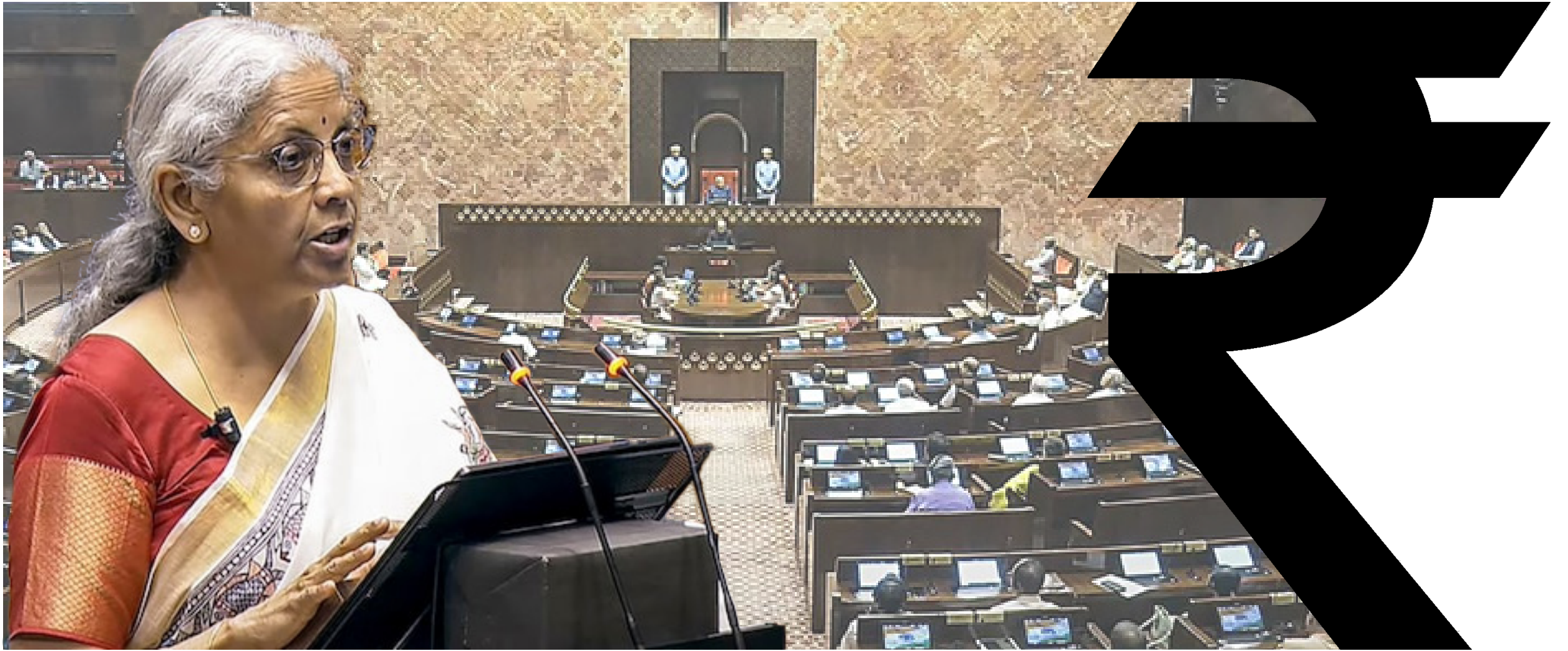


# POINT

**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.

## Even BJP Supporters Save ₹25,000 With AAP Schemes



Kejriwal claims AAP's welfare schemes save families ₹25,000 per month.

Promises new schemes that would increase monthly savings to ₹35,000.

Warns that BJP's rule could put these benefits at risk.

TPN Correspondent | New Delhi  
Delhi Chief Minister and AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal has claimed that even BJP supporters are benefiting from his government's welfare schemes, saving up to ₹25,000 per month. Urging voters to re-elect AAP in the February 5 Assembly elections, he warned that these savings could disappear if BJP comes to power.

In a video message,

2 PAGE

## Amit Shah Mocks AAP, Calls It '3G Government' at Delhi Rally



Amit Shah calls AAP a "3G government"—scams, sheltering infiltrators, and corruption.

Urges voters to "sweep out" AAP in the February 5 election.

8 AAP MLAs Join BJP Days Before Delhi Polls

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# Budget 2025: What's Cheaper and What's Costlier



TPN Correspondent | New Delhi

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented the Union Budget 2025-26, marking her eighth consecutive budget. The second full budget of the Modi 3.0 government focuses on ten broad areas, including agriculture, manufacturing, employment, MSMEs, rural development, and innovation.

**Items That Got Cheaper**

**Essential medicines:** 37 additional medicines, including 36 cancer and rare disease drugs, are exempted from Basic Customs Duty (BCD).

**Fish products:** BCD on fish pasteurii reduced from 30% to 5%, and on fish hydrolysate for aquatic feed from 15% to 5%.

**Chemical compounds:** BCD on pyrimidine and piperazine-based compounds cut from 10% to 7.5%.

**Food & beverage industry:** Synthetic flavouring essences now taxed at 20% instead of 100%.

**Technology & minerals:** Exemptions granted on cobalt products, LED, zinc, lithium-ion battery scrap, and 12 critical minerals.

**Jewelry & metals:** BCD on platinum findings reduced from 25% to 6.4%.

**Shipbuilding:** BCD exemption on raw materials for ship manufacturing extended for 10 years.

**Leather industry:** Wet blue leather and crust leather export duty reduced to 0%.

**Electronics & telecom:** Duty on wired

headset components, microphones, USB cables, and ethernet switches reduced.

**Motorcycles:** BCD on bikes ( $\leq 1600$  CC) cut to 40% from 50%, and for larger bikes ( $\geq 1600$  CC) to 30% from 50%.

**Items That Got Costlier**

**Knitted fabrics:** BCD increased to 20% or ₹115/kg (whichever is higher).

**Interactive flat panel displays:** Duty raised from 10% to 20% to fix inverted duty structure.

**Customs assessments:** A new two-year time limit for provisional assessments introduced.

The budget underscores the government's focus on structural reforms, supporting key industries while addressing trade imbalances.

