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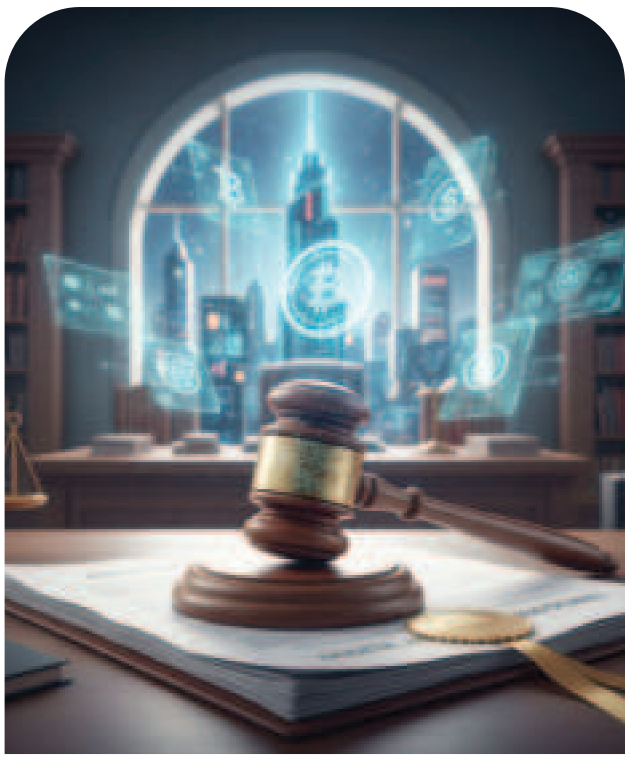
Hail CRYPTO!

Court's legal recognition to digital assets

SUKUMAR SAH



In a move that could change how India views money and ownership in the digital age, the Madras High Court has ruled that cryptocurrency counts as "property" under Indian law.

What started as a simple case about a cyber hack on the WazirX exchange has turned into a landmark moment — giving India its first clear legal recognition of digital assets. With this single decision, the Court may have shifted crypto from a shadowy, speculative trade into a legitimate, accountable asset class.

For years, cryptocurrencies sat in a grey zone — neither money, commodity, nor security. Banks avoided dealing with them, and accountants had no rules for recording them.

That confusion is now fading. By declaring that crypto can be "held in trust," the Court has effectively said it has all the qualities of property — something you can own, transfer, and value. This means companies might finally list digital assets on their balance sheets, much like patents or goodwill. It could mark the beginning of a new era in corporate accounting.

Businesses and investors now have firmer ground. Corporate treasuries that once stayed away from Bitcoin or Ethereum may consider holding small amounts as diversified assets. Venture capital funds investing in Web3 projects can take comfort that their crypto holdings have legal status and can be valued and audited. For finance chiefs and auditors, the ruling offers what the crypto world desperately needed: legal clarity and defensibility.

But with recognition comes responsibility. If crypto can be held "in trust," then exchanges and custodians must act like trustees — protecting client assets and keeping them separate from company funds.

They will need stronger audits, better compliance, and clear user agreements stating that customers own their tokens. This essentially transforms crypto exchanges from tech start-ups into regulated financial entities. Board members could now be held personally accountable for misuse of client funds.

The ripple effects reach banks and fintechs as well. Lenders that once refused crypto-related accounts may now recognise them as valid property holdings, even if risky ones. This opens doors for new services — escrow, insured custody, and crypto-backed loans. Fintechs could design

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PM Modi's virtual Asean Summit appearance signals

Cautious diplomacy around Trump

PRABHU CHAWLA

In the glittering corridors of Kuala Lumpur's convention centres, where South-east Asia's leaders converged to chart a multipolar future, an empty chair spoke volumes. Prime Minister Narendra Modi – the indefatigable globetrotter who has criss-crossed continents to etch India's imprint on the world – addressed the 47th Asean Summit and the 22nd Asean-India Summit virtually.

His conspicuous absence has fuelled fervent speculation. Is Delhi dodging a diplomatic dust-up with Donald Trump, the brash American bulldozer barreling back into Asia's arena? From New Delhi's vantage, this absence isn't mere scheduling sleight-of-hand. It's a calculated sidestep in a high-stakes tango with Washington, where economic edicts masquerade as alliances and trusted ties to Moscow are twisted into treason.

Modi's Asean odyssey has been a hallmark of his hyperactive foreign policy. Since assuming office in 2014, he has attended most Asean-India Summits – in person or virtually – transforming a once-peripheral partnership into a powerhouse pact worth about $120-130 billion in annual trade. But the forum has also become a stage where clashing egos can turn consensus into confrontation.

Two of the world's most influential leaders – Prime Minister Modi and President Donald Trump of the US – seem locked in a peculiar diplomatic dance of avoidance. Both command nations that claim to be the torchbearers of democracy and free enterprise, yet neither appears willing to confront the other in person. The Kuala Lumpur meeting, where Trump appeared and Modi chose to participate only virtually, has become the latest symbol of this uneasy relationship between two statuesque but increasingly mistrustful leaders.

Two of the world's most influential leaders—Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Donald Trump of the US—seem locked in a peculiar diplomatic dance of avoidance

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EDITORIAL

Now for regulation, lest crypto leaves one crying

Deepak Dwivedi
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The Madras High Court's recognition of cryptocurrency as "property" under Indian law marks a watershed moment — but also a dangerous one if misread as a licence for unfettered adoption.

For all the enthusiasm this ruling has generated among crypto fanatics and fintech innovators, India must tread carefully. Behind the promise of digital assets lies a history of volatility, manipulation, and systemic risk that no courtroom declaration can wish away.

Yes, the judgment provides long-awaited legal clarity. It transforms crypto from an undefined grey-zone instrument into something tangible that can be owned, transferred, and taxed. Yet, it also opens the door to speculative excess.

The crypto market's global record — ranging from spectacular bankruptcies like FTX to pump-and-dump schemes — warns of what happens when enthusiasm outruns regulation. The idea that Indian companies can now hold crypto on their books or use it as collateral is exciting, but it must be tempered with prudence. Without strict oversight, the same innovation that drives fintech growth can easily morph into a financial contagion.

The first pitfall is perception. Legitimacy breeds confidence, and confidence, in speculative markets, can breed recklessness. Retail investors who once stayed away from crypto might now interpret the court's ruling as a green signal to rush in, mistaking "property" for "safety."

The legal stamp of ownership does not change the fact that crypto remains an extremely volatile and unregulated asset class, prone to price swings that can wipe out fortunes overnight.

Second, recognition amplifies risk for businesses. By treating crypto as property, the Court may have inadvertently increased corporate exposure. Exchanges, custodians, and even companies that hold digital tokens must now comply with stringent fiduciary and cybersecurity obligations.

> **The legal stamp of ownership does not change the fact that crypto remains an extremely volatile and unregulated asset class, prone to price swings that can wipe out fortunes overnight**

A single breach, like the WazirX hack that sparked this case, could trigger lawsuits, regulatory penalties, and reputational collapse. The same judgment that legitimises crypto also makes its stewards legally liable — potentially a double-edged sword for an industry still learning basic governance.

Then there's the policy vacuum. The Reserve Bank of India and Sebi still lack a coherent framework for regulating digital assets. The Court's move may have outpaced bureaucratic readiness, forcing regulators to play catch-up.

But absence of a unified policy means fragmented enforcement — an open invitation for arbitrage, tax evasion, and cross-border money laundering. The dangers of uncoordinated regulation are real; different agencies could end up pulling in different directions, creating confusion rather than clarity. The resulting uncertainty could unsettle markets and discourage legitimate innovation, precisely the opposite of what the ruling intends.

India's crypto journey cannot be built on judicial enthusiasm alone. Without a central regulatory spine, the system risks encouraging speculative bubbles rather than productive innovation. Crypto's underlying technology — blockchain — deserves nurturing; its financial by-products require vigilance and restraint in equal measure.

The High Court has taken a bold step, but it is now the Government's turn to ensure that India's digital financial future is not built on quicksand. Recognition must not lead to recklessness. What India needs next is not celebration but regulation. BIB

Rubio dangles carrot after Trump's stick to India

Makes conciliatory overtures towards EAM Jaishankar during Asean Summit

SUKUMAR SAH

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio's meeting with India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar in Kuala Lumpur on the sidelines of the 48th Asean Summit a few days ago has drawn attention far beyond the diplomatic circles.

Ostensibly a courtesy call, it carried the undertone of reassurance — that despite Donald Trump's sharp rhetoric and tariff threats, Washington values New Delhi as a strategic partner. For India, the meeting was a test of intent: Is Trump's America still a reliable friend, or a transactional power recalibrating its interests?

Rubio, a prominent Republican voice and one of Trump's closest Senate allies, has been at the forefront of advocating a tougher stance on China while strengthening Indo-Pacific partnerships.

His quiet diplomacy with Jaishankar sought to balance Trump's abrasive style with institutional continuity. By underscoring bipartisan support for India, Rubio aimed to soothe apprehensions emerging in New Delhi's policy circles after the US imposed fresh tariffs on Indian steel and pharmaceuticals earlier this year.

The timing was critical. Public sentiment in India, once overwhelmingly favourable to the US, has begun to slip. Surveys show a drop from 65 per cent in 2023 to barely above 50 per cent in mid-2025, with a growing perception that Washington's "America First" trade agenda sidelines partners like India. The broader worry is that Trump 2.0 may view alliances primarily through the lens of short-term economic gains rather than strategic trust.

Rubio's intervention thus sought to reaffirm the pillars of the India-US partnership — technology collaboration, defence cooperation, and democratic alignment. He reportedly discussed expanding semiconductor investments, joint defence production, and resilient supply chains, areas that dovetail with India's ambition to emerge as an alternative to China in global manufacturing. For New Delhi, these commitments matter: They signal that the US relationship is more than a balance-sheet calculation.

