



## NATION | NEWS

IndiGo aircraft makes emergency landing in Varanasi after information of bomb on board



## WORLD | NEWS

EPSTEIN SENT \$75,000 TO ACCOUNTS LINKED TO MANDELSON



## SPORTS | NEWS

HAPPY TENNIS, SERIOUS NAME - THE MAKING OF CARLOS ALCARAZ

Trump says Iran negotiating with US

Washington, Feb 1 : US President Donald Trump said that Iran is negotiating with the United States. "The plan is that (Iran is) talking to us, and we'll see if we can do something. Otherwise, we'll see what happens," Trump told a Fox News correspondent. He added that "the last time they negotiated, we had to



take out their nuclear. It didn't work, you know. Then we took it out a different way, and we'll see what happens. " "We have a big fleet heading out there, bigger than we had -- and still have, actually -- in Venezuela," Trump said. Trump also said the United States could not share military plans with Gulf allies while negotiating with Iran. "We can't tell them the plan, if I told them the plan, it would be almost as bad as telling you the plan -- it could be worse, actually," Trump said, responding to reports that Gulf allies remain in the dark about potential US intervention plans involving Iran.

## Telangana Neglected in Union Budget, Says Bhatti



Hyderabad (TSIT): Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka Mallu on Sunday alleged that Telangana has been treated unfairly in the Union Budget presented in Parliament, stating that the state received no significant allocations despite repeated representations by the state government.

Addressing a media conference at Praja Bhavan, he said the 53.47 lakh crore Union Budget presented by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman failed to provide support for several priority projects proposed by the Telangana government.

Bhatti Vikramarka said Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy, ministers and MPs had met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Finance Minister multiple times seeking funds for projects such as Musi River rejuvenation, Regional Ring Road, Hyderabad Metro Rail expansion, and major city infrastructure, but these were not reflected in the budget.

He expressed disappointment that Telangana was not considered in key national initiatives relating to bio-pharma, electronics, semiconductors and medical value hubs. Stating that Hyderabad has global recognition as a pharma hub and a strong electronics ecosystem, he said the Centre should have prioritized Telangana in these sectors.

Deputy CM also objected to

Hyderabad-centric Orange Economy initiatives being shifted to Mumbai, noting that Hyderabad is a major center for audio-visual media, gaming and creative industries.

He further said Telangana was overlooked in tourism promotion despite having UNESCO-recognized heritage sites, major forest reserves and internationally known tribal festivals. He added that the state was also not included in rare earth mineral and advanced manufacturing initiatives even though Singareni regions are undertaking related processing activities.

Raising welfare concerns, Bhatti Vikramarka said the

budget did not adequately address the needs of SCs, STs and minorities and warned that weakening of the rural employment guarantee scheme would hurt the rural poor.

He appealed to all Telangana MPs to rise above political differences and jointly submit representations to the Prime Minister and Union Finance Minister seeking fair allocations for the state.

He reiterated that the state government believes in democratic governance and not vendetta politics, and expressed hope that future budgets would better support Telangana's development goals.

NEW DELHI (TSIT): Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday said that the Union Budget 2026-27 is designed to accelerate economic growth and create more jobs across sectors. Addressing journalists after the presentation of the budget, the Finance Minister said: "The Budget focuses on building an ecosystem with structural reforms to improve productivity and create an environment that ensures employment generation across sectors. It is designed to maintain growth momentum through sustained economic expansion."

The emphasis on growth, reforms and job creation reflects the government's push for a tech-driven and inclusive economic framework, she said. Explaining the fine print of her key proposals, the Finance Minister highlighted that the Rs 10,000 crore outlay earmarked in the Budget for the biopharma sector is aimed at ensuring India maintains its leadership in the global biopharma industry.

"Budget proposing Rs 10,000 crore investment in biopharma sector over next five years ensures India maintains lead in the sector," she remarked.

The Finance Minister also highlighted that in this year's budget, health has been given equal importance, with special emphasis on mental health. The Budget marks a significant milestone in the government's ongoing efforts to strengthen

## UNION BUDGET 2026

Budget focuses on pushing growth, reforms, and jobs across sectors: FM Nirmala



The Budget 2026-27 has simplified the customs regime by rationalising exemptions, waiving customs duty on 17 cancer drugs, while easing baggage rules and reducing duty to 10 per cent on goods imported for personal use...

India's healthcare system, with a substantial enhancement in the allocation for the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare to Rs 1,06,530.42 crores, reflecting an increase of nearly 10 per cent over the Revised Estimates of FY 2025-26.

Her budget proposals include the creation of 1 lakh Allied Health Professionals (AHPs) in 10 disciplines, like optometry, radiology, anaesthesia, over the next five years as part of the Budget proposals. Besides, more emergency and trauma centres, as well as mental health institutions like NIMHANS, are to be set up. Sitharaman also announced that as many as 1.5 lakh caregivers would be created for geriatric and NSQF-aligned programmes in the country.

She also expressed optimism about India's new rare earth corridors proposed in the budget. She cited the example of the success achieved in the development of the existing defence corridors to illustrate her point. She further stated that this budget is the first one in the second quarter of the century, leading towards the vision of becoming a developed nation by 2047, along with "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas". Asked why the Union Budget 2026-27 did not give special emphasis to states with upcoming elections like West Bengal, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu, Finance Minister Sitharaman quipped: "The government faces criticism either way."

## SIT examines KCR for nearly five hours in phone-tapping case



Hyderabad, Feb 1 : The Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing the telephone-tapping case examined Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) president and former chief minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao for nearly five hours at his residence here on Sunday.

The SIT team left KCR's Nandi Nagar residence around 8 p.m. after examining him based on the statements given by the accused, including the main accused T. Prabhakar Rao, former

chief of Special Intelligence Bureau (SIB). The team, comprising six officials, made an audio and video recording of the examination. The case, registered in 2024, relates to the alleged tapping of phones of several people, including political opponents, businessmen, journalists and even judges during the BRS rule.

The former chief minister was believed to have been questioned about the appointment of Prabhakar

## India zeroes out Chabahar port outlay, slashes Bangladesh aid in 2026-27 Budget



New Delhi (TSIT) India has not allocated funds for the Chabahar port project in Iran in the Union Budget for 2026-27 and has halved the development assistance for

Bangladesh to Rs 60 crore in reflection of frosty bilateral ties. Bhutan has been allocated the largest share — Rs 2,288 crore — as development aid, followed by Nepal and Rs 550 crore each to the Maldives and Mauritius. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has been given a total of Rs 22,118 crore as against the current fiscal's budget estimate of Rs 20,516 crore and revised estimate of Rs 21,742 crore. For the next fiscal, the allocation for Bangladesh has been pegged at Rs 60 crore.

## Pakistan to boycott T20 WC game against India after granted conditional approval to participate



New Delhi (TIST): Pakistan will not play India in their scheduled Men's T20 World Cup match at the R Premadasa Stadium in Colombo on February 15, after the government granted the team conditional approval to take part in the tournament.

The statement did not specify a reason for that decision, though it is believed that Pakistan will boycott the match against India to show solidarity with Bangladesh, who were pulled out of Men's T20 World Cup for seeking relocation of their matches out of India, citing security issues and were replaced by Scotland in Group C.

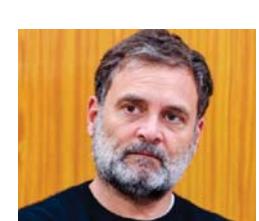
"The Government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan grants approval to the Pakistan Cricket Team to participate in

the ICC World T20 2026, however, the Pakistan Cricket Team shall not take the field in the match scheduled on 15th February 2026 against India," said the government's official account on X account. Earlier this week, PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi met with Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif, and it was then that he announced

that the final decision on Pakistan's participation would be taken on either January 30 or February 2. However, the final verdict was announced a day earlier, which now leaves the tournament on the edge of a fresh problem, considering the revenue coming from the marquee clash.

SEE MORE ON SPORTS PAGE

BLIND TO INDIA'S REAL CRISIS: RAHUL GANDHI SLAMS UNION BUDGET OVER JOBS AND SLOWDOWN



New Delhi (TSIT) : Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, on Sunday criticised the Union Budget 2026-27, accusing the government of being disconnected from the country's pressing economic and social challenges.

In the response to the Budget, Gandhi said it had failed to address key issues confronting the nation, including unemployment, slowing manufacturing growth, capital outflows, declining household savings, and agrarian distress.

"Youth without jobs.

Falling manufacturing. Investors pulling out capital. Household savings plummeting. Farmers in distress. Looming global shocks - all ignored. A Budget that refuses course correction, blind to India's real crises," Gandhi said in a post on X. Other opposition leaders have also criticised the Budget, saying it lacks structural reforms and meaningful interventions to revive growth.

## Well-balanced, forward-looking Budget: Chandrababu Naidu



Amaravati (TSIT): Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu has welcomed the Union Budget, terming it 'well-balanced' and 'forward-looking'. He said that the Budget 2026-27, presented by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Parliament, reflects the aspirations of people for a fast-growing economy.

Chandrababu Naidu, whose Telugu Desam Party (TDP) is a key partner in the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre, congratulated Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Finance Minister Sitharaman. Addressing the media at Kuppam, he

exuded confidence that the Budget will help India become a developed economy by 2047.

The TDP president believes that the Budget will help achieve the goal of self-reliance and

ly on the issues it is focusing on. "This budget will further support the Ease of Doing Business policy being implemented by the State. The state government has already focused heavily on MSMEs, and there is an opportunity to further strengthen them," he said.

Stating that the Budget provides direction and momentum, he hoped that it would give a necessary boost to various technologies, including AI, and the next level of reforms. He also noted that the Budget focuses on renewable energy and a one-grid nation. "It has been designed in line with short, medium, and long-term goals. It will contribute to improved

living standards and ease of living," said Chandrababu Naidu. The Chief Minister said the state will benefit from the Hyderabad-Chennai high-speed rail corridors. Tirupati and Amaravati will be covered by high-speed corridors.

The Bengaluru-Chennai high-speed rail corridor will cover areas like Palamanchi, Chittoor, and others. These three high-speed rail corridors will cover various regions of Andhra Pradesh and connect cities like Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and Chennai. He pointed out that Andhra Pradesh is also included in the dedicated high-speed rail corridors.

## Sunetra Pawar takes oath as 1st woman Dy CM of Maharashtra

**MUMBAI:** Sunetra Pawar on Saturday became the first woman Deputy Chief Minister of Maharashtra and was allotted excise, sports, minority development and Aukaf departments, but not finance and planning which her late husband Ajit Pawar held.

The brief swearing-in ceremony at the Lok Bhavan here took place three days after Ajit Pawar, NCP president and a deputy chief minister in the BJP-Shiv Sena-NCP 'Mahayuti' government, died in an air crash in Baramati on January 28.

