

6 WORLD 8 NATION Iran summons EU ambassadors to protest Revolutionary Guard being listed as terror group Hasina relatives sentenced to prison terms after trial in absentia LS adjourned for day amid uproar over Rahul seeking to quote from ex-army chief's 'memoir' Oppn boycotts Assembly session over dismissal of adjournment motion on prisoners' parole

Karbi Arani triggers shutdown-like situation in Diphu Thousands rally against land encroachment

HT Bureau DIPHU/KHERONI, Feb 2: Normal life came to a halt in Diphu and adjoining areas on Monday as an undeclared shutdown coincided with a massive public mobilisation at Phelangpi in Kheroni, West Karbi Anglong, where thousands of indigenous people gathered to demand the eviction of encroachers from Professional Grazing Reserves (PGR) and Village Grazing Reserves (VGR).



The day was marked as 'Karbi Arani' (Karbi Day), and the focal point of the observance was Phelangpi, where a 'United Front for Land Protection' staged a large demonstration. The protest followed a call by

activist leaders, including Litsong Rongphar, and brought together a wide spectrum of indigenous organisations such as the Indigenous Forum Assam, Sonowal Kachari and Tiwa students' unions, AJYCP, and other linguistic and indigenous Bhumiputra groups. The rally drew momentum from lingering tensions following the violence on December 23, 2025, in Kheroni and Dongkamukam, in which two persons were killed. Speakers at the gathering asserted that the protection of PGR and VGR land is a question of survival for indigenous communities. "We are ready to sacrifice our lives, but we will not part with an inch of our land," leaders of the Tiwa Students' Union declared, drawing loud applause from the crowd. The protesters placed three key demands before the KAAC and the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Bid to create world-class learning environments

Himanta inaugurates 67 schools, lays foundation of 61 more

GUWAHATI, Feb 2: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday inaugurated 67 school buildings and laid the foundation for 61 more with a total investment of ₹ 760 crore, aiming to create world-class learning environments across the state. Speaking at the central function at Sonapur near here, Sarma said the day was "historic and transformative" for the state's education sector. Earlier, educational institutions in the state were constructed through donations and contributions from individuals, and to meet classroom requirements, small rooms were often built using funds from MLAs or MPs' Local Area Development schemes, he said. "Such unplanned constructions diminished the aesthetic appeal of school campuses and even after more than seven decades of India's independence, there was a pressing need to bring about a comprehensive transformation in educational institutions of the state", Sarma said. The CM said after assuming office in 2021, his government had adopted a well-planned approach to reconstruct schools across the state in a modern and aesthetically appealing manner. He said the state government has undertaken the



construction of new buildings for 1,318 schools across the state and renovated old buildings of 58 schools instead of demolishing them. Sarma added that of the 67 schools inaugurated, new buildings have been constructed at a cost of around ₹ 483 crore, of which 18 schools were built under the PM-DevINE scheme. These school buildings include up to 20 classrooms, rooms for the principal and teachers, laboratories, libraries, smart classrooms, and other essential infrastructure. Additionally, 21 (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Union Budget charts roadmap for Viksit Bharat 2047: Assam BJP

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Feb 2: The Assam unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party on Monday mounted a strong defence of the Union Budget, describing it as a comprehensive blueprint for a developed India by 2047, while sharply rebutting criticism from the Congress. Addressing a press conference at the state BJP headquarters, Atal Bihari Vajpayee Bhawan, party spokespersons Devajit Mahanta and Subhash Dutta congratulated Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on presenting her ninth Union Budget, terming it an inclusive and forward-looking document that reflects the aspirations of all sections of society. Mahanta said the Budget is anchored on six core pillars—manufacturing, industrial growth, MSMEs, infrastructure development, national security and stability, and a resilient financial architecture—while clearly articulating the long-term vision of Viksit Bharat @2047. He pointed out that the total expenditure proposed in (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Indian Railways allocates ₹11,486 crore for Assam and Northeast

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Feb 2: The Union Budget for 2026-27 has earmarked a record ₹11,486 crore for Assam and the North Eastern states under the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR), marking a historic milestone for rail infrastructure development in the region. The allocation represents a nearly fivefold increase compared to 2014 and underlines the Centre's focus on faster, safer and future-ready rail connectivity across the Northeast. Officials said the enhanced allocation will support an ongoing infrastructure drive, with railway projects worth ₹72,468 crore currently under execution in Assam and neighbouring states. Surveys for new railway lines are underway to further expand the network, while a new international rail

Union Budget allocates nearly ₹ 50,000 cr tax devolution to Assam in FY'27

GUWAHATI, Feb 2: Assam will receive nearly ₹ 50,000 crore as part of its share of tax devolution in the 2026-27 fiscal, an official release from the Union Ministry of Finance said. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had on Sunday presented the 2026-27 Union Budget in the Lok Sabha. The overall central transfers to Assam have increased substantially under successive Union Budgets, the release said. "For FY 2026-27, ₹ 49,725 crore has been budgeted towards tax devolution, while ₹ 29,548 crore has been provided as grants-in-aid for FY 2025-26," it said. Since 2014, Assam has received around ₹ 3.12 lakh crore through tax devolution and ₹ 2.49 lakh crore as grants-in-aid, reflecting

the Centre's sustained fiscal support, it said. "The Union Budget 2026-27 has further strengthened the development partnership between the Centre and Assam by enhancing capital investment support and ensuring sustained flow of resources through tax devolution, grants-in-aid and flagship welfare schemes," the release said. These measures are creating long-term assets, accelerating economic growth and improving the quality of life of citizens across the state, it said. The ministry said that a significant component of this support continues through the scheme of Special Assistance to States for Capital Expenditure (SASCI), under which Assam is receiving 50-year interest-free loans from the Centre for creation of durable

infrastructure. "These loans are beyond the recommendations of the Finance Commission. Between FY 2020-26 (up to January 12, 2026), Assam has received ₹ 17,104 crore under SASCI, enabling large-scale infrastructure and asset creation," it said. Alongside capital investments, flagship central schemes are delivering wide-ranging socio-economic benefits in Assam, according to the release. "As of January 2026, over 2.55 crore Jan Dhan accounts have strengthened financial inclusion in the state, while social security coverage has expanded through 58 lakh enrolments under PM Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana, and 1.45 crore enrolments under PM Suraksha Bima Yojana and 2 (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Thief injured in police firing in Guwahati

GUWAHATI, Feb 2: A suspected thief was injured in police firing when he attacked security personnel and tried to flee from custody in Guwahati, officials said. Assam Police said in a release that three "dreaded thieves" were nabbed on Sunday by Basistha Police Station after they committed a series of thefts in several places of the state capital. "Within 48 hours, most of the stolen goods were recovered from different places. All three were between 22 years and 30 years of age," it said. When the trio were taken to Jorabat's Dahmlie area to recover further stolen items on Monday morning, one of them attacked the police personnel and tried to flee from the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind moves SC against CM's 'communal' remarks

NEW DELHI, Feb 2: The Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind has moved the Supreme Court against some recent public remarks made by Assam Chief Minister Hemanta Biswa Sarma, terming them "communal, deeply divisive, and contrary to the spirit of the Constitution". The plea filed by Maulana Mahmood Madani, President, Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, through senior advocate M R Shamsiad, urged the court to frame strict and enforceable guidelines for persons holding constitutional positions, so that public offices are not misused to spread (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Sonowal hits out at Cong for alleged corruption, misgovernance, neglect to NE

NEW DELHI, Feb 2: Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Monday claimed that the people of the Northeast have rejected the Congress for its alleged neglect of the region and "systematically looting" its prosperity and potential, saying the opposition party has no hopes of winning any election in the future. Initiating the motion in the Lok Sabha to thank President Droupadi Murmu for her address to the joint sitting of Parliament, Sonowal said the speech should be read not only as a roadmap for India's future, but also as a historic verdict on the failures of the Congress and a declaration of the irreversible national transformation achieved under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He said Murmu, India's first Adivasi president, second woman president and the youngest president of a nation with the world's largest youth population, delivered a "remarkable" speech. He claimed that during the Con-



gress rule, all major institutions, industries, refineries, bridges and connectivity projects in Assam were approved only after prolonged mass movements, protests and sacrifices. "Without agitation, there was no solution. The Congress forced the Northeast to beg for what was rightfully its own. It was not neglect by accident but by design," he claimed. Sonowal also said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has become the most popular leader in the Northeast region due to his continuous attention towards its development. "The people of the Northeast don't consider you (Congress) as our own. You have looted the Northeast, you have deprived people of their legitimate demands. You will be rejected in every election in the Northeast. There is no point of you trying," he said. Sonowal also said that as a proud tribal son of India, he was bestowed the honour (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Koch Rajbongshi community renews demand for tribal status ahead of Assam polls

HT Correspondent NAGAON, Feb 2: The Koch Rajbongshi community has renewed its demand for tribal status ahead of the forthcoming Assam Assembly elections, warning of a mass movement if the long-pending issue is not resolved. The demand was raised at a public function organised by the Central Assam Koch Rajbongshi Students' Union to mark the 516th birth anniversary of legendary warrior Chilarai. Addressing the gathering, Paresch Chandra Deka, state president of the Middle Assam Koch Rajbongshi Students' Union, alleged that successive governments had misled the community on the issue of tribal status. He said the community would be forced to launch a mass agitation if its constitutional demand continues to be ignored. Noted scholar Mohini Mohan Deka spoke on the life and ideals of

Chilarai, highlighting his role in shaping the region's history, while former MLA Dr Durlav Chamua stressed the need to preserve the cultural heritage and identity of the Koch Rajbongshi community. During the programme, the students' union released a charter of demands, which included the setting up of a Koch Rajbongshi Development Authority. The organisation also honoured Madhu Bora and Dr Keshab Bora with the Chilarai Sanman and the Chilarai Literary Award respectively. Several socio-political leaders and representatives of various organisations attended the event, including AJYCP Nagaon district president Prabal Sarma, Uddipta Narayan Raja, senior journalist Kanak Hazarika, Anup Laskar, Nagaon Zila Chutia Yuva Sanmilani president Moon Kakoti and secretary Pankaj Bora, Sadou Nagaon Zila Tai (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Bhutan rail link via Assam to be ready in 3 years: NFR

GUWAHATI, Feb 2: Work on railway lines connecting Kokrajhar in Assam with Bhutan's Gelephu is expected to be completed within three years, officials said on Monday. NFR general manager Chetan Kumar Shrivastava, addressing a press conference here, said, "For Bhutan connectivity, we have two projects. One is 69-km-long from Kokrajhar to Gelephu, and the other is 20-km-long between Banarhat (West Bengal) and Samtse (Bhutan)." Chief Administrative Officer, NFR (Construction), Hitendra Goyal, said the project in Assam is likely to be completed within three years once work commences. "The state government has been positive and helpful in taking forward the work," he said. The project in West Bengal connecting the Himalayan nation through (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Centre eyes underground rail link in Siliguri corridor to boost security, connectivity with NE

Centre planning underground rail tracks along 40-km corridor connecting NE, rest of India: Vaishnaw

GUWAHATI, Feb 2: Union minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Monday said plans are afoot to lay underground railway tracks along a 40-km strategic corridor in West Bengal, connecting the northeast with the rest of India. The strategic corridor, called the 'Chicken's Neck' for its shape, is a strip of land located in northern West Bengal's Siliguri area, having a width of over 20 km. The strip is sandwiched between Nepal and Bangladesh, with Bhutan and China a few hundred kilometres away. Addressing reporters through video conference on the Union Budget allocation for the railway ministry, Vaishnaw said, "There is special planning for the 40-km strategic corridor connecting the



northeast with the rest of the country." "Planning is underway to lay underground railway tracks, and also make the existing tracks four-line," he said. Sharing details, Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) General Manager Chetan Kumar Shrivastava and Chief Administrative Officer (Construction), Hitendra Goyal, said the underground lines will be between Tin Mile Haat and Rangapani railway stations in West Bengal. "When these plans are implemented, it will essentially mean that the strategic corridor will have six lines of railway track - four over-ground and two underground," one of the officials said. Assam had last year (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

"This underground stretch is important from a security point of view," Shrivastava said. One of the lines will go towards Bagdogra in West Bengal, which is vital for the air defence mechanism of the country. Shrivastava said the tracks will be laid around 20-24 metres underground over a plain area. Goyal added that along with the underground tracks, the existing double line on the stretch will be converted into a four-line one. "When these plans are implemented, it will essentially mean that the strategic corridor will have six lines of railway track - four over-ground and two underground," one of the officials said. Assam had last year (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'Inclusion of ACAB in 2nd schedule of RBI Act significant milestone'

GUWAHATI, Feb 2: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday said the inclusion of the Assam Cooperative Apex Bank (ACAB) in the second schedule of the RBI Act was a significant milestone for ensuring grassroots financial inclusion. This accords 'Scheduled Bank' status to the bank, allowing it more operational capacity, boosting liquidity management and increasing public confidence in the system apart from access to various facilities from the Reserve Bank of India, Sarma said in a post on X. "A significant milestone in ensuring grassroots financial inclusion. Glad to note that @RBI has included the Assam Cooperative Apex Bank in the second schedule of the RBI Act," he said. A scheduled bank status enables the bank to (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

CM launches portal for second round of mutual transfer of employees

GUWAHATI, Feb 2: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday launched the Swagat Satirtha Portal 2.0 for the mutual transfer of Grade III and IV government employees in the state. The launch of the portal will help in raising the bar in innovative efforts to promote digital governance and transparency in Assam, the chief minister said on the occasion. Assam is the only state in the country to have institutionalised mutual transfers through a fully digital mechanism, he said. "The digital mutual transfer has helped employees and their family members who have to visit the state secretariat often to exert pressure on officials, which leads to the emergence of middlemen to facilitate the process," Sarma said. He said that the transfer of government employees must be rule-based, technology-enabled and

must not become a tool for rent-seeking. "The portal is a key step towards simplifying mutual transfers of Grade III and IV government employees," he said. Swagat Satirtha 2.0 builds on the success of version 1.0, which approved 4,502 applications benefiting 9,004 employees across 32 departments. He said that the present round of mutual transfers would be completed before March 31. The CM pointed out that employees who had already benefited from the portal in the last round will not be eligible to apply again, but those who had applied but were not successful will be given higher priority in the second round. "The upgraded portal will further strengthen transparency, accountability and ease of governance, bringing administration closer to the people", he added. (PTI)

## Gauhati University launches GUenARK 2026 to boost local enterprises, startup integration

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Feb 2:** Gauhati University on Monday launched a two-day programme, GUenARK 2026, aimed at strengthening local enterprises and integrating them systematically into the region's growing startup ecosystem.

The initiative is being organised by the university's Innovation, Incubation and Startup Cell as a confluence platform bringing together innovation, entrepreneurship and enterprise development from across Assam and the North East.

In his inaugural address, vice-chancellor Prof Nani Gopal Mahanta underscored the role of capacity building in achieving the national vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

He said Assam possesses abundant local talent, innovative ideas and entrepreneurial energy, which, if channelised through the right platforms, can transform the state into a major hub of enterprise and innovation.

He added that programmes such as GUenARK 2026 not only build



confidence among young entrepreneurs but also help local enterprises position themselves on the global stage.

Chief guest Dr Jeevan Basavaraj, IAS, Secretary, Department of Innovation, Incubation and Startups (DIIS), Government of Assam, highlighted the evolving startup ecosystem in the state and described

innovation as the key driver of the future. He said supportive policies, access to modern technology and strong institutional backing could enable Assam's youth to convert ideas into scalable ventures.

The programme features two panel discussions along with a range of competitive and interactive activities, including an Ideathon,

Hackathon and Startup Showcase, designed to encourage problem-solving, collaboration and innovation-led thinking.

More than 1,500 participants—including students, innovators, startup founders and guests from across Assam and the North-Eastern region—are taking part in the event.

Distinguished guests present included Subir Sinha, vice president (Rural Incubation), Professor Ratul Mahanta, Chairman of IIS, Professor Prasanta Sharma, Dean of the Faculty of Commerce and Management, and Professor Kumananda Tayung, Dean of the Faculty of Science, along with other eminent personalities, research scholars and students.

Through focused discussions, competitions and networking opportunities, GUenARK 2026 has emerged as a dynamic platform for innovation and entrepreneurial collaboration, reaffirming Gauhati University's commitment to nurturing a vibrant and inclusive startup ecosystem in the region.

## Classic Legends inaugurates Advanced National Training Centre to strengthen service excellence

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Feb 2:** Classic Legends has taken a significant step towards strengthening technical capability and aftersales excellence with the inauguration of its Advanced National Training Centre at the company's Pithampur plant in Indore.

The new facility marks a key milestone in Classic Legends' effort to build future-ready talent through structured, world-class training infrastructure.

Strategically developed to deliver advanced, hands-on and skill-oriented technical training, the National Training Centre will focus on real-world diagnostics, precision repair practices and systematic capability building.

Designed to support technicians and service professionals across the dealership network, the centre is expected to play a critical role in standardising service quality and enhancing customer experience nationwide.

Commenting on the inauguration, Anupam Thareja, co-founder of Classic Legends, said, "As our brands continue to grow, strengthening our service capability ecosystem becomes extremely important. The Advanced National Training Centre is a strategic investment in people, skills and infrastructure, aimed at building future-ready technicians and standardising service excellence across our network."

Student-led performances added a distinct campus flavour, while reward-based activities seamlessly connected on-ground participation with Myntra's digital ecosystem.

The highlight of the evening was a power-packed live performance by acclaimed singer Shaan, whose headlining act sent the campus into a frenzy.

As he performed a string of iconic and crowd-favourite songs, thousands joined in a massive sing-along, turning the concert into a memorable celebration of music and youth spirit.

Commenting on the initiative, Abhishek Gour, Senior Director—Brand, Myntra, said the brand is increasingly focusing on experience-led and community-driven engagement with young audiences.

"With the Myntra Glamfest Tour at Alcheringa, IIT Guwahati, we connected with Gen Z in a way that felt authentic to the campus environment, making fashion discovery more intuitive, social and deeply resonant," he said.

This centre will play an important role in ensuring every JAWA, YEZDI and BSA rider enjoys a consistent and high-quality ownership experience."

The facility brings together state-of-the-art infrastructure and structured learning modules to elevate technical excellence across Classic Legends and its dealer partners.

It houses a modern showroom, smart classrooms, dedicated engine, electrical and advanced troubleshooting laboratories, along with the latest diagnostic equipment and specialised service tools.

Training programmes have been designed to support comprehensive learning from Level 1 to Level 3, enabling advanced diagnostics, root cause analysis and hands-on skill development.

Officials said the centre will help enhance technical competency, standardise service and repair practices, nurture highly skilled technicians and service professionals, and strengthen the rollout of advanced Level 3 training programmes across the network.

With the launch of the Advanced National Training Centre, Classic Legends aims to reinforce its service capability ecosystem, ensuring its expanding rider base continues to receive consistent, reliable and high-quality aftersales support, thereby delivering a superior ownership experience across its motorcycle portfolio.

## Budget FY27 lays medium-term roadmap for growth, shifts focus to manufacturing and services: HDFC Bank economist

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Feb 2:** Sakshi Gupta, Principal Economist at HDFC Bank, said the Union Budget for FY27, presented amid rising global uncertainties, has focused on laying down a medium-term roadmap to boost domestic growth and productivity, while maintaining a prudent fiscal stance.

She noted that unlike the previous budget, which prioritised consumption through income tax rationalisation, the latest budget has shifted its emphasis towards promoting manufacturing and the services sector.

According to her, the proposed setting up of a standing committee for the banking system to achieve the Viksit Bharat goal, along with

a renewed focus on tourism, health, education and skilling, underlines the government's intent to raise India's share in global services exports to 10 per cent.

On domestic production, Gupta said infrastructure development, along with targeted support for electronics, semiconductors, rare earth magnets and chemicals, featured prominently in the Finance Minister's Viksit Bharat plan.

She added that labour-intensive and tariff-hit sectors such as textiles and MSMEs have also been provided enhanced policy support.

Commenting on the fiscal framework, Gupta observed that the budget remains conservative, assuming a nominal GDP growth of 10 per cent for FY27, which is lower than HDFC Bank's estimate

of 10.5 per cent.

She said the government has, as expected, targeted moderate capital expenditure growth of 11.5 per cent in FY27, while increasingly relying on private sector investment to drive expansion.

"The fiscal math broadly appears credible and prudent, with an emphasis on gentle fiscal consolidation in FY27," she said.

However, Gupta cautioned that the higher-than-expected gross borrowing figure of ₹17.2 lakh crore could weigh on market sentiment, especially at a time when demand-supply imbalances are already exerting pressure on bond yields.

She said this could result in the 10-year government bond yield opening higher in the near term

## Tinder takes dating beyond the app, taps shared culture and community spaces across Northeast India

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Feb 2:** Dating in India is increasingly shaped by everyday interests—from music and food to sports and social hangouts—and shared passions are now central to how young singles connect.

Nearly one in three young Indians say common interests play a decisive role in forming connections, a trend that dating app Tinder has brought to life through a series of culture-led activations across India's North East, including Guwahati, Shillong and Ziro Valley.

Tinder's recent initiatives in the region focused on integrating dating into real-world social moments that already bring people together.

By tapping into music festivals, concerts, sporting events and local humour, the platform demonstrated how conversations that begin online can seamlessly transition into meaningful offline interactions, rooted in familiarity and shared experiences.

Music emerged as a strong connector, particularly in the North East where live performances and festivals are integral to local culture.

Tinder data shows that over half of young singles find shared interests like music more attractive in a match, with many using music as an emotional expression and a reflection of personality.

Concerts and karaoke have also become popular first-date choices, making live music venues natural spaces for dating conversations to unfold.

At a much-anticipated concert by Post Malone in Guwahati, Tinder added a playful pre-show experience with a balloon cart featuring ice-breaker prompts such as "Wanna sing together?"

The light-hearted interactions sparked conversations among attendees even before the music began, setting

a relaxed tone for meeting new people.

Similarly, at the Ziro Festival, Tinder highlighted a real-life dating moment through creator content, capturing the experience of two users meeting for the first time after weeks of chatting on the app.

Bonding over music, local food and the festival atmosphere, the moment reflected how shared interests can make first meetings feel natural and comfortable.

Sports, another major social glue in the region, also featured prominently.

In cities like Shillong, football and basketball matches became spaces for casual interaction, shaped by shared cheers and team loyalties.

Tinder integrated into match-day experiences through on-ground prompts, standees and merchandise, encouraging spectators to engage beyond the game.

Messages like "You found the court, now find your +1" added humour and approachability, blending dating into the collective energy of live sports.

Food and local culture further anchored Tinder's presence. Outdoor billboards across Guwahati and Shillong used regional humour and everyday references—such as bhut jolokia or standing in a bhog queue—to keep conversations around dating light, relatable and culturally rooted.

The brand also collaborated with regional creators and influencers, whose content reflected local dating experiences, language and quirks, extending Tinder's reach across social and digital platforms.

By embedding itself into music, festivals, sports and daily social settings, Tinder's North East activations underscored its broader approach to modern dating—enabling connections through shared experiences and allowing interactions to flow naturally from the app into real life.

Contd. from Page 1...

## Thousands rally against

state government: immediate eviction of all illegal encroachers from protected grazing lands; enactment and enforcement of strong legal measures to prevent future encroachment; and safeguarding of land rights of hill tribes and linguistic indigenous communities. The demonstration concluded peacefully, but the situation in West Karbi Anglong remained tense, with security agencies maintaining heightened alert.

Protest leaders warned that the agitation would be intensified if decisive action is not taken to protect ancestral lands from encroachment.

## Bid to create world

school buildings were constructed under the North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme, while 28 were built using funds from the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund, he said.

The foundation stones laid for 61 school buildings will involve an expenditure of Rs 277.55 crore, with each school being constructed at a cost of Rs 4.55 crore under the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund.

"This is the new Assam. When we resolve to do something, we ensure its completion. We had dreamt of rebuilding school infrastructure across the state, and today we have turned that dream into reality", the CM said.

Sarma announced that within the next few days, 100 newly constructed schools in tea garden areas would be formally inaugurated. Along with new infrastructure development, the government has also recruited a significant number of new teachers with 70 per cent of the current teachers in government schools below the age of 45 years, he added. (PTI)

## Thief injured in

scene. "Police repeatedly asked him to stop, but he did not listen to their warnings. Left with no option, police fired one round and the accused sustained a bullet injury in the knee," the statement said.

The injured man was taken to Gauhati Medical College and Hospital, where his treatment is going on.

Police recovered Rs 15.56 lakh cash, two two-wheelers, three new mobile hand sets and several other items from their possession, the statement said. (PTI)

## Union Budget allocates

lakh crore subscribers for Atal Pension Yojana," it said. Under the PM Mudra Yojana, loans amounting to a cumulative Rs 74,884 crore have been disbursed to support entrepreneurship and small businesses.

"Welfare and infrastructure-focused schemes have also made significant progress. More than 40 lakh rural households have been provided toilets under Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) and 57 lakh rural households have received tap water connections under the Jal Jeevan Mission," it said.

Over 50 lakh LPG connections have been released under the PM Ujjwala Yojana, while 1.76 crore Ayushman cards have been created to ensure health security, the release said. (PTI)

## Indian Railways allocates

routes. Both services were inaugurated by Narendra Modi, strengthening long-distance rail connectivity between the Northeast and northern India.

