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## PERSPECTIVE

Among the large economies of the world, India is the fastest-growing economy, and the Indian economy is expected to grow by 7 to 7.2 percent in the next financial year. ~ Anurag Thakur, MP

## Air Marshal Devendra P Hirani takes over as Senior Air Staff Officer at Eastern Air Command

**GUWAHATI**  
Air Marshal Devendra P Hirani on Sunday assumed charge as the Senior Air Staff Officer (SASO) at the Headquarters of Eastern Air Command, marking a key leadership transition in one of the Indian Air Force's most strategically significant commands.

Commissioned into the Indian Air Force on December 15, 1990, Air Marshal Hirani brings more than three decades of operational, command and staff experience, having served across varied terrains and strategic environments. A qualified flying instructor, he has logged close to 5,000 hours of flying on a wide range of helicopters and trainer aircraft. An alumnus of the National Defence Academy, he has also undergone advanced professional military education at the Defence Services Staff College, the College of Defence Management and the National Defence College in Dhaka, Bangladesh. During his career, Air Marshal Hirani has commanded a training unit and key frontline air bases in the Northern Sector. He has also held critical staff appointments at Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff, Air Headquarters, various Command Headquarters and Headquarters AOC (Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh). His tenure as a DASI Inspector further contributed to operational safety and standardisation within the force. His international exposure includes service with the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, reflecting his experience in multinational military operations. Prior to assuming charge as SASO, Air Marshal Hirani served as Assistant Chief of the Air Staff (Personnel, Airman and Civilians), where he was involved in shaping personnel policies and human resource management in the Indian Air Force.

### WHO SAID WHAT



**Thanks, Udit Narayan ji, for filling Anini with timeless songs.**  
~ Pema Khandu, CM, Arunachal Pradesh

## Made-in-Assam robots, MRI: CM Sarma charts tech-driven healthcare future

**GUWAHATI**

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday unveiled an ambitious road-map to transform Assam's healthcare sector, using the Bhumi Pujan ceremony of the new Gauhati Medical College and Hospital (GMCH) building to outline the state's vision for a technology-driven medical ecosystem.

Addressing doctors, students, and faculty, Sarma said GMCH will be completely overhauled to emerge as a state-of-the-art facility with 3,000 beds, super-specialty services, and advanced medical care. "In the coming years, the old buildings at Narakasur Pahar may be the only reminder of the past," he said, stressing that the transformation is part of a larger push to align Assam with the Centre's AI and digital infrastructure thrust highlighted in the Union Budget 2026-27.

The Chief Minister emphasised that medical technology and indigenous innovation will be key drivers of the state's healthcare transformation. He announced prototypes of indigenous developed robotic surgical systems, which deliver global-grade performance



at nearly one-fifth the cost of imported equipment. "These are made in India, made in Assam," he said, highlighting the potential to make advanced technology more accessible for public hospitals.

In addition, Sarma showcased a locally developed MRI machine, costing around Rs 1.5 crore compared with imported systems priced at nearly Rs 16 crore. He stressed that such innovations

could save foreign exchange, reduce dependency, and promote local manufacturing. To build a robust med-tech ecosystem, the state government has partnered with IIT Guwahati, which is collaborating with AIIMS to drive healthcare innovation. Sarma said GMCH and other medical colleges in Jorhat, Silchar, and Dibrugarh, supported by JICA, will

financial burden on employees. He noted that had over 9,000 transfer orders been processed manually, an equal number of physical files would have been created, with employees spending at least Rs 10,000 each, amounting to nearly Rs 9 crore. "All of this has been resolved through computer technology," he said. Recalling the origins of the policy, Sarma said he first introduced the concept of mutual transfers during his tenure as Education Minister under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, where a single appointing authority made the process effective. The Chief Minister said another round of mutual transfers would be completed before March 31, allowing employees to contribute from the beginning of the next financial year. He added that the current round would be time-bound, largely restricted to 15 days, with efforts to complete it by March 7.

Sarma clarified that employees who have already benefited from the portal once would not be eligible to apply again, while those who had applied earlier but were unsuccessful would be given higher

priority. "In the next three years, my target is to remove transfer files from Assam altogether. After two years, we will issue a notification allowing no manual transfers except in extreme medical emergencies," he said. Swagat Satirtha 2.0 builds on the success of Swagat Satirtha 1.0, under which 4,502 applications were approved, facilitating mutual transfers of 9,004 employees across 32 state government departments.

The Chief Minister also announced plans to introduce a new scheme enabling government employees to avail advance salary in times of need, recoverable either in instalments or as a lump sum. He cited a similar system implemented in Rajasthan, where transactions worth nearly Rs 300 crore have taken place.

On the possibility of elections and the Model Code of Conduct coming into force, Sarma said the government would seek exemption from the Election Commission of India to continue the process.

"This system has nothing to do with politics. It is transparent. If permission is

not granted, we will complete all preparations and carry it out after the elections," he said.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday announced a new financial relief measure for state government employees, allowing them to access their salary in advance on a need-based basis. The announcement was made at Lok Sewa Bhawan, Dispur, during the launch of the Swagat Satirtha Portal 2.0. Under the scheme, employees can draw an advance on their salary, which can be repaid either in a single instalment or in monthly instalments within a year. The advance will attract minimal interest, with lower rates for repayment immediately after the regular salary credit, while instalment-based repayments will carry slightly higher interest.

"The initiative is designed to provide timely financial support to employees during emergencies, reducing their dependence on external borrowing," Sarma said. Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Minister also reiterated his commit-

ment to streamlining employee transfers through the Swagat Satirtha portal. He noted that the portal will be opened twice a year, with another round of transfers scheduled for completion before March 31, 2026. Employees who have already benefited from the portal-around 9,000 staff members-will not be eligible to apply again, but those who missed earlier opportunities can submit requests for transfers to preferred locations.

Sarma said the previous edition of the portal ran from January 1, 2025, to June 7, 2025, and the current exercise aims to be completed by March 7, 2026. The Chief Minister confirmed that the Election Commission would be informed, emphasizing that the transfers are purely administrative. Employees have been asked to complete their applications within 15 days to ensure smooth processing.

"These two initiatives-advance salary provision and streamlined transfers-underscore the Assam government's focus on employee welfare and administrative efficiency," Sarma added.

## Budget 2026-27: Ex-CM Biren Singh sees startup boost for Northeast; Manipur Congress says crisis ignored



**IMPHAL**

Former Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh said the reforms announced in the Union Budget 2026-27 would open up new opportunities for startups, IT-enabled services and skilled youth in the Northeast, while the state Congress accused the Centre of remaining silent on Manipur's prolonged humanitarian and security crisis.

Reacting to the Budget presented earlier in the day, Singh said it had delivered a significant push to India's information technology sector under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

In a post on X, the former chief minister said the "progressive reforms" outlined in the Budget would generate fresh avenues for innovation-led growth, particularly benefiting startups, IT-enabled services and the region's skilled workforce. "This Budget reinforces India's journey towards an innovation-driven digital economy," he said.

Singh also welcomed the Budget's focus on diversifying agricultural output through high-value

farming, stating that the measures would help strengthen farmer incomes and improve rural livelihoods.

The Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee, however, struck a sharply critical note. Party president Keisham Meghachandra alleged that the Budget had failed to address the state's continuing crisis.

