

SHAURYA SSB TRG (8368104529)

India offers ₹15,000 cr. in aid to flood-hit Nepal

After talks with visiting Nepal PM, Modi condoles the deadly floods in August; he says the fund will 'strengthen' the neighbour; India reiterates 'forward-looking' approach to 'boundary issues'

Kallol Bhattacherjee
NEW DELHI

India on Monday extended a ₹15,000-crore development package to Nepal to help it deal with reconstruction and long-term development in the aftermath of the devastating flood in the Bhotekoshi River in August.

Announcing the package following talks with Nepal Prime Minister Balendra Shah on his first official visit to India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the assistance is aimed at "strengthening" Nepal's capacity in dealing with natural disasters in the future.

In his remarks at the joint press statement event at Hyderabad House, Mr. Shah welcomed Indian investments and tourists in Nepal. A press release said that the two Prime Ministers have instructed the Foreign Secretaries of the two countries to "work on the outstanding boundary issues". "We express our deepest condolences over the loss of lives caused by the devastating floods that struck Nepal in August," said Mr. Modi, announcing the package.



Holding hands: Prime Minister Narendra Modi with his Nepal counterpart Balendra Shah in New Delhi on Monday. R.V. MOORTHY

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri said that of the total amount, ₹11,500 crore will be in a rupee-denominated concessionary line of credit entirely for energy projects, and ₹3,500 crore will be in direct grants that will go to reconstruction projects for infrastructure building.

Elaborating on the "boundary issues" between the two sides, which include the dispute over the strategically important Kalapani region of Uttarakhand, Mr. Misri reiterated the "forward-looking" approach. India and Nepal have been dealing with the Kalapani-Limpiyadhura-Lipulekh trijunction dispute and the broader border-related issues for which an Eminent Persons Group (EPG) was set up in 2016 during the visit of former Prime Minister K. P. Sharma Oli. The EPG had submitted its report some years ago, but it was not made public.

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The two Prime Ministers also launched the 'Sarayu-Kamala Express train service connecting Ayodhya with Janakpur in Nepal, through a video link, and inaugurated the Dharchula road bridge between Uttarakhand and Nepal. They also remotely laid the foundation stone for the 669 MW Lower Arun Hydroelectric Project.

A vision statement titled 'Viksit Bharat and Samunnat Nepal: Re-imagining the Partnership', issued at the conclusion of Prime Minister Shah's two-day visit, said the talks between the two leaders were "cordial, substantial and forward-looking".

At Hyderabad House, Mr. Shah, who was on his first bilateral visit abroad, delivered his press statement in Nepali and welcomed Indian tourists to visit famous pilgrimage centres in Nepal like Muktinath and Pashupatinath temples. The two Prime Ministers laid the foundation stones of a new Integrated Check Post at Banbasa and the Jhapa petroleum terminal of the planned Siliguri-Jhapa petroleum pipeline.

During the talks, it was agreed that India will provide access to Nepal's transit cargo at Deendayal Port in Kandla and Paradip Port in Odisha. Nepal will also get an offshore IIT campus soon.

SHAURYA SSB TRG (9368104520)

•10 PILLARS OF THE JOINT VISION DOCUMENT

ECONOMIC AND DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP: To review enabling pacts for trade and investment to facilitate a comprehensive economic partnership



- To open new transit connectivity and air routes
- Cooperation in establishing cross-border special economic zones/parks, and IT parks

PHYSICAL & DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY: Expediting construction of ICPs at Bhairahawa (Nepal) and Sunauli (India), and new ICPs at Banbasa (India)and Dodhara Chandani (Nepal)



- Expedite work on Jayanagar-Bardibas and Jogbani-Biratnagar rail lines
- New gas pipeline connecting Siliguri and Jhapa (Nepal)
- Linking India's UPI with Nepal's national payment system to spur cross-border retail payments

ENERGY, WATER RESOURCES AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE: Accelerate work on the on-going and envisaged hydropower and multipurpose projects



- Proactive partnership on disaster risk reduction, early warning and post-disaster recovery

GOOD GOVERNANCE: Training of Nepali civil servants in India; both sides will share experiences and best practices among legislatures at national and local levels.

