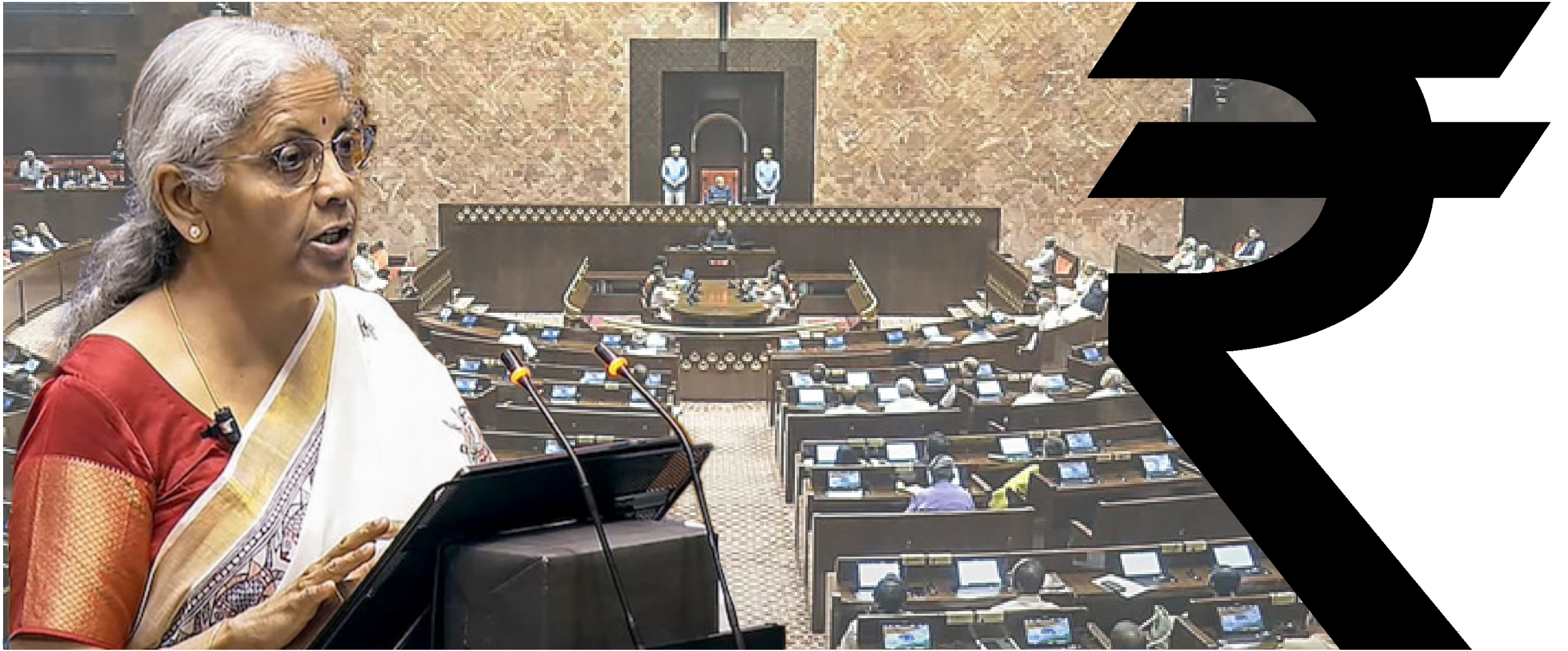




**Weather Forecast**

HYDERABAD	VIJAYAWADA	TIRUPATHI
H 33° C L 25° C	H 35° C L 26° C	H 36° C L 26° C



# BALANCE SHEET MISSING BALANCE

TPN Correspondent | New Delhi

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, while presenting the Union Budget 2025 on February 1, paid tribute to renowned Telugu poet and playwright Gurujada Apparao. She quoted his iconic words, "Desamante matti kaadoyi, desamante manushuloyi," meaning "A country is not just its land and soil, but its people." This line, from the classic poem Desamunu Preminchumanna, highlighted the government's focus on people-centric policies and national development. Sitharaman created history by delivering her eighth consecutive Union Budget, setting a clear roadmap for India's growth towards becoming a developed nation (Viksit Bharat) by 2047. The budget introduces key economic reforms, targeting agriculture, manufacturing, MSMEs, infrastructure, and investment to accelerate national progress.

## Fiscal Deficit Target Set at 4.4% of GDP by FY26

The government has set an ambitious target to reduce the fiscal deficit to 4.4% of GDP by FY26. This move reassures investors about India's economic stability and long-term growth trajectory. Maintaining a balance between fiscal prudence and development, the government aims to strengthen India's macroeconomic foundation.

## ₹20,000 Crore Boost for Startup Fund

With an additional ₹10,000 crore infusion into the Fund of Fund Scheme (FFS), taking its total allocation to ₹20,000 crore, the government is reinforcing its commitment to innovation and entrepreneurship. Launched in 2016, the FFS has successfully mobilized investments of over ₹91,000 crore through 151 Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs), fueling growth in the startup sector.

To enhance ease of doing business, the government has formed a High-Level Committee for Regulatory Reform. This committee will review existing financial regulations and eliminate bureaucratic hurdles, encouraging faster investment and fostering a more competitive business environment.

## MSME Investment Limits Increased by 2.5 Times

Recognizing the role of MSMEs in economic development, the budget significantly increases investment and turnover thresholds by 2.0 to 2.5 times, allowing more businesses to qualify for government-backed benefits. Additionally, the credit guarantee scheme has been expanded, ensuring better access to financing for small businesses.

## 50 Tourist Destinations to Get Infrastructure Boost

The government has launched an initiative to develop India's top 50 tourist destinations in collaboration with state authorities. The plan includes enhancing infrastructure, accessibility, and amenities to attract both domestic and international tourists. Additionally, to support small-scale tourism enterprises, Mudra loans will be extended to homestay operators, promoting local and heritage tourism.

## 120 New Airports to Cater to 4 Crore Passengers

The enhanced UDAN scheme aims to connect 120 new airports over the next decade, improving regional connectivity and making air travel more accessible. The initiative is expected to facilitate the movement of 4 crore passengers, with special focus on remote and hilly regions. Bihar will benefit from new greenfield airports alongside an expansion of Patna airport. With a clear vision for economic growth, financial stability, and inclusive development, the Union Budget 2025 lays a strong foundation for India's future. The government's focus on tax relief, infrastructure, entrepreneurship, and regional development ensures a progressive pathway towards Viksit Bharat by 2047.

"This budget is a force multiplier that will increase savings, investment, consumption, and growth rapidly. It fills the pockets of citizens rather than the government treasury, ensuring that common people drive the mission of Viksit Bharat."  
- PM Narendra Modi



"This budget is designed to empower every Indian by ensuring economic stability, fostering innovation, and creating opportunities for all. Our vision for Viksit Bharat by 2047 is driven by strategic reforms, sustainable growth, and a strong commitment to inclusive development."  
- FM Nirmala Sitharaman

## ₹12 Lakh Tax-Free Income

A major announcement in the budget was the exemption of income tax on earnings up to ₹12 lakh. This bold reform, raising the previous threshold from ₹7 lakh, has been widely celebrated, especially among the middle-class workforce. The move is expected to enhance disposable income, stimulate consumer spending, and bolster economic growth.

## 100% FDI in Insurance....

In a significant policy shift, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced 100% Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the insurance sector in the Union Budget 2025. This move aims to attract global capital, enhance competition, and improve insurance penetration in India. The government expects this reform to bring more investment into the sector, improve efficiency, and expand insurance coverage, benefiting both businesses and consumers.

## Cracks in Karnataka Congress



Internal rift emerges over CM selection in Karnataka Congress

Siddaramaiah's camp insists MLAs should have the final say

Shivakumar's supporters claim high command's decision is final

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

The internal power struggle within the Karnataka Congress has resurfaced, with a heated debate over who will decide the next Chief Minister once Siddaramaiah completes his two-and-a-half-year tenure. Despite AICC President Mallikarjun Kharge's gag order,

## Karnataka Got Nothing but 'Khali Chombu' in Union Budget 2025



TPN Correspondent | Mysuru  
Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has slammed the Union Budget 2025-26, calling it a "Khali Chombu" (empty vessel) for the state. Speaking to reporters in Mysuru on Saturday, he accused the Centre of neglecting Karnataka despite its significant contributions to the national economy. Siddaramaiah pointed out that Karnataka is the second-highest tax-paying state but received a negligible share in the budget. He expressed disappointment that repeated requests for key projects,



## ADB sanctions ₹2,000 crore loan for Karnataka Public Schools

State government to allocate ₹500 crore, making the total ₹2,500 crore AI-based training to improve students' job interview skills

TPN Correspondent | Shivamogga

School Education and Literacy Minister Madhu Bangarappa announced that the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a ₹2,000 crore loan for the development of Karnataka Public Schools (KPS). The state government will contribute an additional ₹500 crore, bringing the total investment to ₹2,500 crore. Speaking to reporters on Friday, the minister highlighted that this is the first time ADB has sanctioned a loan for Karnataka's education sector. "ADB does not approve loans easily. It conducts a thorough evaluation before granting funds. Recognizing the potential of Karnataka Public Schools, it has extended this long-term loan," he said. The funds will be allocated to 400-500 Karnataka Public Schools, with individual schools receiving between ₹2 crore and ₹8 crore, depending on their student intake. The minister also mentioned that CSR funds are being utilized for school development. Additionally, the government plans to expand free NEET coaching, currently available to 25,000 students, to all eligible students. The education department is also introducing AI-driven training in collaboration with the Nandan Nilekani Foundation to help students improve interview skills, body language, and employability. To further address educational challenges, taluk-level education committees will be formed to ensure children stay in school and receive necessary support.

# Karnataka Cabinet Approves Hesaraghatta Grassland Reserve

## Defers Marine Sanctuary Proposal

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

The Karnataka cabinet on Thursday approved the long-pending proposal to declare the Hesaraghatta grasslands as a conservation reserve, fulfilling a decade-old demand from conservationists and the public. The decision designates 5,678 acres and 32 guntas (2,298.18 hectares) in Yelahanka taluk of Bengaluru City district as the 'Greater Hesaraghatta Grassland Conservation Reserve' (GHC) under Section 36(a) of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

The move marks a significant victory for environmentalists, as the Hesaraghatta grasslands represent Bengaluru's last surviving savannah ecosystem. The proposal was initially approved by the State Board for Wildlife, chaired by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, in October 2024.

However, the cabinet deferred the decision to declare 5,959.32 hectares, including a 6 km stretch of the Honnavar sea coast and forest area in Uttara Kannada district, as the 'Apsarakonda-Mugali Marine Wildlife Sanctuary.'

Other Key Cabinet Approvals

**Water Security Project:** Approval for implementing the World Bank-assisted Karnataka Water Security and Disaster Resilience Programme, with a total cost of ₹5,000 crore. The project includes a ₹3,500 crore World Bank loan and a ₹1,500 crore state contribution.

**Infrastructure Policy:** Introduction of the



**Infrastructure Sector PPP Projects Policy, 2025.** Road and Bridge Projects: Approval for constructing a flyover and bypass on the Hassan-Holenarasipur railway line at a revised cost of ₹83.72 crore and a bridge across the Bhima River in Sindagi taluk for ₹44.50 crore.

**APMC Market Fee Redistribution:** Decision to contribute three paise from the collected market fee/user fee to the Market Development Assistance Fund.

**IAS Appointment:** Ex post facto approval for appointing senior IAS officer LK Atheeq as Additional Chief Secretary to the CM post-retirement.

**Education Projects:** Approval for constructing 19 Morarji Desai Residential School and College buildings under the minority welfare department at a cost of ₹304 crore and 12 residential schools/hostels under Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Yojana for ₹191.19 crore.

**Water Transport Revenue Boost:** Revision of annual license renewal charges for the Karnataka Water Transport Board, expected to generate additional revenue of ₹3.50-4 crore annually.

**Withdrawal of Planning Bill:** The Karnataka Urban and Rural Planning (Amendment) Bill, 2024, concerning Premium FAR, was withdrawn after the Governor returned it for legal clarifications.

**Compensation for Bengaluru Palace Grounds Litigation:** Following a Supreme Court judgment on December 10, 2024, the cabinet approved a ₹1 lakh litigation cost payment to the Mysuru royal family regarding 1,217.41 sqm of land used for the Jayamahar Road underpass.

**MUDA Sites for Operation Veerappan Staff:** Approval for site allotments to three medical officers and staff from the health and family welfare department who served in the STF during Operation Veerappan.

## If Sudhakar Wants to Quit BJP, Let him

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

BJP leaders have come out strongly against Chikkaballapur MP Dr K Sudhakar after his sharp criticism of Karnataka BJP president BY Vijayendra, with senior party figures dismissing his statements and even suggesting he should leave the party.

Yelahanka BJP MLA SR Vishwanath took a direct swipe at Sudhakar, stating, "Let him quit, at least the party will be cleansed." Questioning Sudhakar's contributions, Vishwanath pointed out that despite claiming he strengthened BJP, he lost the 2023 Assembly elections. He further accused Sudhakar of lacking loyalty and suggested that he had been in touch with Congress when he was initially denied a Lok Sabha ticket.

Vishwanath also reminded Sudhakar that BJP is not dependent on any individual, stating, "For us, the party is like our mother. If he wants to stay, let him stay. If he wants to leave, let him go." He also questioned whether Sudhakar



would have a ministerial opportunity if he returned to Congress.

