

India Monitor

NEW DELHI, MONDAY, FEBRUARY 09, 2026 | PAGES 12 | PRICE: ₹6 | VOL 29 | NO 115

Over a billion Android phones face security risk, Google warns

Google has warned that Android devices running version 12 or older no longer receive security patches, leaving roughly one billion phones vulnerable to malware and spyware. Latest distribution data show only 57.9 per cent of devices operate on Android 13 or newer, with about 42.1 per cent exposed to potential cyber threats. Phones released before 2021 are most affected. While Google Play Protect still offers malware scanning, the company advises users unable to upgrade beyond Android 12.



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India can buy \$500 bn in US goods in five years: Goyal

Rajesh Rai

NEW DELHI, FEB 8

INDIA will face no difficulty in purchasing goods worth USD 500 billion from the United States over the next five years under the proposed bilateral trade framework, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Sunday, describing the figure as conservative for an economy targeting long-term expansion.

Speaking in an interview, Goyal said rising domestic demand for energy, aviation equipment, advanced technology and industrial inputs would comfortably support such levels of imports. The commitment forms part of the joint statement issued by both countries outlining the first phase of a broader trade agree-



ment, under which India signalled its intention to increase purchases of US energy products, aircraft and parts, technology goods, precious metals and coking coal.

"My sense is that this is an extremely conservative number," Goyal said,

pointing to India's ambition of becoming a USD 30 trillion economy. He cited aviation alone as requiring purchases exceeding USD 100 billion, in addition to sustained demand for crude oil, liquefied natural gas and other energy supplies. The minister

said India currently imports around USD 40 billion to USD 50 billion worth of goods annually from the US, but there is scope to significantly expand sourcing. He noted that imports valued at roughly USD 300 billion that India presently buys from other global suppliers could potentially be sourced from the US, with overall import demand expected to grow sharply alongside economic expansion.

Demand is being driven by investments in sectors such as data centres, semiconductor manufacturing and advanced digital infrastructure, he said. Expansion of artificial intelligence and critical manufacturing programmes would require high-end machinery, computing hardware and specialised chips, areas where US suppliers hold technological leadership.

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MODI FLAGS ZERO TOLERANCE ON TERROR

India, Malaysia expand strategic partnership

KUALA LUMPUR, FEB 8 / PTI

INDIA and Malaysia on Sunday agreed to expand cooperation across trade, defence, energy and high-technology sectors, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserting that counterterrorism efforts must admit "no double standards, no compromise" as the two sides emphasised strategic convergence in the Indo-Pacific.

Following wide-ranging talks with Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, the leaders oversaw the signing of 11 agreements and documents covering priority areas including investment, advanced manufacturing and semiconductors. A framework pact to deepen engagement in the semiconductor sector was among the key outcomes, reflecting shared ambitions to strengthen industrial and technological capacity.

Modi said the partnership would support stability in a region emerging as a major engine of global growth,



underlining India's commitment to ASEAN centrality in the Indo-Pacific architecture. He described the bilateral relationship as "special", rooted in longstanding cultural and maritime links, and said deeper trust would help drive economic transformation.

Both sides welcomed efforts to promote the use of local currencies — the Indian Rupee and Malaysian Ringgit — for bilateral trade settlement, a move seen as strengthening financial flexibility. Modi also announced India's decision to establish a Consulate General in Malaysia, signalling intent to expand diplomatic presence.

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Mohan Bhagwat backs Savarkar for Bharat Ratna, consensus on UCC

Monitor News Service

MUMBAI, FEB 8

RASHTRIYA Swayamsevak Sangh chief Mohan Bhagwat on Sunday said a Uniform Civil Code should be formulated through broad consultation and must avoid creating social divisions, while also reiterating his support for conferring the Bharat Ratna posthumously on Hindutva ideologue Vinayak Damodar Savarkar.

Speaking at an interaction during a programme marking the RSS centenary year, Bhagwat emphasised that efforts toward a common civil framework should be rooted in dialogue and trust. "The Uniform Civil Code should be formed by taking everyone into confidence. It shouldn't create divisions," he said, pointing to Uttarakhand's experience of seeking extensive public feedback before passing legislation.

He underlined the need for engagement across communities, stressing that Indian society should not be viewed through the lens of majorities or minorities. "We are all one society," he said, calling for trust, friendship and dialogue with Muslim and Christian communities. Bhagwat also remarked that religious teachings emphasise peace and spirituality, cautioning that religion can become aggressive if stripped of its ethical core.



The RSS chief addressed a range of political and ideological issues during the session. On the long-standing demand to honour Savarkar with India's highest civilian award, Bhagwat said granting the Bharat Ratna would enhance the award's stature. "If Savarkar is given the Bharat Ratna, it will be an honour for the award itself, and its prestige will increase," he said, adding that he would seek reasons for any delay if the opportunity arose. He noted that Savarkar remained respected by many irrespective of official recognition.

The remarks come amid continued political debate over the issue, with some parties supporting the honour in recognition of Savarkar's contributions as a freedom fighter and writer, while others oppose the move citing

his controversial legacy.

Bhagwat also rejected allegations that the RSS exercises behind the scenes influence over the BJP led central government. "We do not engage in backseat driving," he said, asserting that governance decisions are taken by elected leaders. He maintained, however, that the organisation remains committed to supporting national initiatives when required.

On broader ideological questions, Bhagwat responded to a query on whether the RSS benefited politically from the BJP's rise to power, saying the organisation's growth stemmed from its own efforts and long standing commitment to causes such as the Ram temple movement. "Achche din for us came because of the work of volunteers and ideological commitment," he said. Asked about international developments including the India US trade pact, Bhagwat said he had not studied the details but noted that economic engagement involved mutual give and take and should ensure balanced outcomes.

The interaction, attended by personalities from public life and the arts, also touched on the RSS's organisational outlook. Bhagwat said the organisation focuses on inculcating cultural values rather than seeking publicity, adding that excessive self promotion risks fostering arrogance.

Surajkund fair hit by twin mishaps; two arrested

Monitor News Service

FARIDABAD, FEB 8

POLICE on Sunday arrested the operator of a giant fairground swing and one of his staff members, a day after the ride snapped mid-air at the Surajkund International Crafts Mela, killing an on-duty police inspector and injuring 12 others. Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini called for strict enforcement of safety norms at public events following the tragedy.

The accident occurred on Saturday evening during the 39th edition of the annual fair when about 19 people were on the 'Tsunami' swing. Witnesses said the structure tilted before collapsing onto the ground. Inspector Jagdish Prasad, 58, sustained fatal injuries while attempting to rescue riders trapped in the malfunctioning ride.

Police identified those arrested as Mohammad Shakir, proprietor of the Himachal Pradesh-based firm operating the swing, and his employee Nitesh. Authorities said further arrests

were possible as a special investigation team examines potential lapses in maintenance and safety compliance.

Prasad, who joined the Haryana Armed Police in 1989 and was due to retire in March, was cremated after his body was handed over to family members following a post-mortem examination. Officials said his actions in assisting victims during the collapse were widely acknowledged within the department.

The state government announced financial assistance of Rs 1 lakh each for the seriously injured, while Director General of Police Ajay Singhal declared compensation of Rs 1 crore for the inspector's family and assured employment for an eligible relative. Senior police and administrative officials visited the bereaved family and the injured in hospital. A total of 12 people were hurt in the incident, including police personnel deployed at the venue. Five of them have since been discharged after treatment.

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Epstein sought media advice from Noam Chomsky



Agencies

NEW YORK, FEB 8

NEWLY released documents from the US government's investigation into Jeffrey Epstein reveal that the disgraced financier sought advice from renowned linguist Noam Chomsky on how to handle media coverage of sex-trafficking allegations against him in 2019.

The correspondence, included in a fresh batch of files made public, shows Epstein asking whether he should respond to what he described as "putrid" press attention or ignore it altogether. In emails dated February 2019, he asked if he should defend himself publicly or allow the controversy to subside.

A reply attributed in the documents to Chomsky suggested avoiding engagement, criticising the "horrible way" Epstein was being treated by media outlets and warning that public responses could invite further attacks. The message also referred to heightened public attention surrounding allegations of abuse of women.

The appearance of Chomsky's name in the files does not imply any wrongdoing. In a statement issued Saturday, his wife and spokesperson Valéria Chomsky said Epstein had presented a misleading narrative about his legal situation that her husband accepted in good faith.

She said the couple did not grasp the full extent of the accusations against Epstein until he was formally charged in 2019. She added that the 97-year-old academic, who has been in poor health following a stroke in 2023, is unable to participate in public discussion but felt the interactions carried a "profound weight" in hindsight.

The art of the deal: Piyush Goyal on trade strategy

Monitor News Service

NEW DELHI, FEB 8

COMMERCE and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Sunday offered a glimpse into the temperament behind high-stakes trade diplomacy, portraying negotiations as an exercise in composure, calculation and occasional theatre as India moves forward on its interim trade framework with the United States. Speaking in the wake of the announcement of the bilateral framework, Goyal framed bargaining as both craft and strategy. Negotiators,

he suggested, must remain calm under pressure, yet be willing to signal resolve when circumstances demand. "Trade negotiation is about keeping your cool, but occasionally you may lose temper for effect," he said, characterising the process as one that blends patience with tactical assertion. He added that success also requires anticipation and agility, describing the task as needing the ability to "crystal gaze into the future".

His remarks come at a time when New Delhi is projecting confidence about the opportunities arising from the interim understanding with Washing-

ton. The framework is intended to widen market access and deepen economic engagement, and the minister has spent recent days outlining its potential implications across sectors. Tariff reductions and expanded entry into the US market are being presented as central gains, particularly for exporters seeking scale in a competitive global environment.

Goyal described the development as a milestone in India's economic trajectory, arguing that improved tariff positioning would strengthen competitiveness against regional peers. He pointed to labour-intensive sectors, pharmaceu-

ticals and gems as among those poised to benefit, framing the opening of access as both symbolic and practical for outward-looking businesses.

At the same time, he sought to reassure domestic constituencies wary of increased openness. Small enterprises and agricultural stakeholders, he said, remain shielded through safeguards built into the evolving framework. The balance between outward expansion and internal protection, he indicated, has shaped India's negotiating posture.

Beyond sectoral outcomes, the minister emphasised momentum. He charac-

terised the agreement as part of a broader push to integrate more deeply with global trade flows while sustaining national priorities. Lower barriers and improved conditions, he argued, could bolster investor sentiment and widen commercial horizons. Goyal also placed the framework within a longer diplomatic arc, crediting sustained engagement between the two governments for advancing discussions. Leadership-level dialogue, he suggested, helped maintain direction and continuity, reflecting India's growing confidence in shaping its position within shifting trade alignments.

Protest at Jantar Mantar seeks impartial probe into NEET student's death in Patna

NEW DELHI, FEB 8 / PTI

A protest was held at Jantar Mantar here on Sunday demanding an impartial investigation into the death of a NEET aspirant in Patna last month, with demonstrators calling for strict action against those responsible.

The parents of the aspirant -- who died on January 11 -- have alleged that the Bihar Police was trying to hush up the matter by denying sexual assault and claiming that it was a case of suicide.

The protest here was organised under the banner of Bihar Nirbhaya Sangharsh Samiti, Delhi-NCR and saw participation from a large number of people from Delhi and Bihar, including members of the student's family, according to a statement.

Protesters raised concerns over the handling of the case and sought a fair and transparent investigation. They urged the authorities to ensure that all facts related to the incident were examined thoroughly and justice delivered to the victim's family.

A Special Investigation Team (SIT) of the Bihar police is investigating the case, while the state government has recommended a CBI probe into the matter, according to Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary.

The victim, a NEET aspirant from



Jehanabad district of Bihar, was found unconscious at a girls' hostel in Patna's Chitragupt Nagar area last month.

She was admitted to a private hospital, where she died after remaining in a coma for several days.

Addressing the gathering, the student's father appealed for justice and said the family had been seeking accountability since the incident. The protesters demanded that the matter be investigated under judicial supervision to ensure

impartiality.

Delhi-based social activist Uday Kumar Sharma, who led the protest, said it was important for people across the country to come together to raise their voice against crimes involving students and women.

He said the movement would continue until justice was ensured.

Former MP from West Delhi Mahabab Mishra, who was present at the protest, also supported the demand for an independent investigation under court monitoring.

Talking to reporters in Jehanabad last month, the aspirant's father had said, "I want a judicial probe into the incident and the team should be headed by a sitting judge of the Supreme Court or the high court. We want justice for the family as well as our daughter. If I don't get justice, I may go for self-immolation."

The protesters in Delhi said that they will continue their campaign and mobilise support from across the country to seek justice in the case.

CM Rekha Gupta presents constituency report card

Anil Joseph

NEW DELHI, FEB 8

DELHI Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Sunday presented a report card detailing development works undertaken in her capacity as Shalimar Bagh MLA over the past year, saying projects worth about Rs 250 crore had been completed or were under execution in the constituency since the BJP formed the government in the capital. Addressing

residents at an event in the District Park in Pitampura, Gupta also inaugurated several public welfare initiatives and outlined future plans aimed at expanding infrastructure and civic amenities in the area. Sharing details of the progress report, the chief minister said development works valued at nearly Rs 250 crore had either been completed or were in various stages of implementation, while larger projects worth thousands of crores were being planned.

Among the proposed initiatives she cited were a Rs 5,000-crore elevated road along the Munak Canal, canal-side beautification including the creation of Chhath ghats, and the construction of a modern auditorium and model schools. She also listed plans to build community halls, expand an Ayurvedic hospital, strengthen maternal and child health-care facilities and develop new sports complexes within the constituency.

During her address, Gupta reflected

on her personal connection with the area, recalling her student years and daily commute on city buses. She said representing the constituency that shaped her early life and later being appointed chief minister was the result of public trust and goodwill. Referring to her political journey, she said electoral setbacks had never weakened her commitment to public service and described the formation of the BJP government in Delhi as a reflection of people's aspirations.

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India can easily buy \$500 bn US goods in 5 years: Goyal

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Large aviation orders already illustrate this trajectory. India has placed substantial aircraft and engine orders in recent years, including major purchases from Boeing, and further procurement is anticipated as air travel demand rises. The steel sector is also expected to require increased volumes of coking coal as production capacity expands. Goyal also emphasised that improved tariff positioning in US markets would strengthen India's export competitiveness. He noted that Indian goods facing tariffs of about 18 per cent still enjoy an advantage over several competing economies subject to higher levies, including China and other Asian exporters. This, he said, could benefit labour-intensive sectors

such as textiles, leather, chemicals and gems and jewellery.

Addressing concerns over a surge in imports, the minister said safeguards within the evolving trade framework would protect domestic industries and farmers. He maintained that both countries retain sensitivities around certain product categories and have built protective mechanisms into negotiations. India has not offered duty concessions in areas such as dairy, genetically modified products, meat, poultry and certain agricultural inputs, he added, underlining the government's position that strategic domestic interests remain shielded.

The trade framework itself remains a work in progress, with detailed provisions yet to be finalised. Goyal de-

scribed the current understanding as part of an ongoing negotiation process in which both sides are expected to balance market access with protective safeguards.

Even so, he expressed confidence that expanding trade engagement would support growth in multiple sectors, arguing that rising imports of capital goods and energy inputs would ultimately reinforce industrial expansion and export capacity.

The minister said the scale of projected purchases must be viewed in the context of India's broader economic trajectory, maintaining that increasing integration with global supply chains will be essential as domestic consumption and production continue to rise. PTI

Surajkund fair hit by twin mishaps; two arrested



...Continued from page 1

The district administration has allowed the fair to continue but cordoned off the ride area pending investigation.

Authorities have launched parallel probes into the incident. A police-led SIT is examining criminal liability and safety compliance, while an administrative committee headed by the mela administrator will review regulatory oversight and technical standards. Officials are also assessing whether mandatory inspections were conducted.

The tragedy followed another safety lapse barely an hour earlier, when a gate collapse injured two visitors. Together, the incidents have intensified scrutiny of safety protocols at the fair, which has witnessed similar accidents in past years.

In a statement, organisers said the ride section had been closed as a precaution and that overall safety remained their priority. Cultural and craft activities continued amid a sombre atmosphere, with visitors offering prayers for the deceased and injured.

Prasad's death has also reverberated in his native village in Uttar Pradesh, where relatives recalled his decades of service. He is survived by his wife and three children.

With investigations under way and questions raised over repeated accidents, authorities face mounting pressure to ensure strict compliance with safety regulations governing amusement rides at public events.

Delhi AQI improves to 'moderate'

Monitor News Service

NEW DELHI, FEB 8

THE national capital recorded a maximum temperature of 24.4 degrees Celsius on Sunday, 1.1 notches above the seasonal average, according to the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD). The minimum temperature settled at 10.2 degrees Celsius, which was 0.8 notches above the seasonal average, the IMD stated.

Among various weather stations, Safdarjung recorded a maximum temperature of 24.4 degrees Celsius; Palam 22 degrees Celsius; Lodhi Road 25.2 degrees Celsius; the Ridge 24.6 degrees Celsius and Ayanagar 25.1 degrees Celsius, the IMD data showed. Meanwhile, Safdarjung

logged a minimum of 6.6 degrees Celsius, Palam 9.6 degrees Celsius, Lodhi Road 9.6 degrees Celsius, the Ridge 10.2 degrees Celsius and Ayanagar 9.6 degrees Celsius.

