

# Centre mandates label for photorealistic AI content

Amended IT Rules call for disclosure of AI-generated synthetic media, and warn platforms of loss of safe harbour for non-compliance; changes notified by the govt. to take effect on February 20

**Aroon Deep**

NEW DELHI

**T**he Union government has notified amendments to the Information Technology Act, 2021, requiring photorealistic AI-generated content to be prominently labelled. The changes, which will come into force on February 20, also significantly shorten timelines for takedown of illegal material.

Under the new rules, social media platforms will now have between two and three hours to remove certain categories of unlawful content, a sharp reduction from the earlier 24-36 hours. Content deemed illegal by a court or an “appropriate government” will have to be taken down within three hours, while sensitive content,

## Content check

Platforms that enable creation or sharing of synthetic content must ensure **clear and prominent labelling** under the new rules



### Key changes include:

- Synthetic content to be treated as ‘information’ for determining unlawful acts under IT Rules

- Timeline for platforms to act on government or court orders reduced from 36 hours to **3 hours**

- Sensitive content, including non-consensual deepfake, must be removed within **2 hours**

- Platforms to seek disclosures from users for AI-generated content

featuring non-consensual nudity and deepfakes, must be removed within two hours.

The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Amendment Rules, 2026, defines synthetically generated con-

tent as “audio, visual or audio-visual information which is artificially or algorithmically created, generated, modified or altered using a computer resource, in a manner that such information appears to be real, authentic or true and depicts or portrays

any individual or event in a manner that is, or is likely to be perceived as indistinguishable from a natural person or a real-world event.” The final definition is narrower than the one released in a draft version of these rules in October 2025. As with the existing IT Rules, failure to comply with the rules could result in loss of safe harbour, the legal principle that sites allowing users to post content cannot automatically be held liable in the same way as a publisher of a book or a periodical can.

A senior government official on Tuesday said the rules include a carve-out for touch-ups that smartphone cameras often perform automatically.

**CONTINUED ON**

» **PAGE 10**

# **Label photorealistic** **AI content, says Centre**

Platforms will be required to seek disclosures from users in case their content is AI-generated. If such a disclosure is not received for synthetically generated content, the official said, firms would either have to proactively label the content or take it down in cases of non-consensual deepfakes.

The amended rules mandate that AI-generated imagery be labelled “prominently”. While the draft version specified that 10% of any imagery would have to be covered with such a disclosure, platforms have been given some more leeway, the official said, since they pushed back on such a specific mandate.

## **Safe harbour**

“Provided that where [a social media] intermediary becomes aware, or it is otherwise established, that the intermediary knowingly permitted, promoted, or failed to act upon such synthetically generated information in contravention of these rules, such intermediary shall be deemed to have failed to exercise due diligence under this sub-rule,” the rules say, hinting at a loss of safe harbour.

The rules also partially roll back an amendment notified in October 2025, which had limited each State to designating a single officer authorised to issue takedown orders. States may now notify more than one such officer— an “administrative” measure to address the need of States with large populations, the official said.

# SC agrees to hear plea against Assam CM's 'hate speeches'

**Krishnadas Rajagopal**

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday agreed to schedule for urgent hearing a petition filed by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)], accusing Assam Chief Minister

Himanta Biswa Sarma of indulging in a "sustained pattern of hate speeches" and seeking the registration of a first information report (FIR) into the alleged instances of hate speeches.

The petitioner party said Mr. Sarma, while holding a constitutional office, gave speeches which "target, terrorise, and instigate hostility against the Muslim community residing in Assam".

"As elections take place, part of the elections take place in the Supreme Court," Chief Justice of India Surya Kant remarked.

The Communist Party of India (CPI) has also moved the top court



Himanta Biswa Sarma

through its national secretary, Annie Raja, against the repeated hate speeches and conduct of Mr. Sarma. The CPI submitted that a continuing pattern of statements and actions by the Chief Minister has vitiated the public atmosphere in Assam, deepened communal polarisation, and undermined the constitutional values of fraternity and secularism.

## Social media post

The petition by the CPI(M) sought the registration of an FIR into instances of al-

leged communal speeches attributed to Mr. Sarma and a recent social media post, since deleted, depicting him discharging a firearm toward an animated image of two visibly Muslim men positioned within the crosshairs of the weapon, accompanied by textual phrases like 'point-blank shot' and 'no mercy'.

Chief Justice Kant agreed to give a date for hearing to advocate Nizam Pasha, who made the oral mentioning of the petition for an early date.

"Since assuming office, Respondent No. 4 (Sarma) has, on numerous occasions, delivered public speeches and made statements – both within and beyond the territorial limits of the State – which have been widely disseminated across print, electronic, and digital media platforms," the plea stated.

**CONTINUED ON**

» PAGE 10



# SC to hear plea against Assam CM's 'hate speech'

"These statements, viewed cumulatively, constitute ex facie hate speech inasmuch as they degrade and demean a minority, propagate false and stigmatising stereotypes, incite social and economic boycott, and encourage conditions of exclusion and violence against the community," the petition added.

The social media post, circulated in the public domain as a video, on February 7, 2026 from the "official handle of the Bharatiya Janata Party, Assam on X..., has been the most blatant and disturbing manifestation of the pattern complained of", the petition said.

"The final frames in the sequence culminate in a stylised portrait of Respondent No. 4 depicted in cowboy attire, accompanied by additional textual slogans translating to 'Foreigner-free Assam', 'Community, land, roots first', 'Why did you go to Pakistan', and 'No forgiveness for Bangladeshis'. When viewed in its surrounding factual and political context, the cumulative symbolic and visual rhetoric embodied in the material serves to reinforce and amplify a climate of hostility, exclusion, and intimidation directed against the minority community," the petition said.

The petition said the video was removed from the public domain following severe backlash. However, the material continued to be widely circulated and disseminated through multiple other accounts and platforms.

The petition reminded that national deliberations had been undertaken to combat communalism, regionalism, and divisive tendencies, and on the strength of the recommendations of the National Integration Conference, the Constitution (Sixteenth Amendment) Act, 1963 was enacted.

The 1963 Act had amended Articles 84 and 173 of the Constitution and the Forms of Oath in the Third Schedule to expressly mandate that Ministers and other Constitutional functionaries must swear to uphold the sovereignty and integrity of India. "This Constitutional oath constitutes the foundational assurance that public power shall be exercised in fidelity to the Constitution and in furtherance of its core values of Constitutional morality, equality, fraternity, and the sovereignty and integrity of India," the petition said.



# Opposition MPs submit notice seeking removal of LS Speaker

Notice has 120 signatures, including of SP, DMK MPs; it cites Speaker's prevention of Rahul's speech, 'arbitrary suspension' of MPs, 'false allegations' about protest against PM; House allowed to function after submission, discussion on Budget taken up

**Sandeep Phukan**  
**Sobhana K. Nair**  
NEW DELHI

**O**pposition parties belonging to the Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) on Tuesday submitted a notice to the Secretary-General of the Lok Sabha, seeking the removal of Speaker Om Birla for allegedly conducting the business of the House in a "blatantly partisan" manner.

The notice to bring a resolution for the removal of the Speaker cited four specific reasons, including not allowing Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi to complete his speech on the Motion of Thanks to the President on February 2. "This is not an isolated instance. The Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha is almost invariably not allowed to speak," the notice said.

The notice, with nearly 120 signatures, was submitted to Lok Sabha Secretary-General Utpal Kumar Singh by Congress chief whip K. Suresh and whip Mohamed Jawed on behalf of several Opposition parties, including the Congress, Samajwadi Party, and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). However, the Trinamool Congress did not sign the notice.

