

Happening today

THE GOVERNMENT WILL hold an all-party meeting to discuss legislative and other agenda ahead of the Budget Session of Parliament, which begins Wednesday.

INDIA ENERGY WEEK 2026 begins in Goa. The fourth edition of India's premier annual international energy event will go on until January 30.

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Business as Usual

By EP UNNY

In a world full of question marks, Europe meets an India with no full stops: Mark Tully from New Delhi.


INSIDE
NATION

SIX IED EXPLOSIONS INJURE 11 SECURITY PERSONNEL IN CHHATTISGARH **P7**

THE WORLD

U.S. GUARANTEES DOCUMENT READY TO BE SIGNED, SAYS ZELENSKY **P10**

EU CENTRESTAGE ON 77TH REPUBLIC DAY CELEBRATIONS

Europe & India to work together to shape a new global order: EU chief

Key outcomes include 5-year comprehensive strategic agenda, mobility pact

Shubhajit Roy
New Delhi, January 26



President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi with European Council President Antonio Costa and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen at the Republic Day parade on Monday. [TASHI TOBYAL](#) [FULL COVERAGE, PAGES 4, 5](#)



The US and India share a historic bond as the world's oldest and largest democracies.

U.S. PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP, IN HIS R-DAY GREETINGS TO INDIA

CRUZ SAYS NAVARRO, VANCE AND TRUMP RESISTING INDIA DEAL **P6**

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Conclusion of talks on FTA set to be announced today; pact later this year

Ravi Dutta Mishra
New Delhi, January 26

COMMERCE SECRETARY Rakesh Agarwal said on Monday that official-level negotiations are being wrapped up and both sides are set to announce the successful conclusion of talks on a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) on Tuesday.

This assumes significance as the trade deal has been dec-

ades in the making — the talks first started in 2007 but were abandoned in 2013 due to differences in market access for automobiles.

While the two sides are expected to announce the conclusion of negotiations at the India-EU Summit here on Tuesday, the formal signing would take place later this year after legal scrubbing of the agreement is completed.

"After subsuming a few chapters, India and the EU have completed talks on 21 chapters. While the legal scrubbing of the deal would take four to five months, the trade deal will come into effect by early next year after being ratified by the European Parliament," an official said.

The trade agreement is expected to be among the most comprehensive deals that India

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Top China general removed for 'leaking' n-plan to US: Report

Rishika Singh
New Delhi, January 26

A DAY after top Chinese military general Zhang Youxia was reported to be under official investigation, *The Wall Street Journal* reported Sunday that he was accused of "leaking information about the country's nuclear weapons program to the US", among other allegations.

The extraordinary charge marks a milestone in China's ongoing purge of allegedly corrupt military officials, which has expanded in scope and depth over the past three years.

Zhang, 75, is the most senior



General Zhang Youxia, 75, was joint vice-chairperson of the Central Military Commission

E. Turbulence at the top [PAGE 12](#)

leader targeted so far and is known to have enjoyed the

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Age rating to list of don'ts: Draft rules on obscenity online

Amrita Nayak Dutta
New Delhi, January 26

Court had asked the Solicitor General to draft proposals safeguarding free speech under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution while ensuring the constitutionally permissible "reasonable restrictions" under Article 19(2). This came in the backdrop of public backlash against social media influencers Ranveer Allahbadia and Samay Raina over their comments. The case is scheduled to be heard on January 29.

According to sources, the

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

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No. 1 Game Show

10,000 kg ammonium nitrate seized in Nagaur, 1 held

Hamza Khan
Jaipur, January 26

Police in Rajasthan's Nagaur district has said it has arrested one person and seized about 10,000 kg of ammonium nitrate from a farmhouse. Describing it as "perhaps the biggest such seizure in Rajasthan", Nagaur SP Mridul Kachawa said police had been receiving intelligence "since long that explosive substances are being purchased, sold and stocked in large quantities in the district".

Kachawa said police arrested Sulaiman Khan on January 24 with about 10,000 kg of ammonium nitrate, as well as detonators, detonating wires and other materials "normally used in mining related blasting".

He said the farmhouse is built in a quiet area and Khan had stocked the explosive materials in 2-3 rooms and "basic safety wasn't being followed".

The FIR was lodged under the Explosive Substances Act and for organised crime, the SP said. "We will establish the forward and backward linkages of the explosives. In the preliminary questioning, the facts which have come to light are that he supplied the explosives for legal and illegal mining," the SP said.

He said that Khan already has three FIRs against him, all related to the Explosive Substances Act, and that he has been acquitted in one of these three cases.

Ahead of the New Year's Eve too, the Rajasthan Police had seized 150 kg of ammonium nitrate and other related materials from a car and arrested two Bodi residents, Surendra Patwa and Surendra Mochi.

An autorickshaw had entered the campus carrying

ED attaches immovable assets worth Rs 1,986 cr in PACL scam

Express News Service
New Delhi, January 26

THE ENFORCEMENT Directorate has attached 37 immovable properties valued at Rs 1,986.48 crore in Ludhiana and Jaipur as part of its money laundering probe into the alleged massive fraud related to Pearls Agro-Tech Corporation Limited (PACL), an agency spokesperson stated.

PACL allegedly lured investors with the promise of land plots and high returns under fake real estate schemes, without being registered as a Non-Banking Financial Company, in violation of the RBI Act. Early investors were allegedly paid using funds from new investors, and agents earned hefty commissions and were encouraged to bring in family and friends.

The investigation stems from a First Information Report (FIR) registered by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). The ED registered an Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR) in 2016, filed a prosecution complaint in 2018, and two supplements in 2022 and 2025. The special PMLA court has taken cognisance of all.

"With this seizure, the ED's total attachments in the case — covering movable and immovable assets in India and abroad — now stand at approximately Rs 1,986 crore," the spokesperson stated.

"The ED investigation has found that investor funds, collected via cash down payments and instalments, were routed through shell entities and credited to accounts of the late Nirmal Singh Bhangoo, his family, and associates," the spokesperson said.

"These proceeds were used to buy the attached properties, now deemed proceeds of crime. Non-bailable warrants remain pending against (Bhangoo's wife) Prem Kaur, daughters Barinder Kaur and Sukhwinder Kaur, son-in-law Gurpratap Singh, and associate Prateek Kumar," the spokesperson added.

13-YEAR-OLD'S FAMILY ACCUSES SCHOOL OF NEGLIGENCE

Student dies after falling from auto at residential school in Telangana

Nikhila Henry
Hyderabad, January 26

A 13-YEAR-OLD student of a Telangana Social Welfare Residential School at Banswada in Kamareddy district died Sunday night after she fell out of a moving auto. Her family has accused the school of negligence in connection with the matter, and a police case has been filed.

The girl was a Class 8 student from Kodicherla village. The incident occurred around 7.40 pm at the girl's residential school in Borlam village.

An autorickshaw had entered the campus carrying

plastic chairs for the Republic Day event, and students helped unload the chairs, officials said. After unloading, four girls reportedly boarded the auto for a short ride up to the school gate.

Police said the driver slowed near the gate to allow the girls to alight. While three students did so without incident, the victim purportedly jumped from the moving vehicle and suffered a severe head injury, officials said.

School staff rushed her to a hospital in Banswada, where doctors declared her dead.

The school principal, Sunita, said she was not present at the time of the incident and that

staff had not noticed the students boarding the auto. Based on a complaint from the father of the victim, police registered a case under BNS section 106(1) for causing death due to negligence.

The auto driver and the school principal were booked.

The girl's father has accused the school management of negligence. He also told police that the autorickshaw driver was driving rashly and caused the accident. The father's complaint said, "...the school management should not have allowed the students to board the auto."

Police said, "Prima facie it looks like an accident."

MP village to punish inter-caste marriage, elopement with social boycott of families

Anand Mohan J
Bhopal, January 26

A VILLAGE panchayat in Ratlam district of Madhya Pradesh has announced a social boycott of families where their members enter into love marriages, after a series of elopements and inter-caste marriages over the past six months triggered anger among villagers.

The decision was taken at a meeting held three days ago in Panchewa village of Piplodh tehsil, and came into the public domain after multiple videos of the gathering surfaced on social media.

Villagers claim that under a dozen couples married without family consent in the last six months. According to residents, tensions rose further after some of the women allegedly refused to identify their parents at police stations and before magistrates. Following this, a meeting of village elders, panchayat members and residents was convened, where a series of social and economic restrictions were announced against families of those who married after eloping.

Several videos of the meeting show a villager holding a register and reading out what he describes as a unanimous decision of the village. In the footage, he's heard saying that the decision "has been taken by all the residents of Panchewa village. Any boy or girl who

elopes and gets married will face restrictions, and so will their family". He then lists the measures, stating that "no milk or goods will be supplied to such families, no one will invite them to social or family functions, and no work will be given to them in the village."

He also announces that "priests, barbers and other service providers will not go to their houses", and adds that "anyone who helps the couple, shelters them, acts as a witness to the marriage or supports them in any way will also be socially boycotted".

After the videos went viral, officials from the local administration visited Panchewa village and interacted with residents in the presence of the sarpanch. Additional District Magistrate Shalini Shrivastava has also directed the Jaora Sub-Divisional Magistrate to look into the issue.

Authorities have said they are looking into the video and the circumstances under which the decisions were taken. Ratlam Additional Superintendent of Police Vivek Kumar told *The Indian Express*: "The video issued by the villagers has come to our notice. Instructions have been given to the concerned police officers to examine the matter and take action against those responsible when we get a complaint. The local administration has been dispatched to the village to speak to the residents."

DG and all Ranks of CRPF remember two valiant troopers of 29 Bn, who made the supreme sacrifice while countering an attack by the insurgents in Assam on 26 January 1999. CRPF salutes the bravehearts and pledges never to let their sacrifice go in vain.

DG and all Ranks of CRPF remember Constable Ashok Kumar of 54 Bn, who made the supreme sacrifice in a gunfight with the terrorists on 26 January 2000 in Anantapur, J&K. CRPF salutes the bravehearts and pledges never to let his sacrifice go in vain.

DG and all Ranks of CRPF remember Head Constable Ghanshyam Singh of 70 Bn, who made the supreme sacrifice while countering an attack by Maoists in Odisha on 26 January 2007. CRPF salutes the bravehearts and pledges never to let his sacrifice go in vain.

DG and all Ranks of CRPF remember Constable Narendar Singh of 175 Bn, who made the supreme sacrifice while countering an ambush by the insurgents in Manipur on 26 January 2012. CRPF salutes the bravehearts and pledges never to let their sacrifice go in vain.

DG and all Ranks of CRPF remember Constable Rahmatullah Khan of 12 Bn, who made the supreme sacrifice in a ghastly attack by the terrorists in Punjab on 27 January 1987. CRPF salutes the bravehearts and pledges never to let his sacrifice go in vain.

DG and all Ranks of CRPF remember Constable Badal Roy of 22 Bn, who made the supreme sacrifice while rescuing Panchayat Rozgar Sevaks, held captive by Maoists in Jharkhand on 27 January 2014. CRPF salutes the bravehearts and pledges never to let his sacrifice go in vain.

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'AT HOME' RECEPTION
President Droupadi Murmu's traditional 'At Home' at Rashtrapati Bhavan showcased the culture of the Northeast.
RENUKA PURI



BRAVERY ON DISPLAY
Women CRPF personnel perform stunts during the 77th Republic Day Parade, at Kartavya Path, in New Delhi on Monday.
AMIT MEHRA

MAGNIFICENT ON KARTAVYA PATH

Pride and joy: Marchers & Rafales steal R-Day show

Tableaux, kids, special guests celebrate the Indian Republic

Devansh Mittal & Drishti Jain
New Delhi, January 26

MiG-29s and a Jaguar aircraft. Among the spectators was Mona Kumari (35). Dressed in a sari that sported the colours of the Indian flag, she had hoped to watch the parade with her family. "Somehow, only my ticket came through, no one else's," she said.

Unfazed, she came alone. "My husband dropped me at the gate and I watched the parade alone. I was just amazed by the discipline of the soldiers who were marching. They must have practiced for so many days, I can't even imagine. It looks so much better than watching it on TV," she said, a smile on her face she couldn't contain.

ASHISH SHAH'S jaw dropped when the Rafale aircraft whizzed over his head. "However old you might be, the parade and aircraft make you feel like a child, it makes me energetic," said the 63-year-old, a former college professor.

Shah was among thousands gathered along Kartavya Path on a crisp winter morning on Monday as India celebrated its 77th Republic Day by putting on a showcase of its military might that included elite marching contingents, missiles and indigenous weapon systems at the centre of the Capital.

This was Shah's first time attending the parade in the national capital. There were many like him.

The parade commenced with President Droupadi Murmu taking the salute. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, several other Union ministers, the country's top military brass, foreign diplomats, and senior officials were among those present.

Thirty tableau — 17 of states and union territories and 13 of ministries, departments and services — rolled down the road to loud applause. The showstopper, however, was the Indian Air Force (IAF) flypast.

In a magnificent display of the country's air power, the IAF's fighter jets flew in a special Sindo formation. The seven-aircraft formation comprised two Rafales, two Su-30s, two



FLYPAST: IAF jets perform flypast in New Delhi, Monday. AMIT MEHRA



UNITED IN PERFORMANCE: Around 2,500 dancers from various states perform at the Kartavya Path on Monday. TASHI TOBYAL

2,500 dance to the spirit of Vande Mataram

Drishti Jain & Devansh Mittal
New Delhi, January 26

AS AROUND 2,500 artistes from different parts of India — donning traditional costumes representing different states — came together on Monday during the 77th Republic Day parade at Kartavya Path in Delhi to perform on 'Vande Mataram', which is also this year's theme, their presentation embodied the spirit of India's unity in diversity. Different groups presented different classical and folk dance forms on the national song during the performance.

Also invited were school children who had taken part in various competitions held across India to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Vande Mataram. One of them was Roshan Arjun (16); he had come to Delhi all the way from the town of Cheyyar in Tamil Nadu with his father. He was invited as he was among the top 200 shortlisted from across the country in a quiz held on ISRO's work.

"I was inspired by the celebrations and I'm now more keen to read about the Constitution and follow its ideals," Arjun, who wants to become an astronomer, said.

They divide themselves in two groups — one to help traffic marshals and the other to specially-abled visitors.

Once the parade has started, and they can take a break from their duties, they go and take the seats as audience.

Many of them feel closer to their dream of clearing the Central Defence Services Exam.

Inspired, Vipin Kumar (21), who joined the NCC in 2023, says, "My exam is approaching in April. This is not just any

ance.

The annual parade and the days they spent in Delhi in the run up to the Republic Day celebrations gave them memories they would cherish for a long time. Performing in front of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, foreign dignitaries and many other key personalities was a dream come true for many.

Around 10 students of Maharaja Sayajirao University in Gujarat's Vadodara practiced for 25 days prior to the event. While all of them are undergraduate students in performing arts, learning Bharatanatyam, a classical dance form

most of them have been practicing for at least a couple of years, they said they were a little anxious for this performance and wanted to put in extra efforts.

"We practised for a long time even though it was a small performance," said Divya Patel, Assistant Professor in the Performing Arts department at the university.

Many student performers were delighted to catch glimpses of sorties by fighter jets during rehearsals. "While we couldn't see the parade today, we have been in awe of these formations by the jets

during the practice sessions," a student said.

Disha Handique, 20, who along with her group of six performed Sattriya, a classical dance form from Assam, said,

"The other performances were so beautiful that I can't even express it in words." The group comprises students of the Srimanta Sankaradeva University in Guwahati and have been practicing for 12 days now.

However, Handique added, "I really enjoyed the entire experience of performing in front of so many dignitaries, but the air in Delhi is very bad. Ever since we landed here, the air

smells different and makes us feel a little nauseous."

Meanwhile, for artists from Chhattisgarh, presenting their folk dance, 'Gedi' or bamboo dance, has been a reassurance that the art is still alive and thriving. In the group of 35

dancers from Bilaspur, which also had fresh entrants, few have been practicing since decades. They began their practice sessions on January 6. The sessions used to start at 7:30 am.

"The last three days were the most exciting when we rehearsed at the Kartavya Path. This is the best experience of my life... My parents are very

proud of me," said Priyanshu Bhaskar (20). Another group member said, "This is a very great platform to showcase our folk dance... This costume is also fully handmade and takes around 12 days to make. This gives us visibility."

There was a group from Manipur too.

For Elina, 24, a group member, the most treasured memory she is taking home is the group's visit to Sarojini Nagar the hub of flea shopping. "We used to get a window of a few hours from 11 am till 3 pm... we used to rush there. We have brought lots of clothes."

'I got goosebumps...': R-Day parade fuels dream of NCC cadets to join armed forces

Drishti Jain
New Delhi, January 26



(L-R) NCC cadets Priyanshu, Vipin Kumar, Aryan, Sayon Mandal, and Siddharth Agrawal. DRISHTI JAIN

versity all the more, which we usually see in the NCC too. Bhairav contingent is the highlight. I will aim to join this contingent in future," he says.

Sitting next to him, cadet Sayon Mandal (21) chimes in, "You know, in the morning, when we came here, it was all so silent but as soon as the salute took place, I got goosebumps. One of the reasons I joined NCC was to one day come and witness the parade."

Priyanshu (20), who has been a part of NCC for two years now, says a lot has changed since he witnessed the parade five years back for the first time.

"The technology plays a much bigger role. Drones play a crucial role now, that is a big difference."

His father works for the Delhi Police but he aims to make it to the armed forces.

CM nod to Rs 327 crore for slum development projects

Express News Service
New Delhi, January 26



CM REKHA Gupta on Monday celebrated her first Republic Day after taking charge at her official residence on Monday by approving projects worth Rs 327 crore for the development of slum clusters across Delhi.

Officials said works amounting to Rs 44 crore have been awarded. The CM hosted BJP representatives from slums and Jhuggi Jhupri (JJ) clusters to her residence for a lunch and inaugurated basic infrastructure projects for the clusters.

The projects approved include public convenience complexes and cement concrete (CC) works in the lanes of JJ clusters, said officials, besides Atal Canteens and Ayushman Arogya Mandirs.

"The CM also shared lunch with the JJ cluster represen-

tatives and said that the Delhi government is working with full commitment to improving the living standards of citizens residing in JJ clusters," a statement from her office read.

The programme was also attended by Urban Development Minister Ashish Sood, and Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva among others.

• 20-YEAR-OLD DISAPPEARED IN KONDLI NALA ON SATURDAY

Two days after man immersing idol was swept away, kin await news from divers

Upasika Singh
New Delhi, January 26

never came out," recalled Rahul.