Finance and planning department was not allocated to her, indicating that Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis will hold the charge of the crucial portfolio and present the Budget next month. Sunetra Pawar, 62, has resigned her Rajya Sabha membership. She is not a member of either house of the people, Sunetra, a commerce



legislature at present, and is expected to contest the byelection to the Baramati assembly constituency represented by her late husband. Prime Minister Narendra Modi extended his best wishes to Sunetra Pawar, expressing confidence that she will work tirelessly for welfare of the people and carry forward her late husband's dream. After taking the oath of office, Sunetra, a commerce

graduate born into a political family who mostly stayed away from politics until 2024 (when she contested the Lok Sabha election from Baramati against her sister-in-law Supriya Sule and lost), vowed to carry forward her husband's people-centric legacy and work with a sense of duty to serve the state. Ajit Pawar's commitment to duty, spirit of struggle and honesty towards the people

would remain her guiding strength, she added. Besides Sunetra Pawar's younger son Jay Pawar and his wife, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, and NCP leaders Praful Patel, Sunil Tatkare and Chhagan Bhujbal were present at the ceremony where she was administered the oath of office and secrecy by Governor Acharya Devvrat.

Nobody from party patriarch and NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar's family were present. The Nationalist Congress Party, which elected her as the new leader of its legislature wing earlier in the day, remained tight-lipped about the proposed merger of the two factions.

Speaking to reporters in Baramati in the morning, Sharad Pawar said he learnt about the swearing-in from the news, and he had not been consulted about Sune-

## Govt recommends CBI probe into death of NEET aspirant in Patna

**PATNA:** The Bihar government recommended a CBI probe into the recent death of a female NEET aspirant in Patna, Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary said on Saturday.

A Special Investigation Team (SIT) of the Bihar police is investigating the case.

The NEET aspirant, hailing from Jehanabad, was found unconscious in Shambhu Girls' hostel in Patna's Chiragupt Nagar earlier this month. She died at a private hospital on January 11 after remaining in a coma for several days. Her family had alleged that she was sexually assaulted, accusing authorities of attempting a cover-up.

"Chief Minister Nitish Kumar Jee has urged the Government of India to hand over the investigation of the NEET student's murder case in Patna (Case No-14/26) to the CBI. The in-

cident must be thoroughly uncovered in a transparent and just manner," Choudhary said in a post on X. The deputy CM also holds the home portfolio.

The state home department also issued a notification recommending a CBI probe into the case under the provisions of the Delhi Special Police Establishment (DSPE) Act, which governs the functioning of the country's premier investigation agency.

The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) of the central government will issue a notification, which is a mandatory requirement for initiating a CBI probe in a state-related case, in this regard. As per the rules, prior approval of the state and the DoPT is required to investigate a crime outside the agency's jurisdiction, as law and order is a state subject.

The parents of the NEET aspirant in Bihar on Saturday alleged that the state police was trying to hush up the matter by denying sexual assault and claiming that it was a case of suicide. Her post-mortem report did not exclude the possibility of sexual violence, and this finding contrasts with the police's initial claim that medical reports and CCTV footage had ruled out sexual assault. One person, an employee of her hostel, was arrested in connection with the case. "The CBI may now register a separate case on the basis of the FIR registered by Patna Police. The agency sleuths will collect all evidence obtained by the state police and will also record the statements of suspects, the arrested person, hospital staff, family members and policemen, who had initially investigated the case and concluded it a case of suicide," according to an official.

## Rs 500 Cr scam: EOW arrests 3, over 11K investors cheated in Maharashtra

**THANE:** The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) has arrested a couple and their associate, who allegedly swindled more than 11,000 investors, including police officials, from across Maharashtra of over Rs 500 crore, police said on Saturday.

In a coordinated action, the Thane police's EOW tracked down the accused, Sameer Narvekar, his wife Neha, and their associate Amit Palaw, in neighbouring Gujarat on Thursday, an official said.

According to police, the accused established an investment company, Trade with Jazz, with its headquarters in Pune in 2019, offering a scheme

that allegedly drew in more than 11,000 people, including 1,500 police personnel, from across Maharashtra. The trio allegedly lured victims with promises of a 4 per cent monthly return on stock market trading and allied ventures, the official said, adding that the firm projected monthly earnings of nearly 10 per cent to build credibility.

The company abruptly shut its offices and stopped responding to investors, prompting a flood of police complaints, he said.

According to the initial probe, investors have been defrauded of around Rs 500 crore.

The official said that the EOW has also gathered information suggesting that several government officials and bureaucrats, some of them retired from service, had invested in the scheme. The trio have been booked under the Maharashtra Protection of Interest of Depositors (MPID) Act, 1999, and sections 61(2)(c) (criminal conspiracy) and 316(5) (criminal breach of trust) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, he said. The Thane EOW is examining bank accounts, financial documents and money flows linked to the accused, and further arrests are likely, the official said.

## Target 50 pc votes at every booth in 2027 polls: Nitin Nabin to Goa BJP workers

**PANAJI:** BJP president Nitin Nabin on Saturday called upon party workers in Goa to strengthen the organisation from booth to state level and set a target of securing at least 50 per cent votes at every polling booth in the 2027 assembly elections. Addressing a workers' convention near Panaji, Nabin said the 2027 polls would be a crucial step towards achieving the vision of a "Viksit Goa", stressing that a stable government was necessary to continue the state's development journey. Booth chiefs are the most important persons in the party structure, he said, urging workers to try to secure at least 50 per cent of votes at every polling booth in the 2027 elections. "Sovereignty lies with the people and their support strengthens the party. Con-

tinuous organisational work helps the BJP expand. Prime Minister Narendra Modi believes that when the poor and villages grow stronger, the BJP becomes stronger, ultimately strengthening the nation and the state," he said. Nabin noted that Goa's per capita income had increased from Rs 1.12 lakh in

2014 to around Rs 3 lakh in 2023-24.

He also cited infrastructure development, including two airports, expanding expressways and national highways, and flyovers, and urged workers to communicate the "transformed image" of Goa to the people. Initiatives such as the Mhajji Ghar Yojana reflected the state government's commitment to development, Nabin said, adding that more work was needed to realise the goal of a developed Goa before 2047.

He said that the BJP is a cadre-based party, and even a booth-level president could rise to occupy top leadership positions, including chief minister or prime minister.

Chief Minister Pramod Sawant, who also addressed the convention, asserted that the BJP would return to power in Goa in 2027 and assured the national president that every party worker would strive to ensure the saffron party's victory. "Politics is not a 100 metres race, it is a marathon. It is not your speed but your stamina that is tested," he said. Sawant said that the status for the Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Scheduled Castes (SC) in the state was granted during the tenure of former Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar and that the Opposition "need not lecture" the BJP on the issue. Prime Minister Modi has been working for the welfare of STs, SCs and weaker sections of society, he said. BJP MLAs, office-bearers, and karyakartas from across Goa attended the convention.

## Ram temple construction expected to end by April 30; overall estimated cost Rs 1,900 crore

**AYODHYA:** All construction work related to the Ram temple in Ayodhya is expected to be completed by April 30, with the overall cost of the project estimated at around Rs 1,900 crore, Ram Temple Construction Committee chairman Nripendra Mishra said on Saturday.

Addressing reporters after the conclusion of a two-day meeting of the Ram Temple Construction Committee here, Mishra said that Larsen & Toubro (L&T) and Tata Consultancy, which are executing key works at the site, will exit the temple complex by April 30 once construction is over.

Mishra further informed



that directions have been issued to complete all paperwork and bill payment procedures by the same date. "L&T and Tata Consultancy have offered a three-year warranty

for all the work carried out by them. For maintenance and upkeep, a small team from both organisations will remain deployed inside the temple complex," he said.

The meeting reviewed the progress of construction and associated works, and discussed the final timelines for completion and transition of responsibilities, officials said.

## Delhi Police seizes 31 kg of Alprazolam tablets; busts multi-state racket with arrest of three

**NEW DELHI:** The Delhi Police has busted a major interstate psychotropic drugs racket with the arrest of three people and seizure of 31 kilograms of Alprazolam tablets, an official said on Saturday. The accused were allegedly part of an organised network involved in the illegal manufacture, transportation and distribution of the banned psychotropic substance across Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and the National Capital Region (NCR), he said.

The operation was carried out following intelligence-driven surveillance aimed at tracking drug peddlers active in the NCR. Acting on specific inputs, the team ar-

rested two accused near Nand Nagri Bus Depot while they were travelling in a car bearing an Uttar Pradesh registration number. The arrested individuals have been identified as Shamim, a resident of Badaun in Uttar Pradesh, Rajeev Sharma and Mohit Gupta, both from Bulandshahr. During the search, police recovered 31 kilograms of Alprazolam tablets -- estimated to be around three lakh tablets -- which falls under commercial quantity as defined in the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act. The commercial quantity threshold for Alprazolam is 100 grams, officials said. Apart from the tablets, the team seized 11

kg of aluminium foil with "Alprazolam" printed on it, 25 kg of PVC sheet rolls used for tablet packaging, 20 rubber stamps bearing batch numbers, manufacturing and expiry dates and the car used in transportation. The recovery of packaging material and printing tools indicated a large-scale illegal pharmaceutical manufacturing setup, police said.

An FIR under the relevant sections of the NDPS Act was registered on January 29. During the investigation, the vehicle was found to be registered in the name of Mohit Gupta, who was subsequently apprehended at the instance of the other accused. During interrogation, Sharma allegedly told po-

lice that he used to collect Alprazolam tablets from Shamim and his associate Randeep in Himachal Pradesh on the directions of Gupta, and supply them to local pharmacies in Bulandshahr.

Shamim allegedly disclosed that he and his partner were running an illegal manufacturing unit in Parwanoo, Himachal Pradesh, where the tablets were produced and supplied to distributors in Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. Gupta, who allegedly runs a medical firm in Bulandshahr, told investigators that he procured the illegal tablets through his firm and distributed them to pharmacies in Agra and Bulandshahr, police said.

## Tribal festival 'Medaram Maha Jathara' concludes in Telangana, lakhs offer prayers

**MULUGU:** The four-day 'Maha Jathara' (Grand festival) of tribal goddesses Sammakka and Saralamma in this district, attended by lakhs of devotees, concluded on Saturday.

Devotees from Telangana and neighbouring Chattilgarh, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha offered prayers during the biennial mega tribal festival held at Medaram, officials said.

Tribal goddesses Sammakka and Saralamma "returned to the forests" as per the custom at 7:55 PM on Saturday marking the end of the 'Maha Jathara', amid religious chants of thousands of devotees.

The Adivasi priests also took other deities, Pagididharaju and Govindaraju, to their respective abodes as per the customs.

