



India denies role in Pakistan train attack

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

India dismissed Pakistan's accusations of involvement in a deadly attack on the Quetta-Peshawar train by the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), which killed 21 passengers. India's Ministry of External Affairs rejected the claims, urging Islamabad to focus on its internal issues instead of blaming others. Pakistan's Foreign Office and military alleged that India and Taliban-controlled Afghanistan supported the attackers, citing the use of Indian and Afghan weapons. The Pakistan Army's operation against the BLA resulted in 33 rebel deaths. Reports indicated that at least four Frontier Corps personnel also died, despite official claims that no hostages were harmed.



'Cover up of lies, defeat'

BLA spokesperson Jeeyand Baloch refuted Pakistan Army's claims about the Jaffar Express attack, calling it a cover-up. He stated that 182 passengers were taken hostage, including 100 security personnel, while women, children, and Baloch passengers were released. The BLA, designated a terrorist group by the U.S. in 2019, has long resisted Pakistan's rule in Balochistan, a resource-rich province. The insurgency dates back to Pakistan's inception, with various Baloch clans involved. A major crackdown in 2006 under President Musharraf led to the rise of militant groups like the BLA, while traditional Baloch leaders went into exile.

Democrats press Rubio for details of 'voter turnout' funds to

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



Two Democratic lawmakers from the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC) have written to Secretary of State Marco Rubio seeking details on the alleged \$21 million spent by USAID on voter turnout in India. The programme was reportedly canceled by the Department for Government Efficiency (DOGE), led by Elon Musk, following criticism from President Trump, who cited it as an example of wasteful spending. Trump's claims caused political controversy in India, with BJP and Congress trading accusations. The lawmakers, Gregory Meeks and Sydney Kamlager-Dove, argue that Trump's remarks have undermined USAID's work and strained U.S.-India relations. They have requested a response by March 21, 2025.

Hamas ready to free dual citizen, remains of others

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



Hamas announced its willingness to release Israeli-American hostage Edan Alexander and the remains of four other dual nationals amid indirect ceasefire talks with Israel. The first phase of the truce ended on March 1 without an agreement on the next steps, but negotiations have resumed in Doha. During the initial phase, Hamas released 33 hostages, including eight deceased, in exchange for 1,800 Palestinian detainees. Despite the truce, Israel recently carried out an airstrike and halted aid to Gaza. The second phase, yet to take effect, includes the release of remaining hostages, full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, and a permanent ceasefire.

Aditya-L1 mission: scientists observe a flareless coronal mass ejection

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Scientists from the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA) observed a flareless coronal mass ejection (CME) using the Visible Emission Line Coronagraph (VELC) onboard India's Aditya-L1 mission, the country's first solar study mission. The VELC, developed by IIA, allows detailed observations of the solar corona closer to its base and at shorter time intervals than existing coronagraphs. The team detected a CME eruption on July 5, 2024, that was not linked to any solar flare.

Magnetic instability

Scientists from the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA) reported that data from the Visible Emission Line Coronagraph (VELC) onboard Aditya-L1 provide insights into differentiating magnetic instabilities that cause solar flares and coronal mass ejections (CMEs). Their findings will soon be published in the *Astrophysical Journal*. Senior professor R. Ramesh stated that observing CMEs at their origin is a key goal of VELC, which is successfully achieving this. He also noted that as the sun nears the peak of Solar Cycle 25, CMEs are expected to become more frequent.

Closer monitoring

Prof. R. Ramesh emphasized that continuous monitoring of the sun with the Visible Emission Line Coronagraph (VELC) on Aditya-L1 will provide valuable data for both Indian and international scientists. VELC's unique design allows observations of coronal mass ejections (CMEs) close to the solar limb, aiding in studying their connection with solar flares. Flares and CMEs are explosive solar events caused by magnetic reconnection. Flares release energy as electromagnetic radiation, while CMEs involve massive plasma eruptions traveling at speeds up to 3,000 km/s. The relationship between flares and CMEs remains unclear.

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Centre sanctions 116 new tourist spots across the country

POLITY

The Centre has sanctioned 116 new tourist destinations across India at a cost of ₹4,088 crore under various schemes in collaboration with State governments. These include 34 sites under Swadesh Darshan 2.0 (SD2.0), 42 under the Challenge Based Destination Development (CBDD) sub-scheme, and 40 under Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment (SASCI). SD2.0 focuses on sustainable tourism, while SASCI aims to develop iconic tourist centres at a global level with ₹3,295.76 crore allocated for 40 projects in 23 States. Additionally, the Centre has approved tribal homestays under the Swadesh Darshan scheme as part of the Pradhan Mantri Janjatiya Unnat Gram Abhiyan.

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From the past to the present

Summit diplomacy, dating back to the Congress of Vienna (1814-15), has played a key role in conflict resolution, with notable successes like the Camp David Accords (1978) and U.S.-Soviet negotiations during the Cold War. However, many summits lead to superficial agreements, especially when leaders prioritize their strong image over substantive outcomes. A recent example of failed summit diplomacy was the heated public exchange between U.S. President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on February 28, 2025. Instead of resolving the Ukraine conflict, the meeting became a spectacle, with Trump pressuring Zelenskyy to accept a deal or risk losing U.S. support. In an unusual move, Zelenskyy offered U.S. mineral rights in exchange for past military aid.

