

India's first private sector helicopter FAL by Tata, Airbus opens in Karnataka

Sukalp Sharma

New Delhi, February 17

TWO YEARS after it was announced, India's first private sector helicopter final assembly line (FAL) — to manufacture Airbus' best-selling H125 helicopters — was inaugurated on Tuesday at Vemagal in Karnataka's Kolar district.

The facility, built by Tata Advanced Systems (TASL) in partnership with European aerospace major Airbus, was inaugurated virtually by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and visiting French President Emmanuel Macron. The project, seen as a big boost to aircraft manufacturing in India, was first announced on Republic Day in 2024 in conjunction with Macron's visit to India at the time.

While Modi and Macron inaugurated the facility virtually from Mumbai, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Civil Aviation Minister K Rammohan Naidu, and France's Minister of the Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs Catherine Vautrin, were present at the FAL site for the inauguration. The delivery of the first made-in-India H125 helicopter is expected in early 2027, and the FAL will serve the Indian market as well as other markets in the region.

Although the H125 is primarily a civil helicopter and the initial proposal was to build the helicopters in India for civilian applications and use, plans now also include a military ver-



X/ @TATAADVANCED

E. EXPLAINED

H125M may replace Chetak, Cheetah

Although the H125 is primarily a civil helicopter, plans now also include a military version, H125M, to be offered out of the Indian factory with high levels of indigenised components and technologies. Airbus sees it as an 'ideal successor' to Chetak and Cheetah helicopters used by the Indian armed forces

sion, H125M, to be offered out of the Indian factory with high levels of indigenised components and technologies. Airbus sees the H125M as an "ideal successor" to Chetak and Cheetah helicopters used by the Indian armed forces. These helicopters were a result of an industrial collaboration agree-

ment dating back over 60 years between Airbus and government undertaking Hindustan Aeronautics.

Moreover, civil helicopter use in India lags many other countries where choppers are routinely used for a number of purposes. India's massive population and notable economic growth make it an attractive potential market for increased civil helicopter use.

Vemagal was announced as the location of the H125 FAL in October. Airbus and TASL had originally shortlisted eight potential sites for the FAL, top Airbus Helicopters officials had said in July 2024. TASL and Airbus have a broader partnership with the Tata group company already having a final assembly line for the Airbus C295 military aircraft in Gujarat's Vadodara. The India FAL for the H125 will be the fourth production unit for the single-engine helicopter with an initial annual production capacity of 10 helicopters.

FULL REPORT ON

WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

Indian Army puts up a show with homegrown dual-use AI systems

Saurabh Trivedi

NEW DELHI

The Indian Army on Tuesday unveiled a suite of indigenous artificial intelligence (AI) solutions at the India AI Summit, underlining its ongoing transformation into a data-centric and AI-enabled force aligned with India's vision of technological self-reliance and secure digital capability.

The Army's display at Bharat Mandapam highlighted dual-use platforms designed to serve both defence operations and civilian applications such as disaster management, cybersecurity and governance.

The Indian Army said it showcased several key systems, including AI Examiner, an automated assessment and feedback platform aimed at moder-



New technology: The Army uses AI to counter cyberthreats targeting critical infrastructure. X/@INDIANARMY.ADGPI

nising education and training frameworks. Another major highlight was SAM-UN, a geospatial and AI-enabled situational awareness system designed for mission planning, disaster response and integration with smart command centres.

The Army presented EKAM (AI-as-a-Service), a secure, air-gapped indigenous AI cloud platform fo-

cused on ensuring data sovereignty and secure processing of sensitive information. Complementing this was PRAKSHEPAN, an AI-driven climatology and disaster prediction system capable of providing early alerts for landslides, floods and avalanches.

In the security domain, the Army demonstrated XFace, an AI-powered fa-

cial recognition system for identity verification, along with advanced Deepfake Detection and AI Cyber Security Systems to counter synthetic media manipulation, malware and evolving cyber threats targeting critical infrastructure.

