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Simpler process

Budget 2026: Basic Customs Duty axed for a range of items

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15.1%

INCREASE IN DEFENCE SPENDING IN FY27(BE) COMPARED WITH FY26(BE)

Major hike post Operation Sindoor

ECONOMY » PAGE 6

4.4%

EFFECTIVE CAPITAL EXPENDITURE AS A % OF GDP IN FY27(BE)

Highest share in at least eight years

INFRASTRUCTURE » PAGE 4,8

1.96%

SHARE OF HEALTH EXPENDITURE IN OVERALL BUDGET IN FY27(BE)

Allocation to health Budget remains low

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Capex scale-up

Union Budget sets Centre's capital expenditure target at ₹12.2 lakh crore; India must stay deeply integrated with global markets, attracting stable long-term investment, says Finance Minister

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

While acknowledging the strains created by the external global environment, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday presented the Union Budget 2026 in Parliament, with the aim of increasing productivity across sectors and ensuring employment generation.

Presenting her record ninth consecutive Budget, Ms. Sitharaman said India must remain deeply integrated with global markets, exporting more, and attracting stable long-term investment.

The Budget announced several customs duty reductions aimed at boosting exports of marine, leather, and textile products, and speeding up India's energy transition. It also announced multiple infrastructure projects.

Notably, the Budget did not include any major direct tax rate relaxations, either for individuals or corporations.

The Budget also set the Centre's capital expenditure target at ₹12.2 lakh crore in 2026-27, higher than the ₹10.9 lakh crore as per the Revised Estimates of 2025-26, as well as the ₹11.2 lakh crore initially budgeted that year.

Our effort has been to continuously strengthen skill, scale, and sustainability... [Budget] reflects the thinking of the youth, their dreams, resolve, and vigour

NARENDRA MODI
Prime Minister

Youth without jobs... Farmers in distress. Looming global shocks - all ignored. A Budget that refuses course correction, blind to India's real crises

RAHUL GANDHI
LoP in Lok Sabha

Growth push

"This Budget being the first Budget in the second quarter of the 21st Century, also leading to Viksit Bharat 2047, we are laying the path and giving a push to the economy to maintain the growth momentum," Ms. Sitharaman said in her post-Budget press conference. "For that sustained growth, primarily we are looking at building the ecosystem with structural reforms to make sure we create an environment to increase productivity and make sure employment is generated."

In order to achieve these goals, Ms. Sitharaman said the Budget was structured along three *kartavyas* or duties. "Our first *kartavya* is to accelerate and sustain economic growth, by enhancing productivity and competitiveness, and building resilience to volatile global dynamics," she said. The second *kartavya*, she added, was to fulfil the aspirations of the Indian people and build their capacity.

"Our third *kartavya*, is to ensure that every family, community, region and sector has access to resources, amenities and opportunities for meaningful participation," she said.

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The Budget chose prudence over adventurism
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States' devolution at 41%; South's share up

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

The 16th Finance Commission (16th FC) has recommended that the Centre retain the 41% share of tax devolution to States as has been in force since 2021. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in her Budget speech, announced that the Centre has accepted the recommendations.

"The government has accepted the recommendation of the Commission to retain the vertical share of devolution at 41%," Ms. Sitharaman said. "As recommended by the Commission, I have provided ₹1.4 lakh crore to the States for the FY 2026-27 as Finance Commission Grants. These include Rural and Urban Local Body and Disaster Management Grants."

While the report recommended the same share of devolution between the Centre and States, it tweaked the formula that decides the division of the share. This raises the share for five Southern States – Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Karnataka.

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4.3% FISCAL DEFICIT
» PAGE 17

'Even on eve of poll, Budget ignored T.N.'

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Sunday said the Union Budget had failed to meet Tamil Nadu's expectation that the BJP-led Centre would take note of the State's requirements and listen to its demands, especially since it was an election year.

"The Budget is totally disappointing. It has ignored the State's interests, and there are no schemes for the welfare of the poor, women, farmers, and those on the margins of society," Mr. Stalin said in a statement.

Reiterating Tamil Nadu's complaint that developed States were not being given their due share of tax revenue, Mr. Stalin said the demand of many States to increase the States' share of tax revenue from 41% to 50% had not been heeded.

He said the biggest disappointment was the Prime Minister's Internship Scheme.

"A total of ₹10,831 crore was announced in the previous Budget. But in the revised estimates for 2025-26, the allocation is just ₹526 crore," he said.

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Accessible tourism no longer a niche area but a mainstream imperative: Kerala CM

Dhinesh Kallungal
KOCHI

With over 1.3 billion persons with disabilities and 1.1 billion senior citizens worldwide, accessible tourism is no longer a niche segment but a mainstream imperative, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said on Sunday at the two-day Kerala for All conclave on inclusive and accessible tourism organised in Kochi by Kerala Tourism in association with The Hindu Group.

Kerala is committed to setting a model for the country by learning from the global best practices while adapting them to the local realities of the State, the Chief Minister said.

N. Ram, Director, The Hindu Group, presenting a memento to CM Pinarayi Vijayan at the Kerala for All meet on Sunday. THULASI KAKKAT

Kerala's goal is to provide equal benefits to all segments of society using modern technologies, and the State is committed to achieving this goal, Mr. Vijayan said. The conclave serves as a policy-oriented platform to assess Kerala's current position, setting a new benchmark, along with identifying actionable pathways for the future, he added.

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FMSPEAK

As a growing economy, India must remain deeply integrated with the global markets, exporting more, and attracting stable long-term investments

Share of Income Tax increases

The government is expecting the share of Income Tax in gross tax collections to increase in FY27. GST's share in collections is expected to decline further

SOURCE: BUDGET DOCUMENTS

The Union Budget 2026-27 maintains policy continuity, tax predictability while attempting a fine balancing act between rural and urban, legacy and sunrise sectors

C.S. Setty,
Chairman, SBI

VIEWPOINT

ARCHIT GUPTA
Founder & CEO, Clear Tax

Focus on long-term investments

The STT hike will increase trading costs for high-frequency traders who rely on small price movements

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman introduced major changes in the way securities, shares and investments are taxed in the Union Budget 2026-27. The Budget increases the tax on derivative trades.

What is the net effect of a Securities Transaction Tax (STT) raise on derivative contract on retail investors and brokers? Will the intended effect pan out?

In Budget 2026, the FM increased the STT by 150%, from 0.02% to 0.05%. In case of future trades, if you trade one lot of Nifty futures, and Nifty is currently trading at 25,000 levels, you pay around ₹325 as STT on this trade. But with the new rates, you'll need to pay ₹812 as STT. That's an extra ₹487 per lot. For 10 trades a month, that's an extra ₹4,800 per month. For 25 trades, it's ₹12,000 extra per month, and for 50 trades, it's ₹24,000 extra per month.

For most retail traders, the hike in Options STT is the bigger hit because it targets the premium paid. Now, every time you buy or sell an option, you'll be paying 50% more tax on the premium. For one Nifty option contract, the premium is ₹100. Under the current regime, one pays ₹0.10 as STT (0.1% of ₹100 premium). Under the new rates, this increase to ₹0.15 (0.15% of ₹100 premium), an increase of ₹0.05 per contract. For 10 trades, that is an additional ₹0.50 in tax (₹0.05 x 10 trades). For 25 trades, that's ₹1.25 extra and for 50 trades, the trader pays ₹2.50 more.

If a trader is scalping and targeting small price movements, his or her break-even point just moved up

In short, if a trader is scalping and targeting small price movements, his or her break-even point just moved up. The trader will now need a larger price movement just to cover the additional tax, making it harder to stay profitable over time. The STT hike will increase trading costs, particularly for high-frequency traders and scalpers who rely on small price movements to profit. This could lead to a shift away from short-term speculative trading, pushing more retail investors towards long-term investment strategies. Unlike retail traders, brokers will be hit by this move.

Brokers may experience a decline in transaction volume as retail activity in high-frequency trading decreases due to the increased cost. This could reduce their commissions and transaction fees. However, brokers might also see an opportunity to offer more educational resources, guiding retail investors towards more sustainable investment strategies. Operationally, brokers will need to adjust their platforms to comply with the new tax rates, adding to their complexity and cost. Overall, the intention behind raising STT is likely to reduce speculative trading, especially short-term, high-frequency trades in derivatives like options. By increasing the cost of speculative trading, the government is encouraging retail investors to take a more measured approach.

The recent changes to buyback taxation are advantageous for both retail and promoter investors in terms of absolute returns. The new law treats buyback as a capital gain, taxing it at special rates: 20% for short-term gains and 12.5% for long-term gains for retail investors.

POCKET | SOUMYADIP SINHA

Customs procedures to get simpler

Customs Integrated System will be rolled out in two years as a single, integrated and scalable platform for all the Customs processes; approvals for cargo clearance to be processed through a single and interconnected digital window by the end of the financial year

M. Soundariya Preetha
COIMBATORE

The Union Budget has removed Basic Customs Duty on a range of products, but also raised the levy on some. It also envisions simplification of the Customs procedures, moving into "trust based systems" for ease of doing business.

The Basic Customs Duty on potassium hydroxide will go up to 7.5% from nil, increasing input costs for industries such as chemicals, soaps, detergents, and batteries unless there is adequate domestic availability. The duty on umbrellas (other than garden umbrellas) has been revised from 20% to either 20% or ₹60 per piece, whichever is higher, to curb low-priced imports.

Hardness test: Soaps and detergents may get dearer as levy on potassium hydroxide has been hiked to 7.5% from nil. FILE PHOTO

All dutiable goods imported for personal use will see a reduction of duty from 20% to 10%. For chewing tobacco and Jarda-scented tobacco, the National Calamity Contingent Duty will be increased to 60% from 25% from May 1. However, effective duty rate on these products will remain unchanged.

The Global Trade Research Initiative report says that the Budget, though country-neutral, improves market access prospects for U.S. exporters across several high-value sectors.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has also proposed to increase the limit for duty-free import of specified inputs used for processing seafood products for export, from the current 1% to 3% of the FOB value of the previous year's export turnover.

The time period for export of the final product under the Advance Authorisation scheme has been extended to one year from six months for export of leather or textile garments, leather or synthetic footwear and other leather products.

For better use of capacities of manufacturing units in Special Economic Zones that are hit by global trade disruptions, there will be a one time measure of concessional duty to facilitate sales to sell in the domestic tariff area limited to a prescribed proportion of their exports. Measures will be taken to ensure that the units in the domestic tariff area will not be affected.

For ease of doing business, approvals required for cargo clearance from various Government agencies will be seamlessly processed through a single and interconnected digital window by the end of the financial year. Processes in clearance of food, drugs, plant, animal and wild life products, accounting for around 70% of interdicted cargo, will be operationalised on this system by April. The duty deferral period for tier-two and tier-three Authorised Economic Operators will be increased to 30 days and eligible manufacturer-importers will also get the duty deferral facility.

The validity period of advance ruling, binding on Customs, will be increased from the present three years to five years.

Regular importers with trusted long-standing supply chains will be recognised in the risk system, so that the need for verification of their cargo can be minimised. Customs Integrated System will be rolled out in two years as a single, integrated and scalable platform for all the Customs processes.

Customs duty changes

To reduce input costs, boost domestic manufacturing and promote export competitiveness, customs duty on the following items are being reduced [with effect from 02.02.2026, unless otherwise specified]

S. No.	Commodity	Rate of Basic Customs Duty	
		From (per cent)	To (per cent)
I	CRITICAL MINERALS		
1	Monazite	2.5%	Nil
II.	RENEWABLE ENERGY		
2	Sodium antimonate for use in manufacture of solar glass	7.5%	Nil
3	Specified capital goods for use in manufacture of lithium-ion cells for batteries of Battery Energy Storage System	As applicable	Nil
III.	NUCLEAR ENERGY		
4	All goods for generation of nuclear power falling under tariff item 8401 30 00	7.5%	Nil
5	Control and Protector Absorber Rods, Burnable Absorber Rods for generation of nuclear power falling under tariff item 8401 40 00	7.5%	Nil
6	Goods required for the setting up of specified Nuclear Power Projects, irrespective of their capacity, where the projects have been registered with the Customs Houses concerned on or before 30th September 2035 in compliance with the Project Import Regulations, 1986	As applicable	Nil
IV.	ELECTRONICS		
7	Specified goods for use in the manufacture of Microwave Ovens falling under tariff item 8516 50 00	As applicable	Nil
V.	CIVIL AVIATION		
8	Components or parts including engines, of aircraft, for manufacture of aircraft and parts of the aircraft	As applicable	Nil
VI.	DEFENCE SECTOR		
9	Raw materials for manufacture of parts of aircraft for maintenance, repair, or overhauling of aircraft or components or parts of aircraft, including engines, when imported by Public Sector Units under the Ministry of Defence	As applicable	Nil
VII.	DRUGS/ MEDICINES		
10	17 new drugs/medicines to be added in List 3 appended to TABLE I of notification No. 45/2025-Customs dated 24.10.2025	5%/10%	Nil
11	7 rare diseases that are part of National Policy for Rare Disease (NPRD), 2021 to be added in List 22 appended to TABLE I of notification No. 45/2025- Customs dated 24.10.2025 for customs duty exemption on drugs, medicines and food for special medical purposes, when imported for personal use	As applicable	Nil
VIII.	PERSONAL IMPORTS (WITH EFFECT FROM 01.04.2026)		
12	All dutiable goods, imported for personal use under Chapter heading 9804	10%/20%	10%

SOURCE: BUDGET SPEECH 2026-27

***Note:** Description of entries is indicative. Notification/Tariff may be referred for complete description*

New I-T Act to take effect from April 1

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

During her Budget presentation on Sunday, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman informed that the Income Tax Act of 2025 would be coming into effect from April this year, with the forms and rules to be notified "shortly", provisioning "adequate time" for taxpayers to acquaint themselves with the requirements.

Further, Ms. Sitharaman said that the forms had been redesigned in such a way that ordinary citizens would be able to comply without any difficulty.

The Finance Minister had proposed to overhaul the six-decade-old Income Tax Act of 1961, in her Budget presentation last year.

The objective was to make the direct tax law "concise, lucid, easy to read and understand," the Finance Minister had stated then.

FM hands out a mixed bag for capital markets

Ashokamithran T.
MUMBAI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman delivered a mixed bag to the capital markets, prioritising long-term capital instruments over short-term ones in Budget 2026-27.

While raising tax on derivative transactions, the FM increased investment limits for NRIs, rationalised taxation on share buybacks, and proposed measures to deepen bond markets.

Ms. Sitharaman proposed to raise the Securities Transaction Tax (STT) on Futures to 0.05% from 0.02%. STT on Options Premium and Exercise of Options are both proposed to be raised to 0.15% from the present rates of 0.1% and 0.125% respectively, she said in her Budget speech in Parliament on Sunday.

While stock markets crashed up to 2% after this announcement, tax experts say this is more of "a speed bump than a roadblock."

While the announcement was enough to keep market players disappointed, Ms. Sitharaman delivered a sweet pill in the form of an increase in foreign investment limit for non-resident Indians. "Individual Person Resident Outside India (PROI) will be permitted to invest in equity instruments of listed Indian companies through the Portfolio Investment Scheme. It is also proposed to increase the investment limit for an individual PROI under this scheme from 5% to 10%, with an overall investment limit for all individual PROIs to 24%, from the current 10%," the FM said.

> PROIs will be permitted to invest in equity instruments of listed Indian companies through the Portfolio Investment Scheme
>
> **NIRMALA SITHARAMAN,**
> Finance Minister

Beyond equity capital markets, the FM also proposed to provide a ₹100-crore incentive for single municipal bond issuances above the value of ₹1,000 crore. This is expected to improve municipal bond issuances which are currently lukewarm. Further, the Minister also proposed a framework to create markets on corporate bond indices and total returns swaps on such bonds.

Banking sector set for sea change; PFC, REC to be restructured

Lalatendu Mishra
Saptaparno Ghosh
MUMBAI/DELHI

The Indian banking sector is heading for a major change with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman proposing to set up a 'High Level Committee on Banking for Viksit Bharat' to enable the sector lend differently.

She said the committee will comprehensively review the financial sector and align it with India's next phase of growth, "while safeguarding financial stability, inclusion and consumer protection."

"Indian banking sector today is characterised by strong balance sheets, historic highs in profitability, improved asset quality and coverage exceeding 98% of villages in the country," she said while presenting the Budget.

"High Level Committee to reform banks to suit Viksit Bharat is a clear call to privatisation of public sector banks. Private banks work for profit and not priority-sector lending, rural credit access, and financial inclusion areas where public banks historically play a stabilising role," Amarjeet Kaur, General Secretary, All India Trade Union Congress, said in a statement.

Lending a hand: The High Level Committee on Banking for Viksit Bharat will enable the sector lend differently. FILE PHOTO

"The Finance Minister mentioned about rural branches in 98% villages but does not recognise that this was possible because of nationalised banking," she added.

Also, keeping the future requirement in mind the budget has proposed to restructure the Power Finance Corporation (PFC) and Rural Electrification Corporation (REC) to achieve scale and improve efficiency in public sector NBFCs.

Abhishek Nath, Sector Head for Energy and Power at the think-tank CSTEP, said the move would help NBFCs align with present requirements. "Today, we have to look at various technologies, including RE and nuclear generation, as well as transmission and storage," he stated.

FMSPEAK

Our government has decisively and consistently chosen action over ambivalence, reform over rhetoric, and people over populism

Market gives thumbs down

Most sectors of the market, especially the energy, oil & gas and capital goods segments, reacted negatively to the budget speech, while only IT stocks bucked the trend

SECTOR	% CHANGE
Energy	-3.14%
Healthcare	-0.54%
Fast Moving Consumer Goods	-2.17%
Industrials	-2.66%
IT	+0.66%
Auto	-1.99%
Telecom	-1.41%
Finance	-2.23%
Realty	-2.15%
Oil and gas	-2.77%
Capital goods	-3.02%
Power	-2.52%

SOURCE: BSE

This is the blueprint for a $7-trillion economy built on intelligence, not just scale. It is an intentional and ambitious budget

Arundhati Bhattacharya, *CEO & President, Salesforce, South Asia*

VIEWPOINT

GAUTAM CHHAOCHHARIA
Head of Global Markets, UBS India

Budget pitches for macro stability

Budget's capex focus, support for key sectors should drive medium-term growth, boost long-term investment

The Budget's direct and immediate impact on the Indian equity markets should be negligible. Fundamentally, any path of fiscal consolidation, as this Budget follows, is inherently not going to drive growth directly in any economy in the immediate term. However, some of the Budget's expenditure and tax proposals do enable growth momentum for the relevant sectors. In the right mix, though, these policies – for instance, more capex vs. revenue spending – do help drive an overall macro growth trajectory over the medium term. This Budget has continued on the path of resilience with a focus on enabling a higher future growth trajectory through capex, simplification and supporting key sectors like manufacturing and technology. Therefore, the markets should take confidence that the Budget supports medium-term growth trajectory, though near-term moves may be affected by sentiment or pre-Budget expectations.

Global uncertainty

Investors should reflect on the backdrop against which this year's Budget was announced. Heightened global economic and geopolitical uncertainty meant limited leeway to take any material risks around fiscal assumptions or even growth-supporting fiscal expansion.

The assumptions around the fiscal math are on the credible side. While some may find RBI dividends and disinvestment numbers to be on the aggressive side, the tax revenue assumptions don't seem to be building in any pickup in buoyancy. This is despitethe tax cuts, simplification steps announced in the Budget and some measures meant to boost taxpayers' confidence. The net borrowings figures were also in line and should not alter local interest rates in any material way for now.

Increased taxes on derivatives in equity markets will likely have some adverse impact on trading volumes for derivatives segment

Capex in key public sectors

Capex spending had taken a back seat last couple of years, after three or four years of strong growth, possibly reflecting socio-political considerations. This Budget brings the focus back to capex andthat augurs well for the medium-term growth trajectory. Incentives and schemes supporting data centres, IT services, specific services such as healthcare and tourism, and manufacturing, especially electronics and semiconductors, are positive steps. They will not only aid these sectors directly, but also broader economy as they have a multiplier impact through either job creation, capital formation, increased exports or import substitution.

Impact on derivatives

Increased taxes on derivatives in the equity markets will likely have some adverse impact on trading volumes for the derivatives segment. However, if one of the policy objectives was to curtail retail participation in the segment, the impact may be quite limited. However, long-term investors should take this Budget and other recent policies such as the FTAs, labour reforms as supportive of medium-term economic and earnings growth.

POCKET | SOUMYADIP SINHA

Tax holiday for data centres enthuses IT business leaders

Budget may facilitate domiciliation of global IT, data operations; boost to Global Capability Centres may spur innovation; tax holiday proposed for foreign firms establishing data centres in India

Mini Tejaswi
BENGALURU

The Union Budget signalled a strategic shift toward institutionalised innovation by aggressively lowering regulatory barriers and strategically re-engineering India's fiscal framework to establish the nation as the definitive global hub for data, technology, and innovation, said industry experts and analysts.

Expanding the safe harbour threshold to ₹2,000 crore alongside an automated approval system also provided much-needed fiscal predictability for large Global Capability Centres (GCCs), industry stakeholders said. "The budget's precise, data-driven approach to safe harbour is a master stroke in regulatory clarity.

The proposal of a tax holiday until 2047 for any foreign company establishing data centres in India, coupled with a specific safe harbour (a legal provision or regulation that reduces or eliminates liability, penalties or, tax, scrutiny for individuals and businesses, provided they meet specific, pre-defined conditions) of 15% on cost for companies providing data services from India to a related entity, creates a powerful anchor incentive," said Avinash Vashistha, chairman & CEO of Tholons and former Chairman and CEO of Accenture India. According to Mr. Vashistha, by clubbing all IT services under a single category with a common safe harbour margin of 15.5%, enhancing the monetary threshold for availing this benefit to ₹2,000 crore from ₹300 crore and approving it via automatic rule-driven model, the government delivered a predictable, scalable and globally competitive ecosystem that will accelerate the domiciliation of global data and IT operations.

Holiday from levies: A data centre with fully operational server racks. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

Gartner, a global tech research firm, said, in today's VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous) landscape, this move transformed India from a mere delivery hub into a stable, strategic sanctuary for global enterprises.

New sovereign currency

D.D. Mishra, VP analyst at Gartner, said, "Simultaneously, the 20-year tax holiday for Cloud service providers acknowledges data is the new sovereign currency.

"This is a massive tailwind for AI-enabled data centres, though its success hinges entirely on our ability to scale industrial power infrastructure and cooling requirements."

The Budget has sent a decisive signal to global investors by providing a long-term tax holiday for foreign cloud service providers using Indian data centres, according to KPMG in India.

Markets dip 2% as Sitharaman increases STT on derivatives

Ashokamithran T.
MUMBAI

The benchmark Nifty 50 index declined 1.96% closing at 24,825.45 on the special session on Sunday after Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced securities transaction tax (STT) on derivatives trades will be increased in the Union Budget 2026-27.

The NSE opened flat and stayed so, for the better part of the one-and-half hour Budget speech.

Almost all sectoral indices increased. Barring Nifty IT, which was up 0.57%, all 21 sectoral indices on NSE were trading down with NIFTY PSU Bank index dropping by more than 5%. BSE Sensex 30 fell a steeper 1.88% to 80,723.

"The increase in STT on futures and options significantly raises transaction costs for derivatives traders, particularly impacting high-frequency traders, arbitragers and hedgers (thereby impacting their strategies," said Feroze Azeez, Joint CEO, Anand Rathi Wealth Limited.

Ms. Sitharman proposed to raise the STT on Futures to 0.05% from present 0.02%.

STT on options premium and exercise of options are both proposed to be raised to 0.15% from the present rate of 0.1% and 0.125% respectively, she said in her speech in Parliament.

Surprise announcement

While stock brokers were unhappy with what they called a 'surprise announcement,' many experts also observed that this was a step in the right direction as the STT rise comes on the back of persistent retail participation in the derivative market.

In a white paper published last year, SEBI said 9 out of 10 people lose money adding up to a huge ₹1 lakh crore in the derivative trade segment.

The increase in tax rate, which is intended to reduce the speculation in the segment, is also expected to reduce volumes in the derivative market.

Labour-intensive textile sector, MSMEs to get new schemes

M. Soundariya Preetha
COIMBATORE

Labour-intensive textile and apparel and Micro, Small and Medium-scale Enterprise (MSME) sector impacted by geopolitical developments in the last two years received a boost from the Budget with new schemes and higher allocations.

Jump in allocation

The textile sector will see almost a 25 % jump in budgetary allocation for 2026-2027 from the current financial year while the MSME sector will see doubling of allocation.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said Central Public Sector Enterprises would establish high technology tool rooms in two locations as digitally enabled automated service bureaux that locally design, test and manufacture high-precision components at scale and at lower cost.

A Scheme for Enhancement of Construction and Infrastructure Equipment would be introduced to boost local manufacturing of high-value and technologically-advanced equipment.

A sum of ₹10,000 crore would be allocated during the next five years for a scheme for container manufacturing.

For the 'labour-intensive textile sector,' the government proposed comprehensive measures that would include a special programme to promote sports goods, a National Fibre Scheme for man-made fibre, silk, wool, etc., mega textile parks developed on challenge mode for value addition to technical textiles, a Textile Expansion and Employment Scheme to modernise traditional clusters with capital support for machinery, technology upgradation and common testing and certification centres. A National Handloom and Handicraft programme would ensure targeted support for weavers and artisans, Mahatma Gandhi Gram Swaraj initiative would boost khadi, handloom and handicraft, Tex-Eco Initiative would promote globally competitive and sustainable textiles and apparel and Samarth 2.0 would upgrade the textile skilling ecosystem.

Under rejuvenation of legacy industrial clusters, the budget proposed a scheme to revive 200 legacy industrial clusters, create dedicated ₹10,000 crore SME Growth Fund to create future champions and top up the Self-Reliant India Fund set up in 2021 with ₹2,000 crore to enable micro units access risk capital.

Settlement platform

The TReDS (Trade receivables discounting scheme) would be a mandatory transaction settlement platform for all purchases from MSMEs by CPSEs. A credit guarantee support mechanism would be introduced through CGTMSE for invoice discounting on TReDS platform; GeM would be linked with TReDS and TReDS receivables woulf be introduced as asset-backed securities, helping develop a secondary market.

Vacancy notice-on contract basis RO/Advt/2026/01:539 Dated: 30th Dec

BECIL, R.O, Bangalore a PSU under MIB is inviting Hardcopy applications from the interested and eligible candidates for the post of **Jr. Clerk** (Qualification of Any Degree with Minimum 02 years of experience in Clerical work and working knowledge in Tally Accounting Software with good computer knowledge and drafting, noting skills in English). **Sr. Technical Assistant** (Qualification of Master's Degree in Aquaculture or Zoology or Fisheries or Marine Biology from a recognized University or equivalent and a Minimum 05 years of experience in above saidfield after acquiring above said qualifications working for Coastal Aquaculture Authority, Chennai.

Sl. No.	Post	No. of Post	Consolidated Salary per month
1	Junior Clerk	One	Approx. Rs. 31,442/- Basic Pay Rs.19,900/- Plus applicable Central Government DA at the time of appointment
2	Senior Technical Assistant	One	Approx. Rs. 55,932/- Basic Pay Rs. 35,400/- Plus applicable Central Government DA at the time of appointment

Interested candidates can send their applications with CV's and copies of the qualification documents via Speed post couriered to BECIL Regional Office, Bangalore address on or before **17th Feb 2026.** For more information, please visit the Career and Tenders mentioned in the **website www.becil.com.**

INTEGRAL COACH FACTORY

The following e-tender is published in IREPS website. Firms are requested to login to **www.ireps.gov.in** and quote against the tender. Manual quotation will not be entertained for this tender.

Open Tender No.	Description of the Item	Tender Value	Date of Tender Closing Date & Time
2026476 212077	**Works Contract for "Annual Maintenance Contract for maintenance of 15 numbers of EOT Cranes and 7 numbers of Traversers available in LHB Division & Furnishing Division for a period of Two Years"**	₹ 5,06,36,857/-	11.02.2026 up to 15.00 hrs.

Hindi Version of the above advertisement is available in the **https://icf.indianrailways.gov.in** **Dy. Chief Mechanical Engineer / Plant**

INTEGRAL COACH FACTORY

Tender Notice No. 2025235212048 Dated: 23.01.2026

The following e-tender is published in IREPS website. Firms are requested to login to **www.ireps.gov.in** and quote against the tender. Manual quotations will not be entertained for this tender.

Sl. No.	Open Tender No.	Short Description of the Item	Tender Value (₹)	Last Date of Receipt / Date of Opening of Tender Form
1.	202523 5212048	**Complete Wiring Work in EMU / MEMU, EMU (AC) / SWAP & Kolkata Metro Coaches including Handling & Installation of Equipment at ICF Chennai**	₹ 25,74,39,998/-	16.02.2026 15.00 hrs

Hindi version of the above advertisement is available in ICF website **https://icf.indianrailways.gov.in/** **Dy. Chief Electrical Engineer/Fur-I**

INTEGRAL COACH FACTORY

Tender Notice No. ICF/PCMM/EOT/05/2026 Dated: 30.01.2026

The following e-tenders are published in IREPS website. Firms are requested to login to **www.ireps.gov.in** and quote against these tenders. Manual quotations will not be entertained for these tenders. Closing and Opening time for all tenders are **14.15 hrs.** Hindi version of tender notice is available on website **www.icf.indianrailways.gov.in**

Sl. No.	Tender No.	Tender Title	Quantity	Due Date / Time
01	08261028	SET OF SW PLATE ASSLY LGS AMRIT BHARAT	71 Sets	17/02/2026
02	07260005	S & I OF FRP PANELING FOR SIDE WALL	14 Sets	18/02/2026
03	07261026	SUPPLY OF PILLAR ASSEMBLY LWACCN / PP2	36 Sets	19/02/2026
04	07260006	FRP PANELING FOR SIDE WALL	17 Sets	19/02/2026
05	07261065	RC TOILET DOOR MC TC NDTC	198 Nos	20/02/2026
06	02261028	UNDER FRAME (EMU B)	35 Nos	20/02/2026
07	02261021	CORTEN STEEL UNDER FRAME (LWCB PP2)	6 Nos	24/02/2026
08	01265062	EOT CRANE 40 TON WITH LIFTING TACKLE	2 Nos	24/02/2026
09	03260002	WHEEL SET BEARING (UIC TAPER ROLLER BEARING) FOR DIA 130 MM	102572 Nos	02/03/2026
10	01255099	EOT CRANE 5 TON & 10 TON CAPACITY	Refer IREPS Website	05/03/2026

CORRIGENDUM No. 05

Corrigendum has been issued to the following tender. Please check IREPS website for further details.

Sl. No	Tender No.	Existing Value	Modified Value
01	02250106	27/01/2026	02/02/2026
		Deletions and Additions of Item Description and Drawing, PVC Index Please refer Tender Document for details in IREPS website	
02	06252269	27/01/2026	05/02/2026
03	07260016	EMD	1833
		Modification of Payment term, Deletions and Additions of Bid Document version, Please refer Tender Document for details in IREPS website	

UP Rajya Vidyut Utpadan Nigam Ltd.
Chief Engineer (MPS), Shakti Bhawan, Lucknow
E-Notice No.: ET-01/EOI/Jal Vidyut//2026
EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

FOR EXTRACTION OF ENERGY FROM DISCHARGE COOLING WATER CHANNEL OF ANPARA POWER PLANT BY DESIGN, INSTALLATION & COMMISSIONING ALONGWITH OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE OF HYDRO TURBINE, SURFACE KINETIC HYDRO TURBINE OR ANY OTHER DEVICE.

Last Date for uploading EOI : 23.02.2026

For more information and regular updates regarding EOI kindly regularly visit **www.etender.up.nic.in**

(Erstwhile : U.P. Jal Vidyut Nigam Ltd.)

234/UNL/Prashi./Prakashan/2025-2(43)/2023 Date: 03-09-2025

"Save Electricity for Nation"

DEPARTMENT FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF DIFFERENTLY ABLED AND SENIOR CITIZENS

Podium Block, V.V.Tower, Ground Floor, Dr.B.R.Ambedkar Veedhi, Bangalore 560 001. Telephone No. 080-22866066, 080-22866046
Email Address: **dirdwdscka@gmail.com, dir-dwds-ka@nic.in**

No: DEDASC/STAFF/C1/14/2025-26 **Dated: 31.01.2026**

SHORT TERM RE-TENDER NOTIFICATION
(Through E-Procurement only)

Tender is invited by the Director, Department for the Empowerment of Differently Abled and Senior Citizens, under e-Procurement platform/e-portal in two parts (i.e., Technical bid and Financial bid) from the original manufacturers or their authorized dealers for supply of 554 Sewing Machine for the Hearing Impaired persons for the year 2025-26 to the Department for Empowerment of Differently Abled and Senior Citizens. The interested bidders may see further details and may login in website: **www.kppp.karnataka.gov.in**

The tender can be submitted on or before **07.02.2026 till 05.00PM**. The technical bid will be opened on **09.02.2026 at 11.00 AM** and the financial bid will be opened on **11.02.2026 at 02.00 PM**. Department reserves all rights to accept, reject, incorporate changes and retender without giving any reasons. The details can be obtained from the Department for the Empowerment of Differently Abled and Senior Citizens, Podium Block, V.V. Tower, Dr. B.R.Ambedkar Veedhi, Bengaluru-560001, Phone No:080-22866066, 28860907. For more info please see department website **www.dwdsc.karnataka.gov.in**

Sd/-
Director,
Department for the Empowerment of Differently Abled and Senior Citizens, Bengaluru.

DIPR/CP/5358 Zen/2025-26

FMSPEAK

The economy and its fundamentals are strong. Global uncertainty is facing many of our sectors for whom we have brought in so many different schemes

Effective capital expenditure rises

Effective capital expenditure as a share of GDP increased substantially to 4.4% in FY27(BE) — the highest in at least eight years. This refers to the sum of capital expenditure and Grants-in-Aid for creation of capital assets

SOURCE: CMIE, BUDGET DOCUMENTS

By placing biopharma among the seven strategic frontier sectors and launching Biopharma SHAKTI, the Budget makes a decisive investment in India's health

Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, *Chairperson, Biocon*

VIEWPOINT

PREETHA REDDY
Exec. Vice-Chairperson, Apollo Hospitals

A holistic vision of development

Budget underscores commitment to building strong institutions and nurturing human capital

Every Union Budget offers a window into a nation's priorities, aspirations, and long-term confidence. The Union Budget, 2026 reflects the country's evolution not merely as a growing economic power, but also as a knowledge-driven, people-centric, and responsible society. It underscores a commitment to building strong institutions, nurturing human capital, and creating systems that serve both present and future generations.

In this larger national journey, healthcare occupies a pivotal place. A healthy nation is the foundation of sustainable development, productivity, and social harmony.

One of the most encouraging features was the decisive focus on mental health. Today, mental health has moved from the margins to the mainstream of public policy. The Budget's announcement of expansion of digital counselling services, strengthened referral systems, enhanced institutional capacity, and greater integration with primary healthcare represent a shift from fragmented efforts to coordinated care.

Equally significant is the emphasis on skilling and capacity-building in healthcare and life sciences. India's reputation as a trusted source of medical professionals and affordable care is well established. The next phase of growth lies in deepening our expertise in advanced research, biopharmaceuticals, clinical trials, allied health services, and health informatics. Investments in specialised education, research institutions, and workforce development will create a strong pipeline of globally competitive professionals.

The new policy framework reinforces India's position as a reliable healthcare destination

The growing focus on artificial intelligence, secure digital platforms, and data-driven diagnostics further strengthens this ecosystem. Technology, when used responsibly, can bridge gaps in access, improve early detection, and enhance clinical decision-making.

Research and innovation form another vital pillar of this transformation. Support for biologics, biosimilars, indigenous drug development, and clinical networks signals a long-term commitment to scientific leadership.

Over the years, medical value travellers from around 150 nations have chosen India for complex surgeries, advanced treatments and holistic care. They are drawn not only by affordability, but by clinical excellence, compassion, and trust. The new policy framework strengthens this ecosystem and reinforces India's position as a reliable healthcare destination.

Measures to reduce the cost of life-saving medicines and expand support for rare disease patients, reaffirm the principle that growth must be inclusive.

Taken together, these initiatives reflect a holistic vision of development. They recognise that physical health, mental well-being, scientific capability, skilled manpower, and global engagement are deeply interconnected. They also acknowledge that healthcare is a cornerstone of nation-building.

POCKET | SOUMYADIP SINHA

₹10,000-crore dosage for biopharma

Biopharma SHAKTI aims at facilitating domestic production of biologics and biosimilars; three new National Institutes of Pharmaceutical Education and Research to be set up; Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation to be strengthened according to global standards

N. Ravi Kumar
HYDERABAD

The Union Budget has proposed a biopharma strategy for healthcare advancement through knowledge, technology, and innovation with an outlay of ₹10,000 crore over the next five years to develop India as a global biopharma manufacturing hub.

"Biopharma SHAKTI will build the ecosystem for domestic production of biologics and biosimilars," Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in the Budget speech on Sunday. Biopharma is part of the seven strategic and frontier sectors identified for scaling up by the government.

Biopharmaceuticals are complex medicines manufactured from living systems rather than chemical synthesis. GETTY IMAGES

The decision to facilitate innovation and ramp up production of biopharmaceuticals comes against the backdrop of India's disease burden shifting towards non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, cancer and autoimmune disorders. "Biologic medicines are key to longevity and quality of life at affordable costs," the Finance Minister said.

Setting up three new National Institutes of Pharmaceutical Education and Research (NIPER) and upgrading existing seven facilities along with creation of a network of over 1,000 accredited India clinical trials sites forms part of the strategy on biopharma. "We propose to strengthen the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) to meet global standards and approval timeframes through a dedicated scientific review cadre and specialists," Ms. Sitharaman said.

Biopharmaceuticals are complex molecules and unlike other medicines they are not manufactured through chemical synthesis. According to U.S. Food and Drug Administration, biological products are generally large, complex molecules produced through biotechnology in a living system such as a microorganism, plant cell or animal cell and often more difficult to characterise than small molecule drugs.

Industry reaction

Pharma industry leaders hailed the Budget announcement. Dr. Reddy's Laboratories chairman Satish Reddy said the ₹10,000-crore programme will be a key enabler for India's journey from volume to value leadership. "Alongside the expansion of the national clinical trials network and strengthening of the CDSCO..., these initiatives will enhance India's capacity to develop complex, high-value therapies," he said.

"The Budget's focus on health and biopharma is a welcome step... we also appreciate the government's emphasis on strengthening CDSCO and advancing a more predictable, science-led regulatory framework. Aligning regulatory processes with global standards, while expanding India's clinical research capabilities, will help bring medical innovation to India faster," president and general manager of Eli Lilly and Company (India) Winselow Tucker said.

Anuj Sethi, senior director at Crisil Ratings, said India's pharmaceutical sector has been a leader in low-cost, small-molecule generics. The Biopharma SHAKTI will enable domestic companies to expand into more complex products such as biosimilars.

Budget breakdown

The outlay for the transport sector (apart from interest payments) formed the bulk of the Budget Expenditure in FY27BE. Transport's share in total expenditure rose by 0.16% points from last year (increased from 11.03% of total expenses in FY26RE to 11.19% in FY27BE). The graphic depicts budgeted expenditure (₹ crore) and the change from FY26RE. For instance, the finance sector was allocated ₹20,649 crore in FY27, while its share of total expenditure decreased by 1.87% points from FY26.

