

REGION

2

DELHI GOVERNMENT APPROVES RS 85-CRORE DEVELOPMENT PUSH FOR SC/ST COLONIES



Delhi CM Rekha Gupta, Ministers open 51 new Ayushman Arogya Mandirs



NEW DELHI: Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Friday led her Cabinet Ministers and BJP legislators in launching 51 new Ayushman Arogya Mandirs across the city, taking the number of these neighbourhood health centres to 370 within one year.

Speaking at an event in Chhatrapur constituency, Chief Minister Gupta hit out at the previous Congress government, which was in power for 15 years and the Aam Aadmi Party government, which ruled for 11 years. "They came and went away without really resolving public grievances, but ever since voters have shown trust in the BJP and brought it to power, Delhi has started returning to the development track, she said. In a message on social media, she said, "Giving momentum to the resolve of

Viksit Delhi, today development works worth more than Rs 322 crore were inaugurated for Viksit Chhatrapur Assembly." She said, "Chhatrapur's history is intertwined with the soul of Delhi's history. Every inch of land here bears witness to Delhi's journey of development. But for a long time, previous governments had put the brake on the development of this area. In just one year, under the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, our government has connected Chhatrapur to the mainstream of development."

Through these projects inaugurated today, extensive work will be undertaken on road construction and repair, strengthening of drains, upgradation of schools, resolution of traffic problems, and enhancement of basic infrastructure,

she said. This development will make the lives of local people easier and connect the area to new possibilities, she said at an event attended by MP Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, MLA Kartar Singh Tanwar and MCD South Zone Chairman Umed Singh Fogaat. Meanwhile, Minister of Health and Family Welfare Pankaj Kumar Singh said that more than 14 lakh citizens have availed treatment since the BJP government started opening Ayushman Arogya Mandirs (AAMs).

Launching an AAM at Madipur, which is part of 51 Mandirs launched across the national capital, he said, with the launch of these 51 centres across Delhi, the total number of Ayushman Arogya Mandirs in the city has reached 370. The long-term target is to establish more than 1, 100 Ayushman

Arogya Mandirs across Delhi, ensuring that every neighbourhood benefits from robust and sustainable primary healthcare infrastructure, he said.

Pankaj Kumar Singh said that the Ayushman Arogya Mandir initiative represents a transformative vision to bring quality healthcare closer to communities.

He emphasised that the objective is to ensure that mothers, senior citizens and families do not have to travel long distances to hospitals for basic medical care, as essential services are now being made available within their neighbourhoods.

The Minister highlighted that these centres provide free doctor consultations, essential medicines and more than 100 diagnostic tests, along with screening services for diabetes, hypertension and cancer, maternal and child healthcare, immunisation and mental health support. These services are helping reduce the burden on major government hospitals while ensuring timely and preventive care.

The Health Minister informed that Integrated Public Health Laboratories (IPHL) and Critical Care Blocks (CCB) are being developed in a phased manner to further strengthen Delhi's public healthcare infrastructure and create an integrated healthcare system from primary to advanced treatment facilities.

BANKING & FINANCE

6

RBI INVITES PUBLIC COMMENTS ON DRAFT CIRCULAR ON LEAD BANK SCHEME



Delhi approves Rs 125-crore drain remodelling projects to tackle waterlogging in North zone



OUR CORRESPONDENT
New Delhi

The Delhi government has granted financial approval for three major drain remodelling projects in north Delhi, with a combined outlay of over Rs 125 crore, in a move aimed at addressing chronic waterlogging in the area.

Public Works Department (PWD) Minister Parvash Sahib Singh said the projects are part of the broader Drainage Master Plan 2025 and are designed to provide long-term relief in areas that witness severe flooding during the monsoon.

According to officials, the works will be executed in accordance with the recommendations of the drainage master plan unveiled last year, which lays out a structured roadmap to overhaul the Capital's stormwater infrastructure.

"As laid down in the Drainage Master Plan, these projects

form part of an integrated effort to resolve long-standing waterlogging issues in North Delhi. The focus is on remodelling connected stretches in a systematic manner rather than relying on temporary fixes," the minister said in a statement.

The largest of the three projects involves remodelling the stormwater drain from Azadpur H-Point to Mukarba Chowk on Mall Road Extension. The stretch spans 7.74 kilometres and has been sanctioned at an estimated cost of Rs 33.11 crore.

Another project along the Mall Road Extension will cover the 0.81-kilometre stretch from Camp Chowk to Azadpur H-Point, for which Rs 44.38 crore has been approved.

Local traders say the move is overdue. "Azadpur has a large drain, but every monsoon we face severe waterlogging, especially on the main road and near the Jahangirpuri In-

dustrial Area. If the drainage system is properly remodelled, it will bring major relief," said Nishant Gulati, a trader at Azadpur Mandi.

The third project will focus on Model Town-II, Model Town-III and Kushal Cinema Road, where drainage infrastructure has long been flagged as inadequate. The PWD has approved Rs 48.13 crore for remodelling drains across an approximately 8-kilometre stretch in these areas.

Residents say the problem worsens during heavy rain. "In Model Town-III, waterlogging is frequent and at times sewer water mixes with rainwater during the monsoon," said Sanjay Gupta, president of the local Residents' Welfare Association.

The Drainage Master Plan 2025, unveiled in September last year, is designed to meet Delhi's drainage requirements for the next three decades. The citywide plan, estimated to cost Rs 57,362 crore, is proposed to be implemented over five years in two phases.

Officials have said the plan aims to reduce waterlogging incidents by 50 per cent over the next three years and cut flood-related accidents by 30 per cent within five years.

The latest approvals mark the first set of major works under the master plan in north Delhi, with the government positioning the projects as a shift from reactive, patchwork measures to a more durable and coordinated drainage strategy.

POTPOURRI

8

HAPPIEST MINDS' GROWTH ACCELERATES TO 10.7% Y-O-Y; Q3 REVENUES HIT ₹587 CR AS AI-LED DEAL MOMENTUM STRENGTHENS MARGINS



Delhi Revises Ration Card Norms, Raises Income Limit to Rs 1.2 Lakh



OUR CORRESPONDENT
New Delhi

The Delhi government has notified a fresh set of rules for issuing ration cards, revising income eligibility, redefining who will be treated as the head of a household and tightening scrutiny of beneficiaries under the Public Distribution System (PDS).

Under the Delhi Food Security Rules, 2026, the eldest woman in a family will now be recognised as the head of the household for the purpose of issuing a ration card. Officials said the move is aimed at giving women a more formal role in household documentation. However, if the only woman member in a family is below 18 years of age, the eldest male member will be considered the head. In another significant change, the government has raised the annual income eligibility limit from Rs 1 lakh to Rs 1.2 lakh. Only families earning up to Rs 1.2 lakh per year will be eligible to apply for a new ration card. Applicants will have to furnish an income certificate issued by the Delhi Revenue Department. The application process, officials said, can be completed online through a mobile phone or computer.

MSDE Partners with Swiggy, Flipkart to Expand Industry-Linked Skilling under Skill India Mission



NEW DELHI: The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) is delivering skill, re-skill and up-skill training across the country under the Government's Skill India Mission (SIM), Minister of State (Independent Charge) Jayant Chaudhary informed the Rajya Sabha.

The Minister stated that MSDE implements training programmes through a wide network of skill development centres under flagship schemes such as Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS), National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS) and Craftsman Training Scheme (CTS) through Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs). These initiatives aim to equip youth across all sections of society with industry-relevant, future-ready skills. To strengthen industry alignment and enhance employability, MSDE has entered into partnerships with leading industry players, including food and grocery delivery platforms.

The Ministry has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Swiggy to launch the 'Swiggy Skills' initiative, which offers skill training and employment opportunities within Swiggy's food delivery and quick commerce network.

Similarly, MSDE has partnered with Flipkart's Supply Chain Operations Academy (SCOA) under PMKVY 4.0 to up-skill youth in the e-commerce and supply chain sectors. Flipkart Internet Pvt Ltd has also been recognised as an Awarding Body by the National Council for Vocational Education and Training (NCVET).

Indian Rlys Triples Expenditure on Safety to Over Rs 1.17 Lakh Crore in Last 10 Years



NEW DELHI: The Indian Railways has tripled expenditure on safety over the last decade, from Rs 39,200 crore in 2013-14 to Rs 1,17,693 crore in 2025-26, prioritising passenger safety amid modernisation, the Parliament was informed on Friday.

"Safety is accorded the highest priority on Indian Railways. As a consequence of various safety measures taken over the years, there has been a steep decline in the number of accidents," Minister for Railways Ashwin Vaishnav said in a written reply to questions in the Rajya Sabha.

The indigenously developed hi-tech Kavach Automatic Train Protection (ATP), which requires safety certification of the highest order (SIL-4), has been installed along large sections of the Indian Railways network after successful field trials were carried out in 2016. Kavach aids the loco pilot in running trains within specified speed limits by automatically applying brakes in case the loco pilot fails to do so, and also helps to run trains safely during inclement weather.

The funds utilised on Kavach works so far, up to Dec 2025, are Rs 2,573.36 crore. The allocation of funds during the year 2025-26 is Rs 1,673.19 crore. Requisite funds are made available as per the progress of works, the minister said. Based on the deployment of Kavach version 3.2 on 1465 route km on South Central Railway and experience gained, further improvements were made. Finally, the Kavach

specification version 4.0 was approved by RDSO in July 2024.

Kavach version 4.0 covers all the major features required for the diverse railway network. This is a significant milestone in safety for Indian Railways. Within a short period, IR has developed, tested and started deploying the Automatic Train Protection System, the minister said. After extensive and elaborate trials, Kavach Version 4.0 has been successfully commissioned on 1297 route kilometres, covering the high-density Delhi-Mumbai and Delhi-Howrah routes. On the Delhi-Mumbai route, Kavach version 4.0 has been commissioned on the junction cabin-Palwal-Mathura-Nagda section (667 Rkm) & Ahmedabad-Vadodara-Virar section (432 Rkm) and on the Delhi-Howrah route on Gaya-Saramatanr (93 Rkm) and Bardhaman-Howrah section (105 Rkm).

Further, trackside Kavach implementation work has been taken up on 23,360 route km covering all important sections of the Railways. Specialised training programmes on Kavach are being conducted at centralised training institutes of Indian Railways to impart training to all concerned officials. By now, more than 48,000 technicians, operators and engineers have been trained on Kavach technology. This includes about 45,000 Loco Pilots & Assistant Loco Pilots. Courses have been designed in collaboration with IRISSET.

Over 4.76 Cr Court Cases Pending Across India: Govt Informs Parliament



NEW DELHI: Over 4.76 crore cases are pending across various courts in the country, including more than 63.66 lakh cases in High Courts and 92,101 cases in the Supreme Court of India, the Union Ministry of Law and Justice informed the Lok Sabha on Friday.

Replying to an unstarred question, Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Law and Justice Arjun Ram Meghwal said that, as per data available on the National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG), a total of 4,76,57,328 cases were pending in district and subordinate courts as on December 31, 2025.

Meghwal, who is also the Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs, added that the pendency in the Supreme Court stood at 92,101 cases as on December 31, 2025, reflecting an 11.40 per cent increase over the last three years.

The data further showed that a total of 63,66,023 cases were pending across the 25 High Courts in the country as on December 31, 2025, marking a 4.75 per cent rise in pendency during the same period. Among High Courts, the Allahabad High Court had the highest pendency with 12,07,240 cases, followed by the Bombay High Court with 6,64,979 cases and the Rajasthan High Court with 6,87,595 pending matters as on December 31, 2025, according to official data.

The data indicated that pendency in district and subordinate courts increased by 5.84 per cent over the last three years, rising to 4,76,57,328 cases as on December 31, 2025.

Top World Leaders to Attend Next Week's India-AI Impact Summit in New Delhi

NEW DELHI: Top world leaders - including French President Emmanuel Macron, Brazil President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, Greece Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis - are scheduled to attend the India-AI Impact Summit 2026 in New Delhi from February 16-20, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) announced on Friday.

The summit is anchored in three 'Sutras' - 'People, Planet and Progress' which define India's approach to cooperation on AI, the MEA stated.

It will bring together global leaders, policymakers, innovators, and experts from across the world to deliberate on the way forward for Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Rahul Gandhi meets farm union leaders in Parliament House amid opposition to India-US trade deal



NEW DELHI: Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, on Friday met leaders of several farm unions from across the country at the Parliament House.

During the meeting, the farm union representatives expressed strong opposition to the India-US trade deal and conveyed their deep concern over the potential impact on farmers' livelihoods, particularly those engaged in the cultivation of corn, soybean, cotton, fruits, and nuts.

The leaders told the Congress leader that they fear the agreement could open the door for agricultural imports, which may adversely affect domestic producers. Gandhi also reiterated his position, stating that the trade deal has opened the door for agricultural imports and warned that



At the invitation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a host of other leaders are also scheduled to attend the AI Impact Summit. This includes Netherlands PM Dick Schoof, Sri Lanka President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, Bhutan Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay and

Mauritius PM Navinchandra Ramgoolam. Other leaders attending the landmark summit include Spain President Pedro Sanchez Perez-Castejon, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Khalid bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Croatia PM Andrej Plenkovic,

Estonia President Alar Karis, Finland PM Petteri Orpo, Kazakhstan PM Olzhas Bektenov, Liechtenstein Hereditary Prince Alois, Slovakia President Peter Pellegrini and Switzerland President Guy Parmelin.

Bolivia Vice President Edmundo Lara Montano, Guyana Vice President Bharrat Jagdeo, Serbia Vice President Aleksandar Vuic and Seychelles VP Sebastian Pillay are also scheduled to attend the New Delhi AI Summit.

According to the MEA, in addition, ministerial delegations from over 45 countries would be participating in the Summit. The UN Secretary General and Senior Officials from several International Organisations will also join the deliberations.

Minister Goyal Meets 35 EPCs & Industry Associations; Calls for Push to Maximise FTAs Gain

NEW DELHI: Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal has called on exporters and industry bodies to fully utilise India's Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with developed countries to boost exports and create jobs.

The Minister met representatives of 35 Export Promotion Councils (EPCs) and leading industry associations representing major export sectors.

Union Minister Goyal said, "The Modi government had signed FTAs with developed countries to help India's farmers, workers, professionals, artisans and MSMEs take advantage of the global market with preferential access. With these trade agreements, India's traditional medicines and yoga will also get global opportunities, while the interest of India's agriculture and dairy sectors have been protected."

During the meeting Goyal noted, "Industry must now intensify its efforts to penetrate new markets, upgrade quality and become more competitive to take maximum advantage of trade agreements. Our trade deals will accelerate our Viksit Bharat mission and carry for-



ward Prime Minister Narendra Modi's mantra of 'Vikas bhi, Virasat bhi'. Industry representatives expressed appreciation for the recent trade agreements with the United Kingdom, European Union and the United States.

Particular attention was drawn to the removal of the additional 25 per cent tariff on Indian imports to the US through an Executive Order dated February 6, 2026. Industry bodies said the rollback restores competitive access to one of India's largest export markets and provides stability to exporters.

Sectors previously affected by the US tariff measures - including gems and jewellery, textiles and apparel, carpets, leather and footwear, marine products, handicrafts, engineering goods and chemicals - said the move has improved business confidence and protected employment, especially in labour-intensive industries.

Delhi government approves Rs 85-crore development push for SC/ST Colonies

OUR CORRESPONDENT
New Delhi

The Delhi government on Thursday announced 146 development projects worth nearly Rs 85 crore under the SC/ST Improvement Scheme, aimed at upgrading basic infrastructure in colonies with a significant Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe population.

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta launched and laid the foundation stones for several works at a public event in Malkaganj Chowk in Timarpur, stating that the initiative reflects the government's focus on neighbourhood-level development. Addressing the gathering, she said Delhi's growth cannot be measured only by its skyline but by the condition of the localities where working families live. She added that the projects have been approved in line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas".

The event was attended by Cabinet Minister Ravindra Indraj Singh, Timarpur MLA Surya Prakash Khatri, Model Town MLA Ashok Goel and other local representatives.

Officials said nine projects, completed at a cost of Rs 4.12 crore, were inaugurated during the programme. The Chief Minister



also laid the foundation for 64 new projects worth Rs 38.63 crore, which are expected to begin shortly. She directed departments to expedite pending formalities so that work on the remaining approved projects can start without delay. The projects focus on community-level infrastructure, including renovation of chaulpal buildings, construction and strengthening of roads, development of parks, laying of sewer lines and improvement of drinking water supply.

