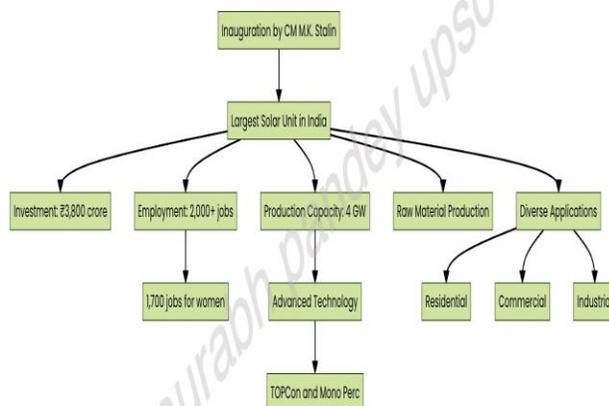


## Current affairs 7<sup>th</sup> February 2025 by Saurabh Pandey CSE

### India's largest solar cell and module manufacturing Inauguration

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin inaugurated India's largest solar cell and module manufacturing unit at Gangaikondan SIPCOT Industrial Growth Centre. Investment: Established by TATA Power's solar energy arm with an investment of ₹3,800 crore. Employment: Over 2,000 jobs expected, with 1,700 positions for women, benefiting local communities in Tirunelveli and Palaymkottai. Capacity: Annual production capacity of 4 GW for photovoltaic cells and modules. Technology: Utilizes advanced robotic automation with TOPCon and Mono Perc technology. Raw Materials: Also manufactures raw materials necessary for module production. Applications: Products cater to residential, commercial, and industrial solar power projects. Summary Tamil Nadu's new solar manufacturing unit, inaugurated by CM M.K. Stalin, marks a significant investment in renewable energy, promising job creation and advanced technology.



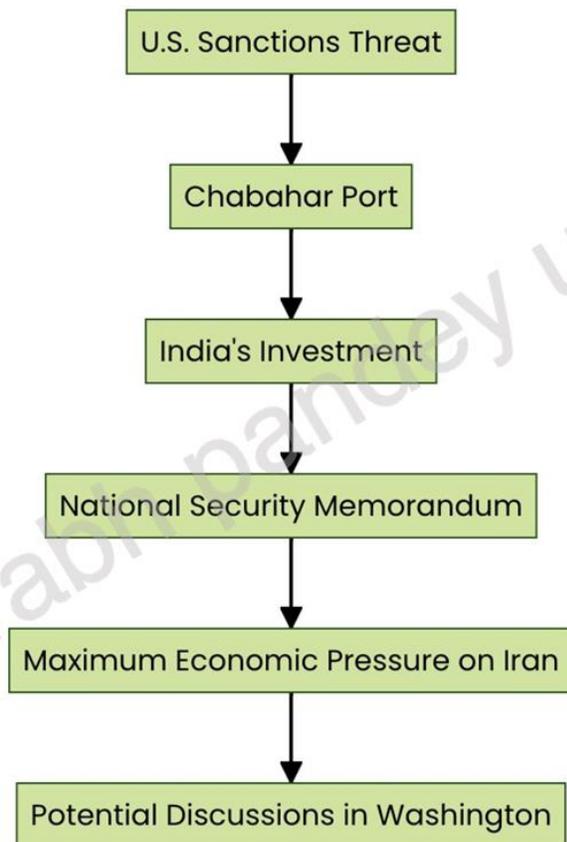
### U.S. Sanctions Threat on India's Chabahar Investment Key Developments U.S.

**Sanctions Threat:** President Trump has signed an order that could lead to sanctions on India due to its investment in Iran's Chabahar port. **National Security Memorandum:** The order, known as the 'National Security Presidential Memorandum', is designed to exert "maximum economic pressure" on Iran. **Chabahar Port Mentioned:** The U.S. directive specifically targets Chabahar port, aiming to curb Iran's economic benefits from the project. **India's Involvement:** India has been involved in developing the Shahid Beheshti Terminal at Chabahar as part of a 2016 trilateral agreement with Iran and Afghanistan.



**No Response from India:** The Indian Ministry of External Affairs has yet to comment on the potential U.S. sanctions. **Upcoming Discussions:** The Chabahar issue is anticipated to be a topic of discussion during Prime Minister Modi's visit to Washington in February. **Previous Waivers:**

Previously, Trump granted India a waiver from sanctions for Chabahar development, citing its role in supporting Afghanistan's growth. Summary: The U.S. has issued a threat of sanctions against India concerning its investment in Iran's Chabahar port, which is expected to be a point of discussion during Prime Minister Modi's upcoming visit to Washington.



