

DIA, DEOGHAR IAS ACADEMY

Daily News Feed

D.N.F

30.01.2025

**Sabaijor Complex, Near Jamunajor Pul, Castair Town
Deoghar, Mob:-9162500508**



Cabinet okays ₹16,300 crore mission to secure critical minerals

Reuters
NEW DELHI

India has approved a ₹16,300 crore (\$1.88 billion) plan to develop its critical minerals sector, the Information Minister said on Wednesday, as the world's fastest-growing major economy aspires to secure raw materials such as lithium.

The government also said it expects additional investment of ₹18,000 crore from the public sector in critical minerals.

"The mission will intensify the exploration of critical minerals within the country and in its offshore areas... Additionally, the mission will offer financial incentives for critical mineral exploration," the government said in a statement on Wednesday.

The funding illustrates India's efforts to reduce its reliance on imports of minerals such as lithium, key to energy transition technologies. India is still in the process of developing lithium processing technology, a sector predominantly led by China. India has contacted many countries, including Australia, Russia and the U.S. for technical help to develop lithium processing technology.

India is looking to expand its investments in Argentina's mining, gas and oil sectors, with a focus on lithium, to secure resources needed for its energy transition, Mines Secretary V.L. Kantha Rao told *Reuters* on a visit to Buenos Aires for the first in-person official meet since the two nations signed a preliminary bilateral pact in 2022 on critical minerals supply.



CCEA approves hike in ethanol procurement price

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) on Wednesday revised the ethanol procurement price for public sector oil marketing companies (OMCs) from ₹56.58 per litre to ₹57.97 per litre.

The new price is for the ongoing Ethanol Supply Year 2024-25, starting November 1, 2024 to October 31, 2025, under the Centre's ethanol blended petrol programme.

Briefing reporters after the Union Cabinet meet-

3% CHM price rise will assure sufficient ethanol availability to meet higher blending target

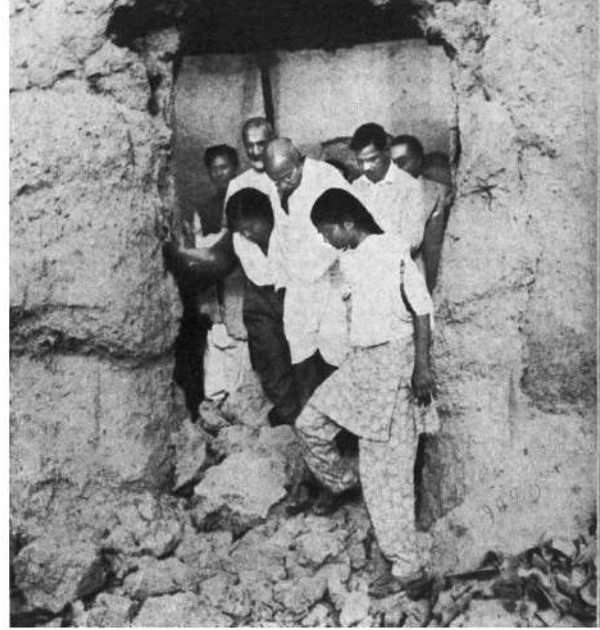
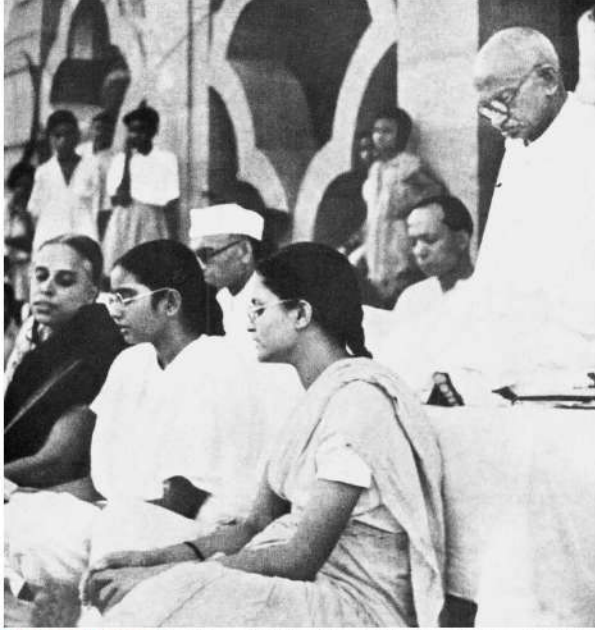
ing, Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said that C Heavy Molasses (CHM), that have very little sugar content, will be used for ethanol production.

“The more we encourage CHM for ethanol production, it will be beneficial for both farmers and environment,” he said.

“The approval will not only facilitate the continued policy in providing price stability and remunerative prices for ethanol suppliers but will also help in reducing dependency on crude oil imports, savings in foreign exchange and bring benefits to the environment,” as per an official statement.

GST and transportation costs would be separately payable. “Increase in prices of CHM ethanol by 3% will assure sufficient availability of ethanol to meet the increased blending target,” the statement noted.





The constant bystander: The picture on the left shows Manu Gandhi, Abha, and Mahatma Gandhi at a prayer meet; the one on the right is when Mahatma Gandhi, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Mridula Sarabhai and Manu were in Bihar. SABARNATI ASHRAM PRESERVATION AND MEMORIAL TRUST; GANDHI HERITAGE PORTAL

Beloved witness: the extraordinary testimony of Manu Gandhi

Tridip Suhrud has translated the second volume of the diaries of Gandhi's grandniece, starting on December 19, 1946, and ending the day after the Mahatma's assassination on January 30, 1948. It is a testimony which bears witness to Gandhi's innermost struggles in the last months of his life

Ananya Vajpeyi

The third section of the *Mundaka Upanishad* is important for our republic, because the phrase "*Satyameva Jayate*", India's national motto, occurs in verse 6. But in Indian philosophy, especially *Vedanta*, it is the first verse of this section that is celebrated. It reads: "Two birds, companions and friends, perch on the very same tree. One of them eats the fruit, the other, not eating, looks on." (MuU 3:1:1)

The commentarial tradition from Shankara onwards explicates each word. The two birds (*dva suparna*) are respectively a consumer (*bhogi*) and a witness (*sakshi*). One is engaged in eating, the other in observing the first. These are two conjoined (*sayuja*) aspects of being that share a single tree (*samanam vriksham*), interpreted as the body. One actively partakes of the world, while the other, perched alongside, watches, friendly but not participating.

We should understand Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) and Mridula 'Manu' Gandhi (1927-1969), his grandniece, as akin to these two philosophically luminous birds (Svetasvatara Upanishad 4:6 is identical). Gandhi acts; Manu bears witness. The second volume of her diaries, starting on December 19, 1946 in Srirampur, and ending the day after Nathuram Godse assassinated the Mahatma at Birla House, New Delhi, has been superbly edited, masterfully introduced and flawlessly translated by Tridip Suhrud.

Moral protagonist

This is the testimony of the second bird, a witness not only to the principal events of

India's history in those years, but also to Gandhi's innermost struggles with his mind and body, his politics and sexuality, his truth and nonviolence. It is an altogether singular work. In our long civilisational quest for self-knowledge, there is no moral protagonist like Gandhi, nor an intimate witness like Manu.

As creatures of fact rather than metaphor, naturally they do not inhabit a single body. But because both are equally subject to the limits of bodily existence, they must be taken as equals. They are not similar at all — one is a man, the other a woman; one is old (almost 80), the other is young (almost 20); one is world-famous, the other unknown outside her family.

And yet, like the inseparable birds of the Upanishadic verse, for the last five years of Gandhi's life from 1943 to 1948, they are joined together in a single experiential space. Manu's diaries give us access to what unfolds in this metaphorical tree where the two birds "nestle" (in Patrick Olivelle's translation), in a way that no one else, not even Gandhi himself, could represent.

