

# Most SIR adjudication cases in Bengal are from Muslim-dominated districts

**Shiv Sahay Singh**

KOLKATA

Most West Bengal voters awaiting adjudication during the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls are from minority-dominated districts, according to data shared by the State's Chief Electoral Officer.

There are 60,06,675 cases under adjudication in the final roll published on February 28.

Muslim-dominated districts have the highest number of such voters, including 11 lakh in Murshidabad and eight lakh in Malda.

In fact, these two districts bordering Bangladesh have almost one-third



Booth-level officers hang voters' list after the publication of the post-SIR electoral rolls, in Birbhum, West Bengal on Sunday. PTI

of cases under adjudication. There are 4.8 lakh cases under adjudication in Uttar Dinajpur, 5.9 lakh in North 24 Parganas, and 5.2 lakh in South 24 Parganas. These districts also have a high percentage of minority population.

There are 501 judicial of-

ficers working to clear the names of 60 lakh electors, and supplementary lists will be published, in accordance with the Supreme Court's order of February 20.

West Bengal's final electoral roll, published on February 28, has 7.04 crore

electors, 8.09% lower than when the process started on October 27, 2025.

## 'Fixed target'

The Trinamool Congress leadership plans to continue its protests against the SIR. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee will sit on a dharna against the Election Commission (EC), on March 6 in Kolkata.

At a press conference on Sunday, Trinamool Congress MP and general secretary Abhishek Banerjee alleged that the "target of deleting over one crore voters was decided even before the exercise began".

"...They had fixed a target. The Election Commission is acting accordingly," Mr. Banerjee alleged.

# Selective outrage

Judiciary seems quick to take offence only when it sees itself under attack

**T**he Supreme Court Bench that took up the NCERT Class 8 social science textbook case might have overreacted when it saw the critical references to the judiciary as a “deep-seated conspiracy” and declared that it will not allow “anyone on earth” to tarnish the judiciary’s integrity. While the government has expressed remorse, Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan’s statement that action will be taken against officials responsible for inserting references to case pendency and “judicial corruption” is an exercise in executive arbitrariness prompted by judicial overreach. In fairness to the Court, it would likely not have taken offence to the passages had these had been in any other book. But textbooks are official, authoritative accounts and the judiciary found the passages ill-motivated. Instances of judicial corruption are real and censoring textbooks is not a corrective measure.

Since the BJP came to power, rewriting school and college textbooks has been a key part of its agenda. Right-wing commentators often find court judgments, such as those giving precedence to the environment as against development, or worse, as against religious practices of Hindus, and therefore not nationalistic or beneficial to the vast majority of the people of India. An adviser to the Prime Minister recently called the judiciary the single biggest obstacle to development. The Court, perhaps, saw the textbook as an attempt to intimidate the judiciary. Some of the sentences were indeed in the form of broad-brushing social media assertions not carefully constructed with rigour. The textbook, for instance, said, “People do experience corruption at various levels of the judiciary” and went on to describe complaints and redress mechanisms. But, such critical references had been used in chapters dealing with the government or the political executive as well. The chapter on elections had a picture of currency notes apparently found in the car of a candidate. The textbook writers probably aimed to spark critical awareness, not offer bland tutorials in civic studies. But as with other textbooks, there are problematic passages. The many history chapters uncritically valorise medieval Hindu kingdoms and portray their struggle to retain power as rightful resistances to Muslim rule. Wars for plunder and territorial expansion have always been part of history, and they did not begin with Muslim invaders. Chapters on Muslim kingdoms briefly refer to Akbar’s tolerance and Babur’s intellectual curiosity but remain largely negative. The chapter on penury under British rule and Mughal-era wealth is not balanced. The problem is not that the textbook selectively targets the judiciary; it is that the judiciary selectively targets certain portions.