### **Amending SO<sub>2</sub> Emission Norms: The Controversial Extension for India's Thermal Plants.**

The regulatory landscape for thermal power plants in India has experienced significant upheaval recently. On December 30, 2024, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) issued a rather contentious notification extending the compliance deadline for sulfur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>)

emission norms by three years. This decision has sparked a flurry of debate and concern among environmentalists, policymakers, and citizens alike

**The Evolution of SO<sub>2</sub> Emission Norms** The history of SO<sub>2</sub> emission regulations in India is as intricate as it is pivotal. Initially revised in 2015, the norms set a stringent compliance date for December 31, 2024. Here's a closer look at the evolution: **2015 Regulations:** Introduction of norms aimed at aligning with international standards. **2017 Compliance Deadline:** A tight timeline that many thermal plants struggled to meet. **Controversy Surrounding Technology:** The debate shifted from compliance to the feasibility of Flue Gas Desulphurisation (FGD) technology, which was never mandated but became a focal point of discussion. Despite Indian coal's lower sulfur content, the shift in focus to FGD technology implementation raised questions about its long-term viability and associated costs

**Insights from Studies** **Central Electricity Authority's Reports:** The CEA has questioned the efficacy of uniform norms across diverse geographical regions, suggesting a phased approach until 2035. **NITI Aayog's Position:** Their recent study posited that SO<sub>2</sub> emissions might not be as critical for improving air quality compared to particulate matter **The Cost Burden on Consumers** The financial implications of these regulatory changes extend far beyond the thermal plants themselves. **Increased Electricity Costs:** With regulators allowing costs for FGD installations to be transferred to consumers, the burden of compliance will ultimately fall on the public. **Installed Equipment Issues:** As many plants have already contracted for FGD installations, the

delay raises concerns about the operational use of this equipment, potentially leading to unnecessary expenditures without corresponding air quality benefits

**Conclusion** As we analyze the recent amendments to SO<sub>2</sub> emission norms, it becomes clear that the implications reach far beyond regulatory compliance. The ongoing debates, shifting deadlines, and varied perspectives highlight a complex interplay between environmental health, technological feasibility, and economic realities.

frequently Asked Questions

**What are SO<sub>2</sub> emission norms?**

SO<sub>2</sub> emission norms are regulations that limit the amount of sulfur dioxide discharged into the atmosphere by thermal power plants to mitigate air pollution and its associated health risks.

**Why was there an extension for compliance deadlines?**

The extension was granted due to ongoing challenges in implementing the necessary technology and infrastructure to meet the established norms, alongside evolving government perspectives on air quality management.

**How do SO<sub>2</sub> emissions affect air quality?**

SO<sub>2</sub> emissions contribute to the formation of acid rain and respiratory issues in humans, severely affecting public health and environmental quality.

What technology is used to reduce SO<sub>2</sub> emissions in thermal plants?

Flue Gas Desulphurisation (FGD) technology is primarily used to remove sulfur dioxide from the exhaust gases of fossil-fuel power plants

**How does the delay in norms impact consumers?**

Delays in compliance often lead to increased costs for consumers as electricity regulators pass on the expenses associated with pollution control measures.

**What role does the Central Electricity Authority play in regulating emissions?**

The Central Electricity Authority evaluates compliance with emission norms and provides recommendations on regulatory frameworks for thermal power plants.

**What are the health implications of sulfur dioxide emissions?**

High levels of sulfur dioxide can lead to serious respiratory problems, aggravate asthma, and contribute to cardiovascular diseases.

**How does Indian coal's sulfur content compare to other countries?**

Indian coal generally has a lower sulfur content, making it theoretically easier for plants to comply with SO<sub>2</sub> norms compared to countries with higher-sulfur coal.

**What actions can citizens take regarding air quality concerns?**

Citizens can advocate for stricter environmental regulations, participate in public consultations, and support initiatives aimed at cleaner energy solutions.

### What is the future of thermal power plants in India amid these changes?

The future will depend on the successful implementation of pollution control technologies, the willingness of regulators to enforce compliance, and the public's response to environmental policies.

