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Former Prince Andrew arrested & released; under investigation' hours after arrest in Epstein row



Former Prince Andrew with Jeffrey Epstein. -File Photo

FEBRUARY 20, 2026 LONDON (TIP)

British police said late Thursday, February 19, 2026, that Britain's former Duke of York, Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor (formerly, 'Prince Andrew') had "been released under investigation" after being arrested and held for hours on suspicion of misconduct while he was a trade envoy, reports AFP.

He was arrested and taken into custody early on Thursday morning, in a case related to Jeffrey Epstein, the deceased American child sex offender and financier. The extraordinary arrest of a member of the Royal family, which has not occurred in centuries, underlines the gravity and reach of the unfolding Epstein scandal, which has shaken both the family and the Keir Starmer government.

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Trump Announces Global Commitment for Gaza Reconstruction



Attendees at the inaugural Board of Peace meeting in Washington, D.C. on Thursday, February 19, 2026

FEBRUARY 19, 2026 WASHINGTON (TIP)

President Donald Trump announced Thursday, February 19, 2026, at the inaugural Board of Peace meeting that nine members of the body have agreed to pledge \$7 billion toward a Gaza relief package.

Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, UAE, Morocco, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan and Kuwait are the countries

that are making pledges, Trump added. "But every dollar spent is an investment in stability and the hope of new and harmonious (region)," said Trump in thanking the donors.

The amount, while significant, represents a fraction of the estimated \$70 billion needed to rebuild the Palestinian territory decimated after two years of war.

Trump also announced the U.S. was

pledging \$10 billion for the Board of Peace, but didn't specify what the money will be used for.

"The Board of Peace is showing how a better future can be built, starting right here in this room," Trump said.

"What we're doing is very simple: peace," Trump said in remarks to open the meeting. "It's called the Board of Peace, and it's all about an easy word to

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India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi joins hands with Google's Sundar Pichai (L), OpenAI's Sam Altman (2nd R) and Anthropic's Dario Amodei at the AI summit. Altman and Amodei raised fists (see pic) instead of holding raised hands. -Photo / PTI

PM Modi calls for ethical, transparent AI, unveils India's MANAV vision

Urges firms to look beyond profits, stresses human-centric approach

FEBRUARY 20, 2026 NEW DELHI (TIP)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday, February 19, 2026, sought global standards for artificial intelligence and advocated strong ethical commitments as the cornerstone of the world's AI development and governance architecture.

Inaugurating the India AI Impact Summit at Bharat Mandapam, where he later addressed the Leaders' Plenary, PM Modi batted for democratization of AI and unveiled India's MANAV vision for the segment.

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UN Chief calls for global unity, says science-led governance an accelerator for solutions



UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres called for utilizing Artificial Intelligence for global good and mitigate challenges being faced by humanity

FEBRUARY 20, 2026 NEW DELHI (TIP)

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres on Friday, February 20, called for utilizing Artificial Intelligence for global good and mitigate challenges being faced by humanity. He urged countries to come together and prepare, protect, and invest in people. Today international cooperation is difficult, trust is strained, and technological rivalry is growing.

He made the remarks while speaking at the Global AI Impact Summit 2026 here in the national capital on the role of science in international AI governance.

"We are barreling into the unknown. AI innovation is moving at the speed of light, outpacing our collective ability to fully understand it.

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**COMMENT****VANITAS VANITATUM**

There is an old Latin phrase from the Book of Ecclesiastes: Vanitas vanitatum, omnia vanitas - "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity." The author was reflecting on the fleeting nature of earthly glory. He could scarcely have imagined that centuries later, the phrase would find fresh relevance in the political theatre of 21st-century America - in the era of President Donald Trump.

Vanity is not a new companion of power. Emperors built monuments, monarchs embossed their crowns with jewels, and presidents have all, in subtle or visible ways, left their personal stamp upon public office. But what distinguishes Mr. Trump is not merely the scale of his personal branding - it is the unapologetic flamboyance with which he fuses governance and self-projection.

Let us begin with the latest flourish: the reported repainting vision for Air Force One in what many have described as a darker, more dramatic red, white, and blue scheme aligned with Mr. Trump's aesthetic tastes. Presidential aircraft have traditionally reflected a sober, calming palette introduced during the John F. Kennedy administration in 1962 - a light blue and white design symbolizing dignity rather than dominance. Mr. Trump's preference, critics say, leans toward spectacle. The aircraft, after all, is not merely transportation; it is airborne symbolism. For him, it appears to be airborne branding.

**THE BALLROOM PRESIDENCY**

Before the debate about aircraft exteriors, there was the perennial fascination with interiors. Mr. Trump's well-known affinity for gilded décor - visible for decades at Mar-a-Lago - shaped public discussions about potential expansions or enhancements to the White House entertainment spaces, including talk of building or redesigning large ballroom facilities befitting state dinners "with style." Now, the White House has hosted balls and grand receptions for centuries, but few presidents have publicly discussed décor with the enthusiasm of a real estate developer fine-tuning a flagship property. Critics suggested that the presidency is not a resort; supporters countered that a successful businessman bringing aesthetic ambition to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue is hardly a scandal. Still, one cannot ignore that gold accents and marble grandeur remain part of Mr. Trump's unmistakable signature.

**THE MIRROR AND THE MEGAPHONE**

Vanity in the digital age no longer requires bronze statues. It requires platforms. Mr. Trump has long displayed a unique symbiosis with media - from his early days hosting *The Apprentice* to his later prominence on Truth Social, the

network he helped launch after departing mainstream social media platforms.

No president in American history has exercised self-commentary quite like Mr. Trump. His posts often read like headline, counter-headline, and applause line combined. To critics, this constant narration of personal triumph verges on self-mythologizing; to supporters, it is unfiltered transparency. Either way, the mirror is no longer passive - it has a megaphone.

One cannot forget the dramatic unveiling of official portraits, carefully chosen lighting, the assertive gaze - images that speak almost more loudly than speeches. Presidential portraiture has always sought gravitas. Yet in the Trump era, the image often seems to say: "You're fired - but beautifully framed."

**BRANDING THE REPUBLIC**

Consider the persistent use of signature slogans - "Make America Great Again," emblazoned across hats, banners, and rallies. To be sure, all politicians brand themselves. Barack Obama had "Hope" and "Change." Ronald Reagan spoke of "Morning in America." Yet Mr. Trump's branding ascended to retail ubiquity. The line between campaign merchandise and political identity blurred almost completely. There were also discussions, in previous terms, of renaming buildings, altering décor, and foregrounding personal achievement in official spaces. The presidency, in Trump's conception, often feels less like a temporary stewardship and more like a gilded extension of a lifelong brand.

**OF STATUES AND SELF-REFERENCES**

Political cartoonists have had a field day. One popular caricature shows Mr. Trump gazing into a mirror; but the reflection is that of a Roman emperor - laurel wreath intact. Another depicts Air Force One with racing stripes and a gold-plated tailfin, roaring across the sky like a luxury jet from central casting. Humor, after all, is democracy's pressure valve.

There have also been moments when Mr. Trump suggested that his achievements warranted extraordinary historical recognition - even at times hinting at constitutional barriers such as term limits with a rhetorical wink. Admirers applaud confidence; detractors diagnose narcissism.

**THE ART OF SELF-PRAISE**

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of Mr. Trump's political persona is his comfort with self-commendation. "Nobody has done more..." is a phrase that surfaces frequently in his rhetoric. Previous presidents often delegated praise to historians or allies; Mr. Trump dispenses it personally. Yet history teaches us that self-confidence, when fused with power, walks a narrow ridge. It can inspire decisive leadership, but tip too far and it risks eclipsing humility - that quiet virtue that steady republics cherish.

The United States has long prided itself on institutional continuity. The White House belongs not to a man, but to a people. George Washington refused a crown. Abraham Lincoln spoke of "government of the people, by the people, for the people." Even when presidents possessed towering

INDRAJIT  
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egos - and many did - tradition reined excess with ceremony.

Mr. Trump often tests those ceremonial boundaries. Whether through visual redesign, architectural ambition, or digital proclamation, he ensures that the spotlight does not dim.

**A REPUBLIC OR A REALITY SHOW?**

Mr. Trump's genius, one must concede, lies in performance. Governance in his hands often carries the cadence of showmanship. Press conferences are theatrical. Campaign rallies become arenas. Policy announcements arrive with cliffhanger flair. It is politics in high-definition color. But here is the question beneath the gilded surface: does spectacle serve democracy, or distract from it?

The repainting of Air Force One may seem trivial, yet symbolism matters. The building of grand ballrooms may appear cosmetic, yet priorities are revealed in architecture. When self-presentation becomes central to governance, citizens must ask whether the mirror has grown larger than the window.

And yet - let us inject a touch of humor. If Mr. Trump ever commissioned a presidential coin, one suspects it might feature him on both sides: heads and... heads again. If Mount Rushmore had space, perhaps he would volunteer engineering assistance.

Democracy, however, is sturdy enough to survive flamboyance. The American Constitution - with its checks and balances - has weathered ambition before. Vanity fades; institutions endure.

**THE BIBLICAL REMINDER**

Ecclesiastes ends not in cynicism, but in perspective. Earthly glory, it says, passes away. In a republic, even the most colorful presidency is a chapter, not the book.

Vanity in leadership is hardly new. What is new is the speed with which image amplifies. Today, a fresh coat of paint on a presidential jet becomes global headline. A chandelier suggestion becomes an international meme.

For readers of *The Indian Panorama* - especially many who cherish both Indian and American democratic traditions - this moment offers reflection. Power should carry dignity. Confidence should be accompanied by restraint. Pride, by humility.

To be clear, criticism of vanity is not condemnation of achievement. Confidence drives enterprise. Style enlivens ceremony. But when style eclipses substance, democracies must gently - sometimes humorously - hold up their own mirror.

Vanitas vanitatum. The Latin phrase is not an accusation; it is a reminder. Leadership is temporary. Legacy is judged not by paint palettes or chandeliers, but by justice, unity, and the welfare of the people.

President Trump's flair guarantees that historians will write colorful chapters. Whether those chapters shimmer as statesmanship or sparkle merely as spectacle will depend not on gold trim, but on moral trim - the quiet molding of humility that strengthens institutions.

And perhaps, one day, even Air Force One will return to calmer hues.

After all, in a republic, the sky belongs not to vanity - but to history.

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# Suozzi Honors Students from New York's Third Congressional District for National Achievements in Science and Mathematics

**FEBRUARY 16, 2026  
GLEN COVE, NY (TIP)**

Congressman Tom Suozzi (D-Long Island, Queens) recognized and honored high school students from New York's Third Congressional District for outstanding achievements in life science, computer science, and mathematics through the Regeneron Science Talent Search, the Congressional App Challenge, and the Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes.

The ceremony was hosted by Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, where Suozzi was introduced by Dr. Bruce Stillman, President and CEO.

"Amid so much negative news, it's important to highlight positive stories," said Suozzi. "This year, 300 high school seniors nationwide advanced in the first round of the Regeneron Science Talent Search. Remarkably, 33 are from Long Island and 28 are from New York's Third Congressional District. While our district represents just 0.02% of the U.S. population, it accounts for nearly 10% of the nation's Regeneron Scholars—the highest total of any congressional district in America. These students



Congressman Tom Suozzi poses for a photograph with the honored students.

represent the future of our community and our country, and I'm proud to honor their achievements."

One student, Ashka Shah of Jericho High School, was named a finalist and is among 40 students nationwide competing in March for more than \$1.8 million in awards provided by Regeneron Pharmaceuticals of

Tarrytown, New York.

The students honored by Congressman Suozzi represent eleven high schools in the Third Congressional District: Jericho High School; Herricks High School; William A. Shine Great Neck South High School; John L. Miller Great Neck North High School; Paul D. Schreiber High School; Syosset High

School; Friends Academy; Manhasset High School; Roslyn High School; St. Francis Preparatory School; and Hunter College High School.

Suozzi also recognized the winning team of the Congressional App Challenge, an annual competition sponsored by the U.S. House of Representatives in which students design original software applications. First place was awarded to Michael Cole (Chaminade High School), Emma Ding (Great Neck South High School), Christine Chen (Hunter College High School), and Caren Ye (Jericho High School). Their winning app, HealthBridge, connects underinsured individuals and families with affordable health care resources. Available in all 50 states and offered in 18 languages, the app exemplifies how technology can be used to improve lives.

Suozzi also honored the 2025 recipient of the Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes, Cynthia Zhang of Great Neck South High School, for her work raising and tagging butterflies to help scientists track their migration routes to winter habitats in Mexico.

Svetlana Lipyanskaya, MPA, FACHE to be appointed CEO of Maimonides Health; Manjinder Kaur, DNP, RN, NEA-BC, FACHE, to become CEO at South Brooklyn Health

**FEBRUARY 19, 2026  
NEW YORK, NY (TIP)**

NYC Health + Hospitals announced on February 19, 2026 that Svetlana Lipyanskaya, MPA, FACHE will be appointed as Chief Executive Officer of Maimonides Health, pending the formal approval of the partnership of the two health care systems. Lipyanskaya is currently the CEO of NYC Health + Hospitals/South Brooklyn Health, a



Lipyanskaya is currently the CEO of NYC Health + Hospitals/South Brooklyn Health, a position she has held since 2020. Manjinder Kaur currently serves as the hospital's Chief Operating Officer and has been at NYC Health + Hospitals since 2006

position she has held since 2020, and she serves on the leadership team charged with bringing the two health care systems together. Moving forward, she will spend more time at Maimonides to best understand the needs of patients, staff, and the community. In addition, Manjinder Kaur, DNP, RN, NEA-BC, FACHE, would become CEO at South Brooklyn Health.

Read full story at [www.theindianpanorama.news](http://www.theindianpanorama.news)

## Deputy Minority Leader Drucker Honors POB Girls Volleyball Athletes At District's Student Recognition Ceremony



Recognition of POB Girls Volleyball athletes  
Photos / Office of Deputy Minority Leader Arnold W. Drucker

**FEBRUARY 19, 2026  
PLAINVIEW, N.Y. (TIP)**

Nassau County Legislature Deputy Minority Leader Arnold W. Drucker (D - Plainview) proudly joined the Plainview-Old Berthage school community on Tuesday, Feb. 10 for their Board of Education Student Recognition Ceremony. During the ceremony, he presented Nassau County Legislature Citation to the Plainview-Old Bethpage JFK Girls' Varsity Volleyball team, who completed a 17-0 season and earned the program's first-ever AAA Long Island Championship and a second consecutive County title.

"Seeing so many talented and accomplished students from the guidance, English, art, music, mathematics and business departments being recognized for their achievements fills me with tremendous optimism for our future," Deputy Minority Leader Drucker said. "As a lifelong Plainview resident, a graduate of this district, and a father whose children's lives were enriched tremendously by their experiences in these schools, it was especially gratifying to honor the girls' volleyball team for their historic run. Congratulations to everyone - keep making us proud!"

## TRUMP THE TRUMP ORGANIZATION

Trump family business files for trademark rights on any airports using the president's name

**FEBRUARY 17, 2026  
NEW YORK (TIP)**

The Trump family company has filed to trademark the use of the president's name on airports but says it doesn't plan on charging a fee - at least for a proposed renaming of one near his Florida home, says an AP report.

Applications filed by the Trump Organization with the federal trademark office are seeking exclusive rights to use the president's name on airports and dozens of related things found there, from buses shuttling passengers to umbrellas and travel bags to flight suits. The filings come amid debate in Florida over a state bill to name the Palm Beach airport after Trump and a dispute over funding of a tunnel between New York and New Jersey that is tied up with proposals that both it and Dulles International Airport in Virginia bear his name.

The Trump Organization said that the applications were triggered by the Florida bill and that it didn't seek any profit - only protection against "bad actors" given that the Trump name is the "most infringed trademark in the world." "To be clear, the President and his family will not receive any royalty, licensing fee, or financial consideration whatsoever from the proposed airport renaming," the company said in a statement, referring to what is now called the Palm Beach International Airport near Trump's Mar-a-Lago club.

Read full story at [www.theindianpanorama.news](http://www.theindianpanorama.news)

# New Trump administration order could lead to the detention of thousands of legal refugees

THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY SAYS IN A MEMO THAT REFUGEES APPLYING FOR GREEN CARDS MUST RETURN TO FEDERAL CUSTODY ONE YEAR AFTER THEY WERE ADMITTED TO THE U.S.

**FEBRUARY 19, 2026**  
**MINNEAPOLIS (TIP)**

The Trump administration has issued a sweeping new order that could lead to the arrest of tens of thousands of refugees who are lawfully in the United States but do not yet have permanent residency, overturning years of legal and immigration safeguards, AP reports.

A memo filed by the Department of Homeland Security ahead of a Thursday, February 19 federal court hearing in Minnesota says refugees applying for green cards must return to federal custody one year after they were admitted to the U.S. for review of their applications.

DHS "may maintain custody for the duration of the inspection and examination process," said the memo, which was filed Wednesday.

Advocacy and resettlement groups slammed the order, which is likely to face legal challenges and could sow confusion and fear among the nearly 200,000 refugees who came to the United States during the Biden administration.

The order is the latest in a series of immigration restrictions by the Trump administration, which has upended longstanding policies toward refugees, including dramatically reducing the number admitted into the country. A memo obtained by The Associated Press late last year said the administration was planning a review of all refugees admitted to the U.S. during the Biden administration, and immediately suspended green card approvals for refugees who arrived during those years.

The administration has cited national security and economic concerns for its changed policies. Experts say refugees let into the country already undergo extensive vetting.

The new order came hours before U.S. District Judge John Tunheim heard arguments Thursday, February 19, on whether he should extend a temporary order that protects Minnesota refugees lawfully in the U.S. from being arrested and deported. Tunheim's order applies only in Minnesota, but the implications of the new national policy were a major part of the discussion anyway.

How many people could be arrested



Hundreds of people at a rally in the rotunda of the Minnesota State Capitol in St. Paul on Wednesday, February 18, 2026 -Photo credit: Steve Karnowski / AP

under the new order was unclear.

Justice Department attorney Brantley Mayers said during Thursday's hearing that the government should have the right to arrest refugees one year after entering the U.S., but indicated that would not always happen.

"That's a discretion call for DHS to make," he said, a comment met with skepticism by attorneys for the Minnesota refugees.

Tunheim did not rule Thursday, saying he would issue a written decision on whether the temporary order would be extended.

After the hearing, Democratic U.S. Sen. Tina Smith of Minnesota said at a news conference outside the courthouse that the government "failed to offer any coherent argument for their policy in either law or fact." She wasn't in court for the hearing, but said she had been briefed about it.

"And so we will continue the fight for justice in the courts," Smith said, flanked by attorneys and refugee rights supporters, including U.S. Rep. Ilhan Omar.

Immigration advocates quickly pushed back against the new policy, with HIAS, an international Jewish nonprofit serving

refugees and asylum seekers, calling it "a transparent effort to detain and potentially deport thousands of people who are legally present in this country, people the U.S. government itself welcomed."

"They were promised safety and the chance to rebuild their lives. Instead, DHS is now threatening them with arrest and indefinite detention," Beth Oppenheim, the group's CEO, said in a statement.

Tunheim blocked the government from targeting the Minnesota refugees last month, saying the plaintiffs in the case were likely to prevail on their claims "that their arrest and detention, and the policy that purports to justify them, are unlawful." His Jan. 28 temporary restraining order will expire Feb. 25 unless he grants a more permanent preliminary injunction.

The judge previously rejected the government's claim that it had the legal right to arrest and detain refugees who have not obtained their green cards within a year of arriving in the U.S.

"Mandating detention would lead to an illogical result," Tunheim wrote, since refugees can't even apply for green cards until they've been in the U.S. for a year. The government's interpretation, he said,

means nearly all refugees would face detention unless immigration officials conducted their review at exactly the one-year mark, which he called "nonsensical."

Refugee rights groups sued the federal government in January after the government launched Operation PARRIS, an acronym for Post-Admission Refugee Reverification and Integrity Strengthening.

It was billed as a "sweeping initiative" to reexamine the cases of 5,600 Minnesota refugees who had not yet been granted permanent resident status, or green cards. The agencies cited fraud in public programs in Minnesota as justification.

Operation PARRIS was part of the Trump administration's immigration crackdown targeting Minnesota, including a surge of thousands of federal officers. Homeland Security called it the largest immigration enforcement operation ever. It set off mass protests after federal agents shot and killed two U.S. citizens. White House border czar Tom Homan announced last week that the surge was ending, though a small federal presence would remain.

The lawsuit alleges that ICE officers went door to door under Operation PARRIS arresting refugees and sending them to detention centers in Texas, without access to attorneys. Some were later released in Texas and left to find their own way back to Minnesota, they said.

Tunheim noted in his order that refugees are extensively vetted by multiple agencies before being resettled in the U.S. He wrote that none arrested in the operation had been deemed a danger to the community or a flight risk, nor had any been charged with crimes that could be grounds for deportation.

Tunheim stressed that the refugees impacted by his order were admitted into the U.S. because of persecution in their home countries. He prohibited further arrests under Operation PARRIS and ordered that detainees still in custody from it be released and returned to Minnesota.

"They are not committing crimes on our streets, nor did they illegally cross the border. Refugees have a legal right to be in the United States, a right to work, a right to live peacefully," he wrote. (Source: AP)



Several fatal highway accidents in recent months involved drivers identified as Harjinder Singh, Jashanpreet Singh, Rajinder Kumar, and Kamalpreet Singh - all described as being of Indian origin and holding non-domiciled CDLs -Photo for representation only .

## Good English skills made top priority for US truck drivers after recent highway accidents

**FEBRUARY 18, 2026**  
**WASHINGTON, D.C. (TIP)**

The Trump administration has unveiled sweeping new federal regulations that significantly narrow eligibility for foreign nationals seeking to obtain Commercial Driver's Licenses (CDLs) in the US, marking one of the most restrictive overhauls of the program in recent years

Under the revised framework, only foreign nationals holding H-2A (temporary agricultural worker), H-2B (temporary non-agricultural worker), and E-2 (treaty investor) non-immigrant visas will be eligible to apply for a CDL. The new rules effectively end the longstanding practice of allowing non-citizens with Employment Authorization Documents (EADs) to seek

commercial driving privileges.

Previously, individuals with valid work authorization - including asylum seekers, refugees, recipients of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), and those granted Temporary Protected Status (TPS) - were permitted to apply for CDLs if they met state and federal requirements.

Under the updated policy, EADs will no longer be accepted as proof of eligibility, significantly tightening access for many categories of legally authorized workers. The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA), which announced the changes, said the new regulations are aimed at addressing safety and compliance concerns.

(Read full story at [www.theindianpanorama.news](http://www.theindianpanorama.news))

# India origin Dr. Rajan Thapaliya Named Asst. Dean of Computer Science, Cybersecurity & IT at the University of Fairfax

**FEBRUARY 18, 2026  
FAIRFAX, VA (TIP)**

The University of Fairfax has announced the appointment of Dr. Rajan Thapaliya as Asst. Dean of Computer Science, Cybersecurity & Information Technology, further strengthening the University's commitment to academic excellence, innovation, and career-focused education in today's high-demand technology disciplines.

Dr. Thapaliya is a distinguished academic leader, award-winning professor, and recognized voice in Artificial Intelligence, Data Science, Machine Learning, Computer Science, and emerging technologies. He brings extensive experience in academic administration, doctoral program leadership, faculty development, curriculum innovation, and student success initiatives across graduate and doctoral programs.

Prior to joining the University of Fairfax, Dr. Thapaliya served as Program Chair for the doctoral-level (DBA) program in Digital and Computer Science at Golden Gate University (GGU Worldwide). In that role, he supported academic quality assurance, accreditation-aligned program oversight, doctoral supervision, assessment strategies, and strategic program development.

Dr. Thapaliya has also been recognized as one of the Top 20 Machine Learning Influencers in the United States by Influencer Hero, highlighting his impact as a technology thought leader and



Dr. Rajan Thapaliya has been named Asst. Dean of Computer Science, Cybersecurity & Information Technology at the University of Fairfax, VA.

mentor to students, researchers, and professionals worldwide.

As Asst. Dean, Dr. Thapaliya will play a key leadership role in advancing the University of Fairfax's academic mission by enhancing faculty engagement, curriculum excellence, academic innovation, program assessment, and student success strategies across the University's computer science, cybersecurity, and information technology programs.

As a professor, Dr. Thapaliya teaches MS- and PhD-level courses in Artificial Intelligence, Data Science, Software Engineering, and Information Technology at universities across the United States. He also serves as a PhD Dissertation Chair and Subject Matter

Expert (SME), guiding doctoral learners in advanced interdisciplinary research. In addition, he contributes to the academic community as an editor and peer reviewer for multiple scholarly journals and academic publishing platforms.

Dr. Thapaliya defines leadership as serving others through vision, integrity, and continuous improvement, while empowering students and faculty to achieve excellence through collaboration, innovation, and lifelong learning.

The University of Fairfax, established in 2002, was founded to meet the growing demand for career-focused education. The University's mission is to provide flexible, in-demand distance education programs that meet the evolving needs of employers and students in a changing global marketplace. Its programs foster critical thinking, effective communication, and collaboration through practitioner-focused curricula that advance applied knowledge and research.

With his blend of academic excellence, professional expertise, and forward-thinking leadership, Dr. Rajan Thapaliya is expected to contribute significantly to the University of Fairfax's long-term success while inspiring future technology leaders in an increasingly digital world.

For more information, visit:

[https://ufairfax.edu/team\\_member/dr-rajn-thapaliya-dean-of-computer-science-cybersecurity-it/](https://ufairfax.edu/team_member/dr-rajn-thapaliya-dean-of-computer-science-cybersecurity-it/)

## Punjabis dominate Canada team for T20 World Cup

**FEBRUARY 18, 2026  
TORONTO (TIP)**

Half a dozen Punjabis have made the cut for the Canadian national team doing duty in the T20 World Cup. To add to it, in domestic cricket, scores of cricketers from Punjab are trying to break into the national squad, making Canada's national circuit look like the mini-Ranji Trophy.



Along with Gurdaspur's Dilpreet Singh Ponty Bajwa, many others in maple leaf countryside figure in Canada team for T20 World Cup

The entire city of Gurdaspur rooted for a Canada victory whenever the team played in the T20 tournament. The reason was simple. 'Son of the soil' Dilpreet Singh Ponty Bajwa was helming the squad. He was one of their own.

The day Canada played New Zealand, heavy bets were placed on Bajwa getting a fifty. Scores of fans had gathered in front of TV showrooms. In the earlier two matches, he was a big disappointment. This time, Gurdaspur wanted Bajwa, born and brought up in the alleys of this ancient town, to score. And score handsomely. He clawed his way to a sedate 36 and was looking good for more, when he holed out in the deep. Gurdaspur's dream had ended. But then, hope sustains life!

Whenever he visits his home in Gurdaspur, and that is often, he makes it a point to train under his coach Rakesh Marshal at the Government College ground. A special bowling machine has also been made available for Bajwa just in case it's a rainy day. It was donated by former Deputy Commissioner (DC) Himanshu Aggarwal.

