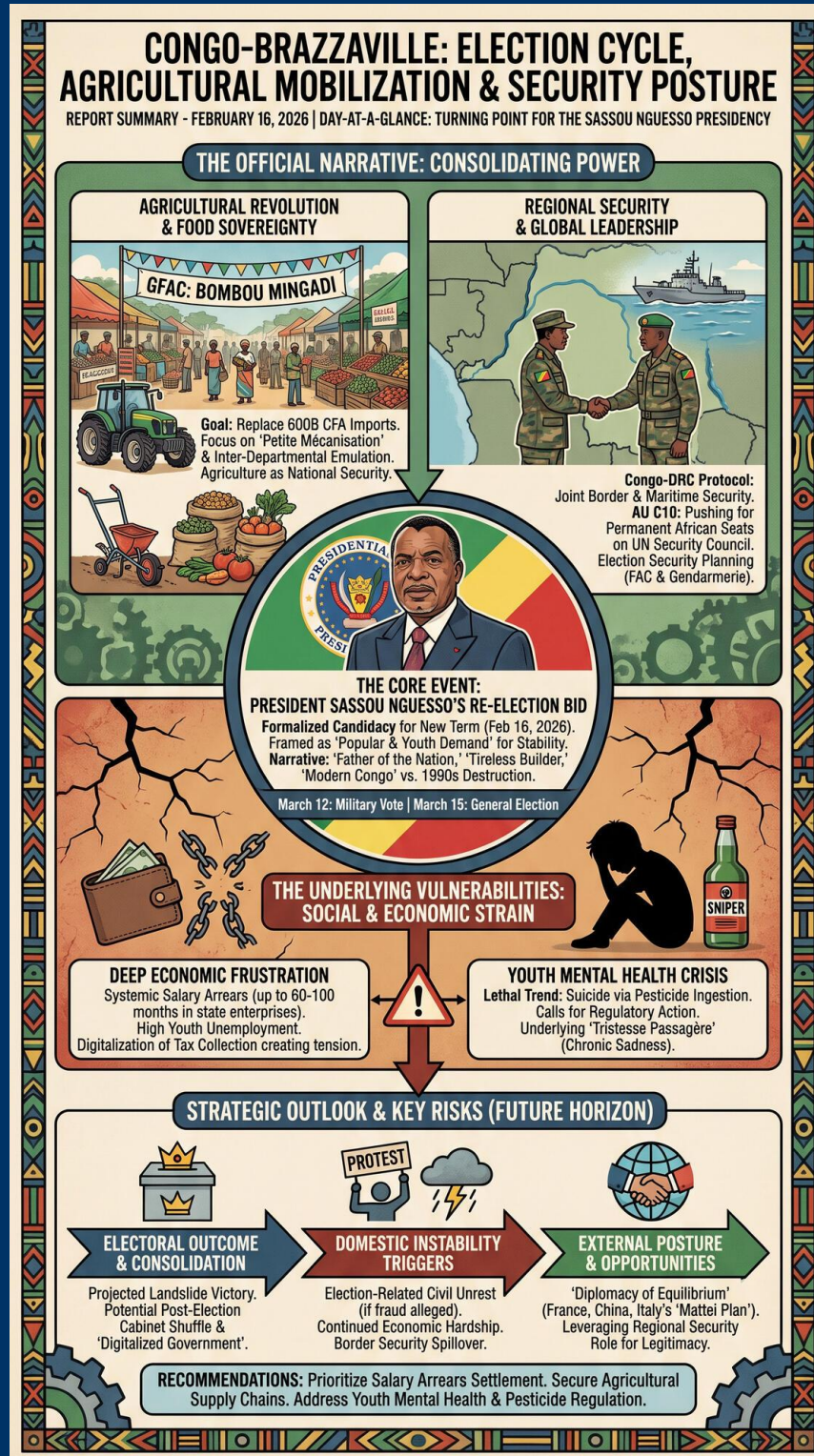


TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

TELECONGO

FEBRUARY 16, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT



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CONGO-BRAZZAVILLE ENTERS
HIGH-STAKES ELECTION CYCLE AS
PRESIDENT SASSOU NGUESSO
FORMALIZES RE-ELECTION BID
AMID MASSIVE AGRICULTURAL AND
SECURITY MOBILIZATIONS

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

February 16, 2026, marks a decisive turning point in Congolese politics as President Denis Sassou Nguesso officially [declared his candidacy](#) for a new term, responding to what the state media characterizes as overwhelming popular and youth demand. This announcement occurred at the inaugural Grand Agricultural Fair of Congo (GFAC), framing the President's platform around food sovereignty and the "physical unity" of the country through infrastructure. The administration is aggressively pushing a narrative of stability and continuity, contrasting the current "modern Congo" with the destruction of the 1990s, while dismissing concerns over the President's 40-year tenure as a [constitutional right](#) validated by the people.