Relative humidity was recorded at 52 per cent at 5.30 pm, the IMD said. Delhi recorded 189 AQI at 4 pm on Sunday, placing the air quality index in the "moderate" category, according to the CPCB. An AQI between zero and 50 is considered 'good', 51 to 100 'satisfactory', 101 to 200 'moderate', 201 to 300 'poor', 301 to 400 'very poor', and 401 to 500 'severe', according to CPCB.

The weather office has predicted shallow fog on Monday with maximum and minimum temperatures expected to hover around 25 and 10 degrees Celsius, respectively.



Delhi Police bust international cyber fraud racket, 3 arrested

Monitor News Service

NEW DELHI, FEB 8

DELHI Police have dismantled a cyber fraud module with alleged international links and arrested three individuals accused of running an organised financial scam that duped a city resident of more than Rs 42 lakh, officials said on Sunday.

The arrests stem from an investigation into a stock investment fraud reported by a 56-year-old resident of Uttam Nagar, who alleged he had been persuaded by online fraudsters to invest in the stock market. According to police, the victim transferred approximately Rs 42.5 lakh, which was later siphoned off through a web of bank accounts. An e-FIR was registered on December 17, 2025, after which investigators traced the movement of funds. The probe revealed the money had been routed through 36 different bank accounts before reaching a beneficiary account linked to Sabbir Ahmed of Munirka village in southwest Delhi. Ahmed was arrested on January 21.

During questioning, Ahmed told investigators he had opened multiple bank accounts and handed over banking credentials to associates in exchange for a commission. Police said he admitted to earning around two per cent of the fraudulent deposits passing through the accounts.

Based on his disclosures, police arrested Mohammad Sarfaraz, 31, and Mohammad Dilshad, 21, both residents of Batla House, on February 5. Officials said the two were allegedly involved in coordinating the opening of accounts using proxy applicants and managing financial transactions connected to the fraud.

Investigators said the accused also disclosed links with foreign handlers and admitted to trading USDT cryptocurrency with overseas contacts, indicating potential international financial connections. Police are examining the extent of these cross-border links as part of the ongoing inquiry. Authorities added that after learning of Ahmed's arrest, the suspects attempted to destroy evidence by discarding cheque books and damaging a registered SIM card.

Five-year-old killed after truck accident in northwest Delhi

Monitor News Service

NEW DELHI, FEB 8

A five-year-old boy died after being run over by a truck in northwest Delhi's Shalimar Bagh area on Sunday, police said. According to officials, information about the accident was received at the Shalimar Bagh police station, following which personnel were dispatched to the site near Lohia Camp in Haiderpur. On arrival, they found a stationary truck and the injured child trapped beneath it.

The boy, estimated to be around five to six years old, was immediately taken to BJRM Hospital in Jahangirpuri, where doctors declared him brought dead. His body has been kept in the mortuary pending completion of legal formalities.

Preliminary inquiries indicate the

incident may have resulted from rash and negligent driving. Police said an eyewitness account pointed to the truck driver's actions as the cause of the accident. Based on the statement and material evidence collected at the spot, investigators identified the driver and later apprehended him.

A case has been registered, and the vehicle involved has been seized for examination. Officers said they are reconstructing the sequence of events that led to the fatality.

As part of the investigation, statements from additional witnesses are being recorded and CCTV footage from nearby locations is being reviewed to corroborate the account of the incident. Authorities said further action will follow based on the findings of the inquiry.

Truck driver held for performing stunts on Delhi-Mumbai Expressway

GURUGRAM, FEB 8 / PTI

A truck driver was arrested on Sunday after a video of him performing dangerous stunts with his vehicle on Delhi-Mumbai Expressway passing through Haryana's Nuh district surfaced on the internet, police said. The truck has been seized, too.

The incident occurred on February 3, around 4 pm, when the driver

drove recklessly near Rigad village.

According to the police, the video captured the driver driving the truck at high speed and performing dangerous stunts, endangering the lives of other passengers. Police took cognisance of the incident, identified the truck's number and started an investigation. During the probe, the driver was identified as Sabir, a resident of Rajasthan's Alwar district.

India, Malaysia expand strategic partnership

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In the security domain, cooperation on counterterrorism, intelligence sharing and maritime security will be intensified, with both leaders condemning terrorism in all its forms, including cross-border activities. A joint statement reaffirmed commitment to zero tolerance and called for coordinated global efforts to counter radicalisation, disrupt financing networks and prevent misuse of emerging technologies for extremist purposes. Engagement in multilateral platforms, including the UN and the Financial Action Task Force, will also be strengthened.

Anwar highlighted India's economic expansion and described closer collaboration as beneficial to Malaysia's growth trajectory, noting particular opportunities in trade, technology and investment. He also termed the move towards local-currency trade "remarkable". The talks covered cooperation in artificial intelligence, digital technologies, healthcare and food security, areas that both sides said offered new avenues for investment following business engagements at a CEO forum. Defence ties are also set to broaden, reflecting alignment on regional security priorities.

Malaysia reiterated its support for India's permanent membership of a



reformed UN Security Council, underscoring convergence on institutional reform. The leaders agreed to work together to strengthen multilateralism and enhance representation in global governance structures, reflecting contemporary geopolitical realities.

Modi said the relationship carried added significance amid global uncertainty, describing expanding engagement between the two countries as vital to mutual progress. He also emphasised the need to expedite review of the ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement to further deepen economic integration with the region.

Beyond formal agreements, both

leaders discussed regional and international developments, reaffirming shared positions on peace, stability and institutional reform. They also explored collaboration across international forums and support for each other's candidatures.

The visit underscored a broadening strategic alignment as India seeks deeper engagement in Southeast Asia through economic, technological and security partnerships. While individual agreements signal immediate cooperation, the overall direction reflects a longer-term effort to embed bilateral ties within evolving regional frameworks and shared multilateral objectives.

Delhi govt approves Rs 1,200 cr grant for transport corporation

Monitor News Service

NEW DELHI, FEB 8

THE Delhi government has approved a grant of Rs 1,200 crore for the Delhi Transport Corporation to support employee payments and modernisation initiatives, Chief Minister Rekha Gupta announced on Sunday.

According to Gupta, Rs 1,100 crore of the allocation will be used to clear salaries, pensions and statutory dues of employees and pensioners. The move is aimed at ensuring financial stability and protecting the welfare of personnel who keep the city's public transport network functioning.

"The grant reflects our commitment to the dignity and financial security of DTC employees and pensioners," she said, adding that timely payments would ensure staff and retirees do not face uncertainty.

Officials said the remaining Rs 100 crore would be invested in upgrad-



ing an advanced traffic management system to improve mobility and in expanding electric vehicle charging infrastructure. The measures are part of broader efforts to modernise transport and promote sustainable urban mobility.

Gupta described DTC workers as the backbone of Delhi's transport system, noting their service under

challenging conditions. Ensuring financial and operational stability for the organisation would strengthen public transport reliability, she said.

The chief minister added that the initiatives align with the government's vision of developing technology driven and environmentally sustainable infrastructure. Enhanced traffic systems and charging facili-

ties are expected to support cleaner transport and improve commuting efficiency.

The funding approval comes amid continuing focus on strengthening public transit and reducing pollution levels in the capital. Officials indicated that implementation steps would follow shortly to ensure timely utilisation of the allocation.

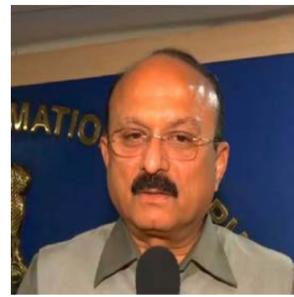
Minister meets kin of Janakpuri accident victim, promises support

Monitor News Service

NEW DELHI, FEB 8

DELHI Urban Development Minister Ashish Sood on Sunday met the family of a man who died after falling into a roadside pit in Janakpuri and assured them of government support and strict action against those responsible for any lapses. Sood visited the bereaved household and expressed condolences, calling the incident deeply distressing. He said the government stood firmly with the family and was committed to ensuring accountability. The victim, Kamal Dhyani, a private bank employee residing in Rohini's Sector 10, was returning home late Thursday night when he fell into a pit dug by the Delhi Jal Board for sewer pipeline restoration work. The accident has triggered public concern over infrastructure safety and monitoring.

"The government will extend all possible support to the family. The matter is being treated with seriousness and sensitivity," the minister said, adding that a detailed probe had been ordered. According to Sood, authorities are examining all aspects of the case, and stringent action will be taken if negligence or der-



eliction of duty is established. He emphasised that public safety remained a top priority and warned that lapses related to civic works would not be tolerated. He said instructions had been issued to concerned departments to strengthen supervision and prevent recurrence of such incidents. The government would also draw lessons from the episode and introduce systemic measures to ensure better safety compliance in infrastructure projects, he added.

Dhyani's death has sparked political and civic debate, highlighting recurring concerns over safety around construction sites. Officials said further updates would follow after completion of the investigation.

Three found dead inside car on Delhi's Peeragarhi flyover

NEW DELHI, FEB 8 / PTI

THREE people, including a woman, were found dead inside an abandoned car on the Peeragarhi flyover in outer Delhi on Sunday, police said.

A PCR call was received regarding a car parked on the flyover, they said.

On reaching the spot, emergency personnel found three people dead inside the vehicle, following which police, along with a forensic team

were informed and the area was cordoned off, they said.

According to the police, the deceased include two men and a woman.

No visible external injuries were found on the bodies and all valuables were intact, the police said. Prima facie the case appears to be a suicide. However, further probe is underway to ascertain the circumstances leading to the deaths, they said.

AAP leader briefly detained during candle tribute for biker death

Monitor News Service

NEW DELHI, FEB 8

AAP Delhi unit chief Saurabh Bharadwaj was briefly detained by police on Sunday while attempting to light candles near the site where a motorcyclist died after falling into an uncovered pit in Janakpuri, officials said.

Police stated that Bharadwaj and his supporters were stopped as they attempted to approach the location, which had been secured amid concerns over a potential protest gathering. They were taken to a nearby police station and later released.



A senior officer said the action was preventive. "They were trying to stage a protest. They were removed and detained briefly before being released," he said.

The death of Kamal Dhyani, a bank employee, occurred late Thursday night when he fell into a 15-foot pit dug by the Delhi Jal Board for sewer pipeline restoration work while returning home. The incident has drawn criticism over safety precautions at civic project sites.

Bharadwaj maintained that the visit was intended solely to offer condolences. In social media posts, he said no slogans were raised and

that the group planned only a brief candle tribute. Questioning the police response, he asked whether expressing sympathy should attract detention.

The episode added political overtones to an already sensitive situation, as parties continue to highlight civic accountability and infrastructure safety concerns. Authorities have launched inquiries into the circumstances surrounding the accident. Meanwhile, the site remains under monitoring, and police said steps were taken to maintain order and prevent crowding while investigations continue.

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Prashant Kishor launches Bihar Navnirman Yatra to rebuild Jan Suraaj

BETTIAH, FEB 8 / PTI

JAN Suraaj founder Prashant Kishor on Sunday launched the 'Bihar Navnirman Yatra' from West Champaran district, saying the campaign would focus on rebuilding and strengthening the organisation across the state.

Despite attracting significant public attention, Jan Suraaj failed to win a single seat in the 2025 Bihar Assembly elections, where it contested 238 seats. Talking to reporters here, Kishor said, "The yatra will focus on rebuilding and strengthening the party's organisation across the state to present an honest and accountable political alternative in Bihar." He asserted that the party has remained active among the people even after the Assembly elections, and the yatra will now help it expand and reorganise its grassroots network at the district level.

"To ensure that our Bihar Navnirman Abhiyan materialises seamlessly on the ground, I will spend some time in each district, and meet old associates and new aspiring ones to strengthen the party's organisational structure," Kishor said. Kishor asserted that during his yatra, the party will address the issue of a poll promise related to financial assistance for women under the Mukhyamantri Mahila Rozgar Yojana.

Govt-hired agencies targeting booths where SP won: Akhilesh slams SIR

LUCKNOW, FEB 8 / PTI

SAMAJWADI Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday alleged large-scale misuse of the Special Intensive Revision exercise in Uttar Pradesh, claiming that professional agencies hired by the government were selectively targeting booths where his party had won elections. Addressing a press conference here, Yadav said, "The government has hired certain agencies comprising professionals sitting in Delhi, Lucknow and other places across the country. They have access to the entire electoral roll data and, using that, they are identifying booths where the Samajwadi Party won elections. Form-7 is being systematically filled and sent from such booths." According to the Election Commission, Form-7 is used to either object to someone's inclusion in the electoral roll or request deletion of a name already listed.

"The forms are properly filled, printed and then sent. At many places, this has led to protests and disturbances," he claimed. The former Uttar Pradesh chief minister also alleged that the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise had already influenced election outcomes in the country. "Through the SIR, they (the BJP) have managed to win the Bihar elections. The exercise played a major role there," he claimed.

Alleging that similar attempts were being made in poll-bound West Bengal, Yadav said, "The BJP is trying to

do the same thing in Bengal. That is why the Bengal government and its chief minister (Mamata Banerjee) are repeatedly saying that the poll panel has become the BJP's commission." On Mamata Banerjee arguing her case before the Supreme Court as a lawyer, Yadav said, "She was forced to wear the black coat and stand before the Supreme Court against the BJP. This shows the kind of discrimination that is taking place and how the Election Commission has become a 'Sahyogi Dal' (ally party) of the BJP."

He also claimed that several Samajwadi workers and PDA 'praharis' had flagged the suspicious forms.

"From time to time, the PDA praharis and Samajwadi workers and leaders have given us forms which were already filled," he claimed.

PDA is a political acronym coined by Yadav to represent a coalition of backward classes (Pichhda), Dalits, and minorities (Alpsankhyak). Yadav also referred to specific cases, naming individuals who, he claimed, were victims of forgery. "A matter involving Dashrath and Nandlal has now come to light. Nandlal is with us today. I am happy that brave Nandlal is standing with us," he said. Alleging signature forgery, Yadav said, "This is the same Nandlal whose thumb impression was allegedly taken by the BJP. Just think of all the sections that are invoked when someone forges a signature. The Election Commission also has rules on this."



Himanta's charges mindless, bogus: Gaurav Gogoi

GUWAHATI, FEB 8 / PTI

ASSAM Congress president Gaurav Gogoi on Sunday dismissed CM Himanta Biswa Sarma's allegations about his Pakistani connections as "most mindless and bogus".

Gogoi called the press conference, where Sarma made the allegations, "worse than C-grade cinema", which was "super flop".

"I pity the journalists from Delhi and Assam who had to suffer the most flop press conference of the century. This was worse than a C grade cinema. Most mindless and bogus points offered by the so called political shrewd Chief Minister," he said in a post on X.

"This #SuperFlop is in contrast to our #XomoyParivartanYatra which has been a hit in uncovering the 12,000 bighas of land occupied by the Chief Minister and his family members," he claimed.

In another post, Gogoi said that Sarma has "embarrassed himself" in front of the media, adding, "After 2.5 hours press conference even the journalists in the room remain unconvinced."

Gogoi, the Congress' deputy leader in the Lok Sabha, maintained that "nobody in Assam is taking his words seriously".

"He should rather explain how and his family managed to acquire 12,000 bighas or 4,000 acres of prime property across Assam."



People gather near the buses at an event where Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, unseen, flagged off 500 new electric vehicle (EV) buses, in New Delhi. PTI

GSN condemns misuse of Mahatma's image in ad war between Congress, BJP

BENGALURU, FEB 8 / PTI

THE KGSN has condemned the alleged misuse of Mahatma Gandhi's image in a recently published advertisement in Karnataka, calling it an affront to the Father of the Nation's core ideals and a matter of serious national concern.

The Congress and the opposition BJP engaged in a spat through advertisement using a cartoon of Gandhi.

In its full page advertisement on the front page of the leading vernacular and English dailies on February 3, the Congress-led Karnataka government showed Gandhi admonishing 'Sangh-Appa' wearing a white shirt and a Khaki pant for scrapping Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

The advertisement takes a potshot at the Centre for replacing the MGNREGA with Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajivika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G-RAMG).

In retaliation, the BJP put out a full-page advertisement on February 7, where Gandhi is shown as lifting his stick to hit Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Congress MP Rahul Gandhi and Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and calls them all 'Nungappa' (The one who squanders everything).

"To you, the Nungappa who are using Mahatma as your property," Gandhi is shown as telling the trio who pose requesting him not to hit them.

In a statement, Karnataka Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi (KGSN) president Woodyay P Krishna and honorary secretary M C Narendra expressed alarm over the portrayal of Gandhi and said it was derogatory and contrary to his philosophy, warning that such representations could mislead the younger generation and damage the sanctity associated with his legacy.

The statement further said, "An advertisement that has recently appeared in leading daily newspapers of Karnataka depicts the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, in a manner that would shock anyone who understands Gandhiji's philosophy. The way in which he has been portrayed is something that brings shame to the entire nation and is completely contrary to his core ideals such as non-violence, Satyagraha, and Sarvodaya."

The KGSN said the depiction amounted to a destruction of Gandhiji's values.

It described the trend of using Gandhi's image for partisan or political convenience as a disturbing development in recent times.

"At a time when Mahatma Gandhi alone is revered across the world with the honorific 'Mahatma', it is a disturbing development that in recent times certain sections of the media are using Gandhiji in a derogatory manner and for the convenience of partisan politics," the statement said, adding that such usage posed the risk of sending "a wrong message to the younger generation".

