

# Top court red flags fiscal strain of pre-poll freebies

**BHAVINI MISHRA**  
New Delhi, 19 February

The burden of states rolling out subsidies and welfare benefits before elections ultimately falls on taxpayers, the Supreme Court observed on Thursday, expressing concern over the growing trend in this respect.

A Bench led by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant, along with Justice Joy-malya Bagchi, and Justice Vipul M Pan-choli, was hearing a petition filed by Tamil Nadu Power Distribution Corporation, which has challenged Rule 23 of the Electricity (Amendment) Rules, 2024, in Tamil Nadu Power Distribution Corporation v Union of India & Anr.

The court issued notice to the Union government and other respondents, seeking their responses.

During the hearing, Justice Surya Kant questioned how governments proposed to finance schemes projected as “free” services. Any expenditure, he remarked, has to be sourced from public funds.

Unchecked distribution of largesse could weaken the country’s economic foundations, he said, particularly when many states were running a revenue deficit. “Who will pay for it (the states’ ‘largesse’)? This is taxpayers’ money,” the CJI said. While acknowledging that governments had a constitutional obligation to assist those who lacked access to essential services such as education and basic utilities, the Bench flagged the need for better targeting.

Benefits, it observed, should not disproportionately flow to those who can pay for them. “The economic development of the nation will be hampered with this kind of largesse distribution,” said the chief jus-



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tice. The chief justice also referred to electricity-subsidy schemes, pointing out that in some instances even affluent land-owners received free power. Public resources, he said, cannot be treated as limitless, and policymakers must ensure fiscal prudence. He underlined that a significant portion of annual state revenue was often wiped off by salaries and subsidies, leaving limited scope for capital expenditure and long-term development.

The timing of such schemes also drew judicial scrutiny.

The Bench noted that welfare announcements frequently coincided with impending elections and suggested that political stakeholders and policy thinkers reflect on the sustainability of such practices.

Senior Advocate Gopal Subramaniam, appearing in the matter, argued that allocation of public resources must be equitable and that widening fiscal imbalances

raised serious governance concerns.

Justice Bagchi emphasised the importance of structured fiscal planning. He observed that if a government intended to give subsidies, those must be transparently incorporated in budgetary allocations. He also expressed reservations about situations where concessions were given after electricity tariffs had been set by statutory regulators, cautioning that such post-facto intervention might dilute regulatory autonomy and introduce uncertainty in financial administration.

The power discom has said Rule 23 of the Electricity (Amendment) Rules, 2024, goes beyond the scope of the Electricity Act, 2003, and is unconstitutional.

The Rule mandates that the difference between the approved cost of power supply and the tariff realised from consumers must not exceed 3 per cent, and requires that any shortfall be liquidated within a stipulated timeframe. It further provides that outstanding gaps be recovered along with an additional charge computed at the base rate of the late payment surcharge.

According to the discom, this framework could put financial stress on distribution companies. The petition says that clearing accumulated revenue gaps through surcharge mechanisms may either necessitate steep tariff revisions or compel substantial fiscal support from state governments.

Although the plea does not directly attack subsidy schemes, it arises against the backdrop of state policies granting concessional or free electricity to certain consumer categories, an issue that formed part of the broader fiscal debate during the hearing. The petition has been filed through Advocate T Harish Kumar.

# From expressways to airports, Maha outlines integrated infra push

**SOHINI DAS**  
Mumbai, 19 February

At the Mumbai Global Economic Cooperation (GEC) Summit 2026, Maharashtra’s infrastructure agencies explained plans for the state’s economic growth. The focus shifted from individual projects to an integrated network of roads, airports and industrial zones to anchor the state’s long-term economic activity.

The Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation (MSRDC) is anchoring development along the Samruddhi Mahamarg through industrial and logistics nodes at key interchanges, while planning hundreds of square kilometres near Mumbai, Vadhavan, and the new Navi Mumbai international airport to support freight, small businesses and manufacturing.