Search operations entered the second day on Monday as teams of the Uttar Pradesh State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), along with the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), and divers from the Delhi Boating Club continued to comb through the black waters.

By evening, several relatives of Vikas had started losing patience. "Use a net... do anything! How long will you make us wait?" asked one of the relatives as the divers continued to work.

Raghbir Singh, leading a team of divers, remained un-



Divers on boat during the search operation on Monday. UPASIKA SINGHAL

moved. "I'm doing my best here, please understand. The river is too full of trash to use a net. We're working with limited

resources," he said. The relatives, exasperated, continued to argue until Singh turned his boat around and left.

Rahul tried hard to hold himself together. "I don't blame them (the divers) for not being able to hold their breath under

the filthy water. Locals have told me that there is a deep pit under the water, on the other side of the Nala. If the water was clean, the divers would have been able to spot him," he said.

The NDRF and SDRF did reach the place on time, but they used boats to look for the body. Boats move a lot of water when they move, it would have moved the body further downstream," he said.

According to the divers' in-charge, Harish Kumar, the distance between the Nala and the mouth of the Yamuna is not more than 1 km.

However, several issues slowed down the search operation. "The call first went to the

UP Police since Kondli falls between the Delhi and Noida border," explained Raghbir Singh, leading the team of five divers present on scene.

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Singh further alleged that while the first call went to the NDRF at 8 pm on Saturday, the divers were only notified by 9:30 pm.

"In that one-and-a-half hours, the boats had circled the area several times. In cases like these, it's difficult to estimate

where the body has moved," he said. The divers continued operations late into the night and had to pause around midnight due to poor visibility. The operations resumed at 6 am the following day.

The divers from the Delhi Boating Club too have faced a slew of challenges during the operation. "The water is extremely cold, the current is fast and the water levels are high,"

"Since the water is cold, the temperature will not let the body come to the river bed, if he has died. At this point, we believe that the body can only be retrieved once it floats and rises to the surface."

WORLD HAILS LARGEST DEMOCRACY ON ITS REPUBLIC DAY



"On behalf of the people of the United States, I extend my heartfelt congratulations to the government and people of India as you celebrate your 77th Republic Day. The United States and India share a historic bond as the world's oldest and largest democracies"

DONALD TRUMP,
US PRESIDENT

"It is with sincere appreciation that I reflect upon the enduring partnership between our countries, rooted in the shared values and mutual respect that define The Commonwealth... I can only commend India's international climate leadership through initiatives such as the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure..." KING CHARLES, BRITISH MONARCH

"What a wonderful memory of the #RepublicDay we shared together in 2024! My dear friend @NarendraModi, dear Indian friends, my very best wishes on this great day of celebration!"

EMMANUEL MACRON, FRENCH PRESIDENT

"The Islamic Republic of #Iran extends its warmest congratulations to the friendly nation and government of the Republic of #India on their Republic Day. We are determined to promote bilateral relations & cooperation..." IRAN FOREIGN MINISTRY

"Happy Republic Day! Celebrating the spirit and aspirations of India, and the warm friendship between our two countries. Japan is proud to walk alongside India towards a shared future."

EMBASSY OF JAPAN IN INDIA

"China and India are good neighbours, friends and partners... over the past year, China-India relations have continued to improve and develop and are of great significance for maintaining and promoting world peace and prosperity... achieving dragon and elephant dancing together is the right choice for both countries"

XI JINPING, CHINESE PRESIDENT



Military might, with a dash of Sindoor

BrahMos, Akash, battle tank Arjun — weapon systems fire up parade

Express News Service
New Delhi, January 26

IN ITS first Republic Day celebrations after Operation Sindoora, India showcased its military might with a display of fighter jets, indigenously built missiles, newly raised units and lethal weapons used during the military operations last year.

President of the European Council Antonio Costa and President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen were the chief guests at the 77th Republic Day celebrations, the theme for which was '150 years of Vande Mataram'.

The parade began with President Droupadi Murmu taking the salute shortly after she arrived at Kartavya Path in a traditional buggy along with Costa and von der Leyen.

PM Narendra Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, several other Union ministers, the country's top military brass, foreign diplomats and senior officials were among the spectators. Around 10,000 special guests were invited.

BrahMos supersonic missiles, Akash weapon systems, 'Suryastra' universal rocket launcher system, Main Battle Tank Arjun, Dhanush artillery guns and Divyastra battery were among the major weapon systems displayed at the parade.

A total of 29 Indian Air Force aircraft, including 16 fighter jets, four transport aircraft and nine helicopters, participated in the flypast. Notably, two Rafale jets, two MiG-29s, two Su-30s, and one Jaguar aircraft flew in a special Op Sindoor formation, alongside other formations, including transport aircraft and helicopters of the IAF. On the ground, the IAF contingent comprised four officers and 144 airmen.

For the first time, the parade showcased a phased Battle Array Format of the Indian Army, including the aerial component. It showcased the Recce element comprising the 61 Cavalry, followed by High Mobility Reconnaissance Vehicle, India's first indigenously designed Armoured Light Specialist Vehicle. This was followed by the T-90 BHISHMA and Main Battle Tank Arjun rolling past the saluting dais with aerial support from combat helicopters.

Other Mechanised Columns included BMP-II Infantry Combat Vehicle, along with Nag Missile System (Tracked) Mk-2. A detachment of Special Forces also followed, comprising Ajaykutti All-Terrain Vehicle, Randhwa.

A military contingent from the EU, carrying the military staff flag and flags of Operations Atalanta and Aspides, the naval operations of the grouping, also featured at the parade. It was the EU's first participation in such an event outside of Europe.

The Indian Navy tableau depicted a stitched ship from the fifth century CE, now christened INSV Kaundinya.



President Droupadi Murmu confers the Ashoka Chakra on Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla on Monday. ANI



(Clockwise from top) An Army contingent with Bactrian camels during the Republic Day parade on Kartavya Path in New Delhi on Monday; Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis in Mumbai; Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin and Governor R N Ravi in Chennai; EU military staff, led by Colonel Frederik Simon Spruijt, during the parade in New Delhi; West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in Kolkata; and Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi, Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge, Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, and Union Minister Bhupender Yadav during the 'At Home' at Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Perform duties enshrined in Constitution, says Bhagwat

ENS & PTI
New Delhi, January 26

RSS CHIEF Mohan Bhagwat on Monday called upon citizens to sincerely discharge their duties enshrined in the Constitution to make India a leading republic in the world and "propagate the message of happiness, peace and dharma" to the whole world.

He was addressing a gathering after unfurling the national flag at RSS's Muzaffarpur divisional office, 'Madhukar Niketan', on the occasion of the 77th Republic Day.

"It is the Constitution that teaches us dharma... Everyone should be encouraged to read the Preamble, the Directive Principles of State Policy, Fundamental Duties, and Fundamental Rights," he said.

"Our Constitution says 'We the People of India' have provided the republic system to ourselves, and we all have to run this country together," he said.

"The makers of our Constitution considered dharma essential. There are laws but everything runs on the basis of dharma, which connects, uplifts and makes everyone walk together, and does not let things scatter. Even Ambedkar sahab spoke many times about the necessity of dharma," the RSS chief said.

Indians abroad mark R-Day with patriotic fervour

Beijing, Kathmandu: Indians across the world on Monday enthusiastically celebrated the 77th Republic Day, exchanging greetings, singing the national anthem and patriotic songs. Dressed in vibrant traditional dresses, the Indian diaspora celebrated the day at the country's missions abroad, where the national Tricolour was unfurled.

In Beijing, Ambassador Pradeep Kumar Rawat unfurled the national flag and read out extracts of President Droupadi Murmu's address to the nation.

The Indian High Commissioner to the UK, Vikram Doraiswami, read out President Murmu's customary Republic Day address at a diaspora gathering in London. There was a special performance of 'Vande Mataram' by singers from the Bengal Heritage Foundation in the UK. "It wasn't just a performance to remind us of the song, but also reflected the value that the song has in our national memory," he said. PTI

FROM JAMMU AND KASHMIR TO KERALA, A SPLASH OF CELEBRATIONS

Stalin talks diversity, Himanta says choose between vote bank politics & progress

ENS & PTI
January 26

FROM JAMMU and Kashmir to Kerala and Tamil Nadu, states celebrated the 77th Republic Day across the country on Monday. While J&K L-G Manoj Sinha said that "a new dawn" has arrived in the UT, Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla called for strengthening peace and upholding ideals of the Constitution.

Chief Ministers also shared their messages on the occasion. Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath said the citizens of India are the real guardians of the Constitution, while Tamil Nadu CM M K Stalin took a

veiled dig at the BJP government at the Centre, saying, "Let's celebrate a unified India. Not a uniform India."

Speaking at the M A Stadium in Jammu, L-G Manoj Sinha said that "decades of suppressed pain and tears are finally receiving dignity and justice", assuring people that "every case linked to terrorism will be thoroughly examined, fresh investigations will be conducted, and the guilty will face the strictest punishment".

He described Operation Sindoor as a "defining moment in India's national security doctrine" that "any terrorist attack on its soil would be treated as an act of war".

"Operation Sindoor was not merely a military action; it was a declaration of India's strategic resolve," he said, adding that "we struck at the heart of the enemy, dismantled their terror infrastructure, exposed the hollowness of nuclear threats, and reaffirmed our unwavering commitment to protecting national sovereignty".

Bhalla said, "...let us resolve to uphold the ideals of our constitution, strengthen peace and harmony, and work with dedication towards inclusive development and social justice." The state has been under the President's Rule since February last year.

Karnataka Governor Tha-

warchand Gehlot said disbursals under the five guarantee schemes, which have brought significant changes in the lives of women apart from increasing the purchasing power of

families, have exceeded Rs 1.13 lakh crore.

Emphasising on "many-

coexist with pride and faith is a personal truth. Our strength has never been sameness. It has always been our many-ness. When diversity is protected, belonging feels natural."

Taking a veiled dig at the Centre, Stalin in his message said, "Let's celebrate a unified India. Not a uniform India."

Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan in a Facebook post called for vigilance against forces attempting to weaken the vision of "unity in diversity" and impose a monolithic ideology.

The federal concept of a strong Centre with empowered states is facing serious challenges. We should stand together against policies that aim to

weaken federalism by curtailing the financial powers of states and turning constitutional institutions into political tools," he said.

CM Adityanath said, "The real guardian of the Constitution is India's citizens."

"Whenever the basic spirit of the Constitution is disregarded, it is not just an insult to the Constitution but also to those great personalities whose sacrifices ensured its freedom," Adityanath said.

Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma said the time has come for people to think and make a choice whether they want "vote bank politics" or take forward the development journey launched by his government

during the last five years.

He said that people must decide whether they want to "surrender to Bangladeshi Muslims" or be part of progress and development. "We have decided not to surrender to the Bangladeshi Muslims who have encroached upon huge areas of land and threatened our identity, culture and traditions. We have started the process of reclaiming our land by evicting the encroachers," he said.

Sarma said his government was committed to protect people's 'maati' (land), 'bheti' (foundation), 'sanskruti' (culture) and 'parichay' (identity) to protect and secure the rights of the future generation.



Jammu and Kashmir L-G Manoj Sinha in Jammu on Monday. PTI

Badrinath-Kedarnath may ban non-Hindus from entering temples

Shrine panel chief says decision in upcoming meeting, even as official claims all stakeholders not consulted

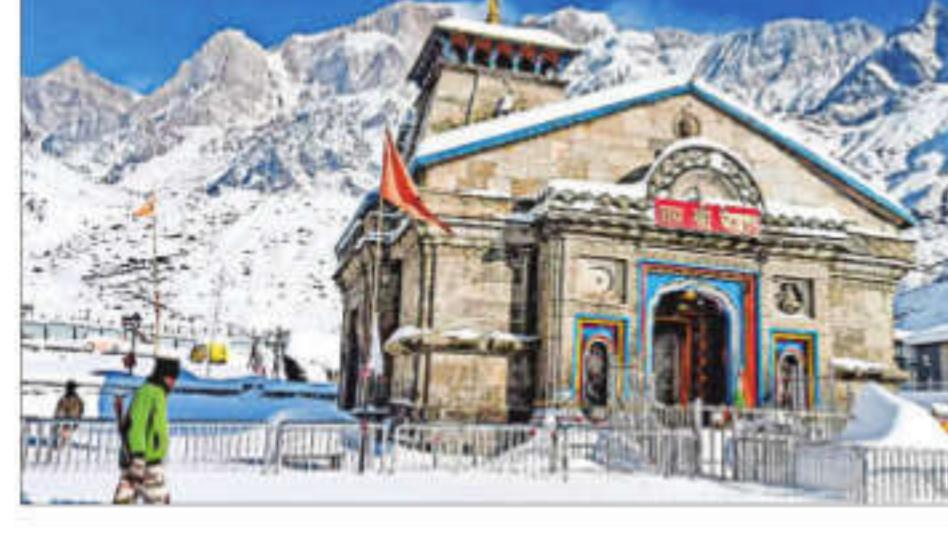
Aiswarya Raj
Dehradun, January 26

THE TEMPLE committees of Char Dham shrines may pass resolutions banning the entry of "non-Hindus" into the temple premises, with the Badrinath-Kedarnath Temple Committee president, Hemant Dwivedi, saying a decision will be passed at the upcoming board meeting.

However, a senior office-bearer of the Board said that no discussion has taken place on this. The next meeting, to chart the budget, is scheduled for February.

He added that Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists will not be excluded. "We should have said that non-Sanatanis are to be excluded," he added.

The Temple Committee is an undertaking of the government with 17 members, established under the 1948 Act of Uttar Pradesh. The administration of both Kedarnath and Badrinath temples is governed by



Over 17 lakh people visited Kedarnath in 2025. PTI

the committee, which includes public representatives, a chairman, members, and government officials. The chairman and vice chairman are nominated by the state government.

Meanwhile, the chairman of the Shri Gangotri Dham Temple Committee, Dharmanand Semwal, said the board will deliberate on a similar proposal. "We also demand that those who hurt our religion should not be given entry. The CM has also said that it will be discussed because this is a general sentiment that residents have raised," he said.

Asked about the entry of people, including the Governor, Gurmeet Singh, who belongs to the Sikh religion, he said, "Sikhs

have come from Hinduism and worship our lords... No resolution has been passed in the committee yet. If passed, it will be forwarded to the administration, and if they approve, it will be implemented," Semwal said, adding that this is a nascent demand currently. "We will discuss who is a non-Hindu," he said.

The four Dhams are visited by many people, including international tourists from across the world, who come for trekking. The four pilgrimage sites recorded footfall of 51 lakh in 2025, of which Badrinath Dham reported 16.6 lakh visitors. Kedarnath remained the temple with the highest footfall with

17.68 lakh pilgrims. Former chief minister and Congress leader Harish Rawat said that the BJP is resorting to communal polarisation. "It has nothing to do with Hindu pilgrimage. In Har Ki Pauri, municipal bylaws have restricted the entry of non-Hindus, and people have been following this since then. There is a general sentiment that those from other religions keep away from these places. Those who would earlier gatekeep their religious places have started opening them to all, while Hinduism, which is known for being open to all, is closing its doors," he said.

Rawat asked, "If the head of the state is a non-Hindu, will you decide that those areas will be out of bounds and out of their jurisdiction?"

Meanwhile, senior Congress leader Suryakant Dhasmana said that this is an agenda to divert people's attention from real issues.

"They have popped up hoardings at Har Ki Pauri in Haridwar. International tourists visit these places. How will you bar these people? Anyone can enter any public space under the Constitution. These are gimmicks for distracting people," he said.

BRIEFLY



Vehicles caught in a traffic jam as heavy snowfall chokes highways and roads in Manali on Monday. PTI

HIMACHAL PRADESH

Tourists stranded in Manali as roads blocked; more snowfall likely today

HUNDREDS OF tourists are stranded in Manali after heavy snowfall in the region led to blockage of local link roads in the popular tourist destination and surrounding areas, leading to long lines of vehicles on adjoining routes, officials said on Monday. The Met office has forecast heavy snowfall in the higher hills of Himachal Pradesh on Tuesday, issuing an orange alert for Kullu, Kinnaur, Chamba, and Lahaul and Spiti districts. Police have advised people to avoid unnecessary travel until weather conditions improve and to refrain from visiting high-altitude areas. According to officials, tourists who had reached Manali prior to the snowfall are restricted to their accommodations as the thoroughfares are closed. PTI

Kingpin in codeine cough syrup case held

KANPUR POLICE has arrested a drug kingpin for his alleged role in running an inter-state network involved in the illegal trade of codeine-based cough syrup and narcotic drugs, officials said. Vinod Agrawal was arrested on Sunday from Narnaul, Haryana, said DCP (Crime) Shrawan Kumar Singh. The accused was involved in illegal procurement, storage and sale of narcotic drugs, and interstate trafficking, he said. PTI

2 boys run over by train while chasing kite

TWO BOYS, 10 and 13 years of age, chasing a kite on a railway track on Chandigarh's outskirts, were run over by a train, officials said on Monday. A group of boys were chasing a kite, which had got detached from its string, and failed to notice the approaching train, the GRP official said. The incident took place on Sunday evening near Harmilap Nagar colony in Baltana area of Chandigarh. PTI

FIR UNDER UP'S ANTI-CONVERSION LAW FILED AGAINST FIVE MUSLIM GIRLS

After Moradabad burqa row, one girl sent out of town, another stops tuitions, third skips school

Saman Husain
Moradabad, January 26

TILL A month-old CCTV footage surfaced last week, appearing to show six giggling girls putting a burqa on one of them, they were known to be a tight group. Neighbours and students of Class 12 in a school in Moradabad, they would together walk to and from a tuition centre where they were preparing for NEET.

Now, after the filing of an FIR under the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Act against the five Muslim girls in the group, at least one has been sent away to her grandparents' place, while another has stopped going for tuitions. The families of the accused are hoping the matter will get resolved. It was "a case of misunderstanding", they say.

The uncle of one of the accused girls says: "All the families met along with some local leaders on Sunday. Everyone agrees this was a mistake of judgment that the girls made in their childlessness."

The stringent UP Act was invoked after the family of the sole Hindu girl in the group alleged she was pressured by the others to wear a burqa while they were returning from tuition classes. Barring one girl who is 20, the rest are between the ages of 16 and 18 and minors.

Police said the matter is

Probe indicates 6 were friends; case of misunderstanding, say villagers



The lane where the CCTV video was recorded. SAMAN HUSSAIN

under investigation and that no arrests have been made so far. In case of "forcible conversion" of minors, women or SC/STs, the UP Act can involve punishment between three and 10 years, and a fine of at least Rs 25,000.

