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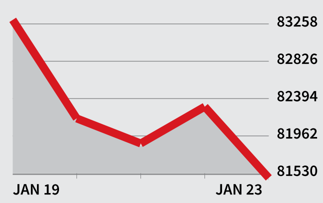
SENSEX 81537.70 (-2032.65)



IN FOCUS

	Week's close	Week's change
Nifty 50	25048.65	-645.70
P/E Ratio (Sensex)	22.47	-0.61
US Dollar (in ₹)	91.94	+1.08
Gold Std 10 gm (in ₹)	153692.00	+12666
Silver 1 kg (in ₹)	317705.00	+35815

GROWTH RESET. **After a turbulent** quarter, IndiGo CEO Pieter Elbers details plans to balance expansion, product upgrades and operational readiness **p10**

DIAMONDS FOREVER. **BIS norms** to end mis-selling in the fast-evolving lab-grown diamond market **p8**

QUICKLY.

DEMAND SURGE

Banks amp up focus on gold loans

Chennai: With the price of gold reaching an all-time high, banks are seeing a huge surge in demand for gold loans. According to data from the RBI, outstanding loans against gold jewellery for scheduled commercial banks stood at ₹3.58 lakh crore as of November 2025, an increase of 125 per cent year-on-year. p6

MARKET WINDOW

Refined fuel exports may stay steady

New Delhi: India's refined petroleum products exports are expected to remain steady in 2026, aided by refinery maintenance on the US West Coast, a development that will help refiners such as Reliance Industries capitalise on petrol and jet fuel shipments to California. Besides, refinery capacity additions and higher utilisation back home is also expected to boost product availability. p3

It's a deal: India-EU FTA talks conclude amid US tariff woes

ALL DONE. To be announced today, pact will boost Indian exports and cut costs of EU luxury cars

Amiti Sen
New Delhi

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Mutual urgency fast-tracked India-EU negotiations because of Donald Trump's global tariff policies
- The pact covers 1.9 billion people and more than 20% of the world's total GDP
- Indian exporters in textiles and jewellery will benefit
- EU to gain access to India's wine and high-end automobile markets

PM Narendra Modi with President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen during the 77th Republic Day Parade PMO

Almost two decades in the making, the India–EU Free Trade Agreement — touted as the 'mother of all trade deals' — is set to be announced on Tuesday at the India-EU Summit in New Delhi, Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal has confirmed.

"The India–EU free trade negotiations have been concluded. The deal will be announced tomorrow. The formal signing will take place after legal scrubbing," Agrawal said on Monday.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Antonio Costa, who were chief guests at the Republic Day celebrations, will join Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the summit, where the formal announcement is expected.

'BALANCED PACT'

Both sides were driven by urgency to finalise the pact amid pressure from US President Donald Trump's aggressive tariff regime.

"The free trade pact will be balanced and forward-looking, aimed at deeper economic integration with the EU. It will propel trade and investment between the two sides," the Commerce Secretary said.

Exporters of labour-intensive goods, such as textiles, garments, leather, footwear, gems and jewellery, chemicals, toys and sports goods — which face tariffs well above the EU's average of 3.8 per cent — are expected to be the key beneficiaries, industry sources said.

EU exporters, particularly in protected sectors such as wines and spirits and automobiles, are also likely to gain improved market access in India, although subject to safeguards, including quotas in automobiles.

The FTA text is expected to be made public in about two weeks after initial cleaning. Legal scrubbing may take five to six months, following which the pact will be formally signed, sources said. Both sides are hopeful the agreement can enter into force in early 2027, subject to domestic approvals, including clearance by the European Parliament.

The FTA covers a combined population of about 1.9 billion — nearly a quarter of the world's population — and over a fifth of global GDP. In services, India is seeking gains in mobility.

While a separate MoU on a comprehensive mobility framework is expected to facilitate movement of students, skilled workers and researchers, the FTA is also likely to include provisions for higher student visa quotas and post-study work options, industry sources said.

Budget may raise gold reserve fund allocation amid SGB redemptions

Shishir Sinha
New Delhi

With gold prices surging, the Budget is likely to provide a higher allocation to the gold reserve fund in both the revised estimates (RE) for FY26 and the budget estimates (BE) for FY27.

The fund is primarily used to meet redemption payouts under the sovereign gold bond (SGB) scheme.

A key driver of the higher allocation is the large volume of SGB redemptions. Fourteen tranches of the 2017-18 series were redeemed during the current fiscal, with the final tranche maturing earlier this month. While these bonds were issued at ₹2,881-2,951 per unit, redemption prices ranged between ₹9,486 and ₹13,486.

Several tranches from the FY19 series are also eligible for premature redemption, with the fifth tranche redeemed at ₹14,853 per unit.

FUTURE ALLOCATIONS

Given that the BE for the gold reserve fund in FY26 was only ₹700 crore, a substantial upward revision is expected in the RE. In FY25, allocations under the RE had surged to over ₹28,000 crore against a BE of ₹8,550 crore.

Pushing up payouts

	2017-18 Series (Eligible for final redemption in FY26)	2018-19 Series (Eligible for final redemption in FY27)	2021-22 Series (Eligible for pre-matured redemption in FY 27)
Total tranches	14	6	10
Issue price range (₹/unit)	2,881-2,951	3,114-3,326	4,777-5,109
Final redemption price range (₹/unit)	9,486-13,486	TBD	TBD
Number of units subscribed (in grams)	65,24,691	20,30,873	2,70,35,139
Number of pre-matured units (in grams)	-	77,113	-
Units outstanding (in grams)	-	19,53,760	2,70,35,139

Source: RBI

Looking ahead to FY27, six tranches from the 2018-19 series will be eligible for final redemption, while 10 tranches from 2021-22 may qualify for premature redemption.

Bonds in the FY19 series were issued at ₹3,114-3,326 per unit, while FY22 issuances were priced at ₹4,777-5,109.

Per the RBI, SGB redemption prices are based on the simple average of closing gold prices of 999 purity over the previous three business days, as published by the India Bullion and Jewellers Association. With the yellow metal currently trading above ₹16,000 per g, redemption costs are set to remain elevated.

Launched in 2015 to curb physical gold imports, the SGB scheme saw 67 tranches issued between FY16 and FY24, with subscriptions equivalent to over 146 tonnes of gold.

Amid the sharp rise in gold prices and mounting redemption costs, the government has not issued fresh SGB tranches since FY24, and has virtually ruled out future issuances.

ON PARADE

ARMY TRADITION. The Army's animal contingent, comprising Double Humped Bactrian camels and Zanskari ponies from Ladakh, made their debut at the 77th Republic Day Parade at Kartavya Path in New Delhi on Monday SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Axis Bank Q3 net edges up amid strong growth in loans and deposits

Our Bureau
Mumbai

Axis Bank reported a muted 3 per cent year-on-year rise in standalone net profit for the third quarter of FY26 at ₹6,490 crore, despite robust growth in credit and deposits. India's third-largest private sector lender had posted a net profit of ₹6,304 crore in the year-ago quarter. Profit rose 27.5 per cent sequentially from ₹5,090 crore in Q2 FY26.

The net interest income was up 5 per cent y-o-y to ₹14,287 crore, while other income grew 4 per cent to ₹6,226 crore (₹5,972 crore). Overall net interest margin-NIM declined 31 basis points to 3.75 per cent from 4.06 per cent a year ago.

Read more p2

Rate cut transmission only half complete in PSBs

Sourashis Banerjee
Chennai

The effectiveness of monetary policy hinges on how quickly banks pass on repo rate changes to borrowers. Foreign banks have been the most agile in passing on the entire rate cuts in the current cycle (between February to November 2025) on both outstanding and fresh rupee loans. Private banks have completed around three-fourth of the transmission to loans.

Public sector banks have been the slowest, bringing down the weighted average lending rate (WALR) on fresh loans by only 54 basis points and that on outstanding loans by 59 basis points.

RATE TRANSMISSION

The RBI had cut repo rate by 100 basis points between February 2025 and November 2025 to boost growth and help the economy deal with geopolitical challenges.

Foreign banks have cut the deposit rates on both fresh as well as outstanding deposits by more than 100 basis points in this cycle, probably to protect their margins.

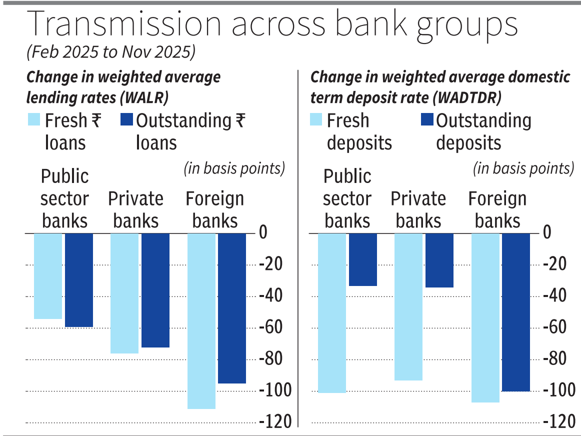
Private and PSBs have managed to pass on the entire rate cut to fresh deposits while the transmission in outstanding deposits is very low, around 33 per cent.

As far as lending rate is concerned, PSBs have been markedly slow in transmission. But foreign banks have cut the WALR for fresh rupee loans by 111 basis points in this cycle. The WALR on outstanding loans also fell 95 bps.

Private sector banks have also been quicker in bringing down their lending rates this cycle with WALR on fresh loans declining 76 bps and the rate on outstanding loans falling 72 bps.

Transmission across bank groups

(Feb 2025 to Nov 2025)



Source: RBI

WHY PSBs LAG

The transmission of changes in repo rate has been strongest in foreign banks due to almost 94 per cent of their outstanding floating rate loans being linked to external benchmark-linked (EBLR). Interest rates on EBLR linked loans are immediately reset when the repo rate is hiked or cut.

In contrast, the marginal cost of funds-based lending rate (MCLR) ties the lending rate to the cost of funds raised by the bank, and is slower to adjust.

Around 46 per cent of the outstanding floating loans of PSBs are linked to MCLR while for private banks, the proportion is only 10 per cent.

PMO urges Finance Ministry to propose ways to accelerate agri growth in Budget

Subramani Ra Mancombu
Chennai

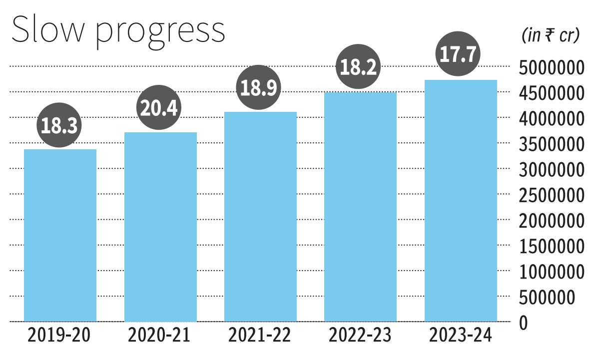
This year's Budget is likely to focus on providing renewed thrust to the rural economy, with the Prime Minister's Office urging the Finance Ministry to accelerate agricultural growth.

"The PMO has taken cognisance of the declining growth trajectory in the agriculture sector, which has slipped from 4.6 per cent in 2024-25 to an estimated 3.1 per cent in 2025-26," said a source with access to the PMO.

One of the ways by which the Budget could perhaps boost the farm sector is by proposing measures to strengthen cooperative farming and promote value-addition across agricultural value chains.

"The government is likely to focus on fostering farmer collectives, improving post-harvest infrastructure, and supporting agro-processing units to boost incomes and rural employment," said the source. The policy emphasis will likely be on integrating small and marginal farmers through co-operatives to achieve economies of scale in production, modernise supply chains and enhance market competitiveness.

Slow progress



Source: NSO, MoSPI

The Budget proposals will likely align with the broader rural revitalisation agenda, ensuring sustainable agricultural growth, alongside value-driven economic diversification.

Data show that despite foodgrain production increasing to record highs over the past 5-6 years, the average gross value-added (GVA) in agriculture has been 3-4 per cent due to the Covid pandemic and climate change-related problems.

GVA SHARE SLIPS

Last year, the Economic Survey said that consistent and stable agricultural growth of around 5 per cent, with a 20 per cent share of overall GVA in the economy, will contribute 1 per cent to GVA.

However, the Ministry of Agriculture's 2024-25 annual report said the share came down to 17.7 per cent in 2023-24 from 20.4 per cent in 2020-21 (*See table*).

On the other hand, sources said the government should look at boosting agricultural exports by asking institutional agencies, such as the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (Apeda), to focus on increasing market access.

How the R-Day parade reimagined India's story

Military might, cultural memory and storytelling help in reshaping the narrative

Rohit Vaid
New Delhi

The 77th Republic Day parade on Monday marked a subtle but deliberate shift from tradition, unfolding as a carefully choreographed narrative that fused military might, cultural memory and visual storytelling.

From battlefield-style marching sequences to river-themed spectator enclosures and immersive installations, the 2026 parade at Kartavya Path signalled a new way of telling the Republic Day story.

At the core of the refreshed presentation was Operation Sindoor, whose success anchored the military display.

The parade moved away from linear drills towards a sequence mirroring modern combat — from reconnaissance and surveillance to mechanised assault and integrated command operations.

The Tamil Nadu tableau at the 77th Republic Day Parade in New Delhi on Monday SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

The tone was set with the arrival of President Droupadi Murmu, accompanied by chief guests — European Council President Antonio Costa and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen — in a ceremonial horse-drawn carriage escorted by the President's Bodyguard.

The inclusion of animal and robotic elements further underscored the evolving character of the armed forces.

ARMED FORCES

For the first time, animals from the Army's Remount and Veterinary Corps marched down Kartavya Path, highlighting their role in border defence. The contingent featured Bactrian camels, Zanskari ponies, trained birds of prey and dogs from indigenous and traditional military breeds.

Visual installations inspired by paintings and calligraphic interpretations of *Vande Mataram* lined the ceremonial route from Rashtrapati Bhavan to the National War Memorial. Military capability formed the parade's backbone. Advanced missile systems rolled past alongside artillery and rocket platforms.

Counterbalancing the martial display were cultural performances and tableaux from the States, UTs and Central Ministries, presenting regional traditions, heritage crafts and folk forms while underscoring themes of self-reliance, innovation and technological progress.

Together, the elements made the parade distinctly different — less a ceremonial procession and more a curated national narrative.

A CH-CHE

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QUICKLY.

Waaree in transmission play with ₹1225-crore buy

Ahmedabad: Waaree Renewable Technologies on Monday moved to expand beyond the renewable power generation sector with its board approving a ₹1,225 crore deal to acquire a majority stake in power transmission player Associated Power Structures Ltd (ASPL). The company, in a regulatory filing, stated that the Board of Directors approved entering into a binding term sheet for the acquisition of approximately 55 per cent stake in ASPL through a mix of primary and secondary investment, subject to conditions. Established in 1996, ASPL is in the business of power transmission and distribution in the infrastructure sector. OUR BUREAU

Axis Bank Q3 profit rises 3% amid robust loan and deposit growth

GROWTH GRAPH. Net advances grew 14% led by corporate and SME banking, while deposits rose 15%

Our Bureau
Mumbai

Axis Bank posted a surprise 3 per cent year-on-year (y-o-y) rise in third quarter (Q3 FY26) standalone net profit to ₹6,490 crore, beating street expectations of an 8 per cent dip, amid robust credit and deposit growth.

India's third largest private sector bank had reported a net profit of ₹6,304 crore a year ago. The bank's net was up 27.5 per cent sequentially from the preceding quarter's (Q2 FY26) ₹5,090 crore. Net interest income (difference between interest earned and interest expended) was up 5 per cent y-o-y at ₹14,287 crore (₹13,606 crore). Other income, comprising profit/loss

Scorecard *(in ₹ crore)*

	Q3FY26	Q3FY25	Growth %
Net profit	6,489.6	6,303.8	2.9
Net interest income	14,286.6	13,605.9	5.0
Other income	6,225.6	5,972.2	4.2
Operating profit	10,875.7	10,533.9	3.2
Loan loss provisions	2,307.0	2,185.0	5.6
Tax expense	2,140.2	2,074.5	3.2
GNPA %	1.4	1.5	-
NNPA %	0.4	0.4	-
Total deposits	12,60,786.0	10,95,883.0	15.0
Net advances	11,59,052.0	10,14,564.0	14.2

from investments (including revaluation), earnings from foreign exchange and derivative transactions, commission earned from guarantees/letters of credit, fees earned from providing services to customers, selling of third party products and so forth, increased 4 per cent to ₹6,226 crore (₹5,972 crore). Overall net interest margin (NIM) declined 29 basis points to 3.64 per cent from 3.93 per cent a year ago.

Amitabh Chaudhry, MD & CEO, Axis Bank, said: "Our core operating performance remains steady, supported by resilient net interest income and healthy momentum in free income. We have now crossed the milestone of 6,000 branches. Our balance sheet remains resilient and our capital position continues to be strong, enabling us to pursue profitable and sustainable growth... We remain vigilant to the evolving geopolitical environment."

GROSS NPAs

Fresh slippages were higher at ₹6,007 crore against ₹5,432 crore in Q3 FY25 and ₹5,696 crore in Q2 FY26. Loan loss provisions were up 5.60 per cent y-o-y at ₹2,307 crore (₹2,185 crore).

Gross non-performing assets (NPA) position improved to 1.4 per cent of gross advances as of December-end 2025 against 1.46 per cent as of December-end 2024. Net NPAs nudged up to 0.42 per cent of net advances from 0.35 per cent a year ago.

Net advances increased by 14 per cent y-o-y to ₹11,59,052 crore as of December-end 2025, with corporate banking clocking the highest growth at 27 per cent, followed by SME advances (22 per cent) and retail loans (6 per cent).

Puneet Sharma, CFO, emphasised that the lead indicator for retail loans is disbursements, which grew 20 per cent y-o-y and 12 per cent quarter-on-quarter.

Total deposits grew 15 per cent to ₹12,60,786 crore as of December-end 2025. Average current account, savings account (CASA) declined to 37 per cent of domestic deposits against 39 per cent.

Renault stages a comeback with its next-gen Duster

TIMELY RE-ENTRY. Fabrice Cambolive (left), Chief Growth Officer, Renault Group and CEO, Renault brand, and Stephane Deblaise, CEO, Renault India, at the launch in Chennai BIJOY GHOSH

T E Raja Simhan
Chennai

Renault India, a wholly owned subsidiary of the French auto major Renault Group, on Monday unveiled the new Renault Duster, marking the return of a model that helped establish the mid-size SUV category in the country 14 years ago.

The new Duster was unveiled on Monday with nearly 15,000 people watching at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in Chennai. The company did not reveal the price at the launch but sources said it could be between ₹10 lakh and ₹20 lakh across variants. Customers can now pre-book the new Renault Duster by purchasing an 'R Pass' for ₹21,000, the company said.

Stephane Deblaise, CEO, Renault Group India, said, "Our promise is clear: Made in India, Made for India. Duster did not compete in a segment but created and defined one."

"As part of the Renault International Game Plan 2027, we are making India a key pillar of our growth outside Europe. We now have a strong ecosystem in Chennai, bringing together design, engineering, manufacturing and local operations at the highest level, making India one of the most complete and powerful hubs in Renault's global network," Fabrice Cambolive, Chief Growth Officer, Renault Group & CEO, Renault brand, said.

The new Duster is on a platform that has been validated for extreme conditions and engineered for 5-star safety standards, the company said. It is powered by a Turbo TCe 160 engine and marks the debut of the Hybrid powertain, the E-Tech 160 engine.

Renault was one of the first auto majors to move from sedan to SUV, which is now one of the most competitive segments. This segment is dominated by models like Hyundai Creta, Kia Seltos, Tata Sierra and Maruti Suzuki Grand Vitara.

