

# Across State

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## PM Modi, Macron inaugurate India's new consulate in France's Marseille



### Paris

On the last day of his visit to France, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Emmanuel Macron on Wednesday jointly inaugurated India's new consulate in France's Marseille city.

The consulate will be India's second diplomatic mission in the country after the embassy in Paris. It will reduce the need for people to travel to Paris for consular work.

The two leaders jointly inaugurated India's new consulate in Marseille with the press of a button amid cheers from the gathered crowd.

Many of these people had come bearing national flags of both India and France, while some sported a tricolour headgear, adding colour to the occasion.

The inauguration marked a culmination of the announcement that was made during Modi's France visit in 2023 about India opening a consulate in the city located in the South of France on the Mediterranean

coast.

Marseille is a key strategic location and marks the entry point for the ambitious India Europe Economic Corridor. India has plans to use the Marseille port, where no foreign power has current presence.

Prior to the inauguration, Modi and Macron visited the historic Mazargues Cemetery, and paid tributes to the fallen Indian soldiers of World War-1. Marseille was the base of Indian troops during WW-1 and 900 fallen Indian soldiers have been commemorated at the Mazargues Cemetery here.

Later, the two leaders also interacted with a section of the people in the crowd.

Modi and Macron will also meet officials of the Port of Marseille, the largest port in France.

Modi's France visit has been marked by special gestures of friendship by President Macron.

"A unique aspect of PM Modi's visit to France has been the time and

respect given by President Macron to him," official sources said.

On the first day, President Macron spent time with PM Modi at the dinner hosted by him. The camaraderie continued the next day at the AI Action Summit, where India and France co-hosted the summit.

"Demonstrating their close ties, they hosted the India-France CEOs Forum together, reflecting their shared vision for economic collaboration. In an extraordinary gesture of friendship, they travelled together in a joint motorcade and in the same plane to Marseille. President Macron hosted PM Modi for a working dinner in Marseille immediately on landing," said sources.

The two leaders will also visit the ITER project and the Marseille port together, underscoring the depth of this unique partnership.

"Such proximity and time being given by a leader like Macron for any world leader is rare and rarely has any precedent," said Indian officials.

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# Amid row over Ranveer Allahbadia's remark, YouTube blocks controversial episode

## Mumbai

An episode of 'India Got Latent' on YouTube, featuring obscene and vulgar comments by Ranveer Allahbadia, has been blocked following orders from the government, officials said on Tuesday.

"The 'India Has Latent' episode on @YouTube with obscene and perverse comments by Ranveer Allahbadia has been blocked following Government of India orders," Kanchan Gupta, Senior Adviser, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, said in a post on X.

Allahbadia — who has over 600,000 followers on X, 4.5 million on Instagram and 10.5 million subscribers on his YouTube channel — faced backlash from

all quarters after his distasteful comment on parents and sex on comedian Samay Raina's YouTube reality show 'India's Got Latent' went viral on social media on Monday.

The youtuber, popularly known as BeerBiceps, later apologised for his "lapse in judgement" and also said he had asked the show creators to remove the controversial segment.

On the comedy reality series, popular among today's youth for its edgy bordering on offensive content, Allahbadia asked a question to a contestant on parents and sex, which has been panned by many.

On Monday, the Guwahati Police registered a case against him and four others. A complaint



was registered against them by a resident of the city for allegedly promoting obscenity in a publicly accessible online show.

Besides Allahbadia, the case was also filed against stand-up comedian Samay Raina, Ashish Chanchlani, Jaspreet Singh and Apoorva Makhija.

In an apology video on X on Monday, Allahbadia admitted that his



comment was not only inappropriate, but also not funny.

"Comedy is not my

forte. Just here to say sorry," the YouTuber, popularly known as BeerBiceps, said in the video.

"Many of you asked if this is how I wish to use my platform. Obviously, this is not how I wish to use my platform. I am not going to give any context, justification or reasoning behind whatever happened. I am just here for an apology. I, personally, had a lapse in judgement. It wasn't cool on my part."

Allahbadia, who has been criticised for setting a bad example for the youth who are his primary audience, said he doesn't want to be the kind of person who takes responsibility lightly.

"Family is the last thing that I would ever disrespect. Need

to use this platform better and that's been my learning from this whole experience.

I promise to just get better. Have asked the makers of the video to remove the insensitive sections from the video and all I can say in the end is sorry. I hope you can forgive me as a human being," he said.

Meanwhile, the All Indian Cine Workers Association (AICWA) "vehemently condemned the reprehensible and offensive remarks" made by Allahbadia.

"In a recent episode, Ranveer Allahbadia, who participated in the YouTube show 'India's Got Latent', unleashed abhorrent and vile statements that are deeply disrespectful to our societal and family values," the AICWA said.

## Rarest Phase of Human Emotions: Mahakumbha Vs Valentine's Day!!

It's been a month where our glorious country has been witnessing the love for our faith and religion through millions of people having bath in the sacred Sangam of this on going Mahakumbha at holy city Prayagraj Uttar Pradesh. This is one love which has manifested in the form of devotion where the devotees have immense reverence for this Mahakumbha festival no matter what. They don't bother about any adversities. They don't condition their mind with any negativity, they just don't want to miss this golden opportunity at any cost. At the same time amidst Mahakumbha, International love festival i. e. Valentine's day has also arrived and now its all around. And one of the most surprising devotion I saw that some love birds and married couples taking their partner to

Kumbha to celebrate their sacred bond in a devotional way, after all this occasion won't come every year so they have merged this romantic love with faith and religion. Where as many people think being at home and doing their normal life activities or duties make them feel blissful. They don't regret or miss the holy snan at Prayagraj. They are worshipers of their work, they don't criticize external worship, idol worship, and pilgrimages but simply enjoy being in their own way. Therefore it is well understood that love, faith, devotion are deep emotions and very personal. These feelings can manifest in many different ways, and what it looks and feels like can be unique to each individual and their experiences.

For some, love might be a romantic partnership, faith might

be observing multiple fastings and elaborate rituals all through year while for others, love might be the bond between family members, friends, or even a deep connection with oneself and faith might be just living with soulful prayers of gratitude in daily life.



I Say  
As I See

By SHASHI DIP  
Bilingual Author/  
Journalist

So, in this season of love, India is immersed with religious faith and romantic love is not much trending as it used to be in the previous years. Millions of people are not able to control themselves even though a heartwrenching stampede shook the country

when it took away thousands of lives, local people of the holy city are facing great pain and hard hardships due to enormous crowd and extreme traffic jams still no one is scared and no one is minding. This is called obsession when all the experts reviews and advices get failed and most of the people just focus on one single matter and love to go with the profound thought of their conscience. This is rarest phase of human emotions just like this unique Mahakumbha. So let us feel the best out of this rare phase when it is not in our control. Whether it's passionate love, companionate love self-love, platonic love, soulful devotion or superficial worships Ultimately, love, faith and devotion are complex and multifaceted emotions that can be experienced in countless ways.

# MVA rift widens as Uddhav's Sena expresses displeasure with Sharad Pawar for felicitating Eknath Shinde

**Mumbai**

Amid the talks of a widening rift within the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) in Maharashtra, Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena (UBT) has expressed displeasure with Sharad Pawar for felicitating state Deputy CM Eknath Shinde.

As per the sources from the Uddhav Sena, Uddhav Thackeray has expressed resentment over the Mahadji Shinde Rashtriya Gaurav Award given to Shinde by the NCP-SCP chief. Thackeray has said that Pawar should not have felicitated the deputy chief minister as he had broken the Shiv Sena. He said that Pawar should have respected the sentiments of the Thackeray family.

Reacting to the felicitation,



UBT MP Sanjay Raut said, "Do you know who gave this award? Such awards given to political leaders are either bought or sold."

The rumours of the rift took

a toll after the alliance faced a crushing defeat at the hands of BJP-led Mahayuti in the 2024 assembly elections. In the most recent development, Uddhav

Thackeray, last month, announced going solo in the Maharashtra municipal elections.

However, UBT leader Sanjay Raut later clarified that the decision had nothing to do with the future of MVA and the decision was taken because the alliance in local polls curbs the opportunities for workers. To settle the dust, Thackeray had also met Sharad Pawar at his South Mumbai residence.

Pawar, the architect of the opposition coalition, had stepped in to calm the turbulence within the MVA and recently said he would convene a meeting of the combine's three constituents to discuss contesting the upcoming local body elections.

## Raut on PM's Marseille visit: 'Nothing wrong with Modi visiting the place from where Savarkar escaped'



**Mujmbai**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Marseille, France, has sparked reactions from Indian political circles. Shiv Sena (UBT) MP has welcomed the visit, emphasizing its historical significance.

Speaking on the occasion, the MP stated, "There's nothing wrong with the PM visiting the place from where Veer Savarkar escaped. It is a matter of pride for us."

Veer Savarkar's daring escape from British captivity in Marseille in 1910 remains a key chapter in India's freedom struggle. PM Modi's visit to the city is seen as a symbolic nod to India's historical legacy.

The visit comes amid India's strengthening bilateral ties with France, with discussions expected on trade, defense, and strategic cooperation.

## Days after excluding him, Maharashtra government makes room for Eknath Shinde in disaster management authority

**Mumbai**

Three days after The Indian Express reported that Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde was kept out of the newly restructured State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA), even as his counterpart Ajit Pawar was included, the state cabinet on Tuesday decided to modify the rules and include Shinde too.

Before the state cabinet meeting, an upset Shinde had said that he had no idea when the committee had been formed. "I am not bothered about the committee. But be assured that whenever there is a disaster, this Eknath Shinde stands to help people," Shinde added.

Last week on Thursday, the government had announced a restructured nine-member SDMA headed by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis. While the chief secretary was the CEO, the other members included Pawar, BJP's Chandrashekhar Bawankule,



Revenue Minister, and Girish Mahajan, Disaster Management Minister, NCP's Makarand Jadhav-Patil, Relief and Rehabilitation Minister, and Shiv Sena's Prakash Abitkar, Public Health Minister. Professors Ravi Sinha and Dipankar Chaudhari from IIT-Mumbai were the non-government members.

On Tuesday, after the cabinet meeting, Mahajan said the committee will now have 10 members. "Both deputy CMs are now included in the committee. Earlier, there used

to be only one chief minister. Now there are two deputy CMs, therefore, both Shinde and Ajit dada are part of this authority," Mahajan added.

The Opposition NCP (SP) took a dig at the government saying rectifying the mistake after being exposed is no less of an insult to Shinde. "When the first list of members was issued, Shinde, being a former CM, should have been there. Shinde should now take a stand to not join this authority after this insult," said Jitendra Awhad, NCP (SP) MLA.

**Evolving global security scenario demands innovation, stronger partnerships: Rajnath Singh**



**Bengaluru**  
Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday asserted that the evolving global security scenario demands innovative approaches and stronger partnerships.

Addressing the Defence Ministers' Conclave organised as part of the Aero India 2025 here, he said, India believes that international order and peace cannot be ensured from a position of weakness.

Today, increasing number of conflicts is making our world, a more unpredictable place. New power plays, new methods and new means of weaponisation, increased role of non-state actors and disruptive technologies, have made the world

order more fragile," Singh said.

At the same time, the distinction between security of the borders and internal security is getting blurred, as hybrid warfare can target critical national infrastructure even during the peace time, he said, "the definition of front line is changing fast today. Moreover, the dimensions of cyberspace and outer space are challenging the established definition of sovereignty."

"It is my firm belief that the evolving global security scenario demands innovative approaches and stronger partnerships. India's engagements in the global stage exemplifies our commitment to fostering security and growth for all," he added.

## Treat failure as fuel to spur success, PM advises students

**New Delhi**  
Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday interacted with students, including differently abled, on issues ranging from mastering exam pressure to busting stress, eating right and cultivating leadership qualities.

In a shift from the traditional town hall format, the PM, addressing the eighth edition of 'Pariksha Pe Charcha', preferred an idyllic setting at the capital's favoured destination, the Sunder Nursery, where he engaged his guests on ecological protection and key issues of life. He also planted trees with them.

The PM said, "We should not exploit nature but protect and nurture our environment."

Speaking on 'master your time, master your life and live in the moment', the PM asked students to treat "failure as a fuel for success



and to challenge themselves."

As an icebreaker, Modi distributed sweets to children rather than notes, even as he stressed the importance of eating right.

His lesson was — avoid junk food as he promoted super food millets asking everyone to have seasonal fruits.

Talking to students drawn from states and UTs across the

country, the Prime Minister said exams were not everything. His conversation with a specially abled child, Vaibhav, who posed many queries related to exam stress, overthinking and time management, was especially engaging.

To make students spot and hone their hidden talents, the PM referred to a case of a boy in Ahmedabad, who was on the verge of being shunted out

of school for poor performance. "But this boy brought laurels to his school in a robotics competition because he used to spend hours tinkering inside labs at school. There is something special in every child," he said.

Modi urged parents not to confine their children and let them explore their passions. He said parents should not compare their children with others.

## 'Are we not creating a class of parasites?' Supreme Court says on freebie culture

**New Delhi**

As political parties continued to make irrational poll-eve promises, the Supreme Court on Wednesday took a dig at the freebie culture, saying people were not willing to work as they were getting free ration and money.

"Unfortunately, because of these freebies which, just on the anvil of election -- 'Ladki Bahin' and some other schemes --- people are not willing to work. They are getting free rations, amounts without doing any work! I am telling you from personal experiences...because of these freebies, some states give free ration, so the people do not want to work," a Bench of Justice BR Gavai and Justice AG Masih said, while hearing

a petition on the right to shelter of homeless persons in urban areas.

"Rather than permitting them to be a part of the mainstream society by contributing to the development of the nation, are we not creating a class of parasites?" a Bench of Justice BR Gavai and Justice AG Masih wondered even as it appreciated the government's concern for homeless people. On behalf of the Centre, Attorney General R Venkataramani submitted that the government was in the process of finalising the urban poverty alleviation mission, which would address various issues, including shelter for the urban homeless. Asking the Attorney General to spell out how much time it would take to make the urban poverty alleviation mission applicable, the

Bench posted the matter for further hearing after six weeks.

