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NEW DELHI, April 6-19, 2026

BlitzINDIA

POSITIVE POWERFUL PROGRESSIVE

DEVELOPMENT NEWS OF THE NATION

Vol. 5 | No. 10

www.blitzindiamedia.com

₹50

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Asma Shaikh

The Women's Reservation Bill has been brought back to focus with Prime Minister Narendra Modi announcing a special three-day session of Parliament to give a "decisive push" to bridge the final gap in implementing the landmark legislation.

Speaking at a poll rally at Thiruvalla in Kerala, the Prime Minister said the special sitting of Parliament would be used to advance measures to ensure one-third reservation for women in legislatures, and urged political parties to extend support.

While the Bill was passed in 2023, its implementation was tethered to a future Census. The special session is aimed at introducing a crucial amendment to delink or fast-track this process, aiming for a 2029 rollout.

Impasse ended

For nearly three decades, the Women's Reservation Bill was in a limbo. While previous attempts in 1996, 1998, and 2010 collapsed under the weight of "quotas within quotas" demands, the Modi Government utilised its parliamentary majority to bypass the deadlock.

PM Modi's latest announcement gives fresh momentum to a major reform. The Bill proposes reserving 33 per cent of seats for women

in the Lok Sabha and state Assemblies. The potential impact of the Bill remains transformative.

Women currently account for just over 14 per cent of the Lok Sabha. Raising that share to one-third would

not only change the gender composition of Parliament but could also reshape its priorities and functioning.

Evidence from India's Panchayati Raj system and international experience suggests that greater female

representation often broadens the policy agenda. Women legislators tend to place greater emphasis on public health, education, sanitation, welfare and gender-related issues.

There is also some indication that women legislators participate actively in committee work, where detailed scrutiny of laws takes place.

However, expectations of immediate change may be overstated. Parliamentary conduct is driven by institutional and political factors. Women MPs function within the same party frameworks, and disruptions or confrontational tactics are unlikely to disappear solely due to increased representation. **IB**

India at crossroads of global trust

Diplomacy is not a game for amateurs, but for hardened professionals who master the art of converting failure into success. The recent episode in which Pakistan outmanoeuvred India in the global battle of perceptions makes this truth painfully, even humiliatingly, clear. Well-spoken and well-turned-out diplomats turned semi-politicians like S Jaishankar may have delivered intellectually superior speeches that win applause in think-tank halls, yet they have failed to secure for India its due status in the global order.



PRABHU CHAWLA

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WAR ON IRAN Anarchic pregnancy of New World Order?

The 20th century was defined by World Wars. They were called world wars not because the whole world was in conflict but because Western empires were fighting viciously for control of the world in an age when conquest was recognised as a legitimate objective. The British Empire was immoral, but it was never illegal.



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Raj Bhavan to Lok Bhavan

Gujarat Governor Acharya Devvrat's weekly rural outreach redefines grassroots governance



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The Iran paradox



Deepak Dwivedi

Editor-in-Chief

X@deepakdwivedi_

Nationalism combined with a sense of siege becomes a potent force

There is a recurring temptation in global strategy: the belief that removing the head of an authoritarian regime will weaken the system itself. It is an idea that has shaped interventions from Iraq to Libya – and now shadows discussions around Iran. Yet, experience suggests the opposite may often be true. External attempts at regime decapitation can consolidate power rather than erode it.

The logic appears straightforward. Eliminate the leadership, disrupt command structures, and allow dissent to surface. But authoritarian regimes are rarely so brittle. They are sustained by institutions, security apparatuses, and narratives. When an external force targets the leadership, it can trigger a powerful unifying response. In Iran, this dynamic is particularly strong.

The Islamic Republic has long grounded its legitimacy in resistance to foreign interference. From the memory of the 1953 coup – when a CIA- and MI6 operation overthrew Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh and reinstated the Shah to decades of sanctions and isolation, the regime has framed itself as

the guardian of sovereignty against external pressure. Any attempt to eliminate its leadership risks reinforcing that narrative.

Nationalism combined with a sense of siege becomes a potent force. Citizens who may criticise the regime often rally around it when faced with an external threat. The boundary between state and nation begins to blur. Dissent is muted and recast as disloyalty, allowing regimes to gain not just control but legitimacy. This is the paradox of intervention. Actions meant to destabilise can strengthen the very structures they target. Leadership losses are reframed as martyrdom, crisis becomes a tool for consolidation, and political space narrows in the name of survival.

History offers sobering lessons. The removal of Saddam Hussein did not bring stability to Iraq, and Libya's collapse produced fragmentation. Even when leaders are removed, outcomes rarely match expectations. Iran presents a more complex case. Power is diffused across clerical authorities, the Revolutionary Guards, and entrenched networks. Removing a single

leader would not dismantle this system. More likely, it would push institutions to close ranks and preserve the regime.

There is also the question of timing. Iranian society contains currents of reform that evolve internally. External intervention risks interrupting these processes, replacing gradual change with reactive nationalism. The broader lesson is clear. Regime change from outside is often counterproductive. It underestimates authoritarian resilience and the power of identity and historical memory in shaping political behaviour.

In Iran, the likely outcome of external decapitation is not collapse but consolidation – a regime more entrenched and defensive. Sometimes, the fastest way to strengthen a regime is to try to destroy it from the outside. Such outcomes should caution policymakers against assuming quick victories, reminding them that unintended consequences often outweigh strategic intent in complex societies like this. **BI**

BlitzINDIA SPECIAL

India's economic rise is no longer a centrally driven story – it is increasingly a federated surge, powered by a handful of high-performing states that together define the country's growth trajectory. As the country moves towards a \$5-trillion economy, the role of these regional growth engines has become decisive.

A striking feature of India's economy is its concentration. Maharashtra alone contributes about 13.5 per cent of national GDP, making it the undisputed leader, anchored by Mumbai's dominance in finance, services, and entertainment. It is followed by Tamil Nadu (9 pc), a highly diversified manufacturing hub, and Uttar Pradesh (9 pc), whose strength lies in scale and consumption. Karnataka (8.4 pc), driven by Bengaluru's global tech ecosystem, and Gujarat (8 pc), with its export-oriented industrial base, complete the top five. Together, these states account for nearly half of India's GDP.

The western corridor

Led by Maharashtra and Gujarat, the western corridor remains India's industrial and financial backbone. Strong infrastructure, ports, and policy continuity have made this region the closest parallel to East Asia's manufacturing belts. Gujarat's strength in petrochemicals and

exports complements Maharashtra's dominance in finance and services, creating a powerful growth axis.

In contrast, southern India represents the knowledge economy. Tamil Nadu combines manufacturing depth with social development, while Karnataka and Telangana have positioned themselves as global IT and startup hubs. These states outperform what their population size would suggest, contributing disproportionately to exports, innovation, and tax revenues. The South, in aggregate, contributes close to 30 pc of India's GDP.

The northern belt, led by Uttar

Pradesh, is emerging as a consumption-driven growth centre. Massive infrastructure investments – expressways, freight corridors, and airports – are gradually shifting the region from an agrarian base to a hybrid economy of manufacturing and services. Delhi and Haryana reinforce this transition with strong service sectors and high per capita incomes.

The eastern states remain the missing piece. Though West Bengal continues to be a significant contributor at around 5-6 per cent, states like Bihar and Odisha, despite resources and population, lag in industrialisation.

Their underperformance underscores India's uneven development, and its untapped potential.

What emerges is a new economic geography: coastal and southern states drive productivity and exports; northern states provide demand and labour; central and eastern regions supply resources and future growth potential. India, in effect, is evolving into a union of competitive growth poles.

This decentralised model carries both promise and risk. While competition among states spurs efficiency and innovation, it also widens regional disparities. The next phase of India's rise will depend on whether laggard regions can catch up – and whether leading states can sustain momentum. India's growth story is a mosaic, shaped by regional strengths, competition, and evolving economic priorities. **BI**

How POWERHOUSE states are shaping future growth

Western corridor remains India's industrial and financial backbone, while South represents knowledge economy and North is emerging as a consumption-driven growth centre

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SHALINI S SHARMA

A CHINA TALE

What makes the country an economic wonder

Shanghai is the third most populous city in the world, behind Tokyo and Delhi, with a population of around 31 million. This factoid conjures up images of bustling streets, traffic pile-ups, large pedestrian crossings, buses, cars and all the usual paraphernalia of a large city. Think Delhi. Right? Wrong, when you are in Shanghai.

Forget about the hustle and bustle, you will be lucky to spot even a living being anywhere on a road or a traffic junction on a busy weekday in this popular port city of China. Situated on the country's east coast, Shanghai can trick anyone into believing that the lockdown is still on. And you suddenly wonder if all the stories of this being the most populous country in the world till some years back, were fake or what.

Social credit system

A little research into this curious subject throws up some interesting facts and the story of a nation's brutal discipline, authoritarian administration and what it does to the psyche of its people begins to emerge. The country's rulers have devised a clever system of individual as well as corporate social credit.

This works much like the credit score system in India. Just like a default on payment of a bank instalment or a credit card bill lowers one's credit score and jeopardises the chances of securing a loan in future, similarly, in China there is a social score for everybody. The only difference is that it goes far beyond tracking timely payments and comprises several parameters with each having an impact on the composite score.

The Chinese social credit system tracks as innocuous a thing as jay walking! And there are surveillance cameras everywhere. Anyone found loitering anywhere without any purpose runs the risk of getting his or her social score lowered. Bigger deviations affect the social score of not just the individual but also of the family members. Add to that, violation of traffic rules, or non-payment of taxes, for corporates.

Good deeds such as blood donation, charity work and high tax compliance fetch points and discounts on public utilities and terms for bank loans etc. A low social score can literally mean the end of the road for many and, life in a slow lane. High speed train and flight tickets are denied to them, they cannot stay in luxury hotels, nor send their children to private, expen-



Autonomous weather and pollution monitoring system



Hybrid trucks being tested



sive schools. Those defaulting on payments are often shamed publicly and their photos displayed on public screens to make them pay.

Programmed to follow

As a result of this system, everybody in China strictly adheres to what he or she is supposed to do. Everybody has a defined role in society and they do as told, without question or objection. On weekdays they all go to offices early morning, have lunch at 11:30 AM, leave for home at 5:30 PM, have dinner at 6:00 PM and go to bed at 9:00 PM. All shops, malls, markets, bazaars close by 7:00 PM.

Only on holidays do people indulge themselves a little – go out to parks with their children or shop in malls. Much like the Japanese and the Koreans, Chinese people, especially the youngsters, have a thing for cuteness. Most carry cute animal mascots on their bags, like charms, and keep cute little pet dogs.

No gigantic or ferocious breeds like Labradors or Alsatians for them. Most people are seen hanging around on a holiday with either a Toy & Teacup Poodle, groomed with 'teddy bear' cuts or a Bichon Frisé in their white, fluffy 'powder puff' coats and cheerful dispositions. Other popular dog breeds are Japanese Spitz and Welsh Corgi.

People mostly travel by Metro, which is underground, everywhere. This means that there are always more people underground, than over ground. If not travelling by Metro, people ride bicycles or electric scooters, which are mostly seen wearing jackets to shield the riders from cold wind, dust and rains.



Scooters wear jackets

Everybody in China strictly adheres to what he or she is supposed to do. Everybody has a defined role in society and they do as told, without question or objection

Only a few cars are ever visible on roads in cities. They are mostly electric powered and always with pitch-dark window glasses. The scenery is achingly beautiful, even in small towns and cities, and there are no cattle, pigeons, birds, other animals / living beings, to tarnish it anywhere.

This explains how China has been able to become an economic wonder and set an example for the world.

Apparatus of growth

Whatever the authorities set out to do in a given timeframe, they are able to do with immaculate planning and precision. There are no delays over land-related issues, all land is owned by the Government and individuals can only take their houses or factories on lease for a defined period.

There are no labour-related problems, no dearth of finances for projects, debt be damned. China's debt to GDP ratio is a staggering 300 per cent. This debt is mostly hidden and does not show in official figures.

If there is an infrastructure project, say a high-speed rail network, to be built in an identified province or city, that city sets up a Local Government Financing Vehicle and gives it the required land for the project. This company then goes to a state-owned bank and asks it to fund the project with the Government land as collateral.

The bank provides this company the required billions which become the debt of the company, not of the Government.

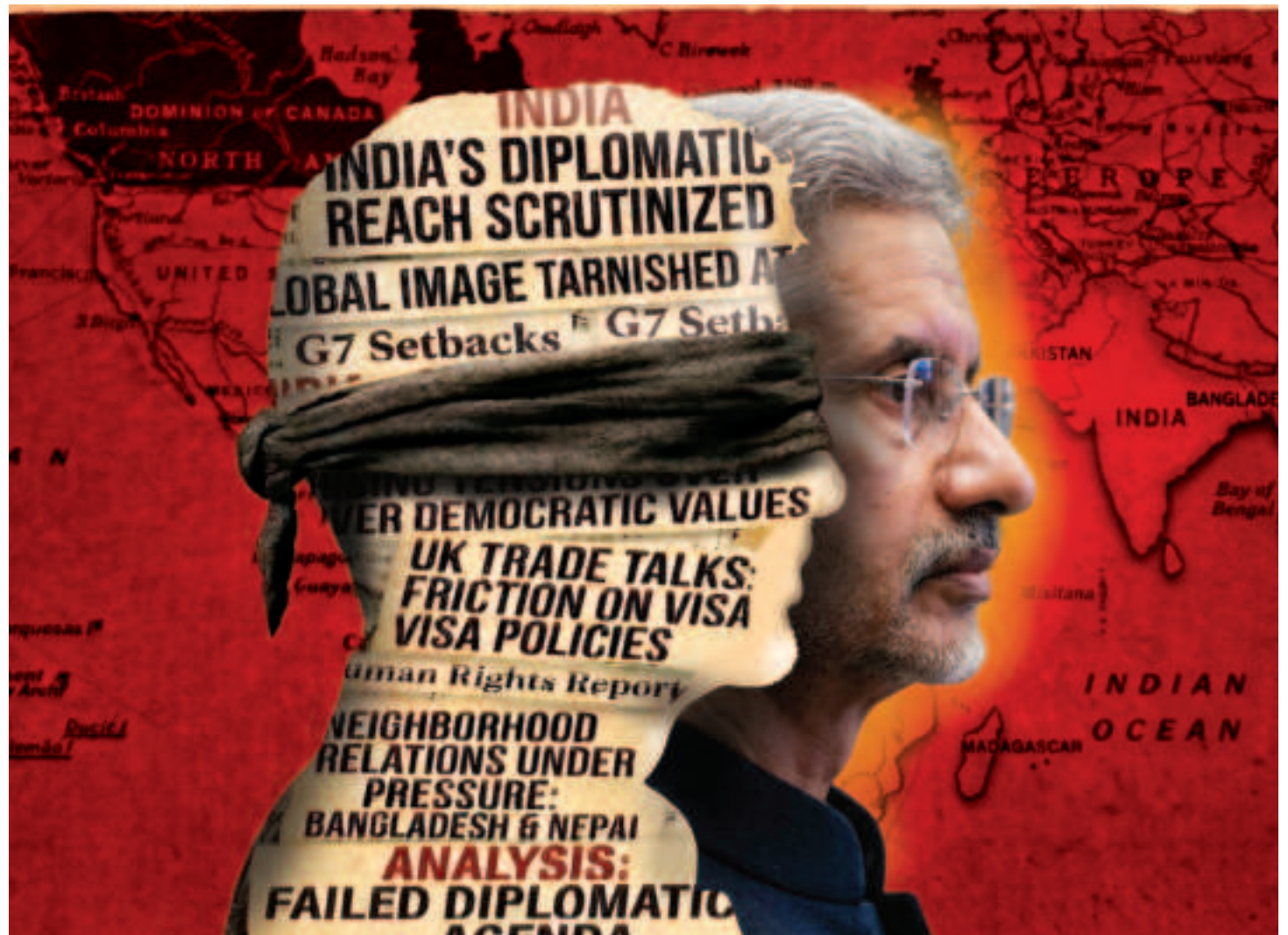
This way, projects never run short of funds, infrastructure is built and the Government stays clear of debt. This hidden debt in China runs into trillions of yuan and is the channel through which the country has built its core assets. **BI**

The writer is Assistant Secretary General at PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PHDCCI). She recently led a PHDCCI delegation on renewable energy to China.



PRABHU CHAWLA

India at crossroads



Jaishankar's marathon travels to dozens of countries may have earned air-miles, but have failed to forge the close, personal relationships with global leaders that Modiplomacy demands

Diplomacy is not a game for amateurs, but for hardened professionals who master the art of converting failure into success. The recent episode in which Pakistan outmanoeuvred India in the global battle of perceptions makes this truth painfully, even humiliatingly, clear. Well-spoken and well-turned-out diplomats turned semi-politicians like S Jaishankar may have delivered intellectually superior speeches that win applause in think-tank halls, yet they have failed to secure for India its due status in the global order.

Jaishankar may dazzle seminar rooms with erudite eloquence, but on the world stage he is not taken seriously precisely because he lacks the domestic political mandate that only an elected leader can command. While Prime Minister Narendra Modi has personally engaged with over a dozen world leaders in a frantic push for de-escalation, Islamabad, long dismissed in New Delhi as a 'failed state' harbouring terrorists, has stolen the global spotlight.

