

# India Monitor

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## Nitin Nabin takes over as BJP president; PM Modi says 'You are my boss'

Monitor News Service

NEW DELHI, JAN 20

Nitin Nabin on Tuesday assumed charge as the Bharatiya Janata Party's 12th national president, succeeding J P Nadda and ushering in a new phase for the ruling party with a generational transition in its leadership.

The formal change of guard took place at the BJP headquarters in New Delhi, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi, along with senior party leaders, accompanied Nabin to his new office after the announcement of his election. With this, the 45-year-old leader officially took over as the youngest-ever national president of the BJP, a party founded in 1980—the same year he was born.

Among those present at the ceremony were Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Home Minister Amit Shah, Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari, outgoing party



president J P Nadda, BJP general secretary (organisation) B L Santhosh, and other senior leaders. Nabin's wife, children and close family members were also in attendance.

Addressing party workers on the occasion, Prime Minister Modi struck a light-hearted yet symbolic

note, saying that in party matters he was merely a worker and that "honourable Nitin Nabin ji" was now his boss. Describing Nabin as a "millennial" leader with youthful energy and deep organisational experience, Modi said his qualities would be an asset to the party as it

moves forward.

In a nearly 40-minute speech, Modi repeatedly referred to Nabin as "mananiya" (honourable) and outlined the achievements of his government over the past 11 years, framing it as an account of work being presented to the new party president. "I, too, as a party worker, was giving an account of my work to the new president. I have given my account. He will now write my confidential report. I am awaiting his guidance," Modi remarked, drawing applause from the gathering.

The prime minister also underlined the broader responsibilities that come with the post, noting that Nabin would have to ensure smooth coordination within the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). "Nitinji is now everybody's president. His responsibilities are not limited to the BJP alone. He has to take care of coordination with all our NDA partners," Modi said.

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## China receives invitation from US to join Trump's Board of Peace

K J M Varma

BEIJING, JAN 20

CHINA on Tuesday said it has received an invitation from the US to join President Donald Trump's Board of Peace for Gaza, but declined to say whether it will join the initiative. China has received the US' invitation, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said when asked about China's position on the establishment of the Gaza "Board of Peace" and whether China has received an invitation to join it.

He declined to say to whom the invitation was addressed or whether China would join the board, described by Trump as a "bold new approach to resolving Global Conflict".

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Pakistan PM Shehbaz Sharif and Russian President Vladimir Putin have also received invitations to join the Peace Board. Several other countries have received similar offers.

The US president unveiled the board as part of the second phase of a ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip. In October, Israel and Hamas agreed to Trump's peace plan. The board is being projected by Washington as a new international body to usher in peace in Gaza and beyond, triggering speculations that it may respond to other global conflicts as well.

Asked about China's view on Trump's one-year Presidency, which was marked by a tariff war between the two countries, Guo said that in the past year, China-US relations realised overall and dynamic stability despite ups and downs. This serves the shared interests of the people in both countries, and meets the common aspiration of the international community, he said.

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## Stock markets tumble, investors' wealth erodes by Rs 9.86 lakh cr

Monitor News Service

NEW DELHI, JAN 20

INVESTOR wealth plunged by nearly Rs 9.86 lakh crore in a single session on Tuesday as Indian equity markets came under severe selling pressure, tracking weak global cues, escalating geopolitical tensions and persistent foreign fund outflows.

Extending losses for a second consecutive day, the benchmark 30-share BSE Sensex slumped 1,065.71 points, or 1.28 per cent, to close at 82,180.47. During intraday trade, the index hit a low of 82,010.58, shedding as much as 1,235.6 points, or 1.48 per cent, as selling intensified across sectors.

Reflecting the sharp sell-off, the total market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies eroded by Rs

9,86,093.96 crore to Rs 4,55,82,683.29 crore, equivalent to about USD 5.01 trillion, underscoring the broad-based nature of the decline.

Heavyweights dragged the Sensex lower, with Eternal plunging 4.02 per cent, Bajaj Finance fell 3.88 per cent, while Sun Pharma, InterGlobe Aviation, Trent, Asian Paints, Mahindra & Mahindra and Bajaj Finserv also ended sharply lower. HDFC Bank was the lone gainer among the Sensex constituents, managing to close marginally higher amid the widespread sell-off.

Market participants pointed to rising global uncertainty as a key trigger for the downturn. Ponmudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, said aggressive and unpredictable use of tariffs by the US administration as a foreign policy tool has unsettled global mar-

kets and heightened volatility. "This has weighed heavily on risk assets, while safe-haven assets like gold and silver have moved higher," he said.

He added that fresh threats by US President Donald Trump to impose additional tariffs on European nations opposing the US move to take control of Greenland triggered another round of global equity selling, with Indian markets also facing broad-based pressure. Weak global cues, cautious investor positioning and subdued risk appetite combined to push domestic equities decisively lower during the session, he noted.

The selling was even more pronounced in the broader market. The BSE smallcap index tumbled 2.74 per cent, while the midcap gauge dropped 2.52 per cent, reflecting risk aversion among investors.

## Imperial Delirium



Photographs shared by US President on his Truth Social handle

## Monitor News Desk

NEW DELHI, JAN 20

US President Donald Trump has shared a series of posts depicting an expanded map of the United States that includes Canada and Greenland as American territory, renewing controversy over his long-stated interest in acquiring Greenland on national security grounds.

In a Truth Social post, Trump shared an image of a US map showing both Canada and Greenland incorporated into the country. The post comes amid his intensified rhetoric around Greenland's strategic importance, which he has linked to Arctic security, rare earth mineral resources, and growing geopolitical competition with Russia and China. Trump has previously warned that tariffs and other economic measures could be used to advance US interests in the region.

Another image posted by Trump shows him seated in the Oval Office, with prominent international leaders appearing to look on. Among those depicted are French President Emmanuel Macron, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, along with other NATO leaders.

In a separate Truth Social post, Trump shared an image of himself alongside Vice President JD Vance and US Secretary of State Marco Rubio raising an American flag in Greenland. A sign visible in the image reads, "Greenland, US Territory, Est. 2026," further fueling speculation and criticism over his remarks.

The posts have drawn renewed attention to Trump's unconventional foreign policy proposals, and his repeated focus on Greenland as a strategic asset for the United States.

## Trump slams UK deal to hand over Chagos Islands to Mauritius

Jill Lawless

LONDON, JAN 20

A STARTLED British government on Tuesday defended its decision to hand sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius, after US President Donald Trump attacked the plan, which his administration had previously supported.

Trump said that relinquishing the remote Indian Ocean archipelago, home to a strategically important American naval and bomber base, was an act of stupidity that shows why he needs to take over Greenland.

"Shockingly, our brilliant' NATO Ally, the United Kingdom, is currently planning to give away the Island of Diego Garcia, the site of a vital US Military Base, to Mauritius, and to do so FOR NO REASON WHATSOEVER," he said in a post on his social media

platform Truth Social. "There is no doubt that China and Russia have noticed this act of total weakness."

"The UK giving away extremely

important land is an act of GREAT STUPIDITY, and is another in a very long line of National Security reasons why Greenland has to be acquired,"

Trump said.

The blast from Trump was a rebuff to efforts by Prime Minister Keir Starmer to calm tensions over Greenland and



Protesters clash with riot police using water cannons and tear gas after a rally against the World Economic Forum in Davos and the visit of US President Donald Trump, on Monday, in Zurich, Switzerland. AP/PTI

patch up a frayed trans-Atlantic relationship. Starmer on Monday called Trump's statements about taking over Greenland "completely wrong," but called for the rift to be "resolved through calm discussion."

The United Kingdom and Mauritius signed a deal in May to give Mauritius sovereignty over the Chagos Islands after two centuries under British control, though the UK will lease back Diego Garcia where the US base is located, for at least 99 years.

The US government welcomed the agreement at the time, saying it "secures the long-term, stable, and effective operation of the joint US-UK military facility at Diego Garcia."

UK Cabinet Minister Darren Jones said Tuesday that the agreement would "secure that military base for the next 100 years."

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## Annual dolphin census begins at Odisha's Chilika Lake

The three-day annual dolphin census began on Tuesday in Odisha's Chilika, Asia's biggest brackish water lagoon, officials said. Over 100 persons, including experts, retired forest officers, wildlife activists and forest staff, were engaged in the exercises, carried out by the Chilika Wildlife Division, with support of the Chilika Development Authority, they said. The enumerators have been equipped with drone cameras, GPS units, range finders, binoculars, cameras and depth measurement instruments to record the sightings of the dolphins following the line-transect method. The 2025 census revealed that there were 174 dolphins in the lake.



# 16 injured as Rajasthan-bound bus overturns

Monitor News Service

NEW DELHI, JAN 20

SIXTEEN passengers were injured after a sleeper bus heading to Rajasthan's Bhilwara overturned on the Delhi Mumbai Expressway in Gurugram district on Tuesday, police said.

The accident occurred near Bhankdaji village when the driver allegedly fell asleep at the wheel, causing the bus to lose control and overturn. Most of the passengers were asleep at the time of the incident, police said.

According to officials, the bus had departed from Delhi for Bhilwara late on Monday night. As it approached Bhankdaji in the early hours, the driver reportedly dozed off, leading to the accident. The impact caused

panic among passengers, several of whom were trapped inside the overturned vehicle.

Local residents rushed to the spot after hearing the crash and assisted in the initial rescue efforts. Police teams later arrived and coordinated the evacuation of the injured. The passengers were taken to hospitals in Nuh and Ferozpur Jhirkha for treatment. Two passengers, identified as Sachin and Prithvi, both residents of Delhi, sustained serious injuries and were referred to a hospital in the national capital for specialised medical care, police said.

Among those admitted to a hospital in Ferozpur Jhirkha are Nisha and Atul from Delhi, Dheeraj from Palwal, Reena and Kanhaiyalal from

Udaipur, and Rahul from Naulakha. The remaining injured passengers suffered minor injuries and were given first aid, officials said.

Ferozpur Jhirkha police station house officer Subhash Chand said preliminary investigation suggested driver fatigue as the cause of the accident. "Initial findings indicate that the driver fell asleep while driving. We are examining CCTV footage from nearby areas to gather more details about the sequence of events," he said.

Police said the condition of most of the injured passengers is stable. Further investigation is under way to determine whether any safety norms were violated and to fix responsibility for the accident.

## GNIDA orders road safety overhaul after techie's death

Deepa Prasad

NEW DELHI, JAN 20

THE Greater Noida Industrial Development Authority (GNIDA) has ordered an immediate overhaul of road safety measures across its jurisdiction following the death of a software engineer whose car plunged into a water filled pit in neighbouring Noida earlier this month.

GNIDA Chief Executive Officer N G Ravi Kumar has directed officials to identify and promptly fill all potholes on and around roads, and to mark accident prone locations, commonly referred to as black spots, without delay. The authority has also been instructed to ensure that essential safety measures such as proper signage, reflectors, and barricading are put in place on all roads within three days, according to an official statement is-

sued on Monday evening.

The directions follow the January 16 incident in Noida's Sector 150, where a 27 year old software engineer died after his vehicle fell into an unbarriered, water filled excavation near an under construction site. The incident sparked public outrage and allegations of negligence, prompting CM Yogi to order a statewide review of road safety arrangements.

Following the CEO's instructions, GNIDA convened an online review meeting with Additional CEOs Sri-lakshmi VS and Sumit Yadav, General Manager A K Singh, and officials from all work circles. During the meeting, all assistant managers, managers, and senior managers were directed to survey their respective areas to identify potholes, sharp turns, and accident prone spots, and to ensure immediate corrective action.

## Delhi's three-day 'severe' AQI streak ends

Shailaja Kumari

NEW DELHI, JAN 20

DELHI's three-day spell of 'severe' air pollution ended on Tuesday morning, with the city's average Air Quality Index showing marginal improvement and settling in the 'very poor' category, according to official data.

The Central Pollution Control Board's Sameer app recorded an average AQI of 395 at 8 am, below the 'severe' threshold of 401. However, pollution levels remained high across several parts of the national capital, with many monitoring stations continuing to report unhealthy air.

Of the stations reporting data, 23 were still in the 'severe' category, 14 were classified as 'very poor', and one station reported 'poor' air quality. Wazirpur recorded the



Armed forces personnel make a 'Sudarshan Chakra' formation, front, during rehearsals for Republic Day, at Kartavya Path in New Delhi, Tuesday, Jan. 20, 2026. PTI

**Rs 84.5 lakh compensation to youth left 90% disabled in road accident**

Nadeem Ansari

NEW DELHI, JAN 20

The Air Quality Warning System has forecast that air quality is likely to remain in the 'very poor' category on Tuesday and continue at similar levels over the next two days, indicating that sustained improvement may take time.

Under the CPCB classification, an AQI between 301 and 400 is categorised as 'very poor', while readings above 400 fall in the 'severe' category. Air quality in these ranges is associated with respiratory discomfort among people and increased health risks for vulnerable groups.

Delhi had witnessed three consecutive days of 'severe' pollution, with the AQI crossing the 400-mark on Saturday, Sunday and Monday. In response, the Commission for Air Quality Management had enforced Stage 4 restrictions under the Graded Response Action Plan, including curbs on construction activities and additional traffic and industrial measures.

The maximum temperature is expected to touch around 24 degrees Celsius during the day, with moderate fog likely in the morning hours.

According to the case, the accident occurred on August 20, 2024, when Sahu was riding his motorcycle to a bank branch in Burari. The driver of the car, identified as Wahabuddin, opened the driver's side door without checking for approaching traffic and without giving any warning, causing the motorcycle to crash into it.

Sahu sustained multiple injuries in the collision and was later medically assessed to have suffered 90 per cent permanent disability.

In its judgment dated January 16, the tribunal held that the act of opening a vehicle door without warning clearly amounted to rash and negligent conduct. "The act of opening the door of a vehicle by its driver, without any warning or indication, itself indicates the existence of rashness and negligence on his part," the tribunal observed.

## Police probes complaint of assault, caste abuse at JMI; says, no conversion attempt

NEW DELHI, JAN 20 / PTI

language and behaved violently towards him.

"Legal proceedings are underway as per law. Statements are being recorded and evidence is being collected," police said in the statement, adding that the matter is under active investigation.

The police dismissed claims of religious conversion angle to the row.

"It is strictly clarified that the complainant has made no allegation regarding any attempt at forceful religious conversion. Such reports are factually incorrect and baseless," their statement read.

The police urged the media and the public to not circulate unverified information that could disturb communal harmony.

## Tech-driven traffic plan to steer R-Day crowds to Kartavya Path

Monitor News Service

NEW DELHI, JAN 20

On ground assistance has been significantly expanded. The traffic police has set up 12 help desks across key locations in central Delhi, compared to just two in previous years. Personnel at these desks will guide commuters on parking, pedestrian movement routes, and security related procedures.

The help desks will be located at Moti Lal Nehru Place, Sunehri Masjid, Man Singh, Jaswant Singh, GPO, Windsor Place, Mandi House, Q point, Teen Murti, Janpath Dr Rajendra Prasad Road crossing, Gate number 14 of Jawahar Lal Nehru Stadium, and Palika Parking.

To ensure smooth dispersal after the events, car calling systems have also been introduced. Under this system, invitees can inform officers at exit gates, after which announcements mentioning vehicle numbers or drivers' names will be made through loudspeakers at parking areas. This is expected to prevent crowding and delays after the programme concludes.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Traffic) Rajiv Kumar said technology is being leveraged on a large scale this year to streamline vehicular and pedestrian movement and improve the overall experience for attendees.

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## Nitin Nabin takes over as BJP president

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In his address, Nabin called upon the youth to actively participate in politics to help realise Prime Minister Modi's vision of a developed India. He urged young people not to distance themselves from public life, emphasising that meaningful change comes through sustained engagement rather than shortcuts. "Politics is not a 100-metre race but a marathon, where stamina is tested," he said, assuring party workers that sincere efforts would be recognised, as the BJP's organisational "watchtower" was strong enough to notice every contribution.

Nabin also appealed to party leaders and workers to make a concerted push for victory in the upcoming assembly elections in

five states, including West Bengal, stressing the need to protect the country's cultural traditions and address concerns related to demographic changes.

