

DAC gives nod for 114 Rafales for IAF, and six more P-8I aircraft for Navy

Approvals for ₹3.6 lakh crore mark one of the largest capital acquisition clearances; council chaired by the Defence Minister accords AoN for air-ship-based pseudo satellite for the IAF, and anti-tank mines and overhaul of vehicle platforms of Army

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

The Defence Acquisition Council, chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, on Thursday accorded Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) for capital acquisition proposals worth approximately ₹3.6 lakh crore.

The proposals include 114 Rafale fighter jets from France for the Indian Air Force and six P-8I long-range maritime reconnaissance aircraft from the United States for the Indian Navy.

The Defence Ministry said that for the IAF, the AoN was approved for the procurement of 114 multi-role fighter aircraft (MRFA), combat missiles, and an air-ship-based high-altitude pseudo satellite (AS-HAPS). The Rafale jets are expected to significantly enhance the IAF's air-dominance capability across the full spectrum of conflict and strengthen its



'Make in India' ambitions: Most of the jets will be manufactured in India, providing a boost to domestic industry. K. MURALI KUMAR

long-range offensive and deterrence posture.

A majority of the aircraft will be manufactured in India, providing a boost to domestic defence production.

The Ministry further added that the combat mis-

siles would enhance the IAF's stand-off ground attack capability with deep-strike precision and high accuracy.

The AS-HAPS platform will be deployed for persistent intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance

(ISR), electronic intelligence (ELINT), telecommunications and remote sensing for military applications.

For the Army, the DAC accorded AoN for the procurement of anti-tank mines (Vibhav) and the overhaul of vehicle platforms of armoured recovery vehicles (ARVs), T-72 tanks and infantry combat vehicles (BMP-II).

The Vibhav mines will serve as an anti-tank obstacle system to delay and disrupt advancing enemy mechanised forces. The overhaul of existing armoured platforms is aimed at extending their service life and ensuring operational readiness, it added.

Reconnaissance aircraft
The Navy received AoN for six additional P-8I long-range maritime reconnaissance aircraft from the U.S., along with a 4 MW marine gas turbine-based electric power generator. The P-8I aircraft will signif-

icantly bolster the Navy's long-range anti-submarine warfare, maritime surveillance and maritime strike capabilities.

Reducing dependence

The induction of the marine gas turbine-based generator under the Make-I category of the Defence Acquisition Procedure, 2020 is expected to reduce dependence on foreign manufacturers and enhance self-reliance in naval power generation systems.

For the Indian Coast Guard, the AoN was granted for the procurement of electro-optical/infrared (EO/IR) systems for its Dornier aircraft. The systems will enhance maritime surveillance and strengthen coastal security operations.

The approvals mark one of the largest capital acquisition clearances in recent years, underlining the government's thrust on force modernisation and indigenisation.

Govt inks deal with HAL for 8 Dornier 228 aircraft for ICG

Rs 2,312-crore contract includes operational role equipment for the Coast Guard

Amrita Nayak Dutta
New Delhi, February 12

THE MINISTRY of Defence on Thursday signed a major deal with the state-owned Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) for the acquisition of eight Dornier 228 aircraft along with Operational Role Equipment for the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) for Rs 2,312 crore.

In a statement, the Ministry of Defence said that a contract has been signed with the Kanpur-based Transport Aircraft Division of HAL under the Buy (Indian) category in the presence of Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh in New Delhi.

This is the second major deal that the government has signed with HAL in this financial year.

In September last year, the Ministry of Defence had signed a Rs 62,370 crore deal with HAL for the procurement of 97 Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Mk1A for the Indian Air Force. This in-



Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh and others during the signing of a contract with HAL on Thursday. ANI

cludes 68 fighters and 29 twin-seaters, along with associated equipment. The delivery of these aircraft would begin during 2027-28 and be completed over a period of six years.

Dornier 228 is a twin-engine turboprop and a multi-mission maritime patrol aircraft manufactured by HAL for the ICG. According to the ICG, the aircraft is lightweight with a wide range of operating speeds and fuel efficiency.

The ICG operates this aircraft in two variants in 228-100 and 228-200 series.

The highly versatile aircraft can perform a variety of roles, including maritime patrol and surveillance, marine pollution con-

tingency, search and rescue missions and medical evacuation.

The Defence Ministry statement noted that the programme is expected to generate significant direct and indirect employment by strengthening HAL's production ecosystem and supporting a broad network of MSMEs and ancillary industries.

"It will also create sustained opportunities in Maintenance, Repair & Overhaul and life cycle technical support," it added.

"The contract reinforces the Government's commitment to Aatmanirbhar Bharat and Make-in-India while bolstering India's maritime security architecture," the statement noted.

