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Atiqa Mir makes stunning WSK debut in Italy



PIONEER IN SHORT

AVALANCHE HITS KASHMIR'S SONAMARG

An avalanche occurred in the Sarbal area of Sonamarg, Jammu and Kashmir on Wednesday. The Sarbal village is the last village of the Kashmiri valley. The mammoth avalanche was caught on camera at the tourist site. No loss of life or damage to properties has been reported so far. Meanwhile, heavy snowfall across Kashmir on Tuesday forced the closure of the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway and led to the cancellation of all flights at Srinagar International Airport, leaving hundreds of tourists stranded. The snow, which began late Monday night, covered the plains and higher reaches, turning popular resorts like Sonamarg, Gulmarg, and Pahalgam into winter landscapes. National Highway 44 was blocked near the Navayug tunnel at Qazigund and Banihal, while all 58 scheduled flights, including 29 arrivals and 29 departures, were cancelled due to unsafe runway conditions. Train services were also disrupted between Banihal and Budgam but resumed later after track clearance. Tourists expressed mixed reactions: some lamented travel delays, while others enjoyed the extended stay. The J&K Disaster Management Authority issued avalanche warnings for 11 districts, including high-danger alerts above 2,000 metres in Ganderbal.

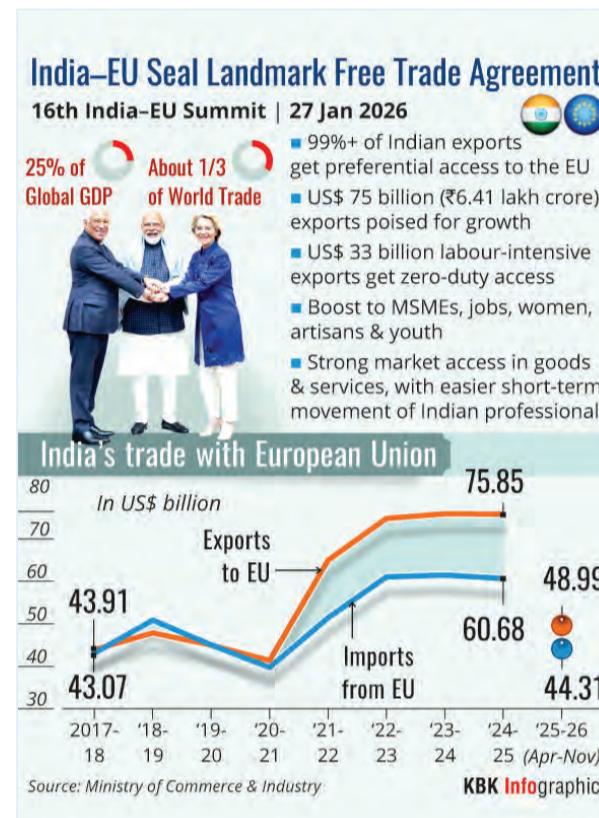
ASHOK RAJ ■ New Delhi

India and the European Union (EU) on Tuesday formally concluded negotiations on a long-pending Free Trade Agreement (FTA), hailed by leaders on both sides as the mother-of-all deals. The pact marks a watershed moment in economic ties between the world's fourth-largest and second-largest economies amid rising geopolitical uncertainty, supply-chain realignments and growing protectionism.

The agreement was announced at the 16th India-EU Summit by PM Narendra Modi and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, bringing to a close nearly 18 years of negotiations first launched in 2007 and revived in 2022.

Describing it as India's largest and most ambitious trade pact, PM Modi said the FTA was "not merely a trade deal, but a new blueprint for shared prosperity."

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India's energy sector offers \$500bn opportunity: PM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Betul (Goa)

Underlining the acceleration of reforms and the country moving from energy security towards energy independence, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said India's energy sector offers investment opportunities worth \$500 billion.

Addressing the inaugural ceremony of India Energy Week 2026 via video conferencing, the PM said \$100 billion investment is being targeted by the end of the decade in the upstream sector after landmark reforms and opening 1 million square kilometres of area for finding and producing oil and gas, while in the downstream, the nation is targeting to become the world's largest oil refining hub.

The ambitious target of more than doubling the share of natural gas in the energy basket to 15 per cent by 2030 will create opportunities in LNG and pipelines, while a growing economy will fuel demand for petrochemical products, he said. "Today,



Prime Minister Narendra Modi virtually addresses a gathering during the inauguration of India Energy Week 2026

PTI

India is a land of immense opportunities for the energy sector," the PM said, noting that as the world's fastest-growing major economy, India's demand for energy products is rising steadily while also creating opportunities to meet global demand. He highlighted that India ranks among the top five exporters of petroleum products globally, supplying to more than 150 countries, and said this capacity would benefit international partners.

CONTINUED ON ▶ P4

The ByStander



UP OFFICER RESIGNS, GOVT SUSPENDS HIM

Bareilly City Magistrate Alankar Agnihotri staged a dharna outside the district magistrate's office on Tuesday after the Uttar Pradesh government suspended him for indiscipline following his resignation over new UGC rules. Agnihotri, a 2019-batch Provincial Civil Service officer, had resigned on Monday, citing deep disagreement with government policies, claiming the regulations could foment caste-based tensions and harm the academic environment. Despite police presence outside his residence, Agnihotri and supporters marched to the collectorate, alleging a "well-planned conspiracy" against him. The administration dismissed claims of attempts to detain him as baseless. His suspension order, issued Monday night, attached him to the Shamli DM's office pending disciplinary proceedings.

KIDNAPPED YOUTH FREED IN JHARKHAND

The 24-year-old son of a Jamshedpur-based industrialist was rescued by police from Jharkhand's Hazaribag district early Tuesday, nearly two weeks after his abduction, officials said. Kairav Gandhi, son of Devang Gandhi, Vice-President of the Adityapur Small Industries Association (ASIA), was kidnapped on January 13 while travelling to his office in the Adityapur industrial area. Senior Superintendent of Police (East Singhbhum) Piyush Pandey said Kairav was freed around midnight on the Chaupur-Barhi stretch of the GT Road after sustained police pressure. He was handed over to his family around 4.30 am and was found to be in good health, with no sign of torture. Police said the abductors intercepted Kairav on the Kadma-Sonari link road, forced him into a vehicle bearing a police sticker, and abandoned his car later the same night.

CONTINUED ON ▶ P4

A new window to the wild: Inside Delhi zoo's big revamp

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

Glass viewing panels will be installed at animal enclosures to provide visitors with a clearer and more immersive view of wildlife as the National Zoological Park in the Capital is set to undergo sweeping modernisation under a ₹400-crore redevelopment plan.

Work on the comprehensive overhaul plan, which includes redesigned entrances, improved traffic circulation, reconstructed animal habitats, and expanded veterinary facilities, is scheduled to begin in February, pending final

Adani, Embraer to build aircraft in India

adani

President and CEO, Embraer Commercial Aviation. "Together, we will evaluate the most viable, advanced, and efficient solutions in support of India's RTA ambitions, and their potential for implementation."

The potential industrial partnership will leverage Embraer's extensive engineering and aircraft manufacturing experience alongside Adani's end-to-end aviation value-chain presence, which includes airport infrastructure, aerospace manufacturing, maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) services, and pilot training.

"Regional aviation is the backbone of economic expansion. With initiatives like UDAN transforming air connectivity across Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, the need for an indigenous regional aviation ecosystem has become critical," said Jeet Adani, Director, Adani Defence & Aerospace.

"This partnership will also strengthen strategic relations between India and Brazil, bringing complementary capabilities together."

CONTINUED ON ▶ P4

approval from the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, the Central Zoo Authority official said.

The Centre had granted in-principle approval of Rs 400 crore and the investment board has largely agreed with the proposed changes, paving the way for formal clearance, the official said. The redevelopment proposal was recently placed before the Delegated Investment Board, a government body that clears major public infrastructure investments, and funding for the project will be drawn through this mechanism, he said. "Reliance's Greens

Stormy Budget Session likely as Govt, Opposition lock horns

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

The Budget Session is likely to witness increased acrimony between the Treasury and the Opposition benches as it comes in the backdrop of continued protest by the Opposition on VB-G RAM-G Act and the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls and a confident BJP-led NDA with recently local body wins in Kerala and Mumbai.

At an all-party meeting chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday, the principal Opposition

party, the Congress, flayed the Government for failing to circulate the legislative agenda for the Budget session of Parliament. Other Opposition members, including John Brittas of the CPI(M), too objected to the non-circulation of government business for the session. Ministers present at the meeting said the agenda will be circulated in due course. The session begins on Wednesday.

"This is the first session of the year. Normally, the list of Government business is shared after the President's address. However, I am pre-



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, left, with Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju, arriving for the all-party meeting on Tuesday

PTI

Govt defends UGC rules as students warn of chaos

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

As the controversy over recently announced anti-discrimination regulations — the Promotion of Equity in Higher Education Institutions Regulations, 2026 — deepens, the Government on Tuesday tried to reassure protesting students that the rules will not be misused or used to discriminate.

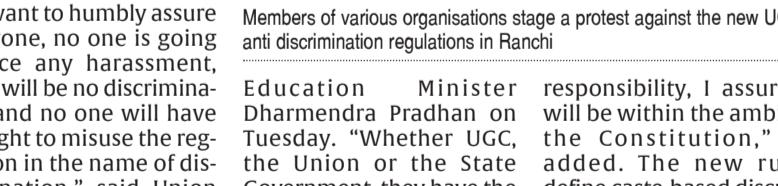
"I want to humbly assure everyone, no one is going to face any harassment, there will be no discrimination and no one will have the right to misuse the regulation in the name of discrimination," said Union

Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Tuesday. "Whether UGC, the Union or the State Government, they have the responsibility, I assure it will be within the ambit of the Constitution," he added. The new rules define caste-based discrim-

ination as discrimination "only on the basis of caste or tribe" against members of the Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs).

Reports indicate the new UGC's regulations have upset upper caste students, who have framed the rules as discriminatory against the general category. In Delhi, a group of students from colleges across Delhi held a protest outside the UGC headquarters on Tuesday, saying that the new regulations issued by the commission could lead to chaos on campuses.

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Members of various organisations stage a protest against the new UGC anti-discrimination regulations in Ranchi

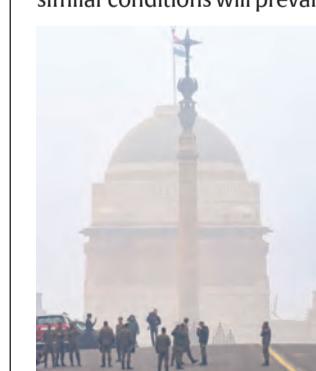
PTI

Rain, thunder, hail lash Delhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

Heavy rain and thunderstorms battered parts of the national Capital on Tuesday, dragging temperatures down sharply and triggering a deterioration in air quality. Hailstorms were also reported in some parts of outer Delhi. The national Capital recorded its highest January rainfall in four years since 2022 on Tuesday. The weather department forecasts similar conditions will prevail

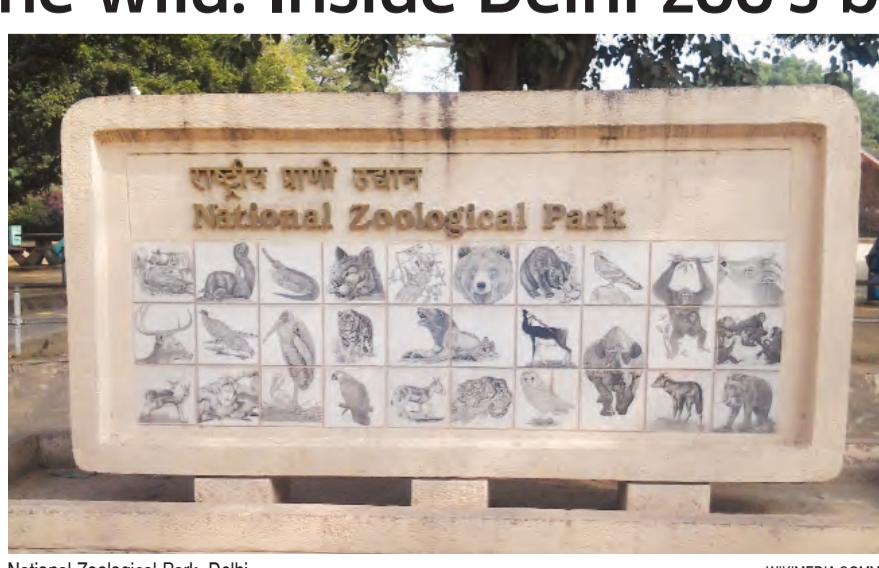


Security on Kartavya Path on a rainy winter day, in New Delhi

over Delhi-NCR on Wednesday, with wind speeds expected to touch around 60 km/hr.

With the latest spell of rain, Delhi's monthly total rainfall for January has risen to 24 mm, making it the highest January total since 2022. The wettest January day in recent years remains January 8, 2022, when the city recorded 40.6 mm of rainfall.

CONTINUED ON ▶ P4



National Zoological Park, Delhi

Zoological Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre will play a significant advisory role, with many of its recommendations incorporated into the project blueprint," the official said.

Elaborating on the makeover plan, he said a major focus would be the complete renovation of the zoo's front gate, including new pick-up and drop-off zones, a visitors' centre and upgraded entry facilities.

Additionally, glass viewing panels will be installed at animal enclosures to provide the public with a clearer and closer view of the animals.

CONTINUED ON ▶ P4



Steady rain, VIP-related curbs bring city traffic to standstill

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

Traffic came to a crawl in several parts of the Capital on Tuesday as rain lashed the city and multiple restrictions remained in force in view of the India-EU summit, movement of VIPs, and related events. Visuals from different areas showed steady rain reducing visibility and slowing vehicular movement, with waterlogging reported in some stretches.

Commuters, especially office-goers, said the combination of VIP-related curbs and rain significantly increased travel time during peak traffic hours.

"Here we go again, Delhi. VIPs are allowed to move

smoothly, while there are traffic curbs for the rest of us. It's a tradition at this point. What do ordinary people do?" a commuter stuck in central Delhi traffic said.

Traffic congestion was reported from different parts of the city, including Outer Ring Road, Delhi-Meerut Expressway towards Sarai Kale Khan, Ghazipur, Mehrauli-Badarpur Road, Bhikaji Cama Place, ITO, Rajghat, Janpath and surrounding areas.

The Delhi Traffic Police had issued advisories announcing special arrangements due to the India-EU summit and a dinner for European Union (EU) delegates at Rashtrapati Bhavan later in the evening, along with visits by digni-



Vehicles are stuck in a traffic jam near Kashmiri Gate in New Delhi

PANKAJ KUMAR

ties to Rajghat. Several key roads in Lutyens' Delhi and central parts of the city were either restricted for parking and halting or subject to diversions.

A commuter, who travels daily from Ghaziabad to Connaught Place for work, said his usual travel time almost doubled.

"I was rushing to work but met severe traffic jams on my way to Connaught Place. While it usually takes me around 35 minutes to get to my workplace, today it took me over an hour," he said.

Earlier, the Delhi Traffic Police has issued an advisory urging commuters to plan their journeys in advance. According to the advisory, special traffic arrangements

will be in place till late evening for the high-level engagements. No vehicle will be allowed to halt or park on a number of key stretches till 5 pm, including Janpath Road, Windsor Place, W-Point, Mathura Road, Bhairon Marg and the C-Hexagon near India Gate.

Vehicles found parked on these roads will be towed, and owners will be prosecuted. Towed vehicles will be kept at the Traffic Pit on Kali Bari Mandir Marg and in front of the Bhairon Mandir Traffic Pit, the police said.

A second phase of restrictions was enforced from 5.30 pm to 8.30 pm to facilitate the movement of dignitaries for the dinner at Rashtrapati Bhavan. During this period,

DJB PLANS BOREWELL SURVEY

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

In a bid to address future drinking water needs of the national Capital, the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) is planning an extensive survey of borewells to ascertain the volume of groundwater extraction.

According to officials, with limited water sources of its own, the city's dependence on groundwater is likely to increase in the future, prompting the need for a new borewell policy.

"By 2051, the population projection is 3.21 crore for which approximately 1,566 MGD of water will be required. With no new sources of water expected to emerge in the near future, the supply needs would be primarily dependent on groundwater," a Government official said.

Woman convicted for culpable homicide attempt, negligence over dog attack

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

A city court has convicted a woman for attempting culpable homicide and negligent conduct with respect to an animal after her pet dog attacked a former employee, causing grievous and life-threatening injuries to the victim's face and neck.

Additional Sessions Judge Samar Vishal held Rajni Singh guilty under Sections 308 (attempt to commit culpable homicide) and 289 IPC (negligent conduct with respect to animals), while acquitting her of the charge under Section 509 IPC (acts intended to insult the modesty of a woman).

The core incident, namely the dog bite causing grievous and life-threatening injuries to the complainant, stands proved beyond reasonable doubt through the unim-



disfigured and caused the loss of two teeth.

The victim also had to undergo vaccination, and upon request, Singh refused to assist her financially with the medical costs. Accepting the prosecution's version, the court noted that the victim's testimony was "clear, cogent and consistent" and was corroborated by unimpeachable medical evidence.

"The complainant is an injured witness, and the law accords a higher degree of credibility to the testimony of an injured witness, as her presence at the spot is natural and her injuries provide an in-built guarantee of truthfulness," the court said.

The court emphasised that the testimony of a sole witness does not become unreliable just because other witnesses turned hostile or do not support the prosecution's version.

Assembly Secretariat writes to former leaders over Privileges Committee report on Phansi Ghar issue

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

The Delhi Assembly Secretariat on Tuesday wrote to former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia, ex-Speaker Ram Niwas Goel and former deputy speaker Rakhi Birla regarding the findings of the Privileges Committee in connection with the "Phansi Ghar" issue.

According to the Secretariat, the letters convey the findings of the Privileges Committee after a detailed examination of the matter. The committee concluded that the concerned former office-bearers deliberately failed to appear before it despite repeated notices, adequate opportunity, and the absence of any stay or direction from a court. The committee has recommended that appropriate action be taken by the House in view of its findings.

The letters ask the four



Arvind Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia

appear before it on the scheduled dates of November 13, 2025, and November 20, 2025, despite being given sufficient opportunity.

It was recalled that the Delhi Legislative Assembly had earlier adopted the First Report of the Privileges Committee after a motion agreeing with the report was presented and passed in the House on January 6, 2026. During the same proceedings, the House also approved a separate motion directing Arvind Kejriwal, Ram Niwas Goel, Manish Sisodia, and Rakhi Birla to appear in person before the Privileges Committee as and when summoned.

The House resolution had specifically instructed the four leaders to explain their absence from the Committee's sittings and to place on record any information or documents in their possession regarding the alleged "Phansi Ghar" in the Assembly precincts.

the former chief minister, the former speaker, the former deputy chief minister, and the former deputy speaker to depose before it and provide information or documents related to the allegation.

The Secretariat said the Privileges Committee examined the entire sequence of events, including the notices issued, correspondence exchanged, the legal position, and established parliamentary procedures, before arriving at its conclusion. The Committee noted that the individuals concerned did not

Bharat Parv is a 'parv' of adopting 'Vocal for Local', promoting tourism, respecting diversity and to give new height to 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat'.

 Narendra Modi
Prime Minister

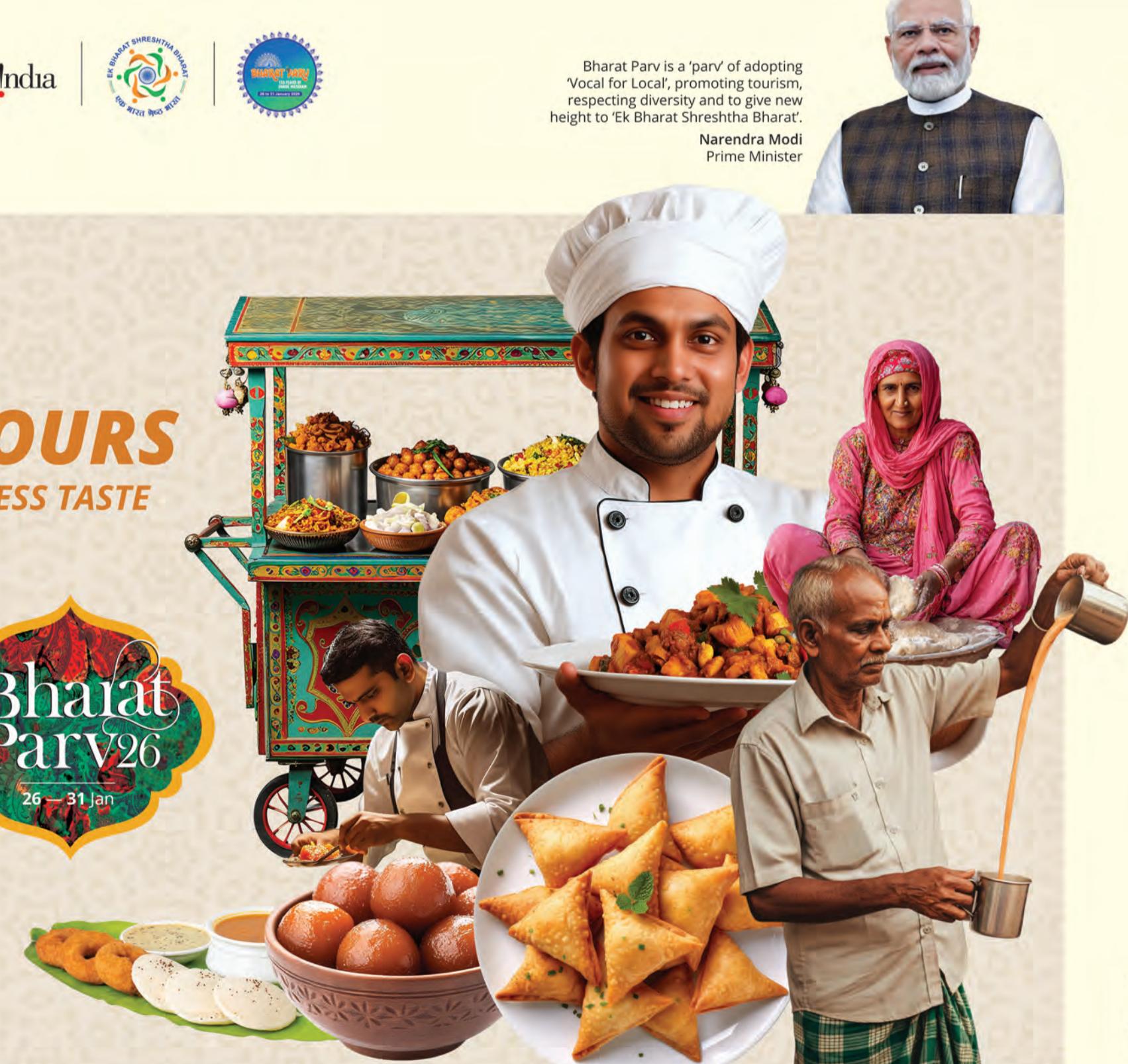

A FEAST OF FLAVOURS A LEGACY OF TIMELESS TASTE

The nation's culinary heritage comes together in one grand celebration. From the spice-laden kitchens of the South to the hearty platters of the North, from coastal delicacies to the authentic tastes of the North East, it is a feast of flavours that tells the story of India. Come, savour the legacy of taste that binds us forever.