GAME PLAN 2027

Originally launched in India in 2012, Renault Duster redefined the SUV landscape and pioneered a segment that today accounts for nearly one-fourth of the passenger vehicle market.

The automaker first announced the relaunch of Duster, which will be produced at its Chennai plant, on October 28. The SUV will be the first product to be launched under the automaker's International Game Plan 2027 in India.

VinFast keen on govt EV scheme after TN foray

S Ronendra Singh
New Delhi

Vietnam-based electric vehicle maker VinFast said the company would participate in the Scheme to Promote Manufacturing of Electric Passenger Cars in India (SPMEPCI).

Participation should be permissible now with the latest announcement of $500 million investment in Tamil Nadu, it said.

The SPMEPCI was approved by the Centre in June 2024. But VinFast started investment from January 2024, and was not eligible for subsidies under the scheme and the Ministry of Heavy Industries (MHI) declined its application. "We are working on that... Last time we missed the opportunity because they (government) tried to attract new investors, whereas we had become an old investor... we will work with them. They asked us to invest $500 million within three years, which is not an issue for us, because we have already invested the first $500 million, and the second $500 million. But localisation is a matter that we need to consider because we need to calculate a lot of other elements as well," Pham Sanh Chau, Chief Executive Officer, Vingroup Asia and VinFast Asia, told *businessline* recently.

He said the company's final objective is to increase maximum localisation in order to bring down the costs and increase the competitiveness.

LOCAL PUSH

"At the moment, it's (localisation) 15 per cent... localisation is moving very aggressively... We don't have the target yet because our purchasing team is looking very aggressively at that, and they have engaged with companies like Uno Minda, Spark Minda, MapmyIndia and many others. So, I believe that 2026 will be a year for more localisation," Chau added.

The company recently proposed $500 million investment to the government of Tamil Nadu and will apply for all applicable incentives, financial support measures and statutory exemptions in accordance with the State's prevailing regulations and relevant policies.

As per SPMEPCI, the approved applicants will set up manufacturing facilities in India with a minimum investment of ₹4,150 crore ($500 million) for manufacturing of electric four-wheelers (e-4W), and the manufacturing facility should be made operational within a period of three years from the date of issuance of approval letter by the MHI, and must achieve minimum domestic value addition (DVA) of 25 per cent within the same period.

MINIMUM DVA

The approved applicant will be required to achieve minimum DVA of 50 per cent within five years from the date of issuance of approval letter by MHI. The applicant will be allowed to import 8,000 completely built units (CBUs) of e-4W per annum, manufactured by them at a reduced customs duty of 15 per cent subject to the conditions as per this scheme.

Axis Bank looks to bolster Axis Finance's capital; roping in strategic partner an option

Our Bureau
Mumbai

Axis Bank is weighing options to bolster its wholly owned subsidiary Axis Finance's capital, including a combination of capital infusion from the bank itself as well as roping in a strategic partner, said a top management team official.

The aforementioned plan comes in the wake of the RBI lifting the proposed bar, mentioned in its October 2024 draft circular, Forms of Business and Prudential Regulation for Investments, on overlap in the businesses undertaken by a bank and its group entity.

STAKE DILUTION

By getting in a strategic partner, the bank can dilute its stake in the subsidiary and raise some capital for it, the official said.

There is also a possibility that the subsidiary could fund its future growth by deleveraging.

Axis Finance is Axis Bank's wholly owned non–banking finance company (NBFC) subsidiary.

It offers loans to corporates, MSMEs and retail customers.

According to RBI (Commercial Banks – Undertaking of Financial Services) (Amendment) Directions, 2025, as a principle, any form of business shall be undertaken by one entity in a bank group.

However, if a bank undertakes a form of business through more than one entity in a bank group, the same shall be done with proper rationale such as business segmentation/specialisation, duly recorded and approved by the board of the bank.

Further, in case lending business is undertaken through a group entity, additional conditions shall be applicable to such a group entity (NBFCs including HFCs) including regulations as applicable to Upper Layer NBFCs other than the requirement for listing, irrespective of whether the NBFC has been specifically identified by the Reserve Bank as Upper Layer or not.

Notwithstanding the same, listing requirement shall be complied with by those NBFC group entities which are identified by the Reserve Bank as Upper Layer.

Referring to the RBI's Forms of Business circular, the bank official said: "All options are on the table..."

Adani Green Energy plans ₹40,000 cr capex in FY27

Avinash Nair
Ahmedabad

Adani Green Energy Ltd is planning to more than double its Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) capacity in the Khavda renewable energy park in Gujarat to over 7 GWh in FY27, backed by a massive ₹25,000–₹40,000 crore capex push. It is set to commission 3.5 GWh of storage capacity by the end of the current financial year.

It said battery storage had become a strategic priority as grid augmentation delays continue to constrain power evacuation from Khavda near the India-Pakistan border in Kutch district.

"On a short-term basis, battery storage will help in absorbing the power which would otherwise have been curtailed," Ashish Khanna, CEO, Adani Green Energy, said adding that storage provides flexibility while long-term evacuation capacity is aligned with project commissioning.

INDIA'S LARGEST

By March-end, Adani Green will bring online 3.5 GWh of BESS capacity, which it described as India's largest battery storage project. "We are going to commission 3.5 GW/hour of BESS capacity. We plan to add more than double the capacity in the coming year," Khanna told investors recently, indicating that storage capacity could exceed 7 GWh in FY27.

Adani Green had formally announced a foray into the BESS project at Khavda in November 2025

The firm said co-locating solar generation with storage at Khavda would significantly enhance revenue realisations. "...We are going to realise much better revenue from the stored power," Khanna said.

E-motorcycle makers 'want incentives'

S Ronendra Singh
New Delhi

Electric motorcycle makers have demanded incentives as there are none currently for this segment of electric vehicles (EVs).

Be it Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric Vehicles (FAME-II) between 2019 and 2024 or the Prime Minister Electric Drive Revolution in Innovative Vehicle Enhancement (PM E-DRIVE) Scheme, all incentives were majorly driven for electric scooters and three-wheelers, they said, adding that there should be some announcements from the upcoming Budget.

"Subsidy should ideally be available only for EV bikes than any other segment. The penetration of electric motorcycles is still much lower compared to electric scooters. If we look at the overall two-wheeler market in India, nearly 70 per cent of ICE (internal combustion engine) vehicle sales are of motorcycles, while scooters account for only about 30 per cent," Anjali Rattan, Chairperson of RattanIndia that makes Revolt electric motorcycles, told *businessline*.

It makes far more sense to continue subsidies for electric bikes so that penetration could reach the level that is realistically expected, she said. "Withdrawing subsidies too early from this segment will significantly slow down adoption and impact the transition in the biggest part of India's two-wheeler market," Rattan added.

Ahmedabad-based electric motorcycle maker Matter said government interventions (because of schemes like FAME and PM E-DRIVE) had given a lot of benefit to electric scooters, and therefore, electric motorcycles should be given similar incentives to drive the market.

"The incentives could be in any shape or form — research and development-led or supply side or demand side — something like a production-linked incentive (PLI); even R&D support, because we don't have much... We (India) are still bringing incremental change. So, if the government even incentivises some R&D, we will suddenly start seeing proper electric motorcycles which operate the way the world wants them to operate," Mohal Lalbhai, Founder of Matter, told *businessline*.

Currently, there are only a few brands that manufacture EV motorcycles in India

Lalbhai said there were representations by the industry and the government had taken note, and so the industry hopes the Centre will do something for electric motorcycles.

2030 TARGETS

"To achieve our national 2030 targets, the Budget should introduce targeted subsidies and demand incentives specifically for electric motorcycles. Prioritising this dominant segment will unlock the next level of mass-market electrification and move India closer to a truly self-reliant EV ecosystem," Madhumita Agrawal, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Oben Electric, said.

Currently, there are only a few brands that manufacture EV motorcycles in India including Matter, Revolt Motors, Ola Electric and Oben Electric.

Major two-wheeler manufacturers such as Hero MotoCorp, Bajaj Auto, Honda Motorcycle & Scooter India, and TVS Motor Company are yet to enter the space.

PVR INOX sells 4700BC biz to Marico

Meenakshi Verma Ambwani
New Delhi

PVR INOX on Monday said it has signed a definitive agreement to divest its 93.27 per cent stake in Zea Maize Private Ltd, which owns the snacking brand 4700BC, to Marico Ltd in an all-cash transaction for a total consideration of ₹226.8 crore.

The firm added that this monetisation follows a strategic review aimed at unlocking shareholder value, strengthening the balance sheet and reallocating resources towards its core cinema exhibition business. "The divestment will have no material impact on PVR INOX's in-cinema food and beverage revenues or its growth trajectory. Overall, the transaction is expected to be accretive to PVR INOX's profit, free cash flow, and return ratios," it added.

Ajay Bijli, Managing Director, PVR INOX, said, "We recognised the potential in 4700BC at a very early stage and supported the brand through its formative years. From a niche gourmet popcorn offering, it has grown into a nationally recognised premium snacking brand. As it looks to scale further and broaden its ambition, the brand is well-positioned under the stewardship of a scaled FMCG leader like Marico. For PVR INOX, this transaction represents a natural culmination of our strategic role and enables us to monetise a non-core asset."

FOOD PLAY

Marico, meantime, said it is a strategic investment that will augment its food play. "Going forward, 4700BC will focus on driving accelerated growth through new product launches across emerging snacking segments, strengthening its multichannel distribution network, and building a differentiated premium brand anchored in innovation," it added. Founded in 2013 by Chirag Gupta, 4700BC pioneered gourmet popcorn in India.

Saugata Gupta, MD and CEO, Marico, noted: "The investment in 4700BC aligns well with Marico's ambition to participate in fast-growing food categories through distinctive, future-ready brands..."

Syngene International to focus on chemistry-led research amid near-term revenue pressure

Aishwarya Kumar
Bengaluru

Syngene International is sharpening its focus on chemistry-led research to drive future growth, even as Q3 FY26 revenues were impacted by inventory correction and client-specific issues.

MD & CEO Peter Bains said demand for integrated chemistry capabilities across discovery, development and manufacturing is rising, positioning Syngene as a long-term partner rather than a project vendor.

The company reported revenue of ₹617 crore in Q3, impacted by inventory correction and client-specific issues.

Syngene expects to close the full year with a decline in revenue in the range of 3 to 5 per cent. Going forward, Bains said growth is visible across research services, with chemistry emerging as a key driver, alongside biology and translational clinical research. "If you put that one product to one side, there is a growth story, and that growth is diversified across all platforms in CDMO and research services," he said, adding that the company's focus will be on building on this momentum.

> Research services continue to form the strong foundation of Syngene's diversified offering
>
> **PETER BAINS**
> MD & CEO, Syngene International

Currently, around two-thirds of Syngene's business comes from research services and one-third from manufacturing, a mix that has been slightly adjusted due to the impact of a large commercial product. Research services, Bains said, continue to form the strong foundation of Syngene's diversified offering, with chemistry playing a central role in drug discovery.

This is being complemented by growing capabilities in biology, spanning discovery biology as well as expansion into biotherapeutics, he said.

On the order book, Bains said the long-term outlook remains healthy, driven by increasing outsourcing across manufacturing, discovery and development.

He added that Syngene is well positioned to capitalise on emerging modalities such as antibody-drug conjugates, peptides, conjugations, PROTACs and oligonucleotides.

PAT DECLINE

Syngene reported a 44 per cent year-on-year decline in profit after tax (PAT) to ₹73 crore for Q3 FY26, excluding a one-time impact of ₹58 crore (net of tax) arising from higher gratuity provisions following changes in the labour codes notified by the Centre.

QUICKLY.

'India, Russia on track for $100 billion trade by 2030'

Moscow: India and Russia are moving confidently to achieve a target of $100 billion in bilateral trade by 2030 and steps are being taken to expand the trade basket, Ambassador Vinay Kumar said. "The past year has been particularly active. We had a very successful visit of President (Vladimir) Putin. Achieving the bilateral trade target of $100 billion by 2030 is eminently possible," Kumar told *PTI*. According to reports, in FY25, India-Russia bilateral trade reached a record high of approximately $68.7 billion due to the massive import of Russian crude. PTI

Russian Urals oil trades at close to widest discounts

Moscow: Russian February Urals crude oil cargoes traded at close to the widest discounts against dated Brent in Indian ports since 2022 amid intensified pressure from Western sanctions, two sources said. Urals oil cargoes to be supplied in February traded at discounts of $10 per barrel to dated Brent for delivery in Indian ports, a $3-5 per barrel increase from estimates for cargoes loading in the autumn months last year. REUTERS

Refined fuel exports may stay steady

KPLER FORECAST. High refinery utilisation, access to both Atlantic Basin and Asian markets will help shipments

Rishi Ranjan Kala
New Delhi

India's refined petroleum product exports are expected to remain steady in the 2026 calendar year, aided by refinery maintenance on the US West Coast, a development that will help refiners such as Reliance Industries (RIL) capitalise on petrol and jet fuel shipments to California.

Besides, refinery capacity additions and higher utilisation back home is also expected to boost product availability.

Global real time data and analytics provider Kpler expects India's refined product export to remain constructive, supported by high refinery utilisation, flexible configurations and continued export optionality into both the Atlantic Basin and Asia.

Incremental throughput growth is likely as new capacity and ramp-ups at HPCL Rajasthan Refinery (HRRL) progress, while expansions at sites such as Panipat (Indian Oil Corporation) and stronger utilisation across other public and private refineries lift overall product availability.

KEY HUB. Given the limited connectivity to some US refining hubs, the likely source of replacement fuels (for California) will be imports from Asia, particularly of jet fuel and gasoline

Refinery economics should remain supportive given continued access to discounted and advantaged crude feedstocks, helping India maintain export competitiveness even if global margins soften, said Sumit Ritolia, Kpler's Lead Research Analyst for Refining & Modeling.

STEADY SAILING

"In addition, refinery closures and rationalisation in PADD 5 are expected to increase California's reliance on imported gasoline and blend stocks, creating an additional outlet for Indian barrels, where RIL has historically been an important supplier," he told *businessline*. Washington's refining sector is organised into Petroleum Administration for Defense Districts (PADDs) with PADD 5 catering to the West Coast.

The US Energy Information Administration (EIA) expects the upcoming loss of refinery capacity at the West Coast to contribute to relatively higher gasoline margins and gasoline prices that are about equal to 2025, in nominal terms.

Given the limited connectivity to other US refining hubs, the most likely source of replacement fuels (for California) will be imports from Asia, particularly of jet fuel and gasoline.

However, the main near-term constraint is higher planned refinery maintenance versus last year, with April–May and August–September likely to see peak turnaround activity that temporarily reduces runs and export availability and increases volatility, Ritolia added.

On the demand side, Ritolia said that domestic growth remains healthy but uneven, with stronger gasoline (petrol) growth than gasoil (diesel), meaning incremental supply could skew toward middle distillates and ATF as new units stabilise.

As a result, exports will remain a key clearing mechanism in 2026, particularly for diesel and jet fuel during periods of high utilisation and outside peak domestic demand windows, he explained.

EU SANCTIONS

On impact on the European Union's (EU) 18th sanctions package, which came into effect on January 21, Ritolia said it is still early to draw firm conclusions.

However, with the new EU restrictions now in force, export-oriented refiners that previously relied on Europe as a key outlet are expected to shift toward lower-risk crude feedstocks and reduce exposure to Russian barrels and other higher-compliance origins since those volumes can no longer be monetised as easily, he added.

"As a result, we could see increased preference for Middle East and other 'clean' Atlantic Basin crudes, while some refiners may cut runs, redirect products to non-EU markets at weaker netbacks, or adjust crude slates to remain compliant," he said.

Netback calculates the revenue generated from oil and gas sales against costs incurred to bring the product to market. "The most impacted exporters have been RIL and Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals (MRPL). So far RIL has not imported Russian barrels since December 19 (2025), while MRPL has not imported Russian crude since late November, although it remains too early to generalise a firm trend as refiners will continue to optimise based on economics and execution feasibility," he said.

Importantly, even without Europe as an outlet, there is still strong global demand for refined products, and Kpler does not expect any major issues in clearing Indian product exports overall.

LNG buyers stall deals as they await record supply wave

Bloomberg

India's liquefied natural gas importers are holding up some deals spanning decades as they push to lock in cheaper prices, hoping that a surge in supply will tilt negotiations in their favour.

Major buyers, including Gail India Ltd and Bharat Petroleum Corp, have been pushing for lower prices and more flexible long-term contracts, leaving discussions with LNG producers stalled for more than a year, according to people familiar with the matter. That approach could be rewarded if prices drop as new projects from the US to Qatar come online.

The talks will be a key topic at the India Energy Week, which kicks off on Tuesday and will be attended by major producers, including Abu Dhabi National Oil Co and TotalEnergies SE. These companies have invested billions of dollars in export plants and new supply on the bet that demand in Asia, including India, will rise for years as the region powers fast-growing industries and transitions away from dirtier fossil fuels.

India for years had a goal of gas making up 15 per cent of its energy mix by 2030, roughly double the current level. However, it has struggled to progress toward the target due in part to LNG being too expensive for consumers. Annual imports have essentially plateaued since 2020, with Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine upending the market and sending prices to an all-time high.

That dynamic could begin to shift. Global LNG capacity is set to rise by about 50 per cent by the end of the decade. Indian buyers are looking for long-term supply contracts from around 2028, near when that wave peaks, according to the people who asked not to be named as they aren't authorized to speak with media.

Gail and BPCL didn't respond to a request for comment. India's LNG imports have a "meaningful upside from the upcoming supply wave," said Kesher Sumeet, a senior LNG analyst at Energy Aspects. "The city gas sector will lead consumption growth along with non-fertilizer industrial demand, as affordable LNG becomes available."

Customs duty cut on imported cars to help expand luxury segment: BMW India

Press Trust of India
New Delhi

Reduction in customs duty on imported cars under the India-EU free trade agreement could enable the growth of the luxury car segment in India, which currently remains minuscule, BMW Group India President and CEO Hardeep Singh Brar said on Monday.

The domestic luxury car segment accounts for just 1 per cent of the overall passenger vehicle segment.

The India-EU Free Trade Agreement would be a historic milestone benefiting both sides by expanding trade and enabling deeper exchange of technology and innovation, Brar said in a statement. "From an automotive industry perspective, we hope the FTA will include balanced, win-win provisions that help stimulate demand in the luxury segment

Hardeep Singh Brar, President and CEO, BMW Group India

while strengthening supply chain integration which is especially important in the current geopolitical context," he added. If customs duties on completely built units are reduced, it would help expand the luxury car market in India, Brar stated.

"While CBUs (completely built units) currently account for about 5 per cent of our sales, such a framework would allow us to broaden our product portfolio, introduce globally popular models and test new offerings," he stated. If demand scales up, it could also support deeper localisation over time, he added.

"Given that luxury vehicles form only about 1 per cent of the passenger vehicle market, this would benefit consumers without impacting mass market players, making it a genuine win-win for both India and the EU," Brar said.

At present, imported passenger vehicles priced below $40,000 attract a basic customs duty of 70 per cent, and those priced above $40,000 are taxed at an effective customs duty of 110 per cent.

POSITIVE SIGNAL

He said there is a positive signal of confidence in India's long-term growth story. India today is not just a large market, but a future-ready economy backed by reforms and policies focused on building a globally competitive ecosystem, he added.

Markets eye capex push, steady fiscal math in run-up to Budget

Akshata Gorde
Mumbai

Indian equities are heading into the Union Budget with expectations of a steady fiscal stance and a renewed push on capital expenditure, as investors position for infra-linked earnings growth amid limited room for fresh stimulus.

Market participants broadly expect the government to stick to its fiscal consolidation path, with the FY27 deficit likely to be set in the low 4 per cent range of the GDP even as gross market borrowing remains elevated to meet heavy bond redemptions and sustain infrastructure outlays.