Apart from Ponty, Punjabis like Navneet Dhaliwal, Pargat Singh, Ravinderpal Singh, Jaskarandeep Buttar and Yuvraj Samra are donning the national colors.

"Cricket is an Englishman's game. However, in Canada, the natives are yet to adapt to it. This development has opened the doors for cricketers from Punjab. In the domestic circuit, you can spot as many as four to six cricketers playing for their respective teams. This means, the country has a fairly decent bench strength," opined Bajwa.

Young Yujrav Samra became a household name in his adopted country when he scored a ton against the high-flying Kiwi. Cricketers like Dhaliwal and Pargat Singh, too, are doing well. In fact, they are helping the team in their own ways to stay afloat in the ongoing tournament.

(Read full story at [www.theindianpanorama.news](http://www.theindianpanorama.news))

## Sikh man kidnapped in US, last seen with 3 unidentified people in California

**FEBRUARY 20, 2026  
SACRAMENTO (TIP)**

Last seen on February 17, The San Joaquin County Sheriff's Office described the missing man as about 5 feet 7 inches tall, weighing roughly 200 pounds, and wearing light-colored traditional Sikh clothing.



Avtar Singh, 57, a Sikh man from Tracy, California, has gone missing in a suspected abduction. CCTV footage showed him with three unidentified people near a white SUV, and authorities believe he may have entered the vehicle against his will.

CCTV footage showed him with three unidentified people near a white SUV, and authorities believe he may have entered the vehicle against his will.

Police responded to a missing person report around 8:52 p.m. on the 16000 block of West Grant Line Road. The Sikh Coalition expressed that it is "deeply disturbed by the apparent abduction," and confirmed that local Sikh leaders are coordinating with authorities. The organization urged anyone with information about Singh's whereabouts to contact the San Joaquin County Sheriff's Office. Police have not released further details.

## Sikh man assaulted by 3 men outside gym in Australia; called "Indian dog"

**FEBRUARY 19, 2026  
VICTORIA (TIP)**

Indian man, 22, has allegedly been the victim of a racial assault outside his gym in Australia.

Harmanpreet Singh, a nurse from Corio in Victoria, said he was attacked late Tuesday night after three men directed racial slurs at him while he was training at a local gym. According to Singh, the men first harassed him inside the facility before following him outside, where the confrontation escalated.

Speaking to 9News, Singh described the moment the situation turned violent. "He got really close to my face and then just got really back and hit his head on my nose. And just started bleeding straight away," he said.

Video footage aired by the media outlet reportedly captured the men shouting, "Wanna mouth off, you Indian dog?" and "Go back to where you came from" during the incident. Singh said the three accused fled the scene in a sedan shortly after the assault, leaving him bleeding heavily. He was taken to a hospital. Doctors have advised that he may need specialist treatment and could require surgery for his injuries.

"Nobody wants to hear it - especially when you're just minding your own business. Anyone would be hurt. I'm still traumatized," Singh said.

The 22-year-old nurse added that while he has previously experienced racial abuse in Australia, this incident was the most distressing.

The alleged attack comes amid a number of reported racially incidents targeting members of the Indian community in Australia.

In July 2025, a 23-year-old Indian student, Amanpreet Singh, was hospitalized following a violent assault in central Adelaide that was reportedly racially driven. According to reports, five men allegedly attacked him without provocation, reportedly using metal knuckles or other sharp weapons.



Video footage aired by 9 News reportedly captured the men shouting, "Wanna mouth off, you Indian dog?" and "Go back to where you came from" during the incident

Grab from video posted on social media by 9 News

# Tamarind Tribeca Crowned 2025 Top Restaurant by IAOTP

CELEBRATING AVTAR SINGH WALIA'S VISION FOR INDIAN FINE DINING IN AMERICA

BY AJAY GHOSH  
FEBRUARY 18, 2026  
NEW YORK CITY (TIP)

In December 2025, the International Association of Top Professionals (IAOTP) bestowed one of the culinary world's highest honors upon Tamarind Tribeca, naming it Top Restaurant of the Year during a gala event at the Bellagio Hotel in Las Vegas. At the heart of this achievement stands Avtar Singh Walia, the restaurant's visionary owner, who was also recognized by IAOTP as a Top Restaurant Owner of the Year. These accolades reflect not only personal and organizational excellence but also the transformative role Walia and Tamarind Tribeca have played in elevating Indian fine dining in the United States.

## WALIA'S EARLY LIFE AND INSPIRATION

Avtar Singh Walia's journey began in the vibrant fields of Punjab, India, where he was raised amidst the aromas and traditions of Punjabi cuisine. "My earliest memories are of my mother and grandmother preparing meals for our large family," Walia recalls. "Those kitchens were filled with laughter, spice, and the belief that food brings people together." This deep-rooted appreciation for authentic recipes and the spirit of hospitality shaped his worldview from the start.

After completing his education at Punjab University in 1974, Walia initially considered a career in the army, but the allure of hospitality proved stronger. He immersed himself in India's restaurant industry, learning the nuances of management and service. Driven by a desire to share the "real taste of India" with a broader audience, Walia immigrated to the United States in the late 1970s—a move that would set the stage for his remarkable career.



Entrance to the famous Tamarind Tribeca



Mr. Avtar Singh Walia has done the interior with imagination

## BUILDING TAMARIND TRIBECA: PHILOSOPHY, AUTHENTICITY, AND INNOVATION

In New York, Walia's professional story began in humble roles, from warehouse manager at Gucci to restaurant manager at Tandoor. His breakthrough came at Akbar, a Park Avenue establishment where he honed his dream of introducing refined Indian cuisine to discerning diners. That dream first materialized in 1986 with the opening of Dawat, co-founded with renowned chef Madhur Jaffrey. "We wanted to show people that Indian cuisine could be sophisticated, nuanced, and worthy of the city's culinary spotlight," Walia reflects.

The true realization of his vision came in 2001 with Tamarind in Manhattan's Flatiron District. Under his sole proprietorship and the talent of acclaimed chefs, Tamarind earned a Michelin star—an unprecedented achievement for an Indian restaurant in New York. "A Michelin star isn't just a personal achievement - it's a recognition of my team's relentless pursuit of perfection," Walia says. In 2010, he launched Tamarind Tribeca, a grand, 11,000-square-foot space designed to blend the "mysteries and joys of the flavors from the Indian sub-continent with the elan and panache of Tribeca, New York."

Central to the restaurant's philosophy is an unwavering commitment to authenticity and refinement. "Our ingredients are carefully sourced, and every dish is prepared with the same care we would show to guests in our own home," Walia explains. He assembled a team of chefs tasked with emulating the "complexity and depth of flavors that is associated with Indian food while maintaining the rigorous standards of a fine dining restaurant."

Read full story at [www.theindianpanorama.news](http://www.theindianpanorama.news)



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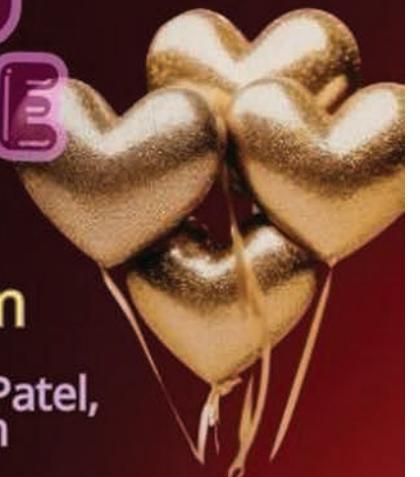
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# A quantum leap is a distant dream

India's quantum computing ambitions present a study in strategic paradox

MANISH  
TEWARI



Amid the India AI Impact Summit in New Delhi, it's time to evaluate where India stands in the arena of frontier technologies - artificial intelligence (AI), semiconductors, robotics, genomics, the Internet of Things and quantum computing, to name a few.

China spent \$98 billion on AI in 2025, out of which the government expenditure was \$56 billion. Five US-based private companies - Amazon, Google, Microsoft, Meta and Oracle - will collectively invest \$700 billion in 2026. In comparison, the Indian government will spend \$1.2 billion over five years on its AI Mission.

China spent \$38 billion on semiconductors in 2025, while India has committed to spend \$0.12 billion in 2026-27 on the India Semiconductor Mission 2.0. The Union Budget has allocated an additional \$0.96 billion for the Modified Programme for Development of Semiconductor and Display Manufacturing Ecosystem. It is quite evident that India's outlays belie its rhetoric.

the arithmetic of the present. India currently employs an estimated 5-10 principal investigators working on quantum computing hardware. For context, a single mid-tier American university lab often hosts more. These investigators support perhaps 300-400 PhD students across the entire quantum technology spectrum.

China's University of Science and Technology alone operates a Division of Quantum Physics and Quantum Information with hundreds of researchers, multi-disciplinary teams of physicists, engineers and materials scientists working in integrated physical centers - not virtual hubs scattered across institutions with procedural handbrakes on every import.

Indian R&D labs import around 90% of the critical subsystems required for quantum computing: dilution refrigerators, high-purity silicon-germanium substrates, arbitrary waveform generators, specialized lasers and cryogenic components. Last year, Europe

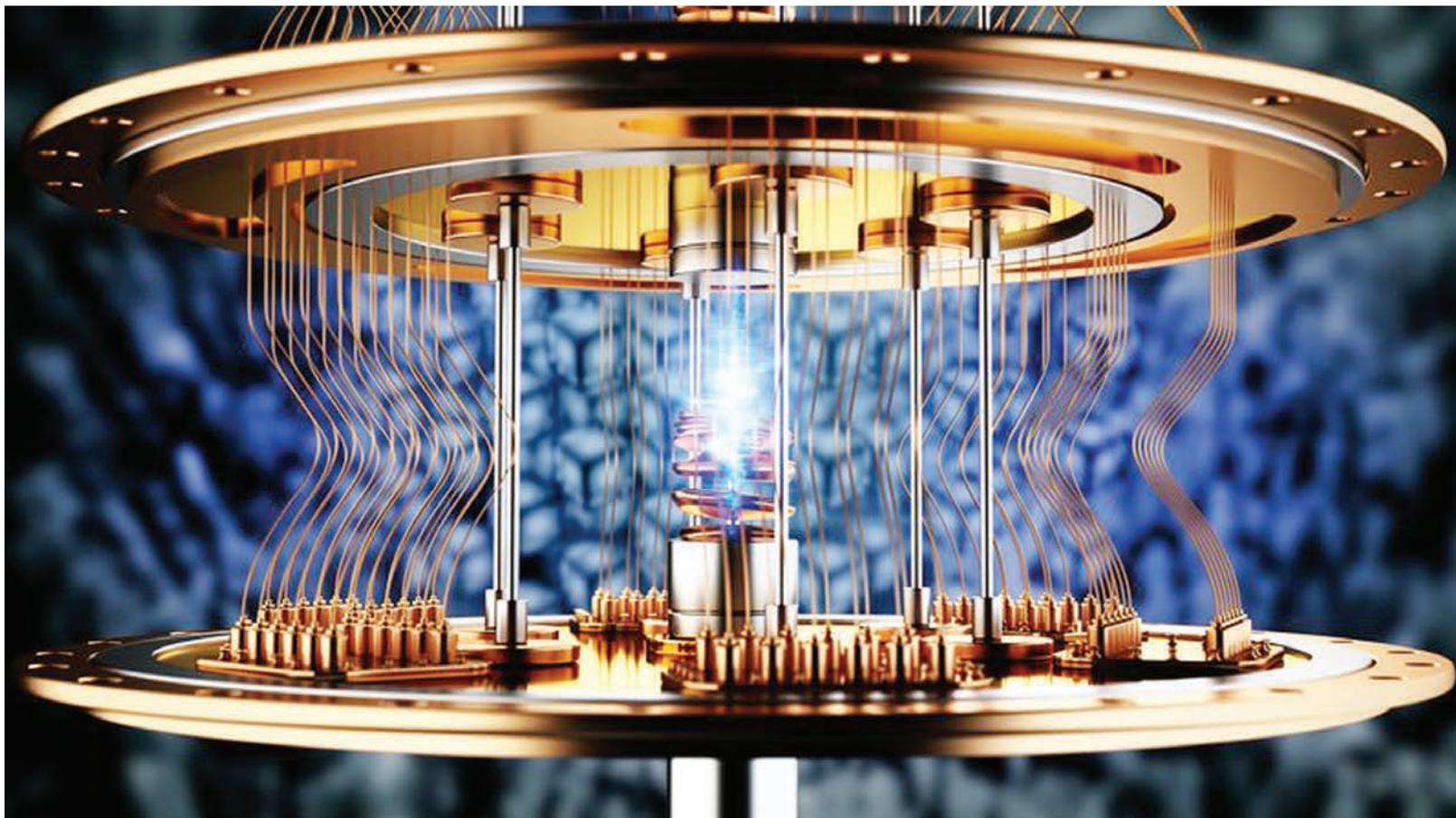
refuse to fund. You cannot build a 1,000-qubit superconducting processor on a diet of crumbs. Superconducting qubits require Josephson junction fabrication at nanometer precision, ultra-low-loss dielectrics and control electronics with picosecond timing accuracy.

A nation that cannot fabricate its own qubits cannot secure its own data. Post-quantum cryptography is a mere protocol patch. If a fault-tolerant quantum computer emerges in the next decade, and the US, China and Europe are racing towards it, India's encrypted state secrets, financial infrastructure and military communications will be rendered transparent. The Indian armed forces currently rely on symmetric encryption and public key infrastructure that Shor's algorithm (a quantum algorithm for factoring integers) will eviscerate. The timeline for topological qubits, once dismissed as decades away, has compressed.

The DRDO's DIA-CoEs (centers of excellence) are

laudable initiatives, but they are not yet integrated into a national mission rhythm that forces transition from TRL3 to TRL7 (technology readiness levels) within defined timelines. In contrast, the Russian Skolkovo model, the European CERN Venture Connect and the US National Quantum Initiative's 14 research centers are operating systems for technological sovereignty. India's NQM hubs remain, in large part, virtual collections of existing grants rather than physical, co-located, multi-disciplinary foundries.

The procedural rot runs deep. The GTE process delays equipment procurement by two to six months. When a dilution refrigerator costs \$3 million and requires six months to install, a six-month procurement delay is a project killer. Maintenance contracts for imported lasers and cryostats are rarely pre-funded; equipment fails, and labs shut down for four months while components are shipped to Europe or Japan



Frontier tech : The National Quantum Mission has an outlay of Rs 6,000 crore for an eight-year period. iStock

Now take the case of quantum computing, a fundamental fourth Industrial Revolution technology. India's quantum computing ambitions, articulated with considerable fanfare through the National Quantum Mission (NQM) and its Rs 6,000-crore (nearly \$670 million) outlay, present a study in strategic paradox.

On paper, India has acknowledged that quantum technologies are not merely a scientific frontier but the bedrock of 21st-century geopolitical power. In practice, the gap between this acknowledgment and the reality of India's R&D ecosystem is a bridge too far.

Between 2000 and 2018, India published around 1,700 papers on quantum technologies. China published around 12,000; the US about 13,000. When the metric shifts from quantity to quality, the proportion of papers in the top 10% most cited globally, India ranks 20th. China ranks third; the US is first. Only 9% of India's quantum computing publications penetrate this upper echelon, compared to 29.1% for the US and 14.6% for China. In patenting, the picture is even bleaker. Between 2015 and 2020, India filed 339 quantum patents. China filed 23,335, the US 8,935. India ranks ninth globally.

The NQM ambitiously targets a 50-1,000 physical qubit quantum computer by the end of the decade. This remains a chimera unless we are prepared to confront

initiated a review of outward FDI in critical security technologies, with quantum among the top three areas under scrutiny. Export controls on quantum components are tightening globally. The US has already signaled that cryogenic systems are moving to controlled lists. India's response? A procurement regime which mandates that Global Tender Enquiry (GTE) exemptions are still ad hoc.

The human capital crisis is deeper. India produces over 91,000 graduates annually in fields relevant to quantum technology. This places us second globally, behind only the EU. Yet this statistic masks a rot. These graduates are not being converted into quantum engineers. The reason is brutally simple: there are no jobs. Not in academia, where permanent faculty positions are stagnant and postdoctoral fellowships in quantum hardware are scarce. Not in the industry, where Indian IT services firms are building "quantum practices" that consist primarily of running Qiskit tutorials on IBM's cloud.

This funding fallacy is the heart of the matter. India's total NQM budget is around \$670 million over eight years. China's estimated investment is \$15 billion. Japan committed \$7.4 billion in 2025 alone. Germany, the UK, France and the Netherlands all outspend India manifold. We are attempting to build gods with tools we

for repair.

The most dangerous delusion is that quantum computing is a software problem. In fact, it is a materials science problem, a cryogenics problem, a microwave engineering problem, a semiconductor fabrication problem. India's failure in the field of semiconductors, despite prescient warnings dating back to the 1990s, is now being repeated on the quantum front.

The Department of Space and ISRO succeeded because they built an integrated, mission-mode vertical. The Department of Atomic Energy succeeded because the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre controlled the fuel cycle. Quantum technology was handed to the Department of Science and Technology, which historically funds curiosity-driven research, not national security-driven engineering.

The NQM is not a quantum leap but a down payment on a down payment. It cannot, at the current velocity, produce a 1,000-qubit computer, a satellite-based QKD (quantum key distribution) network spanning 2,000 km or a single-photon detector that competes with ID Quantique. The government must put its money where its mouth is.

(Manish Tewari is a Lok Sabha MP and former Union Minister of India)

# The Epstein Files and the Erosion of Trust

- **WHY, DESPITE THE AVALANCHE OF REVELATIONS, HAS THERE BEEN SO LITTLE VISIBLE ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE UNITED STATES COMPARED TO DEVELOPMENTS ABROAD?**
- **THE EPSTEIN SAGA IS NOT ABOUT PRURIENT INTRIGUE. IT IS ABOUT STRUCTURAL CREDIBILITY. IT ASKS WHETHER WEALTH AND POWER CONFER EFFECTIVE IMMUNITY. IT ASKS WHETHER INSTITUTIONS STILL POSSESS THE WILL TO CONFRONT ENTRENCHED INFLUENCE.**

PROF. INDRAJIT  
S SALUJA



Jeffrey Epstein and Epstein accomplice Ghislaine Maxwell aboard Epstein's private jet. -File photo

The saga of Jeffrey Epstein is not merely the story of a disgraced financier or a sordid criminal conspiracy. It is a mirror reflecting the fragility of democratic institutions when confronted with wealth, influence, royalty, and power. Years after Epstein's mysterious death in a Manhattan jail cell in August 2019, the central question refuses to die with him: Why, despite the avalanche of revelations, has there been so little visible accountability in the United States compared to developments abroad?

The first arrest of a British royal in 400 years-Prince Andrew, Duke of York-encapsulated the widening fallout of the Epstein issue beyond American shores. In Britain, civil proceedings, police investigations, and public scrutiny reached into the highest echelons of aristocracy. The spectacle shook the foundations of an ancient institution and sent a stark message: no pedestal is immune. It revived this pressing question on this side of the Atlantic: If legal authorities in Britain and elsewhere in Europe can breach the protected circle around Epstein's former network, why is it not happening in the United States? What is being concealed-and protected? And why?

## THE RISE AND FALL OF JEFFREY EPSTEIN

To understand the present dilemma, we must revisit history. Jeffrey Epstein emerged from modest beginnings to cultivate an image of brilliance and exclusivity. By the late 1990s and early 2000s, he had become a fixture in elite circles-his residences frequented by billionaires, politicians, celebrities, and academics. His private island in the Caribbean became notorious, even before the public fully understood why.

In 2008, Epstein reached a controversial plea deal in Florida after being charged with procuring a minor for prostitution. Brokered by then-U.S. Attorney Alexander Acosta, the agreement allowed Epstein to plead guilty to state-level charges, avoid federal prosecution, and serve a lenient sentence that included work release privileges. The deal also shielded potential unnamed co-conspirators.

It was a stunning miscarriage of prosecutorial rigor. For many, that plea deal planted the first seeds of suspicion: that Epstein's wealth and connections insulated him from full justice. Victims later testified that they were never notified of the agreement, in violation of their rights.

A decade later, investigative journalism-most prominently by The Miami Herald-resurrected the case. In July 2019, federal authorities in New York charged Epstein anew with sex trafficking minors. The message seemed clear: the era of impunity was ending.

But on August 10, 2019, Epstein was found dead in his jail cell at the Metropolitan Correctional Center. Officially ruled a suicide, his death spawned global skepticism. Surveillance cameras malfunctioned. Guards reportedly slept or falsified records. The most consequential defendant in a sprawling trafficking network died before he could testify.

For many Americans, that was the moment faith eroded.

## THE BRITISH RECKONING

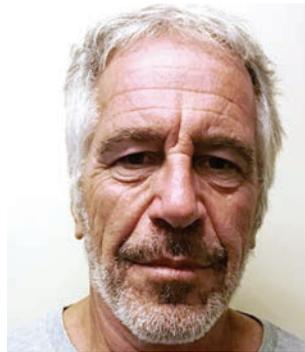
The British chapter unfolded differently. Virginia Giuffre, one of Epstein's most prominent accusers, filed a civil lawsuit against Prince Andrew in the United States, alleging that she had been trafficked to him as a minor. The

2019 BBC interview granted by Andrew-intended to exonerate himself-became a public relations disaster. He denied wrongdoing, but his explanations were widely viewed as implausible.

In 2022, Andrew settled the civil case out of court without admitting liability. The royal household stripped him of military titles and royal duties. The damage to the monarchy's prestige was immense.

The symbolism was unmistakable: even centuries-old institutions must bend before public accountability.

This development raises uncomfortable comparisons. If a royal-representing a family that has reigned for generations-can face scrutiny, why does American democracy appear hesitant to expose and prosecute individuals who, though wealthy and connected, are ultimately citizens equal before the law?



The disgraced Jeffrey Epstein  
File photo

**On August 10, 2019, Epstein was found dead in his jail cell at the Metropolitan Correctional Center. Officially ruled a suicide, his death spawned global skepticism. Surveillance cameras malfunctioned. Guards reportedly slept or falsified records. The most consequential defendant in a sprawling trafficking network died before he could testify**

**"Grand juries, sealed documents, and redactions are tools designed to protect due process. Yet when used excessively or selectively, they nurture suspicion. Americans are left asking: Who remains shielded? Why have investigations not yielded broader prosecutions? If crimes were systemic, where are the systemic consequences?"**

**"The Epstein tragedy began with exploitation of the vulnerable. It continues with exploitation of uncertainty. The American people deserve clarity-not rumor, not selective disclosures, but full sunlight consistent with the rule of law."**

## THE FILES AND THE SILENCE

The so-called "Epstein files"-flight logs, contact books, sealed court documents-fuel both legitimate inquiry and fevered speculation. Names listed in Epstein's address book or seen aboard his aircraft do not constitute proof of criminality. But transparency remains essential to democratic trust.

Grand juries, sealed documents, and redactions are tools designed to protect due process. Yet when used excessively or selectively, they nurture suspicion. Americans are left asking: Who remains shielded? Why have investigations not yielded broader prosecutions? If crimes were systemic, where are the systemic consequences?

The Department of Justice has pursued Maxwell and a handful of others. Yet critics argue that accountability has stopped at the periphery, not at the center of power networks. This perception-fair or not-erodes confidence in the equal application of law.

Democracy thrives on light. Shadows breed doubt.

## THE BROADER DEMOCRATIC ANXIETY

The Epstein saga intersects with a wider unease about governance in America. The Constitution promises equal protection under the law. The First Amendment enshrines free speech. Yet citizens increasingly perceive a dual system: swift justice for the weak, procedural labyrinths for the powerful. Under Donald Trump's second tenure, controversies over executive authority, immigration enforcement, and foreign policy have intensified political polarization. The President who declared he would avoid

"endless wars" has engaged in escalating tensions with multiple nations. Domestic rhetoric has sharpened along racial and religious lines, critics say, raising fears about the politicization of justice.

When leaders appear to operate above scrutiny-or wield legal processes selectively-public trust fractures. And when trust fractures, conspiracy theories fill the void.

The Epstein files have become, for many Americans, shorthand for something larger: the suspicion that there is one rule for ordinary citizens and another for elites.

## LAW, IMPUNITY, AND MORAL AUTHORITY

History warns us what happens when legal systems bend to power. From Watergate to Iran-Contra, from corporate frauds to financial crises, American resilience has depended on one principle: accountability. No office, no fortune, no lineage confers immunity from justice.

The Epstein case tests that principle.

It also tests institutional integrity. Prosecutors must walk the fine line between due process and public transparency. Courts must protect the rights of the accused while honoring the rights of victims. Legislators must ensure oversight without exploiting tragedy for political gain. If Britain's experience demonstrates anything, it is that public scrutiny can penetrate long-protected circles. That does not guarantee conviction. But it restores faith that scrutiny exists.

## WHERE DOES IT END?

The worry haunting Americans is not merely about the past. It is about trajectory. A government perceived as indifferent to law-whether through neglect or design-breeds cynicism. Cynicism breeds disengagement. And disengagement weakens democracy.

The Epstein saga is not about prurient intrigue. It asks whether wealth and power confer effective immunity. It asks whether institutions still possess the will to confront entrenched influence.

Above all, it asks whether justice in the United States is blind-or selective.

The absence of visible, comprehensive action fuels speculation that something is being concealed. That perception, even if exaggerated, is corrosive. Transparency, not secrecy, is the antidote.

## A CALL FOR CLARITY

Democracy does not demand perfection. It demands accountability. If investigations are ongoing, say so transparently. If evidence does not support charges, explain why. Silence is not neutrality; it is fertilizer for distrust.

The Epstein tragedy began with exploitation of the vulnerable. It continues with exploitation of uncertainty. The American people deserve clarity-not rumor, not selective disclosures, but full sunlight consistent with the rule of law. If the United States cannot convincingly demonstrate that justice is applied equally-whether to financier, celebrity, politician, or prince-its moral authority diminishes.

And moral authority is the currency of leadership in a democratic republic.

The Epstein saga has already scarred institutions. It has wounded victims anew with every delayed disclosure. But it also presents an opportunity to reaffirm that in America, no one stands above the law.

If Britain could interrogate royalty, surely a constitutional republic can examine its elite without fear or favor. Where this ends depends not on the past but on what comes next. Will institutions retreat into opacity, or embrace transparency? Will political divisions obscure shared principles? Or will Americans insist that democracy means equal justice, not selective amnesia?

The answer will determine more than the legacy of a scandal. It will determine the credibility of justice itself.

(Prof. Indrajit S Saluja is the Chief Editor of The Indian Panorama)

## TALKS OR CONFLICT?

The indirect talks between the United States and Iran, held in Muscat, Oman on 6 February, and in Geneva on February 17, have been described by both sides as "constructive" but military tensions between the two remain high

PRABHU  
DAYAL



The indirect talks between the United States and Iran, held in Muscat, Oman on 6 February had been described by both sides as "positive" and "constructive". Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi called the talks a "good start," and President Trump described them as "very good". However, there remained fundamental policy differences between the two sides. Iran flatly refused to end uranium enrichment or move its fuel offshore, which was a core U.S. demand.