## Two Arrested in Delhi for Running Fake PhD Admission Racket

TPN Correspondent | New Delhi

Delhi Police have arrested two individuals for running a fraudulent PhD admission racket, duping at least 15 victims. The accused, Javed Khan (30) and Shahrukh Ali (29), both residents of Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh, were caught on Saturday. According to police, the racket was masterminded by Javed Khan, a computer engineer. The investigation began after a complaint was received at PS Cyber regarding a financial fraud linked to online PhD admissions. The complainant, who wanted to pursue a PhD, found Javed Khan's contact details on the website [www.literateus.com](http://www.literateus.com) and reached out to him. She was lured into the scheme and transferred ₹1,80,000 for admission and thesis processing.

When the accused demanded more money without providing receipts, the victim grew suspicious and reported the matter. Police registered an FIR and launched a probe, tracing bank details and call records linked to the suspects. The investigation revealed that the funds were deposited in accounts registered under Javed Khan and Shahrukh Ali.

With the accused discarding their



mobile phones, police relied on technical surveillance to track them down. They were eventually apprehended from Saharanpur and Noida.

During interrogation, Javed Khan admitted that he had worked in an online PhD admission firm in 2022-23 before launching his own operation. He attempted to tie up with multiple universities but only received a Channel Partner letter from Glocal University, Saharanpur. Notably, Glocal University has been inactive since July 2021 and has been linked to a backdated degree scam.

Javed allegedly sent a photo-shopped ID card of Glocal University to the complainant and issued fake honorary doctorate degrees to several individuals. His associate, Shahrukh Ali, actively participated in the fraud and shared the earnings.

## Amit Shah Mocks AAP, Calls It '3G Government' at Delhi Rally

1st page continuation...

TPN Correspondent | New Delhi

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday urged Delhi voters to "sweep AAP out with a broom," attacking the ruling party over alleged corruption and misgovernance. Speaking at a rally in Mustafabad ahead of the February 5 Assembly elections, he labeled the AAP government as a "3G" administration— "ghapla, ghuspaithiyon ko panah, and ghotala." He elaborated that the first "G" stood for a scam-ridden government, the second for sheltering illegal immigrants, and the third for indulging in corruption. Shah asserted that Delhi residents were ready to vote AAP out, citing a growing anti-incumbency wave. Shah also warned voters against allowing those "responsible for riots" to return to power, claiming BJP was the only party that could ensure safety and governance in the capital.

Meanwhile, AAP alleged that its MLA, Mohinder Goyal, was attacked in Rohini. Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal accused BJP of resorting to violence, stating, "The people of

Delhi do not support this politics of hooliganism."

8 AAP MLAs Join BJP Days Before Delhi Polls

With just four days left for the February 5 Delhi Assembly elections, eight outgoing Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MLAs joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Saturday, accusing AAP of corruption and straying from its ideology.

The MLAs—Vandana Gaur (Palam), Rohit Mehraulia (Trilokpuri), Girish Soni (Madipur), Madan Lal (Kasturba Nagar), Rajesh Rishi (Uttam Nagar), B S Joon (Bijwasan), Naresh Yadav (Mehrauli), and Pawan Sharma (Adarsh Nagar)—resigned on Friday after being denied election tickets by AAP.

Former AAP MLA Vijender Garg and other key leaders also joined the BJP in the presence of national vice-president Baijayant Panda and Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva. Welcoming them, Panda termed it a "historic" shift and expressed confidence that Delhi would be "freed" from AAP after the upcoming elections.

## Former CEC Navin B Chawla Passes Away at 79

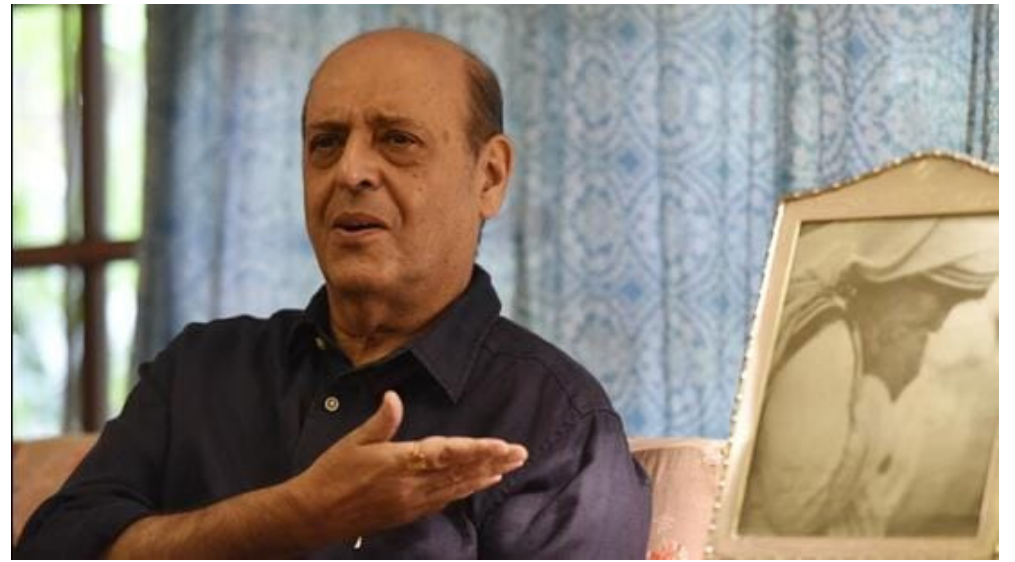
TPN Correspondent | New Delhi

Former Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Navin B Chawla passed away at a Delhi hospital on Saturday at the age of 79. A distinguished officer of the 1969-batch Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Chawla served as the CEC from April 2009 to July 2010.

During his tenure, the Election Commission successfully conducted the 2009 General Elections and assembly polls in seven states. He introduced key electoral reforms, including enabling third-gender voters to register under the 'Other' category instead of being forced to choose 'Male' or 'Female.'

