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Ritu Tawde elected MUMBAI'S MAYOR

Shiv Sena's Sanjay Ghadi becomes deputy mayor



Mumbai

BJP corporator Ritu Tawde was elected mayor of Mumbai on Wednesday, while Shiv Sena's Sanjay Ghadi became the deputy mayor.

Both Tawde and Ghadi were elected unopposed in a special meeting of the general body of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC).

After the election process was completed at the BMC headquarters, Tawde took charge as the 78th mayor of Mumbai amid sloganeering from

both the ruling and opposition party corporators.

Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis and Deputy CM Eknath Shinde, who heads the Shiv Sena, were present during the ceremony. They congratulated the newly elected mayor and deputy mayor.

Tawade is a corporator from Ward 132, while Ghadi was elected from Ward 5 in the January 15 civic elections.

In the absence of an elected general body, BMC Commissioner Bhushan

Gagrani had been overseeing the day-to-day affairs of the civic corporation since March 2022.

With Tawde's elevation, the BJP has secured the mayor's post in the country's richest civic body after a gap of 44 years. She is the second mayor from the BJP in Mumbai.

Earlier, Gagrani conducted the election process in the BMC's historic Committee Hall in his capacity as the state-appointed presiding officer.

Ahead of the proceedings, corporators of the BJP and Shiv Sena gathered at Hutatma Chowk to pay floral tributes before proceeding to the BMC headquarters.

In the polls to the 227-member BMC last month, the BJP emerged as the single-largest party with 89 seats, while Shiv Sena won 29 seats. The ruling alliance, with a combined strength of 118 corporators, was past the halfway mark of 114 and was well placed to secure the mayor's post.

The Shiv Sena (UBT), which ruled the civic body for 25 years since 1997, won 65 seats, while its allies, the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) and the Nationalist Congress Party (Sharad Pawar), won six and one seat, respectively.



Will Provide Transparent, Clean and People-Centric Governance : CM

The keys to power at the Mumbai Municipal Corporation have once again come into the hands of the BJP-Shiv Sena Mahayuti, and this victory in Mumbai has sparked great enthusiasm within the alliance. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, who reached the civic headquarters to congratulate the newly elected Mayor and Deputy Mayor, outlined a new vision for Mumbai's development. Seated in the corporation's historic hall and the iconic 'Queen Gallery,' he celebrated the victory, saying, "I feel a deep sense of pride and happiness that the soldiers of the Mahayuti are once again at the helm in Mumbai."

Speaking on the historic occasion, CM Fadnavis praised the work of experienced and studious leader Ritu Tawde in the corporation. He assured citizens that the trust reposed in the Mahayuti by Mumbaikars would not be broken and that the

alliance would work towards transforming the city. "We have not come merely to enjoy power, but to provide Mumbai with the kind of transparent, clean and people-oriented administration that Shiv Sena founder Balasaheb Thackeray envisioned," he asserted confidently. The new Mahayuti team now faces the significant challenge of pulling Mumbai out of the mire of corruption and steering it firmly on the path of development. Apart from civic politics, the Chief Minister also clarified his stand on the sensational allegations raised by MLA Rohit Pawar. Responding to the suspicions expressed by Pawar regarding Ajit Pawar's aircraft accident, Fadnavis said, "It is extremely important that all doubts in the minds of the public regarding this aircraft accident are cleared. There should be no ambiguity. I have personally written to the DGCA seeking a thorough investigation into the matter."

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Mumbai-Based Advocate Ameet Mehta Receives Global Excellence Award at Prestigious Lokmat Summit in Cairo

Cairo, Egypt

In a glittering ceremony that blended ancient Egyptian grandeur with modern global discourse, Mumbai-based advocate Ameet Mehta, Managing Partner of Solicis Lex Law Firm, was honored with the Global International Excellence Award at the Lokmat One World Summit & Awards Egypt 2026. The event, organized by the Lokmat Media Group in collaboration with the Nyati Group, brought together industry leaders, policymakers, and dignitaries to celebrate achievements in business, law, and international collaboration.

Held against the iconic backdrop of the Pyramids of Giza and the majestic Nile River, the summit featured high-level discussions on the global economic scenario, fostering dialogues on trade, investment, and cross-border opportunities. Mehta, a seasoned lawyer with qualifications in BE, MBA, and LLB, and a council member at Maharashtra National Law University (MNLU), received the award



on behalf of Solicis Lex Law Firm and its partners. The accolade recognizes the firm's exemplary contributions to legal advisory services, mergers and acquisitions, and its role in international business forums.

The award was presented by a constellation of prominent figures, including Bollywood veteran and philanthropist Boman Irani, social activist and wife of Maharashtra Chief Minister Amruta Fadnavis, Lokmat Group Chairman Vijay Darda, and Indian Consul Attaché Sushma. Other notable attendees included IPS officer Ishu Sindhu,

Bhavini Mehta from the Indian Consulate, and Lokmat representatives Vijay Shukla and Sonal Bhujbal. The ceremony underscored the growing India-Egypt ties, with sessions highlighting economic synergies between the two nations.

In a heartfelt acceptance speech, Mehta expressed profound gratitude, describing the moment as one of "happiness, gratitude, performance, and transformation." He thanked the Lokmat Group for including Solicis Lex in the international panel discussions and acknowledged the support

of his team and family. "This recognition is not just for me or our firm, but for the spirit of innovation and collaboration that drives India's legal fraternity on the global stage," Mehta said, as captured in highlights from the event.

The summit, which spanned several days, also featured a memorable dinner cruise on the Nile River, where attendees networked amid the historic waterway's serene vistas. Glimpses from the event, shared across social media, showcased Mehta alongside the dignitaries, radiating pride in this milestone achievement.

Mehta, who also serves as an Independent Director at Bright Outdoor Ltd and a legal advisor to Keshav Shrusti, has been instrumental in high-profile M&A deals, drawing from his training at the London Business School. His recognition at the Lokmat summit adds to a growing list of accolades for Indian professionals making waves internationally.

The Lokmat One World Summit & Awards series aims to spotlight global achievers while promoting cultural and economic exchanges. This Egypt edition, the first of its kind in the region, set a benchmark for future events, with participants hailing from diverse sectors including media, entertainment, law, and public service.

As India strengthens its diplomatic and economic footprint in Africa and the Middle East, events like this serve as vital platforms for forging lasting partnerships. For Mehta and Solicis Lex, the award marks a new chapter in their journey toward greater global impact.

Jeevan Prakash Samaj Gaurav Award Conferred Upon Vivek Sidd

Kolhapur

The state-level award distribution ceremony organized by Jeevan Prakash Multipurpose Charitable Institution was successfully held this year. During this event, Vivek Sidd was honored with the Jeevan Prakash State-Level Samaj Gaurav Award in recognition of his outstanding contributions at the social level. The ceremony was organized by Jeevan Prakash Multipurpose Charitable Institution, along with Jeevan Prakash Public School and Paramedical College, at Shamarav Patil Yadravkar Natyagruha. The awards were presented after reviewing remarkable achievements in various fields such as education,



health, social service, sports, literature, management, and more across Maharashtra. Dignitaries from different sectors participated in the

event.

Dr. Prakash Deepankar, on behalf of the organizing committee, stated: "We organize this award ceremony

to honor individuals who selflessly work for the welfare of society. The objective is to inspire the youth to come forward and engage in social work."

The event was attended in large numbers by Rajendra Patil Yadravkar, Municipal President Sanjay Patil Yadravkar, Vice-President Anuradha Adke, Dr. Prof. Shashikant Kulkarni, Vishal Mhatugade, Dr. Abhita Deepankar, Chandrakala Halsavadekar, along with other office bearers of the institution and citizens. This award highlights the institution's commitment to recognizing selfless service and motivating future generations toward meaningful societal contributions.

Wait for DGCA probe to conclude in Ajit Pawar plane crash case, says CM Devendra Fadnavis

Mumbai

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Wednesday said a crucial probe by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) is underway into the plane crash that killed Deputy CM Ajit Pawar, and urged that conclusions be drawn only after the investigation ends.

Devendra Fadnavis said the aircraft's black box had already been recovered and that investigations on all fronts had commenced. Pawar and four others were killed when the Learjet aircraft crashed near the Baramati airstrip in Pune district on January 28. Describing the DGCA inquiry into the incident as "very important", Fadnavis stressed the need to wait for its findings.

The CM was talking to reporters here in response to



a question about Ajit Pawar's nephew and MLA Rohit Pawar's claims and concerns regarding the plane crash. Rohit Pawar on Tuesday raised several questions regarding the sequence of events leading up to the plane crash. He alleged that there was a reason to suspect sabotage in the tragic incident that killed his uncle

Ajit Pawar, and demanded a comprehensive probe by multiple expert agencies.

Fadnavis said, "I have not personally seen what Rohit Pawar said. I am somewhat aware of it. I believe that if anyone has any doubts, they should be addressed. From this perspective, the investigative agencies available under Indian law have already begun the kind of investigation expected in such cases." The chief minister said he was the first to write to the Union aviation ministry seeking a detailed probe into the accident that claimed the lives of Pawar, the pilot, the co-pilot and two others. "If we can learn from the errors or shortcomings in our civil aviation sector, we can fix them and make it safer for civilians and leaders as well," he said.

Maharashtra govt will bring 100 reforms in next two months on ease of doing business - CM

Mumbai

In an effort towards ease of doing business, the Maharashtra government will bring hundred reforms in the next two months, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis announced on Tuesday. The reforms are aimed at simplifying the process for the industries and investments in the state, he said.

"To curtail red tapism that often complicates and delays the process, the state will work towards a bureaucracy-less system. But it should not be perceived as getting rid of bureaucrats," he said. Fadnavis was speaking at the annual 'Loksatta Varsha Ved' event held in Mumbai on Tuesday.

"I am saying we have to make governance bureaucracy-less. But we certainly need bureaucrats," he said. "We are absolutely committed to making the process of investment less cumbersome and fast. When we say single window clearance, it should be so," he said.



At the event, the chief minister also warned that blackmail and extortion by political leaders and activists against the industrialists and investors will be dealt with ruthlessly. There will be zero tolerance for extortion as it is not only unlawful but also vitiates the investment climate of Maharashtra, he said.

Fadnavis said, "Recently, it was brought to my attention that political parties and workers put pressure on investors to hire their people or purchase raw material from their outfits at specific rates. I intervened and ensured through police that such people were put in prison. In some cases, MCOCA was also applied against political extortionists." The action is applicable to all those who

indulge in extortion irrespective of political affiliations, he said.

While stating that Maharashtra remains the most favoured destination for investments, Fadnavis said, "Of the total foreign direct investment, almost 40 per cent comes from Maharashtra alone."

During the World Economic Forum at Davos, the CM said, "Maharashtra with Rs 30 lakh crore investments emerged the leader. On an average, the realisation of MoUs in other states is 35 per cent. Whereas in Maharashtra it is 75 per cent. Even in the rest 25 per cent cases, there are only technical issues and none of it gets withdrawn."

On some questioning the purpose of visit to Davos when deals were with domestic companies, Fadnavis said, "Why do states spend Rs 40 to 50 lakh to attract investors? If we can get global investors coming forward to invest in Maharashtra, what is the harm in spending Rs seven to eight lakhs."

Rajya Sabha MP Ujjwal Nikam can continue as SPP in 2012 Tikku murder case: Court

Mumbai

Noting that the court cannot interfere with the policy decision of the state to appoint a special public prosecutor (SPP), a sessions court rejected an application of a murder accused seeking the removal of Rajya Sabha MP and lawyer Ujjwal Nikam from the post.

Vijay Palande, an accused facing charges of murder in three cases, has sought that since Nikam was nominated as an MP, he cannot be permitted to continue as an SPP calling it an 'office of profit'.

Nikam can continue to be the SPP in the case where Palande faces charges of murdering Delhi-based businessman Arunkumar Tikku in 2012.

"From the appointment of learned Ujjwal Nikam, the Special Public Prosecutor, it is clear that he had been qualified for being a member of Rajya Sabha when he did not hold any office of profit. Article 102 (1)(a) nowhere states that any person shall be disqualified for being a Special Public Prosecutor if he holds any office of profit under the Government of India or any State," additional sessions judge R J Pawar said in the order passed on February 5, made available on Tuesday.

The Article in the Constitution of India is on disqualifications for membership of an MP, which states that any person 'if he holds any office of profit under the Government of India or the Government of

any State, other than



an office declared by Parliament by law not to disqualify its holder', can be disqualified.

Palande had filed a plea stating that Nikam was appointed by the state government and is paid from public exchequers, therefore, the post should be considered an 'office of profit'. He had told court that Nikam can handle private cases as a defence lawyer but not hold the office of SPP under the state government. He had also claimed that Nikam as an MP and spokesperson of ruling BJP will use 'undue influence', alleging that he holds a personal grudge against him as he had opposed his re-appointment in the case.

Nikam, the state government's Law and Judiciary department, and the Director of Prosecution, had opposed the plea stating he was appointed as an SPP in 2012 and that he had tendered his resignation in April 2024 when he was contesting the Lok Sabha polls. After his defeat, Nikam had again been reappointed by an official order on May 6, 2024. The state had also said that it has the right to appoint any advocate as the SPP, since it is not a permanent office but a contractual appointment.

Hardeep Puri's pointed rebuttal to charges levelled by Rahul Gandhi: 'Met Epstein only on...'

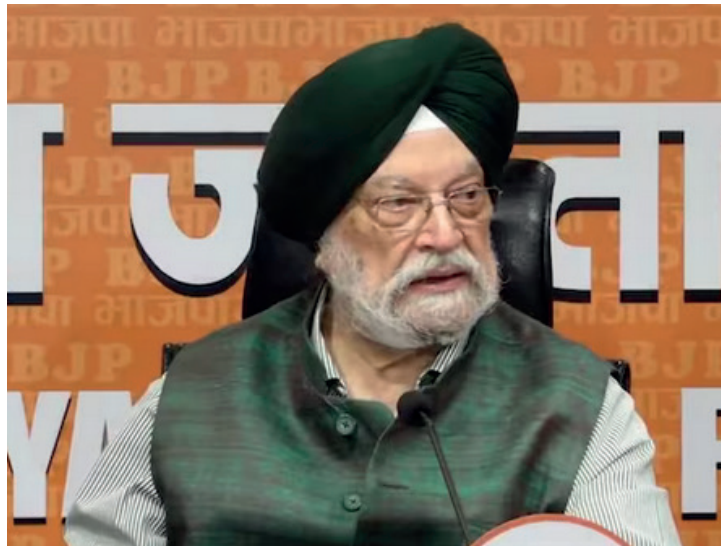
New Delhi

Union minister Hardeep Singh Puri on Wednesday responded to Congress MP Rahul Gandhi's reference to his name in the Epstein files, clarifying that he had met the late and disgraced American financier only "on a few occasions".

The minister, addressing a briefing, offered a point-by-point rebuttal over Rahul Gandhi's speech in Lok Sabha earlier today.

In his statement, Puri mentioned that he met the sex offender as part of an International Peace Institute (IPI) delegation.