The Opposition has seized the moment, launching a blistering assault on the Gov-

ernment's foreign policy, accusing career diplomats of playing safe, visibly aligned with the West, and forever angling for a better posting and squandering India's hard-won stature as the voice of the Global South. The charge is stark: insulated from domestic political realities and wedded to a rigid, pro-West tilt, these career diplomats have left India sidelined, while Pakistan's Field Marshall Asim Munir brokers talks from Islamabad.

India's role erosion

An unintended depoliticisation of foreign policy under a career diplomat-turned-minister has led to major erosion in India's decision-making role in international affairs. Never before has an Indian Foreign Service officer been inducted straight into the Union Cabinet as External Affairs Minister without previous experience in domestic politics. Jaishankar, the first such IFS officer, is also the longest-serving External Affairs Minister after Jawaharlal Nehru. Given full freedom to manage diplomacy since 2019, he has largely chosen his trusted IFS cadre to navigate the most complex international conflicts. He remains In-

dia's most-travelled External Affairs Minister. He has undertaken 150 international trips across 87 countries.

In addition, his being envoy to both the US and China could not compensate for the deficiency in connecting domestic preferences with diplomacy. Unlike the long line of political heavyweights who shaped foreign policy with electoral mandates and domestic instinct like Swaran Singh, PV Narasimha Rao, Pranab Mukherjee, Jaswant Singh, Yashwant Sinha and Sushma Swaraj, unfortunately, Jaishankar operates without that political grounding. Historically, External Affairs Ministers brought coalition realism, party networks and public accountability to the table. On the contrary, Jaishankar's bureaucratic precision, while articulate, has created an insulated echo chamber disconnected from raw power dynamics.

Despite Prime Minister Modi's direct calls with Trump, Masoud Pezeshkian, Benjamin Netanyahu and the Gulf leaders, and India's BRICS presidency, Tehran chose not to entrust New Delhi with mediation, citing India's overt tilt towards Israel and the US. What explains this stunning reversal? Diplomats failed to

of global trust

convert Modi's powerful outreach into a diplomatic dividend. And hardcore BJP members dealing with foreign affairs see Jaishankar as emblematic of the problem. He is brilliant on protocol and multilateral forums, yet politically emasculated, lacking the electoral legitimacy and raw political instinct required to fuel Prime Minister Modi's signature 'huglomacy' style of diplomacy.

Jaishankar's marathon travels to dozens of countries may have earned air-miles, but have failed to forge the close, personal relationships with global leaders that Mo-diplomacy demands. He has handpicked Indian Ambassadors and High Commissioners to key nations who mirror his own cautious, protocol-driven style rather than the aggressive, outcome-oriented approach displayed by Pakistani diplomats.

Restrained approach

Despite India holding the BRICS presidency at present, other member nations are clearly not in line with its restrained approach. Iran has pressed for stronger condemnation; China and Russia have taken overtly pro-Tehran positions; and Gulf members are hedging. Jaishankar's diplomats openly feel that he and his carefully-chosen vague stance have pushed India deep into the pro-America camp. This tilt has eroded the very reputation as a neutral and powerful nation that Modi had painstakingly built over a decade.

Jaishankar always accompanies the Prime Minister on foreign trips. Along with the privileged cadre surrounding him, Jaishankar has effectively insulated the Prime Minister from reaching out directly to other stakeholders like Opposition leaders, business voices, military strategists and regional influencers who could have injected the domestic political realism Modi's global connectivity requires.

As a fatal consequence, it has alienated traditional partners in the Global South and even within BRICS, leaving India isolated precisely when its leadership was most needed. Pakistan's me-

diation coup has 're-hyphenated' India with its neighbour in global perceptions, something New Delhi has fought for years to avoid.

The hour of reckoning has arrived. Pakistan's improbable rise as mediator in a conflict touching India's closest partners is not a fleeting embarrassment. It's the brutal verdict on a decade of depoliticised diplomacy that has hollowed out India's global leverage. What was meant to be Modi's crowning achievement positioning India as vishwaguru, a civilisational bridge-builder for a fractured world, now risks becoming a cautionary tale of untapped potential.

Strategic thinkers

The time for introspection is over; the time for surgery has arrived. Modi, who still commands the trust of the Indian voter and his party, must now reconstruct the foreign policy establishment with the same

tics, economic realism and hard-nosed geopolitics. Political interlocutors with business acumen, battle-tested military strategists, and public intellectuals unafraid of challenging conventional wisdom should be moved to key capitals and policymaking posts.

India's diplomats must be judged not by the elegance of their cables or the polish of their panel appearances, but by hard metrics: narrative wins, investment flows and strategic leverage secured in crisis.

Jaishankar's 150-country marathon and dozen-plus US visits must be audited line by line not for mileage, but for the friendships, concessions and access they failed to deliver. The choice before India is existential. Either she reclaims foreign policy as the sharp instrument of national will and domestic realism, or watches from the sidelines as lesser powers rewrite the rules of the 21st cen-

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ruthlessness he once applied to domestic politics.

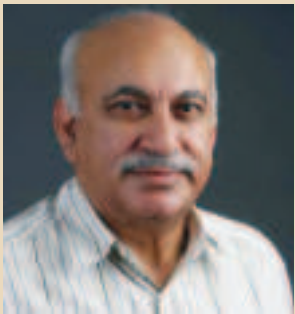
The system needs an infusion of strategic thinkers who combine diplomatic expertise with deep roots in domestic poli-

tics. Vishwaguru cannot be proclaimed; it must be earned through a diplomacy that is politically rooted, strategically audacious and ruthlessly results-driven. India's destiny as a true pole in the multi-polar order hangs in the balance. **BI**

(The writer is a veteran journalist, political commentator, and TV personality)

COURTESY:
The New Indian Express

SPECIAL



MJ Akbar

A veteran journalist, author of several books, and a former minister in the Indian Government

WAR ON IRAN

Is it the anarchic pregnancy of a NEW WORLD ORDER?

The 20th century was defined by World Wars. They were called world wars not because the whole world was in conflict but because Western empires were fighting viciously for control of the world in an age when conquest was recognised as a legitimate objective. The British Empire was immoral, but it was never illegal.

The 21st century is witnessing worldwide wars: separate fires seeking each other to create a common conflagration, as the principles which have maintained a comparative stability for the last eight decades are in meltdown. Separate wars from Eurasia to the centre of Asia are feeding one another, building up to a raging inferno.

Russia-Ukraine war

In February 2022 Russia lit a bonfire in Ukraine. In October 2023 Hamas reignited a tinderbox with a terrorist attack on Israel; since then Israel has punished Palestinians by turning Gaza into a strip of rubble leaving over 75,000 dead. In February this year, America was persuaded by Israel to invade Iran and then reeled away to expand its boundaries in Lebanon.

In a sideshow with dangerous consequences, US President Donald Trump's favourite ally Pakistan invaded Afghanistan, four years after the Americans flew away suddenly from its Bagram base on August 30, 2021. Last reports suggest that Pakistan has moved some 14 km into Afghan territory, which will ensure the longevity of this conflict. As the Afghans used to say, Americans had a watch, they had time.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky has just toured Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Jordan offering drones for hard cash. Reports indicate that Russian satellites are being used by Iranian missiles. An arc is becoming a circle.

What began in Ukraine is merging into a contiguous War of the Five Seas: Mediterranean, Black, Caspian, Red, and Arabian. Each trigger is different, but the impetus to

Both sides need a victory narrative to wind down. Iran has an advantage. It can declare victory if it can avoid defeat. Trump needs something substantial as a war trophy

fire comes from the collapse of the global order established in 1946 through the charter of the United Nations, which sought a global architecture of stability based on the sanctity of sovereignty. Aggression across borders was made illegal for the first time in human history. That promise proved to be short-lived.

International law

The peril was best articulated by the wisest conservative leader of the last five decades, Britain's former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. In 1981 she described the Israeli attack on Iraq's nuclear facility at Osirak as "a grave breach of international law". She explained to the Jewish Chronicle in words that should be etched onto every chancery (unless it is already too late): "If we are not going to

ing the first modern invasion of Iran, by Iraq's Saddam Hussein, the despot who subjugated his own people with as much enthusiasm as he advocated the freedom of Palestinians.

The region had stepped into a new age two years before with the dramatic success of Iran's Islamic Revolution. It redrew and rescaled the strategic map of West Asia. Till 1979, Iran's monarch Mohammad Reza Pahlavi had served as America's most loyal ally, not least because the CIA saved his life and throne in 1953. Captive to his mentors, the Shah stayed out of seminal wars between Israel and its neighbours in 1967 and 1973.

Egypt, more confident after its victory in 1973, came to terms with America and Israel by 1987, leaving Syria as Moscow's last protectorate in the region while Iraq flaunted fake non-alignment. Washington might have let diplomacy and negotiations find a route towards reconciliation with Islamic Iran, but any such possibility was sabotaged by a rash band of student revolutionaries who on November 4, 1979 took 52 Americans serving in the Tehran embassy hostage. Death to Israel and America became the favoured chant of radicals without a prior cause.

Their challenge to a superpower's prestige was compounded by the embarrassing failure of America's rescue mission in April 1980. Only five of the eight helicopters mobilised for Operation Eagle Claw reached in operational condition. President Jimmy Carter, displaying timidity uncharacteristic of the White House, aborted the effort. The eagle was wounded. Carter's successor Ronald Reagan was determined to ensure that the eagle soared again.

Iran-Iraq war

Reagan's response towards Iran was nuanced and commissioned at arm's length. In September 1980 Iraq invaded Iran, without provocation or explicable reason. Iran was not remotely a nuclear power. Its armed forces, created with American help under the Shah, were skewered and uncertain.

Saddam Hussein expected to capture Tehran within a week, and order the regime change which is still on the agenda five-and-a-half decades later. America gave silent support worth billions of dollars in aid, technology, and intelligence. He got massive financial support from Saudi Arabia. It took eight years, with over half-a-million casualties, for this devastating conflict to end where it began,



live by a system of international law, we are going to live by international anarchy. Then no people anywhere in the world are safe."

Ironically, the 1946 UN charter was conceived by America and supported Russia. Pax Americana is dead, not least because America is being driven by a narrow definition of national interest which supersedes the sovereign rights of nation states. In retrospect, such idealism might have been a bridge too far, but it held most of the world together through the extreme dangers of a nuclear age. The compact of 1946 has been shattered. When guardians of international security treat their own principles as irrelevant, anarchy is next in queue.

Thatcher was not speaking in a vacuum in 1981, or amidst calm seas and glowing harvests. She was offering sage advice dur-



in the restoration of status quo ante. The long war had tested Iran's will, and Iran had prevailed. One of its commanders, Ali Khamenei, was nearly killed on the frontlines; he rose to become Ayatollah and Supreme Leader, and was assassinated in the first airstrike of the 2026 war.

Superpowers tend to cloak their interests with the veil of virtue, but sometimes the best minds let slip the truth. The brilliant Republican academic powerbroker Henry Kissinger summed up America's agenda in a pithy sentence when asked about the Iran-Iraq war: "It's a pity both sides can't lose."

Republican President George W Bush ensured the defeat and destruction of Iraq with another inexplicable war begun without provocation. He justified America's invasion of Iraq in March 2003, in collusion with Britain's Tony Blair, with a falsehood, claiming that Iraq had 'weapons of mass destruction', code phrase for nuclear weapons. Any such possibility had been eliminated by Israel's air attack on Osirak in 1981. The true objective was the elimination of Iraq's military capability and control of Iraq's oil resources. America won a pyrrhic victory, as will be evident when the dynamics of the present war play out, for George W Bush created space for pro-Iran militias. The Iraq war has been burnt into generational memory.

An older agenda

Donald Trump may use maverick, coarse or contradictory phrases to justify his attack on Iran, but the agenda is much older than his political career. More candid than his predecessors, Trump has no time for the charades of Bush and Blair. Democratic Presidents in the past half-century have also been hostile to Iran, but wary of military adventure. Trump believed that America had become invincible under Trump.

After four weeks of war the adventure has gone sour. We do not know the outcome, but the best interpretation that the Pentagon could put on the situation in the last week of March was "fluid". Trump said, at the beginning, that he was surprised by Iran's military capability and political resilience; by now he must be shocked. The destruction of America's array of weapons has been extraordinary: a \$700 million AWACS aircraft; radar equipment worth over a billion

dollars; aircraft carrier USS Gerald Ford rushed out of battle seas under the thin cover story of an on-board fire that had injured 200 and

clogged bathrooms; missile hits on aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln; every American military base in the region struck; Israel's famed Iron Dome pierced by Iran's drones and missiles, hitting major cities and infrastructure for the first time in any conflict; Dimona, home of Israel's nuclear facility, being bombed, proving that Israel's most sensitive asset is in the crosshairs.

The repeated devastation of Iran by the formidably armed and trained US and Israeli air forces is not a story. Their strength was known. Iran's response is breaking news. These statistics might help us understand Iran; it spends 4 per cent of its GDP on research and development; it has some five million students in 2,000 universities; Tehran has the largest number of doctorates compared to any other city.

Advantage Iran

We do not know, just now, whether Trump will opt for escalation or cut his losses. Both sides need a victory narrative to wind down. Iran has an advantage. It can declare victory if it can avoid defeat. Trump needs something substantial as a war trophy. Regime change is gone as a possibility. The people's uprising has turned into a nationalist mood across Iran. America is now demanding that the Strait of Hormuz remain open, which it was before war began.

With better planning by the Pentagon, America could have seized Kharg island through a ground offensive in the opening hours of its offensive on Saturday, February 28 while the Air Force hit Tehran. Trump could have declared victory by Monday and lived happily ever after. Four weeks later, Iran, with a million-strong force at its disposal, is prepared for a ground invasion. For America, this war is part of a strategic calculus designed to define security and favourable energy flows. For Iran, this is the last war for generations; Iranians believe that its result will determine Iran's place in world affairs for the rest of this century.

Iran's claims can no longer be dismissed as bombast. It has vowed to set invading American troops "on fire" and hinted at a counter-invasion of the UAE and Bahrain. The implications are startling. If there is street fighting in Dubai, the ebbing confidence in the Gulf as a second, and tax-free, home of the world will further evaporate.

From the sidelines, the Houthis are reminding anyone who will listen that the Arabic name of the passage to the Red Sea between Yemen and Djibouti-Eritrea is Bab el Mandeb, or gate of tears, so-called after the tears shed after the mighty earthquake that separated the Arabian peninsula from Africa. The implication: there will be tears again. It may not be as potent a threat as they would wish, but these allies of Iran have been kept in reserve for the endgame.

The law of unintended consequences thrives in war. The regime in Tehran has not changed yet, but opinion polls suggest regime change in Tel Aviv and regime adjustment in Washington after the autumn elections in Israel and America. Benjamin Netanyahu could be defeated; Republicans may lose control of the Senate.

Arms industry setback

The setback to America's arms industry is under scrutiny. It is overpriced and underperforms. Iran's drones could fetch a better income than oil. Russia's S-500 Prometheus suddenly looks a better deal than America's THAAD, which was unable to protect Dimona or indeed itself at American bases. Israel has, according to estimates in Western media, used half of its THAAD capacity; lost 50 per cent of David's Sling missiles, 80 per cent of its Arrow 2 and 3 interceptors.

An Israeli newspaper reported that the Chief of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Lt General Eyal Zamir told the Cabinet Security Committee that the Army, deployed in Gaza, Lebanon, West Bank, and Syria was overstretched and needed another 100,000 reservists. Chinese weapons technology will be in demand. India could become a third beneficiary with the rising reputation of BrahMos missiles.

In 2023 America controlled 43 per cent of global arms exports, worth an estimated \$400 billion in goods and services. Any change will affect the security structure for nations which supply weapons and hold the source code. Think-tank commanders in every Capital must already be busy with fresh thoughts about tanks. **BI**



Raj Bhavan to Lok Bhavan

Governor Acharya Devvrat's weekly rural outreach redefines grassroots governance

DEEPAK DWIVEDI & PARTH NADPARA

In a significant shift in India's governance approach, Raj Bhavans – once largely ceremonial institutions – are increasingly evolving into proactive centres of public engagement. This transformation aligns with the broader vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi for a Viksit Bharat @2047, where governance is expected to be accessible, accountable, and deeply connected with citizens at the grassroots.

Leading this transition is Gujarat Governor Acharya Devvrat, whose initiative *Har Saptah, Ek Tehsil* (One tehsil every week) is emerging as a distinctive model of rural outreach and participatory governance in the state.

A structured outreach

Under this programme, the Governor visits a different tehsil each week, engaging directly with local communities through structured interactions, public meetings, and on-ground reviews. Unlike conventional administrative visits, the initiative combines governance with community immersion – featuring village dialogues, shared meals, and overnight stays.

The campaign, also referred to as *Aao Chalen Gaon Ki Ore*, reflects a deliberate attempt to bridge the gap between policy formu-

lation and ground-level implementation. It places emphasis on direct communication, enabling authorities to better understand local challenges and respond with targeted interventions.

