

₹53.47L-cr (7.7% ▲)

Total Budget size - up from ₹49.64L-cr in FY25-26

₹12.22L-cr (10% ▲)

Capital expenditure announced for 2026-27 works out to be 4.4% of GDP, up from last year's ₹11.11L-cr

₹7.85L-cr (15% ▲)

Defence outlay for 2026-27 - up from last year's ₹6.81L-cr

4.3% (0.1% ▼)

Fiscal deficit in 2026-27, lower than 4.4% in 2025-26

₹40K-cr (42.7% ▲)

For Electronics Components Manufacturing Scheme under ISM 2.0 - up from ₹22,919cr in 2025

₹2.55L-cr (9.44% ▲)

For MHA - up from ₹2.33L-cr in FY2025-26

- 5 varsity townships in major industrial and logistic corridors; girls hostel in each district
- Content creator labs in 15K schools and 500 colleges
- Reduction of tax collection at source rate to 2% for education



Today's Budget is historic. It reflects the aspirations of 140cr Indians. It strengthens the reform journey and charts a clear roadmap for Viksit Bharat

NARENDRA MODI
Prime Minister


The Modi Govt has run out of ideas. Budget 2026 does not provide a single solution to India's many economic, social, and political challenges

MALLIKARJUN KHARGE
Congress president


This is a disappointing Budget that increases worries about the future. GST should have been restructured to suit value-added tax models

KE RAGHUNATHAN
Chairman, Association of Indian Entrepreneurs


The Budget provides new opportunities for youth, farmers, entrepreneurs, middle class, and recognition for workers

MOHAN CHARAN MAJHI
Odisha CM


Slash in PMAY (Gramin) from ₹35,832 crore to ₹32,500 crore is disappointing

M. K. STALIN
Tamil Nadu CM

NOTHING TO CHEER



demand—the Budget was widely expected to act as a catalyst for consumption-led growth and meaningful job creation. Instead, it falls short of these expectations, offering precious little to rekindle demand or energise employment.

key states, including West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, heading to polls, the Budget signalled continued fiscal consolidation and infrastructure spending. But a hike in STT on equity derivatives rattled equity markets, with key indices plunging as much as 2% in the special budget-day trading session, before recovering some ground.

Sitharaman, in her nearly 90-minute speech in the Lok Sabha, announced detailed anchor schemes for becoming 'Viksit Bharat' - boosting employment, while combining technologies of the future with legacy industries.

Maintaining emphasis on infrastructure development, capital expenditure has been raised to ₹12.2 lakh crore next year from an already record-high ₹11.2 lakh crore in FY26. Among the many infrastructure projects announced by the minister was a plan to build 7 high-speed rail corridors, while defence expenditure is up by about a fifth on the year.

While there were no major changes to personal income-tax slabs, the government announced tax and incentive measures aimed at boosting investment and ease of compliance for the industry.

Tax holiday for global data centres

A major announcement was a 20-year tax holiday for overseas firms providing global data centre services from India, along with a 15% safe harbour on costs for data centre services provided by related entities of foreign cloud firms.

Govt to borrow ₹17.2L-cr

On fiscal front, the govt reiterated its consolidata-

Farmers will face higher input costs as fertilisers such as ammonium phosphate and nitro-phosphate are set to become more expensive. In sum, the Budget arrives not as a balm in troubled times, but as a missed opportunity—leaving many with the uneasy sense that the moment demanded more than what was delivered

PNN & AGENCIES

The Union Budget, presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for a record ninth time in the Lok Sabha, has cast a shadow of disappointment. From youth brimming with aspirations to farmers battling rising input costs, and from the beleaguered middle class to the common citizen, the Budget offers little that inspires cheer or confidence. Income-tax payers found no respite, while investors delivered a resounding thumbs-down to the proposal of raising Securities Transaction Tax (STT) on derivatives. The markets responded with brutal swiftness, with investors' wealth eroded by a staggering ₹9.40 lakh crore. Unveiled against a fraught global backdrop—marked by rising trade barriers, external geopolitical headwinds, and a worrying stagnation in domestic

RUPEE COMES FROM

- Borrowings and other liabilities 24p
- Corporation tax 18p
- Income tax 21p
- Customs 4p
- Union excise duties 6p
- GST and other taxes 15p
- Non-tax revenue 10p
- Non-debt capital receipts 2p

RUPEE GOES TO

- State's share of taxes 22p
- Finance Commission and other transfers 7p
- Centrally sponsored schemes 8p
- Interest payments 20p
- Defence 11p
- Major subsidies 6p
- Central sector schemes 17p
- Civil pensions 2p
- Other expenditures 7p

TRUMP: INDIA TO BUY VENEZUELAN OIL



on Trump's comments.

India had been a major buyer of Iranian oil until 2019, when imports were significantly reduced following the reimposition of US sanctions on Tehran.

Trump's comments come against the backdrop of US sanctions on Iran and Venezuela and its pressure on major energy-importing countries to avoid buying crude from nations under restrictions.

In recent years, India significantly increased its purchases of discounted Russian crude, making Russia one of its largest oil suppliers.

Pak boycotts T20WC game against India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Lahore, Feb 1: Pakistan Sunday formally announced its decision to boycott its marquee ICC T20 World Cup group league match against India, even as the government cleared the national team's participation for the rest of the tournament, starting February 7.

Pakistan government's decision is being perceived as a mark of protest after ICC replaced Bangladesh with Scotland not accepting the latter's demand of shifting its matches from India to Sri Lanka due to security reasons.

The government of Pakistan said it has granted approval to the Pakistan cricket team to take part in the tournament but said the team "shall not take the field" for the February 15 fixture against India in Colombo.

P12

20 new National Waterways to be operationalised over next five years, starting with Odisha

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar/New Delhi, Feb 1: The Centre Sunday proposed establishment of a dedicated 'rare earth corridor' in Odisha, a mineral-rich state, and import duty exemption on capital goods needed for processing critical minerals to boost mining and processing activities.

While presenting the Union Budget 2026-27 in the Lok Sabha, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said, "It is proposed to provide basic customs duty exemption to the import of capital goods required for processing of critical minerals in India."

Noting that a scheme for 'Rare Earth Permanent Magnets' was launched in November 2025, Sitharaman said, "We now

propose to support the mineral-rich states of Odisha, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu to establish dedicated rare earth corridors to promote mining, processing, research and manufacturing."

Sitharaman also said the government will operationalise 20 new National Waterways (NW) over the next five years, starting with NW-5 in Odisha to

connect mineral-rich areas of Talcher and Angul and industrial centres like Kalinganagar to the ports of Paradeep and Dhamra. The government will spend ₹13,000 crore towards the development of NW-5.

The move will help in efficient and affordable freight movement, reducing logistical pressure on the road and rail networks. The aim of the initiative is

Dedicated rare earth corridor in Odisha soon

Turtle trails to be developed near major turtle nesting sites in Odisha and other states



to enhance sustainable inland waterway transport, enhance connectivity for bulk goods (like minerals and industrial goods) and strengthen Odisha's role as a logistics and industrial hub on the east coast.

The Union Finance Minister also announced plans to develop 'turtle trails' near major nesting sites in states like Odisha to promote wildlife tourism and

environmental protection. "We will develop ecologically sustainable mountain trails in Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Jammu and Kashmir; Araku Valley in the Eastern Ghats and Podhigai Malai in the Western Ghats; turtle trails along key nesting sites in the coastal areas of Odisha, Karnataka and Kerala; and bird watching trails along the Pulikat lake in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu," the Minister said.

The Centre also proposed the development of an 'East Coast Industrial Corridor' with a well-connected node at Durgapur in West Bengal, and creation of five tourism destinations in five 'Purvodaya' states. Odisha is likely to benefit due to its coastal geographical and economic connectivity.

leisure

FORTUNE FORECAST



accuracy • reliability • trust

FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL 55181*

ARIES

Today will be an industrious day. The stars foretell that you may visit a historical place, or perhaps a museum. However, Ganesha says, you may need to pay a little attention to your health. If such is the case, it would be better to take the evening off for yourself.



TAURUS

Today, Ganesha sees your mind shifting from your professional affairs and drifting, time and again, towards your home and family. You are likely to return home early and get happily engrossed in discussing pressing domestic issues with your family members. This will possibly be followed by a festive evening filled with fun and laughter.



GEMINI

There is a possibility of conflicts brewing at your home today. The demands made by your family members will increase and you may struggle to cope with them. This could make you ill-tempered. You will encounter large expenses in meeting these demands. You need to cut down on your expenses and increase your savings, says Ganesha.



CANCER

You can improve your finances with your mental capabilities. Ganesha says that you will get success in both private life and career. You will be entrusted many tasks and responsibilities. Yet by evening, you will spend time in your pursuits.



LEO

You may have arguments with your family members today. You need to adopt an accomodating attitude today, since it is not a very promising day for you. Otherwise nothing may go in your favour. You will have to work harder than usual.



VIRGO

Ganesha predicts that your writing skills will possibly help you vent your feelings without offending others. You will successfully complete your pending assignments. Great success will knock at your door in anything and everything you undertake today, predicts Ganesha.



LIBRA

Ganesha says you will spend time with your family members by putting them above other commitments. There may be plans made to go out for dinner or for a short excursion with them. Ganesha says that the health of a close relative may be a cause of concern for you today.



SCORPIO

You nearly emerge as a superhero today, as you have the knack of balancing home and work just perfectly. Intellectual discussions and brainstorming with peers would provide food for thought today. You may look forward to merry-making and soiree with family and friends in the evening.



SAGITTARIUS

You are in a mood to spend money of home décor, paintings or artefacts. Go ahead, and decorate your home. Ganesha foresees success on your cards today. Workplace has never been such an interesting place before. Planning and implementation will make your day easier.



CAPRICORN

You will have heard of many emotional fools who let sentiments rule their lives. Try not be one of them, and if it's too difficult a task, at least pretend not to be one of them, for Ganesha says going by your feelings can leave you at a low ebb. In other words, your feelings can come in the way of your success. A solution to this problem is to remain dispassionate and let the opportunist think you are a hard nut to crack.



AQUARIUS

If you are an astrologer, doctor or a spiritual leader, today is a favourable day for you. Those who may want to challenge you must reconsider the thought of testing your strengths, says Ganesha. Doing charity work, helping the needy, and working for humanitarian causes give you a feeling of contentment.



PISCES

Today will be a hectic day for you. Most of your time will be spent in making your relationships on the business as well as the personal front more meaningful. You will likely find yourself attending social events. There is also the possibility that you will attend some religious ritual today. Apart from this, nothing substantial is likely to occur today, says Ganesha.



PARIS HILTON REFLECTS ON MOTHERHOOD

Socialite and reality TV star Paris Hilton says motherhood has transformed her life. In her new documentary *Infinite Icon: A Visual Memoir*, she shares that raising son Phoenix and daughter London has brought her the deepest love, calling her children her "cutesie crew" and her heart

BELLA HADID, ADAN BANUELOS SPARK REUNION BUZZ

Bella Hadid and Adan Banuelos have sparked fresh reunion buzz after a late-night Texas video surfaced. Footage shows the pair slow dancing intimately at a bar, sharing close moments that suggested they were very much together. The clip has sent fans into speculation mode



Bhumi backs creative equality

Mumbai: In an industry often shaped by rigid hierarchies, *Daldal* quietly makes a powerful case for creative equality. Bhumi Pednekar, in a recent interview, openly acknowledged how the series breaks the traditional divide between established stars and newer faces. Praising her co-actors Samara and Aditya, Bhumi described them as "incredible performers," admitting she was genuinely inspired by their work; an honesty she noted is rare in today's work culture.

What stood out for Bhumi was not just their talent but the balance they brought to emotionally demanding roles. Despite portraying dark, intense characters, Samara and Aditya carried a sense of ease on set, creating an atmosphere that felt collaborative rather than competitive. Bhumi even observed a near-choreographed rhythm in their scenes, with performances flowing in sync and reacting organically to one another.

Producer Vikram Malhotra echoed this senti-

ment, stressing that India's talent pool is vast and that meaningful storytelling depends on strong writing and the courage to cast actors purely on merit. For Bhumi, *Daldal* represents a shift, where performances aren't ranked by seniority but by depth and honesty.

The series thrives on shared space, silence and emotional collision, proving that when the environment is equal and the writing strong, hierarchy fades and talent truly takes centre stage.

AGENCIES



NOISE OVER RAPPORT WITH RANBIR

Alia unperturbed

Mumbai: Actors Alia Bhatt and Ranbir Kapoor have been together for over seven years and married for nearly four, yet their relationship continues to be the subject of online speculation. From viral clips to gossip columns, every small gesture is often dissected to suggest trouble in their marriage. In a recent interview, Alia dismissed this chatter, calling it mere "noise" that doesn't affect their lives.

Speaking to *Esquire India*, Alia addressed how social media reacts to fleeting moments. "The noise doesn't reach us because it's not real," she said, pointing out that people form opinions based on a few seconds of footage, while their relationship spans years. She added that sometimes the couple laughs at memes, and at other times they simply ignore them. "Even the B of bother doesn't enter our life," Alia shared, explaining that online opinions don't alter her reality, family life or happiness.

Alia reflected on feeling content and grateful, saying her life remains unchanged despite outside commentary. The couple began dating during the filming of Ayan Mukerji's *Brahmastra* in 2018 and married in April 2022. They welcomed their daughter Raha later that year.

Professionally, Alia and Ranbir will reunite in Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Love & War*, also starring Vicky Kaushal. Alia will also appear in YRF's spy thriller *Alpha*, while Ranbir headlines Nitesh Tiwari's *Ramayana: Part One*.

AGENCIES



Reason Tabu never used her father's surname



Mumbai: Tabu has always carried an air of quiet strength, both on screen and in life. Long before fame, she made a deeply personal choice, to never use her father's surname, Hashmi. In an old interview, the actress explained that she grew up without her father after her parents' divorce and never felt an emotional connection with him, a reality that shaped her identity early on.

Raised in Hyderabad, Tabu spent her childhood with her mother and grandparents, especially her grandmother, who became a powerful influence in her life. Surrounded by books, prayers and strong women, she grew up calm, introspective and self-contained. "I have no memories of him," Tabu once said about her father, adding that she never felt curious or compelled to seek a relationship with someone she didn't know.

For Tabu, names were about belonging, not convention. She shared that she was known as Tabassum Fatima, with Fatima serving as her surname in school. Using her father's name never felt necessary or meaningful. "I never thought it was important," she said, emphasising that the identity she grew up with felt complete.

Today, Tabu stands firmly rooted in the life she built on her own terms; settled, self-assured and defined not by lineage, but by choice, resilience and remarkable talent.

AGENCIES

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Huma shares her 'best beauty hack'

Mumbai: Bollywood actress Huma Qureshi has shared what she calls her "best beauty hack," and it has nothing to do with makeup or skincare.

The actress believes that laughter is the simplest and most effective way to glow from within. Taking to Instagram, Huma shared a string of monochrome pictures of herself, accompanied by the caption, "Laughter is the best beauty hack."

The actress is all set to be seen in Yash-star-

Toxic: A Fairytale for Grown-Ups. The makers had earlier unveiled the looks of Yash, Kiara Advani, Nayanthara, Rukmini Vasanth, and Tara Sutaria of the film.

Written by Yash and Geetu Mohandas and directed by Geetu Mohandas, the film has been simultaneously shot in Kannada and English, with dubbed versions planned in Hindi, Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, and several other languages.

Toxic: A Fairytale for Grown-Ups is reportedly a gripping tale of crime and deception set in 1980s Goa, where a powerful drug cartel manipulates lives behind the state's picturesque beaches and vibrant culture.

The film features a formidable technical lineup, including National Award-winning cinematographer Rajeev Ravi, music by Ravi Basrur, editing by Ujwal Kulkarni, and production design by TP Abid.

IANS

PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBES

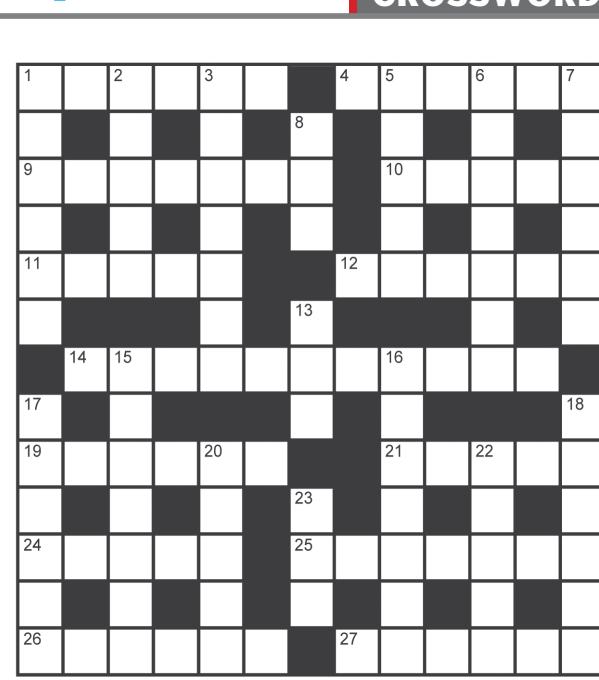


BREVITY



FUN POST

CROSSWORD



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Across

- 1 Really fast (6)
- 4 Latin American dance (3-3)
- 9 What the Titanic hit (7)
- 10 Zoo heavyweight (5)
- 11 Uncredited actor (5)
- 12 Strike caller (6)
- 14 Eagles and hawks, e.g. (5,2)
- 19 Morning eyepener (6)
- 21 Ice house (5)
- 24 Pigsty cries (5)
- 25 Bird with a crested head and very large fanlike tail (7)
- 26 They're over the eyes (6)
- 27 It comes in stalks (6)
- 28 Sheik's bevy (5)
- 29 Culinary art (7)
- 30 Idolises (6)
- 31 Bird-toe (3)
- 32 Milk producer (3)
- 33 Babies (7)
- 34 Ape (7)
- 35 Large group of fish (6)
- 36 Domestic beast of burden (6)
- 37 Come to pass (5)
- 38 Kind of change (5)
- 39 007, for one (3)

Down

- 1 Black widow (6)
- 2 DVD button (5)
- 3 1988 Bruce Willis "Christmas" movie (3-4)
- 4 Inky nebulos (9)
- 5 Maroons (6)
- 6 Oolite (6)
- 7 Novel gratis (9)
- 8 Nature forest (9)
- 9 Siskin abeam (9)
- 10 Craze (6)
- 11 Owl well (6)
- 12 Eel (6)
- 13 Pedestal eyed (9)

SUDOKU

To solve the Sudoku puzzle, fill in the boxes in such a manner that every row, column and 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9, without repeating any.