In addition, a Varanasi-Siliguri bullet train corridor via Patna has been proposed, with future plans to extend it up to Guwahati, which would bring the Northeast into India's high-speed rail network.

Network expansion and electrification have also gathered pace across the region.

Since 2014, around 1,900 km of new railway tracks have been laid under NFR.

Five northeastern states are now fully electrified, while Assam has achieved 98 per cent electrification.

A total of 2,839 km of railway lines in the region have been electrified.

To improve safety and traffic flow, 502 flyovers and underpasses have been constructed, and the Kavach automatic train protection system has been sanctioned for 1,197 km, with work currently in progress on 235 km.

Technology-driven safety measures are also being prioritised.

Indian Railways has deployed AI-based camera systems to help prevent elephant deaths on railway tracks and strengthened intrusion detection systems for smarter and safer operations.

With investments now five times higher than in 2014, Indian Railways' expanded footprint in the Northeast is expected to boost trade, tourism and employment, while supporting inclusive and sustainable growth.

Officials said the enhanced rail network under the Northeast Frontier Railway will also play a crucial role in advancing the Government of India's Act East Policy by improving regional and international connectivity from the Northeast.

## Union Budget charts

the Budget stands at ₹53,47,315 crore, underscoring the scale and ambition of the present government.

In contrast, he said, the final Budget of the Congress-led government in 2013-14 had an outlay of around ₹16 lakh crore.

Responding to remarks by Congress leader Ripun Bora, Mahanta said the criticism reflected either a lack of understanding of the Budget provisions or political fatigue.

He highlighted that a key feature of the Budget is income tax exemption for ordinary citizens, particularly Group C and Group D employees.

He also noted that the threshold for taxing interest income of senior citizens has been raised, with the earlier 10 per cent tax on bank deposits above ₹50,000 now applicable only beyond ₹1 lakh.

Emphasising the Centre's focus on Assam and the North-East, Mahanta said ₹12,500 crore has been allocated for infrastructure development in the region, compared to ₹2,066 crore during the Congress period between 2009 and 2014.

He further countered claims on fiscal mismanagement, stating that while the fiscal deficit stood at 4.8 per cent in 2013-14, it has been reduced to 4.3 per cent in 2025-26 under the present government.

He expressed gratitude to the Narendra Modi-led government for institutionalising the Gross Budgetary Support mechanism since 2014, ensuring a mandatory 10 per cent allocation from every central ministry for the North-East.

Recalling what he termed "step-motherly treatment" of the region during Congress rule, Mahanta said Assam's crude oil royalty dues were withheld earlier and only released in 2018, when ₹7,770 crore was paid by the BJP-led government.

## Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind

hatred or target any community. The application has been filed in a pending petition of Jamiat in which an order was reserved by the apex court on January 20.

The petition refers in particular to a speech delivered by the Assam chief minister on January 27, in which he allegedly made some objectionable remarks against the members of a minority community. (PTI)

## Sonowal hits out

to present the Motion of Thanks to the president's address in the Lok Sabha,

"As a tribal from the Northeast and Assam, I feel immense pride in moving the Motion of Thanks — becoming the first tribal and the first MP from the Northeast to do so, symbolising an India where social justice, inclusive growth and the resolve for a Viksit Bharat guide our parliamentary history," he said.

The minister also claimed that then-prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru said goodbye to the Northeast in 1962 during the Chinese aggression.

"The previous Congress governments were known for rampant corruption and scandals such as the 2G spectrum case, coal block allocations, CWG, among others. Now you have a fair, transparent and corruption-free government headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi," the minister said.

Sonowal asked the Congress to give up its opposition and "hatred" towards the government and join the prime minister's resolve to achieve a self-reliant, "Viksit Bharat" by 2047.

He also claimed that there was low self-esteem in the country during the UPA rule due to policy paralysis and corruption.

However, since 2014, after Narendra Modi became the prime minister, there have been changes in the socio-economic landscape of the country along with all-around development, he claimed.

In the 11 years since 2014, Sonowal said, the country has become the fourth-largest economy in the world, which has been possible due to the political will and visionary leadership of Prime Minister Modi. (PTI)

## Koch Rajbongshi community

Ahom Students' Union president Phanindra Gogoi, and AAKRSU vice-president Dilip Deka.

The programme was mentored by Ratul Kr Rajbongshi, secretary of the Middle Assam Koch Rajbongshi Students' Union, while Birinchi Kashyap Bora, president of the reception committee, delivered the welcome address.

On the occasion, the organisation also felicitated several senior journalists for their contributions.

## Bhutan rail link

railway tracks was facing issues, including those related to land acquisition, the officials claimed.

The West Bengal project is likely to take time as progress has been "slow", they said.

"The land required passes through four tea gardens. The state government (in Bengal) has been slow to respond and land acquisition has become a problem. A timeframe for its completion cannot be provided at the moment," one of the officials said.

Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw had earlier announced the two projects, which is expected to provide a significant boost to trade, tourism and people-to-people exchanges.

Gelephu and Samtse are the major export-import hubs in Bhutan along the 700-km India-Bhutan border, the officials said. Gelephu is being developed as a "mindfulness city" and Samtse as an industrial town by the Government of Bhutan, they said. The Kokrajhar-Gelephu line has been declared a Special Railway Project, enabling fast-tracked clearances and land acquisition. (PTI)

## 'Inclusion of ACAB

access key benefits, including eligibility for refinancing facilities from the RBI, besides improving credibility and visibility in the financial sector, officials said. (PTI)

## Centre planning underground

called for prioritising exploring alternative road routes effectively bypassing the 'Chicken's Neck', after the head of Bangladesh's interim government Muhammad Yunus made a controversial statement in China, saying India's northeastern states are 'landlocked' and have no way to reach the ocean except through his country. (PTI)

### AFFIDAVIT

I, Aminul Hoque, Son of Safar Ali, R/O- Vill- No/2 Barujahar, P.O. Gandi, P.S. Dalgao, District Darrang, Assam, do hereby solemnly affirm and declare that I am citizen of India by birth and a permanent resident of the aforesaid address. That, my actual and correct name is Aminul Hoque. That inadvertently in my Aadhaar Card bearing No 5094-4564- 0570, my name has been wrongly recorded as Aminur Hoque instead of Aminul Hoque. That, Aminul Hoque and Aminur Hoque refer to the same and one person.

Sd/-  
Aminul Hoque

### AFFIDAVIT

I, Lal Miya, S/O- Late Roisuddin Sheikh, (as recorded in my AADHAR Card vide No. 3285 3704 9192) R/O- Vill- Barjhar, P.O- Bherbheri Bill, P.S- Dhula, Dist: Darrang (Assam), shall henceforth be known as Lal Miya and my father's correct name is Roisuddin Sheikh as recorded in the same Aadhaar Card HPQ1417465 as Raisuiddin Sekh, Aadhaar Card vide. That Lal Miya, Lal Miah and Maralal Miya are the same and one person.

Sd/- Lal Miya  
RO- Barjhar, PO- Bherbheri Bill,  
PS- Dhula, Darrang

## District stands as an example of balanced growth: CEM Gorlosa District Day celebrated in Haflong with cultural splendour

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Feb 2:** Dima Hasao marked its District Foundation Day on Monday with great enthusiasm at the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC) Complex in Haflong.

The programme was graced by NCHAC Chief Executive Member Debolal Gorlosa as the chief guest, along with Chairman Mohet Hojai, Executive Members of the council, senior bureaucrats and officials from various departments.

The celebrations began in the morning with a colourful procession from the council premises to Haflong Lake and back.

A major attraction of the rally was the pipe band performance by the Assam Police Battalion, which added ceremonial grandeur to the occasion.

Speaking on the significance of the day, District Commissioner Munindra Nath Ngatey, ACS, traced the history of district formation in this region, highlighting



how administrative systems functioned in the early years and outlining the evolution of Dima Hasao as a district.

Addressing the gathering, CEM Debolal Gorlosa said the district stands as an example of balanced growth, with the council's focus

firmly on sustainable development while preserving the cultural roots of the region.

He said continuous efforts are being made to create greater opportunities for youth through employment, education and skill development.

NCHAC Chairman Mohet Hojai, while extending greetings on the occasion, briefly spoke on the formation of the district and the development initiatives undertaken over the years.

The celebration vividly reflected the district's rich cultural heritage, with students from various educational institutions and traditional performers from different communities participating in the programme.

Local artistes presented a graceful Dimasa dance, which drew warm applause from the audience.

Among others present were Executive Members Donpainon Thaoson and Nirajan Hojai, Deputy Chairman of the District Planning Board and MAC Dhriti Thaoson, MAC Ajoy Chakraborty, Haflong Town Committee Chairperson Ripa Hojai, Dima Hasao Superintendent of Police Ripunjoy Kakati, APS, and officials from the council, district administration and police department.

## MLA Rupak Sarma outlines development roadmap

**HT Correspondent**

**NAGAON, Feb 2:** Rupak Sarma, MLA of the Nagaon-Batadova constituency, on Monday interacted with members of the local media fraternity and highlighted a series of development initiatives undertaken in the constituency over the last five years.

Addressing journalists at a meeting held at Rishiraj Hotel here, Sarma said a public meeting would be organised soon at Khagen Mahanta Auditorium, where he would place a detailed account of the development works carried out during his tenure before the people.

He said the proposed meeting would offer transparency and allow residents to directly assess the progress made in the constituency.

The MLA informed that the Assam government has sanctioned ₹17.39 crore under the 15th Finance Commission for various infrastructure projects in Nagaon town.

These include construction and upgradation of roads, drainage systems and public toilets across several wards under the Nagaon Municipal Board.

Sarma also said that six roads rebuilt by the Public Works Department have already been inaugurated, adding that further infrastructure upgrades are in the pipeline.

He announced that a statue of Jyotish Prasad Agarwala, popularly known as Rupkonwar, will be unveiled soon at Rupkonwar Chowk in Nagaon town as part of efforts to honour Assam's cultural icons.

Expressing satisfaction over the civic improvements, the MLA noted that Nagaon town was recently cited as an example of a clean city during Narendra Modi's 'Mann Ki Baat' programme.

He credited the sanitation workers of the Nagaon Municipal Board for their consistent efforts in maintaining cleanliness and improving urban living conditions.

The interaction programme was attended by Nagaon Municipal Board chairperson Ambika Majumdar, vice chairperson Simanta Bora and over 100 journalists representing various print, electronic and digital media organisations.

## Nine-year-old poet Lakshanya Agarwal launches debut book

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Feb 2:** Guwahati turned into a little capital of creativity on Saturday as nine-year-old literary prodigy Lakshanya Agarwal launched her debut poetry collection, A Book of Poetry for Creative Little Minds, at Hotel Ornate on B Baruah Road.

The event drew over 150 literature lovers, educators and supporters of young talent, turning the book launch into a full-blown celebration of imagination.

The programme unfolded as a tribute to youthful creativity and the power of words beyond age.

Speakers stressed the need to nurture artistic expression early, calling the event a reflection of the growing space for young

voices in the literary world. Renowned Assamese poet and novelist Nilim Kumar attended as chief guest.

The guests of honour included Advocate Bishaldeep Kakati of the Gauhati High Court, Kanchan Kejriwal, President of Brahmaaputra Sahitya Sabha, young writer and Yuva Lekhak Saman 2025 awardee Shaswati Sabhapandit, and award-winning poet and Assam Tribune columnist Sabah Al Ahmed.

The ceremony was conducted by Advocate Babita Paul of the Gauhati High Court.

A warm moment came during a live on-stage interaction between Babita Paul and Lakshanya.

Asked to share a message with

the world, the young poet spoke about staying connected to nature.

When challenged to rhyme with the word "midnight," she replied on the spot, "Midnight comes late at night, pushing away the morning light," drawing applause for her quick wit and poetic flair.

Lakshanya's parents, Suhani Agarwal and Manish Agarwal, were also acknowledged for their constant encouragement and belief in their daughter's creativity.

More than just a book launch, the event emerged as a cultural moment — proof that big ideas can come in small packages, and that the future of literature might just be doing its homework right now.

## Queen Mother of Bhutan to receive Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma 'Soldier of Humanity' Award

**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, Feb 2:** Gyalum Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck, the Queen Mother of Bhutan, will be conferred the 22nd Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma "Soldier of Humanity" Award, 2025 at a ceremonial programme to be held at Bodoland University on Tuesday. Lakshman Prasad Acharya, Governor of Assam, will attend the award presentation ceremony as the chief guest.

Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) Chief Hagrama Mohilyar and former Chief Executive Member of BTR Pramod Boro will be present as special guests, along with several other dignitaries. Her Majesty Gyalum Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck is internationally respected for her compassionate leadership and lifelong humanitarian work.

As the founding president of the Tarayana Foundation, she has spearheaded holistic rural development initiatives in some of the most remote regions of Bhutan, with a strong focus on poverty alleviation, women's empowerment, education, healthcare and cultural preservation. A distinguished author and patron of the arts, she has also played a significant role in nurturing Bhutan's literary and cultural heritage.

The award recognises her outstanding humanitarian service, particularly through the work of the Tarayana

Foundation. Instituted in memory of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma, the award carries a cash prize of ₹2 lakh, a citation and a memento. The Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma "Soldier of Humanity" Award has been instituted by the Upendra Nath Brahma Trust (UNBT) in association with the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), in memory of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma, former president of ABSU and a visionary leader and social reformer.

It is regarded as one of the most prestigious honours of the Bodo community, recognising individuals who have rendered selfless service for the welfare and development of humanity. Conferred annually since 2004, the award honours personalities whose work transcends boundaries of region, nation and identity.

This year's conferment holds special significance as it marks the second consecutive occasion on which a foreign national is being honoured, reaffirming the Trust's inclusive and universal humanitarian vision and highlighting the enduring bonds of friendship and goodwill between the peoples of Bodoland and Bhutan.

The organisers have expressed gratitude to all stakeholders and dignitaries associated with the programme and said the ceremony is expected to be a moment of profound humanitarian and cross-border significance.

## New building of Adharchand Higher Secondary School inaugurated

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Feb 2:** The newly constructed building of Adharchand Higher Secondary School was formally inaugurated on Monday as part of a state-level initiative under which chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma inaugurated 67 modern school buildings and laid foundation stones for 61 new schools across Assam. Assam Education Minister Ranaj Pegu attended the programme digitally. The local inauguration ceremony at Silchar was graced by Silchar MLA Dipayan Chakraborty as the chief guest. Addressing the gathering, Chakraborty said the new building would significantly strengthen the academic environment of the institution and contribute to its overall growth.

Describing the occasion as historic, he emphasised that education is the backbone of development and that no meaningful progress is possible without

a strong education system.

Highlighting the state government's focus on the sector, the MLA said education has been accorded top priority, with special emphasis on upgrading infrastructure in government schools. He noted that government schools are undergoing visible transformation with improved sanitation and facilities, leading to increased public confidence. He congratulated the teachers on the occasion and wished them continued success in their academic endeavours.

Chakraborty also acknowledged the role of engineer Saugata Shome in preparing the master plans for school buildings and said the education department itself has witnessed major reforms, with enhanced transparency and accountability.

He urged the school authorities to maintain the campus properly and advised students to keep the

## Governor felicitates NCC cadets returning from RDC 2026, interacts with NSS volunteers



**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Feb 2:** Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya on Sunday attended a reception programme organised by the Directorate of NCC North Eastern Region at Lachit Ghat to felicitate National Cadet Corps cadets who returned after participating in the Republic Day Camp (RDC) 2026.

Congratulating the cadets for representing Assam and the North Eastern Region at the national celebrations, the Governor said holding the reception at the historic Lachit Ghat carried deep symbolic value, recalling the legacy of Lachit Borphukan and his supreme devotion to the nation.

He described the NCC cadets as torchbearers of this heroic tradition and the face of New India—disciplined, energetic and committed to national service.

Appreciating their performance during the Republic Day celebrations, Acharya said marching on

Kartavya Path is both an honour and a responsibility.

He urged the cadets to uphold the highest standards of discipline, conduct and excellence throughout their lives.

Highlighting the role of NCC cadets in nation-building, the Governor referred to their contributions in disaster relief, civic action, social service, environmental initiatives and adventure activities.

He called upon them to remain alert and always prepared to serve the nation with sincerity and dedication.

Referring to the 2026 Republic Day celebrations, Acharya said the cultural presentations from the North East drew nationwide appreciation.

He specifically mentioned Assam's tableau, "Terracotta Craft Village", which showcased the traditional clay art of Dhubri district and reflected the spirit of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

Recalling that this year's Republic Day was dedicated to 150 years of "Vande Mataram", the Governor quoted Prime Minister Narendra Modi as saying that "Vande Mataram is not just a song, but an energy and a resolve of dedication to Mother India."

He added that India's journey towards becoming a developed nation is being driven by conscious, committed and service-oriented youth.

Stressing that India's greatest strength lies in its youth, the Governor urged the cadets to make discipline the foundation of their lives, place the nation above self and act as responsible citizens.

He expressed confidence that NCC cadets would play a leading role in building a strong, prosperous and self-reliant India.

The Governor also felicitated NCC cadet achievers of RDC 2026 on the occasion.

The programme was attended by Anurag Vij, Additional Director General, NCC North Eastern Region; KJ Singh, Deputy Director General; NC Khuman, Group Commander, NCC Guwahati, along with NCC cadets and other dignitaries.

Earlier in the day, the Governor also interacted with 18 National Service Scheme volunteers from the North Eastern Region who had participated in the Republic Day Parade Camp 2026, during an interaction programme held at Lok Bhavan, Assam.

## New building of Tamulpur Higher Secondary School inaugurated

**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, Feb 2:** The newly constructed building of Tamulpur Higher Secondary School was inaugurated on Monday as part of the state-wide launch of 67 new school buildings by chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

The chief minister virtually inaugurated the building from Sonapur. A programme to mark the occasion was held on the school premises at Tamulpur. District Commissioner Chimi Karan delivered the welcome address, followed by speeches from BTC deputy speaker Bijit Gwra Narzary, local MLA Jalen Dairmy and the school's principal, Bibhuti Deka.

The dignitaries later formally inaugurated the building by cutting the ribbon.

Constructed at a cost of ₹8 crore, the two-storey academic block comprises 17 classrooms, a smart classroom, a library and five laboratories, along with other supporting facilities aimed at improving the learning environment for students.

Teachers, students and staff of the institution were present during the programme, Public Relations Officer Vijay Bezbaruah informed.

## Jorhat Police recover 40 stolen mobile phones, seven arrested



**HT Correspondent**

**JORHAT, Feb 2:** The Jorhat Police have achieved a major breakthrough in their ongoing drive against theft, recovering 40 stolen mobile phones of various brands, including several high-end iPhones, with an estimated total value of around ₹10 lakh.

The recovery was made by the Sadar Police following a sustained operation carried out over nearly two months under the leadership of Hrishikesh Hazarika, Officer-in-Charge of Jorhat Sadar Police Station.

Acting on intelligence and technical tracking, the police traced the stolen devices from different locations in Jorhat and nearby areas.

According to police sources, seven persons involved in mobile phone theft have been arrested in connection with the case and subsequently sent to judicial custody.

The recovered mobile phones have been returned to their rightful

owners after due verification.

Speaking on the operation, Hazarika said the police had intensified efforts to curb mobile phone thefts as part of a broader crackdown on crimes such as illegal liquor trade, drugs and theft.

"Our team has been continuously working on mobile theft cases for the past two months, which has resulted in the recovery of around 40 stolen phones. Such operations will continue in the coming days," he said.

He added that the police have inputs about more theft cases and would deal with them in a phased manner. A special team has been constituted to closely monitor and investigate similar cases to prevent recurrence and ensure swift action against offenders.

The successful recovery, police officials said, reflects the department's focused approach towards crime control and public safety in Jorhat district.

## 4th Mwhur International Theatre Festival opens in Kokrajhar with global participation



**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, Feb 2:** The fourth edition of the Mwhur International Theatre Festival commenced on Sunday evening at Bineswar Brahma Udyan, Chandamari, marking the start of a four-day celebration of theatre and performing arts in Kokrajhar.

Organised by the Lwrgi Theatre Group, the festival will run from February 1 to February 4 and brings together seven prominent theatre groups from across India, alongside an international ensemble from the United States.

Participating groups represent theatre circuits from Delhi, West Bengal and Assam, reflecting the festival's growing national and international footprint.

The festival opened at 6 pm with the staging of the English-language play "(UN) Belonging" by the Ananya Dance Theatre from the United States.

The formal inauguration was carried out by BTC MCLA Jubiraj Basumatary.

Following the inaugural performance, the evening continued with the Bengali-language play

"FULTAR", presented by the Theatre Cine Group of West Bengal.

Directed by Subhajit Bandopadhyay, the production was staged at 7:30 pm and drew appreciation from the audience.

The inaugural programme was attended by several dignitaries, including BTC Executive Member Jubiraj Basumatary, president of the Kokrajhar District Bodo Cultural Association Bijit Giri Basumatary, director of the Lwrgi Theatre Group Sanjeev Brahma and president of the group Soumdan Brahma, among others.

As part of the festival's outreach activities, painting and storytelling competitions are being organised on February 1 and 2 under Group A and Group B categories.

According to Soumdan Brahma, students from Class VI to Class XII representing various schools and colleges are participating in these competitions, aimed at encouraging creative expression among young learners alongside the main theatrical performances.

## Beauty and makeup workshop at Kheroni focuses on women's skill development and self-reliance

**HT Correspondent**

**KHERONI, Feb 2:** With the objective of promoting financial independence and self-reliance among young girls and women, a professional beauty and makeup training workshop was organised at Kheroni Chariali on Monday.

The day-long programme was hosted by Sangita Beauty & Makeup Academy.

The workshop witnessed enthusiastic participation from women of the greater Kheroni area as well as neighbouring districts and towns including Hojai, Nagaon and Lanka.

The initiative aimed to transform interest in beauty care into professional skills and open up sustainable livelihood opportunities in the growing beauty and wellness sector.

The training was conducted under the guidance of Sangita Sahu, director of the academy and a noted beauty expert.

Participants received hands-on instruction in professional makeup application, advanced hair care techniques, skincare routines and treatments, and creative nail art and design.

In addition to practical sessions, a seminar was held to discuss the scope of beauty education as a viable and in-demand career option.

The session highlighted entrepreneurship opportunities, market potential and the importance of certification and professional training in the industry.

At the conclusion of the programme, certificates of completion were awarded to all participants, enabling them to take the first step towards professional practice or self-employment.

The workshop underlined the importance of vocational and skill-based training in rural and semi-urban areas.

By equipping women with specialised, income-generating skills, the academy aims to encourage entrepreneurship and help participants contribute to their family income independently.

The initiative was widely appreciated by the local community, with residents noting that such professional training programmes are vital for the socio-economic empowerment of women in the region.

## Dibrugarh Hindu Maha Sammelan to be held at Chowkidinghee on Feb 8

**HT Correspondent**

**DIBRUGARH, Feb 2:** The Dibrugarh Hindu Maha Sammelan will be organised at the Chowkidinghee playground here on February 8 as part of the centenary celebrations of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

The organisers said the Sammelan is being held to strengthen Sanatan Dharma and Indian cultural values, and is not aimed against any community.

The programme is envisaged as a platform to promote cultural awareness, social harmony and collective participation. Manoj Dubey, president of the Rashtriya Sanathan Sena, has been invited as the main speaker at the event.

A 20-member organising committee has been constituted with Atamaram Agarwal as president, Nirmal Kanti Shil as secretary and Sailen Gogoi as working president.

Hridayananda Mahanta has been named chief advisor of the programme.

According to the organisers, the convention is intended to serve as a symbol of the enduring spirit of Sanatan Dharma and to encourage people to rise above personal biases and social divisions.

"We invite everyone to join this assembly by renouncing selfishness, lethargy and discrimination. This is an occasion to celebrate our heritage and reinforce the bonds of social equality," the organising committee said in a press release.

The organisers said they expect around 10,000 people to attend the Sammelan and appealed to citizens to participate in large numbers to understand Sanatan culture and its values.

The programme will begin at 10.30 am on February 8.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

*Kites rise highest against the wind - not with it.*  
- Winston Churchill

## Xi Jinping's major military purges

With the purge of General Zhang Youxia, until now the vice-chairman of China's all-powerful Central Military Commission, there remains just another member in the traditionally seven-member top body controlling China's vast military outfit following the latest purges by the President Xi Jinping. Chinese analysts are not yet sure of the real reasons of China's supreme Xi's sudden retaliatory action against the leading military officials who are also very senior leaders of the Communist Party. The question that is being asked is whether Xi Jinping is doing these to root out all rival power centres against his undisputed hold over the entire Community Party ruling structure. Alternately, is he doing this out of fear of losing control and seeing opposition to his total domination? One thing is plain clear: Xi Jinping is bit panicky. Although he had total control at the time, there is nothing to fall back upon in a crisis. That is a serious lacunae for country as big n powerful as China is now; more so, when that country has such an arsenal for destruction. Xi Jinping has systematically cut out the most powerful military supremos one after another. In successive purges he had thrown out the military top guns from the military hierarchy and sent them out to jail and detention camps.

