

**DIA, DEOGHAR IAS ACADEMY**

***Daily News Feed***

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***D.N.F***

***11.01.2025***

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# NATO members reluctant to endorse Trump's defence spending proposal

The U.S. President-elect said members of the military alliance should spend 5% of gross domestic product on defence - a huge increase from the current 2% goal and a level that no NATO country currently reaches; a new target is likely to be agreed at a NATO summit in The Hague in June

Reuters  
BRUSSELS

NATO won't heed Donald Trump's proposal for a massive hike in defence spending but will likely agree to go beyond its current target, according to officials and analysts.

The U.S. President-elect declared on Tuesday members of the military alliance should spend 5% of gross domestic product (GDP) on defence - a huge increase from the current 2% goal and a level that no NATO country, including the United States, currently reaches.

Mr. Trump's comments - at a press conference that also generated a blizzard of headlines on Greenland, Canada and Panama - were a reminder of his focus on NATO spending during his first term and his threats not to protect allies that fail to meet the target.

## Politically impossible

Officials from NATO countries said they agreed defence spending needs to rise further but did not endorse the 5% figure, which analysts said would be politically and economically impossible for almost all members. It would require hundreds of billions of dollars in extra funding.

However, a new target is likely to be agreed at a NATO summit in The Hague in



Joint effort: The U.S. flag alongside the NATO flag outside the Eisenhower Executive Office Building in Washington, U.S. REUTERS

June, spurred by fears that Russia may attack a NATO country after Ukraine and by Mr. Trump's exhortations, officials said.

The key open questions are what that new target will be and whether it will be enough to satisfy Mr. Trump.

Some expect NATO's 32 members to agree, after much wrangling, to a target of around 3% of GDP. But even that would be a stretch for many, who barely meet or fall short of the 2% goal now - a decade after it was set.

"It seems there will be a shift," Italian Defence Minister Guido Crosetto said. "I don't think it will be 5%, which would be impossible

for almost every nation in the world right now but... it will not be two [per cent], which we are already struggling to reach, but it will be more than two."

Italy, with defence spending at around 1.5% of GDP, is among eight NATO members that do not meet the current target.

Poland, which borders Ukraine, is the NATO member that spends the highest share of GDP on defence - 4.12% last year, alliance estimates show. It is followed by Estonia with 3.43% and the United States with 3.38%.

NATO estimated the combined defence spending of its members at \$1.474 trillion in 2024 - around

\$968 billion from the United States and \$507 billion from European nations and Canada.

The overall average is about 2.71% of NATO GDP.

Some officials and analysts see Mr. Trump's 5% suggestion as a deliberately high opening bid to kick off months of negotiations and expect he may settle for something closer to 3%.

During last year's U.S. presidential election campaign, Mr. Trump proposed a 3% target, adding this would mean a defence budget increase of about 30% for most NATO countries.

## Spending surge

Shocked by Russia's war in

**Poland, which borders Ukraine, is the NATO member that spends the highest share of GDP on defence - 4.12% last year, alliance estimates show**

Ukraine, many European countries have ramped up defence spending in recent years.

But with public finances tight, and defence spending not politically popular in some countries, it would not be easy for governments to find the extra billions that even a move to spend 3% of GDP on defence would entail.

While Mr. Trump has likened NATO defence spending to alliance membership fees, they reflect budgets set by national governments.

Fenella McGerty, a defence economics expert at the International Institute for Strategic Studies think tank, said recent increases had been "remarkable" but it takes years for countries to start reaching new targets.

"Even if Europe were to continue that rate of quite extraordinary growth - in excess of 10% in real terms in 2024 - it would still take another 10 years to even get to 3% of GDP," she said.

However, many European governments say the

continent should do more to defend itself and rely less on the United States.

France and the Baltic states are pushing for joint European Union borrowing to fund defence spending. The outcome of that debate may depend on next month's national election in Germany, which has so far opposed the idea.

To become more self-reliant, the European allies need to spend more to develop capabilities that the U.S. currently provides such as air-to-air refuelling, heavy-duty military air transport and electronic warfare, said Camille Grand, who previously served as NATO's top official for defence investment.

"All of these things cost a lot of money. Some of them are big-ticket items," said Grand, now with the European Council on Foreign Relations think tank.

The current security environment suggests European countries should be spending about 3% of GDP on defence, she said.

Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann, chair of the European Parliament's defence subcommittee, said Europe must ramp up spending but not fixate on an arbitrary figure.

"We need to mobilise a lot more money, but we shouldn't let Trump drive us crazy," she said.



# Local power

## Local self-governments make a difference to the lives of people

**I**nstead of signalling its intention to hold elections to rural local bodies, the Tamil Nadu government has appointed special officers for these bodies in several districts of the State. Elections were due in 9,624 village panchayats, 314 panchayat unions, and 28 district panchayats where the term of office of the RLBs came to an end on January 5. These government officers will function for the next six months. In support of its decision, the government has cited the ongoing re-organisation of rural and urban local bodies, which will result in a delimitation of wards of the local bodies – a step that the government considers a prerequisite to the conduct of polls to local bodies. It had given an undertaking to the Madras High Court in December 2024, that no poll notification would be issued without completing delimitation and putting in place a quota of seats and offices for women, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Apart from creating four more municipal corporations by accommodating village panchayats, the stage is set for the expansion of the limits of municipal corporations, municipalities and town panchayats by taking in other village panchayats. It has proposed the merger of at least 140 village panchayats with municipal corporations. Though there is nothing final about the reorganisation, the government is of the view that rapid urbanisation in village panchayats adjoining bigger cities such as Chennai and Coimbatore necessitates a fresh look at the local bodies.