Moreover, Washington pushed for a broader agreement that includes Iran's ballistic missile programme and its support for regional proxies, while Iran maintained that talks should only focus on the nuclear issue. A second round of high-level nuclear negotiations between the United States and Iran is scheduled. While the drumbeats of war between the U.S. and Iran seemed to have quietened down after indirect talks between the two sides in Oman on 6 February, the threat has again escalated with the US decision to deploy the USS Gerald R. Ford to the Middle East to join the USS Abraham Lincoln.

However, the Geneva meeting between Iran and the US on February 17, 2026, has provided a breather. It resulted in a shared understanding of "guiding principles" but has not yet produced a breakthrough that significantly changes the volatile situation on the ground. While both sides described the Omani-mediated talks as "constructive", the underlying military and civil tensions remain high.

The Gerald R. Ford is being redirected from a long-term deployment in the Caribbean. The move reflects preparation for a "sustained, multi-week military campaign" rather than just a single strike, indicating the serious nature of the current standoff. The deployment is part of a deliberate, reinforced strategy to pressure Tehran to accept a nuclear deal, with President Trump warning of "traumatic" consequences if negotiations fail. President Trump has stated that the fleet is a "just in case" measure if diplomacy fails, warning of "very traumatic" consequences if a deal is not reached quickly.

The deployment of the Ford ~ the world's largest aircraft carrier ~ is a huge increase in U.S. air, naval, and missile capabilities in the region, allowing for potentially weeks-long military operations if ordered. The combined fleets bring over 150 advanced aircraft, hundreds of Tomahawk missiles, and sophisticated Aegis-equipped missile defenses to the region.

Operating from the sea allows the U.S. to maintain strike capabilities without needing permission to use the airspace or territory of regional allies like the UAE, which has publicly restricted such use. The presence of two carriers enables the U.S. to conduct sustained, multi-week military campaigns if necessary, rather than isolated strikes. This deployment also signals a rapid response capability and is designed to deter Iran

and its regional proxies from attacking US forces or commercial shipping, especially after recent incidents, including the shooting down of an Iranian drone by US forces.

The Iranian Navy has announced that it is tracking every move of the U.S. "armada" as part of its deterrence posture. Senior Iranian officials warned that any U.S. attack would lead to a "major war" and an all-out regional conflict. High-ranking military figures, including IRGC leadership, stated that their forces remain "on the trigger" and are prepared to respond with "vengeful blows" against U.S. forces and regional

they are conducted without threats or sweeping demands for regime change. The US build-up follows large-scale anti-government protests in Iran and a violent crackdown by authorities and coincides with President Trump's recent comments floating the idea that a "shift in power" in Tehran would be the "best thing that could happen". Despite his comments, Trump has repeatedly said that his preference is a diplomatic agreement.

He recently told Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu that nuclear talks with Tehran must continue. While Trump has used the term "regime change," Vice

President JD Vance recently stated that the U.S. is not actively pursuing it. Similarly, Secretary of State Marco Rubio has noted that ousting the current leadership would be "far more complex" than previous efforts in other countries. The increased naval presence is also heavily focused on ensuring the freedom of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz, a critical choke point for global oil, which Iran has threatened to block.

The carriers serve to prevent attacks on commercial shipping that have previously disrupted up to 12 per cent of global trade through the region. The dual-carrier presence provides a formidable deterrent against potential Iranian attempts to block the Strait of Hormuz, a critical chokepoint for 20 per cent of global oil trade. This aims to prevent a spike in global energy prices, which analysts warn could exceed \$150 per barrel if conflict erupts. Summing up, a realistic assessment would be that the Trump administration is focusing on exerting maximum pressure to force a nuclear deal and aiming to contain Iran rather than engaging in a total, resource-draining war.

A direct war could be costly, unpredictable, and potentially lock the US into another long-term Middle East engagement. Despite the preference for diplomacy, US military officials have prepared for potential sustained operations against Iran if ordered, indicating readiness for escalation. On the other side, hardline factions in Tehran, including the IRGC and powerful clerics, have publicly dismissed

the talks as a "political game," and Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei remains deeply skeptical of US intentions.

A full-scale war could lead to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz and trigger retaliatory strikes on US bases in the region, including in Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain. The situation remains high-stakes, with both sides maneuvering to avoid full-scale conflict while being prepared for it. On balance, it appears that both sides may eventually settle for a "temporary de-escalation", as neither side currently may seek a full-scale regional war.

(First published in The Statesman, Feb 19, 2026. Republished on February 20, 2026 with updates, with the writer's permission)

(The writer, a retired IFS officer, served as India's Ambassador to Kuwait and Morocco and as Consul-General in New York)



The military tensions between the US and Iran remain high -Photo / SNS

allies if provoked. State media reported increased activity by the IRGC, including the repositioning of missile units and air defense systems to reduce vulnerability to potential strikes.

Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi insisted that Iran "won't be scared" by the naval presence, framing the deployment as a failed attempt at coercive diplomacy. Iranian defense officials reiterated that all U.S. bases in the region are within reach of their missile arsenal and would be targeted in the event of a strike. In response to U.S. pressure, Iran mobilized large crowds during the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution to demonstrate domestic unity against foreign intervention.

Despite these escalations, Iran has maintained it remains open to "fair and equitable" talks, provided

# Strengthening India-Romania Business Cooperation

## EMBASSY OF INDIA HOSTS HYBRID B2B MEETING ON SPORTS EQUIPMENT



Banner for B2B on Sports Equipment

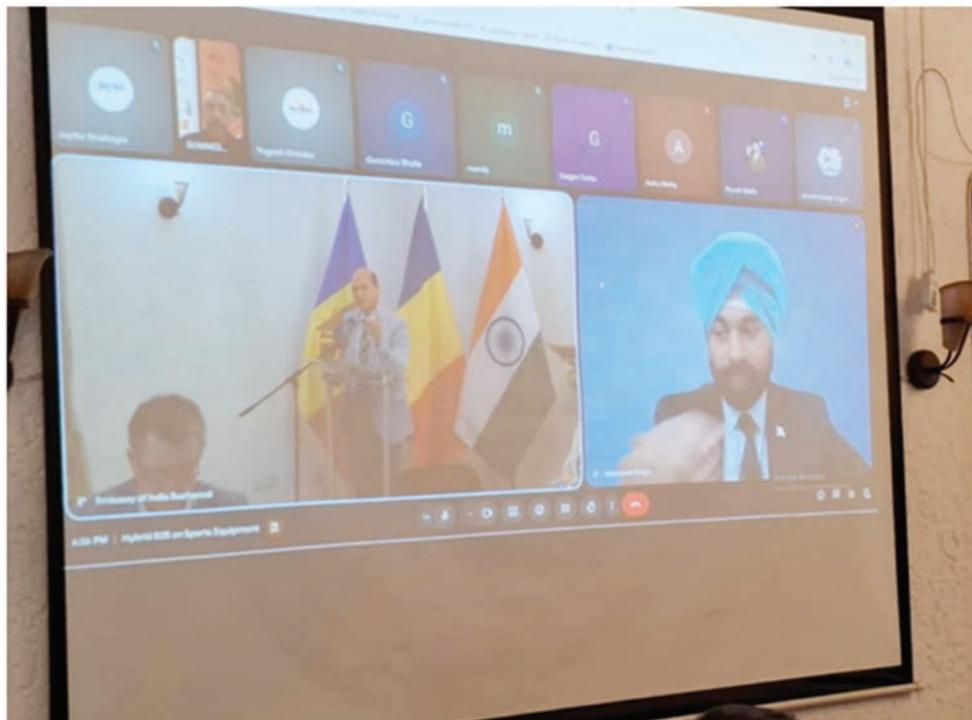
**FEBRUARY 15, 2026**  
**BUCHAREST (TIP)**

The Embassy of India in Bucharest successfully organised a Hybrid Business-to-Business (B2B) Meeting on the Sports Equipment sector on 13 February 2026, bringing together leading Indian and Romanian companies and further strengthening the growing economic engagement between the two countries. The event was organised in close coordination with Mr. Manpreet Singh, President of the Indian Chamber of International Business (ICIB), underscoring the Embassy's proactive efforts to promote bilateral trade and investment cooperation in high-potential sectors.

The B2B engagement witnessed participation from established and emerging companies as well as representatives of sports authorities and institutions from both private and public sectors, reflecting strong mutual interest in expanding cooperation in sports infrastructure and equipment supply. Indian companies showcased their advanced manufacturing capabilities, diversified product portfolios, and growing footprint in international markets, expressing keen interest in expanding exports to Romania and the wider European region. Romanian companies, in turn, recognised India's emergence as a reliable global manufacturing hub and expressed interest in sourcing partnerships, technology collaboration, and possible joint ventures in sports equipment manufacturing and distribution.

The hybrid format ensured wider accessibility and participation, with more than 35 Romanian companies attending physically at the Embassy premises and around 20 Indian companies joining virtually from across India. The format enabled real-time exchanges despite geographical distances, allowing participants to discuss regulatory requirements, certification standards, logistics, and market access considerations for entry into the European market. Indian companies also delivered detailed presentations outlining their product ranges, quality certifications, and successful export experiences in European and global markets.

The meeting commenced with opening remarks by H.E. Dr. Manoj Kumar Mohapatra, Ambassador of India to Romania, followed by remarks from Rtn. Manpreet Singh. In his address, the Ambassador highlighted India's expanding role in global sports development and the country's strong manufacturing ecosystem producing high-quality and cost-effective sports equipment. He noted that Indian



Rtn. Manpreet Singh, President, International Chamber of Investment and Business giving his remarks



Ambassador Dr. Manoj Kumar Mohapatra giving his remarks

manufacturers increasingly meet international standards supported by progressive policy initiatives and encouraged Romanian stakeholders to explore partnerships in sourcing, co-development, and research collaboration to meet evolving market demands.

During interaction sessions, Romanian participants expressed particular interest in collaboration opportunities in sports infrastructure, equipment manufacturing, and related innovation-driven solutions. The discussions were followed by productive one-to-one business meetings that generated promising leads, including potential product trials, preliminary business understandings, and sample shipments. The Embassy reaffirmed its continued commitment to facilitating economic and commercial cooperation between India and Romania and supporting follow-up engagements between participating companies.



Ambassador Dr. Manoj Kumar Mahapatra is seen with the participants

The event concluded with a vote of thanks from the Embassy acknowledging the participation and cooperation of all stakeholders. The B2B meeting proved to be a productive platform, paving the way for future partnerships. Follow-up interactions, including virtual meetings and potential business delegations, are being planned to convert discussions into concrete commercial outcomes, further strengthening India-Romania economic relations.

(Based on a Press Release issued by the Embassy of India in Bucharest)

# India's Ambassador to Romania Dr. Manoj Kumar Mohapatra presented his Letters of Credence to Ms. Maia Sandu, President of the Republic of Moldova



Dr. Manoj Kumar Mohapatra, presented his Letters of Credence to Ms. Maia Sandu, President of the Republic of Moldova

**FEBRUARY 18, 2026  
BUCHAREST (TIP)**

Dr. Manoj Kumar Mohapatra, Ambassador of India to Romania, presented his Letters of Credence to Ms. Maia Sandu, President of the Republic of Moldova, on 17 February 2026 at a solemn ceremony at the Presidential Palace in Chisinau. With the presentation of his Credentials, Ambassador Mohapatra has been concurrently accredited as Ambassador of India to the Republic of Moldova. The ceremony marked an important step in further strengthening India-Moldova relations at a time when both countries are focused on economic growth, energy security and deeper international partnerships.

In his meeting with President Sandu, Ambassador Mohapatra conveyed greetings from the leadership of India and reaffirmed India's commitment to expanding cooperation with Moldova in areas of mutual priority. Discussions focused on infrastructure development, renewable energy, rail connectivity, port modernization, automobiles, IT and digital innovation. President Sandu appreciated the ongoing work of KEC International Ltd in constructing the 158 km, 400 kV overhead transmission line connecting Chisinau and Vulcaneşti. The project, which is nearing completion, represents a major contribution to Moldova's energy resilience and its integration with the European electricity grid. Ambassador Mohapatra underlined that Indian companies operating abroad adhere to high standards of quality, transparency and timely delivery. He emphasized that India's development partnerships are guided by sustainability, respect for local laws and a commitment to strengthening local capacity.

Ambassador Mohapatra also conveyed the growing interest of Indian investors in Moldova, including in renewable energy projects such as the proposed 170 MW wind power initiative, as well as in infrastructure, digital services and manufacturing. He noted that Indian companies seek transparent and predictable frameworks, sound feasibility assessments and mutually agreed financial models that ensure long-term viability. India's approach aims to create partnerships that are commercially sound while contributing to the host country's development objectives.

The Ambassador highlighted India's rapid economic transformation and its emergence as one of the fastest-growing major economies in the world. He referred to India's achievements in digital public infrastructure, renewable energy expansion, innovation and start-up ecosystems. He also noted the recent conclusion of the India-European Union Free Trade Agreement, which is expected to significantly enhance trade, investment and technology cooperation between India and EU member states. As Moldova advances its European integration process, the new India-EU economic



Ambassador Mohapatra called on Prime Minister Mr. Alexandru Munteanu

framework provides additional opportunities to deepen economic engagement, strengthen regional value chains and promote investor confidence.

During his visit, Ambassador Mohapatra called on Mr. Alexandru Munteanu, Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova. The Prime Minister congratulated the Ambassador and expressed appreciation for India's constructive role in Moldova's development. He welcomed greater Indian participation in healthcare infrastructure, IT services and other sectors critical to Moldova's modernization. Ambassador Mohapatra reiterated India's readiness to support Moldova's development priorities through responsible investment, technology partnerships and capacity building. Regional and global developments of mutual interest were also discussed.



Ambassador's meeting with Defense Minister Mr. Anatolie Nosatii

In his meeting with H.E. Mr. Anatolie Nosatii, Minister of Defense, the two sides explored prospects for defense cooperation, training and capacity building. Ambassador Mohapatra highlighted India's expanding defense manufacturing capabilities and its policy of responsible defense engagement based on transparency, mutual respect and international commitments. Both sides agreed to examine appropriate mechanisms for future cooperation.



Ambassador Mohapatra met with Minister for Internal Affairs Ms. Daniela Misail-Nichitin

Ambassador Mohapatra also met Ms. Daniela Misail-Nichitin, Minister of Internal Affairs. Discussions focused on collaboration in training programs, digital

governance, modernization of public services and institutional capacity building. The Ambassador shared India's experience in large-scale digital transformation and expressed readiness to share best practices in areas such as digital identity systems and e-governance. He also raised certain consular matters concerning Indian nationals, including visa-related issues and recognition of official documents. The Minister assured us that these matters would be examined in a constructive manner.



Ambassador met Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mr. Mihai Popsoi

Ambassador Mohapatra met Mr. Mihai Popsoi, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, and reviewed the entire spectrum of bilateral relations. The discussions covered renewable energy, infrastructure, connectivity, tourism, education, people-to-people exchanges and enhanced civil aviation links. Both sides expressed their shared commitment to elevating the partnership and maintaining regular high-level dialogue. The Minister appreciated the contribution of KEC International Ltd to Moldova's energy infrastructure and emphasized the importance of sustained economic cooperation.

During his visit, Ambassador Mohapatra also interacted with representatives of KEC International Ltd to review the progress of the transmission line project and understand operational aspects. He reaffirmed the Government of India's support for Indian enterprises contributing responsibly and effectively to Moldova's development priorities. Ambassador Mohapatra also held interactions with Ambassadors of European countries in Chisinau to exchange perspectives on developments in Moldova and explore areas of mutual interest.

India and Moldova share friendly relations rooted in mutual respect, democratic values and shared aspirations for sustainable development.

Ambassador Mohapatra's visit underscores India's commitment to deepening engagement with Moldova through transparent investments, institutional cooperation, innovation partnerships and strengthened political dialogue.

Trump says he'll talk affordability, inflation in his State of the Union address

FEBRUARY 19, 2026  
WASHINGTON, D.C. (TIP)

President Trump said today, February 19, during remarks at a steel plant in Georgia that he would speak about affordability and inflation in his State of the Union address next Tuesday, February 24.



President Trump

"The last three months, we've had the lowest inflation we have had in over a decade," Trump told the crowd in Rome, Georgia. "You don't have it anymore. I'm going to make a State of the Union address on Tuesday. I hope you're going to watch and we're going to be talking about it."

Inflation increased 0.2% from December to January, but dropped to 2.4% in January compared to a year earlier.

The president continued his remarks today by referencing Democrats' use of the word affordability, asking the crowd, "Do people believe it?"

"They cause the affordability problem, and we've solved it, and we're going still lower, but we've solved it," Trump said.

The president has repeatedly called affordability a "hoax" and a "scam" by Democrats, despite the fact that some Democrats won in November by using affordability as a center of their campaigns amid rising economic concerns from Americans.

## Florida lawmakers pass bill to rename Palm Beach Intl. Airport after Trump



FEBRUARY 19, 2026  
TAMPA (TIP)

The Florida Legislature has passed a bill to rename Palm Beach International Airport as "President Donald J. Trump International Airport."

The bill, which the House passed Tuesday, February 17, and the Senate passed today, now heads to Gov. Ron DeSantis' desk.

The legislation states that the name change is subject to approval by the Federal Aviation Administration. It also

outlines the need for an agreement between the trademark holder authorizing commercial use of the new name by Palm Beach County.

The proposed change to the airport minutes from Mar-a-Lago comes after the Trump administration allegedly asked Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., to support renaming Penn Station in New York and Dulles International Airport in Virginia to clear funding for the Gateway Tunnel Project, which would link New York City and New Jersey. Trump denied that the push was his idea, writing on social media this week that the renaming "was brought up by certain politicians and construction union heads, not me."

Ro Khanna plans to take an Epstein survivor to the State of the Union

FEBRUARY 19, 2026  
WASHINGTON, D.C. (TIP)

Rep. Ro Khanna, D-Calif., who has been leading the charge in forcing the release of the Epstein files, said today, February 19, that he will take Haley Robson, a survivor of Epstein's abuse, as his guest to the State of the Union address next week.



Ro Khanna said he would take Haley Robson, a survivor of Epstein's abuse, as his guest to the State of the Union address next week.

"Haley's courageous fight is proof that this isn't about politics, it's about exposing America's two-tiered system of justice and bringing accountability to the Epstein class involved in the horrific abuse of young girls," Khanna said in a statement.

Robson, who alleges that - starting at age 16 - she was trafficked by Epstein, joined Khanna and Rep. Thomas Massie, R-Ky., in September to stand alongside other survivors on Capitol Hill to demand the release of the Epstein files.

"I'm honored and it came as a wonderful surprise to have been invited," Robson said in a statement today. "I intend to show up fully with not only a hero, but a man who I have immense respect and admiration for."

### EUROPE

## Embassy of India in Romania Organizes Special Screening of Blockbuster Film Dhurandhar for Students in Chisinau

FEBRUARY 19, 2026  
BUCHAREST (TIP)

The Embassy of India in Bucharest, with concurrent accreditation to the Republic of Moldova, organized a special screening of the blockbuster action film Dhurandhar in Chisinau on 16 February 2026, as part of its dedicated efforts to engage Indian students studying abroad, a cornerstone priority of the Government of India. The event drew over 400 participants, including Indian students pursuing higher education in medicine, engineering, and other fields at universities across Chisinau, members of the Indian diaspora, and friends of India from Moldova.

Held at a premier local theatre, the screening transformed into a vibrant cultural hub, with the auditorium buzzing with anticipation, cheers echoing through iconic dialogues, and the aroma of shared Indian snacks fostering an instant sense of home. For the students, who form the backbone of India-Moldova people-to-people ties, the evening was more than cinematic entertainment. It provided a vital platform to unwind from academic rigors, exchange notes on studies and career aspirations, and network with peers and mentors from the diaspora. Many shared stories of balancing rigorous coursework with cultural isolation,



expressing how the Embassy's initiative reignited their pride in India's dynamic soft power through cinema. Interactive sessions post-screening allowed students to discuss the film's themes of resilience and innovation, mirroring their own journeys abroad, and explore opportunities in India-Moldova collaborations in education, technology, and startups.

The warm appreciation from the audience underscored the event's impact: students hailed it as a "breath of fresh air," offering comfort, camaraderie, and a renewed sense of belonging far from family. Diaspora members relished reconnecting, mentoring young

talents, and welcoming newcomers, further solidifying community bonds. Beyond recreation, the screening reinforced cultural bridges between India and Moldova, amplifying youth engagement to nurture future leaders. It exemplified the Embassy's commitment to the Government of India's focus on student welfare abroad, through cultural diplomacy, scholarships awareness, and events that promote Indian values of innovation, diversity, and perseverance, while strengthening enduring bilateral ties.

This initiative also significantly advanced the promotion of Indian cinema in Moldova and across Eastern European countries. By showcasing Dhurandhar's high-octane storytelling and universal appeal to a diverse audience, the event sparked keen interest among local theatre-goers, media, and cultural enthusiasts, paving the way for wider distribution of Indian films in the region. It builds on the growing popularity of Bollywood and regional cinema in Eastern Europe, fostering greater cultural exchange and positioning Indian movies as a bridge for tourism, youth inspiration, and economic partnerships in entertainment.

The Embassy of India in Bucharest extends its sincere gratitude to the producers and promoters of Dhurandhar for their generous support, and to the Chisinau theatre for hosting this memorable occasion. The Embassy looks forward to more such student-focused initiatives in Moldova and Romania.

# Extortions: Canada gives teeth to its law enforcement agencies handling financial crime

PRABHJOT  
SINGH



FEBRUARY 19, 2026  
MISSISSAUGA (TIP)

In its fight against the growing malaise of extortion, the Canadian government has finally granted ammunition to the armory of its law-enforcing agencies, including financial institutions and police organizations, to take the fight to its logical conclusions.

The mainstay of the new measures is to "detect and disrupt" financial crime by following the "movement of the ill-got money".

Announcing a series of measures, the Federal Government has initiated, Finance Minister and National Revenue Minister François-Philippe Champagne, along with Rechie Valdez, Minister of Women and Gender Equality and Secretary of State for Small Business and Tourism, Maninder Sidhu, Minister of International Trade, and Shafqat Ali, President of the Treasury Board, were in Mississauga on Thursday, February 19, to say "enough is enough".

They reiterated their Government's resolve to strengthen the country's ability to detect, disrupt, and prevent extortion across the length and breadth of the country, especially in the most affected areas like Ontario, British Columbia, and Alberta. By improving how financial intelligence is collected and shared, law enforcement will be better equipped to trace criminal networks, support investigations, and hold those responsible accountable, they said at a joint media conference.

The latest series of measures primarily aims to coordinate the working of various agencies, including the RCMP, Police, Canadian Border Agency, banking and other financial institutions, together to keep a track on "extortions" by launching the "Follow the Money" initiative.

Admitting that for too many Canadian individuals and businesses, extortion has emerged as a reality of everyday life—one that brings fear, intimidation, and harm to communities and families alike and that undermines Canadians' sense of safety. These crimes are typically carried out by organized networks operating across borders and using digital platforms. That's why coordinated action between governments, law enforcement, and financial institutions is essential and at the heart of today's announcement, they said. Threats were reported

Last year, there were 133 extortion threats reported to Surrey police alone. Besides, there were 49 shootings. Organized crime has been top of mind in the Greater Toronto Area, where early this month, police in Ontario announced it had laid charges against 27 people, including seven Toronto police officers, in connection with a corruption probe tied to an alleged plot to assassinate an Ontario corrections officer.

Mayors of some cities across Canada have been speaking about the growing incidence of attempted extortions, shootings and arsons aimed at the South Asian community in general and the Punjabi community in particular and urged the federal government to declare it a national emergency.

After returning from a visit to India, the British Columbia Premier, David Eby, met the Prime Minister, Mark Carney, in Ottawa, and even offered to hold a national police meet in Vancouver this month to fight this malaise jointly.

Finance and National Revenue Minister François-Philippe Champagne said, "Extortion is a serious crime that harms Canadians, businesses, and communities. Our government is strengthening financial intelligence and working closely with law enforcement and financial institutions to better detect and disrupt extortion, support investigations, and help protect Canadians.

"Communities across Canada are feeling the impact of extortion. Our government is taking action by investing in prevention, strengthening enforcement, improving intelligence sharing, deepening collaboration at home and abroad, and bringing in tougher laws for extortion-related offences. Working with provincial, territorial, and municipal partners and law enforcement agencies across



Minister François-Philippe Champagne announces new financial strategy to combat extortion at Mississauga's Civic Centre on Feb. 19. -Photo credit: Sabrina Almeida/Metroland

the country, we are taking a coordinated approach to combat this threat. The new measures announced today give police even more tools to target extortion and cut off the illicit money that fuels it," remarked Public Safety Minister Gary Anandasangaree.

Minister of Women and Gender Equality and Secretary of State for Small Business and Tourism Rechie Valdez said, "Small businesses are the backbone of Peel Region's economy. When organized crime targets businesses in our neighborhoods, it puts entrepreneurs, employees, and entire communities at risk. Today's measures reinforce that we will protect the hardworking business owners who power our local economies and ensure they can operate in safety and stability."

Minister for International Trade Maninder Sidhu commented, "In Brampton, I've heard from families and business owners about the real fear that extortion creates in our community. No one should feel unsafe in their own neighborhood or workplace. Our new government is strengthening the work of the Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre of Canada and coordinating with partners such as the RCMP and other law enforcement agencies. We are following the money, targeting criminal networks, and protecting our communities."

President of the Treasury Board Shafqat Ali said: "By strengthening cooperation between governments, law enforcement and financial institutions, we are taking action to disrupt criminal networks, protect livelihoods and ensure Canadians, including families and businesses in Brampton, can live and work without fear."

As the epidemic of extortions accompanied by shooting at both residential and business premises of victims spread to various provinces, including British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario, the federal government recently convened summits on extortion in Surrey (British Columbia), Brampton (Ontario), bringing together federal, provincial, and municipal leaders, along with law enforcement partners, including the Canada Border Services Agency and RCMP, to strengthen coordination and advance integrated efforts to disrupt cross-border criminal networks and protect local businesses and residents.

The Government of Canada, a statement said, was prioritizing efforts, mobilizing the Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre of Canada (FINTRAC) to help to combat extortion and support law enforcement investigations. Key measures include prioritizing financial intelligence resources to tackle extortion: FINTRAC will surge resources to combat extortion. This will enable law enforcement to receive more timely and relevant financial intelligence to identify criminal networks and support investigations.

Another measure was of launching the countering extortion partnership with financial institutions, government, and law enforcement: FINTRAC will work closely with Canadian banks, credit unions, and financial service providers of virtual assets, including cryptocurrencies, alongside partners such as the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions, the Royal

Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), and local police, where applicable, to enhance information sharing and share best practices to fight extortion.

Assigning financial intelligence experts to support police is another step in this direction. FINTRAC will assign dedicated liaison officers to work directly with local law enforcement in the most affected areas, such as Ontario, British Columbia, and Alberta. These officers will provide specialized financial intelligence expertise, strengthen information sharing, and ensure financial intelligence is supporting enforcement efforts, investigations, and prosecutions.