Soon after the submission of the notice against the Speaker, the Opposition agreed to let the House function. The discussion on the Budget started in the second half of the day. Mr. Gandhi is likely to take part in the



**Big move:** Congress leaders Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi with floor leaders of the INDIA bloc parties during a meeting in New Delhi on Tuesday. ANI

discussions tomorrow.

Mr. Birla has directed the Secretary-General to take appropriate action of "examining and processing" the notice, according to the rules, sources said.

At least two Lok Sabha members have to sign the notice to move a resolution for the removal of the Speaker and a minimum of 14 days' notice has to be given before the resolution can be taken up by the House.

Under Article 94C of the Constitution, the Speaker can be removed from office by a resolution passed by the House through a simple majority. Article 96 of the Constitution allows the Speaker to respond to the notice for removal but the charges against her/him will have to be specific.

**'Arbitrary suspension'**  
Apart from Mr. Gandhi's speech, the notice said that on February 3, eight Oppo-

sition MPs were "arbitrarily suspended" for the entire Budget session and were "being penalised merely for exercising their democratic rights".

On February 4, a BJP MP was permitted to make "wholly objectionable and personalised attacks" against two former Prime Ministers, without being reprimanded even once for disregarding established conventions and norms of propriety, the notice said, referring to Nishikant Dubey's remarks. "In spite of our request, no action has been taken against this particular MP, who is a habitual offender," it said.

Referring to the Speaker's statement that he had "concrete information" that Congress members might move towards Prime Minister Narendra Modi's seat and carry out "some unexpected act", the notice termed these remarks "blatantly false allega-

tions" and his decision to make these observations from his Chair as "indicative of an abuse of this constitutional office".

"While we hold the Speaker, Lok Sabha, in personal regard, we are pained and anguished at the manner in which he has consistently prevented opposition members of Parliament from raising issues of legitimate public concern," the notice said.

## BJP slams notice

The BJP on Tuesday slammed the Opposition for submitting the notice and said the time has come for India to "impeach" Mr. Gandhi and the Congress from politics.

"Those who have been impeached of their consciousness are the ones who want to impeach all the constitutional posts of India," BJP national spokesperson Sambit Patra told presspersons. (With PTI inputs)

## Birla to stay away from Lok Sabha proceedings

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla will not preside over the business of the House until the Opposition's notice for a motion seeking his removal is disposed of, sources said on Tuesday, citing "moral grounds" for the decision.

The Speaker has already directed the Lok Sabha Secretary-General to examine and process the notice as per rules.

Countering the Congress claim that the Speaker's charges against its women MPs were baseless, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju posted video footage from February 4 on X, showing women MPs of the principal Opposition party surrounding the Prime Minister's front row seat in the Lok Sabha.

If the ruling party had not restrained its members, Mr. Rijiju said, there would have been "very ugly scenes". "Congress Party is proud of the most degrading behaviour by their MPs!! If we had not stopped all BJP MPs and allowed the Women MPs to confront Cong. MPs, it would have led to very ugly scene. We have very high consideration, to protect the dignity & sanctity of the Parliament," he said.

# No-confidence motion against Speaker: What happens now?

Jatin Anand

New Delhi, February 10

The Opposition on Tuesday moved a no-confidence motion against Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla. Lok Sabha sources said that it would now be examined and processed as per rules.

The Congress and other parties have attacked Birla for not allowing Leader of Opposition (LoP) Rahul Gandhi to quote from or speak about former Indian Army Chief General M M Naravane's unpublished memoir, and for Birla's claim that Prime Minister Narendra Modi could have been attacked inside the House.

## Can the Lok Sabha Speaker be removed from post?

Yes, the process does not apply to the Rajya Sabha or Council of States. According to practices and procedures governing the conduct of legislative business in the House, the Speaker or the Deputy Speaker can be removed from office by a resolution of Lok Sabha passed by a majority of all the then members of the House. This is procedurally possible under Article 94 (c) of the Constitution. Article 94, per se, provides for the vacation, resignation and re-

moval of those occupying the offices of Speaker and Deputy Speaker; the rules in this regard, however, are stringent.

## What are the various conditions under which a Speaker or Deputy Speaker can be removed from their respective offices?

According to Article 94, a Member of the House who holds office as Speaker or Deputy Speaker of the House of the People shall vacate office if, as per 94 (a), they cease "to be a member of the House of the People", according to 94 (b), may at any time "by writing under his hand addressed" resign office and, per 94 (c), be removed "by a resolution of the House of the People passed by a majority of all the then members of the House".

## What is the procedure for the removal of a Speaker or Deputy Speaker of the LS?

A member wishing to give notice of a resolution for the removal of the Speaker or the Deputy Speaker has to do it in writing to the Secretary-General of the Lok Sabha. This notice may be given by two or more members jointly – but no resolution for the removal of such of-



The Opposition has attacked the Speaker for not allowing LoP Rahul Gandhi to speak about General Naravane's memoir, and for Birla's claim that PM Modi could have been attacked inside the House. ANI

ficials moved under clause (c) can be moved unless at least 14 days' notice has been given of the intention to move the resolution.

After such a notice is received, a motion for leave to move the resolution is entered in the List of Business in the name of the members concerned on a day fixed by the Speaker.

## Has a motion of no-confidence been submitted against a LS Speaker or Deputy Speaker in the past?

Yes, thrice in the past: In 1954, 1966 and 1987. Such a motion requires to be backed by at

least two Members of the House of the People, or the Lok Sabha and "50 members have to stand up" in its favour, that is, the quorum of the House has to be fulfilled for the procedure to take place. In 1954, Ganesh Vasudev Mavalankar, the first Speaker of the LS, was the first presiding officer to face a no-confidence motion. There were two more – against Hukam Singh in November 1966 and Balram Jakhar in April 1987. None of them lost the Speaker chair because of the motion.

## Is there any guideline a motion of no-confidence needs to adhere to?

According to Rule 200A, such a resolution needs to be "specific with respect to charges", "be clearly and precisely expressed" and "shall not contain arguments, inferences, ironical expressions, imputations or defamatory statements." The other points which such a motion needs to adhere to include "no speech" by the Member(s) who submitted it after it is admitted for discussion.

## What happens in case such a motion is admitted?

In case such a motion is admitted, members who are in favour of it are required to rise in their places. If "not less than fifty" members rise, the Speaker or the Deputy Speaker or the presiding officer is required to declare that 'leave has been granted' and that the resolution will be taken up on a particular day 'not being more than 10 days from the date on which leave is asked for', as per the presiding officer.

On the appointed day that it is scheduled to be taken up, the resolution 'shall be included in the list of business', followed by discussion. In this case, the Member(s) who have moved the

motion can be allowed to speak if the presiding officer allows.

## What if less than the required number of Members participate?

The presiding officer is then required to inform the House that the member (who submitted the motion) has 'not the leave of the House.' A resolution for the removal of the Speaker or the Deputy Speaker received without due notice is not proceeded with.

E.

## What does the Speaker do while his removal from office is being discussed?

According to the rules, whenever the House of the Lok Sabha is dissolved, the Speaker 'shall not vacate his office until immediately before the first meeting of the House of the People after the dissolution.'

The Speaker has the right to speak as well as to take part in the proceedings while any resolution for their removal from office is under consideration in the House. They are entitled to vote only in the first instance on such a resolution or any other matter during such proceedings but not in the case of an equality of votes.