Former MLA Preetham Gowda also downplayed Sudhakar's influence, saying, "He has been in BJP for just five years. He cannot expect anyone to take his words seriously."

This sharp rebuttal comes after Sudhakar accused Vijayendra of running the party unilaterally and sidelining senior leaders, a claim now met with strong resistance from within the party ranks.

## Rs 3,200 Crore GST Scam Exposed; Two Detained, Manhunt Underway

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

The Directorate General of GST Intelligence (DGGI), Bengaluru Zonal Unit, has uncovered a massive ₹3,200 crore fake invoice scam following extensive searches across 30 locations in Bengaluru and Mumbai. The investigation, conducted on January 29, led to the detention of two suspects, while a search is ongoing for a third accomplice. Officials revealed that the accused orchestrated the scam using 15 shell companies that existed only on paper. These firms, despite having registered directors and physical addresses, conducted no real business operations. "They falsely claimed to have received goods worth hundreds of crores but were merely generating invoices for services like IT support,

management consultancy, and advertising. The presence of numerous inward e-way bills without any corresponding outward e-way bills raised suspicions," said an official.

**Dual-Layered Fraud**

Investigators identified two key aspects of the scam. The first involved a ₹665 crore fake input tax credit (ITC) scheme, where companies fraudulently claimed tax refunds without genuine transactions. The second was a broader ₹3,200 crore fake invoice operation, inflating financial records to mislead authorities and stakeholders.

**Stock Market Manipulation**

Adding to the deception, nine of the 15 fraudulent firms were listed on Indian stock exchanges. Au-

thorities found that the promoters engaged in circular trading—issuing invoices among themselves and procuring fake invoices from other firms, including FMCG companies. This tactic inflated turnover, allowing them to secure bank loans and boost share prices artificially. "Once the company was listed and stock prices surged, the promoters cashed out, selling their stakes at inflated rates, leaving common investors to bear losses," an official explained. Further investigation showed multiple firms filing GST returns from the same IP addresses, indicating centralized control. Many company directors were mere figureheads, while chartered accountants failed to conduct proper audits.

1st Page Cont..

## Cracks in Karnataka Congress

the rift between Siddaramaiah's camp and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar's faction is becoming increasingly evident, signaling deep cracks within the party.

The core of the debate revolves around whether the party's high command or Karnataka's elected MLAs should have the final say in picking the next Chief Minister. Siddaramaiah's loyalists argue that MLAs, as the elected representatives of the people, should be the deciding authority. Meanwhile, Shivakumar's supporters maintain that the high command will ultimately determine the leadership transition. This divide escalated after Ramanagara MLA Iqbal Husain, a staunch Shivakumar supporter, asserted that the high command alone has the authority to pick the CM. In response, Cooperation Minister KN Rajanna, aligned with Siddaramaiah, countered that the decision rests with the MLAs. Amidst this, Home Minister Dr. G Parameshwara at-

tempted to strike a balance, stating that while MLAs' opinions are crucial, the final call will be taken by the high command after considering multiple factors. Adding to the turmoil, a group of 15 MLAs, primarily supporters of PWD Minister Satish Jarkiholi, have rekindled plans to visit Dubai—a move speculated to be a strategic message to the leadership, hinting at Jarkiholi's aspirations for the KPCC president post. This internal lobbying reflects the widening fault lines within Karnataka Congress, further complicating the leadership transition.

The Congress had initially attempted to prevent such tensions by instituting the power-sharing formula, allowing Siddaramaiah to serve as CM for the first half of the term while Shivakumar waits for his turn. However, as the transition period approaches, the competition between the two camps is intensifying, raising concerns about whether the agreement will be honored or

lead to further political turmoil. The high command's silence on the issue so far suggests that it is treading cautiously, wary of a repeat of past leadership battles that have destabilized state governments. However, the longer this ambiguity persists, the deeper the divisions within the party could become. Any delay in resolving the leadership question may weaken Congress' position ahead of crucial elections, potentially offering an opportunity for the opposition BJP to capitalize on the unrest. At a time when the party should be focusing on governance and consolidating its position in Karnataka, internal battles threaten to overshadow its agenda. If Congress fails to handle this transition smoothly, the damage may extend beyond the state, affecting its image at the national level. Whether the party leadership can navigate these deepening cracks and maintain unity remains the real test in the coming months.

## Karnataka Got Nothing but 'Khali Chombu' in Union Budget 2025

including the Mekedatu balancing reservoir, Upper Bhadra water project, and irrigation schemes for the Mahadayi and Krishna rivers, were ignored.

"The budget is a huge letdown for Karnataka. We had sought funds for storm-water drainage and business corridors in Bengaluru, yet the Centre gave us nothing but an empty vessel," he said.

**Allegations of Favoritism Towards Bihar and Andhra Pradesh**

The Chief Minister alleged that the budget favored Bihar and Andhra Pradesh due to political considerations. He noted that both states received special grants while Karnataka was left out.

"With the coalition government at the Centre, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh have been prioritized. They received packages last year, and again this year, while Karnataka was completely overlooked," Siddaramaiah said.

He further speculated that Bihar might eventually face the same neglect. "I have a gut feeling that Bihar, too, will receive the same 'Khali Chombu' treatment in the future," he remarked.

**Opposition will fail in tarnishing my image: CM Siddaramaiah**

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Friday dismissed allegations against him in the MUDA case, stating that opposition parties are making desperate attempts to malign his image. He asserted that the case being investigated by the Lokayukta police does not fall under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA).

Siddaramaiah accused the opposition of misleading the public on the issue, claiming that their efforts would not succeed as there is no evidence to support allegations of money laundering. He cited a Karnataka High Court ruling in favor of former MUDA commissioner DS Natesha, who had challenged the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) actions. The court deemed the ED's summons and searches illegal and issued a stay order.

Clarifying that the ED has not yet released its investigation report, Siddaramaiah called the probe politically motivated. He and his wife have approached the court against the ED's actions and will fight the case legally, he said.



**8,032 acres to be acquired with land compensation model Satellite towns planned in Devanahalli, Nelamangala, Hosakote, Doddaballapura, Magadi, Bidadi, Ramanagara, Sathanur, Solur, and Nandagudi Global tenders to be invited for township design**

## Cabinet Approves Greater Bengaluru Integrated Satellite Town Project

**TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru**

The Karnataka Cabinet has approved the Greater Bengaluru Integrated Satellite Town project, which aims to develop a cluster of ten villages in Ramanagara district to ease congestion in Bengaluru. This move aligns with Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar's long-term vision to expand Bengaluru's urban landscape and infrastructure. The project will be implemented by the Greater Bengaluru Development Authority and focuses on transforming areas such as Devanahalli, Nelamangala, Hosakote, Doddaballapura, Magadi, and Bidadi into fully equipped satellite towns.

The approved plan includes land acquisition of 8,032 acres, with landowners receiving 35-50 percent developed land as compensation under the Urban Development Authorities (Allotment of Alternative Sites for Acquired Land) Rules, 2009. Additionally, 910 acres and 3 guntas of

land already acquired by the Karnataka Industrial Areas Development Board have been excluded from the project. A committee chaired by the Additional Chief Secretary has been formed to oversee the implementation, and the government will invite global tenders to design and plan the township based on the work-live-play model following international urban planning standards.

Shivakumar has also been advocating for the development of a second international airport between Harohalli and Bidadi, urging residents not to sell their land as its value is expected to rise with these upcoming developments. The project is expected to create sustainable cities powered by solar energy, generate employment opportunities, and significantly reduce the strain on Bengaluru's infrastructure by diverting growth to well-planned satellite towns.

## Transport Minister Urges Commuters Not to Board Moving Buses

**TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru**

Following the tragic death of a 20-year-old woman near Padmanabha Nagar, Karnataka Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy has urged commuters to avoid boarding or deboarding moving buses. The minister emphasized the importance of passenger safety and advised people not to take unnecessary risks while using public transport.

The victim, identified as Monica, a resident of Katriguppe, was trying to catch a BMTC bus on Wednesday morning when she tripped and fell under the rear wheel. She was rushed to the hospital but was declared dead on arrival.

Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy urged commuters to follow safety guidelines and avoid rushing to board moving buses. The minister reiterated that BMTC operates over 6,500 buses with high frequency, ensuring ample transport availability. Despite repeated awareness campaigns, incidents continue to occur due to negligence while boarding or deboarding buses.

"It is very clear that if a person tries to catch a running bus or shows negligence while deboarding a bus or while boarding and even standing on footboard, he or she is likely to meet with an accident. We have already created awareness on these issues, but still, people end up repeating the same mistake," said Reddy. The minister stressed



that as the BMTC has a fleet of over 6,500 buses and the frequency is higher and in cities like Bengaluru, the public should not panic. Authorities continue to emphasize public transport safety measures to prevent such accidents in the future.

## Bengaluru Metro Introduces Free Parking for Cyclists, Special Spaces for PwDs

**TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru**

The Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRC) has finalized its new parking policy, which includes free parking for cyclists and designated spaces for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs). The policy will soon be sent to the Urban Development Department for approval.

A BMRC official stated that the revised policy was drafted in October 2024 after incorporating public feedback and suggestions from the Directorate of Urban Land Transport. The move aims to promote eco-friendly transport by allowing cyclists to park free of charge at all Metro stations. Free parking will be available for cyclists at all Metro stations, ensuring better accessibility for eco-friendly commuters. Special parking spaces will also be reserved for persons with disabilities (PwDs) at every station to enhance convenience. Additionally, parking fee payments will be linked to the National Common Mobility Card to prevent non-Metro users from occupying Metro parking spaces. To improve passenger flow, more Automatic Fare Collection (AFC) gates will be installed at seven stations, facilitat-



ing smoother entry and exit. The policy also outlines plans for increased parking space at peripheral and terminal stations, though standalone multi-storeyed parking lots are not permitted under the state's Transit-Oriented Development policy. Additionally, ahead of the Yellow Line's launch in April, officials have inspected stations to ensure proper bus connectivity and parking facilities.

## 220 BMTC Bus Breakdowns in 8 Months Raise Maintenance Concerns

**TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru**

Frequent breakdowns of Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) buses have caused major disruptions for commuters, with a staggering 220 incidents reported between April and November 2024. A significant portion of these failures involved electric buses, raising concerns over their maintenance and reliability.

According to BMTC data, of the total breakdowns, 156 were electric buses, while 64 were diesel-operated. The highest number of breakdowns occurred in September (48 incidents), October (70 incidents), and November (55 incidents), leaving passengers stranded and services delayed. The data indicates that break-



downs were relatively lower between April and August, but saw a sharp rise from September onward. In September, 39 out of 48 breakdowns involved electric buses. October witnessed the worst failure rate, with 62 out of 70 incidents involving electric

buses. With electric buses forming a major part of BMTC's future expansion plans, experts are calling for urgent improvements in maintenance and operational efficiency to ensure uninterrupted service for Bengaluru commuters.

## Centre Puts BMRC Fare Hike on Hold, Says MP P C Mohan

**TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru**

The proposed fare hike by Bengaluru Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRC), set to take effect from February 1, has been put on hold by the Centre, according to Bengaluru Central MP P C Mohan. However, BMRC officials stated that they had not yet received any official communication regarding the decision. The Fare Fixation Committee had recommended an average fare increase of 41%, with hikes ranging between 40% and 45%. A 5% discount was proposed for non-peak hours, while the minimum fare was to remain at ₹10. This would have been the first fare revision by BMRC in eight years. MP P C Mohan said he had previously urged the Union Urban Development Minister to reconsider the steep fare hike.

## Woman Escapes Sexual Assault Attempt in Kammanahalli

**TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru**

A harrowing incident unfolded in Kammanahalli early Monday morning when a young woman from Manipur narrowly escaped a sexual assault. The woman, who had booked an Uber cab to pick up a friend from Whitefield at around 2 am, was attacked by two unidentified men. According to the police report, while she was waiting inside the cab near Kammanahalli, the assailants suddenly entered the vehicle. In a panic, she fled the car, but the men pursued her. One of the attackers grabbed her by the neck, forcing her to the ground, while the other at-

tempted to undress her. Her screams for help alerted nearby residents, causing the attackers to flee the scene before any intervention could occur. The Banaswadi police have since registered a case and are actively investigating the incident. They are currently analyzing CCTV footage from the vicinity to identify and apprehend the suspects. The police are appealing to the public for any information that might help in capturing the perpetrators. This incident has sparked discussions on safety, particularly for those traveling alone at night, and has led to calls for increased security measures in public spaces.

## Davanagere Police Arrest Pharmacist in POCSO Case

**TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru**

In a disturbing development, the Davanagere police have arrested a 56-year-old pharmacist, identified as Amzad, on charges of sexually assaulting a minor girl. The arrest follows a complaint lodged by ASI HN Shashidhar from the Cybercrime, Economic Offences, Narcotics (CEN) police station. The case came to light when ASI Shashidhar reported discovering a video on social media that depicted the assault. According to the complainant, while on duty, he stumbled upon the video which showed the minor being taken to a residence and raped. The heinous act was not only

committed but also recorded and subsequently shared on social media platforms. Superintendent of Police Uma Prashanth swiftly responded to the incident by forming a special team under the leadership of DSP Padmashree Gunjekar to investigate and apprehend the suspect. Their efforts led to the arrest of Amzad, who runs a pharmacy in Devaraj Urs Extension 'C' Block, Davanagere. Amzad was produced in court following his arrest and has been remanded to judicial custody. The police have registered an FIR under several legal provisions, including Sections 67, 67(A), and 67(B) of the IT Act, Sections 77, 294,

and 64 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023, and Sections 4, 6, 14, and 15 of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012. An investigation is currently underway to further explore the circumstances of the crime and to ensure justice for the victim.