Red Fort, Delhi
28th - 31st January
12 Noon to 9 PM

Entry free.
Please carry your Identity Card.





BJP, JD(S) protest alleged insult to Karnataka Governor

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Bengaluru



Karnataka BJP President BY Vijayendra, and other party leaders stage a protest at Vidhana Soudha premises PTI

Opposition BJP and JD(S) staged a protest in front of the Mahatma Gandhi statue at Vidhana Soudha on Tuesday, demanding the suspension of some Congress legislators for allegedly "insulting and disrespecting" Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot during the joint sitting of the State legislature.

Raising anti-Congress Government slogans, the protesters demanded justice. They also demanded the removal of Excise Minister RB Timmapur over the alleged Excise Department scam, law and order failures and inadequate security for women in the state. Leaders of the Opposition, both in the Assembly and Council — R Ashoka and Chalavadi Narayana swamy, State BJP chief BY Vijayendra, BJP MLC CT Ravi, JD(S) leaders Suresh Babu and SL Bhojegowda, along with MLAs and MLCs of both parties, were part of the protest. Speaking to the media here, BJP State President Vijayendra demanded that a thorough

investigation must be conducted into the excise scam involving more than ₹6,000 crore. The probe should be carried out either by a sitting High Court judge or by the CBI, he added.

Vijayendra alleged that the entire country has witnessed Congress "goons" behaving in a hooligan-like manner towards the Governor inside the House.

Condemning the insult and alleged misconduct shown towards the Governor during the joint session, he said, "The (Congress) government is now trying to justify those actions."

In the Karnataka Assembly, the Governor on January 22 refused to read the State-prepared address to a joint session of the State legislature and concluded

his customary speech in three lines, evoking a sharp reaction from the Congress Government in the state.

As the Governor proceeded towards the exit door after concluding his three-line speech, some ruling party legislators, including MLC Hariprasad, tried to gherao him by shouting slogans. They were removed by the security staff.

During the inspection, it was observed that plaster had fallen off at several

places, the flooring was damaged at multiple spots, and the windows in the classrooms were broken.

Regarding the school being constructed in Sector-28, Rohini, Sood directed the officials of the PWD and the Education Department to complete the work at the earliest and to pay special attention to the quality of materials being used.



dilapidated condition, it had to be declared dangerous in 2024. The Education Minister was also informed that sub-standard construction material had been used in the construction of the school, as a result of which the building deteriorated within just a few years.

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He noted that the agreement would deliver unprecedented market access for Indian goods and services, strengthen resilient supply chains and expand mobility opportunities for Indian professionals in Europe.

"This historic agreement will facilitate easier access for our farmers and small enterprises to European markets, create new opportunities in manufacturing, and deepen cooperation across our services sectors," PM Modi said in a joint press statement with European Council President Antonio Costa and von der Leyen.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said the FTA, along with parallel agreements on security, defence and mobility, marked a decisive step in advancing India-EU relations. "These agreements constitute the foundation of a broader, deeper and stronger partnership and will help derisk the global order," he said.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal termed the pact a "balanced, fair and win-win" agreement. He said the FTA would be fast-tracked for legal scrubbing and translated into all 24 EU languages, with the aim of bringing it into force within calendar year 2026.

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri described the summit outcomes as "deeply strategic," reflecting the growing convergence between India and the EU in an increasingly multipolar world.

Under the FTA, over 99 per cent of Indian exports by value will receive preferential access to the EU market. Labour-intensive sectors such as textiles, apparel, leather, footwear, gems and jewellery, marine products and handicrafts will see tariffs of up to 26 per cent eliminated, covering exports worth around \$33 billion.

Services trade has received strong commitments, with enhanced access across key sectors including IT, professional services, education and finance, alongside a future-ready mobility framework for professionals and students.

With India-EU goods trade at \$136.54 billion and services trade at \$83.10 billion in 2024-25, officials said the FTA positions India as a trusted, forward-looking global partner in line with its Viksit Bharat 2047 vision.

Landmark India-EU FTA seals mother-of-all deals

President and CEO, Adani Defence & Aerospace.

Embraer has a long-standing and growing presence in India, with nearly 50 aircraft across 11 models currently operating in the country in commercial, defence, and business aviation segments. The Indian Air Force operates Embraer Legacy 600 aircraft and the 'Netra' AEW&C platform based on the ERJ145, while Star Air operates a fleet of E175 and ERJ145 aircraft. Adani Defence & Aerospace is India's largest integrated private defence and aerospace company, developing critical capabilities across domains in line with national security priorities and global requirements. With the country's largest MRO ecosystem and a rapidly expanding pilot training platform, the company is strengthening India's aviation value chain end to end, spanning aircraft, unmanned systems, avionics, weapons, and sustainment, with a focus on long-term capability development and self-reliance.

Rain, thunder, hail lash Delhi

At Safdarjung, considered Delhi's base station, the maximum temperature settled at 16.9 degrees Celsius, 5.2 degrees Celsius below normal, while the minimum temperature was recorded at 8.0 degrees Celsius, 0.4 degrees Celsius below normal.

"Although the conditions for a cold day were met, with the maximum temperature dropping 4.5 to 6.4 degrees below normal and the minimum falling below 10 degrees Celsius, the day cannot be classified as a cold day, as temperatures are expected to rise again tomorrow. This is the first day of satisfying the criteria," an IMD official said.

For Wednesday, the minimum temperature is expected to rise to 12 degrees Celsius, and the maximum temperature is set to increase to 18 degrees Celsius. The air quality worsened during the day despite rainfall, with Delhi's 24-hour average AQI settling in the 'very poor' category at 336, according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). Delhi transport contributed 13.2 per cent to the city's pollution load, followed by Delhi and peripheral industries at 9.2 per cent, residential sources at 3.5 per cent, construction at 1.6 per cent and waste burning at 1.2 per cent, according to the Decision Support System data.

Adani, Embraer to build aircraft in India

The proposed ecosystem is expected to cater to domestic demand while generating significant direct and indirect employment across engineering, manufacturing, logistics, and support services.

"We are shaping India's regional transport aircraft ecosystem—a bold stride toward Aatmanirbhar aviation that bridges urban-rural divides, generates high-skill employment, and elevates India's position in the global aerospace industry," said Ashish Rajvanshi,

which the Motion of Thanks will be discussed and passed. A discussion on the Union Budget will also be taken up. After a recess, the Houses will reconvene on March 9 and the session will conclude on April 2.

India's energy sector offers \$500bn...

He added that reforms such as reducing No-Go areas and incorporating industry feedback into laws and regulations would improve profitability for investors. Stating that India's large and expanding refining capacity is a key advantage, he said the country currently ranks second globally and is poised to become the world leader.

Singh said he was deeply hurt by what he described as recent attempts to divide the country on the basis of caste and religion, allegedly emanating from the holy land of Prayagraj. Singh said he was stepping down in support of the

honourable prime minister, honourable chief minister and honourable home minister and in support of the Constitution of India," he said in conversation to his wife which he got recorded and apparently got shared on social media.

Singh referred to statements

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BJP chief Nitin Nabin in Bengal for two-day visit



BJP national president Nitin Nabin arrived in West Bengal on Tuesday for a two-day visit, his first to the State after assuming the charge. His maiden visit as the BJP chief holds significance as the Assembly elections in West Bengal are due in a few months.

Tripura CM rejects Roman script for Kokborok

Chief Minister Manik Saha on Tuesday rejected the demand for introducing Roman script for the Kokborok language, spoken by nearly 19 tribes of the State. His comment comes in the backdrop of the demand by the Tipra Motha Party (TMP), an ally of the ruling BJP, ahead of the elections to the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAACD).



2027 elections: Goa Congress leaders meet Kharge, Rahul



A Goa Congress delegation on Tuesday met top party leaders, including AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge and MP Rahul Gandhi, in New Delhi, and discussed ways to strengthen the organisation and deepen public engagement ahead of the 2027 Assembly polls in the State.

Mizoram aims to contribute 1% to GDP by 2047: Lalduhoma

Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma on Tuesday said that his Government is taking steps to ensure that the northeastern State contributes one per cent to the country's GDP by 2047. During a meeting with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) resident representative Angela Lusigi in Aizawl, Lalduhoma thanked the UNDP for its continued support and contributions to Mizoram and urged the agency to further expand its engagement in the State, sources in the CMO said.



Rajnath stresses on indigenisation at DRDO meet

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

Given the fast-changing battlefield scenario, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday here urged the scientists to keep in mind the theory of 'survival of the fittest' and not just 'survival of the fittest'. Making this assertion while addressing the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), he also said, "the country that thinks, decides and deploys technology quickly stays ahead."

He also underlined that "Technology is changing rapidly. Any technology that is new today may become irrelevant in 4-5 years."

Stressing the crucial aspect of indigenisation, Rajnath Singh said, "Operation Sindoor demonstrated that indigenous systems are strengthening India's operational readiness," as he commended the crucial role of DRDO in achieving self-reliance that has become a national mindset under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh addressing the felicitation ceremony of DRDO's best performing scientists and technical personnel in New Delhi

tance of reducing the time between research and prototype, prototype to testing, and testing to deployment, Rajnath Singh asserted that "timely induction in the Armed Forces should be the biggest parameter of our performance".

He pointed out that the DRDO usually focuses on design and prototyping, and production is the role of industries, emphasising that it is necessary to bridge this gap.

He stated that, similar to international models, a co-development approach can be adopted, where the industry is involved from the early stages, from design to production.

Describing the scientists, engineers and technicians as the real strength of the DRDO, Rajnath Singh underlined the need to provide them with the opportunities to learn, while also giving them leadership responsibilities and assurances that their ideas will be heard. "There are failures in research; we must learn from them," he said.

Addressing DRDO's Best Performing Scientists and Technical Persons, who witnessed the 77th Republic Day Parade as Special Guests, he stated that DRDO's technology was effectively used on the battlefield during Operation Sindoor, and it is

playing a key role in the rapid transformation of the defence sector based on the indigenisation pursuit.

The defence minister urged the DRDO to move beyond the sectors where the private sector has already developed its capabilities,

suggesting the creation of a separate wing within the organisation that takes risks in sectors where the chances of success may seem low. However, if success is achieved, it will be historic, he added.

Underscoring the impor-

Government wants to push country back to era of *maharajas* : Rahul

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ New Delhi

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday alleged that the motive behind Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "intent to destroy" MGNREGA is to strip workers of their right to negotiate wages, strip panchayats of their power, and push the country back to the era of kings when all power was concentrated in the hands of a few.

Gandhi shared a video of his recent interaction with MGNREGA workers on X and said the same workers who proclaimed that MGNREGA changed their lives were now saying that the Modi Government is "enslaving workers".

In his post in Hindi accompanying the video, Gandhi said, "What is the motive behind Modi ji's intent to destroy MGNREGA? To strip workers of their right to negotiate daily wages; to strip panchayats of their power



and tie their hands; to strip states of their authority and centralise power in Delhi; to push the country back to the era of kings and maharajas, where all power and wealth were concentrated in the hands of a few."

Minimum wages, a guarantee of year-round work, the right to work with freedom and dignity, "these are what the country's millions of labourers were proclaiming in one voice: 'MGNREGA changed our lives'. It took decades to bring about these changes," Gandhi, the Leader

of Opposition in Lok Sabha, said. Today, those same labourers are saying, "The Modi Government is a Government that enslaves workers," he said. In the video, an MGNREGA worker could be seen telling Gandhi that this Government is "enslaving workers".

The MGNREGA workers talk about how the law helped them in providing livelihood security, but the Government was intending to "destroy" the "transformative" initiative. The Congress has been demanding that the Government withdraw the new *Viksit Bharat* — Guarantee for Rozgar Ajeewika Mission (Gramin) or VB-G RAM G Act and fully restore the UPA-era MGNREGA.

On January 10, the Congress launched the 'MGNREGA Bachao Sangram', a 45-day nationwide campaign against the repeal of the UPA-era Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

Sukhu meets Gadkari, seeks central aid for Himachal roads

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ New Delhi

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu on Tuesday met Union Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari, seeking adequate financial support for the maintenance of roads and bridges in the State, according to a statement.

In a separate meeting, the chief minister also met Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav and urged him to recognise 29.5 per cent forest and tree cover for all calculations relating to forest and ecology or other allocations.

Calling on Gadkari, the chief minister held detailed discussions about strengthening the road infrastructure in the State.

The Union minister approved ₹200 crore in principle under CRIF for Chail-Neripul-Yashwant Nagar-Ochghat road, which would facilitate the apple growers immensely in Himachal, a statement from the Himachal Government said. The chief minister apprised him about the progress of the Shimla-Mataur national highway, which provides connectivity to eight districts, including the State Capital.

He requested the introduction of the maximum number of tunnels between Shimla and Shalaghhat and Bhager to Hamirpur, in his meeting with the environment minister,



keeping in view the hilly terrain and geological sensitivity of the area.

Sukhu said the Chil Bahal to Pucca Broh section has suffered severe damage during monsoons at various locations and has not been strengthened since the last five to six years.

He informed the minister that the stretch was important as it is a key access route to major religious destinations.

He urged the minister to issue necessary directions for handing over Chil Bahal to the Pucca Baroh section of NH 03 to the NH wing of HPPWD for carrying out development and maintenance activities. He also requested the early sanctioning of ₹38.37 crore by NHAI.

The Union minister gave his nod for the amount and assured full support to the State Government, the statement claimed.

In his meeting with the environment minister,

Sukhu apprised him about the discrepancy registered in the actual tree cover of 29.5 per cent against the officially recorded 27.99 per cent. He said that this arises due to the non-inclusion of trees outside forest (ToF) in the consolidated representation of the State's forest and tree cover.

The chief minister said that the State also exercises strict regulatory control over harvesting private lands under different statuses, for which they don't receive any credit from the Central Government.

He emphasised including this 1.5 per cent component in the forest cover in order to recognise the State's true ecological and forestry contribution. Sukhu urged for recognising 29.5 per cent forest and tree cover for all calculations relating to forest and ecology under the Finance Commission or other allocations from the Centre Government.

The fifth annual survey of aquatic reptiles, with a special focus on freshwater turtles and tortoises of the landscape, was conducted by the Park authorities in collaboration with the India Turtle Conservation Programme (ITCP) from January 14 to 18.

The Brahmaputra River supports one of the richest biodiversities in the region and is recognised globally as a freshwater biodiversity hotspot

India-Italy ties destined to deepen: Italian President Mattarella

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

Delhi and Rome share fundamental values, such as democracy and respect for the rule of law, and relations between India and Italy are set on a path of rapid expansion and destined to deepen further to mutually benefit both countries, Italian President Sergio Mattarella has said.

In his greetings to President Droupadi Murmu on the 77th Republic Day of India, Mattarella hoped that the "synergies between our countries" may be strengthened in every sector of the bilateral agenda, as well as within the framework of India-European Union ties,



which stand to "gain greatly" from new economic and trade agreements. An English translation of the text of the greetings, dated January 26, was shared by the Italian Embassy on Tuesday.

"On the occasion of

Republic Day, I would like to extend to you, Madam President, my warmest wishes for a prosperous future for the Republic of India. Relations between India and Italy are set on a path of rapid expansion, des-

tined to deepen further to our mutual benefit," Mattarella said. The bilateral partnership, also thanks to the implementation of the Joint Strategic Action Plan, is "enriched every day" by new opportunities for cooperation, whether through "joint projects between our respective economic operators, scientific collaborations, or increasingly intense and fruitful contacts between our civil societies", the message read.

Mattarella also asserted that Delhi and Rome "share fundamental values", such as democracy and respect for the rule of law.

"They also pursue multiple converging interests, beginning with the protec-

tion of a rules-based international order, the peaceful pursuit of security and stability along the Indo Mediterranean arc, and effective multilateral management of the major global challenges," he said.

"Building on these foundations, I hope that synergies between our countries "drawing impetus from frequent exchanges of visits at the highest institutional and political levels" may be strengthened in every sector of the bilateral agenda, as well as within the framework of relations between India and the European Union, which stand to gain

greatly from new economic and trade agreements," Mattarella said.



and Turtle Priority Area. The Kaziranga landscape alone harbours 17 species of freshwater turtles and tortoises out of the 32 species recorded in India.

The rapid boat survey covered a 174

km stretch of the Brahmaputra River flowing through KNPTR, and documented a total of 945 freshwater turtles — 876 hardshell and 69 softshell — belonging to seven species.

There were 55 direct sightings of hard-shell turtles and 13 sightings of soft-shell turtles, including four Black softshell turtles.

The Black Softshell Turtle, a critically endangered species endemic to the Brahmaputra basin, faces severe threats from habitat loss, predation, and over-exploitation, but conservation efforts in Assam's Kaziranga National Park and Nagshankar Temple in Biswanath district offer hope, the official said.

In addition to turtles, the survey recorded 92 species of birds, along with the smooth-coated otter, Gangetic river dolphin, and the iconic 'big five' megafauna of Kaziranga Tiger Reserve—the tiger, greater one-horned rhinoceros, elephant, swamp deer, and wild water buffalo.

What does Republic Day mean when Constitutional rights are not given? ask Wangchuk's wife Gitanjali

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ New Delhi

As the 77th Republic Day was celebrated across the country with displays of military might and cultural heritage, HIAL co-founder and wife of climate activist Sonam Wangchuk, Gitanjali J Angmo, said it was the first time she did not feel motivated to watch the parade.

Questioning the meaning of Republic Day when rights guaranteed in the Constitution were not being granted, Angmo pointed out that it has been four months since Wangchuk was "unlawfully" arrested. "It is 4 months... i20 days of Sonam



Wangchuk's unlawful and illegal detention! For the first time since I can remember, I did not feel motivated to watch the Republic Day parade on TV, which my mom and I had never missed," Angmo said.

"It is sad, but I don't know how to feel proud of what is showcased anymore! What

to believe and what not to! Where is the truth lying in all this narrative of the rise of India amongst the great nations of the world?" she said.

Wangchuk, a Magsaysay Award-winning climate activist and educator, was detained under the stringent National Security Act (NSA) on September 26, two days after protests demanding Statehood and Sixth Schedule status for Ladakh left four people dead and 90 injured in the Union territory.

"When Constitutional safeguards available are not given to a region that legitimately deserves it, how is it Republic

Day? The Constitution guarantees to put out a point of view in democracy... When you do that, you are jailed... There is no respect for the Constitution that we are celebrating," Angmo told media.

"How much of taxpayers' money is spent on pageantry. It is for the nation, so that all can feel proud of our achievements... But has to be built on a solid foundation. When the foundation is shaky, you can't inspire people based on pageantry," she said.

Angmo, the co-founder of the Himalayan Institute of Alternatives Ladakh (HIAL), said there is a "certain disillusionment".

Justice Varma impeachment underway: Rijiju

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

The process to impeach Allahabad High Court judge Yashwant Varma is underway and the Government is awaiting the report of a three-member committee set up by Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla to probe charges against him, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said on Tuesday.

Birla set up the committee on August 12 last year to probe corruption charges against Justice Varma after admitting a multi-party notice for his removal.

Justice Varma was repatriated from the Delhi High Court to the Allahabad High Court after burnt wads of currency notes were found

at his official residence on March 14.

Asked whether the matter will be taken up before the upcoming Budget session of Parliament beginning Wednesday, Rijiju refused to comment further on the issue.

"As per the procedure, the matter has been referred to the committee constituted by the Speaker with the consent of the House and the process is on," he told reporters.

"While the committee is discharging its duty, we are waiting for the report to come. Before that, I cannot pass any comment," Rijiju said.



Kiren Rijiju

Madras High Court Chief Justice Manindra Mohan Shrivastava and senior Karnataka High Court advocate BV Acharya.

After referring to relevant laws and judgements of the Supreme Court, the Delhi High Court chief justice found that the charges against

Justice Varma were of serious nature and followed it up with the "in-house procedure".