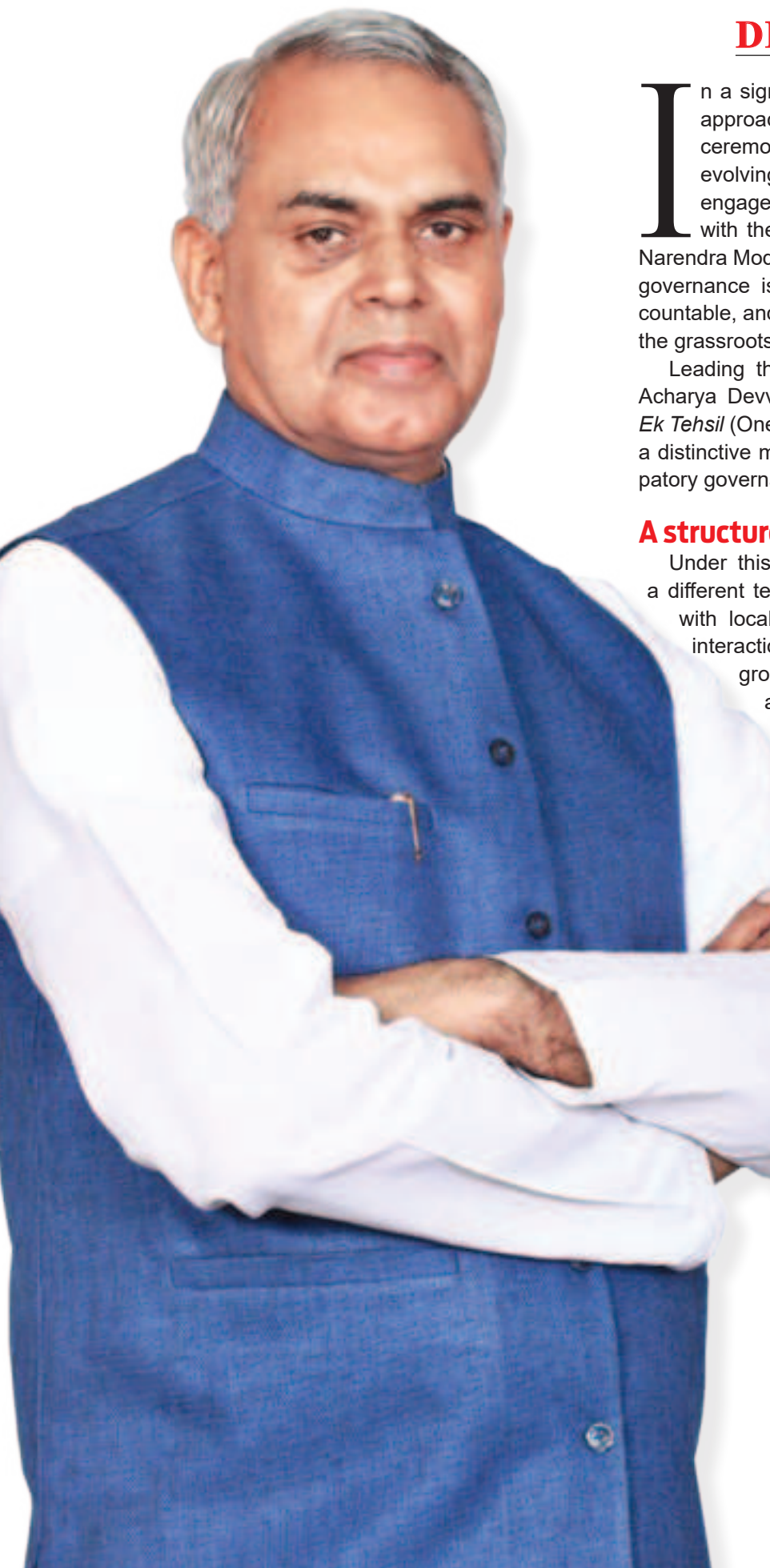
According to official interactions, Governor Devvrat has so far covered 17 districts and more than 38 villages, with participation in multiple local events. Each visit typically involves interaction with 4,000 to 6,000 citizens, where awareness is created about Government schemes and feedback is gathered on implementation gaps.

Social Inclusion focus

The initiative aims to eventually cover all 267 tehsils in Gujarat, indicating a long-term, state-wide engagement strategy inspired by earlier grassroots governance models.

A key feature of the programme is its emphasis on social harmony and inclusion. During village visits, the Governor interacts closely with families across social groups, including Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities. Sharing simple meals and engaging in informal conversations has been positioned as a symbolic and practical step towards strengthening trust, dignity, and social cohesion.

Environmental sustainability forms an integral





Fusion of the Vedic wisdom, statecraft

Blitz BUREAU

In India's evolving governance landscape, Acharya Devvrat stands out as a rare blend of moral authority and administrative clarity. Currently serving as the Governor of Gujarat, he has earned recognition as a steady and principled constitutional figure.

Born in 1959 in Haryana, Devvrat's intellectual journey is deeply rooted in the ideals of the Arya Samaj. A distinguished academic with Master's degrees in Hindi and History and a Ph.D. in Naturopathy and Yogic Sciences, he spent over three decades transforming Gurukul Kurukshetra into a modern institution grounded in traditional values.

Beyond governance, he has emerged as a key advocate of natural farming, or Prakrutik Krushi. Promoting chemical-free agriculture, he has encouraged large-scale adoption among farmers in Gujarat while personally practicing these methods.

As Chancellor of Gujarat Vidyapith, founded by Mahatma Gandhi, Acharya Devvrat continues to embody a rare 'scholar-statesman' model. His work reflects a clear vision – integrating sustainability, tradition, and governance to strengthen India's future. **BI**

part of the outreach. The initiative promotes tree plantation drives under the theme *Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam*, with local stakeholders assigned responsibility for long-term maintenance.

In parallel, awareness sessions on natural farming practices such as *Jeevamrit* and *Ghan Jeevamrit* are conducted to encourage farmers to adopt eco-friendly and cost-effective agricultural methods.

The programme also supports the objectives of the *Swachh Bharat Mission* by encouraging villages to adopt cleanliness as a sustained community practice rather than a one-time campaign. Public participation is emphasised, and sanitation workers are formally acknowledged during events to reinforce their contribution.

Overnight village stays

One of the distinguishing aspects of the initiative is the Governor's overnight stay in villages, typically in

Government schools or Panchayat Bhawans. These stays enable extended interaction through evening Gram Sabhas, where issues such as healthcare, education, substance abuse, women's empowerment, and youth opportunities are discussed in an open forum.

This approach allows for real-time

Governor Devvrat has so far covered 17 districts and more than 38 villages, with participation in multiple local events. Each visit typically involves interaction with 4,000 to 6,000 citizens

assessment of local conditions and fosters a more responsive governance mechanism.

The outreach places strong emphasis on natural farming, with large-scale farmer interactions organised at the tehsil level. Discussions focus on reducing dependence on chemical inputs, improving soil health, lowering costs, and enhancing long-term productivity.

Additionally, the Governor engages with livestock-rearing families, highlighting the role of animal husbandry in augmenting rural incomes and strengthening the local economy.

Digital amplification

The initiative has also leveraged digital platforms to extend its reach. Over the past six months, more than 100 videos and posts related to rural development and natural farming have been shared across social media platforms, collectively reaching

millions of users.

This digital outreach has helped position the programme as a replicable model beyond Gujarat.

Governor Acharya Devvrat's initiative presents a structured and scalable model of governance, where administrative leadership actively engages with citizens, monitors implementation at the grassroots, and promotes inclusive development.

The evolving "Lok Bhavan" approach signals a broader institutional shift – one that prioritises field engagement over formality. As India advances towards its long-term development goals, such models may offer valuable insights for strengthening governance frameworks across states.

In essence, the Gujarat experiment underscores a simple but powerful principle: when governance reaches the people, development becomes more effective, participatory, and sustainable. **BI**



When SUN becomes son, & starts paying

Urban poor are now producing power through solar rooftop and selling it too

Anoop Saxena

As of March 2026, India has added a record 22GW of residential rooftop solar in just 24 months, which is roughly equivalent to the entire power generation capacity of several small European nations combined

In the labyrinthine lanes of Dhara-vi, where the skyline was once a chaotic mesh of tangled electrical wires and 'hooking' cables, a new architecture is rising. The rusted corrugated tin roofs that define Mumbai's informal settlements are disappearing beneath a sleek, blue-black armour of solar panels.

Meet Abdul Sheikh, a 42-year-old tailor, whose family has lived here for three generations. For decades, his biggest overhead wasn't the price of silk or the maintenance of his sewing machines; it was the unpredictable, spiralling cost of electricity. Today, Abdul isn't just a consumer; he is a 'prosumer'. Thanks to the massive push of the PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana, Abdul's roof has been transformed into a miniature power plant.

"Last month, my bill was negative Rs 450," Abdul says, gesturing to the bi-directional net meter installed outside his workshop. "I didn't just get free light; the grid bought electricity

from me," he says with pride.

India's journey to United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 7, i.e., Affordable and Clean Energy, took a

radical, decentralised turn in late 2024. While the massive solar parks of Rajasthan and Gujarat grabbed global headlines for years, the real revolution is now

The Solar DIY guide

BlitzBUREAU

Thinking of going solar this summer? The 2026 application process is 100 per cent digital and faceless. Here is the five-step Do-It-Yourself (DIY) breakdown:

National portal: Log onto the suryaghar.gov.in portal. You will need your Electricity Consumer Number and a photo of your roof.

Feasibility AI: The portal now uses satellite imagery (via Bhuvan-III) to instantly calculate your roof's 'solar harvest potential'." No more waiting for a physical inspection.

Vendor match: Choose from a 'star-rated' list of local vendors. Under the 2026 guidelines, vendors must provide a mandatory five-year comprehensive maintenance guarantee to qualify for the subsidy.

Subsidy drop: Once the installation is geo-tagged and the net meter is installed by your discom, the subsidy (up to Rs 78,000 for a 3kW system) is credited to your Aadhaar-linked bank account within 14 days.

Monitor via app: Use the 'Saur-Shakti' app to track your daily generation and see exactly how much credit you are earning from your discom. **BI**

happening on the 'last-mile' rooftops of urban India.

As of March 2026, India has added a record 22GW of residential rooftop solar in just 24 months. To put that in perspective, that is roughly equivalent to the entire power generation capacity of several small European nations combined, all harvested from the tops of homes, shops, and small factories.

The catalyst for this explosion was the 'saturate and subsidise' model. Unlike previous iterations that were bogged down by red tape, the 2024-25 policy shift offered a staggering 60 per cent direct subsidy for low-income households for systems up to 2kW.

But the real 'secret sauce' was the solar aggregator framework. These are nimble startups that lease roof space from residents, install the panels at zero upfront cost, and share the revenue from the power sold back to the distribution companies (discoms).

Virtual power plant

The story of the 'grid flippers' isn't just about individual homes; it's about the power of the collective. In the Sion-Dharavi belt, the Sion Solar Cooperative has turned a block of ten chawls into India's first urban virtual power plant.

By linking 200 individual rooftop systems via

a smart AI-driven micro-grid, the cooperative provides a steady, aggregated stream of 500kW to Mumbai's main grid during the punishing peak afternoon hours.

When the city's air conditioners are humming at full blast, it is the sunlight captured on the roofs of the poor that is keeping the high-rises of South Mumbai from facing blackouts.

"This is the ultimate democratisation of energy," says Dr. Ananya Sen, an urban economist. "For a century, power flowed from massive, central plants to the people. Now, the people are the plant. When a low-income family saves Rs 2,000 a month on electricity, that money goes directly into better nutrition, healthcare, or school fees. It's a silent, massive wealth transfer from the sun to the pocket of the common man."

The grid challenge

However, this sun-kissed dream has introduced a new, high-stakes technical challenge for the country's power engineers – the 'duck curve'. During the day, when solar generation is at its peak, the demand for traditional coal-powered electricity drops precipitously. But as the sun sets and millions of people turn on their lights and stoves, the demand ramps up with a vertical intensity that can strain even the most robust grids.

The largest blue-collar employer

Blitz BUREAU

Who maintains the millions of rooftop panels across 600,000 villages? Enter the suryamitras.

Since 2024, the Skill India Mission has certified over 1.5 lakh solar technicians, specifically targeting rural youth and ITI graduates. In 2026, the suryamitra has become the new 'mobile repairman' of the hinterland.

"It's a dignity-first job," says 22-year-old Rahul from Satna, who runs a solar-cleaning

startup with three friends. Using specialised telescopic brushes and drones for larger installations, Rahul's team services 40 villages.

"People used to leave for the city to work as security guards. Now, we stay in the village, wear a uniform, and carry a multimeter. We are the 'Doctors of the Roof,'" he stresses.


The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) estimates that for every 1MW of rooftop solar installed, 25 direct jobs are created in maintenance and operations – making solar the largest blue-collar employer of 2026. **BI**



SDG 7

Affordable and clean energy

This UN goal aims to "ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all" by 2030. It focuses on universal electricity access, increasing the share of renewable energy, and doubling energy efficiency improvements, along with expanding infrastructure in developing countries.



In North Indian cities like Ghaziabad and Noida, residents have begun reporting 'voltage jitters'. The local distribution transformers, many of them decades old, were not designed to handle power flowing backward from homes into the substation.

"We are essentially asking a one-way street to suddenly become a high-speed two-way highway," explains Vikram Singh, a senior grid manager. "The solution lies in BESS (Battery Energy Storage Systems). We need to store that mid-day sun to use it at 8:00 PM."

'Silicon Valley' of slums

The economic ripple effect of this transition is creating a new class of 'green-collar' workers. In the narrow alleys where mobile repair shops used to be the primary tech hub, 'solar care' clinics are popping up.

Cleaning a solar panel might sound simple, but in India's dust-heavy atmosphere, soiling can reduce energy efficiency by up to 30 per cent in a single week. This has birthed a micro-entrepreneurship boom.

Small teams of "Suryamitras" (Friends of the Sun) now roam neighborhoods with specialised telescopic brushes and de-ionised water sprays, charging a nominal fee of Rs 50 per panel per month.

Beyond the economics, there is a profound environmental victory. Dense urban areas like Mumbai and Delhi suffer from the 'urban heat island' effect – where concrete and asphalt trap heat, making cities up to 5°C hotter than the surrounding countryside.

New studies from the IIT-Bombay Climate Hub (2026) suggest that the massive installation of rooftop solar is having a 'shading effect'. By intercepting the sun's rays before they hit the concrete roofs, solar panels are naturally cooling the top floors of buildings by 3-4°C.

As India marches toward the 2030 SDG deadline, the 'grid flippers' of 2026 are providing a blueprint for the Global South. The model proves that green energy doesn't have to be a luxury for the elite; it can be a survival tool for the marginalised. **BI**

Challenging times

PM Modi expresses confidence in unity of India to overcome West Asia crisis



The following are the excerpts of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's monthly broadcast, Mann Ki Baat, delivered on March 29.

Welcome once again to 'Mann Ki Baat'. This month of March has been full of turbulence globally. All of us remember that the entire world faced myriad problems for a long time on account of COVID. Indeed, all of us had expected that after emerging from the Corona crisis, the world would move forward on the path of renewed progress. However, situations of war and conflict have continuously kept arising in different parts of the world. Presently, a fierce war has been going on in our neighbourhood for a month. Millions of our family members, near and dear ones, live in these countries, especially working in the Gulf countries. I am deeply grateful to the Gulf countries, who are providing all kinds of assistance to more than 1 crore such Indians there.

Friends, the region where the war is currently going on is a major centre of our energy needs. On account of that, a crisis is emerging around the world regarding petrol and diesel.

Our global relations; the support we receive from various countries, and the strengths the country has built over the past decade have enabled India to bravely confront these circumstances.

Those who are politicising even this issue should refrain from doing so. This is a matter concerning the interests of 140 crore countrymen; there is no place for self-serving politics.

Friends, these certainly are challenging times. Today, through "Mann Ki Baat," I would once again urge all my countrymen that we must unitedly overcome this challenge. Those who are politicising even this issue should refrain from doing so. This is a matter concerning the interests of 140 crore countrymen; there is no place for self-serving politics. ...

... I want to tell you about an initiative that reflects the spirit of public participation among our countrymen. This initiative is the Gyan Bharatam Survey, which is related to our great culture and rich heritage. Its objective is to collect information about manuscripts across the country. One way to participate in this survey is through the Gyan Bharatam App. If you have a manuscript or information about it, do share its image on the Gyan Bharatam App. ...

My dear countrymen, India is the youngest country in the world. When the strength of the country's youth is involved in nation-building, it is of immense help. The organization MY Bharat, is playing a major role in fulfilling this responsibility of nation-building. This organization is connecting the country's youth with various positive activities. Recently, MY Bharat organized a budget quest. Its aim was to connect the youth across the country with the budget process and policymaking. Nearly 12 lakh youth from across the country participated in the quiz. ...

Friends, I have always urged all of you to certainly pay attention to your fitness. Now less than 100 days are left for the International Yoga Day; the attraction towards yoga is also rising continuously all over the world. ... I would urge all of you to reduce your sugar intake also... and as I have said earlier, we also need to cut down on cooking oil by 10 percent. These small efforts will keep you away from obesity and lifestyle diseases ...

My dear countrymen, summer has begun in many parts of the country, which means it's time to renew our commitment to water conservation. Over the last 11 years, the 'Jal Sanchay Abhiyan' has created a lot of awareness among the people. Under this campaign, nearly 50 lakh Artificial Water Harvesting Structures have been created across the country. I am happy to see that community-level efforts are now underway in every village to address the water crisis. ...