"Congress leader Supriya Shrinete raised in an email - 'who introduced Hardeep Puri, I presume to Epstein...'. These facts are known in the public domain. Three million



e-mails have been released. I was in New York for eight years, from May 2009, when I joined as India's Ambassador to the UN. In 2017, I became a minister. There are references to possibly three or four meetings in eight

years," he said.

"I decided to tell Yuva Neta, Rahul Gandhi, and in the note to him, I told him that after I retired as India's Ambassador to the UN, a few months later, I was invited to join the

International Peace Institute. I was not part of the IPI per se... I was secretary general of Independent Commission on Multilateralism (ICM). This was a commission set up in the IPI as a project. As part of the delegation of the IPI or the ICM, I met Mr Epstein on a few occasions (three or maximum four). The ICM was dealing with international issues, and Mr Epstein was not part of it," the minister stated.

The minister further said that in eight years, there are two references for one e-mail that he exchanged.

"Epstein Files, the yuva neta should know, are about wrongdoing, criminal offences. The Epstein Files are about charges that he had an island where he used to take people to indulge their

sexual fantasies, charges of paedophilia, there are victims of this. Those victims have brought cases against people in authority. My interaction had nothing to do with that," he clarified.

The statement came soon after Rahul Gandhi told the Lok Sabha that Hardeep Puri's name is mentioned in the Epstein files, which outline the late financier's criminal conduct and reference various public figures, political leaders and celebrities associated with him. Among those named in the documents are US President Donald Trump and former President Bill Clinton.

Epstein faced federal sex trafficking charges in August 2019 and died in a New York jail cell the following month.

BJP slams Rahul Gandhi's 'sellout to US' charge, calls allegations baseless and false

New Delhi

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Wednesday launched a counterattack against Congress leader Rahul Gandhi over his remarks on the India-US trade deal in the Parliament.

Gandhi alleged that the government has "sold Bharat Mata" through the India-US interim trade deal and that it was a "wholesale surrender" with India's energy security handed over to America and farmers' interests compromised.

At a press conference held soon after Gandhi's Lok Sabha speech, BJP spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi alleged that the LoP had brought down the standards of political discourse and conduct in Parliament. He charged the Congress with persistently making "absurd" and untrue claims against Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"Parliament has long been regarded as a symbol of the highest democratic standards. However, today, through the conduct, language and style of the Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi, a highly condemnable



attempt was made to drag politics and parliamentary decorum to the lowest level," Trivedi said.

Participating in the debate on the Union Budget, Rahul Gandhi said that had an INDIA bloc government negotiated the trade agreement with the US, it would have told US President Donald Trump that he should treat India as an equal.

"You have sold India. Are you not ashamed of selling India? You have sold our mother, Bharat Mata," he said while referring to the trade agreement.

The LoP said energy security has gone under the India-US trade deal, and the US will decide "whom we buy oil from".

Gandhi said the interests of the

farmers have been compromised, and the farmers are facing a "storm" as agricultural products from the US will flood Indian markets.

On Gandhi's remarks, union parliamentary affairs minister Kiren Rijiju said that the leader of the Opposition did not make any substantive contribution to the Budget discussion.

"Rahul Gandhi deliberately does this repeatedly after his speech, which normally is full of lies and allegations, he runs away, and he never sits to listen to the reply of the minister. It is very unfortunate that we don't have a very serious nature or a person with a serious character befitting the position of the leader of the opposition," he said.

"Our party has taken a stand that we will counter Rahul Gandhi's lies outside, but inside the House, a notice will be issued. We will serve the notice to the Speaker. Rahul Gandhi has promised that he will authenticate, but I know he cannot authenticate because he lied. He lied on the house," Rijiju said.

Violence in Manipur's Ukhrul for 3rd day; Internet suspended

Imphal

The situation in the Litan area of Manipur's Ukhrul district remained volatile for the third consecutive day on Tuesday as fresh incidents of firing and arson were reported.

Official sources, however, said the situation was "tense, but under control". The violence had



erupted on February 8 after members of the Naga and Kuki-Zo communities clashed in Litan village over a purported land dispute. The communal fire soon spread to other parts of the district,

prompting the government to rush in four-five companies of central forces, said officials.

The clashes had erupted days after the President's rule ended in Manipur and a BJP-led Manipur Government under new Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh took charge on February 4.

Meanwhile, the government has extended for five days the ban on Internet and data services in Ukhrul and parts of Kangpokpi and Kamjong districts. The state home department issued orders to suspend Internet services, including broadband, VPN and VSAT connections, across the entire revenue jurisdiction of Lhungtin sub-division in Kangpokpi district and Phungyar sub-division in Kamjong district.

If INDIA bloc were negotiating with Trump, Indian data would be top priority: Rahul Gandhi

New Delhi

Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday said that if the INDIA alliance were negotiating with US President Donald Trump, the “most important thing in the equation” would be Indian data, calling it a key strategic asset in the global economic order.

Speaking in the Lok Sabha, Gandhi said India should use its vast digital and demographic strength as leverage in discussions with Washington.

“We would tell President Trump, if you want access to Indian data, you will have to talk to us as an equal,” Gandhi said, stressing that data generated by India’s population gives the country significant bargaining power in international negotiations.

He argued that while population



was often described as a liability in the 20th century, the digital age has transformed it into a source of strength.

“Population is the biggest asset you can have. It’s a strength. But it’s only a strength if you recognise that data,” he said, underlining the need

to harness India’s demographic and technological advantage.

Gandhi further said that in any future negotiations, India could assert that protecting the US dollar and sustaining the American economy would also depend on recognising the value of Indian data.

“The biggest asset that can protect your dollar is lying with the Indian people,” he said, adding that India should negotiate from a position of strength while maintaining friendly relations with the United States.

“The biggest asset that can protect your dollar is lying with the Indian people,” he said, adding that India should negotiate from a position of strength while maintaining friendly relations with the United States.

Opposition notice on Lok Sabha Speaker returned for shortcomings; Birla allows rectification

New Delhi

The Lok Sabha Secretariat has found shortcomings in the notice submitted by Opposition MPs seeking the removal of Speaker Om Birla and has asked for the deficiencies to be rectified before further action is taken, sources said on Wednesday.

Sources in the Secretariat said the notice makes four references to events of February 2025, which could have led to its rejection under the rules.

However, the Speaker has directed officials to allow the Opposition to correct the notice instead of dismissing it outright. He has ordered that action be taken expeditiously in accordance with the prescribed procedure.

The revised notice, once submitted, will be examined promptly under the rules. It will be listed after the commencement of the second phase of the Budget Session, sources added.

The development comes a day after the Congress and its allies in the INDIA bloc formally moved against Birla, accusing him of openly partisan conduct and repeatedly denying Opposition members, including Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi, adequate time to speak in the House.

On Tuesday, a notice under

Article 94(c) of the Constitution was submitted to Lok Sabha Secretary General Utpal Kumar Singh by Congress deputy leader Gaurav Gogoi, chief whip K Suresh and whip Mohamed Jawed.

The motion carries the signatures of 118 MPs drawn from the Congress, Samajwadi Party, DMK, Left parties, RJD, Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP-SP.

The Trinamool Congress (TMC) has not signed the notice.

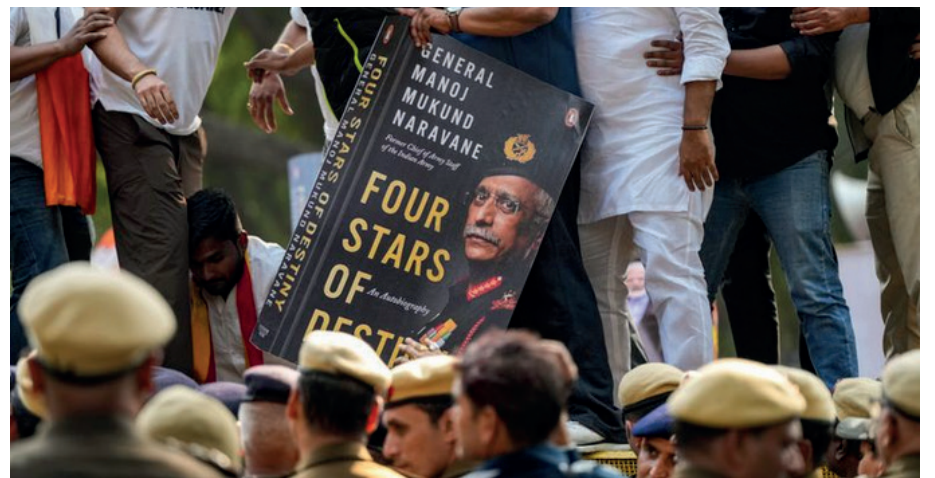
Rahul Gandhi’s signature is also absent, as he is at the centre of one of the four instances cited by the Opposition in its case against the Speaker.

The Opposition has alleged that Birla curtailed debates, disallowed adjournment motions and selectively permitted interventions from treasury benches while restricting Opposition voices. It has claimed that repeated requests for discussions on key national issues were either denied or delayed.

Birla will not preside over Lok Sabha proceedings until the notice for his removal is disposed of. Top sources said he had decided to step aside from House work on moral grounds.



Delhi Police issue notice to Penguin Random House India over Naravane’s book



New Delhi

The Delhi Police’s Special Cell has issued a notice to Penguin Random House India seeking clarifications over the circulation of the unpublished book of former Army Chief General Manoj Mukund Naravane on social media, an official said on Wednesday.

The notice was served as competing claims over the status of the book and the alleged circulation of unauthorised versions intensified, drawing the publisher, the former army chief and senior political figures into a widening public dispute.

According to police, the Special Cell has formally approached the publishing house through the notice,

posing multiple queries and seeking detailed responses.

“Delhi Police Special Cell has issued a notice to Penguin India. Through the notice, several questions have been asked, and responses have been sought,” a senior police officer said.

The move comes in the wake of reports that the manuscript of Naravane’s memoir, titled “Four Stars of Destiny”, may have been illegally circulated in digital and other formats prior to its publication.

Police said allegations regarding the unauthorised dissemination of the manuscript had led to the registration of an FIR and added that the matter was under investigation.

India must sustain momentum on Gaganyaan despite complexities - Shubhanshu Shukla

Bengaluru

India must continue to pursue its ambitious human spaceflight programme with sustained enthusiasm despite inherent complexities and unknowns, Group Captain and Indian astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla said on Wednesday.

The Ashoka Chakra awardee asserted that the success of Mission Gaganyaan will place the country among a select group of spacefaring nations.

Addressing reporters here, he said, "I think, as a nation, what we are trying to do with Mission Gaganyaan has only been done by three other countries in the world."

India aims to launch Gaganyaan in 2027, according to ISRO. Group Captain Shukla is among the four astronauts selected for the mission.



"These are very complex and challenging missions. We are trying to do something so audacious, whatever time it takes, we need to continue to work towards it with the same enthusiasm that I had on day one, and that will be

there on the final day when we finally launch humans into space," he added.

The Indian astronaut acknowledged that delays and hurdles were natural in such cutting-edge ventures while maintaining that they should not be seen as setbacks.

"I do understand the complexities and challenges that are associated with such an ambitious mission. And yes, definitely there are going to be some unknowns along the way before we finally accomplish it," the Group Captain said.

On India-US cooperation in the space sector, Shukla cited his own Axiom mission as an example of how international collaboration can advance space exploration.

"So my Axiom mission itself was a very good example

of how collaboration works in the field of spaceflight or space exploration, and I think it serves as a very good beacon for all the other sectors as well," he said, adding that joint efforts open doors for future partnerships and serve as models for countries to work together towards common goals.

He noted that comparisons between spacefaring nations are inevitable, but they must account for differing starting points and scales of operation.

Shukla also stressed that India's identified missions are being actively supported by the government, with growing investment in science and space exploration over time. He expressed hope that such support would continue in the years ahead.

Govt releases footage of Opposition women MPs blocking PM's path

New Delhi

The government on Tuesday released footage showing women members from the Opposition carrying banners, crossing over to the Treasury benches and blocking the path to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's seat on February 4.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijju posted the video along with images of women parliamentarians positioning themselves along the route taken by the Prime Minister to reach his seat.

In a parallel move, women MPs of the BJP wrote to the Speaker demanding the strictest action against their counterparts from the Opposition, alleging disruption of proceedings in the House on February 4 ahead of the Prime Minister's reply

to the Motion of Thanks on the President's Address. The Prime Minister's reply was later cancelled after the Speaker



advised him not to come to the House.

Commenting on the footage, Rijju said, "Congress Party is proud of the most degrading behavior by their MPs !! If we had not stopped all BJP MPs and allowed the women MPs to confront Congress MPs, it would

have led to very ugly scene. We have very high consideration, to protect the dignity & sanctity of the Parliament."

The minister's post came ahead of the Congress-led Opposition's move to submit a notice seeking the removal of Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla.

The Congress has been accusing the Speaker of making exaggerated claims about a threat to the Prime Minister. Earlier, women MPs from the Opposition had written to Birla alleging that they were unfairly targeted. However, Lok Sabha Secretariat sources said Birla had taken a reasonable decision in advising the Prime Minister not to come to the House, as anything untoward could have occurred with women MPs in his path.

Actor Ranveer Singh receives threat on WhatsApp

Mumbai

Actor Ranveer Singh received a threat through WhatsApp from unidentified persons, police said on Tuesday.

Security around his residence was increased after Singh received a threat through a voice note and approached police, an official said.

The threat to the 'Dhurandhar' star came days after an incident of firing outside the residence of filmmaker Rohit Shetty in the city.

Police suspect that members of the Lawrence Bishnoi gang could be behind the threat to Ranveer with the purpose of extortion, the official said. The crime branch of Mumbai Police has launched a probe, he added. Besides Mumbai Police personnel, private guards, too, have been deployed at the housing society in Central Mumbai where the actor lives. On Tuesday, the society's managing committee approached police and expressed concern over the deployment of guards. "Since these armed guards are frequently moving with weapons in common areas such as the lobby, gymnasium and children's play area, the society managing committee has expressed serious concern regarding the safety and comfort of other residents," they said in a letter. Recently, an unidentified shooter had fired five rounds at filmmaker Rohit Shetty's residence in Juhu. Lawrence Bishnoi gang member Shubham Lonkar, who has been absconding, purportedly took responsibility for the firing. Five men have been arrested in the case.

Budget Links Many Things From 2026 To 2050: FM Sitharaman

New Delhi

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Wednesday informed the Lok Sabha that the Union Budget 2026-27 is the first budget of the second quarter of the 21st century that links many matters ranging from 2026 to 2050.

Replying to the debate on the Union Budget 2026-27, Sitharaman outlined various government initiatives, including skilling and infrastructure investment. "The Budget 2026 has increased public capex from Rs 11.2 lakh crore in BE 2025-26 to Rs 12.2 lakh crore in FY2026-27. Taken together with the provisions for states and union territories, the effective capital expenditure is Rs 17.1 lakh crore," she added.

She said the government has laid thrust on AI education, realising its potential. "AI education is not just kept at an elite level, but it is now for the masses," she said.

On steps to boost entrepreneurship, she said, "We have said that instead of waiting to qualify and finishing your education and coming out and seeking where should they go for acquiring skills, the skilling element can be brought into education itself and at the end of the day when they come out, students can say I can become entrepreneur and this kind of a mega centre can be kept next to any industrial cluster that any state has."