Cheaper cancer drugs; training for 1.5 lakh caregivers

Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

Health spending saw a modest growth, with ₹1.05 lakh crore being allocated for FY 2026-27

Bringing immediate relief to patients with cancer and rare diseases, the Union Budget proposed a full exemption of basic customs duty on 17 cancer-related drugs and medicines. In addition, seven more rare diseases will be added to the list eligible for import duty exemption on drugs, medicines, and food for special medical purposes imported for personal use.

The major highlights for the health sector include creation of a nationwide network of 1,000 accredited clinical trial sites and upgrading of the drug regulatory system.

Overall, health spending saw only modest growth, with the Health Ministry being allocated ₹1.05 lakh crore for 2026-27, just over 6% higher than the previous year's and roughly 9% more than the revised estimates. Major schemes including Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY received ₹9,500 crore, a marginal increase.

A ₹100-crore provision was made for training allied healthcare professionals, alongside a push to expand care delivery beyond hospitals, particularly for geriatric services. "A strong care ecosystem, covering geriatric and allied care services will be built," Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said.

She announced that National Skills Qualifications Framework-aligned programmes would be rolled out to train multi-skilled caregivers combining core care skills with allied capabilities such as wellness, yoga, and the operation of medical and assistive devices. "In the coming year, 1.5 lakh caregivers will be trained," she said.

The Budget also proposed a major scale-up of allied health professionals, a segment critical to easing pressure on doctors and hospitals.

Major investments have also been proposed for the modernisation of existing healthcare facilities.

The Budget provides for a substantial increase in MBBS, postgraduate, super-speciality, and nursing seats, aimed at strengthening teaching, learning, and clinical training capacities, while promoting cutting-edge research and innovation in advanced biomedical fields.

Focus on mental health; comprehensive push to scale up the AYUSH ecosystem

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Mental health took centre stage in the Budget, with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday acknowledging that the country lacked sufficient national-level institutions dedicated exclusively to mental health.

The government proposed the establishment of two new national mental health institutes, in Ranchi and Tezpur, alongside plans to create a new National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS) in North India. Ms. Sitharaman said the new institutions were intended to improve access to specialised mental healthcare, advanced training, and research, particularly in regions that remain underserved.

The Budget also unveiled a comprehensive push to scale up India's AYUSH ecosystem and announced the establishment of three new All India Institutes of Ayurveda to strengthen education and clinical excellence in traditional medicine.

The allocation for the AYUSH Ministry rose to ₹4,408.93 crore in FY 2026-27 from ₹3,671.82 crore (revised estimates) in 2025-26.

Budget ignores unemployment, social security: trade unions

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The allocation for the Union Labour Ministry remained unchanged at around ₹32,666 crore as in the last Budget. Trade unions alleged that the government neglected the employment sector and that there were no provisions to increase job opportunities and ensure social security of workers.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman counted the notification of labour reforms as a comprehensive reform measure, but the unions said there had been no allocation to vulnerable sections of workers such as gig workers.

The total allocation for the Union Labour Ministry in this Budget was ₹32,666.31 crore. In the last Budget, it was ₹32,646.19 crore. This includes an allocation of ₹20,082.7 crore to the Pradhan Mantri Viksit Bharat Rozgar Yojana.

The total allocation for the Union Labour Ministry was ₹32,666.31 crore in Union Budget 2026-27. M. MOORTHY

Trade unions said the Budget reduced capital investment to corporate investment. "The Budget does not address unemployment. It does not address concerns of healthcare and education of workers and their families... this Budget is pro-corporate," Indian National Trade Union Congress leader R. Chandrashekharan said.

Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) said the Budget failed to address the most urgent livelihood and social security concerns of the working class. "Despite repeated pre-Budget consultations, BMS expresses grave dissatisfaction over the continued neglect of core labour and social security demands," it said, adding that scheme workers are not yet recognised as workers and no increase was provided in the eligibility criteria and minimum pension under employees pension scheme.

All India Trade Union Congress leader Amarjeet Kaur said the Budget was full of rhetoric with no substance for the masses, only future promises.

FM SPEAK

This (Education to Employment and Enterprise Standing Committee) will make India a global leader in services with a 10% share of global services exports by 2047

Agriculture allocation stagnates

In FY27, allocation to the Department of Agriculture and Farmers' welfare stagnated at around 2.4% of the total Budget — the lowest in at least four years. Allocation to flagship schemes — PMFBY and PM-KISAN — declined in FY27

SOURCE: BUDGET DOCUMENTS

Year	Agriculture dept.#	PMFBY^	PMKISAN*
FY20	3.51	0.47	1.81
FY21	3.08	0.40	1.74
FY22	3.02	0.36	1.76
FY23	2.38	0.25	1.39
FY24	2.44	0.29	1.38
FY25	2.79	0.31	1.42
FY26 (RE)	2.48	0.25	1.28
FY27(BE)	2.44	0.23	1.19

All allocations are presented as a share of the total Budget

^Scheme to stabilise farmers' incomes by providing comprehensive insurance cover against the failure of the crop

*Aims to provide farmers from lower income groups with a payment of ₹6,000 in three quarterly instalments of ₹2,000

does not include allied activities

RE: Revised Estimate
BE: Budget Estimate

The Budget clearly articulates the government's vision to promote Indian IT services sector as a primary driver of economic growth, leveraging artificial intelligence

Aparna Iyer,
CFO, Wipro Ltd.

VIEWPOINT

SANTOSH MEHROTRA, RAKESH RANJAN
Economists

Employment and strategic choices

Focus on scaling up labour-intensive sectors to drive growth, self-reliance and jobs amid global uncertainty

The Union Budget 2026 does have employment as one element of its growth strategy, though the FM's budget speech barely mentioned jobs. Amid global uncertainty, the emphasis on scaling up strategic and frontier sectors, alongside labour-intensive industries, reflects an attempt to advance economic growth, strategic security and self-reliance, while expanding employment.

The proposed BioPharma SHAKTI initiative, aimed at creating an ecosystem for domestic production of biologics and biosimilars, seeks to deepen India's manufacturing capabilities in a high-value, knowledge-intensive segment. Building on India's established role as a global supplier of generic medicines, the initiative has the potential to expand exports, particularly to the Global South, while creating skilled employment across research, clinical trials, manufacturing, quality control and regulatory functions, linking employment generation with export-led growth.

Building on the India Semiconductor Mission 1.0, the Budget proposes India Semiconductor Mission 2.0, expanding the focus from fabrication to domestic production of semiconductor equipment and materials, development of full-stack Indian intellectual property, and stronger supply chains. In a context of heightened geopolitical volatility and a global pax-silica shaping semiconductor value chains, strengthening domestic capability assumes importance for economic competitiveness and reducing strategic dependence.

The proposal for Mega Textile Parks aims to boost value addition, market access and jobs in rural areas

The effectiveness of technology-intensive manufacturing will also depend on secure access to critical minerals, particularly rare earth elements that underpin electronics, clean energy and advanced manufacturing. Following the launch of a Scheme for Rare Earth Permanent Magnets in November 2025, the Budget proposes the creation of dedicated Rare Earth Corridors to strengthen domestic supply chains by integrating mining, processing and manufacturing, with positive implications for industrial growth, employment and strategic resilience.

Alongside technology and capital-intensive sectors, the Budget emphasises labour-intensive industries such as textiles, which remain critical for large-scale employment. The integrated textile programme combines fibre self-reliance, cluster modernisation, support for handlooms and handicrafts, and a push towards sustainable and competitive textiles. Proposals for Mega Textile Parks and the Mahatma Gandhi Gram Swaraj initiative aim to strengthen value addition, market access and skills, expanding labour-intensive employment and rural self-employment opportunities, particularly for weavers, artisans and youth.

The renewed emphasis on cluster-level development is a much-awaited policy shift, given the role of industrial clusters in driving industrial growth and employment. Adequate access to finance remains critical for MSMEs facing persistent liquidity constraints.

POCKET | SOUMYADIP SINHA

New rural jobs scheme gets over ₹95,000 crore

Experts say the allocation is insufficient to provide 125 workdays to all workers and government will need an outlay of ₹2.3 lakh crore; ₹30,000 crore has also been set aside for MGNREGS

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

The budget for rural employment schemes saw a 43% hike, with allocation of ₹95,692.31 crore for the new scheme under the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Act, 2025 and ₹30,000 crore for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS).

Together, the allocation for both rural employment schemes stands at ₹1,25,692.31 crore, compared with the Revised Estimate of ₹88,000 crore for the MGNREGS in 2025-26. However according to activists, the allocation is not expected to meet the government's own target of providing 125 workdays to all workers enrolled under the MGNREGS.

Calculations show that to meet this commitment, the government would need to allocate ₹2.3 lakh crore.

Budget boost: There are about 8.65 crore active job card holders eligible to work under the VB-G RAM G scheme. G. MOORTHY

The VB-G RAM G Act replaces the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005.

There are approximately 8.65 crore active job card holders who can demand work under the scheme.

"If all active job card holders are provided 125 days of employment, and the average cost per person per day is ₹355, the total expenditure required would be ₹3,83,844 crore. At a 60:40 cost-sharing ratio, the Government of India's share would amount to approximately ₹2.3 lakh crore, with the remaining share to be borne by the states," Chakradhar Budhha, a senior researcher at LibTech India, a consortium of activists and academics, said.

The new law has not yet been notified; once it is, State governments will have six months to roll out their version of the scheme.

In the interim, the MGNREGS will continue. The budgetary allocation of ₹30,000 crore is intended to clear the last financial year's liabilities and cover ongoing expenditure.

Union Rural Development Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan described the Budget as "historic," claiming a 21% hike in allocation for rural development, from ₹1,91,406 crore in 2025-26 to ₹2,31,423 crore in 2026-27.

The Minister highlighted that the total allocation for the MGNREGS in 2025-26 was ₹86,000 crore, while the Centre's share for the coming year has crossed ₹95,600 crore and will exceed ₹1,51,000 crore once States' contributions are included.

"This is unprecedented and historic in itself, as it will give new momentum to rural India," he said.

He added that, in line with the 16th Finance Commission's recommendations, panchayats will directly receive over ₹55,900 crore.

Coconut, cocoa, sandalwood get special attention

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Centre will support high-value crops such as coconut, sandalwood, cocoa, and cashew in the coastal areas of the country, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in her Budget speech on Sunday. However, the allocation for the scheme was ₹350 crore, with farmers organisations stating that the new initiative was just another rhetoric.

"Agar trees in the Northeast and nuts such as almonds, walnuts and pine nuts in our hilly regions will also be supported," she said.

Ms. Sitharaman said India was the world's largest producer of coconuts and about 30 million people depended on coconuts for their livelihood.

"To further enhance competitiveness in coconut production, I propose a Coconut Promotion Scheme to increase production and enhance productivity through various interventions, including replacing old and non-productive trees with new saplings," she said. Ms. Sitharaman said a dedicated programme was proposed for Indian cashew and cocoa to make the country self-reliant in raw cashew and cocoa production .

Sandalwood promotion

Regarding sandalwood, she said the Centre would partner with State governments to promote focused cultivation and post-harvest processing to restore sandalwood ecosystem," she said.

Farmers organisations, however, are not enamoured by the announcement.

"The rhetoric on investing in cash crops continued even in this year's Budget. However, in reality, missions such as Cotton Technology Mission, Mission on Pulses, Hybrid Seeds, and Makhana Board, introduced in the past, find no mention in the budgetary figures," the All India Kisan Sabha said in a statement.

Marginal hike for agriculture leaves farmers unhappy

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The agriculture sector has got a 2.6% boost in the Union Budget, translating to an additional ₹3,000 crore in comparison to the previous year's allocation, days after the Economic Survey pointed to a decrease in agricultural growth in the country.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has proposed to spend ₹1.3 lakh crore for the sector in 2026-27, in comparison to the Budget Estimate of ₹1.27 lakh crore for 2025-26, though this is higher than the Revised Estimate of ₹1.23 lakh crore. The Agriculture Ministry's actual expenditure in the previous year 2024-25 was ₹1.29 lakh crore. The Fertilizer Ministry, meanwhile, was allocated ₹1.7 lakh crore for 2026-27, an increase of about 8.5% from the last budget.

Farmers organisations, cutting across the political spectrum, have criticised the Budget for overlooking critical demands such as statutory minimum support price, farm debt relief, and a resolution to the crisis caused by global trade and tariff problems.

Research budget cut

The allocation for Kisan Samman Nidhi, which provides a fiscal allowance for farmers, has been retained at ₹63,500 crore, as in the last budget. The allocation for Agriculture Research and Education dipped 4.8% to ₹9,967.4 crore from the previous year's ₹10,466.39 crore.

The allocation for Kisan Samman Nidhi has been retained at ₹63,500 crore. ANI

Ms. Sitharaman announced ₹350 crore in support to high-value agriculture such as coconut, cashew, sandalwood and other nut crops.

She also announced an allocation of ₹150 crore for Bharat-VISTAAR (Virtually Integrated System to Access Agricultural Resources), a multilingual Artificial Intelligence tool meant to integrate the AgriStack portals and the Indian Council of Agricultural Research package on agricultural practices with AI systems. "This will enhance farm productivity, enable better decisions for farmers, and reduce risk by providing customised advisory support," she said.

Farmers organisations, from the left-leaning All India Kisan Sabha to the Sangh Parivar's Bharatiya Kisan Sangh (BKS), condemned the Budget. BKS general secretary Mohini Mohan Sharma said the Budget failed to live up to the government's vows to address farmers' problems. "There is a difference in what the government promised and what is there in the Budget," Mr. Mishra said.

INTEGRAL COACH FACTORY

The following e-tenders are published in IREPS website. Firms are requested to login to **www.ireps.gov.in** and quote against these tenders. Manual quotation will not be entertained for this tender.

Sl. No.	OPEN TENDER NO.	SHORT DESCRIPTION OF WORK	APPROX. VALUE IN (₹)	DATE OF TENDER CLOSING DATE & TIME
1	2026377212107	Improvements to Integral Club for Officers.	1.09 Crores	27.02.2026 @ 10.30 hrs
2	2026377212108	Construction of Community Hall at Perambur.	8.04 Crores	27.02.2026 @ 10.30 hrs

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CINEMA ❖ ARTS ❖ EVENTS

MUSIC DANCE DRAMA

The Music Academy Madras
Today: 6.00 p.m. to 7.30 p.m. At the Kasturi Srinivasan Hall - The Music Academy Madras – HCL Concerts – Srividya Vadlamani (Vocal), Vignesh Nydhruva (Violin), Ajay Gopi (Mridangam).

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan,
East Mada Street, Mylapore, Chennai-4
is conducting "**Bhavan's Tamizh Isai Vizha**" from **1st February 2026 to 6th February 2026** at its Main Auditorium, Mylapore.
Today: 2nd Feb: 5.30 pm: High Tea, 6.30pm: **Smt.Amritha Murali (Vocal), Smt.Sruti Sarathy (Violin), Delhi Sri Sairam (Mridangam) & Sri S.Krishna (Ghatam).**
Tomorrow: 3rd Feb: 6.30 pm: **Smt.Anahitha & Smt.Apoorva** (Vocal). All are Welcome.
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18th ANNUAL NALLI NAGASWARA THAVILISAI VIZHA
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6.45 pm Vellore **V.P.N. RAJARAMAN & V.P.N. SETHURAMAN** - Clarinet, **Ambur M.M. NARAYANAN** - Nadaswaram **Vellore** P.R.M.**VENKATESAN & Malaikottai M.S. SENTHILKUMAR** - Spl Thavil.
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Today 6 p.m. at Narada Gana Sabha Mini Hall Bharathanatyam by Vishwashree (Disp. of Dr. Sheela Unnikrishnan) 7.30pm 'Salangaigalin Sangamam 2026' by Disps. of Dr. Jeyanthy Yogharajah, Director of Salangai Narthanalaya Academy of Fine Arts, UK. All are welcome.

M.RADHAKRISHNAN
Family Invites 9150552226
TODAY 6.15 pm: Commemorating the Birth Anniversary of M.Radhakrishnan, RAMAKRISHNAN MURTHY - Vocal with Sangita Kalanidhi R.K.Shriram Kumar - Violin, Vijay Natesan - Mridangam at HAMSADHWANI, Youth hostel, 2nd Avenue, Indira Nagar, Adyar. All are welcome.

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Today - Feb 2 - 5.30 p.m. Bharatanatyam by **K.P. ADHITHI** (Disciple of Guru Pandanallur S. Pandian)
7.00 p.m. Bharatanatyam by **HEMAVATHY KALAIARASAN** (Discipole of Gurus. V.P.Dhananjayan and Shanta Dhananjayan (BharataKalanjali) - All Are Welcome.
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MISCELLANEOUS

Mega Budget Meeting - "Analysis of Union Budget 2026"
Organised by ALL INDIA TAX PAYERS' ASSOCIATION (AITPA) on MONDAY, 2nd February 2026 at 5pm at RANI SEETHAI HALL, 603 Anna Salai Chennai. Chief Guests: Dr. D. SUDHAKARA RAO, IRS, Principal Chief Commissioner of Income Tax, Chennai; CA. G. RAMASWAMY, Past President, ICAI.Speakers: Dr. CA. ABHISHEK MURALI, President, All India Tax Payers' Association ((AITPA & Regional Council Member, SIRC of ICAI (2025-2029); Dr. CA. CMA. V MURALI, Central Council Member & Chairman IFRS Committee, ICMAI and Former Central Council Member, ICAI; Dr. CA. CMA. CS. DIVYA ABHISHEK, Chairperson SIRC of ICMAI (2023-2024) & Chairperson FICCI FLO (2024-2025). NO DELEGATE FEE. All are welcome. Convenor: Auditor Dr. CA. CMA. V MURALI Mob: 9841040010.

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Defence funds remain high

In FY27, defence expenditure as a share of the Budget was slightly lower than in FY26, but still the second highest in seven years. Allocation to the Department of Space stagnated, while the Budget for science & tech is the highest since at least FY20

*includes Defence pensions and Defence (civil)

Year	Expenditure on defence (%)*	Department of Space (%)	Ministry of Science and Tech (%)
FY20	16.86	0.48	0.47
FY21	13.84	0.27	0.32
FY22	13.20	0.33	0.35
FY23	13.67	0.24	0.29
FY24	13.72	0.24	0.26
FY25	13.67	0.24	0.28
FY26 (RE)	14.75	0.25	0.43
FY27(BE)	14.67	0.26	0.72

RE: Revised Estimate | BE: Budget Estimate
All allocations presented as share of total Budget | Source: Budget documents

A bold Budget that combines growth with inclusion. The strong emphasis on skilling, sustained investments in science and research are timely

Sunil Bharti Mittal,
Founder & Chairman, Bharti Enterprises

VIEWPOINT

THOMAS MATHEW
Former civil servant and author

A case for higher defence allocation

To maintain a strong military, India has to take allocation to at least 5% of its GDP in the short to medium term

It is usual for defence allocation to rise sharply in the Budget that follows a security challenge. It has been the case this year too, in the shadow of Operation Sindoor.

The overall increase was more than 15% over the previous year (₹6.81 lakh crore to ₹7.84 lakh crore), with the capital outlay surging by 22% (₹1.80 lakh crore to ₹2.19 lakh crore). It may also look daunting that the defence budget had grown in the present century by a hefty 1,240% (from nearly ₹0.59 lakh crore in 2000-01).

India's defence expenditure since 1960 to 2024, as a percentage of its GDP, has averaged nearly 3% (World Bank data) and to many, this is impressive. It is not. In the context of India's rapidly evolving security requirements, its defence budget is middling. Our security outlays must be assessed in the context of the resources committed by nations that pose a threat to India, rather than in isolation.

Even the U.K., which has a strong military and is umbilically tied to U.S. security architecture, spent nearly 4% of its GDP on defence during the same period (1960-24). The comparative data for the world's most preeminent power, the U.S., is 5.3%. India's unfriendly neighbour Pakistan too has spent nearly 5%. China, which is a greater threat to India, is in a different league altogether. It dwarfs India's defence outlays. Though for 35 years up to 2024, its defence budget as a percentage of GDP – as assessed by the World Bank – averaged only 1.8%, in reality, it is much higher, with estimates varying widely.

It was estimated that in 2017, China's defence budget was $562 billion as against India's $68 billion

While China announced a defence budget of $246 billion in 2025, the overwhelming opinion was that it was much higher. The Heritage Foundation estimated that in 2017, the Chinese budget was 87% of that of the U.S. It implied that in that year, China's defence budget was $562 billion, as opposed to $647 billion for the U.S., and $68 billion for India.

To maintain a strong military, India has to spend more on defence, taking the budget to at least 5% of its GDP in the short to medium term and to 6% to 7% in the long term. A credible deterrence against an increasingly aggressive China cannot be built on hopes.

Critics would argue that India does not have the capacity to absorb a higher defence budget. Without overhauling the existing system, it may be true as we are stuck in a stasis.

China, which did not even have an aircraft carrier when India operated one for decades, is expected to have nine by 2035. India's first indigenous aircraft carrier took nearly 20 years from planning to commissioning stage. We could not order the second so far, mainly on account of budgetary constraints.

A much larger budget with innovative strategies is required to attain a credible defence capability and build India's domestic military industrial complex. Streamlining the Ministry of Defence, adoption of unconventional methods of gaining technology, and forging collaborations – all without the constraint of funding – are the only ways to make India a strong nation.

POCKET | SOUMYADIP SINHA

Post Sindoor, major boost for defence

With the highest-ever outlay of ₹7.85 lakh crore, Budget underlines resolve to upgrade military capabilities to global standards, with a strategic emphasis on self-reliance; capex allocation up 22% to ₹2.19 lakh crore, and 75% of it will be spent on domestic procurement

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

In a decisive push to strengthen national security in the aftermath of Operation Sindoor and focus on indigenous defence production, the Union Budget has allocated a record ₹7.85 lakh crore to defence services, marking the highest-ever outlay for the sector.

The allocation accounts for 2% of the estimated GDP for the financial year 2026-27, and reflects a 15.19% increase over the Budget Estimates for the current year.

Defence spending now constitutes 14.67% of the Union government's total expenditure, the highest among all Ministries.

Shot in the arm: Defence spending now constitutes 14.67% of the Union government's total expenditure. ANI

The Defence Ministry said the enhanced allocation was aimed not only at accelerating the modernisation of the armed forces and meeting routine operational requirements but also at addressing additional financial needs arising from emergency procurement of arms and ammunition undertaken after Operation Sindoor, under both capital and revenue heads.

Capital expenditure has been raised sharply to ₹2.19 lakh crore from ₹1.8 lakh crore in 2025-26, underlining the government's resolve to upgrade military capabilities to global standards, with a strategic emphasis on self-reliance.

Of the Ministry's total allocation, 27.95% has been earmarked for capital expenditure, 20.17% for operational sustenance and preparedness, 26.4% for pay and allowances, 21.84% for defence pensions, and 3.64% for civil organisations.

Capital allocation to the defence forces has risen almost 22% from the previous year's Budget Estimates, to ₹2.19 lakh crore. Within this, ₹1.85 lakh crore has been set aside for capital acquisition, nearly 24% higher than last year's. The Ministry has already concluded contracts worth ₹2.1 lakh crore during the current year up to December, with Acceptance of Necessity approvals exceeding ₹3.5 lakh crore. Upcoming projects include next-generation fighter aircraft, ships, submarines, UAVs, drones, smart weapons, and specialist vehicles.

Local push

A major thrust has been placed on indigenisation, with ₹1.39 lakh crore, or 75% of the capital acquisition budget, earmarked for procurement from domestic industries, boosting self-reliance, investment and job creation, the Ministry added. Revenue expenditure has been enhanced to ₹3.65 lakh crore, while allocations for border infrastructure, veterans' healthcare, research and development, and pensions have seen notable increases.

Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the historic allocation, saying that the Budget strengthens the balance between security, development, and self-reliance.

Mr. Singh said the post-Operation Sindoor Budget reinforced the government's resolve to bolster national security, enhance military capabilities, and ensure the welfare of ex-servicemen, while advancing the vision of an *Aatmanirbhar* (self reliant) and *Viksit* Bharat.

Quality of defence spending up

The share of revenue expenditure in overall defence outlay dropped while share of capital expenditure increased, leading to an improvement in quality of defence expenditure

Table 1: Share of capital and revenue expenditure in total defence sector outlay

Year	Capital %	Revenue %
FY20	25.62	74.38
FY21	28.81	71.19
FY22	28.92	71.08
FY23	26.33	73.67
FY24	27.00	73.00
FY25	26.83	73.17
FY26(RE)	26.95	73.05
FY27(BE)	29.44	70.56

Table 2: Allocations for various schemes as a share of Space Ministry's total Budget (In %)

Year	Department of Space	Space tech*	Space applications^	Space sciences#
FY20	13,017.61 cr.	68.16%	13.79	2.09
FY21	9,474.41 cr.	69.21%	12.35	1.98
FY22	12,473.84 cr.	71.14%	9.65	1.53
FY23	10,139.43 cr.	75.41%	12.51	1.13
FY24	10,704.07 cr.	75.51%	13.78	1.02
FY25	10,949.4 cr.	75.54%	14.27	0.99
FY26	12,448.6 cr.	77.13%	12.82	1.48
FY27(BE)	13,705.63 cr.	75.86%	12.59	4.16

Table 3: Allocations for various schemes as a share of the Science Ministry's total Budget (In %)

Year	Total (In ₹ cr.)	Science and tech	Biotech	Scientific and Industrial Research
FY20	12,637.43	42.8	18.7	38.5
FY21	11,351.48	43.1	19.9	37.0
FY22	13,113.98	39.2	21.7	39.1
FY23	12,333.14	36.0	16.6	47.5
FY24	11,558.58	34.6	12.7	52.7
FY25	13,197.67	38.0	14.9	47.0
FY26 (BE)	21,185.19	56.3	13.4	30.4
FY27 (RE)	38,260.94	73.3	9.0	17.7

***Space tech:** Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre, ISRO Inertial Systems Unit, Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre, Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Human Space Flight Centre etc

^Space applications: Space Applications Centre, National Remote Sensing Centre, Indian Institute of Remote Sensing etc

#Space sciences: Aditya-L1, Chandrayaan-3, X-Ray Polarimeter Mission & Space Docking Experiment etc

Budget allocates ₹6,000 crore for Census exercise

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

Budget for the Union Home Ministry has increased from ₹2,33,210 crore to ₹2,55,233.53 crore

The Union Home Ministry got an increase of 9.44% in the total allocation in the Union Budget 2026-27. The overall Budget has increased from ₹2,33,210 crore to ₹2,55,233.53 crore.

The Intelligence Bureau has seen an increase of ₹2,889 crore in Budget allocation from the ₹3,893 crore Budget Estimate in 2025-26 to ₹6,782 crore BE in 2026-27. The Budget was revised to ₹4,193 crore in the current fiscal. The provision is for meeting the administrative expenses of the bureau.

The Population Census, 2027 has been allocated ₹6,000 crore.

On December 12, 2025, the Union Cabinet approved ₹11,718.24 crore for the Census activities.

Village development

The second phase of the Vibrant Villages Programme, which was approved by the Union Cabinet on April 4, 2025 for the comprehensive development of strategic villages along the International Border, has been allocated ₹300 crore in 2026-27.

There was a significant increase in allocation for building projects and infrastructure for the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF). The section saw an increase of ₹1,000 crore in allocation from ₹4,038 crore in 2025-26 to ₹5,040 crore in 2026-27.

An amount of ₹1,73,802.53 crore has been given to the CAPFs such as the CRPF, the BSF and the CISF.

The government allocated ₹450.54 crore for the modernisation of State Police Forces and Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS), while ₹3,610.8 crore was provided for Security Related Expenditure (SRE) and Special Infrastructure Scheme for Left Wing Extremist Areas.

The Interoperable Criminal Justice System, one of the key pillars of the new criminal laws to integrate digital platforms enabling seamless data sharing among police, courts, prosecution, prisons, and forensic agencies has been allocated ₹550 crore in 2026-27, up from ₹300 crore in 2025-26.

With allocation of ₹500 cr., Centre bats for manufacturing sports goods in India

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The sports goods manufacturing sector on Sunday emerged as a major beneficiary with a first-time allocation of ₹500 crore as allocation for the Youth Affairs and Sports Ministry was raised by over ₹1,000 crore in the Union Budget.

The overall Budget allocation for the Ministry was ₹4,479.88 crore, an increase of ₹1,133.34 crore from the revised allocation of ₹3,346.54 crore for 2025-26.

The allocation for the Sports Authority of India (SAI), the nodal body for the conduct of national camps and logistical arrangements for athletes' training, was enhanced from ₹880 crore to ₹917.38 crore.

The National Dope Testing Laboratory and the National Anti-Doping Agency's budget, however, was reduced from ₹28.55 crore in 2025-26 to ₹23 crore and from ₹24.3 crore to ₹20.3 crore, respectively.

Ms. Sitharaman emphasised India's potential to emerge as a global hub for high quality and affordable sports goods in her speech.

The government's flagship Khelo India programme received an allocation of ₹924.35 crore.

More money and new schemes for livestock, fisheries sectors

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday announced a series of schemes to strengthen the fisheries and animal husbandry sectors in the Union Budget on Sunday, with a focus on value-chain development, entrepreneurship and rural employment.

The Budget proposes integrated development of 500 reservoirs and Amrit Sarovars. Steps will be taken to strengthen the fisheries value chain in coastal areas. Market linkages involving start-ups, women-led groups and Fish Farmers Producer Organisations will be enabled to reduce post-harvest losses and improve price realisation, it said.

To provide quality employment opportunities in rural and peri-urban areas, the Minister said the Centre would support the animal husbandry sector in entrepreneurship development through a credit-linked subsidy programme.

Focus on growth: Steps will be taken to strengthen the fisheries value chain in coastal areas, says the Budget. V. RAJU

Budgetary support for the fisheries sector has been set at ₹2,761.8 crore. The Union Fisheries Ministry said the country has one of the world's largest networks of inland reservoirs, spanning about 31.5 lakh hectares, offering significant potential for inland fisheries development.

The Union Animal Husbandry Ministry received an allocation of ₹6,153.46 crore, an increase of about 21% over the previous years. "Key provisions in the Budget focus on improving productivity, animal health, and infrastructure across the livestock value chain. Enhanced support has been extended for breed improvement programmes, expansion of veterinary services, and disease prevention initiatives to safeguard farmers' assets and ensure quality livestock output," the Ministry said in a statement, welcoming the increase in allocation.

FMSPEAK

The Union government has been delivering on fiscal commitments, consistently, without compromising on social needs

Social spending improves

In FY27, allocation for various social sectors such as health, rural development, social welfare, higher education and school education as a share of total Budget climbed

Year	Health	Rural Development	Higher Education	School Education	Social Welfare
FY20	2.36	5.30	1.37	1.96	1.66
FY21	2.28	6.10	0.92	1.48	1.07
FY22	2.22	6.03	0.88	1.23	1.07
FY23	1.75	5.69	0.92	1.40	0.97
FY24	1.84	5.43	1.25	1.53	0.95
FY25 (RE)	1.90	4.43	0.98	1.40	0.98
FY26 (BE)	1.91	4.29	1.03	1.42	1.01
FY27(BE)	1.96	5.11	1.04	1.56	1.17

All allocations are presented as a share of the total Budget (in %)
RE: Revised Estimate | BE: Budget Estimate | Source: Budget documents

This Budget gives a strong boost to affordable housing through enhanced PMAY subsidies. It will create a multiplier effect across the housing ecosystem

D. Lakshminarayanan,
MD, Sundaram Home Finance

VIEWPOINT

SUBHRAKANT PANDA
Managing Director, IMFA

Budget that invests on competitiveness

The Budget will help secure strategic materials through the Rare Earth Corridors and boost MSMEs

The Union Budget 2026-27 comes at a moment of unusual global uncertainty, marked by disrupted supply chains, rising resource constraints and fragile multilateralism. Against this backdrop, the Budget makes a clear strategic choice: maintain fiscal discipline while using public investment to strengthen India's long-term competitiveness and improve ease of living for citizens.

Rather than chase short-term stimulus, the Budget anchors itself in credibility. The reaffirmation of fiscal consolidation – combined with a continued push on infrastructure – signals a confidence that India's growth momentum can now be sustained with an equal focus on maintaining macro-economic stability.

A defining feature of the Budget is its emphasis on declining debt-to-GDP ratio. The Finance Minister noted that the ratio is projected to fall from 56.1% in 2025-26 to 55.6% in 2026-27. Lower debt and reduced interest outgo are explicitly positioned as creating headroom for spending on priority areas, especially capital expenditure.

This has allowed the government to raise public capital expenditure to ₹12.2 lakh crore, even as the fiscal deficit is reduced to 4.3% of GDP. The message is clear: infrastructure investment will remain the principal lever for growth, but it will be funded within a disciplined macro framework.

By shifting bulk cargo to waterways, the Budget targets a reduction in freight costs

The operationalisation of 20 new national waterways, starting with NW-5 in Odisha, and the launch of a Coastal Cargo Promotion Scheme aim to double the modal share of waterways and coastal shipping to 12% by 2047.

By shifting bulk cargo away from road and rail to waterways, the Budget targets a structural reduction in freight costs while promoting environmentally sustainable movement of cargo. The parallel focus on skill development and ship-repair ecosystems along waterways reinforces the idea that logistics reform can generate employment alongside efficiency gains.

The Budget's focus on Rare Earth Corridors (RECs) reflects a sharp understanding of the geopolitics of manufacturing. By supporting mineral-rich States such as Odisha, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu to develop integrated corridors spanning mining, processing, research and manufacturing, the government is addressing a critical vulnerability in global supply chains.

The proposed SME Growth Fund, liquidity support through a strengthened TReDS ecosystem, and professional compliance assistance aim to help MSMEs scale, formalise and integrate with larger value chains.

Beyond economics, the Budget repeatedly invokes 'ease of living' through tax simplification, faster customs clearance, reduced compliance, and citizen-friendly processes. These measures may appear incremental in isolation, but together they reinforce a governance philosophy that places citizens and small businesses at the centre of reforms.

POCKET | SOUMYADIP SINHA

Booster shot for education and skilling

Allocation for Education Ministry sees 14.21% increase to about ₹1.39 lakh crore; Budget for Samgra Shiksha scheme, Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan raised; Finance Minister announces five university townships and a panel to look at 'pathways from education to employment'

Abhinay Lakshman
NEW DELHI

The Centre has made a significant push in the education and skilling sector in the Union Budget presented on Sunday.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced, among other things, the establishment of five university townships near major industrial and logistics corridors, provisions to set up a girls' hostel in each district to encourage the participation of more girls in STEM education, and a high-powered 'Education to Employment and Enterprise' Standing Committee to focus on the "services sector as a core driver of Viksit Bharat".

The allocation for Atal Tinkering Labs sees a jump of ₹2,700 crore from ₹500 crore last year to ₹3,200 crore this year. S. SIVA SARAVANAN

Budget documents show the allocation for the Union Education Ministry in 2026-27 has risen to about ₹1.39 lakh crore, an increase of 14.21% compared with the revised estimates for the current fiscal, with a majority of this increase being reflected in the allocation for the Department of School Education and Literacy, where the allocation for Atal Tinkering Labs saw a jump of ₹2,700 crore from ₹500 crore last year to ₹3,200 crore this year.

Increases were also seen in the allocations for the Samgra Shiksha scheme, which saw a rise of ₹4,100 crore in its allocation compared with the revised estimates for 2025-26, and in the allocation for the Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan, which has been given about ₹600 crore more when compared with the current fiscal's revised estimates. The PM Poshan scheme also saw an increase of about ₹2,150 crore from the 2025-26 Revised Estimates.

The budget for the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship saw a significant jump in allocation, with a Budget estimate of ₹9,885.8 crore, a 62% increase compared with the previous year's Budget Estimate. However, the Budget Estimate (2025-26) of ₹6,100.1 crore had been revised to ₹2,703.54 crore by the current fiscal. Much of the allocation for the Skills Ministry has been towards the PM Skilling and Employability Transformation through Upgraded Industrial Training Institutes scheme, launched in 2025, which got an allocation of ₹6,081.8 crore.

The Minister also announced provisions to set up 'Content Creator Labs' across 15,000 secondary schools and 500 colleges to promote pathways in the Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming, and Comics (AVGC) sector. She also mentioned plans to set up another National Institute of Design for the promotion of design education in eastern India, and the reduction of Tax Collected at Source (TCS) from 5% to 2% for pursuing education abroad.

The government also announced a high-powered Standing Committee to look at the pathways from education to employment and entrepreneurship. It will identify services sub-sectors with potential for growth, assess impact of emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, on jobs and skills requirements, and propose measures to include AI in the curricula from school onwards and upgrading State Councils for Educational Research and Training Institutes for teacher training.

A new rural job scheme

Much of the Rural Development Ministry's allocations was diverted to the new Viksit Bharat – Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin), which is set to replace the Mahatma Gandhi NREGA scheme. Close to half of school education budget is devoted to Samagra Shiksha scheme. Numbers show the money allocated to each scheme/project as a % of each Ministry

- Among the schemes under the Department of Rural Development, the MGNREGA and VB-G RAM G schemes made up over 60% of allocations
- The Samagra Shiksha Scheme, formed more than 50% of the budget allocated to the Department of School Education in the last three financial years.

	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26(RE)	FY27(BE)
RURAL DEVELOPMENT								
National Social Assistance Progamme	7.1	21.6	5.1	5.5	5.9	5.5	4.9	5.0
MGNREGA/VB-G RAM G	58.7	56.6	61.4	51.3	55.1	48.6	47.1	64.7
Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojna	11.5	7.0	8.7	10.6	9.5	10.1	5.9	9.8
Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM)	7.4	4.7	5.8	6.5	8.6	8.3	8.6	9.9
Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna (PMAY)- Rural	14.8	9.8	18.7	25.4	13.4	18.3	17.4	28.3
HEALTH								
Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY)	5.1	3.5	3.8	8.4	8.3	8.2	9.7	9.3
SCHOOL EDUCATION								
Samagra Shiksha	61.6	53.7	53.5	55.4	48.3	56.0	53.8	50.4
Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman (PM POSHAN)	18.5	24.8	21.9	21.6	12.4	15.2	15.0	15.3
PM Schools for Rising India (PM SHRI)					1.8	5.4	6.4	9.0
HIGHER EDUCATION								
University Grants Commission (UGC)	12.0	11.8	13.8	13.2	9.6	8.1	6.8	6.7
Grants to Central Universities (CUs)	21.6	25.8	26.1	28.2	20.1	35.2	33.3	31.3
IITs	17.9	20.6	24.1	23.3	15.7	22.6	22.4	21.8
IIMs	1.3	1.4	1.9	1.5	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.5
National Institutes of Technology (NITs) and IIEST	9.4	10.0	10.4	10.8	5.9	11.8	11.4	11.2

The share allocated to UGC as a % of Higher Education Budget has declined over the years | Ayushman Bharat scheme forms close to 9% of the Health Budget allocation

Marginal hike for Social Justice and Tribal Affairs

Allocations stand at ₹13,687.59 crore for Social Justice dept. and ₹15,421.97 crore for Tribal Affairs

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Allocations for the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment, and the Tribal Affairs Ministry remained largely the same in the Union Budget 2026-27 compared with the 2025-26 Budget Estimates (BE).

The Ministries implement welfare schemes for marginalised sections such as the Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), Denotified Tribes (DNTs), and Economically Weaker Section (EWS).

According to Budget documents, the Social Justice Department's allocation for 2026-27 is ₹13,687.59 crore and the Tribal Affairs Ministry has been allocated ₹15,421.97 crore. The allocations have increased by 16.69% and 42.47%, respectively compared with the Revised Estimates (RE) for the current fiscal.