Reviewing her government's nearly one-year tenure, the Chief Minister said that long-pending and stalled works have been taken up on priority. She claimed that funds are now being directly channelled into public works and that development projects worth Rs 100 crore are being approved in each Assembly constituency. She

also said new health centres, Atal canteens, schools, flyovers and hospitals are being expanded across the city, with attention to basic civic infrastructure such as lanes, drains and parks in areas like Malkaganj and Timarpur. Cabinet Minister Ravindra Indraj Singh said the budget for such development works has been increased significantly this year, from around Rs 65 crore earlier to nearly Rs 200 crore. He said 32 categories of works are being prioritised in SC/ST colonies, including construction of community centres, chaupals, libraries and skill training centres, to improve living conditions and create better opportunities for residents.

Scheme Details
The SC/ST Improvement Scheme focuses on micro-level infrastructure development in colonies where the SC/ST population is 33 per cent or higher.

It covers road construction and strengthening, development of parks and community centres, laying of sewer lines, and creation or upgradation of facilities such as libraries and dispensaries.

Projects Inaugurated

- Among the nine completed projects inaugurated were:
- Construction and renovation of the Jatav Samaj Chaupal in Najafgarh (Rs 62 lakh)
- Renovation of the Valmiki Chaupal in Budhela village, Vikas Puri (Rs 31.65 lakh)
- Renovation of the Sapera Basti Chaupal in Kondli (Rs 68 lakh)
- Renovation of the SC/ST Chaupal in Hiran Kudna, Mundka (Rs 33.9 lakh)
- Development of parks and construction of boundary walls in Nangloi Phase-2 (Rs 24.82 lakh)
- Construction of an RMC drain in Vishwas Nagar (Rs 41.35 lakh)
- Construction of a community building in Patel Nagar (Rs 28.62 lakh)
- CC pavement and drainage works in Gokulpuri (Rs 47.57 lakh and Rs 74.94 lakh)
- Officials said the remaining approved projects will be rolled out in phases, with an emphasis on timely execution and monitoring.

Delhi Cabinet Clears Metro Phase V(A), Key Central Vista Link Approved



OUR CORRESPONDENT
New Delhi

In a major push to expand the Capital's metro network, the Delhi Cabinet approved Phase V(A) of the Delhi Metro project, including a key corridor passing through the Central Vista area, after receiving clearance from the Centre.

The decision was taken at a Cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta as part of the government's plan to strengthen and modernise public transport infrastructure in the city.

The Chief Minister thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for extending support to the project, stating that it aligns with his "7-C Vision" of mobility — Common, Connected, Convenient, Conges-

tion-free, Charged, Clean and Cutting-edge. She said improving public transport remains critical for easing congestion and addressing air pollution in the Capital.

According to an official statement, three corridors have been approved under Phase V(A): RK Ashram Marg to Indraprastha (via Central Vista), Tughlakabad to Kalindi Kunj, and Aerocity to Indira Gandhi Domestic Terminal-1. Of the 13 proposed stations across these corridors, 10 will be underground and three elevated.

The 9.91-km RK Ashram Marg-Indraprastha corridor will have nine stations and pass through the Central Vista zone. The Chief Minister said the stretch will link key administrative and cultural landmarks,

including the Kartavya Bhavan complexes, and is expected to benefit around 60,000 government employees and nearly two lakh daily commuters.

Major locations to be connected include RK Ashram Marg (under construction), Shivaji Stadium, Central Secretariat, CCS Buildings, India Gate, War Memorial-High Court, Baroda House, Bharat Mandapam and Indraprastha.

The estimated cost of this corridor is Rs 9,570.40 crore, of which Rs 2,337.24 crore will be borne by the Delhi government.

The 2.26-km Aerocity-Indira Gandhi Domestic Terminal-1 corridor will include one station and provide direct metro connectivity to Terminal-1 of the airport. Officials said the project is expected to ease traffic congestion in the surrounding areas. The corridor is estimated to cost Rs 1,419.64 crore, with the Delhi government contributing Rs 351.86 crore.

The 3.9-km Tughlakabad-Kalindi Kunj corridor will comprise three stations and is aimed at improving connectivity in south and south-east Delhi. The project is estimated to cost Rs 1,024.87 crore, with the Delhi government's share pegged at Rs 251.36 crore.

Delhi dears Rs 57-crore skill push for artisans, 3,700 to be trained in Phase-1



OUR CORRESPONDENT
New Delhi

In a move aimed at supporting traditional workers and small artisans, the Delhi Cabinet has approved the Chief Minister Skill Development Scheme, targeting those engaged in khadi, handloom, cottage industries and the unorganised sector.

The decision was cleared at a Cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta. Announcing the scheme, she said artisans have long preserved the city's cultural and craft traditions but now need structured training and direct access to markets to remain competitive.

She said the programme is designed to upgrade skills, provide entrepreneurship training and connect artisans to digital commerce platforms so they can expand their customer base beyond local markets.

The scheme will be implemented through the Delhi Khadi and Village Industries Board (DKVIB). In the first phase during 2025-26, 3,728 beneficiaries will be trained, with Rs 8.95 crore approved for the rollout. For 2026-27, the government is expected to allocate Rs 57.50 crore to expand the programme on a larger scale.

Structured training, stipend and toolkits

Each beneficiary will undergo 12 days, or 96 hours, of structured training. This includes a two-day Entrepreneurship Development Programme to help artisans understand pricing, marketing and business management. Training will be conducted in batches of 35 to 45 participants to ensure focused attention.

On completion, participants will receive a stipend of Rs 4,800, calculated at Rs 400 per day, along with Rs 100 per day towards meals. Toolkits relevant to their trade will also be distributed. In the case of tailoring-related trades, foot-operated sewing machines will be provided where required.

Digital push through ONDC
A key feature of the scheme is digital onboarding. Each artisan will have an e-catalogue created with photographs, product descriptions and profile details. These will be uploaded on the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) platform to increase visibility and access to buyers across India and potentially overseas.

The scheme also includes Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), under which experienced artisans will receive formal certification of their existing skills. Officials said this will help them secure better work opportunities and integrate more easily into the formal economy.

Delhi CM Rekha Gupta Issues 8-Point Safety Directive to Digging Departments



NEW DELHI: Taking a strong view of a biker's death in a ditch in Janakpuri, Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Saturday ordered immediate, time-bound action across all departments and issued an eight-point safety directive to all executing agencies to prevent any recurrence.

Expressing deep concern over lapses in safety arrangements at excavation and digging sites, the Chief Minister directed strict enforcement of safety norms and called for fixing clear accountability on officers and contractors. In a time-bound move, all departments and organisations have been ordered to carry out an immediate review of all ongoing and recently undertaken excavation and digging works within three days. Following the Chief Minister's directions, Chief Secretary Rajeev Verma has issued an Office Memorandum mandating an eight-point safety framework to be followed without exception at all construction, repair and maintenance works involving digging or excavation of roads, footpaths and underground utilities across the National Capital Territory of Delhi.

"The Chief Minister has taken a very serious view of the Janakpuri accident and made it clear that loss of life due to negligence is unacceptable. Public safety cannot be compromised under any circumstances. Accountability will be fixed, and strict action will follow wherever lapses are found," said an official statement from the Delhi government. The directive applies to all departments and agencies under the administrative control of the Delhi government, including but not limited to the Public Works Department (PWD), Irrigation and Flood Control Department (I&FC), Delhi Jal Board (DJB), Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC), power distribution companies (DISCOMs) and all other executing agencies and contractors. As per the eight-point directive, all work sites must display proper and adequate warning signage prominently and sufficiently in advance of all approaches. Reflector lights, blinkers and luminous tapes are to be mandatorily installed around excavated areas and barricades, especially during night hours and in low-visibility conditions. The Chief Minister has also ordered that strong, continuous and clearly visible barricading be ensured around the entire work site by all departments to prevent accidental access by pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles.

Delhi Plans 50 New School Buildings, 8,000 Classrooms in 2026-27

OUR CORRESPONDENT
New Delhi

With enrolment in government schools crossing 8.24 lakh students, the Delhi government has drawn up a plan to construct nearly 50 new school buildings and add 8,000 classrooms in 2026-27 to ease space constraints and improve learning conditions.

Officials said the expansion is aimed at maintaining a balanced student-classroom ratio across districts and ensuring that schools are better equipped to handle growing enrolment. The Education Department has been directed to identify locations where additional infrastructure is most urgently required.

At the same time, the department has initiated a detailed audit of existing school buildings to assess structural safety and infrastructure gaps. District-level officials have been asked to compile data on schools that are in a de-



teriorating condition or lack of basic amenities so that priority repairs and upgrades can be taken up.

Alongside physical expansion, the government is continuing its push for technology-enabled learning. In collaboration with the Ladli Foundation NGO, 101 Information and Communication Technology (ICT) laboratories have been set up, each equipped with 20 computers. Officials said tenders for 7,000 smart blackboards have been

finalised. Over the next four years, smart boards will be installed in 21,000 classrooms for students of Classes IX to XII. The installations will carry a five-year maintenance guarantee to ensure regular upkeep and functionality.

The government has also issued tenders for the procurement of 7,000 computers for 175 ICT laboratories, with delivery expected before March 31. The larger goal is to ensure that every government school in the capital has an

ICT lab within the next three years. In addition, more than 100 digital libraries are being set up in government schools this year to promote reading and provide students access to digital resources. Last year, the Delhi government sanctioned Rs 900 crore to convert 18,966 classrooms into smart classrooms. The initiative included installing interactive panels, audio-visual aids and smart blackboards to integrate digital tools into routine teaching practices. In the first phase of the project, around 2,000 classrooms are being upgraded with interactive panels or projectors, audio-visual equipment and internet connectivity.

An allocation of Rs 100 crore was proposed for the scheme in the 2025-26 financial year.

Delhi has around 1,075 government schools catering to approximately 8.24 lakh students. Officials said the infrastructure push is part of a broader effort to strengthen the quality of public education in the capital.

Nitish Katara Murder Case: Delhi HC Affirms Denial of Furlough to Vikas Yadav



NEW DELHI: The Delhi High Court on Wednesday dismissed a plea filed by Nitish Katara murder case convict Vikas Yadav seeking 21 days' furlough to maintain social ties and spend time with his wife following his recent marriage. A single-judge Bench of Justice Ravinder Dedeja held that there was no arbitrariness, illegality or violation of constitutional rights in the order passed by the Director General (DG) of Prisons rejecting Yadav's request for release.

"This Court finds no arbitrariness, illegality or violation of constitutional rights in the order dated October 29 or the corrigendum dated December 1, 2025. The petition is accordingly dismissed," Justice Dedeja said while pronouncing the verdict.

Yadav, who has been convicted in the 2002 Nitish Katara murder case, is serving a fixed 25-year sentence and has undergone over 23 years of actual incarceration. In his petition, Yadav challenged the October 29, 2025 decision of the jail authorities denying him furlough. He contended that the rejection was arbitrary and failed to take into account that he had earlier been granted interim bail by the Supreme Court for over four and a half months on account of his mother's medical treatment, which was later extended on the ground of his marriage.

SGPC objects to Delhi government's rejection of Prof. Devinderpal Singh Bhullar's release petition

JAGMOHAN SINGH
Amritsar

The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) President Harjinder Singh Dhama has condemned the Delhi government's decision to once again reject the release petition of Prof. Devinderpal Singh Bhullar, terming it an act of injustice against Sikhs.

Dhama said that earlier, during the Aam Aadmi Party government's tenure, Prof. Devinderpal Singh Bhullar's release petition had been rejected multiple times by the Sentence Review Board, Government of Delhi and now the BJP government too is following the same path by taking decisions that go against Sikh sentiments. He pointed out that while the Sentence Review Board has recommended remission of sentences for several prisoners, the case of Prof. Devinderpal Singh Bhullar—who has been undergoing imprisonment for the past 33 years—has been rejected. He described this as a violation of human rights, which is causing disappointment within the Sikh community.

He further stated that on one hand the BJP claims to be sympathetic towards Sikhs, but on the other, the government's approach in Sikh-related matters exposes its double standards. He said that Sikhs have always made immense sacrifices for the nation, yet the negative ap-



proach of governments towards Sikhs has repeatedly led to disillusionment. The SGPC President appealed to the government to deliver justice in the case of Prof. Devinderpal Singh Bhullar, who has already spent more time in jail than the prescribed sentence, and to issue orders for his immediate release.

It may be mentioned here that, Davinder Singh Bhullar's case of the Khalistan Liberation Force convicted for killing nine people and injuring 31 in a bomb blast in 1993. Among those who survived the attack are former Youth Cong chief M S Bitta. His mercy petition was filed before the president of India on 24.1.2003 and the same was rejected on 25.5.2011. Later, the Double Bench of Supreme Court of India commuted his death sentence to life imprisonment.

It is also noteworthy here that Amritsar is the hometown of former Youth Congress chief M S Bitta who was born and brought up in the Amritsar city and his real brother still lives here and Bitta comes here off and on.

Bitta was given Z Plus Security cover after the attack in Delhi outside the office of Youth Congress in Delhi in 1993.

JIH Voices Serious Concerns Over India-US Tariff Deal, Union Budget Priorities and Rising Communal & Caste-Based Violence

KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

Jamaat-e-Islami Hind (JIH) has expressed deep concern over the reported tariff arrangement between India and the United States and the manner in which information related to this deal has been emerging. Addressing the media, Syed Sadatullah Husaini, President, Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, said "At a time when Parliament is in session, neither Parliament nor the people of India have been taken into confidence regarding the finer details of this agreement. Alarmingly, information about the deal is coming primarily through social media reports and statements issued by American officials, rather than through transparent disclosures by the Government of India. Public statements emanating from the United States suggest that India may reduce tariffs on American goods to zero, while the United States would impose tariffs of around 18 percent on Indian exports. If these claims are accurate, they raise serious questions about the balance and



fairness of the agreement. It is particularly concerning that the tariff levels now being projected as a success are, in fact, higher than the tariff rates that existed earlier. JIH is also worried about indications that India may open up its agriculture sector, which has so far enjoyed tariff protection, potentially impacting farmers' livelihoods and food security. The lack of clarity regarding claims about India's oil purchases from Russia has further added to confusion, as there has been neither official confirmation nor denial from the Indian government, raising concerns about sovereignty and independent decision-making."

Referring to the Union Budget 2026-27, Syed Sadatullah Husaini said, "While the

government has emphasised macroeconomic stability, capital expenditure and fiscal discipline, the Budget falls short in addressing employment generation, social sector needs, widening inequality and the growing burden of public debt. The record capital expenditure of over Rs 12.2 lakh crore may support long-term infrastructure creation, but it has limited immediate impact on employment and household incomes, particularly for informal workers, rural households, women and youth." He further noted that social sector spending remains subdued, with Union government expenditure on health and education remaining far below stated national policy goals.

Debt Trap Deepens: Punjab, Haryana Among India's Most Indebted Farm States After Andhra & Kerala

Lok Sabha data shows Green Revolution states far above national average; KCC dues touch Rs 10.39 lakh crore

NEERAJ MOHAN
Chandigarh

India's agriculture sector is facing mounting financial stress, with farmers in key agrarian states such as Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Punjab, Haryana and Telangana carrying some of the highest debt burdens in the country, even as policymakers highlight record foodgrain production and expanded institutional credit outreach.

Amid the growing concerns being expressed by the farmers and agriculture experts of duty-free agri-imports from US, a latest data tabled in the Lok Sabha by the union agriculture minister Shivraj Chouhan revealed that besides Andhra Pradesh and Kerala, country's leading agrarian states Punjab and Haryana rank among the top four states in terms of average outstanding loan per agricultural household.

According to the official response to a question the minister's reply mentioned that the average outstanding loan per agricultural household stands at Rs 2,03,249 in Punjab and Rs 1,82,922 in Haryana. This places Punjab third and Haryana fourth nationally, far above the all-India average of Rs 74,121 per agricultural household. Only Andhra Pradesh, with Rs 2,45,554, and Kerala, with Rs 2,42,482, report higher average debt burdens than Punjab.

The data is based on the "Situation Assessment Survey (SAS) of Agricultural Households" conducted by the National Statistical Office during 2018-19, and it highlights sharp regional disparities in rural indebtedness. Whereas the several northeastern states report negligible levels of farm debt, Nagaland's average outstanding loan per agricultural household is Rs 1,750, Meghalaya's Rs 2,237 and Arunachal Pradesh's Rs 3,581. The grouped average for northeastern states stands at just Rs 10,034, underscoring the wide gap in rural credit exposure across regions.