As petitioner's counsel Prashant Bhushan said there was no one in the country who didn't want to work if they had some work, Justice Gavai shot back, "You must be having only one-sided knowledge." Narrating his personal experience, Justice Gavai said, "I come from an agricultural family. Because of the freebies in Maharashtra which they just announced prior to the (assembly) elections, the agriculturists are not getting labourers. Everybody is getting free (ration and money) at home." It said everybody, including the Attorney General, was on the same page that providing shelter to the homeless merited due attention. "But at the same time, should it not be

balanced?" it asked.

The top court had on July 5, 2013 declared that freebies promised in poll manifestos vitiated the electoral process and asked the Election Commission to frame guidelines to check it in consultation with political parties. However, no substantive progress has been made on the issue.

Acting on a PIL filed by Delhi BJP leader Ashwini Upadhyay, the top court had on August 3, 2022 asked the Centre, Niti Aayog, Finance Commission, Law Commission, RBI and members of ruling and opposition parties to give constructive suggestions to address the issue of irrational poll-eve freebies to influence the electorate. The matter was pending before the top court.

## Cricket terminology abounds in Lok Sabha in barbs against Congress, BJP

New Delhi

Shiv Sena MP Shrikant Shinde on Tuesday described the Congress as a "batter" who is trying to get the other partners of the INDIA bloc "run out".

Independent MP from Maharashtra's Sangli, Vishal Patil, also resorted to cricket lexicon to take a swipe at the Mahayuti government, saying that after winning the assembly poll, the alliance got the "12th man" to run the government.

Participating in a discussion on the Union Budget in Lok Sabha, Shinde said, "The INDIA bloc is like a cricket team that has a batter named the Congress who is bent on getting others run out."



Shinde also lauded the Union Budget saying, "If we call (PM Narendra) Modi ji the captain of Team India then Nirmala Sitharaman is its winning all-rounder."

In a swipe at BJP leader and Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis, Patil said, "In the past, people would show the photograph of an eligible person and then get a useless person married in his place. This is what has happened in Maharashtra, they showed the face of Eknath Shinde and after the results some other person became the 'groom'."

"The man of the match was made the 12th man and the 12th man is now running the government after becoming the captain," he said.

## Don't delete EVM data pending verifications, SC tells EC

New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Tuesday asked the Election Commission to respond to a plea seeking directions to allow verification of the burnt memory and Symbol Loading Units (SLUs) of the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs).

Acting on an interim application filed by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), a Bench of Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Dipankar Datta told senior counsel Maninder Singh, representing the EC, not to erase or reload the data in EVMs while carrying out verifications.

As ADR alleged that the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) framed by the poll panel for verification of EVMs was not in accordance with the top court's April 26, 2024 verdict in the EVM-VVPAT case, the Bench asked the EC to file an affidavit explaining the SOP for verification of EVMs. It also sought a direction to the poll panel to check and verify burnt memory/micro-controllers and SLUs of EVMs.

Terming the present cost of Rs 40,000 fixed by the EC for verification of EVMs as "too high", it also asked the poll panel

to reduce it and posted the matter for the week commencing on March 3.

While dismissing PILs seeking return to the paper ballot system or a 100% cross-verification of votes cast through EVMs with Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) slips, the top court had issued certain directions to the EC to strengthen the current EVM system.

It had opened a window for the aggrieved unsuccessful candidates securing second and third places by allowing them to seek verification of microcontroller chips embedded in five per cent EVMs per assembly constituency on a written request upon payment of a fee to the EC.

It had also mandated that five per cent of the EVMs in every assembly constituency should undergo verification by the engineers from EVM manufacturers after the election results were announced.

On Tuesday, ADR counsel Prashant Bhushan contended that the EC's SOP on EVM verification was inadequate as it didn't comply with the court's directions in the April 26, 2024 verdict.

"What we want is for

someone to examine the software and hardware of the EVMs to see whether they contain any element of manipulation," Bhushan said.

The Bench told EC counsel Singh that its April 26, 2024 verdict did not intend to erase or reload the polling data in EVMs and that it only intended for the EVMs to be verified and checked by an engineer from the EVM manufacturing company after the polling process was over.

Singh told the Bench that the EC would clarify the position by filing an affidavit explaining the procedure adopted and the poll panel would not do any modification/correction of the data.

However, the top court refused to entertain a similar petition by former Haryana minister Karan Singh Dalal and Lakhan Kumar Singla (a candidate in the recent Haryana Assembly elections) seeking a direction to the EC to put in place a policy for verification of the original burnt memory/micro-controller of the four components of EVMs as an earlier petition filed by them on the same cause was withdrawn without obtaining liberty to file a fresh petition.

## Row in Rajya Sabha regarding newer editions of Constitution missing original illustrations

New Delhi

Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar, who is also the Rajya Sabha Chairman, on Tuesday asserted that the Constitution signed by the founding fathers carrying 22 miniatures is the only authentic version and urged Union Minister and Leader of the House J P Nadda to take "severe action" against anyone publishing constitution without the illustrations.

The Chairman gave the directive after a row broke out between the Opposition Congress and the treasury benches regarding newer editions of the Constitution missing original illustrations.

"I am categorical that the Constitution signed by the founding fathers carrying 22 miniatures is the

only authentic one and it can include amendments by the Parliament. If there is any change effected by judiciary or any institution, it is not acceptable to this House," Dhankhar said.

The Chairman appealed to the Leader of the House to ensure that only the authentic version of the Indian Constitution was promulgated.

"Any violation of this should be taken seriously by the government and severe action taken," Dhankhar said.

Speaking during the Zero Hour in Rajya Sabha, BJP MP Radha Mohan Aggarwal raised the issue alleging that several illustrations including those of Lord Ram and Sita, part of original copy of the Constitution,

were dropped from the copies published and sold later. Kharge protested, saying he read the Constitution and never heard of the illustrations the BJP MP was talking about. Misrepresentation of the copy amounted to heaping insult on Constitution framer B R Ambedkar, he said.

Later, the Congress members staged a walkout from the House.

Targeting Congress over the issue, Leader of the House JP Nadda said the previous Congress government got the illustrations removed because they did not want Indians to know about their glorious past. This was the "hidden agenda" of the Congress, he said.

TMC MP Derek O'Brien said

the copy of the Constitution available on the computer installed on his desk did not have any illustration.

Chairman Dhankhar said the original copy of the Constitution contained illustration of Ram-Sita, Lord Krishna giving sermon to Arjuna, Chhatrapati Shivaji, Emperor Akbar and others.

Publishing the copy without the illustrations amounted to insulting B R Ambedkar and other founding fathers of the Constitution, Dhankhar said.

The Chairman said changes in the Constitution could be carried out only by the Members of Parliament and the change would have to be ratified by the President.

# Over 2 crore devotees take holy dip in Sangam on Magh Purnima



## Mukesh Ambani, family visit Maha Kumbh



### Prayagraj

Reliance Industries Chairman Mukesh Ambani visited Maha Kumbh on Tuesday with his family and participated in a yagya at Parmarth Triveni Pushp in Arail, officials here said.

According to a statement issued by Parmarth Niketan, besides Mukesh, Kokilaben Ambani, Shloka Ambani, Anant Ambani and Radhika Merchant

visited the Parmarth Triveni Pushp.

Swami Chidanand Saraswati, who presided over the ritual, said the Ambani family honoured sanitation workers and boatmen with angvastras, sweets, fruits, hygiene kits and other gifts.

The family participated in the Vishwa Shanti Yagya praying for "global peace and welfare", the release said.

### Prayagraj

As the world's largest-ever religious gathering is underway in the holy city of Prayagraj, more than two crore people took a holy dip at the Triveni Sangam today (February 12) on the occasion of Magh Purnima, according to the Uttar Pradesh government.

The Mahakumbh 2025, which began in Prayagraj with chants of bhajans and slogans on Paush Poornima, witnessed a sea of devotees on each day. The Mahakumbh is being held after 12 years, although seers claim that the celestial alignments and cosmic combinations for the event are occurring after 144 years, making the occasion even more auspicious.

Over 46.25 crore take holy dip till today

As per the Uttar Pradesh Information Department, over 46.25 crore people have taken a dip at the confluence of the Ganga, and Yamuna rivers since the commencement of the event on January 13. The mega-religious event, organised every 12 years, is underway in Prayagraj from January 13 and will continue for 45 days till February 26.

The Uttar Pradesh government in

a statement said that by 6 pm, more than two crore devotees, including 10 lakh Kalpwasis and 1.90 crore pilgrims had taken the ritual dip at the Triveni Sangam and other ghats.

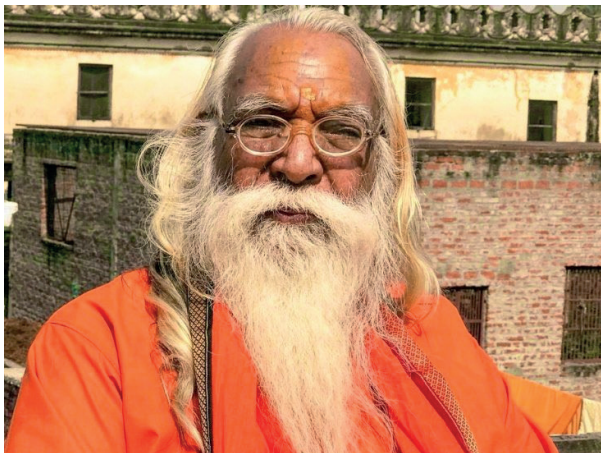
UP CM Yogi monitors situation

Earlier, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath was monitoring the Magh Purnima 'snan' at Triveni Sangam as millions of devotees turned up for the holy bath. He was monitoring the situation in Prayagraj from his official residence in Lucknow in the wee hour on Wednesday. The chief minister was taking regular updates on the 'Snan' at Sangam, from the war room set up at his official residence.

With the Maghi Purnima Snan, the month-long Kalpavas concludes today, and around 10 lakh Kalpwasis will begin departing from the Mahakumbh.

The Mahakumbh, held once every 12 years, is taking place in Prayagraj from January 13 to February 26. As per tradition, pilgrims gather at the Sangam, (the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati river) to take the sacred dip, which is believed to cleanse sins and lead to moksha (liberation).

## Ayodhya Ram temple head priest Mahant Satyendra Das dies at 85



### Lucknow

Mahant Satyendra Das, the chief priest of the Ram Janmabhoomi temple in Ayodhya, died at a hospital here on Wednesday, sources said.

The 85-year-old was admitted to the Sanjay Gandhi Post Graduate Institute of Medical Sciences (SGPGI) earlier this month after he suffered brain stroke.

"Satendra Das ji, chief Priest of Ram Mandir Ayodhya, breathed his last today. He was admitted in HDU (High Dependency Unit) of Neurology ward on February 3 with stroke in critical condition," the hospital said.

Das served as the head priest since he was 20 years old, including during the demolition of the Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992.

## Lottery Distributor Is Not Liable To Pay Service Tax, Says Supreme Court

### New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Tuesday said that the central government cannot impose service tax on the sale of lotteries.

The judgment was pronounced by Justice B V Nagarathna. The apex court dismissed a plea filed by the central government claiming that it is entitled to impose service tax on lotteries.

It upheld the order passed by the Sikkim High Court, which ruled that lottery comes within the expression "betting and gambling", which is Entry 62 of the state list, and only the state government can impose tax.

Pronouncing the operative part of the judgment, Justice Nagarathna said there was no service rendered by the lottery distributors. Therefore, service tax is not leviable. The bench made

it clear that it will not take a different view than what the Sikkim High Court had taken in the matter while dismissing the appeal filed by the central government.

The high court had held that the activities of lottery distributors do not constitute a service.

The apex court said that the relationship between the lottery distributor and the state government was principal-principal and not principal-to-agency. It added that since there is no agency in the relationship, the lottery distributors were not liable to pay service tax but made it clear that they would have to pay the gambling tax, which was levied by the state under Entry 62, List II.

The top said, "We find that at each stage, the amendments made to the Finance Act, 1994, in order to

impose service tax on the sole distributor/purchaser of the lottery tickets (respondents-assessee herein) have been unsuccessful".

"We have reasoned that the amendment to the said definition would in no way detract from the substance of the relationship between the State Government and the sole distributor or purchaser of the lottery tickets which is one of principal to principal and not of principal-agent," said the bench, also comprising Justice N. Kotiswar Singh.

The bench added that there being no agency and no service rendered by the respondents-assessee herein as an agent to the government of Sikkim, service tax is not leviable on the transactions between the purchaser of the lottery tickets and the government of Sikkim.

## India's Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft To Soar By 2028, Evading Enemy Radars

### Bengaluru

India is taking a giant leap towards self-reliance in air defence with the development of the 5th Generation Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA). Designed to evade enemy radars and conduct stealth operations, the AMCA is being developed under the Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA), which operates under the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). If all goes as planned, the indigenously developed AMCA will take its maiden flight by 2028.

At the Aero India 2025 event, DRDO showcased a model of the AMCA, highlighting India's progress in advanced aviation technology. The Defence Ministry approved the production in 2024, and manufacturing has already begun on the outskirts of Bengaluru in Mandur. Currently, only the United States, China, and Russia possess 5th-generation fighter jets, and India is now set to join this elite league, strengthening



its self-reliance in air defence.

### AMCA to Take Flight in Three Years

The Indian Air Force (IAF) took nearly 20 years to develop and induct the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas, but leveraging that experience, the AMCA is being developed at a much faster pace. The first prototype is expected to be ready for testing in 2028, with plans to manufacture 18 fighter jets by 2034. The estimated initial investment is ₹15,000 crore, according to officials.

### Cutting-Edge Technology for Stealth Attacks

Weighing 25 tonnes, the AMCA will have a maximum altitude capability of 55,000 feet. It is designed to penetrate deep into enemy territory, bypass

radar detection, and execute stealth attacks. Additionally, it will have the ability to disable enemy computer monitoring systems, crippling their defence mechanisms.

The aircraft will feature two engines and will be piloted by a single operator. With an advanced weapons storage capacity of up to six tonnes, it can carry missiles, bombs, and rockets for precise air and ground strikes.

"The AMCA is designed to execute precision attacks on designated targets with high efficiency, ensuring India's air superiority in modern warfare," Nagesh, Additional Director of the AMCA project, told media.

