

Abhishek Slams BJP, EC Over SIR Notices; Questions ‘Infiltrator’ Claims

Allegations of public harassment over the SIR process have intensified, with the Trinamool Congress claiming that hearing notices are being issued even for minor discrepancies. According to the party, several prominent personalities, including Nobel laureate Amartya Sen, Indian cricketer Mohammed Shami, actor Deepak Adhikari (Dev) and former Indian women’s cricket captain Jhulan Goswami, have received such notices. The issue was raised strongly by Trinamool Congress national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee, who launched a sharp attack on the BJP and the Election Commission. Questioning Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who is currently on a visit to West Bengal, Banerjee said, “You speak only about infiltrators. Are Amartya Sen, Mohammed Shami, Deepak Adhikari and Jhulan Goswami examples of infiltrators?” He also demanded that the Centre publish a white paper on development, accusing the BJP of making baseless allegations without accountability.

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Congress slams govt ahead of Budget



“State governments will be anxiously awaiting what awaits them since the Finance Minister will be announcing the implementation of the recommendations of the 16th Finance Commission

Jairam Ramesh
Cong General Secretary

MI News Service, New Delhi : A day ahead of the 2026-27 Union Budget, the Congress on Saturday questioned whether the Budget numbers would undergo revisions very soon after they are unveiled, as the new GDP and Consumer Price Index (CPI) series are to be released just days after the Budget, and said it reflects poorly on coordination in policy making. Comments on the budget proposals Congress General Secretary in-charge of Communications, Jairam Ramesh, noted that the Budget to be presented on Sunday, where “State governments will be anxiously awaiting what awaits them since the Finance Minister will be announcing the implementation of the recommendations of the 16th Finance Commission,” In a post on X he said the Finance Commission is a body set up under Article 280 of the Constitution every five years (or earlier) to recommend the share of the states in the tax revenues collected by the Centre, the distribution of this share among the States, and special grants for five years, he said, adding that the 16th Finance Commission deals with the period 2026/27-2030/31.

“But there are two other concerns. First, many of the Budget’s numbers will be expressed as a percentage of GDP. However, just twenty-six days later on Feb 27, 2026 the new and updated GDP series with 2022/23 as the base is scheduled to be released,” Ramesh said. Would the Budget numbers then undergo revisions very soon after they

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Political polarisation hurting transparency: Abhijit Banerjee

MI News Service, Kolkata : Nobel laureate economist Abhijit Banerjee has warned that political polarisation in India is eroding transparency and making the country a “mystery” for the world, even as the growth numbers remain robust. In a recent interview here, Nobel laureate Banerjee said from an economic standpoint, the most critical issues confronting the country today were media freedom and transparency, arguing that investors ultimately cared about data credibility rather than political rhetoric.

“I think India is going through a politically polarised phase in the sense that there are many conflicts that have existed for a long time, and we have to decide, as a nation, to what extent we want to be seen as open and reliable. I think the real issues have to do with media freedom,” he said. “The most important issues are media freedom and transparency. Do we really know what the numbers are? That’s what investors care about,” Banerjee said. While India has continued to attract foreign investment, he described the inflows as unstable and highly sensitive to uncertainty. “We



“We have done reasonably well on foreign investment, but it’s flighty. The rupee is depreciating because money isn’t coming in fast enough

Abhijit Banerjee
Nobel laureate economist

have done reasonably well on foreign investment, but it’s flighty. The rupee is depreciating because money isn’t coming in fast enough,”

he said, linking currency weakness to the absence of sustained capital inflows. Banerjee cautioned that policy unpredictability, combined with internal polarisation, was undermining the country’s credibility as a long-term investment destination. “People need to know what the policy rules are. Will there be shifts in attitude towards specific companies?” he said. “Unless we have a very predictable and transparent policy regime and a transparent media, India will remain a mystery to the world,” he added. He said if India wanted to deepen its capital markets and attract long-term global capital, transparency had to be institutional rather than episodic. “If we want to be the kind of place where people always want to invest, we need transparency at all levels,” the 64-year-old economist said.

On whether identity politics had overtaken growth priorities, Banerjee said such politics existed globally, including in the United States, but questioned whether the country’s leadership had sufficiently thought through the practical roadmap to development. “The government is serious about development, but it

hasn’t thought enough about what it would actually take,” he said.

“What is the roadmap, how to get everybody a really high-quality education, how to get out of this trap of very few good jobs, and what happens if AI takes away more of those jobs?” he said. He warned that headline GDP growth could not indefinitely mask deeper social distress. “GDP can grow, but if most people don’t have decent education, growth will slow and misery will increase. Distributional questions still need to be addressed.” Beyond markets, Banerjee flagged long-term risks to political stability, arguing that economic reform becomes nearly impossible when trust in institutions breaks down.

“If people feel excluded from the voting process, that creates other problems,” he said, adding that erosion of trust makes consensus-driven reform extremely difficult. Banerjee dismissed the term “dole politics” to describe welfare, arguing that large public transfers to the middle and upper classes were rarely acknowledged. “I really hate

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The Badrinath temple covered in snow after fresh snowfall, in Chamoli district, Uttarakhand.

India-France partnership a lifeline : CJI

MI News Service, New Delhi : Describing that the “Indo-France partnership is not a luxury but a lifeline”, Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant has said that the forces of disruption and geopolitical tension is threatening to destabilise the very framework of international cooperation in the present world.

Speaking at the Indo-French Legal and Business Conference here on Friday night, the CJI said the relationship between the two countries has long transcended the purely diplomatic and is instead a multi-dimensional architecture, encompassing everything from the sanctity of the defence and security cooperation to a shared pursuit of sustainable growth and advanced technologies. “We have witnessed a remarkable acceleration in our bilateral trade, which has more than doubled over the last decade, surging from USD 6.4 billion in 2009-10 to an impressive USD 15.11 billion



in the last fiscal year,” he said.

Speaking on the topic of “Cross-Border Dispute Resolution: Courts, Arbitration and India-France Year of Innovation 2026”, Justice Kant said, “The relationship between France and India is not a creation of convenience, it is a bond forged over centuries. Today, standing on the shoulders of this history, we face a world transformed by uncertainty. The forces of

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CJI Surya Kant

disruption and geopolitical tension threaten to destabilise the very framework of international cooperation. In such a world, the France-India partnership is not a luxury; it is a lifeline.” He added that united by the shared belief in democracy, the rule of law and the pursuit of a peaceful and just global order, both countries possess

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2026-27 budget may put stress on debt-to-GDP ratio management

MI News Service, New Delhi : Tomorrow’s Union Budget is going to put emphasis on easing the debt-to-GDP ratio, which is around 56 per cent, instead of targeting a specific fiscal deficit number as the country has almost reached the end of the glide path envisaged in the FRBM legislation.

A fiscal deficit of 3-4 per cent is considered comfortable and a desirable target for a growing, developing economy like India, aiming to balance economic expansion with financial stability. Under the revised Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act, the fiscal deficit target was below 4.5 per cent of GDP for 2025-26.

Therefore, the union government announced a new glide path with the debt-to-GDP ratio as the fiscal anchor. So, the roadmap for the next six years was announced in the FRBM statement released on February 1, 2025. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in her Budget speech in July 2024, had said, “The fiscal consolidation path announced by me in 2021 has served our economy very well, and we aim to reach a deficit below 4.5 per cent next year. The government is committed to staying the course.” From 2026-27 onwards, she had said, “Our endeavour will be to keep the fiscal deficit each year

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Sharad Pawar has no idea about Sunetra’s becoming Maharashtra Dy CM



Sharad Pawar and Sunetra Pawar.

“Some people like Praful Patel and Sunil Tatkare took the initiative. These people might have decided something

Sharad Pawar, NCP (SP) chief

MI News Service, Baramati : Amid reports that Sunetra Pawar, wife of late Ajit Pawar, will be sworn in as the Maharashtra Deputy Chief minister, NCP (SP) chief, Sharad Pawar on Saturday distanced himself from the development, claiming that he had no idea about it. Addressing a press conference in Baramati on Saturday, Sharad Pawar said that he had found out about the swearing-in of Sunetra only through media reports.

“We don’t know about the swearing-in. We got to know about it only through the news. I have no idea about the swearing-in,” he said, when asked if anyone from the Pawar family would be attending the ceremony. The NCP must have made the decision, he stated. “Some people like Praful Patel and Sunil Tatkare took the initiative. These people might have decided something,” he said. The veteran leader further claimed that it was his late nephew Ajit Pawar’s wish to unite both factions, and that they were optimistic about it. “Now we feel his wish should be fulfilled. Ajit Pawar, Shashikant Shinde and Jayant Patil had initiated the talks about the merger of the two factions.

Even the merger date had been fixed — it was scheduled on the 12th (February). Unfortunately, Ajit left us before that,” he said. Sources from the NCP had on Friday said that the Rajya Sabha MP and Ajit Pawar’s wife Sunetra is likely to be sworn in as Deputy Chief minister of Maharashtra on Saturday, replacing her late husband in the cabinet.

Following the tragic death of Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar in the January 28 air crash in Baramati, a section of Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leaders had demanded that she be given the post held by her late husband in the Devendra Fadnis-led cabinet. Senior Pawar’s remarks clearly indicates a demarcation between politics and family. In July 2023, the NCP split into two factions after Ajit Pawar walked out of his party, breaking from his uncle’s side to carve his own path in the political history of the state. Ajit Pawar wanted to give a ‘gift’ of reunion to uncle Sharad Pawar on his birthday (December 12), but the merger did not materialise at the time, NCP (SP) leader Ankush Kakade said on Friday.

ISRO working towards first uncrewed mission for Gaganyaan in March



Gaganyaan Crew Module (Representative Image)

MI News Service, Chennai : ISRO is currently working towards the first uncrewed mission of its ambitious Gaganyaan Mission scheduled for 2027, its Chairman V Narayanan has said.

The Gaganyaan mission is India’s first human spaceflight programme currently under development. It aims to send a three-member crew on a three-day mission to space and bring them back safely to Earth. “Gaganyaan programme is planned for 2027. Before that, three uncrewed missions are planned. We are working towards the first uncrewed mission,” he told reporters late Friday. He said the ISRO is undertaking several tests for the launch of

“Gaganyaan programme is planned for 2027. Before that, three uncrewed missions are planned. We are working towards the first uncrewed mission,” he told reporters late Friday.