Yet the symbolism cannot mask the asymmetry. While the US counts India as a crucial partner in its Indo-Pacific strategy, it has not hesitated to press New Delhi on trade barriers, data localisation, and its ties with Moscow.

India's refusal to join Western sanctions on Russia continues to irk Washington. Rubio's charm offensive, therefore, is also a recognition that coercion has limits; persuasion works better when the goal is to keep India in the US strategic fold.

From New Delhi's perspective, the meeting also served a dual purpose. It reminded Washington that India's partnership is not automatic — it must be earned through respect for India's economic priorities and strategic autonomy.

> **By underscoring bipartisan support for India, Rubio aimed to soothe apprehensions emerging in New Delhi's policy circles after the US imposed fresh tariffs on Indian steel and pharmaceuticals earlier this year**

Jaishankar's measured tone, emphasising "mutual interests and mutual sensitivity," hinted at quiet firmness. India welcomes American engagement but will not be lectured or strong-armed.

Ultimately, Rubio's outreach was less about immediate deliverables and more about optics — an attempt to restore faith amid uncertainty. It conveyed that despite Trump's unpredictability, parts of the US establishment still see India as central to America's long-term interests.

Whether that message translates into trust on the Indian street remains to be seen, but for now, diplomacy has bought time — and perhaps, a little more faith — in Trump's America. BIB

PM Modi's virtual Asean Summit appearance signals

Cautious diplomacy around Trump

PRABHU CHAWLA

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The Summit, hosted by Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, is a critical forum bringing together the 10 Asean member states — Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar — along with dialogue partners such as India, China, Japan, Australia and the US. The theme of 'Connectivity and Resilience' underscores its focus on economic recovery, maritime cooperation, and digital integration in the Indo-Pacific. India, through its Act East policy, has long viewed the Asean as a central pillar of its regional outreach. That is why Modi's absence from Kuala Lumpur stands out as a significant departure from his usual diplomatic pattern.

Since 2014, Modi has been a consistent fixture at Asean-India and East Asia Summits, attending either physically or virtually. Records from Asean and India's Ministry of External Affairs show regular participation from the 12th Summit in Nay Pyi Taw (2014) through the 21st Summit (2024). He has used these meetings to advance India's economic integration with Southeast Asia, reinforce strategic partnerships, and position New Delhi as a balancing voice in a region caught between Chinese assertiveness and American unpredictability.

The official justification from New Delhi has been that the Prime Minister's schedule is crowded with the Bihar Assembly elections and post-Diwali engagements. But such reasoning does not withstand scrutiny. A more convincing interpretation lies in the geopolitical shadow cast by Trump's attendance at the summit. Modi and Trump have not met face-to-face since their brief and awkward Washington encounter in early 2025, which ended without a joint statement or a concrete trade deal. Their relationship, once celebrated as warm, has cooled dramatically.

Economic pain

Trump's acerbic remarks have repeatedly embarrassed India. His public boast that he personally "stopped an India-Pakistan war" after a terror attack drew sharp reactions in New Delhi. His claim that Modi privately promised to reduce Russian oil imports was pointedly ignored by Indian officials – signalling rising tensions.

Beyond rhetoric, Trump's policies have inflicted tangible economic pain. The US has raised tariffs on Indian exports – in some categories reaching as high as 50 per cent – citing "unfair trade practices". The energy sector has also been caught in the crossfire. India's dependence on Russian crude, which accounts for nearly one-third of its total oil imports, has collided with Washington's sanctions regime.

Trump's decision to target Russian oil majors Rosneft and Lukoil has thrown Indian refiners into uncertainty, complicating payments and insurance. His insistence that nations buying Russian oil are "indirectly funding aggression" has been aimed squarely at New Delhi.

Meanwhile, the so-called "reset" diplomacy between Delhi and Washington has yielded little. The gap between rhetoric and reality has widened into a visible gulf. Within this strained atmosphere, Modi's physical appearance alongside Trump at Kuala Lumpur would have been fraught with risk.

Unnecessary spectacle

A single impulsive remark by the American President could have dominated global headlines and undermined India's carefully calibrated position on trade and energy. By staying away, Modi shields himself from an unnecessary diplomatic spectacle. His virtual participation ensures that India's voice is present – but not exposed.

Yet, this approach has a personal cost for the Prime Minister. Modi's political identity has been built on the projection of confidence and global omnipresence. To retreat from a major summit where he has always been a visible force invites questions about India's diplomatic nerve. In foreign policy, absence can sometimes speak louder than attendance.

Predictably, Modi has been targeted by Opposition parties. They claim that Modi, who once stood shoulder to shoulder with global leaders, is now avoiding them. They point to his silence on Trump's repeated exaggerations and accuse him of bending to external pressure. For a leader who built his image on muscular nationalism and global assertiveness, the perception of evasiveness is politically costly.

Modi's virtual attendance at the Asean-India Summit can thus be read as a temporary tactic in a larger diplomatic dilemma. It avoids immediate embarrassment but highlights a growing unease in India's foreign policy posture. His absence denies India the chance to strengthen its partnerships with key Southeast Asian leaders such as Anwar Ibrahim and Ferdinand Marcos Jr. These personal interactions often yield more than formal speeches. By missing them, India forfeits a measure of influence in a region central to its long-term interests.

Predictability erosion

This episode also underscores the erosion of predictability in India-US relations. Trump's slapdash style has unsettled allies and antagonised competitors alike. His economic nationalism and transactional diplomacy have replaced cooperation with confrontation. Modi, on the other hand, has chosen restraint and balance. Their contrasting temperaments have turned once-celebrated camaraderie into cautious detachment.

But the world can ill afford a prolonged silence between the leaders of two major democracies. Global trade, energy security and regional stability all depend on credible coordination between Washington and New Delhi.

The time may soon come when Modi will have to move beyond tactical prudence and confront Trump's bullying style. India, the world's largest democracy, cannot afford to appear intimidated by the richest one. Leadership, after all, is not measured by the number of summits attended, but by the courage to stand firm when the stage is most uncertain.

Modi's virtual presence may keep him out of Trump's reach for now, but it also keeps him out of the centre of the world's most important conversation. The question is not whether Modi will meet Trump, but when he will once again lead the charge to assert India's voice where it matters most – in the real arena of global diplomacy, not behind a digital curtain. BIB

(The writer is a veteran journalist, political commentator, and TV personality)

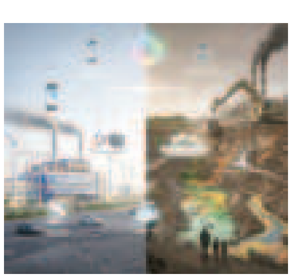
COURTESY: **The New Indian Express**

To mine or not to mine, is the rare question

Industry needs them. But should India embark on the arduous and environmentally damaging journey of mining rare minerals?

HAYA QAZI

For every tonne of rare earth, 2000 tonne of waste material is produced. This presents a paradox: the same minerals essential for a low-carbon future also bring high environmental cost.



In recent months, the headlines about US tariffs on China and India, and fears of an escalating trade war have overshadowed a deeper shift in the global economy: the race for rare-earth elements (REEs) and the reordering of the supply chains that underlie modern technology, defence and the green transition, says an in-depth article on the subject, published in GreaterKashmir.com.

What are rare-earth minerals?

The term "rare-earth minerals" is a group of 17 metallic elements: the 15 lanthanides plus scandium and yttrium. They are critical components in everything from consumer electronics and wind-turbine magnets to fighter jet engines and missile-guidance systems. They are characterised by high melting point, high thermal conductance, high conductivity and high density.

According to the US Geological Survey, China holds around 40 per cent of global reserves and produces nearly 70 per cent of the world's output, which is about 270,000 of the 390,000 metric tonne mined in 2024.

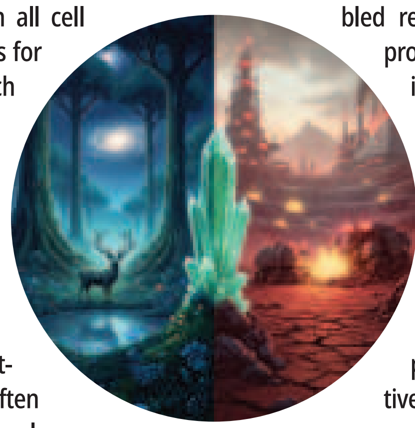
Meanwhile, the US imports nearly 100 per cent of many critical minerals, including several rare-earth elements leaving it highly vulnerable to supply-chain disruptions. China also controls 90 per cent of the world's refining capacity.

The Bayan Obo mine in China is the largest REE mine in the world. That dominance gives Beijing not only economic leverage but geopolitical power in a world increasingly dependent on advanced technologies for civilian and military uses.

In India, rare earths are found in the monazite sand, which contains nearly 50-60 per cent of all the rare earth oxides. These are found along the coastal beaches of Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Odisha, Kerala, Gujarat and Maharashtra.

Utility and significance

Rare earths are nearly omnipresent in high-technology systems: from airpods to airbags in a car, to strong permanent magnets used in electric-vehicle motors or satellite communications. They are used in all cell phone cameras, LED screens for televisions, in healthcare such as MRI machines and even some cancer drugs.



However, the mining and refining of rare earths carry significant environmental and energy-intensity burdens. Life-cycle analyses show that extracting and processing REEs often requires high energy inputs, large volumes of water, and chemical reagents, with consequential radioactive by-products and greenhouse-gas emissions.

For instance, one study in ScienceDirect reported that global rare-earth extraction is tied to large increases in greenhouse gas emissions. The analysis showed that greenhouse gas emissions had increased by 94 per cent in mining in 2020.

For every tonne of rare earth, 2000 tonne of waste material is produced. This presents a paradox: the same minerals essential for a low-carbon future also bring high environmental cost.

