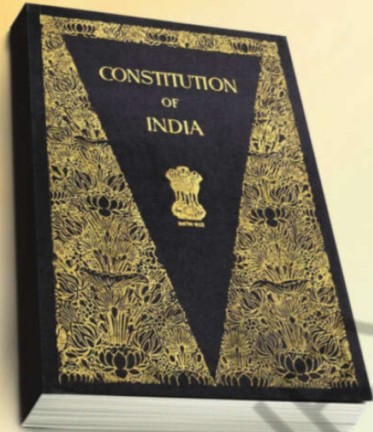


the completion of **75** years of  
coming into effect of our **Constitution &**



**76<sup>th</sup>**

**REPUBLIC DAY**

**ADDRESS TO NATION ON EVE OF REPUBLIC DAY**

# Joint polls promises to redefine good governance: President

Praises new criminal laws, says such reforms 'require an audacity of vision'

**DIVYAA**

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 25

ADDRESSING THE nation on the eve of Republic Day, President Droupadi Murmu on Saturday weighed in on the 'One Nation, One Election' Bills brought in Parliament last month, saying the move "promises to redefine the terms of good governance".

The plan to hold simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and Assemblies "can promote consistency in governance, prevent policy paralysis, mitigate resource diversion, and reduce the financial burden, apart from offering many other benefits," she said in her televised address.

The President also praised the decision to replace the old criminal laws — the new laws

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**



**Indonesia President Prabowo Subianto, the chief guest at the Republic Day celebrations Sunday, with President Droupadi Murmu and PM Narendra Modi at Rashtrapati Bhavan. Renuka Puri**

# In a first, Assam CM to hoist national flag in Dibrugarh on R-Day

## District was once an ULFA stronghold

**SUKRITA BARUAH**

GUWAHATI, JANUARY 25

ONE OF the former nerve-centres of militancy in Assam, where the proscribed ULFA(I) still calls for a boycott of Republic Day and Independence Day celebrations every year, is where the Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has chosen to hoist the national flag on Sunday. The CM usually participates in Republic Day celebrations in Guwahati, but this time, he will be do so in the Khanikar Parade Ground in Eastern Assam's Dibrugarh.

Dibrugarh district has traditionally been one of ULFA's strongholds, and is one of only four districts of the state that continue to be notified as "disturbed areas" under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA).

CM Sarma posted on X: "Dibrugarh is all set to host the Central Republic Day celebrations for the first time and the town is all decked up in Tricolour to celebrate the spirit of the Republic. From being affected by militancy to now hosting full scale Republic Day celebrations, it has come a long way."

"The manning of inter-district boundaries to check for suspicious movement, including of riverine routes, began around Christmas. Patrolling of trains is being done by the Railways Protection Force (RPF) and the Government Railway Police (GRP)," said Dibrugarh SP V V Rakesh Reddy.

Like previous years, ULFA(I) — a militant group demanding sovereignty for Assam — has called for a "total strike" from midnight to 6 pm on Sunday.

Just five months ago, ULFA(I) claimed to have planted 24 bombs across Assam to cause serial blasts on Independence Day. These "bombs", which had not ignition or triggering mechanisms, were found after the group disclosed their locations.

SP Reddy said the Army and the CRPF are assisting and approximately 400 personnel from other districts have been bought in.

"All garbage and construction material is being sanitised for anti-sabotage checking. The three-km area around the main venue...is being checked and we have also done house-to-house surveys to check for any suspicious people. There is security checking all along the route to the venue," he said.

# Uttarakhand set to roll out UCC tomorrow, anticipates legal hurdle

**AISWARYARAJ**

DEHRADUN, JANUARY 25

The Uttarakhand government will implement the UCC on January 27, according to an official communication from the Home Secretary.

Addressing various departments, state Home Secretary Shailesh Bagauli said CM Pushkar Singh Dhami will launch the rules and portal for UCC at 12.30 pm Monday at 'Mukhyasevak Sadan' at the CM's residence. The rules will be notified in the gazette the same day, said officials.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, ADGP Law and Order V Murugesan said a smooth rollout is expected. "Two days ago, a seminar was conducted for the force, and awareness and training were

given to officials. Currently, we do not foresee any challenges, and in case of complaints, we will proceed according to the law," he said.

Sources in the Home Department said they anticipate a legal challenge. "As the Act mandates registration for live-in couples, people will likely file pleas challenging this provision under Article 21, Right to Privacy," said a highly placed source.

Muslim Sewa Sangathan president Naeem Qureshi said, "The order issued says the rules and portal for rolling out UCC will be inaugurated. If the Act comes into effect that day, we will move the High Court the very next day."