V Narayanan, Chairman

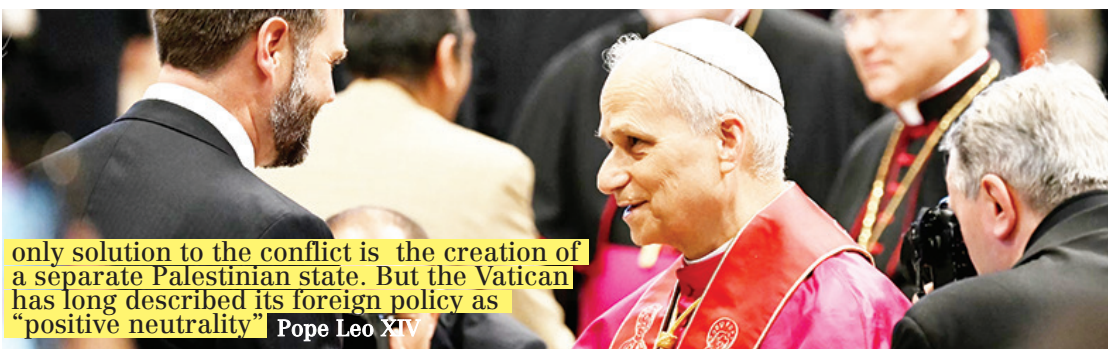
Gaganyaan’s first uncrewed mission G1, slated for March, ahead of its human spaceflight in 2027, Speaking to reporters, Narayanan stated that the tests are

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Pope Leo invited to join Trump’s Board of Peace for ‘positive neutrality’

MI News Service, New Delhi / Rome : Pope Leo XIV is among the top world leaders invited to join Donald Trump’s “Board of Peace”, aimed at ending the conflict in Gaza and resolve conflicts elsewhere in the world. But like many other leaders including Indian Prime minister Narendra Modi, the Vatican’s Secretary of State has said the pope needs time to consider whether to take part. Leo, the first pope from the United States, forcefully decried conditions in Gaza in a Christmas Eve address. He has told journalists that the only solution to the conflict is the creation of a separate Palestinian state. But the Vatican has long described its foreign policy as “positive neutrality”.

Formal membership of state-



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Pope Leo XIV

sponsored commissions have usually been avoided by the Holy See, the central government of the Catholic Church, which has diplomatic relations with 184 countries, plus the European Union and the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, as well as a permanent observer status at the

United Nations.

Across nearly two millennia, popes have been deeply involved in peace efforts. They have mediated disputes, facilitated negotiations, opened humanitarian corridors and applied moral pressure to restrain violence. Yet they have almost always done so

from the sidelines: carefully positioned close enough to influence outcomes, but far enough away to preserve credibility with all parties. The Holy See has no army, no coercive economic power and no capacity to enforce compliance. What it has possessed, in varying degrees across

time, is moral authority, diplomatic reach and access to networks that cross borders, ideologies and regimes.

In late antiquity, popes intervened at moments of acute danger, relying on prestige and symbolic authority rather than force. Pope Leo I’s encounter with Attila the Hun in 452, near Mantua in northern Italy, illustrates this approach. The pope’s message of peace persuaded the ruler of the Huns not to destroy Rome. Between the 10th and 14th centuries, the Peace of God and Truce of God movements sought to limit who could be attacked, when fighting was permitted and how warfare should be conducted. These were not

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Bridegroom killed on way home

MI News Service, South 24 Pgs: A newly married couple's journey home ended in death and devastation. Two youths were killed and two others critically injured after a head –on collision between two motorcycle in the Madhabpur area under Mandirbazer police station.

The deceased identified as Chandan Vaidya, a resident of Atapara, and Saharul Molla of Dadpur. The injured are Rachana Haldar and Tamin Hossain Piada, both of whom are battling for life in a Kolkata hospital. Chandan Vaidya and Ranchana Halder had reportedly completed their registry marriage earlier in the day and were returning home after shopping when their motorcycle collided head –on with another bike coming from the opposite direction. The impact was severe, throwing all four riders onto the road. Local residents rushed to the spot and immediately rescued the injured, taking them to a nearby hospital. Doctors declared Chandan Vaidya and Sahrul Molla dead on arrival. The incident has plunged both families into deep mourning. What was meant to be a day of celebration and new beginning has turned into an unimaginable nightmare, with wedding festivities giving way to grief and despair.

Fatal road accident

MI News Service, Baruipur: A tragic incident occurred around midnight in the Sitakunda area under Baruipur police station. The deceased have been identified as Nazim Sardar (20) and Kartik Mandal (45). The critically injured victim, Moidul, is currently undergoing treatment at SSKM Hospital, Kolkata, where his condition is reportedly to be extremely serious. Nazim Sardar and his friend Moidul were travelling on a motorcycle from Phultala towards Sitakunda when the rider reportedly lost control near Sitakunda. The speeding bike first rammed into a bicycle ridden by Kartik Mandal, who was returning home from work, and then crashed violently into a nearby electric pole. The impact all three onto the road. The deafening sound of the collision alerted local residents, who rushed to the spot and immediately shifted to injured to Baruipur Subdivisional Hospital. Despite emergency efforts, doctors declared Nazim Sardar and Kartik Mandal dead on arrival. As Moidul's condition worsened, he was referred to SSKM hospital for advanced treatment. Police have sent the bodies for post-mortem examination and launched detailed investigation into the incident. Eyewitnesses and local residents are being questioned to determine the sequences of events and the cause the crash.

Higher Secondary student found hanging from a tree



MI News Service, Kharagpur: A higher secondary student died under suspicious circumstances in Babla Govindpur village under Belda police station of Narayanagarh block under West Medinipur district. His body was found hanging from a tree by the police. The name of the deceased is Soma Manna (19 years). She was a resident of Babla Govindpur village and a student of Babla Sohagpur Upendra Vidya Bhavan Vidyalaya. She was a student of higher secondary examination. It is known that the people of the area had first seen the body hanging from the tree. Information about the incident was given to the relatives of the deceased and the police. The police removed the body from the tree and sent it to the hospital for post-mortem. Till the time of writing the news, the cause of death could not be known. The family members of the deceased say that she was mentally ill. The police is investigating the incident.

Bajaj General Insurance launches 'Fetal Flourish'

MI News Service, Portblair: Bajaj General Insurance Limited on Tuesday announced the launch of Fetal Flourish, a pioneering insurance rider designed exclusively to support fetal health and advanced in-utero medical interventions, priced at an affordable premium of ₹1,025.



Union Home Minister Amit Shah meeting at Barrackpore,Anandapuri Math on Saturday .

"BJP govt will hand over land to BSF within 45 days after being voted to power in Bengal": Shah slams TMC over 'infiltration'

MI News Service, Siliguri: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday said that after the Bengal Assembly polls, a BJP chief minister is set to take charge of the state, and all the land required for fencing will be provided to the Border Security Force (BSF) within 45 days.

Home Minister asserted that infiltration would be completely stopped and infiltrators identified and deported.

Addressing a public gathering in Bagdogra, Shah said infiltration in West Bengal was no longer just a state issue but had become a matter of national security, alleging that the present state government was allowing it to continue.

"Mamata Didi is not going to give the land even after the High Court's order. But don't worry, her time is up. By the end of April, the Bharatiya Janata Party's Chief Minister will hand

over all land to the BSF within 45 days. I am saying this today, not only will the infiltration stop, but every single infiltrator will be identified and sent back from Bengal. And that is why Mamata Banerjee is afraid of the SIR, because she knows that if the SIR is implemented, the infiltrators will be removed," he said while addressing worker's conference.

Home Minister said that infiltration in West Bengal is not just a state issue but a matter of national security, alleging that the Mamata Banerjee-led government is allowing it to continue.

"It is necessary to remove this government that is allowing the infiltration. The government changed in Assam, and the infiltration stopped. There is a BJP government in Gujarat, and there is no infiltration. There is a BJP government in Rajasthan, and there is no infiltration."

Union Home Minister Amit

Shah alleged that West Bengal government officials were not cooperating with the Election Commission during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, and said the BJP is fully supporting the exercise to ensure a "purified" voter list.

"In the SIR (Special Intensive Revision), Mamata Banerjee's officers are not cooperating with the Election Commission. But the Bharatiya Janata Party is supporting the SIR, and we will ensure that the voter list is purified here. We will give our full cooperation to the Election Commission," he said.

He also criticised the Mamata Banerjee-led government over the condition of tea garden workers, claiming they had not received real benefits, and asserted that, like Assam, the BJP would grant tea garden workers in Bengal ownership rights over their land if voted to power.

Govt doctor who said "I will not treat any police officer" issued show-cause notice; reply sought within two days

MI News Service, Coch Behar: Following a declaration by a government doctor that he would not treat police officers, the authorities of MJN Medical College in Cooch Behar have issued him a show-cause notice. He has been asked to explain why he made such a statement as a physician. The letter states that a doctor on duty at a government hospital cannot discriminate against patients based on their social, religious, or ethnic background, or profession.

Dr. Asit Chakraborty, a surgeon at the government medical college in Cooch Behar, has alleged that the police have failed to solve the burglary at his home and have not recovered the stolen 5 lakh rupees.



Initially on social media, and later verbally, the doctor declared that no police officer would receive treatment from him at the hospital. He stated that the police

had not been helpful to him, and therefore, he would not treat any police officer. After this news was published, it caused a stir within the district health department. On Saturday, the hospital authorities sent a show-cause letter to Dr. Asit Chakraborty. He has been asked to provide an explanation for his statement within 48 hours of receiving the letter. The principal of MJN Medical College, Nirmal Mandal, has sent the show-cause notice to the doctor.

On Saturday, the MSVP of MJN Medical College, Sauradip Roy, said, "Dr. Chakraborty's post in the media has created a stir. He has been asked to explain the context and reasons behind his post within the next two days."

Opposition party alleges discrimination in Goghat

MI News Service, Hooghly: Hooghly has been gripped by a fresh political controversy after allegations surfaced in Goghat that a family was deprived of drinking water supply due to its political affiliation. The issue has triggered sharp reactions from opposition, while local representatives of the ruling party have strongly denied the charges.

The incident has been reported from the Bagpara area under Saora Gram Panchayat in Goghat, where a family claiming allegiances to the opposition party that the Sajal

Dhar drinking water supply their home has been deliberately stopped. The family has also complained that they were from a nearby neighborhood tap, forcing them to depend on others for drinking water. When reporters visited the area, a Sajal Dhar pipeline was found installed at the house, but no water was flowing through it. Shampa Santra, a member of the affected family, alleged that the local panchayat members had cut their household water connection and told them that they would not be provided services because of their political identity.