Simultaneously, the Congolese state is projecting regional leadership through intense

diplomatic and military activity. High-level engagements with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) focused on maritime security and border stability, while representation at the Italy-Africa summit and the African Union (AU) C10 meeting emphasized a push for [permanent African seats](#) on the UN Security Council. Domestically, the security apparatus has entered a final planning phase for the March 2026 elections, with the military scheduled to [vote by anticipation](#) on March 12, followed by the general election on March 15. This dual-track strategy of domestic economic "revolution" via agriculture and robust regional security positioning suggests an administration seeking to consolidate power ahead of the vote.

Behind the state-sanctioned optimism, significant social and institutional vulnerabilities persist. Brief mentions of [long-term salary arrears](#) in state enterprises (reaching up to 60 months) and high youth unemployment underscore deep economic frustrations. A disturbing public health crisis involving youth suicides via "Sniper" pesticide ingestion has forced a rare state media "chronicle of the neighborhoods" to [demand regulatory action](#). While the government leverages cultural festivals and agricultural triumphs to maintain social order, the undercurrents of economic hardship and mental health crises among the youth present significant latent risks to the regime's stability during the upcoming electoral period.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

- **Presidential Re-election Mobilization:** President Denis Sassou Nguesso formalizes his bid for a new term, with state advisors framing the decision as a [necessary response](#) to youth pressure and global uncertainty. The ruling party (PCT) and the presidential majority (APC) have moved into "battle order" to ensure a [first-round victory](#) exceeding the 88% achieved in 2021.
- **Strategic Agricultural Pivot:** The successful conclusion of the first GFAC at Bombou Mingadi serves as a flagship for the "National Development Plan." The state is emphasizing [inter-departmental emulation](#) to replace 600 billion CFA in food imports with local production, including new initiatives in seaweed processing and [small-scale mechanization](#).
- **Regional Security Consolidation:** High-level military and diplomatic meetings between Congo-Brazzaville and the DRC resulted in a [bilateral protocol](#) on border and maritime security. This cooperation aims to address piracy in the Gulf of Guinea and joint management of the Congo River as a "shared good."
- **Election Security Planning:** The Congolese Armed Forces (FAC) and gendarmerie have finalized a [three-day planning conference](#) to secure the March 2026 election process. The General Staff has ordered the "concrete translation" of security conclusions to ensure a peaceful and transparent vote.

- **Crisis in Youth Mental Health:** State media identifies a lethal trend of [suicide by pesticide ingestion](#) among youth suffering from depression and relationship issues. This has triggered calls for the Ministry of Health and trade regulators to restrict the sale of "Sniper" (dichlorvos) to minors.

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

Armed Conflict & Militarization

- The state has initiated specialized training for "Genie Travaux" (Engineering Works) units, emphasizing a [military-civilian development model](#) based on French partnerships and regional excellence centers.
- Military leadership has been refreshed at the Gomboma NCO school, signaling a focus on [discipline and professionalism](#) ahead of the electoral cycle.

Diplomacy & Statecraft

- Congo is actively participating in the "Mattei Plan" for Africa, positioning itself as a [pilot country](#) for Italian-led energy and infrastructure investments.
- The Foreign Ministry is aggressively lobbying for AU-led [UN Security Council reforms](#), specifically demanding two permanent seats and five non-permanent seats for the African continent.

Energy & Critical Minerals

- The administration claims to have [increased energy production](#) a thousand-fold since 2002, citing the Mukukulu, Imbulu, and gas power plants as foundations for industrial growth.

- Mining activity in Rubaya (North Kivu, DRC) is highlighted as a strategic but [unregulated flashpoint](#) where 15% of global coltan is extracted under precarious conditions involving child labor.

