



Police personnel stop commuters not wearing helmet during a special helmet drive, in Ahmedabad



Female voters wait in a queue to cast their votes for the municipal elections at a polling station at Jagdalpur in Bastar district



Students check the examination centre details before appearing for their first paper of the Class 10 board exams conducted by the Jharkhand Academic Council (JAC), in Ranchi



A visitor experiences VR shooting at India pavilion during the second day of Aero India 2025, at Yelahanka Airbase, in Bengaluru

# Mann dismisses AAP dissent rumours, calls defection Cong culture

PTI, NEW DELHI: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Tuesday dismissed speculation of dissent within AAP's state unit, asserting that Congress leaders have a history of switching parties while AAP leaders remain dedicated.

Mann's remarks came after Punjab Congress leader Partap Singh Bajwa claimed that over 30 AAP MLAs were in touch with his party.

"Switching sides is Congress' culture," Mann said while addressing media after attending a meeting of Punjab ministers and MLAs with AAP national convenor Arvind Kejriwal at Kapurthala House in New Delhi.

"They (Congress) talk about others but do not worry about themselves. I will ask Pratap Singh Bajwa how many MLAs they have in Delhi," the Punjab CM charged.

"Bajwa has made such claims for years, let him say it... He should not count our MLAs and instead, see how many MLAs Congress has in Delhi," he said. The meeting comes days after AAP's major defeat in the Delhi As-

**They (Congress) talk about others but do not worry about themselves. I will ask Pratap Singh Bajwa how many MLAs they have in Delhi — Bhagwant Mann**  
Punjab Chief Minister



sembly elections, sparking speculation about instability in its Punjab unit.

Mann reiterated the unity within AAP, saying, "He (Bajwa) has made such claims earlier as well that 20 or 40 MLAs are in touch with him. Let them say it... We have formed this party with our sweat and blood, by going among people in the villages and towns in the state."

Meanwhile, AAP's Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal took a dig at Kejriwal and said, "Some people have started treating Punjab as their personal ATM. Today, massive corruption is rampant in Punjab."

"There is blatant sand mining at different places, corruption is there in transfer postings. People of Punjab and several MLAs are angry on this. Arvind Kejriwal has appointed his goon Bib-

hav Kumar as the chief advisor of Punjab CM," she said. Ever since Kejriwal faced defeat in Delhi, he is planning to go to Punjab to "keep his politics alive", Maliwal charged. Highlighting his government's achievements, Mann said, "Our party's national convenor Arvind Kejriwal has wholeheartedly thanked everyone for the tireless hard work done by the MLAs of Punjab in campaigning in the Delhi elections."

"We are still getting love from people of Delhi because of the work we have done. We will continue to work for public welfare in the future as well," the AAP leader said.

Speaking about public safety in the state, the Punjab CM said, "The law and order situation in Punjab is better than most states."

If it were not so, then why would industries come here, he asked, adding, "Being a border state, we have to make more efforts which we are doing."

"We have done work beyond our guarantees... closed 17 toll plazas; now people save Rs 62 lakh every day. We have also stopped multiple pensions for MLAs. We did not give all these guarantees, but we have fulfilled them," he said.

Speaking about governance improvements, Mann added, "We are implementing the Delhi model in Punjab as well. Like Mohalla clinics, Aam Aadmi clinics are being built there... We will make Punjab a model state and present it to the entire country."

Punjab has contributed to the development of the country in the past and will continue to do so in the future, he said.

Talking about AAP's poll promise of giving Rs 1,000 financial assistance to women, Mann said, "It will be provided in the coming days. It's public money, and we are spending it on them only."

## NEET aspirant found hanging in Kota

PTI, KOTA: An 18-year-old NEET aspirant from Swai Madhopur district hanged himself in his PG room early Tuesday, police said.

The youth, Ankush Meena, did not leave behind any message. Police, however, surmised he killed himself over a love affair.

According to police, Ankush had been preparing for (NEET-UG) in Kota for over one and a half years and living in a PG room in Pratap Nagar.

He was found hanging from a ceiling fan Tuesday morning by a cousin of his who lives in the same neighbourhood, Circle Inspector at Dadabari police Station Menge Lal Yadav said.

His body was sent for a postmortem, and the matter is under investigation, with a case lodged under section 194 of BNS Act, he said.