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### Understanding Foundational AI:

Foundational AI refers to the underlying architectures and models that serve as the bedrock for more specialized AI applications. These models are designed to perform a wide array of tasks, adapting to various contexts and industries. The concept is pivotal in advancing AI capabilities, enabling systems to learn from vast datasets and enhance their performance over time. General-Purpose Models: Foundational AI includes models like GPT-4 and BERT, which can be fine-tuned for specific applications.

**Scalability:** These models can be scaled and adapted to serve different sectors such as healthcare, finance, and education. **Interoperability:** Foundational AI promotes seamless integration across various platforms and applications, enhancing usability.

**Innovations in Foundational AI:** The landscape of foundational AI is rapidly evolving, with numerous innovations emerging in the field. Key trends include: **Sovereign AI Models:** Discussions around countries like India developing their own foundational AI models to enhance national capabilities. **Financial Technologies:** New architectures are being developed specifically for fintech, focusing on security and efficiency. **AI Education:** Initiatives aimed at educating young people about AI

technologies, fostering a new generation of innovators.

**The Role of Foundational AI in Future Technologies:** Foundational AI is set to play a crucial role in the future of technology. As industries become increasingly reliant on AI, foundational models will be essential for ensuring that applications are robust, adaptable, and capable of handling complex tasks. **The integration of foundational AI into everyday technologies will enhance user experiences and drive innovation.** **Enhanced User Experience:** Foundations built on AI can lead to more intuitive interfaces and smarter applications. **AI Ethics:** As foundational AI grows, discussions around ethical AI practices will become more prominent, addressing biases and transparency. **Research and Development:** Ongoing R&D in foundational AI will lead to breakthroughs in various fields, from medical diagnostics to climate modeling.

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### Appointment of Ad Hoc Judges

The Indian judiciary is grappling with a staggering backlog of cases, which has raised serious concerns about the efficiency and effectiveness of the legal system. On January 30, the Supreme Court made a significant decision to allow High Courts to appoint ad-hoc judges specifically for hearing criminal appeals. This move comes at a time when the number of pending cases in High Courts has reached a staggering 62 lakh, with over 18.2 lakh being criminal cases.

### Understanding Ad-Hoc Judges

Ad-hoc judges are retired judges appointed to serve temporarily in High Courts to alleviate

the burden of pending cases. The provision for such appointments is enshrined in Article 224-A of the Indian Constitution. This article was introduced by the Fifteenth Amendment in 1963 and allows for the appointment of retired judges on an ad-hoc basis when certain conditions are met

**Historical Context:** The Supreme Court's recent decision relaxes the earlier framework established in the Lok Prahari case, which limited such appointments to scenarios where judicial vacancies exceeded 20% of the sanctioned strength. Previous instances of ad-hoc appointments include Justice Suraj Bhan in 1972 and Justice O.P. Srivastava in 2007, showcasing a historical precedent for utilizing retired judges in times of need.

**Conditions and Criteria for Appointment**

### **The Supreme Court outlined specific criteria for appointing ad-hoc judges**

**Vacancies:** Ad-hoc judges can be appointed when vacancies in a High Court exceed 20% of the sanctioned strength.

**its Pending Cases:** If cases in a specific category have been pending for more than five years, or if more than 10% of the High Court's cases are pending for over five years, this triggers the need for ad-hoc judges.

**Case Clearance Rate:** If the case disposal rate is lower than the rate at which new cases are filed, it indicates a backlog that necessitates additional judicial resources.

### **Current Judicial Landscape**

As of January 25, the National Judicial Data Grid indicated that there are 62 lakh pending cases across High Courts, with a substantial proportion being criminal. This backlog poses a grave challenge to the judicial system, with implications for justice delivery

and public confidence in the rule of law.

**Statistics:** Over 18.2 lakh criminal cases are pending. More than 44 lakh civil cases are also awaiting resolution. The Supreme Court's decision aims to tackle this growing pendency and ensure that justice is delivered timely, especially in criminal matters

**Potential Impact of the Decision**

The appointment of ad-hoc judges is expected to have a transformative impact on the judicial system:

- Expedited Justice:** By increasing the number of judges available to hear cases, the backlog can be reduced, leading to quicker resolutions for litigants.
- Enhanced Public Trust:** A more responsive judicial system could restore public confidence in legal processes.