TECHNOLOGY, SPACE & INNOVATION: Expansion of the Indian-Nepal Startup Partnership Network; setting up a Startup Centre of Excellence in Kathmandu, and a Digital Nomads and Innovation Hub in Pokhara



- Development of Digital Parks and data centres in Nepal
- Enhancing bilateral cooperation in Artificial Intelligence (AI)

EDUCATION & SKILL DEVELOPMENT: Opening of branches/campuses of reputed Indian higher educational institutions in Nepal, including IITs



- Scholarships and training opportunities in newer disciplines for Nepali students.

SPORTS: India will support the setting up of a national cricket academy in Nepal apart from upgrade of cricket infrastructure; Nepal sportspersons will be given access to national training academies in India



- Similar opportunities in other sports will also be explored

CULTURE AND TOURISM: To develop religious tourism circuits, including of Ramayana, Buddhist and Shiv-Shakti circuits

- Collaboration between Nalanda University and Lumbini Buddhist University will be strengthened

HEALTH: Collaboration for Nepal's National Medical Laboratory upgrade



- India-Nepal Jan Aushadhi Kendras to improve access to affordable quality medicines
- Foster linkages between premier medical institutions of both countries; student and faculty exchanges

AGRICULTURE: Agro-Industrial Park in Chitwan with India's grant assistance for value addition to Nepali agricultural products



- Expedite implementation of the Work Plan for 2026-30 between Indian Council of Agricultural Research and Nepal Agricultural Research Council
- Establish an ICAR Centre of Excellence in Nepal

SHALINI SSB TEST (8360104529)

Oil, gas production to pick up in 4-5 years, says Ministry

In a note, the petroleum ministry said the oil and gas industry has a long gestation period, and hence exploration and finance decisions taken more than a decade ago were affecting it now

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

The government expects domestic oil and gas production to pick up in the next 4-5 years as several steps taken in the recent past begin to bear fruit in an industry typically characterised by long gestation periods, *The Hindu* has learnt.

According to an analysis by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, the current contraction in domestic oil and gas production is due to factors that took place more than a decade ago.

However, since then, the government has taken steps such as increasing drilling and exploration to record levels, changing laws and rules to provide stable terms to explorers, and opening new avenues for exploration. "The steps taken in the last few years – new acreage, record drilling, deepwater wells and the revival of Mumbai High – will start showing up in production over the next three to four years," a note prepared by the Ministry and accessed by *The Hindu* said. "That is the nature of this sector: the decisions of one decade decide the output of the next."



Profits of upstream companies like ONGC and Oil India are being used to fund exploration rather than subsidies. GETTYIMAGES/ISTOCK

Upstream profits

The note also argues that now, unlike earlier, the profits of oil and gas companies upstream companies like ONGC and Oil India are being used to fund exploration rather than subsidies. "Until 2015, ONGC and Oil India were made to fund a large share of the subsidy on diesel, LPG and kerosene, through discounts on the crude they sold to oil marketing companies," the note said.

According to data with the Ministry, ONGC paid ₹49,421 crore towards this subsidy in 2012-13 against a profit of ₹20,926 crore, and in 2013-14 paid ₹56,384 crore towards this subsidy against a net profit of ₹22,095 crore.

"In both years ONGC gave away more than twice what it earned," the note said. "Money that should have gone into finding new oil and gas went into keeping retail prices down. This burden was ended from 2015-16. ONGC now keeps its earnings and has sharply raised its spending on exploration."

According to the latest data on the Index of Core Industries, the oil and gas sectors have contracted continuously for 22 and 28 months, respectively. "In this sector it takes five to ten years to go from awarding a block to first production," the note said. "Output in 2026 is the result of what was, and was not, done a decade ago. "After the ninth New Exploration Licensing Policy (NELP) round was launched in 2010, no new exploration round was offered until 2016," it added. "The fields producing today were not replaced by new ones in that period, and the effect is still being felt."

