



● POLITY

● ECONOMICS

● TECHNOLOGY

● ECOLOGY

Join Joint Action Committee on delimitation, Stalin tells CMs

POLITY & GOVERNANCE



This issue transcends individual State concerns – it strikes at the heart of our federal principles... We must jointly develop alternatives that preserve our current representation in percentage terms

M.K. STALIN
Tamil Nadu Chief Minister



Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin has invited Chief Ministers and former Chief Ministers of States likely to be affected by the delimitation process to form a Joint Action Committee (JAC). In a letter, he criticized the Centre for lacking clarity and commitment on the issue. Besides southern States, he hopes to include Odisha, Punjab, and West Bengal. Proposing an inaugural meeting on March 22 in Chennai, he emphasized the need for unified advocacy to protect current representation levels. Stalin stressed that delimitation could unfairly penalize States with successful population control and governance. He called for collaborative action beyond political differences to safeguard federal principles and secure resources and policy influence.

'Must not be penalised'

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin warned that an unfair delimitation process could create a long-term democratic

imbalance, weakening certain States' influence in national decision-making. He clarified that he is not against delimitation itself but opposes its use to penalize States that successfully controlled population growth. Citing reports, he noted two possible approaches: redistributing the existing 543 seats or expanding the total to over 800, both based on population. He criticized the government for lacking clarity, stating that while officials mention a "pro rata" approach, they have not explained its basis or assured that no State will lose representation.

Zelenskyy renews his call for aerial truce as Russians launch massive air strike

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



Russia launched a large-scale drone and missile attack on Ukraine's energy facilities, prompting President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to call for a mutual halt to aerial bombardments. His appeal aligns with growing discussions in Kyiv, Washington, and Moscow on ending the war, now in its fourth year. Zelenskyy emphasized that the first steps toward real peace should include stopping all Russian and Ukrainian aerial and naval attacks. He reiterated Ukraine's desire for peace from the start of the conflict and stressed the need to pressure Russia to end the war.

'Precision strike'

Russia confirmed conducting "precision" strikes on Ukrainian energy facilities, claiming they support the military. The Kremlin stated it was

targeting Ukraine's military-industrial sites and dismissed any temporary ceasefire. Ukraine reported at least 58 missiles and 200 drones hitting energy infrastructure nationwide. Firefighters battled blazes in Kharkiv, where emergency services released images of debris-filled streets. Meanwhile, President Zelenskyy's call for halting aerial and naval attacks received international support, including from Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who backed a ceasefire as a trust-building measure.

Talks back on track

Washington confirmed that ceasefire talks between Kyiv and Moscow were back on track. U.S. and Ukrainian officials are set to meet in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday, with President Zelenskyy hoping for a “meaningful meeting.” Zelenskyy will travel to Saudi Arabia on Monday for discussions with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff stated he would discuss an “initial ceasefire” and a framework for a longer-term agreement with Ukrainian negotiators.

India tells U.K. to act firmly against those involved in Jaishankar’s security breach

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

India expressed “deep concern” to the U.K. over a security breach involving External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, after a Khalistani protester approached his car in London. The British Charge d’Affaires in New Delhi was summoned and served a demarche, with India criticizing the U.K.’s “indifference” and demanding action against the culprits. No arrests have been made, though the U.K. Foreign Office condemned the incident. The episode has overshadowed Jaishankar’s visit to the U.K. and Ireland. India continues to press for stronger action against Khalistani separatist groups, viewing the breach as part of a broader security concern.

Lalit Modi case

India acknowledged that Lalit Modi, the former IPL chief wanted for tax evasion and embezzlement, has acquired Vanuatu citizenship. Despite India’s decade-long extradition request, Modi remains in London and has applied to surrender his Indian passport. The External Affairs Ministry stated that his application will be examined and reaffirmed India’s commitment to pursuing the case under the law.

Govt. places emphasis on bilateral trade talks, not reciprocal tariffs by U.S.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

India remains focused on advancing bilateral trade agreement (BTA) talks with the U.S., despite recent remarks by President Donald Trump about imposing “reciprocal tariffs” on India from April 2. Trump reiterated his stance, criticizing India for high tariffs, but Indian officials, including Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal, have continued discussions with U.S. counterparts. The BTA, agreed upon in February, aims to enhance trade, reduce tariffs, and integrate supply chains, with an initial agreement expected by September 2025. Meanwhile, the U.S. Trade Representative has placed India on a “Priority Watch List” over trade and intellectual property concerns, with India’s average tariff on U.S. goods at 7.7% compared to the U.S.’s 2.8% on Indian goods.