"Budget 2026 is out, but for Manipur the silence from Delhi is deafening," Meghachandra said in a post on X, referring to years of violence, displacement and instability in the state. He claimed that thousands of families remain unable to return home and that the Centre had offered little in terms of concrete relief. Meghachandra also pointed out that the Budget did not include a proposed "Peace and Reconciliation Fund" for Manipur and questioned the relevance of infrastructure announcements in the absence of security. "Announcing Rs 12,000 crore for roads means nothing when citizens are too afraid to travel on them. Concrete cannot replace security. Highways cannot substitute healing," he said, adding that the state needed justice, priority attention and a clear roadmap to peace.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday presented the Union Budget for the 2026-27 fiscal, announcing a series of measures aimed at accelerating infrastructure development nationwide, including in tier-2 and tier-3 cities, even as political reactions to its regional impact continue to pour in.

## Union Budget 2026-27 sets aside Rs 500 crore for ULFA rehabilitation

**GUWAHATI**

The Union Budget 2026-27 has earmarked Rs 500 crore as a special package for the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) groups, with the funds primarily aimed at the rehabilitation of surrendered cadres and their reintegration into the mainstream. According to Budget documents presented in Parliament, the allocation has been made under the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER).

The funding follows the Memorandum of Settlement signed on December 29, 2023, between the Centre, the Assam government and the pro-talks faction of ULFA led by Arabinda Rajkhowa. The agreement was signed in the presence of Union Home Minister Amit Shah and marked a key milestone in efforts to resolve Assam's long-running insurgency through dialogue, rehabilitation and economic support. The peace accord places emphasis on the social and economic rehabilitation of former militants, alongside measures aimed at ensuring long-term stability and development in insurgency-affected areas.

Overall, the DoNER Ministry has been allocated Rs 6,812.3 crore in the Budget for 2026-27, a significant increase from the revised estimate of Rs 4,479.2 crore in the previous financial year. Major components of the allocation include Rs 2,500 crore for the North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme, Rs 2,300 crore for the Prime Minister's Development Initiative for North East Region (PM-DevINE), and Rs 825 crore for various schemes under the North Eastern Council.

## Shortage of Rs 50, Rs 100 stamp papers cripples legal, property transactions in Manipur



**IMPHAL**

Manipur is facing an acute shortage of non-judicial stamp papers, particularly in the Rs 50 and Rs 100 denominations, severely disrupting legal, property and administrative transactions across the state since January 2026.

The scarcity has delayed a wide range of routine processes, including the execution of rent agreements, property registrations, affidavits and documentation required for scholarships and other official purposes. Lawyers, students and ordinary citizens alike have reported difficulties in completing even basic paperwork due to the unavailability of stamp papers at authorised outlets.

As the shortage has worsened, a black market has emerged, with non-judicial stamp papers being sold outside court premises at exorbitant prices. Stamp papers with a face value of Rs 50 and Rs 100 are reportedly being sold for as much as Rs 500 and Rs 1,000, placing a heavy financial burden

on those in urgent need of documentation.

Sources alleged that some stamp vendors are deliberately creating artificial scarcity, either by hoarding supplies or diverting them for illegal resale. Others have pointed to irregular supply from the Treasury Office as a contributing factor, further complicating access for the general public.

The impact of the shortage extends beyond legal professionals and property buyers. Students applying for scholarships, individuals requiring affidavits and families seeking to formalise rental agreements have been among the worst affected, with many forced to delay essential processes or pay several times the official value to obtain stamp papers.

In response, the Manipur Bar Association (MBA), in coordination with Manipur Police, has stepped up action against unauthorised sale of stamp papers. Officials said crackdowns have been launched to curb black marketing and ensure that stamp papers are made available through legitimate channels.

The ongoing crisis has once again highlighted systemic issues in the distribution and regulation of non-judicial stamp papers in Manipur. While enforcement measures are underway, residents continue to face significant hurdles in carrying out essential legal and administrative transactions until normal supply is restored.

## Union Budget 2026 includes Assam, five other Northeast states in Buddhist circuit tourism scheme

**GUWAHATI**

The Union Budget 2026 has announced a comprehensive development programme for Buddhist sites across six northeastern states, including Assam, aimed at promoting religious tourism and preserving the region's rich Buddhist heritage.

Officials on February 1 confirmed that the proposed Buddhist circuit scheme will cover Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura, regions where Theravada and Mahayana-Vajrayana Buddhist traditions have coexisted for centuries.

The initiative is intended to focus on the conservation of ancient temples and monasteries, while simultaneously improving infrastructure for pilgrims and tourists. Planned interventions include the setting up of interpretation centres at key pilgrimage sites,

improved road and transport connectivity to remote locations, and the upgradation of basic amenities such as accommodation and visitor facilities.

Authorities said the Northeast occupies a unique place in the Buddhist world as a confluence of diverse traditions, and the proposed circuits are designed to safeguard this cultural legacy while making the sites more accessible to devotees, scholars and tourists.

The scheme forms part of the Centre's broader push to strengthen religious and cultural tourism infrastructure in the Northeast, where Buddhist heritage sites have historically received less attention compared to similar circuits in other regions of the country. Details regarding the budgetary outlay and implementation timeline for the Buddhist circuit scheme are yet to be announced.



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## BUDGET NO BIG BANG HERE

**T**he producers of castor oil cake must be pleased. No. It is not the kind which might help futures and options players. Units located in special economic zones—which produce castor cakes from indigenous seeds on indigenous machinery—are exempted from customs duty if the output is used in the domestic market. The exemption enables the viability of export units and expands the availability of fertilisers in the domestic market for producers. Budget 2026 is defined by a plethora of such surgical steps.

Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman's ninth essay has landed between hype and hope. The budget has quelled the chorus of hype, the serenade of brass band balladeers calling for a 1991 moment. It has also cheered off stock market punters who hoped for booster shots, and the hike in security transaction tax has worsened the business model of the get-poor-quickly motley crowd of futures and options traders.

The fact is that the government, in 2025, created the impulse for consumption demand—the recast of the income tax in February, followed by the recalibration of GST rates in October. The question in the run-up to the budget was how the government would address the persistent slide of the rupee vis-a-vis the dollar, how it could stop the sell-off by foreign portfolio investors and the tepid state of foreign direct investment.

Nothing clarifies strategy like a crisis, and given the history of crisis-led transformation, the expectation was for big-bang steps. Budget 2026 has chosen to play it safe, eschewing the let's-do-something itch that afflicts governments. It has stuck to its tested thesis and a fiscally prudent path. The budget aims to limit the gap between government income and expenditure to 4.3 percent of GDP, implying gross government borrowing of around ₹17 lakh crore. The government will spend over ₹3,800 crore every day or ₹160 crore every hour on interest payments.

The basic approach of the government over the past five years—in the face of reluctant private investment—has been to maintain momentum of growth by topping up the spend on physical infrastructure—the allocation for the year has been upped from ₹11.2 lakh crore to ₹12.2 lakh crore and allocation for defence modernisation has been ramped up to around ₹2.5 lakh crore. Seven new high-speed rail corridors—allocations and timelines for which are yet to be revealed—could enable connectivity and boost growth. There is also a not-so-clear idea of city clusters as economic regions with an allocation of ₹5,000 crore for five years. The question is: Can the government avoid what happened to the smart city programme?

