

RS Elections 2026: Election Commission announces schedule for 37 seats

NEW DELHI, FEB 18: The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Wednesday announced the schedule for the biennial elections to the Council of States (Rajya Sabha) to fill 37 seats from 10 states.

Polling will be held on 16th March 2026 from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm, with counting of votes scheduled the same day at 5:00 pm.

The term of office of 37 members of the Council of States elected from 10 States is due to expire in April 2026, and the elections will follow a structured timeline. The election process will commence with the issuance of notifications on 26 February 2026. The last date for filing nomi-



nations is 5th March 2026, followed by scrutiny on 6th March. Candidates can withdraw their nominations by 9th March.

The Commission has directed that only integrated violet sketch pens of pre-fixed specifications, provided by the Returning Officer, shall be used to mark preferences on the ballot papers, and no other pen will be permitted. To ensure free and fair elections, observers will be appointed to closely monitor the process.

Members retiring include

prominent representatives from Maharashtra, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and Telangana.

Some of the notable members are Dr. Bhagwat Kishanrao Karad, Sharadchandra Govindrao Pawar, Mamata Mohanta, N.R. Elango, Saket Gokhale, Rameswar Teli, Amarendra Dhari Singh, Kavi Tejpal Singh Tulsi, Kiran Choudhry, Indu Bala Goswami, and Dr. Abhishek Manu Singhvi. The Commission has emphasized strict adherence to election guidelines and timely completion of all processes to uphold the integrity of the Rajya Sabha elections.

Chinese products showcased at AI summit; irreparable damage caused to image of country: Rahul

NEW DELHI, FEB 18: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday dubbed the AI Summit a “disorganised PR spectacle” and alleged that Chinese products are being showcased there.

“Instead of leveraging India’s talent and data, the AI summit is a disorganised PR spectacle – Indian data up for sale, Chinese products showcased,” Gandhi said in a post on X.

The former Congress president’s remarks came amid a controversy over Galgotias University allegedly showcasing a robotic dog labelled “Orion” at the AI Summit expo that critics said was actually a Chinese-made Uni-



tree Go2 and not an in-house innovation.

According to sources, Galgotias University has been asked to vacate its stall at the AI Summit Expo immediately.

Gandhi also tagged a post of the Congress which alleged, “The Modi govern-

ment has made a laughing stock of India globally, with regard to AI.” In the ongoing AI summit, Chinese robots are being displayed as our own, he charged.

“The Chinese media has mocked us. This is truly embarrassing for India. What is even more shameful is the fact that Modi’s minister Ashwini Vaishnaw is indulging in the same falsehood, promoting China’s robots at the Indian summit,” the Congress said.

“The Modi Government has caused irreparable damage to the image of the country – they have reduced AI to a joke – a field in which we could be world leaders given our data power.

Can’t say when I’ll return to India; legally barred from leaving UK: Mallya to Bombay HC

MUMBAI, FEB 18: Fugitive businessman Vijay Mallya, facing multiple cases of fraud and money laundering, told the Bombay High Court on Wednesday that he cannot say when he will return to India as he is legally barred from leaving the UK.

In a statement submitted through his counsel Amit Desai to the high court, Mallya said he did not have an active passport after it was revoked and hence, he cannot give a definite date of return to India.

The statement was submitted after a bench of Chief Justice Shree Chandrashekhar and Justice Gautam Ankhad made it clear last week that it would not hear Mallya’s plea against the order declaring a fugitive economic offender until he returns to India.

The court had then asked the former liquor to clarify whether or not he intended to return to India.



Mallya, based in the United Kingdom since 2016, has filed two petitions in the HC — one challenging an order declaring him a fugitive economic offender and the other questioning the constitutional validity of the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act.

The 70-year-old liquor baron is accused of defaulting on multiple loan repayments of several thousand crores and facing money laundering charges.

The businessman, in his statement to HC, said he cannot

give a definite date for his return as he does not have his Indian passport, which was revoked by the Government in 2016, and also because there are orders of courts in England and Wales that prohibit him from leaving the country.

