

# In its first budget, Bengal BJP govt. pushes for jobs, revival of industries

**Shiv Sahay Singh**

KOLKATA

The Bharatiya Janata Party government in West Bengal on Monday tabled its first budget in the Assembly with a push for the industrial revival and creation of jobs. It also continued the State's tradition of welfare of farmers and the backward classes.

Finance Minister Swapan Dasgupta tabled a ₹4.38-lakh-crore budget with the promise that the aim of the newly elected government was to "build *Viksit Bangla* as a part of *Viksit Bharat*".

Mr. Dasgupta announced that the State government was going to provide employment to one lakh people in the financial year 2026-27 with 33% of the vacant posts reserved



Swapan Dasgupta

for women candidates.

Another highlight of the budget was the announcement of a 20% hike of Dearness Allowance (DA) for State government employees.

Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari assured that the State government employees in the due course would receive DA on a par with Central government employees, a demand of the employees and a poll promise of the BJP. The

budget set aside ₹36,000 crore for Annapurna Yojana, the financial assistance scheme for women in which eligible candidates would receive ₹3,000 a month. For unemployed youth, the Finance Minister announced ₹3,000 a month under the *Bhorsa Karmasathi* scheme.

For rural employment, the West Bengal government allocated ₹14,000 crore under the *Viksit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin)* (VB-G RAM G) scheme, which was likely to begin in the State from July 2026. Funds under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) had been suspended in the State since 2022 due to Centre-State tussle.

"We have ended the

needless conflict with the Centre and tried to take advantage of everything the double engine has to offer," Mr. Dasgupta said.

The budget reintroduced a scheme of providing incentives to industry and allocated ₹5,000 crore for the purpose. The State also promised a West Bengal Industrial Promotion Framework.

## Agriculture package

For the welfare of farmers, the budget unveiled a wide-ranging agriculture package, including ₹3,000 annual State assistance for farmers in addition to PM-KISAN benefits and a ₹200 per quintal bonus over minimum support price for paddy procurement.

**FUND FOR SUNDARBANS**

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# Core sector growth slows to 0.5% in May; coal, refinery products down amid crisis

**T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan**

NEW DELHI

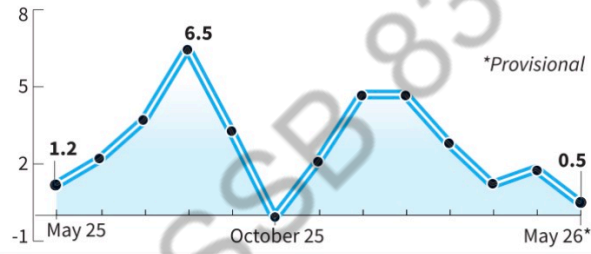
The growth in India's eight core industrial sectors slowed to 0.5% in May 2026, the second lowest in 21 months, official data showed. The data on the Index of Eight Core Industries released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry on Monday showed that five out of eight sectors contracted in May.

The only month in the past 21 months that saw a slower core sector growth was October 2025, when the index contracted 0.1%.

"Core sector growth in May was disappointing at 0.5% compared with 1.2% last year," Madan Sabnavis, chief economist at the Bank of Baroda, said. "The lower growth number on a low base can be attributed

## Growth slump

After touching 6.5% in August 2025, core sector growth has slowed to 0.5% in May 2026, the second lowest in 21 months



SOURCE: MINISTRY OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY

more to the decline in production from the petroleum-based sector."

The crude oil sector contracted 4.6% in May, a worse performance than the contraction of 3.9% in April and of 1.8% in May last year. Similarly, the natural gas sector contracted 4.9% in May, its worst performance in three months.

The refinery products

sector contracted by 8.7% in May, its worst performance in three-and-half years. According to Rahul Agrawal, principal economist at ICRA, this "partly reflects the fallout of the West Asia crisis". The coal sector, too, contracted by 9.3% – the worst in 10 months. "Crude oil, natural gas, and refinery products – all registered a de-

cline in production," Mr. Sabnavis said. "This can be attributed more to the higher import of crude and softening of prices in the international market."

The fertilizer sector contracted for the third consecutive month in May, by 0.9%. This was, however, a stronger performance than the contraction of 8.6% in April and of 24.6% in March.

The steel, cement, and electricity sectors were the only ones that registered growth in May. Of these, the electricity sector saw growth accelerate to 8.7%, albeit on a low base since the sector contracted by 4.7% in May last year. The steel sector saw growth slowing to a 13-month low of 5%, while the cement sector quickened marginally to a growth of 8.4%.

