Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman interacts with representatives of trade and industry in Mangaluru on Saturday | EXPRESS

Counter fake news on Centre, PM effectively: Sitharaman

Says to spread such news, a few selected groups provide financial support

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Udupi/Mangaluru

UNION Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday called upon BJP workers to effectively counter false narratives made on social media against Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Central government, and the party.

Inaugurating a two-day party programme held in Ucchila in Udupi district, Sitharaman said that the majority of the information spread on social media about the Central government and the party is fake. "To spread such fake news, few selected groups, some of the neighbouring countries, and foreign organisations provide financial support. Paid soldiers and vested interests spread such false narratives. Hence, BJP workers need to be vigilant against such propaganda," she added.

Meanwhile, lashing out at Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi and the Congress party, Sitharaman said, "As Congress is in power, it is attempting to target the BJP workers of the state. BJP workers in Karnataka, Kerala, and Maharashtra must effectively counter such attacks."

She further said that under the Modi government, India's economy is one of the strongest despite global tension.

Later, Sitharaman interacted with the representatives of trade and industry in Mangaluru. It was a closed-door meeting organised by the central board of indirect taxes and customs.

Dakshina Kannada MP Capt Brijesh Chowta, CBIC president Vivek Chaturvedi, and several industry leaders from the coast were present.

She also visited the new Mangalore Port and inspected the operations and facilities available there.

Madhwaraj dismisses rumours of joining Cong

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Udupi

FORMER Minister and BJP leader Pramod Madhwaraj, in a press release on Saturday, dismissed reports suggesting that he is planning to rejoin the Congress, calling the speculation baseless.

He also clarified that his commitment remains with the BJP and that he joined the party with the intention of serving people rather than seeking positions or power.

He said that he was not expecting any positions and emphasised that public trust and service are more valuable to him than political power. He added that if the party entrusts him with any responsibilities, he would discharge them with sincerity, and even without a position, he would continue working among people as a party worker.

Expressing confidence in the BJP leadership, he said that the party leaders would recognise his work, loyalty, and commitment to public service and take appropriate decisions in the future. He also appealed to the public not to believe in false rumours regarding his alleged move to Congress.

> **The party leaders will recognise my work, loyalty, and commitment to public service and take appropriate decisions in the future**
>
> Pramod Madhwaraj, BJP leader

54-year-old woman duped of ₹28 lakh in online fraud

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Mangaluru

A 54-year-old woman was allegedly cheated out of ₹28.95 lakh in a fraud involving impersonation and false promises of delivering a foreign parcel.

According to the complaint, the victim got in contact with a person who identified himself as Dr Clinton Smith, a cardiologist from the Netherlands, through Facebook in May 2025. The accused later obtained her WhatsApp number and reportedly gained the victim's trust and promised to send her gold and foreign currency. He also collected her residential address in Mumbai and later claimed that a parcel containing the items had been sent and reached the Delhi Airport.

Subsequently, the victim received calls from individuals posing as customs officials from the airport, who informed her that the parcel had been seized and demanded payment of customs duty for its release. Another person, identified as Tushar, allegedly contacted her and demanded storage charges of ₹5,000 per day, along with additional customs fees to release the parcel. Believing their claims, the victim transferred a total of ₹28,95,000 in multiple transactions to various bank accounts provided by the fraudsters. Later, she was told that the parcel would be redirected to Mangaluru International Airport. However, despite waiting at the airport, no parcel arrived. Repeated calls and messages went unanswered. The next day, Smith allegedly informed her that the parcel had been sent back from Mumbai to Delhi.

The fraud is said to have taken place between June 2025 and May 2026. Officials from the cybercrime police station have registered a case, and further investigation is on.