Other major agrarian states also show significant per-household borrowings. Telangana reports Rs 1,52,113, Karnataka Rs 1,26,240, Tamil Nadu Rs 1,06,553 and Rajasthan Rs 1,13,865. Meanwhile, large Hindi heartland states such as Uttar Pradesh, at Rs 51,107, and Bihar, at Rs 23,534, remain well below the national average.

The government further informed Parliament that as of September 30 last year the outstanding amount under the



highly input-intensive farming systems focused largely on wheat and paddy cultivation. "Rising input costs — including seeds, fertilisers, pesticides and diesel — have steadily squeezed margins. Farm incomes have largely stagnated, landholdings have become increasingly fragmented, and dependence on MSP-backed procurement remains high. Climate variability, erratic rainfall and rising household expenditures have further intensified financial pressure", said farmer leader Ratan Mann.

Over time, easy access to institutional credit has supported productivity, but it has also normalised borrowing as a survival mechanism. For many farm households, loans are no longer confined to crop investment but extend to daily expenses, social obligations and unforeseen contingencies.

Experts argue that while digital agriculture reforms, geo-referenced crop surveys and direct benefit transfers may improve delivery systems as the credit expansion alone cannot resolve deep-rooted farm distress.

The top five states with the highest average outstanding loan per agricultural household are as follows:

Rank	State	Average Outstanding Loan per Agricultural Household (Rs)
1	Andhra Pradesh	2,45,554
2	Kerala	2,42,482
3	Punjab	2,03,249
4	Haryana	1,82,922
5	Telangana	1,52,113

Source: NSS Report No. 587 — Situation Assessment of Agricultural Households (2019), tabled in Lok Sabha.

Kisan Credit Card (KCC) scheme has reached Rs 10.39 lakh crore. The KCC scheme has long been projected as a key instrument for ensuring timely and affordable institutional credit to farmers. However, the magnitude of outstanding dues reflects the scale of dependence on borrowed capital within the agricultural economy. The Ministry also clarified that since the last survey of agricultural households was conducted in 2019, updated figures as of February 1, 2026 are not available.

The agriculture experts have expressed concerns over the rising debt on the farmers saying Punjab and Haryana once celebrated as the pillars of the Green Revolution, adopted

India-US Trade Deal Won't Hurt Farmers, Assures Shivraj Singh Chouhan



"Not Even a Grain Will Be Imported," Says Agriculture Minister as Centre Unveils Roadmap for Pulses Self-Sufficiency

NEERAJ MOHAN
Sehore (Bhopal)

Union Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Friday categorically asserted that the India-US trade agreement will have no adverse impact on Indian farmers or domestic agriculture, stressing that Prime Minister Narendra Modi personally ensured that farmers' interests remain fully protected during the negotiations with US President Donald Trump.

Addressing farmers at the National Consultation and Strategy Conference organised under the National Pulses Self-Reliance Mission, Chouhan declared, "Not even a grain of wheat, maize, or any agricultural or dairy product will be imported from the United States."

Turning the spotlight on India's growing dependence on imported pulses, the minister

called it "shameful" that the country still relies on foreign markets despite having vast agricultural potential. He said farmers have largely confined themselves to traditional crops, leading to a steady decline in pulse production.

"Madhya Pradesh continues to be the largest producer of pulses, yet the area under cultivation is shrinking because pulses are no longer seen as profitable compared to wheat and soybean. This mindset has to change," Chouhan said, stressing the need to make pulse cultivation economically viable.

He said the primary objective of the conference was to strengthen research and innovation in pulses, which is why agriculture ministers, scientists, and senior officials from across the country were brought together. Urging policymakers to stay grounded, Chouhan said agriculture ministers should spend more time in villages rather than offices to understand farmers' challenges firsthand.

The minister announced that new high-yielding pulse

varieties with shorter crop durations are being developed to boost production. He also highlighted the newly established research centre in Sehore, which will focus on developing improved pulse varieties that promise better yields with lower input costs.

Chouhan said ICAR and ICRISAT will jointly spearhead pulse research to make India self-sufficient. Newly developed seeds will be distributed among farmers, and the Centre will provide full technical support to establish Beej Grams (seed villages) in every state to ensure availability of quality seeds at the grassroots level.

To strengthen value addition, the Union government will subsidise dal mills, with 55 dal mills planned for Madhya Pradesh alone, he announced. On price assurance, Chouhan said the Centre will procure urad, masoor, and chana at Minimum Support Price (MSP) in Madhya Pradesh and will lift the entire pulse produce from the state. He urged farmers to expand pulse cultivation to meet India's growing protein demand, adding that research on protein extraction from pulses is also underway.

Sharing that land has already been allotted for key projects, the minister said a comprehensive roadmap for pulses self-sufficiency will soon be unveiled.

Reaffirming the Centre's commitment to farmers' welfare, Chouhan called upon all state agriculture ministers to work in unison to raise farm incomes and make India truly Aatmanirbhar in pulses.

Get Set for Trillion-Dollar Tech Future by 2035: Piyush Goyal tells Industry



NEW DELHI: Calling upon India's technology sector to reset its ambitions towards a trillion-dollar opportunity by 2035, Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Thursday that the industry must embrace reimagination to stay ahead in an era defined by artificial intelligence, data centres and clean energy.

Launching the NITI Frontier Tech Hub's roadmap report titled "Reimagination Ahead" in the national capital, the Union Minister said India should target at least 10 GW of data centre capacity by 2030 and position itself as a global hub for AI-driven technology services.

He emphasised that the future lies in applied AI, reskilling at scale, domestic value creation and retaining talent within the country.

Union Minister Goyal highlighted that India's nearly one billion internet users, among the world's highest per capita data consumption, and rapid AI adoption provide a strong foundation for expansion.

"Affordable data, 5G rollout and upcoming 6G capabilities have strengthened India's digital ecosystem, enabling the growth of a \$250-\$300 billion technology services industry."

He underlined that robust infrastructure reforms have powered this rise.

Recalling the New Telecom Policy of 1999 under the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the Union Minister noted that affordable connectivity laid the groundwork for digital transformation.

He also cited the post-2014 strengthening of India's unified national power grid, which now has 500 GW installed capacity, including 250 GW of clean energy.

"Renewable energy capacity has expanded rapidly, supported by transparent reverse bidding that brought solar tariffs down to nearly Rs 2.31 to 2.41 per unit and wind tariffs to around Rs 2.5 per unit. India now provides 24-hour clean energy at under Rs 6 per kilowatt hour and aims to achieve 500 GW of renewable capacity by 2030," the Union Minister said.

He underscored that the Union Budget announcements offering income tax benefits up to 2047 for certain investments will further boost foreign direct investment, foreign exchange inflows and job creation, particularly in the broader ecosystem around data centres.

Congress describes the Indo-US deal as dumping ground of American goods



KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

The Congress today described the Indo-US trade deal as a surrender that India was forced to sign under pressure, like at gunpoint and through blackmail. The party said the government has compromised the interests of farmers, middle classes and small and medium enterprises.

Party spokesperson and Chairman of AICC Media and Publicity Pawan Khera said that the Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal was hiding more than he was revealing about the deal.

Pawan Khera alleged that the proposed Indo-US trade arrangement amounts to a "surrender" of national economic interests, claiming key decisions are being taken to suit Washington rather than India. He warned of serious consequences for farmers, the middle class and small businesses.

The Congress spokesperson said the government was functioning "in the American time zone", asserting that recent announcements reflected pressure rather than negotiation. "Deals are negotiated across the table, not at gunpoint and through blackmail," he said, alleging coercion and lack of transparency.

Khera said that under the reported terms, India will massively increase imports from the US — from roughly \$ 40-42 billion a year to a staggering \$ 500 billion over the next five years. He questioned what goods India would import at such scale, flagging agricultural products as a key concern. He said this would wreck the country's economy.

Alleging that Indian markets could become a dumping ground for American goods, Khera said over 40 percent of India's exports to the US were already duty-free even before this deal, particularly electronics, pharmaceuticals, petroleum products, tea, coffee and spices. He warned that slashing of import tariffs on US agricultural and food products would "break the backbone of Indian farmers." He claimed American farmers stood to gain access to a vast market, while Indian agriculture would suffer.

Govt Clears Wheat and Additional Sugar Exports as Stocks Rise, Prices Ease

Decision aims to stabilise domestic markets, prevent distress sales, and ensure better returns for farmers

NEERAJ MOHAN
Chandigarh

Expecting a bumper wheat harvest this year the union government has approved the export of 25 lakh metric tonnes (LMT) of wheat along with an additional 5 LMT of wheat products, citing comfortable domestic stocks and a favourable production outlook.

The move is designed to stabilise domestic markets, prevent distress sales during peak arrivals, and ensure remunerative prices for farmers without compromising food security.

According to official data, wheat stock availability with private entities during 2025-26 stands at around 75 LMT, nearly 32 LMT higher than the corresponding period last year. In addition, wheat stocks in the central pool with the Food Corporation of India are projected to reach approximately 182 LMT as of April 1 2026, indicating a comfortable supply position.

Wheat acreage during the ongoing Rabi 2026 season has also expanded to 334.17 lakh hectares, compared to 328.04 lakh hectares last year. The higher sowing area, backed by assured Minimum Support Price (MSP)



procurement, signals expectations of another robust harvest.

Officials said the calibrated export decision follows a comprehensive review of stock levels, price trends, and production prospects. With domestic prices softening amid abundant supply, allowing exports is expected to improve market liquidity and support farm incomes. India had imposed restrictions on wheat exports in May 2022 after an unexpected heatwave reduced crop yields and triggered a sharp rise in domestic prices. The decision was taken to safeguard food security and control inflation amid global supply disruptions following the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Since then, exports were either banned or tightly regulated through government-to-government arrangements. The current decision marks a

shift from restriction to calibrated liberalisation, reflecting improved domestic availability and production prospects. Additional 5 LMT Sugar Exports Approved—Alongside wheat, the government has approved the export of an additional 5 LMT of sugar during the ongoing Sugar Season 2025-26. Earlier, on November 14, 2025, the government had permitted sugar mills to export 15 LMT. However, as per industry data, only 1.97 LMT had been exported as of January 31, 2026, while 2.72 LMT had been contracted for export. The newly approved 5 LMT will be allocated to willing sugar mills on a pro-rata basis, subject to the condition that at least 70% of their allocated quota is exported by June 30, 2026. Mills must indicate their willingness within 15 days of the

order's issuance, and allocated quotas cannot be swapped or transferred.

India — the world's second-largest sugar producer after Brazil — has periodically regulated sugar exports to manage domestic supply and price stability. Export curbs were tightened during 2022-23 and 2023-24 due to concerns over lower output caused by erratic monsoons in key producing states like Maharashtra and Karnataka, rising domestic consumption, and the need to prioritise ethanol blending under the national biofuel programme. With improved production outlook and manageable domestic availability in 2025-26, the government has now moved to gradually ease restrictions. Balancing Farmer Income and Food Security—The twin decisions on wheat and sugar exports reflect the government's strategy of calibrated trade management — tightening exports during shortages to control inflation and easing them during surplus years to support farmer incomes and prevent market gluts.

Officials emphasised that the current export approvals are based on strong stock positions and are structured to ensure that national food security remains fully protected while providing market opportunities for producers.

Major political parties in Odisha are gearing up for the upcoming Rajya Sabha elections where four seats will be at stake. Politics has heated up with Biju Janata Dal (BJD) supreme Naveen Patnaik suspending two of his MLAs—Sanatan Mahakud and Arabinda Mohapatra—for alleged anti-party activities with speculation rife that they have been punished on the suspicion of working secretly for the

three Independents, making its effective strength 82. The BJD, on the other hand, has 50 MLAs including the two suspended legislators. Congress and CPM have 14 and one MLAs respectively in a House of 147 members.

Sources in the BJD said the party is likely to field a third candidate. The party is confident of winning the third seat. However, BJD is likely to make things difficult for the BJP and things might become more complicated if Congress backs the BJD. However, the two parties are yet to hold discussions on the issue.

The parties will also be preparing for the panchayat polls which will be a major test of popularity for the parties. The State Election Commission

After 5G, India to Lead the World in 6G says Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia

NEW DELHI: Union Communications Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia on Wednesday said that India followed the world in 4G, marched with the world in 5G and will lead the world in 6G.

Responding to questions in the Lok Sabha today, the minister highlighted India's rapidly transforming digital landscape and future roadmap.

India has rolled out 5G at the fastest pace in the world. Within just 22 months, 5G services have been launched in 99.9 per cent of the country's districts, setting a global benchmark. "Telecom service providers have invested nearly Rs 4 lakh crore for this expansion, with over 5 lakh BTS (Base Transceiver Stations) installed nationwide," he mentioned.

Economic development without morality creates social imbalance: President Murmu

NEW DELHI: President Droupadi Murmu on Friday inaugurated an all-India conference and launched a nationwide campaign 'Karmayoga for Empowered Bharat' of Brahma Kumaris, underlining that economic and technological development without morality can create imbalances in society.

"Economic progress fosters prosperity, and technological progress promotes innovation, efficiency and competition. These lay the foundation for a prosperous nation. However, economic and technological development without morality can create imbalances in society," said the President.

She said unethical economic progress can lead to the concentration of wealth and resources, environmental damage and exploitation of vulnerable sections of society. The use of technology without ethical values can be destructive to humanity.

Presenting a link between



governance and spirituality, Murmu said, "Just and fair administrative decisions can be made by the country's leadership based on spirituality. Such decisions are not for the benefit of any one class, but for the benefit of all citizens. When government actions are just, it promotes trust and stability in society."

At the event, the President also launched the silver jubilee celebrations of Om Shanti Retreat Centre, Gurugram.

The President said that spirituality provides us with fundamental values and a moral framework that inspires us to practise Karmayoga, or selfless service, and spirituality also emphasises virtues such as integrity, compassion, non-violence and service to others.

Odisha : BJP BJD and Congress gear up for Rajaya Sabha Poll

ARABINDA MOHAPATRA
Bhubaneswar

Major political parties in Odisha are gearing up for the upcoming Rajya Sabha elections where four seats will be at stake. Politics has heated up with Biju Janata Dal (BJD) supreme Naveen Patnaik suspending two of his MLAs—Sanatan Mahakud and Arabinda Mohapatra—for alleged anti-party activities with speculation rife that they have been punished on the suspicion of working secretly for the

three Independents, making its effective strength 82. The BJD, on the other hand, has 50 MLAs including the two suspended legislators. Congress and CPM have 14 and one MLAs respectively in a House of 147 members.

Sources in the BJD said the party is likely to field a third candidate. The party is confident of winning the third seat. However, BJD is likely to make things difficult for the BJP and things might become more complicated if Congress backs the BJD. However, the two parties are yet to hold discussions on the issue.



has begun preparation for these polls where all parties have a stake.

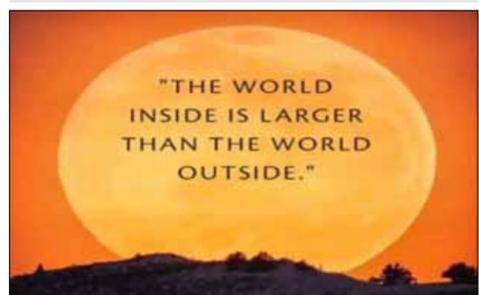
Among BJP leaders union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan has a stake as he has been eyeing the chief minister's chair for sometime. But under his watch some major controversies have erupted. For example, there have been "strong objections" to the draft University Grants Commission Regulations 2025 with the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) seeking its reconsideration. The party claims that the move "undermines the principles of federalism and makes a mockery of cooperative governance" between Centre and the states.

In a letter to the UGC chairman, the BJD had voiced concerns that the regulations grant absolute power to the governors, and, through them, to the central government on key appointment issues including of the state universities. The party also alleged that the appointments will be done without taking the state government's views into account.