Allocation has been increased for the Social Justice Department mostly to implement the scholarship scheme for SCs, STs, OBCs, and the scheme to provide employment, livelihood, and housing for denotified, nomadic, and semi-nomadic tribes. The Tribal Affairs Ministry has received an increase in allocation largely to implement the Eklavya Model Residential School (EMRS) scheme for tribal students.

The Department of Social Justice and Empowerment's Scheme for Economic Empowerment of DNTs (SEED) received an increase in allocation of over 64% compared with the RE. The allocation has increased from ₹61.56 crore to ₹101 crore.

The allocation for the Atal Vayo Abhyuday Yojana for senior citizens was increased by nearly ₹100 crore. The allocation for extending post-matric scholarships for SCs was increased by ₹360 crore, while the allocation to give scholarships for OBCs, DNTs, and Extremely Backward Classes saw an increase of ₹820 crore.

The allocation for the Tribal Affairs Ministry's EMRS scheme was increased to ₹7,150.01 crore for 2026-27. The allocation to provide post and prematric scholarships for ST students was also increased.

Schemes to support livelihood, assistive devices for persons with disabilities

Abhinay Lakshman
NEW DELHI

The Union government is preparing to launch two new schemes for persons with disabilities, aimed at training them for "dignified livelihood opportunities" and providing them with "timely access" to assistive devices by setting up "modern retail-style" Assistive Technology Marts across the country.

Even as Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced the two new schemes – the Divyangjan Kaushal Yojana and Divyang Sahara Yojana – for empowering persons with disabilities, rights organisation National Platform for the Rights of the Disabled (NPRD) said the Budget "continues the exclusionary trajectory of the Modi government in its third term", saying that it "violates disability rights and entrenches inequality".

The Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD) saw an allocation of ₹1,669.72 crore for the 2026-27 fiscal, a rise of about 30% compared to the current fiscal's revised estimates, largely driven by the ₹300 crore allocation for the two new schemes.

Despite dip in spends, Jal Jeevan Mission gets ₹67,600 crore

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

The Centre's marquee Jal Jeevan Mission programme, which aims to provide potable water to every rural household, has been allotted ₹67,600 crore for the financial year 2026-27, incrementally more than the ₹67,000 crore allocated in the Budget for 2025-26.

Despite the significant allocation last year, the Jal Shakti Ministry, according to the Union Budget documents, expects to spend only about ₹17,000 crore when this financial year ends on March 31, 2026. Allocations reportedly dipped after gross irregularities in the administration of the scheme surfaced from various States.

Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Gujarat, Assam, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan have reported significant action in imposing the penalty and recovery process in cases of financial irregularities, and poor quality of works under the Jal Jeevan Mission. Uttar Pradesh has reported that it initiated enquiries in 14,264 complaints received from various channels.

Every drop counts: A few States such as Tamil Nadu have reported action in tackling irregularities and substandard work. FILE PHOTO

The Gujarat government reported that a financial loss of ₹120.65 crore had occurred due to irregularities in 620 villages of Mahisagar district, and orders had been issued for recovery from 112 implementing agencies, according to a statement in the Lok Sabha in December 2025 by C.R. Patil, the Jal Shakti Minister.

According to data reported by 32 States and Union Territories, action was taken against 621 departmental officials, 969 contractors, and 153 third party inspection agencies in cases of financial irregularities and poor quality of works under the Jal Jeevan Mission, the Ministry of Jal Shakti had said in a statement in December 2025.

As of December 11, 2025, around 12.52 crore rural households have been provided with tap water connections under the Jal Jeevan Mission.

FMSPEAK

The government will ensure the dividends of growth reach every farmer, Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and the youth

Infrastructure spending climbs

In FY27, allocations for telecom, power and housing as a share of the total Budget have improved notably, while funds for Road Ministry have stagnated

SOURCE: BUDGET DOCUMENTS

Year	MORTH	Telecom	Power	Housing*
FY20	2.91	1.06	0.57	1.57
FY21	2.83	1.21	0.30	1.33
FY22	3.26	0.84	0.57	2.82
FY23	5.18	2.84	0.22	1.84
FY24	6.21	1.96	0.37	1.54
FY25	6.44	2.62	0.42	1.14
FY26 (RE)	5.78	1.08	0.43	1.15
FY27(BE)	5.79	1.38	0.56	1.60

*Housing and Urban Affairs | RE: Revised Estimate | BE: Budget Estimate
All allocations are presented as a share of the total Budget (in %)

The intent through numbers is laudable, what is critical, however, is the design and efficacy of follow-up reforms – for cost-effective and precise delivery in national security

Raj Shukla,
Lieutenant-General (Retd.)

VIEWPOINT

CHANDRAJIT BANERJEE
Director General, CII

Sustained growth as a key 'kartavya'

Manufacturing remains central to India's growth strategy given its role in large-scale job generation

Over the past decade, the government's policy actions have enabled the economy to combine stability with sustained growth of around 7%, moderate inflation and a steady path of fiscal consolidation. Nonetheless, even amid the 'Goldilocks' phase that India is currently enjoying, the risks emanating from weakening multilateralism, fragmented trade, disrupted supply chains and accelerating technological change loom large.

In this context, the Finance Minister, presenting her ninth consecutive Union Budget, a first in India's history, is to be commended for presenting a Budget that balances short-term requirements with long-term objectives, or as the Economic Survey aptly puts it, running a marathon as sprint.

Particularly noteworthy was the framing of the government's economic agenda as *kartavya*, signalling a shift in perspective towards governance as a statement of duty. This article focuses on the first *kartavya*, namely accelerating and sustaining economic growth by enhancing productivity and competitiveness while building resilience to volatile global dynamics.

Towards this objective, the Finance Minister announced interventions across six key areas: scaling up manufacturing in seven strategic and frontier sectors; rejuvenating legacy industrial sectors; creating champion MSMEs; delivering a strong push to infrastructure; ensuring long-term energy security and stability; and developing City Economic Regions.

Textiles and sports goods get attention, given their labour intensity and export potential

Manufacturing remains central to India's growth strategy given its role in large-scale employment generation, export competitiveness, supply chain resilience and *Atmanirbharta*.

The expansion of the India Semiconductor Mission into ISM 2.0 marks a decisive deepening of India's manufacturing strategy.

Textiles and sports goods manufacturing also receive focused attention, reflecting their employment intensity and export potential. Modernised clusters, technology upgradation and integration with global value chains are expected to help these sectors move up the value ladder while supporting large-scale job creation. Targeted interventions are proposed for biopharma through Biopharma SHAKTI, aimed at positioning India as a global hub for biologics and biosimilars; chemicals and capital goods are similarly supported through cluster-led and scale-oriented interventions.

The CII has consistently advocated enhanced capital support to address the resource constraints faced by MSMEs. The budget acknowledges these challenges and proposes a comprehensive set of measures such as the creation of Champion MSMEs, which is backed by a concrete financial architecture, including a ₹10,000 crore SME Growth Fund and a significant overhaul of MSME liquidity mechanisms through TReDS.

Taken together, the first *kartavya* articulated in the Union Budget 2026-27 represents a coherent and well-calibrated growth strategy.

POCKET | SOUMYADIP SINHA

Rare earth corridors to cut China imports

The govt. will support mineral-rich Odisha, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu in establishing such corridors; China's dominance in rare earths stems not only from resource availability but more so from its long-standing strength in mining and research capacity

The Hindu Data Team
CHENNAI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced in her Union Budget 2026 speech that the government will support the mineral-rich States of Odisha, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu in establishing rare earth corridors to promote the mining, processing, research, and manufacturing of critical minerals.

This announcement comes as China – the dominant force in rare earth production and exports – leverages its mining industry as a strategic bargaining chip in its ongoing tariff war with the U.S. While the U.S. is the second largest importer of Chinese rare earths after Japan, India depends heavily on its neighbour for these materials.

The chart shows India's total rare earth imports over the years and China's share in India's imports. India's rare earth imports increased from $14.1 million in 2014 to $17.5 million in 2024. Over 45% of these minerals come from China.

China's dominance in rare earths stems not only from resource availability but more so from its long-standing strength in mining and research capacity. Rare earth elements (REEs), despite the name, are not particularly scarce.

According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), they comprise 17 metals, typically grouped into light rare earths (LREEs) – including lanthanum, cerium, praseodymium, neodymium, samarium and europium – and heavy rare earths such as gadolinium, terbium, dysprosium, holmium, erbium, thulium, ytterbium, lutetium, scandium and yttrium.

Critical components

Promethium is not included in the list as it is radioactive and does not occur in mineable quantities. They are critical components in clean energy technologies such as electric vehicles and wind turbines, as well as in defence applications.

Rare earths are essential for high-tech devices including smartphones and hard drives.

Although rare earth deposits exist in countries such as Brazil, Australia, and India, China holds nearly half of the global reserves.

China is the world's largest producer, contributing over 60% of global production in the last five years.

Beyond extraction, China dominates the value chain with around 92% of global refining capacity, according to the IEA.

Moreover, in the last five years, China has been the largest exporter, supplying close to 30% of global demand.

Bargaining chip

The announcement about rare earth corridors comes at a time when China is leveraging its mining industry as a strategic bargaining chip with the U.S. The chart shows China's share (%) in India's total rare earth imports

Top source: China is world's largest producer of rare earths, contributing over 60% of global production. REUTERS

India's rare earth imports have been increasing over time from $14.1 million in 2014 to $17.5 million in 2024. | SOURCE: UNCOMTRADE

Boost to Infrastructure allocation

MORTH: Ministry of Road Transport and Highways

**Development of NHs, #For Major Works to NHAI*

Table 1: About 60% of MORTH's Budget is expected to be spent on the Bharatmala programme. The table shows the allocations to various projects as a share of total expenditure

Year	MORTH expenditure	NHAI/Bharatmala Pariyojana#	NH and other road works*
FY20	78,248.72 cr	40.5	59.16
FY21	99,159.09 cr	46.45	53.54
FY22	1,23,550.6 cr	46.2	53.61
FY23	2,17,089.4cr	65.25	34.93
FY24	2,75,985.7 cr	60.65	39.38
FY25	2,99,460.3 cr	56.3	43.73
FY26(RE)	2,87,141.8cr	59.3	40.52
FY27(BE)	3,09,875.3 cr	60.44	39.37

Table 2: Allocations to various projects as a share of total expenditure of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs

Urban Housing	Total expenditure	MRTS and Metro Projects@	AMRUT and Smart Cities Mission	PMAY^	Swachh Bharat Abhiyan
FY20	42,054.4 cr	44.96	22.82	16.28	2.99
FY21	46,700.9 cr	19.27	20.89	44.95	2.13
FY22	1,06,840.5 cr	21.97	12.98	56.12	1.83
FY23	77,310.23 cr	30.53	19.6	37.06	2.49
FY24	68,564.9 cr	33.69	19.8	31.63	3.49
FY25	53,255.15 cr	53.6	14.59	10.92	3.55
FY26(RE)	57,203.78 cr	51.48	13.11	13.11	3.5
FY27(BE)	85,522.39 cr	36.18	9.35	21.78	2.92

@includes National Capital Region Transport Corporation ^PMAY aims at providing pucca house to every household, includes values for PMAY 2.0

Table 3: Allocations to various projects as a share of total expenditure of the Telecom department. Shares in %

Year	Telecom	Pension	Comp*	BSNL#
FY20	28,395.43 cr	47.37	10.3	
FY21	42,310.2 cr	35.28	17.02	
FY22	31,798.37 cr	46.75	26.1	
FY23	1,18,960.5 cr	13.06	44.97	22.18
FY24	86,883.94 cr	20.00	2.3	65.36
FY25	1,21,726.6 cr	14.97	6.74	59.1
FY26(RE)	53,398.17 cr	36.86	18.07	12.89
FY27(BE)	73,990.94 cr	28.47	32.44	38.48

***Pensions:** Pensionary benefits of the employees of the Department of Telecommunications (DoT),*
**Compensation to Service Providers for augmentation of telecom infrastructure, #Capital infusion in BSNL*

Semiconductor Mission 2.0 unveiled; electronics parts scheme outlay doubled

Aroon Deep
NEW DELHI

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday announced that the outlay for the Electronics Component Manufacturing Scheme (ECMS) would be increased from ₹22,805 crore to ₹40,000 crore.

The outlay is being doubled even as the scheme "already has investment commitments at double the target", and the near-doubling of the outlay will "capitalise on the momentum", she said.

The ECMS's application window is open until 2027 for just one category of goods: indigenously manufactured capital machinery to make components.

A step forward

Ms. Sitharaman also announced the India Semiconductor Mission (ISM) 2.0, with an outlay yet to be announced. "ISM 1.0 expanded India's semiconductor sector capabilities," she said. "Building on this, we will launch ISM 2.0 to produce equipment and materials, design full-stack Indian IP, and fortify supply chains."

ISM 1.0 had an outlay of ₹76,000 crore.

Budget bets on duty cuts in new clean energy push

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

The Budget reinforces India's commitment to sustainability, energy security and inclusive growth

PRALHAD JOSHI
Renewable Energy Minister

Eschewing big-ticket announcements, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday resorted to a series of customs duty exemptions in the Union Budget to encourage domestic manufacturers of clean-energy components, including lithium-ion batteries and solar cells.

The basic customs duty on sodium antimonate, used in the manufacture of solar glass, has been cut from 7.5% to zero. "Specified" capital goods required for manufacturing lithium-ion cells for battery energy storage systems have also been exempted from duty, along with several components used in the manufacture of nuclear power projects, including controller and protector absorber rods.

Last year, Parliament passed the Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Act and the Centre announced a ₹20,000-crore Nuclear Energy Mission to develop at least five indigenously designed and operational small modular reactors by 2033. Despite the policy push, the allocation for the Department of Atomic Energy has risen to ₹38,422 crore or about 2% higher than the previous year's. The allocation for atomic energy research is up by 8% to ₹10,000 crore.

The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy saw a sharper rise in allocation to ₹32,914 crore (₹26,549 crore last year). Like last year's budget, the most significant component of this year's outlay is the Pradhan Mantri Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana, which aims to electrify one crore households with solar energy by 2026-27. The Budget has earmarked ₹22,000 crore for the scheme this year (₹20,000 crore last year).

"With a significant increase in allocation for the New and Renewable Energy sector, the Budget reinforces India's commitment to sustainability, energy security and inclusive growth," Renewable Energy Minister Pralhad Joshi said in a post on X.

₹20,000 cr. earmarked for carbon capture, storage scheme

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday earmarked ₹20,000 crore in the Budget towards Carbon Capture Utilisation and Storage (CCUS) – a nascent, esoteric stream of research globally, but mooted as necessary to the quest by countries for a zero-carbon future.

CCUS refers to a suite of technologies that capture carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions from large point sources – such as power plants, steel, cement, chemicals, and refineries – and either use CO_2 as an input for products or permanently store it in geological formations.

Under the aegis of the Principal Scientific Adviser, an expert committee of the Department of Science and Technology (DST) had submitted a report in December 2025 on what India needed to do regarding CCUS to meet its net-zero goals for 2070.

A challenging task: Integration into existing industrial facilities – rather than greenfield plants – is a central design principle of India's approach to Carbon Capture Utilisation Storage. FILE PHOTO

The DST road map positions CCUS as essential for India's "hard-to-abate" sectors (for instance, iron and steel industries) where deep emissions reductions are difficult through efficiency or renewable substitution alone.

India's approach, as outlined by the DST, is explicitly research and development-led rather than deployment first.

The road map proposes a three-phase programme focused on pushing CCUS technologies from laboratory scale to pilot and demonstration projects, and eventually to commercial readiness.

It prioritises point-source capture – especially from cement, steel, fertilizers, and power generation – and emphasises indigenous technology development, and shared transport and storage infrastructure. Integration of CCUS into existing industrial facilities – rather than greenfield plants – is a central design principle. The anticipated costs, according to this estimate, will be around ₹4,500 crore over next two years.

FMSPEAK

The Union government will continue to focus on developing infrastructure in Tier II and Tier III cities with over five lakh population

Marginal rise for Railways

In FY27, Railways' share in the overall Budget improved slightly. While Aviation Ministry's share stagnated, the Shipping Ministry's share rose to its highest in eight years

SOURCE: BUDGET DOCUMENTS

Year	Railway Ministry	Aviation Ministry	Shipping Ministry
FY20	2.6	0.14	0.06
FY21	3.2	0.12	0.04
FY22	3.56	1.9	0.04
FY23	3.87	0.22	0.04
FY24	5.53	0.06	0.05
FY25	5.49	0.06	0.06
FY26 (RE)	5.15	0.04	0.06
FY27(BE)	5.26	0.04	0.1

This Budget focuses on enhancing India's competitiveness in the world and enables a wider participation in the benefits of economic growth

Anish Shah,
Group CEO & MD, Mahindra Group

VIEWPOINT

PUNEET DALMIA
Vice-President, FICCI

Strategic push to manufacturing

Union Budget emphasises the critical role the sector will continue to play in India's economic growth story

The Union Budget 2026-27 comes at a defining moment in India's growth journey.

Manifesting India's aspiration to be a developed country by 2047, the Budget gives a strategic push to manufacturing, emphasising the critical role it will continue to play in India's economic growth story.

Despite global headwinds, the Finance Minister placed a strong emphasis on stability and policy consistency in India's journey towards Viksit Bharat. Against this backdrop, India is steadily reinforcing its position as a resilient growth engine and a trusted destination for manufacturing and investment.

As a key driver of employment, exports, and long-term economic resilience, manufacturing remains central to India's development priorities. The Budget's emphasis on six critical industries – semiconductors, electronics, capital goods, rare earths, chemicals, and biopharma – signals India's intent to move up the value chain and deepen its capabilities in technology-intensive sectors. Global manufacturing continues to shift towards higher-value, innovation-intensive activities. The growth of medium- and high-technology industries is not only higher than low-tech segments, but has also been more resilient.

While this will certainly help India reduce its import dependence in strategic areas, it also aligns with the need to diversify exports in high value items. India's current export composition is concentrated on low value goods, and much of the country's export growth comes from products that fall into low- and mid-complexity categories. It is imperative for India to pursue a significant structural shift towards high-technology and value products, such as advanced machinery, precision engineering goods, electronics, and chemicals. Manufacturing today is no longer just about meeting domestic demand; it is about positioning India as a preferred global production base and a competitive exporter of high-value products. Achieving this transformation requires sustained capital investment, logistics efficiency, rapid technology adoption, and workforce readiness.

India is steadily reinforcing its position as a trusted destination for manufacturing and investment

The Budget also places due emphasis on labour-intensive sectors such as textiles through an integrated programme covering the entire value chain from fibres and clusters to sustainability and skilling. Measures to modernise existing industrial clusters, support artisans, promote sustainable textiles, and strengthen skilling under Samarth 2.0 are expected to boost productivity, generate large-scale employment, and strengthen India's competitiveness in global textile and apparel markets. Support for MSMEs is further strengthened through initiatives aimed at creating Champion SMEs. Providing equity support of ₹10,000 crore through the SME Growth Fund is indeed path-breaking. This is complemented by a proposal to rejuvenate legacy industrial clusters through targeted infrastructure and technology upgradation.

POCKET | SOUMYADIP SINHA

Seven rail corridors get green signal

Calling them 'growth connectors', the Finance Minister says the 4,000-km high-speed network planned at an outlay of ₹16 lakh cr. will link Mumbai-Pune, Pune-Hyderabad, Hyderabad-Bengaluru, Hyderabad-Chennai, Chennai-Bengaluru, Delhi-Varanasi, and Varanasi-Siliguri

Jagriti Chandra
NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in her Budget speech, announced seven high-speed rail corridors, which will connect five South Indian States and others, and will be developed at a total cost of ₹16 lakh crore.

Calling them "growth connectors", the Finance Minister said the corridors would link Mumbai-Pune, Pune-Hyderabad, Hyderabad-Bengaluru, Hyderabad-Chennai, Chennai-Bengaluru, Delhi-Varanasi, and Varanasi-Siliguri.

The corridors will reduce travel time between Chennai and Bengaluru to an hour and a half, Bengaluru to Hyderabad to two hours, Hyderabad to Chennai to two hours and 55 minutes. The travel duration between Pune and Hyderabad will reduce to one hour and 55 minutes, and between Pune and Mumbai to 45 minutes.

Next stop: A total outlay of ₹2,78,030 crore has been set aside for the Ministry of Railways in the Union Budget, a hike of 10.8% from the current fiscal year's allocation. R.V. MOORTHY

At a press conference, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw explained that with five South Indian States interlinked, the announcement would serve as a growth multiplier for them.

The Delhi-Varanasi corridor will bring down travel time to three hours and 50 minutes. The route from Varanasi to Siliguri via Patna will be covered in two hours and 55 minutes.

These corridors will be 4,000 km in length, and developed at an outlay of ₹16 lakh crore. A total outlay of ₹2,78,030 crore has been set aside for the Ministry of Railways in the Union Budget 2026-27 as compared with ₹2,55,466 lakh in the Revised Estimate of the financial year 2025-26, indicating a hike of 10.8%. The total capital expenditure for Railways is at ₹2,93,030 crore.

Safety-related measures

The Railway Minister said a sum of ₹1,20,000 crore has been earmarked on safety-related measures such as track maintenance, locomotives, coaches with rapid installation of Kavach (indigenously developed Automatic Train Protection system), and overhead electricals.

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has been granted a total capital expenditure of ₹3.09 lakh crore for financial year 2026-27 as compared with ₹2.87 lakh in the revised estimate of the current fiscal, a hike of 10.7%. Allocation to state-owned National Highways Authority of India has been increased to ₹1.87 lakh crore from last year's ₹1.70 lakh crore.

Chugging along

Not only are the Railways' allocations consistently high, but the quality of expenditure has also improved, with capital expenses as a share of Railway Budget similar to the revenue expenditure in the recent years. The sector's dependence on extra budgetary resources has also come down

Chart 1: The chart shows the operating ratio of the Railways: the ratio of its operating costs to its revenue

Chart 2: The chart shows share of various sources of Railways' income over the years

Chart 3: Share of revenue and capital expenditure in Railways' overall expenditure

Table 4: The table shows the budget allocations for the UDAN scheme under Ministry of Civil Aviation

Year	UDAN*
FY20	488.81
FY21	700
FY22	980.27
FY23	1063.81
FY24	822.22
FY25	789.31
FY26(RE)	434.5
FY27(BE)	550

**seeks to improve infrastructure and connectivity in India especially in underserved regions*

DATA TEAM: **Vignesh Radhakrishnan, Sambavi Parthasarathy, Nitika Francis, Devyanshi Bihani and Srinivasan Ramani** | DESIGN TEAM: **Kannan Sundar, J.V.S.N. Rajasekhar, T. Sankar Ganesh, A. Ganeshan, S.T. Karthick and L. Balamurugan** | ILLUSTRATIONS: **Soumyadip Sinha, Saai and R. Rajesh**

Container-making, inland waterways on a new course

M. Kalyanaraman
CHENNAI

The Budget features several proposals to boost coastal shipping and kick-start inland shipping that has largely been a non-starter especially in cargo carrying. It also promises ₹10,000 crore to support the making of containers in India.

After the COVID-19 period, during which the government realised the value of having Indian tonnage that it can leverage for national needs, the government has announced several proposals to rejuvenate indigenous shipping. In September 2025, the Union Cabinet approved a ₹69,725 crore comprehensive package that included major investment plans so state-owned Shipping Corporation of India (SCI) could buy a range of ocean-going merchant ships.

On Sunday, the Finance Minister spoke about the government's aim to develop inland and coastal shipping so that its share in total cargo carried through road, rail and water increases from 6% to 12%. Being a potentially cheaper mode, inland waterways can facilitate market access for farmers and small businesses. A major push by the government is needed to overcome the current cost and time disadvantages of inland waterways, observers say.

> Mahanadi has rich potential for development and cargo carrying. But it needs sustained investment
>
> **AMITABH KUMAR**
> Ex- Director-General of Shipping

The Budget has proposed to establish a new Dedicated Freight Corridors connecting Dakuni in the east to Surat in the west and operationalise 20 new national waterways (NW), starting with the Brahmani-Mahanadhi NW 5. This national waterway can connect mining centres in Talcher to industrial centres and feed Paradeep and Dhamra ports. "Mahanadi has rich potential for development and cargo carrying. But it needs sustained investment such as in periodic dredging to make this project work," said Amitabh Kumar, former Director-General of Shipping.

The proposal on container shipping aims to create a competitive container manufacturing ecosystem with a budgetary allocation of ₹10,000 crore over a five-year period.

Centre floats incentives for manufacture of training aircraft, seaplane operations

Jagriti Chandra
NEW DELHI

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday announced incentives for the manufacture of aircraft in India, including training aircraft and seaplanes, in the Union Budget.

The Minister has proposed removal of the 7.5% to 15% basic customs duty currently applicable on "components and parts required for the manufacture of civilian, training and other aircraft", as well as the exemption of basic customs duty on raw materials imported for aircraft maintenance, repair and overhaul services in the defence sector. The civilian aerospace sector, which also has a similar demand, waits to read the fine print in Ms. Sitharaman's Budget.

The Minister has also announced "incentives to indigenise manufacturing of seaplanes" to enhance "last-mile connectivity, and promote tourism".

A viability gap funding scheme will also be introduced to support the use of seaplanes, Ms. Sitharaman said.

Seaplane flights are part of the UDAN scheme since 2018, but no routes have taken off yet. A modified UDAN scheme announced in the previous Union Budget is awaiting Cabinet approval.

Buddhist circuits, hiking trails to put tourism on growth path

Sreeparna Chakrabarty
NEW DELHI

With a focus on using tourism to generate employment and boost local economies, the Union Budget announced a pilot scheme for upskilling 10,000 guides in 20 iconic tourist sites and setting up of a National Institute of Hospitality to train professionals in the sector.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman also said that a National Destination Digital Knowledge Grid to digitally document all places of cultural, spiritual and historic significance would be set up.

To boost tourism in the Northeast, Ms. Sitharaman also proposed a scheme for the development of Buddhist circuits in the region. These States include Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, and Tripura.

Cultural curation: The Union Budget proposes development of 15 archaeological sites into experiential destinations. VIJAY SONEJI

As far as budgetary allocation was concerned, there was a marginal dip in allotment from ₹2,541.06 crore in 2025-26 to ₹2,438 crore in 2026-27. The Revised Estimate for 2025-26 was ₹1,310.30 crore.

Keeping its focus on promoting cultural heritage, the Budget announced development of 15 archaeological sites, including Lothal, Dholavira, Rakhigarhi, Adichanallur, Sarnath, Hastinapur, and Leh Palace into vibrant, experiential cultural destinations. The excavated landscapes will be opened to the public through curated walkways.

She also announced the development of ecologically sustainable environment tourism trails. The initiative includes mountain trails in Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Jammu and Kashmir; Araku Valley in the Eastern Ghats; Podhigai Malai in the Western Ghats (Tamil Nadu), turtle trails along key nesting sites in the coastal areas of Odisha, Karnataka and Kerala; and bird-watching trails along the Pulicat lake on the Andhra Pradesh-Tamil Nadu border.

Credible, creditable

The Budget chose prudence over adventurism, and multipronged measures over Big Bang reforms

Where Budget 2025 was largely dominated by the income-tax rate and slab relaxations, Budget 2026 has done away with Big Bang measures. Instead, its scattershot approach, through various sectoral and issue-based measures, when taken together, is aimed at propelling India's growth over the medium term. Given the level of geoeconomic and geopolitical uncertainties that the Indian economy faces, this diffused approach is likely a more effective policy than targeted Big Bang announcements would be. This is not the time for further disruption. Budget 2026 contains announcements for the manufacturing sector, various services sectors, as well as particular provisions to help labour-intensive sectors such as textiles and leather. In terms of manufacturing, the Budget includes measures covering seven well thought-out areas: biopharma, semiconductors, electronics, rare earths, chemicals, capital goods and textiles. Semiconductor and electronics manufacturing are the few sectors that have gained from the government's existing PLI schemes. The India Semiconductor Mission 2.0 and the increased allocation under the Electronics Component Manufacturing Scheme are appropriate follow-ups to this. These are sectors where India needs to become globally competitive. The Biopharma SHAKTI scheme is aimed at making India a global biopharma manufacturing hub with an allocation of ₹10,000 crore over the next five years. Pharmaceuticals, already a sector that India does well in, are exempt from the U.S.'s 50% tariffs. It is also important to support those sectors that are currently hit by those same tariffs. The National Export Promotion Mission announced in the last Budget was implemented only by December 2025, nine months into the financial year. The Centre should ensure that this Budget's integrated programme for the textiles sector does not face similar delays. Also, the various measures aimed at creating 'Champion MSMEs', providing them equity, liquidity, and professional support, must be implemented quickly. MSMEs account for 48.6% of India's exports, and the EU FTA, even if it is implemented soon, will not kick in quick enough to offset the ongoing pain caused by the U.S. tariffs. The services sector, too, stands to benefit from Budget 2026. The high-powered 'education to employment and enterprise' standing committee, announced by the Finance Minister, should get off the ground soon. The focus on health care and medical tourism, where India is already developing strengths, is a good start. In keeping with the Budget's multipronged approach, the Centre has sought to cater to the election-bound States this year through several smaller announcements – such as dedicated rare earth corridors to benefit Odisha, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, a Coconut Promotion Scheme for Kerala, an integrated East Coast Industrial Corridor for West Bengal, and the first of the new national waterways to begin in Odisha – rather than through the consolidated packages of the past.

As for the Centre's finances, Budget 2026 offers a mix of expenditure enthusiasm and revenue sobriety. The capital expenditure push, especially with regard to infrastructure creation, has continued, perhaps in reaction to the realisation that current conditions do not encourage private investment. Overall, capital expenditure is set to grow to ₹12.2 lakh crore in 2026-27, amounting to 4.4% of GDP, the highest in at least the last 10 years. This includes the announcement of dedicated freight corridors and training institutes for the manpower needed. These rail corridors are also to be supplemented by a Coastal Cargo Promotion Scheme to incentivise increasing the share of inland waterways and coastal shipping. It is noteworthy that the Centre has revised downwards its capital expenditure for 2025-26 to ₹10.9 lakh crore from the ₹11.2 lakh crore initially budgeted. It remains to be seen if this year's target will be met, but even coming close will provide a substantial fillip to the economy. On the revenue front, the Centre did not announce any major tax cuts for individuals or corporations. In 2019 and 2025, respectively, corporations and individuals received substantial tax relief. To announce more would have put undue stress on central finances at a time when its expenditure commitments – known and anticipated – are substantial. However, while direct taxes have largely received procedural improvements, the Budget has included a slew of indirect tax relaxations for the promotion of marine, leather and textile products exports, and speeding up India's energy transition. The tax revenue projections are largely sober. Corporate tax revenue is projected to grow nearly 14% over the Budget estimates of 2025-26. This is broadly in line with the revised estimates for 2025-26 coming in 12.4% higher than the actuals of the previous year. Income-tax revenue has been budgeted to grow 1.9% over the BE of 2025-26 – an expected outcome following last Budget's substantial rate relaxations. Gross GST revenue has been projected to contract 13.5% in 2026-27, a reflection of the September 2025 rate rationalisation and the end of the Compensation Cess. Taken together, the Centre's fiscal deficit has been projected at 4.3% of GDP in 2026-27, down from 4.4% estimated for 2025-26. While the Centre's fiscal consolidation path since the COVID-19 pandemic has been admirable, continued aggression in reducing the deficit deserves some questioning. Even the Economic Survey argued for some fiscal flexibility for the Centre given the geoeconomic and geopolitical conditions. Overall, Budget 2026 may disappoint those looking for massive tax relief or subsidies, but is nevertheless a credible and creditable effort.

Debating Budget 2026 as turning point or tinkering

R. Nagaraj

was with the Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research (IGIDR), Mumbai

As is widely understood, the annual Budget is a political document responding to short to medium-term economic challenges. Formally, it is an annual revenue and expenditure statement outlining the government's priorities. As with any financial statement, the fine print matters the most, not obvious from the media headlines. Yet, it is useful to read the Budget closely to glean the broad direction of economic policy, especially as there are no other long-term policy documents or explicit economic targets in the public domain to locate the annual Budget.

Setting to the Budget

The proximate context of the Budget is the recent eruption of geopolitical turmoil triggered during the second term of the Donald Trump presidency in the United States. Many political and economic arrangements – or, the rules and norms of international relations that have been in place since the fall of the Berlin Wall – are now upended. India's long-term economic and security arrangements with Russia are under threat. Mr. Trump's steep tariffs on India's labour-intensive goods have dashed hopes of a closer economic relationship with the U.S. In response, India is seeking closer ties with the European Union in the form of "mother of all" free trade agreement (FTA), though its details are still unclear. India's import dependence on China continues despite the policy efforts taken, since 2020, to correct this. Diplomatic relations remain strained. For instance, China has imposed restrictions on the exports of critical minerals, tunnel boring machines and the services of skilled workers for the electric vehicle (EV) industry.

Budget 2026-27 needs to be read in this context. Unlike previously, this Budget highlights the urgency of strengthening domestic manufacturing. It also aims to streamline import duties and procedures in order to reduce imports and achieve self-reliance, and to speed up exports.

Factually speaking, the Indian manufacturing sector has not performed satisfactorily for a while now, despite headline GDP growth of 6.5% to 7% annually in real terms (net of inflation). India has deindustrialised prematurely; the share of manufacturing in GDP has declined or, at best, has remained constant. Manufacturing employment in total employment has also declined. The official GDP numbers for manufacturing seem overstated due to infirmities in estimation. Alternative figures, based on the more reliable Annual Survey of Industries (ASI), based on time-tested production accounts of factories, show distinctly slower output growth rates. With very modest growth in fixed investment (or gross fixed capital formation), industrial capacity has eroded during the last decade.

> Budget 2026-27 needs to be read in the context of much geopolitical turmoil

Rising import dependence for most capital and intermediate goods is a reason for modest industrial performance. An inverted duty structure wherein intermediate goods face higher tariffs than final goods seems to be responsible for the poor industrial investments. Policy initiatives such as 'Make in India' (2014), Aatma Nirbhar Bharat (or Self-Reliant India Movement) in 2020 and Production Linked Incentives (2021) seem to have largely failed to dent India's rising import dependence in manufactured goods despite some widely applauded successes in mobile phone assembly (with high import content, best exemplified by Apple iPhone exports).

Hence, the Budget aims to tackle domestic vulnerabilities.

The tariff modifications seem to correct for the inverted duty structures (IDS) by reducing basic customs duties on capital and intermediate goods in order to encourage domestic value addition. Likewise, rationalising procedures at points of entry of goods would perhaps reduce delays, thus improving ease of production and exports.

Focus on electronics, the China factor

The Budget makes substantial provision for augmenting the production of electronics parts and sub-assemblies, which form the single largest product-group of dependence on China. The same holds for rare earth materials (used in the production of EVs and electronic goods) – a choke point as the Economic Survey recently and rightly highlighted. To tackle it, the Budget proposes to create a dedicated rare earths corridor running through "mineral-rich States of Odisha, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu ... to promote mining, processing, research and manufacturing". Similar to encouraging the production of lithium-ion cells for battery storage, the Budget proposes to extend the tax exemption on capital goods to produce these items.

Policymakers perceive India's trade integration has to begin with labour-intensive goods. Now, with the Trump tariffs on India's exports, there is an acute need to enhance the productivity of such goods to overcome these tariffs and ensure diversification away from the U.S. In line with this view, the Budget has laid emphasis on promoting new Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) clusters, modernising the old or "legacy" clusters (about 120 of them), and providing financial assistance to MSMEs to tap the capital market. In principle, these measures are welcome.

However, the Budget seems to fall short in efforts to boost fixed investment. To augment industrial capabilities, India needs to encourage investments in high-tech industries. Such technologies are mostly proprietary items of multinational corporations that often come bundled with foreign direct investment (FDI). In recent years, net FDI, as a ratio of GDP, has become practically zero. The Budget seems to make little effort to correct for the decline in foreign high-tech investments. Geopolitical uncertainties perhaps make it difficult to attract such technology-intensive investments, at least for now.

While the government is committed to promoting exports, the Budget has permitted firms located in special economic zones (SEZs) to sell a part of their output in domestic territory. This seems regressive. The government should tackle their hurdles to augment exports, rather than choose the softer option of allowing sales in the domestic market.

A silence on Centre-State fiscal issues

The Budget, which has been presented in a difficult global context, seems well-intentioned to tackle import dependence in domestic manufacturing to attain greater self-reliance. However, considering the uncertainties, the Budget seems silent on many difficult issues. Centre-State fiscal issues have also been overlooked, considering the impending implementation of the recommendations of the Sixteenth Finance Commission. Whether the proposed measures would yield desired results to reverse India's industrial decline and import dependence (especially on China, a strategic threat) would depend on the specifics of the proposals (which we have not seen) and how they are implemented.

Budget 2026 bets big on industrial growth

M. Suresh Babu

is Director, Madras Institute of Development Studies

Budget 2026-27 comes at a time when the economy is experiencing a rare goldilocks period of high economic growth and low inflation. The Indian economy has become the fourth largest, overtaking Japan, retaining its tag of being one of the fastest growing economies. Beneath the headline numbers lie some inherent challenges, which could be amplified by the uncertainty emanating from the geopolitical crises and tariff wars, and have the potential to hinder long-term growth. A fine balance between optimism and realistic assessment is needed at this juncture to sustain growth and enhance welfare. The Budget attempts this with a slew of long- and short-term measures. It lays out a grand vision, skips specificities and maintains continuity over short-term policy stimuli.

The raise in the capex target to ₹12.2 lakh crore for FY27 from ₹11.2 lakh crore earmarked for the current fiscal signals continuity in maintaining growth primarily fuelled by public infrastructure expenditure. Reaffirming a commitment to fiscal consolidation while continuing to prioritise capital spending to support growth, the fiscal deficit target has been set at 4.3% of GDP for 2026-27.

Sticking to fiscal prudence

The Budget shows that the overarching macro policy objective is to stick to fiscal prudence as the proposed numbers seem to be on the path of targeting the debt-to-GDP ratio of 50% in the midterm though it would be at 55.6% this year. Fiscal deficit involves a gross borrowing of ₹17.2 trillion and a net borrowing of ₹11.7 trillion.

Though the net outflow from the market is the same, the gross borrowing is higher than last year. Growth in nominal GDP has been assumed to be above 10%, which appears more realistic. When we assume growth of 6.8%-7.2% in real GDP, as in the Economic Survey, inflation will be at 2.9%-3.2% in terms of the GDP deflator. This tends to indicate an average CPI inflation of closer to 4%-plus in the year ahead. These numbers will change when the new series of GDP is published.

However, there may not be too much room for further rate cuts in this scenario, given the larger borrowing programme.

> The Budget has a slew of long- and short-term measures with a view to maintaining continuity over short-term policy stimuli

Support for frontier sectors

Marking a stark departure from earlier Budgets, the focus on the manufacturing sector was right in the beginning of the Finance Minister's Budget speech. There is a concerted attempt to push industrial growth by targeting the emerging, legacy and the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) including the khadi and handicrafts sectors.

The expansion of support for seven strategic and frontier manufacturing sectors, which includes semiconductors, electronics components, biopharma, chemicals, capital goods and textiles, is an intent to move beyond Production Linked Incentives. The Electronics Component Manufacturing Scheme outlay was increased to ₹40,000 crore, while the India Semiconductor Mission 2.0 was announced to deepen domestic chip manufacturing and reduce reliance on vulnerable global supply chains.

The Budget also announced ₹10,000 crore for a new container manufacturing scheme and reinforced the logistics backbone that is critical to export competitiveness through major freight corridors and transport investments. It also responded to disruptions caused by the tariff conflict between China and the United States, which has tightened access to critical minerals, most of which are inputs for electronics, defence equipment, electric vehicles and renewable energy systems.