Friends, a unique initiative was also observed in Korea district of Chhattisgarh. Farmers there worked on a simple yet effective idea. They made small recharge ponds and soak pits in their fields, allowing rainwater to remain in the fields and gradually seep into the ground. Today, more than 1,200 farmers in this area have adopted this model, and the groundwater level of the village has improved significantly. ...

My dear countrymen, our fishermen brothers and sisters are not just warriors of the sea; they are also a strong foundation of a self-reliant India. Battling the waves of the sea even before dawn, they set out to strengthen their families and the country's economy. The lives of these hard-working fishermen are being made easier in many ways today. ... they are being fully supported through technology. I am extremely happy that such efforts are not only enriching our fisheries sector; it is also instilling the spirit to innovate. ...

My dear countrymen, if you visit any city, big or small, today, you will surely notice a change. You will see solar panels installed on the rooftops of a large number of homes. Until a few years ago, this was only seen on a few homes. But today, the impact of the "PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana" is being observed in every corner of the country. This scheme has brought about a profound change in the life of Payal Munjpara of Surendranagar district, Gujarat. ... There are countless such examples of the solar energy revolution in the country. Do join this revolution and connect others too.

My dear countrymen, every month I receive numerous messages from different parts of the country for 'Mann Ki Baat'. ... When I read your suggestions, I feel that this is not just a programme; it has become a shared dialogue between all of us. Your thoughts... Your experiences inspire us to continuously improve this programme. **BI**

**MANN
KI
BAAT**
EPISODE 132



CENSUS 2027 begins

Caste enumeration will be done in the second phase

Blitz BUREAU

Census 2027, to be conducted in two phases, has begun in multiple states from April 1. This will be the 16th Census in the series and the 8th since Independence.

In the first phase, house listing and Self-Enumeration will be carried out. The Self-Enumeration facility will be conducted over a 15-day period between April 1 and August 31, with the schedule varying across States and Union Territories.

The second phase, Population Enumeration, will focus on collecting individual-level data, including age, gender, occupation, literacy, and caste details.

The caste enumeration will be done in the second phase of the Census.

In a nutshell

- 16th Census exercise, and the eighth since Independence
- It will be carried out in two phases through digital means
- Option of self-enumeration through an online portal in 16 languages
- Questions for the first phase have been notified

After each State and Union Territory carries out the Self-Enumeration, the house listing operations will be conducted over a 30-day period till September 30.

The self-enumeration portal will be available in 16 languages.

Addressing the media in New Delhi on March 30, Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India Mritunjay Kumar Narayan further informed that the questions for the first phase have already been notified, and the questions for the second phase will be published in due course.

He said that Census 2027 will be conducted through digital means. The data will be collected through a mobile application, and an option for self-enumeration will also be available to the public. He said that a web-based portal will be used to manage and monitor various activities of Census 2027. The Commissioner further added that the House Listing Block (HLB) creation will be carried out through a web mapping application.

Narayan also informed that the Union Cabinet had approved a total outlay of Rs 11,718.24 crore for the Census in December 2025. Administrative boundaries were frozen as of January 1, 2026, and a pre-test of the first phase was conducted across all states and Union Territories in November last year. **BI**

Law must travel to the soldier

Says CJI as he addresses Army personnel in Leh

Blitz BUREAU

In a historic first, the Chief Justice of India, Justice Surya Kant, on March 30 addressed Army personnel at the Leh military camp in Ladakh, emphasising that access to justice must reach soldiers stationed in remote and operationally sensitive areas, reported Live Law.

Underscoring the judiciary's commitment to defence personnel and their families, the CJI said that "the law must travel to the soldier, because the soldier cannot always travel to the law."

This marks the first time a sitting Chief Justice of India has delivered an address to armed forces personnel from the Leh base camp.

Personal challenges

CJI Surya Kant stressed that soldiers often face legal and personal challenges while serving in distant and inhospitable terrains, making physical access to courts and legal services difficult. He observed that while a civilian in a city may know where courts and lawyers are located, a soldier posted in a high-altitude region cannot simply leave duty to pursue litigation or manage disputes back home.

Framing the issue as a constitutional obligation rather than a matter of benevolence, he referred to Article 39A of the Constitution, stating that legal aid is not charity but a commitment to ensure that access to justice does not depend on wealth, geography, or social position.



Highlighting institutional measures taken to address this concern, the CJI spoke about the Veer Parivar Sahayata Yojana, a scheme launched last year during his tenure as Executive Chairman of the National Legal Services Authority to provide free legal aid, assistance and support services to serving defence personnel, ex-servicemen, their dependent family members, and members of paramilitary forces.

Providing details on the scheme's progress, the Chief Justice stated that as of December 31, 2025, nearly 14,929 beneficiaries had been assisted under the programme.

The CJI interacted with officers and jawans of Fire and Fury Corps at Raina Auditorium, Leh. He also inaugurated the newly constructed District Court Complex at Melong Thang, Leh. **BI**

STRATEGIC NEEDS

India scaling up exploration of critical minerals

Rajeshwar Prasad

India is scaling up exploration of critical minerals, fostering a startup-driven mining ecosystem and building strong domestic value chains to reduce import dependence. The Government is also focusing on improving project timelines by simplifying approval processes and addressing issues such as forest clearances, which often delay exploration work.

In 2025, the Government had launched the National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM) with a Rs34,300 crore outlay over seven years. The mission aims to secure India's supply of 21 critical minerals (lithium, cobalt, nickel) by accelerating domestic exploration, mining, recycling, and international acquisition. It aims for 1,000 patents by 2030 to bolster clean energy, tech, and defence sectors.

Union Minister of Science and Technology Jitendra Singh recently said that the pace of exploration, particularly for lithium and other critical minerals, must align with global demand and India's strategic needs.

Addressing the Governing Body meeting of the National Mineral Exploration and Development Trust in New Delhi, the Minister outlined key priorities to accelerate exploration, strengthen domestic capacity and expand participation in the critical minerals sector.

Ongoing work in regions such as the Siwana belt in Rajasthan and the Salal-Haimna block in Jammu and Kashmir was mentioned as examples, with a push to expand such efforts to more potential areas.

"India must create a conducive environment for Indian companies and startups to enter the mining and critical minerals sector," he said and added that reducing import dependence requires end-to-end domestic supply chains, including processing and value addition.

Referring to the success of the biotechnology startup ecosystem, Singh added that similar institutional support, targeted incentives, and hand-holding mechanisms can enable innovation in mining technologies and exploration methods. **BI**



Safety and comfort

AI cameras, holding areas to tackle crowding at railway stations

BlitzBUREAU

The Indian Railways has rolled out a series of measures to manage heavy passenger rush at stations, including the creation of dedicated holding areas, access control systems, and enhanced surveillance.

The holding areas will be equipped with amenities such as seating, drinking water, toilets, ticketing facilities, information displays, and security checks to handle peak-hour crowds.

To streamline passenger movement, complete access control will be implemented, allowing only passengers with confirmed reserved tickets direct entry to platforms, while those without tickets or on waiting lists will be accommodated in designated holding areas outside.

The Railways has also developed

new designs for wider foot-over-bridges (FOBs), measuring 12 metres and 6 metres, which will be installed across stations to ease crowd flow, according to the minister.

Further, AI-enabled CCTV cameras are being installed at stations and adjoining areas for real-time monitoring and crowd management, while dedicated "war rooms" will be set up at major stations to ensure coordinated responses among departments.

These informations were provided by Union Minister for Railways Ashwini Vaishnaw in the Rajya Sabha.

In a written reply, the Minister said that permanent passenger holding areas will be developed at 76 identified sta-

tions to reduce congestion on platforms.

The holding area at New Delhi Railway Station has already been commissioned, featuring additional ticket counters, automatic ticket vending machines (ATVMs), public announcement systems, electronic train information boards, CCTV surveillance, luggage scanners, door-frame

metal detectors (DFMDs), improved lighting, power backup, RO drinking water, and separate toilets for men, women, and Divyangjans.

"Similar facilities at other stations are in various stages of planning and execution," he added.

Further, AI-enabled CCTV cameras are being installed at stations and adjoining areas for real-time monitoring and crowd management, while dedicated "war rooms" will be set up at major stations to ensure coordinated responses among departments.

New-generation digital communication systems, including walkie-talkies and advanced announcement systems, will be deployed at high-footfall stations.

Moreover, railway staff and service personnel will be issued QR code-based ID cards for secure and controlled access, along with new uniforms to enable easy identification during emergencies, according to the minister. **BI**





India's growth prospects are supported by favourable policies, demographic strength, and a growing technological base.

celerating. A more efficient transport network is expected to strengthen supply chains and support the expansion of the domestic economy, Washington Examiner reported.

As per Washington Examiner, at the same time, global shifts in supply chains are working in India's favour. Western companies, particularly from the United States, are increasingly moving operations away from China. Major firms like Apple are expanding their presence in India, bringing capital, technology, and expertise that can

enhance productivity and innovation across sectors

Technology is another key pillar of India's growth story. The country's digital infrastructure—including identity systems, mobile payments, and online public services—has brought millions into the formal economy. This digital expansion is improving efficiency, boosting tax revenues, and enabling small businesses to access funding and scale operations, as per Washington Examiner.

India also stands out for its strong entrepreneurial culture. A growing startup ecosystem, supported by venture capital, is driving innovation in areas such as financial technology, artificial intelligence, and e-commerce. These developments are helping India move towards higher-value economic activities, Washington Examiner reported. **[B]**

A wealthy nation by 2047

India expected to bypass middle-income trap: Report

BlitzBUREAU

India is rapidly emerging as a global economic powerhouse, with projections suggesting it could become a high-income, wealthy nation by 2047, Washington Examiner reported.

According to Washington Examiner, over the past two decades, the country has recorded strong economic growth. Since 2003, India's economy has expanded at an average annual rate of over 7 per cent. If this momentum continues for the next 20 years, India could

cross the high-income threshold, with per capita GDP exceeding \$15,000 in 2025 terms. Sustained growth at this level would also help the country avoid the "middle-income trap" that has stalled economies such as Brazil, South Africa, and Turkey.

India's growth prospects are supported by favourable policies, demographic strength, and a growing technological base. One of its biggest advantages is its young population. With a median age of around 28, India is significantly younger than

the United States and China. Over the coming decades, a large number of young people will enter the workforce, boosting productivity and driving consumption. This demographic trend is expected to support a strong domestic market, reducing reliance on exports for growth, as reported by Washington Examiner.

To fully leverage this advantage, policymakers are focusing on improving productivity. Investments in infrastructure—such as highways, airports, ports, and logistics corridors—are ac-

BlitzBUREAU

Renewable capacity and generation is rising sharply, but coal continues to dominate the country's overall energy mix, according to the Energy Statistics India 2026, released by the National Statistics Office (NSO) under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)

The 33rd edition of the report provides an integrated dataset covering coal, lignite, petroleum, natural gas and renewable energy, along with analytical tools such as energy balance tables, Sankey diagrams and internationally benchmarked sustainable energy indicators.

According to the report, India's Total Primary Energy Supply (TPES) grew by 2.95 per cent in FY 2024-25 to reach 9,32,816 kilo tonnes of oil

Renewable capacity surges

'Energy Statistics India 2026' released

equivalent (KToE), reflecting steady expansion in energy demand alongside economic growth.



A major highlight of the publication is the rapid growth in renewable energy potential, which reached 47,04,043 megawatts as of March 31, 2025. Solar energy dominates this segment,

Among all the major energy supply sources, coal has remained the dominant source, contributing the highest share to the total energy supply

accounting for nearly 71 per cent of the total potential, followed by wind power and large hydro projects. Over 70 per cent of this potential is concentrated in six states – Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh.

Installed renewable energy capacity has also seen significant growth, rising from 90,134 MW in 2016 to 2,29,346 MW in 2025, registering a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 10.93 per cent. Similarly, electricity generation from renewable sources increased from 1,89,314 GWh in FY 2015-16 to 4,16,823 GWh in FY 2024-25. **[B]**



MANOJ SAXENA

In a historic moment for India's aviation sector, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated Phase I of the Noida International Airport (NIA) recently. The launch of the greenfield project at Jewar marks the beginning of a 'two-airport system' for the National Capital Region, promising to decongest Delhi's IGI Airport while positioning Western Uttar Pradesh as a global logistics and transit powerhouse.

Accompanied by UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the Prime Minister took a walkthrough of the state-of-the-art terminal before addressing a massive gathering. "Today, Uttar Pradesh is taking a flight toward a developed future," PM Modi remarked, highlighting the airport's role in the Viksit Bharat vision.

The airport isn't just a marvel of engineering; it's a tribute to Indian culture. The terminal's architecture draws inspiration from the ghats of Varanasi and traditional havelis, blending local aesthetics with a 'net-zero emissions' philosophy.

Built with an investment of approximately Rs 11,200 crore, the initial handling capacity of the airport is 12 million passengers annually, which is scalable to 70 million. A 3,900-metre runway capable of hosting the world's largest wide-body aircraft is among the highlights of the new airport.

Beyond travel, Jewar is set to become a commercial nerve centre. With an integrated multi-modal cargo hub and India's first in-house Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) facility, the airport is expected to generate thousands of jobs and bridge the gap for exporters in Agra, Meerut, and Aligarh. As the first commercial flights are slated for later half of April, the silence of the Jewar farmlands has officially been replaced by the roar of progress. **BI**

Jewar's crown



The 25-YEAR JOURNEY



How It Started

First proposed in 2001 as Taj International Aviation Hub during the Uttar Pradesh Government led by Rajnath Singh. Kept shifting locations and faced multiple clearance issues due to its proximity to Delhi IGI Airport.

Project Structure

Noida International Airport Limited (NIAL)	Project Owner
Yamuna International Airport Pvt Ltd (YIAPL)	Concessionaire/Operator
Zurich Airport International AG	Developer (40-year concession)
Tata Projects Ltd	EPC Construction Contractor
DGCA	Aviation License
BCAS	Security Clearance
CISF	Airport Security

Major Timelines

Oct 7, 2020	Concession agreement signed with Zurich Airport
Nov 25, 2021	Foundation stone laid by PM Modi
June 2022	Physical construction started
June 2022	Tata Projects awarded construction contract
2023 Sep	IATA code assigned – DXN
Apr 20, 2024	First calibration flight test
Dec 9, 2024	Validation flight test successful
Sept 22, 2025	CISF took charge of airport security
March 6, 2026	DGCA aerodrome license granted
March 28, 2026	Inauguration by PM Modi
May-June 2026	Expected commercial flights start

Key Impact Areas

- Real estate boom in YEIDA region
- Industrial corridor development
- Film City project
- Logistics hub
- MRO (Maintenance Repair Overhaul)
- Expressways (Yamuna, Delhi-Mumbai Expressway, Faridabad-Jewar Expressway)

Size, Cost & Capacity

	Cost	Capacity	Runways
Phase 1	Rs 4,588 crore	12 million	1 runway
Phase 2	Rs 5,983 crore	30 million	2 runways
Phase 3	Rs 8,415 crore	50 million	4 runways
Phase 4	Rs 10,575 crore	70 million	6 runways

Early Approvals

July 2014	Site clearance
Dec 2015	Environmental clearance
June 2015	Union Govt approval

Revival & Planning

After 2017, the Yogi Government pushed the project under Yamuna Expressway Industrial Development Authority (YEIDA).



School enrolment up

Blitz BUREAU

Government-run schools in Madhya Pradesh have recorded a 32.4 per cent increase in enrolment, reflecting growing public trust in the state's education system.

For the current academic year 2026-27, the state Government has set a target of 1.45 crore student enrolments in schools.

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav said that the admission process for Classes 1, 6, and 9 in Government schools has been simplified, resulting in a significant 19.6 per cent increase in overall enrolment during the academic year 2025-26.

A four-day (April 1 to 4) state-level 'School Chale Hum' campaign was also launched by the CM in Bhopal to boost enrolment.

Yadav also added that the state Government has established 369 Sandipani Schools (previously known as CM Rise schools), which are among the best schools in the country.

"These Sandipani schools provide all the facilities required for the holistic development of students.

MP sets target of 1.45 cr enrolments in 2026-27



PM SHRI Schools are also playing a significant role in strengthening the modern education system," he said.

Yadav said that under the National Education Policy-2020, 49

books have been prepared in Hindi and local languages and are being distributed to students in tribal areas across the state.

"For students belonging to the

Scheduled Castes, 1,913 hostels with a capacity of 95,000 students are being operated in the state. In 25,439 schools run by the Tribal Affairs Department, more than 20 lakh students are currently studying.

The state government is working for the welfare of every section of society," he said.

During his speech, the Chief Minister also highlighted various schemes of the state Government, which are providing financial help for the students.

He said that a total of 94,306 meritorious students, who secured 75 per cent or more marks in the 2025-26 board examinations, have been provided free laptops.

"In the 2026-27 state budget, provisions of Rs 250 crore for laptops, Rs 100 crore for scooters, and Rs 210 crore for bicycle distribution have been made. School toppers in the board examinations are also being awarded," he added.

On this occasion, the Chief Minister distributed free bicycles and textbooks to students and wished them a bright future. **B**



Blitz BUREAU

Adani Group Chairman Gautam Adani visited the Ram Temple in Ayodhya on April 2 and offered prayers to Ram Lalla and sought blessings. He later visited Shri Nishulk Gurukul Mahavidyalaya for an institutional interaction.



