discussed her dear uncle Sardar Anjum, a well-known Punjabi and Urdu author and poet, and also a close family friend. The 2026 eve, perhaps, was different. She opened up after a little hesitation.

It may be recalled that Sardar Anjum was honoured twice with the Padma Awards. He had received Padmashree for his contribution to literature, and was later honoured with the third highest award, Padma Bhushan.

She vividly narrates about her birth in Mumbai. As soon as the doctor announced that Subhash, her father, is blessed with a lovely daughter, the excitement was natural among the family members, but it became a historical event. Her birth was expressed in a few emotional lines by Sardar Anjum in a sonorous tone that ghar aayi nanhi si pari, a pretty fairy doll, has arrived in our family. Later, these lines became the mukhada or face of the lyric finally composed by Sahir Ludhianvi to become a Bollywood hit.

There was no end to the excitement on the eve of the New Year 2026, when she shared her another secret that the hit Bollywood song, humse tumhe pyar Kitna, do you know how much I love you, too was triggered by a single exchange between her hardly five years old and the uncle, Anjum.

## From Everest to Aconcagua, Aritra Roy Scripts History in South America

ARUN KUMAR RAO  
Bengaluru

Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) has announced yet another moment of pride for the nation as renowned Indian mountaineer Shri Aritra Roy successfully summited Mount Aconcagua in Argentina—the highest peak outside Asia—standing tall at 6,967.15 metres above Mean Sea Level.

The landmark ascent, completed on January 7, 2026, at 2:00 pm (local time), marks a significant milestone in Shri Roy's ambitious Seven Summits Challenge, following his earlier conquest of Mount Everest. Undertaken as a solo expedition and fully sponsored by HAL, the climb reinforces India's growing presence in global high-altitude mountaineering.

Shri Roy completed the summit push well ahead of schedule



after a gruelling 44-kilometre trek, battling extreme conditions that included temperatures plunging to -40°C, fierce snowstorms and blizzards. Demonstrating remarkable endurance and composure in the thin Andean air, he spent 45 minutes at the summit before beginning his descent.

Congratulating Shri Roy on the historic achievement, Dr D K Sunil, Chairman and

Managing Director, HAL, said the ascent stands as a powerful example of grit and perseverance.

"The successful summit of Mount Aconcagua by Shri Aritra Roy is an inspiring story of determination, resilience and unwavering focus. HAL is proud to have sponsored the expedition and congratulates Shri Aritra on this outstanding accomplishment, wishing him continued success in his future

endeavours," he said.

Reflecting on the climb, Shri Roy described the ascent of Aconcagua—often referred to as the 'Stone Sentinel'—as a deeply humbling experience. "Ascending the Stone Sentinel, one gasp of thin Andean air at a time, was a true test of faith. I am proud, honoured and indebted to Hindustan Aeronautics Limited for supporting me on this mission. The climb tested every ounce of my physical and mental strength, but by adapting to the situation and trusting my instincts, I was able to overcome this toughest challenge," he said.

Dedicating the summit to dreamers and achievers alike, Shri Roy added that the accomplishment is a reminder that relentless effort, belief and resilience can turn the most formidable peaks into attainable goals—both in the mountains and beyond.

## Satish Singh has been honoured with the World Hindi Academy Award for the year 2026



FW DESK

The five-day Mumbai International Hindi Literature Festival, organised by the World Hindi Academy in Mumbai, commenced on World Hindi Day, 10 January 2026, at ISKCON's auditorium, Juhu West, Mumbai. The event featured discussions on the current and future status of the Hindi language, Kavi Sammelan/Mushaira and the felicitation of personalities who have made significant contributions to promoting Hindi.

Senior banking and finance columnist, lyricist, storyteller, and banker, Mr Satish Singh, was honoured with the 2026 World Hindi Academy Award for his efforts to promote financial awareness and the Hindi language through his articles on banking, finance, and cyber fraud. The award was presented by renowned comedian Sunil Pal and litterateur Kanak Dixit.

Mr Singh, from Patna, Bihar, is currently serving as an Assistant General Manager at the State Bank of India's Corporate Centre in Mumbai.

## German Chancellor Friedrich Merz Wraps Up Bengaluru Visit, Signals Deeper India-Germany Partnership

ARUN KUMAR RAO  
Bengaluru



Federal Republic of Germany Chancellor Friedrich Merz concluded his official visit to Bengaluru on Tuesday, departing the city after a day of high-level engagements that underlined the growing depth of India-Germany relations and Karnataka's rising profile as a global innovation hub.

Chancellor Merz's visit formed part of a broader diplomatic outreach aimed at strengthening bilateral cooperation across economic, technological and strategic domains. Bengaluru—widely regarded as India's technology capital—served as a fitting backdrop, showcasing opportunities for German collaboration in advanced manufacturing, digital technologies, clean energy and innovation-led enterprises.

Earlier in the day, the Chancellor and his delegation held interactions with leading tech-

nology and industrial institutions, focusing on future-ready sectors and sustainable growth. The engagements highlighted the city's strengths in research, skilled talent and start-up ecosystems, positioning Karnataka as a key destination for German investment and industrial partnerships. At Kempegowda International Airport, MB Patil, Minister for Heavy and Medium Industries and Basic Facilities Development, personally saw off the visiting dignitary, extending a warm farewell on behalf of the Karnataka government. Comprehensive security arrangements ensured the smooth movement of the Chancellor and his delegation through-

out the visit. Several senior officials were present during the farewell, including Additional Chief Secretary Gaurav Gupta; Secretary, Personnel and Administrative Reforms Department, Dr KG Jagadeesh; Bengaluru City District Commissioner G Jagadeesh; Bengaluru City Police Commissioner Simant Kumar Singh; regional passport officers; and representatives from the German Consulate General in New Delhi.

Officials said the Bengaluru engagements were part of a larger India tour that reflects Germany's strong interest in deepening ties with India. The visit carries pan-India significance, with upcoming meetings in New Delhi with Prime Minister Narendra Modi expected to focus on expanding trade, advancing the proposed EU-India free trade agreement, strengthening defence and security cooperation, and exploring mobility and skill development initiatives.

## Mumbai's Largest Public Lohri Celebration Marks 24 Years of Cultural Legacy at 4 Bungalows

FW DESK  
Mumbai



The vibrant spirit of Punjab lit up the heart of Mumbai as Gurudwara 4 Bungalows, Andheri, hosted the 24th consecutive year of its grand Lohri celebrations, reaffirming its status as Mumbai's largest public Lohri event. Over 2,000 people from diverse communities gathered to celebrate the festival with devotion, joy, and cultural pride.

What began in 2002 as a modest community initiative was envisioned by Late

S. Sardar Singh Suri Ji, the then President of Gurudwara 4 Bungalows. His aim was to create a "home away from home" for the Punjabi community in Mumbai - where families could gather around the sacred bonfire, celebrate traditions, and

pass on cultural values to future generations.

Today, this cherished legacy is being carried forward with dedication by his son, S. Jaspal Singh Suri Ji, the current President of the Gurudwara Sahib. Under his leadership, the celebration has grown in scale while retaining its authentic spiritual and cultural essence.

Over the years, the event has evolved into a landmark cultural gathering, welcoming people from all castes, cultures, and backgrounds.

A complete **KNOWLEDGE CAPSULE**

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