The tuition classes the six attended are held by a teacher from their school in Sahu Kunji, an area with predominantly Hindu households. It was a short walk from the neighbouring villages where the six live, both of which have a mixed population.

Inspector Ashok Kumar, the investigating officer in the case, said: "The CCTV footage is from December 20, 2025...we are in-

I don't know how the video went viral," he told *The Indian Express*. Inspector Kumar said that they had recorded the statement of the Hindu girl, and were yet to question the five friends named in the FIR.

In her statement, the Hindu girl claimed she was friends with only one of the five girls, the one carrying the burqa. While she has alleged that the group encouraged her to wear the burqa, the uncle of one of the accused girls said the five had carried the burqa only to help their Hindu friend avoid being seen by her family as they were planning to go to a local eatery for snacks.

"My niece has told us that the Hindu girl's brother forbade her from going anywhere else after tuitions. Since his shop is located on her way home, she was worried about being seen. The girls thought covering her with a burqa would help her avoid trouble at home," the uncle said.

He added that since the case was registered, his niece has stopped attending school and has been sent to her maternal grandmother's home.

The family members of another accused girl also said the incident had been misunderstood and that there was no intention to pressure anyone or interfere with religious beliefs. A former village pradhan, the father of the girl said his daughter was being unfairly im-

plicated simply because she appeared in the CCTV footage. "She was only present there. She did not force anyone to do anything," he said. "We respect all religions. Women in our family wear sarees too on some occasions, and burqa is just a form of clothing for us. There was no religious agenda..." He said he will send his daughter to school only for the board exams now.

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11 security personnel injured in six IED blasts in Chhattisgarh

Jayprakash S Naidu
Raipur, January 26

ELEVEN JAWANS were injured in six IED blasts during anti-Maoist operations in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur on the eve of Republic Day. All the jawans were airlifted to Raipur for treatment.

Additional Superintendent of Police, Moradabad, Kunwar Akash Singh said the police are examining all the versions carefully. "Preliminary inquiry indicates that the girls knew each other and studied together... We are investigating the allegations in detail. No arrests have been made so far."

Since the case was filed, other allegations have been made, including that the Hindu girl was being "encouraged" to eat non-vegetarian food. "...they said gravy gravy kha lo, usmein kya hota hai" (They said just eat the gravy, what's in it), she has told police. She has also said the friends would talk positively about Islam.

"We were always against their friendship," says the girl's brother, adding, "she has stopped going to tuitions".

The tuition teacher distanced himself from the entire matter. He didn't know anything about the six, he told *The Indian Express*.

"We were always against their friendship," says the girl's brother, adding, "she has stopped going to tuitions".

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not clear if Battalion 1 was involved in the blasts, it has been learnt that Battalion 1 still has over 100 armed fighters.

Of the 11 injured jawans, 10 are from the DRG, and one is a sub-inspector with CoBRA. While three jawans suffered serious leg injuries, three others had splinter injuries in their eyes due to the blasts.

Acting on information about the presence of a formation of Maoists in the west of Usur in Bijapur district, a joint operation was undertaken on Saturday by the District Reserve Guard (DRG) and the Central Reserve Police Force's (CRPF) elite Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA).

This year, forces have gunned down 20 Maoists in Chhattisgarh. In 2024 and 2025, over 500 Maoists were gunned down by forces, with a majority of them in the Bijapur district. In the same period, 42 security personnel and 117 civilians were killed in Maoist violence.

UP: 16-year-old girl strangled to death, four held

Manish Sahu
Lucknow, January 26

TO TEACH a 16-year-old girl "a lesson for playing them", two men allegedly strangled her and placed her body on a railway track, where it was run over by a passing train, said the Lucknow Police.

The two accused, along with two of their aides, were arrested on Republic Day, said police.

According to police, the duo — Anshu Gautam alias Lucky (20) and Ashiq Yadav (20) — are friends. Police said the accused killed the girl, suspecting she was allegedly in a relationship with both of them. Suresh Singh, in-charge of the police station concerned, said Anshu, Ashiq and the other accused — Rishu Yadav and Vaibhav Singh Rajput — work in a private factory.

FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

FROM VELLAPPALLY NATESAN TO JAMAAT-E-ISLAMI HIND AND CHRISTIAN GROUP CAASA, SEVERAL OUTFITS TRYING TO SHAPE STATE'S POLITICAL DISCOURSE

Kerala powerbrokers: Caste, religious outfits that parties can't ignore in poll season

CAPITAL CONTEXT

BY LIZ MATHEW

A WEEKLY LOOK AT POLITICS IN A STATE FROM NEW DELHI

IN THE bipolar landscape of Kerala politics that the BJP is seeking to break, a rather important and yet overlooked role is that of major community organisations representing different caste and religious interests.

With just months to go for the Assembly elections, outfits such as the Nair Service Society (NSS) and Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNP) Yogam, the Samastha Kerala Jem-iyathul Ulama (AP faction) and Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, and the Christian Association and Alliance for Social Action (CAASA) are trying to play a role in state politics as caste and religious questions dominate the discourse.

While these outfits have their spheres of influence, the

degree to which they determine the voting choices of their members remains uncertain.

Left and Hindu votes

The NSS and the SNP are among Kerala's most influential caste groups, and their support for the CPI(M)-led LDF has created a stir as it came at a time when two CPI(M) leaders made comments viewed as attempts to polarise the situation.

First, earlier this month, former state minister A K Balan alleged that if the Congress-led UDF returned to power, the Home Department would effectively be controlled by the Jamaat and communal violence like the one that occurred in Marad in Kozhikode in 2002 could happen again. Even as Balan faced backlash from the Congress and the Jamaat, CPI(M) leader Vijayan came out in his party colleague's defence.

Then, state minister Saji Cheriyani triggered a firestorm by

linking the local body poll results in Kasargode and Malappuram — two Muslim-dominated areas — to communal polarisation. The statement drew criticism from within the party and its support base, forcing Cheriyani to retract his comments.

In recent months, there has been a quiet shift by SNP leader Vellappally Natesan towards the CPI(M). Natesan, who is from the backward Ezhava community, told the Varthamanam podcast of *ieMalayalam* that Vijayan would return to power for an unprecedented third term. This growing proximity between the CM and a leader known for making anti-Muslim remarks has also caused discomfort between the CPI(M) and the CPI.

Natesan's son Thushar Vellappally continues to head the SNP's political arm Bharath Dharma Jana Sena, which is part of the BJP-led NDA. On Sunday, in a significant decision, the BJP-

led Centre announced the Padma Bhushan for Natesan. On Monday, NSS general secretary Sukumaran Nair said unity between the NSS and the SNP was not possible in a "new political scenario".

For the CPI(M), the support of the Padma Bhushan for Natesan is important to consolidate the Hindu vote — Hindus constitute 55% of the population, as per the 2011 Census — as it did not get the support of Muslims in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. It also wants to stop Ezhavas from mobilising for the BJP.

This also comes at a time when the BJP is trying to turn the Sabarimala gold scandal into an electoral issue. With the CPI(M)'s suffering in the 2019 LS polls due to its support for the entry of

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Dial down, Bangladesh should play in India

AN UNSPORTING spectacle is playing in the cricket arena, involving bans and ultimatums and brinkmanship. That this is unfolding between two nations and two neighbours with overlapping histories and cultural intimacies that have contributed to regional stability makes it even more of a self-goal for India and Bangladesh. Sports is not always insulated from politics, and it is true that India-Bangladesh ties are currently in a fragile moment. Even so, the ICC diktat that has forced Bangladesh out of the upcoming T20 World Cup, and the events that led up to it, showcase the takeover of an escalatory reactivity and a paralysis of long-termist diplomacy. This is more so in India, the much larger player, on and off the field.

Bangladesh's exclusion from the tournament comes after its government reiterated that its players would find it difficult to play in India because of "security concerns" after the BCCI asked the Kolkata Knight Riders to — unreasonably — remove Bangladesh seamer Mustafizur Rahman from its squad. The BCCI decision pointed to "recent developments", that is, the attacks in Bangladesh on religious minorities. The targeting of minority Hindus amid a weakening state authority on the watch of the Mohammad Yunus-led interim government is a serious concern. New Delhi has done well to flag this — loudly and clearly. But this categorical message is undermined when the BCCI, the behemoth, targets an individual player who has nothing to do with law enforcement or state policy, and when it is seen to be pandering to online troll brigades. In effect, this has only narrowed one of the few remaining spaces for people-to-people engagement, while reinforcing perceptions in Bangladesh of a heavy-handed Delhi.

Ever since the events of August 2024, when a students' uprising toppled the Sheikh Hasina government, India-Bangladesh ties have yet to recover their footing. Now, the February elections in Bangladesh offer a chance for both Delhi and Dhaka to turn the page. Even as Sheikh Hasina continues to find refuge in India — and she should — External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's visit to Dhaka to attend Khaleda Zia's funeral, and his meeting with Tarique Rahman, her son and BNP chief, acknowledged that imperative. A Delhi-Dhaka reset will depend on both sides moving carefully — the "ghuspaithiya" rhetoric ahead of elections in Assam and West Bengal, and anti-India posturing by parties ahead of polls in Bangladesh, will be watched closely. In this precarious time, both countries must let cricket be. The Delhi-Dhaka relationship is too valuable to be hijacked by grandstanding or by letting hardliners run away with the ball. If both sides dial down and a Bangladesh XI plays in India, it will be a win-win.

Trump's foot soldiers unleash domestic terror

THE KILLING of Alex Pretti, a 37-year-old nurse, in Minneapolis by US Border Patrol agents — less than three weeks after the killing of Renée Good in the same city by an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent — is shocking. Videos make it clear that a scuffle began when an agent pushed a woman and Pretti tried to intervene. He was pepper-sprayed, after which another officer fired 10 rounds into him. The Trump administration's defence — that Pretti intended to "do maximum damage and massacre law enforcement" — is contradicted by the video evidence. Equally disturbing is the speed with which officials labelled Pretti a "domestic terrorist" even before an investigation began. Good, shot dead at point-blank range, was also accused of "domestic terrorism".

Donald Trump returned to power on an aggressive anti-immigration platform, and over the past year, a hardline federal enforcement strategy seems to have handed agencies like ICE and the US Border Patrol a blank cheque. Although they are legally mandated to enforce immigration laws in the interest of national security, the expansive powers they have been granted, in a climate of impunity, have led to a record number of detentions and deaths in ICE custody in 2025 — the most in two decades. The overreach of federal agents is now claiming US citizens with no criminal history as its victims.

Even though he said on Monday that he is "reviewing everything", the alacrity with which Trump has defended the federal agents suggests that accountability will be evaded. An independent probe is the only way forward. The federal government has prevented investigations by the state of Minnesota. The fatal shooting has brought the already fragile relationship between the federal and state governments to a tipping point. Under pressure from Democrats, the media and a handful of Republicans, Trump may yet call ICE and other agents off. But if the culture of impunity persists, it will lead to a severe erosion of trust between citizens and the government — a trust that is fundamental to the social contract that sustains a democracy.

When spirituality goes clubbing

IN HIS first "Mann ki Baat" of the year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi mentioned the trend of bhajan clubbing. It is the name given to a new wave of spiritual expression, where bhajans are being reimagined in a contemporary, club-style format — in the PM's words, it is about "spirituality and modernity merging beautifully".

Every generation interprets culture in ways that it can recognise and respond to. Bhajan clubbing is a modern twist to the call-and-response format, engineered for maximum crowd participation, especially from the young and the restless. In a world measuring its life by the gloss of social media, one that is roiled by political turbulence, bhajan clubbing appears like a tether, a way to connect with oneself, an attempt to reach one's roots. Sold-out shows by international kirtan artists such as Krishna Das and Radhika Das and the proliferation of bhajan-clubbing concerts across the country seem to attest to the fact that it has struck a chord with India's young.

For an older generation, bhajan clubbing is a throwback to the global counterculture movement of the Sixties that looked to the religious and cultural traditions of the East — yoga, meditation, classical music — for inspiration. The Beatles' famous retreat to Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's ashram in Rishikesh in 1968 to come to terms with their dizzying fame and find their way to inner peace was a turning point in their careers. It marked a shift in their music — captured most effectively in their *White Album* — and in how they thought of fame, nature, spirituality and creativity. Can bhajan clubbing, too, motivate something similar? A re-engagement with traditions beyond the spectacle, a moment of cultural shift once the novelty wears off? That remains to be seen.

The Editorial Page

TUESDAY, JANUARY 27, 2026

• WORDLY WISE
In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act.
— George Orwell

As rules-based order crumbles, only reforms can shield the economy

2026 HAS BEGUN with a sense of cautious optimism that the economy is experiencing a cyclical upswing. Recent GDP prints have surprised to the upside, credit growth is accelerating and some surveys reveal business sentiment may be firming. Near-term buoyancy should not be surprising. The economy has benefited from a raft of supports in 2025: GST and income tax cuts, monetary and regulatory easing, positive terms-of-trade impulses from lower crude prices, and a second successive strong monsoon. Together, these tailwinds are driving a cyclical lift. The real question is: What will it take for growth to remain strong once the cyclical impulses fade? To do so, the economy must successfully navigate two rotations.

The first rotation is of demand drivers. Post-pandemic growth was driven by a surge in public investment, a revival of the real estate sector, and strong service exports. But several of these impulses are fading. Central capex grew 30 per cent annually for four years post-pandemic but this pace was always going to strain the economy's absorptive capacity. So, central capex has downshifted to around a 10 per cent annual pace even as state capex risks being cannibalised by competitive populism. Meanwhile, residential real estate has slowed sharply over the last year, unsurprising because it was being driven narrowly by the upper echelon, who have likely reached some saturation point. For the recovery to sustain, demand needs to rotate towards the post-pandemic laggards of private consumption and private investment. What will this entail?

Urban and rural consumption have been in a game of whack-a-mole since the pandemic. Can they finally grow in unison? Rural consumption has lifted smartly in re-

cent quarters. Can urban consumption complement it? Autos have picked up nicely post the GST cuts, but the rest of urban consumption looks more tentative. Consumer durables production has lifted only modestly in recent months and much of the pick-up in personal credit growth is gold loans — underpinned by rising collateral from surging gold prices — suggesting it is more supply-driven than strong demand. Meanwhile, growth of the wage bill of listed companies has slowed from 15 per cent in 2022 and 2023 to mid single digits in 2025. The breadth and durability of the consumption recovery will, therefore, come down to whether household balance sheets and employment can strengthen enough in 2026.

Goods exports have been resilient in the face of punitive US tariffs, with exporters finding alternative markets. That said, non-oil export growth rates slowed to 3 per cent (in nominal dollars) by the end of last year. Exports therefore have their work cut out in 2026.

What does all this imply for private capex? In a world floating with Chinese excess capacity and riddled with US policy capriciousness, a broad-based private investment recovery will require both strong domestic demand visibility and animal spirits. It is unsurprising, therefore, that cash flow statements of listed companies reveal capex slowed in the first half of this fiscal year compared to last year, in contrast to market expectations. Instead, the fate of private capex hinges on the strength of the consumption and exports recovery. Can a durable recovery of the latter finally crowd in the former? That remains the \$4-trillion question for 2026.



SAJJID Z CHINOY

The second rotation is the cyclical making way for the structural. The space for more cyclical support is exhausted. Rampant Chinese excess capacity is likely to keep inflation contained but also pull nominal GDP growth into single digits. Assuming 9 per cent nominal growth for the foreseeable future, the combined (central and state) fiscal deficit will need to be reduced by another percentage point of GDP just to keep public debt/GDP at 80 per cent. There is no further space for fiscal support. Paradoxically, lower nominal GDP prospects also accentuate perceptions that India's equity market is expensive and explains why foreign portfolio flows have been reluctant. Meanwhile, low inflation can keep monetary policy in play but with real rates already down to 1.25 per cent, the space for more support, if any, is very modest.

The implication: Cyclical supports must make way for structural underpinnings. Policymakers must be commanded for jumpstarting this process both by bringing reforms back on the table (GST rationalisation, new labour codes, 100 per cent FDI in insurance) and not succumbing to export pessimism (by signing a slew of free trade agreements). But the structural ask is long. Over the last two

decades, growth has become prematurely capital-intensive and there is an urgent need to reverse this drift. Only labour-intensive growth will generate the household incomes to drive sustained consumption growth. But this will require the labour force to become more employable — as it competes with capital — through a mission-like focus on education, skilling and health. Human

capital augmentation is India's biggest imperative over the next decade. If industrial policy is to be exercised, it must be in labour-intensive sectors and formalisation must not push up the marginal cost of labour to the point that businesses, paradoxically, turn more capital-intensive.

Meanwhile, the export push must be taken to its logical conclusion by joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), a large free trading block that accounts for 15 per cent of global trade. The upcoming budget is the perfect opportunity to simplify, rationalise and liberalise customs duties, import tariffs and non-tariff barriers such as SPCOs. The old adage — an import tariff is an export tax — has never been truer in a world of global supply chains.

There is no time to waste. Over the last 10 years, per capita GDP growth in US dollars has clocked 5.9 per cent. To reach \$15,000 per capita by 2047, the asking rate of per capita growth in dollars is 8 per cent for the next 22 years, at a time when India's working age population growth — which averaged 1.5 per cent over the last decade — will progressively go to zero. The quantum of labour productivity growth needed in these circumstances, will require a relentless pace of reform.

The task before us is clear and daunting but not impossible. At a time when the rules-based global order is falling apart and being replaced by the law of the jungle, only sustained economic reforms will induce investment, attract capital flows, create jobs, and thereby create a protective sheath around the economy against a hostile and precarious global backdrop.

The writer is head of Asia Economics at JP Morgan Chase Bank

In a world floating with Chinese excess capacity and riddled with US policy capriciousness, a broad-based private investment recovery will require both strong domestic demand visibility and animal spirits

Amid ICE crackdown, missing in action: Democrats



KSHAMA SAWANT

DONALD TRUMP'S ICE is terrorising American cities. Thousands are being snatched off the streets, and drivers are being pulled over by masked and warrantless ICE agents in unmarked cars. Peaceful activists and mother Renee Good was brutally murdered by ICE agents in Minneapolis. The public approval rating for ICE has plummeted since Trump took office, and a majority of Americans now disapprove of ICE. Trump's own popularity has cratered to an unprecedented low. Yet, the Democratic Party has refused to fight Trump and the Republican Party. This is because creating and funding ICE and super-exploiting immigrant workers for Wall Street's greed have always been a bipartisan agenda.