Falling output

The Ministry also stated that mature oil and gas fields generally lose 7-8% of their output every year as reservoir pressure falls and that most of India's current production comes from such fields. On the other hand, new wells, enhanced recovery, and field redevelopment are making up much of the loss.

As a result, crude oil output fell 4.1% in October 2026, a lower rate of decline than what is generally seen, even though the fields are decades old. Further, the note added that the decline is being seen more among private companies rather than public sector ones. "The steepest fall has come from private producers, whose mature fields have seen double-digit declines over the past year," it said.

The note acknowledges these issues and says that lasting growth has to come from deepwater exploration, where the time from discovery to production is long. Towards this, the government has opened about 1 million square kilometres of areas earlier marked as 'No-Go', and deepwater blocks are being awarded in it for exploration in stages.

The Samudra Manthan mission has committed ₹84,084 crore in its first phase to seismic surveys, more than 60 deepwater wells and shared offshore infrastructure, with the Government bearing up to half the cost of a deepwater well. The government data also shows that ONGC drilled 501 wells in 2025-26, 100 of them exploratory, after drilling 578 in 2024-25, the highest number in 35 years.

ONGC made three new offshore discoveries in 2025-26 and added more reserves than it produced, with a reserve replacement ratio of 1.17, the note added.

SHAURYA SSB TRG (836 4529)

Pak. infiltrated defence-linked WhatsApp groups, says BRO

S. Vijay Kumar
CHENNAI

The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) has issued a cybersecurity alert, warning that Pakistan-based intelligence operatives (PIOs) had infiltrated 11 unofficial WhatsApp groups used by Indian defence, paramilitary, and civil defence personnel to gather sensitive information.

In an advisory, the BRO said reliable government agencies had flagged the targeted cyber-espionage campaign and emphasised on strengthening threat detection and rapid response. Some of the unofficial groups used by the security personnel pertained to transfers and postings. The operatives gained unauthorised access to these groups using spoofed or compromised Indian mobile numbers and remained "silent members", monitoring conversations, the BRO said.

The alert referred to a recent incident in which a civilian staff member allegedly communicated with a PIO posing as a DRDO scientist under the name 'Soniya'.

The communication reportedly took place through a WhatsApp group titled 'All India Defence Civilian Mutual Transfer Posting'. The civilian allegedly leaked sensitive defence-related information "in exchange for monetary consideration".

In view of the threat, the BRO directed its personnel to exercise heightened caution while using social networking applications.

WhatsApp Web misuse flagged

CHENNAI
The Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) has warned WhatsApp users about the possible misuse of authenticated web sessions to gain unauthorised access to their accounts. » PAGE 14

SHAURYA SSB TPG (8368104524)

Trial runs on stretch of bullet train corridor to start in 2027

Sources say high-speed train expected to cover 50-km Surat-Bilimora stretch in 6 minutes; Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw says train successfully underwent crucial squeeze test demonstration

Maitri Porecha
NEW DELHI

Trial runs of the indigenously manufactured high-speed train that will run on the bullet train corridor between Surat and Bilimora will begin in April and May next year, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Monday.

Sources indicated that the high-speed rail service – which is set to cover the 50 km stretch in about six minutes, as opposed to the regular trains that currently take 45 minutes to an hour and a half – may open to the public as early as Independence Day, August 15, 2027.

In a Substack post in October, Mr. Vaishnaw had said that the first section to open would be from Surat to Vapi, a distance of almost 120 km. "Due to multiple reasons including non-completion of work and delays, it has been designed to begin the trial runs on only the Surat to Bilimora section to begin with," a senior official told *The Hindu*.

"Manufacturing of rolling stock for the first Made-In-India bullet train B28, is underway at the Aditya manufacturing facility run by BEML in Bengaluru. Work on signalling systems will be finished by January end next year, and the section will be ready to receive trains in April and May for trial runs," Mr. Vaishnaw said.



An aerial view of a traction substation under construction along the Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train corridor. PTI

India dropped plans to import Japan's E5 Shinkansen trains, chose to build its own due to cost concerns

The entire bullet train corridor between Mumbai and Ahmedabad spans 508 km, and will take approximately two hours to traverse when the full stretch is operationalised. The corridor is being constructed by National High Speed Rail Corporation Ltd. (NHSRCL).