"The upcoming Budget is expected to take a steady and disciplined approach. We see the FY27 fiscal deficit at around 4.3 per cent of GDP, with the government remaining committed to its medium-term 50 ® 1 per cent debt-to-GDP target.

POLICY BOOST. For equity investors, the policy message is likely to reinforce preference for capital goods, construction, metals and infrastructure-linked stocks

Gross market borrowing is likely to stay elevated at roughly ₹16 lakh crore, reflecting heavy redemptions and a continued focus on capex," said Churchil Bhatt, Executive Vice-President – Investment, Kotak Mahindra Life Insurance.

For equity investors, the policy message is likely to reinforce preference for capital-goods, construction, metals and infrastructure-linked stocks, which stand to benefit directly from continued public spending on roads, railways and manufacturing capacity. With committed revenue expenditure already absorbing a large share of government receipts, economists see little headroom for broad consumption-boosting measures this year.

EXPORT SUPPORT

Instead, markets are tracking targeted support for export-oriented sectors facing global headwinds, alongside incentives tied to manufacturing and employment schemes that could support earnings visibility in select segments. "The need of the hour is to encourage both government and private sector capex. Some tax relief measures for sovereign funds investing in India could also serve as a strong catalyst. Financials and pharma remain well-placed, while metals may continue to perform but are running a bit ahead of fundamentals," said Arpit Jain, Joint MD at Arihant Capital Markets Ltd.

Tax reforms aimed at improving ease of doing business could also influence sentiment, particularly for mid-caps and deal-driven sectors.

"On the ease of doing business front, industry is looking for greater tax clarity and simplification, from rationalising multiple TDS rates and extending deductions for research and development, to linking buyback taxation with accumulated profits," said Abhishek Mundada, Partner, Dhruva Advisors, adding that clearer rules could reduce disputes and encourage corporate restructuring.

START-UPS' DEMAND

Start-ups and technology firms are watching out for deferment in taxation on employee stock options until the point of sale to avoid double taxation. There is also a request to align capital gains tax treatment for unlisted shares with that of listed ones. "Start-ups are riskier, less liquid and demand longer holding periods — yet are taxed more harshly. Correcting this imbalance is critical to encourage private capital into India's innovation economy," said Devansh Lakhani, Director, Lakhani Financial Services.

Real estate-linked stocks may also be in focus if the Budget delivers relief for homebuyers. There is also demand for taxation rationalisation for real estate AIFs, and an emerging framework for asset tokenisation.

Prices should pick up in Q4 with currency depreciation: JSW Steel

bl.interview

Suresh P Iyengar
Mumbai

JSW Steel has done well to wade through the pricing pressure in the December quarter. The company managed higher sales growth by liquidating inventory. Jayant Acharya, Jt Managing Director & CEO, JSW Steel, shared his views on the way forward.

Edited excerpts:

> Over next 4-5 years, we will be spending about ₹1.01 lakh crore. By March-end, we will receive over ₹29,000 crore out of ₹37,000 crore BPSL slump sale.
>
> **JAYANT ACHARYA,**
> Joint MD & CEO, JSW Steel

What the key drivers for JSW Steel Q3 performance despite weak prices?

Despite a challenging quarter, we managed to post a good operational performance primarily due to higher volumes. Prices in the last quarter were at an all-time low. The newly-commissioned JVML (JSW Vijayanagar Metallics) capacities have ramped up nicely to almost hit its rated capacity.

Despite shutting down BF3 (blast furnance-3) crude steel production, we operated at 93 per cent capacity utilisation. In fact, we have been consistently maintaining 90 per cent plus capacity utilisation. We liquidated 3 lakh tonnes of inventory.

Also, our value-added sales grew 16 per cent year-on-year in the quarter to an all-time high to 4.54 million tonnes, which helped mitigate the price drop.

How do you see Q4 demand and prices?

The fourth quarter is usually good. Activity picks-up as people want to finish projects before the financial year-end. People try and budget more in this quarter.

We are seeing a healthy pricing environment. In December and January, TMT started recovering a bit. We see a good pricing environment with currency depreciation and the safeguard finalisation, besides anti-dumping announced on hot roll from Vietnam and CRNO (cold rolled non-oriented) from China. It is a positive environment and we should get better prices in this quarter.

Is the safeguard duty enough to protect the industry from cheap imports?

As a percentage point of view, 12 per cent naturally looks low compared to 25 per cent and 50 per cent done across the world. We have to watch that space but I'm happy that the government has finalised the safeguard after a gap. And taken steps on anti-dumping.

It is important for self-reliance of the country because if margins are not generated, the ability to reinvest back gets impacted. The steel industry is one industry which invests in the hinterland. We do not make our steel plants in cities. We create jobs in rural areas with enabling infrastructure. We are impacting the heart of India.

What will be the impact of the CBAM introduced in Europe?

We are already trying to put up a green steel plant at Salav (Maharashtra). We will produce low emission green steel, low carbon emission steel, to whoever wants it. Other than that, I do not see an immediate impact. With prices in Europe on the rise, some of the importers may like to maintain sourcing, which they have developed over time.

We are supplying various products with an established supply chain. Having said that, the India demand is expected to increase incrementally by 13 million tonnes next year. Our steel availability for exports in this decade will not be much. It happens only when the production is lumpy at times.

Have you trimmed capex?

We have recalibrated the capex because some of the equipment payments are falling due next year. Moreover, the EBITDAs have not been as great in this quarter. Some of the projects have been realigned, which do not impact our growth.

Capex will be more if the buyers credit are factored in. The range of ₹16,000 crore. Over the next 4-5 years, we will be spending about ₹1.01 lakh crore. By March-end, we will receive over ₹29,000 crore out of ₹37,000 crore BPSL slump sale while the rest of amount from the deal will come in by June.

What is the logic behind JSW Steel real estate venture, particularly this being the second JV with the promoter's company after JSW Paints?

We are making equity investment of ₹51 crore, which is not material. We are investing this for office and commercial space in Mumbai. The JV company is trying to bid for land in Mumbai. Our interest is only to acquire some office spaces. If they win the bid, then to that extent, we will be able to get office space at a discount to the market. By enabling to buy an office at a discount is value accretive for us. This project is limited to Mumbai and not extended to other cities.

Will JSW Steel capacity fall from 37 mtpa to 32 mtpa after the BPSL deal with JFE?

It depends on how you look at it. It will go down from JSW Steel to that extent to a joint venture entity. We will have an additional 2 million tonne capacity from Vijayanagar BF3 expansion and then 4.5 mtpa of BPSL will move into a joint venture entity. However, it will not have any impact on the 50 mtpa target by 2030-31.

Will Tata Steel entering the western market in joint venture with Lloyd's Metal and Energy impact JSW Steel?

Initially, they are putting up the pellet plant for their consumption. It is to secure their raw material sourcing. It is fine even if they put up a steel plant. I do not see that as a challenge. Even in eastern markets so many companies have put up steel plants.

How do you see global steel prices?

Steel prices in the US and Europe have gone up. In China, prices were range-bound in the last few quarters, but it has moved up a bit. China has launched anti-involution policy and introduced an export licensing policy from January 1. This will control exports and support regional prices in this part of the world.

Cotton textiles council eyes zero-duty access in EU trade deal

Our Bureau
Chennai

The Cotton Textiles Export Promotion Council has emphasised the critical importance of securing a favourable deal for Indian cotton textile products in the European Union (EU) markets.

The prevailing tariff barriers place Indian exporters at a competitive disadvantage *vis-à-vis* countries that enjoy preferential access, said the council's Chairman Vijay Agarwal.

Currently, India annually exports cotton-based textile products worth over $1.3 billion to the EU. A zero-duty regime would significantly enhance India's competitiveness, strengthen MSME exporters, promote sustainable and value-added exports and substantially expand India's footprint in the EU, he said.

The industry's plea comes at a time when the negotiations are moving closer to conclusion, and the industry and trade are making efforts to secure an outcome that ensures a level playing field for Indian cotton textiles in the EU market.

A Sakthivel, Chairman, Apparel Export Promotion Council, said: "With the India-EU FTA expected to be concluded soon and competing countries gradually losing preferential market access such as GSP benefits, the tables are likely to turn decisively in India's favour."

Budget wishlist: Private space industry seeks critical infrastructure tag

Press Trust of India
New Delhi

Ahead of the Union Budget, India's nascent private space industry wants the government to classify space assets as critical infrastructure and allocate funds to procure products and services offered by domestic companies.

"Being a big anchor customer, I think government support has to be around," Awais Ahmed, Founder and CEO at Pixxel Space, told PTI.

The government has taken good steps by introducing a research, development and innovation fund, and the deeptech fund, and wants money to start flowing into capex-heavy businesses having the potential to make India a powerhouse in the space and AI sectors, he said.

The Indian Space Association (ISpA) and consultancy firm Deloitte have recommended that the government recognise space assets as critical infrastructure to allow low-cost, long-term financing for the sector.

"Recognising space infrastructure as a distinct infrastructure sub-sector is essential to unlock scale, private investment and global competitiveness," the ISpA, which represents the space sector industry, said.

Indian private players now possess proven capabilities across satellites, launch systems, EO data and ground infrastructure, but a lack of assured government demand constrains it from scaling, it said.

"A formal procurement mandate will anchor industry growth while allowing ISRO to focus on strategic and exploratory missions," the space industry body said.

ISpA pointed out that NASA procures 80 per cent of its systems from the industry, while the European Space Agency follows a 90 per cent industry-led procurement model.

LOW-COST FUNDS

"Recognising space infrastructure as critical infrastructure can unlock low-cost financing, while rationalising taxes and duties on specialised launch components, along with reducing Customs GST and indirect taxes for deeptech can significantly alleviate cost pressures," Srinath Ravichandran, Founder and CEO at Agnikul Cosmos, told PTI.

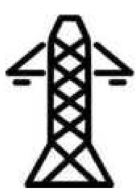
"Targeted fiscal incentives for indigenous satellite manufacturing and payload development, alongside expanded government-backed funding pools for deep-tech and space missions, can significantly de-risk early deployments," Suyash Singh, Co-founder and CEO at GalaxEye, said.

thehindu businessline.
TUESDAY - JANUARY 27, 2026

Switching on reforms

Electricity (Amendment) Bill moots major changes

The Draft Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2025, expected to be tabled in the Budget session, contemplates some landmark measures in the distribution sector. It unveils three major steps; the first two are aimed at reducing the cost of power for productive sectors, while the third attempts to relieve discoms of an operational burden. The moves are salutary, provided they are implemented well.



First, discoms will charge 'cost reflective' tariffs in a broad sense. The big shift here is that cross subsidies being coughed up by industry and railways will be phased out in five years. This will have a positive macroeconomic impact. Power Minister Manohar Lal recently explained that cost reflective tariffs will help discoms make a profit, even as the subsidy to the rural sector continues. Simply put, the subsidy shows up in the books of the State governments, not in that of the discoms. In fact, under the Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS), this is already happening. As a result, State finances have become more transparent. Discoms have begun to show profits. The second big step is allowing multiple distribution companies in a single area to promote competition. And third, discoms may also be relieved of the obligation to supply high load consumers with a demand exceeding 1 MW.

The initiatives raise implementation issues. Cost-reflective tariffs are fine, provided the costs themselves are properly assessed. Discoms may be saddled with high costs where generators and transmission companies enjoy pricing power. Meanwhile, coal dispatched by rail could be expensive because of the Railways' policy of subsidising passenger services. Therefore, a holistic view of power costs that takes upstream entities' operations into account becomes important. The move to allow multiple distributors in one area, where each can set up its own network or use another network, can increase efficiency, and even give a fillip to rooftop solar. But certain issues arising from Mumbai's experience should be kept in mind. Disputes over network rollout or in meeting consumer demand (with litigation going up to the Supreme Court in Mumbai's case) are a real possibility. There could be overcapacities, or excessive dependence on short-term power. Cherry picking of consumers too can crop up. Therefore, a pendulum swing from one distributor to multiple ones is best avoided. Limiting the numbers is a better way forward.

The move to liberate discoms from supplying high load users is welcome. At present, they are forced to have stranded assets to deal with sudden requirements. But moving away from discom dependency calls for a transition period so that all stakeholders benefit. The open access, short-term power market is still evolving, even as it accounts for about 15 per cent of generation. Overall, the sector is transforming rapidly with decentralised power likely to bring down discom costs of supply in remote areas. Centre-States' coordination can make a big difference in keeping all this going.

OTHER VOICES.

The Guardian

Europe's payments problem: sovereignty starts at the till

When the centre-left French politician Aurore Lalucq posted a warning last Wednesday that Donald Trump could cut off Europe from international payment systems, the clip went viral. To many, her message made sense. After all, if Mr Trump was prepared to test allies' boundaries over Greenland, it is not far-fetched to imagine Visa and Mastercard becoming used against a recalcitrant Europe. The US can turn off payment systems it controls. Given such talk, Ms Lalucq, who chairs the European parliament's economic and monetary affairs committee, is not wrong in calling for an "Airbus of European payments" to protect the EU. If the European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, is serious about the bloc's "independence", then during her visit to India this week she might ask New Delhi for advice. LONDON, JANUARY 25

The New York Times

The World Will Remember Trump's Greenland Outburst

The free world exhaled on Wednesday when President Trump retreated from his administration's threat to invade Greenland. That relief, however, masks the damage that Mr. Trump has done to America this week. Mr. Trump's apologists once dismissed his bullying of Greenland as an attempt at humor. Instead, it has been something far darker. His immoral threats against a loyal NATO ally have escalated a crisis in U.S.-European relations, weakened one of history's most successful alliances and hurt American interests in tangible ways. NATO has been an important force for global stability and for the democratic values that our nation champions. It has made the world safer, more prosperous and better able to work together in common purpose. NEW YORK, JANUARY 24

Internal audit and its role in corporate governance

CORP GOVERNANCE. Given the expanding scope of internal auditors, companies must keep up with the evolving environment

GETTY IMAGES

PS KUMAR

Internal auditors could be in-house or an outsourced entity; except for banks and certain Non-banking Finance Companies, risk-based Internal audit (IA) is required to be conducted by in-house internal auditors. Per section 138 of Companies Act, 2013 (the Act), all listed companies, irrespective of their size and other companies meeting certain criteria are required to appoint an internal auditor.

However, IA should be conducted by a chartered accountant or a cost accountant although the internal auditor need not be a firm of chartered accountants or cost accountants.

While section 138 does not define what an IA is, Companies (Accounts) Rules, 2014 lays down that the audit committee or the board of directors shall in consultation with the internal auditor formulate its scope, functioning, periodicity and methodology. As good governance requires, management has no role in this and quite rightly, the Act stays away from it rather than micromanage. This raises the issue that since the statute has left the manner of designing the IA to the discretion of directors, how should they address the issue.

Looking at some of the current practices, there is a need for companies to examine whether they are getting the scope of IA right. Notwithstanding the absence of a statutory definition, there are some pointers as to what could be the minimum acceptable level for section 138 as noted below:

To start with, to have an idea as to how onerous a director's responsibility is, one should take a look at the Directors' Responsibility Statement referred to in section 134(3)(c) which is included in the report of the board of directors to members of a company.

Section 134(5) lists some specific matters for which directors accept responsibility. Considering that the directors of a company are giving a positive assurance with respect to these matters, it would serve the best interests of the directors as well as the company to have them examined by internal auditors for a positive assurance.

The matters that would figure in the Directors Responsibility Statement are briefly: (i) preparation of financial statements that give a true and fair view and that the financial statements were prepared on a 'going concern' basis; (ii) safeguarding the assets of the company, prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities; (iii) in the case of listed companies, the company had laid down effective and adequate internal financial controls (IFC). Per section 143(3)(i), there is a corresponding responsibility placed on the auditors to confirm whether the company has adequate IFCs with reference to financial statements and whether such controls are operating effectively.

Secondly. per section 177(4)(vii) The role of Audit Committee includes 'evaluation of internal financial controls and risk management systems'; and per sub-section (5) 'The Audit Committee may call for the comments of the auditors about internal control systems, the scope of audit, including the observations of the auditors and review of financial statement before their submission to the Board and may also discuss any related issues with the internal auditors and auditors (appointed per section 139) and the management of the company.

> **Directors' responsibilities, role of audit committees, size of the company, and governance of internal audits are some of the** key factors that need to taken into accounting while framing a structured internal audit

Thirdly, Companies Auditor Report Order, 2020 (CARO) requires the auditors to answer 'whether the company has an internal audit system commensurate with the size and nature of its business; The 'Guidance Note on CARO 2020 (Revised 2022)' issued by the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) states as follows (there is more, however, limited for brevity) 'Generally internal audit function includes the following activities with regard to the entity:

(i) Evaluation of internal controls.

(ii) Examination of financial and operational information.

(iii) Review of operating activities.

(iv) Review of compliance with laws and regulations.

(v) Evaluation of risk management and governance practices.

Fourthly, Standard on Audit (SA) 610 (Revised) 'Using the Work of Internal Auditors' defines Internal Audit as follows: 'A function of an entity that performs assurance and consulting activities designed to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of the entity's governance, risk management and internal control processes'.

Lastly, Introducing the Standards of Internal Audit (SIA), the 'Framework Governing Internal Audits' issued by the ICAI, Paragraph 3 defines internal audit as follows: 'Internal audit provides independent assurance on the effectiveness of internal controls and risk management processes to enhance governance and achieve organisational objectives'. Although there is a slight difference between SA 610 and the Framework of SIA, the central theme of IA is on the assurance of effectiveness of internal controls and risk management.

Although the Act is silent about the scope of IA having left it to the discretion of audit committees and board of directors, when it comes to reporting on the adequacy and effectiveness the auditors of the company have been bestowed a special status and have been charged with a responsibility by the CARO and SA 610 (Revised) dealt with above. There is a preponderance of intent even if not expressed within the Act pointing out the direction of an IA.

Therefore, before designing the IA, audit committees and the directors should take a close look at the matters discussed above. This is the minimum expectation and in practice, several companies extend the scope to other areas which are considered relevant and required as circumstances may warrant. The National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA) has been giving guidance to auditors in the manner of dealing with the IA. A formal and structured IA built around the subjects mentioned above would give a company a very effective IA ensuring that it fits into the corporate governance structure.

Also, compliance with Section 138 demands it. Going forward, as new thoughts are emerging in information dissemination to the stakeholders, and with non-financial information including sustainability and ESG demanding more attention, IA would need to keep up with the changing environment with a corresponding responsibility on the directors to be current.

The writer is a Chartered Accountant

When welfare leads to workforce confidence

Social security must no longer be static or fragmented; it must be portable, digital, and inclusive

Shobha Karandlaje

Workers today rarely frame their demands in the language of policy. They demand something more fundamental: Will my job last? Will my family be secure? Will my skills remain relevant tomorrow? These questions speak not just of employment, but of confidence in the future.

India's journey towards Viksit Bharat is not only about creating jobs — it is about creating confidence among workers. Confidence that effort will be rewarded. Confidence that mobility will not mean loss of security. Confidence that change will bring opportunity, not vulnerability.

For a long time, labour policy in India was largely about welfare delivery and dispute resolution. While these remain important, they are no longer sufficient for a fast-changing economy. Today, the role of the Labour Ministry is evolving — from being a regulator of the past to becoming an enabler of the future workforce.

Years of engagement with people at the grassroots has deeply shaped this perspective. I have spoken to young people entering the job market for the first time, uncertain whether degrees will translate into livelihoods. I have met migrant workers who want to move for opportunity without losing access to social protection. I have interacted with platform workers who seek fairness and recognition in new forms of employment. Their aspirations point to a simple truth: workers do not want dependency; they want predictability and dignity.

