

Ruling the seas



Indigenously built aircraft carrier *INS Vikrant* of the Indian Navy at the International Fleet Review, 2026, off the Visakhapatnam coast on Wednesday. President Droupadi Murmu reviewed the formation of nearly 70 warships, including those of friendly foreign Navies. K.R DEEPAK

Maharashtra govt. revokes 5% quota for Muslims in State

The Hindu Bureau

MUMBAI

The Maharashtra government has revoked its old order granting 5% reservation to the Backward Class members of the Muslim community in the State.

The reservation was granted under the Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) category via the formation of the Special Backward Category-A, or SBC-A.

Though the community was not drawing any benefits as the ordinance granting the reservation lapsed 11 years ago in 2014, the process of issuing caste verification certificates and validation certificates was being followed till date. In line with the stated legal position, the government has now officially scrapped that as well.

2014 decision

The Congress-Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) Maharashtra government in 2014 had granted 16% reservation to Marathas and 5% reservation to Muslims in government and semi-government jobs and education.

Both decisions were challenged in the Bombay High Court, even as the government promulgated two ordinances in the matter. While the court struck

down reservation for Marathas, and reservation for Muslims in jobs, it observed the need for reservation for Muslims in education.

After the 2014 Maharashtra Assembly election, when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power in the State, it failed to promulgate a law before the ordinances lapsed. Thereafter, the community did not receive any benefits under the reservation.

‘Anti-minority govt.’

The Opposition has slammed the government as “anti-minority”.

Prithviraj Chavan, who implemented the decision as the Maharashtra Chief Minister in 2014, asked why the BJP had scrapped the decision soon after the demise of Ajit Pawar, despite knowing that Ajit Pawar had taken the decision in 2014 as the Deputy Chief Minister then. “Does Ajit Pawar’s party not stand for Muslim reservation anymore,” Mr. Chavan asked on Wednesday.

Congress leader Amin Patel, who has raised the issue several times in the legislature, said the government should have brought in a law for reservation to Muslim Backward Class in the field of education as it was “essential for nation-building”.

DGCA proposes swift ban on disruptive passengers

Airlines will be able to ban unruly passengers for 30 days without any referral under the proposed amendments to the Civil Aviation Requirement; regulator invites comments from stakeholders

S. Vijay Kumar
CHENNAI

Airline operators may soon be empowered to directly impose a flying ban of up to 30 days on unruly or disruptive passengers without referring the matter to the competent authority.

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has proposed amendments to the Civil Aviation Requirement provisions governing the handling of unruly or disruptive passengers, emphasising that even a single disruptive passenger can jeopardise safety on board and adversely affect flight operations.

Under the proposed revision, airlines will be authorised to impose a flying ban not exceeding 30 days

Aerial decorum

Under the proposed revision, airlines would be authorised to impose a flying ban not exceeding 30 days on passengers found guilty of disruptive behaviour during a flight without prior referral to the existing independent committee mechanism

Disruptive acts include:

- Consumption of alcohol on domestic flights
- Smoking on board
- Tampering with emergency exits
- Engaging in protests or sloganeering
- Unruly conduct arising from intoxication



While airlines will inform the DGCA about any flying ban imposed and maintain a database of such passengers, the ban does not add passengers to the regulator's official No Fly List

on passengers found guilty of disruptive behaviour during a flight without prior referral to an independent committee.

The DGCA said the definition of disruptive acts included smoking on board, consumption of alcohol on domestic flights, tampering with emergency exits, unauthorised use of life-

saving equipment such as life jackets, engaging in protests or sloganeering, and unruly conduct arising from intoxication. Additionally, screaming, causing annoyance to fellow passengers, and kicking or banging seat backs or tray tables have also been categorised as disruptive behaviour. Airlines will be re-

quired to maintain a database of such passengers and inform the DGCA about any flying ban imposed. However, passengers banned under this provision would not be included in the regulator's official No Fly List.

The aviation regulator has invited comments from stakeholders on the proposed amendments issued under Rule 133A of the Aircraft Rules, 1937.

Currently, airlines must refer cases of disruptive conduct to an independent committee. The committee is required to examine the matter and give its decision within 45 days before a flying ban can be enforced. The revision seeks to streamline the process, enabling airlines to act swiftly in the interest of passenger safety.