## UP Court Summons Rahul Gandhi On March 24 Over Remarks Against Army

### Lucknow

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has been summoned by a court here over his alleged defamatory remarks against the army in December 2022 during the Bharat Jodo Yatra.

Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate Alok



Verma fixed March 24 as the date for the next hearing in the case. Gandhi will have to be present in the court.

Earlier, on behalf of Uday Shankar Srivastava, former director of Border Roads Organisation -- a rank equivalent to that of a colonel in the army

-- lawyer Vivek Tiwari had filed a defamation complaint against Gandhi.

According to the lawyer, Gandhi made the alleged derogatory comments on December 16, 2022, during the Bharat Jodo Yatra. While talking to some mediapersons, he made the objectionable comments on the clash between the Indian and the Chinese armies on December 9, 2022.

The complainant has alleged that Gandhi's statements were derogatory and defamed the Indian Army, the lawyer said.

# "Convergence of brightest minds from India and France": PM Modi at CEOs Forum in Paris

## Paris

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday (local time) addressed the CEOs Forum in Paris, highlighting India's economic growth, strong partnership with France, and expanding opportunities for global investors. He emphasised India's stable policies, infrastructure development, and advancements in technology, space, and defence.

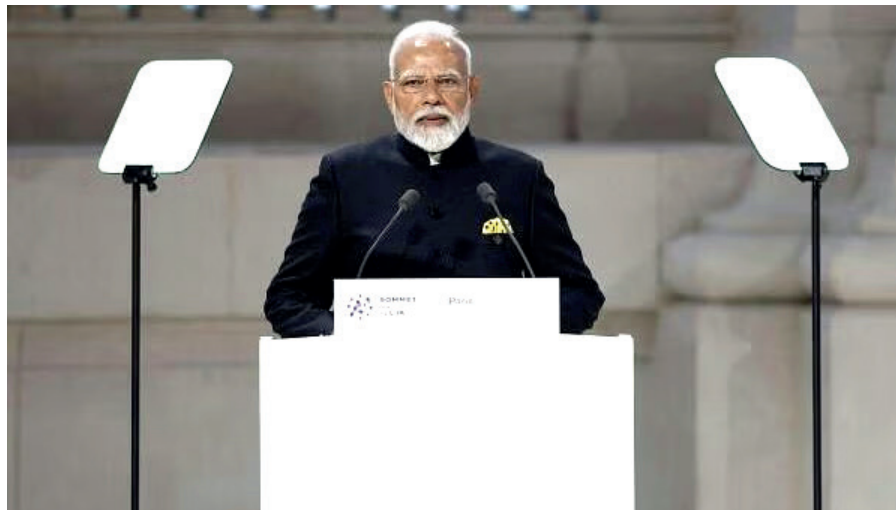
PM Modi described the event "is more than just a business event -- it's convergence of the brightest minds from India and France," where innovation, collaboration, and elevation are driving progress with purpose.

Speaking at the event, PM Modi said, "This is more than just a business event--it's a convergence of the brightest minds from India and France. You are embracing the mantra of innovation, collaboration, and elevation, driving progress with purpose. Beyond forging boardroom connections, you are actively reinforcing the strategic partnership between India and France."

He underlined the deep trust and shared values between India and France, citing democratic values, innovation, and serving the people as pillars of their friendship.

"India and France aren't just connected by democratic values. Deep trust, innovation, and serving the people are the pillars of our friendship. Our relationship isn't limited to just our two nations. Together, we're providing solutions to global problems," said PM Modi.

PM Modi also spoke about India's economic growth, reforms, and focus on infrastructure, space, and



biotechnology.

"We've provided an ecosystem of stable polity and predictable policy. Walking the road of reform, performance, and transform, India has become the world's fifth-largest economy. We're working towards becoming the third-largest," the Prime Minister added.

PM Modi said, "We're touching new highs in the space technology sector. In India, this sector has been opened up for FDI. We're swiftly transforming India into a global biotech powerhouse. Infrastructural development is a priority for us, and we're spending nearly \$114 billion annually. We're spreading a wide network of railways and are modernising it with the usage of technology."

On energy, PM Modi shared India's nuclear power ambitions and added, "We are working with the target of 100 GW of nuclear power by 2047. This sector has also been opened up for the private sector. We're also focusing on SMR and

AMR technologies."

He highlighted India's ambitions in nuclear power, AI, semiconductors, and defense manufacturing, showcasing the country's potential as a favorite investment destination.

He also highlighted India's focus on AI, semiconductors, and defense manufacturing, stating, "Today, India is rapidly becoming a favorite investment destination. In India, we have launched AI, semiconductor, and Quantum Mission. In defense, we are encouraging Make in India and Make for the World, and most of you are also associated with them. In space tech, we are scaling new heights. This sector has been opened for FDI. We are eager to make India a global biotech powerhouse."

Earlier, PM Modi co-chaired the AI Action Summit with French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris. The week-long summit culminated in a High-Level Segment attended by global leaders, policymakers, and industry experts.

In his remarks at the summit, the

Prime Minister noted that the world was at the dawn of the AI age, where this technology was rapidly shaping humanity and transforming politics, the economy, security, and society. Stressing, that AI was different from previous technological milestones in terms of impact, he called for collective global efforts to establish governance and standards that uphold shared values, address risks, and build trust.

He said governance was not just about managing risks but also about promoting innovation and deploying it for global good. In this regard, he suggested ensuring access to AI for all, especially the Global South. He called for democratising technology and its people-centric applications to help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Referring to the success of the India-France sustainability partnership through initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance, PM Modi stated that it was only natural for both countries to collaborate on an innovation partnership for a smart and responsible future.

The Prime Minister highlighted India's success in building a Digital Public Infrastructure for its 1.4 billion citizens using open and accessible technology. Talking about India's AI Mission, PM Modi noted that India, given its diversity, was developing its own Large Language Model for AI. He underlined that India was ready to share its experience to ensure that the benefits of AI reach everyone.

The Prime Minister announced that India would be hosting the next AI Summit.

## Discussed "incredible" opportunities AI will bring to India: Google CEO Sundar Pichai on meeting PM Modi

### Paris

Google CEO Sundar Pichai highlighted the "incredible opportunities" that artificial intelligence (AI) will bring to India, following his meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the AI Action Summit in Paris.

The Alphabet CEO also noted the potential for close collaboration between "we" (Google) and India to advance the country's digital transformation.

He said, "Delighted to meet with PM Narendra Modi today while in Paris for the AI Action Summit. We discussed the incredible opportunities

AI will bring to India and ways we can work closely together on India's digital transformation."

Earlier in the day, PM Modi addressed the India-France CEOs Forum in Paris, stating that the forum plays a key role in strengthening economic ties and "fostering" innovation.

He also noted that business leaders from India and France are coming together to create new opportunities across key sectors, which he believes will drive growth and investment for future generations.

Speaking at the event, PM Modi added, "This is more than just a business event--it's a convergence

of the brightest minds from India and France. You are embracing the mantra of innovation, collaboration, and elevation, driving progress with purpose. Beyond forging boardroom connections, you are actively reinforcing the strategic partnership between India and France."

He further stated that India and France share deep trust and common values, saying, "India and France aren't just connected by democratic values. Deep trust, innovation, and serving the people are the pillars of our friendship. Our relationship isn't limited to just our two nations. Together, we're providing solutions to global problems."



# PM Modi Meets US VP JD Vance, Wife Usha And Their Kids In Paris



## Paris

Prime Minister Narendra Modi met US Vice President J D Vance and his Indian-origin wife along with their two young sons on the sidelines of the AI Action Summit here. PM Modi posted images of the Tuesday meeting on X, showing the Vance family including their sons Ewan and Vivek with the PM.

The Prime Minister's post read: "Had a wonderful meeting with US VP J.D. Vance and his family. We had a great conversation on various subjects. "Delighted to join them in celebrating the joyous birthday of their son, Vivek!"

Vance also took to social media to thank "gracious and kind" Modi as he referenced gifts the prime minister offered to his kids. "Prime Minister Modi was gracious and kind, and our kids enjoyed the gifts. I'm grateful to him for the wonderful conversation," he said.

Earlier, in a video shared by PMO India, the Prime Minister was seen holding bilateral talks with Vance, while his wife Usha watched on. It came soon after Vance's address at the summit, in which he welcomed PM Modi's positive stance on AI as co-chair of the conference with France.

"I appreciate PM Modi's point. AI will facilitate and make people more productive. It is not going to replace human beings, it will never replace human beings," said Vance. The Modi-Vance meeting

followed another bilateral meeting at the summit in the French capital, with Estonian President Alar Karis.

"Had a very productive meeting with the President of Estonia, Mr Alar Karis on the sidelines of the AI Action Summit in Paris. India's ties with Estonia have grown remarkably over the years. We discussed ways to boost ties in areas like trade, technology, culture and more," Modi posted on X along with images of the two leaders in discussion.

In a statement, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said the prime minister invited the Estonian government and companies to explore the opportunities offered by the India growth story and take advantage of programmes such as Digital India.

Earlier, in his concluding remarks at the AI Action Summit, which he co-chaired with French President Emmanuel Macron, Modi said that the discussions have brought out that there is "unity in vision and unity in purpose across stakeholders".

"To build on the momentum of this Action Summit, India would be happy to host the next Summit," he said. The prime minister is set for bilateral talks with Macron later on Tuesday evening. Modi will depart for the US on Wednesday for his meeting with President Donald Trump at the White House.

# Turkish President Erdogan To Visit Pakistan To Co-Chair High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council

## Islamabad

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan will visit Pakistan on Wednesday to co-chair with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif the 7th session of the Pakistan-Turkiye High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council (HLSCC), the Foreign Office said.

Erdogan, accompanied by a high-level delegation, including ministers, senior officials, and corporate leaders, is expected to hold a joint declaration and sign several important agreements/MoUs during the visit, the Foreign Office said on Tuesday.

The two leaders will also address a joint press statement during the HLSCC, the highest-level decision-making forum to further strengthen relations between Pakistan and Turkiye. Several joint standing committees (JSCs) under the

HLSCC cover trade, investment, banking, finance, culture, tourism, energy, defence, agriculture, transport, communication, IT, health, science and technology and education.

Erdogan, who is paying the visit to Pakistan on February 12 and 13 at the invitation of Sharif, will also hold bilateral meetings with the prime minister and President Asif Ali Zardari.

Alongside Sharif, Erdogan will address the Pakistan-Turkiye Business and Investment Forum, bringing together leading investors, companies and business people from both sides. The visit of the Turkish leader would further deepen the brotherly relations and enhance multi-faceted cooperation between the two countries, according to the Foreign Office.

# With Musk by his side, Trump orders US agencies to plan for 'large-scale' staff cuts

## Washington

President Donald Trump ordered US agencies on Tuesday to work closely with top adviser Elon Musk's effort to shrink the federal workforce by identifying government employees

"Make America Great Again" cap, the world's richest man defended his role as an unelected official who has been granted unprecedented authority by the president to dismantle parts of the US government. "You can't have



who can be laid off and functions that can be eliminated entirely.

With his 4-year-old son by his side or on his shoulders, billionaire Musk stood next to Trump in the Oval Office at the White House before the order was signed, taking questions from reporters and making it clear that he was leading efforts to cut what he saw as government waste at Trump's behest. Wearing a

an autonomous federal bureaucracy. You have to have one that's responsive to the people," Musk said. He called the bureaucracy an "unconstitutional" fourth branch of government that in a lot of ways had "more power than any elected representative." Musk, the Tesla CEO and owner of X, pushed back at criticism that he and his Department of Government Efficiency team have operated largely in secrecy.

## BJP all the way

The BJP juggernaut, which was looking rusty and creaky after the party's underwhelming show in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, is at its rampaging best once again.

And that is ominous news for the Opposition's INDIA bloc, or whatever is left of it. After its superb victories in Haryana and Maharashtra last year, the BJP has finally captured the Delhi citadel — ending a painfully long wait of over 26 years. It has managed to topple the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), arguably the most promising outfit to have emerged on the Indian political scene in the past decade or so. AAP had decimated the BJP and other rivals in the 2015 and 2020

Assembly elections, but this time it found itself weighed down by anti-incumbency and corruption charges against its top leaders, particularly Arvind Kejriwal. Itself a product

of Anna Hazare's anti-corruption movement, AAP failed to shake off the graft taint. Moreover, the fledgling party's decision to go solo instead



of joining hands with the Congress proved disastrous. As the voting day neared, Kejriwal's desperation was palpable: he saw demons everywhere, but ignored the dire need to set his

own house in order.

Interestingly, the BJP beat AAP at its own game by offering freebies to women and other key groups of voters. The 2024 Lok Sabha verdict was a wake-up call for the ruling party. It realised that voters simply could not be taken for granted. The BJP shunned its one-size-fits-all strategy and instead focused on a state-specific agenda. It found an unlikely ally in the Congress, a spent force in the Capital that went hammer and tongs at Kejriwal.

The Delhi mandate has triggered an existential crisis for AAP, which now only has Punjab in its kitty. And the BJP, with its well-oiled election-winning machine, will go all out to reverse its fortunes in Punjab as well as West Bengal, two states which have stubbornly resisted Modi's magic and the saffron surge.

// sātyāsyā pārāmām nidhānām //

**YOU'LL NEVER  
CHANGE YOUR  
LIFE UNTIL YOU CHANGE  
SOMETHING YOU DO DAILY.**  
— JOHN C. MAXWELL

## AI summit

THE Paris Artificial Intelligence (AI) Action Summit, co-chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, comes at a fresh inflection point. Establishing the rules of the game has assumed centre stage as China's budget-friendly DeepSeek foundational model shakes up the international competition. AI cannot be the Wild West, French President Emmanuel Macron has said, voicing the need to chart out a collaborative governance template.

On paper, the summit aims to address how to harness AI's potential so that it benefits everyone, while containing its myriad risks. In actuality, the geopolitics around AI will be on full display as the US dominance shows cracks in the

battle for tech supremacy. It will be a test of skills for world leaders, industry honchos and experts to arrive at a broad consensus on guiding the



development of the rapidly advancing technology.

In 2023, the summit in the UK resulted in a non-binding pledge by 28 nations to tackle AI risks. Last year saw another pledge in South Korea to set up a network of public AI safety

institutes to advance research. Agreed, the potential of such events to effect any comprehensive change given the high stakes involved in the AI race is limited.