# Centre sidesteps query on Agniveers' career progression

**Vijaita Singh**

NEW DELHI

The Union Home Ministry on Tuesday evaded a response to a pointed question from Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi in the Lok Sabha on why it

—and not the Ministry of Defence — has been assigned the responsibility of coordinating the career progression of Agniveers, despite their service in the armed forces.

Mr. Gandhi sought to know whether the Home Ministry had been tasked with coordinating the post-service career progression of Agniveers, and whether the government had assessed possible overlap or coordination challenges between the Home and Defence Ministries in managing the transition of ex-Agniveers. He asked for details of the specific activities and programmes that the Home Ministry would oversee for them.

In a written reply, Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai said, “The distribution of subjects among Ministries/ Departments has been specified in the



Rahul Gandhi

Government of India (Allocation of Business) Rules, 1961. As per the amendment issued by the Cabinet Secretariat notification No.S.O.2701(E) dated 16.06.2025, the subject of ‘coordinating activities for further progress of Ex-Agniveers’ is allocated to the MHA.”

The reply added, “A dedicated ex-Agniveer wing and an ex-Agniveer cell have been created within the MHA for smooth coordination, monitoring, and formulation of rehabilitation policies for ex-Agniveers.”

The Agnipath Scheme was launched on June 14, 2022, to recruit soldiers, airmen and sailors into the three services for a four-year tenure.



# Move to procure six more P-8I submarine hunters before DAC this week

Amrita Nayak Dutta

New Delhi, February 10

INDIA IS set to procure six additional Boeing P-8I aircraft, a multi-role Long Range Maritime Reconnaissance Anti-Submarine Warfare (LRMR ASW) aircraft, as part of an inter-governmental agreement with the United States.

The Defence Procurement Board (DPB) is learnt to have cleared the procurement on January 16, weeks before US President Donald Trump, on February 2, announced an agreement with India on a trade deal and cut tariff to 18 per cent. According to highly placed sources, the decision to go ahead with the acquisition of the P-8Is, among other factors, may have played a significant role in achieving a breakthrough in the trade talks.

According to sources, the procurement is set to be cleared by the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) at its meeting on February 12. It will then need to be cleared by the Cabinet Committee on Security, and the final deal will be signed after the cost negotiations are over.

According to officials familiar with the matter, the procurement will be made under the Defence Acquisition Procedure 2020 -- the document that governs all capital military procurements -- thus eliminating any offset obligation to the US firm.

In 2020, the defence ministry had removed the offset clause requirement in Inter-Governmental Agreements when it released the new Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAC) 2020.

So, amid the increased push for 'Make in India', this is one of the few foreign procurements which will not involve any technology transfer and, possibly, other obligations like co-produce-



Decision to go ahead with P-8Is acquisition may have played a role in achieving a breakthrough in trade talks. SOURCE: BOEING.COM

## E. EXPLAINED

### From surveillance to anti-sub warfare

A long-range, multi-mission maritime patrol aircraft operated by the Indian Navy, the Boeing P-8Is are specifically designed for anti-submarine warfare (ASW), anti-surface warfare (ASW), and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR). Considering India's increasing focus on the Indian Ocean Region and maritime matters, these aircraft would strengthen the Navy's capabilities.

tion or creation of maintenance and repair infrastructure.

In November 2019, the DAC had cleared the procurement of six P-8Is, following which the US Department of Defense (DoD), in April 2021, had cleared the sale at an estimated cost of \$2.42 billion. The deal, however, did not fructify. The price of the aircraft is expected to have escalated significantly since then.

In a renewed push, India and the US have been discussing the

finer details of the deal over the last few months. In September last year, a delegation of the US Department of Defence and Boeing officials visited India in this connection.

Last month, US Ambassador to India Sergio Gor, accompanied by a US delegation, had met Defence Secretary R K Singh, following which he posted on X, "...joint exercises will continue, additional sales are in progress..".

Over the last few months, India has also initiated a few other key military procurements from the US, including 216 M982A1 Excalibur tactical projectiles and 100 Javelin rounds for over \$90 million. India has also signed Letters of Offer and Acceptance (LOAs) with the US for sustainment support of the Indian Navy's fleet of MH-60R helicopters through Follow-on Support and Follow-on Supply Support for a period of five years, worth Rs 7,995 crore.

Currently, the Indian Navy operates 12 P-8Is, which were ordered in two batches -- the first batch of eight aircraft was ordered in 2009, and subsequently four aircraft were ordered in 2016. The Rajali-based INAS 312 and INAS 316 at INS Hansa, Goa, operate these aircraft.



# Council to discuss procurement of Rafale for IAF

Amrita Nayak Dutta

New Delhi, February 10

AHEAD OF French President Emmanuel Macron's visit to India between February 17 and 19, the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) is set to discuss the procurement of Rafale fighter jets for the Indian Air Force this week.

According to officials, the DAC, headed by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, will likely discuss the acquisition of the Rafales on Thursday and could grant the Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) for the fighter jets.

Grant of AoNs is the first step in the defence procurement process even though it does not necessarily lead to a final order.

It was immediately not clear whether a deal to procure the jets will be announced during Macron's visit to India. The proposal to procure the Rafale jets was cleared by the Defence Procurement Board last month, and discussions within the military to procure them had only started gathering pace last year.

The exact number of jets to be procured is yet to be made public. The IAF had projected the need to procure 114 aircraft. A few aircraft could be bought in a fly-away condition, and the rest would be manufactured in India with an indigenous content of 30%, which, sources said, is significantly high. India also seeks to integrate indigenous weapons in the aircraft. The deal will be signed after a nod from the Cabinet Committee on Security.

The next fiscal is projected to see a nearly 22% increase in the defence modernisation budget compared to the allocations set for the previous financial year. The highest capital al-

*Officials said the DAC will likely discuss the acquisition on Thursday and could grant the Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) for the fighter jets*

locations – Rs 0.63 lakh crore – for 2026-27 have been earmarked for aircraft and aero-engines, up from Rs 0.48 lakh crore in the previous fiscal.

This jump in capital budgetary allocations also points to the government's plans to sign multiple big-ticket contracts in the upcoming financial year, including the American P8Is and the Rafale jets, which will involve advance payments of up to 10% of the contract value at the outset.

The IAF already operates 36 Rafales, and the Indian Navy would be inducting 26 Rafale M aircraft for carrier operations over the next few years.

The procurement of additional Rafales is thus expected to reduce logistical and training costs.

The modern combat jets will be critical in filling the gap in the IAF's fighter squadron strength, which stands at 29 at present, against the sanctioned squadron strength of 42. They will bridge this capability gap till India's indigenous fighter jet programmes — such as LCA Mk1A, LCA Mk2, and the fifth-generation Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) — mature.

AMCA is expected to enter service only after 2035, and Indian planners are thinking of procuring a separate fifth-generation fighter jet in the interim.



# Fresh violence in Manipur's Ukhrul, Internet suspended

**Jimmy Leivon & Sukrita Baruah**

*Imphal, Guwahati, February 10*

FRESH VIOLENCE broke out in Manipur's Ukhrul district for a third day on Tuesday, resulting in Internet being suspended across the district for five days as well as in parts of Kangpokpi and Kamjong districts.

On Tuesday morning, police confirmed that fresh arson attacks and firing incidents broke out in Litan and adjoining villages of Ukhrul in which over 40 houses were torched by miscreants, amid continuing tensions between Tangkhul Naga and Kuki residents there since February 7.