Head Constable Jitendra said a police team was rushed to the PG in Pratap Nagar after a call about suicide.

Ankush scored around 480 marks in routine tests at his institute and showed no signs of stress over study, an uncle of his told reporters here outside the mortuary.

## BJP delegation meets Guv, MLAs leave CM choice to leadership

PTI, IMPHAL: A BJP delegation on Tuesday called on Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla at the Raj Bhavan here amid a leadership crisis following the resignation of N Biren Singh as the chief minister of the ethnic violence-hit state two days ago.

### MANIPUR POLITICAL CRISIS

The meeting with the governor lasted for around half an hour, but its outcome is not yet known, sources said. BJP Northeast in-charge Sambit Patra and state party president A Sharda Devi called on Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla at the Raj Bhavan here.

Meanwhile, experts have warned that with no one staking claim to form the

### GOVT ASKS PEOPLE TO STAY CALM, NOT TO FALL PREY TO MISINFORMATION

PTI, IMPHAL: The Manipur government on Tuesday urged people to stay calm and not to fall prey to unverified news, rumours or misinformation that may cause unnecessary panic or disrupt peace and harmony in the state. The appeal was made amid a leadership crisis following the resignation of N Biren Singh from the post of chief minister on February 9. "It has also come to the notice of the government that certain unscrupulous individuals and groups may deliberately attempt to incite unrest, disrupt harmony and spread fear among the public using false information, inflammatory content or fabricated narratives," a statement issued by Chief Secretary P K Singh said.

government so far, the BJP-ruled Manipur may head towards a constitutional crisis.

If the situation remains so, the state is likely to be under President's rule, they said.

Senior Supreme Court Advocate Arunabh Chowdhury

told PTI: "In Manipur, the assembly is a live one...It is not under suspended animation or President's Rule. It is mandatory to hold assembly sessions as per the Supreme Court order. Obviously, it will lead to a big constitutional crisis."

## ED arrests former MP transport dept constable, 2 linked persons in PMLA probe

PTI, NEW DELHI: The Enforcement Directorate on Tuesday said it has arrested a former Madhya Pradesh transport department constable and two others "linked" to him in an alleged disproportionate assets linked money laundering case.

The ex-official Saurabh Sharma, Chetan Singh Gaur and Sharad Jaiswal were

taken into custody under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) on Monday, the federal agency said in a statement.

The three were earlier arrested by the state police Lokayukta and the ED took their custody after moving a plea in the court seeking their remand from judicial custody of the former agency.

Sharma was appointed in Madhya Pradesh State Transport department as a constable in 2015, on compassionate grounds. He "acquired huge" assets disproportionate to known sources of income after getting post of constable in RTO (regional transport office) department of the MP government, the ED alleged.

## DIVINE VOYAGE



Devotees during the 'Theppa Thiruvizha' (float festival), in Madurai, Tamil Nadu

## Be meticulous, don't fell trees unnecessarily: SC to public authorities

PTI, NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Tuesday said it was everyone's constitutional duty to protect trees and public authorities should be meticulous and not seek more trees to be felled than necessary.

A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan made the observation while hearing a plea filed by National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) seeking the permission to cut over 800 trees in the Taj Trapezium Zone for the development of a six-lane, access-controlled highway between Agra and Gwalior.

It was yet another instance where the court no-

ticed the public authorities seeking to fell a large number of trees though it wasn't required.

"Practically in case of every application made in TTZ and in Delhi, we have noticed this tendency. It is the constitutional duty of all public authorities to save and protect as many trees as possible. Therefore, when applications are made seeking felling of trees, the authorities have to be meticulous and they should not apply for felling more trees than necessary," it added.

The top court said the NHAI had sought permission for felling 850 trees, however, only 650 were re-

quired to be cut for the construction of the highway.

It noted the report filed by the centrally-empowered committee (CEC) and said it had recommended certain conditions including compensatory plantation of 9,000 trees at the cost of NHAI.

In a large number of cases before compensatory afforestation was done, the court said, the permission to fell trees was granted and the order for compensatory afforestation was not implemented in true letter and spirit.

The NHAI was directed by the bench to first comply with the condition of com-

pensatory afforestation and asked the CEC to examine the compliance.

The committee would submit a compliance report and only then the permission would be granted, it said.