In the trade arena, rare earths have become a strategic choke point. The US imports almost all its REEs from China. When a vital supply chain is concentrated in one country, the dominant supplier can impose export restrictions, tariffs or licensing regimes that ripple through global production.

Recent reports show that China expanded export controls in 2025 to cover many rare-earth elements and will require foreign firms using Chinese-origin materials or equipment to obtain export licences from Beijing.

These moves coincide with broader trade negotiations — such as the APEC summit in November in South Korea between the Asian and Pacific nations, making clear that rare earths are no longer just a commodity but strategic tools in the new world order.

Such dynamics are forcing other nations to reconsider supply-chain resilience, to re-locate mining and refining capacity, and to reduce dependencies that may become liabilities in the global trade environment.

India's dilemma

For India, the rare-earth question presents both an opportunity and a dilemma. On the one hand, India holds the world's fifth-largest rare-earth reserves, about 7 million metric tonne by some estimates.

On the other hand, it lacks the mining, processing, and refining capacity required to actually use these. It is highly dependent on China for rare earth minerals, with which it already has a strained relationship.

India is proactively exploring a tie-up with Russia for rare earth minerals and processing capability — part of the country's attempt to reduce dependence on China and to align its mineral-security strategy with geopolitics.

India Rare Earth Limited is a major player in the mining of rare earths, and has collaboration with Japan (Toyota Company). Additionally, during the recent visit of the Afghan Foreign minister Amir Ali Khan Muttaqi, he offered India to invest in the mineral resources of Afghanistan, which also include some rare earth minerals reserves.

Afghanistan has a complex relation with Pakistan, and such a project can influence India-Pakistan power dynamics in the region. At the same time, China's tightening of export licence regime has already impacted Indian industry: the number of Indian companies awaiting rare-earth magnet import licences from China doubled recently. China reportedly also prohibited India from re-exporting the REEs to USA, thereby hampering India's autonomy.

India is responding with ambitious policy: it has launched a seven-year national initiative to strengthen domestic supply of rare-earths and has proposed a Rs 7,350 crore incentive scheme to develop domestic magnet production.

The Indian Government is also accelerating amendments to mining laws like Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation Act) to facilitate critical-mineral availability.

Yet the dilemma remains: India must decide whether to commit to large-scale investment in mining, refining and magnet manufacturing — with all the environmental, capital-intensive and regulatory challenges such projects entail — or to remain a user of materials processed abroad, thus leaving it vulnerable. BIB

The author is a regular columnist for Greater Kashmir

Flights to China resume

Direct connectivity established again after 5 years to boost bilateral trade

Blitz BUREAU

In a significant step toward strengthening India-China relations, regular direct air connectivity between the two neighbouring nations has resumed after more than five years, according to a report in The Statesman.

IndiGo restarted its flight service connecting Kolkata and Guangzhou from October 26, while China Eastern Airlines will resume its Shanghai-Delhi operations from November 9. The Chinese airline would operate three flights every week – on Wednesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays – using an A330-200 aircraft.

"The resumption of this service marks the full restoration of China Eastern Airlines' network in India, providing fresh momentum for people-to-people exchanges and economic and trade collaboration," a source stated.

Speaking at an event in Kolkata, China's Consul General Xu Wei said the move comes as part of broader efforts by both countries' foreign ministries and civil aviation departments to reinforce their 75 years of bilateral relationship through enhanced trade and people-to-people exchanges.

Vinay Malhotra, head of global sales at IndiGo, said, "We are pleased to enhance our connectivity to China with daily direct flights between Kolkata and Guangzhou, in addition to the resumed route from Delhi also."

Deputy Consul General of China in Kolkata, Qin Yong, said the initial aim is to connect Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen with Delhi and Kolkata. "We have the concept of 'four-layer' cities.

Union civil aviation ministry is hoping the direct connectivity will have far-reaching economic benefits for the region.

China's fourth-tier cities are smaller but rapidly developing urban centres located beyond the major commercial hubs. Over recent years, these cities have witnessed fast-paced growth in infrastructure, industries, and retail markets. They could play an increasingly important role in strengthening India and China's internal economy. We wish to build a sincere and closer partnership with India so that trade and commerce between the two countries grows stronger," he said.

Officials of the Airport Authority of India (AAI) noted that the Union civil aviation ministry is hoping the direct connectivity will have far-reaching economic benefits for the region. "The revival of air links will significantly improve commercial engagement between eastern India and southern China, particularly in sectors like textiles, electronics, and small-scale manufacturing. It will also promote tourism between the two countries," the official said.

Xu Wei also highlighted that the flights would ease education and medical exchanges, allowing Indian students studying in China and Chinese nationals visiting Kolkata for healthcare or business to travel more conveniently.

"Direct flights reduce both time and cost, expanding economic opportunities and enhancing the trade potential of eastern India," he added.

Direct flights between India and China were operational until early 2020 but were suspended following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and amid tensions along the eastern Ladakh border.

On October 2, India's civil aviation ministry had announced that direct air services would resume by the end of October, following continuous technical-level engagements between civil aviation authorities of both nations — a clear indication of efforts to normalise bilateral ties.

Future routes under discussion may include Kolkata–Guangzhou and Chennai–Shenzhen, aimed at linking more commercial hubs in both countries. BIB

Made-in-India PCBs now

Nod for 7 elcom manufacturing projects worth ₹5,532 crore

Blitz BUREAU

Union Electronics and IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw announced last week the approval of first trench of seven projects under the Electronics Components Manufacturing Scheme (ECMS). Now multi-layer printed circuit boards (PCBs), high-density interconnect (HDI) PCBs, camera modules, copper clad laminates, and polypropylene films will be made in India.

The move marks a major step in India's journey from making finished products to manufacturing modules, components, materials and machineries used to manufacture them.

Overwhelming response for ECMS

The scheme has received wonderful response from both domestic and global companies. Total 249 applications were received. These represent ₹1.15 lakh crore investment, ₹10.34 lakh crore production, and 1.42 lakh jobs to be created. It is the highest-ever investment commitment in India's electronics sector.

In total, the seven projects are worth ₹5,532 crore. These projects will lead to production of components worth ₹36,559 crore and creation of over 5,100 direct jobs. The approved units are spread across Tamil Nadu (5), Andhra Pradesh (1), and Madhya Pradesh (1).

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The Minister informed, "20 per cent of our domestic demand of PCBs and 15 per cent of camera module sub-assembly will be met through production from these plants."

Camera modules are compact imaging units that capture photos and videos in electronic devices. Their production in India will enable their usage in smartphones, drones, laptops, tablets, medical instruments, robots, and automotive systems.

Vaishnaw also mentioned that the demand of copper clad laminate will now completely be domestically met. The additional 60 per cent of production through these plants will be exported.

HDI and multi-layer PCBs are the core circuit boards that connect and control every electronic device. These are used in smartphones, laptops, automotive and industrial systems.

ECMS also marks India's entry into component materials manufacturing.

For the first time, India will establish a copper clad laminate (CCL) manufacturing facility. CCL acts as a base component for manufacturing multi-layer PCBs. These PCBs go into every electronic equipment. Right now it is imported.

Polypropylene film is the key material used in manufacturing capacitors for consumer electronics, automotive, ICT, industrial & manufacturing, telecommunications & computing equipment. BIB

Terms set for 8th Pay Commission

Recommendations to come within 18 months

Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai will act as the chairperson. Professor Pulak Ghosh of the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore has been appointed as a part-time member, while Petroleum Secretary Pankaj Jain will serve as the member-secretary.

Blitz BUREAU

The Union Cabinet has approved the Terms of Reference of the 8th Central Pay Commission (CPC), the body in charge of deciding the pay structure and retirement benefits of Central Government employees, the Government announced on October 28.

The Government had announced the formation of the 8th CPC in January 2025 to examine and recommend changes in the salaries and other benefits of Central Government employees.

"As you know, the in-principle approval for the formation of the 8th Central Pay Commission was granted only recently in January, and within a short span, the commission has now been formally constituted," Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said during the press conference announcing the Union Cabinet's decisions.

"This is a major step that involves extensive consultations. Several ministries with large numbers of Central Government employees, such as Defence, Home, Railways, and the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), were part of the process."

The Commission will comprise one chairperson, one part-time member and one member-secretary. It will make its recommendations within 18 months of the date of its constitution. Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai will act as the chairperson. Professor Pulak Ghosh of the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore has been appointed as a part-time member, while Petroleum Secretary Pankaj Jain will serve as the member-secretary.

"There are about 50 lakh Central Government employees, and consultations were also held with many state governments, most of which extended their cooperation," Vaishnaw added.

According to the Government, the 8th CPC would have to keep several factors in mind while coming up with its recommendations.

These include the economic conditions in the country and the need for fiscal prudence, the need to ensure that adequate resources are available for developmental expenditure and welfare measures, the unfunded cost of non-contributory pension schemes, the impact of its recommendations on state finances, as well as the current emolument structure, benefits and working conditions of employees of central public sector undertakings and the private sector.

The 8th CPC can also, if it deems it necessary, send interim reports on any of the issues under its purview as and when the recommendations are finalised. BIB

Hail CRYPTO!

Continued from Page 1

credit products using tokenised assets as collateral. The ruling doesn't turn crypto into money, but it makes it a legitimate asset that can support financial services.

For investors and lawyers, this judgment brings predictability. Indian courts can now enforce contracts involving digital assets, making it easier to recover stolen or lost funds. Arbitration clauses for crypto disputes will hold weight. For the first time, digital property rights have legal teeth in India.

The tax system also benefits from clarity. The Income Tax Act already taxes profits from "virtual digital assets" at 30 per cent, but now this has judicial backing. Companies can classify crypto gains properly, traders can declare income from it, and auditors can value holdings consistently. Even in bankruptcies, crypto can now be treated as recoverable property — a big step for creditors.