Measures are addressed towards the export sectors hit by higher U.S. duties, particularly textiles, leather and seafood. The announcements related to MSMEs signal a shift toward a structural strengthening of financing. The proposed ₹10,000 crore small and medium enterprises (SME) Growth Fund is expected to complement bank credit by addressing the equity gap for scalable enterprises.

The Budget sprang some surprises. First, despite the huge gap between intention and execution of disinvestments, there is an expectation of revenue realisation from disinvestments. The target for last year was ₹47,000 crore of which only ₹8,768 crore was realised. Second, it laid out a proposal for global cloud service providers such as Microsoft, Google and Amazon to use more Indian data centres, promising zero tax until 2047 on global cloud services provided by them through an Indian entity and from an Indian data centre. Twenty-two years of tax concession is one of the longest ever. Third, despite the low employment elasticity of the services sector, it anticipates higher employment generation in this sector. This seems contradictory as we see Artificial Intelligence and other technologies pushing jobs out of segments within services. Fourth, the push for more data centres does not seem to be backed by more thrust on power generation, as these centres consume more power.

Finally, though the Economic Survey pointed out the paradox in the system, that is a very good economy coexisting with a rather volatile rupee, the Budget maintains a silence on this.

The gaps

Though the Budget starts with a thrust on the manufacturing sector, it needs to be complemented with a comprehensive industrial policy. Otherwise, these announcements would remain disjointed parts of a larger package. The focus on industrial growth also need sustained domestic demand, on which there is little discussion. The effective capital expenditure for 2025-26 was budgeted at ₹15,48,282 crore but the actual has only been ₹14,03,906 crore. This shortfall affects the assumed multipliers and demand generation thereof. As external demand is volatile, domestic employment and income growth are crucial for expansion of the manufacturing sector. This has the potential of turning out to be the weak link especially during a period of price rise. Ensuring this would be the challenge for 2026-27, for which we need to run a marathon and a sprint at the same time

The views expressed are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Budget 2026-27

The proposal in Budget 2026 to extend the income-tax return (ITR) revision deadline from December 31 to March 31 is a masterstroke in terms of administrative empathy. For years, the end-of-year deadline was a wall, often leaving tax-payers in a state of panic if they discovered errors in their filings after the new year — especially since updated financial statements or a revised Form 16 often trickle in late. By allowing taxpayers to correct their returns until the very end of the financial year (with a nominal fee), the government is effectively reducing the "tax-filing anxiety" that grips millions.

This is not just about more time; it is about accuracy. It gives honest citizens a chance to self-correct rather than waiting for a formal notice from the department, which in turn reduces unnecessary litigation and the administrative burden on tax-officers. We are finally moving away from a "one size fits all" approach toward a system that respects the time and the complexity involved in different types of income.

Aarchi Verma,
Rajpura, Punjab

The Budget is devoid of any populism but squarely dwells on strengthening the fundamentals of the economy. The focus on sustained economic growth, scaling up manufacturing in seven strategic and frontier sectors, industrial clusters, SME growth, a powerful push toward infrastructure, long-term energy security, high-speed rail corridors, measures intended to raise the farmer's income and other simplified procedures are steps to becoming a more powerful economy.

S.N. Srinivasan,
Bengaluru

Amid global turbulence and geopolitical distractions, the Finance Minister has resisted reactive fiscal postures and instead focused on domestic growth and employment. The total proposed capital expenditure represents a roughly 9% increase in public investment, aimed at infrastructure and growth-enabling projects. The figure for market borrowings reflects a calibrated financing strategy that balances fiscal discipline with elevated capex outlays, and without a commensurate spike in market borrowing. This provides for improved revenue buoyancy, asset monetisation and better expenditure quality to fund growth, rather than leaning on debt markets.

R. Narayanan,
Navi Mumbai

The Budget reflects a clear preference for consolidation and structural deepening over short-term populism, protecting macroeconomic credibility amid softening global demand. The absence of income-tax slab changes or rebates leaves the middle-class salaried segment underwhelmed, making the reform narrative feel distant for ordinary households.

N. Sadhasiva Reddy,
Bengaluru

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the postal address.

Building on a tax gamble that did not pay off

The government should have gone back to the drawing board if its existing strategies were not working

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teaches Economics at JNU

Indranil Chowdhury
teaches Economics at PGDAV College, Delhi University

One interesting thing about the Budget is that people usually do not do a reality check vis-a-vis the previous Budget because the current one takes centre stage. Since Budget 2026-27 is quite run of the mill, it will not be out of place to start with the last Budget.

If there is one thing you would recall about Budget 2025-26, it was the big-ticket announcement of an unprecedented tax cut for the "middle class". The government assumed that despite the tax cut, income tax revenues would go up because of higher compliance and rise in middle-class incomes. But did that happen?

Looking back

As we had argued last year in these columns, the tax gamble may not pay off and it has not. Income tax revenues have fallen woefully short of the estimated 14.38 lakh crore. In the Revised Estimate (RE), the collection is 13.12 lakh crore, so a shortfall of 1.26 lakh crore. Add to that a similar shortfall of 1.31 lakh crore in GST collections. But for a marginally better than expected performance from corporate tax, union and excise duties, the shortfall in the overall gross tax revenue would have been much higher than 1.92 lakh crore (tax part of the chart).

To be sure, this shortfall in itself could be dismissed as a mistake in expectations. But when expenditures are linked to tax collections (which they strictly are under the rules of fiscal deficit targets), the matter is far more serious. When spending is directly tied to revenue collections, a shortfall of this magnitude inevitably results in sharp expenditure cuts. Not surprisingly, there has almost been an across-the-board cut in expenditure (expenditure part of the chart). Even the much-touted capital expenditure (capex) saw a cut, as did agriculture, education, health, rural as well as urban development. A mistake in the government's expectations cost the poor their income, their employment, their education and, their health.

Not for 2026

Budget 2026-27 needs to evaluated in light of this. This is going to be an uncertain year, both politically and economically. India is precariously placed between a current account surplus with the U.S. but a deficit with China. If its exports gets affected as a result of President Donald Trump's tariff war, without its imports countering the fall, the external situation for India may actually worsen. The Economic Survey at least acknowledged this possibility, although with a low probability of 10%. In a fundamentally uncertain world that we currently find ourselves in, you don't want to take refuge in probability theory.

The Budget seems to have taken this probability a little too literally. It has been planned as if we are still in 2025 and such a worsening of the external sector may not happen. If the external demand actually worsens, it is important for the government to focus on domestic demand as well, at least as plan B. A run-of-the-mill Budget like this one would have been fine in normal times but not this year. The focus remains on fiscal prudence, capex, supply-side measures for employment, and credit guarantees to MSMEs, much like the previous Budget or the ones before. Despite the same macroeconomic approach in earlier Budgets, employment numbers, particularly among the youth, have not been encouraging at all. Corporate investment has not been either. Should not the government have gone back to the drawing board if their existing strategies were not working? And yet what we got is more of the same. This lack of imagination comes from a blinkered vision of how the economy works. Supply-side measures work only when complemented with demand, not on their own.

Let us again take the case of public capex as a demand measure. All capex are not the same. Capex in agriculture or health or education is not the same as capex in highways. The first creates jobs along with boosting demand. Now in a world where you don't pit one capex against the other, this would not have been an issue. But if capex in infrastructure comes at the cost of capex in the form of development expenditures, and that too in an economy where gainful employment is limited, there is a serious problem. We keep boasting about our demographic dividend, which is going to peak in 2030, but we have lost most of it already with a high unemployment rate among the youth. For women, particularly in the urban areas, it is even worse.

Missing targets

What could the Budget have done instead? First, it should have kept its hawkish fiscal stance in abeyance, especially for an uncertain year such as this. It should have prioritised employment intensive development expenditure, and welfare expenditure, which also have a multi-round demand generating capacity. And second, this was perhaps the year to take the pollution bull by the horn. People were on the streets of Delhi demanding action. For the first time, it became a political issue. We needed a war on pollution but it does not even find a mention, let alone allocation. It is an opportunity lost.

Pushing welfare towards the States

The arena of welfare spending has now shifted to the States, while the Centre continues to drive the agenda by legislating and setting norms

Dipa Sinha
Associate Professor at Azim Premji University. Views expressed are personal

Budget 2026-27 for the social sector is unusual, as it does not contain any new flagship schemes, which had become par for the course.

Low allocations and spending

However, the neglect of the sector in actual allocations continues. Schemes targeted at the most vulnerable sections of the population – children, pregnant women, the aged, single women and the disabled – such as the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) providing social security pensions; SAMARTHYA, which includes maternity entitlements; PALNA for creches; PM POSHAN, which provides mid-day meals in schools; and Saksham Anganwadi, for young children have for long received low allocations, often declining in real terms. This year too, the trend continues, with allocations increasing between 0.2% (NSAP) to 5.2% (Saksham Anganwadi) in nominal terms. Further, for all these schemes, revised estimates (RE) for 2025-26 are lower than budget estimates (BE), indicating that even what is budgeted is not spent.

The story remains the same for bigger sectors such as health and education, where 2026-27 BE allocations increase by only 6.4% and 8.3% over 2025-26 BE. Even these minimal increases need to be taken with a pinch of salt as 2025-26 RE for both sectors fall below BE (by 3.7% and 5.2%).

The RE for 2025-26 are lower than what was initially allocated across the board for most social sector heads. The largest declines are in Urban Development (41%), Rural Development (20%), Development of the North-East (24%), and Social Welfare (17%). Schemes which were hyped in previous budget announcements see poor spending. For instance, allocation for the Jal Jeevan Mission has fallen from ₹67,000 crore in the 2025-26 BE to just ₹17,000 crore in the RE. The 2025-26 BE for PMAY-Grameen was ₹54,832 crore and PMAY-Urban was ₹19,794 crore. The RE for these schemes is much lower at ₹32,500 crore and ₹7,500 crore, respectively; yet, the allocations in Budget 2026-27 are once again around the same amounts as the previous year.

Students eat lunch under the mid-day meal scheme, in Kadapa, Andhra Pradesh. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

As a share of total expenditure, allocations to these sectors and schemes remain around the same. Overall, centrally sponsored schemes (CSS) show significant underspending, with total allocations falling from ₹5,41,850 crore in the 2025-26 BE to ₹4,20,078 crore in the RE (the 2026-27 BE stands at ₹5,48,798 crore).

Misplaced focus

The emphasis on capex to reduce slackness in the economy continues, with over ₹12 lakh crore being allocated this time. A thorough assessment of its efficacy in creating employment or crowding in private investment is still missing. The challenges facing the Indian economy remain the same – lack of gainful employment opportunities (especially for the educated youth), a stunted structural transformation, low productivity and hence low wages and incomes, resulting in poor purchasing power. Addressing these requires more sustained policy interventions and the Budget alone cannot do much.

Yet, the priorities signalled by the Budget remain unchanged, focusing entirely on supply-side measures in the hope of a market response. While this has not happened so far, the relevance of education, nutrition, health and social security for economic policy, and hence budgets, remains unacknowledged.

Shifting the burden

A trend in the social sector that Budget 2026-27 consolidates is that spending on welfare is increasingly in the domain of State governments. Following the 2015 reforms, cost-sharing norms were changed for most CSS, with greater spending shifted to States. While some major schemes continued to be entirely centrally sponsored, with the repealing of the MGNREGA and the introduction of the VB-G RAM G, that too has now changed drastically. The allocation of over ₹96,000 crore for VB-G RAM G in this Budget, for instance, would only fructify if the States put in around ₹56,000 crore (with the new cost-sharing ratio of 60:40). Therefore, to get a true understanding of welfare spending in the country, a granular analysis of State budgets is required.

Do the States have the wherewithal to spend? While the burden of spending is increasing, the Centre's support to the States is declining. The States' share in total tax revenue receipts is only around 34%, much less than the Finance Commission-recommended 41%, because of the increasing prevalence of cesses and surcharges in the Centre's revenue receipts. The Finance Commission's grants to States have also declined slightly from ₹1,32,767 crore in the 2025-26 BE to ₹1,29,397 crore in the 2026-27 BE.

The arena of welfare spending has now shifted to the States, while the Centre continues to drive the agenda by legislating and setting norms. How are States balancing their own priorities with the requirements of spending on central schemes? And what are the implications for people's access to social services? These are the questions we should be asking.

What the new fiscal rule means for growth and spending

Deficit reduction in FY27 is driven largely by cuts in development expenditure, particularly in the rural and agricultural sectors

Zico Dasgupta
teaches economics at Azim Premji University

The direction of fiscal policy is influenced by the nature of fiscal policy rules. The present fiscal policy rule of the Union government is informed by what can be termed as sound finance rules, where the government typically aims to meet a given borrowing target. While India has been largely following sound finance rules since the implementation of the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act, 2003, there have been two modifications since the last year.

First, in contrast to the FRBM Act, where the fiscal deficit-GDP ratio acted as the primary policy target, it is the debt-GDP ratio which appears as the primary policy target in the new policy rule. Second, the targeted level of debt-GDP ratio in the new rule stands at around 50%, which the government proposes to meet by 2031. The new rule allows the government to sustain higher debt-GDP ratio as compared to the level suggested in the FRBM Act (40%).

There are at least two implications of the present variant of sound finance rule for this year's Budget. First, since the present level of debt-GDP ratio stands above the targeted level, the government has aimed to reduce its debt-ratio by reducing the primary deficits and fiscal deficits from 0.8% and 4.4% in FY 2026 to 0.7% and 4.3% respectively in FY 2027. The fiscal consolidation strategy is similar to one pursued since FY 2022.

Second, the new target of debt-GDP ratio has provided greater fiscal space to the government as compared to the FRBM Act. While both the primary and the fiscal deficits have been reduced for FY27, the magnitude by which they have been reduced is less severe compared to the period since FY22.

Meeting the fiscal target

Any reduction in primary deficits and fiscal deficits requires the government to reduce its expenditures as compared to the non-debt receipts. The Budget Estimate (BE) of FY27 indicates a fall in the government's share of non-debt receipts in GDP to 9.3% as compared to 9.5% in FY26. This is largely on account of the fall in the share of indirect taxes and GST, both of which indicate a decline by 0.3% points in FY27 as compared to FY26.

A farmer walks past his wheat and sugarcane field on the outskirts of Amritsar. AFP

Amid lower non-debt receipts, the reduction in deficits in FY27 is brought about by a more than proportionate fall in the share of total expenditure in GDP. As compared to 13.9% in FY26, the BE of expenditure-GDP ratio indicates a decline in FY27 to 13.6%. While the capital expenditure-GDP ratio remains roughly at the same level (3.1%), the reduction in expenditure ratio is brought about by the reduction in revenue expenditure. This trend is similar to the previous years, where the government has aimed to change the composition of expenditures in favour of capital expenditure on account of its high multiplier value.

The burden of adjustment of this reduction in total expenditures has fallen on development expenditures. The latter is the sum of government expenditures on the social sector and economic services. The Annual Financial Statement indicates a reduction in the BE of the share of development expenditures in GDP to 5.7% in FY27 as compared to 6.1% in FY26. The reduction in the share of development expenditures is largely on account of a similar fall in the expenditures on rural development and agriculture and allied activities, the share of which indicates a decline to 1.2% in FY27 as compared to 1.5% in FY 26. The fall in rural development expenditures was on account of sharp fall in the expenditures in the revenue account of rural employment.

In short, the stimulating positive effect of the reduction in the GST and the indirect taxes on demand has been completely nullified by the adverse demand effect from the reduction in the agricultural and rural expenditures.

While the recent changes in the fiscal rules by the government are welcome, the continuity of fiscal consolidation strategy brings about at least two key concerns.

Two concerns

The first concern relates to stimulus for investments in an uncertain global economy. The investment-capital ratio of the corporate sector in the recent period has remained low in the midst of low global demand and exports. The present fiscal strategy hardly provides any stimulating role to corporate investments.

The second concern involves the distribution question in India's growth process. The burden of adjustment of the fiscal consolidation strategy of the government has been largely borne by the development and agricultural expenditures in the recent period. This is in contrast to the corporate tax-GDP ratio, the level of which remains largely the same as the pre-covid level. While meeting its debt targets, the present fiscal strategy has largely bypassed these two challenges.

At a time when geopolitical tensions and a global trade crisis are hitting the economy, the Budget has no provisions to address these. India is under a severe economic crisis because of U.S.'s "tax terrorism"

Vaiko
MDMK general secretary

The announcement to develop Adichanallur as one of the major archaeological sites will uphold Tamil culture. The high-speed rail lines for Chennai will make travel more comfortable

Nainar Nagenthran
BJP T.N. president

No announcement to address pressing issues such as unemployment, farmers' wages, price rise, or support for MSMEs. There was also no plan to deal with the U.S. imposing 50% tariff on Indian exports to the country

K. Selvaperunthagai
TNCC president

The Budget includes several positive schemes for the development of T.N., including dedicated rare earth corridors, high-speed rail, an inland waterway, and schemes to promote cashew cultivation

Anbumani Ramadoss
PMK leader

The target fixed for the sale of shares in PSUs is ₹8,000 cr., with a proposal to reduce the govt.'s stake to 26%. This is a bid to hand over PSUs to the private sector, with severe consequences for reservation

P. Shanmugam
CPI(M) State secretary

VIEWPOINT

R. NANDINI
Chairperson, GRG Educational Institutions

Responding to the changing realities

A significant highlight of the Budget is its focus on bridging education with employment and enterprise

I see the Union Budget 2026-27 as an attempt to respond to the changing realities of learning, work, and inclusion in today's India. The emphasis on employability, innovation, digital capability, and access suggests a conscious move to align education with emerging workforce and technology needs. A significant highlight of the Budget is its focus on bridging education with employment and enterprise. The proposal to establish a high-level 'Education-to-Employment and Enterprise' Standing Committee reflects an acknowledgement of a gap that many in the academia have observed for years: a disconnect between classroom learning and workplace expectations. If pursued with seriousness and collaboration, this initiative can help make curricula more relevant, strengthen industry linkages, and expand opportunities for internships, apprenticeships, and experiential learning.

From the perspective of inclusion, the announcement of one girls' hostel in every district stands out

Complementing this vision is the announcement of five new university townships near major industrial and logistics hubs.

The push towards future-ready skills is another notable feature. Areas such as artificial intelligence, digital creativity, animation, gaming, and design are no longer niche domains. They are becoming mainstream career pathways. The proposal to set up AVGC (Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming and Comics) laboratories in schools and colleges has the potential to spark creativity and enable hands-on learning for the students from an early stage. From the perspective of inclusion, the announcement of one girls' hostel in every district stands out.

Introduction of SHE Marts, which are community-owned retail outlets for women entrepreneurs, reflects a shift towards enabling women to move from wage-based work to enterprise ownership.

POCKET | SOUMYADIP SINHA

Announcements for T.N. lack electoral appeal

Among the demands put forth by the State were approval for Coimbatore and Madurai Metro Rail projects, funds due under Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan and Jal Jeevan Mission, and the sanctioning of intra-State railway projects. But they didn't find mention in the Budget

ILLUSTRATION: SAAI

N. Sai Charan
CHENNAI

The Union Budget 2026-27, presented by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday, falls short of attractive announcements tailored to have an immediate appeal in poll-bound Tamil Nadu.

While there are a few broad sector-wise measures that would benefit the State, the Budget lacks standout announcements. The Finance Minister announced a rare earth corridor, two high-speed rail corridors, and the development of the Adichanallur archaeological site and mountain trails and bird-watching trails. Tamil Nadu will receive 4.097% of the net proceeds of shareable Central taxes, as per the recommendations of the 16th Finance Commission, which will take effect on April 1, 2026. This is slightly higher than the 4.079% of the net proceeds of shareable Central taxes recommended by the 15th Finance Commission.

In other words, Tamil Nadu is expected to receive ₹62,530.65 crore as the net proceeds as per the Budget Estimate for 2026-27, which is higher than the Revised Estimate for 2025-26 of ₹56,819.23 crore.

Further, the Union government maintained the status quo with respect to the vertical share of devolution to the States from the divisible pool at 41%, in accordance with the 16th Finance Commission's recommendations, though States like Tamil Nadu had demanded that it be increased to 50%.

Ms. Sitharaman announced seven high-speed rail corridors , which include one from Hyderabad to Chennai and the other from Chennai to Bengaluru. She also said the Union government proposed to establish a dedicated rare earth corridor to promote mining, processing, research, and manufacturing in Tamil Nadu and a few other States.

It will develop ecologically sustainable mountain trails in various mountainous regions in the country, which include Podhigai Malai in the Western Ghats, she said, adding that a bird watching trail would be established along the Pulicat Lake on the Tamil Nadu-Andhra Pradesh border.

The Finance Minister also said the Centre will develop 15 archaeological sites across the country, including Adichanallur in Thoothukudi district.

Some of the demands put forth by Tamil Nadu at the pre-Union Budget meeting early last month included approval for the Coimbatore and Madurai Metro Rail projects, funds due to the State under *Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan* and Jal Jeevan Mission, and the sanctioning of intra-State railway projects. However, they did not find any mention in the Budget.

R. RAGU

A. Nagaraj
Housekeeping staff
Annual income: ₹1.8 lakh
Family members: three

'Earnings low, but spending still high'

The word 'moderate inflation' in the Budget speech on Sunday failed to elicit a response from Chennai resident A. Nagaraj, 52, who is struggling to make ends meet. He has overcome all odds, and successfully educated his son, who has completed his Masters in Economics in pursuit of a career in government services.

"Earnings are low, while spending remains high. I depend on loans," he said. He said that in 2026, he had been paying a rent of ₹12,000 for a one-bedroom house, which he rented for ₹4,500 four years ago. He said his wife's monthly wages of ₹7000 were used to meet monthly expenses. Essential commodities and medicine for his mother led to an increase in expenditure last year."My mother passed away recently," Mr. Nagaraj added.

"Even tea is expensive these days. My son spends ₹150 per day on petrol. I pay a bus fare of ₹42 per day. The commodities we get from the ration shop have to be improved. The interest rate for personal loans is high for people like me. Will the Budget ever address some of our concerns," he wondered.

G. Ramakrishnan
Marketing professional
Annual income: ₹22 lakh
Family members: six

'No fresh tax relief for the middle-class'

G. Ramakrishnan, 58, of Chennai said middle-class tax payers such as him had hoped to see a revision in the income tax slabs amid rapidly rising prices. "The income isn't growing for middle-class taxpayers and salaried individuals at the same rate as inflation. Be it essential goods such as cooking oil, rice, or other groceries or healthcare or fuel, all the prices are consistently increasing. If they had at least marginally increased the standard deduction limit, it would have been helpful," he said.

Those employed and retired from private firms mostly end up with a paltry sum as pension, which is barely enough to cover their expenditures, and they end up depending on the returns from their fixed deposits or other such measures, Mr. Ramakrishnan said. It may have been significantly beneficial if there were specific announcements regarding fresh tax concessions for senior citizens, he added.

"Despite paying a hefty tax, if I don't see any relief measures to tackle healthcare expenses, it will be a struggle," he added.

Ranjit K. Jain
Distributors and channel partners
Annual Income: ₹30 lakh
Family members: four

'The Budget is a study in contrasts'

For a family in the ₹30-lakh income bracket, the Union Budget is a study in contrasts. While it delivers a major victory for our global aspirations, it remains stubbornly silent on the domestic tax relief we had anticipated to combat the rising cost of urban living. We are now firmly in the highest tax slab of 30% under the new tax regime.

Our primary hope was for a 'bracket stretch' – moving the trigger to ₹35 lakh. Such a move would have boosted the take-home pay of senior professionals, said Ranjit K. Jain of Chennai. With tax slabs and the standard deduction of ₹75,000 remaining unchanged, our domestic tax outgo remains a significant portion of our gross earnings. The drastic reduction of Tax Collected at Source on overseas tour packages and remittances to a flat 2% (down from 20%) is a game changer. This Budget feels like a strategic 'pat on the back' for the global traveller but a 'cold shoulder' to local earner. It supports our dreams of international mobility while asking us to continue the heavy lifting of domestic tax revenue without any fresh relief.

Agriculture sector's issues haven't been addressed: farmers

The Hindu Bureau
TIRUCHI

Several farmer organisations in Tamil Nadu on Sunday said the Union Budget did not sufficiently address issues faced by the agriculture sector, including rural distress, rising input costs, and climate-related challenges.

The Tamil Nadu Farmers' Association, affiliated to the CPI(M), said the Union government had failed to offer any meaningful intervention to address the agrarian crisis even after more than a decade in office. In a statement, its general secretary Sami Natarajan termed the Budget a "grave betrayal of farmers", contending no new schemes had been announced and allocations for agriculture continued to remain inadequate. He also pointed to the absence of enhanced allocations for fertilizer and pesticide subsidies and expressed disappointment that the annual ₹6,000 assistance under the PM-Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme had not been revised upwards, despite sustained demands from farmer groups.

Echoing these concerns, P.R. Pandian, president of the Tamil Nadu All Farmers' Associations Coordination Committee, said the Budget prioritised industrial investment while ignoring the basic needs of the farm sector.

While welcoming announcements related to sandalwood cultivation, coconut farming and efforts to globalise cashew production, Mr. Pandian said the lack of financial support for staple crops such as paddy, wheat and sugarcane was deeply disappointing. He also criticised the absence of a long-term vision on strengthening input subsidies, expanding cultivated area, improving irrigation infrastructure, river interlinking, rainwater harvesting and groundwater recharge. Similar views were expressed by P. S. Masilamani, general secretary of the Tamil Nadu Farmers' Association affiliated with the CPI.

For the full story, visit: newsth.live/Agri

Union Budget proposes measures to accelerate growth, say industry leaders

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

P. Ravichandran, deputy chairman, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII)-Southern Region, and president of Danfoss India, said on Sunday that if the Union Budget for 2026-27 could be described in one word, it would be "growth". The Budget proposed measures to accelerate growth, he said at a press conference organised by the CII-Southern Region in Chennai.

The government had been focussing on infrastructure in the past three to four years, and some of the budgetary announcements this year – such as a high-speed railway corridor, a freight corridor, and waterways – would boost connectivity, he said. "Infrastructure will also help in generating employment as well as growth," he added.

C.K. Ranganathan, past chairman, CII-Southern Region, and chairman and managing director of CavinKare Pvt. Ltd., said the Budget paid attention to the textile industry. "Special importance has been given to the value-added textile industry," he said, adding that it would help the States such as Tamil Nadu where textile industries are located.

A.R. Unnikrishnan, chairman, CII-Tamil Nadu State Council, and managing director, Glass and Glass Solutions, Saint-Gobain India Pvt. Ltd., termed the Budget "foundational and long term-oriented".

Thomas John Muthoot, chairman, CII-Southern Region, and chairman and managing director of Muthoot FinCorp Ltd., described the budget as a balanced and forward-looking roadmap for India's long-term economic growth. The Madras Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) said the Budget was anchored in fiscal discipline and sustained capital expenditure, even while seeking to strengthen India's growth fundamentals. "The Chamber appreciates the balanced approach reflected in the Union Budget 2026-27," MCCI president Ramkumar Shankar said in a release.

Industry and business leaders at a press conference discussing the Union Budget 2026-27 on Sunday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

G.S.K. Velu, FICCI Tamil Nadu State Council chairman, and chairman and managing director, Trivitron Healthcare/Neuberg Diagnostics Group of Companies, said, "We welcome the Budget's strategic and forward-looking action for health and biopharma."

Bhupesh Nagarajan, co-chairman, FICCI Tamil Nadu State Council and chairman and managing director, Indira Group of Companies, said, "This Budget delivers a powerful impetus to infrastructure, construction, and trade."

Ashok G. Verghese, co-chairman, FICCI Tamil Nadu State Council and pro-chancellor, Hindustan Group of Institutions, said the Budget underscored the importance of education, skills, and employability as the engines of future growth.

The Tamil Nadu Small and Tiny Industries Association (TANSTIA) said the Budget prioritised structural reforms and infrastructure improvement.

"While we welcome the aggressive push toward industrialisation and liquidity, we remain concerned about the fiscal pressure mounting on the micro-enterprise sector," its president S. Vasudevan said.

K.E. Raghunathan, national chairman of the Association of Indian Entrepreneurs, said the Budget failed to address the challenges of micro and small enterprises.

"While the government claims to have focused on MSMEs, it is evident that policy announcements have been made without meaningful consultations with entrepreneurs who are facing severe stress owing to weak demand, delayed payments, high compliance cost, the impact of the U.S. tariff, and global uncertainties," Mr. Raghunathan added.

From Page One

'Even on eve of poll, Budget ignored T.N.'

Mr. Stalin said that even though the 16th Finance Commission had sought to recognise States' contribution to the Indian economy, it appeared that Tamil Nadu's share of tax revenue was likely to continue at 4.097% for the next five years despite its substantial contribution. "This anomaly has not been corrected by the 16th Finance Commission," he said.

He said it was highly condemnable that Tamil Nadu's share of tax revenue had been reduced by ₹1,200 crore, especially when GST reforms had affected the State's tax revenue. "At a time when we are eagerly waiting for the allocation of funds for schemes, there are no new schemes. This shows the Union government's step-motherly attitude towards Tamil Nadu," he said.

The Chief Minister said the Budget had failed to allocate ₹3,548 crore for education since Tamil Nadu had refused to implement the three-language formula, and that there was no announcement regarding the allocation of ₹3,112 crore for the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM), even though Tamil Nadu had implemented the scheme effectively.

'Ignored State's demands'

Finance Minister Thangam Thennarasu said the Budget had ignored the State's genuine demands, and failed to allocate funds for development schemes, employment generation, education, health, and industrial investment.

INBRIEF

Stalin and Udhayanidhi visit BJP leader H. Raja in hospital

Chief Minister M.K. Stalin and his deputy Udhayanidhi Stalin on Sunday visited Apollo Hospitals in Chennai, where senior BJP leader H. Raja has been under treatment after collapsing at a public event on Friday. They enquired about his health with his family.

T.N. Assembly poll: Congress identifies 70 seats to field candidates

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

The Congress committee formed for seat-sharing talks with the ruling DMK has identified around 70 Assembly constituencies in Tamil Nadu from which it would like to contest in the 2026 Assembly election.

"We are firm that our alliance with the DMK will continue, and it is for the high command to take decisions on issues such as power-sharing and the number of seats we should get. Focus is on identifying constituencies where we have a base and where our prospects are strong," a committee member said.

The Congress State unit is likely to gain momentum with the visit of its leader Rahul Gandhi in the third week of February. DMK Parliamentary Party leader Kanimozhi has already discussed with him issues related to seat-sharing and a share in power.

On Sunday, members of the AICC committee for Tamil Nadu and Puducherry – Girish Chodankar, Suraj Hegde, TNCC president K. Selvaperunthagai, and Congress Legislative Party leader S. Rajeshkumar – met and discussed various issues. Nivedith Alva, a representative of the AICC, did not attend the meeting.

No force can destroy unity in DMK-led alliance: Stalin

This is not an electoral alliance based on numbers, but one formed on shared beliefs, to defeat fascism, he says while addressing the valedictory of the CPI's centenary celebrations in Chennai

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

> The BJP hates the ideas of secularism, socialism, equality before law, social justice, and communism. It intends to remove them not only from its rule but also from the dictionary
>
> **M.K. STALIN**
> Tamil Nadu Chief Minister

Political opponents who hoped to destroy the unity in the DMK-led alliance have ended up in failure, DMK president and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin said on Sunday. He asserted that no force could divide the fraternity among the allies.

"This is not an electoral alliance based on numbers, but one formed on shared beliefs. This is an alliance formed with the objective to hold high India and Tamil Nadu," Mr. Stalin said, while addressing the valedictory of the Communist Party of India's (CPI) centenary celebrations in Chennai.

"The camaraderie between us goes beyond electoral politics. We stand together as democratic forces against casteism, classism, majoritarianism... It is this camaraderie that will defeat fascism, autocracy, communalism, and dictatorship," he said.

Tearing into the BJP, Mr. Stalin said its "tentacles" were destroying everything. "The BJP-led Union government has been destroying the ideals that were protected by the country. They are destroying the ideals in the Constitution so that they would suit their interest. They are attempting to weaken the ideal of 'Unity in Diversity' and shift the country towards a unitary model."

'Narrow-minded'

Contending that the BJP was dangerous, narrow-minded and against the multi-dimensional nature of the country, Mr. Stalin said it believed that States should not have any power. "The BJP hates the ideas of secularism, socialism, equality before law, social justice, and communism. It intends to remove them not only from its rule but also from the dictionary. Our country is facing a huge crisis," he said.

If the BJP had won 370-400 seats like it wanted to in the Lok Sabha elections, "the situation would have been worse", he said.

"All the democratic forces in the country formed the INDIA bloc and controlled the speed of the BJP. Even without a majority, the BJP has been using its sharp nails to injure democracy. In this scenario, we need to remain vigilant and careful," he said.

He reiterated that the upcoming Assembly election was between Tamil Nadu and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). "The BJP is riding on the back of its slaves who betrayed Tamil, the Tamil community, and Tamil Nadu," he said.

Mr. Stalin asked why Prime Minister Narendra Modi had not mentioned the AIADMK during his recent electoral campaign. "It is because the AIADMK is not an individual party. It is a wing of the BJP. [AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K.] Palaniswami of this wing, is going about making assurances which even [Mr.] Modi did not make!" Mr. Stalin said.

The BJP had ignored Tamil Nadu in the Union Budget only because it was sure it would lose the Assembly election, Mr. Stalin added.

The alliance parties should remain united for the country's development, Mr. Stalin said.

'Same objective'

Pointing to the equal share of red in the DMK flag, Mr. Stalin said: "There may be minor differences in our principles and political outlook, but the aim of the Dravidian and the Communist movements are the same, which is to have an egalitarian society."

He also recalled the words of late leader and former Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi that he would have become a Communist if there was no Dravidian movement.

Additionally, the Chief Minister said he would unveil a statue of political economist Karl Marx on the Connemara Public Library campus in Chennai on February 6.

Statue of Omandur Ramasamy Reddiyar to be installed

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin announced on Sunday that a statue of former Premier of Madras Presidency, Omandur Ramasamy Reddiyar, would be installed on the campus of the Government Medical College, Omandurar Government Estate.

He made the announcement in a social media post on the occasion of Ramasamy Reddiyar's birth anniversary.

The Chief Minister hailed his simplicity and participation in the freedom struggle.

Tamil Nadu Governor R.N. Ravi paid floral tributes to the portrait of the late leader at the Lok Bhavan.

Highway renamed

On the occasion of Thai Poosam, Mr. Stalin also announced that the Tiruvottiyur highway would henceforth be called 'Vallalar Nedunchalai'.

In a social media post, the Chief Minister announced that a Vallalar conference would be held at Ekambaranathar School in Kilpauk on February 15.

Mr. Stalin also listed the measures undertaken by his government to honour the legacy of Vallalar.

Three college students die as car collides with bus

The Hindu Bureau
CUDDALORE

Three college students were killed and three others were injured after the car in which they were travelling collided with a private bus at Ezhuthur in Cuddalore district on Sunday.

The police said Dharaniselvan, 20; Vinayagam, 19; Nishanth, 19; Madupriyan, 19; Sasikumar, 26; and Rakesh, 18 – all third-year students of B.Sc. Agriculture – were travelling from Tiruchi to Chennai. As they approached Ezhuthur on the Chennai-Tiruchi National Highway, the driver lost control of the car, which jumped the median and landed on the opposite lane before colliding with a Tiruchi-bound bus.

Dharaniselvan, Vinayagam, and Nishanth died on the spot.

Budget will ensure sustained economic growth, says EPS

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

> The emphasis on reducing imports, enhancing domestic production, and promoting research and manufacturing and encouraging high-technology sectors is commendable
>
> **EDAPPADI K. PALANISWAMI**
> AIADMK general secretary

AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami said on Sunday that the Union Budget 2026-27 was aimed at strengthening fiscal management, reducing the fiscal deficit, and ensuring sustained economic growth.

"These measures will further reinforce India's long-term economic stability and growth trajectory. The emphasis placed on reducing imports, enhancing domestic production, promoting research and manufacturing, and encouraging high-technology sectors – including artificial intelligence, digital manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, textiles, container manufacturing, and green energy – is commendable," he said.

Mr. Palaniswami further said that despite the prevailing global uncertainties, India's economy continued to demonstrate resilience and strength, with the growth projected at 6.5%-7% during 2025-26 and 6.8%-7.2% in 2026-27.

Measures for MSMEs

Highlighting the measures announced for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), Mr. Palaniswami said the allocation of ₹2,000 crore for ensuring credit access and ₹10,000 crore for growth-financing would benefit entrepreneurs and small industries.

"Tamil Nadu, which has a strong base of MSMEs, will gain in particular from these initiatives. The allocation of funds for the development of the textile sector, especially in regions such as Tiruppur and Karur, would give an impetus to employment generation and export growth," he added.

DMDK entitled to seek double-digit share of seats, says Premallatha

The Hindu Bureau
NAGERCOIL

DMDK general secretary Premallatha Vijayakant addressing the media in Kanniyakumari district on Sunday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam (DMDK) general secretary Premallatha Vijayakant on Sunday said the party had completed the formation of booth committees in all the 234 Assembly constituencies and was, therefore, entitled to seek a double-digit number of seats (from parties heading alliances).

On the sidelines of a party event in Rajakkamangalam in Kanniyakumari district, she asked, "If all other parties are asking for double-digit seats, why not the DMDK?"

When asked by *The Hindu* whether Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam's entry would affect the DMDK's vote bank, given that TVK founder Vijay is also from the film industry, Ms. Premallatha said the cadre of all parties were working for their respective parties, and the impact on the vote bank could not be assessed right now.

Referring to the Tamil saying '*Makkal Theerppey Magesan Theerppu*' (The voice of the people is the voice of God), she said, "we have to wait and see" for the results and their impact.

Nandan Canal project

She said DMDK MLAs had raised the issue of the Nandan Canal project a decade ago. About 10 days ago, when her son and party functionary Vijaya Prabhakaran visited Villupuram and Kallakurichi constituencies, he also drew attention to it. "Finally, day before yesterday, the State government allocated ₹42 crore for the project," Ms. Premallatha said, adding that the DMDK welcomed the initiative.

On welfare schemes implemented by the State government, she said that a majority of the people in Tamil Nadu lived below the poverty line, and the schemes and grants provided by the current government helped improve their lives. "Naturally, such initiatives should be welcomed," she said.

Ms. Premallatha further said that once the alliance structure and constituencies allocated for the DMDK were finalised, the party would announce the candidates, adding that everyone in the DMDK was a star candidate.

Govt. scheme improves access to NCDs treatment for marginalised sections: study

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

A study has found that the Tamil Nadu government's *Makkalai Thedi Maruthuvam* (MTM) initiative has improved access to non-communicable diseases (NCDs) care, especially for diabetes and hypertension, among the marginalised populations, particularly women, rural residents, and members of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes.

The study has also called for strategies to address the gaps in cancer-screening uptake, disease control, and the programme's reach in urban areas.

The study has found that nearly 80% of the 6,856 individuals surveyed, aged 30 and above, were screened for diabetes (79.4%) and hypertension (81.25%), with over two-thirds of the services delivered by the MTM field staff. While more than 95% of those diagnosed were on treatment, effective control remained poor – at 9.8% for diabetes and 35.4% for hypertension.

The State-wide cross-sectional household survey was conducted in all 38 districts to evaluate the reach and effectiveness of services under the MTM, an initiative that delivers home-based screening and care for NCDs.

The study was conducted by the faculty of community medicine of government medical college hospitals and the Directorate of Public Health and Preventive Medicine (Subramaniam S., Somasundaram A., E, C. et al).

The findings were published in an article – *Makkalai Thedi Maruthuvam: evaluating equity in non-communicable disease care through a doorstep primary health program in Tamil Nadu* – in the journal *BMC Primary Care*.