# Skill India as herculean challenges, Galgotian blunders

Once-in-a-lifetime opportunity requires a herculean effort. India's demographic dividend, that ends by 2040, is one such opportunity. Several European Union countries and China have successfully financed skill systems. In these countries, approximately 50% of secondary-level students are enrolled in vocational education streams. In India that share is 1.3%, reflective of an educational system that neglected school education till 1990, and vocational education till 2006.

However, in 2020, India's National Education Policy (NEP) said: "By 2025, 50% learners will be exposed to vocational education." "Exposed" still reveals an attitudinal problem among policy designers. Vocational education in most countries is around 2% of the education budget. For China and Germany it is 11%. India has no data that is publicly available due to fragmented training schemes in Ministries. India's strategy rests on Budget announcements which falter year-on-year. A scheme that was celebrated last year is forgotten the next year. Consider the internship scheme announced in Budget FY 2026: only 5% of the allocated funds were spent and its design proved ineffective.

## CAG reports, issues raised

The herculean task of making India "the skill capital of the world" is inconsistent with "Galgotian" blunders. Issues of financing skills are crucial. The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) in 2025 audited the flagship Skill India scheme, Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY)-2015-22. Ten years ago, it had similarly looked at compliance and oversight issues of skill institutions.

Both reports raise issues of financial impropriety. In 2015, the CAG dealt with financial reporting delays and unclear accountability of disbursed funds. In 2025, the report mentions that 94.5% of bank accounts were invalid and approximately 41% of trainees in short-term training achieved placement.

How have we evolved from 2015 through 2025? When the short-term skill ecosystem was started, the vision was to create a vibrant public-private market for skills. Over the past decade, however, the focus on quantity through short-term training

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has yielded limited results. Since the CAG's direct concern is fund use, we list three ideas for it.

Imagine a scenario where no operational funding was provided by the PMKVY. What if the amount upward of ₹10,000 crore spent annually was extended as skill loans to students? This would have led to more choices for students, improved the quality of institutions as they competed for enrolment, and promoted demand-driven skill development, benefiting students as they are from economically weaker backgrounds. A model similar to that for educational loans could have been followed. The worst case would be non-performing assets, which we have ways to handle. It is not too late. We can do so now and use skill loans better. There is already a policy framework in place. Priority needs to shift: part of PMKVY funding could be through skill loans. Of course, design work is needed to roll this out, but it is doable. It needs a product-market that has banks and non-banking financial companies on board. It is worth questioning why the National Skill Development Corporation began as a non-banking finance company, later became a funder for training partners, and now primarily implements government schemes.

## Using skill vouchers

Use of skill vouchers is another trainee-based skills financing idea, more so for distribution of public funds. It allows flexibility for policymakers and a choice for students. There is no better way to implement the NEP priority of lifelong learning.

Since vouchers follow the trainee rather than the institution, it incentivises delivery and outcomes. It creates a competitive market. Vouchers can also be good tools to provide upskilling for Artificial Intelligence (AI)-led transition, providing targeted skills in AI, digital and green skills. They can be used for needed segments such as enhancing women workforce participation or provide foreign language learning for global labour markets.

Purchasing power in the hands of learners will drive quality and accountability and be a driver of a demand-based skills market. Singapore and Croatia have implemented them well. It will also

encourage school leavers to pursue vocational courses instead of defaulting to degrees, which often inflate tertiary enrolment.

## The idea of skill levies

Skill levies on organised industries, used in more than 90-plus countries, is another fundamental idea. A well-designed skills levy can sustainably finance skills. In 2017, we had designed and recommended a Reimbursable Industry Contribution (RIC) to the Government of India for the Twelfth Five Year plan. At that time there were 62-plus countries doing it; now, 90-plus have adopted it, for good reasons.

Across Latin America, in Germany, Singapore, South Africa and South Korea, such models have been used to ensure industry ownership of skills and to create stable funding insulated from political and budgetary cycles. Linking contributions to firm size and payroll and then returning them to the industry when training has happened makes employers in-charge of skill development.

Today, skills programmes are supply-driven and government-financed.