The decision also encourages innovation in fundraising and tokenisation. If digital assets are legally recognised as property, they can be used as collateral or even be turned into tradable tokens. Indian start-ups might now tokenise equity or revenue streams, while global investors could use tokenised Indian assets as security — bringing India closer to hubs like Singapore or London.

Along with responsibility, recognition also brings new risks. Exchanges must now meet high cybersecurity standards and comply with fiduciary and data protection laws. The WazirX hack that started it all is a reminder that legal recognition doesn't make crypto immune to theft. Crypto is now taxable, auditable, and insurable — but still vulnerable.

This judgment also puts pressure on regulators. The RBI, Sebi, and Finance Ministry can no longer ignore crypto. The RBI must clarify whether banks can hold or lend against such assets, Sebi must define its role in tokenised securities, and the Corporate Affairs Ministry must issue accounting guidelines. For once, the courts have moved faster than policymakers.

Most importantly, the psychological shift is huge. Legitimacy changes perception. What was once seen as a risky gamble now looks like a valid, ownable asset. Indian

The Madras High Court has done what the Government avoided for years — it has brought crypto into the framework of Indian property law, subject to all the duties and protections that come with real ownership

IT and fintech firms can build blockchain-based businesses — custody, settlement, or tokenisation — with confidence. Global investors may view India as a safer, more credible market for Web3 innovation.

Still, the ruling doesn't make crypto part of the monetary system, and regulators will remain cautious. But in one bold judgment, the Madras High Court has done what the Government avoided for years — it has brought crypto into the framework of Indian property law, subject to all the duties and protections that come with real ownership. BIB

Koyla Shakti to track coal digitally

Ministry portal to integrate multiple stakeholders for ease of operations

Blitz BUREAU

Moving towards digital transformation and enhanced data-driven governance, the Ministry of Coal launched "Koyla Shakti", a coal analytics dashboard last week. The dashboard will serve as a unified platform for real-time monitoring and analysis of coal sector operations.

The portal, which was launched by Minister of Coal and Mines, G. Kishan Reddy, has been conceptualised to integrate and analyse data related to coal production, demand, logistics, and dispatch, thereby strengthening operational transparency and efficiency across the sector.

The dashboard will enable real-time reporting, performance tracking, and optimised logistics, facilitating seamless information flow among stakeholders.

Koyla Shakti will integrate data from multiple stakeholders, including:

- Coal producing companies and private miners
- Central ministries and departments such as coal, Railways, power, finance, ports, shipping & waterways, and road transport & highways
- State departments managing coal production (E-Khanij platforms)
- Power generation companies and other industrial coal consumers
- Port authorities and private coal-handling terminals

The key features of the dashboard will include:

- UNIFIED VISIBILITY: Integration of diverse data sources into a single, comprehensive interface.
- Real-time monitoring: Continuous tracking of coal production, dispatch, and logistics operations.
- Data-driven decision making: Analytical tools to support evidence-based policy formulation and management decisions.
- INCIDENT RESPONSE: Timely alerts and notifications enabling faster resolution of operational challenges.
- STANDARDISATION: Uniform metrics and reporting formats ensuring consistency across departments.
- OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY: Simplification of monitoring and reporting, minimising manual errors.
- SCALABILITY: Provision for integration with future digital systems and additional data sets.
- Transparency and accountability: Enhanced visibility of performance indicators for all stakeholders.
- Policy planning and forecasting: Analytical insights to support demand forecasting and strategic planning. BIB

> **The portal has been conceptualised to integrate and analyse data related to coal production, demand, logistics, and dispatch, thereby strengthening operational transparency and efficiency across the sector.**

Uneven job growth in service sector: NITI report

Blitz BUREAU

NITI Aayog has come out with its first dedicated assessments of the services sector from the macro lens of output and employment, going beyond aggregate trends to present disaggregated and state-level profiles.

The CEO of the think tank, B V R Subrahmanyam, launched two inaugural reports under the Services Thematic Series in New Delhi last week in the presence of Dr Arvind Virmani, Member, NITI Aayog, and Dr. V. Anantha Nageswaran, Chief Economic Adviser, Government of India.

The first report "India's Services Sector: Insights from GVA Trends and State-Level Dynamics" examines national and state-level trends to understand how services-led growth is unfolding across regions and whether states with lower initial shares in services are catching up with more advanced ones, an important indicator of balanced regional development.

The services sector has become the cornerstone of India's economic growth, contributing nearly 55 per cent of national GVA in 2024-25. The report finds that the spread of services-led growth is becoming more regionally balanced.

While inter-state disparities in services sector shares have modestly widened, there is clear evidence that structurally lagging states are beginning to catch up. This emerging pattern of convergence suggests that India's services-led transformation is gradually becoming more broad-based and spatially inclusive.

At the sectoral level, the report recommends prioritising digital infrastructure, logistics, innovation, finance and skilling to accelerate diversification and competitiveness. At the state level, it recommends developing tailored service strategies based on local strengths, improving institutional capacity, integrating services with industrial ecosystems, and scaling up urban and regional service clusters.

The other report on "India's Services Sector: Insights from Employment trends and State-Level Dynamics" analyses services sector employment to present a multi-dimensional profile of India's services workforce across sub-sectors, gender, regions, education, and occupations.

It goes beyond aggregate trends to reveal the sector's dual character: modern, high-productivity segments that are globally competitive yet limited in employment intensity, and traditional segments that absorb large numbers of workers but remain predominantly informal and low-paying.

> **The services sector has become the cornerstone of India's economic growth, contributing nearly 55 per cent of national GVA in 2024-25. The report finds that the spread of services-led growth is becoming more regionally balanced.**

The report shows that while services remain the mainstay of India's employment growth and post-pandemic recovery, challenges persist. Employment generation is uneven across sub-sectors, informality remains widespread, and job quality continues to lag behind output growth.

Gender gaps, rural–urban divides, and regional disparities underline the need for an employment strategy that integrates formalisation, inclusion, and productivity enhancement at its core. BIB

The salt & sugar war

Blitz RESEARCH

Legal stay puts India's ₹1,000 crore ORS business back on the shelves

The battle over the humble, life-saving sachet of Oral Rehydration Solution (ORS) is not being fought in hospital wards, but in the corridors of the Delhi High Court. It is a conflict that pits public health against corporate commerce, regulatory authority against trade stability, and the integrity of a medical term against the lure of a massive, profitable market.

For years, pediatricians and child health advocates in India have fought for a decisive line to be drawn: A ban on using the term 'ORS' for any food or beverage product that did not strictly adhere to the World Health Organisation (WHO) formulation. They won that fight — but only for a glorious moment.

On October 14, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) delivered a verdict long-awaited by the medical community. The regulator declared that any product — from a ready-to-drink beverage to a sachet — using the term "ORS," even with branding prefixes like "Smart ORS" or "Hydra ORS," would henceforth be deemed misbranded.

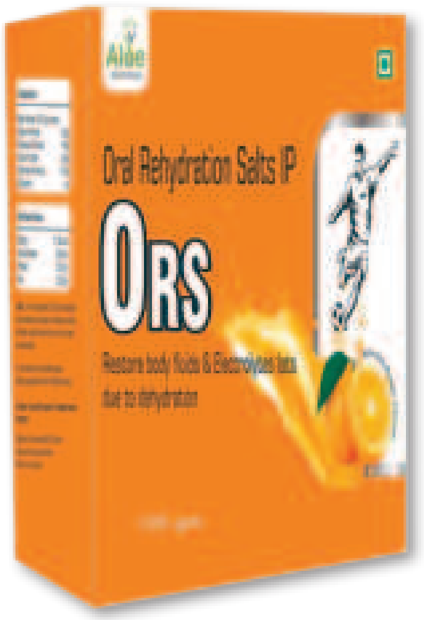
This directive effectively rescinded earlier, more lenient relaxations that had allowed companies to use the term under certain disclaimers. It was heralded as a "long-overdue win," a monumental step to protect children from deceptively marketed, high-sugar drinks that often do more harm than good.

Yet, less than a week later, the entire victory was placed on hold.

In a dramatic legal twist, the Delhi High Court granted an interim stay on FSSAI's key orders. The petition came from JNTL Consumer Health, a subsidiary of global giant Johnson & Johnson, a major player in the disputed beverage segment.

The stay allows the company to continue marketing its ORS-branded products and address an estimated inventory valued at a staggering Rs 155-180 crore. The court's intervention was not a judgment on the health merits of the drinks, but a procedural pause, emphasising that FSSAI could not implement its directive until the company was "given adequate opportunity of hearing."

The judiciary's scrutiny of the regulator's "rapid policy shift" has thrown the busi-



Business ba

The regulatory action by FSSAI affects not just JNTL Consumer Health, but the entire ecosystem of food business operators (FBOs) marketing products in the multi-billion dollar hydration space.

While the FSSAI ban applies universally to any brand failing to meet the WHO medical standard, the dispute highlights how large pharmaceutical and Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) entities operate in the 'grey area' of electrolyte drinks.

The global ORS market is projected to be worth between $2.5 billion and $3.6 billion in 2024 and is expected to grow to over $5 billion by 2030, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) projected between 6.5 per cent and 8.5 per cent. This growth is a powerful incentive for companies to seek every branding advantage.

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Global standards and Indian stakes

The controversy in India underscores the global significance and delicate composition of Oral Rehydration Solution (ORS). Hailed by medical historians as one of the most significant medical advancements of the 20th century, ORS — and the Oral Rehydration Therapy (ORT) it anchors — is credited with saving an estimated 70 million lives globally.

The success of ORS depends on its formulation. The current WHO and Unicef standard is the Reduced Osmolarity ORS, which features a total osmolarity of 245 mOsm/L.