The budget reflects an attempt to backstop economic growth and investment with interventions. Fish caught by an Indian vessel in the exclusive economic zone on the high seas, when landed in a foreign port, will be treated as an export. The time period for exporting the final product has been extended from the existing six months to one year for exporters of leather or textile garments. The entire value of biogas used in blended CNG is exempt from excise. Limits for duty-free imports of specified inputs used for processing seafood for export are hiked. Basic customs duty on specified parts used in making microwave ovens is being exempted to deepen value addition.

It has chosen to address the cogs of growth by unveiling a glut of schemes—each targeting an arthroposcopic approach, dealing with the specificity of a nudge rather than mega-ton propulsion. It has sought to tap into the gold rush of data centres by offering a tax holiday until 2047 to any foreign company that provides cloud services to global customers using data centres in India. It creates a new fund of ₹10,000 crore for five years to boost biopharma manufacturing.

Given the global race for rare earths, the budget proposes to support the mineral-rich states of Odisha, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu in establishing dedicated rare earth corridors to promote mining, processing, research and manufacturing. To promote the manufacture of chemicals, the budget moots supporting states in establishing three dedicated chemical parks via a plug-and-play model. The outlay for electronics component manufacturing increased to ₹40,000 crore and ₹10,000 crore for container manufacturing.

It is not that the schemes do not merit attention. The scheme for promoting India as a hub for assistive devices for the ageing and the ailing has potential across advanced economies if it passes the quality test. A scheme to promote adoption of carbon capture utilisation and storage—important following the India-EU trade deal and for the sustainability story—has an outlay of ₹20,000 crore. There is a scheme for textile parks to promote sports goods exports, and an institute to take khadi global.

With nearly half the workforce dependent on agriculture, the government is challenged in delivering on the promise of boosting farm incomes. The idea of AI-enabled Agri Stack portals for improving farm productivity is promising. That said, the track record of ideas translating into outcomes is rather poor—the fate of the urban challenge fund and the research and development fund is yet unknown. Last budget, a mission for manufacturing was announced. This year, too, there are new committees—one for banking in Viksit Bharat, one called education to employment and enterprise and income disclosure standards.

On the face of it, the budget does not address the issue of rupee depreciation, foreign institutional investor outflows and reluctant private capital formation. The global uncertainties and the discontents do not find explicit mention, but the angst is palpable. Indeed the expectation is that on Monday, when the world markets open, there could be a further slide in the indices and the rupee and a shakeout in gold and silver prices.

The problem with Budget 2026 is not that it lacks ideas and interventions. The problem is they are lost in the fog of minutiae. Redemption could be through an FAQ and/or town halls. More critically, the government could present an action-taken report at the half-year mark to assuage folks at home and investors in India from other geographies. The government may also consider updating the many funds launched in the past five years—let's call it the 'shagun report', since these are all interventions—and a report on the report by the many committees and commissions.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

“Try not to become a man of success but rather to become a man of value.” - Albert Einstein

# INTERPRETING UNION BUDGET 2026-27: NEEDONOMICS THINK TANK INSIGHTS



PROF. MADAN MOHAN GOEL, PROPOUNDER NEEDONOMICS & FORMER VICE-CHANCELLOR (THRICE)

The Union Budget 2026-27, presented by the Finance Minister (FM) Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman, with a budget size of ₹53,47,315 crore, including ₹41,25,494 crore as revenue expenditure and ₹12,21,821 crore as capital expenditure, marks a significant milestone in India's journey towards becoming a Viksit Bharat by 2047. Presented on the auspicious occasion of Magha Purnima and the birth anniversary of Guru Ravidas, the Budget symbolically reinforces the Needonomics philosophy of “growth with goodness.”

The Finance Minister's 62-page speech, structured across 177 headings, reflects ambition, continuity, and reformist intent. Highlighting that over 350 structural reforms have already been undertaken, she reaffirmed that the “Reforms Express” will continue with confidence, balancing economic momentum with social inclusion. The Budget is anchored in three Kartavya (duties):

Accelerating and sustaining economic growth,

Fulfilling the aspirations of people while building national capacity, and

Ensuring equitable access to resources for every family, community, and region.

The budget's emphasis on investment, innovation and inclusion (3I) forms a necessary tripod for sustaining India's growth momentum and aligns well with the Needonomics mandate of need-based, efficiency-oriented development rather than growth for its own sake with cautious optimism.

Growth Strategy and Manufacturing Push

Under the first Kartavya, the Budget emphasizes scaling up manufacturing across seven strategic and frontier sectors, supported by continuous, adaptive, and forward-looking reforms. The Finance Minister underlined that cutting-edge technologies—particularly Artificial Intelligence (AI)—can act as powerful growth multipliers, while reaffirming India's commitment to deep integration with global markets.

A notable positive is the composition of expenditure growth. Capital expenditure in 2026-27 is projected to grow by 11.5% over the revised estimates of 2025-26, compared to a 6.6% increase in revenue expenditure. This signifies an infrastructure-led development strategy, consistent with sound macroeconomic principles, wherein capital expenditure growth should outpace revenue expenditure to strengthen productive capacity.

The growth strategy is not without stress points as cooperative federalism appears strained as states are entrusted with critical respon-

sibilities—healthcare delivery, education reform and climate resilience without a commensurate expansion in fiscal autonomy or predictable revenue streams. This imbalance risks weakening the foundation of inclusive growth, since states are primary agents of last-mile governance.

Key Announcements Welcomed by the Needonomics Think Tank

From a Needonomics perspective, several proposals—especially in education, skills, technology, and services—are commendable.

Artificial Intelligence received unprecedented emphasis, with eleven explicit references in the Budget speech. AI is envisioned as a force multiplier for governance, service delivery, and economic inclusion. Key initiatives include Bharat-VISTAAR, a multilingual AI platform promoting linguistic inclusion; AI integration with AgriStack and ICAR packages for agriculture; AI-enabled healthcare solutions and assistive devices for Persons with Disabilities through ALIMCO; advanced imaging and non-intrusive scanning for customs and security; embedding AI in school curricula and teacher training; professional upskilling; and AI-driven employment matching platforms. The AI Mission and National Quantum Mission further reinforce India's long-term technological ambition.

Other notable initiatives include:

A High-Powered “Education to Employment and Enterprise” Standing Committee to strengthen the services sector, targeting a 10% global share by 2047.

Establishment of a new National Institute of Design in Eastern India, addressing the chronic shortage of trained designers.

Creation of five University Townships near major industrial and logistics corridors to integrate education, research, skills, and industry. Establishment of one girls' hostel in every district through VGF/capital support, promoting gender equity in higher education, particularly in STEM fields.

Development of four major telescope infrastructure facilities, including the National Large Solar Telescope and the Himalayan Chandra Telescope, to advance astrophysics and astronomy.

Additionally, initiatives such as upskilling 20,000 tourist guides in major tourism hubs and exemption on motor accident compensation payments are welcome steps toward employment generation and ease of living, though the neglect of tourism development in Kurukshetra remains a notable omission.

Needonomics Concerns: Fiscal Prudence and Ethical Economics

Despite these positives, the Needonomics Think Tank raises serious concerns regarding fiscal sustainability. The fiscal deficit for

2026-27 is projected at 4.3% of GDP (₹16.96 lakh crore)—significantly above the 3% target mandated under the FRBM Act. Persistent deviation from this benchmark poses risks to long-term macroeconomic stability.

Equally troubling is the expenditure composition. Nearly 20% of every rupee spent goes toward interest payments, a non-productive expenditure that crowds out developmental priorities. Furthermore, borrowings and other liabilities constitute about 24% of government receipts, intensifying inter-generational fiscal stress.