# Goyal-Greer talks start today, trade surplus with US down over 40%

**Ravi Dutta Mishra**  
*New Delhi, June 22*



**EXPLAINED**

WHILE COMMERCE Minister Piyush Goyal is scheduled to begin the two-day talks with United States Trade Representative Jamieson Greer on Tuesday to conclude a trade deal by next month, data shows that India's trade surplus with the US has slipped by over 40% since the negotiations began last year, following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's meeting with US President Donald Trump on February 13, 2025.

## **Across sectors**

From petroleum products to electronic components, motor vehicles to fresh fruits, data shows Indian exports are declining while imports from the US are on the rise.

The high-level talks come as the US is set to complete its  
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# Trade surplus with US down

## • Imports from US rising, exports falling

	U.S. IMPORTS TO INDIA (in \$ million)			INDIA'S EXPORTS TO U.S. (in \$ million)		
	March 2025	March 2026	Growth %	March 2025	March 2026	Growth %
Petroleum products	139	321	130	309	235	-24
Electronic component	182	431	136	203	135	-33
Organic chemicals	86	172	98	115	101	-12
Copper products	29	75	159	38	31	-18
Motor vehicles/Cars	1	14	1,284	2	1	-37
Fresh fruits	113	131	15	2	1	-10

SOURCE: COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY MINISTRY

Section 301 investigation by next month and come out with a new tariff architecture, which could act as an alternative to reciprocal tariffs. After over a year of trade tension between India and the US, government officials said Goyal and Greer are expected to give "the final touch" to the first tranche of the trade agreement.

Meanwhile, data released by the Commerce and Industry Ministry showed that India's export surplus slipped over 40% to \$2.94 billion in May this year, from \$5.02 billion in May 2025. Data suggests that India's surplus has been declining in multiple categories beyond energy.

Ahead of Greer's visit, several farm groups have reiterated that the US has one of the largest farm subsidy programmes, and the government should stick to its stance in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and refrain from commitment on farm imports, which could hurt the interests of apple, almond, walnut, soybean, cotton and rubber growers.

### Declining export surplus

The fears of higher imports from the US come as India's export surplus is already declin-

ing due to various concessions that India agreed to during the negotiations. Right before Modi's visit to the US last year, India reduced duty on American bourbon whiskey and slashed tariff on Harley-Davidson motorcycles.

Last November, Indian public sector refiners also signed a one-year deal for American liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) imports, marking the first structured contract of US LPG for the domestic market. The deal stated that India would import around 2.2 million tonnes per annum (MTPA) of LPG from the US, which is close to 10% of India's annual imports. Amid disruption in LNG imports from West Asia, US turned into India's top source for LNG in May, as per data shared by commodity market analytics firm Kpler.

A push for higher imports from the US came as India, for the better part of 2025, was bargaining to get lower tariff rates. However, the US imposed 50% duty for months until the US Supreme Court declared it illegal in February this year.

### Competition from US

Data showed that several Indian exports have been declining in the same categories where US imports are on the

rise, signalling potential competition. Government officials have claimed that US goods are not price-competitive as compared to Indian manufacturers.

In March this year, India's petroleum product exports to the US slipped by 24.02% to \$235.47 million, as compared to \$309.91 million in March 2025. India's imports in March under the same category increased by 130.95% to \$321.73 million, as compared to \$139.31 million in March 2025.

Another high-volume product category where US imports have been gaining ground is electronic components. While India's exports of electronic components in March this year slipped by 33.41% to \$135.54 million, from \$203.54 million in March 2025, India's imports under this category jumped by 136.30% to \$431.89 million in March 2026 as compared to \$182.77 million in March 2025.

A similar trend was visible in organic chemicals, copper products, motor vehicles and fresh fruits, where exports slipped between 10 to 40% and imports jumped between 15 to 1285%. India's imports of scientific instruments have also been increasing.

### Farmers' appeal

The most sensitive element

in the US-India trade dynamics continues to be agriculture trade. Modi, during his Independence Day speech last year, had said that India would not compromise on the well-being of its farmers, fisherfolk, and cattle-keepers.

Harish Chauhan, Convenor, Hill States Horticulture Forum, said on Monday that the proposal for permitting apple imports from the US above a Minimum Import Price (MIP) does not appear to provide adequate protection to Indian apple growers, as imports from the US are already taking place at prices above the proposed threshold.

"Given the unique agro-climatic conditions of Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir and Uttarakhand, growers of apples, almonds and walnuts have limited opportunities to shift to alternative crops. Any significant increase in imports resulting from tariff reductions would therefore have severe consequences for their livelihoods and the rural economy of these hill states," Chauhan said.