The Election Commission described Chawla as "a brilliant officer" and acknowledged his push for reforms, including advocating parity in the removal process of Election Commissioners and the CEC.

Before his tenure in the commission,



Chawla was known for his association with Mother Teresa, authoring her authorized biography, *Mother Teresa*, in 1992.

An alumnus of St. Stephen's College, Delhi University, Chawla pursued fur-

ther studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University, and completed a diploma in social administration at the London School of Economics in 1967-68.

## 3 Bangladeshis Held for Residing in India With Forged Documents

TPN Correspondent | New Delhi

Delhi Police have arrested three Bangladeshi nationals for illegally residing in India using forged Indian passports and Aadhaar cards. The arrests were made during a crackdown on illegal foreign nationals in the Paharganj area.

A verification drive on January 28 led to the discovery of forged documents, including two Indian passports, two Bangladeshi passports, five Aadhaar cards, two PAN cards, one voter ID, multiple bank documents, and a Bangladeshi education board marksheet.

The accused were identified as Sweetie Sarkar alias Johra Khatoun, her daughter Pushpo Sarkar alias Saiyada Akhtar Pushpo, and a juvenile. Johra allegedly entered India illegally via the Benapole border and had been living in Delhi for over 20 years. She obtained an Indian passport in 2020, while her daughter secured one in September 2024 using forged documents.

A separate case involved Muhammad Ali Amin, a Bangladeshi national overstaying after his visa expired in December 2024, who has been sent for deportation. Police have registered an FIR, and further investigations are underway.



## CISF to Establish First Women's Reserve Battalion in Haryana's Nuh



- CISF's first women's reserve battalion to be set up in Nuh, Haryana.
- 1,025 posts created, with 50 acres of land allocated for the facility.
- Battalion to enhance security at key NCR locations, including IGI Airport and Delhi Metro.

TPN Correspondent | Haryana

The Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) is set to establish its first women's reserve battalion in Haryana's Nuh district, marking a significant step towards increasing women's representation in security forces.

Approved by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on November 11 last year, the battalion will have 1,025 personnel. The Haryana government has allocated 50 acres of land in Nuh, which has been deemed suitable by CISF. The MHA approved the location plan on January 24, 2025.

The women's battalion will cater

to the rising demand for trained women personnel in high-alert zones across Delhi NCR, including Indira Gandhi International Airport, Delhi Metro, Parliament House Complex, and other critical installations. The upcoming Jewar International Airport is also expected to increase security needs, making the battalion crucial for rapid deployment.

In a parallel move, CISF is relocating its 1st Reserve Battalion from Barwaha, Madhya Pradesh, to an adjacent site in Nuh. This co-location is expected to optimize resources and improve operational efficiency in securing vital establishments.

## Even BJP Supporters Save ₹25,000 With AAP Schemes 1st page continuation...

Kejriwal recounted a conversation with a BJP supporter, questioning the benefits available in BJP-ruled states. "Where would you go if BJP comes to power? How many BJP-ruled states have good government schools? Where is electricity free and available round the clock? Vote for yourself and

press the 'Jhaadu' button," he said, referring to AAP's election symbol. On Friday, Kejriwal launched the 'Bachat Patra' campaign to showcase the savings generated by AAP's free schemes. He stated that under AAP's governance, families benefit from free electricity, water, quality

education, and healthcare services. The AAP manifesto also includes new welfare schemes like the Sanjeevani Yojana for free healthcare to senior citizens and free bus rides for students with a 50% concession on Metro fares. Kejriwal claimed these additions would increase monthly savings

to ₹35,000. AAP, which won 62 out of 70 seats in 2020, is seeking a third consecutive term in the upcoming Delhi Assembly elections. The polling will be held on February 5, with results declared on February 8.

## Law Ministry Allocated Over ₹1,400 Crore for Lok Sabha Polls, EVMs



- Law Ministry allocated ₹1,400 crore for Lok Sabha polls and EVMs.
- ₹500 crore sanctioned for elections, ₹300 crore for voter ID cards.
- ₹18.72 crore allotted for new EVM procurement.

TPN Correspondent  
| New Delhi

The Union Budget 2025-26 has earmarked more than ₹1,400 crore for the Law Ministry to cover expenditures related to the 2024 Lok Sabha elections and the procurement of new Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) for the Election Commission.

As per the budget presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, ₹500 crore has been allocated for Lok Sabha elections, ₹300 crore for voter identity cards, and ₹597.80 crore for other election-related expenses. Additionally, ₹18.72 crore has been sanctioned for the purchase of new EVMs by the Election Commission.

Law Ministry officials described the carry-forward expenses as a standard finan-

cial procedure, ensuring that agencies receive funds to cover election-related costs. The Central government bears the entire expenditure for parliamentary elections, while state governments fund assembly polls.

The EVM procurement budget will facilitate the purchase of ballot units, control units, and Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) machines, as well as the disposal of outdated machines under the supervision of the Election Commission's technical experts. EVMs have a lifespan of 15 years before being phased out.

The 2024 Lok Sabha elections, held in seven phases, saw nearly 97 crore eligible voters participate, marking one of the world's largest peacetime logistical operations.

## Sanjay Singh Predicts AAP Victory With Over 60 Seats in Delhi Polls



TPN Correspondent  
| New Delhi

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MP Sanjay Singh has expressed confidence that his party will secure more than 60 seats in the upcoming Delhi Assembly elections. He asserted that the Arvind Kejriwal-led government would return to power with an absolute majority. Speaking to the media, Singh stated, "AAP will be winning more than sixty seats, and the Arvind Kejriwal-led government will be formed in Delhi with an absolute majority." With less than a week left for the elections, the political battle has intensified among AAP, BJP, and Congress.

Meanwhile, BJP National General Secretary Tarun Chugh took a swipe at AAP, calling it the 'Aapda' party and predict-

ing its downfall on February 5. "Arvind Kejriwal's party is sinking, and on February 8, Delhi will get BJP's double-engine government," Chugh remarked, accusing AAP of corruption.