Other measures include providing financial institutions with clear guidance on how to detect extortion transactions: FINTRAC will issue a Targeted Indicator Profile or 'TIP', which will give practical guidance to help financial institutions recognize patterns and behaviors commonly associated with extortion. This will help ensure suspicious transactions are reported quickly and accurately.

Publishing intelligence on how criminals move and hide extortion money: FINTRAC will publish strategic intelligence detailing how criminals launder extortion proceeds, including indicators and typologies to aid in its detection.

Together, these measures will support the ongoing efforts by federal, provincial, and municipal governments and law enforcement to combat criminal extortion activities that harm Canadians. These actions build on broader federal measures to combat organized crime and protect Canadians, including the creation of the new Canada Financial Crimes Agency, significant investments to strengthen RCMP investigative capacity, and enhanced coordination with law enforcement and intelligence partners, the statement said.

Budget 2025 announced \$1.7 billion in funding to strengthen the RCMP's response to a wide range of threats related to transnational organized crime, financial crimes, and money laundering, while enhancing its intelligence and national security capacity, fulfilling the government's commitment to hire 1,000 RCMP personnel. The Prime Minister has indicated that 150 of these new personnel will be dedicated to tackling financial crimes—targeting money laundering networks, organized crime, online fraud, and the recovery of illicit assets.

Leveraging these investments in federal law enforcement capacity, Budget 2025 proposed to establish a new Financial Crimes Agency to be Canada's lead enforcement agency against financial crimes. This agency will be a best-in-class model that aims to unite the police and civilian expertise needed to investigate complex cases of money laundering, organized criminal activity, and online financial scams, and to recover illicit proceeds. The Minister of Finance and National Revenue is working with the Ministers of Justice and Public Safety to introduce legislation to stand up the new Financial Crimes Agency by the spring of 2026.

Businesses with anti-money laundering and anti-terrorist financing (AML/ATF) obligations are on the front lines of the fight against money laundering, terrorist financing, and sanctions evasion. Bill C-12, the Strengthening Canada's Immigration System and Borders Act, proposes comprehensive reforms to strengthen AML/ATF supervision, compliance, and enforcement, including by increasing AML/ATF civil penalties by forty times, and criminal fines by ten times their current amount.

Since 2019, the government has invested close to \$379 million in combating financial crimes. These investments have strengthened supervision and financial intelligence functions at FINTRAC, increased resources and tools to support financial crime investigations, and enhanced Canada's ability to combat trade-based financial crime.

(Prabhjot Singh is a senior Toronto-based, award-winning independent journalist, who worked with The Tribune, Reuters, and several media groups in a career spanning nearly five decades. He has written extensively about Diaspora, Politics, Business, Aviation, Health, Public and Private Sectors and Sports. He can be reached at prabhjot416@gmail.com)

## SC refuses to entertain plea to restrain naming of religious structures in Babur's name

FEBRUARY 20, 2026

**NEW DELHI (TIP):** The Supreme Court on Friday refused to entertain a plea seeking a direction to restrain the construction or naming of any mosque or religious structure in the name of Mughal emperor Babur or Babri Masjid.

After a Bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta showed its disinclination in entertaining the plea, the counsel appearing for the petitioner withdrew it.

The counsel referred to suspended Trinamool Congress MLA Humayun Kabir's announcement to construct a replica of the Babri Masjid in West Bengal's Murshidabad district.

The plea sought a direction to the Centre, states and others to consider the petitioner's case for restraining or banning the construction, establishment or naming of any mosque or religious structure in the name of Babur or Babri Masjid or any other derivative names across India.



FEBRUARY 19, 2026

**NEW DELHI (TIP):** Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Thursday unveiled a 20-point chargesheet against the BJP-led Assam Government, alleging corruption, failure to honour electoral promises and the creation of fear among minorities as the state heads towards Assembly elections.

The document was released at a public programme in Guwahati on the first day of her two-day visit to Assam. The Congress said that the chargesheet enumerates key assurances made by the ruling party over the past decade which, it claimed, remain unfulfilled.

Among the principal issues raised were the pending grant of Scheduled Tribe status to six indigenous communities and the promise to raise the daily wage of tea garden workers to Rs 351. The party said these commitments were repeatedly highlighted during previous election campaigns but were not implemented.

Vadra, who heads the Congress screening committee for the Assam polls, alleged that the government's tenure had been marked by widespread corruption. She claimed that Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, certain ministers and members of their families had accumulated wealth through improper means. The

## SIR In 22 more states and UTs 'expected to start from April': EC

FEBRUARY 19, 2026

**NEW DELHI (TIP):** A special intensive revision (SIR) of the voter rolls in 22 more states and Union territories is expected to begin in April, the Election Commission (EC) has said, asking its top election officials in these jurisdictions to complete preparations for the exercise "at the earliest".

The EC wrote to the chief electoral officers of the 22 states and Union territories – Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Odisha, Punjab, Sikkim, Tripura, Telangana, Uttarakhand, Chandigarh, Delhi, Dadra and Nagar Haveli & Daman and Diu, Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh – asking them on Thursday (February 19) to begin preparatory work for the SIR.

So far, the contentious exercise, which involves preparing the electoral rolls from scratch, has been completed in Bihar and is ongoing in 12 states and territories namely Chhattisgarh, Goa, Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep and Puducherry.

Assam is undergoing a separate 'special revision' of the voter rolls, with the EC citing the state's unique legal



status under section 6A of the 1955 Citizenship Act as well as the ongoing National Register of Citizens process.

Last month the Supreme Court reserved judgment in a batch of pleas challenging the SIR, with the petitioners arguing among other things that the exercise amounts to a citizenship verification drive that falls outside the EC's remit.

Among those states where the SIR is set to next take place is Manipur, which

continues to reel from ethnic tensions that erupted in violence in May 2023. The Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities continue to be segregated from each other by securitised 'buffer zones' and many thousands of people displaced by the strife are living in relief camps. April is also when the houselisting and housing component of the upcoming census is scheduled to begin, and it has been noted that both this exercise and the SIR would involve the state using the services of government school teachers.

## Priyanka Gandhi Vadra attacks Assam Govt, releases 20-point chargesheet



Congress leaders Gaurav Gogoi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra during a press conference in Guwahati on Thursday. PTI

chargesheet also accuses the administration of misusing official machinery and neglecting minorities

and marginalised communities.

Earlier in the day, Vadra, accompanied by Karnataka Deputy

Chief Minister D. K. Shivakumar and Assam Congress president Gaurav Gogoi, visited the Kamakhya Temple and offered prayers.

Speaking to reporters later, she downplayed the recent defection of former Assam Pradesh Congress Committee chief Bhupen Bora to the BJP. She said that party-switching before elections was not unusual and occurred in every political cycle. She maintained that the Congress organisation in Assam remained united and prepared to contest the elections collectively.

On candidate selection, Vadra said the screening committee had been travelling across districts to gather feedback from local leaders and party workers. Over the next two days, she said that she would consult as many stakeholders as possible before finalising nominations to ensure candidates were chosen after thorough consultation and preparation. Asked about possible alliances for the Assembly elections, she said developments would become clear in due course.

## "Extremely Well": Tharoor Praises AI Summit Amid Congress' Criticism

FEBRUARY 19, 2026

**NEW DELHI (TIP):** Congress leader Shashi Tharoor on Thursday praised the AI Impact Summit, saying the first couple of days had gone "extremely well" and "some glitches" can happen at any "large event".

He said what has been impressive is the attendance of presidents, prime ministers, and world leaders who have come with a strong message of wanting to see a newly integrated world in artificial intelligence development. While noting that the first couple of days went "extremely well" at the summit, Tharoor said there have been "some glitches" but such issues can happen at big events.

His remarks come a day after former Congress president Rahul Gandhi dubbed the ongoing AI Summit in Delhi a "disorganised PR spectacle" and alleged that Chinese products were being showcased there.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and other senior party leaders have also criticised the event, saying alleged mismanagement has resulted in "embarrassment" for the country.

Responding to a reporter's question after the launch event of his new book on Narayana Guru, Tharoor said, "Though I have not had the chance to go to the summit, I am speaking there tomorrow. From what I understand, these first couple of days have gone extremely well. There have been some glitches, some organisational things, these things happen in a large event." "But by and large what has been impressive is the attendance... a number of presidents, prime ministers, and world leaders are here, and they've come with a strong message of wanting to see a newly integrated world in AI development, where the impact upon society would be the principle," Tharoor said.

"Preoccupation in India has clearly led the drive in this area," he added.

Asked about French President Emanuel Macron's remarks about procurement of Rafale jets by India and the Make in India component of the deal, Tharoor said as far as the French Rafale is concerned, parts of it are being manufactured in India.

That is a very important aspect of the deal because it is part of strengthening defence, but also increasing our self-reliance in the defence sector, he said.

"Defence is important for India not because we want to go to war, but because we don't want others to think that we are so weak that they can be tempted to go to war. It is a defensive defence literally, and that is what we are working for and I support the government on that," he said.

# SC slams 'freebie culture', says it's detrimental to nation-building

FEBRUARY 19, 2026

**NEW DELHI (TIP):** The Supreme Court has strongly criticised the practice of announcing cash transfer schemes and other freebies by state governments just before elections.

The bench, led by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, expressed concern that such measures, if distributed indiscriminately, could hamper the country's long-term economic development. The Court questioned the rationale behind providing benefits to all citizens regardless of their financial status and emphasised the need for targeted welfare policies.

According to Live Law, the Supreme Court observed that the trend of announcing welfare schemes immediately before elections is widespread across India. The bench stated that distributing state benefits without distinguishing between those who can afford them and those who cannot amounts to appeasement, which is detrimental to economic progress.

The Court highlighted the importance of using state resources for development projects such as roads, hospitals, and schools, rather than for blanket distribution of goods and cash.

As reported by Deccan Herald, the bench noted that most states are running revenue deficits while continuing to offer such largesse. The justices stressed



that states should prioritise opening avenues for employment and focus on long-term development instead of providing free food, cycles, and electricity to all citizens. The Court questioned the sustainability of these practices, especially when states are already facing financial constraints.

The Court further remarked that the fundamental principle should be that individuals pay for services if they are able to do so. Coverage revealed that the justices called for a review of policy frameworks, urging political leaders and parties to reconsider the culture of distributing largesse, particularly during election periods. The bench emphasised that welfare measures should be reserved for the marginalised and not extended indiscriminately to affluent individuals.

The Supreme Court also raised concerns about the impact of direct cash transfer schemes on work culture and employment. The bench questioned whether people would continue to work if they received free food, gas, and

electricity, and whether such policies contribute to nation-building. Analysis showed that the Court is currently examining related petitions and has issued notices to the Union government regarding the matter.

In its oral observations, the Court clarified that it does not oppose welfare for those genuinely in need, such as children who cannot afford education or marginalised groups. However, the justices reiterated that blanket distribution of benefits to all, including the affluent, is not justified. The bench called for a balanced approach, suggesting that states should recover costs from those who can afford to pay and dedicate resources to sustainable development. The need for a shift from short-term populist measures to long-term planning was underscored as details emerged.

Justice Joymalya Bagchi, part of the bench, pointed out that the issue is not limited to any single state but is a pan-India concern. The Court urged states to justify their expenditure on welfare schemes and to ensure that budget proposals are planned and transparent. Reporting indicated that the Court has called for all stakeholders, including political leaders and social engineers, to revisit and reform current policy frameworks to prevent the continued distribution of indiscriminate largesse.

## Emmanuel Macron pitches India-France partnership for responsible AI

FEBRUARY 19, 2026

**NEW DELHI (TIP):** French President Emmanuel Macron on Thursday said India and France would jointly shape the future of artificial intelligence, highlighting India's digital public infrastructure as a model for inclusive technological growth and strategic autonomy.

Addressing the India AI Impact Summit alongside Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Macron said India had demonstrated how technology could transform everyday life, citing digital identity, large-scale payments and health platforms that brought millions into the formal economy.

"What was once impossible — financial access for millions — became reality through India's digital architecture," he said, describing the country's interoperable public digital systems as a "civilisational shift" rather than merely a technological advance.

The French leader noted that artificial intelligence had now become a central arena of geopolitical competition, but argued that India and Europe were pursuing an alternative path based on



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with French President Emmanuel Macron during the AI Impact Summit in New Delhi on Thursday. PTI

independence, cooperation and responsible innovation.

He said India's strategy of building smaller, task-specific AI models and expanding affordable computing capacity complemented Europe's investments in sovereign large-language models and secure infrastructure. Together, he added, the two approaches

could offer a balanced global framework that avoids dependence on a handful of dominant technology ecosystems.

Macron highlighted growing bilateral collaboration in healthcare AI, language technologies and sustainable computing, including joint research partnerships and tools aimed at supporting Indian languages and public services.

He also emphasised workforce development, noting India trains hundreds of thousands of engineers annually and has one of the world's largest developer communities, making it central to global AI innovation.

Calling for wider international cooperation, Macron said India's partnerships, including emerging technology initiatives with Gulf countries and Africa, reflected a broader push to ensure AI benefits developing nations rather than deepening inequalities.

"The future of AI will belong to those who combine innovation with responsibility," he said, adding that Paris and New Delhi would work together to create technology that was accessible, safe and sustainable.

# India in history this Week

## FEBRUARY 20 TO FEBRUARY 26

### 20 FEBRUARY

1987 Mizoram, India's northeastern state got the status of 23rd state. It was a part of the state of Assam before it became a union territory.

1983 A large-scale violence erupted before the assembly elections to be held in the north eastern state of Assam. It also led to the death of 600 people.

1968 The first heart transplant was done in 1968 at KEM Hospital in Mumbai.

1950 In 1950, Sharat Chandra Bose, the elder brother of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, passed away.

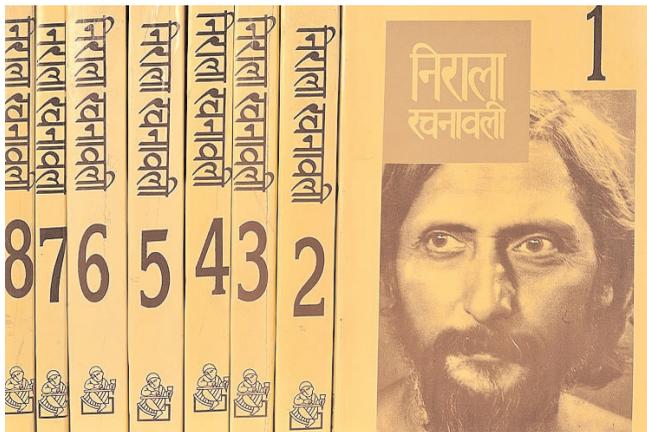


1999 Prime Minister of India Atal Bihari Vajpayee took a historic bus tour of Pakistan in 1999.

1999 The sports channel started on Doordarshan in 1999.

### 21 FEBRUARY

1896 Birth of great poet and writer Suryakant Tripathi Nirala in 1896.



1959 Press Club of India established in 1959 in New Delhi.

1999 Former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and former Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif signed the Lahore Declaration in 1999.

2008 On February 21, 2008, Anil Ambani's Anupam Global Soft was acquired by Reliance Communication.

2008 Private Airlines Jet Airways entered into a strategic alliance with Air Canada on 21 February 2008.

2013 A series of bomb blasts took place in Hyderabad on February 21, 2013, in which around 17 people died and 119 were badly injured.



### 22 FEBRUARY

1944 Mahatma Gandhi's wife Kasturba Gandhi died.

1958 Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the country's first Education Minister, died.



1845 The East India Company bought Serampore and Balasore from the Dutch East India Company in 1845.

1999 India's popular economist Jagdish Bhagwati was appointed as the head of the Center for Indian Politics Economy in Columbia on February 22, 1999.

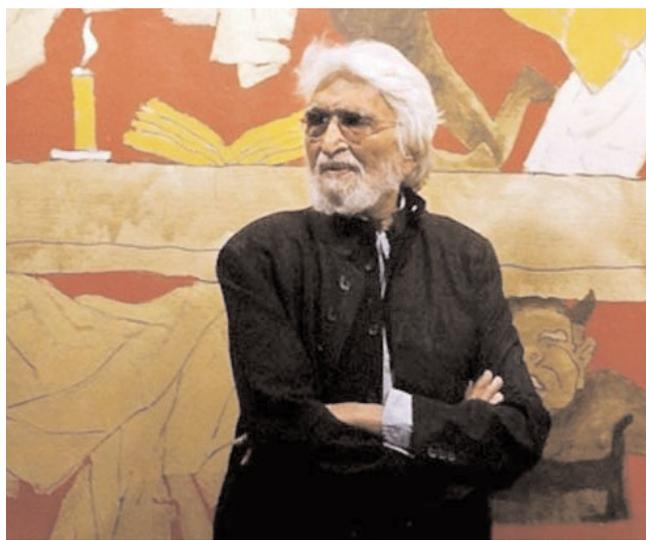
2006 Japan prohibited imports of all poultry products, including meat and eggs, from India in 2006.

### 23 FEBRUARY



2006 In 1952, the Employees Provident Fund and Miscellaneous Provisions Act was passed.

2010 India's famous painter MF Hussain was granted citizenship of Qatar in 2010.



### 24 FEBRUARY

1882 The infectious disease TB was identified to this day.

2001 Pakistan agrees to negotiate nuclear deterrence with India.

2009 Central government announced reduction in

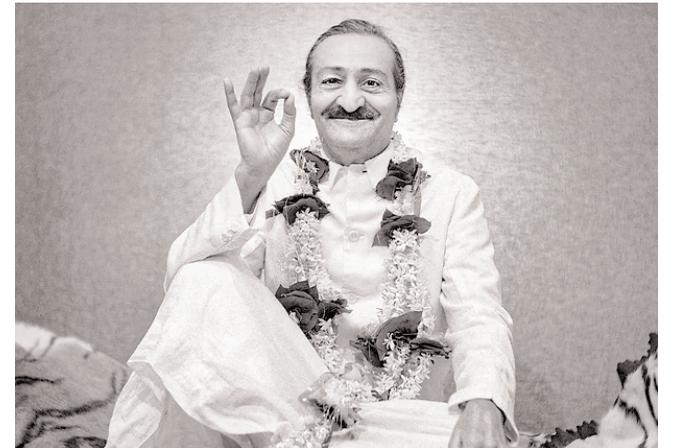
service tax and excise duty.

1822 The world's first Swami Narayan Temple was inaugurated in Ahmedabad in 1822.



1924 Mahatma Gandhi released from jail in 1924.

### 25 FEBRUARY



1894: Meher Baba, Indian mystic, was born. Known for his mystical teachings throughout his life through a spiritual transformation at a very young age, Meher Baba or Merwan Sheriar Irani was an Indian spiritual master. In a remarkable development, he declared himself to be an incarnation ('avataar') of God whose aim was to propagate spirituality. He assumed complete silence for much of his later life, communicating only through gestures and small written words.

1586 Akbar's court Navratan Birbal was killed in a battle with the rebel Yousafzai.



1988 India's first surface-to-surface missile Prithvi was successfully launched.

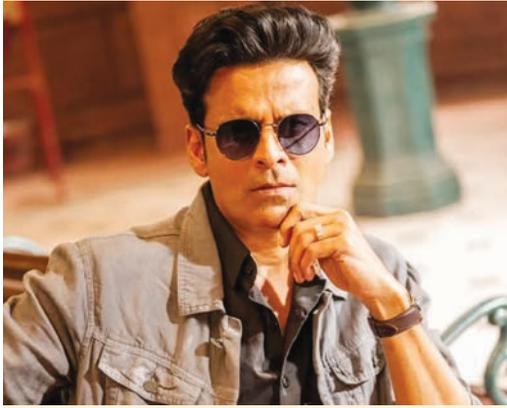
1995 There was a bomb attack on a train in Assam, India in which 27 soldiers were killed.

### 26 FEBRUARY

1972 President V.V. Giri dedicated the Vikram Earth satellite station located in Arvi near Wardha to the country.

1975 The country's first kite museum 'shankar Kendra' was established in Ahmedabad, Gujarat.

2008 India successfully test-fired a ballistic missile capable of carrying nuclear weapons.



## Manoj Bajpayee to play Gandhi in Sudhir Mishra film

Filmmaker Sudhir Mishra has confirmed that Manoj Bajpayee will portray Mahatma Gandhi in his upcoming biographical film. After weeks of speculation around the casting, Mishra put the rumours to rest with a brief but telling social media post, writing, "That's roughly the plan. Hope it all works out."

The announcement marks the first official detail about the project's direction and has already sparked curiosity within the industry. A National Award-winning actor known for layered performances, Bajpayee stepping into Gandhi's shoes is no small cinematic moment. Production is likely to begin in Kolkata this September, subject to final scheduling.

Bajpayee has built a career on portraying morally complex, emotionally intense characters. From small-town protagonists to political figures, he has consistently leaned into roles that demand restraint and internal conflict. Gandhi, a figure both revered and debated, offers precisely that challenge.

Mishra's decision suggests the film may favour psychological depth over grand spectacle. While details remain under wraps, Bajpayee's casting hints at a portrayal rooted in nuance rather than mythology.

# Alia Bhatt announced as presenter at BAFTA Awards 2026, to join Cillian Murphy, Kate Hudson and more

Alia Bhatt is set to present an award at the 79th edition of the BAFTA Awards, the British Academy has announced.

The awards ceremony, officially called the EE BAFTA Film Awards, aims to celebrate excellence in international cinema. It is set to take place on February 22 at London's Royal Festival Hall.

Alia Bhatt took to Instagram to share an Instagram post by the official BAFTA page and wrote, "100 points if you can spot me."

The 32-year-old actor is part of a star-studded lineup of guest presenters which also includes Alicia Vikander, Bryan Cranston, Cillian Murphy, Kate Hudson, Sadie Sink, Patrick Dempsey Delroy Lindo, Emily Watson, Ethan Hawke, Gillian Anderson, Glenn Close, Hannah Waddingham, Monica Bellucci, Rege-Jean Page, Riz Ahmed, and Stellan Skargard.

Besides Bhatt, filmmaker Lakshmipriya Devi, whose Manipuri-language film *Boong* has been nominated in the best children's and family film category, will also attend the ceremony.

"*Boong*, which narrates the story of a young boy named Boong (Gugun Kipgen), from the valley of Manipur, who plans to surprise his mother with a gift, is backed by actor-producer Farhan Akhtar and Ritesh Sidhwani through their banner Excel Entertainment.

In the category, the film will compete against Disney hits *Lilo & Stitch* and *Zootopia 2* as well as animated science fantasy film *Arco*."



# Priyanka Chopra calls Varanasi her career-defining film

Priyanka Chopra Jonas has set the tone for her much-anticipated return to Indian cinema -- and she's not downplaying it. While attending the world premiere of *The Bluff* on 18 February alongside husband Nick Jonas, the actor spoke candidly about *Varanasi*, her upcoming collaboration with director SS Rajamouli.

Calling the project "career-defining", Chopra Jonas made it clear that *Varanasi* marks a pivotal chapter for her. After seven years away from an Indian production, the film is already being positioned as one of the biggest cinematic events on the horizon. The film is directed by SS Rajamouli, widely regarded as one of India's most ambitious filmmakers. Chopra Jonas described him as "one of the best that we have in India", signalling the scale and expectations surrounding the project.

The official announcement in Hyderabad in November 2025 included a teaser that hinted at a sweeping narrative spanning

timelines and locations — complete with visually striking sequences.

*Varanasi* features Mahesh Babu as Rudhra and Prithviraj Sukumaran as the antagonist Kumbha. Chopra Jonas will play Mandakini, marking her debut in Telugu cinema.

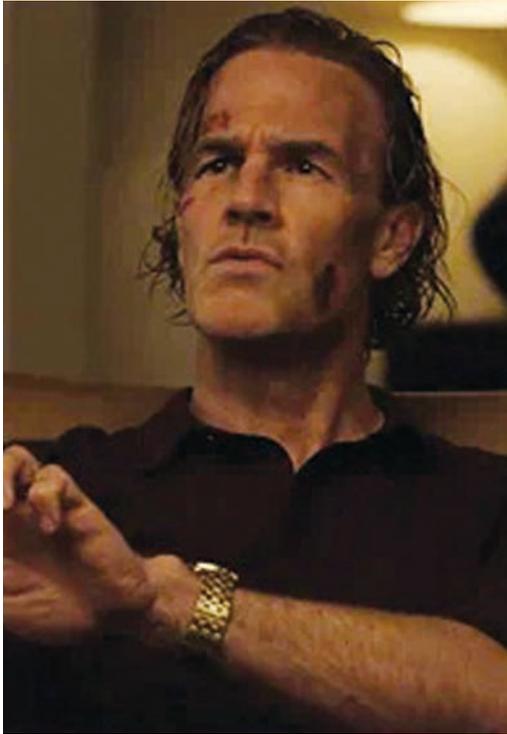
Music for the film is being composed by MM Keeravani, adding further weight to its creative line-up.

The film is scheduled for release on April, 7 2027. With production houses Sri Durga Arts and Showing Business backing it, the project is already being touted as a large-scale spectacle.

Chopra Jonas was last seen in an Indian film in 2019's *The Sky is Pink*. Alongside *Varanasi*, she has international projects lined up, including *The Bluff*, streaming from 25 February, and *Judgment Day*, directed by Nicholas Stoller.

For now, though, all eyes are on *Varanasi*. If Chopra Jonas is calling it career-defining, audiences will be watching closely to see why.





## The Gates trailer: James Van Der Beek stuns as sinister pastor in his final role

A week after the shocking news of James Van Der Beek's death at 48, the trailer of his upcoming film *The Gates* has been unveiled. It offers a glimpse into one of his final performances. Released on February 18 by Lionsgate, the preview presents the late actor in a dark and unsettling role that sharply contrasts the characters that once made him a household name.

The thriller centres on a tense night gone terribly wrong for three young men, played by Mason Gooding, Algee Smith and Keith Powers. What begins as a seemingly harmless outing quickly spirals into danger when they make a fateful decision that changes everything.

According to the official synopsis, Derek, Kevin and Tyon embark on a journey that takes a dark turn when they opt for an unexpected shortcut through an isolated gated neighbourhood. The description calls it a "road trip gone wrong, as the three young men take an ill-advised shortcut through a remote gated community, where they find themselves trapped behind the walls after witnessing a murder."

As suspicion grows, the trio find themselves at the centre of blame and pursuit. Internal differences begin to strain their friendship as tensions escalate. "Over the course of the night, they find themselves blamed, hunted and fractured by their own differing belief systems, while the perpetrator (Van Der Beek) emerges as the cunning patriarch that holds the entire community under his influence."

The trailer teased mounting psychological tension and a gripping survival drama, with Van Der Beek's ominous presence standing out as a powerful and haunting performance. His portrayal of a sinister, influential pastor marks a striking departure from the roles that first brought him widespread recognition.