She said these mega entrepreneurship building centres, as education hubs, can also come up in any state. "We are willing to work with states so that this mammoth higher education centre



can be propped up and therefore students can go there and come out as entrepreneurs," she added.

Talking about the Centre's push for infrastructure, she said, "It's not just roads, it's not just national highways. We are also looking at waterways, so that the cost of logistics may come down and states which are not connected to sea ports will have the advantage of moving goods faster at a lesser cost," she added.

Sitharaman said the Centre is willing to work with states for Mega textile Parks, particularly looking at industrial textiles, which are going to be "new age" and becoming a part of the manufacturing sector. "Whether it's car cushions, which are completely made of industrial textiles, so these new-age textiles

requirements can also be fulfilled. I welcome any state which wants to enter this area. The Centre is willing to collaborate with them," she said.

She said biopharma and semiconductors have been given special focus in the Budget as the push is on building infrastructure and multidimensional developments. Rubbishing the Opposition's allegations of no new schemes for the youth, she said five regional medical hubs are going to promote medical tourism in the country. She said that if Shiv Sena (UBT) provided land on time, the bullet train would have been running in India.

The minister said the government is pushing to increase 'Lakhpati Didis' and announced

mega entrepreneurship hubs and support to MSMEs. The Centre will work with states for job creation as well.

Taking a dig at MPs from Kerala, she said, "Coconut is the life of Kerala, and the government has taken up a major drive to promote it, benefitting the growers. Also, cashew and cocoa are being given support." She said PM Modi is the first to promote sandalwood, an initiative that will benefit Kerala, Karnataka and many southern states. "We consider sandalwood sacred, and our government has been the first to promote it," she added.

She said the budget allocation for the fertiliser sector has been fixed at 1.71 lakh crore so that farmers don't have to shoulder any financial burden or face any shortage. The amount for the Makhana Board scheme has been increased from Rs 30 crore to Rs 90 crore. The Bihar government has allocated land for that scheme which will be taken forward.

She said the Krishi Unnati Yojana is the amalgamation of three schemes — Cotton Technology Missions, Mission for Pulses and Mission for Vegetables and Fruits, and all allocations for them would go in one place.

'Cong surrendered before WTO'

In response to Rahul Gandhi's claim on the government ceding grounds to the US in the interim trade pact, she said PM Modi will always speak in India's interest. Taking a dig at Congress, she said it surrendered before the WTO, sold poor farmers when in power.

Sachin Tendulkar invites PM Modi for his son Arjun's wedding ceremony

New Delhi

Former India cricketer Sachin Tendulkar met with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at his residence on Tuesday and invited him for the wedding of his son Arjun Tendulkar and Saaniya Chandok. The duo got engaged in August last year.

Sharing the news on X, Tendulkar wrote, "We were honoured to invite Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri



@narendramodi ji to Arjun and Saaniya's wedding. Thank you, Modi ji, for your blessings and thoughtful advice for the young couple." Saaniya Chandok comes from a prominent

background. She is the granddaughter of Ravi Ghai, Chairman of Graviss Group. She has been a close friend of the Tendulkar family, particularly Arjun's sister, Sara Tendulkar, for several years.

Vande Bharat AC Chair Car Fares Much Lower Than Those In China, Japan, France: Vaishnaw

New Delhi

The fare of the Vande Bharat AC chair car for a 300-400 kilometre journey is around Rs 2.19 per kilometre, which is much lower than the fares for similar services in countries such as China, Japan and France, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said in a written statement in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday. According to Vaishnaw, the fares in these countries range from Rs 7 to Rs 20 per kilometre.

"The Ministry of Railways, while deciding the fare structure of various types of passenger services, gives due consideration to aspects like the cost of service, value of service, type of services and facilities offered, affordability,

competition from other competing modes and socio-economic considerations," Vaishnaw said while responding to questions regarding fare structure of Vande Bharat trains.

He added that Vande Bharat services were introduced in February 2019 and are currently operating on 82 routes with 164 train services. The Railway minister informed that Vande Bharat trains operate as a distinct passenger service segment with a specific fare structure and features such as improved suspension systems, faster acceleration with semi-high-speed operations, automatic plug doors, ergonomic seats, mini pantry, CCTVs and KAVACH.

Sunetra Pawar Meets PM Modi, Amit Shah In Delhi



New Delhi

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Sunetra Pawar called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi on Wednesday, marking her first visit to the national capital after taking the oath of office following the death of her husband and former Deputy CM Ajit Pawar in an aircraft crash on 28 January.

Sunetra was accompanied by NCP state president and Lok Sabha MP Sunil Tatkare, party's national working president and Rajya Sabha MP Praful Patel, and her two sons,

Parth Pawar and Jay Pawar

According to the Deputy Chief Minister's Office, Sunetra's visit to New Delhi was a courtesy visit after taking charge as Maharashtra's first female Deputy CM on Tuesday. Her visit gained added significance following Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis' late-night and unannounced trip to Delhi on Monday.

Earlier on Wednesday, sources told that Sunetra was likely to declare her son Parth Pawar as the national president of the Nationalist Congress Party (Ajit Pawar faction) after the meeting. Notably, just two days ago,

Parth and Sunetra had visited Sharad Pawar, who is currently admitted to a hospital.

The Delhi visit was being seen as politically significant, with speculation intensifying over the future of the two factions of the NCP, as political observers believe key developments may unfold in the capital.

The most important issue Sunetra faces is the possible merger of the two factions of the Nationalist Congress Party, one that was led by Ajit Pawar and the other by the NCP founder Sharad Pawar. Discussions

on a possible merger may involve consultations with alliance partners in the coming days, indicating that Maharashtra's political landscape could witness major changes soon.

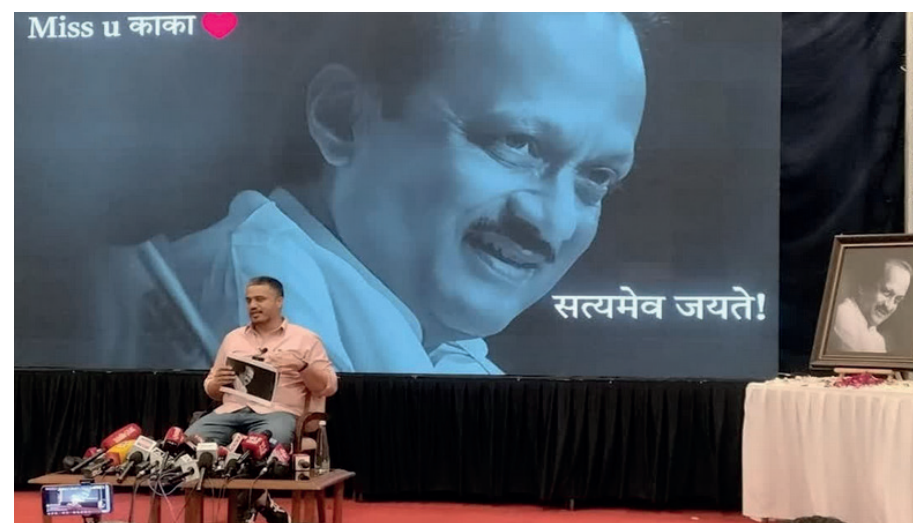
If the merger materialises, it could significantly alter the Rajya Sabha arithmetic from Maharashtra and make it difficult for the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) to secure a seat in the upcoming elections. Another important issue is the vacant Rajya Sabha seat created after Sunetra Pawar took oath as Deputy Chief Minister.

'Definitely A Conspiracy'- Rohit Pawar Seeks Fast-Track Probe into Ajit Pawar's Plane Crash

New Delhi

Raising serious concerns over the recent plane crash that claimed the life of former Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, Nationalist Congress Party (Sharadchandra Pawar) MLA Rohit Pawar on Wednesday alleged that there was "definitely a conspiracy" behind the incident and demanded a swift, detailed investigation by both the Centre and the state government.

Rohit Pawar is also nephew of late Ajit Pawar and represents the Karjat-Jamkhed constituency in the Maharashtra Assembly. Addressing a press conference, the NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar) leader raised several questions over the crash and said there were many doubts in the minds of people, particularly in



Maharashtra.

"Ajit Dada (Ajit Pawar) was my uncle and a mass leader leader of Maharashtra. There are many doubts in the

minds of people, especially in Maharashtra, regarding his death in the plane crash. We also share those doubts," Rohit Pawar said.

He said the family and party

had gathered certain information over the past 13 days through their own sources. "One of our family members has passed away, and we are emotionally affected by this issue. However, we have compiled some information which raises serious concerns," he said.

During the press conference, Pawar also presented a detailed presentation which he claimed was related to the tragic incident. Alleging negligence, he said the aircraft maintenance agency was responsible for poor upkeep of the plane. "The plane was maintained very poorly, which led to the accident. We urge everyone not to use such aircraft even in emergencies," he claimed.

Pakistan was used like 'toilet paper' by US; Defence Minister Asif admits past mistakes in parliament

Islamabad

Pakistan's Defence Minister Khawaja Asif has admitted that the country made serious mistakes by aligning with the United States in the past, especially during the Afghan wars.

Speaking in Pakistan's National Assembly, Asif said the US exploited Pakistan for its own strategic needs and abandoned it after achieving its goals. He said Pakistan was treated "worse than a piece of toilet paper."

Asif admitted that Pakistan often denies its past role in supporting militancy and said this denial has caused long-term damage. He stated that terrorism in Pakistan today is the result of past mistakes made by military



rulers.

He called Pakistan's involvement in two Afghan wars a mistake, particularly after the 9/11 attacks when Islamabad sided with the US and turned against the Taliban. While the US later withdrew from Afghanistan, Pakistan was left

facing violence, radicalisation and economic problems.

The minister rejected claims that Pakistan joined the Afghan wars for religious reasons. He said people were sent to fight under the name of jihad, which he described as misleading and harmful.

Asif blamed former military dictators Zia-ul-Haq and Pervez Musharraf, saying they joined the Afghan wars to please a superpower, not to serve Islam.

He also said Pakistan's education system was changed to justify these wars, and those ideological changes still remain today. Calling the damage irreversible, Asif said the losses suffered by Pakistan can never be fully compensated.

White House revises fact sheet on India trade deal; drops pulses

Washington

In a quiet move within less than 24 hours, the White House has revised its fact sheet on the proposed Indo-US interim trade deal, changing key language and removing references that had not appeared in the original joint statement issued by the two countries.

The sequence of events is significant. On February 6, India and the United States released a Joint Statement outlining the broad understanding reached between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump. A few days later, on February 9, the White House issued a detailed fact sheet that included some commitments that were either not mentioned or described differently in the joint statement.

Now, the White House has quietly updated that fact sheet.

One major change relates to India's purchases of American goods. The earlier fact sheet said India would "commit" to buying \$500 billion worth of US products. The revised version softens this language, saying India "intends" to buy these goods.

Another change concerns the digital services tax. The earlier version stated that India would "remove its digital services tax." This reference has now been dropped from the updated fact sheet.

There has also been a change regarding agricultural imports. The previous fact sheet mentioned that India would import pulses from the United States. In the revised version, pulses are no longer mentioned.

Even in its current form, the US fact sheet refers to wider

agricultural market access than what was stated in the February 6 joint statement. It says India has agreed to "eliminate or reduce tariffs" on US industrial goods and a wide range of agricultural products, including dried distillers' grains (DDGs), red sorghum, tree nuts, fruits, soybean oil, wine and spirits.

The joint statement, however, had clearly said that red sorghum imports from the US would be limited to animal feed. This specific condition is not mentioned in the White House fact sheet.

The agricultural provisions are politically sensitive in India, where farm imports and tariff protections are closely watched.

The fact sheet also states that during a phone call between President Trump and Prime Minister Modi, the US agreed to remove the additional 25 per cent tariff imposed on Indian imports. According to the US document, this decision was linked to India's commitment to stop purchasing Russian oil.

President Trump later signed an Executive Order withdrawing the additional tariff and reducing the reciprocal tariff on India from 25 per cent to 18 per cent.

India has maintained that its energy sourcing decisions are based on national interest and energy security needs.

The differences between the joint statement and the revised White House fact sheet—and the quick corrections made within a day—are likely to be closely examined as negotiations move forward toward a broader Bilateral Trade Agreement.

Gujarat couple heading to US kidnapped in Azerbaijan; rescued with foreign ministry's help

New Delhi

A couple from Gujarat's Anand district was kidnapped and held hostage for ransom in Azerbaijan while en route to the US, and was later rescued with the help of the Indian foreign ministry, the local Lok Sabha MP has said.

Dhruv Patel and his wife Dipika have been released and are safe, thanks to the timely efforts of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Member of Parliament from Anand Mitesh Patel said in a video statement.

"Two days ago, parents

of Dhruv Patel and Dipika Patel contacted me and told me that they were kidnapped in Azerbaijan. They said they (family members) received a video call in which people (kidnappers) from Azerbaijan demanded ransom for their release," the BJP MP said on Tuesday.

The duo was kidnapped while on their way to the US with the help of agents who had promised them safe passage to America through illegal means, he informed.

When the couple's worried

family members contacted Mitesh Patel's office for help, he made a high-level representation to the MEA and met External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Monday when he was in New Delhi for the ongoing Parliament session.

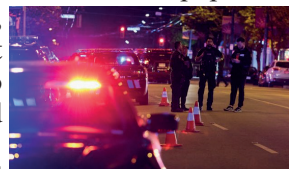
The MEA contacted the Indian Embassy in Azerbaijan and within 24 hours, both the kidnapped persons were rescued and brought to the Embassy in Baku, the capital of the country in the South Caucasus region, Mitesh Patel said.

Canada school shooting: 8, including gunman, dead in northeastern British Columbia

Vancouver

A shooting at a school in British Columbia left eight dead including the suspect, with two more people found dead at a home believed to be connected to the incident, Canadian authorities said Tuesday.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police said more than 25 people are injured, including two with life-threatening injuries, after the shooting at Tumbler Ridge Secondary School.



The town of Tumbler Ridge, which has a population of about 2,400 people, is more than 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) north of Vancouver, near the border with Alberta. The provincial government website lists Tumbler Ridge Secondary School as having 175 students from Grades 7 to 12.

RCMP Superintendent Ken Floyd told reporters that investigators had identified the shooter but would not release a name, but that the suspect's motive remained unclear.

Crackdown on Cyber Fraud

While hearing cases related to cyber fraud—especially those involving “digital arrest” used to siphon off people’s money—the Supreme Court’s expression of displeasure with the conduct of the CBI, banks, and the Reserve Bank makes it clear that what should be done to protect people from fraud is not being done. The Supreme Court’s observation is particularly serious: in several cases, especially those involving digital arrest, bank officials are allegedly in collusion with the accused, which is why cyber fraudsters are able to easily siphon off people’s lifetime savings.

This observation cannot be dismissed as baseless, because it has been seen that banks often fail to take timely action to freeze or seize money that has been transferred from one account to another through fraud. It is difficult to understand why banks do not act promptly against accounts through which such transfers are made. This lack of urgency itself raises questions about the role of banks. If bank employees remain vigilant, cyber fraud cases can be curbed to a large extent.