Eight AAP MLAs recently resigned, alleging that the party had strayed from its founding principles of transparency and internal democracy. The MLAs who stepped down include Naresh Yadav (Mehrauli), Rohit Kumar (Trilokpuri), Madan Lal (Kasturba Nagar), Rajesh Rishi (Janakpuri), Bhavna Gaud (Palam), Bhupinder Singh Joon (Bijwasan), Pawan Kumar Sharma (Adarsh Nagar), and Girish Soni (Madipur).

The Delhi Assembly elections are set for February 5, with the results to be announced on February 8.

## 'Sheesh Mahal' to Slums, Purvanchalis to Pollution 8 Issues That Will Shape Delhi Assembly Polls

TPN Correspondent | New Delhi

As Delhi gears up for the high-stakes Assembly elections in February, political parties are aggressively pushing key issues to sway voters. The contest is primarily between the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), fighting to retain power amid corruption allegations, and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which has been out of office in Delhi since 1998. The Congress, seeking to reclaim relevance, is also in the fray.

With AAP's once-strong image dented by controversies, the party is attempting a resurgence by announcing new guarantees and focusing on diverse voter bases, including youth, slum dwellers, Purvanchalis, and the middle class. Meanwhile, the BJP is leveraging corruption scandals and governance issues to challenge AAP's rule.

Here are the key issues dominating the electoral battle:

### 1. Corruption and the 'Sheesh Mahal' Row

The BJP has made corruption a core campaign plank, relentlessly targeting AAP over the alleged liquor scam and the 'Sheesh Mahal' controversy—referring to Kejriwal's lavish Civil Lines residence. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah have repeatedly accused AAP of misusing public funds, branding Kejriwal's governance as a "politics of lies and deceit."

AAP countered by attacking Modi's residence, calling it a 'Raj Mahal' and attempting a protest march, which was blocked by the police. The corruption allegations have significantly impacted AAP's image, which was initially built on honesty and transparency.

### 2. Wooing the Middle Class

In a bid to reclaim middle-class support, AAP launched its "middle-class manifesto," listing seven demands for the Union Budget, including a tax exemption hike from Rs 7 lakh to Rs 10 lakh, railway discounts for senior citizens, and a cap on

private school fees. Kejriwal framed the middle class as victims of "tax terrorism" and promised to raise their concerns in Parliament.

The BJP, however, is countering this outreach by emphasizing AAP's governance failures and financial mismanagement, using the liquor scam and Sheesh Mahal controversy to drive a wedge between the party and middle-class voters.



### 3. Yamuna Pollution and Cleanliness

The heavily polluted Yamuna River has become a major election issue. UP CM Yogi Adityanath challenged Kejriwal to take a dip in the river, while BJP leaders blamed AAP for failing to clean it despite promises. Haryana CM Nayab Singh Saini refuted AAP's claims that Haryana was polluting the Yamuna, instead accusing the Delhi government of releasing toxic waste into the river.

AAP acknowledged the failure but blamed BJP-led Haryana, promising to clean the river within three years if re-elected. Modi and other BJP leaders dismissed AAP's claims, calling them "disgusting allegations."

### 4. Unfulfilled Promises

BJP leaders, including Modi and Shah, have attacked Kejriwal for not fulfilling promises made in previous elections, such as 24x7 clean water, improved roads, women's safety, and housing for slum dwellers. BJP MP Sudhanshu Trivedi called AAP's governance a "crisis of credibility."

AAP, in response, admitted to failing on

certain promises but assured delivery in the next two to three years if given another term.

### 5. Freebies Debate

AAP has doubled down on welfare schemes, including Rs 2,100 per month for women under Mahila Samman Yojana, subsidized electricity, and financial aid for temple priests and granthis. BJP's manifesto counters with Rs 10 lakh health insurance under Ayushman Bharat, free education from KG to PG, increased pensions for senior citizens, and Rs 2,500 per month for women under Mahila Samridhi Yojana.

Congress, attempting to stay relevant, has promised Rs 2,500 for women under Pyari Didi Yojana, free 300 units of electricity, and Rs 25 lakh health insurance.

### 6. The Purvanchali Vote Bank

With Purvanchalis influencing nearly 27 out of 70 seats, both AAP and BJP have intensified their outreach. AAP has assigned seven teams to engage Purvanchali voters and given tickets to 12 candidates from the community, while BJP has brought in leaders like Manoj Tiwari and Ravi Kishan to mobilize support. The saffron party is also highlighting issues like Yamuna pollution, slum conditions, and Chhath Puja to attract voters.

### 7. Rohingyas and Illegal Immigrants

The presence of Rohingya and Bangladeshi immigrants in Delhi has become a flashpoint between AAP and BJP. Both parties have accused each other of settling illegal immigrants to bolster vote banks. BJP has pledged a crackdown on illegal settlements, while AAP has maintained that law and order is the Centre's responsibility.

### 8. Slums and Housing

Slum rehabilitation remains a key concern, with BJP attacking AAP over poor living conditions. AAP has promised to provide permanent housing to slum dwellers, while BJP has countered with its own housing schemes.

## 'Jhaadu Wale Ja Rahe Hai, Modi Ji Aa Rahe Hai'

Ravi Kishan on Delhi Assembly Elections

TPN Correspondent  
| New Delhi

BJP MP Ravi Kishan has expressed confidence in the party's victory in the upcoming Delhi Assembly polls, asserting that BJP candidate Shikha Rai is set to win from the Greater Kailash Assembly constituency.

Speaking to ANI, Kishan signaled the party's optimism, stating, "Jhaadu wale ja rahe hain, Modi ji aa rahe hain" (The broom is going, Modi ji is coming).

The Greater Kailash seat will witness a tough fight, with BJP's Shikha Rai challenging AAP's incumbent MLA and Delhi Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj, along with Congress candidate Garvit Singhvi.