On Rana’s plea

Indian officials stated they must wait for the U.S. to complete its appeals process before extraditing 26/11 accused Tahawwur Rana. A U.S. Supreme Court judge rejected Rana’s emergency plea to stay his extradition over fears of torture in India, prompting him to submit a renewed application to Chief Justice John Roberts. India is working closely with the U.S. government to finalize the necessary formalities for his extradition.

India, China made positive strides after Modi-Xi meet, says Foreign Minister Wang

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi emphasized that cooperation between India and China is the best path forward, describing their relationship as a “ballet between the elephant and the dragon.” He highlighted positive strides in bilateral ties following the resolution of the Ladakh military stand-off and referenced the Xi-Modi meeting in Kazan as a key moment for strategic guidance. Wang reiterated that border disputes should not define overall relations and called for both nations to resist hegemonism while strengthening the Global South. He expressed China’s readiness to enhance diplomatic ties, especially with the upcoming 75th anniversary of India-China relations in 2025.

Inclusion in public spaces — from fear to freedom

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

India ranks 128th out of 177 countries in the 2023 Women, Peace, and Security Index, highlighting concerns over women's safety. While deep-rooted patriarchy cannot be dismantled overnight, progress can be made by addressing everyday barriers. On International Women's Day, the focus should be on the accessibility of public spaces for women. Despite academic discussions, little has changed in practice—women remain significantly less visible in public spaces than men. Questions arise about where women feel safe, the areas they avoid, and how they regulate their behavior under societal scrutiny, underscoring the urgent need for change.

Gendered spatial control

Public spaces play a crucial role in shaping social, economic, and political identities, yet they remain largely inaccessible to women due to gendered spatial control. Studies show that many women in India are still restricted to private spaces, with only about half having the freedom to visit markets, healthcare facilities, or travel alone. While women's workforce participation has increased to 35.6% (PLFS 2023-24), public spaces for them remain largely functional, serving as transit zones rather than places for leisure. True inclusivity means women should be able to navigate public spaces freely, without purpose or fear, reclaiming them as shared and equitable environments.

The issue of safety

Women's safety remains a major concern, not only in public spaces but also within homes. The risk of gendered violence in open spaces has reinforced the idea that women need protection, leading to restricted autonomy. As a result, women are more commonly found in curated spaces like malls and cafes, while everyday public areas remain unwelcoming. The lack of female presence in streets and public hangout spots highlights flaws in urban design and societal attitudes. Rather than avoiding public spaces, women should reclaim them with the same ease as men. Encouraging women to engage in leisure activities in public spaces can help normalize their presence and foster greater autonomy.

Policy level changes

The government can drive change by redesigning public spaces with better lighting, safe public toilets, seating areas, and recreational spaces for women. Strengthening public safety through stricter laws and effective enforcement is also crucial, as low conviction rates allow offenders to act with impunity. Society often blames women for their own victimization, reinforcing patriarchal control and gendered fear. To create truly inclusive spaces, both policy reforms and societal attitudes must change. While dismantling patriarchy takes time, small actions—improving infrastructure and challenging societal norms—can help women reclaim public spaces without fear or restriction.

An equitable future for women in science, in India

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

Women in science face numerous challenges, starting with educational barriers and societal norms that discourage them from pursuing STEM. Those who persist often encounter cultural expectations prioritizing family over careers, limiting professional growth. Gender stereotypes impact hiring, promotions, and funding, while harassment and discrimination in academic settings create further hostility, driving many women out of the field.

A study of STEM scientists

Women in STEM globally, including in India, face high attrition rates due to non-inclusive workplaces, work-life balance struggles, and limited access to research opportunities. These barriers slow career progression, hinder access to senior roles, and increase dropout rates, especially during the postdoc-to-faculty transition. Retaining women in science is crucial for fostering innovation, creating role models, and promoting equity. However, gender inequity persists, as seen in the "Matilda Effect," which downplays women's contributions, and the "leaky pipeline" model, which highlights systemic biases. The newer "Chutes and Ladders" model emphasizes structural barriers, underscoring the need for systemic reforms to ensure inclusivity in STEM.