The Uttarakhand Cabinet approved the rules on January 20. The law has common provisions for marriage, divorce and succes-

sion for all state residents. It has clauses for live-in relationships, but keeps tribals out of its ambit.

On Friday, government made it clear the UCC will not impact traditional wedding ceremonies. "Whether it is 'Saptapadi,' 'Nikah,' 'Ashirwad,' 'Holy Union,' or 'Anand Karaj' under the Anand Marriage Act, 1909, or a marriage conducted under the Special Marriage Act, 1954, or the Arya Marriage Validation Act, 1937—the (UCC) Act respects all religious and customary practices," a statement said.

CM Dhami said Saturday, "From January 27, the UCC will be implemented in the state, making Uttarakhand the first state in independent India where this law will be enforced... ensure equal rights and responsibilities for all citizens..."

# US court rejects plea, India prepares to get 26/11 plotter Rana back

**MAHENDER SINGH  
MANRAL & DIVYA A**

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 25



Tahawwur Rana is currently held in Los Angeles

PAVING THE way for his extradition, the US Supreme Court has rejected a review petition filed by Tahawwur Rana, who is wanted in India for his role in the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks.

Following the court's decision, the Indian government has started making preparations to bring Rana to India to face trial in the 2008 terror attacks in which 166 people were killed. He is currently lodged in a detention centre in Los Angeles.

"The names of the officers from the National Investigation Agency (NIA) who will go to the US to take his custody are being discussed. Also, a discussion is

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

**EXPLAINED**

**E**

**Focus on extradition**

WITH RANA exhausting all legal options to stall his extradition, the focus now is on the process to bring him to India. An NIA team will be formed and the information will be shared with the US. The team of officers will be sent to complete the procedures before taking Rana's custody.

## SECOND SWAP UNDER CEASEFIRE DEAL

# Hamas frees 4 Israeli soldiers in exchange for 200 Palestinians

Israel halts families from returning to North Gaza over delay in a hostage's release, Hamas says she will be freed soon



Four Israeli soldiers released by Hamas in Gaza City on Saturday. *Reuters*

### REUTERS

JERUSALEM, GAZA, JAN 25

**HAMAS FREED** four female Israeli soldiers on Saturday in exchange for 200 Palestinian prisoners, the second swap under the Gaza truce, although Israel halted families from returning to bombed-out north Gaza over a delay in another hostage's release.

The four freed Israelis were led onto a podium in Gaza City amid a large crowd of Palestinians and surrounded by dozens of armed Hamas men. They waved and smiled before being led off, entering Red Cross vehicles to be transported to Israeli forces.

Soon after, buses carrying released Palestinian prisoners were seen departing from the Israeli

military prison in the occupied West Bank. Israel's Prison Service said all 200 had been released.

The releases on either side were greeted by cheering crowds, including Israelis gathered in Tel Aviv and Palestinians in Ramallah. But the failure of Hamas to release another hostage led Israel to announce it was halting plans to let Palestinians return to northern parts of Gaza. Hamas said it would free her next week. Palestinian officials say as many as 650,000 displaced people are waiting to return to the north. Witnesses said there was a stampede on a road leading to the north, blocked by Israeli troops who opened fire.

The four Israeli soldiers freed on Saturday — Karina Arie, Daniella Gilboa, Naama Levy and Liri Albag — had all been stationed

at a post on the edge of Gaza when Hamas fighters overran their base and abducted them during the October 7, 2023 attack.

Among the 200 Palestinians, around 70 will be deported to Egypt, Palestinian officials said, and from there to another country, possibly Turkey, Qatar or Algeria. Another 16 were sent to Gaza and the rest were released to the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

Joy in Israel was clouded by disappointment after it emerged that Arbel Yehud, 29, who had been abducted with her boyfriend from their home in Kibbutz Nir Oz, was not among those released. Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu said Palestinians in Gaza would not be allowed to cross to the northern part until the issue was resolved.

# Awami League won't be allowed to contest polls: Yunus adviser

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**

DHAKA, JANUARY 25

BANGLADESH'S DEPOSED prime minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League would not be allowed to participate in elections, a key adviser of Muhammad Yunus's interim government said on Saturday.

"The elections will be contested among pro-Bangladesh groups only," said Mahfuz Alam, a top leader of the Anti-Discrimination Movement, which spearheaded the mass uprising that toppled Hasina's Awami League regime and forced her to flee the country on August 5 last year. Addressing a rally at central Chandpur district, Alam said only former prime minister Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Jamaat-e-Islami and other "pro-Bangladesh" groups would carry on their politics in the country. He added that either of these "will establish future governance through a fair electoral process".