In a first, IAF instructors to train Royal Air Force pilots

Amrita Nayak Dutta

New Delhi, February 12

FOR THE first time, Indian Air Force instructors will impart training to British pilots at the Royal Air Force (RAF) Valley in the UK.

According to a statement from the British High Commission, the decision in this regard was taken at the 19th UK-India Air Staff Talks in New Delhi on Thursday, where both countries have agreed to further enhance military training engagements.

Under the latest agreement, the Indian Air Force (IAF) will deploy three Qualified Flight Instructors (QFI) to Royal Air Force (RAF) Valley – the training base for British fast jet pilots, the statement noted.

“This marks the first time that Indian QFIs will impart fast jet training to British pilots at RAF Valley. The deployment will initially be for a period of two years,” it added.

IAF instructors will be deployed in RAF Valley to instruct on the BAE Hawk T2 or Texan T1 aircraft. During their tenure, the Indian QFIs will remain under IAF command while working for RAF commanders

INDIA ASSUMES COMMAND OF CTF154

Amrita Nayak Dutta

New Delhi, February 12

IN A first, the Indian Navy has taken command of Combined Task Force (CTF) 154, an important multinational training task force under the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), a development the Navy said underscores India's commitment to collaborative maritime security and capacity building in the Indian Ocean Region and beyond.

In a statement, the Navy said the change of command ceremony was conducted on

Wednesday at CMF Headquarters in Manama, Bahrain, and was presided over by VAdm Curt A Renshaw, Commander, CMF / US NAVCENT / US Fifth Fleet.

Vice Admiral Tarun Sobti, Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff (DCNS), and senior military leaders from other member nations were present at the event. Commodore Milind M Mookashi from the Indian Navy, formally took over as Commander CTF 154 from the outgoing Commander of the Italian Navy.

on instructional duties.

An agreement on cooperation in military training was signed between the UK and India during PM Keir Starmer's visit to Mumbai in October 2025.

According to the statement, the development closely follows the maiden deployment in January this year of an Indian Air Force officer as an instructor to the Royal Air Force College Cranwell – the air academy that trains the next generation of RAF officers.

With this, all three British military academies will now host Indian officers as instructors from respective services.

The Britannia Royal Naval College Dartmouth already has an officer from the Indian Navy as one of its instructors since May 2024. This development was followed by the deployment of an Indian Army officer to Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in May 2025 as an instructor. The statement quoted Air Vice Marshal Ian Townsend,

Assistant Chief of the Air Staff, as stating that the signing of this Letter of Agreement is a significant step in strengthening the longstanding relationship between the Royal Air Force and the Indian Air Force.

“Bringing Indian QFIs into UK Military Flying Training Systems deepens our cooperation, enhances interoperability and reinforces our shared commitment to excellence in aircrew training,” he said.

“Together, we are investing in the foundation of a long-term collaboration and shaping a partnership that is both enduring and strategic in its outlook,” he added.

Commodore Chris Saunders, MBE Royal Navy, Defence Adviser, British High Commission, said: “The forthcoming deployment of Indian Qualified Flying Instructors to the UK represents another significant milestone in our expanding defence relationship, positively building on the mandate of UK-India Vision 2035.” “It reinforces mutual trust and shared experience that underpins our training cooperation and exemplifies increasingly sophisticated levels of interoperability we are building together across our services.”

Fresh violence in Manipur: 2 more houses set on fire in Ukhrul district

Jimmy Leivon

Imphal, February 12

AFTER 24 HOURS of relative calm, tension gripped Manipur's Ukhrul district again on Thursday when two houses were set on fire in the Litan area, police said.

The incident took place around 7 am when miscreants torched two houses in Litan Sareikhong village, raising fresh concerns about the security situation in the entire district despite massive security deployment, including of central and state forces. Police also said that gunshots were heard around 8 am, but there were no reports of any casualties or arrests.

Tension has been simmering in the Litan area since Sunday night after an alleged drunken brawl between a few people from neighbouring villages escalated. So far, over 40 houses belonging to the Tankhul Naga and Kuki communities have been burnt down in the violence.

The district authorities had imposed an indefinite curfew in

and around the Litan area to de-escalate the situation, followed by shutting down of internet services in the entire district.

Meanwhile, women from the Vaiphei community in Kuki-Zo-dominated Churachandpur district organised a protest rally expressing discontentment over MLA LM Khaute participating in Manipur government formation.

The protest was mobilised by the Vaiphei Women Association. The protestors assembled at Vaiphei Peoples Council hall in Dorcas Veng and marched towards the residence of the MLA. Rapid Action Forces fired a few blank shots to disperse the protestors, sources said.

Carrying placards, the protestors raised slogans and blocked the road before being dispersed around 12.45 pm.

Opposing the participation of Kuki-Zo MLAs in government formation, Kuki Women Organisation for Human Rights had organised a rally last week in Churachandpur and other Kuki-Zo inhabited areas.

