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**IN FOCUS**

	LATEST	CHANGE
Nifty 50	26142.10	-35.05
P/E Ratio (Sensex)	23.57	-0.03
US Dollar (in ₹)	89.78	+0.13
Gold Std 10 gm (in ₹)	136080.00	+343
Silver 1 kg (in ₹)	218983.00	+7983

BENGALURU - CHENNAI - COIMBATORE - HUBBALLI - HYDERABAD - KOCHI - KOLKATA - MADURAI - MALAPPURAM - MANGALURU - MUMBAI - NOIDA - THIRUVANANTHAPURAM - TIRUCHIRAPPALLI - VIJAYAWADA - VISAKHAPATNAM

Regd. TN/ARD/14/2012-2014, RNI No. 55320/94

SCALING NEW HEIGHTS.

ISRO launches LVM3 Bluebird Block II, heaviest yet, to provide space-based cellular broadband connectivity directly **p10**

**UNDER THE LENS.**

IndusInd Bank faces probe by Serious Fraud Investigation Office into ₹2,000 cr derivatives fiasco **p2**

QUICKLY.

RESOLUTION PLANS

IBBI mandates disclosure of final beneficiary

New Delhi: To curb opaque bids, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) has made it mandatory for resolution plans to disclose the ultimate beneficial ownership. An IBBI notification added a new provision in the regulation dealing with mandatory contents of a resolution plan. "Every resolution plan shall include a statement of beneficial ownership, covering details of all natural persons who ultimately own or control the resolution applicant, together with the shareholding structure and jurisdiction of each intermediate entity," the notification said. **p10**



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wishes its readers a

Merry Christmas

Bharti & Warburg to buy 49% stake in Haier India

NEW CALL. The deal marks Bharti's entry into the consumer durables space

Our Bureau
New Delhi

In a strategic move, Bharti Enterprises and Warburg Pincus announced that they will together acquire 49 per cent in Haier India, wholly-owned subsidiary of the Chinese consumer electronics and appliance major Haier Group, for an undisclosed amount.

Post the completion of the transaction, the Haier Group will retain 49 per cent stake in its Indian subsidiary while the balance 2 per cent will be owned by Haier India's management team.

EXPANSION PUSH
Sources said the transaction is expected to be closed in 3-4 months. The move will enable Bharti Enterprises to diversify into the fast-growing consumer electronics and durables space that is fuelled by higher disposable incomes and enhanced lifestyle preferences.

It will help the Chinese consumer electronics major accelerate investments and

BROADER FOOTPRINT

- Haier India is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Chinese consumer electronics and durables major Haier Group
- Haier Group will retain 49% stake; remaining 2% will be held by India management
- This will enable Haier India to accelerate expansion, strengthen local sourcing and manufacturing footprint



expansion in the country without certain regulatory compliances requiring government approvals.

"The partnership will bolster Haier India's 'Made in India, Made for India' vision by deepening local sourcing, expanding manufacturing capacity, driving product innovation and accelerating market penetration. The new capital infusion will also enhance Haier India's competitiveness across the entire value chain," a joint statement added.

Bharti Enterprises stated that in collaboration with Warburg Pincus, it looks forward to "playing a significant role in the evolving consumer durables industry and leveraging the collective

strengths of all parties to meet the needs of Indian consumers." It added that it expects Haier India will further consolidate its standing as a leading brand in India.

STRATEGIC TIE-UP

"This investment reflects Warburg Pincus' ability to leverage its pan-Asia franchise, deep local insights, global expertise and its expansive network to support and accelerate growth for leading companies across the region," the private equity major added.

Haier Group said the strategic partnership aligns with its strategy of advancing globalisation through localisation. The Chinese company added that the move will significantly accelerate Haier India's localised innovation and development.

Faisal Kawaosa, Chief Analyst and Founder, Techarc, said the move will enable Bharti Enterprises to broaden its horizons, offering digital living as a service at a time when consumers are seeking smart home solutions and intelligent devices.

\$6-billion Stonepeak buy of bp stake in Castrol triggers open offer in India arm

Janaki Krishnan
Richa Mishra
Mumbai/Hyderabad

Energy giant bp plc has announced the sale of a 65 per cent stake in Castrol Ltd to alternative investment firm Stonepeak for \$6 billion, triggering an open offer in Castrol India due to an indirect change in control.

Motion JV Co, part of Stonepeak Infrastructure Fund V, entities associated with it, and CPP Investment Board announced on Wednesday an open offer to public shareholders for up to a 26 per cent stake in Castrol India for a little over ₹4,990 crore at ₹194.04 per share.

Stonepeak specialises in infrastructure and real assets with approximately \$80 billion of assets under management.

The open offer is contingent on the underlying transaction going through.

Castrol Ltd, which holds a 51 per cent stake in Castrol India, is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Castrol Group Holdings, in which bp plc holds a 100 per cent stake.

Globally, the transaction will result in the formation of a new joint venture in which Stonepeak will hold a 65 per cent stake and bp 35



third quarter of 2025, its net debt was at \$26.1 billion. Its stake in the JV will also provide exposure to Castrol's growth plans while it retains the option to sell the remaining stake. Apart from Castrol India, the transaction also includes minority interests in other jurisdictions such as Vietnam, Saudi Arabia and Thailand.

"This does not directly affect the listed subsidiaries, share capital, governance arrangements or day-to-day operations. The subsidiary remains a separate legal entity with its own shareholders, board, and regulatory obligations," said industry sources.

CASTROL INDIA

Castrol has a fifth of the lubricants market share in India and a high brand recall.

"It is a high dividend-yielding stock, and recent business results have been strong, and the company has been able to sustain them now for multiple quarters, and that focus will continue," said a source.

The source pointed out that, regardless of the percentage, Castrol will continue to grow and invest in the business to deliver the best value for its shareholders.

YULETIDE GLOW



MERRY CHRISTMAS. About 5,750 stars lit up the Kazhakottam CSI Church, near Technopark in Thiruvananthapuram, to welcome Christmas. The church authorities said they had put up more stars this year than previously. **JAYAMOHANA**

+ US' new H-1B 'salary model' to hit freshers, volume hiring

Sanjana B
Bengaluru

The US proposes to reshape the H-1B visa programme by replacing the long-standing lottery system with a wage-based model to attract highly specialised, high-paid talent while reducing dependence on mass recruitment.

The change is likely to make it harder for entry-level professionals and bulk employers to secure visas.

This final rule will be effective February 27, 2026, and will be in place for the FY 2027 H-1B cap registration season.

'WAGE RANKING'
Nasscom reacted, stating that by assigning multiple selection entries based on Occupational and Employment Wage Statistics levels, the framework risks moving beyond the statutory focus on "specialty occupation" and towards wage ranking, po-



pursuing advanced education in the US," the industry body added.

A sudden shift to a wage-weighted model would introduce uncertainty, increase compliance complexity and disrupt long-established workforce planning for small- and mid-size firms that align recruitment with academic calendars, client delivery schedules, and product release cycles.

Ankit Mehra, CEO and Founder of GyanDhan, explained that by linking visa allocation to salaries, the US government aims to attract highly specialised talent from sectors like AI, semiconductors and advanced engineering, while reducing reliance on volume-driven

hiring models. Freshers, recent graduates and professionals in lower-paid or generalist roles may face challenges as their compensation may not meet the higher thresholds under the wage-based system. Entry-level roles are particularly vulnerable and could emerge as the most disadvantaged segment.

This policy change could also disadvantage international graduates entering the workforce in non-elite or entry-level roles.

Many US graduates begin their careers at salaries that may not qualify under the wage-prioritisation system.

While top graduates from premium universities and specialised programmes may find pathways, the change could narrow options for those relying on smaller employers or regional firms.

WAGE STRUCTURES

"Over time, this policy could push employers to reassess

wage structures for critical roles, especially where H-1B talent is central to business. That said, not all companies will respond by raising wages. Some may reduce hiring volumes, offshore more roles or shift work to other visa categories or geographies. So, the adjustment may be uneven," Varun Singh, Managing Director, XIPHIAS Immigration, said.

Specialist staffing firm Xpheno highlighted that H-1B visas are also leveraged by employers in other sectors like healthcare and financial services. In 2025, the top 103 healthcare institutions in the US received approval for a total of 7,975 H-1B visas, according to Xpheno's analysis.

The US healthcare relies on foreign doctors and nurses who are on H-1B visas. Doctors are however, well-paid and in the higher salary range.

With inputs from Sindhu Hariharan in Chennai

G-Secs rally with yield dipping on RBI's ₹2.90 lakh crore liquidity infusion plan

Our Bureau
Mumbai

The government securities (G-Sec) market on Wednesday was buoyed by the Reserve Bank of India's announcement on liquidity injection measures, with the yields declining sharply.

Yield of the benchmark 10-year G-Sec (6.48 per cent GS2035) closed about 9 basis points lower at 6.54 per cent against the previous close of 6.63 per cent. Price of this security rose about 63 paise.

Bond yield and price are inversely co-related and move in opposite directions.

On Tuesday, the RBI had announced liquidity infusion measures for the banking system. It will conduct open market operation (OMO) purchase of G-Secs, aggregating ₹2 lakh crore and a USD/INR three-year buy/sell swap auction for \$10 billion. These measures come in the wake of the liquidity in the

RBI EFFECT

Yield of the benchmark 10-year G-Sec (6.48% GS2035) closed about 9 bps lower at 6.54% against 6.63%. Price rose about 63 paise

banking system turning into a deficit due to outflows on account of advance tax and GST payments. The liquidity deficit stood at ₹61,636 crore as on December 23.

V Rama Chandra Reddy, Head of Treasury, Karur Vysya Bank, said the RBI's liquidity infusion provided comfort to the G-Sec market, leading to a rally, with the yields declining sharply. Overall, from Tuesday's peak of 6.70 per cent, the yield of the benchmark 10-year G-Sec has come down 16 basis points in two days, he added.

Venkatakrishnan Srinivasan, Founder and Managing Partner, Rockfort

Fincap LLP, said the liquidity infusion move triggered a sharp relief rally in the bond market, underscoring how strongly bond yields are responding to credible and large-scale liquidity signals.

"After the previous round of OMOs, yields had moved higher again as liquidity tightened and external pressures resurfaced. The rupee continues to face stress, uncertainty around the US tariff remains unresolved, and bond market participants increasingly believe that the current rate cut cycle has reached its terminal point, with a long pause before any further monetary policy action."

"These factors have kept investors cautious, leading them to price bonds conservatively. In this context, the sheer size of the liquidity injection provides meaningful near-term relief by reassuring the market that liquidity conditions will be actively managed," he said.

Eggs on the boil on supply squeeze, demand surge

Soaring exports, increased winter consumption and production dip scramble-up the situation



COSTLY CRACKS. The monthly index crossed the ₹700 per 100 eggs mark in Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata

100 eggs price three months ago, National Egg Coordination Committee (NECC) data show.

According to Suresh Chitturi, Chairman and Managing Director of Srinivasa Farms, "This (the high price points) should continue till March and with some correction beyond that too."

He said the price of eggs in India is still lower compared to other global markets. Despite the high prices,

farmers are not getting their due. "They are getting less than ₹6.50 an egg (at the farm-gate)," said Vangili Subramanian, President, Tamil Nadu Egg Poultry Farmers Marketing Society.

PRODUCTION DOWN

There is a general shortage in the domestic market because farm production is lower. And due to the current cold spell, consumption is high. Add to that the soaring exports with the

US, which is facing an egg crunch, procuring more, and the Gulf countries buying steadily.

Namakkal, which produces nearly six crore eggs a day, saw procurement prices soar to an all-time high ₹6.40 per egg on December 23, according to the NECC. Home to over 1,600 poultry farms, Namakkal supplies eggs across Tamil Nadu, Kerala, North India, and exports to Oman, Qatar, the UAE and South Africa.

At Namakkal, the benchmark price rise — which crossed ₹6/egg for the first time on November 17 and hit new highs seven times since — has been driven higher by continuous rain that damaged feed, especially maize, sourced from neighbouring States.

"This led to fungal infections and a 7-10 per cent fall in the output. Winter con-

sumption, festival demand and export orders have added 20-30 lakh eggs daily, pushing the prices upward," said industry sources.

EXPORT DEMAND

Production costs hover at ₹4.50-4.75 per egg, with feed accounting for 60-70 per cent.

Industry sources said export demand holds the key to egg prices, which will most likely stabilise in January.

Divya Kumar Gulati, Chairman, CLFMA of India, apex organisation of the livestock sector, said: "Supply conditions are expected to stabilise gradually in the new year as production normalises, which should help moderate prices and support steady demand."

Inputs from Gayathri G in Chennai and Vishwanath Kulkarni, Bengaluru

QUICKLY.

KPI Green Energy gets ₹128 cr order from NTPC

New Delhi: KPI Green Energy on Wednesday announced that it has bagged an order from state-owned NTPC to establish a green hydrogen generation project for ₹128.49 crore. On Tuesday, the power giant announced its plan to set up a green hydrogen project of 1 tonne/day at Greater Noida in Uttar Pradesh. PTI

Vikran Engineering bags ₹2,000 cr solar projects

New Delhi: Vikran Engineering on Wednesday said it has bagged an order worth over ₹2,000 crore to develop 600 MW solar projects across Maharashtra. The order secured from Onix Renewables will be executed over a period of 12 months on turnkey EPC basis, Vikran Engineering said. The work order covers end-to-end activities including design, engineering, procurement, supply, erection, testing and commissioning of the solar projects totalling 600 MW across multiple locations in Maharashtra. PTI

ECL norms: Banks may up loan rates, re-draw lending strategy

Piyush Shukla

Mumbai

The Reserve Bank of India's draft guidelines on expected credit loss (ECL) for banks, if implemented as is, "could result in lenders re-pricing loans upward and re-drawing their lending strategy".

"Expected credit losses will help banks get a deeper understanding of their portfolio mix and help them to either price their portfolio right to factor in the risks or rebalance their portfolio towards clients and products that offer higher risk adjust-

China issues rare earth licences to a few more Indian companies

WAITING GAME. Large-scale clearances are not happening with a majority of applicants still awaiting nod

Amiti Sen

New Delhi

China is continuing its trickle of rare earth export licences for Indian companies, more than eight months after imposing strict export restrictions, but a majority of applicants are still left out in the cold.

According to official sources, a handful of entities — including dealers for M&M and Maruti Suzuki, Honda scooter suppliers, and Bosch — were recently granted approvals.

EARLIER LICENCES

These follow earlier licences for rare earth magnets (REMs) issued in October to Jay Ushin Ltd, De Diamond Electric India, and the Indian subsidiaries of Continental AG and Hitachi Astemo.

India is largely dependent on China for its REMs which are used mostly by the auto-



BIG BACKLOG. At least 50 applications are pending with the Chinese Commerce Ministry

mobile industry, especially EV manufacturers, the electronics and semiconductor industry as well as producers of sophisticated defence equipment.

RARE EARTH

"China has not been very prolific in clearing licence

applications for rare earth magnet imports for Indian companies. After temporarily stopping issuance of licences in April this year, it resumed in October-end by clearing around four-five cases. Since then the pace has not picked up. New licences continue to be issued albeit sluggishly," an official tracking the matter told businessline.

AWAITING CLEARANCE

At least 50 applications have been pending with the Chinese Commerce Ministry, which were piled up with applications from other

countries awaiting clearance. "Indian Embassy officials have been told by Chinese officials that the delay is due to the pile up, and clearances will happen on a case-to-case basis," the source said.

The April restrictions made exports of rare earth contingent upon the issuance of export licences.

For this, exporters have to secure an end-user certificate from the importer establishing that the imported materials will not be used for weapons of mass destruction or their delivery systems.

The Indian industry has been complaining that even after Indian importers met all the conditions and gave the end-user certificates, export licences were being delayed. However, with improvement in diplomatic relations between the two countries over the past few months, things may be improving, the source added.



a forensic audit, without fulfilment of the governing statutory and procedural framework, is legally unsustainable," Justice Jadhav observed.

The court underscored that RBI's master directions impose mandatory obligations on banks and cannot be treated as optional or ornamental guidelines.

The court noted that lenders cannot remain inactive for years and later initiate drastic action without adhering to timelines, safeguards and due process prescribed under the RBI framework, particularly when dealing with public money.

PAPER TIGER

Justice Jadhav said, "The master directions of RBI are not a mere paper tiger to enable the banks to wake up from their deep slumber and initiate action according to their convenience. Had the concerned accounts of plaintiff being red flagged on account of one or two EWS in the year 2013 itself or even thereafter and had the banks acted strictly in consonance with the prevailing master directions, the present situation would not have arisen.