On almost any given day that Manu documents, there is a striking simultaneity of the historic and the quotidian. On the one hand, an endless procession of eminences coming and going from wherever Gandhi happens to be staying, all noted with a certain familiarity that is at once startling and understandable: Jawaharlal ji, Sardar Dada, Rajendra Babu, Maulana ji, Khan Sahib, Aruna Behn, Ghanshyamdas ji, Jinnah Sahib, Rajkumari Behn, Kripalani ji, Mira Behn, Rajaji, Vijay Lakshmi Behn... besides numerous relatives and ashram associates of Gandhi (and hence of Manu too).

Tumultuous times

Hectic discussions with political leaders, social activists, wealthy businessmen, international press and state officials cover the transfer of populations, the resettlement of refugees, the integration of princely states, widespread communal violence and all manner of other headline events in those tumultuous years of Independence and Partition. Gandhi is terribly unhappy with everything unfolding around him.

Yet true to his character, through all of the tumult engulfing India, he continues to be almost absurdly meticulous about spinning cotton, writing articles for *Harijan*, fasting in protest, adjudicating the minutest of quarrels between members of his inner circle, reading and praying, carrying on a voluminous correspondence, monitoring the food intake of his entourage, and obsessing about his digestion and bowel movements.

Punishing schedule

But in Bapu's close proximity, Manu has her immediate preoccupations, which revolve around his diet and sleep, his health and sickness, washing and darning his clothes, preparing his meals, massaging his head and feet, giving him sponge baths and mud packs, all the while trying to maintain a diary as regularly as possible. She herself is frequently besieged by nosebleeds and fevers, abdominal pains and headaches, and bouts of vomiting and dysentery.

A punishing schedule of relentless travel, gruelling stress, extreme heat and cold, combined with Gandhi's exacting demands that are as much spiritual as physical, clearly take a toll on the young woman. Yet she never expresses concern

for herself — her focus is always and only Gandhi.

Gandhi introduces Manu to many sceptical guests as his "nurse". But then he explains, for example to Lady Mountbatten, visiting him at Bhangi Niwas on July 5, 1947: "I am not only a grandfather to her but also her mother. I wish to cultivate the ideal that even a man can become a mother."

It's difficult to say what caused greater discomfort even to the most loyal Gandhians, and continues to provoke contemporary readers: That he appointed Manu as his chosen witness, or that he appointed himself her mother? To tease out the psychological ramifications of these utterly disjunct relationships, and make sense of his insistence on both roles simultaneously, requires a profound hermeneutics of testimony and of care, outside the scope of this brief review.

On June 21, 1947, Gandhi was on his way back from Haridwar where he and Nehru met hundreds of distressed Partition refugees. Manu records: "We left for Delhi at 5:30. ... Bapuji, Panditji, and I were in the rear seat... He lay down in the car around 6:15. His feet were in Panditji's lap and head in mine. What a wonderful sight! ... This holy picture produced such joy within me!"

On January 31, 1948, in her last entry, she writes: "We reached the cremation ground at 5:00 pm. There was such a multitude of people that even standing near the pyre was difficult. ... I wanted to stay till the pyre burnt. But Sardar brought me home. How would I enter the room bereft of Bapu's presence?"

With the protagonist gone, his beloved witness too, vanishes from view.

Ananya Vajpeyi is a Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies.

How can the Budget arrest growth decline?

How did the period from 2004 to 2011 have a consistent high growth rate accompanied by a reduction in absolute poverty? Does the nature of fiscal expenditure also matter when it comes to private consumption? How would an increase in revenue expenditure, particularly in the social sector, help?

EXPLAINER

Dipa Sinha
Rohit Azad

The Indian economy is going through a rough patch as was evident from the recently released provisional estimates of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The underlying growth rate is lower than what was expected and estimated by the government earlier. What is surprising is that, as noted in the last Economic Survey, this slowdown is despite the rising capital expenditure in various budgets under this regime. To understand the current predicament of the government, it may help to take a longue duree of the Indian economy. In particular, we focus on private consumption since that is the ultimate driver of the domestic market.

We divide the post reform period into three parts – 1991-2004, 2004-2011, and 2011-2023. The period from 2004 to 2011 stands out as the one with sustained high growth rate accompanied by a reduction in absolute poverty. This period also saw some revival in state interventions in welfare through rights-based legislations as well as new national schemes.

In contrast, the most recent period starting from around 2012, but especially since 2019, has seen a slowdown in growth rates with the current concerns in the Indian economy being related to sluggish private consumption as well as private investment. This period also saw some major shocks to the economy including demonetisation, the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST), and the lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic. Chart 1 shows the rate of growth of GDP and private consumption over these three periods; and we get inverted U-shaped growth curves in both.

What explains the high growth then and the slowdown now? Something unique happened during the high growth phase of 2004-2011. While income and wealth inequality were rising for over a decade, this is the only phase in the post-reform period when the share of consumption (out of the total private consumption demand) of the richest 20%, after having risen since 1990, fell significantly. This means that the consumption of the bottom 80% was rising at a faster pace than the richest 20%. But how was this possible when the growth of income was the opposite?

We believe that state policy played a key role in this unique composition of consumption demand. It is not just the amount of fiscal expenditure that matters but its nature as well. Those at the lower end of the income spectrum have a higher propensity to consume as compared to the richest. If state spending tilts in favour of the working class, the income and employment multiplier effects of such spending would be much larger.

To understand this point, let us consider a hypothetical scenario where the government has a choice of spending ₹100 on (A) capital expenditure in commissioning a large scale dam/nuclear project or (B) providing it as National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) wages or pension to the elderly. Let us, for simplicity, assume all wages are consumed and all profits saved.

Under choice A, only a part of the ₹100 is received as wages, which increases workers' consumption demand by that amount. This increase in demand, say on food and clothes, generates income for those employed in producing these

commodities and this process, what economists call as multiplier effect, goes on. In contrast, under choice B, the entire ₹100 is received as wages which leads to a larger base on which the income and employment multiplier works.

Additionally, in choice A, there is a likelihood of a greater leakage of demand to the rest of the world in the form of higher imports such a capital expenditure may entail. Heavy machinery required for a dam or a nuclear reactor may have to be imported whereas the import component in choice B will likely be lower. So, the domestic component of choice A's

multiplier might be even lower than what we have described above.

If the state spends as income transfers (whether in cash or kind) a certain amount per worker at the lower end of the income spectrum, this would add to the demand for mass consumption goods. A mere change in the composition of government expenditure in favour of such transfers, therefore, adds an exogenous component to demand. Moreover, the state played an additional role during this period by introducing NREGA and fixing its wages higher than the prevailing market wages. This generated additional

Prosperity then, slowdown now

We divide the post reform period into three parts – 1991-2004, 2004-2011, and 2011-2023. The period from 2004 to 2011 stands out as the one with sustained high growth rate. This period also saw some revival in state interventions in welfare through rights-based legislations as well as new national schemes

Chart 1: The growth of GDP and consumption since 1991

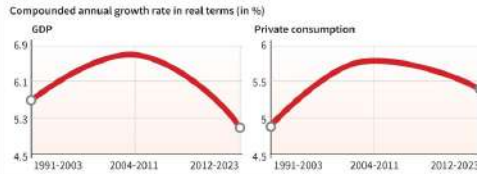


Chart 2: Social sector and development expenditures

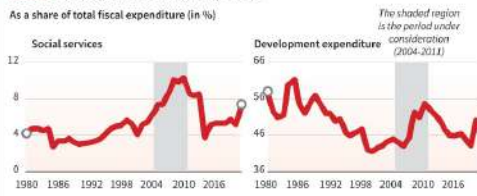


Chart 3: Growth in consumption during 2004-2011

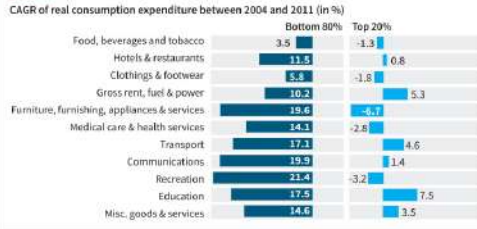
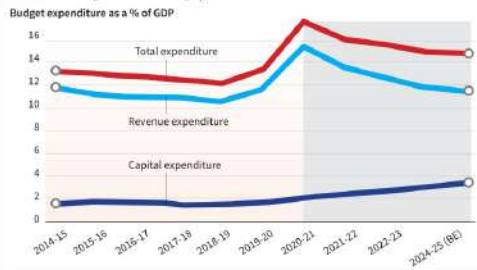


Chart 4: The NDA government's changing priorities



Source: Data from C.D.C. Union Budget documents have been used to derive macroeconomic trends, and the India Human Development Survey (IHDS) for household level analysis

jobs as well as set a floor for rural wages. This rise in rural wages pushed up wages for casual unskilled workers. Investment in agriculture and in rural areas in general also increased during this period contributing to rural incomes.