Did Wangchuk confirm he saw videos that led to detention: SC

Express News Service
New Delhi, February 12

THE SUPREME Court on Thursday questioned the Centre on the claim by climate activist from Ladakh, Sonam Wangchuk, that he had not been supplied with the four videos that formed the primary basis of the order detaining him under the National Security Act (NSA), 1980, when it provided the other videos.

A bench of Justices Aravind Kumar and P B Varale sought to know if there was any endorsement by Wangchuk that he had seen the videos. The court was hearing a petition by Wangchuk's wife Gitanjali Angmo, challenging his detention.

Additional Solicitor General K M Nataraj, appearing for the Centre, urged the court to peruse the detention order saying, "There are 23 videos which have been relied (on) in the detention order, and everything has been supplied to him (Wangchuk) and that is with acknowledgement... All the videos which have been referred (to) in the annexure have been supplied in detail."

Angmo's counsel, however, said Wangchuk had only endorsed receipt of the videos mentioned in the index but that doesn't mean he had seen them. Also, the four videos were miss-



Wangchuk was detained under NSA in September 2025

ing from the pen drive supplied to him, the counsel said.

"The pen drive which was supplied to us... mischievously did not have those videos... When we found out, we repeatedly wrote to them... raising issue of non-supply," the counsel said, pointing out that these letters were part of the petition. The counsel added, "We are not alleging the non-supply of other videos." Nataraj said the DIG met Wangchuk personally and showed him the videos and that this was videographed. Thereafter, a laptop was supplied to Wangchuk to see those videos again, the ASG said.

Justice Kumar, however, pointed out that "he (Wangchuk) only said he received documents as per the...

index...but he does not say he has seen the contents of those videos".

The court then asked the ASG if the Centre could produce some endorsement in this regard. Justice Kumar said such an endorsement "would have contained (endorsement) that I have seen those videos".

Justice Varale, too, echoed the concern and said, "This endorsement only refers to that he has received documents in a pen drive. It is not disclosed in the endorsement that he had occasion to see the video(s)... If you have shown the video, you could have drawn a statement to that effect and obtained his signature."

Justice Varale also referred to the petitioner's contention that Wangchuk had written several letters seeking the copies of the videos. "He wrote four-five letters," he said. Justice Kumar said the detaining authorities could have replied to these letters, saying the videos were already given to him.

"Assuming for a moment we accept your contention, then when he gave this representation, you could have just denied it... Have you done it?... More particularly, when the court was seized of this matter... This is 13 October, by which time we were hearing the matter," said Justice Kumar.

Nataraj also denied Wangchuk's argument that the detaining authority simply copy-pasted the SSP's recommendation and there was no independent application of mind. He said the District Magistrate had taken cognizance of every aspect.

The court will now hear the matter next on February 16.

Justifying the detention order, the ASG said the violence had come to an abrupt end with Wangchuk's detention.

"After the detention, complete agitation and violence came under control. Hence it's proved that it's a perfect order which was justified in the situation," he said.

Concluding his submission, Nataraj also referred to "national interest" and said Wangchuk ought to have been aware of his fundamental duties as well.

"Kindly see the situation in the border areas where agitations and violence are erupting. In such a situation, ultimately, it is the national interest that is the paramount consideration for everyone... By ignoring all these aspects, by pointing out that yes, I have a fundamental right... the person who comes before the court, he should be aware of his fundamental duties towards not only every citizen but also towards the country," he said.

Nationwide strike draws 30 crore participants: unions

The strike call, issued by the Central trade unions and the Samyukt Kisan Morcha, opposes the recent slew of FTAs and Labour Codes; strike actions and mobilisation in 600 districts, unions say

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

More than 30 crore workers, farmers, agricultural workers, and other groups of employees participated in the general strike on Thursday in protest against the four Labour Codes and the free trade deals being struck with the United States, European Union, and United Kingdom, the Central trade unions said.

The joint strike call was given by the trade unions and farm unions of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM). Their charter included demand to withdraw the Draft Seeds Bill, Electricity (Amendment) Bill, Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Act, Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act, and Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishtan Bill.

Strike actions and massive mobilisations were reported from more than 600 districts across the country, the CTUs said in a



A deserted road in Thiruvananthapuram on Thursday during the nationwide strike against the labour codes. NIRMAL HARINDRAN

statement. "In mining/manufacturing/service sectors, among the formal and informal labour, huge impact of the strike and mobilisation was witnessed," they added. "The workers/employees in most of the industrial areas in the country, including in many MNCs, joined the strike in a big way and organised processions. The defence sector employees held protest demonstrations with one hour cut of work in support of strike. The railway un-

ions mobilised and participated in solidarity actions," the CTUs said.