Officials aware of the procedure to appoint and remove Supreme Court and high court judges pointed out that while defending his case before lawmakers in any House of Parliament, Justice Varma can announce that he is quitting and his verbal statement will be considered as his resignation.

If Justice Varma decides to resign, he will be entitled for pension and other benefits entitled to a retired high court judge. But if he is removed by Parliament, he will be deprived of pension and other benefits, the officials noted.



States Focus



PM, CM URGED TO FAST-TRACK BENGALURU SUBURBAN RAIL

A citizens' organisation has urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to personally intervene to expedite Corridor-1 of the BSRP. The Bengaluru Suburban Rail Project (BSRP) was commissioned in 2020 to connect Bengaluru with its suburbs and satellite towns via dedicated rail corridors – similar to suburban rail systems in Mumbai, Chennai, and Kolkata. The project with an estimated cost of Rs 15,767 crore was supposed to be completed in December 2025, but now March 2030 is the fresh deadline given by the Rail Infrastructure Development Company (Karnataka) (K-RIDE), a joint venture of the Ministry of Railways and the Karnataka Government.



LOKESH MARKS 3RD ANNIVERSARY OF YUVAGALAM PADAYATRA

Andhra Pradesh IT Minister Nara Lokesh issued a message on Tuesday on the third anniversary of his 'Yuvagalam Padayatra', recalling the political walk undertaken ahead of the 2024 general elections.

Launched on January 27, 2023, the padayatra began from Kuppam in Chittoor and was originally planned to cover over 4,000 km. However, Lokesh completed over 3,100 km across 226 days.

J&K Speaker to convene all-party meeting ahead of Budget Session

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ New Delhi

An all-parties meeting will be convened ahead of the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly's Budget Session, scheduled to begin next month, Speaker Abdul Rahim Rather said on Tuesday, urging legislators to make effective use of the proceedings by raising public issues for redressal.

The 27-day session will commence on February 2 with an address of Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha. The Omar Abdullah-led Government will present its second Budget on February 6. This fifth session of the Assembly will conclude on April 4. "Preparations to ensure a smooth assembly session are underway."

We have already held meetings with various departments. An all-party meeting will be convened



before the session starts on February 2. The Business Advisory Committee meeting is also scheduled before the Lieutenant Governor's address," Rather said. The session will be held in three phases, the first before the start of Ramzan and the remaining two after Eid-ul-Fitr in March and April. Ramzan is expected to begin on February 18 or 19, depending on the sighting of the moon. According to the provisional calendar issued by the assembly secretariat, February will have 18 days of

Govt ignoring Sanatan Dharma will not return to power: Shah

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Ahmedabad

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday said that with the blessings of saints, a Government that fails to uphold the values of Sanatan Dharma would never return to power in the country.

Addressing a gathering of the Swaminarayan sect in Gandhinagar, Shah said that followers of various Sanatan traditions waited for a long time after Independence, hoping for a Government that would give due importance to Sanatan Dharma and govern as per its principles.

"I am confident that, with the blessings of saints, a Government that disappoints followers of the Sanatan Dharma will never come to power again in this country," he said. The event marked 200 years of "Shikshapatri", a sacred code of conduct containing 212 Sanskrit verses written by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in 1826. It serves as a foundational guide for Swaminarayan Sampraday's followers, out-



lining moral, social, and spiritual principles, including non-violence, purity, diet, and daily duties.

Shah said the son of Gujarat, Narendra Modi, has been leading the country for the past 11 years.

He said a temple of Lord Ram, which was destroyed more than 550 years ago, has been built under the leadership of PM Modi, fulfilling the desire of people who waited for centuries for this moment. He said various decisions and initiatives taken by the Modi government over the past 11 years reflected a commitment to

India's cultural and spiritual heritage. "Article 370 was removed, Triple talaq was abolished, and a Common Civil Code has been initiated for all religions," Shah said. He said efforts had been made to revive ancient traditions and promote holistic well-being. "Yoga, Ayurveda, cow protection, and the restoration of major pilgrimage sites such as Badrinath, Kedarnath, Kashi Vishwanath, and now Somnath, have been undertaken in these 11 years," Shah added. He hailed the contributions made by Lord Swaminarayan to Gujarat and Indian society, describing

him as a guiding force during the British era. "Lord Swaminarayan travelled across India on foot before settling in Gujarat. At a time when society was suffering from many vices and addictions, he worked to organise and reform the community," the Gandhinagar MP said.

Highlighting the importance of the "Shikshapatri" authored by Lord Swaminarayan, Shah said it captured the essence of major Hindu scriptures.

"It is like a moral constitution for life. It provides practical guidance on self-discipline, social conduct, compassion, non-violence, and a sense of duty," he said, adding that the text is relevant today as it advises people to maintain transparency in financial dealings and personal conduct to avoid disputes. Shah further said Lord Swaminarayan strongly recommended social reforms by encouraging girls' education, opposing animal sacrifice, and launching campaigns against casteism and untouchability.

Mann, Saini discuss SYL canal issue

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Chandigarh

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann and his Haryana counterpart Nayab Singh Saini on Tuesday discussed the long-pending Sutlej-Yamuna Link (SYL) canal issue "in a cordial atmosphere" and decided that the officers of both states will deliberate on this issue and brief them on its progress.

After an hour-long meeting, which was held in a hotel here, both the chief ministers later held a joint media briefing with Mann calling Haryana "Punjab's brother, not an enemy."

Mann also stated that there should be a resolution to the long-pending issue, though he emphasised, "Kisi ka had nahi marna chahiye, na hi Punjab ka, na hi Haryana ka" (Rights of neither Punjab, nor of Haryana should be affected). The SYL canal issue has been a bone of contention between the two states for the past several years. Last May, the Supreme Court directed the two states to



cooperate with the Centre for an amicable solution to the decades-old dispute.

The top court recently listed the matter for hearing in April. During the media briefing, Haryana CM Saini said the discussions took place in a very positive atmosphere. And when discussions happen in a good atmosphere, they yield fruitful results, Saini said.

"Today's meeting was held as per the directions of the Supreme Court," he said. Earlier too, a meeting was held under Union Jal Shakti Minister C R Patil's chairmanship and talks were held in a positive atmosphere.

Only Mamata truly countering BJP in India: Akhilesh Yadav

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Kolkata

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Tuesday hailed West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee as the only opposition leader in the entire India who is "effectively countering the BJP", and said that the saffron camp is now aiming for a "respectable defeat" in the upcoming State elections.

Yadav, accompanied by his party's senior leader Kiranmoy Nanda, met Banerjee at the State secretariat Nabanna amid a

charged political atmosphere in the poll-bound state over the controversial SIR exercise, and lauded the TMC supremo for her "courage in countering the BJP's onslaughts".

"If in the entire country, someone is effectively countering the BJP, it is West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. And the BJP can only be truly opposed by the way she is doing it," the former Uttar Pradesh CM told reporters after the meeting, which lasted for about 40 minutes, with Banerjee standing next to him.

Yadav's statement assumes

significance in the wake of several regional parties, which are partners in the anti-BJP nation-wide INDIA alliance, having in the past alleged "big-brotherly attitude" against the platform's biggest constituent, the Congress. Yadav's comment on Tuesday, political observers said, was not only an applause for Banerjee's political stance but also an indirect barb against the Congress, which has failed to post notable poll victories against the saffron camp since the 2024 general elections. The former UPCM alleged that

PTI

West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee with Samajwadi Party President Akhilesh Yadav during a meeting, at Nabanna

PTI

the BJP was in cahoots with the EC in conducting the SIR exercise, which aimed at destroying the secular fabric of India. "The BJP's fight here is a fight for defeat; they only want to embrace defeat with a bit of respect," he said.

Asserting that Banerjee would continue to receive people's support in her fight against the BJP, Yadav extended his party's aid to the TMC's endeavour in Bengal.

"I believe that the secular forces, the brotherhood we share that forms the identity of this nation, will come out on top.

TN will continue to create ecosystem for women to study: Stalin

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Chennai

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Tuesday said that the State will continue to build infrastructure to ensure that every woman can study, live independently, become an entrepreneur and live without fear.

Addressing the two-day Global Women's Summit here, he said women must play a key role in achieving the DMK Government's vision of making Tamil Nadu a USD one trillion economy.

Highlighting initiatives taken by his Government for women's welfare, the CM described the 'Kalaignar Magalir Urimai Thittam' under which Rs 1,000 is provided every month to 1.3 crore women heads of households as a "jewel in the crown". "It is a historic achievement. Today, other states in India are following this model. The scheme has boosted women's self-respect, economic independence and self-confi-

dence," he said.

Claiming that Tamil Nadu has the highest number of women in the workforce in the country, Stalin said that whenever a new company expresses interest in investing in the State, his first question is how many jobs would be created for women.

"Many private companies have begun reserving a specific percentage of jobs for women. We should not be satisfied merely because more women are entering the workforce. Women must progress on par with men and find their place in emerging sectors," he said.

Observing that a nation cannot progress without the advancement of women, Stalin said the idea was strongly emphasised by rationalist leader EV Ramasamy, popularly known as Periyar.

"Following in his footsteps, Kalaignar (former CM M Karunanidhi) implemented several schemes for women's development," he said, citing initiatives such as equal rights

for women in family property, the induction of women police personnel, and reservations for women in local bodies. Under the 'Dravidian model' of governance, Stalin said the Government was implementing several schemes, including 'Vidyal Payanam' (free bus travel for women), the 'Pudhumai Penn scheme' - under which Rs 1,000 is provided until graduation to ensure girls complete their education - 'Naan Mudhalvan' and the establish-

ment of Thozhi hostels.

The 'Naan Mudhalvan scheme' is aimed at improving the employability of students and youth.

The Thozhi hostels scheme seeks to address the challenges faced by women migrating from their hometowns to work in cities.

Managed by the Department of Social Welfare and Women Development, the hostels provide safe, affordable and quality accommodation for working

women across the State.

"Through the TN-RISE initiative, women entrepreneurs have emerged even in rural areas, and the number of women-led startups has increased," the CM said.

Stating that the government provides technology support and skill training under the TN-WE-SAFE project, Stalin said the initiative focuses on women's safety, as large-scale workforce participation by women is possible only in a safe society. "That is why Tamil Nadu has the highest number of working women in factories in India. We also ensure women's safety through the 181 emergency helpline and the Kavalan SOS mobile application," he said.

Reiterating his commitment, Stalin said the Government would continue to work towards creating an ecosystem where every woman can study, live independently, earn a dignified wage, become an entrepreneur and live without fear.

Congress holds protests across Kerala over Sabarimala gold loss

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Thiruvananthapuram

The Congress on Tuesday held protest marches to District Collectorate across the State on various issues, especially the alleged misappropriation of gold from the Lord Ayyappa temple at Sabarimala. In the State Capital, the Congress held a protest outside the Secretariat where Leader of Opposition in the Assembly VD Satheesan termed as "utter nonsense" the recent accusations by Ministers V Sivakutty and MB Rajesh against Congress leader Sonia Gandhi in connection with the Sabarimala gold loss.

He urged citizens to immediately report any incident of harassment, misbehaviour, violence or crime against women to 'Haryana 112' or the nearest police station.

He further appealed to citizens to adopt sensitive behaviour towards women in public places, keep a watch on suspicious activities and actively use government initiatives and services provided by the police related to women's safety, so that a safe, respectful and fear-free society can be built.

Similar remarks were made by other leaders who spoke at the protest venue.

In the protest marches held in other parts of the State, like Kochi, party leaders and workers sang the 'pottiye kettiye' parody song. In Idukki, amid the

push-and-pull with the police personnel deployed to block the protest march, the District Congress Committee (DCC) president C P Mathew fell and suffered injuries to the head, party sources said.

He is currently undergoing treatment for it, they said.

The protesters also demanded the resignation of Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and State Devaswom Minister VN Vasavan.

They also demanded a proper probe into the

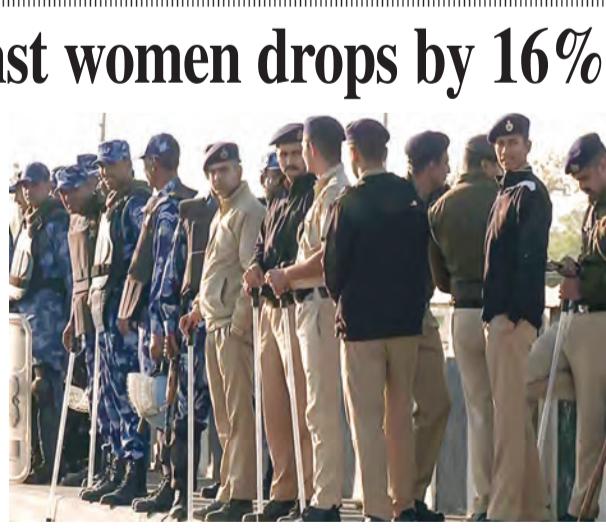
Sabarimala gold loss case.

The Sabarimala gold loss cases pertain to the alleged misappropriation of gold from the Dwarapalaka (guardian deity) idols and the Sreekovil (sanctum sanctorum) door frames at the temple. The SIT probing the matter has so far arrested 12 individuals, including Bengaluru-based businessman Unnikrishnan Potty, the prime accused in the case and two former presidents of the Travancore Devaswom Board.

Sabarimala gold loss case.

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them for their commitment.

According to the comparative analysis of Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems data, a clear decline has also been recorded in serious crimes, the statement further said.

Cases of rape have reduced by nearly 25 per cent, attempt to rape by 33 per cent, molestation by around 16 per cent, cases registered under the POCSO Act by approximately 10 per cent, abduction and kidnapping by over 17 per cent, and sen-

sitive crimes like dowry death by more than 11 per cent. The Haryana Police has also shown effective performance in the disposal of crimes against women. In 2025, the workout rate of crimes against women was recorded at nearly 98 per cent, clearly indicating that timely and stringent action was ensured against offenders. Special drives were conducted across the state last year to control crimes against women. Under these initiatives, the potential hotspots were identified, and women police personnel were deployed in civil dress at such locations.

Effective action was taken against antisocial elements by women police teams, which strengthened the sense of security among women. In addition, special training was provided to women police personnel to enhance their operational efficiency, with special emphasis on prevention of crimes against women, communication with victims and

feedback-based policing. To further strengthen women's safety, Haryana Police has also launched a Trip Monitoring System. Women travelling alone can register themselves through Haryana '112' (emergency response system) and avail of this facility, under which their movement is monitored till they safely reach their destination. DGP Singh has appealed to the people of the state that community participation is extremely essential for women's safety.

He urged citizens to immediately report any incident of harassment, misbehaviour, violence or crime against women to 'Haryana 112' or the nearest police station.

He further appealed to citizens to adopt sensitive behaviour towards women in public places, keep a watch on suspicious activities and actively use government initiatives and services provided by the police related to women's safety, so that a safe, respectful and fear-free society can be built.

Similar remarks were made by other leaders who spoke at the protest venue.

In the protest marches held in other parts of the State, like Kochi, party leaders and workers sang the 'pottiye kettiye' parody song. In Idukki, amid the

push-and-pull with the police personnel deployed to block the protest march, the District Congress Committee (DCC) president C P Mathew fell and suffered injuries to the head, party sources said.

He is currently undergoing treatment for it, they said.

The protesters also demanded the resignation of Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and State Devaswom Minister VN Vasavan.

They also demanded a proper probe into the

Sabarimala gold loss case.

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SC refuses to entertain PIL seeking SC, ST quota in state Bar councils



The Supreme Court on Tuesday refused to entertain a PIL seeking reservation for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe lawyers in the State Bar councils.

Observing that the plea had been filed belatedly after the election process had already been set in motion, a bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices R Mahadevan and Joymalya Bagchi said it was too late to seek such representation for the ongoing polls. During the hearing, the counsels for the petitioners relied on the Supreme Court's earlier order mandating representation for women lawyers in the State Bar councils.

The counsels for the petitioners, including Ram Kumar Gautam, argued that the orders on women lawyers' representation in the State Bar councils were issued despite the Advocates Act, 1961, being silent on the issue of reservation or representation. "You are everywhere. In the judiciary, among lawyers, in Parliament. The Bar council has been there since 1961, and you did nothing. Just because the Supreme Court did something for women, you come now! You just want it on a platter," the CJI said. Clarifying the scope of the earlier directions, the CJI said the bench did not grant "reservation" to women lawyers but only mandated their "representation" to address long-standing under-representation. "We have not provided reservation for women; it is only representation," the CJI said.

SC adjourns hearing on plea challenging new law regulating school fees in Delhi



The Supreme Court on Tuesday adjourned to February 2 the hearing on a plea challenging a new law that regulates fees in schools in the national capital.

A bench of Justices PS Narasimha and Vijay Bishnoi deferred the matter after Additional Solicitor General SV Raju, appearing for Delhi Government, informed it that a meeting was held with the higher officials and one more meeting is required to settle the issues.

The Supreme Court agreed to post the matter on February 2.

The Supreme Court on January 19 had questioned the Delhi Government over its timing of enforcing the Delhi School Education (Transparency in Fixation and Regulation of Fees) Act, 2025, when the academic year was already on. The Supreme Court was hearing petitions filed by associations of private unaided schools challenging the Act and its subsequent rules.

The Delhi Government recently notified the Act, which lays down detailed provisions on permissible fee heads, accounting practices and restrictions on additional charges, while prohibiting capitation fees and any collection beyond what is approved under the law.

The High Court had on January 8 refused to stay a notification directing private schools in the national capital to constitute fee regulation committees but extended the time for setting up such panels from January 10 to January 20.

It also said the last date for submission of the fee proposed by school managements to the committees should also be extended from January 25 to February 5.

SC takes strong note of acid attack cases



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Taking strong note of acid attack cases, the Supreme Court on Tuesday asked all States and Union territories to provide a slew of information, including the year-wise details of the number of such cases and their status in courts, besides the rehabilitation measures to support the victims.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices R Mahadevan and Joymalya Bagchi asked states and UTs to provide information about the number of cases in which charge sheets are filed in trial courts. They will also have to

provide information about the number of cases decided or pending at the trial court levels.

Seeking the details in four weeks, the bench asked them to also provide information about the number of appeals filed in appellate courts, including the High Courts, in such cases. The bench asked them to also provide brief particulars of each victim, her academic qualification, employment and marital status and the medical treatment and the expenses incurred or to be incurred. It also asked states and UTs to provide details about the rehabilitation scheme for such victims.

The bench also asked them to provide details of the cases where victims are forced to ingest acid. The CJI asked the Centre to mull changes in law to ensure that convicts are awarded "extraordinary" punishment for indulging in acid attacks. The bench was hearing a PIL filed by Shaheen Malik, who herself is an acid attack survivor.

Malik is seeking expansion of the definition of disabled persons under the law to ensure that the victims who suffered life-threatening damages to their internal organs due to forced ingestion of acid get adequate compensation and other reliefs, including medical care.

Madras HC sets aside single judge order directing CBFC to grant censor certificate to Jana Nayagan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Chennai

The Madras High Court on Tuesday set aside an order of a single judge which directed CBFC to grant censor certificate to top actor Vijay's 'Jana Nayagan'.

The First Bench comprising Chief Justice MM Shrivastava and Justice G Arul Murugan stated that the single judge, Justice PT Asha, should have given time to Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) for filing counter affidavit. The ruling virtually makes the fate of the film, originally slated for a Pongal release earlier this month, uncertain. The film is stated to be Vijay's last, ahead of his full-fledged political entry.

The High Court allowed the producer of 'Jana Nayagan' to approach the single judge for early disposal of the case.

It also stated that the single judge is at liberty to decide whether the decision



taken to refer the matter to revising committee is correct or not.

The Bench on January 20 reserved orders, on the appeal filed by the Central Board of Film Certification, against an order passed by Justice Asha, after hearing elaborate arguments from both sides.

Justice Asha on January 9 allowed the petition filed by M/s KVN Productions LLP, producer of the film 'Jaya Nayagan' and gave a direction to the CBFC to grant censor certificate forthwith.

The judge had also quashed a communication dated January 5 of the Regional Officer, informing the producer of the film that based on a complaint, the Chairperson of the Censor Board had referred the matter to the revising committee. However, on the same day, the First Bench stayed her order.

Originally on December 22, 2025 the producer received a communication from the Regional Officer from Chennai informing that the 5-member examining committee, which viewed the film had recommended for screening of the movie and issuance of censor certificate.

Thereafter, based on a complaint from one of the members of the examining committee, the Chairperson had decided to put on hold the December 22 communication and referred the matter to the revising committee. This was communicated to the producer of the movie on January 5.

Delhi High Court upholds quashing of CBI notice to ex-judge IM Quddusi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Delhi High Court recently allowed quashing of a notice issued by the CBI to retired Chhattisgarh High Court Justice IM Quddusi in connection with medical college bribery case. The CBI notice sought details about Quddusi's mobile numbers, bank accounts and domestic staff.

In an order passed on January 12, Justice Neena Bansal Krishna noted that the CBI notice was issued under Section 91 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), a provision meant for the production of specific, pre-existing documents or objects, not for compelling an accused to create information based on personal knowledge.

"By issuing a Notice under Section 91 for what is essentially a questionnaire, the Petitioner (CBI) is attempting to bypass the interrogation process. This is an attempt to convert an oral examination, subject to the accused's volition and rights, into a mandatory order for production. To treat a demand for details as a demand for a document, would be to stretch the statutory language of Section 91 beyond its permissible limits," said the HC.

The action plans, the bench said, need to be approved by the principal district judge, south, during the coordination meeting, following which they could be implemented.

The court noted that AIIMS submitted a status report regarding the various coordinated welfare and support measures for patients and their attendants across identified campus locations, and that the focus areas included shelter, transportation, safety, hygiene, food support and on-ground monitoring.



