

SIR row: CM Banerjee urges SC to save democracy; alleges WB targeted, its people bulldozed

NEW DELHI, FEB 4: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday vehemently urged the Supreme Court to intervene in the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls to “save democracy”, alleging the state is being targeted and its people are being bulldozed.

The top court took note of Banerjee’s petition and rare arguments ever advanced by a serving chief minister before it, and said “genuine persons must remain on the electoral roll”.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi issued notices and sought replies by February 9 from the Election Commission and the chief electoral officer of West Bengal on her petition.

“West Bengal is being targeted,” Banerjee alleged, asking why the same yardstick was not applied in Assam.

“They are targeting West Bengal to bulldoze its people,” said the chief minister, who was permitted by the bench to supplement submissions of her lawyer and senior advocate Shyam Divan.

“We are not getting justice anywhere. I have written six letters to the Election Commission,” she said, seeking justice from the bench.

At the fag end of the hearing, Banerjee conveyed her regards to the bench for the



opportunity to argue and urged it to “save democracy”. CM Banerjee has challenged the SIR of electoral rolls in the state.

Divan, appearing for Banerjee, referred to the huge number of unmapped voters and said there was hardly any time left for the remedial measures as the process is to conclude on February 14.

He said the poll panel has to upload the reasons for citing names in the “logical discrepancy” list. Divan said that as of now, 1.36 crore persons have been issued notices after they were found to be in violation of logical discrepancies.

Logical discrepancies in progeny linking with the 2002 voter list include instances of a mismatch in the parent’s name and the age difference between a voter and their parent being less than 15 years or more than 50 years.

Divan said in many cases, names of persons issued no-

tices for logical discrepancy were misspelt and it could be rectified easily.

The CJI referred to a Bengali dialect and said at times, names are misspelt because of it.

The bench said electoral roll revision, at times, deals with migration also, but genuine persons must remain in the voter list.

“Every problem has a solution and we must ensure that no innocent person is left out,” the CJI said.

Banerjee alleged that the poll panel is not allowing Aadhaar and seeking other documents from the voters for electoral roll revision.

She claimed that many alive persons have been declared dead by the EC during the ongoing process.

Senior advocate Rakesh Dwivedi, appearing for the poll panel, countered the charges and alleged that the state government has provided the services of only 80 grade-two officers like SDMs for overseeing the SIR

process. He said only low-ranked government employees like Anganwadi workers have been provided by the West Bengal government for the process.

Banerjee countered the EC’s charges and said the state has provided whatever was sought by the poll panel.

On January 19, the top court passed a slew of directions, observing that the SIR process in West Bengal should be transparent and not cause inconvenience.

It directed the EC to display the names of those on the “logical discrepancies” list at gram panchayat bhavans and block offices, where documents and objections will also be submitted.

Banerjee had earlier written to the chief election commissioner (CEC), urging him to halt the “arbitrary and flawed” SIR in the poll-bound state.

Sharpening her attack on the EC, CM Banerjee had warned that continuation of the SIR in the present form could trigger “mass disenfranchisement” and “strike at the foundations of democracy”.

In a strongly worded letter dated January 3 to CEC Gyanesh Kumar, she accused the EC of presiding over an “unplanned, ill-prepared and ad hoc” process marked by “serious irregularities, procedural violations and administrative lapses”. (Agencies)

Entire Oppn Will Take Call On Impeachment Motion Against CEC Gyanesh Kumar: Congress

NEW DELHI, FEB 4: Congress leader K C Venugopal on Wednesday said the entire Opposition will take a collective call on moving an impeachment motion against Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, a day after West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee called for such a move.

Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi, however, refused to comment on the matter.

Talking to mediapersons in the Parliament House complex, Venugopal said they are “positively” looking

at the suggestion.

“The Trinamool Congress has already contacted the Congress... I think the entire Opposition will take a call on the matter, which is one of the most relevant issues raised by the Trinamool. We are positively looking at it,” the Congress general secretary in charge of organisation said.

Asked about Banerjee’s remarks, Gandhi, however, said, “I am not commenting on that.” Banerjee, who is in the national capital as part of her campaign against the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral

rolls in West Bengal, on Tuesday called for the impeachment of the chief election commissioner (CEC) and sought to rally support from other opposition parties on the issue.

The Trinamool supremo’s remarks came a day after she, along with her delegation, walked out of a meeting with CEC Kumar and other election commissioners on the issue of SIR, alleging that the poll panel chief showed arrogance and humiliated them.