The City and Industrial Development Corporation (CIDCO) is scaling up Navi Mumbai, focusing on expanded cargo and multimodal connectivity, accelerated development of the inner city and Education City, and aviation-led commercial zones.

The Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC) is advancing the next phase of industrialisation through the Mumbai-Pune industrial corridor, new

cluster-based industrial estates, and PPP-driven manufacturing hubs integrated with improved road and port infrastructure.

The Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) is working to connect the region with a 337-km metro network, the Alibaug-Virar multimodal corridor and bullet train connectivity. All that while unlocking new growth areas under Mumbai 3.0 and 4.0 — work that is expected to create jobs and investments.

The Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation (MSRDC) believes highways are instruments

of economic growth. Anilkumar Gaikwad, managing director of MSRDC, said the corporation was set up in 1996 to build major roads but its work has expanded significantly. From early landmarks such as the Mumbai-Pune Expressway and the Bandra-Worli Sea Link, the focus has shifted to statewide connectivity. Referring to the 701-km Hindu Hridaysamrat Balasaheb Thackeray Maharashtra Samruddhi Mahamarg, Gaikwad said: “There are 26 interchanges ... each covers about 8,000 hectares.” MSRDC will be the planning

authority for 15 of the nodes. It plans development work across more than 7,000 sq km, including large areas in MMR and Vadhavan.

Vijay Singhal, managing director of City and Industrial Development Corporation of Maharashtra (CIDCO), said the state accounts for about 15 per cent of India’s exports and industrial output, 31 per cent of foreign direct investment, and nearly 70 per cent of the country’s data centre capacity. CIDCO’s most visible project, the Navi Mumbai International Airport, underlines the pace of execution.

“When we announced a year before that it [the airport] will be completed in eight months, nobody could believe it,” Singhal said. The airport started operations in December 2025 and has already attracted major cargo investments, including a Rs 25,000 crore FedEx hub. It will begin international operations soon. Navi Mumbai has two runways, four terminals and annual capacity of 90 million passengers, putting Maharashtra’s capital among a clutch of global cities with two international airports.

## Chouhan calls for making tree plantation a mass movement

Agri Minister calls for making tree plantation a mass movement Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Thursday stressed the need to make tree plantation a mass movement to address climate change. He was speaking at an event marking the completion of five years of his pledge to plant at least one sapling daily.

Chouhan started the initiative on February 19, 2021, on Narmada Jayanti. He had planted saplings of ‘Rudraksha’ and

‘Sal’ at Amarkantak to mark the occasion. All programmes organised by his two ministries would start with sapling plantation, he said. He also asked Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) officials to do the same.

“Climate change has become a major concern worldwide. We need to take steps to tackle the adverse impact of climate change,” the minister said.

The government is making efforts and has taken many steps, he said, but added

that society as a whole and every citizen also have responsibilities to protect mother earth. “The environment will remain protected if there are trees. The most effective way to protect the environment is to increase the forest cover and green areas,” the minister said.

Therefore, Chouhan said he took this pledge five years ago. “Now, there is a need to create a bigger platform for tree plantation that can involve all sections of society,” he said.

BS REPORTER

### ALL IN A DAY

## DMDK joins DMK-led alliance ahead of TN Assembly elections

The Premalatha Vijayakanth-led DMDK’s decision to reject the AIADMK and join its political rival, the DMK, has come as a setback to the NDA, which is trying to woo the party back into its fold. The DMDK’s move drew a strong reaction from the BJP, which has been attempting to bring together parties opposed to the DMK under the NDA to dislodge the ruling party in the upcoming Assembly elections. The DMDK, however, viewed the move as a major political shift that would enhance its prospects in the elections.

PTI

## 48% ethanol in ESY 2024-25 from Maize, says AIDA

The All India Distillers’ Association (AIDA) Thursday said that in the Ethanol Supply Year 2024-25, ethanol made from maize accounted for 48 to 51 per cent of the total 10.39 billion litres of ethanol supplied as against the contracted 11.63 billion litres. All grains-based ethanol contributed 69 per cent of total supplies while 31 per cent came from sugarcane-based sources.