The banks are equally accountable and answerable. They rattle a common man who places his hard-earned savings with public sector banks with the hope that they shall remain in safe custody and grow."

Observing that the FAR formed the sole basis for the show cause notices and subsequent actions by the banks, Justice Jadhav ruled that the report could not be relied upon to initiate coercive proceedings.

FRAUD ACCOUNT

The High Court further held that classification of an account as fraud, or initiation of adverse proceedings solely on the basis of a forensic audit, without compliance with the statutory and procedural framework, is legally unsustainable.

"It is seen that classification of an account as fraud or initiation of adverse proceedings founded merely on



REBALANCING PORTFOLIO. Expected credit losses will help banks get a deeper understanding of their portfolio mix

ECL basis historical information such as standard deviations, volatility in bond markets, among other factors.

India did not implement IFRS norms for banks as

lenders were not adequately capitalised and had higher NPAs, which is not the case presently.

"When an expected loss is to be computed for accounting, even when banks give

loans, they will start computing expected loss on that exposure. And they will rightly build it into the price. So, the credit markets will become more towards what real risk-based pricing should be rather than what it is today, which is quite arbitrary," he said.

A senior PSU banker said loan rates may rise by 5-10 basis points upon full implementation of ECL norms for large banks and higher for smaller and mid-size peers. Small- and mid-size lenders with higher exposure to unsecured loans may move towards secured loans more.

+ IndianOil, Nayara Energy lead rural push as fuel stations surpass 1 lakh

India's fuel retail outlets

OMC	Retail outlets	Rural India	% of rural outlets
Indian Oil Corporation	41,664	13,661	32.79
Nayara Energy	6,921	2,136	30.86
Mangalore Refineries & Petrochemicals	198	56	28.28
Bharat Petroleum Corporation	24,605	6,533	26.55
Hindustan Petroleum Corporation	24,418	6,202	25.40
Shell	346	85	24.57
RIL / RBML / RSIL#	2,114	130	6.15
Total	1,00,266	28,803	28.73

Source: Petroleum Planning & Analysis Cell (PPAC) # Reliance Industries (RIL)/ Reliance BP Mobility (RBML)/ RBML Solutions India (RSIL)

Rishi Ranjan Kala

New Delhi

State-run Indian Oil Corporation (IOCL) and Rosneft-backed Nayara Energy are the only two oil marketing companies (OMCs) in India with strong rural presence accounting for more than one-third of their entire transport fuel retailing network.

Currently, India has a total of 1,00,266 retail outlets (ROS), or petrol pumps, with 28,803 — roughly 28.73 per cent — serving villages.

More than 6.5 crore people visit these fuel stations daily consuming around 5.5 million barrels per day on an average.

IOCL, which boasts of the country's largest RO network, serves through more than 41,000 fuel retailing stations with almost 33 per cent in the rural areas.

RETAILING STATIONS

Nayara Energy, which accounts for almost 7 per cent of India's fuel retailing stations, has around 6,921 ROS, with almost 31 per cent serving small towns and villages.

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Reliance gets US concession to buy Rosneft oil

Reuters

New Delhi

India's Reliance Industries Ltd continues to receive oil cargoes supplied by Rosneft after obtaining a one-month concession from Washington, which had imposed sanctions on the Russian producer, sources said.

The permission for Reliance has not been reported previously. In October, the US imposed sanctions on Rosneft and Lukoil, giving companies until November 21 to wind down transactions with the two energy firms.

Reliance has a long-term deal with Rosneft to buy 500,000 barrels per day of Russian oil for its 1.4 million bpd refining complex, the world's largest.

The EU has said that from January 21, it will not take fuel produced at refineries that processed Russian oil 60 days prior to the bill-of-lading date.

RURAL PRESENCE However, rural presence of the country's second and third OMCs with the largest RO network — Bharat Petroleum Corporation (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation (HPCL) — is less than the national share, albeit with a slight lag.

While BPCL has around 24,605 ROS with a rural mix of 26.55 per cent, HPCL's village network accounts for 25.40 per cent of its 24,418 petrol pumps.

Recently, Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri noted that the number of ROS and gas stations in India have nearly doubled from 51,870 in 2014 to over a lakh by 2025.

Expansion of the RO network in urban and rural areas by OMCs is a continuous process to ensure adequate availability of motor fuels. ROS are set up at identified locations based on field survey and feasibility studies. Locations having sufficient potential and which are economically viable are rostered in the marketing plans for setting up ROS. Going ahead, the number of ROS will increase as the demand for auto fuels appreciates.

IndusInd facing probe into derivatives fiasco

Our Bureau

Mumbai

Private sector lender IndusInd Bank on Wednesday said it has received a letter from the Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO) regarding an investigation into the derivatives fiasco at the bank, which led to a nearly ₹2,000 crore impact on the lender's balance sheet.

The bank said it continues to give full cooperation and support to the law enforcement agencies in the probe.

MASTER DIRECTIONS

Earlier this month, IndusInd Bank informed that as per the RBI master directions on fraud risk management in commercial banks and All India Financial Institutions dated July 15, 2024, any

fraud reported to the RBI involving an amount of ₹1 crore and above shall also be reported to SFIO on June 2, 2025.

The derivatives issue at the bank led the lender to conduct forensic analysis of the balance sheet and prompted exits of its former CEO Sumanth Kathpalia and Deputy CEO Arun Khurana, and pushed the bank into net loss in Q2FY26.

tical price reductions in key menus by the QSR players to sustain demand rather than any material margin gains," the report noted. On same-store-sales growth (SSSG) trends, the report pointed out that there was 1-2 per cent year-on-year SSSG growth in October during the festival period.

However, this momentum faded, with QSR chains seeing 1-3 per cent decline.

STABLE GROWTH

The report noted that there was no major "uplift or recovery" in terms of same-store sales growth, a key metric for the industry.

However, the report noted that Jubilant Foodworks, which operates Domino's, has been an outlier among peers in terms of margins, profitable expansion and delivery salience.

'QSR sector sees softer demand in Dec quarter'

Meenakshi Verma Ambwani

New Delhi

The quick service restaurants (QSR) sector continued to witness a soft demand environment in the December quarter due to lower footfalls to outlets among other factors, a report by Elara Capital noted. While GST rate cuts and festival demand did lead to some uplift but the momentum faded in November-December period, the report noted.

SUSTAIN DEMAND "As per our preliminary checks, the macro-environment has been subdued for the sector through Q3FY26. QSR stores witnessed muted traffic. While the GST rate cuts were positive, that largely translated into tac-

HCCB lays off 6% workforce

Our Bureau

New Delhi

Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages Ltd (HCCB) has given pink slips to 200-300 employees. The bottling arm of Coca-Cola said this was being done as part of a restructuring exercise.

The company has reduced the workforce by 4-6 per cent over the past two weeks, sources said. HCCB employs about 5,000 people.

"Staying in sync with evolving business needs requires us to re-evaluate capabilities, structures, and take corrective actions where necessary. These remain minor in scale and non-disruptive to our operations," HCCB said in a statement.

Earlier this year, Jubilant Bhartia Group acquired 40 per cent stake in HCCB. The restructuring exercise comes post this transaction.

Juniper Green commissions 60 MWh merchant BESS project in Bikaner

Our Bureau

New Delhi

Juniper Green Energy has successfully commissioned 60 MWh of the proposed 100 MWh merchant battery energy storage system (BESS) project at Bikaner in Rajasthan through its subsidiary Juniper Green Cosmic.

This commissioning represents the firm's first operational merchant BESS, positioning Juniper Green Energy as an early mover in the energy storage market, the company announced on Wednesday, with the start of commercial operations.

REGULATORY APPROVAL The commissioned capacity has received approval from the Northern Regional Load Despatch Centre (NRLDC). The remaining 40 MWh

capacity is expected to be commissioned shortly. Upon commissioning of the full 100 MWh, the project will become one of the largest operating BESS in India, offering significant potential for merchant revenue streams including peak arbitrage, grid balancing services, and ancillary market participation.

"We view BESS as a key value-accretive asset class that complements our renewable portfolio and enhances diversification while supporting grid reliability," said Ankush Malik, CEO of Juniper Green Energy.

A CH-CHE

HC stays banks' action against Anil Ambani, cites RBI norms

Avinash Nair

Ahmedabad

Granting interim relief to Anil Ambani in proceedings involving Reliance Communications group companies, the Bombay High Court on Wednesday stayed all coercive action by public sector banks and warned lenders that the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) master directions are "not a mere paper tiger" to be ignored at will.

Justice Milind N Jadhav halted action by Bank of Baroda, IDBI Bank and Indian Overseas Bank, including show cause notices and fraud classification orders against Ambani and RCom, that banks cannot invoke RBI norms selectively or act without strict adherence to statutory procedure.

**KEY EVENTS
2025.**

- US sanctions on Rosneft and Lukoil hit India's crude oil trade with Russia
- Centre notifies Petroleum and Natural Gas Rules, 2025, which includes a 180-day time limit for lease approvals and a single licence covering exploration, development and production
- India's total installed refinery capacity touched 258.1 mmtpa in April
- Natural gas consumption declined as rain impacted power demand. High prices of LNG also discouraged Indian buyers
- Petroleum product consumption grew by 1.4 per cent y-o-y in the April-November period, as against 4 per cent in the last 10 years

**THINGS TO
WATCH OUT
FOR 2026.**

- Indian oil and gas market is estimated at \$23.28 billion in 2025, projected to grow at a CAGR of 5.03 per cent through 2030
- India to achieve 20 per cent ethanol blending in petrol by FY26
- India is close to discovering large amounts of extractable oil and gas reserves in the Andaman basin
- Experts expect crude oil price to stay in \$60-\$70 per barrel range in FY27. This is attributed to rising production from non-OPEC producers like the US and Brazil, rising volume of oil on water, and fears of a further slump in global demand amid tariff wars
- LPG under-recoveries to reduce in FY27 compared to FY26

Balancing barrel, biz and blame

OIL SMOOTH. Indian refiners have adapted to sanctions, compliance needs, which will trickle into 2026

Rishi Ranjan Kala
New Delhi

The year 2025 has been an outlier for the Indian oil and gas sector as refiners deftly navigated geopolitical and trade tensions with the US imposing sanctions on two of Russia's largest oil companies, Rosneft and Lukoil. This turned out to be the first serious attempt that threatened to disrupt energy trade between New Delhi and Moscow.

Despite headwinds like an escalating conflict in West Asia, President Donald Trump's trade feud, and tightening of EU sanctions amid the Russia-Ukraine war, India skilfully managed these black swan events.

This was achieved by forging stronger trade ties with the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Oman; enhancing energy purchases from the US; bolstering business relations with Brazil and Argentina, and courting African suppliers such as Libya and Gabon.

A top government official said, "2025 has not been easy. Geopolitical tensions, sanctions and trade wars recalibrated energy flows. We are adjusting to this evolving scenario, whether it is reducing crude from Moscow or buying more from Washington. Despite this, refiners ensured availability at the right price. They acted as responsible corporate citizens ensuring that the common man is shielded from high prices of diesel, petrol and LPG."

The official emphasised that India will keep up the strategy — source the most economical barrels from non-sanctioned sources, while maintaining strategic autonomy and affordability.

RUSSIAN ROULETTE
Mohan Ramaswamy, CEO of Rubix Data Sciences, succinctly puts it. He noted that sanctions by the US and the EU are reshaping India's oil trade, reducing Russian dependence "slightly" and redirecting crude (oil) and fuel (refined petroleum products) flows toward compliant markets. "Sanctions,



TUG OF WAR. India navigated headwinds like an escalating conflict in West Asia, President Donald Trump's trade feuds, and tightening of EU sanctions amid the Russia-Ukraine war BUSINESSLINE

compliance requirements, and evolving regulatory regimes have also materially altered energy trade flows and export feasibility," he added.

Manas Majumdar, Partner and Leader, Oil & Gas, Fuels & Resources at PwC India, pointed out that the recent US sanctions and restrictions by the EU made Russian oil cheaper due to rising discounts, which helped Indian refiners import an estimated 1.85 million barrels per day (mb/d) by mid-2025.

However, the recent sanctions are expected to reduce imports from Russia to around 500,000 b/d, or roughly 10 per cent of India's basket.

Supporting the narrative, ICRA's Vice President & Co-Group Head (Corporate Ratings), Prashant Vasisth noted that Indian entities have refrained from transacting with sanctioned entities in the past. "Accordingly, crude oil purchases from sanctioned Russian entities is expected to decline and increase from non-sanctioned

Russian entities especially considering discounts have increased post sanctions," he added.

DIVERSIFYING SOURCES

Majumdar pointed out that source diversification has happened with the addition of recent entrants like Argentina, energy security and reducing dependence on any single region.

"This broader pool enhances bargaining power, aids access to various crude quality grades, and insulates against sanction-driven disruptions. When Western sanctions constrained Russian supply chains, India pivoted swiftly to alternative suppliers in West Asia, the US, Brazil, and Africa — maintaining energy security and price competitiveness. This flexibility has so far enabled uninterrupted refinery operations," he added.

Plus, a key aspect is that India's significant crude volumes will only grow with its refining hub ambitions of 400 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) capacity. This growing

buying power will only increase and hence, the need to look at multiple sources to get most volumes at best deals, he explained.

Vasisth emphasised that India has many sources for crude, including the geographically close West Asia and regions like Africa, Brazil, US, etc.

Diversification has aided in quickly shifting to other suppliers. India is the third-largest crude consumer and Indian entities command the heft and reach to procure a variety of crudes from all over the world.

To compensate for softer near-term Russian arrivals, refiners are expected to increase intake from a broader mix of suppliers — West Asia (Saudi Arabia, Iraq, the UAE and Kuwait), Brazil and broader Latin America (Argentina, Colombia and Guyana), West Africa and North America (the US and Canada), said Sumit Ritalia, Kpler's Lead Research Analyst for Refining & Modeling, recently.

Q&A.

Petroleum product consumption growth slows in 2025: ICRA

Rishi Ranjan Kala
New Delhi

As India pushes for higher consumption of clean energy products and services, consumption growth of diesel and petrol is slowing down, which is expected to continue in 2026 as well. ICRA Vice-President & Co-Group Head (Corporate Ratings) Prashant Vasisth breaks down the key trends re-defining the domestic oil and gas sector.

Edited excerpts:



“

We expect crude oil price to stay between \$60 and \$70 per barrel in FY27 due to muted demand growth and increasing electrification

PRASHANT VASISTH
Vice President & Co-Group Head (Corporate Ratings), ICRA

nounced a ₹30,000-crore compensation package for the three PSU OMCs in August 2025 to address LPG under recoveries. Another highlight is the discovery of large deposits in the Andaman Sea.

Your outlook for 2026?

We expect crude oil price to average between \$60 and \$70 per barrel in FY27 due to muted demand growth as well as increasing electrification globally. We do not see a cut in capex plans. Domestic POL consumption is expected to grow at 1-2 per cent, and so is natural gas consumption.

bl podcast

Scan the QR to listen to the full interview



<https://tinyurl.com/mpapshsm>

Safeguard measures in place to protect farmers' interests under India-New Zealand FTA

Press Trust of India
New Delhi

India has given a balanced and calibrated market access to New Zealand on apple imports under the free trade agreement, while putting in place adequate safeguard measures to protect the interests of domestic farmers, an official statement said on Wednesday.

A concessional customs duty of 25 per cent is available only within the specified quota for apple imports from New Zealand under the pact, for which the negotiations were concluded on Monday.

Both India and New Zealand have finalised the free trade agreement (FTA), and it is expected to be implemented in seven-eight months.

"Any imports beyond the quota will attract the full existing customs duty of 50 per cent, with no concession," the Commerce Ministry



said. In the FTA, it said, a balanced and calibrated market access has been extended for imports of apples from New Zealand to ensure that the interests of domestic farmers are fully protected. "FTA incorporates robust and multi-layered measures, all of which must be simultaneously satisfied for any imports to take place," it said.

The quota is also aligned with India's current import levels from New Zealand (7.3 per cent) in 2024-25, and is phased over six years.

The quota will be increased to 32,500 tonnes

(mt) in the first year, 35,000 mt in year two, 37,500 mt in year three, 40,000 mt in year four, 42,500 mt in year five, and 45,000 mt in year six.