Union Budget a 25-year vision document: Khattar

Monitor News Service

RAIPUR, FEB 8

HAILING the Budget 2026-27 as a 25-year "vision document," Union Minister Manohar Lal Khattar Sunday said the exemption of customs duty on rare minerals is expected to boost Chhattisgarh's mining and industrial sectors, strengthen investment prospects and economic activity in the state.

Addressing a press conference here on the Budget 2026-27, Khattar said the

document has been framed around three key duties aimed at strengthening the nation economically and socially. He said that the budget should be viewed not merely as an annual financial statement but as a "vision document" that will guide the country's development over the next 25 years.

It presents a clear vision for a developed India by 2047, he said.

Khattar, who handles the portfolios of power, housing and urban affairs, said the budget has accepted the rec-

ommendations of the 16th Finance Commission, which will provide direction for development over the next five years.

Explaining the three focus areas, he said that the first relates to India's economic position in the global context and the goal of becoming the third-largest economy in the world, surpassing Germany.

The second focus is on infrastructure development, industrial expansion and employment generation within

the country, and the third emphasises inclusive growth by supporting deserving sections of society, including the poor, women and the underprivileged, the Union minister said.

Khattar said, "The exemption of customs duty on minerals, especially rare ones, is expected to boost Chhattisgarh's mining and industrial sectors."

He further pointed out that since 2014, national highway development has been prioritised in the state, with over 3,400 km of roads constructed.

Protein, not carbs; balanced, not heavy: Naidu's diet mantra

Amanpreet Singh

AMARAVATI, FEB 8

INDIA'S agriculture sector must transition into a demand-based enterprise from a supply-driven one and keep pace with changing dietary sensibilities, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu said on Sunday. Water, being a scarce resource, needs to be conserved on priority and strategic linking of critical rivers is imperative, Naidu said in an interview with PTI Videos.

"Money is not a constraint. Proper public policies are needed. If water is there, India will not have any problem of agricultural productivity. Farmers are ready

to produce. Simultaneously, you have to guide what type of agriculture you have to promote. Again, demand-driven, based on food habits, and also what is good for health," he said, underlining that nutritional philosophy has evolved. "Earlier, it was all about carbohydrates. Now, the focus has shifted to protein. Earlier, it was about very rich food. Now, it is about balanced nutrition. People are health-conscious," he stressed.

Linking of rivers, Naidu said, could avert wastage of water that flows into the sea untapped. It could turn water-scarce areas into water-surplus ones if executed smartly, he emphasised.

EPS slams DMK govt over TNPSC exam postponement

Monitor News Service

CHENNAI, FEB 8 / PTI

LEADER of the Opposition in Tamil Nadu Assembly, Edappadi K Palaniswami, on Sunday launched a scathing attack on the DMK government following the postponement of the TNPSC Group II and IIA Main Examinations. Palaniswami called the postponement "administrative incompetence". The examinations, which were scheduled to take place across Tamil Nadu on Sunday, were deferred at the last minute due to reported irregularities in hall tickets and confusion in the allocation of examination centres.

Terming the incident "unprecedented" in the history of the state's public service commission, the AIADMK

General Secretary said the postponement on the day of the exam exposes the "administrative collapse" under the current regime. "For the first time, a highly significant examination like TNPSC Group II has been postponed on the very day it was to be held. This single incident reveals the true state of governance under the DMK regime," the AIADMK leader said in a statement. Palaniswami highlighted the distress caused to aspirants, citing reports that some candidates had already begun writing the exam before being informed of the postponement. He criticised the government for attributing the lapse to a "technical fault," stating that it trivialises the years of preparation and sacrifice made by lakhs of young aspirants.

Directly addressing Chief Minister



M K Stalin, the former chief minister questioned the government's claims of transforming Tamil Nadu into a "superstar" state. "Your government cannot even conduct a single competitive examination properly. What greater proof is needed for this administration's incompetence?" he asked.

Palaniswami further alleged that the DMK has failed to fulfil its 2021 election promise of providing 5.5 lakh jobs. He

urged the state government to move beyond "eyewash action" against lower-level officials and instead implement systematic safeguards to prevent such blunders in the future. Reaffirming his party's commitment to the youth, he appealed to the candidates to remain steadfast, promising that an AIADMK government in 2026 would protect their aspirations. Controller of Examinations, TNPSC, A Shanmuga Sundaram, told reporters that the confusion and chaos were due to the wrong assignment of exam halls at several Chennai centres, including Presidency and Nandanam colleges. "This is a huge mistake, and we regret the inconvenience. To ensure candidates do not suffer due to the panic caused, we have cancelled today's sessions statewide," Sundaram told reporters here.

Policy should not always favour non-performing states: Naidu



Amanpreet Singh

AMARAVATI, FEB 8

POOR-performing states of the country have inevitably ended up with a higher share in the Centre's devolution of tax revenues at the expense of better performers such as Andhra Pradesh, Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu said on Sunday, acknowledging that it is a good sign that the laggards are gradually getting their act together.

For the country to prosper, all its regions have to prosper, Naidu said in an interview with PTI Videos, adding that the states are allies, not enemies. "Deliberately, they (the Centre) do not want to do any injustice. There are some parameters of backwardness, population—all these things. South India has gone ahead with population control. Because of economic reforms, south India has

taken the lead in technology and the growth rate. The per capita income is very high in south India. Because of that, devolution is a problem. Population poverty is (among) the criteria for devolution," Naidu said.

"Naturally, there will be heart burning. Our policy should not always be for non-performing states. At certain times, protection is okay. Ultimately, everybody has to perform. I am confident now that every state is moving forward. That is the responsibility of the respective state governments or political parties. They have to perform," he added.

The prevailing view on population, he said, has moved from "population control" to "population management".

"We are now facing the problem of an ageing population and also, loneliness. Look what is happening in Europe, Japan and South Korea. I

was the first to say that our people should have more children, after which (RSS chief) Mohan Bhagwat and (Tamil Nadu Chief Minister) M K Stalin said the same thing," Naidu said. Asked if he sees a role for himself in central politics at any point in the future, the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) president ruled out the possibility. "Never have I expected any role at the Centre. I am always interested to work in Andhra, either combined Andhra, or now, the new Andhra Pradesh.

"Hyderabad was agrarian when I became the chief minister in 1995. Consciously, I built a technology and industrial ecosystem. Today, Telangana is the richest state in terms of per capita income. I am representing one more state now. But I have that satisfaction that I produced a model. I have done my best for the nation and that will continue," he said.

Asked whether his party and other constituents in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) deserve credit for the ruling coalition at the Centre functioning seamlessly as it did when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had a majority on its own in the two previous terms, Naidu said the support is mutual.

"We support the government of India. In turn, they are also extending support. That is why we call it a double-engine sarkar. There is no policy difference between the government of India and the government of Andhra Pradesh," he said.

To a question on whether he views himself as a tech leader first or a politician, Naidu said the latter.



Cong slams Assam BJP's 'point-blank shot' video, asks judiciary to act

NEW DELHI, FEB 8 / PTI

THE Congress on Sunday hit out at the BJP over a purported video posted on the X handle of the ruling party's Assam unit, claiming it shows the "targeted point-blank murder of minorities" and said the judiciary must act in the matter. The now-deleted video showed Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma purportedly taking aim with a rifle and firing a shot at two people, one wearing a skull cap and the other with a beard, with "point-blank shot" as the caption.

Congress general secretary in charge of organisation, K C Venugopal, slammed the BJP over the issue.

"An official BJP handle posted a video showing the targeted, 'point-blank' murder of minorities. This is nothing but a call to genocide - a dream this fascist regime has harboured for decades," Venugopal said on X. This is not an innocuous video to be ignored as troll content, but as "poison being spread from the very top", and there must be consequences for this, he said.

"There is no hope that Narendra

Modi will condemn or act against this, but the judiciary must act, and there shouldn't be any leniency shown in this case," Venugopal said.

Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinete said that deleting the video, which showed Assam Chief Minister Sarma "shooting Muslim men" with the caption "point-blank shot", was not enough.

"This is who the BJP really is: Mass murderers. This venom, hatred and violence is on you, Mr Modi. Are the courts and other institutions sleeping?" she said on X.

Congress spokesperson Shama Mohammed said in a post on X, "@narendramodi, you talk about 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas', but your favourite man, Himanta Biswa Sarma, made a video Shooting Muslims and got it posted from the official handle of BJP Assam."

"This is an attack on the Indian Constitution. I am shocked that the Supreme Court of India is acting as a mute spectator. The court's silence and failure to take suo motu cognisance puts its role into question," she added.

India needs to get rid of destructive communist ideology: Shah

RAIPUR, FEB 8 / PTI

UNION Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said the country needs to get rid of the "destructive" communist ideology at the earliest and appealed to Naxalites to lay down their arms, assuring them a red carpet from the government.

Addressing a conclave, titled 'Chhattisgarh@25Shifting The Lens of Organiser Weekly in Nava Raipur, Shah said the Maoist problem cannot be linked to the lack of development or considered merely as a law-and-order issue.

"Left-Wing Extremism is an ideology-driven challenge," he added.

Shah said the people of India should understand the truth of this ideology. "Wherever communists remained in power, they could not bring development. Communist ideology is an ideology indicative of destruction, and the country is required to get rid of it immediately," he added.

Shah said the communist ideology is no longer present in democratic politics.

"It does not exist in Tripura and Bengal. In Kerala, it is surviving to an extent; however, people have started the change from Thiruvananthapuram," he added. Shah appealed to Maoists to lay down their arms, saying the government doesn't want to fire a single bullet and will welcome those who surrender "with a red carpet".

Vaishnav seeks Bengal govt's cooperation in completing railway projects



KOLKATA, FEB 8 / PTI

RAILWAY Minister Ashwini Vaishnav on Sunday requested the West Bengal government to cooperate with the Centre for the completion of railway projects in the state by providing land and permissions as and when required. Vaishnav was speaking after virtually inaugurating two road overbridges at Siuri in Birbhum and Kumarpur in Paschim Bardhaman district and flagging off a MEMU train service between Ansols and Jharkhand's Bokaro. Stating that there "would not be any dearth of funds" for West Bengal's development, Vaishnav said the state government's cooperation will ensure completion of various ongoing railway projects in the state.

The railway minister pointed to the over-a-year-long imbroglio over the construction of a 366-metre viaduct at Chingrighata crossing here for the New Garia-Airport stretch of Kolkata Metro that passes through the city's IT hub, Salt Lake Sector V. "Despite orders of the Calcutta High Court and the metro authorities having constructed a diversion road, the state

government is not giving permission for the construction work," Vaishnav said, adding that the delay is affecting the people of West Bengal.

"I request the state government with folded hands to cooperate for the development of West Bengal," he said, adding that a number of railway projects in the state are stalled due to the non-availability of land and the non-provision of necessary permissions from the local authorities. Vaishnav said that West Bengal has been allocated Rs 14,205 crore for railway infrastructure and safety projects in the annual budget for the 2026-27 fiscal. He said total work worth Rs 92,974 crore is under progress in the state, covering track creation, station redevelopment and safety enhancements.

Vaishnav pointed out at the recent flagging off of a dozen trains for West Bengal by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, including India's first Vande Bharat Sleeper Express between Howrah and Kamakhya in Guwahati.

"The prime minister has time and again put forth how important the progress of Purvodaya (eastern) states is for the all-round development of the country," he said. He said that only 28 km of tracks of Kolkata Metro, the oldest in the country, were completed in 40 years since its inception. "However, under the Narendra Modi government, 45 km of tracks were added in just 11 years," Vaishnav said. Vaishnav said that an underground railway corridor will be constructed in the Chicken's Neck corridor in north Bengal, "so as to ensure safe transportation during strategic times".



A worker in a mustard field, on the day of the presentation of the Union Budget 2026-27 by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in Nagaon, Assam. PTI

Accused in Kanhaiyalal murder case BJP workers: Gehlot

JAIPUR, FEB 8 / PTI

SENIOR Congress leader Ashok Gehlot alleged on Sunday that the accused in the 2022 Kanhaiyalal murder case in Rajasthan's Udaipur are BJP workers and claimed that despite it being an "open-and-shut" case, the victim's family is awaiting justice for nearly four years.

Reacting to a statement made by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Parliament, the former Rajasthan chief minister said her remarks suggesting that no action was taken in the case were "fac-

tually incorrect and misleading".

He said the Rajasthan Police had taken swift action and arrested the assailants within hours of the killing, after which the BJP-led Centre got the probe transferred to the National Investigation Agency (NIA).

"From 2022 till 2026, Kanhaiyalal's family has been waiting for justice," Gehlot said.

The veteran Congress leader said he has repeatedly asked Union Home Minister Amit Shah about the status of the case and when the accused would be punished, but received no clear response.



He said public apprehension is growing due to the delay in meting out punishment to the accused and alleged that this is happening because they are associated with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Gehlot said the issue was politicised with "false claims" during elections, while in reality, the victim's family had received Rs 50 lakh as compensation and government jobs for both sons.

"The country is watching all this and accountability will be fixed when the time comes," the Congress leader said.

Darjeeling ropeway to Surajkund: Major cable car accidents in India

Monitor News Service

NEW DELHI, FEB 8

THE swing ride collapse at the Surajkund International Crafts Mela in Haryana has brought back memories of several accidents involving amusement rides and cable cars reported in India over the years.

The incident took place at the mela venue in Faridabad on Saturday when a giant swing malfunctioned and collapsed mid-operation, killing a police inspector and injuring others. The authorities have halted ride operations and ordered an inquiry. Here is a list of major amusement ride and cable car accidents in India over the years:

(2026): A giant swing collapsed at a local fair on January 19, 2026, injuring around 14 schoolchildren. The district administration ordered a magisterial inquiry and suspended the ride.

South West Delhi amusement park (2025): A 24-year-old woman died on April 3, 2025, after falling from a roller coaster due to a seat belt failure. The ride was shut down, and police initiated action against those responsible for maintenance.

VGP Universal Kingdom, Chennai (2025): A thrill ride stalled mid-air on May 28, 2025, leaving at least 30 riders stranded for nearly three hours. Fire and rescue teams evacuated passengers, and the ride was closed for inspection.



Kagal fair, Kolhapur, Maharashtra (2025): A tower ride malfunctioned on October 25, 2025, leaving 18 people stranded nearly 80 feet above the

ground for several hours. Fire services rescued the riders safely, and authorities ordered safety checks of all rides at the fair.

Pavagadh hill ropeway, Gujarat (2025): A cable snapped on a cargo ropeway on September 6, 2025, killing six people. Police registered an accidental death case, and a technical committee was formed to investigate the incident.

Nainital ropeway, Uttarakhand (2023): A technical snag halted the Nainital cable car mid-route on July 27, 2023, stranding 12 passengers, including six foreign tourists, mid-air. All were rescued safely, and services resumed after repairs and safety inspections.

Trikut ropeway, Deoghar, Jharkhand (2022): Two cable cars collided mid-air on April 10, 2022, killing two people and leaving doz-

ens stranded for hours. The state government ordered an inquiry and later blacklisted the private operator.

Kankaria Amusement Park, Ahmedabad (2019): A pendulum ride at Kankaria Amusement Park in Ahmedabad crashed on July 14, 2019, after a pipe on the main shaft broke, killing two people and injuring nearly 30 others. Authorities immediately suspended the ride and ordered a safety audit of the park.

Darjeeling ropeway, West Bengal (2003): Several cable cars slipped due to a mechanical failure, killing four people and injuring several others on October 19, 2003. The ropeway was shut over for an extended period and later overhauled.

Strategic considerations in India-Malaysia engagement

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Malaysia and the commitments announced alongside Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim signal more than routine diplomatic engagement. The emphasis on expanded cooperation in trade, defence, advanced manufacturing and semiconductors reflects a calibrated strategic pivot in India's regional outreach. At a time of global volatility and shifting economic alignments, the effort to deepen ties with Southeast Asian partners underscores the growing importance of pragmatic partnerships in shaping India's external priorities. The agreements signed across sectors including energy, technology and manufacturing highlight a recognition that economic collaboration now forms the backbone of geopolitical influence. Semiconductor cooperation, in particular, aligns with India's broader ambition to embed itself within resilient supply chains and reduce dependence on concentrated production networks. Malaysia's established industrial capabilities and logistical connectivity offer complementarities that could strengthen regional manufacturing ecosystems. Similarly, efforts to encourage trade settlement in local currencies indicate attempts to widen financial flexibility while reducing exposure to external volatility. Security considerations were equally prominent. The unequivocal emphasis on counterterrorism cooperation and intelligence sharing reinforces India's long-standing diplomatic position that international responses to terrorism must be consistent and uncompromising. Such signalling carries both bilateral and global resonance, particularly when articulated in a joint context that condemns extremism and calls for stronger multilateral coordination. While declaratory in form, these statements contribute to shaping normative expectations in international engagement.

Maritime cooperation and Indo Pacific stability further reflect converging interests. India's articulation of ASEAN centrality remains central to its regional outlook, and stronger engagement with Malaysia supports continuity in that approach. The emphasis on completing review of the ASEAN India Trade Agreement also suggests recognition that economic integration must keep pace with changing production and consumption patterns. As the Indo Pacific increasingly defines global growth dynamics, sustained engagement with regional partners is likely to remain integral to India's external strategy. The diplomatic symbolism accompanying the visit, including the decision to establish a consulate and reaffirm support for institutional reforms at the United Nations, illustrates the layered nature of bilateral relationships today. Partnerships extend beyond transactional cooperation to encompass political signalling and mutual positioning within multilateral frameworks. Malaysia's endorsement of India's role in a reformed Security Council highlights this dimension of reciprocal strategic support. India's outreach toward Southeast Asia continues to evolve from historical connectivity into structured strategic alignment grounded in economic and security interdependence.