This is where reform becomes meaningful. Our efforts are focused on building systems that travel with the worker— across jobs, locations, and life stages. Social security must no longer be static or fragmented; it must be portable, digital, and inclusive. Employment frameworks must encourage formalisation without discouraging enterprise. Most importantly, policy must keep pace with how work itself is changing.

The world of work is being reshaped by technology, global supply chains, and evolving employer-employee relationships. Gig work, remote employment, automation, and international labour mobility are no longer future concepts — they are today's reality. The challenge before us is to ensure that flexibility does not come at the cost of fairness, and innovation does not weaken protection.

WORKERS. For a secure future

COMPASSIONATE REFORMS

The Labour Ministry's approach is guided by a clear principle: reform with compassion, growth with inclusion. Labour reforms are being pursued not as isolated legal exercises, but as instruments to expand coverage, reduce uncertainty, and create an ecosystem where enterprises grow and workers feel secure. Dialogue and trust are central to this journey. Sustainable reform cannot be achieved through directives alone. It requires continuous engagement with workers' organisations, employers, and state governments. Consensus may take time, but it ensures durability — and durability is essential for long-term confidence.

Ultimately, the success of India's growth story will be measured not only by economic indicators, but by the confidence with which workers plan their future.

A confident workforce is more productive, more innovative, and more resilient. It is also the strongest foundation of social harmony.

The Ministry of Labour & Employment is actively working to translate this vision into action — strengthening institutions, modernising systems, and aligning policy with the realities of a 21st-century workforce. The goal is clear: to ensure that every worker feels secure enough to aspire, skilled enough to compete, and confident enough to move forward.

The writer is Union Minister of State for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, and Labour and Employment

LETTERS TO EDITOR

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

Cutting fertilizer subsidy

It is with reference to the news report 'Govt plans Fertilizer Mission to cut imports, chemical use' (January 26).

Fertilizers provide essential nutrients for plants. Every year the Centre spends crores to import chemical fertilizers.

Derived from natural sources such as animal manure, compost, green manure, plant residues enrich the soil with essential nutrients. The proposed Fertilizer Mission must aim to improve the sustainable alternatives to chemical fertilizers.

P Victor Selvaraj
Palayamkottai

This refers to "Govt plans Fertilizer Mission to cut imports, chemical use" (January 26). Promoting bio-fertilizers, organic inputs and other natural alternatives is important to make the proposed Mission on Fertilizers effective.

Direct subsidies to reduce farmers' costs, along with tax benefits, research support for companies, and public-private partnerships, can strengthen the plan. In addition, digital tools can help farmers understand soil health and fertilizer needs. A proper monitoring system to track fertilizer use, soil quality and crop output will help meet goals. Field trials across regions and active farmer participation are essential to reduce imports and maintain agricultural productivity and food security.

S Balasubramaniyan
Villupuram (TN)

For 'bumper' certainty

Apropos the Editorial 'Robust rabi' (January 26), the reported 652 lakh hectares of rabi sowing is a welcome sign of agricultural recovery, fuelled by timely MSPs and strategic fertilizer management. Yet, record acreage is merely a promise, not a payout. While the prospect of cooling food inflation and a GDP boost is enticing, the IMD's forecast of a dry winter and a fading La Niña serves as a sobering reality check. True food security shouldn't rely on the 'luck' of a munificent monsoon. We must pivot from celebrating sowing statistics to fortifying against climate volatility. As we enter the final leg, the real test isn't the quantity of seeds in the ground, but our ability to mitigate heat stress and water scarcity. A bumper crop should be a policy-driven certainty, not a seasonal surprise.

K Chidanand Kumar
Bengaluru

Budget agenda

Apropos the article 'Reformist, strategic focus likely in Budget' (January 26), there is an urgent need to ramp up our investments in semiconductors and critical minerals in the upcoming Budget.

Compared with the US, Taiwan and China, India's chip design and manufacturing is still at the nascent stage of fabricating chips in the range of 28nm to 110nm.

India needs to invest quickly in semiconductor research and development and should be able to transition to manufacturing smaller cutting-edge chips in the range of 5nm to 2nm.

Kosaraju Chandramouli
Hyderabad

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More funds for farm R&D

This is vital for productivity, climate challenges

Bhupinder Singh Hooda

FOOD SECURITY. Investment in agrarian science essential

With the Budget for 2026-27 approaching, farmers across the country are mobilising, underscoring that many agrarian problems remain unsolved. The years of neglect have forced farmers to take to the streets. Their protests point to deeper issues in the sector, especially low income, climate challenges, and the ongoing lack of investment in agricultural research and development.

Farmers want lasting solutions that improve their knowledge, resilience, and income security, especially as input costs rise, weather becomes more unpredictable, and landholdings shrink. Productivity growth has slowed, costs keep rising, and climate shocks are happening more often. Tackling these issues requires science-based solutions, which highlight the importance of agricultural research. Despite numerous policy statements, public investment in agricultural research and development remains insufficient. Almost 85 per cent of the R&D budget goes to salaries and running costs, leaving little for core research. This problem happens every year. The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) says most of its budget is spent on salaries. At the same time, State agricultural universities across India are short of funds, limiting their ability to conduct research and support farmers.

MARGINAL RISE IN FUNDING

Recent budgets have shown only slight increases in funding. The Department of Agricultural Research and Education (DARE), which includes ICAR, got ₹10,466 crore for 2025-26, up from ₹10,156 crore in 2024-25. At the same time, the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare received ₹1.32 lakh crore in 2024-25 and about ₹1.37 lakh crore in 2025-26, a 2.5 per cent drop from the revised 2024-25 estimates. Only a small share of this money goes to research and innovation, indicating that agricultural science remains a low national priority.

With R&D spending stuck at just 0.3-0.7 per cent of agricultural GDP, India is far behind countries like the US, China, Israel, and South Korea, which invest 2-4 per cent. This shows how urgently India needs to step up its commitment. There can be no consequences.

India operates one of the world's most extensive agricultural research systems, employing nearly 27,500 scientists and over 100,000 support staff. Despite this expansive infrastructure, critical challenges remain unresolved, including reducing cultivation costs, closing yield gaps, managing water scarcity, improving market access, and strengthening food processing and value chains.

Previous solutions improved food security but were region-specific and input-intensive, often excluding rainfed areas, smallholders, and landless labourers. Currently, nearly 50 per cent of Indian agriculture is rain-dependent, and climate change has rendered traditional practices increasingly unreliable. Research priorities must therefore shift towards dry land farming, climate-resilient crops, affordable technologies, and diversified livelihood systems that mitigate risk and enhance income security.

Investment in agrarian science should be recognised as essential for food security, rural livelihoods, climate resilience, and national stability. To effectively translate these recommendations into practice, the Budget should include specific policy actions, such as earmarked R&D funds dedicated to sustainable agricultural initiatives, the introduction of performance-linked grants to encourage breakthroughs in agricultural science, and the establishment of a national agrarian innovation task force to prioritise critical research areas.

The principle of 'Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan, Jai Vigyan, Jai Anusandhan' remains relevant, underscoring the interconnectedness of farmers' welfare, scientific advancement, and national self-reliance. Budget 2026 presents a critical opportunity to translate this vision into effective policy measures.

The writer is (State) Leader of Opposition and former CM Haryana; headed the Congress Committee on Agriculture & Farm Welfare

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thehindu businessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

January 27, 2006

Banks can now offer loans, accept deposits thru agents

Banks are now allowed to outsource lending and deposit-taking activities to enable them to reach remote areas. They can now collect deposits from public and deliver credit to borrowers through agents appointed by them. The RBI has permitted banks to appoint NGOs, microfinance agencies, post offices and NBFCs (not accepting deposits) to act as Business Correspondents.

Govt targeting $10-b FDI in '06-07: Kamal Nath

The Government is targeting an overall foreign direct investment (FDI) inflow of $10 billion during the next fiscal and expects around $7.5 billion in the current financial year, the Minister for Commerce and Industry, Mr Kamal Nath, said. The actual FDI inflow till October this fiscal stood $2.59 billion.

Flexible labour law for textiles on anvil

In a bid to introduce labour law flexibility for the textiles sector, the Government is considering a proposal whereby firms could be given the go-ahead to employ "non-permanent" workers if they furnish bank guarantees against the names of these workers, earmarking their salaries against a specified minimum period of employment during a year.

CAPITAL IDEAS.

RICHA MISHRA

How will BRICS energy pact pan out?

It should emerge as a more multipolar order, with Russia and China shaping the energy agenda. However, for tangible outcomes, bilateral relations will play a decisive role

REUTERS

Will BRICS lead to a multi-polar energy order or creation of a fresh cartel? Who will take the lead in energy space — China or Russia? Where does India stand? These questions are being increasingly discussed in the global geopolitical space.

A cursory assessment points to a multipolar order, where both China and Russia will play a significant role in it. For India, BRICS energy cooperation is broadly advantageous but not without constraints.

BRICS cooperation spans hydrocarbons, renewables, critical minerals, and energy infrastructure, with growing emphasis on local-currency trade and alternative payment mechanisms. India assumed the BRICS presidency on January 1, succeeding Brazil. It will lead the 11-member bloc with a focus on 'Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation, and Sustainability'. There are 10 partner countries too.

Over the years, energy cooperation has evolved into a strategic pillar for the bloc, which, according to reports, accounts for nearly 50 per cent of global energy production and consumption. This year, the alliance is increasingly focused on balancing energy security with a just and inclusive transition to a low-carbon future.

The bloc has a 'Roadmap for Energy Cooperation' (2025–2030). Its Nuclear Energy Platform, established in late 2024, was expanded in 2025. It facilitates corporate-level cooperation on nuclear projects as a clean energy source, with financial support from the New Development Bank (NDB).

Then there is an issue of Energy Transition Financing. According to reports, member-states are actively pushing for the use of local currencies in energy trade. As the chair, India has invited BRICS nations to participate in the upcoming energy gathering, scheduled for later this year.

Power Minister Manohar Lal, at the BRICS Energy Ministers' Meeting 2025, highlighted energy security as one of the most pressing challenges and emphasised the need to strengthen BRICS cooperation to promote equitable access to energy resources globally.

The bloc supported open, fair and non-discriminatory international energy markets, and encouraged the use of local currencies in energy trade.. The members also emphasised on the importance of resilient infrastructure, diversified energy sources, and critical minerals for clean technologies.

"From my perspective, BRICS energy cooperation reflects a strategic shift towards a more multipolar energy order rather than the creation of a unified cartel. The initiative is driven by shared interests in energy security, supply diversification, and reducing exposure to Western-dominated institutions and financial systems," Umud Shokri, energy strategist and senior visiting fellow at George Mason University.

"The recent expansion of BRICS to include energy-rich states such as Iran and the UAE strengthens its resource base, but internal diversity in energy profiles and political priorities mean the bloc functions more as a coordination platform than a tightly integrated alliance," he said.

He agrees that geo-politically, BRICS energy cooperation could accelerate the fragmentation of global energy governance. "By facilitating trade outside dollar-based systems and Western regulatory frameworks, it weakens the leverage of sanctions and challenges institutions like the IEA and Bretton Woods-linked mechanisms," he said, adding that "this trend is already visible in Russia's redirection of oil and gas exports to Asia and in experiments with non-dollar settlement. While this may enhance resilience for participating states and stabilise supplies for emerging economies, it also deepens competition with G7 countries and could intensify rivalry in energy-rich regions such as the Middle East, Africa, and Central Asia."

> **As a fast-growing energy importer, India benefits** from diversified supply options, discounted hydrocarbons, and access to alternative financing and technology channels

WHO WILL DOMINATE?

Further, a debate is emerging as to who will become a dominant player in BRICS energy order — China or Russia. According to Shokri, "In terms of dominance, China and Russia are likely to shape the BRICS energy agenda. China's role stems from its position as the world's largest energy consumer, its financial capacity, and its leadership in clean-energy manufacturing and deployment. Russia, despite sanctions, remains a critical supplier of oil, gas, and nuclear technology and uses energy as a strategic tool in foreign policy."

"Other members contribute in more specialised ways: Brazil through biofuels, Gulf states through capital and reserves, and Iran through hydrocarbons under sanctions pressure. Without strong institutional constraints, this asymmetry suggests a *de facto* Sino-Russian leadership rather than equal influence across members," he said.

Amidst all these one also needs to remember that among the BRICS members themselves the bilateral relations vary — for example, India and China *vis-a-vis* India and Russia.

"Bilateral relations will play a decisive role in translating BRICS energy cooperation into tangible outcomes. Given the bloc's loose institutional structure and divergent national interests, most progress is likely to occur through bilateral or mini-lateral deals nested within the broader BRICS framework," he said, adding that examples include Russia-India crude trade, China-Brazil renewable investment, and potential China-Gulf infrastructure financing.

"These arrangements offer flexibility and speed but also limit the emergence of a unified BRICS energy policy, reinforcing the view that the grouping amplifies bilateral leverage rather than replacing it," he said.

INDIA'S POSITION

Where does India stand in all this? "As a fast-growing energy importer, India benefits from diversified supply options, discounted hydrocarbons, and access to alternative financing and technology channels. Participation strengthens its bargaining power and reduces vulnerability to price shocks and geopolitical pressure. At the same time, India must manage China's outsized influence and avoid strategic over-dependence on any single partner," Shokri said.

Though BRICS provides India with greater strategic autonomy in energy diplomacy, New Delhi will need to up its scale when dealing with China, particularly as India too is giving a push to its green energy business.

The looming threat of antimicrobial resistance

CK Mishra
Siddhartha Bhattacharya

Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently made a strong appeal for the responsible use of antibiotics. Referring to a recent report, he cautioned that antibiotics are becoming increasingly ineffective against common infections such as pneumonia and urinary tract infections. His message to citizens was clear: medicines require proper guidance, and antibiotics, in particular, should always be consumed under medical supervision. This public intervention reflects growing concern at the highest levels of government about AMR and its far-reaching implications. According to data from the WHO, around 1.27 million deaths are directly attributed to antimicrobial resistance (AMR) annually.

The economic cost of AMR is substantial and rising. Globally, AMR has already increased healthcare expenditure by an estimated $66 billion. If resistance rates increase at the pace observed in the bottom 15 per cent of countries, AMR-related health costs could escalate to $325 billion, while the global economy could be $1.7 trillion smaller by 2050.

Conversely, providing high-quality treatment to everyone with bacterial infections and funding innovation in new antibiotics could, by 2050, reduce health costs by $97 billion. Addressing AMR requires coordinated action across sectors. One such opportunity lies in creating coalitions of willing countries to establish common funding pools for research and pooled procurement of innovative antibiotics.

Public awareness remains a critical pillar of the response to AMR. A national campaign — similar to those undertaken for HIV, polio and tuberculosis — should be developed to educate patients and consumers about the dangers of antibiotic misuse. Training programmes for doctors should be mandated by ICMR to raise awareness about AMR, including correct dosing, frequency and duration of antibiotic treatment.

A dedicated platform that brings together central and State implementing agencies alongside industry stakeholders would enable structured discussions on the implementation of ICMR AMR guidelines. A defined list of essential diagnostic tests should be formulated, and laboratory infrastructure must be established at the district level to support timely and accurate diagnosis. Finally, monitoring and auditing must become routine.

The Prime Minister's call for responsible antibiotic use should serve as a catalyst for sustained action.

Mishra is former Health Secretary, and Bhattacharya is Secretary General, NATHEALTH

On businessline.in

Perils of expansive gender provisions in FTAs

Taking gender commitments in FTAs with little domestic regulatory and implementing capacity is nothing short of a recipe for disaster, says **Sangeeta Godbole**

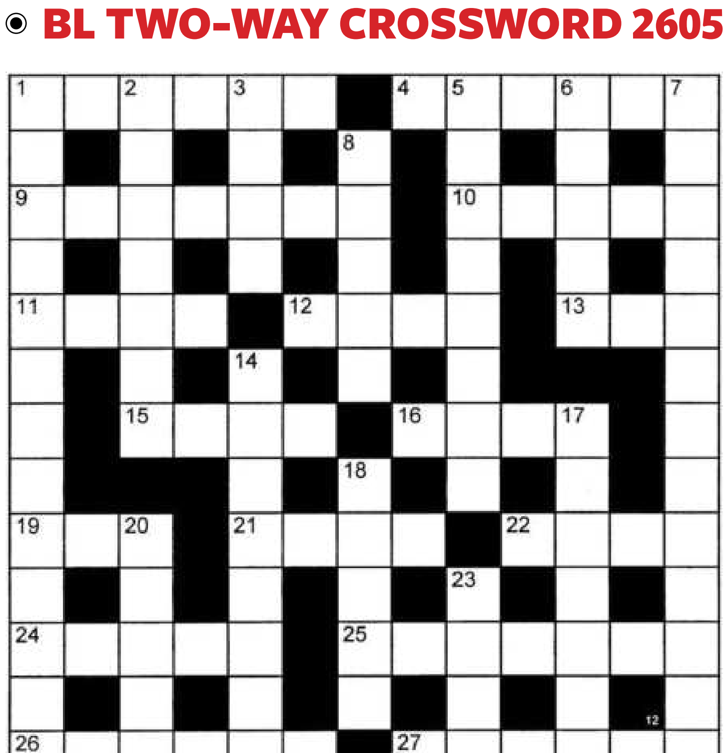
https://tinyurl.com/59k67zh8

The bricks and steel trap

Deepanshu Mohan looks at why India's government capex-spending surge isn't igniting a private sector investment fire

https://tinyurl.com/mur4uduf

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2605



EASY

ACROSS

1. Ill repute (6)
4. Dug-out (6)
9. Maintenance for divorced partner (7)
10. Air raid warning (5)
11. Footway (4)
12. Cry loudly (4)
13. A woman's (3)
15. Study print (4)
16. Puts question (4)
19. Putrefy (3)
21. Return sound (4)
22. Faithful (4)
24. Dwelling-place (5)
25. Proving deficient in test (7)
26. Lay bare (6)
27. Iterate (6)

DOWN

1. Not fitting (13)
2. Squander piecemeal (7)
3. Meeting; old administrative assembly (4)
5. Never still (8)
6. Towards top of world (5)
7. Twentieth of ton (13)
8. Daman, dassie, rock-rabbit (5)
14. Robot-like; with identity concealed (8)
17. Waiting at table (7)
18. Move, budge (5)
20. Body of soldiers (5)
23. Collection of papers, dossier (4)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

1. Public disgrace if many are turned out (6)
4. Slit in the ground where fish goes round river (6)
9. Support for estranged spouse mainly consists of nothing (7)
10. Fascinating woman is going back to Rouen where French left (5)
11. It's the way pathology can be cut short (4)
12. Loud cry from first bandit to break the law (4)
13. A lady's principal man has dropped the ring (3)
15. Study the words that make up the abomasum (4)
16. Invites one to remove the top of the barrels (4)
19. Without a vehicle donkey's encouragement will decay (3)
21. A sound coming back in one Chopin piece (4)
22. Starts the race under-exercised, to be honest (4)
24. Dwelling might consist of a bed with nothing in it (5)
25. Having a weakness for ploughing (7)
26. Let the film see the light to show one up (6)
27. Another showing may not suit one's digestion! (6)

DOWN

1. It isn't suitable to be at home and filch it (13)
2. Waste one's money on food fried in batter (7)
3. Tom held nothing up that was debatable (4)
5. Can't stay still so must do with a smaller amount of sleep (8)
6. Direction taken from noble PM (5)
7. 112 pounds and under height WD ordered (13)
8. A dassie may be hairy without one before ten (5)
14. Don't have to confront so much that is unidentified (8)
17. Performance of religious worship at the start of play (7)
18. Transfer a woman's undergarment (5)
20. Show the colour of pot or its variant (5)
23. Go one behind another to make it smooth (4)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2604

ACROSS 1. Hammocks 7. Crime 8. Between 9. Derange 10. Link 12. Excited 14. Partake 17. Etch 18. Confine 21. Retires 22. Linen 23. Myrmidon

DOWN 1. Hobble 2. Mutineer 3. Open 4. Kindle 5. Sign 6. Defend 7. Coracle 11. Station 13. Tortured 14. Pickle 15. Energy 16. Chosen 19. None 20. Stem

CHENNAI
businessline.
TUESDAY - JANUARY 27 - 2026

QUICKLY.