He was accompanied by his wife Priti Adani, son Karan Adani and daughter-in-law Paridhi Adani.

Adani's visit to the Ram Mandir co-

Faith and seva

Gautam Adani visits Ayodhya temple, gurukul

incides with the Hanuman Jayanti celebrations -- the day marking the birth of Lord Hanuman.

Speaking to the media about Ram Lalla 'darshan', Adani said, "My family and I had the opportunity to visit the magnificent Shri Ram Mandir. It is a deeply emotional and proud moment for us. This temple is not just a centre of faith, but also a symbol of India's culture, unity, and self-confidence."

Later, Adani interacted with students and faculty of the gurukul and observed a learning environment where discipline, inquiry and values come together to preserve and transmit India's civilisational knowledge systems.

"When learning is rooted in values, it does not just shape individuals, it shapes the future of a nation. Our responsibility is to carry these traditions

forward while preparing for the opportunities of tomorrow," he said.

He emphasised the urgency of preserving India's knowledge systems even as the country accelerates into an AI-driven future. He affirmed that the Adani Foundation, the social welfare and development arm of the Adani Group, will support the gurukul ecosystem by enabling a convergence of tradition and technology through an AI-enabled laboratory.

With around 200 students, the gurukul offers free education, ensuring that knowledge remains accessible and inclusive. The campus also includes a gaushala, a traditional cow shelter, reflecting the integration of cultural, ecological and rural practices within the learning environment. The institution carries a rich legacy, with Mahatma Gandhi and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose among its early visitors. **B**

Quick bytes

Assurance to displaced

Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh has reiterated that his Government is making all possible efforts to assist internally displaced persons



(IDPs) affected by ethnic violence, extending support in every capacity available to the state. "I may

not be able to fulfil all your wishes, but I will continue to support each one of you in whatever way I can. Everyone aspires to return home, and our Government is making every effort to assist IDPs in building new houses," Singh said. **BI**

Environmental changes

Researchers from Nagaland University and a Nainital varsity have used advanced Geographic Information System (GIS) modelling and remote sensing techniques to examine environmental changes in Nagaland's Kohima district, with their study offering critical scientific insights into the fragile geo-ecological conditions of the Northeast's hill region and highlighting growing concerns over environmental degradation. **BI**



No to ex-Kolkata CP plea

The Election Commission of India has rejected the plea from former Kolkata Police Commissioner and the current Additional Director General (ADG) of Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of West Bengal, Supratim Sarkar, for relief from going as a central observer to poll-bound Tamil Nadu. The Commission has also directed Sarkar to report as the police observer for five Assembly constituencies in Tamil Nadu. **BI**



A battle of two narratives

Bengal goes to polls on April 23, April 29



Blitz BUREAU

The political landscape of West Bengal is currently a high-voltage arena as the state approaches its 2026 Assembly elections. Scheduled for two phases on April 23 and April 29, with results expected on May 4, this election is being viewed as a defining moment for the "Ma, Mati, Manush" legacy of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and the burgeoning saffron surge of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

At the heart of the contest is a clash of polar-opposite visions. The ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) is doubling down on its "Bengal Model" of governance. Strategically centering its campaign on welfare

schemes like Lakshmir Bhandar and Kanyashree, the TMC aims to consolidate its bedrock of rural and women voters. Mamata's recent prediction of winning over 226 seats reflects a party projecting absolute confidence, even as it navigates the turbulence of anti-incumbency and administrative scrutiny.

In contrast, the BJP is framing the election as a crusade for "Asmita" (identity) and security. By highlighting issues of illegal infiltration and corruption, the BJP is attempting to breach the TMC's southern bastions. The saffron party is particularly focused on Jungle Mahal and North Bengal—regions where they showed significant strength in 2021—hoping to turn these 40 decisive seats into a gateway for the state secretariat, Nabanna.

FLASHPOINTS

The lead-up to the polls has been defined by three major friction points:

- **Voter List Revision:** The "Special Intensive Revision" (SIR) debate has seen the TMC and the Election Commission at loggerheads over the alleged deletion of millions of names.
- **Central Oversight:** The TMC has criticized the "arbitrary removal" of senior officials by the ECI, labeling it political interference.
- **Governance vs. Polarisation:** While the BJP pushes a narrative of "change and national integration," the TMC relies on its record of restoring stability in historically violent regions.

A significant subplot in 2026 is the breakdown of the once-steady alliance between the Left Front and the Congress. In a bold move, the Congress has decided to contest all 294 seats independently, fielding heavyweights like Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury. This "go-it-alone" strategy could lead to a fragmented opposition vote, potentially benefiting the TMC in close triangular contests. Meanwhile, the Left Front is attempting a generational shift, fielding a mix of veterans and fresh youth faces to reclaim the urban and industrial belts they once dominated. **BI**

Bihar politics will never be same again

Nitish's shift to Rajya Sabha marks end of era

Blitz BUREAU

A dominant force in Bihar for over two decades, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's shift to the Rajya Sabha marks the end of an era in Bihar politics.

He is set to achieve a rare political milestone -- having been a member of all four legislative bodies: the Bihar Legislative Assembly, Lok Sabha, Legislative Council, and now the Rajya Sabha.

With him stepping away from the state legislature, the power dynamics are set to shift in the state. The Bharati-

ya Janata Party, which holds 89 seats in the Assembly and has been waiting in the wings, is likely to take the lead, potentially installing its own Chief Minister.

The Janata Dal (U), built around Nitish's leadership, faces an uncertain future without a clear successor. Interestingly, the politics in the state has functioned under a unique arrangement where Nitish remained



the central figure, even when his party, the JD(U), was not the single-largest force. That equilibrium now appears set to change. Even in the last two Assembly elections, the BJP had emerged stronger in terms of seats but still Nitish led the Government.

For years, the state's politics has revolved around three principal parties: the BJP, the JD(U), and the Rashtriya Janata Dal and Nitish's presence ensured that this triangular balance remained intact. **BI**

Poll promises in TN

DMK, AIADMK offer welfare schemes, subsidies, targeted household benefits



S Radha Krishnan

297 promises, focusing on a combination of welfare schemes, subsidies, and targeted household benefits.

Coupons for homemakers

DMK Chief Minister M K Stalin has announced Rs 8,000 coupons for homemakers from non-income tax-paying families to purchase or replace essential household appliances. The party also plans to double the monthly financial assistance for women from Rs 1,000 to Rs 2,000.

AIADMK General Secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami pledged free refrigerators for ration card holders and a Rs 2,000 subsidy under the 'Kula Vilakku'

scheme for all family card holders.

Both parties have promised increases in key social welfare programmes.

The old-age pension has been raised from Rs 1,200 to Rs 2,000. Fishing ban relief to be increased from Rs 8,000 to Rs 12,000.

The DMK has proposed a disability allowance of Rs 2,500 and the AIADMK, Rs 2,000.

The DMK has promised free laptops for 35 lakh higher education students over five years, while the AIADMK has promised a similar scheme for students in government and government-aided colleges.

While the DMK has offered to construct 10 lakh houses in five years, the AIADMK has promised free housing for homeless families under 'Amma Illam'.

For farmers both parties propose to give Rs 3,500 per quintal for paddy and Rs 4,500 per tonne for sugarcane.

While the DMK has promised an insurance coverage of up to ₹ 10 lakh, the AIADMK has assured eligible people of full government funding for major treatments, including heart surgeries and cancer care.

Opposition to NEP

Both parties reaffirm their opposition to certain aspects of the National Education Policy (NEP) and pledge to restore education to the State List, emphasising Tamil Nadu's rights and autonomy in policymaking. **BI**



Salary cut for parental neglect

BlitzBUREAU

The Telangana Legislative Assembly on March 29 unanimously passed a Bill to deduct 15 per cent of salary from employees neglecting their parents.

The Telangana Employees Accountability and Monitoring of Parental Support Bill, 2026, was passed after members cutting across party lines welcomed it.

The Bill provides for deduction of up to 15 per cent or Rs 10,000 — whichever is lower — from the gross salary of employees found to be neglecting their parents. The deducted amount will be paid directly to the parents.

Its scope extends beyond government staff to include private sector employees and public representatives such as MLAs, MLCs and corporators.

The motion for passing the Bill was adopted with a voice vote. **BI**

All parties in Kerala woo Muslims, Christians who constitute 47% population

BlitzBUREAU

Minorities who make up around 47 per cent of Kerala's population remain a decisive factor in determining the poll outcomes in a region long known for its bipolar politics.

The Congress' long-standing association with the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), a predominantly Muslim political outfit, has ensured a significant number of Muslim votes are polled in favour of the United

Democratic Front, according to a media report.

Splinter groups

The CPI (M)-led LDF has had to mostly satisfy itself with the support of splinter Muslims groups and rebels from the League.

The Samastha Kerala Jamiyyathul Ulama and its affiliates have traditionally leaned towards the UDF and many within various Mujahid groups are also



expected to back it. The Welfare Party of India, the political wing of Jamaat-e-Islami, has extended its

support to the UDF.

The BJP has been trying to win the confidence of sections of the Christian community, which is 18% of the population. Once seen as a cohesive block, the Christian vote today is far more fragmented, yet no less decisive.

The politics surrounding the Sabarimala temple continues to shape Kerala's electoral landscape. The alleged gold theft and the ongoing court proceedings related to the entry of women of all ages have once again brought the issue back into focus. **BI**

Wooing the minorities

Mumbai gets TREE authority Committee to safeguard the city's tree cover

Blitz BUREAU

After a brief tussle over who should preside over the committee, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has finally constituted the city's new tree authority – the panel tasked with safeguarding Mumbai's green cover.

A 13-member tree authority was constituted and their names announced during the general body meeting of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) general body meeting on March 30.

The municipal commissioner is the chairperson of the tree authority, and the chairperson of the market and garden committee is an ex-officio member. The next step will be to nominate experts to the committee.



The formation of the tree authority was delayed by a couple of weeks due to differences over who would preside as tree officer. According to civic sources, differences arose between superintendent of gardens Jitendra Pardeshi and deputy municipal commissioner (garden) Ajitkumar Ambi over who would be nominated to the post.

The civic administration finally went with Pardeshi, after he cited Supreme Court (SC) orders.

The tree authority is an important civic committee, taking decisions on the city's tree cover, including permissions to cut trees and the planting of new ones through the civic gardens department.

The role of the tree authority came into sharp focus in 2019, when the government sought to build a car shed for the metro's Line 3 in the Aarey forest. **BI**

Surat now a safe option

Auction of rough diamond shifting owing to Middle East war

Rakesh Sharma

While the ongoing conflict in West Asia has disrupted international trade, it may just prove to be a boon in disguise for Surat's diamond industry.

Citing the crisis, Dubai-based Stargems Group has shifted the venue for its auctioning of rough diamonds to the vast Surat Diamond Bourse (SDB), located on the outskirts of the city, officials said.

A seven-day pre-auction exhibition began at the office space of the Gems and Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC), which has been leased out to the Dubai group, last week, they noted, adding rough diamonds worth over Rs 350 crore were being showcased at SDB for businessmen from across the world.

The GJEPC is the apex body for India's gem and jewellery industry.

GJEPC Gujarat region chairman Jayanti Savaliya said: "It is for the first time that such an exhibition is being held at the GJEPC office at SDB. The [Dubai] company had previously held an exhibition in Dubai. Traders who cannot travel there will have an opportunity to view rough diamonds in person and submit a bid for the lot.



After the last day of the exhibition, the company will conduct an auction."

Sources at GJEPC told The Indian Express that three top global rough diamond companies from Dubai will also be holding auctions in Surat in April as they view it as a "safe" place.

The event could be a milestone for SDB, located in the 700-hectare Diamond Research and Mercantile City, which has been struggling to attract businessmen to set up shop since its inauguration in 2023.

The owner of a company here that

exports natural diamonds said: "Dubai is a free-trade zone where several diamond companies have their centres and are doing business through online auctioning of rough diamonds. As the city has also found itself amidst the war, diamond companies are in search of a better option."

"Eight of 10 polished diamonds in the world are cut and polished in Surat. So, these diamond companies are now seeing Surat as a second option, and for that, they are organising a rough diamond auction here," he added. **BI**

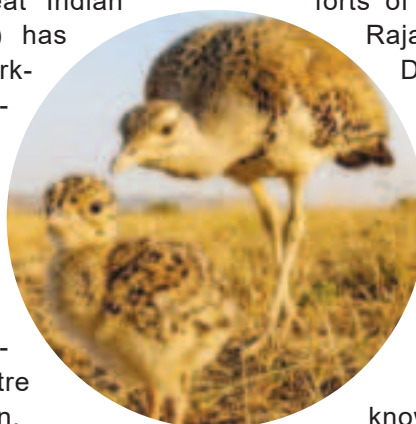
Operation successful

Egg transfer yields rare Great Indian Bustard chick

Blitz BUREAU

After a decade-long gap, a chick of the critically endangered Great Indian Bustard (GIB) has hatched in Kutch, marking a significant achievement in wildlife conservation for Gujarat.

The birth, in the Abdasa region, follows a carefully executed operation to introduce a fertile egg from a Rajasthan breeding centre into the Kutch population.



State Forest and Environment Minister Arjun Modhwadia said the achievement is "a moment of pride for all of us" and credited the efforts of the Gujarat and Rajasthan Forest Departments, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, and the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) for the success.

The initiative, known as 'Operation

Egg Transfer', involved transporting a fertile egg from Rajasthan over 19 hours by road in a portable incubator to ensure its safe arrival in Kutch.

On March 22, the egg was carefully placed in the nest of a female bustard, replacing an infertile one.

The female naturally incubated the egg, resulting in the hatching of a healthy chick on March 26.

Union Forest and Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav conveyed his congratulations to the Environment Ministry, the Gujarat and Rajasthan forest departments, and the WII. **BI**

Fiscal health rests in states

No amount of calibration at the Centre will amount to much if states do not improve their finances

Harvinder Ahuja

The new Fiscal Health Index 2026, released recently by NITI Aayog, is a stress map of India's federal economy. The index assesses state finances for 2023-24 across five pillars — quality of expenditure, revenue mobilisation,

fiscal prudence, debt index and debt sustainability — and in doing so throws up a national message that is unmissable: India's macro story may look steady from New Delhi, but the fiscal foundations beneath it are far from even.

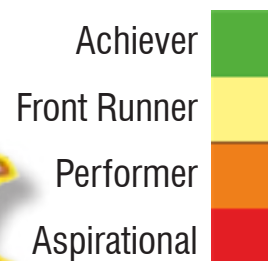
States account for a large share of public spending in India, especially in health, education, agriculture, local infrastructure and welfare delivery. If their finances weaken, national growth does not collapse immediately, but it becomes more brittle.

NITI Aayog says the index has been designed to "evaluate fiscal soundness, guide reforms, and encourage evidence-based fiscal policymaking," which is official language for a fairly blunt concern: too many states are still spending under pressure, borrowing heavily, and leaving themselves with too little room to respond to future shocks.

The rankings themselves underline that divergence. Among the 18 major states, Odisha, Goa, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Gujarat are among the better performers, while Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and Kerala occupy the bottom end. In the Northeast and Himalayan group, Arunachal Pradesh leads. The spread is politically important because it shows that fiscal stress in India is no longer a neat ideological story of one model versus another. It cuts across regions and party lines.

NITI Aayog's new Fiscal Health Index makes clear that the real test of India's fiscal resilience lies not only in the Union Budget, but in whether state governments can raise revenue, control debt and spend productively

FHI Score Heatmap of major states



What separates stronger states from weaker ones is less rhetoric than the basic arithmetic of revenue strength, debt control and the ability to spend on productive heads rather than being trapped by committed liabilities.

At the national level, the first implication is that India's public finance debate can no longer be confined to the Union Budget. The Centre may be meeting its consolidation path, but if several states remain fiscally stretched, the broader public sector balance sheet stays vulnerable.

This is especially true in a country where the states carry much of the burden of day-to-day development spending. A fiscally stressed state government cuts capital expenditure, postpones payments, leans more heavily on borrowing, or squeezes maintenance and service delivery.

None of that shows up as a dramatic national crisis overnight. But over time it drags down investment quality, public service outcomes and growth

potential. The second national message is about the quality, not just the quantity, of spending. The index's emphasis on "quality of expenditure" is an important corrective to the old habit of judging fiscal health only by deficit numbers.

A state can look politically active and administratively busy while still allocating too much to salaries, subsidies, interest payments and other committed heads, leaving too little for capital creation. That is why this index matters more than a simple debt league table.

It asks whether public money is building future capacity or merely financing the present. For India as a whole, that is a crucial distinction, because the country's growth ambition depends not only on how much governments spend, but on what they spend on.

A third implication is that debt stress is no longer a peripheral issue. NITI's framework explicitly separates debt levels from debt sustainability, which is smart because a state can carry high debt for some time if its revenues are robust and its liabilities are manageable.

But where revenue growth is weak and committed expenditure is high, debt quickly becomes a structural trap. Recent reporting around the index has highlighted exactly that pattern in states such as Punjab and Himachal Pradesh, where liabilities remain elevated and

fiscal space narrow.

