

Bulk applications for deleting voter names in Rajasthan's Barmer

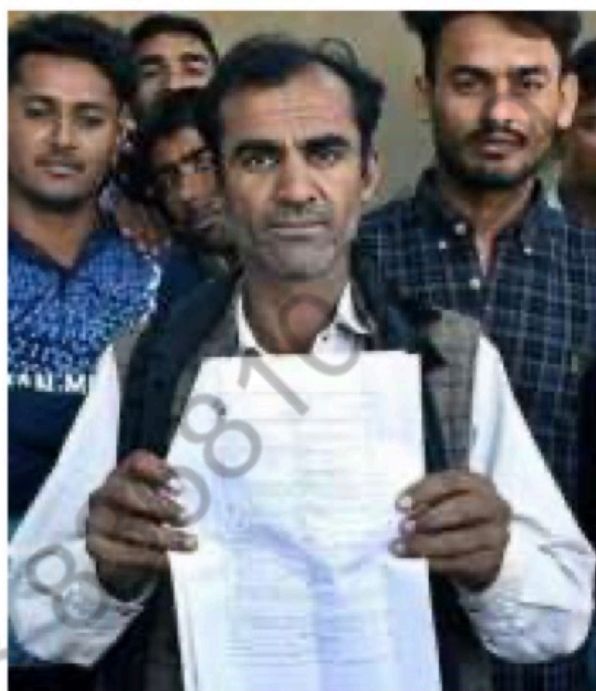
Sreeparna Chakrabarty

BARMER

Subhan Khan, a BJP worker at Janpaliya village in Barmer district of Rajasthan, was stunned when his booth-level officer informed him that an application had been filed seeking the deletion of his name from the State's electoral rolls through Form 7.

Hundreds of such forms have surfaced in this and certain other villages of this district. While booth-level agents of the BJP in whose names these forms had been filed denied signing them, many said the forms had created a furore in the villages, and worried voters had sought answers from them.

“How can I file an application for deletion of my own name when I am very much alive and residing in this place,” Mr. Khan asked this reporter, sitting outside his tiny grocery shop



Subhan Khan says he has not filed any forms which feature his name. R.V. MOORTHY

in the village barely 111 km from the India-Pakistan border. As a BLA himself, he has been keeping tabs on duplicate entries and deceased and shifted voters in his booth after the Election Commission's special intensive revision exercise got under way in October.

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OUTRAGE IN GUJARAT

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Bulk applications for deleting voter names

His BLO Rukhmana Ram said he has more than 105 such Form 7 applications lying with him, but clarified that no further action had been taken as many people denied signing them and most voters whose names were sought to be deleted under the “shifted” category had been residing in the villages for generations. He had collected the applications from a room in the Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM)’s office after he was intimated through a local WhatsApp group of BLOs.

Mr. Ram is a teacher at the Government Senior Secondary School in Janpaliya which hosts two polling booths. Janpaliya is a part of the Chohtan Assembly constituency of Barmer district.

The other BLO, Fakruddin, says he has 87 Form 7 applications with him for deletion of names. All forms have been filed in the names of Mr. Khan and Krishna Ram, the two BJP BLAs of the village. According to EC rules, one BLA can only file up to 10 Form 7 applications a day.

While a BLA is a political party representative for each booth, a BLO – usually a schoolteacher – is appointed by the EC for poll-related work and maintaining voter lists. Form 7 is filed to object to an existing name on the electoral rolls or to request the deletion of a name for reasons such as death, shifting, or ineligibility. The BLO or the Electoral Registration Officer has to conduct an enquiry and issue a notice to the voter before taking action. Both Mr. Khan and Mr. Krishna Ram denied filing the forms at all. According to Mr. Fakruddin, on the evening of January 15, there was an update on the BLOs’ WhatsApp group that Form 7 applications were lying at the SDM’s office and all BLOs should collect and process them.

Hundreds of Form 7 applications have been filed in the name of BJP BLAs who claim they never signed or filed them. A host of BLOs *The Hindu* spoke with said they picked up the applications from the SDM office. What is unclear though is how the forms landed in the SDM office.

