

India breaks through Himalayan tunnel to border zone

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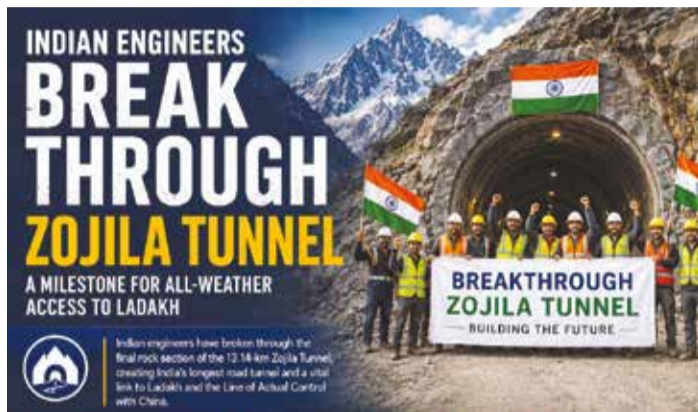
● Gadkari pressed a button to remotely trigger the final blast, connecting tunnels dug from both sides and creating what will be India's longest road tunnel.

AFP | Zojila, India

Indian engineers broke through the final rock section in the strategic Zojila tunnel through a Himalayan mountain yesterday, a milestone in providing all-weather access to the frontier Ladakh region with China.

The tunnel forms part of a broader infrastructure push, creating a link with roads and railways that will allow trade, troops and supplies to move year-round from India's sweltering lowland plains to the soaring icy border zones.

"This is not just a tunnel but a lifeline," said India's minister of roads, Nitin Gadkari, during a breakthrough ceremony on Tuesday at the high-altitude tunnel, which is part of a route designed to rapidly improve connectivity between Srinagar,



The Zojila tunnel, India's longest road tunnel project connecting Jammu and Kashmir state with the Ladakh region

the main city in Indian-administered Kashmir, and Leh, Ladakh's key city.

At present, road travel between the cities is blocked during winter due to heavy snowfall, which can often rise higher than a truck.

Diggers cut through the final stretch of rock in a milestone in the creation of the 13.14-kilometre (8.17-mile) Zojila tunnel, which will connect two sides otherwise cut off by snow during the bitter winters.

More than 3,000 workers have been involved since 2020 in excavating the tunnel, which passes beneath the 3,528-metre (11,575-foot) Zojila Pass.

Gadkari pressed a button to remotely trigger the final blast, connecting tunnels dug from both sides and creating what will be India's longest road tunnel.

"We have worked for this tunnel day and night in challenging weather conditions, and completed it without any accident," project engineer Manmohan Singh told AFP.

The project is part of a broader network of four major tunnels, including the 6.5-kilometre Sonamarg tunnel, a \$712-million initiative expected to be fully operational by 2028.

3.9-billion railway line

India has also developed a \$3.9-billion railway line connecting the lowland plains with Kashmir, including the construction of the Chenab Rail Bridge, currently the highest of its kind in the world.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi opened the railway route in June 2025.

The 272-kilometre railway begins in the garrison city of Udhampur, headquarters of the army's northern command, and runs through Srinagar.

Airbus-led group proposes alternative to Franco-German jet project



Frankfurt, Germany

A consortium led by Airbus has proposed developing a next-generation fighter jet after a high-profile Franco-German warplane project collapsed, one of the firms involved told AFP Tuesday.

The news came a day after Chancellor Friedrich Merz and French President Emmanuel Macron pulled the plug on the original programme after long-running disagreements between the firms involved. Munich-based defence electronics firm Hensoldt said that it had teamed up with Airbus Defence and Space, Autoflug, Diehl Defence, Rohde & Schwarz, Liebherr, MBDA, MTU Aero Engines to come up with an alternative plan.

The proposal had been sent to German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius, a company spokesman said. The Financial Times, which first reported the development, said it had also been sent to Merz's office.

The companies had "jointly drawn up a position paper on the Future Combat Air System (FCAS) and the associated Next Generation Weapon System (NGWS)", the Hensoldt spokesman said. The original FCAS project, started in 2017, came to be seen as a key test of European unity on defence as the region faces a hostile Russia and souring ties with the United States.

But it was dogged by bitter disputes between France's Dassault Aviation and Airbus, representing German and Spanish interests.



A man grabs a child during the 16th Tomato Fight Festival known as "Tomatina" in Sutamarshan, Boyaca department, Colombia

Global nuclear weapons spending hit record high in 2025: study

● The world's nine nuclear-armed states jointly increased their spending on their arsenals by nearly \$17 billion last year

● The study showed that all of the nuclear-armed states -- Britain, China, France, India, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, and the United States -- increased their spending last year.

AFP | Geneva, Switzerland

Nuclear-armed countries swelled their spending on atomic weapons by a fifth last year to a record high of nearly \$119 billion, with plans to ramp up those investments for decades, campaigners said yesterday.



The world's nine nuclear-armed states jointly increased their spending on their arsenals by nearly \$17 billion last year,

according to a new report from the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons.

At a time of growing geopolitical tensions, "a new nuclear

arms race is upon us, one which the perpetrators themselves are preparing to last for decades", the ICAN report warned.

Susi Snyder, ICAN's director

of programmes and co-author of that report, said the scale-up, coupled with fears that artificial intelligence could increase the risk of nuclear weapons use, was deeply alarming.

"To be perfectly honest, I'm terrified," she told AFP.

The study showed that all of the nuclear-armed states -- Britain, China, France, India, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, and the United States -- increased their spending last year. Washington spent more than all the other countries combined, dishing out \$69.2 billion on nuclear weapons in 2025 -- an increase of \$12.4 billion from a year earlier, the report showed.

It was followed by China, which was estimated to have spent \$13.5 billion last year, then Britain at \$12.6 billion and Russia at \$9.5 billion, the report showed.

And over the past five years, ICAN, which won the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize, found that

the nine countries had spent over \$470 billion on their arsenals.

Those investments are only expected to grow going forward.

Examining longer-term spending growth projections, ICAN highlighted figures from Britain, France and the United States showing plans to spend billions to develop and maintain such weapons systems well into the next century.

Other countries too were introducing new weapons systems with long lifespans, it said.

The report pointed out that new planned US Sentinel intercontinental ballistic missiles were expected to remain operational past 2100, while swelling US plutonium pit production indicated that the country's warheads would last through 2120.

That will mean significant investments, with US nuclear arms spending over just the decade between 2025 and 2034 projected at close to \$1 trillion, the report said.