Only last October, Xi had sacked the other top generals of the CMC on charges of gross misconduct. These generally mean "corruption" and once the charges levied the person had hardly any opportunity to defend himself than confessing all the charges and reading out long condemnations of their conduct. Deng Tsiao Ping, maker of China's resurgence from the depredations of Mao Zhe Dong, had faced similar indictments time and again and had to suffer indignities during Mao's increasingly erratic ways during and after the Cultural revolution. It was only after Mao's demise that Deng could be rehabilitated. The sudden exit of so many top military commanders and leaders would have left a major vacuum in the military command structure of China. Of these, General Zhang would be considered one of the key as someone who alone had some active experience among the top brass. Observers of the Chinese military set up generally agree about large scale corruption among the military brass. At the same time, the military is always the principal area of concern and of power grab. Any leader who enjoys control over the military structure could hope to continue in power. Observers feel President Xi has now achieved such an extended system of domination that he could get away with the successive purges of the Chinese military establishment to retain his iron hand over the state apparatus. His single point agenda of wiping out corruption from Chinese administrative and political system has come in handy for this supreme objective of survival.

Nonetheless, President Xi has alienated vast segments of the Chinese administrative and state apparatus and is increasingly becoming dependent on his loyalist base which make a situation of ever greater purges of efficient and effective people.

# Prudence over populism in Budget 2026-27

By: Satyabrata Borah

The Union Budget 2026-27 arrives at a moment when the Indian economy stands at a complex crossroads. Global uncertainty remains elevated due to persistent geopolitical tensions, fragmented supply chains, uneven recovery in major economies, and the disruptive yet promising acceleration of technology led by artificial intelligence. Domestically, India has largely stabilised after the shocks of the pandemic years, but expectations from the government have grown sharper. Citizens want growth, but not reckless growth. Markets want reforms, but not disruptive uncertainty. States want investment, but also fiscal support. In this backdrop, the Budget presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman makes a deliberate choice. It opts for prudence over adventurism and for a steady, multipronged strategy over headline grabbing Big Bang reforms. This makes the Budget both credible in intent and creditable in execution.

The Union Budget 2026-27 recognises that economic policymaking in the current era must balance ambition with restraint. Unlike periods when dramatic reforms could be pushed through in one stroke, today's environment demands careful calibration. Inflationary pressures have not vanished entirely. Fiscal consolidation remains an unfinished task. At the same time, India cannot afford to lose momentum in infrastructure creation, technological adoption, and employment generation. The Budget reflects this reality by avoiding populist excesses or fiscal bravado, while quietly reinforcing the foundations of long term growth.

One of the most striking features of this Budget is its continued emphasis on public capital expenditure. The allocation of ₹12.2 lakh crore for infrastructure signals the government's belief that public investment remains the most reliable engine for crowding in private capital. Roads, railways, ports, logistics hubs, and urban infrastructure are not merely construction projects. They shape productivity, reduce transaction costs, and integrate markets. Over the last several years, sustained capital expenditure has helped India maintain growth even when global demand weakened. The 2026-27 Budget does not deviate from this path, but it also avoids reckless expansion. The allocation is significant yet measured, reinforcing credibility in fiscal management.

Fiscal prudence is a recurring thread throughout the Budget. The government continues its commitment to reducing the fiscal deficit in a gradual and predictable manner. Instead of abrupt expenditure cuts or sudden tax hikes, the approach relies on improved revenue buoyancy, rationalisation of spending, and better targeting of welfare schemes. This signals to investors, rating agencies, and state governments that macroeconomic stability remains a priority. In an era where capital is sensitive to policy signals, such predictability matters as much as growth numbers.

The Budget also reflects a clear understanding that governance itself is a productivity multiplier. The Finance Minister's emphasis on Artificial Intelligence as a key force multiplier for governance and productivity is not rhetorical. It acknowledges that technology can improve service delivery, reduce leakages, enhance transparency, and support evidence based policymaking. Rather than announcing flashy AI missions without institutional backing, the Budget integrates technology into existing administrative and economic frameworks. This understated approach enhances credibility because it aligns ambition with capacity.

Closely linked to this is the push for deep technology and manufacturing capability. The outline of Semiconductor Mission 2.0 by the Minister for Electronics and Information Technology is a recognition of the strategic importance of chip manufacturing in the twenty-first century. Semicon-

ductors are no longer just industrial inputs. They are geopolitical assets, influencing national security, digital sovereignty, and economic resilience. The Budget does not promise overnight self sufficiency. Instead, it focuses on building ecosystems, supporting deep tech startups, strengthening manufacturing equipment capabilities, and attracting long term investment. This incremental yet focused approach avoids the pitfalls of overpromising while laying the groundwork for future competitiveness.

Another important dimension of the Budget is its regional balance, particularly the attention given to Northeast India. Historically underinvested and geographically constrained, the Northeast has often been discussed in terms of potential rather than outcomes. The Union Budget 2026-27 attempts to convert this narrative into action. Initiatives such as developing Buddhist circuits across six states recognise the region's cultural and civilisational significance while linking it to tourism-led growth. Supporting agar tree cultivation reflects an understanding of local ecological and economic realities, offering income opportunities rooted in indigenous resources. The proposal to establish an industrial corridor in the region aims to integrate the Northeast more closely with national and regional value chains.

The proposal to introduce 4,000 electric buses in the Northeast is particularly significant. It addresses multiple objectives simultaneously. It improves connectivity in a region where transport infrastructure remains a challenge. It supports India's broader transition towards cleaner mobility. It generates employment in operations and maintenance. It also signals that green growth is not limited to metropolitan centres but is being extended to peripheral regions. Similarly, the development of new tourism destinations aims to generate employment while encouraging sustainable practices, rather than extractive mass tourism.

Employment generation, though not addressed through grand announcements, is embedded across the Budget's proposals. Infrastructure spending creates jobs directly and indirectly. Support for manufacturing and deep tech startups encourages high skill employment. Tourism initiatives generate service sector opportunities. Agricultural support measures, particularly those focused on high value crops and region specific produce, aim to raise rural incomes. This distributed approach reflects the government's understanding that employment challenges cannot be solved through a single scheme or sector.

The Budget's approach to agriculture deserves careful attention. While it does not introduce dramatic new subsidies or loan waivers, it focuses on productivity, diversification, and value addition. High value agriculture, sustainable practices, and improved supply chains are emphasised over blanket support. This reflects a shift from short term relief to long term resilience. By linking agriculture to tourism, exports, and processing industries, the Budget seeks to create multiple income streams for farmers rather than relying solely on price support mechanisms.

Tax policy in the Budget reinforces its cautious stance. There are no radical overhauls or sweeping cuts designed to generate instant applause. Instead, the focus remains on stability, simplification, and compliance. This is consistent with the government's broader strategy of widening the tax base through digitisation and formalisation rather than increasing rates. Such an approach may lack drama, but it builds trust over time and strengthens the fiscal foundation.

Social sector spending continues to be targeted and outcome oriented. Rather than expanding welfare schemes indiscriminately, the Budget emphasises better delivery, convergence of schemes, and use of technology to reduce leakages. Health, education, and nutrition remain priorities, but within a framework that seeks efficiency and account-

ability. This again reinforces the theme of prudence over populism.

One of the reasons this Budget can be described as credible is that it aligns with the government's past actions. Over the last several years, there has been consistency in prioritising infrastructure, digitisation, fiscal consolidation, and manufacturing. The 2026-27 Budget does not represent a sudden shift or policy reversal. This continuity strengthens institutional credibility and reassures stakeholders that policy direction will not change abruptly due to short term pressures.

At the same time, the Budget is creditable because it adapts to emerging realities. The explicit recognition of artificial intelligence, semiconductor manufacturing, and green mobility shows that the government is not stuck in outdated growth models. It understands that future competitiveness depends on technology, skills, and sustainability. By embedding these priorities within existing fiscal and administrative structures, the Budget avoids the risk of fragmentation.

Critics may argue that the absence of Big Bang reforms reflects a lack of boldness. However, such criticism overlooks the context. Major structural reforms such as GST, insolvency and bankruptcy code, and labour law consolidation have already altered the economic landscape. The challenge now lies in implementation, refinement, and institutional strengthening. The Union Budget 2026-27 appears to recognise that the returns from steady execution may now be higher than those from disruptive announcements.

The international context further strengthens the case for caution. With global growth uneven and capital markets volatile, maintaining macroeconomic stability is itself a form of economic leadership. India's relative resilience has been built on prudent fiscal management combined with targeted growth support. The Budget reinforces this model rather than experimenting with untested fiscal adventures.

For states, the Budget sends a signal of partnership rather than central dominance. Infrastructure spending, regional development initiatives, and support for local economic activities require coordination with state governments. By focusing on enabling frameworks rather than micromanagement, the Budget leaves room for states to adapt policies to local conditions.

In political terms, the Budget avoids polarising choices. It does not sharply tilt towards either austerity or populism. Instead, it occupies a middle ground that seeks to balance competing demands. This may not generate immediate political excitement, but it contributes to economic stability, which ultimately benefits all stakeholders.

In assessing the Union Budget 2026-27, it is important to look beyond headline numbers and isolated announcements. Its true significance lies in its philosophy. It reflects confidence without complacency, ambition without excess, and reform without disruption. By choosing multipronged measures over dramatic gestures, the government signals its belief that sustainable growth is built through persistence rather than spectacle.

The Union Budget 2026-27 stands out not for what it loudly proclaims but for what it quietly reinforces. It strengthens the infrastructure led growth model, deepens the technology driven governance framework, advances regional and sustainable development, and maintains fiscal discipline. In doing so, it enhances India's economic credibility at home and abroad. The Budget may not be remembered for a single transformative announcement, but it may well be remembered as a document that consolidated gains, reduced risks, and prepared the ground for future progress. In an uncertain world, such credibility is not merely desirable. It is essential.

## Budget 2026 deepens infra push with new high-speed rail corridors

By: Dipak Kurmi

When Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced the development of seven new high-speed rail corridors as "growth connectors" in her Union Budget speech, she was not merely unveiling another infrastructure project but signalling a deeper strategic intent about the direction of India's economic geography. The proposed corridors linking Mumbai-Pune, Pune-Hyderabad, Hyderabad-Bengaluru, Bengaluru-Chennai, Chennai-Bengaluru and Delhi-Siliguri are designed to cut across regions, bind major urban and industrial centres, and create faster, cleaner and more efficient mobility in all four directions of the country. Framed as part of an environmentally sustainable transport vision, the announcement reflects the government's belief that physical connectivity is no longer just an enabler of growth but a decisive driver of productivity, competitiveness and regional integration in a large and diverse economy like India.

These announcements come at a time when India is already in the midst of executing its first high-speed rail project, the Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train corridor, which has become both a symbol of ambition and a test case for execution. The first operational stretch between Surat and Bilimora is scheduled to be inaugurated on August 15, 2027, with subsequent phases to follow in stages, including Vapi-Surat, Vapi-Ahmedabad and the Thane-Ahmedabad sections. Once completed fully by 2029, the corridor is expected to dramatically reduce travel time between the two financial hubs while introducing Japanese Shinkansen technology into India's rail ecosystem. The experience gained from this project, both in terms of engineering capability and institutional learning, is likely to shape how the newly announced corridors are planned and executed.

Alongside high-speed passenger rail, Sitharaman's Budget speech also reinforced the government's multi-modal infrastructure strategy by announcing new Dedicated

Freight Corridors linking Dankuni in the east with Surat in the west. These corridors are intended to decongest existing rail networks, reduce logistics costs and improve the reliability of freight movement across the country. Complementing this push is the plan to operationalise 20 new National Waterways over the next five years, beginning with National Waterway-5 in Odisha, which will connect mineral-rich regions such as Talcher and Angul with industrial hubs like Kalinga Nagar and key ports at Paradeep and Dhamra. The proposed development of a ship repair ecosystem for inland waterways at Varanasi and Patna further underlines the government's attempt to build an integrated logistics network that leverages rail, road and water transport.

The emphasis on high-speed rail and freight connectivity fits squarely within the Centre's broader push for higher capital expenditure as the backbone of its growth strategy. For the financial year 2026-27, the government has allocated Rs 12.2 lakh crore towards capital expenditure, marking an increase of around 9 percent from the Rs 11.21 lakh crore allocated in FY26. This sustained rise in public investment reflects a conscious policy choice made over the past decade to use government spending on infrastructure as a catalyst for private investment, job creation and long-term productivity gains. Roads, highways and railways have remained at the heart of this strategy, together accounting for more than half of the Centre's total capex in the previous financial year. The scale of this commitment becomes clearer when viewed in historical perspective. In FY 2024-25, capital expenditure on road transport and highways stood at Rs 2.85 lakh crore, while Railways received Rs 2.52 lakh crore, out of a total central capex of Rs 10.52 lakh crore. This marked a dramatic shift from earlier years. Between FY19 and FY22 alone, the capex budget expanded by 92 percent, rising from Rs 3.07 lakh crore to Rs 5.92 lakh crore. This momen-

tum has not only been sustained but accelerated, with allocations more than doubling over the subsequent years. The underlying logic is that infrastructure investment creates durable assets, crowds in private capital and generates multiplier effects that extend far beyond the construction phase.

The Economic Survey for 2025-26 provides empirical backing for this approach, estimating that every rupee spent on infrastructure can raise GDP by between Rs 2.5 and Rs 3.5. Improved roads, faster trains, efficient ports and reliable logistics reduce transaction costs, shorten supply chains and expand market access for businesses, particularly manufacturing and services. In this context, high-speed rail is not merely about faster travel for passengers but about reshaping economic linkages between cities, enabling daily business travel, strengthening labour mobility and supporting the emergence of larger, more integrated urban and industrial clusters. The proposed corridors, especially those connecting southern and western industrial belts, have the potential to create new growth axes that transcend state boundaries.

At the same time, the government's push into high-speed rail is not without challenges, as the experience of the Mumbai-Ahmedabad project illustrates. The cost of India's first bullet train corridor has almost doubled to Rs 1.98 lakh crore from the initial estimate of Rs 1.08 lakh crore. Delays of nearly four years have been caused by a combination of land acquisition hurdles, regulatory clearances and the unprecedented disruption triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic. These realities underline the fact that high-speed rail projects are inherently capital-intensive, technologically complex and politically sensitive, requiring long gestation periods and sustained coordination between the Centre, states and local authorities.

Such challenges raise important questions about execution capacity as India embarks on multiple new high-speed corridors simultaneously. Land acquisition in densely populated or highly ur-

banised regions, financing structures that balance public borrowing with long-term viability, and the development of domestic manufacturing and maintenance capabilities will all be critical to ensuring that these projects do not become fiscal burdens. Yet, proponents argue that early investments, even if expensive, can yield strategic dividends by building domestic expertise, reducing future costs and positioning India as a serious player in advanced rail technology.

Beyond economics, the environmental dimension of high-speed rail also features prominently in the government's narrative. Electrified rail corridors powered increasingly by renewable energy offer a lower-carbon alternative to road and air travel, particularly for medium-distance journeys between major cities. As India grapples with the twin challenges of urban congestion and climate commitments, shifting a portion of passenger and freight traffic to rail and waterways could play a meaningful role in reducing emissions while improving quality of life. The emphasis on inland waterways and ship repair ecosystems further reflects an effort to diversify transport modes in an energy-efficient manner.

Taken together, the Budget's announcements on high-speed rail, freight corridors and waterways point to a coherent, if ambitious, vision of infrastructure-led transformation. The government appears intent on using public capital expenditure to stitch together disparate regions, deepen domestic markets and create the conditions for sustained growth over the coming decades. While cost overruns and delays remain real risks, the scale and continuity of investment suggest that infrastructure is no longer being treated as a short-term stimulus tool but as a foundational pillar of India's development strategy. In that sense, the new high-speed rail corridors represent not just faster trains, but a statement of confidence in India's long-term economic trajectory and its willingness to invest today for gains that may unfold over a generation. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)

## India's Budget 2026 - Balancing fiscal prudence and growth



By: Vinod Chandrashekar Dixit

The Union Budget 2026, presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, highlights India's fiscal journey with sustained policy continuity and a clear economic vision. In her ninth consecutive Union Budget, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman emphasized India's need to stay integrated with global markets, boost exports, and attract long-term investments. It showcases resilience, structural reforms, and measured responses to global and domestic challenges, signalling a steady approach to long-term growth and fiscal governance. India's economy is growing at 6.8-7.2% annually despite global uncertainty. As India moves steadily toward its Viksit Bharat vision, the Union Budget 2026 becomes a critical opportunity to accelerate the country's next wave of economic transformation. The Union Budget 2026 aims to sustain growth, balance fiscal discipline, and promote inclusive development. Key expectations include middle-class tax relief, infrastructure-driven growth, and employment generation. The Union Budget 2026 brings exciting benefits for the common man, focusing on inclusive growth, job creation, and improved infrastructure. Key highlights include tax relief through simplified rules and forms, making compliance easier. Healthcare gets a boost with plans to create 1 lakh allied health professionals and train 1.5 lakh caregivers over five years. Education is prioritized with initiatives like one girls' hostel in every district for STEM institutions and a new National Institute of Design in eastern India.

The Union Budget 2026 includes several key announcements. Odisha will get its first national waterway, connecting Talcher, Angul, and Kalinga Nagar to Paradip and Dhamra ports. Kerala is set to benefit from turtle trails for conservation-based tourism and local jobs, a Coconut Promotion Scheme, and support for cashew and cocoa production. Additionally, the budget announces an East Coast Industrial Corridor connecting Durgapur (West Bengal) and a new freight corridor linking Dankuni (West Bengal) to Surat (Gujarat). The emphasis on tourism,

care services, bio-pharma, textiles, etc., is indicative of India's growth ambitions being powered by the services sector. There appears to be a strong focus on demand-linked training and sector-specific skilling. It is also proposed the constitution of a high-level committee to comprehensively review the banking sector and align it with the country's next phase of growth.

The Union Budget 2026 acknowledges the need to create jobs for youths, focusing on training caregivers and boosting services exports to 10% by 2047. Seven high-speed rail corridors will be developed as 'growth connectors'. Infrastructure spending prioritizes Railways and roads, accounting for over half of the Centre's capital expenditure. The 16th Finance Commission's recommendations are accepted, retaining states' share in tax revenues at 41% for the next five years. Sitharaman rightly said that "There are honest taxpayers who are willing to settle disputes by paying all their dues. But they get deterred due to negative connotation associated with penalty. They will now be able close cases by paying an additional amount in lieu of penalty. Experts believe this budget prioritizes growth continuity, tax certainty, and sector-led investment, aligning with India's vision of becoming a developed nation by 2047.

The budget also emphasizes rural prosperity, with the Bharat-VISTAAR platform guiding farmers on crops, weather, and markets. Seven high-speed rail corridors will cut travel time and boost regional economies. MSMEs receive support through a ₹10,000 crore SME Growth Fund and ₹7 lakh crore via TREDIS to ease liquidity stress.

The Union Budget 2026 reflects a mature and confident approach, prioritizing long-term competitiveness and structural reforms over short-term gains. It aims to drive resilient growth, global integration, and a predictable regulatory environment, positioning India for sustained success amidst global uncertainty. Overall, the budget aims to improve daily life, increase incomes, and drive economic growth. (The author is a freelance journalist, writer & cartoonist. He also holds Limca Book of Record Holder (7 Times) & can be reached at dixitprakar@yahoo.in)

# Why children need compassionate education, not cruel discipline?

By: Lalit Garg

Education is meant to give direction to life. When it becomes synonymous with fear, violence, and oppression, it turns into one of the greatest tragedies of civilization. In recent years, excessive academic pressure, violent behavior at home and in schools, and the blind race of competition have deeply wounded the very soul of education. The heart-rending incident from Faridabad—where a helpless little girl lost her life due to a father's cruelty simply because she could not learn counting—has placed the entire society in the dock. Such horrifying manifestations of "education" are no longer isolated family tragedies; they are rapidly becoming a collective social malaise. The frightening outcome of this distorted mindset is the continued belief that fear and physical punishment can make children "better." In this age of knowledge, it is shameful to even think that, in the name of education, a child's life, childhood, and self-confidence can be snatched away. Today, education is gradually losing touch with human sensitivity. Exam results, ranks, mark sheets, and competitive statistics are becoming the face of education. Parents burden their children's tender shoulders with their own unfulfilled dreams, while schools assess them like performance machines. As a result, children no longer see learning as a joyful journey or a process of discovery; instead, it appears as a terrifying obligation.

The home, which should be the safest and most nurturing space, turns into a hub of fear. The school, which should nurture curiosity and creativity, becomes a site of punishment and humiliation. In such circumstances, where does a fragile mind go? With whom does it share its fear and helplessness? Numerous studies in psychology and education have clearly established that violence, scolding, fear, and humiliation destroy a child's ability to learn. In an atmosphere of fear, a child cannot ask questions, experiment, or learn from mistakes. Memory, concentration, and decision-making abilities suffer. Gradually, the child falls prey to inferiority complexes and begins to see themselves as incapable. This frustration does not remain con-

finied to childhood; it shadows the individual throughout life. Such children often grow up fearing risks, hesitating to express themselves, and lagging behind due to a lack of self-confidence. This is not education; it is a form of mental abuse.

One of our biggest mistakes is trying to measure every child by the same yardstick. The truth is that every child is unique. Some have an aptitude for mathematics, others for art; some flourish in sports, others in music or literature. Nature has endowed every child with a special ability, yet instead of recognizing it, we shackle them within rigid curricula and fixed expectations. The National Education Policy 2020 emphasizes multidisciplinary learning, interest-based education, and value-oriented perspectives, but at the ground level, the obsession with marks and ranks still dominates. Coaching culture, fear of board examinations, and the race for entrance tests have further narrowed the scope of education. It is also a harsh reality that many children face learning difficulties due to congenital, genetic, or situational reasons. Vision or hearing impairments, dyslexia, mental stress, or family instability can affect academic performance. Such children need the greatest understanding, patience, and support. Unfortunately, they are often the first to face scolding and punishment. Instead of understanding their challenges, teachers and parents label them lazy or incompetent. This attitude is not only inhuman but also an injustice to future generations.

The fundamental purpose of education is not merely to transmit information, but to build character. If education fails to teach non-violence, compassion, empathy, and self-respect, it remains incomplete. The most effective way to teach children is through example. When they see dialogue, patience, and love at home and in school, they naturally imbibe these values. Children raised in fear either become submissive or start seeing violence as the solution. The growing intolerance and aggression in society can be traced, in part, to an education system that produces competitive consumers instead of sensitive human beings. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's repeated appeals to reduce exam stress



and connect education with life itself highlight the seriousness of the problem. However, change will not come through speeches and policies alone. Real transformation will occur when parents understand that their child is not a tool for social prestige, but an independent individual. When teachers accept that their responsibility is not just to complete the syllabus, but to ignite a love for learning. When school administrations abandon a culture of punishment and build systems of support and counseling. And when society acknowledges that failure is also a part of learning, not a crime.

Today, there is an urgent need to humanize education once again—an education where affection forms the basis of discipline, dialogue replaces punishment, and trust takes the place of fear. Children must feel accepted as they are, and assured that their growth will follow their own pace. Viewing education through a lens of

non-violence is not merely a moral appeal; it is a practical necessity. A society whose education system breaks children can never become strong. Innocent minds need encouragement, not fear; guidance, not scolding; trust, not violence. Only then can education truly become life-giving, not life-destroying.

The National Progressive Schools' Conference (NPSC), a leading association of over 250 prominent private senior secondary schools in India, works closely with government bodies such as NCERT and NIEPA to enhance the quality of education. Its focus lies on policy reforms, teaching-learning methodologies, holistic development, technological integration, and value-based education.

In this context, Dr Usha Ram—an experienced educator and leader in the Indian school education sector—and Srinivasan Sriram, Principal of The Mann School, Delhi, a veteran with

over 30 years of experience in residential public-school education and IT administration, play significant roles. A former Head of Computer Science at Mayo College, Mr Sriram is an expert in ICT integration and 21st-century learning. A meaningful discussion on the National Education Policy 2020 was held just yesterday at Platinum Valley International School with these two eminent educationists. There was unanimous agreement on one deeply worrying question: why is education—meant to build life, shape character, and nurture human values—gradually becoming a force of destruction? When education fails to move in the right direction, when it cannot nurture citizens imbued with non-violence, compassion, coexistence, and ethical discernment, the generations it produces become a source of crisis not only at the individual level, but also at social, national, and global levels.

## Food insecurity is on the rise: A look at the world's 'hunger hotspots'

By: José Miguel Soriano del Castillo

On November 12, 2025, the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) published a joint report that raises alarm bells about the state of global food security. Both agencies warn of a "shrinking window to prevent millions more people from facing acute food insecurity".

The report identifies sixteen regions around the world where the risk of severe food crisis is growing. This could lead to major humanitarian emergencies if urgent and coordinated action is not taken.

### War blocks food supplies

Armed conflict is the main cause of food shortage in most of the countries mentioned in the report. Prolonged violence, the destruction of arable land, mass displacement and the blocking of humanitarian corridors all drastically reduce access to food.

Sudan is one of the most critical areas; after months of intense fighting, millions of people are trapped in areas where markets have collapsed and aid distribution is virtually impossible. The FAO warns that some regions could soon approach the technical thresholds for famine if the situation cannot be stabilised.

