



# THE ECHO OF INDIA



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## AT A GLANCE

### Seven cops die in avalanche

**SRINAGAR:** Bodies of seven policemen were on Friday extricated from a police post hit by an avalanche near Jawahar Tunnel in Kulgam district last evening, even as heavy snowfall in Kashmir claimed two more lives in Anantnag. While two cops were rescued, another was missing in the Kulgam incident, a police official said. The rescued police personnel were shifted to hospital where their condition is stated to be stable, he said. (PTI)

### Blasts in Nepal hydel projectsite

**KATHMANDU:** An unidentified group has exploded three improvised explosive devices near the powerhouse of under construction Arun III Hydropower project, which is being developed with India's assistance in the eastern part of the Himalayan nation, according to a media report. The incident happened on Thursday near the powerhouse of the hydroproject that led to the damage of a generator and a boomer, the Himalayan Times reported.

### Ramdev on Lord Ram

**AHMEDABAD:** Asserting that the issue of construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya was linked to the nation's pride, Yoga guru Ramdev Friday said Lord Ram was the ancestor not only of Hindus, but also of Muslims. Talking to reporters at Nadiad town in Kheda district, around 70 kms from here, he said the Ram temple issue was not linked to vote bank politics. "I firmly believe that Ram mandir must be built in Ayodhya. If not in Ayodhya, where would you build it? It is obvious that it will not come up at Mecca, Madina or Vatican City," he said in response to a query. (PTI)

# Modi targets Mamata, says protectors of chit fund fraudsters will not be spared

## Bengal CM hits back, calls PM master of corruption



Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the rally

*Never in the history of our country have we seen a chief minister sitting on a dharna to save the corrupt. The poor want to know why did you sit on dharna to save those who are accused of negligence in probing the chit fund scam*  
— Narendra Modi

*The less we talk about this man (the prime minister) the better. Mr Maddy is the master of corruption. He is the master of arrogance and a shame for the country. I have no words to describe him*  
— Mamata Banerjee



Chief minister Mamata Banerjee at a press conference at Eco Park — Photo: Shyamal Maitra

**CHURABHANDAR/KOLKATA, FEB 8 /-** Escalating his face-off with West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee, Prime Minister Narendra Modi today accused her of trying to protect those involved in chit fund scams and warned neither the perpetrators nor those shielding them will be spared.

Modi said Mamata's ruling TMC had inherited the legacy of "violence and atrocity" from the previous Communist government, and had "defamed" the soil of West Bengal. Attacking the Bengal chief minister, who is at the forefront of efforts to stitch together a broad-based anti-BJP coalition of opposition parties ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, Modi said the proposed 'Mahagathbandhan' (grand alliance) was 'Maha Milawat' (a grand adulteration) of people who were without any ideology or vision for the country. "Never in the history of our country have we seen a chief minister

sitting on a dharna to save the corrupt. The poor want to know why did you sit on dharna to save those who are accused of negligence in probing the chit fund scam. "This chowkidar (watchman) will not spare them. Whether it is the perpetrators or their protectors, nobody will be allowed to go scot free," Modi declared while addressing a BJP rally in Jalpaiguri district. Ministers in the Union government and Mamata are locked in a bitter exchange of words ever since the West Bengal chief minister dramatically launched a dharna to protest the CBI's bid to question Kolkata police commissioner Rajeev Kumar in the Saradha chit fund scam in which lakhs of investors were swindled of their money with the promise of astronomical returns. Modi alleged that the TMC dispensation had taken after its predecessor Left Front government in adopting the culture of bloodshed. "Those you gave power to in

Bengal in the name of 'maa, maati, manush (mother, motherland and man-the TMC's poll slogan) have followed the culture of bloodshed of their Communist predecessors," he said, branding the TMC government "Communist part 2".

Recalling Bengal's rich cultural heritage, the Prime Minister said: "Today, law and order is in a shambles, industries and businesses are in ruins and young people are migrating to other states for jobs. This government has defamed 'maati' of Bengal and rendered its people 'majboor' (helpless)." "We are bringing back the corrupt from other countries and they are bent upon saving the corrupt here. Everybody who is corrupt is afraid of Modi," the Prime Minister said in an apparent reference to the government's efforts to bring back fugitive tycoon Vijay Mallya. Highlighting the contradictions among the probable constituents of the

proposed opposition alliance, Modi said while Congress leaders in West Bengal accused the TMC government of being undemocratic, "in Delhi, the brother-in-law of Robert Vadra is calling up Mamata Banerjee to extend his support". He berated the state government for thwarting rallies of BJP leaders by denying permission for their helicopters to land.