The technologies on display included Nabh Drishti, a mobile telemetry-based real-time reporting and visualisation platform; an AI-enabled Driver Fatigue Detection device for real-time drowsiness alerts; a portable AI-in-a-Box solution designed for deployment in remote or disconnected environments; and an AI-powered Vehicle Tracking System for fleet monitoring and logistics optimisation.

The initiatives collectively signal a decisive push towards building a secure, networked and AI-empowered ecosystem.

Political leaders, officials must foster fraternity: SC

Top court takes note of statements that 'stigmatise' entire communities, legitimise 'discriminatory governance'; it emphasises need for restraint in public comments by constitutional functionaries

Krishnadas Rajagopal

NEW DELHI

Political leaders must foster fraternity and high public office-holders should live up to the ideals of the Constitution, the Supreme Court said on Tuesday.

The court was hearing a petition highlighting instances of Chief Ministers, senior bureaucrats, and police officers making public statements that stigmatise entire communities, legitimise discriminatory governance, and erode public confidence in the state's commitment to equal citizenship.

"We would like to impress upon all political parties to follow the principles of constitutional morality, values, mutual respect, and self-respect. This is a more than 75-year-old mature democracy; we do not expect people to behave like this," Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, heading a three-judge Bench, observed orally.

Justice B.V. Nagarathna advocated the need to "restrain" discriminatory and communally divisive public speeches "from all sides".

"Political leaders must

There is a need to restrain discriminatory and communally divisive public speeches from all sides



B.V.
NAGARATHNA
Supreme Court
Judge

We would like to impress upon all political parties to follow the principles of constitutional morality



SURYA KANT
Chief Justice
of India

ultimately foster fraternity in the country," Justice Nagarathna remarked.

However, she pointed out that the origin of speech was thought. "How can we control thought?" said the judge.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal and advocate Fuzail Ahmad Ayyubi, appearing for petitioner-activist Roop Rekha Verma, said the court could certainly control the "consequences of thought" by laying down guidelines to govern public speech by constitutional functionaries, so as to ensure fidelity to constitutional morality, without imposing prior restraint or censorship. "We have to do something now," Mr. Sibal urged the court.

The court said it was keen to lay down guide-

lines but noted that the petition seemed to name personalities only from a particular political party.

Political thicket

The Bench indicated that the court did not want to enter the political thicket, following which Mr. Sibal sought two weeks to modify the petition.

Chief Justice Kant said the petition has raised a "very serious issue" even as Mr. Sibal pointed out that the public statements have become increasingly "toxic".

Mr. Sibal highlighted the "normalisation of constitutionally unbecoming speeches by holders of high public offices". He said these statements were not merely political rhetoric, but have weaved its way

into the administrative and law enforcement establishments.

Chief Justice Kant asked whether party constitutions did not have any clauses to control public conduct and speeches of their leaders.

Justice Joymalya Bagchi, the third judge on the Bench, said the public have an expectation that "democratic entities would live up to the constitutional ethos and values".

‘Collective blame’

The petition flagged statements, emanating from sitting Chief Ministers and holders of high public offices, which exemplify how constitutional and legal authority was used to legitimise discriminatory hostility. It drew attention to statements by senior bureaucrats and police officers that "reinforce exclusion, humiliation, or collective blame".

It underscored that holders of public office and senior executive authorities who indulge in a continuing pattern of derogatory speech were not ordinary speakers.

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India, France renew defence cooperation for 10 years, call to boost military partnership

The Hindu Bureau

BENGALURU

India and France renewed their defence cooperation agreement for another 10 years on Tuesday at the sixth India-France Annual Defence Dialogue in Bengaluru.

At the meeting, co-chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Minister of the Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs of France Catherine Vautrin, India asked France to increase "indigenous content" in the Rafale by up to 50%, and also expand the Rafale's maintenance, repair and overhaul facility in India.

The cooperation agreement was signed by India's Defence Secretary and France's Deputy Director General for International Relations and Strategy. Besides, both countries an-



Expanding ties: French Defence Minister Catherine Vautrin arrives at the HAL airport in Bengaluru on Tuesday. SUDHAKARA JAIN

nounced Reciprocal Deployment Officers at Indian Army and French Land Forces establishments.