A survey across India

In India, conservative attitudes contribute to the underrepresentation of women in STEM, with women comprising only 17% of faculty across fields and even fewer in higher-ranked institutions. Women scientists are often excluded from conferences and career-enhancing opportunities. Addressing this requires a multi-faceted approach involving policymakers, institutions, and the scientific community. Three key recommendations include: (1) institutional changes such as flexible work policies, childcare support, and work-family integration; (2) public recognition of women's achievements and

challenges to inspire future generations and expose gender biases; and (3) tailored career support through mentorship, grant accessibility, career re-entry programs, and leadership opportunities for women.

Interventions

The Indian government has introduced several initiatives to promote gender equity in STEM. The Department of Science and Technology’s GATI pilot (2020) aims to create an inclusive environment, while programs like WISE-KIRAN and the Women Scientists Scheme (WOS) support women’s participation in research. The BioCARE program helps women scientists return to research after career breaks, and the Indian Council of Medical Research runs initiatives focused on women’s health and training. While these efforts mark progress, broader reforms are needed to ensure women scientists are fully recognized and empowered. True progress in science requires the full inclusion of women, setting a global example.

Diversify now

ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

February saw a sharp rise in India's services PMI to 59, rebounding from January’s 25-month low of 56.5. This offset the decline in the manufacturing PMI, which fell to a 14-month low of 56.3. A PMI above 50 signals economic expansion. The resilience of both sectors, which contribute around 80% of India’s GDP, indicates strong economic fundamentals despite capital outflows. Additionally, the Q3FY25 earnings of Sensex companies showed solid net profit growth, reinforcing long-term economic strength.

India's economy faces looming risks despite recent growth. The manufacturing sector is threatened by U.S. reciprocal tariffs set for April 2, while the services sector grapples with AI-driven disruptions. Though India's real GDP grew 6.2% in Q3FY25, IT sector growth is expected to slow to 5.1% in FY25 due to AI’s impact on contracts and hiring. NASSCOM's 2025 Strategic Review highlights geopolitical upheavals and tariffs as key concerns. With technological shifts, global protectionism, and a possible U.S. recession, India must diversify its trading base to mitigate risks.

Himalayan tragedy

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

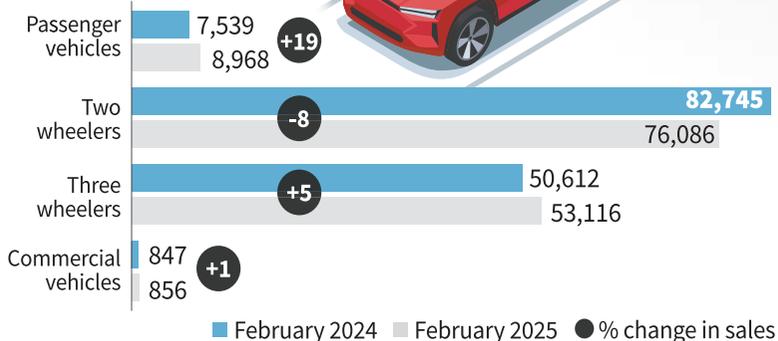
An avalanche in Mana village, Uttarakhand, trapped 23 workers at a Border Roads Organisation site, with eight fatalities. The Indian Army and Indo-Tibetan Border Police conducted a 60-hour rescue operation using drones and helicopters. Avalanches are common in the region, prompting traditional winter migration, but migrant workers may lack awareness of the risks. Given ongoing infrastructure development, safety measures like better shelter design are crucial to prevent future tragedies rather than accepting them as unavoidable.

EVs display resilience in Feb.

ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

Shifting gears

Barring two-wheelers, three segments of EVs reported growth in Feb., indicating rising preference for them in the market



Despite a 7% decline in internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicle sales, most electric vehicle (EV) segments in India showed growth in February 2025, except for two-wheelers. Overall EV sales fell by 2% to 1,39,026 units compared to 1,41,743 units in February 2024.