Worker-peasant unity

The SKM congratulated farmers and workers for the successful strike. "It is one of the largest ever general strikes in the history of Independent India and specifically noted for cementing the worker-peasant unity as the backbone of the mass resistance against the corporate policies being vehemently pur-

sued by the BJP-led NDA government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi," the SKM statement said.

"Anger among the working people against the FTAs, VB G-RAM G Act, the Electricity Bill, the Seed Bill, the Insurance Act, SHANTI Act and anti-people Union Budget 2026-27, and the discontent against the denial of minimum support price as per M.S. Swaminathan Commission formula for all crops with guaranteed procurement, unwillingness to declare comprehensive loan waiver to liberate farmer households from indebtedness

and end continuance of the tragic peasant suicides has reflected on the street protests as part of the general strike," the farmers' body said. The SKM's national council is set to meet on February 24 at Kurukshetra, Haryana to discuss the next phase of action.

In Kerala, the strike assumed the proportions of a 'bandh'. Travel, governance, public service delivery, and commercial activities were disrupted, but the strike was largely peaceful.

Zero tariff textiles exports to U.S. possible for India: Goyal

Commerce Minister says India will receive concessions on textiles exports as Dhaka got through its deal with Washington; the agreement is being finalised, will have details in fine print, he adds

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan

NEW DELHI

India will receive the same benefits on textiles exports under its interim trade agreement with the U.S. as Bangladesh gained through its own deal, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said on Thursday.

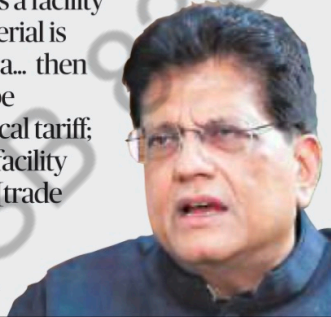
“Just as Bangladesh has a facility that if raw material is purchased from America, then if you process it and make cloth and export it, then it will be available at zero reciprocal tariff; India also has the same facility and India will also get it,” he said.

The Minister pointed out that India’s agreement with the U.S. is still being finalised. “When the interim agreement is finalised, then you will get to see this



Bangladesh has a facility that if raw material is purchased from America... then it [textiles exports] will be available at zero reciprocal tariff; India also has the same facility and India will also get it [trade benefits]

PIYUSH GOYAL
Union Commerce Minister



in the fine print,” Mr. Goyal told presspersons.

In an interview with *The Hindu* earlier this week, Mr. Goyal said that the interim deal is expected to be signed in mid-March.

Trade provisions

Under the Bangladesh-U.S. deal inked on Monday, reciprocal tariffs on Bangladesh’s exports to the U.S. will be reduced to 19% ov-

erall. However, the deal also has a provision saying that, if Bangladesh imports cotton from the U.S., then the tariffs on its textile exports will fall to 0%.

The Congress had attacked the Centre regarding this clause, with Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, saying that India, which is expected to see tariffs of 18% on exports to the U.S.

MEA refuses to deny claims on Russian imports

NEW DELHI

After a U.S. official said that India had cut import of Russian oil, as the U.S. “wanted [India] to,” the Ministry of External Affairs has once again refused to deny the claims. » **PAGE 14**

under the interim agreement, has already been rendered uncompetitive on textiles even before the agreement is signed.

“He [Rahul Gandhi] spread another lie in Parliament that Bangladesh has got more benefits from the trade deal than India,” Mr. Goyal said.

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‘Zero tariff textiles exports to U.S. possible’

The Commerce Minister added that Indian farmers also stand to benefit from increased exports to the European Union, the U.K. , Switzerland, Norway, and Australia due to India’s free trade agreements with these countries and groupings.

This latest shift in the contours of the India-U.S. deal is not a new one. The U.S. government on Wednesday amended a fact sheet it had uploaded a few days earlier, by removing references to “pulses”, “agricultural products”, and “digital service tax”. The new version of the fact sheet also said India “intends” to buy \$500 billion worth of U.S. goods as opposed to the earlier phrasing that said India has “committed to buy” this amount.

P. Krishnaprasad, a senior functionary of Samyukt Kisan Morcha, said the organisation will examine the impact of Bangladesh-U.S. deal on cotton farmers in India. “Cotton farmers here are denied minimum support price. Any import of cotton will harm the farmers...We export cotton to Bangladesh, which is around one per cent of the total volume of the cotton industry. The domestic industry can absorb such losses if government works to enhance the purchasing capacity of people,” he added.

(With inputs from A.M. Jigeesh)

MEA declines to deny U.S. claim on India's Russian oil imports

Senior U.S. official reiterates that India has reduced Russian oil purchases as U.S. 'wanted' it; U.S. Ambassador to India Sergio Gor meets Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri; joint statement, with no mention of Russian oil, is the 'framework', says MEA

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has once again refused to directly deny claims by the U.S. government on Russian oil imports on Thursday. This comes after a senior U.S. official said that India had reduced its purchases of Russian crude, as the U.S. "wanted [India] to."