Delay in AERO's Arrival Sparks Tension at SIR Hearing Camp

MI News Service, Krishnanagar: Krishnanagar witnessed tension on Saturday at an SIR (Special Intensive Revision) hearing camp due to the delayed arrival of an Assistant Electoral Registration Officer (AERO). The camp was organised at the CMS School ground under the Krishnanagar Municipality for residents of the municipal area.

Local residents had started queuing up from early morning for the hearings. However, it was alleged that the AERO of Part No.

86 under Ward No. 18 failed to arrive on time. Although the official hearing was scheduled to reach the venue at 10 am, he did not turn up even after 11:30 am, leading to growing frustration among those waiting in line.

As a result, protesters began demonstrating at the venue. They alleged that AEROs arrive late on a regular basis, causing harassment to people who come for hearings. When the AERO finally reached the camp nearly one and a half hours late, agitated resi-

dents surrounded him and intensified their protest. Many people, who had been standing in queues for a long time, lost patience.

The situation gradually returned to normal after the hearing process began. It was learnt that the AERO assured that he would arrive on time at the hearing centre from Sunday onwards.

The repeated delays and alleged mismanagement at hearing centres have triggered resentment among voters in different areas.

Olive Ridley Turtles' Annual Arribada By IG Iqbal Singh Chauhan, PTM, TM

MI News Service, Kolkata: The Gahirmata Sea Sanctuary in Odisha recently witnessed the mesmerizing spectacle of the Olive Ridley turtles' annual mass nesting, known as 'Arribada'. Under the calm seas and dark skies of the new moon, thousands of female turtles emerged from the ocean and made their way to the beach, instinctively returning to the very sand where they were hatched.

Each turtle digs a pit nearly a foot and a half deep to lay around 100 eggs, which incubate for 45 to 60 days depending on sand temperature—a key factor that determines the sex of the hatchlings. As night falls, the hatchlings emerge and make their perilous journey toward the sea, with only a few surviving to adulthood.

These Olive Ridley turtles

(Lepidochelys olivacea) spend their lives in the ocean, travelling long distances between feeding and mating grounds. Mating occurs near Odisha's coast from November to January, with females capable of mating with multiple males, while males return to the high seas afterward.

For centuries, Odisha's beaches—particularly Gahirmata, Rushikulya, and Devi river mouth—have served as important nesting grounds. However, the species faces threats from coastal development, marine pollution, and fishing practices. To mitigate these risks, the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) has conducted marine conservation initiatives since the early 1980s, working alongside state forest and fisheries departments, fishermen, and NGOs.

The ICG ensures safe passage for turtles during mating and

nesting, conducts community programs on conservation, promotes the use of turtle excluder devices, and trains fishermen to safely release accidentally caught turtles. The Olive Ridley turtle is a Schedule-I species under the Indian Wildlife Protection Act, receiving legal protection from hunting, poaching, and trade.

From 1 November 2024 to 30 April 2025, ICG ships were deployed for 211 ship-days and aircraft for 161 hours 20 minutes. Forest Department surveys confirmed the Arribada, with 5,55,638 eggs safely laid at Rushikulya and Devi river mouth, highlighting the success of collaborative conservation efforts. As the Indian Coast Guard celebrates 50 years of service, the protection of Olive Ridley turtles remains a priority close to its heart.

Asansol Municipal Corporation embroiled in controversy over PF issue; nearly 3,000 sanitation workers stopped work

MI News Service, Asansol: Asansol Municipal Corporation embroiled in another PF controversy!

Municipal sanitation workers have alleged that their Provident Fund (PF) contributions have been deducted for the past 13 months, but the money has not been deposited. They have launched a protest demanding an investigation, raising allegations of corruption.

The Asansol Municipal Corporation employs approximately three thousand sanitation workers. They all stopped work and began protesting from the morning, with many sitting in front of the municipal office. Their protest centered on four main demands: a monthly salary of Rs. 15,000; permanent employee status instead of contractual or daily wage worker status; activation of PF and ESI (Employees' State Insurance) for all, or provision of information if already active; issuance of work identity cards; and provision of specific uniforms and equipment for sanitation work.

During the protest, the workers



made another serious allegation. They claimed that upon visiting the PF office in Durgapur, they discovered that no one's contributions had been deposited, despite deductions being made for the past 13 months. They stated that they had been trying to meet with Mayor Bidhan Upadhyay since the 13th of this month, but to no avail. Therefore, they were forced to resort to protest. Manas Das, the Mayor-in-Council for the sanitation department, attempted to speak with the workers, but the protesters remained firm on their demands. Later, Municipal Chairman Amarnath Chatterjee also tried to speak with the protesters. However, the sanitation

workers clearly stated that they would not resume work unless their demands were met. As a result, sanitation work in Asansol city has come to a standstill.

Manas Das, the Mayor-in-Council for the sanitation department, stated that the protesting workers would be provided with identity cards soon. He added that they are trying to resolve the PF issue quickly by consulting with the accounts department. However, he said that increasing the salary to Rs. 15,000 immediately is not possible. He also mentioned that the matter of making the workers permanent is subject to board approval, and a proposal has al-

ready been submitted. The mayor of Asansol Municipal Corporation said, "The outstanding PF (Provident Fund) money will be credited to the employees' accounts very soon." He claimed that the PF money had not been deposited due to some technical problems. Many employees did not have proper KYC (Know Your Customer) details. The issue will be resolved within the next few days.

On the other hand, Krishnendu Mukherjee, a member of the BJP state committee, alleged, "Asansol Municipal Corporation is a hotbed of corruption. There is no department here where corruption cannot be found. Ultimately, this board has even cheated the poor sanitation workers!"

The PF controversy first surfaced in July of last year. It was alleged that although money was deducted from the salaries of 370 permanent and 3658 temporary employees of Asansol Municipal Corporation, it was not deposited into their PF accounts. Even before the repercussions of that incident had subsided, a new PF controversy involving sanitation workers has begun.

Midnight blast rocks Kulpi; car reduced to wreck

MI News Service, South 24 Pgs: South 24 Parganas was shaken by a powerful explosion late on Friday night after a car parked in Kulpi was badly damaged, triggering panic in the surrounding area and sparking sharp political exchanges ahead of the elections.

The incident occurred around 1 am in Chammabuni village under Gazipur Gram Panchayat of Kulpi, where a car belonging to Qutubuddin Paik, a local booth president, was parked under an asbestos shed. The blast was so intense that the vehicle was severely mangled and the shed was completely destroyed. Residents reported hearing a loud explosion that jolted the locality out of sleep and sent people rushing out of their homes in fear. Speaking about the incident, Qutubuddin Paik said he was alerted by locals after the blast and later found his car and shop badly damaged. He alleged that an explosive device had been planted and demanded a thorough probe to identify those responsible. He also referred to a previous incident at his residence, claiming that earlier attacks had been proven. The incident quickly took on political overtones. While allegations were made blaming opposition forces for the explosion, the **Indian Secular Front (ISF)** rejected the charges and countered with claims that the blast occurred due to the presence of explosives allegedly stored in the area. According to the ISF, the incident was being politically misrepresented, an assertion strongly contested by the other side. Local residents confirmed that the explosion caused widespread panic and tension in the village, with many expressing concern over safety in the area.

Cooch Behar-Kolkata flight service closed

MI News Service, Coch Behar: The Cooch Behar-Kolkata flight service has been completely shut down. The three-year contract with the company called India One Air expired on Saturday, January 31st. However, the flight service had already been suspended before that.

On January 8th, a flight landed and took off from Cooch Behar airport only once. After that, the airline gradually started removing its staff and began dismantling its movable and immovable assets. The flight service on the Cooch Behar-Kolkata route was launched under the central government's UDAN scheme with a three-year contract. The service started on February 21, 2023. The service was suspended on Saturday, even before the contract expired.

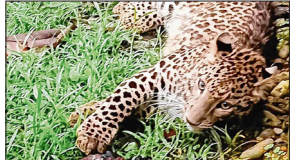
On January 10th, BJP Rajya Sabha MP and state president, Samik Bhattacharya, visited Cooch Behar and inspected the airport. He spoke with airport officials that day and discussed how to keep the airport operational in the future. Samik had stated that he had also raised this issue in the Rajya Sabha.

A section of businessmen in Cooch Behar are angered by the suspension of the flight service. According to them, having a flight service makes it easy to travel to South Bengal for business purposes. Suraj Ghosh, secretary of the District Business Association, said, "This is a very unfortunate matter for our businessmen and the people of Cooch Behar. We had written to the Chief Minister of the state and the Minister of Civil Aviation regarding the continuation of this flight service." They further demanded that the flight service be resumed in collaboration with another airline.

Missing for a month, orphaned leopard 'Sweetie' found dead at Bengal Safari Park

MI News Service, Siliguri: The emaciated carcass of 'Sweetie', a leopard rescued from Siliguri's Bengal Safari Park, has been recovered. The body was found in the leopard safari enclosure. The cause of its death remains unclear.

In 2023, forest officials rescued the nearly dead cub born beside its mother's carcass in a garden in the Ghoshpukur range of the Kurseong division. It was then transported approximately 44 kilometers to the animal hospital at Bengal Safari in Siliguri. The orphaned leopard cub, just two days old, was brought back from the brink of death. This story of 'Sweetie' was published



in the International Journal of Veterinary Science and Animal Husbandry. The death of this leopard has sparked an uproar.

On Saturday, a representative from the Bengal Safari Park authorities stated that they had worked tirelessly to nurse 'Sweetie' back to health. A medical team was formed to treat her. She gradually recovered at the safari park. After growing up, 'Sweetie' was included in the

leopard safari. She was regularly released from her enclosure into the larger area and would return to her enclosure on time.

'Sweetie' used to roam around the enclosure every day. She had been missing for about a month. Forest officials had been searching for her, but the leopard could not be found. On Saturday, following the discovery of her emaciated carcass, the safari park director declined to make any specific comments. He only said, "The emaciated body was recovered during patrolling. She was in the enclosure. The cause of death will be known after the post-mortem examination."

Free health check-up camp in Naul, Shyampur, Howrah

MI News Service, Howrah: A grand free health check-up camp was organized on Thursday at the Indian Institute campus in Naul, Shyampur, Howrah, through the joint initiative of the Indian Institute of Education and Ankur Public School.

A total of 740 men and women received health check-ups on this day. Along with general health check-ups, ECG, physiotherapy, blood tests, and eye examinations were also conducted. ECG was performed on 110 people, physiotherapy on 33, blood tests on 300, and eye examinations on 260.