This critical balance of glucose (sugar) and electrolytes (sodium, potassium, chloride, and citrate) ensures maximum absorption in the small intestine, effectively reversing the fatal effects of dehydration caused by diarrheal diseases. It is a simple, low-cost, and easily administered treatment, designed to be accessible in all settings.

The core market for genuine ORS is estimated to be around ₹1,000 crore (approximately \$120-\$130 million) annually. However, the total market for all 'dehydration drinks' — which includes the commercial, high-sugar substitutes — is a much larger segment that has more than doubled its moving annual turnover in the last four years. This aggressive growth is driven by rising temperatures, increased health and wellness awareness, and a consumer demand for flavored, convenient hydration. BIB

ness of hydration into a complex legal and ethical quagmire, creating a high-stakes standoff where the bottom line clashes directly with the frontline treatment for childhood dehydration.

Misbranding a lifesaver

The core of the controversy lies in the vast, life-or-death difference between genuine ORS and its commercial impersonators.

Diarrhea remains a cruel statistic in India, responsible for around 13 per cent of deaths in children under five. The genuine ORS formula — a simple, calibrated mix of salts and sugar — is considered a frontline intervention that can reduce fatalities by over 90 per cent when used correctly.

The WHO-approved formula is an exacting standard, featuring a total osmolarity of 245 mOsm/L and a precise amount of sugar (dextrose anhydrous), specifically 13.5 grams per liter. This balance is critical: the sugar is necessary to co-transport sodium and water across the small intestine, but too much sugar is disastrous.

The judiciary's scrutiny of the regulator's "rapid policy shift" has thrown the business of hydration into a complex legal and ethical quagmire, creating a high-stakes standoff where the bottom line clashes directly with the frontline treatment for childhood dehydration.

This is where the high-sugar commercial beverages enter the picture. Marketed with the ORS tag and often placed right next to the genuine sachets on pharmacy shelves, these drinks can contain anywhere from 110 to 120 grams of sugar per liter — nearly ten times the safe limit.

The FSSAI's core contention was clear: Such products mislead consumers into believing they are purchasing the scientifically proven, life-saving therapy, when in fact, the dangerously high sugar content in these commercial versions can worsen diarrhea and dehydration by increasing the osmotic load in a child's gut.

For eight years, pediatricians like Dr. Sivaranjani Santosh of Hyderabad spearheaded the fight against this misbranding. They argue that diluting the term ORS undermines a critical public health tool. The FSSAI's October order was their moment of triumph, a powerful statement that the regulator was prioritising public safety over corporate convenience.

Corporate counter-punch

The market for these oral hydration and electrolyte drinks is colossal, and the stakes for the industry are immense.

JNTL Consumer Health's petition was a direct challenge to the regulatory suddenness. The company argues that the October orders were "arbitrary and unreasonable," citing that it had been permitted to use the ORS branding under previous FSSAI orders (including relaxations granted in July 2022 and February 2024).

In reliance on these earlier clearances, JNTL had manufactured large quantities of stock, accounting for the massive Rs 155-180 crore inventory now trapped in regulatory limbo.

Justice Sachin Datta's stay, therefore, signals that the judiciary is examining not the quality of the product, but the process of the policy shift. The court's initial decision to hold the ban until the company is granted an "adequate opportunity of hearing" means the immediate fate of the ban hinges on bureaucratic procedure and due process, not immediate medical necessity.

The stay has, predictably, created confusion and alarm.

Child health advocates are gravely concerned. Dr. Santosh reportedly criticised the interim relief, calling it a "national shame." She warned that the stay could be an erosion of public health gains, suggesting that FSSAI has been forced to permit the "disposal of high-sugar ORS-type stock without fully protecting children."

The message is clear: the delay allows potentially harmful products to remain in circulation and profit from a confusing brand identity, potentially leading to continued misuse by unsuspecting parents and caregivers. BIB

attlefield and the big players

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Consumer Health (Johnson & Johnson
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e products are marketed as energy or
on drinks, but their placement and
ng strategies have been criticised for
capitalising on the consumers' need for a medical rehydration solution.

By using suffixes or prefixes to 'ORS' or by being sold alongside WHO-compliant sachets, these companies benefit from public trust in the ORS brand while delivering a high-sugar beverage unsuitable for treating severe dehydration.

The current stay allows these commercial market forces to continue, underscoring the legal battle's impact on the competitive landscape and consumer safety.

● The Path Ahead: Legal Limbo and Consumer Confusion

The current scenario is a study in regulatory and commercial deadlock.

FSSAI has been quick to clarify that the stay is a "legal procedural outcome, not a policy reversal," reaffirming its commitment to the spirit of the ban. It has indicated that it will act once JNTL's representation is fully considered and the matter is up for "full adjudication." The immediate future of the ban — and the products — rests on the outcome of this hearing process.

For consumers, the stay translates directly into confusion. The immediate need is for a clear distinction: how does one distinguish a genuine, WHO-formulated ORS from a sugar-rich 'hydration' drink?

The regulatory limbo has also ensnared retailers and distributors. While some continue sales under the court's permission, others are pulling stock, fearing future liability should the stay be lifted and the ban enforced.

Consumer-safety experts and pediatricians are united in their advice: Until the regulatory matter is resolved, parents and caregivers must rely only on WHO-approved ORS sachets. BIB

Marks & Spencer ends IT security contract with TCS

Experts blame it on ₹3,200 cr loss due to a cyberattack

Blitz BUREAU

British retail giant Marks & Spencer (M&S) has terminated its long-standing partnership with Indian IT powerhouse Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) following a devastating cyberattack that cost the company an estimated ₹3,200 crore (£300 million) earlier this year, reports The420.in.

The retailer ended its technology helpdesk contract with TCS in July 2025, just months after the breach forced it to suspend online operations for weeks and left many of its stores with empty shelves.

According to investigators, a hacking group known as Scattered Spider infiltrated M&S's systems using "social engineering" tactics — impersonating senior executives over tech support calls to trick helpdesk agents into resetting passwords.

In testimony before British lawmakers, M&S chairman Archie Norman said the cybercriminals gained access through "sophisticated impersonation involving a third-party vendor."

Following the attack, TCS conducted an internal investigation to determine whether its helpdesk team had inadvertently served as a gateway for hackers. The company later stated it found "no evidence of wrongdoing or compromise."

However, the UK Business Select Committee, chaired by Liam Byrne, requested

clarification from TCS regarding its role. In a written response to Members of Parliament, TCS said the breach occurred "within the client's own environment" and that it had found "no indicators of compromise within the TCS network."

TCS — one of India's largest IT service providers — works with dozens of major British institutions, including banks, financial firms, and national infrastructure projects. Many UK companies have outsourced critical IT operations to Indian firms as a cost-saving strategy.

However, cybersecurity experts warn that such outsourcing can expose organisations to new layers of risk.

Kevin Beaumont, a noted cybersecurity researcher, said, "IT helpdesks often serve multiple clients simultaneously and operate off a scripted process. It's easy for attackers to exploit that environment — and easy for humans to make mistakes."

M&S and TCS have worked together

British retail giant Marks & Spencer (M&S) has terminated its long-standing partnership with Indian IT powerhouse Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) following a devastating cyberattack that cost the company an estimated ₹3,200 crore (£300 million) earlier this year, reports The420.in.

for more than a decade. In 2023, the two companies renewed a $1 billion (approximately ₹8,300 crore) agreement aimed at modernising M&S's technology infrastructure and business systems.

Despite the latest contract termination, TCS continues to manage M&S's data center and cloud operations. BIB

Starlink starts security tests ahead of India retail kickoff

Blitz BUREAU

Elon Musk's Starlink is starting security tests in India, one of the final hurdles for the company as it prepares to provide commercial satellite broadband services in the world's most populous country, reports Bloomberg.

The tests are part of India's security clearance process for foreign and domestic telecom operators.

The SpaceX-owned network will still need Trai nod to release the final pricing framework for satellite services. If the regulator does that by year-end, Musk's company could start beaming Internet signals to Indian homes by early 2026, said sources.

India's satellite communications sector is heating up as Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Government opens the space economy to private players. The country is encouraging satellite firms to plug coverage gaps left by traditional fiber and mobile networks.

The SpaceX-owned company is building at least 10 satellite gateways across India, more than triple the number planned by its two major rivals in the market, Space Fiber from Reliance Jio and OneWeb from Eutelsat Communications, according to people aware of the plans.

SpaceX and India's Department of Telecommunications did not respond to requests for comment.

Mumbai, where SpaceX has finished three ground stations, will serve as the company's India hub, the people said, adding that officials are expected to begin onsite inspections soon.

India's satellite communications sector is heating up as Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Government opens the space economy to private players. The country is encouraging satellite firms to plug coverage gaps left by traditional fiber and mobile networks.

Indian regulators earlier this year gave approval for Starlink to launch satellite broadband operations and allocated specific frequency bands, part of a years-long attempt by the US company to gain a foothold in a country with over 900 million internet users.

Starlink's India entry would help SpaceX compensate for being shut out of China, where the Government has kept the market closed to foreign operators.

The scale of the network Starlink is building signals Musk's ambition to sell directly to retail consumers, unlike Jio and OneWeb, which are building their offerings around enterprise and Government clients. BIB

The Idea of relief

SC reprieve for Vodafone as Centre agrees to reconsider AGR dues

Blitz BUREAU

Vodafone-Idea (VI) won a major relief in the Supreme Court last week after the Government agreed to reconsider its demand for additional adjusted gross revenue (AGR) dues from the company and take an appropriate decision in accordance with the law.

Appearing before a Bench headed by the Chief Justice of India B R Gavai, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, for the Union Government, said there had been a "huge change in circumstances" in the time between the previous AGR litigation in the apex court involving VI, and the present one.