Pragmatism shapes India's partnerships

INDIA'S interim trade agreement with the United States represents more than a routine economic arrangement. It signals a deeper shift in the country's negotiating posture and its understanding of the global order it now inhabits. In a world defined less by abstract globalisation and more by strategic competition across supply chains, technology standards and energy markets, engagement with major economic centres is no longer optional. It is foundational. The agreement marks a departure from an earlier defensive reflex that often framed negotiations with Washington through the lens of vulnerability and loss of autonomy. That instinct had historical roots, shaped by postcolonial anxieties and Cold War alignments, but it increasingly sits uneasily with India's current economic scale and geopolitical relevance. A country seeking manufacturing depth, technology partnerships and export expansion cannot afford to approach trade relationships from a position of suspicion alone. The more notable aspect of current debate is not the agreement's content, but the lingering discomfort over the identity of the partner. This hesitation deserves perspective. India's trade profile itself illustrates where its economic linkages lie. Engagement with the United States and Europe dwarfs exchanges with Russia or China in export terms. The logic of policy must therefore follow economic reality rather than ideological preference. Pragmatism, not sentiment, should define partnerships. Just as discounted energy imports from Russia were approached as commercial decisions, trade arrangements with Western markets must be judged on comparable grounds.

Equally significant is the evolution in India's negotiating confidence. Earlier episodes in bilateral engagement were often marked by domestic political fragility and rhetorical overreach. Today's approach suggests a more measured understanding of leverage and interest. That maturity reflects both institutional learning and a recognition that sovereignty is not diluted by cooperation. Autonomy is preserved through diversification and capability, not isolation. The agreement also points to a broader strategic recalibration. India's positioning within reconfigured global supply chains and technology ecosystems will shape its growth trajectory. Partnerships that enable access, resilience and competitiveness are central to this recalibration. Trade deals are therefore not isolated transactions but instruments through which economic and strategic objectives intersect. Public debate around such agreements remains necessary and healthy. Scrutiny strengthens outcomes and transparency reinforces legitimacy. Yet debate must evolve beyond inherited binaries that frame engagement as capitulation. The realities of geo economic competition demand analytical clarity rather than ideological reflex. India's expanding confidence as a negotiator reflects its changing place in the world. Agreements of this kind are less about choosing sides than about strengthening capacity.

of specialised products. For urban consumers in particular, access to a wider range of foods and manufactured goods may expand significantly. Yet expectations must remain measured. Retail pricing reflects logistics, distribution margins and market competition as much as tariff reductions. Cheaper imports are possible, not guaranteed. The consumer benefit here is incremental rather than dramatic. More consequential than immediate price effects is the indirect impact through employment and income. Lower barriers to Indian exports improve competitiveness abroad, especially in labour intensive sectors such as textiles, leather, engineering goods and pharmaceuticals. Expanded market access encourages production and investment, which can support job creation and wage stability. For households, the effect of stable employment often outweighs minor price adjustments on imported goods. Trade therefore shapes con-

A national dialogue beyond exams

India's flagship student engagement initiative has grown from a modest interaction into a nationwide conversation on examination stress, learning attitudes and well-being. Its evolution reflects shifting expectations of education as both academic preparation and personal development.

Ishita Sen

EACH examination season in India revives a familiar cycle of anxiety. Students confront intense expectations, families measure futures through marks, and institutions lean heavily on standardised assessment as the ultimate indicator of merit. Within this environment, Pariksha Pe Charcha has developed into a significant national platform that seeks to shift the narrative. Initiated in 2018 as a direct interaction between the Prime Minister and students, teachers and parents, the programme has evolved into a large-scale engagement centred on examination stress, emotional resilience and learning attitudes. Its continuing expansion raises an important policy question: does this dialogue reflect deeper structural change in education, or does it primarily illuminate the scale of unresolved challenges?

The growth of the initiative is undeniable. Participation figures have expanded from thousands in physical attendance to registrations in the crores, and the 2026 edition's multi-location interactions signal deliberate outreach beyond metropolitan centres. Such engagement demonstrates a strong public appetite for reassurance, guidance and visibility at the highest levels of governance. However, scale should be interpreted carefully. Large participation may reflect not only success in communication but also the persistence of examination driven pressure across the education system. If families feel compelled to seek coping mechanisms, it suggests underlying systemic tensions that policy must address at their roots.

Pariksha Pe Charcha aligns conceptually with the National Education Policy 2020, particularly its emphasis on experiential learning, conceptual understanding and student well-being. The programme's messaging encourages time management, mindfulness, balanced routines and resilience, reinforcing the idea that academic performance cannot be detached from psychological stability. This alignment strengthens the broader policy narrative that education must move beyond memorisation. Yet the translation of principle into classroom practice remains uneven. Curriculum design, teacher preparedness and infrastructure constraints continue to shape the daily experience of learners far more directly than national messaging. For policy coherence, the values highlighted in public platforms must be matched by systematic support at the institutional level.

A notable feature of the programme is its widening thematic scope. Conversations now extend beyond examination techniques into responsible digital engagement, environmental awareness, physical health and leadership development. This reflects recognition that education systems must prepare students for complex social and economic environments rather than singular



Pariksha Pe Charcha has expanded into one of the country's most visible platforms addressing examination anxiety and student resilience. As participation grows, the initiative highlights how education discourse is gradually widening beyond marks and rankings to include emotional health, life skills and confidence building.

academic benchmarks. Encouraging digital discipline, sustainability consciousness and collaborative values aligns with global trends in holistic education. Still, the impact of such messaging depends on integration into curricula and evaluation frameworks. Without formal incorporation, these ideas risk remaining aspirational rather than operational.

The initiative also underscores the centrality of examinations in shaping identity and opportunity. Efforts to recast students as confident participants rather than anxious competitors are psychologically constructive. However, the persistence of exam-centric pathways to higher education and employment means that stress cannot be fully addressed through motivational reframing alone. Assessment reform remains essential. Diversified evaluation methods such as project-based assessment, continuous review and competency mapping could gradually reduce the disproportionate weight assigned to single high stakes tests. Dialogue platforms highlight the issue but cannot substitute for structural redesign.

Another dimension worth examining is governance symbolism. Direct interaction between national leadership and students carries motivational value and cultivates a sense of inclusion. It reinforces visibility and underscores that youth concerns are acknowledged at policy levels. Yet long term outcomes depend on decentralised execution. Counselling networks, teacher support systems and accessible mental health resources are necessary to sustain the confidence such interactions inspire. Programmes addressing psychosocial support indicate policy awareness of these needs, but their coverage, capacity and quality require continuous evaluation. Engagement must

ultimately empower local educational ecosystems rather than rely on episodic national visibility.

Inclusivity remains an important aspect of the programme's evolution. Multi region interactions and outreach to diverse student communities reflect efforts to recognise India's varied educational realities. Such gestures signal intent to bridge disparities across geography and socio-economic context. Nonetheless, structural inequalities persist in access to infrastructure, teacher availability and digital resources. Dialogue can amplify voices, but equitable outcomes depend on resource allocation and targeted interventions. Bridging this gap is central to ensuring that encouragement translates into opportunity.

Culturally, Pariksha Pe Charcha contributes to normalising conversations about stress and expectation. Historically, examination anxiety has often been treated as an individual burden rather than a collective concern. Public acknowledgement of mental well-being in academic discourse reduces stigma and encourages openness. This cultural shift has intrinsic value, particularly in societies where performance pressure is deeply embedded. However, cultural acknowledgement must be accompanied by systemic safeguards. Institutionalising counselling access and embedding well-being practices within school routines would represent meaningful progression from awareness to action. The initiative also reveals an evolving understanding of education as nation building. By connecting personal development to broader societal responsibility, it situates learning within a collective narrative of progress. This framing can inspire motivation and civic engagement. Yet policy must remain

attentive to balance. Education strategies should empower individual aspirations alongside national objectives, ensuring that diversity of pathways and ambitions is preserved. Encouraging autonomy and critical thinking alongside collective purpose strengthens resilience and innovation.

Ultimately, the significance of Pariksha Pe Charcha lies not in its annual occurrence but in what it reflects about policy direction and public expectation. It illustrates recognition that education must address emotional, social and cognitive dimensions simultaneously. It demonstrates the communicative potential of leadership engagement with youth. Most importantly, it highlights the continued urgency of reforming systems that still concentrate pressure within narrow evaluative frameworks.

India's demographic trajectory makes educational transformation imperative. Confidence building dialogues can catalyse awareness and encourage constructive attitudes, but sustainable progress depends on structural continuity. Investment in teacher training, assessment reform, counselling infrastructure and equitable resource distribution will determine whether the spirit of reassurance evolves into enduring change.

As examinations continue to dominate academic calendars, initiatives that broaden the conversation serve a useful function. They remind stakeholders that marks alone do not define capability or potential. The next stage lies in ensuring that the principles articulated in national dialogues reshape everyday educational practice.

The author is a gender rights advocate and independent journalist who writes on gender justice, education, and child rights.

From tariffs to trolleys: India-US trade touches households

Akshansh Sinha

TRADE agreements are often debated in the language of tariffs, market access and geopolitical alignment. For the ordinary citizen, however, their meaning is far simpler and far more tangible. They are felt not in negotiation rooms but at shop counters, in employment prospects and in the range of goods available in everyday markets. The evolving India-US trade framework illustrates this reality clearly. While the arrangement carries strategic and diplomatic significance, its relevance to consumers lies in the gradual reshaping of prices, choices and economic stability.

At the most visible level, trade liberalisation influences retail costs. Reduced tariffs on certain imported agricultural and consumer goods can lower the cost of bringing them into domestic markets. This often translates into modest price relief or increased availability

of specialised products. For urban consumers in particular, access to a wider range of foods and manufactured goods may expand significantly. Yet expectations must remain measured. Retail pricing reflects logistics, distribution margins and market competition as much as tariff reductions. Cheaper imports are possible, not guaranteed. The consumer benefit here is incremental rather than dramatic. More consequential than immediate price effects is the indirect impact through employment and income. Lower barriers to Indian exports improve competitiveness abroad, especially in labour intensive sectors such as textiles, leather, engineering goods and pharmaceuticals. Expanded market access encourages production and investment, which can support job creation and wage stability. For households, the effect of stable employment often outweighs minor price adjustments on imported goods. Trade therefore shapes con-

Trade agreements are often debated through tariffs and market access, yet their real consequences unfold in prices, employment prospects and consumer choice. The evolving India-US trade framework illustrates how global negotiations shape everyday economic life.

sumption power as much as consumption costs. It is in this linkage between global markets and domestic livelihoods that frameworks of this nature acquire deeper significance. The expansion of product choice forms another dimension of consumer impact. Exposure to international competition tends to widen availability and raise quality benchmarks. Domestic producers adapt by improving efficiency or diversifying offerings. Over time, consumers benefit from broader selection and competitive pricing. This process, however, unfolds unevenly across sectors. Metropolitan markets may see faster change than smaller towns, reflecting disparities in distribution networks and purchasing

power. The gains are thus real but geographically differentiated.

Balanced assessment also requires acknowledging adjustment pressures. Trade openness can challenge domestic producers facing stronger foreign competition. In agriculture and small scale manufacturing, concerns persist regarding price undercutting and income volatility. When producer margins compress, the resulting economic stress can affect employment patterns and rural demand, ultimately feeding back into consumption dynamics. Consumer welfare therefore cannot be evaluated solely through the lens of lower prices. Sustainable benefit depends on maintaining equilibri-

um between openness and domestic resilience.

Beyond material outcomes, trade arrangements carry behavioural implications. Increased availability of global goods reshapes consumption patterns and expectations. Quality benchmarks evolve, brand awareness deepens and purchasing decisions reflect greater information flow. This subtle transformation reflects the integration of domestic markets into wider economic networks. Consumers become participants in a broader exchange ecosystem rather than isolated end users. While intangible, this shift influences long term economic orientation and cultural engagement with global commerce.

The India-US engagement should therefore be understood as a process rather than a single event. Its consumer impact will not manifest overnight through sweeping price shifts or sudden retail transformations. Instead, ef-

fects will emerge gradually across employment conditions, market diversity and competitive standards. Some households will perceive benefits earlier, others later, and some sectors will adapt with greater difficulty. Such uneven distribution is characteristic of trade integration globally.

Ultimately, the value of any trade arrangement for citizens lies in its cumulative outcomes. Affordable goods, secure livelihoods and expanding choice together shape everyday welfare. When viewed through this lens, the significance of trade policy becomes tangible. The evolving India-US framework underscores the real measure of trade success, not recorded in tariff schedules but experienced in ordinary economic life.

New Delhi-based columnist on foreign policy and political economy. He writes on India's global strategy, trade disputes, and the shifting balance of power in Asia

Four Indian students among several injured in stabbing attack in Russia



Vinay Shukla

MOSCOW, FEB 8 / PTI

At least six people, including four Indian students, were injured on Saturday in a stabbing attack at a university in Russia's Bashkortostan Republic, media reports and the Indian mission here said. According to preliminary reports, a teenager armed with a knife entered a dormitory of the State Medical University in Ufa in the Bashkortostan Republic. He attacked the students living there and stabbed several of them, the Interior Ministry said.

"The attacker resisted arrest, during which two police officers were stabbed. Furthermore,

the suspect also inflicted bodily harm on himself," Interior Ministry spokesperson Maj General Irina Volk was quoted as saying by RTVI.com webportal.

Calling it an "unfortunate incident", the Indian Embassy here said, "Several persons including four Indian students have been injured."

The Embassy said it is in touch with the authorities, and officials from the Consulate in Kazan are en route to Ufa to provide assistance to the injured students. In a release, the Russian Federal Health Ministry said that four people injured in the attack are receiving medical care. One is in serious condition, while three others are in moderate condition, it added.

The attacker, identified as a 15-year-old youth, has also been ad-

mitted to a local children's hospital in serious condition, the Baza telegram channel said. Authorities in Ufa, the capital of the Bashkortostan Republic about 1,200 km east of Moscow, have launched a high-level probe into the incident. The Baza channel claimed that the attacker belonged to a banned neo-Nazi outfit.

"He belonged to the banned NS/WP neo-Nazi organisation. During the frenzy of attack, he was shouting nationalist slogans about (the) Holocaust," it said and shared the photo of a Swastika drawn on a wall with the blood of the victims.

According to eyewitnesses, "there was blood all around," Ren TV said, showing footage of wounded being taken to hospital by ambulance vans.

France's ex-minister quits over Epstein

PARIS, FEB 8 / AP

FRANCE'S former Culture Minister Jack Lang has resigned as head of a Paris cultural centre over alleged past financial links to convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein that prompted a tax investigation.

Lang was summoned to appear at the French Foreign Ministry, which oversees the Arab World Institute, on Sunday, but he submitted his resignation.

He is the highest-profile figure in France impacted by the release of Epstein files on Jan. 30 by the US Department of Justice, known for his role as a culture minister under Socialist President Francois Mitterrand in the 1980s and 1990s.

The Foreign Ministry confirmed his resignation on Saturday evening. The financial prosecutors' office said it had opened an investigation into Lang and his daughter, Caroline, over alleged "aggravated tax fraud laundering."

French investigative news website Mediapart reported last week on alleged financial and business ties between the Lang family and Jeffrey Epstein through an offshore company based in the US Virgin Islands in the Caribbean Sea. Jack Lang's name was mentioned more than 600 times in the Epstein files, showing intermittent correspondence between 2012 and 2019.

Musk's Starlink entry into Pak delayed over security concerns

Sajjad Hussain

ISLAMABAD, FEB 8

THE licence to Starlink to enter Pakistan's satellite internet market is delayed over data security concerns, the ongoing Musk-Trump fallout and competition from Chinese firms, local media reported on Sunday.

Starlink, owned by tech billionaire Elon Musk, is among several companies seeking approval to operate in Pakistan, but officials say unresolved security and geopolitical considerations have slowed the approval process. The government has come to know that Starlink could transmit certain data bypassing Pakistan's monitoring, regulatory and safety checks, reported the Express Tribune, citing sources.

"We cannot allow a license to Starlink without ensuring a safety check to ensure the safety of the data of consumers in Pakistan," a senior government official was quoted as saying by Express Tribune. According to the officials, the row between US President Donald Trump and Elon Musk is another reason the Pakistani establishment is not ready to grant security clearance, fearing it could provoke displeasure from Trump. The US president and Musk had enjoyed good rapport in the past but they later drifted apart. Pakistan and the US have enjoyed improved relations since Trump returned to power last year, and therefore, Pakistan does

not want to take any step that could raise concerns in Washington.

"But the real reason is that the government has tested some cases in which Starlink was supposed to pick up some sensitive data while providing satellite-based internet services," sources said. The government is working to address the issue, which delayed granting a licence to Starlink, according to the sources.

Currently, Pakistan retains control over internet data as Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited (PTCL) is a majority shareholder in the undersea cable infrastructure. However, authorities fear they would not have similar control over satellite-based internet data and that foreign companies, particularly Starlink, might be involved in data theft. Satellite-based services would primarily be provided in remote areas such as Balochistan, where conventional internet services are either limited or unavailable, sources further said.

Currently, relevant authorities monitor internet services and can even suspend connectivity in the event of security concerns. However, officials fear they may face difficulties blocking satellite-based services when required.

At present, five companies are seeking licences for satellite-based internet services in Pakistan, with plans to invest millions of dollars in the country.