Banks must have systems in place to flag situations where money withdrawn from an account

is rapidly transferred to several other accounts one after another. Such patterns typically occur only in cases of cyber fraud. In this context, it became necessary for the Supreme Court to direct the Reserve



Bank to fix accountability on the concerned banks for accounts through which fraudulently withdrawn money is routed. The question is: why had this not been done so far?

Since prompt action by the police and other agencies is essential in cyber fraud cases—and delays are often seen—the Supreme Court also had to direct the CBI to act swiftly in such matters. It remains to be seen whether this will actually happen, because given the rapid rise in cyber fraud cases, there is doubt about whether the CBI will be capable of investigating all of them.

It is evident that the police too must be made capable of effectively investigating cyber fraud cases. The Supreme Court emphasized the need for greater coordination among the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Reserve Bank, and the telecom authority to prevent cyber fraud, and directed that standard operating procedures be implemented across the country. It would have been better if the government had already taken this initiative on its own. It cannot be unaware that more than ₹54,000 crore has already been siphoned off through digital fraud—an amount that exceeds the budgets of several smaller states.

// sātyāsyā pārāmām nidhānām //

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WHEN YOU’RE
TIRED. STOP WHEN
YOU’RE DONE.”
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Outline of the Agreement

At last, it has been announced that India and the United States have reached an agreement on the framework of an interim trade deal. With this, the clouds of uncertainty have cleared, and it has become evident that trade between the two countries will resume soon. The reduction of the US tariff on India from 25 percent to 18 percent, along with the removal of the punitive 25 percent tariff imposed due to India’s purchase of oil from Russia, is a major relief. It is also reassuring that both countries are keen to finalize the agreement at the earliest.

According to the framework of the agreement, India will eliminate or reduce duties on a wide range of US products, including all industrial goods, dry grains, sorghum for animal feed, nuts, processed fruits, soybean oil, wine, spirits, and other food and agricultural products. Similarly, following the interim agreement, duties on several items exported from India to the United States—such as generic medicines, gems, diamonds, aircraft components, and other goods—will be reduced to

zero.

This is particularly noteworthy because earlier it was believed that all exports from India would attract an 18 percent tariff. This also underlines that the agreement is being negotiated on an equal footing. The reduction in US



tariffs will also boost India’s exports of textiles, garments, leather, footwear, plastics, rubber, organic chemicals, home décor items, handicrafts, and certain machinery.

The framework of the trade agreement also indicates that India has been able to protect its agriculture and dairy sectors, and that fears of having

to compromise national interests under US pressure were unfounded. This is reinforced by the joint statement’s assertion that the United States will consider India’s request to reduce tariffs on Indian goods.

It is equally important that both countries will work toward further expanding market-access opportunities. In fact, this is the only way the target of achieving USD 500 billion in bilateral trade by 2030 can be met. The agreed framework of the trade deal is reassuring, as it promises to enhance India’s export capacity and strengthen the Make in India initiative.

If this initiative truly gains momentum, it will pave the way for India to become the world’s third-largest economy, while also expanding its role in global supply chains. At a time when leading countries want India to play a larger role in global supply chains and reduce China’s dominance, Indian businesses must be prepared to carve out their place in the global market on their own strength.

Make Self-Reliance a National Mission to Become a Superpower

Some time ago, a highly profitable Indian company wanted to purchase a solar-energy-related technology from a small Chinese company, but the latter refused. This happened despite India being the founder of the International Solar Alliance. India established this international organization with France in 2015. It is the first major organization of its kind, headquartered in India. Its objective is to work with 125 member countries to invest one trillion dollars in solar energy by 2030 and generate 1,000 gigawatts of solar power. China was invited several times to join, but it declined.

The irony is that India, which leads such an international organization, saw one of its largest companies having to approach a small Chinese firm for solar technology. The reason is that even Indian companies earning profits of thousands of crores of rupees every quarter do not want to invest in research on new technologies within India. They are expanding their businesses merely as suppliers of retail goods and services and remain dependent on other countries for technology. Because of this weakness, we are unable to provide leadership at the global

level. World powers want us to remain incapable. A recent example of this is the US-led Pax Silica alliance.

Pax Silica has been created to build supply chains for the supply and processing of rare minerals used in critical technological sectors, with the aim of reducing dependence on countries like China that dominate this field. Earlier, India had expressed its desire to join, but the Trump administration rejected it. At that time, some Indian industrialists said that if the government cooperated with them, they could carry out the mining and processing of rare minerals in India.

India has the world's third-largest reserves of rare minerals, after China and Brazil, while the United States ranks seventh. Trump resorted to tactics of pressure and coercion in an attempt to take control of Greenland because it has the world's eighth-largest reserves of rare minerals. Even if the US were to acquire Greenland, it would still remain seventh with 3.4 metric tonnes.

The question to consider is whether India should become a follower of the United States in the rare-minerals sector or become self-reliant. As soon as Indian industrialists



spoke of undertaking mining and processing of these minerals themselves, the US immediately changed its stance and invited India to join Pax Silica. According to a lobby advocating this move, mining and processing rare minerals is a very complex process, so it would be easier for India to work under US leadership. But once these resources become easily available to us, we will become complacent and will not invest in mining and processing technologies. The question is: how did China accomplish this complex task?

China overtook the United States as the world's largest producer of rare minerals as early as 1986. Between 1985 and 1995, China's production of these minerals increased by 464 percent. By 2004, China had become the exporter of 90 percent of the world's rare minerals. Today, China controls 70 percent of global rare-earth

mining, 90 percent of refining, and 90 percent of rare-earth magnet production. If China could achieve this in the 1980s and 1990s, why can't we do it today? Can self-reliance come from self-doubt? When the world refused to give India nuclear technology, did we not build the atomic bomb? Look at the opposite example as well.

We have always imported fighter jets from abroad. As a result, we have never become self-reliant in this sector, while every major power—the United States, Russia, France, the European Union, and China—manufactures its own fighter jets and their engines. Reports suggest that India may once again have to spend several lakh crore rupees to import fighter jets from either France, Russia, or the United States, because the Indian Air Force is left with only 29 squadrons, whereas at least 42 are required. This situation has arisen because the production of the Tejas aircraft was delayed and the indigenous jet-engine development program also remained incomplete.

In the Kaveri jet-engine program launched in 1989, India invested only ₹2,000 crore by 2008 and then, considering it a failure, delinked it from

the Tejas project. Over the past 40 years, India has spent a maximum of ₹5,000 crore on the Kaveri engine program, while China has spent ₹3.5 lakh crore. Today, China has its own jet engine ready for its sixth-generation indigenous fighter aircraft, the J-20, whereas we are preparing to spend three to four lakh crore rupees to buy fourth-generation fighter aircraft from abroad. Can anyone promise that this will be the last time we buy foreign fighter jets?

China is producing 100–120 sixth-generation fighter aircraft, while we are able to produce only 6–12 fourth-generation aircraft. The reason is that we depend on the United States for engines. After spending three to four lakh crore rupees on foreign fighter aircraft, how much will our government be able to spend on developing indigenous jet engines is also worth considering. Until self-reliance in these sectors is made a national mission, India's aspiration to become a self-reliant global power will remain in question. The path to becoming a superpower is neither easy nor can a superpower be built by taking the easy route.

The Trade Agreement Between the European Union and India Is Highly Significant

The presence of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President António Costa in Delhi on this year's Republic Day not only reflected the warming relations between India and Europe, but also underlined the initiative to take these ties forward. Ultimately, on the day after Republic Day, the much-discussed trade agreement between the European Union and India was concluded—an agreement that had been described as the “mother of all trade agreements.”

This agreement attracted global attention. Initially, the reaction from the United States was not very enthusiastic, but soon US President Donald Trump also announced that an agreement on a trade deal with India had been reached. He further clarified that the United States would reduce the 50 percent tariff imposed on India to 18 percent.

The Indian Prime Minister welcomed this announcement as well. Since the framework of this agreement has now come out, it is believed that it will be signed next month. Like the agreement with the European Union, the trade deal with the United States is special because there had been uncertainty over whether such an agreement between the two countries would be possible at all.

The India–European Union trade agreement became possible because, on the one hand, India was concerned

about the stance of the US President, and on the other hand, European countries were also uneasy. Another reason for this agreement is that in recent times India has strengthened its relations with key European countries such as France and Germany.

In addition, India has recently concluded trade agreements with the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Oman, and the UAE. Trade negotiations with several other countries are also in their final stages, including Canada, whose relations with the United States are currently strained. Europe felt the need to partner with India on trade because many European countries are facing significant economic challenges.

Although European nations are prosperous, small-scale manufacturing there has largely declined, and they are now more focused on high-tech products and services. European countries are also facing social upheaval due to the influx of immigrants, and campaigns against immigrants are underway in several nations. While Europe is a union of more than two dozen countries, some are highly developed, while others fall into the category of developing economies. These developing European countries see trade with India as more beneficial for themselves.

Just as the India–European Union trade agreement made headlines, the prospective trade agreement

between India and the United States is also being widely discussed across the world. The joint statement issued by both countries has further intensified this discussion. India was keen to conclude a trade agreement with the United States as soon as possible because Indian exporters were under pressure after the US President imposed a 50 percent tariff. This trade deal had remained stalled largely due to Trump's stance. He was displeased that India continued to buy oil from Russia despite US opposition. Although India had reduced its oil purchases from Russia in recent times, Trump showed no sign of softening. Matters changed rapidly after the US launched an attack on Venezuela, abducted its president, and installed a puppet government there. Following the change of power in Venezuela, Trump announced that the sale of its oil would now be decided on US terms. A few days after this announcement, talks were held between the Indian Prime Minister and the President of Venezuela. Shortly after these talks, Trump announced not only that a trade agreement with India had been finalized, but also that India would now buy oil from Venezuela and stop purchasing oil from Russia. Since India had previously bought oil from Venezuela, resuming such purchases would not be unusual. However, the key question remains whether India will completely stop buying oil from Russia.

Bangladesh at the Crossroads Once Again

All political parties in Bangladesh have geared up for the general elections scheduled for 12 February. The election results will determine the direction of a new Bangladesh. This time, the Awami League is out of the electoral fray due to a ban, yet former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina remains the central issue in the election discourse. For the first time in three decades, Bangladesh's "two Begums"—Sheikh Hasina of the Awami League and Khaleda Zia of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)—are not contesting the elections.

In this context, the election is being fought amid new political equations. In the 13th parliamentary elections, the role of youth is considered particularly significant, as this very group was at the forefront of the movement against Sheikh Hasina in July 2024 that led to her resignation. At present, the population in the 18–35 age group constitutes nearly 30 percent. Equipped with modern technology and social media, this group is seen as the main representative of the July movement. The key question is whether this youth cohort will support the student-movement-born National Citizens Party (NCP), or whether traditional parties will return to power on the strength of their administrative experience and organizational depth.

After 17 years of exile in London, Khaleda Zia's son Tarique Rahman has taken charge of the BNP. The large crowds that gathered during his return to Bangladesh on 25 December last year made it clear that the political gains of the 2024 movement have gone to the BNP, and that expectations from it in the upcoming elections are high. Upon reaching Dhaka, Tarique Rahman said, "I have a plan"—a plan for Bangladesh's development.

On this basis, the party has highlighted issues such as national transformation, social equality, economic stability, regional development, and religious harmony at the top of its manifesto. In Bangladesh's electoral history, party identity and



leadership have mattered more than issues, and over the past year and a half Tarique Rahman has worked in this direction. Even while abroad, he remained connected with the party through online platforms. From an electoral arithmetic standpoint, the BNP is currently considered a strong party, which may also benefit from the absence of the Awami League. At the same time, the BNP is trying to avoid religious polarization while seeking to attract minority voters and supporters of the Awami League.

Jamaat-e-Islami has, for the first time, openly emerged in leadership-driven politics. Due to its support for Pakistan during the 1971 Liberation War, the organization remained controversial for a long time. During Sheikh Hasina's two decades in power, many of its leaders were jailed or went underground. However, after the fall of her government, Jamaat became active again and its leadership came to the fore, including its chief, Ameer Shafiqur Rahman. The absence of the Awami League has given Jamaat a distinct political identity, and it has entered the electoral arena on the strength of its religious base. That said, Jamaat faces no shortage of challenges. Its hardline image, discriminatory outlook toward women, and attempts to give the Constitution an

Islamic character are matters of concern.

Bangladesh was founded on the principles of liberalism, religious harmony, and the active participation of women. In such a scenario, if Jamaat comes to power, the future of secularism could come under question. Recently, remarks by Shafiqur Rahman in an interview about not giving women representation in the party have further heightened concerns. Due to the July movement, the role of youth is considered crucial in this election. Student leader Nahid Islam entered electoral politics by founding the NCP in February 2025.

However, leadership in student movements does not guarantee electoral success. The NCP did not participate in student elections at Dhaka and Jahangirnagar universities, raising questions about its organizational strength. In contrast, victories by Jamaat's student wing, Islami Chhatra Shibir, have demonstrated its grassroots reach. The NCP's alliance with Jamaat also reflects its political uncertainty and opportunism. It remains to be seen to what extent the youth—especially women—will accept this alliance.

Amid domestic issues, the BNP, Jamaat, and NCP have each adopted different positions on relations with India. The BNP and Jamaat have shown relative restraint on foreign policy, while the NCP has spoken of taking a tough stance on issues such as the sharing of international river waters, the return of Sheikh Hasina, and unequal bilateral agreements. The silence of traditional parties can be seen as a strategy to avoid controversy.

Bangladesh has experienced political upheavals many times, yet its political framework has endured. If Jamaat comes to power in this election, religious influence may increase not only in domestic politics but also in foreign policy—an outcome that could become a serious cause for concern for India.

Examinations Are Not the Ultimate Goal of Life

Launched to reduce exam-related stress among students in India and to make the learning process joyful, the Pariksha Pe Charcha initiative has today become a major platform of public participation. What began in 2018 as a conversation between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and students has now guided millions of students, parents, and teachers. In 2025, the programme created a Guinness World Record when more than 35.3 million people registered to participate within a single month. Its total outreach exceeded 210 million viewers, including Indian schools located abroad. The programme conveys a clear message to students: examinations are not the ultimate goal of life, but merely an important stage in the journey of learning.

The Prime Minister repeatedly emphasizes that examinations only measure one's preparation at a particular moment, whereas learning is continuous and meant to be enjoyable. The National Education Policy 2020 places strong emphasis on the concept of "lifelong

learning." One of the key objectives of this programme is to convey that a percentage of marks cannot define a child's entire personality. Children should be encouraged to move beyond textbooks, learn diverse skills, try new activities, and view challenges as opportunities rather than sources of fear.

Mental health has been given special importance in this initiative. Experts are introducing students to simple ways of reducing stress, including healthy routines such as the 5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique, adequate sleep, hydration, exercise, and meditation. The 5-4-3-2-1 technique is a sensory-based mindfulness practice designed to calm racing thoughts by engaging all five senses and gradually narrowing focus to one sense. This helps shift attention away from anxiety-inducing thoughts and toward the present moment. This technique was developed in the 18th century by Betty Ellis Erickson. Several personalities from the sports world shared their experiences, highlighting

that sports do not hinder studies; rather, they help reduce stress and improve concentration.