Soon after, the state home department issued an order, clamping Internet ban in Ukhrul from 11.30 am as a "preventive" and "precautionary" measure.

The fresh violence took place even after the deployment of security forces in the area and setting up of a Joint Control Room at Litan police station to coordinate between the forces.

"Things are still tense in the district and though the civil society organisations on both sides are being engaged, there is still no agreement to resolve the issue. The trigger of this flare-up is a minor issue but there are long standing land disputes

here so that is also aggravating it," said a government official.

By Tuesday evening, Internet restriction was extended to Lhungtin sub-division in Kangpokpi district, a Kuki-Zo-dominated area; and Phungyar sub-division in Kamjong district, a Tangkhul Naga-dominated area, amid circulation of rumours in these areas too.

According to police, the violence was triggered by a drunken brawl on the evening of February 7 at Litan Sareikhong. During the altercation, a Tangkhul Naga man identified as Sterling was allegedly assaulted and sustained serious injuries.

Litan is a small commercial town located about 35 km from Imphal, along the Imphal-Ukhrul road, inhabited by both Tangkhul Naga and Kuki communities, although Ukhrul is Tangkhul Naga-majority district.

Leaders of civil society organisations from both sides said that they have been invited for a meeting with Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh on Wednesday. "The matter has gone completely out of hand with so many different people getting involved, and people are very apprehensive about why the violence is continuing even with the presence of security forces...", said Tangkhul Naga Long vice president R S Jollyson.



# Unemployment dips to 4.8% in Q3, share of salaried jobs down

Siddharth Upasani

New Delhi, February 10

INDIA'S UNEMPLOYMENT rate declined further to 4.8% in the final three months of 2025 from 5.2% in the quarter ended September even as the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) rose, according to data released by the Statistics Ministry on Tuesday. However, the share of salaried jobs continued to fall and was down for all segments from the previous quarter.

As per Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation's (MoSPI) latest quarterly edition of its flagship Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) report for October-December 2025, the share of salaried jobs for those aged 15 years and above declined to 24.9% from 25.4% in July-September 2025 and 25.5% in April-June 2025, indicating that more jobs were being added outside this segment.

Salaried employment is considered better than casual labour and self-employment on account of the social security benefits as well as the regular source of income it provides.

The share of salaried jobs was down for rural males, rural females, as well as their urban counterparts in October-December 2025. Meanwhile, the share of casual labour was un-

***While the increase in overall LFPR to 55.8% in Q3 of FY26 from 55.1% in Q2 is a positive, there will be concerns about the rising share of agri sector jobs***

changed at 18.9% at an all-India level, while that of self-employed rose to 56.3% from 55.8% in July-September 2025.

The PLFS data is based on the Current Weekly Status approach. Under this approach, the activity status of a person is measured for the seven days preceding the date of survey. The PLFS report for October-December 2025 is the third-ever quarterly report by MoSPI under the revamped PLFS methodology. Previous quarterly reports were only for urban areas. While policymakers will be buoyed by the increase in the overall Labour Force Participation Rate — measuring the fraction of the population seeking work — to 55.8% in the December quarter of FY26 from 55.1% in the previous quarter, there will be concerns about the rising share of agri sector jobs. **FULL REPORT ON**

[WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM](http://WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM)

# Netizens bat for 'Mohd.' Deepak's gym

**Ishita Mishra**

NEW DELHI

Help is at hand for Uttarakhand resident Deepak Kumar, who came into the national spotlight after identifying himself as 'Mohammad' Deepak while confronting right-wing activists allegedly harassing a 71-year-old Muslim garment seller over the name of his shop.

The gym owner, who said the incident on Republic Day, an FIR lodged over it, and subsequent protests by Vishva Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal members have taken a toll on his business, is now receiving support from across the country.



Deepak Kumar at his gym, Hulk, located at Jhanda Chowk in Kotdwar. FILE PHOTO

Among those expressing solidarity "with the man who stood for secularism" is Rajya Sabha member John Brittas, who met Mr. Kumar on Sunday and took a one-year membership of Hulk, his gym.

Hundreds of netizens

have also taken to X, Instagram, and other social media platforms asking for account details of Mr. Kumar's gym to extend financial support to him. A few also advised him to start online sessions and promised to sign up for those - an idea 'liked' by actor Swara Bhasker.

Jaipur-based Avi Dandiya, who calls himself a social activist, posted on X that he will sponsor one-month free membership for the first 100 applicants to Mr. Kumar's gym.

## Decline in footfall

Hulk, located at Jhanda Chowk in Kotdwar, previously had around 150 members. The number has

declined to 15-20 now, said Deepak Singh, a trainer at the gym. "Police keep sitting outside the gym all the time. The members are in fear that if something happens some day, they will be in trouble," said Mr. Singh, recalling how until recently Hulk buzzed with the clatter of equipment being put to work and banter between routines.

Despite the decline in footfall, Mr. Kumar still arrives at Hulk before the crack of dawn every day, wiping the dumbbells, adjusting the mirrors - and firm in the belief that the space he has built with his own hands will once again teem with fitness enthusiasts chasing their dreams.



# Bangladesh plans to shift from Indian to U.S. cotton

Information adviser says 'game changer' trade deal can provide Bangladesh greater access to U.S. market; experts caution it will prevent Dhaka from exploring other cotton producing countries

**Kallol Bhattacharjee**

DHAKA

**B**angladesh will replace Indian cotton with U.S.-produced cotton as a result of the U.S.-Bangladesh trade deal that was inked on Monday, said a spokesperson for the interim government here.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Shafiqul Alam, information adviser to chief adviser Muhammad Yunus, said the trade deal was a "game changer" that can provide Bangladesh greater access to the U.S. market.

Professor Selim Jehan of BRAC University in Dhaka said the deal had made Bangladesh's cotton market "attractive" for the U.S. but cautioned that Bangladesh should ensure that the U.S. cotton was of high quality.

"We have got a tariff rate of 19% in the new trade deal with the U.S., which is good compared to our rivals like Cambodia and Indonesia but a clause in the deal has given us greater advantage as the U.S. has agreed to reduce tariff to zero if our textile producers switch to U.S. cotton or manmade fibre," said Mr. Alam, describing the trade deal as a "big boost" for



U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer and Bangladesh's adviser Sheikh Bashir Uddin signing the trade deal. @USTradeRep/X

Bangladesh's textile sector.

Mr. Alam said that Bangladesh traditionally imports cotton from India and Central Asia as it does not produce the cotton or yarns necessary for its large textile sector.

However, this shortcoming has also helped it negotiate with the U.S. more freely as Bangladesh does not have any cotton farmer lobby that could have pressured the government.

## Tit-for-tat restrictions

Cotton and cotton yarn supplies from India and export of Bangladesh's textile products to India came to the spotlight in April-May 2025 when both sides imposed tit-for-tat restrictions on the movement of the items.

Bangladesh restricted import of yarn from India through its land ports through an order dated April 13, 2025.

India exported to Bangladesh cotton yarn worth \$1.6 billion in 2024 and manmade fibre (MMF) yarn worth nearly \$85 million.

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"It appears at first that if Bangladesh produces textile products using raw cotton from the U.S., then Bangladesh will save money as the 19 per cent tariff will be reduced to zero. But then, we also have to combine the amount to purchase U.S. cotton with freight charges, transportation etc. to see if ultimately it amounts to a profitable bargain," Professor Jehan told *The Hindu*.

He further said that Bangladesh will have to ensure that the U.S.-supplied cotton matches the cotton from other countries, including India and Egypt.