SOLUTIONS



CROSSWORD



SUDOKU

CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW



Budget to boost logistics, industrial ecosystem: CM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA



Bhubaneswar, Feb 1: Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Sunday described the Union Budget as "forward-looking and inclusive" and asserted that it would boost the state's logistics and industrial ecosystem.

Noting that the Budget, presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Parliament Sunday, focuses on the development of youth and farmers, Majhi said, "This provides new opportunities for youth, farmers, entrepreneurs, middle class, and recognition for workers."

Speaking to reporters at Sonepur during a visit to the district, he said the provisions of the Budget clearly aims to accelerate innovation, manufacturing, and employment while strengthening agriculture, rural development, infrastructure, tourism and culture.

Referring to Odisha, the chief minister said that the creation

Trails' and mountain trails in the Eastern Ghats will protect biodiversity, empower local communities, and position Odisha as a world-class destination for nature and adventure tourism.

Majhi, who is also in charge of the Finance department, said that the Budget has enough provisions to support to MSMEs, startups, and indigenous production leading to further strength of the Atmanirbhar Bharat'.

This apart, Majhi said the operation of the National Waterway-5 (NW-5) will connect mineral-rich and industrial regions to ports, ensuring cost-effective and environmentally sustainable transport.

The proposal for setting up of skill development centres along the waterway will help local youths to get trained and provide employment opportunities, he said.

This apart, the chief minister said conservation-based tourism initiatives such as 'Turtle

In a post on X, the CMO said, "Presenting the Union Budget 2026-27, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced that, following the launch of the rare-earth permanent magnet scheme in 2025, the government of India will extend central support for dedicated rare-earth corridors in mineral-rich states, including Odisha."

"As seen from the entirety of the Union Budget, Odisha is getting allocations only for taking its natural resources away and completely ignored when it comes to resource allocation for benefit of people of the state," he said.

"I express my disappointment on the #Budget2026 presented today by the Union Government. The Budget has offered no noteworthy benefits to #Odisha and its people," he said.

The regional party also ridiculed the BJP-led Union go-

ernment's allocations for the state despite the saffron party winning 20 of the state's 21 Lok Sabha seats in the previous elections.

Patnaik said the expectation of people was that the double-engine government would provide a growth momentum with a focus on infrastructure, job creation and additional allocations due to the state, but 'the state has received very little'.

However, Patnaik welcomed the proposal for establishment of the rare earth corridor in Odisha. He said the state is the leading producer of several key minerals and will always contribute to nation building through its rich resources.

He noted that the Budget again announced National Waterways to connect mineral-rich areas and industrial centres to ports, but said the proposal was a decade old and there has been 'no progress on the ground'.

Patnaik also said it was a huge disappointment that the announcement to develop seven high-speed rail corridors between cities as 'growth connectors' does not feature Odisha.

Odisha gets allocations only for extractions of resources: LoP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

WHAT THEY SAID

Union Budget 2026 powerfully reinforces Odisha Vision 2036 and India Vision 2047. The Rs 12,200cr transformation of National Waterways 5 and 64 will connect Angul-Talcher with Kalinganagar, Paradip, and Dhamra, reducing logistics costs by up to 30% and creating green cargo corridors for industry, MSMEs, and farmers. Strategic initiatives in rare-earth value chains and the Rs 40,000cr electronics mission position Odisha as a hub for EVs, renewables, defence, and semiconductors. With Rs 12.2lakh crore national capex and Odisha's allocation rising to Rs 64,408 crore, the Budget calls upon all stakeholders to build AI-enabled manufacturing, resilient infrastructure, and inclusive livelihoods, driving Odisha toward a globally competitive, sustainable economy by 2047.

Pankaj Lochan Mohanty | Chairman, ASSOCHAM Odisha State Development Council

The Union Budget 2026 presents mixed signals on environmental priorities. While India's push for renewable energy, clean technology, and electric mobility reflects commitment to climate mitigation and green growth, the Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change has been allocated only Rs 3,759.46 crore—an increase of about 8 percent from the previous year. Given the scale of challenges such as biodiversity loss, climate adaptation, pollution control, and coastal resilience, this allocation remains inadequate. An infrastructure-led growth strategy without strong environmental safeguards risks further straining already fragile ecosystems.

Biswajeet Panda | Environment activist

An 8% increase in the education budget is a classic money illusion. Once you factor in inflation and a growing student population, per-student spending actually declines. Rising construction costs further erode its impact, turning bold promises like 'University Townships' into maintenance exercises. For states like Odisha, relying on the Purvodaya vision, this stagnant per-capita funding means we're not funding an education revolution—we're merely managing a crowd.

Naba Kishor Pujari | Education rights activist

The Union Budget offers encouraging signals for youth empowerment through internships, AI and tech skilling, upgraded training infrastructure, and support for MSMEs and startups. These steps can enhance skills, employability, and self-employment opportunities. However, government job aspirants continue to face challenges due to technical glitches, recruitment delays, and reliance on private online exam centres. Establishing government-owned, standardized examination centres and strengthening public libraries with trained librarians are essential reforms.

Sunil Kumar Mishra | Youth activist

The Union Budget 2026 is a forward-looking blueprint that strengthens growth, job creation, and innovation. A record Rs 12.2 lakh crore allocation for public capital expenditure underscores the government's strong commitment to infrastructure-led development. Initiatives such as the Rs 40,000 crore Semiconductor Mission 2.0, Rs 10,000 crore Biopharma Shakti, and Rs 1.63 lakh crore for agriculture—along with focused MSME support—will empower entrepreneurs and farmers alike. The budget opens meaningful opportunities for youth and startups to actively shape India's next phase of growth.

Sakya Singh Mahapatra | Entrepreneur, Founder & CEO, SakRobotix Lab Pvt. Ltd.

The Union Budget 2026-27 fails to assure economic progress, while the Odisha Budget clearly does. Odisha's fiscal policy deserves to be a model for the Centre. An approach of borrowing to consume is anti-growth and unsustainable. In a healthy economy, capital investment must exceed borrowing by at least the GDP growth rate. Despite a projected 7% GDP growth, the Union Budget proposes higher borrowing than capital investment, reflecting a flawed economic direction. In contrast, Odisha's budget prioritizes capital investment over debt, promoting sustainable development. The Union Government must urgently rethink its budgetary policy and follow Odisha's growth-oriented approach.

Anand Mahapatra | Energy analyst

As a physician, I welcome Budget 2026's promise to upgrade district hospitals with trauma and emergency centers, expand mental health infrastructure, and support integrative medicine through new Ayurvedic institutes. These steps address urgent gaps we see daily—delayed emergency care, untreated psychiatric illness, and limited patient options. Customs duty exemptions on life-saving drugs are also a positive move. Yet, what's missing is equally important: investment in healthcare workers, medical education, and bridging the rural-urban doctor divide. Facilities alone are not enough; hospitals are only as effective as the people who run them. Now, implementation will be the true test.

Suvendu Mishra | Health expert

This Budget seems to turn its back on farmers, workers, and small enterprises, while favoring big business houses. There is no relief for agriculture or insurance of minimum support prices promised. Research and development, crucial for innovation, is neglected. Unemployment persists, MSMEs face reduced support, and public education shrinks. Workers' wages remain stagnant, and social welfare schemes are overlooked. Banking privatization and disinvestment benefit the corporate rather than citizens.

Pradip Nayak | State Secretary, CITU

Investments in highways, Metro, railways, logistics corridor and urban infrastructure will help grow connectivity, open new avenues for development and provide strength to long-term urban development—which will be beneficial for Odisha as a whole

Swadesh Kumar Routray | President, CREDAI Odisha



A long-term deeply-thought Budget to boost manufacturing in various sectors like Defence, aerospace, chemical, pharma and electronics. IT sector has been given thrust by giving a long term tax holiday. Odisha will be benefited in coconut, cashew & tourism sector. Rare earth corridor also will be in focus. MSME may not see a major impact but manufacturing sector will see a long term impact. SHEMart was a long pending demand which is fulfilled.

Satwik Swain | Secretary General, OASME



Union Budget 2026 is a healthy budget for a better growth of our economy. The revenue generation and expenditure has been designed in a well balanced manner. The budget deficit has been proposed well below 5 per cent. Provisions have been kept for infrastructure works and agriculture. The direct tax has been kept as it is. Overall the budget 2026 will prove itself a growth engine of the Indian economy.

Madhav Lodha | Jai Baba Automobile, Royal Enfield



Union Budget 2026-27 is a steady, continuity-driven Budget for the automobile sector—not a big-bang one, but it lays a clearer road for long-term growth.

It reinforces the push for manufacturing and advanced automotive technologies through higher outlay under the auto PLI scheme, which will encourage OEMs to localise more, invest in new products and strengthen supply chains. The continued focus on EVs—through support for PM E-DRIVE, the EV supply chain and domestic cell manufacturing—gives a firm policy signal, though mass-market EV demand in tier-2 and tier-3 cities will still depend on affordability, charging infrastructure and customer confidence. The enhanced capital expenditure on roads and logistics corridors is especially important for states like Odisha, which are emerging as industrial and mining hubs; better highways and connectivity can lift commercial vehicle, SUV and rural passenger-car demand over the next few years.

Aditya Patra | MD I Highway Honda, Aditya Motors-Mahindra, Aditya Hyundai

The Budget can be described as a roadmap to steer India and Odisha towards sustained progress. It seeks to strike a balance between growth and fiscal responsibility.

Measures have been framed to benefit key sectors such as MSMEs, tourism and education. With regard to Odisha, priority has been given to the development of districts rich in rare earths and mineral resources, inland waterways and urban industrial clusters. Provisions span from promoting girls' education to encouraging entrepreneurship, including plans to set up girls' hostels in every district.

Mitali Chinara | Economist



This budget prioritises corporate interests over people and deepens regional inequality. The poorest remain neglected, and states like Odisha continue to be overlooked despite their immense contribution to national growth. Odisha's minerals power India, yet the state receives little investment in industries, infrastructure, or employment opportunities. Projects proposed focus on extracting resources rather than creating value or jobs locally, leaving environmental damage behind. Even in railways, manufacturing, and textiles, Odisha finds no special attention. This is not a demand for favours, but a call for fairness, balance, and truly inclusive development.

Srikanta Jena | Congress



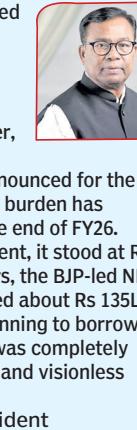
The Union Budget is a welcoming step for the automobile industry, signalling a long-term push towards EVs, manufacturing, and supply-chain strengthening, though it lacks any immediate demand stimulus for buyers. For MSMEs, the budget brings several positives—improved credit access, capital support, and formalisation measures are expected to significantly boost the MSME and micro sectors. Overall, the budget reflects a continuation of earlier policies with a sustained focus on Make in India and long-term economic strengthening.

Akhil Poddar | FADA Odisha, State Chairperson



When a Budget is prepared for 147 crore people, emphasis should have been given to women, youth, farmers, and SC/ST communities. However, there was no specific public-centric project announced for the state. The country's debt burden has reached Rs 190L-cr by the end of FY26. During the UPA government, it stood at Rs 55L-cr. In the last 12 years, the BJP-led NDA government has borrowed about Rs 135L-cr. The Centre is now planning to borrow Rs 17.2L-cr. The Budget was completely directionless, policyless, and visionless

Bhakta Charan Das | Odisha Congress president



Despite its population size, India has consistently lagged behind in winning Olympic medals. Keeping this reality in focus, the new initiative (Khelo India Mission) appears to be a long-term effort to improve athletes' performance in a systematic way. Such steps are expected to benefit sportspersons across multiple disciplines, beginning at the grassroots level. The central government has already taken several measures to promote sports and develop sporting talent.

Anuradha Biswal | Olympian



The Budget charts a firm path toward a sustainable and technology-driven future across sectors. We particularly welcome the government's strong commitment to the electric vehicle (EV) ecosystem. Key measures include exemptions from basic customs duty on capital goods used in lithium-ion cell manufacturing; the establishment of rare-earth corridors in mineral-rich states such as Odisha; and the deployment of 4,000 e-buses for the Northeast and Purvodaya regions to strengthen green mobility.

CS Vigneshwar | President, Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations



The Union Budget has largely ignored Odisha's tribal and KBK regions, offering only symbolic references without a clear development roadmap. Key issues such as livelihoods, displacement safeguards and community participation remain unaddressed:

Saptagiri Shankar Ulaka | Koraput MP



While Budget 2026 refrained from offering direct sops to the real estate sector, its strong thrust on infrastructure development and reforms such as REIT monetization which is expected to provide meaningful indirect support by improving liquidity and stimulating demand over time.

Manoj Sahoo | Founder, Dion Group



Abinash Samal I | MD, Empre Group



The Budget has failed to give due importance to the state. No financial provision has been made to grant special category status, nor has any dedicated allocation been announced to ensure safe drinking water for the people. Similarly, there has been no emphasis on increasing mining royalties. In the coming years, Odisha risks losing its natural mineral resources, which would severely harm the state's economy. The Budget also lacks adequate financial measures to address the growing unemployment problem. It has disappointed the poor, the middle class and women.

Prafulla Chandra Gharai | former finance minister



In the current Budget, the government has laid strong emphasis on infrastructure development with the goal of building a developed India by 2047. Measures to boost the MSME sector are expected to promote self-reliance among the public. Priority has been given to the development of inland waterways through 20 waterway corridors. This initiative is expected to create employment opportunities within the country, reducing the need for people to seek jobs abroad. Overall, the Budget is collective in vision and beneficial to the nation.

Pradeep Kumar Patnaik | Advocate, Orissa High Court



The Budget offers no specific provisions for the poor, daily wage earners and the laboring class, making it a disappointing exercise for workers. There is no focused allocation for sectors linked to paper, newsprint and book production, which also affects large sections of the labor workforce. The budget does not include any proposal for a bullet train in Odisha, nor does it address improvements in rural connectivity. It is also viewed as unfavorable for the share market. However, the proposals related to income tax are welcome.

Utkal Bhushan Rautaray | Railway labour union leader, Cuttack



A Budget anchored in entrepreneurship and self-reliance has delivered a positive message for women entrepreneurs. With a strong focus on MSMEs and startups, expanded access to credit, liquidity support and an emphasis on digital financing, women-led businesses are expected to scale up more easily, boosting confidence among small enterprises. Higher investment in infrastructure and logistics is likely to open new markets for food processing, handicrafts, agro-based ventures and home-based enterprises. The budget's emphasis on skill development and digital empowerment will also help women adopt new technologies and integrate them into their businesses.

Sangeeta Das | Women entrepreneur



Banking sector should have been strengthened, but insufficient focus was given. This is one of the shortest budgets in recent times. While there is a strategic push toward rare earths and mineral-based growth, I feel that states have not received enough attention in this budget.

Gobinda Patnaik I | MD, Annapurna Finance



Abinash Samal I | MD, Empre Group



When one does not
progress one feels bored.

THE MOTHER

Missed Opportunity

For an economy plagued by multiple ailments – a daily depreciating currency, growing household debt, high unemployment and inequality, exodus of foreign capital, and distressed agriculture – the Union Budget for financial year 2026-27 came with seemingly no panacea. In fact, given the uncertain global economic environment, the government had a great opportunity to set things in order, especially in the wake of India facing steep 50 per cent tariffs on its goods sold in the US, the country's biggest exports market. While Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has once again focussed on the government's capital expenditure, hiking it to ₹12.2 lakh crore from ₹11.2 lakh crore last year, the Budget offers little solace to boost consumption in an economy grappling with stagnant wages and uneven demand. Leaving the income tax slabs unchanged may signal fiscal prudence, but it also reflects a missed opportunity to create more disposable income for the middle class.

The rupee's persistent fall against the US dollar has been a major drag on the Indian economy, leading to higher import costs and foreign investors pulling out their money from the Indian capital market. This daily drop in value of INR is taking place at a time when the US\$ is itself weakening. To address this situation, the least the government could have done was to attract foreign investors as more dollars coming into India means the rupee getting stronger. Sadly, the Budget proposed an increase in the Securities Transaction Tax (STT) on derivatives, a move seen as unprofitable for foreign investors, sending the stock markets on a downward spiral with the Sensex and Nifty falling nearly 2 per cent each. The crash eroded investors' wealth by ₹9.40 lakh crore in a single day.

There seems to be no plan to bridge the rising inequality gap, a huge cause of concern and something the government should have focused on. The share of government revenue from personal income tax at 21 per cent has once again overtaken that from corporate tax at 18%. This continues a decade-long trend in which India's tax policy has increasingly favoured corporate houses. In the Budget Estimates for 2026-27, income tax collections are pegged at ₹14.66 lakh crore, while corporation tax is estimated at ₹12.31 lakh crore. This shift follows a steady reduction in corporate tax rates—from 30% earlier to 22% for domestic firms and 15% for new manufacturing units. At the same time, GST revenues have surged, rising from ₹4.4 lakh crore to ₹22.08 lakh crore over the past five years. This regressive taxation policy has greatly contributed to widening income and wealth inequality. GST increase, a tax paid by the poorest of the poor, shows how financial well-being is taken away from the economically weaker sections of society.

Equally disconcerting is the Budget's silence on unemployment and inequality, issues that cannot be addressed by capital expenditure alone. While the government has stayed committed to fiscal consolidation, the absence of fresh social sector thrust risks widening economic divides. The government's allocations for social sectors, that are crucial for human development, remain modest. Health spending is budgeted at just 0.5 per cent of GDP, far below the 2.5 per cent recommended in the National Health Policy of 2017, which envisaged the Centre contributing 40 per cent of the total. Education has a budgetary allocation of ₹1.39 lakh crore, a paltry 0.6 per cent of GDP. The National Education Policy 2020 had called for public spending of 6 per cent of GDP on education, but the Centre's own contribution has stagnated at around 0.4 per cent of GDP since the policy's release, effectively shifting the burden to the states. Even after accounting for state expenditure, India's total spending on education stands at only about 4.12 per cent of GDP.

With a total allocation of ₹1,62,671 crore for agriculture and allied activities, a 7.12 per cent increase from the revised estimate of ₹1,51,853 crore for 2025-26, the Finance Minister unveiled a package for livestock, fisheries and high-value agriculture sectors. The government allocated ₹350 crore for supporting high-value crops including coconut, sandalwood, cocoa and cashew in coastal areas, agar trees in the North East, and almonds, walnuts and pine nuts in hilly regions. It is pertinent to note here that this focus on high-value crops or on organic farming that the government has been so vociferously trying to promote will most likely benefit big Indian and multi-national corporations, not the vast majority of individual farmers who are incapable of affording the certification cost, that ranges between ₹20,000 and ₹1,00,000, for entering high-value organic farming.