The health check-ups were conducted by the college's vice-president Dr. Abid Hasan, Dr. Mofida Khatun, along with Dr. Anil Kumar Guchhait, RMO of Jhunjhumi Rural Hospital, and



ophthalmologist Dr. T.R. Khan.

On this day, speeches on health awareness were delivered by the college president Moinuddin Midde, secretary Sheikh Ghulam Ehiya, joint secretary Firoz Midde, social worker Bhablu Khan, Dr. Anil Kumar Guchhait, and others. HOD Sourav Mishra, acting teacher Prabir Ghosh, and many others

were also present.

The health camp generated a significant response in the area. At the health camp, the college secretary Sheikh Ghulam Ehiya said, "Along with education, we also engage in various other social activities. Throughout the year, we organize cultural, social, and health-related seminars, as well as blood donation drives."

Police arrested three in fraud case worth lakhs of rupees online



MI News Service, Kharagpur: Jhargram cyber police station has arrested three accused in the case of fraud worth lakhs of rupees through online medium. They were arrested from Agarpada area of Khadda police station of North 24 Parganas. According to police sources, the three arrested accused are residents of different police sta-

tion areas of Jamtara district of Jharkhand state. The names of the arrested accused are Nayan Kumar Das (resident of Vidyasagar village of Karamta police station), Sagar Das (resident of Maldi village of Narayanpur police station) and Kaushik Das (resident of Vidyasagar village of Karamta police station). It is known that in the month of May

last year, an employee of Padhati Gram Panchayat of Jambani police station area of Jhargram district had lodged a complaint of online fraud of three and a half lakh rupees in the cyber police station of Jhargram.

Investigating the complaint, police, using various sources and technical assistance, arrested three accused from Agarpada area. The accused were living in a house on rent in the area. It was told that when the complainant had applied online for a debit card, the miscreants had fraudulently stolen Rs. 3.5 lakh through his old debit card. The police presented the three accused in the Jhargram district court. The police had applied for 10 days police custody. The judge partially accepted the plea and ordered the accused to be kept in police custody for 7 days.

Unidentified device found, later identified as weather monitoring instrument



MI News Service, Shantipur: An unidentified device found lying on a road in the Maniknagar area under Shantipur police limits in West Bengal's Nadia district on Saturday morning triggered concern among local residents before authorities clarified that it was likely a weather monitoring instrument.

According to locals, several components were seen scattered on the road, including a white box-shaped object with a blinking red light and a thin white sheet-like material attached to a string.

A parachute-like piece of fabric was also found nearby. Residents claimed the objects appeared to have fallen from the sky.

Local resident Biplab Jowardar said people in the area were unable to identify the objects and grew anxious, prompting them to inform the police.

Police from Shantipur police station reached the spot after receiving information and recovered the items. Administrative sources said there was no immediate threat and urged people not to panic. Preliminary assessment

suggested the parts may have detached from a larger device before landing on the ground.

The incident drew attention as Nadia district includes areas close to the international border, where security surveillance remains heightened. A crowd gathered at the site as news of the mysterious objects spread.

However, the nature of the device became clearer after local youths searched online using image recognition tools. The objects reportedly matched components of a weather observation system, possibly a radiosonde attached to a weather balloon. Such instruments are used to collect atmospheric data, including temperature, humidity and air pressure, and typically descend with a small parachute after completing their task.

Police have initiated an inquiry to determine the origin of the device. Members of science organisations have also been contacted for technical verification. Authorities advised residents to avoid handling unknown objects and to inform police in similar situations.



Book lovers visited the 49th International Kolkata Book Fair in Kolkata on Saturday.



Peeyush Pandey
Appointed
Officiating DGP

MI News Service, Kolkata: After weeks of speculation and prolonged uncertainty over the appointment of a new Director General of Police (DGP), the West Bengal government has carried out a major reshuffle in the top ranks of the police and fire services. Senior IPS officer Peeyush Pandey has been appointed as the officiating DGP of West Bengal, bringing an end to the suspense. However, his appointment is interim in nature. Pandey was previously serving as Director of Security to the Chief Minister, a key role overseeing the Chief Minister's security. He is an experienced officer who earlier served as the first Commissioner of Police of Chandannagar Police Commissionerate and has also been on central deputation, including a long stint with the Special Protection Group (SPG). Following Pandey's elevation, the post of Director of Security has been handed over to Manoj Verma, who was serving as Kolkata Police Commissioner. IPS officer Supratim Sarkar, earlier ADG (South Bengal), has been appointed as the new Commissioner of Kolkata Police. In another significant move, IPS officer Vineet Goyal has been posted as ADG (Law and Order), while Javed Shamim has been shifted to ADG, STF. The reshuffle also affected the fire services, with Anuj Sharma replacing Ranbir Kumar as Director General, Fire Services.

Congress slams
govt ahead of
Budget

From PG 1 are unveiled on February 1, 2026, he said. Second, the new CPI series with 2024 as the base is expected to be released on February 12, 2026, the Congress leader pointed out. "It is being anticipated that the new series will see a sharp reduction in the share of food prices. If this were to be the case, there will be an impact on the Budget numbers," he said. The Wholesale Price Index, too, is undergoing revision and presumably that will be made public in the next few months, Ramesh said adding either way, it reflects poorly on co-ordination in policy making. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will present her record ninth Budget, including two interim budgets, on February 1.

SBI announces 'CHAKRA' Centre



MI News Service, Kolkata: State Bank of India (SBI) announced 'CHAKRA' - Centre of Excellence (CoE) to finance sunrise sectors critical to India's economic transformation. The initiative reinforces SBI's commitment to Viksit Bharat 2047, providing a knowledge-led platform to enable financing for next-generation, technology-driven, and sustainability-focused

Abhishek Slams BJP, EC Over SIR Notices
Questions 'Infiltrator' Claims

MI News Service, Kolkata: Allegations of public harassment over the SIR process have intensified, with the Trinamool Congress claiming that hearing notices are being issued even for minor discrepancies. According to the party, several prominent personalities, including Nobel laureate Amartya Sen, Indian cricketer Mohammed Shami, actor Deepak Adhikari (Dev) and former Indian women's cricket captain Jhulan Goswami, have received such notices. The issue was raised strongly by Trinamool Congress national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee, who launched a sharp attack on the BJP and the Election Commission.

Questioning Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who is currently on a visit to West Bengal, Banerjee said, "You speak only about infiltrators. Are Amartya Sen, Mohammed Shami, Deepak Adhikari and Jhulan Goswami examples of infiltrators?" He also demanded that the Centre publish a white paper on development, accusing



the BJP of making baseless allegations without accountability. With the West Bengal Assembly elections approaching, Amit Shah addressed rallies in Barrackpore and Siliguri, once again targeting the Trinamool Congress government over the issue of infiltration. Responding to

Shah's remarks at Kolkata airport, Banerjee questioned why the list of alleged Bangladeshi and Rohingya infiltrators had still not been made public. "On December 31, we submitted a formal demand to the Election Commission for the list. Even after a month, it has not been released," he said. Banerjee further alleged that people speaking Bengali in different parts of the country are being branded as Bangladeshis, calling it an insult to Bengali culture and identity. He also criticised the Election Commission for not releasing the list of so-called "logical discrepancies" linked to the SIR process. Reacting to Shah's claim that the Matua community was being threatened, Banerjee countered that BJP leaders themselves were creating fear. Citing statements made by Union Minister Shantanu Thakur and BJP leader Asim Sarkar, he said conflicting claims about the removal of Matua voters' names were coming from within the BJP, not the Trinamool Congress.

Indian Coast Guard Celebrates 50th Raising Day

MI News Service, Kolkata: The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) celebrates its 50th Raising Day on 1 February 2026, marking five decades of dedicated service since its inception in 1977 with seven ships and two aircraft. Today, it stands as the fourth-largest maritime law enforcement agency globally, with 206 surface platforms and 77 aircraft, patrolling India's 11,098 km coastline and safeguarding maritime interests. Beyond traditional security duties, ICG has conducted over 4,219 Search and Rescue (SAR) missions, saving 11,806 lives at sea, carried out 495 medical evacuations, and assisted around 14,708 people during natural disasters. The force has also interdicted smuggling operations and confiscated contraband worth ₹54,413.26

crores. Modernization efforts include indigenously built ships, advanced amphibious crafts, and upgraded radar systems, strengthening operational efficiency. In 2025, the North East Region conducted four SAR missions, 270 community programs, 3,694 boarding operations, 3,595 inspections, and 34 joint coastal patrols. Notable achievements include confiscating 30.97 tons of smuggled areca nuts and apprehending nine Bangladesh fishing boats with 194 crew. Under 'Operation Olivia,' over 9.34 lakh Olive Ridley turtles were protected at the Devi River mouth. ICG remains committed to its motto, "Vayam Rakshamah" (We Protect), exemplifying vigilance, resilience, and dedication to India's maritime security.

His Pen Never Stops, But Life Did Long Ago: The Haunting Story of Dr. Sourav Ghosh

By Suman Ganguly

His pen never stops moving, but life for Dr. Sourav Ghosh came to a halt many years ago. Once a brilliant cardiac surgeon, he now wanders the narrow lanes of Nakta, Ramgarh, and Baghajatin in south Kolkata. A unkempt hair, a long beard, filthy clothes, and a sharp stench define his appearance. To most passers-by, he is just another "mentally unstable vagrant." Yet give him a pen and paper, and he transforms. A gentle smile appears as he writes tablets, injections, and dosages with uncanny precision. At the end of each prescription, he signs: Dr. Sourav Ghosh, WBMC 60314, refusing to let go of who he once was. Once a promising doctor from NRS Medical College, Sourav now battles a severe mental illness. Neighbours say he spends entire days writing medicines in notebooks, and his knowledge of drugs remains astonishingly intact. His family, once academically gifted, faced relentless tragedies. His elder sister, Sathi, and younger brother, Gourab, both succumbed to mental



illness, while his parents had passed away earlier. These losses pushed Sourav deeper into illness, ending his medical career and leaving him isolated in a filthy room in his ancestral home. The walls are covered with scribbles of medical colleges, hospitals, and his credentials—a fight against memory loss. Despite multiple failed treatment attempts and occasional disappearances, compassionate neighbours care for him. Locals recount instances where his medical advice helped people stabilize during sudden illnesses. Recently, a few doctor friends from his batch admitted him to a reputed government hospital, hoping to restore some dignity and give the once-brilliant doctor a chance at recovery.