The Democrats control the governor's office and majorities in both houses of the legislature in 16 states. They control the mayor's office in 67 of the 100 largest cities, many of which have experienced some of the most shocking attacks by ICE. These Democrats could declare today that their cities will stop all collaboration with ICE, and follow through. Data reveals that ICE arrests are substantially greater in states where police and other departments cooperate with and share data with ICE. Democratic mayors and city councils could pass emergency legislation banning local agencies from sharing data with ICE and enforce the law with serious penalties, including firing, for agency heads. Local Democrats could pass emergency legislation banning ICE and all other law enforcement officers from wearing masks. They can use their public platforms, which can reach millions of working people, to launch mass protests and civil disobedience.

The Democratic Party has failed to carry out a single one of these actions. In Minneapolis, the Democrats, led by Mayor Jacob Frey and Minnesota Governor Tim Walz, have allowed ICE to launch its dreaded Operation Metro Surge, which has unleashed 3,000 agents in the city. The Democratic Party controls Washington state, where I reside. Chillingly, the state's agencies allowed federal agencies such as ICE and Homeland Security to query the state's Department of Licensing database nearly 2.7 million times in 2025 alone.

Trump's ramping up of deportations is horrendous and dangerous. But it is part of a long-term agenda shared by Republicans and Democrats. The 4.4 million deportations plus border expulsions under Joe Biden exceeded those during any single presidential term since Republican George W Bush's second term. During the eight years of Barack Obama, over 3 million people were deported, more than all 20th-century presidents combined, earning him the title "Deporter-in-Chief". The Democratic Party is not a "lesser evil". Both parties are responsible for brutal attacks on immigrants and working people, atrocities around the world, imperialist wars, and the plundering of resources worldwide, which itself drives immigration.

Attacks on immigrants are endemic to this system, not only in the US, but globally. The capitalist class impoverishes indigenous communities and creates refugees and immigrants. Once the immigrants arrive in the economically advanced nation, it is in the capitalists' interests to oppress them to keep the working class divided. By keeping immigrant workers marginalised, paid lower-tier wages, and always fearful of deportation, the bosses can set the (low) bar for wages and working conditions. They pit native-born workers against immigrant workers in a continual race to the bottom. This is why we need international working-class solidarity against this anti-immigrant agenda.

In the US, we urgently need mass protests, peaceful civil disobedience, and strike actions. When Trump instituted his abhorrent Muslim travel ban in January 2017 during his first term, my socialist Seattle City Council office led the SeaTac airport shutdown, disregarding the objections of many Democratic politicians and operatives who opposed our mass civil disobedience. We need to bring that back to defeat Trump and both parties of the American billionaire class. Working people need to fight to win historic victories such as free healthcare for all by taxing the rich, national rent control, a \$25-an-hour minimum wage, and a permanent end to all US military aid to Israel.

The writer is a former Seattle City Council member who is now running for US Congress as an independent antiwar socialist

Who decided 2016 was the last 'best year'?



SONAL GUPTA

IMAGINE IF the algorithm were a person, or well, a bunch of people, sitting in a backroom sifting through online content to curate your "For You" feed. They'd know you best. One of them would chuckle at a particularly "dank" meme, maybe an inside joke that only you two share, before projecting it onto your screen. Except it isn't a person, but a machine that has learned to identify the content you like and react to.

So, who decided it was time to repost memories from 2016, the algorithm or us? Snapshots from a decade ago have reappeared everywhere on social media. It was the era before we had "looksmaxed", "aura-farmed", or "ate". 2016, now wearing Retrica's yellow-tint, appears like a simpler time.

The trend itself isn't new. Humans love to reminisce, and the algorithm has figured out that looking back keeps us scrolling. In 2019, we posted photos from 2009. In the early 2010s, #throwbackthursday became a weekly ritual. Instagram resurfaces photos from "Story" archives, while Google Photos compiles heart-warming videos from your old photos.

And as we generously romanticise the past, many assert that 2016 was the last "best year" — a claim contested by the politics of that year. Donald Trump came to power in the US. The UK left the European Union. And the Indian government decided to demonise Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 banknotes.

So, why does 2016 feel simpler than the equally tumultuous 2026? The answer may lie in what changed about social media that year. The algorithms that now feed us this nostalgia are the same ones that, in 2016, transformed the internet into a hyper-optimised, engagement-baiting ecosystem.

Facebook changed its News Feed in 2009 to prioritise "relevance" over chronological order, and soon, other platforms followed suit. In 2016, Instagram announced it would abandon chronological feeds in favour of algorithmic curation to show "moments we believe you will care about the most". Twitter, now X, introduced a similar feature to show "best tweets first". The effects of this shift have been measurable and profound. Research shows algorithmic curation can funnel users into echo chambers. Ragebait, moral panics and hot takes elicit strong reactions that spill offline. And the prioritisation of short-form video content has demonstrably impacted attention spans.

In the years since, the algorithm has received countless makeovers and AI-powered upgrades. Social media transformed from the town's message board into a parallel virtual space, and now, as bots and AI sloop proliferate, it increasingly looks less human. When a trend goes viral now, it's nearly impossible to tell: Is this organic? Did the algorithm push it?

The nostalgia for 2016 seems to be driven by both. There's no denying that when you post your 2016 photo, it feels like an act of shared cultural experience. We choose to find connections on platforms designed to be isolating. And the algorithm? It may not have created the longing for 2016, but it recognised, packaged it, and sold it back to us as a trend. Perhaps in 2036, we will look back at 2026 as the best year.

The writer is deputy copy editor, The Indian Express. sonal.gupta@indianexpress.com

When spirituality goes clubbing

IN HIS first "Mann ki Baat" of the year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi mentioned the trend of bhajan clubbing. It is the name given to a new wave of spiritual expression, where bhajans are being reimagined in a contemporary, club-style format — in the PM's words, it is about "spirituality and modernity merging beautifully".

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40 YEARS AGO

January 27, 1986



Punjab-Haryana talks fail

THE SECOND joint meeting of the chief ministers of Punjab and Haryana and the Union Home Minister, S B Chavan, failed to produce a solution to the problem of identifying villages to be transferred to Haryana in lieu of Chandigarh. The two chief ministers, Surjit Singh Barnala and Bhajan Lal, had a 75-minute meeting with Chavan. The chief ministers stuck to the positions taken by them earlier before the Mathew Commission.

Punjab seeks 1,000 villages

PUNJAB WILL claim 1,000 Punjabi-speak-

ing villages of Haryana before the second territorial commission to be set up under the memorandum of settlement between the Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, and Harchand Singh Longowal, the state Chief Minister, Surjit Singh Barnala said. These villages were located in Sirsa, Hissar, Kurukshetra and Ambala districts. Barnala told a news conference.

Rebels take over Kampala

UGANDA'S REBEL National Resistance Army (NRA) has taken the capital, Kampala, after a nine-day offensive on the city, Western diplomatic sources said. The

NRA, led by one-time defence minister Yoweri Museveni, was "clearly in control," one source said. The sources, in radio contact with their counterparts in the city, said that the guerrilla takeover was greeted with jubilation by residents and that Kampala was quiet overnight except for some sporadic shooting.

Budget session

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• **WHAT THE OTHERS SAY**
Mr Pretti and Ms Good are dead.
The American people deserve
to know what happened.
— *The New York Times*

The Ideas Page

TUESDAY, JANUARY 27, 2026



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9

Let's recover lost meanings of ganarajya to face political challenge of our times



YOGENDRA YADAV

GANARAJYA OR *ganatantra*? Our passport and the Indian Constitution name our republic as *ganarajya*. But our Republic Day is officially called Ganatantra Divas. A small discrepancy, you might think. Perhaps an oversight. Or, maybe a nuance. That is what my publisher thought, when I pressed him to change the title of my recent book from the proposed *Ganatantra ka Swadham* to *Ganarajya ka Swadham*.

This seemingly minor difference invites us to search deeper. These two terms allow us to distinguish between two different concepts for which the English language has just one word — “republic”. Once we extricate the concept of *ganarajya* from the more familiar and dominant concept of *ganatantra*, it opens the way to recovering the lost meanings embedded deep in the idea of a *ganarajya*. This recovery, in turn, sets us on a path to face the political challenge of our times.

I am not suggesting that one of the two usages is wrong. Unlike these days, the makers of our Constitution and the early guardians of our republic were very careful with their words. They must have had good reasons to call it “Ganatantra Divas” and not “Ganarajya Divas”. I am not saying that one of these words is more authentic. Sanskrit scholars tell us that both these words are pretty recent, 19th- or 20th-century, coinages. The “republics” in ancient India were called “*gana*” or “*sangha*”, not “*ganarajya*” or “*ganatantra*”. Nor do I claim a direct link between these words and the historical reality of ancient Indian *ganas*. Historians warn us against comparing these older political formations with modern democratic republics. The polities of Vaishali or Lichchhavi are best described as lineage-based oligarchies rather than democracies in our sense of the term.

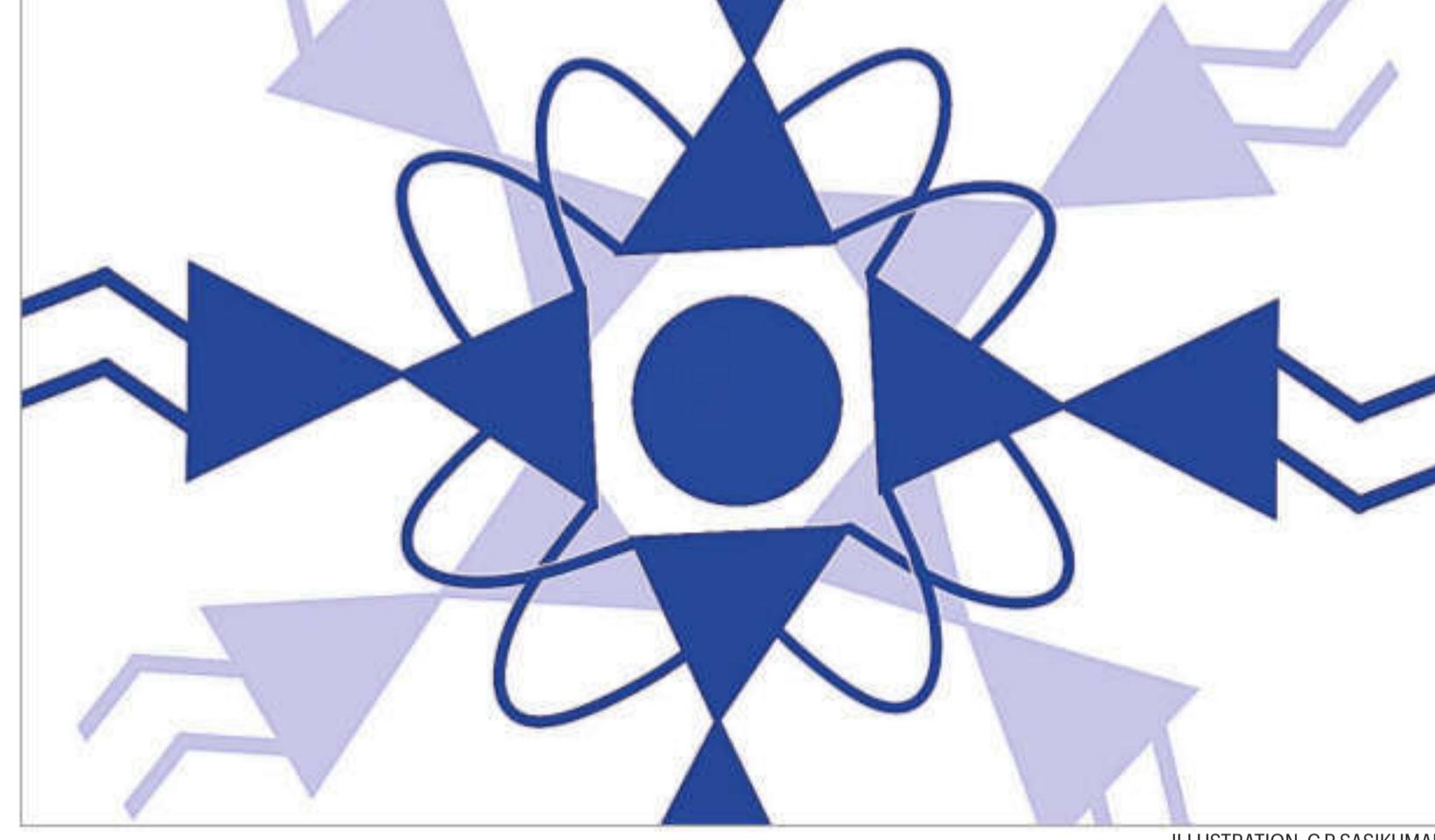


ILLUSTRATION: C R SASIKUMAR

My point here is to underline the distinctiveness of these two terms and uncover their different political possibilities.

Ganatantra refers to a negative and very narrow meaning of a republic. Political Science textbooks tell us that a republic is a form of government where the head of state is not hereditary. Britain is ruled by a king, so it is not a republic. Nepal has done away with the king, so it is now a republic. This is simple and clear-cut. But it also renders the idea pretty much useless. Except for a handful of titular monarchies, virtually every country — democratic or otherwise — is a republic these days. An adjective that applies to nearly everyone is redundant. So is this concept of the republic. That is why students of Political Science do not use this concept in any meaningful way. We learn about it in our textbooks and forget about it.

Sometimes, *ganatantra* is used in a broader sense. It is used not just negatively to refer to the absence of monarchy but also positively to refer to the mechanism of popular sovereignty, the *tantra* of *gana*. Thus, it means the

We have to go deeper and ask:
Why must we believe in these
constitutional values?
An answer to this would
take us beyond the
Constituent Assembly

institutional structure of electoral democracy through which popular sovereignty is exercised. In this broader usage, *ganatantra* is a near synonym of *lokatantra* or electoral democracy. Here again, *ganatantra* is repetitive and superfluous. No wonder *ganatantra* is a decorative expression that does very little in our political imagination.

Ganarajya takes us to deeper and positive meanings embedded in the idea of a republic. Here, the republic is a normative political order. The public is not just a collection; it is a community of equals. This community evolves its own norms, its distinct *dharma*. These norms are upheld by inculcating civic virtues. The people enforce these norms by holding the rulers accountable. The people are not just the source of power; they are also a check on power. In the European tradition, “republicanism” stood for this radical meaning of republic. In recent years, academic revival of “republicanism” in Western political theory has defined a republic not just as absence of monarchy but as absence of domination of any kind.

This radical concept of a re-

public is very much the republican idea upheld by the Indian national movement. The ancient Pali expression “*samanna-rajya*”, a polity where sovereignty is shared by equals, is close to this. In modern usage “*Jan-Gan-Man*” captures the spirit of our *ganarajya*. “*Jan*” stands for the people, the fountain head of sovereignty. “*Gan*” requires the people to be a political community where everyone exercises equal decision making power. “*Man*” is about the collective conscience. It is not mere public opinion at any given point of time, but the ethical ideas that the public upholds on deeper reflection. A radical republicanism informs the Indian Constitution.

Understanding this Indian concept of republic leads us to a question: What are the ethical ideals that inform the Bharat *ganarajya*? One could turn to the Preamble to the Constitution to unpack these ideals. But this may not work at a time when the Constitution itself is under assault. We have to go deeper and ask: Why must we believe in these constitutional values? An answer to this would take us beyond the Constituent Assembly. For our Constitution was not written in two years; the ideas that went into its making were forged over at least 100 years. It would take us beyond the freedom struggle, as the national movement was not just a movement to liberate the country from British colonial rule. It was also a movement for the reconstruction of India. It was an encounter between our civilisational heritage and Western modernity.

A search for the ethical ideals embedded in the idea of *ganarajya* invites us to uncover the *swadham* of our republic. This is what the oft-quoted phrase “the idea of India” must mean. And that would lead us to a stark conclusion: What we confront today is not just a backsliding of our democracy, not just a mutilation of our Constitution. We face nothing short of a determined onslaught on the *swadham* of our *ganarajya*. Defining and defending this *swadham* must be our collective Republic Day resolve.

Yadav is the author of *Ganarajya ka Swadham* (Setu Prakashan, 2026)

Don't bash Davos. Some things work, like this alliance for women



SMRITI IRANI

OVER THE past few days, we have seen some content bashing Davos. It needs no reminding that Davos is not, and should not be mistaken for, an end in itself. It is a catalyst. It is a moment — brief, concentrated, and intensely visible — where global attention converges. What matters is not the convergence alone, but what in-situations, governments, and leaders choose to build in its wake.

It was in this spirit that, three years ago, on the sidelines of the Forum, I established the Alliance for Global Good as an independent platform focused on advancing women's economic participation, inclusive growth, and cross-sector collaboration. The intent was clear: To move beyond episodic interventions and towards systems-level solutions grounded in research, partnerships, and institutional accountability.

Since then, the Alliance has engaged with over 5,000 international delegations and collaborated with more than 12,000 industry stakeholders. Its work has been anchored in evidence, through over a dozen policy papers examining public health systems, climate transition economics, the care economy, and the structural barriers limiting women's participation in growth. These findings have travelled across international platforms and have informed national discourse, including their reflection in India's Economic Survey through our work on the care economy.

A defining principle of the Alliance has been the recognition that policy coherence and delivery capacity are inseparable. This understanding shaped SPARK — The 100 Collective, an initiative designed to enable 1,00,000 women entrepreneurs across 300 locations in India. Its focus is not charity, but capability — connecting women-led enterprises to skills, capital, markets, and regulatory systems that allow them to grow, formalise, and compete. Equally important has been attention to the less visible, but deeply consequential, systems that shape women's lives. In the area of maternal health, the Alliance encouraged the ICMR to develop a clinician usage protocol for an affordable postpartum haemorrhage drape. Developed at a cost of under \$1, this drape and the corresponding usage protocol show how institutional leadership, paired with frugal innovation and system adoption, can deliver life-saving impact at scale.

The Alliance has built four collaborations in Africa, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and the US. Each is shaped by local context and unified by a commitment to women's economic participation and inclusive growth.

This year's engagements in Davos reflected continuity and expansion. The WE Lead Lounge, now in its third year, has evolved into the Alliance's flagship convening platform. Across 14 structured conversations, 65 global leaders engaged with over a thousand participants on issues spanning health security, climate resilience, economic participation, and workforce transitions.

Several milestones marked this year's engagement. The unveiling of Laila Nutraceuticals' women's wellness initiative signalled a \$40-million commitment to integrating research with market delivery. The announcement of the \$100-million SPARK Fund, with early commitments already mobilised, is intended to accelerate women-led enterprises at scale. The report 'Unlocking Her Wealth: The Untapped Economy' combined original analysis with evidence to deepen understanding of the undervaluation of women's work and its implications for economic participation.