Telangana, by contrast, illustrates a more mixed case: stronger revenue mobilisation has improved its standing, but debt concerns remain alive. This tells us something important at the national level: India's next fiscal challenge may not be a spectacular sovereign blow-up, but a prolonged subnational squeeze in which some states steadily lose room to invest while continuing to borrow.

There is also a federalism angle here. Suman Bery, NITI Aayog's Vice-Chairman, has repeatedly argued in recent public discussions that India's development path depends on competitive cooperative federalism work together.

The Fiscal Health Index is a tool built in that spirit: it names the stronger performers, exposes the weaker ones and nudges states to compare themselves with peers rather than only negotiate with the Centre.

NITI's own presentation of the index frames it as a mechanism to identify reform priorities and spread best practices. That matters because Indian federalism increasingly runs on benchmarking. The politics of rankings now shapes policy in everything from logistics to school education, and fiscal management is joining that list.

Experts on public finance have long made the same point in less bureaucratic language: weak state finances eventually become a national problem. Rathin Roy, former director of the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy, has often argued that India's fiscal debate is distorted when it treats the Centre and the states as separate silos, because macro stability depends on the general government picture, not just on the Union's books.



That broader view fits the message of the new index. A strong headline GDP number can coexist with fragile state balance sheets for a while. It cannot do so indefinitely.

The politics of welfare will also hang over the report. Across states, electoral competition has increased pressure for cash transfers, power subsidies, social support schemes and other recurring commitments.

Many of these outlays are politically popular and, in some cases, socially necessary. But the index quietly asks whether states are financing them on a sustainable base.

That is a tough national question because India's development model cannot rely on a permanent mismatch between rising expenditure promises and weak own-revenue capacity. The better-ranked states are not simply spending less; many are mobilising more revenue and managing debt more prudently. That is the real lesson.

There is a deeper warning too. India is entering a period when states will be expected to do more, not less: urbanisation, climate adaptation, local infrastructure, public health resilience, water stress and skilling all require capable subnational finances.

A state already weighed down by debt and rigid expenditure has less ability to respond to a flood, heatwave, commodity shock or employment slowdown. So the index is not just about bookkeeping. It is about resilience.

At one level, then, the Fiscal Health Index 2026 is a technocratic exercise. At another, it is a political-economic document with a clear national message. India's growth story will be only as durable as the states that carry it.

If stronger states use their fiscal room for productive investment while weaker ones remain trapped in debt, deficits and rigid spending, the country will see a widening gap in development capacity across its federal map. That would weaken the national project itself.

In that sense, the report is both a mirror and a warning. It shows that India has pockets of fiscal strength worth emulating. But it also shows that national macro comfort can be misleading if the states beneath it are fiscally uneven.

The real takeaway is plain enough: the next chapter of India's economic reform story will not be written only in North Block. It will be written in state capitals, in how they raise revenue, manage debt and choose between spending that buys votes and spending that builds capacity. **BI**

FHI composite score based categorisation

Rank	State	Score
1	Odisha	73.1
2	Goa	54.7
3	Jharkhand	50.5
4	Gujarat	49.9
5	Maharashtra	45.0
6	Chhattisgarh	44.3
7	Telangana	44.3
8	Uttar Pradesh	41.9
9	Karnataka	41.7
10	Madhya Pradesh	37.8
11	Haryana	34.5
12	Bihar	30.9
13	Tamil Nadu	29.8
14	Rajasthan	27.6
15	Kerala	24.8
16	W Bengal	23.8
17	Andhra Pradesh	23.1
18	Punjab	12.4

Quality over quantity

Blitz BUREAU

The Fiscal Health Index 2026 puts the spotlight on one parameter that often gets buried beneath deficit numbers: Quality of expenditure. This is where the real story of India's state finances lies.

For years, fiscal debates have revolved around how much governments spend and how large their deficits are. But the index makes it clear that what states spend on is far more consequential than how much they spend.

Two states with similar deficit levels can have vastly different growth outcomes depending on whether their budgets are geared towards asset creation or consumption.

The contrast is increasingly visible. Better-performing states are those that have managed to protect capital expenditure — investments in infrastructure, irrigation, logistics and public assets that expand future capacity.

In contrast, fiscally stressed states are seeing a growing share of their budgets preempted by committed expenditure: salaries, pensions, subsidies and interest payments.

These are politically difficult to compress and economically hard to escape.

This shift has long-term consequences. When capital expenditure is squeezed, the impact is not immediate but cumulative. Roads are delayed, maintenance is deferred, and public investment loses its multiplier effect.

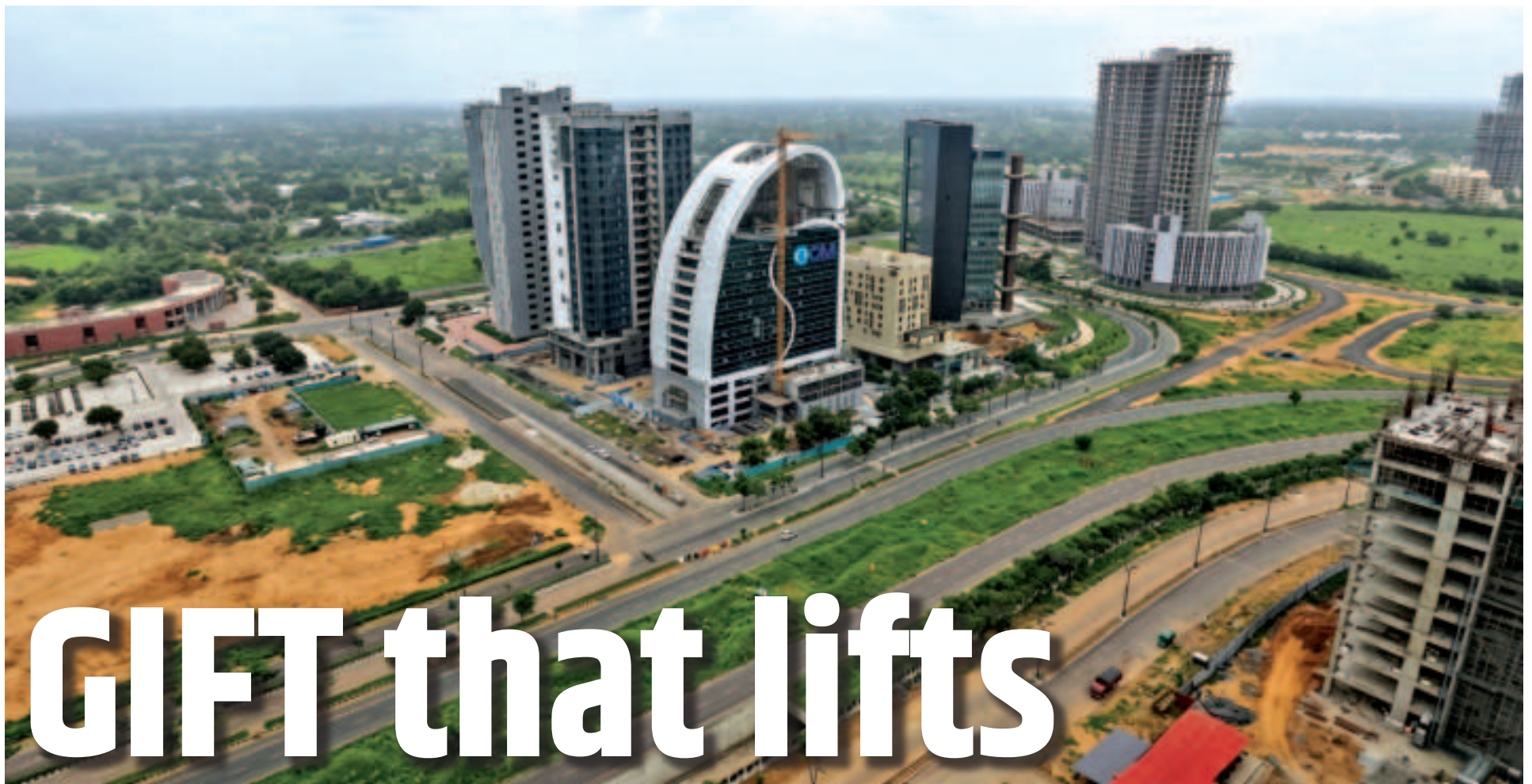
Over time, this weakens private investment sentiment and slows job creation, even if headline spending appears robust.

What makes this trend particularly concerning is its persistence. Once a state's expenditure profile tilts heavily towards committed liabilities, reversing it becomes a slow and politically costly process. Fiscal space narrows, borrowing rises, and policy flexibility erodes.

The message from the index is therefore precise and urgent: India's fiscal challenge is no longer just about balancing budgets. It is about rebalancing spending priorities.

Without a decisive shift towards investment-led expenditure, state finances risk becoming structurally rigid, limiting their ability to support the country's next phase of growth. **BI**

The Fiscal Health Index is a tool built in that spirit: it names the stronger performers, exposes the weaker ones and nudges states to compare themselves with peers rather than only negotiate with the Centre



GIFT that lifts

Stature, dominance, power

GIFT City fast climbing global sweepstakes

The cornerstone of GIFT City's meteoric rise remains its powerful banking ecosystem. Aggregate assets within IFSC Banking Units (IBUs) have now surpassed the staggering \$100.14 billion mark, with total transaction volumes soaring to \$142.98 billion.



Parth Nadpara

The world of global finance is officially on notice. The Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIFT City), a project once dismissed as a vision for tomorrow, is now the fully operational system powering India's integration into the global economy.

In a week of high-velocity institutional milestones, this International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) has signaled its arrival as a mature global financial hub, successfully on-shoring the kind of complex, dollar-denominated activity that was once the exclusive domain of established rivals like Singapore and Dubai.

From the launch of a revolutionary retail investment platform to the successful closing of its first-ever dollar-denominated initial public offering (IPO), the momentum is undeniable. As of March 2026, GIFT City has ascended to 43rd position in the Global Financial Centres Index (GFCI), critically securing the coveted top spot in the index's reputation category.

With a surging count of over 1,034 registered entities and a formidable banking asset base that has punched through the \$100 billion barrier, the 'project of the future' is officially delivering.

How banking rewrote the rules

The cornerstone of GIFT City's meteoric rise remains its powerful banking ecosystem. Aggregate assets within IFSC Banking Units (IBUs) have now surpassed the staggering \$100.14 billion mark, with total transaction volumes soaring to \$142.98 billion.

This is not merely a number; it represents a seismic shift in global financial architecture. Leading the charge are global giants such as JP Morgan, HSBC, and Barclays, which have strategically shifted high-value transaction hubs away from traditional financial capitals and into this dedicated enclave. Crucially, a structural pivot is dramatically underway in the debt markets. IBUs now account for roughly 36 per cent of India's total External Commercial Borrowings (ECBs).

This demonstrates a massive vote of confidence, as multinational corporations and Indian giants are choosing to raise dollar debt on home soil rather than incurring the costs and complexities of issuing in London or Singapore.

This momentum is not expected to slow down; the recently released Union Budget 2026-27 solidi-

fied the city's long-term appeal by extending the tax holiday for IBUs to an unprecedented 20 years within a 25-year block, offering generational fiscal certainty that rivals any jurisdiction globally.

Retail access and 'equity moment'

For common investor, the most electrifying development unfolded on March 20, 2026, with the launch of the "Global Access" platform by the NSE International Exchange (NSE IX). This platform is a game-changer, shattering old barriers and providing Indian retail investors and non-resident Indians (NRIs) with the ability to seamlessly invest in nearly 30 global markets including the US, UK, and Japan all through a single, easy-to-use mobile application.

The platform champions financial inclusion through features like fractional investing, allowing users to buy small portions of high-value stocks such as Apple and Alphabet, democratising access to global wealth creation.

Simultaneously, the city celebrated its profound "equity moment" on March 16, 2026, with the highly anticipated launch of the XED Executive Development IPO. This was the first-ever public offering from GIFT City.

Crucially, the \$12 million issue was fully denominated in US dollars and listed on both the NSE IX and India INX. The successful closure of this IPO is more than just a fundraising event; it is a vital proof-of-concept that firmly establishes GIFT City as a premier, credible venue for global capital raising, offering unparalleled regulatory and tax advantages for issuers.

From dollars to euros and the 'master key'

GIFT City's ascent is founded on its capacity for regulatory agility, facilitated by its unified and autonomous regulator, the International Fi-

financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA). This unified framework allows for rapid, impactful policy changes that keep the hub competitive.

On March 20, IFSCA proposed the introduction of real-time foreign-exchange settlements in euros. This proposal follows the wildly successful implementation of real-time dollar settlements, which slashed transaction times from 24 hours to mere seconds, revolutionising the speed of global trade.

The strategic move into euros is designed to deepen financial ties and transactional volumes with the European Union, positioning GIFT City as a critical bridge between Asia and Europe.

Innovation, meanwhile, is being protected and accelerated. The March 16 approval of the new Fintech Sandbox Framework is being hailed as the “master key” for financial technology.

This framework formalises a critical separation: high-risk, frontier fintech innovation is distinct from stable “techfin” services, creating a secure, low-risk environment for breakthroughs in disruptive technologies like AI and blockchain.

This regulatory clarity has paid dividends, attracting fresh investment, including Wipro's high-profile launch of an AI-powered BFSI (Banking, Financial Services, and Insurance) transformation hub on March 19. The message is clear: GIFT City is where the future of finance is being coded.

The scarcity premium

The city's physical and social landscape is evolving as fast as its ledger. Planners have adopted a shrewd “scarcity by design” model within the master plan, dedicating

only 22 per cent of land for residential use.

This strategic limitation has created a premium, driving high rental yields between 4.5 per cent and 6 per cent that significantly outperform traditional Indian metropolitan areas and ensure sustained value appreciation.

To achieve genuine global parity, the city has focused on resolving operational frictions for multinational firms. The relaxation of the controversial “wine & dine” policies in late 2025 was a watershed moment.

Foreign nationals and visitors can now consume alcohol at licensed venues simply by presenting a valid ID, removing a major hurdle for attracting and retaining high-value global talent.

Looking toward 2030, the city's skyline will be dramatically redefined by the towering “GIFT Eye,” a 158-meter tall Ferris wheel that will anchor a new, vibrant 20.5-acre social infrastructure zone, ensuring a world-class lifestyle.

Global trio: A new competitive edge

As GIFT City's trajectory steepens, the inevitable comparison with the established giants – the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) and Singapore's MAS-regulated ecosystem – has become the central debate for global investors.

While Singapore remains the global benchmark for stability and Dubai leads in lifestyle branding, GIFT City has aggressively carved out a unique competitive advantage founded on three core pillars: cost, legal evolution, and geopolitical neutrality.

The most immediate differentiator is cost. GIFT City



provides Grade A office space at roughly \$10-\$15 per square foot, a mere fraction of the \$45-\$60 seen in Dubai and the prohibitive \$70-\$100 commanded by Singapore.

When coupled with India's vast, skilled talent pool, firms are reporting operational costs that are a decisive 30 per cent to 40 per cent lower than in traditional off-shore hubs. This efficiency allows multinational firms to onshore high-skilled, high-value functions – such as sophisticated risk management, complex legal compliance, and advanced analytics – that would simply be cost-prohibitive elsewhere.

Fiscal policy is equally aggressive. The 2026 Union Budget's proposal to extend the tax holiday to two decades (within a 25-year block) provides a level of multi-decade certainty that directly challenges Dubai's zero-tax zones.

Unlike Singapore's 17 per cent corporate rate, GIFT City units enjoy a 100 per cent exemption on eligible income, alongside zero GST, Securities Transaction Tax (STT), and Dividend Distribution Tax (DDT). This tax regime is an unmissable incentive for capital.

Crucially, to bridge the institutional trust gap, GIFT City is rapidly evolving its legal framework. While both Dubai and Singapore operate under English common law, GIFT City's new Alternative Dispute Resolution Centre (ADRC) now allows contracting parties the flexibility to select foreign law (including English or Singapore law) for their agreements.

Finally, in an era defined by global volatility and uncertainty, GIFT City is positioning itself as a strategic “safe haven.” Sovereign wealth funds and large family offices are increasingly viewing the hub as a secondary, neutral “lifeboat” for capital.

It offers essential operational immunity from regional conflicts – such as those currently impacting West Asia – while maintaining a physical and symbiotic connection to the high-growth Indian economy.

With an ambitious target of 100,000 jobs by 2030, the Gujarat Gambit is no longer just “India's answer.” It is a credible, compelling, and rapidly emerging global contender, fundamentally redefining the power map of international finance. **BI**

Rival Dubai and Singapore?

GIFT City can rival Dubai and Singapore in select India-linked businesses, but not yet across the full spectrum of global finance. The gap is still large in scale and global connectivity.

In the September 2025 Global Financial Centres Index, Singapore ranked fourth globally and Dubai 11th, while GIFT City-Gujarat ranked 43rd. The same report noted that GIFT has fewer connections to other financial centres than established hubs such as Hong Kong, which is a proxy for the network depth that major centres enjoy.

Where GIFT does have a real

edge is India-linked intermediation. It offers a unified regulator in IFSCA, an offshore-style foreign-currency jurisdiction inside India, tax incentives, direct access to Indian opportunity, and now local foreign-currency settlement infrastructure.