Small and medium enterprises, often described as the backbone of the economy and burdened with employing the vast masses, continue to be neglected with limited relief in terms of credit access and regulatory simplification.

Sitharaman's record ninth Budget has failed to strike the right chords at a time when the economy was badly in the need of a massive fillip.

WISDOM CORNER

↳ The promise given was a necessity of the past: the word broken is a necessity of the present.

NICCOLO MACHIAVELLI

↳ To live is to suffer, to survive is to find some meaning in the suffering.

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

↳ Friendship is unnecessary, like philosophy, like art... It has no survival value; rather it is one of those things that give value to survival.

CS LEWIS

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

1884: The first fascicle of the "Oxford English Dictionary" is published. The book contained entries A to Ant.

1905: American writer Ayn Rand, whose commercially successful novels promoting individualism and laissez-faire capitalism became influential among conservatives and libertarians, was born in St. Petersburg.

1912: Frederick Rodman Law performed what was considered the first motion-picture stunt, parachuting from the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor.

1943: The Battle of Stalingrad in World War II ended with the surrender of German troops to the Soviets.

1960: Four Black students start the Greensboro sit-ins. Their refusal to leave a "whites only" lunch counter was a milestone in the fight against racial segregation in the United States.

1971: Idi Amin declared himself president of Uganda and for the next eight years headed a regime that was noted for its brutality.

1979: Ayatollah Khomeini returns to Iran after 15 years in exile. His triumphant return marked the beginning of the Iranian Revolution.

1990: Ban on African National Congress lifted. On this day in 1990, South African President F.W. de Klerk lifted the 30-year ban on the African National Congress, resulting in the release from prison of Nelson Mandela and marking the beginning of the end of apartheid.

FOCUS UNION BUDGET

FISCAL TIGHTROPE BALANCE



Ajit Ranade

WHILE WE BUILD CAPABILITIES FOR GROWTH IN THE FUTURE VIA SKILLING AND LINKING CLUSTERS TO TRAINING INSTITUTES, WE MUST ALSO ENSURE THAT THE GAINS OF GROWTH ARE SPREAD MORE EQUITABLY

India's macro backdrop today looks unusually reassuring. Quarterly real growth has been firm, inflation is low, banks are reporting strong profits with low NPAs, and corporate balance sheets look healthier after years of deleveraging. That surface calm, however, is precisely why the Union Budget deserved to be read more as a stress test than as a celebration.

Because some of the "Goldilocks" shine is contingent. Growth momentum has leaned heavily on the Union government's public capex push, which cannot remain the default engine indefinitely without testing debt dynamics. Meanwhile, low inflation has been helped by food-price deflation which is not permanent. The pre-Budget caution signals that the output of eight core industries grew only 2.6% year-on-year in April–December FY26. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented her record ninth consecutive Budget with the theme of cautious pragmatism—trying to keep the fiscal glidepath intact while nudging the economy toward capability-building and growth enhancement.

But first we must examine the budget numbers. Total spending is budgeted to rise to ₹53.5 trillion, up 7.7% over revised estimates, while revenue (excluding borrowings) is projected at ₹36.5 trillion, up 7.2%. The fiscal deficit is budgeted at 4.3% of the GDP, consistent with the promise of staying below 4.5%. This restraint matters for credibility—especially in a world where external financing conditions can tighten abruptly and where sovereign perception can affect the cost of foreign capital.

But what about the financing environment? Between the Union government's gross borrowing budgeted at ₹17.2 trillion and an additional ₹12.6 trillion of borrowing by States, the bond market faces a flood of issuance. Unsurprisingly, long bond interest rates are stuck at 7% despite substantial easing by the Reserve



The Budget language is heavy on 'capability' and 'Viksit Bharat,' but lighter on distribution: wage growth, the quality of employment, and the channels through which growth becomes broad-based consumption

Bank of India. That becomes a deterrent to private capex.

There is also the issue of tepid revenue buoyancy. The Centre's gross tax revenues grew only 3.3% in April–November FY26, far below the 10.8% growth assumed for the full year. If nominal GDP this year is only 8%, or if consumption stays weak, then the best-laid fiscal arithmetic becomes harder to sustain without cutting the very capex that is propping up growth. The slight tweak to the Security Transactions Tax was as much for revenue mobilisation as for curbing excessive speculative activity in the derivatives market. But of course, the markets convulsed, and hopefully will recover soon.

On the spending side, the Budget keeps the capex bias. Capital spending on infrastructure is budgeted to rise by 9% and reach ₹12.2 trillion. As long as it remains high-quality capex and does not crowd out private investment it is ok.

The Budget sets an ambitious target of achieving a 10% global share in services—beyond software, extending to content creation, design, health and tourism (including medical tourism). India has a comparative advantage in increasingly tradable services. This will need a productivity leap from skills.

Hence the Budget points to the pipeline from education to

employment and enterprise via a proposed standing committee. It also signals a cluster-based industrial approach—linking training institutes to sectoral clusters in textiles and leather and reviving over 200 legacy industrial clusters. The Budget's MSME focus is welcome. Payment delays and working-capital constraints are the silent killers of small firms.

Measures such as strengthening bill discounting via TReDS participation are exactly the kind of "plumbing reforms" that raise survival rates and formalisation. If the Centre's capex push is the visible engine of growth, the private investment response remains the missing cylinder. And here the Budget missed out on a simple but effective reform. That of fixing GST input tax credits—especially for capital goods. Input tax credits on machinery, plant, equipment and construction inputs get trapped for years which discourages capacity expansion. Firms accumulate credits they cannot use. Full tax credit is denied because capital goods enjoy income-tax depreciation. The clean solution is to allow full tax credit on capital goods under GST while disallowing depreciation on the GST-credited portion. This was a missed reform. It has high impact, low political cost, and reduces the cost of capital spending.

Could the Budget have been more redistributive? The FM

must acknowledge an uncomfortable reality: headline growth and macro stability can coexist with widening inequality, wealth concentration, and a sense of stagnant living standards for large sections—especially when job creation is lagging.

The Budget language is heavy on "capability" and "Viksit Bharat," but lighter on distribution: wage growth, the quality of employment, and the channels through which growth becomes broad-based consumption

employment and enterprise via a proposed standing committee. It also signals a cluster-based industrial approach—linking training institutes to sectoral clusters in textiles and leather and reviving over 200 legacy industrial clusters. The Budget's MSME focus is welcome. Payment delays and working-capital constraints are the silent killers of small firms.

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Could the Budget have been more redistributive? The FM

SPECTRUM ECONOMY

Why capex may not be enough



Shivaji Sarkar

SUSTAINED GROWTH COMES WHEN HOUSEHOLDS SAVE, FIRMS INVEST, EXPORTS EXPAND AND JOBS MULTIPLY—WHEN PRIVATE CONFIDENCE, NOT PUBLIC EXPENDITURE, BECOMES THE ENGINE

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's 86-minute Budget speech for 2026-27 tried to project reform and restraint. The markets saw something else. Within hours, Dalal Street delivered its verdict. The Sensex and Nifty slid after the government raised the Securities Transaction Tax (STT) on derivatives, chilling trading activity and offering little to attract foreign capital.

The disappointment ran deeper than the STT tweak. A fiscal deficit of ₹17 lakh crore and planned market borrowings of nearly ₹11 lakh crore signal heavier government demand for funds and costlier credit for companies. With few fresh growth triggers and only modest capex impulses, investors found little to cheer during the rare weekend trading session. The fine print reveals a cautious, defensive Budget with a clear tilt toward urban India and manufacturing. It seeks stability over stimulus at a time when the global backdrop is anything but stable—geopolitical tensions, tariff threats, weakening multilateral trade, and rapid technological disruption. Manufacturing is repack-

aged to fit the European Union FTA playbook, but broader demand-side revival is missing.

Presenting her record ninth straight Budget, Sitharaman listed interventions across everything from walnuts to semiconductors, signalling a state that still wants a hand on the controls. What has changed is the state's role. The government now prefers to position itself as a driver rather than a doer. Public spending remains intentionally strong—but no longer dominant—suggesting a neo-Nehruvian framework: strategic steering without outright control.

What stood out even more was what the speech barely emphasised. The familiar paeans to farmers and rural India—once staples of every Budget—were conspicuously muted. Instead, the thrust was toward industrialising semi-urban clusters, upgrading logistics and nudging agriculture toward higher-value niches such as seeds, herbs, fisheries and food processing. For decades, Budgets were written with the village as the political and economic fulcrum. This one reads as though the future lies squarely in cities, factories and technology parks. Manufacturing is repack-

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Letters

TO THE EDITOR

Readers of Orissa Post are most welcome to contribute letters (100 words), articles and columns (between 600-1000 words). Contributors are requested to send their contact numbers and full postal address/email ID. They may also send in their valuable comments, opinion and suggestions, preferably by email, to: editors@orissapost.com

OrissaPOST

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Visionary or vacuous

Sir, The Union Budget 2026-27 is a masterclass in theatrical incrementalism. While the three "kartavyas" sound poetic the fiscal math reveals a worrying stagnation and increasing public capex to ₹12.2 lakh crore is a welcome nudge but it feels like a band aid on a bullet wound when the fiscal deficit sits at 4.3% and debt to GDP remains a bloated 55.6%. The biggest lacuna is a fund of ₹10,000 crore for MSMEs is a mere pittance for a sector gasping for liquidity. Furthermore the STT hike (0.15% on options) is a predatory tax on retail participation disguised as stability. We are building high speed rail for the elite while the rural middle class is offered modular courses. This budget offers high octane rhetoric but provides low octane fuel for genuine grassroots wealth creation.

Vijaykumar HK, RAICHUR

Evolving trade scenario

Sir, UK Prime Minister Kier Starmer's recent China visit aimed to reset ties and boost Britain's economy after years of caution. He met Chinese President Xi Jinping, securing deals to expand trade, halve tariffs on Scotch whisky, unlock £2.2 billion in exports and £2.3 billion in market access, plus 30-day visa-free travel for UK visitors. China will ease access for UK tourists and firms while opening markets wider. Both sides also agreed on intelligence sharing to fight illegal migration and crime. The visit drew criticism from US President Donald Trump, who called closer UK-China ties "very dangerous" and, in related moves, pressured Canada to certify US Gulfstream jets and threatened tariffs on Canadian Bombardier aircraft, reflecting his protectionist stance. For India, such global trade shifts may open opportunities to attract diversified investments, strengthen its own UK trade negotiations, and position itself as a dependable alternative hub in the evolving international supply chains.

RS Narula, PATIALA

Congress leader Sushila Tiriya dies

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Baripada, Feb 1: Congress leader and former MP Sushila Tiriya died Sunday evening while undergoing treatment at AIIMS-Bhubaneswar, her family said. She was 70, and a spinster.

Tiriya, a four-time MP – twice from Mayurbhanj Lok Sabha seat and twice from Rayagada Sabha – was undergoing treatment for her lungs infection.

A former Congress Working Committee member, Tiriya was currently a State Political Advisory Committee member of the Pradesh Congress Committee.

"I am deeply saddened and shocked to learn about the passing away of Sushila Tiriya, a senior Congress leader from Mayurbhanj, former Rayagada Sabha and Lok Sabha MP," Odisha Congress chief Bhakta Charan Das said in a statement.

Bank robbery accused injured in encounter

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Keonjhar, Feb 1: A man, who was involved in a bank robbery case in Keonjhar district, was injured after he was shot in the leg during an encounter with police in a forest, an officer said Sunday.

The injured accused person has been identified as Sipu Kumar, a native of Bihar. He was hiding in the Tankra jungle on the Odisha-Jharkhand border, police said. Seeing the police team approaching, Sipu first opened fire. He got injured when the police retaliated, the officer said. He has been admitted to Barbil hospital, and a country-made gun has been seized from his possession, the police officer said.

According to the police, Sipu was involved in the robbery of a bank branch in the Barbil area last month. While three accused persons were arrested earlier, Sipu was absconding. He was also involved in cases of murder, armed robbery and theft. Many cases have been registered against him in various police stations across Odisha, Bihar and Jharkhand as well, the police said.

Decapitated body of missing man found; murder suspected

Nayagarh/Ranpur: Police Sunday recovered a decomposed body with the head severed from the torso from the Kotapokharia forest under the Sunakhalia police outpost of Ranpur police station in Nayagarh district. The body was identified as Trilochan Muduli (78) of Talakani village, who had been missing for the past 37 days. Police said the body was sent for post-mortem examination before being handed over to the family. A case has been registered in this connection and an investigation is underway. The circumstances under which the head was found separated from the body in the forest have raised suspicions of murder. Investigators are probing whether Muduli was killed and his body mutilated, or if there is any other explanation behind the incident. According to police, Muduli had been missing since November 25.**CM launches projects worth ₹633 crore in Subarnapur**

POST NEWS NETWORK

Sonepur, Feb 1: Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Sunday launched and laid foundation stones for development projects worth more than ₹633 crore in Subarnapur district, covering sectors such as drinking water, roads, bridges, irrigation, education, health, rural development and urban infrastructure.

CM Majhi inaugurated and laid foundation stones for 58 projects costing ₹276 crore. These included foundation laying for 24 projects worth ₹173 crore and inauguration of 34 projects costing ₹103 crore.

Addressing the district-level Subhadra Shakti Mela at Rameswar Stadium, Majhi said Subarnapur would be developed as a hub for agriculture, irrigation and handloom. He said the government was committed to inclusive development and ensuring that growth reached every section of society.

The chief minister announced several key projects, including the comprehensive development of the Bhima Bhoi Samadhi Peeth at a cost of ₹35 crore. A riverbed reservoir will be constructed at Maradugochha in Tarbha block at a cost of ₹557 crore. An open-air theatre will be built at the Subarnapur Sanskruti Bhawan for ₹11.23 crore, while Gandhi Stadium

**CM Majhi inaugurates 34 projects and laid foundation stones for 24 more, totaling 58 projects worth ₹276 crore****Announces key projects, including ₹35 crore for Bhima Bhoi Samadhi Peeth development and a ₹557 crore riverbed reservoir at Maradugochha, Tarbha block**

will be renovated at a cost of ₹25.28 crore. The Subarnapur Block Chowk junction road will also be improved at a cost of ₹4.23 crore.

Majhi highlighted the role of women in Odisha's development, saying self-help group members were not merely beneficiaries but partners in the state's progress. Their efforts had strengthened the rural economy, he said.

On the occasion, the CM distributed interest-free loans amounting to ₹126 crore to 1,848 self-help groups in the district. He said the support would strengthen women-led enterprises, promote self-reliance and improve livelihoods.

The chief minister said industrial projects worth more

than ₹1,000 crore have been implemented in Subarnapur, adding that the district has strong potential in agriculture, handloom, culture and tourism.

Beneficiaries of various government schemes were also provided assistance during the programme.

Birmaharajpur MLA Raghunath Jagadala said the government was committed to people-centric development and announced that Sonepur College would be declared a government college.

District Collector Nruparaj Sahu delivered the welcome address, while Chief District Development Officer Ashwini Kumar Meher proposed the vote of thanks.

SIBLINGS DROWN IN VILLAGE POND

POST NEWS NETWORK

Jajpur Town, Feb 1: Two siblings drowned in a village pond at Samsarpur village under Bhubaneswar-pur panchayat Sunday, residents said.

The victims were identified as Parbati Guru, 15, and her brother Shankar Guru, 12, children of Chandrasekhar Guru, a paralytic patient. News of their deaths cast a pall of gloom over the village.

According to villagers, the children had gone out to play when Shankar slipped into the pond water. Seeing him drown, his elder sister reportedly jumped in to save him, and both went under the water.



When the children did not return home, villagers launched a search operation and later noticed their slippers floating in the pond. About two hours after the incident, both were recovered from the water and rushed to the district headquarters hospital, where doctors pronounced them dead.

Jajpur Sadar police seized the bodies, sent them for post-mortem and registered a case of unnatural death.

30 platoons of security personnel for Prez visit**President's security will include four DCP-rank officers, five Additional DCPs, 23 ACPs, 33 inspectors, and around 120 sub-inspectors and ASIs****Women constables and officers in plain clothes have also been deployed as part of the security arrangement**

have been put in place at the airport, Lok Bhawan, and Mayfair Hotel, along with enhanced arrangements along the routes the President's motorcade will travel. Additionally, all high-rise buildings and rooftops along these areas are under surveillance.

It is to be noted that during her visit, the President will attend the convocation ceremony of Fakir Mohan University in Balasore, interact with women and youth from tribal communities at Simlipal, and inaugurate as well as lay foundation stones for various projects.

Class XII girl abducted, rape attempted in Balasore

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Accused forcibly abducted the girl to a lonely area and allegedly attempted to rape her, but fled after she escaped and raised an alarm, drawing villagers to her rescue****After being informed by villagers, the girl's family rushed her to Soro hospital and later lodged a complaint at Soro police station****IIC Mukunda Murari Patra said a case has been registered, and a search operation is underway to apprehend the accused**

her, but ran away when the girl escaped from the spot and screamed, attracting some villagers to come to her rescue, the police said.

The family members of the girl took her to Soro hospital and informed the police about the incident after they came to

know about the incident from some villagers. Later, the victim's family lodged a complaint at Soro police station.

Soro police station IIC Mukunda Murari Patra said a case has been registered and a search operation is on to nab the accused persons.

The girl has been medically examined at Soro hospital, and for further examination she will be sent to Balasore district headquarters hospital later on the day, he said.

3-day Sunapur Beach Festival from Feb 3

POST NEWS NETWORK

**The beach festival will commence with the 'Samudra Alati' performed by priests and scholars****A marathon race from Surla junction to Jagapur is scheduled for the morning of February 3**

eswari, and the local deity Maa Ulkeswari of Sunapur.

Much like Gopalpur, this

beach festival will also begin with the 'Samudra Alati' to be performed by the priests and scholars. A marathon race from Surla junction to Jagapur is also planned to take place on the morning of February 3, Samantara informed.

Odisha Legislative Assembly Speaker, a galaxy of state ministers and MLAs are likely to attend the event as chief and special guests on different days. Several renowned Olywood and Bollywood singers and artistes will perform live in concert to entertain the audience.

Government departments and merchants from various districts of Odisha and other states will showcase handlooms, local products and food items at around 60 stalls during the Pallishree Mela.