The 'Maha Jathara', often hailed as the largest tribal festival in Asia, began on January 28 with the deities being installed at the 'adu-



delu' (altar) at Medaram. An estimated 80 lakh devotees visited the 'Maha Jathara' on January 28 and 29, state Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy had said. Thousands of devotees took holy dip in the rivulet Jampa Vagu at Medaram. They offered jaggery equal to their weight to the goddesses as per tradition. Telangana Governor T.S. Venk

of about Rs 101 crore. Additional development works worth Rs 150 crore were undertaken to improve facilities for devotees attending the 2026 festival. About 21 government departments and 42,000 personnel were involved in managing the event by way of crowd control, security, cleanliness, medical services, and other arrangements. Medical camps, ambulances, and bike ambulances were deployed to handle emergencies. The 'Maha Jathara' is celebrated in Medaram, located in the remote Etturnagaram Wildlife Sanctuary, part of the Dandakaranya forest belt. The festival commemorates the revolt led by the mother-daughter duo, Sammakka and Saralamma, against the imposition of taxes on the tribal populace during a drought by the Kakatiya rulers.

## Working towards first uncrewed mission for Gaganyaan programme: ISRO Chairman

**CHENNAI:** ISRO is working towards the first uncrewed mission of its ambitious Gaganyaan Mission, scheduled for 2027, Chairman V Narayanan has said. The Gaganyaan mission is India's first human spaceflight programme currently under development. It aims to send a three-member crew on a three-day mission to space and bring them back safely to Earth.

"Gaganyaan programme is planned in 2027. Before that, three uncrewed missions are planned. We are working towards the first uncrewed mission," he told reporters late Friday. To a query, he said, currently scientists were engaged in conducting a lot of tests for the mission to achieve success. "There are lots of tests happening. You know safety of the Gaganyaan is very, very important. So,

we have to be very careful. We have to qualify every system. In the rocket system, we have to score one hundred out of one hundred," he said. "Our aim is that (success of Gaganyaan). We have to do a perfect job. We are working towards that," he said. On the PSLV-C62 mission, which suffered an anomaly in the third stage of the rocket after lift-off on January 12, he said scientists were studying everything on the mission to put things in order. The PSLV-C62/EOS N1 suffered a setback after an anomaly was encountered on the third stage of the rocket and scientists have initiated a detailed analysis on the mission.



## TN leather industry looks to enjoy fruits of India-EU FTA

CHENNAI: Tamil Nadu has attracted over Rs 9,800 crore in leather and non-leather footwear investments in the last three years, generating more than 1.25 lakh jobs, R Selvam, executive director of the Council for Leather Exports (CLE), said on Friday.

Detailing the investment flow, Selvam said projects are spread across Panapakkam, Kallakurichi, Ariyalur, Perambalur and Tindivanam, covering both leather and non-leather footwear manufacturing. While some units have already commenced production, others are scheduled to begin production in 2026.

Addressing concerns over factory closures, he said the Ambur-Vellore belt continues to function well. "Ambur and Vellore region continues to be functioning well when it comes to leather and non-leather factories," he said, adding that the region remains a key base for the sector. Speaking at a press conference to announce the 39th India International Leather Fair (IILF) 2026, CLE chairman Ramesh Juneja said the India-European Union Free Trade Agreement (FTA) would strengthen export prospects for the sector. The agreement is likely to come into effect within eight to ten months, subject to ratification by the UK and the European Parliament. The EU currently accounts for around 43 per cent of India's leather and footwear exports, and the FTA is expected to improve market access and investment sentiment. The CLE says that India's leather and footwear exports stood at \$4.83 billion in 2024-25, excluding certain non-leather footwear



segments, and about \$5.5 billion when non-leather footwear is included. Exports in the current financial year are expected to remain in the \$5.25 billion range, with limited impact from US tariffs as only about 22 per cent of exports are US-bound.

They have sought further simplification of import procedures for crust and finished leather, requesting a return to the pre-2021 zero-duty import regime. Juneja said that while the Centre has already removed export duty on crust leather and import duty on wet blue leather, the industry is seeking similar relief for crust and finished leather, which would reduce input costs, ease compliance and support value-added exports.

The council said the proposed changes are critical for sustaining export growth and attracting further investments. The CLE also announced the 39th India International Leather Fair (IILF) 2026, scheduled to be held at the Chennai Trade Centre from February 1 to 3. CLE regional chairman (South) M Abdul Wahab said the event will also feature a concurrent Designer Fair, offering Indian manufacturers opportunities for design collaborations.

## Deadline for updation of SIR ends: 22.83L seek inclusion in rolls

CHENNAI: As the claims and objections period under the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) ended on January 30, as many as 22.83 lakh voters applied for the inclusion of their names after the draft electoral roll released on December 19 showed the deletion of nearly 97 lakh voters.

During the claims and objections period, a total of 34.75 lakh applications were received under four categories through both online and offline modes, according to Chief Electoral Officer Archana Patnaik.

Of these, 22.83 lakh applications were for inclusion of names in the voter list.

Officials said 17.10 lakh of the inclusion applications were received through the offline mode and 5.73 lakh online. The next most common request was for change of address, accounting for 9.90 lakh applications.

The draft electoral roll showed a sharp decline in the electorate, with the total number of voters in the State dropping from 6.41 crore to 5.43 crore. Voters whose names were removed and those who wanted to enrol were given an opportunity to submit claims and objections from December 19. The



Election Commission had organised six rounds of special camps across the State over the past 40 days for claims and objections. A senior election official said the applications received are now being scrutinised. Each application will be verified to determine eligibility, and the final voter list will be published on February 17, with which the SIR exercise will formally conclude. Officials said eligible citizens whose names do not appear in the final list can still apply for inclusion up to 10 days before the last date for filing nominations for the ensuing election. Such applicants will be included only in the supplementary voter list and may not receive an Electoral Photo Identity Card immediately. They will, however, be allowed to vote using any of the 13 alternative identity documents prescribed by the Election Commission.

## Stalin seeks concrete allocations for TN in Union Budget, flags pending funds and infra projects

CHENNAI: With the Union Budget for 2026 set to be presented in Parliament, Chief Minister and DMK president MK Stalin on Sunday urged the Centre to move beyond rhetoric and ensure tangible financial commitments for the State, particularly in sectors where allocations have either been delayed or remain inadequate. In a social media post, ahead of the Budget, Stalin said Tamil Nadu expected the Union government to announce long-pending measures even if only with the elections in mind, and stressed that these should be backed by firm funding and implemented within a defined timeframe.

He flagged the non-release of Rs 3,548 crore in education funds meant for students, sought budgetary support for the Coimbatore and Madurai Metro Rail projects, and demanded the release of Rs 3,112 crore due to Tamil Nadu



under the Jal Jeevan Mission, a programme the State has implemented efficiently.

The Chief Minister also called for new railway projects and reiterated the long-standing demand that States receive a 50 per cent share of the Union government's tax revenues, as recommended by the Finance Commission.

"There are more demands on the list. At

the very least this time, announcements for Tamil Nadu should not stop at mere declarations, like the Madurai AIIMS," Stalin said, insisting that projects must be supported by adequate allocations and completed on schedule. The appeal was tagged to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

## Centre repackaging old scheme, ignoring genuine demands: Association

TIRUCHY: Alleging that the Union budget is casting old schemes, East Coast Coconut Farmers Association president EV Gandhi said that the newly announced Coconut promotion initiative was already under practice through the Coconut Development Board (CDB).

On the contrary, many genuine demands of the coconut farmers are not met in the budget, he said.

According to Gandhi, the Union Finance



Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's announcement of the Coconut Promotion Scheme, aimed at increasing coconut production, is nothing new. "The announcement of replacing old and non-producing trees with high-yielding saplings already exists with the Coconut Development Board. The practice of replacing non-productive trees with high-yielding saplings and distribution of seedlings has been there for a long time," Gandhi said.



Honble Minister for Public Works inspected the statues of Thiru N.S Krishnan at Kalaivanar Arangam and Thiru Karl Marx in the campus of Government Museum, Egmore, Chennai which are to be erected shortly

## Uplifting: Migratory birds are arriving in larger numbers in Punjab's wetlands



and Tarn Taran districts; Kanjli in Kapurthala district; and Ropar. To the list were added the Keshopur community reserve, Beas conservation reserve and Nangal wildlife sanctuary, taking the number to six.

Dharminder Sharma, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and head of the Forest Force, says spotting raptors like the Red-headed Falcon, Peregrine Falcon, Eurasian Hobby and Eastern Imperial Eagle at Harike and Keshopur-Miani shows that the Punjab wetlands continue to attract birds from far-off areas. "It indicates that our wetlands have a good prey base for these raptors. The preservation of wildlife, especially migratory birds, remains the top priority of the department," he adds. "Birds from as far away as Siberia have turned up, which is a rare phenomenon."

Gitanjali Kanwar, Senior Coordinator, Aquatic Biodiversity, World Wildlife Fund-India, says the turnout of water birds in Punjab's wetlands continues to be "decently good" despite challenges at the global level. "Flocks of rare birds like Northern Lapwing and Black-tailed Godwit were sighted at Harike. Species like Jerdon's Babler, Rufous-vented Prinia and Short-eared Owls have also been spotted," she adds.

ed-headed Falcon mostly preys on small birds and usually hunts

in pairs. Photo by the writer

"There's been a marginal increase in the number of water birds (resident and migratory) in Punjab's wetlands. The winter season has been very brief this year and rare waterbirds and species of high conservation significance have been spotted. These include the flamingos in Harike, flocks of Northern Lapwing and raptors like Steppe and Eastern Imperial Eagle in Keshopur-Miani and Shalapattan wetlands. The Nangal wetland, like every year, had Black-necked Grebes," says Kanwar.

Punjab Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) Satender Sagar claims the recent sighting of the Bar-headed Goose is a welcome sign for the state's wetlands as this goose species breeds in Central Asia in colonies of thousands near mountain lakes and during winter in South Asia. "The unique thing about this bird is that it flies very high, and even crosses the Himalayas to visit Punjab, flying over difficult terrains and extreme altitudes," says Sagar, excited about the frequent sightings at Punjab wetlands. Amid the positive news, a note of caution comes from Jaskaran Sandhu, former member of the Punjab State Board for Wildlife. "Global warming is changing weather patterns and affecting bird migration. Delayed winter, pollution and shrinking water bodies are all affecting migration of birds across the globe. It's a challenge we must never lose sight of," he says.

Many bird species migrate in order to survive. However, migration is a perilous journey. Only a small number of birds are actually threatened by natural events while human activities are the source for most dangers," says Maj AP Singh (retd), another former member of the Punjab State Board for Wildlife. An avid bird-watcher, with an experience of more than 40 years, he

adds that the loss of habitats due to pollution or encroachment for settlement, agriculture, grazing, etc, is the main threat migratory birds face. "They are dependent on finding suitable breeding and wintering grounds as well as stopover sites, along their flyways, where they can rest and feed. The loss of any of these sites during their annual cycle could have a dramatic impact on the birds' chances of survival. Poaching remains another threat." Pallas's Gull in flight. The pale, deep-chested, long-winged gull chiefly feeds on fish (particularly dead), insects and small mammals.

