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# Sea of people throng roads to catch last glimpse of Zubeen

**GUWAHATI, Sept 21:** Thousands of people thronged the roads of Guwahati to pay their tributes to singer Zubeen Garg, whose body was taken in a 25-km-long procession from the airport to his Kahilipara residence on Sunday.

The convoy took nearly five-and-a-half hours to cover the distance as it crawled through a sea of humanity in an emotionally charged atmosphere with people from all walks of life and ages lining the streets and showering flowers on the ambulance carrying the mortal remains of the iconic singer.

Elderly people, women, children, youngsters and even differently abled persons braved the scorching heat and waited for hours to catch a glimpse of the singer's coffin as the convoy made its way from Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport to Gauhati University campus in Jalukbari and then on to National Highway 27, also called the Guwahati Bypass, to reach his home.

The road dividers along the highway were chock-a-bloc with people, while many stood atop vehicles parked at a distance from the main road and every balcony and terrace of the buildings along the way were filled with shocked fans, who are yet to come to terms with his death.

People showered flower petals and offered prayers with folded hands, while many wailed and chanted his name.

As the convoy entered the street of his home, where only his family and close friends had gathered, the security personnel prevented outsiders from going inside.

People, including reporters, have been barred from entering the street as family (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



## Himanta inspects proposed site for Zubeen's cremation

**GUWAHATI, Sept 21:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday inspected a proposed cremation site in Sonapur, on the outskirts of Guwahati, for conducting the last rites of popular singer Zubeen Garg.

He said the location of the site will be finalised in consultation with Garg's family by the evening.

Garg (52), who was in Singapore to attend a festival, died while swimming in the sea without wearing life jacket on Friday.

His mortal remains were flown in to New Delhi around midnight on Saturday, and reached Guwahati early on Sunday morning on another flight.

Sarma, who returned to Guwahati after receiving the music icon's body at the national capital, said preparations are on for a befitting farewell to Garg.

"Our #BelovedZubeen will be accorded a befitting farewell, one that justifies his legacy as one of Assam's biggest cultural icons. I inspected the proposed cremation site in Sonapur a while back to oversee the preparations where Zubeen will be laid to the final rest," Sarma said in a post on X.

The CM said that three of his cabinet col-

leagues, Ranaj Pegu, Keshab Mahanta and Bimal Bora, will soon meet Garg's wife, Garima, and his immediate family to take a final call.

"In consultation with Garima and nearest family members, we will finalise the location of the cremation venue by today evening," Sarma added. The mortal remains will be kept at Arjun Bhogeswar Baruah sports complex in Sarusajai area of the city for public homage.

Pegu, talking to reporters after inspecting a site in Sonapur earlier in the day, said that the state government is scouting for a suitable venue in and around Guwahati, and options will be placed before his family to take the final call.

"We had held deliberations yesterday about Sonapur being a possible spot... we have other options as well," Pegu said.

"We will place the options before them and they will take the final call. Once the family decides, the final spot will be announced after the cabinet meeting this evening," he added.

A demand was also made for Garg's final resting place to be in Jorhat, where he had spent his formative years, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## CM Khandu pays homage to Zubeen Garg, says his music inspired millions

**ITANAGAR, Sept 21:** Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Sunday paid homage to singer Zubeen Garg, and said his music inspired millions and became a source of pride for the country.

Zubeen died in Singapore on Friday while swimming in the sea without a life jacket.

"United in tribute, a two-minute silence was observed with the NDA legislators, remembering Shri Zubeen Garg. From Assam to the farthest corners of the Northeast, his music inspired millions and became a source of pride for the country," Khandu said in a post on X.

"Our prayers for his soul's peace accompanied this silence, honouring the joy and unity his music brought to countless lives," he said.

Draped in a traditional Assamese 'gamosa', Zubeen's mortal remains arrived in a glass casket at the Sarusajai stadium in Guwahati on Sunday afternoon.

The mortal remains of Garg have been placed at a pandal inside the sports complex, with an alternate site prepared within the stadium premises in case of heavy rain. (PTI)

## Asam Sahitya Sabha urges Bharat Ratna for Zubeen Garg

**HT Correspondent**

**TEZPUR, Sept 21:** The Asam Sahitya Sabha, the apex literary and cultural body of Assam, has urged the Government of India to confer the Bharat Ratna posthumously on late Zubeen Garg, one of the state's most iconic and versatile cultural figures.

In a press note issued on Sunday, Sabha president Dr Basanta Kumar Goswami, vice-president Padum Rajkhowa and principal secretary Debojit Bora said, "On the basis of the demands of the people of Assam, Zubeen Garg should be awarded the Bharat Ratna. Despite his unparalleled contributions and vast talent, he was never formally accorded any major national honour during his lifetime. The unprecedented participation of admirers during his final journey is proof of his immense significance in social life. Therefore, the Asam Sahitya Sabha sincerely hopes that the Government of India will honour the world-renowned artist with the Bharat Ratna."

The Sabha informed that it will submit a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India in this regard. A separate letter will also be sent to chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, urging the state government to take necessary steps.

A resolution to this effect was adopted in the steering committee meeting of the Sabha held on Sunday. Zubeen Garg, celebrated as the heartbeat of the Assamese people, was a renowned playback singer, music director, lyricist, composer, actor, poet and sportsman.

With a career spanning several decades, he performed over 32,000 songs in 40 languages, carving an immortal place in the musical and cultural history of the country, the press note added.

## KAAC to shut offices, institutions today in tribute to Zubeen Garg

**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, Sept 21:** The Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) has expressed profound grief at the demise of eminent singer, filmmaker and cultural icon Zubeen Garg and announced closure of all office establishments and educational institutions under its administrative control on September 22 as a mark of respect.

The Council said the decision was taken in solidarity with the people of Assam and in line with the State Mourning declared by the Government of Assam to honour Garg's immense contributions and enduring legacy.

An order signed by the KAAC Principal Secretary stated that all official ceremonial and celebratory events will remain suspended during the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Zubeen's family prefers Guwahati as cremation place: Minister



**GUWAHATI, Sept 21:** Zubeen Garg's family prefers that the singer be cremated near Guwahati so that his octogenarian father can attend the funeral, Assam minister Ranaj Pegu said on Sunday.

He said the preference of Garg's family will be placed before the cabinet when it meets this evening, he said.

A section of residents of Jorhat, where Zubeen's father had settled

down and the singer spent his formative years, had demanded that the last rites be performed in the upper Assam town.

Addressing a press conference here, the cabinet minister said government officials had detailed discussions over the cremation site with Zubeen's wife Garima and other family members.

"Garima Garg told us that Zubeen's father is 85 years of age and he cannot travel to Jorhat in his current condition. They want the last rites near Guwahati. Also, it will enable them to visit the site frequently later," Pegu said.

Pegu added that a few sites near Guwahati have been under consideration, and these will be discussed at the cabinet meeting, with a final decision to be taken bearing in mind the family's preference. (PTI)

## Lakhs of fans bid adieu to Assam icon Zubeen's creations will continue to remain with us: Garima

**GUWAHATI, Sept 21:** More than one lakh people converged at the Sarusajai stadium in Guwahati on Sunday, queuing up to catch a glimpse of their heart-throb Zubeen Garg for one last time, as the singer's mortal remains lay inside a glass casket, draped in a traditional Assamese 'gamosa'.

From scorching heat to heavy rain, the fans braved the vagaries of weather without flinching, as they jammed the Arjun Bhogeswar Baruah Sports Complex in Sarusajai.

Zubeen's wife Garima, during an address, thanked his fans for their overwhelming love and blessings.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the mortal remains would be kept at the stadium throughout the night and also on



Monday, to enable people to pay their last respects.

Thousands of mourners thronged the venue since morning, even as hundreds camped outside it overnight, with the administration

making elaborate arrangements to receive the body.

Fans, holding aloft cut-outs of their beloved singer, sang his popular numbers through the night. The mortal remains of Zubeen,

who passed away in Singapore on Friday, have been placed at a pandal inside the sports complex.

As public homage commenced around 3 pm, the admirers jostled for space to shower flowers on the casket, and capture his photo on their mobile phones for one last time. Many became inconsolable as they saw the lifeless face of their icon through the glass walls, with security personnel and volunteers having a hard time ensuring that the queue kept moving.

Fans who were unable to enter the stadium gathered in small groups outside and sang Zubeen's favourite songs, hugging each other. Others took out short processions, with the six-lane National Highway-27 (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

# PM's swadeshi push on eve of GST implementation, asks MSMEs to restore glory of made-in-India products

**NEW DELHI, Sept 21:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserted on Sunday that the GST reforms kicking in from Monday will accelerate India's growth story, emphasising that it is a big and important step for "aatmanirbhar Bharat" and linking a boost to 'swadeshi' products to the country's prosperity.

Addressing the nation on the eve of the auspicious Navratri, which will mark the implementation of the revised GST rates, Modi said the reduced prices of items across the board will launch "bachat utsav" for people.

Urging people to buy indigenous products, he said swadeshi will render strength to the country's prosperity in a similar way it powered India's freedom movement.

"We have to make every home a symbol of swadeshi. We have to decorate every shop with swadeshi (goods)," he said.

The roll-out of next-generation GST reforms months after his government raised the income tax exemption on annual earnings of up to Rs 12 lakh will be a "double bonanza" for citizens, helping them realise their dreams by slashing expenditure and increasing savings, he said. Citizens will save Rs 2.5 lakh crore from the twin decisions, he said.

He urged states to boost manufacturing and create a conducive atmosphere for investment, saying that when the Centre and states work together, the dream of a self-reliant India will be realised.

He had a message for citizens too. It should be the spirit of every Indian that he says with pride that



he purchases or sells made-in-India products, the prime minister said, stressing that it will quicken the pace of the country's development.

In his over 19-minute address, Modi said the revised GST rates reflect his government's mantra of "naagrik devo bhawah" (citizens are like gods) as it will bring down the price of everyday items besides cutting expenditure in construction and health sectors.

From tomorrow, it will be like a GST saving festival, he said, adding that it will bring happiness to every family.

"On the first day of Navratri, the country is going to take an important and big step for Atmanirbhar Bharat. With the sunrise tomorrow, the next generation GST reforms will come into effect. A 'GST bachat utsav (savings festival)' will begin tomorrow.

"You will be able to buy things

you like more easily. The poor, middle class, neo middle class, youths, farmers, women, traders and shopkeepers will benefit from this," he said.

He congratulated all on the next generation GST reforms. "These reforms will accelerate India's growth story, increase ease of doing business and attract more investors," Modi said.

When India took a step towards GST reforms in 2017, a new beginning was made to script history, he said.

He said GST realised the 'one nation-one tax' dream. Modi highlighted how the web of taxes and tolls had created hardships for businesses and consumers.

He also said the GST move would benefit MSMEs big time and urged the sector to work to restore glory to made-in-India products, noting that goods manufactured in the country were

behind its past economic might.

India's micro, small and cottage industries will have a key role in building a self-reliant India, he said and called for manufacturing as much as possible within the country.

The prime minister also asked people to be more conscious in their choices, noting that they often do not even know the origin of the comb they may carry.

Items of foreign origins have unwittingly become a part of people's daily lives, he said, exhorting them to ensure that they buy products with an indigenous background.

One should be proud in saying that "I buy swadeshi" or "I sell swadeshi", he said.

Modi expressed happiness at the business sector "taking a lead" in passing the benefits of the GST rate cuts to consumers.

He noted that under the new structure, only 5 per cent and 18 per cent tax slabs primarily remain. He listed everyday food items, medicines, soap, toothbrush, toothpaste, health and life insurance as among the many goods and services that will either be tax-free or attract only a 5 per cent tax.

Nearly 99 per cent of the items previously taxed at 12 per cent now fall under the 5 per cent tax bracket, he added.

He said for decades, citizens and traders were entangled in a complex web of taxes, amounting to dozens of levies across the nation and adding to the hardships of the business and the price burden of consumers.

Modi recalled a story he had read in a foreign newspaper soon

after he took office in 2014 that a company found it more challenging to transport goods from Bengaluru to Hyderabad, a distance of 570 km, due to the multiplicity of taxes than to send its products to Europe and then back to Hyderabad.

The prime minister said he worked with all stakeholders, including states, to allay their concerns and bring them on board to roll out "one nation one tax" in 2017.

From kitchen staples to electronics, from medicines and equipment to automobiles, goods and services will be cheaper from Monday as the reduced GST rates on about 375 items come into effect.

In a bonanza to consumers, the GST Council, comprising the Centre and states, had decided to reduce the tax rates on goods and services, from September 22 -- the first day of Navratri.

The GST will now be a two-tier structure wherein the majority of goods and services will attract tax of 5 and 18 per cent. A 40 per cent tax will be levied on ultra luxury items, while tobacco and related products will continue to be in the 28 per cent plus cess category.

Till now, Goods and Services Tax (GST) was levied in 4 slabs of 5, 12, 18 and 28 per cent. Besides, a compensation cess is levied on luxury items and demerit or sin goods.

Mass consumption items like ghee, paneer, butter, 'namkeen', ketchup, jam, dry fruits, coffee and ice creams, and aspirational goods like TV, AC and washing machines will become cheaper. (PTI)

# 'GST bachat utsav': Taxes on wide range of goods, services to be reduced starting today

**NEW DELHI, Sept 21:** Prices of kitchen staples to electronics, from medicines and equipment to automobiles, will get cheaper from Monday as reduced GST rates on about 375 items come into effect.

In a bonanza to consumers, the GST Council, comprising Centre and states, decided to reduce tax rates on goods and services, from September 22 -- the first day of Navratri.

In his address to the nation on the eve of rollout of the new reduced tax rates, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "GST bachat utsav (savings festival)", coupled with the hike in income tax exemption to Rs 12 lakh given in the Budget, will be a "double bonanza" for people.

"Now, there will now be only 5 per cent and 18 per cent tax slabs in GST. Most everyday items will become cheaper. Food items, medicines, soap, brush, paste, health and life insurance, many such goods and services will either be tax-free or only have 5 per cent GST," Modi said.

Modi said the cut in GST rates and the hike in I-T exemption limit will help households save ₹ 2.5 lakh crore annually.

"Now, the poor, the neo-middle class, and the middle class are receiving a double bonanza. With the reduction in GST, it will be easier for them to fulfil their dreams," Modi said.

From Monday, mass consumption items like ghee, paneer, butter, 'namkeen', ketchup, jam, dry fruits, coffee and ice creams, and

aspirational goods like TV, AC, washing machines will become cheaper.

Various FMCG companies have already announced reduction in prices in view of GST rationalisation.

With GST on most drugs and formulations, and medical devices like glucometers and diagnostic kits reduced to 5 per cent, the cost of medicines will come down for the common man. Also, home builders will benefit as GST on cement has been cut to 18 per cent, from 28 per cent.

The government has already directed pharmacies to revise their MRP or sell medicines at a lower rate after taking into account GST cut benefits.

The biggest beneficiary of GST rate cut is buyers of automobiles wherein tax rates have been slashed to 18 per cent and 28 per cent for small and big cars, respectively.

Several car companies have already announced reduction in prices.

With regard to services, GST on beauty and physical well-being services including services of health clubs, salons, barbers, fitness centres, yoga, etc has been slashed from 18 per cent with Input Tax credit (ITC), to 5 per cent without tax credit.

Also, daily use products like hair oil, toilet soap bars, shampoos, toothbrush, toothpaste, too are likely to get cheaper as tax on them has been cut to 5 per cent from 12/18 per cent currently. (PTI)

## Noida Airport set to begin operations post-Diwali; foreign airlines in talks for flight services

**NOIDA, Sept 21:** The Noida International Airport (NIA), being developed as a greenfield aviation hub in Jewar, Gautam Buddha Nagar, is on track to begin operations by the end of this year.

Union Civil Aviation Minister K Ram Mohan Naidu recently told reporters that the airport would be inaugurated on October 30 and flight operations begin within next 45 days with 10 routes.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has also reiterated the airport's commercial flight operations to commence by 2025 end.

Billed to be India's largest airport upon full development before 2050, the project -- which started in 2019 and saw COVID-19 pandemic too -- was initially scheduled to launch operations in September 2024.

The airport, which is being developed in four phases, has completed key aeronautical infrastructure for Phase 1, including one runway and one passenger terminal with an annual capacity to handle 12 million passengers.

Technical installations and finishing works inside the terminal are underway, while an extensive Operational Readiness and Airport Transfer (ORAT) programme is in progress.

"Phase 1 construction is progressing steadily, and the airport remains on schedule for commissioning this year. The validation flight was successfully completed in December 2024, confirming the readiness of our navigational aids, approach procedures, and ATC systems," NIA Chief Executive Officer Christoph Schnellmann told PTI.

The next major milestone is the issuance of the aerodrome licence by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA). Upon obtaining regulatory clearance, flight operations will commence in close coordination with airlines and other stakeholders, ensuring a smooth and safe launch.

Notably, the airport's runway will be CAT III-compliant, enabling operations during low visibility con-

ditions such as dense fog -- an essential feature for North India's weather conditions.

The NIA has already announced IndiGo as its launch carrier, while Akasa Air will operate both domestic and international flights from the facility.

Talks are going on with several international carriers.

"Airlines from the Middle East and Southeast Asia have shown strong interest in operating from NIA. Route planning and slot allocation discussions are underway, and further announcements will be made closer to the start of operations," Schnellmann said. As part of its broader aviation ecosystem, NIA is also advancing on cargo and MRO infrastructure. The cargo terminal, developed in partnership with Air India SATS, is nearing completion and will begin its own ORAT programme soon. The hub will serve as a multi-modal cargo hub (MMCH), strategically located to cater to major industrial and commercial centres in northern India.

Additionally, the airport has invited expressions of interest for a Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) facility and has received "very strong interest", the CEO said.

The MRO initiative is part of the airport's long-term vision to become "a comprehensive aviation hub".

The project has also generated significant employment, with nearly 9,000 workers currently employed on-site, and thousands of additional jobs expected in the future as construction progresses across other phases. The airport will eventually be capable of handling 70 million passengers annually upon full development.

The NIA is being built under a public-private partnership model, with Yamuna International Airport Private Limited (YIAPL) -- a subsidiary of Zurich Airport International -- as the concessionaire.

Located adjacent to the Yamuna Expressway, the airport will be NCR's second international facility after Delhi's IGIA. (PTI)

## Industry body warns against export duty on low-grade iron ore

**NEW DELHI, Sept 21:** Industry body UCCIL has warned that an export duty on low-grade iron ore will lead to drop in production, domestic prices, long-term capacity losses and erosion of India's export competitiveness.

The government is planning to impose a 30 per cent export duty on low-grade iron ore from October this year.

The Utkal Chamber of Commerce & Industry Ltd (UCCIL) said in a statement, "The proposed export duty will also result in sectoral destabilisation: a likely decline in production, crashing domestic prices, erosion of India's export competitiveness, and long-term capacity losses. The effect will also be felt in employment, regional economies, and industrial output."

It "urged the Government of Odisha to protect the state's iron ore mining industry given the recent discussions by the central government around the imposition of export duties on low-grade iron ore".

Such a measure will inevitably destroy the sector, cause a collective loss of over Rs 16,200 crore to the exchequer of mining predominant states and endanger livelihoods of over five million dependents across the states, it said. (PTI)

## States' expenses on salary, pension, interest payment rise 2.5 times in 10 years since FY14: CAG

**NEW DELHI, Sept 21:** The committed expenditure on salaries, pensions, and interest payments increased by 2.49 times to ₹ 15,63,649 crore in fiscal 2022-23 across all states from ₹ 6,26,849 crore in 2013-14, said a CAG report on state finances.

A large share of the revenue expenditure is either committed or tied up. Salaries, pensions, and interest payments on public debt and liabilities are treated as 'committed expenditure'. During the 10-year period from 2013-14 to 2022-23, revenue expenditure by the states constituted 80-87 per cent of the total expenditure and as percentage of combined GSDP, it was

about 13-15 per cent. In FY 2022-23, revenue expenditure was 84.73 per cent of total expenditure and 13.85 per cent of combined GSDP, said the publication on State Finances 2022-23, the first of its kind by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India.

In FY 2022-23, out of the total revenue expenditure of ₹ 35,95,736 crore, the committed expenditure was ₹ 15,63,649 crore; ₹ 3,09,625 crore on subsidies and ₹ 11,26,486 crore on grants-in aid. These three components totalling ₹ 29,99,760 crore together constituted more than 83 per cent of total revenue expenditure. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## Himanta inspects proposed site

with the Upper Assam town often deemed as the 'cradle' of his creativity. However, sources close to the family said that Guwahati or its suburbs could be the final choice as Garg's octogenarian father will not be able to travel to Jorhat, more than 300 km from here. (PTI)

## KAAC to shut offices, institutions

period. However, service-oriented activities such as health camps, Nikshay Mitra support for TB patients and plantation drives will continue.

## Zubeen's creations will continue

that runs along the stadium getting packed with people and traffic, and coming to a near standstill. It was as if the skies opened up in mourning, too, as rains lashed the area soon after the casket was brought in, after fans had to wait under a scorching sun for hours.

Garima, who was accompanying the mortal remains, said: "Had Zubeen been alive today, he would have been overwhelmed by this show of love. He cannot express himself in words anymore, and on his behalf, I thank each of you." "It was because of this love and blessings he received during his lifetime that he could achieve so much within his short span of life," she said, battling tears.

Garima, a renowned fashion designer herself, said Zubeen wanted all to live in peace and harmony, and the confluence of people of all regions, religions and communities has proven that he belonged to all of them.

"His creations will continue to remain with us, especially the youth whom he loved so much," she said, appealing to the fans to pay their homage in a peaceful and disciplined manner.

Ministers and senior government officers also paid homage to Zubeen, who died in Singapore on Friday while swimming in the sea without a life jacket. In a post on X, Sarma said, "More and more people wish to see our beloved Zubeen one last time, and we deeply understand these sentiments." "Therefore, Bhogeswar Baruah Stadium will remain open throughout the night today for the public to pay their respects to Zubeen. Tomorrow also, the mortal remains of Zubeen will be kept at Sarusajai for people to offer their homage," he added. Zubeen's body was flown to New Delhi from Singapore around midnight on Saturday, and had reached Guwahati by another flight around 7 am on Sunday. It was taken to his residence in Kahilipara area of the city, taking around six hours to travel the 25-km-long distance, as thousands lined up the route from the airport. (PTI)

## Sea of people throng roads

members requested some moments with the singer's body for one last time. After being taken to his house, the body was taken out of the coffin and kept in a glass casket, with his face being shown and the rest draped in a 'gamosa'.

According to the schedule, it was planned that Garg's mortal remains will be kept at his Kahilipara residence for about one-and-a-half hours for his family members, including his 85-year-old ailing father, to pay their last respects. It was planned that his body would be taken from his residence to the Arjun Bhogeswar Baruah Sports Complex for people to pay their homage from 9 am to 7 pm but due to the delay, officials are holding consultations on making changes.

Earlier in the day, after the flight carrying his body landed from Delhi, the coffin was first taken out from the luggage section of the aircraft and kept near the runway, where his wife Garima Saikia Garg offered floral tributes and placed an Assamese gamosa on it. She broke down and hugged the casket.

The coffin was later placed inside the flower-decked ambulance with people who had gathered near the runway, including airport staffers and passengers who came in the same flight, breaking down in tears.

Garima and Assam's Minister for Cultural Affairs Bimal Borah accompanied his body in the ambulance which moved out of the airport through the VIP exit. The coffin was covered with 'gamosa' and flowers, which included marigolds and jasmine. Besides his wife, senior state government officials were at the airport to receive the body.

Thousands of fans were heard singing his songs and shouting 'Jai Zubeen da' as the convoy navigated slowly through the crowd outside the airport. Wailing, 'Why Zubeen da, why did you have to leave us so soon', they were seen holding cut-outs of the singer and the traditional Assamese 'gamosa' with the words 'Z G (Zubeen Garg) Forever' woven in it. Assam Director General of Police Harmeet Singh and Guwahati Police Commissioner Parthasarathi Mahanta were seen walking in front of the ambulance to clear the way for the vehicle.

The singer's favourite vehicle, an open jeep, which he often used to travel to venues where he performed, was also a part of the convoy with his huge portrait positioned in the front. His team of musicians was in the vehicle.

The fans were also seen holding their mobile phones aloft to capture their icon's last journey home.

People have reached Guwahati from across the state to pay their last respects to their favourite singer, who mesmerised them for over three decades with more than 38,000 songs sung in 40 languages and dialects.