Outgoing BJP president J P Nadda described Nabin as a young, energetic and talented karyakarta with extensive organisational and administrative experience. Highlighting his political journey, Nadda noted that Nabin is a five-time MLA from Bihar, has served as a minister in the state government, led the BJP's youth wing, and played a key role in strengthening the party in states such as Sikkim and Chhattisgarh.

Nadda expressed confidence that under Modi's leadership, Nabin would take the party forward at a

rapid pace. He also thanked party workers and leaders for their support during his tenure and expressed gratitude to the prime minister for his guidance.

K Laxman, the returning officer for the BJP's organisational elections, formally declared the results and handed over the certificate of election to Nabin. Announcing the outcome, Laxman said the election reflected the BJP's ethos of rewarding hard work and dedication over dynastic privilege.

Before taking on the national role, Nabin had resigned from his ministerial positions in the Bihar government after being appointed BJP working president in December last year, paving the way for his elevation to the party's top post.

## Trump slams UK deal to hand over Chagos Islands

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In recent years, the United Nations and its top court have urged Britain to return the islands to Mauritius, and the British government says it's acting to protect the security of the base from international legal challenge.

A government spokesperson said that "the UK will never compromise on our national security," and "this deal secures the operations of the joint US-UK base on Diego Garcia for generations, with robust provisions for keeping its unique capabilities intact and our adversaries out."

But the deal has met strong opposition from British opposition parties, which say that giving up the islands puts them at risk of interference by China and Russia.

Islanders who were displaced from the islands to make way for the US

base say they weren't consulted and worry the deal will make it harder for them to go home.

Legislation to approve the agreement has been passed by the House of Commons, but faced strong opposition in Parliament's upper chamber, the House of Lords, which approved it, while also passing a "motion of regret" lamenting the legislation. It's due back in the Commons on Tuesday for further debate.

Conservative Party leader Kemi Badenoch criticised Starmer's Labour Party government over the agreement. Badenoch said in an X post that Trump is right and that Starmer's "plan to give away the Chagos Islands is a terrible policy that weakens UK security and hands away our sovereign territory. And to top it off, makes us and our NATO allies weaker in the face of our enemies."

The UK-Mauritius deal calls for a resettlement fund to be created for displaced islanders to help them move back to the islands — apart from Diego Garcia. (AP)

## China receives invitation from US to join Trump's Board of Peace

...Continued from page 1

The development of China-US relations in the past year once again demonstrates that China-US cooperation would benefit both

sides and that confrontation would hurt both sides, he said. China and the US should find the right way for the two major countries to get along with each other based on equality, mutual respect and reciprocity, Guo said. China stands ready to work with the US to promote the steady development of their relations, and at the same time, China will firmly uphold its sovereignty, security and development interests, he said. (PTI)

lots with capacity for around 8,000 vehicles. Police said nearly 77,000 passes are issued annually for the Republic Day parade, of which about 8,000 are meant for spectators arriving in private vehicles. The system is aimed at managing this volume without disrupting traffic in central Delhi.

Another new initiative this year is the introduction of shuttle services for security personnel deployed for Republic Day duties. Shuttles will operate at a 10 minute frequency from four locations, Khan Market, Amritsar Sher Gil Marg, Patel Chowk Metro Station, and HC Mathur Lane, ferrying personnel to their deployment points. Officials said this will help reduce the number of individual vehicles entering the restricted zone.

Digital navigation support has also been strengthened. Invitees and ticket holders can use Google Maps and Mapples for real time route guidance to Kartavya Path and their assigned parking areas. On Mapples, a dedicated Republic Day tab has been created, while Google Maps will display specially marked parking locations along with entry and exit routes to help visitors navigate without confusion.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Traffic) Rajiv Kumar said technology is being leveraged on a large scale this year to streamline vehicular and pedestrian movement and improve the overall experience for attendees.

# AI tools help crack RWA murder, three arrested

Amit Kumar

NEW DELHI, JAN 20

THE Delhi Police have solved the daylight murder of a woman Residents' Welfare Association president in northwest Delhi's Shalimar Bagh by using artificial intelligence tools to enhance blurred CCTV footage, leading to the identification and arrest of three accused, officials said on Tuesday.

The victim, 44-year-old Rachna Yadav, was shot dead near her residence on January 10. She was the president of her block's RWA and a key prosecution witness in the 2023 murder case of her husband, Bijender Yadav. Police said the killing was planned to prevent her from testifying in that case.

Those arrested have been identified as Nikhil, 22, Sumit, 23, and Bharat Yadav, 33. Bharat Yadav, one of the prime accused, had been absconding since 2023 and was declared a proclaimed offender in Bijender Yadav's murder case. A reward of Rs 20,000 had been announced for his arrest.

According to Special Commissioner of Police (Law and Order)

Ravindra Singh Yadav, a PCR call was received around 11 am on the day of the incident. A police team reached the spot near a park in East Shalimar Bagh and found Rachna Yadav with a gunshot wound to her forehead. An empty cartridge and a bullet fragment were recovered from the scene.

Investigators initially faced difficulties as CCTV footage from the area and nearby escape routes was of poor quality. "Artificial intelligence-based applications were used to enhance the blurred visuals. This helped us obtain clearer images of the shooters, which proved crucial in identifying one of the suspects," a senior police officer said.

Once the footage was enhanced, police were able to identify Nikhil, a resident of Panipat in Haryana. Technical surveillance was then intensified, with investigators analysing call detail records, dump data and Internet Protocol Detail Records, along with examining the movement of recently released offenders and property related documents linked to the deceased's family.

Police said the motive for the murder was rooted in a long-standing

dispute over a 250 square yard plot on the Swaroop Nagar Burari road. Bijender Yadav and Bharat Yadav had issued threats to each other in the past over the property. After Bijender's murder in 2023, Rachna Yadav had been actively pursuing the trial, which investigators believe prompted the conspiracy to kill her.

Based on technical inputs and human intelligence, multiple raids were conducted across Haryana, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Bihar. Nikhil and Bharat Yadav were eventually traced to a hut in Katihar district of Bihar and arrested in a joint operation by the Delhi Police, the Central Reserve Police Force and the Bihar Police.

During interrogation, Nikhil disclosed that Sumit had driven the motorcycle used in the crime. Sumit was later arrested from Panipat. Police said the motorcycle used in the murder was stolen from the Subhash Place area in Delhi and has since been recovered.

Investigators also found that the accused used encrypted communication platforms and frequently changed mobile numbers to avoid electronic surveillance.

## Police to map accident-prone spots to prevent road fatalities

Deepa Prasad

NEW DELHI, JAN 20

THE Delhi Police has directed district level officers to identify, map, and secure accident prone and high-risk locations across the national capital in an effort to reduce preventable deaths caused by poor infrastructure and inadequate safety measures, official sources said on Tuesday.

The directions were issued by senior police leadership during a recent internal meeting, where emphasis was placed on preventive policing and the use of technology to minimise accidental fatalities. District Deputy Commissioners of Police have been asked to coordinate closely with civic bodies, road owning agencies, and traffic authorities to carry out detailed assessments of hazardous road stretches, construction zones, and areas with low visibility.

According to officials, once such locations are identified, they will be provided with clear physical markings, reflective signage, and proper barricading to warn commuters well in advance. Special attention will be given to stretches where road conditions change abruptly, visibility is poor, or ongoing construction poses

a potential risk to motorists and pedestrians.

In a significant technological step, the identified high risk spots will also be mapped on Google Maps and other navigation platforms. This is intended to enable real time alerts for drivers and riders using navigation applications, warning them before they enter dangerous zones.

"The focus is on anticipation and prevention. The objective is to ensure that no road user unknowingly enters a hazardous area because of missing signage, inadequate lighting, or sudden changes in road conditions," a senior police officer said.

Officials said the initiative is part of a broader effort by the Delhi Police to integrate technology with traditional policing methods and address infrastructure related factors that contribute to road accidents. Regular coordination meetings will be held at the district level to monitor progress and ensure that safety measures are implemented on the ground. The move follows a recent fatal incident in neighbouring Noida, where a 27 year old software engineer died after his car plunged into a water filled pit at a construction site amid dense fog.

## Teen held for stabbing tutor

Vikram Singh

NEW DELHI, JAN 20

DELHI Police on Tuesday arrested an 18-year-old youth for allegedly stabbing a private tutor, with investigators claiming the attack was linked to allegations of sexual assault involving a 14-year-old minor.

The accused, identified as Devraj alias Jaggu, is alleged to have attacked Jay Prakash, 32, in the Kondli area earlier this month. Police said the incident was initially projected as a robbery but later emerged as a planned assault.

According to police, the matter came to light in the intervening night of January 2 after Lal Bahadur Shastri Hospital informed them about a man with stab injuries who had been brought in from near Kondli Pul. Due to the seriousness of his condition, the injured man was later shifted to the AIIMS Trauma Centre.

The medico legal certificate indicated that the victim had sustained incised wounds on the abdomen and on the left side of the back. Police said the injured man was not forthcoming during questioning and was unable to clearly identify the exact location of the incident, prompting investigators to rely on technical evidence.

Police analysed footage from nearly 150 CCTV cameras installed across multiple locations. Footage from Kondli Pul showed the victim riding a bicycle towards Nehar Road in Dallupura with a minor seated behind him. About 23 minutes later, the footage showed the man returning alone towards Kondli Mor, visibly injured.

Subsequent footage showed the minor running behind the bicycle and dropping a small duffel bag near Raj Rani Hospital, where the injured man had also reached, police said.

## Atishi meets family of slain RWA president

Monitor News Service

NEW DELHI, JAN 20

LEADER of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly Atishi on Tuesday met the family of slain Residents' Welfare Association president Rachna Yadav and used the visit to criticise the BJP over what she described as a deteriorating law and order situation in the national capital.

Rachna Yadav, 44, was shot at

point blank range near her residence in northwest Delhi's Shalimar Bagh on January 10. The attack took place shortly before she was scheduled to depose in court as the main eyewitness in the murder case of her husband, Bijendra Yadav. She later succumbed to her injuries.

Speaking to reporters after meeting the family, Atishi questioned the effectiveness of governance in the city. "What is the point of having a 'triple engine' government in the national capital when an eyewitness to her husband's murder is gunned down outside her home in broad

daylight," she said.

The Aam Aadmi Party leader claimed that frequent incidents of murder, shootouts and gang related violence had created a climate of fear among residents. She said she had written to Union Home Minister Amit Shah seeking a discussion on what she termed the rapidly worsening law and order situation in Delhi.

Atishi also raised concerns about public safety, pointing out that the crime took place in the assem-

bly constituency of Chief Minister Rekha Gupta. She said the incident had shaken the confidence of ordinary citizens and highlighted the need for urgent steps to ensure security, particularly for witnesses in serious criminal cases.

The Delhi Police on Tuesday said they had arrested three men from Bihar in connection with the killing. The main accused, Bharat Yadav, had been absconding since May 2023, when Rachna Yadav's husband was murdered. Two of

his associates, identified as Nikhil and Sumit, were also taken into custody.

According to police, Bijendra Yadav, described as a history sheeter from the Jahangirpuri area, was shot dead while attending a langar in the Bhalswa area in 2023. Investigators said Rachna Yadav was targeted to prevent her from testifying against the accused in her husband's murder case.

Police said further investigation in the case is under way.

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# TN: Ravi walks out, CM bats for amendment to drop Guv address

Monitor News Service

CHENNAI, JAN 20 / PTI

Governor R N Ravi on Tuesday walked out of the state Assembly without delivering his customary address to the House following an argument with Speaker M Appavu who requested him to stick to the state-prepared text.

Beginning in 2023, this was the fourth such consecutive walkout in a row by Ravi, who cited "unsubstantiated claims and misleading statements," for not reading out the policy statement.

The governor's office alleged national anthem was yet again "insulted" and the fundamental Constitutional duty of respecting it was disregarded. Several crucial issues troubling the people were ignored.

Chief Minister and DMK President MK Stalin said his party would make efforts to amend the Constitution to omit provisions mandating Governor's Address to the state legislature.

As Speaker Appavu began reading out the Tamil version of the state-prepared Governor's Address after Ravi's walk out, main opposition AIADMK staged a walkout alleging law and order failure and other opposition parties including the PMK followed suit.

In the Governor's Address read out



AIADMK General Secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami with party MLAs stage a walkout during the first day of the state Assembly session, in Chennai, Tuesday, Jan. 20, 2026. Tamil Nadu Governor R N Ravi walked out of the Assembly without delivering his customary address to the House. PTI

by the Speaker, the Tamil Nadu government urged the Centre to withdraw the recently passed VB-G RAM G Act and restore UPA-era rural employment scheme, MGNREGA.

While the Assembly, immediately after Ravi walked out of the House, adopted a resolution moved by Stalin stating that only the government prepared customary address would go on official record, the Lok Bhavan quickly released a statement claiming to give an explanation to what trans-

pired inside the House.

Alleging that the mic of the Governor was turned off in Assembly, the Lok Bhavan listed 12 other points all of which was dismissed by the Tamil Nadu government as baseless and false.

While Ravi had been demanding that the national anthem be played at the commencement of the customary address, the government's stand is that the Tamil anthem is traditionally played at the beginning and the

national anthem at the end. Minister S Regupathy reiterating this practice, said the governor was, however, insistent on the national anthem.

"He did not read out the Governor's Address but tried to create problems in the House by saying something on his own. Everyone was, however, quiet. Speaker Appavu requested Governor to stick to the customary address. He, however, walked out."

Regupathy rejected the governor's claim that his mic was turned off and termed it a "lie". Also, he gave a point by point rebuttal to all the allegations listed by the Lok Bhavan.

Regupathy said Ravi, who should have been the representative of the Central government appeared in the House as the representative of the Governor.

After the Governor left the House, Chief Minister Stalin slammed the Governor for "walking out yet again in violation of rules, traditions and ethos," and it was unbecoming of the high office Ravi holds. It was an insult to the House and its dignity, he said.

The CM said it is not good that the Governor refuses every year to read out the government prepared speech. Governors posing trouble happens in several states and it does not happen only in Tamil Nadu.



## Modi wants to do away with MGNREGA: Rahul in Raebareli

RAEBARELI, JAN 20 / PTI

CONGRESS leader Rahul Gandhi accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday of seeking to centralise power and weakening welfare safeguards for the poor, alleging that the MGNREGA has been undermined and that Modi wants to do away with it.

Addressing party workers during a visit to Raebareli, his parliamentary constituency, the leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha said the BJP-led Centre has "insulted" Mahatma Gandhi by replacing the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) with another law and, more importantly, withdrawing the security it provided to the marginalised.

He termed the move an attack on the roots of democracy.

Parliament on December 18, 2025,

passed the Viksit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Bill, replacing the 20-year-old UPA-era MGNREGA and guaranteeing 125 days of rural wage employment every year.

The opposition had protested the removal of Mahatma Gandhi's name from the new law and accused the Centre of putting the financial burden on states.

"The Congress is running a nationwide movement to protect the MGNREGA. We stand with labourers and are committed to protecting their rights," Gandhi said.

He alleged that Modi wants the country's wealth to be concentrated in the hands of industrialists like Gautam Adani and Mukesh Ambani.

"On one hand, we are protecting the people, while on the other, Narendra Modi is diverting the country's wealth to a select few," he said.

## Bulldozers on Manikarnika Ghat attack on Hindu identity: Patole

MUMBAI, JAN 20 / PTI

CONGRESS leader Nana Patole on Tuesday said the demolition at Varanasi's Manikarnika Ghat was an insult to the Hindu community.

Manikarnika Ghat is considered one of the holiest places of Hinduism and it is believed that if the last rites are conducted there, the deceased person gets salvation, he said.

"Running bulldozers over such a sacred site is a serious attack on Hindu identity," said Patole, a former Maharashtra Congress chief.

There have been protests against a demolition drive under the redevelopment plan of the Ghat, with many alleging that a century-old idol of Ahilyabai Holkar has been damaged, a charge refuted by the district administration.

Patole said Ahilyabai Holkar, the renowned 18th century ruler of In-

dore, rebuilt several important Hindu temples including Kashi Vishwanath and Somnath.

"Those who claim to be protectors of Hinduism have destroyed the very heritage built by Ahilyabai Holkar. This is an insult to Hindus and the Dhangar community (to which the Holkar family belongs)," he said.

In the name of development, hundreds of temples and the Manikarnika Ghat built by Ahilyabai Holkar were demolished and even the late queen's statue was damaged, he alleged, adding that he will visit Varanasi on Wednesday to see the reality.