Police arrest protesters at Minneapolis marking 1 month of Good's shooting

MINNEAPOLIS, FEB 8 / AP

POLICE arrested at least several demonstrators Saturday outside a federal building in Minneapolis, breaking up a protest marking the one-month anniversary of a Minnesota woman's death at the hands of an immigration officer.

Renee Good was killed on January 7 as she was driving away from immigration officers in a Minneapolis neighbourhood. Her death and that of another Minneapolis resident, Alex Pretti, just weeks later have stoked outrage nationwide over President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown. Scores of protesters gathered across the street from the Bishop Henry Whipple Federal Building around midday, throwing bottles and sex toys at a line of police guarding the property. The Minnesota Star Tribune reported that officers arrested a handful of protesters after the crowd starting throwing chunks of ice. A deputy was hit in the head, and a squad vehicle's windshield was smashed, according to a statement of the newspaper obtained from the Hennepin County Sheriff's Office.

Police declared the gathering unlawful and ordered protesters to leave. Many complied, the Star Tribune reported, but about 100 remained in a standoff with deputies, state troopers and state conservation officers. No one from the sheriff's office responded to email,

voicemail and text messages from The Associated Press on Saturday afternoon requesting a copy of the statement and inquiring about how many people were arrested, whether anyone was injured and what led up to the arrests.

Meanwhile on Saturday, hundreds gathered on a snow-covered field in a Minneapolis park to honour Good and Pretti. Event organisers echoed recent criticisms of the immigration crackdown across Minnesota, characterising it as a federal occupation.

A Lakota spiritual leader, Chief Arvol Looking Horse, led a ceremony at the front of the crowd filled with people holding signs and American flags. Others shared music and poetry to honour the two people who have become central figures in the polarizing immigration debate in recent weeks.

A federal immigration officer shot and killed Good, a 37-year-old mother of three, in her car in Minneapolis on January 7. Three agents surrounded her Honda Pilot SUV on a snowy street a few blocks from Good's home. Bystander video show an officer approaching the SUV stopped across the middle of the road, demanding the driver open the door and grabbing the handle. The vehicle began to pull forward and a different ICE officer standing in front of it pulled his weapon and immediately fired at close range, jumping back as the vehicle moved toward him.

Suspect in senior Russian general shooting detained

MOSCOW, FEB 8 / AP

RUSSIA'S Federal Security Service said on Sunday that the man suspected of shooting a deputy chief of Russia's military intelligence agency in Moscow was detained in Dubai and handed over to Russia. Lt. Gen. Vladimir Alekseyev was hospitalised after being shot several times on Friday by an assailant at an apartment building in northwestern Moscow, Investigative Committee spokesperson Svetlana Petrenko said. The attack followed a series of assassinations of senior military officers that Russia has blamed on Ukraine.

The Federal Security Service (FSB) said a Russian citizen, Lyubomir Korba, was detained in Dubai on suspicion of carrying out the shooting. In a statement on its website, FSB said it had also identified two "accomplices," one of whom was detained in Moscow and another who "left for Ukraine." Asked about the shooting, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Friday it would be up to law enforcement agencies to pursue the investigation but described it as an apparent "terrorist act" by Ukraine intended to derail peace talks.

There was no immediate response

from Kyiv to a request for comment on the Russian allegations. The shooting came a day after Russian, Ukrainian and US negotiators wrapped up two days of talks in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates, aimed at ending the nearly 4-year-old conflict in Ukraine. The Russian delegation was led by Alekseyev's boss, military intelligence chief Adm. Igor Kostyukov. Alekseyev, 64, has served as the first deputy head of Russia's military intelligence agency, known as the GRU, since 2011. He was decorated with the Hero of Russia medal for his role in Moscow's military campaign in

Syria. In June 2023, he was shown on state TV speaking to mercenary chief Yevgeny Prigozhin, when his Wagner Group seized the military headquarters in the southern city of Rostov-on-Don during his short-lived mutiny.

Since Moscow sent troops into Ukraine in 2022, Russian authorities have blamed Kyiv for several assassinations of military officers and public figures in Russia. Ukraine has claimed responsibility for some of them.

In December, a car bomb killed Lt. Gen. Famil Sarvarov, head of the Operational Training Directorate of the Russian Armed Forces' General Staff.



Voters cast their ballot at a polling station during a general election in Bangkok. AP/PTI

Washington Post publisher quits, days after layoffs

WASHINGTON, FEB 8 / AP

WASHINGTON Post publisher Will Lewis said Saturday that he's stepping down, three days after the troubled newspaper said that it was laying off one-third of its staff. Lewis sent an email to the Post's staff, saying that "difficult decisions have been taken in order to ensure the sustainable future of The Post." Lewis and the newspaper's billionaire owner Jeff Bezos, did not participate in a meeting with staff announcing the layoffs this week. The Post's chief financial officer, Jeff D'Onofrio, was named acting publisher and CEO. He joined the newspaper only last June.

The British-born Lewis was a former top executive at The Wall Street Journal before taking over at The Post in January 2024. His tenure has been rocky from the start, marked by layoffs and a failed reorganisation plan that led to the departure of former top editor Sally Krawcheck. The Post also lost tens of thousands of subscribers following Bezos' order late in the presidential campaign pulling back an expected endorsement of Kamala Harris for president, and subsequent changes to turn the editorial pages in a more conservative direction.

While anticipated, this past week's layoffs were deeper than anticipated, resulting in the shutting down of the Post's renowned sports section, sharp cutbacks in foreign and metro coverage, and the laying off of its photographic staff.

Greenland crisis boosted Danish apps identifying US goods

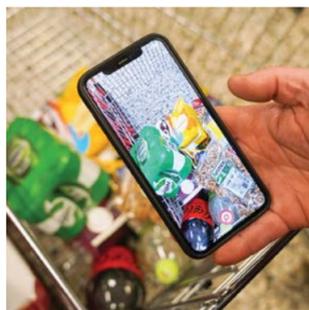
COPENHAGEN, FEB 8 / AP

THE makers of mobile apps designed to help shoppers identify and boycott American goods say they saw a surge of interest in Denmark and beyond after the recent flare-up in tensions over US President Donald Trump's designs on Greenland.

The creator of the "Made O'Meter" app, Ian Rosenfeldt, said he saw around 30,000 downloads of the free app in just three days at the height of the trans-Atlantic diplomatic crisis in late January, out of more than 100,000 since it was launched in March. Rosenfeldt, who lives in Copenhagen and works in digital marketing, decided to create the app a year ago after joining a Facebook group of like-minded Danes hoping to boycott US goods.

"Many people were frustrated and

thinking, How do we actually do this in practical terms?" the 53-year-old recalled. "If you use a bar code scanner, it's difficult to see if a product is actually American or not, if it's Danish or not. And if you don't know that, you can't really make a conscious choice." The latest version of "Made O'Meter" uses artificial intelligence to identify and analyse several products at a time, then recommend similar European-made alternatives. Users can set preferences, like "No USA-owned brands" or "Only EU-based brands." The app claims over 95 per cent accuracy. "By using artificial intelligence, you can take an image of a product... and it can make a deep dive to go out and find the correct information about the product on many levels," Rosenfeldt told The Associated Press during a demonstration at a Copenhagen grocery store.



"This way, you have information that you can use to make decisions on what you think is right." After an initial surge of downloads when the app was launched, usage tailed off. Until last month, when Trump stepped up his rhetoric about the need for the US to acquire Greenland, a strategically im-

portant and mineral-rich Arctic island that is a semiautonomous territory of Denmark. Usage peaked Jan. 23, when there were almost 40,000 scans in one day, compared with 500 or so daily last summer. It has dropped back since, but there were still around 5,000 a day this week, said Rosenfeldt, who noted "Made O'Meter" is used by over 20,000 people in Denmark but also by people in Germany, Spain, Italy, and even Venezuela.

"It's become much more personal," said Rosenfeldt, who spoke of "losing an ally and a friend."

Trump announced in January he would slap new tariffs on Denmark and seven other European countries that opposed his takeover calls, only to abruptly drop his threats after he said a "framework" for a deal over access to mineral-rich Greenland was

reached with NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte's help. Few details of that agreement have emerged.

The US began technical talks in late January to put together an Arctic security deal with Denmark and Greenland, which say sovereignty is not negotiable. Rosenfeldt knows such boycotts won't damage the US economy, but hopes to send a message to supermarkets and encourage greater reliance on European producers. "Maybe we can send a signal, and people will listen, and we can make a change," he added.

Another Danish app, "NonUSA," topped 100,000 downloads at the beginning of February. One of its creators, 21-year-old Jonas Pinner, said there were over 25,000 downloads Jan. 21, when 526 product scans were performed in a minute at one point.

Iran's top diplomat strikes hard line on US talks



DUBAI, FEB 8 / AP

IRAN'S top diplomat insisted on Sunday that Tehran's strength came from its ability to "say no to the great powers," striking a maximalist position just after negotiations with the United States over its nuclear program and in the wake of nationwide protests.

Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, speaking to diplomats at a summit in Tehran, signalled that Iran would stick to its position that it must be able to enrich uranium — a major point of contention with President Donald Trump, who bombed Iranian atomic sites in June during the 12-day Iran-Israel war.

While Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian praised the talks on Fri-

day in Oman with the Americans as "a step forward," Araghchi's remarks show the challenge ahead. Already, the US moved the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, ships and warplanes to the Middle East to pressure Iran into an agreement and have the firepower necessary to strike the Islamic Republic should Trump choose to do so.

"I believe the secret of the Islamic Republic of Iran's power lies in its ability to stand against bullying, domination and pressures from others," Araghchi said. "They fear our atomic bomb, while we are not pursuing an atomic bomb. Our atomic bomb is the power to say no to the great powers. The secret of the Islamic Republic's power is in the power to say no to the powers."

Araghchi's choice to explicitly use an "atomic bomb" as a rhetorical device likely wasn't accidental. While Iran has long maintained its nuclear program is peaceful, the West and the International Atomic Energy Agency say Tehran had an organized military program to seek the bomb up until 2003.

Iran had been enriching uranium up to 60 per cent purity, a short, technical step to weapons-grade levels of 90 per cent, the only non-weapons state to do so. Iranian officials in recent years had also been increasingly threatening that the Islamic Republic could seek the bomb, even while its diplomats have pointed to Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's preachings as a binding fatwa, or religious edict,

that Iran wouldn't build one.

Pezeshkian, who ordered Araghchi to pursue talks with the Americans after likely getting Khamenei's blessing, also wrote on X on Sunday about the talks.

"The Iran-US talks, held through the follow-up efforts of friendly governments in the region, were a step forward," the president wrote. "Dialogue has always been our strategy for peaceful resolution. ... The Iranian nation has always responded to respect with respect, but it does not tolerate the language of force."

It remains unclear when and where, or if, there will be a second round of talks. Trump, after the talks on Friday, offered few details but said: "Iran looks like they want to make a deal very badly — as they should."

During Friday's talks, US Navy Adm. Brad Cooper, the head of the American military's Central Command, was in Oman. Cooper's presence was likely an intentional reminder to Iran about the US military presence in the region. Cooper later accompanied US special envoy Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law, to the Lincoln out in the Arabian Sea after the indirect negotiations.

Araghchi appeared to be taking the threat of an American military strike seriously, as many worried Iranians have in recent weeks. He noted that after multiple rounds of talks last year, the US "attacked us in the midst of negotiations."

"If you take a step back (in negotiations), it is not clear up to where it will go," Araghchi said.



Russian airstrike on Ukrainian city kills 1

KYIV, FEB 8 / AP

A Russian airstrike on a residential area in eastern Ukraine killed one person and wounded two, officials said on Sunday, after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the US has given Ukraine and Russia a June deadline to reach a peace deal.

The attack on the city of Kramatorsk in Ukraine's Donetsk region caused a fire in a nine-story apartment block, according to Ukraine's State Emergency Service.

Russia also struck energy infrastructure in Ukraine's Poltava region overnight into Sunday, Serhii Koretskyi, chief executive of Ukraine's state-owned gas company Naftogaz, said.

Russia has hammered Ukraine's power grid, especially in winter, throughout the nearly 4-year-old war. It aims to weaken the Ukrainian will to resist in a strategy that Kyiv officials call "weaponising winter."

Zelenskyy told reporters Friday the US has given Ukraine and Rus-

sia a June deadline to reach a deal to end the war. If the June deadline is not met, the Trump administration will likely put pressure on both sides, he added.

"The Americans are proposing the parties end the war by the beginning of this summer and will probably put pressure on the parties precisely according to this schedule," Zelenskyy said. "And they say that they want to do everything by June. And they will do everything to end the war. And they want a clear schedule of all events."

He said the US proposed holding the next round of trilateral talks next week in their country for the first time, likely in Miami. "We confirmed our participation," he added. The latest deadline follows US-brokered trilateral talks in Abu Dhabi that produced no breakthrough as the sides cling to mutually exclusive demands. Russia is pressing Ukraine to withdraw from the Donbas, where fighting remains intense — a condition Kyiv says it will never accept.

Takaichi hopes for big win in national elections

TOKYO, FEB 8 / AP

POLLS opened on Sunday in parliamentary elections that Japan's popular Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi hopes will give her struggling party a big enough win to push through an ambitious conservative political agenda.

Takaichi is hugely popular, but the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, which has governed Japan for most of the last seven decades, has struggled with funding and religious scandals. She called Sunday's snap elections only after three months in office, hoping to turn that around before her popularity fades. She wants to make progress on a right-wing agenda that aims to boost Japan's economy and military capabilities as tensions grow with China. She also wants to nurture ties with her crucial US ally, and a sometimes unpredictable President Donald Trump. The ultraconservative Takaichi, who took office as Japan's first female leader in October, pledged to "work, work, work," and her style, which is seen as both playful and tough, has resonated with younger fans.

The latest surveys indicated a landslide win in the lower house for the LDP. The opposition, despite the formation of a new centrist alliance and a rising far-right, is seen as too splintered to be a real challenger. Takaichi is betting that her LDP party, together with its new partner, the Japan Innovation Party, will secure a majority in the 465-seat lower house, the more powerful of Japan's two-chamber parliament. Recent surveys by major Japanese newspapers show a possibility that Takaichi's party could win a simple majority on its own, while her coalition could win as many as 300 seats, a big jump from the thin majority it held since a 2024 election loss.

A big win by Takaichi's coalition could mean a significant shift to the right in Japan's security, immigration and other policies, with its right-wing partner JIP's leader Hirofumi Yoshimura saying his party will serve as an "accelerator."

Palestinians attempt to use Rafah border crossing amidst delays

CAIRO, FEB 8 / AP

PALESTINIANS on both sides of the crossing between Gaza and Egypt, which opened last week for the first time since 2024, were making their way to the border on Sunday in hopes of crossing, one of the main requirements for the US-backed ceasefire. The opening comes as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is expected to travel to Washington this week, though the major subject of discussion will be Iran, his office said.

The Rafah Crossing opened to a few Palestinians in each direction last week, after Israel retrieved the body of the last hostage held in Gaza and several American officials visited Israel to press for the opening. Over the first four days of the crossing's opening, just 36 Palestinians requiring medical care were allowed to leave for Egypt, plus 62 companions, according to United Nations data.

Palestinian officials say nearly 20,000 people in Gaza are seeking to leave for medical care that they say is not available in the war-shattered territory. The few who have succeeded in crossing described delays

and allegations of mistreatment by Israeli forces and other groups involved in the crossing, including an Israeli-backed Palestinian armed group, Abu Shabab.

A group of Palestinian patients and wounded gathered on Sunday morning in the courtyard of a Red Crescent hospital in Gaza's southern city of Khan Younis, before making their way to the Rafah crossing with Egypt for treatment abroad, family members told The Associated Press. Amjad Abu Jedian, who was injured in the war, was scheduled to leave Gaza for medical treatment on the first day of the crossing's reopening, but only five patients were allowed to travel that day, his mother, Raja Abu Jedian, said. Abu Jedian was shot by an Israeli sniper while he was building traditional bathrooms in the central Bureij refugee camp in July 2024, she said. On Saturday, his family received a call from the World Health Organisation notifying them that he is included in the group that will travel on Sunday, she said.

"We want them to take care of the patients (during their evacuation)," she said. "We want the Israeli military not to burden them."



Prime Minister Narendra Modi plays a dafli during the cultural finale of the 'Selamat Datang Modiji' Indian community event, as Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and artists look on appreciatively, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. PTI

Ukraine businesses struggle to cope amidst power cuts, uncertainty

KYIV, FEB 8 / AP

IT is pre-dawn in the historic Podil district of the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, and warm light from the Spelta bakery-bistro's window pierces the darkness outside. On a wooden surface dusted with flour, the baker Oleksandr Kutsenko skilfully divides and shapes soft, damp pieces of dough. As he shoves the first loaves into the oven, a sweet, delicate aroma of fresh bread fills the space. Seconds later, the lights go out, the ovens switch off, and darkness envelops the room. Kutsenko, 31, steps outside into the freezing night, switches on a large rectangular generator, and the power kicks back in. It's a pattern that will be repeated many times as the business struggles to keep working through the power outages caused by Russia's bombing campaign on Ukraine's energy grid.

"It's now more than impossible to imagine a Ukrainian business operating without a generator," said Olha Hrynychuk, the co-founder and head baker of Spelta. The cost of purchasing and operating generators to overcome power outages is just one of many challenges facing Ukrainian businesses after nearly four years of war. Acute labour shortages due to mobilisation and war-related migration, security risks, declining purchasing power and complicated logistics add to the pressure, officials say.