India-France partnership a
lifeline : CJJ

From PG 1 complementary strengths. "As we stand at the precipice of the Year of Innovation 2026, we are no longer just building the nest, we are mapping the sky in which we fly," he said, adding that as India and France enter a new phase of innovation this year, they do so supported by a dispute-resolution architecture that is not reactive, but anticipatory, not adversarial, but principled, and not merely efficient, but enduring.

Justice Kant added that equally vital is the deepening of institutional partnerships between Indian arbitral centres and Paris-based institutions, and through shared procedural standards, joint training initiatives and co-administered proceedings, these collaborations can create dispute-resolution forums that are at once globally credible and contextually nuanced. In the Indian context, the CJJ said together, the Arbitration Act, the Mediation Act and the Commercial Courts Act form a coherent ecosystem — arbitration for binding resolution, mediation for consensual settlement and specialised courts for oversight and enforcement.

He added that judicially, the Supreme Court has repeatedly emphasised a pro-arbitration stance — reaffirming that arbitration clauses should be interpreted liberally and that technical objections should not defeat the parties' clear intent to arbitrate. "Indian courts have played an important role in strengthening the foundational features of arbitration, most notably the principle of party autonomy, which remains the backbone of the arbitral process in India, designed to give parties the widest possible freedom to shape procedures that reflect their needs and commercial realities," he said.

2026-27 budget may
put stress on debt-to-
GDP ratio management

From PG 1 such that the central government debt will be on a declining path as a percentage of GDP." It encourages a shift from rigid annual fiscal targets towards more transparent and operationally flexible fiscal standards. It is also recognized as a more reliable measure of fiscal performance as it captures the cumulative effects of past and current fiscal decisions. It is expected that the debt-to-GDP-based fiscal consolidation strategy would help rebuild buffers and provide the requisite space for growth-enhancing expenditures. The FRBM statement dated February 1, 2025, said the choice of fiscal anchor aligns well with the government's sustained efforts to promote fiscal transparency through proper disclosure of off-budget borrowings. For the period FY 2026-27 to FY 2030-31, it is possible to compute several fiscal scenarios based on GDP growth trends and varying degrees of fiscal calibrations, it said.

TMC Slams Centre Over Saraswati
Puja Ban at Anandapuri Ground

MI News Service, Kolkata: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday held two programmes in West Bengal, one of which included addressing a BJP workers' conference at Anandapuri Ground in Barrackpore, North 24 Parganas. The use of the centrally controlled Anandapuri Ground, however, triggered sharp political controversy, with the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) levelling serious allegations against the Union Home Ministry. Addressing a press conference at Trinamool Bhavan, TMC's Dum Dum-Barrackpore organisational district president Partha Bhowmick and state Education Minister Bratya Basu accused the Home Ministry, headed by Amit Shah, of denying permission for Saraswati Puja, sports activities and fairs at Anandapuri Ground. Bhowmick said the ground once hosted Saraswati Puja celebrations and fairs on a large scale, and produced several prominent footballers and sportspersons from the Barrackpore re-

gion. He alleged that since the BJP came to power at the Centre in 2014, permission for Saraswati Puja, sports and fairs at the ground has been denied. "It is ironic that the Union Home Minister had earlier accused the West Bengal government of not allowing Saraswati Puja, while his own ministry does not grant permission for such events at Anandapuri Ground. The ground is being cleared for his rally, but local children are not allowed to play there," Bhowmick said. The BJP, however, dismissed the allegations and accused the TMC of politicising the issue. On the issue of illegal infiltration, which the BJP has been repeatedly raising against the TMC, Bratya Basu hit back, stating that a BJP booth president was recently arrested in Malda over allegations of sheltering Rohingyas. "If that is the case, then who is responsible for border security and preventing cattle smuggling?" Basu asked, putting the onus on the Centre.

ISRO working towards first uncrewed
mission for Gaganyaan in March

From PG 1

focused on enhancing the safety of Gaganyatris -- Shubhanshu Shukla, Prasanth Balakrishnan Nair, Ajit Krishnan, and Agad Pratap. Every system involved in the mission has to be qualified, he said. "Gaganyaan programme is planned in 2027. Before that, three uncrewed missions are planned. We are working towards the first uncrewed mission," the ISRO chief said adding "There are a lot of tests that are happening. The safety of the Gaganyaan mission is very important. We have to be very careful and qualify every system. In the rocket system, we need to score a hundred out of a hundred". The G1 mission is about 90 per cent complete, with more than 8,000 ground tests, including structural qualifications, successfully conducted. This is paving the way for software simulations and environmental val-

idations to meet the targeted schedule. The G1 test, along with the Vyomitra robot, is being planned for March 2026 and will validate life support, re-entry, and recovery systems.

Previously, Narayanan had ruled out possible delays in the Gaganyaan mission due to the back-to-back PSLV rocket launch failure. While noting that an investigation into the failures is underway, he stated that the programmes are independent of each other. ISRO's Gaganyaan mission will carry astronauts to low Earth orbit for a 3-day mission and bring them back safely to Earth. The astronauts will be launched into a 400 km orbit aboard the human-rated LV-M3 rocket. Gaganyaan's success will mark a major step for India in space exploration. It will also pave the way for future missions and a space station by 2035 and a manned moon mission by 2040.

Pope Leo invited to join Trump's Board
of Peace for 'positive neutrality'

From PG 1

state treaties, but moral frameworks, designed to protect the vulnerable. The church established the right to asylum by proclaiming immunity from violence for those who could not defend themselves. As medieval diplomacy matured, popes increasingly acted as mediators between rulers. The early modern period expanded the ambition and limits of papal peacemaking. In 1493, Pope Alexander VI drew up boundaries for Spain and Portugal's colonisation of non-Christian lands. Other European powers increasingly rejected the pope's authority to allocate sovereignty beyond Christendom. In 1518, Pope Leo X promoted a general peace among central European Christian rulers, resulting in the Treaty of London. But a century later, the region's Thirty Years' War was one of the longest and most destructive conflicts in European history. After it ended, European diplomacy became more overtly secular. For 1,114 years, popes ruled as absolute monarchs over the Italian territories known as the Papal States, strategically located in central Italy. With their loss, completed in 1870, the pope gained a different kind of leverage. In the late 19th century, the Holy See aligned itself with emerging legal approaches to peace, including arbitration and international adjudication. It endorsed mechanisms that restrained unilateral force. Neutrality was no longer a defensive posture, but an active diplomatic resource. The First World War tested the limits of that resource. Pope Benedict XV confronted industrialised mass conflict, in which moral appeals struggled to gain traction. His peace proposal of August 1 1917, outlined principles that would later become familiar: disarmament, arbitration,

Congress leaders only care about illegal Bangladeshi migrants: Assam CM on "Miya Muslims" row

MI News Service, Golaghat: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday launched a sharp attack on Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) president Gaurav Gogoi, alleging that Congress leaders only "care about illegal Bangladeshi migrants" and not about the interests of indigenous Assamese.

Responding to Gogoi's allegations against him, Sarma said, "They only care about illegal Bangladeshi migrants and have no concern for local Assamese people. Thousand Gaurav Gogoi and Rahul Gandhi will be able to do nothing as far as I am concerned. Right now, the situation is very crucial for Assamese people, and it is about their existence in the state."

The Chief Minister's remarks come amid an ongoing political row over his recent comments on illegal immigration and the use of the term "Miya Muslims".

Earlier today, CM Sarma had defended his remarks, stating that he had not coined the term "Miya Muslims" and that it had been in vogue

within the community itself, which had migrated from Bangladesh to refer to themselves.

In a post on X, CM Sarma said those attacking him for his remarks on "Miyan" should note the Supreme Court of India's observations on Assam and illegal migration.

"Those who are attacking me for my remarks on 'Miyan'--a word used in Assam in the context of Bangladeshi Muslim illegal migration--should pause and read what the Supreme Court of India itself has said about Assam. This is not my language, not my imagination, and not political exaggeration," he said.

In his post, the Chief Minister also highlighted the apex court's warning on demographic changes in Assam. "These are the Court's own words: The silent and invidious demographic invasion of Assam may result in the loss of the geostrategically vital districts of lower Assam. The influx of illegal migrants is turning these districts into a Muslim-majority region. It will then only be a matter

of time before a demand for their merger with Bangladesh may be made. Loss of lower Assam will sever the entire land mass of the North East from the rest of India, and the rich natural resources of that region will be lost to the Nation."

Sarma also said that acknowledging such concerns does not constitute communalism or hatred.

Reacting to this, Gogoi accused CM Sarma earlier today of misusing the name of the Supreme Court to justify his remarks, claiming that attributing the language of an executive report to the apex court amounted to contempt of court.

"The Chief Minister has become quiet after I raised his contempt of the Hon'ble Supreme Court. Of course the rest of the BJP just runs on rhetoric and screenshots. They run the risk of contempt too. When a court cites a report relied on by a party it does not make the language of the report the court's 'own words'. Attributing it to the Hon'ble Supreme Court is a clear case for contempt," Gogoi wrote on X.

"Modi govt pushed economy into unprecedented mess": Mallikarjun Kharge ahead of Union Budget

MI News Service, New Delhi: Ahead of the Union Budget 2026, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Saturday criticised the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government, asserting that its own "legacy" has left the economy in an "unprecedented mess," and questioned whether the upcoming budget would deliver concrete solutions.

In a post on X, Kharge said the government could no longer attribute current economic challenges to the legacy of previous administrations.

"In this UnionBudget, the Modi Government cannot hide behind the excuse of 'legacy'. Their own legacy has pushed the economy into an unprecedented mess. Will this Budget offer real solutions to the multiple economic indicators that are now in free fall?" he said.

Referring to the Economic Survey and government data, the Congress chief said the Budget would be the government's 12th in 12 years and challenged it to move

beyond what he called "tired slogans".

Meanwhile, Congress leader Bhupesh Baghel also criticised the Centre ahead of the Budget presentation.

Speaking in Delhi, Baghel told ANI that the Budget was being presented on a Sunday, which is both a holiday and Ravidas Jayanti, and questioned what people could expect from it.

"The budget is being presented tomorrow, Sunday, which is both a holiday and Ravidas Jayanti. What can we expect? There is widespread unemployment and inflation, and farmers are not receiving fair prices for their crops. MGNREGA, which was the only hope for labourers, has been removed, and GST has already caused difficulties for people," he said.

The Union Budget 2026-27 is set to be presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday. This year, the Budget presentation falls on a weekend. FM Sitharaman is set to present a record ninth consecutive Union Budget on February 1,

marking a significant milestone in India's parliamentary and economic history.

Centre earlier this week released the 2025-26 economic survey, noting that India's economic growth remains resilient, with strong domestic demand as the main anchor, even as the global environment remains fragile.