The UP police earlier this week registered FIRs against eight persons for allegedly circulating AI-generated images and videos, and spreading misleading information about the redevelopment work at the Manikarnika Ghat.



## HP to receive heavy snowfall from Jan 22; alerts issued

SHIMLA, JAN 20 / PTI

THE Shimla Meteorological Centre on Tuesday issued an orange alert for three districts -- Kullu, Chamba and Lahaul and Spiti -- for January 23, warning of a heavy spell of snowfall and rain in isolated places of these districts.

The remaining nine districts of the state have been put on a yellow alert for snowfall on January 23, the weather office said.

"Snowfall and rainfall will continue to occur in the state till January 26. Minimum temperatures are expected to fall by 2-3 degrees Celsius in the coming days while maximum temperatures are expected to fall by 6-8 degrees Celsius," the MeT forecast.

On Tuesday, parts of Hamirpur and Mandi districts witnessed cold wave conditions, while the lowest minimum temperature in the state, minus 10 degrees Celsius, was logged at Tabo village in Lahaul and Spiti district, it said.

The MeT has also issued a yellow weather warning for nine districts, including Kullu, Kangra, Chamba, Mandi, Hamirpur, Una, Bilaspur,



Kinnar and Lahaul and Spiti, for January 22, cautioning that heavy precipitation -- snow and rainfall -- is expected in isolated places of these districts.

Conditions remained mostly dry across the state on Tuesday, the MeT added.

## Sukhu announces Rs 250-cr riverfront project for Manali

SHIMLA, JAN 20 / PTI

HIMACHAL Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu on Tuesday announced a riverfront development project in Manali at an outlay of Rs 250 crore to bolster tourism in the region. The announcement was made during the inauguration of the Manali Winter Carnival-2026. Speaking on the occasion, the chief minister said the state government is focused on establishing Himachal Pradesh as a global hub for nature, religious,

adventure, spiritual and wellness tourism. "Tourism is a key pillar of the state's economy. To enhance the experience for visitors, we are developing Green Himachal Biodiversity Parks and riverside parks in both urban and rural areas," Sukhu said.

He added that the state government is also encouraging events like the Winter Carnival to ensure visitors have a memorable experience.

The chief minister said a new eco-tourism policy has been implemented in the state. Under this policy,

11 eco-tourism sites were allotted by November 2025, while the allotment process for an additional 27 sites is in its final stage.

He said these initiatives are aimed at boosting tourism and promote self-employment at the local level.

To support adventure tourism, the state has identified 245 trekking routes and is developing a mobile application for the convenience of tourists. Ropeway projects are also being fast-tracked to ensure environmental conservation, Sukhu said.

## UDF accuses Left govt of 'communal agenda'; CPM rejects charge

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, JAN 20 / PTI

A POLITICAL confrontation erupted in Kerala following recent controversial remarks by Minister Saji Cherian, with the Congress-led UDF on Tuesday accusing the Left government of pushing a "dangerous communal agenda" and the CPI(M) rejecting the charge as "false propaganda".

A day after Cherian said his remarks on the recent Kasaragod municipality and Malappuram election results were "twisted and used to mislead people," Leader of the Opposition V D Sathesan alleged they were not isolated but part of a "planned majoritarian communalism" by the CPI(M), carried out with the knowledge of Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan.

The remarks were interpreted by the Congress and its allies as a reference to the Muslim League candidates' victories in Kasaragod Municipality and Malappuram district in the local body polls last month.

Sathesan said the narrative of majoritarian communalism was first floated by the Chief Minister in Delhi and later repeated through others.

## Police raid locations linked to 60 foreign-based gangsters

Monitor News Service

CHANDIGARH, JAN 20

THE Punjab government on Tuesday launched 'Operation Prahar', a statewide drive to dismantle the entire ecosystem of organised crime, with over 2,000 police teams conducting raids across the state at locations linked to associates of 60 foreign-based gangsters.

Addressing a press conference here, Director General of Punjab Police Gaurav Yadav said raids were being conducted across the state and 12,000 police personnel were participating in the the 72-hour-long operation.

"Financing, logistics, safe houses, weapon supply chains, communication networks... We are committed to bust the entire ecosystem of gangsters. There will be zero tolerance for their aiders and abettors," Yadav told

reporters here. "A massive statewide crackdown against gangsters has already begun. As many as 2,000 police teams are conducting raids at identified and mapped locations linked to associates of 60 foreign-based gangsters across Punjab. These raids are part of the 72-hour-long Operation Prahar," he said.

He said police have mapped 1,200 associates of 60 gangsters and their 600 family members involved in criminal activities under this crackdown.

Prominent among those foreign gangsters were Goldy Brar, Rohit Godara (Brar-Rohit Godara-Kala Jatheri gang), Arsh Dalla (Jaipal gang), Harry Chattha (Jaggu Bhagwanpuria gang) and Harvinder Singh Sandhu alias Rinda (Rinda-Landa gang).

Warning foreign-based gangsters, the DGP added, "They should not feel safe abroad. Soon, they will be brought

back to Punjab to face the law."

The DGP said police identified 60 foreign-based gangsters who are operating from abroad while executing criminal activities in Punjab through their local associates.

To expedite their extradition, the Punjab Police has established an Overseas Fugitive Tracking and Extradition

Cell (OFTEC), headed by DIG Counter Intelligence Ashish Choudhary. These gangsters will be brought to Punjab to face legal action, he said.

Yadav was accompanied by Special DGP (Law and Order) Arpit Shukla, Additional DGP (Anti-Gangster Task Force) Promod Ban and Inspector General of Police (Headquarters) Dr Sukhchain Singh Gill, and reiterated

the Punjab government's zero-tolerance policy against gangsterism and those supporting it.

Yadav said, "The Punjab government, under the leadership of Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann, has declared a well-strategised war against gangsters with the clear intent of eliminating the entire ecosystem of

### 'OPERATION PRAHAR' IN PUNJAB

gangsterism, including their financing, logistics, safe houses, weapon supply chains and communication networks." Providing further details, Yadav said that Red Corner Notices (RCN) have already been issued or are in the process of being issued against 23 of the identified gangsters.

"The process to issue Red Corner Notices against the remaining 37 for-

ign-based gangsters will be completed in a time-bound manner within the next three months," he said.

Appealing directly to the youth, the DGP urged those, who have been misled, to abandon the path of crime and return to the mainstream.

"I urge misguided youth not to fall into the trap of foreign-based gangsters, who themselves are sitting safely abroad and luring you with small sums of money to commit heinous crimes. Crime does not pay," he said, while cautioning that those who refuse to reform should be ready to face strict action. During the press conference, DGP Gaurav Yadav also launched an Anti-Gangster Help-line number, 93946-93946, enabling citizens to anonymously share information about wanted criminals and gangsters, and to provide tips related to crime and criminal activity.

# Hemant makes history at Davos; 1st tribal CM at WEF

## Bestowed White Badge, the highest honour; holds wide-ranging talks on development of Jharkhand

Monitor News Service

DAVOS, JAN 20

Jharkhand marked a historic milestone on the global stage as Chief Minister Hemant Soren became the first tribal elected leader from India to participate in the World Economic Forum (WEF) at Davos, where he was also honoured with the prestigious White Badge, one of the forum's highest distinctions reserved for heads of states and governments.

During his visit, Soren held discussions with WEF leadership on long term collaboration in areas including critical minerals, climate action and energy transition, and building resilient and inclusive societies. The engagement marked Jharkhand's formal entry into high level global economic and policy dialogues.

The occasion also saw the formal inauguration of the Jharkhand Pavilion alongside the India Pavilion at the WEF. State officials said the dedicated pavilion would help showcase Jharkhand's economic potential and attract global attention to its development priorities, particularly as a resource rich and emerging state.

Addressing participants at Davos, Soren said Jharkhand was moving

decisively towards green energy and sustainable development while leveraging its natural resource base. He reiterated the state's vision of contributing to a developed India by 2047 and achieving a prosperous Jharkhand by 2050, expressing confidence that discussions with global leaders and companies would provide fresh momentum to these goals.

On the sidelines of the forum, the chief minister held a series of meetings with industry and international organisations. These included discussions with Tata Steel on investment in new age green steel technology, with the Sweden India Business Council on urban mobility and other sectors, and with the Women Political Leaders Forum on strengthening women's leadership and participation in politics.

Meetings were also held with representatives of the WEF, Hitachi, and Tech Mahindra on potential cooperation and investment in the power and information technology sectors.

Officials described Jharkhand's first participation at Davos as a significant step in strengthening the state's global profile and opening new avenues for economic development and investment.



# SIR is 'Software Intensive Rigging', alleges TMC

Monitor News Service

NEW DELHI, JAN 20

THE Trinamool Congress (TMC) said on Tuesday that the SIR exercise in West Bengal is "Software Intensive Rigging", as the ruling party in the state stressed the need for more "transparency" in the ongoing process for electoral-roll revision.

Addressing a press conference here, TMC's leader in the Rajya Sabha Derek O'Brien, deputy leader Sagarika Ghose and MP Saket Gokhale demanded that the Election Commission (EC) release the transcripts of the discussions held at recent meetings between a party delegation and the full bench of the poll panel. The press meet came a day after the Supreme Court directed the EC to display the names of the voters on the "logical discrepancies" list at gram panchayat bhavans and block offices.

"What does SIR actually stand for? Software Intensive Rigging.... The EC is one of the great institutions of our country, which has kept democracy vibrant for so many decades, but what has been happening now is a dismantling of this great institution," O'Brien said at the press conference.

"All we seek from the All India Trinamool Congress is transparency.... Our chairperson has said it. Our national general secretary has said it. We are for SIR, but we are for a transparent SIR, a planned SIR.... A humane SIR," he said.

O'Brien said during their meetings with the EC on November 28 and December 31 last year, the TMC leaders made several "constructive



suggestions" for making the SIR process smoother. He challenged the poll panel to come out with the transcripts of the meetings.

"Release the transcripts.... It has been 50 days. So do not push our patience. Because if you do not release those transcripts, we will release those transcripts," the TMC MP said.

Targeting Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar, he pointed out that prior to his appointment to the EC, he retired as the secretary of the Ministry of Cooperation under Home Minister Amit Shah, who is also the minister of cooperation.

O'Brien asserted that it is not "Trinamool versus somebody else", but "the people of Bengal versus those who are trying to make the electoral process burdensome on the electors".

Ghose pointed out that the apex court has directed the poll panel to work with transparency and said, "The Election Commission should not work with political interests."

It is the constitutional duty of the EC to protect the right of the citizen to vote, she added.

Ghose said the list of discrepancies and the hearings have led people to go through harrowing times, running from pillar to post to protect their right to vote.

"We are saying that the EC should not change the Special Intensive Revision to software-intensive rigging. And as the Supreme Court has instructed, the EC should work with transparency," she said.

Referring to letters written by West Bengal Chief Minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee to the CEC, O'Brien said, "What did the postscript say?... It said we know that you will not reply to these letters. Who is writing these letters? A three-time chief minister of a state who is about to become a four-time chief minister." One of Banerjee's letters to the CEC on the SIR issue contained a handwritten note, saying she did not expect a reply from Kumar.

"When we say transparency, this is not just a clever term which we have used in the morning. Software-intensive rigging. No. What software is the EC using? Why is it being revised constantly? We asked who makes this software? Come, tell us," O'Brien said.

The Supreme Court said on Monday that the SIR process in West Bengal should be transparent and not cause inconvenience to people, and directed the EC to display the names of those on the "logical discrepancies" list at gram panchayat bhavans and block offices, where documents and objections will also be submitted.

# EC appoints 12 officers as SIR observers in Bengal

KOLKATA, JAN 20 / PTI

THE Election Commission appointed 12 senior central officers as Special Roll Observers (SROs) to oversee the SIR of electoral rolls in West Bengal, an official said on Tuesday.

The observers will ensure that the exercise is conducted strictly in accordance with the EC's directions, he said.

Ministry of Home Affairs Joint Secretary Gaya Prasad has been appointed the SRO of Murshidabad district, while Devesh Deval, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Food Processing Industries, has been assigned Paschim Medinipur.

Nishtha Upadhyay, Additional CEO of the Government e-Marketplace, will initially be stationed at the office of the Chief Electoral Officer in Kolkata, with districts to be allotted later.

Venkatesapathy S, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, has been appointed SRO for Birbhum, and V Kiran Go-

pal, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, for Uttar Dinajpur.

Ministry of Power Joint Secretary Shashank Misra has been assigned the Paschim Bardhaman district. Ravi Shankar, Joint Secretary in the Department of Food and Public Distribution, and Prasana R, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Home Affairs, have been appointed as SROs for the North 24 Parganas district.

National Medical Commission Secretary Raghav Langer has been assigned to the Dakshin Dinajpur district. P Bala Kiran, Joint Secretary in the Department of Personnel and Training, has been assigned to Nadia district.

MyGov CEO Nand Kumarum was named SRO for Hooghly, and Harsh Mangla, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, was assigned Purba Medinipur district.

EC had earlier appointed observers at various levels to oversee the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls.



Mamata likely to hold meet in Singur next week, days after PM's rally

SINGUR, JAN 20 / PTI

WEST Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is likely to address an administrative programme and possibly a TMC rally in Singur next week, days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi mounted a political offensive against her government from the same spot, party sources said.

According to TMC sources, Banerjee is expected to chair an administrative meeting in Singur in Hooghly district, during which she will distribute benefits under various welfare schemes. The chief minister is likely to disburse the first instalment for the construction of pucca houses under the 'Banglar Bari' scheme.

Party leaders indicated that, beyond the administrative outreach, Banerjee may also use the occasion to send out a political message, either by addressing a party rally separately or by weaving political signals into her speech at the public distribution programme.

"I have heard that the chief minister will hold a meeting here on January 28. But the details and nature of the programme are yet to be finalised," senior TMC leader and minister Becharam Manna told PTI.

The proposed Singur programme comes against the backdrop of Modi's twin engagements at the same location on January 18, an official event followed by a public rally, during which the Prime Minister accused the Trinamool Congress government of failing on law and order and claimed that investment would flow into West Bengal only if the situation improved.

TMC leaders in Hooghly district said preparations for Banerjee's visit began soon after Modi's programme, with party workers being asked to remain ready. Sources added that Banerjee's event is likely to be held at the same ground where the Prime Minister addressed his rally, setting the stage for a direct political contrast.

According to TMC insiders, the chief minister, if she addresses the gathering, could counter Modi's remarks by citing figures on industrial growth, investment inflows and welfare delivery, seeking to project governance performance alongside political messaging.

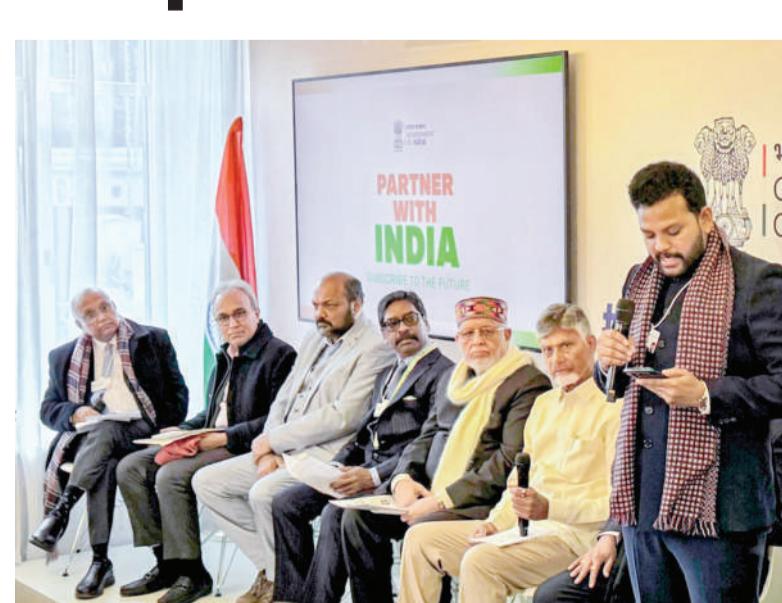
While the Prime Minister addressed a large rally in Singur, he did not announce any new industrial project or investment for the area, a point that some attendees were said to have expressed disappointment over.