When contacted, SDM Badri Narayan Vishnoi, who is also the Assistant Electoral Registration Officer for Sedwa Tehsil under which the village falls, said Form 7 applications were filed by political parties and he was not aware of how they reached his office. He declined to comment when told that the BLAs had denied signing the forms submitted in their name. The office of Rajasthan’s Chief Electoral Officer in a response said action would be taken as per EC guidelines.

Wangchuk incited violence by citing Nepal, Bangladesh, Arab Spring: Centre

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Centre and the administration of Union Territory of Ladakh on Monday accused detained climate activist Sonam Wangchuk of using the veneer of Gandhian non-violence to disguise actual incitement of younger and impressionable generations to turn to violence.

Appearing before a Supreme Court Bench headed by Justice Aravind Kumar, Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta said that Mr. Wangchuk's instigation



Sonam Wangchuk

even touched upon "self-immolation" and non-cooperation in case of an external aggression. He said the region was located along the border to a country with which India had a "fragile" relationship. Mr.

Mehta said Mr. Wangchuk had actively tried to instigate Gen Z by referring to protests like in Nepal and Bangladesh. He had brought up the possibility of an Arab Spring-like agitation.

'No them versus us'

He said Mr. Wangchuk had referred to the Union government as "them" and separated people of Ladakh as "us" and called for "plebiscite" and "referendum", the calls which were made once in Jammu and Kashmir.

"There is no 'them' or

'us'. We are all Indians. Ladakh is a place which shares borders with two countries – China and Pakistan... The area is very fragile. The speeches made by him have to be taken into account in totality. He was misleading young people and carefully using the speeches of Mahatma Gandhi to cover it. Gandhiji never instigated people against their own government," he submitted.

✓ The top court was hearing a plea filed by Gitanjali Angmo against Mr. Wangchuk's detention under the National Security Act.

‘Stuck’ in Dubai, 14 migrant workers from Jharkhand seek govt. help to return

Workers claim most of their salary is being deducted in the name of recovering ticket expenses initially borne by the company they are working for; trying to verify authenticity of incident: Labour Dept.

Amit Bhelari
PATNA

At least 14 migrant workers from three districts of Jharkhand - Giridih, Hazaribagh and Bokaro - stranded in Dubai allegedly due to unpaid wages have appealed to the State government for facilitating their return.

The workers released a video on Monday in which they detailed their ordeal. The video was sent to Giridih-based social activist Sikandar Ali, who later posted it on social media. Of the 14, one is from Bokaro, four from Giridih, and the rest from Hazaribagh.

All the workers are employed by a company in Dubai that is engaged in transmission line work. They have reportedly stopped working now.

Speaking to *The Hindu* over phone from Dubai, a stranded worker from Giridih, Ajay Kumar Mahato, 27, said, “We are facing a lot of problems over here. Our



The workers have sent a video detailing their ordeal. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

passport has been seized by the company we are working for and we are not allowed to return to our country. We want to go back home safely.”

Mr. Ajay said the workers had agreed to work for 1,600 dirhams each per month but the company is now deducting most of their salary to “recover ticket expenses” it had initially incurred.

They all went to Dubai in the first week of October 2025. A Hazaribagh-based agent, Ghanshyam Mahato, who had earlier worked in the same company for 16 years, had facilitated the re-

cruitment, according to the workers.

When contacted, Mr. Ghanshyam said before going to Dubai, all the workers were informed by the company that it will deduct 50 dirhams every month from their salary initially to recover the ticket expenses.

“It was mentioned in the contract as well, but the workers told me that the company has deducted the entire amount to recover the ticket expenses and they have got nothing in hand as salary. I am equally tense and wondering how could the company do such a thing,” he said.

But Rajesh Kumar Mahato, 25, another worker, claimed that the company never told them about deducting the ticket expenses from their salary.

‘No money for food’

“There was no such talk. We were told the company will bear the expenses of our tickets, food, accommodation and visa. The company is also charging us now for accommodation. We do not have money for food as well,” he said.

Shikha Lakra, head of the State Migrant Workers Control Room under the Labour Department, said, “We have received the information and have personally spoken to them. We have asked them to send the contract details based on which we will take further steps. Before going ahead, we want to ascertain the authenticity of the incident. They have sent us a few documents. We are waiting for the remaining.”