Jaibaba Automobiles delivers 1st Himalayan 450 Mana Black**Bhubaneswar:** Jaibaba Automobiles marked a milestone Sunday with the ceremonial delivery of the first Royal Enfield Himalayan 450 Mana Black, equipped with a full kit of Genuine Motorcycle Accessories to Kirti Ketai of Manipal Hospitals. The motorcycle was officially unveiled by dealer principal Harshit Lodha in the presence of Royal Enfield RRC Chandan Gorai and members of the Royal Enfield riding community, including Shuvendu, Prabhu Dutt and Rajkishore. Members of the Jaibaba Tribe were also present at the event. The delivery underscored Jaibaba Automobiles' focus on offering premium motorcycling experiences and strengthening Royal Enfield's riding culture in the region. The occasion was celebrated with a cake-cutting ceremony followed by a high tea, bringing together riders and enthusiasts to mark the landmark delivery.

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 1: In line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a 'Self-reliant and Developed India', the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) recently organised a series of programmes in Bhubaneswar.

The initiatives included the distribution of toolkits and machinery under the Village Industries Development Scheme and the disbursement of margin money subsidies under the Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP). A regional-level Khadi exhibition and a Khadi fashion show were also organised.

KVIC Chairman Manoj Kumar attended the event as the chief guest. Brahmagiri MLA

Upasna Mohapatra, along with senior officials of the Odisha government and KVIC, were also present on the dais.

On the occasion, Kumar distributed margin money subsidies amounting to around ₹10.91 crore to beneficiaries from tribal and North-Eastern regions under the PMEGP.

As part of the programme, 355 machines and toolkits—including electric pottery

wheels, palm jaggery-making units, beehive boxes, plumer toolkits, and waste wood craft kits—were distributed.

Addressing the gathering, Kumar said the tools and financial assistance would help make beneficiaries self-reliant, adding that Khadi and Village Industries is transforming job seekers into job creators and realising the vision of "Vocal for Local to Global."

Koraput emerges as new pepper cultivation hub

NARENDRA RAUT, OP

Koraput, Feb 1: Koraput district, nationally and internationally recognised for its premium-quality coffee, is now steadily carving out a new identity in pepper production, offering fresh opportunities for farmers and strengthening the region's agricultural economy.

With its favourable agro-climatic conditions, adequate rainfall and fertile soil, Koraput has emerged as one of the most suitable regions in southern Odisha for spice cultivation, particularly pepper, which is witnessing rising demand in domestic as well as global markets.

At present, pepper is being cultivated across seven blocks of Koraput district over nearly 1,550 hectares, with an annual production of about 500 metric tons. Out of this total output, nearly 200 metric tons are

being marketed outside Odisha, indicating the growing acceptance of Koraput pepper beyond state boundaries.

Agriculture experts point out that the pepper grown in Koraput has a distinct aroma and quality, making it highly suitable as a raw material for white pepper, which is in strong demand among marketing agencies and exporters in other states.

Among the blocks, Lamtaput leads pepper cultivation with around 550 hectares under the crop, followed by Dasmantpur with 350 hectares. Lakshmiapur and Semiliguda blocks have 250 hectares each, while Nandapur accounts for 120 hectares. Smaller cultivation areas are reported from Potangi with around 20 hectares and Koraput block with nearly 10 hectares.

Farmers are receiving support from the horticulture department in the form of seed

lings and subsidies. Additionally, several cultivators have benefitted from land allocation under the Forest Rights Act (FRA), enabling tribal farmers to adopt pepper cultivation on a larger scale.

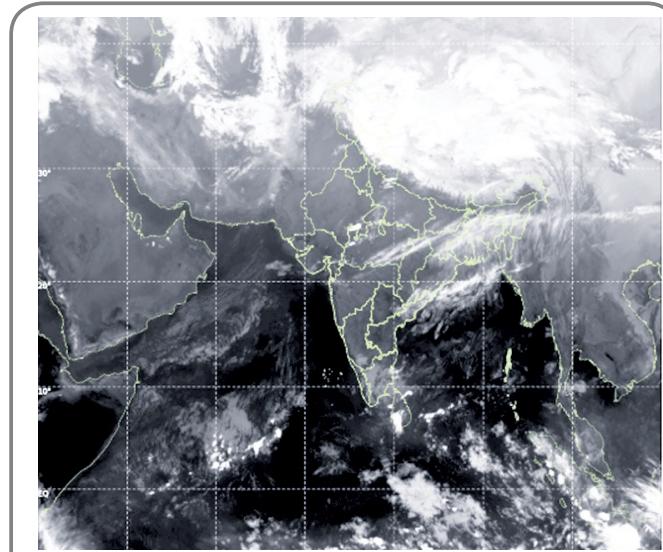
A senior horticulture official said, "Koraput's climate is ideal for spice crops like pepper. If farmers are provided with regular technical guidance, irrigation support and strong market linkage, the district can significantly enhance both production and quality."

Farmers, however, have raised concerns over the lack of adequate incentives and infrastructure. A pepper grower from Lamtaput said, "Pepper cultivation is profitable due to good market prices, but farmers need better incentives, storage facilities and processing units to expand cultivation sustainably."

The horticulture department has set an ambitious target to expand pepper cultivation to nearly 3,000 hectares in the coming years. To achieve this, the Water Resources division is making arrangements for seed supply and irrigation support. Currently, the market price of pepper is around ₹700 per kilogram, encouraging many farmers to shift towards spice cultivation.

Agriculture experts and intellectuals believe that proper branding of "Koraput Pepper," similar to the successful branding of Koraput coffee, could open doors to international markets.

"With focused branding, value addition, skill development and policy support, pepper cultivation can become a major income source for farmers and establish Koraput as a prominent spice-producing district in Odisha," an agriculture analyst observed.

**WEATHER****BBSR** 29.9° **CTC** 27.4° **FORECAST** Dry weather likely to prevail over the districts of Odisha**Max Temp** 29.9° **Min Temp** 18.6° **Humidity** 91% **Rainfall** Nil**Max Temp** 29.9° **Min Temp** 18.6° **Humidity** 91% **Rainfall** Nil**Max Temp** 29.9° **Min Temp** 18.6° **Humidity** 91% **Rainfall** Nil**Max Temp** 29.9° **Min Temp** 18.6° **Humidity** 91% **Rainfall** Nil**Max Temp** 29.9° **Min Temp** 18.6° **Humidity** 91% **Rainfall** Nil**Max Temp** 29.9° **Min Temp** 18.6° **Humidity** 91% **Rainfall** Nil**Max Temp** 29.9° **Min Temp** 18.6° **Humidity** 91% **Rainfall** Nil**Max Temp** 29.9° **Min Temp** 18.6° **Humidity** 91% **Rainfall** Nil**Max Temp** 29.9° **Min Temp** 18.6° **Humidity** 91% **Rainfall** Nil**Max Temp** 29.9° **Min Temp** 18.6° **Humidity** 91% **Rainfall** Nil**Max Temp** 29.9° **Min Temp** 18.6° **Humidity** 91% **Rainfall** Nil**Max Temp** 29.9° **Min Temp** 18.6° **Humidity** 91% **Rainfall** Nil**Max Temp** 29.9° **Min Temp** 18.6° **Humidity** 91% **Rainfall** Nil**Max Temp** 29.9° **Min Temp** 18.6° **Humidity** 91% **Rainfall** Nil**Max Temp** 29.9° **Min Temp** 18.6° **Humidity** 91% **Rainfall** Nil**Max Temp** 29.9° **Min Temp** 18.6° **Humidity** 91% **Rainfall** Nil**Max Temp** 29.9° **Min Temp** 18.6° **Humidity** 91% **Rainfall** Nil

FISCAL BALANCING ACT

The government kept a tight leash on spending in its annual budget for 2026-27, as income and consumption tax cuts announced in the past year weighed on revenues.

The government will target a debt-to-GDP ratio of 55.6% for 2026-27, resulting in a fiscal deficit of 4.3% of GDP, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said Sunday in a budget that sought to strengthen the manufacturing sector amid a volatile global environment.

The latest fiscal consolidation will support economic growth, but bond markets were of large borrowings from the federal government.

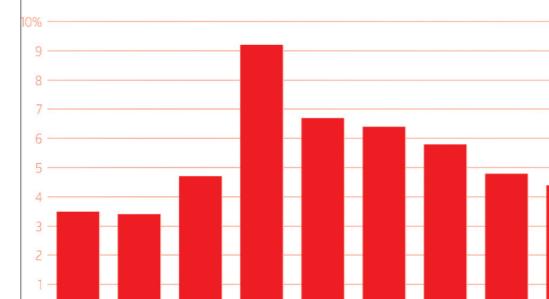
TAX CUTS PRESSURE REVENUE

The government expects nominal GDP growth at 10% in the next financial year that starts April 1, compared to an expected growth of 8% in the current year.

Low nominal GDP growth has weighed on government revenue and corporate earnings growth.

Federal government revenue is expected to rise 5.7% in 2026-27, with net tax revenue seen growing 7%. Non-tax revenue is estimated to remain flat year-over-year, with a large \$3.91 trillion (\$42.65 billion) budgeted via the annual surplus transfer

India aims to lower its fiscal deficit to 4.3% of GDP in FY27



man, senior vice president at Moody's Ratings.

CAPEx FOCUS MAINTAINED

On expenditure, the focus continues to be on creation of infrastructure, with the capital expenditure budget raised to a record \$12.2 trillion. The government also increased the quantum of long-term loans to states for capital spending by 23% to \$1.85 trillion.

"Road and railways ministry continue to account for bulk (~47%) of proposed capital outlay in 2026-27," said Sudip Banerjee, vice president at rating agency ICRA.

"Increased interest free

loan support to states will aid project awards in roads, water supply, urban development, and public buildings," he said.

TIGHT LEASH ON SPENDING

Total federal government expenditure will rise 7.7% in 2026-27, with capital spending growing at a faster pace than revenue spending. Higher capital spending results in more bang for the buck for the economy. Among key revenue areas, the government allocated \$4.1 trillion for food, fuel and petroleum subsidies, which was marginally lower than last year.

"Road and railways ministry continue to account for bulk (~47%) of proposed capital outlay in 2026-27," said Sudip Banerjee, vice president at rating agency ICRA.

"Increased interest free

from the central bank and dividends from other government institutions.

"The tax measures announced last fiscal year are

continuing to weigh on revenue generation simply because a large proportion of workers aren't eligible to pay taxes," said Christian de Guzman, senior vice president at Moody's Ratings.

"The tax measures announced last fiscal year are

Sectoral Allocation

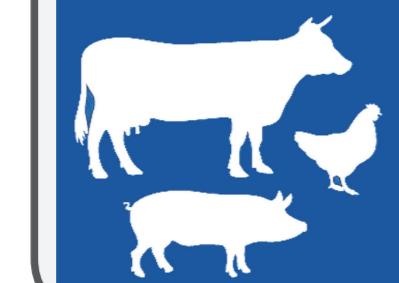
SI no	Ministry/Dept	INR in crore
1	Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare	140,529
2	Department of Atomic Energy	24,124
3	Ministry of AYUSH	4,409
4	Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilisers	177,061
5	Ministry of Civil Aviation	2,103
6	Ministry of Coal	3,635
7	Ministry of Commerce and Industry	17,844
8	Ministry of Communications	102,267
9	Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution	239,521
10	Ministry of Cooperation	1,745
11	Ministry of Corporate Affairs	5,562
12	Ministry of Culture	3,417
13	Ministry of Defence	784,678
14	Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region	6,812
15	Ministry of Earth Sciences	3,789
16	Ministry of Education	139,289
17	Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology	21,633
18	Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change	3,759
19	Ministry of External Affairs	22,119
20	Ministry of Finance	1,972,509
21	Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying	8,915
22	Ministry of Food Processing Industries	4,064
23	Ministry of Health and Family Welfare	106,530
24	Ministry of Heavy Industries	7,940
25	Ministry of Home Affairs	255,234
26	Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs	85,522
27	Ministry of Information and Broadcasting	4,552
28	Ministry of Jal Shakti	94,808
29	Ministry of Labour and Employment	32,666
30	Ministry of Law and Justice	5,513
31	Ministry of MSME	24,566
32	Ministry of Mines	3,806
33	Ministry of Minority Affairs	3,400
34	Ministry of New and Renewable Energy	32,915
35	Ministry of Panchayati Raj	1,190
36	Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs	68
37	Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions	2,662
38	Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas	30,443
39	Ministry of Planning	1,232
40	Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways	5,165
41	Ministry of Power	29,997
42	President, Parliament, UPSC & VP Secretariat	2,084
43	Ministry of Railways	281,377
44	Ministry of Road Transport and Highways	309,875
45	Ministry of Rural Development	197,023
46	Ministry of Science and Technology	38,261
47	Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship	9,886
48	Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment	15,357
49	Department of Space	13,706
50	Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation	5,503
51	Ministry of Steel	443
52	Ministry of Textiles	5,279
53	Ministry of Tourism	2,438
54	Ministry of Tribal Affairs	15,422
55	Ministry of Women and Child Development	28,183
56	Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports	4,480
GRAND TOTAL		5,347,315

Rural agri diversification in focus

and paravet (para-veterinary) colleges, veterinary hospitals, diagnostic laboratories and breeding facilities in the private sector.

Focus on coconut, sandalwood, cocoa

Pointing out that livestock contributes close to 16 per cent of farm income, including for poor and marginal households, Sitharaman proposed

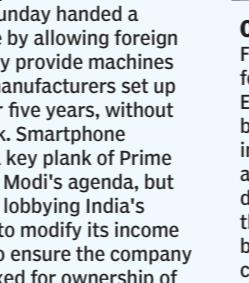


store the glory of the Indian Sandalwood ecosystem". For hilly regions, a dedicated programme will support rejuvenation of old orchards and expansion of high-density cultivation of walnuts, almonds and pine nuts, focusing on value addition through youth engagement. Tax Collection at Source (TCS) for Tendu leaves will be reduced to 2 per cent.



India halves aid to Bangladesh, funds for Chabahar Port Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in her budget, cut aid to Bangladesh by half and set aside no money for the Chabahar port project in Iran. Bangladesh, which had an allocation of \$120 crore in the previous year's Budget Estimates, has been brought down to \$60 crore in 2026-27. The bilateral relationship between New Delhi and Dhaka has taken a hit under interim head Muhammad Yunus, who assumed power in August 2024 after Sheikh Hasina fled Bangladesh.

The biggest surprise in the fine print is

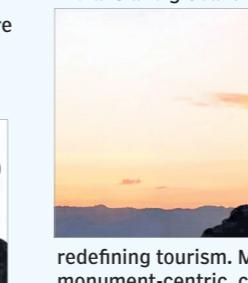


the complete pause on Chabahar funding. The Budget document shows no allocation for the project in 2026-27. India spent \$400 crore on Chabahar in 2024-25.

Budget hands Apple a win The government Sunday handed a major win to Apple by allowing foreign companies to freely provide machines to their contract manufacturers set up in certain areas for five years, without fearing any tax risk. Smartphone manufacturing is a key plank of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's agenda, but Apple had been lobbying India's government to modify its income tax laws to ensure the company is not taxed for ownership of high-end iPhone machinery.

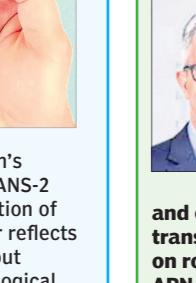


Orange economy enters mainstream For the first time, the Union Budget formally acknowledges the Orange Economy – industries powered by creativity, culture, design and intellectual property. Covering animation, gaming, visual effects, design, fashion, food and digital content, these sectors are increasingly viewed by young Indians as viable, aspirational careers. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's emphasis on the AVGC



and purpose-driven journeys. The proposal to host the first-ever Global Big Cat Summit links conservation with eco-tourism and India's soft power outreach. Financially, reducing TCS on overseas tour packages and foreign education under the LRS to 2% eases barriers for globally mobile students and travellers.

Mental health steps out of shadows A culturally significant shift is the budget's direct engagement



with mental health. Sitharaman's announcement of a new NIMHANS-2 in north India and the upgradation of institutes in Ranchi and Tezpur reflects growing societal openness about stress, depression and psychological well-being.

AI From buzzword to backbone

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in her 9th Budget, has provided fresh impetus to India's ambition of becoming a global artificial intelligence hub, announcing several measures to boost country's tech infrastructure and talent pool. Sitharaman said the government is seeking to meet the "aspirations of youthful India" with these new measures.

Key takeaways:

- Tax holiday until 2047 for foreign cloud providers using Indian data centers for global customers. To qualify, they must provide it through an Indian reseller entity.
- India Semiconductor Mission (ISM) 2.0 launched with a major incentive expansion for electronics component manufacturing scheme
- Government ups semiconductor spending to \$8,000 crore for FY27, from \$4,300 crore
- MeitY outlay raised to \$21,633 crore for FY27, from \$20,232.55 crore
- Budget 2026 proposes to setup high-powered committee to recommend measures on the services sector
- Government proposes safe harbour

POST-SINDOOR SURGE

₹7.85L-cr

The increase in the defence outlay, including the budget for capital acquisition, against the backdrop of "historic success of Strengthening our resolve to make India's defence system even more robust

RANJITH SINGH | DEFENCE MINISTER

RECORD DEFENCE SPENDING

India Sunday set aside ₹7,84,678 crore as defence outlay for 2026-27 in a steep hike of 15 per cent over last year's allocation of ₹6,81 lakh crore, with its military majorly focusing on boosting combat prowess in the face of increasing security challenges from China and Pakistan.

Under the capital outlay, ₹63,733 crore has been set aside for aircraft and aero engines, while ₹25,023 crore is allocated for the naval fleet. The total capital outlay is over ₹39,000 crore higher than the current fiscal's budgetary estimate ₹1,80 lakh.

The allocation for defence stands at two per cent of the estimated GDP (Gross Domestic Product) for the next financial year and shows a significant increase of 15.19 per cent over the budgetary estimates (BE) for 2025-26, the Defence Ministry said.

Total defence budget is 14.67 per cent of the Union government's planned expenditure in the next fiscal and is the highest among the ministries.

The revised capital outlay for 2025-26 has been estimated at ₹1,84,454 crore.

According to the Defence Ministry, ₹1.39 lakh crore, which is 75 per cent of the capital acquisition budget, has been set aside for procurement through domestic industries during the financial year 2026-27.