Employer engagement in today's system is inadequate. We can move from an employer-engaged to an employer-owned system through the RIC reform. It is tested world-wide and there is a small demographic window for this policy choice.

Finally, real time skills demand must feed into policy. Understanding this trajectory needs transparent rules. A mandate for online job boards to share data in a form that safeguards their business interest but also provides aggregate understanding to the government is needed. Data mining and AI modelling can help.

Periodic/one-off skill gap studies (as has been the norm) cannot achieve this goal. The data shared can be made public in the National Career Service (NCS) portal. India's goal to construct a labour market information system has not materialised. This may be the only workable way for skills planning.

Enough strategic errors have been made. By 2040, the demographic dividend will end. It is time for a course correction – we know we can. We hope, we will.

Reforming skill financing is crucial to harness India's demographic dividend

# Iran hits Israel, U.S. bases after killing of Khamenei

Iranian authorities say over 200 people have been killed since start of the U.S. and Israeli strikes; U.S. President says he will 'be talking' to Iran leaders, while Israel pledged 'non-stop' strikes

**Associated Press**  
**Agence France-Presse**  
TEHRAN/DUBAI

Iran vowed revenge on Sunday after the killing of its Supreme Leader, and traded strikes with Israel as part of a widening war prompted by a U.S. and Israeli bombardment a day earlier.

U.S. President Donald Trump warned that any retaliation would only lead to further escalation. He said he would "be talking" to Iranian leaders but was vague on the timing and noted that much of the country's leadership was dead. "They want to talk, and I have agreed to talk, so I will be talking to them. They should have done it sooner," he was quoted as saying by *The Atlantic*.

Blasts in Tehran sent a



A video grab from Israeli military footage shows strikes on what it calls 'headquarters of the Iranian terror regime' in Tehran. AFP

huge plume of smoke into the sky in an area where there are government buildings. Iranian state television said that it had been targeted by strikes.

"The technical team is assessing the damage," said the broadcaster.

Iranian authorities say more than 200 people have been killed since the start of the U.S. and Israeli strikes that killed Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and other senior leaders.

Earlier, Iran fired missiles at an ever-widening

list of targets in Israel and Gulf Arab states in retaliation while Israel pledged "non-stop" strikes against Iran's leaders and military.

In Israel, loud explosions caused by missile impacts or interceptions could be heard in Tel Aviv.

Israel's rescue services said nine people were killed and 28 wounded in a strike that hit a synagogue in the central town of Beit Shemesh, bringing the overall death toll in the country to 11. The U.S. military said three service members have been killed and five seriously wounded in the Iran operation.

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**EDITORIAL**

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# Iran hits Israel, U.S. base after Khamenei's death

Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian said in a pre-recorded message aired on state television that a new leadership council had begun its work. Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said a new Supreme Leader would be chosen in "one or two days".

Iran has named Ayatollah Alireza Araf, a senior cleric, to its interim leadership council. The interim council, which will also include the President and the head of the judiciary, will lead the country until the Assembly of Experts "elects a permanent leader as soon as possible".

"You have crossed our red line and must pay the price," Iran's parliamentary Speaker, Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, said in a televised address on Sunday. "We will deliver such devastating blows that you yourselves will be driven to beg."

Mr. Trump warning against any retaliation said on a social media post, "They better not do that. If they do, we will hit them with a force that has never been seen before!"

He also said that the strikes had sunk nine Iranian naval vessels and partially destroyed Iran's navy headquarters.

As U.S. and Israeli strikes have pounded Iran, the Islamic Republic has retaliated with missiles and drone attacks on Israel and nearby Arab Gulf countries hosting U.S. forces.

On Sunday, Iran's Revolutionary Guards said they struck U.S. aircraft carrier *USS Abraham Lincoln*. "The U.S. aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln was struck by four ballistic missiles," the Guards said in a statement carried by local media, warning that the "the land and sea will increasingly become the graveyard of the terrorist aggressors". However, U.S. Central Command said the aircraft carrier "was not hit".