With the growing dominance of digital media, concerns are being raised about cognitive decline and adverse effects on mental health. Globally, there are 5.66 billion digital media profiles. People spend nearly 15 billion hours every day consuming content on digital platforms—equivalent to more than 1.7 million years of human life. Excessive use is leading to an increase in "digital dementia," which results in a reduction of grey matter in those regions of the brain responsible for emotional regulation and impulse control. Since it is not possible to completely reject digital media, healthy boundaries must be set for its use.

Technology experts have advised students to use mobile phones and digital tools in a controlled manner so that technology remains a support rather than a burden. The *Pariksha Pe Charcha* programme also delivers an important

message to parents: they should not focus solely on marks, but on the learning process. Children should not be compared with others, and a home environment should be created where they can openly share their fears, challenges, and aspirations. Supportive parental behavior plays the most significant role in helping children prepare for examinations.

In the Indian educational philosophy, the pursuit of knowledge is not seen as a solitary process, but as a shared journey. The *Pariksha Pe Charcha* initiative appeals to teachers to move beyond rote learning and promote critical thinking and creativity. The programme aligns with the vision of the National Education Policy, which emphasizes student-centric, stress-free, and experiential learning. There is a need to reform the evaluation system so that examinations assess not just memory, but understanding, application, and overall development. The use of digital platforms is also considered important in making education more accessible.

US inquiring about alleged Iranian oil imports, says Adani Enterprises

Tamilnad Mercantile Bank adopts Oracle Fusion Cloud to boost efficiency

Mumbai

Adani Enterprises Ltd. said the US has sought information from the company after a media report alleged it imported Iranian oil products into India, raising potential sanctions concerns.

The company initiated discussions with the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control following the Wall Street Journal's article last June, according to a regulatory filing Tuesday. Adani received the request for information on Feb. 4 and stressed it is cooperating fully with US authorities.

Shares of Adani Enterprises, the flagship company within the Adani Group, fell as much as 3.5



per cent on Tuesday.

WSJ had reported that companies controlled by billionaire Gautam Adani were being probed by US prosecutors about imports of Iranian liquefied petroleum gas through the Group's port in Mundra. Iran's oil trade has long been subject to sanctions by Washington.

The inquiry adds to ongoing

scrutiny of the conglomerate, including a US bribery probe in which the group's chairman has been indicted. It follows earlier allegations of market manipulation by short-seller Hindenburg Research in 2023, which had already pressured investor confidence. Adani has denied any wrongdoing.

Adani said the latest matter has no financial impact, noting that LPG accounted for just 1.46 per cent of the company's revenue and 0.5 per cent of the Group's overall revenue in the fiscal year ended March 2025.

Out of "abundant caution," the company said it ceased all LPG imports effective last June.

Mumbai

Tamilnad Mercantile Bank (TMB), one of India's oldest private banks, is using Oracle Fusion Cloud Applications to support its mission to deliver technology-driven, efficient and ethical banking services. With Oracle Fusion Applications for finance, HR and customer experience, TMB has unified core operations and leveraged AI to automate processes, increase productivity, reduce costs, and improve the employee and customer experience.

Founded in 1921, TMB now serves more than 5.6 million customers across India, with over 600 branches and 5,000 employees. In a fast-evolving and competitive digital banking landscape, TMB needed to move off legacy systems and onto a scalable cloud platform to accelerate automation and efficiency as it grows. After careful evaluation, TMB decided to move its finance, HR and customer experience processes to Oracle Fusion Applications.

"As we reimagined how our bank operates and serves customers, we knew we needed a modern, agile and intelligent foundation," said Salee S. Nair, managing director and chief executive officer, Tamilnad Mercantile Bank. "Oracle Fusion Applications helped us consolidate systems and automate key business processes, improve insights, and build an AI-powered foundation to strengthen our operations. Oracle's embedded AI and quarterly updates enable us to expand with efficiency and better serve our customers."

With Oracle Fusion

Applications, TMB has standardised on a single integrated suite for finance, HR and customer experience. With Oracle Fusion Cloud Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), TMB has increased productivity, reduced costs and improved financial controls, while Oracle Fusion Cloud Human Capital Management (HCM) has enhanced the employee experience and expanded workforce insights. For example, AI agents like the Leave and Absence Policy Advisor Agent deliver real-time, personalised guidance to TMB employees, helping them navigate company leave policies and reducing administrative burden. In addition, Oracle Fusion Cloud Customer Experience (CX) has helped TMB improve sales efficiency and enhance customer service. "As customer expectations continue to evolve, long-established banks must modernise how they operate while safeguarding the trust and relationships they have built over decades," said Shailesh Singla, vice-president of cloud applications, Oracle India. "With Oracle Fusion Applications, TMB is harnessing embedded AI to streamline finance, HR, sales and service to drive productivity and elevate the employee and customer experience. This is an example of how AI can empower a time-honoured organisation to evolve confidently for the AI era." The implementation was managed by Oracle Partner Network members, Deloitte for finance and customer experience, and Kovaion Consulting for HR.

L&T bags 'significant' transport infrastructure development project in UAE

New Delhi

Larsen and Toubro on Tuesday said it has secured a "significant" transport infrastructure development project in Dubai, UAE.

The order pertains to the Phase-1 of the road development initiative undertaken by the UAE authorities, Larsen and Toubro (L&T) informed the exchanges.

L&T did not provide any financial details of the order. According to company classification, a significant order ranges between ₹1,000 crore to ₹2,500 crore.



The contract has been secured by the Transportation Infrastructure business vertical of the company for the

improvement of Latifa Bint Hamdan Street in Dubai.

The project is scheduled to be completed in 36 months.

The scope of the project includes upgrading the existing road corridor stretching from Emirates Road (E611) to Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Road (E311).

The work involves widening the current two-lane dual carriageway into a four-lane dual carriageway in each direction to enhance network capacity and ease traffic flow.

AstraZeneca gets Indian regulator's nod to market cancer drug Imfinzi

New Delhi

AstraZeneca Pharma India Ltd on Tuesday said it has received permission from India's drug regulator to market Durvalumab solution for infusion used in cancer treatment for an additional indication.

The company has received permission from the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation, Directorate General of Health Services, to import for sale and distribution of Durvalumab solution for infusion of strengths 120 mg/2.4 ml and 500 mg/10 ml (brand name Imfinzi) for an additional indication, AstraZeneca Pharma said in a regulatory filing.

Through this approval, Durvalumab in

combination with carboplatin and paclitaxel is indicated for the first-line treatment of adults with primary advanced or recurrent endometrial cancer who are candidates for systemic therapy, followed by maintenance treatment with Durvalumab as monotherapy in endometrial cancer which is mismatch repair deficient (dMMR).



The receipt of this permission paves way for the marketing of Durvalumab solution for infusion 120 mg/2.4 mL and 500 mg/10 mL (Imfinzi) in India for the specified additional indication, subject to the receipt of related statutory approvals, it added.

Standard Chartered CFO De Giorgi unexpectedly resigns to join Apollo

New Delhi

Standard Chartered Plc Chief Financial Officer Diego De Giorgi, one of the front-runners to eventually replace long-time Chief Executive Officer Bill Winters, unexpectedly resigned after about two years in the role.

He will be replaced by deputy CFO Peter Burrill on an interim basis as the London-based firm seeks a permanent replacement in "due course," according to a statement.

De Giorgi, who joined the bank in September 2023, will take on a role at Apollo Global Management Inc. as a partner and head of Europe, the Middle East and Africa, according to a separate statement from the alternative assets giant. He



will succeed longtime partner Rob Seminara.

He was seen as one of the candidates to replace Winters, who is the longest-serving CEO of a major UK bank. He previously held senior

roles at Bank of America Corp. and Goldman Sachs Group Inc. as well on the board of UniCredit SpA.

Simon Cooper, another front-runner to replace Winters abruptly left the emerging markets lender in 2024, as it pushed through a broader management reshuffle to boost returns.

De Giorgi's departure comes as the bank is in midst of a restructuring program known as 'Fit for Growth' that aims to streamline operations and save \$1.5 billion. Winters has overhauled the lender in the past few years to focus on Asia growth.

Standard Chartered shares in Hong Kong have risen more than 80% in the past year and its share price is around the highest since

2010. The UK lender last year named Maria Ramos as chair to succeed Jose Vinals.

Despite being based in London, Standard Chartered makes most of its income from its operations in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Its single biggest market is Hong Kong, which is still navigating its rebound after a prolonged period of economic contraction. Standard Chartered also has major operations in Singapore, where its largest investor, Temasek Holdings, is headquartered.

As Apollo's head of EMEA, De Giorgi will oversee a fast-growing region for the firm as it expands credit, equity and hybrid origination, as well as in wealth and retirement solutions.

ED to issue fresh summons to Tina Ambani in money laundering probe

Mumbai

The Enforcement Directorate is soon expected to issue fresh summons to Tina Ambani, wife of Reliance Group chairman Anil Ambani, for questioning in a money laundering case after she failed to depose on her scheduled date, officials said on Tuesday.

Tina, 68, a former actor, was asked to depose by the federal agency here on Monday but she did not do so.

She will be called again soon as her statement is to be recorded under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), the officials said.

A response from the Reliance Group on these summons is awaited.

Anil Ambani was questioned by the ED once last year as part of these investigations linked to multiple Reliance Group companies and their bank loans.

It is understood that Tina has been called for questioning with regard to a money trail linked to the purchase of a luxury condominium in New York's Manhattan.

The ED had recently arrested former RCOM (Reliance Communication) president Punit Garg in this case.

The New York property was "fraudulently" sold in 2023 during the corporate insolvency resolution process (CIRP) of RCOM by Garg, the ED had claimed in a statement earlier.



It is understood that RCOM informed the stock exchange about this "fraudulent" sale in 2025.

"The sale proceeds of \$8.3 million (about ₹69.55 crore in 2023) were remitted from the USA under the guise of a sham investment arrangement with a Dubai-based entity controlled by a Pakistan-linked individual, without the knowledge or consent of the Resolution Professional (RP)," the agency has claimed.

The ED recently also constituted a special investigation team (SIT) to probe multiple cases of alleged bank fraud and linked financial irregularities against the Anil Dhirubhai Ambani Group (ADAG) on the directions of the Supreme Court.

It has attached assets worth ₹12,000 crore as part of this probe and has filed three complaints called ECIRs (Enforcement Case Information Reports) against Reliance Group companies.

Tesla IT executive Raj Jegannathan exits months after named to sales role

New Delhi

Tesla Inc.'s head of sales for North America is leaving the electric-vehicle maker, exiting a position that's seen substantial turnover in the past year.

leaders in the midst of back-to-back annual declines in vehicle deliveries.

Longtime Musk confidant Omead Afshar exited last year after overseeing sales and manufacturing

in North America. Milan Kovac, the engineering lead for Tesla's Optimus robot program, and David Lau, who ran software for over a decade, also left the company in 2025.

Jegannathan, who also had responsibility for IT and data functions, including AI infrastructure, took the sales role shortly after long-time Tesla executive Troy Jones left the

company in July. Tesla is confronting a broader slowdown in EV demand in the US, and Musk increasingly is prioritizing investments in artificial intelligence, autonomous driving and humanoid robots. Tesla relinquished its position as the world's largest seller of EVs last year to China's BYD Co.



Raj Jegannathan, a Tesla vice president tapped to oversee sales in the region last year, said in a LinkedIn post that he was parting ways with the company.

He's the latest prominent executive to leave the Elon Musk-led EV maker, which has seen several departures among key

India adds 7.2 GW thermal capacity till December, only 56% of annual target met

New Delhi

India added 7.2 gigawatt (GW) of thermal capacity in the first nine months of this fiscal, the latest data from the Central Electricity Authority (CEA) shows, against the full-year target of 12.86 GW.

No capacity was added in December, highlighting the slowing pace of thermal rolls out in the past few years. Delays in equipment supply or land acquisition issues continue to stall projects even as demand soars.

In FY25, too, only 4.53 GW of thermal capacity could be added against a target of 15.4 GW. In the current fiscal, the country might just be able to add 9.4 GW of thermal capacity, experts said.

Of the targeted 18 units, only eight were commissioned till December 31. The commissioned projects included six units in the central sector, with the remaining two units in the state sector.

The commissioned thermal units include North Karanpura STPP (660



MW), Barh STPP St-I (660 MW), Buxar TPP (660 MW), Patratu STPP (800 MW), Ghatampur TPP (660 MW), Khurja SCTPP (660 MW), Yadadri TPS (800 MW), and Obra-C STPP (660 MW).

The private sector commissioned four power units with a cumulative capacity of 1.65 GW.

As of January 20, 2026, 39.5 GW capacity, including 4.8 GW of stressed thermal power, was under construction.

Contracts for 22.9 GW have been awarded and are due for construction. Another 24 GW of coal and lignite-based candidate capacity has been identified, which is at various stages of planning, the data shows.

Delays in equipment supply or land acquisition issues are among the main reasons for the delay in commissioning plants, analysts said.

The government wants to take India's thermal (coal and lignite) capacity to 307 GW by 2034-35. To

meet the target and the rising demand, the power ministry has envisaged an additional minimum of 97 GW of coal and lignite-based thermal capacity.

Given the complexity of thermal plants, there are a lot of things that need to fall into place, including transmission lines, water pipelines, coal transportation lines and railway sidings, analysts said.

The country's peak power demand reached 241 GW in 2025, as against CEA's estimate of 270 GW. In 2024, the peak demand touched 250 GW in May against the government's projection of 260 GW.

As of December 2025, the country's total installed capacity stood at 513.7 GW, of which thermal capacity accounted for 246.9 GW.

While India has committed to achieving 500 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2030, policymakers have reiterated that renewable energy alone cannot meet the rising demand, affirming the country's reliance on coal-based capacities.

Govt, RBI roll out measures to improve health, governance of cooperative banks- MoS Finance

New Delhi

The Government of India and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) have taken various measures to strengthen cooperative banks' financial health, governance and digital inclusion along with enhancing deposit security, credit availability and prudent regulation, said Minister of State in the Ministry of Finance, Pankaj Chaudhary, in Rajya Sabha on Tuesday.

As part of efforts to support business expansion, Urban Cooperative Banks (UCBs) have been permitted to open new branches, enabling wider outreach and improved customer access. In a move aimed at boosting credit flow, the permissible housing loan exposure of UCBs has been raised to 25 per cent of their total loans and advances, from the earlier limit of 10 per cent.



To improve governance continuity, amendments to the Banking Regulation Act have increased the maximum tenure of directors of cooperative banks from eight years to ten years, allowing experienced boards

to provide longer-term oversight.

To promote digital payments and financial inclusion, the licensing fee for onboarding cooperative banks to the Aadhaar Enabled Payment System (AePS)

has been reduced, lowering entry barriers for smaller institutions.

The government has also strengthened institutional support for cooperative banks through the creation of new entities. The National Urban Co-operative Finance and Development Corporation Limited (NUCFDC) was established as a non-deposit-taking, non-banking financial company to serve as an umbrella organisation for UCBs, providing information technology infrastructure and operational support.