Retired HC Justice IM Quddusi was arrested by the CBI in 2018. The FIR charged him for conspiracy to secure a favourable judicial order for Prasad Education Trust, whose medical college had been debarred by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

The FIR named Justice IM Quddusi, former Allahabad High Court judge Justice Narayan Shukla and others under provisions of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Prevention of Corruption Act.

During the investigation, the CBI issued a notice under Section 91 CrPC

asking Quddusi to provide details of phone numbers used, bank accounts held and drivers or servants employed during the relevant period in 2017. Justice Quddusi challenged the notice, arguing that Section 91 cannot be invoked against an accused and that compelling him to supply such information violated the constitutional protection against self-incrimination under Article 20(3).

The trial court ruled in the ex-judge's favour, prompting the CBI to challenge the order before the High Court. The High Court agreed with the trial court's findings. It held that the CBI's notice effectively amounted to a questionnaire requiring the accused to "apply his mind, search his memory and compile information," thereby amounting to testimonial compulsion.

Retired HC Justice IM Quddusi was close to then Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra. Benches were changed by CJI Misra during the medical college bribery case was heard. This was the tipping point of the controversial press conference by four senior-most judges — Justices J Chelameswar, Madan Lokur, Kurian Joseph and Ranjan Gogoi — accusing CJI for changes benches to scuttle the cases.

Police, had undertaken proactive measures to shift patients and attendants waiting on footpaths to the designated pagoda shelters.

"This has ensured orderly relocation, enhanced safety, and prevention of exposure to harsh weather. Free-of-cost e-shuttle services have also been provided for the safe internal movement of patients and attendants," it said. According to the report, food support had been facilitated through the Society for Promotion of Youth and Masses (SPYM), a non-profit, providing two meals per day along with morning tea at all

shelter sites in an orderly and organised manner.

Security arrangements had been strengthened with round-the-clock roster deployment of AIIMS security staff at key pagoda sites, and the measures included joint supervision and crowd regulation with Delhi Police, particularly during the late evening and night hours, the report said. "As of January 22, all pagoda shelters are fully occupied by patients and their attendants during night hours, underscoring the continued need for sustained vigil and capacity management.

Plea in SC challenges definition of caste discrimination in 2026 UGC regulations

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

A plea was filed in the Supreme Court challenging a recently notified University Grants Commission (UGC) regulation, alleging that it has adopted a non-inclusionary definition of caste-based discrimination and excludes certain categories from institutional protection.

The plea submitted that regulation 3(c) of the recently notified UGC (Promotion of Equity in Higher Education Institutions) Regulations, 2026 is "non-inclusionary" and fails to protect students and faculty who do not belong to reserved categories.

The plea, filed by Vineet Jindal, assailed the regulation on the grounds that caste-based discrimination is defined strictly as discrimination against members of the Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC).

It said by limiting the scope of "caste-based discrimination" only to SC, ST, and OBC categories, the UGC has effectively denied institutional protection and grievance redressal to individuals belonging to the

"general" or non-reserved categories who may also face harassment or bias based on their caste identity. It said the provision in its present "exclusionary form" creates a hierarchy of protection that is unconstitutional.

The plea said the regulation violates the fundamental rights guaranteed under articles 14 (right to equality) and 15(1) (Prohibition of discrimination by the State on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth).

It also alleged that the regulation violates Article 21 (the right to life and personal liberty, which includes the right to live with dignity) of the Constitution.

It urged the Supreme Court to restrain the authorities from enforcing regulation 3(c) in its current form



SC rejects JioStar's plea, allows CCI probe into dominance in Kerala

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Tuesday refused to entertain a plea filed by Reliance Industries' owned streaming platform JioStar seeking to halt a probe by the Competition Commission of India into allegations of abuse of its dominant position in the Kerala cable television market.

A bench of Justices JB Pardiwala and Sandeep Mehta said the matter is at a preliminary stage and the market regulator may be allowed to continue with its probe.

"Sorry. Let the regulator investigate. It is only at a preliminary stage. Dismissed," the bench told senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for JioStar. Rohatgi submitted that JioStar is bound under the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) Act, 1997, which fixes how much it can charge or give a discount.

"The question is, can you investigate in relation to a matter covered by the sectoral regulator. There is a judgment of the Bombay High Court in my favour," Rohatgi contended.

Justice Pardiwala told Rohatgi that the issue needs to be looked into.

The complainant, Asianet Digital Network Limited (ADNPL), has accused JioStar of abusing its dominance in

the television broadcasting space in Kerala in contravention of the Competition Act, 2002, by providing discriminatory discounting payments and preferential treatment to the Kerala Communicators Cable Limited (KCCL).

JioStar has challenged a Kerala High Court order dated December 3, 2025, which affirmed a single judge's order refusing to stay the investigation by the Competition Commission of India (CCI) into the allegations of violations of the Competition Act, 2002.

The CCI has directed the director general to initiate an investigation into the complaints filed by ADNPL, a digital TV service provider, against JioStar and its subsidiaries for alleged discriminatory pricing and excessive discounting to KCCL.

It was alleged in the complaint that due to the preferential treatment of KCCL, ADNPL suffered migration of its subscriber base, which fell steeply within a short span of five-six months.

Under Trai rules, broadcasters can offer discounts of up to 35 per cent and must follow a non-discriminatory pricing regime.

Asianet has claimed that JioStar effectively granted discounts of more than 50 per cent to KCCL through separate marketing or promotional agreements, which it termed sham arrangements.

Delhi HC directs DUSIB to prepare contingency plans to protect patients, kin from harsh weather

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday directed the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board to prepare emergency action plans to protect patients and their attendants camping outside major Government hospitals from extreme weather conditions.

The High Court said two annual short-term contingency action plans would be prepared by the board to address heatwave and cold-wave conditions, which need to be implemented after the approval of the

monitoring committee overseeing the issue.

A bench of Chief Justice D K Upadhyaya and Justice Tejas Karie was hearing a suo motu petition initiated by the High Court after taking cognisance of a news report on the "pitiable condition" of patients and their kin camping on the streets while awaiting treatment outside the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS).

The bench said the summer plan needs to be prepared during January-February and implemented at the onset of heatwave conditions in May-June, with

a scope to extend it during July-August. The plan to address coldwave conditions needs to be framed during July-August and implemented in December, January and February, it said.

The action plans, the bench said, need to be approved by the principal district judge, south, during the coordination meeting, following which they could be implemented.

The court noted that AIIMS submitted a status report regarding the various coordinated welfare and support measures for patients and their attendants across identified campus locations, and that the focus areas included shelter, transportation, safety, hygiene, food support and on-ground monitoring.

The report said that coordinated efforts had been intensified in collaboration with the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB) to facilitate the movement of patients and attendants across designated locations within and around AIIMS. The report also mentioned that AIIMS had operationalised and enhanced shelter facilities at multiple designated locations, including the hospital's internal movement of patients and attendants, and that 750 beds across these sites were fully occupied, reflecting high demand and effective utilisation.

The report also said that the hospital's security staff, in coordination with Delhi Police, had undertaken proactive measures to shift patients and attendants waiting on footpaths to the designated pagoda shelters.

AIIMS had strengthened security arrangements with round-the-clock roster deployment of AIIMS security staff at key pagoda sites, and the measures included joint supervision and crowd regulation with Delhi Police, particularly during the late evening and night hours, the report said.

"As of January 22, all pagoda shelters are fully occupied by patients and their attendants during night hours, underscoring the continued need for sustained vigil and capacity management.



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Editor's TAKE

India and the EU: Charting new pathways

With protectionism rising in the US, the India-EU trade pact marks more than a commercial breakthrough. It is a strategic reset

When António Costa, President of the European Council, and Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, landed in New Delhi as the chief guests at the Republic Day parade, it signalled a breakthrough in the EU-India trade pact, a pact that has been in the making for over two decades.

The trade pact is a strong statement that a new world is slowly yet surely emerging, and Asia is a major player in this world order. When India and the European Union announced the long-awaited Free Trade Agreement (FTA) as a done deal, it signalled a major shift in the stance of the European Union (EU), as this deal is not new thinking but the shaping of a long-drawn conclusion that the two economies must sync for the betterment of both. The win-win for both cannot be overstated. India gets access to huge European markets, and Europe gets economical goods and services. In today's world, the rules of trade and engagement are being rewritten by US President Donald Trump. In a bid to consolidate the US position, he has rattled many, including his close allies. European countries, which have hitherto relied heavily on trade, are now finding it tough going, as new trade tariffs are hurting.

Under the weight of protectionism, geopolitical rivalries and supply-chain disruption, the India-EU pact gives a fresh lease of life to businesses on both sides while simultaneously reshaping the emerging world order. For India, the agreement is a respite, as it provides an alternative to US markets, which are practically out of bounds due to high reciprocal tariffs, as it opens the doors to the world's largest single market. Moreover, it can move up the value chain and attract high-quality investment from Europe, which it needs to take its economy to the next level. The benefits to the EU are also no less. The EU has relied heavily on the US and China to provide for its demands for goods and services. The US is now using this to leverage its geopolitical ambitions, while the Chinese onslaught is equally disturbing. Here, India comes as a respite, as it represents scale, growth and strategic autonomy rolled into one.

Though, as in any other negotiated pact, there is a price to be paid and concessions to be made. India will have to substantially lower tariffs on automobiles, machinery and select agricultural products such as wine and spirits, long shielded by high duties. But that loss would quickly be offset by other advantages coming with the agreement, like increased exports to the EU and the flow of investments. Indian pharmaceuticals, textiles, engineering goods and agricultural produce, along with expanded opportunities in services such as telecoms, maritime transport and financial services, would find it easier to reach the European market. Though the deal will take at least a year to become operational, as it must be ratified by the European Parliament, it is all about hope and uplifting morale in difficult times. While the EU hedges against an unpredictable US trade policy and the flood of low-cost Chinese goods that has unsettled European industry, Indian manufacturers and service providers get a vast playing field. If executed with care and confidence, the FTA could anchor a new axis of trade.

EU-India: Mother of all trade pacts

India and the EU are poised to elevate their partnership into a comprehensive strategic compact – one shaped as much by shared opportunity as by a changing global trade order



KALYANI SHANKAR

As New Delhi hosted the top leadership of the European Union as the chief guests for this year's Republic Day celebrations and the upcoming summit, the signals from Brussels are increasingly positive. India and the EU will soon have a free trade agreement, a defence partnership, and a mobility framework for Indian professionals. The summit was held in a positive environment and was very fruitful for both sides.

A military contingent from the EU, featuring the military staff flag and the flags of the naval operations Atalanta and Aspides, participated in the Republic Day parade. It was the EU's first participation in such an event outside Europe. The agreement could take at least a year to be ratified, but it might significantly expand trade and boost Indian exports, especially textiles and jewellery, which face 50 per cent US tariffs. Negotiations on investment protection and geographical indications are separate, allowing the FTA to focus on goods, services, and trade rules. EU chief Ursula von der Leyen said at Davos: "We are on the cusp of a historic trade agreement."

The FTA will lower or eliminate customs duties in sectors such as technology, pharmaceuticals, automobiles, textiles, steel, and electrical machinery. Labour-intensive industries like garments and leather should gain a competitive advantage in EU markets. India's service exports in telecommunications and transport are also expected to grow. The EU's imports from India comprise mainly machinery and appliances, chemicals, base metals, mineral products, and textiles. The EU's main exports to India consist of machinery and appliances, transport equipment, and chemicals.

India has recently signed trade pacts with the UK, Oman, and New Zealand, and is committed to boosting trade with the UAE to over \$200 billion by 2032. This will be India's ninth trade deal in four years, showing a strategy to secure market access amid mounting global protectionism. Some 6,000 European companies are in India. The FTA allows the EU to diversify supply chains, reduce reliance on China, and engage with India's \$4.2 trillion economy.

The EU will benefit from tariff reductions on wine, automobiles, and chemicals. Both sides excluded agriculture and dairy products to address India's concerns about 700 million farmers. Trade discussions resumed in 2022



THE EU IS ONE OF INDIA'S TOP TRADING PARTNERS, WITH TOTAL BILATERAL TRADE IN GOODS AND SERVICES SURPASSING \$190 BILLION IN 2024/25. INDIA EXPORTED APPROXIMATELY \$76 BILLION IN GOODS AND \$30 BILLION IN SERVICES TO THE EU'S 27 MEMBER STATES

The writer is a popular Columnist
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after a nine-year hiatus and gained urgency after U.S. President Donald Trump doubled tariffs on Indian goods to 50% in August 2025, prompting India to seek alternative export markets.

The European Union (EU) is one of India's main trading partners, along with the United States and China. In 2024/25, total trade between India and the EU exceeded \$190 billion. During this time, India exported about \$76 billion in goods and \$30 billion in services to EU member countries.

The average EU tariff on Indian products is 3.8 per cent, but labour-intensive sectors face 10 per cent duties.

The agreement could create a market of 2 billion people, nearly equal to the combined populations of India and China. This vast consumer base accounts for almost a quarter of global GDP.

India's main concerns are the EU's carbon border levy and non-tariff barriers, for example, regulatory delays and stringent standards. To better understand the potential impact of the carbon border levy, scenario planning could be useful.

A best-case scenario might see only minimal cost increases for Indian exporters, while a worst-case scenario might involve significant financial burdens, making Indian goods less competitive in the EU market. By examining these scenarios, India could formulate actionable strategies to mitigate risks associated with the levy. Indian markets may see cheaper European cars and wines. The two sides will also sign a mobility agreement covering high-skilled workers

and students.

There has been progress on issues related to the agriculture sector, as both sides have "marked and mapped each other's red lines" on it.

According to Reuters, "Once signed and ratified by the European Parliament—a process that could take at least a year—the agreement could significantly expand bilateral trade and boost Indian exports, notably textiles and jewellery, which have faced US tariffs of up to 50 per cent since late August."

Currently, negotiations on investment protection and geographical indications (GIs) are being conducted separately, allowing the FTA to focus primarily on goods, services, and trade rules. Trade discussions between India and the EU resumed in 2022 after a nine-year hiatus, following US President Donald Trump's decision in August 2025 to double tariffs on Indian goods to as high as 50 per cent. Alongside the trade agreement, India and the EU are also expecting a security and defence agreement, marking Europe's third such pact in Asia, following similar agreements with Japan and South Korea.

The EU is one of India's top trading partners, with total bilateral trade in goods and services surpassing \$190 billion in 2024/25. India exported approximately \$76 billion in goods and \$30 billion in services to the EU's 27 member states.

The FTA will likely open India's market to the EU. It will also give a boost to Indian goods abroad. Both India and the EU have seized the opportunity to gain access to each other's markets. Well done, New Delhi.

PIC TALK



The 'Kedarnath Dham' remains covered in snow after snowfall in the region in Rudraprayag district, Uttarakhand.

PHOTO: PTI

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

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ANCIENT WISDOM GUIDING INDIA'S SECURE PATH TO DEVELOPMENT

The recent article, "Self-protecting Bharat for growth", published in *The Pioneer*, presents an erudite synthesis of ancient Indian wisdom and modern strategic imperatives, offering a timely and compelling blueprint for India's journey towards *Viksit Bharat* 2047.

The emphasis on *Atma-raksha* (self-protection) as a dharmic duty resonates profoundly with India's current trajectory. Its relevance is underscored by recent successes such as *Operation Sindo* and the growing self-reliance of our defence sector, where over 65 per cent of equipment is now manufactured domestically.

The article rightly argues that national progress must be rooted in internal strength-social cohesion, economic resilience and strategic autonomy. In the context of global supply-chain

disruptions and rising protectionism, accelerating the *Atmanirbhar Bharat* agenda is imperative.

While World Bank and IMF projections indicate that India will remain the fastest-growing major economy in 2025-26, sustaining this momentum will require deeper investments in manufacturing, skilling and innovation.

Equally significant is the broader notion of self-protection—safeguarding democratic institutions, cultural harmony and internal stability. As India advances towards ambitious 2047 goals, including 100 GW of nuclear energy capacity and an expanded national highway network of 200,000 km, the pillars of discipline and perseverance will be central to success.

V REDDY KETHIRI | TELANGANA

Falling in love with the divine through a single image



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

2ND OPINION THE PIONEER

I love a painting of Lord Krishna in His youth, which is indescribably beautiful. I have never seen anyone, male or female, as beautiful as this painting of Lord Krishna. He simply mesmerises me. A similarly beautiful painting caught my attention in a large calendar many years ago. I cut it out, got it framed and then hung it on the right side of my bed. This was the start of my real love for the Lord, and this emotion has helped me to take His shelter.

Similar emotions are expressed by devotees when God incarnates. Vibhishanji describes the beauty of Lord Ramachandra when he first saw the Lord: "God has huge hands. His eyes are like red lotuses. His com-

plexion is dark, which removes the fear of those who take His shelter. The shoulders are like those of a lion. The chest is broad and looks very beautiful. The Lord's face is more beautiful than that of innumerable Kamadevas (Cupids)."

Poor Shurpanakha lost her nose, having been completely smitten by the beauty of the Lord. What happened to whoever saw Lord Krishna from His childhood? We are aware of cowherd women going crazy about the beauty of the Lord.

Let us compare the beauty or handsomeness of human females and males. At first glance, you may feel attracted or impressed. But soon faults will be noticed in the features, bodily shape, etc.

Even if all these are excellent, the emotions behind the face can spoil it all. An angry look from a beautiful face repels. Similarly, a hateful glance destroys everything. In any case, everyone ages and the charm reduces unless there is an aura.

Now, the message of this article. Not only beauty but all opulences impress. A person who is famous shows confidence. The same is true of knowledgeable people. Powerful people have the look of invincibility. Renounced persons attract, as do wealthy persons.

As this article is about beauty, and that too of God, let me recount how I have made good use of my attraction to my Lord in His photo. I habitually look at my Lord, and chanting of 'Krishna, Krishna, Krishna' starts automatically. Whenever

something good happens, I go and touch my head to the photo of my Lord. A similar reaction occurs when something unpleasant happens; I pray sincerely for guidance and help. Believe me, I am not really impressed by the looks of any person any more, because I compare them with my Lord's beauty.

I respectfully offer namaskar to my Lord several times a day. In short, I have fallen in love with my Lord. This makes taking shelter of God easy, and benefits of all kinds keep coming (Bhagavad Gita 9.22). I sincerely wish that one and all can and should get started on their spiritual journey. Just scan a few large calendars and choose a photo of God's incarnation, whichever attracts you the most. Get it framed nicely and hang it next to your bed. Start looking at Him, and you will be on your way.

The writer is a spiritual teacher

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Padma awards stir political debate

Similar to previous years, this year's Padma Awards have once again ignited a familiar political tempest. The government appears to have made a sincere attempt to project ideological inclusivity at first glance. The list includes names associated with opposing political traditions and even vocal critics of the current regime. However, closer scrutiny suggests that this inclusivity is politically safe and carefully curated.

The Union Government's announcement of the Padma Awards seems to be a deliberate effort to appeal to voters in election-bound states such as Kerala, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Assam, while conveying a message that transcends political divides. VS Achuthanandan, a founding member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and former Chief Minister of Kerala, received India's second-highest civilian honour, the Padma Vibhushan, posthumously. Shibu Soren, founder of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), received the Padma Bhushan.

The award to Shibu Soren also drew attention because his son, former Chief Minister Hemant Soren, was arrested in 2024 by the Enforcement Directorate in an alleged corruption case. The JMM described the action as political vendetta.

ABHIJIT ROY | JAMSHEDPUR

Farmers' march highlights rural distress

Thousands of farmers and tribal residents began a long march towards Mumbai on Tuesday, 27 January, pressing demands for land rights, irrigation facilities and other long-pending issues, even as the Maharashtra Government invited a delegation for discussions. The march, led by the CPI(M)-affiliated All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS), began on Sunday after protests outside the Dindori tehsil office in Nashik district failed to secure firm assurances.

Carrying red flags, the protesters arranged food, fuel and essential supplies for the march. Over two days, they covered nearly 60 kilometres. On Tuesday morning, they descended the Kasara Ghat and entered Thane district.

Growing mobilisation and sustained media attention compelled the State Government to invite representatives for talks at Mantralaya, Mumbai. The delegation is expected to include AIKS leaders Ashok Dhawale, Ajit Navale, Vinod Nikole, and others.

Large numbers of tribal farmers from Peth, Surgana, Kalwan and Trimbakeshwar talukas are participating to highlight unresolved land, forest rights and irrigation issues. They demand regularisation of cultivated land, land records, review of rejected forest claims and procurement at minimum support prices.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Celebrating democracy, unity and progress

It is a proud moment to celebrate the 77th year of India's Republic. 'Simple living and high thinking' remains a guiding ideal. India continues to progress steadily, and its standard of living compares favourably with many developing nations. The share market shows encouraging signs, and people's purchasing power is steadily improving. The IT industry is flourishing, creating employment opportunities for countless young professionals. Republic Day inspires citizens across the nation to reaffirm their love, unity and responsibility towards the country. Our strength lies in unity in diversity as we discharge our duties with a sense of belonging. India's secular fabric ensures harmony among different communities, fostering mutual respect and shared nationhood.

Since Independence, India has advanced through structured development planning. Indian Railways remains a lifeline, connecting distant regions, while telecommunications and electricity have reached even remote villages, marking historic progress. Republic Day is not merely a celebration but a tribute to January 26, 1950, when our Constitution came into force, shaping India into the world's largest democracy.