In repeated barrages across Israel, at least 10 people were killed.

Israel's Defence Minister Israel Katz said on Sunday that Israel will have "a non-stop air train" of strikes against military and leadership targets in Iran.

Shrapnel from Iranian attacks on Abu Dhabi killed two people, state media said, and debris from aerial interceptions caused fires at the city's main port and on the facade of the Burj Al Arab hotel. Attacks also extended into Oman – Iran's long-time interlocutor with the West that hadn't been drawn into the fray previously.

# Indians among injured in Iranian strikes: UAE

Conflict between U.S.-Israel alliance and Iran sends shock waves across West Asia; oil tanker with Indians among crew hit off Oman coast; eight Indians stuck in Karachi airport after aircraft diversion over the conflict; MEA urges foreign nationals who could not leave India to contact their nearest FRRO for visa extension and stay regularisation

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

Several Indians were among those who have been injured in the missile and drone attacks by Iran in West Asia, authorities in the UAE and Oman said on Sunday. The announcement came as the conflict between U.S.-Israel alliance and the Islamic Republic entered its second day even as Indian missions heightened activities to address concerns of citizens scattered across West Asia.

Three were killed in drone attacks and 58, including Indians, were injured in the UAE, the Defence Ministry of the Gulf country said. Iran launched 541 drones at Abu Dhabi and Dubai and nearly 506 of these were destroyed by the UAE forces, the Ministry said. "Three deaths of Pakistani,

Nepalese, and Bangladeshi nationalities, and 58 cases of minor injuries of Emirati, Egyptian, Ethiopian, Filipino, Pakistani, Iranian, Indian, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Azerbaijani, Yemeni, Ugandan, Eritrean, Lebanese, and Afghan nationalities." A total of 165 ballistic missiles launched by Iran were detected since the beginning of the conflict and 152 of them were destroyed, it said.

An oil tanker with 20 crew members, 15 among them Indians, was targeted off the Oman coast, the Maritime Security Centre of Oman said. The tanker *Skylight*, under the flag of the Republic of Palau, was struck five nautical miles north of the Khasab port in the Musandam Governorate and the crew were evacuated, it said, adding that "preliminary information also indicates varying injuries among four mem-



**Embassy outreach:** Indian embassy officials interact with nationals stranded in Kuwait amid temporary airspace shutdown. PTI

bers of the ship's crew who have been transferred to receive necessary medical treatment".

## Stranded passengers

The ripple effect of the conflict is being felt across India with flight cancellations and uncertainties leaving people stranded at multiple locations.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Sunday issued an order urging all fo-

reign nationals who failed to leave India because of the conflict to reach out to their nearest Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO) for extension of visa and regularisation of stay.

A total of 84 students and 4 faculty members of Indira University's School of Business, Pune, were stuck in Dubai after temporary closure of UAE airspace. The team had tra-

velled to Dubai for an international academic and cultural immersion programme, and the institution has urged the MEA to safely bring them back, *The Hindu* was told. "The authority has assured that once airspace operations resume, arrangements will be made for their safe return to India at the earliest," said ISBS Dean Janardhan Pawar. All of them are safe, said the institute.

Among the passengers stranded at the Dubai Airport was two-time Olympic medalist P.V. Sindhu, who said there was an explosion near the airport on Sunday morning. "A few hours ago, there was an explosion close to where we were holed up at the airport. My coach had to quickly run out of the area as he was closest to the smoke and debris. It was an extremely tense and scary moment for all of us.

We are all safe now and have been moved to a more secure place," she said in a post on X on Sunday.

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's office (CMO) confirmed that three Keralites of a family were among eight Indians stranded in Karachi as their aircraft was diverted to Pakistan due to the conflict. The CMO identified them as Krishnadas Nagaluru (Palakkad), his wife, Dr. Rashmi Menon (Ernakulam), and their daughter, Smriti Menon (aged three). The family was on an Air Arabia flight from Azerbaijan to Kuwait via Sharjah when air controllers diverted the plane to Karachi.