As per the initial sightings by the Wildlife Department and the World Wildlife Fund, the migratory birds that have been spotted include the Spot-billed Duck, Ruddy Shelduck, Mallard, Northern Pintail, Comb Duck, Coot, Dabchick, Northern Shoveler, Lesser Whistling Duck, Domicile Crane, Greater Flamingo, Ferruginous Pochard, Peregrine Falcon, Long-eared Owl, Common Pochard, Woolly-necked Stork, Eurasian Coot, Gadwal, Greylag Geese, Little Cormorant, Pied Avocet, Great Cormorant, Common Teal, Black-tailed Godwit, Steppe Gull and Brown-headed Gull.

Records from Harike show sightings of Bonelli's Eagle, Hen Harrier, Peregrine Falcon, Red-headed Falcon, Cotton Pygmy Goose, Northern Lapwing and Greater-crested Grebe.

May 10 is World Migratory Bird Day, but it's a good time to remember UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' message: "As they travel the globe, migratory birds lift our spirits and remind us of nature, connecting people, ecosystems and nations." And his terse reminder: "Our continued encroachment on nature and the destruction of vital habitats are putting many migratory birds at risk of extinction." Any positive development thus is a moment to cherish.

## How stage was set for designers

WHEN the Lakme Fashion Week starts in Mumbai on March 26, it will mark the silver jubilee of India's first marquee fashion event, a trendsetter. In these 25 years, the fashion industry has stitched a mega success story. According to an industry report by Statista, the revenue in the apparel market in India is projected to reach \$109.45 billion (over Rs 10 trillion) in 2025. Women's apparel holds the largest share, with a market volume of \$53.13 billion (over Rs 5 trillion). However, in the early 1990s, the established names today were just starting out. "JJ Valaya, Ashish Soni, Rajesh Pratap Singh, Ritu Beri, Rina Dhaka, Rohit Bal, Rohit Khosla, Tarun Tahiliani and many others were just about beginning their careers. There was a great momentum and more designers were coming out of the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT). But there was no one platform for designers to showcase their vision," recalls designer Narendra Ahmed, who graduated from NIFT in 1990 and was ELLE India's first fashion editor.

The Apparel Export Promotion Council (APEC) had facilitated some designers to present their work at fashion shows in New York, London and Paris. With that in mind, most designers were feeling the need for a fashion week in India, says Rajesh Pratap Singh, who was one of the designers to showcase his collection in the first fashion week. The Fashion Design Council of India (FDCI) had been set up in 1998, in response to an urgent requirement to organise the Indian fashion industry under a formal structure. Sumeet Nair was appointed

the executive director of the FDCI. "Most designers felt that an Indian fashion week will provide the right platform to bring all designers together. Most of them were already holding individual shows but such an event could provide a collective platform for both the designers and the buyers," says Ahmed.

While most industry stakeholders felt the need for such an event, two persons came together to conceptualise and create India's first-ever Fashion Week in 2000 — FDCI's Nair and Zubin Sarkari, fashion director at IMG (International Management Group), India, a global sports and culture company (now known as RISE Worldwide Limited, a subsidiary of Reliance Industries Limited). "It was all very exciting. Some of the grittiest of the first fashion week was thrashed out in our office where Nair and Sarkari would hold meetings with us, my partner Asha Kochhar and I, seeking inputs on various logistics — from the size of the ramp to the number of green rooms for models to the music to be played, and much more," remembers Vidyut Singh, co-founder, Media Makers. Vidyut, part of the journey of Indian fashion since its first hesitant steps in the 1980s, and Asha

had already been working with designers in creating individual fashion shows.

The FDCI and IMG then approached Lakme for the title sponsorship, convincing its then CEO Anil Chopra to steer the fashion week. "The initial years were really wonderful."

**IN THE COURT OF SH. VIKRANT KAUNDAL SENIOR CIVIL, JUDGE KULLU, H.P**  
CMA No.: 88-VI/2015  
Reg. No.: 136/2015  
In the Matter of:-  
M/s. Malma Power Company Ltd. Village Doonthara, PO. Jari, Tehsil Bhunder, Distt. Kullu H.P through authorized signatory Sh. R.K. Khalan.

.....Plaintiff  
Versus  
T. Swaminathan, 50/1, Adhi Paraskhillam, Ramaswamy Avenue, Adyar, Chennai - 600020. ....Defendant

Notice under Section 5 Rule 20 of CPC  
Notice to:- T. Swaminathan, 50/1, Adhi Paraskhillam, Ramaswamy Avenue, Adyar, Chennai - 600020. ....Defendant  
Whereas in the above noted case it has been proved to the satisfaction of the court that above named Defendant cannot be served in the ordinary way. Hence this proclamation is hereby issued against him/her to appear in this court on 09.03.2026 at 10.00 AM to defend the case personally or through an authorized agent or pleader failing which ex parte proceedings will be taken against them. Given under my hand and seal of the court on the 23rd day of December, 2025.

(Vikrant Kaundal)  
Senior Civil Judge,  
Kullu Distt. Kullu

# EDITORIAL

## BUDGET 2026-27: THE MATH ISN'T MATHING

Once the accounting exercises are concluded, the platitudes repeated and campaign slogans masterfully plugged in, we must judge the Union budget on whether it promises to bring any positive change in people's lives. Keeping in mind the government's track record, the answer is a resounding no. For the household sector, this is a budget that is heavy on credit and low on income growth. Since last year, measures such as the enhanced limits under the Kisan Credit Card and PM SVANidhi schemes focus primarily on facilitating loans rather than addressing the more fundamental issue of income generation. This approach risks deepening the debt burden of an already over-leveraged population.

Fifty-two percent of agricultural households are indebted, with the incidence of debt likely highest among small and marginal farmers. Yet the budget offers very few concrete measures to raise real incomes; instead, it largely equates economic relief with the ability to borrow more.

Budgets for the PM KISAN and crop insurance schemes have been kept stagnant, despite inflation. Urea and nutrient-based subsidies have been reduced, which will result in increased cost of production for farmers.

Considerable emphasis has been placed on promoting agricultural output. However, translating this intent into reality will be extremely difficult. Many state governments – particularly those run by the BJP – have cornered themselves through pre-election promises, such as procuring paddy at the minimum support price. Once in power, these governments often realise that they lack either the fiscal capacity or the political will to honour such commitments. Under such circumstances, farmers have little incentive to increase production, since higher output only means higher costs with minimal assurance of even recovering their investments.

The announcement last year of an extension of the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) to 2028 is another example of inadequate accountability. In the last budget, the JJM was allotted Rs 67,000 crore, which was later revised downward to Rs 17,000 crore. Why did the government not spend the money? No explanation was offered as to why the scheme could not be completed within its original timeframe. While the mission was commendable in intent and innovative in design, its execution has been deeply flawed.

There is nothing concrete for education and healthcare. Last year's announcement of adding 75,000 seats to medical colleges also appears encouraging at first glance, but the expansion is largely meaningless unless accompanied by parallel investments in high-quality infrastructure and, more importantly, well-qualified teaching faculty.

Medical education cannot be strengthened without making careers as medical teachers, specialist physicians and surgeons genuinely attractive. This requires substantial financial commitment and improved service conditions, neither of which find mention in the budget. Finally, the repeated invocation of 'Make in India' and the array of schemes proposed to boost manufacturing will succeed only if supported by a conducive social climate and stable institutional environment. Unfortunately, the budget speech is silent on these essential preconditions.

In sum, the budget reflects a preference for credit-driven solutions over income-based empowerment, offering piecemeal initiatives while sidestepping deeper structural reforms. From every perspective, the budget lacks substance. Let's take a look at the macro-economic indicators.

On paper, the Indian economy is thriving. The first advance estimates peg GDP growth for FY26 at 7.4%. If true, this should translate to lakhs of new jobs and investments. But that has clearly not been the case.

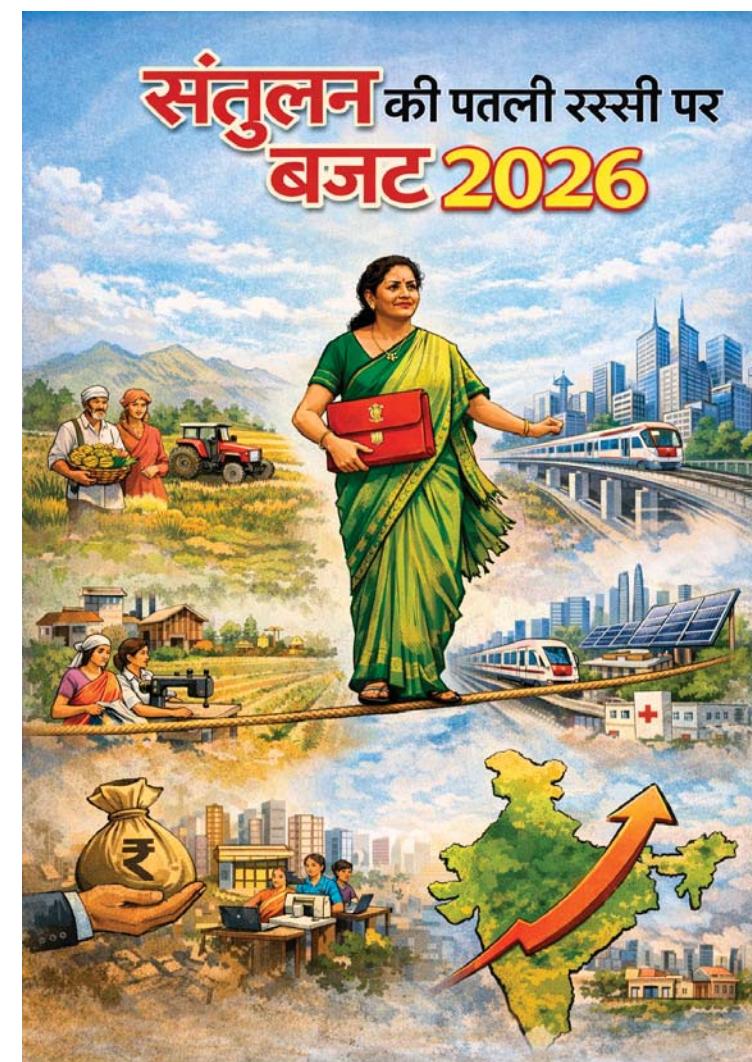
# Budget 2026 on a tightrope



PRIYANKA  
SAURABH

The Union Budget 2026, presented in Parliament today, February 1, 2026, once again demonstrated the government's narrow path between economic discipline and public aspirations.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman began her speech with a vision of stability, continuity, and long-term growth. There were no unexpected populist announcements; instead, the budget adopted a realistic approach. The fiscal deficit was kept at 4.4 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) for fiscal year 2026, below the previously set target of 4.5 percent. This move sets a strong example of fiscal discipline. Capital expenditure was increased from 11.2 lakh crore last year to 12.5 lakh crore, representing an increase of nearly 12 percent. This increase is focused on infrastructure, urban development projects, and the digital technology sector. A target of raising 10 lakh crore has been set under the asset monetization scheme to encourage private sector investment. The Indian economy achieved 6.8 percent growth in the last fiscal year, but challenges such as the global economic slowdown, US-China trade tensions, and domestic inflation persist. The budget tightly controlled the fiscal deficit at 4.4 percent, while the effective revenue deficit was limited to 96,654 crore, a mere 0.3 percent of GDP. A provision of 12.5 lakh crore for capital expenditure will give new impetus to the national infrastructure pipeline. The target of an additional 50,000 kilometers for highway construction and an allocation of 2.5 lakh crore for railway electrification and modernization demonstrate the commitment to laying the foundation for the future. States will be provided with 1.5 lakh crore in 50-year interest-free loans, strengthening the federal structure. Measures such as tax exemptions, a single-window system, and faster approval processes have been implemented to promote the public-private



partnership (PPP) model. The government has sent a clear message: investors, come, we are fully prepared. But the big question is whether these huge investments will create jobs in rural and semi-urban areas, or will they remain confined to the glitz of the metropolises. The middle class, which contributes approximately 40 percent to the country's GDP, received substantial tax relief in this budget. The standard deduction in the old tax system was doubled from Rs 50,000 to Rs 1 lakh, while it is more generous for senior citizens. The new tax system simplified the tax slabs—zero tax on income up to Rs 5 lakh. TCS on education loans was removed (up to Rs 10 lakh), while the rent TDS threshold was raised from Rs 2.4 lakh to Rs 6 lakh. Tax relief was provided on two self-occupied residential properties, and the deadline for filing income tax returns was extended from two years to four years. The promise to simplify the tax code from 819 sections to 536 is commendable.