The NHAI plea submitted that the proposed highway would improve connectivity between Gwalior and Agra via Dholpur and Morena.

It said the greenfield highway would improve road safety along the existing link between Agra and Gwalior National Highway-44 and help save travel time, fuel and transportation costs.

## voice of business

# GDP growth witnessing speedy rebound, says Sitharaman

Says India to remain fastest growing economy, albeit on a lower base compared to leading global economies

PTI, NEW DELHI: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday said that the Indian economy is seeing a "speedy rebound" from 5.4% growth clocked in the second quarter of the current fiscal, and the government shall take measures to ensure that India remains the world's fastest-growing economy.

Replying to discussions on the Union Budget for 2025-26 in the Lok Sabha, the finance minister said the Budget has taken various steps to increase liquidity in the hands of people while maintaining fiscal prudence by using 99% of the borrowing in FY'26 to fund capital expenditure.

She also said that inflation management receives the highest priority of this government with retail inflation within the tolerance band of 2-6%. Inflation trend, particularly in food, appears to be moderating, she added.

Speaking about GDP growth, Sitharaman said in the three years prior to 2024-

25, the country's GDP growth rate averaged about 8%.

The Indian economy is projected to grow at 6.4% in the current fiscal - the lowest pace in four years. The Finance Ministry's Economic Survey has projected growth in next fiscal FY'26 to be between 6.3-6.8%.

Sitharaman said only in two out of 12 quarters, India's growth rate touched 5.4 or remained below it. The GDP growth in the second quarter (July-September) slowed to 7-quarter low of 5.4%.

"... on account of strong economic foundation, a speedy rebound is happening, and we shall take measures which will going forward, help in keeping our economy growing fastest as in the last few years. We will continue to remain the fastest-growing economy," the minister said.

Sitharaman said the private final consumption expenditure is expected to grow by 7.3% in the current fiscal driven by a good rural demand.

The private final con-



Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman speaks in the Lok Sabha during the Budget session of Parliament, in New Delhi, on Tuesday

sumption expenditure is estimated to be 61.8% of the nominal GDP, which is the highest since 2002-03, she added.

Sitharaman said the effective capital expenditure in FY'26 is Rs 15.48 lakh crore, which is 4.3% of GDP.

The Government is targeting a fiscal deficit of Rs 15.68 lakh crore, which is 4.4% of the GDP in FY'26. Fiscal deficit is the differ-

ence between Government revenue and expenditure and the gap is met by market borrowings.

"... the government is using almost the entire borrowed resources for financing effective capital expenditure. So the borrowings are not going for revenue expenditure or committed expenditure, or any of those kinds. It's going only for creating capital assets.

"So, in effect, the government intends to use about 99% of borrowed resources to finance effective capital expenditure in the upcoming year," she said in the Lok Sabha.

Sitharaman said the Budget has come in a time of immense uncertainties, changes in the global macro-economic environment, stagnating global growth and sticky inflation.

The world's scenario in the last 10 years turned 180 degrees, and making Budget is more challenging now than ever before, she said, adding Budget balances national development necessities with fiscal priorities.

On the weakening of rupee against the US dollar, the minister said various global and domestic factors are influencing the value of rupee against the US dollar.

The Indian rupee has depreciated 3.3% against the US dollar between October 2024 and January 2025, but the decline has been lower than that in some of its Asian peers.

## Net direct tax kitty swells 15% till Feb 10

PTI, NEW DELHI: Net direct tax collection grew 14.69% to over Rs 17.78 lakh crore so far this fiscal, government data showed on Tuesday.

As per the data released by the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT), mop up from net non-corporate taxes, which include mainly personal income tax, grew 21% year-on-year to about Rs 9.48 lakh crore.

Net corporate tax collection rose more than 6% to over Rs 7.78 lakh crore between April 1, 2024, and February 10, 2025.

Net collections from securities transaction tax (STT) jumped 65% to Rs 49,201 crore so far this fiscal.

Refunds worth more than Rs 4.10 lakh crore were issued during the period, a 42.63% increase against the year-ago period.

Gross direct tax mop up till February 10 grew 19.06% to more than Rs 21.88 lakh crore.

In the revised estimates (RE) for the current fiscal, the government has pegged income tax collections at Rs 12.57 lakh crore, up from the budget estimate of Rs 11.87 lakh crore.

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