# Margot Robbie: Make movies for the people buying tickets, not the critics

In a recent discussion led by Joel Edgerton, Margot Robbie sat down with her co-star Jacob Elordi to talk about her approach to the craft. When the conversation turned to whether she keeps the theatre-going public in mind during production, the Oscar nominee admitted they are her primary focus. However, she made it clear that the opinions of critics are one thing she never loses sleep over.

Robbie, in a video interview with GQ Australia, said, "I consider audience always. I've never, ever been on set and thought, 'What are the critics going to think of this?'"

"I'm like, 'What's an audience going to feel right now? What's their emotional response going to be?' I believe you should make movies for the people who are going to buy tickets to see the movies. It's as simple as that," she added.

While sharing her working experience with *Wuthering Heights* director Emerald Fennell, the actor concluded, "I love working with Emerald [Fennell] because she always prioritises an emotional experience over a heady idea. She's very smart. She's got great ideas, but she'll let a cool idea fall by the wayside to offer the option that's going to be most exciting for the audience. I really appreciate that about her."

Apart from Robbie and Elordi, *Wuthering Heights* also features Hong Chau, Martin Clunes, and Owen Cooper in pivotal characters. Robbie has co-produced the film, alongside Fennell and Josey McNamara.

This latest version adds to the numerous adaptations of *Wuthering Heights*, with previous versions including William Wyler's 1939 film and Andrea Arnold's 2011 adaptation.



## Zendaya reveals what won her over in Tom Holland, talks about relationship red flags

Actor Zendaya, who has grown up in the public eye and is among Hollywood's most closely watched stars, has opened up about how she evaluates relationships and recognises red flags in people. In a rare, candid reflection, the actor spoke about the importance of the kindness, behaviour away from the spotlight and personal boundaries.

Speaking in a recent interaction quoted by E! News, Zendaya said that observing how people behave when the cameras are off matters deeply to her. "One thing that works for us at work is how people treat their crews," she said. "I admire people who are kind to everyone, not just actors, directors or producers. A very telling thing is how a crew feels about a particular actor, because they get to see how people are when the cameras are not rolling."



The actor also said she often judges a person's character by how they treat animals. "I would get into a fight over my dog, for sure," Zendaya said, adding, "Dogs are a good judge of character."

Acknowledging that relationships are rarely simple, Zendaya noted that people are shaped by layered experiences and personal growth. "People are layered and complex, and they make mistakes," she said, pointing out that cultural differences and evolving perspectives can influence behavior.

At the same time, she stressed the importance of recognising unacceptable conduct. "There are cultural differences, but there are also things that are just rude or mean," she said, adding that drawing those boundaries is essential.

Zendaya, who has been in a relationship with actor Tom Holland since 2021, has largely kept her personal life private. However, in a previous interview, she spoke about what drew her to him.

## Venezuela approves amnesty that could release hundreds detained for political reasons

FEBRUARY 19, 2026

**CARACAS (TIP):** Venezuela acting president on Thursday signed into law an amnesty Bill that could lead to the release of politicians, activists, lawyers and many others, effectively acknowledging that the government has held hundreds of people in prison for political motivations.

The approval marks a stark turn for the South American nation, whose authorities have for decades denied holding any political prisoners. It is the latest policy reversal following last month's stunning US military raid in the country's capital, Caracas, to capture then-President Nicolas Maduro. Acting President Delcy Rodriguez, who proposed the Bill late last month, signed the measure into law hours after it was approved by the country's legislature. "It's not perfect, but it's a great step forward," opposition lawmaker Nora Bracho said during the debate. "It will alleviate the suffering of many Venezuelans." The measure is expected to benefit opposition members, activists, human rights defenders, journalists and many others who were targeted by the ruling party over the past 27 years. It is the latest policy shift for Venezuela, where the government has been quick to comply with orders from the administration of US President Donald Trump.

# White House tells Iran to do deal as Trump hints at US strikes

FEBRUARY 19, 2026

**WASHINGTON (TIP):** The White House warned on Wednesday that Iran would be "wise" to do a deal with the United States as President Donald Trump once again hinted at military action.

The two sides recently resumed indirect talks, mediated by Oman, after Trump repeatedly threatened military action against Iran over a deadly crackdown on protesters last month.

A previous attempt at negotiations collapsed when Israel launched surprise strikes on Iran last June, beginning a 12-day war that Washington briefly joined to bomb Iranian nuclear sites.

"Iran would be very wise to make a deal with President Trump and with his administration," White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters.

On Wednesday, Trump again suggested the United States might strike Iran in a post on his Truth Social site, with a US military buildup underway in the Middle East. He warned Britain against giving up sovereignty over the Chagos Islands in the Indian Ocean, saying that the archipelago's Diego Garcia airbase might be needed were Iran not to agree a deal, "in order to eradicate a potential attack by a highly unstable and dangerous regime." CNN and CBS



reported Wednesday that the US military will be ready to launch strikes against Iran as early as this weekend, though Trump has reportedly not made a final decision yet.

The Wall Street Journal reported Wednesday that Trump has been briefed on his military options with "all of them designed to maximize damage," including a campaign to "kill scores of Iranian political and military leaders, with the goal of overthrowing the government," unnamed US officials told the newspaper.

Earlier on Wednesday, Tehran's top diplomat, Abbas Araghchi, said Iran was "drafting" a framework for future talks with the US. Iran and the US held a second round of Oman-mediated negotiations on Tuesday in Geneva.

Araghchi said then that Tehran had

agreed with Washington on "guiding principles," but US Vice President JD Vance said Iran had not yet acknowledged all of Washington's red lines.

### 'Do not want war'

Speaking on Wednesday, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian insisted "We do not want war" but suggested Tehran could not give in to US demands.

"From the day I took office, I have believed that war must be set aside. But if they are going to try to impose their will on us, humiliate us and demand that we bow our heads at any cost, should we accept that?"

Earlier on Wednesday, Araghchi held a phone call with Rafael Grossi, the head of the UN nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency.

In the call, the Iranian foreign minister "stressed the Islamic Republic of Iran's focus on drafting an initial and coherent framework to advance future talks", according to a statement from his ministry.

Tehran has suspended some cooperation with the IAEA and restricted the watchdog's inspectors from accessing sites bombed by Israel and the United States, accusing the UN body of bias and of failing to condemn the strikes.

# Geneva talks end in deadlock as Russia-Ukraine-US diplomacy yields no breakthrough

FEBRUARY 19, 2026

**GENEVA (TIP):** Talks involving Russia, Ukraine and the United States, aimed at exploring pathways to end Moscow's war in Ukraine, concluded in Geneva without a breakthrough, underscoring the deep and persistent gaps between the parties despite renewed diplomatic engagement.

According to reports, the trilateral meetings stretched late into Tuesday night and resumed briefly on Wednesday, but the second round lasted only about two hours, signalling limited convergence after intensive discussions. Officials familiar with the talks said the focus remained on core issues such as ceasefire conditions, security guarantees, territorial control and the sequencing of any future negotiations. However, none of these areas saw sufficient alignment to allow for a joint statement or a concrete roadmap, BBC and CNN reported on Wednesday.

From an analytical standpoint, the brevity of the final session highlights the entrenched nature of the conflict and the constraints facing diplomacy at this



stage of the war. Russia is understood to have reiterated its longstanding demands around territorial realities and security arrangements, positions that Ukraine continues to reject as incompatible with its sovereignty. Kyiv, backed by Washington, has maintained

that any durable settlement must be anchored in a full withdrawal of Russian forces and credible international guarantees, leaving little room for tactical compromise.

The US role in the talks was largely that of a facilitator and pressure point,

seeking to test whether limited confidence-building measures or humanitarian steps could open the door to broader negotiations. The lack of progress suggests that Washington currently sees more value in maintaining diplomatic channels than in expecting near-term results, especially as battlefield dynamics and domestic political considerations in all three countries continue to shape negotiating positions.

While the Geneva talks ended without tangible outcomes, their very convening signals that back-channel and formal diplomacy remain active alongside the war. Political analysts quoted in the reports note that such meetings often serve as probes rather than deal-making forums, helping each side assess red lines and internal cohesion. For now, however, the failure to narrow differences reinforces expectations that any meaningful movement toward ending the conflict is likely to depend less on conference rooms and more on shifts in military, economic and political calculations on the ground, they said.

## Former South Korean President Yoon gets life sentence for imposing martial law

FEBRUARY 19, 2026

**SEOL (TIP):** Former South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol was sentenced to life in prison for his brief imposition of martial law in a dramatic culmination to the country's biggest political crisis in decades.

Yoon fell from office after an ill-advised attempt to overcome an opposition-controlled legislature by declaring martial law and sending troops to surround the legislature on Dec. 3, 2024.

Judge Jee Kui-youn said he found Yoon guilty of rebellion for mobilizing military and police forces in an illegal attempt to seize the liberal-led National Assembly, arrest politicians and establish unchecked power for a "considerable" time.

Yoon is likely to appeal the verdict.

A special prosecutor had demanded the death penalty for Yoon, saying his actions posed a threat to the country's democracy and deserved the most serious punishment available, but most analysts expect a life sentence since the poorly-planned power grab did not result in casualties.

South Korea has not executed a death row inmate since 1997, in what is widely seen as a de facto moratorium on capital punishment amid calls for its abolition.

# North Korea flexes nuclear-capable rocket launcher ahead of key congress

FEBRUARY 19, 2026

**PYONGYANG (TIP):** North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has unveiled a battery of huge nuclear-capable rocket launchers ahead of a key congress of the nation's ruling party, state media said Thursday.

Kim is expected to detail the next phase in North Korea's nuclear weapons program when he opens a rare congress of the ruling Workers' Party in coming days.

The 600mm multiple launch rocket system was front and center as preparations ramped up for the once-in-five-years gathering, widely viewed as North Korea's most important political event.

"When this weapon is used actually, no force would be able to expect God's protection," Kim said, according to the Korean Central News Agency.

"It is really a wonderful and attractive weapon."

Photos released by state media showed dozens of launch vehicles parked in neat rows on the plaza of Pyongyang's House of Culture, which will host the congress.

The weapon was "appropriate for a special attack, that is, for accomplishing a strategic mission", Kim told a ceremony on Wednesday, using a common euphemism for nuclear weapons.



He said the weapons system — which was presented to the congress as a gift from munitions workers — would deter unnamed enemies.

"There is no need to further explain about its destructive power and military value," Kim said.

"This is because it can reduce the aimed target to ashes through surprise and simultaneous attack by focusing its destructive energy."

The launch system could fire rockets with an estimated range of 400 kilometers (250 miles), covering all of South Korea, said analyst Hong Min from the Korea Institute for National Unification.

### Political Showcase

"Its primary purpose is to neutralize the combined air power of South Korea

and the United States," he told AFP.

"If equipped with tactical nuclear warheads, a single battery firing four to five rounds could devastate an entire airbase."

South Korea's capital Seoul is less than 50 kilometers (30 miles) from the border at its nearest point.

Analysts believe North Korea would use its vast artillery arsenal to launch saturation strikes on the South should fighting break out.

Kim ordered the expansion and modernisation of missile production in the months leading up to the Workers' Party congress.

Pyongyang has also significantly stepped up missile testing.

Analysts say this drive is aimed at improving precision strike capabilities, challenging the United States, and testing weapons before exporting them to Russia.

Pyongyang has said it will hold a landmark congress of the ruling Workers' Party on an unspecified date in late February.

State media has in recent days carried reports of delegates arriving for the gathering, fuelling speculation it could start any day.

The political showcase is expected to lay out North Korea's foreign policy, war planning and nuclear ambitions for the next five years.

## José María Balcázar becomes Peru's eighth president in a decade

FEBRUARY 19, 2026

**LIMA (TIP):** Peru's Congress late Wednesday elected legislator José María Balcázar as the country's eighth president in a decade, replacing another interim leader who was ousted the previous day over corruption allegations just four months into his term.

Balcázar, an 83-year-old former judge representing the leftist Perú Libre party, defeated three other candidates with a majority of the 130-member legislature.

The revolving-door presidency in Peru reflects a political crisis fueled by a lack of legislative majorities for leaders. Lawmakers have frequently used a broad interpretation of a constitutional article regarding "permanent moral incapacity" to remove sitting presidents.

Balcázar, a retired judge with nearly 30 years of experience in the judiciary, was sworn in shortly after the vote by the president of the Congress, Fernando Rospigliosi. He will govern for five months before handing over power to the winner of upcoming elections. Peruvians will choose a new president and legislature on April 12. If no presidential candidate receives more than 50% of the vote, the two front-



runners will advance to a runoff in June. Balcázar's successor will confront a surge in murders and extortion that continues to devastate small business

owners and the working class.

Various political groups are demanding firm guarantees for a transparent election.

Balcázar told journalists that he will ensure that the upcoming elections are "unquestionable," that macroeconomic policies will remain unchanged, along with sound monetary policy "so that economic agents can work without concern," and that he will seek to refocus the fight against organized crime.

Congress had voted Tuesday to remove conservative interim President José Jerí after four months in office. The current Congress, which began its term in 2021, has now impeached three heads of state: Pedro Castillo, Dina Boluarte and Jerí.

In October 2025, Jerí was serving as president of Congress and was next in the line of succession to replace Boluarte, who had no vice presidents.

His own removal followed revelations regarding his undisclosed meetings with Chinese business owners, including a state contractor. Jerí asserted he was merely coordinating a Peruvian-Chinese festival.

The Public Prosecutor's Office has launched two preliminary investigations into Jerí over allegations of illegal sponsorship of private interests and influence-peddling to the detriment of the state.

## 16 killed in explosion due to suspected gas leakage in Karachi

FEBRUARY 19, 2026

**KARACHI (TIP):** At least 16 people, including many children, were killed and 14 others injured when a suspected gas leakage led to an explosion in a residential building in Pakistan's Karachi on Thursday morning.

"The explosion took place around 4:30 am on the first floor of the building located in the Old Soldier Bazar area when everyone was awake for Sehri time," police official Jamshed Asher said.

The police official said that the reason for the explosion apparently was a gas leakage.

Due to gas shortage in Pakistan's biggest city, many families especially in lower income residential areas use liquid petroleum gas cylinders at their homes.

Police surgeon Dr Samaiya Syed confirmed that they have received 14 bodies so far from the blast site while 14 injured are under treatment.

The explosion caused a part of the building structure to collapse due to its dilapidated condition.

"We are still searching through the rubble and debris to see if there are any more bodies or survivors," Chief Fire Officer Humayun Khan said.

The deceased include at least nine children aged between two and 17 while the injured also include seven children.

# Tarique Rahman in power, India to resume visa services in Bangladesh soon

FEBRUARY 19, 2026

**DHAKA (TIP):** Days after the Tarique Rahman-led government came to power in Bangladesh, India is preparing to resume all visa services in Bangladesh, a senior consular official said Thursday.

Aniruddha Das, India's senior consular official in Sylhet, said efforts were underway to fully restore all visa services, bdnews24 reported.

"Medical and double-entry visas are being issued now, and steps are under way to resume other categories, including travel visas," Das said at the Sylhet District Press Club.

The Indian assistant high commissioner in Sylhet also assured of maximum cooperation to strengthen bilateral ties through the facilitation of visas, according to bdnews24. He said India-Bangladesh relations stand on the "foundation of mutual respect and honour."

"The people of both countries will be the principal stakeholders of a stable, positive, constructive, long-term and mutually beneficial relationship," bdnews24 cited Das as saying. The official added that both countries "share the same outlook" and want to work together.

Indian visa centres had suspended operations in Bangladesh as ties between the two countries deteriorated after the death of student leader Sharif Osman



Hadi. The death of the student leader led to protests in Bangladesh, which took on anti-India overtones. Relations between both countries had soured initially after the ouster of former Bangladesh prime minister Sheikh Hasina, who fled to India after protests in July, 2024.

"Whenever the security situation turns bad, we are forced to shut down," an official from the Indian visa centre told ANI news agency in December last year. Bangladesh had also, in January, restricted visa issuance for Indian nationals, extending the curbs to its missions in Kolkata, Mumbai and Chennai. The restriction suspended all categories of visas except business and employment visas. The Bangladesh high commission in New Delhi had suspended visa services for an indefinite period on December 22 after protests near the mission.

## Bangladesh student leader wanted in Hindu cop's murder detained at Delhi airport

A Bangladeshi student leader, accused in the 2024 murder of a Hindu police officer in his country, was detained at Delhi airport while allegedly attempting to flee to Europe, sources said. The accused, Ahmed Raza Hasan Mehdi, was later deported to Bangladesh after alleging physical abuse by police officials during detention.

Mehdi is a student coordinator from Habiganj district in Bangladesh, where the victim, SI Santosh Chowdhury, was killed by a mob on August 5, 2024, the same day when then-Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was ousted following anti-government protests.

Mehdi was intercepted by immigration officials at the Delhi airport. According to sources, authorities detained him when he was trying to leave the country and subsequently deported him to Bangladesh. In a video shot from the airport, Mehdi claimed he was physically abused by one of the policemen and said he will narrate his ordeal after he returns to Bangladesh. "I was in police custody for 40 minutes. I was badly treated and the police wanted to put me in jail. I told them if I had done any illegal work, then I should be allowed to speak to the embassy. But they didn't cooperate," he said.

FEBRUARY 19, 2026

**KABUL (TIP):** A newly introduced penal code in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan has sparked outrage and alarm among women's rights groups. The law reportedly equates women with "slaves" and permits husbands and so-called "slave masters" to physically punish them, provided no bones are broken, or "open wounds" are inflicted, formalising sweeping restrictions under the regime.

Another provision of the penal code reportedly classifies society into multiple tiers, with punishments differing based on one's position within this hierarchy.

The code reportedly distinguishes punishments based on whether a person is deemed "free" or a "slave," creating what experts describe as a rigid, caste-like hierarchy within Afghan society.

Under the 90-page document, signed by the group's supreme leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada, religious leaders are placed at the top, followed by elites, the middle class, and the lower class.

The new caste-based system means that if a religious scholar commits a crime, the maximum consequence is a warning or "advice". Members of the social elite may receive advice and potentially a court summons, while those in the middle class can face imprisonment. For the lower class, punishments can include both



imprisonment and corporal punishment.

Women are treated in the code as being on the same level as "slaves", with provisions allowing either "slave masters" or husbands to administer discretionary punishment, including beatings, to their wives or subordinates. This aspect of the code has drawn particular alarm from rights groups.

Copies of the new criminal code, known as De Mahakumu Jazaai Osulnama, have reportedly been circulated to courts across Afghanistan. Many Afghans are hesitant to speak about its provisions, fearing retaliation from the Taliban, while a separate directive is said to criminalise even discussing the code publicly.

# Taliban legalises domestic violence, permits beatings till no bones broken

Serious crimes under the code are to be punished by Islamic clerics rather than correctional services. For lesser offences, the code prescribes "ta'zir" (discretionary punishment), which, in the context of a wife as the "offender", means a beating administered by her husband.

Although the code technically allows women to seek legal recourse if assaulted, it sets high barriers. Women must present evidence of serious bodily harm by displaying their injuries to a judge, while remaining fully covered and accompanied by their husband or a male chaperone (mahram) -- even if the accused is the husband himself.

A legal adviser in Kabul, speaking to The Independent, described the process for women to access justice under Taliban law as "extremely lengthy and difficult." She recounted a case where a woman was attacked by a Taliban guard while visiting her husband in prison. The woman's complaint was not accepted by authorities unless she could bring her husband, who was behind bars, as her chaperone.

# Sikh History This Week

## FEBRUARY 20 TO FEBRUARY 26

### 20th February



1921 Shaheedi Saka of Sri Nankana Sahib took place. Nankana Sahib is the birth place of Guru Nanak Dev Ji. At the time of this incident, this place was being managed by Mahant Narayan Dass. A Jatha of 150 GurSikh reformers, led by Bhai Lahshman Singh, were visiting Nankana Sahib to seek Gurdwara reforms and its liberation, through non-violent and peaceful means. However, the managing Mahant had hired 28 Pathans and goondas from Majha, collected arms and ammunition besides other weapons, which caused a scare in the surrounding areas. He attacked the unscheduled Jatha, fired upon them without any warning and hounded them from room to room. At least one of them was tied to a tree and burnt alive. When a massacre inside the shrine was on, a group of Sikh devotees arrived outside. Mahant Narain Das on horseback ordered the killing of each and every long haired Sikh, and his men pursued some of them in the fields up to the railway station, killing and burning most of them. He also tried to burn down the dead bodies in a group inside the shrine. Those struck outside were thrown into kilns or burnt alive. The Guru Granth Sahib was riddled with bullets. This incident sent a wave of indignation among the Sikhs and other people throughout the world. The holy shrine of Nankana Sahib was eventually liberated. Additionally, this single incident triggered off a Gurdwara liberation movement throughout Punjab. The main objective of this movement was to consolidate the management of all historical Sikh Shrines under a single elected body which came to be known as the Sharomani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee or SGPC for short.

1924 1st Shaheedhi Jatha of 500 Akali Sikhs, under the command of Jathedar Udharn Singh of village Verpal, that marched from Sri Akal Takhat for Jaito, reached jaito Nabha territory. 1949 In spite of the arrests of hundreds of GurSikhs, the Sikhs held a Conference. All the participants were arrested and jailed for different terms. Participation in religious functions was banned and the Sikh shrines were sealed. Such were the rewards for their sacrifices towards India's independence.

### 21st February

1849 2nd Anglo-Sikh war was fought at Gujrat. This was the last war between the Khalsa forces and the British that resulted in a severe defeat for Khalsa forces and triggered the annexation of the Khalsa Raj.

1915 Marked the revolt within India against British occupation. Sikhs played a major role in this revolt.

1921 Karam Singh of Daulatpur organised a political conference at Mehtapur.

1921 Sri Nankana Sahib's keys and control was handed over to SGPC. The news of Nankana Massacre spread like wild fire. Within hours Sikhs from all

everywhere marched on to Nanakana Sahib, despite the road blocks, re-routed trains and deployment of troops to cordon off the area. By the afternoon, 1000 Akalis and some members of the SGPC confronted the Deputy Commissioner and were resolved to advance on the Gurudwara or be shot by the troops. Bhai Kartar Singh Jabbar with a Jatha of 2200 entered the Gurudwara Janam Asthan, Shri Nankana Sahib defying Deputy Commissioner's orders. The show of force at this time retrieved the Sikh prestige.

### 22nd February

1845 Rani Jindan attempted to cross over to the British with Dalip Singh but her attempt was foiled by Sikh army.

1923 1923: Third meeting took place at Jassowal.

1924 British government accused Akali Singhs of firing upon Nabha rulers.

1956 Master Tara Singh and Nehru held talks on Punjabi Suba. The talks lasted until Feb. 24, 1956.

### 23rd February



1881 Sardar Ajit Singh was born at Khatkadh kala, Jalandar.

1921 Gurudwara Luliani Sahib was forcibly taken over and brought under the control of SGPC.

### 24th February

1922: A diwan held at Ghurial on the concluding day of 101 Akhand Paths.

1929: An All Party Conference was organized at Sri Akal Takhat, Amritsar for released of Sardar Sewa Singh Thikriwala. Political activities in PEPSU (Patiala and East Punjab States Union) centered around economic and social but certainly not on religious considerations. The problem of antagonistic relations between the landlords and tenants was so enormous that it almost defied a solution. The biggest issue, absentee land-lordism in PEPSU, made the struggle between "Haves" and "Have nots" more bitter and even violent. All important posts were exclusively reserved for a few families that were near and dear to the Maharaja.

### 25th February

1710 Baba Banda Singh Bahadur was victorious over Sirhind. Born on KatakSudhi 13 sunmat 1727 to Rajput father Ramdev who was a resident of the Rajori village in Jammu. He was named Lashman Dev by his parents. Since childhood, he exhibited extremely fondness for sanskrit literature and hunting. However, he plunged into deep remorse after killing a pregnant deer. As a result he discarded all his hunting tools and became a disciple of Vaesnav JankiPrasad. He shed all his material wealth, started onto the seekers path for enlightenment, and adopted the new name, Madho



Dass.

1921 Gurudwara Hehr Sahib was forcibly taken over and brought under the control of SGPC.

### 26th February

1630 Seventh Patshash, Guru Har Rai Ji was born at Kirtapur in the house of Baba Gurditta, eldest son of Guru Hargobind, and Mata Nihal Kaur. He was the second grandson of Guru hargobind, the first being Baba Dhir Mal. Today is the actual date of birth, although it is observed on a different date by Guru Khalsa Panth.



1822: General Hari Singh Nalwa reached Hajara with his forces. He was born to father, Sardar Gurdayal Singh Uppal and mother, Mata Dharam Kaur at Gujrawala in 1781. Besides being a valiant soldier, Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa also served as Governor of Kashmir, Hjara, and Peshawar. He joined Maharaja Ranjit Singh's forces in his early youth and established himself to be one of the most popular Khalsa generals. Among the Sirhadhi Pathans, his name brought immediate fear and respect. He is part of their folklore to this day. He won numerous wars for the Khalsa Panth and died, on Vaisakh 19 sunmat 1894, in the battle near Sirhadhi Jamraud. A place is established within Jamraud fort in remembrance of PanthRattan Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa.

1923 Kishan Singh Gargaj was arrested from Pindori Mahal. He was the chief architect of the Babbar Akali Movement, who had steered the Babbar Akalis clear of the murderous assaults. But after his arrest, the Babbars resorted to indiscriminate murders. Their objective was to expel the British rulers by violent means.

# From nose to toes: Easy home hacks for a natural, lasting glow

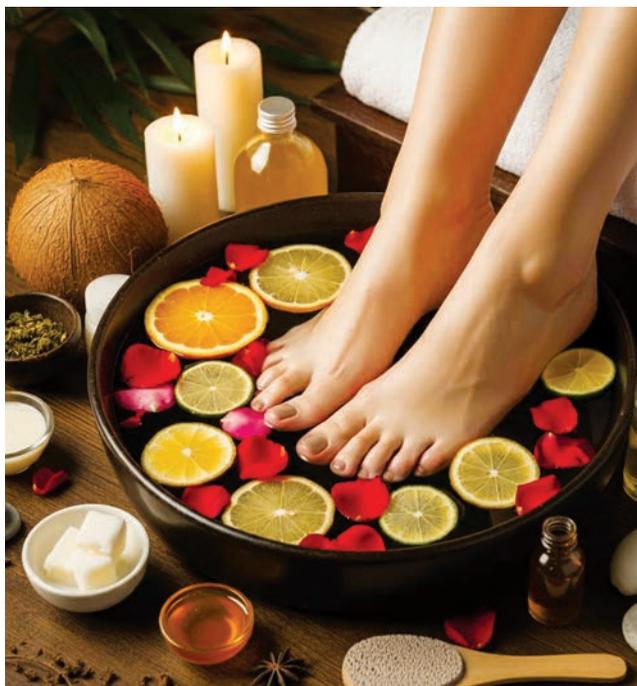
**C**lear, radiant skin and well-groomed feet are not the result of expensive salon visits alone; they are built on small, consistent habits that nurture the body from head to toe. From stubborn blackheads on the nose to cracked heels that hide inside shoes, every beauty concern has a practical, affordable solution that can be done at home with ingredients already sitting in your kitchen.