Information Warfare & Disinformation

- The government, via UNESCO, is conducting workshops for journalists to [combat disinformation](#) and "fake news" disseminated by social media influencers during the election period.
- State narrative focuses on portraying the re-election bid as a ["surprise" emotional moment](#) triggered by a young woman's question, masking the deep-seated institutional planning behind the announcement.

Legal Warfare & Regulatory Risk

- The state is [digitalizing tax collection](#) for local collectivities to combat "resource erosion" and ensure "surgical precision" in revenue management.
- Traders in Brazzaville are being [pressured to comply](#) with the 2026 Finance Law, with warnings against "corrupt tax agents" who divert funds from state coffers.

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

The Consolidation of the "Grand Architect" Narrative

- A clear effort is underway to elevate President Sassou Nguesso to a historic status beyond mere politics. State media and presidential advisors consistently refer to him as the ["Father of the Nation"](#) and a "tireless builder" of modern Congo. This narrative focuses on "physical unity"—the ability to travel between any two points in the country—as his primary legacy, effectively framing opposition as a threat to this hard-won integration.
- The use of literature (e.g., "Les couloirs du destin") to [intellectualize the presidency](#) as a journey from "humble beginnings to the peak of the political chain" suggests a shift toward a personality cult designed to resonate with the rural population and disillusioned youth.

Agriculture as National Security

- The focus on the GFAC and "Étoile des Champs" (Star of the Fields) indicates that agriculture has been reclassified from an economic sector to a [sovereignty issue](#). The state is promoting a transition from manual to "small-scale mechanization" to engage the youth and reduce foreign exchange outflows for food imports.
- The narrative explicitly links [inter-departmental agricultural competition](#) with national peace, suggesting that a well-fed population is less likely to engage in civil unrest.

The Shadow of Social Decay

- Despite the veneer of progress, the transcripts reveal a ["tristesse passagère"](#) (transient sadness) that has become chronic among the youth. The reports on "Sniper" pesticide suicides and the need for mental health "de-stigmatization" suggest a society struggling with the psychological toll of long-term economic stagnation and rigid political hierarchies.
- The [stark admission](#) of 60-month salary delays in state companies indicates a massive disconnect between the state's macro-achievements in energy/roads and the micro-level survival of its employees.

INTERNAL DYNAMICS & DOMESTIC INSTABILITY

Congo-Brazzaville displays a high degree of state capture by the ruling PCT party, which is currently focused on an [engineered re-election scenario](#). The administration's capacity is being heavily channeled into visible symbolic events (fairs, infrastructure openings) and security planning to preempt electoral unrest. However, internal vulnerabilities are evident in the [institutional decay](#) of state-run enterprises, where salary arrears have created a class of "working poor" within the government apparatus. The official response to these crises is dismissive, categorizing them as "isolated cases" rather than systemic failures. Shifting public sentiment is being managed through a mix of [fiscal pressure on traders](#) and highly publicized humanitarian gestures from presidential foundations (e.g., Foundation Mueti). The high youth unemployment rate remains the primary driver of social fragility, which the state is attempting to redirect toward agricultural labor.

EXTERNAL DYNAMICS & GLOBAL POSTURE

The administration frames the "outside world" as a source of both threat (terrorist networks, global economic shocks) and opportunity (Italian energy deals, Chinese infrastructure). Congo is pursuing a ["diplomacy of equilibrium,"](#) maintaining deep ties with traditional partners like France (military training) and China (infrastructure financing) while aggressively engaging with Italy's new African strategy. The relationship with the DRC is portrayed as [interdependent and "indissoluble,"](#) with a focus on stabilizing the shared river border to facilitate trade and security. By positioning itself as a "pilot country" for European plans and a leader in AU security reform, Congo seeks to secure external legitimacy for its internal political transition. The state projects itself as a stable anchor in a "moving world" characterized by uncertainty.

THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

The Congolese economy is currently characterized by a state-led push for diversification away from oil, centering on agriculture and energy. While macro-indicators like energy production are touted as successful, micro-economic realities for the urban populace remain strained by inflation and irregular wage payments. Market sentiment is being heavily influenced by the [digitalization of revenue collection](#), which aims to formalize the informal trade sector.

- **Food Import Dependency:** Congo spends [600 billion CFA](#) annually on food imports; the state aims for "total autonomy" to retain capital for local investment.