In *Suresh Mahajan vs State of Madhya Pradesh*, the Supreme Court had held that the delimitation or formation of ward “cannot be a legitimate ground to be set forth by any authority much less the State Election Commission – to not discharge its constitutional obligation in notifying the election programme” at an opportune time and ensure that an elected body was installed before the expiry of the five-year term of the outgoing body. It had also stipulated that in undertaking delimitation, which the Court regarded as a continuous exercise, it “ought to be commenced well-in-advance” so that the elections were notified on time. Sections of residents in a number of village panchayats have opposed the proposed reorganisation of local bodies as they are apprehensive of the cessation of rural development schemes such as the MGNREGA if there is a merger with urban local bodies. Tamil Nadu is not the only State that has failed to hold local body polls on time. Bigger cities such as Mumbai and Bengaluru are on the list. It is time that the States realise the importance of the space that local bodies occupy in the democratic structure. Despite shortcomings, local self-governments do make a qualitative difference to people’s lives.



# India's journey so far on the AI military bandwagon

As the world has begun utilising and developing artificial intelligence (AI) for military purposes amidst debates of ethical concerns, India also appears to have hopped on the bandwagon. Last year saw a defence Budget of ₹6.21 lakh crore (\$75 billion), with an emphasis on modernising and upgrading India's military. India has begun to make strides towards integrating AI systems with their military and using them across various systems. Products such as the Indrajal autonomous drone security system have been developed. India has also attracted investments from numerous foreign tech giants for its AI ecosystem – Microsoft, for example, has committed approximately \$3 billion to building data centres in Telangana.

## On track but there are hurdles

Multiple government figures have made statements about the utility of AI for military purposes, including Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, who remarked that "artificial intelligence or AI has the potential to revolutionize military operations, from predictive analytics to autonomous decision-making systems".

Additionally, India is a part of multiple joint initiatives internationally that focus on AI. All these steps indicate the pouring of money and manpower into developing AI systems for military purposes. India is on track to fully utilising the potential of AI. However, there are some obstacles. Once addressed, they will ensure that India's adoption of AI will be even better.

A lack of digitised data to train systems on as well as a dearth of funds are the obvious factors. The biggest issue is the fact that the data centres required to run AI systems are expensive. India's military already has to focus on replacing legacy systems such as older aircraft with newer models, which is an expensive endeavour in itself. India's legacy hardware is no longer competitive in the global sphere, and significant resources are being directed towards replacing and upgrading it.

However, more general hurdles which are



**Adya Madhavan**

research analyst at  
The Takshashila  
Institution

India has begun harnessing AI's potential to strengthen its defence ecosystem, but there are still significant impediments

harder to overcome exacerbate the problem. One such issue is that India's policies on AI are still fragmented or lack guidelines for implementation. For instance, the National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence outlines India's vision for deploying AI. However it provides little insight on actual mechanisms for deployment.

Similarly, the responsible AI for All paper outlines the importance of accountability and transparency and puts forward principles for responsible AI use, but falls short in making military AI-specific recommendations. Major strides have been made through these documents, but, as of now, arguably more robust frameworks need to be put in place for the deployment and the regulation of AI in the military. The Defence Artificial Intelligence Council (DAIC) and the Defence AI Project Agency (DAIPA) have been set up, and their objectives will bridge these gaps. However, there have not been any recent updates available to the public from these bodies.

## The international picture

AI is also a technology that is a must based on the alacrity with which other countries have been focusing on integrating it with their militaries. Israel and China have focused on rapidly developing and deploying military AI and their technologies are already far ahead. India needs clarity of vision in its attitude towards AI, to make it possible to roll out AI systems faster and catch up with the global AI wave. There appears to be some degree of inconsistency within the government regarding sentiments towards military AI. This is reflected in remarks made by notable figures that underscore resistance or mistrust regarding the new technology. For example, the Minister of External Affairs compared AI to nuclear weapons – AI will be as dangerous for the world as nuclear bombs once were" – in terms of their potential dangers to the world.

During the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI) in 2023, the Prime Minister

also remarked that there must be a focus proceeding with extreme caution and warned of the darker sides of AI. While there is clarity on the fact that AI will be critical in the coming years, especially military AI, there appears to be less clarity on how to roll it out.

## The specific problems in India

One of the biggest challenges that must be addressed, even when India is at the stage where technologies are ready to be widely deployed, is the historically siloed nature of the armed forces. The Indian Army, Indian Navy, and Indian Air Force have separate doctrines, systems and communication practices. This will likely significantly hinder interoperability and the procurement of systems for joint operations.

Finally, when it comes to the procurement of systems themselves, one of the issues with developing AI for defence is the reliance on public sector units (PSU), which has prevailed in India for many decades. Despite the misconception that most of India's defence manufacturers are public sector companies, many private entities and startups produce advanced, high-quality systems. To equip the military with the best systems at a large enough scale, there will have to be public-private partnerships (PPPs) or an introduction of private competition. As seen with the space sector, this can significantly change the state of affairs.