Taking an optimistic view of the economy, the Economic Survey estimated India's potential growth at around 7 per cent. It also projected that India's GDP growth in FY27 is likely to remain in the range of 6.8 per cent to 7.2 per cent, reflecting the economy's medium-term strength supported by reforms and macroeconomic stability.

The Survey noted that while global economic conditions remain uncertain and fragile, India's overall outlook continues to be positive. It highlighted that India's growth is holding up better than expected relative to many other economies, although risks remain elevated amid global uncertainties.

"Govt has no clear vision to bridge gap between rich and poor": Congress' Sachin Pilot ahead of Union Budget

MI News Service, Jaipur: Ahead of the Union Budget 2026, Congress leader Sachin Pilot on Saturday criticised the government for lacking a clear, results-oriented vision, highlighting unemployment, underemployment, rising inflation, and the widening gap between rich and poor.

He urged the budget to focus on creating productive jobs and empowering citizens while addressing economic inequalities.

Speaking to ANI, Sachin Pilot said, "I regret that for the past several years, the government hasn't presented a very imaginative or results-oriented vision on the ground. I believe the biggest issue in the country is unemployment and underemployment. How will you create constructive, productive jobs for these people? The

government hasn't shown any clear vision for this yet. I hope that, leaving aside all other issues, the budget will address how to reduce inflation. The gap between the rich and the poor has widened today, and the government has no clear vision to bridge this gap or empower the people."

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CAG emphasizes need for reimagining public accountability in 21st century

MI News Service, New Delhi: Comptroller and Auditor General K Sanjay Murthy emphasised the need for reimagining public accountability in the 21st century at the World Forum of Accountants in New Delhi.

He emphasised that public accountability is crucial to good governance and sustainable development, and that it requires a strong internal control environment, transparency, and public participation.

The CAG stressed that the accounting and auditing profession needs to adapt to emerging technologies like AI, block-

chain, and data analytics to ensure effective public accountability. He also emphasised the importance of capacity building and skill upgradation for professionals to cope with new-age methods.

Key initiatives by the CAG include data-driven audits, the Centre for Data Management and Analytics, and the Centre of Excellence in Financial Audit. The CAG has also issued an AI Strategy Framework document to ensure these technologies increase audit precision while preserving fairness, explainability, and institutional ac-

countability.

The CAG's efforts aim to promote transparency, public participation, and real-time scrutiny, ultimately fostering greater trust and transparency in the new economy and contributing to the goal of Viksit Bharat.

The synergy between human expertise and advanced technologies can create more efficient, effective, and insightful accounting and auditing, the CAG said. He expressed confidence that the forum would deliberate on these aspects and chart a roadmap to take the profession to new heights.



Police detain Bharatiya Krantikari Morcha members during the 'Nyay Pad Yatra' protesting over the rape and murder of NEET aspirants demanding a CBI probe, in Patna on Saturday

Below-normal rainfall, above-average temperatures likely in February in India: IMD

MI News Service, New Delhi: India is likely to witness below-normal rainfall in February, while both minimum and maximum temperatures are expected to remain above normal across most parts of the country, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Saturday.

Addressing a press conference, IMD Director General Mrutyunjay Mohapatra said that below-normal cold wave days are expected over several parts of north-west and adjoining central India during the month.

He said that monthly rainfall during February 2026 over Northwest India--comprising East Uttar Pradesh, West Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhanda, Haryana, Chan-

digarh and Delhi, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh--is most likely to be below normal.

"Monthly rainfall over the country as a whole during February 2026 is most likely to be below normal, that is, less than 81 per cent of the Long Period Average (LPA)," Mohapatra said.

He added that below-normal rainfall is likely over most parts of the country, except some areas of north-west and east-central India, and extreme southern parts of northeast India, where normal to above-normal rainfall is expected.

On temperatures, the IMD said minimum temperatures during February 2026 are likely to be above

normal over most parts of the country, except some regions of south peninsular India, where normal minimum temperatures are expected.

Similarly, maximum temperatures are also likely to remain above normal over most parts of the country, barring isolated regions of central India and southern peninsular India, where normal maximum temperatures are likely.

The IMD said February weather conditions are expected to mirror January trends, during which India recorded 31.5 per cent below-normal rainfall, while the all-India mean temperature stood 0.28 degrees Celsius above normal at 18.31 degrees Celsius.

The IMD Director General, Mrutyunjay Mohapatra Jenamani, said rainfall during the January remained deficient over Northwest India, East and Northeast India, and Central India, while South Peninsular India received near-normal rainfall, registering 10.9 per cent above the long-period average.

The deficit was particularly acute across large parts of East and North East India, and central India.

"Northwest India recorded 12.1 per cent less rainfall (in January), while East and Northeast India saw a massive 86.2 per cent shortfall. Central India also witnessed the decline, with rainfall plunging 79.4 per cent below normal," Jenamani said.

"Mamata Banerjee has torn apart the unity of Bengal," alleges Home Minister Amit Shah

MI News Service, Siliguri: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday addressed a Karyakarta Sammelan in Bagdogra, West Bengal, launching a sharp attack on Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and the Trinamool Congress, accusing them of dividing society and weakening the State.

Shah alleged that the Mamata Banerjee-led government had damaged Bengal's social unity by pitting communities against each other. The Union Home Minister also said that Mamata's tenure was nearing its end.

"Mamata Banerjee has torn apart the unity of Bengal. She has only worked to pit people against each other in Bengal. She has worked to set tribals against Kurmis. I am departing from this land today by saying that Mamata Didi, your time is up. Now, under the leadership of Modi Ji, the construction of Sonar Bangla envisioned by Vivekananda Ji and Ravindranath Tagore Ji is about to take place," he said while addressing the programme.

Highlighting Bengal's historical contribution to the nation, Shah said the state had been lagging behind for decades.

"This historic land of Bengal has made a very important contribution to the all-round development of the country in every era. Over nearly four and a half decades, Bengal has been lagging behind. First, the Communist Party spared no effort in pushing this state

backwards. Then, Mamata didi came with the slogan 'Ma, Mati, Manush' and ruined the entire state," he said.

The Union Home Minister also accused the Trinamool Congress of opposing national symbols for vote bank politics. Referring to a discussion in Parliament, Shah said, "It is unfortunate that when Vande Mataram was discussed in Parliament, these Trinamool Congress people were opposing it. I asked one of their MPs why they were opposing Vande Mataram. Bankim Chandra was from Bengal. He said that our vote bank of infiltrators is offended by Vande Mataram, and that is why we are opposing it."

He slammed Chief Minister, saying, "Shame on you, Mamata, you are opposing Vande Mataram for the sake of vote bank politics. The people of Bengal will not forgive you. The people of Bengal will give you a fitting reply for this in the 2026 elections."

Shah further alleged that women are unsafe in West Bengal and accused the Mamata Banerjee-led TMC government of failing to protect them.

He claimed that a BJP tribal MP was attacked and false cases were being filed against party leaders, urging people to bring "Parivartan" by removing TMC from power.

"Women are not safe in Bengal today. Mamata Didi, you have completely failed to protect them. Our tribal MP was attacked, and false

cases are being filed against our leaders. I appeal to the people of Bengal wipe out TMC from this state. This year will be the year of Parivartan," he said.

Home Minister said that infiltration in West Bengal is not just a state issue but a matter of national security, alleging that the Mamata Banerjee-led government is allowing it to continue, stating, "The infiltration from Bengal is not just a matter of Bengal's security. The infiltration happening in Bengal has become a matter of national security, and therefore, it is necessary to remove this government that is allowing the infiltration. The government changed in Assam, and the infiltration stopped. There is a BJP government in Gujarat, and there is no infiltration. There is a BJP government in Rajasthan, and there is no infiltration..."

Referring to a Calcutta High Court order, Shah said the court has directed the state government to provide land to the BSF by March 31, 2026, but alleged that the TMC government will not comply. He asserted that once a BJP government is formed in Bengal, the land will be handed over to the BSF within 45 days, infiltration will stop, and infiltrators will be identified and deported, adding that this is why the TMC is opposed to the SIR.

"Now the Bengal High Court has said that Mamata Banerjee should give all the land that the BSF needs before March 31, 2026.

Mamata Didi is not going to give the land even after the High Court's order. But don't worry, her time is up. By the end of April, the Bharatiya Janata Party's Chief Minister will hand over all the land to the BSF within forty-five days... I am saying this today, not only will the infiltration stop, but every single infiltrator will be identified and sent back from Bengal. And that is why Mamata Banerjee is afraid of the SIR, because she knows that if the SIR is implemented, the infiltrators will be removed."

Expressing confidence in the BJP's prospects, Shah said the party has a strong hold in North Bengal and aims to sweep all 28 Lok Sabha seats in the state. He highlighted the BJP's growing vote share in Bengal and cited recent electoral successes across the country, asserting that change is inevitable in the state.

"I know the situation in North Bengal very well. This time, the Bharatiya Janata Party will sweep all 28 out of 28 seats. Our goal should be to sweep every seat, and we have shown that we can do this. In 2024, we achieved a hat-trick for the third time, and PM Modi became the Prime Minister again. For the first time, a BJP government was formed in Odisha. After Narendra Modi became Prime Minister, the BJP formed many governments, including Tripura and Assam. Similarly, the BJP's vote share in Bengal has increased fourfold. Change is coming," he said.

Goa Police arrests two in inter-state 'digital arrest' fraud worth Rs 1.42 crore

MI News Service, Bicholim: The Cyber Crime Police Station, Goa, has arrested two persons in connection with a major inter-state cyber fraud case involving a "digital arrest" scam worth Rs1.42 crore, police said on Saturday.

The arrested accused have been identified as Ashadul Islam (24) and Yasmina Ahmed (32), residents of Marigaon, Assam.

The case, registered under Sections 318(4) and 319(2) read with relevant provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and Section 66-D of the Information Technology Act, is based on a complaint filed by a resident of Bicholim in North Goa.

According to police, the accused impersonated officers of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the Supreme Court, using multiple WhatsApp numbers to place the victim under a fake "digital arrest." By creating fear and exerting psychological pressure, they coerced the complainant into transferring Rs 1,42,04,868 to multiple bank accounts.

Following a detailed technical analysis of communications between the fraudsters and the victim, a special team of the Goa Crime Branch traced the accused to Nagaon district in Assam. The arrests were carried out

by a team led by Police Inspector Vikas Deykar, with Police Constables Arif Aga, Rupesh Gaikwad and Prakash.