BS REPORTER

## ₹491 cr approved for Tripura-Mizo gas pipeline

Mizoram Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Minister B Lalchhanzova informed the state assembly on Thursday that the Centre has allocated Rs 491 crore for the implementation of the Tripura-Mizoram natural gas pipeline project. The entire 119.5-km project is expected to be completed by December 2027, officials said.

PTI

## Odisha economy grew faster than national average: Eco Survey

Odisha’s economy at current prices is estimated at ₹9.9 trillion in 2025-26, an increase of 9.5 per cent over the previous financial year, which is higher than the national average, according to the Economic Survey report tabled in the state assembly on Thursday. All sectors have shown robust growth rates during the

current fiscal, the survey report of 2025-26 said. “The real economic growth is estimated at 7.9 per cent in 2025-26, which is higher than the preceding year’s growth of 7.2 per cent. This is also higher than the all-India average growth rate of 7.4 per cent,” the report said. It added that the state is poised for rapid

expansion in the years ahead as private and public investment are increasing in the state. According to the report, the state’s per capita income has increased by 9.2 per cent to reach ₹1,86,761 in 2025-26 (AE-Aggregate Expenditure ) while per capita income at All India level has gone up by 6.9 per cent.

PTI

▶ FROM PAGE 1

# PM puts MANAV at heart of AI vision

US Ambassador to India Sergio Gor, US Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs Jacob Helberg, and Indian officials will be present.

The PM invited world leaders and tech leaders attending the event at Bharat Mandapam to “design and develop in India; deliver to the world; deliver to humanity”.

Modi said the Indian perspective is that AI will benefit the world only when it is shared. “When codes are open and shared, millions of young minds can make them safer and better. Therefore, let us resolve to develop AI as a global common good,” he said. In his address, French President Macron, who earlier visited Gurdwara Bangla Sahib, said France and India share a common vision of developing “sovereign AI” to protect the planet and foster prosperity for all. “At a time when tensions are rising, there is an increased sense of urgency to direct all our digital tools towards this inclusive approach — to be strong here in India and also on the African continent,” Macron said.

Macron said France would use its G7 presidency to advance this vision and confirmed that Modi has been invited to attend the G7 Summit. He said France is moving to ban social networks for children under 15 and called it “great news” that India would join such an approach to protect children and teenagers. He began his speech by praising India’s digital journey and concluded with a “Jai Ho”.

UN Secretary-General said the future of AI “cannot be decided by a handful of countries — or left to the whims of a few billionaires”, calling for global cooperation through the UN. Guterres warned that without investment, many countries would be “logged out of the AI age”, and called for a Global Fund on AI to build basic capacity in developing countries. “Our target is \$3 billion,” he said. As AI’s energy and water demands rise, he stressed that data centres and supply chains must shift to clean power and must not pass costs on to vulnerable communities.

Later in the day, addressing the leaders’ plenary, Modi stressed the need to build a human-centric and sensitive global AI ecosystem. Countries should work together on a road map to ensure AI delivers the right outcomes, he said. Ethical use of AI is essential, and he proposed three core principles: respect for data sovereignty through a global data framework for AI training; clear and transparent safety rules for AI platforms; and the embedding of clear human values and guidance. “Tech is powerful, but direction must always be determined by humans,” he said.

Modi said the summit would help shape a human-centric global ecosystem and highlighted India’s role as a hub for affordable and scalable AI, citing its large pool of skilled youth and expansive tech-enabled ecosystem. “India not only creates new technologies but also adopts them at an unprecedented pace,” he said. AI is a transformative force, Modi said. “If directionless, it leads to disruption; if guided rightly, it becomes a solution.” The real question, he added, is not what AI could do in the future, but what choices are made today. Drawing a parallel with nuclear power, he said, “We have seen its destructive force, and we have seen its positive contributions.”

“We must give AI the open sky but keep the command in our

own hands. Like GPS — it suggests the route, but the final decision is ours. The path we choose for AI today will determine the future we create tomorrow,” he said.