Meeting requirements: The study to evaluate the effectiveness of *Makkalai Thedi Maruthuvam* initiative called for strategies to address the gaps in cancer-screening uptake and disease control.

Women comprised 62.4% of the sample. The majority (60.6%) were residents of rural areas. The study noted that 80.8% of the women and 80.5% of the rural residents had undergone diabetes screening.

Of those screened for diabetes, 67.6% were screened under the MTM, largely by field workers.

About 20.7% of all participants had been diagnosed with diabetes, with nearly two-thirds of the recent diagnoses attributed to the MTM. While 97.3% of those diagnosed were on treatment, more than half received their medicines under the programme. Nearly 30% reported shifting from private to public sector services in the past year.

Similarly, 75.4% of the new hypertension cases were identified through MTM, with treatment coverage at 96.2%, and nearly two-thirds receiving treatment through MTM services, the authors said.

"MTM has fundamentally shifted NCD care from a facility-dependent model to a community-owned, doorstep model that actually reaches the most marginalised. It is solving the problem of access. At present, MTM is largely positioned around secondary prevention. The next phase has to deliberately move towards primary and primordial prevention. That means not just finding the disease early, but preventing disease itself by addressing lifestyle, behaviour, and risk environments within households and communities. In other words, MTM has succeeded in reaching people. Now, it must succeed in keeping people healthy," said one of the authors, Sudharshini Subramaniam, Professor of Community Medicine, Government Vellore Medical College.

Critical gaps

The study, however, noted that cancer screening coverage was substantially lower, with notable disparities across caste and economic groups.

About 11.1% of women reported undergoing cervical cancer screening at some point, while 14.2% had been screened for breast cancer. Oral cancer screening was reported by only 3.9% of all participants. Urban women were more likely to undergo cervical cancer screening than rural women. SC women had the highest breast cancer screening rates at 41.2%, while ST women had the lowest (20.5%).

The authors noted that socioeconomic status strongly influenced screening uptake, with women from higher income classes more likely to have been screened for both cervical and breast cancers.

The authors stressed that future efforts should prioritise strengthening cancer screening services, ensuring continuity of care, and designing urban-specific interventions, while underscoring the importance of community health workers.

City gets two high-speed rail corridors in Union Budget '26

Trains in the corridors would be operated at a minimum speed of 230 kilometres per hour, says a railway official; activist calls for a network to connect other major urban centres in the State

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Chennai is set to get two new routes of high-speed rail in the future.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in the Union budget 2026 presented on Sunday, announced seven new high-speed rail (HSR) corridors, including two corridors from Chennai. The project would be executed by National High-Speed Rail Corporation Limited (NHSRCL).

As the country set to witness the operation of bullet trains from Mumbai to Ahmedabad in a few years, the construction of two HSR corridors from the city to Bengaluru and Hyderabad would be a big boost to the thousands of passengers.

A senior Southern Railway official said the routes to Bengaluru and Hyderabad are in high demand as numerous trains are operated from Chennai, including the double-decker train. More than 25 mail and express trains are operated from and via Chennai to Bengaluru, the official pointed out.

Flagship project: The high-speed rail corridor will be built by the National High-Speed Rail Corporation Limited. REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE

Last year, the Union Railway Minister had announced that a detailed project report for the HSR corridor from Chennai to Hyderabad, with a stop at Tirupati, was being prepared.

A senior railway official said that trains in the new high-speed rail corridor would be operated at a minimum speed of 230 km/h, while the bullet trains would be operated at a speed of 370 km/h. For the HSR corridor, new tracks with international standards, similar to those of bullet trains, would be constructed. The HSR corridors would be operated between cities where most passengers undertake air travel. At present, train travel time from Chennai to Bengaluru, including the Vande Bharat, is around six hours, and more than 12 hours to Hyderabad. However, the travel time to Hyderabad would be less than three hours in the HSR corridor. However, residents in the city said that an HSR to Coimbatore would have paved the way for creating a business and tourism corridor. Coimbatore has many heavy industries and also remains the gateway for tourists visiting Ooty.

Transport activist Dayanand Krishnan said it was very disappointing to note that the high-speed rail network planned for the State benefits only Chennai, which lies at the northern part of the State.

"To truly benefit a highly urbanised State like Tamil Nadu, with a population of around 8 crore, the HSR alignment should cover major cities such as Coimbatore in western Tamil Nadu and Madurai in southern Tamil Nadu, thereby connecting them to the capital, Chennai. Extending the proposed HSR connectivity further to Bengaluru and Hyderabad would be a huge welcome and a significant advantage for the people of Tamil Nadu," he said.

Madras Canine Club's dog show ends with grand finale

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

The Madras Canine Club (MCC) concluded its two-day All Breeds Championship Dog Show on Sunday with the grand finale and prize distribution held at St. Bede's School Cricket Ground in Mylapore, marking the Club's Golden Jubilee year.

The event featured a comprehensive programme including obedience trials and three specialty shows -- the Indian Breed National Specialty, the Dobermann National Specialty, and the 19th Great Dane Specialty Show.

An Afghan Hound draws admiring glances from the crowd at the All Breeds Championship Dog Show in Chennai. J. JOHAN SATHYADAS

Rare breeds

Over 40 dog breeds from across India participated, ranging from popular retrievers and hounds to indigenous breeds, as well as rarer ones such as the Rhodesian Ridgeback and Basenji.

An international panel of judges officiated the championships, including Andi Hudono (Indonesia), Petru Muntean (Romania), Stefan Mitrevski (Macedonia), John Bryson (Australia), and Gerard Jipping and Tatjana Urek Jipping (the Netherlands).

The obedience trials were judged by Manjunath M.R. from India.

The prize distribution ceremony was held on Sunday evening, with Tamil Nadu Minister for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises T.M. Anbarasan and Chennai Mayor R. Priya attending as chief guests.

In the All Breeds Championship, a Siberian Husky (Exhibit No. 220), owned by Abhijit Dutta and Brueva, won the Best in Show title. An Afghan Hound (Exhibit No. 349), owned by Praveen Kumar, secured the second position.

In the Dobermann Specialty Show, a Dobermann (Exhibit No. 74), owned by Abhimanyu Reddy and Vasudeva Reddy, was adjudged Best in Show, with the Afghan Hound owned by Mr. Kumar placing second.

Children seek lessons on AI, safe touch in new syllabus

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Children from various districts across the State put forth their views here on Sunday regarding the new curriculum that is being designed by the School Education Department.

From lessons on artificial intelligence, laws related to children and safe touch to curiosity inducing exercises, children compiled their recommendations on the curriculum to submit to the Curriculum Design Committee.

At a State-Level Children's Consultation on formulating recommendations to the State School Curriculum Design Committee, children deliberated for two days on the curriculum they envision. The consultation was organised by the Forum for Promotion of Child Participation (FPCP) Tamil Nadu and Puducherry and Federation of Children's Movements for Right to Participation (FCMRP) Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.

Over 20 children from various districts such as Madurai and Chengalpattu among others took part.

Marathon promotes cancer awareness

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

The fourth edition of the K10K Cancer awareness run, organised by Kauvery Hospital, was held in the city on Sunday. Health Minister Ma. Subramanian flagged off the marathon, which had two categories: 5 kilometres and 10 kilometres. The annual run is being held to stress the importance of early screening and preventive health practices. P. Vijaykumar, Joint Commissioner of police (Traffic South) and Dr. Aravindan Selvaraj, Co-Founder and Executive Director of Kauvery Hospital, also participated. More than 7,000 people participated in the event.

Man's body retrieved from lake in Porur

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

The body of an unidentified man was recovered from the Porur Lake on Sunday morning.

A senior official from the city police said that on Saturday night, a few persons, who were engaged in fishing in the locality, saw a body floating on the lake and alerted the Porur police

However, the personnel were unable to retrieve the body at night, and there was also heavy growth of water hyacinth.

The body was recovered on Sunday morning, and sent to the Government Kilpauk Medical College Hospital for a post-mortem. Further probe is on.

OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

DEATH

IN LOVING MEMORY OF

K Jegadeesan (Retd. GSI)
12/11/1932-1/2/2026
With deep sorrow, we inform you that my beloved father attained eternity. The final rites will commence at 3:00 PM 02-02-2026, at I Block No.2, HIG Flats, Adyar Apartments, Kottur Gardens, Kotturpuram, Chennai 600085. We humbly request your prayers for the departed soul and strength for the bereaved family
9444827919

SAD DEMISE

Dr. R. ANANDAN, M.VSc., Ph.D
DOB: 06.03.1936 | DOD: 01.02.2026
FUNERAL ON TUESDAY, 03.02.2026
11.00 AM AT ANNA NAGAR VELANKADU CREMATORIUM
DEEPLY MOURNED BY:
KALPANA, GOVINDARAJ, SARAVANAN, SABITHA, PRASHANTH, MRINALINI, SUSHRUTH, DHAESHNA

DEATH ANNIVERSARIES

SIXTH ANNIVERSARY
In Loving memory of

C. Rajakesari
15.11.1934 - 02.02.2020
(Retired Deputy Secretary, Govt. of Tamil Nadu)
Sadly missed, but daily remembered
In loving remembrance
Tmt. R. Indrani - Wife, Ganapathy - Son
Ramya - Daughter-in-law
Arul & Abirami - Grandchildren
Tel: 9945388066

FIFTH ANNIVERSARY

Dr. N. LAKSHMANAN
Former Director, CSIR-SERC
Remembering you every single day
Dr.Gomati Lakshmanan
Family & Relatives
+91-98415 57272

KALYANA KARNATAKA ROAD TRANSPORT CORPORATION
STORES & PURCHASE DEPARTMENT, CENTRAL OFFICES,
Sarige Sadana, Main Road, Kalaburagi-585 102.
Tel. & Fax No. 08472-260502, Mobile No. 77606 86172 (COSP), 77609 92029 (S.O).
No. KKT/CO/COSP/ 03 /2025-26 Dated: 29.01.2026

"E"- AUCTION NOTICE

Scrap Materials available at KKRTC, Various Divisions, will be sold through e- Auction on, e-proc portal of GoK.

The e-Auction schedule is as under:

Sl. No.	E-Auction No	No of Lots	E-auction Notification Date	Last date to upload auction documents	Live bidding date & Time	Auction value in Crores
01	KKRTC/2025-26/Auction-03	38	02.02.2026	20.02.2026	04.03.2026 10.30 AM to 17.30 PM	1.06
02	KKRTC/2025-26/Auction-04	53			05.03.2026 10.30 AM to 17.30 PM	1.96

The interested Bidders may log on to https:// kppp.karnataka.gov.in or contact to cospnekrtc@gmail.com or support@helpdesk.com for further details. They may also contact Stores and purchase department, KKRTC, at bellow mentioned address for needful clarification.

Address: Kalyana Karnataka Road Transport Corporation Central Offices, Stores & Purchase Department, Sarige Sadana, Main Road, Kalaburagi-585102. Mob. No-7760686172/ 7760992029

Sd/-
Controller of Stores and Purchases

DIPR/Kalaburagi/1037/KSMC&A/2025-26

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Presents

THE HINDU WELLNESS SERIES

a webinar on
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Tuesday, February 03, 2026 | 11:30 AM Onwards

Dr A N Vaidhyswaran
Senior Consultant, Director - Radiation Oncologist, Kauvery Hospital, Alwarpet, Chennai

Dr Sathish Kumar Anandan
Senior Consultant, Surgical Oncologist & Robotic Surgeon, Kauvery Hospital, Vadapalani, Chennai

Dr Mangai Suseela
Consultant, Medical and Haemato Oncologist, Kauvery Hospital, Trichy - Tennur

Soma Basu
Journalist, Moderator

To register,
newsth.live/THKACP
or scan the QR Code

NORTH WESTERN RAILWAY TENDER NOTICE No: S/2026/004 Date: 30-01-2026

SUPPLY OF STORES ITEMS "THROUGH E-PROCUREMENT TENDERS"

The Principal Chief Material Manager, North Western Railway, headquarter Jaipur, for and on behalf of the President of India invites Open E-tenders on **www.ireps.gov.in** site as follows.

Sr.	Tender No.	Brief Description	Qty	Unit	Due date
1.	6325ENG49	Running contract for Manufacture and Supply of PSC Sleepers 1in12 Turnout to Drg. No. RDSO/T-4218 (Alt-8)	1800	Set	23-02-2026
2.	50251166	Low maintenance Lead Acid Secondary Cell 2V/200AH capacity	1136	Nos	24-02-2026
3.	65255023A	3 Axis Non contact Magnetic Crack crack detector machine	01	Nos	25-02-2026
4.	65265001	Design, manufacture, supply, installation, testing and commissioning of Electric Overhead Traveling crane of Capacity 25T	01	Nos	04-03-2026
5.	37255003	New Design Guard seat for goods Brake Van	250	Nos	19-02-26

Note: (1) Interested tenderers may visit the website **ireps.gov.in** for Full details/ description/Specification/EMD & tender cost etc. All tenderers are requested to obtain digital signatures and get them registered on above site and quote electronically only. **(2)** For viewing and participating in other tenders such as open tender costing below **Rs. 50 Lakh**, limited tenders, special limited tenders and low value tenders, please visit **www.ireps.gov.in**.

Follow us on : /NWRailways NWRailways_ 162-PM/26

PUBLIC NOTICE

Our client intends to acquire the property set out in the Schedule hereto (Schedule Property), from its present owners. Our client is investigating the title of the Owner/s of the Schedule Property. Any person/s having or claiming any right, title, estate or interest, by way of inheritance, share, sale, mortgage, transfer, assignment, lease, sub-lease, tenancy, sub-tenancy, development rights, sub-development rights, lien, license, lis pendens, charge, trust, maintenance, easement, gift, devise, bequest, exchange, possession, encumbrance, succession, occupation, any Memorandum of Understanding, writings, family settlement/arrangement, beneficial interest, decree or Order of any Court of Law, contracts / arrangements or otherwise howsoever, into or upon the said Schedule Property or any or portion thereof, or against the document/s are hereby required to give notice of the claims or objections thereof in writing, along with documentary proof, basis of such claims or objections, to the undersigned within **fifteen (15)** days of the issuance of this Public Notice, failing which on expiry of such period and on non- receipt of any claims within that period, our Client shall proceed on the basis that there are no claims or any claims in whatsoever nature stands relinquished and forfeit with regard to the Schedule Property.

SCHEDULE PROPERTY

All that piece and parcel of land admeasuring 42.045 Acres (approx.), situated at Vengudi Village,Walajabad Taluk, Kancheepuram district, and within the Sub-Registration District of Walajabad and Registration District of Kancheepuram and comprising in the following manner:

Present Owners	Survey Nos.	Extent in in Acres
Hemalatha Rajendran D/o.Rajendran	45/1A	0.37
	75/2A	0.34
Senthil Kumaran Rajendran, S/o.Rajendran	71/3	0.64
	77/1A2	0.28
Nagarajan, S/o.Venkatesan	73/1B1	0.33
	102/1	0.32
	105/2	0.35
	81	0.86
S.Gopi, S/o.Sivapragasam	72/3A	0.36
Vijay Palanivelu, S/o.Palanivelu	45/1B	0.36
	45/2	0.71
	76/2A	0.33
	76/2B	0.34
Rajendran,S/o. Deivasigamani	86/2	0.73
	98/3	0.34
	114/2	0.26
	98/1A Part	0.18
	84/2	0.60
	106/1A	0.37
	106/2	0.66
	74/2	0.17
	119/2B	0.17
	73/1B2	0.32
	84/1	0.60
	85/1	0.65
	85/2	0.73
	85/3	0.65
	98/2	0.62
	99/1	0.66
	114/3	0.23
	77/1A1	0.16
	71/2	0.64
E.Subramanian, S/o.Egambaram Pillai	76/1	0.66
T.Justus Sathurni, S/o.Thobias	72/3B	0.34
	69/1A	0.71
	44/3	0.61
Raja Manickam, S/o.Nadesan	118/1B	0.34
	119/2D	0.08
	122/2	0.63
(i)Karthick and (ii) Sathya Srivathav Sons of Nagaraj	73/2B2	0.33
M/s.MSN Property Development Private Limited	96/6	0.20
	115/3	0.35
	116/1	0.495
	116/2	0.06
	114/1	0.73
R.Sivaraman,S/o. Ramachandra Iyer	115/2	0.35
	118/3	0.71
	86/1	0.66
	96/2A	0.66
	97/2	0.23
	98/1B	0.20
	115/1	0.14
	98/1A Part	0.28

Present Owners	Survey Nos.	Extent in in Acres
Sumathi Manoharan, W/o.Manoharan	131/2	0.50
(i)M.Palani, and (ii)Mohan, Sons of Muthulingam	96/2B	0.65
M.Mani, S/o. Muthulingam	77/1B	0.22
Shanthi.N, W/o.Nadarajan	73/2B1	0.34
	75/1	0.32
	75/2B	0.66
S.N.Rajkumar, S/o.Narayanan	82	0.83
	79/1A	0.02
	80/1	0.65
	80/2A	0.55
	106/1B	0.37
	106/3	0.54
	107/1A	0.13
	77/2	0.67
	78/1A	0.43
	73/2A2	0.33
G.R.Raju, S/o.G.P.Raman	68	1.33
	72/1	1.33
G.P.Raman, S/o. R.Govindasamy Mudaliar	74/1A	1.00
	74/3	0.16
	103/1	0.63
	104	0.61
	105/1	0.32
	95	0.66
	96/4	0.51
	118/2	0.70
	118/1A	0.36
	123	0.28
	131/1	0.37
(i)Sivaraman, S/o. Pachaiappan and (ii)Saraswathy W/o.Sivaraman	69/2	1.31
	70	0.66
	71/1	0.62
Saraswathiammal, W/o.Subramaniya Mudaliar	73/2A1	0.33
G.Anandasekaran, S/o.Gurusamy Mudaliar and 3 others (As per Patta No.159)	26/3A1	0.37
	26/1B31A2A	0.19
Total		**42.045**

Approved by Land Owner/s

G.VIVEKANAND & M.SUDHAKAR, Advocates, M/s.CMS IndusLaw, Savithiri Nilayam, New 8,Old 39, Bhagirathi Ammal Street, T.Nagar,Chennai-17. Ph: 044-43546600

Odisha State Medical Corporation Limited (OSMCL)
In front of Ram Mandir, Convent Square, Unit-III, Bhubaneswar-751001
Tel.:(0674) 2380608; Website:www.osmcl.nic.in; Email: proc.osmcl.od@od.gov.in
Assuring Quality, Saving Lives

Notification No.894/OSMCL/2026 Date : 30.01.2026

NOTICE INVITING Re-Tender for Implementation of NAT testing facility with ID methodology having available technologies covering Blood Centre's of the State of Odisha on PPP mode

Online Bids through e-Tender portal **(https://tendersodisha.gov.in)** are invited from eligible bidders for Supply, Installation & Commissioning of Equipment as per the particulars mentioned below :

Sl.	Bid Reference No.	Item Name	Bid Document Cost inclusive of GST (Rs.)
1.	OSMCL/2025-26/ID NAT SERVICES PPP Retender/09	Re-tender for Implementation of NAT testing facility with ID methodology having available technologies covering Blood Centre's of the State of Odisha on PPP mode	Rs.5,900/-

Sl. No.	Particulars	Date and time	
1.	Date & time of release of bid	30/01/2026, 5 PM	
2.	Date & time of Pre-Bid Meeting	10/02/2026, 11.30 AM **Venue** : Conference Hall, Odisha State Medical Corporation Ltd., In front of Ram Mandir, Convent Square, Unit-III, Bhubaneswar	
3.	Date & time of Online bid submission	Start Date & Time	End Date & Time
		19/02/2026, 3 PM	10/03/2026, 5 PM
4.	Date& time of Online Technical bid Opening	13/03/2026, 3 PM	
5.	Date of opening of Price Bid	To be informed to the qualified bidders	

The bid document with all information relating to the bidding process including cost of bid document, Prequalification criteria and terms & conditions are available in the websites: **www.osmcl.nic.in** and **https://tendersodisha.gov.in.** The Authority reserves the right to reject or modify any conditions of the tender or cancel the tender or cancel the issued purchase order at any stage without assigning any reason thereof.

Managing Director, OSMCL

10001/6/2526 OIPR-10001/10112/1/25-26/0006

மகளிரின் பொருளாதாரச் சுமையைக் குறைக்கும்
விடியல் பயணம் திட்டத்தால்...
625 கோடிமுறை பயணங்கள்... மாதம் ஒன்றுக்குப்
பெண்கள் சராசரியாக 888 ரூபாய் சேமிக்கிறார்கள்...
தமிழ்நாட்டின் வளர்ச்சிப் பயணத்தில் ஒருவரையும் பின்தங்க விடமாட்டோம்!

Poor upkeep hits hi-tech labs in many govt. schools

Officials in the School Education Department say that these labs were set up in 2019 and the annual maintenance contract was awarded to Larsen & Toubro for five years, which ended in April 2025; the contract tender is not closed, even though the contract period has ended, they say, adding that this has prevented issuance of a new tender

Meghna M.
CHENNAI

Hi-tech labs in many government high and higher secondary schools across Tamil Nadu are either partially functional or entirely non-functional due to an absence of maintenance and poor internet access. As a result, students in these schools have been unable to use the labs for computer classes, educational videos, online examinations, or career guidance sessions for the past year.

"The UPS is down, and there is no projector. Online tests cannot be conducted as the computers do not run without electricity. We have contacted the maintenance service, but since their contract ended in April 2025, the computers in the hi-tech labs have stopped functioning," said a computer science teacher from Tiruvallur district.

Officials in the School Education Department noted that these labs were set up in 2019 as part of the first phase of the project, under which 6,029 schools received hi-tech labs. At the time, the annual maintenance contract was awarded to Larsen & Toubro for five years, which ended in April 2025. Teachers said that whenever issues arose during this period, the necessary services were carried out without hindrance.

The contract tender has not yet been closed, even though the contract period has ended, sources in the department said, adding that this has prevented the issuance of a new tender.

Testing times: As schools prepare for the upcoming examinations, teachers are worried about how students will attend practical examinations or the competitive exams conducted online. FILE PHOTO

Upcoming exams

As schools prepare for the upcoming examinations, teachers are worried about how students will take part in practical examinations or competitive exams conducted online. Every government high school has a hi-tech lab with 10 computers, while every government higher secondary school has ones with 20 computers.

"While the computers are working, the UPS has not been serviced, which means that the moment the electricity goes out, the computers shut down," said a teacher from Virudhunagar district.

> The School Education Minister has announced the upgradation of the already established hi-tech labs, which will be done in a phased manner
>
> **M. AARTHI**
> Samagra Shiksha Project Director

Further, not many online tests have been conducted for students this year, except for four exams. "Earlier, we used to have at least one cycle of tests every three months on computers. This gave students confidence in navigating online exams such as the National Merit-cum-Means Scholarship examination and other competitive exams," added a teacher from Tiruvallur district.

About eight km from Melur in Madurai district, a government higher secondary school has locked its hi-tech lab due to the absence of an internet connection. At the beginning of the academic year, the School Education Department had notified all schools to switch to BSNL for internet connectivity. However, in villages located far from towns, BSNL has been unable to provide an internet line. "Previously, a local cable operator provided us with internet access, but after the switch to BSNL, the hi-tech labs have remained shut for over a year," said a computer science teacher.

The Tamil Nadu Higher Secondary Computer Teacher Association (TNHSCTA) stated that inverters in the labs need to be replaced. "Some technical problems can be resolved. However, if the systems themselves need to be replaced, it is difficult at present. As students will soon have to face practical examinations, the non-functioning of hi-tech labs is a major issue that needs to be addressed immediately," said G. Murugan, general secretary of the TNHSCTA.

Samagra Shiksha Project Director M. Aarthi said that the government was aware of the problems. "The School Education Minister has announced the upgradation of the already established hi-tech labs, which will be done in a phased manner. We are identifying other schools that are facing internet-related issues. Discussions are under way with the Tamil Nadu FibreNet Corporation (TANFINET) to establish internet connectivity in schools where BSNL cannot reach," she said. She added that teachers could also approach the district coordinator for the programme for the maintenance of hi-tech labs.

In the first phase of upgradation, 885 hi-tech labs, at a cost of ₹56 crore, will be replaced. The procurement process for these labs has already begun, the official added.

Timings
CHENNAI

MONDAY, FEB. 02		
RISE	06:35	SET 18:10
RISE	18:43	SET 06:49
TUESDAY, FEB. 03		
RISE	06:35	SET 18:11
RISE	19:38	SET 07:35
WEDNESDAY, FEB. 04		
RISE	06:35	SET 18:11
RISE	20:29	SET 08:15

Chennai Weather	max	min
Tiruvallur	30	19
Chennai Airport	31	22
Chennai City	30	24

Chennai Airport Today
30°C Morning will be pleasant. Day will be slightly warm. Night will also be pleasant. Mostly dry weather likely.

Chennai Airport Tomorrow
31°C Weather will be dry. Day will be slightly warm. Night will be pleasant.

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THE HINDU
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ISSN 0971 - 751X

High security, drama as SIT questions KCR in phone tapping case

Former Telangana Chief Minister questioned for nearly five hours in his house, say police; officials carry documents, electronic devices into the residence as part of inquiry, say sources

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

High drama played out amid tight security arrangements at Nandinagar on Sunday as the Special Investigation Team (SIT) completed nearly five hours of questioning of Bharat Rashtra Samithi chief and former Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrashekhar Rao in connection with the alleged phone tapping case. The questioning concluded in the evening after lasting four hours and 45 minutes, police officials said.

The inquiry began around 3 p.m. when a team of SIT officials, including senior officials, arrived at Mr. Chandrashekhar Rao's residence and made arrangements for the examination in a designated room on the second floor.

As per procedure, he was allowed to have one person present during the questioning, and former MP J. Santosh Kumar was permitted to accompany him. Senior advocate Ramchander Rao remained available for legal assistance during the process.

Sources said SIT officials carried certain documents and electronic devices into the residence as part of the inquiry. The SIT team comprised six officers, and questioning was carried out by Siddipet Commissioner S.M. Vijay Kumar, DCP Narayana Reddy, Additional DCP K.S. Rao, Jubilee Hills ACP P. Venkatagiri, Greyhounds Group Commander Ravinder Reddy and DSP Ch. Sridhar.

BRS working president K.T. Rama Rao was present at the house in his capacity as a family member. Senior party leaders, including T. Harish Rao and R.S. Praveen Kumar, along with legal advisers, were also present. After the questioning, Mr. Chandrashekhar Rao met his lawyers and senior party colleagues.

Security was tightened around the residence throughout the day, with multiple layers of police deployment. Police also conducted aerial surveillance using a drone in the vicinity. Mr. K.T. Rama Rao, Mr. T. Harish Rao and Mr. J. Santosh Kumar had appeared before the SIT in connection with the same case. The case came to light after the arrest of former SIB DSP Praneeth Rao on March 13, 2024. He was arrested following a complaint by Additional SP D. Ramesh, who alleged unlawful interception of phone calls belonging to senior political leaders and officials.

Under the scanner: K. Chandrashekhar Rao greets media at his residence after being questioned by the SIT in connection with the alleged phone tapping case on Sunday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

BRS workers stage protests

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

The Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) cadre staged protests across Telangana on Sunday against the summoning of party leader K. Chandrashekhar Rao by the police. Tension prevailed at many places as the police prevented them from taking out rallies and effigy-burning. In several district and constituency headquarters, BRS leaders led road blockades and black flag marches.

YSRCP leader Ambati held for 19 hours in police custody

The Hindu Bureau
VIJAYAWADA

Former Andhra Pradesh Minister and YSR Congress Party leader Ambati Rambabu, who was picked up by the Guntur police late on Saturday night, was kept at the Nallapadu police station till Sunday evening.

The police arrested Mr. Rambabu around 11 p.m. on Saturday from his residence, alleging that he made derogatory remarks against Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu and disrupted police duties. The police had filed two FIRs against him.

Angered by the comments allegedly made by the former Minister, Telegu Desam Party (TDP) leaders and activists cordoned off Mr. Rambabu's house, threw stones and damaged flowerpots and window panes, YSRCP leaders alleged.

Miscreants also set fire to Mr. Rambabu's vehicle, burnt his effigies across the State and raised slogans demanding his arrest.

Failure of police

While TDP leaders alleged that Mr. Rambabu used abusive language against Mr. Naidu, YSRCP leaders claimed that the government was behind the attack on his house and accused the police of failing to control the mobs. Vijayalakshmi, his wife had filed a house motion petition in the High Court alleging illegal detention and failure of the police to provide protection.

Tirupati laddu row: TTD EO Anil Singhal transferred

V. Raghavendra
VIJAYAWADA

As the Tirupati Laddu adulteration controversy deepened, the Andhra Pradesh government on Sunday transferred Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) executive officer (EO) Anil Kumar Singhal with immediate effect.

The 1993 batch IAS officer who served as the EO between May 2017 and October 2020 during Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy' government, was asked to report to the General Administration Department for further posting. He was directed to hand over the charge to Additional EO Ch. Venkaiah Chowdary and report to the General Administration Department. Special Chief Secretary to Chief Minister, M. Ravichandra, has been posted as in-charge EO of the TTD.

Mr. Singhal was at the helm of affairs in the TTD when the ghee was suspected to be adulterated during the YSR Congress Party regime.

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing the case has reportedly found that Mr. Singhal failed to detect the issue on time and even after the incident became public did not take necessary action against those involved in the racket.

Recently, the SIT had filed the final chargesheet in Nellore ACB Court, naming 36 people, including nine TTD officials, five dairy experts and others in the case as accused.

(With inputs from PTI)

WEATHERWATCH

Rainfall, temperature & air quality in select metros yesterday

TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 17.00 HRS)

Forecast for Monday: Thunderstorm with lightning and gusty winds very likely at isolated places over Jammu, Kashmir, Ladakh, Gilgit, Baltistan, Muzaffarabad and Uttar Pradesh. Dense Fog very likely at isolated places over Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Odisha, Punjab, Sub Himalayan West Bengal, Sikkim and Uttar Pradesh.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	—	27.8	12.6	Kozhikode	—	33.8	23.8
Ahmedabad	—	30.5	19.4	Kurnool	—	32.2	18.7
Aizawl	—	27.8	9.5	Lucknow	—	24.1	7.6
Allahabad	—	23.5	9.8	Madurai	—	33.4	23.6
Bengaluru	—	28.7	15.9	Mangaluru	—	33.9	20.8
Bhopal	—	29.2	15.0	Mumbai	—	31.6	21.4
Bhubaneswar	—	29.9	18.6	Mysuru	—	30.4	17.2
Chandigarh	0.9	21.7	11.0	New Delhi	—	22.6	10.6
Chennai	—	29.1	23.7	Patna	—	21.8	13.3
Coimbatore	—	32.4	20.0	Port Blair	—	30.7	24.5
Dehradun	0.9	23.5	11.0	Puducherry	—	29.3	21.4
Gangtok	—	17.2	9.0	Pune	—	31.8	20.2
Goa	—	34.0	20.4	Raipur	—	31.5	17.4
Guwahati	—	25.5	14.4	Ranchi	—	25.2	12.0
Hubballi	—	32.0	18.0	Shillong	—	18.5	7.4
Hyderabad	—	28.3	19.0	Shimla	—	14.8	5.0
Imphal	—	25.0	12.9	Srinagar	0.2	8.4	2.0
Jaipur	—	25.2	12.7	Thiruvananthapuram	—	32.0	24.1
Kochi	—	30.8	24.6	Tiruchi	—	29.7	23.0
Kohima	—	18.4	8.0	Vijayawada	—	30.8	19.8
Kolkata	—	29.0	13.6	Visakhapatnam	—	29.2	21.3

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITIES	SO_2	NO_2	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad	.41	.62	82	279	—	Poor
Bengaluru	6	24	17	135	119	Moderate
Chennai	.15	4	29	85	75	Good
Delhi	.14	.52	64	301	213	Poor
Hyderabad	7	.32	21	—	131	Moderate
Kolkata	.14	.36	42	164	130	Moderate
Lucknow	6	.41	72	252	241	Poor
Mumbai	2	.70	17	138	117	Moderate
Pune	—	.56	.2	299	222	Poor
Visakhapatnam	6	.41	25	262	184	Good

Yesterday

In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Vadodara, Gujarat recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 344 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Shillong, Meghalaya recorded a healthy AQI score of 26 Find max and min

Air Quality Code: Poor Moderate Good (Readings indicate average AQI)

SO_2: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

NO_2: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

CO: Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.

PM2.5 & PM10: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

Budget is forward-looking, aligns with A.P.'s development priorities: Naidu

The Hindu Bureau
KUPPAM

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu on Sunday termed the Union Budget a "forward-looking and balanced blueprint" that rightly aligns with Andhra Pradesh's development priorities and expedites India's journey towards becoming a developed economy by 2047.

Addressing a press conference at his residence here, the Chief Minister welcomed the Budget and congratulated Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. He observed that the Centre had presented a direction-setting document to combine fiscal prudence with growth-oriented reforms. "The Budget provides both direction and momentum for States to pursue structural transformation," he said. "The Budget enables Andhra Pradesh to move more aggressively on the sectors we have already prioritised," Mr. Naidu added. He said that it would significantly strengthen the "Ease of Doing Business" framework in the State. "With a sharp focus on MSMEs, the proposals open new opportunities to deepen industrial growth, job creation, and entrepreneurship," he said.

N. Chandrababu Naidu

Mr. Naidu said the Union Budget had unfolded a strong emphasis on women, farmers, and youth empowerment, and at the same time maintained a clear long-term vision for Viksit Bharat 2047. "The Budget will address short-term, medium-term, and long-term objectives, and can bolster living standards and enhance ease of living," he observed.

Industrial push

The Budget would accelerate the industrial push in the State. "The sector will gain greatly from the proposed high-speed rail corridors – Hyderabad-Bengaluru, Hyderabad-Chennai, and Bengaluru-Chennai... These projects will integrate Hyderabad, Amaravati, Bengaluru, and Chennai to create one of the most dynamic economic corridors in the world, and transform regional connectivity and economic activity, catering to a population of over five crore," he said.

Hailing the inclusion of Andhra Pradesh in the Dedicated Rare Earth Corridor, Mr. Naidu called it a strategic move to harness critical minerals for high-value electronics manufacturing.

"The Budget has bestowed a major boost on the textile sector, tourism, and hospitality industry in the State. The focus on tourism will give fresh momentum to destinations such as Araku Valley," he added.

'Kerala barely mentioned in Union Budget'; all parties, except BJP, slam 'neglect'

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

With Kerala getting barely a mention in the Union Budget, political leaders from across the spectrum lashed out at the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government for ignoring almost all the long-standing demands of the State.

While Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan called the Budget a deliberate attempt to hinder Kerala's development, Leader of the Opposition V.D. Satheesan said that the Budget makes one wonder whether Kerala is part of India.

BJP State president Rajeev Chandrasekhar said that the State government had failed to implement Central allocations from previous Budgets. "Only the NDA's double engine government can get things implemented here (Kerala)," he said.

Pinarayi Vijayan

Mr. Vijayan said that the Budget reveals the Centre's severe neglect towards the State. Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has deliberately forgotten the fact that Kerala is also located on the map of India. The State's long-standing demands for an AIIMS, high-speed corridor and a special package for Vizhinjam port development have all been ignored.

Mr. Satheesan said that it is unfortunate that the Budget did not have any announcement for Kerala. "The Turtle Trail was included in the Budget to show that Kerala exists. The Centre is trying to give the mineral wealth of Kerala to corporates. A decision in this regard should be taken only after consulting the State. The Budget announcement related to this can only be viewed with suspicion," he said.

'Injustice to Telangana in budgetary allocations'

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

The Telangana government expressed dissatisfaction over the Centre ignoring requests seeking assistance for the State's growth in Union Budget 2026-27.

The total outlay of the Budget presented in Parliament on Sunday is to the tune of ₹45.48 lakh crore, but Telangana was meted out injustice as its name did not figure in allocations made for key sectors. "Given the massive outlay, we expected announcements in favour of Telangana. But the State's interests were cold shouldered despite repeated representations submitted to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other Ministers," Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka said.

The State expected allocations for Musi Rejuvenation project, development proposed in the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation area and Metro rail, but nothing had come about. The Centre had announced Biopharma Shakti scheme with an outlay of ₹10,000 crore and Telangana's name was not considered in spite of its ecosystem in the form of Genome Valley and its contributions in vaccine manufacturing.

Tthe project for exploration of rare earth minerals also did not make a mention of the State in spite of traces of rare earths in the Singareni coal belt. Mr. Vikramarka asked the MPs from Telangana, cutting across political lines, to meet the Union Finance Minister and Prime Minister and represent to them the need to undo the injustice meted out to the State.

Siddaramaiah says Budget denies fiscal justice to Karnataka

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Describing the Union Budget as "highly disappointing", the Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said it once again denied fiscal justice to Karnataka despite its strong contribution to the national GDP and tax kitty. He has expressed concern that the State is gripped by an equally disturbing outcome – the 16th Finance Commission's recommendation, which has reduced its share of divisible taxes.

"Karnataka is set to lose ₹10,000 to ₹15,000 crore annually due to 16th Finance Commission fixing the Karnataka's share of divisible taxes at 4.13%. While the total share goes up from 3.64 % in the 15th Finance Commission, the 16th Finance Commission's recommendation is still less than that of the 14th Finance Commission, which fixed the share at 4.71 %," he said.

"Karnataka has been handed nothing – just the usual empty pot. Not only Karnataka, the entire South (India) has been ignored," Mr. Siddaramaiah said.

Rare earth corridor was in Kerala's Budget wish list

Tiki Rajwi
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Sunday's Union Budget announcement that Kerala has been picked, along with Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and Tamil Nadu, for establishing Dedicated Rare Earth Corridors should bring cheer to the State government as this initiative had featured prominently on its Union Budget wish list as well as in the 2026-27 State Budget that was tabled in the Assembly on January 29.

In its wish list presented in January in New Delhi ahead of the Union Budget, Kerala had sought ₹1,000 crore "for targeted financial support for corridor infrastructure, technology acquisition, and related development."

Promising potential: Kerala's coast line has an abundance of rare earth elements such as thorium and scandium. REUTERS

Through this project, the State seeks to become "the permanent magnet hub of the nation," Kerala Finance Minister K.N. Balagopal stated in the State Budget.

On Sunday, presenting the Union Budget, Ms. Sitharaman had announced that the Centre would support the four mineral-rich States for setting up a "Dedicated Rare Earth Corridor" to "promote mining, processing, research and manufacturing."

Rich in elements

According to the State government, its coast line has an abundance of rare earth elements such as thorium and scandium that are required in areas, including space research and defence, energy generation, aviation sector, and production of electric vehicles.

Responding to Ms. Sitharaman's announcement, Mr. Balagopal said that Kerala, through its proposal, aims to have industries based on the minerals established in Kerala.

The State does not want to have the minerals merely mined and carted off outside the State, he addded.

According to Kerala's proposal, this corridor should link Vizhinjam where the new international seaport is situated, with Chavara in Kollam district where the Kerala Minerals and Metals Ltd. (KMML) is situated, and Kochi "for the domestic production of permanent magnets." Through the establishment of the corridor, the State is eyeing an investment of ₹42,000 crore and 50,000 job opportunities.

In the State Budget which Mr. Balagopal presented on January 29, ₹100 crore had been earmarked for establishing a Rare Earth Critical Minerals Mission in partnership with KMML, KELTRON and Non-Ferrous Materials Technology Development Centre (NFTDC). Kerala expects that this initiative would support industrial requirements, while substantially reducing India's dependence on imported rare-earth magnets.