Police said that during verification, it emerged that both accused had earlier been arrested in FIR registered at Nagaon Police Station, Assam, under the BNS for similar cyber fraud activities. In that case, the Assam Police seized 358 SIM cards, five mobile phones, one Wi-Fi router, one DVR, and one laptop. The same mobile phones were found to have been used in the Goa cyber fraud case as well, and the seizure will be formally linked to the Goa Police investigation.

Investigators further revealed that the same mobile numbers were linked to another "digital arrest" complaint filed in Goa, involving a fraudulent amount of Rs 63.50 lakh.

During the probe, it was found that the accused were operating multiple mobile numbers from the same IMEI. These devices were linked to several cyber fraud complaints across the country, indicating that the accused are key operators within a broader network of financial cybercrime.

The Goa Police team received excellent cooperation from the Assam Police in this case. SP Crime constituted 3 teams, comprising personnel from the Crime Branch and Cyber Cell, for different tasks in this case.

The accused have been produced before the Court, and further investigation is in progress under PI Deepak Pednekar, with supervision from Ms Shridevi BV, IPS, ASP Cyber, and Rahul Gupta, IPS, SP Crime or Cyber.



Bengaluru Police forms SIT to probe CJ Roy suicide case

MI News Service, Bengaluru: The Bengaluru Police Commissioner Seemanth Kumar Singh, IPS, has constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the death of CJ Roy, Chairman of the Confident Group.

Roy allegedly died by suicide in Bengaluru on Friday, according to officials.

The SIT will be led by Joint Commissioner of Police, West Zone, C. Vamshi Krishna, IPS, while Deputy Commissioner of Police, South Division, Lokesh Jagalaras, IPS, will serve as the Investigating Officer. Deputy Commissioner of

Police, Central Division, Akshay Hake, IPS, along with senior officers from various divisions and special units, will also be part of the team. The SIT has been authorised to bring in additional officers and resources as required for the investigation.

All concerned officers have been instructed to extend full cooperation to ensure that a lawful, prompt, and effective investigation is conducted. All aspects of the case will be thoroughly examined, and relevant information will be communicated to the public in the coming days.

Earlier in the day, Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara said that Roy's company had been raided by the Income Tax Department in December 2025 and was given 60 days to file a chargesheet.

Speaking to mediapersons in Bengaluru, Parameshwara said the deadline to file the chargesheet was February 4, and Roy had returned from Dubai three days ago.

The police said that all aspects of the case will be thoroughly examined, and relevant information will be communicated to the public in the coming days.

Earlier in the day, Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara said that Roy's company had been raided by the Income Tax Department in December 2025 and was given 60 days to file a chargesheet.

Speaking to mediapersons in Bengaluru, Parameshwara said the deadline to file the chargesheet was February 4, and Roy had returned from Dubai three days ago.

He added that Roy cooperated with the Income Tax officials who visited his office to record his statement.

"His (CJ Roy) company was raided by the IT department in December. They were given 60 days to file a charge sheet. The deadline was set for the February 4 and he arrived from Dubai three days ago. The officials (Income Tax) went to his office to record his statement. He (Roy) responded to that," Parameshwara told reporters.

Meanwhile, officials said forensic teams, including the Scene of Crime Offi-

cer (SOCO) and Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) teams, are investigating the case. Officials said Income Tax raids had been conducted at Roy's premises over the past two days.

Bengaluru City Police Commissioner Seemanth Kumar Singh said, "An incident occurred today within the limits of Ashok Nagar police station, where the chairman of the Confident Group (CJ Roy) shot himself. The SOCO and FSL teams are investigating the matter. He was immediately taken to a nearby hospital, where he was declared dead."

Muslim female lawyer assaulted after exposing corruption in Hardoi



MI News Service, Hardoi: A Muslim female lawyer was targeted and assaulted after she exposed corruption in a village named Hardoi in Uttar Pradesh.

Video of the assault emerged on social media showing Advocate Firdous Jahan and her family attacked by the husband of village head and his associates. The attack was carried out in broad daylight after Jahan filed a formal complaint exposing corruption.

The main accused, Naseem and several men surrounded the car of Jahan, damaged it with sticks and rods and attacked her and her family.

Speaking about the assault, Jahan said, "The attack was meant as a warning message for me. I had complained about their corruption and when investigation was done, the allegations were found to be true leading to the removal of his financial status and powers in the village."

Jahan also said that notice and Naseem was already sent and despite knowing the truth, the men opted to act violently.

"They threatened us by saying that this is what happens after I complained while they were attacking. If a lawyer is not safe for merely following law, how safe are the ordinary people"? She questioned.

The video of the incident has sparked concerns in the public domain. Activists and other social media users voiced their concerns and said that such attacks reveal a harsher truth : that a lawyer isn't safe for exposing corruption and that truth comes with a price. Many also highlighted that if action is not taken, it normalises such crimes and warned about such incidents happening in the future.

Shashi Tharoor reaffirms loyalty to Congress, praises Rahul Gandhi's fight against communalism

MI News Service, Thiruvananthapuram : Congress MP Shashi Tharoor on January 30, 2026, hailed party leader Rahul Gandhi as a "sincere" figure and a "strong voice" against communalism, hatred, and divisiveness in India.

Speaking to reporters in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, Tharoor emphasized that "everyone likes Rahul" for his consistent opposition to the politics of communalism.

"I do not have a different opinion on that," Tharoor stated, adding that he has never endorsed any unfair criticism of Gandhi and views him as a sincere leader.

His remarks came a day after a crucial meeting with Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi in Delhi, where he addressed grievances related to his recent treatment at a Kochi event and perceived attempts to sideline him in Kerala.

Tharoor also clarified his past positions on certain issues, noting that while the media may have portrayed them as pro-BJP, he sees them as pro-government or pro-India. On international matters, he prefers focusing on the nation rather than partisan politics—a stance he said is longstanding.

Addressing speculation about internal rifts, Tharoor admitted that party members should align with the party line and affirmed he has always supported Congress in Parliament.

When pressed on his future, he categorically declared, "I am going to be

Iran says ready for 'fair' talks with US but not 'under shadow of threats'

MI News Service, Tehran: Iran's foreign minister says the country is ready for "fair and equitable" talks with the United States amid soaring tensions, as US President Donald Trump refused to rule out taking military action against Tehran.

On a visit to Türkiye on Friday, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi told reporters that, "Iran has no problem with negotiations, but negotiations cannot take place under the shadow of threats".

"I should also state unequivocally that Iran's defensive and missile capabilities – and Iran's missiles – will never be the subject of any negotiations," Araghchi said during a news conference alongside his Turkish counterpart, Hakan Fidan.

"The security of the Iranian people is no one else's business, and we will preserve and expand our defensive capabilities to whatever extent is necessary to defend the country."

Tensions have been rising for weeks between Tehran and Washington amid Trump's repeated threats to attack Iran over a recent crackdown on antigovernment protests



and his push to curtail the Iranian nuclear programme.

Earlier this week, the US president said a "massive armada" – led by the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier – was moving towards Iran and was ready to use "violence, if necessary" if Iranian leaders did not agree to negotiate a nuclear deal.

Speaking to reporters at the White House on Friday, Trump said his administration was sending "a larger number of ships" to Iran. "And hopefully we'll make a deal," he said. "If we do make a deal, that's good. If we don't make a deal, we'll see what happens."

Reporting from Washington, DC, Al Jazeera's

Kimberly Halkett noted that Trump said he gave Iran a deadline, but "only Iran knows what that deadline is".

"So he's left the world in waiting, trying to determine what the next steps will be," Halkett said.

Trump, who in 2018 unilaterally withdrew from a previous deal that saw Iran agree to curb its nuclear programme in exchange for a lifting of international sanctions, has been pressuring Iran to halt all uranium enrichment.

Washington has accused Tehran of seeking a nuclear weapon – a claim Iranian leaders have repeatedly denied.

Amid the latest tensions, senior officials in

Tehran have repeatedly said they are open to negotiations, but only once Trump ends his military threats against the country.

They also have stressed that Iran's armed forces are ready to respond if attacked.

Meanwhile, regional allies including Türkiye, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia have been engaging in diplomatic efforts to try to prevent a military confrontation between Washington and Tehran.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan earlier on Friday told his Iranian counterpart Masoud Pezeshkian in a call that Ankara was ready to play a "facilitator" role between the two sides.

Fidan, the Turkish foreign minister, also said he had long discussions on the issue with US special envoy Steve Witkoff on Thursday and would keep lines open with Washington.

Speaking alongside Araghchi on Friday, Fidan said US-Iran nuclear negotiations must restart and would pave the way to lifting sanctions on Iran.

"We call the parties to the negotiating table" to address the issues "one by one", he said.

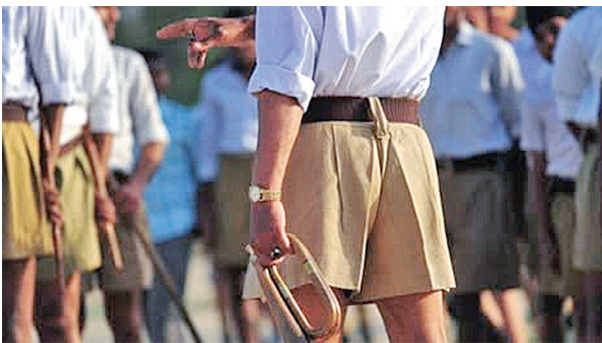
Washington lobbyist ends RSS awareness campaign amid India-U.S. controversy

MI News Service, Washington: Squire Patton Boggs, a prominent Washington DC-based lobbying firm, has disclosed that it has terminated its contract related to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the ideological parent of India's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

The firm, which received \$330,000 in payments during 2025, amended its US Congress disclosures in December 2025 to clarify that it was hired by an individual, Vivek Sharma, rather than the RSS directly. The contract aimed to "introduce the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) to US officials" and was officially ended on September 30, 2025, according to a termination report filed on December 29.

Initially registered in January 2025 under the Lobbying Disclosure Act (LDA), the arrangement involved State Street Strategies (also known as One+Strategies) as the intermediary. Former Republican Congressman Bill Shuster was among the key lobbyists involved.

Early disclosures explicitly named the client as State Street Strategies acting on behalf of the RSS, sparking significant attention after a November 2025 Prism Reports investigation



revealed the details. This marked the first known instance of the RSS engaging US lobbyists.

Subsequent amendments retroactively replaced references to the RSS with Vivek Sharma, a resident of Acton, Massachusetts, and executive chairman of Cohance Lifesciences, a pharmaceutical firm with operations in India and the US.

