

1653

New Amsterdam becomes a city, later renamed New York City

1901

Queen Victoria's funeral takes place in St. George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, England



1922

James Joyce's novel "Ulysses" is first published by Sylvia Beach in Paris (1,000 copies)

1943

German 6th Army surrenders after the Battle of Stalingrad in a major turning point in Europe during World War II

## BY INVITATION

Indian Budget 2026 aims to promote prosperity at home and abroad



AMBASSADOR VINOD K JACOB

In the backdrop of estimated GDP growth of 7.4 percent (with nominal GDP growth at 8 per cent) for FY 2025-26, the Finance Minister of India, Ms. Nirmala Sitharaman presented the Union budget for 2026 on 1 February in New Delhi. Describing the Budget 2026 as historic, Indian Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi asserted that it reflects the aspirations of the 140 crore (1.4 billion) Indians, strengthens the economic reforms journey and charts a clear road map for Viksit Bharat or Developed India by 2047.

## Strong macroeconomic fundamentals

The budget shows that the macroeconomic fundamentals of the Indian economy are strong. The country's GDP has passed USD 4.13 trillion. IMF states that while India accounts for 17 percent of projected worldwide economic growth expansion, the USA sits at less than 10 percent. The fiscal deficit for 2027 is estimated at 4.3 percent of India's GDP while the debt-to-GDP ratio is expected to be 55.6 percent of GDP in 2026-27, slightly lower than 56.1 percent in 2025-26.

The services sector remains the primary growth driver, expanding by 9.1 per cent. Manufacturing and construction have grown by 7 per cent. Domestic demand continues to anchor growth. India's total exports (merchandise and services) reached USD 825.3 billion in FY25, with continued momentum in FY26.

*India's Union Budget comes in the wake of a series of important developments in India's external engagement like the India-EU FTA, India-Arab League cooperation, India-GCC engagement besides the active bilateral commercial and trade links between India and countries around the world, in particular in the GCC area.*



## Forward looking and reform oriented

Some of the significant initiatives of the Budget 2026 include the plans to develop seven High-Speed Rail corridors between cities as 'growth connectors' to promote environmentally sustainable passenger systems, significant outlay for Carbon Capture Utilization and Storage technologies, establishing dedicated Rare Earth Corridors, launching the Bharat-VISTAAR (a multilingual AI tool to improve agriculture sector), various tax related measures to attract global investment and improve ease of doing business and the like. It is pertinent to mention that since August 2025, almost 350 new economic reform measures have been unveiled including GST simplification, notification of Labour Codes, and rationalization of mandatory Quality Control Orders. More efforts are expected focusing on deregulation and reducing compliance requirements.

The budget has been inspired by three 'kartavyas' or duties of the Government of India, namely, (a) accelerating and sustaining economic growth, by enhancing productivity and competitiveness, and building resilience to volatile global dynamics, (b) fulfilling the aspirations of people and building their capacity, making them strong partners in India's path to prosperity, and (c) ensuring that every family, community, region and sector has access to resources, amenities and opportunities for meaningful participation. Also significantly, the budget is also focused on the youth.

## International cooperation

India's Union Budget comes in the wake of a series of important developments in India's external engagement like the India-EU FTA, India-Arab League cooperation, India-GCC engagement besides the active bilateral commercial and trade links between India and countries around the world, in particular in the GCC area. The clear and unmistakable message is the commitment of India to multilateral cooperation and pursuing close ties with all economic partners around the world. This augurs well for India-Bahrain bilateral relations, especially as we celebrate the 55th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations. Equally significant is the Kingdom of Bahrain's presidency of the GCC and its participation in the UN Security Council for the two year term that started in January 2026. India strongly supports Bahrain's role and looks forward to working together for taking the bilateral relations forward.

The author is Ambassador of India to the Kingdom of Bahrain since August 2023. The views presented in the article are personal.)

# Israel to terminate MSF work in Gaza for failing to provide Palestinian staff list

MSF said it had tried for months to engage with Israel



Israeli soldiers secure the area as a bulldozer demolishes Palestinian owned homes they say were built without a permit from the Israeli authorities in the village of Tarqumia, near the occupied West Bank city of Hebron

AFP | Jerusalem, Undefined

## Israel says partially reopening Gaza's Rafah crossing

Rafah, Palestinian Territories

Israel partially reopened the Rafah crossing between the devastated Gaza Strip and Egypt yesterday, following months of appeals from aid groups, though access is limited to pedestrians.

COGAT, the Israeli defence ministry body coordinating Palestinian civilian affairs, made no mention of allowing in a long hoped-for surge of aid, and clarified that the passage of individuals through

MSF said it had tried for months to engage with Israeli authorities over the issue, but its attempts were unsuccessful.

MSF charged that the ministry's move was a "pretext to obstruct humanitarian assistance" to Gaza.

"Israeli authorities are forcing humanitarian organisations into an impossible choice between exposing staff to risk or interrupting critical medical care for people in desperate need," it said in a statement issued on Sunday.

"MSF did not hand over staff names because Israeli authorities failed to provide the concrete assurances required to guarantee our staff's safety, protect their personal data, and uphold the independence of our medical operation," it said.

Such demands by Israel will force aid organisations to pull out when "needs are overwhelming and health services are collapsing" in Gaza, it said.

"At a moment when more



MSF has long been a key provider of medical and humanitarian aid in Gaza, particularly since the war broke out in October 2023 after Hamas's attack on Israel. The charity says it currently provides at least 20 percent of hospital beds in the territory and operates around 20 health centres.

**01**



Peace agreements cannot hold when the root causes of conflict are left to fester. That is why prevention & peacebuilding are not optional extras – they are the first line of defence; And they are among the smartest investments we can make in lives saved & futures protected.

@antonio\_guterres

**02**



I have received the greatly troubling news regarding an increase in tensions between Cuba and the United States of America, two neighboring countries. I echo the message of the Cuban bishops, inviting all responsible parties to promote a sincere and effective dialogue, in order to avoid violence and every action that could increase the suffering of the dear Cuban people.

@Pontifex

**03**



The Union Budget reflects the aspirations of 140 crore Indians. It strengthens the reform journey and charts a clear roadmap for Viksit Bharat.

@narendramodi

**04**



Nipah is a rare but serious disease. The two cases of Nipah virus infection reported by India in West Bengal are the third in this state since the virus was first identified in 1998. No cases have been reported in any other country linked to this outbreak. Indian authorities are following over 190 contacts, and none have developed the disease so far.

@DrTedros

**Disclaimer:** (Views expressed by columnists are personal and need not necessarily reflect our editorial stance)

**No assurances**