From Page One

Capex scale-up: target set at ₹12.2 lakh crore

The Budget also included several customs duty reductions aimed at boosting exports of marine, leather, and textile products, and speeding up India's energy transition.

"We now propose to support the mineral-rich States of Odisha, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu to establish dedicated rare earth corridors to promote mining, processing, research and manufacturing," Ms. Sitharaman announced in her speech.

Ms. Sitharaman also announced that the first of the new national waterways to be constructed would be in Odisha, connecting places such as Talcher and Angul and Kalinga Nagar to the Paradip and Dhamra ports.

The Budget also included the announcement of an integrated East Coast Industrial Corridor connecting Durgapur in West Bengal, as well as a new dedicated freight corridor connecting Dankuni in West Bengal to Surat in Gujarat.

The Finance Minister said that her first *kartavya* would be met through targeted measures in six areas: scaling up manufacturing in seven strategic and frontier sectors; rejuvenating legacy industrial sectors; creating "champion MSMEs"; a powerful push for infrastructure creation; ensuring long-term energy security and stability; and developing city-economic regions.

The second *kartavya* focused on measures targeted at the services sector through the education, training and skilling of the workforce in areas such as healthcare, medical tourism, animal husbandry, animation, visual effects, gaming and comics (AVGC), and design.

Announcements under the third *kartavya* included measures to increase farmer incomes through productivity enhancement and entrepreneurship, empowering India's Divyang and vulnerable population through livelihood opportunities, training, high-quality assistive devices, and access to mental health and trauma care.

Tax devolution share for States stays at 41%

The 16th FC submitted its report to the President on November 17, 2025, which was tabled in Parliament on Sunday. It noted that the "only instrument" available to the commission to assist the finances of the Centre was its share in the divisible pool.

The report said that there was no further space to cut the States' share in the divisible pool as the Centre's cesses and surcharges – not sharable with the States – had "cut" the size of the divisible pool from 89.1% of gross tax revenues in 2014-15 to 74%-80% during the 2020-24 period for which actual figures are available.

Under the new formula, a State's population now accounts for 17.5% of the weightage up from the previous 15%. Its demographic performance – how successfully it has managed to contain population growth – has a lower weightage of 10% from the previous 12.5%. The area of the State has been granted a 10% weightage by the 16th FC as compared to 15% previously.

A State's forest cover now receives a 10% weightage, the same as earlier. The State's per capita GSDP difference – the difference between a State's average per capita income and that of the State with the highest per capita income – has the highest weightage of 42.5%, down from 45% earlier.

Accordingly, Andhra Pradesh is to receive 4.217% of the devolved amount, up from the previous 4.047%. Karnataka's share has gone up to 4.131% from 3.647%. Kerala's share has increased to 2.382% from 1.925%. Tamil Nadu's share has increased to 4.097% from 4.079%, and Telangana's share has gone up to 2.174% from 2.102%.

'Accessible tourism a mainstream imperative'

The aim of Kerala is to translate insights into a robust framework that firmly places accessibility across the entire tourism value chain, from infrastructure to digital enablement, said the Chief Minister. While embarking on a journey toward a more equitable and dignified tourism landscape, the event is very relevant as tourism globally undergoes a transformation with inclusivity and accessibility emerging as central pillars of sustainable growth, he added.

The State has also registered a robust growth in the tourist movement, with over 2.25 domestic tourists visiting various tourist destinations across the State in 2024, netting a total revenue of over ₹49,000 crore.

"We have also been able to achieve much more than what we had before the COVID-19 pandemic. This is the result of the tourism model we have been pursuing," said Mr. Vijayan, adding that the State is also on the cusp of providing new experiences to the visitors by introducing seaplane, caravan, and heli-tourism initiatives.

"We have also been able to create job opportunities for the local people through responsible tourism initiatives apart from experimenting with a new model of women's empowerment. This is the result of the development model pursued by the State government," he added.

MLA K.N. Unnikrishnan presided over the function, while N. Ram, Director, The Hindu Group, delivered the keynote address. K. Biju, Secretary of Kerala Tourism, welcomed the gathering.

Centre aiming for a 4.3% fiscal deficit for 2026-27

Moderation in the figure by only 10 basis points is primarily due to a fall in the gross tax to GDP ratio, say experts; the deficit budgeted in FY26 was 4.4%, down 40 basis points, from 4.8% in FY25

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Centre's fiscal deficit target, which is broadly the amount by which its expenditure exceeds revenue, has been set at 4.3% of the GDP for the financial year 2026-27, entailing a reduction from 4.4% as reported in the Revised Estimates for 2025-26.

The Centre also targets a debt-to-GDP ratio of 55.6%, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in her Budget speech on Sunday, in line with the efforts to reduce the ratio to 50% by 2031.

Experts see this as a sign of moderation in the Centre's fiscal consolidation due, in large part, to a fall in gross tax revenue ratios. "I am happy to inform that I have fulfilled my commitment made in FY 2021-22 to reduce the fiscal deficit below 4.5% of GDP by 2025-26," Ms. Sitharaman said. "In line with the new fiscal prudence path of debt consolidation, the fiscal deficit in BE [budget estimates] 2026-27 is estimated to be 4.3% of GDP," the Union Minister said.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman addressing the post-Budget press conference in New Delhi on Sunday. R.V. MOORTHY

Debt ratio target

In her previous Budget in February 2025, Ms. Sitharaman had outlined an alternative path to fiscal consolidation by focusing on the Centre's debt-to-GDP ratio and reducing it to 50% (with leeway of 1% above and below) by March 2031.

"In line with this, the debt-to-GDP ratio is estimated to be 55.6% of GDP in BE 2026-27, compared to 56.1% of GDP in RE (revised estimates) 2025-26," Ms. Sitharaman said. "A declining debt-to-GDP ratio will gradually free up resources for priority sector expenditure by reducing the outgo on interest payments."

According to D.K. Srivastava, chief policy adviser at EY India, the Centre's fiscal consolidation has moderated in this Budget.

"After achieving a reduction of 40 basis points from 4.8% of GDP in FY25 to 4.4% in FY26 (RE), the reduction in the FY27 (BE) is only 10 basis points, taking the FY27 fiscal deficit to 4.3% of GDP," he said.

"This moderation is due to a fall in the Government of India's (GoI) gross tax revenues to GDP ratio, which has progressively gone down from 11.5% in FY25 to 11.4% in FY26 (RE) and further to 11.2% in FY27 (BE) which translates into a fall in GoI's non-debt receipts relative to GDP," Mr. Srivastava added.

Revenue growth

The Budget documents show that the Centre's net tax receipts, after accounting for devolutions to States, is budgeted at ₹28.7 lakh crore, up 7.2% over the level in the revised estimates of 2025-26.

Notably, Budget 2026 does not contain any big tax cuts for salaried or corporate taxpayers.

Gross corporate tax revenue is budgeted at ₹12.3 lakh crore, 11% higher than the amount received in 2025-26 as per the revised estimates of that year. Gross income tax revenue has been budgeted to grow 11.7% to ₹14.7 lakh crore over the same period.

Notably, income tax revenue as per the revised estimates of 2025-26 was 8.8% lower than what was budgeted at the start of that year.

Capex growth

On the expenditure side, the Centre has budgeted a total expenditure of about ₹53.5 lakh crore for 2026-27, which is 7.7% higher than the revised estimates for 2025-26.

Within this, the Centre's capital expenditure is budgeted to grow to ₹12.2 lakh crore, which is 11.5% higher than the revised estimates for 2025-26. During the post-budget press conference, Ms. Sitharaman emphasised that this amounted to 4.4% of GDP, which is the highest in at least the last 10 years.

Budget reflects the aspirations of 140 cr. Indians, says Modi

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said that Budget 2026 captured the aspirations of 140 crore Indians, laying a strong foundation for their journey towards achieving a Viksit Bharat (Developed India) by 2047.

"It is a unique Budget, which focuses on reducing the fiscal deficit and controlling inflation, and at the same time harmonises high capital expenditure and high growth," he said.

Addressing the nation, Mr. Modi described the Budget as a "highway" of immense opportunities that presented a road map for giving new impetus to Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliant India) campaigns. "The reform express that India is currently on will get new momentum from this Budget. The path-breaking reforms give the brave and talented youth of an aspirational India boundless opportunities to grow."

Job creation

Mr. Modi said measures such as construction of medical hubs, expansion of "orange economy", promotion of tourism, particularly in the Northeast; and Khelo India Mission would open up new opportunities for youth. "A major tax exemption has also been announced to make India a global data-centre hub...the Budget will give a big boost to employment generation...the foundation for balanced development has been strengthened by empowering different States," he said.

Noting that self-help groups involving over 10 crore women had been a successful campaign, Mr. Modi said the ecosystem was given priority in the Budget. "The campaign to build new hostels for girl students in every district will also make education more accessible," said the Prime Minister.

He said that initiatives such as Biopharma Power Mission, Semiconductor Mission 2.0, Electronic Component Manufacturing Scheme, establishment of Rare Earth Corridor, focus on critical minerals, new schemes for the textile sector, promotion of high-tech tool manufacturing, and creation of champion micro, small, medium enterprises were futuristic.

Budget fails test of economic strategy, doesn't address challenges identified in survey: Cong.

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday said the Union Budget had "failed" the test of economic strategy and statesmanship, with former Finance Minister P. Chidambaram stating that the Budget speech did not lay out a narrative to address the challenges identified in this year's Economic Survey.

Addressing a press conference at the All India Congress Committee headquarters, Mr. Chidambaram listed 10 major challenges flagged by the Survey and economic experts. He cited the impact of penal U.S. tariffs on exporters, protracted global trade conflicts, a widening trade deficit with China, low gross fixed capital formation of around 30%, and the private sector's reluctance to invest.

P. Chidambaram and Jairam Ramesh addressing the media at the AICC headquarters in New Delhi on Sunday. R.V. MOORTHY

He also pointed to the uncertain outlook for foreign direct investment inflows and the persistent outflow of foreign portfolio investors, slow fiscal consolidation in violation of FRBM (Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management) targets, a disconnect between official inflation data and household spending on essentials such as education, healthcare and transport, distress among MSMEs, their widespread closures, unemployment among youth, and deteriorating urban infrastructure amid rapid urbanisation.

"None of this was addressed by the Finance Minister's speech," he said at a joint press conference with party colleagues Jairam Ramesh and Amitabh Dubey.

Mr. Chidambaram criticised the government's financial management in 2025-26, noting shortfalls of ₹78,086 crore in revenue receipts and ₹1,00,503 crore in total expenditure. Capital expenditure, he said, was cut by ₹1,44,376 crore, with the Centre's capital spending falling from 3.2% to 3.1% of GDP, without any explanation.

He flagged sharp cuts in revenue expenditure affecting rural and urban development, social welfare, agriculture, education and health, and described the steep reduction in allocations for the Jal Jeevan Mission as "cruel".

"The most serious criticism of the Budget speech is that the Finance Minister is not tired of adding to the number of schemes, programmes, missions, institutes, initiatives, funds, committees, hubs, etc. I counted at least 24," he said, wondering "how many of them will be forgotten and vanish by next year".

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said the Budget lacked policy vision and political will as it failed to address inequality, jobs, farm distress, manufacturing, exports, social security, and States' financial stress. Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi said, "Youth without jobs. Falling manufacturing. Investors pulling out capital. Household savings plummeting. Farmers in distress. Looming global shocks - all ignored. A Budget that refuses course correction, blind to India's real crises."

No allocation for Chabahar port amid U.S. tariff pressure

Kallol Bhattacherjee
NEW DELHI

Indicating a freeze on India's activities on the Chabahar port project in Iran, the Union Budget has made no allocation for the project in 2026-27. The project had received ₹400 crore in allocation in the previous fiscal. Earlier in January, Indian officials here had stated New Delhi remains engaged with Tehran and Washington D.C. to work out a solution after American President Donald Trump announced on January 12 that any country that trades with Iran will end up paying 25% additional tariffs in trade with the U.S.

Support to neighbours

The downturn in India's relations with Bangladesh also reflected in the Budget, with allocation for projects in Bangladesh halved to ₹60 crore from ₹120 crore. India's annual allocation for Bhutan rose to ₹2,288.55 crore, an increase of ₹138.56 crore over last year. The allocation supports several developmental activities and infrastructure projects.

Myanmar has also seen a cut in allocation, down to ₹300 crore this year from last year's ₹350 crore.

Sri Lanka, on the other hand, receives ₹400 crore this year, an increase of ₹100 crore.

Nepal has received ₹800 crore, an increase of ₹100 crore over the allocation last year.

The External Affairs Ministry has been allocated ₹1,292 crore for international training programmes, which are increasingly being seen as an important part of India's soft diplomacy. Officials from other countries are trained in these programmes, which form a bridge between India and foreign states.

₹3,400 crore allocated to schemes for six minorities

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Minority Affairs (MoMA) has been allotted ₹3,400 crore for the implementation of various educational, skill and infrastructure development schemes for the six minorities in India. Quami Waqf Board's Taraqqiati Scheme and *Sahari Waqf Sampati Vikas Yojna*, which are are aimed at computerising waqf records, have been allocated ₹32 crore.

Prime Minister-*Viraasat Ka Samvardhan*has been allocated ₹303.27 crore.

The budget allocation for pre-metric and post-metric scholarships remained at ₹198 crore and ₹581 crore respectively.

An anti-poor Budget detached from economic realities, says Opposition

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Opposition parties on Sunday described the Union Budget 2026 as "anti-poor" and "detached" from the country's economic realities. Left leaders said it offered no relief to workers, farmers or the unemployed while continuing to prioritise big corporate interests. Trinamool Congress general secretary Abhishek Banerjee said the Finance Minister had failed to mention West Bengal even once.

Calling the Budget "faceless, baseless and visionless", Mr. Banerjee said the Finance Minister, in her 85-minute speech, did not speak about West Bengal even once. "Centre views

CPI(M) says the Budget 'exposes the blind commitment' of the Modi govt. to a few corporate houses

Bengal as Bangladesh... Otherwise why was Bengal not mentioned even once?...We had no expectations with this Budget. They knew that even if they spent money in Bengal, they wouldn't win. So, from their perspective if you see, they have preferred not to spend any money on Bengal," he said. The State goes to the Assembly polls in March-April this year.

Communist Party of India (Marxist) general secretary M.A. Baby said the Budget "exposes the blind commitment" of the Modi-led government to a handful of corporate houses. Mr. Baby said cuts in fertiliser, food, and petroleum subsidies amounted to a "naked assault" on workers and peasants, and warned that transfers to States had fallen "by lakhs of crores", undermining fiscal federalism. The Budget, he argued, would deepen inequality and worsen the ongoing economic crisis.

Subsidy cuts

Voicing similar criticism, CPI general secretary D. Raja said the Budget was "detached from the concerns of the masses" and marked by "deliberate vagueness". He said the Finance Minister had avoided giving scheme-wise allocations, and called it an attempt to obscure funding cuts. Mr. Raja said the government had failed to stimulate demand despite the Economic Survey's emphasis on domestic consumption. On agriculture and employment, he said the government had ignored demands for a legal minimum support price (MSP) and continued to push anti-labour policies.

The CPI(ML) Polit Bureau said that the slogan "*Viksit Bharat*" rang hollow as subsidies for food and fertilisers have been cut. It also underlined the push for private-led healthcare and education and the focus on corporate-friendly projects.

Days after suspension, Sidhu's wife quits Cong.

The Hindu Bureau
CHANDIGARH

Days after former cricketer-turned-politician and Congress leader Navjot Singh Sidhu's wife, Navjot Kaur Sidhu, was suspended from the party following her controversial remark that the person who gives "a suitcase of ₹500 crore" becomes the Chief Minister, Ms. Sidhu announced her decision to quit the party.

Announcing her decision on X, she stated that promising leaders within the organisation were not being heard. She criticised Punjab Congress president Amarinder Singh Raja Warring, blaming him for "damaging the organisation". She blamed him of "selling the party for petty gains with an understanding with Aam Aadmi Party".

On December 8, 2025, Ms. Sidhu was suspended from the State Congress Committee without mentioning any reason. "Dr. Navjot Kaur Sidhu is hereby suspended from the primary membership of the party with immediate effect," the order stated.

Trump says India to resume purchases of Venezuelan oil

The move follows U.S. pressure on India to curb purchases of Russian oil amid tariffs; it reflects improved U.S.-India relations; China is welcome to make a deal to buy Venezuelan oil, says Trump

Reuters
ABOARD AIR FORCE ONE

U.S. President Donald Trump on Saturday said India would buy Venezuelan oil, helping to replace some of the Russian oil that the world's third-biggest oil importer buys.

"We've already made that deal, the concept of the deal," Mr. Trump told presspersons aboard Air Force One as he travelled to his vacation home in Florida from Washington.

Reuters reported on Friday that the United States had told Delhi it could soon resume purchases of Venezuelan oil to help replace imports of Russian oil, citing three people familiar with the matter.

India stopped buying oil from Caracas last year after Mr. Trump, in March, imposed a 25% tariff on countries buying Venezuelan oil.

In his comments on Saturday, Mr. Trump said India would buy Venezuelan oil instead of Iranian crude. However, New Delhi stopped loading oil from Iran in 2019 due to U.S. sanctions over Tehran's nuclear programme.

Indian refiners turned to U.S. oil to make up for the loss of Iranian supply, then curbed U.S. purchases and became the top buyer of Russian seaborne oil sold at a discount after Western nations imposed sanctions on Moscow for its invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Mr. Trump in August doubled duties on imports from India to 50% to pressure New Delhi to stop buying Russian oil, and earlier this month said the rate could rise again if it did not curb its purchases.

However, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent signaled in January that the additional 25% tariff on Indian goods could be removed, given what he called a sharp reduction in Indian imports of Russian oil.

The U.S. government this week lifted some sanctions on Venezuela's oil industry to make it easier for U.S. companies to sell its crude oil.

'China is welcome'

Mr. Trump's comments on Saturday appeared to reflect continued improvement in U.S.-India relations, which have been tense throughout the past year. He also said China could make a deal with the U.S. to buy Venezuelan oil. "China is welcome to come in and would make a great deal on oil," he said, without providing any details.

Strategic move: Donald Trump speaking to presspersons aboard Air Force One on Saturday. AFP

Cong. takes dig at Centre after Trump's remark

NEW DELHI
The Congress on Sunday took a swipe at the Modi government over U.S. President Donald Trump's remarks that India is going to buy oil from Venezuela, saying the American leader continues to give "information on what our own government has done or will be doing". PTI

Files expose alleged links between Epstein, Anil Ambani, Delhi 'leadership'

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The "leadership" in Delhi wanted American financier and sex offender Jeffery Epstein to connect businessman Anil Ambani to U.S. President Donald Trump's son-in-law and adviser Jared Kushner and Republican strategist Steve Bannon, Mr. Ambani had claimed, according to messages to Epstein in March 2017 that were released by the U.S. Department of Justice (DoJ).

The meetings requested were to have prepared the ground for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the U.S. in June 2017.

The External Affairs Ministry, which dismissed comments by Epstein alleging he assisted on Mr. Modi's visit to Israel in July 2017 as "trashy ruminations by a convicted criminal" on Saturday, did not respond to requests for a comment on the latest mails.

In addition, Mr. Ambani appears to have met with Epstein on May 23, 2019, at 9.25 a.m., following which Epstein messaged Mr. Bannon that he had met Prime Minister Modi's "guy". Epstein said that the person he met had complained that "no one in [Washington] speaks to him", referring to Mr. Modi.

The BJP denied that the messages were in any way connected to the government.

Congress general secretary K.C. Venugopal said in a post on Sunday that "the reports of the new batch of Epstein files are a huge wake-up call about the kind of monsters who have access to PM Modi".

The messages indicate regular contact between Mr. Ambani and Epstein between 2017 and 2019, until a few months before Epstein's death. Mr. Ambani's office did not respond to a detailed set of questions from *The Hindu* about the mails, and *The Hindu* cannot independently verify whether the messages were indeed sent by Mr. Ambani.

According to a message sent on March 16, 2017, Mr. Ambani asked for assistance with meetings in the U.S. ahead of a likely visit by Mr. Modi that year. Mr. Ambani said he had been in Delhi, and that the "Leadership" would like Epstein's help so he could meet "Jared" (Kushner) and "Steve" (Bannon), "asap" (as soon as possible). According to the chat, the two men agreed to speak directly over the telephone. However, Epstein warned that Mr. Kushner and Mr. Bannon, who were part of the newly sworn-in administration of Mr. Trump during his first presidential tenure (January 2017-2021), were extremely busy, meeting "15 people a day", and may not have been able to have a "meaningful" conversation.

Another set of messages dated March 11 indicated that Mr. Ambani had planned to meet Epstein and "Ehud", believed to be former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, for a dinner in Paris at the time, but had to cancel the meeting as Mr. Ambani was scheduled to have dinner with French President Francois Hollande instead. Mr. Ambani had won the offset contract during the purchase of Rafale fighter jets from France, announced during Mr. Modi's visit to Paris in April 2015 and was part of the business delegation accompanying Mr. Modi at the time.

A number of messages discuss key figures in Washington that Epstein thinks Mr. Ambani should meet. He asks him who the U.S. Ambassadorial nominee should be, which Mr. Ambani suggested General (retd.) David Petraeus, while Epstein said that Ashley Tellis, the policy analyst arrested over stolen official documents last year, was in the running as U.S. Ambassador to India at the time in 2017.

Jeffrey Epstein

MLAs and alliance partners of BJP in Manipur called to New Delhi for crucial meeting today

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) central leadership has asked all its legislators, as well as alliance partners from Manipur, to be present in Delhi for a crucial meeting on Monday.

MLAs from both the Kuki-Zo and Meitei communities were headed to Delhi to attend the meeting, two MLAs confirmed to *The Hindu*.

One of the MLAs said they received a call from Sambit Patra, BJP in-charge for Manipur, to be present in Delhi by 2 p.m. on Monday.

Former Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh told *The Hindu* that he was on his way to Delhi to attend the meeting with the central leadership.

According to a PTI report, Manipur BJP president Adhikarimayum Sharda Devi told presspersons at Imphal airport, "All NDA legislators have been called. We are hoping and believing that a popular government will be formed."

The alliance partners, National People's Party (NPP) and Naga People's Front (NPF), are also likely to attend the meeting on Monday.

Sources say talks are on with the Meitei, Kuki-Zo, and Naga MLAs on government formation in State

Amid the call for the meeting, the security forces deployed in the ethnic strife-hit Northeastern State were learnt to be requisitioning additional forces to handle any law-and-order situation that may emerge in the next few days. President's Rule in Manipur will complete a year on February 13, and over the past one-month, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has held several meetings to explore the possibility of restoration of a popular government in Manipur.

The Manipur Assembly was placed under suspended animation last year, following the resignation of Mr. Singh.

The President's Rule, initially imposed for a period of six months, was extended for another six months on August 19, 2025, after taking the concurrence of the Parliament. Government sources said that talks are on with the Meitei, Kuki-Zo, and Naga MLAs to form the government with participation from all three communities.

The Kuki Zo Council, a conglomerate of civil society organisations of the tribal Kuki-Zo-Hmar community, has opposed the MLAs joining the popular government till the demands for a separate administration, that is, a Union Territory with a Legislative Assembly, are met.

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA-DEPARTMENT OF SPACE
CONSTRUCTION & MAINTENANCE GROUP, SDSC –SHAR
SRIHARIKOTA-524124
Brief E-TENDER NOTICE

No: SHAR:CMG CIVIL:MAINT:E-PT-16/25-26 Dt: 29.01.2026
On behalf of President of India, Item Rate tenders are invited through e-tendering for following works;

Name of Work	Tender No	Estimate Cost
AMC for Civil, PH, Water supply etc at PNN & SMN colonies for the year 2026-27.	T/C-25-059	₹ 188.38 Lakhs
AMC for Civil, PH, Water supply etc at PCN Colony for the year 2026.	T/C-25-060	₹ 97.40 Lakhs

Tender documents can be downloaded up to **16.02.2026**, **14:30** hrs. For eligibility criteria and other details, interested tenderers may please refer to the detailed bilingual (Hindi-English) Notice Inviting Tenders (NIT) on the website **https://www.isro.gov.in/Tenders.html** and tender free view at **https://www.tenderwizard.com/isro**
Sd/- GROUP HEAD, CMG/ SDSC SHAR

India dismisses Pak.'s allegations after BLA attacks in Balochistan

Kallol Bhattacherjee
NEW DELHI

India on Sunday refuted Islamabad's allegation of being linked to a series of attacks by the banned Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) during the weekend, and urged Pakistan to address "long-standing demands" of Baloch rebels. The remarks from the official spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) came after Pakistan's Interior Minister Mohsin Raza Naqvi alleged that the latest attacks that rocked cities such as Gwadar, Quetta, and Pasni were carried out with help from India.

'Own internal failings'

"We categorically reject the baseless allegations made by Pakistan, which are nothing but its usual tactics to deflect attention from its own internal failings," said MEA official spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal who urged Pakistan to "focus on addressing long-standing demands of its people in the region".

"Its record of suppression, brutality and violation of human rights is well known," said Mr. Jaiswal. Earlier, Mr. Naqvi had pointed a finger at India while explaining the latest attacks by BLA that have claimed lives of at least 18 civilians and 17 law enforcement officials.

"India is behind these attacks," Mr. Naqvi said on Saturday.

Over the weekend, several cities and townships in Balochistan witnessed attacks that were claimed by the BLA. BLA spokesperson Jeeyand Baloch said in a mail to the media that the wave of violence is part of the so-called Operation Herof 2 and that the operation has continued for more than 15 hours.

On Sunday, Mr. Baloch claimed that the BLA's fighters have established position in Pakistan military's camp in Noshki, located in southwest Quetta. He further said that BLA's fighters had managed to establish a temporary blockade on the coastal highway of Balochistan disrupting smooth movement.

Randhir Jaiswal

Uttarakhand Police lodge FIRs over shop dispute

Ishita Mishra
NEW DELHI

The Uttarakhand Police have registered a first information report (FIR) against Deepak Kumar and Vijay Rawat, two men who intervened when members of right-wing groups allegedly harassed an elderly Muslim shopkeeper in Kotdwar on January 26 demanding that he change his shop's name.

The police have also lodged an FIR against two named and a few unnamed men based on the complaint of the Muslim shopkeeper, Ahmed Wakil.

Sarvesh Panwar, Superintendent of Police of Pauri Garhwal, told *The Hindu* on Sunday that the FIR against Mr. Kumar and Mr. Rawat was lodged following a complaint filed by Gaurav Kashyap and Kamal Pal, members of the Vishva Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal, respectively.

They were booked on charges of criminal intimidation, voluntarily causing hurt, rioting, and breach of peace.

The police said the FIR was lodged against the members of right-wing groups to maintain law and order and prevent escalation of tensions in the area.

Sheikh Khurshid seeks all-party meeting in J&K

The Hindu Bureau
SRINAGAR

Awami Ittehad Party legislator Sheikh Khurshid on Sunday sought an all-party meeting in J&K over the future of people who returned from Pakistan, harassment of Kashmiris outside J&K and the termination of employees by the Lieutenant Governor administration. He had handed over a letter to CM and pressed for the meeting.

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The Above RFP tender document is available and can be downloaded from the following websites www.iob.bank.in & https://iobtenders.auctiontiger.net
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International Women's Day
The awards will be presented at a ceremony to be held on this occasion.
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THE HINDU GROUP
BUILDING INDIA'S PERFECT XI FOR THE T20 WORLD CUP

Stripping selection of sentiment, this analysis uses matchups and phase-wise data to expose hidden flaws and build an Indian XI designed to solve tactical problems.
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Delegates at various sessions of the Kerala for All conclave, organised jointly by Kerala Tourism and *The Hindu*, in Kochi. The two-day conclave, which focussed on themes such as accessibility and inclusivity, concluded on Sunday. H. VIBHU AND THULASI KAKKAT

N. Ram, Director, The Hindu Group, conversing with Sminu Jindal, founder, Svayam, an accessibility organisation, at the conclave. R.K.NITHIN

Inclusive tourism is a right, not a privilege: N. Ram

M.P. Praveen
KOCHI

"Kerala is a fort that resists divisive influences particularly those trying to polarise society on the basis of religion," N. Ram, Director, The Hindu Group, has said. He was delivering the keynote address during the inauguration of 'Kerala For All – Tourism Without Barriers', a two-day conclave organised jointly by Kerala Tourism and The Hindu Group, on Sunday.

"The idea behind 'Kerala for All' reflects a model that combines strong social indicators with an ethos of openness, dignity and welfare governance. There are some political forces in this country, I don't want to name them, that try to disturb this. But Kerala in a sense is a fort that resists such divisive influences, particularly those trying to polarise society on the basis of religion, sometimes based on caste but mainly religion," Mr. Ram said.

'Most socially advanced State'

Kerala is one of India's most socially advanced States. "In fact, I would say it is India's most socially advanced State. Not because of high per capita income, although that is also growing, but because of its long-standing commitment to human development, social justice and inclusive public policy," said Mr. Ram.

Over the long term, social development in Kerala has been shaped by land reform, social reform movements, and progressive politics. The idea of 'Kerala for All' extends beyond welfare into a broader culture of inclusion. And while we saw the distressing phenomenon of migrant workers during the pandemic walk long distances in various parts of India, Kerala stood as a model of how to handle such crisis situations, he said.

"The State has welcomed migrant workers from other States who contribute significantly to construction, services and industry. And the LDF government led by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan set an example to all of India by calling these migrant workers guest workers. They are treated as residents of Kerala," Mr. Ram said.

Inclusive and accessible tourism should be treated as a right of all tourists and not something that is given as charity or as a special privilege, he said. "Kerala Tourism deserves commendation for its tremendous effort to make Kerala a place for all with inclusive and accessible tourism. *The Hindu* is privileged that that we are in this partnership with the government of Kerala and with Kerala tourism in particular. This is a good start and I hope there'll be consolidation of these efforts," said Mr. Ram.

Kerala urged to go beyond hard infra in accessibility, put AI to good use

Suman Billa, Additional Secretary and Director General, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, says the State needs to develop a truly world-class model that offers differently abled visitors a seamless experience. People should be sensitised to the need, equipped with necessary skills, he adds

M.P. Praveen
KOCHI

Kerala should focus on a few destinations, build standards that match the best in the world, infuse technology, and partner with stakeholders to create a world-class accessibility model, said Suman Billa, Additional Secretary and Director General, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.

He was speaking at the session 'Vision Kerala for All: Shaping the Future of Kerala Tourism' at the two-day conclave 'Kerala for All – Tourism Without Barriers', jointly organised by Kerala Tourism and The Hindu Group, in Kochi on Sunday.

Mr. Billa said that although every project of the Central and State governments has accessibility provisions written into it, implementation is not happening. He stressed the need to think about accessibility beyond hard infrastructure and to incorporate assistive technologies powered by artificial intelligence. He also emphasised the importance of building a culture of accessibility at the school level so that youngsters are socially sensitised.

Suman Billa, Additional Secretary and Director General, Union Ministry of Tourism, and K. Biju, Secretary, Kerala Tourism, and moderator S. Anandan, Resident Editor, Kerala, *The Hindu*, at a session at the Kerala for All conclave, organised by Kerala Tourism and The HIndu, in Kochi on Sunday. THULASI KAKKAT

"What characterises Kerala society are virtues such as compassion and equality, with social mobilisation at its core. The Kerala psyche is hardwired to implement universal accessibility. Kerala has made progress in this field, but much more needs to be done. Accessibility should be integrated into policy, and infrastructure must be built with accessibility as part of every project. Kerala needs to develop a truly world-class model that offers differently-abled visitors a seamless experience," Mr. Billa said.

Calls for a movement

Supporting Kerala's image as an inclusive and accessibility-friendly destination, Mr. Biju said the effort must go beyond tourism sites and destinations where the entire society embrace it. "Just like Responsible Tourism, accessibility should become a movement across the State. People everywhere must be sensitised, equipped with the necessary skills, and supported with the right infrastructure so that Kerala emerges as one of the best States in terms of universal accessibility, a model we can showcase to the world," he said.

Highlighting Kerala's compassionate society and strong grassroots participation, Mr. Biju emphasised the need for a policy-led initiative rather than a project-led approach.

"There is no point in making just one or two rooms differently-abled friendly. Every room and every space, including parks, heritage sites, beaches, backwaters, and houseboats, must be planned to ensure they are disabled-friendly and accessible," he added.

K. Biju, Secretary, Kerala Tourism, was the other participant. S. Anandan, Resident Editor, Kerala, *The Hindu*, moderated the session.

Earlier, addressing the inaugural session, Mr. Billa said if Kerala could set a new model in inclusive and accessible tourism, it would become a global model for reference. "There is no State is better placed than Kerala to implement inclusive and accessible tourism," said Mr. Billa.

Considering the fact that those with special abilities are repeated visitors to the same destinations and stay longer, it is not a matter of social concern alone, but the accessible design should be undertaken from a commercial point of view too, he said.

Vying for gender-inclusive tourism

Hiran Unnikrishnan
KOCHI

Asserting that Kerala is perhaps the only State in the world willing to openly acknowledge shortcomings in the gender inclusivity of its tourism destinations, Sikha Surendran, Director, Kerala Tourism, said the State is working on a comprehensive project to address all such barriers in the near future.

"Kerala Tourism is keen on removing all forms of barriers at destinations for people of all genders and age groups, in consultation with stakeholders," she said, drawing a loud round of applause from the audience.

Ms. Surendran was addressing the session titled Gender Inclusivity at the Heart of Tourism as part of the Kerala for All conclave, jointly organised by Kerala Tourism and *The Hindu*.

Sikha Surendran, Director, Kerala Tourism; Preeja Rajan, State Coordinator, UN Women; Monolita Chatterjee, architect; Soity Banerjee, travel & food journalist; and moderator Saraswathy Nagarajan at the conclave in Kochi on Sunday. THULASI KAKKAT

Preeja Rajan, State Coordinator of UN Women, said women should not only be able to visit destinations but also be visibly represented there.

"The presence of more women in tourism spaces helps enhance the sense of safety among women travellers," she noted.

Monolita Chatterjee, urban designer and architect, said public spaces in India are often designed without considering different types of bodies.

'Simple design changes'

"The real issue is that barriers are not properly understood. Many of these could be addressed through simple design decisions," she said.

Soity Banerjee, Responsible Tourism strategist, raised concerns about the safety of women employed in the tourism sector, highlighting last-mile connectivity as a major challenge. "Poor connectivity forces many women to retreat after sundown," she said.

Responding to the concern, Ms. Surendran pointed out that Kerala has made significant strides in this area by providing behavioural training to cab drivers. She also spoke of plans by the Tourism department to expand a network of women-run toilets for women travellers. "The government will provide incentives for operating such facilities, which will go a long way in addressing these concerns," she said.

Tiffany Brar, founder, Jyothirgamaya Foundation, and moderator K.C. Vijaya Kumar at the Kerala for All conclave in Kochi on Sunday. THULASI KAKKAT

When travelling is more about hearing

John L. Paul
KOCHI

It is high time visually challenged people are given audio descriptions while watching movies, in museums and in tourism locales, Tiffany Brar, a visually challenged person and founder of Jyothirgamaya Foundation said here on Sunday.

She was speaking on 'Seeing travel differently: Navigating the world without sight', at the two-day Kerala for All conclave convened here by the Kerala Tourism in partnership with *The Hindu*, that concluded on Sunday.

"At innumerable museums and places of worship in the country, people are told not to 'touch' anything. This puts people like me who cannot see in a clueless situation," Ms. Brar said.

She contrasted this with visually challenged visitors to many museums in the West being provided with a handheld device that makes audio announcements.

"The absence of an announcement system in public transport buses is yet another constraint, with the result that I myself have alighted at wrong bus stops in Kerala. In addition, there is need to augment wheelchair accessibility in beaches, waterfalls etc.," she said.

Instances of bias

Referring to instances of discrimination she faced, Ms. Brar spoke of how she was told to sit on the last bench at a school, and was once asked to leave the class for saying the correct answer. She faced discrimination in a 'premium' school in central Kerala as well.

Technological advancements in the form of AI and smartphones have come to the help of visually challenged people, Ms. Brar said, and called upon hotels to economise rooms and to have devices to augment accessibility.

The session was moderated by Vijayakumar K.C., Sports Editor of *The Hindu*.

Accessibility should not be an afterthought, say experts

M.P. Praveen
KOCHI

Accessibility should not be reduced to a mere checklist, compliance factor, part of a regulatory mechanism, or simply an afterthought. It must be placed at the core of designing every possible solution, observed experts at the session on Digital and Technology Innovation in Inclusive and Accessible Tourism at Kerala For All.

Anoop P. Ambika, CEO, Kerala Startup Mission (KSUM); Robin Tommy, Executive Director, Kerala Development and Innovation Strategic Council; and Saidarshan Bhagat, Scientist D, Centre for Development of Advanced Computing, Mumbai, participated in the session. Soma Basu, Senior Deputy Editor, *The Hindu*, moderated the discussion.

Tech solutions

Mr. Ambika said technology solutions should intuitively cater to the user by combining technologies like AI, Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality, voice, and brain-computer interfaces. "The adoption of technology, and the infusion of design into this process, remain very poor. Instead of fragmented solutions, what is needed are end-to-end solutions that can be integrated into a single workflow," he said.

Anoop P. Ambika, Robin Tommy, Saidarshan Bhagat, and moderator Soma Basu at a session at the conclave. H. VIBHU

He also called for developing empathy towards the differently abled from the school level by making it part of the curriculum, so that future innovators design solutions accessible to all. He added that the government should incentivise large corporate firms to make their systems fully accessible, either through taxation benefits or by utilising corporate social responsibility funds.

Mr. Tommy said accessibility should be seen as a lived experience. "It is not that we lack technology or are unwilling to adopt it; rather, we don't know where to use what. The design aspect presents the biggest challenge. Today, many designers have not even studied universal design principles in terms of accessibility. Accessibility and inclusive solutions should be approached from the perspective of environment, experience, and design," he said.

Struggles recounted

Mr. Bhagat highlighted that lack of awareness, poor sensitisation, and faulty design of assistive technologies make accessibility a major challenge for differently abled travellers. He recounted his own struggle with self check-in counters at airports, which he said are not designed for the differently abled community.

TEHRAN

Iran declares European armies 'terror groups' in retaliatory move

REUTERS

Iran has declared European countries' armies "terrorist groups", its parliament speaker said on Sunday, following the EU's decision to apply the same designation to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The Guards are the ideological arm of Iran's military, tasked with safeguarding the Islamic revolution from threats. AFP

WASHINGTON

Trump says U.S. 'starting to talk to Cuba' as he moves to cut oil supply

AP

President Donald Trump said the U.S. was beginning to talk with Cuban leaders as his administration is putting greater pressure on the communist-run island and cutting off key oil supplies. He did not offer any details about what level of outreach his administration has had with Cuba, but said, "We're starting to talk to Cuba." AP

YANGON

Myanmar junta urges civil servants protesting against coup to work

AFP

Myanmar's junta called on Sunday for ex-civil servants who quit their jobs in protest over the coup five years ago to report back to work, pledging to remove absent state employees from "blacklists". Public employees who had been absent from work were placed on blacklists, "leading some to remain in hiding", it added. AFP

JERUSALEM

Israel to terminate MSF work in Gaza for failing to provide staff list

AFP

Israel said on Sunday it was terminating the humanitarian operations of Doctors Without Borders (MSF) in Gaza after the medical charity failed to provide a list of its Palestinian staff. "MSF will cease its operations and depart the Gaza Strip by February 28," Ministry of Diaspora Affairs and Combating Antisemitism said. AFP

Reopening of Gaza's Rafah crossing expected today, say Israeli officials

The crossing will initially operate for pedestrian movement only, coordinated between Israel, Egypt, and EU; priority to be given to Palestinians needing medical treatment abroad; reopening aligns with first phase of Trump's plan to end the war

Reuters
JERUSALEM/CAIRO

Gaza's main border crossing in Rafah will reopen for Palestinians on Monday, Israel said, with preparations under way at the war-ravaged enclave's main gateway that has been largely shut for almost two years.