Hrynychuk, 28, opened the bakery 10 months after Russia launched its full-scale invasion in 2022. That winter was the first year Russia targeted Ukraine's energy system. Hrynychuk says they barely know what it is to work under "normal" conditions, but have never faced the challenges they do now.

Production is entirely dependent



on electricity, and the generator burns about 700 hryvnias (USD 16) worth of fuel per hour. "We run on a generator for 10 to 12 hours a day. You have no fixed schedule — you have to adapt and refuel it at the same time," Hrynychuk said. The "Best Way to Cup" project, which has two venues and roasts and grinds its own coffee, is on the brink of permanent closure. Co-founder Yana

Bilym, 33, who opened the cafe in May, said a Russian attack shattered all its windows and glass doors in August. Bilym said the cost of renovation was 150,000 hryvnias (about USD 3,400), half of which she financed with a bank loan that she only recently finished repaying. Last month, after several consecutive large-scale Russian attacks on the energy sector, her entire building

lost its water supply, and soon after, the sewer system stopped working.

"We were forced to close. We believe it's temporary. Businesses in December and January, unfortunately, operate at a loss," Bilym said. Many businesses have become a lifeline for communities struggling with plunging temperatures. Ukraine's government has allowed some firms to operate during curfew hours in the energy emergency as "Points of Invincibility," allowing access to free electricity to charge phones and power banks, drink tea and have some respite from the cold.

Tetiana Abramova, 61, is a founder of the Rito Group, a clothing company that has been producing designer knitwear for men and women since 1991, the year Ukraine became independent. It participates in Ukraine Fashion Week, the country's biggest fashion show, and exports garments to the United States.

PSU banks profit to cross Rs 2 lakh crore milestone in FY26: Nagaraju

Kumar Dipankar

NEW DELHI, FEB 8

BUOYED by the good health of public sector banks (PSBs), Financial Services Secretary M Nagaraju has exuded confidence that the combined profit of these banks should cross Rs 2 lakh crore in the current financial year.

Stressing that the Indian banking sector is in good shape, he said credit growth of PSBs is at 12 per cent this year, which is tremendously "good", while deposit growth at 10 per cent is also reasonably very good. "As I said, banks are at the bellwether for the strength of the economy. Therefore, they are resilient. We have very prudent management systems in place under the regulator RBI. So we are not much worried about the external factors negatively impacting our banking sector," he told PTI in an interview. Asked about the profitability of PSBs, "this year (ongoing financial year) we will cross Rs 2 lakh crore. We already touched almost Rs 1 lakh crore in the first half...I think we will cross Rs 2 lakh crore."

The combined profit of PSBs would double in three years. PSBs profit crossed Rs 1 lakh crore to Rs 1.05 lakh crore in FY23, touched another high of Rs 1.41 lakh crore in 2023-24 and subsequently reached Rs 1.78 lakh



Financial Services Secretary M Nagaraju

crore in FY25 on account of significant improvement in asset quality, credit growth, healthy capital adequacy ratio and rising return on assets. As far as asset quality of PSBs are concerned, Gross NPA is at record low of 2.30 per cent and net NPA at 3 per cent at the end of September 2025. Provisioning coverage ratio (PCR) improved to 94.63 per cent at the end of September 2025, while the capital adequacy ratio

of PSBs stood at 15.96 per cent at the end of the first half of the current fiscal. PSBs declared dividend of Rs 34,990 crore (Gol share Rs 22,699 crore) in FY 2024-25 against total dividend of Rs 27,830 crore to shareholders (GoI share Rs 18,013 crore) in FY 2023-24.

During the current financial year, the Government of India has successfully mobilised resources through divestment of its shareholding in select

PSBs. Amounts of Rs 2,627.52 crore and Rs 1,419.36 crore were realised through the Offer for Sale (OFS) of Government of India's shares in Bank of Maharashtra and Indian Overseas Bank, respectively. The Finance Ministry is considering raising the foreign direct investment (FDI) limit in public sector banks (PSBs) to 49 per cent from the current 20 per cent to strengthen their capital base.

Quota-based duty concession on US DDGS to support poultry sector: Goyal

NEW DELHI, FEB 8 / PTI

INDIA has agreed to provide quota-based duty concessions on dried distillers' grains (DDGS) to the US under the trade deal, as the animal husbandry and poultry industry wants the product due to its high nutritional value, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Sunday.

According to a joint statement, India and the US have agreed on a framework for the first phase of the bilateral trade agreement, which is expected to be signed by mid-March. "I've given them a quota in DDGS. It's an animal feed, very high in nutrition. Animal husbandry, in fact, wants it. Poultry people are craving for it. It makes the chicken much, much healthier. Very high protein," he told PTI Videos in an interview.

To balance the interests, India has agreed to a quota-based duty concession, he said. "Quota on DDGS is good for the economy," he added.

These remarks are important as certain experts have raised concerns over duty cuts in DDGS. He said that India has opened its market in a calibrated and balanced way. "Every one of them is very balanced, very well thought of and will support the India growth story and finally support Indian farmers who also want to export their products, particularly processed products to the rest of the world," Goyal said.



According to the US Grains and Biproducts Council, Distiller's dried grains with solubles (DDGS) are the nutrient-rich co-product of dry-milled ethanol production. DDGS utilisation as a feed ingredient is well documented as both an energy and a protein supplement. Combined, US ethanol plants possess the capacity to produce more than 15 billion gallons of ethanol and 44 million metric tonnes of DDGS, according to the council.

The council has been instrumental in educating the global market on the nutritional benefits of DDGS. Its exports have exploded from 5 million tonnes in 2009 to more than 10 million metric tons in 58 countries in 2022-23. Mexico purchased the bulk of DDGS exports, consisting of more than 20 per cent of the export market, while South Korea was the second-largest importer. Vietnam, Indonesia and Canada were among the top five importers for 2022-23, according to the council's portal.

IAMAI says GST reducing drivers' net earnings

NEW DELHI, FEB 8 / PTI

APPLYING GST on every ride booked through online platforms is reducing the take-home income of driver partners, and there is a need to re-look at its applicability to cab booking services, the internet platforms' industry body IAMAI said in a recent letter to the government. Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI), which represents online firms, like Rapido, Uber, and Ola, in a letter to the Finance Ministry last month, said that the issue not only impacts private online aggregators, but also government-supported digital mobility platforms like Bharat Taxi.

Under the current GST structure, wherein 5 per cent GST is applied on every ride billed through digital platforms, there is a direct and disproportionate impact on driver earnings and the affordability of these services by consumers, the industry body said.

"We request the GST Council

and the Finance Ministry to re-examine the applicability of Section 9 (5) and structure of GST on app-based mobility services with a view to exempting SaaS models from its ambit," IAMAI said.

The section cited by IAMAI on GST structure states that "Electronic Commerce Operator (ECO) is required to pay tax on supply of services such as Passenger Transport Service, Accommodation services, Housekeeping Services & Restaurant Services, if such services are supplied through ECO".

IAMAI said under the SaaS-based technology model, the aggregator is not involved in fare collection, as the payments are settled directly between the driver and the passenger, resulting in an inherent impossibility for the aggregator to discharge GST at 5 per cent on the ride value.

"In other words, the additional GST burden is effectively passed on to drivers and consumers, reducing the take-home income of drivers

Venture capitalists must increase support for defence startups: Saraswat

NAGPUR, FEB 8 / PTI

NITI Aayog member and former DRDO director general VK Saraswat on Sunday said venture capitalists must increase financial support for Indian defence startups, which he asserted have come a long way.

On a question about deepening defence ties with the US and the balance required to ensure the enduring partnership with Russia is not affected, he said the prime focus was on meeting India's requirements rather than "choosing between A and B". Speaking with PTI Videos on the sidelines of 'Advantage Vidarbha -2026 Business Conclave and Investment Summit' here, Saraswat asserted India will continue to progress on its path in the same way as the country has done in the past irrespective of what is happening in geopolitical framework.

Queried on what policymakers need to keep in mind to ensure ties with Russia do not get affected while the defence partnership with US deepens, the former DG of the premier Defence Research and De-



velopment Organisation said, "It is about how we look at our own business requirements. It is not a question of choosing between A and B. It is a question of how do we meet our requirements of security and latest technology in terms of weapons and ensuring it happens." Queried on the robust allocation for defence in the 2026-27 Union Budget presented in Parliament on February 1, Saarswat said it indicated that the country's

focus would now be on large scale production of weapons and equipment required in future wars.

"It is also for indigenisation, for ensuring the private sector gets more participation for bringing down the cost and increasing the rate of production, and ensuring our products become cost effective and competitive," he said.

Saraswat stressed the Budget allocations are in keeping with the

lessons learnt in Operation Sindoor on the choice of weapons and the priority of its manufacturing.

"Whether I should go for long range supersonic missiles or stand-alone weapons that are needed for attacking from a distance. Because the future of war is non-contact warfare and in non contact war fare the technologies that are going to be used are of different nature. This Budget and the R&D initiative which the government has started with the participation of the private sector is totally in that direction," he said. The defence outlay in the 2026-27 Union Budget stood at a whopping Rs 7.85 lakh crore, up from last year's allocation of Rs 6.81 lakh crore. Out of the total allocation, Rs 2,19,306 crore has been earmarked for capital expenditure to the armed forces that largely includes purchasing new weapons, aircraft, warships and other military hardware.

Responding to a query on defence R&D and how defence-related startups have gained from the budgetary support announced last year to create futuristic products in India,

Cybersecurity breaches top risk for India Inc: FICCI-EY Survey

NEW DELHI, FEB 8 / PTI

CYBERSECURITY breaches and attacks have emerged as the top risks for Indian companies' organisational performance, with 51 per cent of senior leaders citing it as their primary concern, according to a new survey released on Sunday. The 'FICCI-EY Risk Survey 2026' identified changing customer demands (49 per cent) and geopolitical events (48 per cent) as the next two most critical risks facing businesses. The report, which draws on inputs from senior decision-makers across various sectors, highlights that technol-

ogy risk is now tightly linked to operational continuity. According to the survey, 61 per cent of respondents feel that rapid technological change and digital disruption are affecting their competitive position. An equal proportion (61 per cent) identified cyber-attacks and data breaches as major financial and reputational threats. "More than half, 57 per cent, report potential data theft and insider fraud as significant risks, and 47 per cent acknowledge difficulty in addressing increasingly sophisticated cyber threats," the report stated.

The findings are based on a web-based survey of 137 senior deci-

sion-makers, including CXOs. The technology sector had the highest representation in the study at 21 per cent, followed by professional services.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a dual risk area for India Inc. While 60 per cent of respondents believe inadequate adoption of emerging technologies, including AI, can adversely impact operational effectiveness, 54 per cent feel AI-related risks, including ethical and governance issues, are not being effectively managed. Commenting on the findings, Rajeev Sharma, Chair, FICCI Committee on Corporate Security &

DRR, said, "In a business environment shaped by volatility, the ability to anticipate, absorb and adapt to risk is emerging as a defining capability for sustained growth. The report indicates that organisations are moving away from treating risk as episodic and are instead embedding it into strategic decision-making". The survey also flagged significant concerns regarding workforce dynamics. About 64 per cent of respondents believe talent shortages and critical skill gaps might affect organisational performance, while 59 per cent cited weak succession planning as a risk to stability.

India's housing mkt steady after crazy growth post COVID: Pirojsha Godrej

NEW DELHI, FEB 8 / PTI

INDIA'S housing market continues to be strong with steady growth in sales volume as well as pricing, Godrej Properties Executive Chairperson Pirojsha Godrej said, ruling out any concern on the demand side.

In an interview with PTI, he noted that the housing market has stabilised after witnessing a crazy growth for a couple of years post-COVID pandemic. Pirojsha exuded confidence that the company would eas-

ily achieve its Rs 32,500 crore target of sales bookings for this fiscal. The company would also meet the annual guidance in other key metrics - collection of funds from customers, deliveries of projects, launches and business development (addition of land parcels for future projects), he said. "Housing market as a whole is holding up. Lots of talk about market softening...But what we are seeing continues to be quite strong." He said the company's pre-sales of housing plots in tier II cities like Panipat have been very encouraging.

Titan eyes Swiss watch boom post European Union trade pact

NEW DELHI, FEB 8 / PTI

LEADING watch maker Titan Company expects sales of luxury Swiss watches to rise sharply in India following the recent India-EU Free Trade Agreement, which has further lowered import duties on such products, said a top company official.

The Tata group firm, which operates Helios and Helios Luxe formats, said Swiss brands will become more competitive in the domestic market as they pass on duty benefits to consumers.

Its Swiss segment has been growing substantially and is in talks with more brands for its chain of Helios and Helios Luxe, Titan Watches

Chief Sales & Marketing Officer Rahul Shukla told PTI.

"Swiss watches will play a larger role, and the premium segment will drive the next phase of growth," he said.

Duties on Swiss watches have already come down from about 22 per cent to 15 per cent under the India-EFTA trade pact, which came into force on October 1, 2025. Switzerland is part of the four-nation European bloc EFTA. The India-EU FTA is expected to further reduce duties.

"This is the second phase of the agreement. Swiss watch duties have already come down from about 22 per cent to around 15 per cent. I expect more action in the Indian watch

market, particularly from Swiss brands," he said.

The company is also bullish on its overall watch business, targeting USD 1 billion in sales next year and aiming to double that figure by FY30, banking on premiumisation, rising demand, and a stronger play in luxury formats.

"We have set a target of reaching a one-billion-dollar business next year. We are looking at doubling that to a two-billion-dollar business by FY30. We are confident about the growth trajectory and the opportunity in the Indian market," said Shukla.

He added that the Swiss watch segment has been growing substantially



and is expected to heat up further, including from domestic players and private equity-funded companies that see watches as a high-growth category.

Titan has tied up with four to five Swiss brands for its Helios and Helios Luxe formats, with more partnerships in the pipeline.

He noted that independent Swiss brands are also showing interest in entering the Indian market, often through partnerships with Titan, while established players are expanding boutiques and multi-brand footprints.

According to Shukla, established Swiss makers may pass on benefits to consumers and become more competitive in India's fast-growing premium and luxury watch market, which generally starts at prices of Rs 50,000 and above.

"We co-invest with partners to build brand equity. We already work with several brands and will launch a few more within this financial year," he said.

Shukla said such "story-led" Swiss brands are finding traction in India, and their contribution to Titan's watch business will certainly increase.

"Swiss watches largely play out through our Helios chain. Watches priced above Rs 50,000 now contribute more than half of the business in that chain," he said.

In FY25, Titan's 'Watch & Wearable' segment had reported a revenue of Rs 4,576 crore, with a growth of over 17 per cent, which, the company said, was a "defining year".

When asked about the third quarter, Shukla said Titan is yet to declare its results but at an aggregate level, demand in Q3 seems quite robust.

Quantum computing India's ticket to global tech space: Naidu

Amanpreet Singh

AMARAVATI, FEB 8

INDIA is poised to become a leading player in quantum technology, which could prove to be a game-changer for the IT sector and the wider economy, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu said on Sunday.

The Quantum Valley initiative launched in Andhra Pradesh is set to usher in the next wave of the information technology (IT) revolution in the country, Naidu said in an interview with PTI Videos, emphasising that it would position India as a hardware-and-manufacturing powerhouse, in addition to being a software-and-services hub.

"Technology is mature now. AI is a reality. Real-time data collection is a reality. The next level is quantum computing as it has unlimited capabilities. As of today, this is the fastest, the father of all technologies or, you can say, the mother of all technologies," he said.

"Only a few countries have taken the lead in quantum technology and we are one of them. The Government of India has announced the quantum mission. Now, we are establishing it (Quantum Valley) here. With that, our people are ready to produce quantum computers and get into manufacturing now," Naidu said. Acknowledging that MoUs and investment pledges often make headlines but do not eventually lead to enough action on the ground, the chief minister said



he is working on improving that conversion rate and putting in place safeguards to ensure that non-serious players are weeded out.

"Earlier, I used to say ease of doing business. Now, I am going for speed of doing business. Any investor, when he invests, he is expecting returns. Then only will he survive. If his project is delayed abnormally, then naturally it will not be viable. All hurdles I want to remove. I am introducing escrow accounts for all benefits or subsidies.

"I have committed something for you, year by year. I will give you online with an escrow account. You do not come to me. This is where I wanted to promote self-discipline and also government regulation," Naidu said. Investment proposals, he said, have to mandatorily come with clear timelines and proof of feasibility, and the progress has to be reviewed monthly. "There will not be any delay. Any non-serious entrepreneur cannot do business with us. If you are serious, we will get it done. All clearances we are giving in 21 days, or even less.

Avoid costly, large LLM buildouts: Sridhar Vembu on India AI strategy

NEW DELHI, FEB 8 / PTI

INDIA should not emulate or compete head-on with the massive Large Language Models (LLMs) currently dominating the AI landscape, Zoho founder and Chief Scientist Sridhar Vembu has said, advocating that the country should focus on smaller models or other approaches that are less-energy, less capital intensive.

The remarks come at a time when interest in artificial intelligence (AI) has peaked in India, with the country soon to host the India AI Impact Summit - the largest of the four major global AI congregations so far.

Vembu's view also aligns with the recent Economic Survey, which noted that India's limited access to cutting-edge compute infrastructure and capital makes pursuit of foundational models as the centrepiece of an AI strategy rather "challenging".

The Survey favoured a bottom-up approach to AI development saying it aligns more closely with realities.