Mr. Vaishnaw added that the train sets manufactured by BEML had recently undergone a successful "squeeze test demonstration", which is a critical quality assurance process in which a train car's body is subjected to heavy pressure generated by controlled compressive forces to test its structural strength, rigidity, and stability.

"This is a crucial test because when the train runs beyond 240 kmph, a vacuum is created where the entire atmospheric pressure falls on the train... So, in the squeeze test, we subject the train car body to double the pressure that could be generated in real life situations," Mr. Vaishnaw said.

It is pertinent to note that there is no technical difference between a high-speed train and a bullet train. The latter is an informal, popular nickname for a high-speed train that originated in 1964 with Japan's Shinkansen series that had pointed, aerodynamic nose cones. India was earlier set to receive Japanese Shinkansen train sets (E5 series) which ply at a speed of up to 320 kmph on certain routes in Japan. However, it was later decided to manufacture indigenous high-speed train sets after negotiations with Japanese counterparts stagnated on multiple grounds, including the costs of acquiring the train sets. While the Shinkansen train set plan has not been scrapped, it has been shifted to a later timeline as Japan transitions from the older E5 series to the next-generation E10 series, which India is set to receive tentatively in 2030, officials added.

SHAURYA SSB TIRUR (04529)

Privately developed PSLV-N1 maiden flight delayed again, likely early next year

Anonna Dutt
New Delhi, November 23

THE MAIDEN flight of India's privately built PSLV-N1 is likely to be pushed to early 2027, further extending the timeline for the programme under which at least two launches were planned this year. The rocket was to carry ISRO's earth observation satellite EOS-10.

This is not the first delay in the launch of PSLV-N1, being built by a consortium led by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and Larsen & Toubro Limited (L&T). The contract to manufacture five PSLV rockets was awarded to the consortium in 2022. As part of the contract, the first vehicle was to be manufactured within two years, and the others were to be delivered every six months. Going by that timeline, the first delivery should have happened in 2024, and all five should have been delivered by 2026.

The delays are a result of various issues such as coordination with the payload and the available launch window, said A T Ramchandani, Senior Vice-President and Head, L&T Precision Engineering & Systems, at the ongoing India International Space Conclave.

While the launch vehicle is ready, the delay stems from ISRO being spooked after two back-to-back failures of its workhorse PSLV. ISRO will likely give a go-ahead to launch the vehicle only after its own successful launch, according to sources.

"After the setbacks, the providers of certain components were changed on recommendation of the failure assessment committee. The changes have already been made to the PSLVs," the source said.

'Human space mission possible with industry push'

Anonna Dutt
New Delhi, November 23

INDIAN ASTRONAUT designate Air Commodore Prasanth Balakrishnan Nair called for Indian industries with deep pockets to come together as a consortium and undertake complex space missions, including a human space mission. "We should enable our entire industry — the Ambanis, Adanis, Mahindras and Tatas... I would love for everyone to come together and make a consortium to undertake even private human space endeavours like Crew Dragon," he said on the sidelines of the India International Space Conclave.

Nair wished India to become the second country after the United States to be able to do so. He said the first uncrewed flight under the Gaganyaan Mission would be a proof of concept of all the systems and procedures. The first uncrewed flight under the Gaganyaan mission is likely to take place later this year, with at least two more flights likely before a human spaceflight.

SHAURYA SCB TRG (8308104523)

Will use 'all available means' to counter U.S. blockade: Iran

America's economic and naval blockade constitutes military aggression, says Iran's Foreign Ministry; official reiterates reopening of Strait of Hormuz if Washington agrees to Tehran's list of demands

Agence France-Presse
TEHRAN

Iran said on Monday it would use all means at its disposal to counter a U.S. naval blockade that was imposed in retaliation for its own push to block the Strait of Hormuz. The war that broke out on February 28 with the U.S.-Israeli strikes on Iran, has expanded after Tehran carried out retaliatory strikes across the region.