Meanwhile, Aam Aadmi Party has suffered a jolt with the resignation of seven MLAs just days before the elections. Those who have stepped down include Rohit Maharoliya (Trilokpuri), Madan Lal (Kasturba Nagar), Rajesh Rishi (Janakpuri), Bhavna Gaud (Palam), Bhupender Singh June (Bijwasan), and Pawan

Kumar Sharma (Adarsh Nagar).

Rohit Kumar Mehraulia, MLA from Trilokpuri, resigned from all posts and the primary membership of AAP, citing "unfulfilled promises" to uplift the Dalit/Valmiki community. Similarly, Madan Lal and Bhavna Gaud stated that they had "lost faith" in AAP and its leadership.

Rajesh Rishi from Janakpuri accused AAP of "abandoning its founding principles of corruption-free governance and transparency." Pawan Kumar Sharma, MLA from Adarsh Nagar, stated, "The party has deviated from the honest ideology on which it was formed. I am deeply saddened by AAP's current state."

Bhupender Singh June from Bijwasan echoed similar concerns, citing a "significant deviation" from the party's original values as the reason for his resignation.

The Delhi Assembly elections are scheduled to take place on February 5, with the counting of votes set for February 8.



## Nitish Kumar Welcomes Budget 2025, Hails Special Focus on Bihar



TPN Correspondent  
| New Delhi

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Saturday welcomed the Union Budget 2025-26, calling it "progressive and forward-looking." He praised Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for prioritizing Bihar's development through special schemes and welfare measures. With Assembly elections due in the state later this year, the budget's focus on Bihar has drawn significant political attention.

Kumar expressed appreciation for the income tax relief measures, particularly the increase in the rebate ceiling from ₹7 lakh to ₹12 lakh, which he said would provide substantial benefits to the middle class. He also highlighted the government's move to raise the loan limit under the Kisan Credit Card to ₹5 lakh and expand the credit guarantee cover for micro enterprises to ₹10 crore, which he believes will generate employment and

boost the rural economy.

Among the key announcements for Bihar, Sitharaman proposed a dedicated board for the makhana (lotus nut) industry to enhance manufacturing, processing, and value addition. Additionally, she confirmed the establishment of greenfield airports in the state to meet future aviation needs and expand international connectivity.

However, the budget's strong focus on Bihar contrasted with the complete omission of Andhra Pradesh, despite the state being ruled by the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), a key ally of the BJP-led NDA government. Congress was quick to criticize the move, with party spokesperson Jairam Ramesh calling it a "bonanza" for Bihar while accusing the Centre of "cruelly ignoring" Andhra Pradesh. His remarks pointed to the political significance of Bihar's upcoming elections as a factor in the budget's allocations.

# 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.

## Maharashtra Forms SIT to Probe Alleged Conspiracy Against Fadnavis, Shinde

Plot to arrest the current CM and Deputy CM during the Maha Vikas Aghadi rule

**TPN Correspondent | Mumbai**  
The Maharashtra Home Department has constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe allegations that the former Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government, led by then-Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, was planning to falsely implicate and arrest current Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis when they were in the opposition. The move comes after claims surfaced that top police officials under the MVA administration were working on framing them in a fabricated case



- SIT to submit report within 30 days
- Former Mumbai police chief allegedly planned arrests
- Opposition questions timing of the probe

The SIT, which will be led by senior Indian Police Service (IPS) officer Satyanarayan Chaudhary, was formally announced in the Maharashtra assembly on Tuesday by cabinet minister Shambhuraje Desai. He stated that the team has been given a strict deadline of 30 days to investigate the allegations and submit its findings

The controversy erupted after businessman Sanjay Punamiya alleged that a former police officer had admitted, in a telephonic conversation, that then-Mumbai Police Commissioner was planning the arrests of Fadnavis and Shinde in connection with a case against him. Punamiya's claims gained traction after a sting operation aired on news channels purportedly backing

his statements

Raising the issue in the legislative council, BJP MLC Pravin Darekar demanded an SIT probe into the matter, arguing that if true, it would expose a serious political conspiracy by the previous government. He presented a pen drive, claiming it contained video evidence from the sting operation that revealed the plot. Following this, the state government acted swiftly in setting up the investigation

The Opposition, however, has dismissed the allegations as a diversionary tactic. Opposition leaders have questioned why the Shinde-Fadnavis govern-

ment, which has been in power for over three years, is only now setting up the probe. They argue that the move is politically motivated and intended to discredit the MVA ahead of the upcoming elections

While the state government insists that the probe is necessary to uncover the truth, the SIT's findings will be closely watched. If the allegations are substantiated, they could have major political and legal ramifications. However, if no evidence is found, the move could backfire, adding to the already intense political rivalry between the ruling Mahayuti alliance and the opposition MVA

## LPG Prices Reduced by Rs 7 in Delhi, Providing Some Relief

**TPN Correspondent | Delhi**  
Oil marketing companies have lowered the prices of 19 kg commercial LPG cylinders, effective from Saturday, which is a welcome change for businesses that rely on LPG for their operations, such as hotels, restaurants, and other commercial establishments. In the national capital, the price reduction brings the retail sale price of the 19 kg cylinder to Rs 1,797, down by Rs 7 from the previous rate. This price drop is seen as a relief for businesses facing high operational costs, especially in a volatile global market where crude oil prices fluctuate regularly.

Despite this reduction, it's im-

portant to note that the prices of domestic LPG cylinders remain unaffected, offering stability to household consumers. The revision in commercial LPG prices comes after a significant price hike in December, when the price of a 19 kg cylinder increased by Rs 62. These fluctuations in LPG prices highlight the dynamic nature of global oil markets, which influence the rates for businesses and households alike.

The price change is a part of a broader trend of fuel price revisions in response to international market conditions, which have been particularly volatile in recent months. With businesses such as



restaurants and hotels relying heavily on LPG, even a marginal price reduction can have a noticeable impact on their daily expenses. However, businesses should keep in mind that LPG prices can vary across states, depending on local taxes and transportation charges. As a result, while the price cut may benefit many commercial establishments, the actual savings might differ depending on location.