- **Labor Arrears:** Reports confirm salary halts of [50 to 100 months](#) in certain state-affiliated entities, indicating severe liquidity crises in the para-statal sector.
- **Commodity Prices:** Fouta prices at the agricultural fair were set at [15,000 CFA per bag](#), with the state subsidizing transport to maintain "village prices" in urban centers.
- **Foreign Investment:** ENI and BF International are providing [250 to 350 machines](#) for agricultural mechanization as part of energy-related offsets.
- **Supply Chain Logistics:** The Ministry of Agriculture is establishing a fleet of [50 transport vehicles](#) (Relais Agricole du Congo) to connect remote production zones to urban markets.

LEADERSHIP CHANGES

The reporting focuses on the formalization of existing leadership structures and the consolidation of the President's inner circle as the election approaches. Military rotations are also being used to ensure institutional loyalty.

- **President Denis Sassou Nguesso:** Officially transitions from incumbent to [presidential candidate](#), solidifying his control over the ruling apparatus.
- **Colonel Séverin Gustave Vittoir:** Appointed as the new [Commandant of the National School of NCOs](#) (Sous-UFC), a key position for maintaining junior officer loyalty.
- **Rodrigue Malandasomba:** Emerges as a key [strategic communicator](#) and advisor to the President, tasked with articulating the "logic of re-election."

- **Jean-Claude Gakosso:** Acting as the President's [primary regional envoy](#), representing Congo at AU summits and high-level DRC meetings.

EDITORIAL POSTURE & STORY HIERARCHY

Telecongo's editorial strategy for February 16 is explicitly designed to build momentum for the President's re-election while portraying the state as a humanitarian and economic success story. The **Lead Stories** are the GFAC agricultural triumphs and the President's "surprise" candidacy, which together received over 50% of total airtime. The tone is nationalistic, celebratory, and reassuring, using terms like "joy total" and "modernity" to describe state activities. **Buried Stories** include the 100-month salary arrears and the systemic nature of child labor in regional mines, which are presented as "external" or "specific" problems rather than state failures. **Conspicuous Omissions** include any mention of opposition party candidates, critiques of the 2026 budget, or details on the actual health of the state's cash reserves despite the push for revenue digitalization.

GEOPOLITICAL FRAMING

The transcripts portray a world where Congo-Brazzaville is a "phare" (lighthouse) of stability in a region otherwise marked by chaotic neighbors and predatory global interests. The narrative emphasizes "African solutions for African problems," particularly regarding border security and UN reform.

- **Congo-Brazzaville:** Portrayed as a stable, ["tireless builder"](#) of modern infrastructure. "The Congo of today is better than the old Congo."

- **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC):** Portrayed as a "destiny-linked" brother nation, [inextricably tied](#) to Brazzaville's security. "Being in Brazzaville is being in Kinshasa."
- **France:** Framed as a ["privileged partner"](#) in military engineering and vocational training, despite the broader shift toward multipolarity.
- **China:** Implicitly portrayed as a [reliable financing partner](#) for critical rail and road infrastructure "since the 1960s."
- **African Union (AU):** Portrayed as a necessary but [historically sidelined](#) arena where Congo must lead the fight for global "justice."

INFORMATION WARFARE ENVIRONMENT

- **Narrative Seeding:** The claim that the re-election bid was a ["surprise agréable"](#) (pleasant surprise) is a classic example of narrative seeding to create an illusion of spontaneity and popular pressure, rather than institutional inertia.
- **Defensive Information Management:** The heavy emphasis on training journalists to [identify "fake news"](#) serves as a pre-emptive measure to delegitimize social media-led protests or opposition messaging during the March campaign.
- **Symbolic Operations:** The "illumination in red" of the Brazzaville Twin Towers for the Chinese New Year is a high-visibility [psychological operation](#) signaling to the population (and international observers) the depth and solidity of the Sino-Congolese alliance.

HYPOTHESES AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

- **Electoral Outcome:** The state's open targeting of a [90%+ first-round victory](#) suggests that the ruling party is prepared to use all institutional and security levers to ensure a landslide, likely suppressing any significant opposition narrative before it gains traction.
- **Agrarian Reform Success:** The focus on ["petite mécanisation"](#) (small mechanization) will likely see a surge in government-subsidized equipment distribution in rural areas to secure the rural vote, even if long-term logistical hurdles remain unaddressed.
- **Security Escalation:** As March 15 approaches, the [FAC and gendarmerie](#) will likely increase their "visibility" in urban centers, framed as "protecting the process" but functioning as a deterrent to civil unrest.