This was my fourth consecutive engagement with the Forum. My earlier journeys were shaped by the responsibilities of ministerial office. This year's engagement — as chairperson of the Alliance for Global Good — was different. It was less about voice and more about architecture: How ideas are translated into systems, how evidence informs collaboration, and how dialogue matures into delivery.

The strength of Davos lies not merely in who attends, but in how it reflects the state of the world. Heads of government, CEOs, and institutional leaders shared the global stage with civic groups, practitioners, youth collectives, and ordinary citizens. This plurality matters. Global attention is a finite resource, and when it gathers, it must be used to surface complexity, not flatten it.

As the conversations from Davos recede, one principle remains clear: Progress is sustained not by momentary alignment, but by institutions that are designed to endure. The enduring value of Davos lies in how global attention is stewarded. When engaged with intent, it serves as a bridge between dialogue and design.

The writer is a former Union minister

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



MRINAL PANDE

Nuclear ambition
EXPANDING NUCLEAR capacity without parallel investment in domestic fuel security and research would create fresh dependencies (“Nuclear power expansion is an R&D challenge”, *IE*, January 26). The government must prioritise sustained funding for thorium-based technologies, strengthen university-industry research links, and build a skilled nuclear workforce. Clear timelines, safety, transparency, and public communication are equally vital if nuclear power is to gain trust and deliver reliable, low-carbon energy.

S M Jeeva, Chennai

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Rare chronicler

I WAS fortunate to have met Sir Mark Tully (“The gift to India that was Mark Tully”, *IE*, January 26), and have him inaugurate a book I wrote on my experiences as an Indian Railways official, *The Boy Who Loved Trains*. His affection for steam locomotives was particularly heartfelt. He lamented their disappearance. For him, the steam engine was a living creature-breathing, panting, sweating, yet always moving forward. His writing and commentary often returned to trains, not merely out of nostalgia but because they represented the India that's constantly evolving: Vast yet intimate, chaotic yet enduring, modernising yet deeply connected to the past. As I mourn the passing of a kind and remarkable individual, I will carry the spirit of Sir Mark Tully whenever I ride a train: Curious, open, patient and endlessly in love with the journey.

Deepak Sapra, via email

The recent furore over the rebuilding and expansion of the area around Manikarnika Ghat arose over the removal of several small temples and the statue of

In Kashi, renovation is also part of the eternal cycle

Maratha queen Ahilyabai Holkar, who built and restored many holy sites and temples, including the present-day Kashi Vishwanath temple. Ahilyabai's statue was shown in some widely circulated clips as lying among the debris. The Holkar family of Indore sent a note of protest and other groups, alleging the desecration of several temples, also jumped into the fray. The Chief Minister then visited the site and told the media that the queen's statue and some others were safe and would be reinstated after the “Manikarnika Teerth Corridor” was rebuilt. He also asserted that the original demand for expanding and rebuilding the cremation grounds and the ghats had been made to the Prime Minister by the Dom Raja whose family has controlled the area for generations.

The area where the cremation grounds and sundry temples stand, the storytellers will tell you, predates history. Once upon a time, it was a dark place where the river banks ended and a dense forest began. The forests have since disappeared. A densely packed pilgrimage centre began surrounding what was once a secretive and sacrosanct space haunted only by sadhus, relatives of the dead waiting for cremation and, of course, the restless souls of the dead.

Till the time of Alauddin Khilji, Hindus were free to build temples to various manifestations of Lord Shiva. Later, when under the Lodhis of Delhi and the Sharqi sultans of Jaunpur, assertive Islam knocked at Kashi's doors, there was considerable destruction of old buildings. But the city had a great power to bounce back and rebuild. By the 17th century, a sort of ceasefire was declared.

During the decline and fall of the great Mughal Empire, the court of the Maharaja of Benaras, his Nagar Kotwal Meer Rustam Ali, and later the British Resident's house, became centres of classical discourses on oriental culture among the pandits, the Muslim nobility and the British orientalists. By 1734, the Maratha lords began a furious rebuilding of Kashi's holy ghats and temples. At the same time, quarrels and litigation over sharing taxes levied at the cremation ghats were common. One Kashmimiral, miffed by the greed of the Doms of Dashashwamedha Ghat, brought his mother's body for cremation to Manikarnika and by way of gratitude rebuilt the ghat and started paying regular wages to the keepers.

Those days are gone. As one old singer, Pyare Ustad, sang: “Nāhīn rāhe woh Dara Sikandar, do dīn ki afsarē rāhi/ Chale gaye sub Mulk e Adam ko, na khushki rāhi, na tareer rāhi” (Those great stalwarts are no more, their rule lasted but two days. Ultimately all left for Adam's final abode, after their things have been neither dry nor wet).“

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ANUSHKA SAXENA

THE CHURN in the Chinese military is not over — this was the message that reverberated through the halls of the Bayi Building in Beijing on January 20, during the plenary of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection. Missing in action at the meeting was the second-in-command of China's highest defence and security decision-making body, Central Military Commission vice chairman Zhang Youxia. Four days later came the unprecedented announcement by the Chinese Ministry of National Defence, that Zhang, along with CMC member Liu Zhenli, have been placed under investigation for “serious violations of discipline and law”.

R S Narula, Patiala

Beijing purge shows risk of being last man standing

In the past few years, under the garb of corruption, it seems a factional war has played out within the People's Liberation Army (PLA). It likely pitted the “Shaanxi Gang” — led by Zhang Youxia and erstwhile discipline czar (now CMC vice-chairman) Zhang Shengmin — against the “Fujian Gang” of naval and Taiwan Strait war-planners. For a time it appeared the Shaanxi clique had won. They wielded the hammer of Xi Jinping's anti-corruption drive, potentially systematically targeting rival sources of power. But the latest signals from Beijing suggest a twist that few saw coming — the rule of the Zhangs is itself in jeopardy.

Corruption in the PLA is a feature, not a bug. It is baked into a system where state-owned monopolies practise ‘scientific gatekeeping’ that is anything but

scientific. The “say it, do it” ethos that underpins Xi's legitimacy — the promise that the Party delivers results, whether in bringing back blue skies or poverty alleviation — was undermined by a procurement system defined by bid rigging, favours in personnel appointment, and *guanxi* (referring to interpersonal military-industry relations).

A highly likely theory is that Xi's response was the unleashing of the Zhangs.

Corruption in the PLA is a feature, not a bug. It is baked into a system where state-owned monopolies practise ‘scientific gatekeeping’ that is anything but scientific

Zhang Shengmin, as secretary of the CMC Discipline Inspection Commission, led the charge. The targets were specific: The likes of He Weidong, Miao Hua, and former Eastern Theatre Command leader Lin Xiangyang, who rose together in the erstwhile Fujian-based 31st Group Army as well as the PLA Navy — the very men entrusted with the Taiwan invasion plans. Their downfall was swift, prompted by allegations of “major duty-related crimes” and political disloyalty. This seemed to leave the Shaanxi faction, with its roots in the Army and the Rocket Force, as the last men standing. But in Xi's China, being the last man standing is a liability.

This perpetual churn has profound implications for global security. A military that is constantly looking over its shoulder cannot effectively prepare for war. The dismantling of the Fujian gang has decapitated the leadership most familiar with the Taiwan Strait. Now, if Youxia is purged, the PLA will be left with a paralysed command structure, and the highest defence and security decision-making body — the CMC — will be the smallest it has ever been in decades, in terms of operational strength.

As one watches the dominoes fall, one thing is clear — that in the new era of the PLA, there is no safety, no immunity, and no end to the churn. The rule of the Zhangs may have looked absolute yesterday, but in Beijing, the ground is always shifting.

The writer is staff research analyst, Indo-Pacific Studies Programme, Takshashila Institution, Bengaluru

Security guarantees document from US is ready: Zelenskyy

Reuters

Vilnius, January 26



The document is 100% ready, and we are waiting for our partners to confirm the date and place when we will sign it... The document will then be sent for ratification to the US Congress and the Ukrainian parliament

VOLODYMIR ZELENSKY, PRESIDENT, UKRAINE

A US document on security guarantees for Ukraine is completely ready and Kyiv is waiting for a time and place for it to be signed, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Sunday, indicating that weekend talks with Russia in Abu Dhabi made some progress.

"For us, security guarantees are first and foremost guarantees of security from the United States. The document is 100% ready, and we are waiting for our partners to confirm the date and place when we will sign it," Zelenskyy told a news conference during a visit to Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital.

"The document will then be sent for ratification to the US Congress and the Ukrainian parliament," he said.

On Friday and Saturday, Ukrainian and Russian negotiators held their first trilateral meeting including US mediators in Abu Dhabi to discuss Washington's framework for ending the almost four-year-old war but no deal emerged.

However, Moscow and Kyiv both said they were open to further dialogue and more discussions were expected next Sunday in Abu Dhabi, a US official told reporters immediately after the weekend talks.

"(In Abu Dhabi) the 20-point (US) plan and problematic issues are being discussed. There were many problematic issues, but now there are fewer," Zelenskyy said.

Military-backed party wins Myanmar polls

Associated Press

Yangon, January 26

MYANMAR'S MILITARY-BACKED Union Solidarity and Development Party claimed Monday that it had won the country's first election since the army seized power in 2021, paving the way for a new government.

The victory of the party led by a former general was widely expected after the vote excluded major opposition parties and dissent was tightly restricted. Also, 25% of parliamentary seats were automatically reserved for the military—effectively guaranteeing control by the armed forces and its favored parties.

Critics say the polls organised by the military government were neither free nor fair, but an effort to legitimise its rule after seizing power from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

The takeover triggered widespread opposition that dragged Myanmar into a civil war. The election was held in three phases on Dec. 28, Jan. 11 and January 25. Of the country's total 330 townships, 67—mostly areas controlled by armed opposing groups—did not participate, reducing the original seats in the 664-member national parliament to 586.

Final results for all seats are expected later this week. After the results are finalized, the new members of Parliament and the military appointees will propose three candidates, and then elect one as president.

France honours fallen troops in Afghanistan

Associated Press

Paris, January 26

A SENIOR French government official said Monday the memory of the French soldiers who died in Afghanistan should not be tarnished following US President Donald Trump's false assertion that troops from non-US NATO countries avoided the front line during that war.

Alice Rufo, the minister delegate at the Defence Ministry, laid a wreath at a monument in downtown Paris dedicated to

those who died for France in overseas operations. Speaking to reporters, Rufo said the ceremony had not been planned until the weekend, adding that it was crucial to show that "we do not accept that their memory be insulted."

Ninety French soldiers died in the conflict.

"At such a moment, it is symbolically important to be there for their families, for their memory, and to remind everyone of the sacrifice they made on the front line," Rufo said.

18 killed as ferry carrying over 350 people sinks off The Philippines

Manila: A ferry with more than 350 people on board sank early Monday near an island in the southern Philippines, killing at least 18 people, officials said. Rescuers saved hundreds more, while a fleet of coast guard and naval ships searched for those still missing.

Coast guard officials said the cargo and passenger ferry apparently encountered technical problems. The steel-hulled vessel abruptly tilted to one side and took on water, hurling people into the sea in the darkness, according to a rescued passenger.

Iran-backed militias signal will to attack amid high tensions with US

Associated Press

Dubai, January 26

TWO IRANIAN-backed militias in the Mideast are signaling their willingness to launch new attacks, likely trying to back Iran on Monday as it worried about an approaching US aircraft carrier after President Donald Trump threatened military action over its crackdown on nationwide protests.

Yemen's Iranian-backed Houthi rebels signaled a willingness to resume attacks on shipping in the Red Sea. That came just after Iraq's Kataib Hezbollah paramilitary group, long supported by Iran's para-

military Revolutionary Guard, issued a direct threat late Sunday toward any attack targeting Iran, warning a "total war" in the region would be a result.

However, both the Houthis and Kataib Hezbollah sat out from Israel's 12-day war on Iran in June that saw the US bomb Iranian nuclear sites. The hesitancy to get involved shows the disarray still affecting Iran's self-described "Axis of Resistance" after facing attacks from Israel.

A short video by the Houthis included images of a ship on fire, with the caption: "Soon." It later aired footage Monday from its January 2024 attack in the Gulf of Aden on the Marshall Is-

lands-flagged tanker Marlin Luanda, one of the over 100 ships attacked as part of a campaign the Houthis said pressured Israel over its war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The Houthis halted their fire after a ceasefire in the conflict, though they've repeatedly warned they could resume fire if needed.

Meanwhile, Ahmad "Abu Hussein" al-Hamidawi of Kataib Hezbollah issued his own threat in a statement. "We affirm to the enemies that the war on the (Islamic) Republic will not be a picnic; rather, you will taste the bitterest forms of death, and nothing will remain of you in our region," he said.

BRIEFLY

THE PHILIPPINES

Ex-President Duterte fit for pre-trial hearings, rule judges



JUDGES AT the International Criminal Court have ruled that former Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte, 80, is fit to attend pre-trial hearings and will hold a confirmation of charges hearing on February 23, the court said on Monday. His defense had said that Duterte, who is being held in The Hague over murders committed during his war on drugs, could not stand trial due to cognitive decline. Judges said in a statement that a report by independent medical experts found that Duterte would be able to understand and participate in his case. They recalled that for someone to be deemed fit to take part in their case it is enough that they have a broad understanding of the procedures, not that they operate at their highest level.

MEXICO

Gunmen open fire at soccer field, 11 killed

GUNMEN OPENED fire at a

soccer field in central Mexico on Sunday, killing at least 11 people and wounding 12, authorities said. Salamanca Mayor Cesar Prieto said in a statement posted to social platforms that the gunmen arrived at the end of a soccer match. Ten people at the scene and one died later at a hospital. Prieto said the attack was part of a "crime wave" in the city and appealed to President Claudia Sheinbaum for help to control violence.

AUSTRALIA

National Day marked as 'Invasion Day'

THOUSANDS MARKED Australia's national day on Monday by attending "Invasion Day" rallies in support of Indigenous Australians and calling for unity, while separate anti-immigration protests also drew crowds. Australia Day commemorates the day Britain established the state of New South Wales as a penal colony. However Indigenous people call it "Invasion Day" and marks the destruction of their cultures by European settlers.

NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

PAKISTAN

2 TTP militants killed in clash with forces

PAKISTAN'S SECURITY forces on Monday averted an attack on a police mobile van by killing two TTP militants in the country's northwest Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. According to the police, the clash between the militants and security forces erupted in the Domel area of the Bannu district in the restive province. Officials killed the militants in an exchange of fire and recovered weapons from their possession. The militants belonged to Fitna al-Khawarij. This is a term the state uses for terrorists belonging to the banned TTP.

SRI LANKA

Govt seeks land donations to rebuild homes

THE SRI Lankan government on Monday urged philanthropic citizens across the country to donate land to provide houses for people affected by Cyclone Ditwah. President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's office said a large number of families lost their homes and properties and were displaced due to the disaster and in response, the government had launched the Re-building Sri Lanka programme. The programme implemented housing construction for families whose houses were destroyed by the disaster.

Dhaka's ex-police chief sentenced to death

Press Trust of India

Dhaka, January 26

FORMER DHAKA police commissioner and two other police officers were on Monday sentenced to death by a special Bangladesh tribunal for their alleged role during the 2024 violent street protests that led to then prime minister Sheikh Hasina's ouster.

A three-judge panel of Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal (ICT-BD), led by Justice Mohammad Golam Mortuza Mozumder, handed down the sentence to former Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) com-

missioner Habibur Rahman, former DMP joint commissioner Sudip Kumar Chakraborty and additional deputy commissioner Mohammad Akhtarul Islam after their trial in absentia.

This is the second verdict delivered by the restructured ICT-BD which earlier handed down the death penalty to deposed premier Hasina and then home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal.

"These three (convicts) had superior status over their subordinates and are liable for superior command responsibility. They are found guilty and hereby awarded a single sentence of death," the judgment said.

THE BELLWETHER TRIAL IN CALIFORNIA SUPERIOR COURT INVOLVES A 19-YEAR-OLD WOMAN IDENTIFIED AS K.G.M. WHO SAYS SHE BECAME ADDICTED TO THE PLATFORMS BECAUSE OF THEIR ATTENTION-GRABBING DESIGN

Meta, TikTok, YouTube to stand trial on youth's screen addiction claims

Courtney Rozen

Washington, January 26

META PLATFROMS, TikTok and YouTube will face court-room scrutiny this week over allegations that their platforms are fuelling a youth mental health crisis, as the national debate about kids' screen time enters a new phase.

The bellwether trial in California Superior Court, Los Angeles County, involves a 19-year-old woman from California, identified as K.G.M., who says she became addicted to the companies' platforms at a young age because of their attention-grabbing design, according to court filings. She al-

leges the apps fueled her depression and suicidal thoughts and is seeking to hold the companies liable.

Her lawsuit is the first of several cases expected to go to trial this year that center on what the plaintiffs call "social media addiction" among children. It will be the first time the tech giants must defend themselves at trial over alleged harm caused by their products, the plaintiff's attorney Matthew Bergman said.

"They will be under a level of scrutiny that does not exist when you testify in front of the witness stand," he told Reuters.

The jury will decide whether the companies were negligent in providing products that

harmed K.G.M.'s mental health, and if her use of the apps was a substantial factor in her depression, compared with other causes such as the third-party content she viewed on the apps or aspects of her life offline.

"This is really a test case," said Clay Calvert, a media lawyer at the American Enterprise Institute, a pro-business think tank. "We're going to see what happens with these theories" that the social media platforms caused the plaintiff harm.

Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Meta is expected to take the witness stand. The company will argue in court that its products did not lead to K.G.M.'s mental health challenges, Meta's law-

yers told Reuters ahead of the trial. Snap CEO Evan Spiegel was also expected to testify, as his company was named a de-

fendant in the lawsuit. Snap (SNAP.N) opened new tabs on January 20 to settle K.G.M.'s lawsuit. A company spokesperson

declined to comment on the specifics of the deal.

YouTube will argue that the company's platforms are fundamentally different from social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, and should not be lumped together in court, a YouTube executive said ahead of the trial.

TikTok declined to comment about the company's planned arguments in court.

As the trial begins, the same tech companies are mounting a nationwide effort to convince critics that their products are safe for teens. They've launched tools they say give parents more control over how their kids use the platforms and

have spent millions of dollars promoting those features.