India has already begun harnessing AI's potential to bolster its defence ecosystem. However, these multiple impediments serve as a reminder of the measures that need to be taken. Strategic alignment is paramount, and robust frameworks and policies are necessary to ensure AI's effective and ethical deployment. India needs to make systemic changes to tackle issues such as the inter-service silos and an overreliance on PSUs. Finally, collaboration and innovation internationally and in terms of PPPs will accelerate AI adoption and innovation. With a cohesive strategy, India will be able to maximise the utility of AI.



# Forging leadership with India's youth power

Every year, January 12 is celebrated across the length and breadth of India as 'National Youth Festival', a day which is also the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. The Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue is an innovative one, launched with the vision of engaging India's youth in the developmental journey of the nation. The programme seeks to harness the collective energy, creativity and leadership potential of young minds to contribute towards realising a Viksit Bharat, i.e., a Developed India.

In line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's belief that the youth of the country are central to India's growth, the dialogue provides a platform for young leaders to engage in discussions, exchange ideas, and collaborate on solutions to the nation's challenges. The competition and its stages are designed to inspire the youth to think critically and contribute in a proactive way towards India's progress.

## A dialogue, its competitive nature

The dialogue is a dynamic, multi-stage initiative, designed to engage and empower India's youth in the country's developmental journey. The competition has four stages, the first being a Viksit Bharat quiz held digitally on the My Bharat platform. This stage tested a participant's knowledge about India's achievements, challenges, and vision for a developed future, covering areas such as sustainable development, technology, and national policies. The top scorers moved on to the second stage, i.e., essay and blog writing, where they had to write on themes such as tech for Viksit Bharat and empowering youth for Viksit Bharat, reflecting on their vision for India's future. These submissions were evaluated for originality.

In the third stage, the Viksit Bharat Vision Pitch Deck, participants at the State level presented innovative ideas for India's development through a compelling pitch deck. The best teams from each State advanced to the fourth and last stage of the Viksit Bharat National Championship, which will be held at the Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi on January 11-12, 2025.

In the finale, the selected teams will pitch their visionary solutions to the Prime Minister. This in itself is a unique opportunity to influence national policy and contribute to India's vision of a Viksit Bharat. The competition is structured to



**Raksha Khadse**

Union Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India

test not only a participant's knowledge and creativity but also their leadership and communication skills.

## The features this year

The National Youth Festival is an annual celebration of India's youth, fostering a spirit of national integration and promoting the ideals of youth empowerment and creativity. However, this year's festival stands out in several ways.

The focus this year is on Youth for Sustainable Development, a theme that resonates with growing recognition of young people as the drivers of global change. In line with India's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the festival has incorporated workshops, seminars and cultural activities that align with the vision of a greener, more inclusive, future. Additionally, there is a greater emphasis on the role of technology and innovation in achieving national goals, with specific sessions dedicated to Tech for Good and Innovation for India's Development.

Another unique feature this year is expanded virtual participation. With digital platforms having been integrated into the festival, young people from remote corners of the country can participate in discussions, workshops, and showcase their talents and ideas online. This inclusivity broadens the festival's reach and ensures that youth, regardless of location, has the chance to contribute.

The 2025 National Youth Festival will feature: workshops and panels on leadership and innovation. With a focus on topics such as youth leadership, digital entrepreneurship, and sustainable living, these sessions will equip participants with the skills necessary to drive change in their communities.

Second, cultural programmes. The festival will celebrate India's rich cultural heritage through music, dance, theatre, and folk art performances. These will provide youth with opportunities to express themselves creatively and appreciate the diverse cultural landscape of the nation.

Third, tech and innovation showcases. With the theme, Tech for Viksit Bharat, the festival will include exhibitions and presentations from young tech innovators and entrepreneurs who are building solutions to real-world problems in sectors such as health, education, agriculture, and urban development.

Fourth, engagement with leaders. The festival will facilitate direct engagement between youth and key leaders as pathbreakers from various sectors, which include government, business and academia. These interactions will provide participants with insights into leadership, governance, and the path to national progress.

Fifth, recognition of youth contributions. Awards and recognitions will be presented to young individuals and organisations that have demonstrated exceptional leadership, innovation and service. This will motivate others to take active roles in shaping India's future.

## The role of MY Bharat

The Mera Yuva Bharat (MY Bharat), an autonomous body under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, plays an instrumental role in shaping and guiding the direction of the National Youth Festival. As a platform that empowers youth by promoting engagement, knowledge sharing, and participation in nation-building activities, it is crucial in curating the festival's programmes and ensuring that they align with the aspirations of India's youth. Through MY Bharat, young people can gain access to resources, mentorship, and opportunities that will enhance their ability to contribute meaningfully to the country's development.

In this year's festival, MY Bharat will facilitate the digital integration of youth, enabling participation from across the country. It will also actively support youth-led initiatives, helping them navigate the complexities of social and technological challenges and encouraging them to find innovative solutions for a better India.

In totality, India's youth is indeed its most precious asset. As the country progresses towards its vision of becoming a Viksit Bharat, it is the boundless energy, the ideas and the ambition of young people that will power the nation's transformation. The initiative of the Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue will not only open a new chapter but will also shape the mobilisation of the political leadership.

The future of India is bright, and it rests in the able hands of its youth. This resonates with the belief expressed by Swami Vivekananda in unlimited possibilities in youth energy when he had said, 'Give me one hundred 'believing' young men... I will transform India as the number one nation in the entire world...'

The Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue is designed to inspire the youth of India to think critically



# Centre calls for comprehensive approach to address impact of climate change on agriculture

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

The challenges posed by climate change to the agriculture sector was one of the key themes discussed at *The Hindu businessline* Agri and Commodity Summit, 2025 held here on Friday.

At the inaugural session, Union Agriculture Secretary Devesh Chaturvedi said the Centre had adopted a two-pronged approach – adaptation and mitigation – to address these challenges.

Ashish Kumar Bhutani, Secretary, Union Cooperation Ministry, said primary agricultural cooperative societies (PACS) can play a vital role in building climate change resilience in rural India.

Mr. Chaturvedi said the adaptation strategies include creating drought- and flood-resistant crop



Devesh Chaturvedi

varieties, implementing efficient water management techniques, and providing a cushion through crop insurance in the event of extreme natural calamities.

#### Mitigation efforts

He added that the mitigation efforts include promoting natural farming to reduce chemical input use and improve soil health. "The government also

aims to use carbon market incentives to encourage farmers to adopt climate-smart practices. This comprehensive approach seeks to ensure food security and farmer livelihoods in the face of a changing climate," he said.

Mr. Bhutani said climate change was impacting everyone and collective action should be taken. "The crop insurance scheme covers

40% of farmers. We need to get every single farmer covered under the scheme," he said, adding that his Ministry was in the process of making two lakh multi-purpose PACS so that the traditional role of PACS could be expanded beyond credit and input supply. "We are also planning to set up 70,000 grain storage points across the country, with PACS potentially playing a key role. Besides addressing the critical issue of grain storage in rural areas, this initiative would reduce transportation costs and act as procurement centres," he said.

#### Four pillars

National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development Chairman Shaji K.V. said accelerating green lending across sectors, providing access to data, internal green transformation, and resource mobili-

sation to fund climate-resilient activities were the four pillars necessary to address challenges posed by climate change. The summit saw sessions on irregular monsoons, climate change and new seeds, digitisation, bio energy, and price risk management. There was also an interaction with drone *didis* and solar *didis*.

*The Hindu businessline* Agri and Commodity Summit, 2025 is presented by NABARD and co-powered by the Federation of Seed Industry of India in association with Yara.

The associate partners are NCDEX, Indofil, Bayer, Hindustan Urvarak and Rasayan Ltd., Kribhco Agri, NSE, Aqua Group, and Tamil Nadu Agricultural University.

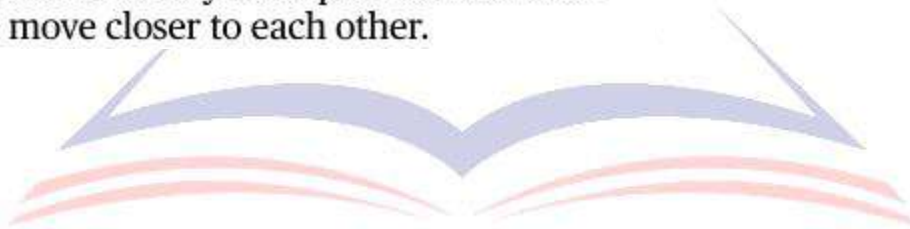
The banking partner is State Bank of India and the broadcast partner is NDTV Profit.





## SpaDeX satellites are at a distance of 1.5 km, says ISRO

The two SpaDeX satellites that are part of a docking experiment are now at a distance of 1.5 km from each other, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) on Friday. “Spacecrafts are at a distance of 1.5 km and on hold mode. Further drift to 500 m is planned to be achieved by tomorrow [Saturday] morning,” the ISRO posted on X. This announcement came a day after the space agency shared that the drift between the satellites that had caused the postponement of the docking experiment for the second time had been arrested and they were put in a slow drift course to move closer to each other.



# 2024 was the first year to breach global warming limit, show data

It is the first time that mean temperature crossed the threshold of 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, says global body; experts say that given the high rate of carbon emissions, the 2024 temperatures represent a point of no return

**Jacob Koshy**  
NEW DELHI

**H**umanity has stepped into a future that climate scientists for decades have warned about. Temperature data made public on Friday by the Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S), an authoritative source on historical trends in climate, show that 2024 was the first year in history when mean global temperature went 1.5 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial level.

Annual climate conferences, or the Conference of Parties convened by the United Nations, are about getting world leaders to agree on measures to curb emissions to keep temperatures from going over 2 degrees Celsius above the temperature in the 1850-1900 pre-industrial period and "as far as possible" keeping it below 1.5 degrees Celsius.

## Consistent rise

The way climatological boundaries are determined, a single year in the red doesn't by itself spell catastrophe. Only when temperatures consistently



**Scorching heat:** Each of the past 10 years was one of the 10 warmest years on record. FILE PHOTO

breach the 1.5 degrees Celsius mark for a decade or two would a boundary considered to have been breached. However, experts say that given the high rate of carbon emissions at present, the 2024 temperatures represent a point of no return.

"While there may be year to year variability, an El Nino in some years or a major volcanic eruption in others might influence temperatures, this suggests that there is no going back and that we are on a trajectory on exceeding 2 degrees Celsius by 2050," Roxy Mathew Koll, climate scientist, Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune, told *The Hindu*.