These steps are aimed at transforming taxpayers from a mere source of revenue to a trusted partner. However, compliance processes must be further simplified at the ground level, otherwise these reliefs may remain limited to mere paperwork. The budget focused on the agricultural sector, which still accounts for 18 percent of GDP and 65 percent of the rural population. The Pradhan Mantri Dhan Dhanya Yojana was expanded to 100 districts, encouraging crop diversification and increasing irrigation and storage capacity. The PM Kisan Samman Nidhi was increased, and the Kisan Credit Card limit was raised. Economic zones were declared in the Andaman and Lakshadweep for fisheries development, with provisions to strengthen the fruit and vegetable supply chain. The MNREGA budget was increased, and the rural credit scoring system facilitated loans to self-help groups (SHGs). The leather, footwear, and toy industries are pro-

jected to generate 2.2 million new jobs. These provisions will boost the rural economy, but the real test will be whether these schemes will move beyond paper and reach farms and markets. Small and marginal farmers should benefit, not be limited to large landowners. Prioritizing women's empowerment, the Lakshmi Vandana Yojana has been expanded, and guarantees on self-employment loans (up to 20 lakh) have been removed. Home-based work for urban women will benefit from tax exemptions. A special provision of 10,000 crore for Panchayati Raj institutions will promote real leadership in states like Haryana, where women's reservation is 50 percent. These steps are important towards gender equality, but effective implementation at the Panchayat level will be essential. To empower 60 percent of the country's youth population (under 35 years), a budget of over 1.35 lakh crore has been allocated for the education sector, including the establishment of 50 new IITs and medical colleges. 2 lakh crore has been allocated for the Skill India program, and an internship scheme will provide 1 lakh monthly stipends to 50 million youth. Support for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and an employment-focused development model. There is a strong determination to bring the unemployment rate below 8 percent. An allocation of 50,000 crore to the Startup India Fund will encourage youth entrepreneurship. But the question remains: will these efforts lead to job creation, or will the younger generation continue to wander aimlessly in search of jobs? In the areas of technology and innovation, the establishment of an artificial intelligence (AI) center, a revenue target of 2 lakh crore rupees from the 5G spectrum auction, and 1 lakh crore rupees for Digital India. 5 lakh crore rupees for clean energy—solar parks and green hydrogen production. 100 percent insurance on foreign direct investment (FDI). The Public Trust Bill 2.0 simplifies over 100 outdated laws. These steps are part of a strategy to make India a developed nation by 2047, but the digital divide must be bridged so that rural areas are not deprived of technology. Finally, the challenges are not insignificant. Keeping inflation under control at 5.5 percent and curbing food inflation. Strengthening border security with a defense budget of 6.5 lakh crore. 1 lakh crore for environmental protection, export promotion, and innovation.

## Reflections on the Murder of Gandhi and the State of India

Seventy-seven years ago, on January 30, 1948, three bullets struck down Mahatma Gandhi at a prayer meeting in Birla House. The gunman, Nathuram Godse, was a Chittavani Brahmin from Pune. It was however no simple act of homicide. It was the Brahminical ideology that sought to exterminate Gandhi's plural, inclusive vision of India as an obstacle to a project of Hindu supremacy and a nostalgic yearning for a restored Peshwari order. The assassin did not act in isolation. He was backed by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Hindu Mahasabha, and blessed by V. D. Savarkar the father of Hindutva. After the assassination, the RSS sought to distance itself from Godse. But historians like D.N. Jha demolished that claim. In his memoir, Godse's brother Gopal Godse himself confessed that all the Godse brothers had been associated with the RSS at the time of the murder. Public anger followed reports that RSS members had celebrated the murder by distributing sweets in parts of Maharashtra provoked public attacks on Brahmin houses at many places. Ideological disposition. The historical disposition of Brahminical ideology has been to secure and preserve supremacy over the religio-social and cultural order, rather than to exercise political power directly. Within the varna hierarchy, rulers who wielded temporal authority were placed below Brahmins, their legitimacy dependent on rituals, codes, and moral sanction controlled by them. This deeply entrenched hierarchy shaped Brahminical attitudes towards political power, particularly when external forces entered the subcontinent. As a social group, Brahmins were rarely opposed to being ruled by outsiders; instead, they tended to accommodate and even support the dominant power, provided it guaranteed the preservation of their social hegemony. There is no sustained historical instance of Brahmins as a community organising resistance to an external ruling power merely on the grounds of foreignness. Even under Muslim rule – so relentless

ly vilified in contemporary Hindutva discourse – Brahmin elites adapted, served as advisers, administrators, and intellectual intermediaries, and secured their privileged position within the social order. This pattern repeated itself under British rule. The only moment of collective Brahminical rage was provoked not by colonial domination per se, but by the defeat of the Peshwai in Pune – the singular historical instance of direct Brahmin political sovereignty. The subsequent rebellions, including participation in the events of 1857 (later romanticised by Savarkar as the "First War of Independence"), were driven less by a universal anti-colonial vision than by the desire to restore lost Brahmin rule. Even here, the acceptance of Bahadur Shah Zafar's nominal leadership illustrates a familiar strategic flexibility: political alliances were negotiable, so long as the deeper structure of social dominance could ultimately be reclaimed. Birth of Hindu consolidation In Indian history, most external groups that entered the subcontinent eventually settled, assimilated, and made India their home. The British – and other Europeans – were different. They arrived as merchant capitalists, captured political power to secure commercial interests, and never intended permanent cultural integration. This distinction mattered. For Brahminical elites, the real historical disruption had come earlier from large-scale conversions of marginalised castes to Islam, which weakened their demographic and cultural monopoly. Islamic civilisation posed a sustained challenge to their authority, creating a deep, if often tacit, resentment toward Muslim rule. When the British defeated the Muslim powers, they were naturally happy. The British, unlike earlier rulers, were expected eventually to depart. By the mid-nineteenth century, it became clear that preparations had to begin for reclaiming political authority by exterminating Muslims as the competitors. This shift is traceable to eastern Bengal, where Brahminical elites felt threatened by Muslim numerical strength and by colo-

## Union Budget 2026-27: Don't Look For Fireworks Here. Continuity Is The Goal



Union Budgets are often assessed by headline announcements. Budget 2026-27 should instead be read as a statement of macroeconomic restraint under external stress. Its defining feature is calibration. It has anchored fiscal policy, preserved financial stability, and extended an existing reform and investment trajectory rather than altering it. While presenting the Budget, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman stated, "India's economic trajectory has been marked by stability, fiscal discipline, sustained growth and moderate inflation", adding that the government has chosen "reform over rhetoric". The numbers that follow are consistent with that claim. The Budget pegs the fiscal deficit at 4.3% of GDP for FY2026-27, following 4.4% in FY2025-26 (RE). This meets the commitment made earlier to bring the deficit below 4.5% by FY2025-26 and signals a steady, rather than accelerated, consolidation path. Public debt is projected to decline from 56.1% of GDP (RE FY2025-26) to 55.6% in FY2026-27, consistent with the medium-term target of 50±1% by FY2030-31. The Budget Estimates imply non-debt receipts of Rs 36.5 lakh crore and total expenditure of Rs 53.5 lakh crore, with net tax receipts of Rs 28.7 lakh crore. Net market borrowing is budgeted at Rs 11.7 lakh crore, with gross borrowing at Rs 17.2 lakh crore, indicating no attempt to compress borrowing artificially. A Credibility-Preserving Step A declining debt ratio is intended to

reduce interest outgo over time, thereby creating fiscal space without raising taxes or cutting expenditure. In an environment of volatile capital flows and weak global nominal growth, this is a credibility-preserving stance. Reform measures in this Budget are largely microeconomic and administrative, but cumulatively significant. The Finance Minister cited that over 350 reforms since 2025 have been implemented, with emphasis on compliance reduction, dispute resolution, and process simplification. On taxation, the new Income Tax Act coming into effect from April 2026 consolidates assessment and penalty proceedings, reduces pre-deposit requirements from 20% to 10%, converts several penalties into fees, and decriminalises minor offences. These changes target litigation volume and compliance cost. Sustaining the momentum in financial markets, the introduction of market-making frameworks and derivatives on corporate bond indices addresses a long-standing gap in secondary market liquidity. Combined with proposals for municipal bonds, the Budget attempts to deepen non-bank financing channels without direct fiscal support. For MSMEs, the emphasis is on liquidity architecture rather than subsidies. TReDS transactions have already facilitated over Rs 7 lakh crore in financing. Mandating its use for CPSE purchases, adding credit guarantees for invoice discounting, and enabling securitisation of receivables aim to reduce working-capital stress. Export promotion measures are important. The Budget increases the duty-free input limit for seafood exports from 1% to 3% of FOB (on board) value and extends export timelines for leather and textile products from six months to twelve months. The removal of the ₹10 lakh per consignment cap on courier exports directly targets small exporters and e-commerce channels. More consequential are customs reforms. Duty deferral for authorised operators is

extended from 15 to 30 days, advance rulings are made valid for five years, and risk-based clearances are expanded. A single digital window is expected to cover approvals for agencies accounting for roughly 70% of interdicted cargo by April 2026. The implicit assumption is that reductions in dwell time, uncertainty, and discretionary intervention yield competitiveness gains comparable to explicit fiscal incentives, particularly when global trade is increasingly shaped by non-tariff barriers. Capex Still The Most Important Growth Instrument Public capital expenditure is budgeted at Rs 12.2 lakh crore in FY2026-27, up from Rs 11.2 lakh crore in BE FY2025-26 and Rs 2 lakh crore in FY2014-15. At roughly 3.3-3.4% of GDP, capex remains the principal growth-supporting instrument within a tight fiscal envelope. The proposed Infrastructure Risk Guarantee Fund marks a shift from direct spending to risk-sharing. Partial credit guarantees during the construction phase are intended to lower financing costs and crowd in private investment. Asset recycling through REITs, freight corridor expansion, 20 new national waterways, and a target to raise the share of inland and coastal shipping from 6% to 12% by 2047 reinforce the productivity orientation of the capex programme. If one came looking for fireworks, this Budget will disappoint. But if one came looking for a macro strategy under external pressure, it is coherent, i.e., Consolidate to preserve credibility and policy room.