# AP, RMZ Group announce \$10 bn tie-up at Davos

DAVOS, JAN 20 / PTI

THE Government of Andhra Pradesh on Tuesday announced a strategic investment partnership with RMZ Group at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2026, involving the development of large-scale digital, mixed-use and industrial infrastructure across the state. Under the proposed partnership, RMZ Group plans to develop a Global Capability Centre (GCC) Park at Kapulupada Phase-1 IT Park in Visakhapatnam, positioning the city as a key digital and GCC hub.

The project envisages up to 10 million square feet of built-up space across about 50 acres, aimed at attracting global enterprises and strengthening Visakhapatnam's ex-



panding GCC ecosystem. The group also proposes to set up a hyperscale data centre cluster in the Visakhapatnam region with a targeted capacity of up to 1 gigawatt. The facility, to be developed in phases over 500-700 acres, will support advanced digital and artificial intelligence workloads, with an emphasis on sustainability, green power integration and future-ready infrastructure.

In Rayalaseema, RMZ Group plans to establish an Industrial and Logistics Park at Tekuludu, spread over approximately 1,000 acres. The project is intended to anchor manufacturing, warehousing and logistics activity and promote balanced regional development through large-scale employment generation.

Together, the proposed projects

represent an estimated investment of around USD 10 billion over five to six years and have the potential to create employment for about one lakh people across information technology, data centres, industrial manufacturing and logistics.

The announcement was made in the presence of the Minister for Information Technology & Electronics, Government of Andhra Pradesh, and the Chairman of RMZ Group.

The state government reiterated its focus on speed of doing business through single-point facilitation, timely land allotment and time-bound clearances, highlighting its predictable policy framework and execution certainty as key factors driving investor confidence in Andhra Pradesh.

## India and the UAE raise strategic stakes

India and the United Arab Emirates have signalled a decisive deepening of their partnership, moving beyond transactional engagement towards a more integrated strategic relationship. The announcement of a planned defence partnership, a long term LNG supply agreement, and an ambitious target of USD 200 billion in annual bilateral trade by 2032 reflects a shared assessment that economic, energy, and security interests are now tightly intertwined. At one level, the outcomes of the brief but substantive visit by UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan underline continuity. Over the past decade, India UAE ties have expanded rapidly across trade, investment, energy, and people to people links. The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement has already doubled bilateral trade to around USD 100 billion. Setting a new target for the next decade signals confidence that this momentum can be sustained despite global economic uncertainty. What marks this visit as qualitatively different, however, is the explicit push towards a strategic defence partnership. The letter of intent covering defence industrial collaboration, advanced technologies, cyberspace training, interoperability, and counter terrorism cooperation places security at the centre of the relationship. This is a notable evolution for a partnership that was once driven largely by energy trade and remittances. It also reflects changing regional realities, with instability in West Asia and growing competition among major powers pushing both sides to diversify security partnerships.

The LNG agreement, under which India will import 0.5 million metric tonnes annually from Abu Dhabi National Oil Company Gas for a decade starting 2028, reinforces the energy pillar of the relationship. While modest in volume relative to India's overall needs, the deal contributes to supply diversification at a time of volatile global gas markets. The UAE's role as India's second largest LNG supplier underlines its importance to India's energy security strategy. Beyond defence and energy, the breadth of cooperation outlined is striking. Civil nuclear collaboration, including small modular reactors, joint work in space infrastructure, artificial intelligence, supercomputing, data centres, and digital public infrastructure points to a relationship increasingly oriented towards future technologies. UAE participation in infrastructure development at Dholera and growing engagement with GIFT City further embed Gulf capital into India's long term growth story. Yet ambition will need careful execution. Defence cooperation, in particular, will test both sides' ability to align strategic priorities, manage sensitivities, and translate intent into tangible outcomes. Similarly, achieving a USD 200 billion trade target will require sustained regulatory coordination, logistics upgrades, and progress on initiatives such as digital payments interlinking and virtual trade corridors.

## India and Europe look ahead long term

The forthcoming India European Union summit marks a potentially consequential moment in a relationship that has often promised more than it delivered. With a free trade agreement, a defence partnership, and a framework for professional mobility all on the table, the summit signals a shared recognition that India EU ties must move faster and think bigger in a rapidly fragmenting global order. The centrepiece is the expected conclusion of negotiations on a free trade agreement, the most ambitious such deal India has attempted in recent years. With bilateral trade in goods already at USD 135 billion, the agreement has the potential to unlock deeper integration in manufacturing, services, and supply chains. Its timing is telling. Both India and the EU are responding to uncertainty created by shifting trade and tariff policies in Washington, and to a broader erosion of predictability in the global trading system. For Brussels, India represents scale, growth, and diversification. For New Delhi, the EU offers technology, capital, and access to a high value market. Yet the agreement's significance lies not just in trade volumes. The long-stalled negotiations, first launched in 2007 and revived only in 2022, reflect how difficult it has been for both sides to reconcile ambition with domestic sensitivities. Contentious issues such as agriculture, dairy, automobiles, steel, and the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism have required careful compromise. That the two sides now appear close to an understanding suggests a greater willingness to prioritise strategic alignment over maximalist demands.

The summit's defence dimension reinforces this shift. The proposed Security and Defence Partnership would move India EU cooperation beyond dialogue into operational collaboration, including interoperability and industrial participation. Access for Indian firms to the EU's SAFE programme, designed to accelerate defence readiness, signals Europe's growing openness to partners outside the transatlantic framework. For India, this offers opportunities to integrate more deeply into European defence supply chains while diversifying partnerships beyond traditional suppliers. Mobility is the third pillar, and politically the most sensitive. A framework to facilitate the movement of Indian professionals responds to Europe's demographic and skills challenges while addressing a long-standing Indian demand. Existing bilateral arrangements with countries such as France and Germany provide a base, but an EU level framework would lend scale and coherence. Symbolism also matters. The participation of an EU military contingent in India's Republic Day parade signals a desire to project strategic closeness publicly. It reflects a Europe more geopolitically conscious and an India more comfortable engaging the EU as a strategic actor, not merely a trade bloc.

## Peace, by invitation only

As Donald Trump's Board of Peace takes shape amid uncertainty and selective participation, it raises uncomfortable questions about how global peace is being reimagined. When authority is personalised, membership is curated, and legitimacy remains contested, peace risks becoming a function of power rather than principle.

Rajiv Bhatia

The hurried emergence of Donald Trump's proposed Board of Peace has laid bare a deeper crisis in global governance than its proponents may have intended. Marketed as a bold corrective to multilateral paralysis, the initiative is instead exposing the dangers of substituting institutional legitimacy with personalised authority. As invitations continue to circulate and governments weigh their responses, the controversy surrounding the Board is no longer about diplomatic etiquette. It is about the future shape of peace-building itself.

The Board of Peace, announced in mid-January and linked to the next phase of the Gaza post war transition, is formally described as an international mechanism to support governance, reconstruction, and security arrangements. Its initial mandate is grounded in a United Nations Security Council resolution that welcomed international support for Gaza's administration and rebuilding. That endorsement gives the initiative a degree of legal cover for its limited purpose. It does not, however, resolve the larger concerns raised by how the Board is structured, led, and politically framed.

At the heart of the unease is the question of authority. The Board is not treaty-based, nor embedded within an existing multilateral organisation. Its convening power flows primarily from American sponsorship and from Trump's role as its proposed chair. Draft documents and invitation letters suggest that leadership is intended to be stable rather than rotational, and decision-making authority concentrated rather than dispersed. This represents a significant departure from the norms that underpin most international peace mechanisms, where legitimacy derives from collective consent, procedural safeguards, and defined accountability.

The rapid expansion of invitations has compounded this uncertainty. Around 60 countries are reported to have been invited, including allies, regional actors, and states with sharply divergent geopolitical interests. Some, such as Morocco, Hungary, Vietnam, Kazakhstan, and Argentina, have accepted. Others, including France and several European partners, have indicated reluctance or a need for further clarification. Russia has confirmed receipt of an invitation and says it is studying the details. Israel itself appears divided, with senior officials expressing reservations about the Board's composition and the role it might play in Gaza's future.

These mixed responses are not merely diplomatic hesitation. They reflect unresolved questions about mandate and scope. While the Board's initial focus is Gaza, language in some invitations refers more broadly to a "new approach



The creation of Donald Trump's Board of Peace has been presented as a decisive response to the failures of multilateral conflict management. With invitations extended to dozens of governments and an initial mandate linked to Gaza's post war transition, the initiative promises speed, authority, and a break from institutional paralysis. Yet the confusion that has accompanied its rapid rollout is not a matter of diplomatic teething troubles. It reflects a deeper problem. Peace, in this model, appears to be organised by invitation, governed by personalised authority, and shaped more by leverage than legitimacy.

to resolving global conflict". This has fuelled concern that the initiative could evolve into a parallel forum on peace and security, potentially overlapping with or competing against established institutions such as the United Nations Security Council. For countries invested in rule-based multilateralism, that ambiguity is a red flag.

The Gaza context illustrates why these concerns matter. Post-war governance is not a technical exercise alone. Decisions about administration, security, and reconstruction are inherently political. They shape who holds power, whose interests are protected, and how grievances are addressed. Any external mechanism tasked with overseeing this process must command credibility not only among donor states but also among the affected population and key regional stakeholders. A body whose leadership is personalised and whose rules remain opaque struggles to meet that standard.

Israel's reaction highlights this dilemma. While the government has not formally rejected the initiative, senior ministers have criticised aspects of the proposed executive arrangements and the possible involvement of certain countries. The objection is not only about specific actors but about control. For Israel, Gaza's future is directly tied to national security. For Palestinians, legitimacy depends

on whether governance arrangements are seen as transitional steps towards political agency or as externally imposed administration. The Board of Peace sits uneasily between these competing imperatives.

Financial arrangements associated with the Board add another layer of controversy. Reports indicate that permanent membership may be linked to substantial financial contributions, reportedly in the region of one billion dollars, while shorter term participation carries no such requirement. Even if funds are earmarked for reconstruction, this structure introduces a transactional logic into peace governance. Influence appears to be tiered, and authority risks becoming correlated with capacity to pay. For smaller states and conflict affected societies, this reinforces perceptions that peace is negotiated above their heads.

Supporters of the initiative argue that such pragmatism is necessary. Existing institutions, they contend, are slow, politicised, and ill equipped to manage complex post conflict transitions. There is merit in the critique. The United Nations system has struggled to adapt to shifting power balances and prolonged conflicts. Yet institutional failure does not justify abandoning institutional principles. The alternative to reform is not personalised governance but fragmentation.

The danger is precedent. If powerful states or leaders increasingly opt to create bespoke peace mechanisms outside established frameworks, global governance risks becoming a patchwork of competing initiatives. Norms weaken, predictability erodes, and smaller states are forced to navigate overlapping and sometimes contradictory processes. Peacebuilding becomes contingent on alignment with particular power centres rather

than adherence to shared rules.

The personalisation of the Board of Peace intensifies this risk. International institutions are designed to outlast individuals, providing continuity across political cycles. A peace framework closely associated with one political figure, particularly one known for transactional diplomacy and public confrontation, is inherently fragile. Its credibility fluctuates with political fortunes, rhetoric, and strategic priorities. Peace cannot be sustainably anchored to personality without sacrificing institutional resilience.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza underscores both the urgency and the limits of the approach. Aid operations have expanded under the ceasefire, and worst-case famine scenarios have been partially averted. Yet the situation remains precarious, with widespread food insecurity and deep social trauma. Reconstruction requires more than funding and oversight. It requires political legitimacy, inclusive governance, and a credible pathway for self-determination. No external board can substitute for that process, however efficiently it is managed.

Beyond Gaza, the Board of Peace reflects a broader erosion of confidence in multilateralism. When reform stalls and institutions appear unresponsive, personalised power fills the vacuum. Trump's initiative is less an aberration than a symptom of that trend. It signals a world in which authority is increasingly exercised through ad hoc arrangements rather than shared frameworks.

Criticism of the Board of Peace is therefore not opposition to innovation. New tools, faster coordination, and more effective post conflict support are urgently needed. But innovation that concentrates power, commodifies influence, and blurs accountability risks doing more harm than good. Peace built on speed and leverage may hold briefly, but it rarely endures.

*The writer is a foreign policy commentator specialising in India's engagement with the Global South, multilateral institutions, and the shifting geopolitics of a multipolar world.*

## When Parliaments are under pressure, dialogue matters

Ishaan V Rao

India's hosting of the 28th Conference of Speakers and Presiding Officers of the Commonwealth in New Delhi came at a moment of visible strain for legislatures worldwide. Democratic institutions are grappling with declining public trust, polarised political discourse, and the disruptive impact of technology on how authority is exercised and contested. Against this backdrop, the Conference was not simply a ceremonial gathering of parliamentary leaders but a timely institutional reflection on how legislatures can adapt without weakening their constitutional core.

Since its establishment in 1969, the Conference of Speakers and Presiding Officers of the Commonwealth has occupied a distinctive space within the Commonwealth ecosystem. It is deliberately non-political, independent of both the Commonwealth Parliaments

and the Commonwealth Secretariat, and focused narrowly on the role of presiding officers as custodians of parliamentary procedure and neutrality. This design reflects a clear institutional logic. Speakers operate at the intersection of law, procedure, and political contestation. Their authority rests less on power than on trust, fairness, and institutional memory, qualities that are tested most sharply during periods of democratic stress.

The scale of participation at the 2026 Conference underscored this continuing relevance. Sixty-one Speakers and presiding officers from 42 Commonwealth countries and four semi-autonomous parliaments took part, making it one of the largest editions of the forum. That breadth of participation suggests a shared recognition that parliamentary credibility cannot be taken for granted. Across diverse constitutional traditions, legislatures are confronting similar pressures and

looking for peer learning rather than prescriptive solutions.

India's role in shaping the Conference agenda was particularly significant. By chairing the Standing Committee meeting in Guernsey in January 2025, India helped steer discussions towards issues that now dominate parliamentary debates globally. Artificial intelligence, social media, security concerns, and public engagement are no longer peripheral to legislative work. They shape how laws are drafted, debated, communicated, and judged by citizens.

The focus on artificial intelligence captured both opportunity and risk. Parliaments are increasingly using AI for legislative research, translation, document management, and public outreach. In large and multilingual democracies, these tools promise greater efficiency and accessibility. Yet they also raise difficult questions about bias, transparency, data security, and

accountability. The Conference did not seek to resolve these dilemmas. Its value lay in acknowledging that presiding officers now bear responsibility not only for order in the chamber but also for the ethical governance of digital systems that influence legislative functioning.

A similar tension emerged in discussions on social media. Digital platforms have expanded public engagement and lowered barriers between representatives and citizens. At the same time, they have blurred institutional boundaries, amplified misinformation, and weakened norms of deliberative debate. The Conference highlighted the need for legislatures to engage citizens online without surrendering the dignity and seriousness that democratic deliberation requires.

India's interventions placed these challenges within a broader narrative of institutional reform and democratic delivery. Emphasis on repealing obso-

lete laws, strengthening parliamentary standing committees, and accelerating welfare-oriented legislation reflected a pragmatic understanding of parliamentary effectiveness. The description of standing committees as mini-Parliaments was not rhetorical. In many democracies, they remain the primary sites of detailed scrutiny and bipartisan engagement.

The Conference also drew attention to the role of women in democratic leadership. India's experience, with women holding high constitutional offices and nearly 1.5 million women representatives in local bodies, illustrates how representation can be expanded through sustained institutional commitment. For Commonwealth legislatures struggling with gender gaps, this experience offers practical lessons rather than ideological prescriptions.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's inaugural remarks framed the Conference within India's democratic

self-conception. His emphasis on debate, dialogue, and last mile delivery positioned parliamentary institutions as instruments of governance rather than arenas of perpetual contestation.

Within the Commonwealth, India's articulation of Global South concerns added another layer of relevance. Many member parliaments face similar constraints, limited resources, youthful populations, and high expectations of democratic outcomes.

As the next Conference in London in 2028 approaches, the challenges facing legislatures are likely to intensify. What the CSPOC offers is not consensus politics but institutional solidarity. In an age of disruption, that quiet, sustained dialogue may be one of democracy's most underappreciated strengths.