In an interview with PTI, Vembu cited the USD 50-100 billion costs and high-energy demands of large models built by the 'Big Tech' - a term used for the world's largest and most influential technology companies that dominate digital platforms, data, and innovation. Vembu noted that in this context, "Sometimes, staying a little bit behind is a good idea."

Rather than emulating energy-hungry global models, he argued that India should leverage its "brain power" to invest in research and development around smaller, more efficient AI approaches.

"If you look at AI today, the big



tech...the big LLMs dominate. That is three or four well-known names... the Chinese are in the game from an open source model perspective...But if you look at the domination, it is from the big LLMs," he elaborated.

He believes India should avoid entering the capital-intensive LLM race and instead pivot to smaller, distinct approaches. "I don't think we should take that (large LLM model) head-on right now, because this is a USD 50 billion, 100 billion game...the GPUs are in short supply, and are expensive. And the energy intensity of this, the electricity prices are going up rapidly in the US. So I don't believe we should simply emulate that right now. Sometimes, staying a little bit behind is a good idea," he pointed out.

Vembu said there is significant

scope for research and development in AI, and added that Zoho is actively pursuing more energy-efficient routes, including smaller models or other approaches. "There are other approaches to AI that don't involve this type of large language model approach. Those all are promising, and we are pursuing some other directions. We have to invest in that, we have to apply our brain power, rather than energy which is scarce," said Vembu, a prominent voice on technology, innovation and the societal implications of artificial intelligence.

The debate comes as India gears up to host the India AI Impact Summit later this month. Billed as the largest of the four global AI summits hosted so far - following the AI Safety Summit hosted by the UK, the AI Seoul Sum-

mit, and the AI Action Summit hosted by France, the event reflects growing international focus on responsible, inclusive and impact-driven AI, as well as India's expanding role in shaping the global AI narrative. According to an official release earlier last week, the Summit has garnered strong interest from the global community with over 35,000 registrations received ahead of the event, at the last count. Governments, industry leaders, researchers, civil society organisations and international institutions are set to actively participate in shaping the Summit's agenda. It is expected to see participation from over 100 countries, including 15 to 20 Heads of Government, 50 plus Ministers from various countries, and 40 plus prominent global and Indian companies.

Indo-US deal will double garment exports: TN exporters

TIRUPPUR, FEB 8 / PTI

EXPORTERS at the textile town in Tiruppur on Sunday indicated that the shipping of garments to the United States would double to Rs 30,000 crore over the next three years following the signing of the India deal with the US. Tiruppur, located about 450 km west of Chennai, would also witness an increase of job creation to about 5 lakh during the period, Tiruppur Exporters' Association president K M Subramanian told PTI.

India and the US announced on Saturday that they have finalised the framework for the first phase of the bilateral trade agreement under which both sides will reduce import duties on a number of goods to boost the two-way trade. Commenting about the deal, Subramanian said, "We welcome it. This deal assumes significance as it will give a huge growth for Tiruppur over the next 5 years." Responding to a query, he said currently exports of garments from Tamil Nadu is valued at Rs 15,000 crore and following the deal, it would double to Rs 30,000 crore over the next three years. Subramanian, also the founder-chairman of Tiruppur-based clothing manufacturer K M Knitwear Pvt Ltd said, on account of the India-US deal.

Labour codes spur hiring in tier III, IV cities: Report



MUMBAI, FEB 8 / PTI

AS businesses expand beyond metros, labour codes are accelerating recruitment in smaller cities, pushing job postings in tier III and IV markets by up to 56 per cent, according to a report. India's Labour Codes are triggering a dramatic redistribution of job opportunities across the country, with smaller cities emerging as the unexpected winners of regulatory reform, according to a report by blue and grey-collar recruitment platform WorkIndia. It revealed that despite early fears about hiring freezes, the data found the total job postings grew by 8.4 per cent after the codes took effect. Tier III and IV markets experienced a surge in hiring as Kolhapur witnessed 56.3 per cent growth in job postings, while Udaipur saw 55.3 per cent increase.

Goa recorded a 23.6 per cent jump, Vijayawada 20.2 per cent, Kochi 17.7 per cent, Coimbatore 14.1 per cent, and Raipur 13.9 per cent, added the report.

Collectively, the report revealed that these tier III and IV cities are growing at 12-15 per cent and above, signalling that Labour Codes are accelerating formal hiring in emerging and semi-urban regions. The WorkIndia report is based on an analysis of data on its platform during pre-Labour Codes reforms, October 1 to November 20, 2025, compared with data during post reforms period - November 21, 2025, to January 31, 2026.

The report further stated that tier I markets aren't being left behind as they witnessed steady growth of 6.6 per cent overall, with Ahmedabad witnessing a growth of 19.2 per cent, Pune at 13.2 per cent, Mumbai at 8.8 per cent, and Kolkata

at 8.9 per cent. The data reinforces that demand remains strong across major employment hubs, even as smaller cities experience disproportionate acceleration, according to the report. Work-from-office roles increased by 8.7 per cent, while work-from-home postings declined by 10.4 per cent, a clear shift towards on-site employment under the new regulatory framework. This swing suggests that compliance requirements are pulling employees back to supervised, formal work environments where adherence to labour standards can be more readily monitored and enforced, it stated.

However, salary structures have remained remarkably stable with average minimum and maximum salaries showing negligible variation post-implementation, indicating that employers are absorbing compliance costs without immediate wage restructuring. This stability suggests companies are prioritising operational adaptation over compensation adjustments in the early phase of the Labour Code rollout. Meanwhile, gender participation saw a significant positive shift, with job postings for women increasing by 10 per cent compared to 6.3 per cent growth for men. This gap represents the widest gender differential in hiring growth recorded in recent quarters, highlighting improved inclusivity in hiring practices after the Labour Code changes.

L&T to ramp up data centre capacity to 32 MW by March-end



NEW DELHI, FEB 8 / PTI

INFRASTRUCTURE major Larsen & Toubro (L&T) plans to commission 18 MW of data centre capacity by March-end, taking its total operational capacity to 32 MW by the end of the current fiscal. The total capital expenditure for the data centre stands at around Rs 1,000 crore. In the semiconductor business, L&T is focusing on design-led chips and engaging with multiple customers, with most spending being expensed through the profit and loss account, the company said during Q3 earnings conference call.

As far as the electrolyser business is concerned, the company has developed a fully indigenous 4 MW stack and is upgrading it to 8-10 MW, expecting significant orders in the near term. "As of now, we have almost 32 MW of capacity of Data Center, out of which 14 megawatts is up and running, another 18 megawatts will get commissioned

by the end of this fiscal year," a company official said during the conference call. "The total capex investment in the data centre is roughly in the range of Rs 1,000-odd crores," he added. The official further noted that for semiconductors, "most of the spending that we are doing is still into creating design-led semiconductor chips. We are in touch with multiple customers in this segment. And whatever spend is happening, most of that is getting washed through the P&L itself.

"As far as electrolyzer business is concerned, we have already made a perfect design of a 100 per cent indigenous 4 MW stack. We are now slowly upgrading it to 8-10 MW stack. And we do expect a lot of opportunities to come in the near term," he said. Larsen & Toubro reported a 4.2 per cent drop in consolidated profit after tax to Rs 3,215 crore in the December quarter due to a one-time provision for employee benefits related to new labour codes.

Cement majors post double-digit volume growth in Q3

NEW DELHI, FEB 8 / PTI

LEADING cement makers reported strong double-digit year-on-year growth in sales volumes during the December 2025 quarter, even as their realisations came under pressure.

The companies remain optimistic of further improvement in demand and prices in the coming months, aided by benign inflation, supportive tax rationalisation measures and healthy infrastructure-led growth.

Industry leaders, including UltraTech, Ambuja Cements, Shree Cement, Dalmia Bharat, JK Lakshmi Cement and JSW Cement, saw higher capacity utilisation and expansion in volumes. However, overall profitability was impacted by rising input costs, provisions under new labour codes and elevated prices of pet coke and coal.

Despite these challenges, topline were supported by premiumisation,

improved product mix and higher non-trade sales.

Apart from grey cement, companies also reported robust growth in their Ready Mix Concrete (RMC) business, which registered high double-digit expansion.

Leading cement maker UltraTech reported a 15 per cent rise in its consolidated sales volumes to 33.85 metric tonnes (MT) in the December quarter.

However, its sales realisation declined 0.4 per cent on a year-on-year basis. Its capacity utilisation was 77 per cent compared to 72 per cent during the same period last year.

In the earnings call, its CFO Atul Daga said cement prices remained subdued post-GST change. However, an improvement is being witnessed in prices in all segments across the country.

"There have been cost increases in the cost of pet coke and coal, the new



labour code will have its own impact, and rupee depreciation. All these will have an impact on the cement industry. And obviously, there is reason to pass on these cost escalations into prices," he said.

The all-India average cement price increased by 1 per cent year-on-year in December 2025 to Rs 330

per 50 kg bag.

"In 9M FY2026, the prices were up by 4 per cent at Rs 345/bag (50Kg). In FY2025, cement prices declined by 7 per cent year-on-year to Rs 340/bag," according to an ICRA report.

Coal prices remain under pressure, it said, adding petcoke prices increased by 10 per cent year-on-year to

Rs 12,280/MT in January 2026 and by 7 per cent during 10 months of FY2026, though diesel prices remained steady.

Adani Group firm Ambuja Cements, which recorded the highest-ever quarterly sales volume at almost 18.9 million tonnes, up 17 per cent, and improved market share to 16.6 per cent. It reported an improvement of Rs 5 per bag in sales realisations with its focus on premium and blended cement.

Its CEO Vinod Bahety said "volume will be growing double digit" in the coming quarter. The company is balancing growth between 'volume and value'.

"And therefore, you will see more accelerated improvement on my realisation, on my blended cement, on my premium cement. And therefore, even at the risk of losing some low EBITDA volume, which we will do, but we will play a balance game of volume and

value," he said in earnings calls while replying to a query.

Bahety remained 'bullish' on demand for the cement industry.

"Q4 should also see around 8 per cent growth. And therefore, the leading players will find double-digit growth again in the quarter of March," he said.

Shree Cement Ltd, the country's third-largest cement group by capacity, though has not specified the total sales volume, but said it was up by 2 per cent on a year-on-year basis. The company is "concentrating on value over volumes" as there is a "large divergence between our sales price and sales price of competitors like UltraTech," said its management in the earnings call. The company, which sold 2.7 million and 3.3 million tonnes of cement in November and December, said January is more or less in line with December 2025.

We need to bat better, smarter: Suryakumar

Monitor New Service

MUMBAI, FEB 7

HAVING showed how to bat on a slightly difficult surface, Indian skipper Suryakumar Yadav didn't hesitate to accept that the batting unit could have been "smarter and better" during the defending champions' 29-run win against USA in their opening game of the T20 World Cup here on Saturday.

"We cannot brush everything under the carpet, we need to bat much better. After winning also, you get to learn a lot of things. Could have batted better and smarter," the skipper said after winning the player of the match award. While Suryakumar was a cut above the rest with his signature 49-ball-84 not out, India were down in the dumps at 77 for 6 before the skipper stemmed the rot and gave the total a semblance of respectability. "Only I can tell how much pressure I was feeling but I had the belief. I knew if I bat till the end, I can make a difference," Surya said at the post-match presentation ceremony. Surya felt that since there was no sunlight during day time, there was a bit of moisture and that made things a bit tricky.

"It was a little different wicket. But

we knew when we woke up, there was not a lot of sun outside. Curator tried their best. There was not enough sunlight to have the pitch rolled and watered. It did not feel like it was a 180-190 wicket, it was more like a 140 wicket," he reasoned.

Asked about his own performance, Surya said he wanted to play the holding role for the longest time but execution wasn't happening. "I knew some day, it was going to come. I was trying to hold the innings for the team (in the last year) and it was not happening. I packed my kit bag (after my last innings last year), spent time with my family and then went to Nagpur, and it was a different feeling." Having literally grown up playing at the Wankhede, Surya had a fair idea of how to do it on this track.

"I have played a lot of my cricket here, so I know how to bat on similar wickets. At 77/6, from there, you had to understand that one batter has to bat till the end. I was just trying to play good shots." USA skipper Monank Patel thought that 130 could be a gettable target on this track. "Pitch was not easy to read. The variations they bowled in the powerplay...we kept them quiet for a while. We dropped catches and that cost us.

Seifert's fifty, bowlers' diligence carry NZ to 5-wicket win over Afghanistan

G Unnikrishnan

CHENNAI, FEB 8 7

TIM Seifert's typically aggressive fifty was the moving force behind New Zealand's five-wicket victory over Afghanistan in a Group D match of the T20 World Cup here on Sunday. Seifert (65, 42b, 7x4, 3x6) showed why he has been nicknamed 'Bam Bam' in Kiwis' circles, helping his side go past the target of 183 with considerable ease.

Seifert had an equally single-minded partner in Glenn Phillips (42, 25b) as the third wicket pair added 74 runs in 47 balls to rescue New Zealand from a wobbly 14 for two. The turbulence was the after result of the little passage of magic by spinner Mujeeb ur Rahman, who dismissed Finn Allen and Rachin Ravindra off successive balls in the second over.

But the Antipodeans clawed back through Seifert, who fetched his fifty off 39 balls with a six off off-spinner Mohammad Nabi. As the noon moved on, the assistance for spinners from the pitch was reduced to a good extent. Phillips focused more on Rashid Khan, slamming him for a four and six

as New Zealand got a real move-on.

However, Nabi had the last laugh, dismissing Seifert, and Rashid too got his revenge through the wicket of Phillips. Seifert was dropped on 48 by Rashid off his own bowling, and the wicketkeeper batter maximised the let-off. But by then, New Zealand were so close to home and reached there through Daryl Mitchell and Mitchell Santner, who knocked off the remaining 28 runs without much ado.

Earlier, seasoned Gulbadin Naib made a free-flowing fifty but Afghanistan had to settle for slightly below-par total of 182 for six.

Naib (63, 35 balls) and Sediqullah Atal (29, 24b) added 79 runs off 51 balls for the third wicket but the general sense was that of labour on a pitch that had a hint of slowness.

It reflected in Afghanistan's scoring pattern — steady rather than flashy: 44/2 in Power Play, 77/2 after 10 overs and 130/3 after 15 overs. The last five overs produced further 52 runs, but ideally the Afghans would have wanted a few more on the board.

Opener Rahmanullah Gurbaz (27, 22b) looked in fine fettle, but a slower delivery from pacer Lockie Ferguson



disturbed his furniture in the sixth over. In the same over, Ferguson, who used leg-cutters to good effect, jettisoned opener Ibrahim Zadran to peg back Afghanistan. Naib, who brought up his fifty in 29 balls, played a forceful innings, tonking pacer Jacob Duffy for two sixes and a four as Afghanistan seemed to have found some momentum in the middle overs.

Atal played a good supporting role, but could not force the pace on

his own and his stay was curtailed by Duffy. But his dismissal came as a blessing in disguise as Naib and Darwish Rasooli (20, 13b) added 33 in 17 balls as Afghanistan crossed the 150-run mark. However, Naib fell to part-time spin of Rachin Ravindra in the 18th over as Afghanistan could not get a desired death over flourish. Azmatullah Omarzai hit a couple of sixes to push his side past the 180-run mark. (PTI)

Hosts Italy celebrate early medals in Winter Olympics

MILAN, FEB 8/AP

HOST nation Italy enjoyed a feel-good start to the Milan Cortina Winter Olympics, collecting a set of gold, silver and bronze medals on the first day of competition, even as Switzerland's Franjo Von Allmen claimed the Games' first gold.

Italian speedskater Francesca Lollobrigida delivered the highlight for the hosts, winning the women's 3,000 metres on her 35th birthday to secure Italy's first gold of the Games. Competing in her fourth Olympics, Lollobrigida edged Norway's Ragne Wiklund to upgrade the silver and bronze she won in Beijing four years earlier. The victory also marked Italy's first gold medal in women's Olympic speedskating. Italy added to its medal tally in alpine skiing, with Giovanni Franzoni and Dominik Paris finishing second and third in the men's downhill at Bormio. However, they were beaten by Switzerland's Von Allmen, whose time of 1 minute, 51.61 seconds secured gold on his Olympic debut and the first title of the Games. Elsewhere, attention turned to upcoming events as American veteran Lindsey Vonn completed her second downhill training run in Cortina ahead of Sunday's medal race. Despite recently injuring her knee, the 41-year-old posted the third fastest time in training while wearing a brace, signalling readiness for competition. Japan and the United States traded momentum in the figure skating team event.

Bhambri-Dhakshineswar win doubles to put India 2-1 ahead



Amanpreet Singh

BENGALURU, FEB 8

YUKI Bhambri and Dhakshineswar Suresh prevailed in a marathon doubles rubber, outlasting David Pel and Sander Arends 7-6 (0) 3-6, 7-6 (1) as India edged ahead 2-1 in their Davis Cup Qualifiers Round 1 tie against the Netherlands here on Sunday. In a contest that swung repeatedly for exactly three hours, India captain Rohit Rajpal's call to bring in Dhakshineswar in place of N Sriram Balaji for the high-stakes doubles proved decisive, as the home pair held their nerve when it mattered the most. With both the teams desperate to seize control of the tie after it stood level at 1-1 overnight, the opening set turned into a stern test of patience and resolve.