A binding regulation may not emerge in Paris, too. Yet, any progress in the global dialogue concerning AI governance, even if incremental, is a step forward in confronting the extreme dangers that AI poses.

The Paris agenda also aims for a more ethical, democratic and environmentally sustainable AI. These may seem to be wishful objectives on the

face of it, but are significant nevertheless. The future of work, inclusivity, public service AI, innovation and culture, trust in AI — widening the scope and persisting with issues of concern only increase the odds of finding solutions.

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## Too little, too late

Amid the euphoria over its resounding win in the Delhi elections, the BJP has started the process of repairing its battered double engine in strife-torn Manipur.

tapes, which include telephonic conversations that purportedly lay bare his role in inciting ethnic violence. All eyes and ears are on the Central Forensic



Chief Minister N Biren Singh has finally stepped down, over a month after he tendered a public apology and expressed regret over the deaths and displacement caused by the unrest in the northeastern state. If Biren thought he had done enough to save his chair merely by saying sorry, he was proven wrong. The last straw was the leak of some audio

Science Laboratory, which has been ordered by the Supreme Court to verify the authenticity of the tapes and submit a report next month. In a bid to pre-empt possible embarrassment and outrage, the BJP has prodded Biren to put in his papers. This is practically an escape route for him, considering the gravity of the allegations against him.

Much damage has already been done, and his resignation has come too late in the day. Ethnic violence has claimed over 250 lives in Manipur since May 2023, with both the Central and state governments failing to handle the volatile situation. Biren remained in the saddle even when Imphal burned, while the party top brass kept ignoring the growing clamour for his ouster. What's worse, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has chosen to stay away from the state, giving the impression that Manipur is just a blip on the Centre's radar.

A new CM will not make much of a difference on the ground as long as there is a lack of political will to resolve the conflict and bring the perpetrators to book. The people of Manipur are impatiently awaiting justice and peace. The onus is on the Modi government to regain their trust.

## Illegal migration

Action against travel agents must go beyond arrests

THE crackdown on travel agents in Punjab and Haryana after the deportation of 104 Indian youths, including some from Punjab and Haryana, from the US once again exposes a grim reality. Thousands of desperate Indians are being duped into perilous journeys, only to return as deportees, robbed of their life savings and dignity. The arrests of multiple



travel agents in Punjab and Haryana following complaints from deportees is a step in the right direction. But it must not be a mere knee-jerk reaction. It should mark the beginning of a larger effort to dismantle the human smuggling networks preying on the vulnerable.

For nearly two decades, unscrupulous travel agents have exploited the region's youth, promising legal migration but, instead, funnelling them through

the hazardous 'Dunki' route — an illegal trail across multiple countries, rife with exploitation, physical dangers and legal dead-ends. Many victims mortgage their farmland and borrow heavily, paying upwards of Rs 50 lakh, only to be arrested and deported. Weak enforcement and lack of deterrent action have emboldened these fraudsters. This inaction must end if the treacherous practice is to be curbed.

These cases highlight not only the greed of unscrupulous agents but also the desperation of those risking everything to escape economic stagnation. At the same time, this is not just an immigration issue — it is a policy failure. The lure of illegal migration grows stronger when domestic opportunities are scarce. The Punjab government's Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe these frauds is a welcome step, but it must go beyond token arrests. Criminal networks thrive on weak enforcement, lack of awareness and corruption. Strict licensing of travel agents, swift legal action and public awareness campaigns must be prioritised. Without decisive action, another wave of desperate youth will fall into the same cycle of deception, debt and deportation.

## RBI's rate cut

### Bid to rekindle economic engine



THE Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has finally pulled the trigger on a much-anticipated rate cut, lowering the benchmark repo rate by 25 basis points to 6.25 per cent. This marks the first such move in nearly five years and signals a shift in the central bank's approach to balancing economic growth and inflation. The decision comes at a time when India's economic momentum has been slowing. With GDP growth projected at 6.7 per cent for FY26 — well below the 8.2 per cent seen in 2023-24 — the RBI appears to be prioritising growth, even as inflation remains above its 4 per cent comfort level. Governor Sanjay Malhotra, in his first policy review, however, dismissed speculation of a prolonged rate-cut cycle. While the move has been welcomed by industry leaders, its impact on borrowing costs remains uncertain, with some saying it is a case of too little, too late. Banks, already facing liquidity constraints, may not immediately pass on the benefits to borrowers even as

there are expectations of loan EMIs going down after the rate cut.

Beyond the monetary policy, the RBI also introduced measures to enhance cybersecurity in financial transactions, requiring banks to shift to the 'bank.in' domain and non-banks to 'fin.in'. Aimed to curb digital fraud and enhance consumer trust in online banking, this additional security measure is welcome in view of the rising cybercrime. Additionally, Malhotra's deferment of the proposed stringent banking norms that were to be implemented from April 1 hints at a more flexible regulatory stance compared to his predecessor. It offers banks more time to adapt to liquidity and capital requirements without disrupting credit flow.

However, global uncertainties — including volatile energy prices and US monetary policy — continue to pose risks. But, for now, the RBI's cautious shift reflects an attempt to revive growth without jeopardising financial stability.

# Lawless in Dhaka

THE hope of a new dawn in Bangladesh, kindled by PM Sheikh Hasina's ouster in August last year, lies extinguished today. The vandalism witnessed this week in many parts of this young country is nothing short of self-immolation — restless protesters are actually harming Bangladesh's present as well as future while trying to erase its past. Houses of Awami League leaders were torched, while murals of the nation's founder and Hasina's father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman were demolished or defaced in several districts. It was apparently a backlash against the ex-PM's online address, in which she urged her supporters to confront the interim government, whom she accused of seizing power in an unconstitutional manner. Unfortunately, the government



is itself fanning the flames. Justifying the attack on Mujib's Dhanmondi residence, chief adviser Muhammad Yunus' press office termed it a response to Hasina's 'violent behaviour'.

The new rulers seem to believe that they can create

Naya Bangladesh on the bedrock of hatred and vengeance. This disturbing mindset will only push the vulnerable nation deeper into chaos and instability. The government as well as protesters are obviously frustrated that Hasina continues

to make her presence felt six months after she fled and took refuge in India. And New Delhi has stood its ground so far, giving the Yunus dispensation no assurance on the demand for her extradition.

The fresh spate of violence makes it evident that Hasina will not get a fair trial if at all she is sent back to Bangladesh. Moreover, Dhaka is making things worse for itself by antagonising New Delhi, which has been its all-weather friend right from the days of the 1971 war of liberation. Hasina's long tenure was no doubt marked by autocratic excesses, but that is not reason enough to destroy the nation's heritage. Bangladesh must rein in hate-mongers and law-breakers for its own good; otherwise, the onerous task of restoring democracy will become an ever-elusive pipe dream.

## Return of the natives

### India must walk the talk on illegal migration

Days before Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Washington, a US military aircraft has brought 200-odd illegal Indian migrants back to their homeland. El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Peru — these are certainly not the countries that India, the world's fastest-growing major economy, would like to be bracketed with. Yet, here's the inescapable fact: India, that is Bharat, figures among the nations with the largest unauthorised immigrant population in the US, according to Pew Research Centre. A deportation flight may not seem to be the ideal build-up to the PM's visit, but New Delhi has managed to earn a few brownie points by talking tough on illegal immigration. During his recent trip to the US, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar did some good diplomatic groundwork, reassuring the Trump administration that India was open to the 'legitimate return' of its errant nationals.

India wisely avoided a confrontational approach, which would have created embarrassing bitterness ahead of the Modi-Trump meeting. There was none of the

bravado that had left Colombian President Gustavo Petro with egg on his face. He initially refused to accept military flights carrying deportees, but did a U-turn after President Trump threatened to impose tariffs and sanctions on Colombia. Now, Petro is requesting migrants from his country to come home right away and "build social wealth". Such appeasement raises vital questions: Does India have a plan to rehabilitate around 18,000 nationals who have been identified for deportation from the US? And how will Delhi ensure that these people, including Punjabis and Gujaratis, do not undertake an immigration misadventure all over again?

A nationwide crackdown on unscrupulous travel agents is a must to deter desperate people who want to enter America by hook or by crook. The distant dream of Viksit Bharat can wait. The immediate priority should be to create lucrative job opportunities at home for skilled manpower. At the same time, streamlining legal migration ought to be high on the PM's agenda during his one-on-one with Trump.

## Politics over Kumbh

### Pilgrims lost, accountability missing

Opposition leaders have accused the Uttar Pradesh government of downplaying the scale of the tragic stampede at the Maha Kumbh Mela on January 29. Official reports claim 30 people were killed and over 60 injured. However, the figures are being hotly contested, with opposition leaders like Akhilesh Yadav alleging that the real death toll is significantly higher, with many still missing. The state's response has been both evasive and inadequate. The UP government, while deploying a judicial commission to investigate, stands accused of suppressing information and failing to provide transparency. The Supreme Court termed the incident "unfortunate" but redirected the matter to the Allahabad High Court, highlighting judicial reluctance to confront administrative lapses directly. Meanwhile, bereaved families continue searching for missing relatives, as official silence fuels public anger and distrust.

More troubling is the emerging angle of a possible conspiracy. With

over 16,000 mobile numbers under investigation and facial recognition technology being used to identify suspects, authorities suggest foul play may have contributed to the chaos. Yet, the specifics remain murky. This raises critical questions about security preparedness and the state's ability to protect its citizens during mass gatherings. Beyond political blame games and conspiracy theories, this tragedy underscores a recurring issue: inadequate crowd management at religious events. The National Disaster Management Authority has long recommended comprehensive policies for such gatherings, yet implementation remains lacklustre.

As millions continue to gather for subsequent bathing rituals during the ongoing Maha Kumbh, which is a grand confluence of faith, tradition and humanity, the pressing need is not just for better protocols but also for transparent governance that respects both the living and the departed. Faith may guide the pilgrims, but safety must be ensured by those in power.

# Banks, NBFCs on better footing after RBI softens regulatory stance

There is a perceptible shift in the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) stance and tone towards regulation under the new governor Sanjay Malhotra. The banking regulator appears more consultative and willing to consider lenders' appeals to soften some of the proposed

pointed out analysts at Elara Capital in a note. Project finance rules had proposed lenders to set aside 5 percent of their standard assets or loans to cover losses during the construction phase of the project and when implemented, would drive up credit costs by at least one

given robust corporate balance sheets and improved repayment capacities.

For non-bank finance companies (NBFC), the cut in the policy rate would immediately translate into lower cost of funds in 2025-26, analysts reckon. Early and big beneficiaries would be vehicle financiers followed by gold loan companies. "NBFCs/ HFCs with higher mix of short tenure/ EBLR linked liabilities like SBI Cards, CIFC (Cholamandalam Investment and Finance Company), and gold NBFCs should see earlier easing of CoF and NIM expansion," analysts at Jefferies India wrote in a note. EBLR is external benchmark lending rate and CoF is cost of funds.

Affordable housing finance companies, on the other hand, could continue to see compression in their margins given that bonds have a larger share in their total borrowings. Moreover, housing finance companies may cut lending rates on home loans as banks would cut theirs in response to the repo rate cut.

NBFCs have had one of the toughest years in FY25 after risk weights were increased for unsecured loans and bank lending towards them. Lenders can now expect some relief in the next financial year. "While we strongly believe that steps taken by the RBI have strengthened the sector, we also now believe that the regulatory environment, going ahead, will be less overwhelming for the sector, since there is a subtle acknowledgement from the regulator that it will balance both growth and regulatory oversight," analysts at Motilal Oswal Financial Services wrote in a note.

The upshot is for both banks and NBFCs, FY26 is looking more promising than before though the challenge of asset quality would continue for some time.



rules. A bunch of rules that could have crimped banks' liquidity and lending abilities have been deferred and the promise of giving liquidity has been strongly reiterated. Now lenders are hoping that the regulator is also willing to dilute some of the norms by looking at things from their perspective.

The proposed LCR norms required banks to hold more high-quality liquid assets (HQLA) such as government bonds against certain deposits identified as high volatile, especially digital deposits. Some banks had indicated pressure on their already strained liquidity situation once these LCR norms kick in and had lobbied for extra time. "Not only would it have strained the banks as regards further liquidity, but it also would have percolated into softer growth and pressure on NIMs. Our earlier estimates (based on the original draft) suggested an impact ranging from 7ppt to 30ppt (percentage points), with the most significant effect on SFBs, followed by mid-sized private banks, PSBs, as also large private banks,"

percentage point. All these would have dented banks' profitability in FY26. The RBI is unlikely to hurry towards implementing expected credit loss (ECL) rules as well.

Banks have thus not only got a relief from immediate liquidity draining factors but can also expect the central bank to support through liquidity injection regularly. That said, business is still tough with deposit accretion remaining slow albeit recovering and asset quality in retail and small business loans under stress. In the third quarter of FY25, most banks reported a rise in their gross bad loans almost entirely in the retail and small business portfolio. While some analysts believe that stress in unsecured personal loans may have peaked, investors should wait for the quarterly earnings of at least two more quarters to confirm. The pressure on net interest margins would continue and perhaps increase for large banks given an easing rate regime. As such, bank loan rates have slipped in recent months, a sign that spreads are being compressed

# India's Pharma market to expand 2.4 times over next 5 years, share in global market to hit 5 pc: Report



## New Delhi

India's pharmaceutical industry is poised for significant growth, with its share in the global market expected to rise to 5 per cent by 2030, according to a report by Bain & Company.

The Indian pharma market, currently valued at around USD 55 billion, is projected to expand 2.2 to 2.4 times over the next six years, reaching USD 120 billion to USD 130 billion.

It said, "The Indian pharma market, currently valued at USD 55 billion, is expected to reach USD 120 billion to USD 130 billion by 2030 and to approach USD 450 billion by 2047."

The global pharmaceutical industry is currently worth about USD 1.6 trillion, with India contributing around 3 per cent to 3.5 per cent. The anticipated growth will solidify India's position as a key player in the global pharma landscape.