**EXPORTERS PERTURBED**  
» BUSINESS PAGE

# White House fact sheet adds 'certain pulses' to reduced/ zero tariff list

**Harikishan Sharma**

*New Delhi, February 10*

DAYS AFTER India and the US announced a framework for an interim agreement on reciprocal, mutually beneficial trade, the White House has released a fact sheet which states that Delhi "will eliminate or reduce tariffs" on American industrial goods and a wide range of food

and agricultural products including "certain pulses".

The mention of "certain pulses" in the US fact sheet, released Monday, is significant because it was not mentioned in the joint statement of February 6.

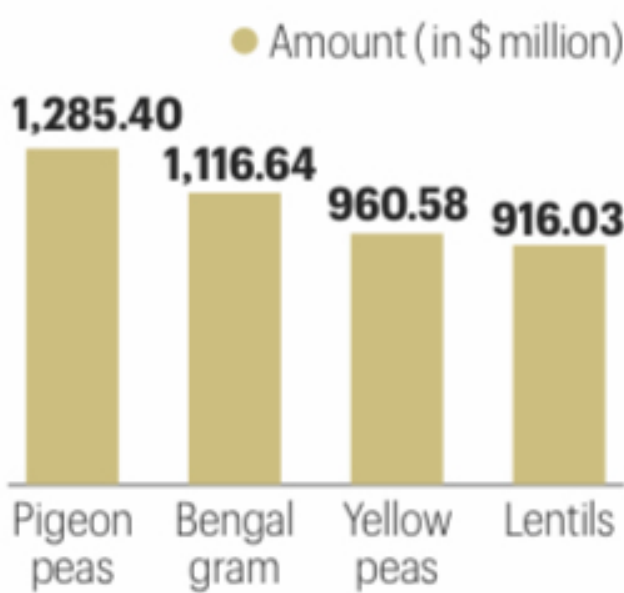
The 'Fact Sheet: The United States and India Announce Historic Trade Deal' states:

**»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**



# Tariff on pulses

## ● Top four imported pulses in 2024-25



## India's pulse imports in last five years

	Amount (in \$ million)
2020-21	1,611.72
2021-22	2,228.95
2022-23	1,943.89
2023-24	3,746.78
2024-25	5,477.28

“India will eliminate or reduce tariffs on all US industrial goods and a wide range of US food and agricultural products, including dried distillers’ grains (DDGs), red sorghum, tree nuts, fresh and processed fruit, certain pulses, soybean oil, wine and spirits, and additional products.”

This is different from the paragraph in the February 6 joint statement which detailed “key terms” of the interim agreement. It said: “India will eliminate or reduce tariffs on all US industrial goods and a wide range of US food and agricultural products, including dried distillers’ grains, red sorghum for animal feed, tree nuts, fresh and processed fruit, soybean oil, wine and spirits, and additional products.” The joint statement was announced following a call between President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi last week, in which the leaders reached a framework for an interim agreement on reciprocal trade and reaffirmed their commitment to broader US-India Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) negotiations.

Addressing a press conference in Bhopal on February 8, Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said hulled grains, flour, wheat, corn, rice, millet, potato, onion, peas, beans, cucumber, mushrooms, pulses, frozen vegetables, oranges, grapes, lemons, strawberries and mixed canned veg-

etables will not come to India. A day earlier, Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal had mentioned “lentils” among the items that have been imported from the US for years and will see tariff cuts. “We have been importing some items for 20 years, even during the UPA tenure. Some items, like pistachios, walnuts, almonds and lentils have been exported (from US to India) for years. We have granted phased eliminations on some of these items, and we have granted exemptions from the very beginning for certain items we need,” he said.

India’s pulses import bill jumped by 46% to \$5.48 billion in FY 2024-25 from \$3.75 billion in 2023-24. Of India’s total pulses bill of \$5.48 billion in 2024-25, the US accounted for only \$89.65 million. India imported a small quantity of lentils worth \$78 million from the US during the last fiscal, ranking third after Canada (\$466 million) and Australia (\$328 million). In 2024-25, India imported \$1,285.40 million worth of pigeon peas, \$1,116.64 million worth of Bengal gram, \$960.58 million of yellow peas, and \$916.03 million of lentils. While import of tur and urad are allowed duty-free until March 31, 2026, yellow pea imports attract a 30% duty from November 1, 2025. Lentils, the main pulse imported from the US, currently attract a 10% duty.

# Indian exporters perturbed by U.S.-Bangladesh trade pact

Bangladesh must use U.S.-sourced raw materials to avail zero tariff, but Indian sector stakeholders feel the time taken to receive U.S. cotton, its transport and storage, could reduce its cost advantage

**M. Soundariya Preetha**  
COIMBATORE

**T**he U.S. Bangladesh Agreement on Reciprocal Trade has led to concerns among Indian textile and apparel exporters who were looking forward to a competitive advantage over Bangladesh with the 19% tariff on goods from that country, as Indian merchandise would be taxed a tad lower at 18%.

According to the U.S. Bangladesh Agreement, the U.S. will establish a mechanism that will allow for certain textile and apparel goods from Bangladesh to receive zero reciprocal tariff based on the use of U.S. cotton or MMF yarn.

India exported \$1.47 billion worth cotton yarn (570 million kg) to Bangladesh, which is the biggest destination for Indian yarn, in 2024-2025. It also shipped 12-14 lakh bales of



**Top destination:** India exported \$1.47 billion worth cotton yarn to Bangladesh in 2024-2025. SIVA SARAVANAN S

cotton to Bangladesh last year. Almost 20% of Bangladesh's garment and 26% of India's cotton apparel exports are to the U.S.

## Immediate impact

"I fear that the immediate impact will be on Indian cotton yarn as Bangladesh can buy U.S. cotton and spin at its textile mills," said Chandrima Chatterjee, secretary general of

the Confederation of Indian Textile Industry.

"How will the U.S. determine traceability of the raw material? As Bangladesh is very strong in apparels, we may stand to lose," said K.M. Subramanian, president of the Tiruppur Exporters Association.

"Bangladesh has to buy MMF yarn or cotton from the U.S. for the reciprocal tariff of 19% to be waived.

But, the MFN rate will continue. The time taken to receive the U.S. cotton and the transport and storage costs should be taken into consideration. Further, not all products can be made from American cotton. So, the product mix should change and supply chain should be realigned in Bangladesh," said Siddhartha Rajagopal, executive director of the Cotton Textiles Export Promotion Council.

"There is an Executive Order by the U.S. government issued last April that says that the ad valorem rates of duty applies only on the non-US component of a product, when there is at least 20% value addition," said A. Sakthivel, chairman of the AEPC.

"We will appeal to the Indian government to ask for a provision similar to the one given to Bangladesh for Indian apparel exporters too," he said.



# Bangladesh plans to shift from Indian to U.S. cotton

Information adviser says 'game changer' trade deal can provide Bangladesh greater access to U.S. market; experts caution it will prevent Dhaka from exploring other cotton producing countries

**Kallol Bhattacharjee**

DHAKA

**B**angladesh will replace Indian cotton with U.S.-produced cotton as a result of the U.S.-Bangladesh trade deal that was inked on Monday, said a spokesperson for the interim government here.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Shafiqul Alam, information adviser to chief adviser Muhammad Yunus, said the trade deal was a "game changer" that can provide Bangladesh greater access to the U.S. market.

Professor Selim Jehan of BRAC University in Dhaka said the deal had made Bangladesh's cotton market "attractive" for the U.S. but cautioned that Bangladesh should ensure that the U.S. cotton was of high quality.