Digital monopoly: When consent is not a choice

The Supreme Court's sharp questioning of Meta Platforms and its messaging service WhatsApp last week goes to the heart of how power is exercised in India's digital economy. At issue is WhatsApp's 2021 privacy policy update, which effectively forced users to consent to the sharing of their data with other Meta platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, or stop using the service altogether. The appeal before the Court stems from a Rs 213.14-crore penalty imposed by the Competition Commission of India, which found this "take-it-or-leave-it" approach to be anti-competitive. The Court was right to underline WhatsApp's extraordinary position in India. For millions, it is not merely another app but the default infrastructure for personal communication, group coordination, small businesses, schools and even local governance. Its network effects are so overwhelming that opting out is rarely a realistic choice. In such circumstances, consent extracted through an ultimatum is consent only in name. This is not an argument against WhatsApp earning revenue. The platform has transformed communication in India, offering messaging, voice and video calls at virtually zero marginal cost, and popularising end-to-end encryption in a surveillance-heavy environment. These are genuine public benefits. But precisely because WhatsApp is so deeply embedded in everyday life, any shift towards monetisation—especially one driven by cross-platform data sharing—demands the strictest scrutiny. In theory, dissatisfied users can switch to alternatives such as Signal or Telegram. In practice, these lack the one feature that matters most: universal presence. The power of the default, when wielded by a platform of WhatsApp's scale, strips users of meaningful choice. An "opt-out" in such circumstances is an inadequate safeguard. The Court's instincts are sound, but judicial concern alone is insufficient. India urgently needs a robust digital competition law tailored to gatekeeper platforms, like the draft released in 2024 but since allowed to languish.

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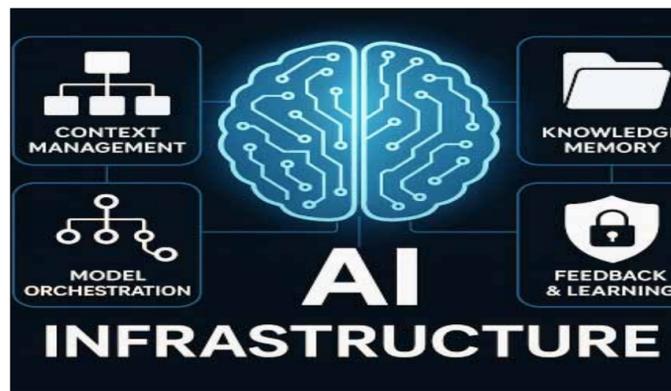


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ARINDAM GOSWAMI EXPLORES WHY AI'S FUTURE LIES IN APPLICATIONS, NOT INFRASTRUCTURE

From GPUs to use cases



The artificial intelligence (AI) industry has reached a crossroads. For years, companies poured money into infrastructure such as data centres, chips and underlying models. Now, the big question is not about AI working, but whether it can be profitable. The solution lies in concrete AI applications, and not just having more training or larger GPU clusters.

AI infrastructure versus AI applications

In 2025, companies spent around \$320 billion on AI infrastructure. Despite this huge investment, foundation model businesses have thin profit margins. High inference costs cut into revenue and competition keeps prices down. For instance, OpenAI reached \$13 billion in annualised revenue by August 2025 but still lost \$5 billion in 2024. This approach is not sustainable; it is a short-term fix supported by venture capital and corporate money hoping for better returns.

The story is different for AI applications. In 2025, businesses spent \$19 billion on AI applications, making up more than half of all generative AI spending. This is over 6% of the total software market, reached just three years after ChatGPT was launched. More importantly, this spending proves real market demand: companies are no longer only testing AI. They are using it widely. At least 10 AI products now bring in over \$1 billion in annual recurring revenue, and 50 products make more than \$100 million.

Meta's \$2 billion purchase of Manus in December 2025 shows this shift. Manus, a Singapore startup, launched its AI agent just nine months earlier and quickly reached \$125 million in annual revenue by supplying a simple but effective AI product that gets tasks done — not just talks about them — thus proving both technical ability and business success.

Investors want companies with real customers, not just technology. By the third quarter

of 2025, there were 265 private equity deals involving AI applications, a 65% increase from the previous year, and 78% were add-on acquisitions for existing portfolio companies. Strategic mergers and acquisitions in AI hit record highs by Q3, with deal values up 242% from the year before.

Where the real value is

Real value is emerging in the departmental AI segment. In 2025, coding tools made up \$4 billion of the \$7.3 billion departmental AI market, making them the largest segment. Half of all developers now use AI coding tools every day, a number which rises to 65% in top-performing companies. When ServiceNow bought Moveworks or Nvidia purchased several AI startups, these were not infrastructure deals. They were investments in companies that help customers achieve real business results with AI.

The foundation model landscape itself tells the application story. Anthropic now commands 40% of enterprise LLM spending, up from 24% last year and 12% in 2023, while

OpenAI's enterprise share fell to 27% from 50% in 2023. Anthropic did this by dominating coding applications, where it holds a market share of 54% compared to OpenAI's 21%. Applications drive infrastructure adoption and foundation models, not the other way around. Morgan Stanley reports that generative AI reached a 34% contribution margin in 2025, its first profitable year, and this could rise to 67% by 2028 as infrastructure costs fall and efficiency improves. However, most of these profits go to companies selling complete solutions, not just raw computing power.

Private investors now have to decide which use cases will create the next wave of real value, not just add a simple interface to ChatGPT without real value. But solutions built for specific verticals such as health care, law, finance and manufacturing (those that are deeply integrated into workflows, use unique data, and become essential to operations) are the businesses that are worth serious investment.

The free market distributes resources well when investors focus on fundamentals, beyond mere stories. Revenue, customer retention,

growth rates and paths to profitability matter again. Right now, circular financing obscures true demand. For instance, of Microsoft's reported Azure AI revenue, quite a lot comes from OpenAI's spending on compute at heavily discounted rates that essentially cover only Microsoft's costs. Applications break this pattern because they generate revenue from outside the circular financing loop.

Core issues

For governments, the next phase will raise tough questions about competition, especially as foundation model providers begin to build their own applications. When OpenAI launches coding tools or Anthropic develops enterprise solutions, it puts pressure on independent application builders who do not have the same infrastructure advantages. Copyright issues are also becoming more important as the source of training data becomes a key legal concern. Privacy rules will need to adapt to address AI agents that access large amounts of personal and business information.

Policymakers should not hurry into strict regulations. The application layer needs room to experiment, fail and improve until it finds product-market fit. But still, rules about competition, especially reviews of acquisitions that prevent big companies from buying and shutting down potential rivals, are important. The trend of acqui-hires (where startups are bought mainly for their staff and then closed) often leaves employees stranded and can hurt the energy and the innovation that the sector needs.

The Internet was not monetised by selling bandwidth. It was monetised by building applications that made bandwidth valuable. AI will follow the same trajectory.

Arindam Goswami is a Research Analyst in the High Tech Geopolitics Programme at The Takshashila Institution, Bengaluru. Views are personal.



PRASENJIT BOSE EXPLAINS HOW TRADE COMMITMENTS FAVOUR THE UNITED STATES OVERWHELMINGLY

Reciprocal in name, asymmetric in reality

The "framework for an Interim Agreement regarding reciprocal and mutually beneficial trade", announced through the U.S.-India joint statement issued on February 6, raises serious concerns regarding India's economic and geopolitical future. An unequal and unfair bilateral trade deal is being brazenly imposed on India by the Trump administration. By agreeing to such terms, the Modi government is surrendering India's national interest.

Unequal trade deal

The very premise of the Interim Agreement, defined as "a common commitment to reciprocal and balanced trade based on mutual interests and concrete outcomes", works against India's economic interests. The current nominal GDP of the U.S. is seven times larger than India's GDP and its per capita income is over 30 times higher than that of India. Why has the Indian government made commitments towards "reciprocal and balanced trade" with a much larger and richer economy?

As per the text of the agreement, India has agreed to zero or reduced tariffs for "all U.S. industrial goods and a wide range of U.S. food and agricultural products, including dried distillers' grains (DDGs), red sorghum for animal feed, tree nuts, fresh and processed fruit, soybean oil, wine and spirits, and additional products". India has also agreed to eliminate non-tariff barriers (NTB) on U.S. exports of ICT goods, medical devices, food and agricultural products, etc. India's intention to purchase \$500 billion worth of U.S. energy products, aircraft and aircraft parts, precious metals, technology products, and coking coal over the next five years has also been built



into the text of the framework agreement.

Such massive trade concessions to the U.S. could completely transform the structure of India's foreign trade. The U.S. has been the largest market for Indian goods exports since long, with Indian exports to the U.S. crossing \$86 billion in 2024-25, accounting for over 19% of India's total exports of \$437 billion. While India's trade deficit expanded to \$283 billion in 2024-25, it had a trade surplus of over \$40 billion with the U.S. In 2025-26 (April-December), India's goods trade surplus vis-a-vis the U.S. stood at \$26 billion, with imports from the U.S. crossing \$39 billion.

It is noteworthy that while India's intention to purchase \$500 billion worth of U.S. goods in the next five years is mentioned in the text of the interim agreement, there is no reciprocal commitment to increase U.S. imports from India to a similar level. This thoroughly exposes the Modi government's exaggerated claims of enhanced potential for Indian exports following the reduction of

the U.S. reciprocal tariff rate to 18%. Such an unfair bilateral trade agreement will eliminate India's present trade surplus vis-a-vis the U.S. and convert it into a deficit in the next five years, with a surge of American imports into India. The losses of domestic market shares by Indian industrial producers and farmers will far exceed the gains made by Indian exporters, if any.

Eroding economic sovereignty

The U.S. President has also issued a separate Executive Order on February 6, alongside the release of the U.S.-India joint statement, making it clear that the withdrawal of the additional 25% import duty on Indian exports, is conditional to India's discontinuation of crude oil imports from Russia. The executive order states: "Specifically, India has committed to stop directly or indirectly importing Russian Federation oil, has represented that it will purchase United States energy products from the United States, and has recently

committed to a framework with the United States to expand defense cooperation over the next 10 years."

The order goes on to state that the U.S. Secretaries of Commerce and Treasury will monitor India's oil purchases, and the additional 25% import duty will be reimposed by the U.S. if India "resumes directly or indirectly importing Russian Federation oil".

Data from the Indian Ministry of Commerce and Industry suggest that India's crude oil imports from Russia increased from 50.85 million metric tonnes in 2022-23 to 83.02 MMT in 2023-24 and further to 87.54 MMT in 2024-25. The price per barrel of Russian crude oil had declined from \$79.41 to \$66.49 between April 2022 and March 2025. The share of Russian Urals oil in India's total crude oil imports rose from below 2% in 2020-21 to over 35% in 2024-25. Russian crude's share has already started falling in 2025-26, and is expected to drop below 20% by the financial year-end.

The Modi government's genuflection on Russian oil imports at a discounted rate can possibly expand India's current account deficit and further devalue the rupee, besides reversing the moderation of domestic retail inflation. The interim trade agreement, seen in totality with the U.S. President's Executive Order on Russian oil imports by India, is a recipe to rob India's strategic autonomy and transform its economy into an American dependency. Parliament must restrain the Modi government from inflicting such irreparable self-harm.

Prasenjit Bose is an economist and Congress leader. Views are personal.

BOOKS: REVIEW

New book explores the thin line between reporting and spying

The Quiet Correspondent: There's a Thin Line between a Journalist and a Spy arrives with a premise that feels less like a high-concept thriller than a lived-in confession. A foreign correspondent begins to realise that the stories he pursues and the sources he cultivates are uncomfortably close to the machinery of intelligence.

Shyam Bhatia has spent decades reporting from conflict zones, and the novel -- his first -- draws heavily on that experience. It does so not through name-dropping wars or crises, but by making the texture of journalism feel authentic: the deadlines, the ego, the quiet bargains, and the particular dread that arises when a story should have consequences, but does not. The central figure, Amol Batty, is described in the book's jacket copy as "a war reporter with a conscience", pulled into a deception that stretches from London to Beirut, Jerusalem and the Balkans. The geography matters. It situates the novel in a post-Cold

War world where information is currency, allegiances are transactional, and the free press often operates in the slipstream of state power. This is a landscape in which journalists are neither heroes nor dupes, but intermediaries -- useful precisely because they appear independent.

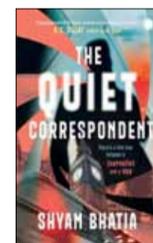
What distinguishes Bhatia's approach -- judging by a substantial excerpt published by Scroll -- is restraint. The prose is clean and controlled, almost unnervingly calm. The excerpt opens on a week of "uneasy silence" after Amol files a story about a Kurdish bomb-maker, Sedo Hazan, "once the PKK's most trusted ghost", now exhausted by the weight of what he has done.

The story runs; the editor teases it. And then nothing happens. No outrage, no threats, no denials -- just the hum of the newsroom and the growing sense that the absence itself is a message. It is a sharply observed journalistic fear: sometimes the most dangerous reaction is not a phone call, but the void.

From there, the narrative moves into familiar territory -- payphones, coded meetings, carefully staged encounters. A Fleet Street café, a walk along the South Bank, a voice that sounds suspiciously like a handler's ("Time to stretch your legs"), and the introduction of Peter Mone, who bluntly "says he's a spook". Yet even here, Bhatia resists the usual thriller indulgences.

He is less interested in gadgets or chase scenes than in the social mechanics of recruitment: familiarity, professional vanity, literary flattery, and the small humiliations that soften resistance. The prose explicitly calls it "theatre", but not the kind that ends in applause -- only cues, silences, and "things already decided". That sense of inevitability hangs over the book.

This is also where the title earns its weight. Many spy novels treat journalism as a convenient cover, a press card functioning as an invisibility cloak. Bhatia reverses the logic. Journalism is not the disguise;



The Quiet Correspondent
By Shyam Bhatia
Juggernaut;
352 pages; Rs 799.

it is the temptation and the trap. The correspondent wants access.

The state wants plausible deniability. Both rely on sources, handlers and selective truth. The promotional material describes the novel as a study of "the moral price of witnessing history being made and the personal cost of knowing too much". That moral framing is not decorative. Even in a short excerpt, Bhatia foregrounds the emotional accounting of the job: envy, fatigue, and the corrosive awareness that charisma and compromise often outlast principle.

If there is a potential weakness implied by these strengths, it is pace. Readers expecting relentless twists may find the novel more cerebral than breathless. The tension is procedural rather than kinetic, built from conversations, atmo-

spheres and the slow tightening of dependence. But this feels deliberate. Power, in the real world, rarely announces itself with a gunshot. More often it arrives as a calendar invite, a friendly introduction, or a favour whose price becomes clear only later.

The book also feels timely in the way effective political fiction often does. It does not chase today's headlines, but illuminates the systems beneath them. The marketing copy nods to an era when disinformation and "deep-state manipulation" first became visible. In 2026, that reads less like a period detail than a warning. Anyone who has wondered how narratives are shaped before they reach the public -- how access is granted, how stories are quietly buried, how journalists can be used without being overtly controlled -- will recognise the terrain.

Taken on the evidence available so far, *The Quiet Correspondent* appears to be a mature debut: less spectacle, more moral pressure; less spy fantasy, more institutional realism. It unsettles not by insisting that everyone is corrupt, but by showing how easy it is to slide, one professional compromise at a time, from witnessing power to serving it.

Revised US Factsheet Reflects Shared Understandings on Trade Deal: MEA

NEW DELHI: The amendments made in the White House factsheet for the India-US trade deal reflect the shared understandings of both countries in the joint statement, the Ministry of External Affairs said on Thursday.

MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said during the weekly media briefing that India and the United States had agreed to a joint statement on the framework for an Interim Agreement on reciprocal and mutually beneficial trade.

"This was issued on 7th February 2026. The joint statement is the framework and remains the basis of our mutual understanding in this matter. Both sides will now work towards implementing this framework and finalising the interim agreement," he said.

The United States has revised the fact sheet of the trade deal with India, making a few changes in the key terms of the agreement in the formal document, which is more closely aligned



with what India has been stating. These changes have been incorporated into the factsheet available on the official website of the White House.

The US has removed "pulses" from a list of American products on which it said India will eliminate or reduce tariffs, revising the statement to say "India will eliminate or reduce tariffs on all U.S. industrial goods and a wide range of U.S. food and agricultural products, including

dried distillers' grains (DDGs), red sorghum, tree nuts, fresh and processed fruit, soybean oil, wine and spirits, and additional products."

The agriculture chapter of the trade agreement released by India mentioned that pulses remain fully protected as a highly sensitive sector under an exemption category.

Another revision in the factsheet on the trade deal is to include India "intends" to buy

more American products and purchase over \$500 billion of energy, information and communication technology, coal, and other products from the US.

The earlier US factsheet had stated that India "will purchase over \$500 billion of US energy, information and communication technology, agricultural, coal, and other products." This tended to indicate that India has committed to buying products worth this amount.

Another sticky point, which has been scrapped, is the earlier mention that India will "remove its digital services tax."

In the earlier factsheet, the White House had said: "India will remove its digital services taxes and has committed to negotiate a robust set of bilateral digital trade rules that address discriminatory or burdensome practices and other barriers to digital trade, including rules that prohibit the imposition of customs duties on electronic transmissions."