Blackheads, those tiny dark dots that often appear on the nose and chin, form when pores get clogged with oil, dirt, and dead skin cells. When exposed to air, the trapped oil oxidizes and turns black. Instead of squeezing them harshly, which can damage the skin and enlarge pores, a gentle steaming routine works wonders. Allowing your face to steam for five to seven minutes softens the buildup inside pores, making cleansing more effective and less aggressive. Following this with a natural clay mask, such as multani mitti mixed with rose water, helps absorb excess oil and tighten pores. Regular but gentle exfoliation is equally important; a mild scrub made from baking soda and water or coffee mixed with honey can slough off dead skin cells and improve circulation, giving the skin a healthy glow.

For those struggling with dull and tired skin, the simplest remedies are often the most effective. Rubbing an ice cube wrapped in a soft cloth across the face instantly boosts blood flow, tightens pores, and reduces puffiness. Aloe vera gel applied as an overnight treatment deeply hydrates and soothes the skin, while also helping repair minor irritation. Consistent hydration from within—drinking enough water and eating vitamin-rich fruits—amplifies these external efforts, proving that glowing skin is as much about lifestyle as it is about skincare.

Areas like elbows, knees, and the neck are frequently ignored, yet they tend to darken due to friction and buildup of dead skin. A natural scrub made of lemon and sugar can gradually lighten and smooth these areas, while potato juice or a paste of turmeric and milk can improve uneven tone over time. Patience is key, as natural remedies work gently but effectively when used consistently.

Hair removal often leads to another common issue: ingrown hairs. The solution lies in proper preparation and aftercare. Exfoliating before shaving or waxing removes dead skin that can trap hair beneath the surface, while applying a soothing gel afterward reduces inflammation and redness. For those who prefer natural alternatives, homemade sugar wax



prepared with sugar, lemon juice, and water can be a gentler option compared to chemical-based products.

Lip and nail care also deserve attention in a complete beauty routine. Lips can be kept soft and naturally pink with a simple sugar and honey scrub followed by a touch of ghee or balm at night. Nails benefit from weekly warm olive oil soaks, which strengthen brittle edges and nourish cuticles, while a quick rub of lemon can remove stains and brighten their appearance.

No head-to-toe beauty ritual is complete without caring for the feet. Cracked heels and rough skin can be easily managed with a weekly pedicure routine at home. Soaking the feet in warm water with salt and a few drops of shampoo softens hardened skin. Gently scrubbing with a pumice stone or a homemade mixture of rice flour and honey removes dead layers. Applying a thick moisturizer, coconut oil, or even petroleum jelly before bed and wearing cotton socks overnight locks in hydration, gradually restoring softness. Regular moisturising after every wash keeps heels smooth and prevents further cracking.

Traditional body polishing methods, such as applying a paste of gram flour, turmeric, and milk before bathing, not only exfoliate but also brighten and soften the skin. Such rituals, long practiced in Indian households, remind us that beauty care does not have to be complicated to be effective.

## FOOD CORNER

### Pure egg Mughlai paratha

#### Ingredients

##### For the Dough

- 2 cups all-purpose flour (maida), 1 tablespoon oil, ½ teaspoon salt, Water (as required),

##### For the Egg Filling

- 3-4 eggs, 1 small onion, finely chopped, 1-2 green chillies, finely chopped, 2 tablespoons fresh coriander leaves, chopped, ¼ teaspoon turmeric powder, ½ teaspoon red chili powder, ½ teaspoon garam masala, Salt to taste

##### For Cooking

- Oil or ghee for shallow frying

#### Method

- In a bowl, mix flour, salt, and oil. Gradually add water and knead into a soft, smooth dough. Cover with a damp cloth and let it rest for at least 20-30 minutes. Resting helps the dough become pliable and easy to roll.
- In a separate bowl, crack the eggs and whisk well. Add chopped onions, green chillies, coriander leaves, turmeric, red chili powder, garam masala, and salt. Mix thoroughly. The filling should be well-seasoned but not too watery.
- Divide the dough into equal balls. Roll each ball into a thin square or round sheet (slightly larger than a regular roti). The thinner the sheet, the crispier the paratha. Heat a flat tawa on medium flame.
- Place the rolled dough onto the hot tawa and cook lightly for 10-15 seconds on one side. Flip it. Now pour a ladleful of the egg mixture in the center and gently spread it, leaving space around the edges. Quickly fold the four sides inward to form a square parcel, sealing the egg inside.
- Drizzle oil or ghee around the edges. Cook on medium-low flame, flipping carefully until both sides turn golden brown and crispy. Press gently with a spatula to ensure the egg inside cooks evenly. Cook until the outer layer is crisp and the inside is fully set.



## Under eye CO2 injections might just be the new dark circle fix

“**S**hadows of the dark world” – these words never meant good for anyone. Be it the fiction you see on screen, or the dark shadows camping under your eyes (yes, the dark circles), it's simply a universal struggle.

Under-eye hollowness or dark circles are the first to arrive and give away that your body is deprived — maybe of sleep, nutrients, or simply healthy blood flow. And yes, those fancy under-eye patches, DIY hacks, tea bags, and a few home remedies, may or may not have helped either. Therefore, with under-eye concerns becoming one of the fastest-growing complaints, there's another path to redemption, and it's called carboxy therapy.

Before you look ahead: This might not

be as aesthetic a visual.

Carboxy is a minimally invasive beauty treatment where medical-grade CO2 gas is injected beneath the skin to boost a natural “oxygen deficit correction” response.

“When the body detects excess CO2, it increases blood flow, oxygen delivery, and tissue repair in that area. This improves microcirculation, boosts collagen production, and enhances cell turnover. It's like resetting the skin's energy supply, making the under-eye area brighter and firmer,” Dr Debraj Shome, co-founder and director, The Esthetic Clinics, tells India Today.

Additionally, it can help with fine lines, break down fat pockets, cellulite, and stretch marks.



Carboxy therapy offers multiple benefits, but the one most people line up

for is its impact on dark circles and under-eye puffiness.

“This area is affected by poor circulation, thinning skin, lymphatic congestion, and minor fat herniation, issues that topical products rarely fix. Carboxy therapy directly improves these underlying causes. It also reduces puffiness by improving lymphatic drainage,” says Dr Shome.

And guess what, it might play quite nicely with Indian skin, especially.

The curiosity that builds with every trend or treatment is – who is doing it, how much it costs, the pros and cons and so on and so forth. So, instead of trying to find the information in weaves of long paragraphs, here's a quick fact sheet of what experts say.

# You don't have to lift heavy weights to build muscles, but there's a catch

Many gym journeys end almost as soon as they begin because of how gruelling weightlifting can be. Heavy weights often feel intimidating, leading many to believe that the gym simply isn't for them. But here's the good news: you don't always have to lift heavy to see results.

A new study suggests that training with lighter weights can be nearly as effective as going heavy. If you've dreaded hitting the gym or struggled to stay consistent because of intense lifting sessions, this might change the way you look at your workouts.

For the study conducted in Canada, researchers recruited 20 healthy young men who did not normally engage in weight training. They trained under supervision for 10 weeks. Each session required them to perform three sets of bicep curls and knee extensions.

## What counts as heavy and what counts as light?

But here's where it gets interesting: each hand used different weights for the exercises, and the same approach was applied to their legs. To compare heavy and light weight training more accurately, one arm and one leg were randomly assigned to lift heavier weights, while the opposite arm and leg performed the exercises with lighter weights.

The heavy weights were challenging enough that participants could not perform more than 12 repetitions. In contrast, the lighter weights allowed them to complete up to 25 repetitions before stopping due to fatigue. Once participants were able to exceed the set repetition range for either the heavy or light weights, the load was gradually increased.

No, you cannot keep using a 3 kg dumbbell forever and expect to get stronger. That would eventually lead to a strength plateau.

## So what happened after 10 weeks?

The participants' muscles were stronger and bigger,



with little difference between the left and right limbs. The arm that trained with lighter weights was just as muscular as the one that lifted heavier loads, and the same was true for the legs.

Lifting lighter weights for more repetitions and heavier weights for fewer repetitions proved equally effective. The key was pushing the muscles to fatigue. A similar study is underway for women as well.

Even a major review in 2023 looked at hundreds of earlier studies and found that any kind of weight training helps build strength and muscle compared to not exercising at all. You do not have to lift heavy weights to see results. Lighter weights can work just as well.

This approach is especially beneficial for those who feel overwhelmed by heavy weights. It also challenges the common belief among many gym-goers and even trainers who think lifting heavy is the only way to build muscle and gain strength.

# Intermittent fasting doesn't have an edge for weight loss, but might still work for some

Intermittent fasting has become a buzzword in nutrition circles, with many people turning to it as a way to lose weight or improve their health. However, new research from the Cochrane Collaboration shows that intermittent fasting is no more effective for weight loss than receiving traditional dietary advice or even doing nothing at all.

In this international review, researchers assessed 22 studies involving 1,995 adults classified as overweight, with a body mass index of 25 to 29.9 kg per square metre, or obese, with a BMI of 30 kg per square metre or above. The studies examined the effectiveness of intermittent fasting over periods of up to 12 months.

The authors found that, when compared with energy restricted dieting, intermittent fasting does not appear to work better for people who are overweight or obese and trying to lose weight. However, they noted that intermittent fasting may still be a reasonable option for some people.

Intermittent fasting is a tool for weight management that includes three main strategies:

Alternate day fasting, where every second day involves low or no energy intake

Periodic fasting, also known as the 5:2 diet, where one or two days of the week involve low or no energy intake

Time restricted eating, also known as the 16:8 diet, where daily energy intake is limited to a shorter window,



usually between eight and ten waking hours

Previous reviews have found differences between types of intermittent fasting.

Alternate day fasting, for example, resulted in more weight loss compared with time restricted eating. This is because participants who fasted every second day consumed about 20 percent less energy than those following time restricted eating.

Cochrane reviews use gold standard techniques to provide an objective overview of the evidence. This review examined 22 individual randomised controlled trials published between 2016 and 2024 from North America, Europe, China, Australia and South America.



## AI set to make medical scan reports twice as easy to understand for patients

Artificial intelligence could soon help patients better understand complex medical scan results, making them far easier to comprehend without losing clinical accuracy, according to a major new study by the University of Sheffield.

The research found that when radiology reports for X-rays, CT scans, and MRIs were rewritten using advanced AI systems such as ChatGPT, patients found them almost twice as easy to understand compared with the original versions. Analysis showed that the reading level dropped from "university level" to one more closely aligned with the comprehension of an 11-13-year-old school pupil.

The findings suggest that AI-assisted explanations could become a standard companion to medical reports, improving transparency and trust across healthcare systems, including the National Health Service (NHS).

Researchers reviewed 38 studies published between 2022 and 2025, covering more than 12,000 radiology reports simplified using AI. These rewritten reports were evaluated by patients, members of the public, and clinicians to assess both patient understanding and clinical accuracy.

Traditionally, radiology reports are written for doctors rather than patients. However, initiatives promoting patient-centred care, such as the NHS App, along with policies mandating greater transparency of medical records, have expanded patient access to these reports. Lead author of the study, Dr Samer Alabed, Senior Clinical Research Fellow at the University of Sheffield and Honorary Consultant Cardio Radiologist at Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, said: "The fundamental issue with these reports is that they are not written with patients in mind. They are often filled with technical jargon and abbreviations that can be easily misunderstood, leading to unnecessary anxiety, false reassurance, and confusion. Patients with lower health literacy or English as a second language are particularly disadvantaged. Clinicians frequently have to use valuable appointment time explaining report terminology instead of focusing on care and treatment."

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# Universe is full of Super-Earths. What makes them special?

For most of human history, Earth was the only known example of a habitable world. Even after astronomers discovered planets orbiting other stars in the 1990s, those early finds were often bizarre: giant gas planets skimming dangerously close to their stars, nothing like the familiar terrain beneath our feet. Then, in the mid-2000s, a new class of planet emerged from the data – worlds larger than Earth but smaller than Neptune. Astronomers called them Super-Earths.

Despite the dramatic name, Super-Earths are not necessarily lush paradises or superior versions of our own planet. The term refers only to their size and mass. They typically weigh between two and ten times the mass of Earth, making them the most common kind of planet discovered in our galaxy. Ironically, our own solar system contains none.

Several astronomers have remarked that Nature seems to prefer making super-Earths and yet we don't have one in our own solar system.

This realization, that the most common worlds in the galaxy are absent from our cosmic neighbourhood, has reshaped our understanding of planet formation.

The turning point came in 2004, when astronomers using telescopes in Chile discovered a planet orbiting the nearby red dwarf star Gliese 876. This planet, Gliese 876d, was about seven times the mass of Earth. It wasn't a gas giant. It wasn't a tiny rocky planet either. It was something in between, the first clear example of a Super-Earth.

Astronomer Eugenio Rivera, one of the scientists involved in the discovery, later recalled the excitement of realizing they had found something entirely new. What stood out was not just the planet itself, but the realization that such worlds might be common. This was not a one-off curiosity; it was a glimpse of a population.

In the years that followed, the Kepler Space Telescope, launched in 2009, transformed this trickle of discoveries into a flood. Kepler monitored more than 150,000 stars, looking for



tiny dips in brightness caused by planets passing in front of them. Many of those dips belonged to Super-Earths.

By 2013, NASA scientists announced that Super-Earth-size planets were among the most common types of planets in the Milky Way. The most striking result is just how common small planets are.

## What are super-earths actually like?

Super-Earths can vary enormously. Some are rocky, like Earth, but larger. Others may be covered by deep global oceans. Some may have thick atmospheres of hydrogen and helium, resembling miniature versions of Neptune.

Gravity on these worlds would feel very different. A person standing on a Super-Earth might weigh twice or three times what they do on Earth. Mountains could be flatter, crushed under their own weight. The atmosphere, if present, might be thicker and denser.

## Humanoid robots stun with their life-like dance moves in China

Chinese broadcaster CCTV recently held its 2026 Spring Festival Gala. However, this annual event has gone viral this time around, as Chinese companies showcased some of their finest humanoid robots. From martial arts to complex dance moves, the entire event demonstrated what a future with robots may look like.

The event was held in Yiwu, a city with just under 2 million people. Big robotics companies such as MagicLab, Unitree Robotics, Noetix Robotics, and Beijing Galbot, showcased their latest tech in humanoid research, and viewers were left impressed.

## Robots do martial arts

Unitree Robotics made its third Spring Festival appearance, integrating its G1 and H2 humanoid robots into the martial arts-themed performance WuBOT. These robots teamed up with martial arts actors to execute moves ranging from horse stances and flips to nunchaku routines and elements of Drunken Fist.

The performance lasted for over 4 minutes, and all robots moved seamlessly, showcasing how advanced the tech has become. Not only for the movement itself, but also balance and coordination throughout.

But this was just one performance. There were more robots too. MagicLab's MagicBot Z1 robot managed to complete a demanding 360-degree rotation, called the Thomas 360. Noetix Robotics had its robots feature in a comedy sketch. The robots performed movements such as side flips and backflips within a confined 12-square-meter stage.

The clustered display of humanoid robots at the gala pointed to broader advances in motion control, balance algorithms, and real-world human-robot interaction in China. As Global Times reports, "this leap reflects 'broader advances.'" At a time when western companies are still developing robots such as Tesla Optimus and Neo, Chinese firms may have an upper hand.



# Smart glasses, AirPods camera and 1 more: Apple tipped to launch these AI gadgets soon

2026 is said to be Apple's year, with the company expected to bring in some fresh innovation, including a serious play in the AI wearables space. According to a latest report by Mark Gurman for Bloomberg, Apple is rapidly developing three new AI-powered wearable devices: smart glasses, a camera-equipped pendant, and upgraded AirPods with built-in cameras. These devices are also said to be powered by a new and upgraded Siri, which could gain smarter capabilities, similar to the AI-powered voice assistants from Gemini and ChatGPT.

If the reports around Apple's smart wearables indeed turn out to be accurate, this would mark one of Apple's most aggressive pushes yet into AI-driven hardware beyond the iPhone. Let's take a quick look at what is expected. According to Gurman's report, the most interesting product in development appears to be Apple's smart glasses. Unlike the high-end Vision Pro headset, which Apple introduced a few years back, these smart glasses are said to be lightweight and designed for everyday use, similar to Meta's Ray-Ban or Oakley smart glasses. The key idea behind Apple's smart wearables is said to be combining cameras with AI so the device can "see" what you see and respond intelligently.

Apple's assistant Siri is expected to sit at the centre of this experience. By adding visual awareness through cameras,

Apple could make Siri far more contextual. For instance, the glasses may recognise objects, provide information about your surroundings, or help with navigation, all while keeping the user completely hands-free.

Another surprising detail Apple is apparently planning, according to the report, is a new pair of AirPods equipped with cameras. While that may sound unusual at first, the goal appears to be similar, giving AI visual context.

These cameras wouldn't necessarily be for taking traditional photos like a smartphone. Instead, they could help the AI understand the

environment around you. Think gesture controls, spatial awareness, and smarter responses from Siri.

Apple has long dominated the wireless earbuds market, and adding AI-enhanced capabilities could be a way to evolve AirPods beyond just audio. If executed well, this could indeed turn them into a more immersive wearable device rather than just a listening accessory.

The third AI-powered device reportedly in development is a small camera-equipped pendant. Details are still limited, but the concept seems to revolve around discreet, always-available AI assistance. Worn around the neck, the device could reportedly capture visual input and feed it into Apple's AI systems for real-time help.



# Relief for US homebuyers as mortgage rates dip to 6.01%, lowest level in over 3 years

FEBRUARY 19, 2026

**NEW YORK (TIP):** The average long-term U.S. mortgage rate slipped this week to its lowest level in more than three years, but remains around 6% in the same narrow range it has been in this year. The benchmark 30-year fixed rate mortgage rate fell to 6.01% from 6.09% last week, mortgage buyer Freddie Mac said Thursday. One year ago, the rate averaged 6.85%.

The modest pullback brings the average rate to its lowest level since Sept. 8, 2022, when it was 5.89%. That was the last time the average rate was below 6%.

Mortgage rates are influenced by several factors, from the Federal Reserve's interest rate policy decisions to bond market investors' expectations for the economy and inflation. They generally follow the trajectory of the 10-year Treasury yield, which lenders use as a guide to pricing home loans.

The 10-year Treasury yield was at 4.08% at midday Thursday, down from around 4.09% a week ago.

Mortgage rates have been trending lower for months, helping drive a pickup in home sales the last four months of 2025, but not enough to lift the housing market out of its slump dating back to 2022, when mortgage rates began to climb from pandemic-era lows. Sales of previously occupied U.S. homes remained stuck last year at 30-year lows. And more buyer-friendly mortgage rates this year weren't enough to lift home sales last month. They posted the biggest monthly drop in nearly four years and the slowest annualized sales pace in more than two years.

Meanwhile, new data on contract signings suggest home sales could remain sluggish in the near term.

A seasonally adjusted index of pending U.S. home sales fell 0.8% in January from the previous month, the National Association of Realtors said Thursday. Pending home sales fell 0.4% from January last year.

There's usually a month or two lag between a contract signing and when the sale is finalized, which makes pending home sales a bellwether for future completed home sales.

"Improving affordability conditions have yet to induce more buying activity," said Lawrence Yun, NAR's chief economist.

A sharp run-up in home prices, especially in the early years of this decade, and a chronic shortage of homes nationally worsened by years of below-average home construction have left many aspiring homeowners priced out of the market.

That's put the focus on mortgage rates, which can boost home shoppers' purchasing power when they come down, but also reduce how much homebuyers can afford when rates rise.

That makes the recent decline in rates a favorable lead in to the annual spring home-buying season — at least for home shoppers who can afford to buy at current rates.

"Lower rates should improve affordability and bring out more



buyers," said Lisa Sturtevant, chief economist at Bright MLS. "Assuming mortgage rates remain at about where they are, or come down even further, we should see more buyers this spring as both inventory and the weather improves."

Homeowners eager to refinance their existing home loan to a more favorable rate are also benefiting from easing rates.

Borrowing costs on 15-year fixed-rate mortgages, popular with homeowners refinancing their home loans, edged lower this week. That average rate fell to 5.35% from 5.44% last week. A year ago, it was at 6.04%, Freddie Mac said.

Mortgage applications, which include loans to buy a home or refinance an existing mortgage, rose 2.8% last week from a week earlier, according to the Mortgage Bankers Association. Applications for mortgage refinance loans made up 57.4% of all applications.

The latest drop in mortgage rates comes three weeks after the Federal Reserve decided to pause cuts to its main interest rate after lowering rates three times in a row to close out 2025 in an attempt to shore up the job market.

Minutes released Wednesday from the Fed's last meeting showed many officials want to see inflation fall further before they would support additional interest rate cuts this year.

The central bank doesn't set mortgage rates, but its decisions to raise or lower its short-term rate are watched closely by bond investors and can ultimately affect the yield on 10-year Treasuries that influence mortgage rates. *Source: AP*

## Adani Group Commits \$100 Billion To Sovereign AI Infrastructure

FEBRUARY 19, 2026

**AHMEDABAD (TIP):** The Adani Group has announced one of the world's largest integrated energy-compute commitments, a direct investment of \$100 billion to develop renewable-energy-powered, hyperscale AI-ready data centres by 2035.

The initiative will establish a long-term sovereign energy and compute platform designed to position India as a global leader in the emerging Intelligence Revolution.

The investment is expected to catalyse by 2035 an additional \$150 billion across server manufacturing, advanced electrical infrastructure, sovereign cloud platforms and supporting industries.

Together, this is projected to create a \$250 billion AI infrastructure ecosystem in India over the decade.

"The world is entering an Intelligence Revolution more profound than any previous Industrial Revolution," said Gautam Adani, Chairman of the Adani Group. "Nations that master the symmetry between energy and compute will shape the next decade. India is uniquely positioned to lead," the Adani Group Chairman said.

He added that at Adani, we are building on our foundation in data centres and green energy to expand into the complete five-layer AI stack focused on India's technological sovereignty.

This roadmap builds on AdaniConnex's existing 2 GW national data centre, expanding toward a 5 GW target that positions India at the epicentre of the global AI economy.

This vision is anchored by landmark partnerships with Google to establish the nation's largest gigawatt-scale AI data centre campus in Visakhapatnam, alongside additional campuses in Noida, and with Microsoft spanning Hyderabad and Pune.

# Brokers' body seeks 6-month pause on RBI's 100% cash collateral rule

FEBRUARY 19, 2026

**NEW DELHI (TIP):** The Association of National Exchanges Members of India (ANMI) has urged the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to keep in abeyance a recent Reserve Bank of India amendment that tightens bank lending norms for capital market intermediaries engaged in proprietary trading.

In a representation dated February 18, ANMI sought a six-month deferment of the RBI circular issued last week, which mandates banks to maintain 100 per cent cash collateral for bank guarantee (BG) facilities extended to capital market intermediaries (CMIs). The requirement has been raised from the earlier 50 per cent and is scheduled to take effect from April 1.

ANMI said that the measure could have "unintended consequences" for market liquidity and depth. "The proposed changes may unintentionally constrain proprietary market makers and arbitrage desks, which are key providers of liquidity and price efficiency," the



brokers' body said in its letter.

Proprietary trading firms play a critical role in market making, arbitrage and price discovery. A sharp increase in collateral requirements could restrict access to bank financing for proprietary positions, widen bid-ask spreads and raise transaction costs for

investors. The association also raised potential implications for foreign portfolio investor participation. Reduced liquidity and higher costs could make Indian markets less attractive, it said, adding that the move could create an uneven playing field. "Foreign entities may continue to finance transactions through overseas banks or standby letters of credit, potentially shifting market share away from domestic firms," ANMI said.

ANMI said that the capital market intermediary segment has historically shown near-zero non-performing assets. Around ₹1.2 lakh crore of bank guarantees are currently outstanding across exchanges, with no reported invocation even during periods of stress such as the 2008 global financial crisis or the Covid-19 market volatility, it said.

The broker body estimated that the proposed rule change would reduce overall collateral availability by about Rs 22,500 crore, or roughly 2.5 per cent of total exchange collateral.



**BEJAN DARUWALLA AND CHIRAG DARUWALLA**

### ARIES

  
**Aries**

Ganesha says this may be an active week for you. You may make quick decisions without much contemplation. There will be positive reactions to your proposals. You may be argumentative and always ready to fight for victory. Students may get auspicious results for their toil. Children may face tough competition for their efforts. They may not have enough confidence to face the situation. A spouse may receive favorable communications about career prospects. He/she may decide to invest money in fixed assets or commercial properties. Father may postpone the finalization of a business decision. Elder siblings may indulge in accidents during night hours. Younger siblings may have problems in domestic life.

### TAURUS

  
**Taurus**

Ganesha says this may be a normal week for you. You may experience difficulties in communication with colleagues or superiors. You should get inspired by others to succeed in your efforts. Transit of planets may bring problems in domestic life. You may have a few injuries or bruises during this week. Students may enjoy fortunate results for their hard work. Children may have testing situations in their careers. There may be a slight change like work. A spouse may be deceived by an old friend or colleague. Father will have decent profits through partnership business. Elder siblings may enjoy decent marital life during this week also. Younger siblings may be trapped in financial uncertainty. There may be success in their efforts for higher education in foreign countries.

### GEMINI

  
**Gemini**

Ganesha says this may be a demanding week for you and may give gains after pressure and embarrassment. Others may misinterpret you on several occasions. There may be a delay in getting clearance for foreign journeys. You may be worried about entangled money. Students may get normal results for their performance. Children may have problems in their love life. They may break up a relationship by the end of this week. A spouse may have better financial support than before. He/she may be redeemed from some responsibilities. Father may move on for a long journey on the pilgrim. He may invest money unhesitatingly. Elder siblings may face problems in domestic life. Younger siblings may be respected for their hard work.

## WEEKLY HOROSCOPE - FEB 23 - MAR 01, 2026

By Chirag Daruwalla - Son of Astrologer Bejan Daruwalla



### CANCER

Ganesha says this may be an advantageous week for you. There may be decent progress in career or business. You may get good support and references for your exploration. You will complete most of your assignments within the stipulated time. This is a favorable time for investment in fixed assets. Students may have to change their presentation pattern. They may get average results for their appearances. Children may have troubles through a spouse or business partner. They may get good exposure in their career line. A spouse may have heavy workloads throughout this week. He/she may enjoy the comfort of a new conveyance. Father may have a definite hike in his earnings. He may also enjoy a benefit from an insurance policy. Elderly siblings may suffer from different health complications. Younger siblings may indulge in minor accidents.

### LEO

  
**Leo**

Ganesha says this may be a nervous week for you and may delay your gains. Your reputation may increase without many monetary benefits. Peace in domestic life may fluctuate. You should not lend money during this week. People engaged in professional services will elevate to new heights. Students may get normal results for their toil. Children may have decent gains through speculation. They may seriously search for a career change. A spouse may have an argumentative outlook throughout this week. Father may have troubles through secret enemies. He may be promoted to the next designation after a lot of pressure. Elder siblings may be promoted. Younger siblings may fall ill. They may get decent returns from business activities.