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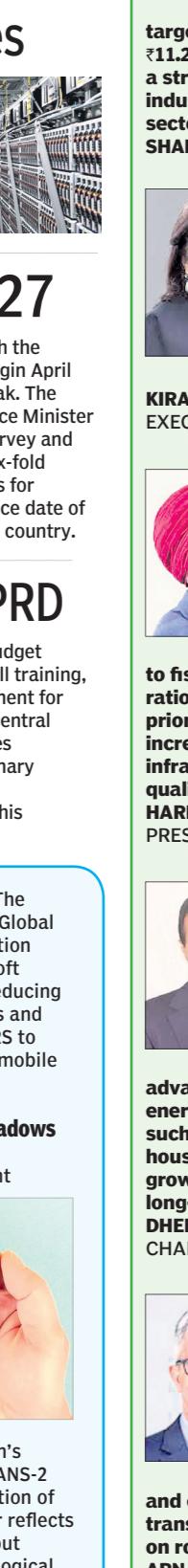
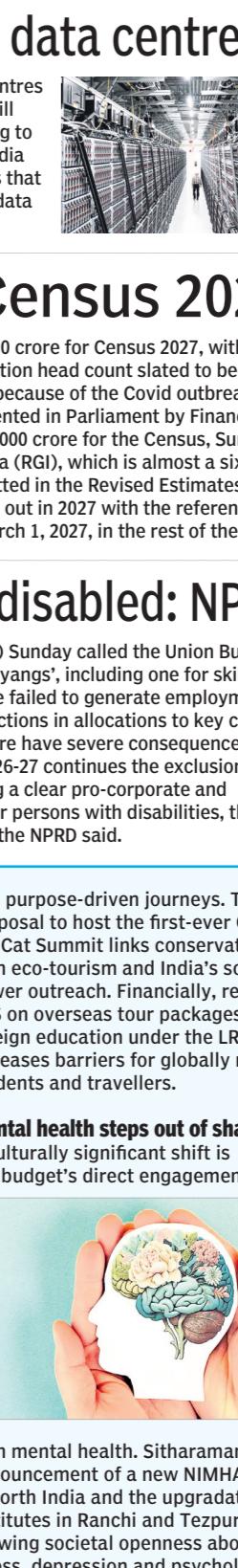
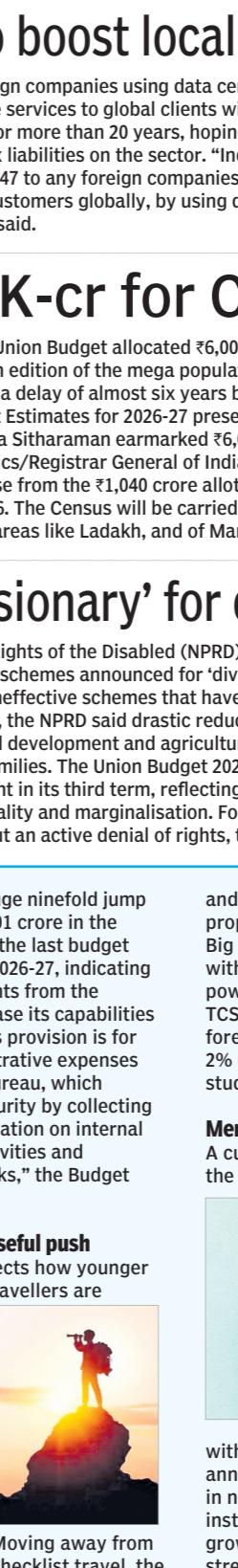
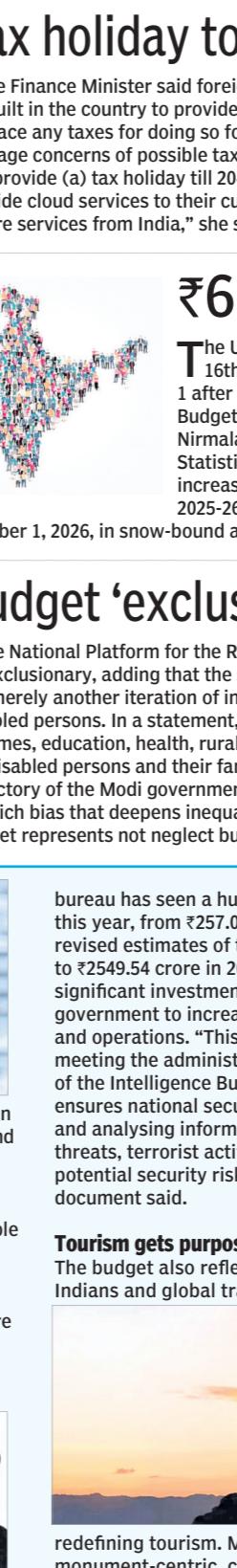
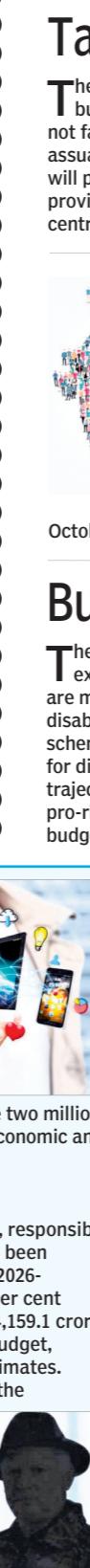
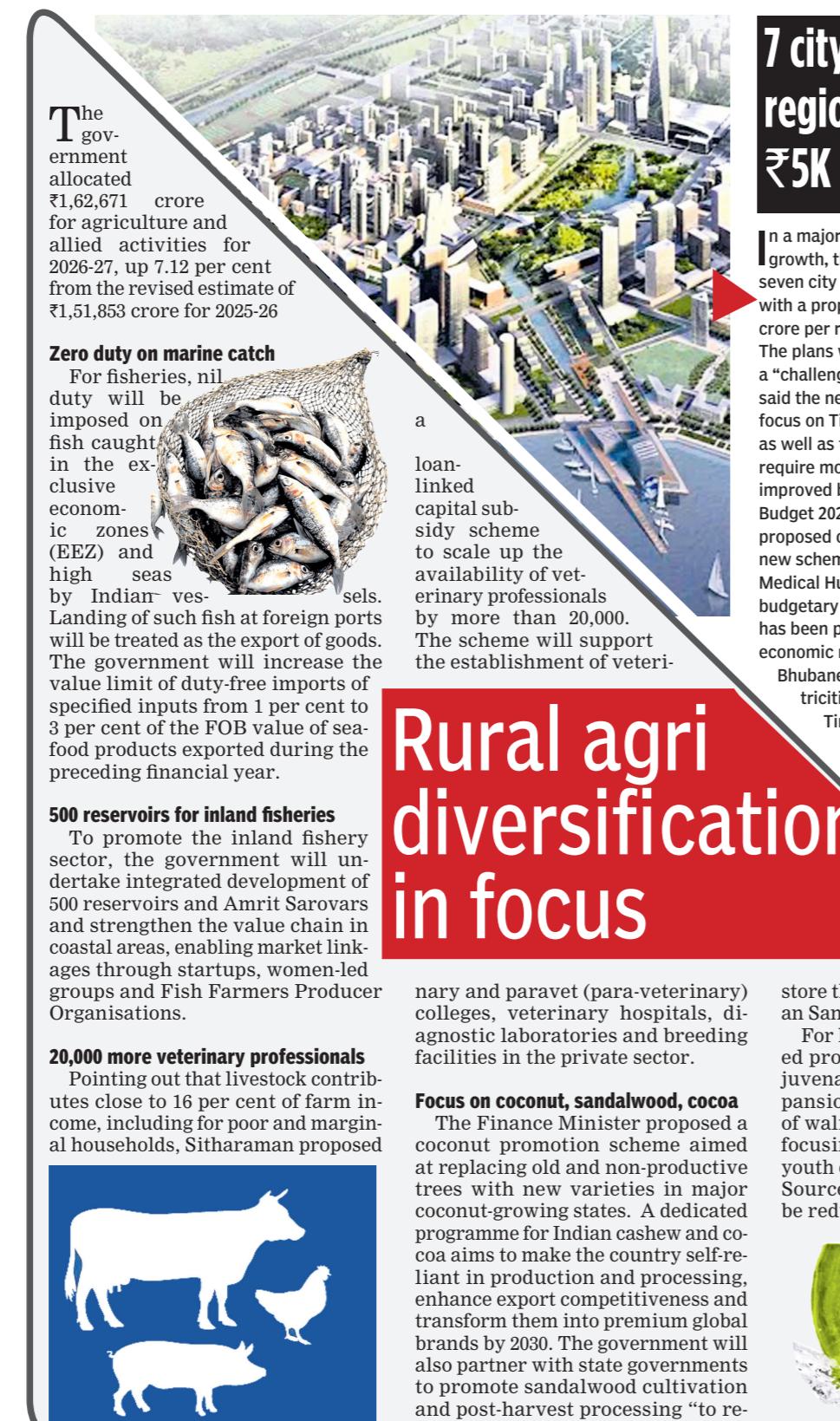
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TWO STATES

Sunetra gets excise, sports, minority affairs portfolios

Sunetra Pawar was sworn in as the first woman deputy chief minister of Maharashtra



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis will hold the finance and planning departments, and is also expected to present the annual budget for 2026-27

Mumbai, Feb 1: Newly appointed first woman Deputy Chief Minister of Maharashtra Sunetra Pawar gets the charge of excise, sports, youth welfare, and minority affairs and Aukaf departments after swearing in Saturday.

Governor Acharya Devvrat, in a communication addressed to the chief minister Devendra Fadnavis, approved the allocation of three key portfolios, including State Excise Duty, Sports and Youth Welfare, and Minorities Development and Aukaf.

She has not been allocated the finance and planning departments, held by former deputy chief minister late Ajit Pawar, especially when the budget session of the state legislature will start from February 23.

have been retained by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis. This move ensures administrative continuity as the state prepares for the upcoming Budget session in March.

NCP insiders said that the party, after the conclusion of the upcoming budget session of the state legislature, will request the chief minister Devendra Fadnavis to allocate the finance and planning departments to Deputy Chief Minister Sunetra Pawar.

The decision was finalised after the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) legislature party unanimously elected Sunetra Pawar as its leader. The proposal for the portfolio allocation was sent by Fadnavis to the Governor earlier today and received immediate approval.

Observers view this appointment as a strategic move to stabilise the party and the Mahayuti alliance ahead of the local body elections.

Earlier, Sunetra Pawar was sworn in as the first woman deputy chief minister of Maharashtra. In a simple ceremony held at Lok Bhawan, the Governor Acharya Devvrat administered Sunetra Pawar the oath of office and secrecy.

The Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, DCM Eknath Shinde, ministers, and legislators were present at the swearing-in ceremony. She took the oath solemnly. She took the oath solemnly.

Assam to benefit from thrust on Tier-2 & 3 cities

THE FOCUS ON MSMES WILL ALSO BE ADVANTAGEOUS FOR THE POLL-BOUND STATE, WHICH HAS A LARGE NUMBER OF SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Guwahati, Feb 1: Assam is expected to benefit from the Union Budget's thrust on infrastructure development of Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities, as well as the announcement of Buddhist Circuits, officials said.

The focus on MSMES will also be advantageous for the poll-bound state, which has a large number of small and medium enterprises, they said.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in her Budget speech, announced that focus will be on Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities, and even temple-towns, which need modern infrastructure and basic amenities.

With a focus on the 'Purvodaya' states and the northeastern region, the Budget has proposed the development of an integrated East Coast Industrial Corridor with a well-connected node at Durgapur in West Bengal.

It also has provision of 4,000 e-buses for the entire region. Assembly elections are due in Assam in the coming months.

The Budget also proposed creation of five tourism destinations in the five 'Purvodaya' states.

The proposal for setting up a Buddhist Circuit in the region, including Assam, also features in the Union Budget for 2026-27.

"The North-Eastern Region is a civilisational confluence of Theravada and Mahayana/Vajrayana traditions. I propose to launch a scheme for development of Buddhist Circuits in Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim,



Assam, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura," Sitharaman said.

The scheme will cover preservation of temples and monasteries, pilgrimage interpretation centers, connectivity and pilgrim amenities.

It has also been proposed to upgrade the National Mental Health Institutes in Tezpur as a Regional Apex Institution.

The Federation of Industry and Commerce of North Eastern Region (FINER) termed

the budget as "balanced and fiscal-disciplined", contending that it was not a populist one.

Though Assembly elections are close, there is nothing as such for the state, FINER president Bajrang Lohia added.

Lohia said the push for SMEs will benefit Assam and the northeast, as the region has mostly medium and small enterprises, and the infrastructure development boost for tier-3 and tier-4 cities will also

aid the region.

"The announcement of the Buddhist Circuit will help the tourism sector, which will in turn propel the economy," he said.

The North East India Regional Council of the Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC) said the Union Budget will encourage the overall development of the region, positioning it as a "multi-dimensional growth engine".

Elusive black leopards steal spotlight at TATR



TATR is regarded as one of the world's most preferred tiger destinations with over 80 tigers in the reserve and 200 in the larger landscape

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chandrapur, Feb 1: Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR), known as a premier habitat for big cats in Maharashtra, has become a haven for elusive melanistic or black leopards, as visitors and wildlife enthusiasts are being treated to regular sightings of the rare predator.

According to foresters, these stealth animals, referred to as the ghosts of the forest, have

made the TATR in Chandrapur district their home over the years.

There are currently more than three black leopards at the TATR, spanning 622.87 sq km, a senior forest officer said.

Recent frequent sightings have turned these elusive felines into a highlight for visiting wildlife enthusiasts.

Wildlife photographer Ranveer Singh Gautam spotted a black leopard near Fulejhari

tekdi in the Keslaghat forest range of the reserve Friday, and his photographs have gone viral on social media.

A black leopard was first captured on a camera trap in the Botezari area on the border of Kolasa and Moharli, in the reserve, in 2014, but eluded patrolling forest personnel. A Belgian couple visiting the reserve sighted a melanistic leopard in May 2018, which became the first recorded instance.

Apart from TATR, black leopards have also been sighted in the Pench and Navegaon-Nagzira tiger reserves.

TATR is regarded as one of the world's most preferred tiger destinations with over 80 tigers in the reserve and 200 in the larger landscape.

Nagaland CM launches digitisation of old birth, death records



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Kohima, Feb 1: Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio officially launched the digitisation of old manual birth and death certificates, marking a major step towards modernising vital records management in the state.

Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Minister said the initiative would significantly streamline service delivery, ensure accurate and efficient data management, and improve citizens' access to essential documents.

He added that the digitisation process would also help the government make informed public policy decisions.

The Chief Minister commended the Department of

Economics and Statistics for its efforts and urged citizens to ensure the timely registration of births and deaths.

In line with the directive of the office of the Registrar General of India (RGI) under the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Nagaland government had introduced online registration of births and deaths in April 2022.

The digitisation of old manual records aims to fully integrate historical data into the online system, ensuring authenticity, security, and long-term accessibility.

The Department announced that manual certificate issuance will soon be discontinued, with the state transitioning to 100 per cent online registration and digitisation.

The move is expected to re-

duce paperwork and provide faster, more reliable services to the public. Officials clarified that only genuine certificates issued by authorised registrars and supported by official records will be digitised.

The Department has appealed to the general public to avail themselves of the facility through the RGI portal to help build a comprehensive and secure database of vital records for Nagaland.

The launch took place at the Chief Minister's office in Kohima in the presence of Akunu S. Meyase, Secretary to the government of Nagaland, Department of Economics and Statistics, Neidilhou Keditsu, Director of Economics and Statistics, and other departmental officials.

Major infra, education projects for Dibang Valley

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Itanagar, Feb 1: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu Saturday announced a slew of major development initiatives for Dibang Valley district following the Cabinet Aapke Dwar meeting held at Anini, the district headquarters town.

Addressing the outcomes of the outreach cabinet meeting, the chief minister said the initiatives span infrastructure, road connectivity, education, power supply, research, and livelihood generation, and are aimed at addressing region-specific needs of one of the state's most remote border districts, an official statement said.

Explaining the Cabinet Aapke Dwar initiative, Khandu said it is designed to bring the government to the people's doorstep by holding cabinet meetings outside the state capital, enabling direct engagement with local communities and district administrations, understanding local challenges, and ensuring prompt decision-making and on-the-spot interventions, particularly in remote and border areas.

Among the key announcements made for the border district was the construction of a community hall at Rekho, to serve as a multipurpose facility for official functions, public meetings, cultural programmes, and social events at the district headquarters.

To strengthen road connectivity, approval was announced for the construction of a 15-kilometre road from NH-313 at Amuli village to the Anini Dam-buen BRO road up to Aliney, at an estimated cost of Rs 15 crore.

The project is expected to reduce travel time, improve civilian movement in the Dri Valley, and enhance strategic connectivity up to the last motorable point at Bruni.

For improving all-weather connectivity, resurfacing of the NH-313 to Anelih circle road was announced.

The 15-kilometre stretch, considered the lifeline of Anelih circle, is currently in poor condition. Similar resurfacing work was also approved for the road connecting Gipulin village to Acheso village.

To strengthen technical administration, Khandu an-



nounced the construction of an office building-cum-residential accommodation for the PWD executive engineer at Anini, aimed at improving on-ground supervision and expediting execution of developmental works.

In the education sector, Khandu announced the creation of a science stream at the government higher secondary school, Anini, enabling stu-

dents of Dibang Valley to pursue science education locally.

Construction of additional classrooms at Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalaya, Anini, was also announced to meet rising demand.

Highlighting livelihood and research opportunities, the chief minister announced the establishment of a high-altitude medicinal plant research centre in Dibang Valley to promote conservation, scientific research, and sustainable use of medicinal plants endemic to the Mishmi Hills.

A feasibility study will be submitted within three months.

A high altitude trout hatchery at Anini was also announced to support cold-water fisheries and generate high-value livelihood opportunities, with a feasibility study to be completed within the same timeframe.

OFFICE OF THE NOTIFIED AREA COUNCIL, BALUGAON

Balugaon, Khordha, Odisha, Pin-752030, Email Id : eonac.balugaon2013@gmail.com

No.160/ QUOTATION CALL NOTICE

No.13001/13/2526 : Sealed Quotations are invited from the intending Firms/Suppliers/ Agency/ Manufacturers/ Authorized Dealers having valid GST Registration Certificate/PAN Card for 'Supply of Sanitation Materials to Balugaon NAC.' The bidder should have quoted their rates including all applicable taxes and transporting charge. The sealed quotation should be reach to the undersigned before dt.12.02.2026 up to 1.00 P.M. through registered post or speed post or by hand. The same will open at 2.30 P.M. on the same day in the presence of the bidder or their authorized representatives in the office of the NAC Balugaon. The quotation must be accompanied with self attested copies of Valid GST Registration Certificate/ PAN Card with paper cost of Rs.1,000/- and EMD of Rs.5,000/- in shape of DD pledged to Executive Officer, Balugaon NAC, Balugaon. The information regarding details of quotations are also available at the website www.khordha.odisha.gov.in. The authority reserves the right to reject any or all quotation without assigning any reason thereof.