This case underscores the critical need for vigilance on social media platforms and the swift action of law enforcement in protecting the most vulnerable members of society. The local community has expressed shock and solidarity with the victim, urging for stringent measures to prevent such atrocities in the future.



## Ministers' meeting at Parameshwara's office sparks political buzz

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

A meeting of ministers at Home Minister Dr. G Parameshwara's office in Vidhana Soudha on Thursday, in the presence of Valmiki community religious head Sri Prasannanandapuri Swamiji, has triggered speculation in political circles. PWD Minister Satish Jarkiholi, Cooperation Minister KN Rajanna, and Social Welfare Minister Dr. HC Mahadevappa reportedly discussed political developments, sources said.

Parameshwara, however, clarified on Friday that there was no formal meeting. He stated that the Swamiji had visited his office to invite him to the annual fair at Rajanahalli Mutt. "Rajanna and Satish Jarkiholi came to know that the Swamiji was in my office and joined to take his blessings," he said. However, he did not explain why Mahadevappa was also present. Jarkiholi sarcastically remarked, "It was all about politics we discussed."

According to sources, Jarkiholi is planning to mobilize a large ST community gathering at the Rajanahalli Mutt fair on February 8 and 9 in Harihara taluk, Davanagere district, to assert his leadership within the Valmiki community.

Former BJP minister B Sriramulu, who had also staked a claim to the leadership, has reportedly lost his influence due to consecutive election defeats. Political analysts suggest that SC/ST ministers, upset with AICC General Secretary and Karnataka in-charge Randeep Singh Surjewala's directive against holding separate SC/ST MLAs' meetings, may align behind Jarkiholi.

A Congress leader hinted at internal power dynamics, stating that if there is a change in the chief minister's post, Jarkiholi and Parameshwara may unite. However, if Deputy CM DK Shivakumar emerges as a contender, the ST ministers might rally behind CM Siddaramaiah to retain his position for a while longer.

## Vijayendra Refutes Sudhakar's Claims

BJP Karnataka president Vijayendra denies influencing district appointments. Election process was handled by officials, with final names sent to high command. Says Sudhakar's concerns stem from confusion, urges internal discussions.

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

Karnataka BJP president BY Vijayendra on Thursday dismissed allegations by Chikkaballapur MP Dr K Sudhakar, who accused him of making unilateral decisions in party appointments. Vijayendra clarified that he has no direct role in electing district unit chiefs, as the process is handled by appointed officials and overseen by the party high command.

Addressing the media in Bengaluru, Vijayendra explained that district presidents are chosen through an organizational election. "Captain Ganesh Karnik oversaw the entire election process, with 13 observers appointed by the high command. Every district had an election officer, a returning officer, and a co-returning officer. The shortlisted names were sent to the party leadership for final approval," he said.

Vijayendra also emphasized that he only provides input for appointments in his district and has no influence over others. He added that Sudhakar appeared to misunderstand the process and assured that he would meet him soon to discuss the concerns.

Stating that he is working tirelessly for the party without any personal ambitions, Vijayendra urged party leaders to resolve differences internally instead of through the media. "I am not working to become CM. The BJP is not my property—it belongs to lakhs of workers. Any concerns should be discussed with senior leaders rather than making public statements," he added.



# State Moves to Curb Microfinance Menace

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

The Karnataka government has decided to introduce an ordinance to regulate microfinance institutions and curb illegal lending practices. The decision, taken during a Cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Thursday, aims to prevent harassment of borrowers and misuse of microfinance loans. The ordinance is now awaiting the governor's approval.

The move comes in response to rising cases of loan-related harassment and suicides. In Malavalli, a woman ended her life due to pressure from a microfinance company, while a 52-year-old man in Konnapura village succumbed after consuming poison when his house was seized over loan defaults. Similar cases have been reported across the state, including in Mysuru, Belagavi, Tumakuru, Bengaluru, and Raichur.

**Strict Action Against Loan Harassment**

Home Minister G Parameshwara reiterated the government's commitment to tackling the issue, urging affected borrowers to report cases directly to the police. District Commissioners have been instructed to take immediate action, and Deputy Commissioners of Police (DCPs) may be granted more authority to handle microfinance-related cases. "We will not let go of this menace. Companies behaving like goons will face strict action. If they violate regulations, their licences will be revoked," said Parameshwara.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah also addressed the issue on X, stating that forced recoveries without court approval are now prohibited. Lending beyond a borrower's repayment capacity will be under strict scrutiny, and any violation of RBI guidelines will result in pen-



alties. **New Guidelines for Police and Microfinance Firms**

Bengaluru Police Commissioner B Dayananda announced a crackdown on illegal lending practices, stating that no harassment cases had been reported in the city so far. However, all officers have been alerted and directed to act promptly on any complaints. Key measures include a strict ban on writing on borrowers' houses, ensuring police respond swiftly to harassment complaints, and compiling a list of companies violating RBI guidelines for necessary action. Additionally, District Superintendents of Police (SPs) have been directed to meet microfinance company heads and warn them against unlawful recovery practices. Victims of harassment are urged to report cases via emergency helpline 112.

**New Authority for Microfinance Regulation**

To further regulate the sector, the government has proposed establishing a Registration Authority to oversee microfinance institutions and moneylenders. All microfinance firms must register with the authority. Transactions without registration could lead to imprisonment of up to three years and a ₹1 lakh fine. Companies found guilty of harassment will face a minimum of six months in jail, extendable up to three years, and a fine of ₹1 lakh. The authority will have the power to cancel registrations of institutions involved in malpractice. Registered firms must submit transaction records by the 10th of every month. The government's crackdown aims to protect borrowers from exploitation and ensure accountability in the microfinance sector.

## Dr Sudhakar Criticizes Vijayendra Says BJP's Future in Karnataka Looks Uncertain

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

BJP MP from Chikkaballapur, Dr K Sudhakar, has launched a scathing attack on Karnataka BJP chief BY Vijayendra, expressing concerns over the party's future in the state. He accused Vijayendra of making unilateral decisions and ignoring party leaders, warning that the BJP's prospects in Karnataka look bleak if the leadership does not intervene.

Dr Sudhakar, a former minister, criticized Vijayendra for announcing district party chiefs, including in Chikkaballapur, without consulting him. He said his repeated requests for discussions were ignored, leaving him feeling sidelined. "I feel humiliated and disappointed. Unless the national leadership takes control of state politics, the future of BJP in Karnataka looks dim," he



stated. He further alleged that the state BJP has become restricted to one family. "I joined the party based on its ideology and the RSS principles. I worked hard in Chikkaballapur,

which was once a political desert for the BJP. But today, decisions are being made without even consulting those who built the party in difficult times," he added.

Sudhakar also emphasized that Karnataka BJP cannot be ignored, as it remains the party's crucial gateway to South India. He hinted at escalating concerns to the high command, saying, "Many leaders have already complained about Vijayendra, and I will also do the same."

When asked whether he would join BJP MLA Basanagouda Yatnal's faction, Sudhakar dismissed the notion, stating, "There are no separate teams in BJP—there is only one team, led by PM Modi." He reiterated his commitment to strengthening the party and ensuring its victory in the 2028 Karnataka Assembly elections.

## HC stays proceedings against MLC CT Ravi in derogatory remarks case. Hearing adjourned to February 20



TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

The Karnataka High Court has stayed criminal proceedings against BJP MLC CT Ravi in a case registered by Minister of Women and Child Development Laxmi Hebbalkar for allegedly making derogatory remarks against her in the Legislative Council. The alleged incident occurred during the last day of the winter session in Belagavi. Justice M Nagaprasanna issued the interim order on Thursday, staying the proceedings linked to the case registered at Bagewadi police station. The court also issued a notice to the complainant and adjourned the

hearing to February 20. The case is currently being probed by the CID.

Senior advocate Prabhuling Navadagi, representing Ravi, argued that registering the case violated Article 194 of the Constitution, which grants freedom of speech and protection to lawmakers within state legislatures. However, State Public Prosecutor BA Bellappa countered that legislative immunity is not absolute and has exceptions. The court noted that it needs to determine whether the Council Chairman's closure of the matter suffices or if an investigation is warranted. Pending this clarification, further proceedings remain stayed. Ravi has challenged the legality of the case, arguing that the Legislative Council Chairman had already acknowledged and closed the matter. Despite this, the government handed over the case to the CID, which he claims is against legal provisions.

## Special court seeks probe against ex-minister Puttaranga Shetty

Minister, contractors allegedly involved in Rs 25.76 lakh cash seizure case

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

The special Lokayukta court has directed the police to conduct a proper investigation into the allegations against former backward classes minister C Puttaranga Shetty and submit a report within three months. The court took serious exception to the chargesheet filed by Lokayukta police, stating that it was incomplete. The case pertains to the seizure of Rs 25.76 lakh from Shetty's personal assistant, SJ Mohan Kumar, in Vidhana Soudha in January 2019. Kumar was caught with a bag containing cash, allegedly collected from contractors as illegal gratification meant to be handed over to the minister. Judge KM Radhakrishna, while hearing the case on Friday, refused to discharge Mohan Kumar from the case registered under the Prevention of Corruption Act. The case, initially handled by the then Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB), was later transferred to the Bengaluru division of Lokayukta police after the ACB was abolished. The Lokayukta po-

lice had filed a chargesheet only against Mohan Kumar, dropping five other accused, stating lack of evidence, while Shetty was treated as a witness.

The chargesheet stated that the cash seized from Mohan Kumar was illegal gratification from contractors seeking official favours for civil work grants. The court referred to statements recorded before the magistrate under Section 164 CrPC, which revealed that contractors Jyothi Prakash and Satish paid Rs 9 lakh, Raju and Umesh paid Rs 7 lakh, Yogesh Babu paid Rs 2 lakh, and another contractor paid Rs 3.5 lakh through intermediaries. These statements indicated that the minister allegedly expected a 6% commission for sanctioning grants. The public prosecutor argued that sufficient material was available to proceed not only against Mohan Kumar but also against those dropped from the chargesheet. Taking note of this, the court has now ordered further investigation into the matter.



## Water Tariff Hike in Bengaluru Inevitable, Says Dy CM Shivakumar



**TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru**

Deputy Chief Minister and Bengaluru Development Minister DK Shivakumar has reiterated that a water tariff hike in the city is unavoidable, citing the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board's (BWSSB) financial losses and infrastructure demands.

Speaking at a Sarvodaya Day programme at the KPCC office on Thursday, Shivakumar stated that the BWSSB has been incurring an annual loss of ₹1,000 crore. Additionally, the board requires approximately ₹6,000 crore to upgrade its pipeline network. "A revision in water charges is inevitable as the last hike was implemented 11 years ago," he said.

Dy CM DK Shivakumar confirmed an imminent water tariff hike due to BWSSB's financial losses and infrastructure needs. The board is losing ₹1,000 crore annually and requires ₹6,000 crore for pipeline development.

Speaking to the media on the sidelines of a Sarvodaya Day programme at the KPCC office on Thursday, Shivakumar said the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) has been incurring losses of Rs 1,000 crore per year. "The board also needs around Rs 6,000 crore to develop its network of pipelines. So, it is inevitable that the water tariff will increase," he said. At the programme earlier, he said the BJP is trying to erase Mahatma Gandhi's legacy.

"The BJP may not accept Gandhi's philosophy yet they stage protests under the Gandhi statue. It was Gandhi who taught us the principles of non-violent protests. It was Gandhi who started the Swadeshi movement, but the PM is claiming credit for the Make in India initiative" he said. Shivakumar said the government is planning to conduct the 'Jai Babu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan' programme throughout the year to spread his message. "The CM may talk about implementation of the report submitted by the Gandhi Bharat Implementation Committee during the budget presentation. We have had discussions about this with the AICC also," he said.

# Maoist Kotehonda Ravi Surrenders After 17 Years in Naxal Movement

**TPN Correspondent, Chikkamagaluru**

Kotehonda Ravi, a 44-year-old native of Hugarubailu in Sringeri taluk, surrendered before the Chikkamagaluru district administration on February 1, marking the end of his 17-year association with the Naxal movement. He had been involved in armed struggles since 2007 and was reportedly active in Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu.

Ravi surrendered before the district committee responsible for rehabilitating left-wing extremists, chaired by Chikkamagaluru Deputy Commissioner Meena Nagaraj. He faces 13 cases in Chikkamagaluru district alone and has been categorized as an 'A' category Maoist under the state's surrender policy, making him eligible for a rehabilitation package of ₹7.5 lakh. He will receive an initial amount of ₹3 lakh at the time of surrender, while the remaining sum will be provided in phases. Additionally, if he chooses to undergo skill development training, the government will offer him a monthly stipend of ₹5,000.

Chikkamagaluru Superintendent of Police Vikram Amathe confirmed that Ravi would undergo a medical examination and face legal proceedings for the 27 cases registered against him. District officials, including Zilla Panchayat CEO H.S. Keerthana, State committee member K.P. Sripal, and representatives of Shantigagi Nagarikara Vedike, were present during the surrender.