## Flight services hit

While arrivals from West Asian countries continued through the morning in Hyderabad, many passengers described a growing sense of unease during

their journeys. Abrar, a resident of Shaikpet, said he had travelled from Medina in Saudi Arabia to Jeddah before boarding a direct flight to Hyderabad on Saturday. "There was not much tension when we boarded the flight on Saturday. Mid-flight, an announcement was made saying that some tensions were ongoing and that those with connecting flights could check with their airline after landing in Hyderabad," he said.

According to information provided by airport authorities, 48 flights to and from Hyderabad were cancelled on Sunday. IndiGo accounted for the highest number of cancellations, with 33 flights affected. Other airlines impacted included Emirates, Qatar Airways, Etihad Airways, Air Arabia, Kuwait Airways, Gulf Air, and Oman Air.

## ● Indians in the warzone

Country	NRI	PIO	Total
Bahrain	3.23 lakh	3,899	3.27 lakh
Saudi Arabia	24.60 lakh	2,906	24.63 lakh
Qatar	8.35 lakh	1,609	8.36 lakh
UAE	35.54 lakh	14,574	35.68 lakh
Kuwait	9.93 lakh	2,244	9.95 lakh
Oman	6.84 lakh	1,864	6.86 lakh
Iran	10,320	445	10,765
Israel	20,000	85,000	1.05 lakh

SOURCE: POPULATION OF OVERSEAS INDIANS, MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

# Slogans against US, Israel during protests in Lucknow, Srinagar

**Express News Service**

*Srinagar, Jammu, Lucknow, March 1*

THE KILLING of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in an attack by the US and Israel sparked protests across J&K as well as the Old City area of Lucknow on Sunday.

J&K CM Omar Abdullah called for calm, asking people to "avoid any actions that could lead to tension or unrest".

On Sunday morning, thousands assembled at Srinagar's Lal Chowk and raised anti-US and anti-Israel slogans. Later, the J&K Police sealed Lal Chowk and put restrictions on civilian movement to prevent the protests from potentially spiralling and causing a law-and-order issue.

Protesters also took to the streets of the Old City of Srinagar, which has a significant Shia population. These mark the first major protests in the Valley since the abrogation of Article 370.

Protests also erupted at several places in central Kashmir's Budgam district. At Haigam in north Kashmir's Baramulla district, protesters blocked the Srinagar-Baramulla NH.

In Jammu division, protests were reported from Surankote town of Poonch district, Ramban town and Doda district's Baderwah area.

The CM's office said the J&K

government is coordinating with the Ministry of External Affairs for the safety and welfare of students and others from J&K who are in the region. J&K L-G Manoj Sinha appealed to all communities to remain calm and united. He reviewed the security situation across the UT at a meeting with Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo, DGP Nalin Prabhat and other officials.

Condemning Khamenei's killing, PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti said on X, "Today marks a deeply tragic and shameful point in history with Israel and USA, boasting about the killing of Iran's beloved leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei."

The Valley's chief cleric, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, called for a shutdown on Monday while calling for unity among the Muslim nations.

Meanwhile, in the Old city area of Lucknow, hundreds of people from the Shia community took to streets amid heavy police presence at prominent points including Akbari Gate, Nakhas, Hussainabad and surrounding localities.

The All India Shia Personal Law Board announced a "national mourning" for three days. "Bada Imambara and Chota Imambara will remain closed for tourists for next three days," said Maulana Mohammad Mirza Yasoob Abbas of AISPLB.

# To hit back. Iran draws from its massive, diverse arsenal of missiles and drones

**Amrita Nayak Dutta**  
New Delhi, March 1

IN RESPONSE to the ongoing strikes carried out against it by Israel and the US, Iran launched waves of drones and missiles targeting Israeli territory and US-linked assets in the Gulf.