Since at least 2018, Meta has sponsored parent workshops about teen online safety at dozens of high schools across the US. The company hosted one of those workshops, dubbed Screen Smart, in 2024 in Los Angeles, opens new tabs alongside National PTA President Yvonne Johnson and Meta safety chief Antigone Davis. National PTA is a nonprofit that advocates for child welfare.

TikTok also sponsored similar gatherings, opens new tabs led by 100 local and regional PTAs, calling it Create with Kindness, according to the company's website. The program includes tutorials on TikTok's features for parents, including the option to limit screen time at night, according to the curriculum.

YouTube's parent company Google in recent years has turned to Girl Scouts to convince the public it is invested in kids' online safety. Girls can earn a patch, which features Google's logo, opens new tabs, to affix to their uniform after completing lessons about strong passwords, being kind online and digital privacy. Girls can earn a patch, which features Google's logo, opens new tabs, to affix to their uniform after completing lessons about strong passwords, being kind online and digital privacy.



Mark Zuckerberg, Meta CEO, is expected to take the witness stand.

DIFFERENT FROM EXISTING PLI SCHEME FOR HIGH-EFFICIENCY SOLAR PV MODULES

MNRE, FinMin discuss capex relief for wafer, polysilicon units

Progress under the PLI scheme has been slower in upstream segments of solar PV module manufacturing

Pratyush Deep & Ravi Dutt Mishra
New Delhi, January 26

THE MINISTRY of Finance and Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) are in discussions to bring out a new capital subsidy scheme for the upstream segment of solar photovoltaic (PV) manufacturing, MNRE Secretary Santosh Kumar Sarangi told *The Indian Express*. The proposed scheme would be separate from the existing Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for high-efficiency solar PV modules.

"Polysilicon is a highly electricity-intensive industry. The refining from silica to polysilicon is extremely electricity intensive. So, efforts will have to focus on sourcing low-cost electricity," Sarangi said.

"Since it involves a huge capital expenditure to set up this kind of industry, a capex subsidy would be desirable. In that context, MNRE is now discussing with Ministry of Finance whether it is possible to have a different kind of scheme where capex is given for polysilicon and ingot-wafer projects that were sanctioned under the PLI but could not take off for a variety of reasons," he added.

"The solar PV cell manufacturing capacity in the country is around 27 GW, according to the information provided by Solar PV Manufacturing Associations. The installed ingot and wafer manufacturing capacity in the country is around 2 GW.

At present there is no commercial production of Polysilicon in the country, the Ministry had informed the Parliament.

"The country's solar PV module manufacturing capacity is sufficient to cater to domestic demand. However, for upstream stages like solar cells, wafers and polysilicon, domestic manufacturing capacity is not sufficient to meet domestic demand which necessitates imports," the Ministry told the Parliament in December.

The MNRE further informed that the data from the Department of Commerce's Export-Import Data Bank shows that imports of solar PV cells,



India's installed solar PV module manufacturing capacity is 121.7 GW, including 26.6 GW capacity under the PLI Scheme, according to the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy. REUTERS

wafers and polysilicon during FY25 were valued at around \$1,641 million, \$156 million, and \$0.03 million, respectively.

Launched in March 2021, the PLI scheme for solar PV modules aimed to install 65 gigawatts (GW) per annum of fully and partially integrated solar PV module manufacturing capacity.

The scheme was initially backed by an outlay of Rs 4,500 crore. In 2022, an additional budget allocation of Rs 19,500 crore was approved, bringing the total sanctioned outlay to Rs 24,000 crore across two tranches.

According to MNRE, the installed solar PV module manufacturing capacity in the

country, as per the Approved List of Models and Manufacturers (ALMM), is 121.7 GW, which includes 26.6 GW capacity under the PLI Scheme for high efficiency Solar PV Modules.

A joint report by Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA) and JMK Research shows that operationalisation of PLI-awarded facilities has revealed significant implementation and execution gaps. While downstream segments such as module assembly have seen progress, upstream segments like wafer and polysilicon manufacturing have lagged behind.

The report, which was released in December 2025, also says that about 36% of India's total cell capacity and 24% of module capacity originate from PLI allocations.

According to the report, as of June 2025 the overall operational capacity achieved under the solar PLI scheme was approximately 29% of the total awarded capacity.

Module assembly exhibited the highest capacity achievement rate at 59%, reflecting stronger progress in downstream manufacturing.

In contrast, the achievement rates for cell manufacturing (22%), wafer-ingot manufacturing (10%) and polysilicon manufacturing (14%) were significantly lower, indicating persistent barriers to upstream capacity realisation.

Trump's policies, sanctions turn central banks to gold, drive de-dollarisation

Siddharth Upasani
New Delhi, January 26

ON MONDAY, even as the US dollar fell to a four-month low, the price of gold crossed the \$5,000-per-ounce mark for the first time. The yellow metal's historic rally is showing no signs of slowing down and even the smartest and biggest institutions in the world — and not just small-time investors like households — continue to pile in on gold. One category of these smart and big investors are central banks.

Take the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), for instance. Last week, data from the Indian central bank showed that its foreign exchange reserves were up more than \$14 billion as on January 16 — the biggest weekly increase in 10 months. However, nearly a third of this rise was due to the RBI's gold kitty of 880 tonnes appreciating in value.

Over the last one year, the value of RBI's foreign currency assets — which predominantly make up the forex reserves — have increased by just 5% even as total reserves rose 12%. What has been the primary driver? Gold, with the value of the RBI's holdings up 70%.

The RBI, though, hasn't even been the biggest buyer of gold over the last year. In fact, the RBI's gold holdings only increased by 4 tonnes or so in 2025. Leading the charge were central banks of Poland (95 tonnes), Kazakhstan (49 tonnes), and Brazil (43 tonnes), as per World Gold Council data until November 2025. But central banks buying gold is not news. What matters is gold's relative position in what these banks hold as reserves; the RBI, for example, now holds 17% of its forex reserves as gold, up from 12% a year ago. The reason, directly and indirectly, is US President Donald Trump.

Debasement of US dollar

In a note last week, economists from Morgan Stanley said that Trump's policies on trade and sanctions, among other factors, and the shift to a multipolar world are key to pushing people away from the US dollar. "On net, we think these factors are neutral to slightly accelerating this transition away from the dollar, but their evolution over the near term will likely be critical in determining the extent of this shift," Morgan Stanley said.

Trump has made no secret about maintaining the US dollar's global supremacy, even threatening the BRICS nations with 100% additional tariff should they move forward with a common currency to "degenerate" and "destroy" the dollar.

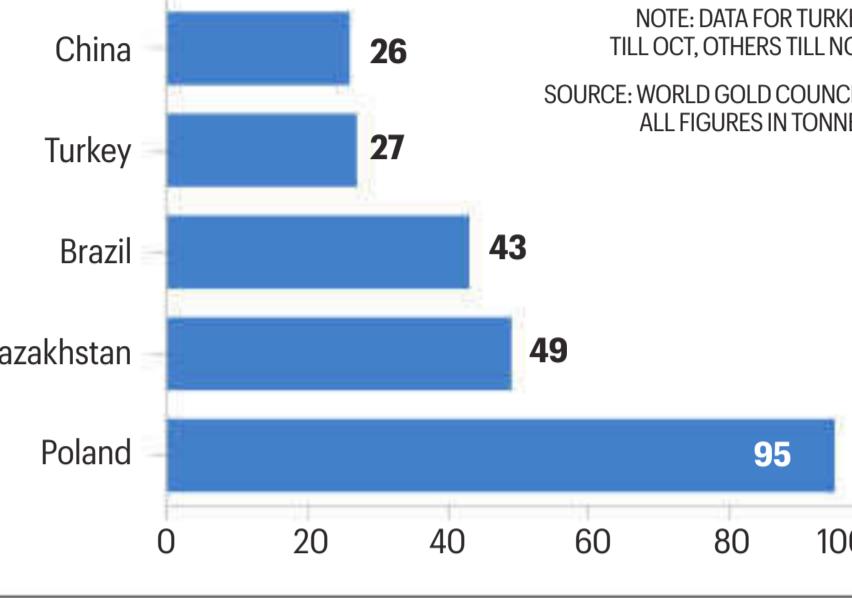
Others are threatening more vocally. Last week, Danish pension fund AkademikerPension said it plans to get rid of its holdings of US Treasuries by the end of January, with Trump's talk of taking over Greenland being one of the several reasons for the move, including the unsustainable finances of the US government debt at a 16-year low.

For the foreseeable future, though, the US dollar remains by far the most dominant currency, with 89% of total turnover of over-the-counter foreign exchange instruments denominated in US dollars. But if the Trump administration and the President himself continue in the same vein, more meaningful change could become evident.

Central banks that bought most gold in 2025

NOTE: DATA FOR TURKEY TILL OCT, OTHERS TILL NOV

SOURCE: WORLD GOLD COUNCIL; ALL FIGURES IN TONNES



Global central banks holding fewer US dollars

YEAR	USD SHARE IN GLOBAL FOREX RESERVES (%)
1999	71.0
2024	58.5

continent cutting its holdings of US debt. "Markets are increasingly discussing the de-dollarisation theme," Nomura analysts said in a note on January 21.

Trump has already promised "big retaliation" in response to European countries dumping US government bonds. The European Union held around \$104 trillion of US portfolio assets — accounting for 29% of foreign ownership of these assets — as of November 2025.

The past and future

The diversification of forex reserves away from the dollar and assets denominated in it received a big push after the US froze Russia's reserves following its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. But signs of de-dollarisation, or at least a gradual shift away from the greenback, have been visible for some time. According to data from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), in 2024 saw the share of the US dollar in global forex reserves fall to an over-30-year low of 58.5%. In 1999, this number stood at 71%.

"Meaningful de-dollarisation would have profound implications for the global security architecture, reducing the United States' capacity to fund its military and impose coercive economic pressure," Ali Ahmadi, Director of Geoeconomics & Sanctions, ReshapeRisk and Executive-in-Residence Fellow at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, said last year.

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'Bangladesh panel says Adani power deal overpriced, flags procedural flaws'

Reuters
Dhaka/Singapore, January 26

SEBI survey: Why just 3.21 cr Indian households invest in securities markets

Hitesh Vyas
Mumbai, January 26

about 6.7% of Indian households report holding mutual funds or exchange-traded funds (ETFs), and approximately 5.3% hold direct equities, which clearly indicates that participation in market-linked instruments is limited," the survey showed.

The survey stated that household awareness of complex securities market products such as corporate bonds, futures and options, Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs)/Infrastructure Investment Trusts (InvITs) and Alternative Investment Funds (AIF) remains limited.

While F&O are recognised by 13% of households, household penetration of this complex product is less than 1%.

Geography plays a substantial role in shaping awareness patterns. Urban households report 74% awareness of at least one securities product, compared with 56% in rural areas. The penetration is highest in the top nine metros at 23%, followed by 10-40 lakh towns (16%) and 5-10 lakh towns (14%).

Delhi leads with 21%, followed by Maharashtra at 17%, Goa at 16% and Gujarat at 15%. Nagaland (3%), Uttarakhand and Meghalaya (4.5%) recorded the lowest participation.

FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

AN ADANI Power coal-fired plant that exports electricity passes on Indian corporate taxes to Bangladesh and charges more than market rates, according to a recent report from a government-appointed committee in Bangladesh. Adani's Godda plant in Jharkhand priced power at a 39.7% premium over its nearest private-sector competitor and had the steepest cost escalation among electricity import arrangements from India, the National Review Committee (NRC) said in a report dated January 20. *Reuters* reviewed the report, which has yet to be made public.

The NRC said the price divergence was an "outcome of specific contractual choices," adding that it had found evidence of "serious anomalies in the procedures through which the contract was awarded."

Adani Power said it could not comment on the review as the committee had neither consulted the company nor provided it with a copy of the report. The company also said it was continuing to supply electricity despite large payment dues, adding that other generators had cut back or stopped their supplies.

Trump has made no secret about maintaining the US dollar's global supremacy, even threatening the BRICS nations with 100% additional tariff should they move forward with a common currency to "degenerate" and "destroy" the dollar.

Others are threatening more vocally. Last week, Danish pension fund AkademikerPension said it plans to get rid of its holdings of US Treasuries by the end of January, with Trump's talk of taking over Greenland being one of the several reasons for the move, including the unsustainable finances of the US government debt at a 16-year low.

For the foreseeable future, though, the US dollar remains by far the most dominant currency, with 89% of total turnover of over-the-counter foreign exchange instruments denominated in US dollars. But if the Trump administration and the President himself continue in the same vein, more meaningful change could become evident.

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DEFENCE

India to expand its hypersonic arsenal with LR-AShM missile



DRDO's Long Range-Anti Ship Missile during the R-Day parade.

Sushant Kulkarni
Pune, January 26

ONE OF the many highlights of the 77th Republic Day Parade was the Defence Research and Development Organisation's (DRDO) Long Range Anti-Ship Hypersonic Missile (LR-AShM), showcased for the first time. We explain the features and capabilities of this hypersonic glide missile, and also what other hypersonic missiles India is developing.

LR-AShM: The hypersonic glide missile

The missile system is designed to meet the coastal battery requirements of the Indian Navy. The LR-AShM is capable of engaging static and moving targets and is designed to carry various payloads to a range of around 1,500 km.

This missile follows a quasi-ballistic trajectory with hypersonic speeds starting at Mach 10 (multiples of speed of sound) and maintaining average Mach 5 with multiple skips. Ballistic missiles are boost-powered initially and then travel unpowered on a high, arched trajectory. Quasi-ballistic missiles begin ballistically but fly lower and manoeuvre in flight to change course and evade interception. As this missile flies at low altitudes with high speed and manoeuvrability, enemy ground and ship-based radars cannot detect it. The LR-AShM is configured with a two-stage solid propulsion rocket motor system. These propulsion systems boost the missile to the required hypersonic velocities. Stage-I of the vehicle is separated after it is spent. After Stage-II burnout, the vehicle performs an unpowered glide with required manoeuvres in the atmosphere before engaging the target, the DRDO has said.

Its significance

The obvious advantages of the hypersonic speed is it makes it difficult for missiles to be detected. It can cover its range around 1,500 kilometers in 15 minutes. Versions with higher ranges upto 3,500 kilometers are currently at various stages of development. A senior DRDO scientist said, "All classes of warships can be neutralised with the missile. This variant and the upcoming ranges will be a key asset for sea denial operations, which prevent an adversary from using a maritime area for military or commercial purposes. This capability will be crucial for the strategically significant Indian Ocean region. Army and Air Force versions of these missile and ship-fired versions for the Navy are also said to be either under consideration or under development. With its versatility, it could well place India in the hypersonic arms domain."

One of the known successful tests of the missile was done by DRDO on November 16, 2024 off the coast of Odisha. As part of the further development cycle, the missile warhead and sensor mechanisms will be integrated soon, before its induction into the Navy in two to three years.

Other hypersonic cruise missiles

Amidst cutthroat global competition in hypersonic weapons, DRDO is working on two key hypersonic technologies. One is hypersonic glide and another is hypersonic cruise. LR-AShM is a hypersonic glide vehicle and includes in itself major achievements in indigenous technologies like materials and control systems needed for sustained hypersonic flight. Hypersonic cruise missiles fly within the atmosphere at hypersonic speeds using scramjet engines for sustained powered flight and manoeuvrability.

Ramjets are air-breathing engines that compress incoming air using forward motion, with fuel igniting in a combustion chamber; they require an assisted take-off and work best around Mach 3, losing efficiency at hypersonic speeds. Scramjets improve on ramjets by keeping airflow supersonic in the combustion chamber, enabling efficient operation above Mach 5, but are far more complex to design and operate.

TRANSPORT

India has most road accident deaths in the world. Can 'talking cars' curb these?

Dheeraj Mishra
New Delhi, January 26

THE UNION government is planning to launch a "vehicle-to-vehicle (V2V)" safety system to prevent road accident deaths and reduce traffic.

V2V communication is a wireless technology that enables vehicles to communicate, or "talk", with one another. This essentially means that vehicles can share real-time information such as speed, location, acceleration and braking with each other.

At a meeting of the Parliamentary consultative committee on January 22, Union Minister Nitin Gadkari said the Department of Telecommunications has allocated the 30 GHz radio frequency for the development of such communication systems.

The V2V system is similar to the aviation sector technology where aircraft broadcast their position, speed, altitude, and the nearby aircraft and ground stations receive it. This system has been a crucial part of the aviation sector across the world. In the roads

sector, however, it is still a work in progress. The V2V system is in place in only a few countries, mostly developed ones.

How will the system work?

According to officials from the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways (MoRTH), an On-Board Unit (OBU) will be installed in cars so that they can exchange information with nearby vehicles wirelessly. This unit will alert the driver about black spots, obstacles, parked vehicles on roadsides, fog or any potential threats.

Usually, V2V systems can detect vehicles in a 300-metre range. For instance, if a car applies brakes suddenly, nearby vehicles will get an alert to slow down. This could help in reducing crashes.

India ranks first in the world in total road accident fatalities, far ahead of second- and third-ranked countries: China accounts for just 36%, and the US 25%, of India's road deaths. MoRTH Secretary V Umashankar said the OBUs will cost between Rs 5,000 and Rs 7,000. These will be first installed in



Usually, V2V systems can detect vehicles in a 300-metre range. PTI FILE

new vehicles. "This will have a significant impact on road safety. Many times, trucks and cars are parked on the roadside, and the speeding vehicles collide with them, which

leads to casualties. We will be able to reduce such accidents, since OBU will automatically issue the warning," said Umashankar at a press conference on January 26.

When will it be rolled out?

The government has not yet announced a specific date for rolling out this system. However, it is the ministry's key initiative as part of its road safety programme for the year. The secretary said the ministry is setting standards for it in collaboration with original equipment manufacturers (OEMs). A joint task force has also been constituted with the telecom department.

"After the decision on the standards, we will issue a notification. Initially, the new vehicles will be required to install these on-board units. After that, the old vehicles will be fitted with this. Under the National Frequency Allocation Plan, the Department of Telecommunications will provide free spectrum. So the OEMs would be able to use this spectrum and get it installed in the vehicle. Our aim is to get it implemented this year," said the MoRTH secretary.

What are the challenges?

The V2V system has some limitations and privacy concerns. The frequency band

allocated for the system might not support all vehicles. This means that incorrect information can lead to accidents and deaths.

The other issue is that it will store a large amount of data — about the vehicles, their location, details about the driver, etc. This puts the whole intelligent transport infrastructure at potential risk of being misused. It would certainly require government regulations and rules to implement. Cyber attacks are another concern for this system.

Which countries use V2V?

The US is the leader in V2V communication systems research and its implementation, with strong regulation. Models like the Volkswagen Golf 8 and the Cadillac models in the US come with this tech.