The two Ministers discussed a range of bilateral security and defence issues, including priority areas for co-development and co-production of

equipment.

The Defence Ministry said the two leaders emphasised the need for a closer defence partnership, connecting industries of both nations, especially in the field of niche technology.

It said they reaffirmed

India has asked France to increase 'indigenous content' in Rafale jets and expand MRO facility

An MoU on Joint Venture was also signed for the manufacturing of Hammer missiles in India between the Chairman and Managing Director of Bharat Electronics Limited and Executive Vice President, Safran Electronics and Defence.

Mr. Singh emphasised that India has been the first responder and net security provider for countries in the Indian Ocean Region and always extends assistance to them in the defence, security and maritime domains to augment their capabilities and ward off any adversary.

On terrorism, he said that Pakistan has a long history of nurturing, nourishing, and promoting cross-border terrorism to create disturbance and violence in India. "This has created a serious threat to peace in the region," he said.

Modi, Macron meet

materials to health and skilling, Modi underlined that “this partnership will provide stability and progress” in “this era of unpredictable global dynamics”.

Macron, who will travel to New Delhi for the AI Impact summit Wednesday, said India is one of the most trusted partners of France. “From Rafale jets to submarines, we are expanding defence cooperation,” he said.

The two leaders virtually inaugurated the H125 light utility helicopter final assembly line of Tata-Airbus in Karnataka.

“We take pride in the fact that, together, India and France will manufacture in India the world’s only helicopter capable of flying to the heights of Mount Everest and export it to the entire world,” Modi said.

The facility, according to the Ministry of External Affairs, will strengthen India’s aeronautical manufacturing capabilities, lead to skilling of the workforce, create jobs and give impetus to At-

manirbhar Bharat.

Describing the India-France relationship as “very crucial”, Modi said, “The strategic partnership between the two countries is one of the oldest and, with the help of President Macron, we have deepened the ties and given it more energy in recent times. Based on this trust and vision, we are elevating our relation to a Special Global Strategic Partnership. This partnership is not just strategic. In this era of unpredictable global dynamics, this partnership will provide global stability and progress.”

He said the friendship between the two countries has “no boundaries” and the partnership can “reach from deep oceans to the tallest mountains”.

Macron said, “Both our countries firmly believe in the rule of law, and it has been demonstrated in the past few years.” He said India and France will continue to cooperate to combat terrorism.

Underlining the cooperation

in the defence and aerospace sectors, Modi said the inauguration of the helicopter assembly line is a testament to the growing collaboration between the two nations. The delivery of the first ‘Made in India’ H125 is expected in early 2027. It will also be available for export in the South Asian region.

Modi and Macron launched the Indo-French Centre for AI in Health, Indo-French Centre for Digital Science and Technology, and National Centre of Excellence for Skilling in Aeronautics. “These are not just institutions, they are future-building platforms,” Modi said.

Randhir Jaiswal, spokesperson for the Ministry of External Affairs, said, “Both leaders announced a total of 21 important outcomes in areas including defence, tech and innovation, startups, critical minerals, advanced materials, health and skilling.”

The outcomes included:

- Establishment of an annual Foreign Ministers Dialogue to regularly review implementation of the elevated partnership and Horizon 2047 Roadmap.
- Launched the India-France

Year of Innovation, Technology and Innovation, and the India-France Innovation Network.

- Renewed the agreement on defence cooperation, and agreed on a JV between BEL and Safran to produce Hammer missiles in India.
- Reciprocal deployment of officers at Indian Army and French Land Forces establishments.
- Constitution of a Joint Advanced Technology Development Group on Critical and Emerging Technologies.
- Joint Declaration of Intent for Cooperation in Critical Minerals and Metals.
- Amending the Protocol on the Double Tax Avoidance Agreement.
- Signed a Letter of Intent between T-Hub and Nord France on strategic cooperation in startup ecosystems, innovation.
- Signed an MoU for scientific collaboration.
- Joint Declaration of Intent on establishing an Indo-French Centre for Digital Sciences and Technology, launch of the Indo-French Centre for AI in Health at AIIMS, New Delhi.