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

- **Short Term (1-4 Weeks):** Expect a wave of "motions of support" from provincial mayors and traditional chiefs following the re-election declaration. The Ministry of Health will likely issue [emergency directives](#) on pesticide sales to respond to the "Sniper" crisis.
- **Medium Term (1-6 Months):** The official campaign starting February 28 will center on Pointe-Noire and the southern departments. Post-election, expect a cabinet shuffle aimed at the ["digitalized government"](#) to appease international donors and young voters.

- **Long Term (1-5 Years):** If re-elected, Sassou Nguesso will likely prioritize the [Congo-DRC bridge-road project](#) and Italian energy investments to cement his legacy as the "unifier of the continent's heart."

RISK ASSESSMENT

The primary risks center on the convergence of economic frustration with electoral tension. While the state appears in control, the youth demographic represents a volatile variable.

- **Election-Related Civil Unrest:** Triggers: Allegations of massive fraud or exclusion of a popular opposition figure. Likelihood: Moderate (history of contested results). Impact: High (urban disruption, regional instability). Mitigations: Pre-emptive security planning, journalist training on "disinformation," and agricultural/cultural "distractions."
- **Systemic Wage Arrears Collapse:** Triggers: Continued failure to pay state employees for multiple years leads to a general strike. Likelihood: Low (currently fragmented). Impact: Moderate (institutional paralysis). Mitigations: Digital tax collection to increase [liquidity for immediate payouts](#).
- **Border Security Spillover:** Triggers: Escalation of the M23 conflict in eastern DRC forcing more refugees or cross-border incursions. Likelihood: Moderate. Impact: High (humanitarian crisis). Mitigations: The [bilateral security protocols](#) signed this week.

- **Lethal Social Trends:** Triggers: Continued increase in youth suicide rates via pesticide ingestion. Likelihood: High (if economic despair persists). Impact: Moderate (social stigma, loss of youth human capital). Mitigations: Regulatory ban on [dichlorvos sales to minors](#).
- **Climate-Induced Food Insecurity:** Triggers: Flash flooding (similar to current Spanish/Portuguese reports) hitting the Nile/Congo basins. Likelihood: Moderate. Impact: Very High (threatens the "food sovereignty" narrative). Mitigations: Investment in [seaweed/resilient crops](#).

GAPS & BLIND SPOTS

- The transcripts mention 60-month salary delays but fail to provide the **total debt burden** or the specific state entities involved, making a full fiscal health assessment impossible.
- There is a total **absence of opposition voices** regarding the re-election bid; the "unanimous" support narrative masks any potential internal PCT or external resistance.
- While the "Mattei Plan" is touted, the **actual financing terms** and sovereignty costs of Italian and Chinese loans for these "grand works" are not disclosed.
- The reports on the "Sniper" pesticide deaths fail to address the **underlying economic drivers** that make toxic substances more accessible than mental health support.

CONTRARIAN NARRATIVE SCENARIOS

- **The Desperate Sovereignty Play:** The massive focus on agriculture and "food sovereignty" may not be a sign of strength, but a **pre-emptive bunkerization** against looming international sanctions or oil price collapses that the state expects post-election.
- **The Security Council Diversion:** The aggressive push for AU/UN reform may be a **distraction tactic** to focus nationalistic energy outward, away from the deep-seated domestic "tristesse" and economic arrears mentioned in social reports.
- **Potential Black Swan:** A **sudden health crisis** involving the aging President before the March 15 vote. Given the heavy centralization of power and the "indispensable" narrative, this would trigger an immediate and likely chaotic succession battle within the military and elite ranks.

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For Statecraft/Public Sector:

- **Security:** Maintain the current [bilateral maritime protocols](#) with DRC to prevent piracy from disrupting the "Relais Agricole" supply lines.
- **Economic:** Prioritize the settlement of at least 12 months of salary arrears before the March general vote to reduce the risk of election-day labor mobilization.
- **Diplomatic:** Leverage the "Mattei Plan" to secure specific [technological transfer](#) for the agriculture sector, moving beyond simple machine acquisition.