On the revenue side, the Budget documents reveal that government receipts comprise 24% borrowings and liabilities, followed by income tax (21%), corporate tax (18%), and non-tax revenues including disinvestment (10%). It must be emphasized that only about 2.2% of India's population pays taxes. This responsible minority deserves recognition and equitable access to quality public services, if not direct concessions.

On the expenditure front, allocations include 20% for interest payments, 22% for states' share of taxes, 11% for defence, 17% for central sector schemes, and 8% for centrally sponsored schemes. Subsidies and pensions account for 6% and 2%, respectively, with the remaining 7% allocated to other expenditures.

Fiscal prudence, too, remains a delicate balancing act. While capital expenditure continues to drive investment-led growth, revenue mobilization has not kept pace with rising developmental commitments.

The “play-it-safe” approach prioritizing stability but its resilience will be tested as India seeks to transition from a large domestic-market economy to a globally competitive industrial and innovation hub.

Towards a Gita-inspired Needonomics Framework

For realizing Needo-Happiness and Needo-Health for the masses—not merely the classes—there is an urgent need to adopt a Gita-inspired Needonomics approach, treating economics as “economic yog.” This framework emphasizes ethical restraint, balance, and well-being over unbridled material expansion.

India's growth challenge is not merely fiscal but behavioral and cultural. A healthy economy growing at 7% requires transforming citizens from careless and careless to careful, and from useless and used-less to useful—making them active stakeholders in nation-building. This demands mindful consumption (needo-consumption) and a cultural shift toward needo-saving, especially as India's domestic savings rate continues to lag behind China's by nearly 10%.

For agriculture, a “rainbow revolution”—focused on productivi-

ty, agro-processing, and agro-exports—must be jointly pursued by the Centre and States. Reducing the compliance burden requires adherence to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's principles of public expenditure: faithfulness, wisdom, and economy in execution.

Resolving the Consumption-Investment Paradox

One of the most critical challenges on India's path to Viksit

### DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

**Statement by the Official Spokesperson to clarify certain reports: We have seen reports of an email message from the so-called Epstein files that has a reference to the Prime Minister and his visit to Israel. Beyond the fact of the Prime Minister's official visit to Israel in July 2017, the rest of the allusions in the email are little more than trashy ruminations by a convicted criminal, which deserve to be dismissed with the utmost contempt.**



Bharat is the Consumption-Investment Paradox. Growth cannot be sustained solely through supply-side investments without strengthening demand-side fundamentals. The Needonomics perspective asserts that consumption must align with genuine human needs, thereby creating inclusive demand and ensuring that investments translate into broad-based welfare rather than concentrated wealth.

### Conclusion

The Union Budget 2026-27 provides momentum, intent, and ambition for India's developmental journey. Its ultimate success, however, will depend on aligning growth with ethical governance, fiscal discipline, and human happiness—the core mandate of the Needonomics School of Thought. Addressing the Consumption-Investment Paradox through need-based consumption, ethical savings, and inclusive investment will be crucial for realizing a prosperous, resilient, and humane Viksit Bharat by 2047. Going forward, sustaining growth with goodness require calibrated courage—strengthening state finances, deepening revenue reforms, and ensuring innovation serves genuine societal needs.

## Union Budget 2026 balances India's global aspirations and development, says Assam CM Sarma

GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday said that the Union Budget 2026-27 strikes a fine balance between India's aspirations and development.

Taking it to X, the Chief Minister stated, "Compliments to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for presenting the Viksit Bharat Budget 2026, which strikes a fine balance between India's global aspirations and grassroots development. Assam and the Eastern region stand to benefit meaningfully from this reform-oriented Budget."

Furthermore, he underlined that the acceptance of the 16th Finance Commission recommendations is expected to enhance Assam's share in tax devolution to 3.25% from 3.12%, providing greater fiscal space for development. Overall, transfers to our state are set to increase substantially through this budget.

Speaking on the employment oppor-



He said that the budget strongly focuses on the data centres, rare earths, and futuristic industry sectors.

"The Budget places a strong thrust on futuristic industries like semicon-

ductors, electronics manufacturing, data centres, chemical parks, and rare earths, creating new employment opportunities for the youth," he wrote on X.

Sarma stated that the Selh-Help Marts will further strengthen Assam's efforts towards building a robust ecosystem of Lakhpati Didis under Mukhyamantri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyaan (MMUA).

The emphasis on skilling aligns well with Assam's vision to emerge as a trusted hub for skilled professionals in health-care, AI, and allied sectors, he wrote.

The Chief Minister said that the targeted support for fisheries, commercial farming, and Amrit Sarovars will benefit farmers and cooperatives alike. Speaking on the infrastructure developments, he wrote on X, "New tourism circuits in the North East, along with investments in infrastructure and public transport in Tier-3 and Tier-4 towns, will accelerate Assam's urbanisation and connectivity."

CM Sarma said that the focus on the Orange Economy creates a new avenue

for creative talent, with content creators emerging in the region.

"We also welcome the decision to upgrade the National Mental Health Institute at Tezpur, which will significantly strengthen specialised healthcare services in Assam," he wrote.

The Chief Minister emphasised that the budget provides Rs. 2 lakh crore under the Special Assistance to States, which will benefit infrastructure activities in Assam.

"This Budget provides Rs. 2 lakh crore under the Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment, which will accelerate infrastructure activities in Assam. It also includes a provision of Rs. 6,812 crore for the development of the North-East, underscoring the Modi Government's sustained focus on the region. The Budget's continued emphasis on fiscal discipline and price stability is equally commendable," he wrote on X.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented her ninth consecutive Union Budget to the Lok Sabha.

## Nagaland CM announces Rs 2 lakh ex-gratia for Kohima bus accident victims

DIMAPUR

Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio on Sunday announced an ex-gratia of Rs 2 lakh each for the families of the five persons who lost their lives in a bus accident in Kohima district on Saturday night. He also sanctioned Rs 50,000 each as financial assistance for those who sustained serious injuries.

Expressing deep sorrow over the tragedy, Rio conveyed his heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families and wished a speedy recovery to the injured.

According to a release issued by the Kohima police PRO, the accident occurred at 10th Mile Road under Chiephobozou police station when a private bus carrying 32 members of the Chumoukedima Ao Baptist Church overturned while returning from a revival programme in Mokochung.

Five passengers—all women—were declared dead at the spot. Their bodies were later retrieved and handed over to the fam-

ilies after completion of legal formalities.

The injured passengers were immediately shifted to the Christian Institute of Health Sciences and Research (CIHSR), Dimapur, where they are undergoing treatment. Police said most of the injuries were minor. A joint team of the Kohima district administration, Chiephobozou police, and Kohima traffic police rushed to the accident site following information received around 8:20 pm and initiated rescue and relief operations.

Preliminary investigation has ruled out rash or drunken driving. Police suspect a mechanical failure may have caused the accident, and a detailed technical examination of the vehicle is underway.

The Kohima police also acknowledged the prompt assistance provided by volunteers of the Northern Angami Youth Organisation and Tsiesema village youth, whose efforts proved crucial during the rescue operations.

Further investigation into the exact cause of the accident is ongoing.

## Congress-Raijor Dal tie-up a 'lollipop', says Himanta

GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday rubbished reports of an understanding between the Congress and Raijor Dal, calling it a short-term political "lollipop" stitched together to manage the fallout of an upcoming press conference scheduled for February 8 over the alleged Pakistan link of Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi.