In original filings, Sharma was listed as an entity contributing over \$5,000 and participating in or supervising lobbying activities. The RSS consistently denied any involvement. Spokesperson Sunil Ambekar stated on X in November that the organization "works in Bharat and has not engaged any lobbying firm in United States of America."

The controversy intensified in India, with Congress leader Jairam Ramesh accusing the RSS

of betraying national interests, particularly noting the firm's simultaneous April 2025 contract to lobby for the government of Pakistan (also since terminated).

A key point of debate was the use of LDA rather than the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA). US Department of Justice guidelines exempt LDA-registered entities representing foreign businesses, individuals, or non-profits from FARA, but not those for foreign governments or political parties. As the RSS is neither, the LDA filing was deemed applicable. Neither Squire Patton Boggs, State Street Strategies, nor Vivek Sharma responded to requests for comment.

The amendments and termination followed media scrutiny, highlighting complexities in foreign influence and lobbying transparency in Washington.

President Diaz-Canel slams Trump's bid to 'suffocate' Cuba's economy

MI News Service,

Havana : Cuba's President Miguel Diaz-Canel has denounced what he called an attempt by his United States counterpart, Donald Trump, to "suffocate" the sanctions-hit country's economy.

Trump signed an executive order on Thursday threatening additional tariffs on countries that sell oil to Cuba, the latest move in Washington's campaign of pressure on Havana. The order alleged that the government of communist-run Cuba was an "unusual and extraordinary threat" to US national security.

In a social media post on Friday, Diaz-Canel said that under "a false and baseless pretext", Trump plans "to suffocate" Cuba's economy by slapping tariffs "on countries that sovereignly



trade oil" with it. "This new measure reveals the fascist, criminal and genocidal nature of a clique that has hijacked the interests of

the American people for purely personal ends," he said, in an apparent allusion to Secretary of State Marco Rubio, a Cuban American and a known anti-Cuban government hawk.

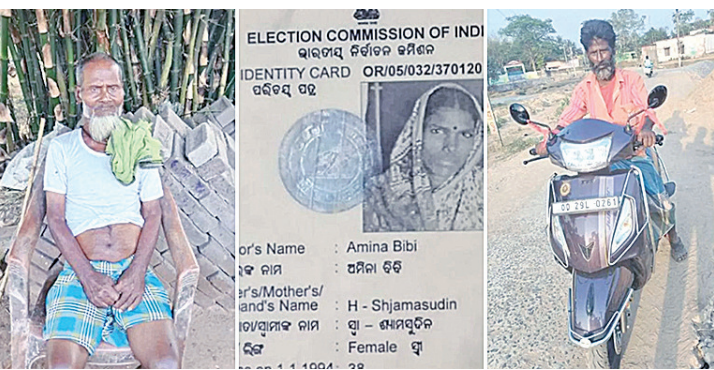
Cuba, which is suffering rolling electricity blackouts blamed on fuel shortages, was cut off from critical supplies of Venezuelan oil after the US abducted Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro and his wife in a bloody military night raid on the capital, Caracas, earlier this month. At least 32 members of Cuba's armed forces and intelligence agencies were killed in the January 3 attack.

MI News Service, Kendrapara : In a controversial incident, Odisha police detained 12 members of a family from Garapur village in Kendrapara district on November 27, suspecting them of being Bangladeshi nationals.

The raid targeted a Muslim-majority village during what was described as a "survey" to identify illegal immigrants. While nine detainees, including Mukhtar Khan, were released after nine days, three elderly relatives—Muntaz Khan (65), his uncle Insaan Khan (59), and aunt Ameena Bibi (70)—vanished from custody.

Mukhtar later learned from authorities that they had been deported to Bangladesh, a fact confirmed by Kendrapara Superintendent of Police Siddharth Kataria on January 14.

Kataria claimed the trio "confessed" to being Bangladeshis during interrogation and were handed over to the Border Security Force (BSF) per Union Home Ministry guidelines from May 2.



These rules require giving suspects 30 days to prove citizenship and verifying claims with their home state. Odisha police said they contacted West Bengal authorities in Purba Medinipur, who allegedly failed to confirm the family's Indian citizenship.

However, Purba Medinipur SP Mitun Kumar Dey strongly denied any such contact: "I completely rule out the claim of Odisha police. There is no official email or message."

The police justified the deportation by alleging the family's patriarch, Yasin Khan, migrated from Bangladesh in the 1970s-80s. Yet family documents, including a 1956 land record seen by Scroll, show Yasin owned property in Bengal's Purba Medinipur district as a cultivator.

Village chief Sheikh Aynul Islam and neighbour Sheikh Reyazuddin, who knew Muntaz for over 50 years, insisted the family migrated from Bengal six

decades ago and has deep roots in Garapur.

Mukhtar presented voter lists (2002), land records (2009), Aadhaar cards, voter IDs, and even Yasin's 1993 voter card issued in Kendrapara.

His mother's letter to the SP highlighted benefits received, like an Indira Awas Yojana house post-1999 cyclone. All evidence was dismissed.

This marks at least the second such expulsion of Bengali Muslim families from Odisha, following a December case involving 14 people, including a 90-year-old woman. Critics argue these actions in BJP-ruled states violate central guidelines by denying due process.

The family remains distraught, worried about the elderly trio's fate in Bangladesh. "We have to go to court," Mukhtar said, "but we don't know who will help us." With limited resources, they face an uphill battle to seek justice and reunion.

Gaza's collapsing economy drives youth to create unconventional solutions

MI News Service, Gaza City: For many Palestinians in Gaza, earning a living has become a daily struggle amid Israel's continuing blockade, repeated ceasefire violations, and the near-total collapse of the local economy.

With infrastructure destroyed and productive sectors paralysed as a result of Israel's genocidal war on Gaza, traditional employment opportunities have all but disappeared, forcing residents to seek alternative, often precarious, ways to survive.

Hala Mohammed al-Maghrabi, 24, is one of many young professionals whose education no longer provides a path to stability. After graduating as a nurse in 2023, she spent two years volunteering in the healthcare sector, hoping the experience would eventually lead to paid employment. That opportunity never came.

"Volunteering doesn't pay the bills," al-Maghrabi said. "With prices constantly rising and no stable income, it became impossible to rely on this work to meet even my basic needs."

With limited prospects in Gaza's overstretched healthcare system, she made a difficult decision to leave her field entirely.

Al-Maghrabi instead shifted into social media marketing and e-commerce, working online to generate a modest income.

As al-Maghrabi recounted, she graduated as a nurse and began training in the hospital. During that training, she also took several design courses and tried to find work in that field, but she was unable to

reach clients and earn an income. She then decided to take marketing courses instead of waiting for someone else to promote her work, allowing her to market herself effectively. After gaining experience in marketing, she began working in e-commerce and digital marketing.

"This isn't what I studied or planned for," she said. "But even though the income is limited, it helps me cover my daily expenses and survive under these conditions."

Al-Maghrabi's experience reflects a broader phenomenon in Gaza, where years of compounded crises have pushed unemployment to unprecedented levels. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics' 2024 figures, the overall unemployment rate in Gaza is 69 percent, rising to approximately 80 percent among 15- to 29-year-olds.

The population under 30 accounts for approximately 70 percent of Gaza's residents, meaning the majority of the community faces severe economic challenges, with a significant portion of young people holding university degrees but unable to find suitable employment.

Gaza's GDP has also contracted by more than 82 percent due to Israel's ongoing war and destruction of economic infrastructure, and around 80 percent of the population relies on international aid due to food insecurity and loss of income sources.

ers as well. Mohammed al-Hajj, who previously worked in general trade and food supplies, saw his entire business model unravel after the war.

"My warehouses and goods were destroyed, and I could no longer afford import costs or the required licences," al-Hajj said. "Everything I had built over the years was suddenly gone."

Faced with few options, al-Hajj searched for an alternative way to earn an income. Because his neighbourhood had not been heavily damaged, and



he still had intermittent internet access, he converted part of his property into a small workspace equipped with an internet connection.

"I created this place after running out of options," he said. "Students and engineers needed somewhere stable to take exams or work online, and this became a solution for them – and for me."

As traditional employment structures collapse, innovation has become less a choice than a necessity. For some Palestinians in Gaza, finding unconven-

tional solutions to personal crises has opened new paths not only for survival, but for rebuilding economic activity.

Ahmed Fares Abu Zayed, CEO of Abu Zayed General Trading, described how his company's operations came to a halt when the war began.

"We started the company before the war as a very small electricity generation business with limited resources, aimed only at supplying specific energy needs," said Abu Zayed. "But when the war broke out, our operations stopped

creativity and necessity."

His story illustrates how innovation in Gaza often emerges directly from crisis, as individuals attempt to solve immediate problems with limited resources.

Project manager and business management specialist Maram al-Qarra explained that such efforts play a critical role in Gaza's labour market.

"The problem in Gaza isn't a lack of talent, but the absence of an economic environment capable of absorbing it," al-Qarra said. "Even small projects can stimulate the market by creating direct jobs and indirect service and production chains."

She emphasised that innovation is now essential. "When traditional jobs are absent, innovation becomes a means to create opportunities instead of waiting for them," she said.

On the broader labour market, al-Qarra concluded, "The blockade and the war destroyed traditional work structures, pushing many young people to seek alternatives outside conventional employment."

Across Gaza, many educated young people – doctors, engineers, nurses, and graduates – now sell bottled water, vegetables, or second-hand clothes on the streets. These efforts are not entrepreneurial ambitions, but survival strategies in a place where choice has all but disappeared.

As one young resident put it, "We don't have the luxury of choice; all we can do is try to survive."

While innovation has

opened new paths for some, desperation has also created space for exploitation. Mahmoud, a young man from Gaza, described how the lack of jobs and social protection has pushed people towards shady or dangerous businesses.

"With no government support and no safety nets, securing a steady income has become almost impossible," Mahmoud said. "Some people are turning to illegal or exploitative methods just to survive."

He explained that money lending, currency trading, and exploitative financial transfers have become increasingly common.

"People are sometimes forced to receive their remittances in cash at a discount because more than 50 percent," he said. "This is clear exploitation of people's urgent needs, and it shows how desperation is being abused."

Yet even amid these negative outcomes, examples of innovation that benefit the wider community persist. Abu Zayed noted that his electricity project did more than solve his own problem.

"The most important part is that it didn't just provide energy," he said. "It created jobs for dozens of young people in manufacturing, installation, and maintenance, and gave them skills they couldn't gain in the traditional job market."

"Even under the toughest circumstances," he added, "a small idea can turn into a sustainable project that supports the community and restores a sense of productivity."