At an average temperature of 15.1 degrees Celsius, 2024 was the warmest year in global temperature records, which go back till 1850, and was 0.72 degrees Celsius above the 1991-2020 average. It was 0.12 degrees Celsius above the average of 2023, the previous warmest year on record. It was also 1.6 degrees Celsius above an estimate of the 1850-1900 temperature designated to be the 'pre-industrial' level. Each of the past 10 years (2015-2024) was one of the 10 warmest years on record.

For 11 months in 2024, the monthly global average temperature exceeded 1.5 degrees Celsius above

pre-industrial levels.

In 2024, the annual average sea surface temperature (SST) over the extra-polar ocean reached a record high of 20.87 degrees Celsius, 0.51 degrees Celsius above the 1991-2020 average.

The average extra-polar SST was at record high levels for the time of year from January to June 2024. From July to December 2024, the SST was the second warmest on record for the time of year, after 2023.

Among the reasons for the record-breaking temperatures in 2024 was the El Nino, which is warming of the Central Equatorial Pacific, that began in June 2023 with effects lasting well into 2024.

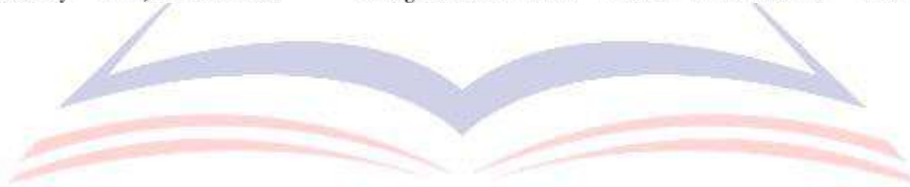
## 'Serious implications'

"A single year with temperatures 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels does not mean we've reached 1.5°C of global warming. However, it does mean we're getting dangerously close. Every fraction of a degree – whether 1.4, 1.5, or 1.6°C – brings more harm to people and ecosystems, underscoring the continued need for ambitious emis-

sions cuts," Professor Joeri Rogelj, Director of Research at the Grantham Institute - Climate Change and Environment, Imperial College London, said in a statement.

Other experts referred to the latest, failed talks at Baku, Azerbaijan, where countries couldn't bring themselves to agree on a financial package that would realistically account for the costs of mitigating runaway carbon emissions.

"The year on year increase in average global temperature has serious implications for developing economies reeling under frequent climate disasters. This, coupled with the failure of COP29 to deliver on meaningful finance, only implies that developing economies will have to allocate more funds to deal with climate impacts and disasters in the future. Mitigation ambition of the developing world would be hit hard, unless fast and meaningful action happens on the carbon markets front," said Vaibhav Chaturvedi, Senior Fellow, Council of Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW).





# India's rights have to be protected, says Sonowal on China's new dam

**Dinakar Peri**  
KAZIRANGA

Adding to the concerns expressed by the Chief Ministers of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh over China's proposed new dam over the Brahmaputra in Tibet, Union Minister for Ports, Shipping, and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal on Friday said that India's rights should be protected.

At the second meeting of the Inland Waterways Development Council (IWDC), presided over by Mr. Sonowal here, the Inland Waterways Authority of India announced investments worth more than ₹50,000 crore in the next five years and also revealed a series of new initiatives across 21 inland waterway States worth over ₹1,400 crore.

## 'Fragile, disastrous'

"Our rights have to be well-guarded and well-protected," Mr. Sonowal replied to a question from *The Hindu* on the issue of China's new dam. Officials in the know said that the exact nature and extent of the impact of the dam on India as a lower riparian nation has to be studied but it is bound to



Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma with Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal during the meeting of IWDC, at Kaziranga on Friday. ANI

have an impact given the scale and size of the project.

If the dam comes up, the Brahmaputra ecosystem will become completely fragile, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had said earlier. "If the dam construction starts in China, the entire ecosystem that thrives on the Brahmaputra will reduce by 60%. This is disastrous for the entire north-eastern region," he said earlier this week.

The External Affairs Ministry had stated that it conveyed its "concerns" to China about the proposed mega hydropower project in the upstream Yarlung Tsangpo, the Tibetan name for the Brahmaputra

that flows through Arunachal Pradesh and Assam. "As a lower riparian State with established user rights to the waters of the river, we have consistently expressed, through expert-level as well as diplomatic channels, our views and concerns to the Chinese side over mega projects on rivers in their territory," Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said last week.

## Upgrading waterways

Mr. Sonowal said that over ₹23,000 crore had been earmarked for development of new national waterways and green shipping initiatives in inland waterways.

A major policy initiative

in the form of Riverine Community Development Scheme was mooted at the IWDC to improve the socio-economic well-being of coastal communities by developing infrastructure, promotion of trade and tourism along with riverine ecosystem, providing skill enrichment trainings and upgrading traditional knowledge of river of the communities in an attempt to upgrade the quality of lives of the people living by the banks of the National Waterways.

"IWDC has anchored a new vista for cooperative federalism as both the governments at Union and the States discussed, deliberated, debated and dwelled on multiple aspects for strengthening of inland waterways. Historically, the role of inland waterways has been paramount for civilisations," Mr. Sonowal stated.

He said they were attempting to rejuvenate the support system of inland waterways so that railways and roadways can be decongested while also providing a viable, economic, sustainable and efficient mode of transportation for both passengers and cargo operators.