Chart 2 shows a sharp rise in the share of social services expenditure as well as development expenditures out of the total expenditure of the Union government, which exactly overlaps with the boom of 2004-2011. Developmental expenditure includes expenditure on economic as well as social services and therefore also includes the spending on agriculture and rural development, whereas social sector expenditure only includes the direct social sector spending such as education, health and welfare programmes.

Not surprisingly, this change in the nature of fiscal spending had a significant impact on consumption, across different categories of commodities, for the bottom 80% of the population (see Chart 3). It is this rise in consumption of the bottom 80% (and this trend continues all the way down to the lowest income group as well) in comparison to the top 20% that explains the fall in the latter's share in total consumption.

What has the government done so far to arrest the current slowdown?

While the government has acknowledged the slowdown and the lack of private investment (for example, in the last Economic Survey), its response has been to focus on capital expenditure of the kind mentioned in choice A as discussed above (see Chart 4). This was done even as the share of fiscal expenditure (as a percentage of GDP) was falling. This exclusive focus on capex was done with the expectation that this would crowd-in private investment but unfortunately the corporate sector has not responded either to this or to the tax cuts from 30% to 22% in 2019.

It is not surprising why private investment has not picked up. Under conditions of slowdown or lack of demand, investment responds more to the level of activity than to cost considerations. If the existing factories are not running to capacity, why would the firms invest more even if they are flush with funds (in the form of post-tax profits) or have access to cheap credit? It won't be an exaggeration to argue, therefore, that an increase in capex, especially of a capital-using variety, is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for revival of the economy.

What should be done instead?

An increase in revenue expenditure, particularly in the social sector, would result in a virtuous cycle of higher income for the workers and therefore to a higher income and employment multiplier, which may kickstart private investment as well. Capital expenditure too must be focused on labour-intensive projects that have a higher multiplier. The experience of 2004-2011 is particularly telling in this regard. What is required, therefore, is a two pronged strategy – (a) fiscal expenditure as a share of GDP has to rise (b) and within that the share of revenue expenditure needs to rise. In other words, a complete reversal in the trend shown in Chart 4.

It remains to be seen on February 1 whether the priority of the government is to placate the markets by keeping such expenses low or to improve the living conditions of the working people of this country to reverse the slowdown.

Dipa Sinha is an independent researcher and Rohit Azad teaches economics at Jawaharlal Nehru University

THE GIST

Something unique happened during the high growth phase of 2004-2011. While income and wealth inequality were rising for over a decade, this is the only phase in the post-reform period when the share of consumption of the richest 20%, fell significantly.

Those at the lower end of the income spectrum have a higher propensity to consume as compared to the richest. If state spending tilts in favour of the working class, the income and employment multiplier effects of such spending would be much larger.

An increase in revenue expenditure, particularly in the social sector, would result in a virtuous cycle of higher income for the workers and therefore to a higher income and employment multiplier.

The old and the new: schemes to look out for on Budget day

Schemes such as Digital India, Startup India and Smart Cities Mission have recorded consistent declines in funding

DATA POINT

The Hindu Data Team

With Budget FY2025-26 scheduled to be presented on February 1, here is a look at some of the recently launched schemes, older schemes with significantly reduced funding, schemes under the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) umbrella, and those promoting electric mobility in India.

Table 1 shows a select list of recently launched schemes and their allocations. It includes the scheme for installing solar rooftops which was launched in 2024 and allocated ₹6,250 crore in FY25(BE). Other schemes are the Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan to re-imagine panchayati raj institutions, the scheme to upgrade Industrial Training Institute (ITIs) and the controversial PM Vishwakarma scheme, which aims to nurture the guru-shishya parampara or family-based practice of traditional skills. Schemes with the goal of promoting AI in India such as the INDIA AI mission and Centres of Excellence for AI are also a part of the list.

Table 2 shows a select list of older schemes, allocations for which have significantly reduced over the years. Major schemes include the Regional Connectivity Scheme, from unserved and underserved airports, and the Smart Cities Mission to enhance the quality of life in 100 cities. The promotion of the digital payments scheme did not get any allocation in the last Budget. Other schemes include Digital India and Startup India.

Table 3 shows the complete list of schemes which come under the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) umbrella. The largest of them is the successful electronics and IT hardware scheme, with the most recent allocation touching ₹6,200 crore. **Table 4** shows the list of schemes which promote electric mobility, with the FAME scheme being the biggest in terms of allocations.

Budget's highs and lows

The text and data for the tables were sourced from the Union Budget documents. The figures for 2024-25 are budget estimates, for 2023-24 are revised estimates and for 2022-23 are actuals

Table 1: Select list of recently launched schemes and allocations for the latest year in ₹ crore

Scheme	Explanation	2024-25
PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana	For installing rooftop solar panels	6,250
Centres of Excellence (CoE) in Artificial Intelligence (AI)	To establish three centres of excellence for AI in educational institutions for research and development	255
IndiaAI Mission	To catalyse the AI innovation ecosystem	551.75
National Green Hydrogen Mission	To make India the global hub for production, usage and export of green hydrogen	600
Legal Aid Defense Counsel System (LADCS)	To provide legal aid work in criminal matters	200
PM Vishwakarma	To strengthen and nurture the guru-shishya parampara or family-based practice of traditional skills	4,824
Rashtriya Gram Swaraj	To re-imagine panchayati raj institutions	1063.67
Global Biofuels Alliance	To expedite the global uptake of biofuels	0.01
Mission Anveshan	To fill gaps in seismic coverage and build a robust geoscientific database	332
National Quantum Mission	To create an ecosystem in quantum technology	427
Pradhan Mantri Janati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM JANMAN)	To enhance the socio-economic conditions of particularly vulnerable tribal groups	240
National Action for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem (NAMASTE)	To ensure the safety and dignity of sanitation workers and safe delivery of mechanised sanitation services	116.94
ITI Upgradation Scheme	To upgrade ITIs	1,000

Table 2: Shows a select list of older schemes, allocations for which have significantly reduced over the years. Figures in ₹ crore

Scheme	Explanation	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Regional connectivity scheme	To enhance regional air connectivity from unserved and underserved airports	1,063.81	850	502
Smart cities mission	Aims to enhance the quality of life in 100 selected cities	8,652.92	8,000	2,400
Promotion of digital payment	To help in growth of digital transactions	1,989.62	584	-
Digital India	To transform India into a digitally empowered society	5,518.09	4,428.01	4,216.51
Startup India	Aims to support entrepreneurs and build a strong startup ecosystem	44.21	45.61	0.01
Prime Minister Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP)	To generate self-employment opportunities through the establishment of micro-enterprises in the non-farm sector	2733.21	2,958.22	2,300
Unnat Bharat Abhiyan	To enable higher educational institutions to work with the people in rural India in identifying development challenges	11.58	5	5
Internationalisation of Higher Education	Help internationalisation of education services	144.36	100	104
Development of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)	Provides various measures for the overall development of the backward population of STs	137.18	-	20

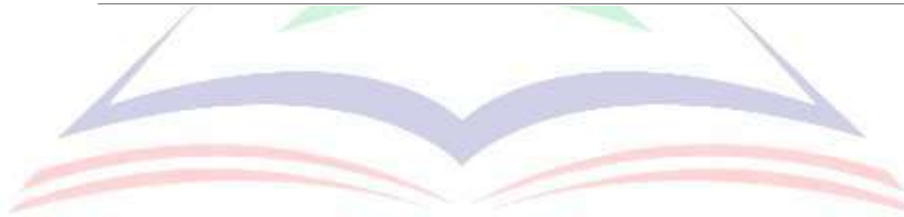


Table 3: The complete list of schemes which come under the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) umbrella and allocations for them in ₹ crore