"We have got a tariff rate of 19% in the new trade deal with the U.S., which is good compared to our rivals like Cambodia and Indonesia but a clause in the deal has given us greater advantage as the U.S. has agreed to reduce tariff to zero if our textile producers switch to U.S. cotton or manmade fibre," said Mr. Alam, describing the trade deal as a "big boost" for



U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer and Bangladesh's adviser Sheikh Bashir Uddin signing the trade deal. @USTradeRep/X

Bangladesh's textile sector.

Mr. Alam said that Bangladesh traditionally imports cotton from India and Central Asia as it does not produce the cotton or yarns necessary for its large textile sector.

However, this shortcoming has also helped it negotiate with the U.S. more freely as Bangladesh does not have any cotton farmer lobby that could have pressured the government.

## Tit-for-tat restrictions

Cotton and cotton yarn supplies from India and export of Bangladesh's textile products to India came to the spotlight in April-May 2025 when both sides imposed tit-for-tat restrictions on the movement of the items.

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**EXPORTERS PERTURBED**  
» BUSINESS PAGE

# Hope US deal won't mean Delhi-Moscow ties suffer: Russia

Divya A

New Delhi, February 10

EXPRESSING CONCERN over the India-US trade framework and statements by US President Donald Trump about India committing to cut its import of Russian oil, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov told *The Indian Express* that Moscow hopes the result of the deal is "not that we (India-Russia ties) suffer".

The remarks by Ryabkov, who is in New Delhi for the first BRICS Sherpas meeting, come a day after Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri said India's energy sourcing would be guided by national interests. Edited excerpts from an interview:

**India and the US have**

EXPRESS  
interview



**SERGEI RYABKOV**

RUSSIAN DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER

**agreed on a framework for an interim trade pact, which also refers to India's dealings with Russia. What do you make of it?**

Well, I hope the result of this deal would not mean that we (India-Russia ties) suffer or

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



# Russia minister

experience difficulties and troubles in our bilateral interactions. Trade volumes (between India and Russia) have been reasonably high, but potential is even higher. So I'm sure that for India, there should be place for everyone and capabilities to interact with everyone. What is problematic with the current US policy is that they want everything for themselves and nothing for others. This is a unilateral approach at its worst.

**Given the tariff wars, what are the practical deliverables from BRICS that you would be looking at?**

Tariffs and coercive measures of all sorts are unacceptable ways to establish one-power dominance. I say so very straightforwardly, because there is no other way of explaining what's going on. Other countries, who believe in multilateralism, think cooperation and mutual benefit are the way to prosper and to ensure that, we collectively resolve issues and withstand challenges.

So we need to be independent. We need to have alternatives to established systems. Like President (Vladimir) Putin said on several occasions, 'If Russia would not be deprived of using dollar, we would still be with dollar... But if this is not the case, we should find an answer'. We should act according to our own interests and there is no hidden agenda. We speak very straightforwardly on what's going on, and BRICS members and partner countries know it first-hand. So no one should be afraid of BRICS, but no one should try to demolish BRICS.

**The US has often criticised BRICS as an anti-West alliance, while India has been saying that it's not anti-West but non-West.**

Indeed, this is how we see it as well in Russia. BRICS has never been an anti-Western entity. If it would be, if one would have an idea to change the character of BRICS into something anti-Western, I'm sure the rupture would come within the grouping and we will be in great

trouble, but there was no intention whatsoever. We do what we see as necessary for ourselves. (The idea is to) dismantle barriers that are artificial. We should do that in all areas... to ensure free flow of goods, investment.

**What do you make of the US linking trade with the war in Ukraine, telling others to stop trade with Russia?**

This is unacceptable. We are not in a war with Ukraine. We are operating under a special military operation mandated by the President, with the only purpose to protect Russians and Russian-speaking people living in Ukraine... The Western understanding and explanation of what's going on has nothing to do with our own. So we reject and completely dissociate ourselves with any attempts to link one with the other. There should be no place for such sanctioning and such linkages. I hope reasonable people like those of India will appreciate and understand this equally.

**India-Russia ties have been on an upswing. With the BRICS Leaders Summit later this year, how do you see the trajectory of the bilateral ties?**

Ties depend on both sides. We are prepared to go as far as India will. The sky is the limit. We have extraordinary history in our relationship. We have several projects in the pipeline, many of them with no parallel... But in India, with its 1.5 billion people and exponential growth rates, there should be a place for everyone here. I'm hopeful that we take further steps in terms of numbers of our trade, investment and projects.

**Is there any conversation with BRICS partners on de-dollarisation or an alternative currency?**

Yes, we are talking on this. Alternative currency is probably not the word I would use on this occasion. We do not create alternative currency, common currency. We are talking on even broader use of national currencies in settlements.



# Misri meets China's vice-minister; talks focus on border peace, trade

## Beijing's message: Understand and respect India's UNSC aspirations

**Divya A**

*New Delhi, February 10*

TRADE RELATIONS and maintaining peace along the Line of Actual Control remained the focus of the talks between India and China on Tuesday, as Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and his Chinese counterpart Ma Zhaoxu met in New Delhi to take stock of overall progress in ties post the border agreement of October 2024.

In their talks, Misri and Ma Zhaoxu, the Executive Vice Foreign Minister of China who is in New Delhi to attend the BRICS Sherpa meeting, primarily focused on steps taken by the two sides to stabilise and rebuild bilateral ties that had come under severe strain following the over four-year-long military standoff in eastern Ladakh.

As per the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) statement on Tuesday evening, in their meeting held under the framework of India-China Strategic Dialogue, both sides recognised the need for an early conclusion of an updated air services agreement.

The Vice Foreign Minister also conveyed that China understands and respects India's aspirations for UNSC membership, the MEA said.

"Both sides underscored the importance of peace and tranquility in the border areas for overall progress in bilateral relations," the statement said, adding, "They reiterated their commitment to implement the guidance provided by their leaders including on the need to proceed from a political and strategic direction to... issues and concerns related to bilateral trade."

The MEA said Misri noted the successful resumption of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra and hoped for the continued expansion of the scale of the Yatra. Misri and Ma also discussed various regional and international issues, as per MEA.

"Both sides recognised the need for an early conclusion of an updated air services agreement. The two sides agreed to continue to take practical steps for visa facilitation and promote people-to-people contacts," it said.

In a post on X, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said both sides reviewed the "positive momentum" in bilateral relations and discussed ways to further advance ties by enhancing people-to-people exchanges and "addressing con-



Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri with his Chinese counterpart Ma Zhaoxu during the India-China Strategic Dialogue, on Tuesday. ANI

cerns on sensitive issues".

As per the Chinese readout post the meeting, both sides had "friendly, candid and in-depth communication on the interna-

tional and regional situation, respective internal and external policies, international and regional issues of shared interest, and China-India relations".

It said that "given the complex and profound changes in the international situation, China and India should work together to earnestly implement the important common understandings reached between President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, view and handle China-India relations from a strategic and long-term perspective, and uphold the strategic perception that China and India are cooperative partners instead of rivals".

China and India should deepen mutual trust and expand cooperation, properly manage differences, and promote the development of China-India relations along a sound and steady track, the Chinese statement said.

Earlier in the day, after the Vice Foreign Minister's participation in the BRICS Sherpa meeting in New Delhi, the Chinese Ambassador to India Xu Feihong posted on X: "China is ready to work with India, the BRICS chair for the year, and BRICS members as well as partner countries to follow the correct course of BRICS cooperation, deepen practical cooperation, improve the working mechanism, strengthen multilateral coordination, uphold international fairness and justice, and bring greater development to BRICS cooperation."