Electric passenger vehicles (PVs) saw an 18.95% year-on-year (YoY) growth, reaching 8,968 units and increasing their market share from 2.2% to 3%. However, electric two-wheelers declined by 8.05% to 76,086 units but maintained a strong 5.6% market share. Electric three-wheelers grew by 4.95% YoY, achieving the highest market penetration at 56.4% with 53,116 units sold. FADA President C.S. Vigneshwar highlighted the resilience of India’s EV market, emphasizing its steady growth despite challenges.

'Tariffs may impact Indian exports to U.S.'

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

A senior EXIM Bank official warned that the U.S.'s tariff changes could significantly impact Indian exports. The bank has provided its assessment to the Indian government but did not disclose details. Since the U.S. is India's largest export market, the effects will depend on evolving trade demands. The official noted that the new U.S. administration's policies may take time to settle, and domestic consumer demand in the U.S. could influence tariff decisions.

Boost value addition in spices to achieve \$10-bn export target by 2030: WSO

ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

Despite being the largest producer and exporter of spices, India holds only a 0.7% share in the \$14 billion global seasoning market, compared to China's 12% and the U.S.'s 11%, according to World Spice Organisation chairman Ramkumar Menon. India exports 1.5 million tonnes of spices worth \$4.5 billion, covering a quarter of the \$20 billion global spice market. However, only 48% of these exports are value-added products. To meet the Spices Board's \$10 billion export target by 2030, the share of value-added spices must increase to 70%. Menon emphasized the need for India to expand its presence in the seasoning sector and explore the pharmaceutical and nutraceutical potential of spices.

'Tap nutraceuticals'

Ramkumar Menon emphasized the need to explore the nutraceutical and pharmaceutical potential of Indian spices as a form of value addition, citing their existing use in Ayurveda and other medicinal practices. He noted that 85% of India's spice production is consumed domestically, despite the country being the global leader in spice production. Meanwhile, countries like Vietnam, Indonesia, Brazil, China, and recently Africa, have become key players in the global spice market.

Emerging producers

Ramkumar Menon highlighted the importance of increasing spice production in India, noting that new regions like the North East, Odisha, and Jharkhand are emerging as key producers. With India's 15 agro-climatic zones, the country can grow a wide variety of spices. To capitalize on export opportunities, he emphasized the need to boost production, reduce costs, improve quality, and increase value-added spice exports. The World Spice Organisation (WSO) is collaborating with farmer producer organizations (FPOs) to enhance production, exports, and sustainability by training farmers on quality control and reducing pesticide use.

Pest management

Spice farmers are being trained in integrated pest management, water management, and hygiene practices for handling, processing, and packaging. Emphasizing the need for high-yielding and climate-resistant spice varieties, Ramkumar Menon highlighted that organizations like the Indian Council of Agricultural Research and the National Research Centre on Seed Spices are already working on these developments.





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Trump writes to Iran's top leader asking him to open nuclear dialogue

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

U.S. President Donald Trump has written to Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, urging negotiations to prevent nuclear weapons development and warning of possible military action if talks fail. Iran's Foreign Minister dismissed negotiations under U.S. "maximum pressure" but did not directly address Trump's letter.

Trump's outreach signals a shift in tone from his previous hardline stance, potentially straining ties with Israel, which has conducted strikes in Iran. He emphasized that diplomacy would be better for Iran, warning against its nuclear ambitions. The 2015 nuclear deal (JCPOA), which curbed Iran's nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief, collapsed after Trump withdrew the U.S. in 2018 and reimposed sanctions. Iran has remained cautious about re-engaging in diplomacy.

Iran's warnings

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi ruled out direct negotiations with the U.S. as long as its "maximum pressure" policy and threats continue. Speaking at an Organization of Islamic Cooperation meeting in Jeddah, he also warned that Iran's nuclear program cannot be dismantled through military action.

China slams 'arbitrary tariffs' imposed by U.S., accuses it of 'meeting good with evil'

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi criticized the U.S. for imposing "arbitrary tariffs", accusing Washington of harming bilateral ties despite China's efforts to combat fentanyl smuggling. He condemned the U.S. for "two-faced acts," stating that suppressing China while seeking good relations is unrealistic. The U.S. recently imposed tariffs on China, Canada, and Mexico over fentanyl smuggling allegations, which China called unjustified. In response, Beijing imposed 15% duties on key U.S. imports like pork and soy, alongside restrictions on U.S. companies. These retaliatory measures mark the continuation of escalating trade tensions since Trump's return to office in January.



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