Addressing a press conference on February 1, Sarma said the arrangement was not a genuine alliance but an "emergency set-up" devised by the Congress state leadership to blunt political damage anticipated from the disclosures expected later this month.

The chief minister alleged that Gaurav Gogoi has been reaching out to political leaders, journalists, newspaper proprietors and television channel heads to shore up support ahead of the February 8 press meet. According to Sarma, the outreach is aimed at ensuring that leaders such as Raijor Dal president Akhil Gogoi publicly defend the Congress MP once the allegations are made.

"The so-called alliance is nothing but a lollipop. If it were a real alliance, seat-sharing would have been announced by now," Sarma said, adding that the true nature of the Congress-Raijor Dal relationship would become evident after February 8.

In a pointed remark, Sarma said it remains to be seen "who will wear the hat" once the controversy unfolds - Gaurav Gogoi or Akhil Gogoi.

The chief minister further claimed that Assam's electoral politics has moved beyond such "theatrics" and asserted that the electorate has already made up its mind ahead of the Assembly elections.

Sarma's comments come amid heightened political speculation over a possible Congress-Raijor Dal understanding, with the BJP intensifying its attack on both parties and questioning the credibility and intent behind the reported tie-up.

## Tripura: Over 5 lakh cannabis plants worth Rs 75 cr destroyed in massive Anti-Narcotics operation

AGARTALA

In one of the biggest crackdowns on illegal cannabis cultivation in Tripura, security forces destroyed over five lakh ganja plants during a large-scale joint operation in the Dulung forest area under Sonamura subdivision of Sepahijala district.

Acting on confidential information, the operation was conducted from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm on February 1. During the raid, teams detected and destroyed 92 separate ganja cultivation plots covering approximately 170 acres of forest land. All plants were uprooted and destroyed on the spot. According to officials, the estimated market value of the destroyed contraband is around Rs 75 crore, making it one of the most significant seizures in the state in recent times. The Sonamura Police Station, the Sepahijala District Armed Police, multiple battalions of the Border Security Force and the Tripura State Rifles, along with the Sonamura Forest Division and other allied agencies, conducted the joint operation.

Senior officials said such coordi-

nated operations would continue to curb illegal cultivation and protect forest land from encroachment and misuse. Investigations are underway to identify those involved in the illegal plantation.

In another incident, security forces destroyed massive illegal cannabis (ganja) plantations spread across 65 acres of forest land in Tripura's Sonamura subdivision on January 29. Following credible intelligence, a joint team launched a nine-hour operation spanning the forest areas of Kamalanagar, Krishnadola, Dulung, and Bijoy Nagar. During the raids, personnel identified and razed 41 separate plots containing approximately 1.80 lakh mature plants.

Officials estimate the market value of the destroyed crop at roughly Rs 27 crore.

The joint operation was conducted by personnel from Sonamura Police Station, along with the 81 Battalion BSF, the 5th, 9th, 11th, and 14th Battalions TSR, the 14th Battalion Women TSR, the 35 Battalion Assam Rifles, and other sister security agencies.

## Arunachal CM unveils border infrastructure push at Anini, announces airport near Indo-China frontier

ITANAGAR

Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Sunday unveiled a multi-crore infrastructure push at Anini, the remote headquarters of Dibang Valley district close to the Indo-China border, announcing plans for a new airport and inaugurating a host of projects aimed at improving connectivity, boosting tourism and encouraging reverse migration.

In a rare move to emphasise decentralised governance, Khandu convened a full Cabinet meeting at Anini, followed by the inauguration and foundation-laying of key infrastructure projects worth thousands of crores. The initiatives form part of the state government's broader strategy to strengthen border areas through development, enhanced civic amenities and livelihood generation.

Among the projects inaugurat-



were a District Hospital, Circuit House, District Panchayat Resource Centre, Panchayat Guest House-cum-Idu Mishmi Heritage Museum, a Sky Walk and Roller Coaster, and a Tourism Complex at Acheso. The Chief Minister also announced upcoming projects, including a High-Altitude Medicinal Plant Research Centre, a High-Altitude Trout Hatchery and several strategic

OUR CORRESPONDENT

**JIRIGHAT:** With the 2026 Assembly Election in focus, the GP-wise "Vijay Sankalp Sabha" was formally launched on Sunday at Jirighat GP under the Lakhimpur Assembly constituency. The programme was marked by the inauguration and foundation-laying of several development projects.

Minister Kaushik Rai attended the event and highlighted the government's commitment to infrastructure, education, and community development in the area.

The inaugural project included the Jagannath Mahaprabhu Community Hall and Skill Centre at Jirighat Tea Garden, built at a cost of Rs 1.40 crore.

Several major projects were also laid with foundation stones. These included the Jirighat to Joypur road under Assam Mala 3.0 with an outlay of Rs 59.80 crore, and the road from Jirighat Pratap Baba Mandir to Ward No. 6 costing Rs 88 lakh.



Other projects included the construction of the Nandankanan Nachgar and Jirighat Nachgar, each at Rs 35 lakh, the Nandankanan Higher Primary School building at Rs 35 lakh, and three Durga Man-

## ZPM gov accuses former MNF regime of trying to sell Mizoram land to IAF, hints at CBI probe



AIZAWL

The Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) government on Saturday accused the previous Mizo National Front (MNF) administration of attempting to sell state land to the Indian Air Force (IAF), alleging that established legal procedures for leasing or acquisition were bypassed.

Revenue Minister B. Lalthanzova made the allegations while addressing a press conference at the Aizawl Press Club, saying the current government was prepared to recommend a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) inquiry if the opposition disputed the findings.

The controversy relates to land parcels at Lengpui and Siphir. Lalthanzova said a review of official correspondence between February 2019 and October 2021 indicated that the MNF-led government had pursued an "outright purchase" arrangement with the IAF.

According to the minister, the negotiations appeared to overlook protective legal frameworks such as the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation (BEFR) Act of 1873 and the Mizoram Land Revenue Act of 2013, which govern the use, partition and transfer of land in

the state.

"This government is processing the land strictly under the Acquisition Act," Lalthanzova said, contrasting the ZPM administration's approach with that of the previous regime. "Our aim is to ensure that land is leased or acquired through due legal process, not sold permanently."

The revenue minister named former chief minister Zoramthanga and former revenue minister Lalruatkima as among those allegedly involved in the process. He further claimed that official records suggest former Planning Board vice-chairman H. Rammawi had exerted pressure on the Aizawl deputy commissioner to expedite the land transfer. The allegations mark a sharp escalation in political tensions between the ruling ZPM and the opposition MNF. Lalthanzova challenged the opposition to clarify its stand, asserting that the government led by Chief Minister Lalthanzova has acted with "total integrity".

He said the ZPM government was ready to place all documents in the public domain and face any legal scrutiny, urging officials to reveal what he described as the "hidden facts" surrounding the negotiations.

# Malem Thongam launches signature campaign seeking free movement on national highways

IMPHAL

Transgender activist and social worker Malem Thongam on Sunday launched a mass signature campaign in Imphal to mobilise public support for a proposed Supreme Court petition seeking unrestricted movement on national highways connecting Manipur and redressal of alleged violence linked to ethnic tensions in the state.

The campaign was inaugurated at Khurai Lamlong in Imphal East district.