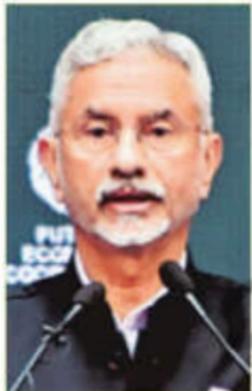
India engaging with global partners from position of strength, says EAM Jaishankar

Hitesh Vyas

Mumbai, February 17

INDIA IS now engaging with its international partners from a position of strength, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Tuesday here, close on the heels of trade deal with the United States. Jaishankar pointed out that economic security is best served through stronger self-reliance and more trusted partners. This is particularly so in respect of large nations like India, he added.

India sealed a free trade agreement (FTA) with the EU last month, closely followed by the announcement of a much-



From a position of strength, India is engaging international partners more intensively. This is demonstrated in recently concluded trade deals”

**S JAISHANKAR,
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTER**

awaited bilateral trade pact with America.

“From a position of strength, India is engaging international partners more intensively. This is demonstrated in recently concluded trade

deals,” Jaishankar said in his address at the inaugural session of the Global Economic Cooperation conference.

The country will also be more salient in the global calculus on production, services,

technology, skills and talent, he noted. Speaking about the global scenario, the foreign minister said the world has entered into a volatile and uncertain era, possibly the most turbulent in living memory, with long-standing assumptions and expectations now becoming questionable.

“The established global order is clearly changing before our very eyes. Replacements are hard to create and we appear to be headed for a long twilight zone. This will be messy, risky, unpredictable, perhaps even dangerous,” Jaishankar said.

FULL REPORT ON

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Adani Group to invest \$100 bn in AI-ready data centres by 2035

Soumyarendra Barik

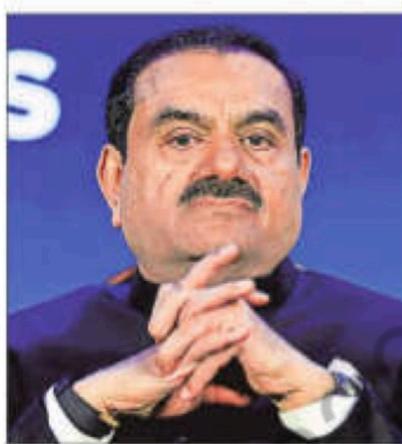
New Delhi, February 17

THE ADANI Group said on Tuesday that it will invest \$100 billion to build renewable energy-powered AI-ready data centres by 2035, as the ports-to-energy conglomerate looks to tap into the growing demand for such infrastructure in the world, with India hoping to position itself as a key destination for these facilities.

The investment is expected to catalyse by 2035 an additional \$150 billion across server manufacturing, advanced electrical infrastructure, sovereign cloud platforms and supporting industries. Together, this is projected to create a \$250-billion AI infrastructure ecosystem in India over the decade, the company said in a statement.

“Nations that master the symmetry between energy and compute will shape the next decade. India is uniquely positioned to lead... India will not be a mere consumer in the AI age. We will be the creators, the builders and the exporters of intelligence,” said Gautam Adani, Chairman, Adani Group.

The big-ticket investment announcement comes amid the ongoing India-AI Impact



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GAUTAM ADANI,
CHAIRMAN, ADANI GROUP

Summit, and is among the first high-profile infrastructure-related announcements that are expected to be made during the five-day summit, which concludes on February 20. It also comes weeks after Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced in her Union Budget speech a tax holiday until 2047 for foreign companies operat-

ing through India-based data centre infrastructure.

The Adani Group said the fresh investment will expand its existing 2 GW data centres capacity to 5 GW.

India’s data centre market is currently estimated to be worth \$10 billion, with around \$1.2 billion revenue generated in FY24, according to a recent report by Anarock.