# Takaichi's win could mean more tensions with China

## NEWS ANALYSIS

**Suhasini Haidar**

NEW DELHI

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's landslide victory in the snap polls she had called for could mean more tensions with China and hold out hope for closer India ties in the Indo-Pacific, say experts.

In particular, the Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) record performance winning two-thirds of the Japanese House of Representatives will accrue to Ms. Takaichi personally, given the LDP's poor performance in the past. Ms. Takaichi, who first came to power after an intra-party election in October 2025, was preceded by Shigeru Ishiba, Fumio Kishida and Yoshihide Suga, all of whom served as PM for two-three years.

"The win is entirely due to PM Takaichi's personal popularity," said former Ambassador to Japan Deepa Gopalan Wadhwa, comparing the "drubbing the LDP had got" in 2024 elections to the latest polls where the LDP won 316 of 465 seats. "As a protégé of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe she can be expected to carry on his legacy and that means focus on the Indo-Pacific and valuing close ties with India," Ms. Wadhwa told *The Hindu*.

In particular, Ms. Takaichi's personal style in international engagements won her many voters, Tomohiko Taniguchi, professor at Japan's Keio University and an adviser to Shinzo Abe, said.

"The way she smiled with Donald Trump, the way she embraced the Ita-



**Popular choice:** Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi enters the Prime Minister's Office in Tokyo on Tuesday. AFP

lian Prime Minister, and the way she sat down at the drum set with the president of South Korea—all this set her dramatically apart from her three immediate predecessors: Suga, Kishida, and, worse still, Ishiba, none of whom learned how to connect with ordinary people," he added, pointing to Ms. Takaichi's "viral" social media content.

The Japanese PM will now be watched most closely for whether she sets out mend fences with China, or step up the country's security policies to counter its maritime neighbour with whom tensions have been high since November, when Ms. Takaichi's comments on Taiwan set off a series of economic sanctions by China.

### Defence spend

"[PM Takaichi] can certainly increase the defence budget – something China may not welcome. Yet, the relationship between Xi and Takaichi could well improve, simply because Xi tends to show due respect to leaders who have proven themselves strong and resilient," Mr. Taniguchi said.

Beijing will also watch closely to see if Ms. Takai-

chi, with her massive mandate makes moves toward a less pacifist, more securitised constitution although she would only be able to make changes if the LDP wins similarly in upper house where elections are not due until 2028.

Ms. Takaichi, who was congratulated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the win on Sunday, said in a post she looks forward to working on bilateral ties and to "cooperate in realising a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)". However, New Delhi will hope for her to push specifically for holding the Quad summit in India, which has not been held since 2024, with the U.S. as well. Ms. Takaichi is expected to travel to Washington in March, ahead of a visit to Beijing by U.S. President Donald Trump in April.

"[PM] Takaichi knows that her friend and mentor, Abe Shinzo, respected both Modi and Singh, and how much strategic importance he placed on India and the QUAD," said Mr. Taniguchi. "She has indicated that she intends to give renewed momentum to FOIP, QUAD, and Japan's relations with India", he added, in comments to *The Hindu*.

## China to offer support for 'reunification forces' in Taiwan

**Reuters**

BEIJING

China will offer firm support for "patriotic pro-reunification forces" in Taiwan and strike hard against "separatists", the top Chinese official in charge of policy towards the democratically-governed island said in comments published on Tuesday.

China, which views Taiwan as its own territory despite the objections of the government in Taipei, has ramped up its military and political pressure against the island as Beijing seeks to assert its sovereignty claims.

Addressing this year's annual "Taiwan Work Conference", the ruling communist party's fourth-ranked leader Wang Huning said officials must advance the "great cause of national reunification", the official state-run *Xinhua* news agency said.

### 'Safeguard peace'

It is necessary to "firmly support the patriotic pro-unification forces on the island, resolutely strike against 'Taiwan independence' separatist forces, oppose interference by external forces, and safeguard peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait", *Xinhua* paraphrased him as saying.

While the report made no mention of the use of force, China has never renounced using military means to bring Taiwan under its control, the Chinese Defence Ministry struck a stronger note commenting on Taiwanese military deployments.

# Israel PM, Trump to meet as Iran tensions stay high

**Agence France-Presse**

JERUSALEM

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Tuesday the top priority in his talks with U.S. President Donald Trump would be the ongoing negotiations with Iran, as he presses for a tougher U.S. approach to Tehran's ballistic missile programme.

So far, Iran has rejected expanding the scope of its talks with the U.S. beyond the issue of its nuclear programme, though Washington also wants Tehran's ballistic missile programme and its support for regional militant groups on the table.

The two leaders are to meet in Washington on Wednesday, their sixth such encounter in the United States since Mr. Trump



Benjamin Netanyahu

returned to office a year ago.

They also met in Jerusalem in October when Mr. Trump announced a ceasefire in Gaza.

Wednesday's meeting comes days after arch-foes Iran and the United States held talks in Oman, after which Mr. Trump said another round of negotiations would follow.

Mr. Netanyahu and Mr. Trump will also meet amid

growing international outrage over Israeli measures to tighten control of the occupied West Bank by allowing settlers to buy land directly from its Palestinian owners.

However, it remains unclear whether the issue will be raised in their talks, despite Mr. Trump's past opposition to any annexation of the West Bank.

"On this trip we will discuss a range of issues: Gaza, the region, but of course first and foremost the negotiations with Iran," Mr. Netanyahu said, in a video statement before his departure.

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesperson warned on Tuesday that Mr. Netanyahu's visit would have a "destructive" influence on diplomacy that is "detrimental to the region".



# New beginnings

## The end of START should prompt discussions on wider and equal terms

**O**n February 5, 2026, the 'New' Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) expired. A symbol of an older era in global geopolitics, where the U.S. and the then Union of Soviet Socialist Republics were engaged in an escalating spiral of one-upmanship such as 'testing' mammoth nuclear weapons and space races, START represented a pivotal shift in how they approached nuclear competition – from unlimited accumulation towards negotiated reduction. It emerged from decades of arms control efforts and altered the trajectory of the Cold War's final years. The nuclear arms race that dominated the Cold War saw both superpowers accumulate massive arsenals. By the 1980s, they each possessed over 10,000 strategic nuclear warheads – the U.S. with a lopsided advantage. Earlier arms control measures such as the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks, in the 1970s, attempted to limit the growth of these arsenals, but were focused on capping numbers rather than reducing them.

START I negotiations began in 1982 and proved complex. The treaty was not signed until July 1991, just months before the Soviet Union's collapse. It represented the first agreement between the superpowers to actually reduce strategic nuclear arsenals rather than merely limit their growth. The treaty required each side to cut strategic warheads to 6,000 and reduce delivery systems proportionally. This was a significant symbolic and practical achievement – each country would have roughly 30% fewer warheads than existing agreements permitted. Later agreements built on START's framework and reduced deployable warheads to 1,700-2,200 a side, and the New START Treaty (2010) limited each side to 1,550 deployed strategic warheads. Each represented further progress down from Cold War peaks. The New START, with its 15-year lifespan, ought to have been replaced with more ambitious outcomes. But given that global geopolitics seems to be receding into imperialist structures – mercantilist tariff systems and a craving for territories – it is unsurprising that arms-race doctrines too will be resuscitated. U.S. President Donald Trump has stated that any future arms control must include China, given its growing nuclear stockpile, signalling that the U.S. will not be bound by limits if other major powers (such as China) are free to build up theirs. The end of START may have serious consequences for global agreements, such as the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. They are both noble in theory but the first is discriminatory in the way it seeks to rid the world of nuclear weapons. The end of START is an opportunity to restart discussion on more equal terms.