Global firms hold 60% office space in India

New Delhi: Global companies remained major demand drivers for office space in India during 2025 as they leased nearly 60 per cent of office spaces in India's seven major cities to expand their businesses, according to JLL India. According to data by real estate consultant JLL India, the gross leasing of office spaces rose by 8 per cent to 83.3 million sq ft last year across seven major cities, from 77.2 million sq ft in the preceding year. The seven cities are Mumbai, Bengaluru, Delhi-NCR, Pune, Hyderabad, Chennai and Kolkata. PTI

Passive Multi-Asset FoFs: ICICI Pru stops inflows

Mumbai: ICICI Prudential Asset Management Company has stopped fresh inflows into its Passive Multi-Asset Fund of Funds. The ICICI Pru Multi-asset FoF invests in domestic equity and debt, overseas equity and gold. However, SEBI mandates that a multi-asset FoF cannot mix overseas and domestic investment together. The fund house said the Multi-Asset FoF with its existing asset allocation and investment objective could not be classified under any of the categories specified under the SEBI framework. OUR BUREAU

Banks amp up focus on gold loans

DEMAND SURGE. Amid global slowdown, the lenders turn to such loans to meet credit demand: Experts

Rohan Das
Chennai

With the price of gold reaching an all-time high, banks are seeing a huge surge in demand for gold loans.

According to data from the RBI, outstanding loans against gold jewellery for scheduled commercial banks (SCBs) stood at ₹3.58 lakh crore as of November 2025, an increase of 125 per cent year-on-year.

In contrast, credit card loans increased only 2.4 per cent, while other personal loans grew 9 per cent over the same period.

Speaking to *businessline*, experts suggested that given the global slowdown, growth is expected to be driven domestically and banks are hence looking at gold loans to meet credit demand. "Banks have been looking to rebalance their portfolios between secured and unsecured lending and gold loans serve to achieve this. As a result, more banks are entering this segment, which has been traditionally dominated by more NBFCs," said Vivek Iyer, Partner and Financial Services Risk Advisory Services, Grant Thornton Bharat.

ONGOING PROCESS

Moreover, Iyer explained that the increase in gold prices directly expands the lending capacity of banks. As the value of the pledged gold increases, banks are able to sanction higher loan amounts for the same quantity of gold while being within the RBI's prescribed loan-to-value (LTV) limits.

"The increase in the underlying collateral value has led to higher disbursements, though the LTV ratio has remained stable," he said.

LESS VOLATILE. Gross non-performing assets for gold loans stood at 0.8% for September 2025, according to the RBI ISTOCKPHOTO

Aparna Kirubakaran, Director, Crisil Ratings, believes the increase could also be attributed to the slowdown in other retail segments, such as personal loans. She added that with the current trend of surge in gold prices and increasing demand from borrowers, banks had already been increasing their focus in this segment over the last 1-2 years. The market share of banks in gold loans could be around 55 per cent, according to industry estimates. In terms of asset quality, gross non-performing assets for gold loans stood at 0.8 per cent for September 2025, according to the RBI.

STATUS FACTOR

From a consumer perspective, Iyer suggested that gold is a sentimental asset class and, hence, when people borrow against it, the intent is to usually pay it back out of the fear of losing it.

This ensures that repayment patterns are strong, making it a good viable product for the lenders.

The increase in demand can also be observed in terms of the total assets under management for major gold non-banking financial companies.

Muthoot Finance, India's largest gold loan NBFC, saw its gold AUM rising 47 per cent to ₹13.2 lakh crore in the quarter ending September 2025, against ₹9 lakh crore in the same quarter last financial year.

Manappuram Finance saw its AUM rising 29 per cent to ₹31,505 crore (₹24,365 crore), while for IIFL Finance it surged over threefold to ₹34,577 crore.

'Tax collection has remained weak so far in FY26'

Press Trust of India
New Delhi

The Central government's tax collections have remained weak so far in FY26, with growth significantly lower than budgeted estimates, but the situation is expected to improve in the next financial year, according to a report by CareEdge Ratings.

TAX COLLECTIONS

The report noted that gross tax collections had grown by just 3.3 per cent year-on-year in the first eight months of FY26, much lower than the budgeted growth of 12.5 per cent.

This highlights the subdued performance of tax revenues in the current fiscal year so far.

RAY OF HOPE. The situation is expected to improve in FY27, according to a report by CareEdge Ratings

It stated: "Direct tax collections have lagged in the year so far, with growth in corporate and income tax collections being lower than the budgeted annual growth."

The report pointed out that the Budget had projected strong growth in both corporate tax and income tax; actual growth in April-November FY26 has remained lower. Corporate tax collections grew by 7.8 per cent compared to the budgeted growth of 9.7 per cent, while income tax collections rose by 6.8 per cent, far below the budgeted growth of 21.6 per cent.

However, the report added that both income tax and corporate tax collections had shown some improvement in recent months.

GST RATIONALISATION

Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections contracted 2 per cent during the period, weighed down by rationalisation in the GST structure implemented at the end of September.

Looking ahead, the report expects tax collections to improve in FY27.

Gross tax revenue is projected to rise to ₹43.5 lakh crore in FY27, registering a growth of 9.6 per cent. Net tax revenue is also expected to increase 9.6 per cent to ₹28.9 lakh crore.

The report mentioned that direct taxes are projected to grow 11 per cent, supported by a recovery in income tax and corporate tax collections.

Corporate tax is expected to grow 12 per cent, while income tax collections are projected to rise 10.2 per cent in FY27. Indirect taxes are also expected to recover, with growth of 8.2 per cent projected for FY27.

Construction equipment loan growth moderates on lower infrastructure spend

Piyush Shukla
Mumbai

Banks and non-banking finance companies (NBFCs) have registered a notable decline in construction equipment (CE) loan growth in Q3FY26, largely due to lack of spending by both State and Central governments on infrastructure development projects, senior industry members say.

Ashok Vaswani, MD & CEO, Kotak Mahindra Bank (KMB), said, "On the CE segment, definitely at the industry level we have seen quite a slowdown — a lot of this is because demand from State governments for CEs has moderated. We are hoping that this picks up and industry levels go up."

HOPES ON BUDGET

Umesh Revankar, Executive Vice-Chairman, Shriram Finance, said CE's share in the NBFCs' overall asset under management continued to decline in Q3. "There has been a slowdown in overall construction activity, especially in the infrastructure sector. The future demand will depend on the Union Budget; at least we will know what projects were executed in the last financial year and the plans for the next fiscal. Everything hinges on the Finance Minister's plans," he said.

Shriram Finance's CE loans stood at ₹14,219 crore in Q3, 20 per cent lower year-on-year (y-o-y) and 7 per cent quarter-on-quarter (q-o-q). Share of CEs in the NBFC's AUM reduced to 4.87 per cent in Q3 from 7.02 per cent a year ago. KMB's commercial vehicle and CE book rose just 2 per cent q-o-q to ₹44,517 crore. CE loans contributed to 2.3 per cent of Tata Capital's net AUM in Q3, lower than 2.5 per cent a quarter ago.

CE SALES SLOWDOWN

According to the Indian Construction Equipment Manufacturers' Association (ICEMA), in Q3FY26, total CE sales declined 9 per cent y-o-y, and in April-December 2025, overall industry volumes stood around 94,000 units, or a 5 per cent decline, driven by a 10 per cent contraction in domestic sales even as exports were up 28 per cent.

Deepak Shetty, President, ICEMA, and MD, CEO, JCB India, said the growth of the CE industry hinges on infrastructure development projects, which have experienced some headwinds.

"This was also a period of adjustment for customers after the CEV Stage V emission standards came into effect, which impacted the asset value of our products. However, we remain hopeful of demand coming back as infrastructure development has been a focus area for the government, particularly rural infrastructure, which is a key growth driver for our industry," said Shetty.

"Recent months have shown early signs of stabilisation, with December recording a 2 per cent month-on-month improvement in overall sales despite a y-o-y decline," he added.

Narendra G Kamath, COO, SME Finance, Tata Capital, noted that lending activity is likely to pick up meaningfully only as project awards pick up, execution improves and cash flows at the contractor level normalise. "From a lender's standpoint, we see this as a critical transition phase and remain optimistic about a recovery," he said.

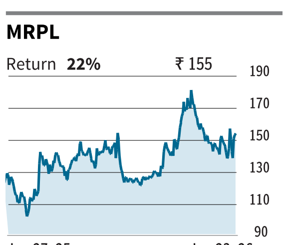
TODAY'S PICK.

MRPL (₹155.35): BUY

Akhil Nallamuthu
bl. research bureau

The stock of Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd (MRPL) has been gradually appreciating since March last year. However, after facing resistance at ₹180 in November, the price saw some moderation. Nevertheless, it has now found support at ₹138 where a rising trendline and the 50-day moving average coincides.

Even as the broader market has been facing notable selling pressure, the stock of MRPL has been able to stay steady and outperform key indices. We expect it to begin next leg of uptrend from the current level and reach ₹198 in the near future. So, buy the stock now at ₹155 with a stop-loss at ₹132. When the price rises to ₹175, trail the stop-loss to ₹158. On a rally to ₹185, alter the stop-loss to ₹178. Book profits at ₹198.



Note: The recommendations are based on technical analysis. There is a risk of loss in trading

Day trading guide

25080 » **Nifty 50 Futures**

S1	S2	R1	R2	COMMENT
25060	24970	25175	25250	Go short on a break below 25060 with a stop-loss at 25090

₹916 » **HDFC Bank**

S1	S2	R1	R2	COMMENT
909	902	922	927	Go short at 919 and 921. Keep the stop-loss at 924

₹1672 » **Infosys**

S1	S2	R1	R2	COMMENT
1660	1650	1680	1700	Go long only above 1680. Keep the stop-loss at 1675

₹323 » **ITC**

S1	S2	R1	R2	COMMENT
318	315	326	330	Go short now and at 325. Stop-loss can be kept at 327

₹246 » **ONGC**

S1	S2	R1	R2	COMMENT
244	242	247	250	Go long only above 247. Stop-loss can be placed at 246

₹1387 » **Reliance Ind.**

S1	S2	R1	R2	COMMENT
1370	1350	1400	1425	Wait for a rise. Go short at 1395 with a stop-loss at 1405

₹1028 » **SBI**

S1	S2	R1	R2	COMMENT
1020	1010	1040	1060	Go short only below 1020. Keep the stop-loss at 1025

₹3157 » **TCS**

S1	S2	R1	R2	COMMENT
3140	3080	3200	3230	Wait for dips. Go long at 3145. Keep the stop-loss at 3135

S1, S2: Support 1 & 2; R1, R2: Resistance 1 & 2.

Raise home loan interest deduction limit, restore tax commission: Naredco

Our Bureau
Hyderabad

The National Real Estate Development Council (Naredco) has appealed to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to increase the limit for interest deduction on home loans and to reinstate the Income Tax Settlement Commission.

"Limit of ₹2 lakh should be raised to ₹5 lakh or more for owner-occupied houses. Five-year period for acquisition/completion from the year of borrowing should be dispensed with," said Parveen Jain, President, Naredco. "Rationalising taxation, especially on housing finance, will stimulate end-user demand, boost a sector grappling with housing shortage, and offer relief to home-buyers impacted by project delays," he said in a statement on Monday.

Naredco also suggested the reinstatement of the Income Tax Settlement Commission.

The commission was established in 1976 to provide taxpayers a one-time opportunity to enter into a compromise and settlement arrangement with the Income Tax authority for relief from penalties and prosecution. It, however, was discontinued from February 1, 2021.

Naredco recommended that the rate of tax, including surcharge and cess, for all non-corporate entities should be brought down to 25 per cent. Further, tax rates for individuals should be reduced to a maximum of 30 per cent, including surcharge and cess.

Banking operations likely to be hit today as unions plan strike seeking 5-day work week

Press Trust of India
New Delhi

Banking operations of public sector banks are likely to take a hit on Tuesday with the United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU) deciding to go ahead with a nationwide strike on January 27 to press for the immediate implementation of a five-day work week.

The strike call by UFBU, an umbrella body of nine unions representing officers and employees, comes after a conciliation meeting on January 23 with the Chief Labour Commissioner failing to yield a positive outcome.

"Despite detailed discussions during the conciliation proceedings, there was no assurance on our demand. Hence, we have been compelled to proceed with the strike action," said CH Venkatachalam, General Secretary, All India Bank Employees Association (AIBEA), a constituent of UFBU.

NOT PART OF UNION. Operations of HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank and Axis Bank are expected to remain unaffected

'MAN-HOURS INTACT'

All India Bank Officers' Confederation (AIBOC) General Secretary Rupam Roy said the decision to declare all Saturdays as holidays was agreed to between the Indian Banks Association and UFBU during the wage revision settlement in 2024.

"There would be no loss of man-hours as we have agreed to work an extra 40 minutes daily from Monday to Friday," he said.

According to another UFBU constituent, National Confederation of Bank Employees (NCBE) General Secretary L Chandrasekhar said, "This movement is not against customers, but for a sustainable, humane and efficient banking system. A rested banker serves the nation better. A balanced workforce strengthens financial stability. Five-day banking is not a luxury; it is an economic and human necessity." Services such as cash deposits, withdrawals, cheque clearances and administrative work are expected to be hit at branches of public sector banks (PSBs), including State Bank of India (SBI), Punjab National Bank (PNB) and Bank of Baroda.

However, operations at major private sector lenders such as HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank and Axis Bank are expected to remain largely unaffected as their employees are not part of the unions that will be going on strike.

Digital banking services, including UPI and Internet banking, will continue to function, though ATM cash availability could face localised issues due to logistical delays.

California Burrito digs in to expand dine-in channel

Riding on popularity of its tacos, burritos and rice bowls, the restaurant chain is set to open 40-45 stores next year

Sindhu Hariharan
Chennai

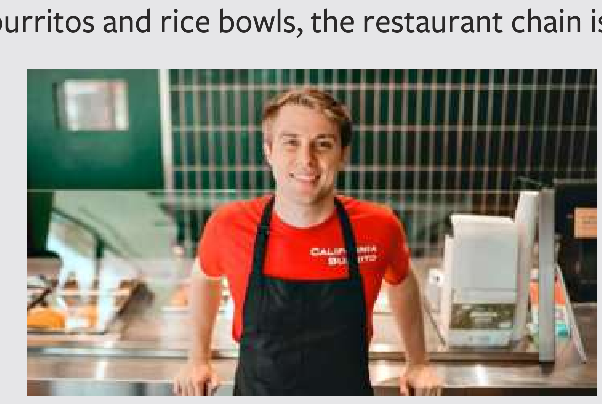
In the age of 10-minute delivery and cloud kitchens, Mexican quick service restaurant chain California Burrito wants to grow its dining footprint, and is focussing its marketing and expansion efforts on it.

Founder Bert Mueller, an American entrepreneur who came to India in 2012 to start the Mexican food chain, told *businessline* that they currently have a 60-40 delivery–dine-in ratio with the latter witnessing growth.

The restaurant chain, which has seen rising popularity for its tacos, burritos, rice bowls, nachos and other fresh offerings, recorded revenue of ₹338 crore in FY25, and is churning out healthy growth every year. This comes at a time when both domestic and global Mexican food peers have made inroads in the Indian market.

"It's a tough thing to get people to come and dine at your store, but we think that's a more defensible position to be in. As a growing brand, you don't want to neglect the dine-in piece," said the entrepreneur, who isn't worried about rising global and domestic competition in Mexican culinary offerings in India. "Our approach has fundamentally been that we want to grow our dine-in channel more. And so our marketing monies were shifted two years ago to focus really on dine-in," he added.

California Burrito currently has 128 stores across five cities — Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Delhi, Gurugram and Chennai — and



Bert Mueller, Founder, California Burrito

Mueller said they are set to open 40-45 stores next year and maybe 50 in the year after that.

"As an organisation, we're focused on city by city, brick by brick, and don't want to take it too wide and fast," he said.

Mueller spoke to *businessline* on the sidelines of the Better Call podcast hosted by MudhalVC in Chennai. Mueller left the US to come start a quaint Mexican food joint in India 14 years ago, and decided to stay back and build a business offering California-style Mexican food to India's changing demographic.

CAPITAL FOR STORES

On scaling up, Mueller said they are IPO-ready, but without the need to go all-out with store expansion, they do not have the need for capital. California Burrito has raised money from angel investors and companies such as Zoho, GoFrugal and Bengaluru-based SNAM Group. It also has VC firm Elevation Capital on its cap table by way of a secondary transaction.

"If you see restaurant success stories around the world, I think it's the nature of the business that there's a steady pace to it. It's not a rocket ship business," the entrepreneur said. The brand has been invited to open outlets globally, but Mueller said he has been resisting since lessons from doing business in India may not apply outside India.

As for his take on quick commerce, Mueller noted that India is uniquely suited to quick deliveries. "Fundamentally, people want opportunities in urban areas. And customers love it," he said. Within India, different cities have different characteristics, he said.

"Chennai has more dine-in, Delhi has more delivery. Chennai's love for California Burrito has been particularly surprising," he said.

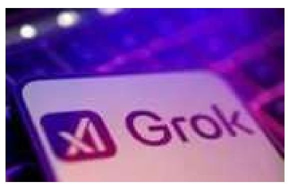
The South, overall, also leans more towards non-vegetarian menu options, he noted.

As an American entrepreneur in India, Mueller also weighed in on the recent trajectory of the India-US relations. "I think a lot of people got very unhappy about the tariffs imposed [by the US on India], but to me, all the stuff with the immigration and H-1Bs is more negative," he said.

"I'm sure Prime Minister [Narendra] Modi and President [Donald] Trump are going to come to great terms," he said.

QUICKLY.

EU to open investigation into X's AI chatbot Grok



Brussels: Elon Musk's Grok chatbot will be investigated on whether it disseminates illegal content, such as manipulated sexualised images, in the European Union in breach of the bloc's tech rules, said the European Commission on Monday, putting the company at risk of a hefty fine. REUTERS

Sun Pharma, Cipla recall products in US market

New Delhi: Drugmakers Sun Pharma and Cipla are recalling products in the US due to manufacturing-related issues, according to the US Food and Drug Administration. According to its latest Enforcement Report, the US-based arm of Sun Pharma is recalling over 26,000 bottles of a generic medication to treat dandruff and skin conditions, while a US-based arm of Cipla is recalling 15,221 syringes in the US. PTI

EU countries give final nod to ban Russian gas

Brussels: European Union countries on Monday gave their final approval to ban Russian gas imports by late 2027, making their vow to cut ties with their former top supplier legally binding, nearly four years after Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Ministers from the EU approved the law at a meeting in Brussels on Monday, although Slovakia and Hungary voted against it and Bulgaria abstained. Hungary said it would challenge the law at the European Court of Justice. REUTERS

'Canadian PM likely to visit India in March as trade deal takes centre stage'

THE AGENDA. Both nations eyeing deals on uranium, energy, minerals and AI, says Indian envoy to Canada

Reuters
Ottawa

Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney will likely visit India in the first week of March and sign deals on uranium, energy, minerals and artificial intelligence, said Dinesh Patnaik, India's High Commissioner to Canada.

Carney is making all-out efforts to diversify Canada's alliances beyond the US, its top trade partner. In Davos last week, he earned a rare standing ovation for saying the old rules-based order is over and called on middle powers, such as Canada, to build coalitions to shape a fairer, more resilient world.