Mehta submitted that the Government has infused a "substantial equity" to the tune of 49 per cent in the company.

"Thus the Government's interest, which is the public's own interest, is interlinked with the company now," the top law officer submitted.

He further briefed the Court that the company has 20 crore consumers, and any decision on the company would affect the customers too. He said the Government had concerns like over-invoicing, etc., associated with the company, but that would be comprehensively heard and considered in detail.

The Court said the issue has entered into the "policy domain" with the Government pumping in considerable equity and the issue involving 20 crore customers of the company.

The Court found nothing wrong in the Government's stand to reconsider its demand for additional AGR dues for the financial year (FY) 2016-2017 from the company and take a suitable decision, saying this would also address the larger public interest involved.

VI had approached the apex court against the additional AGR demand raised by DOT for the 2016-2017 period. The company had argued that the liabilities were already calculated and could not be changed or increased. It had urged the Court to quash the additional DoT demand while seeking a comprehensive re-assessment and reconciliation of AGR dues for the period till FY 2016-17.

The fresh litigation had come only months after the apex court had rejected earlier petitions by Bharti Airtel, Vodafone Idea (VI) and Tata Teleservices seeking relief in the payment of their interest on the dues, penalty and interest on the penalty towards their respective AGR liabilities on the ground that they were under severe financial constraints. The apex court had, in its order in May, concluded their pleas to be "misconceived".

Top court found nothing wrong in the Government's stand to reconsider its demand for additional AGR dues for the financial year (FY) 2016-2017 from the company and take a suitable decision, saying this would also address the larger public interest involved.

In fact, the Chief Justice had voiced the need for finality in the AGR litigation.

Almost exactly a year ago, on September 19, the apex court had dismissed a curative petition filed by telcos, including Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea, against the court's October 2019 judgment upholding the DoT's move to recover AGR of about ₹92,000 crore from them. BIB

HAL ties up with Russian co to make passenger jets

Blitz BUREAU

At time when India's energy and defence ties with Russia have emerged as a major irritant in the India-US relationship, public sector unit Hindustan Aeronautics (HAL) has inked a memorandum of understanding with Russia's public joint stock company United Aircraft Corporation (UAC) — a company under sanction from the US — to manufacture the latter's SJ-100 regional jets in India, reports The Indian Express.

If the MoU materialises, SJ-100 could become the first passenger jet to be fully manufactured in India, which harbours the ambition to become an aerospace manufacturing hub.

"SJ-100 is a twin-engine, narrow-body aircraft. As on date, more than 200 aircraft have been produced and are being operated by more than 16 commercial airline operators. SJ-100 will be the game changer for short-haul connectivity under the UDAN Scheme in India. Under this arrangement, HAL will have the rights to manufacture SJ-100 aircraft for domestic customers," HAL said.

"This will also be the first instance wherein a complete passenger aircraft will be produced in India. The last such project was HAL's production of AVRO HS-748, which started in 1961 and ended in 1988," the company added, without elaborating further on the partnership and project timeline.

If the MoU materialises, SJ-100 could become the first passenger jet to be fully manufactured in India, which harbours the ambition to become an aerospace manufacturing hub.

HAL said that it is estimated that India would require around 200 jets of this category for domestic regional connectivity over the next 10 years, and another 350 planes for flights to international destinations in the Indian Ocean region.

India has been pushing global aircraft manufacturers to set up final assembly lines (FALs) for passenger jets in the country, given India's status as the world's third-largest domestic aviation market and the fastest-growing major aviation market globally.

The SJ-100, earlier known as the Sukhoi Superjet 100 (SSJ-100) — is a regional jet with a flight range of 3,530 km, and can carry up to 103 passengers. Other aircraft in its segment include the likes of Embraer E190 and the Airbus A220.

While announcing the MoU, which is an initial understanding and not a firm contract, HAL — a defence ministry undertaking — did not give any timeline for the project.

The announcement comes as Indian refiners prepare to heavily cut their Russian oil imports following imposition of US sanctions on two of Moscow's large oil and gas companies. Although India has been politically opposed to unilateral sanctions, Indian companies have usually refrained from violating such sanctions, particularly when they are imposed by the US, due to the threat of secondary sanctions from Washington.

Even in the case of India's Russian oil imports, New Delhi had shown no signs of buckling under US pressure, until Russian Rosneft and Lukoil were sanctioned by Washington last week.

Despite an additional tariff of 25 per cent imposed by the Trump administration on most Indian goods, India continued importing Russian oil to show that it will not accept being told whom it can or cannot do business with. BIB

Blitz BUREAU

Solar SURGE

India's bold leap towards a net-zero future

Just a decade ago, India's solar landscape was in its infancy, with panels dotting only a few rooftops and deserts. Today, the nation has raced ahead to script history: India has officially surpassed Japan to become the world's third-largest solar power producer.

According to the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), India generated an impressive 1,08,494 GWh of solar energy, leaving Japan behind at 96,459 GWh.

India's cumulative solar power capacity stood at 119.02 GW as of July this year. The country's progress in the renewable energy sector reflects its focused policies and strategic planning under national leadership. As part of the pledge made at COP26, efforts are being directed towards reaching the target of 500 GW of non-fossil fuel electricity capacity by 2030.

High potential

India lies in the tropical region, with the Tropic of Cancer passing through many states. This gives the country a high potential for solar power generation. The total solar sector potential of the Indian continent is 748 GW. States/ UTs like Rajasthan, Jammu and Kashmir, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Andhra Pradesh have some of the highest solar potential in the country, making them key drivers of India's clean energy growth.

In July this year, India's solar power capacity had increased by 4,000 per cent, and the country's total renewable energy capacity reached 227 GW.

India's solar manufacturing sector includes key components like solar modules, solar PV cells, and ingots and wafers. Producing these within the country supports the domestic economy and reduces dependence on imports.

In just one-year, solar module manufacturing capacity nearly doubled – from 38 GW in March 2024 to 74 GW in March 2025. Similarly, solar PV cell manufacturing rose from 9 GW to 25 GW. A big milestone was the start of India's first ingot-wafer manufacturing facility (2 GW), further strengthening the entire solar supply chain.

Policy support

This rapid growth in domestic capacity is strongly supported by Government policies. To promote Indian-made solar products, the Government has made it mandatory for projects under schemes like the Rooftop Solar Programme, PM-KUSUM, and CPSU Scheme Phase II to use panels and cells made in India.

It has launched several flagship initiatives to promote the adoption and development of solar energy across the country.

PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana: It's a Central scheme with an outlay of Rs 75,021 crore to help one crore Indian households to get up to 300 units of free electricity every month by installing rooftop solar panels.

PM-KUSUM: The Pradhan Mantri Kisan Urja Suraksha Evam Utthaan Mahabhiyaan scheme supports farmers in using solar energy instead of diesel. Farmers can get a 30-50 pc subsidy to install new solar pumps or convert old pumps to solar.

Solar Parks scheme: The Government is running a scheme to set up large solar power plants connected to the electricity grid, with a target of 40 GW by March 2026. So far, 53 Solar Parks with a total capacity of about 39,323 MW have been approved in 13 states.

PM JANMAN: The Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan was launched to address the development needs of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) through 11 critical interventions across nine ministries. BIB

(To be continued...)

Blitz BUREAU

Unlocking India's linguistic future through technology

India's linguistic landscape is among the most diverse in the world, with 22 Scheduled Languages and hundreds of tribal and regional dialects spoken across its vast geography. As digital transformation accelerates, the need to embed this linguistic diversity into digital infrastructure has become critical.

The Government is leveraging advanced technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Natural Language Processing (NLP), machine learning, and speech recognition to build intelligent, scalable language solutions. These initiatives aim to democratise access to digital services by enabling seamless communication, real-time translation, voice-enabled interfaces, and localised content delivery.

By building a robust technological ecosystem that respects linguistic diversity, India is setting the foundation for an inclusive digital future where every citizen, regardless of his/her mother tongue, can participate fully in the digital economy and governance.

Key platforms

AI-driven language platforms and expansive digital repositories are reimagining how India's languages are preserved, used, and evolved. Platforms like Bhashini and BharatGen offer multilingual support across governance, healthcare, and education. Initiatives like Adi-Vaani bring tribal languages into the digital fold.

Adi-Vaani: Founded in 2024, Adi-Vaani is the country's first AI-driven platform dedicated to the real-time translation and preservation of tribal languages. It combines the precision of Artificial Intelligence with human linguistic expertise to deliver seamless multilingual experiences.

PPEL scheme: The Scheme for Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages (SPPEL) focuses on documenting and digitally archiving endangered Indian languages – particularly those spoken by fewer than 10,000 people. It generates rich text, audio, and video datasets that serve both preservation and innovation.

Sanchika: Managed by Central Institute of Indian Languages, Sanchika aggregates dictionaries, primers, storybooks, and multimedia resources for Scheduled and tribal languages.

BharatGen: It develops advanced text-to-text and text-to-speech translation models for all 22 Scheduled Languages. It leverages data from SPPEL and Sanchika to create multilingual A I systems that power applications in governance, education, and healthcare. .

GeMAI: To enhance user accessibility and inclusivity, the Government e-Marketplace (GeM) has integrated GeMAI, an AI-powered multilingual assistant that leverages advanced natural language processing and machine learning to provide voice and text-based support across multiple Indian languages.

Bhashini: It is a pioneering AI platform enabling real-time translation for 22 Scheduled Languages and tribal languages. It facilitates access to Government services, digital content, and promotes digital inclusion through machine translation, speech recognition, and natural language understanding.

TRI-ECE Scheme: The Tribal Research, Information, Education, Communication and Events Scheme supports innovative research and documentation projects aimed at preserving tribal languages and cultures.