*The author is a political scientist whose work examines democratic institutions and legislative behaviour.*

# Trump ties his Greenland stance to not getting Nobel Peace Prize

NUUK, JAN 20 / AP

US President Donald Trump linked his aggressive stance on Greenland to last year's decision not to award him the Nobel Peace Prize, telling Norway's prime minister that he no longer felt "an obligation to think purely of Peace," in a text message released Monday.

Trump's message to Jonas Gahr Støre appears to ratchet up a stand-off between Washington and its closest allies over his threats to take over Greenland, a self-governing territory of NATO member Denmark. Trump's Sunday message to Gahr Støre, released by the Norwegian government, read in part, "Considering your Country decided not to give me the Nobel Peace Prize for having stopped 8 Wars PLUS, I no longer feel an obligation to think purely of Peace."

It concluded, "The World is not secure unless we have Complete and Total Control of Greenland."

The White House confirmed the authenticity of the message, with White House deputy press secretary Anna Kelly saying that Trump "is confident Greenlanders would be better served if protected by the United States from modern threats in the Arctic region."

The Norwegian leader said Trump's message was a reply to an earlier missive sent on behalf of himself and Finnish President Alexander Stubb, in which they conveyed their opposition to the tariff announcement, pointed to a need to de-escalate, and proposed a telephone conversation among the three leaders.



"Norway's position on Greenland is clear. Greenland is a part of the Kingdom of Denmark, and Norway fully supports the Kingdom of Denmark on this matter," the Norwegian leader said in a statement.

"As regards the Nobel Peace Prize, I have clearly explained, including to President Trump what is well known, the prize is awarded by an independent Nobel Committee and not the Norwegian Government."

The Norwegian Nobel Committee is an independent body whose five members are appointed by the Norwegian Parliament.

Trump has openly coveted the peace prize, which the committee awarded to Venezuelan opposition leader María Corina Machado last year. Last week, Machado presented

her Nobel medal to Trump, who said he planned to keep it, though the committee said the prize can't be revoked, transferred or shared with others.

Speaking Monday night to reporters before boarding Air Force One on his way back from Florida to Washington, Trump said he didn't "care about the Nobel prize."

"A very fine woman felt that I deserved it and really wanted me to have the Nobel prize. And I appreciate that. If anybody thinks that Norway doesn't control the Nobel prize, they're just kidding. ... And I don't care what Norway says. But I really don't care about that. What I care about is saving lives," he said.

On Saturday, Trump announced a 10 per cent import tax starting in February on goods from eight nations

that have rallied around Denmark and Greenland, including Norway.

Those countries issued a forceful rebuke. Many longtime allies of the US remained resolute that Greenland was not for sale but encouraged Washington to discuss solutions. In a statement on social media, the European Union's foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said the bloc had "no interest to pick a fight" but would "hold our ground."

The White House has not ruled taking control of the strategic Arctic island by force. Asked whether Trump could invade Greenland, Danish Foreign Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen said Monday that "you can't leave anything out until the president himself has decided to leave anything out."

## What Macron, NATO head are saying to Trump behind scenes

PARIS, JAN 20 / AP

WHILE Europe is pushing back publicly against US President Donald Trump over Greenland, the language appears softer behind the scenes.

Trump published a text message on Tuesday that he received from French President Emmanuel Macron, confirmed as genuine by Macron's office.

Starting with "My friend," Macron's tone was more deferential than the criticism that France and some European nations are openly voicing against Trump's push to wrest Greenland. Before broaching the Greenland dispute, Macron opted in his message to first talk about other issues where he and Trump seem to be roughly on the same page.

"We are totally in line on Syria. We can do great things on Iran," the French leader wrote in English. Then, he added: "I do not understand what you are doing on Greenland," immediately followed by: "Let us try to build great things."

That was the only mention that Macron made of the semi-autonomous Danish territory that Trump covets in the two sections of message that Trump published. It wasn't immediately clear from Trump's post when he received the message.

World leaders' private messages to each other rarely make it verbatim into the public domain. But Trump is casting traditions and diplomatic niceties to the wind and, in the process, lifting back the curtain on goings-on that usually aren't seen.

Trump also published a flattering message from Mark Rutte, secretary general of NATO, which the alliance also confirmed as authentic. "I am committed to finding a way forward on Greenland," Rutte wrote. "Can't wait to see you. Yours, Mark."

Rutte has declined to speak publicly about Greenland.



Danish soldiers land at Nuuk airport on Monday. AP/PTI

## Europe rethinks US security as trust erodes

BRUSSELS, JAN 19 / AP

"INTIMIDATION," "threats" and "blackmail" are just some of the terms being used by European Union leaders to describe US President Donald Trump's warning that he will slap new tariffs on nations opposing American control of Greenland. European language has hardened since Trump returned to the White House 12 months ago.

Now it's in reaction to the previously unthinkable idea that NATO's most powerful member would threaten to seize the territory of another ally. Trade retaliation is likely should Trump make good on his tariff announcement.

A year into Trump 2.0, Europe's faith in the strength of the transatlantic bond is fading fast. For some, it's already disappeared. The flattery

of past months has not worked and tactics are evolving as the Europeans try to manage threats from an old ally just as they confront the threat of an increasingly hostile Russia.

Trump's first term brought NATO to the brink of collapse. "I feared that NATO was about to stop functioning," former Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg wrote in his recent memoir, after the US president had threatened to walk out of a 2018 summit.

Now, Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen is warning that should he try to annex Greenland, a semi-autonomous part of Denmark, "then everything stops ... including our NATO."

"We are at the very early stage of a rather deep political-military crisis," said Maria Martisiute, a European Policy Centre analyst. "There is a greater realisation, even though

political leaders will not like to admit it, that America has abandoned NATO." In January 2025, US allies at NATO were waiting to hear Trump's plans for Ukraine.

In a speech at NATO headquarters in February, US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth read the riot act to European allies and Canada. The United States had priorities elsewhere and Europe must handle security in its own backyard.

Days later that February, in Munich, Vice President JD Vance met the leader of a far-right party during election campaigning in Germany. He claimed that Europe's main threat was internal, not Russia. Free speech is "in retreat" across the continent, Vance warned.

Meanwhile, Europe pressed ahead with new defence measures, even as Trump waged a global tariff

## Besson says Europe, US relations have 'never been closer'

Jamey Keaten

DAVOS, JAN 20

US Treasury Secretary Scott Besson on Tuesday said America's relations with Europe remain strong and urged trading partners to "take a deep breath" and let tensions driven by the Trump administration's new tariff threats over Greenland "play out."

"I think our relations have never been closer," he said, speaking on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland.

On Saturday, US President Donald Trump announced a 10 per cent import tax starting in February on goods from eight European nations that have rallied around Denmark in the wake of his stepped up calls for the United States to take over the semi-autonomous Danish territory of Greenland.

Trump has insisted the US needs the territory for security reasons against possible threats from China and Russia. The American leader's threats have sparked outrage and a flurry of diplomatic activity across Europe, as leaders consider possible countermeasures, including retaliatory tariffs and the first-ever use of the European Union's anti-coercion instrument.

The EU has three major economic tools it could use to pressure Washington: new tariffs, suspension of the US-EU trade deal, and the "trade bazooka" — the unofficial term for the bloc's Anti-Coercion In-

strument, which could sanction individuals or institutions found to be putting undue pressure on the EU.

Earlier Tuesday, Trump posted on social media that he had spoken with NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte. He said "I agreed to a meeting of the various parties in Davos, Switzerland," which is hosting the World Economic Forum's annual meeting this week.

Denmark's minister for European affairs called Trump's tariff threats "deeply unfair." He said that Europe needs to become even stronger and more independent, while stressing there is "no interest in escalating a trade war."

"You just have to note that we are on the edge of a new world order, where having power has unfortunately become crucial, and we see a United States with an enormous condescending rhetoric towards Europe," Marie Bjerre told Danish public broadcaster DK on Tuesday.

Speaking on the sidelines of Davos, California Gov. Gavin Newsom slammed Europe's response to Trump's tariff threats as "pathetic" and "embarrassing," and urged European leaders to unite and stand up to the United States.

"It is time to get serious, and stop being complicit," Newsom told reporters. "It's time to stand tall and firm, have a backbone."

European markets opened sharply lower on Tuesday and US futures fell further as tensions rose over Greenland. Benchmarks in Germany, France and Britain fell about 1 per cent.

## Israeli crews target UN facilities for Palestinian refugees

JERUSALEM, JAN 20 / AP

ISRAELI forces on Tuesday targeted at least two United Nations facilities, pushing forward with its crackdown against the UN agency for Palestinian refugees tasked with delivering humanitarian services to millions of people across the region. Crews began bulldozing the United Nations Relief and Works Agency's (UNRWA) offices in Sheikh Jarrah and fired tear gas at a vocational school in Qalandia, marking Israel's latest and most dramatic step against UNRWA.

Roland Friedrich, the agency's West Bank director, said UNRWA had received word that demolition crews and police arrived at their east Jerusalem headquarters early on Tuesday. Staff have not operated out of the facility for almost a year because of safety reasons, but Israeli forces confiscated devices and forced out the private security guards hired to protect the facility.

"What we saw today is the culmination of two years of incitement and measures against UNRWA in east Jerusalem," Friedrich said, calling it a violation of international law guaranteeing such facilities protection.

He said forces also began firing tear gas at the vocational school for young Palestinians on the outskirts of Jerusalem on Tuesday afternoon. More than 300 young refugees receive job training in technology and welding there.

Israel's Foreign Ministry said the demolition enforced a new law banning UNRWA, noting that Israel owns the site and rejecting UNRWA's claims that the move violated international law.

Israel has long claimed the agency has an anti-Israel bias, often with little evidence. The UN has ardently denied such claims and UNRWA has said it acts quickly to purge any suspected militants among its staff.

# UK approves controversial plans for Chinese 'super embassy' in London

Aditi Khanna

LONDON, JAN 20

The UK government on Tuesday approved China's plans for a so-called mega or super embassy in the heart of London, overriding security concerns raised by parliamentarians and campaigners to stress that all "material considerations" had been taken into account.

The planning permission for the proposed construction at the 20,000-square-metre site of the former Royal Mint Court near the Tower of London had been "called in" for a ministerial review as a matter of national significance.

The Labour Party government's own MPs and Opposition Tories were among those strongly opposed to the plans being greenlit, given the site's proximity to the City of London financial district and characterising China as a "hostile state".

"This statement follows the decision I made today to grant planning permission and listed building consent for a new embassy in London," said Steve Reed, the UK Housing and Communities Secretary who formally approved the plans this week.

"All material considerations were taken into account when making this decision. The decision is now final unless it is successfully challenged in court," he said.

The minister said his decision was in line with the recommendation of the independent Planning Inspector,



who held a public inquiry into the case in February last year.

"This means they must make decisions fairly, based on evidence and planning rules," he added.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) released a 240-page document detailing the rationale behind the planning go-ahead for the new embassy.

"To conclude, I am of the clear view that the proposal complies with the development plan when taken as a whole. There are no other

material considerations which would warrant a conclusion other than that planning permission and listed building consent should be granted," reads the report by Planning Inspector Claire Searson.

"Put simply, the proposed scheme is in accordance with the development plan when considered as a whole... Similarly, for the listed building consent application, the works would preserve the building and its special interest and thus should also be approved. This is uncontested," it states.

She highlights in her analysis that planning permissions are granted on a "nation-neutral" basis under the Vienna Convention.

"In this regard, any ethical or similar objection to the provision of an embassy for a specific country cannot be a material planning consideration. It would not be lawful to refuse permission simply because it would be for a Chinese Embassy... The same would hold for any other specific country seeking an embassy use through the planning system," her report notes.

## AI benefits must be distributed evenly to avoid a bubble: Nadella

Barun Jha

DAVOS, JAN 20 / PTI

MICROSOFT CEO Satya Nadella on Tuesday said the goal of artificial intelligence should be to improve everyone's lives, from education outcomes to public sector efficiency.

Speaking at a session here during the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting, Nadella said it will be a "tell-tale" sign of a bubble if all the AI talk focused only on the supply side or the technology companies.

He said the role of AI needs to be examined across all aspects of life, such as how it is helping pharma companies bring critical drugs faster to the market or accelerate trials.

He called for AI-driven economic

growth rather than just increasing spending. He spoke about how AI and other advanced technologies are increasing productivity and changing the way we work.

"We as a global community have to get to a point where we are using AI to do something useful that changes the outcomes of people and communities and countries and industries," Nadella said.

He also discussed the need for public-private cooperation to ensure that the AI revolution is supported by adequate energy infrastructure and examined data sovereignty and the risk of a so-called AI bubble.

Nadella said the benefits of artificial intelligence (AI) need to be "much more evenly distributed" to avoid it from becoming a "bubble".

Google also began partially functioning as a search engine, with most search results inaccessible.

Officials have offered no firm timeline for the internet to return, leading to fears by businesses across the country about their future.

One pet shop owner in Tehran, who spoke on the condition of anonymity like others for fear of reprisals, said his business had fallen by 90% since the protests.

"Before that, I mainly worked on Instagram and Telegram which I don't have access to anymore. The government has proposed two domestic alternatives. The point is our customers are not there — they don't use it."

The internet outage compounds economic pain already suffered by

## Internet shutdown squeezes Iran's ailing businesses

DUBAI, JAN 20 / AP

IRANIANS have been struggling for nearly two weeks with the longest, most comprehensive internet shutdown in the history of the Islamic Republic — one that has not only restricted their access to information and the outside world, but is also throttling many businesses that rely on online advertising.

Authorities shut down internet access on Jan 8 as nationwide protests led to a brutal crackdown that activists say has killed over 4,000 people, with more feared dead. Since then, there has been minimal access to the outside world, with connectivity in recent days restored only for some domestic websites.

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The internet outage compounds economic pain already suffered by



Iranians. The protests, which appear to have halted under a bloody suppression by authorities, began Dec 28 over Iran's rial currency falling to over 1.4 million to \$1.

Ten years ago, the rial traded at 32,000 to \$1. Before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, it traded at 70 to \$1.

The currency's downward spiral pushed up inflation, increasing the cost of food and other daily necessities. The pressure on Iranians' pockets was compounded by changes to gasoline prices that were also introduced in December, further fuelling anger.

Iran's state-run news agency IRNA quoted a deputy minister of communications and information technology, Ehsan Chitsaz, as saying the cut to the internet cost Iran between \$2.8 to \$4.3 million each day.

But the true cost for the Iranian

economy could be far higher. The internet monitoring organisation NetBlocks estimates each day of an internet shutdown in Iran costs the country over \$37 million.

The site says it estimates the economic impact of internet outages based on indicators from multiple sources including the World Bank and the International Telecommunication Union, which is the United Nations' specialised agency for digital technology.

In 2021 alone, a government estimate suggested Iranian businesses made as much as \$833 million a year in sales from social media sites, wrote Dara Conduit, a lecturer at the University of Melbourne in Australia, in an article published by the journal *Democratisation* in June.

She cited a separate estimate suggesting internet disruptions around the 2022 Mahsa Amini protests cost the Iranian economy \$1.6 billion.

The 2022 internet disruptions' far-reaching and blanket economic consequences risked further heightening tensions in Iran and spurring the mobilisation of new anti-regime cohorts onto the streets at a time when the regime was already facing one of the most serious existential threats of its lifetime," Conduit wrote.

More than 500 people were reportedly killed during that crackdown and over 22,000 detained.

Meanwhile, prosecutors have also begun targeting some businesses in the crackdown.

## UK considers Australia-style teen social media ban

LONDON, JAN 20 / AP

THE British government says it will consider banning young teenagers from social media as it tightens laws designed to protect children from harmful content and excessive screen time.

The government said it would consult with parents, young people and other interested parties about the safe use of technology amid growing concern that children are being harmed by exposure to unregulated social media content.

"As I have been clear, no option is off the table, including looking at what age children should be able to access social media and whether we need restrictions on things such as addictive features like infinite scrolling or streaks in apps," Prime Minister Keir Starmer wrote on Substack.

As part of their investigation, government ministers will travel to Australia to learn about the country's recent move that requires major social media apps such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X to bar children under 16 from their platforms.

More than 60 lawmakers from Starmer's centre-left Labour Party earlier this week wrote to the prime minister calling on the government to introduce an Australia-style ban in Britain.

## 120 IS group members escape from prison in Syria

RAQQA, JAN 20 / AP

SYRIA's ministry of interior said Tuesday that 120 Islamic State members escaped from a prison in northeast Syria a day earlier, amid clashes between government forces and the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, which guards the prison.