The 2026 budget move to extend the IFSC profit-linked tax deduction to 20 years out of 25 strengthens that proposition further. That makes GIFT especially competitive for India-focused off-shore borrowing, treasury activity, fund relocation, aviation and ship leasing, and potentially equity listings. Dubai and Singapore, how-

ever, still have advantages that take years to build: deeper pools of global capital, stronger international investor familiarity, richer professional-services ecosystems, thicker secondary-market liquidity, and more mature liveability for expatriate and regional talent.

Recent reporting has also highlighted that GIFT still needs better housing, talent availability and urban vibrancy if it wants firms to move senior decision-makers, not just back-office or booking functions.

So the realistic answer is this: GIFT City is not yet a like-for-like replacement for Dubai or Singapore as a broad global financial centre, but it is becoming a credible alternative for India-centric global finance.

If current momentum in banks, funds, payments infrastructure and listings continues, GIFT may not need to beat those hubs at everything. It only needs to become the default location for international financial business connected to India. On that narrower, commercially important test, it is making visible progress. **BI**





Race to the moon

Rich in resources, US and China have lined up projects with an eye on the best lunar real estate

BlitzBUREAU

Under the Artemis II mission Nasa is planning to send four astronauts to the Moon, according to a BBC report.

Their voyage around our nearest neighbour will pave the way for a lunar landing and, eventually, a Moon base.

Nasa's Artemis programme has taken years of work, involved thousands of people and is estimated to have cost \$93bn to date.

More than 50 years ago, America's Apollo missions made history when the first people set foot on the lunar surface. With six landings in total, it felt like the Moon had been well and truly ticked off the space to-do list.

Why is the US spending so much time, effort and money racing to return?

The terrain might look dry, dusty and seems rather barren, but it's far from that.

"The Moon has got the same elements in it that we have here on Earth," says Prof

Sara Russell, a planetary scientist at the Natural History Museum.

Rare earth elements

"An example is rare earth elements, which are very scarce on Earth, and there might be parts of the Moon where these are concentrated enough to be able to mine them."

There are metals too, like iron and titanium, and also helium, which is used in everything from superconductors to medical equipment.

But the resource that's the biggest draw is the most surprising: water.

"It has water trapped in some of its minerals, and it also has substantial amounts of water at the poles," says Russell.

The Moon is a fantastic archive of the Earth," says Russell. "A new haul of rocks from a different area of the Moon would be amazing."

America's Apollo missions of the 1960s and 1970s were driven by a race for space dominance with the Soviet Union. This time around China is the competition.

Chinese project

China has been making fast progress with its space programme. It's successfully landed robots and rovers on the Moon, and says it will get humans there by 2030.

There is still prestige in being the first to plant your flag in the lunar dust. But now it really matters where you plant it.

Both the US and China want access to the areas with the most abundant resources, which means securing the best lunar real estate.

Nasa has its sights set on Mars and wants to send people there by the 2030s. Given the technological hurdles it needs to overcome, it's a pretty ambitious timeline.

But you have to start somewhere, and the US has decided the Moon is that place.

Scientists can't wait to get their (gloved) hands on material from the Moon.

The rocks brought home by the Apollo astronauts transformed our understanding of our celestial neighbour.

Perfect time capsule

Because the Moon was once a part of the Earth, it holds a record of 4.5bn years of our own planet's history. And with no plate tectonics, or wind and rain to wipe this record away, the Moon is a perfect time capsule. **B**

America's Apollo missions of the 1960s and 1970s were driven by a race with the Soviet Union. This time around China is the competition.

Shrinking sea ice

Record heat, especially in March, reduces Arctic sea ice to its lowest measured level in winter

Blitz BUREAU

Vital Arctic sea ice shrank to its lowest measured level for the winter, the season when ice grows, as a warming Earth shattered records across the continents.

Earth's refrigerator

Arctic sea ice levels, especially in the summer, are crucial to Earth's climate because without the ice reflecting sunlight, more heat energy goes into the oceans. Ice of all kinds around the poles acts as Earth's refrigerator. Wildlife, such as polar bears and seals, also depend on sea ice. Lack of sea ice in the Arctic creates new shipping routes and in doing so causes geopolitical disruptions, making once-ignored places such as Greenland, more desirable.

The shrinking Arctic sea ice was announced on March 26 as temperatures broke March heat records across the United States, all over Mexico, in Australia, across Northern Africa and through parts of Northern Europe. Climatologist and weather historian Maximiliano Herrera, who tracks extreme temperatures, called the extreme March temperatures "by far the most extreme heat event in world climatic history" and said on social media that the next few days would be "much worse."

Sixteen states broke March temperature records in the past week or so, said weather historian Christ Burt. Twenty-seven locations had temperatures in the past week high enough to tie or surpass the hottest April day on record, including St. Louis, meteorologists said.

Mexico has had thousands of records shattered, some of them warmer than the hottest May temperatures, but that's nothing compared with what's happening in Asia, where "dozens of thousands of monthly records" were smashed by 30 to 35 degrees



(17 to 19 degrees Celsius) margins, Herrera said.

Coldest March day

Yet at the same time earlier this week, Antarctica set a record for the coldest March day anywhere on Earth at minus 105.5 degrees (minus 76.4 degrees Celsius), according to Herrera and Burt.

Each year Arctic sea ice grows over the cold winter and shrinks in the heat of the summer. This year the growth was so small that it peaked before starting to shrink.

Summer sea ice key

The summer melt season — which precedes a September measurement known as the Arctic sea ice minimum — is "really the critical time," senior scientist, Meier, said. One reason is that when there's less white ice

reflecting the strong summer sun, the oceans can absorb more heat. And when that happens, the Arctic warms closer to temperatures further south and atmospheric pressure changes.

Melting sea ice does not contribute to sea level rise. Winter sea ice growth season is also more variable with weather changes, so just because the Arctic hits a record small amount in March, it doesn't mean that the summer will be record low, Meier said.

"The winter maximum is certainly interesting," Meier said. "It is, I'd say, a climate change global warming signal."

On the other end of the planet, Antarctic sea ice is heavily affected by local weather and ocean factors. In February, Antarctica hit its annual low point and while it was smaller than the 30-year average. **BI**

Temperatures broke March heat records across US, all over Mexico, Australia, across Northern Africa and parts of Northern Europe.

Quick bytes

Pope's warning

Pope Leo said on March 29 that God rejects the prayers of leaders who start wars and have "hands full of blood".



He addressed tens of thousands in St. Peter's Square in Vatican City on Palm Sunday, the celebration that opens the holy week leading up to Easter for the world's 1.4 billion Catholics.

The pope lamented that Christians in the Middle East "are suffering the consequences of an atrocious conflict".

Novel protest

Protesters transformed a major Mexico City highway into a makeshift football pitch on March 27, playing impromptu matches to denounce World Cup preparation which they said is overshadowing the capital's pressing needs.



The protest was intended to denounce what organizers termed the "World Cup of

Dispossession" and to draw attention to shortages of housing, water, transport and electricity.

The event took place before Mexico was due to play Portugal in a World Cup warm-up match.

Digital platforms barred

Indonesia on March 28 began implementing a new government regulation approved earlier this month that bans children younger than 16 from access to digital platforms that

could expose them to pornography, cyberbullying, online scams and addiction.



With the move, Indonesia became the first country in Southeast Asia to ban children from having accounts on YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, Threads, X, Bigo Live and Roblox. Indonesia has said that the implementation of the restrictions would be carried out gradually. It follows measures that Australia took last year. **BI**

Chinese economy recovers

BlitzBUREAU

China's factory activity expanded in March, ending two months of contraction, the Government said on March 31.

The official manufacturing purchasing managers index rose to 50.4 from 49 in February, the National Bureau of Statistics reported, beating economists' expectations and notching the strongest reading in a year.

PMI is measured on a scale of 0 to 100 and a reading above 50 indicates expansion.

While the latest official data covered a period after the Iran war began on February 28, analysts say the impacts of surging energy costs have not yet been fully seen.

"So far supply disruptions have not occurred in a material way," said Jacqueline Rong, Chief China Economist, BNP Paribas, a French bank.

A years-long property sector slump in China has also weighed on economic growth and weakened domestic consumption and investment demand in China, the world's second-largest economy after the US.

To help drive its economy, China has been reliant on growing exports, especially to regions such as South-east Asia and Europe, which propelled its trade surplus last year to a record \$1.2 trillion despite higher US tariffs.

China's export engine could hit

However the war in Iran could raise energy cost, disrupt supplies



headwinds as the Iran war drives up energy costs and disrupts supply chains, with most maritime traffic blocked from passing the Strait of Hormuz, through which roughly a fifth of the world's oil normally passes.

China's exports could also suffer if overall global growth takes a serious hit from the energy crisis. Chinese leaders in early March unveiled an economic growth target of 4.5% to 5% for this year, a slightly lower goal than the "around 5%" last year and the lowest growth target since 1991.

For now, China's economy "appears to have weathered" the energy shock from the Iran war well, wrote

Zichun Huang, China economist at Capital Economics.

Trade ties with US

With China's exports to the U.S., its largest trading partner, in decline over the past months, economists are closely watching for positive signs in trade relations between Washington and Beijing as US President Donald Trump is expected to meet with Chinese leader Xi Jinping in May.

Some analysts say lower U.S. tariffs following a recent Supreme Court ruling against Trump's wide-reaching global tariffs could give China a small boost to exports and factory activity. **BI**

Myanmar junta chief steps down

To seek Presidency; loyalist to head armed forces

BlitzBUREAU

Min Aung Hlaing stepped down as Myanmar's armed forces chief on March 30 to seek the presidency. Ye Win Oo, who led the contingent of troops that arrested Nobel Peace Prize winner and the country's then leader Aung San Suu Kyi, was appointed the commander-in-chief of Myanmar's military.

This is the latest step in the military's efforts to maintain power behind the facade of a civilian administration, five years after they led a coup against an elected government.



An election was held in December and January that was won by a military-backed party but widely derided as a sham by the United Nations and many Western countries.

The coup that ousted the democratically elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi prompted mass protests that developed into a nationwide uprising after the military responded with brutal force.

The civil war, which continues

to rage, has killed thousands, displaced millions of people, and further damaged an already weak economy.

Despite the fighting, the junta organised new elections, which excluded Suu Kyi's party and other opposition groups, ensuring the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party would sweep the polls.

"General Ye Win Oo has gained significant power through Min Aung Hlaing's patronage, serving as a vital pillar for the leader's grip on power," said Naing Min Khant, an analyst at the Institute for Strategy and Policy-Myanmar think tank.

Min Aung Hlaing has often prioritised important positions for loyalists, while occasionally detaining senior officers as a way to control potential rivals, Reuters has reported. **BI**

● Iran knocks down two US warplanes ● US, Israel continue strikes on Iran ● Trump blowing hot and cold

No sign of truce

BlitzBUREAU

The war in the Middle East reached a new low with the downing of two US warplanes over Iran and the Gulf on April 3.

The incidents show the risks still faced by US and Israeli aircraft over Iran despite assertions from US President Donald Trump and his Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth that their forces had total control of the skies.

Diplomatic efforts to end the war have so far failed to make progress. Iran has officially told mediators it is not prepared to meet with US officials in Islamabad in coming days and that efforts to produce a ceasefire, led by Pakistan, have reached a dead end, the Wall Street Journal reported.

On April 3, a drone hit a Red Crescent relief warehouse in the Choghadak area of Iran's southern Bushehr province.

Kuwait Petroleum Corporation said its Mina al-Ahmadi refinery had been



hit by drones. Other attacks were also reported to have been intercepted in Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi. Missile debris landed near the Israeli port of Haifa, site of a major oil refinery.

Oil prices

Oil markets were closed after benchmark US crude prices gained 11 per cent on April 3 following a speech by Trump.

Trump threatened to hit Iran's bridges and power plants and Iran struck a power and water plant in Kuwait, underlining the vulnerability of Gulf states

that rely heavily on desalination plants for drinking water.

Iran has rained drones and missiles down on Israel. It has also taken aim at Gulf countries allied to the US, which have so far held back from joining the war directly for fear of further escalation.

In a security alert on April 4, the US embassy in Beirut said Iran and its aligned armed groups may target universities in Lebanon and urged US citizens in the country to leave while commercial flights are still available.

The US and Israel opened the campaign with a wave of strikes that killed Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on February 28. The war has killed thousands and threatened lasting damage to the global economy.

So far, 13 US military service members have been killed in the conflict and more than 300 have been

White House seeks \$1.5 trillion

BlitzBUREAU

With the United States at war with Iran and embroiled in conflicts around the world, the White House asked Congress on April 3 to approve about \$1.5 trillion for defence in the 2027 fiscal year. That amount would set military spending at its highest level in modern history.

The request would amount to a roughly 40 per cent increase from what the United States spent on the Pentagon this fiscal year. The administration coupled the proposal with a call for \$73 billion in cuts spread across many domestic agencies, including the elimination of key federal health, housing and education programs, some of which serve minority groups and the poor. **[B]**

wounded, according to the US Central Command. **[B]**

Securing the Strait

41 nations hold virtual meeting

BlitzBUREAU

Military planners from nations around the globe will meet next week in London to discuss securing the Strait of Hormuz for shipping, the British government said on April 2, according to The New York Times.

The military planners would discuss "viable options to make the Strait of Hormuz accessible and safe for navigation.

The focus was on achieving consensus on the principle of freedom of navigation and on applying maximum diplomatic pressure on Iran.

US President Donald Trump has called on other countries to "build up some delayed courage" and reopen the waterway, which serves as a passage for roughly a fifth of the world's oil deliveries.

Prime Minister



India invited

At the invitation of the UK, India joined a meeting of over 60 countries to explore ways to reopen the vital Strait of Hormuz, whose closure has sent oil prices spiralling.

For India, roughly 40 per cent of the oil, 50 per cent of LNG, and over 80 per cent of LPG flow through the strait. **[B]**

Keir Starmer of Britain has made it clear that Britain will not be drawn into the conflict.

Britain and France are seeking to coordinate an international intervention after the war ends.

The meeting of ministers from 41 nations to discuss a political and diplomatic response to the war was held virtually. Participating countries included France, Germany, Italy, Canada and some Gulf nations, but the United States was not among them. **[B]**

Chokehold over Hormuz

US Intel says Iran has tight grip over the Strait

BlitzBUREAU

Recent US intelligence reports warn that Iran is unlikely to reopen the Strait of Hormuz any time soon because its grip on the world's most vital oil artery provides the only real leverage it has over the United States, according to three sources familiar with the matter.

The reports also provide the latest indication that the war, intended to eradicate Iran's military strength, may actually increase its regional sway by showing Tehran's ability to threaten the key waterway.

Trump has sought to downplay the difficulty of reopening the Strait of Hormuz, which carries a fifth of the world's oil trade. On April 3, he appeared to suggest that he could order US forces to reopen the passage.

But analysts have long warned that trying to use force against Iran, which controls one side of the strait, could prove costly and draw the US into a protracted ground war.

Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard

Corps has used various tactics to make commercial transit through the waterway too dangerous or uninsurable since Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu launched their war.



From attacking civilian vessels and releasing mines to demanding passage fees, Iran has effectively blocked traffic through the strait, sending world oil prices soaring to multi-year highs and causing fuel shortages in countries reliant on Gulf oil and gas.

Rising energy costs risk fueling inflation in the US, posing a political liability for Trump. Iran, the recent intelligence reports warn, is unlikely to surrender that leverage any time soon. **[B]**

Bat, Ball & Billions

How IPL rewrote the game

Saji Chacko

It was the year 2008 when something extraordinary was born in the world of cricket—a tournament that would not just change the game, but rewrote the way it was played, watched, and celebrated. This was the beginning of the Indian Premier League, a bold experiment by the Board of Control for Cricket in India that turned into a global phenomenon.

The idea came in the aftermath of India's thrilling victory in the 2007 ICC T20 World Cup. The shortest format had proven that cricket could be fast, entertaining, and accessible to younger audiences. Seeing this shift, Lalit Modi envisioned a league where cricket met entertainment, where cities became teams, and where players from across the world competed side by side.

When the first IPL season kicked off in April 2008, curiosity filled the air. Would fans accept franchise-

As seasons passed, IPL became more than cricket—it became a festival. Stadiums turned into electrifying arenas filled with music, lights, and passionate fans. The league created icons. Virat Kohli became synonymous with loyalty and aggression, AB de Villiers amazed fans with his 360-degree batting, and Chris Gayle redefined power-hitting.

based cricket? Could international players truly bond with local teams? All doubts were silenced on the very first night when Brendon McCullum smashed an unforgettable 158 runs, announcing to the world that this league meant business.

Eight teams took the field, each representing a city, each building its own identity. Mumbai Indians emerged as a powerhouse with star players, Chennai Super Kings built a reputation for consistency under the calm leadership of MS Dhoni, and Kolkata Knight Riders brought glamour and massive fan support.

As seasons passed, IPL became more than cricket—it became a festival. Stadiums turned into electrifying arenas filled with music, lights, and passionate fans. The league created icons. Virat Kohli became

synonymous with loyalty and aggression, AB de Villiers amazed fans with his 360-degree batting, and Chris Gayle redefined power-hitting.

The injection of big time money was another

factor which made the IPL something of a trendsetter. Never in the annals of the game had untested teenagers being purchased for crores by the various franchises. You no longer needed to be a Ranji or Test player to rake in the big moolah. The splurge of money on offer was unheralded in international cricket and even former players made a killing by taking over as coaches and mentors of franchises.