Sd/- Executive Officer, OIPR-13001/13148/1/25-26/0013

OFFICE OF THE PANCHAYAT SAMITI, CHANDBALI

AT/PO - CHANDBALI, DIST. - BHADRAK, PIN - 756133

INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)

BID IDENTIFICATION NO - 01

S.I No.	Name of the Work	Location	Tender Cost
1	Construction of New Building of Livestock Ait Centre at Ganteswar	Ganteswar	15,73,400

1. Class of Contract : C & D

2. Period of Completion : Six Calendar Months

3. Date & Time : 02.02.2026 (10 A.M.)

4. Last Date : 20.02.2026 (1 P.M.)

5. Time of Opening : 3.30 P.M. of 21.02.2026

6. Name and address : Block Development Officer, Chandbali, Bhadrak

7. EMD applicable : 1% of Tender Cost

Further details can be seen from the website portal <http://bhadrap.odiasha.gov.in/>. The interested bidders contact office of the Block Development Officer, Chandbali, Dist - Bhadrak, Contact No. - 9938176780

Sd/- Block Development Officer Chandbali

national

of the day quote

Young people are a vital pillar of the nation's future and are setting new benchmarks in various fields

BHAJNAL SHARMA | RAJASTHAN CM

Recently, for the first time in the electoral history of India, the Election Commission of India has deployed approximately 8,100 micro observers (MOs) in West Bengal during the ongoing SIR process. These micro observers are being unilaterally engaged by the EC without adequate training or demonstrated expertise for such a specialised, sensitive and quasi-judicial exercise

MAMATA BANERJEE | WEST BENGAL CM

The law and order situation is in shambles. From a 6-year-old girl to older women, they are unable to walk on the road as they lack safety. Drug addiction was another menace afflicting the people

EDAPPADI K PALANISWAMI | AIADMK GENERAL SECY

Nothing New. Same old rhetoric. No vision. No relief. No solution to actual problems. Old promises

repeated. Nothing to cheer for worst budget ever at a time when India needs to address its real issues. I give it 2/10. Drop your ratings. #Budget2026

@RoshanKrRaii

SHORT TAKES

YSRCP leader's house

vandalised, set on fire

Ibrahimpatnam (Andhra Pradesh): The house of former minister and YSRCP Jogi Ramesh was allegedly vandalised and set on fire here in NTR district Sunday. The incident came a day after the party claimed of a murder attempt on senior YSRCP leader Ambati Rambabu.

High drama unfolded at Ibrahimpatnam for several hours where dozens of people were seen ransacking the Ramesh's house and setting parts of it on fire, according to footage aired on vernacular news channels.

Man gets 20 years in jail for raping minor

Kushinagar (UP): A special POCSO court here has sentenced a man to 20 years of rigorous imprisonment for raping an eight-year-old girl, observing that the "unpardonable act" would leave a lifelong scar on the victim's mind. Special Judge (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act) and Additional District Judge Dinesh Kumar II, while convicting the accused Saturday, also imposed a fine of ₹2.05 lakhs on him, government counsel Ajay Gupta said, adding that failure to pay the fine will result in an additional one-year jail term.

3 dead in oxygen cylinder explosion

Jaipur: Three people were killed after an oxygen cylinder exploded at a factory in the Vishwakarma Industrial Area here Saturday evening, police said. The blast was so powerful that the tin shed on top of the factory was blown off and one of its walls collapsed. Police said one worker died on the spot, while another worker and a factory manager succumbed to injuries

during treatment.



Maharashtra, the largest contributor to the Union government's treasury, is not even an afterthought. Be it GDP, GST, Income Tax, Maharashtra is the largest contributor and proportionally most ignored

ADITYA THACKERAY | SENA (UBT) LEADER

KASHMIR, HIMACHAL SEE FRESH SNOWFALL, RAINS

Parts of Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh received fresh snowfall and rains Sunday, even as night temperatures rose across the northern states. Snowfall was witnessed in the higher reaches of Pahalgam in Anantnag district and Qazigund area of Kulgam district, while many areas in south Kashmir, including Srinagar city, were hit by rains



Coal India-supported IIT Bombay pilot project achieves breakthrough

Jeevodaya, a pioneering and humane silk production pilot project led by IIT Bombay and supported by Coal India under its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative, has achieved a major scientific breakthrough after three years of sustained research and innovation.

Developed by IIT Bombay's Centre for Technology Alternatives for Rural Areas (C-TARA), the project introduces a revolutionary silk production technique that does away with the need to kill silkworms. Unlike conventional methods, this innovation allows silkworms to produce silk threads without forming cocoons, enabling them to complete their natural life cycle and emerge as moths. Reflecting its ethical foundation, the silk produced through this process has been aptly named 'Jeevodaya Silk'.

Traditionally, silk extraction involves boiling silkworm cocoons, a process that results in the death of millions of silkworms. Challenging this age-old practice, the Jeevodaya project reimagine silk production through compassionate, science-driven innovation.



After years of meticulous experimentation, C-TARA reached a rare scientific milestone by successfully training silkworms to lay silk threads on flat surfaces rather than spinning cocoons. This breakthrough eliminates the need for cocoon formation altogether, allowing the silkworms to naturally metamorphose into moths and live out their life cycle freely.

Coal India's sustained CSR support has been instrumental in nurturing this visionary project from concept to realisation. Beyond its ethical and environmental significance, the technology also offers a new, sustainable livelihood opportunity for silk farmers, strengthening rural economies and promoting responsible production practices. With the successful completion of the Jeevodaya pilot, the project holds immense potential for large-scale adoption, paving the way for a more compassionate, sustainable future for the silk industry.

AGENCIES



Tharoor slams Budget with cricketing analogy

New Delhi: Senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor Sunday used a cricketing analogy to express his disappointment with the Union Budget, saying Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman "seems to have missed the ball". In an interview with PTI at the news agency's headquarters, Tharoor said Sitharaman's Budget speech seemed to have "lots of subheadings but very few specifics", and was "completely short" of an overall vision. As a Kerala MP, Tharoor said, he had nothing to be happy about in this Budget. Tharoor asserted that the biggest unanswered question remains jobs, noting that there was little in the Budget speech to indicate how employment would be generated. Asked whether the finance minister has "hit it out of the park" or "missed the ball completely and been stumped," Tharoor said, "I don't know if she's been stumped yet, but she certainly seems to have missed the ball. In one or two places, she may have got edges, but I'm not quite sure that we've got anything off the meat of the bat so far."

Congress national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee accused the leaders of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at the Centre of branding people from West Bengal as "Bangladeshis".

In Delhi, her nephew Abhishek Banerjee said Sitharaman did not mention West Bengal even once in her 85-minute speech.

"It is the Union government and its ministers, the ones who presented the Budget, they call us Bangladeshis. Bengal was not even mentioned. The Jal Jeevan Mission money has been stopped, they have not even fulfilled old promises....," the MP from

West Bengal's Diamond Harbour said.

In Kerala, the Budget was slammed by both the ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) and the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF).

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan strongly criticised the Budget, saying it has exposed the BJP-led Centre's continued discrimination and neglect towards the southern state.

Leader of Opposition in the Kerala Assembly V D Satheesan expressed scepticism over the rare-earth mineral corridor announced in the Union Budget, alleging that it could be an attempt to hand over the state's resources to corporates.

In Tamil Nadu, Chief Minister and DMK leader M K Stalin said the Budget was hugely disappointing for his state.

Opposition AIADMK, which is a part of the BJP-led NDA, meanwhile welcomed the Budget.

AIADMK general secretary and Leader of Opposition in the Tamil Nadu Assembly Edappadi K Palaniswami hailed the Budget proposals and said these would lead to growth and several initiatives would benefit the southern state.

Citing specific initiatives, Palaniswami said it will benefit Tamil Nadu's textile hubs, such as Tiruppur and Karur, while asserting that proposals

like high-speed rail corridors linking Chennai will bring a big change.

Sarma hailed the Union Budget as a "reform-oriented" one, from which the entire eastern region, including Assam, will "benefit meaningfully".

The Assam chief minister pointed out that the Budget also has a provision of ₹6,812 crore for the development of the northeast, underlining the Narendra Modi government's sustained focus on the region.

West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Assam, along with Pondicherry, are scheduled to go to polls in a few months, with the terms of their assemblies ending in May-June.



People gather at the Sangam on the occasion of the 'Maghi Purnima' festival, in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh PTI PHOTO

SC to hear plea challenging Wangchuk's detention

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 1: The Supreme Court is slated to hear Monday a plea filed by Gitanjali J Angmo, the wife of jailed climate activist Sonam Wangchuk, against his detention under the National Security Act.

A bench of Justice Aravind Kumar and Justice P B Varale is likely to hear the matter.

On January 29, Wangchuk, who is under detention in Jodhpur Central Jail, denied allegations that he made a statement to overthrow the

government like Arab Spring, emphasising that he has the democratic right to criticise and protest.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Wangchuk's wife, submitted that police have relied on a selective video to mislead the detaining authority.

It had also directed medical examination by a specialist doctor of the climate activist after he complained of stomach issues due to water contamination.

Angmo's claims the detention is illegal and an arbitrary

exercise violating his fundamental rights. On November 24, the top court deferred the matter after Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre and the Union Territory of Ladakh, sought time to respond to the rejoinder filed by Angmo.

The court October 29 sought responses from the Centre and the Ladakh administration on an amended plea of Angmo.

Wangchuk was detained under the stringent National Security Act (NSA) September 26, two days after violent

Modi renames Adampur airport after Guru Ravidas



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

vision, the civil terminal is expected to significantly enhance air connectivity and boost industrial and economic growth in the region.

The airport's terminal building project is a ₹54.67-crore joint venture between the Punjab government and the Airports Authority of India.

On the occasion, Union Civil Aviation minister Ram Mohan Naidu Kinjarpur, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, Union minister Ravneet Singh Bittu and other dignitaries were present at the Halwara airport in Ludhiana.

Tight security arrangements have been made for PM Modi's Jalandhar visit.

The operationalisation of Halwara airport's terminal building is expected to enhance air connectivity in the region significantly, providing a boost to industrial activity, tourism, healthcare, and education, and thereby contributing to the overall socio-economic development of Punjab, officials said.

Earlier, the airport at Ludhiana had a relatively small runway, suitable for small-sized aircraft. To improve connectivity and accommodate larger planes, a new civil enclave has been developed at Halwara which has a longer runway capable of handling A320-type aircraft, the officials said.

Meanwhile, the PM virtually inaugurated the terminal building of the Halwara airport in Ludhiana, which will further advance aviation infrastructure in Punjab. Developed at the Indian Air Force base in Halwara in the Raikot subdi-

A joint monitoring committee, set up by the two sides, consists of forest officials deployed in railway control rooms to provide real-time updates on elephant movement, and strict speed restrictions in identified elephant corridors, he told PTI.

While between 2004 and 2013, over 50 elephants were killed by trains in the region, between 2013 and 2023, around 30 elephants were killed by trains in the region, including the Madarhat-Hasimara and Rajabhatkawa-Alipurduar Jn (Buxa) routes, the official said.

In contrast, not a single elephant death occurred along the corridors in the past two years due to the stepped-up surveillance, he added.

The high-risk areas included the stretches through the Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary, Jaldapara National Park (Madarhat), and Buxa Tiger Reserve.

The Railways is commissioning an Intrusion Detection System (IDS) to coordinate with our officials and staff, as well

as the loco drivers, about any animal presence near tracks," he said.

As part of the IDS project, thermal sensors are actively protecting the corridor by detecting elephants on railway tracks, and the system is operational in areas like the Madarhat-Nagrakata and Buxa Tiger Reserve sections using AI-enabled infrared cameras to alert loco pilots, he said, adding the North East Frontier Railway will be able to speak more about the details of the project.

Forest-rlys collaboration cuts jumbo train deaths in N Bengal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, Feb 1: Coordinated efforts by the West Bengal Forest department and railways and commissioning of intrusion detection system (IDS) have resulted in zero incidents of death of elephants while crossing train tracks which pass through forest reserves and national parks in north Bengal in the past two years, an official said Sunday.

The railway tracks pass through Buxa Tiger Reserve, Jaldapara National Park, Gorumara National Park and Chapramari Wildlife Sanctuary, which have reported "zero incidents of train-hit elephant deaths in the past two years due to joint surveillance between the two sides and IDS", the senior forest official said.

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Conservator of Forests (Wildlife), North Bengal Bhaskar J V, along with senior officials from Buxa Tiger Reserve, Jaldapara and Gorumara national parks, and representatives of the railways, took part in a review meeting recently.

"We are also sharing real-time data with the Railways by merging our CCTV network with the Railways to track the movement of elephant herds. A pilot project for this integration will be launched soon," he added. The North Bengal initiative is part of a larger, ongoing 1,158-km, ₹208-crore, AI-based project across multiple railway zones to ensure zero jumbo deaths in vulnerable stretches across the country, Union Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change Bhupender Yadav said last month.

national

of the day quote

Himachal Pradesh, like several other states, continues to face difficulties as the Budget appears to favour the wealthy over common Indian citizens

SUKHINDER SINGH SUKHU | HP CM

The incentives announced for manufacturing industries will further boost Gujarat's manufacturing sector

BHUPENDRA PATEL | GUJARAT CM

It is a deeply-disappointing Budget, especially at this crucial juncture in the global economy. What it revealed today is a government that has run out of ideas and empathy

RAJEEV GOWDA | CONGRESS LEADER



From a national perspective, the Budget will increase inflation and also create unemployment. This Budget has not suggested any steps to address inflation and unemployment

ARVIND KEJRIWAL | AAP NATIONAL CONVENOR

ANTI-GANGSTER DRIVE

Punjab Police Sunday carried out 767 raids across the state on the 13th day of its anti-gangster campaign and arrested 148 persons, officials said. The campaign 'Gangstran Te Vaar' is aimed at making Punjab a gangster-free state and was launched January 20 under the directions of Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann and is being led by Director General of Police Gaurav Yadav



Firing at Rohit Shetty's home; 4 held

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Feb 1: Four persons were arrested after gunshots were fired at filmmaker Rohit Shetty's residence in Mumbai Sunday, with the preliminary probe pointing at their links with Lawrence Bishnoi gang member Shubham Lonkar, an accused in the Baba Siddique murder case.

The four were among the five persons detained earlier in Pune, an official said. Hours after the firing, a threatening social media post surfaced claiming that Lonkar was behind the crime, he said. At least five rounds were fired at the first floor of the nine-storey building in the Juhu area at around 12.45 am. One bullet struck the glass of a gym located in the building, officials said. Nobody was injured, and it was not known whether the filmmaker was at his residence in the Juhu area when the incident occurred in the wee hours, a Mumbai Police officer said. Security outside Shetty's building was stepped up following the firing, he said.



AT LEAST FIVE ROUNDS WERE FIRED AT THE FIRST FLOOR OF THE NINE-STOREY BUILDING IN JUHU AREA AT AROUND 12.45 AM. ONE BULLET STRUCK THE GLASS OF A GYM LOCATED IN THE BUILDING, OFFICIALS SAID

NOBODY WAS INJURED, AND IT WAS NOT KNOWN WHETHER THE FILMMAKER WAS AT HIS RESIDENCE IN THE JUHU AREA WHEN THE INCIDENT OCCURRED IN THE WEE HOURS, A MUMBAI POLICE OFFICER SAID

Zonal police and crime branch teams are investigating," he said, adding that Juhu Police and crime branch teams rushed to the spot and launched the investigation. The police examined CCTV footage from around the building to establish the sequence of events. Forensic science and ballistic experts' teams also reached the spot to collect evidence, the official said. A case was registered on charges of attempt to murder under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and under the

provisions of the Arms Act.

Sambhaji Kadam, DCP (Zone 3) of Pune Police, said five men were initially detained by personnel from the Warje Malwadi police station. They were identified as Aman Marote (27) and Aditya Gayaki (19), both residents of Karve Nagar; Siddharth Yenpure (20), Samarth Pomaji (18), and Swapnil Sakat (23), residents of Dhayari.

Senior Police Inspector Mahesh Bolotgi said the suspects were handed over to the Mumbai Police. According to police, the persons have links with Bishnoi gang member Shubham Lonkar, who is an accused in the NCP leader Baba Siddique murder case.

Late Sunday night, the Anti-Extortion Cell of the Mumbai crime branch placed four of them under arrest after their roles came to light in connection with providing logistics to the shooters, an official said.

A few hours after the firing, officials said, a post was shared on social media, claiming that Lonkar was behind the incident.



People from the remote Dodra Kwar region are airlifted in an Indian Air Force helicopter amid heavy snowfall, in Shimla district of Himachal Pradesh PTI PHOTO

Air India launches Shanghai-Delhi flight after gap of about 6 yrs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Beijing, Feb 1: Air India Sunday launched the Shanghai-Delhi direct flight resuming its services between the two cities after a gap of about six years.

The inaugural Shanghai-New Delhi flight departed from Shanghai Pudong International Airport, carrying over 230 passengers on board the Boeing 787 aircraft, the Indian Consulate in Shanghai said in a press release.

The resumption of Air India flights comes after a gap of nearly six years and represents a significant milestone in normalising bilateral air connectivity following the suspension of services in early 2020.

The Consul General of India in Shanghai, Pratik Mathur, who has seen off the passengers travelling by the inaugural flight, welcomed the resumption of Air India's direct flight services marking a major step forward in restoring people-to-people, business and institutional connectivity between India and China.

Speaking on the occasion, Mathur said, "The resumption of direct flights between Shanghai and New Delhi is a tangible expression of the renewed momentum in India-China engagement."

Mamata moves SC against SIR

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 1: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has filed a petition in the Supreme Court against the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls in the state, sources said Sunday.

The petition names the Election Commission (EC) and the chief electoral officer of West Bengal as respondents. It was filed before the apex court January 28, the sources said. Banerjee arrived in Delhi Sunday. She is scheduled to meet Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Ganesh Kumar at 4 pm Monday to discuss the ongoing SIR exercise in West Bengal. The Trinamool Congress (TMC) supreme would be accompanied by a delegation of party leaders.