Ravi was part of an active Maoist group until recently. Earlier in January, six other members of the group surrendered in the presence of Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah. With Ravi's surrender, police officials claim that all active Maoists in the region have now returned to the mainstream. Following his surrender, Ravi submitted a written request to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, urging the government to address long-standing issues faced by residents of his village. He stated that he had joined the Naxal movement due to the absence of basic amenities such as electricity and road

connectivity. Now, believing that the government is responsive, he has chosen to reintegrate into society. Among his demands, he has requested permission to cultivate two acres of land that he farmed before joining the movement and urged the government to grant land rights to forest dwellers. He has also appealed for the withdrawal of cases against him.

Meanwhile, another former Maoist, a woman with three cases registered against her, is expected to surrender on February 2. She had distanced herself from the movement long ago but remained in hiding until now.

## Karnataka Implements Supreme Court Directive on 'Right to Die with Dignity'

**TPN Correspondent | Karnataka**

The Karnataka Health Department has issued an order to implement the Supreme Court's directive on a patient's right to die with dignity, introducing an Advance Medical Directive (AMD), or living will, allowing individuals to record their medical treatment preferences in advance.

Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao announced the move on social media, calling it a "historic order" that will benefit terminally ill patients with no chance of recovery, those in a persistent vegetative state, and individuals who no longer benefit from life-sustaining treatments. "This important step will bring great relief and a dignified sense of closure to many families and individuals," he said. Referring to Karnataka's progressive



stance, he stated, "Karnataka is a progressive state, and we are always at the forefront

in upholding liberal and equitable values for a more just society."

The Supreme Court had previously recognized the right to die with dignity as a fundamental right in its 2018 ruling. It upheld an individual's right to self-determination regarding medical treatment and the execution of advance medical directives. The court clarified that passive euthanasia, involving the withholding or withdrawal of life-sustaining treatment, is legally permissible. Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao emphasized that this decision empowers patients to make dignified end-of-life care choices. "We have also come out with an Advance Medical Directive (AMD), or a living will, in which a patient can record their wishes about their medical treatment in the future," he said.



## Commercial LPG Cylinder Price Reduced by ₹7

**TPN Correspondent | New Delhi**

Oil marketing companies have reduced the price of commercial LPG cylinders by ₹7, bringing the cost of a 19 kg cylinder in Delhi down to ₹1,797. The revision, effective from today, is expected to provide marginal relief to businesses that rely on LPG for daily operations.

The price cut applies specifically to the 19 kg commercial LPG cylinder, widely used in hotels, restaurants, and other commercial establishments. However, there has been no change in the prices of domestic LPG cylinders used for household cooking. In December, oil companies had increased the price of commercial LPG cylinders by ₹62, impacting small businesses and commercial operations. These revisions are part of routine price adjustments based on fluctuations in global crude oil rates and other economic factors.

LPG prices vary across states due to local taxes and transportation costs. While the reduction is minimal, businesses nationwide are expected to benefit from the adjustment. The revision comes amid ongoing global market fluctuations influencing fuel prices.

## Lokayukta Raids Unearth ₹18.45 Crore in Disproportionate Assets

**TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru**

The Lokayukta police uncovered disproportionate assets (DA) worth ₹18.45 crore from seven government officials across Karnataka in a series of raids on Friday. The simultaneous searches were conducted at over 27 locations in Bengaluru, Belagavi, Bagalkote, Chitradurga, and Raichur. Among the highest recoveries was from Madhav Rao, Assistant Executive Engineer, Hebbal Division of BBMP, who allegedly possessed DA worth ₹8.57 crore, including ₹7.52 crore in immovable assets such as seven sites, two houses, and 48.27 acres of agricultural land. His movable assets, including ₹55 lakh worth of jewellery and vehicles worth ₹50 lakh, amounted to ₹1.05 crore.

**Key Findings:**

- Madhav Rao (BBMP Engineer) – ₹8.57 crore in DA, including land, houses, and jewellery.
- Sachin Basavant Manded

(Belagavi Sub-Registrar Office) – ₹2.50 crore, including ₹1.01 crore in bank deposits.

- TK Ramesh (Bengaluru Rural ZP) – ₹2.21 crore, including ₹1.23 crore in property and ₹97.83 lakh in other assets.
  - KC Shashidhar (Chitradurga BC Welfare Dept.) – ₹1.78 crore, including land and jewellery.
  - Shivalingaiah (Bagalkote Gram Panchayat PDO) – ₹1.43 crore, including a house, land, and jewellery.
  - Narasimha Rao Gujjar (Raichur ZP) – ₹1.20 crore, including five sites, two houses, and jewellery.
  - Sanjay Annappa Durgannavar (Belagavi Veterinary Inspector) – ₹74.07 lakh, including property and jewellery.
- Authorities are continuing investigations into the assets, and legal action is expected against the officials involved.

## Man booked for black magic, animal sacrifice

**TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru**

Mangaluru city police have booked Rama Sena leader Prasad Attavar under the Karnataka Prevention and Eradication of Inhuman Evil Practices and Black Magic Act, 2017, after videos of alleged black magic rituals and animal sacrifice were retrieved from his phone.

Attavar is accused of performing black magic rituals to seek strength for activist Snehamayi Krishna, a complainant in the MUDA land irregularities case involving Chief Minister Siddaramaiah. Mangaluru city police commissioner Anupam Agrawal stated on Friday that Attavar was initially arrested for vandalizing a massage parlor in Bejai. "During the investigation, we examined his mobile phone at the CEN Lab and found several suspicious videos and messages," he said. According to police, Attavar had

shared a video with Ananth Bhat, an alleged archak, showing a series of animal sacrifices where the blood was offered to deities. A piece of paper with the names of five individuals, including Attavar, Snehamayi Krishna, Gangaraju, Shrinidhi, and Suma Acharya, was found with blood spilled over their photos. The location of the alleged animal sacrifice is yet to be determined, and further investigation will follow after taking Attavar and Ananth into custody.

Police have also recovered an image of a bag containing cash, with chat records suggesting Attavar's involvement in financial dealings. Based on a complaint by Mangaluru East police inspector Somashekhara JC, Prasad Attavar (45) and Ananth Bhat have been booked under Section 3(2) of the Karnataka Prevention and Eradication of Inhuman Evil Practices and Black Magic Act, 2017.

## Thousands of Schoolchildren in Koppal Struggle with Basic Literacy

**TPN Correspondent | Koppal**

Thousands of schoolchildren in Koppal district are struggling with basic literacy, with many SSLC students unable to read and write Kannada and English. The issue was brought to light during education department visits to government schools, prompting concerns among officials and parents as the SSLC examination timetable

has been released. MLC Hemalatha Nayak revealed that a survey found around 7,000 SSLC students in the district facing severe literacy gaps. With exams approaching, teachers have resorted to teaching fundamental alphabets like "ABCD..." and "Aa Aaa, Ee, Eee" to help students catch up. "In rural areas, many children do not attend school regularly as they accompany their par-

ents, who are daily wage workers or vegetable sellers, to workplaces. Some children have been forcibly admitted to government schools, but attendance remains irregular," said Ramesh Badiger, a resident of Kinnal village. He emphasized that illiterate parents often prioritize income over education, and teachers should avoid promoting such students to higher classes without

ensuring they have basic literacy skills. MLC Hemalatha Nayak said she had raised the matter during the recent Belagavi session and urged Primary and Secondary Education Minister Madhu Bangarappa to take immediate action. "The minister promised to look into it and act accordingly, but no serious action has been taken so far," she stated.

# Union Budget 2025: Is the Gender Budget on the Right Track?

Assistant Professor of Economics at the School of Social Sciences & Humanities, VIT-AP University, Amaravati.

The Gender Budget Statement for FY 2025-26 marks a significant milestone in India's commitment to gender-responsive governance, witnessing an impressive 20% increase in allocations compared to the previous fiscal year. With a total outlay of ₹4,49,028.68 crore, constituting 8.86% of the Union Budget, this represents a 466.54% rise from FY 2015-16. The hike signals a progressive shift towards women's development and empowerment, aligning with the government's vision of women-led growth. However, beneath these promising figures lie critical concerns regarding the effectiveness and targeting of these allocations. The Evolution of Gender Budgeting in India

Gender budgeting was formally introduced at the central level in 2005-06 following the recommendations of the Ashok Lahiri Committee Report (2001). Unlike a separate budget for women, it integrates gender-responsive allocations within existing schemes to ensure equitable resource distribution. Over the past two decades (2005-25), gender budgeting has been institutionalized across national and sub-national levels, contributing to improvements in women's empowerment, safety, health, and economic inclusion.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) serves as the nodal agency, with gender budgeting housed under the Samarthya sub-scheme of Mission Shakti. The categorization of gender budgets into Part A (100% women beneficiaries), Part B (30-99% women beneficiaries), and Part C (less than 30% women beneficiaries) enables a structured approach to fund allocation.

## The Good: Notable Increases in Allocations

The Samarthya sub-scheme under Part A has witnessed a remarkable 150% hike, rising from ₹953.74 crore (FY 2024-25, Revised) to ₹2,396 crore (FY 2025-26). Similarly, overall Part A allocations grew by 30%, Part B by 16%, and Part C by 15%, reinforcing a commitment to gender-sensitive spending.

Some sectoral ministries have also seen substantial increases. For instance, allocations under the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy and the Ministry of Power have surged, reflecting an effort to in-



Dr. Ashraf Pulikkamath

tegrate gender considerations into traditionally male-dominated sectors. However, whether these funds are backed by robust gender-disaggregated data and effective implementation frameworks remains an open question.

## The Concerns: Stagnation in Crucial Areas

Despite the rise in total allocations, stagnation in key sectors raises concerns. The Ministry of Labour and Employment's gender budget saw a marginal increase from ₹908.25 crore (FY 2024-25) to ₹922.16 crore (FY 2025-26)—a 1.5% rise, failing to address women's low labor force participation. Similarly, allocations under the Ministry of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) rose modestly from ₹2,466.57 crore to ₹2,821.08 crore, despite MSMEs being a critical pathway for women's entrepreneurship.

Additionally, the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship has not seen a proportionate increase, raising concerns about

whether women's upskilling is receiving adequate attention.

## The Grey Areas: Expanding Gender Budget to Broad Schemes

The inclusion of Part C allocations, now amounting to ₹16,821.28 crore, expands gender sensitivity across broader budget lines. However, a major share of this category goes to PM Kisan Samman, which, while benefiting women farmers, does not directly empower them economically.

Moreover, the categorization of certain large-scale schemes as gender-focused is questionable. For instance, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY)—which rose from ₹15,170 crore to ₹23,294 crore under Part A—prioritizes women but is not exclusively women-centric. Similarly, the Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP) under Part B lacks detailed gender-based targeting.

Conversely, some programs like Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) appear underreported in the gender budget. The ₹40,000 crore allocated under Part B accounts for 46% of total MGNREGA funds, while government data indicates 60% of beneficiaries are women—suggesting a possible discrepancy in gendered reporting.

## The Underlying Challenge: Practical Needs vs.

## Transformative Change

While the gender budget continues to focus on practical gender needs, it remains aligned with the Women's Development paradigm, rather than the women-led development approach announced in 2024. The allocations largely prioritize basic survival, safety, and welfare, reinforcing women's roles within existing social structures rather than enabling structural transformation. While this approach aids poverty alleviation and economic inclusion, it risks limiting women to passive beneficiaries instead of empowered participants in economic and social change.

## A Step Forward, But Is It Enough?

The Gender Budget 2025-26 demonstrates a commendable financial commitment to women's development, with rising allocations and broader inclusion of gender perspectives across schemes. However, stagnation in critical sectors, questionable scheme categorization, and the dominance of welfare-based allocations highlight the gaps between intent and impact.

For gender budgeting to truly foster empowerment, it must move beyond incremental increases in funds and towards a transformative framework—one that prioritizes economic autonomy, leadership, and gender mainstreaming at all levels of policymaking.

## Shifts in South Asian Geopolitics: India-China Thaw and Pakistan-Bangladesh Revitalization



The geopolitical landscape of South Asia has seen notable developments in recent days, with potential shifts in relations between key regional players. Two significant changes have emerged: a thaw in India-China relations after years of tensions, and an apparent revival in diplomatic ties between Pakistan and Bangladesh. These developments could reshape the region's dynamics and open doors for enhanced cooperation.

On the India-China front, the past few years have been marked by strained relations, particularly following the People's Liberation Army's incursions in eastern Ladakh in 2020. However, recent signs suggest a gradual de-escalation of tensions between the two nations. An editorial in *The Nation* posits that India and China should not view each other as adversaries, particularly since both countries stand to gain immensely from peaceful resolution of their border disputes. The editorial also warns India about the potential pitfalls of its growing alliance with the United States, cautioning that such an arrangement may be short-lived, citing Pakistan's past experience. The relationship between the US and Pakistan, once seen as a strategic alliance, faltered when Pakistan's strategic utility diminished, leaving it sidelined.

Meanwhile, diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Bangladesh have taken a positive turn, with high-level engagements signaling a possible shift from historical animosities to a more collaborative future. *The Daily Times* highlights that both countries are in a unique position to move beyond their historical grievances and embrace economic and cultural cooperation. The editorial stresses the importance of fostering bilateral trade and people-to-people exchanges to ensure shared prosperity. Economic collaboration, the piece argues, can create jobs, improve stability, and uplift communities, while cultural exchanges can strengthen the bond between the two nations, united by centuries of shared history.

