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THE SUICIDE OF THREE SISTERS THE STARTUP RAGE IN BENGALURU THE MYSTIQUE OF DESERT TRAVEL

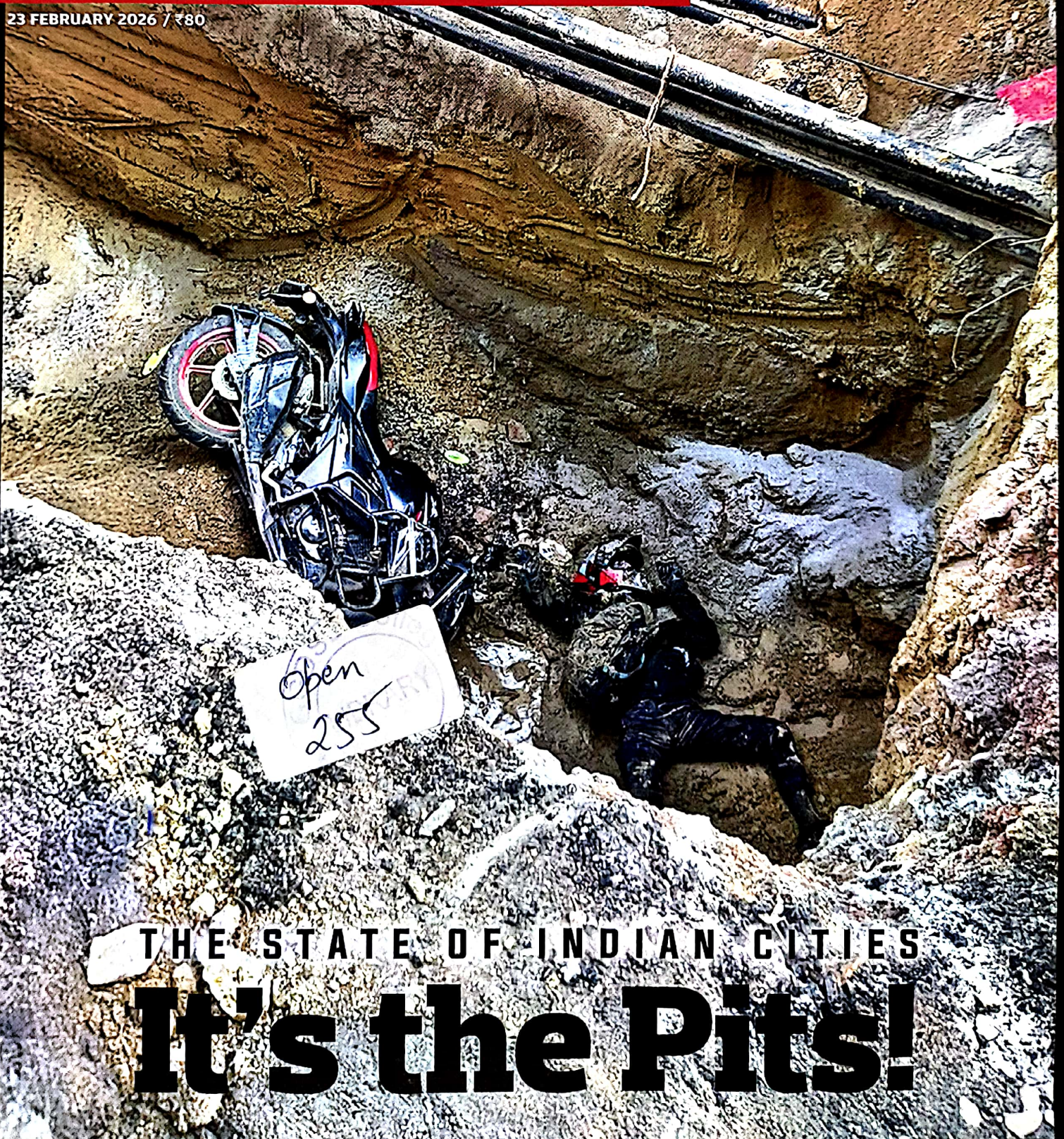
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THE STATE OF INDIAN CITIES

It's the Pits!