Security forces recaptured 81 of the escapees, "while intensive security efforts continue to pursue the remaining fugitives and take the necessary legal measures against them," the statement said.

The SDF and the government have traded blame over the escape in the town of Shaddadeh, amid the breakdown of a ceasefire

deal between the two sides.

Also Tuesday, the SDF accused "Damascus-affiliated factions" of cutting off water supplies to the al-Qatani prison near the city of Raqqa, which it called a "blatant violation of humanitarian standards".

The SDF, the main US-backed force that fought IS in Syria, controls more than a dozen prisons in the northeast where some 9,000 IS members have been held for years without trial. Many of the detained extremists are believed to have carried out atrocities in Syria and Iraq after IS declared a caliphate in June 2014 over large parts of Syria and Iraq.

IS was defeated in Iraq in 2017 and in Syria two years later, but the

group's sleeper cells still carry out deadly attacks in both countries.

Under a deal announced Sunday, government forces were to take over control of the prisons from the SDF, but the transfer did not go smoothly.

On Monday, Syrian government forces and SDF fighters clashed around two prisons housing members of the Islamic State group in Syria's northeast.

The clashes came as SDF chief commander Mazloum Abdi was said to be in Damascus to attempt to solidify a ceasefire deal reached Sunday that ended days of deadly fighting during which government forces captured wide areas of northeast Syria from the SDF.

## Imran Khan party-backed politician appointed oppn leader

Sajjad Hussain

ISLAMABAD, JAN 20

A RIGHT-WING politician backed by incarcerated former prime minister Imran Khan's party was on Tuesday appointed as the opposition leader in Pakistan Senate, in a move expected to lower political temperature in the country.

Raja Nasir Abbas, chief of Majlis Wahdat-i-Muslimeen (MWM), who was elected as senator last year with the support of the Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), was appointed to the Senate, the upper house of the bicameral parliament of Pakistan.

The appointment comes days af-

ter Mehmoond Khan Achakzai, chief of Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party, another ally of PTI, was appointed as leader of the house in the National Assembly.

On Tuesday, a notification issued by the Senate Secretariat said: "In pursuance of sub-rule (3) of Rule 16 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Senate, 2012, the chairman Senate has been pleased to declare Senator Raja Nasir Abbas as leader of the opposition in the Senate, with immediate effect."

Senate chairman Yusuf Raza Gilani announced Abbas' appointment as the opposition leader during the session of the Upper House.

"I want to give a ruling. Before proceeding further, I consider it necessary to place on record the legal and procedural background relating to the declaration of the leader of the opposition in the Senate."

"Rule 16 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Senate, 2012 mandates that the chairman Senate should declare as leader of the opposition the member who commands the support of the majority of the members in opposition," he said.

The MWM is a Shiite political party and Abbas is the only senator in the Senate. The party is a strong ally of PTI and its founder Imran Khan, incarcerated since August 2023.

NSE NIFTY

JANUARY 20, 2026

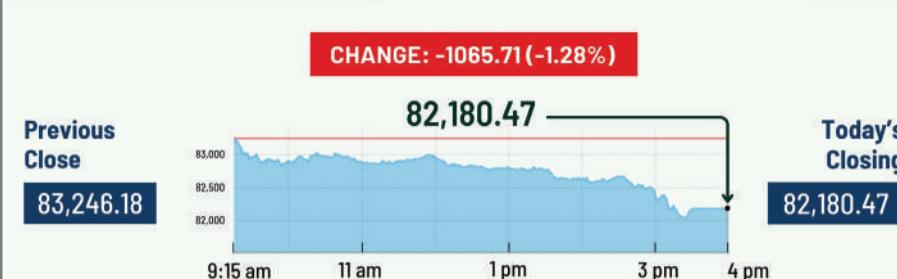
PTI  
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BSE SENSEX

JANUARY 20, 2026

PTI  
GRAPHICS



NSE NIFTY

TOP GAINERS

January 20, 2026

PTI  
GRAPHICS

%	POINTS
+0.46	Dr Reddy's
+0.28	HDFC Bank
+0.28	Tata Consum



# Sensex sinks over 1,000 pts on geopolitical worries; slips below 83K

MUMBAI, JAN 20 / PTI

Equity benchmark index Sensex on Tuesday plunged over 1,000 points to sink below the 83,000 level due to widespread sell-off tracking sluggish global markets amid escalating geopolitical tensions.

Besides, continued weakness in the rupee and persistent foreign fund outflows dented investors' sentiment, traders said.

Extending its previous day's decline, the 30-share BSE Sensex tumbled 1,065.71 points, or 1.28 per cent, to settle at 82,180.47. During the day, it dropped 1,235.6 points, or 1.48 per cent, to 82,010.58.

A total of 3,503 stocks declined while 780 advanced and 119 remained unchanged on the BSE.

The 50-share NSE Nifty tanked 353 points, or 1.38 per cent, to end at 25,232.50.

"Markets extended their weakness on Tuesday and ended lower amid broad-based selling and weak global cues. Market sentiment remained subdued due to mixed corporate earnings and renewed concerns surrounding geopolitical tensions and global trade developments.

"Persistent foreign institutional selling, along with a weaker currency environment, further weighed on investor confidence and kept risk appetite restrained

throughout the session," Ajit Mishra, SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

From the 30-Sensex firms, Eternal declined by 4.02 per cent, followed by Bajaj Finance (3.88 per cent), Sun Pharma, InterGlobe Aviation, Trent, Asian Paints, Mahindra & Mahindra and Bajaj Finserv.

HDFC Bank emerged as the only gainer from the pack.

The BSE smallcap gauge tumbled 2.74 per cent, and the midcap index dropped 2.52 per cent.

Realty dived 5.21 per cent, services tanked 2.89 per cent, capital goods (2.76 per cent), consumer discretionary (2.73 per cent), consumer durables (2.71 per cent), telecommunication (2.42 per cent), auto (2.36 per cent) and power (2.23 per cent).

"Investor sentiment was weighed down by escalating global trade tensions and continued foreign capital outflows. Concerns resurfaced after US President Donald Trump threatened fresh tariffs on several European nations, reviving fears of renewed global trade disruptions.

"At the same time, sustained selling by foreign portfolio investors added to the downside pressure in domestic equities. Heightened global uncertainty and falling equity markets prompted investors to shift towards safe-haven assets, with gold and silver trading at record highs," according



to Ashika Institutional Equities.

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi index, Japan's Nikkei 225 index, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index settled lower.

Markets in Europe were trading over 1 per cent lower.

US markets were closed on Monday for a holiday.

"The aggressive and often unpredictable use of tariffs by the US administration as a foreign policy tool is creating widespread

unease among global market participants, triggering sharp volatility across financial markets. This has weighed heavily on risk assets while pushing safe-haven gold and silver prices higher.

"Fresh threats by US President Donald Trump to impose additional tariffs on European nations opposing the US move to take control of Greenland have triggered another bout of global equity selling, with Indian markets also witnessing broad-based pressure," Ponmudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

The Indian equity market ended today's session on a decisively negative note, reflecting a combination of weak global cues, cautious investor positioning, and subdued risk appetite, he added.

Foreign institutional investors offloaded equities worth Rs 3,262.82 crore on Monday, while Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) remained buyers as they bought stocks worth Rs 4,234.30 crore, according to exchange data.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, went up by 0.09 per cent to USD 63.91 per barrel.

On Monday, the Sensex declined 324.17 points or 0.39 per cent to settle at 83,246.18. The Nifty dropped 108.85 points or 0.42 per cent to 25,585.50.

## Rupee falls 7 paise to settle at record low of 90.97 against US dollar

MUMBAI, JAN 20 / PTI

THE rupee depreciated 7 paise to close at a record low of 90.97 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday, as strong dollar demand from metal importers and persistent foreign fund outflows dented investor sentiment.

Forex traders said rising geopolitical uncertainties, including renewed US expansionary signals, have increased risk aversion and kept emerging market currencies under pressure.

Moreover, a sluggish domestic stock market triggered by an exodus of foreign capital further weighed on the local unit, they said. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 90.91 and lost ground, touched an intraday low of 91.06, and finally ended the day at an all-time low of 90.97 (provisional) against the American currency. On Monday, the rupee depreciated by 12 paise to close at 90.90 against the greenback.

On December 16, 2025, the rupee reached its lowest intra-day level of 91.14 and its previous lowest closing level of 90.93 against the American currency.

Choudhary further noted that the rupee is expected to trade with a negative bias on foreign fund outflows and risk aversion in global markets over the US stance on Greenland.

## US futures, world shares sink over Trump's Greenland push

TOKYO, JAN 20 / AP

US futures fell sharply and European markets shed more than 1% on tensions driven by the Trump administration's new tariff threats over Greenland.

France's CAC 40 slipped 1.2% to 8,014.42, while Germany's DAX lost 1.5% to 24,581.44. Britain's FTSE 100 shed 1.3% to 10,068.04. The future for the S&P 500 sank 1.8% while that for the Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 1.6%.

Trump said Saturday that he would charge a 10% import tax starting in February on goods from Denmark, Norway, Sweden, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Finland because of their opposition to American control of Greenland.

Trump's threats have sparked outrage and a flurry of diplomatic activity across Europe, as leaders consider possible countermeasures, including retaliatory tariffs and the first-ever use of the European Union's anti-coercion instrument.

Meanwhile, US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, speaking on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland, asserted that America's relations with Europe remain strong. He urged trading partners to "take a deep breath" and let tensions driven by the tariff threats over Greenland "play out".

In Asian trading, Tokyo's benchmark Nikkei 225 lost 1.1% to 29,991.10 after Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi called a snap election.

tion for Feb 8. Yields on long-term Japanese government bonds surged after Takaichi indicated Monday she planned to dissolve parliament and hold an election, aiming to capitalise on her strong public opinion ratings. She also has proposed temporarily suspending the food tax.

Expectations that Takaichi will take a renewed electoral mandate to raise government spending have revived worries over Japan's national finances, pushing yields sharply higher, while prices of such investments have fallen as investors sold their holdings.

The yield on the 40-year government bond surged to a record 4% on Tuesday, while yields on other long-term bonds also have been surging to decades-high levels.

Chinese markets also declined. Hong Kong's Hang Seng gave up 0.3% to 26,487.51, while the Shanghai Composite ended nearly unchanged at 4,113.65.

In South Korea, the Kospi dropped 0.4% to 4,885.75, while Australia's S&P/ASX 200 lost 0.7% to 8,815.90.

Taiwan's Taiex gained 0.4% and the Senso in India declined 0.8%.

"Geopolitical events will remain in focus today, particularly any talks that may take place in Davos," said Michael Brown, a senior research strategist at Pepperstone, referring to the World Economic Forum.

This week will bring more corporate earnings in the US and an update on inflation preferred by the Federal Reserve for making policy decisions.

## Gold futures shatter Rs 1.5 lakh/10gram barrier; silver hits record

NEW DELHI, JAN 20 / PTI

GOLD extended its record-breaking run to breach the Rs 1.5 lakh per 10-gram mark in futures trade on Tuesday, while silver surged to a lifetime high of Rs 3.27 lakh per kg as investors rushed to safe-haven assets amid mounting global tensions.

On the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), gold futures for February delivery climbed Rs 6,861, or 4.7% per cent, to record Rs 1,52,500 per 10 grams after settling at Rs 145,639 per 10 grams in the previous session.

Analysts said the yellow metal has been on a relentless upward trajectory since the start of 2026, tracking record gains in the international prices and a weaker rupee.

Silver, too, continued its blistering rally for the second straight session, appreciating by Rs 17,723, or nearly 6 per cent, to hit a new record of Rs 3,27,998 per kilogram on the MCX.

The white metal had breached the Rs 3 lakh milestone on Monday, before closing at Rs 3,10,275 per kg.

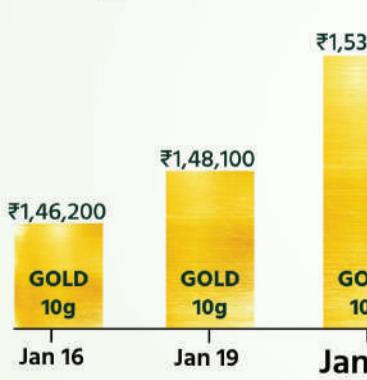
Over the last two trading sessions, silver has zoomed by Rs 32,187, or 11.18 per cent, from Rs 2,87,762 per kg recorded on January 16.

## GOLD & SILVER

PTI  
GRAPHICS

10g = ₹1,53,200\*

1kg = ₹3,23,000\*



## RUPEE ₹ VS DOLLAR \$

PTI  
GRAPHICS

1 USD = 90.97 INR\*INDIA

90.17 (+1p) 90.23 (-6p) 90.34 (-11p) 90.78 (-44p) 90.90 (-12p) 90.97\* (-7p)



Spot gold prices for 24-carat in Delhi for per 10 grams

Silver prices are in national capital for per kg

\*Provisional

BSE SENSEX

TOP LOSERS

January 20, 2026

PTI  
GRAPHICS

%	POINTS
-3.96	2,050.00
-3.89	931.75
-3.72	265.40
-3.59	271.25
-3.29	416.00
-3.23	1,621.30
-3.15	6,908.00
-2.96	4,795.00
-2.85	1,960.30
-2.78	3,836.00

BSE SENSEX

TOP GAINERS

January 20, 2026

PTI  
GRAPHICS

%	POINTS
+0.38	931.15

BSE SENSEX

TOP LOSERS

January 20, 2026

PTI  
GRAPHICS

%	POINTS



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## IndiGo ops stabilised; adequate pilots to comply with flight duty norms: DGCA

NEW DELHI, JAN 20 / PTI

AVIATION watchdog DGCA on Tuesday said sustained regulatory oversight as well as corrective measures have helped stabilise operations at IndiGo, and the airline now has an adequate number of pilots to ensure compliance with the new flight duty norms without disruptions. Days after slapping penalties totalling Rs 22.20 crore on IndiGo for last month's massive flight disruptions, the regulator also said it was closely monitoring the airline's operations with "particular emphasis on roster integrity, crew availability, buffer adequacy, system robustness, and adherence to FDNL requirements".

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) said that during the review meeting on January 19, IndiGo reported adequate pilot availability against projected operational requirements after February 10. Citing the airline's submissions, the watchdog said there are 2,400 Pilots in Command (PICs) as against the requirement for 2,280, and the number of First Officers is 2,240 compared to the requirement for 2,050. In the wake of the massive disruptions, DGCA had curtailed the airline's winter schedule by 10 per cent until February 10.

## Corporates to register 6 pc revenue rise in FY27: Fitch

NEW DELHI JAN 20 / PTI

FITCH Ratings on Tuesday said the aggregate revenue for its rated corporates will rise by 6 per cent in FY27 on steady GDP growth and an improved consumer-spending outlook, following a comprehensive reduction in GST rates.

However, corporates could face some downside risks if additional US tariffs are imposed or in case of a sharp depreciation of the rupee.

Fitch has recently revised India's GDP growth forecast for FY26 to 7.4 per cent, from 6.9 per cent, and expects annual growth of 6.4 per cent and 6.2 per cent over FY-27 and FY28, respectively.

The rating agency expects GDP growth and robust infrastructure spending to underpin healthy demand for cement and building materials, electricity, petroleum products, steel, and engineering and construction (E&C) companies during FY27. Fitch-rated Indian corporates generally have low direct exposure to the current US tariffs, but unaffected sectors, including pharmaceuticals, could be hit by further US tariff announcements.

Direct effects on domestically focused sectors, such as oil and gas (upstream and downstream), cement and building materials, engineering and construction, telecom, and utilities, should be minimal, supported by local demand and regulatory stability.

## Mutual fund industry body AMFI seeks tax relief

NEW DELHI, JAN 20 / PTI

THE Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI) has urged the government to reinstate indexation benefits for debt funds, and allow mutual funds to offer pension-focused schemes with tax benefits similar to the National Pension System (NPS) in forthcoming Budget for 2026-27.

The Union Budget will be presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Lok Sabha on February 1.

The AMFI also demanded enhancement of the tax-free exemption limit on long-term capital gains (LTCG) from equity investments to provide greater relief to retail and long-term investors.

In its recommendations for Union Budget for FY 2026-27, the industry body has urged the government to raise the tax-free

exemption limit for equity LTCG from Rs 1.25 lakh to Rs 2 lakh.