ANANDAMBAL JAYANTHY | COIMBATORE



How climate, geography & resources shaped Iran's crisis

Centuries of environmental vulnerability have converged with modern political and economic pressures to shape Iran's present crisis. From drying rivers to recurring waves of protest, Iran's turmoil is rooted as much in climate and geography as in the fraught politics of power, resources and inequality

FIRST
Column

BK
SINGH

The Little Ice Age (LIA) lasted from the Medieval Warm Period in the early 14th century until the mid-19th century, when the average global temperature dropped by 2 degrees Celsius. The cooling in this period was largely triggered by volcanic eruptions, which injected sulphur dioxide into the stratosphere, forming sulphate aerosols that reflected sunlight back into space and lowered the earth's surface temperature for a few years. This was the period when glaciers all over the Northern Hemisphere grew and expanded. During this period, especially in the 17th and 18th centuries, growing agricultural crops became uncertain. Erratic weather prevailed, as some areas faced long droughts while others experienced heavy rains and flooding. Iran faced adversity for a longer period compared to other regions in the Northern Hemisphere.

The Caspian Sea lies along a portion of the northern boundary, the Persian Gulf along the south-western border, and the Gulf of Oman along the southern border of Iran. From east to west in the northern part of the country runs the Alborz mountain range, while the Zagros mountain ranges run close to the south-western coast, and in continuation, the Makran mountain ranges run closer to the southern coast. The area surrounded by the two large mountain ranges in the centre of the country is a rain-shadow region, where agriculture depends on irrigation systems like the famous qanat system of underground wells. The agricultural land in the central region is interspersed with grasslands, where animal herders and their livestock spend a large part of the year. There are extensive rainforests along the Alborz mountain ranges.

Cooling related to volcanic eruptions is not uniform. Oceans cool more slowly than land, leading to variations in climate across the region. During the LIA in the 17th and 18th centuries, the Safavid dynasty was ruling Iran, and the regions that faced drought could not produce enough food for the population. In addition, people faced epidemics, and nearly one-third of the pop-



IRAN'S FOREIGN
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ulation was wiped out. There was unrest in the country, and the Safavid empire collapsed. After this, the country faced seven decades of internal war, when people like Nadir Shah built large armies and hoarded grains. The country was weakened when the British and Russians intruded in the 19th century.

The qanat system is an intricate network of gently sloping underground tunnels that connect vertical shafts, moving water from aquifers in hillsides to villages and farmlands without pumps. The system relies on gravity, thus requiring no energy and minimising water losses through evaporation. Farmers practised unsustainable agriculture. Ninety per cent of water goes towards irrigating crops, and changing climate patterns could not sustain it. The aquifers were largely emptied. Certainly, climate change has further strained the already vulnerable irrigation framework. Decades of unsustainable use have led to aquifers being fully drained. In such a situation,

the earth tends to compress, reducing the capacity of the aquifers. Climate change has amplified the problem people have created. Water concerns have also driven political protests, which Iran has faced on and off over past centuries and decades.

Iran's oil wealth has been the source of numerous property disputes, often causing heartburn and ill-will among communities, and sometimes generating enormous violence. Before the 2021 'Women, Life, Freedom' protests began, there were many environmental protests, which were widespread. One of the most notable protests was in Isfahan, where the River Zayanderud had gone dry. This was not because of excessive water use for agriculture, but because the Islamic Republic regime had diverted water for agriculture in the central region, overlooking the water requirements of marginalised agriculturists.

Iran is a country with 208 billion barrels of oil reserves, third in global ranking behind Venezuela and Saudi

Arabia. As oil is one of the biggest sources of revenue for the country, it has led to corruption in high offices and distorted the country's politics. Oil reserves were industrialised at the beginning of the 20th century. In 1908, natural gas at a commercial level was also discovered while extracting oil. Foreign oil companies did not install technologies to gather gas, mainly because it was expensive. The management continued discarding the gas, and people held the government headed by Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh responsible. In 1953, the Prime Minister was removed in a coup, and Shah Reza Pahlavi took control of the country.

The Shah owned all natural resources and could sell these to foreign investors. Investors and industries needed to build infrastructure to manage oil reserves for production, refining, storage, transport and sale.

People owning properties on the surface were often in conflict with investors who had rights over oil reserves below the surface. Workers in the oil

industries also became politically active from the mid-20th century.

Both the Shah's rule and the post-1979 Islamic Republic constructed massive gas refineries and laid extensive pipelines across the country, despite it being challenging and expensive. Iranians' confidence grew due to self-sufficiency, as the country underwent massive industrialisation from 1945 to 1975. Gaseous discharge from refineries and industries reduced air quality in the region.

Iranians valued clean air and the natural environment. They were aware of declining air quality in major cities of America, Europe and the Soviet Union, which were industrialising rapidly. This was a period when pollution control laws were not yet in place. The horrific smog of London in the 1950s and 1960s, caused by burning coal and wood for heating, led to many deaths. Poor air quality also killed people in Los Angeles. The topography of Tehran is unfavourable for pollution control. It lies in a mountainous region, where the city sits in a bowl that traps poor-quality air and smog in winter. There was a section favouring industrialisation, as they used fossil fuels, drove cars, and aspired for a better lifestyle and prosperity.

Extensive economic inequality and corruption were responsible for the 1979 revolution and the downfall of the Shah's regime. The Islamic Republic that came to power based its ideology on welfare schemes for disadvantaged groups and rapidly built natural gas networks in villages and working-class neighbourhoods that were previously neglected. After some positive work in its formative years, the Islamic Republic government also faltered. Corruption became more rampant and wealth inequality grew.

Iran's foreign conflicts and Western sanctions have cut its economy off from neighbouring countries. Iran's Revolutionary Guard has come to control exports through smuggling. A small section of Iranian society controls the oil business, leading to wealth inequality and discontent. Present oil output is nearing pre-sanctions levels, with discounted crude offered to Chinese independent refiners. Due to severe strain from inflation, currency collapse, and difficulties repatriating oil revenue, protests continue across the country. US military action in Venezuela may increase buyers' caution towards sanctioned crude and bring further hardship for Iran.

The world needs a new idea of responsibility in an age of unstable capitalism

MANOJ KUMAR
TIWARI

Today, as the world is standing at a critical point with growing economic instability, trade wars, climate crisis and social inequality, the release of the Responsible Nations Index (RNI) is not just another global ranking stamp but a serious intellectual warning for the system.

In this index where India has been ranked 16th among 154 countries, a development model based on responsibility still seems relevant and deeply needed with persistent instability. The index has been prepared by the World Intellectual Foundation (WIF) with academic support from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and IIM Mumbai to help the world rethink the concept of development during a challenging time.

At this moment, it is necessary to seriously reflect on what kind of development model the world wants and plans to achieve. For instance, a model that is environment-friendly, inclusive and capable of ensuring sustainable development & growth is most vital, for all.

Limits of the Present Capitalist Model
Over the past few decades, the world has largely followed a capitalist model driven by profit, consumption and competition. Today, this model is increasingly being questioned. One of the major reasons is the rise of one-sided tariff policies, protectionism, and economic pressure tactics, particularly by powerful countries such as the United States.

Unfortunately, the negative impact of such policies is not limited to developing countries alone; ordinary citizens across the world are also affected through inflation, job losses - amongst other things.

In this situation, the RNI clearly shows that a country's strength cannot be measured only by GDP, military power or market dominance and the rooted strength lies in how responsibly a nation treats its citizens, protects the environment and contributes to the global habitat. This is why major economic powers like the United States (ranked 66th) and China (ranked 68th) are placed far behind in this index, while countries such as Singapore (1st), Switzerland (2nd) and Denmark (3rd) are at the top.

The Pioneer
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The most important feature of the Responsible Nations Index is that it does not judge countries only on economic size or power. Instead, it evaluates:

- How well a country improves the quality of life of its people
- How seriously it works for environmental protection
- How much it contributes to global peace and cooperation

The index was developed over three years, using data from respected institutions such as the World Bank, UN agencies, and the World Justice Project. A total of 58 indicators are used to calculate the final score. This makes the index not just a numerical ranking, but also a policy-oriented and ethical assessment.

The US, Tariff Wars and Global Instability

One of the major reasons behind today's global economic turbulence is unilateral economic decision-making. Repeated tariff hikes, protectionist policies and the 'America First' approach have weakened the global trade system. When the world's largest economy starts breaking rules and imposing its own, the balance of global capitalism is disturbed. This explains why the United States, despite its economic power, ranks 66th in a responsibility-based index. It highlights the growing gap between power and responsibility.

India's Rank and an Alternative Development Path

India's 16th position is not just an achievement but a strong message. It shows that India's development model offers an alternative vision

in global discussions.

Along with economic growth, India has given importance to:

- Social inclusion
- Democratic values
- International cooperation

The idea of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (the world is one family) is not just a slogan, but a guiding principle of India's global outlook. From its G20 leadership to climate action, India has shown that development and responsibility can go together.

Towards Responsible Capitalism

Today, the world does not need to reject capitalism, but to reform it. What is required is Responsible Capitalism – where profit is important, but not at the cost of humanity, the environment and peace.

If the global system continues to run on unilateral decisions, economic pressure and narrow national interests, instability and conflict will only increase.

Ultimately, the Responsible Nations Index forces us to ask an important question:

Do we want to be only powerful nations, or truly responsible nations?

In this age of economic uncertainty, only this new thinking can guide the world towards a stable, fair and sustainable future.

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Defence budget: Time to strive for strategic sovereignty

KARN
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PATIL

As India prepares Budget 2026, the defence sector stands at a pivotal inflection point. Years of policy intent around self-reliance must now translate into industrial depth, technological ownership, and export competitiveness. The recommendations emerging from recent policy thinking suggest a decisive shift from assembling foreign platforms in India to owning intellectual property, from episodic procurement to modular upgrades, and from state-dominated production to a genuinely collaborative public-private ecosystem. If implemented with fiscal backing, Budget 2026 could redefine India's defence-industrial trajectory.

At the heart of this transformation lies the proposed Defence Production Manual (DPM) 2025. Expected to supersede earlier "Make in India" frameworks, the DPM signals a conceptual shift from import substitution to sovereignty. Past acquisition programmes relied heavily on licensed production, with limited absorption of design capability. The new framework is likely to mandate that indigenisation be measured not merely by where a product is manufactured, but by who owns the design and intellectual property.

This is a critical correction. Without indigenous design, India remains vulnerable to supply shocks, export controls, and geopolitical pressure. A chronic weak link in indigenisation has been the Tier-2 and Tier-3 supplier base, largely composed of MSMEs. The anticipated 'cluster approach' under DPM 2025 linking large prime contracts to mandatory MSME sourcing within defence industrial corridors can help address this. However, clusters will not mature on policy intent alone. Budget 2026 must provide enabling incentives: accelerated depreciation on specialised machinery, GST rationalisation, and targeted credit support for MSMEs entering defence supply chains. Equally important is funding for design capability. The proposed Defence Modernisation Fund and government support for 70-80 per cent of prototyping costs, against shared IP, can de-risk private investment in long-gestation technologies such as aero-engines and advanced materials.

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) form the second pillar of reform. Defence manufacturing is capital-intensive and cyclical, making pure private investment risky. A refined PPP model, backed by budgetary support, can balance efficiency with stability. The Government-Owned, Company-Operated (GOCO)

model is an obvious low-hanging fruit for ammunition factories and repair depots, reducing costs while improving quality. For strategic systems like the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft or nuclear submarines, Special Purpose Vehicles that pool DRDO's design strengths, DPSU infrastructure, and private-sector supply chains offer a pragmatic solution. Budgetary provision allowing the Ministry of Defence to take equity stakes in such SPVs would effectively position the state as a venture capitalist in its own industrial base. Leasing and service-based models paying for availability rather than ownership can further enhance operational efficiency while smoothing capital expenditure.

Technology and R&D investment must underpin all these efforts. India's defence R&D spending, still below 1 per cent of GDP, needs sharper targeting. Modern warfare is data-intensive; investments in AI-enabled decision-support systems, high-fidelity simulators, cybersecurity, and space capabilities directly enhance human productivity and operational readiness. Scaling up the iDEX initiative and earmarking a meaningful share of R&D funds for start-ups and academia can democratise innovation. Defence Innovation Hubs within academic institutions can create a steady pipeline of mission-ready talent while keeping costs contained. Procurement reform is equally crucial. The era of 'big bang' acquisitions is increasingly untenable. Modular acquisition-buying open-architecture platforms with periodic upgrades allows India to keep pace with technological change while smoothing budgetary outflows. Moving beyond the rigid L1 system towards Quality and Cost-Based Selection for high-technology platforms would prioritise lifecycle value over short-term savings, improving reliability and accountability. Finally, exports must be treated as a strategic instrument, not an afterthought.

The \$50,000 crore defence export target by 2029 is achievable only if financing and regulatory bottlenecks are addressed. A dedicated corpus for defence lines of credit through EXIM Bank and a fully digital, single-window export clearance system can help Indian platforms compete with Chinese offerings in Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Indian Ocean Region. In sum, Budget 2026 has the opportunity to anchor India's defence ambitions in fiscal reality. By aligning indigenisation with design sovereignty, de-risking private participation, prioritising high-impact R&D, and treating exports as a strategic lever, India can move decisively from being a major arms importer to a credible global defence manufacturing power. The challenge is no longer intent-it is execution and coherence.

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BLASÉ CAPITAL

CYCLES & SEASONS



Like in other sectors, seasons repeat in stocks, even as cycles provide crucial lessons. This helps explain why India's IPO (Initial Public Offering) market in 2025 was relentlessly crowded, and the early signals in 2026 suggest one that is open but noticeably selective. In 2025, India recorded one of its most active years for public listings. According to data by PRIME Database, there were 373 IPOs, which raised close to ₹1.95 trillion. Just over 100 of these were mainboard IPOs, and accounted for nearly ₹1.76 trillion.

Although the listings were spread across quarters, there were weeks when investors needed to evaluate multiple offerings. Financial services emerged as the single largest contributor to the fundraising, and accounted for 26-27 per cent of the amount raised. Consumer-facing businesses, including new-age tech platforms, discretionary brands, and Internet-led models, formed the second large block. Industrials and manufacturing-linked firms added to the values, particularly through SME listings. What made 2025 feel like a season of IPOs was not merely the numbers but the similarities. Growth narratives dominated, as firms spoke about scale and penetration, operational leverage, and order books and capex cycles.

Market data that track the IPOs indicated that nearly two-thirds of the issues listed at premiums to offer prices, but the magnitude of the gains was far lower than in the earlier boom years. More importantly, the bulk of the IPOs in 2025 traded below their listing prices within months, and a significant number slipped below the offer prices. As of late December 2025, post-listing performances showed that less than half of the mainboard IPOs traded above the issue prices, though more had listed with gains.

Listing-day fireworks, as mentioned above, cooled down. PRIME Database data shows that the average listing gains fell to about 10 per cent in 2025, down to a third of about 30 per cent in 2024. Only 36 per cent of the IPOs delivered more than 10 per cent on debut, a sharp drop from the previous year. Three broad patterns emerged in 2025, which cut across sectors. The first pattern was the compounding operator. These were businesses without valuation stretches, often with visible cash flows or credible paths to profitability. Their listings were not dramatic, but their prices held on within narrow ranges, and did not collapse.

Capillary Technologies for instance, gained more than ₹100 to go beyond ₹730, before settling at ₹615 yesterday, after a series of ups and downs over the months. Smartworks Coworking started its journey from ₹445 in July 2025, went beyond ₹600, and seemed settled at around ₹445 yesterday. It entered the market with a profitability narrative anchored in enterprise demand. At every high, including the initial one, the stock faced a selling pressure, which brought the price to either around the ₹500 or ₹450 marks.

The second pattern was liquidity. A notable feature of 2025 was the dominance of offers for sale (OFS) by the promoters, founders, and existing shareholders. Fortune India magazine reported that nearly two thirds of the overall funds raised were via OFS, and amounted to ₹97,000 crore, which made last year one of the most exit-of-the-shareholders-heavy years. Pine Labs was heavily skewed towards OFS, but listed at a premium of nearly 10 per cent. This showed that markets were comfortable absorbing the exit-driven supply. Urban Company was an OFS-heavy listing, and opened more than 50 per cent above its issue price, one of the best yearly debuts.

Another pattern was of the IPOs that attracted reasonable demand, delivered first-day gains, and then traded lower. Excelsoft Technologies listed with a positive premium in November 2025, but the stock nose-dived by nearly 40 per cent relative to its debut. VMS TMT, despite listing higher than its offer price in September 2025, traded more than 50 per cent below the list price a few weeks later. IndiQube Spaces, a workspace tech firm, saw its stock price weaken by over 20 per cent below its listing price within months.

What is notable is that these patterns did not align neatly with the sectors. Instead, they seem to be linked to capital discipline. Investors focused less on the nature and future of the industry, and more on how the firms intended to use the capital, how long the operational and financial runway extended beyond the IPOs, and how dependent they were on favourable market conditions. This helps explain why 2026, despite a slowdown in IPOs due to the wayward and wild indices, feels selective.

There are several big names that hope to tap the markets in the future. Merchant bankers speak of a strong 2026. A foreign news agency reported that the IPOs this year may raise funds in the \$25-27 billion range. So, what may change is not the ambition and enthusiasm of the issuers, but the posture of the stock markets. After a year when the IPO supply was constant, but outcomes uneven, investors appear to be guarded and cautious. They may no longer jump to join the IPO bandwagon. Price bands, offer sizes, and capital structures may be examined closely in 2026. If 2025 was about how IPOs behave in a season, 2026 may show how investors behave once they start thinking in terms of stock cycles.

OUR TAKE

Yeh dil wants more tax reliefs

Buoyed by the tax and GST cuts, people want more of the same

This Union Budget, individuals hope that Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will continue with the tax cuts. With personal income tax zero for annual salaries up to ₹12,00,000 (or ₹12,75,000), and GST 2.0, people want more money in their pockets. There are three crucial and grey areas that have caught their attention. They relate to fixed deposits, ESOPs (employee stock options), and capital gains. Apart from simplification, and rationalisation, the tax changes in the three areas, feel experts, can boost savings, enhance stock and mutual fund investments, and remove anomalies. In essence, they will be carry-forward the letter and spirit of the new tax law.

Fixed Deposits (FDs), for instance, are taxed differently from capital gains, which result from the sale of stocks. At present, interest earned on FDs is taxed according to the slabs that an individual falls under, which is graded as per income levels, ie, higher the earnings, higher the tax. In comparison, the short-term capital gains tax is 12.5 per cent, and the long-term one 20 per cent, which may be lower, especially for the higher-earners taxpayers. Experts feel that they need to be at par, even though FDs are saving instruments, and stocks, which attract capital gains, are for investments.

In addition, such a move will boost household savings. Bank deposits, as a percentage of overall household financial savings, dropped from nearer to 38 per cent in 2023-24 to just over 35 per cent in the next fiscal year. SBI Research, which urged the Government to make this change, asked for two additional ones. The first is to make the lock-in period for tax saving FDs the same as mutual funds, or three years. The

second is to do away with the tax deducted at source for interest that is earned on deposits in the individuals' savings accounts.

ESOPs is another story. At present, stock options are given by employers to enhance the morale of the employees, as well as retain the latter, and enable them to partake in the increases in future valuations due to the growth of the firms. Although such options were initially common among start-ups and tech firms, they have emerged as normal incentives. However, there are major lacunae in how ESOPs are taxed. In its Budget memorandum, the Bombay Chamber of Commerce and Industry claimed that ESOPs lead to double outflows of money for the employees.

Once the eligible employees exercise the choice to take stock options, they need to pay the "exercise price," which is pre-determined by the employers. At the time of the allotment of the ESOPs, the employees need to immediately pay the taxes on them. It is calculated on the difference between the "exercise price," and the market price. "In other words, this results in cash flow issues for employees as they are required to pay tax in the absence of any actual receipt of cash," stated the memorandum. This is because tax becomes due even if the shares are not sold, and retained by the employees.

While the exercise itself causes financial strain, the tax liability increases the burden. This can, therefore, "dissuade employees from exercising their options, impacting morale and retention." More crucially, the tax defeats the purpose of ESOPs, which is aimed to benefit the

employees later, when (and if) valuations go up, and they can sell the shares at higher prices. In addition, this creates a difference between ESOPs (taxed immediately on allotment), short-term capital gains (taxed if sold within a period), and long-term capital gains (taxed if sold after the specified period). The fact remains that the three separate taxes deal with shares, but one is not sold, the second is sold soon, and third is sold later.

Capital gains, whose rationality remains intact, even the difference in the rate between short-term and long-term, has emerged as a contentious issue because of the zero tax on incomes up to ₹12,00,000. As clarity crept in after the Budget announcement last year, while the personal tax was nil for the earnings due to refund of tax deducted at source, special taxes were applicable on it. The latter included capital gains, and others that fell outside the realm of 'direct' tax. Hence, those with multiple income sources need to pay taxes, even if their incomes are below ₹12,00,000.

Experts contend that this creates confusion, and introduces complexity, rather than simplify the tax regime. Any annual income, whatever may be the sources, need to be zero tax if the amount was ₹12,00,000 and below. Most taxpayers, especially in the urban areas, have multiple sources of earnings and, apart from salaries, they do invest in stocks and mutual funds. The existing regime may dissuade them from investing in stocks. In addition, the ₹12,00,000 limit is random and stocky. This is because if the income goes over ₹12,00,000 the individual cannot claim refund, or be liable for zero tax for that amount, and needs to pay normal taxes on the total.

If the Government claims that the new income tax law has simplified the regime, and made it easier for individuals to pay taxes, the above three issues tend to conflict with such a thought process. The idea needs to be that a person does not need to think much about her taxes, and how much she needs to pay. It should be easy to calculate the burden. However, the current rules related to ESOPs, FDs, and capital gains make it more difficult. Even educated taxpayers need to consult financial experts, and pay an extra amount for it.