# Assumption of nominal GDP at 10 pc for FY27 realistic: FM

**New Delhi:** Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday, February 1, said that the estimate for nominal gross domestic product (GDP) at 10 per cent for the financial year beginning April 1, 2026, is realistic. As per the Budget document, India's GDP growth in absolute terms is estimated at Rs 393 lakh crore. "Inflation is down in India, and it is remaining there for some time. Inflation is just not the only one, which is a deflator. However, largely you depend on that. Therefore, the assumption of the nominal GDP is realistic," she said, replying to a query in post-Budget interaction. Besides, a 10 per cent nominal GDP growth figure has been arrived at on the basis of the existing GDP base year and the methodology. The government is set to revise the base year for many important macroeconomic indicators, including GDP and retail inflation measured through the Consumer Price Index (CPI), later this month. The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) will release new statistical series with updated base years on February 27. National Accounts data will follow 2022-23 as the base year and will be released on February 12, and the CPI revision will take place at the end of February. Once these new series are introduced, historical data will be recalculated, altering growth rates, inflation trends and nominal values that form the backbone of fiscal projections. The Centre proposed sever-



al measures in the Union Budget 2026 for the tourism sector, with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman highlighting its importance in generating employment, earning foreign exchange and boosting local economies. Niche tourism and eco-trails Presenting the Union Budget, Sitharaman proposed the development of "ecologically sustainable" mountain trails in Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Jammu and Kashmir, and setting up the "National Institute of Hospitality." "The tourism sector has a large role to play in employment generation, forex earnings and expanding the local economy. I propose to set up a National Institute of Hospitality by upgrading the existing National

Council for Hotel Management and Catering Technology," she said. India will host the first-ever Global Big Cat Summit to deliberate on conservation strategies with 95 countries. Heritage and regional tourism In her speech, the Finance Minister proposed to "develop 15 archaeological sites," including Lothal, Dholavira, Rakshigarhi, Sarnath, Hastinapur and Leh Palace into "vibrant experiential cultural destinations." "Excavated landscapes will be opened to the public through curated walkways and immersive storytelling skills and technologies will be introduced to help conservation labs, interpretation centres and guides," she said. A dedicated scheme will

develop Buddhist circuits in the North-East region, covering Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura. Further, the government aims to create five tourism destinations specifically within the five Purvodaya (eastern) states. There is a renewed focus on providing modern infrastructure and basic amenities to temple towns through the mapping of City Economic Regions Infrastructure and connectivity. To promote tourism in remote areas, a Seaplane VGF (Viability Gap Funding) Scheme will be introduced to support operations and indigenise manufacturing. Seven High-Speed Rail corridors (such as Mumbai-Pune and Delhi-Varanasi) are planned to serve as "growth connectors" for passengers. Taxation and travel ease The Tax Collection at Source (TCS) on overseas tour program packages is reduced to a flat 2 per cent with the removal of the previous Rs 10 lakh threshold, although it also means this tax will apply to all tour packages. Provisions governing baggage clearance during international travel will be revised to increase duty-free allowances and provide better clarity to passengers. Institutional and talent development Upskilling guides: A pilot scheme will be launched to upskill 10,000 guides at 20 iconic tourist sites through a 12-week, high-quality training course developed in collaboration with the Indian Institute of Management (IIM).

# Textile stocks surge post Budget announcements

**New Delhi:** Textile sector stocks rallied on Sunday after the government announced the setting up of Mega Textile Parks in a challenge mode with a focus on integrated infrastructure and value addition, among a raft of reforms.

Shares of Gokaldas Exports surged 10.81 per cent, Arvind Ltd climbed 5.54 per cent, Vardhman Textiles jumped 4.61 per cent, Pearl Global Industries went up by 2.48 per cent, and K P R Mill advanced 2.38 per cent on the BSE. Rally in these stocks was in sharp contrast to the weak trend in equities. Reversing early gains, the 30-share BSE Sensex tumbled 2,370.36 points or 2.88 per cent to slide below the 80,000-mark at 79,899.42 in the afternoon trade. The benchmark gauge ended at 80,722.94, down 1,546.84 points or 1.88 per cent.



The government on Sunday, February 1, announced the setting up of Mega Textile Parks in challenge mode with a focus on integrated infrastructure and value addition, among a raft of reforms, including a five-pronged integrated policy framework, to provide a shot in the arm to India's employment-intensive textile sector. The proposed establishment of new Mega Textile Parks will attract investments, improve compliance and traceability, and create integrated hubs for scale, quality control and exports. It will also support growth in technical textiles, a high-potential segment critical for industrial, medical, defence and infrastructure applications. In a major boost to exports of textiles, leather and marine products, the Budget announced the extension of the export obligation period from 6 months to 12 months for exporters of textile garments, leather garments, leather or synthetic footwear and other leather products manufactured

# Futures STT hike rattles markets as Sensex, Nifty slide nearly 2 pc

**Mumbai:** Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty dived sharply by nearly 2 per cent on Sunday, February 1, logging their worst decline in years on a Budget day, after Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman proposed a hike in the Securities Transaction Tax (STT) on derivatives. Reversing the early gains, the 30-share BSE Sensex plunged sharply by 2,370.36 points or 2.88 per cent to slide below the 80,000-mark at 79,899.42 in afternoon trade as the finance minister announced a hike in STT on futures contracts to 0.05 per cent from the current 0.02 per cent. The barometer settled at 80,722.94, down 1,546.84 points or 1.88 per cent. The 50-share NSE Nifty tanked 495.20 points or 1.96 per cent to settle at 24,825.45. During the day, it tumbled 748.9 points or 2.95 per cent to 24,571.75. Stock exchanges held a special Budget Day trading session on Sunday in view of the budget presentation by Sitharaman for the next financial year. Sensex



and Nifty logged their worst decline in years on a Budget day. Earlier on February 1, 2020, the 30-share BSE benchmark had ended 2.42 per cent lower, and the Nifty tacked 2.51 per cent. Investors' wealth eroded sharply by Rs 9.40 lakh crore on Sunday, tracking a sharp decline in equities. Market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies eroded by Rs 9,40,581.75 crore to Rs 4,50,61,658.60 crore (USD 4.90 trillion) in a single day. "Market unease, however, is centred on the increase in STT on F&O, particularly the sharper hike on futures. This comes on the back of higher capital gains taxes last year, raising overall

transaction costs for market participants," Pranav Haridasan, MD and CEO, Axis Securities, said. Futures are a margined, risk-managed product and not typically the primary source of retail excess, which raises questions on whether higher STT will deliver the desired outcome or instead weigh on liquidity, participation and India's market cost competitiveness, he noted. "These concerns are being voiced by foreign investors and domestic traders, and are reflected in the immediate market reaction," Haridasan added. From the 30 Sensex firms, State Bank of India tanked 5.61 per cent, while Adani Ports lost 5.53 per cent. Bharat Electronics, ITC, Tata Steel, UltraTech Cement and Reliance Industries were also among the laggards. Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys, Sun Pharma and Titan were the gainers. Among indices, BSE PSU Bank dived the most by 5.60 per cent, metal tanked 3.85 per cent, commodities (3.35 per cent), energy (3.14 per cent), capital goods (3.02 per cent), utilities (2.98 per cent), industrials (2.66 per cent) and power (2.52 per cent). IT and BSE Focused IT were the winners. A total of 2,375 stocks declined while 1,759 advanced and 175 remained unchanged on the BSE. "The increase in Securities Transaction Tax (STT), especially in futures and options, is likely to act as a marginal negative for foreign portfolio investor (FPI) flows in the near term, particularly for high-frequency and derivative-focused global funds," Akash Shah, Technical Research Analyst at Choice Equity Broking, said.

# Andhra posts highest Jan GST collections, outpaces national growth

**Vijayawada:** Andhra Pradesh recorded its highest-ever January GST collections since the rollout of the tax in 2017, with net GST revenue rising 6.72 per cent year-on-year to Rs 3,073 crore in January 2026, even as tax rates were cut on several key goods and services. Total state revenues across taxes reached Rs 4,704 crore in January, up 7 per cent from a year earlier. The growth comes despite GST rate reductions on consumer essentials, durables, pharmaceuticals, automobiles and cement, withdrawal of GST on life and medical insurance, and the removal of compensation cess on most products from September 2025. The state's GST growth outpaced the national average of 5.8 per cent (excluding imports) and ranked second among southern states, behind Karnataka, while surpassing Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Telangana, according to official data. Net GST collections in Andhra Pradesh have exceeded year-ago levels for ten consecutive months from April to January, pointing to sustained economic activity and improved tax compliance.

In January, gross GST collections stood at Rs 3,479 crore, with SGST revenue at Rs 1,284 crore, up 8.37 per cent, while IGST settlement rose 5.57 per cent to Rs 1,789 crore. Petroleum VAT collections increased 7.09 per

cent from a year earlier. Cumulative collections till January 2026 rose 4.79 per cent to Rs 44,221 crore. Despite a lower base and the absence of rate-driven gains, the state's revenue performance has remained stable, reflecting a widening tax base and stronger compliance, officials said. Total state revenues across taxes reached Rs 4,704 crore in January, up 7 per cent from a year earlier.



# ICICI Pru Smart Insurance Plan Plus a plan for today's youth, designed for tomorrow's goals



India is at a turning point. The next ten years belong to our youth—the dreamers and doers who are driving the nation's economic future. As per Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), nearly 65% of Indians are below 35 years. Long-term disciplined financial planning and savings will be the key for them to turn their aspirations into reality, whether for buying the first home or retiring early. In this context, ICICI Pru Smart Insurance Plan Plus, a market-linked life insurance product is designed to help young earners to build long-term wealth while providing financial

security to the family. With premiums starting from just ₹1000 per month, this affordable product can enable young professionals and first-time investors to start early, stay invested and benefit from India's growth story. Mr. Vikas Gupta, Chief Product Officer, ICICI Prudential Life Insurance Company Limited, said "ICICI Pru Smart Insurance Plan Plus is a cost-effective product, wherein the entire premium amount is invested over the asset allocation chosen by the customer. It offers customers 25 different funds and four portfolio strategies to choose from. It also provides partial withdrawals so that

any immediate financial needs can be met. Furthermore, it has a 'Waiver of Premium' add-on benefit, ensuring that even if life takes an unexpected turn, the financial goals of the family are safeguarded." The product structure of ULIPs is such that it promotes long-term investment behaviour and wealth creation. This is particularly advantageous for customers since India is slated to become the world's third largest economy by 2028, as per Morgan Stanley. ULIPs also provide customers with flexibility to choose the asset class and freely switch between them without any cost or tax implications.