### VIRGO

  
**Virgo**

Ganesha says this may be an average week for you and may bring stability to life. You may seriously plan for a better future from this week onwards. During this week you may see improvement in your work atmosphere or working conditions. Students may get respectable results for their hard work. Children may have grand success in education or service abroad. A spouse may have problems with business partners. He/she may be perplexed by the delay in the finalization of an interview or contract. Father may have a monetary loss in speculation. He may have distractions at the work location. Elder siblings may be blessed with childbirth. Younger siblings may gain through agency business. They may succeed in different challenges of life.

### LIBRA

  
**Libra**

Ganesha says this may be a productive week for you. You may not have good terms with your superior and may

intensify troubles in a career. You may be entrusted with more power and authority from this week. It is better to postpone long journeys for this week. Students may get grand success in higher education. They may find admission in a respectable institution. This is not a favorable week for her finances. Children may have health complications relating to kidneys or small intestine. The spouse may have the opportunity to work abroad. He/she may dream about owning property. Father may have decent expansion in his career. He may be troubled by some envious people. Elder siblings may drown in more debts. Younger siblings may inherit a legacy from their in-laws. They may achieve an important objective in life.

### SCORPIO

  
**Scorpio**

Ganesha says this may be a profitable week for you and may bring gains through properties or conveyance. There will be enough opportunities to prove your abilities. You may enjoy a confident mind during this week. Students may get decent results for their hard work. This may be a good time for children to finalize marriage. A spouse may have challenging situations in a career. He/she may demand a change which is not possible this week. Father may have serious problems with business partners. He should not think of new business for this week. Elder siblings may be involved in some illicit activities during this week. Younger siblings may have few health hazards.

### SAGITTARIUS

  
**Sagittarius**

Ganesha says this may be a fluctuating week for you and may prompt you to make unimportant decisions. You may prefer to lead a more comfortable life than before. You can work actively but should control aggression this could help in controlling your enemies. Students may have grand success in career matters. Children may be successful in getting admission to higher studies. A spouse may enjoy favorable happenings in career and financial matters. They may find a new source of income during this week. Fathers may not recognize the importance of financial management. He may make indiscreet decisions about business matters. Elder siblings may decide to go for a love marriage. Younger siblings may plan for the expansion of careers.

### CAPRICORN

  
**Capricorn**

Ganesha says this may be a dynamic week for you and favorable for success in business activities. Speculation may not be in your favor. There is a likely chance for the purchase of open lands or conveyance. You may not be confident about future career prospects. Success in the interview may take place towards the end of this week. Students may get decent results for their hard

work. Children should bring more discipline to life. They may postpone important activities for normal reasons. A spouse may have a good lift in the career. He/she may face humiliation from superiors. Fathers may have sudden monetary problems. Elder siblings may face problems with spouses and children. Younger siblings need more concentration to find a suitable career option.

### AQUARIUS

  
**Aquarius**

Ganesha says this may be a normal week for you. Excess expenditure may worry you a lot. You should stay away from speculative activities throughout this week. You may enjoy a satisfactory professional life and good relations with superiors but may bring trouble to family members. Students may get average results for their performance. Children may have sharp fevers and other health complications. They may face trouble in their careers also. A spouse may have sudden career changes. He/she may be confused in career decisions. Father may have positive changes and success in his efforts. Elder siblings may face financial uncertainty throughout this week. Younger siblings may visit holy places in a break journey.

### PISCES

  
**Pisces**

Ganesha says this may be a fortunate week for you and there may be sudden monetary gains. You should be careful while driving during night times. There may be decent growth for your work abroad. You may get the opportunity for technical training in a distant place. It is better to stay away from speculation. Students may get commendable results for their hard work. Children may have youthful distractions during this week. They should devote more time to productive activities. A spouse may have handsome gains through the sale of the property. He/she will enjoy better confidence than before. Father may have a peaceful life and refreshment with long journeys. Elder siblings may decide on a marriage alliance this week. Younger siblings may face serious troubles in love matters.

### AUTHOR BIO

**CHIRAG DARUWALLA IS THE BEST ASTROLOGER AND ONE OF THE MOST FAMOUS NAMES IN THE ASTROLOGY WORLD. HE HAS MORE THAN 18 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE. READERS MAY SEEK HIS ADVICE RELATED TO CAREER, HEALTH, FINANCE, BUSINESS, MONEY, LOVE AND MARRIAGE. HE HAS COMPLETE KNOWLEDGE, SOLUTIONS, AND GUIDANCE TO ALL THE PROBLEMS RELATED TO LIFE. VISIT HIS WEBSITE CHIRAGDARUWALLA.COM. HE IS AVAILABLE FOR CONSULTATIONS ON WHATSAPP NUMBER +91 8141566266 OR BY EMAIL: info@chiragdaruwalla.com**

## BIRTHDAY HOROSCOPE : FEB 23 TO MAR 01 BY VEDIC ASTROLOGER NASTUR BEJAN DARUWALLA

### FEBRUARY 23

Ganesha says you'll find that you're standing at a crossroads today, between the things that have happened in the past and the opportunities that lie ahead. Be confident in following your intuition as you make your way through this intersection. You are being prodded to venture into the unknown by the secrets that the universe is trying to impart to you. Even though the way forward might not be entirely clear, keep in mind that each step you take is a demonstration of your tenacity and bravery. Embrace the experience of the voyage and let your intuition direct you along the way.

### FEBRUARY 24

Ganesha says today is going to usher in an explosion of creative energy. You'll have a hard time resisting the overpowering temptation to express yourself in original and creative ways today. Whether it be through the creation of works of art or literature, or even just by talking about your feelings with those you care about, let your inner artist show. Every thought and emotion you have is a brushstroke on the world, which serves as your canvas. Plunge headfirst into this wellspring of

inspiration, and you will unearth the masterpiece that resides deep within you.

### FEBRUARY 25

Ganesha says the focus of the day is on interpersonal connections. You'll find that you're thinking a lot about the connections you value and the bonds that you've made over the years. It is a day to cultivate these connections, to reach out to individuals who are dear to you, and to let them know how much they mean to you. Keep in mind that seemingly insignificant actions can frequently have the most important effects. Therefore, send that message, make that call, and allow love to serve as the compass that directs you.

### FEBRUARY 26

Ganesha says today is a day for reflection and self-examination. Take a break from the busyness of the world around you to concentrate on yourself for a while. What are some of the hopes and wishes that keep your spirit going strong? Do you have any worries or uncertainties that are preventing you from moving forward? Take advantage of today to face these feelings, get a better understanding

of them, and release yourself from their shackles. After the day, you will have a sense of lightness and a greater connection to your authentic self.

### FEBRUARY 27

Ganesha says the winds of change are blowing, and with them come new opportunities and challenges. You'll have a decision to make today, so prepare yourself. Do you choose to remain in your comfort zone, or do you push yourself into the unknown? Keep in mind that we find the most growth when we step outside of our comfort zones. Therefore, gather up your courage, take a deep breath, and step into the next chapter that lies in wait for you.

### FEBRUARY 28

Ganesha says the natural world is calling to you today. Spend some time connecting with the world around you. This might be done by activities such as taking a stroll through the park, going on a hike in the woods, or even just sitting by a window and watching the world go by. The earth is filled with knowledge and experience, as well as stories to share. If you pay careful attention, you might be able to pick out the sound of the universe's beating heart.



**VEDIC ASTROLOGER NASTUR  
BEJAN DARUWALLA**

### MARCH 1

Ganesha says today marks the beginning of a whole new era for you, which ushers in a clean slate as well as countless opportunities. You are being urged to make new plans, dream greater dreams, and pursue those dreams with a newfound enthusiasm today. You have the support and encouragement of the entire cosmos. So go ahead and take that leap of faith, and then sit back and watch as the universe reveals its beautiful secrets to you.

Nastur Bejan Daruwalla is available for astrological consultations. He can be reached at [www.bejandaruwala.com](http://www.bejandaruwala.com)  
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# Holashtak: The sacred eight days of inner trial before the Festival of Colors

As spring approaches and anticipation for Holi begins to build, the Hindu calendar marks a spiritually intense phase known as Holashtak. Observed during the eight days preceding Holika Dahan in the bright fortnight of Phalguna, Holashtak is traditionally regarded as a period when auspicious ceremonies such as weddings and housewarmings are avoided. However, beneath this cultural restraint lies a profound spiritual narrative rooted in devotion, endurance, and purification. Holashtak is not merely a pause in celebration - it is a sacred preparation for renewal.

## Mythological Origins:

### Prahlada's Unshaken Faith

The foundation of Holashtak is found in the legend of Prahlada, whose devotion to Vishnu remains one of the most powerful expressions of bhakti in Hindu scriptures. Prahlada was the son of the powerful asura king Hiranyakashipu, who, intoxicated by a boon that made him nearly invincible, demanded to be worshipped as supreme.

Prahlada's refusal to abandon Vishnu angered his father, leading to a series of brutal trials. Traditional belief associates these ordeals with the eight days of Holashtak. The child was poisoned, thrown from heights, trampled by elephants, and finally seated on a blazing pyre with his aunt Holika, who possessed a boon protecting her from fire. Yet divine grace shielded Prahlada each time.

The story culminates with Vishnu manifesting as Narasimha, the fierce half-man, half-lion incarnation, who destroyed Hiranyakashipu at twilight, thereby restoring cosmic balance. Holashtak thus commemorates the triumph of unwavering faith over arrogance and tyranny.

## Astrological Significance:

### A Period of Cosmic Turbulence

In many North Indian traditions, Holashtak is considered astrologically sensitive. It is believed that certain planetary alignments during these eight days generate unstable energies, making new beginnings less favorable. As a result, marriages and other major ceremonies are postponed until after Holika Dahan.

Yet the deeper symbolism transcends astrology. The perceived turbulence mirrors the chaos created by Hiranyakashipu's ego. Just as divine intervention ultimately restored order, the sacred fire of Holika Dahan represents the reestablishment of harmony.

## Spiritual Interpretation:

### Confronting the Inner Ego

Beyond mythology and astrology lies the psychological dimension of Holashtak. Hiranyakashipu symbolizes ego, pride, anger, greed, and attachment - qualities that disturb inner peace. Prahlada represents faith, surrender, and resilience.

Each of the eight days can be viewed as a



## Important information

### Holashtak 2026

**Holashtak Start Date : Thursday, 24 February 2026**

**Holashtak End Date : Tuesday, 03 March 2026**



step in confronting personal weaknesses. Devotees often dedicate this time to chanting Vishnu Sahasranama, reciting passages from the Bhagavata Purana, observing simple diets, practicing charity, and engaging in devotional singing. Rather than being a time of fear, Holashtak becomes an opportunity for self-examination and spiritual discipline.

## Regional Observances and Cultural Practices

Holashtak holds particular significance in states such as Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Bihar. Families traditionally avoid planning auspicious events during this period. Temples organize satsangs and narrate Prahlada's story, reinforcing the message of steadfast

## Story related to Holashtak

No auspicious work is done in Holashtak. There is a famous legend related to this, why auspicious works are not done in the days of Holashtak

### Kamadeva's story

According to the legend, Kamadeva had broken the penance of Lord Shiva at the behest of Lord Indra and being angry with this, Lord Shiva had burnt Kamadeva, the god of love with his third eye, on the Ashtami date of Falgun. Kamadeva's wife Rati worshiped Shiva for 8 days and prayed to revive Kamadeva which was accepted by Lord Shiva. Due to this tradition, these 8 days are considered taboo for auspicious works.

### Story of Bhakta Prahlad

According to the legend, King Hiranyakashipu had tormented his son Prahlad during these eight days to turn his son Prahlad away from his devotion to Lord Vishnu. On the eighth day, Holika, the sister of Hiranyakashipu, had a boon that she could not be burnt by fire. But when Holika, taking the devotee Prahlad in her lap, sat in the fire and got burnt. By the grace of Lord Vishnu, the devotee Prahlad was saved from the fire. Therefore, no auspicious work is done during these 8 days.

devotion. Preparations for Holika Dahan often begin during these eight days, including the collection of wood for the ceremonial bonfire. This physical preparation mirrors the inner cleansing devotees are encouraged to undertake.

### Holika Dahan: The Fire of Purification

The culmination of Holashtak occurs on the full moon night with Holika Dahan. Devotees gather around the sacred fire, offering grains and symbolic negativity into the flames. The ritual represents the burning of illusion, ego, and accumulated impurities.

Only after this purification does Holi erupt in vibrant celebration the following day. The sequence is spiritually meaningful - first cleanse, then celebrate.

### A Sacred Pause Before Celebration

In today's fast-paced world, Holashtak offers a rare spiritual rhythm. It reminds us that true joy is most meaningful when preceded by reflection. The colors of Holi symbolize renewal and liberation, but they gain depth when the heart has first been purified. Holashtak, therefore, is not a period of misfortune but a sacred bridge between trial and triumph. It teaches that faith withstands adversity, humility overcomes arrogance, and light inevitably follows even the darkest nights.

CONTD FROM PAGE 1

## Trump Announces Global Commitment...

say, but a hard word to produce -- peace." The board was initiated as part of Trump's 20-point peace plan to end the conflict in Gaza. But since the October ceasefire, Trump's vision for the board has morphed and he wants it to have an even more ambitious remit - one that will not only complete the Herculean task of bringing lasting peace between Israel and Hamas but will also help resolve conflicts around the globe.

But the Gaza ceasefire deal remains fragile and Trump's expanded vision for it has triggered fears the U.S. president is looking to create a rival to the United Nations. Trump earlier this week said he hoped the board would push the U.N. to "get on the ball."

"The United Nations has great potential," he said. "They haven't lived up to the potential."

Trump started the meeting by taking part in a family photo with officials from nations that have joined the board. Most countries sent high-level officials, but a few leaders-including Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto, Argentinian President Javier Milei, and Hungarian President Viktor Orbán-traveled to Washington for the gathering.

More than 40 countries and the European Union confirmed they were sending officials to Thursday's meeting, according to a senior administration official who was not authorized to comment publicly. Germany, Italy, Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom are among more than a dozen countries that have not joined the board but are taking part as observers.

"Almost everybody's accepted, and the ones that haven't, will be," Trump predicted. "And some are playing a little cute -- it doesn't work. You can't play cute with me." The U.N. Security Council held a high-level meeting Wednesday, February 18, on the ceasefire deal and Israel's efforts to expand control in the West Bank. The U.N. session in New York was originally scheduled for Thursday but was moved up after Trump announced the board's meeting for the same date and it became clear that it would complicate travel plans for diplomats planning to attend both.

Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin told reporters earlier this week that "at the international level it should above all be the U.N. that manages these crisis situations." The Trump administration on Wednesday pushed back on the Vatican's concerns.

"This president has a very bold and ambitious plan and vision to rebuild and reconstruct Gaza, which is well underway because of the Board of Peace," White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said. "This is a legitimate organization where there are tens of member countries from around the world."

Mike Waltz, the U.S. ambassador to the U.N., also pushed back on skeptical allies, saying the board is "not talking, it is doing."

"We are hearing the chattering class criticizing the structure of the board, that it's unconventional, that it's unprecedented," Waltz said. "Again, the old ways were not working."

## PM Modi calls for ethical, transparent...

In the presence of world leaders, including UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, French President Emmanuel Macron, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, Swiss President Guy Parmelin and who's who of the AI world, Modi elaborated the human-centric acronym. "I present the MANAV vision for AI where M stands for moral and ethical systems, A for accountable governance, N for national sovereignty, A for accessible and inclusive; and V for valid and legitimate," said the PM, noting that India's MANAV vision for AI would become a vital link to the welfare of mankind.

PM Modi's speech on Thursday included real-time translation in the sign language using AI, reflecting India's commitment to inclusion. "We will always work to ensure that technology and public discourse are accessible to persons with disabilities," PM said. The speech was also dubbed live in 11 Indian languages: Assamese, Bangla, English, Gujarati, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Odia, Punjabi, Tamil and Telugu.

Sri Lanka President Anura Kumara Disanayaka, Bhutan Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay, Mauritius Prime Minister Navinchandra Ramgoolam, Croatia

Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic, Serbia President Aleksandar Vucic, Estonia President Alar Karis, Finland Prime Minister Petteri Orpo and Seychelles Vice-President Sebastien Pillay were among the leaders at the event. Among CEOs there were Google's Sundar Pichai, OpenAI's Sam Altman, Anthropic's Dario Amodei, Google DeepMind's Demis Hassabis, Adobe's Shantanu Narayen and Meta's chief scientist Alexandr Wang.

Without naming any country, Modi made a compelling case for transparency in AI. "Just as sunlight is the best disinfectant, transparency is the best security. Some nations and companies believe AI is a strategic asset, so it should be confidentially developed. But our thoughts are different. We believe AI will be beneficial to the world when it is shared, when codes are opened.... AI should be developed as a global common good," the PM said, adding that India saw destiny, not fear, in AI revolution.

Modi also cautioned against deepfakes, saying fabricated AI content was destabilizing open societies and called for watermarking of AI-generated content. He further urged AI companies to look beyond profits.

"AI companies carry a major responsibility to focus not only on profit, but also on purpose," the PM said, underscoring the need for strong ethical commitments. He said since the scope of unethical behavior in AI was unlimited, "ethical norms for AI must also be unlimited".

As top minds debated the future of AI, PM Modi said authenticity labels should accompany digital content to enable people to know "what's fabricated and what's real". "Watermarking and clear source standards in the AI world are imperatives. It is necessary that trust is inbuilt in technology. We also have to be more alive for children's safety. Just as school syllabus is curated, AI space should also be child-safe and family-guided," the PM said.

His three suggestions for ethical AI were--AI training must respect data sovereignty; AI platforms must keep their safety rules clear and transparent; and AI must be guided by clear human values.

While stressing the importance of India, home to one-sixth of the humanity, hosting the largest AI Summit, Modi urged prioritization of Global South when the future of AI was discussed.

Recalling how humanity had always turned disruptions into opportunities, the PM invoked Lord Buddha's "Right action comes from right understanding" teaching to stress the importance of creating a roadmap that ensured AI's positive impact through timely, well-intentioned, correct and human-centric decisions. (Source: PTI)

## Former Prince Andrew arrested &...

"We can also confirm that our searches in Norfolk have now concluded," Thames Valley Police said in a short statement, in apparent reference to searches of his residence on King Charles III's Sandringham estate in eastern England. It is understood that reported searches of Mr. Mountbatten-Windsor's former home on the Windsor estate, west of London, remained ongoing.

Mr. Mountbatten-Windsor, the younger brother of Britain's King Charles, who turned 66 on Thursday, was arrested on suspicion of misconduct in public office - in connection with passing on confidential official documents to Epstein, when he served as an unpaid trade envoy for the U.K. between 2001 and 2011. The revelations have emerged from the release of files running into millions of pages related to Epstein by the U.S. Department of Justice.

The alleged sharing of documents is just one of several ways in which Mr. Mountbatten-Windsor's name has surfaced in connection with Epstein. In 2021, an American woman, Virginia Giuffre, said that Epstein and his former girlfriend Ghislaine Maxwell had allegedly trafficked her to Mr. Mountbatten-Windsor for sex when she was 17. Giuffre died by suicide in April 2025. In 2022, the former prince, who has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing, reached an out-of-court settlement with her.

A photograph of a man who appeared to be Mr. Mountbatten-Windsor, kneeling on all fours over a fully clothed woman lying on the carpet, was among the images released on January 30, 2026, by the U.S. authorities. The tranche of documents also suggested a possible payment from Epstein to Peter Mandelson,

former U.K. envoy to Washington, who resigned in November over his friendship with Epstein. The revelations also led to Mr. Mandelson's resignation from the Labour Party earlier this month and calls for Mr. Starmer to step down.

The King called for a "full, fair and proper process" and offered his "wholehearted support and cooperation", as per a statement released by Buckingham Palace. "Let me state clearly: the law must take its course," he said, adding it would not be appropriate to comment further at this point in time.

The family of Guiffre also reacted to the news via a statement. "At last, today our broken hearts have been lifted at the news that no one is above the law, not even royalty," they said, thanking the Thames Valley Police and adding, "He was never a prince. For survivors everywhere, Virginia did this for you."

Meanwhile, U.S. President Donald Trump on Thursday called the arrest of the former prince "very sad". "I think it's a shame. I think it's very sad. I think it's so bad for the royal family. It's very, very sad," Mr. Trump told reporters on Air Force One. (With inputs from AFP)

## UN Chief calls for global unity, says...

If we want AI to serve humanity, policy cannot be built on guesswork. It cannot be built on hype or disinformation. We need facts we can trust and share across countries and across sectors. Less noise, more knowledge", he said.

He said, "The United Nations is building a practical architecture that puts science at the center of international cooperation on AI. And it starts with the Independent International Scientific Panel on Artificial Intelligence. This panel is designed to help close the AI knowledge gap and assess the real impacts of AI across economies and societies so countries at every level of AI capacity can act with the same clarity. It is fully independent, it is globally diverse, and it is multidisciplinary because AI touches every area of every society. And I'm delighted that the General Assembly of the United Nations confirmed the 40 experts I proposed to Member States. Now the real work begins on a fast track to deliver a first report ahead of the global dialogue on AI governance in July. The panel will provide a shared baseline of analysis, helping member states move from philosophical debates to technical coordination, and anchor choices in evidence."

He called science-led governance an accelerator for solutions and a way to make progress safer, fairer, and more widely shared.

"It helps us identify where AI can do the most good the fastest. And it helps us anticipate impacts early from risks for children to labor markets to manipulation at scale. So countries can prepare, protect, and invest in people. Today international cooperation is difficult. Trust is strained, and technological rivalry is growing. Without a common baseline, fragmentation wins, with different regions and different countries operating under incompatible policies and technical standards. A patchwork of rules will raise costs, weaken safety, and widen divides. Science is a universal language. Guided by independent panel and the global dialogue on AI governance, we can align our technical baselines. When we agree on how to test systems and measure risk, we create interoperability", the UN Chief added.

Guterres underlined that the goal should be to make humans control a technical reality, not a slogan-with the process requiring meaningful human oversight.

"It requires clear accountability, so responsibility is never outsourced to an algorithm. People must understand how decisions are made, challenge them and get answers. The message is simple. Less hype, less fear, more facts and evidence. Guided by science, we can transform AI from a source of uncertainty into a reliable engine for the sustainable development goals. Let us build a future where policy is as smart as the technology it seeks to guide", Guterres said in his concluding remarks.

The India AI Impact Summit 2026, the first global AI summit hosted in the Global South, has brought together policymakers, industry leaders, academics and civil society representatives to deliberate on responsible AI governance and inclusive technological advancement. (Source: ANI)

# Aurangabad: Where empires whisper through stone

In the heart of Maharashtra lies a city where history does not merely rest in museums - it breathes through caves carved in basalt, echoes in Mughal tombs, and flows quietly through centuries-old watermills. Aurangabad is not just a destination; it is a passage through time. Every monument here carries the imprint of dynasties, faiths, traders, artisans, and emperors who shaped India's layered civilizational story.

Named after the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, Aurangabad once served as a strategic capital of the Deccan during the 17th century. Yet its story stretches far beyond the Mughals - into ancient Buddhist monastic traditions, medieval trade routes, and architectural marvels that continue to astonish the world.

## The Timeless Wonder of Ajanta Caves

About 100 kilometers from the city, hidden in a horseshoe-shaped gorge overlooking the Waghora River, lie the Ajanta Caves - a UNESCO World Heritage Site that feels almost otherworldly. Dating back to the 2nd century BCE and flourishing between the 5th and 6th centuries CE, these rock-cut caves are masterpieces of Buddhist art and devotion.

Step inside and you are greeted by intricate murals depicting the Jataka tales - stories of the Buddha's previous births. The expressions, colors, and delicate brushwork have survived centuries, offering a rare glimpse into ancient Indian painting traditions. The chaityas (prayer halls) and viharas (monasteries) carved into solid rock stand as testimony to the devotion and skill of artisans who worked without modern tools.

The silence inside Ajanta is profound. It is not empty silence, but one filled with centuries of chanting, meditation, and artistic dedication.

## Architectural Brilliance at Ellora Caves

Closer to Aurangabad, about 30 kilometers away, the Ellora Caves present an extraordinary confluence of faiths - Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain monuments coexist here, carved between the 6th and 10th centuries.

The crown jewel is the magnificent Kailasa Temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva. Unlike typical temples built stone by stone, Kailasa was carved from a single massive rock, excavated top-down. The scale is staggering - elephants, pillars, deities, and mythological scenes emerge seamlessly from the rock. It is considered one of the greatest achievements in Indian rock-cut architecture.

Ellora is not merely about grandeur; it represents harmony. The presence of multiple religious traditions within one complex speaks of a time when artistic patronage transcended boundaries.

## The Mini Taj: Bibi Ka Maqbara

Often referred to as the "Taj of the Deccan," Bibi Ka Maqbara was built by Aurangzeb's son, Azam Shah, in memory of his mother. Its resemblance to the Taj Mahal is unmistakable, though its story is uniquely Deccani.

Surrounded by manicured gardens and reflecting pools, the monument glows beautifully during sunrise and



sunset. Though less ornate than its Agra counterpart, it possesses a quiet elegance and historical charm that makes it a must-visit.

## Echoes of the Mughal Deccan

Aurangabad's Mughal connection runs deep. The imposing Daulatabad Fort, originally known as Devagiri, predates the Mughals but became strategically important during their rule. Its labyrinthine passages, steep defenses, and ingenious military architecture tell tales of shifting capitals and ambitious rulers.

Nearby, the Panchakki watermill - powered by an underground water channel - reflects medieval engineering brilliance. The city gates, remnants of fortifications, and old neighborhoods still retain a vintage aura.

## A Spiritual Pause at Grishneshwar Temple

One of the 12 Jyotirlingas dedicated to Lord Shiva, Grishneshwar Temple stands close to Ellora. Pilgrims from across the country visit this sacred shrine, making Aurangabad not just a heritage hub but also a spiritual destination.

The temple's red basalt structure, intricate carvings, and devotional atmosphere offer a deeply immersive cultural experience.

## Flavors of the Deccan

Travel in Aurangabad is incomplete without indulging in its cuisine. The city reflects a blend of Mughlai and Maharashtrian flavors - from fragrant biryanis and naan qalia (a local meat preparation) to simple yet satisfying thalis. Street-side stalls offer sweets and snacks that carry a distinct Deccan identity.

## When to Visit

The best time to explore Aurangabad is between October and March, when the weather is pleasant. Summers can be harsh, but early mornings at the caves reward visitors with cooler breezes and softer light for photography.

## Beyond Monuments

Aurangabad is not just about ticking off UNESCO sites. It is about standing before a 1,500-year-old mural and realizing it still speaks. It is about tracing the ambitions of emperors, the devotion of monks, and the artistry of anonymous craftsmen who carved mountains into prayer.

In Aurangabad, stone is not lifeless. It remembers. It narrates. It invites you to listen.

For travelers seeking history, spirituality, architecture, and quiet reflection in equal measure, Aurangabad offers an experience that lingers long after the journey ends.

