

India will host DeepSeek's AI models on its servers for security checks: Vaishnaw

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New Delhi: India will host Chinese startup DeepSeek's AI models on its servers to check for security and other safety parameters, govt said on Thursday, as it intensified efforts to provide compute to startups and researchers to hasten work on developing localised AI 'foundational models' or tech solutions as the country looks to counter advances made in the US, and now China, in AI.

IT and electronics minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said govt is procuring as many 18,693 graphics processing units (GPU) that will be used to provide the much-needed "affordable compute" facility to large as well as emerging tech companies and researchers working in the area of AI.

Foundation models are a type of AI solution trained



Govt is procuring over 18,000 GPUs to power India's AI quest, IT minister Vaishnaw said

on vast datasets to perform a wide range of tasks. The models are designed to adapt and can be further fine-tuned for specific applications making them versatile.

Vaishnaw said the number of high-tech GPUs being procured — as part of the Rs 10,372 crore IndiaAI mission — are sufficient for now to power India's AI quest, pointing out that DeepSeek was bui-

lt with around 2,000 GPUs.

Dismissing apprehensions over India being late in its AI quest, he said, being a trusted partner, it enjoys the support of countries such as the US. "We are well in time. The most important thing is getting the compute facility. And this is now being made available. We are in very good shape. Getting the compute facility was very, very, very critical to the mission."

He said India is confident of a regular supply of GPUs by companies such as Nvidia, despite restrictions by the US govt against certain countries. "I'm reiterating that we are seen as a trusted country, we're seen as a country which respects IP rights, (and) we're seen as a country which understands the technological development prospects and all the points related to that."

The recent surge in intere-

st in DeepSeek has not got the govt worried. "The good thing is that DeepSeek is an open source model and we are very soon going to actually host it on Indian servers — the way we have hosted (Meta's) Llama. Everything which is open source can be taken and hosted on our servers so that the data privacy parameters can be addressed. That we are going to do very soon," he said.

Vaishnaw said preparatory work has been initiated for this. "The team has worked out the details on how many servers are required, how much capacity is required."

Ministry officials told TOI that the testing around security aspects will be done by multiple agencies, which will include cyber security watchdog CERT-In and those in the security establishments such as National Cyber Security Secretariat.

India to seal Rafale-M, Scorpene sub deals with France soon

NEW DELHI, Jan 30 (PTI)

INDIA is expected to seal in the next few weeks procurement of 26 naval variant of Rafale jets and three Scorpene submarines from France to further crank up its naval prowess, people familiar with the matter said on Thursday.

It is not immediately clear if the procurement will be announced during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Paris next month to attend a summit on artificial intelligence.

Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron are expected to hold bilateral talks on the sideline of the summit, being held on February 10 and 11.

The people cited above said all the two deals are in the final stage



of finalisation and that the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) will have to look at them.

In July 2023, the Defence Ministry approved the purchase of 22 Rafale (marine) jets from France, primarily for deployment on board the indigenously built aircraft carrier INS Vikrant. Under the Indian Navy's Project 75, six Scorpene submarines have already been constructed in India by Mazagon Dock Limited (MDL) in cooperation with the Naval Group of France.

CSL lays keel of 7th Anti-Sub craft

KOCHI, Jan 30 (PTI)

THE Cochin Shipyard Ltd (CSL) on Thursday said that it has laid the keel for the seventh Anti-Submarine Warfare Shallow Water Craft (ASW SWC) as part of a contract to build eight such vessels for the Indian Navy.

The keel-laying ceremony took place on Wednesday at CSL in the presence of Rear Admiral Upal Kundu, VSM, Chief of Staff, Southern Naval Command.

The agreement to construct eight ASW SWC ships was signed between the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and CSL in April 2019.

“The Mahe-class ships will replace the in-service Abhay-class ASW Corvettes and are designed to perform anti-submarine operations in coastal waters, Low-Intensity Maritime Operations (LIMO), mine-laying tasks, and subsurface surveillance,” the release stated.

Citing financial crisis, Kerala halves minority scholarships

Cut Raises Questions Over Priority In Austerity Measures

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Kerala's govt has, citing the financial crisis, slashed scholarships for minority community students by 50%, leaving the education of thousands of students in limbo. The decision affects nine of the 11 scholarship programmes — originally allocated Rs 13.6 crore — offered by the department of minority welfare.