Uncertainty over for global capital, China+1 strategy back in game: CEA

**Siddharth Upasani
& Sandeep Singh**

New Delhi, February 2

THE SHARP cut in reciprocal tariffs by the US to 18% will “remove all uncertainty” in the minds of global investors, and “the China +1 strategy will be back in the game” brightening the prospects of FDI inflows, ac-

cording to Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran.

The rupee is likely to bounce back strongly when domestic financial markets open on Tuesday. It had settled at 91.51 to a US dollar on Monday. Growth forecasts may also be revised up to reflect a sharply improved outlook for the economy in terms of foreign demand for locally-

produced goods.

The 50% tariff, comprising a reciprocal tariff of 25% and a penal 25% for the purchase of Russian arms and crude, has been in force for nearly half a year — a period that has seen foreign investors exit Indian financial markets amid heightened geopolitical and

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Uncertainty over

policy uncertainty.

“This undoubtedly changes the picture on capital flows,” Nageswaran told The Indian Express. “This was the biggest stumbling block for capital flows. This makes a huge, huge difference,” he said.

Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) have pulled out nearly \$12 billion on a net basis from the stock markets since the beginning of August 2025. This should, however, change now that the US and India have cut a deal that sees the tariff rate fall to a level that compares favourably with key export rivals like Vietnam, Malaysia, Cambodia, Thailand, Bangladesh, Indonesia (all 19-20%) and China (37%).

The government’s top economist said the cut in the tariff rate removes a “huge uncertainty” from the minds of both direct and portfolio investors. “In terms of FDI (foreign direct investment), the China plus one strategy was the one that was going to drive FDI inflows. Now, China+1 is back in the game,” Nageswaran said.

“When countries are on good terms there is better flow of capital,” said Nilesh Shah, Managing Director, Kotak Mahindra Asset Management and a part-time member of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister. “The announcement of the deal will clear the imaginary constraints and it should lead to increased capital flow into the markets, which in turn will not only lift the markets but also strengthen the rupee,” Shah said.

“While the devil is in the details, the deal removes a hanging sword over rupee, equity and rates market. Let us hope that it is a win-win deal for both the countries as they have a lot to gain through cooperation,” Shah said.

The trade deal with the US comes close on the heels of India and the EU announcing a deal of their own. This means the “two biggest blocks of capital have clearly opened for India and we may see a turnaround in FPI flows this year”.

Along with FPIs pulling out money from financial markets, direct investment inflows – long-term money that helps set up factories on the ground – has weakened rapidly in the last couple of years. According to latest RBI data, November 2025 saw net FDI outflows of \$446 million from India – outflows for the third straight month. So far in the first eight months of 2025-26, net FDI inflows stand at \$5.63 billion, up from \$959 million in all of 2024-25. Gross FDI inflows during April-November this year stood at \$64.73 billion compared to \$80.62 billion in the entirety of the last fiscal.

Weak FDI inflows have been a huge concern over the last couple of years. The Economic Survey for 2025-26 had described India as “a victim of geopolitics” and said that the rupee’s valuation does not accurately reflect India’s “stellar economic fundamentals”.

The rupee has weakened by almost 7% against the US dollar since the start of 2025 even though the greenback itself has fallen by almost 10% against a basket of key global currencies. In early December 2025, the rupee broke past the 90-per-dollar before falling past 91 later the same month. Last week, it nearly touched 92-per-dollar as it hit an all-time low of 91.99 per dollar.

While the immediate short-run should see the rupee appreciate strongly, domestic economic growth should get a leg-up over the course of the coming fiscal year.