Last month, Union IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said that private investments in India’s AI infrastructure could double from last year’s \$70 billion by the end of the ongoing financial year (FY26).

Last October, TCS said it will invest \$6.5 billion over five years to build 1 gigawatt (GW) in AI-ready data centres. The same month, Google announced an investment of \$15 billion to build a 1GW data centre, in partnership with the Adani Group.

In December, Microsoft said it would invest \$17.5 billion in the country, with primary focus on AI data centres. Amazon has announced it will invest \$35 billion in India over five years, without specifying how much of it would go toward data centre expansion.

‘India must mop up \$500 bn a year for Net Zero goal’

Lalatendu Mishra

MUMBAI

India needs to mobilise about \$22 trillion or about \$500 billion a year to meet Net Zero goal by 2070, said Agnes Dasewicz, chief investment and programme officer, Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet, in an interview.

The GEA works to un-

lock green energy access in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean.

“You will never be able to do that without aligning government, private finance and philanthropy, because you need all of them to grow in the same direction to achieve that kind of ambition,” she said.

On funding, Woochong Um, CEO, Global Energy

Alliance for People and Planet, said, “You hear about trillions of dollars that’s floating globally.

“To get that money, the government has to work very closely with the multilaterals. There are a lot of projects out there as a blueprint but not invested as they don’t have enough information on technical details, viability and all

that stuff. So, doing due diligence to bring it to the bankable stage, that will enable people to invest.”

Multilateral finance

He said different types of money, like the ‘philanthropy and Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) and government and private sector are not necessarily aligned and leveraging

each other. “So, try to create proof of concept so that it leads to some sort of investable project.”

At Mumbai Climate Week, the Alliance unveiled a national platform for deploying up to \$25 million to modernise power distribution, integrate renewable energy and storage and prepare grids for fast demand growth.

51 students evacuated from Manipur school as tension continues

The Kuki students were shifted from a Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya in Naga-dominated Ukhrul district as a precautionary measure, say police

The Hindu Bureau

GUWAHATI

The Manipur police have evacuated 51 Kuki students from a school in the Naga-dominated Ukhrul district amid tensions between the two communities triggered by an assault case on February 7.

In a statement issued late Monday night, the police said the students were temporarily shifted from Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya (JNV) at Ramva in Ukhrul to a JNV in the adjoining Kangpokpi district. Exam centres for 18 of these students appearing for Class 10 and 12 Board exams have also been shifted to the Kangpokpi JNV, officials said.

Kangpokpi is dominated by the Kuki-Zo community. The Class 10 and Class 12 exams are scheduled from February 17 to April 4.

Precautionary measure

“Along with them, the remaining students from the Kuki community of JNV Ramva were also evacuated as a precautionary mea-



Gutted by violence: Houses set ablaze by armed miscreants at Litan Sareikhong village in Ukhrul district of Manipur last week. PTI

sure,” the statement read.

The evacuation involved 20 girls housed at the 40 Assam Rifles Battalion headquarters at Shangshak and 31 boys from the company operating base of the paramilitary force at Shokvao.

“During the evacuation process, some members of the public mistook them for miscreants,” a Manipur police spokesperson said, adding that members of Tangkhul Naga organisations helped de-escalate tensions.

“Their efforts in per-

suading villagers across Shangshak, Ramva, Shokvao, T.M. Kasom, and S. Laho ensured the safe evacuation of the students to Litan police station despite heightened tensions,” the spokesperson said.

According to the officials, the evacuation was deemed necessary after violence in Litan and adjoining areas between February 7 and 13. Although no one was killed, more than 50 houses belonging to members of both tribal communities were torched during the violence.

ARAGCHI SAYS PROGRESS MADE ON THE MAIN GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Iran briefly closes Strait of Hormuz as US, Tehran nuclear talks unfold

First announced closure of the strait carrying 20% of world's oil amid US threats

Reuters
Geneva, February 17

IRAN AND the United States reached an understanding on the main "guiding principles" in a second round of indirect talks over nuclear dispute on Tuesday, but it does not mean a deal is imminent, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said.