"But Awami League's rehabilitation will not be allowed in this country," said Alam, a de facto minister without portfolio in Chief Adviser Yunus's administration. Alam stated that no election would take place until "minimum reforms" were implemented and

institutions, allegedly destroyed by the "fascist Hasina government," were restructured.

Initially appointed by Yunus as a special assistant in his government, Alam later served as an adviser in his interim cabinet. At a function on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly last year, Yunus introduced Alam as the "main brain" behind the "meticulously" designed student-led movement that toppled the past regime.

Earlier, the BNP said it was against banning any political party, visibly weighing its support for archrival Awami League's existence in the political field. It demanded elections in the quickest possible time after minimal reforms, calling it a continued process.

Amid speculations about the formation of a youth-led new political party by the student leaders, BNP said the interim government would lose its credibility if figures of the government formed a party staying in power.

Last month, Yunus said the next general election in the country could take place by the end of 2025 or the first half of 2026. He had, however, said the timing of the election would largely depend upon the political consensus and the extent of the reforms.

# Trump asks OPEC to cut oil prices, says it will stop Russia-Ukraine war

## AGENCIES

WASHINGTON, JANUARY 25

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump has asked the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries to cut the prices of oil, arguing that it would stop the Russia-Ukraine war.

He had made a similar claim earlier, too. Addressing the annual World Economic Forum at Davos in Switzerland via video conference, Trump accused the OPEC+ alliance of oil-exporting countries of being responsible for the nearly three-year conflict in Ukraine.

"We want to see OPEC cut the price of oil. That will automatically stop the tragedy that's taking place in Ukraine. It's a butchering tragedy for both sides," the US President said on Friday. Noting that a large number of Russian and Ukrainian soldiers have died in the conflict so far, Trump said, "Right now, it's just bullets whacking and hitting men. There are over a million men killed, and they are losing thousands of people a week." "It's crazy. It's a crazy war and it never would have happened if I was president (then). This is crazy that it happened, but we want to stop it."

The US president had earlier said Russian President Vladimir Putin "should make a deal" with Ukraine while asserting that they would meet as soon as they can.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy hopes Europe and the United States will be involved in any talks about ending his country's war with Russia, he told reporters on Saturday.

At a joint press conference with President Maia Sandu of neighbouring Moldova, Zelenskyy said Ukraine also needed to be involved in any discussions on ending the war for such negotiations to have any meaningful impact.



Migrants, mostly Venezuelans, are transported aboard a bus from Mexico's National Institute of Migration after being expelled from the US, through the Jeronimo-Santa Teresa border crossing in Ciudad Juarez on Friday. Reuters

## China policy to put America first: Rubio to Wang Yi

Washington: The Trump administration will pursue a relationship with China that advances US interests and puts the American people first, Secretary of State Marco Rubio told his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi.

Rubio Friday spoke with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang, the first call between the two diplomats. "The Secretary also stressed the US commitment to our allies in the region and serious concern over China's coercive actions against Taiwan and in the South China Sea," Bruce said. China claims most of the SCS. Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan have counter claims. PTI

## Hegseth gets Senate nod as US Defence Secy after Vance casts tiebreaker vote

### ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON DC, JAN 25

THE US Senate has narrowly confirmed Pete Hegseth as the country's Defence Secretary after Vice President JD Vance cast a rare tiebreaker vote, approving President Donald Trump's pick to lead the Pentagon after a contentious battle over his nomination amid allegations of sexual assault and alcohol abuse.

In the 100-member Senate, the ruling Republican Party has 53 members.

With the vote tied at 50-50, Vance used his rare vote to confirm the nomination of Hegseth, 44, a veteran of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

All 47 Democrats voted against Hegseth, a former Fox News host. Three Republican



Pete Hegseth, a former Fox News host, faces charges of heavy drinking, aggressive behaviour towards women

Senators Susan Collins, Lisa Murkowski and Mitch McConnell also voted against him.

Friday's vote marked a significant victory for the Trump administration, which has backed Hegseth as its nominee, despite his lack of experience and allegations against him.

During the confirmation hearing, Hegseth was asked

### EXPLAINED E 2nd tie-break for cabinet nominee

IT WAS only the second time in history a cabinet nominee needed a tie-break to be confirmed. The first was also a Trump nominee, Betsy DeVos, who became secretary of education in 2017.

about his previous comments that women should not serve in combat roles. He responded that his concern was not women serving in combat, but in maintaining a certain standard in the US military.