For rural institutions, a Shared Services Entity (SSE) named Sahakar Sarthi has been established to deliver common technological services to Rural Cooperative Banks, improving efficiency and reducing operational costs.

Further strengthening customer protection, Rural

Cooperative Banks have been brought under the RBI's Integrated Ombudsman Scheme, providing customers with access to a unified grievance redressal mechanism.

On deposit safety, the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC) continues to insure deposits of all cooperative banks up to Rs 5 lakh per depositor per bank, including both principal and interest, providing enhanced confidence to depositors.

Recently, it was also announced that loans sanctioned by banks to the National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC), as of January 19, 2026, for on-lending to cooperative societies, are eligible for classification as priority sector lending under the respective categories.

Reimagining Pulses in Global Food and Climate Policy

Every year on 10 February, the United Nations (UN) marks World Pulses Day, a global observance aimed at raising awareness about pulses. What was once considered a humble staple in traditional diets is now gaining international recognition as a symbol of nutritional excellence, climate-smart agriculture and economic opportunity. The theme for World Pulses Day 2026, “Pulses of the world: from modesty to excellence,” captures this shift perfectly. It highlights how pulses, long overshadowed by more widely marketed foods, are essential actors in addressing global challenges such as malnutrition, climate change, and the resilience of the agrifood system.

According to the United Nations, pulses are nutrient-dense foods high in protein, dietary fibre, vitamins, and minerals, making them especially valuable in diets where animal-sourced foods are scarce or unaffordable. Evidence underscores the nutritional superiority of pulses. On average, pulses contain 18–25 percent protein—significantly higher than most cereals—and provide up to 45 percent of daily folate requirements and 25 percent of iron needs per 100 g of cooked serving. Their low glycaemic index (GI 28–52) contributes to improved blood sugar regulation, while regular consumption has been associated with a 22 percent reduction in coronary heart disease risk.

What was once considered a humble staple in traditional diets is now gaining international recognition as a symbol of nutritional excellence, climate-smart agriculture and economic opportunity.

Beyond nutrition, pulses are also environmentally strategic. They fix atmospheric nitrogen through symbiosis with soil bacteria, enhancing soil fertility and reducing the need for synthetic nitrogen fertilisers, which are major contributors to greenhouse gas emissions. This results in 30–40 percent lower greenhouse gas emissions per hectare compared with fertilised cereal systems, while also improving soil structure and supporting biodiversity.

According to data from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), global pulse production was nearly 96 million tonnes in 2022, with average per capita consumption at approximately 7 kg per person per year. Forecasts suggest production may reach 125 million tonnes and average consumption may rise to 8.6 kg per



person by 2032 if current trends continue. Global trade in pulses has also grown, with production estimated at around 101 million tonnes in 2024 and world pulses trade volumes at roughly 20.7 million tonnes, showing rising demand and expanding markets.

World Pulses Day aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), linking nutrition (SDG 2) through affordable protein, good health, and well-being (SDG 3) by reducing diet-related diseases, economic inclusion (SDG 8) via rural employment, and climate action (SDG 13) by lowering emissions and enhancing soil carbon sequestration. Pulses contribute to food security and better diets, support farm productivity through soil enhancement, and encourage diversified, resilient agricultural systems. They are also vital for smallholder farmers and rural economies, especially in low- and middle-income regions where pulses are both consumed locally and traded regionally.

Pulses deliver high-quality protein and essential micronutrients at low cost, making them critical in combating hunger and malnutrition.

Often overshadowed by cereals or animal proteins in public discourse and dietary marketing, pulses are now being reimagined as high-value foods

with a remarkable role in modern food systems. Pulses deliver high-quality protein and essential micronutrients at low cost, making them critical in combating hunger and malnutrition. By supporting local food systems and value chains, pulses generate jobs and incomes—especially for rural women and youth—through cultivation, processing, and trade. Their affordability also makes them accessible to low-income households, amplifying impacts on food security and social equity.

Smallholder- and women-led pulse value chains can be strengthened through targeted seed systems, market access policies, and gender-responsive agricultural extension, thus boosting rural incomes and dietary quality while advancing food security goals. Stakeholders are championing pulses year-round in several key ways:

Food industry innovators are introducing pulses into modern cuisines, plant-based products, and convenience foods, raising their profile among urban and young consumers.

Public health advocates are promoting pulses in dietary recommendations to address malnutrition and diet-related diseases.

Farmers and extension services are expanding pulse cultivation through sustainable practices, including crop diversification and organic rotations.

Governments and international agencies are developing policies and investments that strengthen pulse value chains and market access.

Smallholder- and women-led pulse value chains can be strengthened through targeted seed systems, market access policies, and gender-responsive agricultural extension, thus boosting rural incomes and dietary quality while advancing food security goals.

World Pulses Day 2026, under the theme “Pulses of the world: from modesty to excellence,” underscores the need to move beyond awareness toward systematic policy integration of pulses into national and global food strategies. Governments and development partners are called to embed pulses within agricultural investment plans, public procurement schemes, school feeding programmes, dietary guidelines, and climate-smart agriculture policies. Equally, aligning pulse promotion with nutrition and health policies offers a cost-effective pathway to address malnutrition and diet-related non-communicable diseases. Recognising pulses as strategic crops rather than marginal commodities positions them as practical tools for advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), building resilient agrifood systems, and ensuring that sustainable, healthy diets are accessible to all.

Takaichi's Victory: Japan Embraces Stability at Home, Proactiveness Abroad

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's landslide victory with a two-thirds majority in the 08 February snap general election marks a decisive moment in Japan's contemporary politics. Her Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which held 198 seats prior to the election, has emerged victorious with 316 seats, securing a larger share of representation in the 465-seat Lower House than any party has achieved in postwar Japan. Along with her coalition partner, the Japan Innovation Party (Ishin), Takaichi now has control over 352 seats, enabling her to potentially override the upper chamber, where she does not have a majority.

This win gives Takaichi the latitude to pursue her economic and security agenda with limited legislative obstruction. With her Liberal Democratic Party significantly expanding its seat share, the electorate has endorsed a platform that blends economic reassurance with a renewed sense of strategic purpose. The result ushers in an age where bold administration is both anticipated and politically sanctioned—a rare combination in Japan's electoral politics and an indication of the electorate's yearning for clarity and direction.

This win gives Takaichi the latitude to pursue her economic and security agenda with limited legislative obstruction.

Most importantly, with a firm majority secured, Tokyo is unlikely to see another lower-house election until the next scheduled cycle in 2028, resulting in the longest uninterrupted stretch of legislative continuity in nearly a decade. Japanese stocks jumped to all-time highs on February 9. With the idea that strategic investments and tax reforms under a stable government will sustainably support equities performance, markets have read the unequivocal mandate as favourable for the medium-term.

Decoding the Mandate

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's decision to dissolve the lower house of the Diet and call a snap general election, just months after ascending



to the premiership in October 2025, was a calculated effort to secure a direct popular mandate. Nonetheless, this election was contested not simply over seats in the Diet, but over the direction of Japan's economic compass, its socio-political compact, and the degree to which Tokyo asserts itself internationally. Takaichi herself framed the election as a referendum on her leadership, declaring that she would put her own position on the line while asking voters to judge her capacity to deliver on a range of measures she argued were imperative to confront persistent cost-of-living pressures, slow growth, and strategic vulnerabilities.

Central to this pitch is her promise to suspend the 8 percent sales tax on food for two years, a measure intended to provide immediate relief to households hard-pressed by rising prices and stagnant real wages, and to inject momentum into consumer spending. Takaichi has also

sought to reframe Japan's place in regional geopolitics as a cornerstone of her leadership. Her government has signalled plans to prepone the elevation of defence spending towards 2 percent of GDP by March 2026, against the backdrop of intensified concerns over China's cross-strait ambitions and strategic unpredictability in East Asia. By laying out these priorities for the electorate, Takaichi aimed to establish domestic legitimacy for policy choices that extend beyond technocratic budgeting and speak to Japan's broader identity as a proactive security actor. Simultaneously, her rhetoric on immigration and social cohesion centred on building a strong, prosperous, and safer Japan, a bet that helped consolidate support across demographics and regions.

This election was contested not simply over seats in the Diet, but over the direction of Japan's economic compass, its

socio-political compact, and the degree to which Tokyo asserts itself internationally.

Opposition efforts to regroup into a Centrist Reform Alliance—combining the Constitutional Democratic Party and the LDP's former coalition partner Komeito—reflected an attempt to unify centrist and centre-left constituencies against what they portrayed as a one-dimensional conservative agenda. However, early polling suggested that the alliance had yet to cohere into a compelling alternative. Voter turnout, particularly as citizens contended with severe winter weather and the ongoing impact of inflation, ultimately became a critical factor in shaping the outcome.

The result vindicates Takaichi's pre-election prospects, which had appeared remarkably favourable and projected to secure a comfortable majority. Her high personal approval ratings—

bolstered by a narrative of resolute leadership amid rising costs and strategic uncertainty—contributed significantly to this momentum. Added to this, her straightforward communication style and reputation as a hard-working politician helped cultivate a strong support base, particularly among younger voters. She has also unexpectedly emerged as a cultural phenomenon among the youth, inspiring what is being dubbed “sanakatsu”—loosely translated as “Sanae-mania”. Everyday items associated with her, including her handbag and the pink pen she uses to take notes in parliament, have reportedly seen a surge in popularity. This signals a convergence of political appeal and personal branding—rare in contemporary Japanese politics—helping broaden the LDP's reach beyond its traditional base.

The ramifications of a Takaichi-led government extend well beyond Tokyo. Her hawkish stance on China, emphasis on stronger deterrence in the context of Taiwan contingencies, and enthusiasm for deeper strategic alignment with the United States could recalibrate regional dynamics.

Implications for the Indo-Pacific

The ramifications of a Takaichi-led government extend well beyond Tokyo. Her hawkish stance on China, emphasis on stronger deterrence in the context of Taiwan contingencies, and enthusiasm for deeper strategic alignment with the United States could recalibrate regional dynamics. Notably, she has attracted overt support from US political figures, including President Donald Trump, underscoring a foreign policy profile that is firmly pro-US while sceptical of Beijing's ambitions.

During her term, Tokyo is therefore likely to pursue a more proactive regional role while seeking to balance deterrence with efforts to prevent escalation. This is particularly crucial in an Indo-Pacific context where security competition and economic interdependence coexist uneasily.

The Great Goat Gamble: Assessing Maharashtra's New Leopard Strategy

The rapid urbanisation and uncontrolled outward expansion of metropolitan cities across India have severely diminished the natural buffers that not only protect cities from natural calamities but also maintain a safe distance between wildlife habitats and human settlements. With highways, informal settlements, housing colonies, and industrial estates trampling forests, mangroves, and wetlands, cities surrounded by ecologically sensitive terrain, such as Gurugram (Haryana), Bengaluru (Karnataka), Palasbari and Kaliabor (Assam), and Baripada (Odisha), are witnessing increasing encounters between wildlife and people. Increasing leopard attacks on humans and livestock in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region are primarily due to the disappearing boundary between the Sanjay Gandhi National Park and densely populated human habitats.

The recent rise in leopard attacks across several urban and semi-urban regions in Maharashtra evoked an unusual response. The state's forest minister has suggested releasing goats worth INR 1 crore into the forests surrounding these densely populated areas in each district. The goats are supposed to act as 'sufficient prey,' preventing leopards from straying into the urban fringes in search of food. The minister also stated that the state had sought the downlisting of leopards from the Wildlife Protection Act's Schedule I to Schedule II. This move would significantly dilute their legal protection and offer the state enhanced flexibility to capture, relocate, or, after due authorisation, even eliminate leopards for more effective management of human-animal conflict.

Despite human settlements increasing the availability of food resources, leopards still obtain up to 80 percent of their total dietary requirements within forest areas. These findings contradict the premise that leopards venture into human settlements due to food scarcity, showing that human-animal conflict arises from proximity, not hunger.

While these proposals reflect genuine public concern for human safety, they also raise questions about how policymakers and politicians understand urban-ecological dynamics and whether such unique responses constitute a sustainable solution to growing human-animal conflicts.

The Drivers of Conflict

With 1,985 recorded in 2022, Maharashtra is home to India's second-largest leopard population, after Madhya Pradesh. The Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP), at the heart of the



Mumbai Metropolitan Region, is home to 54 leopards, with the world's highest density of ~26 leopards/100 sq km. However, they are not confined within the SGNP's core. Data analysis from GPS-enabled camera-traps and radio collars indicates that they routinely move across the core areas and into buffer zones, crossing not just peripheral tribal hamlets and institutional areas, but often infiltrating gated residential societies at SGNP's boundary.

Thus, understanding their prey base is key to mitigating leopard attacks on humans in these areas. Research evaluating their food patterns across Maharashtra indicates that the accumulation of waste on the forest fringes attracts a large number of domestic stray animals, including dogs, pigs, and cats, which in turn attract predators from the forests. For example, domestic stray dogs make up nearly 40 percent of leopards' diet, with livestock, rodents, and small wild prey, including monkeys, accounting for the rest. However, despite human settlements increasing the availability of food resources, leopards still obtain

up to 80 percent of their total dietary requirements within forest areas. These findings contradict the premise that leopards venture into human settlements due to food scarcity, showing that human-animal conflict arises from proximity, not hunger.

Why Goats Will Not Fix the Leopard Crisis

The proposal to release goats into forests to reduce leopard attacks also overlooks evidence on the negative impacts of artificially provisioning prey to carnivores. For example, National Tiger Conservation Authority guidelines warn of the adverse consequences of the artificial feeding of carnivores, permitting it only in exceptional cases, primarily during temporary captivity for rehabilitation. Feeding animals may lead to their "habituation," leading to "human-wildlife interface problems like livestock or human depredation," the guidelines caution.

Moreover, goats are inherently domestic. If released en masse in forests, the goats will likely cluster around the city edges to rummage for food or roam near human settlements. Readily

available food near city fringes would draw leopards closer to the humans, contradicting the minister's proposal that well-fed leopards will stay within the confines of the forests.

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Besides such veterinary and ecological challenges, releasing goats inside forests also poses ethical dilemmas. Studies have documented the rapid spread of various diseases, including brucellosis and foot-and-mouth disease, from domestic livestock to wild herbivores. Mass artificial feeding of wild animals can also disrupt the delicate ecological balance between species that have evolved over millennia across diverse ecosystems. Additionally, treating livestock as prey will likely invite severe societal resistance, as evidenced by the public outcry against the judicial orders to round up stray dogs in Delhi and put them in shelter homes and to ban pigeon-feeding in Mumbai.

Crucially, however, the proposal completely deviates from the argument that the real drivers of conflict stem from uncontrolled urban expansion. Peripheral growth of cities has led to: i) neglected solid waste management, allowing the breeding of large stray dog populations, ii) haphazard growth of informal settlements close to the forest area, leading to waste accumulation, and iii) poorly-lit residential areas and paths. These factors primarily contribute to increased human-animal conflicts.