"In order to encourage stable long-term capital in the mutual fund industry, exemption from

long-term capital gains on units held for more than 5 years is recommended. This would ensure investors remain invested for longer periods," AMFI said.

Also, it has requested restoration of long-term indexation benefit for debt schemes of mutual funds which was withdrawn in Bud-

## IMF upgrades India's FY26 GDP growth to 7.3%

NEW DELHI, JAN 20 / PTI

THE IMF on Monday raised India's growth projection to 7.3 per cent for fiscal 2025-26, up 0.7 percentage point from its October forecast, on the back of better-than-expected performance of the economy.

The Washington-headquartered multilateral lending agency has also revised India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth forecast to 6.4 per cent for fiscal year 2026-27 beginning April 1, 2026, from its earlier estimate of 6.2 per cent.

"In India, growth is revised upward by 0.7 percentage point to 7.3 per cent for 2025 (fiscal FY26), reflecting the better-than-expected outturn in the third quarter of the year and strong momentum in the fourth quarter," it said in its World Economic Outlook (WEO) update.

Growth is projected to moderate to 6.4 per cent in 2026-27 and 2027-28 as cyclical and temporary factors wane, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said.

According to India's statistics ministry, GDP during April-September of 2025-26 registered a growth rate of 8 per cent, on the back of a robust 8.2 per cent growth in July-September period.

The Indian economy is likely to expand by 7.4 per cent in the current fiscal, according to the First Advance Estimates released by Ministry of Statistics and Pro-



gramme Implementation (MoSPI). The growth during 2024-25 fiscal was 6.5 per cent.

On inflation, IMF said it is expected to go back to near target levels after a marked decline in 2025 driven by subdued food prices.

The Reserve Bank has a target to maintain consumer price index (CPI) based headline inflation at 4 per cent, with a margin of 2 per cent

on the either side.

The IMF update further said that the global growth is projected to remain resilient at 3.3 per cent in 2026 and at 3.2 per cent in 2027.

The forecast marks a small upward revision for 2026 and no change for 2027 compared with that in the October 2025 WEO.

In emerging market and developing economies, growth is expected

to continue to hover just above 4 per cent in 2026 and 2027.

Relative to the projection in October, growth in 2025 for China is revised upward by 0.2 percentage point to 5 per cent, the IMF said.

Global headline inflation is expected to decline from an estimated 4.1 per cent in 2025 to 3.8 per cent in 2026 and further to 3.4 per cent in 2027, it said.

## Govt to extend quality certification fee concessions for small firms by 3 years

NEW DELHI, JAN 20 / PTI

THE government is set to extend quality certification fee concessions by three years beyond the current mid-2026 deadline to support small and medium enterprises, a senior official said on Tuesday, as India pushes a quality-first approach to manufacturing.

The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) has moved a proposal for the extension, which provides 80 per cent fee reduction for micro units, 50 per cent for small enterprises and 20 per cent for medium-sized firms.

"Very recently we have moved a proposal, it is likely to fructify... this concession would be available for the next three years," said Bharat Khera, additional secretary in the Consumer Affairs Ministry, at a PHD Chamber of Commerce event.

India needs to shift from compliance-driven to culture-driven quality standards to transform its Viksit Bharat manufacturing vision into reality, Khera said, warning that quality is not a compliance cost but "an enabler for market access".

The BIS has published over 23,000 standards with about 95 per cent aligned with international benchmarks, but implementation challenges persist, particularly for small and medium enterprises that account for 80 per cent of BIS licensees.

"Viksit Bharat is not just the scale of manufacturing. It's about credibility, consistency and trust in Indian products," Khera said.

BIS has issued 55,000 certification licenses, with half obtained voluntarily by manufacturers despite



no regulatory mandate, indicating growing industry commitment to quality standards, according to H J S Pasricha, BIS deputy director general for certification. Quality control orders currently cover over 700 products under mandatory certification, while another 900 products are under voluntary certification.

The government has digitised the certification platform with compliance rates reaching 96-97 per cent over the past two years for Indian manufacturers obtaining certification within 30-90 days. BIS operates with about 1,400 staff, including 600-700 technical personnel, but relies on 15,000 industry experts working across more than 400 technical committees to develop standards.

The organisation has recognised 700 laboratories for testing, though officials acknowledged gaps remain in sectors like medical devices. Testing infrastructure remains a challenge in sectors without mandatory

standards, officials said, urging industry associations to identify specific gaps and locations where facilities are needed. Private laboratories have emerged quickly in sectors with quality control orders due to clear business opportunities, but investment lags in other areas.

The Consumer Affairs Ministry's National Test House is assessing gaps in testing infrastructure after recent tours of industrial clusters in Rodera near Ahmedabad, Shindra in Aurangabad and Vikram Udyogpuri in Ujjain.

Officials said they are prepared to establish government-funded facilities where private sector investment is insufficient. BIS removed the requirement for manufacturers to maintain in-house laboratories, now accepting cluster-based facilities or shared testing arrangements.

The organisation also made its quality assurance plan recommendation rather than mandatory.

## Switzerland committed to rules-based global order: Prez

Barun Jha

DAVOS, JAN 20

SWITZERLAND on Tuesday said it supports a rules-based international order, international law, human rights, and free trade and these values have always defined the country.

In the opening plenary address at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting here, Swiss President Guy Parmelin said Switzerland wishes to further diversify its international relations, particularly in the trade and scientific fields. "Even in the current climate of protectionism, we believe in the success of free trade and want to expand our network of agreements in this area," he said.

To achieve this, we must be able to conduct negotiations on equal footing, negotiations that yield positive results for the benefit of all parties, he underlined.

"Such mutually advantageous agreements don't just appear out of thin air, but we have the capacity to build them step by step. Personal



contacts and a willingness to engage in dialogue are essential for this. We possess these qualities," he said.

The president said the WEF has always contributed to this dialogue and thanked the Forum for offering the country, once again this year in Switzerland, this extraordinary international platform for exchange.

He said such a large turnout of global leaders in Davos takes on a special significance this year, which began tragically for Switzerland and thanked the countries concerned for the support and solidarity they showed us during the Crans-Montana tragedy.

The year 2025 revealed a number of these challenges and experienced geopolitical, economic, and digital upheavals on a global scale, he said.

"The year 2026, barely begun, already hints at the upheavals to come, and the hotspots of crisis as well. The difficult situations in Ukraine, Gaza, and Sudan have been compounded by those in Venezuela and Iran, to name just a few," he said. (PTI)

## Jio BlackRock AMC attracts 10 lakh investors, 18 pc first-time participants

NEW DELHI, JAN 20 / PTI

JIO BlackRock Asset Management, which launched its services in May, has built an investor base of 10 lakh, with nearly 18 per cent comprising first-time mutual fund investors, its MD and CEO Sid Swaminathan said on Tuesday. The joint venture between Jio Financial Services and BlackRock has also seen strong participation from investors beyond major metros, with 40 per cent of its retail investors coming from B-30 cities, significantly higher than the industry average of 28 per cent.

B-30 cities in India refer to cities beyond the top 30. Speaking to reporters here, Swaminathan attributed this deeper market penetration to its technology-led approach and sustained focus on investor educa-

tion. Jio BlackRock AMC manages assets worth over Rs 13,700 crore, with equities accounting for around 30 per cent of the total assets under management, while the remaining 70 per cent is invested in fixed income and cash.



Looking ahead, the company plans to focus on key strategic initiatives, including the launch of Specialised Investment Funds (SIFs) and exchange-traded funds (ETFs), and on offering international investment exposure through GIFT City. "We have recently received a no-objection certificate from Sebi to launch

Specialised Investment Funds (SIFs), and we are very excited about this opportunity," he said. The initiative will enable Indian investors to access global allocation opportunities in a responsible manner, while also allowing international investors to tap into differentiated investment opportunities in India.

Alongside this, the company is exploring the launch of exchange-traded funds (ETFs) to ensure investors have access to a comprehensive set of core investment building blocks.

The year could also see the rollout of a series of mutual fund offerings. The active funds will be powered by BlackRock's Systematic Active Equity (SAE) platform, the same platform underpinning its maiden active equity offering, the JioBlackRock Flexicap Fund.

# First T20I against NZ Suryakumar's form under scrutiny

Kushan Sarkar

NAGPUR, JAN 20

INDIA captain Suryakumar Yadav will enter the five match T20I series against New Zealand here on Wednesday under a spotlight that goes beyond leadership, as the hosts look to iron out lingering batting concerns ahead of their World Cup title defence next month.

Since taking over as India's T20 captain in 2024, Suryakumar's record as a leader has been impressive, with the team winning more than 70 percent of its matches. For much of that period, results masked his struggles with the bat. Now, with expectations rising at home and the World Cup less than three weeks away, individual form has become harder to ignore.

India's T20 side has largely operated on autopilot over the past two years, built around clearly defined roles and the confidence of top performing Indian Premier League regulars. Occasional defeats have done little to disturb a settled unit, but the pressure of defending a world title on home soil has sharpened scrutiny, particularly on the captain.

New Zealand arrive with momentum of their own. Over the past year, they have achieved several historic firsts in India, including a Test series clean sweep and a maiden bilateral ODI series victory. While India have dominated the T20 format under Suryakumar, winning 18 of 25 matches, the visitors represent a serious test,



with the depth to challenge India's combinations.

India's success in the shortest format has been driven by Abhishek Sharma's aggressive starts and Varun Chakravarthy's control through the middle overs. Those strengths remain intact, but Suryakumar's lean run has emerged as the most visible weakness in an otherwise formidable line up.

The year 2025 proved difficult for the Mumbai batter, who managed only 218 runs in 19 matches without a single fifty. His strike rate dipped, and his decision to drop down the order to No 4 to accommodate Tilak Varma did little to ease the pressure. Opposing bowlers have increasingly targeted him with hard length deliveries, and questions around the condition of his right wrist have added to the concern.

With Tilak sidelined following ab-

dominal surgery, India face a selection dilemma that could directly affect the captain's role. Shreyas Iyer, one of the most reliable players of spin in the Indian set up, is a strong contender for the middle order. His inclusion could allow Suryakumar to return to his preferred No 3 position.

Alternatively, the management could turn to Ishan Kishan, who is in strong form but is best suited to the top of the order. While Kishan's attacking style fits the powerplay, accommodating him would again force the captain into an unfamiliar role, a risk India may prefer to avoid at this stage. The series also marks the return of key players rested during the ODI leg. All-rounder Hardik Pandya adds balance and flexibility, allowing India to strengthen either batting or bowling.

Pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah's

return bolsters the attack, while Varun Chakravarthy remains a major weapon, particularly against a New Zealand batting line up that has limited exposure to his variations.

Varun's duels with Daryl Mitchell and Glenn Phillips are expected to be pivotal. With Kuldeep Yadav searching for rhythm, the responsibility on the mystery spinner to control the middle overs is likely to increase.

For New Zealand, the presence of Devon Conway, captain Mitchell Santner, Jacob Duffy and the Mitchell Phillips pairing ensures they remain a well-rounded challenge. The series offers India a valuable opportunity to address unresolved questions, with Suryakumar's form and positioning at the centre of their final World Cup preparations.

Match starts at 7 pm. PTI

# Bracewell's fitness under watch as Kiwis juggle squad

Monitor New Service

NEW DELHI, JAN 20

NEW Zealand will closely monitor all-rounder Michael Bracewell's fitness during the five match T20I series against India, coach Rob Walter said on Monday, as the visitors look to manage player workload following their historic ODI series victory. Bracewell suffered a minor left calf strain while fielding during the third ODI at Indore and did not bowl thereafter. While the injury is not considered serious, his availability for the T20I series will depend on how he responds to treatment in the coming days.

"Bracewell will be treated and monitored before a decision on his involvement is confirmed," Walter said in a statement issued by New Zealand Cricket, adding that the team would need to recover quickly with the shortest format beginning on Wednesday in Nagpur.

New Zealand sealed a landmark 2 to 1 ODI series win at the Holkar Stadium, their first bilateral ODI series triumph in India, a result Walter described as a product of strong individual performances and collective effort. The achievement, however, has left little recovery time ahead of the T20I leg of the tour.

Bracewell has travelled with the squad to Nagpur and remains part of the group as the team assesses his readiness. His potential absence would test New Zealand's all



round depth, particularly given the demands of the T20 format.

Walter also confirmed that pacer Kristian Clarke will stay with the squad after being added to the T20I group for the first three matches. Clarke was drafted in amid minor injury concerns within the camp and impressed during the ODI series.

"We want to make sure we have sufficient pace bowling options early in the series," Walter said, explaining that Clarke's continued presence would help manage workloads as players transition between formats.

Clarke made a strong impression in his maiden ODI series, finishing with seven wickets across three matches, including the scalps of Virat Kohli on two occasions. He also contributed useful lower order runs and was sharp in the field, attributes that strengthened his case for an extended stay with the squad.

"What stood out was not just his skill but his calmness under pressure," Walter said, praising the young pacer's ability to adapt quickly on his first tour of India.

## AUSTRALIAN OPEN

# Australians shine on opening day

Monitor News Desk

MELBOURNE, JAN 20 / AP

GAE Monfils' long and colourful association with the Australian Open came to an emotional end on Tuesday as the 39-year-old Frenchman bowed out in the first round, drawing warm applause and chants from a crowd that has embraced him for nearly two decades at Melbourne Park. In what was his 20th appearance at the tournament and 69th Grand Slam outing overall, Monfils went down 6-7 (3), 7-5, 6-4, 7-5 to Australian qualifier Dane Sweeny in a match that lasted close to four hours and oscillated between nostalgia and fierce competitiveness. Monfils had led by a set and a break, with a second-round meeting against eighth seed Ben Shelton looming, but the younger Australian refused to yield.

Sweeny, playing his first Grand Slam main draw match, matched Monfils for athleticism and resilience, scrambling for seemingly lost balls and finding winners from improbable

positions. His effort was rewarded by a partisan crowd that urged him on, many wearing Australia's sporting colours and waving inflatable kangaroos. For Monfils, the loss marked the closing chapter of a career he had announced would end this season. Known for his explosive movement, acrobatic shot-making and capacity to turn defence into attack, he produced flashes of vintage brilliance, including a trademark leaping forehand that drew loud cheers. But the physical toll was evident as the match wore on, with the Frenchman frequently leaning on his racket between points.

Breaking with convention, Monfils

remained on court after the match to address the crowd. "My journey started here a long time ago," he said. "Now it's 2026 and somehow this feels like the finish line. Thank you for this amazing ride." His wife, Ukrainian star Elina Svitolina, watched from the stands as the crowd responded with sustained applause. Monfils leaves Melbourne with lasting memories, having reached the quarterfinals twice and built a special rapport with fans through his showmanship and fighting spirit. Earlier in the day, India's Niki Poonacha and his Thai partner Pruchya Isaro also exited the tournament after a narrow first round loss in the men's doubles. The Indo Thai wild card pairing fell 6-7 (3), 5-7 to Spanish duo Pedro Martinez and Jaume Munar in a closely contested match lasting one hour and 51 minutes. There was little to separate the teams, but Poonacha and Isaro were unable to capitalise on key moments, converting just one of three break point opportunities while dropping serve twice.

## UP Dominators script dramatic comeback

Monitor News Service

NOIDA, JAN 20

UP Dominators produced a spirited comeback to defeat Delhi Dangal Warriors 5-4 in a Pro Wrestling League match here on Tuesday, overturning a three-bout deficit to register a memorable victory and move to the top of the standings.

Delhi seized early control of the tie, beginning with a confident performance by Vafaeipour Hadi Bakhtiar in the 86kg men's category. The Iranian wrestler used solid defence and timely scoring to defeat Mykhalov Vasyl 7-4, giving Delhi the opening point.

The lead was extended in the 76kg women's bout, where Anastasiya Alpyeева recovered after conceding an early takedown to dominate Ojo Damola Hannah 11-2. Alpyeева's superior control and scoring in the second period ensured Delhi maintained momentum.

Delhi tightened their grip on the contest in the 74kg men's category as Azerbaijan's Turan Bayramov adopted a patient and disciplined approach to edge Abhimanyu Mandwal 3-0, pushing the Warriors

to a commanding 3-0 lead.