PLI schemes	2024-25
Large scale electronics and IT Hardware	6200
Food processing industry	1,444.02
White goods (ACs and LED lights)	298.02
Toys	0.01
Footwear and leather sector	0.01
Automobiles and auto components	3,500
National programme on Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) battery storage	250
Specialty steel in India	245.82
Multiple PLIs	2,143
Promote telecom and networking products manufacturing in India	-
Drone and drone components	57

Table 4: Shows the list of schemes which promote electric mobility and allocations for them in ₹ crore

Scheme	Explanation	2024-25
FAME	To promote electric mobility in India	2,671.33
Electric mobility promotion scheme	To accelerate the adoption of electric two-wheelers	500
Scheme to promote manufacturing of electric passenger cars in India (SMEC)	To promote manufacturing of electric passenger cars in India	13
PM-eBus Sewa Scheme	To boost India's electric mobility infrastructure	1,300



Bridge the milk divide for a nutritionally secure India

For a long time, India has told the incredible supply side story of its milk revolution. The White Revolution that was initiated by Verghese Kurien propelled India to become the world's largest milk producer. It is now time to bring focus to demand and ensure that milk reaches the most vulnerable.

Milk, a vital source of protein, calcium, and other micronutrients, is integral to plant-heavy Indian diets. Research links milk consumption to lower odds of stunting, underweight, and anthropometric failure in Indian children aged between six months and five years. However, milk consumption remains highly inequitable across socio-economic groups and regions. As the Union Budget 2025-26 approaches, addressing these disparities is essential to improved health outcomes for all.

Consumption disparities

The latest Household Consumer Expenditure Surveys (HCES) by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) show that households in the top-income decile consume three to four times more milk (equivalent) per capita compared to households in the lowest-income decile. Despite sharper increases in consumption among lower-income groups, the poorest 30% consumed just 18% of India's milk.

The NSSO primarily captures at-home consumption, which is only about 50% of the total milk production. Out-of-home milk consumption through restaurants, and hotels is not adequately captured by HCES. If accounted for, this would only likely enlarge the consumption difference.

Consumption disparities also show regional, social, and urban-rural divides. Urban households consume ~30% more milk per capita than rural ones, despite most milk being produced in rural India. Among social groups, Scheduled Tribe households consume four litres less milk per capita compared to general category



Abhishek Jain

is a fellow and director at the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW)



Ruchira Goyal

is a programme associate and Next Generation India Fellow at the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW)

The challenge is in ensuring equitable milk access for the most vulnerable while moderating over-consumption among the affluent

households. Regionally, States such as Rajasthan, Punjab and Haryana consume between 333 grams to 421 grams per capita daily at home, while eastern States such as Chhattisgarh, Odisha, and West Bengal consume just between 75g to 171g.

Focus on vulnerable groups

While variations in dietary preferences and lactose intolerance levels partly explain these disparities, affordability is a key barrier. The National Institute of Nutrition recommends consuming 300 g per capita of milk daily for an average sedentary adult. However, meeting this level of consumption would require 70% of Indian households to spend 10% to 30% of their total monthly expenditure on milk.

Meanwhile, affluent urban households are likely to consume more than double the recommended levels, which includes high-fat, high-sugar products such as ice cream and packaged milk-based sweets. This raises concerns about overnutrition, obesity, and non-communicable diseases. Given these inequities and challenges, prioritising milk access for vulnerable groups such as young children, pregnant and lactating women, and the elderly in low-income settings is critical. Here is how:

First, enhance milk provision for the vulnerable through the Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman (POSHAN), Integrated Child Development Services meals, and take-home rations. Collaborate with institutions such as the National Institute of Nutrition to integrate milk or milk products that align with socio-cultural preferences and tolerances. States such as Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka and Telangana already provide milk or milk powder under these schemes, but quantities remain insufficient. And some States such as Chhattisgarh, have discontinued provisions due to financial constraints. Boosting financial allocations to these schemes could yield

substantial returns. Governments can explore innovative financing options, such as social bonds, tapping into corporate social responsibility funding, and gradually increasing cess on unhealthy foods.

In regions with strong market access and dairy cooperative networks, milk coupons could enhance access, lower distribution costs, and boost local milk markets.

Second, emphasise the nutritional benefits of milk and other locally appropriate food items in awareness campaigns, targeting women through Anganwadi centres, doctors, self-help groups, and civil society organisations. Maharashtra and Bihar are already leading in organising grassroots activities to drive nutrition awareness and interventions, as seen in Poshan Maah 2024. Research highlights that improved women's nutrition awareness significantly enhances household dietary diversity.

The U.K. model

Third, promote healthy consumption awareness using partnerships with doctors, influencers, and the media. Health messaging should encourage moderation in milk consumption among over-consuming affluent groups, advocating diverse, balanced diets. This can mitigate the burdens of over-nutrition from dairy products and increase milk affordability for vulnerable groups. For example, the Change4Life Sugar Swaps campaign in the United Kingdom effectively reduced sugar and fat consumption, and offers a model for similar initiatives in India.

Milk plays an important role in India's nutrition security. Ensuring equitable access for the most vulnerable while moderating overconsumption among the affluent would honour Verghese Kurien's vision of a nutritionally secure India, making the benefits of the milk revolution accessible to all.

The views expressed are personal



Retinal diseases: RNA therapeutics show promise but is India ready?

There is currently no large cohort study in India, i.e. involving at least 500 patients, to describe the mutation spectrum of IRDs; such extensive studies are vital for researchers to identify the most common genetic defects that can subsequently be targeted using precision medicine

Sandeep Sharma Asodu

Vision is crucial to navigate the world, connect with others, and perform everyday tasks. It helps us perceive colours, shapes, and movement, which are essential to learn, work, and keep safe.

According to the World Health Organisation, more than 2.2 billion people worldwide experience some form of vision impairment. The causes range from cataracts and diabetic retinopathy to glaucoma, age-related macular degeneration, and inherited retinal diseases (IRDs).

IRDs are genetic conditions that lead to progressive vision loss, often resulting in blindness. These diseases stem from mutations in more than 300 genes responsible for the function of the retina, the light-sensitive tissue at the back of the eye.

While some individuals may lose their sight shortly after birth, others experience gradual deterioration over time. In many cases, early intervention could slow down or even prevent the progression of blindness.

An estimated 5.5 million people suffer from IRDs around the world, with a prevalence rate of one in 3,450. However, the situation is more critical in India. Studies have revealed significantly higher prevalence, with one in 372 individuals in rural South India, one in 930 in urban South India, and one in 750 in rural Central India affected by these conditions.

A treatment breakthrough

In 2017, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) made a historic move by approving the first gene therapy for blindness caused by mutations in the *RPE65* gene.

This approval sparked hope for patients with other genetic causes of blindness. Currently, more than 50 clinical trials are exploring gene therapy as an option to treat various inherited eye disorders.

In India, however, awareness among clinicians about the availability and potential of *RPE65* gene therapy remains limited. While gene therapy has proven revolutionary, it is not yet a universal solution for all genetic eye diseases. This is where RNA-based therapies are poised to make a significant impact.

RNA-based precision therapeutics are emerging as a game-changer for genetic disorders, including IRDs. Unlike DNA or genome-editing therapies, RNA-based therapies offer a safer alternative as they make temporary changes that don't carry over to future generations, reducing the risk of unintended long-term effects.

Recent advancements have introduced RNA-based therapies like antisense oligonucleotides (ASOs), which have already been used successfully to treat diseases such as spinal muscular atrophy and Duchenne muscular dystrophy. Medical researchers are now exploring ASO therapy for retinal conditions like Stargardt disease, Leber congenital amaurosis, and retinitis pigmentosa.

Beyond ASOs, researchers are also developing more advanced RNA-based options to address IRDs. One promising approach involves RNA-editing with ADAR enzymes, which can correct specific genetic mutations at the RNA level. This method has the potential to restore protein production in retinal cells without altering the underlying DNA, offering a new way to treat retinal degenerative



Visual trouble: An estimated 5.5 million people suffer from IRDs around the world, with a prevalence rate of one in 3,450. GETTY IMAGES

diseases caused by single-point mutations.