Anyone who has tried to fill tax returns online, despite the claims that it is simple and logical, knows the difficulty levels. It takes too much time, several calculations, some computations, and still result in grey areas, which can only be resolved or clarified by an expert. Calculating taxes, and filing returns should not depend on advice, unless the incomes are complex. They should happen like a breeze. Even a semi-literate should be able to file them. This is a crucial area of concern as the Government wants to enhance 'Digital India,' and expect most people to transact online. Merely having a simple online form is not enough. What is important is that people can easily fill them without having doubts, or facing queries later. Or else, the citizens will easily lose confidence in the ruling regimes.



PETRO POLITICAL ECONOMY

Still crude shocks on crude oil
India eases Russian imports, but the US misses continue

Although crude oil imports from Russia dipped by a third in December 2025, Washington remains angry with New Delhi. As earlier, the former trained its ammunition on the European Union (EU) for feeding the fuel to energise the Russia-Ukraine war on its territory, with help from India. According to the US Treasury Secretary, Scott Bessent, "the Russian oil goes to India, the refined products come out, and the Europeans buy the refined products. They (Europeans) are financing the (Russia-Ukraine) war against themselves." In the same breath, he added optimistically, and possibly hopefully, that whatever happens, under Donald Trump's leadership, "we will eventually end the Russia-Ukraine war."

If we look at the overall picture, there are three problems despite India's reduced dependence on Russian crude oil. The first issue is that Russian imports, despite being lower, are still high. In November 2025, India imported 1.84 million barrels per day (bpd), which came down to 1.2 million in December 2025, but possibly inched up the next month as they touched 1.1 million in the first three weeks of January 2026. If the trend continues in the last week, the monthly imports may be higher than the previous one.

More importantly from Washington's perspective, the leading Indian private refiner, Reliance Industries, claims to have stopped the Russian shipments in January. However, the large state-owned Indian refiners continue to depend on Russia for their supplies.

According to media reports, while Indian Oil purchased 4,70,000 bpd in the first three weeks of January 2026, or more than 40,000 bpd higher than the entire December 2025,

Bharat Petroleum hiked the shipments from 1,43,000 bpd to 1,64,000 in the same period.

Nyara Energy, which has ownership links with the Russian producers, purchased 4,70,000 in the first three weeks of January.

Washington is angry that the imports continue despite an additional 25 per cent tariff, over and above the initial 25 per cent, on Indian imports due to the Russia connection.

Nyara Energy, "which was cut off" from other European countries after the EU slapped specific sanctions on it, continues to thrive on supplies from the Russian parent. It is only

Reliance Industries, which imported 6,00,000 bpd in 2025, which seems to have fallen in line, possibly because of imminent impact on other Indian and global businesses.

Remember, Reliance Jio, which has sizable investments from the US tech firms, will launch its much-awaited IPO (Initial Public Offering) in the first half of 2026.

Issue No. 2 is that the EU still buys petro-products from India. If this was not enough,

even as the US and India struggled to ink the bilateral trade deal for almost seven months, India and EU announced that they had finalised one. As if to taunt Trump, and his loyalists, including Bessent, the EU president, Ursula von der Leyen, grandly announced that the India-EU deal would be the "mother of all trade deals." This had the desired effect, and Bessent said that while the US imposed a 25 per cent extra tariff on India for

buying Russian oil, the

"Europeans signed a trade deal with India."

It is another matter that when he commented, the deal was not finalised. Only yesterday was it

finalised, and maybe signed later.

Of course, the Americans want to be one up on both India and the EU. The former wish

to sign the bilateral deal with India fast so that

the tariffs can come down, trade can be

normal, and American firms can sell more goods in the Indian markets. For the EU, which was repeatedly criticised by Trump, including in his Davos speech, to steal the thunder, so to say, is unacceptable. In addition, the India-EU deal may become the benchmark that the US may have to follow. In the process, it may need to dilute some of its existing demands that are related to agriculture, farm sector, and dairy.

For months, experts and the

media speculated about the

"shadow" global trade in crude oil,

with the Russians having pur-

chased tankers and vessels with secret

national identities to transport its oil to major

purchasers such as India and China. In the

past, sanctioned nations like Iran did the same

to essentially smuggle oil. India's role was a

matter of speculation, but there were reports



FTA with EU to help boost India's exports to 27-nation bloc

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ New Delhi



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with European Council President Antonio Costa, left, and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, right, during their meeting at the Hyderabad House, in New Delhi

whiskies, brandy, gin, tequila, vodka, and liqueurs (\$22.3 million).

FDI inflows

India's cumulative FDI inflows from the EU from April 2000 to September 2024 totalled \$117.4 billion, with about 6,000 EU firms operating in India. FDI from the EU accounted for 16.6 per cent of the cumulative FDI equity inflows from all countries, which stood at \$708.6 billion.

According to GTRI, India's FDI outflows to the EU totalled about \$40.04 billion from April 2000 to March 2024. India mainly receives FDI from the Netherlands (\$55 billion) during April 2000 and September 2025, Germany (\$15.4 billion), France (\$12 billion), Spain (4.3 billion), Belgium (\$4.1 billion), Italy (3.65 billion), Sweden (\$2.8 billion), Denmark (\$1.44 billion), and Poland (\$788.75 million).

Long negotiations

The India-EU FTA negotiations began in 2007. Initially, from 2007 to 2013, multiple rounds of negotiations took place but were hindered by disagreements over market access, intellectual property rights, labour standards, and sustainable development.

By 2013, the talks hit a standstill, particularly due to differences over tariffs on automobiles, wine, spirits, data security for Indian IT firms, and public procurement.

Despite efforts to revive negotiations between 2016 and 2020, substantial progress remained elusive. However, post-2020, both India and the EU showed renewed interest in resuming talks.

In June 2022, negotiations were relaunched for a Free Trade Agreement, an Investment Protection Agreement, and an Agreement on Geographical Indications (GIs). Talks for the GI pact and a bilateral investment treaty are going on.

The following are the highlights of the India-European Union free trade agreement.

- India, the 4th largest economy, and the European Union, the 2nd largest economy, comprising 25 per cent of Global GDP, account for one third of global trade.
- Over 99 per cent of Indian exports gain preferential entry into the EU, unlocking massive growth potential.
- Open new opportunities for MSMEs and create jobs for women, artisans, youth and professionals.
- \$33 billion of exports in labour-intensive sectors like textiles, leather, marine products, gems and jewellery set to gain immensely from preferential access under the FTA.
- To bring down tariffs up to 10 per cent on almost \$33 bn of exports to zero duty on the first day of the implementation of the pact.
- On automobiles, a calibrated and carefully crafted quota-based liberalisation package.
- Will not only allow EU auto makers to introduce their models in India in higher price bands but also open possibilities for Make in India and exports from India in future.
- Indian consumers to benefit from high-tech products and greater competition.
- The reciprocal market access in the EU will also open up opportunities for India-made automobiles.
- India has prudently safeguarded sensitive sectors, including dairy, cereals, poultry, soymeal, certain fruits and vegetables, balancing export growth with domestic priorities.
- FTA provides measures to tackle non-tariff barriers through strengthened regulatory cooperation, greater transparency, and streamlined customs, Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) procedures, and Technical Barriers to Trade disciplines.

Importance of this FTA

The imposition of high tariffs by the US has disrupted the global flow of goods. India is facing steep 50 per cent tariffs. The FTA is expected to help Indian exporters diversify their shipments. It will also help reduce dependence on China. The EU is also facing a threat of high US tariffs.

Benefits for India and the EU

Tariffs or import duties are either reduced or eliminated under an FTA. Therefore, an FTA will open markets, align regulatory frameworks, and benefit key industries such as technology, pharmaceuticals, automobiles, and textiles.

Lower or zero import duties will make Indian exports, including from labour-intensive sectors, such as garments, leather, pharmaceuticals, steel, petroleum products, and electrical machinery, more competitive in the EU.

Similarly, Indian services exports, including telecommunications, business services, and transport, are also expected to grow significantly.

According to think tank GTRI, the EU will benefit from higher exports of aircraft and parts, electrical machinery, diamonds, and chemicals to India. European service sectors such as intellectual property, business services, and IT and telecommunications may also see gains.

Bilateral trade

India's bilateral trade in goods with the EU was \$136.53 billion in 2024-25 (exports worth \$75.85 billion and imports worth \$60.68 billion), making the EU India's largest goods trading partner. The EU market accounts for about 17 per cent of India's total exports, and the bloc's exports to India constitute 9 per cent of its total overseas shipments.

In 2023-24, India exported \$76 billion in goods and \$30 billion in services to the EU, while the EU exported \$61.5 billion in goods and \$23 billion in services to India. Within the EU, Spain, Germany, Belgium, Poland and the Netherlands are key destinations for Indian exporters.

India's exports and imports

Major exports are petroleum products (Diesel and ATF), electronics

(including smartphones), textiles, machinery and computers, organic chemicals, iron and steel, gems and jewellery, pharmaceuticals, and auto parts. Currently, India's textile exports to the EU face tariffs of 12-16 per cent, making Indian products less competitive than those from countries like Bangladesh and Vietnam, which enjoy preferential market access under EU trade agreements, a GTRI report said.

Main imports are Machinery, computers (including turbojets), electronics (including mobile phone parts and integrated circuits), aircraft, medical devices, scientific instruments, rough diamonds, organic chemicals, plastics, iron and steel, cars, and auto parts.

India's key services exports to the EU are business services, telecommunications and IT, and transportation services, while imports are intellectual property services and telecommunications and IT.

Alcohol trade

Both regions are key players in this segment. India's exports to the EU in 2023-24 included wines (\$1.5 million), blended whiskies, vodka, brandy, and liqueurs (\$64.9 million). Imports included wines (\$412.4 million), blended

whiskies, brandy, gin, tequila, vodka, and liqueurs (\$22.3 million).

Union Minister of Commerce & Industry Piyush Goyal, right, and European Commissioner for Trade & Economic Security Maros Sefcovic exchange documents during a joint press statement after a meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi, European Council President Antonio Costa and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen at the Hyderabad House in New Delhi

PTI

The two sides announced on January 27 the conclusion of negotiations for the free trade agreement (FTA).

India and the EU, under the leadership of PM @NarendraModi ji, European Commission President @VonderLeyen and European Council President @AntonioCostapm have inked the 'Mother of all Trade Deals', he said in a social media post.

Goyal said that the pact is a strategic breakthrough in the country's global trade engagement, unlocking vast opportunities in the \$20 trillion EU market for 1.4 billion people. "It is a deal that gives unprecedented market access for over 99

per cent of our exports by value, providing a massive impetus to our labour-intensive sectors and bolstering Make In India," the minister said. This partnership, he said, was forged between the fourth and the second-largest economies, accounting for one-third of global trade.

It will create huge trade and investment opportunities for Indian businesses and benefit MSMEs, women, youth, artisans, workers,

students, skilled professionals, fisherfolk, farmers, and exporters.

"With care being taken to shield sensitive sectors, rural livelihoods have also been secured while opening up potential to scale in the high-value EU market," he said, adding, "a big win has been secured in the services sector with a future-ready mobility framework that will help expand global opportunities for our skilled Indian professionals".

The free trade agreement also provides for a rebalancing of rights in case the EU's measures under this

regulation impair pact benefits to Indian firms or if it fails to establish the grounds for the same.

Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) or the carbon tax, which came into effect on January 1, was one of the contentious issues of the trade pact between India and the European Union (EU).

Under the mechanism, the EU will impose a carbon tax on goods such as steel, aluminium, fertiliser and

cement as they emit carbon beyond a specified threshold during manufacturing. Presently, the tax applies to steel and aluminium products.

"CBAM is a difficult issue. It is a horizontal regulation without any flexibility for anyone. However, there is one commitment that any flexibility given to any other country in the future would be given to India also. We have nudged them," the commerce ministry official said.

As per the agreement, any flexibility or concession that the EU will give to any country in future under CBAM regulation will automatically be extended to India, the commerce ministry official said. The two have also agreed to increase technical cooperation on the recognition of carbon prices and verifiers, as well as financial assistance and targeted support to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to comply with emerging carbon requirements.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will present the Union Budget on February 1. Presented just ahead of the Budget, the survey sets the tone for the Government's economic thinking and offers a detailed snapshot of where India stands financially before new policy decisions are announced.

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Wood Mackenzie said the power sector, while remaining India's largest source of emissions, is also the primary engine of the energy transition.

projection of 6.5-7 per cent. The analysis indicates that the target was missed in 2022-23, when the actual economic growth was 7.6 per cent as against the Economic Survey's projection of 8-8.5 per cent. In 2021-22, due to COVID, the Economic Survey did not make any pro-

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FROM THE
WORLD

OMAN

Three Japanese tourists drown

Three French tourists drowned in Oman after the boat they were in capsized in waters off the sultanate's capital city of Muscat, police said on Tuesday. The Royal Oman Police said the ship carried 25 French tourists, as well as a tour guide and a boat captain, when it capsized in the Gulf of Oman. It said three tourists died and two suffered minor injuries. The police said in a short statement that "investigations are still ongoing to determine the circumstances of the incident." Oman, on the eastern edge of the Arabian Peninsula, draws tourists from around the world for its diving and natural beauty, though the nation remains overshadowed as a destination by skyscraper-studded Dubai in the neighbouring United Arab Emirates.

FRANCE

Social media ban for children

French lawmakers approved a bill banning social media for children under 15, paving the way for the measure to enter into force at the start of the next school year in September, as the idea of setting a minimum age for use of the platforms gains momentum across Europe. The bill, which also bans the use of mobile phones in high schools, was adopted by a 130-21 vote late Monday. French President Emmanuel Macron has requested that the legislation be fast-tracked and it will now be discussed by the Senate in the coming weeks. "Banning social media for those under 15: this is what scientists recommend, and this is what the French people are overwhelmingly calling for," Macron said after the vote. "Because our children's brains are not for sale - neither to American platforms nor to Chinese networks."

North Korea testfires ballistic missiles in a show of strength

ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ Seoul

North Korea launched short-range ballistic missiles toward its eastern waters on Tuesday, according to its neighbours, as the North heightens animosities with rival South Korea ahead of a major political meeting.

South Korea's military said it detected liftoffs of several ballistic missiles from an area northeast of the North Korean Capital, Pyongyang, before the missiles each flew about 350 kilometres (217 miles). Japan's Defence Ministry said two ballistic missiles launched from North Korea landed off the eastern coast of the Korean

Peninsula. The ministry condemned the launches as a threat to the peace of Japan, the region and the international community.

South Korea's military said it maintains a firm readiness to repel any provocations by North Korea.

The launches were the first time North Korea fired weapons since testing what it called hypersonic missiles in early January.

In December, the country test-fired what it called long-range, strategic cruise missiles and new anti-air missiles and released photos showing the apparent construction of its first nuclear-powered submarine. North Korea has engaged in a run of weapons

tests to enlarge its nuclear and missile arsenals since talks with the US. And South Korea stalled in 2019. Experts say the North's leader, Kim Jong Un, believes a bigger weapons arsenal would give him greater leverage to win concessions from the US.

North Korea's recent displays were likely meant to demonstrate or review its weapons development achievements ahead of the upcoming ruling Workers' Party congress, analysts said.

The congress, expected to start in February, would be the first of its kind in five years and is one of North Korea's biggest propaganda spectacles used to set up new political and economic priorities. North

Korea recently threatened retaliation over what it called South Korean surveillance drone flights across the border, one earlier in January and another in September.

The South Korean Government denied operating any drones during the times specified by North Korea and began probing whether civilians sent them.

The accusations likely were driven by the North's efforts to dial up anti-South Korea sentiments ahead of the congress, when Kim's previous declaration of a hostile "two-state" system on the Korean Peninsula could be added to the party constitution, analysts said.



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un

Russian drones strike Ukrainian homes, 23 injured

ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ Kyiv

A heavy Russian drone bombardment of Ukraine's southern city of Odesa injured 23 people, including two children and a pregnant woman, officials said on Tuesday as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called for US efforts to end Russia's almost 4-year-old invasion of his country to move faster.

The Odesa attack involved more than 50 drones, some of them models recently upgraded by Russia to improve their range and strike power, according to Ukrainian authorities. The drones targeted the power grid, which Russia has repeatedly bombarded during the coldest winter in years, and also hit five apartment blocks, officials said.

"The rescue operation will continue until the fate of all people who may be under the rubble is clarified," Zelenskyy said on the Telegram messaging app, adding that an informal Protestant place of worship was also damaged.

"Each such Russian strike undermines diplomacy, which is still ongoing, and hits, in particular, the efforts of partners who are helping to end this war," he said. A diplomatic push by the Trump administration to end the war has made progress, according to officials, but has delivered no breakthrough on the key issue of what happens to Russian-occupied Ukrainian land and

other territory that Moscow is demanding.

Analysts say that Russian President Vladimir Putin is in no rush to find a settlement, despite his army's difficulties on the roughly 1,000-kilometre (600-mile) front line. He believes that time is on his side, that Western support for Kyiv will fade and that Ukraine's resistance will eventually break under pressure, according to analysts.

To replenish its forces and keep up the pressure on Kyiv, Moscow is offering cash bonuses, freeing convicts from prison, and luring foreigners to its army.

An Associated Press investigation found that unwitting Bangladeshi workers were enticed to Russia under the false promise of civilian work

before being thrown into combat in Ukraine. Zelenskyy said late Monday the next round of talks with the United States and Russia is pencilled in for Feb. 1, but that "it would be good if this meeting could be accelerated." He also urged that, in the meantime, additional sanctions be imposed on Russia to compel the Kremlin to make compromises.

Russia fired 165 drones at Ukraine overnight, with 24 of them that got through air defences hitting targets in seven regions, according to Ukraine's air force.

Russia has been improving its drone technology and tactics, striking Ukraine with increasing success. The Ukrainian Defence Ministry's main intelligence

directorate said earlier this month that Russia had deployed the new jet-powered "Geran-5" strike drone against Ukraine for the first time. The Geran is a Russian variant of the Iranian-designed Shahed.

According to the directorate, the drone can carry a 90-kilogram (200-pound) warhead and has a range of nearly 1,000 kilometres (600 miles). In response, Ukraine has significantly expanded production of interceptor drones, as well as developed its own long-range drones.

The Russian Defence Ministry said Tuesday that its air defences shot down 19 Ukrainian drones overnight over several Russian regions.



People waiting for the all-clear signal to reach the opposite bank of the Dnieper River during a Russian drone attack in Kyiv, Ukraine

Holocaust Remembrance Day commemorated

VANESSA GERA

■ Warsaw

Candles flickered at dawn on Tuesday at the vast Holocaust memorial in Berlin as people across Europe and beyond paused to commemorate International Holocaust Remembrance Day, reflecting on Nazi Germany's murder of millions of people and its attempt to completely wipe out Jewish life on the continent. International Holocaust Remembrance Day is observed across the world on January 27, the anniversary of the liberation by Soviet forces of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the most notorious of the Nazi German death camps.

The UN General Assembly adopted a resolution in 2005 establishing the day as an annual commemoration.

At the memorial site of Auschwitz, in an area which was under German occupation during World War II, former prisoners laid flowers and wreaths at the Execution Wall, where German forces murdered thousands of people, most of them Poles. Later in the day, Poland's President Karol Nawrocki will join survivors for a remembrance ceremony at Birkenau, the vast site nearby where Jews were transported from across Europe to be exterminated in gas chambers. Nazi German forces murdered some 1.1 million people at Auschwitz, most of them Jews, but also Poles, Roma and others.

Commemorations on the anniversary of Auschwitz's liberation by the Red Army on January 27, 1945, were also



Holocaust survivors lay flowers at the death wall in the Auschwitz Nazi death camp museum in Oswiecim, Poland

earlier, according to new information released by the New York-based Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany. Nearly all of them - some 97 per cent - are "child survivors" who were born in 1928 and later, the group said.