KV Biju, National Coordinator, Rashtriya Kisan Mahasangh, in a letter to Modi on Monday, said the biggest concern was US agricultural subsidies as the US Farm Bill allocated \$956 billion in 2014 and \$1.5 trillion in 2024. According to the OECD (2024), the Producer Support Estimate (PSE) is +7.1% in the US, while Indian farmers face a negative PSE of -14.5%, effectively amounting to implicit taxation.

"Allowing imports of heavily subsidised US agricultural products will destroy domestic production in affected sectors. India has historically opposed US farm subsidies at the WTO. Permitting subsidised imports now would undermine that long-standing position and the solidarity of countries that supported India in challenging such subsidies," Biju said.



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh meeting Major-General Amir Baram (retd), Director-General, Israel Defence Ministry, on Monday. ANI

# India, Israel discuss expanding defence, industrial relations

**The Hindu Bureau**

NEW DELHI

India and Israel have discussed ways to further strengthen defence cooperation during the visit of the Major-General Amir Baram (retd), the Director-General of Israel's Ministry of Defence, to India on Monday.

Major-General Baram called on Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and briefed him on Israel's commitment to expanding the scope of bilateral defence cooperation under the framework of the India-Israel Special Strategic Partnership.

The discussions focused on enhancing collaboration in defence manufacturing, technology, and joint projects.

In a post on X, the Defence Ministry said the meeting underscored the shared commitment of both countries to deepen

defence ties and explore new avenues of cooperation.

## **Key pillar**

India and Israel have witnessed significant growth in defence cooperation over the years, both in scope and scale.

Defence remains a key pillar of the bilateral relationship, with both countries collaborating closely in areas such as military technology, defence equipment, and research and development.

Major-General Baram said, "India is a key strategic partner of the State of Israel. This important visit, the result of a lengthy bilateral preparation process, reflects the great importance that India and Israel attach to expanding their growing defence and industrial alliance – but no less so, the depth of the bond between our two nations."

# Doval hosts NSAs of BRICS nations amid West Asia tensions

Doval holds talks with Iran official Ghadir Nezamipour and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi at meeting to survey global security issues

**Kallol Bhattacharjee**  
NEW DELHI

**D**evelopments in West Asia formed the dominant backdrop as National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval hosted his counterparts from BRICS grouping in New Delhi for the BRICS NSAs meeting.

Mr. Doval met Ghadir Nezamipour, Deputy Secretary for Defence Affairs of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, and Secretary of Multilateral and Political Affairs of Brazil Carlos Cozende among others who are here to attend the two-day event that will survey the security architecture of the world.

"Both sides reviewed the ongoing situation in West Asia. They also discussed cooperation under the BRICS platform and India-Iran bilateral ties," said the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) after Mr. Doval met Mr. Nezamipour.

The MEA said the meeting between Mr. Doval and Mr. Wang was "forward looking" and added, "The two sides reviewed recent developments in bilateral relations and noted pro-



National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and Deputy Secretary for Defence Affairs of Iran's SNSC, Ghadir Nezamipour in New Delhi. PTI

gress towards gradual normalisation. The NSA underlined that stable, predictable and constructive bilateral relations contribute to building of trust and better understanding between the two sides."

## Tehran and Beijing

The Iranian delegation held a detailed meeting with the Chinese side on the sidelines of the BRICS meeting, informed the Embassy of Iran. Mr. Nezami "expressed appreciation" for "China's political support and emphasised the importance of strengthening the strategic partnership between Tehran and Beijing, as well as Iran's readiness to respond to any potential threats."

"China's Foreign Minister reaffirmed support for Iran's security and territorial integrity, welcomed the improvement of Iran's relations with regional countries and expressed Beijing's willingness to contribute to diplomatic efforts aimed at promoting regional stability," said the Iranian Embassy, informing that the two sides will continue to "maintain close consultations".

The June 22-23 meeting of the NSAs of the BRICS countries will focus on 'non-traditional security challenges confronting the world today'. The meeting will include a review of the outcomes of BRICS Joint Working Groups on Counter-Terrorism.

# From sidelines to centre stage, **Andy Burnham on course to be UK's next PM**



**Andy Burnham** with Labour colleagues in Westminster Hall at the Houses of Parliament in central London, on Monday. REUTERS

**Stephen Castle**  
*London, June 22*

**ANDY BURNHAM** has twice run unsuccessfully for the leadership of Britain's governing Labour Party. Now his decisive victory in a special parliamentary election puts him within reach not just of that goal, but of entering Downing Street as prime minister.

A fluent communicator known for his bonhomie and charisma, Burnham has for nine years been mayor of Greater Manchester, where he cultivated an image of optimism, activism and the type of authentic plain speaking characteristic of northern England.

With a seat in Parliament representing Makerfield, in northwest England, Burnham will need the support of 80 fellow Labour lawmakers to mount a leadership challenge to the country's unpopular

prime minister, Keir Starmer.