# BUDGET 2026-27: OVER RS 1300 CRORE ALLOCATED FOR FORENSIC RELATED SCHEMES

**New Delhi:** The government has allocated over Rs 1471 crore in the Union Budget 2026-27 for the modernisation of forensic capabilities, with a number of other schemes aimed at making justice swift and accessible. In the Budget announced on Sunday, under the Police head of the Union Home Ministry, Rs 500 crore has been allocated for the modernisation of forensic capacities under the schemes for Safety of Women. Additionally, Rs 14 crore has been allocated for upgrading Central Forensic Science Laboratories, which includes the establishment of a National Forensic Data Centre. The Budget also includes Rs 130 crore for the National Forensic Infrastructure Enhancement Scheme, which aims to strengthen the national forensic infrastructure across the country by setting up various off-campus National Forensic Science Universities (NFSUs) and other Central Forensic Science Laboratories (CFSLs). The NFSU has been

allocated Rs 145 crore to cover expenses related to academic, administrative, research, and infrastructural activities. The Inter-Operable Criminal Justice System (ICJS), aimed to "integrate digital platforms enabling seamless data sharing among police, courts, prosecution, prisons, and forensic agencies", has been given Rs 550 crore. The Budget has also allocated Rs 132.89 crore under the Criminology and Forensic Science category, a hike of around 34 per cent from the Rs 99 crore provisioned in Revised Estimates for 2025-26. This expense covers "administrative expenditure on the

Directorate of Forensic Science and Central Forensic Science Laboratories. The provision is also for the modernisation of Central Forensic Science Laboratories with emphasis on human resources development and Research and Development Schemes, establishment of Regional Forensic Laboratories and DNA Centres," the Budget document said. Hospitality bridge: The government proposes to establish a National Institute of Hospitality by upgrading the existing National Council for Hotel Management and Catering Technology to serve as a

bridge between academia, industry and government. Digital documentation: A National Destination Digital Knowledge Grid will be created to digitally document cultural, spiritual and heritage sites of significance, fostering a new job ecosystem for researchers and content creators. Tourism companies hail the budget. Real estate player Brigade Hotel Ventures Ltd said that the Budget has given the "strategic recognition" to the tourism sector. City-headquartered Aarthi Scans and Labs also lauded the Budget, terming it as clear and strengthening healthcare capacity. Vineet Verma, Director of Brigade Hotel Ventures Ltd, said the Budget's emphasis on tourism goes beyond infrastructure and rightly addresses the sector's biggest gap, skilled human capital. "The emphasis on infrastructure development, experiential tourism and ease of doing business sends a strong signal to investors and operators

# IRAN'S SUPREME LEADER WARNS OF REGIONAL WAR IF US ATTACKS

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has warned that any attack would spark a regional conflict, as the US continues to build up its forces nearby. "The Americans should know that if they start a war, this time it will be a regional war," Khamenei was quoted as saying by the semi-official Tasnim news agency. Donald Trump earlier said Iran was in "serious discussions" and he hoped they would lead to something "acceptable", while Iran's top security official Ali Larijani also said a framework for negotiations was progressing. Trump has threatened to intervene in Iran over its nuclear ambitions and after its deadly crackdown on anti-government protests. As part of its build up of forces, the US has sent its aircraft carrier the USS Abraham Lincoln to the region and late last week US



Central Command said it was operating in the Arabian Sea. "[Trump] regularly says that he brought ships... The Iranian nation shall not be scared by these things," added Khamenei. Iran is expected to begin a

two-day live-fire naval exercise on Sunday in the Strait of Hormuz - one of the world's most important shipping lanes and a key route for energy supplies. Around a fifth of the world's traded oil passes through

the waterway, which is about 33km (21 miles) wide at its narrowest point between Iran and Oman. Iran has in the past threatened to close the strait if it were attacked. The US has warned Iran against any

"unsafe and unprofessional behaviour" near its forces in the area. Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi responded by saying: "The US military is now attempting to dictate how our Powerful Armed Forces should conduct target practice in their own turf." On Saturday, two explosions in Iran heightened anxiety in the country. Local authorities said a blast that killed one and hurt 14 at a building in the southern port city of Bandar Abbas was caused by a gas leak. Tasnim denied social media reports that a Revolutionary Guards Corps navy commander had been targeted in the blast. In the southwestern city of Ahvaz, at least four people were killed in another explosion, with local authorities again blaming a gas leak, according to Iran's Tehran Times. On Thursday, Trump said he had told Iran that it had

to do two things to avoid US military action: "Number one, no nuclear. And number two, stop killing protesters." The US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency says it has confirmed the killing of more than 6,300 people since the unrest began in late December, and is investigating another 17,000 reported deaths. Another group, the Norway-based Iran Human Rights (IHR), has warned the final toll could exceed 25,000. Protesters have told the BBC that the lethal crackdown by security forces was unlike anything they had witnessed before. In his remarks on Sunday, Khamenei accused protesters of attacking police, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and other facilities including banks and mosques. "The coup was suppressed," Tasnim quoted him as saying.

Teenager dies from Swiss bar fire injuries, bringing death toll to 41



## Deadly gun and bomb attacks hit Pakistan's Balochistan province



A series of gun and bomb attacks across Pakistan's south-western Balochistan province have killed 31 civilians and 17 security service personnel, the region's Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti says. Security forces responding to the violence killed at least 145 attackers during a 40-hour gun battle, he said. The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) rebel group had earlier said it was behind the attacks, claiming dozens of soldiers were killed. It marks an escalation of violence in the impoverished but resource-rich province, where Pakistan's government has been battling an ethnic insurgency for decades. Pakistan accused India of supporting the BLA. Delhi has repeatedly denied such accusations. Grenade and gun attacks in the provincial capital Quetta and cities and towns across the province targeted hospitals, schools, banks and markets, Pakistan's junior interior minister

Talal Chaudhry said. "In each case, the attackers came dressed as civilians and indiscriminately targeted ordinary people working in shops," he said, adding that the attackers had used civilians as human shields. Armed attackers also opened fire at security installations, attempted to carry out suicide bombings and briefly blocked roads in urban areas. Some key administrative buildings in Quetta and nearby roads were reported to have been sealed off during the day. Mobile phone services were jammed, and regional train services were suspended. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif later praised the military, pledging to "continue the war against terrorism until its complete eradication". The BLA said it had launched a coordinated operation dubbed Herof, or "black storm" against security forces, and claimed to have killed 84 members of the security forces and kidnapped a further 18.

## LA 2028 OLYMPICS CHIEF 'DEEPLY REGRETS' FLIRTY EMAILS WITH GHISLAINE MAXWELL



The chairman of the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games has said he "deeply regrets" decades-old flirty emails with Ghislaine Maxwell - the jailed associate of convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. Casey Wasserman's messages to Maxwell, sent in 2003, were among millions of files published by the US Department of Justice (DOJ) on Friday. In one exchange, Wasserman wrote to

Maxwell: "I think of you all the time... So what do I have to do to see you in a tight leather outfit?" Maxwell is currently serving a 20-year prison sentence for recruiting and trafficking teenage girls to be sexually abused by the disgraced financier Epstein prior to his death in custody in 2019. "I deeply regret my correspondence with Ghislaine Maxwell which took place over two decades ago, long before her horrific crimes came to light," Wasserman said in a statement obtained by news agency AFP. He also emphasised that he had "never had a personal or business relationship with Epstein". As is well documented, I went on a humanitarian trip as part of a delegation with the Clinton Foundation in 2002 on the Epstein plane.

## Israel to ban MSF from working in Gaza over refusal to provide staff list



Israel says it will ban Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) from working in Gaza after the medical charity refused to hand over a list of its staff in the territory. The Israeli government had ordered 37 organisations to submit documents about their local and international workers in Gaza, claiming some in MSF had links to armed groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad. The charity has vehemently denied this. MSF announced on Friday that it would not share a list of its Palestinian and international staff with Israeli authorities as it had not secured "assurances to ensure the safety of our staff". In response, Israel said it was "moving to terminate the activities" of

MSF in Gaza. The Israeli Ministry of Diaspora Affairs and Combating Antisemitism said the decision followed "MSF's failure to submit lists of local employees, a requirement applicable to all humanitarian organisations operating in the region". On 30 December, Israel announced that it was going to revoke the licences of 37 international non-governmental organisations working in Gaza and the occupied West Bank, saying they had failed to meet new registration requirements. At the time the diaspora ministry said the measure was needed to prevent "the infiltration of terrorist operatives into humanitarian structures". The groups - which include MSF, ActionAid and the Norwegian Refugee Council - were told their operations must end within 60 days. The move was condemned by 10 coun-

## FRENCH TECH GIANT CAPGEMINI TO SELL US SUBSIDIARY WORKING FOR ICE



French technology giant Capgemini has announced it will sell its US subsidiary after its work locating people for immigration enforcement agency ICE sparked outrage. Capgemini has come under pressure from French lawmakers over a contract its subsidiary signed with ICE, amid international scrutiny over the methods used by the agency's agents in Minnesota. The fatal shooting of US citizens Renee Nicole Good and Alex Pretti by ICE agents in Minneapolis have sparked protests across the US and led to increased scrutiny of the agency. Capgemini Government Solutions is set to be paid more than \$4.8m (£3.5m) for

been under contract since 18 December to provide "skip tracing services for enforcement and removal operations", public records show. Skip tracing services locate individuals whose whereabouts are unknown. Capgemini Government Solutions is set to be paid more than \$4.8m (£3.5m) for

its work tracing people for ICE, which is due to continue until 15 March, US government listings show. It is one of 13 contracts the subsidiary holds with ICE. Capgemini, one of the largest listed companies in France, said in a statement that it had not been able "to exercise appropriate con-

## Slovakia PM's national security adviser resigns over Epstein links



The national security adviser to Slovakia's prime minister has resigned after documents released by the US showed he exchanged messages about girls and diplomacy with the late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. Robert Fico announced he had accepted Miroslav Lajčák's departure in a video message on Saturday, describing the adviser as "an incredible source of experience in diplomacy and foreign policy". The resignation comes a day after three million files relating to the influential financier were released by the US Department of Justice. While the files do not show any wrongdoing on the part of those featured, including Lajčák, they have raised renewed questions for those who associated with Epstein. In a text exchange from October 2018 - when Lajčák was serving as Slovakia's foreign minister - Lajčák and Epstein could be seen lightheartedly discussing women and a forthcoming meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. After Epstein sent an image, which cannot be seen in the record, Lajčák replies: "Why don't you invite me