As part of this initiative, the Ministry has backed the development of AI-based language translation tools capable of converting English/Hindi text and speech into tribal languages and vice versa. The project also emphasises community involvement through collaboration with tribal research institutes and language experts, ensuring linguistic accuracy and cultural sensitivity.

Digital archives

Institutions like the Central Institute of Indian Languages and the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts collaborate with Bhashini by digitising ancient manuscripts, folk literature, and oral traditions. These digital archives enrich AI and Natural Language Processing (NLP) systems, supporting both preservation and state-of-the-art translation solutions- reinforcing the link between cultural heritage and modern technology. BIB

The growing relevance of Traditional Medicine

Prataprao Jadhav
Union Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare

The World Health Organisation (WHO) reports that traditional medicine is practised in 88 per cent of its member-states — 170 out of 194 countries. For billions, particularly in low- and middle-income nations, it remains the primary form of healthcare due to accessibility and affordability considerations. Yet, its significance extends beyond treatment, supporting biodiversity conservation, nutrition security, and sustainable livelihoods.

Market projections underscore this growing acceptance. Analysts estimate that the global traditional medicine market will reach $583 billion by 2025, with annual growth rates of 10-20 per cent. China's traditional Chinese medicine sector is valued at $122.4 billion, Australia's herbal medicine industry at $3.97 billion, and India's Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy (AYUSH) sector at $43.4 billion.

This expansion reflects a fundamental shift in healthcare philosophy — from reactive treatment models to proactive, preventive approaches that address root causes rather than symptoms alone.

India now exports AYUSH and herbal products worth $1.54 billion to more than 150 countries, with Ayurveda gaining formal recognition as a medical system in several nations

India's Ayurvedic transformation

India's traditional medicine sector has witnessed remarkable transformation. The AYUSH industry, comprising over 92,000 micro, small and medium enterprises, has expanded nearly eight-fold in less than a decade. Manufacturing sector revenues have grown from Rs 21,697 crore in 2014-15 to over Rs 1.37 lakh crore currently, while the services sector has generated Rs 1.67 lakh crore in revenue.

India now exports AYUSH and herbal products worth $1.54 billion to more than 150 countries, with Ayurveda gaining formal recognition as a medical system in several nations. This represents both economic opportunity and soft power projection on the global stage.

The first comprehensive survey on AYUSH by the National Sample Survey Office (2022-23) revealed near-universal awareness — 95 pc in rural areas and 96 pc in urban centres. Over half the population

reported using AYUSH systems in the preceding year, with Ayurveda emerging as the preferred choice for rejuvenation and preventive care.

Scientific validation, global expansion

India has invested significantly in research through institutions including the All India Institute of Ayurveda, the Institute of Teaching and Research in Ayurveda, the National Institute of Ayurveda, and the Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences.

These institutions focus on clinical validation, drug standardisation and developing integrative care models that combine traditional knowledge with modern medical practices.

India's global Ayurveda outreach has achieved unprecedented scale through the Ministry of AYUSH's International Cooperation Scheme. India has signed 25 bilateral agreements and 52 institutional partnerships, established 43 AYUSH Information Cells across 39 countries, and positioned 15 academic chairs in foreign universities.

The establishment of the WHO Global Traditional Medicine Centre in India represents a significant milestone. Supported by the Government of India, the centre aims to harness traditional medicine's potential through modern science, digital health and emerging technologies including artificial intelligence.

WHO's recent publication on AI integration in traditional medicine highlights how advanced technologies can strengthen clinical validation, enable big-data analytics, and enhance predictive care within Ayurveda and related systems.

The theme this year

Ayurveda's core philosophy of balance– between body and mind, humans and nature, consumption and conservation – offers relevant solutions for contemporary challenges. As the world grapples with lifestyle diseases and climate change, Ayurveda provides a framework that addresses both personal and planetary health.

As India leads efforts to mainstream traditional medicine globally, the approach emphasises healthcare that is preventive, affordable, inclusive and sustainable. Ayurveda represents not merely a medical system but a wellness movement that bridges traditional knowledge with contemporary needs.

The convergence of ancient wisdom with modern science and technology positions traditional medicine systems to play an increasingly important role in global health architecture. Ayurveda Day this year serves as a reminder of the potential for traditional knowledge systems to contribute to a more balanced and sustainable future for people and the planet. BIB

Talks deadlocked

Agreement eludes Pakistan, Afghanistan; clashes continue

Blitz BUREAU

The latest round of talks between delegations of Pakistan and Afghanistan in Istanbul ended without any outcome with mediators citing several differences as the reasons that hindered any agreement on security concerns, local media reported on October 27.

The talks between Pakistan and Afghanistan, held for three consecutive days, ended without any breakthrough despite regional mediation efforts. Mediators admitted that the positions of two nations remained far apart as there were differences between two sides in expectations and priorities. The lack of coordination between two nations has sparked concerns about further escalation.

Pakistan has insisted that acting against Tehreek-e-Taliban (TTP) and preventing the fighters of the group to take sanctuary in Afghanistan remain important conditions for any agreement. Pakistan considers the TTP insurgency as a direct threat to its national security.

Analysts have said that the failure of talks showcases mistrust between two nations and demonstrates the difficulty in curbing cross-border militancy. They have warned that prolonged stalemate risks destabilising both nations.

After the border clashes, Islamabad has warned that it will continue to target military operations inside Afghan territory if attacks by TTP militants continue.

The first round of Pakistan-Afghanistan talks, mediated jointly by Qatar and Turkey, took place in Doha on October 18-19.

As the both delegations met in Istanbul for the second round of peace talks, Pakistan's Defence Minister Khawaja Asif continued to engage in aggressive rhetoric by warning Kabul of an "open war" if the talks fail.

Pakistani media reported that Islamabad also wants to establish a "third-party oversight structure", potentially co-chaired by Turkey and Qatar, to verify progress and address non-compliance.

Relations between Kabul and Islamabad have been undergoing a turbulent phase as the situation on the Durand Line has witnessed several clashes in the past few weeks.

Afghanistan's FM Amir Khan Muttaqi's week-long visit to New Delhi beginning on October 9 was viewed with extreme hostility by the Pakistani establishment, and on the very first day of Muttaqi's visit, Kabul witnessed drone attacks. BIB

Controversial map

Northeast India shown as part of Bangladesh

Blitz BUREAU

Chief Adviser of the interim government of Bangladesh Prof. Mohammed Yunus met a high-level Pakistani military visitor during the weekend and gifted him a book that depicted parts of northeast India as part of Bangladesh.

The map in question was printed on the cover of a book that was presented to Chairman of Pakistan's Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCSC) General Sahir Shamshad Mirza on October 2 at the state guest house Jamuna in Dhaka, according to a media report.

The Ministry of External Affairs had lodged a strong protest last December when a similar map was used by a student adviser online.

The book, meant to celebrate the 2024 student movement that led to the fall of Sheikh Hasina's government, included a map portraying Bangladesh as encompassing Assam and other northeastern Indian states. The distorted map immediately triggered backlash on social media and among political observers.

The controversial map appears to represent the idea of a "Greater Bangladesh," a concept propagated by the Dhaka-based Islamist group Sultanat-e-Bangla.

The group's version of the map extends Bangladesh's borders to include all of India's Northeast, West Bengal, parts of Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, and Myanmar's Arakan region.

The visit by General Mirza took place after the August 23-24 visit to Bangladesh by Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar, who asked Bangladesh to "clean hearts" and move on from the painful memories of 1971 genocide by Pakistani military forces. BIB

India's role models

Women peacekeepers play their part

Blitz BUREAU

India's women peacekeepers inspire women in conflict zones and improve civilian protection, the UN Peacebuilding Commission was told.

Indian women peacekeepers, who were pioneers in the UN mission deployments "can be leaders and peacebuilders," P. Wilson said on October 26 at the Commission's meeting on Women, Peace and Security.

Wilson, a Rajya Sabha member from the DMK, is one of the MPs joining the delegation to the General Assembly.

"They build trust in communities and give hope to vulnerable populations, particularly women and children," he said, and "most critically, they help address gender-based violence and ensure that peace processes reflect the needs and perspectives of all segments of society".

The meeting was in observance of the 25th anniversary of the Security Council's adoption of a landmark resolution that called for enhancing the role of women in UN missions, involving them in peace negotiations, and protecting them against violence.

Indian women medical officers served in the peacekeeping operation in Congo in the 1960s.

The UN's first all-women police unit came from India when it was deployed in Liberia in 2007. BIB

Top polluters

Lahore, Karachi figure in top ten cities

Blitz BUREAU

Lahore in Pakistan continues to remain the world's most polluted city as smog blanketed the region on October 27 and the city's Air Quality Index (AQI) was recorded at 329 at around 9 am (local time) as per Swiss air quality monitor IQAir.

The AQI of Lahore stood at 424 earlier in the morning, leading Pakistani daily The News International reported.

Pakistan's Karachi also featured in the top 10 most polluted cities globally. It stood at the third spot in the list with an AQI recorded at 174.

Faisalabad and Multan cities of Punjab recorded AQI of 439 and 438 respectively at different times of the day. Other major urban centres like Bahawalpur, Gujranwala and Sialkot featured predominantly on the list, indicating a public health crisis in Punjab.

The pollution, however, was not uniform across cities. It was reported that several monitoring stations recorded air quality levels in the 'hazardous' category, with some areas facing emergency conditions.

The smog emergency has placed the Punjab province region on high alert.

Smog is set to intensify across Lahore and other parts of Punjab due to a combination of local emissions and pollutants carried by low-speed winds from India, following Diwali celebrations, according to the provincial government.

Besides local pollutants, winds blowing from India are also likely to play a role in worsening the situation over the week.