Before the war, the Rafah border crossing with Egypt was the only direct exit point for most Gazans to reach the outside world as well as a key entry point for aid into the territory. It has been largely shut since May 2024 and under Israeli military control on the Gazan side.

COGAT, the Israeli military unit that oversees humanitarian coordination, said the crossing will reopen in both directions for Gaza residents on foot only and its operation will be coordinated with Egypt and the European Union.

"Today, a pilot is under way to test and assess the operation of the crossing. The movement of residents in both directions, entry and exit to and from Gaza, is expected to begin tomorrow," COGAT said in a statement.

A Palestinian official and a European source close to the EU mission confirmed the details.

Israel has said the crossing would open under stringent security checks only for Palestinians who wish to leave the war-ravaged enclave and for those who fled the fighting in the first months of the war to return.

Many of those expected to leave are sick and wounded Gazans in need of medical care abroad. The Palestinian Health Ministry has said that there are 20,000 patients waiting to leave Gaza.

Reopening the border crossing was a key requirement of the first phase of U.S. President Donald Trump's plan to end the Israel-Hamas war.

But the ceasefire, which came into effect in October after two years of fighting, has been repeatedly shaken by rounds of violence.

Israeli attacks in Gaza have killed more than 500 Palestinians since the ceasefire, local health officials say, and Palestinian militants have killed four Israeli troops, according to Israeli authorities.

On Saturday, Israel launched some of its most intense air strikes since the ceasefire, killing at least 30 people.

Lengthy wait: Ambulances wait on the Egyptian side of the Rafah border crossing with Gaza, in northeastern Egypt on Sunday. AFP

If U.S. strikes Iran, it will be a regional war: Khamenei

Stanly Johny

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Sunday warned that any U.S. strike on the country would become a regional war even as Tehran and Washington confirmed that talks are progressing between the two sides amid regional efforts to de-escalate tensions.

"The Americans should know if they start a war, this time it will be a regional war," said Mr. Khamenei while addressing a gathering at Tehran's Imam Khomeini Hussainiya, which is part of the Office of the Supreme Leader. "We are not the initiators of war. We do not seek to oppress anyone. We do not seek to attack any country. However, anyone who seeks to attack or cause harm will face a decisive blow from the Iranian nation," said Mr. Khamenei.

His comments, which were also posted on social media, come at a time when the U.S. has sent warships, fighter jets and an aircraft carrier to West Asia's waters amid threats of a strike on Iran. U.S. President Donald Trump said last week that "time was running our for Iran" to make a deal over its nuclear programme, adding that "a massive armada" was heading towards Iran and that it was "ready to use violence" if necessary.

Mr. Khamenei appeared to play down Mr. Trump's threats and U.S. troops mobilisation near Iran's shores. "That Americans sometimes talk about war – saying we will come with warships and aircraft – is nothing new. The Iranian nation is not affected by such talks. They shouldn't try to intimidate the Iranian nation with such things," he added.

Iranian officials in recent days had warned that any U.S. attack on Iran would not be a limited war. But at the same time, Tehran has also signalled that it was still open for diplomacy. Earlier on Sunday, Ali Larijani, Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran, said talks were progressing between the two sides. "Contrary to the hype of the contrived media war, structural arrangements for negotiations are progressing," Mr. Larijani, an influential figure in Tehran who met Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on January 30, wrote on social media.

'Talks are on'

U.S. President Trump also confirmed that talks were on. "They are talking to us. Seriously talking to us," Mr. Trump told reporters in Washington on Sunday.

Regional countries Oman, Qatar, Turkiye and Saudi Arabia were pushing for a diplomatic solution to the crisis. Turkiye has stated that it would not support any military action against Iran. Saudi Arabia and the UAE, two American allies in the Persian Gulf, have ruled out letting their air space be used for a strike against Iran. Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement that Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani met Mr. Larijani in Tehran on Saturday to discuss "efforts to de-escalate tensions in the region".

The Prime Minister reiterated Qatar's "support for all efforts aimed at reducing tensions and achieving peaceful solutions that enhance security and stability in the region", the ministry said.

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who was in Turkiye to meet President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on January 29, said Iran was open for a "fair, equitable" nuclear deal.

"Iran has never sought nuclear weapons and is ready to embrace a fair and equitable nuclear deal that meets the legitimate interests of our people; this includes ensuring 'No Nuclear Weapons' and guaranteeing the lifting of sanctions," Mr. Araghchi wrote in social media after meeting Mr. Erdogan and Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan. "Iran always stands ready to engage with regional states to protect peace and stability in our region and shield it from unlawful aggression," he added.

Resolute stance: Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei speaks in a meeting, in Tehran, Iran, on Sunday. AP

'Further Russia-Ukraine talks are scheduled for Wednesday'

Associated Press
KYIV

The next round of peace talks between Russian and Ukrainian delegations will take place on Wednesday and Thursday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Sunday.

Envoys from Russia, Ukraine and the U.S. had been expected to meet that day in Abu Dhabi, to continue negotiations aimed at ending Moscow's all-out invasion of its neighbour.

"We have just had a report from our negotiating team. The dates for the next trilateral meetings have been set: Feb. 4 and 5 in Abu Dhabi. Ukraine is ready for substantive talks, and we are interested in an outcome that will bring us closer to a real and dignified end to the war," Mr. Zelenskyy said.

There was no immediate comment from U.S. or Russian officials.

On Saturday afternoon, top Russian envoy Kirill Dmitriev said he had held a "constructive meeting with the U.S. peacemaking delegation" in Florida.

While Ukrainian and Russian officials have agreed in principle with Washington's calls for a compromise, Moscow and Kyiv differ deeply over what an agreement should look like. A central issue is whether Russia should keep or withdraw from areas of Ukraine its forces have occupied.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy

Gunmen raid police station, burn church, kidnap five in Nigeria

Agence France-Presse
LAGOS

Gunmen raided a police station and a church on Sunday in a central Nigerian district where dozens of school children were kidnapped late last year, police said.

The attack, which occurred in the same local government area where around 300 school children were seized during a mass kidnapping in November, is the latest attack as Nigeria's insecurity comes under scrutiny.

"Armed bandits invaded Agwara community, attacked the police station, used suspected dynamite to set the station ablaze," the police said.

"The militants later moved to United Methodist Church in the community, and burnt part of the church and abducted about five persons...," it said.

Elsewhere in northeastern Borno state, the military said it had killed a senior jihadist commander and 10 Boko Haram fighters, during a night raid.

TH CROSSWORD + 14706

(set by Dr. X)

Solve this puzzle online and access more puzzles at *https://thehindu.com/crosswords*

SCAN TO PLAY

Across

1/6 Frankly, that's how a chemise hangs (8,4,3,8)
5 Killed around noon in revolt (6)
10 Bolt starts to run in very exciting trial (5)
11 Spice in small, unopened case (9)
12 Release new design on time (9)
13 The ones here in rebellious group consuming heroin and ecstasy (5)
14 Briefly talk about popular aquarium fish (6)
15 Distressed by bad truffle (7)
18 Observes creep going around in lounge without shirt (7)
20 Look at husband beginning to ogle lady in base (6)
22 Walk a mile on ground, shortly after gaining pounds (5)
24 Pot-bellied lush drinking right after start of ceremony (9)
25 Help after receiving storm alert in central part of country (9)
26 Squad itching to cross channel (5)
27 Clear on the contrary, need extremely large full-skirted dress (6)
28 Wild romp in pier, awfully inappropriate (8)

Down

1 Walk in street on outing (6)
2 Crazy about topless beauty - gorgeous (9)
3 Lost credit card on set - my mistake (1,5,9)
4 USSR has deployed cavalrymen (7)
6 See 1 Across
7 Continue going around island on most basic battery-powered two-wheeler (1-4)
8 Pursued lady on vacation tenaciously (8)
9 Words on envelope in vehicle upset rival (4,2)
16 Stumble in front of suite, overwhelmed by strong drinks with darling in retreat (5,4)
17 Raised couch to catch insect (8)
19 One getting a little aggressive after cocaine in star's party (6)
20 Apathy of revolutionary involved in blast (7)
21 Extremely elegant songstress, one making an impression (6)
23 Heard roar for former British PM (5)

SUDOKU

2				3			7	
4		7					1	
	9		2				6	
		2		9		8		
			7		1			
		5		4		9		
	2				7		4	
	1					7		2
	8			1				6

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆

Solution to previous puzzle

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

2	8	1	6	3	7	5	9	4
6	5	3	9	4	2	7	8	1
7	9	4	8	1	5	2	3	6
5	4	8	3	2	9	1	6	7
3	2	6	1	7	8	4	5	9
9	1	7	4	5	6	8	2	3
1	6	5	7	8	3	9	4	2
4	3	2	5	9	1	6	7	8
8	7	9	2	6	4	3	1	5

FAITH

Guru Ravidas, voice of Dalits

Guru Ravidas, a 15-16 Century bhakti poet, regarded as a contemporary of Kabir, is said to have met Guru Nanak. Guru Ravidas firmly and steadfastly stood up for those on the marginalised sections of society and fought against Brahminical hegemony, dogma, ostentation, oppression, superstition and ritualism. He tried to reform the casteist and discriminatory practices dominant in that period. He was a voice of the oppressed and the subaltern. Born in a family of leather tanners, a profession he nobly practised and considered his *Keerat* (vocation), loftily continuing it all his life. His thoughts, poetry and life in practice, reflected his constant struggle to bring about social change by stirring the consciousness of the masses, said Prof. Kumool Abbi.

He was consumed by the love of the divine. Forty-one shabdas of Ravidas *bani* have been included in the Guru Granth Sahib in the form of different ragas. Similarly, the Panchvani texts of the Dadupanthi tradition have incorporated some of Ravidas' texts. His works contain the common thread of unflinching devotion to God who is projected in an abstract form as Nirguna (without attributes). It is believed Meera Bai, Queen Jhallan Bai of Chittorgarh and Raja Nagar Mel of Benares were his devotees.

Guru Ravidas' teachings and *bani* resonate across modern-day Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, among others. He is regarded as the personification of Dalit identity and its subsequent assertion and expression. An icon of progressiveness and activism, Guru Ravidas visualised an ideal society of Begumpura, where no sorrow, discrimination, differences and oppression would exist.

UNABASHED PRAISE

You are a big inspiration for all athletes: Alcaraz tells Djokovic

AFP

You're talking about how I'm doing the things, amazing things, but what you're doing is really inspiring. Not only for tennis players, but athletes and all persons around the world. For me, I just enjoyed watching you play so much. It's been an honour sharing the locker room — Alcaraz hails Djokovic on his deeds.

SHARING DUTIES

It was pre-decided that Kishan would keep wickets: Suryakumar

NIRMAL HARINDRAN

Suryakumar Yadav revealed it was pre-decided that Sanju Samson and Ishan Kishan would share the wicketkeeping duties during the New Zealand T20I series. "We decided before the series that Sanju would keep in three games and Ishan in two. Ishan missed the last game, but he was always going to be the 'keeper today (Saturday)".

SEALING THE SERIES

England downs Sri Lanka in rain-affected second T20I

AFP

England beat Sri Lanka by six wickets (DLS Method) in the second T20I in Pallekele to take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series. **The scores:** Sri Lanka 189/5 in 20 overs (Rathnayake 40) lost to England 173/4 in 16.4 overs (Banton 54 n.o.) *by DLS Method, Revised Target: 168 in 17 overs*; **Toss:** England. **PoM:** Banton.

THUMPING WIN

Nawaz stars with a five-for as Pakistan blanks Australia

AP

Mohammad Nawaz took five wickets as Pakistan thrashed Australia by 111 runs to sweep the T20I series 3-0 in Lahore on Sunday. **The scores:** Pakistan 207/6 in 20 overs (Saim 56, Babar 50 n.o., Shadab 46) bt Australia 96 in 16.5 overs (Nawaz 5/18). **Toss:** Pakistan; **PoM:** Nawaz; **PoS:** Agha.

Phenom Alcaraz completes career Slam

The Spaniard surpasses compatriot Nadal as the youngest to achieve the rare feat in the Open era and denies the 38-year-old Djokovic a chance to win a record 25th Major crown; the top seed takes control of the contest after the 10-time champion clinches the opening set

AUSTRALIAN OPEN

Agence France-Presse
MELBOURNE

Carlos Alcaraz swept past Novak Djokovic to win his first Australian Open on Sunday and become the youngest man to complete a career Grand Slam, denying the Serbian great an unprecedented 25th Major.

The Spaniard was imperious after a slow start in dismissing the 38-year-old, 2-6, 6-2, 6-3, 7-5 on Rod Laver Arena to claim a seventh Slam title and cement himself as undisputed World No. 1.

In doing so, he became the youngest man in the Open era to win all four Majors, adding to his two titles each from Wimbledon and the French and US Opens.

At 22, he surpassed legendary countryman Rafael Nadal – in the crowd to witness the feat – who was two years older when he did the same.

"It's an honour to be here in Melbourne every year," said Alcaraz. "Job finished. Four out of four complete."

It was a first defeat for Djokovic in a Melbourne final, having won all 10 previously, leaving him still searching for a landmark 25th Major to better Australia's Margaret Court, who was also watching on centre court.

After battling through five sets in the semifinals, both showed few signs of fatigue in another gladiatorial contest.

They opened with comfortable holds before a double fault and netted forehand presented the first break point chance for Djokovic at 2-1. Alcaraz saved it, but the aggressive fourth seed kept pressing and converted on his third, then consolidated for a 4-1 lead.

He claimed the set in 33 minutes after a ninth unforced error from the top seed, having dominated the big moments.

It was vintage Djokovic, but Alcaraz came storming back, upping the tempo to break for 2-1 in the second set.

Djokovic put drops in his eyes and began rubbing them, unable to tame a now rampant Alcaraz who broke again for 5-2.

There were some sensational rallies that had the crowd on their feet in set three, which went with serve until Djokovic slapped a forehand wide under pressure to slip 2-3 behind. He gamely saved four set points at 3-5 but with his energy levels dropping was unable to save a fifth as the Spaniard took control.

On the back foot, Djokovic then saved six break points in an 11-minute opening service game in set four to stay alive and kept fighting hard. But Alcaraz ground him down and pounced as Djokovic served to stay in the match to seal a maiden triumph in Melbourne.

Day 15 in numbers

Djokovic and Nadal (Roland-Garros 2010-2012) and trailing only the 11 by Nadal and Federer (Roland-Garros 2005 to US Open 2007)

25 Since the inaugural ATP Tour season in 1990, Alcaraz (86) has taken the fewest tournaments to win 25 titles

1 Alcaraz (22y 258d) is the youngest man to complete the Career Grand Slam, and the sixth man to achieve the feat (after Laver, Agassi, Federer, Nadal and Djokovic)

1 The Spaniard is now the youngest man to win seven Majors, breaking Borg's record who won his seventh Slam just days after turning 23

2 Djokovic is 16-4 in Major finals after winning the first set. Two of those defeats have come against Alcaraz (Wimbledon 2023 and Australian Open 2026)

2 Alcaraz is the second Spaniard to win the Melbourne crown after his childhood idol Nadal (2009, 2022)

3 Alcaraz has beaten Djokovic in all three Major finals they contested

9 Alcaraz and Sinner have won the last nine Grand Slams, matching the dominance of

Alcaraz and Djokovic have the biggest age gap (15y 349d) among men's finalists at the Melbourne Major

COMPILED BY ANIRUDH VELAMURI

Pakistan to boycott the India game on Feb. 15

T20 WORLD CUP

Press Trust of India
LAHORE

Pakistan on Sunday formally announced its decision to boycott its marquee T20 World Cup group match against India, even as the government cleared the national team's participation for the rest of the global tournament.

The Pakistan government's decision is being perceived as a mark of protest after the International Cricket Council (ICC) replaced Bangladesh with Scotland, not accepting the former's demand of shifting its matches from India to Sri Lanka. In a statement, the government of Pakistan said it has granted approval to the Pakistan cricket team to take part in the tournament but said the team "shall not take the field" for the February 15 fixture against India in Colombo.

In response, the ICC urged the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) to reconsider its decision of "selectively participating" in the T20 World Cup. "The ICC hopes that the PCB will consider the significant and long-term implications for cricket in its own country. The ICC expects the PCB to explore a mutually acceptable resolution," the ICC said in a statement.

India routs Pakistan, cruises into last four

UNDER-19 WORLD CUP

Press Trust of India
BULAWAYO

Kanishk Chouhan displayed his all-round prowess as India outclassed Pakistan by 58 runs in a Super Six Group 2 clash to qualify for the U-19 World Cup semifinals on Sunday. India will meet Afghanistan in the last-four stage.

After India was invited to bat, Vedant Trivedi set a decent platform with a patient 68 (98b, 2x4, 1x6). But it was Kanishk's 29-ball 35 (4x4, 1x6) and his 50-run stand with Khilan Patel (21 n.o., 15b, 2x4, 1x6) for the eighth wicket that took India to 252. For Pakistan to qualify for the semifinals via better net run-rate, it needed to chase down the target in 33.3 overs.

But it managed only 167 for four in 33.3 overs before finally getting bowled out for 194, with Kanishk delivering a miserly 10-over effort of one for 30.

Vedant. GETTY IMAGES

The scores: India 252 in 49.5 overs (Suryavanshi 30, Vedant 68, Kanishk 35, Subhan 3/33) bt Pakistan 194 in 46.2 overs (Zahoor 42, Usman 66, Yousaf 38, Khilan 3/35); **Semifinal line-up:** India vs. Afghanistan; England vs. Australia.

Capitals survive a minor scare, meet Giants in the Eliminator

WPL-4

Vivek Krishnan
VADODARA

Ahead of the final league fixture of the 2026 Women's Premier League on Sunday, Delhi Capitals' fate was in its own hand. The three-time runner-up needed a win against UP Warriorz at the Kotambi Stadium to set up a clash with Gujarat Giants in the Eliminator on Tuesday.

Jemimah Rodrigues and Co. achieved their objective despite a wobble towards the end, beating Warriorz by five wickets to qualify for the playoffs for the fourth season in a row.

The result consigned Warriorz to the last spot, and also knocked out defending champion Mumbai Indians.

After Marizanne Kapp's three-wicket haul restricted Warriorz to 122 for eight, Capitals took a measured approach in the chase. Shafali Verma and Laura Wolvaardt, who was dropped twice, forged a stand of 73 for the second wicket. A few wickets tumbled as Capitals neared the target, but Jemimah got the job done with an unbeaten 34.

Earlier, Chinelle Henry and Shree Charani, with two wickets each, played supporting roles for DC.

The tone of the contest was set at the very outset. Off a full ball first up, Henry found a hint of swing. Meg Lanning appeared tentative with her forward stride, and got struck on the pads to be dismissed leg-before.

When Charli Knott entered the middle for her WPL debut, she managed to get Kapp away for two boundaries. But Kapp had the last laugh in this mini-battle –she had the 23-year-old caught behind with a bouncer.

Kapp accounted for Deepti Sharma too. In the PowerPlay, Deepti's go-to option was to clear the front leg and slog across the line. While it yielded four fours and a six, Kapp was astute in deceiving the left-hand batter with a slower ball that was skied to extra cover.

Warriorz's plight went from bad to worse in the ninth over as Harleen Deol's botched attempt at a sweep resulted in a leg-before dismissal by Shree Charani.

Jemimah used up Kapp's full quota by the 10th over. The all-rounder pinned Deandro Dottin leg-before on review.

Joy unbound: Kapp, centre, was the toast of her teammates. PTI

SCOREBOARD

UP WARRIORZ
Meg Lanning lbw b Henry 0 *(1b)*, Deepti Sharma c Niki b Kapp 24 *(19b, 4x4, 1x6)*, Charli Knott c Lee b Kapp 12 *(12b, 2x4)*, Harleen Deol lbw b Shree Charani 3 *(11b)*, Deandra Dottin lbw b Kapp 5 *(9b, 1x4)*, Simran Shaikh c Minnu b Henry 22 *(14b, 3x4)*, Shipra Giri c Shafali b Minnu 9 *(8b, 1x4)*, Sophie Ecclestone (not out) 10 *(20b)*, Asha Sobhana c Minnu b Shree Charani 13 *(13b, 1x6)*, Shikha Pandey (not out) 23 *(13b, 3x4)*; Extras (w-1): 1; Total (for eight wkts. in 20 overs): 122.

FALL OF WICKETS
1-0 (Lanning, 0.1), 2-29 (Knott, 3.6), 3-36 (Deepti, 5.6), 4-40 (Harleen, 8.1), 5-52 (Dottin, 9.4), 6-74 (Shipra, 11.6), 7-76 (Simran, 12.3), 8-94 (Asha, 16.5).

CAPITALS BOWLING
Henry 4-0-25-2, Kapp 4-0-30-3, Nandani 4-0-21-0, Minnu 2-0-13-1, Shree Charani 4-0-22-2, Sneh 2-0-11-0.

DELHI CAPITALS
Lizelle Lee c Kranti b Dottin 10 *(10b, 2x4)*, Shafali Verma c Lanning b Shikha 29 *(33b, 2x4)*, Laura Wolvaardt c Ecclestone b Deepti 47 *(36b, 7x4)*, Jemimah Rodrigues (not out) 34 *(18b, 5x4)*, Marizanne Kapp c Kranti b Ecclestone 0 *(5b)*, Chinelle Henry c & b Deepti 1 *(4b)*, Niki Prasad (not out) 4 *(6b)*; Extras (lb-1): 1; Total (for five wkts. in 18.4 overs): 126.

FALL OF WICKETS
1-11 (Lee, 1.5), 2-84 (Wolvaardt, 12.3), 3-97 (Shafali, 14.2), 4-98 (Kapp, 15.2), 5-101 (Henry, 16.2).

WARRIORZ BOWLING
Shikha 4-0-17-1, Dottin 4-0-30-1, Kranti 2-0-22-0, Ecclestone 4-0-20-1, Deepti 3.4-0-27-2, Asha 1-0-9-0.

Toss: Capitals; **PoM:** Kapp.
DC won by five wickets with eight balls to spare.

Lot to cheer: India couldn't have hoped for a better display going into the World Cup. NIRMAL HARINDRAN

Plenty of gains for Men in Blue ahead of the T20 showpiece

NZ IN INDIA

P.K. Ajith Kumar
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The sky, admitted Suryakumar Yadav, hadn't been blue. It is now.

The clouds have lifted. Just in time for the ICC T20 World Cup.

Three half-centuries, the Player-of-the-Series award, and a thumping 4-1 win. Captain SKY's return to form is one of the several gains for the Men in Blue from the five-match T20I series against New Zealand, which concluded here on Saturday night.

No team would want to go into a big event like the World Cup with its captain in poor form, more so when the man has been the world's best batter in the format for quite some time. He had come into the series without a fifty since October, 2024. Of course, this mighty Indian batting lineup doesn't depend on individuals. There is so much depth, and style, too.

Ishan Kishan underlined that depth, as he grabbed his chances with both hands. He has staked a claim for the 'keeper's spot as well, following Sanju Samson's total failure with bat.

Kishan, who didn't even have a BCCI central contract not so long ago, got to play four matches because of the injury to Tilak Varma. He has become a strong contender to open the innings alongside the terrific Abhishek Sharma. With a couple of blinders, Abhishek reminded the bowlers what they could expect from his blade in the World Cup.

Rinku Singh showed in the first game of the series how effective he could be as the finisher. The series also saw the catches following him, and he didn't mind that at all.

Both the seaming all-rounders Hardik Pandya and Shivam Dube have looked good, too. Significantly, Dube's 23-ball 65 came in the only game in which India's batting failed to click.

The two hard-hitting men bring balance to the team. Axar Patel is more than a capable T20I batter, too, and his left-arm spin produced three wickets here on his return from injury. The other spinning options, Varun Chakaravarthy and Kuldeep Yadav have had enough overs under their belt.

Arshdeep Singh's maiden five-wicket haul in T20Is could not have been timed better. That spell came in the final game of the series. He also became the first Indian to take 50 wickets in PowerPlay. The left-arm pacer and the magnificent Jasprit Bumrah form a formidable duo.

The Indians should be pleased with the dress rehearsal that this series has been. The injuries to Washington Sundar and Tilak were among the few disappointments.

India-New Zealand T20I series in numbers

BATTING	M	Runs	HS	SR	100s/50s
Suryakumar	5	242	82*	196.74	0/3
Kishan	4	215	103	231.18	1/1
Abhishek	5	182	84	249.31	0/2
Phillips	5	176	78	153.04	0/1
BOWLING	**M**	**Wkts**	**BB**	**Econ**	**5W**
Arshdeep	4	8	5/51	10.50	1
Duffy	5	6	2/27	10.69	0
Santner	5	5	3/26	11.86	0
Sodhi	5	5	2/46	12.93	0

Spurs rally to hold City; United wins again

EURO LEAGUES

Agencies
MANCHESTER

Tottenham Hotspur came back from two goals down to hold Manchester City 2-2 in a Premier League fixture in London on Sunday. City is now six points behind Arsenal.

Manchester United interim manager Michael Carrick extended his perfect start as Benjamin Sesko's late strike sealed a 3-2 win over Fulham. Aston Villa's title challenge stuttered with a 0-1 loss at Brentford.

In LaLiga, Real Madrid claimed a 2-1 win over nine-man Rayo Vallecano.

Top results: Premier League: Aston Villa 0 lost to Brentford 1 (Ouattara 45+1); Manchester United 3 (Casemiro 19, Cunha 56, Sesko 90+4) bt Fulham 2 (Jimenez 85-pen, Kevin 90+2); Nottingham Forest 1 (Gibbs-White 5) drew with Crystal Palace 1 (Sarr 45+2-pen); Tottenham 2 (Solanke 53, 70) drew with Manchester City 2 (Cherki 11, Semenyo 44). **LaLiga:** Real Madrid 2 (Vinicius 15, Mbappe 90+10-pen) bt Rayo Vallecano 1 (De Frutos 49). **Serie A:** Como 0 drew with Atalanta 0.

On Saturday: Premier League: Chelsea 3 (Joao Pedro 57, Cucurella 70, Fernandez 90+2) bt West Ham 2 (Bowen 7, Summerville 36); Liverpool 4 (Ekitike 41, 43, Wirtz 67, Konate 90+3) bt Newcastle 1 (Gordon 36). **LaLiga:** Levante 0 drew with Atletico Madrid 0; Elche 1 (Rodriguez 29) lost to Barcelona 3 (Yamal 6, Torres 40, Rashford 72). **Serie A:** Napoli 2 (Vergara 11, Gutierrez 49) bt Fiorentina 1 (Solomon 57). **Bundesliga:** Hamburg 2 (Vieira 34-pen, Vuskovic 53) drew with Bayern Munich 2 (Kane 42, Diaz 46).

INBRIEF

Devika wins maiden Super 300 title at Thailand Masters

Devika Sihag clinched her maiden BWF Super 300 crown after Malaysia's Goh Jin Wei retired midway with the former leading 21-8, 6-3 in their women's singles final of the Thailand Masters in Bangkok on Sunday.

Anahat routs Sobhy, enters final of Squash on Fire

Anahat Singh reached her maiden PSA bronze-level final at the Squash on Fire Open in Washington DC with a 3-1 (11-9, 11-3, 9-11, 11-5) win over Sabrina Sobhy of the USA.

Consolation win for Windies in rain-marred third T20I

West Indies won a reduced third and final T20I against South Africa in Johannesburg on Saturday. Hope (48) and Shimron Hetmyer (48 not out) put on 86 off 41 balls for the second wicket in a total of 114 for three. Chasing an adjusted target of 125, S. Africa made 118 for six.

The scores: West Indies 114/3 in 10 overs (Hetmyer 48 n.o. Hope 48) bt S. Africa 118/6 in 10 overs (Motie 3/17). **Toss:** S. Africa. **PoM:** Motie. *West Indies won by 6 runs (DLS method).*

ENGAGEMENTS

Cricket: CSK-Thiruvallur DCA inter-college T20 tournament, first round, Christ Arts & Science vs. Jaya Sakthi EC (7.30 a.m.); Apollo Arts & Science vs. GRT IET (10.45 a.m.), Magna-A; Annai Violet vs. Veltech RS Arts (2 p.m.), Magna-B.
Second round, JHA Agarsen vs. Veltech Multitech (7.30 a.m,); Veltech Hightech vs. Jaya Engg (10.45 a.m.), Magna-B; S.A. Engg vs. Veltech Dr. Sagunthala IST (2 p.m.), Magna-A.

LIVE TELECAST

Men's T20 World Cup: (Warm-ups), JioHotstar, 3 & 5 p.m.
Sri Lanka vs England: 3rd T20I, Sony Sports Ten 5 & LIV, 7 p.m.
Premier League: SS Select 1 & JioHotstar, 1.30 a.m. (Tuesday)

Tamil Nadu and Baroda finish their campaigns with a drab draw

The visitor's openers, Jyotsnil and Shivalik, stitch together a 124-run unbroken partnership; the home team secures a 74-run first-innings lead

RANJI TROPHY

S. Dipak Ragav
SALEM

One of the quirks of multi-day cricket is the compulsion to continue playing until a given time despite there being no possibility of a result. Tamil Nadu and Baroda faced such a situation and went through the grind for two sessions on the last day of the Ranji Trophy Elite Group A match, playing out a dull draw to bring the curtains down on their domestic season at the Salem Cricket Foundation ground on Sunday.

Tamil Nadu, by virtue of having taken the first-innings lead on the penultimate day, pocketed three points, while Baroda added one more to the kitty as the two sides finished sixth and fourth in their group, respectively.

One for the future: Rookie Tamil Nadu batter Nidhish notched up a half-century, his second in as many games. E. LAKSHMI NARAYANAN

Considering there was nothing at stake, it was a chance for the players to pursue some personal milestones.

Resuming at 411 for seven, the home team was bowled out for 449, taking a 74-run lead. Overnight batter Nidhish S. Rajagopal (52) scored his second half-century in as many games.

For Baroda, off-spinner Mahesh Pithiya took the final two wickets to return figures of six for 118, his seventh First Class five-wicket haul.

The visitors' openers, Jyotsnil Singh (55 n.o.) and Shivalik Sharma (59 n.o.), made full use of the rare freedom to play without pressure, stitching together a 124-run unbroken partnership.

Baroda knocked off the deficit by the 20th over, and when tea was taken, both teams were more than happy to shake hands and agree to a draw.

The scores: Baroda — 1st innings: 375.
Tamil Nadu — 1st innings: S.R. Athish lbw b Pithiya 43, R. Vimal Khumar b Bhatt 182, Pradosh Ranjan Paul st. More b Pithiya 80, C. Andre Siddarth b Rathva 7, G. Ajitesh c Rawat b Bhatt 15, Nidhish S. Rajagopal c Babashafi b Pithiya 52, R. Sonu Yadav c Sheth b Pithiya 15, R. Sai Kishore lbw b Pithiya 18, P. Vidyuth lbw b Sheth 15, J. Hemchudeshan c Pandey b Pithiya 2, G. Govinth (not out) 0; Extras (b-13, lb-4, nb-3): 20; Total (in 148.1 overs): 449.

Fall of wickets: 1-125, 2-269, 3-284, 4-323, 5-356, 6-376, 7-411, 8-438, 9-448.

Baroda bowling: Babashafi 13-1-29-0, Pithiya 49.1-10-118-6, Bhatt 33-3-125-2, Sheth 15-1-48-1, Rathva 30-3-85-1, Jyotsnil 7-0-25-0, Pandey 1-0-2-0.

Baroda — 2nd innings: Jyotsnil Singh (not out) 55, Shivalik Sharma (not out) 59; Extras (b-5, lb-5): 10; Total (for no loss in 35 overs): 124.

Tamil Nadu bowling: Sai Kishore 5-1-21-0, Govinth 8-2-21-0, Hemchudeshan 9-0-33-0, Vidyuth 9-0-25-0, Nidhish 2-0-8-0, Pradosh 1-0-5-0, Vimal 1-0-1-0.

RANJI TROPHY SCORES — SEVENTH ROUND, FOURTH AND FINAL DAY

Elite: Group-A: At Sovima: Nagaland 366 & 342 in 104 overs (Chetan Bist 100, Nagaho Chishi 79, Saurabh Kumar 4/116, Tripurana Vijay 5/104) drew with Andhra 536/9 decl. & 64/4 in 8.3 overs. **Points: Andhra 3(31), Nagaland 1(2).**
At Jamshedpur: Odisha 282 & 226 in 82 overs (Subhranshu Senapati 73, Anukul Roy 5/72, Aditya Singh 4/77) lost to Jharkhand 263 & 249/6 in 71.3 overs (Sharandeep Singh 64, Robin Minz 63, Anukul Roy 45, Sayed Tufayl Ahmad 4/101). **Jharkhand 6(31), Odisha 0(7).**
At Salem: Baroda 375 & 124/0 in 35 overs (Jyotsnil Singh 55 n.o., Shivalik Sharma 59 n.o.) drew with Tamil Nadu 449 in 148.1 overs (S.R. Athish 43, Vimal Khumar 182, Pradosh Ranjan Paul 80, Nidhish Rajagopal 52, Mahesh Pithiya 6/118). **TN 3(14), Baroda 1(17).**
At Nagpur: Uttar Pradesh 237 & 200 lost to Vidarbha 237 & 201/6 in 58.2 overs (Aman Mokhade 83, Danish Malewar 54, Shivam Sharma 4/55). **Vidarbha 6(31), U.P. 0(17).**
Final placings (read as matches, won, lost, drawn, NR, points): Jharkhand 7-4-1-2-0-31; Andhra 7-4-0-3-0-31; Vidarbha 7-4-1-2-0-31; Baroda 7-2-1-3-1-17; U.P. 7-1-2-3-1-17; TN 7-1-2-4-0-14; Odisha 7-1-5-1-0-7; Nagaland 7-0-5-2-0-2. **Note:** *Jharkhand (3) and Andhra (2) qualified, thanks to more bonus points than Vidarbha (1).*
Group-B: At Mohali: Punjab 309 & 256 in 101 overs (Uday Saharan 93, Anmolpreet Singh 44) lost to Karnataka 316 & 252/5 in 27.5 overs (Devdutt Padikkal 120 n.o., Mayank Agarwal 53). **Karnataka 6(27), Punjab 0(11).**
At Porvorim: Goa 355 & 199 in 53.3 overs (Darshan Misal 55, M.D. Nidheesh 5/47) lost to Kerala 526/9 decl. & 29/1 in 5.5 overs. **Kerala 6(14), Goa 0(11).**
Final placings: MP 7-3-0-4-0-28; Karnataka 7-3-1-3-0-27; Saurashtra 7-3-0-4-0-26; Maharashtra 7-3-1-3-0-24; Kerala 7-1-2-4-0-14; Goa 7-1-4-2-0-11; Punjab 7-1-3-3-0-11; Chandigarh 7-1-5-1-0-8.
Group-C: At Agartala: Gujarat 352 & 252/9 decl. in 68.5 overs (Manan Hingrajia 59, Kshitij Patel 41, Priyesh Patel 51) lost to Tripura 427 & 179/6 in 27.1 overs (Sridam Paul 64). **Tripura 6(12), Gujarat 0(15).**
At Delhi: Services 343 & 166/8 decl. lost to Railways 212 & 298/7 in 95.1 overs (Pratham Singh 79, Ravi Singh 45, Zubair Ali 58 n.o., Pulkit Narang 5/97). **Railways 6(23), Services 0(19).**
At Dehradun: Uttarakhand 460/7 decl. bt Assam 140 & 278 in 82.5 overs (Nihar Deka 52, Swarupam Purkayastha 73, Mayank Mishra 6/86). **Uttarakhand 7(29), Assam 0(4).**
Final placings: Bengal 7-5-0-2-0-36; Uttarakhand 7-4-2-1-0-29; Haryana 7-4-3-0-0-24; Railways 7-3-2-2-0-23; Services 7-3-4-0-0-19; Gujarat 7-2-4-1-0-15; Tripura 7-1-4-2-0-12; Assam 7-0-3-4-0-4.
Group-D: At Nadaun: Himachal Pradesh 168 & 26/2 lost to J & K 771. **J&K 3(24), Himachal 1(9).**
At Hyderabad: Chhattisgarh 283 & 411/8 in 122 overs (Anuj Tiwary 88, Amandeep Khare 176 n.o., Dev Aditya Singh 79 n.o.) drew with Hyderabad 631. **Hyderabad 3(16), Chhattisgarh 0(18).**
At Mumbai: Delhi 221 & 407/6 decl. in 105 overs (Vaibhav Kandpal 61, Ayush Doseja 159 n.o., Divij Mehra 46) drew with Mumbai 317. **Mumbai 3(33), Delhi 0(10). At Puducherry:** Rajasthan 168 & 352 lost to Pondicherry 349 & 172/5 in 44.1 overs (Jashwanth Shreeram 57, Ajay Rohera 49 n.o., Mohit Changra 4/71). **Pondicherry 6(12), Rajasthan 0(14).**
Final placings: Mumbai 7-4-0-3-0-33; J & K 7-3-1-3-0-24; Chhattisgarh 7-1-1-5-0-18; Hyderabad 7-1-2-4-0-16; Rajasthan 7-1-2-4-0-14; Pondicherry 7-1-2-4-0-12; Delhi 7-0-1-6-0-10; Himachal 7-0-2-5-0-9.
Quarterfinal line-up: Feb. 6 to 10: Bengal vs. Andhra (Kalyani); MP vs J & K (Indore); Jharkhand vs. Uttarakhand (Jamshedpur); Mumbai vs. Karnataka (Mumbai).

Sai Kishore laments inability to bowl out opponents

S. Dipak Ragav
SALEM

Tamil Nadu skipper R. Sai Kishore conceded that the team has regressed from the progress made over the last couple of years after failing to qualify for the knockouts in any of the three domestic competitions this season.

Tamil Nadu's Ranji Trophy campaign ended after a draw against Baroda on Sunday, and the team finished sixth out of eight teams in Elite Group A.

"The only way you can qualify for the knockouts is by taking 20 wickets. At least in all our home games, we have to do that, but we have failed to do so even once this season. We have to fix that," said Sai Kishore.

The left-arm spinner also took responsibility for his own performance and admitted that he was not at his best this season after returning from a finger injury. "I played six Ranji games, but it was only by the middle of the Vijay Hazare Trophy that I got my rhythm back. The way I bowled in this game, I wasn't able to do so earlier."

Taking responsibility: Sai Kishore, centre, admitted that he was not at his best this season. E. LAKSHMI NARAYANAN

When asked how the team and players can improve to be better prepared for such challenges, Sai Kishore stressed the importance of seizing the moment.

"We have to handle pressure in tough situations. Even if we can't win those moments, at least we mustn't lose the plot, hang in there and then capitalise when there is an opening. We have to try to simulate those situations during training."

On the team's dwindling fortunes in white-ball cricket, Sai Kishore said, "We have to play fearless cricket, especially as batters. The other teams have moved the game to the next level, but we haven't caught up".

Abdusattorov pulls away at the top

Press Trust of India
WIJK AAN ZEE

Champion D. Gukesh played out a draw with Hans Moke Niemann in the 12th and penultimate round while Nodirbek Abdusattorov regained sole lead with a crushing victory over Matthias Bluebaum to inch closer to the title, here Sunday.

Javokhir Sindarov did not risk anything against R. Praggnanandhaa and settled for a draw to slip to second spot on 7.5 points.