Addressing supporters, Thongam said the petition would seek legal action against the Committee on Tribal Unity (CoTU) for allegedly obstructing her "Cycling for Manipur Peace" rally during its passage through Kangpokpi and adjoining areas. CoTU is a civil society organisation representing the Kuki-Zo community and is active in the Sadar Hills region of Kangpokpi



district.

Thongam said the move followed inaction by the Manipur police on a complaint she lodged earlier this month with the Officer-in-Charge of Kangpokpi district police through Heingang

police station on January 2, 2026. In her complaint, she alleged that CoTU members had issued threats to her life and sought registration of an FIR.

Recalling earlier developments, Thongam said CoTU had publicly

opposed her campaign on December 17, 2025, warning that her movement through Senapati district could trigger tension during the Christmas period. She asserted that such restrictions violated Article 19 of the Constitution, which guarantees freedom of movement.

Thongam's "Cycling for Manipur Peace" campaign began on October 2, 2025, from Qutub Minar in New Delhi. Over the course of the journey, she covered more than 2,300 km, travelling through Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Assam and Nagaland before entering Manipur.

The first phase of the campaign concluded on December 19, 2025, when she reached Sekmai Police Station in Imphal West district in the early hours, escorted by a special BSF convoy from Senapati.

Through the ongoing signature campaign, Thongam said she aims to build public pressure to ensure safe passage on national highways and pursue legal remedies, reiterating her commitment to peace and communal harmony in the conflict-affected state.

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## Budget 2026 backs self-reliance with caution and growth

NEW DELHI

At its core, the Union Budget 2026 is about building strategic autonomy. The continued emphasis on infrastructure will lift national output, but the parallel push to strengthen domestic manufacturing is equally vital, as it reduces import dependence and enhances self-sufficiency in an uncertain global order. Capital expenditure has been a defining feature of recent budgets, yet the renewed focus on sectors such as semiconductors, rare earths, biopharma, chemicals, and advanced materials indicates the government's intent to shield the economy from geopolitical risks. This approach gains relevance in light of the Economic Survey's warning that emerging markets could face future shortages of base metals, crude oil and pharmaceutical inputs, all areas where India remains heavily import-reliant. The budget, therefore, rightly prioritises building domestic capacity to withstand supply-chain shocks and the weaponisation of trade. If roads, railways and ports create assets, jobs and incomes, then investments in capital goods, textiles, sports equipment, precision manufacturing and allied industries will add industrial depth and keep the growth engine running smoothly.

On budget math, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman remained conservative about the fiscal deficit, gross borrowings, expenditure, and taxes. For FY27, the fiscal deficit has been set at 4.3 percent, marginally lower than the



4.4 percent projected for FY26, with a sharper focus on reducing the overall debt burden. The debt-to-GDP ratio is expected to ease to 55.6 percent from 56.1 percent a year earlier. Total expenditure is budgeted to rise by a modest 7.7 percent to ₹53 lakh crore. While most of the projections seem credible, there is caution writ large. A 10 percent rise in capital expenditure seems achievable, but overall revenue, capital receipts and tax collections are projected to grow at roughly seven percent, a cautious assumption that could eventually prove understated. Defence allocations were enhanced, but spending on health, education and rural development saw limited expansion. Overall, the budget reflects a clear preference for prudence over populism, efficiency over excess. The moral calculus may invite debate, but the fiscal arithmetic remains internally consistent.

Markets, however, reacted adversely. Sunday witnessed the worst budget-day stock market performance on record, with the Sensex

and Nifty plunging over 2,000 points and 600 points, respectively. The immediate trigger was the hike in Securities Transaction Tax on futures and options, justified by the government as a step to curb excessive speculation that has inflicted heavy losses on retail investors. Disappointment was compounded by the absence of clarity on long- and short-term capital gains taxes, as well as changes to taxation on Sovereign Gold Bond redemptions. However, markets are not the economy, and budgets need not be market-centric. The country needs foreign capital, but perhaps the government believes it can attract and retain capital by building strong economic fundamentals. Lastly, the wait for the salaried middle class grew longer as Sitharaman's tax sops were limited to reductions in TCS and TDS. Still, the forthcoming Income Tax Bill promises simpler laws and fewer compliance requirements for taxpayers. For the world, though, Budget 2026 signals stability and strategic long-term growth.

# MGNREGA WAS TRANSFORMATIVE LAW, ITS SUBSTITUTE A FLAW: CONGRESS



NEW DELHI

Hitting out at the Modi government, the Congress on Monday said MGNREGA was a transformative law while the new scheme brought by the Centre that "bulldozed it away" is a "flaw".

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said exactly 20 years ago today, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee

Act (MNREGA) was launched at Badnapalli village in Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh.

"Over the years, it has provided 180 crore days of work to rural households (especially women), created an estimated 10 crore community assets, significantly reduced distress migration, empowered gram panchayats, and decisively increased the bargaining power of the rural poor for higher wages," Ramesh said on X. It also launched the direct

benefit transfer initiative to credit wages directly into bank and post office accounts, he said.

Individual small and marginal farmers were able to establish irrigation facilities like digging wells on their own lands, the Congress leader said.

MGNREGA was a demand-based legal guarantee and not just an administrative promise, Ramesh asserted.

"It was a right derived from Article 41 of the Constitution. Work was allocated when demanded by citizens and was made available anywhere in rural India. Projects were decided upon by the local Gram Panchayat, and the State Government having to pay only 10% of the overall costs was incentivised to provide work without having to bear significant costs," he said. Social audits through the Gram Sabha and high-level audits through the CAG were conducted regularly, Ramesh pointed out. He further claimed that Modi Government's new law guarantees only centralisation in New Delhi. Work will now be notified in certain districts by the Modi government, he added.

"Work will be provided based on the Government's allocated budget rather than on citizen demand. The scheme will stop altogether for two months every year during peak agricultural activities - a big blow to workers' bargaining power who won't be able to negotiate better wages for agricultural work," Ramesh said. The panchayat has been side-

lined, and projects will be determined by the Modi government according to its priorities, he said.

Finally, states will now have to bear 40% of the costs given their financial stress, they will not be able to do so and will stop providing work altogether, he opined.

"MGNREGA was a transformative law. The Modi government's new scheme that bulldozed it away is a flaw," Ramesh said.

Ramesh also shared a photo from 20 years ago when Cheemala Pedakka, a Dalit woman from Badnapalli, became the first job card holder under MGNREGA.

The Union government's Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act, 2025 (VB-G RAM G), was passed by both houses amid opposition uproar and received presidential assent in December 2025, effectively replacing MGNREGA after two decades.

Under the new law, the statutory guarantee of employment was increased on paper from 100 to 125 days per rural household each year, and changes were made in funding patterns, planning mechanisms and implementation structures.

Opposition parties have argued the new law dilutes the rights-based nature of MGNREGA, increases centralisation of power, and saddles states with greater financial responsibilities, potentially weakening the original legal entitlement to work.

## INTERNATIONAL

### 'Our blood is not cheap': Pakistan says it has killed 145 terrorists in Balochistan; India denies involvement



QUETTA

Pakistani police and military forces killed over 100 terrorists in counterterrorism operations across the southwestern province of Balochistan over the past 40 hours, a day after coordinated suicide and gun attacks killed 33 people, mostly civilians, which Islamabad pinned on India.

Meanwhile, India on Sunday firmly rejected Pakistan's allegations that New Delhi was involved in the terror attacks. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) termed the charges "baseless" and a familiar attempt to deflect attention from Islamabad's internal security failures.