## Indian Railway's SuperApp: A Unified Platform for All Railway Services

**TPN Correspondent | Delhi**  
The Railway Ministry has officially launched the SuperApp, a one-stop platform designed to offer a variety of services related to Indian Railways, for beta testing on the Google Play Store. The app is currently available for download by only 1,000 users, who will be asked to provide feedback to help improve its functionality before it's made available to 10,000 users for further testing.

The app provides easy access to a range of services, including both reserved and unreserved



Dilip Kumar, the Executive

Director of Information and Publicity at the Railway Board, emphasized the importance of a clean, streamlined interface to improve the user experience. The app integrates various railway services, ensuring that users can access all necessary features through a single platform. The app is released by the Centre for Railway Information Systems (CRIS) on behalf of the Ministry of Railways for beta testing, with users encouraged to download it from the Play Store or App Store to provide valuable feedback.

## Mob Attacks Security Team Destroying Illegal Opium Poppy Fields in Manipur

**TPN Correspondent | IMPHAL**  
A large mob of around 80 people on Friday confronted a security team engaged in destroying illegal opium poppy cultivation in Manipur's Kangpokpi district, damaging four vehicles before being dispersed by police. The incident occurred in the Lhungjang hill range, where personnel from the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and Manipur Police were carrying out an anti-poppy drive

According to police officials, the mob attacked the security team, breaking the front windshields of four light vehicles. "The mob was later controlled by using minimum force. Later, reinforcements arrived, and the poppy destruction at Lhungjang hill range resumed," a police statement said. There were no reports of serious injuries during the confrontation

Manipur has been grappling with rampant illegal poppy cultivation, which has been fueling drug production and

smuggling in the region. The state government has been running a sustained crackdown on opium farming as part of its "War on Drugs" campaign, launched to curb the growing influence of narcotics in the state. However, efforts to eradicate poppy fields have often met with stiff resistance from locals, who depend on the crop for their livelihood



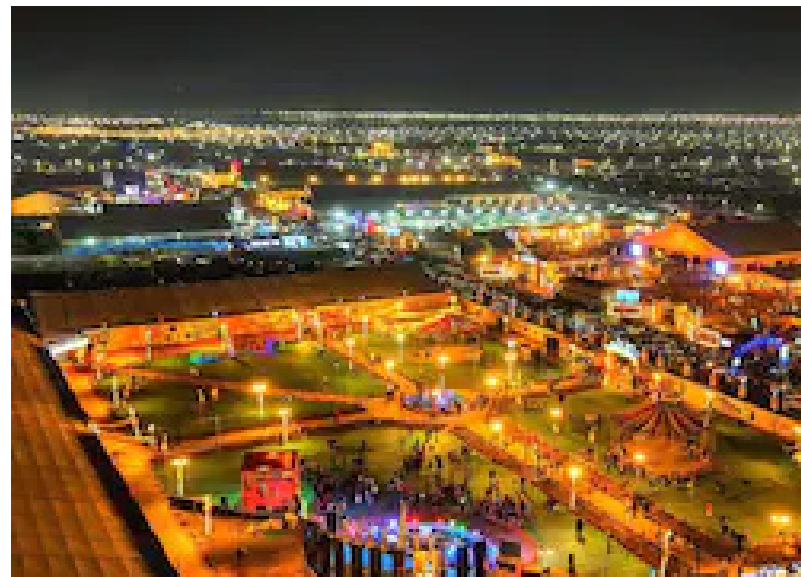
Security forces have been intensifying operations across several districts, including Kangpokpi, Churachandpur, and Ukhrul, where poppy plantations have proliferated in recent years. The crackdown has led to clashes between law enforcement agencies and poppy cultivators, with reports of confrontations surfacing repeatedly. Authorities, however,

remain firm on their stance, stating that the destruction of illegal poppy fields is crucial to combating the region's drug crisis

The latest attack highlights the ongoing tension between law enforcement agencies and local communities involved in illicit poppy farming. While the government has pledged to provide alternative livelihood options, many cultivators remain reliant on poppy farming due to its high profitability. Officials say they will continue the crackdown while also working on rehabilitation programs for affected farmers

With the anti-poppy campaign gaining momentum, security agencies are on high alert to prevent further clashes. The administration has urged local communities to cooperate with authorities in the fight against drug production, emphasizing the long-term benefits of eliminating illegal opium cultivation in the state

## Govt Slashes Airfares by 50% for Kumbh Mela Pilgrims



The ongoing Maha Kumbh, which began on January 13, has already seen an astonishing 199.4 million visitors. The festival, which will conclude on February 26, has transformed Prayagraj into a sprawling temporary city. Covering 4,000 hectares—equivalent to 7,500 football fields—the setup includes 150,000 tents and an equal number of toilets to accommodate devotees

Despite these massive arrangements, the overwhelming influx of pilgrims led to a stampede earlier this week at key bathing ghats. Authorities have since reinforced crowd control measures, deploying additional security personnel and expanding entry points to ensure the safety of visitors

With the government's latest move to make travel more accessible, footfall at the Kumbh Mela is expected to rise further. Devotees and travelers are encouraged to book their flights early to take advantage of the reduced fares while ensuring a smooth and safe pilgrimage experience

**TPN Correspondent | Delhi**  
In a major relief for pilgrims traveling to the Maha Kumbh Mela, Civil Aviation Minister K Ram Mohan Naidu announced a 50% reduction in airfare for flights to Prayagraj. The discounted fares came into effect today following multiple discussions with airline companies. Airlines were reminded of the religious and cultural significance of the event, which occurs once every 140 years, and were urged to cooperate with the government's initiative

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) had earlier taken steps to rationalize airfare prices amid reports of a 21-fold hike on certain routes, such as Delhi-Prayagraj. To accommodate the surge in demand, 81 additional flights were approved, increasing the number of daily flights to 132. The surge in ticket prices had triggered public outcry, prompting the government to intervene. However, officials assured that airlines would not face financial losses despite the fare reduction

## Eight Maoists Killed in Encounter with Security Forces in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur District

**TPN Correspondent | Chhattisgarh**  
Eight Maoists were killed in an encounter with security forces on Saturday morning in Bijapur district of Chhattisgarh, according to police officials. The gunfight broke out around 8:30 am in the forested area near Gangaloor police station.