Supporters see Burnham — who in Manchester won the nickname “king of the North” for his defense of the area during the COVID-19 pandemic — as Labour's potential savior against the populist right-wing Reform UK party, led by Nigel Farage. Critics portray Burnham as a political chameleon who would face the same economic constraints that have stymied Starmer's lackluster government, and the same restless, impatient electorate.

Either way, he would be a different kind of leader from the one he wants to replace.

“He's just optimistic and happy and seems to enjoy being a politician,” said John McTernan, an adviser to Tony Blair when he was prime minister and someone who has known Burnham since his days as a researcher for a lawmaker in south London. NYT

# 12 Indians among 13 killed in explosion at Qatar gas plant

Over 60 injured in the fire caused by a **blast at the Barzan facility in Ras Laffan**; authorities say the **explosion was 'an accident**, not sabotage or hostile act'; Indian Embassy issues helpline numbers

## Press Trust of India

DOHA/DUBAI

**A** huge blast at a gas hub killed 13 people, including 12 Indians, and injured 66 others in the Ras Laffan industrial zone in Qatar, officials said on Monday.

"Qatari authorities have confirmed that 12 Indian nationals have unfortunately passed away in the Ras Laffan incident yesterday night," the Indian Embassy in Doha said in a post on X.

Earlier, during a press briefing on Monday, the country's Energy Minister Saad al-Kaabi confirmed that 13 people of Indian and Pakistani origins have died in the incident. He reported that 66 people of various nationalities were



**Incident zone:** The blast occurred during start-up of operations at Ras Laffan Industrial City, officials said. FILE PHOTO

injured, all of whom are in a stable condition and receiving medical treatment.

Authorities are investigating the cause of the explosion, which they said was "an accident and not sabotage or hostile in nature", despite earlier Iranian attacks targeting energy facilities in the Gulf

during the war in West Asia. The Interior Ministry had said a "technical incident" caused the explosion late on Sunday.

Qatar's state-owned energy company, QatarEnergy, said the blast erupted "during the start-up of operations at Ras Laffan Industrial City, which result-

ed in an explosion and fire at Barzan local gas supply facility".

Mr. Kaabi explained Barzan's production had been stopped since December 2025 for maintenance and was first restarted again two days prior to the explosion. According to QatarEnergy, the facility could provide 1.4 billion standard cubic feet of sales gas per day.

The Embassy of India in Doha said it is in constant touch with Qatari authorities and will render all help to the families of those who have lost their lives or have been injured.

The Embassy issued the following helpline numbers: +974-55647502 or +975-55384683 and email: cons.doha@mea.gov.in

(With inputs from AFP)

# China slaps sanctions on 10 U.S. tech firms

**Associated Press**

BEIJING

China on Monday announced sanctions on 10 American military-related companies in response to a recent U.S. move that bars some leading Chinese tech companies from defence contracts.

The Commerce Ministry said that Chinese companies would be blocked from exporting “dual-use” items to the firms, which include military drone makers and some involved in rare earth mining. Dual

use refers to goods that can have military as well as non-military applications.

The 10 companies are AVEOX, Red Cat Holdings and Teal Drones, IMSAR, Jaia Robotics, Ball Aerospace & Technologies, Oshkosh Defense, L3Harris Maritime Services, MP Materials and USA Rare Earth.

Separately, the Finance Ministry said that government entities would be prohibited from buying products from 46 American companies including Lockheed Martin, Raytheon and General Dynamics.

# U.S. waives sanctions on Iranian oil, ships

**M. Kalyanaraman**

CHENNAI

With the peace process moving ahead after an interruption, the U.S. Treasury Department has issued a waiver that waives all sanctions for a period of 60 days ending August 21 related to the production, sale, delivery and offloading of Iranian crude oil as well as petroleum products. The waiver includes



The waiver covers financial transactions on ship operations. FILE

transactions involving vessels that were earlier sanctioned, as per as Treasury Department notification.

Following the announcement, Brent price plunged 2% to 3% and was trading at around \$77. The

waiver covers financial transactions related to ship operations such as bunkering, piloting and so on.

The waiver permits the import of Iranian crude, petroleum and petrochemical products to the U.S. and allows payments to be made if they are in U.S. dollar-denominated funds.

Prashant Vashisht, Senior Vice President, and Co-Group Head Corporate Sector Ratings, ICRA Ltd.,

commented on why this could lead to a spurt in trade in Iranian crude including by India.

“Iranian crude was historically available with a credit period of 60-90 days as against 30 days of other crude producers which was beneficial for refiners due to lower working capital requirements besides which geographical proximity to India would benefit Indian refiners.”