Another innovative strategy is the use of suppressor tRNAs to bypass stop-codon mutations, which can prematurely halt protein synthesis in retinal cells. By enabling the production of full-length proteins, this approach could help restore proper retinal function in IRD patients, where stop-codon mutations disrupt vital protein production.

Another potential small molecule RNA-based therapy is PTCL24, also known as ataluren, which is already being used to treat patients with cystic fibrosis and Duchenne muscular dystrophy. Recently, clinical trials have begun to investigate its use in treating a rare developmental eye disease called aniridia.

Taken together, these options offer a more targeted, personalised treatment approach that could halt the progression of IRDs and improve patient outcomes with greater precision.

India and precision therapeutics

Precision medicine is an approach that tailors treatments to an individual's genetic makeup, lifestyle, and other factors, offering a more targeted alternative to the one-size-fits-all approach of traditional options.

For rare diseases like IRDs, understanding the genetic mutations prevalent in a population is essential for researchers to develop effective RNA-based therapies. Although researchers have linked more than 300 genes to IRDs, research in India has yet to

IRDs are genetic conditions that lead to progressive vision loss, often resulting in blindness. These diseases stem from mutations in more than 300 genes responsible for the function of the retina, the light-sensitive tissue present at the back of the eye

fully map the genetic mutations responsible for these conditions in the local population.

In fact, there is currently no large cohort study in India (i.e. involving at least 500 patients) to describe the mutation spectrum of IRDs. Such extensive studies are vital for researchers to identify the most common genetic defects that can subsequently be targeted using precision medicine.

For example, the *ABCA4* gene is commonly mutated in IRD patients worldwide and is a popular therapeutic target. However, we lack a clear understanding of whether it is just as prevalent in Indian populations and/or whether some other mutation is expressed more often in certain ethnic groups.

India's large size and diverse population add another layer to this challenge.

Genetic mutations can vary significantly across different communities, making it difficult to identify common mutations. Accurately

mapping these mutations necessitates extensive, resource-intensive research across various subgroups.

Additionally, there are several barriers, including a lack of awareness of the genetic basis of IRDs among the people at large and healthcare providers alike, limited availability of genetic counselling services, insufficient research funding, and restricted access to diagnostic infrastructure in rural areas.

Thus, to fully unlock the potential of RNA-based therapeutics, India must prioritise genetic research with a particular emphasis on understanding the mutation profiles of people with IRDs, in collaboration with local research institutions and healthcare providers.

A notable example of such a collaboration is a June 2024 study by researchers from the CSIR-Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology, New Delhi, and the L.V. Prasad Eye Institute, Hyderabad. The teams' findings led to the development of a precision therapy for a specific form of IRD.

Expanding partnerships between global and local pharmaceutical companies, as well as research institutes, will also make these treatments more accessible to Indian patients. Raising awareness among clinicians and researchers about advances in RNA therapies will likewise be crucial to ensure they are implemented effectively. Sandeep Sharma Asodu is a postdoctoral fellow at Hadassah Medical School, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. (sandeepsarma.asodu@mail.huji.ac.il)

Rooftop solar installation scheme reaches 8.5% of 1-crore house target

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

Nearly a year after the Centre launched the ₹75,000-crore PM Surya Ghar scheme, 8.5 lakh households have installed rooftop solar connections, Union Minister for New and Renewable Energy Pralhad Joshi said at a public event on Wednesday. First announced following the inauguration of the Ram temple in Ayodhya by Prime Minister Narendra Modi last January, the scheme was officially launched on February 15, 2024.

The scheme, on the whole, targets one crore household installations across India. Mr. Joshi said that this target is likely to be met “within the next two or three years”.

Last month, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Energy remarked about the “slow pace” of



Keeping it affordable: The PM Surya Ghar scheme was officially launched on February 15, 2024. ISTOCKPHOTO

installations. Only five lakh installations, of a total 20 lakh applications made on the Surya Ghar portal, had been completed as of October last year, the committee noted. The Secretary of the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy told the committee that there were “rain-related delays” but the Centre was on track to ensure that 12 lakh households were covered in the financial year

2024-25. With time, the pace of installations would accelerate, the official said. He explained that from 3,000 in a day, the number of daily installations had risen to 9,000.

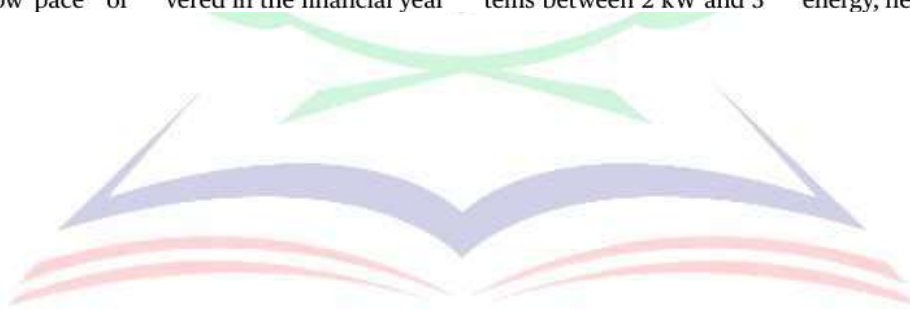
Subsidy given

The scheme subsidises 60% of the solar unit cost for systems up to 2 kW capacity and 40% of additional system costs for systems between 2 kW and 3

kW capacity. The subsidy has been capped at 3 kW capacity.

At current benchmark prices, this means a ₹30,000 subsidy for a 1-kW system, ₹60,000 for 2-kW systems, and ₹78,000 for 3-kW systems or higher.

Speaking at the India Energy Transition Conference, organised by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), the Union Minister said India is set to add 50 GW of new renewable capacity annually in the coming years. In the past 10 years, India’s installed renewable capacity has risen by 200%, from 75.52 GW in 2014 to 220 GW today. The tariff for grid-connected solar power plants has decreased by 80%, from ₹10.95 per unit in 2010-11 to just ₹2.15 per unit, making India a leader in affordable renewable energy, he added.



Lack of a protective law exposes domestic workers to abuse, says SC

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

Anguished by the years of abuse an impoverished tribal woman from Chhattisgarh suffered as a domestic worker in the national capital and neighbouring cities, the Supreme Court on Wednesday directed the Union government to work on bringing a law to protect this burgeoning but unorganised workforce from exploitation.

“The simple reason for this harassment and rampant abuse, which seems to be prevalent throughout the country, is the legal vacuum which exists vis-à-vis the rights and protection of domestic workers... As a result, they frequently endure low wages, unsafe environments, and extended hours without effective recourse,” the court observed in a judgment.

A Bench of Justices Su-



A legal framework can help to uphold the rights of domestic workers, says court.

rya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan ordered the Centre to form an inter-ministerial committee to “consider the desirability of recommending a legal framework for the benefit, protection and regulation of the rights of domestic workers”.

The committee must comprise experts from the Ministries of Labour, Women and Child Develop-

ment, Law and Justice and Social Justice and Empowerment. The report of the committee must be placed before the Union government in six months, after which the Centre would decide on the necessity of a law for domestic workers, who were mainly women.

Justice Kant, who wrote the judgment, said the lack of a Central law was indeed a vacuum.

State laws

The court drew attention to States such as Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Kerala which had not waited for a Central law but took the initiative to enact their laws to safeguard domestic workers. These three States had constituted specialised bodies under their respective laws to administer various social security benefits, maternity and childcare, education assis-

tance, and medical expense reimbursement, etc.

The court noted that multiple attempts were made in the past to bring a Central law to protect domestic workers, from the Domestic Workers (Conditions of Employment) Bill of 1959 to the Domestic Workers (Regulation of Work and Social Security) Bill of 2017. None of these proposed laws were enacted.

Justice Kant said the demand for domestic workers was mounting in India in consonance with rapid urbanisation. However, this indispensable workforce remained the most vulnerable to abuse. Noting that, “Domestic workers often belong to marginalised communities, such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, and Economically Weaker Sections.”