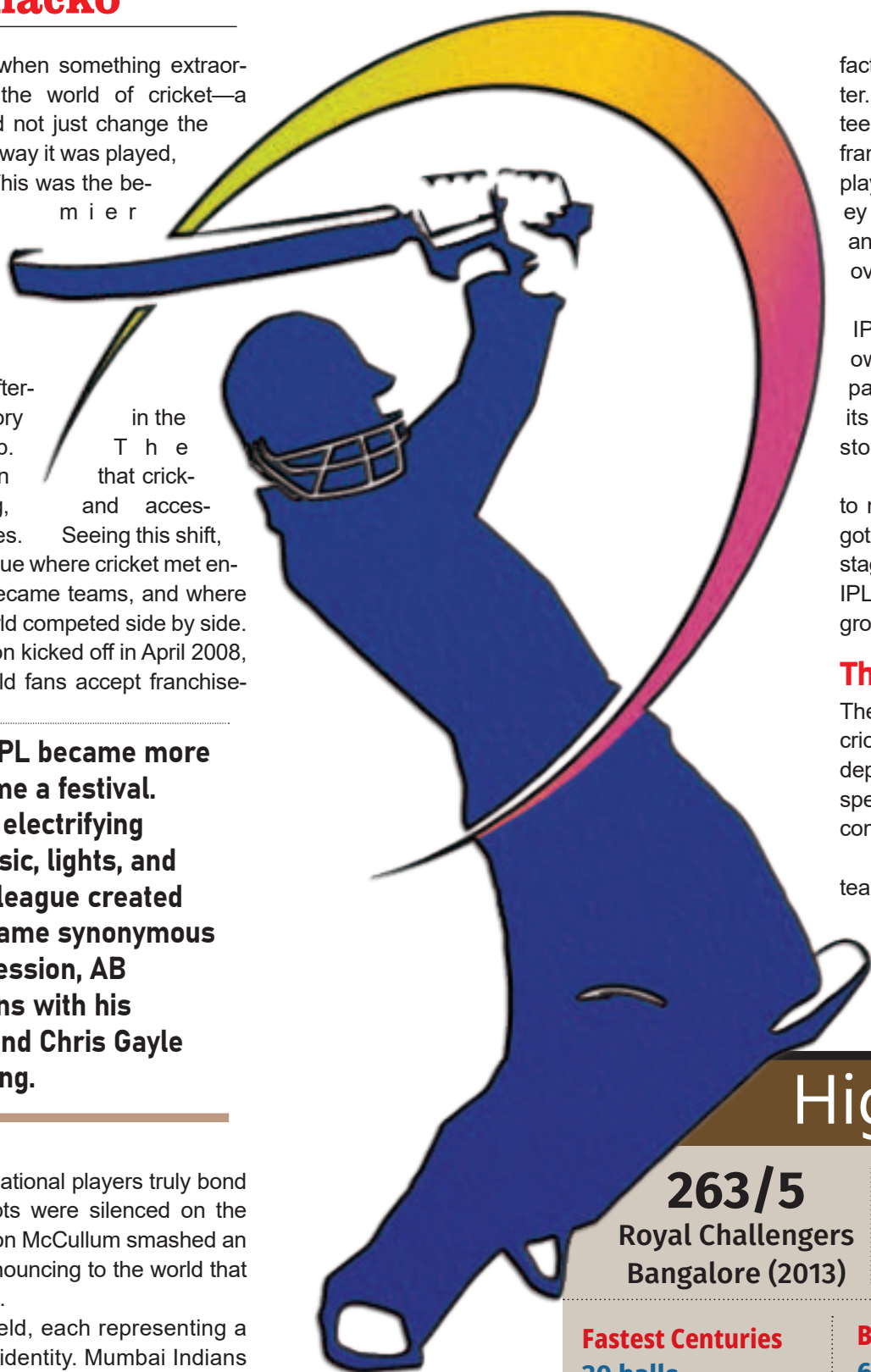
But the journey was not always smooth. The IPL faced controversies—team suspensions, ownership disputes, and questions about transparency. Yet, what made the league special was its resilience. Each setback became a stepping stone for improvement.

One of the defining features of IPL was its ability to nurture young talent. Unknown domestic players got a platform to showcase their skills on the biggest stage. Many went on to represent India, proving that IPL was not just entertainment—it was a breeding ground for future stars.

The Future Arrives

The league also introduced innovations that changed cricket forever. Strategic time-outs added tactical depth. Auctions turned team building into a thrilling spectacle. Salary caps ensured balance, making the competition unpredictable.

As the years progressed, the IPL expanded. New teams like Gujarat Titans and Lucknow Super Giants entered the tournament, bringing fresh rivalries and new fanbases. The league's reach extended beyond India, capturing audiences worldwide.



Highest Totals

263/5 Royal Challengers Bangalore (2013)	257/5 Lucknow Super Giants (2023)	248/3 Chennai Super Kings (2010)
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Fastest Centuries

30 balls
Chris Gayle
(fastest ever
IPL 100)

37 balls
Yusuf Pathan

38 balls
David Miller

Best Bowling Figures

6/12
Alzarri Joseph

6/14
Sohail Tanvir

Most IPL Titles
Mumbai Indians – 5
titles (2013, 2015,
2017, 2019, 2020)

**Chennai Super
Kings—5 titles**
(2010, 2011,
2018, 2021, 2023)

**Most Runner-
Up finishes**
CSK –5 times
RCB 3 times
(2009, 2011, 2016).

The 'Brain' behind IPL

LALIT Modi was the chief architect behind the Indian Premier League (IPL), launched in 2008 by the Board of Control for Cricket in India. His idea was inspired partly by global sports leagues like the English Premier League and the National Basketball Association, combining sports with entertainment and business.

The IPL introduced a city-based franchise system where teams such as Mumbai Indians and Chennai Super Kings competed in a fast-paced Twenty20 format.

Lalit Modi also pioneered player auctions, allowing franchises to bid for both Indian and international cricketers, creating a dynamic and competitive environment. The inclusion of cheerleaders, celebrity team owners, and prime-time broadcasting turned matches into entertainment events, attracting a wide audience beyond traditional cricket fans.

Financially, the IPL became a massive success within



a few years, securing lucrative broadcasting deals and sponsorships. It significantly increased players' earnings and provided a global platform for young talent. However, Modi's tenure ended in controversy in 2010 when he faced allegations of financial misconduct and was suspended by the BCCI, eventually going into exile.

Despite these issues, Lalit Modi's vision transformed cricket's landscape. The IPL set a model for other T20 leagues worldwide, such as Australia's Big Bash League, proving that cricket could thrive as both a sport and a global entertainment business. **BI**

One of the defining features of IPL was its ability to nurture young talent. Unknown domestic players got a platform to showcase their skills on the biggest stage.

One of the most exciting aspects of IPL 2026 is the rise of fearless young cricketers. Players in their early twenties are dominating games, playing innovative shots, and challenging experienced bowlers. The gap between newcomers and legends has narrowed, making matches more competitive than ever.

Technology has taken center stage. Teams now use AI-driven analytics to study opponents, predict strategies, and optimize performance. Real-time data helps captains make smarter decisions on the field. Fans, too, benefit from this technological revolution. Augmented reality features allow viewers to experience matches like never before, bringing them closer to the action.

The auction system has evolved into a science. Teams carefully analyze player fitness, consistency, and adaptability before making decisions. Surprise picks and strategic buys often become the talking points of the season.

Rivalries remain the heartbeat of IPL. The clash between Chennai and Mumbai continues to be legendary, often described as the "El Clásico" of IPL. Meanwhile, new rivalries



involving Gujarat, Lucknow, and Bangalore are adding fresh drama.

Another fascinating aspect of IPL 2026 is its global influence. Players from different countries see IPL as the ultimate stage. Performances here can define careers, turning players into international superstars.

A Living Legacy

The league has also become a storytelling platform. Every match carries emotion—comebacks, last-ball thrillers, underdog victories. A young player hitting a winning six, a veteran proving critics wrong, or a team rising from the bottom of the table—these moments create magic.

Looking back, the IPL's journey feels like a story of ambition and transformation. What began as a bold experiment is now a cultural phenomenon. It has changed cricket's DNA—making it faster, more innovative, and more entertaining. It has created heroes, built careers, and united fans

across the globe.

And as IPL 2026 unfolds, the story continues. New chapters are written every match, every season. The league keeps evolving, surprising, and inspiring.

Because the IPL is not just about cricket—it is about dreams, passion, and the thrill of the unexpected. **BI**

Media rights hit the roof



The media rights value of the IPL has witnessed extraordinary growth from 2008 to 2026, reflecting its rise as one of the world's most valuable sports properties. When the league began in 2008, its broadcasting rights were sold to Sony for approximately Rs 8,200 crore for a ten-year period. At that time, the IPL was a new and untested concept, and its revenues were driven primarily by television advertising within India.

The first major increase occurred in 2017, when Star India acquired the rights for Rs 16,347 crore for five years (2018–2022), effectively doubling the previous deal. This surge was largely fueled by the rapid expansion of smartphones and affordable internet, especially after the telecom revolution triggered by Reliance Jio. Digital streaming through platforms like Disney Hotstar significantly expanded the IPL's audience base beyond traditional television viewers.

The most dramatic growth came in the 2023–2027 cycle, which covers 2026. The total media rights were sold for an astonishing Rs 48,390 crore, nearly three times the previous cycle. Notably, the rights were split between TV and digital platforms, with companies like Viacom18 securing digital rights. For the first time, digital broadcasting rivaled and even surpassed television in value, highlighting a major shift in viewer preferences.

Overall, the IPL's media rights value has increased nearly sixfold from 2008 to 2026. This growth is driven by massive viewership, digital expansion, intense bidding competition, and the league's evolution into a global sporting and entertainment phenomenon. **BI**

INSIGHT

EDUCATION-JOBS MISMATCH

A lesson from Gujarat



SUKUMAR SAH

India's demographic dividend is often invoked as destiny – a young workforce poised to power growth for decades. But dividends are not automatic; they are earned. The uncomfortable reality is that India's education system remains misaligned with the needs of its economy, producing degrees at scale but skills in short supply. If this gap persists, the country risks turning its greatest advantage into a structural drag.

The paradox is stark. Universities are expanding, enrolments are rising, and policy frameworks such as the National Education Policy promise flexibility and interdisciplinarity. Yet employers across sectors – from manufacturing to services – continue to report a shortage of job-ready talent. Graduates, meanwhile, face unemployment or drift into low-productivity work unrelated to their training.

The design problem

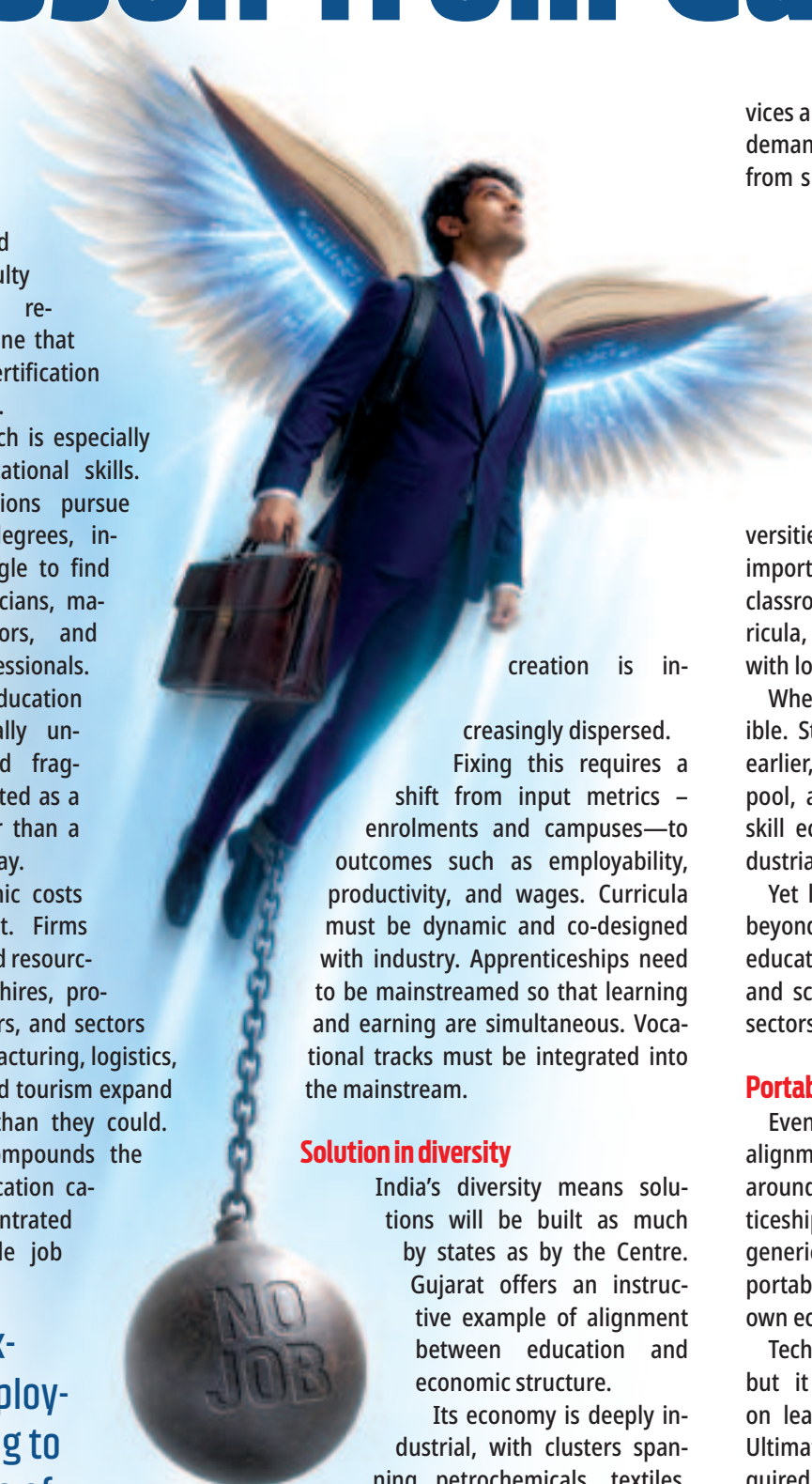
This is not merely a jobs problem; it is a design problem. India's education system has been largely supply-driven and degree-oriented. Schooling emphasises rote learning over problem-solving, while higher education often relies on outdated curricula, limited

industry exposure, and uneven faculty quality. The result is a pipeline that values certification over capability.

The mismatch is especially visible in vocational skills. Even as millions pursue white-collar degrees, industries struggle to find trained technicians, machine operators, and service professionals. Vocational education remains socially undervalued and fragmented – treated as a fallback rather than a parallel pathway.

The economic costs are significant. Firms spend time and resources retraining hires, productivity suffers, and sectors such as manufacturing, logistics, healthcare, and tourism expand more slowly than they could. Geography compounds the problem: education capacity is concentrated in cities, while job

The paradox is stark. Universities are expanding, enrolments are rising, yet employers across sectors – from manufacturing to services – continue to report a shortage of job-ready talent.



creation is increasingly dispersed. Fixing this requires a shift from input metrics – enrolments and campuses—to outcomes such as employability, productivity, and wages. Curricula must be dynamic and co-designed with industry. Apprenticeships need to be mainstreamed so that learning and earning are simultaneous. Vocational tracks must be integrated into the mainstream.

Solution in diversity

India's diversity means solutions will be built as much by states as by the Centre. Gujarat offers an instructive example of alignment between education and economic structure.

Its economy is deeply industrial, with clusters spanning petrochemicals, textiles, engineering, pharmaceuticals, ports and logistics, and financial ser-

vices anchored in GIFT City. This creates demand for a wide spectrum of skills – from shop-floor technicians to specialised professionals.

The state has paired this demand with institution-building. Flagship campuses such as IIM Ahmedabad, IIT Gandhinagar, and the National Institute of Design coexist with a growing network of universities and technical institutes. More important is the attempt to connect classrooms to clusters – aligning curricula, internships, and apprenticeships with local industry needs.

Where it works, the benefits are visible. Students gain practical exposure earlier, firms find a more job-ready pool, and local economies deepen as skill ecosystems take root around industrial clusters.

Yet limits remain: quality is uneven beyond elite institutions, vocational education retains a second-tier status, and scaling specialised models across sectors is still a work in progress.

Portable principles

Even so, Gujarat points to what alignment could look like. Build around clusters. Normalise apprenticeships. Specialise rather than chase generic degrees. These principles are portable across states, each with its own economic base.

Technology can accelerate this shift, but it cannot substitute for hands-on learning and industry immersion. Ultimately, a cultural change is required – away from degrees as proxies for success toward skills as the true currency. **■**

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RNI No. DELENG/2022/82311 Edited, Printed and Published by Deepak Dwivedi at The Indian Express Private Limited A-8, Sector -7, Noida 201301 (UP)
 Editorial, Advertisement and Administrative offices: 8-B, Vandhna Building, 11, Tolstoy Marg, New Delhi-110001 Phones: 43502031, 43502032. E-mail: info@blitzindiamedia.com
 Mumbai office: 311-B, INS Tower, Bandra Kurla Complex, Bandra (East), Mumbai-400051 CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD : Anil Vohra CHIEF ADVISOR: AK Sharma
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