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THE CIVIC NIGHTMARE OF INDIAN CITIES

Across India, cities once imagined as engines of development are increasingly becoming landscapes of risk. Fatal accidents, collapsing infrastructure, toxic air, and contaminated water are no longer shocking interruptions but recurring features of urban life. Is there a way out?

By Rahul Pandita



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LETTER OF THE WEEK

In a move that had Parliament buzzing, during the Union Budget session, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a series of tax reliefs ('It's the Stability, Stupid!', February 16, 2026). The event marked a significant moment in the country's financial history, as Sitharaman became the first finance minister to deliver nine straight budgets, surpassing Morarji Desai's earlier record. Budget 2026-27 holds great significance. There has been the highest outlay on capital expenditure at ₹12.2 lakh crore (4.4 per cent of GDP), a reduction in the fiscal deficit, and a large outlay on welfare schemes. Budget 2026 is a holistic one that will be applauded not only in India but abroad also. This can be seen especially in South Asia, as the governments of Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh have been overthrown in the last five years. While Sri Lanka has an elected government again, Nepal and Bangladesh still have interim governments in place. The Budget is one of the markers of India's current and future stability.



Jayanthy Subramaniam





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NOT ON THE SAME PAGE

Rahul Gandhi brandishes a controversial book by a former Army chief to attack the government over China. The entire I.N.D.I.A. is not with him
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KIRTAN IS THE NEW COOL

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STARGAZER
By Kaveree Bamzai

On the Cover
The body of Kamal Dhyani lies in a pit he fell into with his bike, Janakpuri, New Delhi, February 6, 2026

A BUDGET FOR THE FUTURE

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's ninth consecutive Budget is a testament to steady leadership in uncertain times ('A Fine Balance', by Pravin Krishna, February 16, 2026). Despite global headwinds—punitive US tariffs, volatile capital flows, and currency pressures—the government has refused to indulge in reckless populism. Instead, it has prioritised capital expenditure, fiscal discipline, and long-term manufacturing strength. With ₹ 12.2 lakh crore earmarked for infrastructure, renewed momentum for MSMEs, and strategic pushes in semiconductors and bio-pharma, this Budget reinforces Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a self-reliant, future-ready India. This Budget signals continuity, credibility, and commitment to nation-building.

Pooja Bakshi

PROMISING A NEW DEAL

After making a deal with the European Union, India has managed to ink a trade deal with the US which is very welcome ('A Winning Deal With Trump', February 16, 2026). It is a relief after the high tariffs of the past year. It also always helps to diversify our basket to reduce our dependence on any one trade partner. The scale of the Indo-US agreement signals strategic ambition and underlines the government's confidence in deepening economic ties with Washington. If executed effectively, such commitments could significantly expand bilateral trade and strengthen India's global economic standing. India should ensure that the 2025 deal with the UK, as well as the recent one with the EU, get implemented at the earliest and similar FTAs are inked with other nations as well.

Bal Govind

HOPEFUL PARTNERSHIP

The India-EU free trade agreement last month signals a deliberate turn towards stable partnerships at a time when unilateral tariffs have already strained the global trading system ('A Deal For the Times,' February 9, 2026). Negotiations succeeded because both sides elevated political ownership, managed regulatory anxieties, and accepted calibrated compromises in sensitive sectors. The pact also underlines India's evolving confidence in engaging major economies on its own terms. Market access now comes with higher expectations on quality, competitiveness, and regulatory discipline for Indian firms. For Europe, the deal diversifies supply chains amid strategic uncertainty. Together, they affirm that negotiated multilateralism remains viable even when global order appears fragile.

K Chidanand Kumar