Maharashtra reports two Guillain-Barre deaths, 16 fresh cases

The total number of cases mounts to 127, with 20 on ventilator; Health Department of the Sangli Municipal Corporation put on a high alert

Snehal Mutha
MUMBAI

Two deaths from Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) and 16 fresh suspected cases were reported in Pune and other districts, the Public Health Department said on Wednesday.

The total number of cases mounted to 127 from the 111 till January 28.

A total of 23 patients are from the Pune Municipal Corporation area, 73 from newly integrated villages within its limits, 13 from the Pimpri-Chinchwad Municipal Corporation limits, nine from Pune's rural areas and nine from other districts in Maharashtra.

Nearly 20 patients are on ventilator, show data of the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme by the Public Health Department

At least six suspected cases came to light in Sangli district on Wednesday and they have been admitted to various private hospitals in Sangli.



Emergency preparedness: Beds kept ready to accommodate GBS patients at Kamla Nehru Hospital in Pune. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

“Six patients have suspected GBS, but nothing to worry about as all these patients are from different areas. If all the cases are from one place, then only we can say it is an outbreak. However, we are checking the background and whether they travelled,” District Civil Surgeon, Sangli, Vikramsinh Kadam told *The Hindu*.

The six patients were hospitalised in the last six days, the doctor said.

Three patients have been found in the Chintamani Nagar, Mardawadi, and Gudmudshingi areas of Sangli, two are from rural Sangli, and one is from

the Kolhapur border area.

The Sangli Municipal Corporation's Health Department has been put on high alert.

The Health Department has sent 121 stool samples to the National Institute of Virology Pune, all tested for enteric virus panel. Twenty-one samples are positive for Norovirus, and are positive for Campylobacter.

Among 25 cerebrospinal fluid samples, one tested positive for Epstein-Barr virus.

All 200 blood samples have tested negative for Zika, Dengue, and Chikungunya.

Act against negligent officials, SC tells Railways

Maitri Porecha
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court directed the Railways Ministry on Wednesday to act against negligent Railway officials, in the case of extensive irregularities in the management of catering stalls in its Mumbai division. Corrective measures must be taken on the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) report within three months, and a report is to

be sent to the SC registry, it said.

In an order dated January 21, the SC observed that a complaint alleging fraud to the tune of almost ₹95 lakh was received before the Special Judge of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), after which reports were sought from the CBI and CVC. A bench of Justices J.K. Maheshwari and Arvind Kumar observed that there were administrative lapses

on the part of Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC), and serious negligence on the part of divisional officials.

The complaint said these rail officials have been undervaluing the sales of vends such as Coffee Day and Tibbs Frankie, allowing them to operate without valid licenses for multiple years, in violation of the Railway Catering Policy.

The seven officials

against whom an inquiry was conducted include Atul Rane, former CPRO, Central Railway, and those working in the catering division: S.S. Patange, Manik Ram, Sudhakar, Ghodke, M.D. Srivastava, and Suresh Saxena.

A CVC inquiry held the IRCTC administration responsible for the huge outstanding dues, and said that divisional officials must be held responsible for negligence on their

part. The bench also observed that the CVC report must be implemented by the Railways.

“Report of CVC shall be looked into by the Railway administration and placed before competent authorities for taking action within a month and the corrective actions be taken within three months, and a report to that effect be sent to the Registry of this court for placing on record,” the SC said.



High-level meet discusses Labour Code rules, issues of gig workers

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Setting the stage for the possible implementation of the four Labour Codes from April 1, a meeting of officials and Ministers of the Union and State Labour Ministries reviewed the progress in drafting of rules under the codes by the States.

The meeting noted that over 18 States and Union Territories have implemented a majority of the reforms and more than 32 of them have pre-published the draft rules.

The remaining have made satisfactory progress and all 36 are expected to complete pre-publication of harmonised draft rules in line with the Labour



A balance between workers' welfare and industrial growth is needed, says Labour Minister Mansukh Mandaviya at meeting. FILE PHOTO

Codes by March 31.

The two-day meeting, chaired by Union Labour Minister Mansukh Mandaviya, discussed labour reforms and issues of gig and platform workers. Dr. Mandaviya said a fine balance between workers' welfare

and industrial growth must remain at the core of all policy decisions.

He urged all States and Union Territories to participate in knowledge sharing on reforms undertaken by them.

"There is equal focus on

interventions for matching demand and supply in the labour market, promoting employment generation and employability through National Career Service (NCS) Portal and Model Career Centres (MCC), etc.," a government release said.

The Minister also launched the State and Union Territory microsites under the e-Shram initiative and the Occupational Shortage Index (OSI) during the meeting.

The OSI will match labour market demand and supply, enhancing employment outcomes across the country. It also provides data-driven insights into occupations facing shortages, helping align job seekers' skills with industry demands.



Panel approves ₹3,027 crore for projects to mitigate disasters

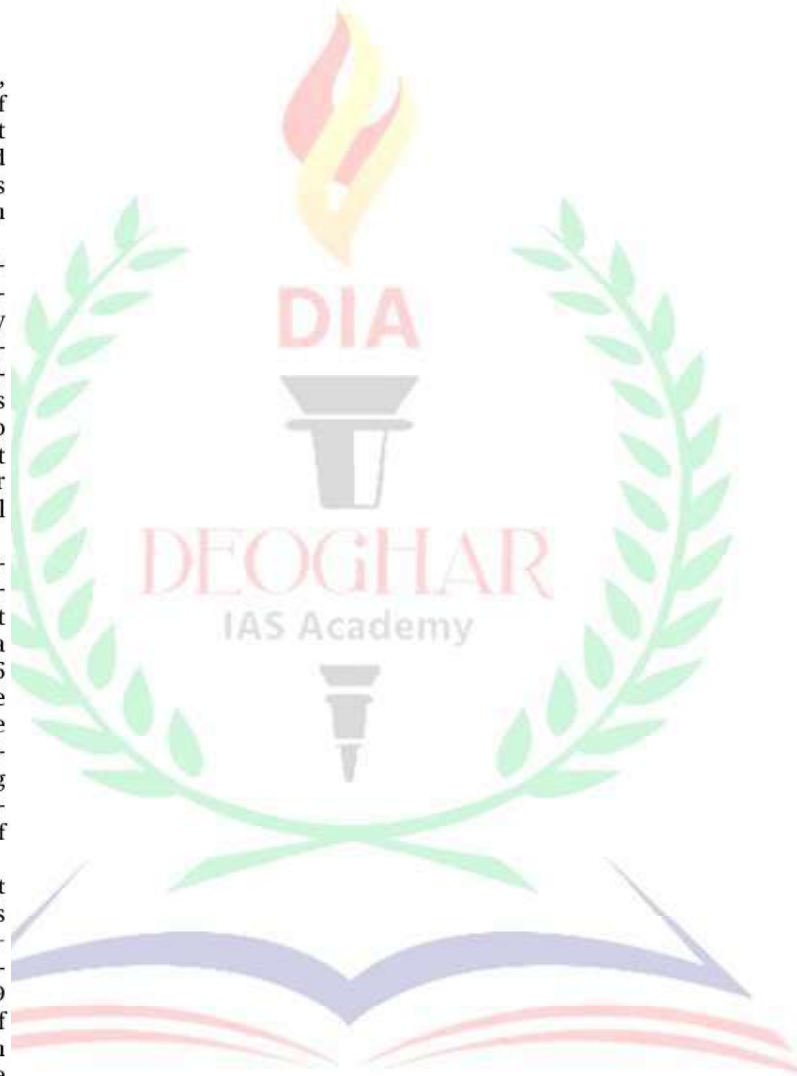
The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

A high-level committee, under the chairmanship of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, has approved ₹3,027.86 crore for projects to mitigate disasters such as lightning and drought.

The committee considered proposals of projects on lightning safety and lightning risk mitigation in 50 heavy lightning-prone districts of 10 States and catalytic assistance to 49 districts of 12 most drought-prone States for funding from the National Disaster Mitigation Fund.