Downlisting Leopards: A Risky Shortcut

Maharashtra's parallel demand of downlisting leopards from Schedule I to Schedule II of the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 could prove to be equally detrimental. Schedule I provides sweeping legal protection to endangered wild animals, including the tiger. Schedule I animals are protected from capture, hunting, poaching, trading, or relocation, unless backed by strong justification and rigorous oversight. Its violations invite severe penal action, including imprisonment. Downlisting leopards to Schedule II would make them open to interpretation as threats to human life or property, enabling their control through capture or hunting, with the Chief Wildlife Warden's approval.

From Temperature Shocks to Human Welfare: Budget 2026–27 and India's Climate Strategy

Departing from alarmist and noise-heavy climate narratives, the Economic Survey 2026 places development at the core of climate adaptation. It emphasises the role of societal resilience, instrumented through productivity enhancement, access to affordable and reliable energy, and strengthened institutional capacity. Climate change is framed as a development-linked challenge, where risks are best managed through growth, infrastructure, and welfare rather than through stand-alone climate action. The broader question is whether this approach is both optimal and sufficient, and where Budget 2026–27 stands on this.

From West to East: The Discourse of Climate Action

Much of today's climate debate originates in an earlier phase of environmental diplomacy that began in the West. The 1972 Stockholm Conference was an early turning point, as it integrated environmental issues into global diplomacy and led to the creation of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). In the years that followed, climate concerns were first recognised and institutionalised mainly in advanced industrial economies, where the effects of rapid industrialisation were already visible. This gave Western countries a first-mover role in shaping how climate change was discussed and governed, not by design, but as a result of their earlier stage of development. The structure of the UN climate framework reflects this sequencing, with industrialised developed countries expected to take the lead and developing countries following suit. In this sense, the climate discourse evolved in line with economic history and growth, moving from industrial growth to environmental stress, and only then to global climate governance.

Climate change is framed as a development-linked challenge, where risks are best managed through growth, infrastructure, and welfare rather than through stand-alone climate action.

Taking note of recent experience in advanced economies, the Survey observes that the global climate agenda has reached a turning point. For instance, developments in parts of Europe demonstrate that rapid decarbonisation, when undertaken without adequate system readiness, can lead to grid stress, reliability issues, and higher balancing costs. This experience highlights that energy transitions are



system-wide challenges, not simply a matter of adding renewable capacity. In this context, the Survey frames climate action for India as a development issue, where growth, energy security, and institutional capacity are essential for building resilience.

The message is straightforward. Climate action must be practical, well sequenced, and focused on improving human welfare rather than driven by targets and signalling. The real test now lies in assessing how the latest Budget 2026–27 addresses this.

Budget 2026–27 and the Development-Oriented Climate Policy

Building on the identification of green growth in the Union Budget 2023–24, and the subsequent budgets that strengthened this narrative through deeper integration and expanded support for renewable energy, the Union Budget 2026–27 marks a clear shift towards climate–development action. The climate agenda is advanced through a development-first strategy, with the emphasis moving from broad frameworks to tangible fiscal measures, reflecting a transition from intent to implementation.

Most climate-relevant measures in the Budget are primarily mitigation-oriented, focusing on infrastructure and capacity expansion, with limited detail on expected outcomes and safeguards.

The budget situates India's climate policy within a development-oriented fiscal framework, aligning traditional growth priorities with climate objectives. From a climate-mitigation perspective, this is reflected in dedicated allocations for Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage (CCUS), expanded support for clean energy supply chains and the integration of climate considerations across key infrastructure sectors. Specific measures include customs duty exemptions for solar inputs and

critical minerals, increased budgetary allocations for the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE)—up by 24 percent—excise duty reductions for biogas, and duty exemptions for nuclear power plant projects. From a development perspective, the budget allocates INR 12.2 lakh crore towards infrastructure capital expenditure, which, while not explicitly framed as climate adaptation, strengthens economic and physical resilience by improving connectivity, service delivery, and shock absorption. In terms of welfare, continued spending on housing, which is 7.7 percent higher than FY2025–26, along with investments in rural infrastructure, employment, and social protection programmes, enhances households' capacity to cope with climate-related stresses. These interventions create indirect but important linkages to climate resilience by reducing vulnerability and improving adaptive capacity.

When Mitigation Overshadows Adaptation in Practice

While the Budget's development-oriented framing of climate and environmental policy is broadly sound and defensible, a key concern is whether this approach risks obscuring the actual priority and depth of climate policy by relying excessively on growth-led spillovers and assumed trickle-down benefits. Most climate-relevant measures in the Budget are primarily mitigation-oriented, focusing on infrastructure and capacity expansion, with limited detail on expected outcomes and safeguards. For instance, a) climate-related disasters are no longer abstract risks—floods, cyclones, heatwaves, and landslides are already imposing significant economic and social costs. Yet, responses to these risks are largely subsumed under aggregate infrastructure capital

expenditure, rather than supported by a dedicated framework for adaptation finance or a clear strategy for climate-resilient infrastructure; and b) the issue of environmental and social externalities remains insufficiently addressed. Recent concerns over the potential opening of the Aravalli range for mining, alongside the Budget's emphasis on rare-earth and critical mineral extraction, underscore the absence of explicit safeguards or accounting for ecological and social costs.

Adaptation continues to be treated implicitly, based on the assumption that growth and infrastructure expansion will automatically enhance resilience.

In practice, adaptation continues to be treated implicitly, based on the assumption that growth and infrastructure expansion will automatically enhance resilience. This approach benefits households and regions already better equipped to absorb shocks, while leaving vulnerable populations exposed. Although the Economic Survey notes progress on adaptation—including higher public spending in adaptation-related sectors and community-led initiatives—both the Survey and Budget 2026–27 place greater emphasis on mitigation through critical minerals, carbon markets, climate finance, and renewable energy. Consequently, adaptation remains secondary, receiving neither comparable policy clarity nor significant fiscal priority.

Ideally, adaptation must remain a central pillar of India's climate discourse, alongside mitigation and the energy transition, which continue to receive greater attention due to their economic, industrial, and market appeal. Going forward, a truly development-oriented climate policy cannot rely on the assumption that climate outcomes will automatically improve through the trickle-down effects of growth or the gradual expansion of cleaner technologies alone. Instead, development must be deliberate and targeted, with explicit focus on national climate priorities, urban resilience and heat stress, food and water security, and the protection of vulnerable livelihoods. Addressing these challenges will require clear targets, dedicated financing, and, in some cases, standalone policy frameworks—rather than treating adaptation as an indirect by-product of growth.

Nick Jonas calls Priyanka Chopra's Varanasi SS Rajamouli's 'next big film,' teases "it's going to be incredible"

Mumbai

Actress Priyanka Chopra is gearing up to make a grand comeback to the Indian cinema with the highly anticipated film, Varanasi, directed by SS Rajamouli. With the debut of its trailer last year, the movie has already generated a lot of interest, and fans are eagerly awaiting further updates.

Nick Jonas, the singer and Priyanka's husband, has teased the movie amid all the enthusiasm, referring to it as Rajamouli's next major endeavour.

During a recent appearance on the Zach Sang Show podcast, Nick talked about Varanasi and said, "Priyanka has been shooting one movie for 14 months, on and off. It's a South Indian film with SS Rajamouli, who directed RRR, his last movie. This is his next big film; it's going to be incredible."

The singer also shared his love for Hindi music and added, "The melodies are just so incredible. They are on a scale that we are not as familiar with over here. The thing I love about Hindi music and music from



Southeast Asia is that, a lot of the time, the music comes from a film and becomes famous."

Nick continued, "So often it's the actors who are lip-syncing to someone else's voice. But there are these music composers who specialise in making songs sound like big hits and fit cinematically. That's something very inspiring to me. There's so much great music in Indian cinema."

He went on to discuss how Indian music frequently becomes a festival, with people dancing in theatres to it.

In January, a puja was held to launch Varanasi, but images from the event were not released

to protect Mahesh Babu's movie appearance. The makers have also dropped an intense first look poster of her character.

In the movie, Priyanka portrays Mandakini. The movie marks Priyanka's eight-year comeback to Indian cinema and Mahesh's big-screen comeback following his 2024 film Guntur Kaaram.

Prithviraj Sukumaran plays the antagonist in the movie. Mahesh will also play Lord Ram in one of the movie's scenes, the director has disclosed, adding that time travel is also a part of the plot.

Sonu Sood offers to help Rajpal Yadav after comedian is jailed in cheque-bounce case

Actor Sonu Sood on Tuesday stepped in to help Rajpal Yadav with a role and a signing amount after the comedian surrendered himself to Tihar jail authorities in connection with cheque-bounce case.

Sood also urged filmmakers and other industry colleagues to come forward and help the comedian in the time of crisis.

Yadav, an NSD graduate who is known for his roles in movies such as "Mujhse Shaadi Karogi", "Waqt", "Phir Hera Pheri", "Partner", "Bhool Bhulaiyaa", "Hungama" and "Chup Chup Ke", was sent to Tihar jail after the Delhi High Court rejected his plea seeking more time to repay outstanding amount in a cheque-bounce case. The actor has to pay nearly Rs 9 crore.

In 2010, Yadav borrowed Rs 5 crore from M/s Murali Projects Pvt Ltd for his directorial debut film "Ata Pata Laapata", but the film flopped at the box office.

Before his surrender, Yadav told 'Bollywood Hungama' that he did not have money or any other means to pay the outstanding amount. When asked whether he had sought help from his colleagues, the actor said, "Everyone is on their own" in the industry.

Sood, in a post on X, requested colleagues to help Yadav by paying him signing amount for future works.

"Rajpal Yadav is a gifted actor who has given years of unforgettable work to our industry. Sometimes life turns unfair, not because of talent, but because timing can be



brutal. He will be part of my film, and I believe this is the moment for all of us... Producers, directors, colleagues to stand together," he wrote in the post.

The actor said the industry should "remind him he's not alone".

"A small signing amount, adjustable against future work, is not charity, it's dignity. When one of our own is going through a tough phase... This is how we show we are more than just an industry," he added.

The fans supported the step by Sood in the comments section.

"At least, someone is speaking for their colleagues. Small steps amplify to something bigger," one user wrote.

"After Johnny Lever, the one comedian who truly made us laugh from the heart is Rajpal Yadav. He gave us joy in our tough times and now in his difficult phase, your support can help him stand strong again. Thank you for standing with Rajpal Yadav and for your kind contribution," wrote another.

The Delhi High Court, in its judgement, had noted that Yadav was required to make payments of Rs 1.35 crore in each of the seven cases against him and directed that the amount already deposited with the registrar general of the high court be released in favour of the complainant.

So grateful: Shahid Kapoor thanks Vishal Bhardwaj for role in 'O'Romeo'

Bollywood actor Shahid Kapoor penned a heartfelt note for filmmaker and his frequent collaborator Vishal Bhardwaj on social media and said he is grateful for getting to feature in his latest directorial "O'Romeo", which gave him the character that got etched in his filmography.

Also featuring Triptii Dimri, the film is set to release in theatres on February 13 and stars Kapoor as Haseen Ustara.

The film revolves around Mumbai underworld gangster Ustara and his romantic alliance with a woman named Afsha (Dimri).

"Yeh hai from me as an actor for this man @vishalbhardwaj. Thank you for 'O'Romeo' !! Another character for me that's etched in my filmography. So proud so happy and so grateful," Kapoor wrote on his Instagram story on Tuesday as he shared a picture alongside the filmmaker.

The film also marks the fourth collaboration for Kapoor and Bhardwaj after their work on "Kaminey", "Haider", and "Rangoon". "O'Romeo" also features Nana Patekar, Avinash Tiwary, Tamannaah Bhatia, Disha Patani and Vikrant Massey.



Russian skater grooves to 'Dhurandhar' track, wins hearts



Russian-Georgian figure skater Anastasiia Gubanova is not just impressing people with her suave moves, but also her choice of music. Her performance on the title track of Bollywood runway hit 'Dhurandhar' has earned her praise from India and the world.

A video of her unique performance, that blended elite skating with popular Bollywood music at the 2026 Winter Olympics in Italy, has gone viral on social media.

Gubanova's routine have been receiving enthusiastic reactions, especially from Indian audiences online.

Gubanova, 23, is a decorated Russian-Georgian figure skater who represents Georgia in international competition. She is the 2023 European champion, a two-time European silver medallist, and has earned multiple medals on the ISU Challenger Series and Grand Prix circuits.

During her Winter Olympics routine, Gubanova skated to a carefully selected mashup of Bollywood tracks. The routine began with the song 'San Sanana' from the film Ashoka before transitioning into the energetic title song from Dhurandhar, a Bollywood hit that has enjoyed widespread popularity since its release.

Gubanova also wore a red-and-gold costume and a red bindi, elements that several viewers interpreted as an appreciative nod to Indian culture. During parts of her routine, she even incorporated movements of Punjabi folk steps, blending cultural expression with athletic skill.

Many Indian users praised her choice of music and attire. Released on December 5 last year, Dhurandhar continues to be a fan favourite, both in India and abroad. As Dhurandhar: The Revenge is slated to release on March 19, this moment suggests that the Dhurandhar fever continues to soar.

I knew I don't have career in film industry- Lucky Ali on 30 years in music

Renowned singer Lucky Ali, who has completed three decades in the music industry, is humbled by all the love he has received in his career, which he considers a gift that, he says, he didn't necessarily deserve.

Ali, known for hits such as "Gori Teri Aankhein Kahan", "Teri Yaad Jab Aati Hai", and Bollywood tracks "Na Tum Jaano Na Hum", "Ek Pal Ka Jeena" and "Jaane Kya Dhoondta Hai", is back with his signature soulful style with his latest single, "Tu Jaane Hai Kahan", which is produced under the Tips music banner.

"I feel grateful to the Almighty that I've had this opportunity and the response that I've received continuously over all these decades. I don't think I deserve this. I feel it's a gift that was given and I respect it. And that's what I've done all this time. I've not abused my career in any way. It's the greatness of the people who give you that love. You don't go expecting, 'Oh, love me'," Ali told PTI in a virtual interview.



The singer said he is aware that the love and success that he has garnered over the years is not permanent.

"I feel that nothing is permanent (and) at some point, it will stop. I'm happy for that. I'm not holding on to that. I look forward to those changes whenever they come. I think they're happening now as we age and go further into trying to identify what is it that makes it tick for us", the singer added.

"After all the fame and all the success, there's still something in

me that feels like I need to find or look for that, which maybe could be a piece that I seek away from all the noise."

Ali began his journey in 1996 with his album, "Sunoh", featuring his iconic track "O Sanam" and established him as a leading figure in Indi-pop.

When asked about his unconventional start with Indi-pop rather than mainstream film music, Ali candidly replied, "Yeah, because I'm not a singer-singer. I knew that I don't have a career in the film industry. I didn't want to sing for anyone."

"I didn't have a career (in movies) because I'm not a singer. I just sing for myself. I don't sing as a director. I don't do 'gayaki'. Whatever work I did was more internal. At some point, I felt that I need to express this and that's how the albums came about," he added.

For Ali, music serves as a vital means of communication, a way to connect with others.