IMPORT PRICE

There is also a provision of a minimum import price (MIP). For apples currently imported from other countries, the prevailing MIP is ₹50/kg, with post-duty prices around ₹75/kg. In contrast, imports from New Zealand under the FTA are subject to a higher MIP of ₹1.25/kg (about ₹112/kg), resulting in a minimum post-duty price of ₹140/kg after the concessional duty.

India is the third-largest importer of apples globally at 557,989 mt in 2024-25.

"This ensures that only premium-priced apples enter the Indian market, fully protecting domestic prices, while imports are diversified," the Commerce Ministry said.

Concessional duty-based access is also restricted to a defined seasonal window from April 1 to August 31, deliberately avoiding peak periods. Further, it said that the market access is explicitly linked to the implementation of the Apple Action Plan under the Agriculture Productivity Partnership.

India is the third-largest importer of apples globally at 557,989 mt in 2024-25.

'India can boost exports to New Zealand after FTA'

Our Bureau
New Delhi

In FY25, New Zealand imported goods worth \$711 million, which was less than 1.5 per cent of its total imports of \$50 billion. In contrast, China exported goods worth over \$10 billion to the country, the report noted.

For India, the challenge now is to pair the FTA with targeted export promotion, standards cooperation, regulatory facilitation, and logistics support, according to Ajay Srivastava, trade expert and Founder of GTRI. "For New Zealand, diversifying imports away from a single dominant supplier would strengthen supply chain resilience. India could unlock new trade across processed foods, pharma, machinery, electronics, vehicles, aerospace components, and furniture," he said.



aerospace components and furniture," he said.

TRADE OUTLOOK

Bilateral merchandise trade, at \$1.3 billion in FY25, is expected to grow manifold.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said at a media briefing on Monday.

The pact will be legally vetted by both sides, after which it will await nod from

New Zealand Parliament.

FOOD EXPORTS GAP

"India exported \$602 million of bakery products globally but only \$6.5 million to New Zealand. In food preparations, India's global exports are \$817 million, yet shipments to New Zealand are just \$7.7 million," stated the GTRI report.

In the pharma sector, New Zealand imports \$962 million in medicines, while India supplies only \$75 million.

"Data point to under-penetration rather than weak competitiveness, making processed foods, pharma, machinery, electronics, vehicles, aerospace and furniture prime growth areas," stated the report.

milma®		Malabar Regional Co-Operative Milk Producers' Union Ltd.	
WYD/ENGG/2025-26		Ph: 04936 207245, 207398	
22.12.2025			
E-TENDER NOTICE			
MRCMPU Ltd, Wayanad Dairy invites competitive tenders for the following.			
No.	Item Details	Last Date for Bid submission	
1	STFC of Ghee Biscuit Machineries E-Tender ID: (2025_KCMMF_823624_1)	13.01.2026	
	Estimated Cost: Rs. 20,00 Lakhs (Incl.all)	5:00 PM	
E-tenders shall be submitted through www.etenders.kerala.gov.in . For more details, contact Ph: 8281053617, 9656432736 Sd/- Senior Manager			

TATA POWER				
(Corporate Contracts Department)				
The Tata Power Company Limited, 2nd Floor, Sahar Receiving Station, Sahar Airport Road, Andheri East, Mumbai-400059 (Board Line: 022-67173917) CIN: L28920MH1919PLC00567				
NOTICE INVITING TENDER (NIT)				
The Tata Power Company Limited invites tenders from eligible vendors for the following project (Two Part Bidding) in Mumbai.				
A) Project 1 - Transmission Tower foundation works for Line Diversion of 110 KV Malad Versova 1 & 2 Bhagat Singh Project.				
i. Package 1: Tower Foundations (Inside Malad Creek - 08 Nos Tower Foundations) of 110 KV Malad Versova line No. 1 & 2 for Coastal Road Project (Package Ref No. CC265VP049)				
ii. Package 2: Tower Foundations (Inside Malad Creek - 04 Nos Tower Foundations) of 110 KV Malad Versova line No. 1 & 2 and 110 KV Malad Esselworld line No. 1 & 2 for Coastal Road Project (Package Ref No. CC265VP049)				
iii. Package 3: Tower Foundations (Inside Marshy Land (08 Nos Tower Foundations) of 110 KV Malad Esselworld line No. 1 & 2 and 110 KV Malad Versova line No. 1 & 2 for Coastal Road Project (Package Ref No. CC265VP049)				
iv. Package 4: Tower Foundations (Inside Marshy Land (03 Nos Tower Foundations) for 110 KV Malad Versova line No. 1 & 2 for Bhagat Singh Nagar Cable Bridge (Package Ref No. CC265VP049)				
Interested & eligible vendors for above Project to submit Tender Fee, Authorization Letter before 15:00 Hrs, Tuesday, 6 th January 2026. Vendors may participate in one or more than one tender package mentioned above.				
For detailed NIT, please visit Tender section on website https://www.tatapower.com .				
For detailed NIT, please visit Tender section on website https://www.tatapower.com .				
Also, future corrigendum's if any, to the said tender will be published on Tender section of above website (Tata Power → Business Associates → Tender Documents) only.				

Invesco Mutual Fund

Invesco Asset Management (India) Pvt. Ltd.
(CIN: U67190MH2005PTC153471), 2101-A, 21st Floor, A Wing, Marathon Futurex, N. M. Joshi Marg, Lower Parel, Mumbai - 400 013

Telephone: +91 22 6731 0000, Email: mfservices@invescoindia.com; www.invescomutualfund.com

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TENDER NOTICE				
25.12.2025				
Item rate E-tenders are invited from reputed agencies for the work mentioned below at Cochin International Airport.				
Sl. No.	Name of Work	Tender Fee	EMD	Completion Period
1	Appointment of Consultant for Preparation of Master Plan	Rs. 5,		

Gadgets that made it to Santa's 'nice' list 2025!

DIGITAL ARMOURY. From sleek everyday tools to powerhouse gadgets, this year's standouts aren't just about specs — they're about making life smoother, smarter & a little more fun

Mahananda Bohidar

Looking back at 2025, the devices that left the strongest impression aren't necessarily the flashiest or the most expensive — they're the ones that understand how we live, work and create. From gadgets that make everyday tasks effortless to tools that support productivity and creativity, this year has shown how thoughtful engineering and smart design can make technology feel intuitive rather than intimidating. The common thread across all our favourites is practicality meeting style, proving that the most compelling tech isn't just about pushing boundaries — it's about enhancing life in meaningful, everyday ways.

SMARTPHONES.

NO-NONSENSE FLAGSHIP

SAMSUNG GALAXY S25 ULTRA

The refined design on this powerful, capable fan favourite feels lighter and more comfortable despite the massive 6.9-inch display. Powered by the Snapdragon 8 Gen Elite for Galaxy and paired with a 12 GB RAM, it handles everything from heavy multitasking to gaming without breaking a sweat.

Where it truly pulls ahead, though, is productivity — thanks to deep Gemini integration, granular UI customisations, practical AI tools such as Live Translate across calls and Google Meet and more. Add to that a versatile quad-camera setup and a dependable 5,000 mAh all-day battery life, and the S25 Ultra emerges as the most well-rounded Android flagship of the year — powerful, capable and genuinely useful in day-to-day life.

SEXIEST NEW DESIGN

APPLE IPHONE AIR

No other smartphone this year has overhauled design aesthetics the way the iPhone Air has.

It is super slim at 6.1 mm and weighs under 165 grams — it is featherlight yet unmistakably premium, with a matte aluminium frame and frosted glass back that looks refined, and is unmistakably Apple.

The muted colour palette, especially the light gold and cloud white finishes, enhances its minimalist appeal, while the expansive 6.5-inch Super Retina XDR OLED display with 120 Hz ProMotion sits seamlessly within the impossibly slim chassis. In a year crowded with bulky camera bumps and overdesigned frames or rear panels, the iPhone Air stands out by doing less, and better!

FLIP YOU CAN'T SKIP!

SAMSUNG GALAXY Z FLIP7



Google Pixel Watch 4



iPhone Air



Sennheiser HDB 630



Asus ROG Strix Scar 16



Samsung Galaxy S25 Ultra



ASUS Zenbook A14



Samsung Galaxy Flip 7



OnePlus Pad 3



iPhone 17 Pro



Apple AirPods Pro 3 hero

rounder Windows laptop because it nails the balance that most ultraportables struggle to achieve — extreme portability without compromising everyday performance. At just 980 g, it's effortlessly light, yet the 14-inch Lumina OLED display, excellent keyboard, and Snapdragon X performance make it genuinely capable for real work, not just travel-friendly tasks. Add to that an outstanding two-day battery life, a compact fast charger and thoughtful AI features baked into Windows, and you get a laptop that feels modern, responsive and future-ready. While not flawless, the Zenbook A14 stands out in a crowded field by delivering a rare mix of comfort, efficiency and endurance, making it one of our favourite laptops this year.

THE TABLET FOR ALL TIME! ONEPLUS PAD 3

This one earns its spot as the best all-round tablet without burning a hole in your pocket! The OnePlus Pad 3 strikes a satisfying balance between performance, display, battery and value. Its massive 13.2-inch LCD display with 144 Hz refresh rate makes content look seamless, while the Snapdragon 8 Elite processor with up to 16 GB RAM ensures smooth multitasking, gaming, and creative work. The 12,140 mAh battery keeps you powered for over a day of mixed use, and the eight-speaker setup delivers punchy, well-rounded audio for entertainment. Sleek design, solid software optimisations such as OxygenOS 15, and optional accessories such as the Smart Keyboard make it versatile for both work and play, offering a premium tablet experience at a price that's far more accessible than flagship competitors.

THE SMARTWATCH THAT WON US OVER!

GOOGLE PIXEL WATCH 4

The Google Pixel Watch 4 has quickly become our favourite smartwatch thanks to its perfect mix of style, functionality and battery endurance. Its curved AMOLED display is both elegant and practical, offering crisp visuals and easy readability from any angle. Powered by the Snapdragon W5 Gen 2 processor, the watch handles daily tasks, notifications and fitness tracking with smooth efficiency, while Gemini AI makes interactions with the watch intuitive and responsive. Health and activity monitoring are thorough and reliable, covering heart rate, sleep and a wide range of workouts. What really sets it apart is the long-lasting battery, a key feature that most premium smartwatches still fall short on. The watch easily offers two days of tracking, while connected to the internet, and frequent display-on time throughout the day!

This one's always been a head-turner — marrying form, function, and everyday usability really well! The standout 4.1-inch Super AMOLED cover display stretches edge to edge and is no longer just for glances — you can reply using a full keyboard, run apps such as Google Maps and YouTube, and even use Interpreter mode without opening the phone.

Inside, the 6.9-inch Dynamic AMOLED display with a 120 Hz refresh rate is bright, fluid and a pleasure to use. Powering it all is the Exynos 2500 chip with 12 GB RAM, which delivers smooth performance without heating issues, while the larger 4,300 mAh battery comfortably lasts a full day.

Add to that the dependable 50 MP cameras that benefit from Flex Mode shooting, practical Galaxy AI tools baked into daily workflows, an IP48 rating and Samsung's promise of seven years of updates, and the Flip 7 emerges as the most complete, confident and genuinely usable flip phone you can buy this year.

The only aspect in which our other favourite — the Moto Razr 60 Ultra — has an edge over the Samsung Flip is that we can directly play video games on the cover screen with the Moto, a fea-

AUDIO DEVICES.

AUDIOPHILE'S GO-TO SENNHEISER HDB 630

These headphones come closest to delivering a true reference-grade listening experience in a wireless form. Unlike bass-forward rivals, it prioritises a neutral, well-balanced sound signature with excellent separation, a wide soundstage and tonal accuracy that stays faithful to the original mix. The inclusion of the BTD 700 USB-C dongle unlocks high-quality codecs such as aptX Adaptive and aptX HD, making wireless hi-res audio genuinely worthwhile.

Options for USB-C and analogue wired playback up to 24-bit/96 kHz add versatility to listening options. Features such as customisable EQ, cross-feed, refined ANC and the promise of 60-hour battery life further strengthen its audiophile credentials. In a market dominated by convenience-first flagships, the HDB 630 stands out for putting sound fidelity, control and flexibility first, making it the most compelling choice for discerning

listeners in 2025.

BEST BUDS TO PLUG IN APPLE AIRPODS PRO 3

The only thing we didn't love about the latest AirPods Pro is how similar the audio quality is to that of the previous generation. Which by itself isn't a downside because the acoustics on the AirPods Pro 2 are stellar!

With class-leading Active Noise Cancellation that's noticeably more effective than the previous generation, richer and more spacious sound powered by Apple's H2 chip and high-definition Spatial Audio with dynamic head tracking, these deliver an immersive listening experience. Add to that the genuinely innovative upgrades such as heart rate sensing during workouts and Live Translation make it hard to find a competitor to match this in the market. Also, with improved call clarity and a reliable 8-hour battery life with ANC on, this one's an easy winner.

LAPTOPS & TABLETS

GAMER'S ULTIMATE WINGMAN

ASUS ZENBOOK A14

We chose the ASUS Zenbook A14 as a top contender for an all-

WHAT'S HOT: GADGETS.

Smart snapper

The **motorola edge 70** features a 6.7-inch AMOLED display with a 120 Hz refresh rate and up to 4,500 nits peak brightness. The camera hardware includes a triple rear setup with a 50 MP OIS main camera, a 50 MP ultra-wide and macro camera, and a 50 MP front camera, with support for 4K 60 fps video recording on both setups. The phone comes with 8 GB RAM and 256 GB storage. It is powered by the Snapdragon 7 Gen 4

processor with a vapour chamber cooling system and runs on Hello UI which is based on Android 16 with three OS upgrades and four years of security updates. The device packs a 5,000 mAh battery with 68 W wired charging, 15 W wireless charging and reverse charging. The motorola edge 70 is priced ₹29,999 and is offered in three Pantone curated colour options — Bronze Green, Lily Pad and Gadget Gray.

Clean compute

The **ASUS VM670KA** is an all-in-one desktop designed for everyday work and entertainment, featuring a 27-inch IPS display with 178-degree viewing angles, touch support, and TÜV Rheinland certification for reduced eye strain. Camera duties are handled by a retractable 5 MP built-in webcam with IR function to support Windows Hello. AI features include two-way AI-powered noise cancellation to reduce background noise during

video calls. The system is powered by the AMD Ryzen AI 7 350 processor and comes with 16 GB RAM and a 1 TB storage. Connectivity includes multiple USB ports, HDMI-in support, and Wi-Fi 7 for faster wireless performance. Audio is delivered via dual 5 W stereo speakers with Dolby Atmos support. Running on Windows 11 Home, the desktop is priced ₹1,09,990 onwards.

Power packed

The **OnePlus 15R** features a 6.83-inch 1.5K AMOLED display with a 165 Hz refresh rate and up to 1,800 nits peak brightness. Camera hardware includes a 50MP Sony IMX906 main camera, an 8 MP ultra-wide camera with a 112-degree field of view, and a 32 MP autofocus front camera, with support for up to 4K 120 fps video recording.

AI features include Plus Mind, AI Writer, AI Recorder, AI Portrait Glow and Google

Gemini integration. The device is powered by the Snapdragon 8 Gen 5 Mobile Platform and runs on OxygenOS 16. A 7,400 mAh battery supports 80 W SUPERVOOC fast charging and advanced Cryo Velocity cooling.

The OnePlus 15R's price starts at ₹44,999.

Stealth wellness

The **boAt Valour Ring 1** is a lightweight smart ring built with a titanium frame, with a carbon black matte finish. Featuring a minimalist design, the gadget weighs under 6 grams, and comes with multiple size options for the perfect fit. Health and fitness capabilities include round-the-clock heart-rate monitoring, heart rate variability insights, blood oxygen saturation measurement, step and activity tracking, skin-

temperature insights and stress monitoring. It also offers advanced sleep tracking with nap detection and supports more than 40 dedicated sports modes, which can be accessed via the boAt Crest app. Battery life is rated at up to 15 days, with under-90-minute charging via a Type-C dock. The boAt Valour Ring 1 is priced ₹12,999.

IMX906 main camera, an 8 MP ultra-wide camera with a 112-degree field of view, and a 32 MP autofocus front camera, with support for up to 4K 120 fps video recording.

AI features include Plus Mind, AI Writer, AI Recorder, AI Portrait Glow and Google

Gemini integration. The device is powered by the Snapdragon 8 Gen 5 Mobile Platform and runs on OxygenOS 16. A 7,400 mAh battery supports 80 W SUPERVOOC fast charging and advanced Cryo Velocity cooling.

The OnePlus 15R's price starts at ₹44,999.

TECH DIGEST.