Yemen is in a similar situation, with more than 40 per cent of the population experiencing severe levels of food crisis. The destruction of essential infrastructure and a lack of fuel hinder the arrival of imports, on which most of the country's diet depends.

In Palestine, the report highlights that chronic instability and restrictions on the movement of essential goods have further reduced food availability, leading to a rapid deterioration in nutritional indicators.

The situation is also worrying in Mali and Burkina Faso, where insecurity and unstable territorial control are causing market disruptions, blockages to agricultural trade and significant losses in crop production.

In Burkina Faso, the poorest households living in conflict-affected areas face "market disruptions and limited humanitarian assistance", according to the latest food security analysis.

These dynamics can also be observed in Mali, where the same conditions are causing "a rapid deterioration in local food consumption and nutrition levels". This diagnosis is backed up by data from the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification scale. It placed the proportion of the country's population suffering from insufficient food consumption at around 52 per cent in September 2025.

### Economic shocks entrench vulnerability

The second driver of food insecurity is economic instability, which manifests through rising food prices, the depreciation of local currencies, and increases in the prices of fuel and agricultural supplies.

In Haiti, this situation is exacerbated by violence and the disruption of normal market functioning, which has left millions extremely vulnerable. Around 5.7 million Haitians, over half the country, are already experiencing acute food insecurity, and this figure continues to rise.

Similar circumstances can be observed in Myanmar and Ethiopia, where currency devaluation and the disruption of economic activities have pushed up the price of basic foodstuffs. This has drastically reduced households' purchasing power.

### The climate crisis' central role

The third major factor is climate change. No longer limited to isolated incidents, the climate is now a structural driver of vulnerability, with pro-



longed droughts, flash floods, cyclones and heat waves repeatedly affecting regions where agriculture depends heavily on seasonal rainfall.

The Horn of Africa is the clearest example. After five consecutive seasons of failed rains, millions of herders and farmers have lost their livestock and crops, leading to mass displacement and a dramatic increase in dependence on nutritional programmes.

The WFP report emphasises that these phenomena, intensified by El Niño-related variations, will happen again. In countries such as South Sudan, Somalia and Ethiopia, extreme rainfall following droughts frequently destroys basic infrastructure, devastates crops and contaminates essential water sources.

### Vanishing humanitarian aid

The fourth factor, and one of the most crucial to understanding the magnitude of the problem, is the enormous shortfall in humanitarian funding. The WFP has warned that the funds available this year could be around \$6.4 billion: far less than what is needed to sustain its global operations and well below previous levels. This will force it to cut rations, suspend nutritional programmes, and strictly prioritise the most vulnerable beneficiaries.

These cuts have direct consequences. In areas where conflict prevents access to food and local markets have collapsed, humanitarian aid is the only source of sustenance. If funding remains insufficient, millions of people will be at risk of rapidly moving from a crisis situation to a severe food emergency, or even conditions close to famine.

The WFP itself has pointed out that a lack of resources is seriously compromising its ability to anticipate seasonal or climate-related hunger spikes, limiting its scope for action in some of the planet's most vulnerable areas.

### A question of global stability

The FAO-WFP report demonstrates that food is not just a domestic issue or a matter of individual habits. Food insecurity is both a symptom and a cause of instability, with impacts on public health, local economies and migratory movements.

The interdependence of global markets means that food crises in the sixteen identified hunger hotspots will have repercussions far beyond their immediate surroundings, creating additional tensions in importing countries and vulnerable economies.

Despite its cautionary tone, the report concludes that it is still possible to avert the massive deterioration predicted for 2026. It points out that investing in livelihoods, resilience and social protection before hunger reaches its peak would be "a smart investment in long-term peace and stability".

It also stresses that agricultural support—in areas such as seeds, livestock health and early action—is essential to stabilising food production and reducing dependence on emergency aid. At the same time, it warns that lack of funding and blocks to humanitarian access are seriously compromising the ability to act in time, and that ignoring this window of opportunity will have an incalculable human cost. (Courtesy: Down to Earth)

## 10 minutes. 11 quick exercises you can do

By: Muskan Rastogi

Want to exercise and stay fit but cannot find time?

Here's a quick list of exercises that will help you strengthen your shoulders, back, knees, joints, neck, legs and improve your overall fitness.

### 1. Shoulder rolls

The goal of this exercise is to reduce shoulder stiffness caused by long hours at a desk.

#### How to do it

- Roll your shoulders clockwise 10 times.
- Repeat anticlockwise 10 times.

Doing this exercise daily helps to improve posture, release tension and prevent a frozen shoulder.

### 2. Neck stretches

This is an ideal exercise for people who spend too much time on laptops or phones.

#### How to do it

- Tilt your head gently to your left and hold for 10 seconds.
- Repeat on your right side for 10 seconds.
- Do at least five reps a day.

This exercise will help to reduce neck pain, headaches and tech-neck stiffness.

### 3. Cat-cow stretch (for spine mobility)

If you are suffering from back pain due to long hours of sitting, do this exercise under the supervision of an expert.

It will gradually help you tackle that notorious back pain and also provide you with much-needed relief.

#### How to do it

- Start on all fours.
- Arch your back (like a cat), then gently dip it down (like a cow).

This will also improve spine flexibility, reduce back pain and boost circulation.

### 4. Knee marching (for healthy knees)

This is particularly recommended for people who are struggling to stand, walk or sit due to weak knees.

#### How to do it

- Stand straight and lift one knee at a time like you are marching.
- This exercise will help you strengthen the knee joints, improve balance and circulation.

Do it twice a day, and you will be able to get rid

of knee pain.

### 5. Ankle circles (for joint health)

In the absence of physical activity, your joints tend to get stiff, leading to pain and discomfort while standing up, walking or jogging.

#### How to do it

- You can do this while you are sitting or standing.
- Lift one foot at a time and rotate your ankle in circles.

• Do it clockwise and anticlockwise.

This exercise will also help to prevent ankle injuries and improve mobility.

### 6. Wall push-ups (for upper body strength)

This is an alternative to the regular traditional push-ups.

If you find it difficult to do the regular push-ups (which most people avoid), these wall push-ups are perfect for you.

#### How to do it

- Stand at an arm's distance from a wall.
- Keep your palms on the wall and push your body forward and behind.

This will help you strengthen the arms, chest and shoulders.

### 7. Seated leg raises (for strong legs)

If you are worried about sitting too long, this exercise is important.

#### How to do it

- Sit straight with your back erect on a chair.
- Lift one leg straight and hold for 5 seconds.
- Switch and repeat with the other leg.

Doing this regularly can also help to strengthen the thighs, improve knee support and boost blood circulation.

### 8. Glute bridge (for your lower back)

This is another healthy exercise that focuses on your lower back.

#### How to do it

- Lie down on your back with your knees bent.
- Now try to lift your hips up and hold for 10 seconds.
- Gently bring your hips down. Repeat five times.

This exercise strengthens your lower back, hips and glutes and gradually helps reduce lower-back pain.

### 9. Step-ups (for legs and heart health)

This exercise makes difficult decisions with limited options, and about the cost of trying to move upward in a society that keeps a quiet score. Caste is present throughout, but it is not turned into an accusation. Instead, it appears as something lived and navigated alongside everyday anxieties about money, safety, and the future.

The aspirations in Homebound are strikingly modest. Education, employment, and the hope of a uniform are not symbols of power but of protection. Preparing for exams, seeking stable government work as a hawdalar, or imagining a predictable income are acts of self-preservation. These dreams are not driven by entitlement, but by the desire to move through the world with a little less friction.

One moment captures this with painful clarity. Sudha speaks of finishing her graduation—perhaps a PhD—so that people will not mind sitting next to her. Education, here, is not freedom. It is

permission. The film shows how dignity often has to be earned repeatedly, rather than assumed.

What makes Homebound especially compelling is that it refuses to become a moral courtroom. Discrimination appears not through dramatic cruelty, but through silences, pauses, and everyday exclusions. The protagonists are not surrounded by villains. There are also moments of kindness, solidarity, and support—sometimes from people belonging to socially privileged castes.

These moments do not cancel out structural inequality, but they complicate the picture. They remind us that lived reality rarely fits neatly into categories of good and bad.

This balance matters. Conversations around caste often collapse into defensiveness or guilt, leaving little room for reflection. Homebound charts a quieter path. It does not demand collective shame, nor does it offer easy absolution. Instead, it shows how caste shapes

choices unevenly—sometimes harshly, sometimes subtly—while still allowing space for human connection across social boundaries.

Friendship in the film becomes both refuge and risk. Bonds form not because identity disappears, but despite it. Shared uncertainty, rather than shared background, becomes the basis of trust. These relationships are fragile, but they are also sustaining.

The film also looks closely at family and mobility. Parents' decisions are neither romanticised nor condemned. Migration, compromise, silence, and endurance emerge as imperfect strategies for securing a future that feels slightly safer than the present.

This attentiveness extends to gender as well. While Chandan is supported in pursuing education and mobility, his sister's path is narrower—she begins working early as an anganwadi worker, her ambitions shaped by care responsibilities and constraint.

EU sanctions draw Iran's anger

Iran summons EU ambassadors to protest Revolutionary Guard being listed as terror group

DUBAI, Feb 2: Iran said on Monday it had summoned all of the European Union ambassadors in the Islamic Republic to protest the bloc's listing of the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard as a terror group.

The move comes as Iran faces the threat of US military action in response to the killing of peaceful demonstrators and over possible mass executions. The American military has moved the USS Abraham Lincoln and several guided-missile destroyers into the Mideast. It remains unclear whether President Donald Trump will decide to use force, though regional countries have engaged in diplomacy in an effort to halt a new Mideast war from breaking out.

"Trump is trying to calibrate a response to Iran's mass killing of protesters that punishes Iranian leaders without also embroiling the United States in a new, open-ended conflict in the region," the New York-based Soufan Centre think tank said Monday.

"Some Trump aides seek to exploit Tehran's weakness to secure major concessions from the regime, but Trump has set conditions for a diplomatic resolution that Tehran cannot accept."

EU sanctions draw Iran's anger. The EU agreed to list the Guard as a terror group last week over its part in the bloody crackdown on nationwide protests in January that killed thousands and saw tens of thousands detained.



Other countries, including the US and Canada, have previously designated the Guard as a terrorist organisation. While the move is largely symbolic, it does add to the economic pressure squeezing Iran, particularly as the Guard has a major influence on the country's economy.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei told journalists that the ambassadors had begun to be summoned on Sunday and that the process went into Monday as well.

"A series of actions were reviewed, various options are being prepared and were sent to the related decision-making bodies," Baghaei said. "We think that in the coming days, a decision will be made about a reciprocal action by the Islamic Republic of Iran toward the illegal, unreasonable and

very wrong move by the EU." Also, on Sunday, Iran's parliament speaker said that the Islamic Republic now considers all European Union militaries to be terrorist groups, citing a 2019 law.

The Guard emerged from Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution as a force meant to protect the Shiite cleric-overseen government and was later enshrined in its constitution. Operating in parallel with the country's regular armed forces, it grew in prominence and power during a long and ruinous war with Iraq in the 1980s. Though it faced possible disbandment after the war, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei granted it powers to expand into private enterprise, allowing it to thrive.

The Guard's Basij force likely was key in putting down the demonstrations, starting in earnest from Jan. 8, when authorities cut off the internet and international telephone calls for the nation of 85 million people. Videos that have come out of Iran via Starlink satellite dishes and other means show men likely belonging to its forces shooting and beating protesters.

Guard drill in Strait of Hormuz ongoing. Meanwhile, Baghaei also said a drill by the Guard in the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which a fifth of all oil traded passes, was "ongoing based on its timetable." Iran warned ships last week that a drill would be carried out on Sunday and Monday, but prior to Baghaei's comments, it had not acknowledged it taking place. The US military's Central Command issued a strong warning to Iran not to harass its warships and aircraft, or impede commercial vessels moving through the strait.

Satellite photos taken Sunday by Planet Labs PBC and analysed by The Associated Press showed small vessels moving at speed in the strait between Iran's Qeshm and Hengam islands, some distance away from the corridor commercial vessels take. The Guard relies on a fleet of small, fast-attack ships in the strait.

Asked about whether Iran could face a war, Baghaei told the public, "Don't worry at all." He declined, however, to discuss whether Trump set a deadline for Iran to respond to America's demands. (AP)

Hasina relatives sentenced to prison terms after trial in absentia

DHAKA, Feb 2: A Bangladesh court on Monday sentenced deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to 10 years in jail in two separate corruption cases related to alleged irregularities in allocations of land in a government housing project.

Dhaka's Special Judge's Court Handed 79-year-old Hasina 10 years of rigorous imprisonment for using her official influence in allocating residential plots to others, including her niece, UK Labour MP and former British minister Tulip Siddiq, under the Rajuk New Town Project in Purbachol on the outskirts of the capital.

Judge Robiul Alam simultaneously handed down Hasina's two nieces and a nephew, to different prison terms.

Siddiq's younger sister, Azaman Siddiq and brother Radwan Mujib Siddiq Bobby were sentenced to seven years rigorous imprisonment, while the deposed premier and her relatives were handed down the prison terms after trial in absentia.

Only one of the 16 accused, a senior official of Rajuk, which allocates the plots, Khurshid Alam, was tried in person and was present at the court as the verdict was delivered.

The other accused in the case were sentenced to five years' imprisonment, including a former junior minister for housing, a former secretary of the ministry, a former Rajuk chairman and officials of the state-run entity.

"The trial of the accused was not obstructed regardless of where



they (accused) were in the world," the judge said while delivering the verdict.

Hasina's now disbanded Awami League has labelled the sentences as "entirely predictable" and "false cases" staged by Muhammad Yunus' interim government, while it earlier called the charges "Fabricated" and "Malicious".

The British lawmaker, on the other hand, said the process had been "flawed and farcical from the beginning to the end".

"I'm absolutely baffled by the whole thing - I've still had no contact whatsoever from the Bangladesh authorities despite them spreading malicious allegations about me for a year-and-a-half now," BBC quoted her as saying.

"There's been absolutely no summons sent to me, there's no charge sheet, I've had no correspondence from them - I'm not difficult to find, I'm a parliamentarian."

She said she had engaged lawyers in the UK and Bangladesh. "I feel like I'm in some sort of Kafkaesque nightmare," she added.

Hasina's Awami League government was toppled in student-led violent protest dubbed July Uprising on August 5, 2024, and since then, the interim government launched a number of wide-ranging legal cases against the ex-premier, her associates and family members.

Earlier, a special tribunal sentenced Hasina, now in exile in India, to death on charges of committing crimes against humanity through brutal efforts to tame the uprising.

On an Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) complaint, a court earlier on November 27 sentenced Hasina to 21 years' imprisonment in total, while her children, Sajeb Wazed Joy and Saima Wazed Putul, each received a 5-year prison sentence in a different case involving Rajuk plots. (PTI)

Pak forces kill 22 more terrorists in Balochistan, death toll rises to 177

KARACHI, Feb 2: Pakistani security forces have killed 22 more terrorists, raising the death toll of militants to 177 in the last two days in Balochistan after coordinated terror attacks at multiple places in the restive southwestern province, security officials said on Monday.

The counter terror operation was launched after militants belonging to ethnic Baloch groups carried out multiple attacks at several locations on Saturday.

"Since Sunday night, security forces have killed 22 more terrorists," Shahid Rind, a spokesperson for the provincial government, said on Monday.

He said that 167 bodies have been sent to hospitals so far for future processing and identification. He added that 177 militants have been killed in the last two days.

Rind said most of the terrorists killed belonged to the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) and had support from other insurgent groups.

"These terrorists have been killed over a period of over two days during the attacks or when security forces chased them and started clean-up operations," he added.

On Sunday, Balochistan Chief Minister Sarfaraz Bugti had said that 145 terrorists had been killed. On Friday, the military said that security forces killed 41 terrorists on Thursday in the Panggur and Shaban areas of the province.

The military and the state have designated these terrorists belonging to insurgent groups or the Tehreek-e-Taliban as "Fitna-al-Hindustan", a term the government uses claiming that the militants allegedly receive support from Indian intelligence agencies.

Due to the clean-up operations underway at different locations,



mobile or internet services since were suspended in Quetta, Mastung, Kalat, Khuzdar, Nushki, Dalbandin, Kharan and other cities on Saturday.

Balochistan's Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Hamza Shafiqat told the media that the services would resume on Tuesday.

The terrorists, including two female suicide bombers, attacked multiple security and government installations at 12 different towns and cities in the province last week. So far, authorities have confirmed the death of at least 17 personnel of police, frontier corps and security forces. Eighteen civilians, including three women and two children, were killed in Gwadar.

Security forces engaged the terrorists in gun battles across the province.

Sarfaraz Bugti on Sunday expressed firm resolve to eliminate the insurgent groups unless they surrendered and laid down their weapons. Balochistan, bordering Iran and Afghanistan, is home to a long-running violent insurgency. Baloch insurgent groups have previously carried out several attacks targeting the USD 60 billion CPEC projects.

In 2025, the BLA claimed responsibility for the March hijacking of the Jaffar Express train travelling from Quetta to Peshawar, killing 31 civilians and security personnel and holding hostage over 300 passengers. (PTI)

Gaza's border crossing to Egypt reopens in key step for truce but only few Palestinians can cross

CAIRO, Feb 2: Gaza's Rafah border crossing with Egypt reopened on Monday for limited traffic, a key step in the Israeli-Hamas ceasefire but a mostly symbolic development on the ground as few people will be allowed to travel in either direction and no goods will be going into the war-torn territory.

Within the first hour of the opening, no one was actually seen crossing in or out of Gaza. An Egyptian official said 50 Palestinians would cross in each direction on the first day of the crossing's operation.

About 20,000 Palestinian children and adults needing medical care hope to leave devastated Gaza via the crossing, according to Gaza health officials. Thousands of other Palestinians outside the territory hope to enter and return home.

State-run Egyptian media and an Israeli security official also confirmed the reopening. The officials spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to discuss the issue.

Before the war, Rafah was the main crossing for people moving in and out of Gaza. The territory's handful of other crossings are all shared with Israel. Under the terms of the ceasefire, which went into effect in October, Israel's military controls the area between the Rafah crossing and the zone where most Palestinians live. Violence still continued across the coastal territory, and Gaza hospital officials said an Israeli navy ship had fired on a tent camp, killing a 3-year-old Palestinian boy.

Egypt prepares to receive the war-wounded. About 150 hospitals across Egypt are ready to receive Palestinian patients evacuated from Gaza through the Rafah crossing, authorities said. Also, the Egyptian Red Crescent said it has readied "safe spaces" at the Egyptian side of the crossing to support those evacuated from the Gaza Strip.

Israel has banned sending patients to hospitals in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and east Jerusalem since the war began — a move that cut off what was previously the main outlet for Palestinians needing medical treatment unavailable in Gaza.

Israel has said it, and Egypt will vet people for exit and entry through the Rafah crossing, which will be supervised by European Union border patrol agents with a small Palestinian presence. The number of travellers is expected to increase over time if the system is successful.

Fearing that Israel could use the crossing to push Palestinians out of the enclave, Egypt has repeatedly



said it must be open for them to enter and exit Gaza. Historically, Israel and Egypt have vetted Palestinians applying to cross.

Palestinian toddler killed by Israeli fire. A 3-year-old Palestinian was killed Monday when the Israeli navy hit tents sheltering displaced people on the coast of Gaza's southern city of Khan Younis, Palestinian hospital authorities said.

According to the Nasser hospital, which received the body, the attack happened in Muwasi, a tent camp area on the Gaza Strip's coast. The boy was the latest among Palestinians in Gaza since the October ceasefire in Gaza. Israel's military said it was looking into the incident.

More than 520 Palestinians were killed by Israeli fire since October 10, according to the strip's health ministry. The casualties since the ceasefire, which UNICEF said include more than 100 children, are among the over 71,700 Palestinians killed since the start of Israel's offensive, according to the Gaza health ministry, which does not say how many were fighters or civilians.

The ministry, which is part of Gaza's Hamas-led government, keeps detailed casualty records that are seen as generally reliable by UN agencies and independent experts.

Rafah's opening represents ceasefire progress. Israeli troops seized the Rafah crossing in May 2024, calling it part of efforts to combat arms smuggling for the militant Hamas group. The crossing was briefly opened for the evacuation of medical patients during a ceasefire in early 2025. Israel had resisted reopening the Rafah crossing, but the recovery of the remains of the last hostage in Gaza cleared the way to move forward. (AP)

Top Justice Department official plays down chance for charges arising from Epstein files revelations

WASHINGTON, Feb 2: A top Justice Department official played down the possibility of additional criminal charges arising from the Jeffrey Epstein files, saying Sunday that the existence of "horrible photographs" and troubling email correspondence does not "allow us necessarily to prosecute somebody."

Department officials said over the summer that a review of Epstein-related records did not establish a basis for new criminal investigations, and Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche said that position remains unchanged even as a massive document dump since Friday has focused fresh attention on Epstein's links to powerful individuals around the world and revived questions about what, if any, knowledge the wealthy financier's associates had about his crimes. "There's a lot of correspondence. There's a lot of emails. There's a lot of photographs. There's a lot of horrible photographs that appear to be taken by Mr. Epstein or people around him," Blanche said Sunday on CNN's "State of the Union." "But that doesn't allow us necessarily to prosecute somebody."

He said victims of Epstein's sex abuse "want to be made whole," but that "doesn't mean we can just create evidence or that we can just kind of come up with a case that isn't there."

President Donald Trump's Justice Department said Friday that it would be releasing more than 3 million pages of documents and more than 2,000 videos and 180,000 images under a law intended to reveal most of the mate-

rial it collected during long-running investigations into Epstein.

The fallout from the release of the files has been swift.

In the United Kingdom, Lord Peter Mandelson announced his resignation from the governing Labour Party on Sunday following further revelations about his relationship with Epstein. He said he was stepping aside to avoid causing "further embarrassment," even as he denied allegations he had received payments from Epstein two decades ago.

A top official in Slovakia, meanwhile, left his position after photos and emails revealed he had met with Epstein in the years after Epstein was released from jail. And British Prime Minister Keir Starmer suggested that longtime Epstein friend Andrew Mounbatten-Windsor, formerly known as Prince Andrew, should tell U.S. investigators whatever he knows about Epstein's activities.

The revelations continue. The files posted to the department's website included documents involving Epstein's friendship with Mounbatten-Windsor, along with Epstein's email correspondence with onetime Trump adviser Steve Bannon, New York Giants co-owner Steve Tisch and other prominent contacts with people in political, business and philanthropic circles, such as billionaires Bill Gates and Elon Musk.

The Epstein saga has long fueled public fascination in part because of his past friendships with Trump and former President Bill Clinton. Both men have said they had no knowledge Epstein was abusing underage girls. (AP)

The Dalai Lama, K-pop win first Grammys, Steven Spielberg achieves EGOT status

LOS ANGELES, Feb 2: The 68th annual Grammy Awards are taking place Sunday and spirits were high from the jump after a few back-to-back, history-making moments.

The Dalai Lama won his first Grammy for audio book, narration and storytelling recording, beating out Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson. You ready that correctly.

"I am not the Dalai Lama," Rufus Wainwright joked in an acceptance speech. "It was a privilege to participate on this project."

"Golden" from "KPop Demon Hunters" won song written for visual media at the Premiere Ceremony, marking the first time a K-pop act has won a Grammy. Songwriters delivered their acceptance speech in both English and Korean, highlighting the song's bilingual appeal.

Music film went to "Music for John Williams," which means director Steven Spielberg has officially won his first Grammy. That makes him an EGOT winner — an artist with an Emmy, Grammy, Tony and Oscar.

The Premiere Ceremony, a pre-telecast show held at the adjacent Peacock Theater, began with musician and host Darren Criss setting the scene — giving out the first award of the day, for best

pop/duo group performance to Cynthia Erivo and Ariana Grande for "Defying Gravity." They were not present to accept the award.

An impressive 86 Grammys will be handed out pre-broadcast.

Yungblud won his first Grammy for rock performance for his cover of Black Sabbath's "Changes (live from Villa Park)," which he performed at Ozzy Osbourne's final show. Hardcore band Turnstile also won their first Grammy for rock album and later, metal performance.

"To Baltimore, thank you, we love you," said frontman Brendan Yates.

The Cure won alternative music performance but were unable to attend as they were attending the funeral of Perry Archangelo Bamonte, the Cure's longtime guitarist and keyboardist, who died last month.

FKA twigs won her first Grammy for best dance/electronic album for "EU-SEXUA," becoming only the second Black woman to win in the category. "I didn't expect to come up here. I was just so happy to be nominated," she said in her speech. "Thank you so much — wow."

"All the Latino kids in the hood watching, anything is possible," said rapper Lefty Gunplay, who also won his first Grammy for rap performance for his role



on Kendrick Lamar's "TV Off."

Earlier on, Edgar Barrera handed out some of the Latin music categories: Natalia Lafourcade won best Latin pop album for "Cancionera"; best Latin rock or Alternative album to CA7RIEL & Paco Amoroso for "Papota." It is their first win on their first nomination. In their speech, in Spanish, they thanked their home country of Argentina and all of Latin America. Música Mexicana album (including Tejano) went to Carlin León for "Palabra De To's (Seca)." It is his second win on his second nomination.