Iran started developing its missile programme during the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s and its stockpile has since grown in scale and diversity. Here's a look at Iran's diverse and massive drone, ballistic and cruise missile arsenal.

## ● In Iran's growing stockpile of missiles



Iran also has a variety of military UAVs — including surveillance, and precision strikes and has reportedly acquired Soviet-era Kh-55 cruise missiles from Ukraine, with a range of up to 3,000 km

## *Ballistic Missile Arsenal*

Ballistic missiles work by taking a parabolic path through the atmosphere, and travel faster than drones and cruise missiles. They are usually harder to intercept. Iran possesses a substantial range of Short-Range Ballistic Missiles (SRBMs), Medium-Range Ballistic Missiles (MRBMs) and potentially Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missiles (IRBMs). Most of these have the capability to hit other West Asian countries, while European countries such as Britain, France and Germany fall within the range of

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

# Airlines cancel 350 flights; all services to 11 nations suspended

**Jagriti Chandra**

NEW DELHI

Indian airlines cancelled nearly 350 flights on Sunday, with Air India suspending 20 additional long-haul services to European destinations, including London, Zurich, Milan, Frankfurt and Copenhagen.

The cancellations add to the complete suspension of flights by all Indian carriers to 11 countries in West Asia, following air strikes in the region in the wake of the war between Israel-U.S. and Iran and an urgent advisory issued by the Directorate-General of Civil Aviation valid until March 2. Air India on Sunday announced 20 additional flight cancellations across Europe, taking the total number of its long-haul and ultra-long-haul services, over and above the Gulf flights, scrapped for the day to 48. This includes 28

## Indians among those injured in Iranian strikes

NEW DELHI

Several Indians were among those who have been injured in the missile and drone attacks by Iran in West Asia, authorities in the UAE and Oman said. Indian missions heightened activities to address concerns of citizens scattered across West Asia. » **PAGE 11**

earlier cancellations affecting routes to the U.S., Canada and Europe.

The UAE's aviation regulator announced that the state would cover all accommodation and sustenance costs for the stranded passengers, ensuring continued provision of essential services, according to *Khaleej Times*.

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## Indian airlines suspend services to all 11 nations

Authorities in Dubai and Abu Dhabi have instructed hotels to accommodate guests unable to depart due to the disruption.

In Dubai, the Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism issued a formal directive to hotel managers, asking them to allow affected guests to extend their stay on the same terms as in their original bookings.

In Abu Dhabi, authorities issued a parallel order that goes a step further, confirming that the government would bear the accommodation costs for stranded guests, according to local media reports.

The Embassy of India in Muscat, Oman issued a public notice informing that Indian citizens in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE), who hold valid resident cards, were eligible for a visa on arrival, enabling them to enter Oman and seek temporary shelter.

The advisory added that Indian passport holders with a valid visa or residence permit from the U.S., the U.K., Canada, Japan and Schengen countries are also eligible for a visa on arrival, allowing entry into Oman for up to 10 days without a pre-arranged visa.

Other travellers may apply for an e-visa through an authorised travel agency.

# Iran attacks oil tanker with 15 Indians on board off Oman coast

Press Trust of India

New Delhi, March 1

A PALAU-FLAGGED oil tanker with 15 Indian crew members came under attack from the Iranian military off Oman's Musandam peninsula and four people were injured in the strike, Omani authorities said on Sunday.

Oman's Maritime Security Center said the oil tanker — Skylight — came under attack around five nautical miles north of the port of Khasab in the Musandam governorate, according to Oman news agency.

The entire crew of 20 persons, comprising 15 Indian nationals and five Iranians, have been safely evacuated, it said.

It said four crew members sustained injuries of varying degrees and have been given medical care. People familiar with the incident indicated that New Delhi is in touch with the relevant authorities.

Iran on Sunday said it will avenge the killing of its Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Saturday that India is deeply concerned at the recent developments in Iran and the Gulf region.