She is also likely to meet party MPs in the Parliament House Monday. Talking to reporters at the Kolkata airport before leaving for the national capital, Banerjee claimed that the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at the Centre is resorting to the SIR exercise because it is certain of its imminent defeat in the West Bengal Assembly polls, due in a few months, and said the saffron party should contest the election politically and democratically.

Woman murdered
Bangalore: A 65-year-old woman was allegedly strangled to death, while her 50-year-old male domestic help was found dead by hanging at her house, under Mico Layout police station limits here, police said Sunday. As per preliminary inquiry, the domestic help is suspected to have murdered the elderly woman before committing suicide, they said. The incident came to light when the woman's husband returned from abroad early Sunday.

SNIPPETS

Excise constable run over by ganja smugglers die

HYDERABAD: A 23-year-old woman excise constable who was seriously injured after allegedly being attacked by ganja smugglers in Nizamabad district of Telangana recently, died while undergoing treatment at the state-run NIMS hospital here. G Soumya had suffered injuries when she was run over by a car driven by ganja transporters January 23 in an apparent attempt to flee after being stopped by the excise team. After initially being admitted to a local hospital, she was later shifted to the Nizam's Institute of Medical Sciences (NIMS), where she succumbed to her injuries Saturday night. "All necessary medical interventions and advanced life-support measures were provided by a multidisciplinary team of specialists. Despite sustained and best possible efforts, the patient (Soumya) could not be revived and was declared dead January 31 at 9.41 pm," the NIMS said in a release.

IndiGo plane makes emergency landing after bomb threat

VARANASI: An IndiGo Airlines aircraft was forced to make an emergency landing at the Lal Bahadur Shastri International Airport here Sunday following information about a bomb on board, police said. According to Phulpur-Babatpur police, a note claiming that there was a bomb in the aircraft was found written on a piece of paper. The aircraft was carrying over 200 passengers from Hyderabad to Varanasi, police said, adding that upon receiving the information, it made an emergency landing at the Babatpur airport. Security agencies, including the CISF, bomb disposal squad, fire brigade and police personnel, rushed to the spot and carried out a thorough check of passengers and the aircraft according to standard security protocol, police said.

Rajnath praises Coast Guard's role during Op Sindo

NEW DELHI: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh Sunday praised the role of the Indian Coast Guard during last year's Operation Sindo, saying the maritime force had forward deployed its strategic assets, and maintained a "high alert" in the coastal and creek areas. Addressing an event to mark the Indian Coast Guard's (ICG) 50th Raising Day, Singh also said that in the past five decades, the ICG has emerged as an "important pillar" of India's strategic apparatus. Raised February 1, 1977, the ICG was envisioned to address emerging maritime challenges and safeguard India's expanding marine interests.

ED files fresh chargesheet in Andhra skills devpt case

NEW DELHI: The Enforcement Directorate has filed a fresh chargesheet in the Andhra Pradesh Skill Development Corporation (APSSDC) Siemens project case stating that while government funds were "diverted" by certain accused no role of Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu was found in laundering of the proceeds of crime. The previous YSRCP-led Andhra Pradesh government of chief minister Jagan Mohan Reddy had arrested Naidu in this case in January 2023 alleging irregularities in the scheme caused a loss of Rs 300 crore to the state exchequer.

KCR QUESTIONED BY SIT IN PHONE TAPPING CASE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Hyderabad, Feb 1: Former Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao was Sunday questioned by the Telangana Police SIT at his residence here in connection with a case related to alleged "phone tapping" during the previous BRS regime.

A team of SIT officials questioned the BRS President for nearly five hours.

A few hours before the questioning, Rao left from his farmhouse at Yerravalli, about 70 km from Hyderabad and reached his Nandi Nagar residence to appear before the SIT for examination.

Elaborate security arrangements were made near Rao's residence with heavy deployment of police personnel and the lane was barricaded.

Rao Saturday told the SIT that he would appear for questioning at his Nandi Nagar residence February 1, while accusing the investigating officer of "violating legal procedures" in serving the notice.

BRS cadres held demonstrations across Telangana Sunday protesting against the "political harassment" done to Rao by Congress government over summoning of their leader.

Reacting to the questioning of Rao, Telangana Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka Sunday said the Congress government will not indulge in vindictive actions.

He said providing highly



democratic governance is the core objective of "our people's government".

The case pertains to allegations of widespread unauthorised and illegal phone surveillance and interception involving politicians, businessmen, journalists, members of the judiciary, and other prominent individuals during the previous BRS government.

The Special Investigation Team January 30 declined Rao's request to be questioned at Yerravalli and directed him to appear at his residence on February 1. Rao has been engaged in legal arguments with investigators in recent days over the place and date of his examination in the "phone-tapping" case.

On January 29, Rao requested that his examination be conducted at his farmhouse in Yerravalli.

The SIT had sought to examine him January 30, but he requested a fresh date due to preoccupations with the

upcoming municipal election nominations.

Earlier, KCR's son and BRS Working President K T Rama Rao and his (Rama Rao's) cousins, T Harish Rao and J Santosh Kumar, appeared before the SIT January 23, January 20, and January 27, respectively, in connection with the case.

Former Telangana intelligence chief T Prabhakar Rao, the prime accused in the case, has already been questioned by the SIT.

A suspended DSP of the Telangana Special Intelligence Bureau (SIB) was among four police officials arrested by Hyderabad Police since March 2024 for allegedly erasing intelligence information from electronic devices and for alleged phone-tapping during the previous BRS regime. They were subsequently granted bail.

A detailed investigation has been going on into the case with the first chargesheet having been filed against certain accused persons, police earlier said.

Telangana: Killing of stray dogs continues, case booked

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Hyderabad, Feb 1: In yet another incident of stray dog killings in Telangana, nearly 100 canines were allegedly "poisoned to death" in Jagtial district Sunday, police said.

With the latest incident, the reported toll of stray dog touched 1,300, animal rights activists claimed.

An FIR was registered in connection with the fresh incident that allegedly occurred at Abbapur village of Gollapalli mandal, a police official said.

He is also likely to meet party MPs in the Parliament House Monday. Talking to reporters at the Kolkata airport before leaving for the national capital, Banerjee claimed that the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at the Centre is resorting to the SIR exercise because it is certain of its imminent defeat in the West Bengal Assembly polls, due in a few months, and said the saffron party should contest the election politically and democratically.

The complainant, working as Animal Cruelty Prevention Assistant with the Stray Ani



mal Foundation of India (NGO) further said that after getting information over the killing of stray dogs, he along with other animal welfare activists visited the village and also the dump yard where they found the carcasses of the dogs in a pit.

Based on preliminary investigation, the official said some villagers stated that their cattle were bitten and injured by the stray dogs with "health issues" over the past two days.

Further investigation is underway, police added. Several incidents of mass killings of

stray dog were reported from different districts in Telangana in since December last year, taking the toll to 1,200, even as cases were registered against Sarpanches, their husbands, Gram Panchayat Secretaries and others based on complaints lodged by animal welfare activists.

The killings are suspected to have been carried out by some elected representatives, including Sarpanches, allegedly to fulfill promises made to villagers ahead of gram panchayat elections held in December last year, to address the stray dog menace.

NCP WILL CONTINUE TO BE IN NDA: TATKARE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Feb 1: NCP Maharashtra president and Lok Sabha MP Sunil Tatkare Sunday said his party will continue to be a part of the BJP-led NDA, asserting that the organisation will move forward on the ideology and path laid down by the late Ajit Pawar.

His statement came amid claims that February 12 had been fixed as the date for the announcement of the merger between the NCP and NCP (SP), more than two and a half years after the Sharad Pawar-founded party split following Ajit Pawar's switch over to the ruling Mahayati.

"Whatever people may say, our stand is clear. We will take forward the party and the ideology given by Ajitdada. We are firm on this position," Tatkare told reporters at the NCP (Nationalist Congress Party) state office here.

"We are with the NDA (National Democratic Alliance) and will remain with the NDA. This was a well-thought-out decision taken by Ajitdada,"

the Raigad Lok Sabha MP said. The decision to align with the ruling National Democratic Alliance was taken collectively under Ajit Pawar's leadership, Tatkare said, emphasising he had never taken any political decision without the late leader's consent. Referring to criticism over the "haste" in having Sunetra Pawar sworn in as deputy chief minister just days after Pawar's death, Tatkare said the Constitution gives everyone the right to express their views, but stressed that the decision was taken in the interest of Maharashtra and to strengthen the NCP. "There is nothing wrong in her taking the oath to stabilise Maharashtra and to fulfil Ajit Pawar's vision of a developed state," he said.

Tatkare said the decision on the party's Rajya Sabha candidate was an internal matter of the NCP and praised the BJP for maintaining cordial relations within the NDA. "The BJP has always cooperated with us and treated its allies with respect," he said.

international

of the day quote



It would be foolhardy to simply say we will ignore (China). For the UK to be the only country that refuses to engage would not be in our national interest

KEIR STARMER | PRIME MINISTER, UK



Trump wants to go down in history as a peacemaker - and he is really trying. He is really trying to do that. And that is why contacts with Americans have become much more productive

DMITRY MEDVEDEV | DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF RUSSIA'S SECURITY COUNCIL



I think they probably would come to us and want to make a deal ... They have a situation that's very bad for Cuba. They have no money. They have no oil. They lived off Venezuelan money and oil, and none of that's coming now

DONALD TRUMP | PRESIDENT, US

SHORT TAKES

Japan, Britain to boost cybersecurity

Tokyo: Japan and Britain agreed Saturday to accelerate cooperation on cybersecurity and the supply of critical minerals, as China's influence grows in the region. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said his visit to Japan comes at a time "when geopolitical, economic and technological shocks are literally shaking the world." Starmer's overnight Tokyo visit comes on the heels of his trip to Beijing, where he and Chinese President Xi Jinping agreed to seek a long-term, stable "strategic partnership." Japan has faced growing tension from China since a comment by the country's leader Sanae Takaichi about a possible Japanese involvement in the case of Chinese military action against Taiwan, the self-governing island Beijing claims as its own.

BNP alleges 'unusual' voter migration

Dhaka: The BNP Sunday alleged it found an "unusual" voter migration in capital Dhaka and other parts of Bangladesh ahead of the February 12 parliamentary elections. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), led by late former prime minister Khaleda Zia's son Tarique Rahman, also demanded Election Commission (EC) data on such suspicious activities. "A large number of voters migrated to some specific constituencies in Dhaka and other parts of the country over the last year-and-a-half, which is unusual," BNP's Election Steering Committee chairman Nazrul Islam Khan told reporters emerging from a meeting with Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) AMM Nasir Uddin. Khan said the BNP asked the EC to provide the constituency-wise voters' migration data.

Khartoum sees second commercial flight land

Cairo: A commercial flight landed in the Sudanese capital Sunday for the second time since a devastating war broke out in the northeastern African country nearly three years ago. The domestic flight, operated by the national flag carrier SUDANAIR, landed at the Khartoum International Airport Sunday afternoon, according to the state-run SUNA news agency. The flight took off Sunday morning from the eastern Red Sea city of Port Sudan, which had served as an interim seat for the government until the administration moved back to Khartoum earlier this year, SUNA said. The reopening of the Khartoum International Airport was a crucial step in the government's efforts to normalize life in the capital, which has been wrecked during the ongoing war between the military and the powerful paramilitary Rapid Support Forces.

IRAN WARNS OF REGIONAL CONFLICT IF US ATTACKS

Iran designates EU armies as 'terrorist groups' in retaliatory move

REUTERS

Dubai, Feb 1: Iran's leadership warned of a regional conflict Sunday if the US were to attack it, stoking the tension between Washington and Tehran, and it designated EU armies as "terrorist groups" in a retaliatory move.

The United States has ramped up its naval presence in the Middle East after President Donald Trump repeatedly threatened Iran with intervention if it did not agree to a nuclear deal or failed to stop killing protesters.

Despite the standoff between Iran's clerical rulers and the Trump administration, both sides have signalled they are ready to resume talks, and regional allies such as Turkey have sought de-escalation.

An Iranian official denied an earlier report by state-run Press TV that the Revolutionary Guards' naval forces would carry out live-fire exercises in the Strait of Hormuz Sunday and Monday, telling Reuters they have no such plan and the media reports are wrong.

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was quoted on state media as saying that although Trump says he has sent ships to the region, "the Iranian nation shall not be scared by these things, the Iranian people will not be stirred by these threats".

"We are not the initiators



US INCREASES NAVAL PRESENCE IN MIDDLE EAST AMID TENSIONS

IRANIAN OFFICIAL DENIES PLANNED NAVAL EXERCISES IN STRAIT OF HORMUZ

IRAN RETALIATES AGAINST EU AFTER IT DESIGNATES IRGC AS TERRORIST GROUP

and do not want to attack any country, but the Iranian nation will strike a strong blow against anyone who attacks and harasses them," he said.

The US Navy currently has six destroyers, one aircraft carrier, and three littoral combat ships in the region, raising the risk of war after Iran's deadly crackdown in January on nationwide protests against Iranian leadership.

Trump was against Iran that include targeted strikes on security forces, Reuters has reported, citing multiple sources.

Trump told reporters Saturday that Iran was "seriously talking" with Washington, hours after Tehran's top security official Ali Larijani said on X that arrangements for negotiations were underway.

SNIPPETS

Reopening of Gaza's Rafah crossing expected today



JERUSALEM/CAIRO: Gaza's main border crossing in Rafah will reopen for Palestinians Monday, Israel said, with preparations underway at the war-ravaged enclave's main gateway that has been largely shut for almost two years. Before the war, the Rafah border crossing with Egypt was the only direct exit

point for most Gazans to reach the outside world as well as a key entry point for aid into the territory. It has been largely shut since May 2024 and under Israeli military control on the Gazan side. COGAT, the Israeli military unit that oversees humanitarian coordination, said the crossing will remain open in both directions for Gaza residents on foot only and its operation will be coordinated with Egypt and the European Union. "Today, a pilot is underway to test and assess the operation of the crossing. The movement of residents in both directions, entry and exit to and from Gaza, is expected to begin tomorrow," COGAT said in a statement.

Ukraine talks set for next week as cold sweeps country

KYIV: US-backed trilateral talks involving Ukraine and Russia will take place next week in Abu Dhabi, President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said Sunday, as Ukrainians faced uncertainty over the fate of an energy ceasefire with Russia amid plunging temperatures. Kyiv is under US pressure to secure peace in the nearly four-year war while grappling with a Russian campaign of air strikes that has ravaged its energy system during one of the coldest winters in years. The first round of negotiations took place in late January, but led to no new movement on the vital question of territory, with Moscow still demanding Kyiv cede more land in its war-torn east, which it refuses to do. Zelenskiy said the new talks would take place February 4 and 5, and that Ukraine - struggling to stop grinding Russian advances on the battlefield - was ready for a "substantive discussion". "Ukraine is ready for a substantive discussion, and we are interested in ensuring that the outcome brings us closer to a real and dignified end to the war," Zelenskiy wrote on X.



FROM MUSK TO EX-PRINCE ANDREW

ASSOCIATED PRESS

New York, Feb 1: From tech titans to Wall Street power brokers and foreign dignitaries, a who's who of powerful men make appearances in the huge trove of documents released Friday by the Justice Department in connection with its investigations of Jeffrey Epstein.

Many have denied having close ties to the late financier, or at least having anything to do with his alleged sexual abuse of girls and young women that led to his arrest on sex trafficking charges.

None have been charged with a crime connected to the investigation. Epstein killed himself in a Manhattan jail cell in 2019. Yet some of them maintained friendships with Epstein, or developed them anew, even after he became known as a predator of young girls and registered sex offender.

Here's a primer on some of the notable names in the Epstein files:

ELON MUSK The billionaire Tesla founder turns up at least a few times in

ANDREW MOUNTBATTEN-WINDSOR

The man formerly known as Britain's Prince Andrew has long been dogged by questions about his relationship with Epstein, including allegations from the late Virginia Roberts Giuffre that she was trafficked by Epstein and instructed to have sex with Mountbatten-Windsor when she was 17.

The former prince has repeatedly denied that it happened, but his brother, King Charles III, still stripped him of his royal titles late last year, including the right to be called a prince and the Duke of York.

Among the correspondence is an invitation for Epstein to dine at Buckingham Palace, Epstein's offer to introduce Mountbatten-Windsor to a 26-year-old Russian woman, and photos that appear to show Mountbatten-Windsor kneeling over an unidentified woman lying on the floor.

RICHARD BRANSON

The billionaire founder of the Virgin Group, a global conglomerate, exchanged numerous emails with Epstein in the



I hope that those who care about peace among peoples and hold positions of authority will take concrete steps on this occasion toward de-escalation and dialogue

POPE LEO XIV | CATHOLIC CHURCH LEADER

SINGAPORE-BASED HINDUS CELEBRATE THAIPUSAM

A Singapore minister was among the thousands of Hindu devotees who took part in the Thaipusam celebration Sunday. A 3.2 km procession with the devotees carrying paalkudams (milk pots) set off from Sri Srinivasa Perumal Temple along Serangoon Road in the Little India precinct towards Sri Thendayuthapani Temple at Tank Road



Judge orders release of 5-year-old, father detained in ICE raid

REUTERS

Detroit, Feb 1: A federal judge Saturday ordered the release of Adrian Conejo Arias and his five-year-old son, Liam Conejo Ramos, whom immigration officers detained during a Minnesota raid.

The boy — seen in a now-viral photo wearing a blue bunny hat outside his house as federal agents stood nearby — was one of four students detained by immigration officials earlier this month in a Minneapolis suburb, according to the Columbia Heights Public School District.

"The case has its genesis in the ill-conceived and incompletely-implemented government pursuit of daily deportation quotas, apparently even if it requires traumatizing children," US District Judge Fred Biery wrote in a ruling published Saturday.

Official numbers put the un-related death toll at 3,117, while US-based HRANA rights group said Sunday it had so far verified the death of 6,713 people. Reuters was unable to independently verify the numbers.

In a symbolic shift in response to the crackdown on protests, the European Union Thursday.

In retaliation Sunday, Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf said EU armies would also be designated as such, and that authorities would deliberate on the expulsion of EU states' military attaches.

"By trying to hit the Revolutionary Guards... the Europeans actually shot themselves in the foot" the speaker told fellow lawmakers, who all wore IRGC uniforms in support of the elite force. After his address, lawmakers shouted "Death to America, Shame on you Europe".

Official numbers put the un-related death toll at 3,117, while US-based HRANA rights group said Sunday it had so far verified the death of 6,713 people. Reuters was unable to independently verify the numbers.