A unique aspect of India's pharma industry is that its export market is as large as its domestic market. Indian pharma exports play a crucial role in the country's economy, making up 6 per cent of total merchandise exports by value. In 2023, pharmaceutical exports reached USD 27 billion, up from USD 19 billion in 2018, growing at an annual rate of 8 per cent. The report added that more than 70 per cent of these exports are formulations, while bulk drugs and drug intermediates account for around 20 per cent. Other export categories include vaccines, biosimilars, and innovative products such as New Chemical Entities (NCEs) and New Biological Entities (NBEs).

India has established itself as a global pharmaceutical hub, with over 10,000 manufacturing facilities, 3,000 pharmaceutical companies, and 650 US-FDA-compliant plants--the highest number outside the United States. It is the world's largest supplier of generic medicines, providing one in every five generic drugs sold globally. Indian pharmaceutical products reach nearly 200 countries, supplying around 50 per cent of Africa's demand for generics and 40 per cent of the United States' generic medicine needs. Due to its ability to produce high-quality, low-cost medicines, India has earned the title of the "pharmacy of the world."

## Budget provisions will boost technical textile market which stands at USD 29 bn: Rubix Report

**New Delhi**

The technical textiles market in India, worth USD 29 billion in 2023-24, is set for significant expansion, fuelled by Budget

BCD is expected to encourage domestic manufacturing, reduce reliance on imports, and protect local producers from cheaper foreign competition," the Rubix

extended till 2025-26, with a financial outlay of Rs 1,480 crore.

Coming to the Rubix report, it asserted India has been a net exporter of technical textiles



2025's increase in Basic Customs Duty (BCD) on knitted fabrics and tax breaks for textile machinery, according to Rubix Data Sciences, an analytics services provider.

Technical textiles are defined as textile materials and products used primarily for their technical performance in various high-end industries.

Among others, government initiatives such as the PLI scheme, PM MITRA parks, and quality control mandates are playing a crucial role in positioning India as a global leader in technical textiles.

The Indian technical textiles market is the fifth largest in the world and accounts for around 15 per cent of the overall textiles and apparel market in India, as per the Rubix report.

"The increase in

report read.

India has long been a global leader in traditional textiles and natural fibres. In recent years, however, the country has made significant strides in the specialised field of technical textiles.

In the past five years, the Indian technical textiles market has grown at a rate of 8-10 per cent annually, Rubix said.

The central government aims to target the export of USD 10 billion worth of technical textiles under its National Technical Textiles Mission. At present, India's technical textile exports are reportedly between USD 2 billion to USD 3 billion.

To position India as a global leader in technical textiles, the Mission was launched in 2020-21 and has been

since 2020-21. From 2018-19 to 2023-24, exports have grown at 5.3 per cent compound annual growth rate (CAGR) whereas imports have declined at 1.7 per cent CAGR.

## Adani to partner Mayo Clinic to establish affordable, world class healthcare facilities

**Ahmedabad**

Gautam Adani, Chairman of the Adani Group, has announced the launch of Adani Health City (AHC) integrated health campuses, to be implemented through the Group's not-for-profit healthcare arm.

In line with Gautam Adani's social philosophy of "Service is meditation, service is prayer and service is God", the Adani family will fully meet the cost of bringing affordable, world-class medical care and medical education to people from all strata of society pan India, the conglomerate said in a statement.

The family will donate upwards of Rs 6,000 crore to build the first two of these integrated health campuses in Ahmedabad and Mumbai, the statement added.

This Rs 6000 crore worth healthcare facilities is part of the Rs 10,000 crore commitment the Group announced to spend for social causes on the occasion of Jeet Adani's wedding.

Gautam Adani has plans for more such integrated Adani Health Cities in cities and towns across India.

Each of these integrated healthcare campuses will comprise 1,000-bed multi-super-specialty hospitals, medical colleges with an annual intake of 150 undergraduates, over 80 residents and over 40 fellows, step-down and transitional care facilities,



and cutting-edge research facilities.

The Adani Health City medical ecosystem aims to serve people from all socio-economic backgrounds, train the next generation of doctors and focus on clinical research, artificial intelligence and biomedical informatics.

The Adani Group has engaged USA's Mayo Clinic Global Consulting (Mayo Clinic) to provide strategic advice on organizational objectives and clinical practices at these establishments.

Mayo Clinic will also offer expert guidance on the integration of technology, with a focus on digital and information technology and healthcare quality enhancement.

"Two years ago, as a gift to me on my 60th birthday, my family committed INR 60,000 Cr towards improving healthcare, education and skill development," said Gautam Adani, Chairman of the Adani Group.

## Indian Natural Stone Industry Set to Shine at STONA 2025

**Bengaluru**

The Indian natural stone industry, a vital contributor to the country's economy and cultural heritage, is gearing up for STONA 2025, India's premier international stone fair to be held at Bangalore International Exhibition Center (BIEC), Tumkur Road. As the industry navigates regulatory hurdles, supply chain disruptions, and international competition, STONA 2025 promises to be a beacon of hope and growth. Amidst Challenges and Opportunities, FIGSI Advocates - One Nation One Mineral One Policy.

"We are excited to host STONA 2025, which will bring

together industry stakeholders, innovators, and enthusiasts from around the world," said Krishna Prasad, President, Federation of Indian Granite and Stone Industry (FIGSI). "This event will showcase India's rich natural stone heritage and provide a platform for businesses to connect, collaborate, and grow."

Despite its potential, the Indian natural stone industry faces several challenges. "The industry is struggling with raw material shortages, regulatory bottlenecks, and unfair competition from artificial materials," said Krishna Prasad, President, FIGSI. "We need to conducive atmosphere for the industry to perform and deliver.

This requires serious attention towards the Stone industry to solve the issues faced and also the implementation of best practises around the world to ensure level playing field."

FIGSI has been advocating for key policy changes, including granting quarry leases to 50 years with guaranteed renewals, rationalizing royalty rates, and reducing GST on raw blocks and slabs. "We believe there should be the reforms like 'One Nation One Mineral One Policy' which will help the industry achieve its full potential and contribute significantly to India's economic growth," said Krishna Prasad, President, FIGSI.

# US tariffs will not impact Indian steel industry much: Steel Secretary Poundrik

**New Delhi**

The US announcement to impose tariffs on steel imports will not have much impact on the Indian industry as the domestic market is strong and a small quantity is exported to America, Steel Secretary Sandeep Poundrik said on Monday.

President Donald Trump said he would announce an additional 25 per cent tariff on all steel and aluminium imports from different countries on Monday.

"...the US President has said about putting tariffs on steel. How much steel actually we export to the US? We produced 145 million tonnes of steel last year, of which 95,000 tonnes was exported to the US. So, how does it matter if out of 145 million tonnes, you are not able to export 95,000 tonnes," the official said at an event organised by Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCC&I).

Addressing the 'Minerals Mining & Metals Conclave', he said India's domestic market itself is so strong with growing



consumption that the steel industry will find it difficult to cater to that in the coming years.

However, in 2018, when the US imposed taxes on steel and aluminium, India retaliated by raising tariffs on 29 US products, recovering equivalent revenue.

Further, on exports, Poundrik said it will become a problem as more countries put safeguards and restrictions.

As per official data, India's

exports have shrunk 28.9 per cent to 3.99 million tonnes during the April-January period of FY25, compared to 5.61 million tonnes in the corresponding period of the preceding fiscal.

The country remained a net importer of steel with the inbound shipments rising over 20 per cent to 8.29 million tonnes during the April-January period of the current fiscal.

# India open to buying energy from all sources, gas prices to come down in 2026: Oil Minister Puri

**New Delhi**

Union Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri on Monday said that India is open to energy imports from all sources at the lowest rates and domestic oil marketing firms are looking for more gas which is expected to cost less in 2026.

Addressing a presser on Indian Energy Week 2025 beginning on Tuesday, Puri allayed fears of impact on energy supplies to India from Russia after US sanctions. "Today we have a situation that we have (increased) from 27 suppliers to 39 suppliers. We added Argentina among others. We are open to import from all sources."

"We issued tenders at the importation. Those tenders are open to any supplier. We buy from the cheapest source possible."

He also informed that domestic (oil marketing firms) companies are looking for more gas.

"We also expect the prices of gas (natural gas) to come down. My reading of the international market is that in 2026 you will begin to see a major increase in the availability of natural gas. We may get more gas from Qatar. Our companies are looking for more gas."

Puri stated that LPG is more or less saturated in the country and the idea is to take piped natural gas to every house as it is 30 per cent cheaper.

A top official said that Indian Oil, Bharat Petroleum and GAIL are considering the

purchase of LNG and crude oil from the US.

The top official also stated that domestic firms may sign long-term contracts and may look to invest in the US (energy projects).

This assumes significance in view of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the US later this week where discussion on energy is likely on the agenda.

During the presser, Puri also said, "I will be surprised if sourcing of energy from the US does not figure in the discussions (of PM and Trump)."

He said, "With President (Trump) saying he wants to see global prices of energy to come down, he wants more and more energy to come to the market. For countries like India it is a positive development."

During India Energy Week 2025, energy buyers will hold meetings with producers in the national capital.

Puri said that IEW'25 is set to be even larger, more diverse, and more impactful than its previous two editions. Covering over 1 lakh sq m, IEW'25 will be the second-largest energy event globally in terms of ministerial and CEO participation, exhibition space, and the number of sessions.

He also said that the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas will host a Clean Cooking Ministerial, bringing together global policymakers, industry leaders, and experts to accelerate the transition to clean cooking solutions.

# Chidambaram says 11 pc tax growth unlikely with tax cuts as RS takes up budget discussion, seeks Bharat Ratna for Manmohan Singh

**New Delhi**

Rajya Sabha on Monday took up discussion on the Union Budget with senior Congress leader and former Finance Minister P Chidambaram slamming Union Budget 2024-25 saying that tax proposals not only benefit the middle class but also the rich and richest.

Chidambaram pointed out that the number of income tax payers in India stands at 3.2 crore, with many filing returns but paying nil tax.

He asked why the government had not yet conferred the Bharat Ratna on former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and also sought questions from the government over recent deportation of Indian nationals from the United States.

The discussion on Union Budget also continued in Lok Sabha with opposition members slamming the government and BJP members stating that it will contribute to fulfilling the goal of 'Viksit Bharat'

Chidambaram noted that the government's decision to increase the income tax exemption threshold from Rs 7 lakh to Rs 12 lakh would remove 80 to 85 lakh taxpayers from the tax net.

"It includes 2,27,315 individuals earning over Rs 1 crore, 262 individuals earning over Rs 100 crore, and 23 individuals earning more than Rs 500 crore. This is not just a middle-class relief but a boon for the richest in the country," Chidambaram remarked.

He also questioned the finance minister's claim of forgoing Rs 1 lakh crore in tax revenue while simultaneously projecting an 11.1 per cent growth in net tax revenues in FY 2025-26, similar to the 11 per cent growth recorded in the previous fiscal.

"After foregoing Rs one lakh crore, how does she still project the same revenue growth? This is pure magic, not mathematics. I will wait to see how this magic unfolds," he stated.

The Congress leader further challenged the government's assertion that the Rs one lakh crore tax relief would spur consumption and boost the economy.

He argued that a portion of this money would likely go into savings, debt repayment, foreign travel, and imported goods, rather than fuelling domestic consumption.

# Will 2025 mark the beginning of practically useful quantum computers?

A major impediment facing quantum computing was that of scalability, the ability to significantly increase the number of qubits in a quantum computer. This has been particularly difficult in light of error correction, which has been a problem pretty much since the genesis of quantum computers. There have been several attempts to address the issue, but none of them panned out. In 2024, however, some developments have shown real promise. In particular, in a paper recently published in Nature, Google has claimed that it has been able to surmount this obstacle using its “Willow” quantum processor, thereby paving the way for large-scale quantum computers to become a practical reality in the near future.

The problem of error correction and scalability

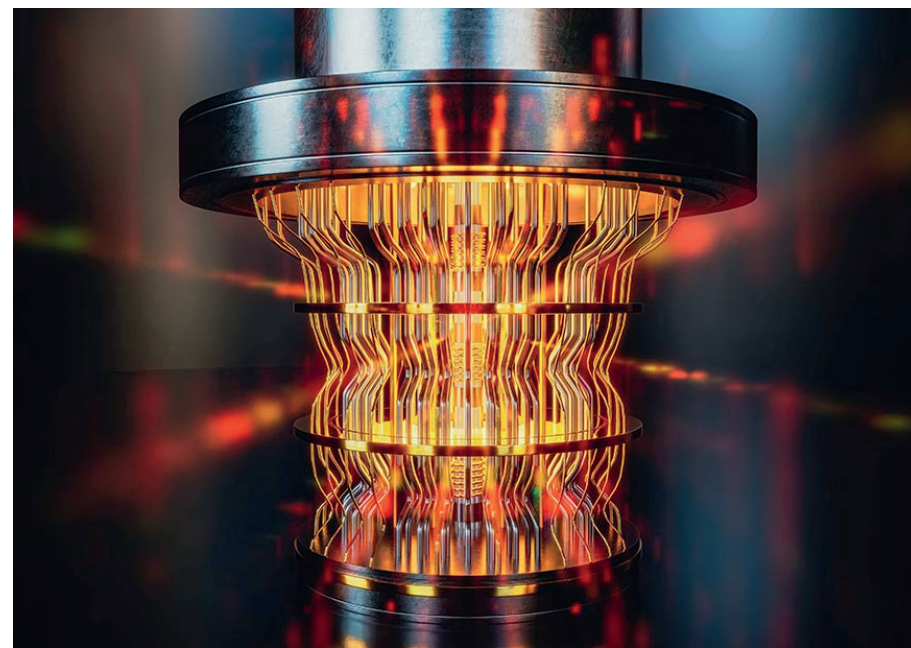
Unlike classical computers, which use bits as carriers of information, quantum computers use qubits for the same purpose. These qubits are particles such as photons (particles of light), electrons, etc. Since these are microscopic particles, they exhibit quantum behaviour and are incredibly susceptible to the external environment. The slightest disturbance due to temperature fluctuations or electromagnetic fields can cause the information contained by them to start decaying, a phenomenon known as quantum decoherence or “noise,” which is the primary obstacle in building quantum computers.

The maximum number of physical qubits in a quantum processing chip is a little over 1,000, a feat which has been achieved by both IBM and Atom Computing, a California-based startup.