The government expressed satisfaction at the amendments made by the U.S. administration to its "fact sheet" on the India-U.S. trade deal.

The fact sheet, available on the White House website, has now dropped contentious references to pulses and agriculture, saying it reflects the "shared understanding" between India and the U.S. on trade. However, it continues to state that India has committed to stop buying Russian oil.

"The Joint Statement is the framework and remains the basis of our mu-



Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri with U.S. Ambassador to India Sergio Gor during an event on Thursday. PTI

tual understanding in the matter. Both sides will now work towards implementing this framework and finalising the Interim Agreement," MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said. "The amendments in the U.S. fact sheet reflect the shared understandings contained in the Joint Statement."

The joint statement does not contain any men-

tion of Russian oil purchases.

Avoiding questions

As the Opposition continued to raise questions about the agreement in Parliament, U.S. Ambassador to India Sergio Gor met with Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri on Thursday.

"So many opportunities ahead now that the trade deal has been finalized,"

Mr. Gor wrote in a post on social media.

Mr. Jaiswal declined to comment on the U.S. contentions about Russian oil.

In a public statement, Mr. Misri said earlier this week that India's energy sourcing is guided by pricing, availability, and risks, but did not respond to questions about the month-on-month decline in India's imports of Russian oil.

On Wednesday, at a hearing of the U.S. House Sub-Committee on Foreign Affairs on U.S. ties with South Asia, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State S. Paul Kapur repeated statements by U.S. President Donald Trump and U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer asserting that India's actions had been part of the larger trade deal with the U.S.

"The Indians have been reducing their purchases of Russian oil and diversifying away [from it], which is what we [the U.S.] wanted them [India] to do," Mr. Ka-

pur told the committee. "They've actually been buying more U.S. energy and that's, I think, a promising possibility is to substitute some U.S. energy for the Russian energy and buying from other parts of the world," he added.

When asked about the statements, Mr. Jaiswal said that Mr. Misri had responded to the "kind of commentary and conversations" being heard, including in the U.S. "Exactly to clarify matters, our Foreign Secretary has made a detailed statement... highlighting the various aspects of where [India's] approach to energy sourcing remains," he said.

According to the fact sheet, Mr. Trump had discussed the issue with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a call on February 2, and had "agreed to remove the additional 25% tariff on imports from India in recognition of India's commitment to stop purchasing Russian Federation oil."

Modi to inaugurate new PMO and Central Secretariat buildings today

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will on Friday formally inaugurate the new Prime Minister's Office and the Central Secretariat buildings, and Kartavya Bhavan 1 and 2. He will also preside over the last meeting of the Union Cabinet in South Block.

An era will end when the iconic North and South Blocks are vacated. North and South Blocks initially housed the British government, and were taken over by the Indian government in 1947. They were designed by Herbert Baker.

South Block houses the Prime Minister's Office, as well as the offices of the Union Ministries of External Affairs and Defence.



Making history: The last meeting of the Union Cabinet at South Block will be held on Friday. FILE PHOTO

North Block houses the Ministries of Home Affairs and Finance.

The Prime Minister's Office will be moved on Friday to the newly built 'Seva Teerth' complex.

'Seva Teerth' will also house the National Security Council Secretariat and

the Cabinet Secretariat, all of which were previously situated across different locations.

Kartavya Bhavan 1 and 2 house several key Ministries, including the Ministries of Finance, Defence, Health and Family Welfare, Education, Corporate Af-

fairs, Culture, Law and Justice, Information and Broadcasting, Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Chemicals and Fertilizers, and Tribal Affairs.

Both building complexes feature digitally integrated offices, structured public interface zones, and centralised reception facilities. Designed in accordance with 4-Star GRIHA standards, the complexes incorporate renewable energy systems, water conservation measures, waste management solutions, and high-performance building envelopes.

"The new building complexes address these issues by consolidating administrative functions within modern, future-ready facilities," an official statement said.

As multilateralism erodes, India must reframe its foreign policy

Multilateral structures and international institutions are withering away as power politics and transactional relationships reshape the new world order; India must reframe foreign policy beyond strategic autonomy, build endogenous capabilities, diversify trade, and pursue Viksit Bharat 2047

Mukul Sanwal

Speaking in the Rajya Sabha, Prime Minister Narendra Modi formally acknowledged the new world order. The hard part is to formulate a new national identity and approach to international relations.