For Private Sector/Investors:

- **Supply Chain:** Agricultural logistics (the RAC project) presents a **high-growth opportunity** for cold-chain storage and transport providers as the state pushes for local consumption.
- **Regulatory Compliance:** Importers and retailers of chemicals and pesticides face **imminent regulatory tightening** following the "Sniper" crisis; pre-emptive safety labeling is advised.
- **Capital Allocation:** Focus on [women-led tech startups](#) (Rising Tide Africa), which are being signaled by the state as the "new frontier" for social stability and economic growth.

LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

The current legislative period is dominated by the **2026 Finance Law** and a suite of security-related protocols aimed at the upcoming election. The state is also [lobbying for new laws](#) on nuclear medicine and cancer screening standards.

• BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:

- **2026 Finance Law:** Implements digital revenue collection and stricter tax compliance for urban traders.
- **Law on Radioactive Substances:** Proposed to allow the import of [isotopes for radiotherapy](#) while ensuring civil protection.
- **Loi Mbara:** Continues to be promoted as a landmark for [protecting women's rights](#) in the agricultural and social sectors.

- **HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:**

- **Military Security Conference:** A three-day session at command post #9 to [ratify the electoral security plan](#).
- **Media De-pollution Workshop:** A UNESCO-partnered event [targeting "influencer-led" fake news](#) during the campaign.

KEY STORIES

- **President Sassou Nguesso Re-election Bid:** Formal announcement on February 11 at the GFAC, following reported youth and PCT party pressure. Focus on "modernity" and "peace" as primary campaign pillars ([Broadcast: 20260216-1](#)).
- **Grand Agricultural Fair (GFAC) Closure:** Ended on February 15 in Bombou Mingadi. Generated 4 billion CFA for 8,801 beneficiaries and showcased [products from all 15 departments](#) ([Broadcast: 20260216-2](#)).
- **Congo-DRC Security Protocol:** Vice-PM Gik Kabongo (DRC) met with Minister Charles Mondjo (Brazzaville) to [formalize joint river and border patrols](#) ([Broadcast: 20260216-11](#)).
- **UN Security Council Reform Push:** Minister Gakosso represented the AU C10 in Addis Ababa, [demanding two permanent seats](#) for Africa ([Broadcast: 20260216-14](#)).
- **The "Sniper" Pesticide Crisis:** Investigation into youth suicides in Brazzaville (Combo neighborhood) involving the [ingestion of dichlorvos pesticide](#) ([Broadcast: 20260216-26](#)).
- **Election Schedule Clarification:** Official confirmation that the military will [vote on March 12](#), with the general population voting on March 15, 2026 ([Broadcast: 20260216-3](#)).
- **Radiotherapy and IAEA Cooperation:** Report on Congo settling its dues to the IAEA to facilitate the [return of modern cancer treatment units](#) to Brazzaville ([Broadcast: 20260216-8](#)).
- **Sino-Congolese Cultural Diplomacy:** Celebration of the "Chinese New Year" and the [50th anniversary of diplomatic relations at the Pila Twin Towers](#) ([Broadcast: 20260216-15](#)).
- **Rising Tide Africa Women's Fund:** Announcement of [2 million USD in venture capital](#) specifically for women-led tech startups in the region ([Broadcast: 20260216-23](#)).
- **Small-Scale Mechanization Push:** Distribution of manual seeders (1-2 hectare capacity) to youth at the GFAC to [modernize rural farming](#) ([Broadcast: 20260216-15](#)).

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Today's Media Trends is a public interest experiment in applying deep thematic trend analysis to television news coverage from around the world to explore how responsibly applied advanced AI can help journalists and scholars better understand the overarching trends, themes and patterns of our global world.

No data is used to train or tune any AI model.

Each morning, in collaboration with the Internet Archive's TV News Archive, we apply Google's Gemini 3 to deeply examine yesterday's coverage from each television news channel to tease out the overarching themes and trends of its news coverage into a richly annotated thematic analysis. Each high-level insight is connected back to the original

broadcast, allowing journalists and scholars to understand the dominate themes and trends and instantly click out to the underlying sources for details.

By helping journalists and scholars see the broader trends and patterns of global news coverage, this analysis helps them identify relevant stories and coverage they might not otherwise have encountered and uncover connections, emphases and narrative shifts that enable more comprehensive reporting and deeper, evidence-based research.

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omissions. Please verify all findings. No data is used to train or tune any AI model.

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