People started gathering since Saturday night outside the Arjun Bhogeswar Baruah Sports Complex, where his body will be kept to allow the public to pay their last respects.

Details of the last rites are yet to be finalised, although a team of officials has visited Sonapur near Guwahati to inspect a suitable place, where Zubeen can be cremated and a memorial built in his honour.

The Assam cabinet will meet on Sunday evening to decide on the cremation venue.

Earlier, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had said the casket carrying the singer's body could not be accommodated in any chartered flight and was flown to Guwahati from Delhi on a regular flight.

The body arrived at the Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi around Saturday midnight from Singapore, where he died a day earlier while swimming in the sea without a life jacket.

CM Sarma received the singer's body at the airport and paid his tribute.

He was accompanied by Union Minister of State for External Affairs Pabitra Margherita and senior Assam government officials posted in the national capital. (PTI)

# Radisson Hotel Group to expand footprint in eastern India, shows interest to enter Bihar

**BENGALURU, Sept 21:** Radisson Hotel Group, whose India portfolio includes over 200 hotels, is seeking to expand its footprint in eastern part of the country, with a top company official saying the hospitality giant's focus is on "balancing" location of properties in both key and tier 2 cities.

In an interview to PTI here, chairman of the group's South Asia operations, K B Kachru, also pitched for preserving and "restoring historic buildings" to redevelop them as heritage properties rather than demolishing such structures and replacing them with "big boxes".

"One of the reasons for our growth has been that we are focussed on key locations pan-India... In fact, we are doing equally well in tier 2 and tier 3 (cities) as in tier 1. So, that's very gratifying," Kachru told PTI.

Representatives from senior management of various leading hotel chains participated in a national tourism and hospitality conference hosted by the Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) at a luxury hotel in Bengaluru from September 18-20. Tourism ministers of Karnataka, Puducherry, and Andhra Pradesh also attended and addressed the gathering at the mega event.

Kachru and top officials of ITC



Group and The Postcard Hotel also took part in a panel discussion on 'Building Iconic Indian Hospitality Brands that Travel the World' during the event.

On the sidelines, Kachru shared insights about the journey of the Radisson Hotel Group in India and its plans for the road ahead.

"We started close to 28 years back (in India) with nothing. We are now 207 hotels in India, and growing," he said.

And, at the 55th annual convention of the FHRAI, "great ideas were floated" to boost the brand value of Indian hospitality as a whole, both from the government and the industry sides, the chairman of the group's South Asia op-

erations said.

"And, what is really pleasing to all of us is that the government has taken certain initiatives which are focussed on how to get more inbound tourists and consolidate our domestic tourism. There is a clear action plan. And, we as an industry are participating fully in it," he added. "We are 207 hotels at the moment, and about 50 per cent of our properties are in tier 2 and tier 3 cities," he said.

In April this year, the hospitality giant had announced that with its ambitious growth plan for 2025, Radisson Hotel Group has reached a "historic milestone in India with crossing 200 hotels, following the signing of five new hotels".

316 candidates in fray as over 26 lakh voters set to decide fate of 40-member council

## BTC elections today across five districts of Assam

**GUWAHATI, Sept 21:** The stage is set for the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) elections scheduled to be held today across five districts of Assam — Kokrajhar, Baksa, Chirang, Udalguri and Tamulpur.

A total of 316 candidates are contesting for the 40-member council, with polling to take place from 7:30 AM to 4:00 PM. Officials from the Assam State Election Commission confirmed that all necessary arrangements have been made to ensure a peaceful polling process, including deployment of polling personnel to remote booths.

The voter base stands at 26, 58,153, including 13, 34,600 women. Voting will take place across 3,359 polling stations — 942 in Kokrajhar, 575 in Baksa, 510 in Chirang, 937 in Udalguri, and 395 in Tamulpur. Notably, 187 polling stations will be managed exclusively by female



polling staff.

Re-polling, if required, will be held on September 24. Counting of votes is scheduled for September 26, and the entire election process is expected to conclude by September 28.

Among the 40 BTC seats, 30 are reserved for Scheduled Tribes

(ST), five for non-STs, and the remaining five are open to both ST and non-ST candidates.

The ruling United Peoples' Party Liberal (UPPL), led by incumbent BTC chief Pramod Boro, is contesting the elections in alliance with the BJP and the Gana Suraksha Party (GSP). However,

this time the BJP is also fielding candidates independently in some constituencies.

The Bodo heartland witnessed intense campaigning, with Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma addressing rallies in all five districts. The Bodoland People's Front (BPF), which ruled the BTC for three consecutive terms, has also mounted a strong campaign in a bid to regain control.

In the last council elections, held after the signing of the fresh Bodo Accord in January 2020, the UPPL secured 12 seats, BJP won nine, and the GSP took one. The BPF emerged as the single largest party with 17 seats, while Congress won one seat — the lone member later joined the BJP.

With high political stakes and a complex contest unfolding, 2025's polling is set to play a crucial role in shaping the future political landscape of the Bodoland Territorial Region. (PTI)

## Amrit Bharat Express introduced at affordable fares



**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Sept 21:** Indian Railways has launched the Amrit Bharat Express, a new category of trains designed to offer state-of-the-art facilities at affordable fares, marking a significant step towards modernising rail travel in India.

Announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Amrit Bharat Express trains aim to make modern travel amenities accessible to the common man, blending comfort, safety, and efficiency. A total of 11 such trains have been introduced on various routes across the country.

Under the jurisdiction of North-east Frontier Railway (N.F. Railway), a new weekly Amrit Bharat

Express service between Erode and Jogbani is set to commence from September 25, 2025. Train No. 16601 (Erode-Jogbani) will depart from Erode every Thursday at 08:10 hrs and arrive at Jogbani at 19:00 hrs on Saturday. In the return direction, Train No. 16602 (Jogbani-Erode) will leave Jogbani every Sunday at 15:15 hrs and reach Erode at 07:20 hrs on Wednesday.

The inaugural run of this service was flagged off by Prime Minister Modi on September 15, 2025. The new train is expected to significantly improve regional connectivity while ensuring a comfortable and economical journey for passengers.

Amrit Bharat Express trains are equipped with advanced safety systems, including the indigenous Kavach anti-collision technology, modern braking mechanisms, and improved suspension for smoother rides. Coaches feature modern automatic doors, bio-vacuum toilets, mobile charging points, CCTV surveillance, and automatic fire and smoke detection systems.

Passengers will also benefit from LED lighting, modular toilets, improved seating, and GPS-based passenger information systems. The trains operate on push-pull technology with engines at both ends, reducing journey time by eliminating the need for engine reversals. Enhanced insulation and energy-efficient equipment contribute to a quieter, more comfortable travel experience.

With a top speed of 130 kmph, the Amrit Bharat Express will cover distances of around 1,000 kilometres for approximately Rs 450, making it an affordable yet modern travel option.

The introduction of the Amrit Bharat Express is seen as a milestone in Indian Railways' ongoing efforts to upgrade its services and infrastructure, aligning with the broader vision of a progressive and inclusive India.

### 20 Battalion CRPF wins in Jorhat sector shooting contest

**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, Sept 21:** The Inter-Battalion Shooting Competition-2025 of the Jorhat Operational Sector was successfully held at the 20 Battalion CRPF headquarters in Diphu from September 17 to 19. A total of 11 teams under the operational jurisdiction of the Jorhat sector participated in the event.

The closing ceremony was held on Sunday in a befitting manner at HQ/20 Battalion, CRPF, Diphu, and was graced by DIG, Range Khatkhathi, Rinchen Wangyal Dawa, as the chief guest. Also present on the occasion were Commandant of 155 Battalion Satyaveer Singh Verma, Second-in-Command of 20 Battalion Rajesh Kumar, Assistant Commandant Omber Singh, and other CRPF jawans.

DIG Rinchen Wangyal Dawa distributed the prizes to the winners. The overall team championship was clinched by the host, 20 Battalion CRPF. The 119 Battalion CRPF secured the first runners-up position, while the 186 Battalion CRPF stood as the second runners-up.

## Tezpur University pays tribute to cultural icon Zubeen Garg



**HT Correspondent**

**TEZPUR, Sept 21:** Tezpur University joined the rest of the state and nation in paying heartfelt tribute to Zubeen Garg, the legendary singer, composer, and cultural icon whose music resonated across generations. In a solemn gathering held on campus, students, faculty, and staff came together to remember and celebrate the life and legacy of the beloved artist, affectionately known as Zubeen Da.

The tribute featured renditions of some of his most iconic songs performed by students, filling the university grounds with the familiar melodies that defined his career. A candlelight march was also held in his honour, symbolising the collective grief and admiration of the university community.

Several academic departments offered their individual tributes, sharing memories and reflections on Zubeen Garg's immense contribution to Assamese music and culture.

"Zubeen is not just a name; he is an emotion. His untimely death leaves a huge void in the cultural landscape of Assam. A true Assamese at heart, he was above caste, creed, and religion, and only spread love through his music and life," said Professor Shambhu Nath Singh, Vice Chancellor of Tezpur University.

As a mark of respect, the university flag was flown at half-mast. The university has declared a period of mourning from September 20 to 22, 2025, in solidarity with the people of Assam and the artist's countless admirers. Tezpur University extended its deepest condolences to Zubeen Garg's family, friends, and fans, reaffirming its support in remembering his extraordinary life and his unwavering love for the people of Assam.

Meanwhile, educational institutions, religious, cultural, and social organisations across Sonitpur district also observed tributes in his memory, underscoring the profound impact of the artist's work and persona on society.

### Gurudwara prabandhak committee mourns the passing of Zubeen Garg

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Sept 21:** With profound grief and a heavy heart, the Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee of Fancy Bazar and Gopinath Nagar mourns the untimely passing of music icon Zubeen Garg — the immortal voice of Assam whose music transcended boundaries and united hearts across communities and generations.

His songs carried the spirit and essence of Assam, giving a distinct identity to Assamese culture on the global stage. Through his art, Zubeen Garg brought people together, leaving an indelible mark on countless lives.

On behalf of the Sikh sangat of Guwahati, Sardar Bhupinder Pal Singh Kiki, President, and Sardar Harcharan Singh Bawa, General Secretary of the Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee, extended their deepest condolences to Zubeen Garg's family, admirers, and all those touched by his music and humanitarian spirit.

Assam has lost a truly irreplaceable soul. The silence left in the wake of his departure is one that words can scarcely fill.

May Waheguru bless his noble soul with eternal peace and grant strength to his loved ones and to all who mourn this profound loss.

## Procession held in Demow to pay tribute to Zubeen Garg

**HT Correspondent**

**DEMOW, Sept 21:** Three days after the untimely passing of Assam's beloved music icon Zubeen Garg, residents of Demow continued to mourn with deep emotion and reverence. On Sunday, the entire town came to a near standstill as business establishments kept their shutters down in a collective tribute to the late singer. The usually busy streets were a deserted look, while Zubeen's timeless song "Mayabini Ratir Bukut" echoed through the lanes, capturing the mood of grief that has gripped the area.

A heartfelt procession was taken out by the people of Demow, along with various local organisations and institutions. A framed photograph of Zubeen Garg, adorned with a phulam gamosa and garland, was placed in a vehicle that led the procession.

The event was formally inaugurated by Bisadu Singhpho, Officer-in-Charge of Demow Police Station. As the procession moved through the streets, participants chanted slogans such as "Zubeen Da Amar Houk," expressing their undying love and respect for the late artist.

The procession culminated at the Demow Public Playground, where the crowd gathered to sing

"Mayabini Ratir Bukut" together. A moment of silence was observed, and prayers were offered for the eternal peace of Zubeen Garg's soul.

Among those present were prominent local figures and youth leaders including Prasantajit Chetia, Rupjyoti Handique, Sumit Nandi, and representatives from AASU, AYM, ATASU, and



ATTSA.

Later in the evening, shradhanjali programmes were held at multiple locations across Demow, as residents lit candles, offered flowers, and shared their memories of the artist who left an indelible mark on Assam's cultural landscape.

As the state continues to mourn, Demow stands united in honouring the voice that gave expression to the dreams and emotions of millions.

## Margherita pays heartfelt tribute to Zubeen Garg

NEC Coal India and Coal India Mahila Samaj join thousands in honouring the late cultural icon



**HT Correspondent**

**MARGHERITA, Sept 21:** North-eastern Coalfields (NEC), Coal India Ltd, Margherita, along with the Coal India Mahila Samaj, on Sunday paid rich tributes to the legendary singer and cultural icon Zubeen Garg at a solemn event held at the Margherita India Club. NEC is a subsidiary of Coal India Ltd, a Maharatna company and one of the largest coal producers in the country.

The tribute ceremony began with the lighting of earthen lamps, offering of floral tributes, and a one-minute silence observed before Zubeen Garg's portrait.

The event was attended by NEC CIL Margherita General Managers K Mere and S P Dutta, CSR Officer Santanu Hazarika, Central Hospital Chief Medical Officers Dr Sanjeev Sonowal and Dr Manab Brota Gogoi, Deputy Chief Medical Officer Dr Swarup Das, and office bearers of the Coal India Mahila Samaj, including the president, vice-president, general secretary, and other members.

As Assam continues to reel from the sudden loss of the iconic artist, tributes are pouring in from every corner of the state. In the coal town

of Ledo, thousands gathered last night in an emotional show of unity and remembrance. A massive candlelight procession was held, with fans walking the streets and chanting Zubeen's name.

One of the key organisers, Ranajyoti Neog, said the gathering went beyond caste and religion—it was a celebration of humanity. A special tribute was also held at Ledo Railway Station, where Bhikkhu Jyotika Bhante of Maunglang Khamti Buddhist Vihar and senior journalist Jagat Changmai led the candle lighting ceremony.

Admirers from all walks of life offered flowers and lit candles in front of Zubeen Garg's portrait, expressing their deep grief and admiration. Among those present were social worker Dheeraj Sonowal, Kanchan Borah, vice-president of the AJYCP Tinsukia District Committee, Sukhdev Sharma, former president of Margherita Anchalik Panchayat, retired headmistress Nang Sufati Pomung Mili, Dipjyoti Gogoi of Bir Lachit Sena Asom, and Dipak Chetia, secretary of Ledo branch Xakha Xahitya Xabha.

Speakers at the event shared emotional memories and said that

Zubeen Garg would live on forever through his music, which transcends generations and boundaries.

The programme, anchored by Ranajyoti Neog, featured soulful performances of Zubeen's songs by artists Dr Dipali Barpujari, Babita Das Choudhury, Dwipendu Chakraborty, Utpal Chakraborty, Dipanwita Biswas, Jaydeep Gohain, Prabirjyoti Bora, and Jyotismita Gohain.

In a significant announcement during the tribute, senior journalist and chief organiser Ranajyoti Neog proposed the erection of a statue of Zubeen Garg in Ledo. He also appealed to Margherita MLA Bhaskar Sharma and the Margherita Co-District Administration to name the Bargolai Dehing Sports Complex stadium as "Zubeen Garg Stadium" in honour of the artist. He further called for Zubeen Garg's birthday to be celebrated annually to keep his legacy alive.

The overwhelming participation and emotional tributes showcased the profound impact Zubeen Garg had on the lives of the people of Assam—an artist, an activist, and above all, a voice of unity and humanity.

## Mass mourning in Morigaon over death of Assam icon Zubeen Garg

**HT Correspondent**

**MORIGAON, Sept 21:** The death of Assam's beloved music icon Zubeen Garg was deeply mourned across Morigaon district. Safai karmacharis, small vendors, fishmongers, butchers, along with businessmen, district administration officials, police, medical staff, and the general public came out spontaneously to express their condolences on Saturday evening at the Morigaon traffic point.

A large gathering assembled to pay tribute, singing Zubeen Garg's songs in unison before his portrait. The turnout included families of safai karmacharis, small vendors, fishmongers, and butchers, who set aside their daily earnings to join the tribute, many accompanied by their young children. They offered floral tributes and lit earthen lamps before the late icon's portrait, creating a solemn and emotional atmosphere.

The unique and heartfelt gathering left the town stunned. Locals described it as unprecedented — never before had Morigaon witnessed such a spontaneous and united show of grief.

In response to the singer's passing, the local trade union had called for a three-hour bandh from 9 am to 12 pm. However, Jagroad, Morigaon town, Laharighat Bazar, and Moirabari Bazar remained closed for the entire day. Not a single business establishment, except for medicine shops, was open in the district, giving the towns a deserted look throughout the day.

The event served as a powerful testament to the deep emotional connection the people of Assam shared with Zubeen Garg and his music.

## Mangaldai mourns Zubeen Garg; Town unites in grief pays rich tributes

**HT Correspondent**

**MANGALDAI, Sept 21:** A profound sense of grief enveloped Mangaldai for the second consecutive day as the town came to a standstill, mourning the untimely demise of Zubeen Garg, the beloved musical icon cherished by millions across the region. In a rare display of unity and sorrow, all shops, business establishments, and even the vegetable market remained shuttered on the weekly market day as a mark of respect for the departed soul.

Tributes poured in from every corner of the region, with the air resonating with slogans of "Zubeen da amar houk" and the haunting melodies of his songs. Rallies organised by small traders, ambulance drivers, and e-rickshaw drivers filled the silent streets, echoing the legacy of the musical maestro. Various organisations, including Darrang Zilla Sahitya Sabha, Mangaldai Kendriya Rongali

Bihu Sanmilani, Mangaldai College, and the Santipara Ward No. 1 booth committee of BJP, held public tribute and community prayer programs.

Prominent figures, including Mangaldai MLA Basanta Das, District Commissioner Parag Kr Kakaty, Chairperson of Mangaldai Municipal Board Nirmali Devi Sarma, Principal of Mangaldai College Dr Kamala Kanta Borah, former MLA Hiren Kumar Das, former AASU leader Diganta Mani Bora, radio artiste Pranjal Sarma, senior journalist Bhargab Kr Das, and cultural organizer Rakesh Baruah, spoke at these events. They fondly recalled Zubeen Garg's deep cultural connection with Mangaldai, reflecting on his contributions to the region's cultural landscape. MLA Basanta Das expressed regret that Zubeen's aspiration to create a personal record remained unfulfilled, leaving a void in the hearts of his admirers.

## Tribute on Mahalaya blends environmental awareness with cultural reverence

### Zubeen Garg's legacy honoured with 2,000 saplings distributed in Diphu



**HT Correspondent**

**KHERONI, Sept 21:** In a unique tribute to the legendary singer and filmmaker Zubeen Garg, the Madhya Bazar Puja Committee in Diphu organised a special sapling distribution programme on the eve of Mahalaya. The event saw the distribution of over 2,000 saplings to local residents and children, celebrating the enduring legacy of the beloved cultural icon.

Held in the early morning hours, the event drew enthusiastic participation from Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) Executive Member Ritesh Enghe, alongside office bearers and

members of the Puja Committee, as well as conscious and environmentally aware citizens of the area.

The initiative served a dual purpose—honouring Zubeen Garg's invaluable contributions to music and cinema, while also promoting environmental consciousness in the community.

The event, infused with the spirit of Mahalaya, reflected a meaningful blend of cultural reverence and ecological responsibility, resonating deeply with attendees and further strengthening the connection between the arts and environmental stewardship.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

Applause is a receipt, not a bill.  
-Dale Carnegie

## SC's balancing act

The Supreme Court of India did a balancing exercise on the Waqf Amendment Act 2025 in the interim stage of hearing on September 15, 2025. The apex court refused to stay the act on the one hand, which brought cheer to the Union Government, but put on hold certain controversial key provisions of the legislation which were challenged by the petitioners alleging that they amounted to interference in the affairs of the minority Muslim community, making it unconstitutional since it violated fundamental right to practice religion. Though the court has rejected the prayer to stay the legislation itself, it clarified that its present direction was based on the prima facie view and will not preclude the parties from making submissions with regard to the validity of the provisions of the Act in final hearing. The court had reserved the order on May 22. The Opposition has welcomed the interim order and said that the Supreme Court's interim order has put a "hold" on the "conspiracy and the intention of the government". Congress MP and communication in-charge Jairam Ramesh said the order "represents a substantial victory" for Opposition parties and "all those members of the Joint Parliamentary Committee who submitted detailed dissent notes".

It is obvious that the balancing act of the Supreme Court bench comprising of Chief Justice of India BR Gavai and Justice AG Masih has pleased both the ruling establishment and the opposition, while for the Muslim community it is going to be a long legal battle for restoration of their fundamental right to manage the affairs of their religion. The matter obviously needs an in-depth consideration when the bench will hear the case further for its final decision. However, at this stage, the bench observed that several other provisions in the legislation did not require any interference at the interim stage. Refusing to stay the Waqf Amendment Act 2025, the bench observed that "no case was made to stay the provision of the entire statute." CJI observed, "The prayer for stay of the impugned Act is, therefore rejected. However, while doing so, in order to protect the interest of all the parties and balance the equities during pendency of this batch of matters, we issue the following orders."

Though the Supreme Court has issued specific direction on five key issues, it did not interfere with other major contentious issues, such as the abolition of 'waqf-by-user', bar on creating waqfs over Scheduled Areas and protected monuments, condition that only Muslim can create Waqfs, and application of the Limitation Act to the Waqf act etc. The key orders of the bench included stay on the condition that a person should be a practitioner of Islam for at least 5 years till rules are framed by State Governments to provide a mechanism to determine this question. The bench observed that without such a mechanism the provision can lead to arbitrariness.

## Zubeen Garg - What was he truly?

Zubeen Garg was another name for an innate talent. With his enchanting voice, over three decades, he enriched and strengthened Assamese music with more than thirty-eight thousand songs, starting from 'Anamika.' There is surely no need to recount Zubeen's musical journey anew. What did Zubeen not sing? From Borgeet and folk songs to Bollywood, from the languages of Bodo, Tiwa, Mising, and other ethnic communities to Tamil and Telugu songs, this beloved artist from Assam sang every genre with utmost fluency, precision, and beauty.

Zubeen Garg was not merely a singer or an artist; he was the emotion and identity of Assam. From innocent children to the elderly, everyone genuinely loved this entity called Zubeen. For the youth, he was nothing less than a god. Perhaps no one, ever, could take his place. Zubeen possessed a divine ability to captivate people. His straightforward speech, clarity, and manner of expression always left everyone enchanted. While his voice mesmerized people, it was his socially conscious efforts that instilled a deep sense of reverence and attraction in every Assamese heart. Zubeen did much for society. He consistently raised his voice to stop rhino poaching and worked to make the youth aware of wildlife and nature conservation. By founding the Kalaguru Artist Foundation, he supported many struggling artists, performers, and impoverished individuals, bringing smiles to the faces of numerous talented but destitute people. To spark interest in football, a sport nearly forgotten in Assam, Zubeen organized matches across the state with other artists. He never turned away anyone who approached him in distress, helping them to the best of his ability. With a magnanimous heart, Zubeen gave selflessly without a thought for himself.

Every year during floods, he stood by the afflicted, collecting donations from the public on the streets and delivering them to those in need. He vocally advocated for declaring floods a national calamity.

Though he could have made a

mark in Mumbai or Bollywood—the dreamland of every artist and performer—he chose to return to Assam for his homeland, to work for Assam. He loved Assam and its people with a pure heart. Most importantly, Zubeen Garg was a tremendous source of courage for Assam and the Assamese nation. He spoke out boldly for the community in any situation, be it crisis or adversity. The people of Assam listened to him. The youth would come running at his call. Undoubtedly, in today's Assamese society, Zubeen Garg holds a place second only to the melodious Dr. Bhupen Hazarika. Zubeen toiled day and night for Assam, for its cultural sphere. Driven by a passion for creation, he remained tirelessly engaged. He wanted to give so much to Assam. Being outspoken, if something upset him, he would voice it without fear. He spoke boldly and directly, saying things others could not. Controversies followed him, but suddenly, everything came to a standstill.

The most significant fact is that during the dire times of the Assamese film industry, Zubeen single-handedly invested crores to produce commercially successful films like 'Mission China' or 'Kanchanjan-ganga.' At a time when people hesitated to visit theaters for Assamese films, and many leading filmmakers and directors shied away from production, Zubeen used cutting-edge technology and high-end cameras to create visually stunning, entertaining films that could rival Bollywood, catering to the modern audience's tastes. This bold step significantly deepened the love and admiration every Assamese felt for him. Until his final moments, he was immersed in Assamese cinema. His newly produced film 'Roi Roi Binale' was set to release just days later. Zubeen had already won the hearts of the public with his acting. His exceptional performances in films like 'Deenbandhu' and 'Man Jai,' along with others, will remain unforgettable. For Assam, for its cultural and social spheres, he tirelessly endeavored until his last breath. His relentless drive to contribute made him beloved across generations.