Most White-Collar Jobs to be Automated in 12-18 Months: Microsoft AI Chief



NEW DELHI: Chief of artificial intelligence at Microsoft, Mustafa Suleyman, has warned that most white collar roles that rely on computers could be automated within the next 12 to 18 months.

He informed that the company is building a "professional grade AGI", that could automate majority of works done by lawyers, accountants, project managers and marketers.

In an interview with the Financial Times, Suleyman said Microsoft is racing to develop "professional grade AGI", AI systems capable of performing

nearly everything a human professional can do. He said the current shift in AI landscape would go beyond incremental productivity gains to produce structural displacement across knowledge based professions.

"White-collar work, where you're sitting down at a computer, either being a lawyer or an accountant or a project manager or a marketing person, most of those tasks will be fully automated by an AI within the next 12 to 18 months," the report quoted Suleyman as saying.

He described Microsoft's strategy to capture a larger share

of the enterprise market by automating routine and repeatable tasks such as document drafting, data analysis and project coordination that currently require skilled employees. He informed about Microsoft's plans to increase AI model productions to reduce reliance on OpenAI, following a revised agreement between the two companies.

Further, he said "creating a new model will be as simple as making a podcast or writing a blog," adding that institutions and individuals could design AI tailored to their specific needs.

US tech giant Oracle plans to cut 20,000 to 30,000 jobs to expand its AI data centre capacity, while Amazon recently announced lay off 16,000 employees as part of its AI restructure plan. A recent report from PwC India said artificial intelligence could contribute nearly \$550 billion to India's economy by 2035, across five priority sectors including agriculture, education, energy, healthcare and manufacturing.

FTAs Mark Structural Shift in How India Engages with the World: Piyush Goyal



NEW DELHI: Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Friday said that India's recent free trade agreements (FTAs), particularly the interim trade deal framework with the US, have marked a structural shift in how New Delhi engages with the world on trade issues.

Delivering the keynote address at the 'ET NOW Global Business Summit (GBS) 2026' here, the minister reiterated that India has fully protected the interests of farmers while negotiating the trade deal with the US.

The minister told the gathering that when we did the trade deal with the US, "it was very clear that we need to protect our farmers".

"Therefore, in all the areas in which our farmers have high production or helped the country become self-sufficient, we were able to keep them out of the trade agreement," he said, adding that "we have fully protected the interests of farmers, possibly over 95 per cent of the local farm produce".

Goyal further stated that for a long time, they've been discussing why India's textile sector isn't growing.

"We couldn't even compete with countries like Vietnam and Bangladesh. Now, with the textile sector open to Europe without any duty, and the United States reducing the reciprocal tariff from 25 per cent to 18 per cent, we can compete with the rest of the world," he said.

He earlier said that India will receive the same benefits on textiles exports under its interim trade agreement with the US as Bangladesh gained through its own deal. Textile exporters had received assurances of equal treatment with Bangladesh.

At the event, Goyal also underlined that FTAs are rooted in a clear framework. "FTA deals based on 3 principles - Trust, Transparency, and Time-bound certainty."

The minister cited the India-EFTA agreement as an example of how New Delhi is rewriting the template for trade partnerships. The European Free Trade Association (EFTA) comprises Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.

Centre Government Strengthens Cotton Supply Chain through MSP & E-Auctions



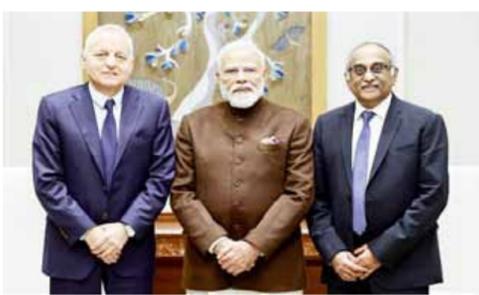
NEW DELHI: The government facilitates the availability of cotton to the domestic textile and spinning industries through the release of stocks procured by the Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) under Minimum Support Price (MSP) operations, said Minister of State for Textiles, Patricia Margherita in written reply to a question in the Rajya Sabha. These stocks are sold through a transparent online e-auction system to enable competitive price discovery. MSP for cotton is declared annually to safeguard farmers' interests when market prices fall below the support level and to ensure sustained cotton production. To enhance cotton productivity, quality and farmer incomes, several policy and programmatic interventions have been undertaken, the Minister said. A five-year Mission for Cotton Productivity was announced in the Union Budget 2025-26, with the Department of Agricultural Research & Education as the nodal department and the Ministry of Textiles as a partner.

Rolls Royce to Scale Up India Operations, Eyes Co Development of Combat Jet Engine

NEW DELHI: Luxury car manufacturer Rolls-Royce on Thursday said it intends to scale up its business in India to support future programmes and partnerships across defence, civil aviation and energy.

The automaker is exploring opportunities to codevelop a next generation combat jet engine and localising engine manufacture for the Indian Army, Navy as well as Coast Guard, and potentially power solutions for critical infrastructure and industry, a statement said.

These initiatives could more than double the workforce supporting Rolls Royce and its partners to about 10,000 people in India. "As India advances its next generation military capabilities, Rolls-Royce with the UK Government has offered to co-develop a 120 kN class combat jet engine



core that could be India's fastest route to an indigenous next-generation engine," the statement said. Rolls Royce highlighted that the co-development will provide full technology transfer with IP ownership for India, supported by a dedicated design complex and manufacturing capabilities that will unlock significant job

creation. The company also estimated a ten fold increase in its supply chain sourcing from India, which would benefit many small and medium sized enterprises. "We are determined to partner India on its Atmanirbhar journey, by developing indigenous propulsion capabilities, providing sustained power to critical

infrastructure and industry, and expanding local manufacturing for global supply chains," said Tufan Erginbilic, CEO, Rolls Royce.

"As we grow our participation in programmes across India's defence, aviation and energy sectors, we will expand our ecosystem in India, as we have done successfully in other countries," Tufan added. Over 1,400 Rolls-Royce engines are currently powering various defence platforms such as the Jaguar combat aircraft and Hawk trainers of the Indian Air Force and Navy; the Arjun Main Battle Tanks of the Army, and a variety of vessels and submarines of the Indian Navy and Coast Guard including the Anti-Submarine Warfare Shallow Watercrafts and the P17 Alpha frigates, the company said.

National Productivity Week 2026 to Highlight Clusters as Growth Engine for MSMEs

NEW DELHI: The National Productivity Council (NPC) will mark its 68th Foundation Day on 12 February 2026 and observe National Productivity Week from 12 to 18 February 2026 across the country, with a focus on strengthening cluster-based development for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).

The theme for this year's observance is "Clusters as Growth Engine: Maximizing Productivity in MSMEs."

The theme reflects the emphasis placed by Union Minister of Commerce and Industry and President of NPC, Piyush Goyal, on enhancing MSME competitiveness, promoting sustainable industrialisation and strengthening India's manufacturing base.

In the context of India's recent trade agreements, cluster-led development is being positioned as a strategic approach to accelerate productivity, foster inclusive growth, expand sustainable industrial capacity and deepen integration into global value chains.

To mark the week, a series of seminars, workshops and outreach programmes will be organised nationwide through NPC's 12 Regional Directorates located in Bengaluru, Bhubaneswar, Chandigarh, Chen-



nai, Gandhinagar, Guwahati, Hyderabad, Jaipur, Kanpur, Kolkata, Mumbai and Patna.

Twenty-four Local Productivity Councils, along with concerned Union Ministries, State Governments, industry associations and academic institutions, will collaborate in conducting awareness and engagement activities.

The National Productivity Council is an autonomous organisation under the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

It provides consultancy, training and research services in areas such as industrial engineering, environmental and energy management, agri-business, economic services, quality management, human resources, information technology and technology management to government and industry.

India in 1st Group of AI-Ready Nations with Youngest, Tech Savvy Workforce

NEW DELHI: India is in the first group of AI-ready nations, with systematic progress across all five layers of the AI architecture applications, models, chips, infrastructure and energy, an official document said on Thursday.

India is at the forefront of an AI-led transformation, where technology is driving productivity, innovation, and job creation. "India has one of the youngest



workforces in the world, with over 65 per cent of the population under 35. This large, tech savvy talent base can be trained and adapted for AI driven industries, creating a strong founda-

tion for innovation, digital services, and future ready jobs," the document added.

In preparation for the 'India AI Impact Summit 2026', 12 Indian AI startups selected under the Foundation Model Pillar engaged in Roundtable chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, and presented their ideas and work. According to the statement, these startups are working in a diverse set of areas includ-

ing Indian language foundation models, multilingual LLMs, speech-to-text, text-to-audio and text-to-video; 3D content using generative AI for e-commerce, marketing, and personalized content creation; engineering simulations, material research and advanced analytics for data-driven decision-making across industries; healthcare diagnostics and medical research, among others.

India-EU FTA and Indian Pharma Industry



DR. ANIL KUMAR ANGRISH
India-European Union (EU) Free Trade Agreement (FTA) has been described as "mother of all deals" as this deal created the world's largest free trade zone. The deal encompasses 2 billion people and about 25% of the world's Global Domestic Product (GDP). In this background, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said that "we have delivered the mother of all deals. This is a tale of two giants - the world's second and fourth-largest economies". The EU and India concluded negotiations on January 27, 2026, after the 14th and last negotiating round took place in October 2025. It took almost two decades to conclude negotiations for a FTA which were initiated in 2007. After suspension of talks in 2013, negotiations were relaunched in 2022.

The conclusion of negotiations unlocked access to the \$572.3 Bn EU Pharmaceuticals and Medical Devices market for Indian Pharma and MedTech Industry. Importance of EU can be vouched from the fact that four out of the top five European markets - Germany, France, Italy, and Spain - are part of European Union. Medicine spending in these top 5 Western European

Markets (WE5) stood at \$226 Bn in 2023, and is expected to reach \$296 Bn by 2028. The United Kingdom (UK) is part of WE5 but it left the EU on January 31, 2020.

Europe is an important market for Indian pharma industry as European region is the second largest market for Indian pharma exports with 18.93 per cent share in overall exports of pharmaceuticals. North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) region (the US, Canada, and Mexico) is the largest market for Indian pharma exports with 37.63 per cent share. India pharma exports to Europe comprise APIs, formulations, vaccines, and biosimilars. For FY25, pharma exports to the Europe stood at \$5.77 Bn, and out of this, exports of pharmaceuticals to European Union stood at \$4.39 Bn.

Imports from EU for FY25 stood at \$1.3 Bn which mainly consisted of patented pharma products. Ireland is a leading country in export of pharmaceutical products. In 2024, Ireland exported pharmaceutical products worth \$99.9 billion across the world. The top exports from Ireland to India were Orthopaedic Appliances worth \$132 Mn, and Vaccines, blood, antisera, toxins, and cultures worth \$122 Mn. India's pharma exports to Ireland stood at \$108.35 Mn. Elimination of tariffs - ranging up to 11.0 per cent on

Table 1: India's Pharmaceuticals Exports to European Union countries

Export Figures in \$ Million

Rank in FY25	Country	Exports in FY24	Exports in FY25	% Change	% Share
4	France	667.53	720.63	7.92	2.36
7	Netherlands	699.27	616.76	-11.80	2.02
8	Germany	567.42	597.58	5.32	1.96
11	Belgium	574.41	534.46	-6.96	1.75
23	Spain	250.31	246.23	-1.63	0.81
26	Italy	223.55	244.59	9.41	0.80
29	Malta	205.37	231.32	12.64	0.76
36	Poland	174.44	203.57	16.70	0.67
42	Latvia	96.13	157.05	63.37	0.52
47	Slovenia	125.58	126.82	0.99	0.42
53	Ireland	156.76	108.35	-30.88	0.36
56	Hungary	98.81	101.08	2.29	0.33
75	Greece	67.39	80.98	20.17	0.27
64	Finland	91.04	59.60	-34.54	0.20
79	Romania	44.03	54.65	24.12	0.18
80	Denmark	44.60	53.05	18.94	0.17
83	Sweden	33.75	51.75	53.35	0.17
84	Czechia	62.46	50.49	-19.16	0.17
92	Croatia	24.06	38.88	61.57	0.13
98	Portugal	31.44	33.07	5.19	0.11
114	Austria	24.88	24.03	3.41	0.08
118	Cyprus	27.92	22.52	-19.34	0.07
127	Lithuania	24.76	16.03	-35.24	0.05
135	Bulgaria	15.09	14.82	-1.85	0.05
162	Slovakia	5.61	3.46	-38.38	0.01
164	Estonia	4.25	3.28	-22.79	0.01
185	Luxembourg	4.34	0.37	-91.54	0.00

Source: Compiled from Pharmaceuticals Export Promotion Council of India data on pharma exports

pharma products will make import from EU cheaper. European (08) and EU (06) countries dominate the list of top pharma exporting nations in value terms. Germany ranked number 1 in pharma



and UK (\$32 Bn). Even in volume terms, two countries from European Union namely France (rank: 2), and Germany (rank: 5) figure among top 5 countries. There was marginal difference in the quantity exported by India (rank: 3), the US (rank: 4), and Germany in 2023.

Pharma exports of \$5.77 Bn for FY25 from India is a small proportion in the background that medicine spending in WE5 itself was \$226 Bn in 2023. Immense potential exists as the population of the EU was estimated at 450.4 million as on January 1, 2025. In 19 EU countries, the population

increased in 2024 while in decreased in eight. For FY25, exports to 12 countries out of 27 European Union countries showed a decline. In 3 out of 5 top countries for pharma exports, the decline was observed for FY25.

This is pertinent to note that there are European countries which are not part of EU but are major markets for Indian pharma exports, e.g., the UK which is the second largest market for Indian pharma exports forming 3.0 per cent of total pharma exports. Switzerland (0.47% share), Georgia (0.09%), Serbia (0.06%), Norway (0.03%), Iceland (0.02%),

Albania (0.01%), etc. are not part of European Union but are destination for Indian pharma exports.

Factsheet regarding India and European Union Trade Agreement as released by the Department of Commerce points out that the deal will expand horizons for Indian Traditional Medicine by providing a boost to Indian traditional medicine services and practitioners. AYUSH practitioners based on their professional qualifications in India will be allowed to provide their services in those EU Member States where regulations do not exist. As per the FTA, there is openness of the EU for establishment of AYUSH wellness centres and clinics in the EU Member States. Trade in Indian Traditional Medicine services will get push due to greater exchange with EU.

The FTA also recognizes the importance of digital libraries, specifically the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) project initiated by the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR) to protect Indian traditional medicinal knowledge and prevent its misappropriation at International Patent Offices. It was TKDL that set international specifications and standards for setting up of TK databases based on TKDL specifications. In the 5th Session of the Intergovernmental Committees (IGC) of the World Intellectual

Property Organization (WIPO) on Intellectual Property and Generic Resources, Traditional Knowledge, and Expression of folklore, this was adopted in the year 2003.

India's pharma exports in FY25 worth \$30.47 Bn comprised Drugs, formulations & Biologicals (75.26%), followed by Bulk Drugs & Drug Intermediates (15.98%), Vaccines (4.01%), Surgicals (2.48%), and Ayush & Herbs (2.26%). In contrast to this, India's pharma imports in FY25 worth \$8.93 Bn comprised Drugs, formulations & Biologicals (27.21%), followed by Bulk Drugs & Drug Intermediates (51.81%), Vaccines (4.55%), Surgicals (14.74%), and Ayush & Herbs (1.68%).

To conclude, it can be said that EU-India FTA will open avenues for Indian Pharma Industry (IPI). Contract Development and Manufacturing Organizations (CDMOs) are likely to gain. Loss of Exclusivity will add to the gains for IPI. But to tap this opportunity, IPI must strengthen quality systems, and compliance as European market is a highly regulated market.

Dr. Anil Kumar Angrish - Associate Professor (Finance and Accounting), Department of Pharmaceutical Management, NIPER S.A.S. Nagar (Mohali), **DISCLAIMER:** Views are personal and do not represent the views of the Institute.

RBI Index Shows Sharp Rise in Digital Payments across India

MUMBAI: The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) Digital Payments Index (DPI) rose to 516.76, as of September 2025, up from 493.22 in March 2025, according to an RBI statement issued on Thursday.

The increase in the RBI-DPI was driven by significant growth in parameters such as payment performance and payment enablers across the country over the period, the apex bank said.

The RBI has been publishing a composite RBI-DPI since January 1, 2021, with March 2018 as the base to capture the extent of digitalisation of payments across the country.