He was also accused of sexually assaulting an unnamed woman in 2017 in a California hotel room.



## SLUGGISHNESS IN CONSUMPTION INDICATORS, MIDLING PVT INVESTMENTS

# Slowdown may shape Budget focus: I-T tweaks, MSME support likely on table

ANACHAL MAGAZINE  
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 25

THE UPCOMING Budget 2025-26 comes in the backdrop of a discernible slowdown in growth, compounded by continuing sluggishness in consumption indicators and middling private investments. North Block officials engaged in the Budget-making exercise are learnt to be weighing the option of tweaks in income tax rates at lower income levels, a proposal that was considered in the July Budget but failed to pass muster, alongside a bevy of incentives for MSMEs.

The support for the MSME sector is being seen as crucial, given its outsized influence in large-scale employment and in India's labour-intensive exports, people in the know said.

Rationalisation of import duties, especially on intermediate products, in the context of the Trump-led administration taking charge in Washington is also under discussion, which could go in tandem with a Commerce Ministry-led initiative to prepare a plan to calibrate the leeway in reducing tariffs on items imported from the US, the person quoted

### IMPORT DUTY RATIONALISATION UNDER DISCUSSION

**NORTH BLOCK** officials engaged in the Budget-making exercise are learnt to be weighing the option of tweaks in income tax rates at lower income levels, a proposal that was considered in the July Budget but failed to pass muster, alongside a bevy of incentives for MSMEs

### RATIONALISATION OF

import duties, especially on intermediate products, in the context of the Trump-led administration taking charge in Washington is also under discussion, which could go in tandem with a Commerce Ministry-led initiative to prepare a plan to calibrate the leeway in reducing tariffs on items imported from the US

above said. Even though it's not a part of the Union Budget, the government may also reiterate its intent to rationalise the Goods and Services Tax (GST) structure, but that could only be indicative and likely to remain a broad statement of intent.

Easier access to credit, extension of incentives and subsidies to MSMEs, have featured in the internal discussions in the government in the run-up to the Budget. "There is a concern about the high tax incidence at lower income levels and that has come up during internal discussions for the Budget. Estimates have been drawn about the marginal income tax rates and some relief is being considered for

those earning less and senior citizens," a person aware of the discussions said. An earlier proposal within the Finance Ministry involving income tax rate cuts for those earning less as a measure to enhance disposable income and boost consumption had not found space in the Budget of the new government in July after the Lok Sabha elections.

The room to manoeuvre on the revenue front is, however, seen limited with no significant progress on mobilisation of other resources such as asset monetisation and disinvestment. Multiple economists, including those who have met with North Block officials in the run-up to Budget 2025-26,

are also of the view that the government should stick to fiscal prudence. A Budget with a balanced fiscal path is seen as being critical to provide space for the monetary policy to ease a bit, given the signs of a credit growth slowdown. "We expect the Budget to adopt a balanced approach to boosting growth while retaining fiscal prudence. This should keep India's fiscal risk premia low and provide greater leeway to the RBI to begin lowering its policy rate at the February MPC (monetary policy committee)," economists at Nomura said in a note.

The rate of increase in capital expenditure by the Centre will also be a critical factor coming after a slowdown in spending in the current financial year, primarily affected due to the elections held in the first three months of the fiscal along with weather impact from heavy rains. Industry is expecting the government to continue with its capex push, which it believes will help crowd in private investment. "The Union government should increase capital expenditure by 25 per cent in FY26 while staying within the fiscal glide path, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) president Sanjiv Puri had told *The Indian Express* in an interview earlier this

month.

The focus is expected to continue on the interest-free loans for capex to states as the on-ground impact is more widespread at the state level, even though the conditions for the loans to states might be tweaked further.

To meet its fiscal objectives, the government is expected to rely on the dividend from the central bank, even as the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is tackling the slide in the Indian currency that is seen affecting its balance sheet size.

"Reliance on RBI dividends is likely to remain high in FY26 to achieve fiscal consolidation. Central government fiscal consolidation — from 9.2 per cent of GDP in FY21 to a likely 4.8 per cent of GDP in FY25 — has been driven by improved tax collection, a reduction in unproductive expenditure, and high dividend flows from the RBI. Reliance on RBI dividends has usually been between 0.1-0.4 per cent of GDP; however, this increased significantly to 0.65 per cent of GDP in FY25. Reliance on RBI dividends is likely to remain high at 0.50-0.55 per cent of GDP in FY26 as well to continue on the path of fiscal consolidation." Standard Chartered said in a recent note.