The chief minister, Sarfraz Bugti, told a news conference in Quetta that all the districts under attack were cleared on Sunday. "We are chasing them, we will not let

them go so easily," he said. "Our blood is not that cheap. We will chase them until their hideouts."

Bugti said that the troops and police officers responded swiftly, killing 145 members of "Fitna al-Hindustan," a phrase the government uses for the allegedly Indian-backed outlawed Baloch Liberation Army, or BLA. The BLA, the province's most active militant separatist group, claimed responsibility for the attacks in a statement sent to AFP.

The number of militants killed over the past two days was the highest in decades, he said.

"The bodies of these 145 killed terrorists are in our custody, and some of them are Afghan nationals," he said.

Bugti claimed that the "Indian-backed terrorists" wanted to take hostages but failed to make it to

the city center.

India's MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said Pakistan routinely resorts to blaming India after violent incidents instead of addressing long-standing political and economic grievances in Balochistan.

"We categorically reject the baseless allegations made by Pakistan, which are nothing but its usual tactics to deflect attention from its own internal failings," he said.

"Instead of parroting frivolous claims each time there is a violent incident, it would do better to focus on addressing the long-standing demands of its people in the region," he said.

Militant attacks erupted on Saturday in a resource-rich region where Pakistan is seeking to attract foreign investment in

mining and minerals.

In September 2025, a U.S. metals company signed a \$500 million investment agreement with Pakistan, a month after the U.S. State Department designated BLA and its armed wing as a foreign terrorist organization.

Security personnel cordon off a road leading to the blast site in Quetta on February 1, 2026, a day after an attack by Baloch separatists. Residents described scenes of panic after a suicide bombing killed several police officers on Saturday.

"(It) was a very scary day in the history of Quetta," said Khan Muhammad, a local resident. "Armed men were roaming openly on the roads before security forces arrived." Tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan have persisted since early October when Pakistan carried out airstrikes on what it described as Pakistani Taliban hideouts inside Afghanistan, killing dozens of alleged insurgents.

The BLA is banned in Pakistan and has carried out numerous attacks in recent years, often targeting security forces, Chinese interests and infrastructure projects. Authorities say the group has operated with support from the Pakistani Taliban, known as Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, or TTP. The TTP, a separate group, is allied with Afghanistan's Taliban, who returned to power in August 2021.

Balochistan has long faced a separatist insurgency by ethnic Baloch groups seeking greater autonomy or independence from Pakistan's central government. The BLA regularly targets Pakistani security forces and has also attacked civilians, including Chinese nationals among the thousands working on various projects in the province.

## Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama wins first Grammy for spoken-word album



BERLIN

Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama has won a Grammy Award for his spoken-word audiobook Meditations: The Reflections of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, marking a notable moment at the 68th Grammy Awards.

The album earned the top honor in the spoken-word category, beating out a diverse field of nominees that included US Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson for *Lovely One: A Memoir*, Trevor Noah for *Into The Uncut Grass*, Kathy Garver for *Elvis, Rocky & Me: The Carol Connors Story*, and Fab Morvan for *You Know*

It's True: The Real Story of Milli Vanilli.

The Dalai Lama did not attend the ceremony. Singer-songwriter Rufus Wainwright accepted the award on his behalf, drawing laughter from the audience when he quipped during his speech, "I am not the Dalai Lama."

The Dalai Lama had collaborated with sarod maestro Amjad Ali Khan and his sons, Amaan Ali Bangash and Ayaan Ali Bangash, on the album, blending spoken word and music to celebrate universal values of peace, compassion, kindness and hope.

In a statement following the win, the Dalai Lama said, "I receive

this recognition with gratitude and humility. I don't see it as something personal, but as a recognition of our shared universal responsibility. I truly believe that peace, compassion, care for our environment, and an understanding of the oneness of humanity are essential for the collective well-being of all eight billion human beings. I'm grateful that this Grammy recognition can help spread these messages more widely."

The Dalai Lama joined a list of first-time Grammy winners this year that also included K-pop artists and acclaimed filmmaker Steven Spielberg.

## Child Budget 2026-27 Sees Modest Rise, But CRY Calls for Clearer Priority for Children



Children with disabilities have seen only marginal growth, though funding for the Pradhan Mantri Vanbandhu Kalyan Yojana for tribal development has increased significantly.

Overall, CRY said the 2026-27 child budget reflects gradual progress but cannot yet be called a comprehensive investment in children. The organisation urged future budgets to move beyond small incremental increases and place children's rights at the centre of financial planning, with adequate scale, equity and a long-term vision.



### NEW DELHI

The Union Budget 2026-27 has shown a small but meaningful increase in spending on children. Child rights organisation CRY – Child Rights and You said the rise is a positive sign, but stressed that India still needs stronger and clearer financial priority for children.

According to CRY's preliminary analysis, total allocation for children in 2026-27 has increased to Rs 1,32,296.85 crore, compared to Rs 1,16,132.5 crore in 2025-26. This marks an increase of Rs 16,164.35 crore over the previous year.

The share of children's allocation in the overall Union Budget has also gone up slightly, from 2.29 percent in 2025-26 to 2.47 percent in 2026-27. As a share of GDP, spending on children has inched up from 0.33 percent to 0.34 percent.

Reacting to the budget, CRY CEO Puja Marwaha said the rise in the child budget sends a positive message, but falls short of meeting the growing needs of children in a country like India. She said incremental increases in health, nutrition and education are welcome, but long-term and universal development will need stronger and more focused investment beyond minimum annual hikes.

In the health and nutrition sector, some key schemes have seen notable growth. Allocation for the National Health Mission and National Urban Health Mission has increased sharply to Rs 4,591.58 crore in 2026-27 from Rs 261.15 crore in the previous year. The Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0 scheme has also received a boost, with allocation rising to Rs 19,635 crore, aimed at improving nutrition services for children, adolescent girls, and pregnant and lactating women.

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The PM Shakti Nirman scheme has seen a 2 percent increase, with

an allocation of Rs 12,749.99 crore. The Jal Jeevan Mission has been re-included in the child budget after 2024-25, with Rs 6,736.36 crore earmarked, highlighting the importance of safe drinking water for child health.

In education and child protection, Mission Vatsalya has received a 3.33 percent increase, taking its allocation to Rs 1,550 crore. Samagra Shiksha has been allocated Rs 42,100 crore, a rise of 2.06 percent. A major highlight is the more than 20 percent increase for Eklavya Model Residential Schools, with funding reaching Rs 7,200 crore, signalling stronger focus on education for tribal children. Allocations for Navodaya and Kendriya Vidyalayas have also been raised.

The budget has set aside Rs 3,200 crore for Atal Tinkering Labs, which is expected to promote innovation and scientific thinking among government school students. The inclusion of the Skill India programme in the child budget aligns with the National Education Policy's emphasis on early vocational exposure.

However, CRY pointed out that scholarship schemes for children from marginalised groups have seen little to no increase. Scholarships for Scheduled Caste students at pre-matric and post-matric levels remain largely unchanged. Allocations for Other Backward Classes, Economically Weaker Sections, Scheduled Tribes and chil-

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## “BIOINT and Borderlands: Golden Langurs as Early-Warning Indicators in India’s Northeast”.