The March 2018 base period was assigned a score of 100. The index rose to 153.47 after a year in March 2019. The index has been published every six months since 2021 and has been showing a rapid rise over the years. The increase in RBI-DPI index was driven by sig-



nificant growth in parameters, viz. Payment Performance and Payment Enablers across the country over the period. The last index was announced on July 28, 2025.

The DPI comprises five broad parameters that measure the deepening and penetration of digital payments in the country over time.

These parameters include: payment enablers with a weightage of 25 per cent; payment infrastructure —

demand-side factors at 10 per cent; payment infrastructure — supply-side factors at 10 per cent; payment performance with the highest weightage at 45 per cent; and consumer centrality at 5 per cent. Each of the parameters includes the sub-parameters, which in turn consist of various measurable indicators.

UPI has played a major role in pushing up the use of digital payments in the country. The International Monetary

Fund (IMF) has recognised Unified Payments Interface (UPI) as the world's largest retail fast-payment system by transaction volume. This fact has been highlighted in the IMF's report on 'Growing Retail Digital Payments (The Value of Interoperability)' dated June 2025.

Further, as per the ACI Worldwide report on 'Prime Time for Real-Time' 2024, UPI tops the global list with a 49 per cent share in the global real-time payment system and a transaction volume of 129.3 billion. Brazil is placed in the second position with a market share of 14 per cent and a transaction volume of 37.4 per cent, followed by Thailand in the third spot with a market share of 8 per cent and a transaction volume of 20.4 billion. China figures in the fourth place with a market share of 6 per cent and transaction volume of 17.2 billion.

RBI Invites Public Comments on Draft Circular on Lead Bank Scheme

MUMBAI: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday issued a draft circular on the revised guidelines of the Lead Bank Scheme for public comments, which can be submitted till March 6.

Reserve Bank Governor Sanjay Malhotra had announced, as part of the Statement on Developmental and Regulatory Policies on February 6, that revised guidelines on the Lead Bank Scheme would be issued shortly to streamline the operational aspects. The revised guidelines aim to fine-tune the objectives of the Scheme; the structure, membership and agenda of various fora under the scheme; clear delineation of roles and responsibilities of key functionaries; and provisions to further strengthen the State Level Bankers' Committee and Lead District Manager offices, according to an RBI statement.



"The comments on the draft Circular may be submitted by email with the subject line 'Feedback on the Draft Circular on Lead Bank Scheme'. The last date for submission of comments is March 06, 2026," the statement said. The Lead Bank Scheme was introduced by the RBI in December 1969. The scheme aims at coordinating the activities of banks and other developmental agencies through various fora in order to achieve the objective of enhancing the flow of bank finance to priority sector and other sectors and to promote banks' role in overall

development of the rural sector.

For coordinating the activities in the district, a particular bank is assigned the lead bank responsibility of the district. The lead bank is expected to assume leadership role for coordinating the efforts of the credit institutions and Government. In view of the number of changes that had taken place in the financial sector, the Lead Bank Scheme was last reviewed by the High Level Committee of the Reserve Bank of India in 2009. The High Level Committee held wide ranging discussions with various stakeholders — State Governments, banks, development institutions, academicians, NGOs and MIFIs, etc — and noted that the scheme has been useful in achieving its original objectives of improvement in branch expansion, deposit mobilisation and lending to the priority sectors, especially in rural/semi urban areas.

Centre releases over Rs 3,324 crore to strengthen rural local bodies in 5 states



NEW DELHI: The Union government has announced the release of more than Rs 3,324 crore to strengthen rural local bodies in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and West Bengal as part of the second instalment of the 15th Finance Commission's untied grants for financial year 2025-26, government officials said.

Under this tranche, Bihar has received Rs 802.40 crore benefiting all 38 district panchayats, 533 block panchayats and 8,053 gram panchayats, along with an additional release of Rs 1.39 crore from the withheld portion of the first instalment that has since become eligible, officials on Thursday added.

Similarly, Uttar Pradesh has received Rs 1,559.40 crore for all 75 district panchayats, 826 block panchayats and 57,694 gram panchayats, in addition to Rs 11.016 crore released from the withheld portion that also become eligible.

West Bengal has also been allocated Rs 680.86 crore for eligible 21 district panchayats, 335 block panchayats and 3,225 gram panchayats under the same instalment. Haryana has been provided Rs 197.627 crore for various panchayats with a further Rs 2.5 crore released to additionally eligible local bodies from the earlier withheld amount. For Himachal Pradesh, the allocation stands at Rs 68.30 crore supplemented by Rs 0.35 crore released to 26 newly eligible gram panchayats, officials said. The Union government through the Ministry of Panchayati Raj and the Ministry of Jal Shakti (Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation) recommends release of 15th Finance Commission grants to states for Panchayati Raj institutions, which are then released by the Ministry of Finance. The allocated grants are recommended and released in two instalments in a financial year, officials added.

Pakistan's Stablecoin Experiment Could Weaken Its Currency Further: Report



NEW DELHI: Pakistan's plan to embrace a dollar-linked stablecoin through a partnership with US crypto firm World Liberty Financial could accelerate the country's dollarisation and undermine its macroeconomic stability, a new report has said. The report in the Daily Mirror said that a dollar-pegged stablecoin embeds a preference for the dollar as store of value and medium of exchange encouraging households to hold it as a state-tolerated alternative and move away from Pakistani rupee (PKR). Currency substitution through stablecoins could intensify exchange rate pressures and activate a feedback loop that accelerates rupee weakness. "For a country with a fragile currency, recurring balance-of-payments stress, and limited monetary policy space, the introduction of an officially endorsed dollar-linked stablecoin risks amplifying rather than reducing instability," the report said.

RBI raises Ceiling for Unsecured Loans of UCBs to 20 Pct of total advances

MUMBAI: The Reserve Bank of India has decided to raise the aggregate ceiling for unsecured loans given by urban co-operative banks to 20 per cent of total advances, from the existing limit of 10 per cent of total assets in the revised draft norms released on Tuesday.

The limits for individual unsecured advances within the aggregate ceiling of unsecured advances have been fixed at Rs 5 lakh for Tier 1, Rs 7.5 lakh for Tier 2, and Rs 10 lakh for Tier 3 and Tier 4 urban co-operative banks (UCBs).

The limit for lending to nominal members for the purchase of consumer durables is also proposed to be enhanced to Rs 2.5 lakh per borrower.

The draft norms state that the tenor of housing loans for Tier



1 and Tier 2 will not exceed 20 years, including the moratorium period, while Tier 3 and Tier 4 are permitted to determine the tenor of housing loans as per their board-approved policies.

The credit policy of a UCB must specify risk management and pricing strategies for hous-

ing loans, considering the life expectancy of the borrower and the longer duration of these exposures.

Feedback on the draft can be submitted on or before March 4, 2026. The amendments will come into force from October 1, 2026, or an earlier date when

adopted by a UCB in entirety, the RBI statement said.

The moratorium on housing loans is extended only for the purpose of the construction of houses and shall not be allowed for loans for the acquisition of completed houses.

For Tier 1 and Tier 2 UCBs, moratorium periods in housing loans will be a maximum of 18 months from the date of first disbursement of the loan or the date of obtaining completion.

Tier 3 and Tier 4 UCBs may determine the moratorium periods in housing loans within the overall loan tenor as per board-approved policies.

Additionally, the tenor and moratorium requirements for housing loans are proposed to be deregulated for Tier 3 and Tier 4 UCBs.

RBI Releases Draft Revised Guidelines for Kisan Credit Card Scheme, Seeks Public Feedback

NEW DELHI: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has released draft revised guidelines for the Kisan Credit Card (KCC) scheme. The proposal follows the Statement on Developmental and Regulatory Policies dated February 6, 2026, which indicated that

guidelines would be consolidated and updated to expand coverage, streamline operations and address emerging requirements. The draft guidelines propose significant changes to the KCC framework, including standardising crop seasons to ensure uniform loan sanction



and repayment schedules, with a 12-month cycle for short-duration crops and an 18-month cycle for long-duration crops. The overall KCC tenure has been extended to six years to better align with crop cycles, particularly for longer-duration crops.

Inflation Calculated Using a Revised Base Year and Its Effects

SATISH SINGH
The government has officially updated the base year for measuring inflation, shifting it from 2012 to 2024, a change that will be in effect for the next decade. This significant decision was first put into practice on February 12th, when retail inflation figures for January were calculated under the new base year for the inaugural time. As a result, retail inflation was recorded at 2.75% for January 2026, a noticeable increase from the previous month's rate of 1.33%. This marks the highest inflation level observed in eight months, highlighting the dynamic nature of economic conditions. Notably, during May 2025, inflation had peaked at 2.82%.

The intricate interplay between demand and supply fundamentally influences the rate of inflation. When consumers have higher disposable income, their spending surges, boosting demand for various goods and services. If the supply fails to keep pace with this heightened demand, it inevitably leads to an escalation in commodity prices. Conversely, a scenario in which demand is subdued and supply remains abundant can lead to lower inflation.

Typically, the government revises the base year every five to ten years, selecting a year that is not marred by natural disasters, health epidemics, or extreme inflation, which could distort economic assessments. In the previous index, food items accounted for nearly 50%, but in the new framework, this share has been significantly reduced

to 36.8%. The base year serves as the standardised reference point for price evaluation, essentially designating the average prices of goods in that year as a benchmark of 100. Therefore, when comparing prices in subsequent years to the base year, one can observe inflationary fluctuations. For example, if the price of a kilogram of potatoes were Rs 50 in 2022 and increased to Rs 80 in 2025, the inflation rate would be: $(80-50)/50 \times 100 = 60\%$, indicating a considerable price increase over that period.

To accurately gauge inflation, a basket of goods and services that most affect consumer spending is compiled. Each item within this basket is assigned a weight that reflects its significance in the average consumer's budget. The National Statistical Office (NSO) uses the Consumer Price Index (CPI) to measure retail inflation monthly. This comprehensive index encompasses a variety of goods and services consumed by the general population, including food staples, clothing, housing costs, fuel, and healthcare expenses. The newly calculated index will shift from using 2012 figures to 2024 figures, providing a more accurate reflection of contemporary market conditions.

Understanding the true state of inflation is crucial for fostering economic growth, as it enables a precise assessment of the public's declining purchasing power, stagnant income levels, and the rising cost of living. This awareness aids in making informed decisions regarding financial planning, protecting investments, advocating for fair wage demands, and formulating effective governmental monetary policies.



A clear understanding of inflation allows the government to take timely and appropriate measures to control price rises, safeguarding the interests of the general populace. High inflation rates can erode the value of money, prompting individuals to reassess how much they need to earn or save. If inflation rises, investment returns may turn negative. However, an accurate inflation rate helps individuals make more informed investment decisions, considering alternatives such as gold and equities.

Furthermore, precise inflation data is essential for understanding its ramifications on education, healthcare, and other vital commodities. Governments rely on this data to make critical adjustments to interest rates and tax policies. Inaccurate inflation data can adversely affect public policy, leading to misinformed public decisions, especially when inflation is volatile.

Over the past decade, significant shifts have occurred in people's lifestyles, spending habits, and day-to-day needs. As a result, the previous base year, 2012, no longer accurately reflected inflation levels. To better reflect the realities of modern life, the index now

includes 358 items, up from 299, providing a more comprehensive picture of consumer behaviour and real incomes.

The newly introduced index features a significant advancement: it encompasses a range of goods and services that reflect contemporary spending habits of the general population. In today's digital age, essential devices such as smartphones, high-speed internet, earphones, and fitness trackers have become woven into the fabric of daily life, a stark contrast to their earlier limited use. Additionally, including popular over-the-top (OTT) services such as Netflix, Jio Hotstar, and Amazon Prime Video in this index acknowledges the shift in entertainment consumption patterns.

The transition to a new base year is a strategic move to mitigate the influence of price volatility in fundamental commodities, particularly perishables such as vegetables and grains, on inflation statistics. This revision captures the variability in the pricing of non-food items and services, which together contribute to a more nuanced and accurate representation of inflation trends. The updated index will

scrape data from a variety of sources, including e-commerce platforms, to capture the evolving retail landscape. Key factors such as air travel fees, utility costs like electricity, app-based taxi fares, and prices of online services are now incorporated into the equation. Importantly, this expansion also accounts for house rental rates in rural regions, thereby enhancing understanding of inflationary pressures affecting rural households. Furthermore, it has proactively removed outdated items from the inflation metric, such as video and audio cassettes, which no longer play a role in modern consumers' lives.

An accurate understanding of inflation is essential, as any misrepresentation can lead to widespread public concern and hinder economic growth. When inflation rises, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) typically refrains from reducing the repo rate, thereby restricting banks' access to cost-effective capital. Subsequently, this compels lending institutions to charge higher interest rates, stifling competition in the borrowing landscape and ultimately impeding economic activity. Thus, comprehending the genuine level of inflation is critical. By adjusting the base year and incorporating relevant consumer goods into the inflation framework, we can reveal the true nature of inflation, paving the way for effective policy measures to stimulate growth.

Satish Singh is a Senior Banking and Economic Columnist based in Mumbai. The insights in the article reflect his personal views and analysis.

EPF Scheme Applies to Organised Sector Employees Earning upto Rs 15K: Mandaviya

NEW DELHI: Coverage under the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) Scheme is mandatory for employees in EPFO-registered establishments drawing wages up to Rs 15,000 per month and applies only to the organised sector, said Minister of Labour and Employment Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya in response to a question in Lok Sabha.

The Minister clarified that Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) function as community health volunteers and receive fixed monthly incentives for routine activities, along with performance-based incentives under National Health Programmes. Several States and Union Territories also provide additional State-specific incentives. Dr. Mandaviya stated that



ASHAs have been enrolled in various social security schemes subject to eligibility norms, including the Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan Dhan (PM-SYM), Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Beema Yojana (PMJJBY) and Pradhan Mantri Suraksha

Beema Yojana (PMSBY). They and their family members are also covered under the Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY), which provides annual health coverage of Rs 5 lakh.

NPAs of India's Banks Decline to Historic Low of 2.15 Per Cent

NEW DELHI: The gross NPAs as a percentage of total loans and advances of scheduled commercial banks have been continuously declining during the last eight financial years, and were at a historic low of 2.15 per cent at the end of September 2025, which is lower than the 2010-11 level, the Parliament was informed on February 9.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has apprised that the data on gross NPAs of banks is not collected by it on a monthly basis. However, as per the latest data available with the apex bank, as on September 30, 2025, for domestic operations, the gross NPA ratio of scheduled commercial banks was 2.15 per cent. In the case of public sector banks, the gross NPA ratio was 2.50



per cent, while for private sector banks it was 1.73 per cent, and for foreign banks the figure stood at 0.8 per cent. Also, public sector banks recorded a higher decline in gross NPA ratio in comparison with private banks and foreign banks since March 2018, Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary said in a written reply to a question in the Lok Sabha. This continuous decline in gross NPAs of banks has led to reduced provisioning by them, which in turn has improved their profitability, thereby causing

a positive impact on business growth. It also indicates that the asset quality, as well as underwriting, has improved in PSBs supported by a strong balance sheet and sustained profitability, the minister said. The RBI initiated the asset quality review in 2015, after which the government initiated 4R's strategy of recognising NPAs transparently, resolving and recovering value from stressed accounts through clean and effective laws and processes, recapitalising public sector banks, and reforms in banks and the financial ecosystem to address the problem of rising NPAs and growing loan default. Enabled by these initiatives, a large drop in gross NPAs was achieved by the banks, the minister said.

INTERNATIONAL

Prez Donald Trump to Visit China in April for Summit With Xi Jinping

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump said that he will visit China in April for a summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping. Xi is expected to visit the United States later this year.

"Yeah, I'll be visiting President Xi in April. I look forward to it. He's coming here later in the year, and I look very much forward to it," Trump told reporters at the White House.

Trump described ties with Beijing as steady. "No, our relationship with China is very good right now," he said in response to a question. "My relationship with President Xi is very good," he added.

Trump did not give details about the location or agenda of the April visit. He also did not specify when Xi's US trip would take place, beyond saying it would happen later this year.



The comments come as US-China ties remain defined by competition in trade, technology and security. The two countries continue to clash over tariffs and semiconductor export controls. Strategic

rivalry in the Indo-Pacific has also deepened.

Even so, both sides have kept high-level diplomatic channels open.

For India, engagement between Washington and Beijing

has regional implications. New Delhi has strengthened strategic ties with the United States in recent years while managing tensions with China.

Developments between the world's two largest economies are closely watched across Asia, especially in the Indo-Pacific.