Ultimately, Petitioners may, because of the arcane United States immigration system, return to their home country, involuntarily or by self-deportation. But that result should occur through a more orderly and humane policy than currently in place."

The Ecuadorean boy and his father, who entered the United States legally as asylum applicants, were sent to a family detention facility in Dilley, Texas, their attorney Marc Prokosch previously told Reuters.

Prokosch and the Department of Homeland Security did not immediately return requests for comment.

Pakistan forces kill 145 militants in 2-day battle



REUTERS

a coordinated operation dubbed Herof, or "black storm", targeting security forces across the province.

In Quetta, the provincial capital, the aftermath was visible in burnt-out vehicles at a police station, bullet-riddled doors and streets sealed off with yellow tape, as security forces tightened patrols and restricted movement following the attacks.

Chief Minister of Balochistan Sarfaraz Bugti said 17 law enforcement personnel and 31 civilians were killed in the militant attacks. Pakistan's military said 92 militants were killed Saturday, while 41 were killed Friday.

The latest total is the highest number of militants killed in such a short span since the insurgency intensified, Bugti said, without providing comparative figures.

PROVINCE-WIDE COORDINATED ATTACKS

Balochistan, Pakistan's largest and poorest province, has faced a decades-long insurgency led by ethnic Baloch separatists seeking greater autonomy and a larger share of its natural resources.

CHALLENGING DOLLAR DOMINANCE

Xi calls for building 'strong' yuan to boost global role

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

San Jose, Feb 1: Costa Ricans will vote in a general election Sunday as the right-wing populist government seeks to extend its mandate and secure control of Congress at a time when drug-fueled violence has gripped the country.

Laura Fernandez, President Rodrigo Chaves' protege and former chief of staff, is leading in the polls with just over 40%, enough to win outright and avoid an April 5 runoff. She has pledged to continue Chaves' tough security policies and anti-establishment message.

Her closest rivals in the 20-person field are Alvaro Ramos, a centrist economist representing Costa Rica's oldest political party, and Claudia Dobles, an architect representing a progressive coalition and a former first lady whose husband, Carlos Alvarado, served as president from 2018 to 2022.

Both are polling in the single digits but are seen as the two most likely to compete in a possible runoff if Fernandez falls short of 40%.

In an article published in Qiuishi, the ruling Communist Party's leading theoretical journal, Saturday, Xi said China needs to build a "strong currency" that can be widely used in international trade, investment and foreign exchange markets, and achieve the status of a global reserve.



Though Xi did not directly mention the US dollar in the article, the excerpts of which were carried by several media outlets here, the Chinese president has been strongly pushing for the yuan (RMB) to become an international currency to rival the dollar since assuming power in 2012.

While China ranks among the world's biggest economies

in terms of banking assets, foreign exchange reserves and capital market size, it remains "big but not strong" overall, Xi said, stressing that building a financial powerhouse would be a long-term task, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported.

China, along with Russia, has been promoting the Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS) as an alternative Swift international bank network.

China, the largest buyer of Russian oil and gas, has also expanded the use of the yuan in bilateral trade with Russia.

According to reports, China has already established currency swap agreements with about 50 countries to facilitate trade in local currencies.

Over the past year, the yuan has generally strengthened against the dollar, although international investment banks maintain that it remains below its long-term fair value.

Who's who of powerful men named in Epstein files



a particular woman, whose physical beauty he praised in crude terms.

CASEY WASSERMAN

The president of the committee for the 2028 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles exchanged flirtily emails with Epstein confidant Ghislaine Maxwell, Friday's document release shows.

Wasserman released a statement Saturday saying he never had a personal or business relationship with Epstein and that he regretted the correspondence with Maxwell, which he said came "long before her horrific crimes came to light."

Maxwell is currently serving a 20-year prison sentence for sex trafficking and abuse of minors.

MIROSLAV LAJCAK

The national security adviser to the Slovakian prime minister, Lajcak resigned Saturday after his past communications with Epstein appeared in Friday's document release.

Opposition parties and a nationalist partner in Fico's governing coalition had called for him to step down.

HOWARD LUTNICK

President Donald Trump's commerce secretary visited Epstein's private Caribbean island with his family on at least one occasion, records released Friday show.

That appears to contradict prior statements he's made claiming he cut ties with the disgraced financier, who he's called "gross," decades ago.

SERGEY BRIN

The billionaire Google co-founder made plans to meet with Epstein and Maxwell at his townhouse in New York years before he was publicly accused of sexually abusing underage girls, emails show.

SHUBHANSHU BARAK

The former Israeli prime minister and his wife turn up frequently in the documents released Friday, showing they stayed in regular contact with Epstein for years, including well after his 2008 guilty plea for sex crimes in Florida.

Miracle man Alcaraz rewrites history

Spanish prodigy Carlos Alcaraz clinches his first Australian Open title; becomes youngest man to complete a career Grand Slam

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Melbourne, Feb 1: Carlos Alcaraz is the youngest man ever to complete a career Grand Slam after securing the Australian Open title against Novak Djokovic, who had never lost in his 10 previous finals at Melbourne Park.

The top-ranked Alcaraz dropped the first set Sunday as Djokovic went out hard in pursuit of a record 25th major title, but he dug deep to win 2-6, 6-2, 6-3, 7-5.

As he was leaving the court, he signed the lens of the TV camera with a note of recognition: "Job finished. 4/4 Complete."

The 22-year-old Spaniard scrambled to retrieve shots that usually would be winners for Djokovic, and he kept up intense pressure on his 38-year-old rival. There were extended

rallies where each player hit enough brilliant shots to usually win a game, with neither player willing to give an inch or concede.

Once he secured victory, Alcaraz let his racket slip out of his hand and fell to the ground on his back, putting his hands to his head.

He stayed there for a few seconds before going to the net to shake hands with Djokovic. Both players exchanged a few words and Djokovic smiled as he congratulated Alcaraz. The new champion then ran to hug his coaches in the courtside chairs and later his dad and other team members in the stands.

After paying tribute to Djokovic for being an inspiration, Alcaraz turned to his support team. He parted ways with long-time coach Juan Carlos Ferrero at the end of last season and Samuel Lopez stepped

up to head the team. "Nobody knows how hard I've been working to get this



Nobody knows how hard I've been working to get this trophy. I just chased this moment so much. The pre-season was a bit of a rollercoaster emotionally. I'm just really grateful for everyone I have in my corner right now

CARLOS ALCARAZ

trophy. I just chased this moment so much. The pre-season was a bit of a rollercoaster emotionally. I'm just really grateful for everyone I have in my corner right now," Alcaraz said.

Djokovic joked about this showdown setting up a rivalry over the next 10 years with Alcaraz, but then said it was only right to hand the floor over to the new champion.

"First and foremost, congratulations to an amazing tournament and amazing couple of weeks," Djokovic said at the trophy presentation. "What you've been doing, the best word to describe is historic, legendary, so congratulations. I wish the best of luck in the rest

of your career."

Both players were coming off grueling five-set semifinal wins and showed phenomenal fitness, athleticism and stamina for just over three hours in pursuit of their own historic achievements.

Neither player was willing to relent on the big points - and there were many of them. In the end, Alcaraz was able to convert 5 of the 16 breakpoints he set up. Djokovic converted two of his six.

Djokovic's push for an unprecedented 25th Grand Slam singles title has now been blocked by Alcaraz or Jannik Sinner for nine majors.

Djokovic edged Sinner in the semifinals and was aiming to be the oldest man to win a Grand Slam title in the Open era, but didn't quite make it against Alcaraz.

At 22 years and 272 days, Alcaraz is the youngest man to complete a set of all four major singles titles. He broke the mark set by Don Budge in the 1938 French championships, when he was 22 years and 363 days.

Alcaraz now has seven major titles - his first in Australia along with two each at Wimbledon and the French and US Opens. He's the ninth man to achieve the career Grand Slam, a list that also includes Djokovic, Nadal and Roger Federer.



Implications of boycott:

Completely banned from the tournament.

ICC annual revenue pay-out withheld.

PCB asked to pay full compensation to Jio-Star for revenue loss.

Sanctions on bilateral series, impact on WTC points and ICC rankings.

Banning all overseas players (save free agents) from playing in the PSL.

The ICC stressed that its events are founded on "sporting integrity, competitiveness, consistency and fairness" and any deviation from full participation would undermine the "spirit and sanctity" of its competitions.

Without directly challenging Islamabad's directive, the ICC stated: "While the ICC respects the roles of governments in matters of national policy, this decision is not in the interest of the global game or the welfare of fans worldwide, including millions in Pakistan."

THAILAND MASTERS

Devika secures maiden title

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bangkok, Feb 1: Young Indian shuttler Devika Sihag clinched her maiden BWF Super 300 crown after Malaysia's Goh Jin Wei retired midway through the women's singles final of the Thailand Masters, a USD 250,000 event, here Sunday.

The 20-year-old from Haryana was leading 21-8, 6-3 when world No 68 Goh, a two-time former world junior champion, pulled out due to a hamstring injury, handing the Indian the biggest title of her career.

"I'm really happy today as this is my first Super 300 title. I'm excited to play more tournaments ahead," Devika said.

"I've played very good matches here. I've learnt a lot. I'll implement them in my game and rectify my mistakes. Coming into the match I didn't think about winning or losing, rather wanted to give my 100%. That gave me the confidence. I thought to start with a good pace initially, and that worked well. She was tired I believe & had cramps. I wish for her recovery," she added.

With this victory, Devika becomes only the third Indian woman to win a Super 300 women's singles title, joining an elite list that includes PV Sindhu and Saina Nehwal.

Ranked world No 63, Devika trains under coach Umendra Rana at the Padukone-Dravid



Centre for Sports Excellence in Bengaluru and has also been sharpening her game alongside two-time Olympic medallist P V Sindhu under Indonesian coach Irwansyah Adi Pratama.

The final brought ecstasy for Devika but agony for her opponent Goh, who looked exhausted after playing four long three-game matches in the run-up to the final.

Devika's rise on the circuit has been steady. She claimed

her maiden international title at the Malaysia International in August 2025 and later contributed to India's mixed team bronze at the 2025 World University Games.

Last season, she finished runner-up at the Indonesia Masters Super 100 and reached four finals in 2024, winning the Swedish Open and Portugal International, while finishing second at the Estonian International and Dutch International.

Odisha delivered a commanding masterclass, winning all three U15, U18 and Senior Women categories, underlining depth of women's rugby pathway

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 1: The inaugural edition of the ASMITA Rugby League - National concluded at the Kalinga Stadium, Bhubaneswar, with Odisha securing championship titles across all three categories - Sub-Junior Girls (U15), Junior Girls (U18) and Senior Women - after an action-packed final day Sunday.

The hosts completed a clean sweep across all three categories with victories over strong opposition. In the Sub-Junior Girls (U15) final, Odisha defeated Bihar 26-5, before backing it up with a commanding 29-0 win against Maharashtra in the Junior Girls (U18) final.

The sweep was sealed in the Senior Women's final, where Odisha overcame Bihar 36-5, securing the Senior Women's title.

Maharashtra and Rajasthan finished as joint 2nd runners-up in the Sub-Junior Girls (U15) category, while Bihar and Rajasthan shared joint 2nd runners-up honours in the Junior

ASMITA RUGBY LEAGUE - NATIONAL

Home glory: Odisha sweep all titles



eight, followed by high-quality semi-finals that set the stage for decisive title encounters. In the Sub-Junior Girls (U15) final, Odisha delivered a composed performance to defeat Bihar 26-5, claiming the title.

The Junior Girls (U18) final saw Odisha continue their strong run, registering victory by the same scoreline over Maharashtra to be crowned champions.

In the Senior Women's competition, the final became a repeat of Rugby India's Senior National Championship 2025 title clash between Bihar and Odisha. This time, Odisha produced a decisive performance to win 36-5, securing the Senior Women's title.

Odisha Lift Irrigation Corporation; Yeddula Vijay, IAS, Director - Sports, Department of Sports & Youth Services, Government of Odisha; Sanaya Mehta Vyas, Vice-President and Chairperson - Women's Committee, Rugby India; Amit Kumar Nayak, OAS, Deputy Secretary, Department of Sports & Youth Services, Government of Odisha; Sonali Chand, OAS, Officer on Special Duty, Department of Sports & Youth Services, Government of Odisha; Sonali Chand, OAS, Officer on Special Duty, Department of Sports & Youth Services, Government of Odisha; Sonali Subhadarshini, OAS, Officer on Special Duty, Government of Odisha; Dhiroj Kumar Pattnayak, Officer on Special Duty, Government of Odisha; Priyadarshi Mishra, President, Odisha Rugby Football Association; and Upendra Mohanty, Vice-President, Odisha Rugby Football Association, adding stature and significance to the event.

Managing Director, Odisha Lift Irrigation Corporation; Yeddula Vijay, IAS, Director - Sports, Department of Sports & Youth Services, Government of Odisha; Sanaya Mehta Vyas, Vice-President and Chairperson - Women's Committee, Rugby India; Amit Kumar Nayak, OAS, Deputy Secretary, Department of Sports & Youth Services, Government of Odisha; Sonali Chand, OAS, Officer on Special Duty, Department of Sports & Youth Services, Government of Odisha; Sonali Subhadarshini, OAS, Officer on Special Duty, Government of Odisha; Dhiroj Kumar Pattnayak, Officer on Special Duty, Government of Odisha; Priyadarshi Mishra, President, Odisha Rugby Football Association; and Upendra Mohanty, Vice-President, Odisha Rugby Football Association, adding stature and significance to the event.

The winners of each category were awarded a cash prize of Rs 14,400, while the runners-up received Rs 12,000. The joint 2nd runners-up, that is, both the losing semi-finalists in each category, were awarded a cash prize of Rs 9,600 each.

In the U-15 category, Odisha's Sumi Gagarai topped the scoring charts with 71 points, while Bihar's Simran Parveen finished as the top scorer in the Junior Girls (U18) category with 60 points. In the Senior Women's competition, the final became a repeat of Rugby India's Senior National Championship 2025 title clash between Bihar and Odisha. This time, Odisha produced a decisive performance to win 36-5, securing the Senior Women's title.

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TATA STEEL MASTERS

Gukesh forces a draw

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Wijk Aan Zee (The Netherlands), Feb 1: World Champion D Gukesh played out a draw with Hans Moke Niemann in the 12th and penultimate round while Nodirbek Abdusattorov regained sole lead with a crushing victory over Matthias Blaubaum to inch closer to the title, here Sunday.

Javokhir Sindarov did not risk anything against R Pragganandhaa and settled for a draw to slip to second spot on 7.5 points, a half point behind compatriot Abdusattorov and it could well be an Uzbek domination in the first super-tournament of the year.

Gukesh, on six points, is in joint eighth spot in the company of Dutchman Anish Giri. Fedoseev on 5.5 is ahead of Pragganandhaa or five who in turn is half point clear of Arjun Erigaisi and Aravindh Chithambaram.

Gukesh and Niemann played a crazy game wherein the American sacrificed a pieces when it was just not warranted. Gukesh had some chances to make use of the extra material but he also erred and let the American off the hook.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bulawayo, Feb 1: Young Kanishk Chouhan showed his all-round prowess as India comfortably outclassed arch-rivals Pakistan by 58 runs in a Super Six encounter to qualify for the semifinal of the ICC U-19 World Cup here Sunday.

India will meet Afghanistan in the semifinal while England and Australia will play in the other last-four encounter.

It was all-rounder Kanishk, whose quickfire 29-ball-35 and a 50-run stand for the eighth wicket with Kishan Patel (21 not out off 15 balls) took India U-19 to a decent 252 in 49.5 overs.

However, for Pakistan to qualify for the semi-finals on account of better run-rate, they needed to reach 253 in 33.3 overs but their batters didn't seem interested in making a match as they managed 167 for 4 in 33.3 overs before pulling off a 40 dot balls.

In the bowling department, it was Kanishk, who basically stopped the Pakistan team on its tracks with figures of 1 for 30 in 10 overs which included an astounding 40 dot balls.

With pitch assisting spinners,



left-arm spinner Khilan Patel (3/35 in 9.2 overs) and skipper Ayush Mhatre (3/231 in 8 overs) also choked the run flow throughout the middle overs.

Pakistan's Asia Cup hero Sameer Minhas was dismissed by a Henil Patel off-cutter and the remaining batters strangely displayed a defensive mindset.

Earlier, Kanishk and Khilan added 50 runs in just 5.1 overs to provide a final flourish after Vedant's patient 68 off 98 balls helped them lay a platform.

Put into bat, Vaibhav

Subhan bowled full and straight and with his height, produced that awkward bounce making life difficult for the batters.

From 47 for no loss, India were reduced to 47 for 3 after which left-handed Vihaan Mhatre (21) joined Vedant and consolidated the innings with a 62-run stand.

However, none of the top order batters including Vedant could lift the tempo of the innings due to the slowness of the track that made shot making difficult. The right-handed Vedant played 98 balls and hit two fours and a six before a poor shot off a full-toss from left-arm wrist spinner Momin Qamar brought about his downfall.

Khilan and Kanishk chanced their arms just when it was required to take the team to a safe score. As has been the norm, players didn't shake hands after the match.

Brief Scores: India 252 in 49.5 overs (Vedant Trivedi 68, Kanishk Chouhan 35, Abdul Subhan 3/33) beat Pakistan 194 in 46.2 overs (Hamza Zahoor 42, Usman Khan 68, Farhan Yousef 38; Khilan Patel 3/35, Ayush Mhatre 3/21) by 58 runs

REUTERS

London, Feb 1: Chelsea battled from two goals down to beat West Ham 3-2 in the Premier League Saturday with a stoppage-time Enzo Fernandez winner crowning the second dramatic comeback win in four days for the Blues under new coach Liam Rosenior.

The Hammers, struggling in the relegation zone, took full advantage of a careless performance in the first half by Chelsea, who started with key players on the bench after beating Napoli 3-2 in the Champions League Wednesday.

Chelsea trailed 2-0 at halftime to a West Ham fighting for survival, and the decision by coach Liam Rosenior to make seven changes to his lineup looked like a costly one.

But after going behind at Stamford Bridge to goals from Jarred Bowen and Crysencio Summerville, Rosenior acted decisively - making three halftime

substitutions - and it paid off. Joao Pedro and Marc Cucurella came off the bench and scored to level the game by the 70th. After West Ham's Jean-Clair Todibo missed in front of the goal, Chelsea took all three points when Fernandez swept in the winner from inside the box.

Chelsea climbed to provisional fourth place in the Premier League table, two points ahead of Manchester United who host Fulham Sunday.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Chelsea triumph late vs West Ham



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