The committee approved projects for catalytic assistance to 12 most drought-prone States, at a total outlay of ₹2,022.16 crore, out of which the Central share will be ₹1,200 crore. The mitigation project on lightning safety in 10 States was approved at a total outlay of ₹186.78 crore.

The scheme for forest fire risk management was also approved for implementation in 144 high-priority districts in 19 States with a total outlay of ₹818.92 crore, out of which the Central share from the NDMF and the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) will be ₹690.63 crore, the Ministry said. The primary objective of the scheme will be to implement a mitigation project for transforming the forest fire management approach in the country so as to strengthen prevention and mitigation activities.



Beating Retreat offers a lilting coda to Republic Day festivities

Samridhi Tewari
NEW DELHI

With the sun setting over the Raisina Hills, the iconic Vijay Chowk reverberated with the melodies played by the military and paramilitary bands during the Beating Retreat ceremony in the heart of the national capital on Wednesday, marking the culmination of Republic Day celebrations.

Beating Retreat is a centuries-old military tradition wherein troops disengage from battle at sunset and return to the camps.

The bands of the Army, the Navy, the Indian Air Force (IAF), and the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) played 30 foot-tapping tunes during the ceremony, which was attended by President Droupadi Murmu, Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Union Ministers, se-



Celebratory mode: The President's Bodyguards offer a salute to President Droupadi Murmu at the end of the Beating Retreat ceremony at Vijay Chowk in New Delhi on Wednesday. PTI

nior officials, and the public.

This year, the focus was on 75 years of the enactment of the Constitution and people's participation

as the Republic Day celebrations were a unique blend of India's rich cultural diversity, unity, equality, development, and military prowess.

The Beating Retreat ceremony began with the President, who is also the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, arriving in a colonial-era horse-

J&K Rifles, Delhi Police best marching contingents

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The marching contingent from the Army's J&K Rifles regiment was adjudged the best among the three Services while Delhi Police was adjudged the best marching contingent from among the Central Armed Police Forces and other auxiliary forces at the Republic Day parade.

Among the tableaux, Uttar Pradesh, which showcased the Maha Kumbh, with the theme

"Swarnim Bharat: Virasat aur Vikas", bagged the first spot.

Tripura's tableau, themed "Eternal Reverence: the Worship of 14 Deities in Tripura - *Kharchi Puja*", came second, while Andhra Pradesh's "*Etikoppaka Bonmalu - Eco-friendly Wooden Toys*" stood third. The tableau from the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, "*Janjatiya Gaurav Varsh*", was declared the best among Central Ministries and departments.

drawn buggy. The tri-service chiefs welcomed Ms. Murmu, Mr. Dhankhar, Mr. Modi, and Mr. Singh.

The ceremony began with the massed band's *Ka-*

dam Kadam Badhaye Ja tune. The event came to a close with the ever-popular tune of *Sare Jahan se Achha* played by the Buglers.



How many cases lodged under triple talaq law, SC asks Centre


Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday ordered the Centre to collect the total number of criminal cases registered against Muslim men under a law which penalises the declaration of triple or instant talaq.

The utterance of triple talaq was declared “null and void” by a Constitution Bench in a majority judgment in August 2017. The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019 came into force with retrospective effect from September 19, 2018. The law held triple talaq to be a non-bailable offence punishable with three years imprisonment.

The court questioned the point of a penal law when the practice of divorce by triple talaq had itself been declared void. “The relationship as a husband and wife continues... What you have criminalised then is the process?”



 This is the minimum required to be done to protect women. The effect of triple talaq was instantaneous, irrevocable

TUSHAR MEHTA
Solicitor-General

Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna asked Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, appealing for the Centre.

The Bench, including Justice Sanjay Kumar, directed the Centre to produce on record the number of first information reports (FIRs) registered and chargesheets filed against Muslim men under the 2019 Act. The court said it specifically wanted data on the number of FIRs lodged in rural areas of the country.

Advocate Nizam Pasha, appearing for the petitioners, said the law endeavoured to penalise even a threat of divorce.

Mr. Mehta said “crimi-

nal intimidation” was basically a threat. “Yet it is an offence under Section 506 of the Indian Penal Code... It is not the threat, but the consequences of the threat that really matters,” he argued.

Mr. Pasha responded that Section 506 of the IPC did not, however, criminalise an ineffectual threat made by a husband to his wife to divorce her.

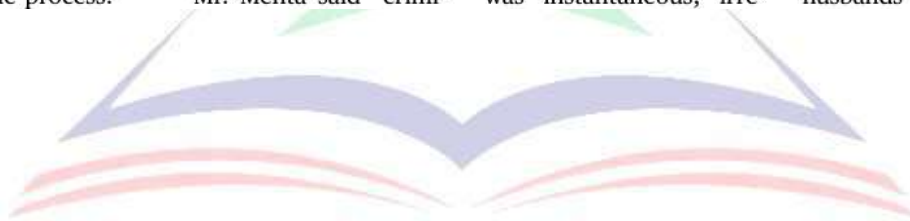
The Solicitor-General said the law was brought to counter the abandonment of Muslim women by their husbands. “This is the minimum required to be done to protect women. The effect of triple talaq was instantaneous, irre-

vocable... You say talaq to your wife, and the very next moment, she is not your wife,” he said.

But, Mr. Pasha interjected to point out that the practice of triple talaq ceased to have any legal effect since the Supreme Court declared it “manifestly arbitrary” in the *Shayara Bano* case in 2017.

Justice Khanna, after the hearing, orally remarked that not a single advocate present in the courtroom would say triple talaq was a good thing. But he indicated that criminalising a practice after it was declared void would raise doubts. The court fixed the next hearing in the week commencing on March 17.

The petitioners, including Jamiat Ulama-I-Hind, said the Act was both “disproportionate and excessive”. Another petition by Samastha Kerala Jem-iyathul Ulama claimed the sole objective of the new law was “to punish Muslim husbands”.



Symphony cannot be explained, it should be experienced, says maestro Ilaiyaraaja

B. Kolappan
CHENNAI

Music director Ilaiyaraaja, the first Indian to write a symphony, has said a symphony should not be explained, but experienced. "Music is an experience," he said in a conversation with *The Hindu* in Chennai on Wednesday.

Asked whether some knowledge was required to enjoy a symphony, the maestro wondered: "What is the knowledge you used while enjoying film music? You are able to differentiate between a good song and not a good song. How do you differentiate it? Knowledge or feeling? Feeling is important.."



A symphony is not composed for everyone; it's something different and you can't expect equality in it, says Ilaiyaraaja. B. THAMODHARAN

Quoting the Tamil saying, *Chitiramum Kai Pazhakkam, Senthamizhum Naa Pazhakkam* (Practice makes perfection), he said one required the *rasanai* (taste).

"It depends on the level of *rasanai* (taste). Some can enjoy cinema songs and differentiate a good song from a bad one because he should have been listening to it for a long

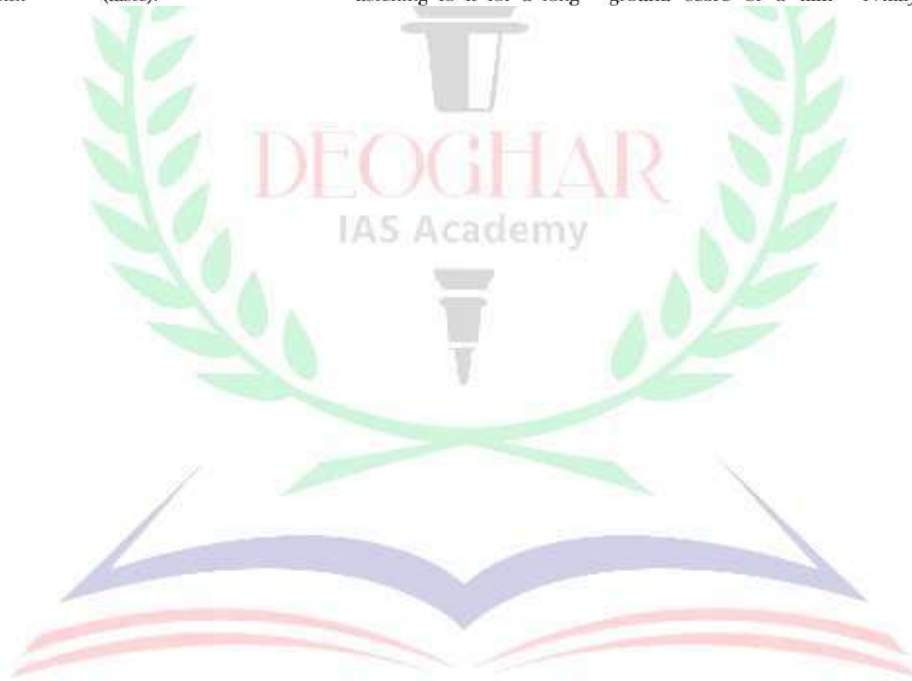
time. A symphony is not composed for everyone. It is something different and you cannot expect equality in it," he explained.