# AI gains in US, China: Should India build an LLM?

SOUAMYARENDRA BARIK  
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 25

IN THE United States, the likes of OpenAI, Softbank, Oracle, Microsoft and Nvidia are coming together to build artificial intelligence (AI) infrastructure for OpenAI in the country. An investment of \$500 billion is expected to be made in a new company — Stargate Project — to fuel this expansion over the next four years.

In China, a company has recently shown a new large language model (LLM) which is being touted to beat or be on par with OpenAI's o1 in several math, coding, and reasoning benchmarks. The model, launched by Chinese AI lab DeepSeek, is open source, and is being made available to people at a fraction of OpenAI's.

These two developments in the span of a few days have put the spotlight squarely on India, and the path it chooses in the new AI arms

race. Some questions are crucial to be answered: Does India have the economic bandwidth to fuel procurement of AI-specific hardware at scale? Should India even focus on building a foundational model, or just work on use-case specific wrappers that are built on top of other companies' models?

## To LLM, or not to LLM

One of the key questions facing India and the country's businesses and researchers is whether to build a foundational model from scratch or rely on some already available open source LLMs to build wrappers on top of them. Even within this question, there are further doubts. If an LLM is to be made, should it be India-specific, filled with information about specific Indian languages, and related knowledge, or if should be a complete foundational model.

Infosys co-founder Nandan Nilekani has said that India should not focus on building large lan-

guage models. "Our goal should not be to build one more LLM. Let the big boys in the (Silicon) Valley do it, spending billions of dollars. We will use it to create synthetic data, build small language models quickly, and train them using appropriate data," Nilekani said at the Meta AI Summit last October.

However, some in the AI industry believe this could be a flawed approach. Aravind Srinivas, the founder of Perplexity AI, a conversational search engine which is being seen as a potential Google rival, said that Nilekani's comment on India not needing to build its own AI models "is wrong."

"...he's (Nilekani's) wrong on pushing Indians to ignore model training skills and just focus on building on top of existing models. Essential to do both," Srinivas said in a post on X. Speaking about the breakthrough made by DeepSeek, Srinivas added in another post: "I hope India changes



File

its stance from wanting to reuse models from open-source and instead trying to build muscle to train their models that are not just good for Indic languages but are globally competitive on all benchmarks."

To be sure, the model released by China's DeepSeek has shown that training an AI model may not be as expensive an endeavour as previously thought, with cutting edge models possible at a fraction of the cost

of what it took companies like OpenAI and Meta to build theirs.

"It is a good start for Indian companies to build wrappers as a first step. But there is a fundamental challenge there. In building wrappers, you are dependent on the foundational model of someone else. That model might be open source, and easy to access today. What if it isn't tomorrow," a senior government official said.

## Computing costs

That brings one to another fundamental requirement for training LLMs: the hardware. As of now, Nvidia has a virtual monopoly on the graphics processing units (GPUs) needed to train sophisticated foundational models. Companies like OpenAI and Meta have procured thousands and thousands of these GPUs to build their models. These GPUs are a major cost centre of AI operations

today, and an area where Indian companies are challenged.

The government has announced the Rs 13,370 crore India AI Mission, under which it plans to subsidise private companies to help them procure 10,000 GPUs and set up AI data centres, which could be accessed by other start-ups at a nominal cost to build their wrapper models.

There could, however, be a challenge to these plans, coming from the United States. Days before demitting office, the Joe Biden administration released an expansive regulatory framework on the export of AI hardware, which could have far-reaching consequences for India's AI ambitions.

In an "interim final rule," titled 'Framework for Artificial Intelligence Diffusion,' the US government has proposed to create three tiers of countries with specific restrictions on the export of AI chips and GPUs for each. India is in the middle tier of this classifi-

cation and will face some restrictions on the number of GPUs it can import from the United States.

These countries will face a limit on how much computing power they can import from American companies, unless that computing power is hosted in trusted and secure environments.

There are caps on the levels of computing power that can go to each of these countries: roughly around 50,000 advanced AI chips through 2027, although that can double if the state reaches an agreement with the US.

Apart from this tiered classification, the law also envisions a special review called the General Validated End User. This list includes only two countries: India and China. Indian companies that get this authorisation can use the exported items for civilian and military purposes, but not for nuclear use. Chinese companies with this authorisation can only use the technology for civilian use.





# HAPPY REPUBLIC DAY

26<sup>th</sup> JANUARY

"Heartfelt greetings to all the residents of Delhi on 76<sup>th</sup> **Republic Day**!  
Let's unite to strengthen democracy and contribute to the nation's progress.  
Honour the Constitution and fulfill our duties as responsible citizens."

**Jai Hind!**