“We urge all sides to exercise restraint, avoid escalation, and prioritise the safety of civilians,” it said. “Dialogue and diplomacy should be pursued to de-escalate tensions and address underlying issues. Sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states must be respected,” it said.

## Indian among 58 injured in UAE

An Indian national is



Smoke billows from the oil tanker. All crew members were evacuated. PTI

among 58 people who sustained minor injuries in Iranian military strikes targeting the UAE, according to details shared by the country.

The Indian embassy in Abu Dhabi said it is in touch with the hospital authorities. “The Indian national is out of danger. We are rendering all possible assistance,” the mission said on social media.

The UAE defence ministry said three people were killed and 58 sustained minor injuries in the Iranian strikes. The UAE defence ministry said its military has dealt with 165 ballistic missiles, two cruise missiles and 541 drones fired by Iran since the start of its attack.

“The incidents resulted in three fatalities of Pakistani, Nepali and Bangladeshi nationalities...” it said. The specific location within the UAE where the Indian national sustained the injury is not yet clear.

# At least 22 killed, over 120 hurt in protests across Pak.

## Associated Press

KARACHI

Violent clashes between protesters and security forces in Pakistan's port city of Karachi and in the country's north on Sunday left at least 22 people dead and more than 120 others injured in pro-Iran demonstrations, authorities said.

At least 10 people were killed in firing in Karachi when protesters tried to storm the U.S. Consulate in the port city. Police said that at least 40 people were also wounded in the clashes and some of them were in critical condition.

Twelve people were killed and over 80 wounded in clashes with police in the northern Gilgit-Baltistan region when thousands of Shia protesters attacked the offices of the UN Mili-



Protesters engaging in a clash with security forces outside the U.S. Consulate in Karachi, Pakistan on Sunday. REUTERS

tary Observer Group and the UN Development Programme (UNDP), local police official Asghar Ali said.

The U.S. Embassy in Islamabad said it is monitoring reports of ongoing demonstrations even as Pakistan's Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi requested the citizens not to take the law into their hands, and "record protest peacefully".

Meanwhile, Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said that the killing of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was a "violation" of international law.

President Asif Ali Zardari also expressed his "profound sorrow over the martyrdom of Khamenei" and conveyed his condolences to Iran.

## FISCAL DEFICIT OF 4.3% NEEDS 14% NOMINAL GROWTH

# Centre's debt target, \$4-tn economy aim now more difficult to achieve

Siddharth Upasani  
New Delhi, March 1

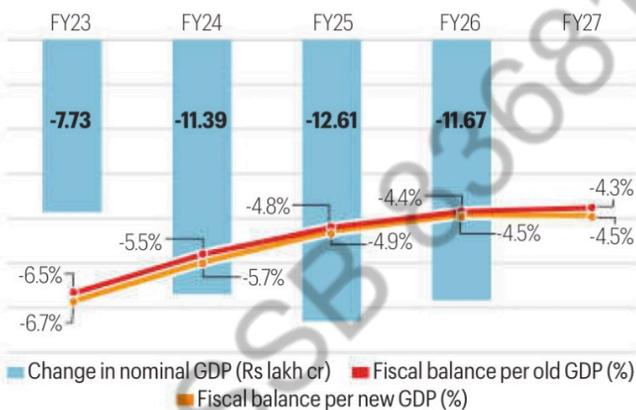
THE MINISTRY of Statistics and Programme Implementation's (MoSPI) revamp of the gross domestic product (GDP) data has thrown up several interesting changes from what we previously thought of the Indian economy. Chief among them is that the growth in 2023-24 (FY24) is now not as high (7.2%) as estimated earlier (9.2%).

However, growth is only the year-on-year change in the GDP in rupee terms — so, that is where one must look to understand the consequences of the new GDP series. And the Indian economy is somewhat smaller than what the Statistics Ministry had previously calculated.

The new series with 2022-23 as the base year for prices has led to a reduction in the GDP in nominal terms by 3-4% in FY26 because of changes in sources of data used to compile the GDP as well as the methods.