"Different ideas have been presented, these ideas have been seriously discussed, ultimately we've been able to reach a general agreement on some guiding principles, from now on we will move based on those principles and enter the text of a potential agreement," Araghchi told Iranian media after the talks concluded in Geneva.

After the exchange of documents the two sides will decide on a date for a third round of negotiations, he said.

The US has sent a battle



People carry pre-Iranian Revolution national flags as they protest near the United Nations office in Geneva on Tuesday. REUTERS

force to the Middle East to press Tehran to make concessions in the decades-long nuclear dispute and President Donald Trump has said "regime change" in Tehran may be the best thing that can happen.

Iranian state media reported earlier that Iran would temporarily shut part of the Strait of Hormuz, a vital global oil supply route, as it held talks over its nuclear programme while Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei warned on Tuesday that any US attempts to depose his govern-



ment would fail.

It was the first time Iran has announced the closure of the key



The US President says their army is the world's strongest, but the strongest army in the world can sometimes be slapped so hard it cannot get up"

AYATOLLAH ALI KHAMENEI,
IRAN SUPREME LEADER

international waterway, through which 20% of the world's oil passes, since the US began threatening Iran and rushing military assets to the region

Speaking at a disarmament conference in Geneva after the talks, Araghchi said that a "new window of opportunity" had opened and that he hoped talks would lead to a "sustainable" solution that ensured the full

recognition of Iran's legitimate rights. US envoy Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner took part in the Geneva talks, which were being mediated by Oman, a source briefed on the matter told Reuters. The White House did not respond to emailed questions about the meeting.

Earlier, Trump said he himself would be involved "indirectly" in the Geneva talks and that he believed Tehran wanted to make a deal. "I don't think they want the consequences of not making a deal," Trump said.

Just after the talks started, Iranian media cited 86-year-old Khamenei as saying Washington could not force out his government. The republic has been ruled by clerics since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

"The US President says their army is the world's strongest, but the strongest army in the world can sometimes be slapped so hard it cannot get up," he said, in comments published by Iranian media.

The US has sought to expand scope of talks to non-nuclear issues such as Iran's missile stockpile. Tehran says it is willing only to discuss curbs on its nuclear programme - in exchange for sanctions relief - and will not give up uranium enrichment.



Ukrainian and Russian delegations attend the trilateral talks on Russia-Ukraine war in Geneva on Tuesday. AP

Ukraine, Russia begin Geneva talks as Trump piles pressure on Kyiv

Reuters

Geneva, February 17

NEGOTIATORS FROM Ukraine and Russia began two days of US-mediated peace talks in Geneva on Tuesday that will focus on the main sticking point of land, with US President Donald Trump pressing Kyiv to act fast to reach a deal.

Trump is urging Moscow and Kyiv to reach a deal to end Europe's biggest war since 1945, though Zelenskyy has complained that his country is facing the greatest pressure to make concessions.

Lead Ukrainian negotiator Rustem Umerov said "security and humanitarian issues" would be on the agenda. "We are working constructively, focused and without excessive expectations," he posted on X. "Our task is to maximally advance those solutions that can bring sustainable peace closer."

Ahead of the talks, Russia carried out heavy airstrikes overnight across swathes of Ukraine, inflicting severe damage to the power network in the southern port city of Odesa, which Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said left tens of thousands without heat and water.



E. EXPLAINED

Territory demands stall peace effort

Negotiators from Russia and Ukraine met in Geneva for United States-mediated talks centred on territorial control, especially Donetsk. Donald Trump urged Kyiv to move quickly, while fresh Russian strikes in Odesa underscored tensions. With pressure mounting on both sides, prospects for a development appear slim.

Zelenskyy called for allies to increase pressure on Russia to reach a "real and just" peace deal via tougher sanctions and weapons supplies to Ukraine.

Trump pointed to Ukraine when asked by reporters what he was expecting from the talks in Geneva. "Well, we have big talks," Trump told reporters aboard Air Force One. "It's going to be very easy. I mean, look, so far, Ukraine better come to the table fast. That's all I'm telling you."