# Vokkaligas, Lingayats against caste census; plan to stage protests

## **The Hindu Bureau**

BENGALURU

The dominant land-owning communities of Vokkaligas and Veerashaiva-Lingayats in Karnataka, which are more often divided over the issue of power-sharing, seem to be coming together to fight the Socio-Economic and Educational Survey (caste census) which is likely to be brought for discussion before the next Cabinet meeting.

Driven by political compulsions, the caste census is expected to be discussed in the Cabinet next week where a decision could also be taken to place it before the legislature. Government sources said the issue was likely to figure in the Congress Legislature Party meeting convened on January 13. Last week, Parliamentary Affairs Minister H.K. Patil had indicated that the matter could come before the Cabinet.

The survey was conducted by the Karnataka State Permanent Commission for Backward Classes headed by H. Kantharaj but the report was submitted to the government by K. Jayaprakash Hegde, who

## **Govt. sources said the issue is likely to figure in Congress Legislature Party meeting on Jan. 13**

headed the commission later. In the run-up to the Assembly election, the Congress promised to accept the report, which has been opposed by the BJP and the Janata Dal (Secular).

The Vokkaligara Sangha is likely to convene a meeting of political and community leaders under the leadership of Adichunchanagiri Mutt seer on Sunday to register its opposition, and take the issue to the larger community to "create awareness". The Akhila Bharatha Veerashaiva Mahasabha is also expected to pressure the government not to take up the census for discussion. It had earlier passed a resolution to reject the report as "unscientific" and sought for a new survey. Leaders in the two community-based organisations confirmed that the two communities would stage a "coordinated fight" against the caste census, including street protests.



# Like-minded nations must strive for peace, prosperity: Rajnath

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

Emerging as a leading voice for the Global South, India advocates for a multi-aligned policy approach that engages multiple stakeholders, which ensures that diverse views are considered in our collective pursuit of prosperity, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Friday. He stated that India today can boast of having one of the largest defence industrial ecosystems in Asia and the country is committed to further enhancing existing capabilities.

"It is of paramount importance that the like-minded countries should



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh poses for a photo at Ambassadors' round-table, at Manekshaw Centre, New Delhi, on Friday. PTI

strive together for collective actions for peace and prosperity. Without these, our future generations will not be able to take advantage of economic growth or technological innova-

tions that we are experiencing in today's era," Mr. Singh said, addressing an Ambassadors round-table ahead of the upcoming Aero India 2025 expo.

"In today's geopolitical

landscape, fostering unity among like-minded nations is essential for ensuring mutual prosperity and peace, while addressing contemporary challenges," he told the Ambassadors and High Commissioners of various countries.

Aero India is an event where nations come together and form bonds beyond boundaries, Mr. Singh said making a pitch about the 15th edition of the biennial air show, Aero India 2025, scheduled to be held at the Air Force Station, Yelahanka, in Bengaluru from February 10 to 14. "Asia's largest air show presents an opportunity for nations to jointly explore strengths and capa-

bilities and address strategic and tactical needs," he said.

The first three days of the event will be business days, and the last two days are open to the public. The event includes both air displays and static exhibitions of a large array of military platforms from the aerospace and defence sectors.

Stating that India has emerged as an attractive destination for investment, Mr. Singh said Aero India 2025 presents an opportunity for friendly nations to jointly explore strengths and capabilities in the defence sector, addressing both strategic needs and tactical requirements. "Aero India 2025 will serve as a

vital forum for exploring partnerships that will form the base for future challenges. Together, we can create pathways for growth that are inclusive and sustainable," he added.

Mr. Singh will host the Defence Ministers' Conclave on the theme "BRIDGE – Building Resilience through International Defence and Global Engagement".

Several bilateral meetings are also planned at various levels. The focus will be on bolstering the defence and aerospace ties with friendly countries by exploring newer avenues to take the partnership to the next level, the Ministry noted.



# Indian diaspora's bond with homeland is eternal: Murmu

The President says their entrepreneurship, philanthropy, and knowledge-sharing are crucial in shaping the vision of India; she confers the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards on 27 recipients

**Satyasundar Barik**  
BHUBANESWAR

**D**escribing the bond between the Indian diaspora and the homeland as eternal, President Droupadi Murmu on Friday said their entrepreneurship, philanthropy, and knowledge-sharing were crucial in shaping the vision of a developed India.

"The connection between the Indian diaspora and the motherland is eternal. No matter where you are in the world, Bharat is and will always be your home. This bond is rooted in shared heritage, culture, and values. It is this connection that we celebrate today, and it is this connection that will continue to inspire us as we move forward together," Ms. Murmu said, while addressing the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention that came to an end here.

"As we celebrate the achievements of our Pravasi Bharatiya family, let us also look forward to the future with hope and determination. Together, we



Odisha CM Mohan Charan Majhi welcomes Droupadi Murmu as she arrives at Janata Maidan in Bhubaneswar. BISWARANJAN ROUT

can build a Viksit Bharat, a nation that stands tall on the global stage and continues to be a beacon of light for the world," she said.

"Our vision for Viksit Bharat aligns with our growing stature on the world stage, particularly as a leading voice for the Global South. It is guided by our timeless philosophy of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, or The World is One Family," she said.