Govt insists that the reduction in plan size is being adjusted on a priority basis but the disproportionate cut-back in educational assistance for minority students raises questions about policy priorities and social justice.

The hardest hit is the Prof Joseph Mundassery Scholarship, which was allocated Rs 5.2 crore this year. It has been a lifeline for high-achieving students from the Muslim, Sikh, Jain and Parsi communities, offering Rs 10,000 to those securing A-Plus in all subjects in the SSLC examination and Rs 15,000 to those scoring 80% in higher secondary or 75% in vocational higher secondary courses. With priority given to students from below-poverty-

STUDENTS' FUTURE IN LIMBO

Name of scholarship	Reimbursement, revised funds (₹)
Prof Joseph Mundassery	2.6 crore
Civil Service Fees	10 lakh
For students studying abroad	85 lakh
IIT/IIM/IISc/IMSC	10 lakh
CA/ICWA/CS	28.9 lakh
UGC/CSIR-NET coaching	9.6 lakh
ITC fee	2 crore
Mother Teresa	33.7 lakh
APJ Abdul Kalam	41 lakh



line (BPL) families and provisions extended to those from economically weaker sections of the above-poverty-line (APL) category, it ensured that bright students from underprivileged backgrounds were not forced to abandon their education due to financial constraints.

The APJ Abdul Kalam Scholarship, another critical support for minority students, has also been halved. The scholarship, of Rs 6,000, is offered to those securing admission in govt-approved institutions on merit, with priority for those from BPL families. It also reserves 30%

of funds for female students, meaning the cuts could affect young women from disadvantaged backgrounds who already face hurdles in accessing higher education.

The Mother Teresa Scholarship, which supports students from Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain and Parsi communities pursuing diploma courses in govt nursing and paramedical institutions, is another scheme affected. Many aspiring nurses and paramedics, whose families struggle to afford the cost of professional training, now face the grim prospect of discontinuing their studies.

The decision has also affected scholarships for those studying abroad, financial assistance for civil service coaching and reimbursement for UGC coaching.

When education remains the most powerful tool for social mobility, slashing financial assistance for students from historically marginalised communities only widens the gap between privilege and disadvantage, IUML leader M K Muneer said. "The LDF govt always speaks about the younger generation and knowledge economy. This is contradictory to that stance. They justify the Plan cuts citing a financial crisis and claim they are prioritising essential expenditures. If this so-called prioritisation results in slashing scholarships meant for underprivileged students, it clearly exposes where the govt's real priorities lie," he said.

Many families from minority communities rely on these scholarships for their children's education. The selective austerity measures also raise the question of who bears the real cost of the financial crisis.

Rebel leader named Syria's interim President

DAMASCUS, Jan 30 (AP)

THE leader of Syria's rebels who toppled President Bashar Assad last month was named the country's interim President on Wednesday as former insurgents cancelled the existing constitution, saying a new charter would be drafted soon.

The appointment of Ahmad al-Sharaa, a rebel once aligned with al-Qaeda, as Syria's President "in the transitional phase," came after a meeting of the former insurgent factions in Damascus, the Syrian capital.

The announcement was made by the spokesperson for Syria's new, de facto Government's military operations sector, Col

Hassan Abdul Ghani, the state-run SANA news agency said.

Al-Sharaa had been expected to appear in a televised speech following the meeting, but did not immediately do so, and it remained unclear if he would. The exact mechanism under which the factions selected him as interim President was also not clear.

Al-Sharaa, formerly known as Abu Mohammed al-Golani, is the leader of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, an Islamist former insurgent group that led the lightning offensive that toppled Assad in early



Ahmad al-Sharaa

December.

The group was once affiliated with al-Qaeda but has since denounced its former ties, and in recent years, al-Sharaa has sought to cast himself as a champion of pluralism and tolerance and promised to protect the rights of women and religious minorities.

The United States had previously placed a USD 10 million bounty on al-Sharaa but cancelled it last month after a US delegation visited Damascus and met with him. Top US diplomat for the Middle East, Barbara Leaf

said after the meeting that al-Sharaa came across as "pragmatic."

There was no immediate reaction by the Arab world or beyond on al-Sharaa's appointment, which had been expected. Western nations, although they have moved to restore ties with Damascus after Assad was overthrown, are still somewhat circumspect about Syria's new Islamist rulers.