# Why Canada can't leverage oil like China did rare earths

In its escalating tensions with the U.S., Canada will find it difficult to mimic China, whose dominance over rare earths gave it leverage during the tariff war

## DATA POINT

Nitika Francis

**O**n Monday, U.S. President Donald Trump threatened to stop the opening of the new bridge, costing \$4.6 billion and connecting Windsor in Canada and Detroit in the U.S., until his country was "compensated" by Canada "for everything we have given them". This is the latest in a series of threats that Mr. Trump has issued against Canada. In January, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney negotiated a deal with China to lower tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles in return for lower import taxes on Canadian farm products. In response, Mr. Trump threatened a 100% tariff on all Canadian imports.

In fact, Mr. Trump began his second term by making claims on Canada as the 51st State of the U.S. So, the current situation is not a sudden shift in the relationship, but a severe escalation of a strategy that began last year.

It was in this fraught climate that Mr. Carney took a stand against Mr. Trump in Davos. "The rules-based order is fading. That the strong can do what they can, and the weak must suffer what they must," he said. "The middle powers must act together because if we're not at the table, we're on the menu." The question is, can Mr. Carney walk the talk? Does he have strong bargaining chips like China had when the U.S. tried a similar tactic against the country?

When the U.S. waged a tariff war on China, the latter leveraged its dominance over rare earths, a critical component in clean energy technologies. It introduced measures that required the Chinese government's approval to export items that contained rare earths. In fact, the U.S. is the second-largest importer of Chinese rare earths, with about 22% of China's exports going to the U.S. in 2024. More importantly, about 35% of

U.S.'s rare earth imports came from China (Chart 1A and 1B). Given this high dependency, China used the commodity as a bargaining chip.

Does Canada have a similar bargaining chip? In theory, it does. It is the U.S.'s largest foreign supplier of energy products such as crude oil. Data show that about 60% of the U.S.'s crude oil imports came from Canada in 2024. However, how practical is it for Canada to use this "leverage" to bargain?

Canada has been pumping almost all of its crude oil to the U.S., with 95% of all crude exports in 2024 going to its neighbour (Chart 2A and 2B). So, even if it plans to reduce oil shipments to the U.S., it needs to negotiate fresh deals, like the one Ottawa is trying to strike with New Delhi. Notably, in parallel, Trump has claimed that India will be purchasing oil from Venezuela instead of Iran.

But even if Canada manages to secure deals to diversify away from the U.S., finding newer markets is not the only hindrance. The way Canada's oil pipeline is built demands a forced collaboration with the U.S. About 95% of the oil is produced in Canada's western provinces (Chart 3A). Meanwhile, a large chunk of its population resides in its eastern provinces (Chart 3B). In order for the oil to be transported from the west to the east, it must be transported through pipelines which pass through the U.S., because of geographical hurdles. So Canada's oil network is intertwined with the U.S.'s energy infrastructure.

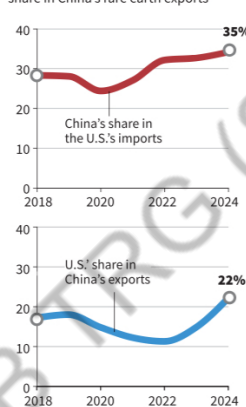
The other bargaining chip could be to threaten stopping exports to the U.S.'s northern States. The States that share borders with Canada are especially heavily dependent on Canada for imports; 90% of Montana's imports and 70% of Maine's in 2024 were from the northern neighbour (Map 4).

However, the volume of imports by these States is too small compared to overall U.S. imports to have a significant impact.

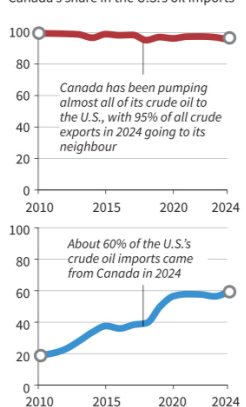
## An American spat

The data were sourced from the United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics Database, the Canada Energy Regulator, the International Trade Administration and Statistics Canada

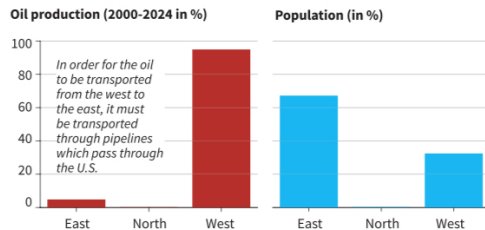
**CHART 1A & 1B:** China's share in the U.S.'s rare earth imports and the U.S.'s share in China's rare earth exports



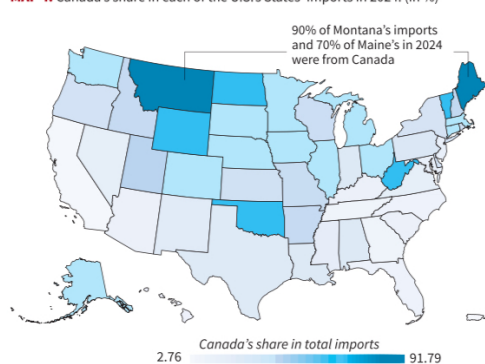
**CHART 2A & B:** The U.S.'s share in Canada's crude oil exports and Canada's share in the U.S.'s oil imports



**CHART 3A & B:** Canada's region-wise share of oil production between 2000 and 2024 and region-wise share of population in 2025



**MAP 4:** Canada's share in each of the U.S.'s States' imports in 2024. (in %)





# Unemployment dips to 4.8% in Q3, share of salaried jobs down

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INDIA'S UNEMPLOYMENT rate declined further to 4.8% in the final three months of 2025 from 5.2% in the quarter ended September even as the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) rose, according to data released by the Statistics Ministry on Tuesday. However, the share of salaried jobs continued to fall and was down for all segments from the previous quarter.

As per Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation's (MoSPI) latest quarterly edition of its flagship Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) report for October-December 2025, the share of salaried jobs for those aged 15 years and above declined to 24.9% from 25.4% in July-September 2025 and 25.5% in April-June 2025, indicating that more jobs were being added outside this segment.

Salaried employment is considered better than casual labour and self-employment on account of the social security benefits as well as the regular source of income it provides.

The share of salaried jobs was down for rural males, rural females, as well as their urban counterparts in October-December 2025. Meanwhile, the share of casual labour was un-

***While the increase in overall LFPR to 55.8% in Q3 of FY26 from 55.1% in Q2 is a positive, there will be concerns about the rising share of agri sector jobs***

changed at 18.9% at an all-India level, while that of self-employed rose to 56.3% from 55.8% in July-September 2025.

The PLFS data is based on the Current Weekly Status approach. Under this approach, the activity status of a person is measured for the seven days preceding the date of survey. The PLFS report for October-December 2025 is the third-ever quarterly report by MoSPI under the revamped PLFS methodology. Previous quarterly reports were only for urban areas. While policymakers will be buoyed by the increase in the overall Labour Force Participation Rate — measuring the fraction of the population seeking work — to 55.8% in the December quarter of FY26 from 55.1% in the previous quarter, there will be concerns about the rising share of agri sector jobs. **FULL REPORT ON**

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