European countries such as Germany, France and the UK, too, are incorporating V2V into new vehicles and smart city projects. China is another major adopter of V2V. Countries such as the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Brazil and Mexico are in early pilot stages to roll out V2V systems.

GLOBAL

In China's series of purges, why latest one stands out



RISHIKA SINGH

FOR MONTHS now, reports of China purging senior military officials have frequently made headlines. Even then, the investigation into the only remaining Vice Chairman of China's apex military decision-making body — for "suspected serious violations of discipline and law" — marks an unprecedented development.

Zhang Youxia, 75, is a veteran leader. He joined the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the military arm of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), in 1968. Zhang was not only professionally associated with Chinese President Xi Jinping, but is also known to share personal ties with him. Their fathers were senior party leaders who knew each other.

The Wall Street Journal claimed Sunday that he was accused of "leaking information about the country's nuclear weapons program to the US". If true, this would be an extraordinary charge. There are also other theories floating around his removal.

Officially, past purges have been justified as cracking down on corruption. Past incidents also indicate that reprieve is unlikely after an investigation begins, and Zhang will be removed from his post.

This effectively means that the seven-member Chinese Central Military Commission (CMC) now has only two people: Xi Jinping himself, as the CMC Chairman, and Zhang Shengmin, the other CMC Vice Chairman. Shengmin was appointed to the post just three months ago, when his predecessor, He Weidong, was also purged.

Why this probe is noteworthy

First, there is the seniority of the people involved. Zhang Youxia holds the senior-most army rank, that of general. He was also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party Central Committee, which is among the top political bodies in China. Apart from Zhang, the investigation will also include fellow CMC member Liu Zhenli, 61, the chief of the CMC's Joint Staff Department.

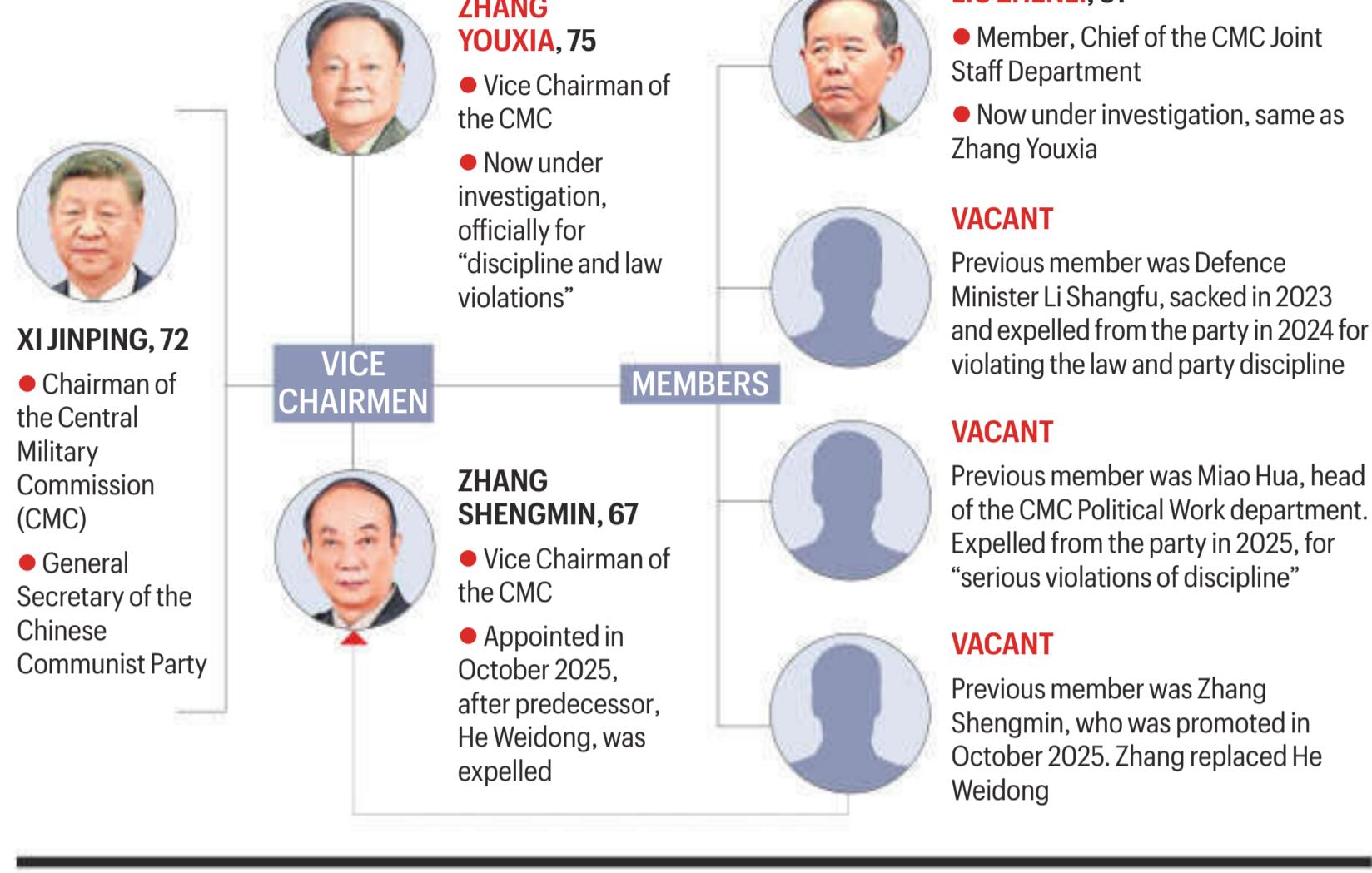
A South China Morning Post report said that both Zhang and Liu are "decorated war heroes" and participated in PLA campaigns against Vietnam in the late 1970s.

Since 2023, the list of those purged, including civilian leaders, has rapidly accumulated top names in defence, including former Defence Minister Li Shangfu, former Foreign Affairs Minister Qin Gang, and PLA Rocket Force generals. The editorial said the latest move showed a "clear attitude of zero tolerance, no forbidden zones, and full coverage in punishing corruption," adding that "Rome wasn't built in a day."

On the two men, it said they "seriously betrayed the trust and expectations of the Party Central Committee and the Central Military Commission, severely trampled on and undermined the Chairman of the Central Military Commission's responsibility system (referring to Xi Jinping), seriously fostered political and corruption

• AND THEN THERE WERE TWO

China's top military decision-making body, the seven-member Central Military Commission, now has only two people left — one of them being Xi Jinping himself.



**PCB defers
World Cup call,
India match
boycott looms**

Express News Service
Chennai, January 26

THE PAKISTAN Cricket Board (PCB) has deferred its decision on participation in the upcoming T20 World Cup, with chairman Mohsin Naqvi saying a final call will be taken either on Friday or by Monday.

Naqvi met Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Monday and said the issue was discussed in detail. "Had a productive meeting with the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif," Naqvi tweeted. "Briefed him on the ICC matter, and he directed that we resolve it while keeping all options on the table. It was agreed that the final decision will be taken either on Friday or next Monday." His comments came days after he said the decision on sending the team to Sri Lanka for the T20 World Cup would be taken after consultations with the government.

While Pakistan have already announced their squad for the tournament, scheduled to begin on February 7, speculation over their participation has intensified. The controversy began after the PCB supported Bangladesh's decision not to travel to India during an ICC board meeting. Bangladesh were subsequently dropped from the T20 World Cup and replaced by Scotland, prompting Pakistan to accuse the ICC of double standards, citing India being allowed to play the Champions Trophy at a neutral venue.

Although the PCB has not officially indicated that it may pull out of the tournament, reports from Pakistan suggest multiple options are being considered. One possibility is Pakistan refusing to play their group-stage match against India on February 15 in Colombo. Grouped with India, Namibia, the USA and the Netherlands, Pakistan would forfeit two points if they skip the match and could also face ICC sanctions, given that an India-Pakistan clash is the tournament's most commercially valuable fixture. The match is scheduled to be played in Colombo under an arrangement between the two boards that fixtures involving both teams in ICC tournaments hosted by either country are to be held at neutral venues. However, there is also uncertainty over the prospect of the two teams meeting in the knockout stages.

Amid the uncertainty, former Pakistan cricketer Basit Ali has urged the PCB not to boycott the match against India. "Pakistan should not boycott, but wear black armbands and play the India game," Basit said on his YouTube channel *BasitAliShow*. Basit also questioned the timing of any potential boycott. "Why wait for the February 15 India vs Pakistan game at the T20 World Cup? If you have to boycott, do it on February 1 during the Pakistan vs India U-19 World Cup match," he said.

ICC sources told *The Indian Express* that if Pakistan decides to boycott the T20 World Cup or withdraw from the tournament, the ICC could impose sanctions. These could include suspension of bilateral series and exclusion from the Asia Cup.

WEAPONS FINE-TUNED FOR TITLE DEFENCE

Bumrah effect: India's ultimate trump card for T20 World Cup

Premier pacer is redefining fast bowling in shortest format with unmatched versatility, precision

Venkata Krishna B
Chennai, January 26

JASPRIT BUMRAH is not just a bowler who executes plans—he's the plan itself. As teams prepare their strategies for the T20 World Cup, they'll face an unsolvable riddle: How do you plan for a bowler who can bowl anywhere, anytime, and deliver magic with every ball? A couple of Kiwis found that out on Monday.

Tim Seifert stood at the crease, his reputation as one of T20 cricket's most explosive openers—boasting a strike rate of 142.66—preceding him. The New Zealand wicketkeeper-batsman wasn't attempting anything reckless. He was simply playing the line. Then Jasprit Bumrah happened.

One delivery. That's all it took. The ball landed on a good length just outside off-stump at 137 kmph, swung in 0.3 degrees with the angle, prompting Seifert to commit.

Then it seamed away 0.8 degrees—a subtle but devastating deviation that sent the off-stump cartwheeling. Seifert hurried back to the pavilion, another victim of Bumrah's extraordinary craft.

Art of deception

To the naked eye, the delivery that dismissed Seifert in the third T20I at Guwahati didn't appear extraordinary at first glance. But television replays revealed the brutal truth: Seifert had been completely outfoxed. He isn't alone. Babar Azam and Muhammad Rizwan have found their defenses breached in similarly spectacular fashion by Bumrah. The dismissal evoked memories of

Wasim Akram's magic against Rahul Dravid at the famous Chennai Test in 1999. But Bumrah is conjuring this wizardry in T20 cricket—a format where margins are razor-thin and batsmen are supposed to dominate.

While India's breathtaking acceleration with the bat has reinforced why they're top favourites to defend their T20 World Cup title, their bowling unit—despite rotation—has been equally impressive.

They defended totals at Nagpur despite dew, limited New Zealand to 208/6 on a flat Raipur deck, and delivered another clinical performance at Guwahati. The damage started by Harshit Rana was completed by Bumrah, returning figures of 4-0-17-3.

Ultimate weapon

What makes Bumrah invaluable is his unparalleled versatility. He can bowl with the new ball, in the second half of the powerplay, through the middle overs, and definitively at the death. In an era obsessed with match-ups, Bumrah's entry point keeps opponents perpetually guessing.

"I'm happy as far as I'm able to contribute," Bumrah reflected after receiving the Man of the Match award. "If the team wants me to bowl with the new ball, I'm more than happy. If they want me to bowl in the end, I'm happy to do that. I did that in the Asia Cup as well. That was a new role for me—bowling three overs in the powerplay. But as a team, we have to be flexible. So I'm flexible as well."

That flexibility is a luxury most teams can only dream of.



Jasprit Bumrah returned figures of 3/17 in the third T20I. CREIMAS

While captains typically seek versatility in their batting ranks, Bumrah's sensational form offers India a unique tactical advantage. At Guwahati, he entered as second change in the sixth over—the second half of the powerplay when batsmen are desperate to maximize field restrictions. His impact was immediate and devastating.

Perfect storm

Bumrah's liberation stems from the strength around him. With Arshdeep Singh exploit-

ing the new ball, Hardik Pandya fit and firing, the skiddy Harshit Rana providing backup, and the spin duo of Varun Chakaravarthy and Kuldeep Yadav dominating the middle overs, captain Suryakumar Yadav can deploy Bumrah's four overs wherever the game demands.

And when Bumrah takes the ball, he possesses enough variations to adapt to any situation. While his yorker remains his most lethal weapon, his good-length delivery is equally poisonous—particularly in

subcontinental conditions with dew factored in.

Science of Skid

Bumrah's unique bowling action, featuring hyperextension of the elbow, means his good-length deliveries naturally skid through—arriving quicker than they appear. Add even slight seam movement or swing, and what looks driveable at release becomes a delivery with the batsman's name written on it.

Seifert perhaps paid the price by standing rooted to the crease, but with that pacy skidding weapon tailing in, he can't be blamed. Later, Kyle Jamieson attempted to play off the back foot and lost his leg stump. In the dressing room afterward, both would have realized the cruel truth: those deliveries offered no correct response—neither forward nor back.

That length, when dragged slightly back, becomes the hardest for batsmen to clear the boundary. And even when batsmen believe they've adapted, Bumrah produces another trick from his sleeve—a well-disguised slower ball that's almost impossible to pick.

While spinners Varun Chakaravarthy and Kuldeep Yadav provide something even rarer in modern T20 cricket: complete control across all phases of the game, regardless of match situation.

His ability to swing momentum, break partnerships, and deliver in pressure moments makes him India's ultimate trump card. In the format that supposedly belongs to batsmen, one man is rewriting the rules with a cricket ball in hand—proving that even in the most explosive era of the game, quality will always trump power.

In a team brimming with match-winners, Bumrah could well be the one that wins them the T20 World Cup.

BRIEFLY



Piyush Kumar celebrates his double century on Monday. PTI

Piyush double ton powers Bihar to Ranji Trophy Plate title

BIHAR CAPITALISED on opener Piyush Singh's magnificent second-innings double century and incisive bowling spells from Suraj Kashyap and Himanshu Singh to hammer Manipur by a massive 568 runs in the Plate final, sealing a triumphant return to the Ranji Trophy Elite Group in Patna on Monday. PTI

BRIEF SCORES: Bihar 522 & 505/6 decl (Piyush Singh 216; Pheirojam Jotin 3/85) beat Manipur 264 & 95 all out (Pheirojam Jotin 74; Prashant Singh 2/51) by 568 runs.

Bradman's cap, gifted to Indian, fetches \$460K

DON BRADMAN'S 'Baggy Green' cap, which he wore in the first Test series that India played in the country's independent history, was sold for \$460,000 at a Gold Coast auction, fetching the highest price for a cap sported by the great Australian batter. Bradman had gifted the cap to Ranga Sohoni, who had played one of the five Tests that India played on the tour. The cap was sold to an anonymous bidder and will be kept on display at an Australian museum, local media reported. ENS

Indians secure 10 medals at Youth Contender

INDIAN PADDLERS enjoyed a rich haul of 10 medals, including four gold, at the 2026 WTT Star Youth Contender and Feeder events in Doha, highlighted by Ahona Ray's top-podium finish in the fiercely contested Under-15 girls' category. India enjoyed a sweep of the podium in the Under-15 girls' category, with Ahona, Ankoli Chakraborty and Naisha Rewaskar finishing in the top three positions. PTI

Qatar influence grows, Al Thani elected OCA prez

QATAR SCORED a win in Olympic politics Monday, with the emirate also aiming to host the 2036 Summer Games. Olympic Council of Asia members elected Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad Al Thani as their president to complete the term in office of Randhir Singh of India, who stepped down for health reasons. Sheikh Joaan was the only candidate nominated and received 44 votes, with one OCA member abstaining, at the Olympic body's annual assembly. His term runs to 2028. AP

Young shuttlers eye strong start in Bangkok

A CROP of young Indian shuttlers will aim to seize an early-season opportunity when they begin their campaigns at the Thailand Masters, a USD 250,000 event, beginning in Bangkok on Tuesday. The tournament offers a valuable opportunity for the likes of Priyanshu Rajawat, Kiran George and Tharun Manne palli to test themselves and attempt deep runs at the Super 300 level, the second-lowest tier within the main Badminton World Federation World Tour structure. PTI

KIWG 2026: Army retain ice hockey gold

INDIAN ARMY summoned all their experience to edge out Chandigarh 3-2 and retain their Khelo India Winter Games men's ice-hockey gold medal on Monday. The Army's match-winner came with just three minutes left on the clock and the Ladakh leg of KIWG 2026 could not have asked for a better and thrilling ending. Haryana won the team championship title of the Ladakh phase of KIWG 2026, thanks to their four golds. PTI

F1: Ex-Red Bull boss interested in Alpine stake

THE ALPINE Formula 1 team confirmed Sunday that ex-Red Bull boss Christian Horner is among the interested parties in buying a minority stake in the team. "It is no secret that Oto Capital has held talks to sell its stake in the team," Alpine said in a statement. "One of those parties to express an interest is a group of investors, which also includes Christian Horner." Horner was fired by Red Bull in July to end a 20-year stint that included eight F1 drivers' titles but also recent turmoil that rocked the team on and off the track. AP

How Kishan's early intent is powering India's powerplays

Shankar Nayaran
Mumbai, January 26



Ishan Kishan is not treating scorecards like 6/2 or 0/1 like crises but opportunities to disrupt. CREIMAS FOR BCCI

WHEN SANJU Samson fell on the very first ball in the third T20I against New Zealand at Guwahati on Sunday, the Kiwi bowlers felt they had a foot in the door. What they may not have accounted for was the "Ishan Kishan effect."

The left-hander doesn't treat scorecards like 0/1 and 6/2 as a crisis right now, but as an opportunity to disrupt. By facing 13 of the next 19 balls in the third T20I, he protected Abhishek Sharma, allowing the youngster to find his feet while the scoreboard raced to a record-breaking 50 in 19 balls.

Earlier at Raipur, India was in deep trouble at 6/2, chasing a massive 209. Instead of retreating, Kishan went into overdrive. By the time the powerplay was over, Kishan had already blazed to 56 runs.

How did Kishan steer the 3.1 overs?

Ishan Kishan faced 13 out of

the 19 balls and made 28 runs, while Abhishek Sharma faced the remaining six deliveries and made 23 runs in this phase of the innings.

● Kishan: 0, 6, 6, 4, 0, 4, 0, 1, 2, 0, 1, 4, out

● Abhishek: 6, 1, 4, 2, 4, 6

What was the boundary split during these 3.1 overs?

The duo hit a combined nine boundary shots to propel the

score to 53/2. Kishan smashed three fours and two sixes while Abhishek hit two fours and two sixes in this phase.

