

+ A WINNING DEAL WITH TRUMP

THE GREAT INDIAN ART RUSH

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LETTER OF THE WEEK

The free trade agreement (FTA) between India and the European Union (EU) stands out as a calm and confident choice ('A Deal for the Times', February 9, 2026). It shows that trusted partnerships still matter when uncertainty dominates international commerce. Instead of reacting with protectionism, India and the EU have chosen cooperation, signalling faith in rules-based trade. That decision could have a real impact. Bilateral trade is expected to rise to around \$200 billion, offering stability at a time when businesses still fear sudden policy shocks and disrupted supply chains. More importantly, the deal opens the door to economic potential that has remained largely untapped for years. India gains deeper access to a large, sophisticated market while the EU finds a long-term partner in one of the world's fastest-growing economies. The India-EU deal offers predictability, growth and a reminder that global trade does not have to be driven by fear.

Gautam Bagchi



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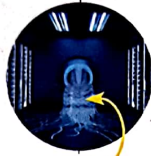


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POLITICS AFTER PAWAR

The plane crash at Baramati airport brought an abrupt end to the life of Ajit Pawar, Maharashtra's deputy chief minister ('Pawar Vaccum', February 9, 2026). For decades, he was a central figure in Maharashtra politics, especially in western Maharashtra, where control over cooperatives shaped his influence. Pawar understood this system better than most and built his strength from the ground up. Known as a tough and effective administrator, he also carried a reputation for sharp words and frequent controversy. Yet, his political grip was undeniable. Despite serving six times as deputy chief minister, the top post always remained just out of reach. With Pawar gone, attention now turns to how the party steadies itself and redefines its direction in a political space he helped shape.

Nisith Deshpande

TIME FOR A NEW STRATEGY

Repeated encounters in the Jammu region have exposed the limits of India's current counterterrorism approach ('Rethinking the Grid', February 9, 2026). While security forces have shown courage and resolve, the mixed outcomes suggest familiar tactics are no longer enough. Militants appear more mobile, better informed and increasingly comfortable choosing terrain to their advantage. This makes a strong case for updating the counterterrorism playbook. Intelligence must become sharper, more local and better coordinated across agencies. Technology can support operations, but it cannot replace human sources or community trust. There is also a need to rethink deployment patterns, rather than reacting only after attacks occur. Jammu presents a different security challenge from the Valley, and copying old templates risks failure.

KV Krishnaswamy

PRICE OF PUBLICITY

The Delhi High Court's dismissal of Sameer Wankhede's defamation case against a Netflix show raises questions about power and accountability ('The Flip Side of Defamation', February 9, 2026). Wankhede rose to prominence for arresting Aryan Khan, the son of actor Shah Rukh Khan, in a drugs case. Khan Jr was later cleared by the Narcotics Control Bureau. But by then, the spectacle around his arrest had already played out. Law enforcement often benefits from such publicity, especially in high-profile cases, with little concern for the reputational damage to the accused persons. Wankhede built his public image with Aryan Khan's arrest. When that image was later mocked in popular culture, the court found no legal grounds to intervene. Fame, once welcomed, can cut both ways.

Meera Iyer