Today, the youth consider him a 'Godfather,' following him with devotion. Zubeen's bond with nature was unparalleled. He deeply loved trees, birds, and animals, finding profound peace in nature's embrace. A true lover of nature, Zubeen Garg ultimately merged with it. Silently, without informing anyone, he slipped into eternal rest in the lap of a foreign sea. In many ways, his tragic death remains an unresolved mystery.

As a singer, lyricist, composer, and music director, Zubeen Garg's creativity reshaped the modern stream of Assamese music. His magical voice found a place in every Assamese household, and his melodies touched the depths of the Assamese soul. His musical reach was not confined to Assam; his voice created ripples across India. In essence, Zubeen Garg's arrival added a new dimension to the traditional stream of Assamese music. This transformation brought Assamese music to a new audience, creating a medium for the younger generation to express their emotions. The most notable aspect of Zubeen's music was the versatility and beauty of his voice. His singing carried a magic that deeply resonated with listeners. His melodies blended Eastern and

and a people-centric language, making them immensely popular among the youth. His words easily connected with listeners, becoming a part of their daily lives.

Zubeen Garg was not only a singer but also an equally successful lyricist and composer. His original compositions and melodies reflected his personal thoughts and emotions, deeply impacting listeners. Moreover, he breathed new life into songs written by others through his voice. From Hiren Bhattacharya, Diganta Bharati, Hemanta Dutta, and Manas Robin to Jayanta Kikati and Ajay Phukan, his voice added a special dimension to many lyricists' works. His music direction showcased his creativity, making unparalleled contributions to Assamese cinema. His work enriched Assamese films commercially and artistically. His music harmonized with the storyline, making the songs not just entertainment but an integral part of the film's emotional expression. While his songs predominantly featured love and romance, they also voiced protests against societal issues. His music expressed dissent against Assam's social unrest and terrorism while reflecting national consciousness. His songs showcased deep

relevance for Assam's beauty, culture, and heritage, vividly portraying its nature, rural life, and the simplicity of ordinary people. The use of nature's metaphors in his lyrics added an artistic dimension. His musical reach extended beyond Assamese music. He played a leading role in Hindi and Bengali music, with his voice becoming indispensable in Bengali cinema, giving new life to its songs and earning him popularity among audiences of other Indian languages. This universal appeal earned him a special place on the national stage. Most notably, his knowledge of language, pronunciation accuracy, and vocal purity were remarkable, evident in every song he sang.

To the Assamese nation, Zubeen Garg was a cherished treasure, deeply loved. When asked, 'What was Zubeen Garg?' the answer is singular - a musician, singer, lyricist,

composer, actor, director, humanitarian, nature lover, and someone who loved his Assam with all his heart and soul. Above all, for every Assamese household, Zubeen was like a son of the family. No matter what he did, no one could ever truly dislike him; they only felt affection. Even when he stirred controversy, people embraced him like their own, scolding him fondly as one would a family member. Just as one lovingly corrects a son's mistakes with gentle rebukes or temporary displeasure, the people of Assam did the same with Zubeen, sometimes chiding or scolding him but never truly disliking him. Who could dislike their own son? No one could ever dislike Zubeen Garg. One scolds or feels momentary displeasure only with someone they love deeply. Everyone always wished for Zubeen to stay well. When he lay in a hospital bed multiple times, all of Assam was consumed with worry. Overwhelmed by mental stress, lack of sleep, and the burden of work, when Zubeen fell ill, everyone urged him to rest, saying, "Take a break; the work can wait." But now...

Now, there is no Zubeen Garg to spark debates, to feel affectionate displeasure toward, to scold, or to embrace lovingly again. His playful banter on stage, his countless acts of kindness, his fearless and straightforward words spoken without pleasing anyone—all of these have suddenly become memories. He was Assam's pride, self-respect, and affection.

At this moment, everyone is overwhelmed with emotion. But no matter how emotional we become or how much we weep, Zubeen Garg will never return to us physically. We must accept this cruel twist of fate. Now, in his absence, our primary responsibility is to keep Zubeen Garg alive. We must carry forward his dreams for Assam, his unfinished work in Assamese culture, cinema, and music, with unwavering dedication. Zubeen Garg cannot die. We cannot let the heartbeat of Assam, our beloved Zubeen Garg, fade away. We will keep him forever in our hearts, close to us, with us always.

## Zubeen Garg: Assam's Sonic Soul

By: Satyabrata Borah

Zubeen Garg is not merely a singer or an actor. To refer to him as just a celebrity would be a profound understatement, a failure to grasp the essence of what he represents to the people of Assam. He is, as the sentiment so rightly goes, the very emotion of Assam. He is a force of nature, a cultural architect, and the defining voice of a generation. His career is not a simple catalogue of songs and films; it is the soundtrack to the lives of millions, the narrative of a people's joys, sorrows, aspirations, and identity, all woven into a single, extraordinary artistic journey.

The arrival of Zubeen Garg on the Assamese music scene in the early 1990s was nothing short of a revolution. The landscape of Assamese music at the time, while rich in tradition, was yearning for a new, contemporary voice that could bridge the gap between its revered classical and folk roots and the modern sensibilities of a changing world. Zubeen became that bridge. He did not just sing; he erupted with a raw, untamed energy that was entirely new. His voice, a powerful instrument of incredible range and versatility, could convey the delicate vulnerability of a romantic ballad and the fierce passion of a rock anthem with equal conviction. He brought a new style, a new sound, and a new attitude.

What set Zubeen apart was his innate ability to modernize without alienating. His music was a fusion, a respectful and innovative blend of traditional Assamese folk melodies like Bihu, Borgeet, and Ojapali with contemporary pop, rock, and blues. This was not appropriation; it was evolution. He took the familiar, soul stirring tunes that were the inheritance of every Assamese household and repackaged them for the youth, making them feel both cool and connected. Songs from his early albums, and later in countless films, became instant anthems. They were played in crowded college fests, whispered between lovers, and blared from speakers during the riotous celebrations of Rongali Bihu. He gave Assam a modern musical identity, one it could wear with pride on the national stage.

His impact on Assamese cinema is equally monumental. The industry, often struggling against the juggernaut of Bollywood and

other regional cinemas, found its savior in Zubeen. His entry into films was not that of a mere playback singer; he became a bankable star whose presence could guarantee a film's success. He embodied a new kind of Assamese hero relatable, rugged, and real. His acting, much like his music, was raw and intensely emotional, resonating deeply with audiences.

However, his greatest contribution to cinema remains his music. He did not just sing for films; he breathed life into them. His compositions became the emotional core of countless movies. A Zubeen song could elevate a simple scene into a timeless moment. The yearning in a love song, the pain in a lament, the unbridled joy in a Bihu number he provided the emotional vocabulary for an entire film industry. He made the movies sing, and in doing so, he shaped the very narrative and aesthetic of contemporary Assamese cinema, pulling it from the brink of obscurity and infusing it with renewed vitality and commercial viability.

To understand Zubeen is to understand that his art is inextricably linked to his land and his people. He is the undisputed king of Bihu, the festival that is the heartbeat of Assam. His annual Bihu concerts are not mere musical performances; they are cultural phenomena, massive gatherings that transcend age and class, becoming a collective expression of Assamese pride and joy. When Zubeen sings a Bihu geet, he does not merely perform it; he leads a million people in a celebration of their identity. He is the high priest of this cultural ritual, and his voice is the catalyst that unleashes a wave of uninhibited emotion.

But his voice is not confined to celebration. Zubeen Garg has consistently used his platform as a tool for social commentary and protest. He has sung about political injustice, environmental concerns, and social issues, giving voice to the anxieties and anger of the common man. He has never shied away from speaking his mind, often courting controversy but always standing firm in his convictions. This willingness to be the people's champion, to fight for what he believes is right, has cemented his status not just as an entertainer, but as a leader and a folk hero. His music becomes a weapon, a solace, and a rallying cry, depending on the

need of the hour.

The question of how we can ever forget him is, therefore, rhetorical. Forgetting Zubeen Garg would be akin to forgetting a part of one's own soul. His music is the backdrop to first loves and heartbreaks. His voice is the sound of home for the Assamese diaspora scattered across the globe, an immediate teleportation to the verdant fields and mighty Brahmaputra of their homeland. He is the artist who provided the soundtrack for weddings, festivals, and funerals. He articulated feelings that people felt but could not express.

His legacy is not stored in archives; it is alive, breathing, and evolving. It is about a young musician strumming a guitar and attempting to fuse its chords with a traditional tune, inspired by Zubeen's pioneering spirit. It is in the actor who seeks a more authentic, grounded performance. It is in the very confidence of a generation that sees no contradiction in being fiercely Assamese and confidently global, a duality that Zubeen embodies perfectly.

Zubeen Garg is a phenomenon. He is the storm and the solace, the traditional and the modern, the rebel and the beloved. He is the artist who took the essence of Assam, its folk traditions, its contemporary dreams, its struggles, and its exuberant spirit and reflected it back through his music, louder, prouder, and more beautiful than ever before. He did not just shape the culture; he became its most vibrant and enduring symbol. He is, quite simply, the voice of Assam. And a voice that has spoken so directly to the heart of a people becomes an indelible part of their history, their present, and their future. To forget him is impossible, for his echo is forever etched into the very soul of the land.



## Legendary Zubin Garg revolutionised music of our time

By: Dr. Ratan Bhattacharjee

Zubin Garg is no more with us. But he will be forever with us. In the vast treasury of Indian music, where classical ragas meet folk rhythms and Bollywood melodies echo across generations, one name stands out as a force of transformation—Zubeen Garg wherever he is now. We pray for his m to live in peace in the eternal abode. He is not merely a singer, composer, or actor. He is a phenomenon. A cultural insurgent. A voice that defies boundaries and redefines what music can mean to a people. To say that Zubeen Garg revolutionised music of our time is not hyperbole—it is a historical truth, etched in the hearts of millions and sung along the banks of the Brahmaputra.

Born in Jorhat, Assam, in 1972, Zubeen Garg inherited music like a sacred flame. His mother, Ily Borthakur, was a singer and his father, Mohini Borthakur (pen name Kapil Thakur), a lyricist. Music was not a profession—it was a calling. From an early age, Zubeen displayed an uncanny ability to absorb, adapt, and innovate. He was not content with imitation; he sought immersion.

His debut album Anamika (1992) was a quiet storm. It carried the scent of Assamese soil, the pulse of youth, and the promise of a new voice. But Zubeen was never meant to be confined to one language, one region, or one genre. He was destined to flow—like the Brahmaputra—across borders, breaking dams of convention. Zubeen Garg's musical revolution lies in his polyphony—not just in sound, but in spirit. He sings in over 40 languages, including Assamese, Bengali, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Punjabi, and Nepali. His voice is a bridge between cultures, a thread that weaves together the diverse musical traditions of India. This multilingual mastery is not a gimmick—it is a philosophy. Zubeen believes that music must speak to everyone, everywhere. His songs are not just heard; they are felt. Whether it is the haunting "Ya Ali" from Gangster (2006) or the soulful "Mayabini" in Assamese, Zubeen's voice carries emotion like a river carries memory.

He does not merely perform songs—he inhabits them. His vocal range, emotional depth, and stylistic versatility allow him to move from devotional hymns to rock anthems, from romantic ballads to protest songs. In Zubeen's

music, there is no hierarchy of genre—only the democracy of feeling. For decades, Bollywood dominated the Indian music scene, often sidelining regional voices. Zubeen Garg challenged this hegemony—not by rejecting Bollywood, but by infiltrating it. His breakout hit "Ya Ali" was not just a chartbuster; it was a cultural rupture. It introduced a new soundscape—infused with Sufi mysticism, Assamese tonality, and raw emotion. Zubeen's success in Bollywood opened doors for other regional artists. He proved that talent need not be diluted to be accepted. He sang with his accent, his soul, his truth. In doing so, he redefined what it meant to be a pan-Indian artist. Yet, Zubeen never abandoned his roots. He continued to produce Assamese albums, mentor local musicians, and perform in village fairs with the same passion as in metropolitan concerts. His revolution was not about assimilation—it was about assertion.

One of Zubeen Garg's most profound contributions is the revival of folk music. In an age of auto-tuned pop and synthetic beats, Zubeen returned to the dhol, the pepa, the toka. He reimagined Bihu songs, reinterpreted Zikir and Borgeet, and brought forgotten melodies back to life. His folk renditions are not museum pieces—they are living art. He infuses them with contemporary arrangements, making them accessible to younger generations without losing their essence. In doing so, he has preserved and popularised the musical heritage of Assam and the Northeast. Zubeen's cultural renaissance extends beyond music. He is a filmmaker, actor, and activist. His films like Mission China and Kanchanjan-ganga explore themes of identity, resistance, and belonging. His lyrics often carry philosophical depth, invoking Sankardev, Bhupen Hazarika, and even global icons like Bob Dylan. Zubeen Garg is not just a musician—he is a movement. He is a rebel with a cause. His songs are often laced with protest, satire, and social commentary. He sings against corruption, injustice, and apathy. He has been vocal in movements like anti-CAA protests, environmental campaigns, and mental health awareness.

His song "Ei Prithibi Ekhan Krirangan" is not just a melody—it is a manifesto. It calls upon listeners to wake up, to act, to change. Zubeen's activism is not performative—it is personal. He walks in rallies, speaks at forums, and uses his platform to amplify unheard voices. This fusion of art and activism is rare. Zubeen does not separate his music from his mission. He believes that a song can be a sword, a balm, a prayer. His revolution is not just sonic—it is spiritual.

Zubeen Garg's creative process is as unconventional as his persona. His studio is a sanctuary, a laboratory, a temple. He records late into the night, often composing spontaneously. He writes his own lyrics, plays multiple instruments, and experiments with soundscapes. This hands-on approach gives his music authenticity. It is not manufactured—it is manifested. His albums are not commercial products—they are emotional journeys. He does not chase trends; he creates them. Zubeen's prolific output—over 30,000 songs—is staggering. But quantity never compromises quality. Each song carries a signature—a whisper of the river, a flicker of rebellion, a heartbeat of romance. Zubeen Garg's music has crossed oceans. His concerts

in London, New York, Dubai, and Singapore draw diasporic crowds who find in his voice a piece of home. His collaborations with international artists reflect his openness to fusion, dialogue, and innovation. Yet, he remains deeply rooted. He sings in village dialects, performs in rural festivals, and supports local causes. His revolution is not about escape—it is about expansion. He brings the world to Assam and Assam to the world. This duality—global resonance and local roots—is the hallmark of Zubeen's genius. He is both cosmopolitan and indigenous, both avant-garde and ancestral. Today when he is no more living because of the mysterious situation during diving, Zubeen Garg's lyrics are being discussed more deeply. His fans now discover philosophical undertones. He sings of impermanence, longing, and liberation. His songs are meditations on life, death, and the divine. He invokes metaphors of rivers, birds, stars, and shadows.

In "Mon Jaai," he sings of the soul's journey. In "Tumi Mur Mathu Mur," he explores the pain of separation. In "Bohag Mathu Eti Ritu Noi," he celebrates the cyclical nature of existence. These are not mere songs—they are sutras. Zubeen's philosophical depth is not academic—it is experiential. He sang what he lived what he lost, what he learnt. His music was a diary, a dialogue, a dharma. Zubeen Garg was a mythic figure. His tattoos, his eccentric fashion, his candid interviews—all contributed to his aura. He was often compared to Bob Dylan, Freddie Mercury, and Bhupen Hazarika. Yet, he remained uniquely himself. He was afraid of vulnerability. He spoke of his struggles with depression, addiction, and rejection. He embraced imperfection. In doing so, he becomes relatable, real, revolutionary. His fans see him as a healer, a prophet, a friend. His concerts are not performances—they are pilgrimages. His songs are not hits—they are hymns. As Zubeen Garg enters new phases of his career—mentoring young artists, directing films, exploring fusion—his revolution continues. He is not content with legacy; he seeks evolution.

He dreamt of a music academy in Assam, of global collaborations, of spiritual albums. He wanted to create not just songs, but systems—platforms for creativity, community, and change. His road ahead was not linear—it was labyrinthine. But like the Brahmaputra, he will find his way. He will carve new paths, flood new fields, and sing new songs.

To say Zubeen Garg revolutionised music of our time is to acknowledge a seismic shift. He changed how we listen, how we feel, how we fight, how we heal. He made music a mirror, a movement, a mantra. His revolution is not over—it is ongoing. It flows in every young singer who dares to dream, in every folk tune reborn, in every protest sung. Zubeen Garg is no more in corporeal form. But in our mind he lives for ever not just as a musician—he is music itself. And as long as there is a song to be sung, a truth to be told, a river to be remembered—Zubeen will be singing till eternity.

(The writer of the obituary is International Tagore Award writer Dr. Ratan Bhattacharjee, a formerly Affiliate Faculty Virginia Commonwealth University. Email: profpratanbhattacharjee@gmail.com)

# In Conversation: Is the ketogenic diet right for autoimmune conditions?

By: Yasemin Nicola Sakay

The ketogenic diet has been the center of some controversy over the years. It is characterized by a very low consumption of carbohydrates—less than 50 grams Trusted Source a day—offset by a higher proportion Trusted Source of fat. Its opponents often demonize it for cutting out whole food groups while its advocates maintain that its benefits outweigh the risks.

However, apart from its well-studied benefits in managing epilepsy in children Trusted Source, evidence for its other potential advantages—such as reducing inflammation—has remained scarce, at least in humans.

What's certain for now, however, is that we are still uncovering the exact mechanisms behind why and how this diet works and impacts health.

In the latest installment of our In Conversation podcast, we discuss the benefits and drawbacks of following a ketogenic diet while diving into how the diet may potentially impact autoimmune conditions such as lupus, with Dr. Susan A. Masino of Trinity College, Vernon D. Roosa professor of Applied Science, and author of "Ketogenic Diet and Metabolic Therapies: Expanded Roles in Health and Disease" weighing in as an expert, and Shea, who has trialled the diet with his lupus, sharing his personal experience.

You can listen to this month's episode below, or on your preferred streaming platform:

## How keto came to be

In 2021, the ketogenic diet officially marked its 100th anniversary Trusted Source. In the 1920s, the keto diet was introduced as an alternative therapy to help children with epilepsy after doctors saw that mimicking the metabolism of fasting not only improved symptoms but also helped control seizures Trusted Source.

"The diet was used to try and treat epilepsy because it had been observed when people who had seizures didn't eat [carbohydrates] the seizures would stop. But, of course, that wasn't sustainable. So, it was sort of developed to try and further explore this therapeutic potential of fasting, in epilepsy. It was effective in adults and children," said Dr. Masino.

## Mimicking 'starvation'

Keto's main mechanism of action is via prompting the body to switch into a different energy-forming process—using fat rather than simple carbohydrates (such as glucose and fructose) and complex carbohydrates (such as starch and dietary fibers) as its primary source for fuel.

When the liver starts breaking down fats, it starts producing chemicals called ketones. When

the level of ketones in the blood reach the appropriate level, and the body relies on fat, or specifically ketone bodies Trusted Source, for energy, it enters a metabolic state called ketosis.

"When you have restricted carbohydrates, or just insufficient calories, you will start generating ketone bodies instead of glucose. And so your body will be using these ketones for fuel," explained Dr. Masino.

The keto diet, in a sense, stresses the body initially, which sparks a protective response much like exercise does to muscles. As a result, it reduces inflammation Trusted Source, oxidative stress Trusted Source, and sensitivity within the nervous system—all of which can help with managing chronic pain.

Dr. Masino underscored that it isn't always necessarily a 'stress-inducing state' for the body when it produces ketones, and evolutionarily, humans have experienced this state quite frequently when there was less available food.

She added that the body can start generating ketones even in "a relatively short duration of insufficient calories or restricted carbohydrates."

"I think the best way to think about how a ketogenic diet works is that it works in many ways, on many different cellular processes, and tissues in the body. And that makes it difficult to study and nail down what is the mechanism, but also makes it very powerful in that it has a number of different mechanisms."

— Dr. Susan A. Masino

Multiple mechanisms of action Using food—the fuel we use for many metabolic processes in the body—as potential treatments for metabolic-related disorders or chronic conditions is nothing new.

Dr. Masino elaborated on the multiplicity of mechanisms of the keto diet:

"[It may] address a number of different conditions because it can increase energy production, reduce inflammation. [A] lot of my work has been centered on adenosine, which is a really interesting molecule that is involved in communication between nerve cells—it's involved in energy cycles, it can impact DNA methylation."

She added that the ketogenic diet increases production of adenosine.

Although many people report rapid weight loss while on a keto diet, the reverse—in less extreme—has also been true.

"What's been amazing to me is that this kind of ketone-based metabolism seems to help people who are overweight to lose weight. But it [also] helps people who are underweight or animal models that suffer from underweight to maintain and stabilize



their weight. So it's not always a weight loss diet," said Dr. Masino.

Dr. Masino believes the keto diet may help restore a state of physiological balance.

"It's almost something that I think through this multiplicity of mechanisms [that] is helping your body to get to its sort of ideal physiological state, where it is then more resilient to other stresses that may come in on it," she said.

"If you have a more resilient physiology that's less inflammatory, has great mitochondrial energy production—which the ketogenic diet absolutely does—then you can fend off assaults from all of the things that our bodies are assaulted with."

— Dr. Susan Masino

How the diet may potentially help autoimmune conditions lies in these yet-uncovered mechanisms.

**Keto, the microbiome, and inflammatory pain**

Interest in the gut microbiome, and how it can influence the body and brain, has been growing over the last few decades.

Previous research Trusted Source has shown that diet can influence inflammatory pain, finding particular links between a Standard American Diet (SAD) Trusted Source, which is typically high in processed foods, fats, and carbohydrates, and chronic inflammation.

"The fastest way to change your microbiome is through diet. So it's not surprising that this would have a rapid effect, and that changes signaling in your brain and in your body," said Dr. Masino.

Her research, for example, was based on the hypothesis that ketone-based metabolism could increase adenosine—a molecule that could be instrumental in the body's inflammatory response.

"Adenosine is also released during any kind of injury or wound during that inflammatory process. And that's something that can help with the healing. It's a very powerful anti-convulsant molecule," she elaborated.

She hypothesized that the keto diet could be a way to promote the neuroprotective and anti-seizure benefits of this molecule,

which could help regulate the nervous system.

"There's a lot of interest now in trying to use these metabolic approaches, particularly ketogenic approaches in mental illness, which are all of our neurological disorders are associated with a metabolic and inflammatory component," she added.

**Disrupting pain signals in the body**

As for keto's inflammation-reducing benefits, Dr. Masino elaborated on the mechanism:

"Inflammation itself is something that can cause pain. So reducing the inflammation in general, so that it's not chronic or inappropriate, is itself a critical kind of pain disorder benefit of the ketogenic diet."

"More specifically, if we increase adenosine in the central nervous system, that means the brain and the spinal cord—if the ketogenic diet is able to do that—that helps calm down the nerve cells directly so that they're not firing and sending that pain signal."

— Dr. Susan Masino

"If you have better metabolism, if your mitochondria are in good shape, that helps to clean up all the broken things and keep your cells functioning and able to recover at a cellular level. If we can reduce the pro-inflammatory cytokines, that is another important mechanism," she added.

Another way a ketogenic diet may help calm down chronic pain arising from an overexcited and overstimulated nervous system is via ketones.

One ketone, called Beta-hydroxybutyrate Trusted Source, can block the immune system receptors linked to inflammation, and help decrease nervous system activity.

**How essential are ketones?**

However, it remains unclear whether such ketone bodies produced in a ketogenic diet are essential for mediating pain and inflammatory responses, or whether following a low-glucose diet could also produce similar results. "In some specific pain conditions, or epilepsy conditions or inflammatory conditions, maybe the ketone bodies are critical in that case, and in other

cases, maybe just reducing and stabilizing glucose is enough to relieve those symptoms," said Dr. Masino.

**Addressing controversies on keto**

The low fiber, high fat content of the keto diet, as well as its effects on weight and its sustainability in the long term have been the main areas of concern.

**Is a high fat diet always bad?**

One particular area of controversy for keto is its high fat content—both in saturated and unsaturated fats.