**Challenges:** Critics argue that the reliance on ad-hoc judges might lead to inconsistencies in judicial quality and raise concerns about the temporary nature of their appointments

**Historical Precedence and Future Outlook**

Looking back at the historical context, the Supreme Court's decision is not unprecedented. However, its implications for the future of the judiciary are significant. The legal community will closely monitor the effectiveness of these appointments in addressing the backlog and whether they represent a sustainable solution for judicial reforms.

**Future Considerations:** The court's decision prompts discussions on the necessity for more permanent solutions to judicial vacancies and the overall structure of the Indian legal system

In conclusion, the recent Supreme Court decision is a pivotal moment in the history of the Indian judiciary. While it may not be unprecedented, its implications for the future are significant. The legal community must remain vigilant in monitoring the

effectiveness of these appointments and advocating for sustainable solutions to the challenges facing the judiciary. The future of the Indian legal system depends on our ability to learn from the past and implement meaningful reforms

### 1. What is the current backlog of cases in Indian courts?

The backlog is estimated to be in the millions, affecting the timely delivery of justice.

### How does the Supreme Court's decision impact judicial appointments?

It aims to fill vacancies and address the backlog, but its effectiveness is yet to be seen.

### What are some proposed solutions for judicial reforms?

Suggestions include structural changes, improved case management, and leveraging technology.

4. **Why is the structure of the Indian legal system important?** A well-structured legal system ensures efficiency, accessibility, and justice for all citizens.

5. **How can the legal community contribute to judicial reforms?** By advocating for changes, monitoring the effectiveness of appointments, and engaging in public discourse on legal issues.

**Corporate Treasurers Ramp Up Hedging Amid Dollar Surge**  
**Understanding the Current Landscape**  
 The U.S. dollar is currently enjoying a robust performance, with the dollar index hovering approximately 7% above its September lows, nearing a two-year high. This surge is largely attributed to expectations of solid U.S. economic growth and President Trump's protectionist trade policies. As speculators pile onto bullish bets, net long dollar positions have skyrocketed to \$35 billion, marking the highest levels in

almost nine years. **Key Insights:** The dollar's strength is perceived as a bellwether for economic resilience. Corporate treasurers are adopting a more proactive approach to currency hedging as the financial landscape becomes increasingly volatile.

### Corporate Treasurers' Response

In this heightened environment, corporate treasurers, often characterized by their cautious pace, are increasingly incorporating forward contracts, currency options, and swaps into their financial strategies. The corporate community is now acknowledging the need to hedge against currency fluctuations that threaten their profits. **Strategies Employed:**  
**Forward Contracts:** Allow companies to lock in exchange rates for future transactions.  
**Currency Options:** Provide the right, but not the obligation, to exchange at a predetermined rate.

**Swaps:** Enable companies to exchange cash flows in different currencies, minimizing risk exposure

**Market Sentiments and Predictions**  
 Analysts are increasingly optimistic about the dollar's longevity at these elevated levels, bolstered by anticipated policy changes under the Trump administration. This sentiment has prompted corporations to recalibrate their hedging strategies, ensuring they are equipped to navigate the potential fallout from fluctuating exchange rates. **Market Sentiments:** Analysts predict sustained dollar strength as protective tariffs come into play. Companies are urged to remain vigilant, as unexpected trade tensions could disrupt forecasts and hedging efforts.

### Challenges for Smaller Firms

While larger corporations are adapting to the new reality of dollar strength, smaller firms face unique challenges. These companies often lack the sophisticated hedging tools available to their larger counterparts, making

them more susceptible to adverse currency movements. Key Challenges: ● ● ● Limited capital for hedging activities. Inadequate access to advanced hedging programs. Necessity for meticulous management of FX risks.

### FAQs Creation Frequently Asked Questions

#### What are the primary reasons for the recent strength of the U.S. dollar?

The U.S. dollar has strengthened due to solid economic growth expectations, protective trade policies under the Trump administration, and increased speculative bullish positions in the currency market. How are corporate treasurers adapting their hedging strategies? Corporate treasurers are increasingly utilizing forward contracts, currency options, and swaps to mitigate the risks associated with currency fluctuations resulting from dollar strength. What challenges do smaller firms face when hedging against currency risks? Smaller firms often have limited capital for hedging, lack access to sophisticated hedging tools, and face difficulties in managing FX risks effectively. How do tariffs impact corporate financial strategies? Tariffs can lead to increased costs for multinational companies, making their products less competitive internationally and affecting their overall financial performance