On concerns over job losses, Modi said it is difficult to predict what kinds of roles will emerge in the AI era. “We are entering a phase where humans and intelligent systems co-create, co-work, and co-evolve,” he said.

He also flagged the threat posed by deepfakes and fabricated content destabilising open societies. AI-generated content, he said, must carry authenticity labels, much like nutrition labels on food packaging. “We must be even more vigilant about children’s safety. Just as a school syllabus is carefully curated, the AI space too must be child-safe and family-guided,” he said.

Recalling Lord Buddha’s teaching that “right action comes from right understanding”, Modi underlined the need for timely, well-intentioned, and correct decisions to ensure AI’s positive impact. He said AI companies must focus not only on profit but also on purpose, backed by strong ethical commitments.

AI training, he said, must respect data sovereignty and be built on a trusted global data framework. Citing the principle of “garbage in, garbage out”, Modi warned that insecure, unbalanced, or unreliable data would lead to untrustworthy outcomes. He called for a “glass box” approach instead of a “black box”, where safety rules are visible and verifiable, ensuring accountability and ethical business practices. He again cited the “paper clip problem” to illustrate how a system given a single objective could exhaust global resources if not guided by human values.

On the sidelines of the summit, Modi met Swiss President Parmelin. The two leaders underscored the momentum generated by the recently concluded India-European Free Trade Association (EFTA) Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement, with Switzerland a key member of the EFTA. Switzerland will host the next AI Summit, to be followed by the United Arab Emirates.

Modi also met Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and Dutch Prime Minister Dick Schoof. “The Netherlands has made strides in the digital and AI space, and our nations will work together in these areas. We deliberated on strengthening linkages in semiconductors, mega water projects, green hydrogen, talent mobility, counterterrorism, and more,” Modi said on social media. He also met Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi.

The PM noted that his address at the summit featured real-time sign-language translation using AI. “It reflects our commitment to accessibility and inclusion. We will continue to ensure that tech and public discourse are accessible to persons with disabilities,” he said. In the evening, the PM chaired a CEO Roundtable at the AI Impact Summit.

The PM said it brought together various stakeholders from the world of AI, technology and innovation. “The discussions were insightful and forward-looking, focused on scaling AI responsibly, strengthening global collaboration and unlocking opportunities for growth. It was heartening to see a shared commitment to harnessing AI for human progress and sustainable development,” Modi posted on social media.

## KESORAM INDUSTRIES LIMITED

(CIN: L17119WB1919PLC003429)

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Recommendations of the Committee of Independent Directors (“IDC”) on the Open Offer to the Public Shareholders of Kesoram Industries Limited (“Kesoram”/“Target Company”) under Regulation 26(7) of Securities and Exchange Board of India (Substantial Acquisition of Shares and Takeovers) Regulations, 2011 and subsequent amendments thereto (“SEBI (SAST) Regulations, 2011”)