It is a dramatically different tone than last year. The 2025 award show was completely reimagined and refocused to relief efforts following the devastating Los Angeles-area wildfires. In 2026, the focus has been placed once again on the music, where Kendrick Lamar, Lady Gaga, Bad Bunny and more will go head-to-head during the televised ceremony.

The energy was high from minute one at the Premiere Ceremony: Earth, Wind & Fire gave a groovy opening performance of "Shining Star" with some help from Israel Houghton, Lila Ike,

Grace Potter, Maggie Rose and Trombone Shorty.

"That's how you start a show!" Recording Academy CEO and President Harvey Mason Jr. said in his opening remarks. "That's a statement. That's joy. That's resilience."

There were many other performances as well: Zara Larsson brought her Swedish pop "Midnight Sun," followed by Spiritbox's metallic "Soft Spine," Tasha Cobbs Leonard's "Church," and Criss and Helen J. Shen's "Never Fly Away."

Following the Premiere Ceremony, comedian Trevor Noah will host the main show for a sixth and final year and history could be made when some of the biggest names in music gather. Here's some key things to know ahead of Sunday's show at the Crypto.com Arena.

Artists speak out Trump administration's immigration crackdowns

At the Premiere Ceremony, artists offered pro-immigration and anti-ICE messaging.

Country duo/group performance went to first-time winners Shaboozey and Jelly Roll. Shaboozey accepted the award with tears in his eyes. "I want to thank my mother, who as of today, has retired from her job of 30 years ... working as a registered nurse in a psych ward ... as an immigrant in this country. Thank you, mom.

"Immigrants built this country, literally, actually. So, this for them," he concluded. "Thank you for bringing your culture, your music and your stories."

Amy Allen won songwriter of the year, nonclassical for a second year in a row and wore an "ICE Out" pin, an anti-immigration enforcement message. So did Kehlani — who won her first Grammy for R&B performance and later, her second, for R&B song.

"I've never won anything before, this is a really crazy feeling," she said as she fought back tears, reflecting on her first nomination 10 years ago. Then she shifted gears to focus on the current political moment: "Imma leave this and say, (expletive) ICE."

"I'm scared," Gloria Estefan said of the current political moment backstage at the Grammys. "There are hundreds of children in detention centers. ... I don't recognize my country in this moment right now."

Who's nominated at the 2025 Grammys. Kendrick Lamar leads the 2026 Grammy Award nominations with nine. Lady Gaga, Jack Antonoff and Canadian record producer/songwriter Cirkut follow with seven nominations each.

Sabrina Carpenter, Bad Bunny, Leon Thomas and Serban Ghenea all boast six nominations. (AP)

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# Oppn MPs in Rajya Sabha attack govt; allege rise in communal rifts, economic disparities

**NEW DELHI, Feb 2:** Members from Opposition parties in the Rajya Sabha on Monday accused the government of fomenting communal division amid rising economic disparities, saying the Centre needs a reality check on its claim of 'Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas'.

Participating in the Motion of Thanks on the President's address in the Upper House, Congress leader Digvijaya Singh dubbed the government as "anti-poor and anti-farmer", and Trinamool Congress MP Sagarika Ghose claimed that it was in "denial of the present-day reality".

DMK MP Tiruchi Siva alleged that parliamentary democracy norms are being flouted, bills are being bulldozed, and the voices of opposition parties are being strangled.

Congress leader Singh also mentioned Rahul Gandhi's remarks on China occupying Indian territory made in the Lok Sabha, urging that Prime Minister Narendra Modi must reply to the issue.

Singh observed that there was a discussion in the Lok Sabha about how China has occupied 2,000 square kilometres of Indian territory. If Leader of the Opposition (in the Lok Sabha) Rahul Gandhi mentioned this there (in the Lok Sabha), then it is necessary for the Prime Minister to respond to it, the Congress leader said.

He (PM) should also respond to whatever Major General Manoj Mukul Naravane has said, Singh stated.

A row erupted in the Lok Sabha on Monday when Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi sought to quote from the "memoir" of former Army chief MM Naravane on the 2020 India-China conflict.



He said while the Centre claims 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas', ground reality reflects otherwise, claiming that minorities and backward classes were left out of the developmental agenda.

"The D Grade government is in denial of the problem, practices distraction and uses division as a political strategy," Trinamool Congress MP Ghose said, targeting the Centre, claiming "there is no Sabka Saath, there is no Sabka Vikas in today's India".

In remarks apparently referring to Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, Ghose said, "None other than the Chief Minister of

a BJP-ruled state has called for the economic apartheid of a particular community and referred to them as Miyas".

She said the Enforcement Directorate raided the Trinamool Congress' office before the Assembly Elections, accusing the agency of selectively targeting the ruling party in West Bengal.

Congress leader Singh also flagged irregularities in the implementation of the government's flagship skilling scheme Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), citing observations made by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG).

When Singh mentioned the RSS in the context of Mahatma Gandhi's assassination, Leader of the House in the Rajya Sabha JP Nadda objected to his remarks, saying the courts have observed that the RSS had no role in Gandhi's assassination.

Nadda said such observations and misleading the nation do not behave a senior leader like Singh and demanded that his comments should be expunged.

In response to Singh's assertions, Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman Harivansh cited former Vice President and Rajya Sabha Chairman VV Giri's ruling in 1967, which said "members who are not in a position to substantiate charges to be made should not make such statements. Allegations and counter-allegations of this nature by the members detract from the dignity of Parliament".

Singh retorted that he will not name the RSS but will definitely talk about the "divisive ideology", which has spread hatred.

The Congress leader claimed that communal differences and economic disparities are on the rise.

"Are you (the govt) able to provide equal opportunities and justice to minorities?" Singh questioned, alleging that homes are being razed by bulldozers on the basis of one's religion, and observing that while the guilty should be punished, what have their families done to suffer like this?

"Ye sarkar garib virodhi, mazdoor virodhi aur kisan virodhi hai (this government is anti-poor, anti-labourers and anti-farmers)," Singh alleged, claiming that while Constitutional rights are being diminished, kartavyas (duties) are being emphasised. (PTI)

## Sonam Wangchuk tried to instigate Gen Z for protests like Nepal, Bangladesh: Centre to SC



**NEW DELHI, Feb 2:** The Centre and the Union Territory of Ladakh administration told the Supreme Court on Monday that jailed climate activist Sonam Wangchuk tried to instigate Gen Z for protests like in Nepal and Bangladesh.

A bench of Justices Arvind Kumar and P V Varale was told by Solicitor General Tushar Mehta that Wangchuk even referred to 'Arab Springs' like agitation which has led to the overthrow of multiple governments in countries of the Arab world.

"He carefully crafted his speech to instigate Gen Z and asked for agitations like in Nepal and Bangladesh and used speeches of Mahatma Gandhi to cover the real intention," Mehta said.

The top court was hearing a plea filed by Gitanjali J Angmo, the wife of jailed climate activist Sonam Wangchuk, against his detention under the stringent National Security Act (NSA).

The NSA empowers the Centre and states to detain individuals to prevent them from acting in a manner "prejudicial to the defence of India". The maximum detention period is 12 months, though it can be revoked earlier.

Mehta said Wangchuk referred to the central government as "them" and separated people of Ladakh as "us" and called for "plebiscite" and "referendum", the calls which were made once in Jammu and Kashmir.

"There is no them or us but we are all Indians. Ladakh is a place which shares borders with two countries -- China and Pakistan... The area is very fragile."

"The speeches made by him have to be taken into account in totality. He was misleading young people and carefully using the speeches of Mahatma Gandhi to cover it. Gandhi ji never instigated people against their own government," Mehta said, adding that Ladakh is important for the supply chain for the security forces guarding the borders.

He contended that the district magistrate had to pass the order for his preventive detention after going through the relevant materials placed before him and the videos of his speech.

"It took four hours for the order of preventive detention to get executed as after the district magistrate passed the order, a DIG rank officer went to him and explained everything and showed him videos of his speeches. Grounds of detention was explained to him," Mehta informed the bench.

Countering the argument of Wangchuk's wife made through senior advocate Kapil Sibal, Mehta said that the district magistrate has not relied upon any "borrowed material" for passing

the detention order.

"This argument of 'borrowed material' itself suffers from inherent fallacy as the district magistrate does not need to go to each and every place where he made the speech and hear it firsthand. Some officials who heard the speech and made videos of it placed before the district magistrate and based on such relevant materials, an order was passed," the solicitor general contended.

The arguments remained inconclusive and would continue on Tuesday.

On January 29, Wangchuk, who is under detention in the Jodhpur Central Jail, denied allegations that he made a statement to overthrow the government like the 'Arab Spring', emphasising that he has the democratic right to criticise and protest.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal submitted that police have relied on "borrowed material" and selective videos to mislead the detaining authority.

Angmo claims the detention is illegal and an arbitrary exercise violating his fundamental rights.

Wangchuk was detained under the NSA on September 26 last year, two days after violent protests demanding statehood and Sixth Schedule status for Ladakh left four people dead and 90 injured in the Union Territory.

The government accused him of inciting the violence.

According to the amended plea, the detention order is founded upon "stale FIRs, vague imputations and speculative assertions, lacks any live or proximate connection to the purported grounds of detention and is thus, devoid of any legal or factual justification".

"Such arbitrary exercise of preventive powers amounts to gross abuse of authority, striking at the core of constitutional liberties and due process, rendering the detention order liable to be vitiated by this court," it alleged.

The plea said it is wholly "preposterous" that Wangchuk would suddenly be targeted after more than three decades of being recognised at the state, national and international levels for his contributions to grassroots education, innovation and environmental conservation in Ladakh and across India.

Angmo said the unfortunate events of violence in Leh on September 24 last year cannot be attributed to the actions or statements of Wangchuk in any manner. Wangchuk himself condemned the violence through his social media handles and categorically said violence would lead to the failure of Ladakh's "tapasya" and peaceful pursuit of five years, Angmo said, adding it was the saddest day of his life. (PTI)

## Election process can't be stalled at behest of individual grievance: SC



**NEW DELHI, Feb 2:** The Supreme Court on Monday said that election process cannot be lightly interdicted or stalled at the behest of an individual grievance.

A bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta said in respect of individual grievances, the ultimate and exclusive remedy lies by way of an election petition.

The bench delivered its verdict on an appeal challenging a July 2025 interim order of the Uttarakhand High Court which had directed the returning officer to allot a symbol and permit a man to participate in the election to the office of zila panchayat member.

The top court said the right to contest or question an election being statutory in nature, must be strictly construed and exercised in accordance with the statute governing the field.

"The high court must, therefore, eschew the grant of liberal interim reliefs in favour of individuals and instead remain mindful of the over-

arching public interest in ensuring the smooth and uninterrupted conduct of elections across the state," the bench said.

"The election process cannot be lightly interdicted or stalled at the behest of an individual grievance," the bench said, while setting aside the high court's interim order.

It noted the Uttarakhand State Election Commission had issued a revised notification resuming the panchayat elections in 12 districts and the man submitted his nomination for election to the post of zila panchayat member from a constituency in Pithoragarh district.

His candidature was cancelled after objection was raised alleging failure on his part to make the requisite disclosures.

Later, the man moved the high court aggrieved by cancellation of his candidature.

A single judge of the high court dismissed the plea observing that in view of the election process having already been set in motion, the petition was not liable to be entertained at that stage. The man then preferred an intra-court appeal and a division bench of the high court stayed the operation of the judgment rendered by the single judge.

The division bench also directed the returning officer to allot a symbol to the man and to permit him to participate in the election.

The appellant, who was declared elected opposed to the office of zila panchayat member, then moved the apex court challenging the high court's order.

In its verdict, the apex court noted that the single judge had assigned reasons, including that Article 243-O of the Constitution contains an express bar, stipulating that no election to any panchayat shall be called in question except by way of an election petition, to be governed by law enacted by the legislature of the concerned state.

"In our considered view, the division bench transgressed the limits of its jurisdiction in interfering with the electoral process, in disregard of the settled position of law. The election jurisprudence in this country has undergone a significant evolution," the top court said.

It said with a view to maintaining a delicate balance between decisions rendered by statutory authorities and judicial intervention by way of judicial review, a stage was reached where Parliament considered it appropriate to accord constitutional status to the Panchayati Raj institutions.

The bench said Uttarakhand had enacted the Uttarakhand Panchayati Raj Act, 2016, and consequently, the bar envisaged under Article 243-O of the Constitution stands attracted.

"By virtue of the express constitutional embargo contained in Article 243-O of the Constitution of India, the high court is precluded from exercising jurisdiction under Article 226 of the Constitution where a law enacted by the State Legislature provides for the remedy of an election petition to redress grievances arising during the course of an election," it said. (PTI)

## White Knight Corps GOC visits J-K's Kishtwar

**JAMMU, Feb 2:** The General Officer Commanding of the Army's White Knight Corps, Lieutenant General P K Mishra, on Monday visited Jammu and Kashmir's Kishtwar district and urged all ranks to remain vigilant and mission-ready at all times, officials said. Lt Gen Mishra was accompanied by General Officer Commanding, Counter-Insurgency Force (Delta), Major General A P S Bal, they said.

The visit came amid an ongoing operation in the snow-bound higher reaches of the Chatroo forest belt to hunt down a group of Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) terrorists, who had four encounters with the search parties over the past two weeks at different places.

"The GOC White Knight Corps, accompanied by GOC CIF (Delta), visited the general area of Kishtwar to review the counter-terrorism grid and assess the operational preparedness of the units deployed in the region. (PTI)

## Seychelles president to visit India from Feb 5-10

**NEW DELHI, Feb 2:** Seychelles President Patrick Herminie will undertake a six-day visit to India beginning Thursday with a focus on boosting bilateral ties in a range of areas including trade and defence.

It will be President Herminie's first visit to India since assuming office last October.

"At the invitation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Patrick Herminie, the President of the Republic of Seychelles, will undertake a state visit to India from February 5 to 10," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said. The visit coincides with the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two countries.

Herminie will hold wide-ranging talks with PM Modi on bilateral, re-

gional, and international issues of mutual interest, the MEA said.

The Seychelles president will also visit Chennai and Mumbai where he would be attending business events.

"Seychelles is a key maritime neighbour for India in the Indian Ocean region and holds a special place in India's Vision MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions) and our commitment to the Global South," the MEA said.

The visit of President Herminie to India is expected to lend further momentum to wide-ranging cooperation and robust people-to-people ties between the two countries, it said in a statement. (PTI)

## CM Stalin announces first of its kind Tamil Biennale in Jan 2027

**MAMALLAPURAM (TAMIL NADU) Feb 2:** Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin on Monday announced the launch of a first of its kind Tamil Biennale in January next year to position the state as a global hub for art and cultural tourism.

Inaugurating the Tamil Nadu Global Tourism Summit 2026 at the UNESCO heritage site of Mamallapuram, the chief minister also unveiled a ₹ 100 crore plan to establish a Special Area Development Authority for the town to create international standard infrastructure.

Addressing a gathering of global investors and industry stakeholders, Stalin said the state government has signed 127 Memoranda of Understanding representing a committed investment of ₹ 22,794.78 crore.

"These projects are expected to generate employment for 65,937 people across various segments, including heritage, adventure, and eco-tourism," he added.

The chief minister noted that under the 2023 Tourism Policy, the state nodal agency SIPCOT will identify and

develop new tourist destinations in two phases.

While the first phase covers sites in Kanyakumari, Kallakurichi, Erode, and Thoothukudi, the second phase has identified 31 locations for theme parks, camping sites, and nature stay.

This expansion is projected to create job opportunities for several lakh people across the state. Highlighting the growth of the sector, Stalin stated that the government has allocated 612.18 crore rupees for tourism development over the last five years.

This investment has helped in attracting 128.97 crore domestic and 45 lakh foreign tourists during the same period, he added.

He emphasised that the state provides a safe environment and excellent transport facilities for travellers.

During the event, the chief minister virtually inaugurated completed infrastructure projects worth ₹ 40.25 crore, including a glow garden in Mamallapuram and a new hotel in Chidambaram.

He also laid the foundation stone for additional facilities in Thirukkadaiyur and Tharangambadi. (PTI)

## Two tigers electrocuted in MP's Shahdol Nine big cat deaths in state since Jan 1, says official

**BHOPAL, Feb 2:** A tiger and a tigress died of electrocution in Madhya Pradesh's Shahdol district on Monday, taking the death toll of big cats in the state this year to nine, an official said.

The two carcasses were found less than 100 metres apart in agricultural land in North Shahdol forest division, some 75 kilometres from the district headquarters, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) Subharanjan Sen told PTI.

"The tigers died due to electrocution. Wires used in the incident have been recovered. With these two deaths, nine tigers have died in Madhya Pradesh since January 1 this year. Seven of these deaths took place in January," Sen said.

Another official said such electric traps are laid by farmers to protect crops from herbivores but they often end up electrocuting tigers.



The deaths come just days after the Madhya Pradesh High Court issued notices to the Centre and the state government on January 20 on a petition filed by wildlife activist Ajay Dubey.

In his petition, Dubey claimed

54 tigers died in the state in 2025, the highest annual mortality recorded since the inception of Project Tiger, with over half of the deaths attributed to unnatural causes.

Dubey told PTI the High Court

is scheduled to hear the matter again on February 11. He also said he has written to the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) and the state chief secretary alleging administrative negligence in the Shahdol incident.

Dubey said he has sought an overhaul of the wildlife administration. In his complaint, Dubey alleged the deaths reflected a systemic failure and sought action against senior forest officials.

Madhya Pradesh is home to the highest number of tigers in the country.

As per the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) website, a total of 19 tigers have died in the country between January 1 and 26 this year. As per the website, the last reported case, on January 26, took place in the buffer zone of Pench Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh. (PTI)

## Deployment outside Banga Bhawan part of security: Delhi Police as it refutes Mamata's claims

**NEW DELHI, Feb 2:** The Delhi Police on Monday refuted claims of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee regarding the SIR-affected families being bothered in the national capital, stating that the deployment outside the Banga Bhawan was part of security. Banerjee earlier in the day confronted police personnel outside the Bhawan in Chanakyapuri and alleged harassment of the families who have been brought to Delhi from West Bengal for a meeting with the chief election commissioner on Special Intensive Revision (SIR) here. They are staying at various properties of the state government in the city, including the Bhawan.

The West Bengal chief minister also questioned the heavy deployment at the location.

Refuting her claims, Special Commissioner of Police (Perception Management and Media Cell) Devesh Chandra Srivastav said, while addressing a press conference, that no police personnel entered the Banga Bhawan.

"We didn't restrict anyone living in Banga Bhawan and didn't stop the entry or exit of people. Deployment outside the building was a part of security as the West Bengal chief minister has Z+ security," he said.

The West Bengal Police had already informed us about her visit to the Bhawan, and we had made appropriate arrangements for her, he added.

In a statement, the Delhi Police said that as per the prescribed protocol, the responsibility of Banerjee's security arrangements in the national capital lies with the Delhi Police, and in this regard, the West Bengal Police had already informed its counterpart here.

"Thereafter, the Delhi Police has made extensive security and law-and-order arrangements at the Banga Bhawan, located at Chanakyapuri and Hailey Road in Delhi. The Delhi Police generally takes assistance from CAPF personnel throughout the year for various security and law-and-order duties, and they were also deployed for these law-and-order/security arrangements," the statement read.

If further said that in this connection, neither has any police personnel entered Banga Bhawan on Monday nor has any restriction been imposed on the movement of residents living there.

"As per the information received, it was reported that around 150-200 supporters of a political party had come from West Bengal and were staying at different locations in Delhi, including guest houses and hotels in South Delhi, New Delhi, and Central Delhi areas. It was also informed that VIPs and senior leaders would visit these guest houses or hotels. Accordingly, adequate deployment was made at these places," the Delhi Police said. (PTI)

# LS adjourned for day amid uproar over Rahul seeking to quote from ex-army chief's 'memoir'

**NEW DELHI, Feb 2:** A row erupted in Lok Sabha on Monday when Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi sought to quote from a "memoir" of former Army chief M M Naravane on the 2020 India-China conflict but faced strong opposition from Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and other BJP members who accused the Congress leader of misleading the House, leading to uproar and adjournment of proceedings for the day.

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla disallowed Gandhi from raising the issue, but he did not relent and several opposition leaders also rallied behind him. The House was adjourned twice and later for the day amid heated exchanges between the treasury and opposition benches.

Earlier, as Gandhi rose to speak on the Motion of Thanks to the president's address, he said he would first like to respond to the charges made by the previous speaker, BJP MP Tejasvi Surya, against the Congress on national-

ism and began quoting from what he stated was the "memoir" of Gen. Naravane talking about the India-China conflict of 2020.

However, Defence Minister Singh strongly protested this and asked Gandhi to clarify whether the book had been published or not. The uproar went on for about 50 minutes with Speaker Om Birla repeatedly stating that no book or newspaper clipping can be quoted on a matter not related to the proceedings of the House, and Gandhi insisting that the document was authenticated and he could quote from it.

Government sources said Gandhi was reading "concocted things" on China. They said there was ample material in the public domain on the decisions taken by India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, on China, and alleged that he "surrendered thousands of acres of land just to further his own statesmanship."

Gandhi said he never wanted to speak on the particular issue, but



decided to do so after BJP's Surya questioned the patriotism of the Congress party. Singh maintained that the book had not been published. Gandhi then said he was quoting from a magazine article to put forth his views.

Birla again disallowed it and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju called for the Speaker's ruling to be adhered to.

Rijiju said if the leader of the opposition repeatedly ignores the Speaker's ruling and flouts rules, the House will have to discuss what action should be taken against such a member.

The minister said Gandhi was setting a wrong example for young MPs by not following the rules of the House.

With Gandhi unrelenting, the

Speaker repeatedly warned him against quoting the book.

Singh then got up and asked if the book was not allowed to be published as alleged, then why didn't Naravane go to court against it. The defence minister also accused Gandhi of "misleading the House".

Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav supported Gandhi and urged the Speaker to allow the Congress leader to speak.

With both the treasury and opposition MPs unrelenting, the Speaker adjourned the House till 3 pm. When the House reassembled at 3 pm, Gandhi again attempted to raise the India-China border issue and was met with stiff resistance from the treasury benches.

Rijiju said Gandhi should not say things that belittle the army.

As the deadlock continued, Birla adjourned the House till 4 pm. Several opposition leaders, including TMC's Mahua Moitra and Kalyan Banerjee, RJD's Manoj Jha, and SP chief Yadav, rallied behind Gandhi over the issue. (PTI)

# Oppn boycotts Assembly session over dismissal of adjournment motion on prisoners' parole



**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, Feb 2:** Alleging that the LDF government was granting parole to CPI(M) activists convicted in criminal cases, UDF MLAs staged a protest inside the Kerala Assembly and boycotted the session on Monday after the Speaker rejected an adjournment motion seeking a discussion on the issue.

The Assembly session began with a walkout by opposition leaders, who demanded the resignation of Devaswam Minister V N Vasavan in connection with the Sabarimala gold loss case. After the question hour, the adjournment motion was moved by Revolutionary Marxist Party of India MLA KK Rema, who alleged that several convicts, including those recently sentenced, were granted parole and released from jail.

However, Speaker A M Samseer dismissed the motion, saying the issue was not of urgent importance and could be raised as a submission. Leader of the Opposition V D Satheesan questioned the rejection of the notice, alleging that criminals were being illegally granted parole and were creating law-and-order issues outside. "If the government is not interested in holding a discussion on an issue, why is such a provision created? Is it not important that criminals are being released onto the streets," he asked.

Satheesan pointed out that CPI(M) leader and Payyannur municipal councillor V K Nishad, who was sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment in December last year, was granted parole a month later. Replying to the allegations, Parliamentary Affairs Minister M B Rajesh said parole was granted to Nishad on January 8, but the issue was not raised when the Assembly session began last month. "Such a motion has been

brought as the Opposition is facing a dearth of subjects to raise in the Assembly," he alleged. Rajesh also claimed that during the Oommen Chandy government, a convict in the T P Chandrasekharan murder case was granted a reduction in sentence. Opposition MLAs raised placards, prompting the Speaker to say that printed materials were brought into the House after they realised the motion would not be admitted. "They do not want the issue to be discussed in the Assembly," Samseer said.

Following this, Opposition MLAs entered the well of the house and raised banners protesting the granting of parole to convicted prisoners, shouting slogans.

Later, the Opposition MLAs walked out of the Assembly holding a banner.

However, the Assembly continued, with LDF MLAs attending the calling attention motion, submissions, and financial business sessions, which were chaired by MLA Santhakumari K until the afternoon. Speaking to reporters outside the Assembly, Satheesan alleged that parole was being granted in violation of rules to criminals who committed murders for the CPI(M). He said the Opposition had sought an urgent discussion on the serious issue of hardened criminals lodged in jails being granted parole for hundreds of days in violation of all norms.

However, he alleged that the Speaker, by misinterpreting the Rules of Procedure, was acting against the government's best interest to block discussion of matters inconvenient to the CPI(M). He further alleged that some of the accused in the T P Chandrasekharan murder case had received parole for more than 1,000 days and had spent over three years outside jail. (PTI)

## MGNREGA was transformative law, its substitute a flaw: Congress

**NEW DELHI, Feb 2:** Hitting out at the Modi government, the Congress on Monday said MGNREGA was a transformative law while the new scheme brought by the Centre that "bulldozed it away" is a "flaw".