A change in the size of the economy has knock-on effects. The Union Budget presented on February 1 said the fiscal deficit target of 4.4% of GDP for FY26 was set to be achieved. However,

### • New GDP series complicates fiscal math



**Note:** Change in nominal GDP is from old to new series; FY27 fiscal balance assumes 10% nominal growth; **Source:** MoSPI, Budget documents, *The Indian Express* calculations

that ratio was calculated on the basis of the first advance estimate of GDP, released in January, as per the old series. Under the new series released on Friday — which lowered this year's nominal GDP by 3.3% to Rs 345 lakh crore — the fiscal deficit for FY26 edges up to 4.5%. And given that the nominal GDP in absolute terms has reduced for previous years as well, fiscal deficits have risen: from 6.5% to 6.7%

for FY23, 5.5% to 5.7% for FY24, and 4.8% to 4.9% for FY25.

Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran took note of the same on Friday, although he said the GDP revisions do not alter the fiscal trajectory the government is on.

For FY27, the picture is not so simple. The fiscal deficit target has been fixed at 4.3% of GDP, or Rs 16.96 lakh crore in absolute terms. Assuming the fiscal defi-

cit in rupee terms is met, achieving the target in terms of the GDP will require nominal growth next year to be 13-14% — much higher than the Budget's assumption of 10% — according to calculations by *The Indian Express*. This, as per SBI Capital Markets, appears difficult even if real growth in FY27 is in line with the CEA's revised forecast of 7-7.4%. "Clearly, the Centre will have to recalibrate its borrowing to achieve fiscal aims," SBI Capital Markets' Venkatesh Balakrishnan said in a note Friday.

While the Centre's final objective is for India to be developed by 2047, one milestone on that journey is to become a \$4 trillion economy. A reduction in the nominal GDP under the new series does not help. Going by Friday's closing exchange rate of 90.98/USD, India's GDP in FY26 stood at \$3.8 trillion. At the same exchange rate for FY27, and 10% nominal GDP growth assumed in the Budget, the economy will comfortably exceed the \$4-trillion mark next year. But much depends not only on the nominal growth rate but also the rupee's exchange rate.

FULL REPORT ON

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

# GST collection increases by 8.1% to over ₹1.83 lakh crore

**Press Trust of India**

NEW DELHI

Gross Goods and Services Tax (GST) collection increased by 8.1% to over ₹1.83 lakh crore in February, led by higher growth in revenues from imports and improved domestic sales.

Gross domestic revenue rose 5.3% to about ₹1.36 lakh crore, while gross import revenue climbed 17.2% to ₹47,837 crore. Total refunds were up 10.2% at ₹22,595 crore.

Total net GST collection stood at over ₹1.61 lakh crore, up 7.9% year-on-year.

Net cess revenue was ₹5,063 crore, down from ₹13,481 crore in February last year.

The GST rates on about 375 items were slashed, effective from September 2025. Also, four tax slabs of 5%, 12%, 18% and 28% were merged into two of 5% and 18%, with a highest 40% slab for a select few ultra



luxury goods and tobacco products. The GST collections had initially dipped in the first month of tax cut implementation, with revenues declining to ₹1.7 lakh crore in November.

The collection rose to ₹1.74 lakh crore in December and further to ₹1.93 lakh crore in January.

## 'Consumption uptick'

Deloitte India Partner M.S. Mani said GST collection figures reflected the fact that there had been a consumption uptick that had more than compensated for the

rate reductions. However, the negative growth reported by major States such as Tamil Nadu (-6%), Madhya Pradesh (-8%), and Rajasthan (-1%), and the single digit growth below the national average of 8% reported by West Bengal (1%), Haryana (2%), Uttar Pradesh (5%), and Maharashtra (6%) would be a matter of concern, Mr. Mani said.

EY India tax partner Saurabh Agarwal said this performance reaffirmed the strength of India's consumption engine.