The clash occurred during an ongoing anti-Maoist operation conducted by a joint team of security personnel. The operation was launched following intelligence about the presence of Maoist cadres from the "West Bastar division" in the region. The team involved in the operation included personnel from the District Reserve Guard (DRG), Special Task Force (STF) of the state police,

and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), along with the CRPF's elite CoBRA (Commando Battalion for Resolute Action).

The encounter comes amid the central government's commitment to eradicating Naxalism by 2026. This goal was reiterated by Home Minister Amit Shah on January 6, following a tragic incident where eight DRG jawans and one driver lost their lives after their vehicle was blown up by a Maoist-placed IED in Bijapur. The blast occurred on the Bedre-Kutru Road in the district, while the DRG personnel were returning from a joint operation in Dantewada, Narayanpur, and Bijapur.

The recent operation is part of



a broader strategy to combat the Maoist insurgency in the region, which has seen a significant escalation of violence in recent years. Authorities have been focused on disrupting the Maoist supply lines and dismantling their strongholds in central India. Security forces have ramped up their presence in areas where Maoists are active, with the aim of reducing their influence and preventing further attacks.

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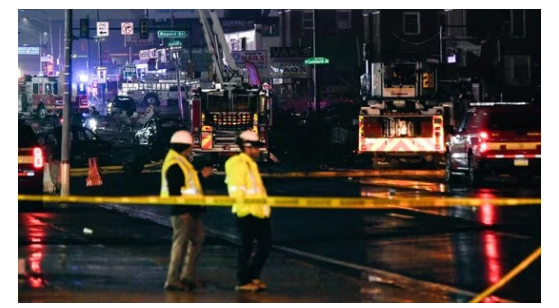
tion and the fentanyl crisis, issues he claims Canada and Mexico have failed to address sufficiently.

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.

# India Investigates Missing Nationals in Iran and Russia

## India Raises Concerns with Iranian Authorities, Calls for Quick Action



- Three Indian nationals who traveled to Iran for business are confirmed missing.
- MEA is in close contact with Iranian authorities and the families of the missing individuals.
- Previous incidents of Indian nationals missing in Russia also remain unresolved.

**TPN Correspondent | New Delhi**  
The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) confirmed on Friday that three Indian nationals who traveled to Iran for business have gone missing. MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal provided details, stating that the Indian government has raised the matter with both the Iranian Embassy in New Delhi and the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tehran. In addition, the Indian government is maintaining communication with the families of the missing individuals and has requested Iranian authori-

ties' assistance in locating and ensuring the safety of the three nationals.

This incident comes amid ongoing concerns regarding the safety of Indian nationals abroad, particularly in conflict zones. Earlier, on January 17, the MEA confirmed the deaths of 12 Indian nationals who had been serving in the Russian Army during the ongoing Ukraine conflict, with another 16 still unaccounted for. Jaiswal emphasized that India is actively in contact with Russian authorities in an effort to locate the missing indi-

viduals and facilitate their safe repatriation.

A growing concern has been the exploitation of Indian nationals through human trafficking networks, which deceive individuals with promises of well-paying jobs abroad but instead send them into dangerous situations such as the Ukraine conflict. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) had previously uncovered a large human trafficking syndicate operating across India, which lured individuals with offers of work in foreign countries but ultimately tricked them into fighting in the war.

The Indian government has expressed its strong commitment to resolving these issues, continuously working to secure the early release and safe return of Indian nationals caught in conflict zones, particularly those still serving in the Russian military. Efforts to ensure the safety of Indian citizens abroad remain a top priority, with the government actively engaging with foreign authorities to provide support and assistance in locating and repatriating missing nationals.

As the situation unfolds, the MEA continues to stress the importance of vigilance and caution for Indian citizens traveling abroad, particularly in volatile regions, and has reiterated its commitment to supporting families affected by such incidents.

# iPhone Was Top Selling Model In India, There Is A Huge Market: Apple CEO Tim Cook



**TPN Correspondent | Delhi**

Apple CEO Tim Cook expressed the company's excitement over its performance in India, noting a record-breaking achievement during the December quarter. The iPhone was the top-selling model in the country, which is the second-largest smartphone market in the world. During Apple's earnings call, Cook emphasized the vast growth potential in India, despite the company's relatively modest market share. He pointed out that there is significant room for expansion not only in the smartphone sector but also in other product categories such as PCs and tablets.

As part of its strategy to tap into this potential, Apple plans to open more retail stores in India to meet the increasing demand for its products. According to Counterpoint Research, Apple led the Indian smartphone market in 2024 in terms of total smartphone value, holding a 23% share. However, during the December quarter, Apple's market share in India stood at 11%, indicating considerable opportunity for further growth in the country.

In addition to expanding its physical retail presence, Apple is also focusing

on growing its services sector in India. The company plans to launch a localized English version of Apple Intelligence in India by April, marking a step toward providing tailored services for the Indian market. Despite a slight decline of about 1% in iPhone sales, Apple's overall product sales grew by 1.5%, reaching USD 97.96 billion. Additionally, services revenue surged by 14%, reaching a record USD 26.34 billion.

While Apple enjoyed strong global performance, it faced challenges in the Chinese market, where its sales fell by 11% during the quarter. Despite this decline, the company's total revenue reached an all-time high of USD 124.3 billion, marking a 4% year-on-year increase. However, net income saw a decrease of about 7%, totaling USD 36.33 billion.

Given India's massive growth potential in both product and service categories, Apple's increased focus on the region is expected to drive significant expansion in the coming years. With its plans for more retail stores and a tailored approach to local services, Apple is well-positioned to capitalize on the opportunities that India offers.