"We will use all available means to counter U.S. aggression," said Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmaeil Baqaei in a press briefing.

The Strait of Hormuz has become the focus of the conflict, with Iran continuing in its efforts to blockade the waterway, vital to global energy supplies. In response, the U.S. imposed its own counter-blockade of Iranian ports.



Mural message: Women walk past a billboard depicting a futuristic scene with the national flag, in Enghelab Square, Tehran. AFP

"You should bear in mind that what the Americans have described as economic sanctions, an economic blockade and a naval blockade undoubtedly constitutes an act of military aggression against Iran," he said.

"Under these circumstances, Iran is entitled, pursuant to Article 51 of the UN Charter, to use any means at its disposal to defend itself."

Iran has said Hormuz could be open within two days if the U.S. agrees to its list of demands which includes the lifting of the blockade. "If the U.S. fulfils its commitments, security can be restored to Hormuz and the region in the shortest possible time," he said.

Meanwhile, Iranian courts have demanded that the U.S. pay $290 billion in damages, according to state TV. Lawsuits had also been filed against Gulf nations for "allowing the U.S. to use their territory for attacks on Iran," it said.

SHAURYA PATEL RG (8368104329)

Bangladesh vows to arrest Hasina if she returns home

Reuters
Dhaka, November 23

BANGLADESH WILL arrest and jail former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina if she returns from India, a senior government minister said, as her plans to come home in December fuel political tension and renewed street violence.

Dhaka is instead seeking Hasina's extradition from India, and expects New Delhi to comply with an existing extradition treaty, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shama Obaed Islam told *Reuters*.

Hasina faces a death sentence in Bangladesh and her Awami League party is banned following the 2024 uprising that ended her long rule. The UN has said as many as 1,400 people were killed during the unrest.

Hasina fled Dhaka in August 2024 as protests demanding her resignation swept the country. She has since sought a new passport and identity card ahead of a planned return in December — requests the government has rejected.

"As soon as she tries to enter Bangladesh, she will be arrested. And she will be taken to jail, and the law will take its course," Obaed said in an interview on Sunday. "We would like India to honour the extradition treaty and return her as a convict, and the law will take its course. She (Hasina) will have to face the music."



> **"As soon as she tries to enter Bangladesh, she will be arrested. And she will be taken to jail, and the law will take its course"**
>
> **SHAMA OBAED ISLAM,**
> BANGLADESH STATE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

The standoff has brought Hasina's Awami League supporters out on the streets. The party this month announced a week of protests and rallies in support of Hasina's return, culminating in a nationwide lockdown on November 19.

Police have recorded dozens of crude bomb blasts and incidents of arson targeting vehicles in at least 28 districts over the past 10 days, with several police officers and civilians injured, according to local media.

Obaed called the violence a survival tactic by Hasina's "politically bankrupt political party."

Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury, a senior Awami League official, said the current political establishment was responsible for the violence. The minister said there had been no official discussions with India about sending an aircraft to bring Hasina back, adding that Dhaka wanted balanced ties with New Delhi that did not compromise Bangladesh's "dignity, self-respect and interests."

"India needs to decide what kind of foreign policy they need to adopt for Bangladesh," Obaed said.

SHAURYA SSB TRG (8368104529)

China fears AI could give US an edge in nuclear arms race

Chris Buckley
Washington, November 23

WHEN XI Jinping, the Chinese leader, set about expanding China's nuclear forces a decade ago, his goal was to ensure that enough missiles could survive an initial attack so Beijing could deliver a devastating counterattack.

That ability to withstand a strike and hit back would deter any enemy from risking nuclear blackmail or war against China in the first place, Chinese strategists have said.

But now, researchers in the Chinese military worry that American advances in artificial intelligence could weaken Beijing's nuclear hand in a crisis or conflict. They have been warning that artificial intelligence could make it easier for US forces to find and wipe out Chinese nuclear missiles, giving Washington a menacing advantage.

The worries over AI complicate the growing nuclear tensions between Washington and Beijing, and could make China more reluctant to consider limits to its smaller arsenal. At a summit on Thursday, Xi, President Donald Trump and President Vladimir Putin of Russia spoke of reducing nuclear risks. But Xi has shown no interest in Trump's calls for China to join arms control commitments.