Gukesh, on six points, is in joint eighth spot in the company of Dutchman Anish Giri. Fedoseev on 5.5 is ahead of Praggnanandhaa on five who in turn is half point clear of Arjun Erigaisi and Aravindh Chithambaram.

The results (round 12): Hans Moke Niemann (7) drew with D. Gukesh (6); Javokhir Sindarov (7.5) drew with R. Praggnanandhaa (5); Nodirbek Abdusattorov (8) bt Matthias Bluebaum (6.5); Vincent Keymer (7) bt Thai Dai Van Nguyen (3); Jorden van Foreest (7) drew with Arjun Erigaisi (4.5); Yagiz Kaan Erdogmus (6.5) bt Vladimir Fedoseev (5.5); Aravindh Chithambaram (4.5) drew with Anish Giri (6).

Maaya is back, bolder and stronger

MUMBAI OPEN

Tarun Shastry
MUMBAI

A year ago, a teenage sensation from India announced herself on the big stage, making the tennis world take notice with a stunning run to the semifinals of the 2025 WTA 125 Mumbai Open. Then 15-year-old Maaya Rajeshwaran bowed out to Switzerland's Jil Teichmann, who went on to lift the title.

Now, as the fifth edition of the WTA 125K Series L&T Mumbai Open gets underway at the Maharashtra State Lawn Tennis Association (MSLTA) on Monday, Maaya is back – bolder, stronger, and determined to go further.

Speaking to the media ahead of the main draw, the young Indian expressed her excitement at returning to Mumbai and gaining experience at the highest level.

"I just want to play as many big tournaments as possible this year. It's all about getting more match time and building the strength to play for longer durations on the road,"

Maaya.

Maaya said.

"It is a privilege and an honour to play against such high-level athletes. For me right now, it's about playing more, gaining experience, and showing up on court to the best of my ability," she added.

The tournament also boasts a strong international field, with eight players in the main draw ranked inside the WTA top 150.

Indian players are expected to take centre stage as well, with the likes of Sahaja Yamalapalli, Shrivalli Bhamidipati, Vaidehi Chaudhari and Vaishnavi Adkar set to feature through wildcard entries, adding further intrigue to what promises to be a high-quality week of tennis in Mumbai.

Haryana Thunders rules the roost

Sports Bureau

Paris Olympics silver medallist Iryna Koliadenko proved her credentials and stepped up when needed most, helping Haryana Thunders clinch the Pro Wrestling League title at the Noida Indoor Stadium here on Sunday. Thunders defeated Delhi Dangal Warriors 5-4 in the final.

Iryna blanks Anjli

Ukrainian Iryna, a two-time Olympic medallist, registered a dominant 16-0 win against Anjli in 62kg, the final bout of the season after the teams were tied 4-4 in the closest contest of the league.

It was a night that saw Warriors repeatedly take the lead only for Thunders, the pre-final favourite and the most dominant team of the season, level immediately.

The triumph was also a testament to Haryana's team selection – the top women wrestlers of the competition, Yui Susaki (53kg) and Kajal Dhochak (76kg), were in its ranks.

While Yui got past Saarika 15-0 within the first two minutes of their bout, Kajal defeated Anastasiya Alpyeyeva 3-1.

Delhi began strongly as Turan Bayramov defeated Parvinder 8-2 in 74kg, his seventh win in as many bouts and making him the most dominant wrestler in the league.

Warriors captain Sujeet Kalkal (65kg) overcame a 0-6 deficit to prevail 8-6 in a dramatic fightback against Tumur Ochir Tulga, scoring seven points in the final power minute with a push-out, takedown and caution.

The results:
Final: Haryana Thunders bt Delhi Dangal Warriors 5-4
(**Men: 57kg:** Akshay Dhere bt Amit Kumar 16-0.
65kg: Tumur Ochir Tulga lost to Sujeet Kalkal 6-8.
74kg: Parvinder lost to Turan Bayramov 2-8.
86kg: Ashirov Ashraf lost to Vafaeipour Hadi Bakhtiyar 0-11.
125kg: Anirudh Gulia lost to Ronak 2-12.
Women: 53kg: Yui Susaki bt Saarika 15-0, by Technical Superiority.
57kg: Neha Sangwan bt Anjali 8-2, by Fall.
62kg: Iryna Koliadenko bt Anjli 16-0, by Technical Superiority.
76kg: Kajal Dhochak bt Anastasiya Alpyeyeva 3-1).
On Saturday: Second semifinal: Dangal Warriors bt Maharashtra Kesari 5-4.

AROUND THE CITY

TN men complete hat-trick in National 3x3 basketball

Tamil Nadu claimed the men's title in the National 3x3 basketball championships held in New Delhi on Saturday.

TN made it three-in-a-row by defeating Uttar Pradesh 22-20 in the final.

Tamil Nadu women lost the bronze medal play-off to Delhi 20-21.

Reign continues: The victorious Tamil Nadu 3x3 basketball squad with its reward. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Varun stars as Jeppiaar MHSS emerges champion

S. Varun struck 119 (235b, 17x4) as Jeppiaar MHSS piled on 537 for nine before declaration on day three of the Take Rotary Serenity Cup u-19 inter-school tournament final against St. Bede's AIHSS at the Amir Mahal ground on Sunday.

Jeppiaar MHSS emerged the champion by virtue of its first-innings lead.

The scores (final, day three): St. Bede's AIHSS 214 & 72/1 in 7 overs drew with Jeppiaar MHSS 537/9 decl. in 187.1 overs (B. Siddharth 54, R. Raj Jamie Walsh 52, S. Arjun 133, P. Yatish 35, S. Varun 119, Deepak Gahlot 36, V. Shavin 3/68, Sidarrth Ravi 3/94).

Special award: Player-of-the-Tournament: Virendra Singh Rajpurohit (Jeppiaar).

All smiles: Jeppiaar MHSS which won the Take Rotary Serenity Cup u-19 inter-school tournament. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Vengatesh and Lakshanaa win under-19 chess titles

C. Vengatesh Krishnan secured 4.5 points from five rounds to win the u-19 boys' title in the 30th Tiruvallur District selection u-19 boys & girls chess tournament at the Bharath Chess Academy in Thiruninravur on Sunday.

The top four in each category will represent Tiruvallur District in the upcoming Tamil Nadu State u-15 & u-19 championship.

The standings: Boys: u-19: 1. C. Vengatesh Krishnan (4.5/5), 2. B.Y. Sooriya (4); **u-15:** 1. B.U. Prajeesh (5.5/6), 2. Raghava Prabhakaran Kumar (5).

Girls: u-19: 1. R. Lakshanaa (5/5), 2. M. Rithika (4.5); **u-15:** 1. B.J. Harshitha (5.5/6), 2. Vaishnavi Anand (5).

Belligerent and uncomplicated – pocket-dynamite Kishan is here to stay

The 27-year-old, with a whirlwind outing against New Zealand, has overtaken Samson in the race to be India's wicketkeeper-batter/opener for the T20 World Cup; his blistering century in Thiruvananthapuram proved to be the icing on the cake

R. Kaushik

A little after 7.30 p.m. on Saturday in Thiruvananthapuram, chants of 'Ishaaaan, Ishan' rang around the Greenfield International Stadium as everyone packing the stands roared as one in approbation. After an uncharacteristically tepid start, Ishan Kishan had started to find his bearings, manifesting his aggression with a four and a six, through and over the off-side, off successive deliveries from Lockie Ferguson, who had accounted for both Indian wickets to fall at that stage.

What's the big deal, you say? An Indian crowd cheering an Indian batter at an Indian venue? Isn't that how it always has been?

But yes, this was a big deal. Here's why.

One of the two wickets in the pocket of Ferguson, the tearaway Kiwi playing his first match of the T20I series, was that of Sanju Samson, hometown hero bar none, the toast of God's own country, the man who can do no wrong even when he is exasperatingly infuriating with the bat.

Samson had just 40 runs in four outings coming into the final match, and desperately needed a score of substance to stay ahead of Kishan in the race to the wicketkeeper-batter/opener's slot at the T20 World Cup, now not even a week away.

But the 31-year-old right-hander who has allowed glaring technical shortcomings to infest his game – what are head coach Gautam Gambhir and batting coach Sitanshu Kotak doing?? - courted another failure, caught at deep third-man trying to work an awayswinger from outside off to the on-side and only managing a leading edge. His contribution this time was a princely six runs, of which four came off an aerial outside edge that flew through untenanted short third-man and to the boundary in the second over.

Kerala, the land primarily but not only of athletics and football, hasn't produced too many international men cricketers. Sunil Valson (who was part of the 1983 World Cup-winning squad but never got a game), Abey Kuruvilla and Ajay Jadeja all had links with the State through language, though none of them represented Kerala at the domestic level. Tinu Yohannan was the first Kerala player to play for India, and even though he took a wicket in his first over in Test cricket (Mohali, 2001, against England), he didn't quite kick on.

S. Sreesanth arrived in a blazing run of wickets and histrionic idiosyncrasies but self-destructed with as much flamboyance as he mesmerised with his control over wrist and seam, while Samson has promised much but not quite lived up to that promise, though recent developments suggest that had he not been moved around in the batting order so much, he might have started to deliver on a more sustained basis. But such is the depth of options when it comes to T20 cricket particularly, and so intense is the competition for places, that few can afford to insist on a settled batting position to state their case.

NIRMAL HARINDRAN

Big deal

It is against this backdrop that the support for Kishan in the Kerala capital becomes a big deal. Samson's third-over dismissal enveloped the stadium in the deafening sound of silence, which soon gave way to polite applause by way of encouragement. Kishan passed the exiting Samson – no glances exchanged, which doesn't mean anything because each of them was caught up in their own world – not worried about anything else apart from making a contribution to the team's cause. Whatever else came out of that would be a bonus.

Kishan himself has overcome a challenging phase – the loss of his central contract after refusing to follow BCCI orders and making himself unavailable for domestic cricket in early 2024, and an extended stay on the sidelines, not even close to an international comeback – to reach where he is today. Once wisdom dawned and saner counsel prevailed, he shed petulance and affected indignation to knuckle down and reel off attractive, bruising, impactful runs, for Sunrisers Hyderabad in the IPL and for Jharkhand on the domestic circuit. He wasn't sure what the endgame would be, but he seemed remarkably sanguine about that. And so, the runs flowed, with great ease and tremendous outcomes. He led Jharkhand to the 20-over Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy glory for the first time late last year, capping a stellar run with a hundred in the final, and made a strong case for himself without having to scream from the rooftops.

Destiny has a funny way of expressing itself. By October last year, India had pretty much decided that Shubman Gill, the all-format captain-in-waiting, would be in the starting XI for the T20 World Cup, and that their wicketkeeper-batter would man the middle-order. That's why Samson was shunted down the order in the first place; Gill's return to international T20s was an unqualified failure while Samson couldn't re-adjust to middle-overs demands and was briefly replaced by Jitesh Sharma.

When the decision-makers finally chose to pull the plug on the Gill experiment, just before the New Zealand series, Samson was back in the opening fray, with Kishan rewarded for his outstanding form by being named the back-up opener/stumper. If all other things had been equal, the little left-hander would largely have looked on from the outside, thankful for being reintegrated with the national setup but wondering when his turn would come. As it transpired, Tilak Varma developed a condition that necessitated surgery during the 50-over Vijay Hazare Trophy and therefore Kishan got the opportunity to bat at No. 3.

Smart and obvious

In so many ways, that was such a smart if obvious call. The temptation to play Shreyas Iyer, the 50-over vice-captain called up as Tilak's replacement, would have been immense, but Gambhir and Suryakumar Yadav chose to stick with the personnel in the World Cup 15, hence the unexpected Kishan recall. They say that when certain things are meant to happen, all the forces in the universe come together to facilitate that eventuality. No one will agree more with that than the 27-year-old from Patna.

Kishan is no stranger to extreme success internationally. He is one of only five Indians to boast an ODI double-century (against Bangladesh in December 2022). His 210 is the fastest ODI double ever with the promise of more to follow until he shot himself in the foot 12 months later by returning home midway through the all-format tour of South Africa and then choosing to ignore Board orders with regard to domestic participation. Chastened and having learnt his lessons, he is now a more dangerous version of his explosive positive self, his growing maturity manifesting itself in greater prudence in shot-selection and a wider array of strokes that has erased the tag of 'slogger' some had attached to him.

Having made just eight in Nagpur on his return to the Indian XI after 26 months, Kishan fired the imagination with a breathtaking 76 (32 balls) in Raipur as India hunted down 209 with 28 deliveries to spare. A teaser in Guwahati, 28 off 13, set up India's chase of 154 (achieved with a whopping 10 overs in the bag) before he missed the mid-week Visakhapatnam defeat with an unspecified niggle.

In Thiruvananthapuram, it was Kishan at his ferocious best, targeting both sides of the field, and taking pacers and spinners apart with equal felicity, belligerence and intrepidness. There were no half-measures; when he struck the ball, he struck it uncomplicatedly and no one was spared though he took a special liking to Ish Sodhi, the leg-spinner with Indian roots.

Four fours and two sixes came off the leggie's third (and final) over, the ball disappearing here, there and everywhere. Among the fours was a nonchalant switch-hit. Some 20 minutes later, he hammered New Zealand captain Mitchell Santner for back-to-back sixes, the second of them taking him to three-figures. It's a sign of how popular he is that Hardik Pandya, the non-striker who had captained Kishan for one season when the latter was still at Mumbai Indians, celebrated with greater gusto than the protagonist himself.

Kishan has now made himself undroppable, so to say. Even had Samson hit a rich vein of form, it would have been impossible to overlook the younger man's credentials, but now, it is almost a no-brainer that Kishan will be India's preferred opener/wicketkeeper at the World Cup. Once Tilak is back in the fray – and that could be as early as in the opener against United States on Saturday – then Samson will have to make way, a reality that the 31-year-old must all too painfully be aware of. He will also know that he has no one else to blame but himself, but he will not grudge Kishan his success because that's not how he is wired.

The ultimate non-vocal confirmation that Kishan has zoomed ahead of Samson in the selection debate came when he was entrusted with the big gloves as India set out to defend their tally of 271 for five, their third highest T20I total. Hitherto, it was Samson behind the sticks and Kishan manning the outfield, scurrying around busily as he used his short but powerful strides to great effect. Kishan will be the first to concede that he didn't have a great time behind the stumps, spurning a couple of straightforward stumping opportunities, but that can happen when one hasn't kept wickets in a game situation for a while, even if one has spent plenty of time at practice ensuring that the primary – or is it now secondary? – skill isn't ignored.

India have an enviable arsenal of aggressive riches, with the icing on the cake coming in the shape of Suryakumar, who shed a horrendous patch in 2025 by winning the Player-of-the-Series award, rediscovering his mojo. Because India bat deep, and because each of their batters is capable of taking down the best attacks – in this series alone, 21- and 22-ball half-centuries seem passe, given that Abhishek Sharma got there in 14 and Shivam Dube in 15 – there is one uninterrupted burst from ball one to 20. The strapping Abhishek and the pocket dynamite that Kishan is, now that is the perfect launchpad from which to wreak untold mayhem. Excitingly mouth-watering for everyone, except those in the opposition who have good reason to fear the worst.

THE GIST

- Kishan, who only got a chance against New Zealand due to Tilak having to undergo surgery, has made full use of his opportunity
- The Jharkhand captain, who led the State to its first SMAT title recently, has now made himself undroppable in India's T20I set-up
- The ultimate non-vocal confirmation that Kishan has zoomed ahead of Samson in the selection debate came when he was entrusted with the big gloves as India set out to defend their tally of 271 for five in the fifth and final T20I

From field to screen: the changing landscape of ecology research

The physical presence of ecologists and biologists in forests is no longer required to conduct fieldwork; the point of knowledge production is now being transformed into *in silico* work, which is carried out through computers and AI systems, it helps produce results faster than long-term field studies, yet crucial challenges remain

Biju Dharmapalan

For centuries, ecology and biology have been built on muddy boots, mosquito bites and long days spent in forests, wetlands and oceans. Fieldwork was not just a method; it was an identity. To be an ecologist meant to be outdoors, immersed in nature, observing life in its raw, unpredictable complexity. But the age of artificial intelligence is quietly – and decisively – redrawing this relationship. Today, fieldwork is increasingly transforming into *in silico* work, carried out on computer screens, powered by algorithms, sensors, and automated systems.

The shift is neither accidental nor trivial. It is driven by an unprecedented explosion of data. More than a billion natural history specimens have been digitised globally, many linked with genetic information. Citizen scientists upload millions of observations to platforms such as iNaturalist, while satellites, drones, camera traps, acoustic sensors, and environmental DNA samplers stream data continuously from land, sea, and air. AI systems now classify species, track migration, model distributions, and even predict ecological futures – which are all tasks that once demanded years of painstaking field observations.

Robotic and automated systems generate standardised, high-resolution data across vast spatial and temporal scales, something no individual researcher could ever achieve. SIBOREY SEAN/UNSPLASH

Screen ecology

In this context, the romantic ideal of physically walking through forests to document biodiversity begins to look inefficient, even unnecessary. Why trek through dense jungles, risking logistics, health and carbon emissions, when sophisticated robotic cameras can sit silently for years, capturing images day and night? Why manually count insects when AI-enabled camera traps can identify thousands of species automatically? And why rely on sporadic human visits when sensors never sleep?

Robotic and automated systems do offer clear advantages. They reduce human disturbance to sensitive habitats. They can operate in extreme or inaccessible environments – including the deep ocean and from amid dense canopies – and where human presence is limited or dangerous. They generate standardised, high-resolution data across vast spatial and temporal scales, something no individual researcher could ever achieve. In many cases, insisting on physical presence may add little scientific value while consuming time and resources better spent analysing the data.

Indeed, the very idea that ecological understanding must come from direct bodily immersion is being challenged. Some of the most influential ecological insights of recent years have emerged from computer-based analyses rather than hands-on field studies. Researchers studying flowering times, invasive species or insect declines increasingly work indoors, writing code rather than field notes.

From this perspective, physically going to a forest can appear almost irrelevant. Forests today are already saturated with technologies: camera traps fixed to trees, microphones recording soundscapes, drones scanning canopies, satellites tracking phenology from space. AI does not merely supplement fieldwork but replaces large parts of it. The forest, in effect, comes to the scientist as streams of data. What matters is not where the scientist stands but how intelligently she is able to interpret the data.

Not without discomfort

There is also a pragmatic argument. Modern academic careers reward speed and publication volume. *In silico* research driven by data often produces results faster than long-term field studies. In a competitive environment, spending years inside a forest may be career-limiting compared with analysing global datasets from a laptop. The incentives of science increasingly favour algorithms rather than adventures.

Yet to be sure this transformation is not without discomfort. Many ecologists worry about an extinction of experience, i.e. a gradual loss of direct engagement with nature that could erode ecological intuition, contextual understanding and ethical responsibility. They argue that algorithms trained without deep field knowledge risk bias and misinterpretation. Data after all are not neutral: they reflect how, where, and why they were collected.

As ecological research enters this new phase, the challenge is to ensure that *in silico* science remains grounded in ecological realities, ethical responsibility and conservation goals

But even these concerns must be weighed against reality. Ecology, like physics or genomics, has reached a level of complexity that demands specialisation. Not every physicist builds detectors and not every biologist needs to chase animals through forests. Expecting all ecologists to be field naturalists may be nostalgic rather than rational. As the field matures, its exponents must consider division of labour more seriously and sensitively.

Science, *in silico*

Moreover, the idea that physical presence automatically guarantees better understanding is itself questionable. Human observation is limited, subjective, and intermittent. Robotic cameras don't tire, and they don't forget or notice selectively.

AI systems can also reveal patterns that are invisible to the naked eye, uncovering relationships across scales that fieldwork alone could never capture. In this sense, *in silico* ecology need not be the retreat from reality that many make it out to be a way for human researchers to perceive more.

This does not mean that forests, wetlands or reefs have become scientifically irrelevant – only that scientists no longer need to be physically present to study them, traversing the dangers involved in it. The point of knowledge production has shifted. Nature is increasingly mediated through technology and scientific understanding can now emerge from synthesis rather than sensory immersion.

The future is in turn not a simple choice between boots on the ground and laptops but rather an opportunity to redefine what 'fieldwork' could mean. A camera trap bolted to a tree is as much a field instrument as a notebook once was. A machine-learning model trained on millions of observations is as much a lens on nature as a pair of binoculars. In the AI world, the forest still matters; it's just that it no longer demands our constant physical presence.

And as ecological research enters this new phase, the challenge is not to mourn the decline of traditional fieldwork but to ensure that *in silico* science remains grounded in ecological realities, ethical responsibility and conservation goals.

The mud may be gone from our boots but the responsibility to understand and protect the living world remains firmly under our feet, even if those feet now rest under a desk.

(Dr. Biju Dharmapalan is Dean, Academic Affairs, Garden City University, Bengaluru, and an adjunct faculty member at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru. bijudharmapalan@gmail.com)

THE GIST

- Fieldwork is increasingly transforming into *in silico* work, carried out on computer screens, powered by algorithms, sensors, and automated systems
- Robotic and automated systems reduce human disturbance to sensitive habitats. They can operate in extreme or inaccessible environments and places where human presence is limited or dangerous
- *In silico* research driven by data often produces results faster than long-term field studies
- Many ecologists worry about an extinction of experience, i.e. a gradual loss of direct engagement with nature that could erode ecological intuition, contextual understanding and ethical responsibility. They argue that algorithms trained without deep field knowledge risk bias and misinterpretation

BIG SHOT

French spatial scientist Marie-Anne Blanchet examines bear cubs before taking adipose tissue biopsies and blood samples from their sedated mother, in eastern Spitzbergen, in the Svalbard archipelago, on April 6, 2025. The Norwegian Polar Institute, an Arctic research organisation, organised a five-week expedition aboard the high-tech research vessel and icebreaker Kronprins Haakon to collect adipose tissue biopsies and blood samples from polar bears in order to study the impact of pollutants on their health. AFP

QUESTION CORNER

What is waste-to-energy?

Q

A: Waste-to-energy (WtE) is a technology to convert non-recyclable waste materials into usable fuel, typically heat or electricity. A common method is incineration in which trash is burned at a high temperature to boil the water off, creating steam that turns a turbine to generate power. Other methods include gasification, which uses a large quantity of heat with little oxygen to turn waste into gas, and anaerobic digestion, where bacteria break down organic waste to produce biogas.

The impact of WtE on the environment involves both benefits and drawbacks and is a subject of ongoing debate. Waste reduction facilities can reduce the volume of waste by around 90%, significantly extending the life of existing landfills and reducing the need for new ones. By diverting organic waste from landfills, WtE can also prevent the release of methane, a potent greenhouse gas, into the atmosphere.

On the flip side, burning waste releases carbon dioxide and — especially in poorly controlled environments — pollutants like dioxins, furans, and heavy metals. Some contemporary facilities use advanced scrubbing and filtration systems to trap these toxins. Critics have also argued that WtE may discourage more sustainable practices like recycling and composting by creating a constant demand for trash.

A view of a waste-to-energy plant at Bidadi, near Bengaluru. RAVICHANDRAN N.

India currently has at least 21 WtE plants in operation and 133 biogas facilities. The plants come under the purview of the Solid Waste Management Rules 2026, which mandate waste segregation and encourage refuse-derived fuel (RDF) in order to reduce the burden on landfills.

For feedback and suggestions for 'Science', please write to **science@thehindu.co.in** with the subject 'Daily page'

Text&Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

The decrease in funds for the National Intelligence Grid

27 In per cent. Funds for the National Intelligence Grid, which connects databases of security and intelligence agencies to provide real-time access to crucial datasets to combat terrorism, have been slashed by a massive 27.11% in the Union Budget 2026-27. PTI

The amount allocated for the Ministry of Minority Affairs

3,400 In ₹ crore. A total of ₹3,400 crore is the budgetary estimate for the Ministry of Minority Affairs in the Union Budget this year, which is ₹50 crore more than the budgetary estimate of the previous financial year. PTI

Number of persons feared dead in a landslide in the DRC

200 The Democratic Republic of Congo's (DRC) government said it feared "at least 200 dead" in a landslide that struck a militia-held mine in the country's east. Since its resurgence in 2021, the M23 armed group has seized vast tracts of the DRC's resource-rich east. AFP

The expected investment in data centres in India

200 In $ billion. The government expects investment in data centres to cross $200 billion, Union Electronics and IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Sunday. The Minister said the sector has already received an investment proposal of $90 billion. PTI

Funds for Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship

9,886 In ₹ crore. The government proposed a ₹9,885.80 crore budget for the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship for the next fiscal, a sharp increase from the allocation made for 2025-26. PTI

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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What does the Budget offer urban India?

The Union Budget 2026 has cut urban development allocations by 11.6%, lowering funding from ₹96,777 crore to ₹85,522 crore. This reduction raises concerns about the sustainability of essential services amid rising challenges such as mass migration, climate change and infrastructure stagnation in cities

ECONOMIC NOTES

Tikender Singh Panwar

As the Union Budget 2026 was placed before Parliament, the Finance Minister once again invoked the familiar triad of capital investment, growth momentum and the long-held vision of 'Viksit Bharat'. Cities were spoken of as engines of development, enablers of productivity and sites of future opportunity. Yet when one moves from rhetoric to arithmetic, urban India emerges not as a priority but as a sector quietly absorbing fiscal contraction.

The headline fact is stark: the total central outlay for urban development has fallen from ₹96,777 crore in the previous year to ₹85,522 crore in 2026-27. This is a reduction of ₹11,255 crore, amounting to a shrinkage of about 11.6%. When inflation is factored in, the real cut is even sharper. In effect, urban India is being asked to do more with less, at precisely the moment when cities face mounting pressures of migration, climate stress, infrastructure fatigue and job creation.

This contraction also signals a deeper problem: while the government continues to foreground capital expenditure at the macro level, urban development is no longer seen as a growth-critical investment space, but rather as a residual category to be adjusted once larger fiscal priorities are met.

The centrality of the metro rail

Within this shrinking envelope, the structure of spending remains deeply skewed. Metro rail projects continue to dominate urban allocations, even as overall urban spending contracts. The allocation for metro and mass rapid transit projects has declined from ₹31,239.28 crore to ₹28,740 crore, a reduction of ₹2,499.28 crore. In percentage terms, this is a cut of roughly 8%. While this appears as moderate, the larger picture tells a different story.

Out of the total urban outlay of ₹85,522 crore, metro rail alone accounts for ₹28,740 crore, which translates to approximately 33.6% of all central urban spending. In other words, one-third of India's urban budget continues to be absorbed by a single transport mode.

This is not a neutral policy choice. Metro systems are capital-intensive, spatially limited and socially selective. They primarily serve dense corridors in large cities and cater disproportionately to formal, middle-class commuters. They are important, but they are neither the most inclusive nor the most scalable solution for India's urban mobility crisis. What is missing is proportional investment in bus-based public transport, non-motorised transport, suburban rail, and last-mile connectivity – modes that actually carry the urban majority. By continuing to privilege metros even within a shrinking budget, the state reinforces an urban imagination that prioritises visibility over universality.

The persistence in metro-centric planning reveals a deeper policy blind spot. Public transport is being equated with rail projects, while buses, walking and cycling – the modes that actually move most urban Indians – remain peripheral. Metros cannot be the sole answer in a country where a majority of urban trips are short, income-constrained and highly sensitive to fare increases. A fraction of metro spending redirected towards city bus systems or non-motorised infrastructure would yield far higher social returns. Yet the Budget does not reflect such a rebalancing.

Narrow vision: People are seen hanging on the door of a Mumbai local train approaching the central railway's Thane station in 2025. EMMANUAL YOGINI

Urban mobility, in this fiscal design, is treated as an engineering problem rather than a social one.

The retreat of flagship urban schemes

If the metro rail represents continuity, the treatment of flagship urban welfare and service schemes represents retreat. Every major centrally sponsored urban programme has seen a reduction in allocation.

The allocation for the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban) (PMAY-U) has declined from ₹19,794 crore to ₹18,625 crore, a reduction of ₹1,169 crore – nearly a 5.9% cut. This comes at a time when urban housing shortage remains acute, affordability is worsening, and informal settlements continue to expand at the peripheries of cities. A cut in housing support is not fiscally neutral – it directly translates into prolonged informality, overcrowding and exclusion from basic services.

The sharpest cut has been reserved for sanitation. The allocation for the Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban) (SBM-U) has been halved from ₹5,000 crore to ₹2,500 crore, a 50% reduction. This is not a marginal adjustment; it is a fundamental rollback. Urban sanitation is not a one-time achievement but a continuous service requiring sustained investment – particularly for waste processing, sewage treatment, faecal sludge management and worker safety. Cutting sanitation funding by half signals that urban cleanliness and public health are no longer seen as urgent policy domains.

Additionally, the allocation for the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) scheme has also fallen from ₹10,000 crore to ₹8,000 crore, a 20% cut. This reduction is especially troubling in an era of acute urban water stress. Cities across India are grappling with groundwater depletion, inequitable access, ageing pipelines and climate-induced variability. AMRUT was meant to be the backbone of universal water and sewerage access. A fifth of its budget disappearing weakens the very foundations of urban sustainability.

Shrinking commitments

Taken together, the picture is unambiguous. Centrally sponsored urban schemes have received major cuts, reinforcing the 11.6% nominal contraction in central support for cities.

This contraction is not offset by any new institutional architecture, fiscal devolution or empowered municipal financing frameworks. Urban local bodies remain fiscally weak, dependent on tied transfers, and constrained in their ability to plan long-term infrastructure or service delivery.

What makes this particularly consequential is the timing. Urban India is currently absorbing large-scale migration and demographic churn; rising urban unemployment and informalisation of the workspace; climate shocks such as heat waves, floods, and water scarcity; and infrastructure backlogs in transport, housing and sanitation.

Against this backdrop, reducing real urban spending is not fiscal prudence; it is strategic short-sightedness.

The empty promise of development

The government's vision of Viksit Bharat rests on growth, productivity and global competitiveness.

But no country has achieved high-income status without strong, well-funded, inclusive cities. Urban India generates the bulk of GDP, absorbs labour, and anchors innovation ecosystems. Weakening its fiscal base undermines the very ambition the Budget claims to advance.

What this Budget ultimately reflects is a contradiction: cities are celebrated rhetorically but constrained fiscally.

The emphasis remains on select capital-heavy projects rather than everyday systems that determine whether cities are liveable, equitable and resilient.

The Union Budget 2026 does not abandon urban India – but it unmistakably pulls back. With an 11.6% cut in total urban allocations, steep reductions in sanitation, water and housing, and one-third of remaining funds locked in metro projects, the Budget signals caution where urgency is required.

Urban India is expected to carry the weight of future growth, climate adaptation and social transformation. Yet the fiscal imagination on display treats cities as cost centres rather than engines of national renewal.

If India is serious about its development trajectory, urban budgets must expand, diversify and decentralise – not shrink, narrow and centralise.

Anything less risks turning the promise of Viksit Bharat into a slogan built on under-funded cities and deferred futures.

Tikender Singh Panwar is a former Deputy Mayor of Shimla and currently a member of the Kerala Urban Commission.

THE GIST

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CACHE

GETTY IMAGES

Do AI-powered toys affect the healthy development of children?

AI-powered toys use chatbots to "talk" to children and educate them. Multiple AI toy makers claim that the models powering their toys are sourced through reputed providers, such as OpenAI's ChatGPT, and that there are safety measures in place

Sahana Venugopal

Generative AI is now part of children's toys. These novel AI-powered toy "companions" are available on popular e-commerce platforms. Their makers claim the toys help educate children. But experts warn that such toys could impact a child's healthy development.

How do AI toys work?

AI toys require internet connectivity to work and are made in the form of plush aliens, fluffy animals, or friendly-faced robots. Some robotic AI toys can move independently, while those in the form of stuffed animals are meant to be carried around by their owners. Many of these AI toys come with embedded microphones that listen to children, to formulate replies. Their makers promote them as products that offer educational answers, give emotional support, guide children through tasks or games, teach them new skills, and return compliments.

Take, for example, Grem by Curio. Shaped like a cute, blue alien creature with large eyes, the website noted that the plush toy was voiced and designed by the singer Grimes. It does not require a subscription. Meanwhile, many Amazon.com reviews for the 'Miko 3 AI Robot for Kids' toy focused on how children were fascinated by the robot, with one buyer noting that it could play hide-and-seek with kids, cheer them up, and serve as an intercom for parents. Others complained about the subscription price and poor battery life.

Multiple AI toy makers on Amazon claim that the models powering these interactions are sourced through reputed providers, such as OpenAI's ChatGPT, and that there are safety measures in place to ensure they maintain children's privacy and do not initiate inappropriate conversation topics.

These AI toys are starkly different from toys that make the same sounds over and over again when a button is pressed, or those that can only mimic children's voices and offer a limited set of replies. AI toys are also expensive.

Why are experts warning parents about AI toys?

AI toys made headlines in late 2025 when the advocacy group U.S. PIRG Education Fund reported that Singapore-based FoloToy's Kumma bear for children encouraged sexual conversations, and also allegedly told users how to access dangerous objects. The toy previously used OpenAI's GPT 4o, but the AI company later suspended the developer and the company moved to another tech provider, according to the group.

Common Sense Media, a tech and media ratings organisation, also outlined the risks of AI toys in a report on January 22. AI toys or "companions" that look cute and soft on the outside but use voice-based chatbots to engage children come with "unacceptable risks," per the organisation. The organisation cited risk factors that included unhealthy emotional attachments to AI toys, children's extremely private data being collected, and cases of chatbots not working reliably. Curio's Grem and Miko 3 were two of the toys it tested.

The organisation pointed out that children aged five or under cannot properly tell humans apart from AI, so such AI toys could harm how these children develop and recognise key relationships. Even older children between ages six and 12 who might understand that AI isn't real could still use the toys as a replacement for healthy human connections, per the report.

The organisation listed a slew of concerning factors affecting not just children, but their families as well. For example, AI toys that use subscriptions could harm children if they become dependent on the toys for emotional comfort while parents are unable to keep up with payments. Furthermore, about 27% of AI toy outputs were inappropriate for children, as per Common Sense Media's testing, and included content about self-harm, drugs, and unsafe roleplay, apart from going into mature topics and sharing risky advice. "This happens because the underlying AI models are trained on adult internet content, and child-safety layers are added after the fact. These filters are imperfect, and content designed for adults or teens can leak through when children ask questions in unexpected ways," noted the organisation.

Furthermore, Common Sense Media stressed the importance of giving children privacy during difficult moments and teaching them to cope with everyday frustrations in healthy ways, instead of distracting them with an always-cheerful toy. The organisation reported that parental insight tools for these AI toys were largely inadequate, and that children's private interactions were possibly being shared with third parties for further AI training purposes. Due to hallucination, the AI toys could also provide incorrect responses and confuse their young users, per the report.

How should parents and caretakers treat AI toys?

Common Sense Media acknowledged that AI toys offered some benefits such as stimulating children's learning, correcting potential bad behaviour, or telling customised stories to young users. The makers of these AI toys also point out that they offer a screen-free playtime experience for children, while encouraging learning and communication. However, Common Sense Media recommended that parents engage with their children directly and guide them towards more traditional learning experiences, such as non-AI toys, books, museum visits, playdates, family game nights, imaginative play, and art.

"Human interaction is developmentally essential. No AI toy can replace the benefits of reading together with a parent, playing pretend with siblings, building with friends, or learning from teachers and caregivers," stated Common Sense Media. "These messy, complex human interactions are where real development happens. AI toys at best supplement these experiences and at worst replace them – and replacement is the greater risk," it added.

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

The morale of the team was low yesterday

We discussed the reasons for the loss but could not arrive at a conclusive cause

S. Upendran

What is the difference between 'moral' and 'morale'? (P. Radhika)

Both come from the Latin 'moralis', meaning 'proper social behaviour'; today, however, the two words are very different, not only in terms of meaning, but also pronunciation. 'Moral' can be used both as a noun and an adjective. When you talk about the 'moral' of a story, you are referring to the lesson one can learn from it – for example, we know that the moral of the 'Hare and the Tortoise' is slow and steady wins the race.

Even as a kid, I never enjoyed stories which had a moral in them.

When used as an adjective, the word is frequently used to mean 'correct' or 'ethical' – you are making a distinction between right and wrong and good and evil. For example, when you say, 'The builder returned the money because it was the moral thing to do', what you're suggesting is that it was the right or ethical thing to do.

'Morale', on the other hand, has more to do with the feeling within. When you say that the morale of the team was high, what you are suggesting is that the players were feeling very confident; they were very optimistic of winning the game.

The fiery speech given by the General lifted the morale of the soldiers.

As for the pronunciation, 'moral' rhymes with 'laurel' and 'quarrel'. The word is pronounced MO-rel with the stress on the first syllable. In the case of 'morale', the vowel in the first syllable is like the 'a' in 'china', while the following 'a' sounds like the 'a' in 'father'. The British pronounce the word 'me-RAAL', with the stress on the second syllable.

What is the meaning of 'run something up the flagpole'?

Sometimes, when we have an idea, we do not always share it with everyone immediately. In order to determine what others think of it, we float the idea to a few people, and study their reaction. This manner of testing an idea is called 'run something up the flagpole'. Another informal expression which has more or less the same meaning is 'to send up a trial balloon'. The feedback that you receive from the select individuals will help you determine the feasibility of your idea. If the feedback is positive, you can move forward with your proposal.

Radha ran her idea up the flagpole before presenting it to her boss.

Is it okay to say, 'At home, we don't discuss about politics at the dining table'? (D. Rukmani, Coimbatore)

It is quite common to hear people in our country say, 'discuss about politics', 'discuss about sports', 'discuss about the problems', etc. In native varieties of English, however, 'discuss about' is considered ungrammatical – one can 'discuss something' and not 'discuss about' something. It is, however, okay to say 'discussion about'.

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THE DAILY QUIZ

Please send in your answers to dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in

A quiz to mark World Wetlands Day which is observed on February 2 every year

V.V. Ramanan

QUESTION 1

The World Wetlands Day marks the anniversary of a convention signed on February 2, 1971. In which Iranian city was it signed?

QUESTION 2

What is the theme for World Wetlands Day 2026?

QUESTION 3

What are the three types of wetlands as per the convention?

QUESTION 4

Which country has the highest number of sites (176) designated under the Ramsar Convention and which has the largest area with 2,67,000 square km under the Convention protection?

QUESTION 5

India ranks third amongst Ramsar Sites. How many sites does India have?

QUESTION 6

Name the first two Indians sites to join the convention in October 1981.

Visual question:

Name this site in India that was added in January 2026. WILDLIFE WARDEN, NCSP ETAWAH

Questions and Answers to the January 29 edition of the daily quiz: 1. The original profession of Chekhov. **Ans: Doctor**

2. Chekhov's first major play. **Ans: *The Seagull***

3. In Chekov's short story *The Bet*, the banker and a lawyer place a wager on this. **Ans: Surviving voluntary imprisonment**

4. This work by Chekhov won him the prestigious Pushkin prize in 1888. **Ans: *At Dusk***

5. Name the tool that is associated with Chekov as a metaphor for foreshadowing in screenplays. **Ans: Gun**

Visual: Name the location. **Ans: The story *The Lady with the Lapdog* was set in this building in Yalta**

Early Birds: Tamal Biswas| Sudhir Thapa| Sunil Madhavan| Mohan Lal Patel| Dodo Jayaditya

Word of the day

Deprecate: express strong disapproval of; deplore; belittle

Synonyms: depreciate, vilipend

Usage: *A teacher should not deprecate his student's efforts.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/deprecatepro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /ˈdɛprɪkeɪt/, /ˈdɛprəkeɪt/

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