Team Technophile

New generative AI features on Adobe Firefly

Adobe has announced a set of updates to its Firefly generative AI platform, adding new tools for video creation, editing and enhancement.

A key addition is the "prompt to edit" feature for video, which allows users to make targeted changes to an existing AI-generated clip instead of regenerating it entirely. Users can remove objects or people, replace backgrounds, adjust lighting conditions or modify framing using text instructions.

These edits are applied directly to the original clip, reducing the need for repeated generations.

Firefly's video tools also now support camera motion control. Users can upload

a reference video to guide how the camera should move within a generated scene, while anchoring the motion to a chosen starting frame.

Adobe is also expanding Firefly's video enhancement capabilities through the addition of Topaz Astra, a third-party video upscaling model now available in Firefly Boards. The tool allows users to upscale footage to 1080p or 4K, restore older or low-resolution clips and improve overall clarity. Multiple videos can be queued for upscaling, allowing users to continue working on other tasks at the same time.

Alongside video updates, Firefly now includes access to additional image-generation models. This includes FLUX.2 from Black Forest Labs, which supports photorealistic image generation, improved text rendering and the use of multiple reference images. The

model is available across Firefly's image tools and in select Adobe applications, with broader availability planned in the coming months.

Adobe has also launched the public beta of Firefly video editor, a browser-based editing environment designed to assemble AI-generated clips with music, visuals and user-uploaded footage. The editor offers a multi-track timeline for traditional video editing as well as text-based editing for spoken content, allowing users to rearrange or trim clips by editing transcripts. Finished videos can be exported in different formats, including vertical and widescreen layouts.

As part of a limited-time promotion, Adobe said users on select Firefly subscription plans will have unlimited image and video generations until January 15.

Google rolls out annual Pixel upgrade programme in India

A new initiative by Google allows customers to purchase select Pixel smartphones on a monthly instalment

plan and upgrade to a newer model annually. The programme starts at ₹3,333 per month and is available from

December 19.

Under the scheme, customers can buy eligible Pixel devices on a 24-month no-cost EMI plan. After completing a minimum of nine monthly payments, users can exchange their existing Pixel

handset for a newer eligible model while continuing to pay the same EMI amount. The exchange includes an assured buyback, provided the device powers on and meets basic functional requirements, regardless of cosmetic condition.

The programme is being offered in partnership with Cashify, Bajaj Finance Ltd and HDFC Bank, and will be available at select retail outlets across India until June 30, 2026.

At the time of upgrade, which must take place between the ninth and 15th EMI payments — Cashify credits the remaining loan balance to the customer's bank account, allowing the existing loan to be closed without pre-closure charges. Customers are then enrolled in a new

24-month EMI plan for the upgraded Pixel device.

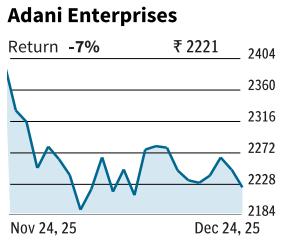
Eligible devices under the programme include the Pixel 10, Pixel 10 Pro, Pixel 10 Pro XL and Pixel 10 Pro Fold. Customers must enrol in the upgrade programme through the Cashify website within 30 days of purchasing the phone.

As part of the enrolment, users may also receive an exchange bonus of up to ₹7,000 when trading in an existing device. In addition, new Pixel purchases under the scheme come with limited-period trial subscriptions to select Google services such as Google AI Pro, Google One Premium, Fitbit Premium and YouTube Premium, depending on the model purchased.



QUICKLY.

Adani Enterprises board okays ₹500 cr NCD issue



Bengaluru: The board of Adani Enterprises on Wednesday approved and adopted the draft prospectus with respect to public issuance of non-convertible debentures (NCDs) of face value of ₹1,000 each amounting up to ₹500 crore with an option to retain over-subscription up to ₹500 crore, aggregating up to ₹1,000 crore. The stock of Adani Enterprises closed 1.17 per cent lower at ₹2,221.55 on the BSE. OUR BUREAU

NHAI gets SEBI nod for Raajmarg Infra InvIT

New Delhi: State-owned NHAI-sponsored Raajmarg Infra Investment Trust (RIIT) has received approval from SEBI as an Infrastructure Investment Trust (InvIT), an official statement said. The statement said the Public InvIT aims to unlock the monetisation potential of the National Highway assets while creating a high-quality, long-term investment instrument primarily targeting retail and domestic investors. The initiative marks an important step in broadening public participation in the national highway infrastructure growth story, it added. Earlier, NHAI had incorporated Raajmarg Infra Investment Managers as the Investment Manager for the RIIT. NRVM Rajendra Kumar, Member (Finance), NHAI, will be the MD and CEO (Additional Charge) of the investment manager company. PTI

Earnings-led growth expected in 2026

MARKET SENTIMENT. After a volatile 2025, analysts express measured optimism for the new year

Madhu Balaji
Bengaluru

benchmarks recovered and touched fresh highs, supported by strong domestic inflows and signs of improving cyclical momentum.

LARGE-CAPS LEAD

According to Nigudkar, large-cap stocks led the recovery, with banks and heavyweight IT companies outperforming initially, followed by consumer-facing names as spending showed early signs of revival after GST-related policy support.

Broader markets were more selective, reflecting investor caution around stretched valuations and the sustainability of earnings growth. FIIs stayed on the sidelines or were net sellers for much of the year, influenced by global rate dynamics and geopolitical risks. Domestic investors, however, continued to provide stability. SIP inflows held firm, ensuring a steady flow of cap-



LOOKING AHEAD. Mid-cap stocks offer relatively better growth potential compared with large-caps, say analysts

ital into equities even during volatile phases. At the same time, the market absorbed significant supply through large IPOs and increased promoter stake-sales.

Multi-asset strategies also found favour in 2025, as gold and silver rallied to multi-year highs. Equity returns were relatively modest, reinforcing the case for diversification.

OPTIMISM FOR 2026

Brokerage houses echo this

measured optimism for 2026.

Equity returns in 2026 will be anchored firmly in earnings growth rather than valuation expansion, said Nilesh Shah, MD, Kotak Mahindra AMC.

Improving credit growth, healthier balance sheets in the financial sector and easing margin pressures are seen as supportive for banks and NBFCs. Consumption-related sectors are also expected to gain traction, aided

by rising incomes, tax reforms and a gradual recovery in rural demand.

Mid-cap stocks are viewed as offering relatively better growth potential compared with large-caps, although brokerages caution that the gap in performance may remain narrow and stock selection will be critical.

"We enter 2026 on a cautiously constructive global macro backdrop that includes expectations of a gradual US Fed easing, benign energy prices, resolution to the Russia-Ukraine war and end of tariff-related uncertainty," Nigudkar added.

Motilal Oswal remains optimistic on the long-term compounding potential of the domestic markets and advised investors to use market volatility as an opportunity to build their portfolio aligned with India's structural growth themes.

Sensex, Nifty end marginally lower ahead of Christmas

Madhu Balaji
Bengaluru

dipped 35.05 points to close at 26,142.10.

GAINERS, LOSERS

On the sectoral front, most ended in the red. Nifty Media ended as the top sectoral gainer, followed by Nifty Realty. Nifty oil & gas, chemicals, and IT emerged as the top sectoral losers.

Among the Nifty 50 constituents, Trent, Shriram Finance, Apollo Hospitals, Bajaj Auto and UltraTech Cement emerged as major gainers, while InterGlobe Aviation, Adani Enterprises, Dr Reddy's Laboratories, Wipro and Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles (TMPV) were major laggards. IT stocks underperformed for the second straight session after the US administration announced changes to the H-1B visa framework, said Gaurav Garg, Research Analyst, Lemon Markets Desk.

Coforge, Persistent Systems, Mphasis, Wipro and LTI Mindtree led the losses. After climbing nearly 396 points intraday, Sensex settled with 116.14 points loss at 85,408.70. Nifty 50

Apollo Hospitals' revamp plan gets bourses' nod

Our Bureau
Chennai

also fulfil the exchange's criteria for listing of such company and also comply with other applicable statutory requirements, it added.

The validity of the "Observation Letter" is for six months from December 23, 2025, within which the scheme shall be submitted to NCLT. The company had earlier told media persons that it expects to complete the restructuring by FY27-end.

In July, Apollo Hospitals announced that its board has given in-principle approval for the spin-off and separate listing of its digital health and pharmacy business units as part of a strategic reorganisation.

Gujarat Kidney and Super Speciality IPO subscribed 5x

Our Bureau
Bengaluru

The initial public offering (IPO) of Gujarat Kidney and Super Speciality saw healthy overall demand, with the issue subscribed 5.21 times overall on the final day of bidding, reflecting strong investor interest in the regional healthcare player.

The retail demand led with 19.04 times subscription. NIIIs also showed solid appetite, subscribing 5.73 times, while the qualified institutional buyers' segment remained relatively subdued at 1.06 times.

IPO participation

	No. of times
QIBs	1.06
Non-institutions	5.73
Retail investors	19.04
Total	5.21

Ahead of the public issue, Gujarat Kidney and Super Speciality mobilised a little over ₹100 crore from anchor investors.

ANCHOR ALLOCATION

The ₹251-crore IPO was priced in the band of ₹108-114 per share, consisting of entirely of a fresh issue of up to 2.2 crore equity shares.

The company will use the proceeds for multiple expansion and consolidation initiatives. These include the proposed acquisition of Parekh's Hospital in Ahmedabad and part-payment of the purchase consideration for the already-acquired Ashwini Medical Centre.

Funds will also be deployed for setting up a new hospital in Vadodara, purchasing robotics equipment for the Vadodara facility, repaying a portion of existing debt, supporting inorganic growth through potential unidentified acquisitions and meeting general corporate expenses.

management exceeding ₹65,000 crore. EAAA focuses on real assets and private credit business strategies.

Its real assets business, with AUM of more than ₹22,000 crore, invests across infrastructure, energy and commercial real estate. The private credit business, with an AUM of more than ₹45,500 crore, offers customised credit solutions to large corporates, through performing private credit and special situations funds.

Embassy Manyata Business Park, spread across 122 acres, and offers 16 million square feet of leasable area and houses 60 tenants with more than 1,00,000 park users.

Retail investors continue to bet big on passive funds

Anjana C Shriram
Chennai

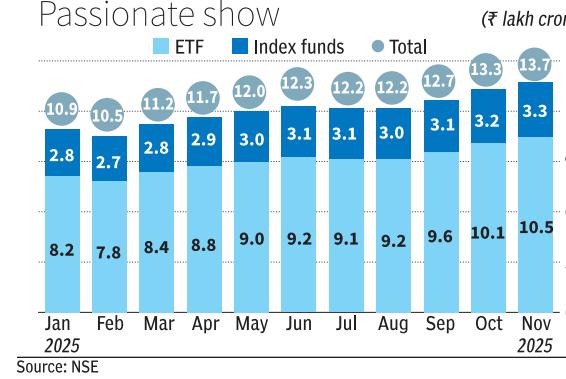
₹3.2 lakh crore in 2025, outpacing the return of Sensex and Nifty that returned about 8-10 per cent YTD.

EQUITY ETFS SIZZLE

A note from Zerodha Fund House says equity ETFs continue to dominate the market, accounting for 25 lakh new folios in the last 12 months. "This shift is characterised by a surge in gold and silver ETFs, which have grown to represent nearly 15 per cent of the total ETF AUM as of November 2025."

According to Prashant Thakkar, President - Retail Strategy, Operations & Technology at LIC Mutual Fund AMC, Gold ETFs saw a staggering 56 per cent year-on-year folio growth by November, driven by global uncertainty.

Perhaps, this explains why trading volumes for ETFs in India have surged from ₹51,000 crore in FY20 to ₹3.83 lakh crore in FY25, an increase of over seven times. As of October, the Indian ETF landscape crossed the ₹10-lakh crore assets under management (AUM) milestone. AUM of index funds, too, jumped 16.4 per cent to



and cost-conscious retail investors are moving toward Index ETFs for large-cap exposure," says Thakkar.

A key driver for this shift is the unprecedented rise in retail engagement, thanks to the increase in education and awareness about ETFs and easier access to digital platforms. As the year winds up, industry participants are hopeful that this trend would continue in 2026 too. "ETFs have structural tailwinds because of low cost, transparency, and convenience of broad market exposure. As awareness and liquid-

ity improve, ETF adoption should continue in 2026 and beyond, especially in index linked categories," says Chintan Haria, Principal - Investment Strategy, ICICI Prudential AMC.

PASSIVES TO RULE 2026 While the demand for ETFs is expected to remain robust, in 2026 passive funds are likely to be a significant portion of core portfolio allocation, says Thakkar.

"Looking ahead to 2026, passive investing is no longer a side bet, it is fast becoming the backbone of

long-term portfolios. AUM has climbed from ₹1.9 lakh crore in 2019 to ₹13.7 lakh crore in 2025, marking a seven-fold rise, while folios have expanded nearly 20-fold to 4.7 crore. The momentum is expected to sustain in 2026, supported by deeper retail participation and growing institutional interest," says Hemen Bhatia, ED and CEO, Angel One AMC.

Radhika Gupta, MD & CEO, Edelweiss MF, says, "We expect gradual but steady traction for factor-based strategies in 2026. As investor understanding improves, factors such as quality, momentum and low volatility are increasingly seen as structured, rule-based alternatives to traditional active and plain-vanilla passive funds. While adoption will be measured rather than aggressive, these strategies are likely to gain acceptance as satellite allocations, especially among informed and long-term investors seeking transparency and disciplined exposure."

"Looking ahead to 2026, passive investing is no longer a side bet, it is fast becoming the backbone of

Nifty 50 Movers

	Close(R)	Pt	PE	Wk%
Shriram Finance Ltd.	973.70	4.88	18.59	1.14
Trent Ltd	4289.60	4.88	94.93	0.80
Maruti Suzuki	1670.00	3.40	35.53	1.84
M&M	3636.70	2.25	29.16	2.70
UltraTech Cement	1176.00	2.24	46.80	1.17
Apollo Hosp	7172.00	2.18	59.65	0.61
TCS	3319.00	2.02	24.17	2.84
HDFC Bank	997.20	2.01	20.40	12.78
Bajaj Auto	9170.00	1.73	30.74	0.85
PowerGrid Corp	268.05	1.04	16.64	1.02
Max HealthCare	1081.40	1.01	77.47	0.67
Coal India	402.30	0.76	14.68	0.77
Adani Ports	1226.30	0.82	14.58	2.95
NestleIndia	1259.70	0.50	32.31	0.76
Bharti Airtel	2123.70	0.48	27.10	4.95
Bharti Elect	400.00	0.47	51.34	1.20
Kotak	2163.70	0.32	23.16	2.67
Eicher Motors	7312.50	0.29	37.27	0.84
Hindalco	864.65	0.19	10.94	1.05
Bajaj Finance	1011.70	0.18	33.91	2.26
Jio Financial Services Ltd.	298.90	0.14	116.46	0.82
Adani Ports	1494.30	0.11	26.96	0.93
SBI Life	2052.40	0.06	82.76	0.76
Hindustan Unilever	40.20	0.00	0.00	0.03
Tech Mahindra	1631.50	-0.21	35.82	0.87
Grasim Ind	2826.			

Regulating academia

Bill to regulate higher education raises autonomy concerns

In the recently concluded Parliament session, the government introduced the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, which seeks to create a single, unified regulatory framework for higher education. The Bill proposes to comprehensively restructure India's higher education governance by subsuming and replacing the existing fragmented regulatory architecture dominated by multiple bodies such as the University Grants Commission (UGC), the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) and other sector-specific regulators.

The Bill proposes setting up a single overarching authority, the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan, supported by separate verticals for standards-setting, accreditation and funding. The stated aim is to simplify regulation, reduce overlaps, and bring coherence to a system criticised for being fragmented, opaque and compliance-heavy. There is much to commend in this intent. A unified umbrella regulator could, in principle, reduce red tape, ensure consistency in standards, and improve accountability across institutions. However, there are a number of provisions in the Bill that require scrutiny and debate. It brings Institutes of National Importance, including the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), the Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) within the ambit of the new regulator. These elite institutions have functioned with a high degree of statutory and academic autonomy, largely insulated from routine regulatory oversight of the UGC or the AICTE. That autonomy has been widely credited as a key factor behind their global standing, strong research output and ability to attract talent.