U.S. tariff on India reduced to 18%, say Modi and Trump

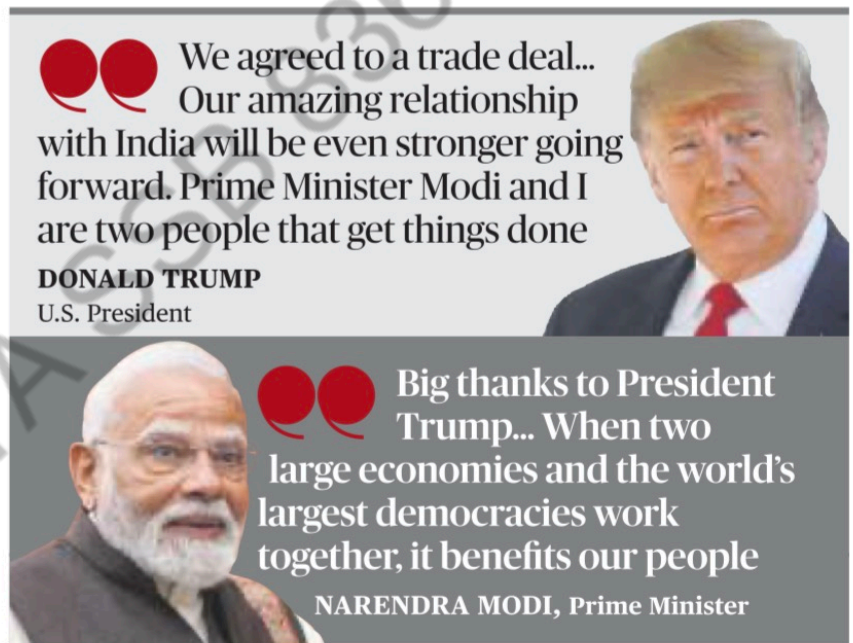
After a phone call with Prime Minister, U.S. President says the countries have 'agreed to a trade deal', and India will stop buying oil from Russia

Kallol Bhattacharjee

NEW DELHI

Indicating a positive turn in a bilateral relationship that had been under strain because of multiple issues, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that “Made in India” products would “now” attract a “reduced tariff of 18%” in the U.S., after a telephonic conversation with President Donald Trump on Monday.

The move is expected to significantly reduce the impact of the 50% penalty tariffs that Mr. Trump had imposed on India in August 2025. Minutes earlier, Mr. Trump had announced on the social media platform Truth Social that In-







dia and the U.S. had “agreed to a trade deal”. He said India had agreed to “stop buying Russian oil” and would reduce “Tariffs and Non Tariff Barriers against the U.S. to zero”.





The External Affairs Mi-





nistry is yet to respond to some of the questions related to the declaration and the details shared by Mr. Trump.

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• US tariffs on countries globally

India	18%	
Brazil	50%	
China	37%	
South Africa	30%	

Vietnam	20%	
Bangladesh	20%	
Malaysia	19%	
Cambodia	19%	

Pakistan	19%	
Indonesia	19%	
European Union	15%	
UK	10%	

SOURCE: WHITE HOUSE

U.S. tariff on India cut to 18%, say PM and Trump

“Delighted that Made in India products will now have a reduced tariff of 18%,” said Mr. Modi thanking Mr. Trump.

“When two large economies and the world’s largest democracies work together, it benefits our people and unlocks immense opportunities for mutually beneficial cooperation,” he said in his post on X.

A little before Mr. Modi’s message, Mr. Trump said on Truth Social, “...we agreed to a Trade Deal between the United States and India, whereby the United States will charge a reduced Reciprocal Tariff, lowering it from 25% to 18%.” He further claimed, “...they will likewise move forward to reduce their Tariffs and Non Tariff Barriers against the United States, to ZERO”.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal welcomed the developments.

The U.S. President had said in the Truth Social post that during his discussion, India agreed “to stop buying Russian oil.” He also claimed that India will “buy much more from the United States and potentially, Venezuela”. Mr. Trump said that Mr. Modi had “committed” to increasing purchase of U.S. products to \$500 billion. The two announcements from Mr. Modi and Mr. Trump drew prompt response from the Congress, with its general secretary (communications) Jairam Ramesh saying, “It appears Mr. Modi has capitulated finally.”

The telephone conversation between Mr. Modi and Mr. Trump took place as External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar started a visit to the United States from February 2 to 4, when he will participate in the Critical Minerals Ministerial meet convened by U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

Gaza's crucial Rafah crossing to Egypt reopens with limits

Associated Press

CAIRO

Gaza's Rafah border crossing with Egypt reopened on Monday for limited traffic, a key step in the Israel-Hamas ceasefire but a mostly symbolic one as few people will be allowed to travel in either direction and no goods will pass through.