Abdul Ghani, the spokesman, also announced on Wednesday the cancellation of the country's constitution - adopted in 2012, under Assad's rule - and said that al-Sharaa would be authorised to form a temporary legislative council until a new constitution

is drafted.

All the armed factions in the country would be disbanded, Abdul Ghani said, and would be absorbed into state institutions.

Since Assad's fall, HTS has become the de facto ruling party and has set up an interim Government largely composed of officials from the local Government it previously ran in rebel-held Idlib province.

The interim authorities have promised they would launch an inclusive process to set up a new Government and constitution, including convening a national dialogue conference and invite Syria's different communities, though no date has been set.

INSV Tarini with 2 women crew crosses Pt Nemo, Oceanic Pole of Inaccessibility

Point Nemo is one of the most remote locations on Earth, situated approximately 2,688 kilometers from the nearest landmass. Due to its isolation, it is often considered the farthest point from any human habitation. The nearest human presence is usually aboard the International Space Station, which orbits above the region.



Lt Commander Dilna K and Lt Commander Roopa A aboard INSV Tarini as it crosses Point Nemo - the Oceanic Pole of Inaccessibility.

(PTI)

LYTTELTON, Jan 30 (ANI)

LIEUTENANT Commander Dilna K and Lieutenant Commander Roopa A, aboard INSV Tarini, crossed Point Nemo at 0030 hours (IST) on Thursday during the third leg of their journey from Lyttelton, New Zealand, to Port Stanley, Falkland Islands, said an Indian Navy statement.

This event marks a significant milestone in the Navika Sagar

Parikrama II mission, a circumnavigation journey undertaken by the two officers as part of India's naval exploration initiative, the statement added.

Point Nemo, located at coordinates 48°53'S 123°24'W, is known as the Oceanic Pole of Inaccessibility. It is one of the most remote locations on Earth, situated approximately 2,688 kilometers from the nearest landmass. Due to its isolation, it is

often considered the farthest point from any human habitation. The nearest human presence is usually aboard the International Space Station, which orbits above the region. Additionally, Point Nemo is a designated area where space agencies intentionally guide decommissioned spacecraft, including satellites and space stations, to re-enter Earth's atmosphere and fall into the ocean to avoid harm

to populated areas.

INSV Tarini's passage through Point Nemo was achieved entirely under sail, which makes it a noteworthy accomplishment in terms of maritime navigation. The vessel's crossing through this isolated point highlights the challenges of navigating such remote and difficult waters.

During their passage, the officers also collected water samples from the area, which will be analysed by the National Institute of Oceanography.

These samples are expected to provide valuable data on oceanic conditions, including marine biodiversity and the chemical composition of the water, contributing to ongoing oceanographic research, the Navy statement said.

Further the statement added, Navika Sagar Parikrama II represents a continuation of India's efforts to support scientific exploration and collaboration. As the officers continue their journey, they will progress toward their next destination, Port Stanley, further advancing the objectives of the mission.

Shubhanshu Shukla: 1st Indian astronaut to fly to ISS

NEW YORK, Jan 30 (IANS)

INDIAN Space Research Organisation (ISRO) astronaut and Indian Air Force (IAF) officer, Shubhanshu Shukla, will take on the role of pilot on the Axiom Mission 4, or Ax-4, that will go to the International Space Station (ISS) from NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida no earlier than Spring 2025, the US space agency said on Thursday.

Shukla will make history as the first Indian astronaut to visit the orbiting laboratory aboard a SpaceX Dragon spacecraft. A serving officer in the IAF, he has also been chosen as an astronaut for India's Gaganyaan Mission.

Peggy Whitson, former NASA astronaut and Director of human spaceflight at Axiom Space, will command the commercial mission, while ISRO astronaut



Shukla will serve as pilot, said NASA. The two mission specialists are European Space Agency project astronaut Slawosz Uznanski-Wisniewski of Poland and Tibor Kapu of Hungary.

"I am excited to see continued interest and dedication for the private astronaut missions

aboard the International Space Station," said Dana Weigel, manager of NASA's International Space Station Program at the agency's Johnson Space Center in Houston.

"As NASA looks toward the future of low Earth orbit, private astronaut missions help pave the way and expand access to the unique microgravity environment," said the US space agency.

The first private astronaut mission to the station, Axiom Mission 1, lifted off in April 2022 for a 17-day mission aboard the orbiting laboratory.

The second private astronaut mission to the station, Axiom Mission 2, also was commanded by Whitson and launched in May 2023 with four private astronauts who spent eight days in orbit.