Flanked by people from her state allegedly affected by the SIR exercise, Baner-

jee claimed at a presser that the electors whose names were being deleted were Trinamool supporters.

The process for impeaching the CEC is similar to that for a Supreme Court judge. The removal can take place only on the grounds of proven misbehaviour or incapacity.

A motion for removal may be introduced in either House of Parliament and must be passed by a special majority – a majority of the total membership of the House and a two-thirds majority of the members present and voting. (Agencies)



Fletcher said they have set the beginning of Ramadan, on February 17, as a date “to make visible progress on this work”.

Boulos said the US has put forward a “comprehensive proposal” for a humanitarian truce that could be agreed on in the next few weeks.

Sudan has been in the throes of war since 2023, with the Rapid Support Forces paramilitary force and the Sudanese military clashing for power over the country. The UN estimates that over 40,000 people have been killed in the war,

but consider that the true number could be many times higher.

The conflict created the world’s largest humanitarian crisis, with over 14 million people forced to flee their homes and with famine declared in several regions of Sudan.

Fighting has concentrated in the Kordofan regions recently after the RSF took over el-Fasher, one of the army’s last strongholds in the Darfur region.

But the military has since been making gains in Kordofan by breaking a siege in

Kadugli and the neighbouring town of Dilling. On Tuesday, the Sudanese military announced that it had opened a crucial road between Kadugli and Dilling.

Kadugli was under siege by the RSF since the start of the war, and famine was declared there by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification in November.

The RSF launched a drone attack Tuesday that hit a medical centre in Kadugli, killing 15 people including seven children, according to Sudan Doctors Network, which tracks the war. (AP)

Sri Lanka’s ex-president Mahinda Rajapaksa’s wife, son questioned by police in separate cases

COLOMBO, FEB 4: Sri Lanka’s former president Mahinda Rajapaksa’s wife and son were questioned separately by police on Tuesday in connection with two different cases, officials said.

The former first lady, Shiranthi Rajapaksa, was questioned in connection with a case filed in 2015 over alleged financial irregularities involving a foundation headed by her.

Namal Rajapaksa, an opposition legislator, was quizzed over his alleged links with underworld figure Keshelbaddara Padme, who was extradited from Dubai in mid-2025, officials said.

The mother-son duo were and questioned by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) for over four hours, police said.

Supporters of Namal’s Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) party gathered outside the CID office to express solidarity with the Rajapaksa family during the question-



ing.

In a statement issued later, Namal said the questioning of him and his mother by the CID was part of a campaign of political victimisation by the ruling National People’s Power (NPP) government.

Namal is the eldest son of former strongman Mahinda Rajapaksa, who had dominated Sri Lankan politics as president for a decade.

Namal alleged the govern-

ment was targeting political opponents to divert attention from its failures.

“When a government fails to deliver on its promises to govern and fails the people, it tries to cover up those failures by targeting and victimising opponents. Lies, misinformation, corruption, and broken promises cannot be covered by attacking us,” he said.

Namal also thanked his

supporters, saying their “presence, courage, and belief gave us strength when it mattered most”.

The questioning of the two high-profile members of the Rajapaksa family comes a week after the court proceedings against former president Ranil Wickremesinghe, who was arrested in August last year over alleged misuse of public funds and later released on bail.

S Africa deploys frigate to India for multilateral naval exercise



JOHANNESBURG, FEB 4 : The South African Navy’s frigate SAS AMATOLA has commenced a strategically significant deployment to India, where it will represent South Africa at the 2026 International Fleet Review and Exercise MILAN, hosted by the Indian Navy.

“SAS Amatola’s voyage to India is significant on multiple levels,” the South African Navy (SAN) said in a statement after the frigate departed on Sunday.

“This deployment marks an important milestone for South Africa’s maritime posture, reaffirming the SAN’s role as an active contributor to multilateral naval cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region. It also reflects a measured return to long-range deployments, undertaken with careful planning, disciplined prioritisation and professional resolve.”

“The deployment includes participation in the Indian Navy’s International Fleet Review (IFR) and Exercise MILAN, a large multilateral naval exercise emphasising interoperability, maritime security operations, and strategic dialogue among participating nations,” SAN said.

“These events convene naval forces from multiple participating countries, focusing on shared responsibilities for safety, stability, and cooperation across the Indian Ocean Region,” SAN said.

The Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) Con-

clave of Chiefs and an International Maritime Seminar will accompany these activities, offering platforms to address challenges such as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), information sharing, and coordinated responses to non-traditional security threats.