Bhambri's serve was under sustained pressure, particularly in the seventh game when his first serve deserted him. A double fault at 30-all handed the Dutch a break point, but Bhambri responded with deep, probing returns to snuff out the threat. Dhakshineswar then missed a

regulation backhand volley on game point, and Arends' awkward yet effective overhead smash aimed at his legs earned the visitors another break chance. Once again, the Indian pair survived, Dhakshineswar showing deft touch at the net before Arends finally erred with a long return to end a prolonged game.

India earned its first break opportunity in the following game when Dhakshineswar threaded a forehand winner between Pel and Arends at 30-all, but the Dutch pair escaped. Bhambri was once again under siege in the 11th game, as the Indians faced five break points before somehow holding on, drawing loud cheers from the home crowd. With neither side able to force a breakthrough, the set went into a tie-break, where the Indians suddenly found another gear. Bhambri and Dhakshineswar raced to a 4-0 lead and closed it out without dropping a point, highlighted by Dhakshineswar's sharply angled passing winner and Bhambri's clean service return winner at 5-0.

ICC deputy chair heads to Lahore for talks with PCB

Monitor News Desk

KARACHI, FEB 8

INTERNATIONAL Cricket Council deputy chair Imran Khwaja has travelled to Lahore to meet Pakistan Cricket Board officials as efforts gather momentum to resolve the standoff over Pakistan's proposed boycott of its high profile T20 World Cup clash against India.

Khwaja, who represents Singapore and serves as an associate member director with voting rights on the ICC board, has been nominated by the governing body to mediate discussions on the issue, according to a source close to the PCB. His visit comes ahead of a virtual meeting involving key stakeholders aimed at defusing tensions surrounding the scheduled fixture in Colombo on February 15.

The source said Khwaja had been in communication with PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi for some time and would hold initial talks upon arrival. He is also expected to interact with Bangladesh Cricket Board president Aminul Islam, who is already in Lahore and has met Naqvi as consultations intensified on Sunday.

The proposed boycott stems from broader regional developments. Pakistan announced its decision in solidarity with Bangladesh, which declined to travel to India for its World Cup matches citing security concerns and was subsequently replaced by Scotland. Bangladesh's withdrawal followed the release of its

fast bowler Mustafizur Rahman from his IPL franchise on instructions from Indian authorities, a development that triggered diplomatic and cricketing friction. Naqvi has made limited public comment on the matter, though sources indicated the PCB's stance may have softened after Sri Lanka Cricket urged reconsideration. The host board warned of significant financial repercussions for stakeholders should the marquee fixture not take place. ICC chief

board indicated it was acting under government direction. While the legal and administrative aspects remain under discussion, officials suggested there were indications of renewed engagement from Pakistan.

An ICC director said structured consultations were under way, expressing cautious optimism that a resolution could emerge. "The interest of the game must take precedence," the official said, noting that dialogue between boards continued.



executive Sanjog Gupta has also travelled to Colombo to confer with Sri Lanka Cricket president Shammi Silva, reflecting the seriousness with which the governing body views the situation.

The ICC has formally sought clarification from the PCB regarding the potential invocation of the "force majeure" clause to justify withdrawal from the match, particularly after the

The India-Pakistan encounter remains one of the most commercially significant fixtures in international cricket, and uncertainty surrounding it has heightened concern among organisers and broadcasters. With mediation efforts intensifying and multiple boards involved in discussions, attention now centres on whether diplomacy can ensure the match proceeds as scheduled.

S Africa seek strong start against Canada

Monitor News Service

AHMEDABAD/COLOMBO, FEB 8

SOUTH Africa will look to overcome patchy recent form and begin their T20 World Cup campaign on a confident note when they face Canada on Monday, while Zimbabwe take on Oman in another opening fixture of the tournament. South Africa enter the competition with mixed results behind them, having won just 12 of their 32 matches since their defeat to India in the 2024 T20 World Cup final. Despite that inconsistency, the side draws confidence from securing the World Test Championship title last year, a triumph that ended a long wait for a major global trophy and boosted belief within the camp. Captain Aiden Markram dismissed suggestions that the team carries baggage from the narrow loss in Barbados, stressing that past setbacks have little bearing on the current challenge.

"The previous World Cup is what it is. It's done now. We have played a lot of cricket since. You have to earn the right to be contenders through the group stage," Markram said, adding that the unpredictable nature of the format



leaves every side capable of producing match-winning moments.

South Africa have made adjustments to their squad after injuries ruled out Donovan Ferreira and Tony de Zorzi, with Ryan Rickelton and Tristan Stubbs drafted in. Their campaign will rely heavily on experienced players, including Quinton de Kock and Dewald Brevis with the bat, while Kagiso Rabada's pace and Keshav Maharaj's spin are expected to be key on batting-

friendly surfaces in India and Sri Lanka.

Canada, appearing in their second consecutive T20 World Cup, enter the contest with limited recent top-level match exposure but arrive with confidence following an unbeaten run through regional qualification. The team, led by 23-year-old Dilpreet Bajwa, won all six matches in the Americas qualifiers and has attempted to compensate for limited international cricket through

preparatory games in Sri Lanka.

Bajwa expressed optimism about the squad's readiness, highlighting the significance of playing in familiar subcontinental conditions for several players of Indian origin. He acknowledged the challenge posed by South Africa but maintained that preparation and adaptability would shape the outcome.

Elsewhere in Colombo, Zimbabwe begin their campaign against Oman seeking to make an immediate impact after missing the previous edition. Led by Sikandar Raza and featuring experienced wicketkeeper Brendan Taylor, Zimbabwe will look to young batter Brian Bennett, whose prolific form during qualification helped secure their place in the tournament.

Oman, making their fourth appearance at the event, rely on a bowling unit strengthened by performances during the qualifiers and will aim to continue their record of registering wins at previous tournaments. South Africa face Canada in Ahmedabad at 7 pm IST, with both teams hoping to set the tone for their campaigns in a format where early momentum often proves decisive.

Uttarakhand crush Jharkhand by innings, reach Ranji semis

Monitor News Service

JAMSHEDPUR, FEB 8

UTTARAKHAND produced a commanding all-round display to defeat Jharkhand by an innings and six runs and secure a place in the Ranji Trophy semifinals on Sunday, with bowlers Abhay Negi and Mayank Mishra dismantling the hosts on the third day. Veteran left-arm spinner Mishra led the charge with an incisive 5 for 22, while Negi complemented him with 4 for 36 as Jharkhand were bowled out for 130 in their second innings. The duo's disciplined attack sealed a comprehensive victory after Uttarakhand had built a decisive first-innings lead. Resuming Day 3 at 282 for 5, Uttarakhand extended their dominance before being dismissed for 371 in 122.3 overs. Their 136-run advantage proved crucial, bolstered by late-order resistance from Negi, whose 46 added valuable runs and tightened pressure on Jharkhand.

Jharkhand had earlier posted 235 in their first innings but struggled for consistency, with key batters Virat Singh and Kumar Kushagra failing to

anchor the side. Their second innings began poorly as openers Shikhar Mohan and Sharandeep Singh fell cheaply within four overs, reducing the hosts to 14 for 2 after early strikes from Negi. A brief recovery followed through an 86-run third-wicket stand between Singh, who top-scored with 55, and Kushagra, who made 34. However, the partnership failed to provide lasting stability. Jharkhand's resistance collapsed soon after, with Aditya Singh dismissed for nine and the middle and lower order unable to withstand Uttarakhand's sustained pressure.

From 100 for 3, Jharkhand slid dramatically to 126 for 9 as Mishra spun through the lineup, finishing with a match haul of eight wickets. The innings featured six single-digit scores and three ducks, underlining the extent of the collapse.

Uttarakhand's batting foundation had earlier been shaped by half-centuries from Avneesh Sudha (64), Kunal Chandela (68) and Jagadeesha Suchith (70), ensuring control of the contest before their bowlers delivered the decisive blow.

Teeth are the most visible markers of income inequality

Eve Vincent, Macquarie University

SYDNEY, FEB 8

TEETH are among the most visible markers of inequality, reflecting structural circumstances that individuals must bear. In public discourse, damaged or missing teeth are often framed as the result of personal neglect. Yet a growing body of research and lived testimony suggests oral health is deeply shaped by income, access and social policy.

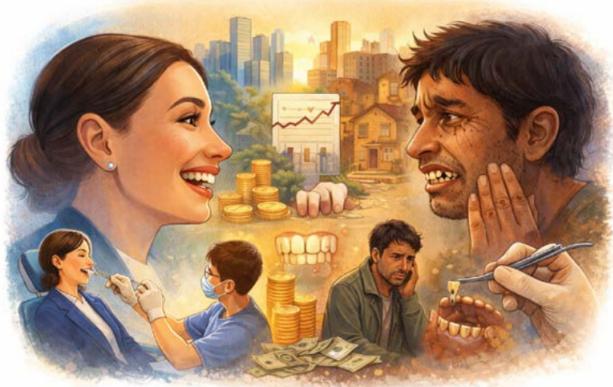
In an essay for Aeon, US journalist Sarah Smarsh describes concluding that “poor teeth” carry stigma that extends beyond appearance. People with damaged teeth may face diminished employment prospects and fewer opportunities, reinforcing cycles of disadvantage. In an era of increasingly standardised cosmetic dentistry and expectations of whitened smiles, the contrast between healthy and neglected teeth can highlight economic divides.

Australia’s policy framework illustrates the structural nature of this divide. Dental care was excluded when Medicare’s predecessor was designed in the 1970s, leaving oral health largely outside universal health coverage. Since 2014, the Child Dental Benefits Schedule has provided eligible children access to subsidised treatment, but adult care remains uneven and often costly. Political debate intensified during the 2025 federal election, when expanding dental coverage under Medicare became a campaign issue.

Research indicates cost barriers continue to deter many from seeking care. Analysts at the Grattan Institute reported in 2024 that more than two

million Australians avoid dental visits because of expense, while over four in ten adults typically wait longer than a year between appointments. Observers argue public dental services are both underfunded and overstretched.

Public provision is fragmented. While around a third of Australians qualify for free or low cost treatment through state and territory systems, waiting times vary widely and can



stretch for years. Untreated dental problems may escalate into emergencies requiring hospital intervention. Such outcomes underscore the health consequences of delayed access and the wider social costs associated with inequitable care.

The relationship between poverty and oral health also emerges in broader welfare contexts. In both Australia and the United Kingdom, tightly conditional disability or work capacity assessments shape access to benefits. Accounts collected in studies of wel-

fare regimes describe individuals enduring severe hardship, including resorting to self extraction of teeth due to lack of treatment access. These stories illustrate the intersection of healthcare gaps with economic vulnerability.

Literary and autobiographical accounts have increasingly contributed to understanding these realities. Linda Tirado’s memoir *Hand to Mouth* documents life on unstable wages in

the United States, describing both the economic pressures of poverty and the shame associated with visible dental decline. The book originated from a widely shared online response to assumptions about self destructive behaviour among the poor, highlighting how experiential narratives can challenge stereotypes.

Writers and activists have increasingly used digital platforms to present their own perspectives, questioning the traditional mediation of poverty narratives by academics or journal-

ists. This shift raises ethical questions about representation while amplifying first person testimony. Barbara Ehrenreich’s foreword to Tirado’s work acknowledged the limits of outsider interpretation, emphasising the importance of lived experience in depicting deprivation. Australian storytelling has followed similar paths. The 2024 collection *Povo*, developed through workshops in Western Sydney, brings together authors recounting poverty from personal vantage points. In one contribution, references to cosmetic tooth gems serve as both symbolism and survival strategy, reflecting attempts to assert identity and aspiration within financial constraints.

Public demonstrations over welfare policy likewise illustrate how economic hardship intersects with health. Protesters dependent on income support have spoken about surviving on payments below the poverty line, highlighting daily challenges associated with housing, nutrition and healthcare. Demographic profiles show recipients are often older women managing chronic illness or disability rather than stereotypes of younger job seekers. Encounters with such participants reveal the subtle markers of hardship embedded in physical appearance. Observers note chipped or missing teeth alongside expressions of resilience and advocacy, underscoring the human dimension of statistical inequalities. These personal moments illustrate how oral health becomes both symbol and consequence of systemic conditions. Teeth therefore offer more than a clinical measure. They represent the cumulative effects of policy design, labour precarity and welfare structures.

(The Conversation)



India’s rising box office collections mask declining theatre attendance

Monitor News Service

NEW DELHI, FEB 8

INDIA’S film industry recorded its highest ever box office collections in 2025, crossing the Rs 13,000 crore milestone for the first time. Total earnings touched Rs 13,395 crore, surpassing the previous record of Rs 12,226 crore set in 2023. While the headline figure signals strong financial performance, underlying trends suggest a more complex reality for theatrical exhibition.

Industry reports indicate that domestic footfalls declined even as revenue grew. Cinema admissions fell by about six per cent year on year, with theatres registering around 83.2 crore entries nationwide. The contrast between record collections and lower attendance highlights a shift in how box office growth is being generated.

Analysts point to rising ticket prices as a key driver. The average ticket price increased sharply, climbing from Rs 134 in 2024 to Rs 161 in 2025, representing nearly a 20 per cent rise. This marks the steepest annual increase recorded in recent years. Higher pricing across premium formats and urban multiplex chains has contributed significantly to revenue expansion, offsetting the impact of

declining audience numbers.

The trend suggests that collections are increasingly influenced by pricing rather than volume growth. Fewer viewers are attending screenings overall, but those who do are paying more per visit. The pattern has prompted industry observers to describe the phenomenon as a widening gap between revenue metrics and audience participation.

Historical comparisons reinforce this shift. Pre pandemic attendance levels were considerably higher, and current footfalls remain below those peaks despite the sector’s financial recovery. The data indicates that cinema going behaviour may be changing, with audiences becoming more selective about theatrical visits. Instead of routine outings, many viewers appear to prioritise high profile releases or films perceived to offer a strong big screen experience.

Ticket pricing is seen as one factor influencing this selectivity. As costs rise, consumers may be choosing fewer films to watch in theatres. At the same time, the expanding availability of digital streaming platforms continues to reshape viewing habits, providing convenient alternatives for content consumption at home.

Despite these concerns, industry stakeholders view the revenue

Court declines plea to halt release of ‘O’ Romeo’

Monitor News Service

MUMBAI, FEB 8

A Mumbai civil court has declined to stall the release of the film *O’ Romeo*, rejecting a request by the daughter of late gangster Hussain Ustara who alleged the movie was based on her father’s life without her consent. The ruling clears the way for the film, starring Shahid Kapoor and Triptii Dimri, to hit theatres as scheduled on February 13.

Sanobar Shaikh, daughter of Hussain Shaikh, widely known as Hussain Ustara, had filed a civil suit against producer Sajid Nadiadwala, director Vishal Bhardwaj and author Hussain Zaidi. She sought an interim injunction restraining the release, arguing that the project drew directly from her father’s biography and portrayed him as a gangster for commercial gain. The court, however, found that she had not established a prima facie case warranting urgent intervention. In his order, civil court judge H C Shende observed



that the plaintiff had earlier sought monetary compensation from the film’s makers, which undermined the claim for immediate injunctive relief. The correspondence placed before the court indicated demands ranging from Rs 1 crore to Rs 5 crore, suggesting that the dispute was primarily financial in nature.

Shaikh’s plea also faced questions over timing. The judge noted that she was aware of the proposed film well before filing the suit but approached the court only when its theatrical release was imminent.

Such delay weighed against granting equitable relief, the order stated, adding that legal principles do not favour parties who fail to act promptly to protect alleged rights.

The defence maintained that *O’ Romeo* was a fictional work carrying appropriate disclaimers and not a biographical portrayal. Lawyers representing the filmmakers argued that the request to halt the release lacked legal merit and amounted to an attempt to exert pressure shortly before distribution. Rejecting another contention, the court declined the request for pre release screening through a court appointed commissioner, holding that such a step would effectively amount to judicial censorship, which is not permissible under established legal principles.

While refusing interim relief, the court clarified that its observations were limited to the present stage and would not affect the final adjudication of the civil suit. The underlying case will continue to be heard on merits.

Mariah Carey’s Olympic performance draws applause as well as scrutiny

Monitor News Desk

MILAN, FEB 8

POP star Mariah Carey’s appearance at the Milan Cortina Winter Olympics opening ceremony captivated audiences, but it also sparked debate over performance choices and stage presentation during one of the Games’ most widely watched moments. Carey delivered a rendition of the Italian classic “Nel Blu Dipinto di Blu”, widely known as “Volare”, during the three-and-a-half-hour ceremony that launched the Winter Games. The performance, staged before a global broadcast audience, drew enthusiastic applause inside the stadium and praise from admirers who highlighted her vocal range and willingness to perform in Italian.

The singer later described the appearance as a milestone, calling it a dream to perform at the event. Organisers had promoted her participa-

tion for months as a major highlight of the programme, underscoring the global draw of international star power. However, the performance also prompted criticism and speculation online. Some commentators questioned why an Italian artist had not been chosen to perform such an iconic song, while others focused



on technical aspects of the staging. Social media posts pointed to the presence of a large teleprompter displaying phonetic lyrics and raised questions about whether parts of the performance had been lip synced.

The issues were raised with organisers during a media briefing the following day. Ceremony director Maria Laura Iascone praised the performance, describing it as creating a “magic moment”, but did not directly address speculation about lip syncing. She noted that recordings are routinely prepared in advance for major international broadcasts to ensure technical reliability, without confirming how they were used in this case. Organisers did acknowledge the teleprompter, describing it as a practical aid for artists performing in languages other than their own. Visible inside the stadium, the display spelled out pronunciations to support delivery of the Italian lyrics.

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