Eroding multilateralism

India's leadership of the Global South at the United Nations General Assembly was the foundation of its long-standing foreign policy of 'strategic autonomy'. The global rules agreed in the UN established by former colonial powers led by the U.S. served their interests in the post-colonial world. India's Oxbridge-educated diplomats had unquestioned leadership in the UN negotiating text on principles and rules, successfully diverting pressure on poor countries. Climate negotiations ending in 1992 were left entirely to India by the Global South.

However, China's rise around 2010, through the creation of alternative funding, economic and security institutions, impacted the intellectual leadership position of India and also changed the UN irreversibly. China heads four principal UN agencies, and its aid volumes exceed those of the West. The U.S., now unable to manage the UN process, has withdrawn from 31 UN institutions.

In 1986, the U.S. launched the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations, leading to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995, where developing countries' interests became more differentiated, and India struggled to secure its interests. In a more equal world, since 2019, the U.S. has rejected the dispute settlement mechanism of the WTO, making it dysfunctional and reverting to unilateral tariffs. China, in contrast, has diversified

its exports away from the U.S. and is now the largest trading partner of 120 countries.

The problem India faces is not from the rise of China. While the EU and Canada acknowledge the collapse of the multilateral structures, developing countries are wondering how to revive them. With the potential to become the world's third-largest economy, India is particularly impacted in the U.S.-dominated world of transactional relationships, even willing to discard NATO.

The evolution of strategic autonomy

First, leadership of the Global South gave India outsized influence and now where do you speak for developing countries when international institutions and law have withered away? The U.S. and China are competing for technological dominance, not votes in the UN.

Second, 'strategic autonomy' applied to the Cold War when India led the Non-Aligned Movement. It lost relevance after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and gradually became a self-declared identity used to rationalise foreign policy choices. India joined the U.S.-led rejuvenated Quad in 2017 and then chose the Russian S-400 missile system over the U.S. Patriot system in 2018.

The reality is that India gravitated towards the Soviet Union after its 1951 veto prevented discussion of Kashmir in the UN Security Council. Russia remains India's only long-trusted partner giving cutting-edge military technology, which the U.S. is chipping away at testing India's resolve to remain a third pole in a multipolar world.

Third, with China's rise, U.S. analysts began describing India not as strategically autonomous but as a "swing state." The current U.S. military strategy rejects

containment of China.

Power politics

The major scope of international relations, outside of alliances, was within multilateral institutions which has now returned to asymmetric relations. Reciprocity in tariffs is redefined as "America first", implying others are in a subordinate relationship. Under the India-U.S. Framework Agreement, India has agreed to double imports, largely industrial products, while the U.S. continues an 18% tariff, unilaterally deciding reductions clearly after further concessions. The EU trade agreement eliminated 70% tariff lines with phased reciprocal reductions.

The real question for India is why it was targeted by the U.S. tariffs and how to grow in a world marked by flux.

The U.S. is determined to prevent the rise of another China and India alone has the potential to overtake the U.S. China exploited multilateral rules to become a fiercely independent global manufacturing power and that opportunity no longer exists. The long-term U.S. policy of keeping India apart from Russia and China has now gained greater force and blunting it will test Indian diplomacy.

Reframing foreign policy

India's comparative advantage lies in its young population; nearly half of Silicon Valley's workforce traces its roots to India. Building and attracting that talent can develop the capability to become a 'cyber superpower', spreading AI across security, manufacturing and services to secure development space.

To achieve this, India needs good economic and technological relations with the U.S., Russia, and China, Free Trade Agreements (FTA), and,

importantly foreign policy replacing 'strategic autonomy' with 'Viksit Bharat 2047'.

First, taking a leaf from China and the U.S. in the early 1900s, India should bid its time, maintain a low international profile and develop endogenous capabilities, requiring a diplomatic posture to accelerate the Asian Century and a passive role in all other regions.

Second, India must prioritise trade diplomacy by diversifying exports away from the U.S., even as vulnerabilities remain in bilateral relationships. Now that India is open to industrial imports, the push for FTAs must continue with Asia, soon to have two-thirds of global wealth, and Africa, the fastest-growing continent.

Third, India should create new technological, cyber and space relations with Russia, its steadfast and tested partner, now more an Asian than European power. It should also enable China to invest in infrastructure and partner manufacturing, with safeguards, to take advantage of trade opportunities and accelerate growth.

Fourth, India should treat relations with Pakistan as a foreign policy issue rather than a security challenge. A new water-sharing arrangement incorporating the needs of the Kashmir Valley, revival of the Iran-Pakistan-India Peace Pipeline with Pakistan benefiting from transit fees, and even a trade agreement could create economic incentives.