How has Kishan's powerplay batting helped India recover from early wickets?

With Tilak Varma recovering from injury, Kishan batted at number three in each of the last three T20Is. The southpaw's exploits in the

last two T20Is have been game-changing. In the third T20I, after Samson fell for a first-ball duck, Kishan immediately counter-attacked, scoring 16 off his first five balls, and ensured New Zealand couldn't build on the momentum of that early wicket.

In the second T20I, India were 6/1 chasing 209 and were 6/2 following over when Abhishek fell for a first-ball duck. Kishan took total control of this state of despair, scoring 56 in the next 25 balls during the powerplay, single-handedly powering India to 75/2 by the end of the six overs.

The fireworks from Kishan sparked praise from captain Suryakumar Yadav. "I've never seen anyone bat at 6 for 2 in that manner and still end the powerplay around 67 or 70. Chasing 200 or 210, this is what we want from batters," Surya said at the post-match presentation, after the win.

What is the significance of Kishan's strike rate from first two balls?

With Smriti Mandhana, Georgia Volll and Radha Yadav in a clutch two-over spell. On the other end, Shabnil Ismail took the all-important wicket of RCB's power-hitter Grace Smith, who gave away the faintest edges at the end of a nine-ball stay and then picked up RCB's latest find Gautami Naik.

• WOMEN'S PREMIER LEAGUE

Sciver-Brunt makes history as champions power past RCB

SYNOPSIS: Sciver-Brunt scores WPL's first-ever century, leads MI to first win in four in boost to their playoff hopes.

Express News Service
New Delhi, January 26

A MONSTER middle overs partnership – one that saw the Women's Premier League's first-ever century come from the bat of England skipper Nat Sciver-Brunt -- followed by table-toppers Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) losing their top-order for 40 runs, allowed Mumbai Indians to pump life into their playoff hopes on Monday in Vadodara.

Nat stabilises first

When MI skipper Harmanpreet Kaur said at the toss she



Nat Sciver-Brunt hit the WPL's first-ever century. CREIMAS FOR BCCI

would have fielded if she won, the thought tracked with the Vadodara pitch that has seen the ball coming on to the bat slowly. That thought may have gained further weight when Mumbai struggled to get out of the blocks – a persistent issue this season – and produced only 38 from the powerplay overs.

But Sciver-Brunt first held the fort with Hayley Matthews after Lauren Bell foxed Sajeevan Sajana with a delivery that stayed straight and rapped her on the pad. And once they had steadied the innings at 75/1 after ten overs, they went hunting for boundaries. Bell was the only bowler who had an economy rate under 10, as Brunt and Matthews picked everyone apart.

Sciver-Brunt's international strike rate stays a shade under

followed. MI, who had lost their last three games, found the partnerships they were missing and posted an above par target of 200 with Sciver-Brunt remaining unbeaten with a historic century – her first-ever in the T20 format.

Top half disorder
Any hopes of Bengaluru living up to the form they have shown through most of the season fizzled out within the powerplay as Matthews, who had excelled with the bat, took out Smriti Mandhana, Georgia Volll and Radha Yadav in a clutch two-over spell. On the other end, Shabnil Ismail took the all-important wicket of RCB's power-hitter Grace Smith, who gave away the faintest edges at the end of a nine-ball stay and then picked up RCB's latest find Gautami Naik.

BRIEF SCORES: Mumbai Indians 199/4 (Nat Sciver-Brunt 100, Hayley Matthews 56; Lauren Bell 2/21) defeated Royal Challengers Bengaluru 184/9 in 20 overs (Richa Ghosh 90; Hayley Matthews 3/10, Shabnil Ismail 2/25) by 15 runs.

Stay

Sh*t happens: Gukesh on his blunders

Amit Kamath
Mumbai, January 26

"SHIT HAPPENS." That was world champion Gukesh's frank assessment about his stunning blunder two rounds ago in the game against arch-rival Nodirbek Abdusattarov at the Tata Steel Chess tournament in Wijk aan Zee.

The blunder, in an equalish position, meant that Gukesh would immediately lose a pawn and then a rook, and would be likely checkmated later on in the game. Gukesh had resigned from the game soon afterwards, and had also lost to Anish Giri the next day before finally bouncing back with a victory over Vladimir Fedoseev with black pieces on Sunday in round 8.

Gukesh had seemed inconsolable in the aftermath of the result against Abdusattarov, spending five minutes at the table speechless even as the Uzbekistan grandmaster tried to engage him in conversation and analyse the game. Later, Gukesh had walked into the press room at the tournament venue where he had spent another 10 to 15 minutes in silence with his face turned away from the world as he tried to come to terms with the blunder.

Speaking about the incident after he managed to defeat Fedoseev on Sunday, a smiling Gukesh said: "The best part about the blunder is that I can't even explain how it happened. In a way, those kinds of blunders are perhaps easier to handle than the ones you can actually explain. This just happens—I mean, shit happens—it's what happened. After that, I managed to move on. I think the more painful game was the one against Anish Giri (in round 7) because I was just completely off; I played one of my worst games in quite a while. It's been a good challenge. After two losses, I still have to play good chess, and I've managed to do that," Gukesh told the YouTube channel of Tata Steel Chess tournament in an interview on Sunday after his win.

Abdusattarov had struck a sympathetic note after winning against Gukesh, even as he called the blunder "unexplainable." "I feel very sorry for him. It's a terrible feeling. I've done it myself many times. So it's an absolutely horrible feeling," a sympathetic Abdusattarov said in an interview with the YouTube channel of Tata Steel Chess tournament after his win. "This game was pretty much normal. At some point I think he was getting excited and he was obviously trying to push but I sort of controlled the margin. I thought I had a good margin to draw and at the end he was getting low on time and he felt nervous and he blundered horribly."

After two losses in a row, the game against Fedoseev provided some respite to the world champion.

AUSTRALIAN OPEN

In Melbourne heat, Sinner on a hot streak with 18 straight wins

Defending champion demolishes Luciano Darderi in straight sets; Swiatek stays in hunt for career slam

Associated Press
Melbourne, January 26

TWO-TIME defending champion Jannik Sinner beat compatriot Luciano Darderi 6-1, 6-3, 7-6 (2) two days after admitting he felt lucky to survive the third round.

Sinner struggled with the extreme heat and cramping in his Saturday afternoon win over No. 85-ranked Eliot Spizzirri, and only took control of that match after the roof was closed in the third set.

All-American quarters

Jessica Pegula knocked podcast pal and defending champion Madison Keys out of the Australian Open on Monday to secure a quarterfinal against Amanda Anisimova, another all-American match.

Their fourth-round wins on Day 9 means four Americans have reached the women's singles last eight in Australia for the first time since 2001, when Serena and Venus Williams, Jennifer Capriati, Monica Seles and Lindsay Davenport made it through.

It is also the first time the top six seeds in the women's and men's singles have all qualified for the last eight of a Grand Slam event in the Open Era.

"Sucks that one American has to go out in the quarterfinals," Anisimova said.

No. 6-seeded Pegula had a slightly different take: "At least one of us will get through and I think that's great for American tennis. Yeah, it's been pretty crazy how well the women have been doing and how many top-ranked girls there are. I'm just happy to be a part of that conversation."

Pegula and No. 4 Anisimova advanced a day after No. 3 Coco Gauff and 18-year-old Iva Jovic earned their places on the other side of the draw.

Pegula's 6-3, 6-4 win at Rod Laver Arena ended Keys' first

Monday but instead had a walkover into the quarterfinals. Heat is on with a forecast maximum temperature of 45 degrees Celsius (113 Fahrenheit) on Tuesday, organizers planned to open the gates early for fans.



Defending champion Jannik Sinner beat fellow Italian Luciano Darderi 6-1, 6-3, 7-6 (2). AP

Order of play (Quarterfinals)

ROD LAVER ARENA: 1-Aryna Sabalenka (Belarus) v 29-Iva Jovic (U.S.); 3-Alexander Zverev (Germany) v 25-Learner Tien (U.S.); 3-Coco Gauff (U.S.) v 12-Elena Svitolina (Ukraine); 1-Carlos Alcaraz (Spain) v 6-Alex de Minaur (Australia)

Live on Sony Sports Network, 6am onwards

Grand Slam title defense in a tough section of the draw.

Anisimova, runner-up at the last two majors at Wimledon and the U.S. Open, advanced 7-6 (4), 6-4 over Wang Xinyu as the temperature started rising at Melbourne Park and organizers triggered the heat stress policy, which allowed for extra cooling breaks.

"What a battle out there. Tough conditions against a

Number Plate

45°C

• Monday at the Australian Open was stifling but day 10 of the Grand Slam on Tuesday will be on another level, with a forecast of 45 degrees, raising the prospect of match disruptions and closed roofs at the main stadiums.

really good opponent," Anisimova said. "There were a lot of fans from China today but, honestly, it made the atmosphere great."

Swiatek's quest

No. 2 Iga Swiatek continued her quest to complete a career Grand Slam with a 6-0, 6-3 win over home qualifier Maddison Inglis, giving the center court crowd little to cheer on the Australia Day national holiday.

Swiatek next meets No. 5 Elena Rybakina, runner-up to Aryna Sabalenka here in 2023.

Pegula is in the quarterfinals for the fourth time in Australia but has never previously gone further at the season-opening major. Anisimova is in the last eight here for the first time.

"I have been seeing, hitting, moving, I feel very well this whole tournament, and to be able to keep that up against such a great player as Maddie and defending champion was going to be a lot tougher of a task today," Pegula said. "I was still able to do that really well."

Pegula and Keys had played three times previously, and Keys had won the last two. But on Monday it was Pegula who dominated, racing to 4-1 leads in both sets.

"I felt if I didn't hit a really good ball immediately, she was in charge of the points," Keys said. "I was kind of struggling to kind of get that dominance back."

Pegula's best performance in a major was reaching the U.S. Open final in 2024. Men's draw Three Italian men started Day 9. Only two could advance.



Kalinga Lancers players and coaching staff with the trophy. HIL

Odisha-based Lancers beat Ranchi to be crowned HIL champs

Scoreline

KALINGA	RANCHI
3	2
Hendrickx 4', 27'	Hundal 9'
Dilpreet 25'	Boon 59'

Express News Service

Mumbai, January 26

KALINGA LANCERS edged past Ranchi Royals 3-2 in a gripping final to lift the men's Hockey India League (HIL) title in front of a partisan home crowd at the Kalinga Hockey Stadium in Bhubaneswar on Monday.

Put under extreme pressure in the closing stages, the Lancers held their nerve in a high-quality contest to secure the championship, with Alexander Hendrickx and Dilpreet Singh reacting quickest to the rebound, calmly slotting the ball home. Just two minutes later, Hendrickx converted another penalty corner, firing a thunderous dragflick into the top right corner to give the Lancers a 3-1 lead at halftime.

Ranchi Royals dominated possession in the third quarter and pushed hard to get back into the contest. Captain Tom Boon saw his penalty-corner effort blocked by the first rusher, while Arajeet Singh Hundal came close again late in the quarter only to be denied by an excellent save from goalkeeper Krishan Bahadur Pathak.

The Royals threw everything forward in the final quarter, but Pathak produced a series of outstanding saves, denying Sam Lane, Boon and Nilam Sanjeev Xess. Boon finally pulled one back from a penalty corner in the 59th minute, but time ran out as Vedanta Kalinga Lancers held on to claim a memorable HIL title a 3-1 lead at halftime.

The Hockey India League also announced a total prize purse of Rs 6 Crore following the final. The champions, Kalinga Lancers, received Rs 3 Crore, while runners-up Ranchi Royals took home Rs 2 Crore. Hyderabad Toofans, who defeated HIL GC earlier in the day to finish third, were awarded Rs 1 Crore.

In a high-scoring thriller, Amandeep Lakra (30', 53') bagged a brace with Nilakanta Sharma (24') and Jacob Anderson (33') also getting on the scoresheet for the Toofans. Meanwhile, Sam Ward (14', 52') scored twice with Kana Russell (55') were on target for HIL GC.

Among individual award winners, Tamil Nadu Dragons goalkeeper Prince Deep Singh was named Best Goalkeeper of the Tournament, while Talem Priyobarta of HIL GC won the Upcoming Player of the Tournament award. Both players received Rs 10 Lakh each. Ranchi Royals skipper Boon finished as the Top Scorer of the Tournament with 19 goals and was also awarded Rs 10 Lakh.

Hyderabad Toofans' Amandeep Lakra was crowned the Player of the Tournament and received Rs 20 Lakh.

Defending champ Keys loses match and a friendly bet

Express News Service
January 26

A FRIENDLY wager over apple pie topped with melted cheddar cheese proved to be motivation enough for Jessica Pegula than defending champion status for Madison Keys at the Australian Open on Monday.

Pegula defeated her close friend and podcast co-host 6-3, 6-4 in an all-American fourth-round clash on Rod Laver Arena, ending Keys' title defense in just 78 minutes and settling a light-hearted bet that had been brewing off court.

Pegula will face Amanda Anisimova in the quarterfinal in an all-American match.

Pegula and Anisimova's wins on Day 9 meant four Americans reached the

women's singles quarterfinals in Australia for the first time since 2001, when Serena and Venus Williams, Jennifer Capriati, Monica Seles and Lindsay Davenport made it to the last 8.

Pegula's win also meant Keys must now sample a Pegula family Thanksgiving tradition—apple pie topped with melted cheddar cheese—a delicacy Keys had previously vowed never to try.

"In the US, we have Thanksgiving, and I don't know why my grandparents are Canadian—but this is something my mum always did," Pegula said in her on-court interview. "Tell me if this is weird or if it's real. They would melt cheddar cheese on their apple pie."

Keys conceded defeat to



Madison Keys (R) lost to her podcast pal Jessica Pegula. AP

both the scoreboard and the wager. "A bet is a bet, so I'll do it," she said later. "I hope it's less gross than I think it's going to be."

Had the result gone the other way, Pegula would have been the one paying up—by

wearing a Kansas City Chiefs jersey, complete with a Travis Kelce-Taylor Swift crossover. Pegula, whose billionaire parents own the NFL's Buffalo Bills, admitted the prospect was strong motivation.

"She wanted me to wear a

Keys must now sample a Pegula family Thanksgiving tradition—apple pie topped with melted cheddar cheese—a delicacy Keys had previously vowed never to try.

[Travis] Kelce slash Taylor Swift Chiefs jersey," Pegula said. "Honestly, I had a lot of motivation today not to wear that."

After sealing the win, Pegula scribbled "no Chiefs jersey today" on a court-side camera lens before the two friends were spotted laughing together in the locker room.

STOP-GAP COACHES

Football's perennial ingratitude towards caretaker managers

Sandip G
New Delhi, January 26

THE AWAY end at the Emirates Stadium chanted Michael Carrick's name. The players leapt into Carrick's embrace when the final whistle blew, capping a liberating victory for the beleaguered Manchester United over league toppers Arsenal.

There was newfound joy and bounce in their game, there was renewed optimism among their fans. After Ruben Amorim's rigid reign, the old midfield warhorse, the caretaker manager, has instilled a sense of belief that had eluded the faithfuls with successive wins over Manchester City and Arsenal in London, the first time in nine seasons.

Yet, club legend Roy Keane quipped that even if Carrick were to win the remaining games, he wouldn't make his job permanent. "If United win every game until the end of the season, I still wouldn't be giving him the job. I still wouldn't be convinced he's the man for the job. Absolutely not," he would say. The observation offered a glimpse into the thankless world of caretakers, or "interim managers", as is the phrase in



Manchester United interim manager Michael Carrick might not be entrusted with the job despite wins over Man City and Arsenal. AP

vogue these days. It's both a cruel and rewarding world. If the caretaker does a credible job, his reputation is enhanced, he might fetch a handsome job elsewhere. Yet at the end of the season, their brief tenure ends with a warm handshake, a "thankyou" note and a hefty reward. A bigger manager lands up next year.

The caretaker, often, ends up in a smaller club, a mid-table or promoted side, or a Championship side. Some of them become crisis specialists, hired to stave off relegation or a mid-table slump. There would be no dearth of jobs, there would always be a club in crisis.

Carrick has tasted it once, when he managed the club briefly but successfully after the ouster of Ole Gunnar Solskjær. He soon found a job with Middlesbrough, where he spent three futile seasons fighting for promotion.

Bolstering the sense of foreboding when making an interim coach permanent is that only one of these 21 has ever lasted a full season after landing the permanent job, betraying the general distrust of stopgaps.

There had been exceptions

too. Like Fulham's Chris Coleman in the early aughts. He helped the Cottagers out of relegation and was appointed manager next season, when he was only 32. He lasted four seasons. Fulham's Scott Parker is another tale of success. Or slipping further back, Aston Villa's Tony Parker, who engineered their European Cup triumph.

The grandest success story involves the Brazilian legend Mario Zagallo. A shrewd tactician and an industrious winger, who invented the deep-lying winger role, his reappointment during a press conference.

History, perhaps, is a source of cynicism. In 34 Premier League seasons, only 21 caretaker managers had their job made

A lone defeat was all CBF required to oust him. Zagallo answered the SOS, and went to shape a devastatingly brilliant World Cup triumph, what most pundits consider the most flawless stroll of the title. His first decision was to recall Pele. The rest is history.

It's the argument put forth in favour of Carrick too. That he knows the club's DNA, even though what constitutes Manchester United DNA is vague. It's not a club, like Real Madrid, now run by the interim Álvaro Arbeloa, a former full-back of the world's most glamorous club, but not one of the Galacticos, that flourishes on systems and structures. Its ethos are shaped and driven by a personality cult. A legend of the club, he has stature, but without the aura.

The case against him is the precedent of Solskjær, who suffered in the long run. A similar fate could befall on Carrick too, even if rides United to European qualification. He might have beaten the two foremost teams of his time in his first two games in charge, but he might not get a permanent gig next season. It's the fate of caretakers.

A communist in the era of dictator Emílio Garrastazu Médici, he snubbed the latter's recommendation of picking his favourite Dario. The brazen manager, the rumour goes, brandished a gun at a journalist during a press conference.

"I'm enjoying it and I'll continue to do what I can. I know from our perspective it's just about moving forward to the next game."

Michael Carrick
ON HIS FUTURE

since 2017. "The goals were fantastic goals and some of the football was good, and we looked dangerous at certain times," Carrick said. "Other times we had to defend, but it was just a performance with a bit of everything, really."

With Carrick placed in charge until the end of the season this time, he has the chance to stake his claim for the role on a permanent basis and his stock has risen rapidly. "What happens next I'm not going to be answering it every week. I'm enjoying it and I'll continue to do what

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