2. What role do speculators play in the dollar's performance? Speculators have significantly boosted their bullish bets on the dollar, contributing to a net long dollar position that is at its highest in nearly nine years, which influences overall market perceptions and currency strength. Why is it essential for companies to hedge against currency fluctuations? Hedging is vital for companies to protect their profit margins from adverse currency movements, ensuring financial

stability and predictability in their cash flows. What tools can companies use for effective currency hedging? Companies can employ various financial instruments such as forward contracts, options, and swaps to effectively hedge against potential currency risks. How does a strong dollar affect multinational corporations? A strong dollar increases the cost of converting foreign profits into dollars, potentially harming profit margins and competitiveness in international markets. What might prompt a shift in corporate hedging strategies? Changes in trade policies, economic forecasts, and market volatility can all prompt corporations to reassess and potentially alter their hedging strategies. How can firms prepare for a more volatile currency environment? Firms can prepare by closely monitoring market conditions, utilizing advanced hedging strategies, and ensuring they have flexible financial plans to adapt to changing circumstances.

#### Shared future



**Cultural celebration:** Waka carrying warriors and wahine paddled at Waitangi, New Zealand, on Thursday to commemorate Waitangi Day, marking the 185th anniversary of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, New Zealand's founding document. GETTY IMAGES

#### Te Tiriti o Waitangi

Te Tiriti o Waitangi is the Māori name for the Treaty of Waitangi, signed in 1840. The treaty was an agreement between the British Crown and various Māori chiefs. It aimed to establish a legal framework for British

settlement in New Zealand while recognizing Māori land rights. 🌿 The treaty is considered New Zealand's founding document and is central to the country's legal and political landscape. It has been the subject of numerous interpretations and legal disputes over the years. The treaty is often referenced in discussions about Māori rights and sovereignty.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi is celebrated as a symbol of partnership between Māori and the Crown. Summary: Te Tiriti o Waitangi is a foundational treaty in New Zealand, establishing a partnership between the British Crown and Māori chiefs while recognizing Māori land rights.

### **USAID, or the United States Agency for International Development**

USAID, or the United States Agency for International Development, has long been a cornerstone of American foreign policy, delivering humanitarian aid and fostering global development. However, recent developments raise questions about its future. With proposed cuts to staffing and funding, the implications stretch far beyond the agency itself.

#### **What is USAID and what does it do?**

USAID is the U.S. government agency responsible for administering foreign aid and development assistance.

**How will the proposed cuts affect USAID's operations?** Proposed cuts could lead to significant staff reductions, impacting the agency's ability to deliver aid effectively

#### **What are the reactions from agricultural leaders regarding USAID funding cuts?**

Agricultural leaders express concerns over the potential loss of vital funding that supports U.S. farms and food security. Why has USAID faced criticism from political figures? Criticism stems from budget concerns and differing opinions on foreign aid effectiveness. What impact does USAID have globally? USAID plays a crucial role in global health, environmental protection, and humanitarian efforts, influencing millions of lives worldwide. How does USAID support health initiatives? USAID funds health programs that address diseases, maternal and child health, and nutrition.

**What is the history of USAID's funding and resources?** USAID has historically received funding from Congress to support various programs aimed at development and humanitarian assistance. How can citizens support USAID's mission? Citizens can engage through advocacy, donations, and raising awareness about the importance of foreign aid. **What are the key challenges facing USAID today?** Key challenges include budget constraints, political criticism, and the need to adapt to new global challenges. **How does USAID collaborate with other international organizations?** USAID partners with various NGOs and international bodies to enhance the effectiveness of its programs. "El Dorado" Lithium mining is often referred to as the "El Dorado" due to its high demand and potential for significant profits. Lithium is a crucial component in batteries, particularly for electric vehicles and renewable energy storage. The surge in electric vehicle production has led to an increased need for lithium, driving exploration and mining efforts. Environmental concerns are associated with lithium mining, including water usage and ecosystem disruption. Countries rich in lithium resources, such as Australia, Chile,

and Argentina, are becoming focal points for mining investments

The economic implications of lithium mining can lead to job creation and local development, but also potential conflicts over land use. The future of lithium mining is tied to technological advancements and sustainable practices to mitigate environmental impacts

Lithium mining is likened to "El Dorado" due to its lucrative potential, driven by the growing demand for electric vehicle batteries, while also raising environmental concerns.



Artisanal mining is a type of subsistence mining where individuals or small groups extract minerals by hand or with limited machinery. • It's also known as small-scale mining (ASM).