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said exactly 20 years ago today, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was launched at Badnapalli village in Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh.

"Over the years, it has provided 180 crore days of work to rural households (especially women), created an estimated 10 crore community assets, significantly reduced distress migration, empowered gram panchayats, and decisively increased the bargaining power of the rural poor for higher wages," Ramesh said on X.

It also launched the direct benefit transfer initiative to credit wages directly into bank and post office accounts, he said. Individual small and marginal farmers were able to establish irrigation facilities like digging wells on their own lands, the Congress leader said.

MGNREGA was a demand-based legal guarantee and not just an administrative promise, Ramesh asserted. "It was a right derived from Article 41 of the Constitution. Work was allocated when demanded by citizens and was made available anywhere in rural India. Projects were decided upon by the local Gram Panchayat, and the State Government having to pay only 10% of the overall costs was incentivised to provide work without having to bear significant costs," he said. Social audits through the Gram Sabha and high-level audits through the CAG were conducted regularly, Ramesh pointed out. He further claimed that Modi Government's new law guarantees only centralisation in New Delhi.

Work will now be notified in certain districts by the Modi government, he added. "Work will be provided based on the Government's allocated budget rather than on citizen demand. The scheme will stop altogether for two months every year during peak agricultural activities - a big blow to workers' bargaining power who won't be able to negotiate better wages for agricultural work," Ramesh said. (PTI)

## Mamata, TMC leaders confront cops in Delhi

**NEW DELHI, Feb 2:** West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday confronted police personnel deployed outside the Banga Bhawan in Delhi's Chanakyapuri and alleged harassment of the families affected by the SIR exercise in her state who have been brought to the national capital by the TMC.

Police said security arrangements in the area have been stepped up after the incident.

Addressing reporters, Banerjee said that the people from Bengal had come to raise their issue with the Election Commission, but were being "threatened". She questioned the heavy police deployment outside the Bhawan's premises.

However, Banerjee added that she doesn't blame the police, but "those who are on the top", referring to Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

The chief minister had reached the national capital on Sunday, a day before her meeting with Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar on the SIR issue.

Around 50 families impacted by the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in West Bengal have been brought to the national capital and are staying at various properties of the state government, including the Banga Bhawan in Chanakyapuri. A few of these families were later taken to the meeting at the Election Commission on Monday.

Amid high drama, Banerjee reached the Banga Bhawan in Delhi's Chanakyapuri on Monday morning, where she confronted the

Delhi Police over the "heavy" security deployment.

Banerjee was seen directly confronting the security personnel and asking them to be sensitive towards the families of those who have been impacted by the SIR in her state.

"People from Bengal are being threatened in Banga Bhawan... Our case is going on in the Supreme Court; we have a meeting at the Election Commission. We are here with an official appointment... People have died, can their families not talk to the media?" Banerjee said while talking to reporters.

The chief minister said, "Many families are here who have been impacted by the SIR process. Delhi Police have been deployed everywhere the SIR-affected families are staying. Where is the Delhi Police when a blast happens in Delhi?"

"But I don't blame the Delhi Police, I blame those who are on the top. This is incompetence... They can't protect the nation, they torture Bengal and the common people, and are committing atrocities in the name of SIR," she alleged.

"They get nervous when I come here... I could have brought lakhs of people," Banerjee said.

Claiming that Delhi has become "like a Zamindari", she said it has no place for the poor.

Banerjee was earlier seen approaching the police personnel at the Bhawan and saying, "I am not here for an agitation; if I was here for an agitation, you would have lost your mind."

She also said the Delhi Police should not bother the SIR-affected families that have come to the city.

"We are here for justice..." she said.

Police presence was increased at the Banga Bhawan in Chanakyapuri and Mandi House with personnel stationed at multiple points near the premises, police said, without elaborating on specific security arrangements.

Trinamool Congress (TMC) MPs, including Saket Gokhale, Dola Sen, Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar and Bapi Halder, meanwhile, rushed to different locations in the national capital where the SIR-impacted families are staying.

Gokhale was seen confronting the police personnel deployed outside a West Bengal Power Development Corporation Limited guesthouse in Delhi's Kailash Colony. Twenty people affected by the revision exercise in the eastern state are staying here.

Gokhale told PTI that the Delhi Police came to check the register there in the morning, and around 25-30 police personnel, along with a bus purportedly to carry detainees, was deployed at the location.

"The Delhi Police had told them they would be detained if they stepped out, and the gates had been locked. When I spoke to the police, they said it was a security measure for the Republic Day. When I said the Republic Day had passed, I was told an AI summit is happening," he said.

"I asked them where the Delhi Police is when blasts happen in Delhi?" he said. (PTI)

## SC issues notices to Centre, 12 states on PIL by Christian body against anti-conversion laws

**NEW DELHI, Feb 2:** The Supreme Court on Monday sought responses from the Centre and 12 states, including Rajasthan and Arunachal Pradesh, on a fresh PIL filed by the National Council of Churches in India challenging the validity of their respective anti-conversion laws.

The National Council of Churches in India (NCCI), represented by senior advocate Meenakshi Arora, also sought a stay on the operation of these state laws.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi took note of the submissions of the NCCI and sought responses from the Centre and 12 state governments within four weeks.

Ordering tagging of the fresh pleas with the pending ones, the CJ said a three-judge bench would hear them together.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, said that similar petitions are pending which challenge the state laws. "Our reply is ready and will be filed shortly," the law officer said.

Arora said that Odisha and Rajasthan have also come out with their separate laws, and they were not under challenge in earlier petitions. "There are amendments also in other Acts which are not challenged. Let me serve all the standing counsels," she said.

"Issue notice. Let a copy of each be served on Advocate Generals (of states) also. Let a counter affidavit (of the Centre and 12 states) be filed within four

weeks. Let respondents file a common counter affidavit. Having regard to the importance, let it be placed before a three-judge bench," the bench said in the order.

The counsel for the Christian body said that a few state laws are such that they "incentivise vigilante groups to complain" against so-called conversions, and hence many complaints are being filed.

The law officer opposed the submissions and said that these laws are covered by a five-judge SC bench judgement.

Besides the Centre, the bench also issued notices to Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Arunachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, and Himachal Pradesh.

On September 16, 2025, the top court had sought the stand of several states on other pending pleas seeking a stay on their respective anti-conversion laws.

The bench had made clear that it would consider the prayer for staying the operation of such laws once the replies were in.

It was hearing petitions challenging the constitutional validity of anti-conversion laws enacted by several states.

The court had appointed advocate Shrishiti as the nodal counsel for the petitioners and advocate Ruchira as the nodal counsel for the respondent states to streamline communication in the case. (PTI)

## Raut cites Ajit Pawar's statement on BJP 'scam' file, casts doubts on death

**MUMBAI, Feb 2:** Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Monday said former Maharashtra deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar died just days after his revelation that he had a file on BJP's scam and asserted the chain of events was "mysterious".

Talking to reporters in New Delhi, Raut also claimed Ajit Pawar had decided to sever ties with the BJP and rejoin his uncle and NCP (SP) president Sharad Pawar.

"Ajit Pawar was constantly saying that he has a file of the BJP's scam and he will make a revelation of this. He said this on January 15 and he died in an accident in the next 10 days. This is mysterious," Raut said. Ajit Pawar died in a plane crash in Baramati on January 28.

During the civic body election campaign, Pawar had claimed he had a file of BJP's corruption when it was in power in the state between 1995 and 1999 along with the undivided Shiv Sena.

"I had suspicion since the day Ajit Pawar revealed that he has a file of BJP's scam. This means Ajit Dada had decided to sever ties with the BJP. I could see clearly that Ajit Dada again wanted to get back with Sharad Pawar," Raut claimed.

The Shiv Sena (UBT) Rajya Sabha MP further said although Sharad Pawar has made it clear that Ajit Pawar's death was an accident and there should be no politics over it, the octogenarian leader will also release this is not as simple as it looks.

"A person like Ajit Pawar sits in an aircraft and there is no other important person in the aircraft, there is no OSD. There is no maintenance certificate," Raut claimed.

Raut said Ajit Pawar going back to his original home was a defeat for the Bharatiya Janata Party.

This would have been a turning point in the country's politics and BJP's terror would have ended, he added. The Rajya Sabha MP also claimed Ajit Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party has become a vassal of the BJP.

Raut's allegations drew a sharp response from BJP MLC Chitra Wagh who said he was using someone's death for his own interests by making reckless and unsubstantiated claims.

"If Ajit Pawar had any documents against the BJP, and if they have not been burnt, then they should be traced and collected. Raut is free to approach the court," said Wagh, who is also her party's state women's wing chief. (PTI)



## Strict action required against people involved in illegal sand mining: NGT to UP officials

**NEW DELHI, Feb 2:** Underlining that strict action is required to be taken against people involved in illegal sand mining, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed the Uttar Pradesh authorities to take stringent measures for preventing such unauthorised mining and transportation of minor minerals.

The green body was hearing a plea regarding illegal sand mining in the Kanpur and Unnao areas in Uttar Pradesh causing pollution in River Ganga.

In an order dated January 16 and made available recently, a bench of NGT's judicial member Justice Arun Kumar Tyagi and expert member Afroz Ahmad said, "The applicant has submitted that sand mining activities have been carried out without having environmental clearance (EC) and even if ECs have been granted, then those norms of clearances have not been complied with by the mining



lessees which has caused severe damage to river belt."

The tribunal noted that the applicant had named a private person or project proponent who was carrying out illegal sand mining in Bilhaur near Kanpur and built an unauthorised bridge in the Ganga river, dividing it into two streams which had become hazardous to

the nearby villages and could be catastrophic for the entire region.

Noting a report by a panel, the tribunal, however, said it revealed a "graver misconduct" of illegal construction of a temporary road in the Ganga, dividing the stream and obstructing its flow, which had a far more serious adverse environmental impact than any temporary bridge.

Rapping the state's director of the geology and mining department for remaining "completely insensitive to the issue" and "culpably ignoring" it, the tribunal said, "Natural river channels can be destroyed and dried up by spending small amounts of money, but cannot be created even with huge amounts of money and other infrastructural resources."

It said, "The facts and circumstances of the present case reveal serious violations of environmental laws/norms by the Respondent 2 (project proponent) and serious derelictions of duties by concerned officers of the (state's) mining department and Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board (UPPCB)."

The tribunal directed the state chief secretary to issue appropriate instructions to all district magistrates to ensure that a copy of the executed mining lease is immediately sent to the UPPCB's member

secretary and the board's regional office. This, the tribunal said, was necessary to ensure compliance with the EC conditions and for obtaining the mandatory consent to establish (CTE) and consent to operate (CTO) before commencement of mining.

It asked the director of the geology and mining department to ensure that complete information about all mining leases and permits was uploaded on its website. Besides, the UPPCB had to upload the details, including the application and grant of CTE and CTO by mining lease holders.

The tribunal said, "Illegal mining has to be dealt with sternly by visiting the persons involved with all stipulated consequences without any leniency. It may be observed that strict action is required to be taken against all persons involved in illegal mining in accordance with the law." (PTI)

## Govt allocates ₹ 67,300 cr for Jal Jeevan Mission in Budget for next fiscal

**NEW DELHI, Feb 2:** Union Jal Shakti Minister CR Patil on Monday said the central government has allocated Rs 67,300 crore for Jal Jeevan Mission in the Budget for the next financial year, and the fund will be provided to states if certain conditions are fulfilled.

The Centre is implementing Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM), in partnership with states, to provide tap water supply to every rural household. Replying to supplementaries in the Rajya Sabha during Question Hour, the minister asserted that the Modi government in the last 11 years has provided adequate budgetary support to implement all the central schemes and programmes. "No scheme has stopped because of a lack of funds," Patil emphasised. The minister was replying to a query by AAP member Sanjay Singh, who wanted to know the reason for the sharp reduction in allocation of funds under the Jal Jeevan Mission, from around Rs 67,000 crore in the Budget estimate for 2025-26 to Rs 17,000 crore in the revised estimate for the current fiscal.

To this, Patil said the revised estimate is lower as states had to fulfil certain conditions and address all complaints. There was a review meeting in September last year, and based on that, Rs 17,000 crore was allocated in the revised estimates. The minister said the finance minister, in the latest Budget, has allocated Rs 67,300 crore under the Jal Jeevan Mission for the 2026-27 fiscal. "We have prescribed certain conditions. If those are fulfilled, we will provide funds," the minister said, adding that there is no reason to have any doubt about the government's intention.

He said the government is taking action against irregularities. In a written reply, Patil informed that the Centre is implementing Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM), in partnership with states, to make provision of tap water supply to every rural household, as well as public institutions in villages like schools, anganwadi centres, ashramshalas, among others. (PTI)

# Arts, music, literature is soul of people: Governor Bhalla

**KOHIMA, Feb 2:** Calling arts, music and literature “the soul of our people and living memory of our history”, Nagaland Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla on Monday said that a society which invests in creativity invests in its conscience and future.

He was speaking at the Governor's Award 2025 ceremony in the fields of Arts, Music and Literature, held at Lok Bhavan, Kohima.

The governor said that in a rapidly changing world, artists, musicians and writers play a crucial role as custodians of heritage and as pioneers of new thought, bridging tradition and modernity without losing cultural roots.

He added that creativity has the power to inspire, unite communities

and shape a peaceful and progressive society.

The governor presented the awards to five recipients in the presence of Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio, legislators, senior government officials and distinguished guests.

The 2025 awardees are Manneyi Konyak (Arts – Sculpture and Woodwork), Guru Rarenbenba (Arts – Performing Arts), Colored Keys (Music), Moko Koza (Music), and Vishu Rita Krocha (Literature).

Earlier, Secretary, Department of Art and Culture, Bodeno S Colo, presented a brief outline of the Governor's Award, stating that the award, instituted in 2003, has become one of the state's most prestigious cultural

recognitions. She highlighted the transparent, multi-tier selection process conducted from the district level to the state level.

The programme featured the reading of citations, display of artworks, live performances in performing arts and music, and a literary reading, reflecting the diversity and vibrancy of Naga culture by the awardees.

Congratulating the awardees, the governor said that awards are milestones rather than endpoints, carrying a responsibility to mentor younger generations and continue contributing to cultural dialogue. He also acknowledged the role of families, mentors and cultural institutions in nurturing creative excellence. (PTI)



## Manipur NDA MLAs in Delhi; political parleys on cards ahead of expiry of Prez rule

**NEW DELHI, Feb 2:** The NDA MLAs from Manipur have arrived in the national capital after being summoned by the BJP central leadership, ostensibly to discuss the formation of a popular government in the Northeastern state where the current spell of the President's rule will expire next week.

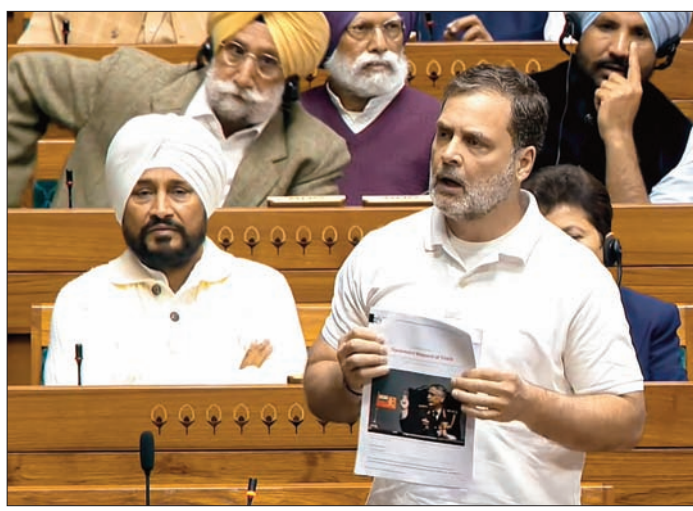
The legislators are expected to attend a meeting with senior BJP leaders on Monday evening during which the prevailing political situation in Manipur will be discussed, sources said.

While nearly 20 MLAs arrived on Sunday night, others reached here on Monday on the direction of the BJP leadership, which is expected to take a call on whether to form a party-led government or not in the next few days.

The meeting comes days ahead of the expiry of the second spell of the President's rule, which was first imposed on February 13, 2025, for six months following months of ethnic violence between Meitei and Kuki communities. The central rule was extended for another six months in August 2025.

Those who have arrived in the national capital include former chief minister N Biren Singh, Assembly Speaker Satyabrata Singh and former minister Y Khemchand Singh. BJP state president A Sharda Devi is also in Delhi.

The President's rule was im-



posed in Manipur after the BJP-led government headed by Biren Singh resigned on February 9. The 60-member state assembly, which has a tenure till 2027, was put under suspended animation.

The BJP central leadership had held several rounds of separate meetings with its Meitei and Kuki MLAs, allies NPP and NPP and a few Independent legislators over the last few months to gauge their views on whether the political situation was conducive for the formation of a popular government, the sources said.

On December 14, 2025, BJP's national general secretary (organisation) B L Santhosh and the

party's Northeast coordinator Sambit Patra met BJP MLAs from both warring Meitei and Kuki communities in Delhi under one roof.

However, sources said, the key hurdle in the progress of talks was the reported inability of the BJP's Kuki MLAs to give a commitment on participating in any future government, apparently due to community pressure.

The sources said the Kukis have been seeking a firm commitment from the central leadership on their demand for a Union Territory with a legislature.

Currently, there are 37 BJP MLAs in Manipur. Originally, a total of 32 BJP MLAs won the

2022 assembly elections. The JD(U) had won six seats, and five of its MLAs later defected to the BJP, taking the strength of the saffron party to 37.

Among the other MLAs, six are from the National People's Party (NPP), five from the Naga People's Front, five from the Congress, two from the Kuki People's Alliance (KPA), one from Janata Dal (United) and three Independents. There is one vacant seat following the death of a sitting MLA.

The sources said if a new government does not assume charge in the coming weeks, a statutory resolution will have to be adopted in both Houses of Parliament in the first part of the ongoing Budget Session for the extension of the President's rule.

After the imposition of the President's rule, Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla had taken a number of steps to restore peace and bring back normalcy, including asking those who looted arms from security forces to surrender them.

The ethnic violence between the Meitei and Kuki communities started after a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was seeking in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. At least 260 people lost their lives during the violence, which first started in May 2023. (PTI)

## Union Budget reaffirmed national priority for NE: Patton

**HT Correspondent**

**DIMAPUR, Feb 2:** Nagaland deputy chief minister Y Patton on Monday said the Union Budget for 2026-27, presented by Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday, reaffirmed the national priority accorded to historically disadvantaged and geographically challenged states, including Nagaland.

Congratulating Sitharaman for presenting her 9th consecutive Union Budget, Patton described the budget as highly visionary and in the right direction towards realising the dream of a Viksit Bharat.

“The provisions supporting high-value agriculture, including agarwood cultivation in the Northeast, were noted as being well aligned with the region's ecological and economic strengths and crucial for its long-term development,” he said.

Further, highlighting that the enhanced thrust on animal husbandry, fisheries, and rural entrepreneurship will directly support livelihood diversification in hill states like Nagaland, Patton welcomed the strengthened MSME framework, which demonstrates the intent to empower small



enterprises and local entrepreneurs in remote regions.

He stressed that the increased public capital expenditure would sustain infrastructure momentum critical for improving connectivity and market access.

He said the budget's emphasis on skilling, allied health, and the services sector was appreciated for expanding employment opportunities for youth and aligning with the Nagaland government's initiatives to skill its human capital.

He also acknowledged the sup-

port extended to handloom, handicrafts, and village industries, recognizing the cultural economy of indigenous communities.

Patton added that the budget's inclusive approach effectively integrates growth with social justice and regional equity, balances fiscal prudence with growth imperatives, prioritises capital formation, and provides a stable, outcome-oriented framework for inclusive and sustainable development crucial for achieving the vision of a Viksit Bharat and a Viksit Nagaland.

## Sikkim Chamber of Commerce welcomes Union Budget

**GANGTOK, Feb 2:** The Sikkim Chamber of Commerce (SCC) has welcomed the Union Budget 2026-27 and commended the Centre's balanced approach, combining economic growth with fiscal discipline.

SCC president Amar Agarwal said that the continued focus on infrastructure development, capital expenditure, and connectivity will play a crucial role in strengthening long-term growth and generating employment.

Agarwal said SCC is pleased that Sikkim has been included in the “Scheme for Development of Buddhist Circuits”, covering Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, and Sikkim. He said that, as outlined in the budget, this initiative will focus on the preservation of temples and monasteries and aims to highlight the northeast's rich spiritual heritage.

For Sikkim, where tourism is a major driver of livelihoods and small businesses, this scheme will create new opportunities for hoteliers, tour operators, transport providers, artisans, and youth entrepreneurs, he said.

The SCC president that the budget's continued support for health, education, rural development, and women empowerment schemes, along with central tax devolution and grants, provides vital financial stability for states with challenging terrains like Sikkim.

He said that while the budget does not provide immediate tax relief, its focus on regional development, tourism promotion, and enterprise growth is encouraging.

“On behalf of the business community of Sikkim, I express my sincere gratitude to the Finance minister and the Government of India for recognising Sikkim's potential and supporting our journey toward sustainable and inclusive development,” he said. (PTI)

## M'laya districts ban sale, transport of ‘illegally imported’ fish from Bangladesh

**SHILLONG, Feb 2:** Authorities in Meghalaya have banned the transportation, storage and sale of fish ‘illegally imported’ from Bangladesh in at least two districts following reports of unregulated consignments entering the state through porous border routes, officials said on Monday.

East Khasi Hills and South West Khasi Hills districts have issued the ban citing concerns over public health and bio-security, they said.

In East Khasi Hills, the in-charge district magistrate issued a prohibitory order under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023, stating that “the transportation, storage, sale or distribution of fish illegally imported from Bangladesh without valid legal documents is hereby prohibited within the jurisdiction of East Khasi Hills district.” A similar order was also issued by South West Khasi Hills district deputy commissioner.

The order also prohibits “the use of any vehicle, vessel, boat or other conveyance, and assisting, harbouring or facilitating any individual or group involved in such illegal activities,” it said.

According to the order, reports have been received that “illegal transportation of fish from Bangladesh is taking place through various border routes, riverine channels, roads and market points within the state,” with the possibility of such consignments



entering the district through multiple channels. It said the illegal transportation and entry of unregulated fish violate customs, import-export and food safety regulations and “carry the potential of introducing diseased or restricted species.”

Warning of wider implications, the order noted that “the illegal, unchecked and uncertified sale and distribution of these foreign-origin fish pose a serious risk to public health and sanitation, negatively impact the bio-security of the local aquatic ecosystem and cause economic loss to legitimate fish traders and the state government.”

Any person found violating the order “shall be liable for action under Section 223 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023, and other relevant provisions of law including the Customs Act, the Foreigners Act and the Passport Act,” it said.

The prohibitory order has come into force with immediate effect and “shall remain in force until further orders,” the district administration added. (PTI)

## Sikkim CM congratulates Dalai Lama on winning Grammy Award

**GANGTOK, Feb 2:** Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang on Monday congratulated Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama on winning the Grammy Award.

The Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, won his first Grammy in the category of best audio book, narration, and storytelling recording for his spoken-word album, Meditations: The Reflections of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, at the 68th annual Grammy Awards in Los Angeles.

Tamang said on X, “With deep reverence and joy, I offer heartfelt congratulations to His Holiness on receiving the Grammy Award for Best Audio Book, Narration for Meditations: The Reflections of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.” He said that this recognition honours a lifetime devoted to awakening compassion, wisdom, and universal responsibility.

Tamang said that through Dalai Lama's gentle voice and timeless teachings, countless beings are guided toward inner peace and a deeper remembrance of our shared interconnectedness. (PTI)

## NagaLanguge.ai wins 2nd prize at Global AI-Powered Education Award

**HT Correspondent**

**DIMAPUR, Feb 2:** A multidisciplinary research team has been awarded Second Prize at the AI-Powered Education Global Award 2025-2026 Contest, organised by the ASEM Lifelong Learning Hub, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand, on Sunday for their innovative project titled ‘Preserving Heritage through Technology: A Scalable NLP Solution for Nagamese language (NagaLanguge.ai)’.

A varsity release on Monday said the award-winning project addresses a critical gap in artificial intelligence by enhancing machine translation for low-resource and underrepresented languages, with a special focus on Nagamese, a widely spoken creole of Northeast India.

Using a token-augmented adaptation of the mBART-50 multilingual model, the research introduced language-specific tokens to significantly improve translation accuracy without requiring costly architectural changes or large-scale retraining. Experimental results demonstrated substantial performance gains, with Nagamese-English translation achieving a BLEU score improvement from 81.25 to 85.42, alongside up to 40% reduction in accent-induced translation errors when compared to leading multilingual models such as transformer, M2M-100, and NLLB-200.

## Wildfire in Nagaland's southern Dzukou valley largely contained: Officials

**KOHIMA, Feb 2:** The wildfire that has been raging in the southern Dzukou valley in Nagaland's Kohima district entered its eighth day on Monday, with authorities saying that the blaze has been largely contained.

Kohima Deputy Commissioner B Henok Buchem said the fire, which broke out on January 26, is now mostly confined to areas below and around Mount Tempfi.

The administration claimed that the main valley remains unaffected and free from immediate fire hazards.