While it is impossible to completely remove noise from the system, the objective is to limit it to the extent of providing sufficient time for computation. This is called quantum error correction. Due to noise, the physical qubits comprising the quantum computer get eaten up by the system, which then drastically reduces the number of functional or “logical” qubits - the ones which are capable of performing computations. So, for instance, the maximum number of physical qubits in a quantum processing chip is a little over 1,000,

a feat which has been achieved by both IBM and Atom Computing, a California-based startup. However, these have limited practical utility due to a lack of error correction.

Up until recently, quantum error correction has been notoriously difficult to achieve. However, without it, it is impossible to build large-scale quantum computers, which



is why there has been a shift in the industry towards error correction and scalability rather than simply increasing the number of physical qubits in the system.

The Willow chip and Google’s assertions

While Google had staked its claim for achieving “quantum supremacy” as far back as 2019 with the announcement of its 54-qubit Sycamore processor, it did not make much headway subsequently. On December 9, 2024, it announced its 105-qubit Willow quantum processor with the claim that it could perform a standard benchmark computation in under five minutes, a task which would take the second-fastest supercomputer in the world, Frontier, about 10 septillion (10<sup>25</sup>) years to accomplish. Though this may seem like a major accomplishment, the fact is that this is true for a benchmark computation called Radar Cross Section (RCS) and has virtually no practical utility.

The team at Google’s Quantum

AI has shown with Willow that as the qubits were made larger, they made half as many errors as the physical qubits comprising them.

What was much more interesting, however, was the assertion that Willow’s error correction increases exponentially as its qubits are scaled up. The team at Google’s Quantum AI has shown with Willow that as

the qubits were made larger, they made half as many errors as the physical qubits comprising them. If this increase is sustainable, it will pave the way for more large-scale quantum computers which get better at computation as the number of qubits increases, an unprecedented achievement.

Other key attempts at achieving scalability

In November 2024, Microsoft and Atom Computing were able to demonstrate a computation using 24 logical qubits using neutral atoms, the highest number to date. To put this into perspective, as per Microsoft’s Logical Qubit Roadmap, reaching 100 logical qubits will provide a scientific advantage by solving scientific problems, which classical computers are incapable of. Subsequently, reaching 1000 logical qubits will provide an industrial advantage by enabling the discovery of novel material compounds.

Along with the release of its Condor processor, IBM had also

announced its decision to shift more towards error correction and scalability. In November 2024, it provided the world’s first demonstration of two quantum processing units (QPUs) working in tandem to execute a circuit beyond the capabilities of each processor. This is part of IBM’s broader goal of “modular quantum computing,” wherein multiple QPUs will work in concert and provide scalable quantum computers.

The lack of efficient quantum error correction has been the chief culprit behind this since the utility of quantum computers is limited primarily by a lack of scalability.

What it means for the future of quantum computers

The biggest hurdle for quantum computing till date, particularly from an investment point-of-view, has been the lack of its practical utility and applications. The absence of any tangible results detracts investors since they have no guarantee for returns on their investment. The lack of efficient quantum error correction has been the chief culprit behind this since the utility of quantum computers is limited primarily by a lack of scalability.

For quantum computing, 2024 witnessed a sharp shift towards enhanced error correction and scalable quantum computers. This may provide the impetus for private investment in the field, which, up until now, has largely been driven by government investment, particularly in Global South nations like India, which do not have Big Tech firms like IBM and Microsoft. The landscape of quantum computing is steadily shifting, and 2025 may turn out to be the breakthrough year the technology has been striving towards. The recent announcement of four Thematic Hubs under India’s National Quantum Mission is an excellent starting point for the country to establish its foundation in quantum technology. The practical utility of quantum computers will bring in the much-required investment from private players and startups, which is sorely needed to spur innovation in the field.



# BJP government in Delhi faces both short-term and long-term challenges



The newly elected Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in Delhi faces two prime challenges. First, to deal with the financial mess created by the AAP government's short-sightedness, which is reflected in the poor state of infrastructure. Second, to initiate long-term planning, keeping in mind the demographic changes Delhi is expected to undergo due to unabated migration from other parts of the country over the next couple of decades.

## Long-term challenges

According to a study conducted by the Institute for Human Development, titled 'Study on Population, Economy and Employment for Delhi: MPD-2041', migration from other cities to Delhi will be the biggest challenge for policy planners. The projected annual migration rates for males are expected to be in the range of 2 to 4 percent, and for females, 2 to 3.5 percent.

Total interstate migration was found to be 1.54 million, 2.1 million, and 2.26 million in the census years 1991, 2001, and 2011, respectively.

Low projection estimates show a population of 27.8 million by 2041. The medium projection estimates a population of 29.2 million in 2041, and the high projection estimates the population of Delhi to reach as high as 30.8 million in 2041.

District projections for 2041 estimate the largest share of the population will reside in West and North-West districts, together comprising nearly 30 percent

of the total population of NCT Delhi. The projected population of the West district is 4.2 million, 4.4 million, and 4.7 million by 2041 in the low, medium, and high scenarios, respectively. The corresponding figures for the North-West district are 3.7 million, 3.9 million, and 4.1 million by 2041.

## Job creation

Employment generation will be a major challenge for any government, as the study has captured some notable trends.

The unemployment rate in Delhi has increased more than two-fold, from 3.9 percent in 2012 to 9.4 percent in 2018. These rates were 1.8 percent higher than the All-India Unemployment Rate in 2011-12 and 3.4 percent higher in 2018. There exists a gender difference in the unemployment rate as well. Female unemployment rates have always been higher than male unemployment rates in Delhi.

The labour force in Delhi has increased at an annual compound growth rate of 2.1 percent, from 58 lakh in 2011-12 to 69 lakh in 2017-18. Assuming other factors remain the same and the current long-term growth rate continues, the labour force is likely to reach around 98 lakh by 2030-31 and further to 120 lakh by 2040-41.

Total unemployment is likely to be in

the tune of 10 lakh by 2030-31 and 13 lakh by 2040-41. The share of the secondary sector in employment generation is likely to increase from 32 percent in 2017-18 to 34 percent in 2030-31 and further to 35 percent in 2040-41. The employment share of the tertiary sector is likely to marginally decline from 66 percent in 2017-18 to 65 percent in 2030-31 and further to 64 percent in 2040-41. Modern industries capable of generating substantial employment are identified as: i) computer programming and related services, ii) non-traditional financial services, iii) legal and accounting services, and iv) office administrative, office support, and other business support activities. All these industries show considerable employment absorption capabilities in the future, according to the study.

## Short-term challenges

The AAP government's 2024-25 budget for Delhi highlighted several concerning trends. The proposed capital outlay for 2024-25 stands at ₹5,919 crore, marking a 29% decline from the revised estimate for 2023-24.

The report further highlights significant reductions in capital outlay across key sectors in 2024-25 compared to the revised estimate for 2023-24, including transport (₹2,433 crore less), education (₹543 crore less), and health (₹402 crore less). Similarly, in 2023-24, Delhi's capital outlay was estimated to be

25% lower than initially budgeted, with notable shortfalls in roads and bridges (₹950 crore), urban development (₹776 crore), and health (₹742 crore).

Between 2015-16 and 2021-22, Delhi, on average, spent 39% of its capital outlay compared to budget estimates—significantly higher than the 19% average underspending observed in other states.

Capital outlay refers to expenditures aimed at asset creation. A fall in capital expenditure has been reflected in poor conditions and a lack of roads, inefficient sewage and water supply systems, and absence of waste disposal management. The state of road transport is also a cause for concern.

The CAG report has highlighted that the net worth of both Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) and Delhi Power Company Limited is negative. As of March 31, 2020, the net worth of Delhi Power Company Limited and DTC stood at ₹(-)37,124.89 crore.

According to the latest finalized accounts as of March 2020, seven State Public Sector Enterprises (SPSEs) reported financial losses. Their combined losses escalated from ₹3,859.78 crore in 2017-18 to ₹4,386.79 crore in 2018-19 and further to ₹5,294.16 crore in 2019-20. Notably, DTC accounted for ₹5,280.55 crore, or 99.74%, of the total losses among these SPSEs in 2019-20.

# Can tax cuts deliver higher growth and distributive justice?

The Union Budget shot down all talk of a boring, business-as-usual budget by delivering on several fronts. The Finance Bill, which made substantial changes to the income tax rates, contained the most noteworthy reform. The government has offered significant tax breaks to all income levels, answering the middle class's demands. Under the new rates, a person making INR 21 lakh (US\$100,000 at PPP) will pay INR 95,000 less in taxes. Even while this could be classified as populist policymaking, it nevertheless benefits development in two different ways. First, increased consumption will lead to growth by increasing aggregate demand. Second, distributive fairness and inequality reduction will result from the tax cuts.

India's growth trajectory has not followed the export-led, manufacturing-dominant model of the East Asian tigers or the growth marvels of the previous century.

Shifting the focus to consumption-led growth

India's growth trajectory has not followed the export-led, manufacturing-dominant model of the East Asian tigers or the growth marvels of the previous century. Although services have been essential to the supply side, it is frequently forgotten that India has grown mostly due to demand, following a path of consumption-led growth. Both the co-movement of their development paths (barring shock outliers) and the dominant share of consumption in GDP (C/Y) make this clear. Over the past 10 years, this phenomenon has become even more pronounced, with a higher correlation between GDP growth and a rise in consumption. Increased disposable incomes that directly stimulate discretionary spending are therefore likely to have a significant multiplier effect on growth.

The Finance Minister, Sitharaman, anticipates a loss of INR 1 lakh crore in direct tax income under the new proposed rates. The author has estimated

the costs and benefits of the proposed adjustment using the income tax return statistics for 2023–2024 for consistency. 7.6 crore of the 9.1 crore taxpayers submitted taxes in 2023–2024. This indicates that barely 15 percent of India's 64 crore workers pay taxes. Nonetheless, the number of taxpayers has increased substantially, rising by 82 percent during the past 10 years. Nearly 90 percent of tax filers will not be required to pay any income tax, which will relieve an additional 50 lakh people of their tax duties, according to data on income distribution.

Economic benefits of the tax cut

Using averages for each income group and analysing the change in tax requirements, it was predicted that the net difference in tax collection would be around INR 80,000 crore. Stated differently, Indian consumers will have access to an extra INR 80,000 crore in revenue. The multiplier mechanism—the repeated rounds of injection into the economy because of its circular nature—would have a far greater overall impact on this transfer. To keep things simple, let us look at India's gross savings rate, which is about 30 percent. As a result, the average propensity to consume accounts for 70 percent of income. The marginal propensity to consume (mpc) is approximated to this. Note that this is a strained assumption since mpc being equated to apc, is usually applicable at high-income levels.

Lower public borrowing in the upcoming years will reduce inflation, given the government's prudent approach by the Fiscal Rules and Budget Management Act (FRBMA).

The multiplier impact has the potential to raise consumption expenditure by INR 2.5 lakh crore, or 1.25 percent in nominal terms. GDP growth will directly mirror this, yielding nominal growth of about 11 percent in 2025–2026. Furthermore, the steady rise in tax revenue



will make fiscal consolidation easier, presuming that India is operating in the Laffer Curve's prohibitive range. Lower public borrowing in the upcoming years will reduce inflation, given the government's prudent approach by the Fiscal Rules and Budget Management Act (FRBMA). Real economic growth of at least 8 percent can be achieved with the resulting lower deflator.

Distributive justice through a tax cut?

India's income disparity has been a recurring topic of discussion, raising concerns about the country's development potential and fiscal policies. Even among taxpayers, where only 40 percent of income goes to the poorest 90 percent of the population, income inequality is present. The degree of income inequality among taxpayers is indicated by the area between the Lorenz Curve and the line of equality (Figure 2). Tax cuts exacerbate income disparity, according to conventional economic literature. The premise that social transfers will be reduced while the wealthy benefit is the result of these studies' primary focus on tax breaks for the wealthy. On the other hand, total tax rate rationalisation with reduced burdens at the lower end of

the income distribution may produce different outcomes.

The tax burden will shift to high-income earners as a result of the decision to decrease taxes across all segments until INR 30 lakhs. 81 percent of the tax burden would now fall on those making more than INR 1 crore per year, up from 77 percent under the previous rates. Even if it's a modest step in the right direction, it can inspire bigger ones down the road. The growth process is also linked to greater equality. Because of the behavioural characteristics of mpc, a lower proportion of tax burden at lower income levels results in a bigger consumption multiplier. As a result, by strengthening the mechanism for consumption, the tax change may both reduce inequality and promote growth.

The nation's desired self-sufficient, industry-heavy growth trajectory can be started with a gradual increase in the savings rate.

Implications for Viksit Bharat

For India to achieve its aim of becoming a high-income country by 2047, there must be a structural change in its rate of growth. In addition to boosting demand, the implicit increase in disposable income will allow for more capital accumulation through the savings channel. The nation's desired self-sufficient, industry-heavy growth trajectory can be started with a gradual increase in the savings rate. It should be highlighted, nevertheless, that consumption will remain the crucial element for at least the medium term. The multiplier results presented here are cautious underestimates that do not take into account the relationships between supply and demand. If there are no restrictions on growth, more consumption will result in a greater need for services, which will increase output and exports. Therefore, Viksit Bharat's chances depend on how consistently, creatively, and quickly policies are implemented.

# India's 2025 Budget: Transforming tariffs, trading in, and looking out

The Union Budget 2025 is a clear signal from the government on greater confidence in its supply chain strategy and commitment to productivity and growth. The Finance Bill has been a thorough exercise in rationalising tariffs and addressing inverted duty structures in sectors where India aims to ramp up production.

There seem to be two clear aims for the budget this year—*increase consumption and ease production*. The first part was seen in the revisions made to the income tax slabs. The second, to galvanise manufacturing, has been done through three major policy pushes.

First is the rationalisation of customs duties. Coming down to eight rates, even as adjustments have been made to preserve the effective duty, clarifies a lot of the noise in the Indian tariff structure. The merging down of the 150, 135 and 100 per cent tariff layer down to 70 percent is a big step forward. The effective duty remains high due to the implementation of between 7.5 percent to 20 percent, and in the case of laboratory chemicals, 70 percent for Agriculture, Infrastructure and Development Cess (AIDC) on some—not all products where rates have been reduced.