The fallout from this summit left Europe scrambling to respond. A meeting of 19 European leaders in London produced vague commitments, with the U.K. pledging military support while reaffirming its close ties with the U.S. However, the broader European sentiment suggests that Trump's U.S. is unwilling to continue Biden's strategy of backing Ukraine.

India and a working visit

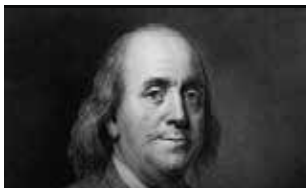
The Trump-Zelenskyy exchanges reinforced Trump's image as a political "bully," but his meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 13, 2025, did not reflect the same aggression. While Trump criticized India's tariff barriers, the discussions remained civil, with Modi making some concessions but not succumbing to pressure. Analysts suggest neither leader dominated the talks, with both adhering to a balance of power.

A key takeaway was Trump's offer to sell F-35 fighter jets to India, potentially influencing India's defense strategy against China. The Joint Statement issued after the meeting was vague, emphasizing collaboration while subtly pushing U.S. defense sales to India.

Modi carefully prepared for the meeting by engaging with U.S. intelligence and security officials, as well as Tesla CEO Elon Musk, to navigate Trump's unpredictable style. In summit diplomacy, there are rarely clear winners or losers, and the full impact of this meeting remains uncertain.

In perspective

Trump's approach to summit diplomacy differs from traditional diplomacy, which focuses on conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and trust-building. Many world leaders engage in summits without proper preparation, turning them into mere public relations exercises with limited results. Despite its flaws, summit diplomacy remains essential in international relations and may become even more crucial as global challenges demand collective cooperation.



"If you invest more in your education, then you are likely to get more interest in it."

—Benjamin Franklin

A school closure that must be called out

POLITY

The closure of Maharashtra's only Gondi-medium school in Mohgaon village raises concerns about tribal education and linguistic rights. Established in 2019 through a gram panchayat resolution, the school aimed to improve learning outcomes by teaching in the students' mother tongue, aligning with Article 29 and Article 350(a) of the Constitution. However, local authorities argue that the school lacks recognition under the Right to Education Act, 2009, making it unregulated and potentially harming students' future prospects. Officials have assured that students will be accommodated in other schools if the closure proceeds.

Subordination by bias

The closure of the Gondi-medium school reflects deeper issues of power and systemic bias against Adivasi language and culture, beyond bureaucratic concerns. The school's non-recognition highlights the socio-political subordination of tribal communities. Jawaharlal Nehru believed Adivasis should develop on their own terms, learning from historical experiences where colonial policies led to the destruction of indigenous communities. The Constitution includes provisions to protect tribal rights over land, language, and culture, ensuring their participation in nation-building without eroding their identity.

Forces of absorption

The forces of absorption, both secular and religious, have negatively impacted tribal communities since Independence. The state and market contribute to secular absorption, while tribal religious beliefs are undermined in the religious realm. The closure of the Gondi-medium school reflects this systemic absorption through non-recognition of tribal culture. Adivasi languages like Gondi remain excluded from the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution, despite being spoken by over 29 lakh people, whereas Sanskrit, spoken by fewer than 25,000, is included. This disparity highlights how state recognition is influenced by socio-political power rather than linguistic necessity or cultural preservation.

Specificity of Adivasi languages

State recognition is crucial for Adivasi communities as their oral traditions preserve their myths, beliefs, and history. With increasing urbanization, deforestation, and market-driven changes, the oral transmission of Adivasi identity is at risk. The loss of their languages could lead to irreversible cultural erosion. To prevent this, Adivasi languages must be given special status for protection. The irony lies in the state's promotion of Sanskrit (Devbhasha) while neglecting Adivasi languages (Janbhasha). Addressing this moral failure requires recognizing the Gondi-medium school and expanding such initiatives, aligning with the Constitution's spirit of inclusivity.

A voluntary mandate

POLITY

The Ministry of Education's Automated Permanent Academic Account Registry (APAAR) aims to digitize students' academic records, linking them to Aadhaar for a unified database. While officially voluntary, schools and state authorities in Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka are pressuring parents for full enrolment, treating APAAR as mandatory. This mirrors past government pushes for digital services like Aadhaar and Digi Yatra, which later became de facto requirements. Issues such as data mismatches and lack of informed consent raise concerns, especially since the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 is not yet in effect. The Supreme Court has ruled that Aadhaar cannot be mandated for basic education, making APAAR an indirect violation of this principle. To ensure transparency and protect privacy, the government should implement such measures through proper legislation.