“Mallya is not permitted to leave or attempt to leave England and Wales or apply for or be in possession of any international travel document. In any event, the petitioner is unable to precisely state when he will return to India,” Desai read out the statement in the court.

The senior counsel reiterated that Mallya’s presence was not required in the country for the court to hear his pleas against the fugitive tag and the provisions of the Act.

“If he (Mallya) were to appear in India, then all these proceedings would be rendered irrelevant as the statute says that once the offender appears in the concerned court of law, then all these orders would be set aside,” Desai told the court.

The bench directed the Union government to file its reply to Mallya’s statement and posted the matter for further hearing next month.

Mallya was declared a Fugitive Economic Offender in January 2019 by a special court hearing cases under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

The businessman left India in March 2016. (PTI)

Six skiers rescued from avalanche in California, 9 still missing

CALIFORNIA, FEB 18: Six skiers trapped in an avalanche in the mountains of California in the United States have been rescued, while search teams hunt for the remaining nine, the Nevada County Sheriff’s Office has said.

On Tuesday, the police said that 16 skiers were caught in the avalanche. Six survived and were awaiting rescue, 10 were missing. They later corrected the total to 15 people.

“The six initially reported skiers who survived the avalanche have been successfully rescued this evening by search and rescue teams with varying injuries.

Due to extreme weather conditions, it took several hours for rescue personnel



to safely reach the skiers and transport them to safety where they were medically evaluated by Truckee Fire. Two of the six skiers have been transported to a hospital for treatment,” the local police said on social media.

Search efforts continue for the other nine skiers, police said. (UNI)

Bangla PM Tarique Rahman’s cabinet holds first meeting

DHAKA, FEB 18: Bangladesh Prime Minister Tarique Rahman on Wednesday chaired the first meeting of his newly formed cabinet “to set the course for the new administration,” media reports said.

Rahman, chief of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), was sworn in as the prime minister on Tuesday.

“The newly formed cabinet led by Prime Minister Tarique Rahman has begun its inaugural meeting to set the course for the new administration,” BDNews24 news portal said.

Rahman is presiding over the session, which began at 3 pm on Wednesday, his first official day in office, it said.

He is set to hold a separate meeting with secretaries after the cabinet discussion.

Rahman, 60, will deliver his maiden address to the nation at 6:30 pm (local time), the state-run BSS news agency said, quoting a statement by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

The BNP leader, who became the prime minister for the first time, replaced Interim government chief Muhammad Yunus, who had taken charge in August 2024 after the collapse of the Awami League regime.

Rahman, the son of late President Ziaur Rahman and Khaleda Zia, by placing wreaths at their graves at Zia Uddin in the city’s Sher-e-Bangla Nagar area at noon, the BSS said.

Later, flanked by the new cabinet colleagues, he also placed another wreath at the graves and offered prayers.

The BNP bagged 209 out of 297 seats, while right-wing Jamaat-e-Islami secured 68 seats in the 13th Parliamentary elections held on February 12 after a period of tumultuous political vacuum, instability and fragile security situation. The Awami League was barred from contesting polls. The result was a major turnaround for the BNP, long targeted under the 15-year rule of the Awami League government which collapsed following nationwide student-led protests in August 2024. (PTI)



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Mark Zuckerberg set to testify in watershed social media trial

LOS ANGELES, FEB 18: Mark Zuckerberg will testify in an unprecedented social media trial that questions whether Meta’s platforms deliberately addict and harm children.

Meta’s CEO is expected to answer tough questions on Wednesday from attorneys representing a now 20-year-old woman identified by the initials KGM, who claims her early use of social media addicted her to the technology and exacerbated depression and suicidal thoughts.

Meta Platforms and Google’s YouTube are the two remaining defendants in the case, which TikTok and Snap have settled.

Zuckerberg has testified in other trials and answered questions from Congress about youth safety on Meta’s platforms, and he apologised to families at that hearing whose lives had been upended by tragedies they believed were because of social media.