The automobile sector has seen significant reductions in tariffs, with luxury cars now attracting a duty of 70 percent over the earlier 125 percent.

A significant element of these rate cuts is the items on which rates have been reduced. The automobile sector has seen significant reductions in tariffs, with luxury cars now attracting a duty of 70 percent over the earlier 125 percent. Motorcycles have seen a 10 percent rate cut from 50 percent to 40 percent with completely knocked down (CKD) bikes at 10 per cent and semi-knocked down (SKD) bikes at 20 percent. These are essential not just for India's manufacturing strategy, whereby the SKD and CKD bikes would ostensibly be assembled in India. It is also a significant element of international signaling with Donald Trump back in the White House. Both Tesla and Harley Davidson—companies that have become significant players in the Trump administration's trade rhetoric when it comes to India—are likely to gain from these tariff cuts. Similarly, further rate cuts on lithium-ion and other critical minerals and components



used in battery production are going to have positive implications for tech giants like Apple, and also serve India's own goals to attract investors and manufacturers in the sector. This will, of course, have to be backed with sufficient infrastructure investment to make it easier to build manufacturing units in India. It also signals a continued push by the government to secure the supply of critical minerals and components.

With Prime Minister Modi's upcoming visit to the United States (US) this month, it is an important signal to send to an American administration that unapologetically uses tariffs that India is willing to negotiate and ready for a mutually beneficial trade conversation. The rate cuts in the chemicals and pharmaceuticals sector also send a similar significant message.

Stepping up and completing those negotiations at the earliest is a key interest for India due to their significance as export markets for India.

Besides easing the conversation with the US, the automobile rate cuts and those in the food and beverage sector (Chapter 33) will also ease the conversation on the EU-India Free

Trade Agreement and the UK-India FTA negotiation front. Stepping up and completing those negotiations at the earliest is a key interest for India due to their significance as export markets for India. When it comes to the EU, there is also the race against the upcoming implementation of the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) in 2026. While the FTA will not directly impact how India deals with the CBAM, guarantees prescribed in FTAs will clarify the business environment, especially in the face of an uncertain US trade policy.

A second landmark announcement for trade facilitation was that of Bharat Trade Net (BTN), the latest upcoming innovation from the India Stack family. An end-to-end solution to create a 'single window' for documentation, as with single window investment projects, is an important way to at least ease the navigation of existing red tape as the country works on reducing the same. This type of innovation will also increase the ease of doing business in the country. The kinks will lie in training the large corpus of staff from customs officials to the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), who will have to use and implement the BTN.

The availability of high-quality insurance products with premiums invested in India will also allow for greater business interest in emerging high-risk sectors of experimental technologies.

The third major reform to the service sector is the allowance of 100 percent FDI from the earlier 74 percent in the insurance sector. This will ease the entry of businesses into India, which will no longer have to find domestic partners to service the remaining 26 percent. It will also encourage higher standards of performance for our domestic insurance sector. The availability of high-quality insurance products with premiums invested in India will also allow for greater business interest in emerging high-risk sectors of experimental technologies.

Overall, this year's budget has done both domestic and international signaling successfully. It charts a course for India to ramp up manufacturing and gives it a better standing to negotiate with partners. It also means that the centre and state will have to step up their investment in upskilling and re-skilling the workforce, as some traditionally protected sectors are now open to competition.

# Mumbai Police Summons Ranveer Allahbadia, Samay Raina for Indecent Comment on India's Got Latent



YouTuber Ranveer Allahbadia and comedian Samay Raina were summoned by Mumbai Police Tuesday after growing uproar on their indecent comment on the show India's Got Latent. This comes after calls for a ban on the YouTube show, an FIR registered in Guwahati, and massive public outcry over the attack on Indian family values. Though Ranveer has apologised, the controversy is far from over.

The Mumbai Police has asked for cooperation from the two and sought a reply on the matter. Earlier, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said that Guwahati Police has registered an FIR against the prominent content creators for allegedly promoting obscenity and engaging in sexually explicit and vulgar discussion in a show titled India's Got Latent.

Taking to social media, the

Assam chief minister stated, "Today @GuwahatiPol has registered an FIR against certain Youtubers and social Influencers, namely 1. Shri Ashish Chanchlani 2. Shri Jaspreet Singh 3. Shri Apoorva Makhija 4. Shri Ranveer Allahbadia 5. Shri Samay Raina and others for promoting obscenity and engaging in sexually explicit and vulgar discussion in a show titled India's Got Latent."

"Guwahati Crime Branch has registered a case vide Cyber PS case no 03/2025 under sections - 79/95/294/296 of BNS 2023 read with Sec 67 of IT Act, 2000, read with Section 4/7 of Cinematograph Act 1952 read with Section 4/6 of Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986 . Investigation is currently underway," added the statement.

Meanwhile, Bhartiya

Influencers Association general secretary Neelkant Bakshi has strongly condemned comments of YouTuber and podcaster Ranveer Allahbadia, also known as BeerBiceps, on the reality comedy show terming them 'disgustingly vulgar' and 'beyond any shreds of decency'.

In a post on X, Neelkant Bakshi said he is disturbed over the comments and Allahbadia has 'shown his true colors'. "A social media influencer, @BeerBicepsGuy has shown his true colors by his disgustingly vulgar comments on a comedy show which is popular on Social Media, in the garb of freedom of speech. This is beyond any shreds of decency. As the general secretary of Bhartiya Influencers Association, I am disturbed and strongly condemn his comments," Bakshi said.

The 'offensive' remarks of Allahbadia, during the YouTube episode of the show India's Got Latent have drawn widespread criticism. Following the outrage, Allahbadia on Monday apologised for his remarks, terming them 'inappropriate' and 'insensitive'. Allahbadia shared a one-minute video on his X account apologising for his comments on the show. "I shouldn't have said what I said on India's got latent. I'm sorry," he wrote.

## Vidaamuyarchi Box Office Collection Day 5: Ajith's Film To Hit Rs 130 Cr Worldwide Gross, Mints Over Rs 65 Cr In India



Filmmaker Magizh Thirumeni's Vidaamuyarchi is performing well at the box office. Headlined by superstar Ajith Kumar, the film was released on February 6, missing the Pongal release window but still captivating Ajith's fans. The film had a massive opening in India but experienced a rollercoaster ride in the following days. It saw a drop in numbers on its first Monday, which is a common trend for most releases, except for a few films that pass the "Monday test" with flying colours.

On its fifth day of release, Vidaamuyarchi saw a 76% drop in collections. According to early estimates from industry tracker Sacnilk, the film earned Rs 3 crore net in India on Monday. The movie started strong with a Rs 26 crore opening, but faced a major drop on day 2. It bounced back on day 3 and maintained momentum on day 4, before experiencing another decline on day 5. By the end of its five-day run, Vidaamuyarchi has grossed Rs 65.25 crore net in India.

Vidaamuyarchi continues to perform well overseas. According to trade analyst Ramesh Bala, the film has grossed an estimated Rs 135 crore to Rs 140 crore worldwide in its opening weekend. It has particularly dominated the North American market for Indian releases. Vidaamuyarchi ranked number 1 in the list of South Asian titles in the weekend top 5 in the UK and Ireland, with £235K, according to Comscore, an American global media measurement and analytics company.

## Ranveer Allahbadia Loses Followers After India's Got Latent Stint; B Praak Pulls Out of His Podcast

The controversy around YouTuber Ranveer Allahbadia, also known as BeerBiceps, has snowballed leading to legal action, and calls for bans amid public critique. It all followed after Allahbadia appeared on an episode of comedian Samay Raina's show India's Got Latent. In the episode, the YouTuber posed an indecent question about parents that did not go down well with netizens.

Since the incident and online uproar, Allahbadia has witnessed a massive decline in his followers on all social media platforms

from X, to Instagram to YouTube. According to reports, BeerBiceps has lost approximately 1 lakh subscribers on YouTube following the controversial episode. He is also on the verge of losing several brand deals, endorsements, and other collaborations, severely affecting his career.

Plunging into action, the All Indian Cine Workers Association (AICWA) has strongly condemned the comments made by the YouTuber on the show. AICWA has called for a complete ban on the show India's Got Latent,

citing the show's format and the remark as a direct attack on Indian family values.

In its lengthy note, addressing the controversy, AICWA wrote to the Indian film industry to ban individuals, technicians, crew, and others in any way associated with the show. With the public outrage growing, Allahbadia on Monday issued an apology for his remarks. He acknowledged his comments were disrespectful and said comedy was not his forte hence the lapse in judgement.

## Nayanthara to reunite with Mammooty for upcoming film 'MMMN'



Tamil cinema star Nayanthara is all set to feature alongside Mammooty and Mohanlal in the upcoming Malayalam film, tentatively titled "MMMN".

Mahesh Narayanan, known for acclaimed Malayalam titles "Malik", "Take Off" and "Ariyippu", will direct the movie.

The currently untitled project marks the reunion of Nayanthara with Mammooty after 2016's "Puthiya Niyamam".

Production banner Anto Joseph Film Company announced Nayanthara's casting in a video posted on its official Instagram handle on Sunday.

The "Jawan" star can be seen interacting with Mammooty and Narayanan on the set in the clip.

The new film also marks the collaboration between Mammooty and Mohanlal after over a decade. The duo last worked together in "Kadal Kadannoru Maathukutty" (2013).

"MMMN" also stars Fahadh Faasil and Kunchacko Boban in pivotal roles.

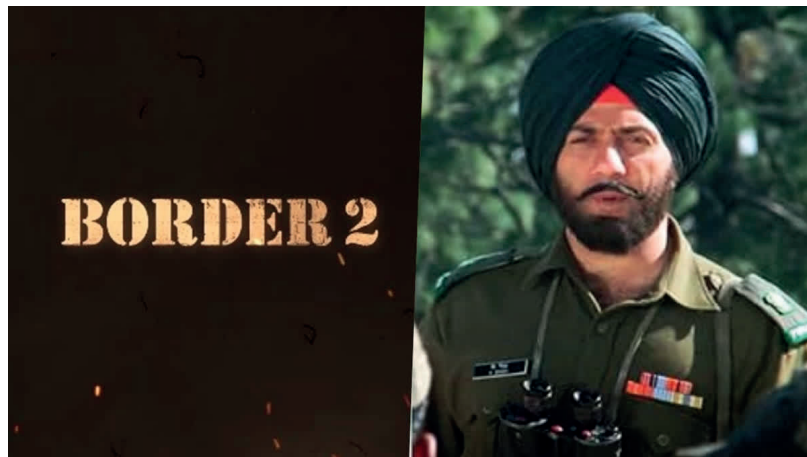
Nayantehara, who made her Bollywood debut alongside Shah Rukh Khan's "Jawan" in 2023, was most recently seen in her Netflix documentary "Nayanthara: Beyond the Fairytale", which released in November 2024.

## Sunny Deol To Begin Shooting For Border 2 In Uttarakhand This February

The makers of the much-awaited sequel to the Bollywood war drama Border are set to begin shooting for the film in Uttarakhand soon. Sunny Deol, who led the first instalment to immense success, is all set to reprise his role in Border 2, directed by Anurag Singh, known for his war film Kesari. The film is being produced by Nidhi Dutt, daughter of filmmaker JP Dutta, who directed Border.

After initial delays, the film's production team is finally ready to capture key sequences in Uttarakhand, primarily around Dehradun and Mussoorie. Previously, the shooting was scheduled to start in December 2024, but due to overcrowding on set and other logistical challenges, it was postponed. Now, the entire film unit, including Sunny Deol, Varun Dhawan, and Diljit Dosanjh, is expected to arrive in Uttarakhand on February 25.

According to Nitin Upadhyay, Joint CEO of the Uttarakhand Film Development Council, the necessary permissions for shooting have already been granted. Various picturesque locations have been scouted by the team which includes the Santala Devi Temple near Dehradun, Kimadi Road, and areas around Jageshwar in Almora. Preparations for filming



have already started at these locations.

"We are always working towards providing the best possibilities for film shoots in Uttarakhand, and the fact that Border 2 has been shot here is evidence of our efforts. Uttarakhand, known as the land of Gods, offers an ideal setting for such patriotic films," Upadhyay stated.

The production team has also taken into consideration the weather conditions. Thus, shooting is expected to run smoothly with clear skies, clean air, and pleasant weather in February and March. The state's natural landscapes, including mountains, rivers, and waterfalls, provide a perfect backdrop for the film's intense sequences.

Earlier schedules of the film were shot in Rajasthan

and Jammu & Kashmir. Now, Uttarakhand's serene beauty will play a central role in the movie's narrative.

Border 2 features Sunny Deol, Varun Dhawan, Diljit Dosanjh, and Ahan Shetty. This has created a tremendous buzz, especially after Deol's Gadar 2 recently broke several box-office records in 2023.

Scheduled to release on Republic Day 2026, it continues the tradition of captivating viewers with its musical charm. There's another set of fans waiting in anticipation for Deol's return to the iconic Border franchise, with a saga packed with heavy doses of narrative and nationalism. Apart from Border 2, Sunny Deol will star in the action film Jaat, which is slated to release on April 10.

## Chhaava stars Vicky Kaushal and Rashmika Mandana perform ardhas at the Golden Temple before the film's release

For Bollywood's favourite Punjabi munda, Vicky Kaushal, coming to Amritsar is like homecoming. "Amritsar is very special. It is my home, my pind. My native village is in Hoshiarpur and I have a history with this city," he shared with a smile as bright as his starched, styled, white kurta, as he along with Rashmika Mandana paid obeisance at the Golden Temple on Monday.

The moment he got out of the car, he addressed the scribes and his fans gathered outside the Golden Temple plaza with an affectionate, "Hor Ki Haal Aa." Rashmika, who looked beautiful in a pink Anarkali suit, accompanied him as they performed ardhas along with the Chhaava team for the upcoming



film's success.

"I begin anything new in my life after paying

my respects at the Golden temple. It's a ritual for me," said Vicky. That's true! Everytime he has a film lined up for release, Vicky makes sure he comes to the Golden Temple and he has followed this ritual since his life changing blockbuster Uri—The Surgical Strike.