“Fresh flare-ups have been reported in pockets near Mount Tempfi and Mount Merata, while the fire near the helipad area has been completely contained. A multi-agency firefighting operation has been underway since day one, involving over 150 personnel,” the DC said.

Due to the rugged terrain and inaccessibility of certain fire spots, particularly behind Mount Tempfi, manual firefighting has been limited in some areas, the official said.

“Two IAF helicopters have been engaged, with three each Bambi bucket sorties conducted on Saturday and Sunday,” he said, adding that additional sorties have been planned for Monday.

A Bambi bucket is a specialised, lightweight, collapsible, and cable-suspended container used by helicopters for aerial firefighting.



While a scientific damage assessment is yet to be carried out, preliminary estimates suggest that nearly one-third of the Dzukou area may have been affected, another district official said, adding that the “main

Dzukou valley has remained unaffected”. The authorities noted that most of the damage has been confined to dwarf bamboo vegetation, which is expected to regenerate naturally within a few months.

Several teams from the district administration, state disaster response force (SDRF), police, forest department, fire and emergency services, along with representatives of Southern Angami Youth Organisation (SAYO), home guards, drone operators, and personnel from 13 Assam Rifles have been engaged in the operations.

Southern Angami Youth Organisation (SAYO) president Zaseitsole Beio said the wildfire initially started between the Jakhama and Viswema entry routes and spread towards Kehoke and Mount Tempfi.

Highlighting the challenges on the ground, Beio said the dense vegetation, bamboo growth, and difficult terrain have made firefighting operations extremely difficult.

He commended SDRF personnel for their sustained manual firefighting efforts despite the risks.

Both the district administration and SAYO reiterated concerns over recurring wildfires in Dzukou, attributing such incidents to visitor negligence.

The government, in consultation with SAYO, is considering issuing a notification to institutionalise guidelines for the management and maintenance of the Dzukou valley, the officials said.

They appealed to trekkers and tourists to act responsibly, adhere strictly to guidelines, and engage authorised guides to ensure safety and protect the fragile Dzukou ecosystem. (PTI)

## 5 female church members killed in Kohima road mishap



**HT Correspondent**

**DIMAPUR, Feb 2:** Five members of the Chumoukedima Ao Baptist church travelling in a private bus were killed in a road mishap at 10th Mile Road under the Chiephobozou police station in Kohima district Saturday night.

The incident happened after the bus carrying 32 members of the church after a revival programme in Mokochung overturned at the location.

Kohima police PRO, in a release, on Sunday said all the deceased were females, and they were declared dead at the spot.

Their bodies were retrieved from the accident site and handed over to their bereaved families after completion of all necessary legal formalities, the release said.

The remaining passengers, who sustained minor injuries, were promptly shifted to the Christian Institute of Health Sciences and Research, Dimapur.

On receipt of information at around 8.20 pm, the release said, a joint team of the Kohima district administration, Chiephobozou police station Kohima traffic police immediately rushed to the spot to take stock of the situation and initiate emergency response.

Police said preliminary investigation at the scene ruled out rash and drunken driving as causes.

The bus likely developed a mechanical snag, leading to the accident. A detailed technical examination is underway.

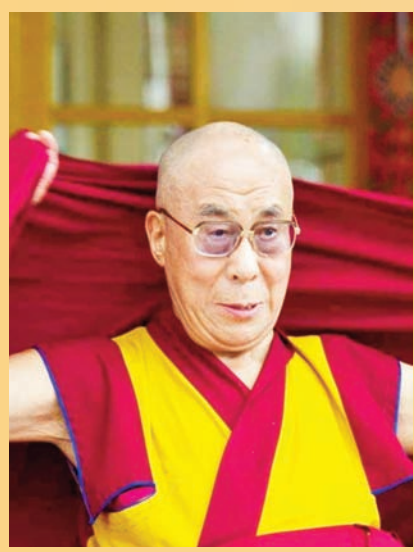
The Kohima police acknowledged the swift and compassionate assistance rendered by volunteers from the Northern Angami Youth Organisation and the Tsiesema village youth, who provided crucial on-ground support during the rescue and relief operations.

Further investigation into the exact cause of the accident is ongoing, the release added.

Meanwhile, Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio today announced ex-gratia of ₹ 2 lakh each to the families of the deceased.

He also announced financial assistance of ₹ 50,000 each to those seriously injured.

Rio extended heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families of the deceased and wished speedy recovery of the injured.



## Dalai Lama wins Grammy for spoken word album, Indian artistes draw a blank

"I receive this recognition with gratitude and humility. I don't see it as something personal, but as a recognition of our shared universal responsibility," the Dalai Lama said.

"I firmly believe that peace, compassion, care for our environment, and an understanding of the oneness of humanity are essential for the collective well-being of all eight billion human beings. I am grateful that this Grammy recognition can help spread these messages more widely," he said in a statement.

It was the first Grammy for the Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, as well as for director Steven Spielberg and for K-pop too.

Spielberg won in the "music film" category for "Music for John Williams", a documentary on his long-time collaborator, composer John Williams. With the Grammy, he joins the enviable EGOT list — those who have won an Emmy, Grammy, Oscar and a Tony.

Popular song "Golden" from "KPop Demon Hunters" won the Grammy for song written for visual media.

India did not register any wins despite its artists being nominated in different categories.

Sitarist Shankar was nominated for two of her albums — "Daybreak" in the 'global music performance' and "Chapter III: We Return to Light" in the 'global music album' categories. They both feature Shankar alongside Alam Khan and Sarathy Korwar.

She lost out in the 'global music performance' category to Bad Bunny's "EoO" and in the 'global music album' category to "Caetano e Bethânia Ao Vivo"

by Caetano Veloso and Maria Bethania.

Also nominated in the 'global music performance' category was "Shirini's Dream (Live)" by Shakti, featuring John McLaughlin, late Zakir Hussain, Shankar Mahadevan, Selvaganesh Vinayakram and Ganesh Rajagopalan.

The 'global music album' category had three India connect albums that were nominated — Shankar, Indian musician Siddhant Bhatia ("Sounds of Kumbha") and "Mind Explosion (50th Anniversary Tour Live)" by Shakti.

Shankar said she decided to skip the music's biggest night on Sunday and instead spend the time in India where she is touring.

"It's Grammy day today! I'm proud to be twice nominated - for my album Chapter III: We Return to Light and for 'Daybreak,' the lead song from the album. These are my 12th and 13th nominations, which in itself is HUGE! At the same time, it feels really good NOT to be in LA getting sucked into the whirlwind of interlocking excitement and stress that comes with major awards events," she posted on Instagram ahead of the ceremony.

"This year, I made a conscious decision not to go, and to be on the road in India during the ceremony. I wanted to practice what I preach, which is that awards don't matter like the actual connection playing music for people affords us as artists. I wanted to take care of my mental health too," she said, explaining how missing out on winning can be taxing.

The Grammys this year saw Bad Bunny win the Album of the Year for "Debí Tirar Más Fotos", making it the first time a

Spanish-language album won the top prize.

Bad Bunny used his first time on stage to share an anti-ICE message.

"Before I say thanks to God, I'm going to say ICE out," he said.

Billie Eilish won song of the year for "Wildflower" and used the moment to add her voice to the chorus of musicians criticizing immigration authorities Sunday.

"No one is illegal on stolen land," she said while accepting the award for the song from her 2024 album "Hit Me Hard and Soft." "\*\*\*\* ICE is all I want to say."

Olivia Dean, who won New Artist, called herself "a granddaughter of an immigrant".

Kendrick Lamar and SZA won Record of the Year at an electric 2026 Grammy Awards Sunday night for "Luther." With the win, he breaks Jay-Z's record to become the rapper with most Grammys. He now has 27 Grammys against Jay-Z's 25.

The award season is slated to draw more such protests against the Trump administration's mass deportation campaign in Minneapolis. Up ahead are the Oscars.

The US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has drawn a lot of backlash after a Border Patrol officer shot and killed 37-year-old nurse Alex Prettini and federal agents detained 5-year-old Liam Conejo Ramos.

Artists like Justin Bieber, Jason Isbell, Margo Price, Kehlani, Rhiannon Giddens, Joni Mitchell, Samara Joy, Amy Aden, Kamal Wilson, Helen J. Shen, Fannele and Billie Eilish were among the artists who wore pins saying "ICE OUT". (PTI)



## MERYL STREEP, ANNE HATHAWAY, EMILY BLUNT ARE IN FASHION CLASH IN 'THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA 2' TRAILER

Hollywood stars Meryl Streep, Anne Hathaway, and Emily Blunt are set to return to the world of fashion after 20 years with the upcoming sequel of the acclaimed film "The Devil Wears Prada" from 20th Century Studios. Directed by David Frankel, the 2006 film revolved around Hathaway's Andy, a young graduate, who starts working as an assistant to one of the city's biggest magazine editors, Miranda Priestly. The sequel is also directed by

Frankel. The makers shared the trailer of "The Devil Wears Prada 2" on Monday. The trailer starts with Andy, who returns to work with Priestly's Runway magazine as a Features Editor. As the trailer proceeds, it shows Priestly facing off against Blunt's character, who used to be her former assistant but turned into a high-powered executive for a luxury group.

The twist in the story is that Priestly fails to recognise Hathaway and dis-

misses her as "one of the Emilies".

The upcoming film is set to release on May 1. Actors Stanley Tucci, Tracie Thoms and Tibor Feldman are reprising their roles in the film. Written by Aline Brosh McKenna, the film is produced under Wendy Finerman Productions and Sunswest Entertainment.

Actors Simone Ashley, Lucy Liu, Kenneth Branagh, Justin Theroux and Helen J. Shen are among the newly added cast members to the film. (PTI)

## Ranbir Kapoor looking good as Lord Ram in 'Ramayana': Actor Arun Govil

Veteran actor Arun Govil, known for his iconic portrayal of Lord Ram in Ramanand Sagar's "Ramayan", has praised the upcoming cinematic adaptation of epic and endorsed its lead Ranbir Kapoor, saying that only a "good actor and a good human being" can convincingly play god on screen.

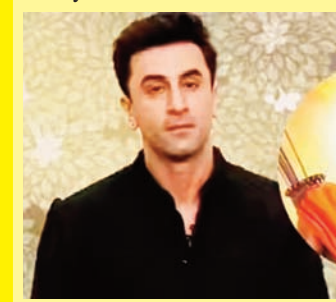
Billed as an ambitious cinematic event, the film features "KGF" star Yash as Ravana, Sai Pallavi as Goddess Sita, Sunny Deol as Lord Hanuman

The iconic series also starred Deepika Chikhalia as Sita, Sunil Lahri as Laxman and Dara Singh as Hanuman.

"Comparisons are always made when a standard is set and no one should feel bad that I'm being compared. I believe that in order to play the role of God, you should look like that. The look is very important.

When people see you, they should see God in you, and think, 'God can be like that'," he added.

That said, the 68-year-old dismissed any attempts to draw parallel between the upcoming "Ramayana" and the 2022 film "Adipurush" — starring Prabhas and criticised for its portrayal of



and Ravie Dubey as Lord Lakshman. It is directed by Nitesh Tiwari of "Dangal" fame.

"The 'Ramayana' by Nitesh Tiwari looks very good. It has been made with a lot of hard work by Nitesh Tiwari, the actors and the entire team. The main actor Ranbir Kapoor is looking very good as Lord Ram. He is a good actor and good human being.

"To play a God, you've to have a good, pure soul, and you have to be a good human being also," Govil, who is playing the role of King Dasharatha, Lord Ram's father, in "Ramayana", told PTI.

He was speaking on the sidelines of a FWICE and Cine Artiste Welfare Trust (CAWT) event held last week.

The actor, best known for his portrayal of Lord Ram in the 1987 television epic, noted that comparisons between different adaptations were inevitable due to the lasting influence of Ramanand Sagar's "Ramayan".

iconic characters and visual effects — by describing them as two fundamentally different projects.

"There is a lot of difference between 'Ramayana' and 'Adipurush'," he added.

Govil, playing the role of King Dasharatha in Tiwari's two-part cinematic epic, said he had a "good" experience working with the whole team.

"I finished work on the film long back. The experiences from that film, and with that unit are good for me," he concluded.

"Ramayana" is produced by Namit Malhotra's Prime Focus Studios and DNEG, in association with Yash's Monster Mind Creations, the film is a two-part live-action saga set 5,000 years ago and rooted in one of Indian mythology's most enduring epics.

The first part is slated to release worldwide in IMAX during Diwali 2026, with part two following in Diwali 2027. (PTI)

## Discomfort is where change begins: Rani Mukerji on 'Mardaani 3' message



Cinema not only entertains but has the power to speak to people's conscience, says actor Rani Mukerji, who hopes that her new film "Mardaani 3" makes the audience uncomfortable with its focus on the topic of child trafficking. The film, part of Yash Raj Films' hit franchise, has earned Rs 28 crore in worldwide

gross in three days of its release.

In a statement, released by YRF, Mukerji, who has donned the cop uniform for the third time to play SSP Shivani Shivaji Roy, said the love shown by the audiences is overwhelming.

"This film belongs to every viewer who believes that cinema can do more than entertain... it can maybe speak to our conscience." "If Mardaani 3 has moved you, disturbed you, or made you think - then it has done its job. Discomfort is where change begins. Our girls do not need our sympathy. They

need our protection. They need our courage. They need our voices right now and not tomorrow because just a film alone cannot bring change. Change begins in our homes, in our schools, in our streets. It begins when we teach our sons how to respect, when we empower our daughters with confidence and when we stand up for a girl child who cannot stand up for herself," she said.

The actor said the "Mardaani" franchise, which began in 2014, has told stories that are "uncomfortable, urgent and

necessary". The second chapter of the movie released in 2019.

Mukerji, who won the National Award last year for her performance in "Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway", said stories like the one depicted in "Mardaani 3" exist because the reality they reflect still exists.

"Every daughter of this country deserves safety, dignity, education and the freedom to dream without fear," she said, adding that she is humbled by how the fans have connected with the message of the film. (PTI)

## Shaan sets IIT Guwahati buzzing at the MyntraGlamfest Tour, drawing a footfall of 13,000

Myntra, in collaboration with Alcheringa, IIT Guwahati's iconic annual cultural festival, brought the MyntraGlamfest Tour to the Northeast with a high-energy campus celebration on February 1. Set against the vibrant backdrop of one of India's most prestigious institutes, the event brought together 13,000 students and music lovers, transforming the campus into a dynamic hub of fashion discovery, live entertainment, and youth culture.

The Guwahati edition saw strong engagement throughout the day, with students actively participating in fashion-led activities, campus showcases, and interactive experiences across the venue. The Myntra Experience Zone drew great interest, offering a mix of playful interactions, styling moments, and visual installations that encouraged exploration and self-expression. Campus-led performances and showcases highlighted student talent, while reward-driven activities enabled seamless engagement that extended from on-ground experiences to Myntra's digital ecosystem.

The evening culminated in a high-energy live performance by acclaimed singer Shaan, with his headlining act drawing an enthusiastic response from students across the campus. His set, featuring iconic and crowd-favourite songs, quickly turned the venue into a mass sing-along, turning it into a



memorable evening.

Commenting on the MyntraGlamfest Tour, Abhishek Gour, Senior Director of Brand, Myntra, said, "Our approach to youth engagement continues to evolve beyond conventional brand interactions to formats that are experience-led and community-driven. With the MyntraGlamfest Tour at IIT Guwahati's Alcheringa, we connected with young audiences in a way that felt authentic to the campus environment and reflective of how Gen Z interacts with fashion, making trend discovery more intuitive, social, and deeply resonant."

## Chambal International Film Festival concludes in Kota, promotes filmmaking in Rajasthan

The three-day Chambal International Film Festival concluded here on Saturday with a strong emphasis on promoting film production and documentary-making in Rajasthan, particularly in Kota. The eighth edition of the festival, held at the UIT auditorium, showcased 1,104 short films, documentaries, and animations from 93 countries. Director of Chambal International Film Festival Dr. Kapil Sidharth said.

He said around 75 filmmakers from across India and one from Rome, Italy, participated in the event, festival director. The festival aims to provide a platform for filmmakers, documentary creators, and animation artists while also encouraging film production, art, and culture in Kota, allowing local audiences to experience quality short films being produced globally, he added.

Dr Sidharth highlighted that the Italian movie Safed (White), shot in Kota last year, for the festival. The film became the first foreign production to complete 75 per cent of its shooting in Kota.

We are making efforts to attract more foreign filmmakers to Rajasthan, he said. Italian filmmaker Stefania Simoni, who worked on Safed, said the 93-minute film offers a unique perspective of Kota through a foreigner's eyes. She expressed admiration for Rajasthan's natural landscapes, architecture, palaces, and forts, noting that they provide remarkable locations for filmmaking.

Short film director Vaishali Panwar from Sangli, Maharashtra, who screened her film Desire at the festival, said short movies are a viable career option as they convey powerful messages with minimal budgets. Animation filmmaker Semon Das from Kolkata emphasized the growing career opportunities in animation and multimedia. Graphics, video editing, audio editing, and other related fields are in high demand in India and animation plays a crucial role in content creation across various industries, he said.

Documentary filmmaker Anil Goswami from Uttar Pradesh presented his documentary Vietnam War, which focused on the environmental and biodiversity destruction caused by wars.

The festival served as a platform to raise awareness about short films and animation, providing aspiring filmmakers with new opportunities, the organizers said. (PTI)

# Tottenham roars back to draw with Man City and do Arsenal a favor in Premier League title race

LONDON, Feb 2: Tottenham did fierce rival Arsenal a huge favor in the Premier League title race.

Dominik Solanke scored a second-half double — including one from an outrageous scorpion kick — as Spurs came from two goals down to salvage a 2-2 draw with second-place Manchester City on Sunday, leaving Arsenal with a six-point lead with 14 games left.

It was almost the perfect day for the leaders, with Aston Villa — the other title contender — losing 1-0 at home to 10-man Brentford.

Villa stayed seven points adrift of Arsenal and was in danger of being reeled in by fourth-place Manchester United, which scored a stoppage-time winner through Benjamin Sesko to beat Fulham 3-2 for a third straight league win under new manager Michael Carrick.

Having already overseen victories over City and Arsenal in his short tenure, Carrick appears to have the magic touch at revitalized United.

The same cannot be said of Pep Guardiola at the moment.

**Missed opportunity for City**  
This was a huge wasted opportunity for Guardiola's City, which was up against a heavily depleted Tottenham team and was cruising 2-0 ahead at half-time thanks to goals by Rayan Cherki and Antoine Semenyo. At times, it was almost too easy for City in front of an apathetic home crowd at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium.

City then collapsed as a revitalized Tottenham fought back. Solanke bundled in Spurs' first goal — appearing to kick the back of Marc Guehi's leg, resulting in the ball dribbling over the line — and then grabbed the equalizer with a deft, flying back-flick that looped over City goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma and into the corner.

"The first half was difficult — we couldn't get near them at times," Solanke said.

"The second half was a different story. In the second half, we were great and



grew with confidence and belief."

In the last five games, City has looked vulnerable in losing twice — to United and tiny Bodo/Glimt in the Champions League — and now spluttering against

an injury-hit Tottenham.

"It is a setback but we are still there," Guardiola said.

"There are 14 games to go and a lot of points. We will see."

Arsenal, a 4-0 winner at Leeds on Saturday, might not have a better chance to end its league title drought stretching back to 2004.

**Villa loses to 10 men**

Villa played for more than half the match with an extra man after Brentford winger Kevin Schade's straight red card for kicking out at Matty Cash in the 42nd minute after they had challenged for the ball.

In the first minute of first-half stoppage time, Dango Ouattara escaped down the right and scored at the second attempt for what proved to be only goal as Brentford weathered a second-half onslaught.

**United fans protest**

United squandered a two-goal lead earned by goals from Casemiro and Matheus Cunha, with Raul Jimenez — via a penalty — and Kevin scoring to bring Fulham briefly level at Old Trafford.

There was still time for Bruno Fernandes to send over a cross that was con-

trolled by Sesko before he swiveled to curl home a finish in front of the Stamford End.

"It's the best feeling, I have to say," Carrick said about the kind of late winners United scored so often under his old manager, Alex Ferguson.

"People leave here with more than just, 'United won today.' It's layers on top of that, the emotion and the feeling, and it's why we all love it so much."

The match took place after a protest by around 500-600 United fans unhappy at the ownership of the 20-time champions, but the team is finally in a decent league position — fourth place — in its bid to return to the Champions League.

United is five points behind Villa with 14 rounds remaining.

Also Sunday, Crystal Palace — without star striker Jean-Philippe Mateta ahead of his possible move to AC Milan — drew 1-1 at 10-man Nottingham Forest, which had Neco Williams sent off in the 45th minute for a handball on the line. (AP)

## Delhi Capitals eye fourth straight WPL final as Gujarat Giants chase maiden berth

VADODARA, Feb 2: Runners-up in the first three editions, perennial bridesmaid Delhi Capitals will seek to make their fourth straight final when they take on an ambitious Gujarat Giants side in the Women's Premier League eliminator here on Tuesday.

One of the most consistent sides in the league's brief history, the Capitals once again navigated the league phase successfully to finish among the top three, making them the only team to qualify for the playoffs in all four seasons so far.

Their 2026 campaign, however, has been a mixed bag, marked by flashes of both dominance and inconsistency. They have won four matches while losing as many so far. Delhi's bowling has been spearheaded by pacer Nandani Sharma, who has been particularly effective at the death, picking up the bulk of her 14 wickets in the final overs to keep the Capitals competitive in tight contests.

She has been well supported by left-arm spinner Shree Charani (14), while experienced South African all-rounder Marizanne Kapp (10) continues to lend control and reliability.

With the bat, Kapp's compatriots Laura Wolvaardt (241 runs) and



Lizelle Lee (240) have provided solidity at the top of the order, though India opener Shafali Verma's (208) inconsistency remains a concern.

The Capitals, however, will take heart from skipper Jemimah Rodrigues rediscovering her touch in a pressure situation in the previous match after struggling for consistency through the season.

Gujarat Giants, on the other hand, head into the eliminator with momentum firmly on their side after recovering impressively from a three-match losing streak.

The Giants strung together a hat-trick of wins, including a confidence-boosting 11-run victory over defending champions Mumbai In-

dians, their first ever against the two-time champions, to book their place in the knockouts.

They will also draw confidence from having beaten Delhi Capitals in both their league games this season, with veteran New Zealander Sophie Devine playing a decisive role on both occasions.

The Kiwi star has been the stand-out performer of the tournament, emerging as the leading wicket-taker with 17 scalps from eight matches, while also scoring 237 runs, including two half-centuries.

Devine's all-round brilliance has made her the Giants' biggest match-winner, and her influence will once again be central to their hopes of

reaching their maiden final.

Gujarat have also been buoyed by Georgia Wareham's return to form, highlighted by a counter-attacking 26-ball 44 not out against MI.

The Giants will also hope for key contributions from Australian stalwart Beth Mooney and skipper Ashleigh Gardner.

The winner of the eliminator will face former champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the final on February 5.

**Teams:**

**Delhi Capitals:** Jemimah Rodrigues (c), Taniya Bhatia, Chinelle Henry, Lizelle Lee, Niki Prasad, Shafali Verma, Laura Wolvaardt, Lucy Hamilton, Marizanne Kapp, Alana King, Sneha Rana, Pragati Singh, Minnu Mani, Nandani Sharma, Shree Charani, Eddla Srudana.

**Gujarat Giants:** Ashleigh Gardner (c), Kanika Ahuja, Sophie Devine, Bharti Fulmali, Kim Garth, Kashvee Gautam, Rajeshwari Gayakwad, Happy Kumari, Jintamani Kalita, Tanuja Kanwar, Beth Mooney (wk), Renuka Singh, Anushka Sharma, Shivani Singh, Ayushi Soni, Georgia Wareham, Danni Wyatt-Hodge.

Match Starts at 7:30pm. (PTI)

## No Indo-Pak contest in T20 World Cup could cause losses to the tune of USD 250 million

NEW DELHI, Feb 2: An India-Pakistan fixture in an ICC event generates revenue to the tune of a staggering "USD 250 million (over ₹ 2200 crore)", as per some estimates and the absence of the cash-crowd fixture from the upcoming T20 World Cup is certain to cause heavy losses to all stakeholders.

Such is the pull of the contest between the arch-rivals, who only play in multi team competitions due to the tense relations between the two countries, that the ICC places them in the same pool in every world event. On Sunday, the Pakistan government announced its team's boycott of the marquee clash in Colombo on February 15.

If Pakistan remain adamant, they would risk losing millions in revenues and a no-show would cause significant financial damage to the ICC coffers and India media rights holder JioStar which is already trying to renegotiate a USD 3 billion deal with the world body.

The host broadcaster could incur advertisement revenue losses in the range of ₹ 200 crore to ₹ 250 crore for a marquee game whose 10 second commercial slot can cost up to ₹ 40 lakh.

While a walkover would hand full points to India, the ICC retains the authority to impose financial penalties on the PCB.

A former ICC and PCB communications head, Sami-ul-Hasan Bur-



ney, summed up the magnitude of the money riding on just one game.

"As regards the sanctions or the losses, as I said, the one match is costing USD 250 million (everything accounted for not just broadcaster's loss). Pakistan's annual revenue is USD 35.5 million, so there is a big, big difference," he told PTI.