## Epstein sent \$75,000 to accounts linked to Mandelson



Epstein's JP Morgan bank accounts. The first, dated 14 May 2003, shows a payment was sent to a Barclays bank account where Reinaldo Avila da Silva - Lord Mandelson's partner at the time - is named as "A/C", typically an abbreviation for account. In that payment, a "Peter Mandelson" is named on the account as "BEN", which is often an abbreviation for beneficiary. The second and third payments of

to da Silva's loan, Lord Mandelson said he had been "very clear" about his relationship with Epstein in interviews with the BBC. "I have nothing more to add," he said. Lord Mandelson was later sent to Washington by Sir Keir Starmer in December 2024 as the UK's ambassador to the US, but was sacked the following September after further revelations emerged about his friendship with Epstein. Emails revealed he had been in contact with Epstein after the US financier's 2008 conviction, sending a string of supportive messages. Asked by Laura Kuenssberg if the government was aware of Mandelson's alleged financial links to Epstein, Housing Secretary Steve Reed confirmed they were not. "You're talking about things that happened more



BUDGET 2026:

## Khelo India Mission Announced To Drive Decade Of Sporting Excellence

In a landmark announcement during the 2026 Union Budget session, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman unveiled an ambitious 10-year roadmap to transform India's sports sector. Central to this vision is the launch of the Khelo India Mission, a revitalised initiative designed to shift the country from being a participant to a global powerhouse in the sporting arena. Recognising that the sports sector is no longer just about podium finishes but is a significant engine for economic growth, the Minister highlighted its potential as a major provider of employment opportunities. "The Sports Sector provides multiple means of employment, skilling and job opportunities. Taking forward the systematic nurturing of



sports talent which is set in motion through the Khelo India programme, I propose to launch a Khelo India Mission to transform the

sports sector over the next decade," Sitharaman said. The core theme of this year's sports budget is the professionalisation of the

industry. Sitharaman emphasised that the expansion of the Khelo India Mission would create a vast array of jobs beyond the field of play. These may include: Technical & Coaching Roles: A surge in demand for certified coaches, high-performance directors, and scouts. Sports Science & Medicine: New avenues for physiotherapists, sports psychologists, nutritionists, and researchers. Management & Logistics: Opportunities in sports management, event organisation, and facility maintenance. Manufacturing: Job creation in the design and production of high-quality, affordable sports gear under the "Make in India" banner. India Eye Pivotal Sporting Shift: This strategic shift comes as India prepares to host the 100th

Commonwealth Games in Ahmedabad in 2030 and strengthens its bid for the 2036 Olympic Games. By committing to a 10-year build-out, the government is laying the groundwork for structural transformation, ensuring that the "Khelo India" spirit becomes a permanent fixture of India's national identity and economic fabric. The Khelo India programme was introduced by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports to revive the sports culture in India at the grassroots level. It was conceptualised in 2016-17 and officially launched with the first Khelo India School Games in January 2018. Since its inception, it has evolved from a single event into a massive national movement. Here is a brief on its journey and achievements so far.

## HAPPY TENNIS, SERIOUS NAME - THE MAKING OF CARLOS ALCARAZ

With his Australian Open triumph, the name of Carlos Alcaraz is now engraved on all four Grand Slam trophies. There is just one thing you need to know. "I don't like being called Carlos," he said in 2022. "Honestly, Carlos seems too serious to me, like I've done something wrong. I like Carlitos or Charlie." Once a young prodigy who smashed racquets when things did not go his way, Alcaraz has secured a spot in the history books once again as the youngest man to complete the career Grand Slam. He is the world number one, has seven major titles to his name and is one half of a potentially era-defining rivalry. But before all that, he was



Carlitos from Murcia. Watching Alcaraz is, for the most part, like watching sunshine personified.

There is a carefree joy in his shot-making; the huge forehand that goes blasting through every surface, the

drop shots and volleys that few would dare try. Then there is Alcaraz himself. He runs around the court with a puppyish enthusiasm, a huge smile never far from his face. The sleeveless shirts, the cries of 'vamos!', the ill-advised buzzcut in New York all add to the theatre. Alcaraz plays by the motto passed down to him by his grandfather - cabeza, corazon, cojones. Head, heart, balls. A reminder to be brave in the big moments, to truly go for what you want. It has served him well throughout his career. Tennis, Alcaraz told Vogue, external in 2023, is in his blood. His great-uncle built the club in Murcia where generations of the family would play.

## Pakistan Star Usman Tariq Hits Back At Cameron Green's 'Chucking' Accusation



ing off-break deliveries. Such a process often makes the batter perceive as if he bent in his arm. Tariq isn't a veteran in Pakistan's international team but has played in multiple T20 domestic leagues since making his professional debut in 2023. He has a total of eight T20 wickets at 7.50 with an economy rate of 5.62. But,

with the picture of a crying kid. This isn't the first time that Tariq has been accused of a suspected illegal action. The spinner has twice been reported while representing the Quetta Gladiators during the Pakistan Super League 2024 and 2025 seasons. On the first occasion, he was reported by umpires Asif Yaqoob and Richard Illingworth. Last year, he was reported again by match officials Ahsan Raza and Chris Brown. He has even undergone biomechanical testing at Lahore's National Cricket Academy twice. On both occasions, however, the officials cleared Tariq's action, and he was permitted to continue bowling in the T20 tournament.

## WWE Royal Rumble 2026 Results: Roman Reigns Books Ticket To WrestleMania 42



In a night defined by the amalgamation of eras, the 2026 Royal Rumble served as both a coronation for a modern underdog and the definitive return of a legendary bloodline. As the dust settled in Riyadh, the WWE Universe witnessed the heart-wrenching conclusion of a "Phenomenal" career and the rise of two superstars destined to headline WrestleMania 42. By eliminating the formidable Gunther in the final moments, Roman Reigns has officially forced a collision course with the reigning champions in Las Vegas. This victory provides the narrative fuel for Reigns to finally address the "unfinished business" lingering from his previous encounters with both Cody Rhodes and CM

## In-Form Rohtak Royals Look To Continue Winning Run Against Gurugram Gurus



8:00 PM onwards on 1st February (Sunday), 2026. Displaying grit and authority, the Royals transformed their previous encounter into a one-sided contest with a commanding second-half performance. Their ability to deliver under pressure in both raiding and defence has been the driving force

behind their impressive run. Rohtak will look to sustain that momentum and produce another dominant outing against Gurugram Gurus, who are still searching for their first points of the season. Leading from the front, skipper Sandeep Narwal produced a heroic defensive display in the last match despite

battling a severe fever. His High-5 and nine-point haul, the highest in the game, earned him the Best Defender of the Match award. Alongside him, Naveen, Himanshu, Sandeep Deswal, Aaryan and Rakesh will shoulder the responsibility of building a robust defensive wall. The raiding unit will once again be spearheaded by star raider Vijay Malik, who was named Best Raider of the Match in the last outing. Supporting him will be Milan Dahiya, who has been in tremendous form, along with local lad Ankit Rana, who could pose a significant threat to the opposition. Head Coach Surender Nada expressed confidence ahead of the upcoming clash.

## The most powerful woman in football - meet game's first female super agent



Rafaela Pimenta has never scored a goal or managed a team. But the 53-year-old is the only football entry in Forbes' '50 over 50' list for 2026. Every January, the global media company publishes the 50 women who have reached a position of status and influence that makes them beacons for others to follow. Oscar-winning actress Penelope Cruz is there, so too Dame Sarah Mullally - the first female Archbishop of Canterbury. As football's first female super agent, Brazilian Pimenta is hugely influential. Her impressive stable of clients includes Manchester City striker Erling Haaland, Liverpool manager Arne Slot and 17-year-old Mexican

wonderkid Gilberto Mora. She radiates warmth as she arrives on time to speak exclusively to BBC Sport. Once the cameras are rolling, Pimenta is deadly serious as she covers a range of topics, including the treatment of women in football. But, on the eve of deadline day, let's start with her con-

cerns about the present transfer system. "There needs to be a change," she explains. "There's too much power for clubs. 'Players are sometimes hostages of situations. I'm not fighting for chaos. We need the transfer system for the whole thing to work. But we need more balance. 'We are in a transfer

## PAKISTAN TO BOYCOTT T20 WORLD CUP 2026 MATCH AGAINST INDIA, BUT PLAY IN TOURNAMENT



Pakistan announced on Sunday that they will participate in the T20 World Cup 2026 but will boycott the match against India. Pakistan were scheduled to face India in a group stage match in Colombo on February 15. The decision was announced by the Government of Pakistan on their social media handle. The decision was taken by the government following the International Cricket Council's (ICC) removal of Bangladesh from the tournament. Bangladesh requested ICC to shift their matches from India citing 'security concerns' but their request was denied. "The Government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan grants approval to the Pakistan Cricket Team to participate in the World Cup 2026, however, the Pakistan Cricket Team shall not take the field in the match scheduled on 15th February 2026 against India," the government posted on X (former

Twitter). The announcement brought an end to days of speculation over Pakistan's participation in the tournament. Pakistan had also postponed the team's jersey reveal for the Men's T20 World Cup, and it was understood that the event would take place once the verdict on the team's participation in the

## WOLVES ACCEPT NEW £48M OFFER FOR STRAND LARSEN



Wolves have accepted a reduced offer worth £48m for striker Jorgen Strand Larsen from Crystal Palace. Last week, the two clubs reached an agreement in principle over a £50m deal for the Norway international to move to Selhurst Park. All that was left was for Palace to submit a written offer and provided the bid was of the value discussed, Wolves would have accepted. However, as BBC Sport revealed, the offer never arrived as Palace communicated their intention to walk away from the deal, which put the transfer in jeopardy. Sources claim that Palace's decision to pause final talks was down to reservations over the total cost of the deal, not concerns over the player. The impasse in recent days has placed further doubt on the deal. But with a little over 24 hours to go until the transfer window closes, Palace have now had a new offer

## Creators of "Joe" kick-start shooting of their next titled "Haiku" Starring Aegan today with Netflix securing Digital Streaming Rights

Netflix, one of the global OTT giants known for its selective curation, consistently champions content-driven stories alongside major star vehicles. The latest addition to their library is actor Aegan's 'Haiku', with makers proudly announcing that Netflix has acquired its digital streaming rights even before completion. In a rare move, bypassing the usual wait for theatrical results, the shoot kicked off this morning (February 1, 2026) with Netflix already on board. The shooting of the upcoming Tamil feature film Haiku commenced today with a formal pooja and first clap ceremony held at Eddiki. Celebrated filmmaker Director Ram, acclaimed for works like Peranbu and Taraman, gave the inaugural clap and extended his best wishes to the team, marking an auspicious beginning. Haiku is directed by Yuvaraj Chinnaasamy and produced by Dr. D. Arulanandhu and Mathewo Arulanandhu under Vision Cinema

House. The film features additional screenplay by Hari Haran Ram, who previously directed the critically acclaimed Joe. The technical crew includes Priyesh

led by Aegan (known from Joe and Kozhi Pannai ChellaDurai), alongside Femina George (Minnal Murali, Sesham Mire - i

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