"This has been related to changes in dietary recommendations, where fat was basically vilified and became another focus of changing our food system so that we eat less fat and less saturated fat. So [the ketogenic diet] became not only perceived as less scientific, but actually dangerous to eat this much fat," explained Dr. Masino.

High fat diets aren't necessarily bad, stressed Dr. Masino.

"It's really high fat diets in combination with carbohydrates that have those toxic effects," she said. Dr. Hilary Guite pointed out the main problem many people have when following a diet higher in fat.

"If you have a high fat diet, in the face of low carbs, your body reacts very differently to the fat. It starts using them. Whereas if you have a standard American diet, then you're having high fat and high carbs. And that's where the danger from fats coming," she said.

Dr. Masino agreed.

"That's exactly the issue. [It is a] completely different environment with high fat and restricted carbohydrate versus high fat and high carbohydrate, which is the environment that most of us are physiologically, in most of the time, which is much more pro-inflammatory, will cause you to gain weight. [W]hereas [with] high fat, low carb, you're not putting on weight, you're maintaining your weight," she said.

**Will keto lead to high cholesterol?**

Keto's impact on lipids because of its high saturated fat content has been another aspect deemed controversial. Consuming saturated fats, which are found in butter, cheese, and fatty meats, has been linked to higher total and low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL-C) levels, which can increase the risk for heart attack and stroke.

However, it appears that high saturated fat diets increase the larger buoyant sub fraction of LDL-C Trusted Source (which have not been associated with increased cardiovascular disease). Furthermore a keto diet results in decreases in the small dense sub fraction of LDL-C, high levels of which have been associated with increased heart attack and stroke.

However, there is conflicting

evidence Trusted Source in the literature about keto's impact on cholesterol and cardiovascular disease, and can lead to alarming rises of LDL-C though case studies like this do not distinguish the type of LDL-C.

"There has been a concern that if the diet increases your cholesterol levels, [then] that would be a hallmark for cardio metabolic problem[s]. I think we need to reevaluate the mantra that cholesterol is the villain in terms of cardio metabolic issues," said Dr. Masino.

**Does keto deplete healthy gut bacteria?**

Dr. Guite, meanwhile, expressed concern about the health of the gut microbiome while on the keto diet. She said recent research Trusted Source has indicated that children on long-term ketogenic diets had lower levels of gut bacteria that protect the gut lining.

"If you take away those legumes and the high fiber foods, then the bacteria can start using the mucus around the lining and actually damage the gut [in the] long term. What do you think the impact of a long term ketogenic diet is on the gut microbiome and the integrity of the gut lining?" asked Dr. Guite.

Dr. Masino acknowledged that, especially in the absence of a trained dietician, such negative effects may be seen.

"I do want to mention that dietitians actually recommend eating prebiotic foods like fermented foods [such as] pickles, sauerkraut. [P]rebiotic foods like that might be really protective against that possible negative consequence," she said.

There is also research that suggests the ketogenic diet can increase certain types of gut bacteria, such as Akkermansia muciniphila Trusted Source, one of several markers of good metabolic health that occur on the keto diet.

**Lived experience: Lupus and keto**

To see if the keto diet may actually help improve the management or severity of pain and inflammation-related symptoms, Medical News Today asked Shea, who has lupus, about his experience on-and-off the diet over the years.

Shea first described how he felt after his body had switched into a state of ketosis.

"I initially had a lot of gastrointestinal problems, [a] bit of stomach gurgling, bloating, [feeling] really, really lethargic. And I didn't really want to do much, [it] felt like a headache as well. And that lasted for about four or five days," he said.

These symptoms are more commonly referred to as the "keto flu Trusted Source".

**What makes keto hard to follow**  
On a more personal level, Shea also shared his struggles with

strictly following the diet, especially in social settings.

"It was very hard to do in the beginning. Because in the beginning, you just want a cake, cookies, bread, rice, anything. And then you have to realize that those are all things that you can't really eat," he said.

Shea said one of the hardest switches he had to do was with snacks because most of them were very high in carbohydrates. "So you have to make your own kind of snack or just have a slice of cheese to hold you down," he said.

Around the 2-month mark is when Shea grew accustomed to the keto diet and he knew what he could eat.

## Less inflammation

Although Shea didn't adopt this diet specifically to see whether it helped with his lupus, he did see positive changes in the management and frequency of his symptoms.

"I didn't start the diet to help with my autoimmune disease. It was mainly for health. And this was just a side effect of what happened with it," he explained.

"Before I started the keto diet, I would take about two to three allergy tablets a day. And then when I was on the keto diet, probably at the 2-month mark, I wasn't taking that many tablets anymore. It was usually about one a day. And it got to the point where I was taking half a tablet a day or I can miss a day and I would still be fine. And the longest I've gone is about three days without taking medication."

Shea, on his experience with lupus and the keto diet

## Reduced pain

In terms of chronic pain, Shea also saw improvements.

"When I was on the diet, my pain, I could almost feel that it would reduce the longer I was on it. And it wasn't as [wide]spread over as it was before. Because before I would feel it in almost all my joints, and it would feel quite stiff," he said.

## Is keto sustainable?

Dr. Masino reiterated that there are certain situations where it's a recommended diet, such as in epilepsy. There are also instances where it's not, which are very easily determined, she said.

But when it comes to long-term concerns, Dr. Masino believes—with the correct guidance—the keto diet can be sustainable.

Shea believes, for him, it's not a diet that he can do in the long term.

"It's not very sustainable [because] you're just constantly eating fatty foods. And you will get to the point where you want to go out for a meal with some friends or you want to go on a date or anything like that. And you can't really get the options for a keto diet out there," he said. (Courtesy: MNT)

# Clearing the Air for TB-free India: The last mile imperative

By: Nimisha Chadha

India's fight against tuberculosis (TB) spans from early mentions in ancient scriptures and foundational Ayurvedic literature to the 21st century. Despite being a preventable and treatable disease, its eradication is a challenge. TB is the largest contributor to deaths worldwide from a single infectious agent. Between 2015 and 2023, India saw an 18 percent decline in TB incidence from 237 to 195 cases per 100,000 population—outpacing the global average by double. Simultaneously, mortality declined by 21 percent from 28 to 22 per 100,000 population. However, India continues to have the highest (26 percent) TB burden globally.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), several factors contribute to the burden of TB, including broader socio-economic determinants and other risk factors linked to health. The primary factors include the mycobacterium tuberculosis (MTB) strain factor (gene mutation, drug-resistant MTB), host factors such as genetics, history of contact, malnutrition, dual infections and co-morbid conditions, socio-economic factors including population density, immigration, stigmatisation, and health resources allocation among others, and environmental factors including temperature, pressure, and precipitation. However, emerging evidence points to another determinant of TB transmission, progression, and treatment outcomes—air pollution.

## TB and Air Pollution

In 2025, the WHO acknowledged the link between air pollution and TB. The increasing exposure to pollutants above acceptable thresholds for the majority of the population worldwide can not only alter lung function by inducing oxidative stress and inflammation and weaken immune responses, but also allow particulate matter (PM) to act as carriers of airborne MTB, thereby increasing vulnerability to TB.

Various studies indicate that both short-term and long-term exposure to air pollutants increases the susceptibility to an MTB infection and progression to active disease. Research has long established the link between indoor air pollution (IAP) and the incidence of TB. Emerging evidence is increasingly recognising outdoor air pollution (OAP) as a contributor to TB as well.

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the majority of the population worldwide can not only alter lung function by inducing oxidative stress and inflammation and weaken immune responses, but also allow particulate matter (PM) to act as carriers of airborne MTB, thereby increasing vulnerability to TB.

## 1. Incidence

Research indicates that exposure to both IAP and OAP can contribute to an increase in active TB cases, particularly pulmonary TB (PTB). Of the total incidence of TB globally in 2024, an estimated 81 percent of cases were found to have PTB. A 2021 meta-analysis found that long-term exposure to air pollutants was associated with higher TB incidence. Specifically, for every 10 µg/m<sup>3</sup> rise in particulate matter with an aerodynamic diameter ≤10 µm (PM10) concentrations, the relative risk of TB increased by 5.8 percent. Similarly, a 1 ppb increase in sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) and nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) was associated with a 1.6 percent and 1.0 percent rise in TB incidence, respectively.

Air pollutants, such as PM<sub>2.5</sub>, PM10 and SO<sub>2</sub>, when inhaled, dampen natural defence barriers of the respiratory tract. IAP has been found to be associated with TB risk as well, with solid fuel and kerosene use for heating and cooking purposes associated with a higher likelihood of active TB.

A study from China found a lagged relationship between air pollution and PTB incidence. Increases in PM<sub>2.5</sub>, NO<sub>2</sub>, SO<sub>2</sub> and carbon monoxide (CO) were associated with a rise in PTB incidence after a lag of three months, while exposure to ozone (O<sub>3</sub>) was linked to an increase within the same month. For PM10, the increase in incidence appeared after a lag of around nine months. A 2020 study from Korea further indicated that the relationship between exposure to PM10 and TB incidence strengthened with longer durations of exposure.

**2. Treatment Outcomes, Disease Progression and Drug-Resistant Tuberculosis**

Associations have been found between exposure to air pollutants and unfavourable treatment outcomes as well—including recurrent morbidity, disability, and mortality—limiting the effectiveness of TB treatment. Pollutants impairing the host's lung immunity may also create a biologically favourable environment for the reactivation of MTB.

Additionally, a study found that high exposure to PM<sub>2.5</sub>, PM10 and CO was significantly associated with an increased incidence of MDR. Short-

term exposure to air pollutants can aggravate drug-resistant tuberculosis (DR-TB) symptoms; particularly, NO<sub>2</sub> exposure was associated with a 15.9 percent higher risk of a first-time outpatient visit for acute DR-TB exacerbations.

Women and children in solid-fuel-dependent households are particularly vulnerable and face higher susceptibility to TB. Climate change is expected to worsen these challenges, not only through higher exposure to pollutants, but also through extreme weather events and increasing outdoor pollution, driving people indoors, often in poorly ventilated spaces.

The cumulative risk of PM10 on TB-associated mortality can be seen even with exposure to concentrations as low as 15 µg/m<sup>3</sup>, and long-term exposure can be of significant harm to MDR patients, with effects varying with temperature and humidity levels. Additionally, a study found that higher concentrations of air pollutants in the living environment of newly treated TB patients were associated with greater risks of death as well.

**3. Vulnerable Populations and Risk Stratification**

According to the WHO, IAP from burning solid fuels disproportionately affects those from weaker socio-economic backgrounds. Women and children in solid-fuel-dependent households are particularly vulnerable and face higher susceptibility to TB. Climate change is expected to worsen these challenges, not only through higher exposure to pollutants, but also through extreme weather events and increasing outdoor pollution, driving people indoors, often in poorly ventilated spaces.

Stratified analysis also showed that elderly patients (≥65 years) and those with a history of TB treatment are more vulnerable to the effects of air pollution. Specifically, SO<sub>2</sub> exposure was linked to symptom flare-ups among the elderly. Other vulnerable populations may include communities that face the double burden of both high TB prevalence and exposure to air pollution, such as the urban poor. This is especially true for slum dwellers in megacities, who face a five-fold risk of TB in India and are regularly exposed to air pollutants.

Even though tribal populations comprise about 8.4 percent of India's population, 63 percent of 170 tribal districts report TB rates above the national average, and continue to remain marginalised, despite schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) to reduce IAP, with Scheduled Tribes found to benefit the least

from PMUY, limiting reductions in IAP.

## The Indian Context

All of India is exposed to unhealthy levels of PM<sub>2.5</sub>. In 2019 alone, 1.67 million deaths (17.8 percent of all deaths) in India were attributed to air pollution. Additionally, 40 percent of the Indian population is estimated to be infected with MTB. Decades of unrestrained transmission have left many Indians with latent TB infection (LTBI). Further, according to the WHO, India hosted 27 percent of the global multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR) cases in 2023. Together, this presents a major obstacle for TB eradication, with poor air quality increasing the likelihood of LTBI reactivation. While TB shares social determinants and comorbidity risks with a range of health conditions—including Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and diabetes—the relative burden in India underscores a policy gap. HIV dramatically increases the risk of developing active TB (by around eightfold), but People Living with HIV (PLHIV) account for just 5 percent of new TB cases each year (about 100,000 cases), even as TB contributes to 25 percent of deaths among this population. Diabetes is linked to 10 percent of TB cases globally. Decades of unrestrained transmission have left many Indians with latent TB infection (LTBI). Further, according to the WHO, India hosted 27 percent of the global multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR) cases in 2023. Together, this presents a major obstacle for TB eradication, with poor air quality increasing the likelihood of LTBI reactivation.

In contrast, approximately 26 percent of all TB cases are attributed to IAP. Meanwhile, the impact of OAP is still being studied. Although India's response to HIV- and diabetes-associated TB, along with other determinants of TB, has been robust, the impact of air pollution on TB merits greater integration into elimination strategies.

## Current Policy Framework

India's remarkable progress in combating tuberculosis can be attributed to the long-standing commitment of the state to eradicating it. In 1962, India launched the National TB Programme (NTP), followed by the Revised National Tuberculosis Control Programme (RNTCP) in 1997, which was renamed in 2020 as the National Tuberculosis Elimination Program (NTEP) after the government's 2018 declaration of 'TB-Mukt Bharat' (TB-Free India) by 2025—five years ahead of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN-SDGs) target of ending the TB

epidemic by 2030, to which India is a signatory.

To bolster efforts and tackle the problem of missing cases, India launched the '100 Day TB Elimination' campaign in December 2024, aimed at initiating early treatment and preventing deaths. Resultantly, 129.7 million vulnerable individuals were screened, and 0.719 million new TB cases were detected. While the overall progress in TB reduction has been commendable, in absolute numbers, the TB burden is still significant and far from the target of 44 new cases per 100,000 population.

As India develops its strategy for last-mile efforts in TB eradication, the approach should be broadened to consider TB within the context of wider lung health challenges—where air pollutants play a significant role in disease transmission, progression, and mortality.

Currently, the National Strategic Plan for Tuberculosis: 2017-15 (NSP 2017-25) lists indoor air pollution as a determinant of TB, and discusses efforts under the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY), which provides LPG connections to low-income households dependent on solid fuels to improve indoor air quality and reduce the incidence of TB. However, despite the increasing number of connections under PMUY, refill rates remain low among the beneficiaries. Moreover, there is no explicit framework to tackle TB in the context of air pollution.

As India develops its strategy for last-mile efforts in TB eradication, the approach should be broadened to consider TB within the context of wider lung health challenges—where air pollutants play a significant role in disease transmission, progression, and mortality.

## Way Forward

Explicit and sustained integration of TB and air pollution policies is essential to reduce India's TB burden. Embedding air quality considerations in TB elimination strategies, expanding surveillance for both IAP and OAP exposure, and prioritising high-risk populations are necessary. Given that TB is influenced by multiple intertwined health and environmental factors, adopting a 'One Health' approach that embeds environmental health, particularly air pollution, within TB frameworks can help address the disease comprehensively. In forthcoming work, a dedicated issue brief will explore cross-sectoral policies and innovative models that can operationalise this integration and accelerate India's TB elimination efforts. (Courtesy: ORF)

# Stopped India-Pak conflict with trade, should get Nobel Prize for ending seven wars: Trump

Trump announced on social media that India and Pakistan had agreed to a 'full and immediate' ceasefire after a 'long night'

**NEW YORK/WASHINGTON, Sept 21:** US President Donald Trump has repeated his claim that he solved the India-Pakistan conflict earlier this year with trade and asserted that he should get the Nobel Peace Prize for "ending seven wars".

Since May 10, when Trump announced on social media that India and Pakistan had agreed to a "full and immediate" ceasefire after a "long night" of talks mediated by Washington, he has repeated his claim over 40 times that he "helped settle" the tensions between India and Pakistan.

India has consistently denied any third-party intervention.

"On the world stage, we are once again doing things that we are just respected at a level that we have never been respected before. We are forging peace agreements, and we are stopping wars. So we stopped wars between India and Pakistan, Thailand and Cambodia," Trump said at the American Cornerstone Institute Founder's Dinner on Saturday.

He went on to say, "Think of India and Pakistan. Think of that. And you know how I stopped that -- with trade. They want to trade. And I have great respect for both



leaders. But when you take a look at all of these wars that we've stopped."

"Just look at that. India, Pakistan, Thailand, Cambodia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kosovo and Serbia, Israel and Iran, Egypt and Ethiopia, Rwanda and the Congo.

We stopped all of them. And 60 per cent of them were stopped because of trade," the US president claimed.

He added that "like with India, I said, 'look, we're not going to do any trade if you're going to fight and they have nuclear weapons. They stopped.'" India launched Operation Sindoor on May 7, targeting terror infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir in retaliation for the April 22 Pahalgam attack that killed 26 civilians.

India and Pakistan reached an understanding on May 10 to end the conflict after four days of intense cross-border drone and missile strikes. India has been consistently maintaining that the understanding on cessation of hostilities with Pakistan was reached following direct talks between the Directors General of Military Operations (DGMOs) of the two militaries. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has made it clear in Parlia-

ment that no leader of any country asked India to stop Operation Sindoor. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has categorically said there was no third-party intervention in bringing about a ceasefire with Pakistan during Operation Sindoor. Trump said he was told that if he could stop the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, he should get the Nobel Prize. "I said, 'Well, what about the seven others? I should get a Nobel Prize for each one'. So they said, 'but if you stop Russia and Ukraine, sir, you should be able to get the Nobel'. I said I stopped seven wars. That's one war, and that's a big one," Trump said. He added that he had thought the Russia-Ukraine conflict would be easy to resolve "because I have a good relationship with President Putin, disappointed in him, but I do. I thought that would be the easiest one, but we'll get it done one way or the other." (PTI)

# Saudi Arabia major source of cheap foreign loans for Pakistan: Report



**ISLAMABAD, Sept 21:** Saudi Arabia remains the major source of cheap foreign loans for Pakistan, charging an annual interest rate of only 4 per cent, a media report said on Sunday.

Riyadh charged a 4 per cent interest rate on two separate cash deposit facilities obtained by Islamabad in recent years, according to official records. The loan, originally contracted for one year, has yet to be repaid. The Express Tribune reported.

The kingdom has been rolling it over annually without imposing additional costs.

The Saudi loans are about one-third cheaper than Chinese cash deposits and less than half the cost of foreign commercial borrowing, the report added.

A USD 2 billion Saudi cash deposit facility is set to mature in December, and the Ministry of Finance plans to roll it over again, according to the report, which quoted sources as saying.

Another USD 3 billion Saudi loan, obtained to plug the external financing gap under the IMF programme, will mature in June next year.

The IMF has stipulated that Pakistan's three bilateral creditors, Saudi Arabia, China and the United Arab Emirates, must maintain their cash deposits until the completion of the three-year programme.

Together, these countries have provided USD 12 billion in deposits, forming the bulk of the central bank's USD 14.3 billion gross foreign exchange reserves, the report said.

IMF programmes are no longer as effective in helping Pakistan as they were in the past. The central bank had to purchase over USD 8 billion from the local market to meet maturing debt obligations, despite the IMF package.

The Finance Ministry is reportedly more dependent on multilateral banks' credit guarantees to access international markets, as the global lender's economic "clean bill of health" is no longer sufficient on its own.

Sources said that while Saudi loans carry a 4 per cent interest rate, Pakistan is paying around 6.1 per cent on four cash deposit facil-

ities worth USD 4 billion.

These facilities are priced at the six-month Secured Overnight Financing Rate (SOFR) plus 1.72 per cent, making them significantly more expensive than Saudi deposits. However, the Saudi Oil facility of USD 1.2 billion is obtained at a flat 6 per cent interest rate, the report quoted sources as saying.

The Chinese facilities, maturing between March and July next year, are also expected to be rolled over in light of IMF conditions and Pakistan's low foreign exchange reserves. Among the costliest foreign commercial loans was one from Standard Chartered Bank, which extended USD 400 million for six months at an interest rate of 8.2 per cent in the last fiscal year. The loan was contracted at the six-month SOFR plus a 3.9 per cent margin, the report said.

Likewise, the United Bank Limited arranged a USD 300 million loan for merely 10 months at an interest rate of 12-month SOFR plus 3.5 per cent, which was also equal to a 7.2 per cent interest rate, it added, quoting sources. The UAE had initially given a USD 2 billion loan to Pakistan at an interest rate of 3 per cent, but its last USD 1 billion facility was obtained at 6.5 per cent in 2024 ahead of the IMF deal. Pakistan also obtained a USD 1 billion loan from the commercial banks for a period of five years at an estimated rate of 7.22 per cent. Over 7.2 per cent rate is paid despite the Asian Development Bank having provided partial guarantees to the foreign lenders, it said, quoting sources. Pakistan is also availing Chinese commercial loans, which are now converted into Chinese currency from USD. The rates on these Chinese facilities vary. The USD 2.1 billion equal Chinese commercial facility is refinanced for a period of three years at roughly 4.5 per cent interest rate, said sources. Likewise, the USD 300 million Bank of China loan is taken for two years at a 6.5 per cent interest rate, and another USD 200 million is obtained at a 7.3 per cent interest rate, sources added. A USD 1.3 billion loan from Industrial and Commercial Bank of China was taken at a flat 4.5 per cent interest rate, according to The Express Tribune. (PTI)

# Fallout from cyberattack on check-in systems at 3 European airports continues for 2nd day

**BRUSSELS, Sept 21:** Fallout from a cyberattack that affected check-in systems at several European airports extended into a second full day on Sunday, as passengers faced dozens of cancelled and delayed flights and airport teams scrambled to limit the damage to travel plans.

Starting late Friday, major airports in Brussels, London and Berlin were hit by disruptions to electronic systems that snarled up check-in and sent airline staffers trying options like hand-writing boarding passes or using backup laptops. Many other European airports were unaffected.

It was not immediately clear who might be behind the cyberattack, but experts said it could turn out to be hackers, criminal organisations, or state actors.

The cyberattack affected the software of Collins Aerospace, whose systems help passengers check in, print boarding passes and bag tags, and dispatch their luggage. The U.S.-based company on Saturday cited a "cyber-related disruption" to its software at "select" airports in Europe.

While departure boards for London's Heathrow and Berlin's Brandenburg airports were showing signs of smoother arrivals and departures on Sunday, Brussels Airport was still facing considerable issues.

Ihsane Chioua Lekhli, a spokesperson for Brussels Airport, said 45 outbound and 30 inbound flights were cancelled on Sunday, more than double the number a day earlier: 25 departures and 13 ar-

rivals cancelled.

The cyberattack affected only computer systems at check-in desks, not self-service kiosks, she said, and teams were turning to alternative backup systems and pulling out laptop computers to help cope with the impact.

It remained unclear when the situation would be fixed, she said: "For now, we have no idea on the timing, we're taking it day by day."

The airports advised passengers to check the status of their flights before travelling to the airports, and to use alternative check-in methods.

"Work continues to resolve and recover from Friday's outage of a Collins Aerospace airline system that impacted check-in," a Heathrow statement said. "We apologise to those who have faced delays, but by working together with airlines, the vast majority of flights have continued to operate."

A rolling message on Sunday on the Brandenburg Airport's web page said: "Due to a systems outage at a service provider, there are longer waiting times. Please use online check-in, self-service check-in and the fast bag drop service."

Collins, an aviation and defence technology company that is a subsidiary of RTX Corp., formerly Raytheon Technologies, said on Saturday it was working to resolve the issue.

"The impact is limited to electronic customer check-in and baggage drop and can be mitigated with manual check-in operations," it said in a statement. (AP)

# UK set to recognise Palestinian state despite opposition from US



**LONDON, Sept 21:** The UK is expected to recognise a Palestinian state later Sunday despite opposition from the US, after judging that Israel has not met conditions it set over the war in Gaza.

Though the anticipated move is largely symbolic, the UK hopes that it could increase diplomatic pressure for an end to the conflict in Gaza as well as help pave the way for a long-lasting peace.

Deputy Prime Minister David Lammy, who was foreign secretary until earlier this month, said an announcement on the recognition of a Palestinian state will come later Sunday from Prime Minister Keir Starmer.

"Any decision to recognise a Palestinian state, if that were to take place later on today, does not make a Palestinian state happen overnight," he told Sky News.

He suggested that recognition would help keep the prospect of a two-state solution alive, and stressed that identifying the Palestinian people with Hamas was mistaken.