In another area of concern, Pakistan remains deeply worried about the security implications of Afghanistan's role in regional stability. *Dawn* reports that 2024 witnessed the highest civilian and military casualties in a decade, largely due to terrorism. The editorial emphasizes that Pakistan must refine its counterterrorism policies and apply diplomatic pressure on the Afghan Taliban to prevent their soil from being used by anti-Pakistan actors. Additionally, *The Daily Times* points to the Taliban's public display of American military hardware as a source of growing concern, especially given the evidence of these weapons being used in attacks in Balochistan.

As the geopolitical landscape in South Asia continues to evolve, these shifts offer opportunities for cooperation, but also pose significant challenges that need careful navigation.

## Congress Revives Its Campaign in Delhi: A Resurgence Amidst Political Uncertainty

The Congress party's campaign in Delhi is showing signs of a strong comeback, increasing uncertainty ahead of the upcoming state elections. This revival of the party has led to speculation that it may perform well in its traditional strongholds, where it has prominent candidates and the electorate appears to be regaining interest in the party. However, potential Congress supporters are grappling with a crucial question: will voting for the party inadvertently help the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)?

Arvind Kejriwal, Chief Minister of Delhi, has attempted to sway voters away from Congress by labeling the party as a "vote cutter," warning people not to waste their votes on Congress. This remark is particularly contentious given Kejriwal's own role in contributing to BJP victories in Goa, Gujarat, and Uttarakhand in 2022 through similar tactics.

Despite Kejriwal's accusations, there are several compelling rea-



sons why voting for Congress in Delhi might be a wise choice. First, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), despite its promises during the 2020 elections, has largely failed to deliver on key issues. Second, unlike AAP, Congress has shown a readiness to challenge the BJP's majoritarian and authoritarian approach, as well as its polarizing politics in Delhi. The notion that Congress merely acts as a "vote cutter" is also overly simplistic, as the party could very well attract disillusioned AAP voters, potentially reducing BJP's vote share in the process. Lastly, unlike the pre-

vious Sheila Dikshit government, which focused on infrastructural development, AAP has underfunded vital capital projects, such as the expansion of hospitals and sewage treatment plants.

At its core, AAP promotes an anti-political, middle-class sensibility, with Arvind Kejriwal positioning himself as a populist leader akin to Narendra Modi or Donald Trump. He casts himself as an individual crusading against a corrupt system, with elected officials and civil servants portrayed as distractions.

## Ram Bharose at the Kumbh: A Political Lesson for the Opposition

The recent tragedy at the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj, where 38 lives were lost in a stampede during Mauni Amavasya, has drawn attention to the stark realities of political dynamics in Uttar Pradesh. Despite the tragic deaths, the overwhelming sentiment among pilgrims is a fatalistic acceptance: "Chalo, ho gaya," as many devotees deem these incidents part of the spiritual experience. However, a closer look reveals a deeper issue within the political landscape of Uttar Pradesh.

While the deaths at the Kumbh were tragic, the state's leadership, particularly Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, has faced minimal political fallout. PM Modi's reassurances and statements from religious figures like VHP global chief Alok Kumar, who called it the "will of god," have reinforced the public perception that such incidents are beyond human control. However, this narrative is also indicative of a political culture where accountability is diluted by devotion and an ingrained acceptance of suffering.

The political opposition, including leaders like Akhilesh Yadav and Rahul Gandhi, have attempted to capitalize on the trage-



dy, questioning the government's handling of the situation. Yet, their critiques are not resonating with the masses, as they lack a credible alternative to the current regime. The opposition leaders are seen more as distant figures disconnected from the realities of the common people. As the situation in Uttar Pradesh demonstrates, any political anger against Yogi will likely be felt in a faceless manner, from the devotees themselves, rather than from organized political opposition.

The recent incident in Prayagraj highlights the failure of the opposition to offer a viable alternative. Rahul Gandhi's photo-op on the Yamuna and the Congress's refusal to collaborate with AAP in the Haryana elections exemplify the party's disarray.

# People's Budget, force-multiplier: PM Modi on Union Budget 2024-25

- PM Modi calls Union Budget a "people's budget" for growth.
- Budget boosts youth empowerment for development.
- Focus on infrastructure & innovation for sustainability.

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi praised the Union Budget presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, describing it as a "people's budget" aimed at empowering citizens and boosting the nation's economy. Modi highlighted that the budget focuses on putting more money in the hands of people, which will, in turn, spur investment and foster long-term growth.

In his televised remarks, Modi emphasized the significance of the government's focus on creating a growth-oriented environment by investing in critical sectors that directly benefit the people. He explained that the budget prioritizes investments in key areas, which will lead to increased opportunities for employment, development, and prosperity. According to Modi, the policies outlined will act as a

"force-multiplier," accelerating India's trajectory toward becoming a developed nation.

A key highlight of the budget, Modi pointed out, is the opening up of multiple sectors to the youth, who are envisioned to play a central role in realizing the mission of 'Viksit Bharat' (Developed India). He underscored the importance of youth empowerment and their ability to drive the country forward in various fields. The prime minister also mentioned how the budget reflects the government's commitment to enhancing infrastructure, supporting innovation, and promoting a green economy, all while ensuring that the welfare of citizens remains at the forefront.

Through this strategic approach, Modi believes the budget will create a positive cycle of growth and job creation, benefiting not only the youth but also the broader population. The prime



minister's remarks reflect the government's optimism regarding the long-term impact of the budget, particularly in driving India's development agenda.

## Man Flees To US Without Passport, Top Court Says "We Are Amazed"



TPN Correspondent | Delhi

In a rare and unusual case, the Supreme Court has ordered an inquiry and the arrest of a man who faces contempt proceedings but fled to the United States, despite his passport being held in court custody. The bench, consisting of Justices Sudhanshu Dhulia and Prashant Kumar Mishra, expressed surprise over how the man was able to leave India without his passport and directed the additional solicitor general, K M Nataraj, to investigate how the escape occurred.

"We are amazed as to how the alleged contemnor/respondent left for the USA or any other country without a passport, as his passport is in the custody of this court. Now, we have no choice but to issue a non-bailable warrant against him," the bench stated, ordering the arrest of the man.

The man is embroiled in a custody battle with his former wife over their 10-year-old child. The Supreme Court had previously issued orders regarding the child's custody, and the man's failure to comply with these orders led to contempt proceedings. Senior advocate Vikas Singh, representing the man, informed the court that his client had already left for a foreign country.

The court directed the Ministry of Home Affairs to take immediate action under the law to arrest the respondent and bring him back to India. The bench also ordered Nataraj to investigate how the man was allowed to leave the country without his passport and without permission from the court, instructing him to identify those involved in facilitating the escape.

## No difference between PM Modi, Kejriwal; both are cowards, corrupt

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

In a scathing attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Friday accused them of being "cowards and corrupt," and criticized their failure to take responsibility for the country's challenges. Addressing a public meeting in Mustafabad, Priyanka Gandhi compared the two leaders, saying that while Modi blamed Jawaharlal Nehru for India's problems, Kejriwal blamed Modi, yet neither took responsibility for the issues they were facing.

Priyanka Gandhi's remarks came as she ramped up her campaign ahead of the Delhi Assembly elections, first leading a roadshow in Nangloi Jat for Congress candidate Rohit Chaudhary, and then campaigning for Ali Mehdi in Mustafabad. Priyanka Gandhi said that both Modi and Kejriwal had shifted the focus away from real issues, instead indulging in personal attacks and finger-pointing. "They talk about corruption and who built bigger 'mahal' but are silent on the issues that actually matter to the people," she said.

She accused both leaders of using divisive tactics, highlighting how the BJP and AAP were more concerned with framing each other as corrupt than addressing the real concerns of citizens like roads, clean water, quality education, jobs, and business growth. Priyanka Gandhi pointed out that both parties have failed to focus on these basic needs. "They are trying to divide people by focusing on trivial matters like insults and political squabbles, instead of the things that really matter," she said.

Furthermore, Priyanka questioned the AAP's rise under Kejriwal, originally built on an anti-corruption platform. "What has changed? Kejriwal blames Modi, Modi blames Nehru, but neither is taking responsibility," she added. She contrasted Modi's approach of blaming the past and Kejriwal's constant shift of blame to the central government, highlighting that both were avoiding responsibility.

## Union Budget 2025: New Income Tax Bill and Major Relief for Middle Class

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced on Saturday that the government will introduce a new Income Tax bill in Parliament next week. This bill aims to simplify the existing tax structure while focusing on transparency and ease for taxpayers.



In her Budget 2025 speech, Sitharaman shared that the new Income Tax bill will embody the "trust first, scrutinize later" approach. The revamped bill will be significantly reduced in volume, with clearer and more direct language to make it easier to understand and comply with. This is part of the government's ongoing effort to reform the Income Tax Act, 1961, a process that was first initiated with a comprehensive review announced in July 2025.

Over the past decade, the government has made several key reforms, such as the introduction of faceless assessments and greater digitalization of tax processes, to streamline the system for taxpayers. The new Income Tax bill is expected to further simplify the law, reducing disputes and litigation while offering greater certainty for taxpayers.

Sitharaman also highlighted the introduction of a taxpayers' charter, which will provide better clarity on taxpayer rights and responsibilities. The government has implemented a faster returns process, with nearly 99 percent of income tax returns now being self-assessed by taxpayers. This is part of an ongoing effort to reduce administrative burden and improve the efficiency of tax filing.

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has set up an internal committee to oversee the review process, with the goal of making the Income Tax Act concise and clear. Additionally, 22 specialized sub-committees have been formed to review various aspects of the Act in detail.

## Bonanza For Bihar, Andhra Pradesh Cruelly Ignored: Congress' Jab Over Budget

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

Congress spokesperson Jairam Ramesh sharply criticized the Union Budget 2025, claiming that Bihar received significant benefits while Andhra Pradesh was "cruelly ignored." Ramesh made these remarks shortly after Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's budget speech, accusing the government of prioritizing Bihar ahead of its upcoming Assembly elections.



Ramesh sarcastically noted that the sops given to Bihar were expected, considering the elections are scheduled later in the year. However, he questioned why Andhra Pradesh, another key member of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA), had been left out. "It is natural since an election is due there later in the year. But why has the other pillar of the NDA, namely Andhra Pradesh, been so cruelly ignored?" Ramesh posted on X, a social media platform.

In a series of tweets, Ramesh also criticized the overall economic direction presented in the budget, highlighting issues such as stagnant real wages, lack of consumption growth, sluggish private investment, and a complicated GST system. He added that while the budget provided relief to income taxpayers, its broader impact on the economy remained uncertain.

Manish Tewari, another Congress leader, echoed Ramesh's sentiments, questioning whether the budget was designed for the whole country or was tailored specifically for Bihar. "Did you hear the name of another state in the entire speech of the Union Finance Minister?" Tewari asked.

The budget included several proposals benefiting Bihar, such as the establishment of a makhana (fox nut) industry and special benefits for farmers through central government schemes.

## Union Budget 2025: FM Sitharaman twins with President Droupadi Murmu

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, draped in a white and red saree, arrived at the Rashtrapati Bhavan for the presentation of the Union Budget 2025, carrying her signature 'bahi-khata'. President Droupadi Murmu, who was already present, also chose a white and red ensemble, creating a striking coordinated look. At first glance, their sarees appeared almost identical, but upon closer inspection, subtle differences became apparent.



Both women wore sarees that featured similar red and white tones, but the shades and details of their outfits set them apart. Sitharaman's blouse was a deeper maroon hue, while Murmu's was a vibrant vermilion red. Additionally, the white in Sitharaman's saree leaned more towards a cream or off-white, while Murmu's was a pure white.

Their blouses also displayed differences in the golden borders. Sitharaman's golden border was wider, while Murmu's had a more delicate border. Sitharaman's saree was made from handloom silk, adorned with intricate

fish-themed embroidery and a dull golden border, while Murmu's saree was a regional tribal woven piece, characterized by a broader red and golden border.

This year, Sitharaman's saree was a tribute to Madhubani Art, with the design created by Padma Shri awardee Dulari Devi, a Bihar-based Dalit artist. Dulari Devi, known for her distinctive Madhubani art styles—'Kachnhi' (line sketching) and 'Bharni' (colored)—gifted the saree to Sitharaman, requesting her to wear it during the Budget presentation. In another customary gesture, President Murmu offered 'dahi-cheeni' (yogurt and sugar) to Sitharaman, a symbol of good luck before her departure to present her eighth consecutive Union Budget.

# Trudeau Warns of "Forceful but Reasonable" Response to Trump's Threatened Tariffs

## US Moves Ahead with 25% Tariffs on Canadian and Mexican Goods

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has firmly stated that Canada will respond "purposefully but reasonably" if U.S. President Donald Trump goes ahead with his threat to impose 25 percent tariffs on imports from Canada and Mexico. Speaking to reporters before a meeting with his advisory council on Canada-U.S. relations, Trudeau said that Canada's response would be immediate and strategic.

TPN Correspondent | Washington

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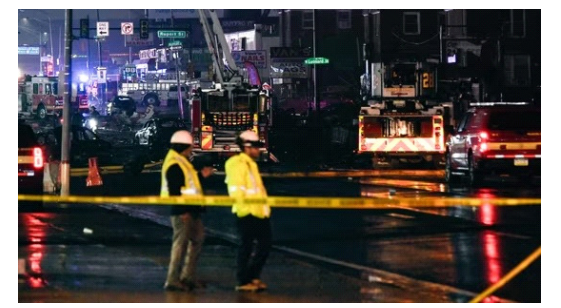
tion and the fentanyl crisis, issues he claims Canada and Mexico have failed to address sufficiently.