Vikrant Massey dismisses reports of being replaced in Ramayana-Was never part of it

Actor Vikrant Massey on Saturday dismissed reports claiming he was replaced in filmmaker Nitesh Tiwari's upcoming big-budget adaptation of the epic "Ramayana", saying he was never part of the project in the first place.

There were media reports claiming that actor Raghav Juyal had stepped in to play Meghanad, the eldest son of Ravana and the crown prince of Lanka, replacing Massey in the role.

In a post on his Instagram Stories, Massey said, "OK. To put the rumours to rest, I was never a part of Nitesh Tiwari's 'Ramayana'." "The many media portals reporting about my



supposed 'replacement' should've done the requisite background check. Disappointing. Nonetheless, wishing everyone a part of the movie, all the very best," added the National

Award-winning actor.

Tiwari's "Ramayana" is being mounted as one of the biggest cinematic spectacles in Indian cinema. It will feature Ranbir Kapoor as Lord

Ram, Sai Pallavi as Goddess Sita and Yash as Ravana. The film's ensemble cast also includes Sunny Deol as Lord Hanuman, Ravi Dubey as Lakshman.

A two-part live-action saga, the project is produced by Namit Malhotra's Prime Focus Studios and DNEG, in association with Yash's Monster Mind Creations.

Massey will next be seen in a special appearance in filmmaker Vishal Bhardwaj's next feature "O'Romeo", headlined by Shahid Kapoor. He will also star in the Netflix series "Musafir Cafe" and "White", a biographical drama about spiritual guru Sri Sri Ravi Shankar.

Pakistan's concessions for ending boycott remains mystery, details to be made public post T20 World Cup – Report

Dubai

The dispute between the International Cricket Council (ICC) and Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) over the match against India at the T20 World Cup finally settled late on Monday night. The Pakistan government, which had earlier called for boycott of the fixture, took a U-turn from its previous stance and announced that the contest will go as originally planned. Both teams will be meeting in a high-voltage encounter in Colombo on February 15.

Before reaching to the decision, there was an intense meeting between ICC and the PCB that was also attended by Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Aminul Islam in Lahore on Sunday. It was reported that several demands, such as the resumption of bilateral, proposing a tri-series featuring India-Bangladesh-Pakistan, were among the many presented by the cricket boards to the apex body.

While it was reported that ICC declined from assuring any bilateral



or a tri-series among them, the global body did confirm that there will be no sanction on Bangladesh and the country will also get to host an ICC event prior to the Men's ODI World Cup in 2031. However, the official statement shared by the ICC didn't mention any such commitments concerning Pakistan.

On Tuesday evening, a report in PTI stated that the ICC has promised a few concessions to the PCB for

ending its boycott but those will only be announced after the conclusion of the T20 World Cup. "Whatever concessions the PCB has got from the ICC on ending their boycott will only be made public after the end of T20 World Cup," the news agency cited a PCB source as saying.

Meanwhile, the Pakistan government announced their decision in an official update, which also mentioned of a phone call between

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake. The report quoting another source stated that it played a key role in persuading Pakistan to reconsider its stance. "The call from Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake played a big part in ending the boycott as did a briefing from some top people in the government/establishment who have been closely following the developments," the source was quoted as saying.

Another source said that the Prime Minister who is also patron in chief of the PCB was in fact briefed on what Pakistan could achieve if the government issued a notification for not playing against India.

"The ICC now has a clear understanding with Naqvi that no further details of the discussions that took place with PCB, Bangladesh Cricket Board and some other boards would be made public," the source said.

Alireza Firouzja returns for Norway Chess 2026

Stavanger [Norway]

Alireza Firouzja, one of the most dynamic players of his generation, returns to Norway Chess in 2026.

Firouzja made history as the youngest player ever to reach a 2800 rating, a milestone achieved by only a select few in chess history.

"I am looking forward to competing against the best chess players in the world at Norway Chess 2026 in Oslo," says Firouzja, as quoted by Norway Chess.

He earned the grandmaster title at just 14 years old and became the second-youngest

player ever to cross the 2700 rating mark at the age of 16, underlining his rapid rise to the top of international chess.

He has qualified for the FIDE Candidates Tournament twice, first by winning the FIDE Grand

Swiss in 2021 at just 18 years old, and later through the FIDE rating list in January 2024.

Norway Chess is familiar ground for Firouzja. He has



competed in the tournament on four previous occasions and has been a central figure in several memorable editions. His strongest results came in 2020 and 2021, when he finished runner-up both years.

"Alireza Firouzja has been part of Norway Chess for several years and has consistently delivered performances at the very highest level, says Benedicte Westre Skog, COO of Norway Chess. He brings intensity, ambition and world-class quality to the field. We are very pleased to welcome him back to Oslo in 2026."

Norway Chess is one of the world's premier chess tournaments, bringing together the top male and female players in a distinctive 6-player double round-robin format.

The introduction of Norway Chess Women in 2024, with equal prize funds for men and women, underscores the event's commitment to gender equality and innovation in the sport. Norway Chess 2026 will take place from May 25 to June 5 at Deichman Bjorvika in Oslo.

Ravindra Jadeja meets PM Modi, praises his leadership



New Delhi

India's star all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja, along with his wife, Gujarat minister for Primary, Secondary and Adult Education Rivaba Jadeja, met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi on Tuesday. Jadeja expressed his delight after meeting PM Modi, calling it an inspiring experience. He lauded the PM's

clarity, enthusiasm, and dedication, saying it was a privilege to learn from his leadership. In an X post, Jadeja wrote, "An absolute privilege and honour to meet and interact with Hon'ble PM Shri Narendra Modi, sir. His clarity of thought, enthusiasm and commitment to excellence are deeply inspiring. A privilege to learn from such leadership."

"Sports and politics are different": Ganguly on Pakistan's decision to play Feb 15 World Cup clash against India

Kolkata

Former BCCI President Sourav Ganguly has said that "sports and politics are different" and "it is good" that Pakistan are playing the February 15 T20 World Cup match against India after reviewing their boycott move.

Speaking to reporters in Kolkata, Ganguly also noted that India-Pakistan matches have been good, but there has not been much competition in the last few years.

"I am not aware of the talks on the government level, but it is good that they are playing. Sports and politics are different. It will be a good match. India and Pakistan matches have always been good; there has not been much competition in the last few years. I hope Pakistan plays well because India is a superb team and it is not going to be easy for them to defeat India," he said.

The Pakistan Government, on



Monday, directed its national cricket team to take the field on February 15, for their scheduled fixture against the defending champions, India, in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup.

The decision came after Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Chairman Mohsin Naqvi briefed Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on the outcomes of high-level talks between the PCB, the

International Cricket Council (ICC), and the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), according to a statement by the Pakistan Government.

Pakistan had previously decided to boycott their group-stage World Cup match against arch-rivals India, evidently in support of Bangladesh, who decided not to take part in the tournament after the ICC did not agree to the demand to shift their matches outside India over "security concerns".

Pakistan's Prime Minister also spoke with Sri Lanka's President Anura Kumara Dissanayake to discuss the country's support during "challenging times."

ICC held a meeting with the PCB and the BCB at Lahore's Gaddafi Stadium on Sunday to discuss Pakistan's decision to boycott the T20 World Cup 2026 match with India in Colombo. BCB president Aminul Islam Bulbul also urged Pakistan to

play their February 15 ICC Men's T20 World Cup clash against India.

In their first Group A fixture, the Indian team defeated the USA by 29 runs, with skipper Suryakumar Yadav remaining unbeaten on 84 from 49 balls.

The Men in Blue are in Delhi and will play Namibia on February 12. They are then scheduled to play the much-anticipated World Cup match against Pakistan in Colombo on February 15, before travelling to Ahmedabad for their final group-stage clash against the Netherlands on February 18.

Team India's T20 World Cup 2026 squad: Suryakumar Yadav (captain), Abhishek Sharma, Tilak Varma, Sanju Samson, Shivam Dube, Ishan Kishan, Hardik Pandya, Arshdeep Singh, Jasprit Bumrah, Harshit Rana, Varun Chakaravathy, Kuldeep Yadav, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Rinku Singh.

"Best player I've ever seen": Jos Buttler heaps praise Vaibhav Sooryavanshi

New Delhi

The England wicket-keeper batter Jos Buttler hailed the 14-year-old Indian cricketer Vaibhav Sooryavanshi as the best player he has ever seen. Buttler's remarks come after Sooryavanshi's record-shattering and match-winning 175 in 80 balls in the Under-19 World Cup 2026 final against India.

Speaking on the 'Love for Cricket' podcast, Buttler called Sooryavanshi the best player he has ever seen and added that if Sooryavanshi is producing such batting brilliance at the age of 14, it's exciting to imagine how good he could be at 16, 18, or 20.

"My statement is he's the best player I've ever seen, 'cause I'm like, who else was doing this at 14 years old? If he's doing that at 14, what's he gonna be doing at 16, 18, 20?"

Mark Wood, who also appeared on the 'Love for Cricket' podcast, replied to Buttler, saying, "That's a pretty big statement from you", and further asked, "Do you see him being an absolute superstar, or do you think there's any way he gets derailed?"



Buttler said it's hard to doubt Sooryavanshi's talent, noting that excelling at 14 is remarkable and adding that the youngster has already proven himself by scoring a century in the IPL.

"I don't see how he can't be, you know? To be playing the way he can at 14 years old, and if he hadn't played in the IPL, you'd say, 'Oh, he's only done it in an under-19 World Cup, and yes, it's amazing, but let's see when he steps up to senior cricket.' But he's already played... he's got a hundred in the IPL. He hit his first ball in the IPL for six."

Coming to Sooryavanshi's 175 against England in the U-19 World Cup final, Sooryavanshi's masterclass (175 in 80 balls, with 15 fours and 15 sixes) guided India to a massive 411/9, with the Men in Blue eventually winning the match by 100 runs and lifting their record-extending 6th U-19 World Cup.

Sooryavanshi also earned the Player of the Tournament award for his 439 runs in the tournament. Sooryavanshi rewrote multiple records during his 175 in the final,

as he also became the batter to hit the most sixes in a single Under-19 World Cup innings. He smashed 15 sixes, breaking the previous record of 12 sixes held by Australia's Michael Hill. Batting at a blistering strike rate of 218.75, his innings included 15 fours and 15 sixes. Remarkably, 150 of his runs came through boundaries alone.

Additionally, Vaibhav Sooryavanshi's 2025 year was a relentless assault on the record books. The young cricket sensation was honoured with the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar after becoming the youngest player to earn an Indian Premier League (IPL) contract and the youngest centurion in T20 cricket with a 35-ball IPL century against the Gujarat Titans. He also scored the fastest century in U19 ODIs with a 52-ball 143, became the youngest centurion in Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy with a 61-ball 108 and became the youngest player to hit a century in men's List A cricket, among other achievements that marked the arrival of a generational talent.

Govt clears land policy for 'Third Mumbai' Rs 6,000 crore loan for Purandar airport

Mumbai

The state Cabinet on Tuesday approved a comprehensive land acquisition and allotment policy for the proposed "third Mumbai", which is coming up in the influence zone of the Atal Setu (Mumbai Trans Harbour Link).

The policy will apply to projects undertaken by the NavNagar Development Authority and the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) in the Atal Setu impact area. Land can be acquired through mutual agreement under the Maharashtra Regional and Town Planning Act, 1966, or under the 2013 land acquisition law.

The government has approved compensation through cash, Floor Space Index (FSI) or Transferable Development Rights (TDR).

A 22.5 per cent developed land return scheme will be implemented. If the returnable plot is less than 40 sq m, compensation will be paid in cash.

A "pass-through" policy has also been cleared for undeveloped areas. Under this, landholders will bear the acquisition cost, registration charges and a 15 per cent administrative charge payable to MMRDA. Land will be allotted on an "as-is-where-is" basis. Any additional compensation awarded later will be recovered from

the allottee.



Mouje Vikaswadi in Karveer taluka

To attract foreign direct investment (FDI), industries bringing in FDI will get priority in land allotment. A minimum of 100 acres must be acquired, with at least Rs 250 crore investment within four years per 100 acres. Sale of undeveloped land will not be permitted. Up to 25 per cent of the developed area can be used for FDI-linked activity. MMRDA has been directed to frame detailed land allotment rules and a revenue model.

The Cabinet, chaired by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, also approved the transfer of 12.76 hectares of government land at

in Kolhapur for an international-standard cricket stadium. The land will be given free of cost to the School Education and Sports Department.

The Cabinet also approved raising a loan of Rs 6,000 crore for land acquisition for the proposed Purandar airport in Pune district. The loan will be backed by a state guarantee.

Email notices in revenue hearings

In a move aimed at cutting delays in revenue courts, the cabinet approved an amendment to the Maharashtra Land Revenue Code, 1966, allowing notices for revenue hearings to be

served through email. The decision came on a proposal moved by Revenue Minister Chandrashekhar Bawankule.

Until now, notices had to be delivered by hand or post, a process that often led to delays when letters were returned, addresses were incorrect, or parties claimed they never received them. These disputes frequently resulted in repeated postponements of hearings.

With the change in law, a notice sent to a party's registered email address will now be treated as officially served. The government says this will help speed up thousands of pending land-related cases across the state.

Nearly 12,000 such matters are currently pending at the secretariat level, many held up at the notice stage.

Bawankule said the change would make the system quicker and fairer. "For years, hearings were delayed because people claimed they never received notices. Once email notices are recognised by law, this excuse will no longer hold," he said.

The amendment will come into effect after formal notification, and is expected to apply to both existing and new revenue cases across the state.

Minister Ashish Shelar to visit France to receive Unesco World Heritage certificate for 12 Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj forts

Mumbai

Maharashtra Cultural Affairs Minister Ashish Shelar will depart for France on Tuesday night to receive the certificate for Unesco World Heritage status accorded to 12 forts of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, officials said.

Following an extensive process spanning nearly one and a half years, Unesco, at its 47th session held on July 11, 2025, inscribed 12 forts from the era of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj on the World Heritage List under the title Maratha Military Landscapes of India. These forts are at Raigad, Rajgad, Pratapgad, Panhala, Shivneri, Lohagad, Salher, Sindhudurg, Suvarnadurg, Vijaydurg, Khanderi, and Gingee in Tamil Nadu.

"The network of forts envisioned and established by Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj to safeguard



Hindavi Swarajya against foreign invasions, ensure secure governance, and promote public welfare stands as an exemplary model of military strategy and statecraft in Indian history," Shelar said in a press statement.

Shelar will lead an official government

delegation during the February 11-16 visit. He will also pay homage to the half-bust statue of Dr B R Ambedkar installed at the Unesco headquarters by the Department of Cultural Affairs, Government of Maharashtra. Shelar stated that this tribute to Dr Ambedkar in Paris is a step that powerfully reiterates the values of Indian democracy on the international platform. During the visit, Shelar will also hold separate meetings with the director-general of Unesco, subject experts and India's permanent representative to the UN agency, Vishal Sharma. He expressed confidence that this visit would further strengthen the Government's ongoing efforts to secure World Heritage recognition for the Konkan rock art, Maharashtra's sea forts and intangible cultural heritage traditions such as the Pandharpur Wari, Ganeshotsav, and Dahi Handi.