In July, in the wake of intense pressure within his governing Labour Party, Prime Minister Keir Starmer said the UK would recognise a Palestinian state unless Israel agreed to a ceasefire in Gaza, allowed the UN to bring in aid and took other steps toward long-term peace.

The anticipated move comes ahead of the UN General Assembly this week, where other nations, including Australia, Canada and France, are also readying to recognise a Palestinian state.

The UK's recognition of a Palestinian state comes just days after a state visit from US President Donald

Trump, during which he voiced his disapproval of the plan.

"I have a disagreement with the prime minister on that score," Trump said. "It's one of our few disagreements, actually."

Critics, including the US and the Israeli government, which has shown no interest in a two-state solution, have condemned the plans, saying it rewards Hamas and terrorism.

Starmer has insisted that Hamas will have no role in the future of the governance of the Palestinian people and must release the Israeli hostages it still holds from the attacks on October 7, 2023.

More than 140 countries have already taken the step to recognise a Palestinian state, but the decisions by France and Britain are significant as they are both members of the Group of Seven and the UN Security Council.

The two countries have a historic role in the politics of the Middle East over the past 100 years, having carved out the region following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I.

As part of that carve-up, the UK became the governing power of what was then Palestine. It was also author of the 1917 Balfour Declaration, which backed the establishment of a "national home for the Jewish people."

However, the second part of the declaration has been largely neglected over the decades. It noted "that nothing shall be done, nothing which may prejudice the civil and religious rights" of the Palestinian people. Lammy, who will represent the UK at the UN this week, said in July that this had not been upheld and represented "a historical injustice which continues to unfold." The UK has for decades supported an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel, but insisted recognition must come as part of a peace plan to achieve a two-state solution. However, UK officials have become increasingly worried that such a solution is becoming all but impossible — not only because of the razing of Gaza and displacement of most of its population during nearly two years of conflict, but because Israel's government is aggressively expanding settlements in the West Bank, land Palestinians want for their future state. Much of the world regards Israel's occupation of the West Bank as illegal. (AP)

# Democratic leaders in Congress demand meeting with Trump as govt shutdown looms

**WASHINGTON, Sept 21:** As a possible federal shutdown looms, the Democratic leaders of Congress are demanding a meeting with President Donald Trump to negotiate an end to what they call "your decision" to shutter government offices if no action is taken by the end-of-the-month deadline.

Sen. Chuck Schumer and Rep. Hakeem Jeffries said Saturday that Republicans, at Trump's insistence, have refused to enter talks. Democrats are pushing to preserve healthcare programmes as part of any deal to keep government running past the Sept. 30 funding deadline.

"We write to demand a meeting in connection with your decision to shut down the federal government because of the Republican desire to continue to gut the healthcare of the American people," the two New York Democrats wrote.

"Democrats have been clear and consistent in our position," they said. "We are ready to work toward a bipartisan spending agreement that improves the lives of American families and addresses the Republican healthcare crisis."

Trump, in an exchange with reporters on Saturday evening, suggested that he remains open to a potential meeting but was dismissive of the Democratic leadership. "I'd love to meet with them, but I don't think it's going to have any impact," he said.

Congress, which is controlled by Republicans, failed to address the funding issue before lawmakers left town Friday for a break.

The House approved a Republican proposal to keep the federal government funded into November, but the measure failed in the Senate. A Democratic proposal that would have boosted healthcare funds also failed.

It all leaves Congress and the White House with no easy way out of the standoff that threatens a shutdown in less than two weeks when the current budget year and funding expires. Trump's first term in office saw a month-long shutdown, the longest in federal history, in 2018-2019.

Trump predicted Friday that there could be "a closed country for a period of time." He said the government will continue to "take care" of the military and Social Security payments in a closure.

Republicans have insisted they are not to blame for any possible shutdown, turning it back on Democrats.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., and Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., have put forward the short-term measure, which is a typical way that Congress resolves such logjams. That would keep government operations running at current levels as talks get underway.

While the House was able to narrowly pass the temporary funding measure on a mostly party-line vote, in the Senate the process can require a higher 60-vote threshold that means support is needed from Republicans and Democrats.

Democrats are working to protect health care programs. (AP)

# Taliban rejects Trump's bid

**JALALABAD (AFGHANISTAN), Sept 21:** The Taliban government on Sunday rejected US President Donald Trump's bid to retake Bagram Air Base, four years after America's chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan left the sprawling military facility in the Taliban hands.

It is unclear what conversations the US has had with Afghan officials about returning to the country. But Trump hinted that the Taliban, who have struggled with an economic crisis, international legitimacy, internal rifts and rival militant groups since their return to power in 2021, could be open to allowing the US military back.

The chief Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, rejected Trump's assertions and urged the US to adopt a policy of "realism and rationality." Afghanistan had an economy-oriented foreign policy and sought constructive relations with all states on the basis of mutual and shared interests, Mujahid posted on X.

It had been consistently communicated to the US in all bilateral negotiations that Afghanistan's independence and territorial integrity were of the utmost importance, he said.

"It should be recalled that, under the Doha Agreement, the United States pledged that it will not use or threaten force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Afghanistan, nor interfere in its internal affairs," he said. The US needed to remain faithful to its commitments, he added.

Mujahid did not reply to questions from The Associated Press about conversations with the Trump administration regarding Bagram and why Trump believed the US could retake it. (AP)

# UK joins Australia, Canada in recognising Palestinian state despite opposition from US and Israel



**LONDON, Sept 21:** British Prime Minister Keir Starmer confirmed Sunday that the UK is formally recognising a Palestinian state despite vociferous opposition from the US and Israel.

His announcement follows those from Canada and Australia, in what appears to be a coordinated initiative from the Commonwealth nations.

Starmer, who has faced pressure to take a harder line on Israel within his own governing Labour Party, said the move is intended "to revive the hope of peace for the Palestinians and Israelis" but that it wasn't a reward for Hamas, which he stressed will have no role in any future governance of the Palestinian people.

"We must channel our efforts, united together in hope, behind the peaceful future that we want to see: the release of the hostages, an end to the violence, an end to the suffering and a shift back towards a two-state solution as the best

hope for peace and security for all sides," he said.

Though the move is largely symbolic, it is a historic moment as the UK arguably laid the groundwork for the creation of the Israeli state when it was in control of what was then known as Palestine in 1917.

The announcement was widely anticipated after Starmer said in July that the UK would recognise a Palestinian state unless Israel agreed to a ceasefire in Gaza, allowed the UN to bring in aid and took other steps toward long-term peace.

The UK is not alone in recognising a Palestinian state. More than 140 countries have already taken that step and more are expected to do so at the UN General Assembly this week, including France.

The UK's recognition of a Palestinian state comes just days after a state visit from US President Donald Trump, during which he voiced

his disapproval of the plan.

Critics, including the US and the Israeli government, which has shown no interest in a two-state solution, have condemned the plans, saying it rewards Hamas for its attack on October 7, 2023.

As well as arguing that recognition is immoral, critics argue that it's an empty gesture given that the Palestinian people are divided into two territories — the West Bank and Gaza — with no recognised international capital.

**Historical overlay**

France and the UK have a historic role in the politics of the Middle East over the past 100 years, having carved up the region following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I.

As part of that carve-up, the UK became the governing power of what was then Palestine. It was also author of the 1917 Balfour Declaration, which backed the establishment of a "national home for the Jewish people."

However, the second part of the declaration has been largely neglected over the decades. It noted "that nothing shall be done, nothing which may prejudice the civil and religious rights" of the Palestinian people.

"It's significant for France and the UK to recognise Palestine because of the legacy of these two countries' involvement in the Middle East," said Burcu Ozelik, senior research fellow for Middle East Security at London-based Royal United Services Institute.

"But without the United States coming on board with the idea of a Palestine, I think very little will change on the ground."

The Palestinian head of mission in the UK Husam Zomlot told the BBC that recognition would right a colonial-era wrong.

"The issue today is ending the denial of our existence that started 108 years ago, in 1917," he said. "And I think today, the British people should celebrate a day when history is being corrected, when wrongs are being righted, when recognition of the wrongs of the past are beginning to be corrected."

**Change of tack**

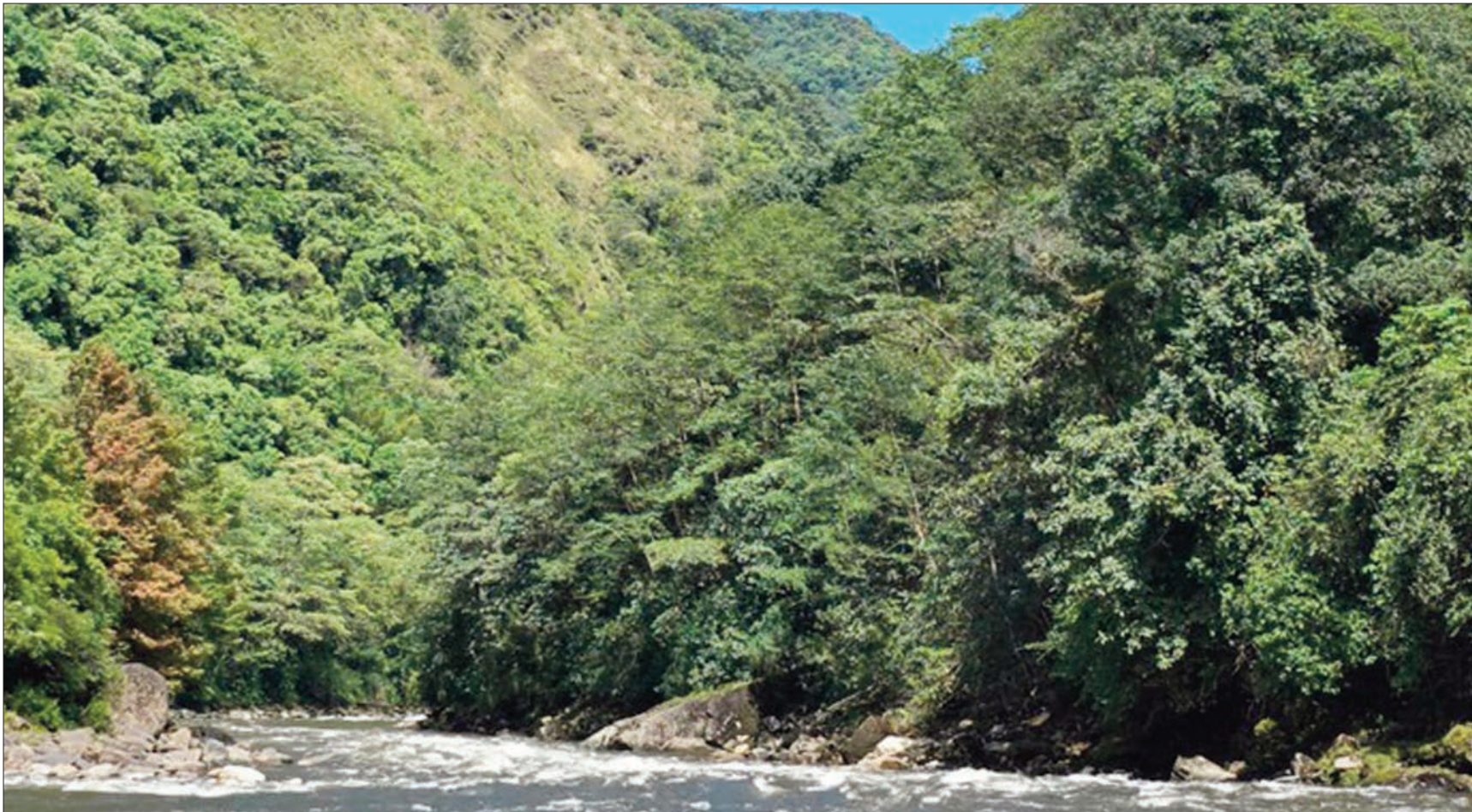
The UK has for decades supported an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel, but insisted recognition must come as part of a peace plan to achieve a two-state solution.

However, the government has become increasingly worried that such a solution is becoming all but impossible — not only because of the razing of Gaza and displacement of most of its population during nearly two years of conflict, but because Israel's government is aggressively expanding settlements in the West Bank, land Palestinians want for their future state. Much of the world regards Israel's occupation of the West Bank, which is ostensibly run by the Palestinian Authority, as illegal.

"This move has symbolic and historic weight, makes clear the UK's concerns about the survival of a two-state solution, and is intended to keep that goal relevant and alive," said Olivia O'Sullivan, Director of the UK in the World Programme at the London-based think tank, Chatham House. (AP)

# PM to visit Arunachal today, unveil infra projects worth ₹ 5,000cr

## Hydro Power Project expected to generate around 802 million units of electricity annually



**ITANAGAR, Sept 21:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Arunachal Pradesh on Monday, during which he will unveil infrastructure projects worth nearly ₹ 5,000 crore.

The PM is scheduled to arrive at the Donyi Polo Airport in Hollongi around 9 am, after which he will fly to the Raj Bhavan in Itanagar on a helicopter, officials said.

He will then travel to Indira Gandhi Park, where he will unveil the development projects and address a rally.

Modi will lay the foundation stones for the Tato-I and Heo hydropower projects, both of which will be developed on the Yarjep River in the Shi Yomi district.

The Tato-I project, with a capacity of 186 mw, will be developed jointly by the Arunachal Pradesh government and the North Eastern Electric Power Corporation Limited (NEEPCO) at ₹ 1,750 crore.

It is expected to generate around 802 million units of electricity annually.

The 240-mw Heo project will also be developed by the state government and NEEPCO at ₹ 1,939 crore. It is expected to produce 1,000 million units of electricity each year.

Modi will also inaugurate a convention centre in Tawang, built under the PM-DevINE scheme at ₹ 145.37 crore. With a capacity to host over 1,500 people, it will meet global standards and support the tourism and cultural potential of the region, officials said.

The PM will launch multiple key infrastructure projects worth over ₹ 1,290 crore, catering to various sectors, including connectivity, health and fire safety, among others, they said.

These initiatives are expected to catalyse economic activity, improve quality of life, and enhance connectivity in the region, they added.

Governor KT Parnaik, Chief Minister Pema Khandu, Union Minister Kiren Rijiju, Lok Sabha MP Tapir Gao, and Rajya Sabha MP Nabam Rebia are expected to attend the event.

Security has been strengthened in the city for the PM's visit, officials said.

From Arunachal, Modi will travel to Tripura to attend official functions there.

Meanwhile, indigenous priests or 'nibus' performed traditional rituals in Itanagar on Saturday in view of the PM's visit.

Priest Hari Taro said, "We have prayed to the almighty for the PM's good health and spirit. Our state has a rich diversity of culture and tradition, but we all live with communal harmony, brotherhood, and patriotism."

"We prayed that our PM continues to visit Arunachal more often than his predecessors. Every visit brings major schemes, projects, and opportunities that help our people prosper and move towards making Arunachal one of the developed states of the country," he added. (PTI)

## APYO defers hunger strike over road, flyover delay ahead of PM's visit



**HT Correspondent**

**ITANAGAR, Sept 21:** The Arunachal Pradesh Youth Organisation (APYO) has deferred its proposed indefinite hunger strike over the delay in completion of the four-lane road and flyover project in the Itanagar Capital Complex in view of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit.

APYO, which has earlier staged roadshows, bike rallies, dharnas and press conferences, has alleged loopholes and anomalies in the ongoing construction works that have been underway for the past four

years.

APYO president Kipa Kanam said the organisation has repeatedly drawn the attention of the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, the State Highway Department and the state government regarding the incomplete works, particularly Package-B of National Highway-415 that connects Naharlagun and Nirjuli.

Kanam informed that Home Minister Mama Natung has taken cognizance of the issue and assured that the matter will be discussed on September 26. "Since Prime Minister Narendra Modi is visiting

our state tomorrow, it will be a historic occasion. On the request of Home Minister Mama Natung, we have decided to defer our indefinite hunger strike keeping in view the VVIP visit," Kanam stated.

He added that APYO only demands timely completion of quality road and flyover projects so that the people of the state can "truly taste the fruits of development." The organisation emphasized that it has never aimed to obstruct construction works, but the inordinate delays and faulty construction remain a serious concern.

## APCA attends All India Catholic Union meet in Mangalore



**HT Correspondent**

**ITANAGAR, Sept 21:** The Arunachal Pradesh Catholic Association (APCA) participated in the two-day All India Catholic Union (AICU) national meeting held at Mangalore, Karnataka, on September 19 and 20.

APCA Secretary General Michi Challo informed that the 71st Annual General Body Meeting of AICU was inaugurated by Karnataka Legislative Assembly Speaker U T Khadar as Chief Guest and blessed by Most Rev Rt Peter Paul Saldanha, Bishop of Mangalore.

More than 200 working committee members from across the country attended. From Arunachal Pradesh,

APCA president Nabam Pekhi, secretary general Michi Challo, finance secretary Er Takam Majeng, and national coordinator for the Northeast region Taw Tebin participated.

The chief guest lauded the Christian community for maintaining peace and harmony and called for unity with all other communities.

A symposium on interfaith relations was held on the theme "Compassion Beyond Boundaries" with speakers Bishop Peter Paul Saldanha, Prof Rajaram Tolpadi (Hindu), and writer Fatima Ralia (Muslim), who reflected on the humanitarian service of St Mother Teresa.

On the second day, Ivan D'Souza, Member of the Karnataka Legislative Council and Chief Guest, spoke about the need to build strong political leadership within the Christian community.

The General Body Meeting resolved to intervene in the implementation of the Freedom of Religion Act in various states and decided to organise a National Christian Convention on atrocities against the Christian community, both in New Delhi and across the states.

Michi Challo presented the APCA activity report and highlighted the state's burning issue of APFRA, suggesting key points for discussion in upcoming AICU meetings.

## CM Khandu conferred with 'Outstanding Public Service Award' by Hindu College alumni

**HT Correspondent**

**ITANAGAR, Sept 21:** Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu has been conferred with the prestigious Outstanding Public Service Award by the Old Boys Association of Hindu College (OBAHC), New Delhi.

The award, instituted to recognise exceptional contributions to society and governance by alumni of Hindu College, was presented during the 20th Distinguished Alumni Awards ceremony in New Delhi on Sunday.

On behalf of the chief minister, the award was received by Nalong Mize, chairman of the Arunachal Pradesh Forest Corporation Limited, who is also an alumnus of Hindu College.

Expressing his gratitude, Khandu dedicated the honour to the people of Arunachal Pradesh, stating that their trust, cooperation and collective spirit of progress had guided his journey in public service.

"It is truly humbling to be recognised by my alma mater for the work we are doing in Arunachal Pradesh. This honour belongs not to me alone but to the people of my state, who inspire me every day to work harder for a brighter future. I extend my heartfelt thanks to the Old Boys

Association of Hindu College for this recognition, and to my fellow Hinduites whose camaraderie continues to enrich my life and service," Khandu said in a message.

The OBAHC, one of India's most prominent alumni networks, honours members who have made significant contributions across diverse fields.

Khandu's recognition highlights his leadership in Arunachal Pradesh, marked by strides in infrastructure, education, healthcare, governance, women's empowerment and environmental sustainability.

Under his leadership, Arunachal Pradesh has emerged as a model of balanced progress, blending tradition with modern aspirations, aligned with the vision of Viksit Arunachal, Viksit Bharat. The OBAHC applauded the chief minister's achievements and expressed pride in his leadership as an example of Hindu College's legacy of nurturing leaders who serve with integrity and dedication.

Other distinguished awardees this year included filmmaker Imtiaz Ali, India's Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, Supreme Court judge Justice Manmohan and Rajiv Nayyar, who was honoured with the Lifetime Achievement Award.



## Aircel-Maxis corruption case

## Fresh summons issued to Malaysian telecom giant Maxis

**NEW DELHI, Sept 21:** A special court here has issued fresh summons to Malaysian telecom giant Maxis and its former director Augustus Ralph Marshall on a CBI request in connection with FIPB clearance granted to its subsidiary during the tenure of former finance minister P Chidambaram for the takeover of Aircel in 2006, officials said.

The agency has also requested the issuance of a summons to the Malaysian company Astro All Asia Network in connection with the case, which has been cleared by the special court, they said.

The CBI has sought three months from the court to serve the summons in Malaysia, they said.

The probe agency had filed its first chargesheet against former telecom minister Dayanidhi Maran and some others on August 29, 2014, after which the special court had issued summonses a number of times to the Malaysia-based accused, but in spite of efforts of the Indian High Commission and the Ministry of Home Affairs, they were not served.

In 2015, Senior Public Prosecutor (SSP) K K Goel had told the



special CBI judge that the High Commission and the MHA have tried thrice to serve the summons. "In the first set of summons, they said there was some problem. They are not cooperating. We have sent the report thrice," he had said in 2015. The special court had issued the summons in 2015 following the submissions.

Later in February 2017, the court discharged Maran and others named in the CBI charge sheet.

The discharge has been challenged by the CBI in the Delhi High Court through a revision pe-

tion. The agency filed another charge sheet on July 19, 2018, against Chidambaram and others, which is still before the special court. Chidambaram has refrained from making any public comment on the issue.

"CBI has already filed a Chargesheet in the Aircel-Maxis case. ED has now filed a Complaint in the same case. If and when summons is issued by the Honourable Court, the cases will be contested. I will not make any other public comment," he had

said in 2018 on 'X'.

In another message on 'X' in 2018, when the contents of the CBI chargesheet were reported in the media, he had said, "It is the FIPB that decides if a proposal falls within the competence of the FM. FIPB put up the proposal to me and I approved it along with 20 other proposals."

The case pertains to alleged corruption in Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB) clearance granted to Global Communication Services Holdings Limited, a 100 per cent subsidiary of Maxis based in Mauritius, in 2006 when Chidambaram was the Union finance minister.

The company had moved the proposal to enhance its direct or indirect share of foreign shareholdings from 26 per cent to 73.99 per cent in the equity shares in Aircel Ltd for USD 800 million (Rs 3,560 crore).

Global Communication went on to acquire 73.99 per cent equity share in Aircel Limited and an economic interest of 99.3 per cent in the company, the CBI has said.

The agency has alleged that Chidambaram and the accused offi-

cial of the FIPB had approved the proposal by showing the actual inflow of FDI in Indian rupees to be at ₹ 180 crore, though the proposal was actually to the tune of ₹ 3,560 crores (USD 800 million).

It was done to keep the proposal under the competence of Chidambaram, as he, being the then finance minister, had powers to approve total investments of up to ₹ 600 crore, the CBI has alleged.

It said proposals beyond ₹ 600 crore required the approval of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA). The agency has alleged that Chidambaram and his son Karti P. Chidambaram, now a Lok Sabha MP, received quid pro quo through companies linked to the latter -- Chess Management Services Private Limited and Advantage Strategic Consulting Private Limited -- from the associate companies of Maxis in the garb of providing electronic legal compliance management (eLCM) services and management consultancy during March 29, 2007 to January 27, 2012. A bribe of ₹ 26 lakh and ₹ 87 lakh was taken through the two companies, the agency has alleged. (PTI)

## Will PM address Trump's India-Pak ceasefire claims, concerns of lakhs of Indian H1B holders: Cong



**NEW DELHI, Sept 21:** Ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address to the nation, the Congress on Sunday took a swipe at him, asking whether he will address US President Donald Trump's India-Pakistan "ceasefire" claims and the concerns of lakhs of Indian H1B visa holders or just repeat what is already known on the new GST rates.

Prime Minister Modi will address the nation at 5 pm on Sunday, his office said. However, the Prime Minister's Office gave no indication of the subject of his address in the evening.

His address will come on the eve of Navratri, the day from when the revised GST rates will kick in, with the prices of a large number of products set to come down.

In a post on X, Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said, "As the PM prepares to address the nation, his good friend in Washington DC has once again stolen his thunder and claimed -- for the 42nd time -- that he stopped Operation Sindoor by using increased trade with America as leverage."

President Trump has made these claims not only at home in the USA, but also in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UK, Ramesh said.

"Will the PM address these claims and speak of the increasingly fraught Indo-US relationship? Will he address the concerns of lakhs of Indian H1B holders? Will he provide some assurances to the crores of farmers and workers who stand to lose their livelihood due to his good friend's tariffs? Or will he just repeat what we all know on the new GST rates - worked out under desperation and which become effective tomorrow?" the Congress leader said.

In a sudden move that will hugely impact skilled Indian professionals in the US, President Trump has ordered a steep hike in the annual H-1B non-immigrant visa fee to USD 100,000.

The Trump administration, however, has clarified that the new USD 100,000 fee for H-1B visas is a one-time payment applicable only to new petitions and does not

apply to current visa holders.