Health experts have warned that prolonged exposure to such high pollution levels can result in people facing severe health issues, including heart disease, lung cancer, stroke and chronic respiratory illnesses, The News International reported. BIB

India, China hold fresh round of border talks

Both sides agree to maintain stability

Blitz BUREAU

Union Minister for Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Shivraj Singh Chouhan on October 27 inaugurated the newly established state-of-the-art vegetable and flower seed processing and packaging unit of the National Seeds Corporation (NSC) at Pusa Institute in New Delhi and also virtually inaugurated five NSC seed processing plants located at Bareilly, Dharwad, Hassan, Suratgarh and Raichur.

The vegetable seed processing plant at Beej Bhawan in the Pusa complex has a processing capacity of one tonne per hour, while the other five NSC plants have a capacity of four tonnes per hour each. These facilities are equipped with advanced technologies to ensure the availability of high-quality seeds to farmers and to enhance the quality of seed production across the country.

During the programme, Chouhan also launched the 'Seed Management 2.0' system and an online seed booking platform for farmers. Through this platform, farmers will now be able to book their seed requirements online, ensuring greater transparency and accessibility. He emphasised that it is crucial for quality seeds to reach small and marginal farmers for enhancing their incomes.

He stated that the new facilities will ensure easy access to high-quality seeds, significantly improving agricultural productivity.

"These new plants will fulfil farmers' requirements, which is extremely important. During the recently conducted 'Viksit Krishi Sankalp Abhiyan', the maximum number of complaints received were related to spurious and substandard seeds. Hence, ensuring the supply of quality seeds is essential, and NSC has a vital role to play in this. The government is taking strict measures in this regard," the Union Minister said.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has highlighted the Government's commitment to enhance India's domestic food processing capacity, underscoring its critical role in ensuring national security, rural prosperity and economic resilience. BIB

PM Modi, Japanese PM agree to deepen strategic partnership

Blitz BUREAU

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on October 29 held a conversation with his Japanese counterpart Sanae Takaichi, reaffirming their shared commitment to enhance India-Japan Special Strategic and Global Partnership, particularly in areas of economic security, defence cooperation and talent mobility.

PM Modi also conveyed his best wishes to Takaichi on assuming office as the newly elected Prime Minister of Japan.

"Had a warm conversation with Sanae Takaichi, Prime Minister of Japan. Congratulated her on assuming office and discussed our shared vision for advancing the India-Japan Special Strategic and Global Partnership, with focus on economic security, defence cooperation and talent mobility. We agreed that stronger India–Japan ties are vital for global peace, stability and prosperity," PM Modi posted on X.

Last week, Takaichi expressed her commitment to work with PM Modi to further strengthen the Special Strategic and Global Partnership between the two countries, while thanking him for his wishes on her election as Japan's new PM.

"Thank you very much Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India for extending warm congratulations on my selection as a Prime Minister. I look forward to working with Your Excellency to further promote the Japan-India Special Strategic and Global Partnership," Takaichi posted on X.

Takaichi was elected as Japan's Prime Minister on October 21, following a run-off election in the Parliament. She is the first woman to be elected Japan's PM. BIB

Navy Chief calls for safer maritime order

Blitz BUREAU

Indian Navy Chief Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi has called upon representatives from 30 countries to share ideas for building a safer, stronger and more prosperous maritime order.

In a video address to the Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue 2025, the country's premier international conference on maritime strategy, diplomacy, and cooperation, Admiral Tripathi said, "Over the years, the Dialogue has evolved into a premier platform for the nations of the region to come together, share perspectives and explore new opportunities for cooperation under the Indo-Pacific oceans initiative."

He said this year's Dialogue is being held under the broader maritime vision of #MAHASAGAR as a vital forum fostering collaboration and capacity-building. He said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of MAHASAGAR -- Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth across Regions -- places capacity building in the heart of our collective maritime progress. It encourages cooperation among like-minded nations to ensure shared security and prosperity.

Admiral Tripathi said the theme of Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue 2025 - "Promoting Holistic Maritime Security and Growth Through Regional Capacity-Building and Capability-Enhancement" - is, therefore, both timely and apt. It reflects India's steadfast commitment to inclusive, collaborative and sustainable maritime engagement, he said, adding, "Together, let's build a safer, stronger and more prosperous maritime order." BIB

Srajan makes its Delhi-NCR debut with musical soirée

Blitz BUREAU

The national Capital came alive with music and cultural splendour as Srajan the Spark, a movement celebrating timeless musical and artistic heritage of India, launched its Delhi-NCR chapter, at the historic Chelmsford Club on October 26.

Delhi Police Commissioner Satish Golchha was the Chief Guest at the event, which was attended by an eclectic gathering of art connoisseurs, diplomats, and patrons of Indian culture.

The evening featured soulful ghazals by Jitendra Jamwal followed by a captivating act by 'The Anirudh Varma Collective', whose blend of classical and contemporary styles earned a standing ovation.

The Delhi-NCR Chapter is led by trustees Pramod Bapna, Ashok Chordia, Mamta Jain, Navyug Mohnot, and Rajesh Agarwal with its Council Chairman Sandesh Jain. With its Delhi-NCR debut, Srajan the Spark continues its inspiring journey of bridging hearts through harmony, and generations through shared artistry.

Founded by retired IPS officer Prasanna Khamesra, Srajan the Spark has evolved into a vibrant national collective whose motto is to preserve and promote Indian music and provide a wider platform to upcoming talent.

What began in Udaipur has, over the past 11 years, blossomed into a platform with active chapters across Jaipur, Hyderabad, Jodhpur, Kota, Ahmedabad, Chennai, Pune, Bhilwara, and now Delhi-NCR; with international chapters in the US, Canada, and the UK. BIB

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Indian coffee's popularity figures in PM's *Mann ki Baat*

'Brewed in India loved by world'

Blitz BUREAU

MANN KI BAAT
EPISODE 127

"INDIA'S coffee is coffee at its finest. It is brewed in India and loved by the world," Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in the 127th episode of his monthly radio programme Man Ki Baat. Joining the thread from where he had left last year – talking about Araku coffee of Andhra Pradesh – PM Modi in his October 26 broadcast commended the Koraput coffee of Odisha. He said he was told that Koraput coffee tastes amazing, and not only that; besides the taste, coffee cultivation is also benefiting people. The PM, as always included a whole range of issues in the latest episode of his Mann Ki Baat. **The following are the excerpts:**

...On this occasion of festivals, I had written a letter to all of you sharing my feelings. In the letter, I had mentioned the achievements of the country that have made this year's festivals even more vibrant. In response to my letter, I have received messages from many citizens of the country. Indeed, 'Operation Sindoor' has filled every Indian with pride. This time around, lamps of joy were lit even in those areas where the darkness of Maoist terror once prevailed. People want the complete eradication of the Maoist terror that had jeopardized the future of their children.

There is also a lot of enthusiasm among people regarding the GST Bachat Utsav. This time, something equally pleasant was observed during the festivals. The purchase of indigenous goods in the markets has increased tremendously. In the messages people have sent me, they have mentioned what indigenous products they have purchased this time...

Do you know what would be the most satisfying thing for me in the topics we discuss in 'Mann Ki Baat'? I would say that the topics we discuss in 'Mann Ki Baat' inspire people to do something good, something innovative for society. This brings forth many aspects of our culture and our country...

The 150th birth anniversary of Sardar Patel is a very special occasion for the entire country. Sardar Patel has been one of the greatest luminaries of the nation in modern times. His towering personality encompassed many qualities. He was an exceptionally brilliant student. He excelled in his studies both in India and Britain. He was also one of the most successful lawyers of his time. He could have earned even more fame in the field of law, but, inspired by Gandhiji, he completely dedicated himself to the freedom movement. Sardar Patel also laid a strong foundation for India's bureaucratic framework. He made unparalleled efforts for the unity and integrity of the country...

You all know about my association with tea; but today I thought, why not discuss coffee in 'Mann Ki Baat'! You may recall, last year we talked about Araku coffee in 'Mann Ki Baat'. Some time ago, many people from Odisha also shared their feelings with me regarding Koraput coffee. They wrote to me saying that Koraput coffee should also be discussed in 'Mann Ki Baat'.

Friends, I have been told that Koraput coffee tastes amazing, and not only that; besides the taste, coffee cultivation is also benefiting people. There are people in Koraput who are cultivating coffee through their sheer passion. They were doing handsome jobs in the corporate world... but they liked coffee so much that they entered this field and are now successfully working in it. There also are many women whose lives have been pleasantly transformed by coffee...

Indian coffee is becoming very popular all over the world. Be it Chikmagalur, Coorg and Hassan in Karnataka; the areas of Pulney, Shevaroy, Nilgiri and Annamalai in Tamil Nadu; the Biligiri region on the Karnataka-Tamil Nadu border; or the areas of Wayanad, Travancore and Malabar in Kerala - the diversity of Indian coffee is truly remarkable.

I have been told that our North-East is also progressing in coffee cultivation. This is further strengthening the identity of Indian coffee worldwide – that's why coffee lovers say: India's coffee is coffee at its finest. It is brewed in India and loved by the world.

My dear countrymen, in 'Mann Ki Baat' now, let's talk about a subject that is very close to everyone's hearts. This subject is our national song - India's national song, 'Vande Mataram'. A song whose very first word evokes a surge of emotions in our hearts. 'Vande Mataram' - this one word contains so many emotions, so many energies. In simple terms, it makes us experience the maternal affection of Ma Bharati. It makes us aware of our responsibilities as children of Ma Bharati. If there is a moment of difficulty, the chant of 'Vande Mataram' fills 140 crore Indians with the energy of unity.

Friends, patriotism... love for Ma Bharati... if this is an emotion beyond words, then 'Vande Mataram' is the song that lends tangible voice form to that abstract feeling. It was composed by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay to infuse new life into an India weakened by centuries of servitude. 'Vande Mataram' might have been written in the 19th century, but its spirit is connected to the immortal consciousness of India that is thousands of years old... BIB

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