Though the world's community of survivors shrinks with time, some are still telling their stories for the first time after all these years. On Sunday, the Netherlands marked its National Holocaust Memorial Day with a silent march through Amsterdam's historic Jewish quarter to a memorial to Auschwitz victims. Amsterdam Mayor Femke Halsema spoke to hundreds of people who attended the sombre event. "Bergen-Belsen, Sobibor, Auschwitz — they are unprecedented and still incomprehensible examples of what intolerance, hatred, and racism can lead to. Unparalleled in history," she said. (AP)

Israel marks its Holocaust Remembrance Day on the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in April 1943, which stresses Jewish resistance to the Nazi terror. There are an estimated 196,600 Jewish Holocaust survivors still alive globally, down from the 220,000 survivors estimated to be alive a year

GOVERNMENT OF HARYANA TENDER NOTICE					
OS R. No.	NAME OF BOARD/CORP./ AUTH	NAME OF WORK NOTICE TENDER	OPENING DATE CLOSING DATE (TIME)	AMOUNT / EMD (APPROX.) IN RUPEES	WEBSITE OF THE BOARD CORP./AUTH
1	HSIIDC	CONSTRUCTION OF PLATFORM AND SHEDS FOR COVER OF GENSETS, PUMPS AND MOTORS INSTALLED FOR DISPOSAL OF STORM WATER & REPAIR AND MAINTENANCE WORKS OF SECTOR-35, UDYOG VIHAR, PHASE-II, GURUGRAM	27.01.2026 04.02.2026	Rs. 8,91,215/-	https://etenders.hry.nic.in
2	HSIIDC	PLANNING, DESIGNING, CONSTRUCTION, INSTALLATION, TESTING AND TRIAL RUN FOR 3 MONTHS THE WORK OF 0.5 MLD CEP CAPACITY PLANT BASED ON 10 YRS O & M INCLUDING CL 0.5 M INCLUDING HSIDC IND	30.01.2026 02.02.2026	Rs. 5,00,69,375/-	https://etenders.hry.nic.in
3	HSIIDC	SWEEPING OF METALLED ROADS INCLUDING BERMS (ROW) COMPLETE AT INDUSTRIAL GROWTH CENTRE, PHASE-I, SAHA DISTT, AMBALA FOR ONE YEAR	22.01.2026 29.01.2026	Rs. 46,72,836/-	https://etenders.hry.nic.in
4	HSIIDC	SWEEPING OF METALLED ROADS INCLUDING BERMS (ROW) COMPLETE AT INDUSTRIAL ESTATE, AMBALA CANTT FOR ONE YEAR	22.01.2026 29.01.2026	Rs. 16,77,096/-	https://etenders.hry.nic.in
5	HSIIDC	PROVIDING AND LAYING OF MASTER SEWER LINE AND TRENCHLESS CROSSING OF OLD DELHI ROAD IN UDYOG VIHAR PHASE-IV, GURUGRAM	27.01.2026 04.02.2026	Rs. 2,42,74,901/-	https://etenders.hry.nic.in

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION KINDLY VISIT : www.haryanaeprocurement.gov.in or www.etenders.hry.nic.in RO 42423-I-27-7

GOVERNMENT OF HARYANA TENDER NOTICE					
SR NO.	NAME OF DEPARTMENT	NAME OF WORK NOTICE TENDER	OPENING DATE CLOSING DATE	AMOUNT / EMD (APPROX.) IN RUPEES	WEBSITE OF THE DEPARTMENT
1	PWD B&R, GURUGRAM	DEVELOPMENT OF LANDSCAPING WORK OF SDO CIVIL COMPLEX RESIDENTIAL HOUSES AT BAWALI IN REWARD DISTRICT. # 1 WORKS	21.01.2026 10.02.2026	25.64 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in
2	PWD B&R, AMBALA	CONSTRUCTION OF RESIDENTIAL ACCOMMODATION FOR DOCTORS / PARAMEDICAL STAFF IN CIVIL HOSPITAL AT AMBALA CANTT IN AMBALA DISTRICT PART A/C I.E. (T-2, T-3, T-6, ROAD AND PARKING AND FIRE FIGHTING SERVICES) (BALANCE WORK)	20.01.2026 02.02.2026	960.45 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in
3	PUBLIC HEALTH ENGINEERING, SIRSA	SIRSA TOWN (P-2): AUGMENTATION W/S SCHEME SIRSA TOWN CONSTRUCTING B/STNS, ADDITIONAL STRUCTURES AND LAYING THE INTERNAL DISTRIBUTION PIPE LINES AT SIRSA TOWN DISTRICT SIRSA. (UNDER AMRUT-2) A&E CONSTRUCTION OF 3RD W/W STRUCTURES, MBS-1, MBS-2 AND BOOSTING STATIONS INCLUDING CLEAR WATER TANKS, PUMP CHAMBER, BOUNDARY WALL, PUMPING MACHINERY, D.G SET, ELECTRIC TRANSFORMER, GAS CHLORINATOR, RISING MAIN LINES, PHTC AND LAYING THE DISTRIBUTION PIPE LINES ETC. O AND M DURING DEFECT LIABILITY PERIOD OF 12 MONTHS AFTER SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF 3 MONTHS TRIAL RUN AND THEREAFTER FOR 5 YEARS COMPLETE IN ALL RESPECT. A&E	19.01.2026 16.02.2026	3787.78 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in
4	PUBLIC HEALTH ENGINEERING, SIRSA	CHAHARWALA:- REPLACEMENT OF RCC PIPE INLET CHANNEL, CONSTRUCTION OF ONE NO. RCC S/S TANK OF SIZE:- 35.00X12.00X4.44 MTR., ONE NO. RCC HIGH LEVEL TANK OF SIZE:- 7X4.73X1.83 MTR., TWO NO. RCC FILTER BED OF SIZE 10.20X6.80 MTR., LAYING OF HEAD WORKS PIPE LINE, PAINTING, DISTEMPERING AND SNOWMELT, LIGHTING ARRANGEMENT, C.C. ROAD AND PATH, SUPPLYING AND INSTALLATION OF PUMPING MACHINERY, LAYING OF DISTRIBUTION PIPE LINE, RESTORED AND NEW CONNECTION, REPAIR OF EXISTING WATER WORKS STRUCTURES ALL OTHER WORKS CONTINGENT THERETO AT CHAHARWALA.	22.01.2026 18.02.2026	457.52 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in
5	CIVIL AVIATION, DEPARTMENT HARYANA	EMANELMENT OF FIRM TO PROVIDE VEHICLES ON RATE CONTRACT (DURATION 03 YEARS)	23.01.2026 12.02.2026		https://etenders.hry.nic.in
6	PWD B&R, KARNAL	CONST. OF GTII BUILDING AT CHORPURA AT JINDRI DISTT. KARNAL (PDG, STREET LIGHT ONLY) + 3 WORKS	23.01.2026 29.01.2026	124.27 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in
7	IRRIGATION & WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT HARYANA,ROHTAK	RESTORATION OF RURAL POND 'CHOTA BABA POND' IN VILLAGE SIMLI, BLOCK ROHTAK, DISTRICT ROHTAK + 3 WORKS	CLOSING DATE 02.02.2026	327.71 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in
8	PANCHAYATI RAJ, KARNAL	COMPLETION OF TWO AGANWADI CENTRE NEAR COMMUNITY CENTRE AT VILLAGE NIGHDHO BLOK NILOKHERI DISTRICT KARNAL	21.01.2026 30.01.2026	5.71 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in
9	PANCHAYATI RAJ, AMBALA	REJUVENATION OF LANGAR HALL POND IN VILL. BARNALA, BLOCK AMBALA-II	23.01.2026 29.01.2026	23.16 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in
10	PANCHAYATI RAJ, KARNAL	DABRI CONSTRUCTION OF TOE WALL (WIDENING) FROM DABRI MAIN ROAD TO DERA AMRIK SINGH AT VILLAGE DABRI BLOCK CHIRAO SCHEME VANYI + 3 WORKS	21.01.2026 30.01.2026	28.71 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in
11	PANCHAYATI RAJ, KARNAL	CONST. OF COMMUNITY CENTRE (1 ACRE) IN VILLAGE DAKWALA GURAN IN BLOCK KARNAL SCHEME-HGVY UNDER CM ANNOUNCEMENT CODE NO. 27547	24.01.2026 05.02.2026	186.60 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in
12	AGRICULTURE & FARMERS WELFARE, BHUWANI	RECALAMATION OF SALINE AND WATER LOGGED AREA THROUGH VERTICAL DRAINAGE SYSTEM, VILLAGE- KELANGA, BLOCK- BHUWANI, DISTT- BHUWANI	21.01.2026 02.02.2026	153.14 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in



Iranian Rial falls to record low after recent protest

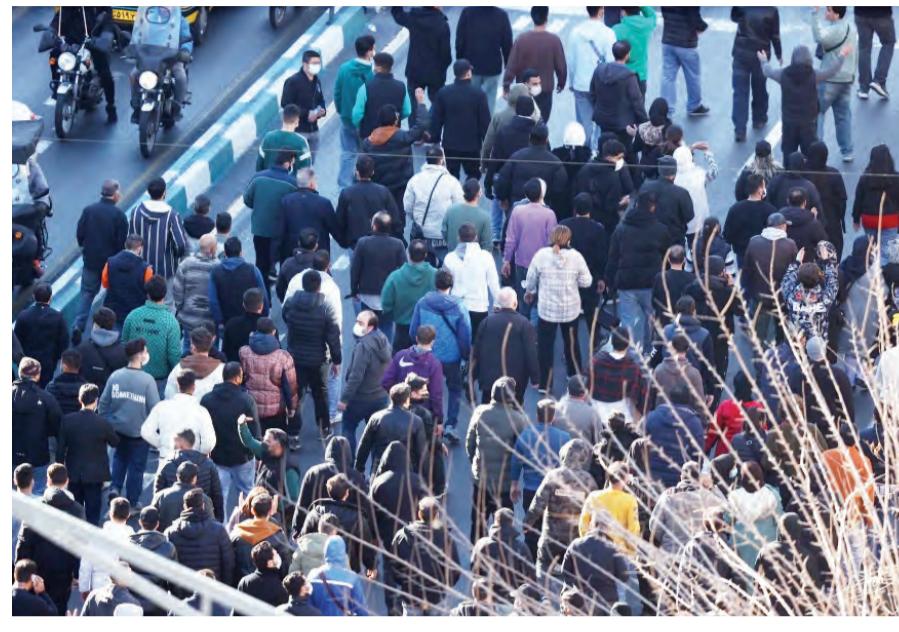
ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Dubai

Iran's bloody crackdown on nationwide protests killed at least 6,126 people while many others still are feared dead, activists said on Tuesday, as a US aircraft carrier group arrived in the Middle East to lead any American military response to the crisis.

Iran's currency, the rial, meanwhile fell to a record low of 1.5 million to \$1.

The arrival of the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier and guided missile destroyers accompanying it provide the US the ability to strike Iran, particularly as Gulf Arab States have signalled they want to stay out of any attack despite hosting American military personnel. Two Iranian-backed militias in the Mideast have signalled their willingness to launch new attacks, likely trying to back Iran after US President Donald Trump threatened military action over the killing of peaceful protesters or Tehran launching mass executions in the wake of the demonstrations.

Iran has repeatedly threatened to drag the entire Mideast into a war, though its air defences and military are still reeling after the June war launched by Israel against the country. But the pressure on its economy may spark new unrest as everyday goods slowly go



out of reach of its people.

Activists offer new death toll

The new figures on Tuesday came from the US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency, which has been accurate in multiple rounds of unrest in Iran. The group verifies each death with a network of activists on the ground in Iran.

It identified the dead as including at least 5,777 protesters, 214 Government-affiliated forces, 86 children and 49 civilians who weren't demonstrating. The crackdown has seen over

41,800 arrests, it added. *The Associated Press* has been unable to independently assess the death toll given authorities cutting off the internet and disrupting calls into the Islamic Republic.

Iran's Government has put the death toll at a far lower 3,117, saying 2,427 were civilians and security forces, and labelled the rest "terrorists." In the past, Iran's theocracy has undercounted or not reported fatalities from unrest.

That death toll exceeds that of any other round of protest or unrest there in decades, and recalls the chaos surrounding Iran's

1979 Islamic Revolution. The protests in Iran began on December 28, sparked by the fall of the Iranian currency, the rial, and quickly spread across the country. They were met by a violent crackdown by Iran's theocracy, the scale of which is only starting to become clear as the country has faced more than two weeks of internet blackout — the most comprehensive in its history.

Iran's UN ambassador told a UN Security Council meeting late Monday that Trump's repeated threats to use military force against the country "are neither

ambiguous nor misinterpreted." Amir Saeid Iravani also repeated allegations that the US leader incited violence by "armed terrorist groups" supported by the United States and Israel, but gave no evidence to support his claims.

Iranian state media has tried to accuse forces abroad for the protests as the theocracy remains broadly unable to address the country's ailing economy, which is still squeezed by international sanctions, particularly over its nuclear program.

Exchange shops offered the record-low rial-to-dollar rate in Tehran. Already, Iran has vastly limited its subsidized currency rates to cut down on corruption. It also has offered the equivalent of USD 7 a month to most people in the country to cover rising costs. However, Iran's people have seen the rial fall from 32,000 to USD 1 just a decade ago — which has devoured the value of their savings.

Iran projected its power across the Mideast through the "Axis of Resistance," a network of proxy militant groups in Gaza, Lebanon, Yemen, Syria and Iraq, and other places. It was also seen as a defensive buffer, intended to keep conflict away from Iranian borders. But it has collapsed after Israel targeted Hamas, Hezbollah in Lebanon and others

Thousands remain without power after storm in US



As a deadly storm that brought crippling ice to the South and deep snow to the Northeast finally began to swirl out to sea on Monday, it represented light at the end of the tunnel for some. But thousands of Americans were still without power or heat, and temperatures were

forecast to plunge well below freezing by early on Tuesday in areas where the ice storm did its worst damage. More than 800,000 power outages were reported nationwide

Monday morning, with more than 150,000 of them in the Nashville, Tennessee, area, according to poweroutage.com. About 140,000 remained without power in hard-hit Mississippi, and 115,000 more in icy Louisiana. After a sleepless night in Luka, Mississippi,

Adrian Ronca-Hohn said he awoke Monday to what looked "like a war zone." "We couldn't go 10 seconds without hearing what sounded like a gunshot," the 23-year-old football coach said of falling trees and branches. "You'd hear a pop, a hard pop, and you'd hear the whistle of it falling, and then it would crash to the ground and just kind of explode."

As temperatures across the South are expected to reach their coldest this week early

Tuesday morning, people without power are trying to survive. "We have a lot of people without heat, without power and without water,"

Ronca-Hohn said. We have a lot of mobile homes

down here that aren't very well-insulated."

Security forces kill 10 terrorists in Pakistan's Balochistan



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ karachi

Ten terrorists belonging to two insurgent groups were killed while 10 security personnel sustained injuries in an operation in Pakistan's restive Balochistan province, an official said on Tuesday.

The incident occurred in the hilly tracts of Panjgur city on Monday, Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) Ayetza Ahmed Goraya told reporters in Quetta. "We tracked down a hideout of suspected terrorists



The Loh Temple, located at the historical Lahore Fort in the Punjab province of Pakistan, has been restored and opened for public

PTI

Temple dedicated to Lord Ram son restored in Pak

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Lahore

The Loh Temple, dedicated to one of Lord Ram's sons, located at the historical Lahore Fort in Punjab province of Pakistan, has been fully restored and opened for the public.

The Walled City Lahore Authority (WCLA) said on Tuesday that it has completed the conservation of Loh Temple along with two other monuments the Sikh-era Hammam and Athdara Pavilion of Maharaja Ranjit Singh — in collaboration with the Aga Khan Cultural Service-Pakistan.

The Loh Temple comprises a cluster of interconnected chambers located within the Lahore Fort. Loh Temple is an open-to-sky

space housing a memorial shrine. The Loh or Lava temple is dedicated to Lava, one of the sons of Lord Ram.

According to Hindu beliefs, Lahore is named after him. It was partially restored in 2018.

The restoration initiative aims to celebrate Lahore Fort's rich cross-cultural heritage, reflected in its Sikh and Hindu temples, Mughal mosques and structures from the British period," WCLA spokesperson Tania Qureshi said and added extensive techniques have been employed as a part of the conservation process.

Last year, a Sikh researcher identified some 100 monuments at the Lahore Fort maintained during the Sikh era (1799-1849), detailing its historical significance.

KPK Assembly adopts resolution rejecting Pak Govt's decision to join Gaza Peace Plan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Peshawar



The provincial assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has unanimously passed a resolution rejecting Pakistan's decision to join the Board of Peace for Gaza set up by US President Donald Trump.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday joined a group of world leaders in signing the charter for the Board of Peace for Gaza, despite criticism from the opposition parties.

Trump hosted the ceremony on the margins of the annual World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. Pakistan had received the invitation from Trump to join the Board, which was later accepted. The KPK assembly,

with Speaker Babar Saleem Swati in the chair, on Monday unanimously adopted the resolution moved by Law Minister Aftab Alam of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf. The Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F) supported the resolution. Imran Khan's party has been ruling the province since 2013.

The resolution stated that

joining the Board of Peace is

contrary to Pakistan's historic and principled stance and the will of the Palestinian people. It argued that this move could damage the Palestinians' right to self-determination.

The House noted that the Board of Peace is inconsistent with UN resolutions and the right of self-determination for the Palestinians; instead, it served to strengthen Israeli atrocities, it said.

The resolution described the Board as a political forum that operates under the patronage of the US and Israel, essentially working to serve their specific agenda.

It further warns that subcommittees formed under this framework could act against Pakistan's national interests. The House demanded that the Federal

Government should adopt a clear and principled stance for the sovereignty, freedom, and right to self-determination of the people of Palestine and Gaza. Refrain from any actions that go against the rights of the Palestinian people, the resolution added.

The resolution reminded the federal Government of the principled stance of the country's founder, M A Jinnah, stating that Pakistan will never recognise Israel and will continue to oppose the illegal Israeli occupation of Palestine. Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz lawmaker Ibadullah, the Leader of the Opposition in the provincial assembly, told PTI that his party did not vote for the passage of the resolution along with the PPP and the ANP.

Goma city hanging by thread year after city fell to Rwanda-backed rebels

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Goma (Congo)



One year after M23 militants stormed into Goma, the rebel group still controls the main city in eastern Congo and is tightening its grip.

The scars from the fighting between the Congolese army and M23 in January 2025 remain visible, but life has gradually returned to normal. Markets are functioning, and people are adapting, but there is no real economic recovery. Bank closings, followed by the shutdown of the international airport, have severely crippled economic activity, plunging thousands of households into poverty.

Rwanda-backed M23 is the most powerful of over 100 armed groups vying for a foothold in mineral-rich eastern Congo, near the border with Rwanda. The conflict has created one of the world's most significant humanitarian crises, with more than 7 million people displaced, according to the

UN agency for refugees.

Following a sharp escalation of fighting early last year, M23 rebels took over Goma, which remains in their hands today. In downtown Goma, the banking district is one of the most striking symbols of the new reality, with once-bustling buildings now shuttered.

NORTHERN RAILWAY

(E-Auction Notice)

Sr. Divisional Commercial Manager/PS, Northern Railway, Delhi Division invited bids through e-Auction through IREPS (<https://ireps.gov.in/>) for the allotment of under mention contracts at following Railway stations/locations:-

E-Catalogue No.	Date & Time of bidding	Railway Stations/Locations/Lots
Parking-02-2026	12.02.2026 at 11:00 Hrs	Panipat (Car) (1 st Entry), Murad Nagar, Rohtak (2 nd Entry), Kurukshetra (1 st Entry) (Cycle-Scooter), Baraut, Kurukshetra (2 nd Entry) (Cycle-Scooter), Karnal (2 nd Entry) (Cycle-Scooter-Car), Meerut Cantt, Budhla, Barela, Karnal (641.62 Sqm), Shamli (Near PNR), Sampal (Main Entry), Kurukshetra (1 st Entry) (Cycle-Scooter-Car), Sampal (2 nd Entry) = Total 15 Sites

Website particulars where complete details of E-Auction can be seen <https://ireps.gov.in/>

All contractors who intend to participate in the e-auctions conducted through E-Auction Leasing module of IREPS should fulfil following mandatory requirements before they can submit their bids:

1. Registration on IREPS for E-Auction Leasing module -Active IREPS User Account for E-Auction Leasing Module.
2. Payment of One Time Registration Fee 3, Current Account in State Bank of India 4. Integration of SBI Bank Account with IREPS Account 5. Lien Marking of Funds 6. Updation of Turnover Details 7. Contractors who do not have IREPS account for any module of IREPS can submit their online request for registration by clicking on New Vendors / Contractors (E-Tender / E-Auction Leasing) link on IREPS Home page.

Railway Authority to contact, in case of any query Divisional Railway Manager's Office, Commercial Branch, State Entry Road, New Delhi 110055. Email: pkg.delhividision@gmail.com Tel: 011-23743084

No. 23AC/393-E-Auction/PKG/2026 Dated: 27.01.2026 287/2026

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Dated 28.01.2026

Advertisement No. 01/2026

RECRUITMENT NOTIFICATION 01/2026

The Central Sanskrit University, Delhi (CSU) is the nodal agency of the Ministry of Education, Govt. of India for implementing the Central Schemes of the Govt. of India for Sanskrit Promotion. Under one of the Central Schemes i.e. The Scheme for Financial Assistance to Institutions Recognized as Adarsh Sanskrit Mahavidyalayas (ASMs)/Adarsh Sanskrit Shodh Sansthanas (ASSSs) (Revised Adarsh Scheme-2022), various institutions have been recognised as ASMs/ASSSs, in different parts of the country, for financial assistance. In this context, under the provisions contained in this Scheme, applications are invited through online from Indian nationals for direct recruitment for the following Non-teaching/other academic posts in recognised ASMs/ASSSs located in various parts of the country :

Name of the posts & Level (as 7 th CPC)	No. of posts	Reservations, Eligibility, Qualifications, other necessary requirements
College Librarian (Level-10)	04	Details of Eligibility criteria, Qualifications, Age limit, Zone-wise Recruitment process, Institution-wise segregation of vacancies, reservation etc. and other essential requirements, application process etc. details are available in the detailed notification, which is available at CSU's website www.sanskrit.nic.in under recruitment/notification heads and also available in the website of the concerned institutions.
Section Officer (Level-07)	01	
Assistant (Level-06)	15	
Professional Assistant (Level-06)	01	
UDC (Level-04)	02	
LDC (Level-02)	20	

The starting date of the application is 28.01.2026 and closing date of advertisement is 27.02.2026 by 11.30 p.m. (IST).

This advertisement is only a short notification, on behalf of 19 grantee Adarsh institutions who are the appointing authority(s) for the concerned selected candidate(s). Accordingly, interested candidates are advised to go through the detailed advertisement for all necessary information.

cbc 21212/12/0004/2526

SD/- REGISTRAR I/c

Minnesota killing produces backlash against Trump administration from Second Amendment advocates

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Minneapolis



Prominent Republicans and gun rights advocates helped elicit a White House turn-around this week after bristling over the administration's characterisation of Alex Pretti, the second person killed this month by a federal officer in Minneapolis, as responsible for his own death because he lawfully possessed a weapon.