Also, Trump has repeated his claim that he solved the India-Pakistan conflict earlier this year with trade and asserted that he should get the Nobel Peace Prize for "ending seven wars". Since May 10, when Trump announced on social media that India and Pakistan had agreed to a full and immediate ceasefire after a long night of talks mediated by Washington, he has repeated his claim several times that he helped settle the tensions between India and Pakistan.

India has consistently denied any third-party intervention.

"On the world stage, we are once again doing things that we are just respected at a level that we have never been respected before.

We are forging peace agreements, and we are stopping wars. So we stopped wars between India and Pakistan, Thailand and Cambodia," Trump said at the American Cornerstone Institute Founder's Dinner on Saturday.

He went on to say, "Think of India and Pakistan. Think of that. And you know how I stopped that with trade."

They want to trade. And I have great respect for both leaders.

But when you take a look at all of these wars that we've stopped."

"Just look at that.

India, Pakistan, Thailand, Cambodia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kosovo and Serbia, Israel and Iran, Egypt and Ethiopia, Rwanda and the Congo. We stopped all of them. And 60 per cent of them were stopped because of trade," the US president claimed.

He added that "like with India, I said, 'look, we're not going to do any trade if you're going to fight and they have nuclear weapons. They stopped."

India launched Operation Sindoor on May 7, targeting terror infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir in retaliation for the April 22 Pahalgalam attack that killed 26 civilians.

India and Pakistan reached an understanding on May 10 to end the conflict after four days of intense cross-border drone and missile strikes. (PTI)

## Haryana DGP chairs high-level meeting ahead of festival season

**CHANDIGARH, Sept 21:** Haryana Director General of Police Shatruiet Kapur held a meeting with senior officers during to review security arrangements for the upcoming festival season.

The meeting with Additional Director Generals of Police, Police Commissioners, Range Inspectors General, and other senior officers of the state was held at Haryana Police Academy, Madhuban in Karnal on Saturday.

The meeting also discussed action against foreign nationals illegally residing in Haryana, traffic management, and security arrangements for the upcoming festival season.

During the meeting, DGP Kapur stated that all officers must review cases related to illegally residing foreign nationals every week and ensure strict action is taken.

He directed that a separate cell be constituted in every district for this purpose and instructed that immediate action be taken on received inputs.

The top police official further directed officers to send weekly reports on this matter to Police Headquarters at Panchkula.

In the meeting, Kapur also reviewed the ongoing intensive campaign against those moneylenders who exploit the needy and poor.

Sonapat Police Commissioner Mamta Singh informed during the

meeting that the police are receiving full cooperation from the public and that complaints are being acted upon promptly.

According to an official statement, DGP Kapur clarified that the main objective of this campaign is to help needy and poor people.

He said those moneylenders who exploit the helplessness of the poor, charge exorbitant interest, and even seize their property, will face strict action.

DGP Kapur instructed that strict surveillance be maintained on criminals and anti-social elements and directed all SHOs to personally monitor such individuals, hear complaints against them themselves, and ensure strict action.

He further emphasised that criminals should be categorised into different groups so that monitoring and action can be carried out more effectively.

Additional Director General of Police (Traffic & Highways) Hardeep Doon said that during a special campaign conducted from September 5 to 14, as many as 30,603 challans were issued. These included actions against drunk driving, noise pollution, and other traffic violations. Awareness campaigns were also conducted during this period, he said. The DGP directed that accident-prone areas be identified an necessary road safety measures be taken there. (PTI)

## PM Modi pitches for 'swadeshi' goods, says GST reforms will accelerate India's growth story



**NEW DELHI, Sept 21:** A day before reduced GST rates come into effect, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday made a strong pitch for promoting 'swadeshi' goods and asserted that the next generation GST reforms will accelerate India's growth story, increase ease of doing business and attract more investors.

In his address to the nation, Modi said a 'GST bachat utsav (savings festival)' will begin from the first day of Navratri, and coupled with the income tax exemption, it will be a "double bonanza" for most of the people.

PM Modi stressed all states will be equal stakeholders in the development race and urged them to give pace to manufacturing with 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' and swadeshi campaigns in mind.

"On the first day of Navratri, the country is going to take an important and big step for Atmanirbhar Bharat. With the sunrise tomorrow, the next generation GST reforms will come into effect. A 'GST bachat utsav (savings festival)' will begin tomorrow.

"You will be able to buy things you like more easily. The poor, middle class, neo middle class, youths, farmers, women, traders and shopkeepers will benefit from this," he said.

In this season of festivals, everyone's happiness will

increase, Modi said.

He congratulated all on the next generation GST reforms. "These reforms will accelerate India's growth story, increase ease of doing business and attract more investors," Modi said.

When India took a step towards GST reforms in 2017, a new beginning was made to script history, he said.

He said GST realised the 'one nation-one tax' dream. Modi highlighted how the web of taxes and tolls had created hardships for businesses and consumers.

Citing income tax exemption on earnings up to ₹ 12 lakh and GST reforms, he said it is a "double bonanza" for the poor, neo-middle class, and middle class.

He also said the GST move would benefit MSMEs big time.

Prime Minister Modi urged the people of the country to take pride in selling and buying indigenous goods.

The way the country's independence got strengthened by the Swadeshi movement, similarly, India's prosperity will be empowered by the mantra of 'swadeshi', he said. From kitchen staples to electronics, from medicines and equipment to automobiles, goods and services will be cheaper from Monday as the reduced GST rates on about 375 items come into effect. In a bonanza to consumers, the GST Council, comprising the Centre and states, had decided to reduce the tax rates on goods and services, from September 22 -- the first day of the Navratri. The GST will now be a two-tier structure wherein the majority of goods and services will attract tax of 5 and 18 per cent.

A 40 per cent tax will be levied on ultra luxury items, while tobacco and related products will continue to be in the 28 per cent plus cess category.

Till now, Goods and Services Tax (GST) was levied in 4 slabs of 5, 12, 18 and 28 per cent. (PTI)

## Wreath-laying ceremony held for fallen soldier

**JAMMU, Sept 21:** A wreath-laying ceremony was held here to pay tributes to a soldier who laid down his life fighting terrorists in a remote forest area in Jammu and Kashmir's Udhampur district where an anti-terrorist operation entered the third day on Sunday, officials said.

White Knight Corps Chief of staff Maj Gen P S Dagar led the solemn ceremony held at the Indian Air Force Station Jammu to honour Lance Dafadar Baldev Chand whose mortar remains were later flown to his home town in Himachal Pradesh for last rites, the officials said.

Deputy Inspector General of Police, Doda-Kishtwar-Ramban range, Shridhar Patil and some civil officers also attended the ceremony and paid their tributes to the fallen soldier.

"His supreme sacrifice stands as a beacon of courage and duty, inspiring future generations," the army said in a post on X after the wreath laying ceremony while paying rich tributes to the brave heart.

The soldier was injured late Friday evening when terrorists opened fire on a joint search party of the Army and Special Operations Group (SOG) of Jammu and Kashmir Police at Kanji in the Seoj Dhar forest between Dudu-Basantgarh area of Udhampur and Baderwah in Doda district.

He was shifted to a hospital where he later succumbed to injuries. A massive search operation, launched to track down and neutralise the terrorists, continued for the third day on Sunday, the officials said. (PTI)

## BJP claims abuses again hurled at PM's mother, this time during Tejashwi's 'Bihar Adhikar Yatra'

**PATNA, Sept 21:** The BJP on Sunday alleged that abuses were again hurled at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's late mother, this time by some RJD workers during Leader of Opposition Tejashwi Yadav's 'Bihar Adhikar Yatra'.

The RJD, however, dismissed the allegation and claimed that a video in circulation of the alleged incident is "doctored".

The politically charged environment of Bihar, where elections are due later this year, recently saw a major controversy as abuses were allegedly hurled at the PM's late mother by a man from a stage set for Rahul Gandhi's 'Voter Adhikar Yatra' in Darbhanga district last month. Sharing a video of the purported latest incident on his X handle, Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary wrote, "Tejashwi Yadav has once again insulted Modi ji's late mother. He has once again torn apart the culture of Bihar. In the rally, the RJD workers were hurling as many abuses as they could, and Tejashwi was encouraging them. The mothers and sisters of Bihar will surely hold him accountable for this thuggish mentality and abusive behaviour."

PTI could not independently verify the authenticity of the video, which has gone viral on social media.

"This is extremely unfortunate and a grave insult to democracy. Has insulting mothers and sisters become their culture and weapon to counter parties in opposition? The people of Bihar understand this dirty politics well and will re-

spond in a democratic manner," Choudhary added.

He later addressed a press conference, in which he said that hurling abuses at the PM's mother was an insult to Bihar.

"This incident has established the fact that the RJD is patronising such elements in the party... RJD is a party of goons... they protect criminals. Both Rahul Gandhi and Tejashwi Yadav should apologise for this," he said. Echoing a similar view, another Deputy Chief Minister, Vijay Kumar Sinha, wrote in an X post, "Once again, abuses were hurled at the late mother of PM Modi Ji during Tejashwi Yadav's yatra... and the RJD leader was boosting the morale of his workers... It's shocking... This shows their mindset."

Senior BJP leader and Union minister Nityanand Rai also condemned the alleged incident.

In a post on X, he said, "Having earned a PhD in abusive language, Tejashwi Yadav and his goons have committed yet another shameful act... This abuse is directed against PM Modi out of frustration over impending defeat."

Tejashwi Yadav and RJD members must remember that they have been completely exposed... they will have to face the consequences of hurting the sentiments of 14 crore people of the state."

Reacting to the BJP's allegations, RJD spokesperson Chitrangan Gagan accused the saffron party of trying to divert the attention of the electorate from the core issues ahead of polls. (PTI)

## Navratri, to be observed from September 22 to October 1 Pilgrims to get volunteer support as Vaishno Devi shrine wears festive look for Navratri

**KATRA/JAMMU, Sept 21:** Mata Vaishno Devi shrine atop Trikuta hills in Jammu and Kashmir's Reasi district has been adorned with vibrant floral decorations on the eve of Shardiya Navratras on Sunday, creating a festive ambience for the thousands of devotees expected to arrive over the next nine days.

The Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board (SMVDSB) has also pressed volunteers into service to guide pilgrims, manage the heavy rush, and ensure smooth movement along the 12-km yatra route, the officials said.

They said additional facilities, including drinking water points, medical aid and crowd management measures, have also been put in place to provide a comfortable pilgrimage experience for visitors from different parts of the country.

The pilgrimage to the revered shrine resumed on September 17 after remaining suspended for 22 days due to a devastating landslide along the track amid torrential rains on August 26 resulting in the death of 34 persons and injuries to 20 others.

Navratri, which will be observed from September 22 to October 1, is dedicated to the worship of goddess Durga and holds special significance at the Mata Vaishno Devi shrine, which witnesses one of its highest pilgrim turnouts during this period. Devotees undertake the uphill trek chanting hymns and offering prayers, seeking blessings for prosperity and well-being.

"The shrine board is ready to welcome the devotees during the



festival. All arrangements including security is in place while the whole track along with 'Bhawan' (sanctum sanctorum) is decorated like the past with additional steps to provide better experience to the devotees," Chief Executive Officer of SMVDSB Sachin Kumar Vaishya said.

In addition to the help desks, he said this year volunteers have been deployed all along the track to guide the pilgrims and respond to their questions.

"They will be identified by their attire in which it will be written 'how can I help you'. They are deployed on the track," the CEO said.

He said the shrine board has also decided to reintroduce wireless sets to strengthen the communication network and put up extra signages along the route besides joint patrol monitoring to manage crowds effectively and designate holding areas.

A multi-tier security grid involv-

ing police, CRPF, paramilitary forces, and quick-response teams would be ensured during the festival, he said.

Officials said the number of pilgrims visiting the shrine in the past five days have shown an increasing trend with over 4,000 pilgrims paying their obeisance at the shrine on Friday.

The pilgrims are advised to carry valid identification, follow designated pathways and cooperate with on-ground staff, they said adding Radio Frequency Identity Card (RFID)-based tracking remains mandatory for transparency and traceability.

Meanwhile, Divisional Commissioner Jammu, Ramesh Kumar and Inspector General of Police, Bhim Sen Tuti chaired a meeting in Jammu on Saturday to review the arrangements made by district administrations for the forthcoming festivals of Navratri, Ram Navami, Dussehra and Diwali.

Threadbare discussions were

held on different aspects of arrangements with a focus on availability of civil supplies, security, connectivity and civic amenities for the smooth celebration of the festivals, an official spokesperson said.

He said directions were issued to ensure seamless arrangements in and around the religious places with a special focus on sanitation, crowd management, accessibility of roads, drinking water, power supply, traffic management, availability of essential items and check on overcharging in the markets in each district.

Kumar directed the concerned Deputy Commissioners to personally visit the religious shrines that witness large congregations of people during the holy festivals. He also asked them to ensure proper deployment of police personnel and queue management systems for the smooth movement of people.

Directions were also issued for meticulous planning of routes for religious processions and selection of venues for organizing Ramlila.

The IGP directed the district SSPs to formulate police deployment and traffic plans for the festive season.

Health and Fire Emergency departments were asked to deploy their ambulances and fire tenders at the religious shrines with adequate doctors and staff, the spokesperson said.

He said the Deputy Commissioners were asked to put in place adequate fire safety measures at the venues identified for selling firecrackers. (PTI)

## Mata Tripura Sundari temple beautification to be inaugurated today Tripura gears up to welcome PM Modi today

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Sept 21: Tripura is brimming with anticipation as Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to visit the state on September 22 to inaugurate the redeveloped Mata Tripura Sundari Temple Complex at Udaipur in Gomati district.

The project has been completed under the PRASAD scheme (Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation Drive), giving one of India's most sacred Shakti Peethas a modern yet culturally rooted makeover.

The Prime Minister's visit holds special significance — this will be his 11th trip to Tripura since 2014. His first visit was in December that year, when he inaugurated the second unit of the Palatana Power Plant. He has since returned on multiple occasions, including two visits in February 2018 for election rallies.

Tourism Minister Sushanta Chowdhury revealed that the redevelopment project cost ₹ 52 crore, with ₹ 17 crore contributed by the state government and the remainder funded by the Centre.



temple complex has been re-designed with a distinctive architectural vision — from above, it resembles a tortoise, symbolizing stability and divinity. Spread across three floors, the complex now features modern pathways and renovated entrances, strengthened fencing and upgraded drainage, three-storied facility housing stalls, a meditation hall, guest accommodations, and office spaces.

Officials expressed confidence

that the new-look temple will boost tourism, create jobs, and spur local businesses, strengthening the socio-economic fabric of the region.

With the Prime Minister's arrival, security has been tightened across Agartala and Udaipur. Teams from Tripura Police, Tripura State Rifles, and CAPF have been deployed, supported by additional forces to ensure smooth operations.

According to officials, PM Modi

will land at MBB Airport, Agartala, fly by chopper to Palatana Helipad, and then proceed by road to the temple complex. The shrine has been decked up with flowers, fresh paint, and festive decorations to welcome the occasion.

To ensure smooth movement, the District Magistrate of West Tripura has issued restrictions on heavy vehicles along the route from Agartala MBB Airport to Sekerkot between 10 am and 7 pm on September 22. Similar restrictions have also been applied in the Udaipur area, with emergency vehicles advised to use alternate routes.

"Mata Tripurasundari Temple is not only a revered Shakti Peetha but also a jewel of Northeast India's spiritual tourism," said Tourism Minister Chowdhury. "We are hopeful that the Prime Minister's visit and the redevelopment project will draw devotees and tourists from far and wide."

With the grand inauguration just hours away, Tripura readies itself to showcase its spiritual heritage on a national stage, as the centuries-old shrine steps into a new era of significance and splendor.

## Violence in Manipur hospital



IMPHAL, Sept 21: Violence erupted at the Regional Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS), Imphal, after the death of a 35-year-old woman following a caesarean delivery. Enraged family members and locals allegedly vandalised hospital property and assaulted a senior doctor, forcing the shutdown of all medical services.

The deceased has been identified as Chingshubam Ongbi Manju, a resident of Lilong Chajing in Imphal West. Her relatives alleged negligence by a doctor at RIMS led to her death.

Following the incident, a large number of people gathered at the hospital, demanding accountability. Protesters allegedly damaged

the office of the Medical Superintendent and other hospital property. The doctor in question was also reportedly assaulted while hiding in a toilet.

Police from Lamphel, assisted by hospital security, rescued the doctor. He was later admitted to the trauma ICU, where doctors confirmed he is out of danger.

Teachers' and Medical Officers' Association (TMOA) of RIMS issued a strong condemnation of the assault of the doctor, describing it as a "false allegation and violent attack" on a senior consultant.

The association announced an immediate suspension of all services including OPD, emergency, routine operations, and PME until

those responsible are arrested and punished. However, it assured that patients already admitted would continue to receive necessary care.

"Normal duties will resume only when the working environment becomes safe and conducive," the association stated, while urging RIMS authorities to lodge an FIR and ensure strict legal action against the perpetrators.

In a separate statement, the hospital authority expressed grief over Manju's death but condemned the vandalism and assault on staff.

"The assault on a RIMS professor and the destruction of hospital property are serious offences against both individuals and public institutions," the statement said. "The hospital will review the matter with utmost seriousness, ascertain the facts, and address grievances lawfully. We appeal to all sections of society to maintain peace, respect public institutions, and cooperate in resolving the matter through proper legal and administrative channels."

RIMS is a central government-run medical institute under the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare. (NNN)

## Manipur MP files police complaint after being called 'Arambai Tenggol leader' on social media



IMPHAL, Sept 21: The lone Rajya Sabha MP from Manipur, Sanajaoba Leishemba, filed a police complaint against an X user over what he called a "misleading post" implying he was a leader of Meitei organisation Arambai Tenggol.

A user on X, identified as Shalini Shukla, posted a photo of Leishemba along with a caption that "tarnished his image", a police complaint lodged by the MP's personal secretary Mainsam Shivadutta, on his behalf, said.

The complaint sent to both police chief and cyber crime unit stated, "I am to enclose here a photocopy of a misleading tweet by one Shalini Shukla in connection with the recent ambush on Assam Rifles personnel at Nambol Sabal Leikai." The tweet by Shukla "includes the photograph of Hon'ble MP (R/S), Manipur implying he was the leader of Arambai Tenggol", it said.

"This is a serious offence to tarnish the image of a public leader and character assassination of a Member of Parliament. This is a ploy to defame Hon'ble MP (R/S) Manipur and it is in a very bad taste," it said, requesting the police to look into the matter and initiate necessary action. (PTI)

## Tripura CM urges youth to lead mass movement against drug abuse

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Sept 21: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Sunday appealed to the youths of the state to create a mass movement against drug abuse and informed that the state government has undertaken a series of steps to make Tripura a Nasha Mukta (addiction-free) state.

Saha said this while participating in the Namo Yuva Run marathon. He congratulated and thanked the BJP Yuva Morcha for organising the event, which started from Ujjayanta Palace.

"The main aim is to create a Nasha Mukta Tripura. To achieve this, the Tripura Pradesh Yuva Morcha organized this event. As part of the 75th birthday celebrations of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, we have undertaken Seva Pakhwada with many social service activities. Under the direction of the central leadership, many programs are being organized, and we are also contributing. Everyone has listened to



Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech from Madhya Pradesh, where we understood how he has been working for the strengthening and development of the country. Around 65% of our population are youths — this is a massive resource. If we can utilize it properly, nobody can

stop the progress and development of the country, and this is exactly what PM Modi wants us to realize," Saha said.

He further informed that PM Modi always seeks suggestions from the people regarding the country's development and progress.

"From 17th September to 2nd October, Seva Pakhwada is being observed, under which today's Namo Yuva Run was organized by the Yuva Morcha. We have taken a series of steps to make Tripura Nasha Mukta, and I urge the youth to come forward for a mass movement (gono andolon) to understand the dangers of addiction. It can destroy a family and a society. We have seen the failures of previous governments, but after 2018, police and security agencies have launched strict actions by seizing narcotics and arresting drug smugglers. The intensity of destruction has also increased. Youth must come forward against such threats," he added.

## Meth worth over ₹ 9 crore seized in Mizoram's Champhai

AIZAWL, Sept 21: Methamphetamine tablets worth ₹ 9.12 crore have been seized in east Mizoram's Champhai district near the Myanmar border and one person arrested, police said on Sunday.

Acting on a tip-off, police launched an operation at Zotlang area and seized 70.20 kg of methamphetamine tablets concealed under sand on Friday, he said.

Methamphetamine, also known as 'ice' or 'crystal meth', is a highly addictive and powerful stimulant. Methamphetamine tablets are banned in India.

A resident of Champhai's Dinthar locality has been arrested for his alleged involvement in the smuggling, the officer said.

Further investigation into the recovery is underway, he said.



On May 4, the state police had seized 236 kg of methamphetamine tablets worth ₹ 30.72 crore at Vanzau village in Champhai.

The Mizoram Police, in association with the Excise and Narcotics Department, and the Young Mizo Association

(YMA), has been carrying out an operation against drug trafficking since September 1, particularly along the India-Myanmar border and interstate boundaries, officials said.

The operation will continue till December. (PTI)

## Three militants, arms dealer arrested in Manipur

IMPHAL, Sept 21: Three militants belonging to different proscribed outfits, and an arms dealer, have been arrested in Manipur, police said on Sunday.

Two insurgents belonging to the banned PREPAK outfit were nabbed from Tronglaobi in Bishnupur district on Friday.

The militants, identified as Thokhom Manimatam Singh (20) and Laishram Prensagar Singh (24), were involved in extorting the public, local businesses and schools, a police statement said.

Also, a cadre of the banned outfit People's Liberation Army was arrested from Kongba in Imphal East district. He was identified as Adhikarimayum Ramkumar Sharma (62), it said. (PTI)

## BJP accuses Tipra Motha of violence during social program, four injured

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Sept 21: At least four BJP workers, including the vice president of the BJP ST Morcha, and one journalist sustained injuries today following a clash during a cloth distribution programme at Hezamara under Mohanpur subdivision in West Tripura district.

Tipra Motha Party is now in alliance with BJP in Government.

According to BJP state general secretary Bipin Debarma, the incident took place when party leaders were preparing to distribute clothes among women ahead of Durga Puja.

He alleged that workers of the Tipra Motha Party were involved in the attack.

"It was a social programme, not a political one. Unfortunately, our workers came under attack," Deb-

barma said.

BJP ST Morcha vice president Mangal Debarma, who suffered head injuries, is undergoing treatment at GB Pant Hospital in Agartala.

He claimed that the violence was an attempt by Tipra Motha workers to disrupt their activities.

Former Chief Minister and MP Bipin Kumar Deb visited the injured at the hospital.

He said an FIR had been filed and called for strict action against those responsible. "One journalist, Mangal Debarma, and several others were injured. I have also spoken with Tipra Motha founder Pradyot Kishore Manikya, who is currently

abroad," he stated.

Police said they are investigating the matter.

## Mizoram making efforts to increase GST collection, tax base: Official

AIZAWL, Sept 21: The Mizoram government will make concerted efforts to enhance Goods & Services (GST) collection and expand the tax base in view of the current GST reforms, an official said on Sunday.

He said that the state government decided to collaborate with local councils to increase the number of traders and shopkeepers in state capital Aizawl and other parts of the state paying GST.

He said that a meeting of the Mizoram Resource Mobilisation Committee (MRMC), state taxation department and Aizawl City Local Council Association chaired by MRMC vice chairman Haukhuma Hauzel, on September 19, observed that many traders in Aizawl and other parts of the state despite their monthly income exceeding the GST requirement, avoid GST and did not comply with the registration requirement.

He said that the state government will take steps to address this issue and strengthen cooperation between the taxation department and local councils in identifying unregistered traders. The state government hopes to increase GST collection if such collaboration or campaign prove successful, he said.

According to GST guidelines, traders with an annual turnover exceeding ₹ 20 lakh are required to register for GST. (PTI)

## Nagaland minister assures students of early release of pending post-matric scholarships

KOHIMA, Sept 21: Nagaland Minister for Higher and Technical Education, Temjen Inna Along, on Sunday said pending post-matric scholarships for students will be released soon.

Along told reporters here that the first phase of the scholarships had already been disbursed a few months ago, but many students are still awaiting the second round.

He said that the department is pursuing the central share of the post-matric scholarships from the Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

Along said the ministry had on September 15 sought a statement of expenditure and requirement for 2024-25, which the department has already complied with and submitted.