An Egyptian official said 50 Palestinians were expected to cross in each direction on the first day of Rafah's operation. Within the first few hours of the opening, no one was seen crossing in or out of Gaza. About 20,000 Palestinian children and adults needing medical care hope to leave the devastated territory via the crossing, according to Gaza health officials.

Thousands of other Palestinians outside the territory hope to enter and return home. Egyptian state media and an Israeli security official also confirmed the reopening.

Violence still continued across the coastal territory on Monday, and Gaza hos-



Key lifeline: Egyptian ambulances wait in line before moving into the Gaza Strip through the Rafah border on Monday. REUTERS

pital officials said an Israeli Navy ship had fired on a tent camp, killing a 3-year-old Palestinian boy. Israel's military said it was looking into the incident.

Medical exit

About 150 hospitals across Egypt are ready to receive Palestinian patients evacuated from Gaza through Rafah, authorities said. Also, the Egyptian Red Crescent said it has readied "safe spaces" on the Egyptian side of the crossing to support those evacuated from the Gaza Strip.

Israel has banned sending patients to hospitals in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and east Jerusalem

since the war began – a move that cut off what was previously the main outlet for Palestinians needing medical treatment unavailable in Gaza.

Israel has said it and Egypt will vet people for exit and entry through the Rafah crossing, which will be supervised by European Union border patrol agents with a small Palestinian presence. Fearing that Israel could use the crossing to push Palestinians out of the enclave, Egypt has repeatedly said it must be open for them to enter and exit Gaza. Historically, Israel and Egypt have vetted Palestinians applying to cross.

177 Baloch militants killed in two days, say Pakistan forces

Security operation in response to coordinated militant attacks that struck 12 towns; the attacks tied to the Balochistan Liberation Army left at least 50 dead, mostly civilians, Pak. authorities claim

Press Trust of India

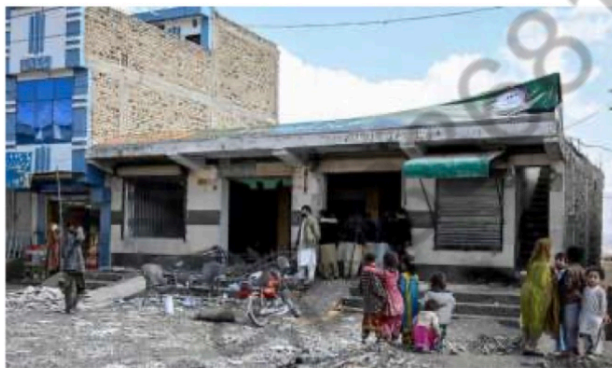
KARACHI/ISLAMABAD

Security forces overnight killed 22 militants, raising the death toll of militants to 177 in the last two days in Balochistan after coordinated attacks at multiple places in the restive southwestern Pakistan province left at least 50 dead, mostly civilians, security officials said on Monday.

The operation was launched after militants, including two female suicide bombers, belonging to ethnic Baloch groups carried out attacks across 12 towns in the province on Saturday targeting civilians in Quetta, Mastung, Nushki, Dalbandin, Kharan, Panjgur, Tump, Gwadar and Pasni.

The death toll of militants in operations in the last two days has increased to 177, according to security officials.

“Since Sunday night, se-



Cost of conflict: Local residents stand near a damaged bank on the outskirts of Quetta after an attack by Baloch separatists. AFP

curity forces have killed 22 more terrorists,” Shahid Rind, a spokesperson for the provincial government, said on Monday. He said that 167 bodies have been sent to hospitals so far for future processing and identification.

Mr. Rind said most of the militants killed belonged to the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and had support from other insurgent groups.

On Sunday, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif said

that the security forces were prepared and timely retaliated to push back the attackers, killing 150 militants.

The military and the state have designated these militants belonging to insurgent groups or the Tehreek-e-Taliban as “Fitna-al-Hindustan”, a term the government uses claiming that the militants allegedly receive support from Indian intelligence agencies.