Lastly, as chair of BRICS, India has an opportunity to articulate its new foreign policy by building consensus on repositioning BRICS as an economic cooperation community, not a political multilateral body. Linking official digital currencies to make cross-border trade, repatriation and tourism payments smoother will be a good first step. (Mukul Sanwal is a former UN diplomat)

SOUTH KOREAN SPY AGENCY TELLS LAWMAKERS AT CLOSED-DOOR MEET

'Kim's daughter set to be next ruler of North Korea'

Associated Press
Seoul, February 12

SOUTH KOREA'S spy agency told lawmakers on Thursday that it believes the teenage daughter of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is close to being designated as the country's future leader as he moves to extend the family dynasty to a fourth generation.

The assessment by the National Intelligence Service comes as North Korea is preparing to hold its biggest political conference later this month, where Kim is expected to outline his major policy goals for the next five years and take steps to tighten his authoritarian grip.

In a closed-door briefing, NIS officials said they are closely monitoring whether Kim's daughter - believed to be named Kim Ju Ae and around 13 years old - appears with him before thousands of delegates at the upcoming Workers' Party Congress, said lawmaker Lee Seong Kweun, who attended the meeting.

First appearing in public at a long-range missile test in November 2022, Kim Ju Ae has since accompanied her father to an increasing number of events, including weapons tests, military parades and factory openings. She travelled with him to Beijing last Sep-



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un with his daughter at an unidentified location in North Korea. AP

• Who is Kim Jong Un's daughter?

KIM JU AE

AROUND 13 YEARS OLD

- Teenager believed to be close to being designated as North Korea's future leader.
- Has accompanied her father to an increasing number of events since 2022, including weapons

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At a long-range missile test

tests and military parades.

- Travelled with her father to Beijing last September for his first summit with Xi Jinping in 6 years.
- Speculation about political future intensified after January 2026, when she joined her parents on a visit to a sacred family mausoleum.

**Would be the first female to
rule North Korea since its
foundation in 1948.**

tember for Kim's first summit with Chinese leader Xi Jinping in six years on the sidelines of a World War II event.

Speculation about her political future intensified last month when she joined her parents on a New Year's Day

South Korea's former interior minister gets 7-year jail term for supporting martial law

Seoul: South Korea's former interior minister was sentenced Thursday to seven years in prison for abetting then-President Yoon Suk Yeol's brief declaration of martial law in 2024.

The verdict for Lee Sang-min came a week before a different judge at the same Seoul court rules on whether Yoon's actions amounted to rebellion, a crime for which prosecutors are seeking the death penalty.

Lee, who led the ministry of interior and safety, was convicted for helping carry out the declaration and passing along Yoon's orders to the country's police and fire chiefs. AP

visit to Pyongyang's Kumsusan Palace of the Sun, a sacred family mausoleum displaying the embalmed bodies of her late grandfather and great-grandfather, the country's first- and second-generation leaders.

South Korean officials initially expressed doubt that she could be chosen as a North Korean leader, citing the country's deeply conservative culture and tradition of male-dominated leadership.

Polling ends as Bangladesh votes in first election post-Hasina govt.

Voting concludes across 36,031 election centres for both the general election and a referendum on constitutional changes; 2,028 candidates from 51 political parties contest the polls; Hasina's Awami League remains banned from participation

Kallol Bhattacharjee
DHAKA

Bangladesh completed polling for the general election and referendum for constitutional changes on Thursday. Polling started in 36,031 election centres at 7.30 a.m. and ended at 4.30 p.m. with the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) accusing Jamaat-e-Islami, leader of an 11-party alliance, of intimidating voters in various locations. In total, 2,028 candidates are in the fray for the election that will pave the way for handover of power from the interim government to an elected administration.

Soon after the polling process, party symbols-bearing white ballot papers of the parliamentary



Crucial moment: An electoral official opens a ballot box as counting starts at a polling station in Dhaka on Thursday. AFP

election and pink ballots containing 'Yes' and 'No' votes for the referendum on 'July Charter' were collected for overnight counting. "The spontaneous participation of voters, the responsible conduct of political parties, the restraint shown by candidates, and

the professionalism of all institutions involved in the electoral process collectively demonstrated that our commitment to democracy remains unwavering," said Muhammad Yunus, Chief Adviser to the Interim Government.

Several incidents of vio-

lence and voter influencing were reported from different parts of the country. The BNP Election Steering Committee alleged that, in Khulna, a leader of the metropolitan BNP sustained injuries in a scuffle with Jamaat workers after he reportedly "opposed manipulating votes".

This election has witnessed participation of 51 political parties, including Jatiyo Party that was an ally of deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Ms. Hasina's Awami League remains banned and was not in the field for the first time in Bangladesh's history. According to the Election Commission, till 2 p.m., poll percentage was around 47.91% with expectation of greater footfall towards the conclusion of

the poll. While brisk polling was witnessed in most parts of Bangladesh, low voting was reported from Awami League's strongholds. In a statement sent to media, Ms. Hasina, who is based in India, said "workers of the Awami League, and well-wishers and minority religious communities of Bangladesh were being intimidated over the past days".

The Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi reiterated its position on the need for a "free, fair, inclusive and credible election in Bangladesh". Official spokesperson of the MEA Randhir Jaiswal said the interim government of Bangladesh had invited India to send observers. "We have not sent our observers to Bangladesh."

MOSCOW

Russia confirms ban on WhatsApp, says it failed to abide by the law



REUTERS

Russia has blocked the popular messaging service WhatsApp over its failure to comply with local legislation, the Kremlin said on Thursday, urging its 100 million Russian users to switch to Max, a domestic messaging service that lacks end-to-end encryption and that activists have called a potential tool for surveillance. AFP

ISLAMABAD

Pak. launches its indigenous Earth Observation Satellite from China



GETTY IMAGES

▶ Pakistan on Thursday successfully launched its second indigenous Earth Observation Satellite, EO-2, from China's Yangjiang Seashore Launch Centre, according to the state media. The satellite is designed to significantly enhance the country's earth observation and high-resolution imaging capabilities. PTI

WEIGHT OF FOOD & BEVERAGE ITEMS HAS FALLEN TO 36.75% FROM 45.86% IN NEW CPI

Retail inflation at 2.75% in Jan under revised CPI data series

Siddharth Upasani

New Delhi, February 12

INDIA'S HEADLINE retail inflation rate based on the revised and updated Consumer Price Index (CPI) stood at 2.75% in January, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) said on Thursday.

As per the old CPI inflation series, retail prices had risen 1.33% in the final month of 2025.

Broadly along expected lines, the newest CPI inflation comes after years of work by the Statistics Ministry to update the base year for prices of the CPI to 2024 from 2012, reconstitute the consumption basket based on the results of the 2023-24 Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) so that prices are measured as per the latest consumption patterns and not the 2011-12 survey, and revised methods to calculate price changes for certain items to more accurately measure inflation in the country. The new CPI basket contains 358 goods and services, up from 299 in the erstwhile basket, with new goods such as airpods being added to the CPI and obsolete ones like

audio cassettes being removed.

The modernisation of CPI inflation — India's most important macroeconomic indicator — is part of a larger overhaul of India's official statistics by MoSPI.

Later this month, the new GDP series — with 2022-23 as the base year and sweeping methodological changes — will be released on February 27 starting with data for October-December 2025 and the second advance estimate for 2025-26. Then, in May, the revised Index of Industrial Production will be released, also with a new base year of 2022-23.

As per the revised CPI, while headline inflation stood at 2.75% in January, food inflation was 2.13%. This represents a dramatic change in the food inflation picture from 2025 under the old series, when food prices had fallen on a y-o-y basis in the last seven months. However, MoSPI officials warned that making direct comparisons between inflation numbers under the old and new series would not be correct due to changes in the consumption baskets, item weights, and methodologies, although a 'linking factor' has been provided by the ministry to connect the old and new data series.

• How prices moved in 2025 under old, new CPI

- MoM % change in CPI in old series (2012 base year)
- MoM % change in CPI in new series (2024 base year)



Note: MoM is month-on-month change in general index of CPI under old, new series Source: MoSPI

According to BofA Securities economists Rahul Bajoria and Smriti Mehra, food inflation rising above 2% in January from (-) 2.7% in December under the old series is largely due to the lower weight of vegetables and pulses in the new CPI and an increase in the weight of fruits.

"In the new index, while the level of food price decline appears to have *prima facie* corrected, the extent of underperformance has not. As such, our underlying logic of food prices mean reverting in 2026 due to their cyclical nature remains intact. As we await more information, we see food infla-

tion normalising back to around 5% in FY27 (close to decadal average of 5.1%), with risks balanced evenly," Bajoria and Mehra said in a note.

Going by the back-series of the general index of the CPI for 2025, provided by MoSPI on Thursday, January saw a pickup in the overall price momentum, as measured by the month-on-month change in the index.

In January, CPI was 0.35% higher compared to December 2025. This was a higher sequential increase than the 0.08% month-on-month rise seen in December. **FULL REPORT ON**

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New CPI improves information basis for policies: CEA

Siddharth Upasani

New Delhi, February 12

TERMING THE revision of CPI an "important development", CEA V Anantha Nageswaran said Thursday that inflation signals will now be "more closely matched" to prevailing economic conditions.

"...the new CPI series now provides policymakers with a more up-to-date basis for assessing real incomes, consumption trends, and purchasing power. Lower weightage for the otherwise volatile group of food and beverages may make the headline inflation also less volatile, ceteris paribus. Inflation now could become more driven by core rather than food (prices) and in that sense, monetary policy response in particular could become more focused on aggregate demand pressures rather than dealing with supply-induced inflation," the CEA said at the release of the updated CPI inflation series. **FULL REPORT ON**

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