Over the past decade, US-China relations have swung between cooperation and confrontation. Trade disputes escalated during Trump's first term. Military and technology competition has expanded since then. At the same time, summit diplomacy has continued as a way to reduce risks and keep communication lines open.

Trump's critics say that the president has been soft on China when it comes to imposing tariffs on their imports. The United States has a massive trade deficit with China.

India, Fiji Discuss Ways to Further Strengthen Bilateral Cooperation

SUVA: India's High Commissioner to Fiji Suneet Mehta held a meeting with Fiji's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade Sakiasi Ditoka, discussing new avenues to further strengthen bilateral cooperation across priority sectors of mutual interest.

"High Commissioner Suneet Mehta was honoured to call on the Minister for Fiji's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade Honourable Sakiasi Ditoka. The meeting featured warm and constructive discussions reaffirming the enduring India-Fiji Veilomani Dosti partnership, and exploring new avenues to further strengthen bilateral cooperation across priority sectors of mutual interest," Indian High Commission in Fiji posted on X. Earlier on Tuesday, Union Minister of State for External Affairs Pabitra Margherita held a meeting with Fiji's Minister for Finance, Commerce and



Business Development Esrom Immanuel in New Delhi and discussed bilateral ties, shared priorities, and possibilities for cooperation in digital infrastructure.

"Pleased to meet Hon. Esrom Immanuel, Minister for Finance, Commerce and Business Development of Fiji, this morning. Held productive discussions covering the entire gamut of India-Fiji bilateral relations and shared priorities, with particular focus on development partnership, capacity building, and possibilities for cooperation in

digital infrastructure, including ongoing collaboration and the way ahead," Margherita posted on X.

On February 2, India's High Commissioner to Fiji Suneet Mehta held a meeting with Fiji Parliament Speaker Filmone Jitoko and discussed strengthening bilateral cooperation.

Following their talks, India's High Commission in Fiji in a post on X stated, "High Commissioner Suneet Mehta was honoured to call on the Speaker of the Fiji Parliament, Filmone Jitoko. Productive discussions were held reaffirming strong parliamentary ties and avenues to further advance bilateral cooperation." Earlier on January 19, Suneet Mehta called on Fiji's Minister for Finance, Commerce and Business Development Esrom Immanuel and discussed strengthening ties and enhancing cooperation in the areas of mutual interest.

Farical, Illegal and Unconstitutional: Sheikh Hasina slams 'Voterless' Bangladesh Polls



DHAKA: Bangladesh's former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has termed the 13th Parliamentary election held in the country on Thursday as "farical" while expressing gratitude to the citizens, including women and minority communities, for rejecting the polls.

Condemning the "so-called" election organised by the Muhammad Yunus-led interim government, Hasina said the administration that seized power "illegally and unconstitutionally", orchestrated a "well-planned farce". She underscored that the people's voting rights, democratic values, and the spirit of the Constitution were completely disregarded in the "deceptive, voterless election" conducted without the participation of the Awami League party.

"From the evening of 11 February, this farce began with seizure of polling centres, gunfire, vote-buying, distribution of money, stamping of ballots, and agents signing result sheets. By the morning of 12 February, voter turnout was negligible in most polling centres nationwide, and in many centres across the capital and other areas, there were no voters at all," read a statement by Hasina, which was posted on the Awami League's social media platform X.

"According to the Election Commission's briefing, by 11 am - just three and a half hours into voting - only 14.96 per cent of eligible voters had participated. This extremely low turnout clearly shows that the Awami League-free election was widely rejected by the people," she added. Hasina noted that in the run-up to the elections, continuous attacks, arrests, intimidation, and fear was directed at the Awami League voters, supporters, well-wishers, and minority communities, forcing them toward polling centres.

"Even so, despite all threats and harassment, people rejected this fraudulent election, leaving most polling centres effectively empty. Additionally, abnormal increases in voter numbers were observed in voter lists, especially in Dhaka city, which raises serious questions and is highly suspicious," Hasina stated.

The Awami League called for the cancellation of this "voterless, illegal, and unconstitutional" election, resignation of the "murderous-fascist Yunus", and release of all political prisoners, including teachers, journalists, and intellectuals, and withdrawal of all false cases. Additionally, it demanded revocation of the suspension on Awami League activities and holding of free, fair, and inclusive elections under a neutral caretaker government to restore the people's voting rights.

Dalai Lama's office rejects reports linking Tibetan spiritual leader to Jeffrey Epstein



DHARAMSALA: The office of the Dalai Lama on Sunday firmly denied media reports suggesting any association between the Tibetan spiritual leader and convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

The clarification comes after several media outlets, citing documents from the United States Department of Justice (DoJ), reported that the Dalai Lama's name appeared 169 times in the widely discussed Epstein files. According to some reports, the Buddhist leader's name allegedly appeared in multiple personal emails and in the index of a book titled 'Massage for Dummies', which was included as a scanned document in files released earlier as part of the Epstein case records.

Following the circulation of these claims, the Dalai Lama's office issued a statement categorically rejecting any alleged link. "Some recent media reports and social media posts concerning the 'Epstein files' are attempting to link His Holiness the Dalai Lama with Jeffrey Epstein," the statement read. "We can unequivocally confirm that His Holiness has never met Jeffrey Epstein or authorised any meeting or interaction with him by anyone on His Holiness's behalf," it added.

Some reports have referred to emails dated October 2012 that allegedly contained references suggesting a meeting between the Tibetan spiritual leader and Epstein, and also indicated that the Dalai Lama was expected to attend an event alongside him.

Additionally, European media outlet 'Nexta TV' claimed that individuals described as followers of the Dalai Lama might have met Epstein, further fuelling speculation about possible indirect links.

The issue also gained attention last year after journalist Michael Wolff made claims during an appearance on the 'Daily Beast' podcast.

Canadian PM Carney's India Visit May Mark New Phase in Bilateral Ties: Report

NEW DELHI: India and Canada are not linked by geography or alliance structures but by economic complementarity and shared global governance interests - ties that have historically endured, a report said on Thursday.

If current trends persist, India-Canada relations over the next decade are likely to be driven less by political turbulence and more by investment flows, energy integration, supply chain partnerships and deeper people-to-people ties, former diplomat Sanjay Kumar Verma opined in 'India Narrative'.

He stated that Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney's expected visit to India in the next few weeks is likely to signal a shift from stabilisation to a more structured phase of expansion in the bilateral ties, with a strong focus on trade architecture, investment flows and long-term energy integration.



"Movement toward finalising the Terms of Reference for a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement could represent the most consequential next step in institutionalising economic engagement between the two countries. Greater regulatory facilitation of Indian exports in pharmaceuticals, digital services, engineering goods, and refined petroleum products would significantly expand Indian market

access in Canada," wrote Verma.

"Reciprocally, India is expected to further open market space for Canadian exports in energy resources, potash, pulses, timber, and advanced agricultural technology. Canadian institutional capital already ranks among the largest sources of foreign institutional investment in Indian infrastructure and renewable energy. A structured trade

framework has the potential to substantially scale bilateral trade volumes over the coming decade, possibly doubling current levels if tariff, regulatory, and mobility barriers are progressively reduced," the seasoned diplomat added.

According to Verma, apart from trade, the visit is expected to help shape a clearer economic, security, and strategic framework for the next phase of the partnership.

"Energy cooperation is expected to deepen through structured hydrocarbon supply engagement and expanded discussions on long-term uranium procurement to support India's civil nuclear expansion and clean baseload energy requirements. Supply chain complementarities are likely to drive reciprocal market access conversations across agriculture, energy, advanced manufacturing inputs, and services trade," he stated.

PM Modi Congratulates Japan's Takaichi On 'Landmark Victory'



NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday congratulated his Japanese counterpart, Sanae Takaichi, on her "landmark victory" in the snap elections, and expressed confidence in the India-Japan friendship to "greater heights".

"Congratulations Sanae Takaichi on your landmark victory in the elections to the House of Representatives! Our Special Strategic and Global Partnership plays a vital role in enhancing global peace, stability and prosperity. I am confident that under your able

leadership, we will continue to take the India-Japan friendship to greater heights", PM Modi said in a post on X.

Prime Minister Modi had held a bilateral meeting with PM Takaichi on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Johannesburg on November 23 last year, discussing ways to add momentum to bilateral cooperation in sectors like innovation, defence, and talent mobility.

"Had a productive meeting with Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi of Japan. We discussed ways to add momentum to bilateral cooperation

in areas such as innovation, defence, talent mobility and more. We are also looking to enhance trade ties between our nations. A strong India-Japan partnership is vital for a better planet," PM Modi had posted on X after the meeting.

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) under Takaichi, Japan's first-ever woman Prime Minister, was set to win a comfortable majority on its own, and may even clinch a two-thirds majority with allies, in the snap elections held on Sunday, as per exit polls in the Japanese media.

Soon after polling closed on Sunday, an exit poll by public broadcaster NHK showed that the LDP is on course to win 274 to 328 of the 465 seats in the powerful lower house of parliament, well above the 233 needed for a majority.

Together with its coalition partner, the Japan Innovation Party, known as Ishin, the LDP could secure as many as 366 in the House of Representatives, as per the polls.

Nine Killed in Mass-Shooting at Canada School, Suspect Dead by Suicide



OTTAWA: Nine people were killed in a mass shooting allegedly by a person, possibly a woman, who committed suicide in a mining town in British Columbia, according to officials. The area's federal police Chief Superintendent Ken Floyd said on Tuesday night (local time) that seven people were found dead in a local high school in Tumbler Ridge and two others in a home.

The alleged shooter was discovered dead in the school, he said during a virtual news conference. Floyd, who commands the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) northern district in the province, said that about 100 staff and students at the school were safe and were evacuated. Prime Minister Mark Carney said on X that he was "devastated" by the "horrific acts of violence". There were indications that the shooter was a woman or someone in female attire.

Citing privacy reasons and the ongoing investigation, Floyd did not disclose if the shooter was a student or an adult, but confirmed that it was the same person mentioned in an active shooter alert sent to phones in the area. That message described the suspected shooter as a brown-haired female wearing a dress. Two people with serious injuries were airlifted to a hospital, while 25 were checked for injuries at a local medical centre, according to police. British Columbia's Premier David Eby called the incident an "unimaginable tragedy" and said the "government will ensure every possible support for community members in the coming days".

President Trump backs coal as critical minerals source



WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump and industry leaders described coal as a strategic source of rare earth elements and critical minerals, expanding its role beyond traditional power generation.

At the White House "Champion of Coal" event on Wednesday (local time), Jim Grech, CEO of Peabody Energy, said the industry was working closely with the administration on new opportunities.

"We are working with your administration on the potential to build new coal-fueled power plants, and coal emerges as a source of rare earth elements and critical minerals that are essential for our national security and economic future," Grech said.

Trump tied coal directly to advanced manufacturing and defence. "Coal is also critical to our national security, vital to everything from steel production to shipbuilding and artificial intelligence," he said.

Grech underscored the scale of US reserves. "The US has more energy in its coal than any nation has in any single energy source," he said. "We have more energy than Russia has in its gas, and

we have more energy than Saudi Arabia has in its oil."

The administration's focus comes as critical minerals -- including rare earth elements -- have become central to global supply chains for electronics, defence systems, and emerging technologies.

Grech said mining communities were seeing renewed investment. "Mining towns that once feared for their futures are seeing new investment, renewed optimism, and a sense of pride restored," he said.

The renewed push to extract strategic minerals from coal adds a new dimension to U.S. industrial policy. Rare earth elements are key components in advanced electronics, renewable technologies, defence equipment, and artificial intelligence infrastructure.

The Trump Administration has prioritised securing domestic supplies of critical minerals amid growing concerns over supply chain concentration and strategic competition.

Its emphasis on coal as a potential source reflects broader efforts to strengthen domestic production and reduce vulnerabilities in high-tech industries.

Bangladesh Crisis Political Stability Remains a Mirage Despite Polls

GOPAL MISRA

In spite of the exile of the erstwhile Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the banning of her political party, Awami League to contest the elections, the Islamists supported by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), the Islamists could not sweep the one-day poll. The initial indications of the outcome of the polls could be an unprecedented success of the Bangladesh National Party (BNP). However, it would be too early to conclude that the Islamists suffered a temporary setback.

The clashes between the supporters of the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami, perhaps, gave a setback to the political ambitions of the leader of the Islamic party,

Shafiqur Rahman. Rahman, like the Taliban, advocates for the introduction of Sharia laws. He had formed an electoral alliance with the National Citizen Party (NCP) having the support of the pro-Pakistani Muslim clerics or mullahas.



The NCP, which was formed in 2024 by the students who had organised the countrywide agitation against the Hasina regime. It is to be ascertained yet to know how much it could get seats in the 350-member parliament. The 173 million voters of Bangladesh have exercised their franchise for electing 300 seats. Fifty seats are being reserved for women. The noisy, but without much following, the Amar Bangladesh Party, which has been campaigning for political reforms might not have registered much presence in the new parliament.

It may be recalled that the BNP had ruled from 2001-

2006. In 2009, the Awami League under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina was voted to power in 2009 by trouncing BNP. Since Awami League has not been allowed to contest the polls, BNP led by Tarique Rahman, the son of recently deceased former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia might be the new prime minister.

The final outcome of the poll's result will decide whether the agenda of destroying Bangladesh nationalism has really been achieved. However, by denying Awami League to contest the elections, the political instability may continue to haunt the country.

India and UK Sign Agreement on Social Security for Employees on Short-Term Overseas Assignments

NEW DELHI: India and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland signed an agreement on social security relating to Social Security Contributions in New Delhi on Tuesday. The agreement seeks to avoid double social security contributions for employees of both countries on temporary assignments in each other's territories for periods of up to 36 months.

The Agreement was signed by Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri for the Indian side and by the British High Commissioner to India, Lindy Cameron for the UK side.



External Affairs (MEA), India has been entering into bilateral Social Security Agreements (SSAs) with other countries in order to protect the interests of Indian professionals/skilled workers working abroad for short durations and enhance

the competitiveness of Indian companies. It may be recalled that at the time of signing of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between India and the United Kingdom in July 2025, both governments had committed to concluding an agreement on social security. "The Agreement seeks to avoid double social security contributions for employees of both coun-

tries on temporary assignments in each other's territories for periods of up to 36 months. The Agreement will support mobility and continued social security coverage of the employees on short-term overseas assignments. This will enhance India-UK partnerships in the service sector, leveraging the high skills and innovative service sectors of both countries," read a statement issued by the MEA. "The Agreement forms part of India's trade deal with the UK and shall come into effect together with the CETA, planned for implementation during the first half of the current year," it added.

US Decision to Leave WHO Causes Worldwide Anxiety

BY SUDHA RAO

The recent decision of the US President Donald Trump to quit the WHO has naturally caused anxiety worldwide, because the human race across the continents would be facing pandemic without any co-ordinated support from WHO, an important UN institution. Further, it may also adversely affect the US position as the only Superpower on the earth.

During the post Cold War era, 1990 onwards, the US has been the only Superpower on the earth, but in recent years, it appears Washington is quietly abandoning its key- role in supervising the vital issues related to maintaining global order. The decision to leave WHO, perhaps, indicates that the new rulers in Washington are adopting policies only for maintaining the US supremacy in the Western hemisphere, thus compromising its global agenda.

The implications of leaving the WHO should have been thoroughly examined by the American establishment. It is going to diminish the US role in the issues related to the health of mankind, especially when authoritarian countries like China are engaged in the development of viruses, which could cause diseases.

Being a person closely related to medical issues, most of my peers are aghast that the USA has decided to walk out from the WHO or the World Health Organization. The current situation is alarming, especially when the dreaded NIPAH, believed to be a successor of the Covid -19, is quietly expanding in Asia and Africa. Interestingly, a few symptoms of NIPAH adversely affecting lungs are being treated as the cases of pneumonia. Unfortunately, there are reports that many other countries are either withdrawing or becoming neutral and have distanced from WHO.

Admittedly WHO has many inadequacies or shortcomings, but it is the only international



NIPAH VIRUS SPREAD

forum which regulates the health issues, especially in the context of eruptions of pandemics. It is very painful for such an organisation to die which has served millions of people around world in eradication of deadly diseases like, Polio, Small Pox, Ebola, Cholera and had played a key-role in tackling Covid-19.