This trial, though, marks



the first time Zuckerberg will answer similar questions in front of a jury and, again, bereaved parents are expected to be in the limited courtroom seats available to the public.

The case, along with two others, has been selected as a bellwether trial, meaning its outcome could impact how thousands of similar lawsuits against social media companies would play out.

A Meta spokesperson said the company strongly disagrees with the allegations in the lawsuit and said they are “confident the evidence will show our longstanding commitment to supporting young people.”

One of Meta’s attorneys, Paul Schmidt, said in his opening statement that the company is not disputing that KGM experienced mental health struggles, but rather that Instagram played a substantial factor in those struggles. He pointed to medical records that showed a turbulent home life, and both he and an attorney representing YouTube argue she turned to their platforms as a coping mechanism or a means of escaping her mental health struggles.

Zuckerberg’s testimony

comes a week after that of Adam Mosseri, the head of Meta’s Instagram, who said in the courtroom that he disagrees with the idea that people can be clinically addicted to social media platforms.

Mosseri maintained that Instagram works hard to protect young people using the service, and said it’s “not good for the company, over the long run, to make decisions that profit for us but are poor for people’s well-being.”

Much of Mosseri’s questioning from the plaintiff’s lawyer, Mark Lanier, centered on cosmetic filters on Instagram that changed people’s appearance — a topic that Lanier is sure to revisit with Zuckerberg.

He is also expected to face questions about Instagram’s algorithm, the infinite nature of Meta’s feeds and other features the plaintiffs argue are designed to get users hooked.

Meta is also facing a separate trial in New Mexico that began last week. (AP)

Nepotism, self-aggrandizement anathema to democratic system: SC

NEW DELHI, FEB 18: Observing that nepotism and self-aggrandizement are anathema to a democratic system, the Supreme Court has cancelled the allotment of two flats by a Haryana Government housing society to a governing body member and his subordinate.

A bench of Justices Sanjay Kumar and K Vinod Chandran set aside an order of the Punjab and Haryana High Court which had refused to intervene in the allotment process.

It said the allotments made to a governing body member and his subordinate were arbitrary, biased, and violated the society’s own eligibility criteria.

“Nepotism and self-aggrandizement are anathema to a democratic system, more so when it happens within a society comprising

members of the government service, enabling housing facilities to its members by transparent allotment,” the bench said.

The top court was hearing a plea filed by one Dinesh Kumar, a member of the HUDA, Urban Estate and Town and Country Planning Employees Welfare Organisation (HEWO) challenging allotment of two high-end super deluxe flats.

Kumar challenged the allotment of the super deluxe flats to two persons alleging them to be ineligible and accusing HEWO of favouritism. The top court said the appellant applied under the advertisement and was eligible on all counts, satisfying both the deputation period and the basic pay requirements.

“There could have been no preferential allotment given to the governing body member



who was not even satisfying the six months deputation period in the service of HUDA. We find absolutely no reason to uphold the allotment made to the third respondent which is a clear act of favouritism and blatant display of self-aggrandizement,” the bench said.

Considering the gross abuse of powers and authority carried out, the apex court set aside the judgment of the high court and imposed costs of Rs 1 lakh on HUDA with further costs of Rs.50,000 on the third respondent (BB Gupta) and costs of Rs 25,000 on the fourth respondent (Puran Chand). “The second respondent (HUDA) shall pay Rs.50,000 to the appellant as litigation expenses and the balance shall be deposited with the Legal Services Committee of the Supreme Court, with

whom the third and fourth respondents also shall deposit the costs imposed on them, within a period of two months.

“We make it clear that the costs imposed on the second respondent would be capable of recovery from the governing body members, except the 3rd respondent on whom we have separately imposed costs, which the second respondent would be entitled to proceed with after issuing notice to the members of the Governing Body, who took the decision for allotment,” the bench said.

The top court made it clear that the entire amounts deposited by the third and fourth respondents shall be refunded to them within a period of one month without any interest and they shall vacate the premises within one month of the refund. (PTI)