"This vision is about

creating an ecosystem that not only meets our needs but also contributes to global well-being. We seek to be a nation that balances economic progress with social justice and environmental stewardship, ensuring a bright future for generations to come. Each one of you, whether through entrepreneurship, philanthropy, or knowledge-sharing, will play an essential role in achieving this vision," the President said.

Ms. Murmu said recognising the crucial role of the diaspora in nation-building, the Indian government had undertaken several initiatives, including the simplification of consular services for Non-Resident Indians and digitisation process for Overseas Citizens of India.

Under the initiatives like "Know India Programme", younger members of the Indian diaspora are facilitated to rediscover their Indian roots.

"We have also been proactive in safeguarding the interests of Indians living abroad. In recent years, we have launched several missions, including Operation Kaveri, Operation Ganga, and Operation Vande Bharat to assist distressed Indians. Today, Indians around the world can count on their homeland for support and protection in times of need," Ms. Murmu said.

The President presented the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards to Trinidad and Tobago President Christine Carla Kangaloo and 26 others.

# Odisha to be the highlight of Singapore President's visit

**Kallol Bhattacharjee**

NEW DELHI

Singapore will mark the 60th anniversary of bilateral relations with India with the January 15-18 India visit by President Tharman Shanmugaratnam. According to diplomatic sources, the visit is part of a year-long chain of events and exchanges that will mark the maturing of the relationship over the past six decades.

The unique aspect of the planned visit will be the focus on Odisha. Mr. Shanmugaratnam will visit the State on January 17-18 as an expression of his government's interest in setting up projects there.

During the stay in Odisha, he will visit a vaccine manufacturing plant of Bharat Biotech and tour the World Skills Centre supported by Singapore's Institute of Technical Education Services (ITEES). Two memoranda of under-



**Boosting ties:** Narendra Modi and Tharman Shanmugaratnam during a meeting held in Singapore in September last year. ANI

standing (MoUS) will be signed.

During his stay in Delhi on January 15-16, the President will confer the Honorary Citizen Award on Taron Das, former Director-General of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), for his contribution to Singapore-India relations. Mr. Shanmugaratnam will meet President Droupadi Murmu at the Rashtrapati Bhavan and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The Singapore Presi-

dent, who is of Sri Lankan Tamil origin, will also meet members of the Singaporean community based in India.

Ms. Murmu will host a state banquet for him on January 16. Singapore has usually tied up with Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, and Karnataka and the latest focus on Odisha and Assam are part of its reorientation to broaden the range for partnership in India, a diplomatic source said on Friday.

# President Murmu's invite for this year's Republic Day reception set to honour crafts from South

**Nistula Hebbar**  
NEW DELHI

A stiff white card embossed with the Lion Capital of Ashoka is the usual format of the invitation card sent out for the customary "At home" reception held at Rashtrapati Bhavan on Republic and Independence Day. This year, however, to mark 75 years since the formation of the Republic of India, things are different.

In a departure from convention, invitees for the "At home" will receive a specially curated box of craftwork from the five southern States – Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh – along with the card.

The idea of this special

box, packed with symbolic meaning, was floated by President Droupadi Murmu herself, and executed by Rashtrapati Bhavan, with the support of the National Institute of Design (NID), which has campuses in Ahmedabad and Bengaluru (where President Murmu is a Visitor).

"The idea behind the artefacts in the invitation box is the 5,000-year civilisational history of Bharat, with the underlying message of sustainability and colour schemes that invoke the 75 years of the forming of the Indian Republic," Rashtrapati Bhavan officials told *The Hindu*. The craft products in the invitation box are all made in the southern States, have GI (geographi-

## Art in a box

President Droupadi Murmu's guests are set to receive a gift box containing the best of south India's GI-tagged crafts. **Here are some products featured in the hamper:**



**Pochampally Ikat on a pencil pouch:** This Telangana staple is known for its distinct geometric patterns and bold colours



**Etikoppaka toys:** The soft wood and lacquer toys from the eponymous village in Andhra Pradesh are valued for the use of natural dyes and themes depicting everyday life



**Kalamkari on bamboo:** These goodies will arrive in a bamboo box decorated with Kalamkari motifs, pen-drawn with natural dyes



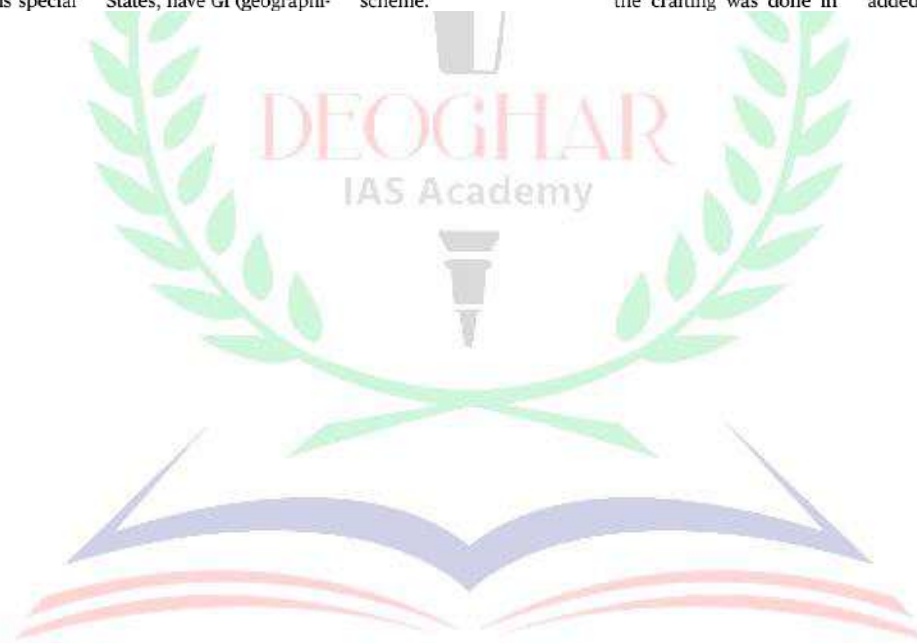
**Kanchipuram silk as a pouch:** The handloom silk, world renowned for its richness and elegance, makes its way from Tamil Nadu