Addressing the ship’s company during the send-off ceremony at Naval Base Durban, Vice Admiral Monde Lobese, Chief of the South African Navy, said the participation by South Africa reinforces longstanding defence relations with India, built over decades through bilateral engagements and trilateral initiatives.

Lobese stated that the deployment honours a diplomatic commitment he made during his official visit to India in 2024.

“This trip is a practical demonstration of the promise I made to the Indian Chief of Naval Staff – that the

South African Navy would send a vessel to participate in their International Fleet Review. Today, SAS Amatola sails as our chosen flagship,” Lobese said as he emphasised that the deployment places SAN sailors in the role of maritime diplomats.

“Through your behaviour, your engagements and your conduct, you must present our country and the Navy not just in a positive light but in the best possible light,” the Navy Chief said as he called on the crew to act with professionalism, discipline and conduct ashore in India, which was as important as their performance at sea.

Lobese candidly reflected on public discourse over recent years about the South African Navy’s operational capacity, funding constraints, and maintenance backlogs that have limited a sustained overseas presence.

Budgetary challenges have contributed to reduced sea

hours and delayed refits across the fleet, a situation that shaped a prolonged period with limited long-range deployments.

“We all know that it has been quite a while since we have had the privilege of sending a ship on such a voyage. This moment is not only important in the history of our Navy but indeed of our country.”

Exercise MILAN has evolved into one of the world’s largest multilateral naval engagements, bringing together dozens of navies to strengthen interoperability, trust-building, and cooperative maritime security.

SAN said South Africa’s participation places it within a community of professional naval forces, addressing shared challenges such as maritime safety, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and the protection of sea lines of communication. (PTI)

US, UN launch humanitarian fund with \$700 million for war-ravaged Sudan

CAIRO, FEB 4: The United States and the United Nations are seeking to rally international support for humanitarian aid to war-ravaged Sudan, kicking off a new Sudan Humanitarian Fund with \$700 million in contributions from the United Arab Emirates and the US.

The Trump administration said Tuesday that it would contribute \$200 million to the initiative from a basket of \$2 billion it set aside late last year to fund humanitarian projects around the world. The UAE said it would contribute \$500 million. Saudi Arabia and several other participants promised they would make pledges but did not specify amounts.

“Today we are signalling that the international community will work together to bring this suffering to an end, and to ensure lifesaving aid reaches communities in such desperate, desperate need,” said UN humanitarian chief Tom Fletcher, who heads the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs or OCHA. Fletcher co-hosted the fundraising event in Washington on Tuesday with US senior adviser for Arab and African affairs Massad Boulos.

European Union citizens want more unified, bold leadership: survey

BRUSSELS, FEB 4: Citizens across the European Union want more unified, stronger and ambitious leadership of the 27-nation bloc as it faces military threats, economic pressures and climate instability, according to an official EU poll.

The Eurobarometer survey was conducted before US President Donald Trump’s ordered a military operation that captured the former Venezuelan leader and rattled European nations by threatening to seize Greenland, a semiautonomous territory of Denmark. It did not specifically ask about Washington, NATO or China.

More than 2,600 EU citizens were asked questions

in mostly face-to-face meetings in November.

They overwhelmingly supported a more muscular EU – 69% say they wanted an expanded security role in global crises, 87% a more diplomatically aggressive Brussels on topics like peace and climate change, and 90% called for a bloc more unified to tackle key issues. The margin of error was 2 percentage points.

The poll found a majority of EU citizens are “highly worried” about conflicts near the bloc, climate change-fueled natural disasters and cyberwarfare.

The results broadly align with the stated goals and ambitions of European Commission President Ur-

sula von der Leyen, who has been hawkish on trade and defense and called for solidifying EU power in Brussels.

She has struck trade deals across the world in the wake of Trump’s tariff threats and China’s curbs on critical mineral exports. The poll results suggested that respondents believe Russian, US and far-right attempts to divide the EU have so far not worked. EU citizens were increasingly focused on defence, which emerged as the top priority in 18 of the 27 EU nations, according to the survey.

Anxieties identified in the poll included Russian hybrid attacks, including drone incursions in Euro-

pean airports, disinformation campaigns, the use of AI, social polarisation, foreign meddling in elections and EU reliance on imports for its defense industry.

Pessimism about the state of world affairs was rife across respondents, who were more optimistic about the EU as a bloc than their own nations, and their personal situation.

“The contrast between personal confidence and broader uncertainty has important implications, shaping citizens’ priorities, attitudes toward governance, and expectations for cooperation at national, European, and global levels,” according to the poll. (AP)