The death produced no clear shifts in US gun politics or policies, even as President Donald Trump shuffles the lieutenants in charge of his

Republicans' Second Amendment stances. If the dynamic persists, it could give Republicans problems as Trump heads into a midterm election year with voters already growing sceptical of his overall immigration approach.

The concern is acute enough that Trump's top spokeswoman sought Monday to reassert his brand as a staunch gun rights supporter. "The president supports the Second Amendment rights of law-abiding American citizens, absolutely," White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters.



BRIEFLY

SAI conducts workshop for coaches on advanced training



A four-day Sports Science Workshop for SAI coaches in archery and shooting, focussing on biomechanics, pressure management and emotional control, has begun at the Indira Gandhi Sports Complex. Secretary (Sports) and Director General, SAI (Sports Authority of India), Hari Ranjan Rao, gave the opening address on Monday, underlining the need to deepen the integration of sports science into daily training.

"Sports science must be used effectively to support athletes, especially in disciplines where marginal gains can make the difference between participation and podium success," Rao was quoted as saying in a press release from SAI. The workshop for SAI coaches in precision sports follows a series of coach sensitisation workshops, which started off in December last year.

Similar workshops have been held at the SAI Sports Science Division across disciplines like Hockey, Boxing, Wrestling, Judo, Athletics and now Shooting and Archery.

"Sports science has a crucial role to play in ensuring efficient training, injury prevention and career longevity, which ultimately reduces the financial burden on athletes and their families," Rao said.

Udinese beat struggling Verona by 3-1 in Serie A



Former Aston Villa striker Keinan Davis scored for the seventh time this season as his Udinese beat struggling Verona 3-1.

Verona remained second bottom of Serie A, equal on 14 points with last-placed Pisa, and it rarely looked like recording its third win of a dismal season.

Udinese took the lead after 23 minutes with a deflected shot from Arthur Attala. Although Emmanuel Orban equalized for Verona three minutes later, Verona's hopes did not last long into the second half.

Alessandro Zanoli put Udinese back in front 13 minutes into the second period. Jordan Veretout's free kick was blocked by the wall and while the ball fell awfully for Zanoli, his deft volley with the outside of his boot sailed into the top corner. Davis' confident finish after 66 minutes sealed the points for Udinese. It remains in 10th but is now on 29 points, equal with ninth-placed Lazio, and one point behind Bologna.

IOC puts Katie Uhlaender's Olympic dream on hold

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Washington

Katie Uhlaender's hopes of making the women's skeleton field for next month's Milan Cortina Games have been thwarted again, after US officials said that the International Olympic Committee didn't take action on their request for her to receive a discretionary spot.

The US Olympic and Paralympic Committee asked last week for Uhlaender to get a spot, citing how her qualifying chances were hurt by Canada's decision to pull four sliders from a race and limit the available number of rankings points earlier this month.

The International Bobsled and Skeleton Federation — the sport's governing body — investigated that race and said no rules were broken. USOPC chief of sport and athlete services Rocky Harris



said the IOC deferred to that in its reply to the Americans.

"We got a response this morning that they are supporting the international federation's decision on the matter," Harris said.

Uhlaender said Monday she is exploring options for filing with the Court of Arbitration for Sport, which deals with all sorts of issues

within global sports. USA Bobsled and Skeleton declined to comment.

The Americans are sending Kelly Curtis and Mystique Ro to the Olympics in women's skeleton; both were formally nominated to the team by the USOPC on Monday.

"We were requesting an additional slot for the sport to allocate to Katie, so it

would not have taken away from one of our currently competing athletes," Harris said. The 41-year-old Uhlaender — hoping to be the first woman to compete in the Winter Games six times for the US — fell just short of qualifying for the Olympic team. If the North American Cup race in question had at least 21 sliders,

which would have been the case before Canada's decision to hold some racers out, she may have earned an Olympic berth.

Uhlaender won that race in Lake Placid, New York, which had 19 sliders. She received 25 per cent fewer rankings points than she would have in a full field, and that difference left her behind Ro in the final standings. Uhlaender did not qualify for the US World Cup team entering this season, which made her Olympic quest even more challenging. She competed on the lower-tier NAC and Asian Cup circuits in an effort to collect enough points to qualify. Uhlaender said last week that she was hoping the IOC would "send a powerful message to young athletes everywhere: that standing up for ethics and integrity may be difficult, but it matters."

No financial details were disclosed. French sports daily L'Equipe said PSG paid 8 million euros (\$9.5 million) for the player better known just as Dru, whose Barca contract was set to expire in June next year.

"I'm very happy and very proud to be joining Paris Saint-Germain. This is a moment of huge pride for me and for my family," Dru said.

PSG signs 18-year-old midfielder Dru Fernandez from Barcelona

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Paris

Paris Saint-Germain has signed 18-year-old midfielder Dru Fernandez from Barcelona on a four-year deal.

PSG announced the deal in a statement late Monday, saying the signing "is fully in line with the club's sporting strategy and its strong focus on youth and talent."

No financial details were disclosed. French sports daily L'Equipe said PSG paid 8 million euros (\$9.5 million) for the player better known just as Dru, whose Barca contract was set to expire in June next year.

"I'm hugely excited and motivated to play and to give everything for this shirt."

Dru can play as an attacking midfielder or a left winger. He made five appear-

ances for Barca this season after coming through the club's prestigious La Masia youth academy that has produced stars like Lionel Messi and Lamine Yamal.

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Gotham hungry to win inaugural Women's Champions Cup, says Coach

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ London

Coach Juan Carlos Amoros says Gotham FC already has a league trophy and a confederation title, so, naturally, the next step is an intercontinental championship.

The National Women's Soccer League club is vying to win the first Women's Champions Cup in England this week, starting on Wednesday when the team will face Brazil's Corinthians in a semifinal.

"The hunger they have to win is unbelievable. It's in their nature," Amoros said about Gotham. "They win one competition and they're already thinking about the next one." UEFA Champions

League winner Arsenal plays Morocco's AS FAR in the late semifinal at London's Etihad Community Stadium. The championship and a third-place match will take place Sunday at Emirates Stadium with \$2.3 million going to the winner. The runner-up takes home \$1 million.

Gotham was the surprising winner of the NWSL championship as the eighth seed heading into the playoffs, knocking off No. 1 Kansas City and defending champion Orlando before beating the Washington Spirit 1-0 for the championship. Gotham qualified for the inaugural FIFA event by winning the first CONCACAF Champions Cup, with a 1-0 victory over Mexico's Tigres last May. "This

is where we want to be: Competing in the semifinals, competing in the finals, competing to raise another trophy. That's the standard here at Gotham," Gotham defender Mandy Freeman said as the team held pre-season training in Spain. "We want to not only be the first to win these types of competitions, but to continue that legacy and keep coming back to fight for championships."

The six-team women's Champions Cup was created as an intercontinental championship for women's club teams. It builds on a growing number of regional club competitions, led by the success of the UEFA Women's Champions League.

It also capitalises on the

growth of women's soccer globally. The 2025 Women's European Championship in Switzerland set a tournament record in attendance and

crowd of over 91,000. But the launch of the new tournament has been bumpy. A global broadcast partner for the final stage wasn't announced until two weeks ago, when DAZN stepped in. Sky Sports will broadcast the matches in England.

FIFA is also introducing a 16-team Women's Club World Cup, which will launch in 2028 and be played every four years. The new Champions Cup will be held every year, except years when the Club World Cup takes place.

Who qualifies? The competition includes one representative from each of the six confederations: UEFA (Europe), CONCACAF (North and Central America and the Caribbean), CONMEBOL

(South America), CAF (Africa), OFC (Oceania) and AFC (Asia).

In addition to Arsenal's qualification through the UEFA Champions League and Gotham's qualification via CONCACAF's Champions Cup, Corinthians won the CONMEBOL Copa Libertadores Femenina to earn a spot and AS FAR won the CAF Champions League. Two continental champions were eliminated in earlier rounds: Auckland United from Oceania and Wuhan Chegong Jiangda representing Asia.

The UEFA, CONCACAF and CONMEBOL competition winners advance to the semi-finals directly, while the Africa, Asia and Oceania winners play a knockout round.

Why London? The NWSL

had offered to host, and there were rumors that a West Coast location was considered for the final stage, but Arsenal's league match against Chelsea on Sunday made that problematic. So London was ultimately chosen.

Prize pool: The total prize pool to be distributed among the six continental champions is \$3.9 million. In contrast, Arsenal got some \$1.8 million in prize money for winning the Women's Champions League last season.

The prize money is "a clear statement of the belief in women's club football and the players, teams and competitions driving its continued rise," FIFA secretary general Mattias Grafstrom said in a statement.

Spain aims to host World Cup 2030 final

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Madrid

Spain will host the final of the 2030 World Cup, the president of the Spanish soccer federation said.

FIFA has not yet said where it plans to stage the decisive match of a tournament that will be co-hosted by Spain, Portugal and Morocco. But Rafael Louzan told reporters at a media event that the title match will be in Spain, although he did not specify in which city or venue it would be played.

"Spain will lead the World Cup and the final will be held here," Louzan said Monday, without elaborating.

Real Madrid's recently renovated Santiago Bernabeu Stadium has been long touted by Spanish media as



ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Washington

Former FIFA president Sepp Blatter backed a proposed fan boycott of World Cup matches in the United States because of the conduct of President Donald Trump and his administration at home and abroad.

Blatter was the latest international soccer figure to call into question the suitability of the United States as a host country. He called for the boycott in a post on X on Monday that supported Mark Pieth's comments in an interview last week with the Swiss newspaper Der Bund.

Pieth, a Swiss attorney specializing in white-collar crime and an anti-corruption expert, chaired the Independent Governance Committee's oversight of FIFA reform a decade ago. Blatter was president of the world's governing body for soccer from 1998-2015; he resigned amid an investigation into corruption.

In his interview with Der Bund, Pieth said, "If we consider everything we've discussed, there's only one piece of advice for fans: Stay away from the USA! You'll see it better on TV anyway. And upon arrival, fans should expect that if they don't please the officials, they'll be

put straight on the next flight home. If they're lucky."

In his post, Blatter quoted Pieth and added, "I think Mark Pieth is right to question this World Cup."

The United States is co-hosting the World Cup with Canada and Mexico from June 11-July 19. The international soccer community's concerns about the United States stem from Trump's expansionist posture on Greenland, travel bans and aggressive tactics in dealing with migrants and immigra-

tion enforcement protestors in American cities, particularly Minneapolis.

Oke Gottlich, one of the vice presidents of the German soccer federation, told the Hamburger Morgenpost newspaper in an interview on Friday that the time had come to seriously consider boycotting the World Cup.

Two weeks ago, travel plans for fans from two of the top soccer countries in Africa were thrown into disarray when the Trump administra-

tion announced a ban that would effectively bar people from Senegal and Ivory Coast from following their teams unless they already have visas. Trump cited "screening and vetting deficiencies" as the main reason for the suspensions. Fans from Iran and Haiti, two other countries that have qualified for the World Cup, will be barred from entering the United States as well; they were included in the first iteration of the travel ban announced by the Trump administration.

Barry scores fourth goal in 5 games to rescue Everton

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Liverpool



French striker Thierno Barry scored his fourth goal in five games to give Everton a 1-1 draw at home to Leeds. Leeds was dominant in the first half and took the lead in the 28th minute when Anton Stach's low cross from the right ran across the 18-yard box to James Justin, who stormed in at the far post to score with a low shot.

Dominic Calvert-Lewin almost doubled Leeds lead three minutes later but hit the post from about four meters out. Leeds' early superiority was highlighted by the visitors having more shots in the first half — 10 — than in any league game since September 2021.

However, Everton coach David Moyes changed to a back three for the second half and the switch brought his side right back into the game. Leeds goalkeeper Karl Darlow denied Barry an earlier equalizer and Iliman Ndiaye, back in the side after

winning the Africa Cup of Nations with Senegal, also came close for Everton.

But it was Barry who finally got the goal 14 minutes from time when the big forward got in front of a Leeds defender to stab home a low cross from

the first half we weren't at it and in the second half we were much better," Moyes added. "Thankfully, we got a goal back. We were fortunate to only be 1-0 down at half-time, but I could say the same as the second half — we could have maybe got a second goal."

The draw was a blow to Everton's European hopes. A win would have taken it into seventh, but it remained in 10th, one of four teams on 33 points.



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PSG announced the deal in a statement late Monday, saying the signing "is fully in line with the club's sporting strategy and its strong focus on youth and talent."

No financial details were disclosed. French sports daily L'Equipe said PSG paid 8 million euros (\$9.5 million) for the player better known just as Dru, whose Barca contract was set to expire in June next year.

"I'm hugely excited and motivated to play and to give everything for this shirt."

Dru can play as an attacking midfielder or a left winger. He made five appear-



Spotlight on spinners in 4th T20I against New Zealand

G UNNIKRISHNAN

■ Visakhapatnam

With the series already sealed, India will be hoping for a positive turn in their spinners' performance while attempting to extend the total domination over New Zealand to the fourth T20I on Wednesday.

The batting storm kicked up by Abhishek Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav and Ishan Kishan and the resultant 3-0 series lead has so far masked the underwhelming outings of two premier spinners — Kuldeep Yadav and Varun Chakravarthy.

Kuldeep has picked up two wickets in as many matches, but looked a distant shadow of his bewitching self, conceding 9.5 runs an over.

The left-arm wrist spinner had three expensive overs, that leaked 32 runs, even when India limited the Kiwis to 153 for 9 riding on brilliant

spells by Jasprit Bumrah, Ravi Bishnoi and Hardik Pandya.

In fact, the modest effort was a continuation from the preceding ODI series in which he took three wickets across three matches and gave away 7.28 runs an over.

Chakravarthy, who was rested for the third T20I, is a slightly different case as he has played in two high-scoring matches when the visitors scored 190 and 208.

But the usual zip has not been there in his bowling. The little time away might have been useful in replenishing him.

Kuldeep or Bishnoi?: In that context, India will ponder whether to persist with Bishnoi (4-0-18-2 at Guwahati) in the fourth match, and bring back Chakravarthy in place of Kuldeep to allow the latter some breathing space.

India will also keep a close eye on the fitness of all-

rounder Axar Patel, as he has



not played since the first game at Nagpur because of a finger injury.

Bats of fury: While the bowling pieces in this series have still not entirely fallen in their places, the hosts' batting

has been a different story.

The top-order reshaped India's T20 batting in this series and third match resembled an extended Power Play. Abhishek has scored at a strike-rate of

over 300 while Suryakumar and Kishan have maintained a strike-rate close to 230.

Such has been the fury in their batting that India have so far spent only a combined 25.2 overs in the park while

chasing 209 and 154 (363 runs in total) in the second and third T20Is.

If the nature of the pitch and the amount of dew in Visakhapatnam are anything to go by, this match too will not be offering a different script. The only out of sync piece, surprisingly too, is the wretched form of Sanju Samson, who has been given his preferred opening slot in this series.

Perhaps, dawdling in the middle-order the whole of last year without role clarity has affected his rhythm but the talent rush in Indian cricket has made it mandatory for Samson to come good on almost all occasions.

However, pitiful numbers in this series so far — 16 runs in three matches at 5.33 — have made the ride rough for him. But with a recuperating Tilak Varma having an extended time away from the team, Samson might be getting another game here

to vindicate the management's faith in him. Perhaps, the team think tank can also consider giving him the No. 3 slot while pushing Kishan up to pair with Abhishek.

However, the Kerala man will be aware that he is closer to the tip of the rope more than ever before.

Can Kiwis fly high?: Little has gone right for New Zealand in the ongoing series.

Their batters found occasional spark but bowlers failed to mount a response to Indian batters' onslaught.

That Jacob Duffy, with an economy of 10.30, is their most parsimonious bowler tells a story in itself, but his numbers shine bright in comparison to other bowlers.

They offer a stunning read too. Matt Henry (13.80), Kyle Jamieson (14.20), Mitchell Santner (13.14) and Ish Sodhi (12.50) have all been taken to the cleaners by the home side.

There are some peripheral concerns such as a possible promotion of in-form Daryl Mitchell higher up in the order, but if the bowlers do not self-heal their scars and manage their fears quickly then another round of walloping awaits them.

Teams (from):

India: Suryakumar Yadav (capt), Abhishek Sharma, Sanju Samson (wk), Shreyas Iyer, Hardik Pandya, Shivam Dube, Axar Patel (vice-capt), Rinku Singh, Jasprit Bumrah, Harshit Rana, Arshdeep Singh, Kuldeep Yadav, Varun Chakravarthy, Ishan Kishan (wk), Ravi Bishnoi.

New Zealand: Mitchell Santner (c), Michael Bracewell, Mark Chapman, Devon Conway, Jacob Duffy, Zak Foulkes, Matt Henry, Kyle Jamieson, Bevon Jacobs, Daryl Mitchell, James Neesham, Glenn Phillips, Rachin Ravindra, Lockie Ferguson, Ish Sodhi, Tim Seifert.

(PTI)

T20 WC: Scotland hopes for timely Indian visas

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Cricket Scotland chief executive Trudy Lindblade is confident that players of the national team, including Pakistan-origin pacer Safyaan Sharif, will get visas in time to travel to India for the T20 World Cup.

Scotland were included into the T20 World Cup following Bangladesh's withdrawal citing security concerns despite the ICC insisting that there were no threats as per their assessment.

Scotland will open their campaign against West Indies in Kolkata on February 7. Pakistan origin applicants of India visa attract more scrutiny and therefore taking more processing time.

"We are all committed (to) working with the ICC to make that happen," Lindblade was quoted as saying by ESPNcricinfo.

"The visa piece is always slightly an unknown, and it doesn't matter whether you've got three days or whether you've got 45 days."

"Certainly that's been our focus in the last 48 hours: just getting those visas done so our players are all ready to go. They're all in the middle of submitting their visas and we



will be there on the ground in India as quickly as we can, so it's just a matter of time now."

Sharif, who was born in Huddersfield to a Pakistani father and a British-Pakistani mother, shifted to Scotland as a seven-year-old.

"(The ICC) can only give us the assurances of the bits that they can control and, absolutely, of the bits that they control, we are working with them and obviously they're working with the BCCI and local people on the

ground there to make sure that we are getting all of that support that we need," Lindblade said.

"So, absolutely, (they have given) the assurance that they can provide of things that were in their control. There is a team working very, very hard to not just help us, but to help 19 other teams as well that are also going to a World Cup. But we are their intense focus right now."

As a contingency plan, Scotland will also apply for visas for two travelling

reserves and three non-travelling reserves to ensure they can field a team in case of delays.

"We [also] anticipate some support whenever we can [get it] from the BCCI," Scotland's head of performance, Steve Snell said.

"I don't think we need to escalate that any further to get into the country, because you'd suggest that Scotland being invited to

attend the World Cup and then not being able to get there wouldn't be a great

opportunity." Scotland will play warm-up matches against Afghanistan and Namibia in Bengaluru on February 2 and 4 before their opening match against West Indies in Kolkata.

Their other first-round matches are against Italy, England and Nepal, with the top two teams in Group B qualifying for the Super 8s stage.

"We do feel for Bangladesh": Lindblade said Scotland sympathise with Bangladesh and that this was not how they wanted to compete in the ICC showpiece.

"We certainly have for the Bangladesh team," Lindblade said when asked if she had sympathy for the side they had replaced.

"Obviously, this is not how we wanted to go to a World Cup. There is a qualification process and nobody wants to qualify or attend or be invited to a World Cup in the way that we have done. We acknowledge it is certainly unique circumstances by our participation, and we do feel for the Bangladesh players."

Scotland had missed out on qualification after losing matches against Italy and Jersey at the Europe Regional Final last July.

Scotland announce T20 WC squad, pick uncapped Afghan-born pacer

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Edinburgh

Last minute T20 World Cup entrants Scotland have included Afghan-born uncapped pacer Zainullah Ihsan in their 15-member squad for the ICC event beginning in India and Sri Lanka on February 7. Scotland have replaced Bangladesh in the tournament with the latter refusing to play in India citing security concerns.

Richie Berrington will captain a strong squad that includes eleven players who were part of the 2024 T20 World Cup squad in West Indies and USA. The team selection on Monday was the first made by new head coach Owen Dawkins, following his appointment last month.

Ihsan is the sole first-time call-up, with the fast bowler having recently qualified to play for Scotland. Tom Bruce, Finlay McCreath and Oliver Davidson will all travel to their first World Cup, following their involvement in T20 and ODI squads during the last twelve months.

The squad selection is subject to all player and staff visa applications being approved. Given the limited

notice for Scotland's participation at the tournament and timescale for selecting players, two travelling reserves have been selected while three others will be non-travelling reserves," said Cricket Scotland in a statement.

Safyaan Sharif is a squad member of Pakistan lineage and his application will attract more scrutiny.

Head coach Dawkins said the unexpected entry into the World Cup provides a great opportunity for the players.

"It's been a whirlwind forty-eight hours for everyone at Cricket Scotland, and I know Steve, Trudy Lindblade and whenever he's played at youth level or for the 'A' squad he's shown an exciting range of skills and bowled at genuine pace.

players and support staff since we learnt we would be participating at the World Cup. "We're all very excited and feeling privileged to have this opportunity. The players have been working hard in a fitness phase in recent weeks with Scott Hislen preparing for the ICC Cricket World Cup League Two series in Namibia at the end of March, and I have no doubt that this will help us in the next few weeks," said Dawkins.

On the selection of Ihsan, head of performance Steve Snell added: "There's obviously

a great opportunity for Zainullah Ihsan, and whenever he's played at youth level or for the 'A' squad he's shown an exciting range of skills and bowled at genuine pace.

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