The militants targeted multiple security and go-

vernment installations in their attacks on Saturday. So far, authorities have confirmed the death of at least 17 personnel of the police, frontier corps and security forces.

Balochistan Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti said that the attacks were carried out by the outlawed BLA, which also killed at least 31 civilians. In Islamabad, the Senate unanimously adopted a resolution condemning the spate of militant attacks in Balochistan.

Insurgency-hit region

Balochistan, bordering Iran and Afghanistan, is home to a long-running violent insurgency. Baloch insurgent groups have previously carried out several attacks targeting the \$60 billion CPEC projects. In 2025, the BLA claimed responsibility for the March hijacking of the Jaffar Express train, killing 31 people and holding hostage over 300 passengers.

It is an elitist Budget, does not address people's needs



PULAPRE
BALAKRISHNAN

ACCORDING TO the latest Economic Survey, India is expected to grow by 7.4 per cent this fiscal year. This is above the average annual growth rate for the past two decades. When growth is sufficiently vigorous, economic policy should pivot towards course correction, targeting sectors that need particular attention, especially if they have been neglected in the past. In India, these sectors are health and education. The state of India's health and education is deficient both in absolute terms and in relation to the rest of the world. Health and education represent the basic capabilities of the population. Nations compete through the prowess of their people, which depends on their relative capabilities. The development of capabilities relies strongly on public spending on health and education, even when there may exist a vibrant private sector that provides these services. A comparison of the pattern of public spending on health and education across the world shows that while India is not a laggard when it comes to expenditure on education, it is severely behind countries such as China and the United States when it comes to health services. We might ask if the Union Budget for 2026-27 addresses this issue.

Clearly, the Budget's focus is on growth. To "accelerate and sustain growth by enhancing productivity and competitiveness, and building resilience to volatile global dynamics" is the first of the stated "*kartavyas*" or duties embraced by this government. While the other two, stated as fulfilment of the aspirations of the people and *sabka saath, sabka vikas*, may be interpreted as a nod to the social sector, the Budget contains little by way of concrete provisions to enhance the health and education endowments of the general population.

Though described by the Finance Minister in her speech as a *yuva shakti*-driven Budget, the initiatives on education are mostly on its uppermost segment. The highlights include the creation of five university townships, which will have multiple universities, colleges and associated housing. A new design institute is planned for eastern India and an upgraded National Institute of Hospitality will "align academic excellence with industry requirements". The only initiative for schools announced

in the Budget speech is the proposal to support the Indian Institute of Creative Technologies, Mumbai in setting up animation, visual effects, gaming, and comics (AVCG) content creator labs in 15,000 secondary schools and 500 colleges across the country. The potential of these initiatives should be evaluated bearing in mind the problem of low quality in India's public education sector.

New schemes for the health sector follow a pattern similar to what has been adopted for education. Existing institutions for allied health professionals (AHPs) are to be upgraded and new AHP Institutions established in private and government sectors. "Biopharma SHAKTI" has been described as a strategy for healthcare advancement through knowledge, technology and innovation but its stated goal is to develop India as a global biopharma manufacturing hub, expected to build the ecosystem for domestic production of biologics and biosimilars. The strategy will include a biopharma-focused network with three new National Institutes of Pharmaceutical Education and Research (NIPER) and upgrading seven existing ones. As with the proposed university townships, a scheme has been announced to support states in establishing five regional medical hubs in partnership with the private sector. These hubs will serve as integrated healthcare complexes that combine medical, educational and research facilities. But the intention behind this is to promote India as a hub for medical tourism services.

The Budget has marginally raised the share of the social spend in the total expenditure, but the new schemes are largely aimed at the top tier in their fields. Therefore, the impact on schools and hospitals, which is where a severe shortfall of public provision of services is concentrated, is unlikely to be much. For that very reason, their impact on India's "disease burden", which the minister referred to, is also unlikely to be great. This is an elitist Budget. Its spending pattern does not address the pressing needs of the majority of the people. But it may yet raise the growth rate since capital expenditure has been hiked to its highest level in a decade.

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The new schemes are largely aimed at the top tier in their fields. The impact on schools and hospitals, which have a severe shortfall of public provision of services, is unlikely to be much