AI for people, applying technology for social good

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming our lives, including how we work. The question is not whether AI will change jobs – it already does – but whether this transformation will be shaped in ways that advance social justice, decent work and shared prosperity. As India hosts the AI Impact Summit in New Delhi – the first of its kind in the Global South, coinciding with the World Day of Social Justice observed on February 20 – we take the opportunity to call for a human-centred AI that serves people and drives inclusive social development.

By its scale and impact, India's AI journey stands at a critical moment, offering a compelling laboratory for what lies ahead. The country now has the world's largest share of monthly active users of the ChatGPT mobile application and one of the largest user bases for advanced AI platforms. By 2030, AI could generate more than three million new technology jobs in India while reshaping over 10 million existing ones. India illustrates both the scale of transformation and the promise of responsible AI deployment for social justice, job creation, economic inclusion and growth.

Divided discourse

Globally, debates on AI are increasingly polarised. Some narratives emphasise the potential for surging productivity growth, while others focus on job losses, rising inequality and governance gaps. Yet, both perspectives overlook a fundamental truth: technology alone does not determine outcomes, human beings do. This is why the way AI is governed – through inclusive institutions, social dialogue and democratic participation – matters as much as the technology itself.

When deployed inclusively and responsibly, AI can help reduce inequalities, expand access to training, employment and social protection, and improve workplace safety and conditions – benefiting workers and enterprises alike. To support this agenda, the International Labour Organization (ILO) is working together with India and other partners of the Global Coalition for Social Justice, which includes a global network of AI observatories to strengthen evidence and



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is Director-General of the International Labour Organization (ILO)

Artificial intelligence must help advance social justice, inclusive work, and equitable growth

support decision-making. Evidence from the ILO – the leading normative agency on labour standards – suggests that AI will profoundly reshape the world of work, not by replacing jobs wholesale, but by transforming roles in ways that can enhance productivity, drive innovation and improve organisational performance. Around one in four workers globally is employed in occupations with some level of exposure to generative AI, yet more roles are likely to be transformed rather than replaced. To maximise these opportunities, effective policy and governance frameworks are essential, along with meaningful worker participation and strong social dialogue to ensure that innovation promotes equitable and inclusive outcomes across the world of work.

Tech for good, AI impact

There are compelling examples of how technologies, including AI, can strengthen social justice and decent work. For instance, India's e-Shram platform, which enables over 315 million informal workers to register for social protection schemes. With the ILO's technical collaboration on the inclusion of major central and states schemes, India has increased its social protection coverage from 19% in 2015 to 64.3% in 2025. Building on this success, major investments, such as Microsoft's \$17.5 billion commitment to AI diffusion, are supporting the integration of AI into e-Shram and the National Career Service portal. This approach has the potential to benefit India's informal workers by improving access to jobs, skills development and social protection.

Aligned with the vision of leveraging AI for inclusive and human-centred development, the Government of India has been proactive in preparing the country for the future of work by advancing transformative technologies through initiatives such as the AI Mission, National Quantum Mission, Anusandhan National Research Fund and the Research, Development and Innovation Fund.

Recognising that technological progress must translate into inclusive growth and quality

employment, the Union Budget 2026-27 has announced the formation of a High-Powered 'Education to Employment and Enterprise' Standing Committee to assess the impact of emerging technologies, including AI, on employment and skill requirements. It will also recommend targeted measures to embed AI education, from the school-level onwards, and enable AI-driven matching of workers with jobs and training opportunities. Through these forward-looking measures, India is positioning itself not only to harness AI for social good domestically but also to serve as a model for the Global South in building an inclusive, future-ready digital economy.

AI access remains unequal

AI exposure around the world is, however, uneven with persistent gaps in access to technology and skills across regions and within countries, genders, age groups and social categories. In low-income countries, only about 11.5% of employment is exposed to generative AI, compared with roughly one-third in high-income economies. These differences reflect variations in economic structures and underscore

the need for tailored policy approaches rather than one-size-fits-all solutions. Targeted public investment in skills development, digital infrastructure and social protection, alongside international collaboration and solidarity, are essential to ensure that AI fosters greater inclusion and expands opportunity across all countries.