1)	Date	February 19, 2026	
2)	Name of the Target Company (“TC”)	Kesoram Industries Limited	
3)	Details of the Open Offer pertaining to Target Company	The Open Offer is made by the Acquirer in terms of Regulations 3(1) and 4 of SEBI (SAST) Regulations, 2011 for acquisition of up to 8,07,72,600 fully paid-up equity shares having face value of ₹10 each representing 26.00% of Voting Share Capital of the Target Company at a price of ₹5.48 per Equity Share from the Eligible Equity Shareholders of the Target Company in terms of SEBI (SAST) Regulations, 2011.	
4)	Name of the Acquirer	Frontier Warehousing Limited (“Acquirer”)	
5)	Name of the Manager to the Offer	Mark Corporate Advisors Private Limited (SEBI Reg. No.: INM000012128) Address: 404/1, The Summit, Sant Janabai Road (Service Lane), Off Western Express Highway, Vile Parle (East), Mumbai – 400057 Email ID: openoffer@markcorporateadvisors.com	
6)	Members of the Committee of Independent Directors	(i)	Mr. Satish Narain Jajoo (DIN: 07524333) : Chairman
		(ii)	Mrs. Mangala Radhakrishna Prabhu (DIN: 06450659) : Member
		(iii)	Mr. Jitendra Kumar Agarwal (DIN: 06830635) : Member
		(iv)	Ms. Rashmi Bihani (DIN: 07062288) : Member
7)	IDC Member’s relationship with the TC (Director, equity shares owned, any other contract/relationship), if any	All the Members of the IDC are Independent Directors on the Board of the Target Company. Mr. Satish Narain Jajoo holds 208 equity shares of Target Company. Barring this, none of members of the Committee of Independent Directors hold any equity shares in the Target Company. None of the members of the IDC have entered into any contract or have other relationship with the Target Company, except as mentioned above.	
8)	Trading in the equity shares/ other securities of the TC by IDC Members	None of the members of the IDC have traded in any of the Equity Shares/ securities of the Target Company during the: (a) 12 months period preceding the date of the PA; and (b) period from the date of the PA and till the date of this recommendation.	
9)	IDC Member’s relationship with the Acquirer (Director, equity shares owned, any other contract/relationship), if any	None of the members of IDC: (a) are Directors on the Board of the Acquirer; (b) hold any equity shares or other securities of the Acquirer; and (c) have any contracts/ relationship with the Acquirer.	
10)	Trading in the Equity Shares/ other securities of the Acquirer by IDC Members	None of the members of the IDC have traded in any of the Equity Shares/ securities of the Acquirer during the: (a) 12 months period preceding the date of the PA; and (b) period from the date of the PA and till the date of this recommendation.	
11)	Recommendation on the Open offer, as to whether the offer is fair and reasonable	Based on a review of the relevant information (as set out in the summary of reasons for recommendation below), the IDC is of the opinion that the Offer Price of ₹5.48 per Equity Share is in accordance with the applicable regulations being SEBI (SAST) Regulations 2011 and accordingly, is fair and reasonable.	
12)	Summary of reasons for recommendation	The IDC has perused the DPS, DLOF and LOF issued by the Manager to the Offer on behalf of the Acquirer in connection with the Open Offer.  The recommendation of the IDC set out in the paragraph above is based on the following: (a) The Offer Price is in accordance with Regulation 8(2) of the SEBI (SAST) Regulations, 2011; (b) The Offer Price of ₹5.48 per equity share is more than the negotiated price for acquisition of Equity Shares by the Acquirer i.e. ₹4.00 per Equity Share; and (c) The Offer Price is equal to the volume-weighted average market price of the Equity Shares during the period of 60 trading days immediately preceding the date of the PA, as traded on the National Stock Exchange of India Limited (the stock exchanges with maximum volume of trading during such period), i.e. ₹5.48 per Equity Share.  This is an Open Offer for acquisition of publicly held Equity Shares.  The public shareholders have an option to tender the Equity Shares held by them or remain public shareholders in the Target Company. The public shareholders of the Target Company are advised to independently evaluate the Open Offer and the market performance of the Target Company’s scrip and take an informed decision about tendering the Equity Shares held by them in the Open Offer.  The statement of recommendation will be available on the website of the Target Company at <a href="http://www.kesocorp.com">www.kesocorp.com</a>	
13)	Disclosure of Voting Pattern of IDC	The recommendations were unanimously approved by the members of the IDC present at the meeting held on February 19, 2026.	
14)	Details of Independent Advisors, if any	None	
15)	Any other matter(s) to be highlighted	The current market price is higher than that of the offer price.	

To the best of our knowledge and belief, after making proper enquiry, the information contained in or accompanying this statement is, in all material respect, true and correct and not misleading, whether by omission of any information or otherwise, and includes all the information required to be disclosed by the Target Company under the SEBI (SAST) Regulations, 2011.

For and on behalf of  
The Committee of Independent Directors of  
Kesoram Industries Limited  
Sd/-

Satish Narain Jajoo  
Chairman-IDC  
(DIN: 07524333)

Date : February 19, 2026  
Place : Kolkata