The Sydney Morning Herald quoted industry sources with knowledge of confidential negotiations on the costs involved in the game with a billion plus audience.

Each game between India and Pakistan has an estimated value of around USD 250 million, it added.

The tone and tenor of ICC's statement following the Pakistan government announcement also underlined the undisputed value of the contest. "This position of selective participation is difficult to reconcile with the fundamental premise of a

global sporting event where all qualified teams are expected to compete on equal terms per the event schedule," the ICC said.

"ICC tournaments are built on sporting integrity, competitiveness, consistency and fairness, and selective participation undermines the spirit and sanctity of the competitions."

Amid the drama, Pakistan left for Colombo to play its other games in the showpiece starting February 7.

With the ICC, PCB and BCCI agreeing to a hybrid model for the India-Pakistan games till 2027, the Pakistan board would find it tough to justify the selective pullout.

It all started with Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman's removal from the IPL on BCCI instructions, leading to the withdrawal of the national team from ICC event co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka. (PTI)

## Theegala picks second straight Top-10 finish at Farmers Insurance



SAN DIEGO, Feb 2: Indian American golfer Sabith Theegala compiled his second straight Top-10 finish as he rode on a fine run of four birdies in a row in the middle of the final round of the Farmers Insurance Open here.

He carded 6-under 66 with seven birdies and one bogey and totalled 14-under to finish tied 7th. A week earlier he was tied 8th at American Express. Sudarshan Yellamaraju (72) was T-56, while Akshay Bhatia missed the cut.

Rustin Rose was in a class of his own at Torrey Pines and cruised to a seven-shot wire-to-wire win. He carded 2-under 70 to get to 23-under 265 which also broke Tiger Woods' 72-hole tournament record last set in 1999. Rose's rounds were 62-65-69-70 as the tournament had one of its best weeks of weather.

Theegala birdied the first and the third and dropped his only shot on the fourth. He got on a birdie run from seventh to the 10th, but then parred six in a row, often from 10-15 feet. He had his last birdie on the 17th and closed with a par for a 66.

Theegala plays the Waste Management Phoenix Open next week. Englishman Rose, 45, who is playing some of the best golf in his career moved to No. 3 in the world. Only Vijay Singh was older when ranked that high in September 2008.

No one got closer than the six-shot lead he had at the start of the final round. He tapped in for par to finish at 23-under, one better than Woods and George Burns in 1987. He was also the first wire-to-wire winner at Torrey Pines in 71 years, since Tommy Bolt in 1955. (PTI)

## Hazlewood won't join Australia squad in early part of T20 WC: Selector Dodemaide

SYDNEY, Feb 2: Australian fast bowler Josh Hazlewood will not travel with the squad for the early part of its T20 World Cup matches in Sri Lanka as he continues his rehabilitation after recovering from an injury here, national selector Tony Dodemaide said on Monday.

The trio of Nathan Ellis, Tim David and Glenn Maxwell, however, have reached Colombo and will be joined by the Australian squad on Tuesday for the upcoming ICC T20 showpiece, Dodemaide said.

Australia will play their four preliminary games in Colombo and Pallekele, starting February 11 against Ireland.

Hazlewood will remain in Sydney during the early part of the tournament, which begins on February 7, to continue his return to play program. Sean Abbott has joined the touring party as a travelling reserve.

Dodemaide said: "Nathan, Tim and Glenn have arrived in Colombo and we look forward to meeting up with them when we arrive from Pakistan."

"We felt with Josh it was more practical and beneficial for him to continue his rehabilitation at home in a

familiar environment before travelling to Sri Lanka."

Hazlewood was ruled out of the 2025-26 Ashes series due to a lingering Achilles injury that occurred during his rehabilitation from a previous hamstring strain.

Dodemaide did not reveal the specifics of when exactly Hazlewood would be available for the tournament. Australia's preliminary engagements will end on February 20 and their other group rivals are Oman, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe.

Last week, seasoned pacer Pat Cummins was ruled out of the entire tournament due to a persistent back injury. He has been replaced in the 15-man squad by Ben Dwarshuis.

Dodemaide said Abbott is there as a backup for Ellis. "With Nathan also completing his return to play we decided to bring Sean with us as fast bowling cover should anything come up at short notice," he said.

"Sean is an accomplished and versatile international player who has experienced numerous World Cup campaigns. It made sense for him to stay with the group following the Pakistan tour." (PTI)

## From injury to diet to age verification: How AI is reshaping Indian athletes' training

NEW DELHI, Feb 2: From dietary recommendations to injury predictions and from age verification to psychological mapping -- Artificial Intelligence is set to become a force of change in Indian sports with a centralised data management system that would not just customise training but also track athletes' progress like never before. At the Sports Ministry's National Centre for Sports Science and Research (NCSSR) here, India's first Athlete Management and Sports Science platform has been developed and put into operation.

It covers the elite athletes vigorously for now but is intended to penetrate the junior-most level going forward so that "catch them young" becomes a planned reality of Indian sports.

It allows coaches and sports science experts to track the smallest details of an athlete's day, right down to the quantity of their lemon water intake or the number of soaked almonds consumed in the morning.

It's a platform developed by NASSCOM DeepTech startup Darwin, incubated with IIT Bombay, which is also a shareholder in the company.

Designed "specifically for Indian training needs", SPEEED AI (Sports Performance Enhancement and Evaluation through Digitization) has myriad data from Sports Authority of India's (SAI) 14 National Centres of Excellence (NCOE), covering over 6000 athletes right now.

Every NCOE head has access to the data



of the athletes based there while the collated information is available only to the top leadership of NCSSR in Delhi.

"We want to map everything from the baseline, whether it is wrist strength, shoulder strength, or postural balance because only then we start the training in areas where there is scope for improvement," NCSSR Director and head Brigadier (Dr) Bibhu Kalyan Nayak told PTI at the centre, which held a workshop on sports sciences in precision disciplines (shooting and archery) just last week.

Nayak has previously served as the head of International Hockey Federation's (FIH) Health and Safety Committee, was

in-charge of the Safdarjung Hospital's Sports Injury Centre and travelled with the Indian contingent to the Tokyo Olympics as its Medical Officer during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021. He took over as NCSSR's first head in 2022 and can barely hide his excitement while talking about the possibilities that AI will open up.

"Through AI, it would be easier to track injuries, even predict injuries. For instance there are 300 archers at a SAI centre and the maximum risk of injury is say a wrist issue.

"We will zero it down to which centre has the maximum wrist issues, accordingly we can ask strength and conditioning staff

to look at why there are so many of such cases in that particular centre.

"Data will give you actionable inputs and that helps in taking right decisions," he asserts. Early detection of injury risk would not just reduce downtime to prevent loss of training days but also enhance athlete longevity. The company that has developed the platform, promising a 360 degree Athlete Performance System, says the biggest benefit would be injury detection and management.

"Niggles like minor inflammation are always a good indicator of what might happen next. The Drona dashboard stores such inputs to give an indication on what might happen next and since the information is centralised, it allows for preemptive action instead of waiting for something to go wrong at a bigger scale," Darwin CEO Rahul Bajaj told PTI while showcasing the system that would soon have chat bot 'Akshay' helping athletes plan their warm-up routines if needed. Bajaj says SPEEED is inspired by Australia's Smartabase system that was created back in 2003 for sports analytics in that country and later found takers even in the USA.

"Our system is inspired by Smartabase but evolves as per changing technology. Also the sensitive health and personal data of our athletes remains in India, not parked in servers somewhere in the US. Data safety is already a major concern every-

where," Bajaj said.

"Ours is a role-based access control where complete information is available only at the very top level in SAI and Sports Ministry to ensure data privacy," he added.

The injury prediction system relies on analysing something as minute as joint angles.

"AI evaluates acute versus chronic workload to identify high-risk fatigue zones. Early Warning System like a subtle gait and movement changes are detected before minor stress escalates into serious injury," said Arun Navani, head of sports tech firm A2S Edge that is also working with SAI to enhance its AI mechanisms for injury management. An unintended positive consequence of such scrutiny is the strengthening of anti-doping mechanisms, according to the experts.

"On SPEEED, athletes can upload prescriptions and know what might be a banned drug. Since our AI assistant Drona is built entirely on SAI-verified data, it won't crawl around the web to may be end up giving misleading information. That's a huge safeguard against AI hallucination," said Bajaj.

**Tackling Age fraud**

Age fraud has been a bane of Indian sports for decades now with manipulation of paper records being rampant despite the introduction of The Tanner-Whitehouse 3 (TW3) test, that assesses skeletal maturity to verify age. (PTI)

## 'BCCI's tactful handling of Mustafizur's IPL ouster would've prevented T20WC turmoil'

**NEW DELHI, Feb 2:** Critical of the BCCI's handling of Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman's ouster from the IPL, former ICC Head of Communications Sami-ul-Hasan Burney on Monday said the Indian Board could have saved the T20 World Cup from the current turmoil by being more tactful.

Rahman's release from a contract with the Kolkata Knight Riders triggered a chain of events that led to Bangladesh's exit from the event starting February 7 after refusing to play in India due to "security concerns". In an apparent show of solidarity, Pakistan has now decided to forfeit the match against India on February 15 on government instructions.

Burney, who also worked as Media Director of Pakistan Cricket Board after the end of his ICC tenure, said the BCCI could have avoided public statements announcing Rahman's ouster without actually specifying the reasons.

"I mean, things could have been easily avoided if the cricket administrators or people responsible for the game had been a little bit more careful and avoided public statements, like a Bangladesh player (Mustafizur) has to be removed from the franchise," Sami told PTI.

"I mean they (the BCCI) didn't have to say it publicly. They could have easily privately told the franchise (KKR) to release the player and nobody would have known what happened and life would have moved on."

"Sometimes you make an error of judgment and make a statement which has implications. So the



January 3 announcement became a trigger," he explained.

Burney, a former journalist with "The Dawn", worked for more than a decade at ICC's Dubai headquarters and till last year, was PCB's Media Director.

He offered an into the mind of PCB chief Mohsin Naqvi, who also happens to be his country's Interior Minister and the second most important person in Pakistan's central government.

Burney believes that his former boss has looked at ICC's refusal to change Bangladesh's venues from India to Sri Lanka as "shifting of goalposts."

"I refer back to November, 2024, when I was a part of the Pakistan Cricket Board, and I was with Mr Mohsin Naqvi, when that e-mail came in which the ICC said the BCCI has informed them that

the Indian government has refused permission to send their team to Pakistan."

"Mr. Naqvi believes when a similar situation arose in January (with regards Bangladesh), the same principles were not applied, and that is where he is referring to the double standards."

"I think that is what is upsetting Mr. Naqvi and the PCB, because they think goalposts are being changed, or shifted."

Asked if Bangladesh's conflict with India was Pakistan's fight, he replied: "We may agree with it, we may disagree with this decision, we may argue...but when the government makes a decision, they are looking at something bigger than what what you and I are seeing."

The ICC has indicated that the PCB could face some punitive action, including financial penalties

and loss of revenue which could amount to millions of dollars but Burney believes that Pakistan must have been taken this decision keeping implications in mind.

"I mean, these decisions are not easy decisions to make. They must have spoken to a lot of people, sought the advice from the experts, looked at the legal side."

"I am sure an extensive exercise would have taken place before the government of Pakistan made that decision. As regards the sanctions or the losses you are talking about, that one match is costing USD 250 million (everything accounted for not just broadcaster's loss).

"Pakistan's annual revenue is USD 35.5 million, so there is a big, big difference," he said.

Burney also pointed to the fact that Pakistan have somehow survived the financial loss of not being able to play India bilaterally for two decades now.

"...unlike other countries, Pakistan have not hosted India for 20 years in a bilateral series, even though they have toured India twice in 2007 and then 2012-13 for white-ball cricket."

"They have not played, I mean, they were playing off-shore for 10 years, 2009 to 2019 not at home, but in the Middle East, or in the UAE, and still managed to win two tournaments, the T20 World Cup in 2009 and 2017 Champions Trophy," he said.

"So, yes, there will be financial implications, but if Pakistan Cricket Board can survive that 20-year period without playing India, they can sustain." (PTI)

## Mandaviya asserts India's operational readiness for int'l sports events



**NEW DELHI, Feb 2:** Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Monday asserted that India has displayed "operational readiness" by hosting 45 international competitions covering over 20 disciplines in the last one year, positioning the nation as a "reliable destination" for the 2036 Olympic Games.

Mandaviya cited endorsements from International Federations to validate his point even though the country has also faced fair amount of criticism for organisational issues during the India Open of badminton last month.

India will be hosting the 2030 Commonwealth Games in Ahmedabad, which is also bidding to host the 2036 Olympics.

"India has hosted nearly 45 international competitions across over 20 sports disciplines in the last one year, spanning Olympic, Paralympic and Commonwealth core sports," Mandaviya told reporters.

This "sustained hosting record demonstrates India's capacity to deliver technically complex, multi-venue, broadcast-intensive events with large international participation," he added.

In 2025, India hosted the Asian Aquatics Championships (Ahmedabad), World Para Athletics Championships (New Delhi), Kho Kho World Cup, FIH Pro League, ISSF Junior World Cup, BWF World Junior

Championships, and the UCI Pune Grand Tour cycling event.

"This sustained hosting experience directly strengthens India's preparedness for the Commonwealth Games 2030, already awarded to the country, with demonstrated success across CWG disciplines, venues, and international federation coordination."

"Collectively, India's hosting track record and repeated validation by senior IF officials align seamlessly with India's aspiration to host the Olympic Games 2036, positioning the nation as a reliable, globally respected, and future-ready destination for the world's largest sporting events," he said.

Mandaviya also plans to bring out schemes to boost India's sports goods manufacturing sector, which has been given a first-time allocation of Rs 500 crore in the union budget.

"Right now we are importing 80 to 85 per cent of our sports goods. I will bring schemes so that we can manufacture sports goods in India and don't have to depend on imports," he said.

**MY Bharat Budget Quest**

Mandaviya also launched MY Bharat Budget Quest 2026, a nationwide youth-centric initiative aimed at enhancing the understanding of the Union Budget and making budgetary provisions more accessible, reliable and citizen-centric.

It is a national-level online quiz on the Union Budget, open to youth registered on the MY Bharat portal. The minister said that this competition will start on the MY Bharat platform (<https://mybharat.gov.in/>) from Tuesday.

The deadline for participation is February 17.

Top performers from each state and Union Territory will take part in the second round from February 17 to March 3, which will be an essay-writing round.

In the essay round, youth will receive eight topics related to the Union Budget aligned with the vision of Viksit Bharat.

Evaluation of essays will be undertaken between March 3 and 10 and state/UT-wise merit lists will be announced on March 10.

State and UT-wise winners will subsequently get an opportunity to participate in an interaction with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the vision of a Viksit Bharat Budget. (PTI)

## Chhetri-led Bengaluru FC players agree to pay cuts for truncated ISL



**NEW DELHI, Feb 2:** Bengaluru FC players, including India legend Sunil Chhetri, have accepted pay cut for the truncated Indian Super League (ISL) season beginning February 14, club owner Parth Jindal said while appreciating the footballers for making the "sacrifice" in the best interest of the franchise and the sport.

Jindal said the club's management has had open, honest conversations with all first team players about "navigating the situation the sport finds itself in."

The delayed ISL, which has been paused for more than four months, will restart on February 14 in a truncated version.

"Everyone is well aware of the challenging phase Indian Football is going through. For me, as BFC team owner and someone who is

deeply passionate about the sport and the club, this has been one of the toughest periods ever," Jindal wrote on 'X'.

"I am grateful to all the first team players who have agreed to reduce their remuneration during this phase."

"Without a doubt, this was one of the toughest decisions we have had to make as a club, and I truly appreciate that the players have made this sacrifice in the best interests of the club and the sport."

Jindal was among the first ISL club officials to have mooted the necessity of voluntary pay cuts by the players, when he last month called on the players to "make sacrifices" in view of the "financial burden" the club will shoulder to participate in the delayed ISL.

He had said that without the support of the players, his franchise may have to "shut shop for good".

At that time, Jindal did not specifically explain the kind of "sacrifice" the footballers will be expected to make, but had hinted at a reduced salary for this season.

The club features, among others, former India captain Sunil Chhetri and star goalkeeper Gurpreet Singh Sandhu.

Meanwhile, Bengaluru FC have announced the appointment of former India international Renedy Singh as first team head coach for the upcoming ISL season.

Last month, FC Goa players, including India captain Sandesh Jhingana, and support staff have accepted pay cut for the truncated ISL season, with the club terming their decision a "selfless" act.

The AIFF Super Cup champion team had said it was "deeply humbled by this gesture and immensely grateful for the unity, character, and commitment shown by the group."

FC Goa have some other India players like Udanta Singh and Boris Singh in their roster.

ISL 2025-26 was thrown into disarray after its earlier organiser and the AIFF's former commercial partner FSDI ended the Master Rights Agreement (MRA) with the national federation on December 8 last following disagreement between the two parties regarding its renewal. (PTI)

## Tilak Varma, Mayank Yadav included in India A squad for T20 warm-up matches

**MUMBAI, Feb 2:** Swashbuckling batter Tilak Varma was on Monday named in the India A squad for the T20 World Cup warm-up matches, while tearaway pacer Mayank Yadav returned after a long injury layoff. Tilak, who has been cleared by the BCCI's Centre of Excellence (CoE) following a successful recovery from a groin injury, will feature in one of the two warm-up games before rejoining the senior national side.

The left-handed batter will make a comeback to the national side after missing the recent T20 series against New Zealand, in which Shreyas Iyer was used as his replacement.

"Tilak Varma will feature in one warm-up match before joining the senior team," the BCCI said in a post on social media while announcing the squad. India A will take on the USA at the DY Patil Stadium in Navi Mumbai on Monday before facing Namibia on Friday at the CoE in Bengaluru.

Ayush Badoni will captain the 15-member India A squad, which also includes Naman Dhir, Vipraj Nigam and Riyan Parag. Mayank, meanwhile, had been sidelined for over a year due to a stress fracture.

Defending champions India will begin their campaign against the USA on the opening day of the T20 World Cup on February 7.

**India A squad:** Ayush Badoni (c), Naman Dhir, Ashutosh Sharma, Priyansh Arya, N. Jagadeesan (wk), Tilak Varma, Riyan Parag, Manav Suthar, Ashok Sharma, Urvil Patel (wk), Gurjapneet Singh, Vipraj Nigam, Ravi Bishnoi, Khaleel Ahmed, Mayank Yadav. (PTI)

## India women brace for stiff test, men eye podium at Asia Team Championships

**QINGDAO (CHINA), Feb 2:** A depleted Indian women's side will face an uphill task in defending its crown without talisman PV Sindhu, while the men will bank on a seasoned core to mount a strong podium challenge at the Badminton Asia Team Championships beginning here on Tuesday.

India had scripted history by clinching their maiden women's team gold in the last edition in Malaysia, but Sindhu's withdrawal due to a niggle has dealt a significant blow to their medal hopes.

The absence of the two-time Olympic medalist leaves the younger crop, led by Tanvi Sharma, with the responsibility of carrying the campaign.

The 17-year-old from Punjab was part of the champion team in 2024 although she didn't get to play any games. In two years, Tanvi has emerged as the next big hope in women's singles with a silver medal at World Junior Championships in Guwahati, and a final finish at the US Open Super 300.

She made a rollicking start to the season, pushing World No. 2 Wang Zhi Yi and World No. 9 Tomoka Miyazaki to deciders at the India Open and Indonesia Masters, proving she can compete with the world's best.

Unnati Hooda, 18, too is coming into the tournament after a successful 2025 season where she achieved a career-high world ranking of No. 23 and defeated Sindhu at the China Open. The youngest Indian ever to win a BWF Super

100 title, Unnati ended 2025 with a title at the Odisha Masters.

The singles duties will also now rest on Malvika Bansod and Rakshitha Sree Santhosh Ramraj, while Commonwealth Games bronze medallists Gayatri Gopichand and Treasa Jolly, who defended their Syed Modi International crown in December, will spearhead the doubles challenge alongside Priya Konjengbam, Shruti Mishra and Tanisha Crasto.

India open their women's campaign against Myanmar on Wednesday before facing Thailand in Group Y.

The men, bronze medallists from 2016 and 2020, appear better placed with a blend of experience and depth.

The squad has the same core group which won the historic gold at the 2022 Thomas Cup and the onus will be on them to deliver.

Led by World No. 13 Lakshya Sen, the squad also features former World No. 1 Kidambi Srikanth and seasoned campaigner HS Prannoy -- three world championship medallists.

Lakshya has been in good form, having won the Australian Open last year and making the final of Hong Kong Open. Srikanth too had reached the finals at Malaysia Masters and Syed Modi International but Prannoy has endured a tough phase.

Rising youngster Ayush Shetty, who won the US Open Super 300 last year, and Tharun Manneppalli will also share the responsibility in singles. (PTI)

## Sports Ministry keen to revive Formula 1 in India



**NEW DELHI, Feb 2:** The Sports Ministry is keen to bring Formula 1 back to the Buddh International Circuit in the near future and has already initiated dialogues with the track authorities to revive the race last held in India in 2013.

According to a ministry source, Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya has already visited the circuit in Greater Noida and held talks with officials from Yamuna Expressway Industrial Development Authority, the state run body which took control of the facility from the owners -- the now bankrupt Jaypee Group.

Adani is in fray to buy the troubled Jaypee Group and once that happens, the whole process of trying to get the race back in India may gain momentum. What is clear for now is that the central government wants the high-profile sport to return to the country.

The India round was held for three seasons from 2011 to 2013 before being dropped from the Formula 1 calendar due to tax and bureaucratic issues.

"The minister went to see the F1 track in Greater Noida recently and held discussions with promoters about when latest the race can be restarted. He has told the track owners to hand over the track to any sports management company for 2-3 years, who will work on the sport's comeback to India," the source said.

"Tax issue is there in hosting F1 but this will be resolved soon. The minister has told the promoters to restart F1 as soon as possible," the source added.

However, it would take a concerted effort from all stakeholders to bring Formula 1 back to India.

Already dealing with a record 24-race calendar and the growing interest from countries to host the globally followed event, Formula 1 is spoilt for choice when it comes to awarding races.

Insane costs are involved in a hosting a Formula 1 race, ranging from USD 20 million to USD 60 million annually.

A substantial chunk of the races on the existing calendar are bankrolled by the government, especially in the oil-rich middle east.

What works in favour of India is that it already has a world class racing facility like the Buddh International Circuit.

The three races in India in the previous decade had drawn massive crowds before fading into darkness due to red tape and taxation hurdles. (PTI)

## India's power-hitting scary across formats, amount of talent in men's team is 'utterly ridiculous' talent: Sarah Taylor

**NEW DELHI, Feb 2:** Former England stumper and Gujarat Giants fielding coach Sarah Taylor believes that Indian batters' incredible power-hitting across formats has made the country a formidable force in world cricket, with the men's T20 team considered a perennial contender at global events.

She also said the WPL has accelerated the women's game.

Speaking ahead of the WPL eliminator against Delhi Capitals in Vadodra, Taylor said Indian women's cricket is undergoing a significant shift, with the current generation adding power to a traditionally elegant style.

"They're on their way. It's scary where the girls were last year and where they are now," Taylor told PTI Videos.

"The power coming into the domestic game here is incredible. In five years' time, India will be absolutely flying."

Taylor noted that even players who are not very well-built are now consistently clearing the boundary, a trend rarely seen a few years ago.

"You've got young girls who are tiny

but hitting sixes straight down the ground. That power just wasn't part of the game earlier," she said.

Highlighting the role of the WPL, Taylor said the league has provided young Indian players with vital exposure ahead of the Women's T20 World Cup, scheduled to be held in the UK this summer.

"They're playing under lights, in tight games, with some of the best players in the world, watching how they go about their cricket and picking up little titbits," she said.

"Going into the World Cup, these girls should have no problems. They've been there, done that."

Taylor singled out youngsters like Anushka Sharma as future stars, adding that the willingness to learn among Indian players is driving rapid improvement.

"They want to learn, and that's the most beautiful thing. They're only going to get better," she said.

Turning to the men's game, Taylor said India's recent performances underline the extraordinary depth of talent available.

"Having a look at the series they've just



played against New Zealand, they're obviously going so well. India are so strong — the amount of talent they have is utterly ridiculous," Taylor said.

"Some of the shots they play, we sit and

watch and think, 'I don't know how that's just gone over cover from a ball on leg stump'," she added.

While stopping short of predicting a title win due to her allegiance to England, Tay-

lor said India will always be among the leading contenders at the T20 World Cup.

"They're always up there and they always will be. I'm a massive England fan, so I can't say India are going to go and win it, but they will absolutely be right at the top," she said.

Reflecting on her own international career, Taylor clarified that her decision to retire from England duty at the age of 30 was driven by clarity around selection and contracts rather than mental health alone.

"From a factual point of view, I knew, given the meetings that were taking place, that I wasn't going to be offered a contract," she said.

"I didn't particularly want that meeting, and it became a case of saying, 'Cool, I'm done then.'"

Taylor described the decision as a clear-eyed conclusion to what she called a "wonderful career", adding that the experience has shaped her perspective as a coach.

"I've tried really hard and had an amazing career. That was just the factual situation at the time," she concluded. (PTI)