Identities and symbols

The Tamil Nadu government's use of the Tamil letter 'Roo' (ரூ) instead of the '₹' symbol in the State budget logo has sparked political debate, with critics viewing it as a regional assertion over national identity. However, the government maintains flexibility in using multiple currency symbols, highlighting cultural diversity rather than political intent. Meanwhile, Tamil Nadu's first Economic Survey provides valuable insights into the State's economy, forecasting over 8% growth in 2024-25. It emphasizes the State's sensitivity to global market fluctuations, demographic challenges, and the need for sustainable water management. However, the report lacks in-depth analysis of State finances and socio-economic issues faced by Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. As more States release Economic Surveys, comparative studies could enhance understanding of India's economic landscape.

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Gold hits \$3,000/oz, a first in a historic safe-haven rally

ECONOMY

Gold surpassed the \$3,000 mark for the first time on Friday, driven by investor demand for a safe-haven asset amid economic uncertainty caused by U.S. President Donald Trump's tariff war. Spot gold reached a record high of \$3,004.86 before settling at \$2,991 an ounce, while U.S. gold futures rose to \$3,002.30. The surge, attributed to market turmoil and investor caution, has led to a nearly 14% rise in gold prices this year, as traders seek stability amid geopolitical and economic instability.

Unsettled markets

U.S. President Donald Trump's protectionist policies have rattled global markets, leading to a weeklong sell-off that pushed the S&P 500 into correction territory, wiping out \$4 trillion. This turmoil has driven investors back to gold, with strong demand from asset managers and central banks, particularly China, which has increased its bullion reserves for the fourth consecutive month. Central banks are seeking to diversify away from the volatile U.S. dollar, while expectations of Federal Reserve rate cuts further support gold's rise. However, a resolution to trade issues could trigger a market recovery and a gold price correction. Other metals also saw gains, with silver, platinum, and palladium rising modestly.

Vande Bharat sleeper prototype roll-out set for FY2026: Titagarh Dy. MD

POLITY

A prototype of the Vande Bharat (VB) sleeper train set will be rolled out in the financial year 2025-26, according to Prithish Chowdhary, deputy MD of Titagarh Rail Systems. The ₹9,600-crore contract for 80 train sets, awarded to the Titagarh-BHEL consortium, includes a four-year delivery timeline at ₹120 crore per train, with an additional ₹13,400 crore allocated for 35 years of maintenance. The Union Ministry of Railways requested design modifications, including adding a pantry car and deciding between 16 or 24 coaches. Another contract for sleeper train sets was awarded to the Russian firm Transmashholding (TMH) and Rail Vikas Nigam Ltd. (RVNL). Chowdhary clarified that design change requests applied to both consortiums.



Adding pantry car

Titagarh Rail Systems will proceed with the original 16-car configuration for the Vande Bharat (VB) sleeper train sets after initial design modifications were put on hold due to engineering changes required for a pantry car. Production is expected to begin in the coming months. The Indian Railways has a future demand for 3,200 VB coaches, valued at ₹72,000 crore.

Titagarh also partnered with Chinese firm CRRC Corporation Limited to manufacture metro coaches for Bangalore

Metro after CRRC faced contractual issues. Titagarh is producing 204 metro coaches at ₹1 crore per coach, with deliveries spanning four years. A prototype was delivered in January, and full production is set to begin by March or April.

Additionally, Titagarh is expanding into new sectors, including railway signalling, safety systems, and maritime projects. Plans for these ventures are still being detailed, with updates to be shared later.



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Dividends from CPSEs exceed RE, surge to a record ₹66,000 crore

ECONOMY

Dividends from Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) have exceeded the FY25 revised estimates by over ₹10,000 crore, reaching a record high. So far, ₹66,000 crore has been received, with the total expected to reach ₹67,000 crore by the fiscal year-end. This excludes dividends from public sector banks and financial institutions. The earnings contribute significantly to non-tax revenue and may help offset shortfalls in 'Miscellaneous Capital Receipts' from government disinvestments.

Earnings update

The Budget initially estimated ₹56,260 crore in dividends from Public Sector Enterprises, later revised to ₹55,000 crore, but actual receipts have surpassed last fiscal's ₹65,381 crore. However, 'Miscellaneous Capital Receipts' stand at only ₹8,625 crore against the revised estimate of ₹33,000 crore. The Public Enterprises Survey reports that 212 out of 272 operating CPSEs posted a net profit of ₹3.43 lakh crore in FY24, a 48% rise from ₹2.18 lakh crore in FY23. Dividends from CPSEs grew over 16%, reaching ₹1.23 lakh crore in FY24. Since only 66 CPSEs are publicly listed, all dividends go to the government.

Vande Bharat sleeper prototype roll-out set for FY2026: Titagarh Dy. MD

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

U.S. President Donald Trump stated that his administration had "productive" talks with Russia regarding a ceasefire in Ukraine. His envoy, Steve Witkoff, met Russian President Vladimir Putin to discuss a U.S.-Ukrainian plan for a 30-day pause in hostilities. While Trump expressed optimism about ending the war, the Kremlin insisted that direct talks between Trump and Putin were necessary for progress. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy accused Putin of attempting to sabotage diplomacy with difficult conditions. Trump also urged Putin to spare Ukrainian troops he claimed were surrounded, but Kyiv denied any such threat. Meanwhile, Russian forces have been advancing in Ukraine's Kursk region.

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