Ilaiyaraaja, who had introduced the forms of symphony in the background scores of film songs, said one would need 10 births to listen and enjoy the symphonies of the greatest composers in the world.

"I am an Indian. A south Indian born in a *pattikadu* (hamlet). I cannot incorporate into a symphony the music I listened to as a youth. There is no place for my identity as a film musician. I cannot allow room for the complaint that I have used the background score of a film

song. The element, Indian, also should not be part of a symphony. If these elements are found, some might say that an Indian has composed something. My objective is to write an actual symphony. While writing I should also be careful that the sounds and elements found in the composition of the greatest composers are in my writing. Then people may say I have copied Beethoven or Mozart and ignore my symphony. I am saying this just to explain the difficulties I faced," said Mr. Ilaiyaraaja, who has penned it in 35 days.

(Full interview will be published in these columns on Friday.)



Kerala to hold meeting on draft UGC norms next month

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Kerala government will organise a convention against the draft University Grants Commission (UGC) regulations of 2025 in the State capital on February 20, Minister for Higher

Education R. Bindu has said. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan will inaugurate the convention, which will be attended by Ministers of other States.

The State-level convention, which will also be attended by all sections in the higher education sec-

tor like students, teachers, non-teaching staff, and university representatives, will be held at Tagore Theatre here, the Minister said at a press conference here on Wednesday.

The Kerala Assembly had also adopted a resolution calling for immediate

withdrawal of the draft regulations.

Ms. Bindu alleged that the draft guidelines went against the federal structure of the country and weakened the academic quality of universities.

She also flayed the provision for appointment of

non-academics as Vice-Chancellors.

The Minister said the State Higher Education Council had constituted a three-member committee chaired by the former State Planning Board vice-chairperson Prabhat Patnaik to study the draft regulations.



Probe panel finds proof of illegal coal mining in Meghalaya

The Hindu Bureau

GUWAHATI

A committee appointed by the High Court of Meghalaya has found evidence of illegal mining and transportation of coal in the State's South Garo Hills district.

The panel, headed by retired judge B.P. Katakey, was appointed in April 2022 to recommend measures to the Meghalaya government in compliance with the directions of the Supreme Court and the National Green Tribunal (NGT), which banned hazardous rat-hole coal mining in April 2014.

"Coal is coming from somewhere, and mining is taking place. This conclusion is based on available information, which will be included in my report to the High Court of Meghalaya," Justice Katakey said after a meeting on Tuesday

to address the implementation of measures to curb illegal mining in the State.

Earlier, all District Magistrates were instructed to report the quantity of coal seized between November 2024 and January this year.

Most district heads denied any mining activities within their jurisdictions, but the District Magistrate of South Garo Hills reported the seizure of more than 2,500 metric tonnes of illegal coal during the period.

Several complaints

The committee received seven complaints, one accompanied by a video clip, about illegal mining, which is currently under investigation. Justice Katakey said notices have been issued concerning some of these complaints, and that the department concerned has been directed to record statements from the parties involved.

SC orders complete stop to practice of manual scavenging in six metros

Court directs State officials in Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, and Hyderabad to file affidavits by Feb. 13 on when and how manual scavenging and sewer cleaning ceased in their cities

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday ordered a complete stop to the practice of manual scavenging and hazardous manual cleaning of sewers and septic tanks in top metros across the country.

“We hereby order manual sewer cleaning and manual scavenging shall be stopped in all top metropolitan cities of Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, and Hyderabad,” a Special Bench of Justices Sudhanshu Dhulia and Aravind Kumar directed in a petition filed by Dr. Balram Singh.

Centre’s submission

The Centre, represented by Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati, submitted a report that out of 775 districts in the country, 465 have not reported any manual scavenging.

Amicus curiae, senior



The Centre, represented by Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati, submitted a report that out of 775 districts in the country, 465 have not reported any manual scavenging. FILE PHOTO

advocate K. Parameshar, however, said the data presented by the States to the Union government may not be accurate as some of these districts had not constituted committees to monitor and check the practice under the law.

A December 2024 hearing had witnessed the

Bench observe that claims of fraternity, equality, and dignity among citizens remain a mere illusion if a sizeable section of society was forced to enter sewers for a living and die trapped in them even a decade after the introduction of the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scaven-

gers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013.

The apex court had referred to its October 20, 2023 judgment in which it issued directions to the Union and States to take measures to eradicate manual scavenging and hazardous cleaning in the country. The court had noted that these “inhuman” occupations continue, often with fatal results.

‘We will not leave it’

“This is something very close to our hearts and minds. We will not leave it. We tell you, we will go to any extent to get our judgment of October 2023 complied with, come what may,” the Bench had observed then.

On Wednesday, the court directed the State officials in the six metros concerned to file affidavits by February 13 on exactly when and how manual scavenging and sewer cleaning had ceased in their respective cities.

ISRO's 100th launch lifts NavIC satellite into orbit

Hemanth C.S.
BENGALURU

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) on Wednesday morning launched its historic 100th mission – GSLV-F15 lifting off with a navigation satellite from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota.

The launch vehicle with an indigenous cryogenic stage lifted off from the spaceport's second launch pad at 6.23 a.m. The rocket successfully placed the NVS-02 satellite in the intended orbit.

"I am extremely happy to announce from the spaceport of ISRO that the first launch of this year has been successfully accomplished with the GSLV-F15 precisely placing the NVS-02 satellite into the intended orbit. This mission is our 100th launch from here. This is a significant milestone for our space programme," said ISRO Chairman V. Narayanan.

Dr. Narayanan, who assumed charge of the space agency earlier this month, added that over these 100 launches, ISRO has lifted 548 satellites to orbit.

"We have lifted a total of 120 tonnes of payload including 23 tonnes for 433 foreign satellites," he added.

The NVS-02 is the second satellite in the NVS series and part of India's Navigation with Indian Constellation (NavIC).

The ISRO said NavIC is India's independent regional navigation satellite system designed to provide accurate Position, Velocity, and Timing (PVT) service to users in India and the region extending about 1,500 kilometres beyond the Indian landmass, which is its primary service area.



New horizons: The GSLV-F15 lifting off from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota on Wednesday. B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

NavIC provides two types of services: Standard Positioning Service (SPS) and Restricted Service (RS). The former provides a position accuracy of better than 20 metres and a timing accuracy of better than 40 nanoseconds over the primary service area.

Constellation planned

Five second-generation NavIC satellites are envisaged to augment the NavIC base layer constellation with enhanced features to ensure continuity of services. NVS-01, the first of the second-generation satellites, was launched aboard GSLV-F12 on May 29, 2023. For the first time, an indigenous atomic clock was flown on NVS-01.

"The NavIC system is evolving as the backbone of indigenous satellite navigation ecosystem of the Indian region. The first batch

of Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS) satellites launched in the previous decades has been successful in establishing the Personal Navigation Device (PND) services in the country. The NVS series is the second generation of these satellites that are progressively being deployed by the GSLV to augment NavIC constellation and further strengthening the PND ecosystem in the nation," Dr. Narayanan said.

On the second indigenous atomic clock, Dr. Narayanan said that this is a shining example of "Make in India" in critical technology development. "Today many applications based on NavIC for strategic uses, tracking of shipping vessels, time synchronisation, train tracking and safety alert dissemination are accomplished," he added.