The convergence of the AI Impact Summit and the World Day of Social Justice is a reminder that technology should primarily serve workers and societies. AI is moving faster than our institutions, but it does not absolve us from our collective responsibility. The task ahead is to align technological ambition with social purpose so that innovation strengthens trust, inclusion and dignity at work. Through such an approach, AI will not only reaffirm why work matters but also its intrinsic value as a source of dignity and social cohesion, and its fundamental role in building peaceful and socially just societies.



India stays out of statement criticising Israel's actions

Centre's decision not to sign the declaration is seen as linked to Modi's upcoming visit to Israel; Israel's Parliament has passed several plans to tighten control over West Bank in last few months

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

India has stayed out of a joint statement issued by 85 countries at the United Nations, criticising Israel's latest plans to tighten control of the West Bank territory.

The statement was endorsed by the League of Arab States; the European Union; BRICS founder members Russia, China, Brazil, and South Africa; India's Quad partners Australia and Japan; and neighbouring countries, including Bangladesh, the Maldives, Mauritius, and Pakistan. It came just ahead of a UN meeting on the issue and the U.S.-led Board of Peace meeting in Washington on Thursday.

India's decision is a departure from previous positions, particularly its vote at the UN in October 2025 criticising Israel's illegal annexation of Palestinian territory, and the Delhi Declaration on January 31, 2026 that supported a Palestinian state based on "1967 borders".

The External Affairs Ministry declined to comment on the reasons for India's stance.

More than a policy shift,



Shifting lines: Heavy machinery demolishes a Palestinian building near Hebron in Israeli-occupied West Bank on Wednesday. REUTERS

the flip-flop and the decisions to stay away from both the joint statement and the Board of Peace meetings are seen as linked to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's upcoming visit to Israel on February 25-26, observers say.

'Condemn move'

The joint statement was issued at a "stakeout" on Tuesday, and it was read out by the Palestinian Ambassador to the UN, flanked by diplomats from dozens of countries that co-signed the document.

"We strongly condemn unilateral Israeli decisions and measures aimed at expanding Israel's unlawful presence in the West Bank," Riyadh Mansour said.

"We underline in this regard our strong opposition to any form of annexation," Mr. Mansour said, adding that the statement rejected all measures "aimed at altering the demographic composition, character and status of the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem".

Over the past few months, following the ceasefire in Gaza, the Israeli Knesset has passed a number of plans to tighten its control over land in the Palestinian West Bank's "A" and "B" Areas, which have been administered by the Palestinian Authority since the Oslo Accords (1993-1995).

Among the measures are the removal of restric-

tions on the acquisition of land by outsiders and the checking of documentation for those currently living on the land.

"Such measures violate international law, undermine the ongoing efforts for peace and stability in the region, run counter to the Comprehensive Plan and jeopardise the prospect of reaching a peace agreement ending the conflict," the statement said.

India's refusal to join the statement signed by many significant states was criticised by diplomats on social media.

Former Ambassador to Iran K.C. Singh called it "regrettable that India has chosen Israeli corner so blatantly" and questioned whether the move was also linked to help India's ties with the U.S.

"Strategic autonomy was meant to expand India's choices, not shrink its moral vocabulary. If autonomy turns into avoidance of normative positions altogether, it starts looking less like independence and more like hedging," wrote former Foreign Secretary Nirupama Menon Rao, referring to India's normal positions on the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Order on 18% U.S. tariffs likely in '3-4 days': sources

United States' President Donald Trump reduced India's tariff from 50% to 25% effective February 7; the reduction of the balance 25% reciprocal tariffs to 18% is pending action from Washington

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan

NEW DELHI

U.S. President Donald Trump can reduce tariffs on imports from India to 18% from the current 25% without issuing a fresh Executive Order, said senior official in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. Instead, Mr. Trump can simply update the U.S. Federal Register with the new tariffs, the official explained, adding this should take place in "3-4 days".

As per a February 6 joint statement, the U.S. said it agreed to cut reciprocal tariffs on imports from India to 18% from the 25% set in



Ice melts: U.S. President Donald Trump shakes hands with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at White House, U.S. FILE REUTERS

July 2025. The U.S., in August 2025, also slapped a 25% penal tariff on Indian goods due to India's energy trade with Russia, taking the total tariffs to 50%.

Mr. Trump on February 6 issued Executive Order

14384, which removed the 25% penal tariffs linked to India's import of Russian oil from February 7. In an interview to *The Hindu* on February 9, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said he hoped to see the order to

reduce the balance 25% reciprocal tariffs to 18% in the subsequent week. As of now, however, the 25% is in force. The reason, a senior official said, was the U.S. government had its own processes and reciprocal tariffs were more complicated than penal tariffs.