Hitting back at the Prime Minister, Mamata today called him "the master of corruption" and said that she supported the views of the Congress on the Rafale deal. Mamata described Rafale deal as "one of the biggest scam of the country". "I do not know how much money changed hands or what had happened, but certainly there must be something behind the curtain. Rafale deal is a big scam and I support the Congress' views on it," Mamata told a press conference after the conclusion of the Bengal Global Business Summit

here. Earlier in the day, Congress president Rahul Gandhi had alleged that "the Prime Minister has stolen Rs 30,000 crore of your money, bypassed a process, and given it to his friend Mr Anil Ambani". He demanded answers to questions raised by a media report that the PMO conducted parallel negotiations on the Rafale deal, saying it is now "crystal clear" that the "watchman" is the "thief". Calling Modi as "Mr Maddy", Mamata claimed that the country has not witnessed such a corrupt prime minister in its history. "The less we talk about this man (the prime minister) the better. Mr Maddy is the master of corruption. He is the master of arrogance and a shame for the country. I have no words to describe him. His standard is so low that we have never expected such a man to be the prime minister. We have respect for the chair but not for this man," she said. (PTI)

## State received Rs 2.84 lakh cr biz proposals from summit: Mamata



Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee greating industrialists and dignitaries at the BGBS in Kolkata — Photo: Shyamal Maitra

**KOLKATA, FEB 8 /-** The fifth edition of 'Bengal Global Business Summit' has generated investment proposals of Rs 2.84 lakh crore, chief minister Mamata Banerjee said today. Terming the state's showpiece annual industry event as a "remarkable success", Mamata said that West Bengal was the safest and warmest place to invest in the country. "The outcome is fantastic. This is reflected by the amount of investment proposals we received," she said. During the previous edition of the summit, the state had received investment proposals of around Rs 2.19 lakh crore. As many as 140 memorandums of understanding (MoUs) were signed across sectors, while 45 B2C (business to consumer) and 1,200 B2B (business to business) meetings were held during the two-day summit that concluded today. The state government expects 8-10 lakh jobs to be created from the investment proposals. "There is no strike, no suspension of work and no workers' unrest. While two crore jobs got reduced due to demonetisation and GST (Goods and Services Tax) in India, Bengal has been able to reduce unemployment by 40 per cent. We need to create jobs," she said. The chief minister added that the next edition of the summit would be held in end-January or early February 2020. State finance minister Amit Mitra said furniture and accessories giant IKEA has shown interest to open store in the state after Hyderabad. (PTI)

## Rahul ramps up Rafale attack after media report, says PM guilty

### Yet another lie, says defence minister

**NEW DELHI, FEB 8 /-** Congress president Rahul Gandhi today demanded answers to questions raised by a media report that the PMO conducted parallel negotiations on the Rafale deal, saying it is now crystal clear that the "watchman" is the "thief" as he ramped up his attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

It is an open and shut case, Rahul declared, citing a report in The Hindu newspaper claiming the defence ministry raised strong objections to "parallel discussions" conducted by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) during the negotiations over the Rs 59,000 crore Rafale fighter jet deal between India and France. As the report drew fresh battle-lines with the BJP and its ministers terming Rahul's allegations another "lie from his lie manufacturing factory" and opposition leaders speaking out against the deal, the Congress president brought in his brother-in-law Robert Vadra and senior leader P Chidambaram to make his point. "Whatever inquiry you want to do, you do it. You implement the law. Robert Vadra, P Chidambaram - you implement the law on everyone. No problem. But you also give answers on the Rafale matter," he said at a press conference, using the report to give his offensive on the Rafale deal a fillip. The Congress president was responding to a question on the Enforcement Directorate (ED) interrogating Vadra in a money laundering case and the government's sanction to prosecute Chidambaram in the INX MEDIA case. A day after

the Prime Minister alleged that the Congress did not want the Indian Air Force to be strong, Rahul said he wanted to address every member of the armed forces. "It is absolutely clear that the Prime Minister has stolen Rs 30,000 crore of your money, bypassed a process, and given it to his friend Mr. Anil Ambani," he said. The government, as well as Ambani, have



Rahul Gandhi addressing a press conference at AICC Headquarters, in New Delhi on Friday

strongly denied any wrongdoing in the fighter jet agreement with France. "We have been saying for more than a year that the prime minister is directly involved in the Rafale scam. Now, today, in The Hindu newspaper, it is black and white... that the Prime Minister himself was carrying out a parallel negotiation with the French," Rahul said. "It has been proven now that the watchman (chowkidar) is the thief (chor). What can be more clear than this," he asked, reiterating epithets he has used several times earlier. Holding up the documents quoted in the newspaper, he said the