Although the proposed Bill does not directly amend the appointment processes or governance structures laid down in the IIT and IIM Acts, the new regulator's overriding scope could lead to 'regulatory creep', gradually constraining the discretion of Boards and Senates that have traditionally underpinned the autonomy of these elite institutions. Even if the Bill envisages only "light-touch" supervision, limited to minimum standards, accreditation and system-wide alignment, this could dilute institutional freedom over time. Uniform standards, however well-intentioned, may not always sit easily with institutions whose strength lies precisely in their ability to set benchmarks rather than follow them. Preserving excellence while extending oversight will require unusually careful calibration.

It is, therefore, reassuring that the Bill has been referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee. This provides an opportunity for legislators to examine these issues threadbare, invite comments from academic leaders and experts and assess whether the right balance has been struck between accountability and autonomy. The committee's recommendations should ideally lead to amendments that safeguard the independence of India's premier institutions, even as the broader system benefits from regulatory consolidation.

POCKET



GURBACHAN SINGH

The severity of the problem of very high air quality index (AQI) varies across the country. Parts of the country like the South are better placed or better managed but only in a relative sense. High AQI is a serious problem in India. And, yet, the authorities are not active enough in meaningfully dealing with the issue. Why is this so?

Policymakers are aspiring for high GDP growth, and there is fear that dealing with high AQI and environmental issues can come in the way of boosting growth. Hence, there is near-inaction on the AQI front; there are, however, other reasons also for this.

The fear though, is exaggerated. It is a matter of finding the right solution, which, broadly speaking, involves two aspects. One, dealing with high AQI, especially in the big cities. The other is about meaningfully moving away from the model of continuously expanding big cities. Coming to addressing high AQI, let's focus on the automobile industry as an example; there are other industries and factors that contribute to the problem as well.

In China, the one-time prices of electric vehicles (EVs) are now a little less than those of petrol vehicles, and close to half of the new vehicles produced are EVs. There is a lesson here for India. There should be a big shift to EVs (their indirect contribution to pollution is effectively low). However, the prices of EVs are high in India, and the charging stations are inadequate. All this limits the size of the EV industry, the related economies of scale, and the possible reduction in the prices. But policy measures can help.

Policymakers should meaningfully subsidise EVs, and expand and enable the needed infrastructure. Also, they can simultaneously raise the taxes on petrol/diesel vehicles significantly. This is revenue neutral. It is also about restructuring — not diminishing — the automobile industry in GDP. This should pave the way for lower AQI.

It is true that some of the capacity to manufacture petrol cars can go "waste" with the shift to EVs. While some physical capital can become useless, there can be greater gain in human capital through the reduction in millions of cases of stunted growth of children, who are at present affected by high AQI in their very early years. Their

AQI can be cut without hurting growth

CLEARING THE AIR. Policy push to energise the EV ecosystem and creating new, smaller, well-planned cities should help reduce pollution levels



contribution to GDP at a later stage will be limited if the AQI issue isn't addressed. Delhi alone, for instance, adds about 500 passenger cars every day.

EXPAND SMALLER CITIES
This brings us to the other part of the long-term solution. We have some very large cities, and some with extended regions, like the National Capital Region (NCR). The AQI is high in such places. It is, in several ways, an outcome of the very size of the regions, the large population there, the long commutes, the demolition of small/old buildings, the construction of taller buildings, and the regular expansion and upgrading of general infrastructure. There is a legacy,

The policymakers should meaningfully subsidise EVs, and expand and enable the needed infrastructure

with its implications for AQI and even GDP growth.

High AQI needs to be dealt with in a way that takes care of other important problems as well. There's need for some new urban areas. These can be altogether new cities, or extensions of small cities that are far away from the big ones. It is true that building new urban areas is costly. But this is mainly from the point of cost of construction. In one important way, namely, land it is actually far, far cheaper — and it is by far the major part of the cost of homes, offices, showrooms, schools, colleges and hospitals — in smaller cities. And, the Land Acquisition Act, 2013 has been diluted by many States.

There is scope for using policy to pave the way for building new urban areas. It is about shifting some consumption and production geographically without affecting aggregate GDP growth. The government need not, by and large, build or finance; it simply needs to be an enabler. There can be involvement of

experienced and good real-estate developers who can provide, or advise on providing, an entire ecosystem conducive to habitation in a phased manner in the new urban areas. Gurgaon in the 1980s and 1990s is a case in point.

The suggestion here is for a low-cost solution, which gradually reduces the population (and AQI) burden in big cities. This could, in fact, raise GDP growth.

The AQI in small and new urban areas will anyway be relatively low to begin with. These areas can be planned afresh to take care of clean energy, public transport, general cleanliness, waste disposal, etc. Long commutes, congestion, restructuring, etc., will, therefore, be minimal.

In sum, we don't have to lower economic growth in order to bring down AQI. We just need to develop differently, which we need to do anyway.

The writer is an independent economist. He taught at Ashoka University, ISI (Delhi) and JNU

Why the agri-derivatives market has lost its sheen

The suspension of 7 agri-futures has led to a decline not only in commodity futures turnover, but also in physical delivery

Kushankur Dey

Has the suspension of seven agri-futures since December 2021 eroded the vitality of agri-derivatives? To get some light on this, one needs to examine the performance of agri-derivatives after the suspension of liquid agri-futures.

The SEBI annual reports from 2021-22 to 2024-25 reveal commodity futures turnover declined from ₹72.16 lakh crore in 2021-22 to ₹71.41 lakh crore in 2024-25 — a negative 0.26 per cent CAGR (see Table). The notional turnover in agri-derivatives was ₹1.5 lakh crore in 2024-25, with a 28.5 per cent decline from 2023-24, and the NCDEX reported a decrease in turnover from ₹4.56 lakh crore in 2020-21 to ₹1.35 lakh crore in 2024-25 — with a negative 19.24 per cent CAGR.

MINISCULE SHARE
Commodity options (notional) trade turnover reached ₹5.08 crore in 2024-25 from ₹28.10 lakh crore in 2021-22 with a 106.22 per cent CAGR. However, the NCDEX reported a minuscule share in commodity options turnover, indicating these have not yet gained significant traction. The product-wise share of notional turnover shows that agri-commodities accounted for only 0.3 per cent in 2024-25, down from 0.8 per cent in 2023-24, while energy and bullion had a significant share of the turnover.

Second, among the traded futures, guar gum (2.2 per cent), coriander (2.7 per cent), castor seed (3.8 per cent), guar seed (4.1 per cent), cottonseed

Turnover of commodity derivatives (₹ crore)

	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	CAGR %
MCX					
Futures	67,53,928	60,43,084	49,87,564	70,05,485	0.9
Options	20,27,830	87,37,483	2,26,67,916	4,95,12,692	122.3
BSE					
Futures	4,039	3,433	5	5	-81.2
Options	7,65,036	4,933	31	275	-86.2
NCDEX					
Futures	4,56,693	2,04,920	2,06,102	1,35,621	-26.2
Options	487	1,989	10	12,427	124.8
NSE					
Futures	2,273	14	5,429	250	-42.4
Options	17,472	17,741	1,96,270	13,05,206	194.0
Total					
Futures	72,16,933	62,51,451	51,99,100	71,41,361	-0.3
Options (notional)	28,10,825	87,62,146	2,28,64,227	5,08,30,600	106.2

Source: Analysed from the SEBI Annual Reports, 2021-22 to 2024-25

oilcake, and cottonseed (10.3 per cent) emerged as upward-moving futures contracts. In comparison, turmeric (-22.5 per cent) and jeera (-4.6 per cent) witnessed a decline in futures prices.

The lack of the 'contango' market phenomenon and liquidity in agri-futures can be attributed to the suspension of active contracts — namely soybean, refined soy oil, chana, crude palm oil, and rapeseed-mustard oil complex — which contributed the most to the daily average traded volume and open interest value between 2018-19 and 2019-20.

Third, the proportionate share of total turnover for farmer-producer

organisations fell to 0.2 per cent of total turnover in 2024-25, down from 0.5 per cent in 2023-24.

Additionally, the share of value chain partners and hedgers decreased from 8.1 per cent to 7.3 per cent in the corresponding periods. While the proprietary trades increased 43.7 per cent from 39.3 per cent in the given period, clients' participation in trade declined significantly, from 52.3 per cent in 2019-20 and 55.5 per cent in 2018-19 to less than 50 per cent in 2024-25. The lower participation of clients reduced the breadth and depth of the agri-derivatives market.

Fourth, the physical delivery in agri-

was reported 1.7 lakh tonnes in 2024-25 compared to 2 lakh tonnes in 2023-24, with major deliveries coming from castor seed (56,620 tonnes), cotton seed oilcake (42,610 tonnes), guar seed (30,195 tonnes), and coriander (13,810 tonnes). While these data indicate the convergence of futures and spot prices at the contract's expiry, the reduced delivery volume, implying higher closed-out (squared-off) positions or cash-settled futures contracts, raises concerns for the agri-derivative market depth.

REAL-TIME PRICE INFO
Fifth, in the absence of a liquid or thickly traded agricultural derivatives market, value chain actors have to rely on national spot and international agricultural derivatives markets to inform their investment, production, and trading decisions. In other words, the purpose of (agri) commodity exchanges remains elusive if the market does not provide real-time price information and risk management platform to diverse and discursive actors.

In sum, the government, in consultation with the regulator, the Commodity Derivatives Advisory Committee, and value chain actors, must revisit the agri-derivatives microstructure, including contract specifications, margin requirements, transaction fees, and membership eligibility criteria, and consider revoking the suspension to restore the vitality of agri-futures.

Dey is an Associate Professor, IIM Lucknow. Views are personal

• LETTERS TO EDITOR Send your letters by email to bleditor@thehindu.co.in or by post to 'Letters to the Editor', The Hindu Business Line, Kasturi Buildings, 859-860, Anna Salai, Chennai 600002.

Floating loan asymmetry

Floating-rate housing loans are premised on the idea of shared movement with policy rates. Borrowers consent to this structure at inception, accepting automatic increases in EMIs when rates rise. However, when rates fall, the benefit is not transmitted with the same ease: borrowers are required to exercise a fresh option and pay a conversion fee to access lower EMIs. This asymmetry merits reflection. The lender-borrower relationship is not one of equal bargaining power, and disclosure alone may not ensure

substantive fairness. While lenders are entitled to recover legitimate administrative costs, a framework where downside operates automatically while upside is conditional appears tilted. The regulator may consider revisiting whether greater symmetry in rate transmission would better protect borrowers without undermining financial stability.

Gopalaswamy J

Chennai

Trust builds savings

This refers to "Bankers' dilemma"

(December 24). A key reason for weak deposit growth is the lack of clarity among savers about which savings options can protect returns during rising inflation. This has reduced confidence in traditional bank deposits. Banks must rebuild trust by focusing on customer benefits, not profit alone. Simple financial awareness programmes for new investors, incentives for regular savings, and flexible fixed deposit schemes can encourage deposits.

Digital tools such as auto-saving features can also support this effort. Stronger trust will help improve deposits and sustain credit growth.

S Balasubramanian
Villupuram, TN

New securities code

Apropos the editorial 'Market monitor' (December 24), the proposed Securities Markets Code, 2025 aims to consolidate overlapping laws into a single, clearer framework. This is welcome in principle. Yet, major delays in probing stock market scams — sometimes stretching years — erode investor confidence. Merging laws alone will not suffice. We must

strengthen enforcement. SEBI needs more investigators and forensic experts for faster probes. Mandatory timelines for completing investigations in serious cases, say within 18 months, would help. Greater use of technology for surveillance and anonymous whistle-blower channels can deter manipulation early. A robust grievance redressal system, with time-bound resolution at stock exchanges and SEBI, will further build trust.

M Barathi
Bengaluru

Refurbishing RBI data

A panel can be formed to examine this issue

Manas R Das

In a recent speech, Poonam Gupta, RBI Deputy Governor, hailed the central bank as "not just an important source, but at times the only source for comprehensive data..." which has been traditionally true.

Echoing the global recognition of data as "public good," she called for "regularly updating and revising the existing data series as well as constructing new ones" in sync with ongoing economic transformations.

Here are some changes that the RBI can look at to expand its banking sector data base.

Banks, being financial intermediaries and the backbone of the payments system, generate humongous data - high frequency to annual. Banks transmit a lot of data to the RBI (besides other regulators) in various formats ('Returns') including some which are mandatory by various laws.

Nevertheless, the Balance Sheets of banks and 'Notes on Account' ('Notes'), which are prepared or vetted by the RBI-approved auditors, contain considerable quantitative and qualitative data. Over several years, the RBI has been publishing some of these data basically through its annual publication titled 'Statistical Tables Relating To Banks In India (STRBI)', released usually in December.

As STRBI provides time series data for individual Scheduled Commercial Banks (SCBs) and bank groups in one place, that too with nil cost and high reliability, it is extremely useful for banking research.

Keeping in view (a) that banks finish their Annual General Meetings (AGMs) by September-end, (b) increasing electronification of data transmission and (c) submission of detailed annual accounts to the RBI by banks much before their AGMs, can RBI advance the STRBI publication to October-end?

Alternatively, the RBI may consider releasing STRBI in three parts: first, for the public sector banks, then for the private banks and finally, for the foreign banks in India.

At present, the 'Notes' contains numerous crucial data which is not fully captured in STRBI. These include Liquidity Coverage Ratio, Net Stable Funding Ratio, Transfer to the Depositor Education and Awareness Fund, penalties levied, cross-selling income, deposit insurance coverage and premium paid, and



RESERVE BANK. Revamping data structure GETTY IMAGES

customer complaints.

Some data needs update, e.g., Unclaimed Deposits (in 'Other Tables' of STRBI) which has topical significance.

Similarly, the ambit of 'Industry-wise Gross Bank Credit of SCBs' necessitates further disaggregation to accommodate new-age industries.

CO-OP BANK DATA

In respect of the Urban Co-operative Banks (UCBs), data presented in 'Primary (Urban) Co-operative Banks Outlook,' which is released in December, lags by one year.

This could be due to the large numbers of UCBs with many not finalising their annual accounts on time. However, since the RBI is in the course of preparing a Discussion Paper on Licensing Framework for new UCBs, this aspect may also be examined therein.

Banking data immensely supports policy-making in the financial and real sectors. As an 'official' source, the RBI will continue to remain paramount despite emergence of 'alternative' sources.

So the RBI must constitute an internal committee to discuss the expansion and changes in its entire banking database.

This may necessitate cooperation from banks, the data suppliers as well as prominent end-users. Inputs from select institutional and individual researchers on banking may also be invited.

Data is a means to an end; the end is to do practical policy-oriented research by using data for which commercial banks, in particular, should augment their 'banking' (as distinguished from 'economic') research capacity which will help themselves and the country as well.

The writer is a former Assistant General Manager (Economist), SBI. Views expressed are personal



ADITYA SINHA

India's long and uneven experience with spatial industrial policy has left policymakers wary of zoning as a development tool. Special Economic Zones (SEZs), launched under the SEZ Act of 2005, promised export-led industrialisation, foreign investment, and regional transformation.

What they largely delivered instead were enclaves. They are/were islands of activity with weak spillovers, high land under-utilisation, and declining credibility once fiscal incentives eroded.

Against this backdrop, Andhra Pradesh's decision to restructure the State into three large Economic Development Zones — North Coastal (Visakhapatnam), Central Coastal (Amaravati) and Rayalaseema (Tirupati) — marks a meaningful departure. The question is not whether this resembles SEZs. It does not. The real question is whether it corrects the structural reasons zones failed in India in the first place.

Those failures can be analytically grouped into three categories — economic design failure, institutional failure, and political-economy failure.

Indian SEZs were economically fragile because they were designed as incentive-driven enclaves, not productivity-driven ecosystems. Their competitiveness relied disproportionately on tax holidays (100 per cent income tax exemption for five years, followed by partial exemptions), duty-free imports, and regulatory exemptions.

Once WTO disciplines on export subsidies tightened and domestic policy introduced sunset clauses, the core value proposition collapsed. Firms exited, and zones hollowed out.

Critically, SEZs were also too small. Most Indian SEZs resemble industrial estates, hundreds or a few thousand hectares at best.

By contrast, successful international zones functioned at city or metropolitan scale, allowing labour markets, supplier networks, housing, logistics, and services to co-evolve.

Shenzhen Special Economic Zone was competitive, not because of tax exemptions alone. It worked because it operated as an integrated urban-industrial system linked to ports, global markets, and dense domestic supply chains.

Andhra Pradesh's zoning model implicitly acknowledges this scale problem. These are not fenced estates but sub-state economic regions, each with a differentiated production logic.

Port-led industry in the North Coastal Zone, agro-processing and logistics in the Central Coastal Zone, and resource-linked renewables and horticulture in Rayalaseema.