He expressed confidence that the central share would be released to the state soon, after which the department would ensure immediate disbursement to the remaining students.

Asked about the demand of the All Nagaland College Students' Union for establishment of a common scholarship cell in the department, the minister said the state government had earlier directed officials concerned to streamline scholarship matters.

He said a dedicated scholarship cell is being established under the Higher Education Department.

"I will personally ensure that the matter is pursued and completed at the earliest," Along added. (PTI)

## Tensions arose over remarks made by a Naga student about late Assamese singer Zubeen Garg Students from Nagaland safe in Kaziranga University: Minister

KOHIMA, Sept 21: Nagaland Minister for Higher and Technical Education, Temjen Inna Along, on Sunday, stated that students from the state studying at Kaziranga University in Jorhat, Assam, are safe following tensions that arose over remarks made by a Naga student about late Assamese singer Zubeen Garg.

Along told reporters that the tension, which began around 8:30 pm on Saturday and continued till 2 am, stemmed from comments made by a B.Tech student that hurt local sentiments.

He said that the student had been moved to a safe house, while over 300-400 Naga students enrolled at the university remain unharmed.

The minister expressed gratitude to the Assam government, police, and Kaziranga university management for swift intervention and coordination with Nagaland authorities.

"The situation is now normal. There were no major injuries or untoward incidents apart from the mob getting out of control in anger," the minister said.

Along acknowledged that the student's remarks were inappropriate, given the widespread mourning over Garg's death, and appealed to



Nagas in Assam and also back home to exercise restraint on social media.

"When one of our own boys does such a mistake, whether it's knowingly or unknowingly, first of all, such kind of statement in anger or in

happiness should not be given. That is completely wrong. Because we also understand, late Zubeen Garg ji is very close to the heart of the people of Assam and such ideas spoken without sensitivity is wrong," he said.

On possible disciplinary action against the student or other Naga students studying there, the minister described the matter as sensitive but hoped that Kaziranga University would unlikely take severe steps.

"We are sorry for what our boy has spoken about, and while the government of both states, Deputy Commissioners of Kokochung and Jorhat, are all in touch, it would be good for the boy to return back for some time. The rest of the students that are in Kaziranga university are safe and sound," Along said.

The minister thanked the university authorities for ensuring the safety of Naga students and said the concerned student would be handed over to his family soon.

Further maintaining that the people of Assam are the big brothers of Nagaland, he said they were angry, but hope they also understand and love the Naga people. (PTI)

## AFFIDAVIT

I, Smt. Nirmala Kumari Bhagat W/o Mohit Varma, resident of village Amtola, P.O & P.S Hojai, Mouza Hojai, Sub-Division Hojai, district Nagaon, Assam, have passed my HS final year examination in 2007 from Hojai Girls College.

In 2009 I took admission in the upper classes, but was unable to complete my T.D.C. due to my marriage with Sri Mohit Varma, for which there was a gap of three years in my studies between 2009 to 2011. Now I desire to take admission to complete my T.D.C. course.

That, I am swearing this affidavit in regard to its contents mentioned herein before and submitting the same before the concerned authority as a documentary piece of evidence for the cause of the gap of my study and use the same for all official and non official purposes.

I, Smt. Nirmala Kumari Bhagat the deponent do hereby verify that the contents made above are true to the best of my knowledge, belief and information and as such I hereby put signature under this verification on this 16 day of June 2011 at Hojai, S/Nagar Court premises.

## Karisma Kapoor, Ananya Panday and others extend wishes to Kareena Kapoor Khan on her birthday



**NEW DELHI, Sept 21:** Several celebrities including Ananya Panday, Kiara Advani and Ajay Devgn extended wishes to Bollywood star Kareena Kapoor Khan on her 45th birthday.

Her sister and actor Karisma Kapoor shared a post on her Instagram handle on Sunday, which featured a throwback picture of the duo.

"Best sister, best friends and beyond. Happy birthday to my most precious sister. Love you mostest," she captioned the post.

Ananya posted a childhood picture holding up a magazine cover with Kareena on her Instagram stories.

"Happy birthday BaeBoooo!! Love you long time (clearly)," she wrote.

Kiara also posted an Instagram story to congratulate the actor which featured a picture of the two from an ad shoot.

"Happy Happy Birthday Bebo! You are the bestest. Big hug and loads of love always," she wrote.

Ajay wrote, "Sharing screen space and food on sets with you is always a pleasure...Happy Birthday Bebo." Anil Kapoor

wrote, "Happy birthday @kareenakapoorkhan! You have it all- beauty, talent, humour and a warmth that light up every room. But what I admire the most is your individuality..you're an original, a Kapoor unlike any other. Wishing you love, joy and everything."

Sharing a series of pictures alongside the actor, Soha Ali Khan wrote, "On your birthday - trying to channel my inner Bebo... love you! @kareenakapoorkhan happy birthday to the ultimate glam queen and our forever inspiration!" Saba Pataudi also posted a series of pictures.

"Beboooo jaan. To ALL the moments we've shared... our traditional selfies together, the photos I've taken — you with Bhai, Ma, the kids, etc. To the family occasions you complete... Eid, Diwali, birthdays, and more! Keep shining. You don't need a saree with glitz — it's all about YOU! So proud! You totally rock! Here's wishing you a VERY HAPPY BIRTHDAY!! See you soon. Lots of love," she captioned her post. (PTI)

## MAMMOOTTY, AKSHAY KUMAR AND OTHERS CONGRATULATE MOHANLAL ON DADASAHEB PHALKE AWARD WIN



**NEW DELHI, Sept 21:** Celebrities Mammootty, Akshay Kumar and Prithviraj Sukumaran, among others, have extended their wishes to the Malayalam superstar Mohanlal on being honoured with the Dadasaheb Phalke Award.

Mohanlal, 65, who has been in the industry for over four decades and has notable projects to his credit such as "Iruvar", "Vanaprastham" and "Drishyam", will be honoured with the Dadasaheb Phalke Award for 2023, the country's highest recognition in the field of cinema, the I&B ministry announced on Saturday.

The actor's friend and superstar Mam-

mooty, extended his heartfelt wishes on his X handle and said he is proud of Mohanlal's achievement.

"More than a colleague, a brother, and an artist who has embarked on this wonderful cinematic journey for decades. The Dadasaheb Phalke Award is not just for an actor, but for a true artist who has lived and breathed cinema. So happy and proud of you, Lal. You truly deserve this crown," Mammootty wrote in his post.

Both the actors have collaborated on the popular films like "Athiratham", "Anubandham" and "Vartha".

Amitabh called Mohanlal's achievement "the most deserving recognition".

The actor shared a congratulatory post on his X handle, comprising Mohanlal's picture along with a note.

"Mohanlal Ji, I am very happy that you have received the Dadasaheb Phalke Award, feeling immense joy — the most deserving recognition! Many congratulations! I am a big fan of your work and craftsmanship. The simplicity in expressing some of the most evident emotions is truly remarkable. May you continue to honour us all with your invincible talents, and let it remain a lesson for us. With utmost respect and pride, I remain a dedicated fan forever. Namaskar," he wrote.

The actors have shared the screen in "Kandahar" (2010) and "Ram Gopal Varma Ki Aag" (2007).

Akshay, who appeared in a brief cameo alongside Mohanlal in the 2025 film "Kannappa" also shared his wishes through a post on X.

"Heartiest congratulations, @Mohanlal sir, on being honoured with the Dadasaheb Phalke Award.

Every time I've had the chance to meet you or observe your work, it's been like sitting in the front row of the greatest acting school ever. This recognition is so richly deserved. Respect and love," he wrote.

Prithviraj congratulated his "L2: Empuraan" co-star with a post on Instagram story.

"Congratulations chetta on the Dadasaheb Phalke Award! A truly well de-

served recognition for a legend beyond ages!" "Kannadam" actor Manju Warrier shared a selfie alongside the star an Instagram post. "Congratulations Laletta! Thank you for inspiring generations. And for being our very own," she wrote.

Producer Antony Perumbavoor, who began his career as a chauffeur on set to Mohanlal on his 1988 film "Pattanapravesham", also shared a post on Instagram.

"Seeing my dearest Mohanlal Sir honoured with the Dadasaheb Phalke Award fills me with immense joy. For those of us who have walked this journey with him, it's more than an award. It's a celebration of a lifetime of love and dedication to cinema. Blessed to stand by your side always," he wrote in the caption.

Director Ram Gopal Varma congratulated Mohanlal in a post on his X handle. "I don't know much about #DadasahebPhalke except that he's made the 1st ever film, which I didn't see and I never met anyone who saw it, but from what I saw and know of @Mohanlal, I think Dadasaheb Phalke should be given the MOHANLAL AWARD," he wrote.

Mohanlal has acted in over 350 films across Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, Hindi and Kannada. The award will be presented to him during the 71st National Film Awards ceremony on September 23. (PTI)

## Akshay Kumar-starrer 'Jolly LLB 3' earns ₹ 32.75 at box office

**NEW DELHI, Sept 21:** "Jolly LLB 3", featuring Akshay Kumar and Arshad Warsi in the lead roles, has crossed the mark of ₹ 30 crore at the domestic box office in two days of its release.

Produced by Star Studio18, "Jolly LLB 3" is directed by Subhash Kapoor and also stars Amrita Rao and Saurabh Shukla in pivotal roles. It released in theatres on Friday.

According to the trade tracking website Sacnilk, the film opened with ₹ 12.75 crore nett at box office and went on to earn ₹ 20 crore on the following day. The total collection of the film stands at ₹ 32.75 crore nett at the domestic box office.

The film is the third installment in the courtroom comedy franchise that started with 2013's "Jolly LLB", featuring Warsi as a down-on-luck lawyer from Meerut, Jolly Tyagi.

It was followed by 2017's "Jolly LLB 2" that saw Kumar starring as Jolly Mishra, another struggling lawyer from Kanpur. Both installments were directed by Kapoor. Besides "Jolly LLB 3", Kumar will also star in "Welcome to the Jungle", which is the third installment of the "Welcome" franchise. It is directed by Ahmed Khan and comprises a star-studded cast, which also features Jacqueline Fernandez, Raveena Tandon, Shreyas Talpade, and Manushi Chhillar alongside Kumar. His other projects include "Hera Pheri 3", and a horror-comedy "Bhooth Bangla", starring Kumar alongside Paresh Rawal, Tabu, and Wamiqa Gabbi. It is directed by Priyadarshan. (PTI)



## Dulquer Salmaan denies 'Lokah's' OTT release

**NEW DELHI, Sept 21:** Malayalam star Dulquer Salmaan, who serves as a producer on "Lokah Chapter 1: Chandra", slammed the rumours around the film's OTT release and said it won't be out on any streaming platform anytime soon.

The actor shared a post on his X handle on Sunday following the reports around the film's upcoming release on OTT. The actor also urged fans and followers not to fall prey to fake news and wait for the official announcements instead. "Lokah' isn't coming to OTT anytime soon. Ignore the fake news and stay tuned for official announcements! #Lokah #WhatstheHurry," he wrote. Directed by Dominic Arun, the superhero film has been produced by Dulquer Salmaan under his production banner Wayfarer Films. It released in theatres on August 28.

Featuring Kalyani Priyadarshan in the lead role alongside Sandy and Naslen, the film revolves around a woman who uncovers mystical skills while facing personal hurdles. As evil surfaces, she must embrace her powers and fate in a shifting world. The film is having a good run at the box office and has crossed the mark of ₹ 100 crore. Actors Master, Arun Kurian, and Chandu Salimkumar round off the cast of the film. (PTI)



## Will always cherish the experience: Pratik Gandhi on working with Tom Felton

**MUMBAI, Sept 21:** Actor Pratik Gandhi says he has formed a strong friendship with Hollywood star Tom Felton, both on and off screen, while working on their upcoming series, "Gandhi", calling it as one of the most unforgettable experiences of his career.

"What struck me most is that, despite being a global star adored by generations, including my own daughter, he carries none of that on his sleeve. He's easygoing, collaborative, and has a childlike curiosity and joy in his eyes that light up both his personality and his performance."

"That energy made it easy for me to approach him, and our friendship grew naturally from there. Working with him has not just been memorable, but truly joyous and an experience I will always cherish," Pratik told PTI in an interview.

Felton, widely recognized for his

villainous role as Draco Malfoy in the popular Harry Potter movie series, will be making his Bollywood debut with "Gandhi".

Speaking highly of his co-star, Pratik shared that collaborating with Felton was seamless.

"He has a very organic process, and working with him felt effortless, almost as if we had collaborated before. We could improvise on the go, and it all flowed naturally," he said.

Helmed by Hansal Mehta, the series features Pratik as Mahatma Gandhi, with Felton portraying his close confidant, Josiah Oldfield, during Gandhi's years in London. The historical drama is inspired by historian and author Ramachandra Guha's acclaimed books, "Gandhi Before India" and "Gandhi: The Years That Changed the World". Bookshelves

Their camaraderie was evident at the recent Toronto International

Film Festival (TIFF) world premiere of their show where Tom posted photos from the event on his social media account and affectionately referred to Pratik as his "brother".

"It was really sweet of him to put up a post like that, but that's truly what happened between us," Pratik said, adding Felton gave him the "vibe of an old friend".

The "Scam 1992" actor explained how the mutual love for theatre became a common ground for them to bond. He revealed that while they were shooting for "Gandhi", Felton was also preparing for his "Harry Potter" musical play. "His dedication to theatre is inspiring, and it became a beautiful common ground for us," he added.

The first two episodes of Gandhi were screened at TIFF, earning a standing ovation from the audience. Pratik shared that attending such prestigious international film

festivals was beyond anything that he had ever imagined, and described the audience's response as "immense encouragement".

"I never in my wildest dream had thought I'll go to an international film festival like TIFF with my favourite character, that I've done till now. 'Gandhi' is the biggest project of my career. A lot of firsts are attached to it, which makes it even more special," he said. "The way the audience reacted to each and every sequence, line, it gave me a lot of happiness, satisfaction and immense encouragement. Not only Indian diaspora out here, but the western audience also could understand each and every context and they enjoyed and reacted at the correct places," he added.

The series also marks a special collaboration for Pratik, as his wife, Bhamini Oza, essays the role of Kasturba Gandhi. (PTI)



# Clinical India U19 thump Australia U19 by seven wickets



**BRISBANE, Sept 21:** Teen sensation Vaibhav Suryavanshi showed glimpses of his batting prowess before wicketkeeper Abhigyan Kundu and Vedant Trivedi's unbeaten half-centuries powered India U19 to a comprehensive seven-wicket win over Australia U19 in the first Youth ODI here on Sunday.

Batting first after winning the toss, Australia could muster only 225 for nine thanks to an excellent performance by the Indian bowlers.

The visitors then completed the chase with as many as 117 balls to spare at the Ian Healy Oval, with Kundu and Trivedi remaining not out on a master-

ful 87 and 61 respectively.

The spotlight was on 14-year-old Suryavanshi, and he responded with a blazing 38 off just 22 balls, his innings containing seven fours.

Such was Suryavanshi's dominance that skipper Ayush Mhatre contributed just six runs in a 50-run opening partnership be-

fore the latter was dismissed by pacer Hayden Schiller.

Two balls later, Mhatre was sent back by Charles Lachmund, as India suddenly lost two wickets at the same score.

One-down batter Vihaan Malhotra (9) too failed to make a significant contribution as Lachmund accounted for the

batter to leave India at 75 for three in the 10th over and give Australia a glimmer of hope.

However, Trivedi and Kundu joined forces to dash Australian hopes with an unbroken fourth-wicket partnership of 152 runs to complete the chase in only 30.3 overs.

Kundu smashed five sixes and eight fours in his 74-ball knock, while Trivedi struck eight boundaries while facing 69 deliveries.

Seamer Lachmund (2/46 in 7 overs) was the most successful bowler for Australia U19.

Earlier, the Indians bowled to a disciplined line and length to restrict Australia within 230, way below what the home team would have hoped for when they opted to bat first.

However, they wouldn't have got that many too if it was not for John James' counterattacking, unbeaten 68-ball 77 after they were reeling at 35 for four and then 107 for six.

Henil Patel (3/38 in 10 overs), Kanishk Chouhan (2/39 in 10) and Kishan Kumar (2/59 in 10) mainly shared the spoils with one wicket going to RS Amburish (1/50 in 10).

Tom Hogan chipped in with a slow 41 off 81 balls, while Steven Hogan struggled to 39 after facing 82 deliveries, reflecting the stranglehold of the Indian bowlers over the Australian batters. (PTI)

# Pranavi, Hitaashee on tied 47<sup>th</sup> place in La Sella Open

**ALICANTE (SPAIN), Sept 21:** Pranavi Urs and Hitaashee Bakshi were tied for the 47th place with one more round to go in the 2025 La Sella Open here.

Pranavi carded an even par 72, while Hitaashee shot 1-over 73.

Pranavi had two birdies and two bogeys all on the back nine of the course and between the 13th and the 18th.

Hitaashee had four birdies, but she also gave away three bogeys and a double bogey on Par-5 ninth.

The other Indians — Diksha Dagar, Tvessa Malik, Avani Prashanth, Ridhima Dilawari and Vani Kapoor — missed the halfway cut.

Canada's Anna Huang continued her fine form, producing a round of 69 (-3) on day three to hold a three-stroke lead heading into the final day.

The 16-year-old has held the lead since the start of the tournament and began well with a birdie on the second at La Sella Golf Resort.

Huang sits at the top of the leaderboard with a score of 17-under-par. Huang, who is in her rookie season on the Ladies Euro-

pean Tour (LET), made another birdie on the ninth before back-to-back birdies on 11 and 12.

After back-to-back bogey-free rounds, the teenager dropped her first shot of the week on her 15 — she had not made a bogey in her previous 62 holes in competition on the LET.

If she were to win on the LET, Huang would join an elite club of players to win on Tour before their 17th birthday — the last player to do so was Germany's Chiara Noja at the Aramco Team Series — Riyadh in 2022.

France's Nastasia Nadaud sits in second place on 14-under-par after carding a round of 69 (-3) on day two. Ireland's Lauren Walsh is in solo third place on the leaderboard after a bogey-free round of 66 (-6).

Three players are in a share of fourth place with Australia's Maddison Hinson-Tolchard, Slovenia's Pia Babnik and Singapore's Shannon Tan all on nine-under-par. Sweden's Kajsa Arwefall is in outright seventh place on eight-under with Scotland's Laura Beveridge and Italy's Alessandra Fanali one shot further back in T8. (PTI)

# Lamine Yamal will win the Ballon d'Or 'one day,' coach Hansi Flick says

**BARCELONA, Sept 21:** Barcelona coach Hansi Flick says his young star Lamine Yamal will "one day" win the Ballon d'Or.

The Barcelona forward is among the top candidates to receive the annual award for the world's best soccer player in Paris on Monday.

"One day we will see this, that Lamine gets this trophy," Flick said on Saturday when asked at a pre-match press conference at Barcelona's training grounds.

Yamal, who turned 18 in July, helped Barcelona win La Liga and the Copa del Rey last season and reach the Champions League semifinals. He also helped Spain win the European Championship in July 2024.

Yamal is one of the 30 nominees for the award, along with teammates Raphinha, Pedri González and Robert Lewandowski.

Paris Saint-Germain forward Ousmane Dembélé is considered a favorite after leading his team to its first Champions League title.

Flick is nominated for the best coach award.

Aitana Bonmati, the winner of the past two years, is one of six Barcelona players nominated for the Women's Ballon d'Or.

"For me it's respect to be there, because we are nominated," Flick said. "We will see. Everyone who's got this trophy deserved it."

Flick added that "I want to enjoy it, I want also to show respect to the winners. For me it's crucial."

Last year, Real Madrid did not attend the award gala apparently after it knew that its player Vinicius Júnior was not going to win the award, which went to Manchester City midfielder Rodri. (AP)

# Christian Pulisic scores 2 and helps set up another in AC Milan win at Udinese in Serie A

**ROME, Sept 21:** Christian Pulisic is in fine form nine months before a home World Cup.

The United States forward scored twice and was involved in another goal as AC Milan won at previously unbeaten Udinese 3-0 in Serie A on Saturday.

It was just the type of performance that American fans will be hoping to see at the 2026 World Cup that the U.S. is co-hosting with Canada and Mexico. Pulisic and U.S. coach Mauricio Pochettino recently indicated they had moved on from some controversy after the top American player

skipped the CONCACAF Gold Cup.

Since joining Milan in 2023, Pulisic has scored 36 goals and provided 21 assists in 105 matches — meaning he has produced a goal in more than half of his matches.

"Winning trophies and games are more important for me," Pulisic said. "Goals and assists are always there."

Pulisic scored first by pounding in a rebound shortly before half-time.

Then his high pressing allowed Youssouf Fofana to score undisturbed less than a minute into the

second half.

Pulisic made it 3-0 after taking a well-disguised pass from Adrien Rabiot and shooting through a defender's legs.

Milan's third win in four matches moved the Rossoneri level with defending champion Napoli, one point behind leader Juventus, which had its perfect start ended in a 1-1 draw at Hellas Verona.

Under returning coach Massimiliano Allegri, who was suspended for the Udinese game, it's already looking like Milan has improved after an eighth-place finish last season that left the seven-time Euro-



pean champion out of continental competition.

Napoli hosts promoted Pisa on Monday.

Francisco Conceicao put Juventus ahead in the 19th minute after

dribbling around defenders then unleashing from the edge of the area.

But a handball by Joao Mario led to a penalty for Verona that was converted by Gift Orban before the break.

Verona thought it may have won with a goal from Suat Serdar following a corner in the 67th but it was waived for offside after a VAR review.

Earlier, Bologna came from a goal down to beat visiting Genoa 2-1 with a penalty kick from Riccardo Orsolini nine minutes into stoppage time. (AP)

# Man United wins chaotic match against Chelsea and Liverpool remains perfect

**MANCHESTER, Sept 21:** Bruno Fernandes struck his 100th goal for Manchester United in a chaotic 2-1 win against Chelsea and helped ease pressure on coach Ruben Amorim.

Fernandes and Casemiro struck in a wild first half at Old Trafford where both teams went down to 10 men and Chelsea lost star player Cole Palmer to injury.

Fernandes hit a century of goals in his 200th Premier League appearance. But the biggest celebration came after the final whistle as United won for only the second time this season.

"Every win, especially in this moment, is important against a great opponent," Amorim told the BBC. "Our crowd, our fans are easy to please. If you give everything they will be there. That is something our players need to understand. To have the crowd with us we just need to run, to fight and tackle."

Earlier, defending champion Liverpool maintained its 100% start with a 2-1 victory against Everton at Anfield in the Merseyside derby.

Amorim will take wins however he can get them after a torrid 10 months in charge.

After overseeing the 20-time English champion's worst ever Premier League campaign last season, there have been more struggles this term, raising questions about his ability to revive United. So when Sanchez was shown red for bringing down Bryan Mbeumo just outside the area, it looked like the perfect chance for United to get back to winning ways following last week's 3-0 defeat to Manchester City. And United took advantage with Fernandes converting from close range in the 14th and Casemiro heading home in the 37th. In a half that needed VAR to confirm Fernandes' goal and saw Chelsea make three substitutions, referee Peter Bankes played nearly 10 minutes of added time.

During that period Casemiro was issued a second yellow for a foul on Andrey Santos.

United continued to make better chances but when Trevoh Chalobah headed a goal for Chelsea in the 80th it set up a nervy finish before the home fans erupted with relief at the final whistle.

"We deserve this, but we complicated our lives," Amorim said.

The win moved United up to 10th and one point behind sixth-placed Chelsea, which was tipped to challenge for the title this season.

"We have to forget the good feeling of winning the game and get back to the urgency of feeling we need to win the next game," Amorim said.

Ryan Gravenberch scored and assisted to help improve Liverpool's record to 5-0. For the first time this season, it didn't require a late goal to secure victory.

Gravenberch put Liverpool ahead in the 10th when Mohamed Salah lofted a one-hop pass into his path. The defensive midfielder extended his right leg and on the half volley lifted the ball over the outstretched arm of goalkeeper Jordan Pickford.

Gravenberch made a perfect through-pass in the 29th and Hugo Ekitike slotted the ball through Pickford's legs and inside the far post.

Idrissa Gueye scored on a long-range shot after Iliman Ndiaye tapped back Jack Grealish's cross. About to turn 36 next Friday, Gueye became the second oldest Everton player to score in a Merseyside derby behind 37-year-old Sam Chedzoy in 1926, according to Opta.