The tariffs, which could be imposed as early as February 1, are seen as a way for Trump to push back against

what he perceives as a trade imbalance, with both Canada and Mexico being significant trade partners to the U.S. However, Trudeau has expressed that such measures would not only harm Canada but also the U.S. economy, undermining the

shared security and prosperity between the two nations.

In a defiant statement, Trudeau added, "If the tariffs are implemented against Canada, we will respond. We won't relent until tariffs are removed and, of course, everything is on the table." This sets the stage for potential economic repercussions, as Canada has pledged to make its case on the benefits of the long-term relationship, highlighting key sectors like steel, aluminum, critical minerals, and clean energy. As of now, Trump remains resolute in his plan, indicating that Canadian oil may also face tariffs, although this remains uncertain. The situation continues to unfold as both sides prepare for the economic and political consequences of these potential measures.



## Plane Crashes In US Neighbourhood, Trump Says Innocent Souls Lost

TPN Correspondent | Washington

At least six people are feared dead after a small private plane crashed in a built-up neighborhood in northeast Philadelphia on Friday. The crash occurred just two days after a devastating collision between a passenger jet and a military helicopter near Washington's Reagan National Airport, which killed all 67 people onboard.

### Here are the key details surrounding the Philadelphia crash:

The plane, a Jet Rescue Air Ambulance, was carrying six people, including four crew members, a pediatric patient, and the patient's escort. The aircraft took off from Northeast Philadelphia Airport and was headed to Springfield-Branson National Airport in Missouri. The passengers were identified as Mexican nationals, according to the country's foreign ministry. Social media footage, including a dashcam and a house doorbell camera, captured the moment of the crash. The crash occurred near Roosevelt Mall, but officials have not yet confirmed the number of deaths on the ground or in the plane. Weather conditions at the time of the crash were cold and rainy, with low visibility, which may have contributed to the incident. Philadelphia Mayor Cherelle Parker confirmed that several houses and cars were engulfed in flames after the crash.

The city's Office of Emergency Management declared the event a "major incident" and advised the public to avoid the area. Several roads near Roosevelt Mall were closed. First responders were quickly on the scene, with dozens seen outside the strip mall near the crash site, assisting with rescue efforts.

US President Donald Trump expressed his sorrow, stating on Truth Social, "So sad to see the plane go down in Philadelphia. More innocent souls lost. This tragedy follows the earlier crash of an American Airlines jet and a US Army Black Hawk helicopter over Washington, marking the deadliest aviation accident in the United States since 2009. Investigations are underway to determine the cause of both incidents."

## Trump to Impose Tariffs on Canada, Mexico, and China, Targets More Industries

TPN Correspondent | Washington

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## Trump and Putin Could Take 'Significant' Step Towards Ending Ukraine War

TPN Correspondent | Washington

US President Donald Trump indicated on Friday that he and Russian President Vladimir Putin might soon take a "significant" step toward ending the ongoing war in Ukraine. Trump mentioned that the US has already held "very serious" discussions with Russia regarding the conflict.

Since assuming office on January 20, Trump has been vocal about his desire to bring an end to the Russia-Ukraine war. In a brief exchange with reporters in the Oval Office, Trump suggested that a major move could be on the horizon. "We will be speaking, and I think we will perhaps do something that'll be significant," he said. Trump also claimed that the war would not have started if he had been president, hinting that his leadership might have prevented the conflict.

However, Trump refrained from providing specifics about the ongoing US-Russia talks, particularly whether he had directly communicated with Putin. His remarks come amid ongoing global concern over the war's toll and the US's involvement in the conflict.

Trump has been a staunch critic of the Russia-Ukraine war and the role the US has played in it. He previously stated that the war could have been avoided if he had remained in office, a sentiment echoed by Putin. In interviews, Putin has often praised Trump, calling him a pragmatic and trustworthy leader. "We always had a business-like, pragmatic but also trusting relationship with the current U.S. president," Putin said, adding that if Trump had been president, the crisis in Ukraine in 2022 might have been avoided.

The relationship between Trump and Putin has raised eyebrows, especially after the 2016 US election, which was marred by allegations of Russian interference. Reports suggested that Russia's actions were intended to boost Trump's chances of winning.



## Hamas hands over 2 Israeli hostages in southern Gaza

TPN Correspondent | Palestine

Hamas released two hostages to the Red Cross in the southern Gaza Strip on Saturday as part of a ceasefire agreement with Israel. The hostages, Yarden Bibas, 35, and French-Israeli Ofer Kalderon, 54, were handed over in a well-coordinated, orderly exchange. Both individuals had been abducted during the Hamas-led attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, which triggered the ongoing conflict.



the Gaza Strip, a region devastated by the war.

The fragile ceasefire has been in place for nearly two weeks, marking a brief respite in the deadliest and most destructive war fought between Israel and Hamas. The deal, which is part of an ongoing effort

to resolve the conflict, involves the exchange of 33 Israeli hostages for nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners over the truce's initial six weeks. However, Israel has been informed by Hamas that eight of the hostages had either been killed during the October 7 attack or have died while in captivity.

On Saturday, Red Cross vehicles arrived in Khan Younis, a city in southern Gaza, to collect the released hostages. The ceasefire, while delicate, has paused the fighting after more than 15 months of war, providing a brief window for humanitarian relief and negotiations to continue.

## Congress Restricts Use of Chinese Chatbot DeepSeek Over Security Concerns

TPN Correspondent | Washington DC

Congressional offices have been warned against using DeepSeek, a Chinese chatbot that has recently gained attention in the US AI market. As AI technology rapidly evolves, Congress has faced growing challenges related to security and administration, prompting the House's Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to take proactive steps. According to a notice obtained by Axios, the CAO stated that DeepSeek is currently under review and unauthorized for use on official House devices. The notice emphasized concerns about the risks associated with the chatbot, particularly regarding how "threat actors" have already exploited DeepSeek to deliver malicious software and compromise devices.

In response, the House has implemented security measures to limit DeepSeek's functionality on all House-issued devices, including phones, computers, and tablets. Staffers are explicitly prohibited from installing or using the chatbot on these devices to safeguard against potential cyber threats.



## Stock Market Ends Flat After Union Budget, Mixed Reactions to Announcements

The Indian stock market ended flat on Union Budget day, signaling a neutral market response to the announcements made by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. Despite initial optimism, the enthusiasm faded as the Budget speech progressed.



The Sensex opened at 77,637 points, reflecting a gain of 200 points from its previous close on Friday. Similarly, the Nifty started strong, opening 47 points higher at 23,296. However, both indices quickly lost ground after the government revised its capital expenditure (capex) estimates for FY25 downward and announced a modest increase of less than 1% in capex for FY26.

By noon, the market had reversed its initial gains, with the Sensex falling by 350.20 points, or 0.45%, to 77,150.37, while the Nifty dropped by 101.15 points, or 0.43%, to 23,407.25. The market breadth was mixed, with 1,685 stocks advancing

and 1,660 declining, indicating a divided sentiment among investors.

While some of the Budget's provisions were seen as positive, particularly for certain sectors, the reduced capex estimates and muted spending outlook for the coming fiscal year seemed to dampen investor confidence. As a result, the stock market closed flat, reflecting cautious optimism rather than a strong reaction, as market participants continued to assess the full impact of the Budget on the economy and individual sectors.

## Government Projects Rs 2.56 Lakh Crore Dividend Income from RBI and PSUs in FY2025-25

The Indian government has projected a dividend income of Rs 2.56 lakh crore from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and public sector financial institutions for the fiscal year 2025-25, according to the Budget documents released on Saturday. This projection marks a significant increase from the current financial year's estimated receipts, which stand at Rs 2.34 lakh crore, approximately Rs 1,410 crore higher than earlier estimates.



The government's fiscal deficit is expected to be 4.4% of GDP for the next financial year, a key indicator of the country's economic health and budgetary priorities. To finance the fiscal deficit, the government plans to borrow Rs 11.54 lakh crore through net market borrowings from dated securities. The gross market borrowings for the year are estimated to be Rs 14.82 lakh crore.

The documents also indicate a rise in total central government receipts from dividends and investments in public sector enterprises, which are expected to reach Rs 3.25 lakh crore, up from Rs 2.89 lakh crore in the previous year.

In her Budget speech, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman highlighted the estimated total receipts for the central government, excluding borrowings, at Rs 34.96 lakh crore. She also outlined the total expenditure for the year at Rs 50.65 lakh crore. Additionally, the government's net tax receipts are projected to be Rs 28.37 lakh crore.

Sitharaman emphasized the government's commitment to managing the fiscal deficit in a manner that ensures the central government debt as a percentage of GDP remains on a declining trajectory. This strategic approach is part of the broader goal to maintain economic stability while investing in key sectors to support growth.

With these projections, the government aims to balance fiscal responsibility with continued investment in critical areas such as infrastructure, social welfare, and public services, ensuring that the economy remains on a sustainable growth path.

## Union Budget Allocates Rs 2,000 Crore for IndiaAI Mission to Boost AI Infrastructure



In the Union Budget 2025-26, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has approved a substantial allocation of Rs 2,000 crore for the IndiaAI Mission, marking nearly a fifth of the scheme's total outlay of Rs 10,370 crore. This funding is part of the government's strategy to enhance the country's artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities, as it seeks to position India as a global leader in AI innovation.

The new allocation comes at a time when the government has already shortlisted 10 companies that will supply nearly 19,000 graphics processing units (GPUs). These GPUs will be critical for setting up AI data centres across the country and developing foundational models for AI applications. This move is expected to significantly bolster India's AI infrastructure, enabling the nation to meet its growing demand for advanced AI technologies.

In the previous fiscal year, the IndiaAI Mission was allocated Rs 551.75 crore for 2024-25, but this amount was largely underutilised, with the revised allocation dropping to Rs 173 crore. The new allocation of Rs 2,000 crore for 2025-26 demon-

strates the government's renewed commitment to advancing AI technologies.

The sanctioned amount will be used for several key initiatives, as outlined in the outcome budget document. A portion of the funding will be directed towards setting up 20 AI curation units within various central ministries, as well as establishing 80 IndiaAI Labs across the country. These labs are expected to drive research and development in AI, fostering innovation in diverse sectors.

Additionally, the funding will support 25 deep-tech startups and finance three industry-led AI projects. The overall goal is to create a robust AI ecosystem in India that not only accelerates innovation but also fosters collaboration between industry leaders, academia, and government entities.

With this significant boost to the IndiaAI Mission, the government aims to lay a strong foundation for AI growth in India, positioning the nation to harness the full potential of emerging technologies in the coming years.

## Budget 2025 will boost job creation, consumption in Indian economy: Piyush Goyal

Union Minister for Commerce Piyush Goyal has expressed confidence that the Union Budget 2025 will foster job creation across all sectors, contributing to the country's goal of becoming a Viksit Bharat (Developed India) by 2047. Speaking shortly after Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented the budget, Goyal highlighted that the proposals would bring a significant boost to employment opportunities.

According to Goyal, sectors like leather and footwear will see substantial growth. He noted that the leather and footwear industries alone could generate 22 lakh new jobs, both directly and indirectly. The government has unveiled a "Focus Product Scheme" aimed at enhancing the productivity, quality, and competitiveness of India's leather and footwear sector. This initiative will support various aspects of production, including design capacity, component manufacturing, and machinery. The scheme is expected to drive a turnover of Rs 4 lakh crore and generate exports worth over Rs 1.1 lakh crore, along with



the creation of 22 lakh jobs.

The government is also taking steps to boost the cotton textiles and garments industry. Goyal emphasized that skill development programs, which were announced in the previous year's budget, would help equip young Indians with the skills needed to thrive in the job market. These initiatives are expected to improve

employability, increase incomes, and generate more job opportunities across various sectors.

Further, the budget introduces measures to promote the domestic production of technical textiles like agro-textiles, medical textiles, and geo-textiles. The government has proposed adding two more types of shuttle-less looms to the list of fully exempted textile machinery, and revising the Basic Customs Duty (BCD) on knitted fabrics. These changes aim to make India's textile industry more competitive.

The Union Budget also offers significant relief to taxpayers. With the new tax regime, individuals earning up to Rs 12 lakh will no longer need to pay income tax. For salaried taxpayers, this threshold increases to Rs 12.75 lakh, including a Rs 75,000 standard deduction. Goyal described the budget as a holistic approach that will not only benefit the middle class but also boost demand in the economy, setting the stage for India's development in the years to come.

## GST Collections Show Strong Growth in January, Indicating Economic Resilience

India's Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections for January 2025 saw a robust increase, with net collections rising by 10.9% to ₹1.71 trillion, up from ₹1.54 trillion in the same month last year. The gross collection reached ₹1.95 trillion, the highest since the record ₹2.1 trillion in April 2024, signaling positive revenue trends despite fluctuations in previous months. This upward movement follows a drop in December, when collections had reached a three-month low.

The fiscal year-to-date (April-January) GST net collection stands at ₹16.16 trillion, reflecting an 8.7% growth over the same period last year. The steady pace of GST revenue growth, particularly a 9.4% rise compared to the previous year, indicates that the country is on track to exceed its Budget Estimates (BE) for FY25, assuming this trend continues through the final months of the fiscal year. M.S. Mani, partner at Deloitte India, highlighted that the notable 15% increase in tax refunds also reflects improved familiarity with refund processes, benefiting



both businesses and tax authorities.