This matters because agglomeration economies, knowledge spillovers, labour pooling, supplier specialisation, only



AP's recast of SEZ concept holds promise

POLITICAL ECONOMY. Zones became vehicles for land monetisation rather than industrial upgrading. Andhra Pradesh moots a different governance model

emerge beyond a certain spatial and economic threshold.

FRAGMENTED AUTHORITY

The second failure of Indian SEZs was institutional. Despite the rhetoric of "single-window clearance," SEZ developers and units faced fragmented authority across central ministries, state departments, and local agencies.

Approvals were sequential, not parallel.

Powers were dispersed. Accountability was diffused. Empirically, this showed up in long gestation periods, repeated deadline extensions, and a striking fact. By the mid-2010s, less than 40 per cent of notified SEZ land was actually utilised, with utilisation falling over time.

Land governance compounded the problem. SEZ rules imposed rigid contiguity and minimum-area requirements, even for services-oriented zones where vertical development would have been more efficient.

Exit and repurposing were difficult. Vacant land became speculative ballast rather than productive capital.

Andhra Pradesh's proposed architecture directly targets these coordination failures. Each zone will have a dedicated CEO with delegated financial and administrative powers, including land allocation and project

Shenzhen Special Economic Zone was competitive, not because of tax exemptions alone. It worked because it operated as an integrated urban-industrial system

clearances, supported by zonal committees of regional ministers and legislators. A Chief Minister-chairing state steering committee provides vertical integration.

It is an attempt to collapse fragmented authority into a single decision locus per zone, something SEZs conspicuously lacked. If implemented credibly, it could reduce transaction costs, accelerate project timelines, and, crucially, make land a flexible input rather than a sunk political asset.

Equally important is policy credibility. Indian SEZs suffered from repeated rule changes, tax withdrawals (MAT, DDT), shifting interpretations of domestic tariff area sales, and inconsistencies between trade, tax, and industrial policies. Andhra Pradesh's collaboration with NITI Aayog and the Government of Singapore on zone-specific vision plans functions as a non-fiscal commitment device.

Perhaps the deepest failure of Indian SEZs was political-economic. Zones became vehicles for land monetisation rather than industrial upgrading. Developers internalised land rents, while the costs of infrastructure and adjustment were socialised. Once land was acquired and incentives captured, there was little pressure to generate spillovers into surrounding regions.

This is why empirical studies consistently find weak or non-existent SEZ spillovers in India, in contrast to East Asian cases where local governments competed on performance and were rewarded for growth outcomes.

AP MODEL

Andhra Pradesh's model alters this incentive structure in two ways. First,

zones are embedded within the State's ordinary political geography, not carved out as exceptional jurisdictions. Under-performance cannot be hidden behind a legal fence. Second, zonal outcomes become politically attributable to identifiable authorities: zonal CEOs, regional ministers, and ultimately the Chief Minister.

This raises the reputational and political cost of failure. It does not eliminate rent-seeking risks, but it changes the calculus, i.e., extracting rents without delivering growth becomes electorally and administratively visible.

India has not failed to replicate Shenzhen because it lacks ambition or capital. It has failed because it attempted to copy the instrument (zones) without replicating the underlying governance logic: scale, administrative authority, credible commitment, and performance-linked accountability.

Andhra Pradesh's experiment is not a Shenzhen replica. It cannot reproduce China's cadre promotion system or its unitary state capacity. What it does test, however, is whether India can approximate the functional equivalents of those mechanisms within a democratic, federal system.

If this works, then Andhra Pradesh may demonstrate that zoning can work without fiscal exceptionalism. If not, it will confirm that India's binding constraint lies deeper, in land markets, bureaucratic incentives, and political risk tolerance. Either way, this is a rare case where zoning is being used not as a tax instrument, but as a governance experiment. That alone makes it worth watching closely.

Sinha writes on macroeconomic and geopolitical issues

thehindu businessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

December 25, 2005

Govt will address India Inc's concerns over tax burden: PM

The Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, has promised to address, over the next year, the concerns voiced by corporate India over the high direct tax burden.

SCI consortium lowest bidder for Petronet LNG deal

The consortium comprising state-owned Shipping Corporation of India (SCI) and three Japanese shipping lines Mitsui O.S.K Lines, NYK Line and K Line is set to win the Rs 3,200 crore deal from Petronet LNG Ltd to haul additional quantities of LNG cargo from Ras Gas in Qatar to its expanded terminal at Dahej in Gujarat.

Have licence to play music

If you are planning to celebrate this festive season at one of the hotels or pubs offering customised packages for musical gala nights, it might just be prudent to check if the owners of the venue have paid up a licence fee to play music. For Phonographic Performance Ltd (PPL), which has 127 member music companies, is planning to crack down on those restaurants that do not pay the fee.

US economy expands at fastest pace in years

Molly Smith

The US economy expanded in the third quarter at the fastest pace in two years, bolstered by resilient consumer and business spending and calmer trade policies.

Inflation-adjusted gross domestic product, which measures the value of goods and services produced in the US, increased at a 4.3 per cent annualized pace, a Bureau of Economic Analysis report showed Tuesday. That was higher than all but one estimate in a Bloomberg survey and followed 3.8 per cent growth in the prior period.

The BEA was originally due to publish an advance estimate of GDP on

October 30 but the report was cancelled due to the government shutdown. The agency typically releases three estimates of quarterly growth — fine-tuning its projections as more data comes in — but it will only release two for the period leading up to the longest shutdown on record.

The delayed report card shows the economy maintained momentum through the middle of the year as consumers powered ahead and the most punitive of President Donald Trump's tariffs were rolled back. While the shutdown is expected to weigh on fourth-quarter growth, economists expect a modest rebound in 2016 when households receive tax refunds and an anticipated Supreme Court ruling may strike down Trump's sweeping global tariffs.

The Federal Reserve's latest projections echo that sentiment, with Chair Jerome Powell citing supportive



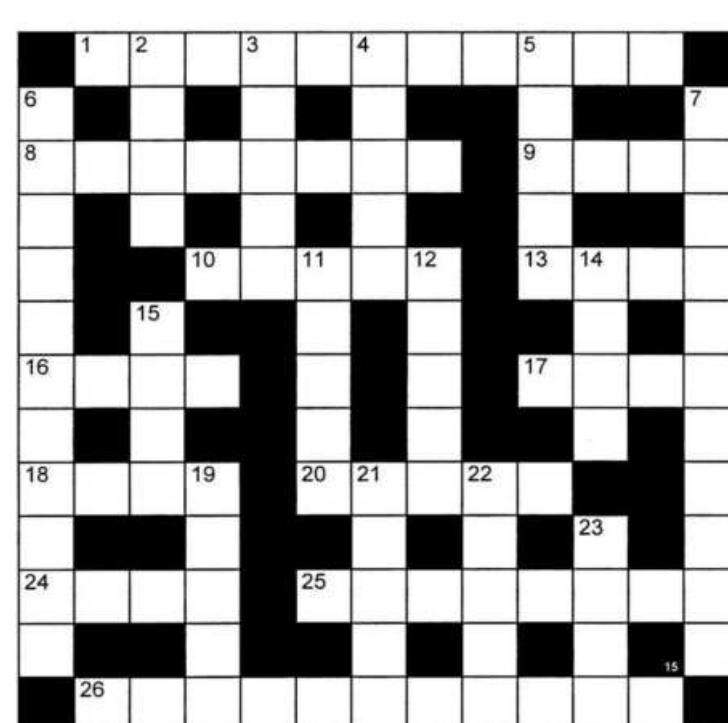
US ECONOMY. Spending spike REUTERS

fiscal policy, spending on AI data centers and continued household consumption as reasons for the central bank's forecast for faster growth next year. Policymakers are projecting just one interest-rate cut in 2016 after three straight reductions to end this year.

Part of the reason for some officials' hesitation to lower borrowing costs much more is because inflation remains above their 2 per cent target.

Consumer spending — the main growth engine of the economy — advanced at a 3.5 per cent annualized pace. That reflected solid outlays on services, including health care and international travel. Spending on motor vehicles fell. BLOOMBERG

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2853



EASY

ACROSS

- 01. Bed-cover (11)
- 08. Current pulling below surface (8)
- 09. Opening in the skin (4)
- 10. Put one off (5)
- 13. The orient (4)
- 16. For all time (4)
- 17. At one time (4)
- 18. Final judgment, death (4)
- 20. Lucid, unfogged (5)
- 24. Show boredom, tiredness (4)
- 25. Washing-place (8)

DOWN

- 02. Price bookmaker offers (4)
- 03. Look after (5)
- 04. Bring into the mind (5)
- 05. Plenty (5)
- 06. Dates for rent, interest payments (7-4)
- 07. Orchestral timpani (11)
- 11. Pick-me-up, gin mixer (5)
- 12. Awaken (5)
- 14. Female related (4)
- 15. Chief male character (4)
- 19. Food from heaven (5)
- 21. Acquire knowledge (5)
- 22. Was painful (5)
- 23. Chief, governor (4)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

- 01. It is put on bed to be an antidote to suffering, one hears (11)
- 08. Current that may give one a hitch below the surface (8)
- 09. Closely study what may exude perspiration (4)
- 10. Stop one doing what one has half made up one's mind to do (5)
- 13. Direction to take seat and make the first third (4)
- 16. Hold it, Steve - right? Any time! (4)
- 17. At some time somebody indefinite holds first of ceremonies (4)
- 18. When the way one feels has returned, pronounce judgment (4)
- 20. Pass one through the bank, it's quite plain (5)
- 24. Move, like a boat, north - what a bore! (4)
- 25. Salon Beau Nash may have known where one can come clean (8)
- 26. Studying a bit of office furniture like a lectern (7-4)

DOWN

- 02. Up Derby and steeplechase front-runners for this price (4)
- 03. Hold baby up in one's runabout (5)
- 04. Stimulate memory of woman about to give the go-ahead (5)
- 05. A bit to try with the top off is more than enough (5)
- 06. Six-hour periods allotted for paying interest? (7-4)
- 07. They may take a beating, but don't get steamed up (11)
- 11. Before sol-fa is scaled, it should do one good (5)
- 12. It may excite us to be surrounded by fish-eggs (5)
- 14. Old gossip who addressed Mum as Sis? (4)
- 15. Principal man gives the girl a ring (5)
- 19. Girl taken in by Mother finds the food heavenly (5)
- 21. Come to hear of pounds to get by working for it (5)
- 22. At length it proved painful (5)
- 23. Stud raised by the man at the top (4)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2852

ACROSS 1. Confirms 4. Thus 8. Let 9. Balsa 10. Mar 11. Unshorn 12. Those 13. Flight decks 17. Burst 18. Maximum 20. Ewe 21. Units 22. Rat 23. Tote 24. Recently

DOWN 1. Colour 2. Notes 3. Melon 5. Hammock 6. Street 7. Battleaxes 9. Brought out 14. Largest 15. Object 16. Smithy 18. Maize 19. Merit

QUICKLY.

Copper near \$12,300 on US GDP growth, weak \$



Copper advanced for a sixth straight session to an all-time high close of \$12,300 on Wednesday as robust US economic growth boosted demand prospects and a weaker dollar supported prices. Benchmark three-month copper on the LME was up 1.3 per cent at \$12,218 a tonne. REUTERS

Palm oil muted by firmer ringgit

Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian palm oil futures traded flat as a firmer ringgit weighed on the market, though the currency pressure was offset by stronger crude oil prices. The benchmark palm oil contract for March delivery on the BMD shed 1 ringgit to 4,035 ringgit (\$998.02) a tonne. REUTERS

Crude oil rises for 6th session on US data

London: Crude oil prices rose slightly for a sixth day supported by robust US economic growth and the risk of supply disruptions from Venezuela and Russia, though prices were on course for their steepest annual decline since 2020. Brent crude futures climbed 16 cents to \$62.54 a barrel by 1222 GMT, while US WTI added 23 cents to \$58.61. REUTERS

'La Nina persists in tropical Pacific; negative IOD has ended'

Srikrishnan PC
Chennai

The La Nina weather phenomenon continues in the tropical Pacific while the negative Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) has ended, the Australian Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) said on Tuesday.

"The latest relative Niño3.4 SST index value for the week ending December 21, 2025, is -0.91 °C. Sustained values below -0.80 °C are consistent with a La Nina pattern. Weekly values of the relative Niño3.4 index have been fluctuating around the La Niña threshold since mid-to-late September," the BoM said in its latest climate driver update.

It said its model currently predicts that tropical Pacific Ocean temperatures are

Palladium tops \$2,300/oz, silver \$72 as gold holds near \$4,500/oz

FRESH VOLATILITY. Fears of sanction against Venezuelan oil tankers add to market worries

Subramani Ra Mancombu
Chennai

Silver exceeded \$72 an ounce on Wednesday, even as platinum surged past \$2,350. Palladium shed its gains, while gold hovered near \$4,500 an ounce after topping the mark in early trade.

The precious metals complex gained further as escalating tensions over Venezuela added to the market worries, apart from fears of further US Fed rate cuts and lack of confidence in the dollar.

US President Donald Trump announced that Washington would impose a blockade on sanctioned oil tankers entering and leaving Venezuela. This puts at risk around 6,00,000 barrels a day of oil exports, the majority of which goes to China.

SILVER STRESSED

Trump is also putting pressure on Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro amid a build-up of defence forces. US inflation data, due on Thursday, too, kept the market ticking higher as it could result in a further easing of Fed rates. Traders expect a less than 0.25 per cent Fed rate cut in January.

The precious metal market is now seeing silver, platinum and palladium move higher as gold has turned price.

Traders say silver is also under stress as the physical shortage is being felt more acutely now, particularly concerning delivery from London.

This week, platinum, in particular, saw prices rising by about 20 per cent to cross the \$2,350-an-ounce mark from \$1,975 during the weekend. However, it has turned volatile after reaching



BEDAZZLING RETURNS. Platinum has gained over 160% this year, while silver has increased by 150%. Palladium has increased by 123% and gold over 71%

ing the milestone.

As of 1930 hours IST, gold ruled at \$4,486.70 an ounce. Gold futures on the COMEX, expiring in February, were \$4,516 an ounce. On the MCX, gold February contracts ended the first session at ₹1,38,225 per 10 g. In the Mumbai spot market, gold ended at ₹1,36,627 per 10 g. Gold has gained ₹4,000 in the past week.

SILVER AT \$100/OZ?

Silver climbed to \$72.05 an ounce, and futures on the COMEX, due for delivery in March, were quoted at \$72.05. However, in the Shanghai Futures Exchange, silver futures rose to \$78.49 an ounce (17,714 Chinese yuan).

On the MCX, silver March contracts ruled at ₹223,667 a kg. In the Mumbai spot market, it closed at ₹218,983 a kg. Silver has gained over ₹18,000 a kg over the past week.

On social media, industry

experts said silver could soar to \$100 an ounce. Its market cap exceeded that of Apple Inc at \$4,070 trillion. It will likely top Nvidia soon, whose market cap is \$4,606 trillion.

Platinum soared to \$2,377 an ounce before easing to \$2,355 an ounce. Palladium, which rose to a three-year high of \$1,932.7 an ounce on Tuesday, retracted to \$1,835.

Platinum has gained over 160 per cent this year, while silver has increased by 150 per cent. Palladium has increased by 123 per cent and gold over 71 per cent.

OUTLOOK POSITIVE

Renisha Chainani, Head of Research at Augmont, said, "I think it's time to book profits in silver as the rally seems overdone. We can see a price retracement up to \$68 (-₹21,000). But, if silver continues its bullish momentum, the next target is ₹75 (₹235,000)."

ING Think said it was positive on its gold outlook, with macro tailwinds and fundamentals pointing to further upside next year.

"We expect gold prices to reach new record highs in 2026. The downside should be limited as any weakness will likely attract renewed interest from both retail and institutional buyers," it said.

On silver, it said the investor appetite remained strong as silver-backed ETFs continue to attract inflows.

"The outlook remains constructive into 2026, supported by robust industrial demand from solar PV installations and battery technologies, alongside sustained investment flows," said ING Think.

Meanwhile, ICICI said it was changing its gold exchange-traded fund benchmark from the London Bullion Market Association (LBMA) AM fixing price to domestic prices.

CCI bought 50 lakh bales of cotton at MSP in 2025-26

Vishwanath Kulkarni
Bengaluru

The state-run Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) has procured about 50 lakh bales (of 170 kg) of the natural fibre crop at minimum support price (MSP) in the current 2025-26 season.