"They have their own processes that take time," and these are reciprocal tariffs that need to be reduced," the official told

The Hindu. "We expect it in the next 3-4 days or maximum early next week. They do not need to necessarily reduce tariffs through executive order. They can simply enter it into their Federal Register."

Nordic states move to deepen Greenland ties after Trump threats

Reuters

Copenhagen, February 18

NORDIC GOVERNMENT ministers will meet in Denmark on Wednesday to discuss elevating Greenland and two other autonomous territories to equal status in a regional forum, boosting cooperation after US President Donald Trump's push to control the Arctic island.

Denmark and its European allies have rejected Trump's insistence that the Nordic country must hand Greenland to the United States, launching talks last month between Copenhagen, Nuuk and Washington to resolve the diplomatic standoff.

Wednesday's meeting will focus on upgrading the Helsinki Treaty, adopted in 1962 by Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland and Norway, to give full rights to the Danish-ruled territories of Greenland and the Faroe Islands as well as Finland's Åland.

The autonomous regions have for decades sought equal status in the Nordic forum, but were kept out of meetings focusing on security and related matters such as the war in Ukraine, leading Greenland's government in 2024 to boycott

E. EXPLAINED

Helsinki Treaty may be rewritten

The Helsinki Treaty update will give equal forum status to Greenland, the Faroe Islands and Åland. They will join security and policy talks. A commission will rewrite the treaty to grant rights, boosting Nordic cooperation with Denmark on defence, diplomacy and stronger economic ties.

the format.

“An update of the Helsinki Treaty will be a historic step and a future-proofing of Nordic cooperation,” Denmark's minister for Nordic cooperation, Morten Dahlin, said in a statement.

Greenland will actively participate in creating a commission to update the agreement, the island's Foreign Minister Vivian Motzfeldt said.

“The process surrounding the Helsinki Treaty will be decisive in determining whether Greenland can be recognised as an equal partner in Nordic cooperation,” Motzfeldt said.

With its strong presence, Europe gives India a vote of 'AI confidence'

Shubhajit Roy

New Delhi, February 18

WITH PRIME Minister Narendra Modi slated to inaugurate the leaders' segment of the India AI Impact Summit on Thursday, the strong European participation at the event is a major take-away. Eleven heads of state or government — France, The Netherlands, Spain, Croatia, Greece, Serbia, Slovakia, Estonia, Finland, Swiss Confederation and Liechtenstein — are participating in the Summit.

Besides two deputy PM-level leaders from the UK and Sweden and 12 ministerial-level dignitaries from Germany, Italy, EU, Portugal, Belgium, Ireland, Austria, Cyprus, Norway, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania and one deputy Speaker from Hungary — a total of 26 European nations have been officially represented.

Modi met Spanish President Pedro Sanchez on Wednesday and hailed AI as a transformative force and underlined the need for closer India-Spain cooperation to leverage its potential for inclusive development.

The Spanish President said the AI Impact Summit could emerge as a turning point in shaping a global framework for AI. The two leaders also discussed boosting bilateral cooperation in defence, trade and critical energy sectors. Modi held bilateral talks with Sanchez and several other leaders including his counterparts from Finland, Croatia, Bhutan and Kazakhstan as well as presidents of Estonia and Serbia on the margins of the summit.

Besides AI, the other focus area of the PM's bilateral talks with European leaders was the FTA between India and the 27-nation EU and how it would act as a strong catalyst to shore up bilateral trade and investments.

An Indian readout said President Sanchez highlighted the importance of the AI Summit and expressed confidence that its outcomes would contribute meaningfully to shaping global AI governance. "The two leaders recognised artificial intelligence as a transformative force and underlined the need for closer India-Spain cooperation to leverage its potential for inclusive development and societal benefit," it said.

This is the largest European delegation to any technology-centric event in India.

The EU leaders and their representatives, in official talks, have conveyed their unanimous support to the early implementation of the India-EU FTA. They have assured their support for its early ratification in the European Council and European Parliament, officials said.