His viral speech followed an agreement with China to slash tariffs on electric vehicles and canola and open up to C$7billion ($5.11 billion) in export markets as he attempts to double US exports over the next decade.

MENDING TIES

Carney is also resetting relations with India after his predecessor Justin Trudeau accused the Indian government of involvement in the killing of a Sikh separatist leader in 2023. India has denied those claims.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended the Group of 7 summit on Carney's invitation last year, and several of Carney's Ministers have travelled to India. "I have a feeling in the first week of March is what we are looking at," said High Commissioner Patnaik on Carney's visit during a weekend interview.

Carney's office declined to comment. Canada's Energy Minister Tim Hodgson is visiting India this week and said the timing of Carney's trip was not yet set.

"There are plans for the Prime Minister to visit at some point this year; it will depend on the progress we make," said Hodgson.

STRONG MESSAGE. Canadian PM Mark Carney is making all-out efforts to diversify Canada's alliances beyond the US REUTERS

STALLED TRADE TALKS

Formal negotiations for a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with India should also start in March, said Patnaik. The countries agreed to restart stalled trade talks in November. Carney will sign smaller agreements with the Indian government on nuclear energy, oil and gas, environment, AI and quantum computing, as well as deals on education and culture during his visit, said Patnaik.

A 10-year C$2.8 billion uranium supply deal is likely to be included. Hodgson did not confirm the deal, but said Canada is happy to sell uranium under the Canada-India nuclear cooperation agreement as long as India is prepared to abide by International Energy Agency safeguards.

"We know India is a major nuclear country with plans to grow its civilian use of nuclear energy," said Hodgson. "So that would be one of the topics I expect to discuss with my counterpart."

'Europe financing war against itself by buying Russian oil from India'

Press Trust of India
New York / Washington

The US imposed 25 per cent tariffs on India for buying Russian oil, but the Europeans signed a trade deal with New Delhi, said Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent as he emphasised that Europe is financing the war against itself by purchasing refined Russian oil products from India.

UKRAINE WAR

President Donald Trump has worked to negotiate a settlement on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, said Bessent, adding that the US has made much bigger sacrifices than the Europeans.

"We have put 25 per cent tariffs on India for buying Russian oil. Guess what happened last week? The Europeans signed a trade deal with India," Bessent told *ABC News*. "And just to be clear again, the Russian oil goes into India, the refined products come out, and the Europeans buy the refined products. They are financing the war against themselves," he said.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent

He added that under Trump's leadership, "we will eventually end" the Russia-Ukraine war.

The Trump administration has imposed 50 per cent tariffs on India, including 25 per cent for Delhi's purchase of Russian oil.

Winter storm freezes US travel, forces mass flight cancellations

IN A LIMBO. Equipment to remove snow seen near American Airlines planes at the LaGuardia Airport in the Queens borough of New York. A massive winter storm reached the US Atlantic Coast on Sunday, grounding thousands of flights at levels not seen since the pandemic BLOOMBERG

Reuters

A powerful winter storm sweeping across much of the US forced airlines to cancel thousands of flights and delay hundreds on Monday, as rain and heavy snowfall disrupted travel and snarled transportation networks.

About 3,800 flights were cancelled and over 1,000 were delayed as of early Monday, according to flight-tracking website FlightAware, following more than 11,000 cancellations reported on Sunday.

The number of cancellations and delays was expected to rise as the day progressed.

Low pressure south of New England is expected to move east over the Atlantic on Monday, bringing heavy snow to parts of the north-east and freezing rain across sections of the Mid-Atlantic, said the US National Weather Service.

Snow is also expected along the Appalachian region, while rain will spread along the south-east coast as a cold front moves offshore, said the agency.

American Airlines accounted for the largest share of disruptions on Monday, with over 600 flights cancelled and about 135 delayed, followed by Republic Airways, JetBlue Airways and Delta Air Lines.

The disruptions also left thousands of travel plans in limbo. Passengers inundated carriers with queries on social media platforms such as X to seek clarity on flight schedules.

MAJOR HUBS HIT

The Federal Aviation Administration said in an advisory that weather-related constraints, including snow, freezing rain and low visibility, were affecting major hubs such as Boston and the New York-area airspace.

The agency said ground stops and delay programmes could be imposed through the afternoon at airports, including LaGuardia, John F Kennedy International, Philadelphia International, Newark Liberty International and Washington Dulles International if the conditions worsen. Major US carriers rolled out sweeping travel waivers and flexible re-booking options to assist passengers whose travel plans were disrupted by the cancellations.

Airline operations are highly interconnected, meaning cancellations can leave aircraft and crews out of position, complicating efforts to restore normal flight schedules.

International operations were also affected by the extreme weather. Dutch carrier KLM said some of its US-bound flights were disrupted over the weekend, but added that all services to the country were expected to operate normally on Monday.

Bangladeshi committee says Adani power deal overpriced, flags procedural anomalies

Reuters
Dhaka / Singapore

An Adani Power coal-fired plant that exports electricity passes on Indian corporate taxes to Bangladesh and charges more than market rates, according to a recent report from a government-appointed committee.

Adani's Godda plant in Jharkhand priced power at a 39.7 per cent premium over its nearest private sector competitor and had the steepest cost escalation among electricity import arrangements from India, said the National Review Committee (NRC) in a report dated January 20.

FLAWS DETECTED

Reuters reviewed the report, which is yet to be made public. The NRC said the price divergence was an "outcome of specific contractual choices," adding that it had found evidence of "serious anomalies in the procedures through which the contract was awarded".

The price being paid is roughly 50% higher than what it should be, said the National Review Committee report

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

"We urge Bangladesh government to liquidate our dues at the earliest as this is impacting our operations," said the company in a statement.

'REVIEW CONTRACTS'

The report called for electricity contracts to be reviewed to identify opportunities for "renegotiation of the most fiscally damaging provisions". It also said the Adani plant, which supplies more than 10 per cent of Bangladesh's power, used "excessively priced" coal and billed Indian corporate taxes to Bangladesh.

"The price being paid is roughly 50 per cent higher than what it should be," said the NRC, calling it the "most significant statistical outlier" in Bangladesh's cross-border electricity procurement portfolio.

"Standard international practice usually requires independent power plants to bear their own corporate taxes in their home jurisdiction," said the NRC report. "The Adani power purchase agreement deviates by including Indian corporate tax components in the tariff charged to Bangladesh."

China to open nickel, lithium futures to foreign investors

Bloomberg

China will allow overseas investors to invest in domestic nickel and lithium futures, part of Beijing's efforts to boost its influence in the global commodities markets.

Nickel and lithium carbonate are among 14 futures and options products that will be opened up, the China Securities Regulatory Commission said. Exchanges would be urged to make preparations to implement the changes, it said, without providing any start dates.

LARGEST BUYER

China is the world's largest buyer of raw materials, but benchmark prices are mainly set in financial centres such as London, Singapore and New York.

Beijing wants more sway over prices, and the move also dovetails with its goal of burnishing the yuan's appeal as a global currency. Nickel futures are traded on the Shanghai Futures Exchange and lithium carbonate on the Guangzhou Futures Exchange.

They are are among the most-active domestic commodities contracts and are of critical global importance, given their importance for batteries and the energy transition.

'SIGNIFICANT MOVE'

"It's a significant move," said Tiger Shi, a managing partner at brokerage BANDS Financial.

It's likely that other metals such as copper, aluminium and zinc will also become available to foreign investors due to the SHFE's global push, he said.

The Shanghai exchange unveiled an internationalisation plan last May, which included a proposal to allow overseas investors to post foreign exchange as collateral for yuan-denominated trades.

Blackstone to hire more in Asia to tap private market demand

Bloomberg

Blackstone Inc is planning to hire more people across Asia to tap growing opportunities in private markets, said Ed Huang, the firm's head of Asia Pacific private wealth.

The alternative asset manager sees huge potential from bringing private markets to individual investors, who are looking for alternatives to the conventional portfolio of stocks and bonds, said Huang on Monday.

"We've roughly doubled our team size over the last two years," said Huang. "We're certainly continuing to grow our business. We want to expand in Japan. We've added people on the ground in Australia. We're putting people on the ground in Korea. We're looking to continue to scale up our team to meet the opportunity."

Investment managers are increasingly eager to capture money flows from high net-worth individuals, in large part because these investors still have negligible exposure to private equity and private credit.

While institutions allocate roughly 30 per cent of their capital to private market products, individual investors commit only around 3 per cent, said Huang.

GLOBAL RIVALS

Blackstone has been ramping up its presence in Asia, part of a broader push by global rivals, including Bain Capital and KKR & Co. These firms have occasionally competed over the same deals; all three joined a recent bidding race for Japanese personal-care group FineToday Holdings Co, although Blackstone and KKR ultimately backed away.

Among key investment themes, the US manager continues to bet on major themes, including AI, energy and life sciences.

QUICKLY.

Palm oil gains on stronger rival edible oils

Jakarta: Malaysian palm oil futures ended higher on Monday, underpinned by stronger rival edible oils and crude oil, while favourable data on exports also lent support to the market. The benchmark palm oil contract for April delivery on the Bursa Malaysia Derivatives Exchange gained 49 ringgit to 4,224 ringgit ($1,065.86) a tonne at the close. REUTERS

Copper climbs to highest in more than a week

London: Copper prices rose to their highest in more than a week on Monday as attention returned to expectations of strong demand and supply disruptions while tin prices dropped after touching record highs on position limits imposed by China. Tin on the LME traded 2.5 per cent down at $55,350 a tonne in official rings after hitting a record $57,515. Copper was up 1 per cent at $13,245 a tonne after touching $13,260 for its highest since January 14. REUTERS

Crude oil rises as harsh winter disrupts US output

London: Crude oil prices edged higher on Monday after climbing more than 2 per cent in the previous session, as output disruptions in major US crude-producing regions and tensions between the US and Iran boosted prices. Brent crude futures rose 23 cents to $66.11 a barrel at 0905 GMT. REUTERS

Higher area, conducive weather may lift mustard output by 10%

GREAT LEAP. The area under the oilseed has increased in major growing States such as Rajasthan, MP and UP

Prabhudatta Mishra
New Delhi

After sliding more than 4 per cent last year, mustard production may exceed by at least 10 per cent in 2025-26 due to increased area as well as conducive weather so far.

However, latest prediction of rain and hailstorms over the North-West region in the next few days may be a concern due to the possibility of crop damage.

Mustard acreage this year is higher by 3.2 per cent at 89.36 lakh hectares (lh) against 86.57 lh in 2024-25. The production was 126.67 lakh tonnes (lt) last year, and the government has set a target of 139 lt during 2025-26.

Isolated hailstorm activity is likely over Jammu and Kashmir on January 26-27, and over Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, west Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan on January 27 due to a western disturbance, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said in a statement on Monday.

NO REPORT OF FROST

"Scattered to fairly widespread light to moderate rainfall with thunderstorms, lightning and gusty winds speed reaching 40-50 kmph gusting to 60 kmph are likely over Punjab and Haryana on January 27; thunderstorms, lightning and gusty winds with speed reaching 30-40 kmph gusting to 50 kmph over west Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan are likely on January 27 and over east Uttar Pradesh on January 27-28," the IMD said in its forecast for the mustard-growing regions.

"The production looks good as the crop is in very good conditions in all places.

Acreage on the rise (in lakh hectares)

	2025	2026	Growth %
Rajasthan	34.93	35.35	1.2
Uttar Pradesh	16.34	16.99	4.0
Madhya Pradesh	8.38	11.79	40.7
Haryana	6.68	6.72	0.6
West Bengal	6.37	6.07	-4.8
Jharkhand	4.58	3.52	-23.1
Assam	3.07	2.88	-6.3
Gujarat	2.58	2.78	7.7
Bihar	0.89	1.02	14.6
Others	2.75	2.25	-18.2
All India	**86.57**	**89.36**	**3.2**

Source: Govt of India

There was no report of frost, which is good for the yield," said PK Rai, former Director of the Bharatpur-based Indian Institute of Rapeseed-Mustard Research.

Rai, who is currently Director of the National Institute of Biotic Stress Management (NIBSM), said that he plans to increase the area under mustard in Chhattisgarh to about 1 lakh hectare from the current about 30,000 hectare.

AREA UP 3 TIMES IN UP

An analysis of mustard acreage this year showed that in traditional Rajasthan, it has increased by 1 per cent to 35.35 lh, in Madhya Pradesh by 41 per cent to 11.79 lh and in Uttar Pradesh by 4 per cent to 16.99 lh.

The area in Rajasthan is still below the record 39.37 lh of 2022-23, but the area in Uttar Pradesh has shown an impressive gain of nearly three times from 5.93 lh in 2015-16.

Rai attributed it to major work in east Uttar Pradesh, where a programme was run in association with the Banaras Hindu University for the expansion of area.

However, the slide in mustard acreage in the North-East, Assam, in particular, and Jharkhand may cause concerns for the government when the edible oil mission is in its third season.

Experts attribute the decline in mustard area in Jharkhand to rain in November which is the main sowing window, planting beyond which could put the crop at risk of higher temperature and pest attack.

'BIS norms to weed out mis-selling in lab-grown diamond market'

Avinash Nair
Ahmedabad

In Ayodhya, far from India's traditional diamond hubs, shoppers are buying lab-grown diamonds without hesitation — a trend Surat-based Greenlab Diamonds says reflects rising consumer awareness, just as the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) rolls out mandatory disclosure norms to bring clarity and trust to the fast-evolving market.

For Greenlab, the impact is already visible on the ground: A six-month-old store in the temple town is clocking ₹30–40 lakh in monthly sales, showing how lab-grown diamonds are finding eager buyers beyond India's metros. Industry players said the BIS notification is set to significantly enhance transparency and build consumer trust, especially as lab-grown stones — priced nearly 90 per cent lower than natural diamonds — gain wider acceptance.

"People are coming in to buy diamonds in small cities, and we no longer need to explain to them what a lab-grown diamond is," Sanket Patel, Director (R&D and Marketing), Greenlab Diamonds, told *businessline*.

FACED HEADWINDS

The BIS' new diamond disclosure standard requires jewellers and retailers to clearly distinguish laboratory-grown diamonds from natural diamonds at every stage of sale. Under the rules, only natural stones can be referred to as "diamonds," while lab-grown stones must be disclosed using the full terms "laboratory-grown diamond" or "laboratory-created diamond," along with details of the production method such as chemical vapour deposition (CVD) or high pressure high temperature (HPHT).

Industry experts also pointed out that both natural and laboratory-grown diamonds faced headwinds this year amid a global slowdown.

Per provisional data from the Gems & Jewellery Export Promotion Council, exports of cut and polished natural diamonds fell 7.8 per cent y-o-y during April–December 2025 and of polished laboratory-grown diamonds declined 10.3 per cent.

Surat-based Gautam Kanani, who runs online platform Pure Light Diamond, said the BIS notification would go a long way in creating awareness among consumers and weeding out players who used to mis-sell laboratory grown diamonds as natural diamonds.

Similar sentiments were expressed by N Anantha Padmanabhan, Managing Director of Chennai-based NAC Jewellers. "It will help increase the sales of diamonds," he said.

Parag Shah, CEO of KISNA Diamond and Gold Jewellery, the flagship natural diamond and jewellery brand of Hari Krishna Group said, "The BIS guideline brings much-needed clarity to how diamonds are represented in the market and in their marketing as well. Transparent disclosure ensures consumers know exactly what they are buying, protects trust at the point of purchase, and allows both categories to grow on honest and well-defined terms."

(*With inputs from Subramani Ra Mancombu in Chennai*)

Chilli prices get spicier as area and yields fall

KV Kurmanath
Hyderabad

A decline in the chilli area, coupled with thrips attacks and wilt, and an increase in demand in international markets led to a sharp rise in prices at the Warangal and Khammam agricultural market yards. Produce from cold chains was also being lifted by traders amid short supply and higher demand.

After touching ₹22,000 a quintal last week, prices are now ruling in the range of ₹15,000-18,500 at the *mandis*, the highest level in three years. "Though it peaked a few days ago at about ₹22,000, chilli prices are around ₹15,000 even though the higher range is going up to ₹18,500," B Rambabu, a farmer from Khammam, told *businessline*.

EXCESS MOISTURE

He attributed the increase to a significant decline in the area from about 1.25 lakh acres about 5 years ago to about 30,000 acres.

The market intelligence unit of Prof Jayashankar Telangana Agricultural University sees a "mixed sentiment" in the red chilli market during the last week of December due to quality concerns in new crop arrivals. "Early arrivals from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana were affected by excess moisture and rain damage, leading to cautious buying. As a result, overall trade activity remained subdued," the outlook report for January 2026 said.

HOT SPOT. As against production of 6.62 lt last year, this year's output is expected to be down at 5.39 lt

"In the near term, the market is likely to remain range-bound, with only gradual recovery expected. We expect chilli to trade in a price range of ₹13,500–₹15,500 per quintal in January 2026," it said.

Telangana Rythu Sangham leader S Malla Reddy said the crop might reach 4 lakh tonnes this year, as against the average annual production of 6.5 lakh tonnes.

Andhra Pradesh Agriculture Minister Kinjarapu Atchannaidu recently said the price situation looked optimistic due to strong demand. The acreage in the State too witnessed a sharp decline. From 1.96 lakh acres last year, the area fell to 1.06 lakh acres. As against production of 6.62 lakh tonnes last year, this year's production is expected to be around 5.39 lakh tonnes.

Sharp price hike fails to lift Kashmir's saffron farmers hit by output slump

Gulzar Bhat
Srinagar

Saffron prices in Kashmir have nearly doubled this season, but lower output has offset any gains for farmers, growers and industry representatives said.

Farmers said 10 g of GI-tagged Kashmiri saffron is selling around ₹4,000 this year, reflecting a significant rise in market prices. However, the benefit of higher prices has been largely neutralised by a steep fall in production.

"Prices are high, but production has collapsed," Abdul Majeed Wani, President of the All Jammu and Kashmir Saffron Growers' Association, told *businessline*.

DEEP DIP. Production fell from about 8 tonnes in 2010–11 to 2.6 tonnes in 2023–24

Wani said saffron production fell by about 75 per cent last year, dropping from nearly 15 tonnes decades ago to around one tonne in the most recent season.

CLIMATIC PATTERNS

Growers attributed the decline largely to changing climatic patterns, particularly prolonged dry spells during winter, which has disrupted the crop's growth cycle. "Due to the prolonged dry spell last winter, the corms failed to develop properly as the soil lacked moisture," Wani said.

Official data underlines the long-term decline in saffron output in Jammu and Kashmir. Production fell from about 8 tonnes in 2010–11 to 2.6 tonnes in 2023–24, marking an overall decline of nearly 67.5 per cent. The data, however, show a marginal recovery in the latest season, with production rising by about 4 per cent from 2022–23 to 2023–24.

Despite the slight improvement, growers said output remains far below historical levels and is insufficient to compensate for rising input costs and shrinking cultivation areas.

Industry stakeholders warned that unless irrigation infrastructure is strengthened and climate-resilient farming practices are adopted, Kashmir's saffron sector could face further decline.

Don't let WHO decide on curbing areca until India completes its study: Campco tells govt

AJ Vinayak
Mangaluru

The Central Arecanut and Cocoa Marketing and Processing Cooperative (Campco) Ltd has urged the Centre not to allow international agencies such as the World Health Organisation (WHO) to decide or recommend restrictions on arecanut until India's scientific research in this regard is completed.

This follows the classification of arecanut as carcinogenic by the WHO-IARC (International Agency for Research on Cancer).

SR Satishchandra, President of Campco, who has written letters to various Ministries, including Health and Agriculture, said WHO's move had caused serious distress among farmers and had far-reaching socio-economic implications.