# Rishi Sunak and Narayana Murthy Attend Jaipur Literature Festival

**TPN Correspondent | Delhi**  
Former British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and his renowned father-in-law Narayana Murthy, co-founder of Infosys, were seen sitting in the front row at the Jaipur Literature Festival (JLF) on Saturday. The two were attending a session where Sunak's wife, Akshata Murthy, and her mother, Sudha Murty, a prominent author and Rajya Sabha MP, were scheduled to speak on a session titled "My Mother, Myself."

As the event unfolded, a presenter acknowledged the presence of the distinguished guests, saying, "Just to say again and acknowledge, we have got two wonderful people, Narayana Murthy and former Prime Minister (of Britain) Rishi Sunak. Thank you and welcome to the Jaipur Literature Festival," which was met with enthusiastic applause from the audience.

At this point, Sunak's aunt-in-law playfully prompted him to greet the crowd. The former PM responded by standing up, performing a namaste gesture, and waving to the audience before returning to his seat. The presenter also remarked, "For those of you who don't know, Rishi and Akshata were great supporters of JLF



London before he joined the suit gang. But now he is back, and we're thrilled to have him here."

Sunak, who stepped down as the leader of the Conservative Party following a difficult electoral defeat in July, has since taken up new academic roles at the University of Oxford and Stanford University—both prestigious institutions he attended. These academic appointments will complement his work as a Tory Member of Parliament in the UK.

Before entering politics, Sunak, 44, had a successful career in business and finance. He co-founded an investment firm and worked internationally, helping small businesses grow in the UK.

This year's JLF features over 300 participants, including Nobel laureates, Booker Prize winners, acclaimed journalists, and prominent authors. Notable figures such as Abhijit Banerjee, Esther Duflo, Amol Palekar, Ira Mukhoty, and Geetanjali Shree are among those attending the festival.

# Indian Rupee Depreciates Modestly in FY25, Outperforms Other Currencies

**TPN Correspondent | New Delhi**

The Indian rupee (INR) has depreciated by 2.9% in the first nine months of the fiscal year 2025, as reported in the Economic Survey presented in Parliament on Friday. Despite this decline, the INR has outperformed several major global currencies, including the Canadian Dollar, South Korean Won, and Brazilian Real, which depreciated by 5.4%, 8.2%, and 17.4%, respectively, over the same period. This relative strength underscores the rupee's resilience amidst broader global currency trends.

The value of the INR is influenced by various domestic and international factors, such as fluctuations in the Dollar Index, global capital flows, interest rates, crude oil prices, and the current account deficit. According to the survey, one of the key drivers of the rupee's depreciation in 2024 was the broad strengthening of the US dollar,

compounded by geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and uncertainties surrounding the upcoming US elections.

Despite facing these challenges, the rupee has displayed a degree of stability. The Nominal Effective Exchange Rate (NEER), which tracks the rupee's value against a basket of major currencies, remained relatively steady between 90 and 92 from April to November 2024. This indicates that, in spite of external volatility, the INR held its ground.

The Real Effective Exchange Rate (REER), which adjusts the nominal rate for inflation and purchasing power, saw a steady appreciation, rising from 103.2 in April 2024 to 107.2 by December 2024. This increase in the REER suggests that the rupee's competitiveness in global markets has improved, signaling strength despite the depreciation.

# India-Israel Maitri Project kicks off with visit of influencers from India

**TPN Correspondent | New Delhi**  
This week, Sharaka, a non-governmental organization, hosted the first delegation of intellectuals, influencers, professionals, and academics from India to Israel under its flagship initiative, the India-Israel Maitri Project (IIMP). The mission of this delegation is to promote greater awareness and understanding of Israeli society and history, with a particular focus on Holocaust education.

Amit Deri, chairman and co-found-

er of Sharaka, expressed his honor in hosting the Indian delegation, stating, "We are honored to host this Indian delegation. The delegates represent the great diversity and talents of a rising Indian civilization. There is enormous untapped potential in Israel-India relations, and the knowledge and experiences they will gain on this visit will lay the foundations for the future of our relations for many years to come."

Dan Feferman, the Executive Di-

rector of Sharaka, also highlighted the significance of the visit. "We are excited to host this senior delegation in Israel of Muslim, Hindu, and Christian leaders from India. Although Indians have a general af-



finity to Israel and vice versa, our societies are not deeply familiar with each other. This presents an opportunity to build on this relationship with the largest democracy, home to one of the largest Muslim communities in the world," he noted.

During their six-day visit, which concluded on January 31, the delegation explored the historic holy sites of Jerusalem, engaged with experts, and participated in dialogues with Israeli Arabs. They also connected

with local academics and public policy leaders, delving deeper into Israel's social and political landscape. One of the highlights of the visit was the tour of sites impacted by the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack, which resulted in the deaths of approximately 1,200 people and the hostage-taking of 251 others. The delegation's visit aimed to offer them a deeper understanding of Israel's current security situation and the broader geopolitical context.

# 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.



## 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.

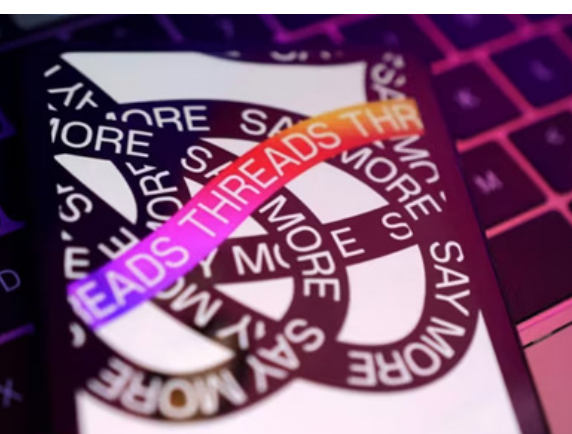
As of now, while these experiments offer valuable insights into genetic disorders and reproduction, applying this technology to humans remains a distant possibility.

## 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 BrahmaAnandam 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 BrahmaAnandam's birthday, the makers released a special look poster as a tribute to the legendary comedian. The trendy poster, featuring BrahmaAnandam 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 BrahmaAnandam'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.