January also saw a significant rise in tax refunds, with refunds for the fiscal year up by 15.7%, reaching ₹2.12 trillion. Refunds in January alone surged by 23.9%, totaling ₹23,853 crore. These figures suggest that the tax system is becom-

ing more efficient, boosting both business compliance and economic activity.

Regional performance varied, with states like Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra reporting a 20% and 14% increase in GST collections, respectively. Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat also saw growth of 11% each, while Telangana and West Bengal recorded a 10% and 7% rise, respectively. On the other hand, states such as Himachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Manipur, and Lakshadweep experienced a decline in revenue collection.

Abhishek Jain, indirect tax head and partner at KPMG, noted that the 12.5% year-on-year growth in GST collections in January, coupled with higher refunds, suggests an uptick in economic growth and sustained tax compliance. Jain also emphasized the efficiency improvements in refund processing, marking a significant step toward simplifying the business environment in India.



## Can Two Men Have A Baby Without Needing A Woman? Chinese Scientists cover Breakthrough



A team of scientists in China has successfully created a mouse born without a biological mother, marking a significant breakthrough in reproductive science. Led by molecular biologist Zhi Kun Li from the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS), this groundbreaking experiment involved precise stem cell engineering and is being hailed as a major achievement. While similar experiments have been attempted before, this is the first time a mouse born from two fathers has survived until puberty.

In 2023, Japanese researchers managed to create a similar mouse, but its lifespan was short-lived. The Chinese study, however, showed promising results, as the mice, though unable to reproduce independently, appeared to exhibit better health than previous experimental animals. This success is seen as a step forward in understanding certain genetic disorders in humans, although the technology still requires considerable refinement.

The main challenge in such experiments lies in the issue of gene imprinting. In normal reproduction, when a sperm fertilizes an egg, half of the genes are silenced in a process that requires input from both male and female DNA. When two sperm cells are used to

create an embryo, this silencing mechanism often fails, leading to genetic abnormalities. This disorder is a key obstacle to achieving unisexual reproduction, where offspring are created from two individuals of the same sex.

To overcome this issue, Li and his team employed advanced genetic techniques such as gene deletion, region editing, and the manipulation of genetic base pairs. Their method addressed the imprinting challenge, allowing the successful creation of embryos that could develop into healthy mice.

While the breakthrough in China is significant, it also comes with limitations. The success rate of creating viable embryos remains low, with only 13% of embryos developing into live mice, and many did not survive to adulthood. Moreover, these animals cannot reproduce. Despite these hurdles, the researchers are optimistic that refining their approach will help address the challenges of genetic imprinting, bringing them closer to understanding how to create viable offspring from two male parents.

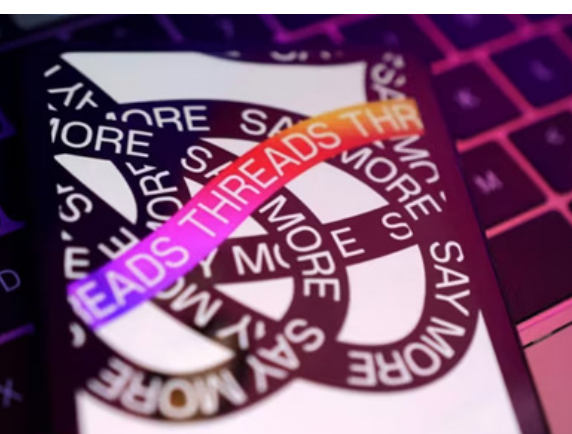
As of now, while these experiments offer valuable insights into genetic disorders and reproduction, applying this technology to humans remains a distant possibility.

## Threads Introduces Media Tab, Markup Tool, and Photo Tagging Feature

Meta's microblogging platform, Threads, has launched several new features in its latest update for both iPhone and Android users. The most notable addition is the long-awaited dedicated media tab, which now allows users to view all photos and videos posted by someone in a single, easily accessible location. Previously, users had to scroll through a person's entire timeline to find media posts, with photos and videos mixed in with text-based content. Now, media posts are displayed in reverse chronological order, making it much easier to find and enjoy them.

Instagram head Adam Mosseri announced the arrival of the media tab, calling it a "long overdue request" from the community. Alongside this feature, Threads has introduced a photo tagging function, similar to Instagram, allowing users to tag others while sharing images. This update aims to enhance user interaction and make the platform more social, fostering connections between users who share visual content.

Another new feature rolling out to Threads users is the markup tool. This tool lets users highlight parts of another user's post when reposting it to their followers. The markup



tool includes several options, such as a pencil, highlighter, and arrow tools, allowing users to emphasize specific parts of a post. This feature, which was announced earlier this month, is now being widely implemented, enabling users to better customize and engage with content they share.

While the new media tab and markup tool are available in the latest Threads update, the photo tagging feature is still being gradually rolled out to users. These new additions are expected to make Threads a more engaging and interactive platform, enhancing the user experience and encouraging more dynamic content sharing.

## Asteroid Sample Reveals Organic Compounds That May Hint at Life Beyond Earth

In 2023, NASA's OSIRIS-REX mission delivered a sample from the asteroid Bennu, providing groundbreaking insights into the fundamental molecules and minerals that could play a role in the origins of life. The analysis of this pristine sample, reported in *Nature\** and *Nature Astronomy\**, identified organic compounds such as amino acids, nucleobases, and ammonia, as well as minerals formed in saltwater. These findings suggest that the necessary conditions for life might have existed across the early solar system, potentially supporting the idea that life could have developed

elsewhere beyond Earth.

Among the key discoveries, 14 of the 20 amino acids essential for protein formation, along with all five nucleobases critical to DNA and RNA, were detected in the Bennu sample. The presence of ammonia and formaldehyde further supports the notion that complex organic molecules could form in space environments. These compounds, while previously found in meteorites, are now confirmed in an uncontaminated sample from space, bolstering the idea that asteroid material may have contributed to

the building blocks of life on Earth.

Additionally, the study revealed evaporite minerals, such as calcite, halite, and sylvite, indicating that water once existed on Bennu. These minerals, formed as saltwater evaporated over time, are similar to those observed on other celestial bodies, such as Ceres and Enceladus. This discovery is particularly significant, as it marks the first time a complete set of these evaporite minerals has been found in extraterrestrial material.

Despite these revelations, questions



remain, particularly regarding the molecular orientation of amino acids. While Earth's amino acids predominantly exhibit a left-handed orientation, Bennu's sample contained an equal mix of left- and right-handed forms. This raises intriguing ques-

tions about the chemistry of the solar system and the origins of life. Further studies are expected to deepen our understanding of these complex processes and the potential for life beyond Earth.

## French Chef Cedric Grolet Redefines Apple Pie with Artistic Twist, Mesmerizing the Internet

In the world of culinary arts, where taste meets innovation, French pastry chef Cedric Grolet has become an icon for his hyper-realistic, edible creations. Known for transforming everyday desserts into visually stunning works of art, Grolet's latest masterpiece—a unique twist on the classic apple pie—has captivated food enthusiasts across the globe.



The viral video, which has already amassed over 22 million views on Instagram, shows Grolet's meticulous process of creating a one-of-a-kind apple pie. From the very beginning, it's clear that this isn't just any ordinary dessert. Grolet starts by peeling an apple, his skilled hands working with precision as curious onlookers watch. He then carefully washes the chopped apples and boils the peel in water, extracting its essence into a rich, flavorful liquid.

The magic happens when Grolet thickens this apple-infused concoction, adding butter, chopped apples, sugar, and milk. As the mixture bubbles and thickens, he incorporates a dollop of fresh cream and chocolate, creating a decadent blend of rich flavors. To add texture, Grolet mixes in cookie cream and apple crumble, giving the dessert depth and complexity. The *pièce de résis-*

tance comes when the glossy, apple-like pastry is dipped in red food coloring, transforming it into a stunning visual spectacle.

The final result is a dessert that not only looks like an apple but also captures the essence of the fruit in flavor and texture. Grolet's signature touch of artistic flair has left the internet in awe, with many commenting that the dessert is more of an art piece than just food.

Grolet's apple pie creation comes with a timely twist—it's presented as "An apple of Love for February 14, 2025," making it the perfect treat for Valentine's Day. With his culinary expertise and artistic vision, Cedric Grolet continues to blur the lines between food and art, turning each creation into a mesmerizing, one-of-a-kind experience for both the eyes and the palate.

## Spider "Rain" in Brazil: A Natural Mating Phenomenon Stuns Locals

In an extraordinary event in São Thomé das Letras, a small town in Minas Gerais, Brazil, hundreds of spiders appeared to "rain" from the sky, leaving both locals and social media users stunned. The bizarre scene, which resembled snowfall but with eight-legged creatures descending from above, quickly captured the public's imagination and sparked widespread curiosity.



Despite the unsettling visual, experts have explained that this phenomenon is a natural occurrence. According to biologist Kayron Passos, the spider rain was a result of a mating ritual, during which numerous spiders were suspended in the air by a massive web. The spiders were not falling randomly; rather, they were part of a larger, coordinated event driven by instinctual behaviors.

Passos clarified that female spiders have an organ called the spermatheca, which allows them to store sperm from multiple males. This adaptation promotes genetic diversity, as the females can fertilize their eggs with sperm from different mates, ensuring stronger and more varied offspring. Even after laying eggs, these females may continue to collect sperm for future use.

Further insight into the spiders' behavior was provided by archaeologist Ana Lucia Tourinho, who noted that while most spiders are solitary creatures, certain species, such as *Stegodyphus* and *Anelosimus*, are known for their social behavior. These species form colonies that include several generations, often consisting of mothers and daughters. In these colonies, the spiders work together to capture prey, share food, and defend their territory.

The surreal spectacle in São Thomé das Letras was not a freak occurrence but rather a rare natural event linked to the spiders' mating practices. Still, it left many in awe of the complexities of nature and the behaviors of these often misunderstood creatures.

## Sports and Youth Affairs Ministry Gets ₹3,794.30 Crore in Budget 2025, Khelo India Leads Allocation

**New Delhi:** The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports received a significant budgetary boost in the Union Budget 2025-26, with an overall allocation of ₹3,794.30 crore, marking an increase of ₹351.98 crore from the previous year. The Khelo India program emerged as the biggest beneficiary, securing ₹1,000 crore, a ₹200 crore hike from last year's ₹800 crore. Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya welcomed the budget, stating that the increased funds will "strengthen sports infrastructure, boost Khelo India, and empower the next generation of athletes and leaders."

### Key Budget Highlights:

- **National Sports Federations:** ₹400 crore (up from ₹340 crore)
- **Sports Authority of India (SAI):** ₹830 crore (up from ₹815 crore)
- **National Dope Testing Laboratory:** ₹23 crore (up from ₹18.70 crore)
- **National Anti-Doping Agency:** ₹24.30 crore (up from ₹20.30 crore)
- **Sports Facilities in Jammu & Kashmir:**



₹20 crore (up by ₹14 crore)

- **National Sports Development Fund:** ₹18 crore (unchanged)
- **Incentives for Sportspersons:** Reduced to ₹37 crore from ₹42.65 crore
- **National Service Scheme (NSS):** ₹450 crore (₹200 crore hike)

The Indian government's focus on sports development, despite no major international events in the coming year, reaffirms its commitment to strengthening grassroots and elite sports infrastructure.

## Karnataka, Manipur, and Maharashtra Lead Medals Tally in Uttarakhand

The latest edition of National Games 2025, are being held from January 28 to February 14 in Uttarakhand, showcasing the incredible talent of over 10,000 athletes who competed across 32 disciplines. Organized under the auspices of the Indian Olympic Association, this event garnered attention not just for its athletic prowess but also for the spirited competition among states.



Karnataka, Manipur, and Maharashtra have emerged as the top contenders so far, dominating the medals tally and showcasing their depth in various sports. Maha state is the defending champion after winning the most number of gold medals in the 2023 edition. This year's games were more than just a contest for medals; they represented a platform for athletes to shine and represent their regions, all vying for the coveted Raja Bhalindra Singh Trophy.

For those who want to watch, live streaming of the National Games was available on the Prasar

Bharati Sports YouTube channel, offering fans an opportunity to support their favorite athletes. Additionally, the live telecast on the DD Sports TV channel ensures that sports enthusiasts across the nation could catch all the action from the games.

As we reflect on these exciting days of competition, one thing is clear: The National Games 2025 are not only highlighting the athletic caliber but also fostering a sense of unity and sportsmanship among diverse Indian states.

## New Delhi Likely to Miss Out on D Gukesh vs Magnus Carlsen Showdown as Freestyle Chess Tour Faces Uncertainty

**New Delhi's** much-anticipated Freestyle Chess Grand Slam Tour event is now in doubt, with reports suggesting that the tournament is struggling to find takers. The India leg of the event was scheduled to take place in New Delhi from September 17-24, 2025, according to the Freestyle Chess' official website. However, ongoing conflicts between the Freestyle Chess Players Club (FCPC) and FIDE (International Chess Federation) have cast uncertainty over its execution.



The Freestyle Chess Grand Slam Tour is set to begin its first leg in Weissenhaus, Germany, on February 7, 2025. The FCPC, which boasts some of the biggest names in the chess world, including D Gukesh, Magnus Carlsen, and Hikaru Nakamura, received official recognition from FIDE in December 2024.