According to them, France is playing a key role in AI governance and applications. PM Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron co-chaired the AI Action Summit in Paris in February 2025. In recent diplomatic engagements, officials said that Europe has given an "unambiguous vote of confidence" in the "vitality" of the India-Europe Strategic Partnership — anchored in AI, digital innovation, strategic cooperation, economic growth and shared global priorities.

Pakistan extends airspace closure to Indian airlines until March 24

Sukalp Sharma

New Delhi, February 18

PAKISTAN HAS extended the ban on Indian airlines and aircraft from entering its airspace by another month—till the early morning of March 24—as per a fresh notice to airmen (NOTAM) issued by Islamabad's aviation authorities.

India, too, is expected to reciprocate in a similar manner, which would take the neighbours' reciprocal airspace closures into their eleventh month.

With the relations between New Delhi and Islamabad worsening after the Pahalgam terror attack, Pakistan closed its airspace on April 24. Initially for one month, the closure banned Indian aircraft and airlines from overflying Pakistan. India responded on April 30 by closing its airspace to Pakistani aircraft and airlines. Since then, both countries have extended airspace closures for each other's airlines and aircraft one month at a time.

Pakistan has issued its latest NOTAM extending the airspace closure a few days before the February 24 expiration of the earlier notice. India's current ban on Pakistani aircraft is also

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set to expire on February 24, and India's aviation authorities are expected to issue a fresh NOTAM to extend the closure by another month before the current notice lapses.

Around 800 weekly flights—departures and arrivals—operated by Indian airlines have been affected due to the closure of Pakistani airspace. This leads to operational challenges like increased flight durations, higher fuel consumption and increased complexity in crew and flight scheduling. In some cases, flights are forced to take refueling stops overseas; flights on some routes have also been suspended.

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Bangladesh signals reset in India cricket ties after WC boycott

Mihir Vasavda
& Shubhajit Roy

Mumbai, New Delhi,
February 18

A POTENTIAL reset in ties between the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) could be on the horizon after Bangladesh's newly appointed State Minister for Youth and Sports Aminul Haque signalled a desire to rebuild bilateral relations, stressing on dialogue and cooperation.

Relations between the two neighbours had worsened after the Bangladesh cricket team declined to travel to India for its group-stage fixtures at the on-

Business as Usual

By EP UNNY

*They all belong
to the good old
handshaking era.*



going 2026 T20 World Cup, citing security concerns. The

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Bangladesh signals reset in India cricket ties

move was in response to IPL franchise Kolkata Knight Riders releasing Bangladesh bowler Mustafizur Rahman from their team on the BCCI's directions.

"After attending the oath-taking ceremony, I met with the Deputy High Commissioner of India at the Parliament building. I discussed this matter (T20 World Cup) with him. He was very friendly, and I also spoke to him in a friendly manner," Haque was quoted as saying by *The Daily Star*.

Haque emphasised that Dhaka is keen to resolve all disputes. "I told him that we want to resolve this issue quickly through discussions because we want to maintain friendly relations with all our neighboring countries. From sports to all other sectors, we want to build a

E. EXPLAINED

Thaw after freeze

With the new BNP government in Dhaka reaching out to India, the Bangladesh Sports Minister's conciliatory remarks open the door for renewed cooperation between BCCI and BCB.

sincere and cordial relationship," he said.

Reflecting on Bangladesh's absence from the global tournament, Haque — the former national football captain — attributed the decision to strained ties. "You know that because of

diplomatic complications, we could not play in the World Cup. If those issues had been discussed and settled earlier, our team might have participated," he said.

Following its election victory, the new Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) government has indicated that it wants to recalibrate ties. Besides, there is a sense in Dhaka that the interim government under Prof Mohammad Yunus mishandled the situation by boycotting the World Cup. Although there is resentment over Mustafizur's exclusion from the IPL, and India for what is perceived to be an inappropriate response, the boycott decision is being seen as counterproductive.

Meanwhile, the Sports Minister also questioned the legit-

imacy of the recent BCB polls, indirectly questioning the standing of board president Aminul Islam. "Regarding the cricket board election, I have said before and I still say that it was questionable," Haque said.

"Look, this matter is regulated by the ICC. Within the framework of the law and regulations, whatever needs to be done will be addressed through discussions. After sitting down and reviewing everything properly, I will comment further," he said.

The Daily Star also reported that the BCB president Aminul Islam Bulbul had left the country citing personal reasons while the board's CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury has departed for Australia to join his family residing there.