The MSP purchases this season are higher by about 60 per cent over the 31 lakh bales purchased till mid-December last year.

"We have procured about 50 lakh bales, out of the arrivals of 118 lakh bales. The daily procurement is now more than 2 lakh bales," said Lalit Kumar Gupta, Chairman and Managing Director, CCI.

Per the CCI, the progressive purchase of raw cotton till December 19 was 230.23 lakh quintals, valued at ₹18,238 crore. The bulk of these purchases has been made in Telangana and Maharashtra.

In Telangana, about 93.87 lakh quintals of cotton, valued at ₹7,445 crore, have been purchased, while in Maharashtra the CCI purchased

STRONG BUYING

Purchases are up by about 60% over the corresponding period a year ago

about 47.69 lakh quintals, valued at ₹3,779 crore.

LENDING STABILITY

In Karnataka, 21.49 lakh quintals, valued at ₹1,708 crore, has been procured by the CCI, while in Gujarat the purchased quantity stood at 19.23 lakh quintals, valued at ₹1,546 crore.

In Andhra Pradesh, the procured quantity is valued at ₹972 crore, while in Rajasthan it was ₹848 crore so far. In Haryana, the CCI has purchased cotton valued at ₹484 crore, while in Odisha it was ₹315 crore and Punjab ₹103 crore, per the data on the CCI website.

The CCI's market intervention has lent stability to cotton prices, which have firmed up from the levels at the start of the season, but are still below the MSP.

The Centre has announced a MSP of ₹7,710 per

quintal for the medium staple cotton and ₹8,110 for the long staple cotton for the 2025-26 season.

"Quality raw cotton prices, which were hovering around ₹7,200-7,300 per quintal at the start of the season, are now hovering around ₹7,800 levels in private trade at Raichur, Karnataka," said Ramanuj Das Boob, a sourcing agent.

Similarly, the pressed cotton prices have moved up by ₹2,000-2,500 per candy (of 356 kg) to around ₹54,000. Farmers prefer to sell to CCI as they are offering higher prices compared to the market price, he said.

Lower acreage, coupled with adverse weather, has shrunk the cotton crop this year. Also, the excess and unseasonal rain have impacted quality across almost all growing States.

Per the Agriculture Ministry's first advance estimates, cotton crop for 2025-26 is projected slightly lower at 292.15 lakh bales (297.24 lakh bales).

Cotton imports are currently duty-free till the end of this year.

Wait for copper futures to exceed ₹1,170 before going long

Akhil Nallamuthu
bl. research bureau

Copper futures have gained about 3.5 per cent so far this week. The December contract is now trading at ₹1,152 (per kg) and the January contract is at ₹1,166.

COMMODITY CALL.

Both contracts have gained about 11 per cent

each so far in December.

Since the December series is nearing expiry, we shall consider the January contract for analysis and trade recommendation. The contract has a resistance ahead at ₹1,170.

If the contract breaks out of the barrier at ₹1,170, it could move further higher to ₹1,245, a potential hurdle. A breakout of this could lift the contract to ₹1,340.

On the other hand, if the price declines, it could find

support at ₹1,100. Subsequent support is at ₹1,060. Overall, the uptrend remains strong and the likelihood of the resistance at ₹1,170 being breached is high.

TRADE STRATEGY

Traders can wait for the copper futures (January) to surpass ₹1,170 before buying. Go long after a breakout with a stop-loss at ₹1,100. When the contract rises to ₹1,245, raise the stop-loss to ₹1,220. Book profits at ₹1,340.

Guatemala crop loss boosts India's cardamom export prospects for Ramadan

V Sajeew Kumar
Kochi

Failure of Guatemala's cardamom crop has rekindled the hopes of Indian exporters of dispatching more overseas shipments, especially to the Gulf markets for the coming Ramadan season.

The emerging situation leaves India with good scope to export more quantity with a record shipment of 12,000-14,000 tonnes, industry sources said.

Guatemala's production, according to SB Prabhakar, a cardamom planter in Idukki, is expected to be around 17,000 tonnes this season against 14,000 tonnes.

In normal years, the usual production is around 40,000-50,000 tonnes. As replanting has not been undertaken in the wake of the drought last



year, the production next year is likely to be around 22,000 tonnes.

Meanwhile, the picking

season in many growing regions in Idukki is on, and there will be sporadic pickings till March 2026. The calendar year 2025 should see auction arrivals to be in the range of 30,000-31,000 tonnes, with average prices ruling at ₹2,520 per kg.

With La Nina conditions, the sector is expecting good

mand for cardamom for Gahwa coffee is at its highest, he said, adding that exporting 12,000-14,000 tonnes would be a significant jump from the average 6,000-8,000 tonnes.

The Middle East market is currently less price-sensitive and more "availability-sensitive"—they need the greenest, largest pods for the festive season and are willing to pay the premium to secure Indian stocks over the missing Guatemalan supply.

The Indian 8 mm cardamom is currently quoted around ₹35/kg.

SKM Dhanavanthan, a Bodinayakanur based exporter, said high-volume arrivals in the auctions have not compromised quality and the current crop meets stringent international standards, sustaining robust demand.

FEED report flags gaps in co-operatives, digital access for marginal farmers

Our Bureau
Mangaluru

A report, 'State of Marginal Farmers in India 2025', has called for a contemplative pause to acknowledge agrarian struggles from the margins. It also issued a call to modernise governance, integrate value chains and reimagine cooperative structures to make them more inclusive.

The report was launched by the Forum of Enterprises for Equitable Development (FEED) to mark *Kisan Diwas* on December 23. It is based on surveys conducted across Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tripura and Uttarakhand.

A statement said marginal farmers constitute nearly 60-70 per cent of India's agricultural households, yet remain



societies (PACS), the report said they are increasingly functioning as broader rural service hubs, rather than just credit providers.

Across States, PACS are supporting input supply, enabling procurement and marketing, distributing essential commodities through the public distribution system, and facilitating access to digital and public services. States where PACS operate as integrated service centres tend to see better outcomes for marginal farmers, it said.

ROLE OF PACS Mentioning that co-operatives work when access exists, the report said around 45 per cent of co-operative-linked marginal farmers reported an increase in household income, and about 42 per cent reported improvements in crop yields.

On the evolving role of primary agricultural credit

High density apple farming boosts Uttarakhand farmers' income

Our Bureau
Mangaluru

High-density apple farming under 'Project Unnati Apple' has helped a farmer from Chatra village of Uttarakhand improve his income. This development highlights the role of modern agricultural practices in improving farmers' livelihoods as the country celebrated National Kisan Day on December 23.

Project Unnati is an initiative supported by Anandana-The Coca-Cola India Foundation, in partnership with Indo-Dutch Horticulture Technologies.

FARMER'S JOURNEY A media statement said that Surendar Singh Rawat from the hill village of Chatra in

Uttarakhand, who runs a small grocery shop in nearby Hanoli, tends to an apple orchard that has quietly transformed his family's future.

He learned about Project Unnati Apple in 2021, and the programme introduced him to high-density apple farming, a method that enables fruiting in the first year.

The family adopted chemical-free and sustainable farming practices, supported by hands-on training and continuous handholding.

Over time, the orchard began to reflect those efforts with healthy plants, uniform growth and strong yields, the statement said.

Quoting Rawat, the statement said that this year he expected to earn between ₹2.5 and ₹3 lakh from the orchard.

Mustard area up 4.3% as of Dec 15

Our Bureau
Mangaluru

The all-India mustard acreage has been estimated around 84.67 lakh hectares (lh) till December 15, 2025, against 81.16 lh in the corresponding period a year ago, a growth of around 4.32 per cent.

According to the third report of the 'Mustard Crop Monitoring Study for the Rabi Season 2025-26', prepared by Agriwatch, States such as Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana and West Bengal showed significant expansion during the period.

The Solvent Extractors' Association of India (SEA) has engaged Agriwatch as the official agency for the rapemustard crop survey for 2025-26.

According to the report, the overall condition is normal and favourable conditions through November and the first fortnight of December allowed the crop to recover. At present, the crop is 45-60 days old

QUICKLY.

Select Group buys ₹125 cr property in South Delhi

Bengaluru: Real estate developer Select Group has acquired a high-value residential property in Delhi's Westend locality for ₹125 crore. The low-density residential neighbourhood attracts HNIs, diplomats, and corporate buyers in South Delhi. OUR BUREAU

Centre launches official logo of Repairability Index

New Delhi: The Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution unveiled the official logo of the Repairability Index during the inaugural session of the National Consumer Day 2025 celebrations here. The unveiling of the logo marks a significant milestone in India's consumer protection and sustainability agenda, Pralhad Joshi, Minister of Consumer Affairs, said, adding that the initiative seeks to operationalise the "Right to Repair" framework developed by the Department of Consumer Affairs. OUR BUREAU

'To offset India-US ties, China trying to get closer with New Delhi'

STRATEGIC MOVE. US Congress report says China is using thaw along LAC to get close to its neighbour

Dalip Singh
New Delhi

Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit.

CHINA'S OBJECTIVE

According to the report, Beijing "probably seeks to capitalise on decreased tension along the LAC" to stabilise ties with India and limit the strengthening of US-India relations. However, it added that India is likely to remain cautious about China's actions and intentions.

"Continued mutual distrust and other irritants almost certainly limit the bilateral relationship," the report said.

It also noted the role of China's Western Theater Command, which is responsible for any potential conflict with India, border interactions with Central Asian countries, and internal se-



CAREFUL APPROACH. India is likely to remain cautious about China's actions and intentions

curity challenges in Tibet and Xinjiang.

The command includes the 76th and 77th Group Armies, ground forces under the Xinjiang and Xizang Military Districts, three People's Liberation Army Air Force bases, and two People's Liberation Army Rocket Force bases.

Outlining China's broader

strategic objectives, the report said Beijing's national strategy aims to achieve "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" by 2049 — somewhat akin to India's vision of becoming Viksit Bharat by 2047. This vision includes building a "world-class" military capable of safeguarding China's sovereignty, security, and development

interests while significantly expanding its global influence.

CORE INTERESTS

China identifies three "core interests" that it considers non-negotiable: maintaining Chinese Communist Party control, advancing economic development, and defending and expanding its sovereignty and territorial claims.

The report noted that Beijing has extended the concept of "core interests" to include Arunachal Pradesh.

The report also observed that China's engagement in Africa is increasingly focused on expanding defence cooperation, securing access to the Atlantic and Indian Ocean coasts, obtaining critical raw materials, protecting Chinese citizens and economic interests, and projecting itself as a leader of the Global South.

Cabinet nod for ₹12,000 cr Delhi Metro expansion



MORE GOOD. The corridors will benefit 60,000 office-goers and 2 lakh daily visitors, reducing congestion, fossil fuel use and pollution while enhancing public transport access

Our Bureau
New Delhi

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday gave the green light to a new phase of metro connectivity at a cost of over ₹12,000 crore. The new phase will facilitate connectivity in the new Central government offices complex, better known as Kartavya Bhawan, and in other parts of the national capital.

The longest corridor in the new phase will connect all the Kartavya Bhawans, thereby providing doorstep access to office-goers and visitors in this area. "With this connectivity, around 60,000 office goers and 2 lakh visitors will get benefited on a daily basis," Vaishnavi said. Along with the other corridors, it will further reduce pollution and usage of fossil fuels, enhancing ease of living.

PHASE IV UPDATE
According to an official statement, construction of phase-IV, comprising 111 km and 83 stations, is underway, and as of December 24, about 80.43 per cent of the civil construction of the phase-IV (3 priority) corridors has been completed.

The corridors are likely to be completed in stages by December 2026.

The Delhi Metro caters to an average of 65 lakh passenger journeys per day.

For Kashmir artisans, X-mas brings orders from abroad

Gulzar Bhat
Srinagar



MERRY DAYS. Artisans at a workshop in Srinagar, making Christmas gifts for markets abroad IMRAN NISSAR

In a small workshop in Srinagar, artisan Ghulam Mohammad meticulously applies red and white paint to a papier mâché Christmas ball. While the delicate patterns are rooted in centuries of Kashmiri tradition, the destination for his work is thousands of miles away.

With the local Christian population at just 0.28 per cent, the survival of this craft depends almost entirely on the global export market. While the US market is proving to be challenging because

of the recent high tariffs, exporters are thankful for the increased demand from Europe.

"It is very painstaking work," Mohammad said taking a small break from his

painting. "Each piece requires precision, and even a small mistake means starting all over again," he explained.

Most of his papier mâché items are exported to coun-

tries such as the United States, France, the UK and Germany.

"Most of our demand comes from countries where Christmas is widely celebrated," said Mir Arshad, a Srinagar-based artisan, adding that he sells most of his products through domestic outlets, with a smaller share exported to the UK.

Artisans begin preparing for Christmas orders as early as January, he said.

Official data showed that Kashmir's traditional craft sector has seen a broader rebound, with exports of hand-made products rising to

₹309.62 crore in the first

quarter of the current fiscal, up 243 per cent from ₹126.90 crore a year earlier.

Exports of Kashmiri's papier mâché products, including decorative balls, hanging stars, bells, miniature Santa Claus figures, reindeer and baubles, typically pick up during the Christmas season, particularly in European markets, said Qazi Tauseef, spokesperson for the Kashmiri Economic Alliance, an umbrella body of trade and transport groups.

US TARIFF IMPACT
"This year, there has been an encouraging demand from

Europe, reflecting a growing appreciation for Kashmiri's traditional handicrafts," Tauseef said.

Exports to the US, however, have been hit by a recent increase in US tariffs, he added. "The higher tariff structure has hurt competitiveness and dampened demand from the US market despite sustained interest in Kashmiri products," Tauseef added.

Despite tariff trouble in the US, artisans said that demand for Kashmiri's papier mâché products has increased 15 to 20 per cent compared to the previous year, Tauseef said.

IFSCA eases employee-cap for GHCs and scraps office space rule for BATF

Avinash Nair
Ahmedabad



In a significant regulatory reset for GIFT City, the International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA) has approved changes easing the 20 per cent cap on domestic employee transfers for Global In-House Centres (GHCs) and scrapping the mandatory 60 sq ft per-emloyee office space requirement for Book-keeping, Accounting, Taxation and Financial Crime (BATF) service providers.

Under the earlier IFSCA GHC framework, the 20 per cent cap applied to the transfer of employees from locations in India (domestic entities) to GIFT IFSC, a restriction that industry participants said often constrained the ability to scale operations and migrate specialised talent. Currently,

technology, risk management, analytics and compliance functions within the IFSC.

The revised regulations, approved at a meeting of IFSCA on December 22, also formally recognise multiple GHC operating models, including captive centres, shared services, build-operate-transfer (BOT), joint ventures and hybrid structures, providing additional structural flexibility.

NORMS RELAXED

In addition, the updated framework permits GHC Units to serve Indian group entities up to 10 per cent of their total annual revenue, a relaxation compared with earlier restrictions, and allows third-party service providers to assist in setting up and operating GHC Units.

The BATF service provider would employ as many employees as required, with

the minimum specified in the regulations.

Space required by each business would be dictated by the needs of each firm. Hence, minimum area requirements have been removed keeping ease of doing business in mind," Rajaraman added.

The Authority also approved amendments to the IFSCA (Global In-House Centres) Regulations, 2025, relaxing eligibility norms for key managerial personnel through a certification-based route and expanding eligible work experience to include consulting and advisory roles.

Earlier norms required stricter financial-sector experience. Fund managers will also get greater flexibility on fundraising timelines, with multiple six-month extensions now permitted for Private Placement Memorandums, compared with the earlier one-time extension.

+ Govt imposes ban on new mining leases in Aravallis

Press Trust of India
New Delhi

The Centre on Wednesday issued directions to the States for a complete ban on granting new mining leases in the Aravallis, officials said.

The Ministry of Environment and Forests also directed the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE) to identify additional areas and zones in the entire Aravallis where mining should be prohibited over and above the areas already prohibited by the Centre.

"This prohibition applies uniformly across the entire Aravalli landscape and is intended to preserve the integrity of the range. The directions are aimed at safeguarding the Aravallis as a continuous geological ridge extending from Gujarat to NCR and at stopping all unregulated mining activities," a senior official said.

Coast Guard inducts 1st indigenously built pollution control vessel

Our Bureau
New Delhi



POLLUTION FIGHTER. PCV Samudra Pratap was formally inducted into the ICG, on Tuesday ANI

tegrated bridge system, integrated platform management system, automated power management system and a high-capacity external firefighting system.

The vessel, commissioned on December 23 under the two-ship PCV project of Goa Shipyard Ltd, has over 60 per cent indigenous content.