India's Northeast represents one of the most complex internal security and ecological theatres in the world. Dense forests, porous borders, insurgent mobility, illegal timber extraction, wildlife crime, and difficult terrain limit the effectiveness of conventional intelligence tools such as drones, satellites, and static surveillance. This article introduces BIOINT (Biological Intelligence Indicators) as a complementary intelligence domain and explores the Golden Langur (*Trachypithecus geei*) a Schedule (I), endangered primate as a non-invasive, ethical, and legally compliant early-warning indicator. By studying and integrating naturally occurring behavioural cues of Golden Langurs with HUMINT, IMINT, and ELINT, India can enhance forest security, counter-insurgency awareness, and border management without violating wildlife protection laws.

### 1. Introduction: Intelligence Gaps in Forested Borderlands

The forests of western Assam and adjoining borderlands with Bhutan and Bangladesh are not merely ecological spaces, they are operational environments. These jungles are routinely exploited by, insurgent groups for concealment and transit, organised forest-theft networks, cross-border smugglers and infiltrators, and anti-national elements seeking sanctuary beyond conventional reach.

While modern surveillance technologies have transformed intelligence collection, they face severe degradation in tropical forest conditions as under:-

- (i) Dense multi-layered canopies,
- (ii) Persistent cloud cover,
- (iii) High humidity,
- (iv) Limited line-of-sight,
- (v) Electronic noise.

This compels a reassessment of ground-truth intelligence, especially indicators that operate continuously, silently, and organically.

### 2. The Golden Langur: Ecology, Distribution, and Legal Status.

The Golden Langur (*Trachypithecus geei*) is endemic to a narrow ecological belt between the Manas and Sankosh rivers in western Assam and southern Bhutan.

Key Habitats in India  
Chakrashila Wildlife Sanctuary, (Kokrajhar-Dhubri).

Kakoiijana Reserve Forest (Bongaigaon).  
Manas National Park (Western Range).  
Raimona National Park (Indo-Bhutan border).

Umananda Island (introduced population).

Conservation Status  
IUCN: Endangered  
CITES: Appendix I  
India: Schedule I, Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

Estimated Population: 6,000 - 7,000

Golden Langurs are among the most legally protected species in India. Any intelligence framework involving them must therefore be strictly non-intrusive, observational, and science-led.

### 3. Cultural and Civilisational Context.

For communities in western Assam and the Bhutanese foothills, the Golden Langur is regarded as sacred, often associated with Hanumanic symbolism. This cultural reverence has historically ensured community protection and offers a crucial advantage: local cooperation.

Unlike technological surveillance often viewed with suspicion ecology-based monitoring rooted in cultural respect enjoys social legitimacy, a critical factor in long-term intelligence sustainability.

### 4. BIOINT: Defining Biological Intelligence Indicators.

BIOINT does not imply training, deploying, or manipulating animals. It refers to the scientific interpretation of naturally occurring biological behaviour as an indicator of environmental anomalies.

In forest ecosystems, primates function as

highly sensitive disturbance detectors, canopy-level observers, and continuous environmental monitors. Golden Langurs respond sharply to:  
(i) Unusual human movement,  
(ii) Metallic sounds and weapon handling,  
(iii) Smoke and fire,  
(iv) Night-time activity,  
(v) Unfamiliar odours and vibrations.  
Such responses manifest as:  
Abrupt troop migration,  
Repetitive alarm calls,  
Abandonment of feeding zones,  
Abnormal clustering or silence.  
These behaviours are ecological signatures of intrusion.

### 5. Why Golden Langurs Can Outperform Drones

In dense jungle conditions. Drones are weather-dependent and detectable.

Satellites provide periodic snapshots, not continuity.

Sensors are vulnerable to sabotage or interception.

Golden Langurs, by contrast can operate 24x7, all-weather, cannot be jammed or spoofed, adapt instantly to terrain changes, and cover micro-corridors inaccessible to humans.

They act as living early-warning systems, particularly effective in areas where militants establish temporary jungle camps or forest thieves operate cyclically.

### 6. Forest Department as the Nodal Authority

Under the Indian Forest Act and Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, the Forest Department must remain the lead agency.

Its role includes the following:  
(i) Long-term behavioural mapping,  
(ii) Bio-acoustic libraries of alarm calls,  
(iii) Habitat disturbance databases and coordination with academic institutions.  
This ensures legality, ethics, and ecological balance.

### 7. Police, CAPF, and Border Security Applications

Police and CAPF (CRPF, Assam Rifles, BSF, ITBP) can benefit indirectly through:

- (i) Early alerts on illegal timber movement, identification of forest-thief corridors,
- (ii) Detection of infiltration routes along the Bangladesh border,
- (iii) Night-time movement indicators beyond human patrol range.
- (iv) Golden Langur behaviour can function as a natural trip-wire, allowing forces to focus patrols and reduce ambush risk.

### 8. Military and Counter-Insurgency Relevance.

In counter-insurgency environments where sustained troop presence is risky, intelligence grids are thin, and militant camps are transient. BIOINT indicators when fused with the following:-  
HUMINT (local sources),  
IMINT (targeted satellite or UAV imagery),

ELINT (communication spikes), can drastically reduce search areas and improve decision-making cycles.

This is not substitution, but intelligence multiplication.

### 9. HUMINT- IMINT- ELINT- BIOINT, Fusion Model.

The proposed model positions BIOINT as a supporting intelligence layer, feeding into existing systems.

Golden Langurs thus become, sentinels, not assets, indicators, not instruments, protected species, not tools.

Such fusion offers India a low-cost, high-credibility, deniable intelligence advantage, particularly suited to forested borderlands.

### 10. Legal and Ethical Safeguards.

Any implementation must ensure the following:-  
Zero captivity or relocation,  
No invasive tagging,

no coercive conditioning, Oversight by State Wildlife Boards, transparency with MoEFCC and MHA. This framework aligns with: Article 48A (environment protection), Article 51A(g) (citizen's duty), Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

### 11. Strategic Implications.

If responsibly adopted, this approach can prevent crores of rupees in forest theft, enhance border security in Assam - Bangladesh belt,

reduce troop casualties,  
Strengthen civil- military- forest coordination,

and evolve a uniquely Indian intelligence doctrine rooted in ecology.

To sum up in an era of visible, expensive, and vulnerable surveillance, India's forests offer an older, subtler intelligence advantage. The Golden Langur endangered, sacred, and perceptive stands as a reminder that nature observes before technology reacts.

BIOINT, when ethically integrated, does not militarise wildlife, it civilises intelligence.

### About the Author.

The author is a retired senior officer of the Indian Army with over four decades of operational experience in the field of Intelligence, specialising in Imagery Intelligence (IMINT), he had served as a HOD & Senior

Instructor Military Intelligence Training School. He has been directly involved in and led numerous successful intelligence-based operations in India and abroad, contributing significantly to mission planning, target analysis, and strategic assessment.

A recognised authority in IMINT, he has authored multiple analytical papers and professional articles on intelligence, surveillance, and national security. He has served as a Visiting Faculty at the National Remote Sensing Agency (NRSA), Hyderabad, and later headed an academic faculty specialising in intelligence studies.

His distinguished service includes postings in the Cabinet Secretariat and the Police Department, reflecting rare civil-military intelligence integration experience. A recipient of a Gallantry Award, the Vishisht Seva Medal (VSM), and multiple commendations, his professional journey represents a sustained contribution to India's national security, intelligence doctrine, and institutional capacity building.

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“Ashk Machhanvi” 20.01.2026



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