A review of more than 100 recent studies by Chinese civilian and military researchers, as well as interviews with experts and former US officials, points to a deep wariness in China about the American pursuit of AI nuclear systems. At the same time, Chinese military institutes are also exploring how AI could make Chinese missiles harder to detect and knock from the sky.

Breakthroughs in AI could help create technology to detect, track and strike nuclear weapons more quickly and accurately. Experts in China worry that it could lag the US in applying such advances. A study from China's top military institute described a scenario in which artificial intelligence accelerated US actions in a crisis to mere moments, potentially overwhelming slower rivals.

"By embedding AI and other technologies into nuclear decision-making systems, the United States could compress the decision-making process from the traditional 15 to 30 minutes to 90 seconds or less, drastically increasing the speed of response," two researchers from the Academy of Military Science in Beijing wrote in an overview of global nuclear trends published several months ago.

China fears that AI advances could enable the US "to rapidly engage in strikes as soon as something pops out from a hiding spot or mobilizes," said Gerald C Brown, a former analyst with US State Department. "Basically, in their view, it could make survivability a lot more difficult." **NYT**

SHAURYA SSB TRG (8668104529)

• THE LINKED ROBOTIC EXPLORERS WILL SEPARATE FROM EACH OTHER NEXT MONTH IN ORDER TO MAP AND STUDY THE LITTLE PLANET FROM DIFFERENT ALTITUDES

Mercury gets first visitor in years as pair of spacecraft loop into orbit

Marcia Dunn
Cape Canaveral, November 23

A PAIR of spacecraft slipped into orbit around Mercury on Saturday after an eight-year cruise through the inner solar system to unravel our littlest planet's mountain of mysteries.

The linked robotic explorers — one European, the other Japanese — will separate from one another next month in order to map and study the scorching little planet from different altitudes. The $2 billion (1.7 billion euros) mission is known collectively as BepiColombo.

The European Space Agency announced BepiColombo's arrival via social media.

A series of thruster firings slowed the spacecraft enough to be captured by the planet's weak gravity.

But it took several anxious hours before flight controllers in Germany — 94 million miles (152 million kilometers) away — could confirm that BepiColombo had achieved orbit. Teams pored over the data streaming back; additional information was not immediately available. BepiColombo is only the third spacecraft to visit Mercury — the sun's closest planet and barely bigger than our moon — and the first in more than a decade.

NASA's Mariner 10 flew past Mercury three times in the mid-1970s. The team included the late Italian mathematician Giuseppe "Bepi" Colombo, for whom this latest mission is named. NASA's Messenger spacecraft entered orbit around Mercury in 2011 and, after running out of fuel, crashed into the planet in 2015.



A close-up photo of Mercury's north pole captured by the European-Japanese spacecraft BepiColombo. EUROPEAN SPACE AGENCY

Launched in 2018, BepiColombo took a slower, more roundabout route to get to Mercury, flying once past Earth, twice past Venus and six times past Mercury for gravity-guiding assists. All those loop-de-loops put more than 6 billion miles (10 billion kilometers) on the odometer. The conjoined spacecraft shed their mother ship in September for the final leg of the journey.

Lead project scientist Geraint Jones said he and others can't wait for all the new data to start streaming down in the spring. The mission will provide the ability to compare "unprecedented measurements taken by two spacecraft at the planet at the same time," he noted.

Once orbiting separately, the European Space Agency's satellite and the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency's smaller craft will study Mercury's dense interior and exterior magnetic field, as well as everything in between: impact craters, volcanic plains, mountain ridges and peaks jutting as high as 3 miles (4 1/2 kilometers).

The mercury at Mercury can hit more than 800 degrees (427 degrees Celsius), adding strain to electronic and engineering systems. Space agency officials want to keep the mission going for at least one Earth year — or the equivalent of four Mercury years.

"The spacecraft and its instruments need to be kept as cool as possible, which is a huge technical challenge in itself," Jones said in an email. **AP**