However, tensions between FIDE and FCPC have escalated rapidly. FCPC co-owner Jan Henric Buettner has ac-

cused FIDE of demanding \$500,000 for the rights to use the "World Championship" title, calling it an unjustified move and threatening legal action against the governing body.

Meanwhile, FIDE CEO Emil Sutovsky has defended the federation's stance, asserting that FIDE has exclusive rights to the "World Championship" title and accused Carlsen of trying to disrupt the chess ecosystem.

As the dispute continues, the possibility of witnessing an epic D Gukesh vs Magnus Carlsen clash in New Delhi remains uncertain. Chess fans now await clarity on whether the India leg of the tour will proceed as planned or be scrapped altogether.

## Srihari Nataraj, Sajan Prakash Reset Goals at National Games

**Haldwani:** Indian swimming stars Srihari Nataraj and Sajan Prakash set new goals as they returned to competitive action at the 25th National Games. While Srihari won the 200m freestyle, Sajan dominated the 200m butterfly.

Srihari, a two-time Olympian, has decided to focus on freestyle alongside his backstroke events. He broke the 200m freestyle national record at the 2023 Asian Games, finishing 10th overall with 1:49.05. Now, he aims to strengthen his performance in 50m, 100m backstroke, and 200m freestyle. "I had a great freestyle season in 2021 and was consistent in 2023. This season, I plan to execute my races better," he said. Winning the 200m freestyle in 1:50.57, Srihari



is eyeing the 2026 Asian Games and Commonwealth Games.

Sajan, recovering from a shoulder injury, had a tough start, finishing third in the 100m butterfly (54.52s). However, he made a strong comeback, clinching gold in the 200m butterfly (2:01.40s). The 31-year-old

remains determined, aiming for a podium finish at the 2026 Asian Games.

Both swimmers emphasized the need for new talent to step up. "We've maintained our dominance for years, but younger swimmers must push forward," Srihari noted.

## India Set to Defend Women's U19 T20 World Cup Title Against South Africa



**Benoni, South Africa:** India's Women's U19 team will look to secure their second consecutive T20 World Cup title as they face South Africa in the final on Sunday. The Niki Prasad-led side has been in dominant form throughout the tournament, winning all six matches convincingly. India's journey to the final saw commanding victories over West Indies (9 wickets), Malaysia (10 wickets), Sri Lanka (60 runs), Bangladesh (8 wickets), Scotland (150 runs), and England (9 wickets) in the semifinal. Opener Gongadi Trisha has been India's top performer with the bat, scoring 265 runs in six innings at an average of 66.25, while G Kamalini has contributed

135 runs. However, India's middle order remains untested, as the top-order has shouldered most of the responsibility.

On the bowling front, Vaishnavi Sharma (15 wickets) and Aayushi Shukla (12 wickets) have been outstanding, leading the wicket-taking charts. Their spin will be crucial on Benoni's slow and turning tracks.

South Africa, playing their first-ever U19 Women's T20 World Cup final, will look to challenge India after their thrilling five-wicket win over Australia in the semifinal. The final is set to begin at 12:00 PM IST on Sunday, with India entering as clear favorites to lift the trophy once again.

## Yuvraj Singh Returns to Cricket, Joins India Masters in International Masters League

**New Delhi:** Former Indian cricket star Yuvraj Singh is set to make his return to competitive cricket, representing India Masters in the inaugural season of the International Masters League (IML). The tournament, featuring legendary cricketers, will be held from February 22 to March 16, 2025.

Yuvraj, a two-time World Cup winner, was instrumental in India's 2007 ICC T20 World Cup triumph, famously smashing six sixes in an over against England's Stuart Broad. He was also the Player of the Tournament in India's historic 2011 ICC ODI World Cup win. Expressing his excitement, Yuvraj said, "Taking the field with Sachin Tendulkar and my other teammates feels like reliving the glory days. The IML is a tribute to an era that defined Indian cricket, and I can't wait to create more unforgettable memories for fans."

The tournament will also see South Africa's JP Duminy and Sri Lanka's Upul Tharanga in action. Duminy will play for South Africa Masters, while Tharanga will represent Sri Lanka Masters.

With legends of the game participating, the IML promises high-quality cricket, bringing back nostalgia for fans worldwide.



## Young Kartik Singh Creates History in Indian Golf

**Gurugram's** Kartik Singh, at just 15 years and 26 days old, has become the youngest Indian to make the cut in an international professional golf tournament, leaving a lasting impression at the \$2 million International Series India. Competing against some of the biggest names in golf, Kartik showcased remarkable skill at the challenging DLF Golf & Country Club, securing a spot in the third round at tied-30th place.



Kartik shot an impressive one-under-par 71 in the second round, finishing the first 36 holes at four-over-par 148. His stellar performance makes him the fourth-youngest golfer ever to make the cut on the Asian Tour. Competing in a field featuring reigning US Open champion Bryson DeChambeau and top-ranked golfers like Anirban Lahiri and Joaquin Neimann, his achievement is even more significant. Despite dropping three shots on the difficult final stretch, Kartik's position in the third round was never in doubt. His ability to thrive under pressure

was evident, as he had previously become the youngest player to make the cut at the Asia-Pacific Amateur Championship at Royal Melbourne Golf Club at just 13 years old.

Kartik, who trains at the DLF Golf Academy under Deepinder Khullar, expressed excitement about playing alongside his idol, DeChambeau, and hopes to improve his game further. "Making the cut was my goal, and now I want to finish as high as possible," said the rising star, who received a rousing ovation from golf fans at the 18th hole.



## Vikram's 'Thangalaan' Selected for International Film Festival Rotterdam

Tamil superstar Vikram's blockbuster film 'Thangalaan', directed by Pa. Ranjith, has achieved a remarkable feat by securing a spot at the 54th International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR) in the Netherlands. The film's director's cut version will be screened at the prestigious event, as announced by Pa. Ranjith on social media. Based on real-life events in the Kolar Gold Fields (KGF), Thangalaan was released last year as an Independence Day special and became a super hit at the box office. The film not only marked Vikram's return to form but also grossed over ₹100 crore worldwide. Following its theatrical

success, Thangalaan is now streaming on Netflix. The film's selection at IFFR 2025 marks a major milestone, bringing international recognition to Indian cinema. The festival, known for showcasing innovative and thought-provoking films, provides a global platform for filmmakers to present their artistic vision. With its gripping narrative and Vikram's intense performance, Thangalaan continues to make waves, proving to be a landmark film in Tamil cinema. This achievement is a testament to the film's cinematic brilliance and its impact on global audiences.

## BrahmaAnandam: King of Comedy's Birthday Special Look Goes Viral

Veteran comedian Brahmanandam is set to make a grand return with the upcoming film 'BrahmaAnandam', co-starring Raja Goutham. Directed by RVS Nikhil, the film is being produced by Rahul Yadav Nakka under the Swadharm Entertainment banner, known for delivering blockbuster hits like Masooda. On the occasion of Brahmanandam's birthday, the makers released a special look poster as a tribute to the legendary comedian. The trendy poster, featuring Brahmanandam in stylish goggles and a traditional panchekattu, has



gone viral on social media, increasing excitement for the film. Promotional teasers featuring Vennela Kishore and Raja Goutham have already generated significant buzz, raising expectations for the movie. The film stars Priya Vadlamani and Aishwarya Hollakal as the female leads, while Sandilya Pisapati is composing the music. With Brahmanandam's impeccable comic timing and a fresh concept, BrahmaAnandam is shaping up to be an exciting entertainer. Fans eagerly await more updates as the film nears its release.

## The Secret of the Shiledars: A Promising Plot with Weak Execution

Disney+ Hotstar's latest web series, The Secret of the Shiledars, directed by Aditya Sarpotdar, is based on Dr. Raviprakash Koyade's Marathi novel "Pratipachandra". Starring Rajeev Khandelwal, Sai Tamhankar, and Ashish Vidyarthi, the series explores an ancient hidden treasure linked to Shivaji Maharaj. The story begins in 1996 and shifts to the present, following Ravi Bhatt (Rajeev Khandelwal), who loses his parents in a car accident. He grows up with immense respect for Shivaji Maharaj. His life takes a dramatic turn when he meets Justice Krishna Dixit, who hands him a mysterious book. The book reveals the story of a hidden treasure that Aurangzeb once sought, protected by a secret group called the Shiledars. Ravi learns he belongs to this lineage and is responsible for safeguarding the treasure. The plot unfolds as he embarks on a thrilling search, facing enemies determined to seize the treasure for themselves. While the series has an intriguing premise, it struggles with pacing and screenplay execution. The six-episode format follows a predictable structure, with slow early episodes that pick up momentum in the latter half. The cinematography and production values are impressive, captur-



ing historical grandeur, but the historical elements often feel artificial. The action sequences and twists lack depth, making the mystery feel less gripping than expected. Rajeev Khandelwal delivers a solid performance, but Ashish Vidyarthi's role feels underdeveloped. The lack of depth in character arcs and predictable storytelling weakens the overall impact. Though the treasure hunt element keeps the viewer engaged, the series doesn't offer anything groundbreaking. Despite its grand visuals and an engaging premise, The Secret of the Shiledars fails to maintain consistent excitement. While it provides a decent historical adventure, it doesn't leave a lasting impression. Rating: 2.75/5

## Vijay's 'Jana Nayagan' Set for a Grand Overseas Release

Tamil superstar Thalapathy Vijay is actively working on strengthening his political party ahead of the upcoming Tamil Nadu Assembly elections while also focusing on his next big film, 'Jana Nayagan' (People's Leader). Directed by H. Vinoth of Khakee fame, the film has already created massive buzz, especially after the first look and title announcement on Republic Day received an overwhelming response. According to reports, Jana Nayagan's overseas rights have been sold for a record-breaking ₹75 crore, highlighting Vijay's immense global fanbase. This makes it one of the most expensive overseas deals for a Tamil film. The movie is being produced by Kannada production giant KVN Productions, with Anirudh Ravichander composing the music. Actress Mamitha Baiju, known for her role in Premalu, will play the female lead.



Scheduled for a worldwide release in October 2025, Jana Nayagan is expected to be a politically significant film, aligning with Vijay's increasing involvement in state politics. The film's massive pre-release business proves that Vijay's popularity continues to soar, making it one of the most anticipated Tamil films of 2025.

## Venkatesh Sets New Record

Remuneration Rises to ₹25 Crore After 'Sankranthiki Vasthunam' Blockbuster

Veteran Telugu actor Venkatesh Daggubati has created history by becoming the first senior hero to achieve ₹300 crore gross collections with his latest film, 'Sankranthiki Vasthunam'. The film, directed by Anil Ravipudi, turned out to be a massive success, winning over family audiences and emerging as a blockbuster hit. Before the film's release, Venkatesh was reportedly charging a remuneration of ₹10-12 crore per movie. However, with the spectacular success of 'Sankranthiki Vasthunam', his remuneration has now skyrocketed to ₹25 crore for his next project.



The Daggubati star is widely known for his strong family audience base, which played a key role in the film's record-breaking collections. Made on a budget of ₹60 crore, the film reportedly grossed ₹300 crore, making it one of the highest-grossing films of

his career. Trade analysts have confirmed this as a milestone for a senior hero in the Telugu film industry. With this achievement, Venkatesh now stands as the highest-paid senior actor, setting a new benchmark among Chiran-

jeevi, Balakrishna, and Nagarjuna in terms of both market success and remuneration. His next film is already generating huge buzz, and expectations are high on what he will bring to the big screen next.

## Tanikella Bharani in Lead Role for 'Asura Samharam'

Veteran actor Tanikella Bharani, known for his exceptional performances in over 750 films, is set to play the lead role in the upcoming crime suspense thriller Asura Samharam. The film is being produced under the Sri Sai Tejo Celluloids banner by Sai Srinanth and Shabarish Boyella, while Sri Sai Pravartika Boyella is presenting the project. The film's story, screenplay, dialogues, and direction will be handled by Kishore Srikrishna. Asura Samharam is a village crime drama that promises an intense and thrilling narrative. Alongside



Tanikella Bharani, Midhun Priya plays a significant role. The movie will feature Tanikella Bharani in a unique role as a village detective,

offering audiences a fresh and intriguing experience. Currently, the film is in its pre-production phase, with shooting scheduled to commence soon. The makers have assured that further details, including the complete cast and technical crew, will be announced in the coming days. Given Tanikella Bharani's versatile acting skills and the promising crime-thriller backdrop, Asura Samharam is expected to captivate audiences with its engaging storyline and gripping suspense.

## Ajith's 'Pattudala' Completes Censor Formalities, Set for February 6 Release

Tamil superstar Ajith Kumar is set to captivate audiences with his upcoming action thriller Pattudala (Telugu version of Vidaa Muyarchi). Directed by Magizh Thirumeni, the film carries the tagline "Efforts Never Fail." The movie has recently completed its censor formalities and has been granted a U/A certificate by the Censor Board. With all post-production work wrapped up, Pattudala is scheduled for a grand worldwide release on February 6. Produced by Lyca Productions, the film stars Ajith and Trisha in the lead roles, marking their much-anticipated on-screen reunion. Arjun Sarja and Regina Cassandra also play crucial roles in the film. The music is composed by Anirudh Ravichander, adding to the film's excitement. With its high-octane action, gripping storyline, and star-studded cast, Pattudala is expected to make a



strong impact at the box office. Fans are eagerly awaiting to witness Ajith's power-packed performance in this thriller.