Rashmika, who arrived on a wheelchair, and Vicky later went do the next favourite thing on Vicky's list of 'when in Amritsar, gorge on some hot crispy paranthas and kulchas at Bhrawan Da Dhaba'. "Khana yahan itna swaad hai ki mein photo khichwana bhool jata hoon (the food is so tasty that I forget to get pictures clicked)," Vicky explained, as the foodie in him took over to finish that plate of hot paranthas and Dal Makhni.

# Just another day in office, says Rohit but concedes it's not that simple

It was just another day in office, said a nonchalant India skipper Rohit Sharma after his 32nd ODI century ended a prolonged lean patch but acknowledged that the process of getting back among runs "is quite difficult" even though it "sounds very simple".

Rohit blazed his way to a 90-ball 119 with 12 fours and seven sixes to set up India's four-wicket win over England in the second ODI here on Sunday, giving the hosts an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match affair.

"...when people have played for a number of years and scored so many runs over the years...that means something," Rohit said in a video shared by BCCI. "I've played this game for a long time now and I understand what is required of me. So, it's just about going out there and doing your things and this was, what I did today was, one of my things."

Rohit's 119 was his first century in ODIs since October 2023, a period during which the opening batter hit five fifties in 13 matches. Across formats, this was his first century since March 2024 when he hit 104 against England at Dharamsala.

"In my mind, it was just about doing things that



I do, try and bat the way I do. I've been here long enough... one or two knocks is not going to change my mind and the way I bat. But (it was) just another day in the office," the 37-year-old said.

Rohit, however, admitted that regaining form despite knowing the methods and ways, is not always easy.

"When you have scored so many, you have done something, right? You just need to get back to that that mindset of you know, how to get runs," he said.

"(It) sounds very simple, but it is quite difficult. But in my mind, it was just about enjoying and that is what we play the sport for, to enjoy the game more than anything else," he explained.

Rohit's lean patch, particularly in Tests since October 2024 wherein he crossed fifty only once in eight games against Bangladesh, New Zealand and Australia, led to calls for the India stalwart to contemplate his future.

The usually affable Mumbaikar has been combative in his response to such suggestions. After Sunday's blitzkrieg too, he asserted that his only goal is to perform on the field and ignore the noise on the periphery.

"We need to do our job, okay? Our job is to go out there and play the game. As long as you go there and you know that today when you go to bed, you know that you've given your best, that is what matters," he said.

"Every time I walk onto the pitch, walk on to play the game, I want to try and do well. Sometimes it happens, sometimes it may not happen. As long as I am clear what I want to do, that's all that matters. Nothing else matters," he added.

## England all-rounder Bethell ruled out of Champions Trophy



England suffered a major setback ahead of the Champions Trophy as promising all-rounder Jacob Bethell has been ruled out of the tournament due to a hamstring injury, skipper Jos Buttler has confirmed.

"I'm pretty sure he's been ruled out of the Champions Trophy, to be honest," Buttler said after their four-wicket defeat to India in the second ODI here on Sunday.

"So, that's really disappointing for him. Obviously, he played nicely the other day and has been one of the really exciting players. So, it's a shame that the injury is going to rule him out."

The 21-year-old left-hander, who scored a half-century and took a wicket in the first ODI at Nagpur, missed the match here as the visitors called up batter Tom Banton as a cover.

The deadline to submit the final squads for the Champions Trophy is Wednesday.

## Carlos Alcaraz expresses happiness following maiden indoor title win at Rotterdam

Rotterdam  
Spanish tennis sensation Carlos Alcaraz expressed happiness after securing the Rotterdam Open singles title, which is his first-ever indoor tour-level title.

After 16 tour-level titles and four Grand Slams, Alcaraz's chase for a maiden indoor tour-level title came to an end on Sunday as he defeated Alex de Minaur in the summit clash 6-4, 3-6, 6-2. He became the first-ever Spanish to win the title in its 52-year-old history.

Taking to Instagram, Alcaraz wrote, "It means so much to me to win in Rotterdam! It has been a very special week! Thank you for the support from day one! Congratulations @alexdeminaur for the tournament and a tremendous battle today in the final!"

De Minaur made Alcaraz play a third decider set, but the 21-year-old kept his



rhythm intact to get his 17th tour-level title in a match that lasted one hour and 54 minutes.

Following the match, as quoted by ATP's official website, Alcaaz said to his team after the win, "This week has been a really good week all together. Putting in really good work. Coming here not feeling 100 per cent well with the cold but after

every day I am feeling better and better. Rotterdam has been a really special week for me. I was going to say not only for the title... yeah for the title as well, but for the support that I received here since the first day."

"It was the first time that I was playing here and you made it like I have been playing this tournament for a long time," he added.

Alcaraz had become the first player to secure ATP 500 titles on clay, grass and hard courts and now has an indoor title finally. He has improved his record in tournament finals to 17-5. He also moved to 3-0 in the ATP head-to-head battle with De Minaur.

Alcaraz started his season with a quarterfinal finish in the Australian Open, losing to Novak Djokovic, but now has something to cheer about as it is his first trophy since beating Jannik Sinner at the Beijing Open last October.

# Freestyle Chess Grand Slam: D Gukesh Resigns In 18 Moves Against Caruana; Eliminated From Title Race

## Weissenhaus

World Champion D Gukesh's winless run in the first tournament of the year, Freestyle Chess Grand Slam Tour continued on Monday as well. The Indian Grandmaster resigned against world No.2 Fabiano Caruana in just 18 moves in a must-win fixture. He had already lost to Caruana in the first leg of the quarterfinals (chess 960 classical format) on Sunday and another defeat in the Game 2 has dashed his hopes of winning a title. He will now contend for a 5th-8th place classification spot while the American chess grandmaster has sailed into the semi-finals.

Gukesh was playing with black pieces and he needed a draw to survive and force the game into a tiebreaker. However, it turned out to be a very brief contest odds tilted against the Indian.

Gukesh was down a pawn, his king was in plain sight of his opponent and there was a lack of scope for counterplay. All these factors led to Gukesh resigning after 18 moves.

During the Game 1 of his quarterfinal against Caruana, Gukesh stunned the commentators with a calm heart rate - 61, picked up by the sensors. The game was in balance and it might have swung anyone's way. Caruana showed attacking instinct to take a full point from the contest.

"It really came down to yesterday. He probably could have posed more problems for me. He tried to sacrifice a pawn and create imbalances... but it just didn't work out and his compensation completely fizzled out where he was just in a hopeless situation early on. He didn't want to



prolong the torture which I understand and his chances of winning the game were approximately zero," Caruana said after the match.

Gukesh recorded seven draws and two losses in the round-robin stage.

He conceded defeats against Magnus Carlsen and Alireza Firouzja in the rapid round robin section. He just scraped through the quarterfinals finishing at the eighth spot in a 10-man field.

# Kane Williamson Surpasses Virat Kohli In An Elite List; Placed Second Only Behind Hashim Amla



## Lahore

Star New Zealand batter Kane Williamson played an impressive knock in the tri-series fixture against South Africa and helped them secure a six-wicket victory over the opposition. Chasing a target of 305, Williamson's brilliant stroke-making ensured the Blackcaps of their highest successful chase against South Africa and they also entered the final of the tri-series with a triumph.

The 34-year-old remained unbeaten on 133 runs from 113 deliveries smashing 13 fours and two sixes en route his hundred. The right-handed batter sealed the victory with a four in the 49th over. He also wrote his name in the history books becoming the second-fastest batter to score 7000 ODI runs. The New Zealand batter surpassed Virat Kohli who had reached the mark in 161 innings. Williamson completed 7000 ODI runs in

just his 159th innings. With a tally of 13,911 runs from 296 ODIs, Kohli is in the third position in the list.

South African batter Hashim Amla holds the record of being the fastest batter to score 7000 ODI runs. He achieved the feat in 150 innings. Earlier, Martin Guptill was the quickest New Zealand batter making it to the milestone in 186 innings.

Batting first, South Africa posted 304/6 as Matthew Breetzke played a whirlwind knock of 150 runs. Wiaan Mulder also played a supportive hand with an innings of 64 runs from 60 deliveries.

In response, Kane Williamson scored 133 runs while Devon Conway scored 97 runs during his stay at the crease. The duo helped the team chase the target with eight balls to spare. Senuran Muthusamy picked a couple of wickets while Junior Dala dismissed Conway.

## Mumbai Indians Add One More Franchise To Their Roster; Acquire 49% Stake In This London-Based Team

### Mumbai

Mumbai Indians are known for their involvement in the T20 leagues all around the world and have their franchises in the leagues like SA20, Caribbean Premier League (CPL) and ILT20. They have added one more squad to their 6-team roster. MI have now found their way through The Hundred, where they have acquired 49% stake in the London based franchise Oval Invincibles. The owners of the MI, Reliance Industries Limited (RIL) partnered with the Surrey County Cricket Club (SCC) through their subsidiary RISE Worldwide. Surrey have retained 51 percent of the Invincibles' stake while MI have 49 percent stake. RIL will have to pay a price of near about 644 Crore rupees (60 million GBP) for their stake in the London-based franchise. Oval Invincibles were the first team to be sold by the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB). The franchise is currently valued at 1320 Crore rupees (123 million GBP). The women's team was the winner of The Hundred in 2021 and 2022 beating Southern Brave in the finals while the men's team was crowned as the champions in 2023 and 2024 beating Manchester Originals and Southern Brave respectively in the title decider.

Owner of the MI, Nita Ambani welcomed Oval Invincibles to their family. "Cricket is more than just a sport, it's a passion that unites people across geographies and cultures. Welcoming Oval Invincibles into our Mumbai Indians family is a proud and special moment. With this partnership, we expand our MI fan base across India, New York, the UAE, South Africa, and now England - ushering in a new chapter of our global cricketing journey," she stated in an official release.

# 'This Is Right Time To Come To India'

## PM Modi Invites French Businesses To Invest

### Paris

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has invited French companies to look at the immense opportunities offered by the India growth story and said it was the "right time" to invest in the country.

In his address at the 14th India-France CEOs Forum in Paris, where he was joined by French President Emmanuel Macron, Modi noted the expanding bilateral business and economic collaboration and the impetus it has provided to the strategic partnership between the two countries.

He highlighted India's attractiveness as a favoured global investment destination, based on a stable polity and predictable policy ecosystem.

"Let me tell you all, this is the right time to come to India. Everyone's progress is linked to India's progress," said Modi.

"An example of this was seen in the aviation sector, when Indian companies placed large orders for airplanes. And, now, when we are going to open 120 new airports, you can imagine the future possibilities for yourselves," he said.

Inviting French business to join India's development journey, he said, "When France's finesse and India's scale meet; when India's pace and



France's precision join; when France's technology and India's talent unite... then, not just business landscape, but global transformation will happen."

PM Modi noted that India is becoming the biggest centre of diversification and de-risking, backed by a new generation of reforms outlined in the Union Budget earlier this month.

He noted, "India and France are not just linked by democratic values. The foundation of our friendship is based on the spirit of deep trust, innovation, and public welfare. Our partnership is not limited to just two countries.

"We are cooperating together to address global problems and

challenges. During my last visit, we had outlined the 2047 roadmap for our partnership. Following that, we are pursuing cooperation in a comprehensive manner in every field."

He pointed to areas such as aerospace, ports, defence, electronics, dairy, chemicals and consumer goods where Indo-French cooperation is already in action.

"You are well aware of the changes that have taken place in India in the last decade. We have established a stable polity, and predictable policy ecosystem. Following the path of reform, perform, and transform, today India is the fifth largest economy in the world. It is the fastest growing

major economy in the world," he said.

"It will soon become the world's third largest economy. India's skilled young talent factory and innovation spirit are our identity on the global stage. Today, India is fast becoming a preferred global investment destination," he added.

In a post on X, Modi said the India-France CEO Forum plays a key role in strengthening economic ties and fostering innovation. "It is gladdening to see business leaders from both nations collaborate and create new opportunities across key sectors. This drives growth, investment and ensures a better future for the coming generations."

According to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), the forum brought together CEOs from a diverse group of companies from both sides, focusing on sectors such as defence, aerospace, critical and emerging technologies, infrastructure, advanced manufacturing, artificial intelligence, life-sciences, wellness and lifestyle, and food and hospitality.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar also addressed the forum alongside French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Jean-Noël Barrot, and the Minister of the Economy, Finance, and Industrial and Digital Sovereignty of France, Eric Lombard,

## Jasprit Bumrah Ruled Out Of Champions Trophy 2025, Rana, Chakravarthy Included; Siraj Misses Out Again

### Mumbai

The BCCI on late Tuesday night announced that pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah has been ruled out of the ICC Men's Champions Trophy 2025, which will be hosted by Pakistan, scheduled to commence from February 19. However, India will play all its games in Dubai, United Arab Emirates with a campaign opener slated against Bangladesh on February 20.

Bumrah sustained a back injury during the fifth and final Test for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy 2024-25 down under and hasn't played a game since then.

The five-member National selection committee headed by former India pacer Ajit Agarkar has named right-arm pacer Harshit Rana as Bumrah's replacement for the marquee event, returning after an eight-year hiatus.



Newly appointed BCCI Secretary Devajit Saikia in a media statement said, "Fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah has been ruled out of the 2025 ICC Champions Trophy due to a lower back injury. The Men's Selection Committee has named Harshit Rana as Bumrah's replacement."

The national selectors have also named mystery spinner Varun Chakravarthy who recently made his ODI debut, to the squad for the Champions Trophy. For the record, Chakravarthy became the second

oldest Indian to make an ODI debut after Sir Farukh Engineer. With his inclusion, India's squad feature five out-and-out spinners in the squad.

Chakravarthy, who plays for Tamil Nadu in the domestic circuit has replaced flamboyant opener Yashasvi Jaiswal, who was named in the provisional squad, which was declared by the BCCI.

It is very likely that considering the nature of pitches in Dubai, which could assist the spinners, Chakravarthy was named in the squad. However, the recently concluded International League T20 (ILT20) which was played in UAE, favoured pacers more than the spinners. Hence, India's move to bring a spin-heavy squad could backfire as well.

"Team India have also named Varun Chakravarthy in the squad. The spinner will replace Yashasvi Jaiswal who was initially named in the provisional squad," Saikia added.