It may be recalled that soon after the end of the World War-II, the world powers had adopted a comprehensive approach towards the survival of the human race. Thru, WHO was established in 1945 as a body of the United Nation (U.N.). Its task was specific, especially related to health issues and emergencies. It is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, and has six regional offices and 150 field offices worldwide. Only sovereign states are eligible to join, and it is the largest intergovernmental health organization at the international level. Its purpose has been to achieve the highest possible level of health for all the world's people, defining health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." Its main functions include the task of controlling epidemic and endemic diseases; providing and improving the teaching and training in public health, the medical treatment of disease, and related matters; and promoting the establishment of international standards for biological products.

Within three years of the establishment of the UN, WHO was established on 7

April 1948, and formally began its work on 1 September 1948. It incorporated the assets, personnel, and duties of the League of Nations' Health Organization and the Paris-based Office International d'Hygiène Publique, including the International Classification of Diseases (ICD). The agency's work began in earnest in 1951 after a significant infusion of financial and technical resources. The WHO's official mandate is to promote health and safety while helping the vulnerable societies worldwide. It provides technical assistance to countries, sets international health standards, collects data on global health issues, and serves as a forum for scientific or policy discussions related to health. Its official publication, the World Health Report, provides assessments of worldwide health topics.

The WHO has played a leading role in several public health achievements, most notably the eradication of smallpox, the near-eradication of polio, and the development of an Ebola vaccine. Its current priorities include communicable diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, Ebola, malaria and tuberculosis; non-communicable diseases such as heart disease and cancer; healthy diet, nutrition, and food security; occupational health; and substance abuse.

The agency advocates for universal health care coverage, engagement with the monitoring of public health risks, coordinating responses

to health emergencies, and promoting health and well-being generally.

The WHO is governed by the World Health Assembly (WHA), which is composed of its 193 member states. The WHA elects and advises an executive board made up of 34 health specialists; selects the WHO's chief administrator, the director-general (currently Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus of Ethiopia) sets goals and priorities; and approves the budget and activities. The WHO is funded primarily by contributions from member states (both assessed and voluntary), followed by private donors.

A study published by Lancet Global Health says that the stoppage or reduction of funding of Big Rich countries like USA, Britain etc to poor countries will cause the death of 2.2 crores people by 2030, and these deaths are preventable by proper treatment, mostly children below five years. In the last 20 years infant and children death has been reduced by 39 per cent and may again increase due to lack of funds for prevention and treatment of many diseases.

International help by the rich countries helps in Vaccination programmes, HIV-AIDS, Malaria, T.B. treatment programmes. Maternal and Child Health Care programmes, prevention of epidemics etc.

Now coming to the latest threat of NIPAH Virus Infection and any outbreak will cause death and devastation as there is no specific treatment or vaccine available like for COVID or other epidemic illness.

Nipah virus infection (NVI) is a zoonotic illness transmitted to humans from animals through contaminated food or directly from one to another person. It mainly affects the brain, nervous system, lungs and may be Asymptomatic.

With the weakening of the

WHO, there is a worldwide concern that mankind will be able to face the menace of the Nipah virus (NiV), believed to be manmade virus.

During his previous tenure US President Donald Trump had criticised the delayed intervention of WHO in taking effective measures against Covid -19. Being disenchanted by the performance of WHO, he has announced to leave the WHO. Instead, being the leader of the earth's only Superpower, Trump was expected to announce corrective steps for improving its functioning. It cannot be denied that despite its inadequacies, the WHO prioritizes research in key areas as well as monitors outbreaks, and provides technical support to countries. Also, it works in preventing the spread of diseases through risk communication, infection control guidance, and coordinating the development of vaccines and treatments for the high-fatality diseases.

Nipah and WHO : In spite of the financial challenges, WHO has already taken initiative in managing Nipah Virus. It has begun surveillance and monitoring NiV outbreaks globally, assessing risks to prevent international spread, particularly in South-East Asia where outbreaks are more common.

The WHO assessment in February 2026 is that the global risk of NiV is to be low but emphasizes the need for continued vigilance. The prevention of its transmission, which often takes place from the direct contact with infected animals like bats, pigs or horses, or by consumption of fruits or fruit products like Raw date palm juice contaminated by infected fruit bats.

A number of NIPAH cases have been reported in Bangladesh, Malaysia, Philippines and Singapore. In India, two cases have been reported in Kolkata.

The incubation period is the time from infection to symptoms on set varies from

3-14 days or even longer. It may be asymptomatic and usually causes fever, headache confusions, involving the brain leading to convulsions or fits. Further, it may cause breathing problems, vomiting or diarrhoea. It has also been noticed that many among the survivors have also suffered neurological problems.

It is difficult to diagnose the infection unless adequate laboratory facilities were available to identify this man-made virus. The main test is real time polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) of respiratory samples. The blood or C.S.F. ELISA may also detect it.

Till writing this text, there is no vaccine available in the market. However, there are media reports that China has already prepared a vaccine. It may not be surprising that initial reports indicate that the Chinese facility at Wuhan, where Covid -19 was born, the NIPAH virus too has been developed.

The Precautions : It is stated that prevention is always better than anything to be followed for curing the disease. In this case, the risk factors may be taken care of by promoting awareness regarding the risk factors such as the prevention of transmission by decreasing Bat population, bat access to date palm and only fresh and healthy fruits should be taken.

The virus also spreads through human to human transmission, which could be avoided or by adhering to the strict protocols such as by proper handwashing and protective clothing and gloves. The patients should be isolated or quarantined.

It is hoped that President Donald Trump would be revisiting the decision to dissociate from WHO. It might also undermine American influence in the geo-politics.

Dr.Sudha Rao, an anesthesiologist of repute, takes up their challenges in the public domain.

Sachin Tendulkar Meets PM Modi with Family, Invites Him to Son Arjun's Wedding



NEW DELHI: Cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar, along with his family and the family of his son's fiancée Saaniya Chandhok, met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi on Tuesday and personally invited him to the wedding of Arjun Tendulkar.

Sachin posted about the moment on social media, expressing that the family was honoured to invite the Prime Minister and thanking him for his blessings and wise advice for the young couple. The meeting occurred before the wedding celebrations, which are reportedly planned to take place in Mumbai.

"We were honoured to invite Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri @narendramodi ji to Arjun and Saaniya's wedding. Thank you, Modi ji, for your blessings and thoughtful advice for the young couple," Sachin wrote on Instagram while sharing pictures of the entire family posing with the Prime Minister, and also a photo of Arjun and Saaniya with him.

Arjun, son of the legendary cricketer, is set to marry Saaniya Chandhok, an entrepreneur and qualified veterinary technician. Earlier, sources had confirmed to IANS that the wedding festivities will begin on March 3 and the marriage will be an intimate affair at-

tended by close family members and friends on March 5.

The couple reportedly got engaged in a private ceremony in August last year, with only close relatives and friends in attendance. Saaniya Chandhok is a successful entrepreneur and the granddaughter of prominent Mumbai businessman Ravi Ghai.

Arjun, a fast bowler and a useful lower-order batter, is an active cricketer in the domestic setup as well as in the Indian Premier League. He made his Ranji Trophy debut for Goa in 2022 and impressed by scoring a century in his maiden first-class match. In the IPL, he was first bought by the Mumbai Indians in 2021 at his base price of Rs. 20 lakh, though an injury ruled him out that season.

Mumbai Indians picked him up again at the IPL 2022 auction for Rs. 30 lakh. Arjun made his IPL debut in 2023 against the Kolkata Knight Riders and claimed his first wicket against Sunrisers Hyderabad by dismissing Bhuvneshwar Kumar in a winning effort. He went on to take two more wickets that season and was retained by the Mumbai Indians for the 2024 campaign.

Ahead of the 2026 season, he was traded to the Lucknow Super Giants.

Over 1.77 cr tourists visited J&K in 2025, Including 36,000 foreigners: Govt



FW DESK Srinagar

More than 1.77 crore tourists visited Jammu and Kashmir in 2025, including over 36,000 foreign nationals, the government informed the Legislative Assembly on Saturday.

In a written response to a query by MLA Hasnain Masoodi, the Tourism Department said a total of 1,77,65,390 tourists visited the Union Territory between January 1 and December 31, 2025. Of these, 36,410 were international visitors, while 1,77,28,980 were domestic tourists. The government said it has not fixed specific targets for tourist arrivals in 2026 but noted that continuous promotional campaigns and development initiatives are being undertaken to boost both domestic and foreign tourism. On the resumption of international flights from Srinagar airport, the department said the airport is fully equipped with immigration, customs, security, and passenger-handling infrastructure. However, the launch of international flight operations depends on the operational and commercial decisions of airlines. The government said the airport is ready to handle international services whenever airlines decide to commence operations. Responding to a separate query on the Home Stay Programme, the department said the initiative has been largely successful in increasing accommodation capacity, creating local employment, and promoting community participation in tourism. In view of its positive outcomes, the programme is likely to be extended to more potential areas.

Happiest Minds' growth accelerates to 10.7% y-o-y; Q3 revenues hit ₹587 cr as AI-led deal momentum strengthens margins

EBITDA margin at a robust 20.4%; 'AI First. Agile Always.' strategy begins translating into scalable growth
ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru



Happiest Minds Technologies Limited (NSE: HAPP-STMNDS) reported a sharp acceleration in growth for the third quarter ended December 31, 2025, with consolidated revenues rising 10.7 per cent year-on-year to Rs 587 crore, driven by strong deal closures and increasing traction of its AI-led offerings. The company delivered an EBITDA margin of 20.4 per cent, underlining disciplined execution and operating efficiency even as investments in next-generation capabilities continue.

The quarter marked a strategic

inflection point for the company as it rolled out "AI First. Agile Always.", positioning AI as the core driver of future growth and value creation. The strategy, launched as Happiest Minds' 11th strategic transformation, is anchored by 11 focused programs aimed at embedding AI deeply across solutions, delivery, and operations.

Ashok Soota, Chairman & Chief Mentor, said address-

ing Press conference the momentum around AI adoption is already visible across the organisation and in customer engagements. "What some see as turbulence in global software markets, we see as an opportunity. AI is not a threat to Happiest Minds; it is a powerful growth catalyst. Our AI First transformation is progressing well, and we expect this to accelerate our growth trajectory," he said.

One Run, Seven Thousand Stories, A Million Reasons for Hope

ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

In a hall filled with quiet courage and unspoken resilience, the Organization for Rare Diseases India (ORDI) hosted a moving press conference ahead of its flagship awareness run, Racefor7, scheduled for February 22. But this was more than an announcement of an event. It was a call — urgent, heartfelt, and impossible to ignore.

Rare diseases affect over 300 million people worldwide and more than 70 million in India. Yet for many families, the journey begins not with a diagnosis, but with confusion. Years of unanswered questions. Endless hospital visits. Mounting bills. And the silent fear of the unknown.



sage was clear: rare should never mean invisible.

Turning Awareness into Action- Prasanna Shirol, Co-founder and Executive Director of ORDI, spoke with conviction about the need to move beyond symbolic gestures.

"India has made progress in awareness and evolving policies for rare diseases," he said, "but now the focus must shift to structured, sustained action. Patients need timely diagnosis, comprehensive supportive care, and equitable access to therapies — regardless of geography or affordability. Equitable access must be the standard of care,

not a privilege."

Through initiatives like Racefor7, ORDI has been building a people's movement — one that unites patients, doctors, researchers, corporates, and citizens in solidarity. Each step taken during the run represents the 7,000+ known rare diseases and the millions of lives intertwined with them. Science, Policy and the Promise of India- Dr. Meenakshi Bhat, Head-Director at the Centre for Human Genetics (CHG), Karnataka, reflected on how the landscape has begun to shift since the National Policy for Rare Diseases was announced in 2021.

Talking Points

Narvijay Yadav



High income does not guarantee financial stability. Without money discipline, even success becomes fragile. Managing money well matters more than earning it fast.

Money problems rarely begin with low income. They begin with poor handling of money. This distinction is often missed in public conversations. We admire high earnings, big projects, and visible success, but quietly ignore the discipline required to sustain wealth. Many financial collapses do not happen because money was not earned. They happen because money was not managed.

In India, earning is celebrated. Management is assumed to follow automatically. This assumption is flawed. Financial literacy is not instinctive. It is learned. Unfortunately, our education system does not teach it early. Children are trained to score marks, secure degrees, and chase jobs. They are rarely taught how money behaves, how risk accumulates, or how poor decisions compound quietly over time.

This gap becomes visible across professions. Actors, sportspersons, startup founders, professionals, and even senior executives have faced financial distress despite impressive earnings. Public attention often focuses on the fall, not the cause. The cause is usually the same. Cash flow misjudgment. Overconfidence. Poor advice. Lack of

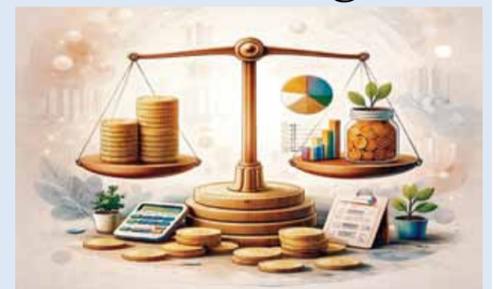
reserves. Emotional spending. Unplanned liabilities.

Robert Kiyosaki, in Rich Dad Poor Dad, highlights this weakness sharply. He points out that most people are trained to earn salaries but not to understand assets, liabilities, or financial discipline. Income without literacy creates illusionary comfort. The money comes in, lifestyle expands, commitments grow, and risk quietly builds. When income slows or stops, reality hits suddenly.

Indian households often reinforce this pattern. Parents encourage children to earn well, not to manage well. Spending is treated as a reward. Saving is treated as a sacrifice. Investment is often seen as gambling rather than planning. This mindset travels into adulthood.

When larger sums arrive, habits do not change. Only the scale increases. Another overlooked aspect is emotional money behavior. Sudden success creates pressure to appear successful. Gifts are bought unnecessarily. Events are overspent on. Image management replaces financial management. Many professionals confuse visibility with value. Money gets spent to impress rather than to protect stability. Over time, this creates stress instead of security.

Why Earning More Isn't Enough



Money also demands boring discipline. Accounting. Contracts. Legal clarity. Timely payments. Conservative buffers. These are not glamorous tasks. They require patience and restraint. Many talented individuals delegate this responsibility blindly or ignore it altogether. When disputes arise, consequences follow. Legal systems do not care about reputation or creativity. They respond to numbers, agreements, and timelines.

Financial literacy is not about hoarding wealth. It is about balance. It allows people to live freely without anxiety. It protects creative energy. It supports long-term thinking. Without it, even high earners feel trapped, pressured, and constantly worried. Money then becomes a source of fear instead of freedom.

The solution lies in early education and honest conversation should begin in schools. Children should learn budgeting, saving, basic investing, and risk awareness alongside academics.

Adults should normalize talking about money decisions, mistakes, and planning without shame. Professionals should seek structured financial advice, not casual opinions.

This is also where the Bliss philosophy quietly fits in. A calmer lifestyle naturally reduces reckless spending. Mindful living improves judgment. Slower decisions prevent impulsive commitments. When life is less noisy, money choices become clearer. Bliss is not anti-ambition. It is anti-chaos. It supports sustainable success rather than fragile growth.

Earning money is important. Managing money is essential. Without management, earnings become temporary relief. With management, even modest income creates lasting stability. The future will reward those who combine skill with discipline, ambition with awareness, and success with responsibility. Bliss On.

The author is a senior journalist and columnist, views are personal.

Sir Ganga Ram Hospital makes history with Robotic Telesurgeries across 1200 kilometres

KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

Sir Ganga Ram Hospital has successfully completed a series of robotic-telesurgeries using the state-of-the-art Mizzo Endo 4000 robotic surgical system, surgeries were performed by surgeons operating from Vapi, Gujarat, to treat patients at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital located over 1,200 kilometres away, highlighting a new dimension of surgical collaboration in India.

The hospital's expert team accomplished four complex



procedures across urology and general surgery within just 24 hours with ultra-low latency. The procedures were performed with exceptional real-time precision, seamless control, and

uncompromised safety. The surgical team included Dr.Vipin Tyagi-Senior Consultant, who worked as a Robotic Coordinator, Dr Ajay Sharma, Senior Consultant, Dr.Tarun Mittal Senior Consultant, Dr Anmol Ahuja Senior Consultant, Dr Ashish Dey-Senior Consultant, and Dr. Mukund Khaitan-Senior Consultant

Dr. Ajay Swaroop, who serves as Chairman, Board of Management of Sir Ganga Ram Hospital recognized the achievement by stating, "This reflects our unwavering commitment to combining medical excellence with advanced technology to make quality healthcare more accessible.