The most recent private astronaut mission, Axiom Mission 3,

launched in January 2024; the crew spent 18 days docked to the space station.

"Working with the talented and diverse Ax-4 crew has been a deeply rewarding experience," said Whitson.

"Witnessing their selfless dedication and commitment to expanding horizons and creating opportunities for their nations in space exploration is truly remarkable. Each crew member brings unique strengths and perspectives, making our mission not just a scientific endeavour, but a testament to human ingenuity and teamwork," Whitson added.

The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.

Psalm 103:8

Challenges galore as Nirmala and her team sit down to frame FY26 Budget

NEW DELHI, Jan 30 (PTI)

FINANCE Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, set to make history with her eighth consecutive Union Budget, has worked tirelessly with key officials, including Finance Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey, to prepare a Budget of over Rs 50 lakh crore for FY26.

The Budget will have to address several challenges, including decelerating economic growth, falling value of rupee against the US dollar and moderation in consumption demand.

The economic growth is estimated to slow to a 4-year low of 6.4 per cent in FY25. This is the lowest growth since the outbreak of the COVID pandemic which hit the world in 2019.

Sitharaman, who had steered the Indian economy through many difficult phases, including

once-in-a-century pandemic, is again confronted with economic deceleration, moderation in consumption, stagnant private investment, and an uncertain geopolitical situation.

On account of various factors, the rupee plunged to an all-time low of 86.7 per US dollar earlier this month.

The team, assisting the Finance Minister to frame Budget proposals for 2025-26, includes Revenue Secretary Pandey, Economic Affairs Secretary Ajay Seth, Expenditure Secretary Manoj Govil, Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) Secretary Arunish Chawla, Financial Services Secretary M Nagaraju,



and Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran.

The uphill task before the Finance Minister and her team would be to bolster growth without sacrificing fiscal prudence.

The Government is also expected to stick to the fiscal glide path of reducing the fiscal deficit to below 4.5 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in FY26 amidst various headwinds.

Finance Secretary and Revenue Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey: The oldest hand at the Finance Ministry who has been involved with the Budget making process since October 2019

when he joined DIPAM as Secretary. In September last year, Pandey, a 1987-batch IAS officer from Odisha cadre, was appointed the Finance Secretary.

The Finance Ministry has six departments -- Revenue, Economic Affairs, Expenditure, Financial Services, DIPAM and DPE -- and the senior most bureaucrat in the ministry is designated as the Finance Secretary.

He has been credited with divestment of Air India and PSU dividend policy among others during his tenure as DIPAM Secretary.

Before serving as Secretary in the DIPAM, Pandey held many significant positions in the Union Government and the Odisha Government, in addition to serving a stint in the Regional Office of the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO).

Budget Session of Parliament from today

Stormy Budget Session likely as Oppn to raise Mahakumbh stampede issue

The Union Budget will be presented on February 1



Union Ministers Rajnath Singh, JP Nadda, and Kiren Rijju with MoS L. Murugan and Arjun Ram Meghwal during an all-party meeting, convened by the Government, ahead of the Budget Session of Parliament, in New Delhi on Thursday. (PTI)

Singh on the eve of the Parliament Session, Opposition parties also accused the Government of politicising the parliamentary committees and trying to push its agenda by using its majority.

The Budget Session starts on Friday with President Droupadi Murmu addressing both the Houses of Parliament assembled together in the Lok Sabha. After the President's address, Finance

(Contd on page 5)

Judicial panel to visit Mahakumbh stampede site today

LUCKNOW, Jan 30 (PTI)

THE three-member judicial commission set up by the Uttar Pradesh Government to probe the Mahakumbh stampede will visit the site on Friday, panel head Harsh Kumar, a retired judge of the Allahabad High Court, said.

Kumar also said that the commission has a month to wrap up its investigation but will try to expedite it. Kumar and panel members former

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Parl panel on Waqf amendment bill submits report to LS Speaker



NEW DELHI, Jan 30 (PTI)

THE joint committee of Parliament examining the Waqf (Amendment) Bill submitted its report to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Thursday.

Panel chairperson Jagdambika Pal met Birla at his

Parliament House office and handed over the report.

The panel on Wednesday adopted by a majority vote its report that contained changes suggested by members of the ruling BJP, prompting the opposition to dub the exercise an attempt to destroy Waqf boards.