UP finally opened their account through Tapsya Gahlawat in the 57kg women's contest. The Under 20 world champion wrestled with composure, combining an early push out and activity point with sharp second period takedowns to secure an 8-2 victory over Karla Gonzalez.

Delhi responded strongly in the 65kg men's bout through captain and Under-23 world champion Sujeet Kalkal, who overwhelmed Vishal Kali Raman with sustained attacking pressure to stretch the lead to 4-1.

The turning point came in the 57kg men's contest, where Rahul Deswal kept UP in contention. After conceding early push outs, Deswal produced a decisive four point takedown during the Power Minute to defeat Shubham Kaushik 8-5.

UP's resurgence gathered pace in the heavyweight category, as Jaspooran Singh controlled the centre of the mat to claim a narrow 3-1 win over Ronak, reducing the deficit to a single point. Captain Nisha Dahiya then rose to the occasion in the 62kg women's contest, edging Anjli 9-5 in a high intensity bout to level the tie at 4-4.

## Vaishnavi replaces injured Kamalini in MI squad for WPL

Monitor News Service

VADODARA, JAN 20

INDIA spinner Vaishnavi Sharma has been named as a replacement for injured wicketkeeper batter G Kamalini in the Mumbai Indians squad for the remainder of the Women's Premier League, the organisers said on Tuesday.

The 17-year-old Kamalini featured in five matches this season, opening the batting in four of them. She struggled for form, scoring 75 runs at a strike rate of 97.40, before being ruled out due to injury. The WPL said Vaishnavi will join the Mumbai Indians for a fee of Rs 30 lakh.

The 20-year-old left arm spinner was part of India's Under 19 World Cup winning squad in 2025 and made her senior international debut last month during India's five match T20I series against Sri Lanka, which the hosts won 5-0. Vaishnavi impressed with her control and consistency in that series, picking up five wickets with her accurate left arm spin.

# FIFA boss Infantino slams Senegal's conduct in final

RABAT (MOROCCO), JAN 20 / AP

FIFA president Gianni Infantino has criticised Senegal's players, coaching staff and some supporters for what he described as "unacceptable" behaviour during the chaotic closing stages of the Africa Cup of Nations final, despite the team going on to win the title. Senegal secured a 1-0 extra time victory over host nation Morocco in Rabat on Sunday, but the final was overshadowed by extraordinary scenes at the end of regulation time, when Senegal players left the pitch in protest over refereeing decisions, forcing a 15-minute stoppage.

"The ugly scenes witnessed must be condemned and never repeated," Infantino said in a post on social media after attending the match. He added that he expected the Confederation of African Football to take appropriate disciplinary action. CAF later echoed that view, describing the incidents as unacceptable and confirming that it is reviewing footage from the match before referring the matter to its disciplinary bodies.

The controversy erupted deep into stoppage time of a scoreless match. Senegal believed they had scored what could have been a decisive goal, only for it to be ruled out for a foul. Minutes later, following a video review, Morocco were awarded a penalty after forward Brahim Diaz was



judged to have been pulled down during a corner.

Senegal coach Pape Thiaw then led his players off the pitch in protest, delaying the taking of the penalty. Tensions spilled into the stands, where clashes were reported between some Senegal supporters and police.

Infantino condemned both the walk off and the violence. "It is unacceptable to leave the field of play in this manner, and equally, violence cannot be tolerated in our sport," he said. "We must always respect the decisions taken by the match officials. Teams must compete on the pitch and within the Laws of the Game."

When play eventually resumed, Diaz missed the penalty in remarkable fashion, attempting a weak chipped effort that was comfortably saved by Senegal goalkeeper Édouard Mendy. The match went into extra time, where Senegal struck the winning goal four minutes into the first period through Pape Gueye.

## Kostoulas stunner earns Brighton late draw against Bournemouth

Monitor News Service

BRIGHTON (ENGLAND), JAN 20 / AP

TEENAGE substitute Charalampos Kostoulas produced a moment of brilliance deep into stoppage time to rescue a 1-1 draw for Brighton and Hove Albion against Bournemouth in their Premier League clash here on Monday.

The 18-year-old Greek international, introduced late in the match, scored with an acrobatic overhead kick that denied Bournemouth a first league win at the Amex Stadium. With seconds remaining, centre back Jan Paul van Hecke headed the ball into Kostoulas's path, and the youngster controlled it on his chest before executing a perfectly timed bicycle kick from close range that flew into the top corner.

The dramatic equaliser extended Brighton's unbeaten run to five matches and kept Fabian Hürzeler's side in 12th place in the table, three points and three positions above their south coast rivals.

Brighton began brightly but struggled to sustain their early momentum, allowing Bournemouth to grow into the contest. The visitors took the lead in the 32nd minute following a controversial penalty decision.

# Slow down and deep read to think clearly

JT Torres, Washington and Lee University and Jeff

HAMDEN (US), JAN 20

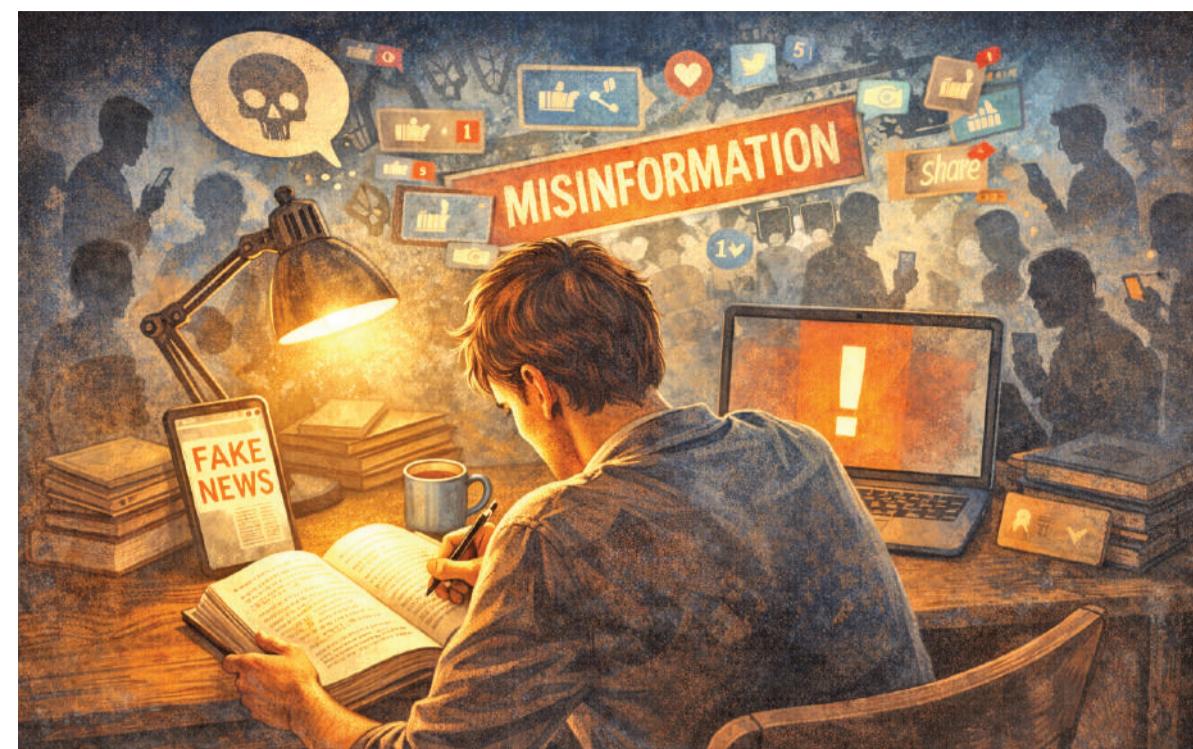
The average American checks their phone more than 140 times a day and spends over four hours daily on it. In that attention economy, tech companies, influencers, and content creators are competing relentlessly for engagement. One consequence of this competition has been the rapid spread of misinformation, which thrives in fast, frictionless environments.

In this challenging information landscape, strong critical reading skills are more necessary than ever. Yet literacy indicators point in the opposite direction. Reading comprehension scores continue to decline, many parents read less frequently to children, and a growing number of college students struggle to finish entire books. At the same time, social media platforms encourage habits of skimming, scrolling, and sharing rather than careful evaluation.

As researchers who study how people process information through reading, we argue that deep reading offers a powerful counterweight to misinformation. Beyond improving comprehension, it can reduce stress, build empathy, and strengthen a sense of purpose. While it demands more effort than scrolling, there are practical ways to rebuild this skill.

Smartphones and social media fulfil real needs, from relieving boredom to maintaining social connections and staying informed. But the sheer volume of information can overwhelm attention and impair judgement. Cognitive science shows that constant scrolling trains the brain toward passive consumption rather than active evaluation.

Social media algorithms reinforce this pattern by showing users content similar to what they have



already engaged with. Repeated exposure makes information feel more credible, even when it is false, a phenomenon known as the illusory truth effect. When multiple sources repeat the same claim, it can seem trustworthy simply through familiarity.

Deep reading works differently. It involves intentionally engaging with a text by analysing arguments, drawing connections, considering alternative perspectives, and questioning meaning. This process activates critical thinking and empathy, allowing readers to move beyond surface impressions.

The challenge is that deep reading is effortful. It can feel uncomfortable, especially when a text is complex or challenges existing beliefs. Confusion, irritation, and mental fatigue are common. In contrast, scrolling offers instant stimulation with little cognitive cost. Given this, why would anyone choose the harder path?

Mindless scrolling may feel relaxing, but it often carries hidden costs. Research links heavy smartphone and social media use with increased boredom, loneliness, and anxiety. Doomsscrolling in particular is associated with heightened existential worry and cynicism about others.

By contrast, sustained attention and mental effort, though tiring, can deepen meaning and strengthen social connection. People are more motivated to engage in challenging tasks when they align with personal goals and when those efforts are shared or recognised by others. This is one reason social contexts are so important for reading.

Teachers, for example, often guide students through longer texts alongside structured discussion. Evidence suggests that sustained reading, especially when paired with conversation, can foster long term engagement with books. While

debates continue over whether schools should prioritise excerpts or full texts, extended reading in social settings appears to support deeper comprehension and enjoyment.

Interestingly, social media itself can sometimes support this process. Online communities such as BookTok show that close analysis still has an audience. Users share detailed discussions of novels, films, and popular culture, demonstrating that critical engagement can coexist with digital platforms when the norms encourage reflection rather than speed.

Deep reading does not require rejecting digital life altogether. It begins with awareness. Understanding how fast paced digital environments shape attention can help people make more intentional choices about how they consume information.

(The Conversation)

# Severe solar storm heading for Earth

Monitor News Desk

NEW DELHI, JAN 20

A POWERFUL burst of solar activity from the Sun is heading towards Earth and is expected to trigger vivid auroral displays in regions far from the poles on Monday evening and early Tuesday, while also posing risks to satellites, aviation, and navigation systems.

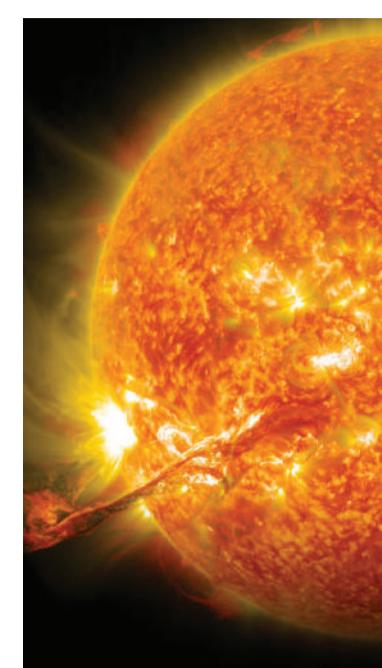
The National Weather Service's Space Weather Prediction Center (SWPC) said a severe solar radiation storm, rated four out of five on its intensity scale, is currently under way. Such an event has not been observed for more than two decades.

"An S4 severe solar radiation storm is now in progress. This is the largest solar radiation storm in over 20 years," the centre said in a post on social media. The last storm of similar magnitude occurred in October 2003, during the so called Halloween space weather events that caused power outages in parts of Europe and damaged infrastructure elsewhere.

Solar radiation storms occur when high energy particles released by the Sun reach Earth at near light speed. These particles can increase radiation exposure for astronauts aboard the International Space Station and for passengers and crew on flights travelling along polar routes.

The SWPC said it has alerted airlines, NASA, the Federal Aviation Administration, emergency management agencies and power grid operators to prepare for potential impacts. Satellite operators have also been advised to take precautionary measures to protect spacecraft and maintain accurate positioning.

"We've been making direct con-



tact with critical infrastructure operators to ensure they are aware of the situation," said SWPC forecaster Shawn Dahl.

In addition to the radiation storm, a severe geomagnetic storm reached Earth earlier on Monday. Geomagnetic storms are caused by coronal mass ejections, large clouds of plasma and magnetic fields ejected from the Sun's outer atmosphere. When directed at Earth, they can disturb the planet's magnetic field and interfere with power grids and satellite systems.

The latest event was triggered by an X class solar flare, the most intense category of solar flare, making it the first major flare of the year, according to scientists. While the storm could temporarily affect satellite-based communications and reduce the accuracy of GPS systems, experts said widespread disruption for the public is unlikely.

# Cargo spill covers UK beach in fries

Monitor News Service

NEW DELHI, JAN 20

A STRETCH of coastline in south-east England has been left covered in uncooked French fries and onions after containers from cargo ships were lost at sea during recent storms, prompting a large-scale clean-up operation involving local authorities and volunteers.

The clean-up began on Tuesday along parts of the East Sussex coast after containers from two vessels went overboard late last year and earlier this month, the county council said. Among the debris washing ashore were thousands of plastic bags filled with frozen chips and onions, believed to have come from a container ship that lost part of its cargo during a storm on January 8.

Residents in the resort town of Eastbourne said onions began appearing on beaches last week, with volunteers stepping in to collect the plastic packaging before further



damage could be caused to wildlife.

Joel Bonnici, an Eastbourne resident, said the situation escalated over the weekend when a new wave of debris arrived. While hiking near Falling Sands on Saturday, he said he and his partner had been picking up onion bags along the path before encountering a beach covered with packets of French fries.

"From a distance, you would think the beach was covered in yellow sand, like on a tropical is-

land," Bonnici said, adding that the scale of the spill was immediately apparent. The couple abandoned their walk and spent several hours collecting plastic waste alongside other local families.

Environmental group Plastic Free Eastbourne warned that the spill posed a serious risk to marine life, particularly seals that frequent the area. The group said thousands of plastic bags had washed ashore and urged volunteers to assist with clean-up efforts.

# Season 2 of Netflix series 'Kohrra' to debut on Feb 11

Monitor News Service

MUMBAI, JAN 20

NETFLIX on Tuesday announced that the second season of its acclaimed police procedural series Kohrra will premiere on February 11, returning viewers to the sombre landscapes and emotionally layered storytelling that defined its debut outing. After earning widespread praise for its restrained narrative style and character-driven approach, the new season promises a fresh investigation set against Punjab's cold and muted winter backdrop. The series, which built a strong following for its ability to find tension in silence and subtext, shifts location and emotional focus while retaining its brooding tone.

Actor Barun Sobti reprises his role as assistant sub inspector Amarpal Garundi, a character whose internal conflicts were central to the first season. Season two sees Garundi leaving the town of Jagran and taking

charge at the Dalerpura Police Station. There, he reports to a new commanding officer, Dhanwant Kaur, played by Mona Singh, who joins the franchise in a pivotal role.

According to the official logline, the two officers share an uncompromising commitment to their work, even as unresolved personal histories threaten to resurface. The season explores how their contrasting personalities collide and converge while navigating a complex case, continuing the show's focus on emo-

tional realism alongside procedural detail.

Kohrra is created and written by Gunjot Chopra, Diggi Sisodia and Sudip Sharma, and produced by A Film Squad Production in association with Act Three. The second season marks a creative evolution for the series, with Sharma stepping into the director's role alongside Faisal Rahman. Sharma is best known for his work on the Prime Video series Paatal Lok.

Speaking about the new season, Sharma said the team remained committed to portraying Punjab with authenticity, while grounding the characters in experiences that resonate beyond the region. He described the season as an emotional journey, adding that the performances by Sobti and Singh elevate the narrative. Netflix India's series head Tanya Bami described Kohrra as a cult favourite that has earned critical acclaim and awards for its understated storytelling.



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