SR Satishchandra, President of Campco

"This classification, as widely noted, is largely derived from studies examining chewing preparations, such as betel quid, gutkha, and paan masala, which include tobacco and other additives, rather than arecanut in its natural or traditional form," he said.

Highlighting the apparent inconsistency in the current IARC classification, he said arecanut is placed under Group 1 ('carcinogenic to humans') while arecoline, one of the principal constituents of arecanut, is classified under Group 2B ('possibly carcinogenic to humans').

"Such contradictions underscore the need for further rigorous, India-specific scientific scrutiny before arriving at any policy-level conclusions," he said.

INDIAN STUDY

Mentioning that the Centre had initiated a national-level research programme on arecanut, involving 11 reputed agencies and institutions of national importance to examine its health effects, he said this research programme is expected to take at least another 18 months to reach definitive conclusions. The ICAR is leading this research.

He requested the government to engage with the WHO-IARC to ensure that no policy recommendation regarding arecanut is drawn until the ongoing research is completed. He also sought the Central government's help to engage with WHO-IARC and recommend to it to reconsider for reclassification arecanut from Group 1 to Group 2, at least as an interim measure, until the completion of the government-led research programme.

Agri-business sector calls for empowerment of farmers in Budget

Our Bureau
Mangaluru

Representatives from India's agri-business sector have stressed the need to focus on policies that empower farmers, improve market efficiency and support climate-resilient agricultural growth in the forthcoming Union budget.

Arun Raste, MD & CEO of NCDEX, said higher allocations for agricultural R&D, particularly for high-yield, climate-resilient seeds, are critical to improve productivity amid climate risks.

MIDWAY POINT

He said strengthening rural entrepreneurship through targeted skill-building initiatives will help arrest rural migration and provide gainful employment to rural youth by integrating them into industrial and agri-value chains, while investments in WDRA-notified warehousing will further support a transparent and efficient agri-market ecosystem.

Simon Wiebusch, Country Divisional Head, Crop Science Division of Bayer in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, said, "At Bayer, we believe that the sector needs stronger income and credit support for farmers, predictable trade policies, and sustained investment in agri-logistics, value addition, and post-harvest infrastructure to create scalable impact. Equally critical is accelerating innovation in seeds, crop protection, and digital, climate-smart farming to drive productivity and resilience."

Haresh Karamchandani, MD and Group CEO, HyFun Foods said measures such as PLI schemes for large-scale processors, export-oriented incentives, investments in cold chain infrastructure, and support for backward integration can strengthen supply chains from farm to factory.

Rohit Mehrotra, Co-Founder of Organic Tattva, said: "We expect focused policy support for organic farmers through improved access to subsidies, certification support, and easier credit facilities. Investments in soil health, natural farming practices, and climate-resilient agriculture will not only empower farmers but also ensure long-term food security for the nation."

Sparsh Sachar, Director and Business Head, FMCG, Nutrica, said the Budget 2026 has a real opportunity to tackle one of India's most persistent food vulnerabilities, its dependence on imported edible oils.

Sanjay Kumar, CEO & MD, Rassense Pvt Ltd said the lack of input tax credit has made it difficult to squeeze margins of formalised players who presently take about 45-50 per cent of the market and access to institutional funds has also been restricted.

Gold hits record above $5,100 on safe-haven rush

Reuters

Gold prices marched to record levels above $5,100 on Monday as investors sought a safe haven away from international political tensions, and silver and platinum also scaled all-time highs.

Spot gold was up 2 per cent at $5,079.66 an ounce by 8.15 am ET (1315 GMT) after hitting a record $5,110.50. US gold futures for February delivery gained 2 per cent to $5,078.50.

WEAK DOLLAR

Prices were also supported by the weakness of the dollar, which lingered near a multi-month low, making dollar-priced assets more affordable for holders of other currencies.

For precious metals this year, the major drivers are going to be "Trump and Trump," said Adrian Ash, Head of Research at online marketplace BullionVault.

"A wave of new first-time investing is driving this move in precious metals. It's led by private investors across Asia and Europe, rushing to build their personal holdings of gold and silver," he added.

In the latest geopolitical flare-up, Donald Trump said on Saturday he would impose a 100 per cent tariff on Canada if it follows through on a trade deal with China.

Spot platinum was up by 2.8 per cent to $2,844.29 an ounce after touching a record $2,918.80 while spot palladium climbed by 4.5 per cent to $2,099.50 after registering a more than three-year high earlier.

NBFC Moneyboxx comes up with muzzle tech to identify cattle uniquely

Subramani Ra Mancombu
Chennai

NSE-listed Moneyboxx Financial Ltd, a non-banking finance company (NBFC), has developed an in-house muzzle technology to identify each head of cattle uniquely. The NBFC is also carrying out a pilot project to speed up the process of issuing loans within 15 minutes, according to Deepak Aggarwal, the NBFC's Co-founder and Co-CEO.

"We are the second company to successfully develop this app with an AI model. We have 6 lakh cattle in our own portfolio," Aggarwal said. Moneyboxx supports financial inclusion with tailor-made loans to micro and small enterprises.

The unique identification of cattle is a significant development. Through this, it would be easy to identify the breed of the cattle and its lactating cycle. This will also help insurance companies, particularly in terms of innovation.

DATABASE TO AID

Until now, ear tags were being used as an identifier for cattle, but insurance companies faced problems, as some of the owners used to cut off the ear of the bovine that died.

The technology has been developed over the past one-and-a-half years, and with Moneyboxx having a database of six lakh cattle, machine learning is also being used to identify animals, their age and other features.

"On the technology side, we have developed multiple models. We are building our own LOS (loan origination software), which will be live by April," said Aggarwal.

HOW IT WORKS

This is how the technology works. The NBFC's staff have an app on their mobile phones with which they take a photo of the cattle's muzzle and another on the side. This will reveal the unique feature of the animal.

When a loan is given against it, the unique id created through the app will be tagged to the borrower.

The staff takes a photo of the cattle again after a day or two, and if there is any difference, it will show up. The breed of the cattle can also be identified through their body structure.

"Our AI model is learning to identify the age of the cattle as well. So, we will know if a cow or buffalo is in its fourth lactation cycle or fifth lactation cycle. So, it's a better assessment of risk there," said Aggarwal.

The unique identification can be used by insurance companies, who can make use of it even when the cattle is sold to another person. "This unique ecosystem can help avoid any fraud either in the loan or insurance process," he said.

QUICKLY.

HFCL deploys indigenous routers for BharatNet

New Delhi: Domestic telecom gear maker HFCL has started largescale deployment of indigenously designed and manufactured network routers in collaboration with ITI for the BharatNet project. The company has bagged orders for deploying over 80,000 network routers under the government's rural broadband project BharatNet. India's network router market is currently dominated by US companies after Chinese gear was restricted by the government. PTI

Premier Energies opens solar cell plant in Telangana

New Delhi: Clean energy firm Premier Energies has commissioned a 400 MW solar cell manufacturing facility in Telangana as part of its ₹11,000-crore expansion plan, the company said. It is aiming to more than double its annual solar cell and module manufacturing capacities to 10.6 GW and 11.1 GW respectively to cater to domestic demand, a company official said. PTI

Battery incentive scheme a non-starter as India's cell manufacturing push falters

NO RAMP UP. Only 2.8% of capacity commissioned in Advanced Chemistry Cell PLI as investments and job creation lag targets

Rishi Ranjan Kala
New Delhi

Over four years since its launch, India's Advanced Chemistry Cell production linked incentive (ACC PLI) scheme is struggling to gain momentum.

A mere 2.8 per cent of the targeted capacity has been added so far, attracting only about one-fourth of the targeted investments.

In October 2021, the Ministry of Heavy Industries (MHI) launched the ACC PLI scheme to catalyse domestic cell manufacturing with an outlay of ₹18,100 crore ($2.08 billion).

It aimed to attract large players by mandating a minimum investment of ₹1,125 crore ($129.3 million).

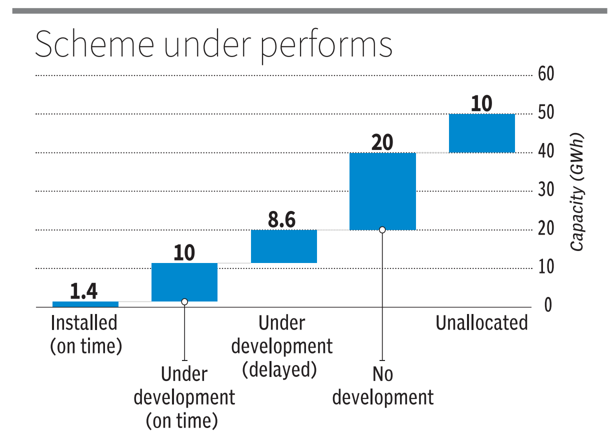
In a joint report, JMK Research and the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA) noted that despite strong industry interest, India's ACC PLI scheme is yet to translate policy ambition into realised capacity.

As of October 2025, only 2.8 per cent, or 1.4 Gigawatt-hour (GWh), of the targeted 50 GWh capacity has been commissioned within the timeline, and this is entirely by Ola Electric.

Reliance New Energy (Reliance) and Rajesh Exports are yet to commence operations.

Another 8.6 GWh is under development but delayed, and there has been no progress on the remaining 20 GWh.

Against an estimated 1.03 million jobs, the scheme has generated only 1,118, or 0.12 per cent. Similarly, investments of around ₹2.870 crore ($330 million) account for just 25.58 per cent of the targeted investment.



Source: News articles, JMK Research As of October 2025

ACC PLI AUCTIONS

Initially, the government allocated the entire 50 GWh capacity in the first auction in March 2022 and conducted a second auction after Hyundai Global Motors (HGM) withdrew its 20 GWh allocation.

In the second round (September 2024), bidders secured only 10 GWh, leaving the remaining 10 GWh capacity unallocated. The MHI plans to tender this unallocated capacity separately at a later date.

Excluding HGM, only three companies secured allocations across the two auctions: Ola Electric (20 GWh), Reliance (15 GWh) and Rajesh Exports (5 GWh).

In the second auction round, Reliance, the sole beneficiary, is advancing development of its allocated 10 GWh capacity and has indicated plans to commission the facility ahead of schedule by February 2027.

CAPITAL INTENSIVE

Given India's lack of domestic cell manufacturing capability, the scheme's emphasis on largescale capacity with a minimum bid size of 5 GWh represented an ambitious target.

The high net-worth requirement, a minimum of ₹225 crore per GWh, further restricted participation to large corporates.

Of the 40 GWh allocated so far under the ACC PLI, Ola Electric plans to commission 5 GWh by March 2026 with a budgeted capital cost of around ₹450 crore ($51.72 million) per GWh. However, Ola's decision to limit its capacity until FY29 significantly dilutes the scheme's commitments.

Reliance is developing its battery manufacturing facility as part of the Dhirubhai Ambani Green Energy Giga Complex, but expects to start full commercial cell production by FY27.

Despite Chinese firm Xiamen Hithium Energy Storage Technology withdrawing from the proposed partnership for the development and licensing of lithium cell technology, Reliance has clarified that there will be no change in its implementation plans.

Rajesh Exports' complete lack of progress and absence of public updates raise concerns over its ability to commission the capacity anytime soon.

It signed a tripartite agreement with MHI and Karnataka's Department of Industries and Commerce in January 2023, and also created a subsidiary for its cell manufacturing business.

Elevator industry seeks unified norms to drive growth, safety

Our Bureau
Mumbai

India's elevators and escalators sector has called for a unified 'One Nation, One Lift Law' to improve safety, simplify regulations and enable sustainable growth.

Industry leaders, policy-makers, regulators and global technology providers will deliberate on a national framework and the future of vertical mobility at the 'Smart Lift and Mobility World 2026' expo scheduled to be held on February 5.

POLICY IMPERATIVE

With annual elevator sales nearing one lakh units, the need for a national framework has become critical. However, fragmented State laws create compliance inefficiencies.

Amit Gossain, MD, Kone Elevators, said the harmonisation of lift rules into a single national code will ensure uniform safety standards and faster adoption of new technologies.

Recent case puts the spotlight back on combination drugs

PT Jyothi Datta
Mumbai

A recent Delhi High Court directive restoring a ban on two diabetes fixed dose combination (FDC) drugs has put the spotlight back on FDCs and pioglitazone — a drug with a troubled legacy, say doctors.

Less than a fortnight ago, the Delhi HC restored a ban that had been previously set aside by a single judge — on two FDC drugs for diabetes that included pioglitazone.

The latest directive upheld the regulatory framework enabling timely intervention "in the interest of public health".

The move has public health circles abuzz, and a caveat has since been filed in the Supreme Court on the matter, said S Srinivasan, with the All India Drug Action Network (Aidan) — the appellants in the case.

The respondents were Micro Labs, Intas Pharmaceuticals, Lupin and Eris Lifesciences, who were writ petitioners before the single judge who lifted the ban.

UNDERLYING FACTOR

FDCs involve two or more drugs combined in fixed doses to ostensibly deliver benefits and convenience, according to drug-makers selling such drugs.

While they may have been beneficial in treating HIV or tuberculosis, for example, the marketplace witnessed FDCs that combined sometimes seven drugs, leading to public health practitioners cautioning that these products were driven by commerce, not science.

After much discussion, in 2016, the Centre banned 344 FDCs.

The issue further went through expert committees and legal cases.

It is against this backdrop that the Delhi HC's latest directive is being received by medical practitioners and public health workers.

The judgment is in the "interest of rationality of products in this country", said Srinivasan, also a Co-founder of Locost (a maker of less expensive medicines). And the use of pioglitazone in the FDC is an additional red-flag, said doctors, given its backstory.

businessline reached out to the companies in the case; a response is awaited.

PIO'S POTENTIAL RISK

Anurag Bhargava, Professor (Department of Medicine) with Mangaluru's Kasturba Medical College, said the concern with pioglitazone is that it is inappropriate in people who are likely to develop heart problems, "as it can cause or worsen heart failure, it is associated with decrease in bone density and higher risk of fractures, and a potential risk of bladder cancer from chronic use".

There is no outright ban on it, but in the US, it is sold with a black-box warning to prescribers and used with caution in select patients only, he said, adding that it was better to use pioglitazone as a separate drug with monitoring.

"Often physicians may not be aware of the dose and constituent medicines in dual or triple drug FDCs, which also have the disadvantage of not allowing individualisation of drug doses," said Bhargava.

M.P. govt to sign pacts for 4,000 MW thermal power

Press Trust of India
Bhopal

The Madhya Pradesh government will ink three agreements on Tuesday for the production of 4,000 MW of thermal power.

The MP Power Management Company Ltd has completed the bidding process on a DBFOO (design, build, finance, own and operate) basis for the new thermal power plants, Additional Chief Secretary to the Chief Minister and the Energy Department, Neeraj Mandloi, told *PTI*.

"Three developers have been selected for a capacity of 3,200 MW under the tender and an additional 800 MW capacity has been allocated under the greenshoe option," he added.

"These projects are expected to bring in direct investment of around ₹60,000 crore and create 3,000 direct and 5,000 indirect employments," said Energy Minister Pradyumn Singh Tomar.

Hindustan Thermal Projects Ltd has been allocated 800 MW, Torrent Power Ltd 1,600 MW and Adani Power Ltd 800 MW, with an additional 800 MW under the greenshoe option, he said.

AI reshapes IT salaries and job security: Experts

Vallari Sanzgiri
Mumbai

Employees equipped with new-age AI skills are commanding 20-40 per cent higher salary than those engaged in traditional roles in the IT sector, according to hiring firms.

On average, leaders with AI skills enjoy a premium of about 30-35 per cent, while entry-level talent receives a much lower premium of around 8-10 per cent. This premium also depends on the level and industry that is hiring, per TeamLease Digital.

PAY DIVIDE

"For most roles, the pay differential between the niche roles and traditional ones is close to 25 per cent. However, there are some new roles such as LLM and Gen AI Engineers, Platform Engineers and Risk Leads that pay above 40 per cent higher salaries than conventional roles," said Neeti Sharma, CEO, TeamLease Digital.

WAGE LEAP. Gen AI engineering and ML operation roles set new salary benchmarks, with senior professionals earning ₹60 lakh per annum and annual growth exceeding 18% in GCCs

This pay divide is all the more apparent in global capability centres (GCCs), product firms and global consulting setups, where recruiters look for both governance skills and domain expertise.

Meanwhile, most traditional engineering, analytics and delivery roles are seeing modest single-digit growth, with compensation remaining within standard bands.

"Demand and compensation are rising sharply at the top end for AI architects, agent managers and AI-native leaders. Routine cognitive roles are facing increasing pricing pressure and risk of commoditisation," Ganesh S Padmanabhan, VP-Recruitment Business at CIEL HR, told *businessline*, adding that roles combining technical depth with responsibility for major AI projects enjoy the sharpest premiums. These include AI/ Agent Architects, Agentic AI Engineers, AI Governance & Risk Specialists, Responsible AI Leads and AI Product Managers, among others.

NEW BENCHMARKS

Generative AI Engineering and Machine Learning Operation roles set new salary benchmarks, with senior professionals earning ₹58-60 lakh per annum (LPA) and annual growth exceeding 18 per cent in GCCs, per an earlier report by TeamLease.

Salaries for senior-level Generative AI roles are expected to reach ₹33.5 LPA in FY27 from ₹28 LPA in FY25 in IT Product and services.

LOCATION DIFFERENCE

Location also becomes a huge differentiator as metro cities report senior professionals in AI and Cybersecurity to command ₹45 to ₹48 LPA while tier-1 cities report 20-30 per cent lower salaries for the same roles. Tier-2 cities report 30-40 per cent lower salaries than metros.

UP leads AI skilling drive, Maharashtra follows closely

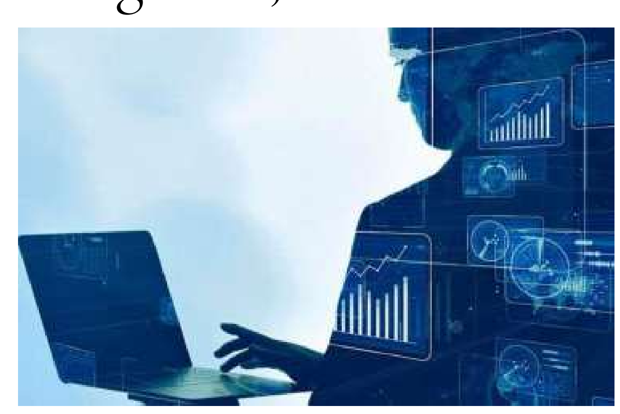
S Ronendra Singh
New Delhi

Uttar Pradesh has emerged as the leading State in the Skilling for AI Readiness (SOAR) programme under the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), with 34,830 enrolments, highlighting rising youth engagement in artificial intelligence (AI) and digital skills.

Maharashtra follows with 27,009 learners, while Andhra Pradesh has registered 17,734 enrolments, pointing to the broad-based adoption of AI learning across regions.

AI EDUCATION

A total of 2.11 lakh learners nationwide have signed up so far, reflecting the government's focused push to democratise access to AI education and equip citizens with emerging digital skills, the MSDE said. The programme is being delivered in partnership with



NEXT GEN. Young learners in the 21–30 age group form the largest cohort, followed by those below 20 years

leading digital learning organisations, including Microsoft Corporation India, which has supported training over 1 lakhlearners, followed by HCLTech with 80,871 enrolments and Nasscom with 29,685, it said.

YOUTH FORCE

Young learners in the 21–30 age group form the largest cohort, followed by those below 20 years, it said, adding that women account for 28.53 per cent of total enrolments, translating to 60,200 learners. Currently, SOAR offers 12 online courses, supported by over 12,300 minutes of digital content available on the Skill India Digital Hub.

A total of 1.45 lakh candidates have completed eKYC, enabling seamless onboarding and access to learning resources, it added.