## History This Week FEB 20 - FEB 26

### FEBRUARY 20



February 20, 1943 - German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel broke through American lines at Kasserine Pass in North Africa as inexperienced U.S. Troops lost their first major battle of World War II in Europe, with 1,000 Americans killed.



February 20, 1962 - Astronaut John Glenn became the first American launched into orbit. Traveling aboard the "Friendship 7" spacecraft, Glenn reached an altitude of 162 miles (260 kilometers) and completed three orbits in a flight lasting just under five hours. Glenn was the third American in space, preceded by Alan Shepard and Virgil "Gus" Grissom who had each completed short sub-orbital flights. All of them had been preceded by Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin who was the first human in space, completing one orbit on April 12, 1961 - a feat that intensified the already ongoing Space Race between the Russians and Americans. Glenn's successful flight showed the Americans had caught up and was followed in September 1962 by President John F. Kennedy's open call to land an American on the moon before the decade's end.

### FEBRUARY 21



February 21, 1965 - Former Black Muslim leader Malcolm X (1925-1965) was shot and killed while delivering a speech in a ballroom in New York City.



February 21, 1972 - President Richard Nixon arrived in China for historic meetings with Chairman Mao Tse-tung

and Premier Chou En-lai.



February 21, 1994 - CIA agent Aldrich Ames was arrested on charges he spied for the Soviet Union from 1985 to 1991.

### FEBRUARY 22



February 22, 1956 - In Montgomery, Alabama, 80 participants in the three-month-old bus boycott voluntarily gave themselves up for arrest after an ultimatum from white city leaders. Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks were among those arrested. Later in 1956, the U.S. Supreme Court mandated desegregation of the buses.



Birthday - George Washington (1732-1799) was born in Westmoreland County, Virginia. He served as commander of the Continental Army during the American Revolution and became the first U.S. President.

### FEBRUARY 23



February 23, 1942 - During World War II, the first attack on the U.S. mainland occurred as a Japanese submarine shelled an oil refinery near Santa Barbara, California, causing minor damage.

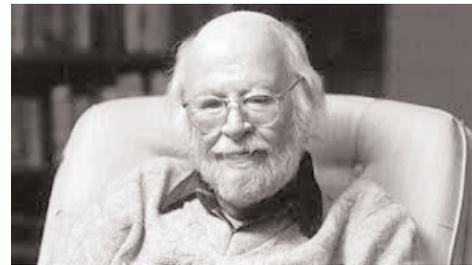


February 23, 1991 - In Desert Storm, the Allied ground offensive began after a devastating month-long air campaign

targeting Iraqi troops in both Iraq and Kuwait.



Birthday - African American educator and leader W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963) was born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts.

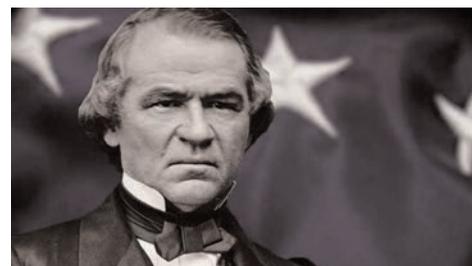


Birthday - Historian William L. Shirer (1904-1993) was born in Chicago, Illinois. As a news reporter stationed in Europe, he witnessed the rise of Adolf Hitler and reported on the surrender of France. Following the war he wrote the first major history of Nazi Germany, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*.

### FEBRUARY 24



February 24, 1582 - Pope Gregory XIII corrected mistakes on the Julian calendar by dropping 10 days and directing that the day after October 4, 1582 would be October 15th. The Gregorian, or New Style calendar, was then adopted by Catholic countries, followed gradually by Protestant and other nations.



February 24, 1867 - The House of Representatives voted to impeach President Andrew Johnson. The vote followed bitter opposition by the Radical Republicans in Congress toward Johnson's reconstruction policies in the South. However, the effort to remove him failed in the Senate by just one vote.



Birthday - Admiral Chester Nimitz

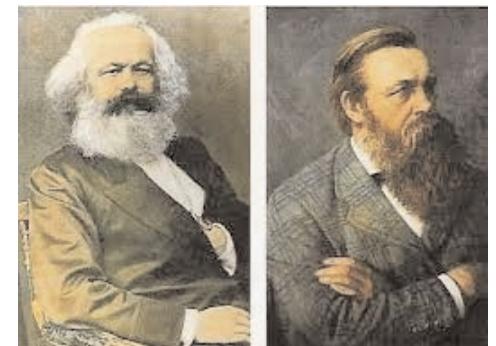
(1885-1966) was born in Fredericksburg, Texas. He commanded Allied naval, land and air forces in the South Pacific during World War II, and signed the Japanese surrender document on September 2, 1945.

### FEBRUARY 25



Birthday - Millicent Fenwick (1910-1992) was born in New York City. She championed liberal causes, serving as a member of the U.N. General Assembly and as a U.S. Congresswoman.

### FEBRUARY 26



February 26, 1848 - The Communist Manifesto pamphlet was published by two young socialists, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. It advocated the abolition of all private property and a system in which workers own all means of production, land, factories and machinery.



February 26, 1994 - Political foes of Russian President Boris Yeltsin were freed by a general amnesty granted by the new Russian Parliament.



Birthday - American frontiersman "Buffalo Bill" Cody (1846-1917) was born in Scott County, Indiana. He claimed to have killed over 4,000 buffalo within 17 months. He became world famous through his Wild West show which traveled throughout the U.S. and Europe for 30 years.

# Milano Cortina 2026: It was Canada's day



BY  
PRABHJOT SINGH

FEBRUARY 18, 2026

**MILAN (TIP):** Members of the Canadian squad could not have asked for more. They tasted success in almost every event they participated in. Though they won a gold and a bronze in short speed skating but also registered breathtaking wins in men's ice hockey and curling to climb to 11th position in the medals tally with four golds and as many silvers plus six bronze medals.

In ice hockey for men, Canada survived a scare before overpowering Czechia 4-3 in extra time to make the last four round.

While Johannes Hoesflot Klaebo continued to satiate his appetite for Olympic medals by adding his career 10th medal, some other stalwarts who delivered the magic on the ice and snow read like a cast from a superhero movie: Mikaela Shiffrin, Xu Mengtao, Arianna Fontana, and Zoi Sadowski-Synnott

The USA has steadily maintained its position at number three in the medals tally as Mikaela Shiffrin, irrepressible Shiffrin, demonstrated why she is by soaring to her first gold of the Games in women's slalom.

The adage that form is temporary, class is permanent rang true on Day 12 of the Olympic Winter Games Milano Cortina 2026 as it witnessed another day of record-setting performances, dramatic finishes and remarkable comebacks.

Canada's Steven Dubois powered to Olympic gold in the men's 500m short track speed skating final, producing a front-running masterclass to win in 40.85 seconds.

Dubois exploded off the start and was first into the opening corner - a crucial advantage in the sport's shortest distance - and from that moment never relinquished control. Skating smooth, tight lines, the Canadian kept the field at bay across all four-and-a-half laps, resisting late pressure to seal the victory.

Behind him, Melle van 't Wout of the Netherlands closed strongly in the final lap but crossed just 0.06 seconds back in 40.91 to take silver. His compatriot Jens van 't Wout secured bronze in 41.92, completing a double podium for the Dutch team.

For Dubois, the victory marks his first individual Olympic gold medal, adding to the bronze he won at Beijing 2022. It is the Canadian's fifth Olympic medal of its career and second of Milano Cortina 2026, following silver in the mixed relay earlier at these Games.

The silver for Melle van 't Wout represents his first Olympic medal on his Games debut and the Netherlands' first Olympic medal in the men's 500m.

Bronze medalist Jens van 't Wout continues his remarkable Milano Cortina campaign, earning his third



Players of Team Canada celebrate the team's 4-3 overtime victory over Czechia in the Men's Quarterfinals Playoff match on day 12 of the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Olympic games at Milano Santagiulia Ice Hockey Arena. (Photo by Getty Images)

medal after winning gold in both the 1000m and 1500m. The other Canadian in the race, William Dandjinou, was disqualified. It's Dubois' second medal after he won silver in the mixed 2000-metre relay. Maxime Laoun competed in semifinal B, finishing fourth.

Canada also won bronze in the women's 3,000 meter short track speed skating relay event. Danae Blais, Florence Brunelle, Kim Boutin and Courtney Sarault led the relay for much of the race before falling back to third. Canada finished in four minutes 4.314 seconds, three-tenths of a second behind gold medalist South Korea. Host Italy was second.

For Sarault, it is her fourth medal in short track at these Winter Games, having won silver in the mixed team relay and women's 1,000m, and bronze in the women's 500 meter event. It is Canada's 13th medal of the Games. Canada survived a major scare at Milano Cortina 2026 on Wednesday (18 February), edging Czechia 4-3 in overtime in a dramatic men's ice hockey quarter-final in Milan to keep their Olympic gold hopes alive. After cruising through the group stage unbeaten, Canada were pushed to the limit by a Czech side that led late in the third period and came within minutes of a huge upset, before Nick Suzuki's late equalizer forced overtime.

Mitch Marner struck the golden goal in the extra period, firing Canada into the semi-finals and keeping the tournament favorites on track for a medal.

Mitch Marner scores in overtime to send Canada through to the semi-finals.

After Canada opened its Milano Cortina 2026 campaign by beating Czechia 5-0 in the preliminary round, this quarter-final had a very different edge from the first drop of the puck. Czechia was far more aggressive and physical from the outset, and its opponents soon realized that they were in for a battle.

Canada still struck first through Macklin Celebrini, but Czechia

responded with real intent, levelling through Lukáš Sedlák before David Pastrňák put them ahead with a power-play goal to give the Czechs a 2-1 lead after the first period. The Canadians hit back in the second, with Nathan MacKinnon finishing off a power play to tie the contest at 2-2 and set the stage for a tense final period.

Czechia regained the lead midway through the third when Ondřej Palát made it 3-2, leaving Canada suddenly staring at elimination. But with time running out, Suzuki struck with just over three minutes remaining to make it 3-3 and force overtime in one of the most gripping games of the men's tournament so far.

Mikaela Shiffrin raced to her first gold of the Games in women's slalom to demonstrate she is the best, winning her second Olympic slalom gold medal, 12 years apart.

Looking to win her first gold medal at the Games since PyeongChang 2018, Shiffrin had one final shot in an event she has absolutely dominated between Olympic cycles. Shiffrin has 108 World Cup victories behind her name - including 71 in slalom - and seven World Championship wins.

Shiffrin showed no sign of nerves as she delivered an imperious performance on both her runs for a combined time of 1:39.10. The 30-year-old finished a second and a half ahead of silver medalist Camille Rast of Switzerland, with Sweden's Anna Swenn Larsson (1:40.81) finishing third.

In cross-country skiing, the undisputed King of Winter Olympics, Klaebo anchored Norway to men's team sprint free gold as he continued his gold-medal harvest at Milano Cortina 2026 by anchoring Norway to victory in the men's team sprint free.

Klaebo captured his fifth title at these Games and his 10th overall, extending his record as the all-time gold-medal leader in the history of the Winter Olympics.

Making his break in the final uphill section of the course, Klaebo raced to a

1.37-second winning margin over Team USA in second position.

The 29-year-old Klaebo is just one victory away from breaking Eric Heiden's record for the most gold medals at a single Winter Olympic Games. He will get that chance in the 50km classic race on Saturday.

In cross-country skiing, Jonna Sundling and Maja Dahlqvist hit gold for Sweden as they raced to victory in the women's team sprint free to upgrade their silver medals from four years ago to gold. Sundling and Dahlqvist gave Sweden its fourth gold of Milano Cortina 2026, edging Switzerland's Nadja Kaelin and Nadine Faehndrich into second place by just 1.4 seconds. Germany's Laura Gimmler and Coletta Rydzek (20:35.86) secured the bronze. Xu Mengtao of China retained women's aerials crown as she reached lofty heights, becoming the first athlete to win two Olympic golds in the aerials. The decorated aerial skier successfully defended her crown with a winning score of 112.90 for a commanding win over Australia's Danielle Scott (102.17) in second place. Shao Qi (101.90) rounded out the podium to give the People's Republic of China a 1-3 on the podium.

The 35-year-old Xu, who is widely considered the greatest aerialist, won her fourth medal on her fifth appearance at the Games. Other gold for China came in slopestyle through Su Yiming on his birthday, when he blew out the candles and the competition for the men's snowboard slopestyle gold medal on his birthday.

The 22-year-old Su upgraded his silver from four years ago and now has four medals in his collection - two gold (big air and slopestyle) and bronze (big air).

Su got down to business on his first run with a score of 82.41 that would prove good enough for the title, beating Japan's Hasegawa Taiga (82.13) into second place. Team USA's Jake Canter bagged the bronze with 79.36.

Another Asian to shine was Japanese teenager Fukada Mari, the winner of the women's slopestyle title

She celebrated a stunning debut at Milano Cortina 2026, winning the women's snowboard slopestyle gold medal. The 19-year-old got the best of New Zealand's defending champion Sadowski-Synnott and Japanese compatriot Murase Kokomo. The competition came to a climactic end with the three medalists posting their best scores on the final run.

Fukada took the lead on her first run and sealed the deal on the third with a winning score of 87.83, with Sadowski-Synnott falling just short with 87.48.

Murase, the newly crowned big air gold medalist from Italy, scored 85.80 for her second consecutive bronze in the event. Sadowski-Synnott won a career fifth medal and her second in Italy, becoming the most decorated Olympic snowboarder in the world.

## MILANO CORTINA 2026

## USA dethrones Canada for women's hockey title, moves to second spot in medals tally



BY  
PRABHJOT SINGH

FEBRUARY 19, 2026

**MILAN (TIP):** With three more medals, including a pleasant gold in women's hockey, the United States moved to the number two spot in the medals tally at the Milano Cortina 2026 Games on Thursday.

The much-anticipated gold-medal game in the women's ice hockey did not disappoint, as an absorbing contest of fluctuating fortunes reiterated Team USA's supremacy over the defending champions, Canada, who led 1-0 until the closing minutes of the game. It was a big heartbreak for the Canadians in general and their star performer and top scorer, Poulin, who returned from injury, hoping to get her team its sixth gold.

The women's figure skating brought the 13th day of action to a stylish close with Alysa Liu becoming the first American woman in 24 years to win gold.

The Games leaders, Norway, too, added another gold to take its tally to 16 gold to maintain a clear edge over the number two nation, the USA. While Norway has a total of 34 medals, the USA has harvested 27, closely followed by the hosts, Italy, with 26. Canada's hopes of adding a fifth gold to its tally were shattered by its surprise overtime defeat in women's hockey. It continued to be at number 11 position with 15 medals, including 4 gold.

As the Games are hurtling towards a climactic conclusion, there were a lot more incredible skills, athleticism, and pure grit on display on day 13.

Ski mountaineering made its triumphant debut on the Olympic programme with Oriol Cardona Coll of Spain and Switzerland's Marianne Fatton crowned as its very first champions.

In figure skating, Alysa Liu not only broke the 24-year USA gold drought in the women's single event, but also set the stands ablaze with her memorable performance.

Alysa Liu mesmerized in the free skate, launching her from third place after the short program into first place for Olympic gold in women's figure skating with a career-best 226.79 overall. In doing so, Liu gave Team USA its first Olympic title in women's figure skating in 24 years, past her two Japanese opponents.

The beaming Liu finished ahead of short program leader Nakai Ami (224.90) and three-time world champion Sakamoto Kaori (291.16). Sakamoto took silver and Nakai bronze.



United States' players celebrate after Thursday's gold medal win over Canada.

The 20-year-old Liu secured her second gold of these Games, adding to the team event crown in the opening week of the global showpiece.

In the most exciting team event of the day, five-time champions Canada had one hand on the title, leading 1-0 before Team USA's tactic paid dividends in the dying moments of regulation time. The U.S. pulled its goaltender Aerin Frankel in favor of an extra attacker, ultimately leading to captain Hilary Knight's equalizer to tie the game at 1-1.

Megan Keller landed the decisive blow 4:07 into sudden-death overtime for the United States to reclaim its crown from PyeongChang 2018.

Earlier, Switzerland defeated Sweden in the bronze medal game to win its first Olympic medal since Sochi 2014.

As ski mountaineering entered the competition arena, Marianne Fatton of Switzerland won her first-ever Olympic gold in women's sprint. She made history as the first Olympic champion in ski mountaineering, winning the women's sprint with a time of two minutes, 59.77 seconds (2:59.77).

The 30-year-old Fatton finished just over two seconds ahead of arch-rival and favorite Emily Harrop of France. Ana Alonso Rodriguez earned her place on the historic podium in third place, for Spain's first medal at the Winter Games.

Fatton found the edge in an epic duel with the Frenchwoman by taking the lead from the second transition before navigating the downhill element in style for the win.

In the men's section of ski mountaineering, Oriol Cardona Coll of Spain won the inaugural Olympic men's

sprint gold as he cemented his name into the annals of history as the first-ever male Olympic champion in ski mountaineering with his win in the sprint event.

Cardona Coll was in flying form amidst heavy snowfall with a late surge on the climb to lead heading into the downhill section, crossing the line in a winning time of two minutes, 34.03 seconds (2:34.03).

The Spaniard edged Nikita Filipov by 1.5 seconds, with France's Thibault Anselmet following in third in 2:36.3.

In Nordic combined, Jens Luraas Oftebro helped Norway to get its 16th gold medal with a men's team sprint. It was his third gold of the Games.

The Norwegian ace continued his unbeatable form in the Nordic combined, winning the men's team sprint for his third gold of these Winter Games. Oftebro and Andreas Skoglund finished ahead of Finland's Eero Hirvonen and Ilkka Herola, with Austria's Stefan Rettenegger and Johannes Lamparter taking bronze.

Showcasing his never-say-die spirit, Oftebro caught Finnish leader Hirvonen on the final leg of the cross-country section. The two were embroiled in a fierce arm wrestle until the finish, with Oftebro getting his nose in front in 41:18.0, with Hirvonen following 0.5 seconds adrift. Austria finished third, a further 22.3 seconds behind Norway.

Germany held the lead heading into the cross-country skiing phase with a total score from the ski jumping round of 246.5 points, with Skoglund and Oftebro (237.00) the second best.

China held the spotlight in men's speed

From page 35

### It was Canada's day...

In biathlon, the French quartet powers to women's biathlon relay gold as

Julia Simon delivered another decisive anchor leg, leading France to victory in the women's biathlon 4x6km relay.

The French quartet of Simon, Camille Bened, Lou Jeanmonnot and Océane Michelon claimed Olympic gold in 1:10:22.7.

A faultless performance on the shooting range gave Simon the edge to power her team across the line in a commanding 51.3-second winning margin over silver medalists Sweden. Norway completed the podium with bronze in 1:11:30.3 (+1:07.6).

The 29-year-old Simon now boasts three gold medals at these Games with her victories in the women's relay, mixed relay, and the 15km individual event.

The Republic of Korea reclaimed the women's 3000m relay crown.

Kim Gilli produced a roaring final two laps to lead the Republic of Korea to victory to reclaim the Olympic short track speed skating gold in the women's 3000m relay. The Korean quartet of Kim, Choi Minjeong, Shim Sukhee, and Noh Dohee raced to victory, reclaiming the title from PyeongChang 2018 in a time of 4:04.014. Kim held off a challenge from Italy's Arianna Fontana and team for the title.

Fontana led her nation across the line in second for a record 14th career Olympic medal, with a time of 4:04.107. She is now the most decorated Italian Olympian, male or female. Canada rounded out the podium in 4:04.314.

skating. Ning Zhongyan raced to an Olympic record to claim the men's 1500m speed skating gold. The Chinese athlete won his third medal of the Winter Games, adding to his bronze in the 1000m and team pursuit.

Ning won his maiden Olympic crown in style with a time of 1:41.98, beating the pre-race favorite Jordan Stolz (1:42.75) of the United States into second place. Dutch skater Kjeld Nuis completed the podium with bronze in 1:42.82.

*(Prabhjot Singh is a senior Toronto-based, award-winning independent journalist, who worked with The Tribune, Reuters, and several media groups in a career spanning nearly five decades. He has written extensively about Diaspora, Politics, Business, Aviation, Health, Public and Private Sectors and Sports. He can be reached at prabhjot416@gmail.com)*

# T20 WC: Dube, Chakravarthy star as India end league stage with 17-run win over Netherlands

AHMEDABAD (TIP), FEBRUARY 18

Shivam Dube played a momentum-changing knock before Varun Chakravarthy produced another incisive spell to set up India's convincing 17-run victory over the Netherlands in their final league fixture of the T20 World Cup here on Wednesday, February 18.

Despite the top-order struggles against off-spinner Aryan Dutt, India managed to make a challenging 193 for six courtesy the fireworks from Shivam Dube (66 off 31) in the second half of the innings. The Netherlands were always behind in the chase and doors on them were shut by Chakravarthy (3/14 in 3 overs), who did the damage in the powerplay as well as in the middle overs.

Staying true to his strength, the mystery spinner relentlessly attacked the stumps, removing Colin Ackermann and Aryan Dutt in successive balls in the 13th over to leave the Netherlands at 94 for four.

Soon after, a well-set Bas de Leede and captain Scott Edwards were dismissed, snuffing out all hopes for the associate nation who ended their campaign with three losses and a solitary win.

Zach Lion-Cachet (26 not out off 16) and Noah Croes (25 not out off 12) made things more interesting in the death overs but were left with too much to do despite collecting 18 runs from Hardik Pandya in the 19th over.

Expecting tougher battles ahead, Suryakumar Yadav chose to give the final over to Shivam Dube over Jasprit Bumrah. Despite two dropped catches, Dube was able to defend 28 off the last six balls as the Netherlands ended at 176/7 in 20 overs.

Overwhelming title favourites India now head into their opening Super 8 game against South Africa here as the only unbeaten team from Group A. However, they still have work to do against the spinners.

Opting to bat, India were hoping for Abhishek Sharma's return to form ahead of the Super 8, but the left-hander had to endure his third consecutive duck in the tournament. In the form of his life not so long ago, he is yet to score a run in his maiden ICC event.



Shivam Dube: India's silent hero this T20 World Cup

India all-rounder Shivam Dube is rapidly enhancing his credentials as a premier power-hitter with impactful performances in the ongoing T20 World Cup.

After crucial cameos on tricky pitches against Namibia and Pakistan, Dube overcame a slow start to provide much-needed momentum to India's innings in the middle overs against the Netherlands here on Wednesday.

Tested by off-spinner Aryan Dutt initially and managing six off his first 11 balls, Dube stepped on the accelerator to end with a match-winning 31-ball 66 including half a dozen sixes.

Playing in his second T20 World Cup, Dube was always known for his siting-hitting prowess against the spinners but now he has made himself equally effective against the pacers.

His improved play against fast bowlers was on display against the Netherlands as he read the pace variations well from the hand of Logan van Been to dispatch him for three maximums.

## IPL owners not to consider Pakistan players in The Hundred

MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 19

No player from Pakistan will be considered by teams with an Indian investment in the upcoming edition of The Hundred, the flagship tournament of the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB). The Pakistan players have not featured in any edition of the Indian Premier League (IPL) since 2009, and no player from the country has ever played a match in South Africa's SA20, as all six teams are owned by IPL owners.

According to a report by the BBC, a senior official at the ECB has already indicated to an agent that interest in his Pakistan players would be limited to teams without ties to IPL owners. On the other hand, another agent described this situation as an "unwritten rule" across various leagues where there is an Indian investment.

Four teams of the Hundred's eight franchises now have some form of investment from the IPL owners: Manchester Super Giants, MI London, Southern Brave, and SunRisers Leeds. The ownership came into effect on October 1, 2025. When asked for a comment on the latest development, James Sheridan, the deputy chair of Manchester Super Giants, said that the entire group's focus remains on building the best possible squad. "The only conversations we've had is to pick the two best squads to give us the best possible chance of winning the two competitions," Sheridan was quoted as saying by the BBC. On the other hand, the ECB spokesperson said, "The Hundred welcomes men's and women's players from all over the world, and we would expect the eight teams to reflect that."

# Zimbabwe stun Sri Lanka by six wickets in T20 World Cup

FEBRUARY 19, 2026

**COLOMBO (TIP):** Zimbabwe notched up a stunning six-wicket win over Sri Lanka in their final Group B T20 World Cup match here on Thursday.

Opting to bat, Pathum Nissanka carted eight fours en route to a 41-ball 62 and Pavan Rathnayake blasted a 25-ball 44 in the back end as SL posted 178 for 7.

In reply, Brian Bennett (63) hit a fifty and skipper Sikandar Raza (45) produced the needed acceleration as Zimbabwe chased down the total, scoring 182-4 in 19.3 overs to top the group.

Earlier, Graeme Cremer (2/27), Blessing Muzarabani (2/38) and Brad Evans (2/35) claimed two wickets each for Zimbabwe.

Both the teams have qualified for the Super 8s.

### Brief Scores:

Sri Lanka: 178-7 in 20 overs (Pathum Nissanka 62; Graeme Cremer 2/27, Blessing Muzarabani 2/38).

Zimbabwe: 182 for 4 in 19.3 overs (Brian Bennett 63, Sikandar Raza 45; Dushan Hemantha 2/36).



Zimbabwe's Graeme Cremer, left, celebrates with teammate the wicket of Sri Lanka's Pavan Rathnayake during the T20 World Cup cricket match between Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe in Colombo, Sri Lanka, Thursday, Feb. 19, 2026. AP/PTI

### Aus out of T20 World Cup

Australia have been knocked out of the Twenty20 cricket World Cup before even finishing their group stage fixtures after Zimbabwe's match with Ireland in Sri

Lanka was abandoned without a ball being bowled.

With each side taking a point from the rained-off tie Australia, on two points, can no longer catch Zimbabwe, on five, even if they win their final match against

Oman on February 20.

Heavy rain in Kandy meant the covers were on the Pallekele International Stadium for much of the day before the match was finally called off three hours after the scheduled toss. Zimbabwe thus go through to the Super 8 stage alongside Sri Lanka, with Thursday's match between the teams deciding who tops group B.

It is the first time Australia have been knocked out of a World Cup at the group stage, in either the T20 or ODI formats, since 2009. Their only victory was over Ireland, who were also eliminated by the washout.

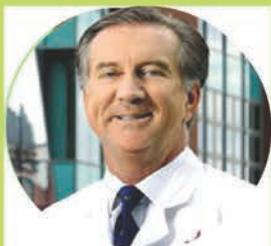
It was defeat by Sri Lanka that knocked out Australia in both cases, in Nottingham in 2009 and Kandy on Monday, but the real damage this time was done by the loss to Zimbabwe. The African side did not qualify for the last World Cup, in 2024, and had to start their journey to this event in October that year, in the sub-regional Africa B tournament. They won 10 successive qualifiers to get to the World Cup, and two more in Sri Lanka prior to this match.



## An Eye Institute in Rajahmundry, Andhra Pradesh combating avoidable blindness in children.

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Best Wishes, Peter



Peter J McDonnell, MD Director Wilmer Eye Institute, Johns Hopkins



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