cal indicator) tags, and are drawn from the "One District One Product" scheme.

According to NID Ahmedabad director Ashok Mondal, the curation and even the crafting was done in

the institute's Bengaluru campus, with craftsmen from five States still hard at work there.

The craft elements will be packed in a box made of bamboo weave with Kalamkari paintings on it done by Nimmalakunta artisans. The box will include an Ikat-Pochampalli cover that can be used even after the box has been dismantled, a fridge magnet depicting Mysore's Ganjifa art, usually seen in the famous Ganjifa playing cards, and a handmade pouch of Kanchipuram silk from Tamil Nadu. "Etikoppaka dolls from Andhra Pradesh are included, along with a bookmark made of screw-pine leaves woven by artists from Kerala," he added.



# Trump sentenced in hush money case

U.S. President-elect gets an unconditional discharge, New York judge spares Trump prison term or fine

He will become the first felon in the White House; calls it a 'setback for the New York court system'

Outside the courthouse, Trump supporters held giant banner emblazoned with their idol's name

Agence France-Presse  
NEW YORK

A judge sentenced Donald Trump to an unconditional discharge on Friday for covering up hush money payments to a porn star despite the U.S. President-elect's efforts to avoid becoming the first felon in the White House.

The judge spared Mr. Trump prison or a fine even though the 34 counts of falsifying business records on which he was convicted in May 2024 carried potential jail time. Instead New York judge Juan Merchan handed down the mildest criminal sanction available, an unconditional discharge – a relatively uncommon measure.

"Never before has this court been presented with such a unique and remark-

able set of circumstances," Mr. Merchan said. "The only lawful sentence that permits entry of a judgment of conviction without encroaching on the highest office of the land is an unconditional discharge."

Mr. Trump attended his sentencing virtually, with the judge, lawyers and media packed into the scruffy Manhattan courtroom that was the backdrop to the trial's high drama, legal wrangling and vitriolic personal attacks by the divisive Republican.

#### "Terrible experience"

"This has been a very terrible experience. I think it's been a tremendous setback for New York and the New York court system," Mr. Trump said before the discharge was passed. "It was done to damage my



Case closed: Donald Trump and attorney Todd Blanche appear virtually before judge Juan Merchan for the sentencing hearing. AP

reputation, so I would lose the election."

The former President appeared on screens in the courtroom with two large U.S. flags behind him, wearing a red tie with white stripes and looking on impatiently as the brief proceeding unfolded.

Ahead of the sentencing, prosecutor Joshua Steinglass said Mr. Trump

had been convicted of a "premeditated and continuous deception." "The verdict in this case was unanimous and decisive and it must be respected."

The trial saw Mr. Trump forced to look on as a string of witnesses testified that he had fraudulently covered up illicit payments to porn star Stormy Daniels in an effort to stop her dis-

closing their tryst ahead of the 2016 presidential election, which he ultimately won.

Mr. Trump had sought a suspension of the criminal proceedings after a New York State appeals court dismissed his effort to have the hearing delayed.

However, the Supreme Court ruled that the sentencing could proceed.

Prosecutors opposed the effort to stave off sentencing, 10 days before Mr. Trump is due to be sworn in for a second term, arguing it was wrong for the apex court to hear the case when the mogul still had avenues of appeal to pursue in New York.

#### First convicted felony

An unconditional discharge is a measure without any sanctions or restriction that nonetheless

upholds the jury's guilty verdict – and Mr. Trump's infamy as the first former President to be convicted of a felony.

The 78-year-old had potentially faced up to four years in prison.

"He's sticking his middle finger at the judge, the jury, the system of justice, and laughing," said Pace University law professor and former prosecutor Bennett Gershman ahead of the sentencing.

Outside the courthouse, Trump supporters held a giant banner emblazoned with their idol's name that was buffeted by high winds. There was also a small vigil of anti-Trump demonstrators behind a hoarding reading "Trump is guilty".

Mr. Trump's counsel had argued sentencing should have been post-

poned while the Republican appealed his conviction, but New York state Associate Justice Ellen Gesmer rejected that on Tuesday.

Mr. Trump repeatedly called the prosecution a "witch hunt" which Mr. Steinglass said was "designed to have a chilling effect".

"This defendant has caused enduring damage to public perception of the criminal justice system," the career prosecutor said.

Mr. Trump's lawyer Todd Blanche said he "very, very much disagree with much of what the [prosecution] just said".

Mr. Trump was certified as the winner of the 2024 presidential election on Monday, four years after his supporters rioted at the US Capitol as he sought to overturn his 2020 defeat.