Defence ministry was clearly objecting to the interference. The Congress president also read out from a 2015 note, purportedly from the defence ministry, published in the newspaper. "Now, it is crystal clear that the ministry itself has said, and I will read it to you, 'It is therefore clear that the parallel discussions by the PMO has weakened the negotiation of the MOD and the Indian negotiating team. We may advise PMO that any officers who are not part of the negotiation team may refrain from having parallel parleys with the officer of the French government'," Rahul said. He also reiterated his demand for a joint parliamentary committee to probe the Rafale deal. In a sharp counter-offensive against Rahul Gandhi over the Rafale issue, the BJP today said the Congress chief's fresh allegation against Prime Minister Narendra Modi is "yet another lie from his lie-manufacturing factory" and accused him of working at the behest of foreign forces for the cancellation of the deal. "Keeping in mind the ethics of journalism, isn't it the responsibility of the newspaper to publish response of Manohar Parrikar (then defence minister). Is it right to selectively raise issues to suit one's story? Picking this selective kind of noting and building an issue falsely on it is completely called out today," the defence minister said. He also took exceptions to Rahul's direct address to armed forces, asking if he wants to agitate them and to rise against the government. (PTI)

### Oppn leaders slam 'parallel negotiations' by PMO; Kejriwal seeks 'independent CBI raid'

**NEW DELHI, FEB 8 /-** Attacking the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) for alleged "parallel negotiations" in the Rafale deal, Opposition leaders today asked the Union government to come clean on objections raised by the defence ministry at that time with AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal going to the extent of demanding an "independent" CBI raid to seize all related files and arrest everyone involved. Latching on to an article in The Hindu newspaper, which claimed that the defence ministry had raised strong objections to "parallel discussions" conducted by the PMO during negotiations for the Rs 59,000-crore fighter jet deal between India and France, the opposition leaders also raised questions on the role of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, however, dismissed the media report as "flogging a dead horse" and accused the opposition of playing into the hands of multinational companies and vested interests. She also said that periodical enquiries by the PMO cannot be construed as interference. Reacting to the report, former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Omar Abdullah tweeted: "I'd like to see how this one is explained by the talking heads aligned to the BJP. @PMOIndia 'weakened the negotiating position of the Ministry of Defence & the Indian Negotiating Team' as per this note in a MOD file that went up the Defence Minister." (PTI)

## Under attack, Twitter clarifies its products and policies are never biased

**NEW DELHI, FEB 8 /-** Facing heat over allegations of political bias in the country, Twitter today said the microblogging platform is committed to remain unbiased and that its product as well as policies are never based on political ideology. Twitter, which counts India among its biggest markets, asserted that the company "does not take any action based upon political views or viewpoints". Neither does it use political ideology to rank content on its service. The statement comes against the backdrop of the Parliamentary panel on Information Technology asking Twitter officials to

appear before it on February 11 over the issue of safeguarding citizens' rights on social media platforms. "There has been a lot of discussion about Twitter and political bias in India in recent weeks and the global real time communication platform today set the record straight... Twitter is a platform where voices from across the spectrum can be seen and heard.

It is committed to the principles of openness, transparency, and impartiality," Twitter said in a statement. The social media giant has been summoned days after the members of Youth for Social Media Democracy, a right-wing group, protested



outside its office alleging that Twitter has acquired an "anti-right-wing attitude" and has been blocking their accounts.

In its statement today, Twitter argued that the content that appears in users' timelines, or the manner in which the company enforces its policies are impartial and said that it is "committed to remain unbiased with public interest in mind". "Twitter's product and policies are never developed nor evolved on the basis of political ideology... Abuse and hateful conduct comes from accounts across the ideological spectrum and Twitter will continue to take action when its rules are broken," it added. The US-based company

said it has a specialised, global team that enforces its rules with impartiality and that its India employees do not make enforcement decisions - which "by design" ensures fairness and objectivity. "Twitter does not review, prioritise, or enforce its policies on the basis of political ideology. Every Tweet and every account is treated impartially. We apply our policies fairly and judiciously for all. If there are 'false positive' decisions, these are not political statements of intent; they are the basic human error rate of running the fastest, most open conversational tool in history," Twitter Global VP (Public Policy) Colin Crowell said. (PTI)