LARGEST SHIP
Samudra Pratap is the largest ship in the Coast Guard fleet, with a length of 114.5 m, a breadth of 16.5 m and a displacement of 4,170 tonnes. The ship features a 30 mm CRN-91 gun, two 12.7 mm stabilised remote-controlled guns with integrated fire control systems, an indigenously developed in-

tegrated bridge system, integrated platform management system, automated power management system and a high-capacity external firefighting system.

The vessel is fitted with dynamic positioning capability (DP-1) and holds FIFI-2/FFV-2 notation certification. It is also equipped with specialised systems for oil spill detection and response, including an oil fingerprinting machine, a gyro-stabilised stand-off active chemical de-

tector, and a fully equipped pollution control laboratory.

According to officials, the ship is capable of high-precision operations, recovery of pollutants from viscous oil, analysis of contaminants, and separation of oil from contaminated water.

The induction ceremony was attended by DIG VK Parmar, Principal Director (Materials), Coast Guard, Goa Shipyard Chairman and Managing Director Brajesh Kumar Upadhyay, and other officials.

Purandar airport to boost Pune GDP by 2%: Fadnavis

Our Bureau
Pune

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis has said that the proposed Purandar airport project would increase Pune's gross domestic product (GDP) by at least 2 per cent and significantly accelerate industrial growth in the region.

Addressing a recent review meeting on the project in Mumbai, Fadnavis said that several industries were keen to invest in Pune, and the Purandar airport would facilitate this. He added that in addition to passenger services, the airport would provide cargo services, particularly beneficial for perishable goods.

POWER PROBLEMS
One of the most serious concerns highlighted by industry stakeholders is the sudden unblocking of lead kVArh.

"This sudden shift has caused electricity bills to increase manifold in several cases," they said.

They asked the government to set up an expert committee and stakeholders to comprehensively evaluate the current reactive power requirements of the grid.

COMPENSATION, JOBS
Rehabilitation of farmers and citizens affected by the

Purandar project will be accorded the highest priority. To ensure the viability of the project, all aspects would be examined in detail, and a decision would be taken to provide maximum possible compensation to farmers for the acquired land.

It is for this reason that the State government has decided to determine land acquisition rates through negotiations rather than following the ready reckoner. Also, this would be the first project in the State to offer both monetary compensation and alternative land for the acquired land.

Addressing a recent review meeting on the project in Mumbai, Fadnavis said that several industries were keen to invest in Pune, and the Purandar airport would facilitate this. He added that in addition to passenger services, the airport would provide cargo services, particularly beneficial for perishable goods.

CURRENT YEAR
In the first half of the current financial year, FY25-26

(April-September), the State's exports were \$34.37 billion, 15.63 per cent of India's total exports of \$219.87 billion during the same period.

While the share shows a marginal recovery compared to FY25, the absolute export value suggests continued pressure on shipments.

India's overall exports declined from \$451.07 billion in FY25, 15.06 per cent of the country's exports, from \$67.20 billion (15.38 per cent) in FY24 and \$72.43 billion (16.06 per cent) in FY23, indicating a gradual erosion of Maharashtra's export dominance even as national exports remained broadly stable.

THE HINDU BUSINESSLINE

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis recently stated that by creating a truly industry-friendly ecosystem, Maharashtra will continue to attract large-scale investment, accelerate industrial growth and progress steadily towards the vision of becoming India's first \$1 trillion sub-national economy.

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Telangana industry associations cry foul as power bills skyrocket

Our Bureau
Hyderabad

Leading industry and trade associations have asked the Telangana government to reconsider the implementation of measures that could lead to a sharp increase in power costs for businesses.

They say that investments in renewable energy have been stalled due to delays in the issuance of no objection certificates and other roadblocks.

The industry bodies called for the restoration of the earlier night-time-of-day concession of ₹1.50 per unit, or a higher concession on the daytime tariff, considering the availability of cheaper solar power. They sought more time, and a phased transition for the implementation of lead kVArh.

They also want the State government to put on hold the controversial Hyderabad Industrial Lands Transformation (HILT) Policy that sought to streamline land use within the Outer Ring Road (ORR). Top industry and business associations, including the Federation of Telangana Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FTCCI), the Telangana Industrialists Federation (TIF), the Telangana Iron and Steel Manufacturers Association (TISMA), and the Telangana State Tool Manufacturers Association (TSTMA), voiced their concerns here on Wednesday.

POWER PROBLEMS
One of the most serious concerns highlighted by industry stakeholders is the sudden unblocking of lead kVArh.

"This sudden shift has caused electricity bills to increase manifold in several cases," they said.

They asked the government to set up an expert committee and stakeholders to comprehensively evaluate the current reactive power requirements of the grid.

COMPENSATION, JOBS
Rehabilitation of farmers and citizens affected by the

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CURRENT YEAR
In the first half of the current financial year, FY25-26

QUICKLY.

Sanofi to acquire vaccine maker Dynavax for \$2.2 b



Sanofi will buy US vaccines firm Dynavax Technologies for around \$2.2 billion, the French drugmaker said, a deal that will give it access to an approved hepatitis B vaccine. Sanofi has made a string of acquisitions this year, as it looks to diversify growth beyond its blockbuster asthma drug Dupixent. It bought UK private biotech firm Visebio for \$1.5 billion in July shortly after finalising an up to \$9.5 billion deal for US-based rare disease drugmaker BluePrint Medicines. Sanofi said it expected to complete the acquisition in Q1 2026. REUTERS

Shank Air plans to start flights in Q1 2026

New Delhi: Shank Air, which has received no objection certificate from the Civil Aviation Ministry, plans to start services in the first quarter of 2026. In a statement on Wednesday, Shank Aviation said its aircraft are currently undergoing technical reviews and are being readied for delivery to India. PTI

IBBI cracks down on dubious bids with new norms on ownership

Shishir Sinha
New Delhi

In an effort to curb opaque bids, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) has made it mandatory for resolution plans to disclose the ultimate beneficial ownership.

An IBBI notification added a new provision in the regulation dealing with mandatory contents of a resolution plan. "Every resolution plan shall include a statement of beneficial ownership, covering details of all natural persons who ultimately owns or controls the resolution applicant, together with the shareholding structure and jurisdiction of each intermediate entity," the notification said.

SEC 32A AFFIDAVIT
Also, an affidavit needs to be given about whether the resolution applicant is eligible/not eligible for the benefit under Section 32A of IBC dealing with liability for prior offences.

The amendments are critical considering the last year's ruling by Supreme Court on liquidation of Jet Airways after the Jalan-Kalrock Consortium failed to implement the resolution plan.

The ruling suggested re-

ISRO launches LVM3 Bluebird Block II, heaviest of payloads from India so far

SPACE LEAP. Communications satellite to provide space-based cellular broadband connectivity to smartphones

Rohan Das
Chennai

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) on Wednesday carried out the successful lift off of the LVM3-M6 mission from the Second Launch Pad at Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC SHAR) in Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh.

The fully commercial mission carried the US-based AST Space Mobile's Bluebird Block-2 satellite to the Low Earth Orbit (LEO).

Weighing 6,100 kg, the communication satellite is the heaviest payload to be launched from Indian soil, breaking the short-lived record of the CMS-03 satellite launched last month.

The largest commercial communications satellite, it is designed to provide space-based cellular broadband connectivity directly to standard mobile smartphones.

The LVM3-M6 mission is ISRO's 9th consecutive successful launch using the highly reliable three-stage heavy launch vehicle and marks the third time an LVM3 mission was carried out in collaboration with in-



ZEROING IN. The LVM3 mission achieved the best accuracy of any Indian launch, deploying the satellite less than 2 km away from the intended target, better than the orbital cut-off of 15 km

ternational partners.

The agency has now carried out 434 satellite launches for 34 countries. "LVM-3 'Bahubali' launch vehicle has successfully and precisely injected the Blue

Bird Block II communication satellite in the intended orbit. The launch vehicle has demonstrated its excellent track record including the Chandrayaan 2, Chandrayaan 3, OneWeb missions,

CMS-3 satellites and now the Bluebird Block II satellite. This was not an easy task and required enormous efforts and close coordination among various teams," said ISRO Chairman V Narayanan.

an after the launch.

GAGANYAAN MISSION

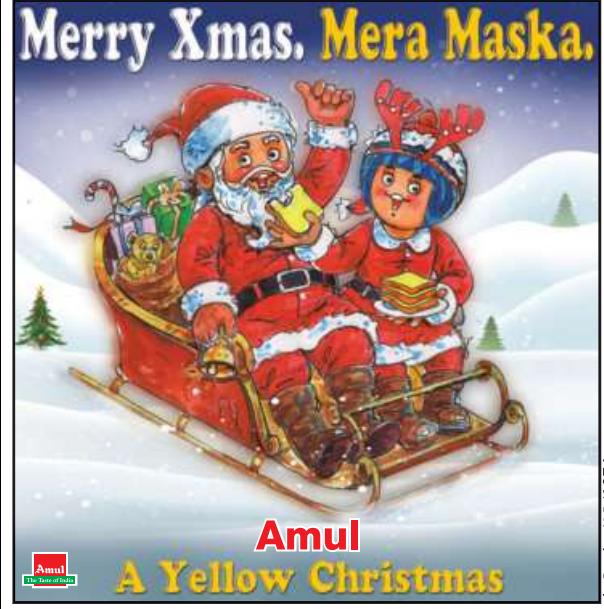
At a press meet after the launch, Narayanan emphasised that the LVM3 rocket now has payload capabilities in the range of 8,000 kg, nearing the 9,500 kg requirement needed for Gaganyaan mission. He added that the repeated successful launches using the LVM3 has given ISRO increased confidence about its viability for the Gaganyaan.

He explained that the LVM3 mission achieved the best accuracy of any Indian launch, deploying the satellite less than 2 km away from the intended target, significantly better than the orbital cut-off of 15 km.

"The new electro-mechanical actuators in the stage one strap on motors also helped improve payload capacity by 100-150 kg," he said.

UNCREWED FLIGHTS

The successful launch comes at a time when the space agency is looking at a growing pipeline of launches scheduled in the next few months including uncrewed test flights for the Gaganyaan programme.



daCunha/AB/1074

Air India eyes over 55% new, refreshed wide-body fleet by 2026-end

Rohit Vaid
New Delhi

Tata Group-led Air India is targeting over 55 per cent of its wide-body fleet to comprise new and refreshed aircraft by the end of 2026, industry sources said.

According to the sources, six new wide-body aircraft, including Boeing 787-9 and Airbus A350-1000 aircraft, are set to join the airline's fleet, with the first Boeing 787-9 aircraft likely to be inducted in the first half of January 2026.

Besides, the airline aims to completely retrofit at least 12 Boeing 787 aircraft. On the whole, the airline will have close to 60 wide-body aircraft.

"The airline's aim is to have 60 per cent of its wide-body fleet to be new or retrofitted by the end of 2026," sources told businessline.

The airline had highlighted that in 2026, it plans to induct six new wide-body aircraft, alongside around 20 narrow-body aircraft.

and thereafter 2-3 aircraft will be sent for retrofit every month," sources said.

Presently, the airline has 26 Boeing 787-8 aircraft, and Air India will complete their retrofit by mid-2027.

WI-FI CONNECTIVITY
Apart from this, the retrofit programme also includes the introduction of Wi-Fi connectivity on the Boeing 787

+ The retrofit timeline has been aligned with aircraft availability, given the airline's network requirements and the ongoing induction of new wide-body aircraft.

The aim is to further improve passenger experience through better on-ground and on-board soft products, which include new international food menu, a new beverage menu, lounges as well as Wi-Fi on board wide-body aircraft, sources said.

As per Air India, the Boeing 787 retrofit programme forms part of the airline's broader cabin upgradation plan under its transformation roadmap.

The retrofit work involves the installation of new seats across cabins, upgraded in-flight entertainment systems, refreshed cabin interiors, and improved lighting and lavatories, the sources pointed out.

Currently, 83 per cent of Air India's narrow-body aircraft have new or upgraded interiors, as Air India completed the retrofit of 27 of its legacy A320 family aircraft earlier this year.

This will reach 100 per cent by the end of 2026, ensuring passengers on Air India's domestic and short haul international flights are able to experience an upgraded product.

'Alcohol raises risk of mouth cancer'

PT Jyothi Datta
Mumbai

There is no safe limit for consuming alcohol; even a low daily intake heightened the risk of mouth cancer, says a study by the Centre for Cancer Epidemiology and Advanced Centre for Treatment, Research and Education in Cancer (ACTREC), at Mumbai's Tata Memorial Centre.

People think drinking wine or a locally brewed alcohol is safe, but the study in fact found greater risk with locally brewed alcohols, including beer, whisky, vodka, rum and breezer (flavoured alcoholic drinks) and 30 locally brewed brews, including *mahuwa*, *desi daru* and *tharra*.

Tobacco products are restricted near schools, they have warnings and so on, he said, adding that consumers need to make an informed choice on alcohol as well.

Calling for the "deglamourisation" of alcohol, Chaturvedi pointed out that it was presently easily accessible and promoted through events, celebrities and surrogate advertising.

The 10-year multi-centre study compared 1,803 people with confirmed buccal mucosa (mouth



we need a policy on alcohol control, which is missing."

Tobacco products are restricted near schools, they have warnings and so on, he said, adding that consumers need to make an informed choice on alcohol as well.

With the foundations for 5G scale, spectrum reform and unified safeguards now in place, India's telecom industry is

Telcos, gear makers see promising year ahead

S Ronendra Singh
New Delhi

As 2025 closes, the telecom sector's focus is firmly on strengthening digital trust and ensuring that future networks are secure, reliable and inclusive, SP Kochhar, Director General, Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI), said on Wednesday.

He noted 2025 was also a year of important regulatory developments as the sector moved to align with the new Telecommunications Act, 2023, and the evolving framework for service authorisations.

The industry has consistently emphasised that the new authorisation regime should retain the contractual certainty of the current licensing framework to support long-term investments... With the foundations for 5G scale, spectrum reform and unified safeguards now in place, India's telecom industry is



WIRED FUTURE. The outlook looks promising in 2026 because it is witnessing strong momentum across mobile networks, fixed wireless access and fixed broadband

Network expansion was also equally strong as India crossed 5.15 lakh 5G BTS sites and average mobile data usage touched 36 GB per month, with a forecast of 65 GB by 2031.

Fixed wireless access grew steadily with subscribers rising to 13.18 million in October across both urban and rural markets.

Moreover, telecom exports from India have increased by 72 per cent in the last five years, increasing to ₹18,406 crore in FY25 from

₹10,000 crore in FY21.

According to Tarun Chhabra, Senior Vice-President and Country Head, Nokia India, the outlook for the industry looks promising in 2026 because it is witnessing strong momentum across mobile networks, fixed wireless access, and fixed broadband as data consumption continues to grow nationwide.

"This surging data growth and emerging use cases will drive substantial investment in network expansion and

upgrades. Looking ahead, the industry will be increasingly defined by artificial intelligence (AI)-driven network automation and the expansion of data centres alongside transport infrastructure to support cloud and edge workloads," Chhabra added.

Anku Jain, Managing Director, MediaTek India, said that generative and agentic AI will soon become central to edge-device experiences, while 5G and satellite (NTN) convergence will ensure seamless connectivity, even in the remotest areas.

"As 2026 approaches, India has emerged as a global engine of digital innovation, with consumers demanding flagship performance and hyper-intelligent experiences. Intelligence is rapidly democratising — we are empowering users with 'On-Device Generative AI'. At MediaTek, we see India as both a key market and a hub of engineering excellence, shaping the global semiconductor landscape," he added.

People think drinking wine or a locally brewed alcohol is safe, but the study in fact found greater risk with locally brewed alcohols, including beer, whisky, vodka, rum and breezer (flavoured alcoholic drinks) and 30 locally brewed brews, including *mahuwa*, *desi daru* and *tharra*.

Each of the participants provided information on the duration, frequency, and type of alcohol they drank from among 11 internationally recognised drinks, including beer, whisky, vodka, rum and breezer (flavoured alcoholic drinks) and 30 locally brewed brews, including *mahuwa*, *desi daru* and *tharra*.

Compared with those who didn't drink any alcohol, the risk was 68 per cent higher for those who did... Among locally produced, country liquors used highest risk," a note in the study said.

LOCAL BREWS
Rajesh Dikshit, Director, Centre for Cancer Epidemiology, said it was not clear why local brews fared worse, and it could be because of the manufacturing or contamination.

A CH-CHE