"Through SOAR, we are ensuring that AI education is not limited to a privileged few, but reaches learners across States, age groups and backgrounds. The strong participation from Atates like Uttar Pradesh reflects the aspiration of our youth to be part of India's digital future. Our focus is on building awareness, confidence and job-relevant capabilities in emerging technologies so that India's workforce is prepared to lead in an AI-driven economy," Jayant Chaudhary, Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, said.

FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE

SOAR is a flagship initiative of MSDE aimed at building AI awareness and capability. Offered free of cost through the Skill India Digital Hub, the programme focuses on inclusive access, industry-aligned learning and future-ready skills, empowering India's youth to thrive in an AI-powered global economy, Chaudhary added.

S Rly's gross earnings up 8% in nine months of FY26

Our Bureau
Chennai

The Southern Railway reported an 8 per cent increase in gross earnings to ₹9,846 crore in the first nine months of this fiscal. It handled 31 million tonnes of goods between April and December 2025 as against 29 mt during the same period last year.

Over 57.9 crore originating passengers travelled by rail, a 6 per cent increase over the previous year. It registered 92 per cent punctuality, despite an increase in traffic volume, said RN Singh, General Manager, Southern Railway, in his Republic Day speech on Monday.

To cater to seasonal demand, SR operated 3,570 special train trips in addition to regular services, he said.

During the year, six new trains with LHB coaches, four Amrit Bharat trains and one passenger train were introduced, 111 coaches were permanently augmented in various trains and 100 mail/express/passenger trains were speeded up. Further, 46 ICF coach trains were converted to LHB coaches, enhancing capacity and passenger comfort, he said.

Significant infrastructure projects commissioned include the fourth between Chennai Beach and Chennai Egmore, new lines between Karaikal and Peralam and between Chinna Salem and Porpada Kurichi, he said.

A total of 253 track km were electrified, taking the total electrified network to 4,943 route km. Further, 286 route km on the Coimbatore-Jolarpettai section are expected to be upgraded to 130 kmph during the current year, he said.

AP govt targeting to commission Polavaram project by Dec 2027: Governor Abdul Nazeer

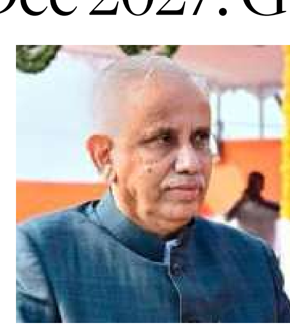
Our Bureau
Hyderabad

Andhra Pradesh plans to commission the Polavaram multi-purpose irrigation project by December 2027, according to Governor S Abdul Nazeer.

The construction of the spillway and powerhouse has been completed and the diaphragm wall is nearing completion, he said at the 77th Republic Day celebrations at the greenfield capital city of Amaravati on Monday.

The project will irrigate 7.2 lakh more acres, stabilise 23.50 lakh acres and generate 960 MW of power.

"The Pula Subbaiah Veligonda Project, with key tunnel works underway, will supply drought-prone Prakasam, Nellore and Kadapa districts by June 2027," he said. Stating that water was the lifeline of Andhra Pradesh, he said the government was advancing the interlinking of rivers from Vamsadhara to Godavari, Krishna and Penna to ensure every cultivable acre receives adequate water.



Andhra Pradesh Governor S Abdul Nazeer

The Polavaram-Nallamala Sagar link is being actively pursued. "As a lower riparian State, Andhra Pradesh uses only water that would otherwise reach the sea, ensuring no harm to neighbouring States," he said.

THEMATIC CITIES

"Thematic cities — electronic, toy, solar, drone, space, and bulk drug — are under development. The Ratan Tata Innovation Hub at Amaravati, with spokes across major cities, will drive start-ups and MSMEs."

The massive investments being received by the State were reshaping employment, he said, adding, "The ₹10 lakh crore Green Hydrogen Valley project will create 7.5 lakh jobs, while 75 new industrial projects worth ₹4.18 lakh crore will generate 3.18 lakh more."

The State government was committed to creating 20 lakh jobs in five years under the Yuva Galam promise. Through Mega DSC-2025, 15,941 teacher posts are being filled with 92.9 per cent attendance, and 5,757 police constables were recruited last year.

To make students industry-ready, a "Skill Passport" would track competencies from Grade 6 onwards. The "Naipunyam" platform — featuring an AI Resume builder and voice assistant 'Ask Vidya' — connects youth to global jobs, he said.

ZERO-POVERTY

The P4 Programme (Public-Private-People Partnership), launched on Ugadi 2025, is advancing the goal of "Zero Poverty" by uniting government, industry and communities to uplift the bottom 20 per cent of the population.

Over 1 lakh "Margadarsis" had adopted 10.3 lakh "Bangaru Kutumbalu," working family by family to eliminate deprivation.

ED attaches PACL assets worth ₹1,986 cr in Ponzi case

Press Trust of India
New Delhi

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Monday said it has attached fresh properties worth over ₹1,986 crore as part of its money laundering investigation against the Chandigarh-based PACL (Pearls Group), accused of orchestrating a ₹48,000 crore Ponzi scheme.

The latest action has taken the total value of assets attached in the case to ₹7,589 crore.

In a statement, the agency said it has provisionally attached 37 immovable properties, located in Ludhiana and Jaipur, valued at ₹1,986.48 crore, under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act.

The ED probe stems from a CBI case against PACL, its late promoter Nirmal Singh Bhangoo and some others. Bhangoo died in August 2024.

The accused entities and individuals of PACL operated an illegal collective investment scheme, fraudulently mobilising over ₹60,000 crore from investors across India under the guise of the sale and development of agricultural land, as per the ED.

QUICKLY.

Smart glasses firm sues Meta, EssilorLuxottica

Meta Platforms and EssilorLuxottica were sued in a US court by a smart glasses maker that claims they copied its technology for their competing wearables. Solos Technology said in a patent infringement lawsuit filed in a Massachusetts court that the firms' products rely on "foundational technologies" it developed related to smart glasses audio, sensing, processing and other features. The lawsuit said Meta's product collaborations with EssilorLuxottica sunglass brands Ray-Ban and Oakley infringe five of its patents. REUTERS

Republic Day sales signal early-year consumer intent

SHIFTING PATTERNS. Consumer trends evolving for D2C brands, highlighting premium purchases and sustained engagement on e-commerce platforms

Jyoti Banthia
Bengaluru

Republic Day sales are fast consolidating their position as the first major demand signal of the year for e-commerce platforms, offering early insights into consumer sentiment after the festive season.

Unlike the sharp discount-led spikes seen during Diwali, platforms say this period is increasingly about measured upgrades, wellness-led consumption and widening access, rather than impulse buying.

At Amazon's Great Republic Day Sale, customers showed a clear inclination to trade up across categories.

"We saw customers going premium, investing in healthier products and enjoying value selection," said Saurabh Srivastava, Vice-President, Amazon India.

Demand was amplified by the ongoing wedding season, with precious jewellery and ethnic wear both growing 2X year-on-year.

ENTRY-LEVEL MODELS

In home appliances, customers moved beyond entry-level models, with washer-dryers growing nearly 10X, while side-by-side refrigerators, 2-tonne air conditioners and large-screen televisions doubled over last year. Premium smartphones from Apple, Samsung, OnePlus and iQOO also saw high double-digit growth.

Alongside premiumisation, value-led consumption remained strong. Orders on Amazon Bazaar grew 3.3X year-on-year, driven largely by first-time customers from tier-2 and tier-3 towns.

HIGH ON VALUE. Alongside premiumisation, value-led consumption remained strong

"Affordability programmes, such as no-cost EMI starting at ₹99 per day, exchange offers and bank offers continued to make aspirational purchases accessible," Srivastava said.

Ultra-fast delivery also gained traction, with Amazon rolling out a dedicated 'Republic Day Essentials' page on Amazon Now, offering deliveries within minutes in parts of Delhi-NCR, Mumbai and Bengaluru.

For D2C brands, Republic Day is emerging as an engagement-led reset, rather than a discount-heavy event. At food and beverage brand Boba Bhai, early data points to stronger repeat behaviour.

HIGHER ENGAGEMENT

"Overall sales are currently up by around 40 per cent, indicating higher engagement and repeat interest from consumers," said Dhruv Kohli, Founder, Boba Bhai. Food accounted for nearly 60 per cent of sales, while bubble tea contributed the rest. "Customers are being thoughtful with spending, but not entirely holding back on experiences they enjoy," Kohli added, describing the period as a more organic re-entry into consumption.

Fashion retailer Globus echoed this shift towards relationship-led buying. "Republic Day has increasingly become a relationship-led event for us rather than just a discount-driven spike," said Ranganath Kuppur, CEO, Globus Fashion.

REPEAT CUSTOMERS

A larger share of demand came from repeat customers, with shoppers trading up to better fabrics and higher-value styles. Tier-2 and tier-3 markets, he said, are now a core growth pillar, driven by aspirational, brand-aware consumers.

BASELINE GROWTH

Travel and mobility brand EUME struck a more measured note. "With travel becoming a 12-month phenomenon, Republic Day no longer delivers the same uplift it once did," said Pranay Parekh, Co-founder, EUME.

However, smaller cities are increasingly contributing to steady, baseline growth rather than short-lived sale spikes.

Taken together, Republic Day sales are evolving into an early-year barometer of intent, signalling where Indian consumers are willing to spend, upgrade and commit as platforms and brands chart the year ahead.

MANALI FREEZES

SNOW SIEGE. Vehicles remain stuck in a traffic jam as heavy snowfall chokes highways and roads, leaving tourists stranded in Manali, Himachal Pradesh, on January 26 PTI

Robust BFSI growth drove momentum for Indian IT in third quarter of FY26

Sanjana B
Bengaluru

During Q3 FY26, India's IT majors noted that despite macroeconomic uncertainties, BFSI (banking, financial services and insurance) demand continues to hold firm — and in some cases, accelerate — as banks and financial institutions ramp up large deals, discretionary spending and AI-led transformation.

Tier-1 IT companies — TCS, Infosys, HCLTech and Wipro — reported BFSI vertical growth of 1.6 per cent, 3.9 per cent, 8.1 per cent and 0.4 per cent on a constant-currency year-on-year (y-o-y) basis respectively.

Tier-2 companies showed similar trends, with Persistent Systems, Coforge and Mphasis posting y-o-y growth of 3.6 per cent, 13.8 per cent and 20.8 per cent respectively, in the BFSI vertical.

LARGE DEALS

During Infosys' earnings conference call, the management commented that it sees good traction in large deals and discretionary projects in financial services.

The company expects more acceleration in the sector FY27 over FY26, with increased activity on AI.

"We see continued momentum in financial services with approximately 5 per cent growth in last nine months, led by large deal wins and uptick in discretionary spends across sub-verticals like banking, payments, mortgages, along with asset and wealth management. There is elevated interest in AI-led transformation, platform modernisation and vendor consolidation. We are seeing a shift from compliance to business growth," said CFO Jayesh Sanghrajka.

The company signed 26 large deals during the quarter, including 10 in financial services alone.

BANKING SEGMENT

On the other hand, Sudhir Singh, CEO and Executive Director of Coforge, noted during the company's Q3 earnings call that the banking segment is growing at 32 per cent y-o-y, while insurance is expanding at 20 per cent y-o-y.

Singh added that the pipeline remains strong.

Going forward, Singh said he expects banking to maintain its current share of revenue, as the vertical is likely to continue growing at roughly the same pace as the rest of the firm.

UNDER PRESSURE

"Banking institutions are under pressure to improve ROE amidst the macro uncertainty, with the higher interest rates and the intensified regulatory scrutiny. From our vantage, business demand is healthy across commercial banking, lending, wealth management, and risk and compliance. Operational resilience, cloud native architectures have become mission critical for banks, which is also an area of investment," he said.

Mphasis sees steady growth, to focus on solving AI challenges

Tejaswini S
Bengaluru

Bengaluru-headquartered mid-sized IT services company Mphasis, which reported steady performance in the December quarter (Q3 FY26), says it is looking at steady growth, driven by demand in core verticals and growing traction for its AI-led, platform-driven offerings.

Mphasis' revenue grew 2.6 per cent quarter-on-quarter (q-o-q) to ₹4,002.6 crore and 12.4 per cent year-on-year (y-o-y) on a reported basis and 7.4 per cent y-o-y in constant currency (CC).

Quarterly net profit declined by about 4.7 per cent to ₹442.2 crore mainly due to 'one-time costs'.

STABLE DEMAND

The company said demand had remained stable across banking, financial services and insurance (BFSI) and technology, while logistics had shown early signs of recovery.

According to Prabhudas Lilladher, the management noted that BFSI demand continued to accelerate, supported by healthy bank earnings, regulatory programmes and elevated mergers and acquisitions and initial public offering activity. Banks are increasingly investing in enterprise-wide AI fabrics, modernisation and large-scale transformation initiatives.

Elara Securities noted that management said enterprises are shifting away from traditional effort-based managed services and reallocating budgets toward AI-led modernisation and efficiency programmes.

While discretionary IT spending may not return to prior levels, demand for AI stacks and platforms is rising, benefiting vendors with strong AI execution capabilities.

Mphasis said enterprises are moving beyond pilot projects to scale AI use cases in application modernisation, data engineering and intelligent automation. While much of the industry has focused on using generative AI (Gen AI) to write software faster, it has been ignoring deeper challenges.

Mphasis' revenue grew 2.6 per cent q-o-q to ₹4,002.6 crore and 12.4 per cent y-o-y on a reported basis

Nitin Rakesh, CEO and MD of Mphasis, said, "Everybody was so focused on using Gen AI to write new software. Nobody was focusing on solving hard, complex problems."

These include addressing the massive technical debt in legacy systems. Legacy systems and technical debt are the underlying challenges of older technology systems that many enterprises, such as banks and insurance companies, still rely on today.

EMBEDDING AI

The company's strategy focuses on embedding AI across platforms, rather than offering it as a standalone service. Clients are seeking outcomes-led engagements in which AI improves productivity, accelerates decision-making and reduces operational friction.

On talent, Mphasis continues to moderate hiring while selectively investing in data science, cloud engineering and domain-led consulting roles, maintaining margin discipline, Rakesh noted.

The writer is an intern

Flexibility is driving IndiGo's next phase of growth: Elbers

bl.interview

Rohit Vaid
New Delhi

After a quarter of turbulence and falling profits, IndiGo's Chief Executive Pieter Elbers has outlined how the airline is balancing expansion, product evolution and operational readiness. Elbers spoke about the carrier's next phase of growth with the induction of the long-range Airbus A321XLR and expansion of international services.

Edited excerpts:

> The transformation is anchored in several milestones, including code-share deals, developing hubs, scaling cargo, strengthening ancillary services and more
>
> **PIETER ELBERS**
> IndiGo's Chief Executive

As IndiGo expands across longer-haul, regional international and domestic markets, how is the airline redefining its growth priorities and positioning itself over the next six to 12 months?

IndiGo is going through a phase of growth and development, defining a new category and becoming a fit-to-purpose airline.

We are evolving as a brand, retaining our hallmark of efficiency, simplicity and affordability, yet broadening our product portfolio, as we scale up, to match our customers' varied expectations across different flight categories and routes on our network.

Customers' expectations on an eight-to-10-hour journey is starkly different from what they want on a two-hour domestic flight or a five-hour, regional international flight.

This evolution becomes even more important as we progress further on our internationalisation journey, especially with our long-haul expansion.

How is IndiGo evolving its product and service offering to cater to customers across different journey lengths and market segments?

Today, in addition to our proven economy class, we offer the convenience of IndiGoStretch — our tailor-made business product designed for added comfort, more benefits and privacy.

We introduced BluChip, our loyalty programme, to reward our loyal customers. On our long-haul flights, we have elevated the passenger experience with the introduction of complimentary hot meals, alcoholic beverages and thoughtfully-curated amenities onboard.

All these product enhancements and diversification are primarily rooted in our understanding of how we can make air travel more convenient.

How is fleet expansion and diversification supporting IndiGo's transformation as it builds scale and deepens its international footprint?

Another key pillar of this transformation journey is fleet expansion and diversification.

Last year, we introduced the Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner aircraft in our fleet, taken on wet/damp lease from Norse Atlantic Airways, which enabled us to launch and expand our first few long-haul offerings — Manchester, Amsterdam, London Heathrow and Copenhagen.

The lease arrangements are helping us in gaining invaluable operational insights into wide-body operations, particularly around turnaround time management, on-board service delivery, and customer expectations for long-haul travel, before our Airbus A350-900s start arriving from 2028 onwards, enabling deeper international penetration across continents.

Recently, we took delivery of India's first A321XLR, enabling the connectivity from Mumbai and Delhi to Athens, Greece.

The extended-range capability of this new-generation aircraft will allow us to tap into several strategic markets across Europe and East Asia.

This transformation story is anchored in several additional strategic milestones, including deepening code-share partnerships, developing hubs, scaling cargo, strengthening ancillary services and more.

We are also moving towards greater aircraft ownership, and building a world-class 12-bay MRO facility in Bengaluru, in addition to the existing facilities in Delhi and Bengaluru.

As we launch new routes and integrate additional aircraft into the fleet, we are equally focused on ensuring that our systems, processes and people are well prepared to support this growth sustainably.

Ultimately, the challenges and the opportunities lie in balancing ambition with execution.

In a dynamic operating environment marked by supply-chain disruptions and geopolitical constraints, how does IndiGo build flexibility and resilience into its network strategy?

As our fleet continues to grow, flexibility is built into how we plan our network. Our fleet strategy, which includes progressive addition of narrow-body aircraft such as the A321XLR alongside leased wide-body Boeing 787s, allows us to respond to demand across different markets while remaining aligned with our long-term plans.

From cargo to combat: Sea containers turn into indoor mobile firing ranges

JCBL South has developed a prototype for the defence sector at its Oragadam facility near Chennai

T E Raja Simhan
Chennai

Sea containers have long found uses beyond transporting goods, but here's one you may not have expected.

Containers are now being used as indoor firing ranges for short-arm weapons training, positioning them as a safer alternative to outdoor training, which is often a high-risk environment.

At JCBL South's facility at Oragadam near Chennai, three 40-foot sea containers have been joined together to create a 150-foot room, and at the far end of it is a shooting target.

The bullet-proof firing practice container is designed for safe short-arms weapon training, and is a prototype developed for the defence sector, said JCBL South's Managing Director Sandip Chakroborty.

This can be deployed in remote, forward and urban locations and is ideal for temporary bases, ships and airbases, enabling minimal site preparation, he said.

TESTING CARRIED OUT

"Many rounds of testing have been done by defence shooting professionals," he added.

The short-arm firing practice containers provide a safe, mobile and cost-effective solution for modern military training.

SMART TRAINING. The bullet-proof firing practice container is designed for safe short-arms weapon training BIJOY GHOSH

The flexible adaptability makes them suitable for Army, Navy and Air Force applications. These systems represent a critical advancement in flexible and secure defence training capabilities, said Chakroborty.

It has fully bullet-proof walls, ceilings, glasses and floors with integrated bullet traps that prevent ricochets and fragmentation. As a result, there is marked silence inside the facility; even when shooting practice is on, no noise is heard outside.

TARGET SYSTEMS

The container integrates ballistic protection, bullet traps, ventilation, noise reduction and target systems within a standardised structure. The containers enable realistic, safe and repeatable weapons training in both permanent and temporary locations, the MD told *businessline*.

Designed to be user-friendly with simple electronics, the facility enables measuring target accuracy with moving targets and stationary targets. It can be used in multiple scenarios, including daylight, dim light and dark mode, with static and dynamic targeting, he said, without giving details on the cost of setting up the facility.

The ₹1,500 crore group produces passenger-related products, including caravans and buses (on chassis procured from top OEMs) at Chandigarh and cargo-related products, and armoured vehicles at Oragadam, said Chakroborty.