Liverpool has won five consecutive home games against Everton for the first time since 1937.

In another bad day for West Ham coach Graham Potter, his team lost for the fourth time in five games, going down at home to Crystal Palace 2-1. (AP)

# Mbappe and Militao strike from distance as Real Madrid deals Espanyol first loss

**BARCELONA, Sept 21:** Kylian Mbappé and Eder Militao scored from well outside the area to help Real Madrid ease past Espanyol 2-0 in La Liga on Saturday and deal the Barcelona-based side its first loss.

Espanyol gave Militao space and the Brazil defender fired a right-foot screamer into the top corner in the 22nd minute. A diving Marko Dmitrovic got only fingertips on the ball.

It was Mbappé's turn in the 47th when he had time to pick a spot in the bottom corner and smashed a strike that Dmitrovic could only watch nestle into the net. Mbappé has seven goals in six games for Madrid this season, including a double in its 2-1 win over Marseille to start the Champions League on Tuesday.

"When you are facing a defense set well inside its area, you have to try from long range," coach Xabi Alonso said. "Militao's goal was very good, and Kylian scored in transition. We are taking steps forward and continue to grow."

Madrid's fifth win in as many rounds moved it five points clear of Espanyol and Barcelona, which hosts fifth-placed Getafe at its 6,000-seat Estadi Johan Cruyff on Sunday.

England midfielder Jude Bellingham went on as a late substitute for his first appearance since he underwent an operation on his left shoulder on July 16.

Eduardo Camavinga also went on with Bellingham after several weeks out with an ankle injury. Espanyol arrived to the Santi-

ago Bernabeu just two points back in third place and undefeated after its best start over four rounds in 30 years.

The modest Barcelona-based club was without top scorer Pere Milla, who was serving a one-game red-card suspension, and struggled to produce scoring chances.

Dmitrovic made back-to-back saves to stop Mbappé from making it three in the 65th before Vinicius Júnior hit the post for Madrid. Alonso restored Vinicius as a substitute in the Champions League opener this week.

Madrid was without right back Trent Alexander-Arnold, who is expected to be sidelined for several weeks because of a hamstring injury sustained against Mar-

seille. Defender Dean Huijsen was suspended.

After Saturday's win, Madrid defender Dani Carvajal apologized for being sent off for head-butting Marseille goalkeeper Gerónimo Rulli this week, calling his behavior "unacceptable."

Carvajal and Rulli were exchanging words before a corner kick for Madrid when the defender moved closer to the goal and struck his face with his head.

"It won't happen again," Carvajal said. Girona, which just two seasons ago finished the league in third place, remained stuck to the bottom of the standings after being humbled 4-0 at home by the promoted Levante.

Girona has lost all five of its games. "We are the worst team in the league," coach Michel

Sánchez said, "and the only way out of this is to keep working and improve." Georges Mikautadze scored his first goal for Villarreal help them fight back for a 2-1 win over 10-man Osasuna. Georgia striker Mikautadze transferred from Lyon on the last day of the transfer market.

Veteran Chile forward Alexis Sánchez also scored his first goal since joining Sevilla this season to help beat Alaves 2-1. Valencia beat 10-man Athletic Bilbao 2-0 at home to bounce back from a 6-0 defeat to Barcelona last round.

Baptiste Santamaría and Hugo Duro scored in the second half for Valencia, after Athletic lost Daniel Vivian to a direct red card when he fouled Santamaría with only the goalkeeper to beat. (AP)

# Mithun Manhas: Street-Smart cricketer, who was always at the right place at right time

**DUBAI, Sept 21:** Mithun Manhas, a veteran of 157 first-class games, is all set to become the 37th BCCI president and the surprise development has not only raised eyebrows but also left the cricket fraternity in the country in disbelief as no one saw it coming.

He has an impressive tally of 9714 first class runs with 27 centuries to go with 4126 runs in List A matches. A veteran cricket administrator, who has witnessed bitter BCCI elections from close quarters, made an apt observation.

"Observe how BJP leadership chose its Chief Ministers in Delhi, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan," veteran administrator told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

"If anyone claimed that he knew Rekha Gupta, Mohan Yadav and Bhajan Lal Sharma would grab the top posts, he would have been lying. No one saw that coming," he said. "In case of BCCI, options are lesser and you can second guess, but for someone like Manhas, may

be a joint secretary would have been logical when a Test player (Raghu Ram Bhatt) is being made treasurer. "When you had three Test players in electoral rolls, two with 100 plus Tests (Sourav Ganguly, Harbhajan Singh), Manhas' selection will raise eyebrows for sure," the administrator said. In Delhi cricket circuit, when a range of cricketers were contacted, most of them agreed that Manhas, 45, has always been a bright, intelligent person.

"He was always a people's person. Don't forget he had been a Delhi captain in a team that had a lot of big stars, India players. They played under him and he managed them fairly well. "He came from Jammu after playing U-16s and then India U-19 and Delhi senior team," former India opener and noted cricket pundit Aakash Chopra fondly recalled the playing days. Chopra shared an anecdote from their junior playing days.

"Mithun and I were travelling

from Surat to Mumbai for a board age-group match in a crowded train. "I was feeling sleepy and requested Mithun to take care of my new pair of shoes, kept in a box under the seat. Mithun himself had got a new pair of shoes. He rested his legs on my shoe box to guard it from getting stolen. "When we got down at Mumbai, as luck would have it, Mithun's new pair was stolen. He knew how to make friends," Chopra recollected. "I messaged him, wishing good luck. He was a bright man and a very good cricketer. Obviously he played in the middle order in an era when your No. 3 (Rahul Dravid), 4 (Sachin Tendulkar), 5 (Sourav Ganguly) and 6 (VVS Laxman) were sealed. He was unlucky but someone who was a very intelligent man," Chopra said.

Manhas' cricketing journey and now cricket administrative journey is always about being at the right place at the right time.

"Mithun in one word is a street smart man. When he first came to

Delhi, he knew National Stadium and Gucchi Paaji's (Dronacharya awardee Gurcharan Singh) days of clout were over. "Unstadji (late Tarak Sinha) and Sonnet Club was the gate pass to play for any state team from age-group to senior," another former Delhi player, who had played good six to seven years with him, encapsulated his journey.

So it was again following the old adage of "being at the right place at the right time".

"His crickering credentials was more than decent but he knew what he needed and for how long. He wasn't a thoroughbred Sonnet kid like Raman bhaiyya (Lamba), Ajay bhaiyya (Sharma), Bhasi bhai (KP Bhaskar), Aakash (Chopra) or for that matter of fact Ashish (Nehra) or Rishabh (Pant).

"He was around in Sonnet till his Delhi selection and once he got his job in ONGC in sports quota, he wasn't much of a Sonnet man," the cricketer reminisced.

As he was gaining foothold in

Delhi cricket, he knew that late Arun Jaitley was the most powerful man in DCCA and not many first-class cricketers would think of living in his close proximity in a plush South Delhi locality.

Was he the most popular man in the dressing room? There is divided opinion — some called him shrewd and some practical knowing what to say and what to do at any given point. "Mithun was the captain when Virat lost his dad in the middle of a Ranji game and Delhi were in trouble. Despite that Mithun told Virat to go home and when he insisted on playing, Mithun agreed. That was one part.

"At the other end, most of his friends were powerful international players like Viru (Virender Sehwag) and Yuvi (Yuvraj). Despite a modest T20 record, he played 55 IPL games for Delhi Daredevils (when Sehwag was skipper), Pune Warriors and Kings XI Punjab (Yuvraj). Viru and Mithun at one point were thick as thieves," the player added. (PTI)

## Thauvin scores against club he controversially left as Lens beats Lille in Ligue 1

PARIS, Sept 21: Florian Thauvin scored against the club he controversially left as Lens beat Lille 3-0 to move up to fourth place in Ligue 1.

The victory ended third-placed Lille's unbeaten start to the season, leaving leader Paris Saint-Germain as the only unbeaten side.

Thauvin was a promising 20-year-old winger with an eye for goal when Lille signed him from Corsican side Bastia in January 2013. He was sent back on loan to Bastia for the rest of that season, but then stunned Lille by aggressively pushing for a move to Marseille that summer.

The transfer went through without Thauvin playing a single game for Lille, making him vastly unpopular with its fans.

Saturday's match opposed two veterans from France's victorious 2018 World Cup squad. Thauvin and Lille striker Olivier Giroud.

After forward Wesley Saïd put Lens ahead in the 28th minute following a low corner, Thauvin made it 2-0 close to halftime after latching onto Saïd's long pass. Rayan Fofana added the third goal from close range in the 52nd.

Despite Lille being a fierce northern rival, the Lens home fans applauded Giroud when he was substituted late on. (AP)

## Heartbreak for Satwik-Chirag as Indians go down fighting in China Masters final

SHENZHEN, Sept 21: India's top men's doubles duo of Satwik-sairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty endured yet another heartbreak, falling in straight games to world No.1 Kim Won Ho and Seo Seung Jae of Korea in a gripping China Masters Super 750 final here on Sunday.

The Asian Games champions had hoped to end their title drought but squandered a 14-7 advantage in the opening game before slipping to a 19-21, 15-21 defeat in 45 minutes.

Satwik and Chirag came into their second successive final in supreme touch, not dropping a game all week after adding a second World Championships bronze and finishing runners-up at the Hong Kong Open. But they would rue letting slip the opening game from a position of strength.

Kim and Seo, who reunited this season after experimenting with other partners, were contesting their ninth final of 2025, having already won six titles, including a World Championships gold in Paris and Super 1000 crowns at the All England and Indonesia Open.

It was billed as a battle between the world's best attack and the best defence and it did have its mo-



ments but in the end Kim and Seo showed better nerves and technical acumen to emerge victorious.

In the opening, the Koreans stormed back with a flurry of angled smashes to make it 6-0. Chirag's deft touches at the net gave them an 11-7 cushion at the break and soon they stretched it to 14-8.

However, errors crept in, a lost

video challenge broke their rhythm and the Koreans pounced on eight of the next nine points to wrest back the momentum at 15-11. Kim served a fault but a deceptive return kept it tight at 17-17.

A net error from Chirag handed Korea a 19-17 lead, but the Indians struck back as Seo miscued to make it 19-11.

The left-handed Kim earned game point with a sharp winner,

and Chirag went wide to give the Koreans the opening game.

After the change of sides, the Indians went 3-2 up with Chirag dazzling at the net, even producing a between-the-legs shot before spraying wide. At 4-4, Satwik hit his own between-the-legs return to win a point.

The Indians unleashed steep angled smashes to break through the Korean defence and led 8-6. However, they allowed the Koreans back to 9-9 before Seo's outrageous cross-court defensive return made it 10-9. Seo produced another delicate net shot to secure a one-point cushion at the interval.

On resumption, Seo served into the net but killed Satwik's weak serve on the next point. A flat return from Seo, followed by Kim keeping a rally alive despite being on the floor, and Chirag hitting long, gave the Koreans a four-point lead at 15-11. Seo prevailed in a flat exchange next before Chirag miscued again as the Koreans stayed ahead 17-14.

A neat drop shot extended the lead to 18-15 for the Koreans, who grabbed five match points after Chirag went long twice. Satwik then pushed the final return long to seal the title for the Koreans. (PTI)

## Mithun Manhas files nomination for post of BCCI president



MUMBAI, Sept 21: Former Delhi captain Mithun Manhas, on Sunday, filed his nomination for the post of BCCI president at the board's headquarters here ahead of the deadline later this afternoon.

Manhas, who played 157 First-Class, 130 List A and 55 IPL matches in a long domestic career from 1997-98 to 2016-17, had emerged as a front runner to take over the role left vacant by the exit of Roger Binny last month.

The 45-year-old Manhas' name came to the fore after an informal meeting held in New Delhi, where it was decided by those in power to put forth his name for the role of BCCI president.

A few other key positions in the Indian cricket board will be filled up here next Sunday during the annual general meeting of the Board.

"A new body is being made for the next term. Mithun Manhas is a former player and it was decided to make him the president. Arun Dhimal is the chairman of the IPL governing council and he will continue in that position," BCCI vice president Rajeev Shukla told the media here.

Among those who filed their nominations were BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia, IPL governing council chairman Arun Dhimal, and Karnataka State Cricket Asso-

ciation (KSCA) president and former India cricketer Raghuram Bhat, who is in the fray to become the Board's treasurer. Prabtej Bhatia, who was the treasurer will replace Rohan Gauns Desai as the joint secretary. Saurashtra CA president Jaydev Shah will replace Dilip Vengsarkar in the Apex Council.

Saikia filed his nomination to continue as the secretary of the BCCI, having taken up the role in January this year.

"I have been the secretary for the last few months, my colleagues wanted me to file the nominations so I did," Saikia said. PTI

Saikia said the Indian team for the two-Test series against the West Indies will be picked in a couple of days.

"The team will be picked on September 23 or 25. The selection meeting will be held online," he said.

The first Test will be played in Ahmedabad from October 2-6 while the second will be in New Delhi from October 10-14.

It will be the first home assignment in the World Test Championship cycle 2025-27 for Shubman Gill's side. Gill took over as India's full-time Test captain in June this year ahead of the tour to England. (PTI)

## Hope India women's team breaks World Cup jinx this time, says BCCI secretary Saikia

'It will be a 40-minute programme in memory of Zubeen and possibly the biggest tribute a cricketing fraternity can offer to him,' said Saikia



MUMBAI, Sept 21: BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia on Sunday hoped that the Indian women's team would end a long wait to win a World Cup trophy when the 50-overs showpiece event begins in Guwahati on September 30.

India, who are co-hosting the eight-team tournament with Sri Lanka, will take on the team from the island nation in the first match which will be preceded by an opening ceremony.

India will aim to end a long drought as they have never won the women's World Cup in any of the past 12 editions.

"In the past, warm-up matches were held for the ICC (Men's) World Cup and for the first time the ICC Women's World Cup will start from Guwahati. The opening match will be played between India and Sri Lanka," Saikia told the media here at the BCCI headquarters.

"As the matches are being held in India as well as in Sri Lanka, everybody is backing our Indian team. Recently, they have done extremely well in England also, which is a big achievement for the Indian team."

"(The) Indian women's cricket has come of age and I am sure they will produce a remarkable

performance in the upcoming World Cup. I hope that the jinx will be broken this time," Saikia said.

Saikia said the recently-concluded ODI series between India and Australia, which the visitors won 2-1, was a "keenly contested" affair.

"It was a very keenly contested series, which Australia won 2-1. But India played extremely well. Australia is a very good team, but India is catching up. Till now, India has not won any ICC women's trophy, so this is a big opportunity for the team to do well," he said.

The BCCI secretary said 40 minutes of the opening ceremony ahead of the Women's World Cup will be dedicated to Indian singer Zubeen Garg, who died in Singapore on Friday after suffering injuries in a scuba diving incident. He was 52 years old.

Saikia said the Assam Cricket Association and the BCCI are working together to pay tribute to the singer.

"There is a huge grief and tragic situation prevailing in Assam, following Zubeen's death. Keeping in consonance with that situation, and as a person who deserves some respect, the Assam Cricket Association and the BCCI will have a tribute programme during the opening ceremony. This will be our respect and tribute to Zubeen," he said.

"It will be a 40-minute programme in memory of Zubeen and possibly the biggest tribute a cricketing fraternity can offer to him," said Saikia.

Shreya Ghoshal will also perform during the mid-innings break of the tournament opener, Saikia added. (PTI)

## McLaughlin-Levrone romps in the rain to an American 4x400 victory at worlds

TOKYO, Sept 21: Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone received the baton in the lead and the rest was history Sunday night at world championships in a rain-soaked U.S. romp in the women's 4x400-meter relay.

McLaughlin-Levrone widened the already big lead handed to her by Aaliyah Butler and the Americans finished in a championships-record 3 minutes, 16.61 seconds for a 2.64-second win over Jamaica.

She ran a split of 47.82 seconds three nights after running 47.78 in the 400 flat, where she won her first gold medal in that event and was the first woman to break 48 seconds in that race in nearly 40 years.



The Netherlands finished third. Femke Bol, the country's 400 hurdles champ, was paired with McLaughlin-Levrone for the anchor lap, but the two were running in different sections of the track.

The U.S. has won eight of the last 10 women's 4x400s at worlds.

The men's 4x400 came down to a last-lap sprint between 400-hurdles champ Rai Benjamin of America and 400-flat champ Collen Kebinatshipi of Botswana.

Benjamin received the baton with a .19-second lead but couldn't hold off Kebinatshipi, who beat him to the line by .07 to give emerging sprint power Botswana its first relay win in 2:57.76. (AP)

## Pycroft is not a schoolteacher, or principal: Ashwin

NEW DELHI, Sept 21: Former India off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin has backed match referee Andy Pycroft amid Pakistan's criticism in the post-match handshake controversy, saying the Zimbabwean official is not a "school teacher" and was only doing his job to avoid an unnecessary spectacle.

Pycroft was the referee last Sunday when India, as a policy decision, did not shake hands with Pakistan after their Asia Cup match. He was dragged into the controversy after India skipper Suryakumar Yadav did not follow the convention at the toss.

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) wrote two emails to the ICC — first requesting Pycroft's removal from the tournament and then seeking his exclusion from their games. Both demands were rejected, with the world body standing firmly behind its Elite Panel referee.

"Andy Pycroft actually saved everybody from seeing such a poor spectacle. India informed the match referee in advance — this is our decision, and we will follow it. That's it. After all this drama, you lost the match. So what are you complaining about?" Ashwin said on his YouTube channel 'Ash Ki Baat'.

"He is not a schoolteacher. He's not a principal. He can't go and bring Surya and say, 'Come shake hands'. That's not his job. What exactly is Pycroft's fault here?" he asked.

The ICC rejected PCB's claims that Pycroft had violated the 'Spirit of the Game' code, clarifying that he was merely relaying what had been conveyed by the Asian Cricket Council's venue manager, with little time left before the match began.

The governing body later arranged a meeting between Pycroft and Pakistan's team management — captain Salman Ali Agha, head coach Mike Hesson and manager Naveed Akram Cheema, where the PCB claimed the referee said he "regretted the miscommunication."

Ashwin said the Indian players were simply following directives from their board, with no ambiguity in communication to Pycroft. He was also scathing about Pakistan's demand for an apology. (PTI)

## To win World Cups you have to be the most adaptable and composed team: Mooney



NEW DELHI, Sept 21: Australia batter Beth Mooney believes adaptability and composure are the hallmarks of a champion side, qualities that will once again be tested at the upcoming Women's World Cup. The seven-time winners showcased both traits to perfection. Staring at the possibility of a historic series defeat against India, they responded in style, piling up their joint-highest total of 412 all out before sealing a 43-run win in the

third ODI here to clinch the series 2-1 here on Saturday.

"I think to win World Cups you've got to be the most adaptable team and the most composed team," Mooney said at the post-match press conference.

Defending the mammoth target, Australia endured a fierce counterattack, first through Smriti Mandhana's blazing 125 off 63 balls, then via Harmanpreet Kaur's 52 and Deepti Sharma's late flourish of 72. But they held their nerve.

"We showed that a lot tonight when Smriti was obviously coming quite hard and building some partnerships with Harmanpreet, and then Deepti coming in at the end," added Mooney, who herself blazed away to 138 off 75 balls.

The visitors were without youngsters Phoebe Litchfield and Annabel Sutherland for the decider, but Mooney said their return would only strengthen an already formidable squad.

"It's been nice to see the girls come up with different ideas with the ball and the fielders backing it up. With Belzely

(Annabel) and Phoebe waiting on the sidelines, once they're fit and firing, I think there's absolutely no ceiling for this group. We can really put a marker down at this World Cup."

Mooney admitted that Australian players are leaning on each other's Women's Premier League experience to adapt quickly to Indian conditions.

"Obviously a few of us have been playing in the WPL, so picking up little things about the conditions has been huge, and then learning off each other in terms of how we want to play. Sharing information and being agile as the tournament goes on will be key." As the defending champions chase a record-extending eighth title, Mooney cautioned that no side can be taken lightly.

"Every game is going to be tough, to be honest. There are no easy games in international cricket anymore, and most teams have spent the last three and a half years working hard towards this World Cup. You've got to get it right when you show up," she said. (PTI)

## Sabastian Sawe wins Berlin Marathon but his record attempt is foiled by unseasonable heat

BERLIN, Sept 21: Sebastian Sawe of Kenya finished far ahead of his rivals to win the Berlin Marathon on Sunday, when unseasonable warmth thwarted his effort to break the course record. The 29-year-old Sawa finished in a year's best time of 2 hours, 2 minutes and 16 seconds — four minutes ahead of Japan's Akira Akasaki and more than 4½ minutes ahead of Ethiopia's Chimessea Debele.

"I did my best," Sawa said. "I'm so happy." Sawa's compatriot Rosemary Wanjiru won the women's race in 2:21:05, just ahead of Ethiopia's Dera Dida.

Sawe looked exhausted as the top three were presented with

giant alcohol-free beers during their award ceremony.

He had been targeting Eliud Kipchoge's course record of 2:01:09 from 2022, a world record at the time. Kelvin Kiptum's time of 2:00:35 from the 2023 Chicago Marathon is still the world's best. Kiptum was killed in a car crash in February 2024.

On Sunday, temperatures climbed to 24 degrees Celsius (75.2 Fahrenheit) as summer made an unexpected return to the German capital.

"You can't do anything about the weather. I was ready for everything," said Sawe, who said he'd be back next year. (AP)

## Ganguly set for unopposed return as CAB president, faces new challenges amid image crisis



KOLKATA, Sept 21: Former India captain Sourav Ganguly is set to return unopposed as Cricket Association of Bengal president at its annual general meeting here on Monday, but his second stint promises to be more challenging with the association hit by financial irregularities and credibility concerns in recent months.

The entire panel led by Ganguly — Bablu Kolay (secretary), Madan Mohan Ghosh (joint-secretary), Sanjay Das (treasurer) and Anu Dutta (vice-president) — is also set to be elected unopposed.

The 53-year-old former BCCI president will be replacing his elder brother Snehasish Ganguly, who had to step down following the six-year cap on executive positions as mandated by the

Lodha Committee directives.

CAB's image has been dented by a series of controversies in the recent past while the performance of the Ranji Trophy side has been lukewarm.

Finance committee member Subrata Saha was recently fined Rs 2 lakh and barred from sub-committee activities after being found guilty of conflict of interest, while the association itself was also penalised.

Earlier in August, joint-secretary Debabrata Das was suspended for six months over allegations of financial misconduct.

"Most organisations have issues to deal with. In the future, if there are issues it will be dealt in an appropriate manner," Ganguly responded with a straight bat after filing his nomination

last Sunday. In his second innings as CAB president, Ganguly has outlined his priorities which include strengthening Bengal's first-class cricket, boosting the Bengal Pro T20 League, promoting women's cricket and developing grassroots structures.

"The cricketing system has to move forward. I'll be trying to talk to our Ranji Trophy cricketers, but there's no need for too many heads in the team. Players' skills matter, after all. As an administrator, I'll help them with the best possible things, and I will do it," he said. He also emphasised the importance of committed administrators.

"The ones selected (as office-bearers) can give time, which is very important for this organisation," Ganguly said.

Reflecting on his comeback, the former

India skipper added: "I would like to thank everyone for their support. There are important events coming up at the Eden Gardens."

Among his first major responsibilities will be overseeing the India-South Africa opening Test at Eden Gardens from November 14, the first at the iconic venue since the historic pink-ball clash against Bangladesh in 2019.

That landmark match incidentally was an initiative driven by Ganguly during his tenure as BCCI president and remains one of his major achievements.

The Eden is also expected to host marquee fixtures, including a knockout during the T20 World Cup next year.

"I do not consider it as a challenge. I have eight years' experience both as CAB and BCCI president. I will try and

do my best. We will work together to take CAB and Bengal cricket ahead," Ganguly asserted.

The former BCCI chief also stressed on reviving long-term initiatives. "We had a Vision project in place but due to Covid it had to be stopped. We would want it to restart. We also need to focus on junior cricket, club cricket, Bengal Pro T20 league," he said.

Ganguly, who will represent CAB at the BCCI annual general meeting on September 28, returns to administration at a crucial juncture with the new Sports Act about to be implemented. With the BCCI set to elect a new president following Roger Binny's exit on age grounds, his presence in the national body's corridors of power could again be significant. (PTI)